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Foundations for Belonging: A snapshot of newly arrived refugees

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Foundations for Belonging: A snapshot of newly arrived refugees

Ingrid Culos
Hussain Rajwani
Tadgh McMahon
and Shanthi Robertson

We are indebted to the participants for their support and generosity of time in participating in this research.

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Key Messages

Successful settlement and integration is a goal shared by refugees, the communities where refugees settle and government at all levels. This research shines a light on aspects of integration that are often overlooked: refugees' social connections and their access to rights and fulfilment of responsibilities.

These aspects of integration help to build resilience in the face of challenges that refugees inevitably encounter as they settle and navigate a new chapter of their lives in Australia and help build foundations for belonging. Overall, refugees in this study are tracking well in terms of these aspects of integration. That said, integration depends on everyone taking responsibility for their own contribution, including refugees, receiving communities and government at all levels. This research points to a series of actions that governments, policymakers, service providers and civil society can pursue to strengthen their contribution to settlement and integration.

Governments and policymakers

- Develop a broader lens of “success” in settlement and integration with a stronger focus on social connections and rights and responsibilities to provide a foundation for other integration outcomes in employment, health, education and language acquisition.
- Preserve permanent protection for refugees to enable access to rights and opportunities to fulfil responsibilities and offer a pathway to Australian citizenship.
- Nurture a positive social climate towards refugees in policy and public discourse to maintain trust and mutual respect between refugees and the broader Australian community.

Essential services and other service providers

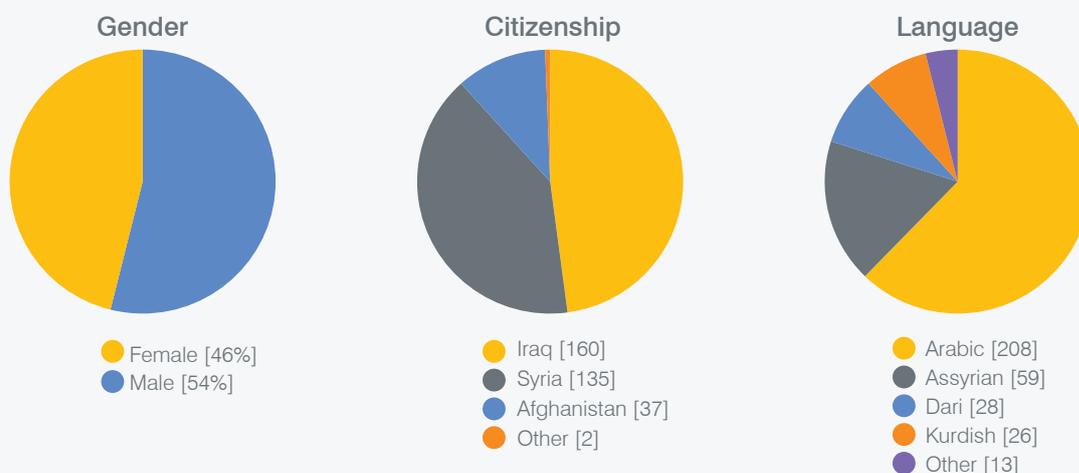
- Offer greater in-language support and information to refugees to address access barriers, particularly among women and those in regional areas, and capitalise on the high level of trust found among refugees in government and other essential services.
- Provide online and digital service support to refugees in ways that ensure fair and equitable access to essential and other services.

Settlement services and civil society organisations

- Continue to leverage the willingness of refugees to volunteer to strengthen reciprocal social and civic participation between refugees and other members of the Australian community.
- Engage refugees, in particular women, in community initiatives to facilitate meeting and exchange between refugees and receiving communities at the local level, building on refugees' positive sense of welcome and trust in neighbours and neighbourhoods in the early stages of settlement.
- Encourage and support ethnic and religious community groups to offer community activities, recognising their crucial role in fostering social bonds and settlement.
- Promote a stronger understanding among refugees of the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the First Nations people of Australia.

Key Findings – at a glance

Of 334 respondents:



Survey respondents ...	Result (%)	Comparison with other refugees in Australia ¹ (%)
Receive or feel supported by their ethnic community (<i>Yes/Sometimes</i>)	84	52
Receive or feel supported by their religious community (<i>Yes/Sometimes</i>)	76	50
Find it easy to make friends in Australia (<i>Very Easy/Easy</i>)	66	53
Understand Australian ways and culture (<i>Very Easy/Easy</i>)	69	57
Find it easy to talk to their Australian neighbours (<i>Very Easy/Easy</i>)	57	45
Maintain mixed friendship networks	52	47
Feel welcome in Australia (<i>Always/Most of the time</i>)	90	88
Feel part of the Australian community (<i>Always/Most of the time</i>)	87	81
Trust the government (<i>A lot</i>)	85	70
Trust the police (<i>A lot</i>)	88	70
Received support from other community groups (<i>Yes/Sometimes</i>)	76	41
Survey respondents ...	Result (%)	Comparison with broader Australian community ² (%)
Feel that people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds get along in their neighbourhood (<i>Strongly agree/Agree</i>)	90	76
Reported helping someone (volunteering) with activities in the month prior	60	46
Feel that people in their local area are willing to help neighbours (<i>Strongly agree/Agree</i>)	79	80
Experienced racial discrimination in the past 12 months (<i>Always/Most of the time/Some of the time</i>)	5	19

1 Comparison with Building a New Life in Australia

2 Comparison with Mapping Social Cohesion or the ABS General Social Survey

Executive Summary

Unlike other studies that focus on refugees' education, employment, English proficiency and health, this study shines a light on under-researched social and civic dimensions of integration.

The public discourse around refugee integration tends to focus on a narrow band of markers of "successful settlement" – notably employment, education, English language proficiency and health.

This study shines a light on under-researched dimensions of integration. Using the framework of integration originally developed in 2008 and updated by the UK Home Office in 2019, this research examines four dimensions of integration: social bonds, social bridges, social links, and rights and responsibilities. Social bonds describe connections that link members of a group; social bridges the connections between groups; and social links refer to connections between individuals and structures of the state, such as government services and institutions. Rights and responsibilities refer to knowledge, access and fulfilment of social and civic rights and responsibilities. The research examines these dimensions from the perspectives of refugees themselves and their everyday experiences of welcome, participation and belonging in the early stages of settlement.

Over 330 refugees, all past participants of an on-arrival settlement program in NSW, completed a telephone survey in their preferred language and 15 refugees participated in an in-depth interview. The average length of residency of survey respondents was 2.5 years, about 1 in 10 were settled in a regional area, the most common countries of origin were Syria and Iraq, and Arabic, Assyrian, Dari and Kurdish/Kurdish Kurmanji the most common languages spoken. Multiple steps were taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the study findings, including through using existing validated survey items, a random stratified sampling strategy, and

validating the findings against a comparison group from a longitudinal study of refugees and, in some indicators, against the general Australian population. Nonetheless, there are study limitations, which are described later in the report.

"Having your support there, a network [of] support, it's so important, especially to people who don't know these things. Yeah, at the end of the day it comes back to network [of] support. If I tell you from overall experience, I think people who first received in Australia and how they treat you, they really play a very big important role in how you would start your life in Australia and how to live your life in Australia." (Asfar, male, early twenties, from Afghanistan.)

Refugees' strong family and community connections do not prevent them from developing connections with the broader Australian community. Instead, as refugees engage with their ethnic and religious communities, they develop a strong sense of belonging to their local neighbourhood and mixed friendship networks.

The study findings contest assumptions that strong family and community connections among refugees prevent them from developing connections with the broader Australian community. While refugees in this study report strong social bonds with their families and their national, ethnic and/or religious communities, a majority have mixed friendship networks (although this was not as evident among women) and reported a strong sense of belonging to their neighbourhood. In this sample, refugees reported maintaining family and social ties through regular use of digital communication platforms to message/speak to families and relatives.

Refugees' strong social bonds are underpinned by support from their ethnic, religious and national community, the ability to practise religion freely and regular attendance at a place of worship. This study finds that refugees develop social bonds through cultural activities (e.g., festivals, special days) organised by their own ethnic or religious community rather than other activities such as sports, parent support groups or youth groups. This indicates a

potential scope for ethnic and religious community groups to be supported to offer a wider range of community activities to enhance social bonds.

“The community where I’m at, or the neighbourhood, there are people from all different races, from Asian to Middle-Eastern, Africans, they are all different nations. So we get along really well. We all say ‘hello’ to each other, very courteous to each other. So in both ways, it feels that I’m welcome from this end and welcome from the other end, so there’s not really a big difference.” (Aram, male, late thirties, Armenian from Syria.)

Refugees feel part of the Australian community and regularly seek to get to know people from cultural backgrounds other than their own. Refugees demonstrate high levels of trust in their neighbours and neighbourhoods as a result of positive and regular interactions and experiences, despite reporting difficulties in talking to their neighbours due to language difficulties.

Refugees report a very strong sense of feeling welcome in Australia and feeling part of the Australian community. According to most refugees in this study, understanding Australian culture and norms is easy and they report getting support from community groups other than their own, which provides a solid foundation for community engagement initiatives that facilitate meeting and exchange between receiving communities and refugees.

More than three-quarters of refugees reported regularly meeting and getting to know people from backgrounds other than their own, indicating strong interactions and bridges in everyday situations. These social bridges were strongest among those living in regional areas, and among men and young people.

Refugees in this study overwhelmingly view their local areas as places where people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds get along – much higher than the general Australian population in response to the same measure in an annual national survey. More than three-quarters feel that their neighbours are willing to help each other, similar to responses on this same measure in an annual national survey in Australia. For those living in regional areas this sense of support from neighbours was even higher.

When given scenarios to gauge their trust and the strength of social bridges with their neighbours, the majority of refugees were comfortable in an

emergency to leave a set of keys and, in the case of illness, to ask a neighbour to help with shopping. Refugees living in regional areas were far less comfortable on both of these measures compared to those living in major cities, and women were also somewhat less comfortable.

Compared to other refugees in Australia, refugees in this study find it easier to make friends, understand Australian ways and culture, and talk to their Australian neighbours. Men, young people and those with a proposer (a relative already living in Australia) are more likely to find it easier against all three measures.

That said, talking to their Australian neighbours was a challenge for refugees in this study, which we speculate was largely due to language barriers, given the very positive responses on other measures of social bridges with neighbours reported in the survey.

Refugees’ social bridges are fostered primarily through everyday encounters and experiences, as there were relatively low rates of participation in formal community activities (e.g., school, parent support groups, youth groups). The findings suggest that local, everyday and neighbourhood level social bridges are a critical part of refugee belonging, and it is at this scale that interventions are most likely to yield success. The findings also highlight the need to safeguard and enhance positive social attitudes towards refugees in the general community to maintain and build social bridges.

“Let’s start with the way I’ve been treated, it’s been great. Secondly, feeling safe: that feeling is beyond great. Even when you go to the restaurants and no-one bothers you. The respect is everywhere, and there is no bothering in the slightest way, which is great.” (Salem, male, mid-fifties, from Syria.)

Refugees demonstrate a high level of trust in government and civil society institutions as well as the wider Australian community which imbues them with a sense of confidence to be independent and access services when needed. The most common difficulties in accessing services were language difficulties, waiting times and online/internet difficulties.

Refugees in this study, in particular men and young people, reported a deep level of trust in many institutions, including the police, the government and, to a lesser extent, the media. They also reported trust in work or study colleagues, people in their neighbourhood and the wider Australian community,

which is comparable to other studies of refugees in Australia.

This high level of trust imbues refugees with a sense of confidence and independence. Refugees, especially young people, demonstrated an awareness of knowing where to find somewhere to live, get around and navigate transport, use government and commercial services, and access critical support when needed. The weakest measures were in knowing how to find a job and finding out about their rights but, in both of these, refugees in this survey were more knowledgeable compared to other refugees in Australia. This indicates the need for settlement programs to continue to build independent living skills among refugees and to link them to services that can be accessed when needed.

Against a backdrop of trust and confidence, the most common difficulties in accessing government and essential services were language and long waiting times for an appointment, similar to other studies among refugees in Australia. While refugees in this survey saw language difficulties as a key barrier, almost half reported that they were able to access interpreting assistance when needed, especially women. This study found online/internet difficulties were also a common barrier, which, as far as we are aware, has not been widely measured in studies of refugees in Australia. We can speculate that these difficulties may be due to limited English language proficiency and/or limited digital skills or digital access.

Young refugees know more about accessing essential services and reported fewer difficulties compared to all other age brackets. Women reported more difficulties accessing essential services, especially in terms of language, transport and online/internet difficulties. Similarly, while refugees in regional areas reported similar levels of awareness, they reported greater difficulty accessing government services.

