



March 8, 2018

Source: New York Times, February 17, 2017

Recently Resettled Refugees and their Experience with the Annual Survey of Refugees

*Hamutal Bernstein, Urban Institute
David Dutwin, SSRS
Susan Sherr, SSRS
Arina Goyle, SSRS*

*Robert Santos, Urban Institute
Nicole Deterding, Business Strategy Consultants
Erica Meade, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Tyler Woods, Urban Institute*

This study is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The views are those of the authors and not HHS. All results are preliminary.

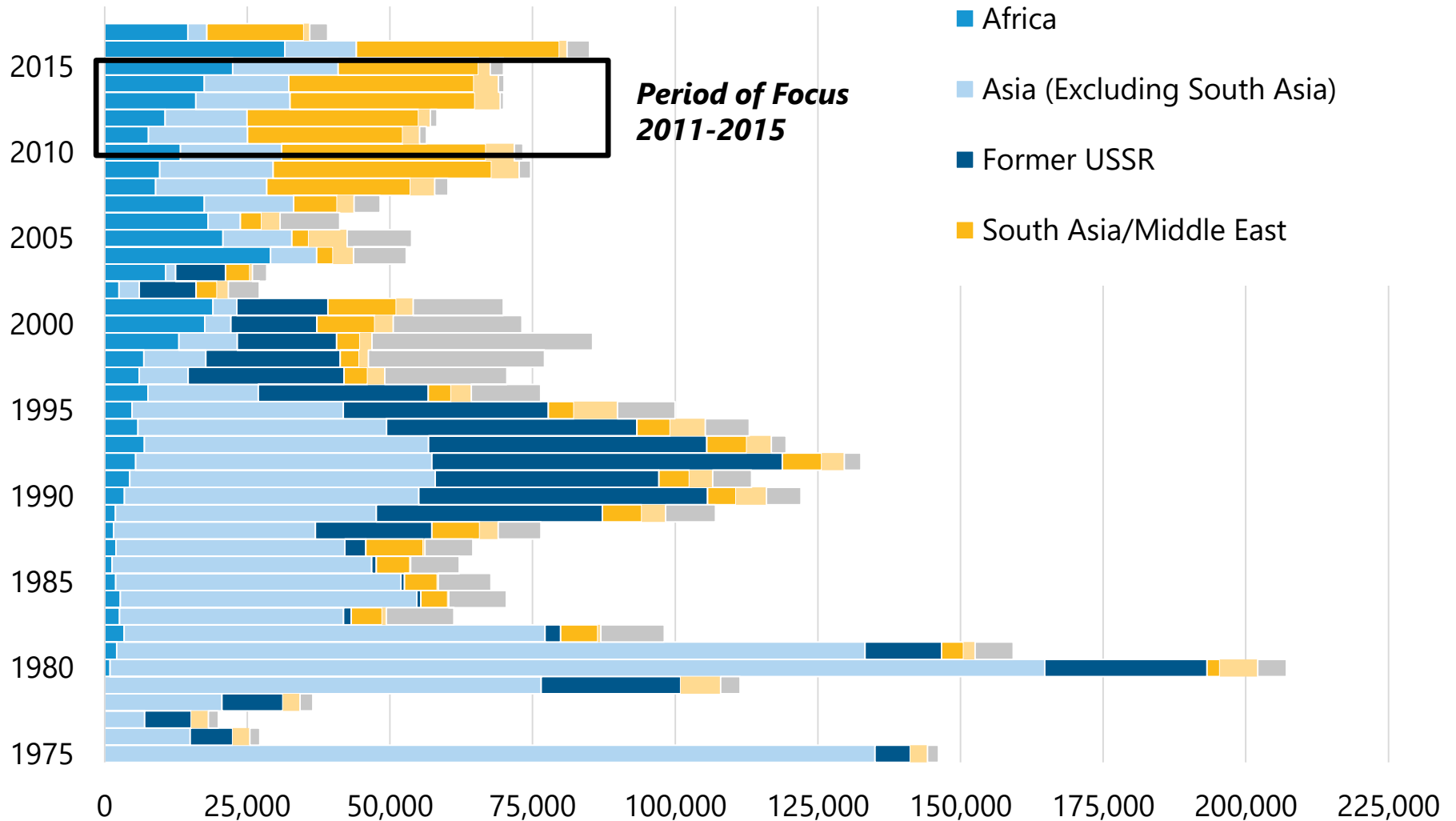
Presentation

- Background on Resettled Refugees
- The Annual Survey of Refugees (ASR) and Redesign Effort
- Design of Pretest
- **Work in Progress**: Initial Observations on Cognitive and In-depth Interviews
- Reaching a Sensitive Group
- Next Steps in Analysis and Lessons for Surveys of Vulnerable Multilingual Populations

