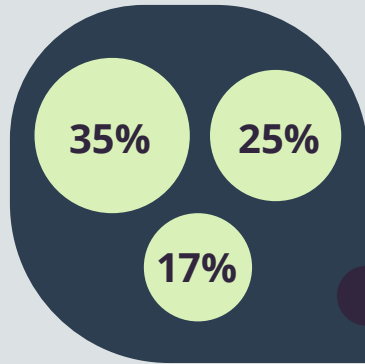


Refugees and Immigrants



Racial & ethnic discrimination noted as a community concern: **35%** in **2021**, **25%** in **2019** and **17%** in **2011**.

26% rated lack of services for non-English speakers in the community was a major or moderate problem.

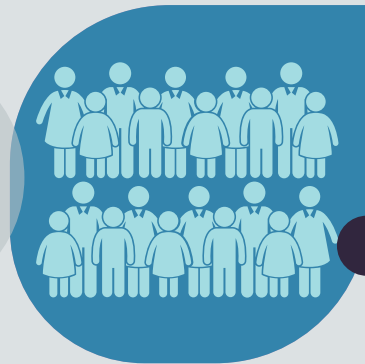


10% of Bellevue households have limited English proficiency.

Nearly **55,000** Bellevue households speak a language other than English at home.



The need for more culturally and linguistically responsive human services grows each year.



Refugees and Immigrants

Key Findings

- The need for more culturally and linguistically responsive human services grows each year. Throughout the community, there is a need for information to be available in languages other than English. In addition, there is a need for more diverse staff who are not only bilingual but also culturally competent. Many providers expressed challenges in recruiting bilingual staff.
- Many refugees and immigrants are refusing services and disengaging from other public or private systems. The most commonly cited reason for doing so was the perception that accessing resources is not safe for them or their family due to their citizenship status.

Population Overview

The City of Bellevue's population continues to grow and diversify. Forty-one percent of Bellevue's population is foreign-born, up from only 13% in 1990.¹ The term "foreign-born" includes immigrants (documented and undocumented), refugees, and asylees. Immigrants are people who petitioned to enter the U.S. to become lawful permanent residents. By comparison, refugees are those who are forced to leave the country of their nationality due to persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution, and asylees are foreign nationals currently residing in the U.S. awaiting refugee designation.

This chapter only provides information about goals 1 through 5 as they relate specifically to refugees and immigrants. For a broader discussion of these areas, please see their respective chapters.

- Goal 1: Food to Eat and Roof Overhead
- Goal 2: Supportive Relationships within Families, Neighborhoods, and Communities
- Goal 3: A Safe Haven from All Forms of Violence
- Goal 4: Health Care to be as Physically and Mentally Fit as Possible
- Goal 5: Education and Job Skills to Help Individuals Reach their Full Potential

In addition to these goals, the following topics have been identified as important to this population:

- Language Barriers
- Fear and Discrimination

We recognize that disparate outcomes based on race exist regarding prevalence of and responses to the issues covered in this chapter. As part of the City's ongoing efforts to continue growing as a culturally competent and racially equitable organization and city, we have, when possible, highlighted racial disparities throughout this report, denoted by the phrase Racial (In)Equity Data Point. **As the majority of refugees and immigrants in Bellevue are people of color, all data in this chapter are Racial (In)Equity Data Points.**

While gender is a spectrum that includes transgender people and those who identify as neither male nor female, the sources referenced in this chapter reported data by male and female and did not report data encompassing the entire gender spectrum.

