

The Evaluation of the Refugee Social Service (RSS) and Targeted Assistance Formula Grant (TAG) Programs: Houston Case Study

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ACRONYMS

Administration for Children and Families (ACF)
Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM)
Cuban Haitian Entrant Program (CHEP)
Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
Department of Homeland Security (DHS)
Department of State (DOS)
Employment Authorization Document (EAD)
English as a Second Language (ESL)
Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR)
Immigration and Nationality Act (INA)
Legal Permanent Resident (LPR)
Mutual Assistance Association (MAA)
Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR)
Public/Private Partnership (PPP)
Reception and Placement Services (R&P)
Refugee Arrival Data System (RADS)
Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA)
Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA)
Refugee Social Services (RSS)
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
Social Security Administration (SSA)
Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
Targeted Assistance Formula Grant (TAG)
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
Unemployment Insurance (UI) wage records
United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR)
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)
Workforce Investment Act (WIA)
Voluntary Agency (Volag)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is a case study of refugee employability services in Houston (Harris County), Texas. It is one of several reports presenting the findings of the Evaluation of Refugee Social Service (RSS) and Targeted Assistance Formula Grant (TAG) programs. The RSS and TAG programs provide services to refugees and members of certain other eligible groups¹ with the objective of helping them achieve economic self-sufficiency soon after entering the country. The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) administers these programs and sponsored the evaluation, which was conducted by The Lewin Group and its partners, the Urban Institute, Johns Hopkins University, the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), and Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC).

Components of the study of Houston's program included an implementation study examining how the programs operate in different settings and what services are provided to refugees, and an outcomes study examining refugees' receipt of services and employment and public benefit outcomes over time. Data used included refugee entry data from the Refugee Arrival Data System (RADS) database; program data from the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (THHSC), which administers the state RSS and TAG grants; administrative data on benefits received through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) program, and the Food Stamp Program; wage and employment data from unemployment insurance (UI) wage records; and a new survey of a random sample of RSS, TAG, and Matching Grant (MG) clients in Houston designed and administered by the research team. In addition, interviews with program administrators and partners were conducted during an intensive site visit to Houston, and several focus group discussions were held with program participants.

A. Findings in Brief

This report focuses on refugees who entered the country between the years 2000 and 2004, were between the ages of 18 and 55 at entry, and who received RSS or TAG services at some point. It relies on administrative data and a client survey that was conducted between September 2006 and March 2007. The report's key findings include the following:

- Houston resettles a large, diverse, and frequently changing refugee population; this diversity can complicate RSS and TAG delivery. Cubans are the largest group of refugees—22 percent of all 2000 through 2004 arrivals—but no other group accounts for more than 11 percent. Cuban and Vietnamese refugees have large co-ethnic communities in Houston and can rely on them to help find employment. Cuban and former Soviet/Eastern European refugees are relatively well educated, while some of the smaller African refugee groups—most recently Somali Bantu and Liberians—have very low educational attainment. The five languages spoken by the Bantu, their lack of basic literacy skills, and their unfamiliarity with modern urban living have made resettlement,

¹ Asylees, Cuban and Haitian entrants, Amerasians, and victims of a severe form of trafficking. For ease of reference, this report generally uses the term “refugees” to refer to all such groups that qualify for ORR services, except where delineation is necessary.

employment placement, and integration considerably more difficult for them than most other refugee groups.

- Texas operates a public-private partnership (PPP) through which cash assistance is delivered by voluntary agencies (Volags) instead of by state welfare offices. As a result, the same Volags that offer initial resettlement services through the Reception and Placement (R&P) program also offer RCA and MG alongside RSS and TAG employment services. Often the same case managers stay with refugees through both the R&P and cash assistance periods.
- Long-term welfare dependency is rare among refugees in Houston because Texas TANF benefits are relatively low. Most families with children are placed in MG, which provides housing assistance and higher benefits than TANF, though for a shorter time. Even after RCA or MG benefits expire, very few refugees receive TANF; instead, they primarily rely on income from work and, in some cases, Food Stamps and private support.
- Refugees must find employment quickly because of the eight-month time limit on RCA and the six-month limit on MG. The vast majority of refugees in Houston are employed, regardless of period of entry or region of origin. Employment is rapid, as half of refugees are employed within their second quarter after entry. The median wage of refugees' first job is \$7 an hour; the median wage of jobs held by refugees at the time of the survey is \$8.50 an hour.
- Refugees' earnings and wages are low and show little upward progression after the second year after entry, but Houston has a relatively low cost of living. Even four years after entry, refugees are only earning \$15,000 a year on average, and almost two thirds (63 percent) of refugees earn less than \$15,000. In 2005, Houston was ranked 140th out of 154 U.S. metropolitan areas in terms of overall cost of living, and 147th out of 154 in the cost of housing.
- Receipt of English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction is associated with higher wages and a higher likelihood of employment; yet, refugees generally do not continue taking classes once they become employed. Further, those refugees who receive employment services are less likely to take English classes, and vice versa. Even five years after arrival, fewer than 20 percent of refugees in the study speak English very well, and about a third do not speak English well. Lack of ongoing ESL instruction may be impeding refugees' long-run economic advancement.
- Although most refugees are satisfied with the services they receive, a significant share (30 percent) rate services as fair or poor. Somali Bantu focus group participants criticized the MG period (4–6 months) as too short for them to achieve economic self-sufficiency, and criticized the fact that they had to take the first job offered to them.

B. The Texas Public Private Partnership and the Houston Consortium for Service Delivery

The operation of a PPP in Texas was one of the reasons that Houston was chosen as a site for this evaluation. In 2002, Texas began operating a PPP, allowing Volags to deliver RCA and associated RSS and TAG services. Most states deliver RCA through their TANF agencies and local welfare offices, as part of the typical “publicly-administered” system, but in Texas, RCA is delivered through Volags. Part of the reason for implementing the PPP is the state’s low TANF benefit levels, as Texas is among the half dozen states with lowest maximum TANF benefits nationally. The PPP allows Volags to offer RCA at levels higher than the TANF thresholds, but benefits are available for a much shorter time and cannot exceed the determined ceiling.² The PPP also allows Volags to deliver RCA alongside RSS- or TAG-funded employment services, and to do so seamlessly following the initial R&P period.

A second important feature of Houston’s service delivery system is the consortium of RSS and TAG providers. In spring 2006, at the time of the study’s site visit to Houston, four Volags and two education providers had formed a consortium to deliver RCA, RSS, TAG, and other services to refugees; they were the only RSS and TAG grant recipients in the area. A fifth, relatively small Volag in the area has since joined the consortium, and it began receiving RSS and TAG funding in FY 2007. Since the consortium agencies work together closely and deliver services similarly, there was continuity among most of the provider staff interviewed for this study, which allowed a very detailed and consistent picture of RSS, TAG, and other service delivery to emerge across providers. This consortium model for service delivery has been developed in other sites such as Chicago and Idaho, but some features of the Texas system may offer lessons for providers in other communities.

C. Characteristics of Refugees Served in Houston

Houston has been among the metropolitan areas where the largest numbers of refugees resettle. Between October 1982 and June 2004, almost 33,000 refugees were resettled in Houston, making it the fifteenth largest refugee resettlement site in the United States during that period.³

The great diversity of Houston’s refugee population was a major criterion for site selection, and it enabled a rich comparison of service use and outcomes across origin groups, as shown throughout this report. Houston’s diverse flow of refugees includes some new and challenging populations—such as Liberians, Somali Bantu, and Meskhetian Turks—but also larger flows of more established populations like Cubans and Vietnamese. Although Cubans were the largest group during the period of the study, no single group accounted for a majority of refugees. In addition, the origins of refugees shifted significantly from year to year, requiring significant changes in RSS and TAG service delivery responses.

Cuba is the largest single country of origin for Houston’s refugees, accounting for 22 percent of all adult refugee arrivals in FY 2000–04. Houston has a large Cuban community, although

² The PPP RCA program has a time limit of eight months and a payment ceiling that varies by the size of the family unit, as stated in Office of Refugee Resettlement, ACF, DHHS, “Refugee Resettlement Program: Refugee Cash Assistance—Payment Levels,” 45 CFR 400.60(a).

³ See Audrey Singer and Jill H. Wilson, “From ‘There’ to Here’: Refugee Resettlement in Metropolitan America,” The Brookings Institution Living Cities Census Series, September 2006, Table 3.

there are far more Mexican-origin immigrants. There are almost 1.5 million Latinos in Harris County, meaning Spanish-language use is common throughout the area, especially in many lower-skilled sectors of the economy.

Vietnam is the second-largest country of origin, accounting for 11 percent of FY 2000–04 arrivals. Houston has a well-established Vietnamese population as well, with refugee arrivals dating back to 1975. Harris County’s Vietnamese community numbers over 60,000.

Approximately 9 percent of FY 2000–04 arrivals came from Yugoslavia and Sudan. Refugees from the former Yugoslavia—mostly Bosnians—were still coming in large numbers through FY 2002, but Houston stopped receiving them in 2003. Sudanese refugees include families as well as the “Lost Boys” and “Lost Girls”—adolescents who formed a close bond while fleeing Sudan and were resettled as young single men and women.

Somalia accounted for 9 percent and Liberia 5 percent of FY 2000–04 arrivals. Somali Bantu refugees on the whole speak five different languages, greatly complicating interpretation. Liberian refugees, who arrived in substantial numbers from 2003 through 2005, speak English, but it is a dialect that is difficult for U.S.-born English speakers to understand. Both the Somali Bantu and Liberian groups come mostly from rural, preliterate societies, and so have had more difficulty than other refugees in finding employment and integrating into Houston, which is a highly urbanized setting.

Meshketian Turks represent an even newer group, arriving since 2004, and are not included in the study’s survey and administrative data. Houston’s small Turkish community, led by a community-based organization (CBO) with a strong and well-educated volunteer pool, has helped with their resettlement.

Latin American refugees have educational attainment comparable to the overall Houston population, but African refugees’ attainment is much lower. Half (49 percent) of Latin American refugees have at least some college education, and only 16 percent lack a high school degree; these levels are comparable to the general population of Harris County. By contrast, less than a quarter (22 percent) of African survey respondents have at least some college education. Over half (55 percent) lack a high school degree, and 15 percent have no formal education at all. The relatively low educational attainment of African refugees—especially the Somali Bantu and Liberians—has made employment placement for them more challenging.

Houston’s refugees speak a great variety of languages. A third of refugees entering in FY 2000–04 spoke Spanish; the next most common languages were Arabic and Vietnamese (9 percent and 7 percent, respectively). No other language accounted for substantially more than 6 percent. The broad mixture of languages and constant changes in them make providing assistance in the same language as Houston’s refugees challenging.

The vast majority of refugees have little or no English language ability when they arrive in Houston. In 2000–04, 69 percent of RSS and TAG recipients had no or only basic English speaking ability. According to the survey, there were low levels of English speaking ability across all origin groups of refugees, but Latin American refugees had, on average, the lowest English proficiency. The large Latino population in Houston means that Cubans and other Latin

American refugees can easily find employment in a Spanish-speaking environment, and perhaps it gives them less incentive to learn English than other groups.

D. Services Delivered to Refugees in Houston

Volags deliver employment services alongside RCA and MG benefits; very few refugees receive TANF. Due to low TANF benefit levels in Texas, Volags generally attempt to place families with children in the MG program so they can receive a higher benefit and rental assistance. Single refugees and couples without children receive RCA. Both the MG and RCA benefits are delivered by the same Volags that provided initial R&P services, allowing for continuity of assistance. Similarly, MG employment and related services are delivered alongside RSS and TAG services—often by the same case managers within the same Volags. The types of employment and supportive services and manner in which they are delivered do not vary substantially among the MG, RSS, and TAG programs or among the Volags.

The Houston consortium strongly emphasizes rapid employment. Because RCA and MG time limits are so short (eight and six months, respectively), and TANF levels low in Texas, most refugees must find employment within their first few months after arrival. The Volags that deliver MG, RSS, and TAG employment services are the same Volags delivering R&P, and refugees often stay with the same case manager from arrival through the period of job search and initial employment. Orientation to employment and other job-related services often begin within the R&P period, and many refugees are able to find their first jobs around the time they receive their Social Security numbers—usually within their first two months. Employment services are similar across Volags in the consortium, and job developers generally share job leads and refer to the same providers for education and supportive services.

Most refugees are placed in entry-level jobs in manufacturing and leisure and hospitality. Houston continues to have a large manufacturing sector, despite uneven growth in recent years. Many refugees are placed in assembly line jobs—for instance, building and repairing underwater cables for oil rigs—and these jobs generally require little formal education or English skills. The leisure and hospitality industry has been growing steadily in recent years, with most placements in large hotels in downtown Houston. These jobs also require little formal education, though slightly more English than the manufacturing jobs. Employment specialists seek to place refugees in jobs near where they live or on major bus lines, at least for their initial jobs.

African refugees are more reliant on RSS, TAG and other job placement services than other refugees. In the survey, African respondents were much more likely to have used employment services (81 percent) than respondents from Latin America and other regions of the world (59–61 percent). RSS and TAG providers note that the Somali Bantu, Liberians and some other refugee groups are more likely to use their employment services, and often are placed in entry-level manufacturing and leisure/hospitality jobs. Cuban and Vietnamese refugees, however, are less likely to use RSS and TAG services as they are often able to find jobs through informal networks, such as in co-ethnic restaurants, shops, and service establishments. The newest group—the Meskhetian Turks—have also found many jobs through informal networks in Houston’s small but growing Turkish community.

English as a Second Language (ESL) is the other most common service offered under RSS and TAG, alongside employment referral and placement; receipt of ESL varies substantially by refugees' country of origin. In the survey, only about half of Latin American survey respondents (54 percent) received ESL services, compared with about three-quarters of African and other respondents. If refugees do not receive ESL and do not become proficient in English, they may be disadvantaged in their long-run labor market outcomes, integration in to U.S. society, and the naturalization process.

RSS and TAG providers say that Cuban and Vietnamese refugees do not tend to take ESL—or at least not many levels of ESL—because they can find jobs in their own languages. ESL is most commonly delivered during the first month or two, while refugees are awaiting placement in their first job. African refugees—in particular the Somali Bantu—often need to take ESL for a longer time because they are starting at a more basic level; often they need a basic literacy class before employment as well.

Once the first job starts, it is difficult for refugees to pursue ESL or additional education, given the long hours—often overtime—and odd shifts they work, especially in manufacturing. Sometimes, the nonworking spouse (usually the wife) in the refugee household takes ESL while her husband works. Most ESL classes are offered at an educational institution located near where most refugees live, but there are also classes on site at some other service providers as well as in one of the apartment complexes where many refugees live.

Vocational training, on-the-job training (OJT), and subsidized employment are rare among Houston's refugees. Given the imperatives to find employment quickly, most of Houston's refugees are placed in jobs before they have time to pursue significant additional education or training. Only 6 percent of RSS and TAG participants in the June 2002–December 2005 data ever received vocational training, and only 16 percent of refugees in the survey reported receiving training. Less than 2 percent of refugees in the June 2000–December 2005 RSS and TAG participant data received OJT, and the OJT program ended altogether in summer 2007, owing to objections from employers over paperwork. Skilled health care and construction jobs are very lucrative in Houston, and those few refugees who complete training in these fields command relatively high wages.

Houston is a very large city, with employers dispersed throughout, and driver's education is an essential service there. Because of high demand, driver's education is another one of the most common services offered under RSS and TAG, and 30 percent of participants in June 2002–December 2005 received this service. But, only 14 percent of RSS and TAG participants had received driver's education within their first 120 days, suggesting that refugees often need other forms of transportation assistance—or a job near where they live—for their initial employment. By their second year, however, virtually all refugees responding to the survey had access to an automobile and a driver's license.

E. Outcomes and Statistical Analysis

Cash assistance receipt rates are low for longer-term refugees, although most refugees receive RCA or MG when they first arrive. Over half (55 percent) of refugees in the RSS and TAG programs had received RCA or TANF during their first year in the United States. Most of this

share was RCA receipt (48 percent of all refugees in RSS and TAG), as only 7 percent of refugees received TANF in their first year after entry, and only about 5 percent received TANF in subsequent years. Cuban and other Latin American refugees had relatively high RCA receipt within their first eight months (58–59 percent) because a relatively high share of these groups were singles or childless couples.⁴ Data on MG were not collected systematically in this evaluation, but close to half the refugees who received RSS and TAG during this period had first received MG. Therefore, it is likely that virtually all the refugees receiving RSS and TAG had received some form of cash assistance during their first year.

Most refugees receive Food Stamps during their first year, and about a quarter received this benefit in later years. In FY 2000–04, almost two-thirds of RSS and TAG participants (64 percent) had ever received Food Stamps. Most of this receipt was during the first year after entry, during which 61 percent received Food Stamps. A quarter of RSS and TAG participants, however, were still receiving Food Stamps two, three, and four years after entry, suggesting longer-term reliance on this benefit.

The vast majority of refugees in Houston are employed, regardless of period of entry or region of origin. In the FY 2000–04 period, 87 percent of all refugees had been employed at some point during their first four years after entry, in UI-covered jobs, according to UI wage records of refugees with Social Security numbers. Three-quarters were employed during their first year, and similar shares were employed during subsequent years.

