

2022

Greater Middle Eastern Community Needs Assessment

Key findings from Greater Middle Eastern immigrant and refugee communities in Oregon and SW Washington.



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Message From Our Leaders



On behalf of the founding director of IRCO's Greater Middle East Center (GMEC) and IRCO Associate Director, Jihane Nami, and the GMEC Advisory Council through its chair, Laila Hajoo, we are pleased to present the following 2022 Greater Middle Eastern Community Needs Assessment.

IRCO Greater Middle East Center is delighted to share this 2022 Greater Middle Eastern Community Needs Assessment, the first of its kind for Greater Middle Eastern (GME) communities in Oregon and SW Washington.

These past few years have brought significant challenges to members of our GME communities. The COVID-19 pandemic wreaked harm to our physical and mental health, disrupting community gatherings and celebrations and aggravating a sense of isolation for both newly arrived and more established community members, as well as for particular groups, like our youth, women, and seniors. Meanwhile, amidst this crisis another unfolds, with new refugees from Afghanistan and Syria arriving every day seeking safety, shelter, opportunity, and community.

Still, there are many reasons to celebrate. The responses from our community to these and other crises really demonstrate the growing resiliency and solidarity within the GME community. People from different backgrounds have come together to provide emotional, material, and financial support to those in need. As the pandemic wanes, people are gathering again to safely celebrate our cultures and holidays.

For IRCO, we are immensely proud to have become a refugee resettlement agency this year, which, in conjunction with new services provided through GMEC, has enabled us to better respond to and support newly arrived refugees from the Greater Middle East. To have someone from your background coming to greet and support you as you and your family start a new life in a foreign country is a wonderful thing. We are also proud that the newly established GMEC has found a home in Washington County, responding to the longstanding need expressed in this assessment and elsewhere for a cultural community center serving the diverse and growing GME community.

This 2022 GME Community Needs Assessment is one of many tools to help guide our work going forward, and we are mindful of the limits of the data:

- Most of the Arabic-speaking survey respondents were from Iraq, which is the largest GME and Arabic-speaking community in Oregon, but this oversampling means that the cumulative data is skewed toward one community and does not reflect the conditions of many other GME communities. This is particularly true for those who are newer to the country and less settled.
- Several GME communities (such as Pashto speakers, Yemeni, Palestinians, Turks, and Kurds) are not represented in this assessment, and we will continue to find opportunities to hear and learn from these communities.
- A bigger data challenge may be the cultural issues affecting how community members respond to surveys. Even though the surveyors came from their community, respondents may have felt it shameful to acknowledge their inability to provide for their families, or to describe other challenges in detail (such as mental health). This is an important lesson of this research, and we will continue to have conversations on how best to engage with the community around their needs.

One method featured here, which we wish to elevate, is our annual Community Leaders Gathering. In the 2022 gathering, community leaders identified their top community needs: housing/stability, access to adult education and training opportunities, legal services, physical and mental health, and a cultural community center (which we now have through GMEC). These needs are validated by the survey data, and we will focus our efforts to ensure that these needs are met.

Overall, the stories told in this assessment, as well as the relationships forged through this effort, will help our community navigate its way out of the pandemic and into the future.

Survey Methodology

The 2022 CNA utilized a survey questionnaire administered by a team of dozens of culturally specific Community Survey Specialists (CSSs), who reached out to community members from their individual cultural and language groups to identify individual challenges and needs as well as those of their community. Survey languages targeted were determined based on feedback from community leaders and publicly available data on languages spoken at home. Our Survey questions incorporated different aspects of the social determinants of health (SDOH), defined

as the “conditions in the environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age.” Ultimately, we successfully surveyed 528 community members from 23 different language groups, representing more than 50 cultural and national backgrounds (See below). Due to small sample sizes, conclusions should not be made about any community from this data alone. In some cases, limited or skewed sample sizes could lead to incorrect conclusions about a community’s level of need.

