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Foundations for Belonging 2021

Insights on newly arrived refugees:
Women and digital inclusion

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Settlement Services International and its subsidiaries (SSI Group) acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Land. We pay respect to Elders past, present and future and the continuation of cultural, spiritual and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Ancestors have walked this country, and we acknowledge their special and unique place in our nation's historical, cultural and linguistic identity.

Foundations for Belonging 2021

Insights on newly arrived refugees: Women and digital inclusion

Ingrid Culos
Tadgh McMahon
Shanthi Robertson
Emilie Baganz
and Liam Magee

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Key Messages

Foundations for Belonging 2021 reports on a second wave of research carried out with newly arrived refugees in Australia. As with the first wave, this second wave explores refugees' social connections, their access to rights and fulfilment of responsibilities. In doing so, we aim to deepen understanding of the social and civic dimensions of integration in the early stages of settlement.

This second wave includes a stronger focus on refugee women, building on the initial findings in 2020. The data was collected as the COVID-19 pandemic impacted communities in Australia and around the world. During this period digital technologies became even more important in daily life, work and study. Consequently, this second wave provides insights on digital inclusion among newly arrived refugees in Australia. Overall, we found that newly arrived refugees have been resilient across the social and civic dimensions of integration in the face of the pandemic, although some gender disparities found in the first wave of *Foundations for Belonging* persist.

Integration relies on whole-of-community approaches, and actions from refugees, receiving communities and government at all levels. This research points to a series of actions that governments, policymakers, service providers and civil society can pursue to strengthen their contributions to refugee settlement and integration.

Governments and policymakers

- Settlement policy should consider and address gender disparities in light of the small but consistent gaps found for women in relation to social connections and digital inclusion.
- Digital inclusion – access, affordability and ability – should be embedded into settlement policy and the design and delivery of major settlement programs such as the Humanitarian Settlement Program, the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support Program and the Adult Migrant English Program.
- Settlement policy at all levels of government should expand and incentivise community engagement, particularly at the local neighbourhood level and with a focus on refugee women's participation.
- Permanent protection is the central pillar for refugees having equal access to rights, equal opportunities to fulfil responsibilities and a pathway to Australian citizenship.

Essential services and other service providers

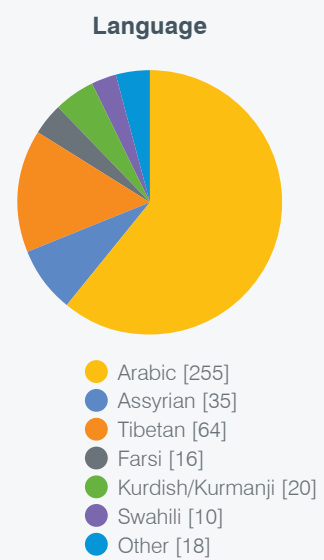
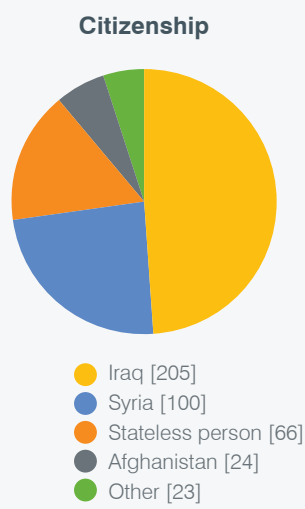
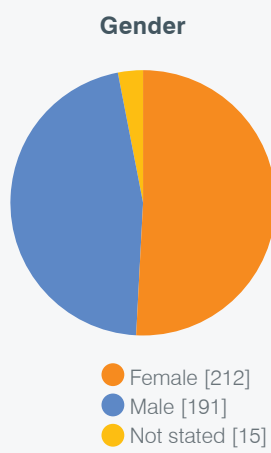
- Essential services, including digital and blended modes of service delivery, should be culturally responsive to refugees' needs and preferences and include in-language support to build fair and equitable access to services and capitalise on the high levels of trust among refugees in government and essential services.
- Service providers should support and develop stronger links with refugee community groups and harness the potential for digital communication channels between essential services and refugee communities.
- Volunteering opportunities should be open and accessible to refugees and responsive to refugees' strengths and demonstrated willingness to volunteer.

Settlement services and civil society organisations

- Settlement programs should continue to foster community engagement and opportunities for informal meeting and exchange for refugee women at the local level, both within and between communities.
- Strengthening the digital skills of refugees, particularly older women, should be prioritised so that they can navigate services and other aspects of daily life independently, and participate in skills and knowledge transfer with peers and within families.
- Settlement programs should harness the potential of culturally responsive digital and blended modes of service delivery to improve access to services and information.
- Civil society organisations should leverage the willingness of refugees to volunteer in ways that are meaningful and purposeful to strengthen social and civic participation between refugees and the wider Australian community.
- Settlement programs should continue to promote a stronger understanding among refugees of the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the First Nations people of Australia.

Key findings – at a glance

Of 418 respondents:



Key findings – at a glance

Survey respondents...	Survey 2020 (%)	Survey 2019 (%)	Comparison with other refugees in Australia ¹ (%)
Receive or feel supported by their ethnic community (Yes/Sometimes)	89	84	52
Receive or feel supported by their religious community (Yes/Sometimes)	82	76	50
Find it easy to make friends in Australia (Very Easy/Easy)	64	66	53
Understand Australian ways and culture (Very Easy/Easy)	69	69	57
Find it easy to talk to their Australian neighbours (Very Easy/Easy)	56	57	45
Maintain mixed friendship networks	53	51	47
Feel welcome in Australia (Always/Most of the time)	91	91	88
Feel part of the Australian community (Always/Most of the time)	87	87	81
Trust the government (A lot)	86	85	70
Trust the police (A lot)	84	88	70
Received support from other community groups (Yes/Sometimes)	76	76	41
Survey respondents...	Survey 2020 (%)	Survey 2019 (%)	Comparison with broader Australian community ² (%)
Feel that people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds get along in their neighbourhood (Strongly agree/Agree)	90	90	84
Reported helping someone (volunteering) with activities in the month prior	48	60	49
Feel that people in their local area are willing to help neighbours (Strongly agree/Agree)	74	79	84
Experienced racial discrimination in the past 12 months (Always/Most of the time/Some of the time)	6	5	13

1 Comparison with Building a New Life in Australia Wave 3.

2 Comparison with Mapping Social Cohesion 2020 or the ABS General Social Survey 2020.

Executive Summary

Newly arrived refugees in Australia have been resilient and stable on the social and civic dimensions of integration in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Foundations for Belonging 2021 reports on a second wave of research carried out with newly arrived refugees in Australia. As with the first wave of research (Culos, Rajwani, McMahon, & Robertson, 2020), this second wave explores four dimensions of two-way integration:

1. social bonds

(ties with family, friends and other *people from the same cultural background* who share *similar values and norms*);

2. social bridges

(connections with *people from different backgrounds* and opportunities for *cultural exchange*);

3. social links

(*two-way engagement and interactions with the institutions of society*); and

4. rights and responsibilities

(fulfilling *social and civic responsibilities* and access to *rights and equality*).

The research examines these dimensions from the perspective of refugees' everyday experiences of welcome, participation and belonging in the early stages of settlement. The *Foundations for Belonging 2021* (N=418) survey was conducted in late 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact communities around the world. At that time in Australia major restrictions on daily life were, for the most part, easing but there was continuing uncertainty about vaccines, travel within Australia and no timeline for when refugees and other Australians could travel overseas to reconnect with loved ones and family. Despite the uncertainty and the unfolding global human crisis, the second wave of data is markedly stable across most indicators

compared to the first wave of surveys (N=344) conducted in late 2019. The data does not signal any fracturing of refugees' sense of welcome, belonging and participation in Australia due to the pandemic.

This report takes a closer look at integration and digital inclusion among refugee women through the data analysis and through in-language focus groups with women conducted in early 2021. In addition, this second wave examines digital inclusion among refugees in light of the accelerated move to digital technologies across almost every aspect of daily life brought about by COVID-19.

As with the first wave of research, a telephone survey was conducted in the respondents' preferred first languages with Tibetan- and Swahili-speaking backgrounds more numerous in the current sample. The average length of residency of survey respondents in this wave was two years; about 1 in 20 were settled in a regional area; and just under half lived in a household with children under 18. As with the first wave of research, multiple steps were taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings including comparisons with a group from a national longitudinal study of refugees and, in some indicators, with the general Australian population.



I always remember when my sister welcomed me at the airport, I felt very welcomed in Australia. When I arrived in Australia, my relatives would call home to celebrate me, which I felt very welcome.
(Survey participant)

Newly arrived refugee women have strong family and community connections with their national, ethnic and religious communities while also developing mixed friendship networks among the wider Australian community.

Compared to men, women in *Foundations for Belonging 2021* reported stronger support from their national, ethnic and religious communities. Similarly, women were more likely to maintain ties with friends and family in Australia and overseas. This was often enabled by digital technologies, particularly for younger women. Maintaining ties with friends and family showed an increase in this wave of surveys conducted in 2020, likely sparked by the unfolding COVID-19 situation globally and locally. About two-thirds of all respondents reported mixed friendship networks, with no appreciable differences between women and men, despite women's stronger ties to their own ethnic and religious communities. That said, younger women were more likely than older women to have mixed friendship networks. There was a small but noticeable drop in the frequency of participation in most activities organised by their own community in 2020, including attending a place of worship, probably due to COVID-19 restrictions. Younger refugee women were more likely to have higher rates of participation. On the whole, the findings in *Foundations for Belonging 2021* underscore the importance of social bonds as a basis for other forms of social connection for refugee women.



The service that I received from [settlement provider] was perfect, but my cousin assisted me a lot. All that made me feel welcome and happy to be in Australia.
(Survey participant)



Seeing my kids improving at the school made me feel happy and welcome to be in Australia.
(Survey participant)

Refugee women have greater difficulties than men in forging connections with people from cultural backgrounds other than their own.

Survey respondents reported relatively strong responses on measures of social bridges. However, compared to men, refugee women tended to report more negative or neutral perceptions of feeling welcome in Australia, and of feeling their local neighbourhood is a place where people from different cultural backgrounds get along (though refugee women were still more positive than the general Australian population on this neighbourhood measure). Talking to their Australian neighbours was also more challenging for women than for men. Despite this, in comparison to refugee men, women report similar levels of feeling part of the Australian community and similar levels of ease in making friends in Australia and understanding Australian ways and culture.

Compared to refugees participating in a large-scale Australian study, survey respondents in both waves of *Foundations for Belonging* report much higher levels of support from other community groups, which provides evidence of the value of community engagement initiatives to facilitate meeting and exchange between receiving communities and refugees. Refugee women and men reported equal and relatively low levels of participation in activities organised by the wider community, with women more likely to participate in school-based activities and parent support groups. Unsurprisingly, participation in community-based activities dropped noticeably in this survey, consistent with COVID-19 restrictions being in place.

The survey responses and focus group discussions indicate that, for women, social bridges expand primarily through everyday encounters and small positive interactions, even where in-depth communication is hampered by language difficulties. Women in the focus groups emphasised these local, everyday encounters as being critical to their feelings of belonging and welcome in Australia.



In 2019 I had an operation, I stayed in the hospital for about four months. My neighbours assisted us a lot during that time, with shopping, interpreting. The Australian community in general showed me very nice feeling being refugee in this country.
(Survey participant)

Refugees demonstrate a high degree of confidence around independent living skills, though this was typically weaker among women. They also expressed a very high level of trust in government and civil society institutions, alongside reporting common difficulties in terms of access to government services.

Apart from finding somewhere to live or finding schools and childcare, refugee women reported weaker knowledge than men around independent living skills such as using bank services or public transport, getting help in an emergency or finding out about government services. Age also influenced these living skills, with younger refugee women being more knowledgeable. Interestingly, women with children under 18 living with them also reported stronger competency across many independent living skills than other refugee women. In the focus groups, older women reported that teenage or adult children played a key role in managing access to essential services on their behalf. The weakest measures among women and men in the surveys were in knowing how to find a job and knowing about their rights – though for both of these measures refugees in this sample were more knowledgeable compared to other refugees in Australia. This indicates the need for settlement programs to continue to focus on enhancing independent living skills in some of these areas, particularly among older women, to build stronger social links.

In terms of access to services, *Foundations for Belonging 2021* found that about two-thirds of respondents were able to access interpreting when needed, and this was usually a government interpreter. The most common difficulties accessing government services were language difficulties, waiting times for an appointment, and online/internet difficulties – mirroring the findings of the first wave of this research. Among women, there was a strong relationship between waiting times for

an appointment and living in a regional area. Age influences language difficulties and online/internet difficulties, with younger women more likely to report fewer difficulties. Older women with children under 18 living with them also reported fewer online/internet difficulties. This finding aligns with focus group discussions, with older women stating they relied upon young people in their household to assist with using services, and demonstrates the role of social bonds in reducing knowledge and skills gaps among a more vulnerable cohort of refugee women.

Young refugees know more about accessing essential services, reporting fewer difficulties compared to all other age brackets. Women reported more difficulties accessing essential services, especially in terms of language, transport and online/internet difficulties. Similarly, while refugees in regional areas reported similar levels of awareness of government services, they reported greater difficulty with access.

As with the previous cohort, the current cohort reported very high levels of trust in many institutions, including the police, the government and, to a lesser extent, the media. Refugee women and men also reported similar levels of trust in work or study colleagues, but women were less likely to trust people in their neighbourhood and the wider Australian community. The high level of trust in government and civic institutions provides a strong basis for government departments, essential services and other service providers to redouble their efforts to deliver culturally responsive services and in-language support and information, especially to older refugee women.



I was a fashion designer and my dream was to show people my talent. When I arrived to Australia, I was selected to participate in a fashion designer project with [settlement provider]. There was lots of meetings and workshops that I attended. At the end I received an award for my achievement. It was one of the happiest times of my life. Thank you Australia, you made my dream come true.
(Survey participant)

Newly arrived refugees are strongly motivated and committed to fulfil their social and civic responsibilities in Australia, which are grounded in secure residency and being treated fairly and equally.

Refugees have an almost universal sense – irrespective of gender – of wanting to contribute to Australia and fulfil social and civic responsibilities such as obeying the law, being self-sufficient, protecting the environment, treating others with respect and helping others. On the whole, this motivation has not been dented by COVID-19. Rates of volunteering were lower in the most recent survey, most likely due to public health restrictions, but remained comparable to rates of volunteering in a representative sample of the Australian population. Settlement services, civil society organisations and service providers should leverage the willingness of refugees to volunteer in meaningful and purposeful ways to strengthen two-way social and civic participation between refugees and other members of the Australian community.

As with the first wave of research, *Foundations for Belonging 2021* found very low reports of racial discrimination, at about half the rate of discrimination reported in the general Australian population. The one exception was Tibetan women in the focus groups, who reported racist incidents which they linked to anti-Asian racism as a result of COVID-19.

Refugee women and men were just as likely to report they had equal access to government services, that their rights are adequately protected and that they are treated fairly. This was also evident in responses to an open-ended question on what made them feel welcome in Australia, where “services took care of us”, “airport welcome” and “people are kind and helpful” feature among the most common unprompted themes. This motivation to contribute and sense of equity is likely generated by the fact that research participants have permanent and secure residency, and therefore have access to all of the responsibilities and rights that this entails.

Refugees across both cohorts of this research were overwhelmingly committed to acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the traditional owners of Australia, while almost two-thirds reported that it was easy to understand the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Australian society. Settlement services and civil society organisations should strengthen opportunities for refugees to increase their understanding of the central place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia.



Everyone is encouraging that I have young family and still able to study. We found the help and welcomed attitude in Centrelink and medical centres.

(Survey participant)

Newly arrived refugees by and large report high levels of digital inclusion, though some caution is needed due to research limitations.

Refugee women and men reported very high levels of access to the internet, to digital devices and to a sufficient data allowance. However, there were notable differences in the types of devices households had access to. These findings confirm what settlement services have raised in consultations with peak bodies such as the Settlement Council of Australia. Refugee households had more mobiles/smartphones but fewer laptops/desktops/tablets – devices typically associated with work and study. Worryingly, refugee households with children under 15 had fewer laptops/desktops/tablets – even compared to this same question with a 2017 representative sample of the Australian population. This tallies with anecdotal evidence in SSI’s experience of refugee families having to share a limited number of devices for education and study.

Compared to other Australians, the predominant uses of the internet reported by refugees were different, with less emphasis on banking and shopping and more use for educational, social and welfare purposes. Different patterns of usage were also evident among different demographics across the focus groups, with some women using digital technologies to assist with parenting and education and a younger group of Kurdish/Kurmanji women reporting high levels of confidence in their digital skills and, in fact, functioning as ‘digital enablers’ in their families. The survey data analysis found that gender, apart from younger women, was associated with a small but consistent gap in terms of digital ability. This mirrors to some extent the gap between women and men seen in some measures of social links such as independent living skills (e.g. knowing how to look for a job, being able to find the services you need online, etc.).