The high level of trust in government and civic institutions in this study and in longitudinal research of refugees provides a strong basis for government departments, essential services and other service providers to redouble their effort to offer in-language support and information, especially to refugee women and refugees in regional areas. As governments, essential services and other service providers continue to shift towards online and digital services, they need to pay close attention to ensuring

that they do not create additional barriers for refugees to access critical support when needed.

“The first thing was the language. We couldn’t speak the language. The other thing, as much as you’d be safe, you’ll have a good life here, you will miss your home country. You will miss your family members. You will miss your dad, your mother — you will miss those things. They [the neighbours] are good. But we don’t communicate with each other.” (Aska, female, early twenties, from Iraq.)

Refugees demonstrate a strong commitment and motivation to fulfil their social and civic responsibilities in Australia, which is demonstrated through their high rates of volunteering. Refugees generally feel they are treated fairly and equally in exercising their rights and accessing government and essential services and are committed to acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the first people of Australia.

The findings challenge claims that refugees do not demonstrate a sense of responsibility to Australia and do not understand what it means to be Australian. Instead, refugees report a strong commitment to fulfilling social and civic responsibilities, including to obey the law, to be self-sufficient, to protect the environment, to treat others with respect and to help others.

Refugees in this study were overwhelmingly committed to acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the traditional owners of Australia, while almost two-thirds, in particular young people, reported that it was easy to understand the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. In SSI’s experience, some refugees see themselves as part of a “first nation” community in their country-of-origin and consequently may have an affinity for Australia’s First Nations Peoples. Settlement services and civil society organisations should strengthen opportunities for refugees to increase their understanding of the central place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Australia.

One way that refugees demonstrate their sense of civic responsibility to Australia is through volunteering. Just under two-thirds of refugees reported volunteering in the month prior to the survey, which is higher than the rate of volunteering (under half) reported on this measure by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in the General Social Survey of a representative sample of the Australian population. Settlement services and civil society organisations should continue to leverage the willingness of refugees to volunteer as another avenue to strengthen social and civic participation.

Refugees in this study report very low instances of discrimination on the basis of cultural or religious background. In the few instances where this had occurred, the most common settings were the private rental market in housing, in public spaces and online and on social media.

Interestingly, refugees in this survey reported that they have equal access to government and essential services, that their rights are adequately protected and that they are treated fairly. This was also evident in responses to open-ended questions on what made them feel welcome in Australia. Older respondents had a stronger sense of fairness in Australia whereas women had a far weaker sense of rights and fairness.

This sense of equity is likely to be grounded in the fact that all survey respondents had permanent residency and therefore access to all of the responsibilities and rights that secure residency entails. Indeed, it could be argued that permanent residency is the bedrock on which the social, economic, cultural and civic participation of refugees' rests: without permanent protection, refugees' safety and security is not assured.

"Well, actually many things that help us to feel that we belong here and especially the equal rights for everyone, everyone is equal. The sense of freedom that we have here and plus on top of that the services, because my daughter now, she goes to school and everything is provided free of charge."

(Reema, female, late fifties, from Iraq.)

This research provides a snapshot of settlement and integration among newly arrived refugees. Overall, the findings indicate that refugees are tracking well across most of the indicators of integration assessed in this study. In exploring rights and responsibilities, the research indicated that permanent and secure

residency is instrumental in supporting integration across multiple domains. Achieving stronger outcomes in refugee integration involves settlement services and mainstream government and essential services working together.

This research suggests that essential services and other service providers could capitalise on the high level of trust among refugees to be more culturally responsive in their service delivery. The research found a gap in accessing services around refugees' digital skills. This warrants further investigation in future research and attention from service providers to ensure that online and digital services are accessible to refugees.

This study also reiterates a potentially greater role for ethnic and religious community groups in settlement and their potential in fostering social bonds. In addition, settlement services and civil society organisations should continue to leverage the willingness of refugees to volunteer as another avenue to strengthen social and civic participation.

This study adds to the evidence base and the role of social connections and rights and responsibilities in settlement trajectories and integration. In doing so, we aim to further understanding of the strengths and aspirations of refugees and further understanding of the complementary roles and contributions of refugees, receiving communities and government at all levels on which successful integration depends and which help build foundations for belonging.



Background

Australia has a long tradition since World War II of providing permanent protection and resettlement to refugees. During this time the policy settings, practice and evidence base for refugee settlement in Australia and other resettlement countries have progressively evolved. Today, a range of targeted settlement services, which rely on the wider mainstream service system, are at the forefront of the practice of settlement and integration in Australia, while policy settings continue to shift and the evidence base continues to expand.

This research shines a light on often-overlooked aspects of integration to amplify the role of social connections and rights and responsibilities in settlement trajectories and integration. While the broader discourse in Australia tends to focus on the perceptions of refugees in terms of narrow, often economic, integration outcomes, this research paints a picture of the social and civic dimensions of settlement and gives refugees themselves a voice to express their everyday sense of welcome, participation and belonging as they settle and navigate a new chapter of their lives in Australia.

The public discourse, research and policy around refugee integration and settlement in Australia tend to focus on employment, English language proficiency, education and health.

Australia's rich history contains countless stories of refugees who have contributed to the social, cultural, civic and economic fabric of Australia. While some commentary paints a negative economic picture of refugees in terms of workforce and education, comprehensive studies of refugee settlement and integration that take a long-term view demonstrate otherwise. After the initial settlement period, the levels of unemployment and workforce participation among refugees converge, with increased residence, towards the rates of the Australian-born population (Hugo 2011, Hugo 2014). The children of refugees demonstrate higher levels of workforce participation than their parents and, in many cases, higher than the Australian-born population (Hugo 2011, Hugo 2014). In addition, refugees are more likely to establish their own businesses than other migrant groups and thus make a unique and important contribution to the Australian economy (Hugo 2011,

Collins 2017). In education, intergenerational upward mobility is evident with the children of refugees having higher education participation rates than their parents and Australian-born individuals (Hugo 2014, p. 37). Thus, the long-term picture is that refugees make a significant economic contribution to Australia.

To ensure all newcomers are able to participate fully in the economic, social, cultural and civic life of Australia, Australia's migration policy settings strive towards successful settlement and integration of migrants and refugees (Fozdar and Hartley 2013). This is underpinned by a commitment to multiculturalism, which supports newcomers to integrate and participate in Australia rather than placing the onus on migrants and refugees to assimilate (Department of Social Services 2017). A core element of multiculturalism is that people can have multiple, overlapping identities and that individuals can belong to more than one national or ethnic group (Strang and Ager 2010). According to the Australian Government's multicultural policy, economic and social integration leads to a sense of worth and belonging that is vital to allow newcomers to thrive (Department of Social Services 2017, p.13).

However, what does successful settlement and integration look like?

Several studies and reports link successful settlement and integration of migrants with achievement in areas such as employment, housing, health, education and host community language acquisition. For example, a recognised international indicator of migration policy outcomes, the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), measures countries against specific integration domains, including education, labour market mobility and health (MIPEX 2019). In 2014, Australia ranked eight out of 38 participating countries under the MIPEX with strong results for settlement strategies in education, health and pathways to citizenship (MIPEX 2019).

Likewise, in Australia, key settlement outcomes for refugees are usually conceptualised across a number of domains, including language acquisition, employment, housing, education and health. A longitudinal study of refugees, Building a New Life in Australia, is tracking these key areas and has found

that language barriers, lack of job opportunities and financial difficulties made it harder to settle in Australia (National Centre for Longitudinal Data 2017). The emphasis on employment is evident across the literature, with Colic-Peisker (2009) noting that policymakers and politicians often view employment as the most important aspect of integration. Others propose a wider understanding of outcomes, with employment, housing, education and health seen as both the markers and the means of achieving integration, which is a multi-dimensional, long-term, two-way process of mutual adaptation by new migrants and the receiving society (Ager and Strang 2008, Fozdar and Hartley 2013). However, settlement and integration are also influenced by less tangible markers, experiences and attitudes. Ultimately, settlement and integration is determined by the extent to which refugees “are able to become a valued citizen within their new country” (Correa-Velez, Gifford et al. 2010, p.1406). As such, it is not only material security of housing and labour that matter. Rather, “the opportunity to flourish, to become at home, to belong is powerfully shaped by the prevailing social climate and structures that are openly inclusive or exclude” (Correa-Velez, Gifford et al. 2010, p. 1406.)

While outcomes in the areas of employment, housing, health, education and English language acquisition are important, these areas do not capture the full spectrum of domains that contribute to integration. Refugees themselves report a wider view of integration and Australians in general also value the wider contributions of refugees and migrants to Australian society.

Social connections are an important aspect of settlement and integration outcomes (Correa-Velez, Gifford et al. 2010, Strang and Ager 2010). The evidence indicates that for many refugees “emotional and social factors are more important in the place-making and resettlement process than economic factors” (Hiruy 2009, p. 109). While governments seek to measure settlement “success” in terms of economic factors, refugees themselves value “community connectedness, interdependence and personal happiness as ... indicators of successful settlement” (Woldeyes 2019, p. 56). This was also found in a major survey of newly arrived migrants and refugees in Australia (Australian Survey Group 2011). These social connections, and the social capital that they help to create, build resilience and provide a buffer to migrants and refugees from the ups and downs of life in a new country (Fonseca, Lukosch et al. 2019).

Likewise, Building a New Life in Australia, which since 2014 is following the settlement journey of about 2,000 refugees, reveals their desire to have better connections to the community and an increasing willingness to engage in activities organised by community, ethnic or religious groups over time. The study found that interaction with the broader Australian community increased with the length of residence, as did refugees’ trust in people in the neighbourhood (National Centre for Longitudinal Data 2017). Alongside increased engagement with community activities, refugees felt a greater sense of welcome in Australia over time (National Centre for Longitudinal Data 2017).

Refugees’ desire for greater community connectedness informs the approach of settlement service providers that provide targeted services to refugees. These connections and bridges can occur organically in everyday situations in the community but a proactive, intentional approach is also needed to foster local spaces for meeting and exchange. Settlement service providers such as SSI actively invest in a wide range of community engagement initiatives to enhance social participation, recognising that settlement is a whole of community approach. This approach is evident in the way that SSI has worked with local agencies and the wider community in Armidale, NSW — Australia’s newest designated regional settlement location (Settlement Services International 2019).

At the same time, Australians value the contribution made by migrants and refugees. The twelfth Scanlon Foundation Mapping Social Cohesion Survey conducted in 2019 shows that Australians continue to endorse the view that we are an immigrant nation and remain positive about the contribution of newcomers. In the most recent survey, more than 80 per cent agreed with the proposition that migrants improve Australian society, bring new ideas and cultures, and that migrants are generally good for the economy (Markus 2019).

This research is framed by a comprehensive framework of settlement and integration.

In 2004 the UK Home Office commissioned a rigorous consultation process with migrant and refugee communities, settlement sector organisations and policy makers to develop an understanding of the key domains of integration. The resulting framework of integration (Ager and Strang 2008) was influential in shaping policy, practice and research to further understandings of integration at an international level. In 2019, the UK Home Office released an updated and expanded framework and a range of supporting policy and practice tools (UK Home Office 2019). As with the first version, the updated framework was developed in collaboration with researchers, with input from migrant and refugee organisations, NGOs, local and national governments and newcomers themselves.

The key principles underpinning the framework are:

- *Integration is multi-dimensional* and depends on multiple factors encompassing access to resources and opportunities as well as social mixing;
- *Integration is multi-directional* and involves mutual adaptation by everyone in a society or community;
- *Integration is a shared responsibility* that depends on everyone taking responsibility for their own contribution, including newcomers, receiving communities and government at all levels; and

- *Integration is context-specific* and needs to be understood and planned in relation to its particular context and this context influences the timeframe of outcomes (UK Home Office 2019).

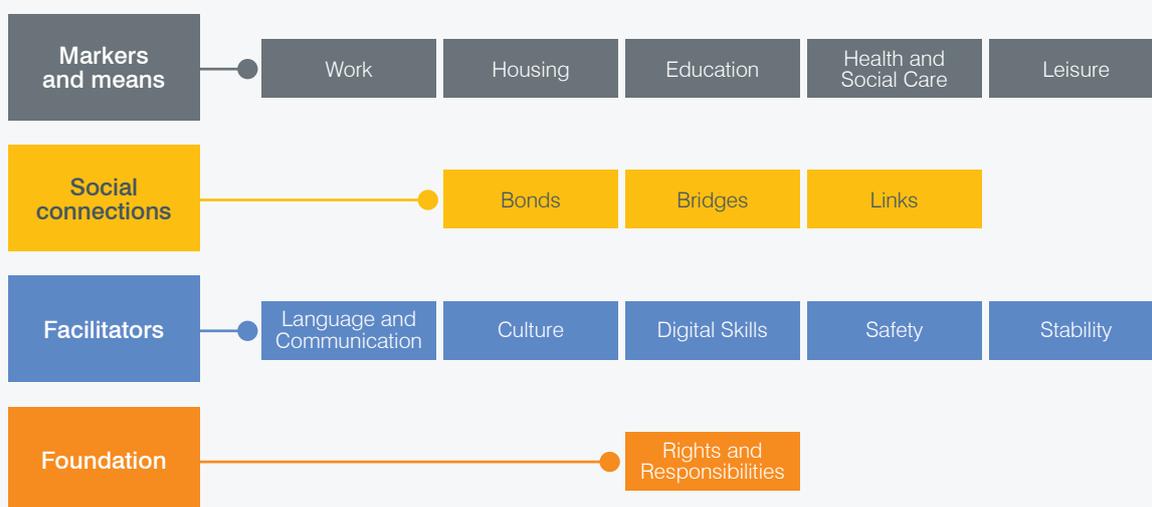
The focus of this research is on social connections and the foundational level of rights and responsibilities.