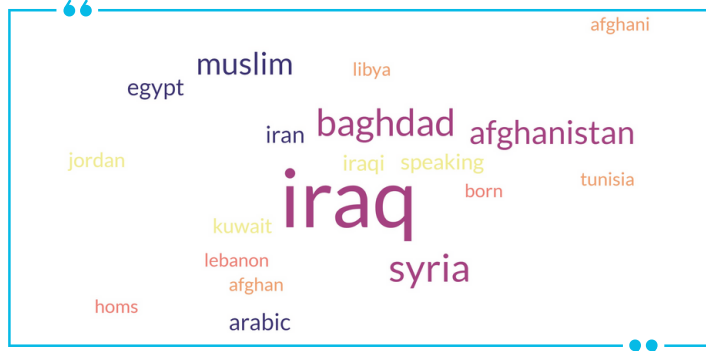
TABLE 1: COMMUNITY MEMBERS SURVEYED: BY COUNTRY OR CULTURE OF ORIGIN

AFRICAN (95)	Swahili-speaking, from Kenya (26)	Swahili-speaking, from Democratic Republic of Congo (8)	Swahili-speaking, from Tanzania (2)	Swahili-speaking, from Uganda (1)	Swahili-speaking, blank (1)	Tigrigna-speaking (16)	Amharic-speaking (16)	Somali-speaking (15)	Oromo-speaking (10)			
ASIAN (178)	Vietnamese-speaking (45)	Mandarin-speaking (35)	Mandarin-speaking, from Vietnam (3)	Karen-speaking (25)	Zomi-speaking (17)	Nepali-speaking, from Bhutan (16)	Nepali-speaking, from Nepal (9)	Khmer-speaking (13)	Burmese-speaking (8)	Burmese-speaking Rohingya (5)	Lao-speaking (1)	Hmong-speaking (1)
GREATER MIDDLE EASTERN (85)	Arabic-speaking, from Iraq/Kuwait (44)	Arabic-speaking, from Syria (14)	Arabic-speaking, from Egypt (4)	Arabic-speaking, from Jordan (2)	Arabic-speaking, from Lebanon (1)	Arabic-speaking, from Libya (1)	Arabic-speaking, from Tunisia (1)	Arabic-speaking, origin unknown (4)	Dari-speaking (10)	Farsi-speaking (4)		
LATIN AMERICAN (53)	Spanish-speaking, from Mexico (38)	Spanish-speaking, Hispanic or from the U.S. (10)	Spanish-speaking, from Guatemala (1)	Spanish-speaking, from Honduras (1)	Spanish-speaking, from El Salvador (1)	Spanish-speaking, from Venezuela (1)	Spanish-speaking, origin unknown (1)					
PACIFIC ISLANDER (30)	Tongan-speaking (15)	Marshallese-speaking (12)	Chuukese-speaking (3)									
SLAVIC/ EASTERN EUROPEAN (87)	Ukrainian-speaking (43)	Russian-speaking from Russia (19)	Moldovan-speaking (14)	Russian-speaking from Belarus (2)	Russian-speaking from Uzbekistan (2)	Russian-speaking from Georgia (1)	Russian-speaking from Kazakhstan (1)	Russian-speaking from Kyrgyzstan (1)	Russian-speaking from Latvia (1)	Other Russian-speaking (3)		