Finding assistance in using technology was one of the most discussed topics in the focus groups with women. This encompassed, for instance, assistance with access, like borrowing a laptop

from a family member, and assistance with use, like having a friend help to complete an online form. As governments and other service providers continue to shift towards digital and blended models of services, our findings suggest a need for close attention to potential English language difficulties, combined with technology barriers, especially for refugee women. Social bonds between refugee women and their friends and family can have an enabling function as peers and family members support each other in accessing and learning technology. This is something services can also look to leverage and amplify through structured peer-support opportunities.

The findings around digital inclusion in this report need to be interpreted with some caution as there were a limited number of questions that could be included. Also, we were unable to include survey questions from the annual Australian Digital Inclusion Index, so direct comparisons with a recent dataset of the Australian population were not possible. Instead, measures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics Household Use of Internet Technology, a somewhat dated dataset last collected in 2017, were used.

This research provides a second snapshot of settlement and integration among newly arrived refugees. On the whole, refugees are tracking well across the dimensions of integration measured in this research. No evidence of significant change over the two waves of data emerged despite the upheaval and uncertainty caused by COVID-19. Thus, there is no indication of any fracturing of refugees' sense of welcome, belonging and participation in the past, tumultuous year. Emerging evidence also points to some stability overall in terms of mental health outcomes among people on humanitarian visas in Australia during 2020 despite COVID-19 triggering memories of past traumatic events (Liddell BJ et al., 2021).

As with the first wave of data, we found disparities among refugee women in some aspects of social and civic participation which point to the need for a stronger consideration of gender in settlement policy and practice. The research also underscores the value of community engagement initiatives (Settlement Services International, 2019), particularly at the local level to foster opportunities for informal meeting and exchange, both within and between communities. As with the previous wave of data, this research indicates high rates of volunteering and a potential for refugees to volunteer in meaningful and purposeful ways to further expand social and civic participation (Volunteering Australia/Settlement Council of Australia, 2019). The research indicates opportunities in the area of digital inclusion that build on refugees' existing digital strengths (Settlement Council of Australia, 2020) and high levels of trust in the institutions of Australia.

Taken as a whole this study adds to the evidence of the crucial part played by social connections and rights and responsibilities in refugee settlement and integration. This study among newly arrived refugees is, at its heart, an exploration of belonging, seen as vital for integration. By illuminating the multidimensional nature of integration, we aim to further understand the strengths and aspirations of refugees and of the complementary roles and contributions of refugees, receiving communities and government at all levels in successful integration and building *Foundations for Belonging*.



Background

Australia has a long tradition since the end of World War II of providing permanent protection and resettlement to refugees. Policy settings, practice and the evidence base for refugee settlement in Australia and other resettlement countries have expanded and evolved since that time.

The international community has come together in recent years to reinvigorate the global governance of migration and responses to refugees, culminating in 2018 in the adoption of two Global Compacts, one on migration and one on refugees. Australia is part of the Compact on Refugees but did not formally adopt the Global Compact on Migration (Sherrell, 2019).

The world is experiencing a major human crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic which has impacted on the resettlement of refugees in third countries like Australia. The UNHCR estimates that the total number of people resettled globally fell from about 100,000 in 2019 to 34,000 in 2020 (Voice of America News, 21 June 2021). Since March 2020, the arrival of refugees under Australia's humanitarian program has virtually ceased due to international border restrictions. In October 2020, the Australian Government reduced the annual humanitarian intake from 18,750 to a ceiling of 13,750 places over the next four years.

There are media reports of countries such as New Zealand, Canada and the United States adapting resettlement programs to the global pandemic and, in some cases, bolstering their humanitarian intake. For example, while the number of refugees allowed into the United States fell from 85,000 in 2016 to 18,000 in 2020, the Biden administration has boosted the intake of refugees to 62,500 in 2021, with plans to boost it further to 125,000 (Voice of America News, 21 June 2021). At the time of writing, it is unclear when Australian international border restrictions will ease and allow entry to refugees who have already met all of the requirements to become permanent residents and be resettled in Australia.

Foundations for Belonging aims to extend the understanding of settlement and integration through painting a picture of the social and civic dimensions of settlement with longitudinal cross-sectional research. Central to this goal is gathering the perspectives of refugees and their everyday sense of welcome, participation and belonging as they navigate a new chapter of their lives in Australia. This current research builds on the findings of the first *Foundations for Belonging* research (Culos et al., 2020). Here in this

second iteration, *Foundations for Belonging 2021*, we report on a survey with a second cohort of newly arrived refugees conducted in late 2020 and focus groups in early 2021.

Foundations for Belonging 2021 is guided by similar overarching research questions around settlement and integration to build on and validate previous findings while also extending and addressing research gaps. The previous research indicated gender differences in relation to creating social bridges and accessing essential services (Culos et al., 2020). *Foundations for Belonging 2021* examines the settlement and integration trajectories of refugee women to explore these differences in more depth. In addition, in light of the significant impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on daily life which have entailed an acceleration to digital modes of education and employment and access to essential services, this second iteration of the research takes a closer look at digital inclusion among newly arrived refugees in Australia.

Similar to the previous research (Culos et al., 2020), *Foundations for Belonging 2021* followed multiple steps to enhance reliability and validity of the research. These included using existing validated survey items, a random stratified sampling strategy, and comparisons with the previous dataset (Culos et al., 2020), with an additional group from a longitudinal study of refugees and, for some indicators, with the general Australian population. In addition, focus groups with refugee women, undertaken after an initial analysis of the quantitative survey data, explored preliminary findings in more depth. Nonetheless there are limitations, described later alongside a detailed overview of the research methods (available online in Appendix 1).

There is considerable debate in public discourse, research and policy around refugee integration and settlement in Australia and internationally.

Australia's recent history includes countless stories of refugees who have contributed to the social, cultural, civic and economic fabric of the country. Australia's migration policy strives towards successful settlement and integration of migrants and refugees (Fozdar & Hartley, 2013). These policy settings are underpinned by a commitment to multiculturalism that supports newcomers to integrate and participate in Australia rather than placing the onus on migrants and refugees to assimilate (Department of Social Services, 2017). The Australian Government's multicultural policy sees economic and social integration contributing to a sense of worth and belonging that is vital to allow newcomers to thrive (Department of Social Services, 2017, p.17). Ultimately, settlement and integration are determined by the extent to which refugees "are able to become a valued citizen within their new country" (Correa-Velez, Gifford, & Barnett, 2010, p. 1406). As such, integration is not only about addressing needs; it is also about having "the opportunity to flourish, to be at home, to belong [which] is powerfully shaped by the prevailing social climate and structures that are openly inclusive or exclude" (Correa-Velez et al., 2010, p. 1406).

Integration is a much-debated topic, with challenges in terms of definition and measurement. International bodies like the OECD define integration as a two-way process of adaptation involving refugees and migrants and receiving societies – a process involving rights, obligations, access to services and the labour market, and identification of and respect for a core set of values that bind the newcomers and receiving communities for common good (OECD, 2011). At a policy level, there are diverse ways to examine settlement and integration. A prominent measure is the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), an international benchmark that assesses countries against eight domains including education, labour market mobility, access to citizenship and family reunion, political participation and health (MIPEX, 2020). In 2020, Australia ranked eight out

of 52 participating countries under the MIPEX, with strong results for policy settings in education, health and pathways to citizenship, and weaker results in labour market integration and pathways to permanent residence (MIPEX, 2020). Most research attention focuses on the functional aspects of integration – employment, housing, education and health (Cheung & Phillimore, 2017). In contrast, *Foundations for Belonging* focuses on the social and civic dimensions of settlement and integration.

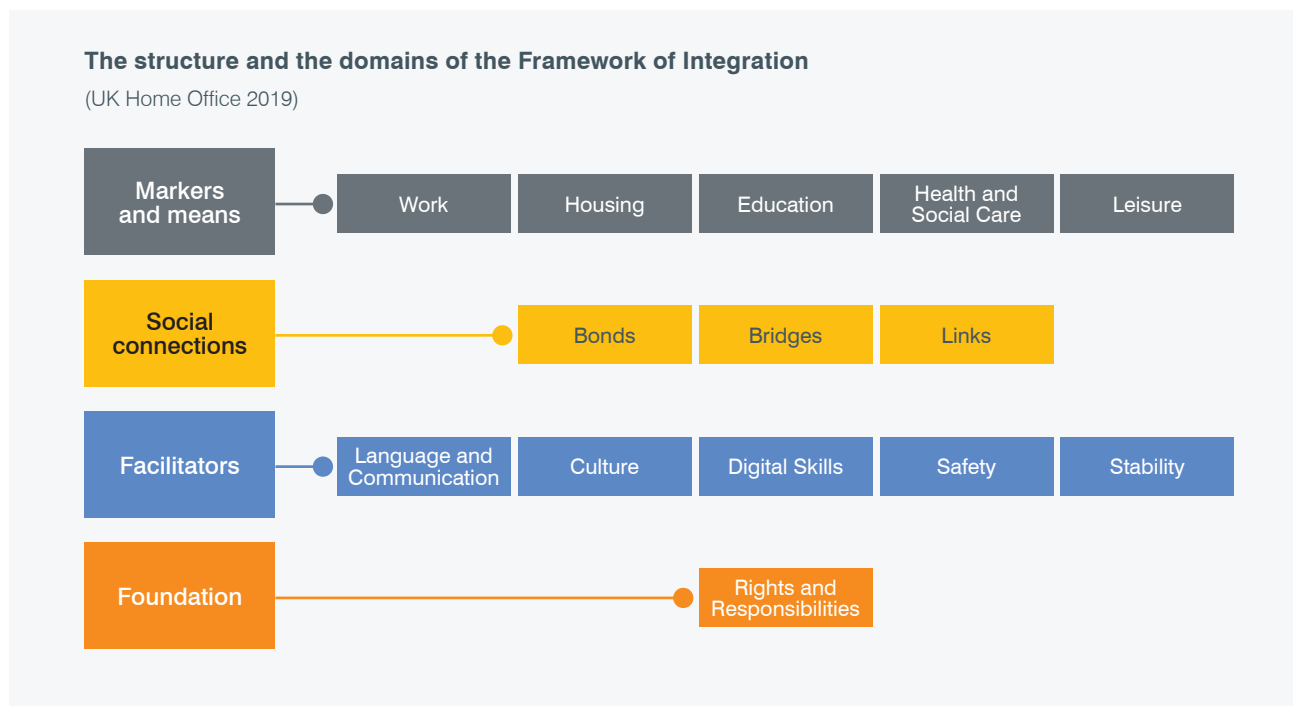
This research is framed by a comprehensive and multidimensional framework of settlement and integration.

An influential framework of integration originally developed by the UK Home Office in 2004 guides this research. The framework was developed through a rigorous consultation process with migrant and refugee communities, settlement sector organisations and policymakers (Ager & Strang, 2008). An updated and expanded framework was released in 2019 (UK Home Office, 2019) following an additional consultation process.

The key principles underpinning the framework are:

- **Integration is multidimensional** and depends on multiple factors encompassing access to resources and opportunities as well as social mixing.
- **Integration is multidirectional** and involves mutual adaptation by everyone in a society or community.
- **Integration is a shared responsibility** that depends on everyone taking responsibility for their own contribution, including newcomers, receiving communities and government at all levels.
- **Integration is context-specific** and needs to be understood and planned in relation to its particular context which influences the timeframe of outcomes (UK Home Office, 2019).

Under this framework the interdependencies and relationships between these various domains are vital to understanding the process and mechanisms underlying integration. To illustrate, there is ample evidence of social connections assisting with finding work, and health and local language proficiency also influencing refugee employment pathways (Brell, Dustmann, & Preston, 2020). Similarly, the domain of rights and responsibilities provides a basis for full and equal engagement within society, with flow-on impacts to other domains including health and education (Ager & Strang, 2008).



The Foundations for Belonging research is focused on social connections and the foundational level of rights and responsibilities.

Social connections in integration includes three related aspects: bonds, bridges and links. For refugees, social bonds involve strengthening relationships with their ethnic and cultural communities. Strang and Ager (2010, p. 598) note the “importance of bonds as a source of emotional support, self-esteem and confidence”. Family, however defined and wherever they live, is another dimension of social bonds. Refugees are impeded in their settlement when the safety and fate of family members is unknown or continues to be at risk (Strang & Ager, 2010), and the negative impacts of ongoing family separation on refugee settlement in Australia are well documented (Liddell et al., 2020; Wickes, van Kooy, Powell, & Moran, 2019).

Research indicates that there is no trade-off between social bonds and developing wider connections with the broader community. Rather, social bonds created through spaces such as places of worship, community events and organisations, and restaurants with home cuisine imbue refugees with confidence in their identity and a sense of feeling at home in their new environment (Elliott & Yusuf, 2014; Refugee Council of Australia, 2014; Strang & Ager, 2010).

The second aspect of social connections – social bridges – involves forming networks with other groups in the broader community in everyday encounters such as those that occur at shops, sports or school activities. For refugees, social bridges and social bonds are equally important, as acquiring both strikes “the balance between adapting to life in a new setting whilst paying homage to one’s homeland” (Elliott & Yusuf, 2014, p. 104). Expanding refugees’ social networks also develops trust in institutions (Strang & Ager, 2010) and, unsurprisingly, has also been shown to have benefits in terms of mental health (Nickerson et al., 2019).

Social links, the third aspect of social connections, involves engaging with the institutions of society such as local government and non-government services, civic participation and political processes. The role of these institutions in facilitating the integration of migrants and refugees is rarely examined in research (Grzymala-Kazlowska & Phillimore, 2018). Social links connect refugees with institutions and structures in society so they can contribute and benefit in a mutual exchange (UK Home Office, 2019). Conversely, social links can be undermined

through experiences of discrimination or perceived unfair treatment (Elliott & Yusuf, 2014).

The foundational domain of rights and responsibilities foregrounds access to rights, security and equality and the opportunity to contribute and fulfil responsibilities to strengthen belonging (Strang & Ager, 2010). At a core level, the refugee experience has been characterised as “one of being cast out, of being socially excluded, where belonging – to family, community and country – is always at risk” (Correa-Velez et al., 2010, p. 1399). Ager and Strang note that the rights and responsibilities domain focuses on “the extent to which refugees are provided with the basis for full and equal engagement within society” (2008, p. 176) and echoes how the OECD defines a socially cohesive society which “works towards the wellbeing of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalisation, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility” (OECD cited in Fonseca, Lukosch, & Brazier, 2019, p. 245).

Secure residency status is critical to substantive rights. Permanent residency is “in itself, instrumental in enabling integration, emphasising the [...] foundational place of policy on rights and citizenship on refugee integration [...] and belonging” (Strang & Ager, 2010, p. 596).

The role of gender has gained traction in refugee integration and settlement in recent years.

While women represent an equal proportion of those forced to flee war and persecution, considerations of gender have often been inadequately addressed in refugee research, policy and practice (Cheung & Phillimore, 2017; Hennebray & Petrozziello, 2019). Historically considerations of refugee integration were gender-blind, and thus “ignore[ed] the ways in which gender shapes migration, in particular the gendered realities and risks for women” (Hennebray & Petrozziello, 2019, p. 117). However, some progress has been made in recent years. An examination of the development and the ratified content of the Global Compact on Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees concluded that gains have been made to foreground gender (Hennebray & Petrozziello, 2019) though it is too early to say if this will lead to substantive change. Of the two, the Global Compact on Refugees is weaker in terms of actions, with gender having ‘equal-billing’ alongside age, disability and other diversity and vulnerability considerations (Hennebray & Petrozziello, 2019). In essence, this relegates gender to another

variable of vulnerability instead of a gender-responsive approach to the global governance of forced migration (Hennebry & Petrozziello, 2019). Predictably, research on gender and refugee integration has also been constrained with only qualitative research and/or limited exploration of the multidimensional aspects of integration (Cheung & Phillimore, 2017). *Foundations for Belonging 2021* aims to address this gap, to shed light on those aspects of social connections and rights and responsibilities that might warrant a more gender-responsive approach.

The UNHCR Women at Risk Program is one longstanding area of gender-responsive approaches to refugees and is designed to fast-track protection for women and girls, albeit at a small scale. Australia has a Woman at Risk visa for women and their dependants who are subject to persecution or are of concern to UNHCR, who are living outside their home country without the protection of a partner or relative and who are in danger of gender-based victimisation (Settlement Services International, 2014). Each year a quota – currently around 1,000 places, between 5 and 7% of the annual Australian humanitarian program intake – is set aside for Woman at Risk visa holders (Department of Home Affairs, 2020).