Wages and earnings show little progression after the second year following refugees' arrival. At the time of the survey (2006–07), the median wage in the current job ranged from \$8 to \$9 an hour for respondents in all entry cohorts, FY 2000 through 2004. The median wage was \$7 for the first job in the United States. Wage progression was only \$2 an hour or less on average, even for refugees arriving in 2000 and 2001—that is, for those who had been in the country more than five years by the time of the survey.

Earnings reported in the UI data also show little upward progression after the second year in the United States. There is almost no wage progression in any entry cohort from the second to third year (only \$1,000 to \$2,000 on average), and among the three cohorts with four years of employment history, only one cohort (2002) experienced an increase in average earnings between years three and four of more than \$1,000.

There is significant variation in wages and earnings by origin, with Cuban and former Soviet/Eastern European refugees earning the most. When controlling for education, English language ability, and other factors, Cuban refugees earn significantly higher wages than African refugees in the survey model, but there are no statistically significant differences between Africans and other groups in the administrative data model. In the survey data model, former Soviet/Eastern European and other non-African refugees also have higher wages than African refugees. In the administrative data, Vietnamese refugees have significantly lower earnings than

⁴ The Houston consortium, unlike resettlement agencies elsewhere, places almost all families with children in MG. In Houston, in contrast to the national pattern, MG cases are often more difficult to serve than RCA cases, because they need child care and other supportive services and often include refugee groups with low educational attainment such as the Somali Bantu and Liberians. Thus, in Houston, cash assistance receipt would likely be higher among the MG than the RCA population—again in contrast to the national pattern.

African refugees, which may be because Vietnamese who are more prosperous find jobs on their own through co-ethnic networks and never participate in RSS or TAG programs.

Education and English language ability are both associated with the earnings of refugees. In the survey model, neither education nor English language ability is significantly associated with wages. But in the administrative data model, both are significantly and positively associated with earnings. English ability is more strongly associated with earnings, however, than educational attainment in the administrative model, suggesting that the provision of ESL is an important component in boosting refugees' self-sufficiency.

Employment assistance and related RSS and TAG services are strongly associated with employment and with higher earnings for refugees. In the administrative data models, job assistance, ESL, and driver's education are all positively associated with employment and earnings. Although the biggest boost in earnings comes from job assistance—showing clearly the centrality of this service to RSS and TAG—ESL and driver's education also show strong positive relationships with earnings. As these models control for refugees' origins and demographic characteristics, the findings suggest that the package of services offered by RSS and TAG plays an important role in improving refugees' economic outcomes—both employment and earnings—in Houston.

I. INTRODUCTION

This case study is one of several reports presenting the findings of the Evaluation of Refugee Social Service (RSS) and Targeted Assistance Formula Grant (TAG) programs. The RSS and TAG programs provide services to refugees and members of certain other eligible groups with the objective of helping them achieve economic self-sufficiency soon after entering the country. The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) administers these programs and sponsored the evaluation, which was conducted by The Lewin Group and its partners, the Urban Institute, Johns Hopkins University, National Opinion Research Center (NORC), and Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC). The evaluation focuses on the delivery of the program's services and outcomes of its participants in three sites: Houston, Texas; Miami, Florida; and Sacramento, California. This report presents the study's findings from Houston. Separate reports present findings from the other sites, overall themes from the evaluation, and recommendations for ongoing evaluation of the programs.

A. Background

1. Definition of "Refugee"

A refugee, as defined by the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), is a person who is outside his or her country of nationality or of last habitual residence and faces in his or her own country "persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion."⁵ Each year, the United States admits a certain number of refugees from among groups determined by the president, in consultation with members of Congress, public and private groups, and the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR), to be of special humanitarian concern. From 2000 to 2004, the average annual number of refugees admitted by the United States was approximately 50,000. The number varies from year to year, with 73,147 refugees admitted in FY 2000 and 27,110 admitted in FY 2002.⁶

In addition to refugees, a number of other humanitarian categories are eligible for the same benefits and services for which refugees are eligible, including those funded through RSS and TAG. These groups include the four listed below:

- **Asylees:** Individuals who enter the United States or arrive at a port of entry in any immigration status, undocumented, or unlawfully present (and without refugee status) and who are then determined to meet the definition of a refugee. Refugees and asylees differ in that refugee status is conferred overseas and thus refugees enter the country as refugees, while asylees apply for asylum at a port of entry or after entering the country. Asylees and refugees must meet the same statutory definition of refugee and requirements in the INA.

⁵ 8 USC § 1101(a)(42).

⁶ Data from table entitled "Cumulative Summary of Refugee Admissions" in U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, *Summary of Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2006*, October 3, 2006. Available at <http://www.state.gov/g/prm/refadm/rls/85970.htm>, accessed August 22, 2007.

- ***Cuban/Haitian entrants:*** (a) Any individual granted parole status as a Cuban/Haitian Entrant (Status Pending) or granted any other special status subsequently established under the immigration laws for nationals of Cuba or Haiti, regardless of the status of the individual at the time assistance or services are provided; and (b) Any other national of Cuba or Haiti (1) Who: (i) Was paroled into the United States and has not acquired any other status under the Immigration and Nationality Act; (ii) Is the subject of exclusion or deportation proceedings under the Immigration and Nationality Act; or (iii) Has an application for asylum pending with the Immigration and Naturalization Service; and (2) With respect to whom a final, nonappealable, and legally enforceable order of deportation or exclusion has not been entered.⁷
- ***Amerasians:*** Certain Amerasians from Vietnam who are admitted to the U.S. as immigrants pursuant to Sec. 584 of the Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 1988 (as contained in Sec. 101(e) of Public Law 100-202 and amended by the 9th proviso under Migration and Refugee Assistance in title II of the Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Acts, 1989 (Public Law 100-461 as amended) and “was born in Vietnam after January 1, 1962 and before January 1, 1976 and was fathered by a citizen of the United States.” Amerasians are admitted to the United States as immigrants, rather than refugees.
- ***Victims of a severe form of trafficking:*** Individuals who are subjected to (1) sex trafficking, which is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act,⁸ in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person forced to perform such an act is under the age of 18 years; or (2) labor trafficking, which is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

For ease of reference, this document generally uses the term “refugees” to refer to all such groups that qualify for RSS- and TAG-funded services.

2. ***Services Provided to Refugees***

Refugees are offered a myriad of benefits and services to help them successfully transition to life in the United States and gain economic self-sufficiency as soon as possible. These services include the following:

- ***Reception and placement (R&P) services:***⁹ Individuals brought into the country as refugees receive help upon their arrival from voluntary agencies (“Volags”) for the first 30 days. The services provided by Volags include help with refugees’ immediate food, clothing, and shelter needs, an introduction to the new culture in which they will be

⁷ Refugee Education Assistance Act of 1980, Pub. L. No. 96-422.

⁸ As defined by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, the term “commercial sex act” means any sex act on account of which anything of value is given to or received by any person.

⁹ R&P services are not available to asylees, entrants, and victims of a severe form of trafficking.

living, and help accessing resources and services available to them. Volags receive funding to provide R&P services through the U.S. Department of State.

- **Cuban Haitian Entrant Program (CHEP):** U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) administers CHEP, a program that ensures the orderly migration of Cubans and Haitians paroled into the U.S. Through agreements with national non-governmental organizations, USCIS coordinates the structured reception, processing and community placement of Cubans and Haitians who are paroled into the U.S. from various ports-of-entry or Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Processing Centers. Cubans are also paroled into the U.S. directly from Havana through the Cuban Special Migration Program, and Cubans and Haitians have been paroled from Offshore Safe Havens such as the Guantanamo Bay, Cuba Naval Base. Services under CHEP may include family reunification or placement in a free case site for individuals with no family or other ties in the U.S. Family reunification cases may receive services for 30 days for adults and 90 days for unaccompanied minors, while free cases may receive services for 180 days.¹⁰
- **Cash and medical assistance:** Refugees with dependents can receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Medicaid as long as they meet the same eligibility requirements U.S. citizens must meet. Refugees ineligible for TANF or other federal assistance (e.g., those without dependents), and who meet income limits and other program criteria, are eligible to receive Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) for up to eight months following their entry.¹¹ Similarly, refugees ineligible for Medicaid can receive Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA) over that period.¹²

The Matching Grant Program

The Matching Grant Program is an alternative to public cash assistance and is offered through the Voluntary Agency network. The principle goal of the program is to obtain economic self-sufficiency within six months without accessing public cash assistance. Participating Volag affiliates are required to provide employment services, case management, maintenance assistance (which includes provision of food or food subsidies, housing, and transportation) and cash allowance. Enrollment in Matching Grant services must be within the first 31 days of eligibility, with maintenance assistance provided for at least four months, and case management/employment services continuing for 180 days (six months).

Refugees who participate in Matching Grant are eligible for RSS and TAG employability services after the Matching Grant period has expired. In Houston, the Matching Grant Program is an integral part of employability services for refugee families. In order to get a complete picture of the services refugees receive, it is included as part of the Houston case study.

¹⁰ This program affects both Miami and Houston.

¹¹ For refugees and entrants, this is based on their date of arrival (as recorded on the I-94 record of arrival). For asylees, it is the date of final grant of asylum (recorded on the asylum approval letter). For victims of trafficking, it is the date of certification or eligibility (on the certification or eligibility letter).

¹² General eligibility requirements for RCA are listed under 45 CFR §400.53. General eligibility requirements for RMA are listed under 45 CFR §400.100.

- **RSS and TAG programs:** These state-administered and Wilson/Fish¹³ programs provide services to help refugees obtain employment and achieve economic self-sufficiency quickly following their entry into the United States.
- **Matching Grant program:** An alternative to the public cash assistance programs, this program also aims at helping refugees achieve self-sufficiency. The Matching Grant program provides matched funds to Volags for intensive case management and employment services during the first four to six months of a refugee’s eligibility.
- **Other:** A variety of other ORR-funded discretionary programs exist to aid refugees and related populations, such as discretionary grants to communities receiving a large number of refugees or to target specific needs, or special programs to help survivors of torture.

3. Overview of the RSS and TAG Programs

RSS and TAG are primarily employability programs. The Immigration and Nationality Act specifies that in providing refugee assistance, “employable refugees should be placed on jobs as soon as possible after their arrival in the United States.” ORR uses RSS and TAG formula funds to fulfill this intent of the law, subject to federal regulations governing the administration of the programs.¹⁴

a. Types of services provided with RSS and TAG

RSS and TAG services are aimed at addressing barriers to employment and integration into the United States. Refugees are eligible for employability and other services funded through the formula RSS and TAG programs during their first five years of residence in the United States.¹⁵ Employability services are meant to enable refugees to obtain employment within one year of enrollment and to achieve economic self-sufficiency as quickly as possible. The services that can be provided through these programs include

- employment services such as the development of a family self-sufficiency plan and individual employability plan, job orientation, job development, job referral, job search, placement, and follow-up;
- employability assessment services, including aptitude and skills testing;
- on-the-job training (expected to result in full-time, permanent, unsubsidized employment with that employer);
- English language training (emphasizing English needed to obtain and retain a job); and

¹³ Wilson/Fish programs, funded through RSS and Cash and Medical Assistance (CMA) funding, provide integrated services and cash assistance to refugees. They represent an alternative approach to a publicly-administered program or a public/private partnership. None of the sites studied as part of the evaluation are located in Wilson/Fish states or communities.

¹⁴ ORR makes the text of the relevant legislation and regulations available on its web site at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/policy/legislative.htm> and http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/policy/orr_regulations.htm, respectively (accessed August 22, 2007). The legislative citation is Section 412(c)(2)(B)(i) of the INA. The INA also establishes an additional statutory requirement for TAG that funds be used “primarily for the purpose of facilitating refugee employment.” (Section 412 (a)(1)(B)(i).) Regulations governing the use of RSS and TAG funds are found in 45 CFR Part 400.

¹⁵ Regulations governing employability services (and support services related to employability services) can be found in 45 CFR §400.154.

- short-term vocational training, including driver’s education and training as part of an employability plan. (RSS and TAG funds cannot be used for long-term training lasting more than one year or for general education not intended to lead to employment within one year.)

A number of employability support services can also be provided to refugees, including

- skills recertification;
- assistance in obtaining work-related documentation (e.g., employment authorization documents);
- day care for children whose parents are participating in employability services or are employed;¹⁶
- transportation, when necessary for participation in employability services;
- translation or interpreter services related to employment or employability services; and
- employment-focused case management.

In addition, in recognition of the challenges facing refugees in integrating and adjusting to a new country, regulations allow the use of RSS and TAG to provide a number of other services.¹⁷ Examples include

- information, referral, and outreach to facilitate refugees’ access to available services;
- social adjustment services such as emergency response to families in crisis, health-related information, referral, and assistance in scheduling appointments, counseling regarding physical and mental health needs, and home management services;
- citizenship and naturalization preparation services;
- day care and transportation to support participation in services other than employability services; and
- translation, interpretation, and case management, other than what is provided in support of employability services.

Beyond these services, states can use RSS or TAG funding to provide additional services only if they acquire ORR’s approval. Further, the only RSS- or TAG-funded services a refugee can receive 60 months after his or her date of entry are referral, interpreter, and citizenship and naturalization preparation services.

b. Rules, restrictions, and principles

The regulations governing RSS, TAG, and other refugee services establish numerous rules and restrictions that programs must conform to in using the funding to provide services. These rules are important parts of the context in which to understand how programs in different states or

¹⁶ Day care can be provided if no other publicly funded child care funding is available. Day care for working refugees is only available for up to one year after the refugee becomes employed.

¹⁷ The regulations governing these other services are in 45 CFR §400.155.

counties serve refugees. For example, programs using RSS and TAG funds must develop with the refugee family a coherent family self-sufficiency plan and individual employability plans to address the family's needs from time of arrival until attainment of economic independence.¹⁸ RSS and TAG's primary focus in providing English language training is to reduce the barrier that lack of English proficiency creates to employability, and the rules require that programs using RSS or TAG funds for English language training must provide it concurrently, not sequentially, with employment or employment-related activities.¹⁹ Similarly, employable refugees must participate in employability services as a condition of receiving RCA unless exempt.²⁰

Social services must be provided in a manner that is culturally and linguistically compatible with a refugee's language and cultural background, to the maximum extent feasible. States are encouraged to contract services to public or private nonprofit agencies such as resettlement agencies, faith-based and community or ethnic service organizations, particularly considering the special strengths of mutual assistance associations (MAAs). (In official documents related to the awarding of TAG grants, ORR states that it "believes it is essential for refugee-serving organizations to form close partnerships in the provision of services to refugees in order to be able to respond adequately to a changing refugee environment."²¹)

States must ensure that women have the same access as men to training and instruction and must endeavor to include bilingual/bicultural women on service agency staff to encourage adequate service access by refugee women. RSS and TAG programs must attempt to obtain child care services, preferably subsidized, to assist parents with children to participate in employment services or to accept or retain employment.

The regulations set an order of priority for delivering services. For RSS, this order is as follows:

- a) newly arriving refugees during their first year in the United States;
- b) refugees receiving cash assistance;
- c) unemployed refugees not receiving cash assistance; then
- d) employed refugees in need of services to retain employment or to attain economic independence.

TAG services target refugees with difficulty in securing employment beyond their initial resettlement, and therefore the services use a slightly different order of priority that does not include newly arriving refugees. TAG priorities specify that providers first serve long-term cash assistance recipients.²²

¹⁸ 45 CFR 400.79 and 400.156(g).

¹⁹ 45CFR400.156(c).

²⁰ 45CFR400.76

²¹ See, for example, Office of Refugee Resettlement, "Final Notice of Fiscal Year 2006 Final Formula Allocations for Targeted Assistance Grants to States for Services to Refugees," September 15, 2006, available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/grants/open/HHS-2006-ACF-ORR-TA-0116.html> (accessed August 22, 2007).

²² The order of priority for TAG is established at 45 CFR §400.314. The order for RSS is established at 45 CFR §400.147.

c. *Determination of RSS and TAG grant amounts*

ORR awards RSS and TAG formula funds to publicly-administered programs, public/private partnerships (PPPs), and Wilson/Fish alternative programs. RSS provides funding to states with allocations based on the most recent three years of refugee arrivals. In federal fiscal year (FY) 2005, about half the funding went to the four states with the largest service populations: Florida, California, New York, and Minnesota. In contrast, TAG assists counties “highly impacted” by large numbers of refugees. Allocations are based on the most recent five years of refugee arrivals. TAG was enacted to address very high rates of cash welfare use by refugees in the early 1980s, especially in California. The states receiving the most TAG funding in FY 2005 were Florida, California, New York, and Texas.

B. The Evaluation of the Refugee Social Services and Targeted Assistance Formula Grants Programs

1. Overview of the Evaluation

This evaluation of the RSS and TAG programs examines the programs’ effectiveness in improving refugees’ employment and income over time. Its key research questions include these three:

- How are RSS- and TAG-funded services delivered to refugees? To what extent do refugees receive these services?
- What are the employment and income outcomes of refugees served by the RSS and TAG programs?
- Do different refugee groups have different outcomes? If so, what factors are associated with this variation?

There are three components to the evaluation:

- ***An implementation study*** examining how the programs operate in different settings and what types of services are provided to refugees. This analysis relies on information obtained from site visits, including interviews with program staff and refugees, and analysis of program data.
- ***An outcome study*** examining refugees’ receipt of services and employment and public benefit outcomes over time. This component of the study relies on administrative data and a survey of refugees.
- ***A continuous evaluation design study*** that presents to ORR a range of options it might consider to complement its existing performance and evaluation strategies.

