Foundations for Belonging 2022
Insights on newly arrived refugees:
Family separation and reunion during the pandemic
Snapshot

Foundations for Belonging 2022 reports on a third phase of research carried out with newly arrived refugees in Australia.

This research has explored refugees' **social connections**, their **access to rights** and **fulfilment of responsibilities**. The research also explored the **impacts of COVID-19 on family separation and reunion**, and other hardships faced by refugees in their everyday lives.

The research reflected the cultural diversity of refugees and in this phase, the most common countries of origin were **Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan**. Refugees had on average lived in Australia for about **four years**.

Key findings

- Alongside cultural background and settlement location, **gender and age** emerge as strong predictors of differences in social and civic participation.

- Newly arrived refugees have been **resilient in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic**. However, COVID-19 has exacerbated family separation for refugees with evidence of **increased psychological and financial stress**.

- Refugees reunited with family in Australia **had more positive settlement and integration outcomes**.

- There is continuing **high levels of trust** among refugees in government.

- **Difficulties in using technology**, alongside language difficulties, remains one of the most common barriers to accessing essential services

Recommendations

Integration is a two-way process that relies on shared responsibility and actions by everyone including new arrivals, the broader community and government.

Family is a cornerstone

- The Australian Government should examine ways to **expedite humanitarian visa processing and expand family reunion pathways** to reduce the negative impacts of ongoing isolation and uncertainty, exacerbated by the pandemic.

Digital inclusion is key

- The ongoing digital transformation of government services should be anchored in **policy that promotes equitable access by refugees**.

- Digital inclusion – **access, affordability, and skills** – should be embedded into government and settlement policy.

- Education policy at the jurisdictional level should ensure **equitable access for refugee children** to the devices they need (i.e., laptops/tablets) for optimal school learning.

- Mainstream service providers **should develop stronger links with settlement providers** to improve digital communication so that newly arrived refugees can access the services they need.

A focus on refugee women

- Digital and blended modes of essential service delivery should be **culturally responsive to refugees' needs** and preferences to **minimise the twin challenges of language barriers and weaker digital skills**, which persist for refugees, especially women, even with longer residency in Australia.

- Settlement programs should continue to **foster community engagement** and opportunities for informal meeting and exchange for refugees, **with a focus on women, at the local level,** both within and between communities.

- Strengthening the **digital skills of refugees, particularly older women, should be prioritised**.

To read the research paper in full, and the actions that governments, policymakers, service providers and civil society can pursue to strengthen their contribution to settlement and integration, visit ssi.org.au/ssi-insights

The Foundations for Belonging research is conducted by Settlement Services International in partnership with the Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University.