Interest in the digital inclusion of refugees has been growing in terms of settlement and integration.

Information and communication technology (ICT) has transformed almost every aspect of people's lives. COVID-19 has accelerated this change and elevated interest in refugees and digital inclusion. For refugees, as with other people, digital inclusion is "a critical aspect of social inclusion" (Alam & Imran, 2015, p.2) and encompasses the ability to effectively use "online and mobile technologies to improve skills, enhance quality of life, educate, and promote wellbeing, [and] civic engagement [...] across the whole of society" (Thomas et al., 2020, p.8). Research from the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) reveals a digital divide that largely follows the contours of intersectional barriers, especially income, employment and education (Thomas et al., 2020), meaning that "students, younger people, employed, higher-educated, and higher-income individuals are more likely to use the internet than lower-educated and lower-income individuals" (Felton, 2012, p. 5). As we note below, some research suggest that people from culturally diverse backgrounds may have greater access and digital ability than the Australian

population, though this can disguise important intersectional distinctions, such as gender, income and education levels (Thomas et al., 2020), and differences between migrants and refugees.

While the digital inclusion of refugees and migrants was generally under-researched in the past (Goodall, Ward, & Newman, 2010; Kenny, 2017; Leung, 2011a, 2011b), it has since received much more academic and political attention, most notably in Europe linked to the refugee 'crisis' in 2015 and 2016 (see, for example, Abujarour, 2018; Andrade & Doolin, 2016; European Commission, 2017; Merisalo & Jauhiainen, 2020) and to a lesser extent in Australia (see, for example, Alam & Imran, 2015; Leung, 2018; Shariati, 2019), amid a greater appreciation of the role of the use of ICT before, during and after resettlement. This interest in digital inclusion has also been raised by settlement services in consultation processes with peak bodies (Settlement Council of Australia, 2020).

The engagement of refugees with digital technologies points towards a potential for stronger digital inclusion.

There is now significant interest in how refugees use ICT to navigate settlement and, consequently, how receiving communities and settlement programs might utilise ICT to facilitate integration and social inclusion. For example, the UK Home Office Framework of Integration added a new domain – digital skills – in 2019 in recognition of digital technology's increased importance in settlement (UK Home Office, 2019). A significant challenge is that refugees are diverse and there can be stark differences in digital literacy among them: some have very advanced skills on arrival, whereas others have very limited skills (Shariati, 2019). For refugees in Australia, Lloyd et al. (2013) found that many need assistance to build skills in navigating digital platforms.

Digital platforms can enhance integration by facilitating social bridges and social links as well as maintaining or developing new social bonds. As part of settlement in a new country, refugees use ICT in everyday situations such as shopping (Shariati, 2019), transport (Massmann, 2018), health check-ups, online banking and job searches (Andrade & Doolin, 2016) and local language learning (Massmann, 2018) as well as to acquire knowledge about the receiving society including laws and regulations (Andrade & Doolin, 2016; Lloyd et al., 2013). In addition, ICT devices allow refugees to monitor events in their home country (Andrade & Doolin, 2016). Refugees use smartphones as their

main device but, once they become more settled, they use a broader range of devices (Massmann, 2018).

ICT allows refugees to maintain contact with friends and family in their homeland and around the world (Andrade & Doolin, 2016; Shariati, 2019) with resulting positive impacts on wellbeing and reduced negative feelings arising from family separation (Shariati, 2019). ICT also facilitates social bonds within cultural, ethnic and religious communities in the host country which are often geographically dispersed (Shariati, 2019), and allows for information sharing of settlement experiences and advice between newly-arrived and longer-resident refugees, which can “assist refugees to become less isolated, less marginalised and more a part of mainstream society” (Shariati, 2019, p. iv).

Despite the positive role of ICT in refugee settlement and integration, research has noted differences in terms of gender, age and education (O'Mara, Babacan, & Borland, 2010). A study of Iranian refugees in Australia (Shariati, 2019) has shown that women demonstrated lower digital skills and interacted less with Australian government departments than men, despite similar rates of tertiary education, which reveals the relationship between social links and digital skills and reflects the relationship between tertiary education and digital inclusion seen in the wider Australian community (Wilson, Thomas, & Barraket, 2019). Alam and Imram (2015) found that older refugees in regional Australia were more reluctant to use the internet while younger refugees attributed high value to the availability of internet access. Looking specifically at younger, newly-arrived refugees in Australia, Kenny (2017, p. 8) found that ICT was integral to multiple aspects of settlement, such as “maintaining important connections to family and friends overseas, connecting to local opportunities and resources, developing broader social networks and skills, and accessing information and tools to support their language acquisition and general knowledge about Australian culture and society”. Some differences with regards to digital inclusion have also been linked to cultural backgrounds, with Emmer et al. (2020) finding that participants from Syria and Iraq in their study were more likely to use ICT throughout their settlement journey than refugees from central Asia.

The evidence base for trends in digital inclusion is evolving in Australia to capture different segments of the community.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics gathered information on digital inclusion each year from 1996 in the Household Use of Information Technology (HUIT) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018) survey, as part of a larger annual survey. This was discontinued in 2017. Since 2015, the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) (Thomas et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2019) has measured digital inclusion each year across three areas: access, affordability and digital ability. The 2020 ADII found that culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) migrants demonstrated a high level of digital inclusion, above the Australian average. However, they also note that, due to the diversity of this group, internal differences may not be able to be captured by the ADII. To provide a more nuanced insight, an ADII case study on 164 CALD migrants who arrived in Australia after 2005 and settled in Shepparton, Victoria, was conducted in 2019. It revealed that CALD migrants showed higher rates of digital exclusion, mainly related to affordability (Thomas et al., 2020). However, participants demonstrated a high level of digital ability (87% compared to a 48% national average), reporting that “computers and technology gave them more control over their lives” and a similar proportion (86% compared to 35% national average) “are committed to learning about new technologies” (Wilson et al., 2019, p. 21). Looking at digital activities showed that “the level of engagement in some functional activities, such as email, internet banking and online commerce and transactions was substantially below the national average. [However,] use of the internet for searching for information related to education, employment, health and other essential government and technical services and activities was above the national average” (Thomas et al., 2020, p. 22). In our previous research among newly arrived refugees in Australia (Culos et al., 2020), we found that online/internet difficulties were a common barrier to accessing services especially for women. Consequently, we included additional items in the *Foundations for Belonging 2021* survey drawing on the conceptual areas of digital inclusion in ADII, namely access, affordability and digital ability. We drew questions from the Household Use of Information Technology (HUIT) survey and augmented this with an exploration of digital inclusion with refugee women in four focus groups in early 2021.



Findings

Survey Sample Demographics

Of the 418 survey respondents, 212 (51%) were female, 191 (46%) were male. Gender was missing for 15 respondents (3%).

The respondents live mostly in major cities with about 4% residing in a regional location of NSW (using Australian Bureau of Statistics definitions³) (Fig. 1) and respondents are predominantly (76%) between 25–54 years of age (Fig. 2).

All respondents held a permanent humanitarian visa and most arrived in Australia in 2018 (49%), with an average residency in Australia of 24 months at the time of the survey. More than 6 out of 10 arrived (64%) through the Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) visa (subclass 202), supported by a proposer (typically a relative) in Australia, and the sample included 14 (3%) Woman at Risk (subclass 204) visa holders (Fig. 3).⁴

Fig.1 Place of residence of survey respondents

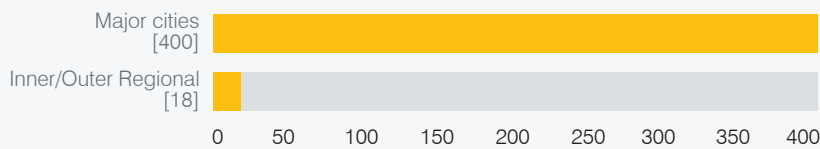
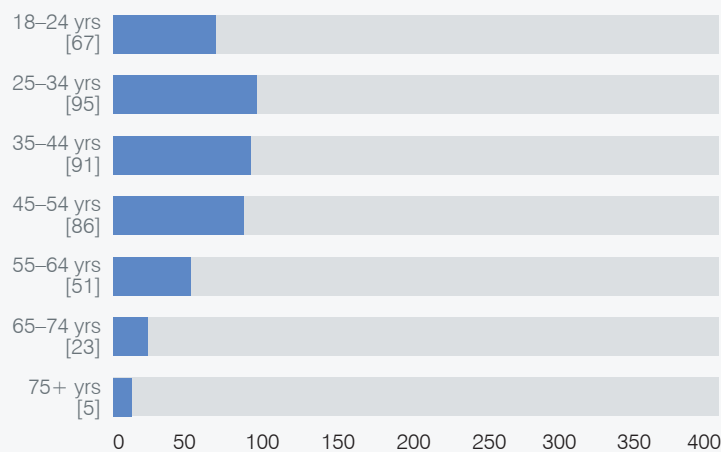


Fig.2 Age bands of survey respondents

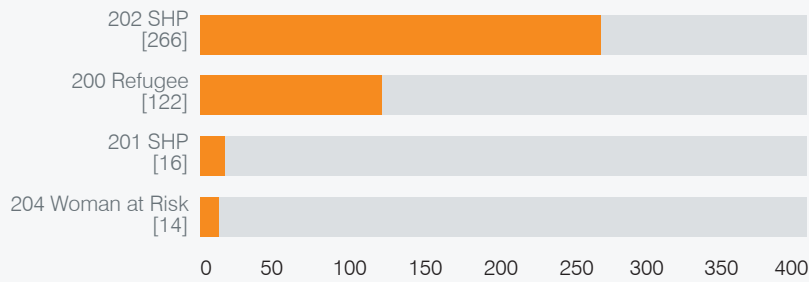


³ The Department of Home Affairs, and the Humanitarian Settlement Program, follow a different method of classifying regional areas of Australia.

⁴ Respondents in this research arrived on one of the following visa types:

- Refugee visa (subclass 200) for people who the UNHCR has referred to Australia for resettlement;
- In-country Special Humanitarian visa (subclass 201) for people who are still living in their country and have been unable to leave;
- Woman at Risk visa (subclass 204) for women who do not have the protection of a partner or a relative and are in danger of victimisation; and
- Special Humanitarian Program visa (subclass 202) for people subject to substantial discrimination amounting to a gross violation of human rights, and with a proposer in Australia.

Fig.3 Visa type of survey respondents



The most common citizenships in the sample were Iraq (205, 49%) and Syria (100, 24%), followed by Stateless Persons (66, 16%), Afghanistan (24, 6%) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (10, 2%).

Respondents spoke a wide variety of languages (the telephone survey was conducted in more than 10 different languages), with the most common first languages in the sample being Arabic (255), Assyrian (35), Tibetan (64), Kurdish/Kurmanji (20), Farsi (16) and Swahili (10).

Just under half of the respondents (47%) had children under 18 living with them and one in six (16%) reported having pre-school children under 5 living with them.

Focus Group Demographics

Four in-language focus groups were conducted with refugee women in early 2021 with the following participation: Tibetan (6), Arabic (8), Kurdish/ Kurmanji (6) and Assyrian (1).

Fig.4 Have you been given support in Australia from... (by survey)

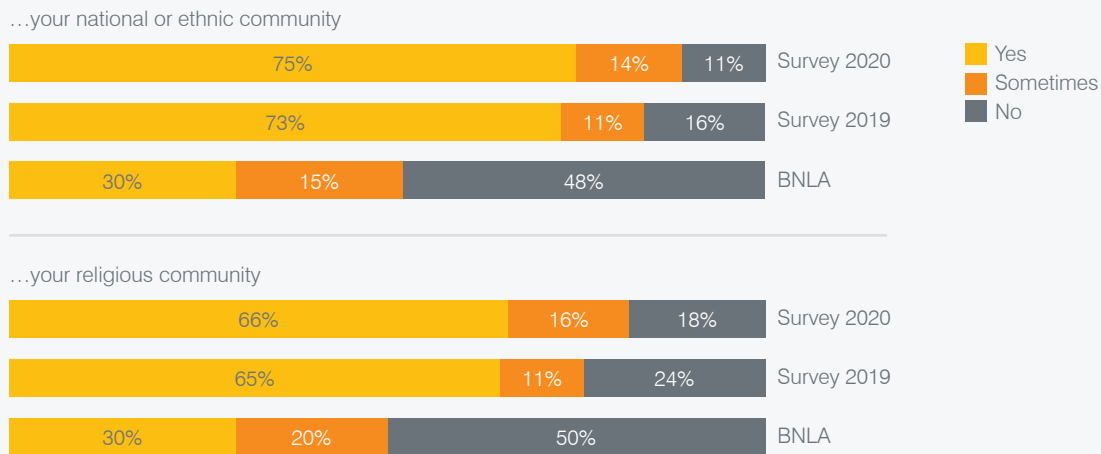
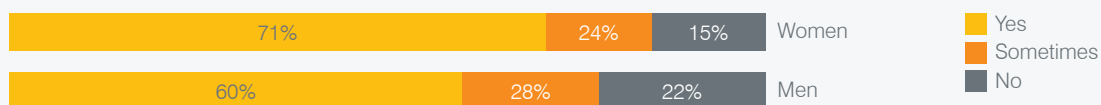


Fig.5 Do you feel you have been given support/comfort in Australia from your religious community? (by gender)



Social bonds

Social bonds relate to the connections people have with others from the same cultural background. Supportive relationships with people who share similar values, norms and expectations about life are an important initial step to establish connections in a new country. These bonds are generally – but not always – formed with family and friends who share the same culture, language and faith and contribute to a sense of belonging.⁵

Welcome

Most respondents, around six in 10, reported being given strong support in Australia from their national or ethnic community or from their religious community (Fig. 4) and the findings in the current survey in 2020 were almost identical to the previous survey results from 2019 (Culos et al., 2020). Building a New Life in Australia (BNLA⁶) respondents reported significantly less support (only about a third) from the community on these two indicators compared to both samples of *Foundations for Belonging* respondents.

Women were more likely to report stronger support on these two measures of social bonds than men (Fig. 5, Fig. 6) and this was statistically significant. There was some variation among women, with less support on both measures among Farsi-speaking women and the category of ‘Other’ languages. There was no significant correlation by age, apart from women aged over the age of 65 who were

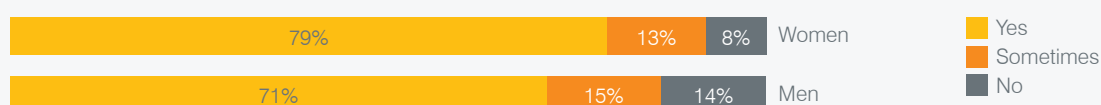
much stronger on both measures, and there was no correlation on either measure by women having young children living with them – either under 5 or under 18. Refugee women living in regional areas reported somewhat stronger responses on these two measures of social bonds. Women who were holders of a Special Humanitarian Program visa (subclass 202), in other words linked with a proposer (usually a relative) already in Australia, predictably reported higher rates of support from their national and ethnic community.

On another indicator of bonds, almost all the respondents (98%) feel able to practise their religion freely in Australia, which is virtually identical to the previous *Foundations for Belonging* findings (Culos et al., 2020).

Participation

Maintaining contact with family members is an important aspect of social bonds. The first item in this question in this current survey (Fig. 7) was changed to use of social media, after the option of email was rarely nominated by the previous cohort. Almost all respondents in the current cohort nominated social media as a daily or weekly way to stay in touch with friends and family (Fig. 6). There was more frequent usage of the two items that were repeated from the previous wave of data – exchanging text messages and exchanging audio/video calls – in the current cohort, with around 80–90% of respondents using these daily or at least once a week (Fig. 7).

Fig.6 Do you feel you have been given support/comfort in Australia from your national and ethnic community? (by gender)



⁵ UK Home Office Indicators of Integration Framework 2019.

⁶ For information on the BNLA (National Centre for Longitudinal Data, 2017) comparison group used in this study, see Methods in Appendix 1 available online.

