



# COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT 2017 REPORT

*Key findings from Oregon's immigrant and refugee communities*



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	3
<b>Methods</b>	6
<b>The Changing Contexts for Oregon’s Immigrant &amp; Refugee Communities</b>	8
<b>Cross-Cutting Needs for Oregon’s Immigrant &amp; Refugee Communities</b>	13
<b>Community-Specific Needs &amp; Priorities</b>	18
African	18
Asian Established	22
Bhutanese/Nepalese	22
Communities from Myanmar (Burma)	24
Latinx	26
Middle Eastern	28
Pacific Islander	30
Slavic	32
<b>Special Feature: Immigrant &amp; Refugee Youth</b>	34
<b>About IRCO</b>	39

## INTRODUCTION



Immigrant and refugee communities in Oregon are growing rapidly in both size and diversity. As the largest community-based organization serving these populations, the Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) drives efforts to design, link and align effective programming for immigrants and refugees, including working closely with federal, state and local government, educators, other community based organizations and refugee resettlement agencies to ensure no population's needs fall through the cracks.

It is vital that the perspectives of immigrant and refugee communities help to guide this regional service coordination. As a trusted community focal point for these populations, IRCO plays a key leadership role in gathering input from the communities on their needs and creating culturally and linguistically specific programs that directly address those needs.

To accomplish this, IRCO has developed and implemented numerous immigrant and refugee leadership-driven information collection processes including its Community Needs Assessment (CNA) — a national model for community-led data gathering and assessment that engages immigrant and refugee leaders to define their strengths, needs, barriers and solutions.

Goals for the CNA reporting process include: to inform and educate the community, highlight service needs and gaps, dispel myths, and elevate the voices and perspectives of Oregon's immigrant and refugee communities with a vision to use the input and data gathered to promote equity and inclusion across all programs and services in the state of Oregon.

Unique to this year's assessment was a special focus on youth leadership and input. This provided vital input for the 2017 CNA, and this report includes a special chapter featuring the voice and perspectives of immigrant and refugee youth.

IRCO uses input gathered through these assessments to drive planning and development at many levels of its work. The agency utilizes feedback and data for strategic planning, program development and service enhancement. The report guides programming strategies aligned with the diverse communities' culturally and linguistically specific needs. Input from immigrant and refugee leadership drives advocacy and partnership development. Data informs staffing decisions that ensure IRCO workforce and services match Oregon's current and forecasted demographic landscape. Nearly every aspect of IRCO's work is informed by information gathered through its CNA.

*"The very fact that IRCO exists in America is awesome. They help you learn the language and find a job. If it wasn't for this organization, what would we do?"*  
— Slavic Immigrant

The CNA also serves as a resource for the wider community by educating leaders and community members about Oregon's diverse immigrant and refugee communities, and by highlighting gaps and opportunities in the service delivery systems that serve them. This report aims to inform the community organizations,

school districts, and state and local government agencies across Oregon and the nation who serve immigrants and refugees and rely on their voices for guidance.

This report aims to be a tool not only for IRCO, but for guiding future development of culturally and linguistically specific services for some of the most marginalized families in Oregon. Not only will it incorporate essential community feedback and perspective to IRCO's strategic planning for 2018-2022, we are optimistic that it will be helpful for other decision makers in our state as they apply an equity lens across their programs in order to ensure that services are available and accessible to all who need them.

## *Community Needs Assessment 2017*

On July 8, 2017, IRCO convened its Community Needs Assessment Conference 2017, which gathered 243 immigrant and refugee leaders, community members and key stakeholders to assess and prioritize local immigrant and refugee populations' needs.

Immigrant and refugee attendees were diverse. There were over 50 languages spoken and a comparable number of cultural, national or ethnic communities were represented. Immigrant and refugee community leaders organized in eight broad cultural groupings to allow communities to separately convene and discuss their community's distinct needs and perspectives. The groups were organized around communities from these regions:

- African (including Bantu, Central African, Congolese, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Gambian, Ghanaian, Kenyan, Liberian, Oromo, Rwandese, Sierra Leonean, Swahili, Somali, Tanzanian, Togolese and Ugandan);
- Asian "established communities" (including Hmong, Vietnamese, Chinese, Tibetan, Japanese, Asian Indian);
- Bhutanese/Nepalese;
- Communities from Myanmar (including Karen, Rohingya, Zomi, Burmese);



- Latinx (including Mexican, Cuban);
- Middle Eastern (including Iraqi, Iranian, Turkish, Afghan);
- Pacific Islander (including Tongan, Chuukese);
- Slavic (including Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Moldovan).

During the event, each of these groups gathered separately for two extended breakout sessions that provided a forum where immigrant and refugee community leaders could discuss their communities' assets, barriers, priorities and solutions in a culturally responsive process that supported their leadership and self-definition. The sessions were each led by a bilingual and bicultural facilitator and recorded by a bilingual note taker.



The event also included reports from community leadership on previous Community Needs Assessment outcomes as well as a presentation by guest speaker Senator Michael Dembrow. Panel discussions led by key stakeholders engaged all attendees in dialogue on policy impact as well as supports available through local service providers. “Ally” sessions were also held for local community members to separately discuss ways to be effective allies to the immigrant and refugee community, as well as how to support IRCO in its current capacity.

To incorporate refugee and immigrant youth voices in the CNA, IRCO solicited the guidance of school-aged youth from diverse backgrounds. IRCO convened a series of four focus groups at a variety of program sites between August 25th and September 7, 2017. The focus groups were led by an IRCO staff person and supported by interpreters. At these focus groups, immigrant and refugee youth voiced and defined their unique needs, priorities, and solutions. 38 young people participated in the groups; almost all of the participants are current high school students, with one student in middle school and one who left high school without completing.

## METHODS



The 2017 Community Needs Assessment gathered original data from multiple sources. The primary source of data was the July CNA Conference, compiled jointly from facilitated community discussions as well as responses to a survey that attendees filled out during the registration process. The CNA conference was supplemented by data from the youth focus groups mentioned above, and by data from three listening sessions conducted with seniors from the Slavic, African and Bhutanese communities.

These primary sources yielded significant insights into the needs and experiences of Oregon's immigrant and refugee communities, but it is important to note some data limitations. First, the participants in the CNA conference and focus groups were almost entirely from the Portland metro area, particularly Multnomah County, because of transportation challenges. Additionally, not all immigrant and refugee communities served by IRCO were represented at the CNA conference. Although IRCO conducted significant outreach and provided supports to encourage community members to participate, some communities were not represented at the event, and their specific needs and concerns may not be reflected.

Finally, there was some variation from community to community in how people defined the key terms used in the community needs ranking. For example, some communities used "education" to refer to K-12 schooling, others to describe postsecondary education; still others used the term to describe English-language classes for adult community members. Other terms with wide variation included "community development" and "economic development." When communities' definitions appeared to vary from more common definitions, we have relied heavily on the notes from the breakout sessions and used the terms that were employed by the community members in their discussions, and we have provided clarifying examples to help the reader understand what the community intended.