Basics on recently arrived resettled refugees

Refugee flows into the U.S. have varied over time

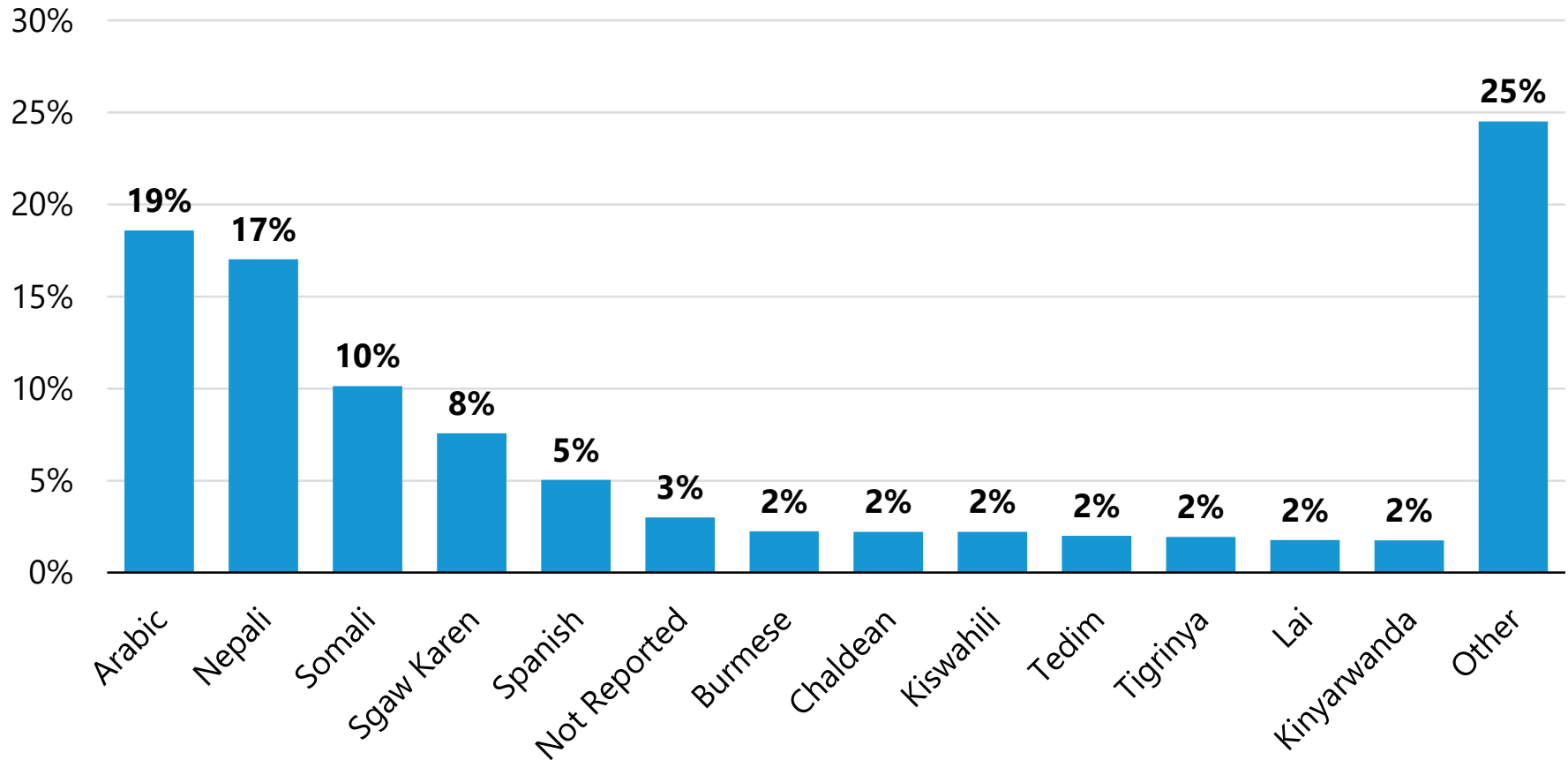
Region of origin of refugees, 1975-2017



Source: Department of State-Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration- Office of Admissions - Refugee Processing Center, 2017

Recently resettled refugees speak over 200 languages

Primary language of refugee arrivals, 2011-2015



Source: Refugee Arrivals Data System.