Fig.7 On average, how often do you...? (by survey)

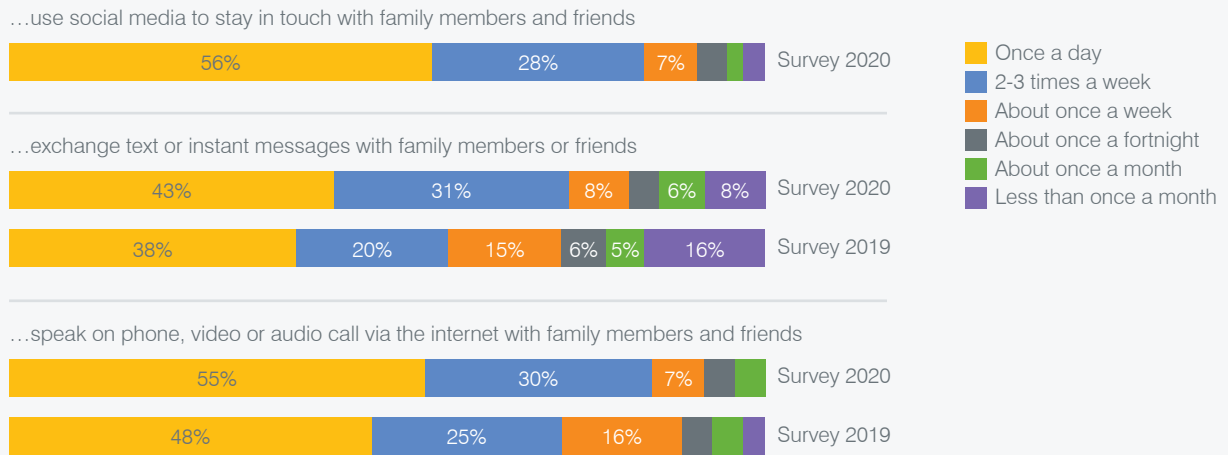


Fig.8 On average, how often do you speak on the phone/video/ audio call with family members or friends? (by gender)

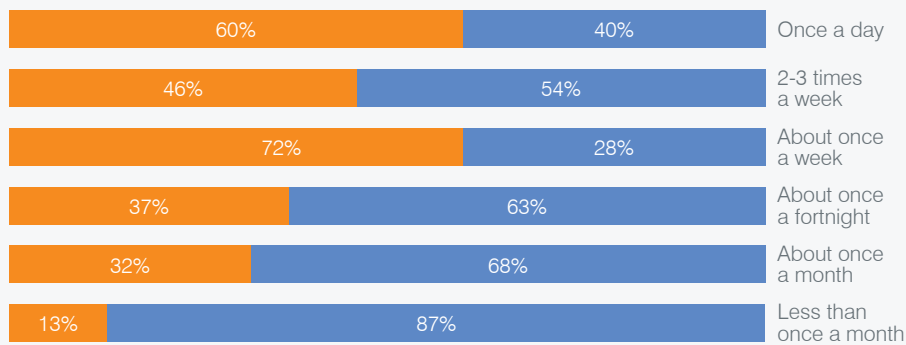
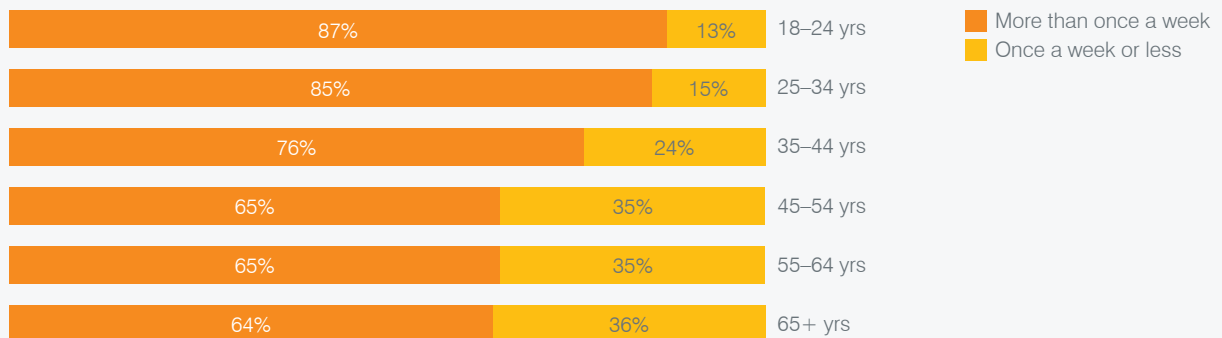


Fig.9 Women's use of social media to stay in touch with family and friends (by age)



Refugees are likely to have family members in countries of origin, countries of displacement, other countries and other parts of Australia, and all three communication methods – social media, text messages and audio/video calls – were frequently used. Their increased use in 2020 might well be related to a greater need for contact with friends and family due to the unfolding COVID-19 pandemic around the world.

There was a statistically significant relationship between gender and maintaining contact via phone/video/audio call with family members or friends, with women more likely to speak often with family and friends than men (Fig. 8).

Among women, age is significantly correlated to sending text/instant messages (Fig. 9), with younger women using these more frequently than older women (35 and over). Age was not significant among women in terms of the two other modes of communication.

Respondents living in a regional area used social media more often than those in urban areas, but

those respondents were younger than the rest of the sample, which may account in part for this result. There were also some differences between language backgrounds on social media use, but given small sample sizes in some of these language groups it is not possible to confirm if these are significant. There were no differences in social media use among women by visa type, though Woman at Risk visa holders (subclass 204) reported more frequent daily contact across all three modes of communication: social media, text and calls.

Women who had children under 18 living with them were more likely than other groups to use text/instant messages and to make phone/video/audio calls with family members or friends.

In the current 2020 survey, rates of participation in activities organised by their own ethnic or religious community (Table 1) dipped compared to our first *Foundations for Belonging* survey, which can be attributed to the impacts of COVID-19. An exception here is participation in cultural activities which showed a slight increase. In general, the findings on these measures in the 2020 survey were at least on

Table 1. Since you came to Australia, how often have you and/or the family members you live with been involved in any of these activities organised by your ethnic or religious community?

(by survey, percentage)

	Survey	Daily/Weekly	Monthly/ A few times a year or less	Never	Not applicable
School activities	Survey 2020	7	12	60	20
	Survey 2019	9	25	41	24
	BNLA	5	17	40	37
Sporting activities	Survey 2020	7	11	59	20
	Survey 2019	11	15	49	24
	BNLA	10	28	68	0
Leisure activities (e.g. movie nights, cooking classes)	Survey 2020	6	19	58	17
	Survey 2019	9	19	53	19
	BNLA	6	24	69	0
Cultural activities (e.g. festivals, special days)	Survey 2020	12	47	30	11
	Survey 2019	6	48	31	15
	BNLA	3	42	55	0
Attend a place of worship (e.g. a church or place of prayer)	Survey 2020	27	41	17	14
	Survey 2019	43	19	9	29
	BNLA	38	20	13	29

Table 2. Women’s attendance at a place of worship by language group (percentage)

	Weekly	Monthly	A few times a year or less	Never	Not applicable
Arabic	27	24	16	24	9
Assyrian	39	33	22	0	6
Tibetan	0	0	11	4	85
Farsi	43	0	29	29	0
Kurdish/Kurmanji	27	0	0	0	73
Swahili	67	0	33	0	0
Other	10	40	20	30	0

par in this cohort compared to BNLA respondents – a surprising finding in light of the downward pressure on participation we might expect due to COVID-19 restrictions at the time of the survey in late 2020. We found no significant differences in terms of participation between women and men, apart from some specific areas detailed below.

Among women, there was a significant relationship between age and participation in all activities, apart from attending a place of worship. In all other activities, women in the younger age bands tended to report more participation. There were some differences by language groups, with Kurdish/Kurmanji and Arabic-speaking background women reporting more frequent participation.

Among women, most respondents were attending on a weekly/monthly basis apart from Tibetan and Kurdish/Kurmanji respondents (Table 2). This appears unrelated to culture or gender per se. The Bilingual Guides pointed out that the Tibetan community in NSW currently has limited options to attend a place of worship and that the Ezidi community (speakers of Kurdish/Kurmanji) do not have a place of worship.

Similar to the trend seen in the previous survey cohort in 2019, there is a significant relationship between living in a regional area and more frequent participation among women, especially for school activities, sport and leisure, though this too might be due in part to the younger age of the regional respondents in the survey sample detailed earlier.

Of note, in this question there was a high level of ‘not applicable’ responses, which the Bilingual Guides conducting the telephone surveys attributed to respondents in this sample being unaware of relevant activities organised by their own ethnic and religious community.

Belonging

When asked about their friendship networks in Australia (Fig. 10), more than half reported a mix of people from their ethnic/religious community and other communities, which is consistent with the 2019 survey and BNLA respondents.

In our sample, women were slightly less likely than men to have a mixed friendship network (Table 3). Among women, there is a significant relationship between age and friendship networks, with younger women more likely to have mixed friendship networks and friends from other ethnic/religious communities. Woman at Risk visa holders (subclass 204) also tended to report more mixed friendships networks than other visa types.

In the focus groups, there were significant differences in the discussion of social bonds based on the demographics and life stage of the different groups. The younger Kurdish/Kurmanji cohort had strong transnational friendship and familial networks which they maintained through technology. They described the importance of friends scattered around the world due to displacement and resettlement, with whom they keep in close contact via messaging applications and social media. Some of these young women also mentioned long-distance relationships. In the Tibetan group, in contrast, most women were parents of school-aged children, and both social bonds and bridges tended to be formed around parent identities and children’s activities such as mothers’ groups or playgroups. Facebook and WhatsApp were commonly used for parent- and child-related socialising and activities. Older women in the Arabic group were more focused on their family connections than with friendship networks, spending the most time locally with their children and with family overseas via online communication.

Fig.10 Would you say that your friends in Australia are...? (by survey)

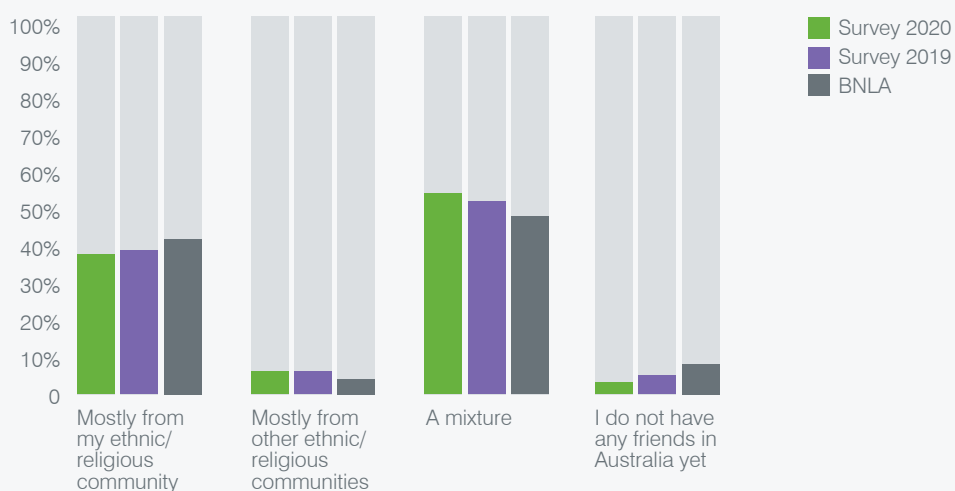


Table 3. Would you say that your friends in Australia are...? (by gender, percentage)

	M	F
Mostly from my ethnic/religious community	31	44
Mostly from other ethnic/religious communities	7	5
A mixture	61	46
I do not have any friends in Australia yet	1	5
Total	100	100

Key Points

- On the whole these findings validate the results from the previous research, with results consistent between current and previous waves of survey data (Culos et al., 2020).
- The latest data affirms that while refugees report strong social bonds with their families and their national, ethnic and/or religious communities, a majority had mixed friendship networks, while only a third had networks that were mainly with their own national/ethnic community even at this relatively early stage of settlement.
- Refugees' social bonds are underpinned by strong ethnic, religious and national community support. The frequency of participation in activities organised by their own community was relatively low, and lower than in the 2019 survey, across most activities, including attending a place of worship, attributable to COVID-19 restrictions in place during 2020.
- Refugees maintain family and social ties through regular contact using various digital technologies and platforms to message or speak to families and friends.

Women

- Gender influences social bonds, with women having stronger connections to their own community than men, reflected in significantly more frequent calls to family and friends. Younger women prefer social media to maintain ties.
 - Women were significantly more likely to report stronger support from their national/ethnic and religious community than men. Age did not influence this, apart from women aged over 65, who were much stronger on both measures of national/ethnic and religious community support.
- Women reported having less mixed friendship networks compared to men.
 - Among women there is a strong relationship between age and friendship networks: younger refugee women are more likely to have mixed friendship networks and friends from other ethnic/religious communities.
 - While there was no significant difference between women and men in terms of participation in activities organised by their ethnic or religious community, there was a significant correlation between age and participation. Women in the younger age groups and women living in regional areas are more likely to participate in all activities, apart from attending a place of worship.

Overall, the findings indicate that:

- Interactions with and support from ethnic and religious communities are a bedrock for social bonds among newly arrived refugees.
- Women from refugee backgrounds may need different forms of support at different ages to build and sustain mixed friendship networks.
- Digital access and inclusion are significant to the maintenance of social bonds both locally and transnationally, indicating the potential for digital communications for locally-based ethnic and religious community organisations and others to reach newly arrived refugees.

Social Bridges

Establishing social bridges with people from other cultural backgrounds is another important dimension of social connections, and critical to establishing the 'two-way' interaction at the heart of integration. Creating bridges to other communities opens up opportunities for broadening cultural exchange and understanding and provides a pathway for refugees to contribute to social and cultural life.

Welcome

About nine in 10 respondents felt that they have been made to feel welcome in Australia (Fig. 11) most of the time or always – similar to the 2019 survey cohort of *Foundations for Belonging* and refugees in BNLA.

There was a significant relationship between gender and feelings of welcome in Australia, with women statistically more likely to nominate weaker perceptions of support than men (Table 4).

Table 4. Do you think that you have been made to feel welcome in Australia? (by gender, percentage)

	M	F
Always	76	72
Most of the time	20	15
Some of the time	4	12
Never	0	1
Total	100	100

Fig.11 Do you think that you have been made to feel welcome in Australia? (by survey)

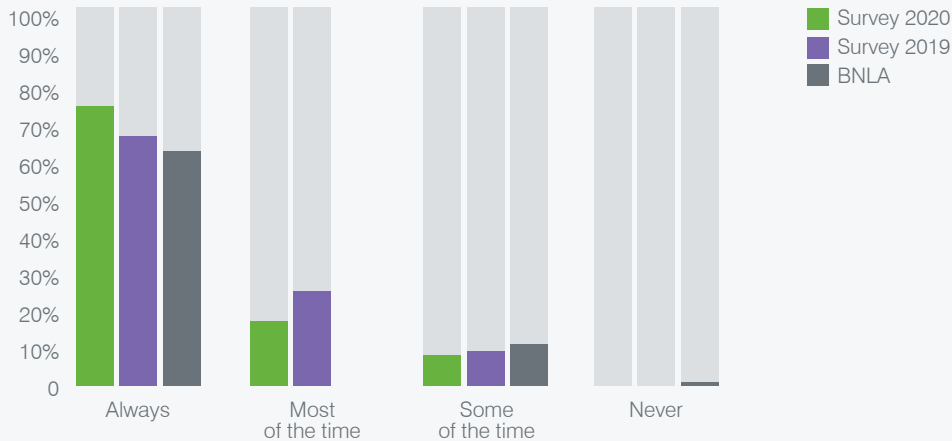
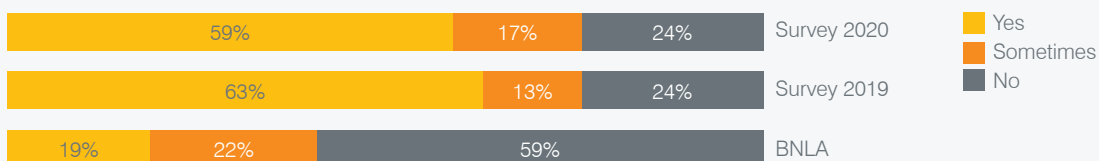


Fig.12 Do you feel you have been given support/comfort in Australia from other community groups? (by survey)



Among women, refugees in regional areas feel significantly less welcome than women in major cities. There was a significant difference among language groups, where women who speak Kurdish/Kurmanji were far less likely to feel welcome. However, as Kurdish/Kurmanji speakers made up almost all of our sample living in regional areas, this is not surprising. We found no other significant differences on feelings of welcome among women grouped by visa type, age or having children living with them.

Over three-quarters of respondents reported at least some support from community groups other than their own, a finding that is virtually identical to the 2019 survey cohort (Fig. 12) and almost double what BNLA respondents indicate on this same measure. This marked difference suggests an increase in activities by local communities in Australia to welcome refugees in recent years. The BNLA

comparison group data was collected in late 2015 and early 2016. The marked differences between the two *Foundations for Belonging* cohorts and BNLA on this measure may be due to the significant global attention on refugees as a result of the displacement of Syrian-conflict refugees in the past five years.

Among women, there was considerable variation among language groups, with Farsi and the language category 'Other' feeling less supported by other community groups (Table 5).

