



Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO)

2022

Community Needs Assessment

Executive Summary

I. INTRODUCTION

In the past, the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO)'s Community Needs Assessment (CNA) was conducted through a one-day conference with breakout sessions led by bilingual IRCO staff, providing a forum for community members and leaders to identify their assets, challenges, priorities, and solutions. The COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with the housing crisis pushing immigrant and refugee communities out of urban areas, forced a departure from this method. The 2022 CNA utilized a survey questionnaire administered by a team of dozens of culturally specific Community Survey Specialists (CSSs). These bilingual CSSs reached out to community members from their individual cultural and language groups to identify each respondent's individual challenges and needs as well as those of their community. This report does not seek to be representative of any community, but rather it is a platform for community members to express their thoughts and opinions on what they and their communities need and the strategies to address those needs. Since 'community' is actively constructed and constantly evolving, only through community-driven processes such as this one can we truly understand the unique needs of immigrants and refugees in Oregon and SW Washington.

Ultimately, we successfully surveyed 528 community members from 23 different language groups representing more than 50 cultural and national backgrounds (See Table 1). Each survey interview took an average of 45 minutes to 1 hour long and was often conducted in the respondent's native language. Of the respondents, 178 are Asian, 95 are African, 87 are Slavic/Eastern European, 85 are Greater Middle Eastern, 53 are Latin American, and 30 are Pacific Islander. 58% of the respondents live in Multnomah County, 21% in Washington County, 6% in Clackamas County, and less than 5% live in Malheur County, Marion County, Southern Washington, Lane County, Linn County, and Klamath County; our most geographically diverse CNA to date, reflecting the growing diversity of immigrant and refugee communities.

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," and our findings are organized around the 5 SDOH domains of Economic Stability, Education Access and Quality, Health Care Access and Quality, Neighborhood and Built Environment, and Social and Community Context.¹ The SDOH are universal across all communities regardless of race, ethnicity, or country of origin, yet highlight the severity of needs of individual communities and the degree to which different communities can address those needs. Given the diversity of the community members surveyed, that there are differences across and within immigrant and refugee communities is not surprising, but the size and pervasiveness of the disparities revealed here are striking. These disparities show that there is an immediate need for more equitable services and targeted strategies for immigrants, refugees, and communities of color to better understand and respond to systemic inequities.

¹ [Social Determinants of Health - Healthy People 2030 | health.gov](https://www.health.gov/ourinitiatives/initiatives/2019-2020/social-determinants-of-health)

PROVIDE YOUR FEEDBACK

We recognize that no assessment can perfectly reflect the diverse communities that IRCO serves and welcome continued dialogue on the data presented here and strategies to address these needs moving forward.

To share your thoughts and feedback, please scan the QR code below or go to this link:

<https://forms.office.com/r/2yNNj4geia>



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) | | |

II. ECONOMIC STABILITY

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

COMMON NEEDS

- **Housing instability** is a problem for all communities, with 40% of Asian, 42% of Slavic/Eastern European, 69% of African, 75% of Pacific Islander, 77% of Greater Middle Eastern, and 87% of Latin American respondents reporting that housing instability is a problem for people in their community. High/rising costs is the most common housing challenge identified by all communities.
- **Having more marketing, information, and outreach** of available workforce employment and training services is the most identified need that would help people sign up for adult education and career and training services and was also a common need identified for accessing employment, legal, health care, and mental health care services. Across all groups, most of those who received information on adult education, career, and training services were able to access those services.

“Some families move a lot, so their kids have been in and out of school. They do not stay in one school and this affects their education. Rent is very expensive and too high for them to afford. Sometimes there is too many people in the apartments, but that is how they can afford the apartment. So, they are forced to move out.”

—A Chuukese-speaking respondent

DIFFERENCES AND DISPARITIES

- **Covering monthly costs:** Only 32% of Latin American respondents reported being able to cover their food, housing, and other costs each month, followed by 50% of Pacific Islander, 57% of African, 63% of Slavic/Eastern European, 73% of Asian, and 74% of Greater Middle Eastern respondents.
- **Food access:** Only 24% of Pacific Islander respondents, 27% of Latin American respondents, and 41% of African respondents say that people in their community have enough food to eat for the entire month, compared to 81% of Greater Middle Eastern, 86% of Asian, and 94% of Slavic/Eastern European respondents.
- **Finding work:** Only 24% of Latin American and 27% Pacific Islander respondents say that people in their community can find work, followed by 59% of African, 84% of Greater Middle Eastern, 92% of Slavic/Eastern European, and 96% of Asian respondents.

