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Understanding Refugees in Worcester, MA

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Understanding Refugees in Worcester, MA

Abstract

Worcester, Massachusetts serves as the entry point to America for more refugees than any other municipality in Massachusetts, with more than 2,000 refugees settling there between 2007 and 2012. However, there has been a lack of information about how the livelihoods and experiences of refugees differ from those of the foreign-born population. This report uses data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Bureau of Population, Refugee, and Migration to present a snapshot of the social, educational, and economic status of refugees in Worcester and identifies several areas for future data and research needs relating to refugee resettlement both in Worcester and elsewhere. Findings include a higher rate of employment among the foreign-born community than the native counterpart, and rates of English competency below the state average for immigrants in Worcester.

Keywords

refugees, Worcester, immigrants, demographics, asylum

Disciplines

Sociology

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Understanding Refugees in Worcester, MA

A Demographic Snapshot¹

December 2014

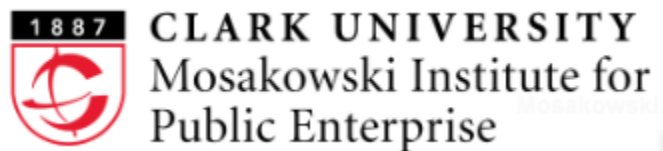
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- ✓ Between 2007 and 2012, Worcester welcomed 2,196 refugees, more than any other municipality in Massachusetts. Refugees who arrived in Worcester during this period make up 1.2 % of Worcester's current population but represent 26% of all refugees arriving in Massachusetts (8,468) during that time.
- ✓ The refugees who entered Worcester between 2007 and 2012 came from 24 different countries. The three countries that accounted for the greatest number of refugees were Burma (30 %), Bhutan (26.6 %) and Iraq (16.6 %).
- ✓ Worcester is home to 37,498 foreign-born individuals. This group constitutes over 20% of the total population of Worcester.
- ✓ Although Worcester is home to a large number of refugees, they can easily be overlooked due to the overall size of the foreign-born population. To provide context, refugees in Worcester represented 6.6% of recently arrived immigrants in 2000, whereas in Springfield, they accounted for 29.6%.
- ✓ Roughly 54% of the foreign-born population in Worcester estimates that they speak English "less than very well". This rate is about 10% higher than the number of foreign-born individuals statewide reporting a similar lack of proficiency.
- ✓ Even within the foreign-born population of Worcester, educational attainment varies greatly, and appears to be influenced by the educational patterns of the countries of origin.
- ✓ The foreign-born population in Worcester has a higher rate of employment and labor force participation than its native counterpart. However, full-time native workers out-earn foreign-born workers by more than 20%.
- ✓ The lack of available data that is specific to refugees in the city of Worcester highlights the enormous room for further research into the wellbeing, challenges, and contributions of the city's refugee population.

INTRODUCTION

"Refugees²" in the city of Worcester are both easy and hard to see. Information sharing among resettlement agencies, municipal service providers, and policy makers has enhanced our understanding of successes and struggles of recently arrived refugees, and refugee community activities play a prominent role in the city's cultural offerings. However, despite the increasing quality, availability, and accessibility of data in the United State, which allows us to create and learn from statistical profiles of different segments of the American population³, refugees as a group are at risk of being excluded from the picture. Data relating to refugees as a particular type of immigrant newcomer, especially at the municipal level, is scarce. This lack of data is concerning in light of the fact that refugees have experiences and face challenges that are distinct from those encountered by the native and non-refugee immigrant populations. The aim of this report is to synthesize and make sense of the information that is available concerning refugees in Worcester, Massachusetts in hopes of affording them their proper space in the statistical mural of the community.

This report looks specifically at data available through the US Census Bureau from the decennial census and the intercensus American Community Survey (ACS) to examine the status of refugees and immigrants. Using the US Census American Factfinder tool to gather information about specific immigrant populations presents some sizeable challenges. Neither the Census nor the American Community Survey specifically track refugees⁴, asylees⁵, or other special

2 While statistics regarding refugee resettlement use the term "refugee" refer generally to those refugees counted under the federal resettlement program, census data may include people from different legal categories. Unless otherwise noted, we use this term to include not only formally resettled refugee newcomers, but other legal and bureaucratic categories including "asylees," "unaccompanied alien children," and "secondary migrants", among others.

3 For example, a researcher may readily choose to compare household income by race, median earnings by sex, or educational attainment by neighborhood of residence.

4 The US Immigration and Nationality Act defines "refugee" in Sec. 101 (a)(42) as:

(A) any person who is outside any country of such person's nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, is outside any country in which such person last habitually resided, and who is unable or

immigrant populations; therefore, these special populations cannot be explicitly extrapolated with any certainty from US census data. Additionally, vague categories and inconsistently available data sets for different immigrant groups make comparisons difficult. For example, the authors were only able to find comprehensive refugee arrival statistics at the state level. Nonetheless, the authors collected applicable data tables through the US Census Factfinder tool to present a demographical context for understanding longer-term refugee settlement in Worcester. Within the city datasets, the authors were able to find statistics on the education, employment, and housing of the foreign-born versus native-born populations. Our methodology is described further in Appendix A.

It is important to note that the use of “native” and “foreign-born” are descriptive terms but not necessarily neutral terms. The use of citizenship and place of birth as a means of describing a population could also describe perceived obligations of the state to these populations to varying degrees. While this subject is highly volatile, we call attention to this to acknowledge that the use of these categories could affect the way these trends are perceived. Throughout this report, the terms “immigrant” and “foreign-born” are used interchangeably.

unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of, that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, or

(B) in such circumstances as the President after appropriate consultation (as defined in section 207(e) of this Act) may specify, any person who is within the country of such person's nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, within the country in which such person is habitually residing, and who is persecuted or who has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. The term "refugee" does not include any person who ordered, incited, assisted, or otherwise participated in the persecution of any person on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. For purposes of determinations under this Act, a person who has been forced to abort a pregnancy or to undergo involuntary sterilization, or who has been persecuted for failure or refusal to undergo such a procedure or for other resistance to a coercive population control program, shall be deemed to have been persecuted on account of political opinion, and a person who has a well founded fear that he or she will be forced to undergo such a procedure or subject to persecution for such failure, refusal, or resistance shall be deemed to have a well founded fear of persecution on account of political opinion.

5 Asylees do not initially enter the United States as refugees. They can reach the US in any number of ways, but once they arrive, they apply to the Department of Homeland Security for asylum. To qualify for asylum status, a person must fulfill the same criteria as a refugee and also meet an application deadline. These distinctions create additional complications when trying to explore and quantify the refugee experience.

BACKGROUND

REFUGEE IDENTITY

Article 1A, paragraph 1, of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the updating 1967 Protocol define a refugee as any person that:

“owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or owing to such fear is unwilling to avail himself to the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”

Despite this definition, the identity of “refugee” is one that is not clear cut or well defined, particularly for refugees who have been resettled to a third country. Some questions that the label presents are: For how long is this label relevant or appropriate? Does it end the moment of resettlement or with naturalization to another country or some other milestone? Does it describe a legal status, a life experience, or both? There are no definitive answers to any of these questions, which scholars and policy makers continue to grapple with.