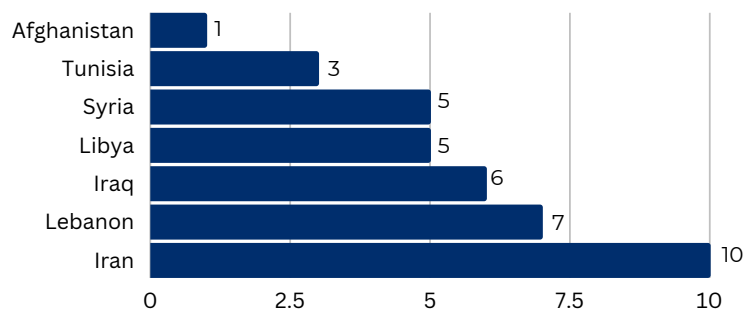
Survey Respondent Background

We surveyed 85 respondents from a Greater Middle Eastern (GME) country or culture, including 71 Arabic-speaking respondents, 10 Dari-speaking respondents, and 4 Farsi-speaking respondents. Of the Arabic-speaking respondents, 42 are from Iraq, 14 from Syria, 4 from Egypt, 2 from Jordan, 2 from Kuwait, 1 each from Lebanon, Libya, and Tunisia, and 4 who did not specify their origin. Dari and Farsi-speaking respondents are from Afghanistan and Iran, respectively. We failed to get surveys from several target communities (such as Pashto speakers, Yemeni, Palestinians, Turks, and Kurds).

Survey participant responses when asked about their country or culture of origin



Average number of years living in their current city (by country of origin)



Overall, most survey respondents have been in the country for longer than 5 years. However, all but one Afghan, and most Syrian, Jordanian, Libyan, and Tunisian respondents have lived in their city for less than 5 years, reflecting the trends in migration.

5% of Oregon's foreign-born population, or approximately 20,603 people are from the Greater Middle East.¹ The top Greater Middle Eastern countries of origin are Iraq (21%), Iran (20%), Syria (9%), Israel (7%), Afghanistan (6%), Turkey (6%), and Egypt (5%).

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. Total includes counts from countries in census-designated "Western Asia," the "South Central Asian" countries of Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan, as well as "North Africa."

Data Disclaimer

Our survey saw an oversampling of community members from Iraq (comprising 62% of Arabic-speaking respondents), who at the time represented the largest GME and Arabic-speaking community in Oregon. This meant that the data is skewed toward that community, who have generally been in the country for longer and, as a result, may be more settled in many aspects of their lives. Through our work, and in speaking with community leaders, we know that this is not the case for many other GME communities who are newer to the country and less settled.

To negate this error, we present disaggregated data where relevant, and balance the survey results with findings from a GMEC Community Leaders Gathering conducted in June 2022, as well as ongoing conversations with our GMEC Advisory Council.

In sharing the data with our GMEC Advisory Council, it was clear to council members that there may be cultural issues affecting the survey responses. One issue is that respondents may have felt it shameful to acknowledge their inability to provide for their families, or to describe other challenges (for example, mental health) in detail. Another issue is that respondents who are new to the country (Afghans, in particular) often did not know how to respond when asking about the conditions and needs of their community, and many defaulted to answering affirmatively or "I don't know".

Overall, because of data limitations, assumptions should not be made about any community from the data alone. Any conclusions we make and summaries we provide are drawn solely from the survey and focus group data gathered.

40 Average age of survey respondents. Although Afghan respondents had an average age of 27.

67% of respondents were female. Although 80% of Afghan respondents were male.

64% lived in a household with children. The average household size was 4.

46% had challenges because of their English level.

In particular, more than 70% of Afghan and Syrian respondents reported challenges because of their English level.

63% lived in a Washington County zip code.

Most Washington County respondents lived in Beaverton.

Community Leaders Gathering

Since 2019, IRCO has convened an annual gathering of Greater Middle Eastern community leaders to discuss community needs, challenges, and opportunities. This year, we had 22 participants, representing Afghan, Iraqi, Egyptian, Kurdish, Moroccan, Syrian, Palestinian, and Tunisian communities.



Participants were asked to walk around and think about the top 5 needs of their community. They then paired up with another participant to share their lists and to come up with a new needs list together. This activity was repeated but with a group of 4, and needs were written on flip chart paper. Participants were then asked to walk around and rank the top needs, and to identify challenges and opportunities for each need. These challenges and opportunities will be detailed in the following sections along with survey results.

Top Community Needs

Participants identified 13 areas of need for their communities, and of these, identified the top 5 needs below:

- Housing/ stability
- Education
- Legal services
- Physical and mental health
- Cultural community center

Other needs identified include women support and empowerment; language support/services; building wealth; voice/civic engagement; skill development/coaching; jobs; transferring credentials and qualification; and integration/social cohesion.