“It’s just hard in general and staff and managers don’t treat you with respect and don’t value us for our work.”

—A Spanish-speaking respondent

- **Job satisfaction:** Only 36% of African respondents are satisfied with their job, compared to 61% of Latin American, 71% of Pacific Islander, 84% of Greater Middle Eastern, 87% of Asian, and 88% of Slavic/Eastern European respondents.
- **Career and training services:** Less than half of Pacific Islander, Latin American, and Asian respondents (20%, 24%, and 46%, respectively) have ever received information on career and training services, compared to 54% of African, 58% of Greater Middle Eastern, and 64% of Slavic/Eastern European respondents.
- **Adult education:** Only 27% of Pacific Islander and half of Latin American respondents say that people in their community can get adult education classes, compared to 69% of African, 77% of Asian, 89% of Greater Middle Eastern, and 95% of Slavic/Eastern European respondents.



- **Legal services:** Less than half of Pacific Islander and African respondents (31% and 49%, respectively), say that people in their community can generally access legal services or information, compared to 65% of Asian, 73% of Latin American, 81% of Slavic/Eastern European, and 82% of Greater Middle Eastern respondents.
- **Understanding their rights:** Only 17% of Latin American, 31% of Pacific Islander, 48% of Asian, and 57% of African respondents say that they understand their legal rights and U.S./local laws, compared to 82% of Greater Middle Eastern and 83% of Slavic/Eastern European respondents.

III. EDUCATION ACCESS AND QUALITY

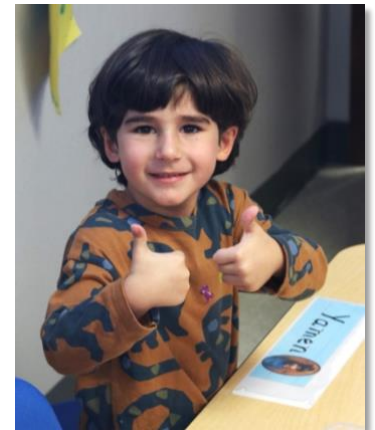
Education Access and Quality covers factors such as English proficiency, access to culturally specific early learning programs, inclusivity in school, and concerns related to children and youth.

COMMON NEEDS

- Most respondents (53%) expressed challenges because of their **level of English**, and across all groups, the challenge most often identified is general communication, followed by communication with service providers, and job search/interviews.
- Only 39% of all respondents say there are **early learning programs** in their area with staff that look like them/their family or speak their language. Meanwhile across all groups, respondents most often identified language lessons/immersion as the activity that would help early learning programs be more inclusive of their cultures and languages.
- When asked what worries respondents the most about children in their community, all groups—except for Latin American respondents—are concerned about **children losing their native language and culture**. Specifically, 11% of Slavic/Eastern European, 16% of Greater Middle Eastern, 17% of African, 22% of Asian, and 40% of Pacific Islander respondents share this concern.
- When asked what has helped or would help their children in their community **feel welcomed at school**, respondents across all groups most often mentioned having a safe, welcoming environment, supportive teachers who greet and check in with them, culturally specific staff and teachers, and opportunities for students to socialize and welcome one another.
- When asked what respondents feel is **missing or wish was taught in their child’s school**, respondents across nearly all groups most frequently mentioned teaching values, respect, and morality, followed by their native language or culture.
- Across all groups, **drug use** was the most common concern that respondents had for **teenagers** in their community. And across all groups, more mentorship and counseling are the most common service or support desired for youth in their community.

“We need culturally specific groups where youths can come to make good friends and talk to mentors who can guide them to make good choices in life and influence them positively.”

—Swahili-speaking respondent



IV. HEALTH CARE ACCESS AND QUALITY

Health Care Access and Quality include access to health services, primary care, and mental health support and services.