The study began in October 2004. Stages in the study included preliminary visits to various communities to identify the sites on which the evaluation would focus, collection of program and administrative data, visits to the three sites, focus group discussions with refugees who had received RSS or TAG services, and a survey of more than 900 refugees in the three sites.

This and the other case study reports describe the findings of the implementation and outcome studies, and a synthesis report analyzes overarching themes from the three sites. A separate, stand-alone report to ORR addresses potential plans for continuous evaluation.

2. Research Methodologies

a. Site selection

ORR, in consultation with the project team, identified several potential communities that could serve as the focus of the study. Based on the project team findings from preliminary phone conversations and site visits, ORR selected Houston, Miami, and Sacramento based on the following criteria:

- caseload size;
- high levels of RSS and TAG support;
- the availability of complete and accessible program data for research purposes;
- the cooperativeness of the local resettlement agencies and of the state and local administrators; and
- diversity among the sites, including diversity of service delivery strategies, geography, and population served (e.g., variation in the countries of origin; native languages and English language speaking abilities; education levels; family structure; age at entry; and entry as refugees, Cuban-Haitian entrants, or asylees).

b. Implementation study

The purpose of the implementation study is to understand how the RSS and TAG programs operate in different settings and how RSS and TAG funds are used to provide services to help refugees achieve economic success and social adjustment. The study examines what factors influence the structure, organization, and management of the programs in each site.

Two types of information collection were conducted for the implementation study: interviews with program administrators, partners, and employers at each of the three sites; and focus groups with program participants in each site. In addition, analysis of program data and the client survey—discussed in the section on the outcome study—help inform the analysis performed as part of the implementation study.

i) Site visits

The team conducted intensive site visits at each site. During the visits, project team members met with program staff at the agency coordinating RSS and TAG funding, RSS and TAG service providers, local welfare offices, employers of refugees, and staff of other organizations providing services to refugees. Topics covered included program goals, organization, staffing, services provided, population served, community and economic context, coordination among agencies and other organizations, and data systems. The team asked employers about their experiences employing refugees and the employers' involvement with refugee service providers.

During the visits, the project team members also reviewed documents provided by the agencies and organizations they were interviewing, such as client flow charts and memoranda of understanding (MOUs), and conducted case review discussions. During the case review discussions, service providers walked through selected individual case files, discussing the process the client went through, the services provided, the case management involved, and the client's progress toward achieving participant goals.

The site visits occurred in spring 2006.

ii) Focus groups

SEARAC conducted three focus groups in each site with recipients of RSS- and TAG-funded services. Seven to 20 individuals participated in each group. Participants were recruited with the help of local service providers; some had entered the country as recently as 2006. Questions were open-ended and designed to elicit detailed responses, including anecdotal material. Key topics included services received, agencies visited, satisfaction with services and providers, employment experiences, other service needs or gaps in services, and the refugee's adjustment to his or her new community. Within the basic format and topical areas, focus group questions were tailored to the circumstances of each site and of particular refugee groups, and moderators allowed the direction of the conversation in each particular group to develop flexibly within the framework set by these questions.

The focus group discussions occurred in June and July 2006.

c. Outcome study

The outcome study includes two components: (1) a descriptive analysis of services refugees received and employment and other economic outcomes since coming to the United States, and (2) a statistical analysis that shows associations between refugee characteristics and services and their outcomes.

i) Research sample and period of focus

The evaluation focuses on working-age adult recipients of RSS and TAG services who entered the country in federal fiscal years 2000 through 2004 (or, for asylees, who were granted asylum status during that period). The research sample was identified using service data from the providers of RSS- and TAG-funded services in each site, and included working-age adults, defined for the purposes of the sample as those between the ages 18 and 55 at the time of entry.

The period over which outcomes are analyzed varies by data source. NORC administered the survey between September 2006 and March 2007; it measured outcomes at the time of the survey, as well as earlier periods for selected outcomes. The outcome study uses unemployment insurance (UI) wage data to measure employment outcomes through the end of FY 2006. The period over which there is administrative data on public assistance receipt varies by site.

ii) Data sources

Data for the outcome study come from various sources:

- **Refugee entry data.** ORR provided the project team with data from the Refugee Arrival Data System (RADS) database. It includes basic demographic information on all refugees and somewhat more limited information on entrants. RADS data provided to the research team did not include information on asylees due restrictions contained in an Attorney General Waiver of 8 CFR 208.6(a) that allows ORR to receive asylee information from USCIS and the Department of Justice’s Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR), but prevents ORR from sharing these data except as aggregate statistics.
- **Program data.** At each site, the agency administering RSS and TAG services provided data on recipients of RSS and TAG services. The data kept by each site differs, but each data set contains at least some demographic information on the recipients and data on which RSS and TAG services the refugee received.
- **Matching Grant data.** In Houston, most families with children in the research sample are first placed into the Matching Grant (MG) program instead of immediately receiving RSS and TAG services. (Some later receive RSS and TAG services when their eligibility for MG ends.) National and local Volags provided enrollment data and basic demographic information on MG participants in Houston.
- **Welfare administrative data.** State welfare departments provided data recorded in the welfare system on individuals in the research sample. Information provided include various demographic characteristics, TANF and RCA cash benefits received, and Food Stamp benefits received.
- **Unemployment insurance wage records.** State labor departments provided administrative data on wages earned in each quarter by individuals in the research sample. The data come from UI wage records.²³
- **Survey of refugees.** As part of this study, NORC conducted a survey of RSS and TAG clients in each site randomly selected from the research sample. The project team designed the survey instrument, which asked respondents about their receipt of the services provided through the RSS and TAG programs, their income, their employment histories, their program participation, and other characteristics that could influence their ability to achieve self-sufficiency through employment such as education level, English language skills, and their health status.

²³ UI wage records do not capture work in a small number of sectors. Overall, it is estimated that about 98 percent of non-farm wage and salary employment is covered by unemployment insurance. Certain occupations and wages, however, are not captured by these data. Many employees not covered are agricultural workers, state and local governmental employees, domestic workers, and those in the Armed Forces. See Bureau of Labor Statistics, BLS Handbook of Methods, Chapter 5, “Employment and Wages Covered by Unemployment Insurance,” April 1997, available on the BLS web site at <http://www.bls.gov/opub/hom/pdf/homch5.pdf>. Informal or “off-the-books” employment will not be captured in the UI wage records.

When the respondent spoke English sufficiently well, interviews were conducted in English. For other respondents, the interviews were conducted in the respondent’s own language. This was done using a translated version of the instrument and bilingual reviewers for five languages: Arabic, Russian, Spanish, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese. Interviewers in other languages used interpreters provided through an over-the-phone interpretation service.

The survey was administered through a “mixed mode” method that involved both telephone and in-person interviews. NORC began by attempting to interview each respondent by phone; if that was not successful within a reasonable period, NORC later attempted to interview the respondent in the field. Interviews were attempted with a total sample of 1,488 refugees, and 955 were completed. Sample sizes, completed interviews, and response rates for each site are shown in *Table I.1*.

Table I.1: Sample Sizes and Response Rates in the Survey of Refugees

Size	Houston	Miami	Sacramento
Total sample	509	537	402
Number of interviews completed	315	334	306
Response rate (%)	62	62	76

Note: Total sample excludes “out-of-scope” cases such as deceased individuals or individuals found not to fit the criteria that defined the research sample (e.g., were not working-age adults).

The survey was fielded between July 2006 and March 2007. Analysis of the data for each site began when sufficient data were received and continued through the summer of 2007.

C. Environmental Context in Houston

1. Overview

Houston was chosen as a site for three primary reasons: diversity of the refugee population, the delivery of RCA through a public/private partnership, and the delivery of RSS, TAG, and associated services through a consortium of providers. Houston has not only a large overall refugee population but also a diverse flow of refugees including some new and challenging populations—such as Liberians, Somali Bantu, and Meskhetian Turks—along with flows of older, more established populations like the Cubans and Vietnamese. The demographics, types of services and benefits received, and employment outcomes differ substantially among these different groups, according to the RSS and TAG providers interviewed for the study. The refugee survey also showed some important differences in demographics, services, and outcomes by refugees’ origins. The site was chosen with the anticipation that the diversity of refugee populations there—particularly the more recent, harder-to-serve groups—would offer lessons for other resettlement sites with similar populations across the country.

In 2002, Texas began operating a PPP, allowing voluntary agencies to deliver RCA and associated services. Most states deliver RCA through their TANF agencies and local welfare offices, as part of the typical “publicly-administered” system. In a publicly-administered system,

refugees are usually referred from resettlement agencies, RSS and TAG providers, and other refugee-serving entities to local welfare offices, where they sign up for RCA or TANF—depending on which program they meet the criteria for—and associated benefits such as Medicaid and Food Stamps. RCA participants often also use employment and other service providers similar to TANF recipients. In a publicly-administered program, RCA benefits are delivered through public social service agencies and tied to TANF benefit levels, which vary widely from state to state. In a PPP RCA program, by contrast, RCA benefits may be distributed by the same Volags that resettle refugees.²⁴

In a PPP system, there is generally more continuity between the R&P and RCA, because the same agencies deliver both types of assistance; this is the case in Houston. Additionally, in a PPP, the RSS and TAG employment providers are often also more closely linked to resettlement agencies, rather than the larger public welfare or workforce systems that work with TANF clients. TANF, Medicaid, and Food Stamps, however, are still delivered through state agencies. The PPP allows Volags to offer RCA at levels higher than the TANF thresholds, but benefits are available for a much shorter time and cannot exceed the determined ceiling.²⁵ Texas has one of the lowest TANF benefit levels in the country, and by operating a PPP, the state allows refugees to receive RCA at higher levels than would be the case under a publicly-administered system.²⁶

Because TANF eligibility and benefit levels are low, very few refugees are ever placed in the state's TANF program. Instead, refugee singles and childless couples receive RCA along with RSS- and TAG-funded employability services, while families with children receive benefits and services funded through the MG program. Because of the tight time limits for both RCA and MG, the Houston consortium focuses on rapid employment in entry-level jobs, and then works with refugees to help them retain employment and, in some cases, advance to higher-skilled, higher-paying jobs. Teams of case managers, employment specialists, and job developers at the Volags provide similar services to both RCA and MG clients.

In spring 2006, at the time of the study's site visit to Houston, four Volags and two education providers had formed a consortium to deliver RCA, RSS, TAG, and other services to refugees; they were the only RSS and TAG grant recipients in the area. A fifth, relatively small Volag in the area has since joined the consortium, and it began receiving RSS and TAG funding in FY 2007. Since the consortium agencies work together closely and deliver services similarly, there was continuity among most provider staff interviewed for this study, which allowed a very detailed and consistent picture of RSS, TAG, and other service delivery to emerge across providers. This consortium model for service delivery may also offer lessons for providers in other communities.

The Houston consortium uses RSS and TAG, which has been merged into a single funding stream in Texas, to provide employment and a variety of other services. Since rapid employment is the consortium's primary focus, most RSS, TAG, and MG programs are geared toward

²⁴ Office of Refugee Resettlement, ACF, HSS, "Refugee Resettlement Program: Refugee Cash Assistance—Structure," 45 CFR 400.56(d).

²⁵ The PPP RCA program has a time limit of eight months and a payment ceiling that varies by the size of the family unit, as stated in ORR, ACF, HSS, "Refugee Resettlement Program: Refugee Cash Assistance—Payment Levels," 45 CFR 400.60(a).

²⁶ In 2003, Texas had a maximum TANF benefit of \$213 for a family of three. Only Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Tennessee had lower maximum benefit levels. See Gretchen Rowe and Jeffrey Versteeg, "Welfare Rules Databook: State TANF Policies as of July 2003," The Urban Institute, Washington, DC, April 2005, table II.A.4. As the title implies, the data are for July 2003.

services that remove employment barriers, chief among them English as a Second Language (ESL), literacy, transportation, child care, and access to health services. The consortium has gained additional resources to work with recent refugee groups—the Somali Bantu in particular—through competitive ORR grants such as Unanticipated Arrivals and Preferred Communities. These grants have been used mostly to provide additional cultural orientation services, to hire culturally and linguistically competent case managers, and to recruit volunteers and collect in-kind donations from churches and other religious and community organizations.

2. The Houston Economy

The Houston metropolitan statistical area (MSA) has a large economy, with over 2.5 million jobs in May 2007. The Houston economy, despite a downturn in 2001–04, has generally provided substantial numbers of entry-level jobs for refugees. Between January 2002 and April 2004, the Houston MSA experienced job losses, but growth has been steady since May 2004, exceeding 3 percent from summer 2005 through spring 2007.²⁷ Mirroring national trends, Houston MSA’s unemployment rate rose starting in 2001, peaked at 7.6 percent in June 2004, and then fell consistently from 2005 through 2007. For most of 2002–04, the unemployment rate exceeded 6 percent, but by the time of the study’s site visit in April 2006, unemployment had fallen to 5 percent; by April 2007, it had fallen below 4 percent.²⁸ During the site visit, RSS and TAG employment providers said that 2002–04 were difficult years to place refugees in jobs—particularly in the manufacturing sector—but that 2005 and 2006 were much better years owing to an economic rebound driven by the national expansion, rising oil prices, and Gulf of Mexico oil infrastructure rebuilding following the 2005 hurricanes.

According to RSS and TAG providers, the two leading industries in recent years for employment of refugees, especially those with lower skills, have been manufacturing and leisure and hospitality. In May 2007, these industries each represented about 9 percent of the Houston MSA’s total workforce.²⁹ Manufacturing is a large industry, with more than 200,000 employees in the MSA, but it has experienced substantial declines in recent years. Between 2001 and 2004, manufacturing employment dropped by 10 percent, but it rebounded 7 percent from 2004 to 2006. Leisure and hospitality showed steady growth of 2–3 percent between 2000 and 2005, but grew faster—by almost 5 percent—between 2006 and 2007. There are now more than 200,000 employees in this sector in the Houston MSA as well. Health care, transportation, and wholesale/retail trade are also major sectors of employment, but they generally require more education and language skills than manufacturing or leisure/hospitality. Like manufacturing, trade and transportation experienced a downturn in Houston from 2001 to 2004 and then a rebound from 2004 to 2006, but health care grew more steadily over these years.³⁰

²⁷ Texas Workforce Commission, “Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown MSA Economic Profile,” May 2007. Available at <http://www.twc.state.tx.us/customers/rpm/rpm.html>.

²⁸ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Local Area Unemployment Statistics: Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown, Texas Metropolitan Statistical Area.” Available at <http://www.bls.gov/lau/>.

²⁹ Texas Workforce Commission, “Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown MSA Economic Profile,” May 2007. Available at <http://www.twc.state.tx.us/customers/rpm/rpm.html>.

³⁰ Texas Workforce Commission, “CesMSA00present employment trends by occupation,” Excel spreadsheet, May 2007. Available at <http://www.twc.state.tx.us/customers/rpm/rpm.html>.

D. Organization of This Report

Chapter II of this report describes the major groups of refugees served in Houston and presents finding from the survey and other data on their characteristics. Chapter III describes how refugee services are delivered in Houston and presents data on which services program participants receive. Chapter IV discusses descriptive statistics on outcomes of program participants in the research sample, including receipt of public assistance, employment outcomes, and income. Chapter V presents the results of statistical analysis of associations between services received, programs outcomes, and participant characteristics.

II. POPULATION SERVED

Houston, like most other major refugee resettlement sites, faced a downturn in its refugee flows during FY 2002 and 2003, just following the events of September 11, 2001. Annual total flows were about 1,600 in FY 2000 and 2001, then dropped to between 800 and 900 in FY 2002–03, and rebounded to almost 2,000 in FY 2004.³¹ For Houston, this meant that the 2002–03 drop in refugee flows resulted in lower RSS and TAG funding for 2004, a year in which refugee flows more than doubled. During the study’s preliminary visit to Houston in early 2005, RSS and TAG providers said that these funding cuts had affected services and staff workloads. By the time of the second, full site visit in early 2006, however, funding had rebounded and the consortium had applied for additional support from Preferred Communities and Unanticipated Arrivals grants. With increased resources, the Volags had been able to hire new staff—particularly those familiar with Somali languages and cultures—in late 2005 and early 2006.

A. Major Refugee Populations

1. Countries of Origin

Houston’s refugee population is very diverse in origin, but a half-dozen countries—Cuba, Vietnam, Sudan, the former Yugoslavia, Somali, and Liberia—were the most common during the period of this study. Refugees from these countries have very different characteristics, as discussed throughout this case study report.

Cuba is and was the largest single country of origin for Houston’s refugees, accounting for 22 percent of all refugee arrivals in FY 2000–04, peaking at 36 percent in 2004 (*Table II.1*).³² Cubans were also 22 percent of the refugees in the survey (*Appendix Table I*). Houston has a large Cuban community, although there are far more Mexican-origin immigrants. The large Latino population of Harris County, where Houston is located (1.4 million, or 38 percent of the county’s total population in 2005),³³ means that Spanish-language use is common throughout the area, especially in many lower-skilled sectors of the economy. Cuban refugees also tend to be well educated relative to many other refugee groups.