Immigration is a particularly hot topic in American politics. Immigrants and refugees can find themselves targets of stereotypes, often being accused of “draining the system dry.” However, Bollinger and Hagstrom (2008) found that unlike non-refugee immigrant groups, whose participation in the food stamp program is steady or increases, refugees and asylees tend to decline in participation relative to their entry date. Clearly, the topic of refugees as a population and as a part of the larger group of immigrants in the United States is a complex and constantly evolving phenomenon.

USING CENSUS DATA

As mentioned in the methodology section, the census data has no data collection question to identify refugee populations. Census data disregards legal statuses such as asylee, legal immigrant, and refugee when creating data on immigrant populations in the United States

(Ahearn, 135). Due to the fact that all of these different categories represent very different populations, not taking them into account decreases the value of immigrant census data. However, even with these acknowledged shortcomings, census data are sometimes the only way to document the features of different populations in the United States. By knowing these limitations, researchers can make more defensible inferences from the available census data. As the following example shows, there are methods of making significant use of census data.

The methodology of Allen's 2006 study is of particular interest to increase our understanding of refugee populations. By utilizing Social Security numbers and case file information from VOLAGs (**volunteer agencies** given the task of receiving and settling refugee newcomers in the US), the researchers were able to access data via the Department of Labor to track earnings and employment information and compare with VOLAG reporting and statistics. Further investigation beyond this exploratory report should consider duplicating this technique to better access refugee-specific employment and earnings data. However, the authors did not have sufficient resources to pursue this methodology. As a result, we were forced to undertake the process of obtaining census data simply through the use of the available data on immigrant populations from the US Census Bureau, particularly in the education, employment, and housing sectors. The following findings should therefore be viewed with an appropriate level of caution, and better serve as a launching point for future studies of refugees in Worcester than as the final word on the subject.

FINDINGS

DEMOGRAPHICS

Largely due to significant growth in foreign-born populations over the last decade, the total population of the city of Worcester grew by about 5.8% between 2001 and 2011, from 172,634 to 182,680. While the native population decreased by 1.5% during this period, the foreign-born population of Worcester increased from 25,097 to 37,498. The foreign-born population now represents 20.5% of the overall population of Worcester.

According to the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, the city of Worcester received 2,196 refugees, from 24 different countries, between 2007 and 2012. With 8,468 refugees arriving in Massachusetts during that period, the city of Worcester welcomed roughly 26% of the state's refugee newcomers. The number of arrivals in the city almost doubled during the five-year period, jumping from 176 to 341. The trends in refugee arrival figures shed light on the changing face of the foreign-born population in Worcester, and raise questions regarding refugee integration (defined here as a dynamic multi-directional process in which refugees and the receiving society work together to build a secure, vibrant, cohesive community) and how to value the cultural diversity that they bring with them. Such a flow of diverse populations has the potential to impact the receiving community, perhaps significantly. In addition to the economic perspective, and the potential workforce they represent, the refugee and migrant populations present in Worcester can significantly shape the integrative and participative process leading to cultural diversity. In adapting to their new environment, refugee populations will also bring new experiences, languages, and traditions to Worcester's communities.

National Landscape

The formal admission of refugees to the United States is strictly regulated by the Department of State, which submits a report to Congress for every fiscal year. The report

proposes ceilings of admissions by world regions, depending on humanitarian emergencies and the US government's migration policies. The primary receiving states of refugees in 2012 were Florida (18.5%), California (13.2%) and New-York (11.3%). The state of Massachusetts is the fifteenth highest ranking recipient of resettlement cases of refugees, welcoming 1.9% of new refugees. The US refugee program tends to place refugees throughout the whole of its territory, primarily to avoid placing extra burdens on local communities, but also to ease the process of family reunification.

The state of Massachusetts provides refugees with a broad range of resources and support services. The state minimum wage is currently \$8/hour for Massachusetts (it is scheduled to rise to \$11 by 2017), as opposed to \$7.25/hour for the federal minimum wage. Additionally, refugees may be attracted to Massachusetts because the state has had universal healthcare in place since 2006, providing greater access to health services than many other states.

Foreign-born and native-born populations

The percentage of the population comprised of foreign-born individuals varies significantly between Worcester and the state of Massachusetts as a whole (Table 1). Statewide, the foreign-born population constitutes 15% of the overall population, of whom 37,498 or 3.7% of all immigrants are settled in Worcester. With a total population of less than 500,000 inhabitants, Worcester (181,473 inhabitants) is considered an urban city.

Table 1: Population by Place of Birth, 2011

Source: US Census Bureau. Table S021: 2012 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.

	Massachusetts	Worcester
Total Population	6,646,144	181,473
Native	5,650,452 (85%)	143,975 (79%)
Foreign-born	995,692 (15%)	37,498 (21%)

Singer and Wilson (2006) point out that refugee populations can have a strong impact on small size cities, especially if the foreign population is not very large. Through the tabulation of Office of refugee Resettlement and Census 2000 data, the authors were able to evaluate the potential impact of refugee populations on the local population. To do this we calculated the ratio of refugees resettled for a certain amount of time to the foreign-born newcomers in the same period. For the period of 1990-2000, this figure was 6.6% in Worcester. In comparison, this statistic was 29.6% in Springfield, another city in Massachusetts. The ratios indicate that, compared to Worcester, Springfield's refugee population was more highly visible amongst the overall immigrant population. Additionally, because refugees are initially supported by federally funded organizations for housing, employment, and education they are more visible in smaller cities, such as Springfield, and often constitute a more dominant image of immigration in these communities.

Age, Gender and Marital Status

Understanding trends in age, gender and marital status can provide some light on the characteristics of specific populations. The figures below illustrate the diversity among foreign-born populations, in terms of age, gender, and marital status in accordance with place of birth and citizenship status. The 2008-2012 American Community Survey shows that foreign-born populations are somewhat older than the native population. The 25 to 44 year old foreign-born population is highly visible in Worcester, constituting 41.8% of all foreign-born individuals in the city. Interestingly, about 50% of individuals included in that range of ages are not US Citizens. Additionally, there is a sizeable gap between the median age of natives (31.1 years) and foreign-born individuals (40.3 years). Figure 1 displays a more detailed age breakdown.