Common Needs

- Most respondents, including 64% of African, 68% of Pacific Islander, 68% Slavic/Eastern European, 70% of Latin American, 93% of Asian, and 94% of Greater Middle Eastern respondents, say that they and their family go to a **primary care provider/family physician** for their health needs.
- The most common **challenges to accessing healthcare** identified across all groups are high costs and lack of health insurance.
- The most common **healthcare needs** identified across all groups are affordable healthcare or health insurance plus more information, education, and healthcare navigation.

“People need to meet qualifications they can actually meet. In reality, not all households have good income, paperwork to represent, or [they] don't understand the qualifications they need to be able to get healthcare.”

–Tongan-speaking respondent



“As more and more Somalis are adopting to the westernized culture, they are learning to openly talk about, share and address their feelings and that has been going really good by far.”

–Somali-speaking respondent

DIFFERENCES AND DISPARITIES

- **Health care access:** Less than half of Latin American, Pacific Islander, and African respondents (31%, 48% and 49%, respectively) say that people in their community can get the care they need, compared to 70% of Slavic/Eastern European respondents, 86% of Greater Middle Eastern respondents, and 91% of Asian respondents.
- **Mental health support:** Only 37% and 46% of African and Pacific Islander respondents say that people in their community seek help when they have intense or prolonged feelings of sadness, anxiety, or distress, compared to 66% of Latin American, 76% of Asian, 78% of Slavic/Eastern European, and 83% of Greater Middle Eastern respondents.

COVID-19 IMPACT

- 41% of respondents say that someone in their household worked in an **environment that is high-risk for contracting COVID-19**, including 8% of Slavic/Eastern European, 31% of Pacific Islander, 43% of Asian, 46% of Latin American, 47% of Greater Middle Eastern, and 63% of African respondents.
- 51% of all respondents say that someone in their family has **gotten really sick due to COVID-19**, including 40% of Slavic/Eastern European, 45% of African, 46% of Asian, 55% of Pacific Islander, 59% of Greater Middle Eastern, and 77% of Latin American respondents.

“I got to stay at home during the pandemic time. It was a really tough time for all my family. Another way [I was] affected was I had waited for my husband to [come to] the US from my back home country and because of that, all the doors closed, and it was too much on me to manage.”

—An Arabic-speaking respondent from Iraq

- 24% say that someone in their family has been **hospitalized because of COVID-19**, including 7% of Slavic/Eastern European, 15% of Asian, 21% of Pacific Islander, 34% of Greater Middle Eastern, 38% of Latin American, and 40% of African respondents.
- 8% say that someone in their family **passed away from COVID-19**. This rate was higher for Greater Middle Eastern, Pacific Islander, and Latin American respondents, 13%, 21%, and 25% of whom said a family member passed away, respectively.

V. NEIGHBORHOOD AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Neighborhood and Built Environment includes factors such as housing conditions, safety concerns, neighborhood food access, and transportation.

COMMON NEEDS

- **Finding affordable food** is a challenge for all communities. Only 18% of Latin American, 31% of Pacific Islander, 31% of Greater Middle Eastern, 41% of African, 60% Slavic/Eastern European, and 61% of Asian respondents say they can easily find food in their neighborhood that is affordable.
- Across all groups, the most common **safety concerns** are the perceived threat of people who are homeless, crime (especially violent crime), shootings, and neighborhood safety.
- In terms of **problems within the community**, drug use, crime, alcohol use, discrimination, and hate-violence were most often cited across all groups.

“Hate crimes, it appears they have been targeting the senior residents. My children don’t want me leaving the house on my own.”

—Mandarin-speaking respondent



DIFFERENCES AND DISPARITIES

- **Safety concerns:** 55% of Greater Middle Eastern, 62% of Latin American and 66% of Pacific Islander respondents are concerned about the personal safety of people in their household or community, compared to less than half of Slavic/Eastern European, African, and Asian respondents (39%, 42%, and 43%, respectively).
- Unlike other groups, **discrimination, racial profiling, and hate crimes** are the top safety concerns for African respondents, cited by 27% of respondents.
- Each group except the African respondents identified **neighborhood safety** as the most common environmental concern, while the top concern for African respondents was the **extreme weather (especially heat)** and the **lack of air conditioning** (cited by 26% of respondents).

“As an immigrant, a black person, there is always fear in this country.”