The Annual Survey of Refugees and Redesign Project

What is the Annual Survey of Refugees?

- The ASR is the only national survey on refugee self-sufficiency and integration
- Conducted annually since the early 1980s
- Collects information on refugees arriving in the U.S. in the previous five years
- Refugee Act annual reporting requirement

What are the objectives of the ASR?

- Statutory annual reporting requirements, such as:
 - Employment and labor force statistics
 - Economic self-sufficiency
 - English language proficiency
 - Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR) status
 - Medical insurance coverage

How has the ASR pursued its objectives?

- Survey instrument focused on
 - Demographics
 - Economic Self-Sufficiency
 - Employment
 - Public Benefits
- Interview Principal Applicants (usually heads of household) by telephone
 - Collect data on all eligible adults in household
 - Some information on all household members
- Most recent (2016) survey collection: 1500 households, 17 languages including English

Redesigning the ASR

- Revised questionnaire to explore refugee integration and expand content while improving existing questions
- Explore issues around contacting and outreach, attitudes toward government sponsorship, and respondent willingness to participate
- Scan literature and reference surveys (spring 2017)
- Expert roundtable to identify priorities for questionnaire revision (May 2017)
- OMB submission (Aug 2017)
- Pretest of revised questionnaire (Oct-Dec 2017)

Revised Questionnaire content

- Demographics/HH roster
- Experiences before arrival in the U.S.
- Human Capital
- Economic Self-Sufficiency
- Social Connection
- Receiving Community
- Health
- Children and Schools
- Technology Use and Access

Pretest Design

Research Objectives of the Pretest

Research objectives	Telephone Interviews	Site Visits
Verify that the survey instrument captures accurate policy- and community-relevant information	X	X
Identify survey questions in need of revision due to structural or conceptual issues	X	
Validate comprehension and assess respondent cognitive burden	X	
Measure the length and cost of administration for various languages and refugee subgroup	X	
Explore cultural relevance and sensitivity issues	X	X
Explore mobility, locating, and other issues related to longitudinal survey implementation	X	X
Explore ways of securing better participation and acceptance	X	X
Explore how government sponsorship might affect participation, trust, anxiety, veracity	X	X

Design of the Pretest

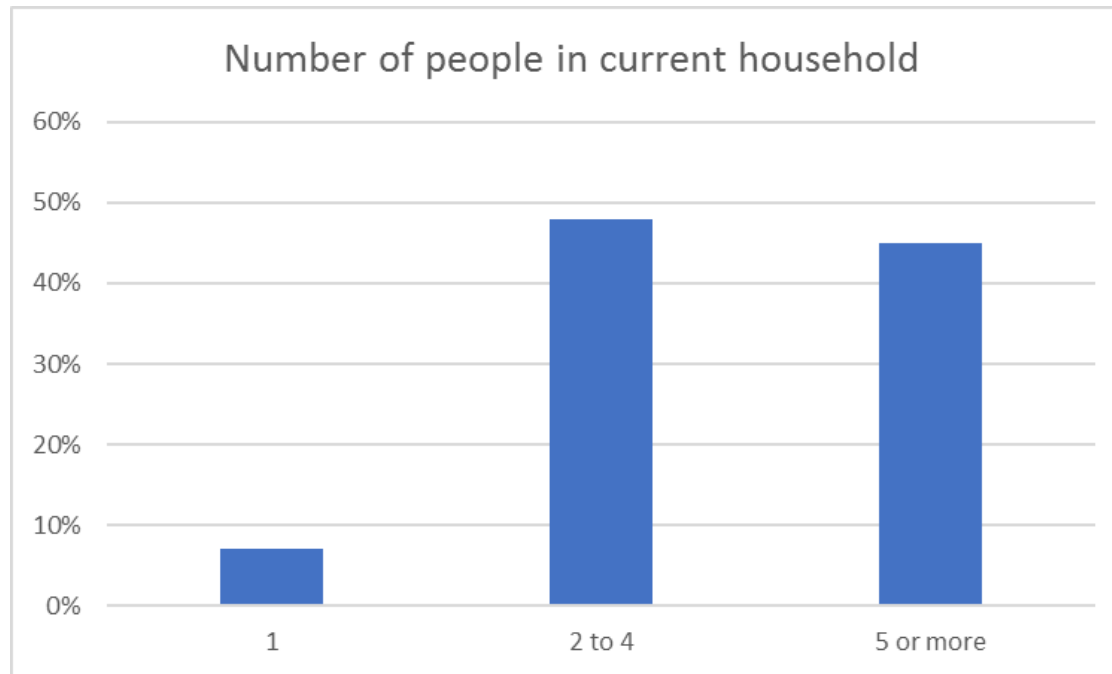
- Capture refugee perspective through telephone interviews
 - Used **2016 ASR respondent pool**
 - Combine quantitative and qualitative
 - 109 survey interviews
 - Half were also given cognitive interviews: 47
 - Other half were given in-depth interviews: 58
- Capture stakeholder perspectives through site visits
 - Interviews with service providers and community stakeholders in two cities