Goal 1: Food to Eat and Roof Overhead

- Staff at both Bellevue Wraparound Program and LifeSpring discussed the challenge of accessing culturally appropriate food through available food program. There has been an effort to improve the availability of culturally appropriate food, but there is still a need for more options in the community for each cultural group.²
- In 2019, 40% of the Bellevue residents served in Hopelink's food programs were immigrants or refugees. In addition, 26% of the Bellevue residents who accessed food services reported Limited English Proficiency (LEP). Hopelink continues to have Spanish (35%) and Russian (32%) as the main languages spoken among Bellevue LEP clients accessing Food services. Chinese & Mandarin (7%), Farsi (5%), and Arabic (4%) are the next most common languages spoken among clients that report limited English proficiency. Due to the impact of COVID-19 and ensuring that food services were easily accessible, Hopelink stopped collecting demographic data for food program clients. Therefore, this is the most recent data available.³
- More than half of Bellevue residents that Renewal Food Bank served in 2020 identify as immigrants or refugees.⁴
- 92% of Immigrants/Refugees served by all Hopelink programs at the Bellevue Service Center reported being stably housed, 7% report being homeless or at-risk. In comparison, 82% of Non-Immigrant/Refugees served at the Bellevue Center reported being stably housed, 18% reported being homeless or at risk.⁵
- Muslim Community Resource Center (MCRC) serves a high percentage of refugee and immigrant individuals. One of the programs they offer provides culturally relevant food assistance and gas assistance. From January 2021 to September 2021, they served 177 Bellevue residents with 277 services of either food or gas assistance.⁶

Goal 2: Supportive Relationships within Families, Neighborhoods, and Communities

- Both in the community conversations and in the provider's survey, providers stated that there is a significant lack of resources for those battling immigration laws or trying to attain citizenship.
- Indian American Community Services (previously Indian Association of Western Washington) reported a surge in legal needs ranging from domestic violence to legal immigration. They offer a legal clinic that offers support to build the individual's case with limited hours, but no representation in court. They have significantly increased their frequency of their clinics and are currently holding 5-6 clinics in a month.⁷
- Almost three-quarters (73.7%) of parents and caregivers of children in 5th grade and younger in King County had someone to turn to for day-to-day emotional support with parenting or raising children in 2017 and 2019. Parents and caregivers in households that spoke many languages other than English at home were less likely to have emotional support with parenting. This includes parents and caregivers who primarily speak at home in Amharic (62.6%), Arabic (20.0%), Chinese (50.7%), Korean (59.2%), Russian (44.0%), Somali (42.4%), Spanish (27.2%), Telugu (47.3%), Vietnamese (62.3%), and other languages (48.3%).⁸
- With the increasing and complex needs of Bellevue residents, Bellevue Mini City Hall (MCH) staff continue to spend more time with each customer as more agencies and organizations lack capacity to respond especially to those with limited English and cultural barrier issues. Currently, volunteer interpreters and city staff offer assistance in Chinese (Mandarin and

Cantonese), Spanish, Russian, Ukrainian, Hindi, Somali. City staff also have access to the dual-receiver language line, which provides an over-the-phone interpreter in more than 100 languages at Mini City Hall and throughout the city.⁹

- Many families from diverse cultures prefer their children be cared for by families, friends, or neighbors (FFN) rather than in centers. FFN is more prevalent among immigrant families, because FFN caregivers are people that they know and trust to care for their child within the family's home culture and language. Child Care Resources collaborates with community-based organizations to offer Kaleidoscope Play & Learn groups, which is a weekly facilitated play group where children get to experience socializing with their peers and FFN caregivers/parents learn more about child development and how they can help their children be ready for kindergarten. Due to COVID-19, all sessions are being held virtually. Prior to the pandemic, 4 groups met in Bellevue: 1) Newport Library in Chinese & English (run by Chinese Information and Services Center – CISC), 2) Woodside East Apartments in English (CISC), 3) Crossroads Community Center in Spanish & English (CISC), and 4) North Bellevue Community Center in English (Indian Association of Western Washington). All groups are free to families.¹⁰

“There is a need for more diverse staff who are not only bilingual but also culturally competent.”