Social bonds represent the first domain of social connections. For refugees, this involves strengthening relationships with their ethnic and cultural communities. Ager and Strang (Strang and Ager 2010, p. 598) note the “importance of bonds as a source of emotional support, self-esteem and confidence”. For refugees, the deep sense of loss can invoke a desire to create spaces that represent the familiar, such as places of worship, cultural centres and ethnic restaurants or grocery stores (Hiruy 2009, p.95).

Families, however defined and wherever they live, are a dimension of social bonds and have a primal importance in terms of integration (Strang and Ager 2010). There is ample evidence that refugees are impeded in their settlement journey when the safety and fate of family members is unknown or continues to be at risk (Strang and Ager 2010) and the negative impacts of ongoing family separation on refugee settlement in Australia has been documented (Wickes, van Kooy et al. 2019).

The structure and the domains of the Framework of Integration

(UK Home Office 2019)



The research evidence emphasises that there is no trade-off between social bonds and developing connections with the broader community such that refugees are part of “separate, very bonded but disconnected communities” (Strang and Ager 2010, p. 598). Rather, social bonds created through spaces such as places of worship, community events and restaurants with home cuisine imbue refugees with confidence in their identity and a sense of feeling at home in their new environment (Elliott and Yusuf 2014).

Another domain of social connection, social bridges, involves forming networks with other groups within the broader community. This generally occurs in neighbourhood encounters such as the local shops, sports tournaments or school activities. For refugees, social bridges and bonds are both important as acquiring both strikes “the balance between adapting to life in a new setting whilst paying homage to one’s homeland” (Elliott and Yusuf 2014, p. 104). Expanding refugees’ social networks also fosters the development of trust in institutions (Strang and Ager 2010).

The third domain of social connections, social links, involves engaging with institutions of society such as local government and non-government services, civic participation and political processes. The role of these institutions and practices in adapting to refugees and migrants and, in turn, their part in facilitating integration, is rarely examined in the research literature (Grzymala-Kazłowska and Phillimore 2018). Social links connect refugees with institutions and structures in society so that they contribute to its development and are the beneficiaries of services (UK Home Office 2019, p. 17). Social links can be undermined through experiences of discrimination such as denial of service or perceived unfair treatment (Elliott and Yusuf 2014).

Finally, this research also explores the foundational domain of rights and responsibilities. At a core level, the refugee experience is: “one of being cast out, of being socially excluded, where belonging – to family, community and country – is always at risk” (Correa-Velez, Gifford et al. 2010, p. 1399). This underscores the importance of access to rights, security and equality, and the opportunity to contribute and fulfil responsibilities to strengthen belonging (Strang and Ager 2010). Ager and Strang (2008) note that the rights and responsibilities domain focuses on “the extent to which refugees are provided with the basis for full and equal engagement within society” (p. 176). This is consistent with how the OECD defines the opportunity and the dividend of a socially cohesive society which:

“works towards the wellbeing of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalisation, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility” (OECD, 2011 cited in Fonseca, Lukosch et al. 2019, p. 245).

Having secure residency status (i.e., permanent residency) is “in itself, instrumental in enabling integration, emphasising the ... foundational place of policy on rights and citizenship on refugee integration ... and belonging” (Strang and Ager 2010, p. 596). This is critical to substantive rights. The domain also encompasses refugees’ perceptions of their responsibilities to society and community such as the responsibility to be self-sufficient and to obey and respect the law.



“[a socially cohesive society]... works towards the wellbeing of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalisation, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility”

Findings

Demographics of participants

Of our 334 survey respondents, 154 (46%) were female and 180 (54%) were male.

The respondents are mainly between 25 and 54 years of age (64%) and live mostly in major cities, with about one person in ten residing in a regional location of NSW (using Australian Bureau of Statistics definitions³) (Fig. 1).

All of the respondents held a permanent humanitarian visa and most arrived in Australia in 2018 (84%) with an average residency in Australia of 2.5 years at the time of the survey. More than 7 out of 10 arrived (71%) through the Special Humanitarian Program visa (subclass 202) supported by a proposer, typically a relative, in Australia (Fig. 2)⁴.

The most common citizenships in the sample were Iraq (160), followed by Syria (135) and Afghanistan (37).

Fig. 1 Place of residence

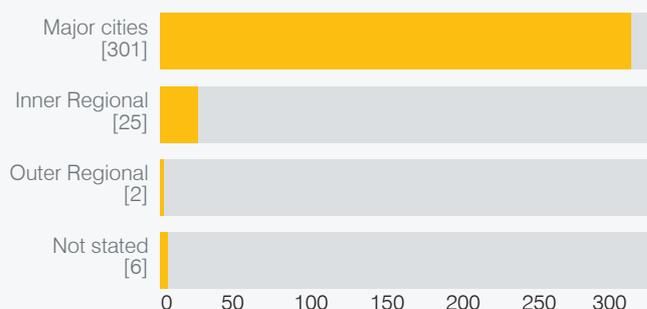
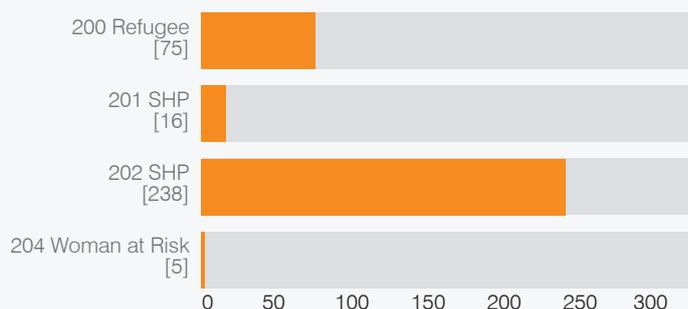


Fig. 2 Visa type

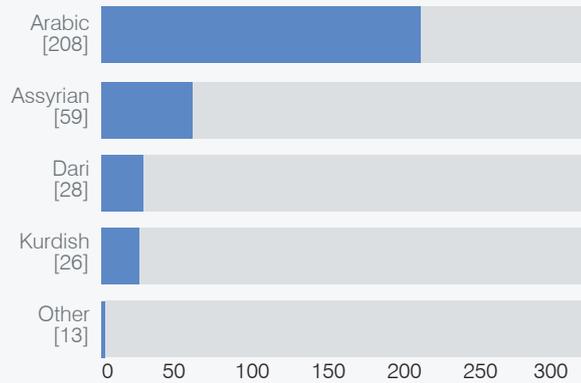


³ The Department of Home Affairs, and the Humanitarian Settlement Program, follows a different method of classifying regional areas of Australia.

⁴ Respondents in this research arrived on one of the following visa types:

- 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.

Fig. 3 First language



Respondents spoke a wide variety of languages (the telephone survey was conducted in more than 10 different languages), with the most common first languages in the sample being Arabic (208), Assyrian/Assyrian Neo-Aramaic (59), Dari (28) and Kurdish/Kurdish Karanja (26) and Hazaragi. Other languages spoken included Chaldean, Farsi and Armenian (Fig. 3).

In the findings we note, where relevant, major variations in responses by age, gender, visa type and place of residence (i.e., metropolitan/regional area).

Interviewee Demographics

The 15 participants in the qualitative interviews reflected the survey sample demographics in terms of gender, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, visa types and living in regional/metropolitan locations.

Social Bonds

Social bonds relate to the connections people have with others from the same cultural background. Supportive relationships with people who share similar values and expectations about life (norms) are an important initial step to establishing connections in a new country. These bonds are generally – but not always – formed with family and friends who share the same culture, language and faith and contribute to a sense of belonging.⁵

Welcome

Most respondents reported being given strong support in Australia (Fig.4), from their national or ethnic community (85%, Yes/Sometimes) and support from their religious community (77%, Yes/Sometimes).

Age seems to influence respondents' perceptions of being supported with higher reported rates among older respondents: 61% of respondents aged 18-24 feel supported by their religious community, and 66% by their national or ethnic community; while over three-quarters of respondents aged over 55 feel supported by their religious community and by their national and ethnic community.

Unsurprisingly, respondents holding a Special Humanitarian Program visa (subclass 202), in other words linked with a proposer (usually a relative) already in Australia, reported more support from their national or ethnic community (between 73% and 80% feel supported), compared to respondents with another offshore visa (Refugee visa (subclass 200); In-country Special Humanitarian visa (subclass 201);

⁵ UK Home Office Indicators of Integration Framework 2019

Fig. 4 Do you feel that you have been given support/comfort in Australia from ...?



and Woman at Risk visa (subclass 204), less than 60%).

Compared to this study sample, Building a New Life in Australia (BNLA)⁶ respondents reported significantly less support from the community on these two indicators: with about half reporting support from their national, ethnic or religious community. The BNLA comparison group had a far smaller proportion of respondents with a Special Humanitarian Program visa (subclass 202), which involves having a proposer in Australia, which could mean that the type of visa explains the differences on these measures with between BNLA and this study.

On another indicator, almost all the respondents (98%) feel able to practise their religion freely in Australia, which was a very similar response when compared to BNLA respondents. This perception does not vary in terms of age, gender, visa or place of residence.

Participation

Maintaining contact with family members is an important aspect of social bonds and connections. More than three quarters of respondents reported being in contact with family members, daily or at least once a week (Table 1). We can expect refugee respondents to have family members in countries of origin, countries of displacement and other countries, and the two predominant communication methods were phone or exchanging text messages/instant messages. Email usage was far less common. We can speculate that, for many respondents, maintaining connection with family and friends overseas is crucial, especially where those family members are experiencing threats to their security and safety and uncertainty about the future.

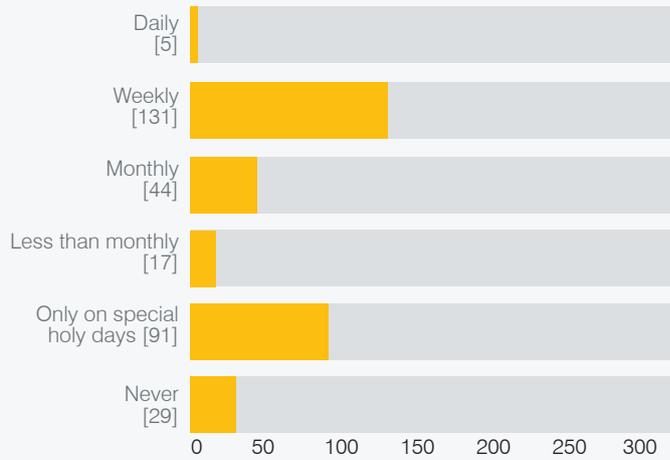
When asked about their participation in religious activities, just over half of the respondents regularly attend a place of worship (Fig. 5). This is in line with the BNLA survey results.

Table 1. On average, how often do you ... ? (Percentage)

Frequency	Once a day	2-3 times a week	About once a week	About once a fortnight	About once a month	Less than once a month	Total
Speak on the phone or video or audio call via the internet with family members or friends	48	25	16	4	4	4	100
Email or write to family members or friends	27	12	10	5	8	38	100
Exchange text messages or instant messages with family members or friends	38	20	15	5	5	16	100

⁶ For information on the BNLA comparison group used in this study see Methods section

Fig. 5 How often do you attend a place of worship (eg. a church or place of prayer)?



In relation to activities organised by their own ethnic or religious community (Table 2), apart from cultural activities, there was low reported participation. This is perhaps unsurprising given that community activities (e.g., sports, school) are not generally within the scope of what ethnic or religious community organisations offer.

Respondents living in regional areas reported more participation in activities related to school, sport, and other leisure activities, and less participation in cultural activities within their own community. It is reasonable to conclude that in regional areas there is less access to these kinds of “own community”

cultural events like festivals and special days due to smaller ethnic and religious communities.