The overwhelming view of respondents in the 2020 survey is that their local area is a place where people from different national and ethnic backgrounds get along well together and are willing to help their neighbours (Table 6), a finding similar to the 2019 survey cohort. This indicates that COVID-19 conditions have not markedly changed refugees' generally positive feelings about their local community.

Table 5. Women feeling supported by other community groups by language group (percentage)

	Swahili	Assyrian	Arabic	Kurdish/ Kurmanji	Tibetan	Farsi	Other
Yes	100	72	69	37	4	0	0
Sometimes	0	22	11	36	92	0	0
No	0	6	20	27	4	100	100
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 6. To what extent do you agree with the following statements...? (by survey, percentage)

	2020 Survey	2019 Survey	MSC Nov. 2020
My local area is a place where people from different national or ethnic backgrounds get along well together			
Strongly agree/Agree	90	90	84
Neither agree nor disagree	10	9	2
Disagree/Strongly Disagree	0	1	14
Total	100	100	100
People in my local area are willing to help their neighbours			
Strongly agree/Agree	74	79	84
Neither agree nor disagree	19	18	3
Disagree/Strongly Disagree	7	3	13
Total	100	100	100

These two items are taken from Mapping Social Cohesion (MSC), a major annual survey of Australian community attitudes on a range of social issues. In comparison to the broader community sample in MSC, refugee respondents in this study were less likely to express disagreement with these statements and indicated a more positive sentiment about their local area than other Australians (1–7%, Disagree/Strongly Disagree compared to 13–14% in MSC 2020).⁷

Gender influenced sentiment about the local area being a place where people from different national and ethnic backgrounds get along with each other. Our findings indicate that women are significantly more likely to have a negative or neutral attitude to their neighbourhood (Table 7). Among women, there were also some significant differences in terms of language groups, with women who speak Kurdish/Kurmanji and Assyrian more likely to have positive attitudes than other language groups. There were no other evident variations by visa type or age or having children among women but respondents living in regional areas had more positive attitudes, repeating the pattern seen in other measures with a cross-over between Kurdish/Kurmanji and regional respondents.

Table 7. My local area is a place where people from different national or ethnic backgrounds get along well together (by gender, percentage)

	M	F
Strongly agree	39	27
Agree	54	60
Neither agree nor disagree	5	13
Disagree	0	1
Strongly disagree	NA	NA
(There are not enough immigrants in my neighbourhood to have an impact)	1	0
Total	100	100

In relation to attitudes about the willingness of people in the local area to help their neighbours (Table 6), there was no significant difference between the attitudes of women and men.

⁷ Mapping Social Cohesion 2020, The Scanlon Foundation/Monash University.

Participation

When asked about their participation in social activities organised by the wider community, there was a slightly lower response in the 2020 survey than in the 2019 survey across all activities (Table 8). This can again be attributed to the impact of COVID-19 restrictions. About 1 in 4 reported being involved in school activities and the 2020 responses were broadly comparable to BNLA respondents. As with the set of questions on community activities organised by their own ethnic/religious community (Table 1), there was a high rate of ‘not applicable’ responses.

Gender was not significantly associated with participation in these community activities, but women are more likely to participate in school activities and parent support groups, reflecting the gendered nature of parenting in many contexts.

Among women, given the relatively low rates of participation in virtually all of these activities, it is hard to be definitive about the relationships between women’s characteristics and participation. That said, there is significant variation across activities by language groups, place of residence and age. In general, younger women and women in regional areas are more likely to participate in sport activities and, unsurprisingly, youth groups, while women aged between 25 and 54 are more involved in school activities and women living in cities are more likely to participate in leisure activities.

When given scenarios about behaviours that indicate social bridges and trust in their neighbours, about four in 10 respondents in the 2020 survey would feel comfortable asking their neighbours to keep a set of spare keys to their home in case of emergency (Table 9). Slightly more, about half of respondents, would feel comfortable asking neighbours to help with shopping in case of illness (Table 9). The main differences between the 2019 and 2020 survey results was in the middle ground with a shift in 2020 to reporting being ‘fairly uncomfortable’ and little change in reports of being ‘very comfortable’/‘very uncomfortable’.

Women were statistically more likely to express discomfort in relation to leaving a set of keys with neighbours (Fig. 13) compared to men. Among women, those living in regional areas were less comfortable and among the language groups women who speak Kurdish/Kurmanji or Tibetan were significantly more likely to be uncomfortable to leave a set of keys, but there were no differences by visa type, age or having children living with them.

Table 8. Since you came to Australia, how often have you and/or the family members you live with been involved in any of these activities organised by groups other than your ethnic or religious community?

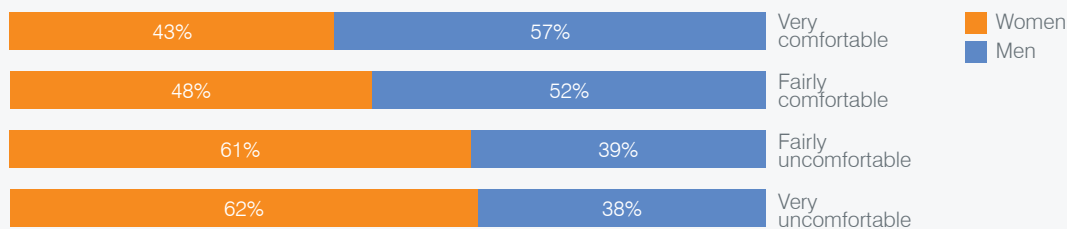
(by survey, percentage)

		Daily/Weekly	Monthly/ A few times a year	Never	Not applicable
School activities	Survey 2020	9	19	55	17
	Survey 2019	13	32	38	18
	BNLA	6	17	39	38
Sporting activities	Survey 2020	4	11	66	18
	Survey 2019	9	19	49	22
	BNLA	10	21	69	0
Leisure activities (e.g. movie nights, cooking classes)	Survey 2020	5	17	63	15
	Survey 2019	6	20	54	20
	BNLA	5	23	72	0
Parent support groups	Survey 2020	0	12	68	20
	Survey 2019	2	16	59	23
	BNLA	2	9	50	38
Self-improvement activities (e.g. coping with stress, exercise class)	Survey 2020	8	11	64	17
	Survey 2019	6	20	55	20
	BNLA	4	17	79	0
Youth groups	Survey 2020	1	8	63	28
	Survey 2019	2	14	59	24
	BNLA	3	15	82	0

Table 9. Indicators of social bridges (by survey, percentage)

	Very comfortable	Fairly comfortable	Fairly uncomfortable	Very uncomfortable
How comfortable would you be asking a neighbour to keep a set of keys to your home for emergencies, for example if you were locked out?				
Survey 2020	16	23	42	19
Survey 2019	16	33	28	24
If you were ill and at home on your own, and needed someone to collect a few shopping essentials, how comfortable would you feel asking a neighbour to do this for you?				
Survey 2020	22	28	36	15
Survey 2019	22	38	22	18

Fig.13 How comfortable would you be asking a neighbour to keep a set of keys to your home for emergencies, for example if you were locked out? (by gender)



Neither gender, age or visa type was significant in the case of asking a neighbour to do shopping in case of illness but there is a significant decrease in comfort among women who live in regional areas/ who speak Kurdish/Kurmanji – a pattern repeated across other measures as well.

Belonging

About two-thirds of respondents in the 2020 survey found it very easy/easy to make friends in Australia and understand the Australian ways/culture, but about four in 10 find it hard to talk to their Australian neighbours (Table 10). This may reflect language barriers, rather than a lack of comfort with their neighbours, given the findings in other measures show high levels of comfort with neighbours. The 2020 cohort reported very similar responses to the 2019 cohort and both cohorts expressed greater ease than BNLA respondents on all three measures (Table 10).

Table 10. Since you came to Australia, how easy have you found it to...? (by survey, percentage)

		Very easy	Easy	Hard	Very hard
Make friends in Australia	Survey 2020	9	55	33	3
	Survey 2019	14	52	29	5
	BNLA	10	44	39	8
Talk to your Australian neighbours	Survey 2020	5	51	38	5
	Survey 2019	9	48	35	9
	BNLA	8	37	42	13
Understand Australian ways/ culture	Survey 2020	8	61	27	4
	Survey 2019	9	60	29	2
	BNLA	9	48	35	7

Women are statistically more likely to have difficulties in talking to their Australian neighbours than men (Fig. 14).

Among women, 'understanding Australian ways' was reported to be harder by women who speak Kurdish/Kurmanji and significantly easier for Arabic-speaking women. Women who speak Kurdish/Kurmanji were also significantly more likely to find it harder to make friends in Australia but there were no other variations in terms of age or place of residence.

Among women, those holding Woman at Risk visas (subclass 204) were more likely to report finding it easier to talk to their Australian neighbours and report 'understanding Australian ways', though neither of these were statistically significant.

Almost nine out of 10 respondents report that they feel part of the Australian community always or most of the time (Fig. 15), similar to responses reported in the 2019 survey and in BNLA.

There was no statistical difference by gender, age, visa type or place of residence. Among women there were some small variations, with women on Special

Humanitarian Visas (202) feeling more part of the Australian community, and women in regional areas feeling less part of the Australian community.

In focus groups, most women expressed a strong desire to form connections and friendships outside of their own ethnic group. The main challenges they faced in forming social bridges were language barriers and the fact that people are often busy with their own lives. Members of the Tibetan focus group, for example, mentioned they had joined local mothers' groups but had struggled to participate because of their limited English, and ultimately felt "more comfortable" within their own Tibetan-speaking community networks. However, in the focus groups it was also apparent that small positive encounters and interactions with neighbours and in public spaces were significant to feelings of belonging for refugee women, even if in-depth communication and connection were limited due to language barriers. Participants in the Arabic focus group, for example, mentioned a number of these small positive encounters that generated feelings of welcome and belonging:

Fig.14 Since you came to Australia, how easy have you found it to talk to your Australian neighbours? (by gender)

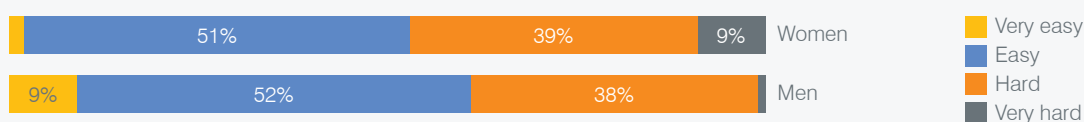
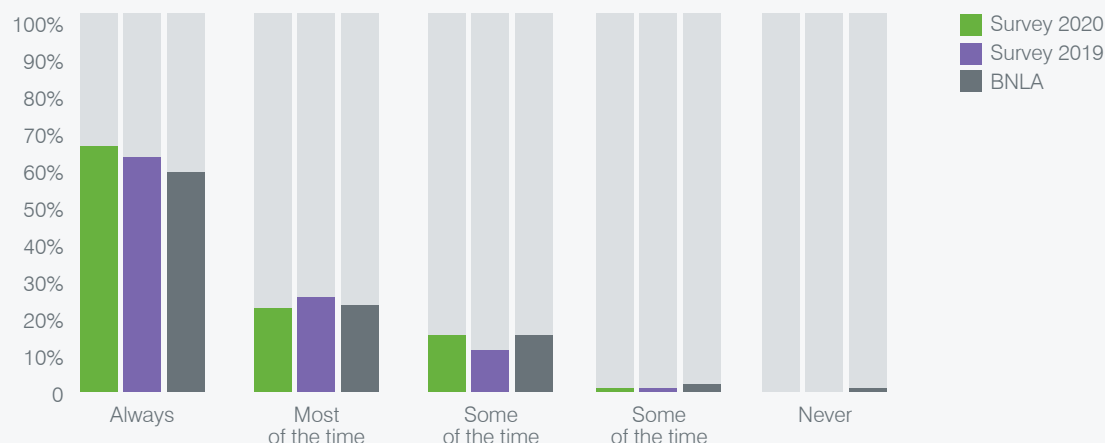


Fig.15 Do you feel a part of the Australian community? (by survey)



“

I have an Australian neighbour. She says 'hi' but she doesn't come to inside my house and I don't go into their house. But when I cook some food, I go and take something for them [...] and if my car is broken down on the road and parked, someone will stop and help me. I was one time on the bus and one Australian lady next to me tried to have a conversation. Some Asian neighbours also once left some chocolates in front of my house – a gift to make us feel welcome.

“

So generally people smile, they like come and say 'hi', friendly. If my mum is walking on the street, the Australians give her the wave and smile to her. But language is the first barrier. So, I have Italian neighbours, and we can't communicate with each other, but our kids, like the sister, will translate to the parents.



Key Points

- These results validate the previous wave of research, with a strong level of consistency between the current findings and the previous survey data (Culos et al., 2020).
- The findings challenge perceptions that refugees are hesitant to mix with the broader Australian community or that English language proficiency is a prerequisite to social bridges, although language barriers remain significant to in-depth interactions.
- Refugees report a very strong sense of being welcomed in Australia and being part of the Australian community. They report much higher levels of support from community groups other than their own, compared to other refugees in Australia.
- Refugees overwhelmingly view their local areas as places where people from different backgrounds get along, which was higher than responses to the same measure in an annual national survey of the general population in Australia. The reported willingness of neighbours to help each other out was slightly weaker among refugees compared to the general population.
- When given scenarios to gauge trust in their neighbours, the majority of refugees were comfortable in an emergency to leave a set of keys and, in the case of illness, to ask a neighbour to help with shopping.
- About two-thirds of refugees find it very easy/easy to make friends in Australia and understand the Australian ways/culture, but about four in 10 find it hard to talk to their Australian neighbours, which we speculate is most likely due to language barriers, given the largely positive sentiment on other measures of social bridges with neighbours.
- Interestingly, social bridges seem to be fostered through everyday encounters and experiences, as there were relatively low rates of participation in formal community activities such as school activities, parent support groups and youth groups.

Women

- Women are less likely to feel welcomed in Australia compared to men but were equally as likely as men to feel a part of the Australian community.
- Gender influenced attitudes about the local area being a place where people from different backgrounds get along: women are significantly more likely to have a negative or neutral attitude to their neighbourhood.
- Among women, there were also some significant differences in terms of language groups, with women who speak Kurdish/Kurmanji and Assyrian and regional respondents more likely to have positive attitudes towards people getting along in their neighbourhood.
- In response to scenarios about their neighbours, women were more likely to express discomfort in relation to leaving a set of keys with neighbours but equally as likely as men to rely on a neighbour to do shopping if needed. Refugee women in regional areas and Kurdish/Kurmanji speakers were less comfortable in relation to both of these scenarios.
- On the whole, women are equally as likely as men to report that it is easy to make friends in Australia and understand Australian ways, but women were statistically more likely to report difficulties talking to their Australian neighbours.
- Women have similar levels of participation as men in activities organised by communities other than their own. That said, older women are more likely to participate in school activities and parent support groups, reflecting the gendered nature of parenting, whereas younger women and women in regional areas participate more in sports and youth groups.

Overall, the findings indicate that:

- Refugees, despite language barriers, are developing social bridges through friendship networks and have a positive sense of welcome and trust in neighbours and neighbourhoods even at this relatively early stage of settlement. This provides strong evidence for the value of community engagement initiatives that facilitate meeting and exchange between receiving communities and newly arrived refugees.
- Women are as likely as men to report ease in making friends in Australia but more likely to report difficulties in talking to their Australian neighbours, which suggests more targeted engagement and support may be warranted for women.
- These emerging social bridges are grounded in the sense of welcome and support offered by the broader community at the local level.

Social Links

Social links refer to engagement with the institutions of society, such as government and non-government services, adding a third dimension to social connections involved in settlement and integration. Social links exist where a person is able to engage with and benefit from essential and other government services, and able to develop a sense of independence and trust in the institutions of society.

Welcome

Almost nine in 10 respondents had a deep level of trust in the police and the government (Table 11). By combining 'A lot' and 'Some' responses in relation to trust, a similar proportion of respondents, about eight in 10, trusted the media and the people they work and study with. Similar levels of trust and a similar ranking order were found in the 2019 survey cohort and among BNLA respondents. Taken together with evidence from focus group data, this suggests that these levels of trust in the country of settlement are likely to be related to refugees comparing life in Australia to their past experiences of war, conflict and state-based persecution which form the basis for meeting the UN Convention criteria for refugee status.

Table 11. How much do you trust the following groups of people...? (by survey, percentage)

		A lot	Some	A little	Not at all
People in your neighbourhood	Survey 2020	28	42	21	9
	Survey 2019	28	48	18	6
	BNLA	27	50	17	6
People in the wider Australian community	Survey 2020	24	45	21	10
	Survey 2019	21	47	23	9
	BNLA	27	52	16	5
The police	Survey 2020	84	12	3	1
	Survey 2019	88	9	2	1
	BNLA	70	22	6	3
People you work/study with	Survey 2020	50	33	12	5
	Survey 2019	45	35	11	9
	BNLA	36	48	12	4
The media	Survey 2020	39	41	15	6
	Survey 2019	43	40	13	4
	BNLA	30	43	18	9
The government	Survey 2020	86	11	2	1
	Survey 2019	85	12	2	1
	BNLA	70	22	6	2

Women have significantly less trust in people in the wider community and people in the neighbourhood compared to men (Table. 12).