~ Community Conversations

Goal 3: A Safe Haven from All Forms of Violence

- King County Sexual Assault Resource Coalition (KCSARC) reports an increased demand from Spanish speaking refugees and immigrants over the past few years and now provides all their services in Spanish as well as English. They provide access to legal services for Latinx survivors who are in need of immigration legal assistance related to the sexual assault as well as those needing family legal services related to sexual assault.¹¹
- Immigrant survivors of domestic violence may be subject to unique forms of abuse, especially those who are undocumented or whose legal status depends on the abuser. Physical, emotional, sexual, and other kinds of abuse occur in all communities; however, abusers may use immigration status as an extra weapon of power and control, threatening to call Immigration and Customs Enforcement if a victim challenges or reports domestic or sexual violence. Those who are undocumented may be particularly vulnerable to this type of threat because they fear being deported if they challenge or report their abusers to law enforcement.¹²
- Refugee Women’s Alliance (ReWA) serves refugee and immigrant women and families to support them to stabilize, promote acculturation, increase language proficiency, and improve employability. In 2020, 18 Bellevue residents completed Refugee Women’s Alliance 8-week domestic violence support group.¹³
- Consejo Counseling Services’ Domestic Violence Advocacy Program provides counseling, outreach, and advocacy services to Latinx survivors of domestic violence; most of their clients are immigrants from Latin America who speak Spanish. In 2020, Consejo has provided 22 Bellevue residents with 268 hours of counseling and 146 hours in support groups.¹⁴

For information on Hate Crimes and Bias Incidents, please see Goal 2: Safe Haven from All Forms of Violence.

Goal 4: Health Care to be as Physically and Mentally Fit as Possible

- Safe Haven is a grassroots group of non-profit providers and advocates that collaborates to strengthen systems for immigrants and refugees, with a particular focus on advocating for the rights and safety of undocumented community members. During a community conversation at a Safe Haven meeting, participants reported a need for culturally relevant services for Immigrant and Refugees. They discussed the stigma of accessing services and the challenge when they're not able to receive services from someone that both understands their culture and is bi-lingual when needed. Members reported clients going to Seattle or South King County to access services.¹⁵
- Mini City Hall staff reported that accessing health care is especially challenging for older immigrant individuals, because they cannot afford private insurance and may not qualify for Medicaid or Medicare.¹⁶
- International Community Health Services reported in the provider's survey that refugees and immigrants often find it hard to find care that is provided in their language and in ways that are culturally appropriate. Some are not eligible for Medicaid, having not been in the US long enough, or are not familiar with the US healthcare and insurance systems and are unsure about the out-of-pocket costs they may have to pay so they delay accessing needed care.¹⁷
- Several providers report that there is a significant need for more bi-lingual, culturally competent mental health providers. They discussed there often being a stigma associated with accessing mental health services, so it decreases anxiety when the provider speaks their primary language and understands the culture. Chinese Information Service Center (CISC) staff reported that there are no therapists in Bellevue that speak Russian and accept Medicaid, resulting in clients accessing services in South King County.¹⁸
- Indian American Community Services (IACS) discussed the stress, anxiety, and grief that individuals in their community and likely other immigrant communities are experiencing due to the impact of COVID-19. They stated that nearly every Indian family they know has lost a family member or friend that lives in India to COVID-19. Being so far away from family makes it even more challenging to go through the grieving process.¹⁹
- International Community Health Services (ICHS) services a high number of immigrant and refugee clients. They stated in their provider's survey that the demand for dental services in Bellevue was rising. From January 1 through June 30, 2021, the dentists at the ICHS Bellevue Clinic that are funded partially by city funds provided 980 visits to 679 unduplicated Bellevue residents. During the same period in 2019, these dentists provided 353 visits to 236 unduplicated residents. This shows how demand has increased above even pre-pandemic levels.²⁰

Goal 5: Education and Job Skills to Help Individuals Reach Their Full Potential

- Although the lack of living-wage jobs was a consistent theme across community conversations, immigrant populations have unique experiences and challenges. CISC staff discussed that many of the clients they serve have the skills to do the job, but their language barrier makes it nearly impossible for them to obtain jobs that fit their skills and education.²¹
- Bellevue College's Preparing for Work program helps meet the refugee/immigrant community's need for job and English skills training. Bellevue College served 680 Bellevue residents in 2020 through Preparing for Work Course and Center for Career Course²²

- In 2020, Jewish Family Services, who serves a high percentage of immigrants and refugees, provided 34 Bellevue residents with employment services, such as resume creation, job coaching, and skills training.²³
- Hopelink’s English for Work (EFW) program teaches English language learners how to search for jobs and speak about their skills and experience. All classes were moved online due to COVID-19, which results in a decreased number of participants. In FY 2021, over 150 clients were served. Of those who completed the course, 18 percent improved their employment status. Of all employed students who completed the course, their average wage when exiting the course was \$17.88 per hour.