BNLA respondents reported slightly more participation on this measure in sport, leisure and cultural activities when compared to respondents in this survey. Of note, in this question there was a high level of “not applicable” responses, which the Bilingual Guide telephone interviewers attributed to respondents in this sample being unaware of a relevant activity organised by their own ethnic and religious community across most of the options in this question.

Table 2. Since you came to Australia, how often have you and/or the family members you live with been involved in any of these activities organised by your ethnic or religious community? (Percentage)

	Daily/ Weekly	Monthly/ A few times a year or less	Never	Not Applicable	Total
School activities	9	26	41	24	100
Sporting activities	11	15	49	24	100
Leisure activities (e.g., movie nights, cooking classes)	9	19	53	19	100
Parent support groups	3	17	55	25	100
Youth groups	3	11	61	26	100
Volunteering/helping others in your ethnic/ religious community	8	22	52	18	100
Cultural activities (e.g., festivals, special days)	6	48	31	15	100

Belonging

When asked about their friendship networks in Australia (Fig.6), just over a half (52%) reported a mix of people from their ethnic/religious community and other communities, while over a third (37%) reported having mostly friends from their own religious/ethnic community. These responses are very similar to BNLA respondents. In our sample, women were slightly less likely than men to have a mixed friendship network.

The respondents reported a strong sense of belonging to their immediate neighbourhood (Fig.7) (90%, Strongly Agree/Agree) and this was even stronger among those living in regional areas (95%, Strongly Agree/Agree).

In the qualitative interviews, social bonds and social bridges were often described as equally important and mutually reinforcing in refugees' lives. Participants pointed out how support and interactions both within and beyond their ethnic or religious communities contributed to their sense of welcome and belonging. Living in diverse neighbourhoods was often highlighted as a benefit. As Aram explained:

"The community where I'm at, or the neighbourhood, there are people from all different races, from Asian to Middle-Eastern, Africans, they are all different nations. So

we get along really well. We all say 'hello' to each other, very courteous to each other, et cetera. [...] The Armenian community, well, they're also very welcoming. Obviously, speaking Armenian and we have our own community and they make us feel welcome as well. So in both ways, it feels that I'm welcome from this end and welcome from the other end, so there's not really a big difference." (Aram, male, late thirties, Armenian from Syria.)

The strongest concerns around social bonds expressed by interviewees were around family members who were still overseas in difficult circumstances. Participants spoke about how being separated from family and concerned about their safety disrupted their own sense of settlement into Australia. Toran told us:

"I say if my family, like my brothers and my sister, my grandma, brothers and sisters they all live in a tent now back in Iraq. And as you know in winter it's very cold and in summer is really, really hot as they living and there are plastic basically. So the situation like – it's very bad. If they were here with me I would feel like my family's here too and I feel like more home." (Toran, male, mid-thirties, Kurdish from Iraq.)

Fig. 6 Would you say your friends in Australia are ...?

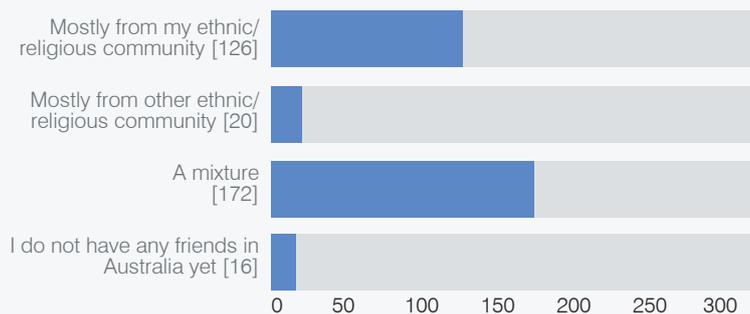
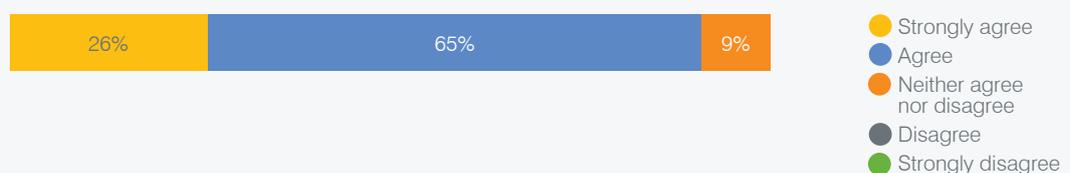


Fig. 7 I feel like I belong to my immediate neighbourhood?



Key Points

- The findings contest assumptions that refugees' strong family and community connections prevent them from developing connections with the broader Australian community.
- Instead, the findings demonstrate that while refugees report strong social bonds with their families and their national, ethnic and/or religious communities, a majority have a mixed friendship network (slightly lower among women and higher among refugees in regional areas), while a third had friendship networks that were mainly with their own national/ethnic community and they also reported a strong sense of belonging to their immediate neighbourhood.
- Refugees' strong social bonds are underpinned by strong ethnic, religious and national community support, particularly among older refugees and those with a proposer already in Australia, and the ability to practise religion freely, with just over half attending a place of worship at least monthly.
- Interestingly, participation in community activities, other than cultural activities, was not a strong source of social bonds for refugees. Therefore there is potential for ethnic and/or religious groups to deliver a wider set of activities to ensure they are able to foster social bonds among refugees.
- Refugees maintain family and social ties through regular contact using digital communication platforms to message or speak to families and relatives. We can speculate that, for many refugees, maintaining connection with family and friends overseas is crucial, especially where those family members are experiencing threats to their security, and safety and uncertainty about the future, and indeed this was raised in the qualitative interviews.
- Overall, the findings suggest:
 - There is potential scope for ethnic and religious community groups to be supported to offer a range of community activities, in addition to cultural activities, to enhance social bonds among newly arrived refugees;
 - Given a majority of refugees attended a place of worship weekly, further thought needs to be given to how religious communities can be supported in their role of nurturing social bonds; and
 - Women from refugee backgrounds may need greater support to build mixed friendship networks with people of different backgrounds.

Social Bridges

Establishing social bridges with people from other cultural backgrounds is another important dimension of social connections and critical to establishing the “two-way” interaction at the heart of integration. Creating bridges to other community members opens up opportunities for broadening cultural exchange and understanding and a pathway for refugees to contribute to social and cultural life.

Welcome

Almost all respondents (90%) felt that they have been made to feel welcome in Australia, which is on a par with respondents in BNLA.

Young people (18-24) reported feeling less welcome than older people (over 55) (84%, compared to 94%). Respondents in regional areas feel slightly less welcome than refugees residing in major cities (82%, Always/Most of the Time, compared to 90%).

Over three-quarters of participants reported support from other community groups than their own (76%, Yes/Sometimes) (Fig. 9), almost double what BNLA respondents reported on this same measure.

Men reported more support from other community groups than women (68% of men, 57% of women). Respondents living in regional areas of NSW reported far more support from other community groups (90%, Yes/Sometimes), perhaps due to not having easy access to people from their ethnic or religious community in regional areas.

Fig. 8 Do you feel that you have been given support/comfort in Australia from: other community groups?

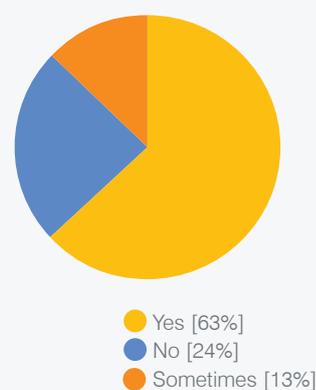


Table 3. To what extent do you agree with the following statements ... ? (Percentage)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
My local area is a place where people from different national or ethnic backgrounds get along well together	24	66	9	1	0	100
People in my local area are willing to help their neighbours	16	63	18	3	0	100

In relation to their local area, respondents feel that their neighbours are willing to help each other (Table 3) (79%, Strongly Agree/Agree). There were no major variations by gender, visa type or age but respondents living in regional areas, compared to those in cities, felt that locals are more willing to help each other (90%, Strongly Agree/Agree compared to 79%).

The overwhelming view of respondents is that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together (90%, Strongly Agree/Agree) and this does not vary by age, gender, visa type or place of residence.

These two items (Table 2) are taken from Mapping Social Cohesion (MSC), a major annual survey of Australian community attitudes. In comparison, respondents in this study indicated similar responses in relation to peoples' willingness to help their neighbours (80% in MSC 2019) but have much more positive views on people from different backgrounds getting on well in their local area (90%, Strongly Agree/Agree compared to 76% in MSC 2019)⁷.

Participation

When asked about their participation in social activities organised by the wider community there was a slightly higher response (Table 4), especially school activities (45%), compared to activities organised by their own ethnic/religious community (Table 2). As with the set of questions on community activities organised by their own ethnic/religious community (Fig. 6), there was a high rate of "not applicable" responses, which is hard to explain and runs against what we found in most other responses to measures in the survey.

In general, men were slightly more likely to report participating in these community activities. Age

also influenced participation with young people (18-24) more likely to participate in school, leisure and self-improvement activities and, unsurprisingly, youth groups, than older age brackets. Similarly, respondents living in regional areas reported stronger participation in most activities, indicating more involvement in local communities than respondents living in metropolitan areas.

Overall, the findings are on a par with BNLA respondents with the exception that respondents in this sample tended to participate far more in school activities (45%, Daily to A few times a year, compared to 24%).

Over three-quarters of respondents (77%, Strongly Agree/Agree) regularly meet and get to know people from ethnic and religious backgrounds other than their own, indicating a strong level of interactions/social bridges in everyday situations (Fig. 9).

Age, gender and, particularly, place of residence all play a role. Respondents living in regional areas were more likely than people in metropolitan areas to regularly meet with people from ethnic/religious communities other than their own (90%, Strongly Agree/Agree compared to 81%). Male respondents were also more likely to regularly meet with people from different backgrounds (81%, Strongly Agree/Agree compared to 70% among women), as were young people (18-24) (79%).

When given scenarios about behaviours that indicate social bridges and trust in their neighbours, about half of the respondents would feel comfortable (49%, Very Comfortable/Fairly Comfortable) asking their neighbours to keep a set of spare keys to their home in case of emergency (Fig. 10). A higher proportion, almost three-quarters, would feel comfortable (70%, Very Comfortable/Fairly Comfortable) asking neighbours to help with shopping in case of illness (Fig. 11).

⁷ Mapping Social Cohesion 2019, The Scanlon Foundation/Monash University

Table 4. Since you came to Australia, how often have you and/or the family members you live with, been involved in any of these activities organised by groups other than your ethnic or religious community? (Percentage)

	Daily/ Weekly	Monthly/ A few times a year	Never	Not applicable	Total
School activities	13	32	38	18	100
Sporting activities	9	19	49	22	100
Leisure activities (e.g., movie nights, cooking classes)	6	20	54	20	100
Parent support groups	2	16	59	23	100
Self- improvement activities (e.g., coping with stress)	6	20	55	20	100
Youth groups	2	14	59	24	100

Fig. 9 I regularly meet and get to know people from ethnic and religious community other than my own

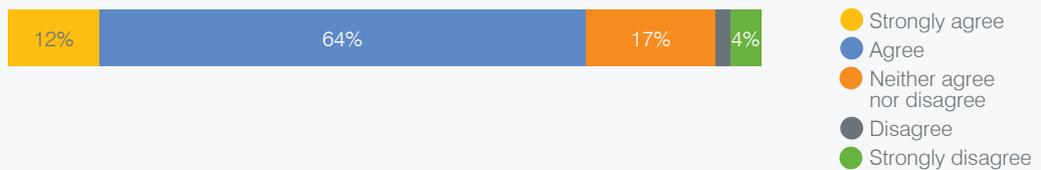


Fig. 10 How comfortable would you be asking a neighbour to keep a set of keys to your home for emergencies, for example if you were locked out?

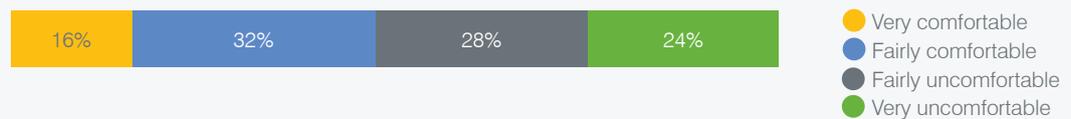
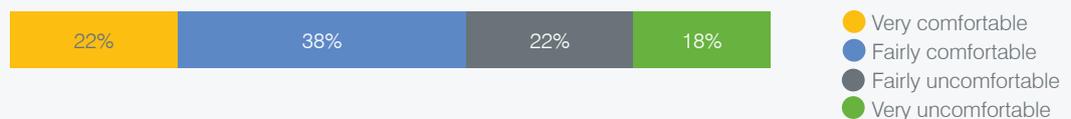


Fig. 11 If you were ill and at home on your own and needed someone to collect a few shopping essentials, how comfortable would you feel asking a neighbour to do this for you?



