

2022

Slavic & Eastern European Community Needs Assessment

Key findings from Slavic & Eastern European immigrant and refugee communities in Oregon and SW Washington.



SLAVIC &
EASTERN
EUROPEAN
CENTER



Acknowledgements

Thank you to the 96 community members who participated in the surveys and focus groups and shared their experiences and wisdom.

Thank you to the Community Survey Specialists for their dedication to supporting their community:

- Natalia Anand
- Iryna Bashynskyy
- Alina Gvozdicova
- Kseniia Nesviatypaska
- Yelena Obedkov

Thank you to the IRCO personnel involved in this project:

- Jenny Bremner
- An Bui
- Linda Castillo
- Christian Chase
- Irena Cheradayko
- Djimet Dogo
- Sokho Eath
- Kolini Fusitua
- Simrit Gill
- Mouna Jbali
- Jihane Nami
- Hazel Odell
- Alex Senai Riedlinger
- Nelli Salvador
- Olga Sotiriadi
- Megan Wilson

Special thanks to the Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS) and the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) for their generous support of this project.





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Message From Our Leaders



On behalf of the founding director of IRCO's Slavic and Eastern European Center (SEEC), Nelli Salvador, and the SEEC Advisory Council through its chair, Shuk Arifdjanov, we are pleased to present the following 2022 Slavic and Eastern European Community Needs Assessment.

2022 was a tough year for the Slavic community here in Oregon and SW Washington, but also all around the world. As our community was starting to recover from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, war began in Ukraine. Those in our community who have had to flee their country in the past watched in horror as history began to repeat itself. Urgent calls were made to friends and family to see what could be done to help. While some tensions flared up within the community, overwhelmingly the response was one of solidarity and support – from within our community and also more broadly.

Hundreds of new Ukrainian refugees and their families went through SEEC services, receiving help with English language classes, navigating the different systems, finding their first job, paying for rent and utilities, and much more. By the end of the year, we have helped more than 1,600 immigrants and refugees from our diverse Slavic and Eastern European community.

While we are immensely proud of our work this past year, we did not have the capacity to serve all those in need, and we hope that this 2022 Slavic and Eastern European Community Needs Assessment report will help us build on our work to address the major issues affecting our community.

What we hear from our community through our work and also from this report is that affordable housing was the biggest need for the last year, especially rental assistance for new arrivals who are still getting settled.

We see this in the report where half of Ukrainian respondents cited a need for rental assistance. Other housing issues include a lack of credit history, finding housing suitable for different sizes of families, and the high cost of bills and utilities. Many families have moved to the Vancouver, Washington area to meet their housing needs, and we have started serving those in Vancouver in response.

Mental health issues persist too for both newly arrived refugees and immigrants as well as those who came here in the past. In the report, we see that more than 41% of respondents say that people in their community do not seek help when dealing with mental health issues, and that 39% of Russian respondents say that people in their community cannot get the mental health support they need. At SEEC, we have started providing wellbeing group activities for new arrivals to reduce their trauma from the war, and we hope we can provide more of these services to our community.

Overall, this last year has been tough. The war still rages and the issues raised here will continue to exist. But compared to the past, the Slavic and Eastern European community in Oregon and SW Washington has become stronger and more resilient, more ready to respond to crises as they emerge. We at SEEC hope this growth continues.

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 87 community members from a Slavic & Eastern European country or culture. Unfortunately, we are missing representation from Romania and Balkan countries. Due to small sample sizes, conclusions should not be made about any community from this data alone.