In addition to the original data collected for this study, we reviewed secondary data on immigrants and refugees in Oregon; these sources are cited whenever they appear. There are several significant limitations with Census data or other publicly collected data about immigrants and refugees. Refugees are tracked only at the point of their arrival; therefore refugee data include reliable details about the community at the point of their arrival but does not track their characteristics or well-being over time. In addition, researchers believe that the Census and other sources may systematically undercount immigrants because “many immigrants come from regions of the world where participating in formal census processes are not customary and it is unlikely that all of the community is counted. This is particularly true for large families, for refugee families and for families whose landlords are unaware of the number of people living in the home.”<sup>i</sup>



## THE CHANGING CONTEXT FOR OREGON'S IMMIGRANTS & REFUGEES



### *A Snapshot of Oregon's Immigrants and Refugees*

This report profiles the needs of immigrant and refugee communities in Oregon, particularly of those in the Portland metropolitan area. It is helpful to start by understanding the distinctions between immigrants and refugees, while also examining the overall size and composition of Oregon's immigrant and refugee communities.



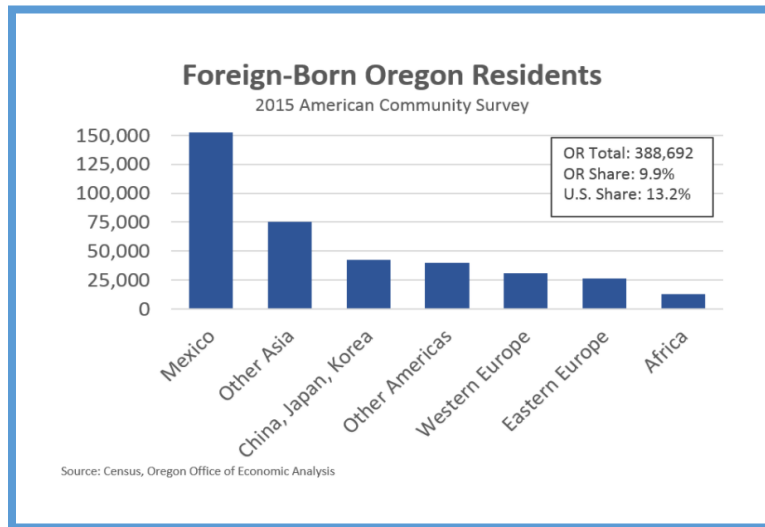
In Oregon, there were roughly 384,000 foreign born residents in 2014, of whom 130,000 were undocumented and 254,000 were legal permanent residents. There are nearly 16,000 Oregon residents approved for DACA. 1,340 refugees were resettled in Oregon in the 2017 fiscal year.

**Immigrants** include all people who are born outside the United States and migrate to the country. This includes both lawful permanent residents, whose immigration status is authorized by Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and undocumented immigrants. A subset of undocumented young adults who meet strict criteria receive protections under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which allows them to work and attend postsecondary education during a limited period without fear of deportation.

**Refugees** are people who must flee their home country out of fear of persecution based on religion, race, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. The U.S. State Department



determines eligibility for admission as refugees and determines which community to send them to.



The majority of Oregon's immigrants and refugees live in the Willamette Valley; 60% live in the Tri-County area, and 10% live in Marion County. Approximately 10% of foreign-born Oregonians arrived in the U.S. after 2010. 40% of Oregon's immigrants are now naturalized citizens; 60% are not.

Mexico is the country of birth for almost 40% of immigrants in Oregon, and nearly half of immigrants come from the Americas. The next most common region of origin is Asia (28%).

Both the number of refugee arrivals and their countries of origin fluctuate widely from year to year; 2016 was the peak year for arrivals in the last decade with 1,773 arrivals.<sup>ii</sup> In the 2017 fiscal year, the majority of refugees in Oregon came from Ukraine (27%), Iraq and Afghanistan (23% combined), Somalia (13%) and Cuba (11%). Approximately 35-40% of refugees in the U.S. are estimated to be children.<sup>iii</sup>

## *The Economic Context for Immigrants and Refugees*

This report profiles the needs of immigrant and refugee communities in Oregon, particularly of those in the Portland metropolitan area. It is helpful to start by understanding the distinctions between immigrants and refugees, while also examining the overall size and composition of Oregon's immigrant and refugee communities.

Immigrants and refugees make up nearly 10 percent of Oregon's population. They are responsible for paying the same taxes as U.S. citizens; however, many classes of immigrants and refugees have limited eligibility for public benefits. The unique landscape of benefits and exclusions, illustrated in the table on the next page, has significant implications for the economic well-being of different immigrant and refugee groups.



## *Benefit Eligibility Based on Immigrant/Refugee Status*

Immigration policy is governed by a complex patchwork of federal, state, and local laws and eligibility rules. Eligibility for public assistance benefits and income support programs varies by immigration status, arrival date, and home country, and these benefits are often difficult to access and navigate. Immigrants are most economically vulnerable during their first five years in the U.S., because the 1996 Welfare Reform Act restricted access to many federal safety net programs for many immigrants who have been in the country for less than 5 years. It is especially challenging for elders of retirement age or those who face additional barriers to finding employment, such as disabilities. Many Pacific Islanders in Oregon struggle to access health care and other basic supports because of certain eligibility exclusions. Undocumented immigrants are not eligible for public aid of any kind; they may also be subject to intimidation and exploitation because of their legal status. For those with refugee status, the brief period of refugee resettlement funding and the requirement to take the first available job consigns many refugee families to poverty because they may be stuck in a low-wage job and don't have time or opportunities to improve their English, pursue an education or find jobs that are in line with their credentials.

## *The Social and Political Context for Oregon's Immigrants and Refugees*

The climate for immigrants and refugees has shifted a great deal since IRCO's last Community Needs Assessment in 2014. Immigrant and refugee issues have been at the center of recent fierce political and legal battles. The rancor has spilled over into the broader public climate; anti-immigrant and refugee sentiments appear to be on the rise in the U.S. and abroad.

Immigration issues have been at the forefront of many national debates since 2014. Deportations of undocumented immigrants rose to historic highs during the Obama administration and continue under

*"Being undocumented and threats by the current presidential administration are causing a lot of fear and anxiety in our homes, where families have mixed status."*

— Latinx immigrant

the Trump administration, contributing to a climate of fear and uncertainty for many. President Trump launched an aggressive policy agenda to curtail immigration, including the multiple iterations of the refugee and travel bans, the elimination of DACA, the proposed border wall and potential changes to the legal immigration

process. Concurrently, white nationalists appear to be emboldened by the policy shifts, and have mounted public marches and pressure tactics to oppose immigration.

Oregon has followed national trends. Instances of hateful graffiti and racist vandalism are on the rise (Portland residents reported more biased-fueled vandalisms in the 6 months following the 2016 presidential election than in any similar period in the previous five years, according to figures gathered by the City), and right-wing extremists continue to hold marches which terrify minority communities and draw national press. Three community members were attacked, two fatally, while intervening in a race-based altercation on a MAX commuter train between a white man and two African-American women, one of whom was in hijab.

Several immigrants and refugees at IRCO's CNA shared stories of fear and persecution. This was the first time that "discrimination" was measured as a potential community concern in the CNA, so it is not possible to

compare to previous years. However, there were numerous anecdotes that spoke to a significant level of insecurity for many. Members of the Latinx, African, Pacific Islander and Burmese communities identified discrimination as a challenge more frequently than did members of other communities. This discrimination took many forms. Burmese refugees talked about workplace exploitation. Mexican immigrants talked about bullying, targeting of the Latinx community, and the need for "know your rights" trainings. Pacific Islander youth described how they felt feared and disliked in their schools. Muslim youth and families talked about the impact of the MAX stabbings in creating a sense of fear and vulnerability, especially on transportation networks they relied on for school and work. Immigrants and refugees from multiple communities identified the need for more legal services and more trainings to help community members understand their rights and avoid exploitation and discrimination in the workplace and other settings.