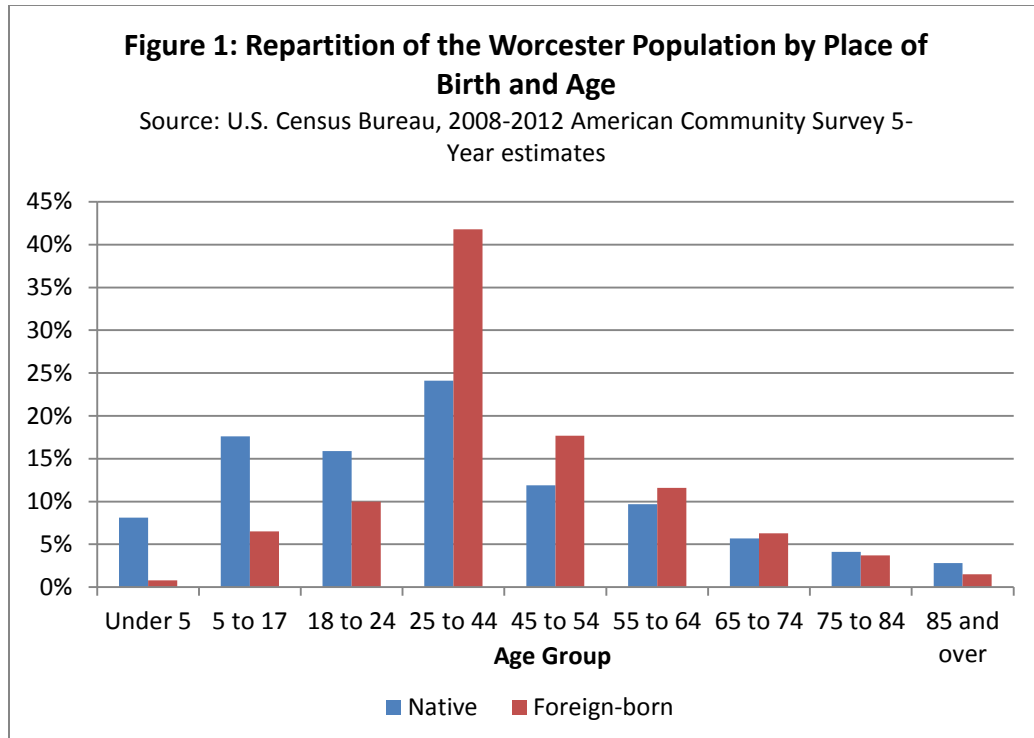
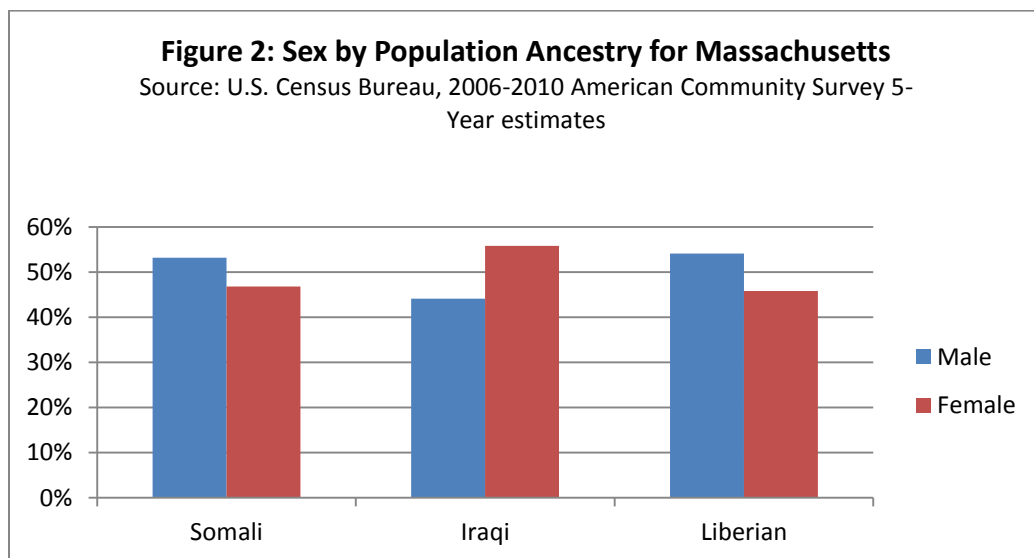


Figure 2 illustrates the gender breakdown among Somalian, Iraqi, and Liberian residents of Massachusetts. The graph shows that men outnumber women for the Somalian and Liberian populations in Massachusetts. However, women constitute 56 percent of the Iraqi population in the state.



Regarding marital status, the ACS estimates that foreign-born populations have higher rates of marriage than the native population in Worcester, with marriage rates of 49.1% and 32.2% respectively (Figure 3). Marital patterns can also be explored for specific ancestry populations at the state level. Figure 4 shows us that marital patterns vary across ancestries, and also between the sexes within them. A few stark contrasts are worth noting. First, although Iraqi men and women both have the highest rates of marriage among these three populations, men outstrip women in marriage rate by over 18 percent. We also see a notable gap in divorce rates between Iraqi men and women; 7.4 percent of Iraqi women over the age of 15 have been divorced, whereas no Iraqi men in Massachusetts have reported being divorced. In regards to the differences between the ancestral populations, we see Liberian men and women outpacing the Somali and Iraqi populations in the “never married” category, with gaps as large as 32 percent between Iraqi men and Liberian men. The cultural forces that factor into these patterns are quite complex, and it would be interesting to find out if these patterns hold true for the refugees from these particular countries.

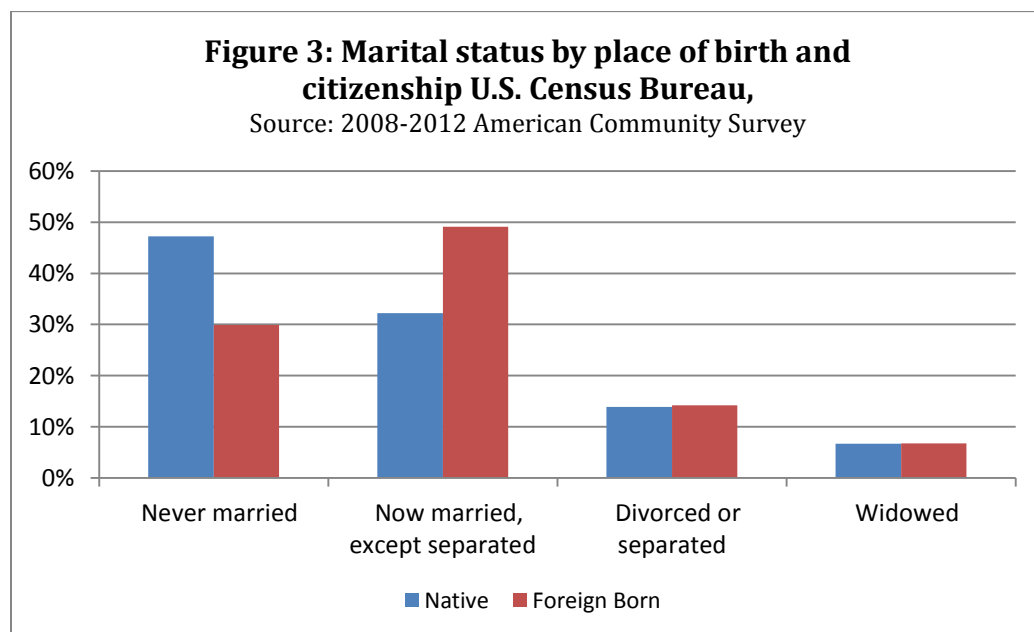
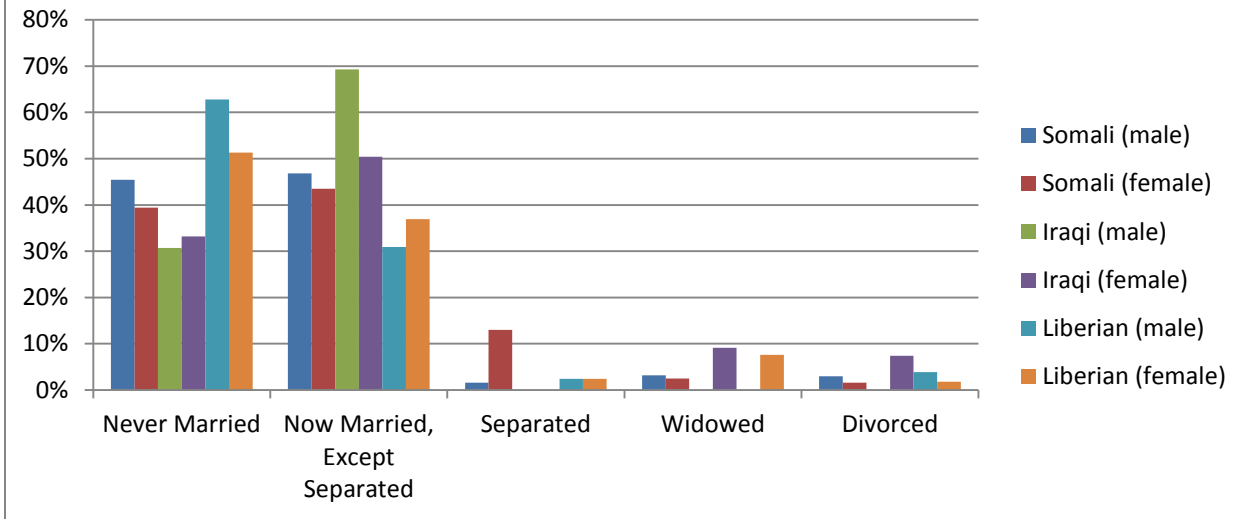