Vietnam was the second-largest origin country, accounting for 9 percent of refugees surveyed, 11 percent of FY 2000–04 arrivals, and 22 percent of arrivals in 2002. Houston also has a well-established Vietnamese population, with refugee arrivals dating back to 1975. Harris County’s Vietnamese community numbered 62,000 in 2005.³⁴

³¹ These figures are for all arrivals, including refugees, asylees and entrants.

³² The arrivals by origin country in Table II.1 are based on the State Department’s RADS data and include only refugees ages 18 and over. Asylees are not included.

³³ U.S. Census Bureau, “Harris County, TX: General Demographic Characteristics: 2005,” *American Community Survey 2005*. Available at <http://factfinder.census.gov>.

³⁴ Ibid.

Table II.1: Annual Arrivals by Country of Origin and Entry Cohort

Country of Origin (%)	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	Total
Cuba	12.9	12.0	27.8	22.6	35.6	22.2
Vietnam	13.3	14.9	21.6	8.8	1.9	10.9
Sudan	8.7	16.0	5.1	10.0	5.9	9.3
Somalia	6.7	3.6	0.8	2.7	19.9	8.5
Bosnia	17.8	12.1	9.3	2.1	0.0	8.4
Other Africa	8.0	6.5	6.1	8.5	5.3	6.7
Liberia	2.0	3.4	1.8	8.6	9.0	5.2
Afghanistan	4.5	8.3	7.6	6.0	1.7	5.1
Iran	3.6	6.3	2.2	5.8	2.8	4.1
Congo	6.0	0.9	0.8	3.6	6.4	4.0
Ethiopia	3.8	3.4	3.5	3.8	3.0	3.4
Iraq	4.4	3.8	1.3	0.7	0.8	2.4
Other East Asia	1.4	1.0	4.5	2.8	3.1	2.4
Sierra Leone	1.2	4.3	1.0	2.7	1.9	2.3
Other Former USSR and Europe	2.2	1.3	2.1	2.6	0.6	1.6
Other Near East & South Asia	3.3	1.2	1.6	1.2	0.4	1.5
Colombia	0.0	0.4	2.7	5.6	0.9	1.4
Other Latin America & Caribbean	0.2	0.1	0.2	1.2	0.9	0.5
Yugoslavia	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.2
Total number of refugees	1,626	1,599	825	893	1,969	1,382

Source: State refugee office

About 9 percent of FY 2000-04 arrivals came from Yugoslavia and Sudan.³⁵ Refugees from the former Yugoslavia—mostly Bosnians—were still coming in large numbers through FY 2002, but Houston stopped receiving them in 2003. Former Yugoslavian refugees, like the Cubans, tend to be well educated. Sudanese refugees include families as well as the “Lost Boys” and “Lost Girls”—adolescents who formed a close bond while fleeing Sudan and were resettled as young single men and women. Significant numbers of Sudanese refugees arrived in each year between 2000 and 2004.

Somalia accounted for 9 percent and Liberia 5 percent of 2000–04 arrivals and are more recent groups. There was an earlier wave of Somali refugees that ended in 2001, but respondents were most concerned with the Somali Bantu, the bulk of whom arrived in 2004 and 2005. Somali Bantu have little in common with earlier waves of Somali refugees, owing to differences in language, culture, socioeconomic status, and rural versus urban origin. Complicating interpretation, Somali refugees may speak one or more of the five major native languages of Somalia. Liberian refugees, who arrived in substantial numbers from 2003 through 2005, speak English, but their dialect is difficult for U.S.-born English speakers to understand. Both the Somali Bantu and Liberian groups come mostly from rural, preliterate societies, and so they have

³⁵ In the survey, former Yugoslavia was represented by Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, former Yugoslavia Republic, and Serbia and Montenegro. Together these four origins accounted for 9 percent of all refugees in the survey (Appendix Table 1).

had more difficulty than other refugees in finding employment and integrating into Houston, which is highly urbanized. RSS and TAG providers generally felt these two were among the most challenging groups of refugees with whom they had worked.

Since 2004, the origins of Houston’s refugees have shifted yet again. The flows from Somalia and Liberian have mostly ended, and the newest large group is composed of Turkish origin people (“Meshketian Turks”) who lived in the former Soviet Union, mostly Georgia. Information about this group was obtained from the study’s site visit, but they arrived too late to be included in the sampling frame for the survey. Houston’s small Turkish community, led by a community-based organization (CBO) with a strong and well-educated volunteer pool, has helped tremendously with the Meshketian Turks’ resettlement, according to respondents at two Volags. The Turkish community has found employment for many refugees at local restaurants and other businesses.

Beyond these larger groups, Houston has received smaller numbers of refugees from diverse origins, including many different countries in Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. Owing to the relatively small size of each of these other groups, the analysis in this case study report does not focus on them.

2. Demographic Characteristics

Houston’s recent refugees have been disproportionately young, single men. For FY 2000 through 2004, 57 percent of RSS and TAG participants in Houston were men, and 57 percent were under age 36 (18 to 35) when they entered the country or obtained asylum (**Table II.2**). The 2002 arrival cohort included more women and more married people, but in the 2003 and 2004 cohorts, half were single. Similar shares of respondents to the survey were men (59 percent) and under age 36 (46 percent), but survey respondents were far less likely to be single (22 percent, as shown in Appendix Table 1).

3. Free versus Family Cases and Asylees

Most participants in RSS, TAG, and MG programs are resettled as refugees, and Houston traditionally has had a high share of free cases—refugees without family members already living in the United States and sponsored by voluntary agencies. Some older and more established refugee groups—such as Cubans and Vietnamese—have a large number of family cases, but the vast majority of the more recent groups—Liberians, Somali Bantu, and Meskhetian Turks—are resettled as free cases. The Houston consortium also receives a significant number of Cubans through the Cuban-Haitian entrant program, some of whom crossed the Texas-Mexico border. Houston’s RSS and TAG providers serve a small number of asylees. In FY 2000–04, 10 percent of Houston RSS and TAG participants were asylees. According to staff interviewed, some of Houston’s asylees come from Cuba, and most of the rest come from other Latin American countries such as Colombia. Many Cuban asylees have crossed the Texas-Mexico border.

Table II.2: Characteristics by Entry Cohort

Characteristic	Year of Entry					Total
	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	
Gender (%)						
Female	43.6	39.0	54.7	43.1	40.8	42.7
Male	56.4	61.0	45.3	56.9	59.2	57.3
Age at entry ^a (%)						
18 to 25	18.8	29.2	13.9	22.9	24.2	22.9
26 to 35	41.6	29.7	34.5	34.5	33.1	33.8
36 to 45	26.9	27.7	31.8	28.4	29.1	29.0
46 to 55	12.8	13.3	19.7	14.2	13.6	14.3
Marital status (%)						
Married	56.2	44.0	58.0	43.6	42.0	44.9
Single	33.6	47.8	31.2	49.2	50.7	47.3
Divorced	3.4	2.8	3.8	3.4	3.5	3.4
Separated	4.1	2.2	5.1	2.5	2.9	3.0
Widowed	2.7	3.3	1.9	1.3	0.9	1.4
Asylee (%)						
No	95.3	92.3	86.1	84.6	92.0	90.2
Yes	4.7	7.7	13.9	15.4	8.0	9.8
Education level (%)						
Never attended school	16.0	22.4	31.1	30.7	19.8	22.4
Some school	17.4	15.6	8.6	8.6	10.1	10.8
Some high school	10.4	4.5	8.0	11.5	11.4	10.4
High school diploma	38.9	36.9	35.8	36.7	41.3	39.5
1 to 3 years of college	6.3	7.3	6.0	4.8	6.5	6.2
4 or more years of college	10.4	10.1	10.6	6.1	10.2	9.5
GED	0.7	0.6	0.0	0.6	0.1	0.3
Other	0.0	2.8	0.0	1.0	0.7	0.9
English speaking ability (%)						
None	6.2	13.0	32.6	37.7	49.5	38.9
Basic conversation	34.5	33.2	40.5	27.4	28.5	30.4
Medium conversation	37.2	28.0	20.0	23.7	14.4	19.7
Advanced conversation	22.1	25.9	7.0	11.2	7.6	11.0
English understanding ability (%)						
None	3.5	12.3	31.5	35.4	47.1	36.9
Basic conversation	36.4	33.2	40.4	27.6	30.2	31.5
Medium conversation	37.8	27.3	20.7	24.6	14.8	20.0
Advanced conversation	22.4	27.3	7.5	12.4	8.0	11.6

Table II.2 (continued)

Characteristic	Year of Entry					Total
	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	
English reading and writing ability (%)						
None	11.9	15.0	41.8	39.8	53.0	42.9
Basic words	33.6	30.5	30.1	26.1	24.8	26.8
Sentences	26.6	26.2	18.8	17.0	11.6	15.8
Notes and letters	11.2	14.4	6.1	10.4	4.4	7.2
Everything	16.8	13.9	3.3	6.8	6.1	7.4
Language (%)						
Spanish	11.0	15.5	28.4	27.5	42.3	33.2
Arabic	17.2	15.0	8.1	11.1	6.1	8.9
Vietnamese	15.9	9.8	23.0	6.4	1.9	6.8
Somali	3.5	0.5	0.5	2.7	8.7	5.5
French	13.8	5.7	2.7	8.1	3.6	5.3
Farsi	1.4	4.7	1.8	10.3	3.5	4.6
Amharic	6.9	4.7	4.1	5.4	3.3	4.2
English	0.0	8.3	1.8	5.7	3.4	3.9
Bosnian	4.1	8.8	5.9	2.5	0.0	2.2
Swahili	2.1	0.5	0.0	1.5	1.5	1.3
Maay Maay	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.4	1.3
Burmese	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.5	1.8	1.1
Other	24.1	25.9	23.9	18.4	21.7	21.8
Sample size	149	195	223	415	1,138	2,120

Sources: RSS and TAG program data provided by the state and the Refugee Arrival Data System.

^a For asylees, "entry" refers to when the individual was granted asylum status.

4. Secondary Migration

A small but rising share of Houston's refugee population are secondary migrants—refugees who were initially resettled elsewhere in the United States but have since moved. According to the survey, about 12 percent of refugees arriving in FY 2000–04 were secondary migrants, and this share rose across the five entry cohorts (Appendix Table 1). Houston has a well-established Vietnamese community, and some secondary migrants may be Vietnamese. Additionally, the Somali Bantu community has been quickly establishing itself. RSS and TAG providers did not, however, discuss large numbers of secondary migrants from any particular origin group coming into Houston.

On the other hand, RSS and TAG providers did say that some Cubans leave Houston for Miami. In general, Cubans—especially those who are well educated and have professional job experience—find the wages and job prospects in Houston disappointing. They change jobs frequently and often move to Miami where they have heard—sometimes incorrectly—that opportunities are better. Many also have family or friends living in the large Cuban community in Miami. The secondary migration rate *into* Houston, according to the survey, was actually higher for Latin American respondents (18 percent) than for either African or other respondents (10 percent, as shown in Appendix Table 2).

5. Previous Refugee Camp Experience

A large share of refugees lived in camps before arriving in Houston, and many of them lived in camps for many years. Almost half of refugees surveyed (45 percent) reported living in a refugee camp. Among those who lived in a camp, 46 percent reported living in a camp for five years or more (Appendix Table 1). The shares of refugees reporting a camp experience were highest in FY 2000 and 2001 and lowest in 2002. This pattern tracks the share of refugees from non-Latin American countries. In fact, only 11 percent of Latin American refugees responding to the survey had any camp experience (Appendix Table 2)—not surprising given the fact that the vast majority were Cuban or had received asylum after arriving in the United States. Shares with camp experience were highest for African respondents (74 percent). Many African refugees who reported living in a camp had been in camps for substantial periods: over half had been in camps for more than five years.

Study respondents—both the Volag staff who participated in the site visit and national-level respondents interviewed before the site visit—said that refugee camp experiences may strongly influence economic self-sufficiency and other outcomes after arrival. In general, the longer the period in the camp, the more difficulties that refugees might be expected to experience in adapting to work and other aspects of life in the United States. Respondents also noted that refugees have very different experiences in different camps. For instance, many Somali Bantu lived in a camp in Kenya that had relatively better living conditions and work opportunities than some of the other camps, particularly those where some of the Burmese and Liberian refugees lived.

B. Household Composition

The refugee household population in Houston includes a mixture of singles, childless couples, and families with children. A large majority (58 percent) of the households in the refugee survey has at least one child (*Table II.3*). Forty-one percent of the households surveyed have one or two children; 18 percent have three or more children. The average number of individuals in the household is 3.7, including both those households with and without children.

A significant share of refugee households surveyed are extended and include multiple workers. Ten percent of respondents live with siblings and 14 percent with nonrelatives—in most cases, these nonrelatives are other adults. Over a quarter (28 percent) of households have more than two adults in them. The average number of workers per household is 1.7.

Table II.3: Household Characteristics by Entry Cohort

Characteristic	Year of Entry					Total
	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	
Average number of individuals in household	3.7	3.8	3.4	3.6	3.8	3.7
Average number of working individuals in household	1.7	1.9	1.7	1.8	1.6	1.7
Number of adults (%)						
1 adult	24.1	15.9	19.2	25.0	18.9	20.3
2 adult	51.9	55.6	46.2	48.1	53.7	51.6
3 or more	24.1	28.6	34.6	26.9	27.4	28.2
Number of minors (%)						
1-2	35.2	41.3	48.1	38.5	40.0	40.5
3-5	18.5	20.6	*	17.3	13.7	15.2
6 or more	*	*	0.0	*	*	2.5
Percentage of respondents living with:						
Spouse	55.6	61.9	55.8	50.0	45.3	52.8
Parent(s)	*	7.9	11.5	11.5	15.8	10.8
Son/daughter(s)	64.8	66.7	59.6	51.9	55.8	59.5
Grandparent(s)	0.0	0.0	*	0.0	*	*
Grandchild(ren)	*	0.0	*	0.0	*	1.6
Sibling(s)	*	*	11.5	13.5	14.7	10.4
Other relative(s)	0.0	9.5	*	*	6.3	6.0
Nonrelative(s)	9.3	12.7	9.6	13.5	21.1	14.2
Sample size	54	63	52	52	95	316

Source: Refugee Assistance Survey

* Indicates a category that contains fewer than five individuals

According to staff interviewed, Cuban refugees were largely single or childless couples, and they mostly received RCA. Some Cuban RSS and TAG recipients were border crossers, who tend to be predominantly men owing to the extreme conditions of the Texas-Mexico border. The survey data, however, show that Cubans and other Latin American respondents are actually more likely to live in households with two or more adults than are African refugees (86 versus 72 percent, *Table II.4*), and just as likely to live with other adults as respondents from other world regions. Two-thirds of Latin American survey respondents live in households with children, compared with 55–56 percent of African and other respondents. Thus, based on the survey, Latin American refugees are actually more likely than other refugees to have children.

On the other hand, Latin American survey respondents have fewer children on average than other refugees. Over a quarter (26 percent) of African respondents and 18 percent of respondents from other regions have three or more children, compared with just 6 percent of Latin American respondents.

During the site visits, RSS and TAG providers said that Somali Bantu, Liberian, and some other African refugee groups tend to have large families that are, in many cases, headed by single parents. Survey data bear this out: only 38 percent of African survey respondents live with a

spouse, compared with over 60 percent of Latin American respondents. Additionally, over a quarter of African refugees have three or more children, and 7 percent have six or more children.

The survey data suggest that families with children predominate among the RSS, TAG, and MG populations in Houston, and therefore child care services are important to allow parents to work.³⁶ Child care is critical for African refugees—especially Somali Bantu and Liberians—who have the most number of children on average and are least likely to live with their spouses.

Table II.4: Household Characteristics by Region of Birth

Characteristic	Region of Birth		
	Africa	Latin America	Other
Average number of individuals in household	3.8	3.4	3.8
Average number of working individuals in household	1.6	1.6	1.9
Number of adults (%)			
1 adult	28.3	14.1	16.2
2 adult	50.0	58.8	47.7
3 or more	21.7	27.1	36.0
Number of minors (%)			
1–2	30.0	60.0	36.9
3–5	19.2	5.9	18.0
6 or more	6.7	0.0	0.0
Percentage of respondents living with:			
Spouse	37.5	61.2	63.1
Parent(s)	5.8	9.4	17.1
Son/daughter(s)	50.8	71.8	59.5
Grandparent(s)	0.0	*	*
Grandchild(ren)	*	*	*
Sibling(s)	10.8	7.1	12.6
Other relative(s)	9.2	5.9	*
Nonrelative(s)	24.2	10.6	6.3
Sample size	120	85	111

Source: Refugee Assistance Survey

* Indicates a category that contains fewer than five individuals

³⁶ The RSS and TAG service population is predominantly composed of singles and childless couples, who qualify for RCA and therefore receive RSS and TAG services shortly after entry. In Houston, all families with children receive MG instead of TANF, and therefore receive their initial services through the MG program. Some families with children may return to service providers after their MG benefits expire, and at this point they may receive services funded through RSS and TAG. But RSS, TAG, and MG are provided by the same providers, and often by the same staff at those providers, in essentially the same manner. Additionally, the refugee survey conducted for this study includes RSS, TAG, and MG participants. Throughout the report, much of the discussion is about RSS, TAG, and MG service populations, because they generally receive the same services in Houston.