*"People think we're bad. Like, they look at our size and how we look and they think we're bad. They just think we're scary... Nobody wants to talk to us... To be honest with you, they don't like us."*

— Pacific Islander youth





Despite these challenges, there were also signs of support from the mainstream community. Large numbers of people turned out at airports to contest the travel ban and participated in rallies to support immigrants and refugees. The Oregon Legislature adopted the Cover All Kids act in the recent session, expanding health coverage to include undocumented children in Oregon. This bill will expand eligibility for up to 17,600 children.<sup>iv</sup> Some community members also spoke to ways that their community has grown and matured, deepening its ability to support one another. For example, the Asian established community said that after 20 years of hard work, Asian Americans are more empowered and speak up more, and that they've seen even stronger changes in the next generation.

***"There is a lack of conversation about and support for undocumented Asian and Pacific Islanders who are under threat of deportation."***

— Asian immigrant

## CROSS-CUTTING NEEDS FOR OREGON'S IMMIGRANT & REFUGEE COMMUNITIES

### Key Themes and Findings

The diversity of Oregon's immigrant and refugee communities is apparent when reviewing the findings from each community. Needs vary widely based on a number of factors, including: immigration status, differences between immigrant and refugee circumstances and supports, the length of time a community or individual has been established in the U.S., and the unique characteristics of each culture. At the same time, some cross-cutting issues emerged that were common across most communities.

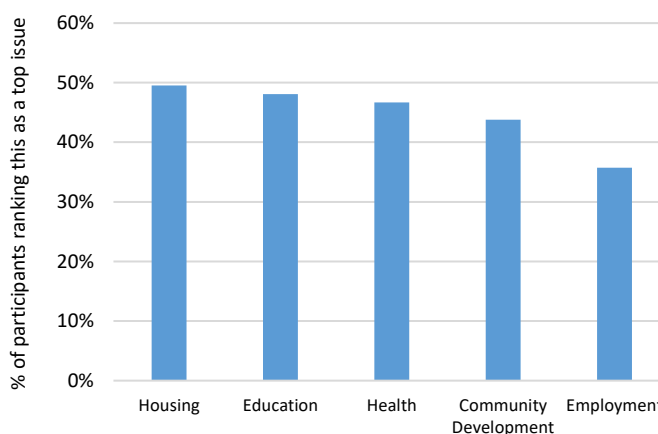
Communities confirmed our understanding that language barriers are a significant challenge for many immigrants and refugees, and that these language barriers amplify many of the other challenges they face. Limited English skills are a barrier to employment and education. Non-English speaking community members struggled to receive and understand appropriate health care. Without English, people reported it was difficult to navigate the social service system and identify resources that could support them, to understand their legal rights and responsibilities, and to use public transportation.

In short, English skills are a gateway for many to achieve self-sufficiency. Across the board, immigrants and refugees voiced a need for more English classes at times and locations that both workers and parents could access. They also needed instruction at a range of levels: some are at such a basic level

*"(Through IRCO), I learned a lot about English and can talk better. When I was here at first, I couldn't talk nicely because of my accent... It's all about talk. Because if you don't have talk, then how you can meet new people?"*

— Immigrant youth

Top Issues Identified by Individuals



that they called for interpreters to help them understand what was taking place in their ESL classes, while others needed support with more specialized vocational language. People also identified some key areas where their communities needed interpreters – especially in key contexts like citizenship/immigration processes and doctor visits.

## Cross-cutting Themes

**Housing** emerged as the top cross-cutting need for immigrants and refugees in the 2017 Community Needs Assessment. This reflects in part the acute lack of affordable housing in the Portland Metropolitan Area. A recent study reported that the average rent for a 2-bedroom apartment (\$1,208) requires a salary of \$48,000, the equivalent of 2.5 full-time minimum wage jobs.<sup>v</sup> Housing costs were cited by newcomers and long-term residents, immigrants and refugees. However, housing needs were particularly acute for newly arrived refugees, many of whom reported being placed in substandard housing that was beyond their ability to pay. Housing issues were frequently intertwined with employment issues, which in turn were closely connected with English language skills and education.

**Education** was named by many communities as a priority, but the term was used to describe many different issues. Several communities that prioritized education were focused primarily on English language skills for adult members of their community, or technology and job-seeking skills. Other communities talked about the need for K-12 school systems to better support immigrant and refugee students; in particular, there were multiple concerns about how newcomer refugee students were placed in their grade level based on their age rather than their

*"I was at a meeting and it was said that the reading level in Oregon has dropped dramatically. Reading is not a culture in our house, and many of us aren't even educated. We need to prepare our children to be ready for school."*

— African community member

academic readiness. Parents talked about the difficulty of communicating with their child's school, particularly when their language skills and their own educational backgrounds were limited. Several communities called for more information and support for students and their families to help students prepare for and attend postsecondary education.

**Health** issues were a common theme across most communities. The most common concern was access to health insurance (particularly for immigrants or refugees in categories that are not eligible for Medicaid). Other groups talked about



*A family of African refugees was placed in an apartment on a long-term lease they could not afford. When their housing subsidy ran out after 8 months, they were unable to continue to pay rent and were evicted. This damaged their credit and made it hard for them to find new housing.*

*"Doctors are not culturally aware, not aware of the problems that the communities are facing. People are not getting the right prescription. More research would help get deep into specific backgrounds and issues of the community to find the correct source of problem."*

— Bhutanese community member



the need for culturally-specific providers and providers who share their language. Several communities also raised the need for mental health supports, and others discussed the need for more health information in their language.

**Community development** was seen as a need by most communities, although the definition of “community development” varied widely from group to group. For some groups, community development meant building community connections and maintaining cultural traditions; for others, it

*“We are worried about not being able to keep up with our cultural norms and values because of the political situation. It is making us nervous that we will eventually lose our values.”*

— Bhutanese/Nepali refugee

meant leadership development, organizing and advocacy. Many groups talked about community development as creating a hub where their community could have culturally- and linguistically-specific help to navigate services and resolve problems. Many groups expressed a desire to have a gathering place for their community (e.g., a “Slavic House” or “Middle Eastern House”), that would both serve as a place to get

connected with resources and help one another, but also provide a physical space where the community can gather. Another theme that emerged in many communities was the challenges of preserving their culture among younger generations and bridging the cultural divide across generations.

**Employment** is a common struggle for many immigrant and refugee communities, but the needs vary by group. Some communities, such as Bhutanese/Nepali and communities from Myanmar, emphasized the need for basic job search support and work-related language classes.

*“My living cost increased, and I can’t afford living costs. I’m close to retirement, working for a long-time, and I still do not meet a \$15 wage.”*

— Asian immigrant

Other communities, such as the Middle Eastern refugee communities sought career planning skills for and coaching on re-credentialing for professionals who had completed postsecondary degrees in their countries of origin. Some communities—particularly those whose employees were clustered in low-wage jobs—emphasized the need to train workers on their employment rights, and sought more advocacy with employers to create more supportive work environments.