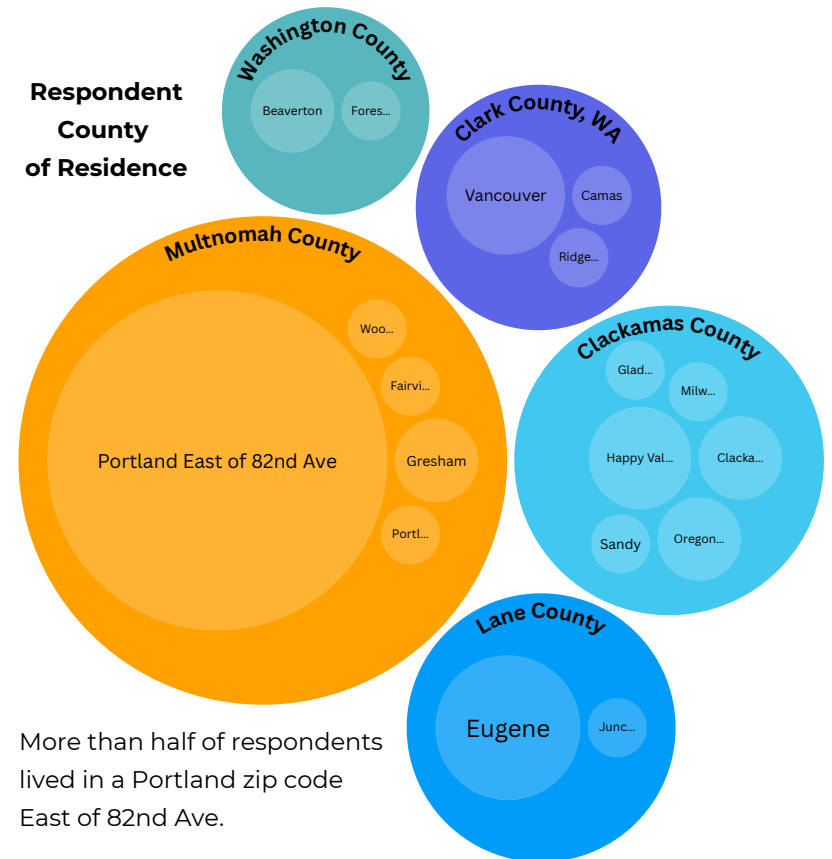
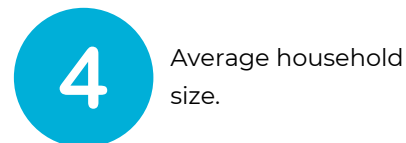
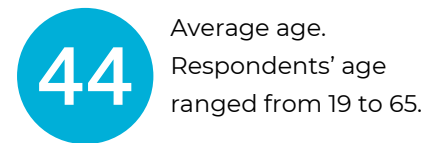
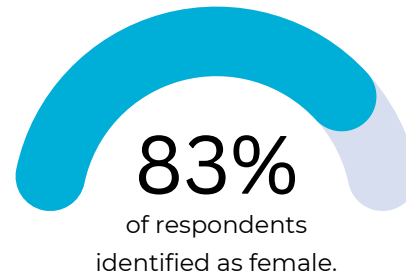
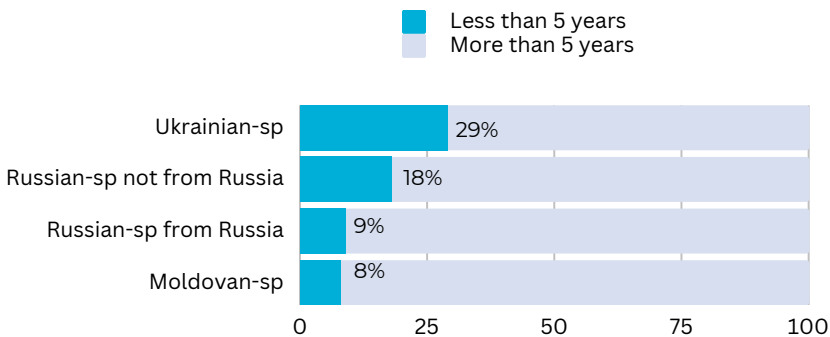
4% More than 4% of Oregon's foreign-born pop. is from an Eastern European country or culture. The top Eastern European countries of origin are Ukraine, Russia, and Romania.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.