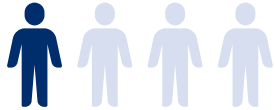
Compared To Previous Years (2019, 2021, and 2022):

- Housing and health are consistent top community needs across the past three gatherings.
- Legal services and mental health are top needs in two of the past three gatherings.
- Workforce services/recertification were top needs in 2019 and 2021, but not this year.
- Education is a new top need this year.
- Teaching of home languages was a top need the year before, and this year a top need is having a cultural community center.



Economic Stability

This section covers factors such as housing instability, employment, income, food insecurity, and access to services.



1 in 4 (26%) survey respondents cannot cover their monthly living costs.

This rate was especially high for Syrian respondents, half of whom say they could not cover their monthly costs.



1 in 5 (19%) survey respondents say that people in their community do not have enough food to eat for the entire month.

Only 1 in 3 respondents say that they can easily find food that is affordable in their neighborhood.

Desired food-related services or support:

- Food pantry (cited by 30% of respondents), especially with culturally specific and fresh food pantry options
- Culturally specific food businesses, such as a grocery store, bakery, and restaurant (15%)

"[We need] more benefits in their SNAP cards now that everything is expensive. We are on the 20th of the month, and I already used all my SNAP for the month! I think we need also more mosques food pantries."

Respondent from Iraq

Legal Services

"Some of my community's people do not have enough information so they will search for the right legal person to get the right answer, but [it's] still hard if they don't [know] how to reach out."

Respondent from Iraq

Common challenges to accessing legal services:



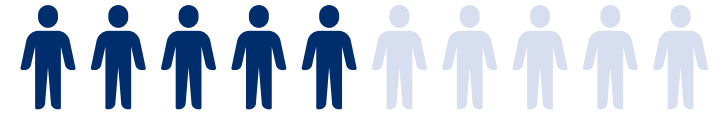
- Lack of information or knowledge (cited by 32% of respondents)
- Language barrier (26%)
- Cost (12%)

Community leaders at the gathering also identified not having enough attorneys and difficulty navigating the legal system as challenges.

1 in 4 Egyptian and Syrian survey respondents say that people in their community cannot generally access legal services or information.

"I wish there was a specific service for the Arab community to defend their rights."

Respondent from Iraq



51% of respondents are employed.

12% are unemployed and looking for work, and **37%** are unemployed and not looking for work. Of those employed, **84%** are satisfied with their job.

"It was not easy to find a job. They always ask for experience and if I never worked how can I get the experience."

Respondent from Iraq

1 in 3 (33%) Afghan survey respondents say that people in their community cannot find work.

"It was much hard to find a job. It was my first experience. It takes time to learn."

Respondent from Afghanistan

Challenges to finding work:

- Language barrier (cited by 52% of respondents)
- Lack of work experience (32%)
- Lack of education or training (16%)
- Employers not accepting the education or credentials attained in their native country (8%)

Desired services:

- Skills-building and vocational training (16%)
- More information and outreach on available services (10%)
- Culturally or linguistically specific support (8%)
- Career coaching (8%)

"When I apply for any job, I hope you get attention to the degree that an employee has from back home to get that job."

Respondent from Iraq

Education Access & Quality

This section covers factors such as adult education and training and inclusivity and representation in school.



Less than half (44%) of respondents say that there are preschool or childcare programs with culturally specific teachers or staff in their area.

“My kids were born here so they did not have any issue to feel welcome at their schools. But I can tell that my friend's kids came when they were older and maybe not the same skin color and it took them some time to feel welcomed because of previous rumors they heard. I think what makes them feel welcomed is that school accept them as is.”

Respondent from Lebanon

How schools can be more inclusive and welcoming to children in their community:

- More cultural education and celebrations (cited by 33% of respondents).
- Language lessons (28%)
- Having supportive school administration, staff, and teachers (28%)
- Inclusive and fair curriculum/teaching (20%)

“More pictures on the walls of people [who] look like us. More bilingual staff to help kids and make them feel welcome. I think it's also how the teacher treat the kids and make them love school.”

Respondent from Syria

1 in 3 respondents (37%) wish that their native language and culture was taught in schools.