### *Priorities that Differ Based on Immigrant or Refugee Status*

Immigrants and refugees arrived in the U.S. by different processes, enjoy different rights and benefits, and often had different experiences in their home countries that spurred their migration. Refugees by definition faced persecution in their countries of origin, and many experienced trauma through war, persecution and ethnic cleansing. Some, like the Bhutanese and Syrian refugees, have undergone double migration – fleeing their home countries to refugee camps in neighboring countries before

ultimately being resettled to countries around the world after a long waiting period. Refugees enjoy more generous benefits than immigrants upon arrival in the U.S., but most benefits expire after 8

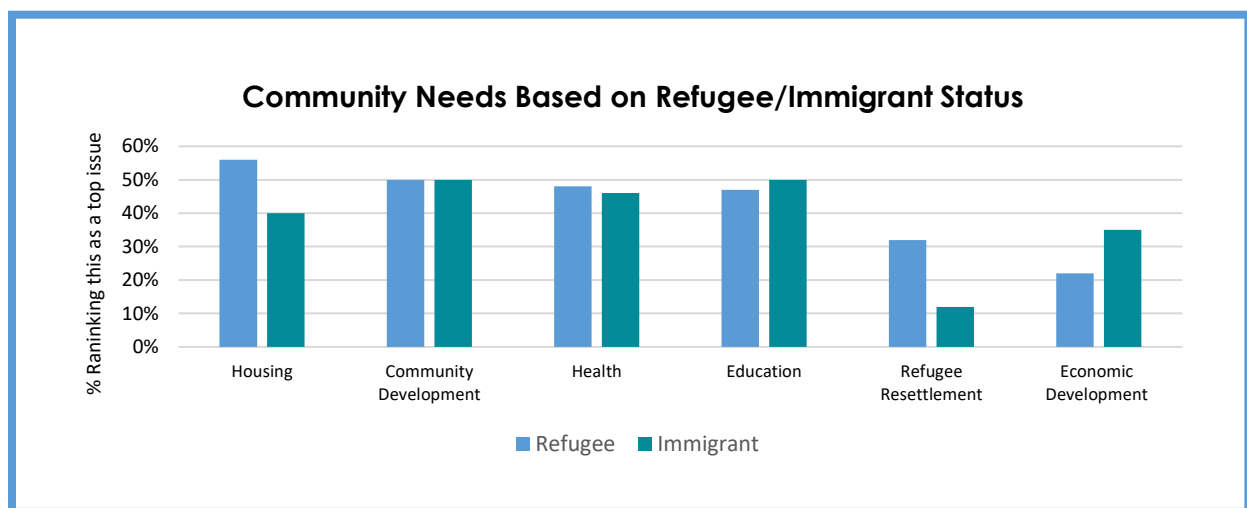
*“The amount of resources available has decreased. I’ve never seen that... (Refugees) don’t have social workers to ask questions when they need (help).”*

— African refugee

months—often before they are ready to be self-sufficient.

Immigrants have experienced a more varied set of circumstances that led to their migration. Immigrants in this study came from many different regions in Africa, Asia, the Pacific Islands, Europe and the Americas. These differences are magnified

when comparing undocumented immigrants with legal permanent residents. Undocumented immigrants enjoy no public safety net support, and many live in fear of deportation, which directly impacts their economic and educational prospects. Legal permanent residents can attain eligibility for many social supports after completing a 5-year waiting period.



Although immigrants and refugees both identified the same top four issues as their primary concerns (housing, community development, health and education), they differed in how they ranked those needs and in the intensity of those needs. Beyond the top four needs they held in common, their rankings of other needs diverged further. Refugees identified refugee resettlement as their next priority, while immigrants cited economic development next.

Refugees gave greater weight to immediate basic needs, such as housing and health. Refugee resettlement issues came up frequently, especially around housing, education and interconnected needs. Some refugees who have been in the country for many years perceived a drop in refugee supports compared with historic levels, deepening their community’s struggles. Many find the service systems hard to navigate; they also struggled to reach self-sufficiency in the 8-month period before their benefits expired. Refugees were also more likely to mention the impacts of trauma and unmet

mental health needs. In education, refugees noted that their children can struggle with the transition into American schools, and many would benefit from a more carefully planned transition. Families felt that school systems need more awareness and support for refugee students.

Immigrants in the CNA were more likely to prioritize issues like education (particularly access to higher education) and community and economic development that are connected to longer term pathways to improve their living standards. They were also more likely to identify issues like the generational gaps between elders steeped in their native language and traditions and youth who were fluent in the language and culture of their new home.



### *Priorities that Differ Based on Length of Time in the U.S.*

Needs also appear to vary based on the length of tenure in the United States. Housing and basic needs are front-burner issues for newcomers, whereas for people who have been here longer, employment and self-sufficiency take on greater weight.

*“There is this pressure to leave your old culture. This pressure to assimilate today is much stronger. I work with youth and they tell me this also. And if you decided to keep your culture within that circle it’s not so hard, but if you go outside it is harder.”*

— Slavic immigrant

The need for English language skills and guidance in navigating service systems and American culture and institutions were expressed most acutely by newcomers, though language support and service navigation needs continue to remain important even after a decade.

The CNA newcomer participants (2 years or less in the U.S.) were primarily refugees;

half were African. Housing and health topped the list as their most pressing needs. They emphasized their need for more extended language supports than they currently receive in order to attain self-sufficiency.

The CNA participants who had been in the U.S. for 10 years or more were slightly more likely to be immigrants than refugees. They were fairly evenly distributed across cultural groups. Education and housing were their strongest community needs, followed by community development.



## COMMUNITY-SPECIFIC NEEDS & PRIORITIES

Participants in the Community Needs Assessment divided into 8 groups to discuss the unique assets, needs and perspectives of their communities. Many of these groups included multiple linguistic, cultural and ethnic groups, with participants engaging in multiple languages. This section highlights the themes and perspectives for each group.



### AFRICAN COMMUNITIES



The participants in the African community's CNA were diverse, and included participants from Central Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Tanzania, Togo and Uganda. They included both immigrants and refugees.

They identified many assets of their communities, including their multi-generational, family-oriented community, their resiliency and drive and the ways they maintain their African identity and culture. The African community sees value in strengthening its development as a community.

Many immigrants and refugees face language barriers, have low education levels, and are disconnected and unaware of available resources. People see opportunities to engage the community more and improve outreach to connect community members to Africa House. They talked about

conducting a biannual community census to understand community needs. They also see a need to forge a more common identity and trusting relationships across different African communities.

**Housing** is the top need for African communities, and it is a crisis for many. Housing problems are most acute for refugees, who do not receive adequate housing placements. Community members shared stories of large refugee families and people with disabilities who were placed in housing that did not

*“There were 22 people (two refugee families) in a six-bedroom house, one kitchen, one living room.”*

— African refugee

meet minimum accessibility and adequacy needs or situations where they were sharing housing with non-family members. People also talked about refugee agencies placing them in housing they could not afford, and then when the resettlement subsidies ended, they were evicted, which in turn damaged their credit and ability to

find future housing. No-cause evictions were another issue for some. People felt that one solution is for IRCO’s Africa House to work with other agencies to develop more housing.