Curiously, respondents living in regional areas were far less comfortable asking their neighbours to keep a set of keys (27%, Very Comfortable/Comfortable compared to 50%) and collect shopping (39%, Very Comfortable/Comfortable compared to 60%) than their counterparts living in metropolitan areas. In terms of gender, women were less comfortable in giving a set of keys to a neighbour.

Respondents who held a Special Humanitarian Program visa (subclass 202) showed a higher degree of trust both on leaving a set of keys (54%, Very Comfortable/Fairly Comfortable against other visa types 36%) and asking a neighbour to collect the shopping (66%, Very Comfortable/Fairly Comfortable against other visa types 47%).

Respondents over 65 have more trust in their neighbours to do shopping for them (65%, Very Comfortable/Fairly Comfortable) against the younger age groups (59%). Young people (18-24) would be less comfortable leaving house keys to neighbours (35%, Very Comfortable/Fairly Comfortable).

Belonging

The majority of respondents found it Very Easy/Easy to make friends in Australia (66%) and understand the Australian ways/culture (69%), but a significant proportion (43%) still found it hard to talk to their neighbours (Table 5). This may be a result of language barriers, rather than a more global lack of comfort with their neighbours, given the findings from multiple other measures in this survey showing high levels of trust in neighbours and belonging in neighbourhoods.

Making friends was slightly easier for men (70%) than women (63%), as is talking to neighbours (61%, Very Easy/Easy against 50% of women). Young people (18-24) reported finding it easier to make friends in Australia (73%) than older age groups, and to talk to their Australian neighbours (71%).

Visa category also influenced responses with Special Humanitarian Program visa holders (subclass 202) involving a proposer in Australia, reporting they find

it much easier to make friends (73%, Easy/Very Easy compared to 46%) and to understand Australian ways and culture (73%, Easy/Very Easy compared to 58%).

Respondents in regional areas find it harder to make friends in Australia (68%, Very Hard/Hard) and to talk to their neighbours (58%, Very Hard/Hard). This is despite them reporting that they participate more in social activities organised by the local regional community organisations.

In comparison to BNLA, respondents in this sample find it: easier to make friends in Australia (66%, Very Easy/Easy compared to 53%); understand Australian ways and culture (69%, Very Easy/Easy compared to 57%); and talk to their Australian neighbours (57%, Very Easy/Easy compared to 45%).

The vast majority of respondents (87%) report that they feel part of the Australian community always or most of the time (Fig. 12), which is similar to what is reported by respondents in BNLA.

Fig. 12 Do you feel part of the Australia community?

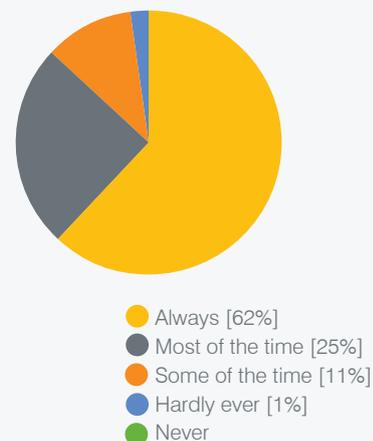


Table 5. Since you came to Australia, how easy have you found it to ... ? (Percentage)

	Very easy	Easy	Hard	Very hard	Total
Make friends in Australia	14	52	29	5	100
Talk to your Australian neighbours	9	48	35	9	100
Understand Australian ways/culture	9	60	29	2	100

Respondents in regional areas feel less part of the Australian community than those residing in metropolitan areas (74%, Always/ Most of the Time, compared to 87%).

In the interviews, schools, universities, and local religious organisations were often mentioned as important places to expand networks into the community and to build diverse and supportive groups of friends. Asfar, for example, in his early twenties and from Afghanistan, mentioned a regular community event held by a local church that had been an important node of relationship building during his early settlement. These relationships remain important now that he has been in Australia for three years:

“There was this community at the Uniting Church. [They held] an event that people go there from every background and I’ve met quite a few friends and I’ve felt welcomed. I’ve felt a lot from the community. I still go there sometimes. They have this event every Tuesday where you go, they do singing, they do dancing. They read books, they read stories, they’re bringing stories, you can share your stories with them. You will hear the people with stories. I was very fortunate to be able to join that community. I did make some good friends in that community. I have their private contacts, I contact them every time I need support and in that hard time, I contacted one of these beautiful families. They were checking on me. Every week or second, they would invite me over and talk to me and see how progress.” (Asfar, male, early twenties, from Afghanistan.)

For interviewees who felt less connected in terms of social bridges, it was language barriers and cultural differences that were often mentioned as difficulties, particularly for women and for older men, who noted the unfamiliar ways of socialising or their fear and uncertainty of the new social environment, especially during their early days, as Ferran explained:

“It was a bit hard for us as the older people here but for the younger generation like my son, it was so easy for him to feel that he’s one of the people here, one of the Australian people. [...] Social life here is different than my home country because in my home country I get to know everyone around me or even on the street but here, it’s a bit difficult. It’s limited to the community or people in my own community or just family

and relatives. [...] People here are very nice and very helpful whenever I ask but culturally, it’s different from my own home country. You can’t make a friendship or relationship so easily with anyone unless you previously know him from the community or a relative gets to spend some time. This is the main thing but people are kind [...] but not — socially, it’s not like my own country. We have some differences in the social and cultural life.” (Ferran, male, sixties, from Syria.)

Aska, a young woman from Iraq, had a similar experience to Ferran, despite their difference in age. Aska felt that, although people in the broader community were potentially friendly, the communication and cultural barriers were often hard to breach. The pain of missing the bonds of her close family compounded a sense of isolation:

“The first thing was the language. We couldn’t speak the language. The other thing is as far as being — not being able to speak or not being able to hear, both of them together. Because you couldn’t know any way, how to go to places, anything. The other thing, as much as you’d be safe, you’ll have a good life here, you will miss your home country. You will miss your family members. You will miss your dad, your mother — you will miss those things. They [the neighbours] are good. But we don’t communicate with each other.” (Aska, female, early twenties, from Iraq.)

Key Points

- The findings challenge perceptions that refugees are hesitant to mix with the broader Australian community or that English language proficiency is a prerequisite to strong social bridges.
- Refugees in this survey feel a very strong sense of being welcomed in Australia and being part of the Australian community, which was encapsulated in reports, particularly among men and refugees in regional areas, of being given support from community groups other than their own.
- More than three-quarters of refugees reported regularly meeting and getting to know people from backgrounds other than their own, indicating strong interactions and bridges in everyday situations. This was strongest among people living in regional areas and also more common among men and young people.
- Refugees overwhelmingly view their local areas as places where people from different backgrounds get along, much higher than responses to the

same measure in an annual national survey of the general population in Australia.

- Compared to a similar cohort of refugees in Australia, refugees in this survey find it easier to make friends, understand Australian ways and culture and talk to their Australian neighbours. Men, young people and those with a proposer were more likely to find it easiest in our sample all three measures.
 - That said, talking to their Australian neighbours was a challenge for refugees in this sample, which we speculate was largely due to language barriers, given positive responses on other measures of social bridges with neighbours.
 - For example, more than three-quarters of refugees feel that their neighbours are willing to help each other, similar to responses on this same measure in an annual national survey of the general population in Australia. For those living in regional areas, this sense of support among neighbours was even higher.
 - In the same way, when given scenarios to gauge their trust in their neighbours, the majority of refugees were comfortable in an emergency to leave a set of keys and, in the case of illness, to ask a neighbour to help with shopping. Refugees living in regional areas were far less comfortable on both of these measures compared to those living in major cities. Women were also somewhat less comfortable.
- Interestingly, social bridges seem to be fostered through everyday encounters and experiences, as there were relatively low rates of participation in formal community activities such as school activities, parents support groups and youth groups.
 - Overall, the findings suggest:
 - Refugees, despite language barriers, are developing social bridges through friendship networks and have a positive sense of welcome and trust in neighbours and neighbourhoods even at this relatively early stage of settlement. This provides a strong base for community engagement initiatives that facilitate meeting and exchange between receiving communities and newly arrived refugees;
 - These social bridges are grounded in the sense of welcome and support offered by the broader Australian community. Safeguarding and nurturing a prevailing social climate that is positive towards refugees and cultural diversity is critical to maintaining and fostering these social bridges; and
 - More work is needed to link refugees to activities in the broader community such as schools, sports and leisure activities.

Social Links

Social links refer to engagement with the institutions of society, such as government and non-governmental services, adding a third dimension to social connection that supports integration. Social links exist where a person is able to engage with, and benefit from, essential and other government services, and develop a sense of independence and trust in the institutions of society.

Welcome

Respondents show a deep level of trust towards the police (88%, A lot) and the government (85%, A lot) (Fig. 13). By combining “A lot” and “Some” responses in relation to trust, a similar proportion of respondents, almost 8 out of 10, trusted the media (82%, A Lot/Some) and the people they work and study with (78%, A Lot/Some) which, while still high, is nonetheless weaker in terms of trust.

Trust in people in their neighbourhood was also high (75%, A Lot/Some) but trust in the wider Australian community was somewhat lower (67% A Lot/Some).

Men in this study were more trusting than women of people in their neighbourhood (82%, A Lot/Some compared to 60%), people they work and study with (90%, A Lot/Some compared to 67%) and the wider Australian community (90%, A Lot/Some compared to 67%).

Young people (18-24) trust police slightly less (78%, A Lot), but they trust the government slightly more (90%, A lot).

Respondents holding a Refugee visa (subclass 200) reported less trust in the wider Australian community (46% A Lot/Some) compared to 65% of holders of a Special Humanitarian Program visa (subclass 202) (those with a proposer in Australia).

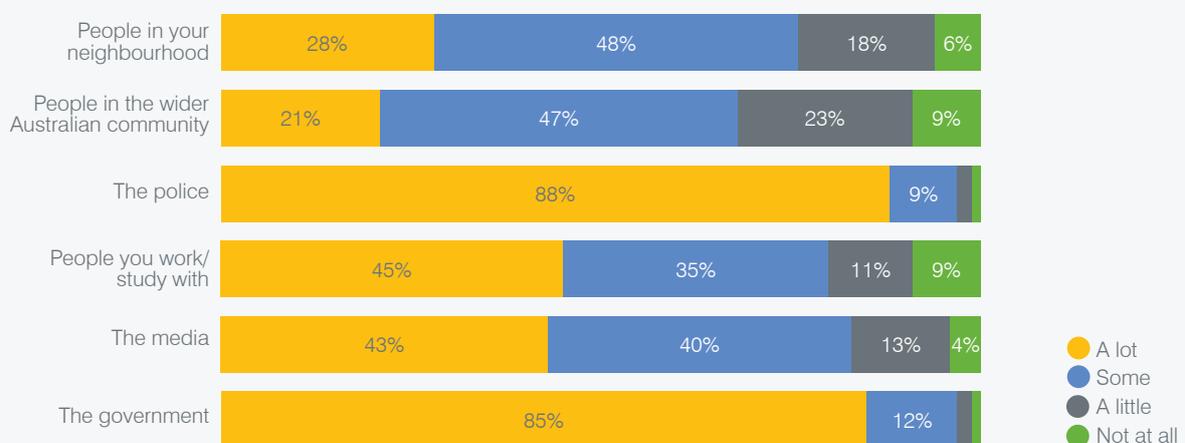
Respondents living in regional areas trust the police and government as much as other respondents, but they show a higher degree of trust in the people of the neighbourhood (87%, A Lot/Some) and less trust towards the people they work or study with (57%, A Lot/Some).

Respondents in BNLA had similar patterns with very high levels of trust in the government and the police, followed by people they work or study with. We can conclude that these levels of trust are related to refugees’ past experiences of war, conflict and state-based persecution. In fact these kinds of experiences are the very basis for meeting the UN Convention criteria for refugee status.

Participation

Respondents would know very well or fairly well how to find somewhere to live (76%), use public transport (87%), get help in an emergency (88%), use bank services (76%), and get help from the police (85%) (Fig. 14). Respondents would know very well or fairly well also how to find out what government services and benefits are available (76%) (Fig. 13). Almost two-thirds reported they would know very well or fairly well how to look for a job (60%) and find out about their rights (59%) (Fig. 13).

Fig. 13 How much do you trust the following groups of people ...?



Age strongly influences the capacity to know how to access services: young people (18-24) reported they would know very well how to find all services compared to all the other age brackets. This is particularly true around finding out about government services (91%), looking for a job (79%), finding somewhere to live (80%), finding out about rights (80%) and using bank services (89%)

Respondents holding a Refugee visa (subclass 200) tend to have weaker knowledge of how to access services in general compared to Special Humanitarian Program visa (subclass 202) holders (e.g., 38% of Refugee visa holders would know very well how to use public transport against 59% of Special Humanitarian Program visa holders).