Table 12. How much do you trust the following groups of people...? (by gender, percentage)

	M	F
People in the wider Australian community		
A lot	26	22
Some	46	43
A little	23	20
Not at all	5	15
Total	100	100
People in your neighbourhood		
A lot	33	24
Some	40	43
A little	21	21
Not at all	6	12
Total	100	100

Among women, there were differences by language groups with women who speak Kurdish/Kurmanji having significantly less trust across all elements compared to other language groups. Women living in regional areas, mostly Kurdish/Kurmanji speakers, have less trust in the wider community, government and the police than women in the major cities. Woman at Risk visa holders (subclass 204) were even more trusting of government but less trustful of people in the wider Australian community, though, due to the small sample size of these visa holders, we need to interpret this with some caution.

Among women age influences trust, with young women (18–24) reporting significantly less trust towards the wider community, the police and the government.

Participation

More than eight out of 10 respondents would know very well or fairly well how to get help in an emergency or from the police, and use public transport, with slightly less reporting knowing how to get help for services they need through the internet, find out about government benefits, or find a school or childcare (Table 13). About six in 10 would know how to find somewhere to live and use bank services (Table 13). The lowest rates of knowledge were around looking for a job and finding out about their rights. The rate and scale of responses in the 2020 survey were lower than those of the 2019 cohort. Compared to BNLA respondents,⁸ the 2020 cohort still reported a higher knowledge on these independent living skills (Table 13).

Women reported less knowledge than men in navigating all aspects of social links (see one example at Table 14). Woman at Risk visa holders (subclass 204) had less knowledge of using bank services or public transport and finding help through the internet although, due to the small number of these visa holders in the survey, this finding would require further research to determine its broader significance.

Young women (18–24) reported significantly more knowledge and capacity against all of these indicators compared to women in older age groups. That said, older women (over 50) with children under 18 living with them with were significantly more likely to have knowledge in relation to finding help for services they need through the internet, getting help from the police and using public transport, which suggests children might play a role in assisting older women in their households with social links. This was confirmed in focus groups, where the women who reported the least problems connecting to services were older women with teenage or adult children and whose children played a key role in managing their access to services. When asked about their access to language support, about two-thirds of the respondents reported that they have always been able or are usually able to get interpreting assistance when needed (Fig. 16) with a slight increase compared to the 2019 cohort. There were no significant differences with respect to gender, age, place of residence, visa type or language group.

In a multiple response question about who provided interpreting assistance, respondents mostly nominated government interpreters and family and friends.

⁸ In the original question in the BNLA Wave 3 survey, there is no option for "Find somewhere to live".

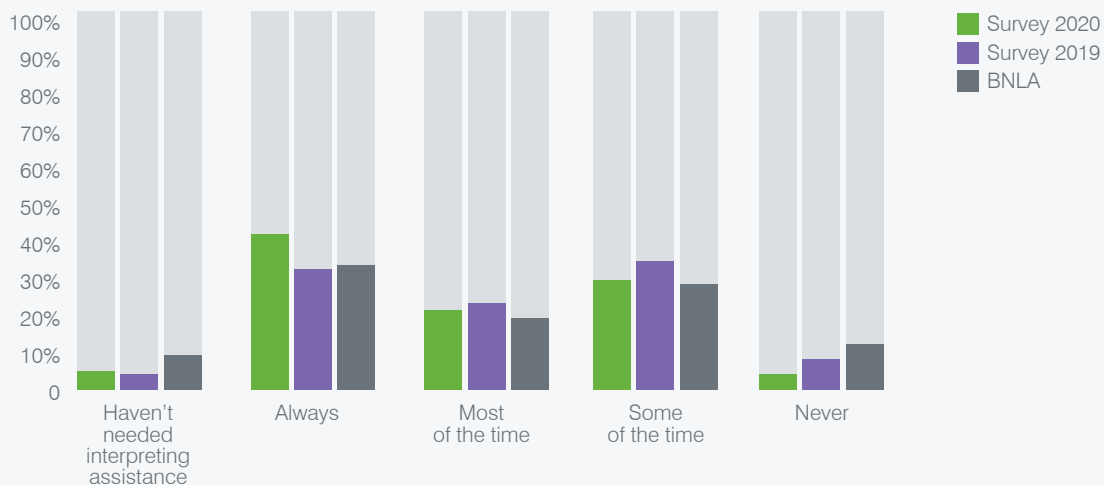
Table 13. If you had to, would you know how to...? (by survey, percentage)

		Would know very well	Would know fairly well	Would know a little	Wouldn't know at all
Find somewhere to live	Survey 2020	28	35	18	19
	Survey 2019	33	44	23	0
	Not in BNLA Wave 3				
Look for a job	Survey 2020	16	26	26	32
	Survey 2019	26	34	40	0
	BNLA	11	20	30	39
Use public transport (e.g. bus, train)	Survey 2020	53	27	12	8
	Survey 2019	54	33	13	0
	BNLA	42	27	20	11
Find a school or childcare for children (if Q3 Yes)	Survey 2020	39	30	18	13
	Not in Survey 2019				
	BNLA	17	23	31	29
Get help in an emergency	Survey 2020	47	30	14	9
	Survey 2019	55	33	12	0
	BNLA	33	30	23	14
Use bank services (e.g. open an account, get a loan)	Survey 2020	34	27	17	22
	Survey 2019	39	37	24	0
	BNLA	23	25	24	28
Find out what government services and benefits are available	Survey 2020	36	33	17	14
	Survey 2019	35	36	29	0
	BNLA	20	22	34	24
Find out about your rights (e.g. legal rights, tenancy rights, etc.)	Survey 2020	27	26	20	27
	Survey 2019	28	41	31	0
	BNLA	18	24	34	24
Get help from the police	Survey 2020	50	28	13	9
	Survey 2019	53	32	15	0
	BNLA	32	28	24	16
Find and get help through the internet or mobile apps for services you need (e.g. MyGov, TAFE, Medicare)	Survey 2020	32	30	19	19
	Not in Survey 2019				
	Not in BNLA Wave 3				

Table 14. If you had to would you know how to find and get help through the internet or mobile apps for services you need (e.g. MyGov, TAFE, Medicare)? (by gender, percentage)

	M	F
Would know very well	38	26
Would know fairly well	34	28
Would know a little	13	23
Wouldn't know at all	15	23
Total	100	100

Fig.16 How often have you been able to get interpreting assistance in Australia when you needed it? (by survey)



Belonging

When asked about access to government services, the most common difficulties were language difficulties, waiting times for an appointment and online/internet access difficulties (Table 15). Language difficulties were higher and waiting times and online/internet difficulties were lower than what was reported in 2019 but the ranking order of difficulties was unchanged. In terms of difficulties accessing government services,⁹ language difficulties and long waiting times for an appointment were the most frequent responses among BNLA respondents as well.

Overall there were no major differences between women and men apart from a statistically significant relationship between gender and transport difficulties (Table 16).

Among women there is a significant correlation between waiting for an appointment and living in a regional location compared to a major city, reflecting the widespread reports of constraints in access to essential services in regional areas. Predictably, women speaking Kurdish/Kurmanji also nominate long waiting times more than other language groups. Woman at Risk visa holders (subclass 204) were more likely to report transport difficulties, not knowing where to get help and online/internet difficulties, although, as with all findings on this group, the small sample size means this requires further research to be conclusive.

⁹ In the original question in the BNLA Wave 3 survey, there is no option for "Online/internet difficulties".

Table 15. Now thinking about government services (e.g. Medicare, Centrelink, public housing, hospitals), have any of the options below, if any, made it difficult to get help from these services? (by survey, percentage)

		Yes	No
I did not know where to get help	Survey 2020	12	88
	Survey 2019	21	79
	BNLA	18	82
Transport difficulties	Survey 2020	15	85
	Survey 2019	18	82
	BNLA	21	79
Language difficulties	Survey 2020	68	32
	Survey 2019	59	41
	BNLA	55	45
I was afraid that my information would not be kept private	Survey 2020	6	94
	Survey 2019	10	90
	BNLA	10	90
I had to wait a long time for an appointment	Survey 2020	40	60
	Survey 2019	49	51
	BNLA	34	66
I asked for help but did not get it	Survey 2020	9	91
	Survey 2019	15	85
	BNLA	11	89
I haven't used any Government services	Survey 2020	6	94
	Survey 2019	10	90
	BNLA	16	84
Online/internet difficulties	Survey 2020	29	71
	Survey 2019	38	62
	Not in BNLA		
Other difficulties (please explain)	Survey 2020	11	89
	Survey 2019	15	85
	Not in BNLA		

Table 16. Transport difficulties accessing government services by gender (percentage)

	M	F
Yes	7	22
No	93	78
Total	100	100

Table 17. Women’s online/internet difficulties accessing government services by age (percentage)

	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	≥ 65
Yes	11	12	32	21	66	56
No	89	88	68	79	34	44
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Age influences language difficulties and online/internet difficulties (Fig. 17), with younger age groups having less difficulties and older age groups more difficulties. Women with children under 18 living with them reported far less online/internet difficulties compared to other women. That said, this does align with focus group discussions, where women spoke of relying on younger people to assist with online access to services.

In focus groups, settlement services staff case-managers were mentioned as the key actors that enabled women to access and understand services when they first arrived in Australia. Many also mentioned receiving help from family members such as children or siblings when they need to access a service like banking or Centrelink. Several women also noted that they now help other women in their communities with these activities. Lack of access to interpreters was raised as a key issue

across the groups, especially in relation to medical services. This is contrary to our survey findings in 2019 and 2020 which indicated about two-thirds of respondents had access to interpreting when they needed it. Across the board, women in the focus groups said they preferred accessing services like Medicare or Centrelink online. Even if they required some help with online access, this tended to be much easier than having to attend in-person appointments or travel to an office. The Tibetan group who live in the northern suburbs of Sydney were most concerned with housing costs and housing provision, which was indicative of their location in a higher cost of living area of Sydney compared to the other focus group participants.

Key Points

- These results validate the findings from the previous research (Culos et al., 2020) in terms of social links, with consistency between the 2020 and 2019 survey data.
- Refugees report a deep level of trust in many institutions including the government and police and, to a lesser extent, the media. They also report trust in work or study colleagues, people in their neighbourhood and the wider Australian community, at levels comparable to other refugees in Australia.
- This high level of trust imbues refugees with a sense of confidence to be independent. Even at this relatively early stage of settlement refugees report an awareness of knowing where to find somewhere to live, find a school or childcare, get around and navigate transport, use government and commercial services and access emergency support when needed. Confidence was weakest in knowing how to find a job and finding out about their rights, but in both of these refugees in this sample were more knowledgeable compared to other refugees in Australia.
- Against a backdrop of trust and confidence, the most common difficulties accessing government services were language and long waiting times for an appointment.
- When asked about their access to language support, almost half of the respondents reported they have always or usually been able to get interpreting when needed.
- This 2020 cohort confirmed the finding in 2019 that online/internet difficulties were a common barrier to government services, which, as far as we are aware, has not been previously assessed in longitudinal research among refugees in Australia.
- Focus group findings suggest a link between social bonds and social links – women often relied on support from family members or close community networks to assist with accessing or understanding services.

Women

- Women were significantly less likely to trust people in the wider community and people in their neighbourhood.
- Women who speak Kurdish/Kurmanji had significantly less trust in institutions compared to

other language groups. Women living in regional areas reported less trust in the wider community, government and the police than women in major cities.

- Young women report significantly less trust towards the wider community, the police and the government.
- Women report weaker knowledge than men in virtually all aspects of social links.
- Younger women tend to have more knowledge in how to access services and older women less knowledge. An exception was older women with children under 18 living with them, who reported more knowledge in terms of getting help through the internet for services they need, using public transport and getting help from the police.
- Refugee women reported being able to access interpreting support at similar levels to men.
- When accessing government services women reported the same main difficulties as men: language barriers, waiting times and online/internet difficulties but were significantly more likely than men to report transport difficulties. Women in regional areas, in particular, reported long waiting times for appointments.
- Among women, younger women reported less language and online/internet difficulties when accessing government services as did women with children living with them.

Overall, the findings indicate that:

- Settlement programs should continue to build the independent living skills of refugees and link them to services that can be accessed when needed and pay particular attention to older women without children.
- High levels of reported trust in government institutions provide a strong basis for government departments, essential services and other service providers to redouble their efforts to offer in-language support and information to reduce language barriers.
- As governments and other service providers continue to shift towards online and digital services, the enabling capacities of social bonds should be considered, since focus group data shows refugee women demonstrate sharing and transferring of their own skills and knowledge with each other.

Rights and Responsibilities

This domain addresses the extent to which refugees are provided with the foundations of full and equal participation in Australian society. While all respondents in the *Foundations for Belonging* research are Australian permanent residents, they are still newly arrived, and consequently are ineligible to apply for citizenship (due to minimum length of residency requirements). Therefore, it is premature to ask questions about registering to vote, political participation and contribution to decision-making for these cohorts. Instead, this domain assesses perceptions of fairness and equality, experiences of discrimination, and awareness of access to rights and responsibilities to fulfil social and civic responsibilities.

Welcome

When asked about experiences of discrimination in the past 12 months, 23 respondents (less than 6%) indicated that this had occurred – a similar result to the 2019 survey (Table 18). This finding differs from results on the same question in the annual Mapping Social Cohesion national survey, where reports of experiences of discrimination in the previous 12 months are much higher (13% in 2020).

Table 18. Have you experienced discrimination because of your skin colour, ethnic origin or religion over the last 12 months? (by survey, percentage)

% of respondents having experienced discrimination	Survey 2020	Survey 2019
Foundations for Belonging	6	5
Mapping Social Cohesion	13	19

Women and men were equally likely to report experiences of racial discrimination. There were some differences by language groups with Swahili and Tibetan-speakers more likely to experience discrimination. However, given the very low numbers reporting racial discrimination in the sample, we need to be cautious about this slight variation.

Respondents were also asked a series of questions on the frequency of experiences of racial discrimination in different settings (both institutional and everyday) and, again, very few respondents reported experiencing discrimination in these settings.

The most common institutional settings where discrimination was reported were in the workplace

(3%), in educational settings (3%) and in the rental housing market (2%). The most common everyday settings where discrimination was reported were while shopping (3%), on public transport or on the street (3%), and online or on social media (1%). The two key changes in 2020 were that there was a slight decrease of racial discrimination in the rental housing market and online/social media compared to the 2019 survey cohort. The measures in this question were from a national survey of the wider Australian community where racial discrimination is reported at far higher rates, of around 25%.¹⁰ In focus groups, Tibetan women reported racist incidents in public spaces that they linked to anti-Asian racism as a result of COVID-19.

Participation

As with the 2019 survey cohort, almost all respondents (99%) intend to apply for Australian citizenship once eligible, which is the same as respondents in BNLA.

The overwhelming majority of respondents were committed to fulfilling social and civic responsibilities in Australia (Table 19), including to obey and respect the law, to be self-sufficient, to respect and protect the environment, and to help others.

Respondents are also overwhelmingly committed (97%) to acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the traditional owners of Australia (Table 19), while just over half of respondents found it easy to understand the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (62%, Very Easy/Easy) (Table 20) since coming to Australia, with results in the 2020 survey on a par with the 2019 survey cohort.

Women find it slightly harder than men to understand the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, though this was not statistically significant.

Among women there is a stark difference between those in regional areas who are significantly more likely to find it harder to understand the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders than refugee women in major cities (Table 21).