Pretest Administration Design Plan

Pretest Survey Administration Design								
Language Group	Recency of Arrival:	Male PA		Female PA		Language Totals	Total In-Depth Interviews	Total Cognitive Interviews
		families at arrival	no family members at arrival	families at arrival	no family members at arrival			
Arabic (2 dialects)	Recent Arrival (1-2 yr); or 2-3 Years	3	4	4	6	32	58	47
	Longer Term Arrival (3-6 yrs); or 4-7 Years	5	4	4	2			
Nepali	Recent Arrival	5	3	8	5	25		
	Longer Term Arrival	3	1					
Sgaw Karen		2	6	5	7	20		
Somali	Recent Arrival	3	4	3	5	16		
	Longer Term Arrival	1						
Kiswahili (French)		8		8		16		
Subtotals		52		57		109	<== Total Surv. Admins.	

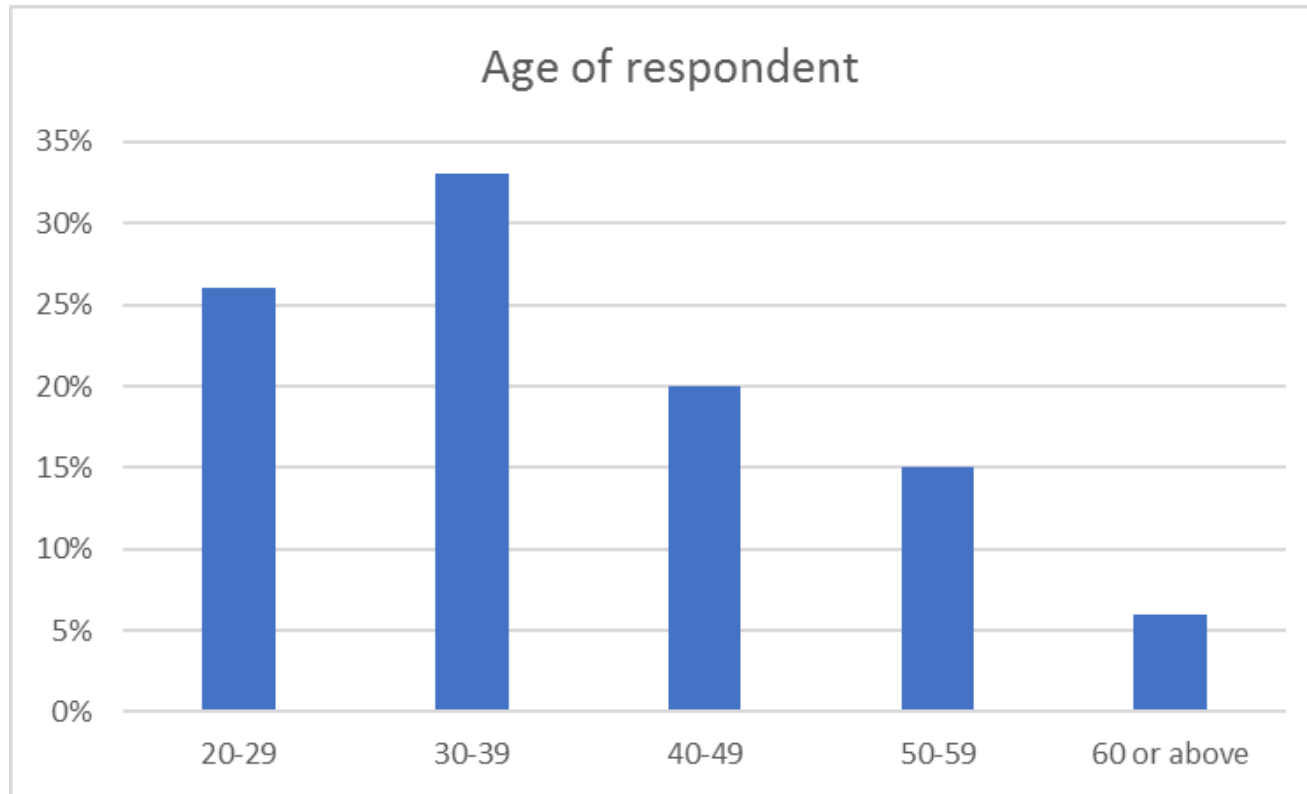
Demographics of Pretest Respondents

- Small share (7%) lived in single-person households; mostly multiple-member household and many large households