C. Education and Language Skills

Houston's refugees tend to have relatively low educational attainment. As reported in the RSS and TAG program data, in FY 2000–04, close to half (44 percent) of RSS and TAG participants had less than a high school education, and 22 percent lacked any formal education at all (Table II.2). Only 16 percent had some college education. Educational attainment was consistently low across all entry cohorts, though somewhat lower in the earlier cohorts, when the share of arrivals from Cuba was lower. The survey showed somewhat but not much higher educational attainment: 39 percent of respondents did not have a high school education, while 30 percent had at least some college (*Table II.5*). Educational attainment rates are much higher in the general population of Harris County, where 52 percent of adults age 25 and over had at least some college education, while only 24 percent lacked a high school education in 2005.³⁷

During the site visit, RSS and TAG providers said that Cubans and former Yugoslavian refugees tended to have higher levels of formal education than other refugees. The lowest levels of education were among the African refugees, especially the Somali Bantu and Liberians (*Table II.6*). Among respondents to the survey, Latin American refugees had by far the highest level of educational attainment: about half had at least some college education, comparable to the level of Harris County residents (52 percent). Only 16 percent of Latin American refugees in the survey lacked a high school degree, versus 24 percent of Harris County residents. In fact, Latin American refugees responding to the survey were better educated on average than the general population of Harris County. By contrast, less than a quarter of African survey respondents had at least some college education. Over half (55 percent) lacked a high school degree, and 15 percent had no formal education at all. Respondents from other world regions fell somewhere in between: 26 percent had at least some college education and 38 percent lacked a high school degree. Owing to their far lower levels of formal education, one would expect the African refugees to have more limited employment options than other groups in Houston.

The vast majority of refugees have little or no English language ability when they arrive in Houston. In 2000–04, 69 percent of RSS and TAG participants had no or only basic English speaking ability (Table II.2). This share was consistent for 2002–04 but somewhat lower (less than 50 percent) for the 2000 and 2001 entry cohorts. Similarly high shares of refugees had no or only basic English understanding, reading, and writing ability.

³⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, "Harris County, TX Metropolitan: Selected Social Characteristics in the United States: 2005," *American Community Survey* 2005. Available at <http://factfinder.census.gov>.

Table II.5: English Ability and Education by Entry Cohort

Measure	Year of Entry					Total
	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	
Education						
Education level on arrival (%)						
None	*	*	0.0	7.7	11.6	6.3
Primary	13.0	17.5	*	7.7	21.1	14.6
Some secondary school	22.2	15.9	21.2	11.5	17.9	17.7
High school diploma	40.7	30.2	34.6	30.8	24.2	31.0
Some college or university	11.1	11.1	17.3	11.5	7.4	11.1
College or university degree	*	15.9	13.5	21.2	13.7	14.2
Professional degree	0.0	*	*	5.8	*	3.2
Other degree or certificate	*	*	*	3.8	*	1.9
English Language Skills						
Understand English (%)						
Very well	17.0	20.6	13.7	17.3	9.7	15.1
Well	49.1	47.6	33.3	48.1	34.4	41.7
Not well	28.3	27.0	43.1	26.9	50.5	36.9
Not at all	*	*	9.8	*	*	6
Speak in English (%)						
Very well	*	17.5	11.8	13.5	8.6	11.5
Well	54.7	39.7	23.5	36.5	22.6	34.0
Not well	30.2	36.5	51.0	44.2	55.9	44.9
Not at all	*	*	13.7	*	12.9	9.6
Read English materials (%)						
Very well	13.2	20.6	13.7	17.3	15.1	16.0
Well	39.6	36.5	27.5	36.5	26.9	32.7
Not well	37.7	28.6	29.4	32.7	36.6	33.3
Not at all	9.4	14.3	29.4	13.5	21.5	17.9
Write in English (%)						
Very well	*	12.7	9.8	9.6	9.7	9.9
Well	45.3	31.7	23.5	32.7	25.8	31.1
Not well	39.6	42.9	25.5	44.2	35.5	37.5
Not at all	*	12.7	41.2	13.5	29.0	21.5
Native Language Skills						
Read and write in native language (%)						
Very well	83.0	64.5	80.0	75.0	64.8	72.1
Well	*	19.4	16.0	9.6	14.3	13.6
Not well	*	*	*	*	9.9	5.5
Not at all	*	12.9	0.0	9.6	11.0	8.8
Sample size	54	63	52	52	95	316

Source: Refugee Assistance Survey

* Indicates a category that contains fewer than five individuals

Table II.6: English Ability and Education by Region of Birth

Measure	Region of Birth		
	Africa	Latin America	Other
Education			
Education level on arrival (%)			
None	15.0	0.0	*
Primary	23.3	*	15.3
Some secondary school	16.7	15.3	20.7
High school diploma	23.3	34.1	36.9
Some college or university	10.8	15.3	8.1
College or university degree	7.5	27.1	11.7
Professional degree	*	*	4.5
Other degree or certificate	*	*	*
English Language Skills			
Understand English (%)			
Very well	21.2	7.1	14.7
Well	44.9	38.8	40.4
Not well	28.8	48.2	36.7
Not at all	5.1	5.9	8.3
Speak in English (%)			
Very well	16.9	*	12.8
Well	36.4	29.4	34.9
Not well	39.0	55.3	43.1
Not at all	7.6	12.9	9.2
Read English materials (%)			
Very well	25.4	8.2	11.9
Well	33.1	34.1	31.2
Not well	24.6	32.9	43.1
Not at all	16.9	24.7	13.8
Write in English (%)			
Very well	15.3	*	9.2
Well	37.3	29.4	25.7
Not well	33.9	29.4	47.7
Not at all	13.6	37.6	17.4
Native Language Skills			
Read and write in native language (%)			
Very well	55.7	89.4	75.9
Well	15.7	10.6	13.9
Not well	9.6	0.0	5.6
Not at all	19.1	0.0	4.6
Sample size	120	85	111

Source: Refugee Assistance Survey

* Indicates a category that contains fewer than five individuals

The survey shows some variation in English proficiency by region of origin, but this variation works in the opposite direction from educational attainment. African survey respondents are the *most likely* to speak, read, and write English very well, while Latin American respondents are the least likely to have this level of English proficiency (Table II.6). Some African refugees come from countries such as Sudan and Nigeria where English is a common (if not primary) language, while others have spent time in camps in English-speaking countries like Kenya. In Liberia, English is the official language, but the dialect of English spoken there is very different from that spoken in the United States. Latin American refugees generally speak Spanish, and they have little incentive to learn English after arriving in Houston, where there are ample job opportunities for Spanish speakers and large Latino enclaves. Lack of English skills may, however, severely limit the upward mobility of Latin American refugees. Other refugees may be forced to assimilate and learn English more quickly, which could work to their advantage in the labor market in the long run.

Houston's refugees speak a great variety of different languages (with fully 22 percent speaking languages other than the 12 listed in Table II.2), and the language composition of the refugee population changes considerably from year to year. A third of refugees entering in FY 2000–04 spoke Spanish; the next most common languages were Arabic and Vietnamese, at about 9 percent and 7 percent, respectively. No other language accounted for substantially more than 5 percent. Spanish is more common in the later entry cohorts (FY 2002–04), when Cubans were a higher share of refugees, while Vietnamese is more common in earlier cohorts. Bosnian and French are also more common languages in the earlier cohorts. Arabic is spoken by refugees from a wide variety of countries including Iraq, other “Near East” countries, Sudan, and, to some extent, Somalia. Arabic, Maay Maay, Somali and Swahili are four of the five languages spoken by refugees from Somalia—including, in some cases, the Bantu. The broad mix of languages and constant change in refugee languages make providing assistance in the same language as refugees challenging.

There are also some concerns about literacy in native languages for some of Houston's recent refugee groups. Overall, in the survey sample, 14 percent of respondents could not read or write well, or at all, in their native languages (**Table II.5**). RSS and TAG service providers said that most, if not all, of the Somali Bantu had very low literacy levels, as did many Liberian and Afghani refugees. In the survey, 29 percent of African respondents reported they could not read or write well or at all in their native language, compared with just 10 percent of respondents from other regions of the world and none of the Latin American respondents (Table II.6). Twenty-one percent of respondents arriving in FY 2004 reported they could not read or write well or at all; this was the highest level for any of the five entry cohorts among survey respondents (Table II.5). FY 2004 is also the year in which Somalis and Liberians accounted for the highest share of arrivals. RSS and TAG providers expressed concern that the Somali Bantu and Liberians have had difficulty achieving economic self-sufficiency in a short period because they have needed to learn basic reading and writing skills in addition to English.

D. Employment History before Arrival

According to site visit respondents, Cubans often arrive with relevant previous work experience, but they sometimes have difficulty translating that experience into careers in the United States. Health care is a major sector in the economies of both Cuba and Houston, and many refugees

have previous experience as health professionals, especially nurses. Many Cubans have extensive education and experience in the health care sector, but they are unable to find health care jobs in Houston beyond a limited number of low-paying Spanish-speaking nursing home facilities. Health certification courses and exams in the United States generally require a high level of English proficiency, and so Cuban refugees seeking jobs outside the Spanish-speaking nursing homes must often first take other jobs alongside English courses before they can continue in their health care careers. Health professions training are among the most popular courses offered by the Houston Community College (HCC) to refugees.

The Somali Bantu, Liberians, Afghans, Burmese, and some other recent refugee groups come from agricultural backgrounds. According to RSS and TAG providers, they often have little or no relevant employment history.

Many Bosnians had professional backgrounds before arrival, and some of them have successfully transferred these backgrounds into such jobs as those at refugee service providers.

Meshketian Turks, the most recent group but not represented in the survey, include a wide range of occupational backgrounds, including farming, manufacturing, and professional occupations. Many in this group speak more than one language.

Cubans and some better-educated Meskhetian Turks often realize they are underemployed and are often dissatisfied with the jobs that consortium employment staff offer them. This is one reason their job turnover tends to be higher than for other refugees.

E. Health Conditions

Immigrants commonly report higher rates of fair or poor health than the general population, and Houston's recent refugees are no exception. About one quarter (26 percent) of survey respondents reported fair or poor health (*Table II.7*), about double the national average for adults. For example, in the 2005 National Health Interview Survey, only 12 percent of all adults 18 and older (including the elderly) reported fair or poor health.³⁸ The share reporting fair or poor health rises to about a third for FY 2004 arrivals, the same year in which the largest share of refugees came from Somalia and Liberia.

Despite the high level reporting fair and poor health, the share of Houston survey respondents reporting disabilities is low: only 4 percent. Only 3 percent report adults in their families are disabled, and only 2 percent report that their children are disabled.³⁹

During the site visits, respondents said that in the past, Houston Volags have not resettled many cases that do not include employable adults because cash support levels are so low in Texas. But Houston has a very strong health care sector, and refugees can find top-quality treatment there with proper case management. Using a Preferred Communities (PC) grant, one of the five Volags in the Houston consortium has begun resettling chronically ill refugees, including those with

³⁸ National Center for Health Statistics, "Summary Health Statistics for U.S. Adults: National Health Interview Survey, 2005," *Vital and Health Statistics Series 10*, Number 232, Hyattsville, MD: U.S. Centers for Disease Control, December 2006. page 9.

³⁹ The survey asked respondents, "Do you or anyone in your family have a health problem or disability that prevents you from working or participating in training activities or that limits the kind or amount of work you can do?"

HIV/AIDS. Through its PC medical case management grant, the Volag has found employment for over 90 percent of HIV/AIDS and disabled refugees it has resettled recently, and it hopes to resettle and find employment for more disabled refugees in the future. The other four Volags, however, generally do not resettle disabled refugees.

Table II.7: Self-Reported Health and Disability Status by Entry Cohort

Measure	Year of Entry					Total
	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	
Respondent's health status (%)						
Excellent	18.9	23.8	32.7	21.2	13.8	21.0
Very good	22.6	11.1	19.2	30.8	19.1	20.1
Good	34.0	39.7	23.1	34.6	33.0	33.1
Fair	15.1	17.5	17.3	11.5	23.4	17.8
Poor	9.4	7.9	*	*	10.6	8.0
Disability (%)						
Has work-preventing disability	9.0	*	0.0	*	*	4.1
Has disabled family member (adult)	*	*	*	*	*	3.2
Has disabled family member (minor)	*	*	0.0	*	*	2.2
Sample size	53	63	52	52	94	316

Source: Refugee Assistance Survey

* Indicates a category that contains fewer than five individuals

During the site visit, respondents said that Meshketian Turks have chronic health problems such as cancer, diabetes, and poor teeth, owing to the fact they lacked access to health care in Russia. Many Bantu and Liberians also arrived with serious illnesses, which may, in the worst cases, delay their employment. More generally, refugees' physical conditioning can affect the types of jobs they can take; many assembly-line jobs, for instance, are too physically demanding for some of the refugees.

F. Plans to Apply for Citizenship

Virtually all the refugees in the survey (98 percent) plan on becoming United States citizens (Appendix Table 1). There is little variation from year to year or by region of origin. The refugee consortium offers citizenship classes as part of the refugee program. The relatively low share of refugees participating in RSS- or TAG-funded ESL classes and the high share with limited English ability may, however, mean that many refugees will have difficulty passing the citizenship test. This is particularly true for Latin Americans, who show a relatively low rate of participation in ESL.

III. SERVICE DELIVERY

A. Client Flow: From Reception and Placement to RSS and TAG

The client flow through the RSS and TAG system in Houston is strongly influenced by two factors: the PPP for RCA delivery, and the consortium of RSS and TAG providers. Texas operates a PPP, under which RCA benefits are disbursed through the same Volags that initially resettle refugees. These same agencies provide the bulk of RSS and TAG services—including most employment and education services and the client flow from R&P into RSS, TAG, and MG is seamless. These agencies work together as part of a consortium that handles all the RSS and TAG contracts in Harris County. As a result, client flow and services provided are very similar across all the agencies, as described below.

1. Reception and Placement

Five Volags provide R&P services to refugees in Houston, and four of these Volags were also consortium members and RSS and TAG service providers at the time of the study's site visit. In these four Volags, either the same worker handles both sets of services, the R&P case manager teams up with an employment specialist, or there is a referral within the same agency. Volags do not refer their clients to other Volags for employment; in other words, refugees stay at the same agency that initially resettled them. Conversations about employment usually begin early in the R&P period, with employment specialists holding work orientations within the first week or two after arrival. Thus, for the vast majority of Houston area refugees who come through these four Volags, the RSS and TAG employment and social services programs operate as an extension of the R&P program. The fifth Volag had not yet joined the consortium at the time of the site visit in spring 2006 and was still referring its refugees to one of the other four Volags for employment services. At the time this report was written in summer 2007, however, that Volag had joined the consortium.

R&P is even more closely linked with MG services across the four consortium Volags. The same case worker generally stays with the refugees from R&P through the full four-to-six month MG period.

Since the same organizations handle R&P, RSS, TAG, and MG services, these services were all discussed in detail during questions about client flow as part of site visit interviews.

Employment-related services begin within the R&P period in all the Volags. Thus, R&P services were a major item discussed during interviews with R&P providers. The client flow section below discusses the experiences of typical refugee clients beginning with R&P and proceeding through MG, RSS or TAG employment services.

2. Housing

The Houston Consortium resettles most refugees in a handful of large apartment complexes in southwest Houston. These complexes offer below-market rents and additional amenities and services for refugees. They also have large apartments, up to three bedrooms, for the largest refugee families with children. For instance, in the complex visited by the research team, refugees filled 160 of the 810 units, and many other units housed Hurricane Katrina evacuees

and other subsidized low-income tenants. The complex has a special refugee rate, negotiated between management and the consortium, and utilities are included in the rent. The Houston Volags have made inclusion of utilities in rent “non-negotiable” because several years ago they were paying very large electricity bills for refugees, especially during the summer months. MG and RCA recipients receive four months of housing assistance along with their cash benefits, and the complex offers the fifth months’ rent free. Thus, most refugees resettled in this complex do not pay their own rent until their sixth month. This complex recently hired a Somali with experience in refugee camp work as a facilitator between management and a large group of recent Bantu arrivals. The complex also houses an ESL class operated by the consortium’s ESL provider.

Despite the availability of large numbers of low-rent apartments and support services, the complexes in which many of the refugees live are located in a dangerous part of Houston.⁴⁰ Somali Bantu focus group participants expressed concern that their housing conditions would be safer, and recommended finding housing in safe and drug-free neighborhoods. These complexes, however, are located near the manufacturing plants and some other places of employment for many Somali Bantu and other refugees that rely heavily on RSS- and TAG-funded employment services.

3. Cash Assistance

Texas has one of the lowest TANF eligibility and benefit levels in the country. The maximum TANF grant for a family of three is \$208 a month, and only \$120 a month in earnings is disregarded (*Table III.1*). Only five states had lower maximum grants in 2003.⁴¹ This means that, for practical purposes, refugees cannot subsist on TANF, and if they work even at minimum wage jobs, they become ineligible. As a result, refugee families with children in Texas are almost always placed in MG slots, which allow them a larger benefit. Single refugees and childless couples generally receive RCA. The Volags usually only place refugees or their families in the TANF program if all the adults are elderly, disabled, lack child care, or cannot work for some other reason; these families can receive TANF while their SSI applications are pending.