Respondents in this sample showed a much higher degree of confidence on many aspects of engagement with institutions and society when compared to BNLA respondents,⁸ in particular: finding out about their rights (70%, Know Very Well/ Know Fairly Well compared to 43%); finding out about government services and benefits (76%, Know Very Well/Know Fairly Well compared to 45%).

When asked about their access to language support, almost half of the respondents report they have always been able or usually able to get interpreting assistance when needed (Fig.15). Women are more likely than men to report always being able to get interpreting when needed.

Fig. 14 If you had to, would you know how to ...?

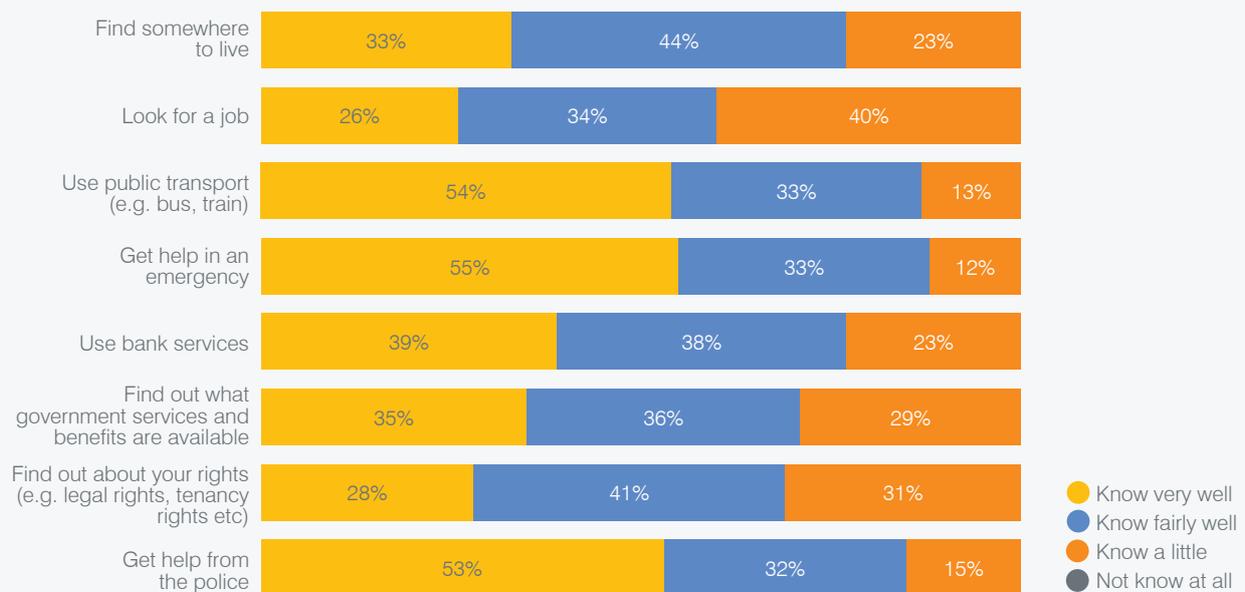
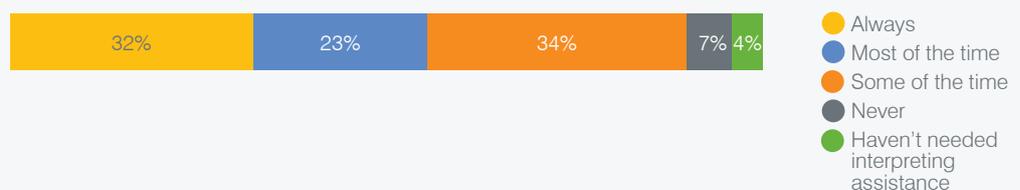


Fig. 15 How often have you been able to get interpreting assistance in Australia when you needed it?



⁸ In the original question in the BNLA Wave 3 survey, there is no option for "Find somewhere to live".

Fig. 16 Who provided interpreting assistance? (Multiple response) (n=300)

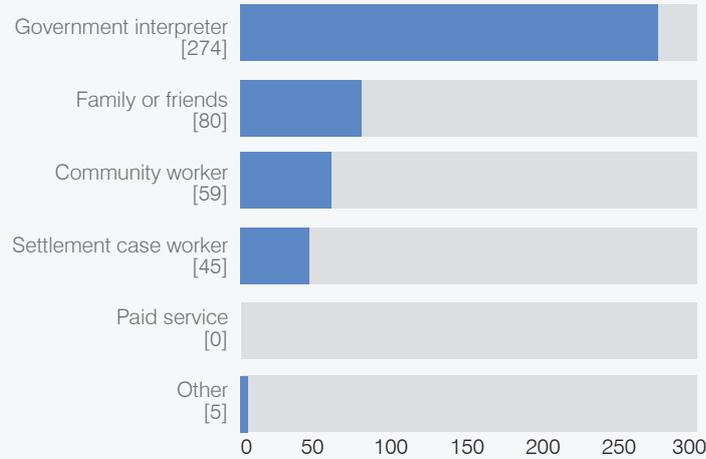
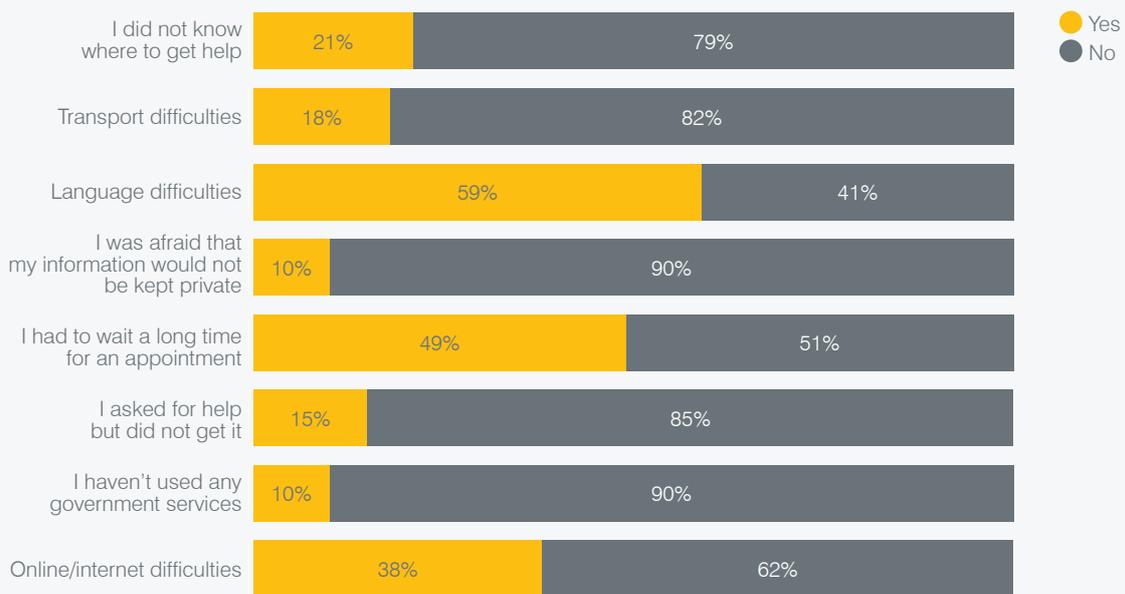


Fig. 17 Now thinking about Government services (e.g. Medicare, Centrelink, public housing, hospitals), have any of the options below, if any, made it difficult to get help from these services?



In most cases interpreting assistance was given by a government interpreter, family and friends, and community or settlement caseworkers (Fig.16).

Belonging

When asked about access to government services the most commonly nominated difficulties were language difficulties (59%), waiting times for an appointment (49%) and online/internet access difficulties (38%) (Fig. 17). Less common barriers

included not knowing where to get help (21%) and transport (18%) (Fig. 17). The measure for online/internet difficulties was added to the list of options in this survey to the original BNLA survey list of options. This result may be due to a mix of limited English language proficiency and/or limited digital skills, as well as potential barriers to digital access (e.g., access to internet connections and devices).

Young people reported fewer difficulties accessing services, in particular fewer language barriers (38%

compared to 60% of all other age groups) and fewer difficulties in terms of online/internet accessibility (21% compared to 39% of other age groups).

Female respondents reported more difficulties than men in all the aspects of getting help from government services, in particular language (almost 70% against 48% for men), transport (28% against 8% for men) and online/internet access (51% against 25% for men).

Respondents living in regional areas also reported slightly less knowledge in how to access services. At the same time, they reported more difficulties in terms of language (68% against 57% of people living in metropolitan areas) and difficulties accessing services online (55% against 37% of people living in metropolitan areas).

In terms of difficulties accessing government services,⁹ language difficulties and long waiting times for an appointment were the most commonly nominated among BNLA respondents as well.

For many of the interviewees, the sense of equal rights and equal access to services was about more than material support but was a significant dimension of their feelings of belonging, welcome and security. Positive and routine face-to-face interactions with frontline service workers, schooling or healthcare were often mentioned as increasing positive feelings about belonging in Australian society in general:

“Let’s start with the way I’ve been treated, it’s been great. Secondly, feeling safe: that feeling is beyond great. [...] Once I had an accident [...] I was dizzy and then I fell so they straightaway contacted the ambulance. And the ambulance that came within a few minutes which was amazing, and they even – while taking me to the hospital, the way the ambulance treated me was beyond great. They treated me very well. And then by the time I arrived to the hospital, the nurses and everyone was very caring and they provided the best service for me, which I was really happy with. [...] Of course there are so many other services. To name a few, the RTA. Even when you go to the restaurants and no-one bothers you. The respect is everywhere, and there is no bothering in the slightest way, which is great.” (Salem, male, mid-fifties, from Syria.)

In parallel, negative experiences with service providers were also highlighted as corrosive to feelings of welcome and belonging. Beyond just access to services, interviewees noted “how they were treated” in the provision of services as critical:

“Having your support there, a network support, it’s so important, especially to people who don’t know these things. Every day they would ask you, you know, at Centrelink that you have to find a job, but you have nowhere to find a job. You go to Joblink or whatever the organisation’s called, they’re just on the computer and tell you what to do. You don’t know how it’s done. Yeah, at the end of the day it comes back to network support. If I tell you from overall experience, I think people who first received in Australia and how they treat you, they really play a very big important role in how you would start your life in Australia and how to live your life in Australia.” (Asfar, male, early twenties, from Afghanistan.)

Key Points

- Refugees in this study, in particular men and young people, reported a deep level of trust in many institutions, including the police and the government and, to a lesser extent, the media. They also reported trust in work or study colleagues, people in their neighbourhood and the wider Australian community, which is comparable to other cohorts of refugees in Australia.
- This high level of trust imbues refugees with a sense of confidence to be independent. Refugees, especially young people, demonstrate an awareness of knowing where to find somewhere to live, get around and navigate transport, use government and commercial services and access critical support when needed. The weakest measures were in knowing how to find a job and finding out about their rights but, in both of these, refugees in this sample were more knowledgeable compared to other refugees in Australia.
- Against a backdrop of trust and confidence, the most common difficulties in accessing government services were language and long waiting times for an appointment, similar to other refugees in Australia.
- When asked about their access to language support, almost half of the respondents report that they have been always or usually able to get interpreting assistance when needed. Women are

⁹ In the original question in the BNLA Wave 3 survey, there is no option for “Online/internet difficulties”.

more likely than men to report always being able to get interpreting when needed.

- This study also found that online/internet difficulties was a common barrier, which, as far as we are aware, has not been measured in previous major survey studies of refugees in Australia.
- Young refugees (18-24) know more about accessing services and reported fewer difficulties accessing government services compared to all other age brackets. Worryingly, women reported more difficulties accessing government support, especially in terms of language, transport and online/internet difficulties. Similarly, while refugees in regional areas reported similar levels of awareness of institutions, they reported greater levels of difficulty accessing government services.
- Overall, the findings suggest:
 - Settlement programs should continue to build the independent living skills of refugees and link them to services that can be accessed when needed;
 - This high level of trust in government institutions reported here provides a strong basis for government departments, essential services and other service providers to redouble their efforts to offer in-language support and information, especially to refugee women and refugees in regional areas; and
 - As governments, essential services and other service providers continue to shift towards online and digital services, they need to pay close attention to ensuring that they do not create additional barriers for refugees to access services.

Rights and Responsibilities

This domain addresses the extent to which newcomers are provided with the foundations of full and equal participation within Australian society. While all respondents in this survey are holders of permanent residency in Australia, they are still newly arrived and consequently are ineligible to apply for citizenship (due to minimum length of residency requirements). Therefore, it was premature to ask questions about registering to vote, political participation and contribution to decision-making for this population.

This domain instead assesses perceptions of fairness and equality, experiences of discrimination, as well as awareness of access to rights and the fulfilment of social and civic responsibilities.