Additional Items for Consideration

Language Barriers

Limited English Proficiency (LEP) refers to anyone above the age of 5 who reported speaking English less than “very well” in the U.S. Census classification system. Those with LEP can find it difficult to navigate systems due to lack of information available in their native language and inability to directly communicate with providers.

- In the phone/online survey, 26% of respondents said that *lack of services for non-English speakers in the community* was a major or moderate problem.²⁴
- Several providers discussed that information in the community is often only offered in English and not translated. Therefore, the immigrant and refugee community are often not aware of community resources, community events, and other important information distributed into the community, include COVID-19 precautions.
- Asian Counseling and Referral Services reported in the provider’s survey that parents/guardians struggle getting connected with community services due to language barriers, and unfamiliarity of resources and services they qualify for.²⁵
- Approximately 10% of Bellevue households and 6% of King County households had LEP in 2019. About 30% of these Bellevue households speak Spanish and 24% speak an Asian or Pacific Island language.²⁶
- Regardless of language proficiency, nearly 55,000 Bellevue households speak a language other than English at home; 55% speak an Asian and Pacific Island language, 29% an Indo-European language, and 14% Spanish.²⁷
- CISC discussed community information often not being translated in a timely manner, sometimes only having that translation completed a couple days before the program ends. CISC took a proactive approach and prioritized translating COVID-19 information as it became available. As of August 2021, they had translated over 300 pieces of COVID-19 information into Chinese, because the information was not translated as it was released.

“Refugees and immigrants often have to face English language barriers, which prevent them to find a good job, to involve with their children’s schooling and helping them succeed in school...etc. just to name a few. Transportation would also be a major issue for newcomers who rely on public transportation which is not always convenient.”

~ Provider’s Survey, Jewish Family Services

- Jubilee REACH, a community center in the Lake Hills neighborhood, offers ESL classes at all levels. These ESL classes can help students to prepare for entrance to a college or university, or help to improve English for social purposes or travel. Students practice conversational English and learn the skills necessary for communicating in a wide variety of situations. In 2019, more than 200 students from 23 countries attended ESL classes. In March of 2020, the ESL program was temporarily deferred due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The ESL program has resumed in-person classes at the Jubilee REACH Center as of October 5, 2021.²⁸

Fear and Discrimination

- Several provider's survey respondents reported increased fear related to immigration status was a substantial barrier to clients accessing services.
- Thirty-five percent of community phone/online survey respondents rated racial or ethnic discrimination as a major or moderate community issue, a 10% increase from 2019 and 22% increase from 2009.
- Seven percent of community phone/online survey respondents rated experiencing racial or ethnic discrimination as a major or moderate household issue, a 2% decrease from 2019 and the same as 2009.
- Twenty percent of the consumer survey respondents reported that someone in their household is experiencing racial or ethnic discrimination most of the time or sometimes. 31% of respondents reported that someone in their household is experiencing discrimination other than racial or ethnic discrimination.
- Across many community conversations, a major theme was that many refugees and immigrants are refusing services and disengaging from other public or private systems.²⁹ The most commonly cited reason for doing so was the perception that accessing resources is not safe for them or their family due to their citizenship status.
- A substantial amount of fear among immigrants and refugees stems from the federal government's proposed administrative redefinition of "public charge." An individual seeking admission or permanent residency in the U.S. is deemed inadmissible if they are likely to become a "public charge," meaning they will become primarily dependent on the government for support. Use of these programs, though legal, could be used against immigrants in their attempts to gain permanent residency status.
- Bellevue Mini City Hall staff reported that many immigrants they serve, especially those who are undocumented, withdraw their families from housing, medical care and nutrition programs because they feared deportation.³⁰

For information on Hate Crimes and Bias Incidents, please see Goal 2: Safe Haven from All Forms of Violence.

Endnotes

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