In addition to paying more in cash benefits than TANF, MG and RCA provide substantial resources for housing. R&P pays the full housing cost during the first month. MG pays the full housing cost for refugees during their second through fourth months; this benefit is important for families with children, especially larger families. MG pays cash benefits but not housing during the fifth and sixth months.

RCA can provide cash benefits for a longer time—up to eight months (versus six months for MG)—but the housing subsidy is less generous: in single-person cases, RCA only pays up to \$245 a month toward rent and other housing costs during the second through fourth months.⁴² RCA also does not pay rent subsidies after the fourth month. If RCA recipients stay with relatives or other sponsors for free, or if their housing costs are less than \$245 a month, then they receive the balance between \$245 and their housing costs as cash during their second through

⁴⁰ At the time of the study’s site visit, there had recently been a shooting in one of the complexes.

⁴¹ These five states are Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Tennessee (Rowe and Versteeg 2005).

⁴² The amount of RCA available for rent and utilities during the first four months varies by the number of people on the case.

fourth months. Study respondents mentioned that RCA is usually a better deal than MG for singles and childless couples because they get more cash out of RCA than they would out of MG and they do not need as large a rent subsidy as families with children. During R&P, Volag staff often house more than one RCA case within the same apartment unit, so they can share rent costs. RCA and MG can pay for utilities as well as rent, but utilities are covered as part of the rent in the complexes where refugees are resettled.

Table III.1: Benefit Levels for TANF, Matching Grant, and RCA in Texas

	Benefits	Eligibility
TANF	The maximum grant is \$208 a month for a family of three	Maximum assumes no earnings (earnings disregard is \$120/month). Must be families with children.
RCA ^a	First four months: \$200/month per adult + partial rent/utility subsidy (paid directly to vendor) of \$245 a month Next four months: \$187.50/month (no rent subsidy)	Eligible for up to eight months; after fourth month, must have family income below 165% federal poverty threshold. Must be ineligible for TANF.
Matching Grant	\$200/month per adult + \$40/month per child + full rent (paid directly to vendor)	Eligible for up to four months with possibility of two additional months (cash only after fourth month). Can be for families or singles/childless couples, although generally used for families in Texas.

^a Amounts shown for RCA are for single-person cases. Cash payments in the first four months are constant at \$200 a month per person, up to four people, but vendor payments and cash payments in months five to eight vary by the number of people on the case.

The time limits for both MG and RCA are short—much shorter than for TANF—so there is a risk that benefits will expire before recipients find jobs. Families with children remain eligible for TANF after the MG eligibility period expires. Although even the hardest to serve refugees are placed in MG or RCA in Houston, the Volags are usually successful in finding employment within these tight time limits. Volag staff prefer to find other forms of assistance than TANF to help refugees in this situation.

Before the PPP, when Texas operated a publicly-administered program, the TANF staff did not have the necessary background on refugees to provide adequate services. There were some refugee-dedicated staff in state welfare offices, but most of these staff were familiar with older, more established Southeast Asian refugee populations. With the arrival of other refugee groups, they did not have the same facility with changing languages, cultures, and service needs that the Volags have; Volags have more flexibility in hiring staff from different backgrounds.⁴³ Additionally, since Volag staff disburse benefits directly, they do not need to refer refugees to welfare offices for cash benefits or find them means of transportation to offices.

Since refugees served by the PPP typically have no contact with state TANF workers, they generally do not participate in TANF employment programs. The WorkSource contractors who

⁴³ For instance, one Volag recently hired a Somali Bantu caseworker using a Preferred Communities grant; see later section of the report for details.

provide employment services to TANF recipients are not part of the network of RSS and TAG employment services, except in the rare cases that consortium agency staff obtain job leads from WorkSource staff or refer refugees to them for specific job openings. WorkSource resources were not used by Volag staff in any of the 27 cases reviewed during the study's site visit.

4. Food Stamps and Medical Assistance

Refugees also have very little direct contact with Texas Health and Human Services Commission offices for either Food Stamps or for Medicaid/RMA until their first recertification or renewal of benefits. One THHSC office in Houston used to have a refugee unit that included staff who were familiar with refugees and spoke Vietnamese. But in fall 2001, just before implementation of the PPP for refugee cash assistance and when the diversity of refugee origins was increasing, THHSC began handling refugee applications for Food Stamps and RMA through a centralized call center in Austin. There are eight eligibility workers at the center, which handles refugee applications for these benefits from across the state. These call center workers speak a variety of languages.

Case managers at the Volags fill out the Texas combined application for benefits, which includes Food Stamps, Medicaid, and TANF. THHSC staff handle eligibility determination either at a regional office in Houston or at the call center in Texas. If eligible for Medicaid, refugees' applications are forwarded to the Houston regional office for eligibility determination. Applications for Food Stamps are forwarded to the call center in Austin for eligibility determination. Volag case managers speak directly with call center or regional office staff if there are any problems with applications, and they have developed relationships with the two eligibility workers in Austin that handle Houston refugee applications.⁴⁴

Once Food Stamps are approved, refugees can go to any local THHSC office to receive their electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card. Refugees must go in-person to obtain their card because they are fingerprinted for card security purposes. Spanish speaking refugees mostly go to the same office because the EBT clerk there speaks Spanish. Other refugees often go with Volag staff to one of the other offices, which are located nearer to where refugees live.

Aside from EBT card pickup and fingerprinting, the only reason refugees go to local THHSC offices is to renew their Food Stamps or medical benefits, which they need only do every 6 to 12 months. At that time, Volag staff sometimes help them set up appointments and accompany them to the office for the renewal interview.

There have been some complaints about service at the local THHSC offices recently—by refugees and other clients—because these offices are severely short staffed. THHSC announced that it would privatize many eligibility functions by early 2006 and that many workers would be laid off. Although that privatization effort was behind schedule, many eligibility workers had already found other jobs, and THHSC cannot hire new staff to replace them.

⁴⁴ There is not a separate application for RMA, rather when a refugee is determined ineligible for Medicaid the call center will process the refugee's eligibility for RMA.

B. RSS and TAG Services

Refugees receiving RCA and MG receive essentially the same employment and supportive services from the four Volags in the consortium. The primary difference is that RCA recipients are single individuals and childless couples, while MG recipients tend to be families with children. Thus, MG recipients may have additional employment barriers and need additional services such as child care. In addition, while different staff handle case management for RSS, TAG, and MG clients, they work closely together at all four Volags. Some Volags have employment specialists that serve RSS, TAG, and MG clients, and in most cases the job developers are paid out of both funding streams (*Table III.2*). The two education providers in the consortium also offer the same services to RSS, TAG, and MG clients.

Throughout this section of the report, every effort is made to differentiate between RSS- and TAG- versus MG-funded services, but in many cases the services described are provided similarly to RSS, TAG, and MG clients. Since the four Volags in the consortium offer substantively similar services, this section of the report does not differentiate among Volags either. For the most part, the descriptions of services delivered were very consistent across interviews conducted for this study.

Table III.2: Houston Consortium of RSS and TAG Providers, Staff and FY 2006 Participation Targets

Organization	Type	RSS- and TAG-funded staff	FY 2006 participation targets ^a
Alliance for Multicultural Services	Volag	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resettlement manager (part) • Refugee coordinator (part) • Case management program coordinator (part) • 3 health/case managers (100%) • 2 job developers (part) • Employment counselor * MG pays for part of both job developers and separate case managers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 190 employment participants ○ 314 case management recipients ○ 237 driver's education participants
Catholic Charities of Houston	Volag	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program manager (part) • Client services coordinator (part) • Refugee Social Services coordinator (100%) • 5 staff that do case management, employment, and job development (100%) • 2 case managers (100%) • Job developer (100%) * MG has separate case managers and employment specialists. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 150 employment participants ○ 233 case management recipients ○ 130 citizenship services recipients

Table III.2 (Cont'd)

Organization	Type	RSS- and TAG-funded staff	FY 2006 participation targets
Interfaith Ministries	Volag	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program manager (part) • Refugee Social Services coordinator (100%) • Medical case manager (50%) • Employment coordinator (part) • Employment specialist (part) • Job developer (part) * MG pays for parts of employment coordinator, specialist and job developer. UA pays for part of specialist. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 150 employment participants ○ 143 case management recipients ○ 55 orientation recipients
YMCA	Volag	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment Services Director (part) • 2 Job Developers (100%, part) • 4 Employment Specialists (2 vacant, 100%) • Case Manager * MG pays for part of one job developer and has separate case managers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 294 employment participants ○ 143 case management recipients ○ 70 citizenship service recipients ○ 16 GED enrollees ○ 200 orientation recipients
Bilingual Education Institute	For-profit corporation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case manager (100%) • Outreach worker (100%) • Lead instructor (part) • Part-time instructors (number and funding vary based on demand) * RSS and TAG currently pay about half of overall BEI budget. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 664 ESL enrollees ○ 60 civics instruction enrollees ○ 60 orientation recipients
Houston Community College	Public university	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director of multicultural/international center (part) • Vocational instructors (through tuition) • Wage subsidies (for OJT) * State education agency pays for ESL, pre-GED, and GED for refugees. Higher education paid out of regular financial aid program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 72 vocational education participants ○ 34 OJT participants

Note: A seventh agency—another Volag—joined the consortium after the site visit, and so data from that agency are not included in this evaluation.

^a Each year, service delivery targets are negotiated among the state refugee office, the Houston consortium, and individual providers. These targets are included in annual RSS and TAG grant applications and reported to the state via the Refugee Data Center.

1. General Client Flow/Case Management

Rapid employment is the primary focus of the RSS, TAG, and MG programs in Houston, because both programs have such short time limits for assistance. Both programs are geared toward finding refugees employment within four months, and benefits are only extended beyond four months if assistance is still needed. The first month is generally taken up by R&P activities, although refugees are usually enrolled in ESL within the first couple of weeks. In most cases, refugees receive their Social Security cards within one month, and so can start searching for employment during their second month.

Since refugees receive RSS, TAG, and MG services from the same Volags—and often the same case managers—that initially resettled them, they are geared toward employment from their very first week in the country. For instance, at one Volag, the employment specialists introduce themselves to newly arrived refugees every Monday, during the refugees' first week. They provide an employment orientation during the second week, after refugees have received their health screening and applied for their Social Security cards. Refugees are also enrolled in ESL during their second week. R&P case managers are in continual contact with refugees, and most of what they talk about is work. Employment specialists also stay in contact with the R&P case managers during the R&P period, and they do the employment screening—asking about job histories, skills, and interests—immediately when either RCA or MG begins.

Refugees stay with the Volag that resettled them throughout the employment follow-up period and receive all RSS-, TAG-, and MG-funded services through the six consortium members. Employment specialists and job developers share job leads and experiences with refugees—especially difficult-to-serve groups—across the Volags, but the Volag that resettled the refugee is responsible for that refugee's employment outcomes. Almost all refugees who need English language instruction are referred to Bilingual Education Institute (BEI), a for-profit corporation that is a member of the consortium, for ESL classes, although some refugees take classes offered by Houston Community College, one of the Volags, or other community organizations that are not paid by RSS, TAG, or MG. Some refugees are referred to HCC, another consortium member, for their vocational education. HCC also offers ESL, GED, pre-GED, higher education, and other services to refugees, using other funding sources. Thus, this section of the report focuses on services delivered through the six consortium members.

2. Employment Referral and Placement

Employment referral and placement are one of the two most common types of services offered through RSS and TAG in Houston, which should not be surprising given the emphasis of the Texas PPP and the Houston consortium on rapid employment. Fully half of RSS and TAG participants between June 2002 and December 2005 had received job placement services at some point, and over a quarter (28 percent) had received these services within their first 120 days after entry (*Table III.3*). In the survey of refugees arriving between 2000 and 2004, over two-thirds of respondents (68 percent) reported receiving job search assistance (*Table III.4*), although in some cases this may have been through agencies other than RSS and TAG providers, thus accounting for the higher share reported in the survey than in the RSS and TAG data (68 versus 51 percent). There was not much variation in employment services receipt by entry cohort, but there was substantial variation by region of origin. African respondents are much more likely to have used

employment services (81 percent) than respondents from Latin American and other regions of the world (59-61 percent, *Table III.5*).

Table III.3: Receipt of RSS and TAG Services by Entry Date

Service type (% receiving service)	Within 30 days after entry	Within 60 days after entry	Within 90 days after entry	Within 120 days after entry	Within 365 days after entry	Ever received service
Education or training						
ESL	26.2	35.7	40.1	42.6	48.4	54.1
Vocational training	1.3	2.5	3.2	3.3	4.3	5.7
Pre-GED activity	0.0	0.4	0.5	0.5	1.2	1.7
Employment services						
Job referral and placement	3.0	14.9	23.4	27.8	45.2	51.2
OJT	0.1	0.3	0.4	0.6	1.4	1.7
Other						
Case management	8.1	14.2	17.7	19.8	32.3	37.6
Driver education	2.6	7.6	11.8	13.6	24.7	30.3
Orientation	5.5	13.0	17.3	18.9	22.3	24.2
Any service	38.4	58.8	68.2	72.6	88.5	100.0
Sample size	1,674	1,674	1,674	1,674	1,674	1,674

Source: RSS and TAG program data provided by the state

Table III.4: Receipt of Any Services by Entry Cohort

Measure	Year of Entry					Total
	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	
Ever received services (%)						
Job search	70.4	66.7	71.2	61.5	69.5	68.0
Subsidized employment	*	11.3	*	9.8	6.3	8.0
Vocational skills training	25.9	20.6	17.3	*	12.6	16.1
GED/ABE instruction	16.7	15.9	*	13.5	15.8	13.6
ESL/English language training	81.5	73.0	65.4	63.5	63.2	68.7
Legal services	61.1	58.7	40.4	55.8	38.7	49.7
Translation/Interpretation services	38.9	30.2	34.6	38.5	36.8	35.8
Assessment of services and assistance (%)						
Excellent	35.2	23.8	30.0	24.0	20.4	25.8
Good	35.2	46.0	46.0	46.0	46.2	44.2
Fair	13.0	19.0	22.0	18.0	18.3	18.1
Poor	14.8	11.1	*	12.0	15.1	11.6
Don't know	*	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	*
Sample size	54	63	52	52	95	316

Source: Refugee Assistance Survey

* Indicates a category that contains fewer than five individuals

YMCA is the fiscal agent for RSS and TAG employment services, and all services are offered through subcontracts to the four Volags in the consortium. Within the RSS and TAG programs, employment specialists or counselors are responsible for providing most services, including: employment orientation, resume preparation, addressing employment barriers (e.g., dress, hygiene, transportation, child care), setting up interviews, accompanying refugees on interviews (in some cases), and following up with refugees and their employers during the 90-day follow-up period. RSS and TAG case managers, and, in some cases, supervisors such as employment program coordinators also help with these services. In three Volags, a separate group of MG case managers and their supervisors provide similar services for MG clients, but in the smallest Volag (Interfaith) a team of three employment workers provides services to both RSS, TAG, and MG clients (Table III.2).

Table III.5: Receipt of Any Services by Region of Birth

Measure	Region of Birth		
	Africa	Latin America	Other
Ever received services (%)			
Job search	80.8	58.8	61.3
Subsidized employment	15.3	0.0	6.3
Vocational skills training	18.3	15.3	14.4
GED/ABE instruction	21.7	*	11.7
ESL/English language training	71.7	54.1	76.6
Legal services	58.3	29.8	55.5
Translation/Interpretation services	42.5	25.9	36.0
Assessment of services and assistance (%)			
Excellent	26.9	26.2	24.3
Good	38.7	57.1	40.2
Fair	19.3	13.1	20.6
Poor	15.1	*	14.0
Don't know	0.0	0.0	*
Sample size	120	85	111

Source: Refugee Assistance Survey

* Indicates a category that contains fewer than five individuals

The four Volags in the consortium each have a small number of RSS, TAG, and MG employment staff, and these staff work closely together both within and across the Volags. Job developers share job leads with both MG and RSS and TAG employment staff in all the Volags. Additionally, job developers meet regularly to discuss job openings and they share job leads across the Volags. Employment specialists, counselors, and case managers also share experiences with refugees across the Volags. In fact, they work so closely together that one employer interviewed for the study said she has a single point of contact for the consortium: a job developer at one Volag refers clients from all four Volags.

The employment process and outcomes depend heavily on whether refugees know English or Spanish. If they know either of these languages, they can be placed relatively quickly and easily; they may even be able to get better-than-entry-level jobs soon after arrival. If they do not know

either English or Spanish, their job opportunities are much more limited. In the vast majority of cases, however, the Houston consortium has found employment for non-English, non-Spanish speaking refugees quickly in entry-level jobs. The three examples at the end of this section of the report highlight the variation in employment experiences and the intensity of services delivered for refugees who arrived recently in Houston.

The Houston consortium uses RCA and MG funding to offer clients incentives for early employment, and it offers a child care subsidy through the MG program. For RCA cases, there is a \$150 incentive for employment of the first employable adult in the case, if that adult is employed at any point during the first three months for at least 35 hours a week and at least 30 continuous days. There is also a \$52 bonus for the second employed adult, and similar bonuses for each additional employed adult on a case. RCA cash payments, however, stop at four months if the case has an income at or above 165 percent of the federal poverty threshold. The MG program also offers early employment bonuses, but these bonuses vary by Volag because the national Volag affiliate agencies have different policies. One Houston Volag, for instance, pays early employment incentives that range from \$100 to \$300 per MG case depending on family size and on whether the job is retained for 90 days. Across all Volags, MG pays \$40 a month per child under age 18 as a child care subsidy (*Table III.1*).