—Swahili-speaking respondent

- **Trust in police:** 78% of Asian, 95% of Greater Middle Eastern, and 96% of Slavic/Eastern European respondents trust the police, compared to less than half of Pacific Islander, African, and Latin American respondents (42%, 43%, and 46%, respectively).
- **Fresh and culturally specific food access:** Less than half of Latin American and African respondents (16% and 47%, respectively) say that they can easily find food in their neighborhood that is fresh and healthy. Meanwhile, only 31% of Greater Middle Eastern respondents say that they can easily find food in their neighborhood that is culturally specific.
- **Transportation:** On average, most respondents across the groups have a personal car or truck for transportation. However, respondents from particular-language groups were less likely to have a personal vehicle, including 0% of Dari-speaking, 38% of Amharic-speaking, and roughly half of Tigrigna-speaking, Nepali-speaking, Burmese-speaking, and Khmer-speaking respondents. The average commute time for those without a personal vehicle was longer than the overall average commute time of their larger group.

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

–Farsi-speaking respondent

VI. SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Social and Community Context includes factors such as community involvement, civic engagement, community spaces, and maintaining culture.

COMMON NEEDS

- Overall, most respondents from all groups do not tend to **keep up with political issues** and the share of those who follow political issues ranged from 6% of Latin American respondents to 47% of Slavic/Eastern European respondents. Of those that do follow political issues, they were more likely to follow global/international politics and/or political issues or conflicts in their home country. Only 3% of all respondents kept up with local politics, like school board, city council, and mayoral elections.
- Across all groups, the most common **challenges when trying to maintain their culture** are a lack of language support and opportunities to practice as well as infrequent community gatherings and activities. Similarly, the most common needs that would help respondents and their communities maintain their home culture is having more community events, gatherings, and cultural celebrations, more language and cultural lessons, and having a community or cultural center.
- When asked what they would **consider the center of their community**, the most common response across all groups (except Latin American respondents) is a place of worship such as a church, mosque, or temple. At the same time, 63% of Latin American, 46% of African, 40% of Greater Middle Eastern, 26% of Slavic/Eastern European, and 21% of Asian say that they do not know of a space that is the center of their community, or that there is not one. For Pacific Islander respondents, the second most common response is IRCO.
- Overall, religious activities and volunteering were the most common ways that respondents across all groups were **involved in their community**.



“In Portland, specifically, many Nepali people are moving away, so there is a lack of culture.”

–Nepali-speaking respondent

DIFFERENCES AND DISPARITIES

- **Unique challenges to maintaining culture:** Within the Asian group, 29% of Nepali-speaking, 30% of Vietnamese-speaking, and 42% of Mandarin-speaking respondents say that a **lack or loss of community** makes it difficult for them to maintain their home culture. Within the African group, 17% of respondents identified the **pressure to assimilate**, and the influence of American culture as challenge.

- **Unique community challenges:** When asked what are some larger issues that are affecting people's happiness, each group gave unique answers. African respondents most often identified **mental health/trauma**, as well as **social pressure, expectations, and a fear of being judged** as larger issues affecting people's happiness. Asian respondents most often identified a **lack or loss of community as an issue**. This was particularly felt by Nepali-speaking respondents and Zomi-speaking respondents, 50% and 90% of whom cited it, respectively. Slavic/Eastern European respondents most often cited the **Russian-Ukrainian war** and **increasing community division** because of the war as an issue. Greater Middle Eastern respondents most often cited **loneliness, isolation, and homesickness** as an issue. Both Latin American and Pacific Islander respondents most often mentioned **low wages** as an issue affecting the happiness of people in their 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

"Yes. Some members are feeling homesick, lonely and can't adjust to the new environment. I work as a real estate agent and I saw the families in which one family member would feel very happy to live in US, but the other would want to go back because he or she cannot adjust and feels very homesick."

—Russian-speaking respondent.

VII. COMMUNITIES WITH HIGH NEEDS

While there are wide differences and disparities across the different ethnic groups, there were also significant differences within the groups. Below is a list of communities whose respondents consistently reported greater needs across the various indicators compared to the overall group average.