Volunteering is another indicator of civic engagement. In a multiple response question, just under half (48%) of respondents reported volunteering in the month prior to the survey (Table 22), about a quarter of whom provided help in more than one type of activity. This question was taken from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) General Social Survey, and results are in line with

¹⁰ Challenging Racism Project 2015–2016 National Survey Report, available at www.westernsydney.edu.au/

Table 19. Which one of the options below, if any, do you feel should be the responsibilities of everyone living in Australia? (by survey, percentage)

		Yes	No/Unsure
To obey and respect the law	Survey 2020	100	0
	Survey 2019	100	0
To work to provide for yourself	Survey 2020	97	3
	Survey 2019	94	6
To respect and preserve the environment	Survey 2020	100	0
	Survey 2019	100	0
To help others	Survey 2020	99	1
	Survey 2019	98	2
To treat others with respect	Survey 2020	100	0
	Survey 2019	99	1
To acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the traditional owners of Australia	Survey 2020	97	3
	Survey 2019	95	5

Table 20. Since you came to Australia, how easy have you found it to understand the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the first people of Australia? (by source, percentage)

	Survey 2020	Survey 2019
Very easy	7	12
Easy	55	45
Hard	32	38
Very hard	6	5
Total	100	100

Table 21. Women's understanding of the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the first people of Australia by place of residence (by place of residence, percentage)

	Major Cities of Australia	Inner/Outer Regional Australia
Very easy	9	0
Easy	56	10
Hard	29	70
Very hard	7	20
Total	100	100

Table 22. In the last 4 weeks, did you help anyone, other than family members you live with, with the following activities? (by survey, percentage on multiple response)

	Survey 2020	Survey 2019	GSS 2020
Domestic work, home maintenance or gardening	51	42	37
Providing transport or running errands	44	30	38
Any teaching, coaching or practical advice	28	16	19
Any other help (Please explain)	13	12	9
% people volunteering for others	48	60	49

the rate of volunteering reported on this measure in a representative sample of the general Australian population (49% in 2020).¹¹ We can expect that COVID-19 would have had an effect on rates of volunteering in 2020. The overall rate of volunteering in the 2019 survey cohort of *Foundations for Belonging* was higher (60%).

Most of the volunteering revolved around domestic work, home maintenance or gardening, providing transport, running errands and teaching or offering advice.

Table 23. In the last 4 weeks, did you help anyone, other than family members you live with, with the following activities (by gender, percentage on multiple response)

	F	M
Domestic work, home maintenance or gardening	13	11
Providing transport or running errands	8	13
Any teaching, coaching or practical advice	8	6
Any other help (Please explain)	3	3
Did not help anyone	30	22

While there was no significant gender difference, women were less likely to have volunteered in the previous month (Fig. 23), and less likely to volunteer in providing transport and running errands (Table 23).

For more than half of the respondents the voluntary work was provided to a relative living in another household (Fig. 17); a third of respondents volunteered for a friend; and a quarter of respondents helped a neighbour.

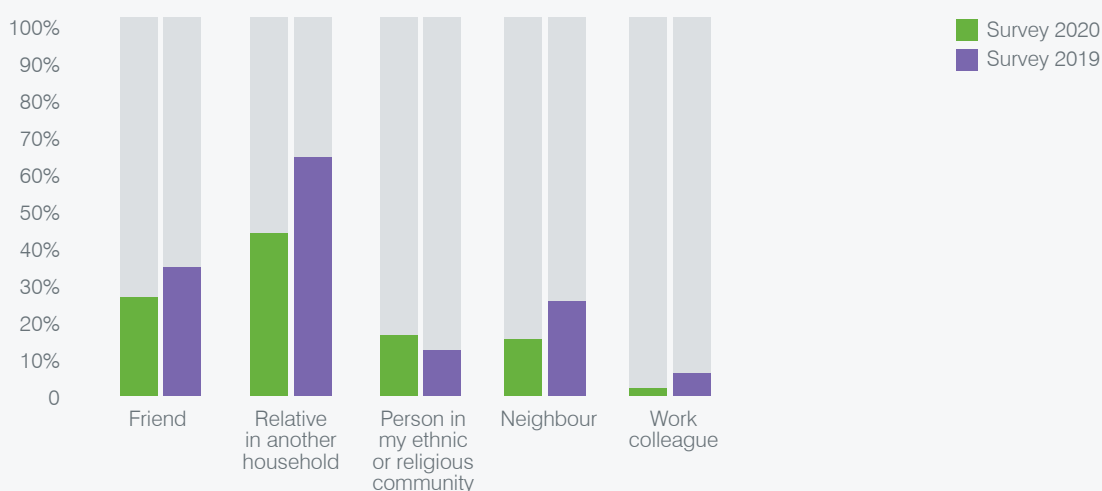
There was little variation in terms of gender, visa type or place of residency in relation to who respondents had helped.

Belonging

Respondents reported a very high sense of being treated fairly when they access services and support, that their rights are protected, and that they have equal access to services (Fig. 18), similar to the 2019 cohort. Here we can infer that this sense of equity is likely to be grounded in the fact that all of the respondents in this study had permanent residency, and therefore access to all of the responsibilities and rights that permanent and secure residency entails, including a pathway to Australian citizenship.

Given the very low variance in responses to each of these variables, it is not meaningful to test for differences by gender, age, and other variables. That said, older respondents over 55 tended to strongly agree more than other age bands.

Fig.17 Who did you give this voluntary help to? (by survey, multiple response)



¹¹ After pilot testing of this survey, the ABS General Social Survey question was modified slightly by adding "other than family members you live with" and removing "Giving emotional support" from the original list of options. General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020 (<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia/2020#data-download>)

Fig.18 As a refugee to Australia... (by survey)

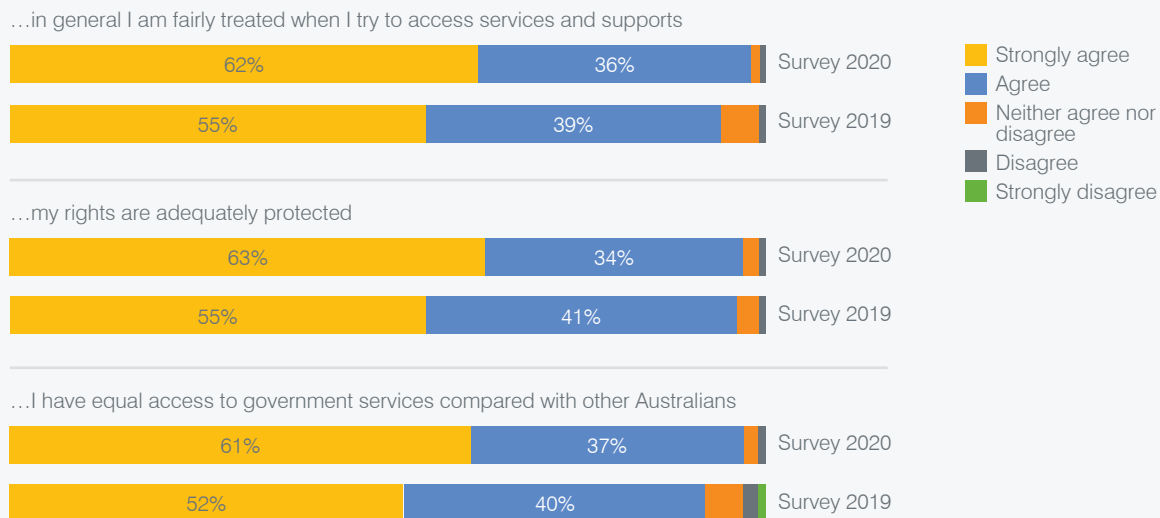
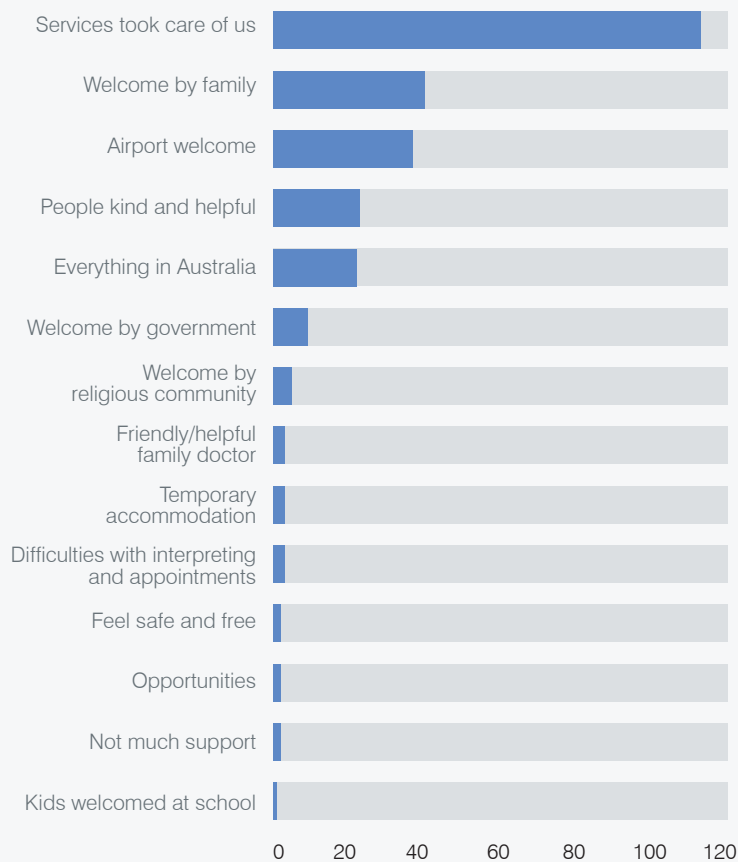


Fig.19 Everyday experiences and situations where refugees were made to feel welcome in Australia



In an open-ended survey question, we explored everyday experiences and situations where refugees were made to feel welcome in Australia. We did a basic coding of these free-text responses and the most common experiences nominated (Fig. 19)

were: “services took care of us”; “welcome by family”; the “airport welcome” usually offered by settlement providers; that “people [were] kind and helpful”; and “everything in Australia”.

Key Points

- Overall these results validate the findings from the previous research (Culos et al., 2020) in terms of rights and responsibilities, with results consistent between the 2020 and 2019 survey data.
- The findings challenge assertions that refugees do not demonstrate a sense of responsibility to Australia and do not understand what it means to be Australian. Instead, refugees report a strong commitment to fulfilling social and civic responsibilities in Australia including obeying the law, being self-sufficient, protecting the environment, treating others with respect and helping others.
- One way refugees demonstrate their sense of civic responsibility is through volunteering. In the month prior to the survey almost half of the refugees reported volunteering, which is in line with rate of volunteering found in the general Australian population in 2020.
- Refugees in this sample are overwhelmingly committed to acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the traditional owners of Australia. Almost two-thirds of refugees find it easy to understand the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the first people of Australia.
- Refugees feel they are treated with respect and have equal access to government services, that their rights are protected and that they are treated fairly. This also came through strongly in the open-ended questions when asked about specific experiences that made them feel welcome: “services took care of us” and “people kind and helpful” featured prominently. In line with this finding, refugees report very low instances of discrimination on the basis of cultural or religious background. In the few instances where discrimination had occurred, the most common settings were at work, while shopping or in other public spaces.

Women

- In many of the measures in the area of rights and responsibilities there was very low variance in responses so that it was not meaningful to test for differences by gender.
- While refugee women find it slightly harder than men to understand the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, there was a stark difference among women in different locations. Refugee women in regional areas are significantly more likely to find it harder to understand the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders than those in major cities.

Overall, the findings indicate that:

- Refugees have a strong commitment and motivation to fulfil their social and civic responsibilities in Australia and there was so little variance that gender comparisons were not meaningful.
- Settlement services should continue to provide refugees with an understanding of the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the first people of Australia.
- Settlement services and civil society organisations should continue to recognise and leverage the willingness of refugees to volunteer as another avenue for strengthening social and civic participation.
- Permanent and secure residency is the bedrock on which the social, economic, cultural and civic participation of refugees rests: without permanent protection refugees’ safety and security is not assured.

Digital Inclusion

In light of digital technologies becoming even more important in daily life, work and study as a result of COVID-19, *Foundations for Belonging 2021* takes a closer look at digital inclusion among newly arrived refugees. These questions were drawn from the Australian Bureau of Statistics Household Use of Information Technology (HUIT) survey, gathered each year from 1996 but discontinued in 2017. Since 2015, the 'gold standard' in this area has been the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) (Thomas et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2019) which measures digital inclusion annually across three dimensions: access, affordability, and digital ability. *Foundations for Belonging 2021* had to work within a number of constraints in the collection of data on digital inclusion. Due to survey length, we were limited in the number of questions we could include. We were unable to access survey questions from ADII so direct comparisons at the question level were not possible with this dataset, which is the most relevant and recent measure of digital inclusion in the wider Australia population. The HUIT data is somewhat outdated given the collection ceased in 2017.

In addition we found scores on all these questions were very high across the sample. Granular comparative analysis by gender, age or other social variables is therefore potentially less meaningful than for other measures (e.g. social bonds) where there was a wider distribution of responses and scores. For these reasons the findings on digital inclusion need to be interpreted with some caution. However, they provide a baseline understanding of some

key digital inclusion measures for recently arrived refugees and suggest some avenues for further research.

Digital Access

More than nine in 10 respondents (95%) reported having access to the internet in their household (Fig. 20), which is higher compared to the HUIT (86%) in 2016/17 and the more recent Australian Digital Inclusion Index report (88%) in 2020, a report that also reports higher uptake among culturally and linguistically diverse groups nationally.

There was no significant gender difference in terms of respondents' access to the internet at home. There were some significant differences by household composition, with households with children under 5 more likely to have access to the internet at home (Table 24) but, unlike the HUIT, there were no differences with households with children under 15. There were no significant differences in terms of place of residence or language groups.

Respondents were asked about the number and type of digital devices in their household. Respondents had a higher average number of mobiles/smartphones than the HUIT 2016/17 (Table 25) with, on average, less desktop/laptop computers than the HUIT, and also slightly less tablets. This finding, however, may be related to the time gap between these two studies, with smartphone capabilities and popularity increasing more generally between 2017 and 2020.

There were no differences in terms of gender but there was a difference in terms of household composition. Households in the HUIT 2016/17

Fig.20 Do you or any member of your household have access to the internet at home, whether through a computer, mobile phone or other device? (by survey)



Table 24. Access to the internet at home by household composition (percentage)

	Yes	No	I don't know
With children under 5	85	64	100
Without children under 5	15	36	0
Total	100	100	100

with children under 15 had more laptops/desktop computers (average 2.1 with children under 15 compared to 1.7 without children under 15). In our 2020 survey it was the opposite case (average 1.1 with children under 15 compared to 1.6 without children under 15). This is not what one would expect given the need for laptops to participate in school education being even more pronounced in 2020, with remote learning due to COVID-19. Even by including tablets, which are also used for school education, there is still a gap between refugee households in the sample and the HUIT data. That said, respondents without children under 15 have more mobiles/smartphones and tend to live in regional areas and are likely to be young women and men (18–24). Overall, respondents in regional areas tend to have more devices, apart from internet TV. Age has a

statistically significant correlation with the number of devices, in particular with younger people having more desktops/laptops and mobiles/smartphones, though not tablets (Table 25).

A very high proportion of respondents (95%) reported having used the internet in the past three months (Table 26), compared to the HUIT (87%) in 2016/17.

There were no significant differences in terms of gender or place of residence but some variation by language groups with Arabic and Assyrian speakers reporting less access to the internet, which may be related to the older ages of these respondents. Respondents with children under the age of 15 were significantly more likely to have accessed the internet (Table 27).

Table 25. Average number of devices used by the household to access the internet by type

(by survey, living with children under 15, place of residence, age and gender)

	Desktop or laptop computer	Mobile or smartphone	Tablet	Internet connected TV	Internet connected music or video player	Internet connected game console
Survey 2020	1.2	3.3	0.8	1	0.3	0.4
HUIT Survey 2016/17	1.8	2.0	1.1	0.6	0.3	0.4
Foundations for Belonging Survey 2020						
With children under 15	1.1	2.9	1	1	0.3	0.5
Without children under 15	1.6	4.4	0.3	0.7	0.2	0.6
Place of residence						
Major cities	1.2	3.3	0.8	1	0.3	0.4
Regional	1.5	4.5	1	1	1	1
Age						
18–24 yrs	1.4	3.8	0.5	1.0	0.7	0.6
25–34 yrs	1.1	3.0	0.7	0.9	0.1	0.2
35–44 yrs	1.0	2.6	0.6	0.9	0.2	0.3
45–54 yrs	1.4	3.3	0.7	1.0	0.1	0.2
55–64 yrs	1.1	3.3	0.7	0.9	0.2	0.4
65 yrs and over	0.8	2.9	0.9	0.8	0.2	0.4
Gender						
Male	1.2	3.1	0.7	0.9	0.2	0.4
Female	1.1	3.1	0.6	0.9	0.3	0.3
NA	1.0	3.4	1.0	0.9	0.3	0.3

Table 26. In the last three months, did you personally access the internet? (by survey, percentage)

	Survey 2020	HUIT 2016/17
Yes	95	87
No	4	13
Don't know	1	0
Total	100	100

Table 27. Internet access in the past three months by people living with children under 15 (percentage)

	With children under 15	Without children under 15
Yes	99	93
No	1	5
Don't know	0	2
Total	100	100

Predictably there was a correlation with age, with younger people reporting more access to the internet than older cohorts. That said, nine in 10 (91%) of respondents over 65 still reported accessing the internet in the previous three months.