Most entry-level jobs that refugees take are in manufacturing plants, hotels, or other service locations. The job developers have developed strong relationships with several large plants and hotels located near either major transportation lines or the large apartment complexes in southwest Houston where most refugees are resettled. The consortium has experimented with employment in manufacturing facilities located farther away from where refugees live. But these experiments were short-lived, as transportation proved a major barrier to refugees who have not lived in the country long enough to learn how to drive and afford a car. (The consortium had provided transportation to one factory located more than 10 miles away.) Refugees are mostly placed at a handful of nearby employers, and employment specialists or case managers generally take refugees to these employers for interviews, sometimes in groups. There are some exceptions: some refugees who do not live in southwest Houston generally find their own jobs closer to where they live, rather than working with the consortium to find jobs in downtown or southwest Houston.

Most of Houston's recent refugees have limited English skills, and some groups—for example, Liberians and Somali Bantu—are illiterate. Although there is great need for ESL, literacy, and basic education services, in general, refugees must be placed in jobs long before they can learn English or improve their reading and writing skills. As mentioned earlier, the consortium's rapid employment strategy is based on the reality that MG benefits expire in six months, and RCA terminates in eight; TANF is not a long-term option for refugees in Texas.

For the Liberians, Somali Bantu, and some other African and Asian refugees, placement in entry-level manufacturing and service jobs is the only realistic option. These jobs generally start at \$6–7 an hour and may be either temporary or permanent. Hours are good, however, and in some cases refugees may earn substantial incomes due to overtime—up to 60 hours a week in one manufacturing plant. Most refugees from these groups stay in their first job through the 90-day follow-up period. Some Somalis and Liberians, however, are difficult to place in their first job or

have difficulties with retention; these difficulties are discussed later in the outcomes chapter of this report.

Vietnamese and Meshtekian Turkish refugees have greater job options, even when they do not speak English, because of links with co-ethnic communities. There are a number of Vietnamese and Turkish restaurants and other ethnic employers throughout Houston. Many of these refugees receive jobs through informal networks, community organizations, or other resources; fewer are placed by the consortium in the same manufacturing and hotel jobs as other refugees.

Cubans and other Spanish speakers have the widest range of job options, as Spanish is a strong, if not predominant, language in several large sectors of Houston's economy, including manufacturing, construction, trade, and services. Cubans and other Spanish speakers are often placed by the consortium in the same manufacturing and hotel jobs as other refugees, but they also find their own jobs through family members, friends, and other informal contacts. Spanish speakers tend to be more dispersed than other refugee groups and find more jobs outside the areas in southwest and downtown Houston where the consortium makes most of its job placements.

Many Cuban refugees have a significant amount of formal education in their home country and could be qualified for professional jobs. Lack of English skills and credentials accepted by U.S. employers, however, represent significant barriers, and most refugees must take entry-level jobs even if they are well educated. For instance, many Cubans have extensive education plus experience in the health care sectors, but they are unable to find health care jobs in Houston beyond a limited number of Spanish-speaking nursing home facilities. Cubans and some better-educated Meskhetian Turks often realize they are underemployed and are often dissatisfied with the jobs that consortium employment staff offer them. RSS and TAG providers said that Cubans may take these entry-level jobs but often change jobs quickly and tend to find their own employment more often than other refugee groups. The survey and wage data discussed later in this report, however, do not show higher turnover for Latin Americans than for other groups of refugees.

An African Father Needs Multiple Job Placements before Securing His First Job

African refugees who do not speak English and have limited formal education tend to have more difficulty finding jobs, as shown in this case. A French-speaking family of four—two adults with two children—arrived in Houston from Africa in 2004. During their R&P period, the parents were referred to an ESL class offered in their apartment complex and to a job developer. They were placed on MG, which paid their rent for the first several months. About ten days after their first MG check was issued, the father was taken to apply for a job as a kitchen helper at a restaurant. He did not get the job because of his poor English skills. About ten days later he took a test at the Volag for a warehouse job and got an interview. But he was not offered this second job either, again because of his English ability. A week later he had an interview for a third job at a coffee shop, but the employer never got back to them. The father got two more interviews—one at a cleaning job and one at a retailer—but failed to get those jobs as well. Finally, almost three months after resettlement, the husband got a job working as a dishwasher at a hotel in downtown Houston. The wife got a job at a manufacturer in a Houston suburb around the same time; the Volag helped arrange her transportation. Both the husband and wife were happy with these initial placements. Six months after arrival and three months after their placements, the couple were still employed and doing well. Even in cases like this, where the husband needed six job referrals and 10 interviews before he got his first job, the Volag staffs are generally able to find refugees employment within the four-month MG period.

A Cuban Couple Finds Employment Quickly and Easily

Cubans generally find employment quickly in Houston because Spanish is a common language in the city, but they are often dissatisfied with their first placements and change jobs frequently. In this case, a Cuban couple, both with high school diplomas, arrived in 2005. They moved into one of the apartment complexes in southwest Houston. The RSS and TAG case manager met with them on their first day and conducted a job orientation during their first week in the country. The case manager began conducting a job search within the first two weeks; both the husband and wife were employable. The couple started receiving RCA after one month (as they have no children), and they both found jobs within their first six weeks (i.e., less than a month into the RCA period). The husband received a \$150 early employment incentive; the wife received a \$52 incentive. The case manager took them to an interview with a manufacturer, and both the husband and wife took jobs on the assembly line, for \$6 an hour with benefits. The wife stayed with this job for the 90-day follow-up period, but the husband changed jobs twice within the 90-day period for higher salaries: once for \$6.75 an hour at a hotel, and a second time for \$7.50 an hour at another manufacturer. After the 90-day period, he changed his job a third time, to work at a supermarket closer to home.

A Single Ethiopian Woman Finds Her Own Job and Pursues Further Education

Not all African refugees resettled in Houston have difficulty finding work, as the following case of an English-speaking woman from Ethiopia shows. In 2005, a single woman from Ethiopia was sponsored by a family member and arrived with another brother and sister, who were resettled as a separate case. She shared an apartment with the brother and sister who arrived at the same time and were placed in the MG program, which paid their full rent. Categorized as a single adult, she received RCA. Although she had less than a 9th grade education, she tested into the highest class—the computer group—in Bilingual Education Institute’s ESL program. Volag employment staff referred her to two jobs working at hotels, but she found her own job working as a parking cashier for \$6 an hour. After she found her job, she stopped receiving RCA and began a pre-GED program at HCC, paid through financial aid from the college. As this case shows, some English-speaking refugees have a relatively easy time finding their own jobs in Houston even when they have little formal education. Co-ethnic job networks—such as Ethiopian parking cashiers—also help in this regard.

3. Education Services

Bilingual Education Institute is the consortium’s fiscal agent for education services and sole provider for RSS-, TAG-, and MG-funded ESL classes. BEI also offers literacy classes and subcontracts to one Volag for some ESL classes and for driver’s education. The bulk of the education business for the consortium is short-term ESL. The 2006 participation target for the number of refugees enrolled in ESL was 664 (Table III.2). BEI is solely responsible for the education outcomes measured by the state, including shares of refugees completing instruction and advancing to a higher level.

a. English as a Second Language

English as a Second Language is the second-most common service offered under RSS and TAG, after employment referral and placement. In the RSS and TAG data for June 2002 through December 2005, over half (54 percent) of participants had received ESL at some point, and 36 percent of participants had received ESL within their first 60 days (Table III.3). RSS and TAG providers said that most refugees drop ESL within two to three months, when they take their first job, owing to the time demands of the job. In the survey, ESL was also one of the two most commonly reported services—again alongside employment—at 69 percent (Table III.4). There was not much variation in the survey by entry cohort: ESL receipt hovered around 70 percent for all entrants from FY 2001 through 2004, and it was somewhat higher (just over 80 percent) for the earliest cohort, FY 2000. Only about half of Latin American survey respondents (54 percent) received ESL services, compared with about three quarters of African and other respondents (72–77 percent, as shown in Table III.5). Lower participation in ESL classes could be one explanation for the generally lower level of English proficiency among Latin Americans compared with other refugees.

BEI offers ESL classes for refugees separately from other populations it serves; refugees account for about half of its business. The refugee curriculum, called “accelerated learning,” focuses more on survival English and language skills needed for job searches and work. The refugee

curriculum is taught in a more hands-on and visual manner than the regular ESL classes, which focus more on grammar and formal language learning.

BEI offers four levels of ESL instruction for refugees:

- level 1, for refugees with low literacy and little or no English ability;
- level 2, for refugees with basic knowledge of English;
- level 3, for refugees who speak some English but have limited vocabulary; and
- level 4, for refugees with more advanced English skills. This level introduces refugees to computers and helps them complete resumes and otherwise prepare for employment.

BEI's classes have open-entry and open-exit enrollment to accommodate refugees when they first arrive. BEI has a waiting period of around 10 days, because it tries not to place refugees in classes after midterm. But most refugees are referred for ESL within their first two weeks in Houston. Most refugees take level 1, especially with the recent waves of Somali Bantu and Meskhetian Turks, who speak no English on arrival. Many Cubans are also placed in level 1. BEI's classes give priority to recently arrived refugees.

Each class consists of 80 hours of instruction, which may not be enough for students with the weakest language skills. Thus, refugees sometimes must take the level 1 class more than once. But because the recent arrivals receive priority, refugees who need to take the class again sometimes cannot get a slot. In a few instances, when slots have not been available, BEI has allowed refugees to sit in on the class but not participate.

Most ESL classes are held two hours a day, five days a week, at different time slots to accommodate people with different schedules. One service provider in the case study—who is not a BEI employee—criticized the structure of the ESL program as lacking intensity. He suggested that a more intensive program including several hours a day over the course of several weeks would be more effective, though more expensive. He questioned whether refugees were learning enough English in the short time they have to attend these classes, with only two hours of instruction a day. Some Somali Bantu focus group participants also criticized the times that the ESL classes were offered, because they did not accommodate people working on evening shifts from 2:00 to 10:00 p.m.

RSS and TAG providers reported that, although refugees are placed in ESL classes within their first month—and often their first two weeks, in most cases they drop these classes once they start working. Employment begins as early as one month and almost always within three or four months after arrival. Yet each level of ESL instruction takes six weeks. In reality, then, refugees seldom make it through level 2, because they have already found employment and quit instruction by the three-month mark. In fact, most refugees only take the first level of ESL.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Providers of ESL services through RSS and TAG do not have flexibility in the sequencing of ESL services: they must be offered while refugees are employed or employment or related services are being offered. The regulations governing RSS- or TAG- funded ESL state:

The Volags offer cash incentives for refugees to stay enrolled in ESL classes. In the first month, Volags pay \$50 for each person on the case who has a good attendance record. In the second month, the incentive is \$50, and in the third month it is \$75.

BEI offers most classes on its campus, which is located in southwest Houston not far from most of the apartment complexes where refugees first live. BEI also offers additional classes at the apartment complexes. For example, at the time of the study's site visit in April 2006, three classes were held at BEI's main campus, and eight classes were held in four different apartment complexes. Refugees who find their own housing in other parts of the city, however, may not find these class locations convenient, and they often find ESL instruction on their own through other sources.

Location and lack of child care are barriers to refugee ESL participation in Houston. Somali Bantu women in the focus group reported that in general their husbands take ESL classes or work, while the wives stay at home with the children. The Bantu, however, expressed appreciation that BEI had held ESL classes in their own environment—the apartment complex—and hoped that more such classes would be offered. To help overcome these barriers, BEI offers babysitting on site and does some outreach through reminder letters and visits to refugees' homes.

HCC and some other community organizations also offer ESL, but these courses are not paid by RSS, TAG, or MG. Many Meskhetian Turks, for example, were receiving ESL from a Turkish organization, which provided transportation to the class and had Turkish-speaking instructors, at the time of the study's site visit.

b. Literacy

Many recent refugees—especially the Bantu and some Liberians—are illiterate in their native languages. BEI offers two 80-hour courses in basic literacy for these refugees, again mostly held on their main campus. These courses are scheduled so refugees can take two hours of literacy and two hours of ESL instruction each day. As with ESL, refugees seldom make it through both literacy courses before their first job placement.

In many Bantu families, the husband works but the wife stays with the children and may take ESL and literacy classes at BEI, where child care is provided, or at the apartment complex where they live. Other Bantu families are single women with children, and they also take ESL and literacy for an extended period while not working.

The RSS and TAG participant data and the refugee survey did not provide information on receipt of literacy services, and this program is largely limited to the Bantu, Liberians, Afghanis, and other small refugee groups with low basic literacy levels.

“English language instruction funded under this part must be provided in a concurrent, rather than sequential, time period with employment or with other employment-related services.” (Office of Refugee Resettlement, ACF, HHS, “Service Requirements,” 45 CFR 400.156(c)).

c. Driver's education

Houston is a large, dispersed metropolitan area, and refugees have limited job options if they cannot drive. Almost all the respondents during the site visit mentioned that transportation is a major barrier to employment for many refugees in Houston. Driver's education and assistance in purchasing an automobile are therefore essential services to promote refugees' long-term self-sufficiency.

Because of high demand, driver's education is another common service offered under RSS and TAG, and 30 percent of participants in June 2002–December 2005 received this service (Table III.3). Only 14 percent of RSS and TAG participants had received driver's education within their first 120 days, suggesting this service is usually offered later in the resettlement process. The survey did not inquire about driver's education.

The Alliance, one of four Volags in the consortium, offers a driver's education course under a contract with BEI, the fiscal agent for the education grant. The program has three phases:

- a) intake and basic orientation, during which the Volag provides information on driving rules, insurance, and how to purchase a car;
- b) classroom instruction, which includes the instruction and application assistance refugees need to obtain a learner's permit; and
- c) driver's instruction, which ends with a written and driving test.

The driver's education program is a large one: the FY 2006 participation target was 237 students (Table III.2).⁴⁶ Not all refugees complete the program, however; many have difficulty learning to drive, especially if they do not have driving experience in their home countries.

There is a waiting list for driver's education, and one focus group participant expressed frustration with being placed on the waiting list. His recommendation was that more than one agency should offer this form of assistance.

d. Civics instruction

BEI offers a 40-hour class that prepares refugees for the U.S. citizenship test. Staff from the YMCA and Catholic Charities provide legal advice to refugees and help them navigate the process of becoming a citizen. The FY 2006 participation target for civics instruction was 60 students (Table III.2). RSS and TAG funds can be used to provide civics instruction for refugees who have been in the country for more than five years. Civics instruction was not reported in the RSS and TAG data nor in the refugee survey.

⁴⁶ Each year, service delivery targets are negotiated among the state refugee office, the Houston consortium, and individual providers. These targets are included in annual RSS and TAG grant applications and reported to the state via the Refugee Data Center.

e. Cultural orientation

Cultural orientation is also part of the education grant, and is offered by BEI and all but one Volag in the consortium. Cultural orientation services include taking refugees on outings, showing them where to shop for clothing and food, taking them to parks and recreation centers, and so on. Refugees are also shown how to use the bus system to get around Houston.

Not all refugees need RSS- and TAG-funded cultural orientation, and according to the RSS and TAG data, only about a quarter (24 percent) received such services. Many refugees get orientation through the MG program—and so would not appear in the RSS and TAG data. Others may get it during the R&P period. Most of these (17 percent of all RSS and TAG participants) had received cultural orientation within the first 90 days (Table III.3). Cultural orientation participation was not reported in the refugee survey.

Some refugees need more cultural orientation than others. Many Somali Bantu, for example, were entirely unfamiliar with modern urban life, and so they had great difficulty adjusting to apartment living and hygiene in the workplace. Regular case management and cultural orientation services funded under RSS, TAG, and MG proved insufficient with this group, and additional grant funds, mostly under the Unanticipated Arrivals program, were used to hire additional staff and provide additional orientation and case management services. These services are discussed in more detail later in the “Other Funding Sources—Unanticipated Arrivals” section of this report. Because many of these services were provided to refugees receiving MG or were funded by additional grant funds, they may not appear in the RSS and TAG data shown in Table III.3.

4. Vocational Training

Houston Community College offers vocational training for refugees, although far fewer refugees are enrolled in these programs than in ESL—HCC’s goal is just 72 students a year (Table III.2). In fact, only 6 percent of RSS and TAG participants in the June 2002–December 2005 data ever received vocational training, and only 16 percent of refugees in the survey reported receiving training (Tables III.3, III.4). The rapid employment focus of the PPP in Texas and the Houston consortium generally directs refugees toward job search and employment, along with ESL instruction, rather than longer-term vocational training and other forms of skills development.

HCC has a vocational training subcontract under the Volag that is the consortium’s fiscal agent for employment services. Because of the consortium’s emphasis on rapid employment in entry-level jobs, few refugees can pursue their career paths right away. The college, however, offers vocational programs for some better-skilled refugees, and those who have some English ability, in vocational programs. The college also serves refugees who have been in the country for a longer time—up to five years—as well as (in rare cases) recent arrivals who are working and taking vocational education at the same time.