Figure 4: Marital Status by Gender and Population Ancestry for Massachusetts

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-Year estimates



Households

The US Census Bureau defines a household as all of the people who physically occupy a housing unit as their usual place of residence. A family, according to the Bureau, represents a group of two or more people who reside together and who are related by birth, marriage or adoption. Interestingly, those definitions do not take into account translocal or transnational families and the fact that families can be dispersed between different locales, states, and even different countries. This point is crucial, because income thresholds that define poverty status are determined by the number of family members living in a particular household, not the size of the complete family.

In the situation of refugee families, some form of family reunification might occur over time, and in several steps. This does not mean that family and household heads in the US do not

provide for family members overseas; indeed, the pressure to send remittances abroad is well-known (Akeui 2005).

Data from the 2008-2012 American Community Survey indicate that differences between native and foreign-born individuals exist in the average size of both households and families. Households that are listed as foreign-born had 2.85 individuals living in them, compared with the 2.3 people living in an average native household. Foreign-born individuals were also members of larger families, with the average family size being 3.42 and 3.03 for foreign-born and native families respectively.

Refugee arrivals

According to Singer and Wilson (2006), refugees and other immigrants often have established connections with people in the United States prior to their arrival. They often follow a "chain of migration", that can be anticipated by resettlement agencies. Therefore, the favorable climate of Worcester for refugee population integration, combined with the established immigrant populations, has made it an attractive gateway city for many newcomers. The refugee new arrival dataset, which is compiled by the Refugee Processing Center, is one such tool to aid in the estimation of upcoming migrant population trends in Worcester. We can expect to see continued flows of formally settled refugees, asylees, and secondary migrants, among other immigrants arriving to join already established foreign-born populations from particular countries. Table 2 provides an overview of the number of refugees that arrived in Worcester and Massachusetts between 2007 and 2012.

Table 2: Formal Refugee Admissions by Region of Origin. Calendar Years 2007-2012.

Source: Department of State. Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. Office of Admission – Refugee Processing Center. Refugee Arrivals. Calendar Year: as of 30-September 2012

Region	Massachusetts			Worcester		
	Number of countries represented	Cumulative Number of refugees	% of total	Number of countries represented	Cumulative Number of refugees	% of total
Africa	17	1,839	21.72%	14	420	19.13%
East Asia	5	1,577	18.62%	3	313	14.25%
Europe and Central Asia	11	646	7.63%	0	0	0%
Latin America/Caribbean	1	36	0.43%	1	2	0.09%
Near East/South Asia	11	4,370	51.61%	6	1,461	66.56%
Total	45	8,468	100%	24	2,196	100%

The city of Worcester received 2,196 new refugees between 2007 and 2012, representing 25.9% of all refugees entering Massachusetts during that period. In fact, Worcester received the most refugees of any municipality in Massachusetts between 2007 and 2012, followed by Boston, West Springfield, and Springfield, respectively. In total, Worcester welcomed refugees from 24 different countries, none of whom originated from Europe or Central Asia. Table 3 presents the number of refugees from the 10 countries that accounted for the largest number of refugees coming to Worcester.

Table 3: Worcester Formal Refugee Admissions by Country. Calendar Years 2007-2012.

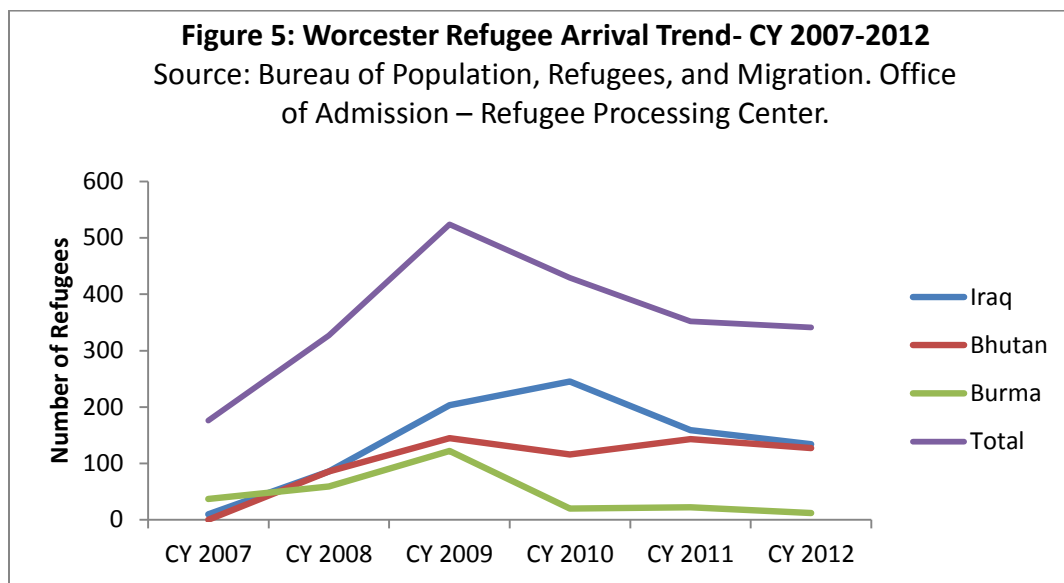
Source: Department of State. Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. Office of Admission – Refugee Processing Center. Refugee Arrivals. Calendar Year: as of 30-September 2012