Demographics of Pretest Respondents

- Range of ages, reflecting the refugee pool



Demographics of Pretest Respondents

- Variety of countries of origin

Country of birth of respondent	Number	%
Bhutan	24	22%
Burma	18	17%
Burundi	1	10%
DRC	14	13%
Iraq	25	23%
Nepal	1	10%
Somalia	16	15%
Sudan	3	30%
Syria	3	30%
Tanzania	1	10%
Thailand	2	20%
Other	1	10%

Initial Observations on Cognitive and In-depth Interviews

Note that these are our initial observations and we have just begun our analysis; additional findings will emerge as we continue analysis

Challenges of researching the refugee population

- Mobility: lack of strong data on secondary migration after initial placement in the U.S.
- Tracing: challenge of updating refugees' contact information
- Linguistic and cultural diversity: many language groups and ethnic and national-origin groups
- Concerns in speaking with the government

Testing a new questionnaire

- Challenges for the cognitive interviewing
 - Length of the protocol (153 questions)
 - Many new questions had been developed and needing testing
 - Interviewers who had the linguistic and cultural competency were non-native-English speakers, so recording cognitive interview results was not trivial
 - Interviewers' sharing cultural background with respondents was invaluable for establishing rapport and collecting information from vulnerable population
 - Even with early feedback mechanisms, back and forth monitoring is difficult with rare languages; difficult to provide real time feedback

Despite challenges, rich information collected

- Initial analysis of cognitive interview results have provided valuable information on the questionnaire usability
- Many newly developed questions on challenging concepts seem to be successful (e.g. race, health, community, social connection, unemployment, experiences before arrival in the U.S.)
 - Willingness to respond and comfort with these types of questions
 - Validation that these are important concepts for understanding their experience in the U.S.

Helpful feedback from the cognitive interviews

- Identifying areas of miscomprehension, challenge with recall, or areas of sensitivity
 - Proxy reporting: Discomfort reporting on and lack of knowledge of detailed information on other household members (income, employment and wages, demographics)
 - Confusion about different public benefits programs and health insurance
- Identifying missing concepts
 - One example: the questions on experience before arrival in the U.S. assume an adult, but many were youth when they fled their home country and during their period of displacement
- Identifying additional response options for multiple-choice questions

Insights from the in-depth interviews

- Broadly, in-depth interview validated measures that were added or expanded in the redesigned questionnaire (e.g., English language ability, social connections, health care, safety, discrimination)
- Having interviewers from a common cultural background helped develop rapport and build trust with respondents
 - "I: Would you be willing to participate in the survey again in the future?

R: Yes, of course. I enjoy speaking to someone different who understands me."

Insights from the in-depth interviews

- Respondents consistently point to English language ability as a major challenge and a key marker of integration
- Many respondents feel uncomfortable or unsafe in their neighborhoods, which can lead to fear and isolation
- Respondents often provide detailed stories of their lives before resettling in the US, but some were hesitant to share or relive the experience.
 - “This whole story really stresses me out and I really don’t [feel] like reliving it.”
 - “I was very young when everything happened, I can’t remember anything and I hate talking much about the past as it really hurts me.”

Insights from the in-depth interviews

- Older respondents and those with health problems face unique barriers to integration and self-sufficiency
 - “If I had come to this country 20 years ago, things would have been different perhaps, I would have completed my education, as I still had the will. But for me now, life has been passing me by, this is my destiny. We arrived at a very old age and it is very difficult for us to learn.”
- Respondents describe the difficulty of adapting to the US work culture, working long hours to make enough money to pay the bills