**Education** is considered to be the second most pressing concern for African communities. Parents talked about struggling to support their children’s learning, especially when they lacked formal education themselves and cannot read information provided by their children’s school. Refugee children are often placed in classes at school based solely on age, not proficiency level, and as a result they can struggle to overcome big gaps in their readiness. Parents of young children seek more ideas for how they can support their children’s school readiness. They also want to see young adults mentor children and help them set high aspirations for their future. The community wants to see better preparation for and access to higher education and see that as critical for ensuring the development of the next generation of leaders.

A third significant issue for the African community is **health**. Community members reported a need for basic health information as well as the need to understand the importance of seeking preventive care instead of waiting until major problems develop. They talked about the need for culturally specific community health workers, which used to exist but were eliminated. Both the cost and complexity of health insurance are barriers for people receiving support for health care. Also, the interplay of poverty, housing and unemployment place families in stress, which contributes to family violence problems. African community members also discussed other issues impacting their community, including employment challenges, discrimination, and the need for more housing and transportation supports for seniors.



## ASIAN ESTABLISHED COMMUNITIES



Oregon’s established Asian communities include immigrants and refugees from East and Southeast Asian countries, many of whom immigrated or came as refugees in earlier decades (Pacific Islander communities are addressed in a separate section of this report). Community leaders participating in the CNA conference included representatives from Hmong,

Japanese, Vietnamese, Taiwanese, Tibetan, Chinese, Cambodian and Lao communities.

Many CNA participants have been in the United States for several decades, or are second generation, although they also spoke to the needs of newcomers. Community members identified many assets that the community is proud of, including close-knit extended families, a strong commitment to education, civic activism, community service, cultural pride, access to a community center through IRCO’s Asian Family Center, cultural fluency between Asian and dominant cultures, and the contribution that the earlier generation made by paving the way. Asian community members identified several promising solutions to help address community needs. They saw community health workers as part of a promising strategy to help Asian community members. They also aim to engage more API community members in the civic space as voters and as representatives on local boards and commissions.

**Employment** was the highest reported need for the Asian established community. Unemployment is a challenge, particularly for middle-aged and elder Asians, who are experiencing layoffs and having a difficult time finding jobs because of discrimination and technical skills gaps. Many Asian immigrants



are in low-wage jobs, forcing them to work multiple jobs and leading to depression and family stress. Community members need training to help develop marketable skills to adapt and participate in a changing economy where jobs are being lost to automation, and in growing sectors like green jobs. Community members called for more career mentoring and apprenticeships and encouraged more soft skills training. Also, highly-skilled immigrants need help with re-credentialing in fields like health care.

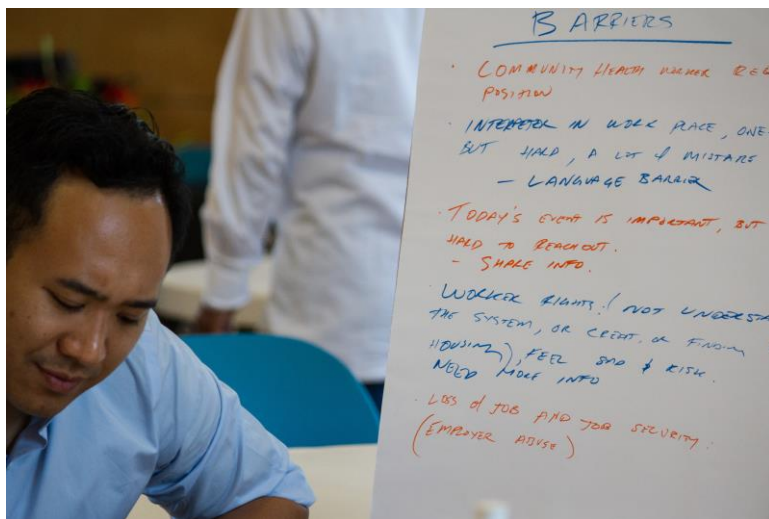
**Health** was the second highest concern for the Asian established community. Mental health is a significant issue for many people, and people feel shame and stigma around mental health issues. There are high rates of suicide, especially for Asian females. Established Asian communities note that many of their newcomer peers have experienced trauma and need support to address that. Asian immigrants do not have sufficient access to health care, and in particular they lack access to Asian providers and coverage for traditional Asian remedies. Senior health is also a concern.

*"There is a lack of Asian-specific health providers who serve Asians – especially mental health providers."*

— Asian immigrant

**Community development** and **housing** issues were both ranked as the third-highest concern for the Asian established community. Cultural identity and cultural preservation are major concerns. Generational issues were a recurring theme, with gaps between parents who want to preserve their

cultural values and children who are more connected to the dominant culture. There are also generational disagreements about success and educational aspirations. In addition, people spoke to the invisibility of Asian Americans, the damage of the model minority myth, and the lack of representation of Asians in leadership roles in government and business. With regard to **housing**, community members talked about how housing costs put home ownership out of reach. There was significant concern about the lack of



affordable rental housing, especially for low-income individuals, seniors and families. Some families are living doubled or tripled up with several families in a home. Many people are forced to find housing farther from work, compounding the stresses, especially for people trying to make ends meet by working multiple jobs.



## BHUTANESE/NEPALESE COMMUNITIES

access affordable class community  
cultural disability employment english expenses  
family hard help housing income  
language living pressure prices program rent senior  
skills transportation understand work

The Bhutanese/Nepali community is composed primarily of refugees. Many Bhutanese, especially those with Nepalese backgrounds, were forced to leave Bhutan in the early 1990s and spent 15 - 20 years living in refugee camps in Nepal before being resettled in the United States.

**Housing** was the top challenge for Bhutanese and Nepali communities in Oregon. People are struggling to find affordable housing, and the gap between earnings and housing costs is growing fast. There is a long waiting list for low-income housing. Many community members have moved out of Oregon because they could not afford rent, with one person saying that as many as half of the community members have left for lower-cost destinations like Ohio. Many community members have had difficulty finding work, making it even harder to get housing. Retired elders and people who can't work because of disabilities are particularly struggling with housing needs. People shared multiple stories of multigenerational households with only one family member who could find work, and who were struggling to meet their rent.

**Community development** was listed as the second-highest need for the community. Community leaders talked about the need for their own community gathering space where members of the Bhutanese/Nepali community can gather for cultural activities, weddings, funerals and celebrations. This is especially important for elders and people with disabilities, who can easily become isolated; they also need bus passes to help them access community functions, social services and exercise opportunities. People talked about the importance of maintaining traditions and cultural values, and passing them on to the next generation. People also talked about needing guidance and legal assistance with immigration and citizenship; many community members are struggling with these

processes, particularly community members who do not speak English and cannot navigate the interviews.

**Education** was the third-ranking need for the Bhutanese/Nepali community. The community defined “education” primarily as classes for adults in English language skills and the citizenship process, rather than K-12 or postsecondary education.

Limited English language skills are a major barrier to employment, to citizenship and to accessing resources for the community. Community members said that for many, their English skills were at such a basic level that they were not able to understand the instructor in ESL classes without the help of an interpreter (which they lack). In addition to more English language opportunities, the community also wants Nepali language classes for youths because they are not able to communicate with their elders or connect with their cultural traditions without a common language.