Welcome

When asked about how often they experience being treated less respectfully or people distrusting them because of their cultural or religious background, the overwhelming majority of respondents report that this never occurred (Table 6).

Respondents were also asked a series of questions on the frequency of experiences of discrimination because of their cultural or religious background in different settings (both institutional and everyday) and, again, very few respondents reported experiencing discrimination in these settings. The most common areas where discrimination was reported were in the rental housing market (5% Always/Most of the time/Some of the time), on public transport (4%) or on the street, and online or in social media (3%). The measures in this question were adapted from a national survey of racism, which has reported far higher rates of discrimination, at around 25%.¹⁰

Table 6. How often do you feel that because of your cultural or religious background ...? (Percentage)

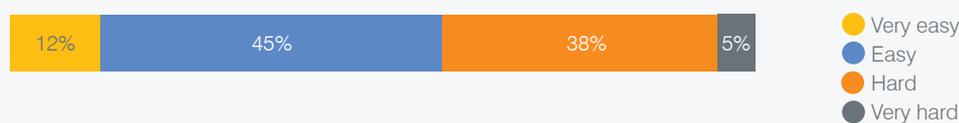
	Always	Most of the time	Some of the time	Never	Total
You are treated less respectfully	5	3	0	92	100
People act as if you are not to be trusted	3	4	0	93	100

¹⁰ Challenging Racism Project 2015-2016 National Survey Report, available at www.westernsydney.edu.au/

Table 7. Which one of the options below, if any, do you feel should be the responsibilities of everyone living in Australia? (Percentage)

	Yes	No	Unsure	Total
To obey and respect the law	100	0	0	100
To work to provide for yourself	94	1	5	100
To respect and preserve the environment	100	0	0	100
To help others	98	0	2	100
To treat others with respect	99	0	1	100
To acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait as the traditional owners of Australia	95	0	5	100

Fig. 18 Since you came to Australia how easy have you found it to understand the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the first people of Australia?



Participation

All respondents (100%) intend to apply for Australian citizenship once eligible, which is higher but similar to respondents in BNLA.

The overwhelming majority of respondents were committed to fulfilling social and civic responsibilities in Australia (Table 7), including to obey and respect the law, to be self-sufficient, to respect and protect the environment and to help others.

Respondents are also overwhelmingly committed (95%) to acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the traditional owners of Australia (Table 7), while just over half of respondents found it easy to understand the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (56%, Very Easy/Easy) (Fig.18) since coming to Australia.

Respondents in regional areas find it harder to understand the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (73%, Hard/Very Hard), young people found it easier but there were no major variations of gender or visa type.

Just over 60% of respondents reported volunteering in the month prior to the survey, about a quarter of whom provided help in more than one type of activity (Fig. 19). This question was taken from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) General Social Survey

and is higher than the rate of volunteering reported on this measure in a representative sample of the general Australian population (46%)¹¹.

Most of the volunteering revolved around domestic work, home maintenance or gardening, providing transport or errands and teaching or providing advice. For more than half of the respondents the voluntary work was provided to a relative living in another household (Fig. 20), about a third to a friend and about a quarter of respondents helped a neighbour.

Belonging

Respondents reported a high sense in terms of equity (over 90%, Strongly Agree/Agree) that their rights are protected and being treated fairly when they access services (Fig. 21). Here we can infer that this sense of equity is likely to be grounded in the fact that all of the respondents in this study had permanent residency and therefore access to all of the responsibilities and rights that permanent and

¹¹ After pilot testing of this survey, the ABS General Social Survey question was modified slightly by adding, "other than family members you live with" and removing "Giving emotional support" from the original list of options. General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014 (<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@nsf/mf/4159.0>)

Fig. 19 In the last 4 weeks, did you help anyone, other than family members you live with, with the following activities? (Multiple response) (n=206)

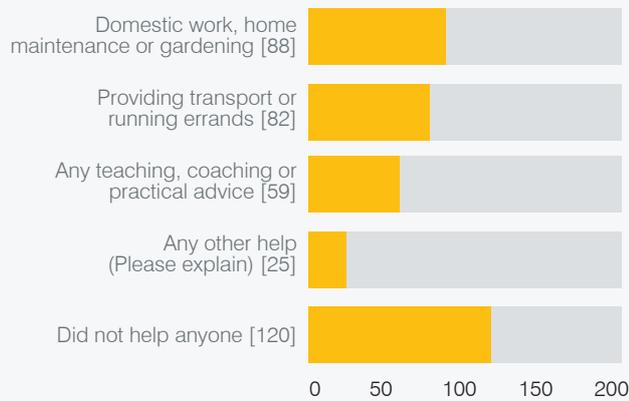


Fig. 20 Who did you give this assistance to? (Multiple response) (n=203)

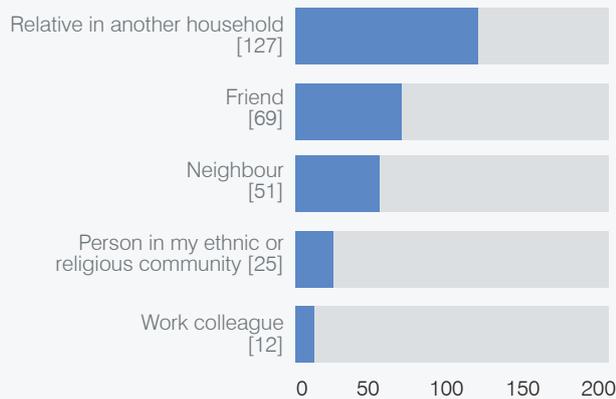
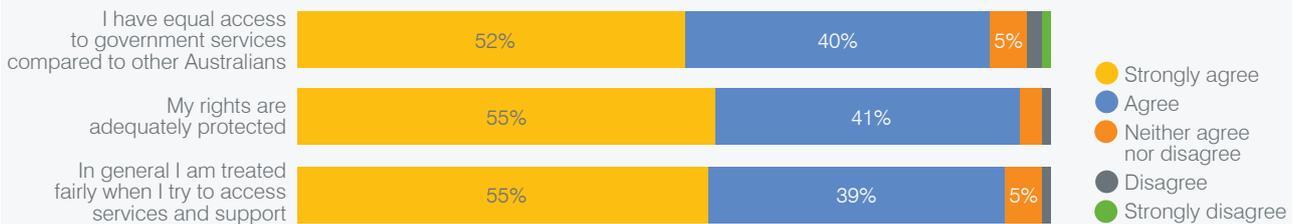


Fig. 21 As a refugee to Australia ...



secure residency entails, including a pathway to Australian citizenship.

This was strongly influenced by the age of the respondents: the older the respondent, the more they are likely to agree with all the three statements. Women showed much weaker agreement to all three statements (30%-35%, Strongly Agree compared to 69%-72%).

In relation to a question of experiences of discrimination in the past 12 months, thirteen respondents (less than 5%) indicated that this had occurred (Fig.22). This finding is in contrast to the same question, taken from the annual Mapping Social Cohesion national survey, where reports of experiences of discrimination in the previous 12 months are far higher (19% in 2019).

Fig. 22 Have you experienced discrimination because of your skin colour, ethnic origin or religion over the last 12 months?

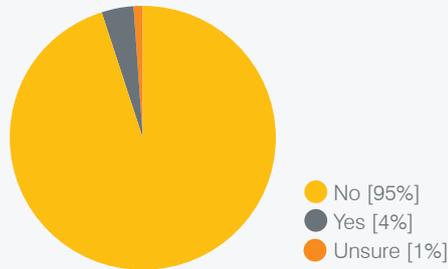


Fig.23 What interactions and experiences in Australia have made you feel welcome?

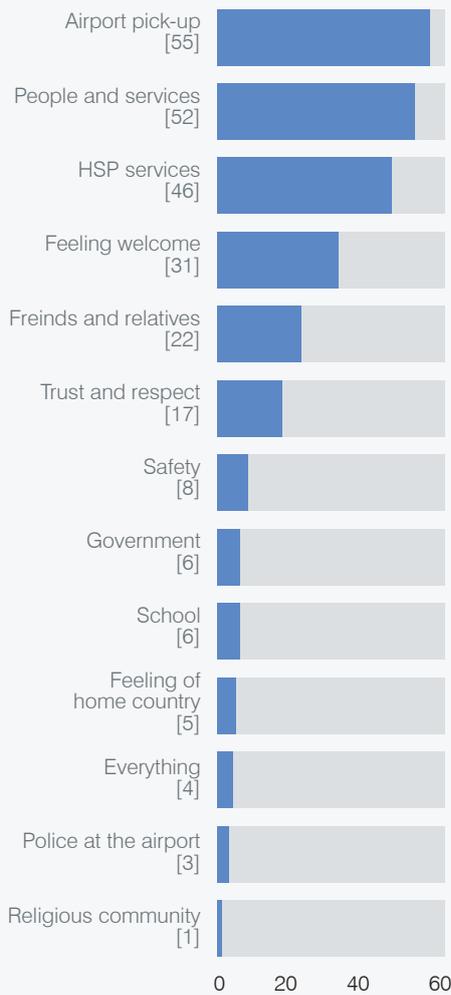


Fig.24 Can you please tell us about a specific situation or experience when people around you made you feel welcome?



Slightly more men than women reported experiences of discrimination. Woman at Risk visa holders (subclass 204) and respondents living in regional areas were also more likely to report discrimination but as the overall numbers of experiences of discrimination are very low we need to be cautious with this finding.

In a series of open-ended questions in the survey we explored what interactions and experiences had made refugees feel more welcome in Australia. We did a basic coding of these free text responses and the most common experiences nominated (Fig. 23) were “airport pick-up”, “people and services”, “on-arrival settlement services” and a generalised “feeling of welcome”.

When prompted to share a specific experience or situation that made them feel welcome (Fig. 24), “respect from people” was the highest followed by “people and services” and then specific mention of “SSI staff”, “Centrelink”, and “School”.

The interviews reflected the survey data on perceptions of rights and responsibilities. Many interview participants mentioned specific rights that they felt the government could do more to support: rights to housing, labour market participation and avenues for family reunion. Women who were interviewed were more likely to highlight safety as an important right, while men were more likely to mention the lack of discrimination. But, overall, the daily interactions in which they felt treated fairly and with respect, and the knowledge that their rights were legally protected, and that they had equal status to other Australians, all enable a sense of welcome, belonging and security for refugees, as Hakeem and Reema explained:

“The most things that made me feel that I am welcome here was at the airport. When the officers saw the visa and saw that we are refugees and permanent residents, they said, “Welcome to your home.” And the other thing, I came to this country and I found that with my rights and responsibilities there, I am the same as citizens, so that makes me feel that I am welcome in this country [...] The rights, the equality. There’s no discrimination, and this is what’s beautiful in Australia. There’s no discrimination based on religion, race, or sex. Anybody who comes here feels that they belong.” (Hakeem, male, mid-thirties, from Syria.)

“They met us at the airport when we first arrived and they organised accommodation for us, they provide us with food for the whole month. So, they looked after us in a great deal. [...] Well, actually many things that help us to feel that we belong here and especially the equal rights for everyone, everyone is equal. The sense of freedom that we have here and plus on top of that the services, because my daughter now, she goes to school and everything is provided free of charge.” (Reema, female, late fifties, from Iraq.)

Key Points

- The findings challenge claims that refugees do not demonstrate a sense of responsibility to Australia and do not understand what it means to be Australian. Instead, refugees report a strong commitment to fulfilling social and civic responsibilities in Australia, including obeying the law, being self-sufficient, protecting the environment, treating others with respect and helping others.
- One way refugees demonstrate their sense of civic responsibility is through volunteering. In the month prior to the survey almost two-thirds of refugees reported volunteering, which is higher than the rate of volunteering found in the general Australian population.
- Refugees in this sample are overwhelmingly committed to acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the traditional owners of Australia. Almost two-thirds of refugees, especially young people, find it easy to understand the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at the first people of Australia.
- Interestingly, refugees feel they are treated with respect and have equal access to government services, that their rights are protected and that they are treated fairly. The older you are, the stronger is the sense of fairness in Australia. In contrast, women had a far weaker sense of fairness, access to services and protection of their rights in Australia.
- Almost universally, refugees report being treated respectfully and being trusted irrespective of their cultural backgrounds. This also came through strongly in the open-ended questions when asked about specific experiences that made them feel welcome.