“I'd like my daughter to learn about my culture and all other people's cultures.”

Respondent from Iraq

41% of respondents say that it is easy to participate in their child's learning.

When asked how respondents would like to be involved in their child's learning and development, the most common response was communicating with their child's teacher.

“I want to see more special programs including moms to see and learn from those programs.”

Respondent from Syria

89% said that they can communicate their concerns and expectations with their child's teachers and school staff.

“It's hard to get childcare assistance, and it's expensive at the same time, but I've got good service with IRCO to solve that issue so far.”

Respondent from Syria

Adult Education

Education was a top need identified in the Community Leaders Gathering. According to participants, some of the challenges community members face include not knowing how to start classes and not having teachers who speak the language. Opportunities identified include finding teachers who speak the language, financial aid, scholarships, and offering free classes.

“I am thinking to open my own daycare. I need more training after the baby gets bigger a bit.”

Respondent from Jordan

Only 58% of survey respondents have ever received information about career and training services.

Almost all (87%) of those that did receive information, were able to access those services.

“[People need] more advertisement about job trainings and info session nights that reach the community.”

Respondent from Libya

71% of survey respondents say that a lack of information, outreach, and marketing makes it hard for people to sign up for classes.



Respondents were most interested in trainings in the field of healthcare (such as nursing, dental assistant, and caregiving); teaching/education; technology (such as IT, cybersecurity, and data analytics); and business/ management.

“The hardest thing is the equivalence of diplomas.”

Respondent from Iraq

Health Care Access & Quality

This section covers access to health services, primary care, mental health support and services, and the impact of COVID-19.

Mental Health

17% of respondents say that people in their community do not seek help when experiencing prolonged or intense feelings of distress, depression, or anxiety.*



This rate was higher for Egyptian respondents, half of whom say that people in their community do not seek help.

* It should be noted that responses in regard to mental health differ from what we often hear and see in our work and also in conversation with community leaders, who consistently rank mental health as a top issue within the community.



People in the respondents' community most often turn to a mental health specialist or counselor for support (cited by half of respondents), followed by a healthcare provider, such as doctor (48%), then family or friends (37%).

"I like to talk to [a] mental health specialist or counselor rather than my family. They might hold something against me, but my counselor will be more understanding."
Respondent from Iraq

Survey participants reported that being shy, afraid of people's judgement, cultural stigma, and difficulty getting appointments are challenges people face. Community Leaders Gathering participants also shared that the language barrier and not having enough culturally specific providers are challenges. With the latter, there is an opportunity to grow the peer support network and to connect community members with educational opportunities in the field.

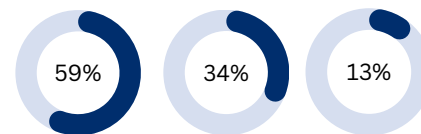
"Only few sessions are covered by our insurance plan. Through Medicaid we were attended by interns."
Respondent from Iran

COVID-19 Impact

"My husband and I was affected by COVID-19 because both are [in] customer service. Emotionally [my] grandma got COVID-19 because of our work, and we took her to the hospital. It was a tough time to describe it."

Respondent from Syria

- **47%** of respondents say that someone in their household worked in an environment that is high-risk for contracting COVID-19. This rate was even higher for Iraqi respondents (64%).



- **59%** of respondents had someone in their family who got sick due to COVID-19. This rate was higher for Syrian (64%) and Iraqi (70%) respondents.
- **34%** say that someone in their family had been hospitalized because of COVID-19. This rate was almost twice as high for Syrian respondents (64%).
- **13%** say that someone in their family passed away from COVID-19. This rate was higher for Syrian respondents, **1 in 5 (21%)** had someone in their family who passed away.

85% of respondents say that people in their community can get the healthcare they need.

This rate was lower for Syrian respondents, only 64% of whom said that people can get the healthcare they need.

Common Challenges to accessing healthcare:

- High cost
- Lack of health insurance or coverage
- Language barrier or communication
- Long waitlist
- Immigration status
- Limited coverage
- Not having culturally specific providers

"[People in the community] need people who have long experience in translation because the language is the biggest barrier I think."