*“Our community has low education in English and are studying English from the beginning right now, trying to learn the alphabet.”*

— Bhutanese/Nepali refugee



**Health** is also a challenge for the Bhutanese/Nepali community, particularly for people with disabilities. Community members with disabilities face barriers for accessing services and struggle to access transportation. Most are unable to find work and may also struggle to qualify for SSI disability supports because of limited English and bureaucratic barriers. They can become isolated and disconnected from the community. They called on IRCO to develop a program providing targeted

supports and building advocacy for people with disabilities in this community. They also encouraged IRCO to provide entrepreneurship training, noting that many people with disabilities have skills that could generate income.





## COMMUNITIES FROM MYANMAR (BURMA)



Communities from Myanmar (Burma) include members of the Burmese, Karen, Rohingya, and Zomi communities. While all of these groups have migrated from the same country, they have distinct languages, traditions and circumstances in Myanmar that led to their migration (this is why we are not referring to this entire group as

“Burmese”; several of these groups are ethnic minorities that were persecuted by the government composed of the majority Burmese ethnic group).

The majority of the CNA participants from these communities arrived as refugees. They spoke about their sense of freedom and safety in America, and some mentioned that they had support and material comforts in their lives here that they never had in Myanmar, such as a car and access to health care. They expressed pride in their jobs and in their children’s schoolwork. They were also proud of having a community representative on the New Portland Policy Commission.

**Community development** is the top issue for communities from Myanmar. CNA participants from Myanmar defined “community development” broadly, including service navigators, language classes and legal education as well as more traditional community development activities. Many community members seek culturally specific community workers to do outreach and provide assistance in their own language. Rohingya refugees were particularly outspoken about the lack of supports for their community. People also sought more resources to educate community members about the legal system in the U.S. including family law as well as workplace rights; several people shared stories about

how they had become involved in domestic violence proceedings and were confused by the differences in the U.S. legal system. People also needed interpreters and help navigating bureaucratic processes to apply for green cards, housing, health insurance and other supports.



**Health** issues were the second most-cited concern. The community emphasized the need for culturally specific community health workers, in particular for Rohingya, Karen and Zomi communities. People need help accessing health insurance coverage, noting that Oregon Health Authority applications are very long and confusing, making it hard for people to attain coverage.

The communities from Myanmar cited **education** as the third-highest challenge. Much of the discussion focused on the need for more English language classes for adults – particularly more weekend classes. Community members felt that education is readily available for youth, but less so for adults, although some community members spoke positively about the help they got from IRCO to enroll in community college and certification programs. For school-aged youth, the community expressed a need for Zomi social workers at Centennial High School.

**Employment** issues were also a challenge for immigrants and refugees from Myanmar. People face language barriers in the workplace and need interpreters. Many immigrants and refugees from Myanmar need education and support about their rights in the workplace; workers who do not understand the rules are afraid to stand up for themselves for fear of losing their jobs. As a result some people may remain in exploitive work situations. People also talked about the need for computer training and English language classes for adults, especially on weekends.

*“Nobody has explained workers’ rights to them. The employer manipulates them if they don’t know all the rules. You’re kind of at their mercy.”*

— Burmese refugee





## LATINX COMMUNITIES



Latinx participants in the CNA conference were predominantly immigrants from Mexico, along with a few Cuban refugees and a Haitian immigrant. The Mexican immigrants included both legal permanent residents and undocumented immigrants. They spoke about the racial, ethnic and linguistic diversity of

the Latinx communities, noting that language and literacy levels are extremely varied, and that for many recently arrived Mexican immigrants, their native language is an indigenous language and Spanish is a second language. The participants spoke with pride of the solidarity across the community's diverse members.

They talked about the assets of strong, multigenerational families and a close community that celebrates its food and culture. They also celebrated traits that characterize many members of their community, such as hard-working, happy and resilient. Community members identified several solutions to support their communities. They suggested creating an advisory group of cultural informants to advise on providing effective outreach and support to reach Portland's diverse Latinx communities. They also see benefit in combating discrimination in many forms through "know your rights" trainings for immigrants and by doing outreach to boards and staff of local nonprofit agencies



to develop greater cultural awareness and humility among agencies' board and staff, not just cultural competence.

**Education** is the top issue for the Latinx community. Community members want more support to help families plan and put their children on the path to college, including the application process, financing and college options. They want outreach to begin early—with parents of elementary school children—to help them understand their options and educate them about

saving early. For K-12 education, the community is seeking more support for parent empowerment and engagement in their children's schooling, including supports like interpreters and child care to overcome barriers. They also want to see more native language immersion options in schools.

The second highest need is **housing**. Community members are struggling with high rental costs and the lack of affordable housing. It can be difficult for families to meet rental requirements, especially for undocumented people. Also, community members need more knowledge and support for their rights as tenants; in particular, some undocumented immigrants are preyed upon by landlords who use their immigration status as leverage.

**Employment** is also a top need in the community. People need support to build employment skills, including technology training and resume-building, as well as internships or apprenticeships that provide pathways to higher-paying jobs. Professionals who earned their credentials in Latin America need support with re-credentialing; they also seek more Latinx professional organizations. Undocumented community members struggle to find work, and discrimination is a challenge for many people regardless of status. People also called for advocacy and/or training with employers to encourage them to value and retain employees.

**Health** was also a major community need. Many Latinx lack health insurance and must rely on emergency rooms for care. Many programs (health and other) are geared toward women and children, and more attention is now needed by the aging elder Latinx, and by Latinx men in general. The community also called for more bilingual providers, noting that the poor quality of health care interpreters can impact treatment. There is also a need for more preventive care and community health education.

*"The community at large continues to generalize and homogenize the Hispanic and Latinx community as 'one culture.' We are misidentified regularly and assumptions are made about us. In the divisive social and political climates catalyzed by the current presidential administration, my community continues to be targeted, racially profiled, demeaned, and assaulted."*

— Latinx community member



## MIDDLE EASTERN COMMUNITIES



The Middle Eastern communities participating in the CNA included representatives from the Arabic community (Iraqi, Syrian and Egyptian), Afghan community, Iranian community and Turkish community. The community is highly diverse, composed of many different language, religious, and ethnic groups. Oregon's Middle Eastern community is one of the newer

immigrant and refugee communities in the state; the majority of the CNA participants were refugees from recent war-torn regions. They described community strengths that included their history and diversity, and their hard-working and educated people.

**Housing** issues were the top concern for the Middle Eastern community. Many community members – and especially the newest arrivals – are struggling with navigating housing options for their families, and the rapidly increasing high costs of housing. Housing needs are acute for refugees, who were having difficulty with housing placements resulting in unstable living situations. They also talked about the need to educate the community about rental law and to help them to understand their rights as renters.

**Community development** was tied with housing as the top community need. The community was united in its request for a “Middle East House” similar to IRCO’s Asian Family Center and Africa House

that could serve as a community center, service access and navigation point for the community. They envision a hub that could help people access services, and build trust and communication among community members. It could help ensure the development of culturally-specific services and approaches, which was a cross-cutting concern for many different services and supports. People spoke about discrimination they experienced. A Middle East House could provide a safe space, as well as a place where people can learn how to advocate for their rights.



**Health** was another area of concern for the Middle Eastern community. Many community members are not aware of the Oregon Health Plan (OHP) and need outreach to learn how they can access services they are eligible for as well as tools on how to navigate OHP care. They suggested training community members to become OHP assisters who could address language and cultural barriers to families accessing OHP coverage and services. People also talked about the need to provide mental health services addressing trauma, which many refugees have experienced, and called for culturally-specific mental health care. People also need health information to be translated into their languages.