- In another of the open-ended questions, the airport pickup, a core element of on-arrival settlement services, was nominated as a defining experience for refugees feeling a sense of welcome in Australia.
- In line with this finding, refugees report very low instances of discrimination on the basis of cultural or religious background. In the few instances where this had occurred, the setting was the private rental market in housing, in public spaces, online and on social media.
- Overall, the findings suggest:
 - Refugees have a strong commitment and motivation to fulfil their social and civic responsibilities in Australia;
 - Settlement services should continue to provide refugees with an understanding of the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the first people of Australia;
 - Settlement services and civil society organisations should continue to recognise and leverage the willingness of refugees to volunteer as another avenue for refugees to strengthen their social and civic participation;
 - Governments and civil society organisations should continue to be vigilant and maintain legal protections in the area of racial discrimination and target anti-discrimination efforts to focus on the private rental market, public spaces and on social media; and
 - Permanent and secure residency is the bedrock on which the social, economic, cultural and civic participation of refugees rests: without permanent protection refugees' safety and security is not assured.



Implications of this Study

This research provides a snapshot of settlement and integration among newly arrived refugees. Overall, the findings indicate that refugees are tracking well across most of the indicators of integration assessed in this study. These findings need to be interpreted within the wider context of Australian migration policy and settlement practice and within the prevailing social climate towards refugees.

In exploring rights and responsibilities, the research indicated that permanent and secure residency is instrumental in supporting integration across multiple domains. This legal status determines security of residency as well as the extent of access to employment, education, health care and the social safety net. This is not a unique finding. The benefits of permanent residency and secure legal status to support settlement and integration are generally well-recognised (Lomba 2010, MIPEx 2019). However, in the current context there is a global trend towards more restrictive policies for people fleeing persecution (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Tan 2017). In Australia, one of the policy settings in this area is the use of temporary visas for people deemed to meet Australia's international protection obligations (Spinks 2018). All refugees in this study had permanent residency, a status that is likely to be pivotal to the positive findings across rights and responsibilities and social connection domains of integration.

This study gives an insight into the prevailing social climate in Australia, with refugees expressing a strong sense of welcome and belonging in their everyday lives. This echoes the sentiment found in the annual Mapping Social Cohesion research, where about 80% of Australians agree with the proposition that migrants and refugees improve Australian society and bring new ideas and cultures (Markus 2019). Despite the positive sentiment reported by refugees themselves and by the wider Australian community, a recent review of settlement policy has found that, too often, the focus of refugee settlement policy is on needs and barriers rather than the strengths and aspirations of refugees (Shergold, Benson et al. 2019). Nurturing and promoting a strong narrative of the contribution of refugees in public commentary and policy debates provides part of the necessary environment in

which refugees can effectively settle and integrate. Achieving better outcomes in refugee integration involves targeted settlement services (e.g., the Humanitarian Settlement Program, the Adult Migrant English Program, the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support) and mainstream government and essential services (e.g., in education, health, employment, welfare) working together (Shergold, Benson et al. 2019). There is a body of policy and intergovernmental work to better coordinate and improve linkages in this service provision to refugees, with the most recent review putting forward a number of recommendations (Shergold, Benson et al. 2019). In the past it was commonly assumed that refugees had low levels of trust in government services and this was often seen as an explanation for poorer access to these services. In contrast, this research found very high levels of trust in government and essential services, comparable to the levels of trust found in the BNLA study (National Centre for Longitudinal Data 2017). Two of the main barriers identified in this study related to language barriers and long waiting times. This suggests that essential services and other service providers could capitalise on the high level of trust among refugees to be more culturally responsive through offering greater in-language support and information to refugees.

Skills and confidence in digital technology can facilitate social connections and are increasingly crucial in accessing rights and services. This prompted the UK Home Office in 2019 to include digital skills as a new domain in the Indicators of Integration (UK Home Office 2019). Digital skills such as finding, assessing and retrieving information are vital for living, work and study but there is little knowledge about the digital competencies of refugees (Stiller and Trkulja 2018). In this study we found that refugees regularly use digital technology to maintain social connections as others have found in Australian research (Alam and Imran 2015) but in this study online/internet difficulties were one of the key barriers in terms of access to government and essential services. Alam and Imran (2015) found that the digital divide among refugees is due to "inequalities in physical access to and use of digital technology, the skills necessary to use the different technologies effectively and the ability to pay for the

services” (Alam and Imran 2015, p. 344). Language difficulties may also be another potential contributing factor. In this study, we had not foreseen that digital skills would be a major barrier for refugees in accessing essential services in the design of the survey, which only had one single measure of digital issues. This issue warrants further investigation in future research. In the meantime, service providers should ensure that online and digital services are accessible to refugees.

The finding in relation to the high rate of volunteering among refugees and in settlement services has been reported elsewhere (Hugo 2011, Volunteering Australia/Settlement Council of Australia 2019). What is new is that by using ABS General Social Survey measures we are able to indicate the rate of volunteering among the refugees in this sample in relation to the broader Australian population.

It is generally known that rates of participation by refugees in community activities, especially in the initial years of settlement, can be low (National Centre for Longitudinal Data 2017). This study corroborates this. However, the inclusion of a range of measures on the sense of welcome and trust in neighbours and neighbourhoods in this study adds an insight of strong social bridges despite low rates of participation in formal community activities.

Likewise, the role of ethnic and religious community groups in strengthening social bonds and settlement is widely understood (Refugee Council of Australia 2014, Shergold, Benson et al. 2019). In this study, refugees again expressed a desire for these organisations, which are often voluntary and unfunded, to have a greater role in settlement, which reflects one of the recommendations of the recent review of refugee settlement policy in Australia (Shergold, Benson et al. 2019).



Methods

This study used methods that drew on earlier research commissioned by SSI as part of two separate evaluations of settlement programs in 2015 and 2019. Ethics approval for this study was received from the Human Research Ethics Committee of Western Sydney University.

Sampling

a. Telephone Surveys

A sample was generated from former participants in SSI's Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP). Some of these 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 in the Program, were over 18 years of age and had lived in Australia for at least 18 months at the time of the survey (i.e., arrived between April 2016 to February 2018). 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 1,707 records of individuals. The calculation to determine the highest representative sample returned a target of 314 respondents.¹²

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 in order 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 was only accessed by SSI researchers in this study as per the approved research protocol from Western Sydney University.

b. Qualitative Interviews

At completion of the telephone survey, respondents were asked if they consented to being called in the future to potentially participate in a follow-up telephone interview and, if they consented, whether they would like an interpreter.

A total of 254 survey respondents consented to be contacted again. Of these, 30 participants were selected using a random stratified sample around gender, place of residence (regional/metropolitan) and language spoken at home. These selected participants were contacted in turn and 15 were interviewed.

Survey Design

The development of the survey was framed against four key domains of the 2019 Framework of Integration by the UK Home Office with a focus on social bonds, social bridges, social links and rights and responsibilities to generate insights into refugees' sense of welcome, participation and belonging. The reference materials for the 2019 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 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) General Social Survey. The exact 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 questions adapted from the Challenging Racism Project at Western Sydney University and some items from the reference materials included in the UK Home Office, Framework of Integration Report.

The survey had five major components:

- **Social Bonds:** indicators of relationships with family members, people from the same cultural background, participation in ethnic or religious community activities, sense of belonging to their local neighbourhood.
- **Social Bridges:** indicators of social connections with people from different backgrounds, participation in community activities and relationships and trust in their neighbours and neighbourhood.

¹² The sample size was calculated with a Confidence level of 95%, Confidence interval of 0.05 and SE (Standard Error) of 0.02551. Calculations generated from Australian Bureau of Statistics, sample size calculation <https://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/home/Sample+Size+Calculator>

- **Social Links:** indicators of engagement with essential services and other government services, sense of independence and trust in Australian institutions.
- **Rights and Responsibilities:** perceptions of fairness and equality, awareness and access to rights and fulfilment of social and civic responsibilities.
- **Open-ended questions:** questions around personal experiences of feeling welcome in Australia.

The authors developed the survey iteratively and a draft was piloted with SSI's Bilingual Guides¹³ from the target communities and subsequently revised. The final survey had 30 multiple response questions and four open-ended questions. Of these, 14 multiple response questions were taken from BNLA, four from Mapping Social Cohesion and two questions from the ABS General Social Survey, which allowed for comparisons in the survey data analysis. The BNLA questions in the survey were already available in Arabic and the additional survey items were translated into Arabic and checked for accuracy and consistency.

The survey is available in an [Appendix](#) available at: www.ssi.org.au

Qualitative Interviews

The survey was complemented by qualitative interviews to draw out and expand on dominant themes that had been found in a preliminary analysis of the surveys. During interviews, participants were asked about specific and general experiences of welcome and belonging, and any perceived barriers and challenges. The interviews were conducted in January 2020 via telephone by one of the authors. One interview was conducted in English; all others were conducted using telephone interpreters from the National Translating and Interpreting Service. The interviews, with participants' consent, were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The qualitative data was analysed thematically in relation to the four integration indicators using NVivo qualitative analysis software.

The interview guide is available in an [Appendix](#) available at: www.ssi.org.au

¹³ SSI employs Bilingual Guides who speak a range of community languages. These Bilingual Guides were matched in terms of the languages to the sample to carry out the telephone survey.

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.¹⁴ 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 study, we selected BNLA Wave 3 results as the comparison group for data collected in our study as the length of residence in Australia was the best match to refugees in our study (from 29 to 34 months).¹⁵ BNLA Wave 3 includes 1,894 respondents, who were filtered by visa type (excluding onshore protection visa holders), by age (excluding people under 18) and by type of respondent (excluding secondary applicants). The final sample size for the comparison group in our data analysis of BNLA questions was 1,609 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, Persian, 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 types¹⁶ are Refugee visa (subclass 200), In-country Special Humanitarian visa (subclass 201), Woman at Risk visa (subclass 204),

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ Access to the BNLA dataset is available, on request, from the Australian Government Department of Social Services: <https://www.dss.gov.au/about-the-department/national-centre-for-longitudinal-data>

¹⁶ 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.

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) (82%), followed by 204 Woman at Risk visa (subclass 204) (14%) and 202 Special Humanitarian Program visa (subclass 202) (3%). The major difference between the BNLA comparison group and our study sample is in terms of the visa type: where there were far more 202 Special Humanitarian Program (subclass 202) visa holders (71%) and far fewer 200 Refugee (subclass 200) visa holders (3%) and 204 Woman at Risk (subclass 204) visa holders (3%).

Survey Data Collection and Analysis

In order to enable survey respondents to participate in this research in their preferred language, we engaged SSI Bilingual Guides to conduct telephone surveys. SSI Bilingual Guides speak a range of community languages and these Bilingual Guides were matched in terms of languages to the sample.

A 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, Qualtrics.

After making contact, respondents were offered the opportunity to either complete the survey over the telephone or receive a paper version of the survey. Telephone surveys were conducted in the preferred language of the participant and participant responses were recorded in Qualtrics. Almost all surveys were conducted in a language other than English between October and December 2019.

Paper surveys were available in English and in Arabic and were sent with a postage paid envelope to be returned to SSI. Responses from returned paper surveys were entered into the same online system, Qualtrics, for analysis.

Only de-identified survey data from the telephone surveys and postal surveys was entered and stored in Qualtrics. 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 Qualtrics and cleaned to remove incomplete/invalid surveys. The data was then analysed with descriptive statistics and visualised with charts and tables.

Response rate

The total number of former SSI clients selected to be contacted for the survey was 1,337. The Bilingual Guides contacted 684 individuals and completed 329 telephone surveys. We posted 180 paper-based surveys and 23 were returned.

Of the total number of 352 completed surveys (between phone and mail), after cleaning (the main exclusions were for incomplete client identifiers where we could not extract demographic information), 334 were included in the data analysis.

Therefore, with 334 valid surveys from 684 people contacted, the overall response rate is 49%. The response rate for the postal survey is 13%.

Summary	
Total number of people identified for the survey	1337
People contacted	684
People unable to be contacted (Wrong number, dead number, unanswered after three attempts)	653
People who refused/undecided	152
Postal surveys mailed	180
Returned postal surveys	23
Completed telephone surveys	329
Total surveys delivered	352
Total valid surveys	334

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, the selection of a BNLA comparison group that matched this study sample, and including comparisons with other refugees (through the BNLA comparison group) and other Australian surveys (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, is more representative of refugees across Australia.

In addition, the study sample was drawn from the records of one settlement provider, SSI, (though some respondents in regional NSW received on-arrival services from another settlement provider under a previous government contract) 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 surveys.

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 affected the reliability of comparisons between BNLA and this study.

Conclusion

Australia has a history of welcoming refugees and refugees have a proud record of contributing to the social, cultural and economic fabric of Australia. The policy settings, practice and evidence base for refugee settlement in Australia have progressively evolved. This study adds insights to this evolving picture and amplifies the role of social connections and rights and responsibilities in settlement trajectories and integration. In doing so, we aim to add value to research, policy and practice and understanding of the strengths and aspirations of refugees and further understanding of the complementary roles and contributions of refugees, receiving communities and government at all levels on which successful integration depends.

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