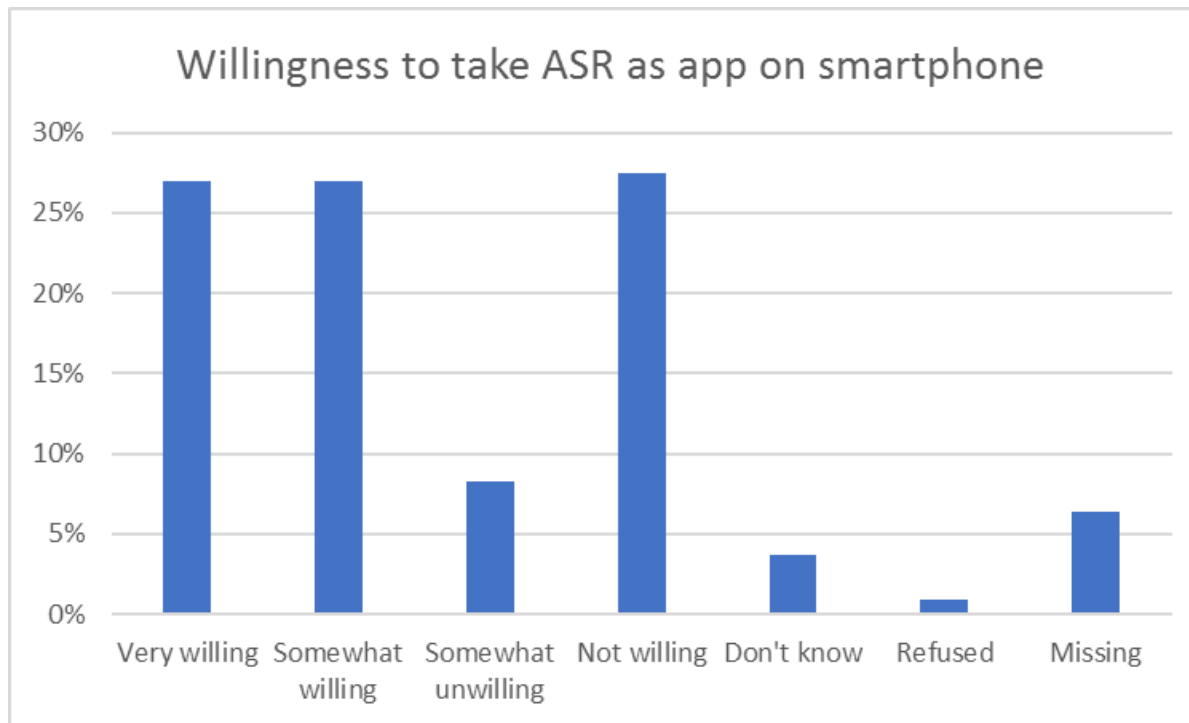
Reaching a sensitive group

Among the 5 percent who were not willing to participate again...

- “I really don’t know, as I told you I am trying to improve my English and am working at the same time so I don’t have much time. If you want to call me and I am available then that is fine”
- “I’m not sure about it because I don’t know if I can answer any more questions. It’s just in my head that something could happen to me if I say something wrong or give the wrong answers.”