- Within the African group, **Oromo-speaking** respondents reported greater need than average in more indicators than any other African language group, followed by **Tigrigna-speaking** and **Amharic-speaking** respondents. All three are part of the Ethiopian diaspora.
- Within the Asian group, **Zomi-speaking** respondents reported greater need than average in more indicators than any other Asian language group, followed by **Burmese-speaking** respondents and **Nepali-speaking respondents from Bhutan**.
- Within the Greater Middle Eastern group, **Syrian** respondents most often reported greater need than the group average.
- **Latin American** respondents generally reported high need across most of the indicators.



- Responses from certain **Pacific Islander** communities were sparse, so it is difficult to make comparisons, but in general Pacific Islander respondents, especially **Tongan speaking** respondents, reported high need across most of the indicators.
- Within the Slavic and Eastern European group, **Ukrainian** respondents most often reported greater need than average.

“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.”

Arabic-speaking respondent

The disparities within the different ethnic groups revealed here reinforces the importance of more disaggregated data to better reflect the diversity of immigrant and refugee communities and highlights the need for more intentional, tailored strategies to understand and address disparities experienced by certain groups.

VIII. INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES

In addition to the survey results, we conducted a series of focus groups for specific immigrant and refugee populations to understand their needs and ideas to address those needs. This includes a focus group for seniors, those with disability, youth in Portland, youth in Ontario, and Arabic-speaking women in Ontario. Due to safety and privacy concerns, we also created a short anonymous survey instead of a focus group for immigrants and refugees who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Two-Spirit, and other identities that fall outside of cisgender and heterosexual paradigms (LGBTQIA2+).

IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE SENIORS

On October 26, 2022, we conducted a focus group of 17 immigrant and refugee seniors, including 5 Asian (2 Nepali from Bhutan, 2 Vietnamese, and 1 Mandarin-speaking), 4 African (2 Tigrigna/Amharic, 1 Oromo, and 1 Swahili-speaking), 4 Greater Middle Eastern (3 Iraqi and 1 Kurdish), and 4 Slavic seniors (all “Ukrainian/Russian”).



Immigrant and Refugee Seniors Focus Group

The biggest needs identified by the African seniors are **ESL classes**, more opportunities for **exercise and physical activity**, more **social activities**, such as knitting, art, and cultural exchange programs. Other needs include access to healthy **food and meals** and **healthcare navigation**.

Among Asian seniors, Nepali-speaking seniors identified **spiritual needs**—including a need for more priests to conduct ceremonies and rituals and places of worship—which have led people to move out of the state. They also identified a need for **more community gatherings and trips** like before the pandemic (e.g., to visit gardens, the coast), more **affordable housing** (especially for seniors/when families split), **transportation** (to go to parks and activities), more **availability of medical appointments**, more **translation/interpretation**, and help with expenses in the winter as SSI income is too low. Vietnamese-speaking respondents expressed concerns about **safety** (in particular, road safety, a lack of trust in the police, and concerns about homelessness), difficulty

booking medical appointments, **the high cost of utilities** especially in winter, and a need for **free or low-cost insurance**. The Mandarin-speaking senior identified a need for better outreach and information for **food pantries**, more food and cash assistance, and **financial assistance** to cover high Medicare bills, especially for newcomers.

Greater Middle Eastern seniors expressed concern that **SSI income was too low**, and as a result, they are ineligible for loans to **buy a home**, and need **rental assistance**. They also expressed a need for a **cultural center** for the Arabic community, more **gatherings** to socialize and play games, like dominoes, and translated signs and information regarding **Halal food** at grocery stores.

Slavic/Eastern European seniors all identified that their top need is more **ESL classes**, especially those after 5pm when community members get off work. They also expressed concerns with **discrimination and conflict** from within the community because of language and nationality, especially among the youth.

IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES WITH DISABILITY

On October 26th, 2022, we conducted a focus group for immigrants and refugees with disabilities, with two participants. They identified a need for more **safe places to stay**, such as shelters and hotels, including for those with no children. Along the theme of housing, participants highlighted the need for **healthier environments** in low-income housing (e.g., less smoking, noise, etc.), as well as more **support with housing applications and education** on tenant rights/responsibilities. In addition, they highlighted a need for more advocacy and education to help understand the available laws and protections, especially when it comes to **violations of the right to a service animal**. Both participants also identified the need for more **transportation assistance** to make appointments, including outside of public transit. In terms of family support, participants identified a challenge of people finding it difficult to fit into their community and to get what they need, and a need for more **screenings and earlier diagnosis of disabilities**, as well as education on available services and support, including for family members and caretakers. Participants also reported a need for more **adult education classes**, such as driving classes, and connections to **employment opportunities** that can accommodate disabilities, such as work from home jobs. Both participants agree that **one solution is access to strong advocates** to help educate and connect available services; one who has adequate training, sufficient pay, smaller caseload, and lived experience. Other strategies identified include partnering with ride-share companies, increasing education, engagement, and representation (including representation of different disabilities), and more support for family members and caretakers of people with disabilities.

LGBTQIA2+ IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

We conducted a short survey of LGBTQIA2+ immigrants and refugees to understand their needs and received four responses. When asked to rank the SDOH areas most important to them, respondents most often mentioned Social and Community Context, Neighborhood and Built Environment, and Economic Stability. Some specific issues or needs that respondents mentioned include **“work equality and human rights,” “feeling safe around coworkers and directors,”** and **“immigrants, refugees and LGBTQIA2 need more support and respect.”** 3 of 4 strongly agreed that there are existing resources available for them and/or immigrants and refugees in the LGBTQIA2+ community to address their needs, and 1 said they agree. However, 1 disagreed when asked if there are places they feel comfortable going to if they wanted support for LGBTQIA2+ issues/experiences.

3 agreed that they feel safe within their larger ethnic or cultural community, but 1 disagreed. When asked about specific resources desired, respondents mentioned “work, health and safe environment,” “everything, classes, doctor, more community support”, and “educational tools and events”. Some potential barriers identified are language availability, price, location, and discriminatory staff/providers.

IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE YOUTH

African Youth

Despite our efforts, we were unable to organize an African youth focus group within the project timeline.

Asian Youth

On November 3rd, 2022, we conducted a focus group of 22 Asian youth from McDaniel High School. The participants were a mix of genders and backgrounds, including 8 Vietnamese, 1 Filipino, 3 Chinese, 1 Japanese, 1 Lao, 1 Korean, and 4 who were multiracial (“Lao & Vietnamese”, “Thai/Chinese”, and 2 “Viet/Chinese”). The participants were asked to identify the most important issues, needs, and challenges facing them and other youth in their community. The most frequently identified issues were related to **racism, “casual racism,” racism being overlooked or dismissed, stereotypes, and Asian hate crimes**, mentioned by 9 participants. This was followed by issues related to **mental health, depression, anxiety, and stress**, mentioned by 5 participants; issues related to **money, finance, and living costs**, mentioned by 5 participants; and **a need for financial support, scholarships, and help paying for college tuition and supplies**, mentioned by 4 participants. When asked to rank their top three needs, social issues related to racism and hate crimes were mentioned 14 times and the top need for 11 participants; education related issues were mentioned 12 times and was the top need for 1 participant; economic issues were mentioned 11 times and was the top need for 2 participants; and mental health issues were mentioned 8 times and was the top need for 4 participants.

Greater Middle Eastern Youth

On November 18th, 2022, we conducted a virtual focus of 13 Greater Middle Eastern Youth, who were a mix of genders and between the ages of 12 and 19. When asked their country or culture of origin, 5 said Iraqi, 5 said Libyan, 2 said United States, and 1 said “Muslim/Islamic.” The need emphasized by many of the participants was **“cultural clash - not belonging”** and **“culture shock”** and **“trauma”** from that shock. Similarly, participants mentioned **depression** and **homesickness**. Others mentioned **“racism, criticism from other kids in school”**, as well as **“bad influence at school and peer pressure from friends.”** Participants also mentioned getting a need for more assistance and support **“with things that are hard.”** In terms of education needs, participants mentioned a need to find a good school with good education, which is dependent on the area you live in, as well as a need for **help with schoolwork** and more **school supplies**. Other challenges mentioned is that it was **dangerous to play outside** by yourself, because of crime and safety concerns, and that it is difficult to find a job with the **language barrier**. 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.”** Participants also emphasized the importance of making friends and having their support, fitting in, keeping their grades up, and their family.