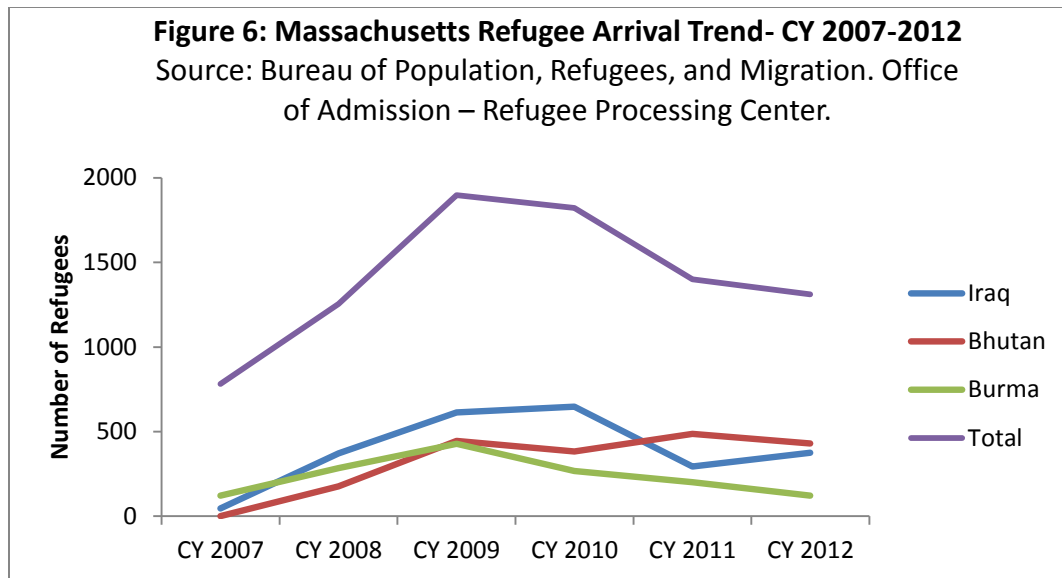
Rank	Country	Number of Refugees Arrived in Worcester, 2007-2012
1	Iraq	837
2	Bhutan	617
3	Burma	272
4	Burundi	112
5	Somalia	101
6	Liberia	45
7	Vietnam	38
8	Democratic Republic of Congo	34
9	Central African Republic	29
10	Ethiopia	11

Table 3 clearly shows that Iraq and Bhutan accounted for a large portion of arriving refugees during the years under consideration. These two countries combined accounted for 67% of the total number of refugees arriving in Worcester. With regards to the country of origin, the trends in Worcester and Massachusetts are in line with the national tendencies. According to the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, the leading regions and nationalities for refugee admissions to the US are the following:

- East Asia with Burma (30%) and Vietnam (0.2%).
- Near East/South Asia with Bhutan (26.6%), Iraq (16.6%) and Iran (3.6%).
- Africa with Somalia (5.6%), Eritrea (3.6%) and Democratic Republic of Congo (1.7%).

Figures 5 and 6 represent the trends of the main refugee populations in Worcester and Massachusetts. We can observe that the arrival of Iraqi refugees markedly increased between 2007 and 2012, with a peak in 2010, when Worcester welcomed 245 individuals, an exponential increase from the 10 Iraqi arrivals in 2007. The arrival of Iraqi refugees then tapered off in 2011 and 2012, when Worcester received 159 and 134 newcomers, respectively. A similar “rise, peak, dip” pattern can be seen in the Burmese refugee trend for Worcester, with the peak for that population occurring in 2009, which is also the peak year for the total number of refugees arriving in Worcester and Massachusetts between 2007 and 2012. However, the trend relating to refugees from Bhutan is a bit different. Again, we see a marked increase in arrivals around the year 2009, but there is no subsequent decrease in refuge arrivals in the available data.





A comparison of the shapes of the curves in Figure 5 against those in Figure 6 shows that the trends are fairly similar at the state and Worcester-city level. This makes sense considering the fact that Worcester accounts for such a large portion of refugee arrivals in Massachusetts. The ongoing displacement of individuals from Iraq and Burma, and the relocation of Bhutanese from Nepal are complex and multi-faceted phenomena, and their arrival in Massachusetts and Worcester are due to a bewildering array of structural, political, and social forces, which deserve thorough research in the future.

LANGUAGE

Language abilities and the capacity to communicate in English are crucial for refugees attempting to integrate and establish a sustainable livelihood. Being able to speak English allows for access to employment, education, and health services. According to Tran (1987), English proficiency is also connected with the general level of satisfaction of refugees.

The following table showing language ability for Massachusetts and Worcester-based foreign-born residents refers to a self-assessment of individual capacity to speak English and the language spoken at home, with the possible responses being: “English only”, “Language other

than English", and "Speak English less than very well". The US Census Bureau indicates that information from this category is self-reported and therefore fairly subjective, as the estimations are not the results of standard examination. Roughly 54% of the foreign-born population in Worcester estimates that they speak English "less than very well". This rate is about 10% higher than the level of foreign-born individuals reporting a similar lack of proficiency at the state level.

Table 4: Languages Spoken at Home

Source : Table DP02: 2012 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME AND ABILITY TO SPEAK ENGLISH	Massachusetts		Worcester city	
	Native	Foreign- born	Native	Foreign- born
Total population	5,589,130	971,465	143,975	37,498
English only	89.30%	18.60%	80.50%	14.90%
Language other than English	10.70%	81.40%	19.50%	85.10%
Speak English less than "very well"	2.20%	44.90%	7.40%	54.10%

Linguistic diversity is not exclusive to the foreign-born population in Worcester; 19.2% of the city's native population speaks a language other than English at home, which is nearly double the state average for natives, affirming Worcester's sizeable capacity for cultural diversity.

EDUCATION

In this section of our data analysis, we focus on the educational attainment statistics for the populations of Iraqi, Somali, and Liberian ancestries in Massachusetts (and presumably linked to their refugee-producing countries of origin). There are several facts that stand out in relation to these topics and populations.

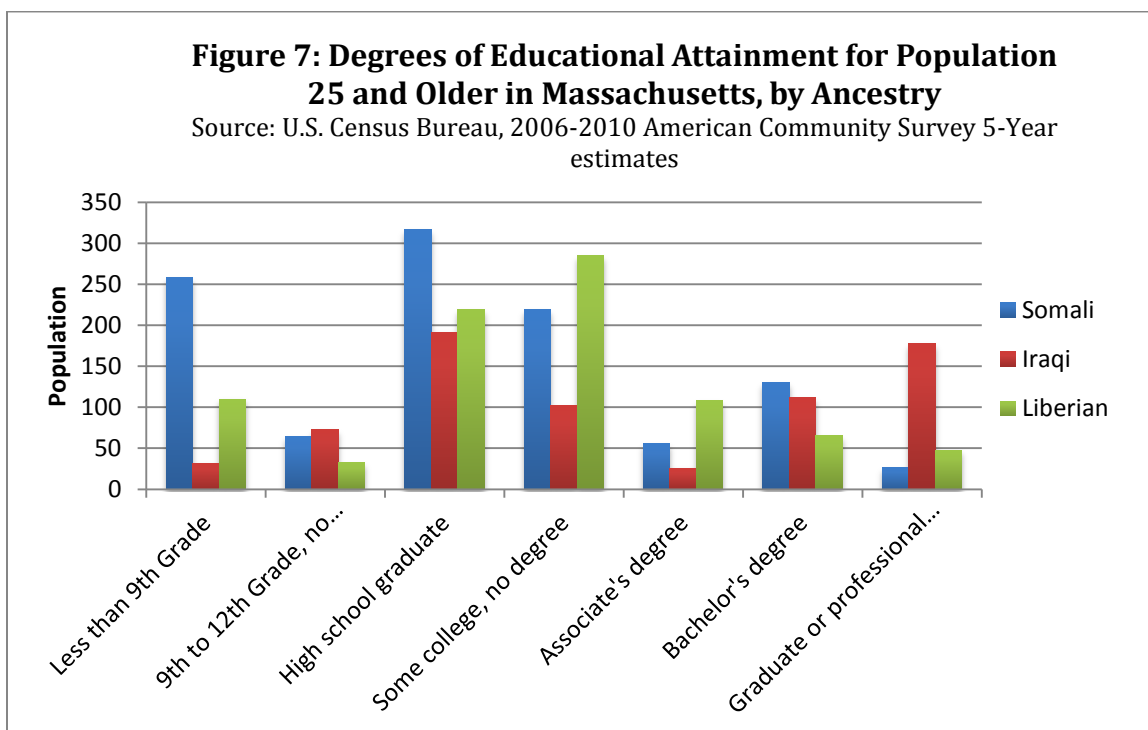
The educational attainment data available in the US Census Bureau is self-reported. In other words, this means that the people who fill out their data for the Census Bureau are allowed to report whatever they think is the degree of educational attainment that they have received in their country of origin or in the United States. With this context in mind, it is important to know the background of each ancestral group being described in order to understand the full value of the data.