*“Refugees need to find a job so they can survive, but in parallel, they need someone to work with them based on their education level to find what the opportunities are for them. They need a career planner and not just a jobs course.”*

— Middle Eastern immigrant

**Employment** is another significant challenge for the Middle Eastern community. People spoke about the challenges that refugees experience when transitioning from education and employment in their countries of origin into the U.S. system. Many Middle Eastern refugees have postsecondary degrees and credentials, but they need a career plan and the support to recertify their credential

in the American system, as well as the financial support to help bridge them during the transition period. Refugees are required to take the first job they are hired for, but they need career planning to support them while they work toward better opportunities in their professional fields. They also need help learning English – particularly the vocationally-specific language of their professions.





## PACIFIC ISLANDER COMMUNITIES



The Pacific Islander representatives who participated in the CNA were Tongan and Chuukese immigrants. The Chuukese (along with other PI immigrants from the “COFA” nations of Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau) have a unique immigration status because of a federal

agreement that was developed in part to compensate for the U.S. government’s nuclear testing in the region after World War II.

Immigrants from COFA nations can freely migrate to the U.S., but they face a lifetime exclusion from many public benefits, such as Medicaid, SNAP, federal student loans and TANF that creates unique economic challenges. There are an estimated 3,000 COFA residents in Oregon.<sup>vi</sup> The Pacific Islander representatives described their community as hard-working, family-oriented, big-hearted and persistent. They celebrated their tight-knit community, with its strong sense of cultural identity, and described the ways their community members support one another.

**Education** was the highest priority area for the Pacific Islander community. The community defined this broadly to include parent engagement, youth engagement and education. For parents, they seek parent education about child development, supports for culturally-specific parenting skills, and supports for parents’ involvement in their children’s education. Pacific Islanders also seek more youth leadership development opportunities that will strengthen youth’s voice and help prepare them to take on more leadership roles in adulthood. They want to expose PI youth to a wider range of career

options beyond construction and caregiving, which are fields where many Pacific Islanders are clustered. They are eager to provide more opportunities for their youth to attend college, seeking more emphasis on college preparation and more support for the college application process as well as scholarship assistance. They also want to expand summer programs and to help prepare more Pacific Islanders to be teachers, so that students see more teachers who reflect their community.

*“We need classes or leadership positions that give our kids opportunities to experience what it is like to be a leader.”*

— Pacific Islander community member

**Employment** ranks as the second highest need for the community. CNA participants said that many



community members are employed in construction and caregiving professions, which has been a pattern across generations. PI communities want to provide more support to those employed in those professions (such as helping people obtain licenses providing training in required skills and guidance in the licensing process as well as translators or materials in their languages for licensing exams), while also supporting community members to access a wider range of careers. In particular, women need assistance in obtaining better employment credentials. They also want more PI entrepreneurs to be able to access support from business advisors (banking, financial advisors, etc.).

**Community development** is the third community priority.

Community members aspire to have a one-stop community center that specifically serves the PI community and is led by community members. Pacific Islanders discussed several other ideas to deepen community connections and support for one another. For example, they talked about joining forces to support members of the community who don't speak English

well and assist them with information and basic needs. They discussed increasing their presence on social media to create culturally specific networks to share resources and information across the community. They affirmed the need to engage community leaders more. They also called for more youth leadership development, starting with a youth leadership summit.



## SLAVIC COMMUNITIES



The Slavic community was represented by a mix of immigrants and refugees from the former Soviet Union, including Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova. They described their community assets, including their spiritual values, kindness, perseverance, adaptability, enterprise, ability to work and their education.

**Health** was ranked as the top Slavic community issue, tied with housing. Slavic participants reported that medical insurance is expensive, and it is hard to navigate insurance options. Even those with Medicare find that it doesn't cover all their needs. Several community members are struggling with untreated medical and dental issues. The community needs medical interpreters who can help them make appointments and interpret at medical visits. The Slavic community seeks culturally-specific solutions to address challenges such as family violence and alcoholism, providing counseling to help families resolve conflict without violence. People also want information about alternative medicine and traditional Russian medicine.

**Housing** was also ranked as the top issue for the Slavic community. Affordable

*"A landowner told my mother that if she didn't come up with the money for rent then she should return to her home country. We didn't know our rights then, we didn't know they couldn't talk to us this way."*

— Slavic immigrant



housing is a major issue – especially for low-income elders. People don’t know how to apply for benefits, including affordable housing programs, and need someone who can help them do so. Slavic community members who are active in faith-based communities often receive help through their congregations in finding housing, so housing needs may be especially acute for those who are not connected to a church and its resources.



The Slavic community identified **community development** as a third area of need. Community members shared many stories about the difficulty they face navigating systems and accessing resources (e.g., applying for benefits), and the ways that language barriers make it hard to get the information they need. They voiced a strong desire for a Russian/Slavic cultural center modeled after IRCO’s Asian Family Center that could serve as a hub to help people access and navigate services, while also serving as a community center with cultural exchange and clubs. They talked about the need to work with some of the existing organizations serving the Slavic community for better cooperation rather than reinventing the wheel. They talked about reaching out to Russian-owned businesses to donate funds to help support a cultural center and to pay for activities like religious celebrations that cannot be supported with government funds. They also called for more English language instruction, especially targeted toward people who need English skills to find and retain a job.

## SPECIAL FEATURE: IMMIGRANT/REFUGEE CHILDREN & YOUTH



The 2017 CNA includes a special section focusing on the needs and perspectives of immigrant and refugee youth. This information was gathered through a series of four focus groups involving a total of 38 high school-aged youth representing many immigrant and refugee communities, including African, Pacific Islander and Slavic communities. The quotes and statements are not tied to particular communities in order to maintain the anonymity of the youth.

### *Understanding the Youth Perspective*

There is a widespread tendency for older generations to see young people as a source of hope for a better future, and this was particularly true for the adults who participated in the 2017 CNA. Immigrant and refugee youth often play an important role in helping their families connect to their new community in the United States, and they may be the first in their families to master English and learn how to navigate the culture and systems in their new home. Many elders spoke of the importance of supporting youth to become the leaders and advocates for their communities.

The immigrant and refugee youth who participated in the focus groups recognize the outsized role they play, and they identified many strengths and points of pride. They talked about their strong sense of caring and desire to help other immigrant students – and they were especially driven to ensure that their younger siblings will have a better experience and receive more support than they did. They are proud of their diversity and the cultural and linguistic fluency they have developed. They are open-minded, tolerant, and respectful of others. They feel a strong sense of family support and connection, and they know their parents hold high expectations for them. They are empowered, resilient and

*"I don't want (my little sister) going through like the same struggle (I had)... I want her to be able to communicate with whoever she wants to. And I don't want her to feel left out because of the way she looks or how she is."*  
— Immigrant youth

proud that they can advocate for themselves. And they are proud of their culture and remain actively connected to their roots.

The youth talked about the importance of finding a sense of belonging. They described how newcomer students and their families can feel scared and disoriented. Some

students felt marginalized by mainstream students in their schools. Many spoke to how IRCO creates safe spaces where students could find a sense of belonging. Youth need someone trusted to talk to, and many are finding it through IRCO programs. Building a sense of belonging can provide young people with the confidence to engage more broadly in other activities and to express themselves. It also can help them feel that they matter, which in turn helps them to avoid alcohol and drug use. One spoke about how that was the key to get him to start attending school regularly and bring his grades up. Some pointed to examples of isolated youth who had fallen in with the wrong crowd and gotten into more serious trouble.