Ontario Youth Focus Group

Latin American Youth

Despite our efforts, we were unable to organize a Latin American youth focus group within the project timeline.

Pacific Islander Youth

On November 7th, 2022, we conducted a focus group of 19 Pacific Islander youth from Centennial High School. The participants were from a mix of genders and backgrounds, including 9 Micronesian, 6 Chuukese, 3 Samoan, and 1 Tongan participant. The participants were asked to identify the most important issues, needs, and challenges facing them and other youth in their community. 6 participants identified **needing a job/unemployment**, and the same number reported needing **financial help and poverty**. 4 participants mentioned needing **tutoring** and help getting their grades up, and 3 mentioned the **language barrier** and communication issues. Other issues mentioned include high school dropouts, challenges focusing on and attending classes, racial profiling, trauma, wanting more Islander representation, access to health care, and parents not believing in mental health. When asked to rank their top three needs, **mental health** was mentioned 5 times and was the top need in each instance; **tutoring or “school”** was mentioned 4 times and was the top need in 1 instance; **money, money for family and/or financial support** was also mentioned 4 times and was the top need in 1 instance; and **wanting more Islander representation** was mentioned twice.

Slavic/Eastern European Youth

On November 9th, 2022, we conducted a focus group of 5 Slavic/Eastern European youth at Lane Middle School. The participants were a mix of genders, and 3 identified as “Russian/Ukrainian”, 1 as “Ukrainian/Russian” and 1 identified as “Ukrainian/Romanian.” The participants were asked to identify and rank the most important issues for them and other youth in their community, and they identified a range of issues, such as fear of homeless people in their neighborhood, air quality, lack of parks, safety on public transit, issues with neighbors, a lack of options for Slavic teachers, the public ignorance of Slavic culture, prejudice against Russians, social media use, the rising cost of gas/living, and lack of transit options to school. When asked to rank their top needs, participants identified the **cost of gas, fear of homeless people in their neighborhood, crime** (especially theft), **living far away from school** (specifically Franklin High School, the only Russian immersion school), **prejudice against Russians, needing more teachers, and alcohol**.

Youth in Ontario

On September 28th, 2022, we conducted a focus group of 9 youth from refugee families living and working in Ontario and the surrounding areas. The youth ranged from Middle School to High School age, with a mix of boys and girls, and were from Middle Eastern Arabic-speaking background and African background. The participants were asked to identify and rank the most important issues for them and their community. Responses covered a range of issues, from being unwelcomed and xenophobia, to hunger, income and jobs, isolation, air quality, and more. When asked to rank these issues, they were all united in the choice of **mental health** as the number one issue, while others also felt that their **education, career, hunger, government** ("and having the President be a good one"), **safety, and drugs/dispensaries** were a top concern. Second choices included: **transportation** (lack of taxis,



Slavic Youth on a Fall Outing

Ubers), **home-to-school transportation**, **lack of a mosque**, **their government**, and **drugs**. Third choices included: **housing**, **money (jobs)**, **religion/beliefs**, **racism**, **environment**, and safety. The youth participants provided a range of different top 3 choices but noted collectively they agreed that any of these issues were ranked in the top issues they found to be of concern.

ARABIC-SPEAKING WOMEN IN ONTARIO

On September 28th, 2022, IRCO Greater Middle East Center (GMEC) staff conducted a focus group of 5 Arabic-speaking women living in Ontario, Oregon. 3 of the participants identified as Syrian and 2 identified as Iraqi. All came from refugee families, and 2 identified Ontario as their first resettlement city in the U.S. When asked to identify their top needs, participants shared it was difficult to find **housing that was affordable and suitable** to their needs. **Employment** was also an issue as there are limited opportunities and not many employers in the area. A **lack of activities and recreational spaces for children** is another issue, as well as the lack of **access to ethnic halal stores**. Lastly, participants expressed difficulty in **connecting with the community**, the **lack of community events**, and **feeling isolated**. Participants agreed that all these issues were important to them. Possible solutions identified by the participants include 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. When asked about the barriers to these strategies, participants reported that small projects usually fail because the city is too small and there is no clientele, and that activities available are scattered around the area and require driving which makes gas expenses go up for the families and cause financial hardships.



Ontario Arabic-Speaking Women Focus Group