Respondent from Syria

Healthcare needs desired:

- Affordable healthcare/health insurance (cited by 47% of respondents)
- Interpretation and language support (12%)
- Comprehensive coverage (7%)
- More outreach/information (5%)
- Healthcare navigation (3%)

"I see some people from my community are suffering from dental service because it doesn't cover everything the patient needs."

Respondent from Iraq

Neighborhood & Built Environment

This section includes factors such as housing conditions, safety concerns, neighborhood food access, and transportation.



66% of respondents are renters, including **79%** of Syrian and all Afghan respondents.

Almost all (94%) of respondents say they are satisfied with their current housing. However, 31% of respondents are worried about the safety of their housing structure (such as building safety, lead, mold).

"We are all in the same boat and it's hard to get a good place to rent or buy. Everything is expensive."

Respondent from Iraq



77% respondents say that housing instability is a problem for people in their community.

Including 86% of respondents from Iraq and Syria. 72% of respondents cited high/rising rent/costs as a challenge, followed by limited housing options (cited by 20% of respondents).

"The size of the housing does not match the size of the families."

Respondent from Iraq

"I hope [there is] support for people who want to buy a house for the first [time]."

Respondent from Syria

Housing-specific supports desired:

- Affordable or low-income housing
- Rental or payment assistance
- Language support
- Support for first-time home buyers
- Tenant rights education and advocacy

Safety Concerns

55% of respondents are concerned about the personal safety of people in their household or community. The top safety concerns are:

- Crime (cited by 34% of respondents)
- Gun violence/shootings (19%)
- Discrimination and hate crimes (9%)
- Health concerns related to the pandemic (9%)

"I am Muslim and wearing hijab and I am afraid to go out for a walk at night."

Respondent from Libya



95% of survey respondents trust the local police, and 29% have had interactions with the local police.

Food Access



Only **31%** of respondents say that they can easily find food in their neighborhood that is affordable. Only **39%** say they can easily find food that is culturally-specific.

64% said they can easily find food in their neighborhood that is of a good variety, and **69%** say they can easily find fresh and healthy food.

"For purchasing culturally specific food we have to travel far from home and they are costly."

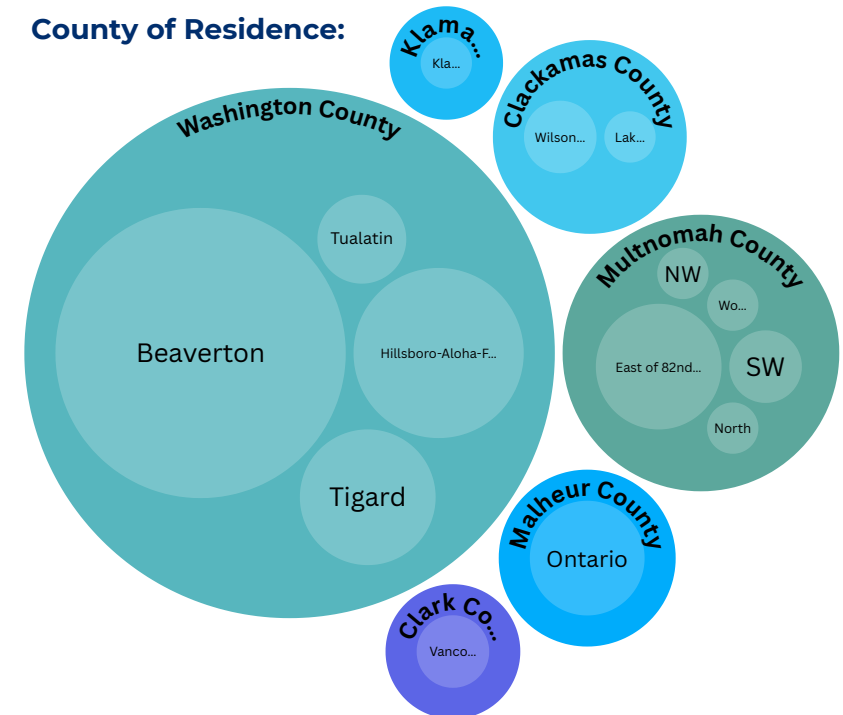
Respondent from Iran

80%



of Afghan respondents did not have a private vehicle, such as a car or truck to use, relying instead on public transport, biking, walking, taxis, and rides from friends and family. This rate is much higher than the total average (**20%**).