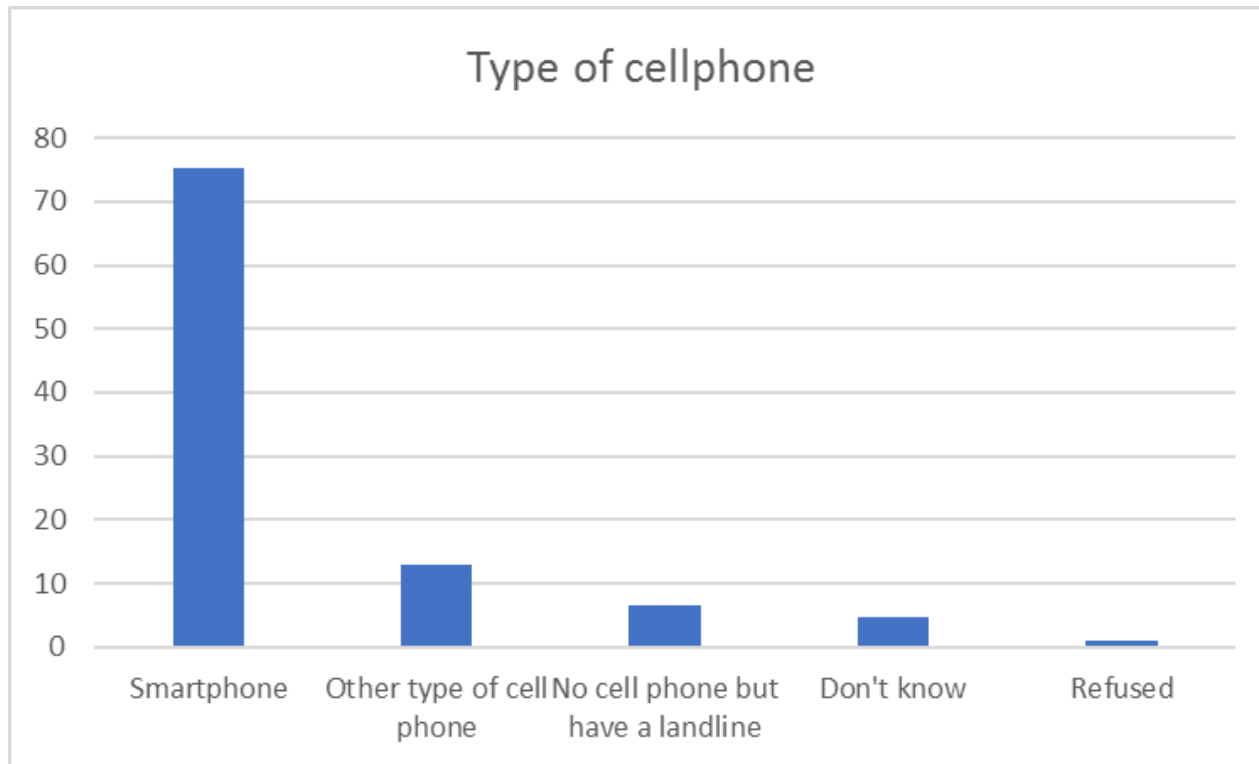
Preference on mode

- Only half (54%) of pretest respondents said they would be willing to take the ASR through an app, and qualitative findings confirm a sizable portion prefer the telephone mode