The population of Somali ancestry arriving most recently from Somalia to Massachusetts came in 2003. The population that came at this time consisted of refugees from the Bantu ethnic group in Somalia. While they were living in Somalia, they suffered from exclusion from the rest of Somali society (Van Lehman, et al.). This was the case because the Bantu population made up some of the smaller clans in Somalia in comparison with a number of more dominant clans. The dominant clans received the most amount of educational funding and thus the majority of schools in Somalia ended up having the languages of the dominant clans as the language of instruction. This left the Bantu attending schools with a different language of instruction and thus not being able to get the most out of their education. As a result, only an estimated 5% of all Bantu refugees have been formally educated (Van Lehman, et al.).

Levels of education for Iraqis and Liberians contrast greatly with the Somali population. Iraq has had a consistent history of a strong educational system with high rates of literacy for both men and women. While the instability that has existed in the country since the Gulf War has taken a toll on the quality of education in the country, as well as resulted in a significant increase

in the number of refugees coming to America, the population of Iraqi ancestry in Massachusetts tends to be well educated (Ghareeb, et al.).

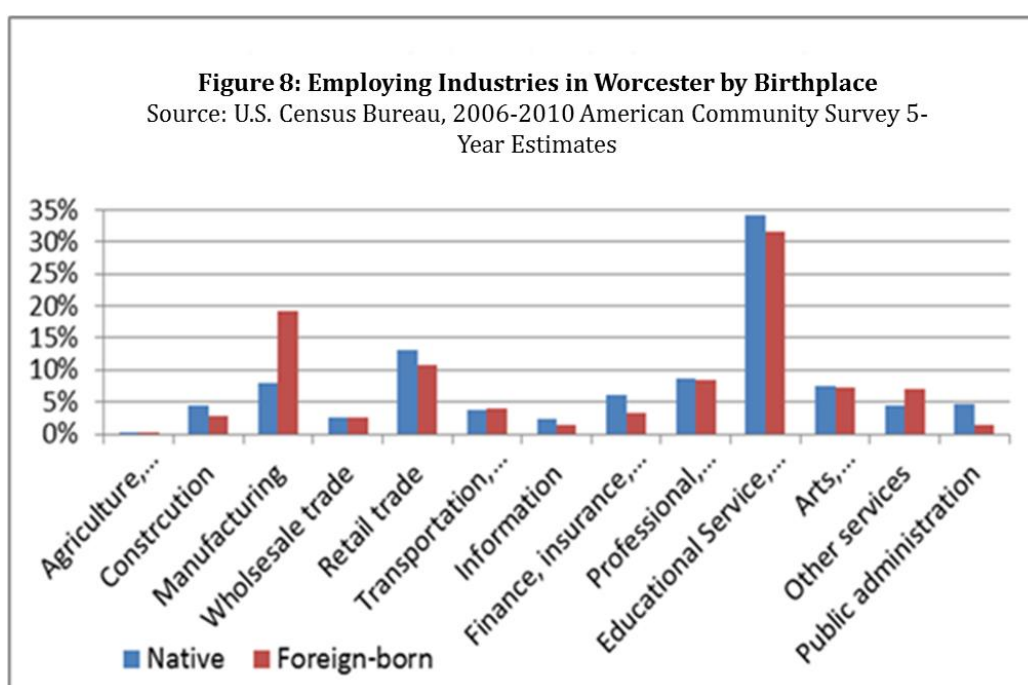
However, in Liberia, the educational system has not been consistently of a high quality and has actually produced some of the lowest literacy rates on the continent of Africa. Furthermore, due to the fact that the poverty rate in the country is tremendously high, the schools in the country often lack some of the most basic resources (Dunn-Marcos, et al.). Despite these challenges, more than 97% of Liberian immigrants reported at least some level of schooling. Patterns of educational attainment are revealed in Figure 7.



EMPLOYMENT, INCOME, AND POVERTY

Employment and income are relevant to refugee livelihoods in an urban setting. By using economic data on foreign-born individuals (serving as proxies for refugees), we can expand our understanding of the conditions which refugees in Worcester find themselves in. Figure 8 shows

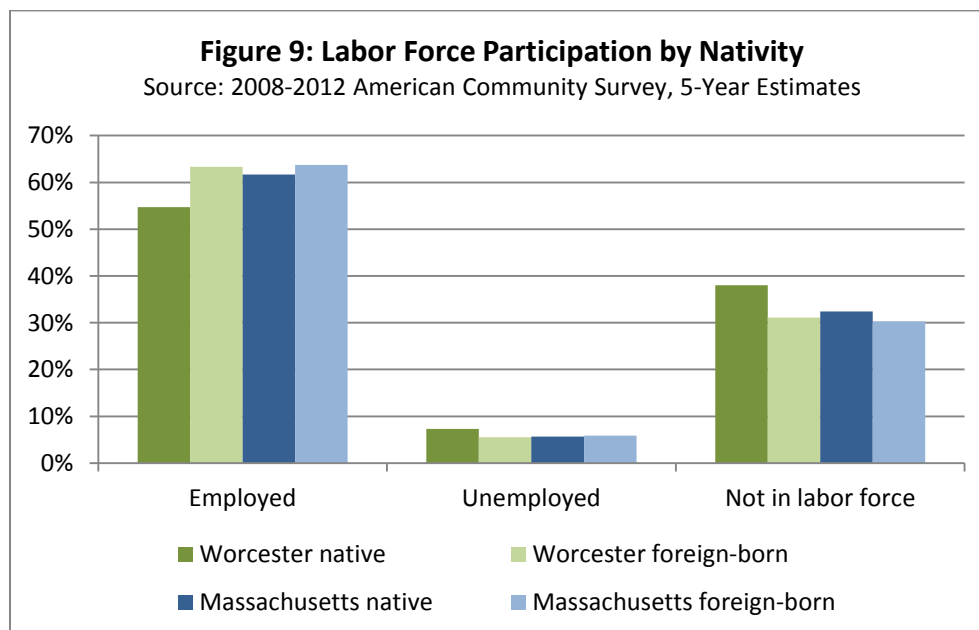
the percentage of workers employed in several employment categories. The first thing that stands out about the graph is that the broad shapes of the trends for native and foreign-born workers are fairly similar; the only category that shows a difference greater than 3.5% is manufacturing. Manufacturing employs 19.3% of foreign-born workers, while only 8% of native workers are associated with that sector, a difference of 11.3%. The next largest gaps in employment percentages are in public administration, finance, insurance and real estate, and other services.