Participant responses when asked about their country or culture of origin



% of respondents who are newcomers (<5 years living in their city)



More than half of respondents lived in a Portland zip code East of 82nd Ave.



- General communication
- Needing interpretation for important appointments and to access services
- Difficulties with their career/career advancement

"When I came to the USA, I had basic knowledge of English. I had to attend English language courses. Since moving to the USA, my life has changed a lot, I had to change a lot in my life. I had to change my profession."

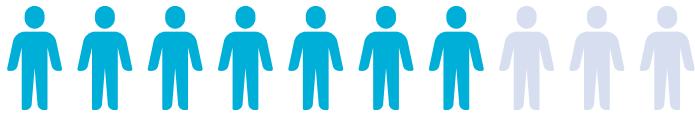
Russian-speaking respondent

Economic Stability

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

37% of respondents cannot cover their housing, food, and other costs each month.

66% of those who could not cover their monthly living costs were employed, with an average age of 44.



70% of Ukrainian-speaking respondents say they cannot cover their monthly living costs.



40% of respondents say they cannot easily find food in their neighborhood that is affordable.

Desired food-related services or support:

- Classes for cooking and other life skills (such as how to buy in bulk, nutrition, budgeting, saving, and emergency preparedness)
- Food pantry
- Gardening access and education
- Help for big families

"Big families might not have enough food, because of the current prices. My family is doing good. Teach how to cook, learn how to save little by little in case of emergency."

Ukrainian-speaking respondent

Legal Services & Information



1 in 5 respondents said people in their community cannot access legal services or information.

47% of respondents have needed immigration services, and less than 10% have needed disability and employment legal services.

"There is no way to get services commensurate with your income. For many, it is very expensive."

Ukrainian-speaking respondent

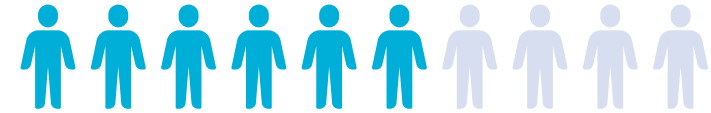
Common challenges to accessing legal services:

- Cost (cited by 30% of respondents)
- Language barrier (24%)
- Not knowing the law (22%)
- Hard to find information (5%)
- No culturally-specific lawyer (3%)

"There is no difficulty in getting legal services. The only problem is that it is very expensive. Not everyone has the money to pay for this service."

Russian-speaking respondent

Employment



62% of respondents are employed.

13% are unemployed and looking for work, and 25% are unemployed and not looking for work. 88% of those employed are satisfied with their job.

"It was hard in the beginning without English and experience."

Ukrainian-speaking respondent

1 in 4 (22%) Russian-speaking respondents not from Russia say that people in their community cannot find work, compared to 8% overall.

"It was very difficult. First, I had to learn the language. Then get the certificate. Only then I was able to find a job."

Russian-speaking respondent

Challenges to finding work:

- Language barrier (cited by 58% of respondents)
- Lack of work experience (28%)
- Lack of motivation (22%)
- Lack of training/education (17%)
- Transportation issues (11%)
- No information or experience with job search (6%)

Desired services:

- Affordable/accessible schooling or training
- General employment services like help with job searching
- English classes
- Work or volunteer experience
- Culturally-specific job fair

"Everyone has different reasons. No education, no work experience. There is no car. No knowledge of the language."

Russian-speaking respondent

Education Access & Quality

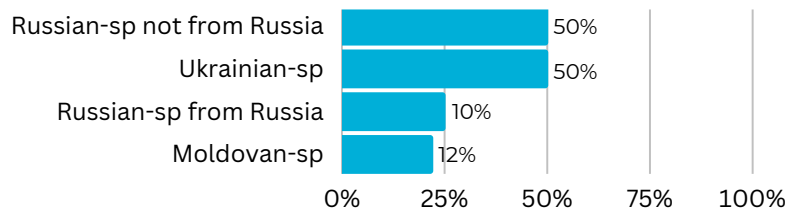
This section covers factors such as adult education and training and inclusivity and representation in school.