Digital Affordability

Respondents who reported having internet in their household were asked if they had sufficient data allowance, and almost nine in 10 (88%) indicated that they did (Fig. 21). The main reasons given for not having enough data were that it was too expensive or that they lived in an internet blackspot.

There was no significant difference between respondents in relation to data allowance in terms of gender, having children under 5 or children under 15, place of residence or language groups. There was a slight variation by age with respondents aged 45–54 and 55–64 reporting not having enough data allowance.

Digital Ability

For those who had used the internet in the past three months the main reasons for access were social media, entertainment and banking (Table 28). In developing the survey we added three further options – ‘Welfare and social services (e.g. Medicare, Centrelink)’; ‘Working from home’; ‘Other’ – to those used in the HUIT. Of these three options, respondents reported high levels of using the internet to access welfare and social services (e.g. Medicare, Centrelink). Notably, a higher proportion of respondents in the 2020 survey had used the internet for formal education, likely with online learning due to COVID-19, compared to the HUIT in 2016/17. Compared to the HUIT, respondents in 2020 used the internet in different ways and far less in some areas (e.g. purchasing goods and services, health services, banking).

Table 28. Reasons for accessing the internet in the past three months by survey (percentage)

	Survey 2020	HUIT 2016/17
Banking (including paying bills)	52	80
Social media	75	80
Purchasing goods and services	34	73
Entertainment	66	80
Formal education activities (e.g. schools, TAFE, university)	42	32
Health Services or health research	29	46
Welfare and social services (e.g. Medicare, Centrelink)	49	NA*
Working from home	4	NA*
Other (please specify)	7	NA*

* Not in HUIT Survey

Fig.21 Does your household have enough data allowance to meet your needs?

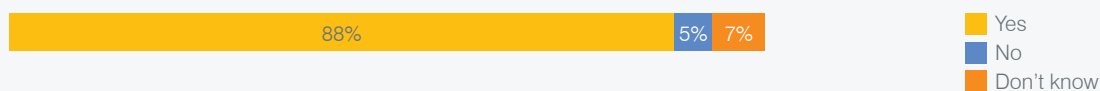


Table 29. Reasons for using the internet by gender (percentage)

	F	M
Banking (including paying bills)	47	57
Social media	71	78
Purchasing goods and services	32	36
Entertainment	62	70
Formal education activities (e.g. schools, TAFE, university)	41	43
Health services or health research	25	32
Welfare and social services (e.g. Medicare, Centrelink)	46	54
Working from home	3	5
Other (please specify)	8	5

There were no significant gender differences in reasons cited for using the internet, but women were less likely to nominate reasons than men across every indicator (Table 29).

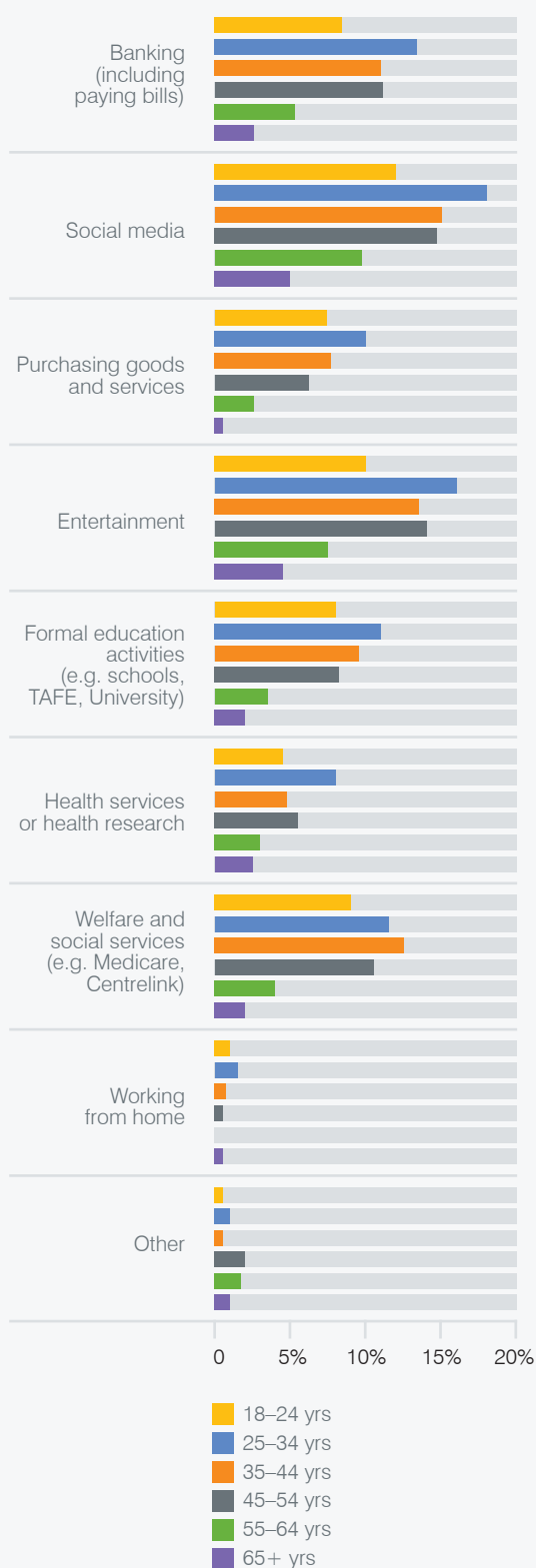
Respondents between the ages of 25–34 had the highest rates of reasons for using the internet (Fig. 22).

Regional respondents reported a significantly higher use of social media compared to respondents living in major cities, but again this may reflect the age of the regional respondents in the sample.

Respondents without children under 15 cited social media, entertainment and banking more commonly, while respondents with children under 15 cited welfare, social services and formal education as their main reasons to access the internet.

In the focus groups, most women spoke positively about internet accessibility in Australia, particularly mentioning the improved access to the internet and to online services compared to their countries of origin. This is notable because it suggests that self-reporting by newly arrived refugees around internet accessibility might skew more positively than in the general population because of comparison with poor or absent services in their places of former residence. The online tools that women across all the focus groups mentioned most often as significant to enabling their settlement were: online banking; accessing services like Centrelink and Medicare;

Fig.22 Reasons for accessing the internet in the past three months by age (percentage)



using social media for local and transnational communication; using maps to find their way around their new cities or towns; and using translation apps like Google Translate to assist with language barriers. One respondent in the Assyrian group gave a typical response of using the internet for her English language study during COVID-19, as well as to access services on a regular basis:



A lot of things have been very easy using the internet. Do the net banking, Medicare... if I need something, I would access those services on the internet. But mainly Centrelink services on the internet. So I access the bank to get a statement or read a letter from Centrelink. During corona [COVID-19], we used to study online. We were 45 students. So when we were 45 students, the teacher divided us into two groups. One group would study nine to 11, and the other one, 11 till two. We started to understand more when we were all studying together. I live in a flat, a unit now, where the internet is not very strong as it is. So if I need the internet in the Wi-Fi, I would use my phone. Technology made it easier, of course [...] Life would have been harder, harder and more in chaos, if there wasn't internet. We didn't have that easy access to the internet back in Iraq. It's easier to access the internet here [...] You feel happy in life with all this easy stuff through the internet!

Even women who expressed a struggle with digital skills and knowledge were aware of the importance of online capacities and discussed plans to improve their skills or the ways they drew on family or friends to assist them when required. For example, an older woman in the Arabic group told us about her determination to develop her digital skills:



I reached a point where I was about to call because I didn't know how to use online services. In Turkey, I was using technology, I learned to use technology, but it's different from the system here in place. I have a plan for myself for the next five years, but I don't know how to implement it and where I can go so I can help me. It's very important, even if you fail one or two times, you still have to try to learn how to use it. It's very important.

Finding assistance in using technology was one of the most discussed topics among women in the focus groups. Assistance included assistance with access, like borrowing laptops from family members, as well as assistance with use, like having a friend assist with filling in an online form. Some of the older women relied entirely on adult or teenage children to complete online tasks for services and banking on their behalf. Most women, however, discussed reciprocal relationships, in which they both at times received assistance (most often from family members or teachers) but also at times were able to help others. The younger women in the Kurdish/Kurmanji group, for example, noted that they frequently assisted their parents:



I help my Mum with a lot of other things [...] She doesn't know how to do a lot of things, so I'm the one to help. But I help my Mum too because my Mum, she hasn't attend school at all, so I help her with other things. But I help my parents because my Dad is over age and so they haven't used these things at all. They don't know anything about the internet so I helping them. I help my parents use internet and also my sister too. Anything to communicate or do something, I'm going to help them.

One of the Tibetan women noted that she often helps other women in the community with online forms and accessing services but is sometimes concerned about the access to their private information and passwords that this involves. Thus, while the mobilisation of social bonds to facilitate digital inclusion seems largely positive, it does carry some risks around privacy or coercion and control that could be particularly significant for women who rely heavily on others in their family or community.

General online uses varied across the different demographics represented in the focus groups. In the Arabic group, for example, where most women were raising children or were seniors, a lot of use was connected to motherhood, children and domestic life. The women discussed learning social media so they can keep up with their children, buying devices for the children's schooling, and using the internet to find recipes or children's activities. A few also mentioned using social media to track and surveil their teenage children and to monitor their internet use and safety. This indicates that parenting has a

significant impact on modes of general digital practice for women. This group also expressed slightly more concern about using online forms for government services, mentioning concerns that misunderstanding or making a mistake can have consequences. The Tibetan group were more focused on using the internet to access government services than for social or personal use. They were particularly focused on keeping up-to-date on changing immigration or other laws that might affect them and their communities. They also, however, frequently mentioned the benefit of WhatsApp groups and Facebook for local

connections and mothers' groups. The women in the Kurdish/Kurmanji group were younger and more confident, daily digital users, more active on social media, consumed online content regularly and reported minimal skills gaps or access issues. A few mentioned the usefulness of online content like YouTube in helping to improve their English. Many of these young women assist older family members and younger siblings with technology, and also assist their teachers in class with overcoming the language barrier by using translation apps – they are in this sense 'digital enablers'.

Key Points

- The findings indicate that newly arrived refugees have access to the internet and use the internet at similar rates as the rest of the Australian community, though we do need to interpret this with some caution.
- Refugee households have on average as many devices as the rest of the Australian community but there are differences in the types of devices they use: they are more likely to have mobiles/smartphones but less likely to have laptops/desktops and tablets.
- Household composition influenced some measures, with refugees living with children under 15 having less devices than households without children under 15, yet were also more likely to report accessing the internet. Households with children under 5 were less likely to have the internet at home.
- Younger refugees and refugees in regional areas tend to have more digital access and digital ability.
- In terms of affordability, a very high proportion of refugees report that they have a sufficient data allowance. Women are more likely to report having insufficient data but only to a small degree.
- Refugees use the internet for a wide variety of reasons but in quite different ways to the wider Australian community, with refugees using the internet far less for banking, shopping and health services and more for education, welfare and social services (e.g. Medicare, Centrelink).
- Refugee women nominate fewer reasons to access the internet across all types of uses, which perhaps mirrors the weaker findings

among women compared to men across a number of indicators in social links.

Women

- Refugee women and men have similar levels of access to the internet and there were no major differences in terms of affordability.
- The gender gap, while small, was most apparent in digital ability, with women consistently reporting less use of the internet for all categories of activities (e.g. banking, education, health services) than men, mirroring to some extent the gaps between refugee women and men in social links.
- The focus group discussions and the survey analysis indicated that older women rely on younger people to assist with using the internet, with younger women in the focus groups taking on the role of 'digital enablers' for older relatives.

Overall, the findings suggest that:

- Refugees by and large have access to the internet and a sufficient data allowance.
- Refugee households tend to have fewer devices that are typically associated with education and employment (i.e. laptops/desktops/tablets).
- A particular concern is that households with children under 15 have less laptops/desktops/tablets compared to a representative sample of the Australian community from 2017, despite these devices being essential for study in primary and secondary education.
- The predominant use of the internet by refugees differs from the wider Australian community and there is a small but consistent gap for refugee women (aside from younger women) in terms of digital ability.

Implications of this Research

This study of settlement and integration among newly arrived refugees is, at its heart, an exploration of belonging.

Belonging, seen as vital for integration, seems on the one-hand 'natural' and straightforward yet can be difficult to practically define. May (2013) sees belonging as being at ease in one's self and one's social, cultural and relational contexts (p. 3). Antonsich (2010) takes this further to theorise belonging along two intersecting axes: a personal axis and a social and political axis. The personal sense of being 'at home' in a place, "which is built up and grows out of everyday practices" (Antonsich, 2010, p. 646) is closely aligned to identity, including ethnic and national identity and citizenship. The social and political axis of belonging includes group membership (or exclusion) and a tension between "the side that claims belonging and the side that has the power of 'granting' belonging" (Antonsich, 2010, p. 561). Adding a further layer in the current era of migration and a digitally connected world is the concept of transnationalism, which involves people maintaining numerous ties to places and multiple identities as they navigate lives in many places and contexts (Antonsich, 2010; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007).

Taken as a whole, the findings of this report indicate that refugees are tracking well across most of the indicators of integration assessed in this study. May (2013) indicates that our sense of belonging can fluctuate with changes in contexts. Yet here we found no significant change over the two waves of data despite the upheaval and uncertainty caused by COVID-19 in the intervening period. Thus there is no indication of any fracturing of refugees' sense of welcome, belonging and participation in the past, tumultuous year.

All refugees in this study had permanent residency and this second wave of data examining rights and responsibilities highlights (once again) the instrumental nature of permanent and secure residency in supporting integration across multiple

domains. At one level permanent residency is a legal status that confers eligibility and access to employment, education, health care and the social safety net. This access is materially important to productive settlement outcomes like employment and health care. At a deeper level, however, secure residency intersects with belonging: "where you belong is where you are safe; and where you are safe is where you belong" (Ignatieff (1994), cited in Antonsich, 2010, p. 649).

The strong sense of welcome and belonging reported here by newly arrived refugees in their everyday lives gives an insight into the prevailing social climate in Australia. It echoes the sentiment found in the annual Mapping Social Cohesion research where about 80% of Australians agree that migrants and refugees improve Australian society and bring new ideas and cultures (Markus, 2020). Yet a recent policy review has found that, too often, the focus of debate on refugee settlement is on needs and barriers rather than the strengths and aspirations of refugees (Shergold, Benson, & Piper, 2019). Nurturing and promoting a strong narrative of the contribution of refugees in public commentary and policy debates, as stressed by the Shergold Review in 2019, provides part of the necessary environment for refugee integration and belonging.

This research is framed by an understanding of the multidimensional and multidirectional nature of integration (UK Home Office, 2019). There is a tendency in refugee research to focus on what have been called the functional aspects of integration – education, employment, health and housing – and pay less attention on other domains (Cheung & Phillimore, 2017). This narrow focus can tend to position functional aspects of integration, for example employment, as the 'silver bullets' to successful refugee settlement. This study's emphasis on the social and civic dimensions of integration among refugees over time aims to broaden our lens of settlement to encompass the multiple domains of integration and to expand understanding of the interdependencies between these domains. For example, there is ample evidence of the relationship

between finding employment and social connections (Brell et al., 2020). Indeed, a recent study of refugees in Australia found that these informal social connections were as good as, or better, than formal employment-support programs (like jobactive) in refugees finding work (Arian, Gavranovic, & Venner, 2021). Therefore, we recommend investment in efforts to expand social networks and opportunities for meeting and exchange through community engagement and other initiatives.

The influence of gender on the social and civic domains of integration indicates that a modest but consistent gap in digital inclusion effects refugee women and deserves attention in terms of both policy and practice. Skills, confidence and access to digital technology are increasingly crucial for students, workers, service users and parents, particularly in the wake of increased digitization brought about by the COVID19 pandemic. The findings reported here point to a mixed picture, while some gender disparities are apparent, there are also promising findings in terms of digital inclusion for refugees. These preliminary findings warrant further research, especially as the digitalization of service delivery continues to expand.

Conclusion

Australia has a history of welcoming refugees, and refugees have a proud record of contributing to the social, cultural and economic fabric of Australia. The policy settings, practice and evidence base for refugee settlement in Australia have progressively evolved. This study adds to the evidence base, by highlighting the crucial role of social connections and rights and responsibilities in settlement, integration and belonging. By illuminating the multidimensional nature of integration, we aim to further understand the strengths and aspirations of refugees and the complementary roles and contributions of refugees, receiving communities and government at all levels on which successful integration and *Foundations for Belonging* depend.

Links to Appendices

[Appendix 1. Methods and Limitations](#)

[Appendix 2. Survey](#)

[Appendix 3. Focus Group Interview Guide](#)



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