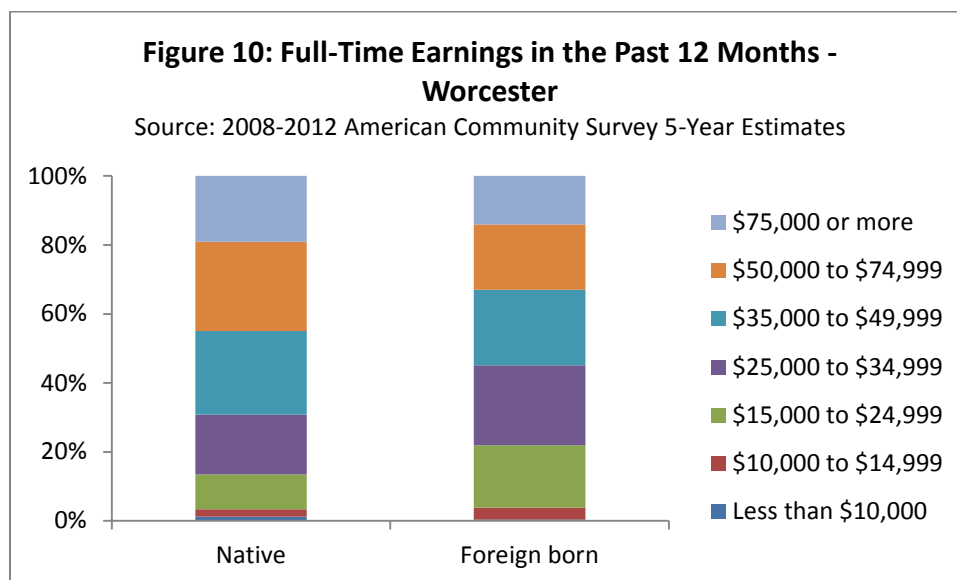
Refugees and immigrants often face difficulties in obtaining professional certifications based on credentials earned in their country of origin but not recognized in the United States. While many industries employ similar levels of the native and foreign-born populations, it is important to keep in mind that salaries within these industries vary substantially according to professional credentials. This point is driven home by looking at the top health care industry occupations in the Department of Labor's 2013 occupation and wage statistics for the Worcester Metropolitan Area; the median hourly wage for nurses in this area (6,530 employed) is \$39.94 with an annual wage of \$89,500 while nursing assistants in the area (4,720 employed) earn

\$14.74 an hour and \$31,420 – an annual difference of more than \$50,000 for an immigrant or refugee who might have been a nurse in their home country but is now judged to be qualified only to be a nursing aide.

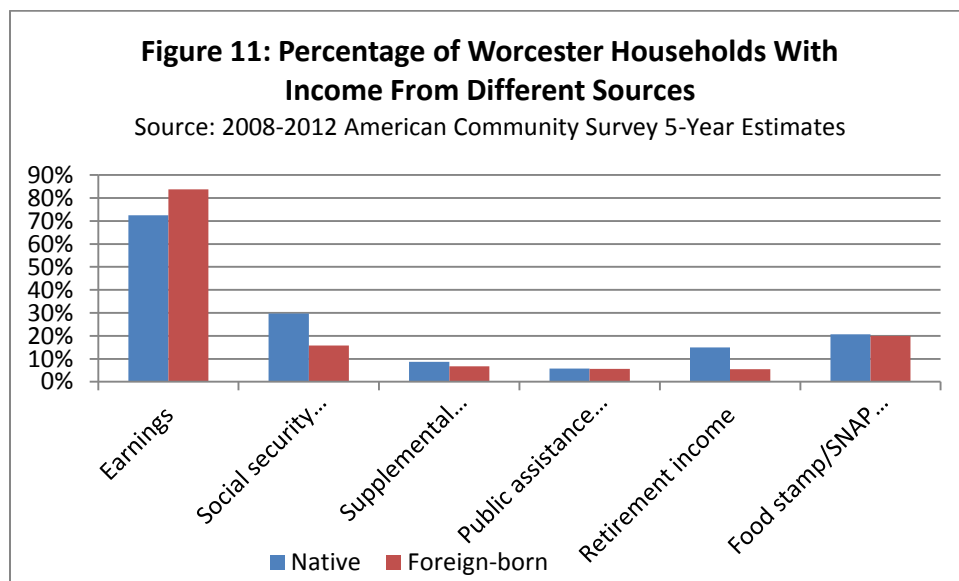
Data from the ACS also allows for a comparison of employment status between native and foreign-born individuals at the city and state level. Figure 9 reveals that there are similar relationships between labor force participation and nativity at the state and local level. In both cases, foreign-born individuals have higher rates of employment and labor force participation than their native counterparts. This difference is particularly stark in Worcester, where foreign-born individuals have a higher employment rate by 8.6% and a lower unemployment rate by 1.8%. It is important to remember that the quality of these jobs can vary to a great degree, and that foreign-born individuals are far from perfectly representative of refugees, but these facts nonetheless indicate that, in general individuals born outside of the US are finding employment in Worcester.



Although foreign-born individuals displayed higher rates of employment and labor force participation than native-born, the ACS data shows that native-born individuals out earn immigrants on an annual basis. A native-born man who is employed full-time can expect to earn \$50,620 annually, which is 22% higher than the \$41,549 that a male immigrant can be expected to make during a year. A similar discrepancy exists among female workers, with native-born women who are full-time employees earning an annual income of \$41,940, exceeding the \$33,108 median annual earnings for female foreign-born workers by \$8,832. Interestingly, a greater portion of Worcester's native population lives below the poverty level (21%) than of the foreign-born population (16.9%), which is a reversal of the trend for Massachusetts as a whole. This may be due to the foreign-born population having more people working per household. A more thorough breakdown and comparison of the earnings of full-time workers can be seen in figure 10. It should be noted that the figures from the Census Bureau on employment by industry and labor force participation apply to both full- and part-time workers, while the data on earnings solely focus on full-time laborers. This is significant in that 39 percent of workers in Worcester are considered part-time or part-year workers.



The 2007-2011 ACS 5-year estimates allow for a comparison of the percentage of households drawing income from various sources, disaggregated by natives and foreign-born individuals. The subject of benefits for immigrants is a politically controversial topic, but the data below show that, in Worcester, a smaller portion of foreign-born households receive governmental benefits than native households. While looking at the percentages of households that depend on benefits, it is important to keep in mind scale. The foreign-born population only makes up 21% of the total population of Worcester. Figure 11 clearly shows that a higher percentage of foreign-born households draw income from earnings (83.8% versus 72.5% for native households). Additionally, the percentage of native households drawing income from social security and retirement funds vastly outstrips the portion of foreign-born households receiving income from similar sources. The portion of households receiving supplemental security income, public assistance income, and food stamp/SNAP benefits were very similar between native and foreign-born households.



Conclusion

This report has made use of data available through the U.S. Census and American Community Survey in an effort to paint a picture of the current status of refugees in Worcester, Massachusetts. The authors were able to extrapolate relevant information from state-level data on refugee immigration patterns and city-level demographic information on the foreign-born and native populations of Worcester. At the state level, Massachusetts welcomed 8,468 refugees between 2007 and 2012; Worcester became the home for over a quarter of these individuals, but the refugee population only represents 1.2 % of the total population of Worcester. The refugees who entered Worcester during this period represent 24 different countries. The countries that accounted for the largest share of refugees were Iraq, Bhutan, and Burma. The peak year for refugee arrivals in Massachusetts between 2007 and 2012 was 2009.