Preschool



36% respondents say that there are no preschool or childcare programs with culturally specific teachers or staff in their area.

% of respondents who say there are no preschool or childcare programs in their area with culturally specific staff



When asked about their experience enrolling in childcare, the most common response was that their child/children stayed home and was cared for by family member. The second most common response was the high cost.

"My child does not attend childcare. For my family, the cost of paying for childcare [is too high]. Husband is working, and I'm sitting at home with my child."

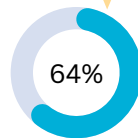
Ukrainian-speaking respondent

Things that would make school be more inclusive of their culture and language:

- Language immersion and learning
- Cultural representation and education
- Bilingual staff

"I don't have any information now, I am newcomer. It's hard to listen by phone in English, we would like to have [information through a] language call center. And it's hard to choose and see location with small baby in public transportation."

Ukrainian-speaking respondent



64% of respondents did not receive help when signing their children up for school.

38% found that signing their child up for school was easy.

How respondents want to be involved in their child's learning and development:

- Attend school activities
- Checking in with their child
- Helping them with homework
- Read to them
- Teaching them their native language
- Communicating with their teacher

23% of respondents said they are not able to participate or did not want to.

No, we were taught in a completely different way and we cannot participate in the training program and there is no knowledge of the language."

Russian-speaking respondent from Kirgistan

Adult Education



Only 64% of respondents have ever received information about career and training services.

This rate is even lower for Ukrainian respondents, only 58% of whom have received information.

"Yes, I would like to be able to call and get advice in Russian about all educational programs."

Ukrainian-speaking respondent

Services or support that could help people sign up for classes:

- Tuition assistance (cited by 36% of respondents)
- Evening classes, and classes with flexible scheduling
- More information/marketing of available services
- More accessible locations
- A language hotline or website with information
- More choices for classes

"College classes are expensive, help with tuition would be nice to have, also evening classes for working people."

Ukrainian-speaking respondent



Healthcare was the number one field people would like more training for.

Other fields include cosmetology, management, event planning, real estate, business, teaching, paralegal, engineering, and psychology.

Health Care Access & Quality

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



respondents did not have access to a primary care provider or family physician for their health needs.

"Not everyone has the opportunity to get medical care because there is no money or insurance."

Russian-speaking respondent



of respondents say that people in their community cannot get the health care they need.

Common Challenges to accessing healthcare:

- Lack of health insurance or coverage (cited by 25% of respondents)
- High cost (21%)
- Long waitlist (12%)
- Dental care (6%)

Healthcare services or support desired:

- Affordable health insurance (cited by 25% of respondents)
- Dental care (13%)
- Comprehensive medical coverage (10%)
- More support, information, education, and outreach (<10%)

"Everyone has different needs. Especially a big problem with dental care"

Russian-speaking respondent

COVID-19

"It was a very difficult time for all of us. We suffered a lot. Emotional health has deteriorated. We lived in constant fear."

Ukrainian-speaking respondent

8% of all respondents say that someone in their household works in an environment that is high-risk for contracting COVID-19.

42% of respondents say that someone in their family has gotten really sick due to COVID-19.

7% say that someone in their family had been hospitalized because of COVID-19.

2% say that someone in their family passed away from COVID-19.

53% of respondents reported a decline in their mental health due to the pandemic.

25% reported experiencing financial hardship during the pandemic.

"I had a very negative experience of the pandemic. The deterioration of relations with my husband, we divorced. There was fear and anxiety."

Russian-speaking respondent

Mental Health



41% of respondents say that people in their community do not seek the help they need when having intense or prolonged feelings of sadness, anxiety or distress.