County of Residence:



Social & Community Context

This section includes factors such as community involvement, civic engagement, community spaces, and maintaining culture.

In the last year, **41%** of respondents were not involved in their community, or preferred not to say if they were involved.

22% were involved through volunteering, 17% were involved through caretaking of children, elderly, or others with special needs outside the household, and 9% were involved through religious activities.



Only 2 of 84 (2%) respondents kept up with local politics, like school board, city council, and mayoral elections.

Most (79%) respondents did not tend to keep up with political issues. And 10% kept up with political issues or conflicts in their home country, and 8% kept up with global/international politics.



Less than half (45%) of respondents consider a place of worship as a center of their community.

25% cited a culturally specific school as a center of their community, 25% cited public spaces, such as parks and the library, 23% mentioned a community center, and 18% mentioned private businesses, like restaurants and grocery stores.



At the same time, 40% of respondents say that their community does not have a center, or that they do not know of one, including all Farsi-speaking respondents.

"The social bonds that are created at the community centers help build strong, safe, and inclusive communities."

Respondent from Iraq

"There is no center."

Respondent from Iran

Community assets desired:

- Space for gatherings and events (33%)
- Space of specific populations, such as children, women, and the elderly (12%)
- Businesses (such as cafes and stores)
- Social groups/clubs
- More outdoor spaces, such as pools and parks

"I wish we have a specific swimming pool for Muslim women in general."

Female respondent from Iraq

Maintaining culture:

What would help respondents maintain their home culture:

- Language support or opportunities to practice (cited by 45% of respondents)
- Having more gatherings (41%)
- Cultural celebrations & education (21%)
- Cultural representation in school, or culturally specific school (11%)

"[What would help is] understanding the differences between the community members even if [they're] from the same culture. People from different countries have different culture within the culture."

Respondent from Lebanon

Loneliness/isolation and **homesickness** were the top "larger issues" affecting people's happiness (cited by 17% of respondents).

"Here that we are in the USA we have no family and no gathering, not a lot of friends. This will affect people to feel happy."

Respondent from Iraq

Concerns for youth in their community:

- Bullying and/or bad behavior (cited by 19% of respondents)
- Negative influence from peers (19%)
- Youth becoming disconnected from their native culture and language (16%)
- Drug use (14%)

"My kids hear our language only from me and some of their friends. They don't hear it or see it more frequently."

Respondent from Syria

Concerns for teenagers in their community:

- Drug use (cited by 44% of respondents)
- Negative influence from peers (25%)
- Smoking (15%)
- Sexual activity/education (8%)

Desired youth services and resources:

- Opportunities for sports and physical activity (cited by 16% of respondents)
- Connections to role models and mentors (14%)
- Having a center for youth activities; youth groups (9%)
- Tutoring (9%)



Community Focus Groups

In addition to the survey and community leaders gathering, we conducted two focus groups: one with Greater Middle Eastern youth (ages 12-19) in the Portland metro area, and one with Greater Middle Eastern women in Ontario, Oregon. In both groups, we shared information about the social determinants of health, then asked participants to identify their top needs, as well as ideas to address those needs.

GME Youth Focus Group Findings

14 youth participated in our focus group. They were between the ages of 12 to 19, and a mix of genders. When asked their country or culture of origin, 6 said Iraqi, 5 said Libyan, 2 said United States, and 1 said “Muslim/Islamic.”

The most common theme discussed was around a sense of belonging. A sense of “cultural clash,” “not belonging,” and “culture shock”, as well as trauma from that shock was emphasized by many of the youth. Similarly, participants mentioned experiencing depression and homesickness. Others mentioned “racism” and “criticism from other kids in school,” as well as “bad influence at school and peer pressure from friends.”