Worcester is a city with a sizeable foreign-born population. Over 20 percent of Worcester's population was born beyond the borders of America. Within this subpopulation, 54% of individuals reported that they spoke English "less than very well". This is an area that offers room for improvement when viewed next to the rate for the entire state, which is roughly 44%. Worcester's foreign-born population has a higher rate of employment and labor force participation than Worcester natives. However, full-time native workers out-earn foreign-born workers by more than 20%. At this point in time, we have a broad-brush image of refugee settlement in Worcester. Future research will refine this image and add a greater level of detail, increasing Worcester's ability to understand and accommodate this unique population.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Due to the acknowledged limitations of this study, our findings should be understood as a demographic snapshot based on the available data on refugees in Worcester, and a chance to highlight some crude trends in the demographic data for further research. A robust study of

refugee integration would require a review of common indicators of successful refugee settlement used in the US, as well as what “integration” means to both refugee newcomers across a range of experiences, and to Worcester natives. Furthermore, since refugee integration is an evolving, multi-dimensional process, there are challenges to comprehensive measurement beyond economic indicators. A study of refugee integration in Worcester should reflect existing and ongoing discussions about refugee incorporation in New England and in the United States more broadly, and include a comparative analysis of refugee integration policies elsewhere. Additional avenues for inquiry arising from the demographic snapshot presented in this report are:

- We see the need to enhance our use of the term “refugee” to include not only those formally resettled in the US, but also asylees, secondary migrants, and other categories of refugee newcomers—in Worcester. Any future study would need to incorporate innovative research techniques to account for the similarities and differences in settlement experience and integration for people who fall under different legal categories, including undocumented immigrants.
- The safety and security of refugees should be addressed by future research. The design of a future study should aim to document the frequency and type of crimes impacting the refugee community, along with the experiences of refugees interacting with law enforcement.
- In order to accurately understand the strengths and weaknesses of Worcester as a receiving community for refugees, it will be necessary to identify its position in a wider context. Worcester’s refugee integration stakeholders will be able to take proactive measures towards meeting the goals of city residents by studying and incorporating the best practices of other cities across America that are home to significant refugee populations.

- From our initial reading of the data, refugee newcomers show strong labor force participation; furthermore, there is no evidence that refugees demonstrate a higher use of services overall. However, this assessment still needs to be confirmed by data collection across different populations of refugees. In particular, the absence in some data sets of the growing prevalence of temporary and part-time work is a shortcoming for understanding the extent of labor force participation. We suggest that adopting a livelihood approach to refugee integration would help to ascertain the range of assets and liabilities experienced by refugee households beyond the focus on employment.
- As these data show, refugee populations in Worcester are linguistically as well as culturally diverse, which presents a number of challenges for interpretation and translation in providing service. More research is needed to understand how Worcester's refugees, service providers and local communities compare to other cities.

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APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

In an effort to capture the characteristics of a group as amorphous and diverse as refugees, the authors consulted and cross-referenced multiple sources for data. For the purpose of this study, the US census data were disaggregated to explore the differences between the broad category of immigrants—as an initial proxy that includes refugees—and natives. Using insights from our literature review the authors included categories on language, education, housing, and employment. This was done by looking for data through the US Census Factfinder tool on the US Census website, which provides access to decennial census data and the American Community Survey. The American Community Survey collects data on communities on a daily basis for the years between the decennial censuses. These data are used to derive estimated measurements for the overall population. The estimates are available at three different temporal scopes, with the 1-year estimates being based on the most recent 12 months of data, 3-year estimates based on 36 months of data, and 5-year estimates derived from 60 months of continuous data collection.

It is notoriously difficult to find reliable data on mobile and hidden populations, such as refugees. Neither the decennial census nor the ACS collects residency status information or entry status for special populations such as refugees or asylees. In the US, formally recognized refugees receive a one-year refugee visa, after which they are granted 'green cards' and are counted as resident immigrants⁶. This change of legal status does not necessarily mitigate the challenges refugees face that extend beyond the first year. Even if refugee-specific data were available, given the complex and fluid nature of migratory processes, it is possible that individuals who might qualify for protection as refugees enter the US through other means. For example, people

⁶ The US State Department says, "Refugees are admitted to the U.S. as refugees and remain in that status for 12 months. They are, however, authorized and expected to work during this time. After 12 months, they are required to adjust their status to that of Permanent Resident Alien. They can apply for citizenship after having been resident in the United States for five years."
<http://www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/factsheets/2013/210135.htm> [Accessed September 30, 2014]

escaping conflict but entering the US as tourists, students, or with other short-term visa status would not be officially counted through the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, which records refugee arrivals. Other vulnerable individuals for whom it is difficult to collect data are, for example, those seeking protection who are smuggled or trafficked across borders.

Despite the gaps in the legal and administrative categorization of refugees and immigrants in the decennial census and ACS, the authors were able to collect relevant data in an attempt to present demographic data at the city and state levels on incoming groups of immigrants and refugees. One approach has been to cross-reference US census categories such as “language” and “foreign-born” with specific populations who claim ancestry matching the larger population trends of incoming refugees in the past 5 years. This methodology specifically identified “immigrants” with Liberian, Iraqi and Somali ancestry. The limitations of this methodology are many. While the possibility of using region of birth was considered, ultimately the authors decided against it as refugees likely comprise a small percentage of these population groups. Even in using ancestral populations, rather than assuming these groups are largely refugee, the authors understand that these population groups are not entirely comprised of refugees, which limits the explanatory power of the data.

Another limitation lies with the census categories themselves. In particular, the ancestry category, which could potentially help to illuminate characteristics of different generations within immigrant groups, primarily focuses on populations of European lineage. For example, ancestral lines published in the 2011 ACS 1-year estimates report an entire row for the 5,046 estimated individuals of Slovak ancestry but group together the 119,798 estimated individuals of “Sub-Saharan African” ancestry. Further, not a single Latin American country is included in the ancestry tables for Massachusetts or Worcester. Even by using the search function on Factfinder for any applicable table, the Bhutanese, one of the largest populations of refugees being resettled in central Massachusetts, have been untraceable within census data since 1990. Additionally, there is no uniformity in regards to what data are available through the different

year estimates. For example, Information regarding foreign-born populations was sometimes available for 1-year estimates and not for 5-year estimates.

Even in trying to describe the situation for populations born in a particular world region, the data sets are likely skewed by larger populations of immigrants from nearby countries. For example, trying to understand the context of Bhutanese refugees by looking at those from South Central Asia is difficult due to Bhutanese immigrants being outnumbered by skilled immigrants from India. When looking at the occupations held by those born in India, according to the 2009-2011 ACS, 78.8% are employed in management, business, science, and art occupations with statewide median household earnings of \$112,474 and mean household earnings of \$136,756, far above the state household median and mean of \$64,504 and \$87,050, respectively. However, it is highly unlikely that these figures would also hold true for the Bhutanese immigrant population. Ultimately, we decided against reporting on Birth by World Region as it seemed to be an unlikely source of meaningful data for describing refugee populations.