People in the respondents' community most often turn to family or friends for mental health support (cited by 51% of respondents), followed by a faith or spiritual leader (45%), healthcare provider, such as doctor (35%), then a mental health specialist or counselor (28%).

Reasons people do not seek help:

- Personal resistance
- A lack of health insurance or coverage
- Relying more on a religious or spiritual leader
- People not seeking help unless the problem gets worse

"In our community, people do not often seek professional help. They usually turn to friends or religious leaders for help."

Russian-speaking respondent



of Russian respondents say that people in their community cannot get the mental health support they need, compared to 22% overall.

What kind of help do people need:

- Counseling and/or emotional support
- Seeing a professional
- Socializing, retreats, or a support group
- Spiritual or religious support

Neighborhood & Built Environment

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

Housing



45% of respondents are renters.

This rate was higher for Ukrainian-speaking respondents, half of whom are renters. Of Ukrainian renters, only **55%** are satisfied with their housing. **30%** of all renters did not know and understand their rights and responsibilities as tenants.

"It is not always possible to find a suitable apartment. We have a large family, but it is very expensive to rent a large apartment. Therefore, this is a problem for us."

Ukrainian-speaking respondent

42% of respondents say that housing instability is a problem for people in their community.

This rate was higher for Russian-speaking respondents not from Russia, **56%** of whom said housing instability is a problem.

Common housing-related challenges:

- High cost
- A lack of credit history
- A lack of suitable housing options (especially for big families and in desired areas)
- Low income

"Not everyone has a credit history, or enough money to pay for housing."

Russian-speaking respondent from Uzbekistan

Housing-specific supports desired:

- Rental Assistance (cited by half of Ukrainian respondents)
- More affordable housing
- Support for first-time home buyers
- Home repair/renovation assistance
- Bills/utilities assistance
- Support for big families
- Renter education

"I wish there would be available more housing assistance for low-income people as rent is extremely high."

Russian-speaking respondent from Uzbekistan

Safety Concerns

Most common safety concerns:

- Perceived threat of people who are homeless
- Gun violence
- Drug use and/or trafficking

Other issues affecting the community:

- **41%** identified alcohol use and domestic violence as issues.
- **38%** identified discrimination and hate-violence as an issue

96% of respondents say they trust the local police and **24%** of respondents have had interactions with the police.

Food Access



Only 60% of respondents say that they can easily find food in their neighborhood that is affordable.

Meanwhile, **most respondents** say they easily find food in their neighborhood that is fresh and health (83%), culturally specific (83%), and of a good variety (86%).

Food-specific support or services desired:

- Classes for cooking and other life skills (such as how to buy in bulk, nutrition, budgeting, saving, and emergency preparedness)
- Food pantry
- Gardening access and education
- Help for big families

"We need classes for newcomers how and where and what products are better to buy. How to use the big stores and how to choose products. The benefits and harms of the ingredients and how to choose products that are close in taste, which were in your native country, so that it is easier to survive adaptation."

Ukrainian-speaking respondent

"Classes how to cook Belorussian, Russian, or Ukrainian food. I took one of these with my son, who was born here in US and we both really enjoyed it."

Russian-speaking respondent from Belarus

Transportation



12% of respondents did not have a car for transportation, relying instead on walking, public transit, biking, or rides from friends and family.

Social & Community Context

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

Community Involvement

In the last year, **30%** of respondents were involved in their community through religious activities and **26%** were involved through volunteering.

For Moldovan-speaking respondents, 67% were involved in their community through religious activities.



Half (53%) of respondents do not tend to keep up with political issues.

This rate was higher for Russian-speaking and Moldovan-speaking respondents, **63%** and **83%** of whom did not keep up with political issues, respectively.

If respondents did keep up with politics, it was more likely in US politics (cited by 25% of respondents) and political issues or conflicts in their home country (14%).