Participants also mentioned needing more assistance and support “with things that are hard.” Strategies that were identified by respondents to meet these needs include: more gatherings, “helping each other, especially people who are new and are struggling, with settling down,” and, “if we all made a community where we can all gather together from time to time to feel more at home and also be with people that get you more.”

Another theme was around their school and neighborhood environment. Participants mentioned a need to find a good school with good education, which is dependent on the area you live in. They also mentioned needing help with schoolwork and more school supplies. One participant mentioned that it was dangerous to play outside by yourself, because of crime and safety concerns.

Another participant said that it is difficult to find a job because of the language barrier.

GME Women in Ontario Focus Group Findings

10 community members participated in this focus group, representing the majority of the women in the GME community in Ontario, Oregon. 5 identified as Middle Eastern Arabic-speaking, 3 as Syrian, and 2 as Iraqi. The women all lived in Ontario and came from refugee families living and working in Ontario and the surrounding area. 3 identified Ontario as their first resettlement city in the U.S.

Participants were very engaged in the discussion around the social determinants of health, especially the mental health component and its relationship to other health factors. They noted the importance of having a tight community, as well as safety, education, and health.

Below are the needs identified, all of which are of equal importance, according to the participants:

- Housing: Difficulty finding housing (both affordable and in general), especially housing that is suitable for their family. One participant shared that they usually spend a long time in temporary housing and some of them end up with housing that is not suitable for their needs.
- Employment: participants shared that it is hard to find jobs and job opportunities are usually limited because there are not many employers in Ontario.
- Lack of activities and recreational spaces for children.
- Lack of access to ethnic halal stores.
- Connecting with the community, isolation, and the lack of community events.

Participants shared many possible solutions to the issues, such as finding better ways to communicate with the community, more culturally specific engagement from IRCO, support with small enterprise projects, more activities for children, and more community events in general.

Community Pride & Hope

In what ways are you happy or proud of how your cultural community has been doing in the past few years?

"[Having] our community touch with our people to solve our problems."

— Respondent from Afghanistan

"At the Eid festival end of the Holy month of Ramadan. When my community went to Oaks Park. That was nice and I am proud of this yearly thing before COVID and now it's back."

— Respondent from Iraq

"I am proud of how to easily [we] communicate with each other. I feel I'm still living in Syria."

— Respondent from Syria

"I attended THPRD [Tualatin Hills Park & Recreational District] Activity gathering for Arab (Marhaba Festival) at Garden Homes in Portland THPRD. I was happy that this was facilitated and happened."

— Respondent from Libya

"I am proud of the resources our neighbors told me about and I reached out to our Islamic center and helped me with my bills."

— Respondent from Tunisia

In what ways are you hopeful for the future of your local cultural community?

"I hope to have my children [go to] school from our cultural mosques and Muslim community."

— Respondent from Afghanistan

"I really see my community in the right way, and they know what they want to do to develop their skills to serve the whole different communities in general."

— Respondent from Iraq

"I want to see more support for future refugees and immigrants."

— Respondent from Syria

"I wish we get together more and have more activities and festival together."

— Respondent from Libya

"It depends on the political situation and the economic one. As you know, my community's future is related to the American life situation. I can't say my future is too [far] away from the American future. We all are in the same direction, but I hope [what's] coming is better."

— Respondent from Iraq

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About This Report

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Our Mission at IRCO

To welcome, serve, and empower refugees, immigrants, and people across cultures and generations to reach their full potential.

About Greater Middle East Center

The Greater Middle East Center (GMEC) plays a critical role in welcoming newly arrived Afghan refugees in Oregon in addition to helping other refugees and immigrants from Greater Middle Eastern countries. Helping 2,197 community members in this last year, GMEC supports refugee resettlement, housing services, economic development, health and behavioral health services, school enrollment, youth mentorship, and parent/child activities for early learners. GMEC continues to expand its capacity, implementing new programs designed to address unmet community needs.