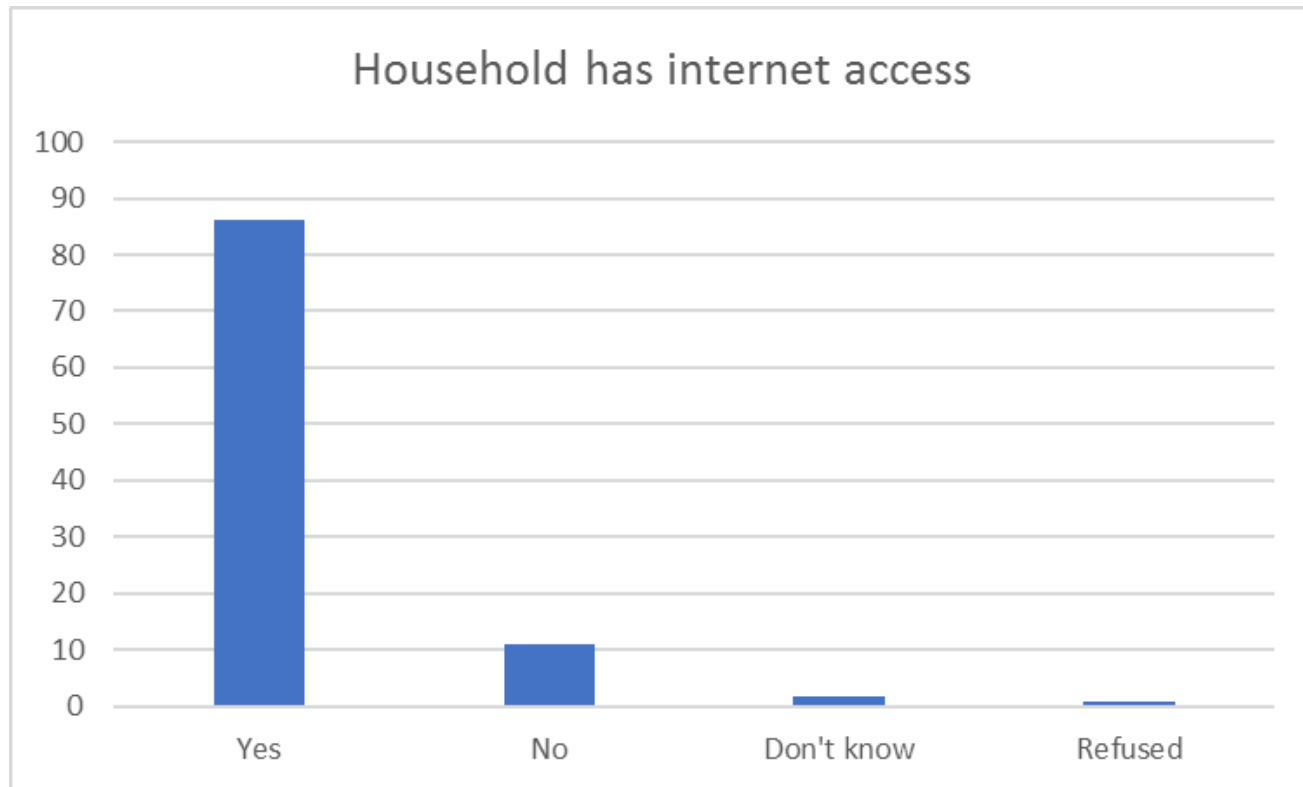
Smartphone use

- A fifth (19%) of pretest respondents do not have a smartphone



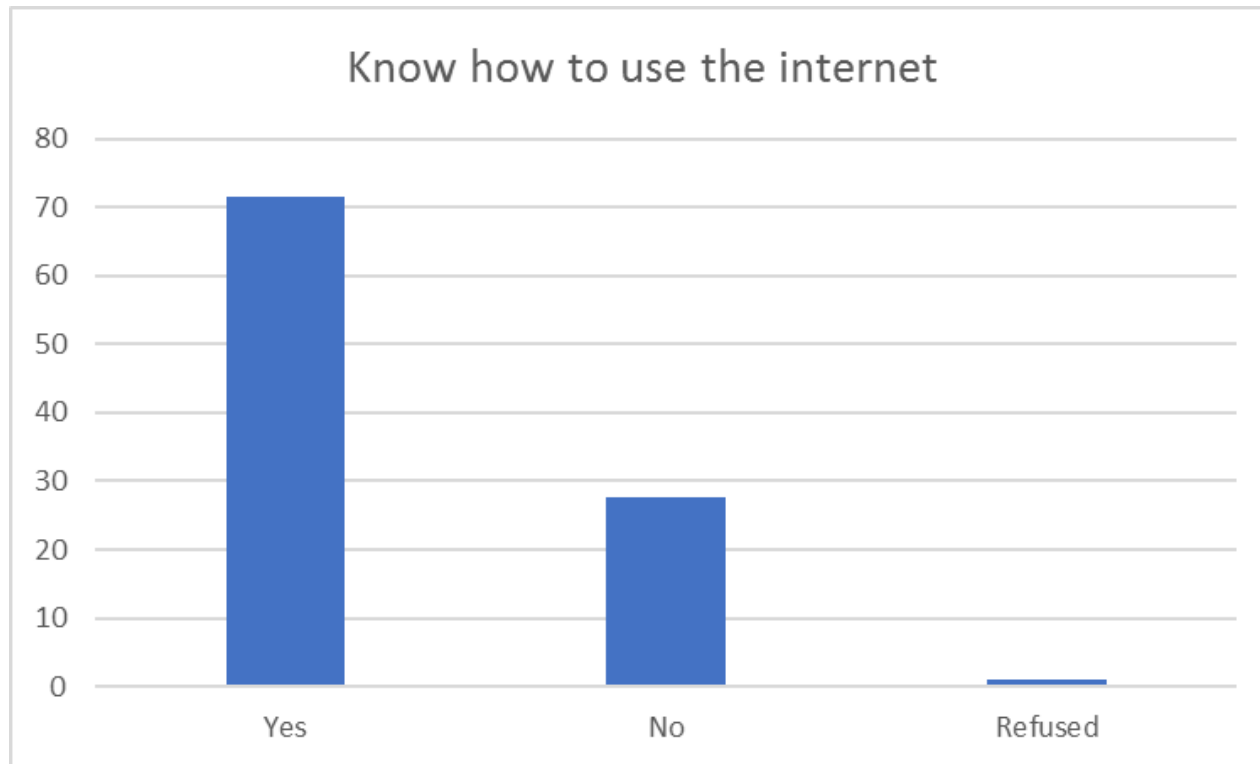
Internet access

- Most (86%) say they or a member of their household has internet access



But, internet knowledge...

- But fewer (72%) say they know how to use the internet



Next Steps and Further Questions

Next steps in analysis

- Analyze questions from all qualitative respondents on preferred mode, government sponsorship, willingness to participate, and missing topics
- Analyze subgroup differences in qualitative data
- In tandem with cognitive interview results, analyze survey data for illogical response patterns, anomalous missing data patterns, refusal rates for sensitive questions, and subgroup variation
- Analyze survey data for length of administration

Lessons learned for surveys of multicultural and vulnerable populations

- Important to match interviewer country of origin with respondent's background to foster rapport and build on shared experience
- Respondents generally willing to discuss sensitive issues and answer questions about traumatic past before resettlement, although they may require reassurance from interviewers
- Important to have survey administration scheduling that is flexible to accommodate many respondents' long working hours