Only 9% of respondents kept up with local politics, like a school board, city council, and mayoral elections.

"Nowadays I constantly watch the news about my home country because of the war."

Ukrainian-speaking respondent

Community Spaces

When asked what spaces would be considered the center of their community, 34% of respondents said the local church and 26% said they don't know, or there isn't one.



Half of Russian-speaking respondents say they do not know of a center for their community

"I do not know if we even have one but would be nice to have an office space or agency for Ukrainian people where they can come to receive support or advice."

Ukrainian-speaking respondent

38% of all respondents and **57%** of Ukrainian-speaking respondents wish that a community or cultural center was available for their community.

Maintaining Culture

Things that would help the community maintain its culture:

- A community or cultural center
- More cultural events and gatherings
- Opportunities to stay connected

"Only the joint efforts of the Slavic population can support our culture."

Russian-speaking respondent

Youth & Senior Focus Groups

We conducted two focus groups with 5 Slavic/Eastern European youth and 4 Slavic/Eastern European seniors. The participants were asked to identify the most important issues, needs, and challenges facing them and other youth/seniors in their community. The most frequently identified issues are summarized below:

Concerns From Youth:

- Fear of homeless people in their neighborhood, which is preventing them from going on walks.
- The rising cost of living.
- People being ignorant of their culture and issues in their country, as well as discrimination against Russian community members and businesses.
- A lack of Slavic teachers.
- Busy and dangerous roads in their neighborhood.
- Other issues include crime, a lack of parks in their neighborhood, safety on public transit, and health.

"I love Russia and Ukraine the same, because that's my blood."

Youth focus group participant

Senior Needs:

- ESL classes, especially those after 5pm when community members get off work.
- Discrimination and conflict from within the community because of language and nationality, especially among youth.

Larger Community Issues

When asked about larger issues affecting people's happiness, survey participants mentioned:

- The war, and increasing division because of the war
- Uncertainty about the future
- Cost of living and rising inflation
- Stress and other mental health issues

Community Pride & Hope

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

“Yes, I feel proud. We all joined together, Russians, Ukrainians, Uzbeks, Americans - all helped to collect humanitarian aid for Ukraine.”

— Ukrainian-speaking respondent

“Yes, the Slavic community is growing. We go to festivals every year and support each other.”

— Ukrainian-speaking respondent

“People are kind and sympathetic. Yes, there are positive changes. I am proud of my community.”

— Russian-speaking respondent from Russia

“I am the editor of a Russian-language magazine for children, which is published in the USA. which helps to support the Russian language for children.”

— Russian-speaking respondent from Russia

“I'm happy of how my cultural community has been growing over the past few years.”

— Russian-speaking respondent from Uzbekistan

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

“I hope that the situation in the world will not be able to destroy our Slavic community and will not be able to divide people.”

— Ukrainian-speaking respondent

“I hope we will have our place, community center, it's our big dream. Every community has a center but we don't have.”

— Ukrainian-speaking respondent

“I believe that Slavic culture has a future. Oregon is home to a large number of Russian-speaking population. That is why the Slavic culture will be preserved.”

— Russian-speaking respondent from Russia

“Those who take personal responsibility over their life are getting more confident about it.”

— Russian-speaking respondent from Belarus

“I'm hopeful for a peaceful future for my local cultural community ”

— Russian-speaking respondent from Uzbekistan

2022

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About This Report

An Bui

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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 SEEC

IRCO's Slavic and Eastern European Center (SEEC) draws on our diverse cultural and ethnic communities to build a safe future and flourish together through respect, understanding, openness to dialogue, and mutual support. A true reflection of the people it serves, SEEC is led by an advisory council of community leaders and staffed by a multicultural, multilingual IRCO team.

We provide our clients with a number of resources and services to assist them in overcoming the challenges of moving to a new home and adjusting to a new culture.