Many immigrant and refugee youth struggle with the experience of straddling two cultures, and often they are bridging two different languages as well. They can have trouble communicating with their non-English speaking parents. Some described conflicts when their parents perceived their children as being too

*"I just like how (IRCO staff) always check up on us. Like, how are you doing in school? I think that's good for me because I know like someone is caring about what I do."*  
— Immigrant youth

Americanized and felt they were not upholding their cultural values or traditions. At the same time immigrant youth can feel out of step with their schoolmates from other cultures. "There's a reason all the Somali kids sit together at lunch," noted one youth. Young people can also struggle for respect and voice within their communities. They feel that adults don't listen to what they're saying, and that elders assume that youth are not as smart as them.



## Prioritizing Youth Needs

*“Some (immigrant youth) didn’t graduate because they didn’t know what to do. Some are seniors, even taking AP classes. But they don’t have any idea how to do the college application. There is not anyone to call, because their families are immigrants or have never been to college.”*

— Immigrant youth

**Academic advising and support** was the top identified need for many youth. Many students need help developing a plan for what they want to do after high school and need someone to help them build a pathway to realize that plan. More fundamentally, students need mentors to help them see a positive future for themselves. In some cultures, this is especially important for girls who may be expected to marry right after graduating

from high school. Students who want to go to college need someone to guide them through the college application process and educate them about their postsecondary options. They also need information about how to apply for financial aid.

Students particularly need counselors at school who can help them build their course schedules to ensure on-time graduation. Students need to be counseled about graduation requirements and supported to get the schedules that will meet those requirements in four years. Many youth shared stories of immigrant students who were assigned to elective classes without receiving the core classes that were graduation requirements, and who had to take an extra year to complete high school as a result. Students shared stories about students being assigned to a class they had already taken, which caused them to lose credits toward graduation.





Youth also expressed the need for more **positive youth activities**. Students value immigrant-focused student clubs and would like to see more of them – and to do more outreach to engage other students to join. Many wanted to have more after-school activities, and many students talked specifically about sports. Youth would like to have more access to after-school sports leagues where they could play with youth from other schools; soccer was a particularly strong interest for many. Students valued past activities like “Shop with a Cop”, Tongan Days and other events and would like to see even more. Youth also talked about wanting more outdoor activities in general and spoke to the benefits they received from spending time outside. They also valued field trips they have done through IRCO programs and would

like to see more of them, including finding ways for youth to help lead trips. They talked about the value of these activities in helping youth avoid alcohol and drug use by providing positive alternatives.

Youth seek more **language learning opportunities**. Newcomers need help learning English. One student said, “Sometime I’m behind because if a teacher teaches something...there are going to be a couple of words that I don’t understand.” That student requested more dual language instruction; other students said it would be especially helpful to add English language classes in the summer. Newcomers also need help understanding dominant cultural norms and how you are expected to behave. “They don’t know how to act,” noted one student. Students also need language classes in their native language and cultural traditions to maintain their connection with family and reinforce their cultural identity.

Immigrant youth also need **support and advocacy** for those who are playing a key role in supporting their families, such as transportation and school schedule flexibility for youth who help their parents by taking family members to appointments and interpreting. They are honored to help their family, but sometimes they are punished by the school when family duties makes them late or absent.

Across several different focus groups, youth talked about how much they appreciated the chance to come together

*“I think you guys do a great job to bring those people together and to make them know they are welcome here.”*

— Immigrant youth

in a group to discuss their community and how important it was to them to try to improve things for their families and peers. They were eager for action and called for follow-up so they would know what actions come about as a result of their input. They said that they wanted a youth summit where they could hear from youth in other communities. “I think they should like let everybody meet the other groups. I think you guys should pick like one person from each group. I want to hear about what other people feel. Like not just like our Tongan community, but other communities too.”



## ABOUT IRCO



Founded in 1976 by Southeast Asian refugees resettling in Oregon, IRCO has grown to be a nationally recognized multi-ethnic, multi-service community based nonprofit organization that is one of the first stops for immigrants and refugees arriving in Oregon and a trusted focal point for all those in need. IRCO's mission is to promote the integration of refugees, immigrants and the community at large into a self-sufficient, healthy and inclusive multi-ethnic society. We do this by providing more than 200 culturally specific and responsive programs targeting a wide array of community identified needs ranging from early childhood development to employment and training services to support for elders. Our services assist individuals from all communities at all ages and stages of life. Last year alone IRCO served nearly 32,000 clients from more than 100 ethnic backgrounds/countries of origin speaking over 50 languages from the following broadly defined regions of origin:

- 23% Asian & Pacific Islander
- 14% Hispanic/Latinx
- 12% African Immigrant or Refugee
- 11% African American
- 6% Slavic/Eastern European
- 5% Middle Eastern
- 3% Native American
- 3% Other or Multiethnic identities; as well as 23% from White/Mainstream.



Supporting and empowering this diverse client community requires guidance from and work through the leadership, knowledge, and cultural and linguistic capacity of all of the local population groups we serve. This is made possible in part through the skills and expertise of one of the most diverse workforces in the state of Oregon. IRCO's multilingual, multicultural management and staff comprises over 500 individuals who collectively speak 98 languages and represent 73 ethnicities — 72 percent

*"I had nothing in the refugee camp. IRCO was so helpful when we came. I got my first job at a fruit company and now at a tree farm thanks to help from IRCO."*

— Burmese refugee

came to the U.S. as immigrants or refugees. The highest level of IRCO agency leadership also represents the communities the agency serves; IRCO's Executive Director came to the U.S. as a Hmong refugee and over 70 percent of the IRCO Board of Directors identify as an immigrant and refugee and/or a person of color.

Community input is at the heart of IRCO's work. This Community Needs Assessment will help guide the agency-wide strategic plan for 2018-2022. It will also bring community voice to guide new programs we develop and improve the services we currently provide. Equally important, we are committed to sharing the findings from this report so that this group of diverse community leaders can help the leaders of other service systems and policy bodies to understand the assets, challenges and needs these communities face, and the opportunities we all have to increase equity in Oregon.



Our 2017 Community Needs Assessment gathered  
**243** community members speaking  
**51** foreign languages



## THANK YOU

*to all community participants; our sponsors Chase Bank, Coon Family Foundation, Meyer Memorial Trust, and Oregon DHS State Refugee Program; volunteers and IRCO staff; report author Chris Tebben, Sapient Solutions LLC who generously donated her time to this project; editorial team Sophorn Cheang, Jenny Bremner, Angela Dimmick, and Olivia Katbi Smith; and photographers Chamille Hartman and Doug McClay.*

<sup>i</sup> In Need of a Long Welcome, p. 10

<sup>ii</sup> ORR data—Oregon Refugee Arrivals 2009-16, 2017.

<sup>iii</sup> Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Accessed online on November 17, 2017. <http://www.brycs.org/aboutRefugees/refugee101.cfm>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://portlandtribune.com/bvt/15-news/368216-250347-state-of-oregon-now-covering-health-care-for-undocumented-children>

<sup>v</sup> National Low Income Housing Coalition, Out of Reach, 2017, as reported by the Welcome Home Coalition

<sup>vi</sup> Mend the Gap report, p. 4





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