HCC has a large menu of vocational programs. In recent years refugees have enrolled in training to become certified nursing assistants (CNA), auto mechanics, welders, machinists, plumbers, electricians, truck drivers, air conditioning repair workers, hotel/restaurant workers, fashion

industry workers, and bank tellers and other finance workers. The college is also starting a property management course that will likely enroll some refugees.

The CNA program—the most popular among refugees—requires a high school degree and strong English skills. Starting wages are \$8 to \$9 an hour, and higher at hospitals. The 13–15 refugees enrolled in this program in spring 2006 were mostly English-speaking Africans from Liberia, Congo, Sierra Leone, and Cameroon. CNA program graduates can also move on to higher-skilled jobs in the medical field with additional training at the college. But most of these programs take more than a year, so students must apply for financial aid. Because the medical field is growing so rapidly and is already such a large sector in Houston, it represents a strong career path for refugees. Cuban refugees, however, generally do not take these courses, even though many have experience in Cuba’s medical system, because they must improve their English skills first.

The truck driving program is also popular, but it requires good English skills and substantial experience in driving in the United States, so is not open to the most recent refugees. Demand for these jobs has been strong, and as many as 10 refugees may enroll in 2006. The course is very demanding—requirements substantially exceed those for a state commercial driver’s license—and so graduates are usually guaranteed high-paying jobs at reputable companies upon completion.

HCC offers several skilled construction-related programs that serve small numbers of refugees. These programs—for instance, plumbing, electrical work, and air conditioning repair—are geared toward getting students apprenticeships and eventually licenses. Because the jobs are licensed, they pay well and have limited labor supply. For example, plumbing program graduates earn \$9 an hour as apprentices and after 8,000 hours and a licensing exam can earn up to \$22 an hour. But these jobs and training programs are physically and technically demanding. In the words of the air conditioning instructor, “The first job they put you in is in a dark, hot, dirty attic in Houston in the summertime.” Demand also rises and falls for some of these jobs with local economic conditions: the demand for electricians fell with the collapse of Enron, Dynegy, and the rest of the energy sector. The college placed four refugees in the plumbing program this year, and six to eight in the electrician program over the past couple of years.

HCC generally only places refugees in programs that are able to be completed and offer a strong chance of placement within one year. The college must show that refugees receive employment through its programs in one year or less in order to meet RSS, TAG, and MG program goals. This requirement limits the types of training that refugees can take. The CNA, truck driving, and plumbing programs, for instance, are less than one year long. The air conditioning program has a one-year course that leads to placement, but there are two more years of instruction available. The electrician course, however, is three semesters long, and most medical courses above CNA are longer than a year. The college must find financial aid for refugees who wish to take vocational education beyond the first year.

HCC has one of the largest international student bodies in the country, and staff there have great facility with different languages and cultures. Courses are offered on several campuses across the metropolitan area, some of which are closer to where refugees live than others, but which are generally accessible by public transportation.

An African Refugee Takes a Plumbing Class while Also Working 12 Hours a Day

It can be extremely difficult for refugees to pursue a career path while holding down an entry-level job. For instance, one refugee in a community college plumbing course also works 12 hours a day on an assembly line. He works the overnight shift—6 p.m. to 6 a.m.—and then attends class from 8 a.m. until noon. He has a few hours to sleep every afternoon before returning to work, and he also has a family at home. When he completes the course, he will likely get paid \$9 an hour instead of the \$6 he is earning at the assembling plant. He is likely to be hired because he has shown a strong work ethic.

This case shows just how difficult it is for refugees to pursue vocational training and a full-time job simultaneously. While this may be an extreme case, it shows the challenges that confront refugees if they try to pursue education while working when they first arrive in Houston.

5. On-the-Job Training and Subsidized Employment

Like vocational training, on-the-job training (OJT) is very rare among refugees in Houston. HCC used to offer OJT for a small number of refugees, with a participation target of 34 a year (Table III.2). The college had difficulties meeting this target, with 20 refugees enrolled in FY 2005, and only 5 by spring 2006 for FY 2006. Less than 2 percent of refugees in the June 2000–December 2005 RSS and TAG participant data received OJT. By summer 2007, HCC and the consortium had entirely suspended the refugee OJT program. Employers objected to the paperwork burden of the program and told the consortium that it was not worth it for small subsidies for small numbers of employees. WorkSource, the primary workforce investment contractor in Houston, had encountered the same objections from employers and nearly suspended its OJT program as well.

In the OJT program, employers were reimbursed for half the wage for the first 480 hours of work. Employers were required to retain workers for another three months after the OJT period expired.

HCC recruited some employers for the OJT program, but most employers came to the college with specific job requests. Common recent OJT placements for refugees were in light manufacturing, auto mechanics, baking, groceries, and security. For instance, a supermarket chain employed workers as cleaners in their bakeries while training them to become bakers. A window treatment manufacturer provided training for workers on the assembly line.

Subsidized employment is also uncommon in Houston, except for African refugees. Only 8 percent of refugees surveyed reported subsidized employment (Table III.4). However, the share reporting subsidized employment was almost twice as high (15 percent) among African refugees, suggesting that some may have been in wage subsidy programs. One program developed to serve

Somali Bantu and Liberian women was a training and subsidized wage program in custodial services at one of the major hotels in downtown Houston.

6. Client Satisfaction with RSS and TAG Surveys

In the survey of refugees resettled in FY 2000–04, respondents were asked how satisfied they were with the services they received from RSS and TAG providers. Specifically they were asked how they would assess “services and assistance received to help settle, become adjusted, and support” themselves. Although the majority of survey respondents assessed the services and assistance they received as excellent or good, a substantial share—30 percent—rated services and assistance as fair or poor. There was little variation across entry cohorts, except that only about a quarter of FY 2002 entrants rated services and assistance as fair or poor (Table III.4). About a third (34 to 35 percent) of African and other survey respondents rated services as fair or poor, compared with just 17 percent of Latin American respondents (Table III.5). Latin American respondents received the least intensive services: their service receipt levels were lower than for other respondents in every category. Latin American refugees, according to site visit respondents, also had the easiest time finding jobs owing to relatively high educational attainment, substantial job experience, and the demand for Spanish-speaking workers in the Houston labor market. Lower satisfaction among other refugees may result from more difficulty finding jobs and lower job quality because of lower educational attainment.

The Somali Bantu in one focus group in Houston were particularly critical of the RSS, TAG, and MG programs. They criticized the fact that assistance only lasted four to six months, and many were unable to get jobs within that short time frame. They felt “forced” into taking the first job they could get,⁴⁷ and then they had to request other forms of welfare assistance (such as Food Stamps) on their own, after their MG benefits had expired.⁴⁸ They also complained that in emergency situations they did not receive assistance (e.g., for food and housing) as quickly as they had expected. The Bantu focus group participants suggested that for them, it would be helpful to extend the assistance period beyond six months to give them more time to learn English, improve their skills, and find jobs.

There was also criticism from one English-speaking African focus group participant. His family had been in the United States before his arrival (and so he was likely resettled as a family case rather than a free case). He was told by a caseworker that he was not entitled to a number of services, but instead his family would assume responsibility for housing, food, and other forms of assistance.

C. Other Refugee Resettlement Programs and Services

The consortium members together and separately have applied for several discretionary grant programs to meet the special needs of refugee populations, particularly the Somali Bantu. In

⁴⁷ Federal rules require that refugees receiving RCA accept the first job offered; this is not a policy specific to the Houston consortium. As stated in Office of Refugee Resettlement, ACF, HSS, “General Requirements,” 45 CFR 400.75 (a): “As a condition for receipt of refugee cash assistance, a refugee ... must ... accept at any time, from any source, an offer of employment, as determined to be appropriate by the State agency or its designee.”

⁴⁸ It is worth noting, however, that Volags in the consortium routinely call the Texas Department of Health and Human Services to file applications for Food Stamps and other public benefits for refugees. The study did not ascertain whether the complaints discussed in this focus group were common to many other refugees.

general, the resources for these programs are spread among the four Volags in the consortium, although some have specialized in certain programs. These additional grant programs have been instrumental in successfully integrating some recent refugee groups when resources under the regular RSS, TAG, and MG programs were insufficient.

This section of the report describes education services funded entirely outside refugee resettlement programs. Many refugees take basic or continuing education courses with funding through the Texas Education Agency or HCC's financial aid program. These other education programs are important in promoting the long-run self-sufficiency of refugees. Services provided by the community and funded entirely outside government programs for refugees are also described.

1. *Unanticipated Arrivals*

At the time of the study's site visit, the Houston consortium had a 17-month Unanticipated Arrivals (UA) grant, due to expire in July 2006, which was geared toward aiding the Somali Bantu in employment and cultural adjustment. All four Volags participated in this program, which primarily had been used to fund additional time for employment staff, particularly those who were familiar with Bantu culture and languages. But this program was beginning to wind down as the numbers of Bantu arrivals dropped considerably in FY 2006.

As the Bantu speak five different languages, are often illiterate, and come from rural areas, their integration into U.S. society and the labor market has been much more challenging than most other recent groups of refugees. Thus, the Bantu, particularly the women, have often required multiple job placements and longer financial and community support than other refugee groups. Owing to low English skills, personal hygiene problems, and other issues, many Bantu were let go from their first or second jobs and were still struggling to find stable entry-level jobs after 9 to 12 months. In some cases, their cash assistance through MG had expired, they had lost Food Stamps, or they had not figured out how to sort their mail.

Hiring Somali staff has been essential to bridging large cultural and linguistic gaps between the Bantu and their new community. UA funding allowed one Volag to hire a Bantu employment specialist. The other Volags, however, had begun shifting resources away from the Bantu population, as the number of Somali Bantu arrivals had dropped and most Bantu had found stable employment and began adapting to U.S. life by early 2006. One other Volag had used UA funding to hire a case manager dedicated to the employment of Bantu, with a focus on the women, but this case manager had left at the time of the study's site visit. This Volag was shifting the funding to a staff person handling orientation for new refugees and for refugees who needed further assistance over time. A third Volag also used UA funding to work with the Bantu on employment, but its focus had shifted to Liberians and Meskhetian Turks by April 2006.

A Somali Bantu Employment Specialist Helps Bridge Cultural Gap

The Somali Bantu speak five different languages, are mostly illiterate, and many are from rural areas. All these factors have complicated their adjustment to modern city living in Houston. In particular, many Bantu had difficulty in retaining employment because of personal hygiene issues, and none of the Houston consortium's employment or case management staff could communicate with them to resolve these issues. One consortium agency hired a Bantu employment specialist who uncovered the problem: the Bantu did not know how to use coin-operated laundry machines and therefore were not washing their clothes frequently. Once they were instructed in how to use the machines, and obtained quarters and detergent, they began washing clothes regularly and the problem was solved. In general, the Bantu had great difficulty understanding how to live in apartments and use modern appliances. Finding staff that could speak their languages and understand their rural cultural background helped overcome many social adjustment challenges.

2. Preferred Communities

Three of the four Volags in the Houston consortium have received Preferred Communities (PC) grants through their national affiliate Volags. They use them for various services, mostly focused on the Somali Bantu and Liberians, but in some cases to serve broader populations. For instance, these Volags used PC grants for the following purposes:

a. Enhancing Somali Bantu case management

The same Volag that hired the Bantu employment specialist using UA funding also hired a Somali case manager using PC funding, to help provide additional assistance in addressing employment barriers among the Bantu.

b. Addressing child care and other employment barriers for single mothers

One Volag used PC funding to provide additional resources for single-parent families during the MG period and, in some cases, after their MG expired. For example, one single parent with seven children had difficulty finding a job; MG resources were used to help arrange child care for her. In a second single-parent case, the mother was placed in three jobs during the MG period but could not keep them because of low skills, poor English ability, lack of child care, and transportation barriers. The PC grant was used to help subsidize her transportation, find her better child care, and address communication and personal hygiene issues. A second Volag has also used PC funding to provide child care for refugees up to one year after their arrival.

c. Providing additional cultural orientation

One Volag used PC funding to produce a video focusing on parenting skills and provide additional group orientations around cultural adjustment and employment issues. The Volags in general found that the Somali Bantu and often the Liberians required more orientation than other groups of refugees; they used PC funding to go back over some of the same issues—for example, using appliances, personal hygiene, communicating with employers and potential employers—that were discussed during the R&P period and later by MG case managers.

d. Providing medical case management

One Volag used a PC grant to pay half the salary of a medical case manager for refugees who arrive with chronic conditions or develop them within their first 90 days in the country. This Volag used PC funding to provide orientation to U.S. health services and help locate providers in the Houston area. Many Bantu, Liberians, and Meskhetian Turks arrive with serious illnesses or disabilities, which may delay or prevent their employment. In the past, Houston Volags have not resettled many cases that do not include employable adults because cash support levels are so low in Texas. However, Houston has a very strong health care sector—several of the nation’s largest hospitals are located there, and refugees can find top-quality treatment there with proper case management. The Volag with this PC grant hopes to be able to resettle more chronically ill refugees, especially those with HIV/AIDS, in the future. Through the PC medical case management grant, the Volag has found employment for over 90 percent of HIV/AIDS and disabled refugees they have resettled recently.

e. Recruiting community support

Two Volags used PC funding to help recruit volunteers and develop partnerships with local churches to support refugees. One hired a parish outreach coordinator, and the other hired a sponsorship developer; both have conducted fundraising campaigns among local congregations and worked with them to sponsor refugees. Parish support has included ESL classes, furniture donations, cultural orientation, cash grants, clothes, diapers, and toys for children. Ongoing community support is vital for the promotion of refugee self-sufficiency in Houston, especially for refugees who cannot find stable employment within the short MG and RCA time frames.

3. Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriages

One Volag had a Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriages (SRFM) grant through its national affiliate. This grant was used to increase communication skills and provide conflict resolution for refugee families. The Volag held four-hour orientation sessions, organized by language group, and used the Family Wellness curriculum adapted for the refugee population. In particular, these sessions addressed raising bicultural children, conflicts between children and parents, and dealing with children who are often the primary English speakers in the family. These orientation sessions have been successful with a wide range of refugee groups, including Cubans, Bantu, and Vietnamese. The SRFM grant also pays for youth mentoring programs through parochial high schools and domestic violence education. Volags have used SRFM funding to recruit bilingual people in the refugee community and train them in marriage and family issues.

4. GED and Other General Education Programs

Only a small share of refugees in Houston receives GED or pre-GED services. According to the RSS and TAG data for June 2002 through December 2005, fewer than 2 percent of RSS and TAG participants received pre-GED services (Table III.3). Among survey respondents, 14 percent had received GED or adult basic education (ABE) services (Table III.4). The share receiving GED/ABE was highest among African respondents (22 percent) and lowest among Cuban respondents (5 percent, Table III.5).

YMCA offers GED courses to a small number of refugees using RSS and TAG funding: its FY 2006 participation target was 16 enrollees (Table III.2). But more refugees take GED and pre-GED courses paid for by the Texas Education Agency and offered through HCC on its campuses or on site at one of the Volags. (GED and pre-GED enrollment numbers were not obtained for refugees at the community college because this information is not tracked, as these services are not part of the RSS, TAG, or MG programs.) HCC courses are offered on a more intensive schedule (five days a week, 20 hours a week) and a less intensive schedule (four days a week, 8 hours a week). They are self-paced, and many refugees can complete a GED within than a year even if they have only a 9th or 10th grade education. The least educated refugees—those who are enrolled in BEI’s literacy classes, for instance—seldom take the pre-GED or GED classes. These courses are mostly for the better-educated refugees.

The HCC respondent estimated that overall, between 150 and 200 refugees were taking continuing education classes at the college. These students all pay their own way or receive financial aid, as these classes are not supported by RSS, TAG, or MG funds.

5. Legal Services

Half of survey respondents reported receiving legal services, with the highest rates of service receipt in the earliest entry cohorts—FY 2000 and 2001 (Table III.4). The highest rate of service receipt was once again among African respondents (58 percent) and the lowest among Latin American respondents (30 percent, Table III.5). Thus, despite what RSS and TAG providers said about legal services for Cuban border crossers and other Latin American asylum seekers, the vast majority of Cubans resettled in Houston do not appear to require legal services.

Two Volags also have legal services departments, which provide a wide range of services in addition to RSS- and TAG-funded citizenship and permanent resident application assistance. Most of these additional services are for asylees and asylum applicants, as well as the significant number of Cuban border crossers that come to Houston seeking services. One Volag has a large, separate legal services department that includes immigration lawyers. The other Volag also has a staff attorney and a representative who is accredited with the Board of Immigration Appeals. Some of these services generate fees, while others are funded through grants.

The most common form of assistance for asylees and border crossers is helping obtain employment authorization documents (EADs). When asylees or border crossers do not have EADs, they are ineligible to get Social Security cards, and this ineligibility can stall their job placement. Although from time to time there is a delay of several months in obtaining EADs, most asylees and border crossers in Houston already have them before they come to Volags for services.

One Volag also has an asylum project, funded through the Texas Equal Access to Justice Foundation. This project provides legal services for asylum seekers. This Volag also has a program to work with victims of domestic violence, to help them obtain permanent residency through the provisions of the Violence against Women Act.

6. Trafficking Assistance

One Volag has a grant from U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) to work with victims of trafficking, who are eligible for RSS- and TAG-funded services once their trafficking status is certified. The DOJ funding supports certification of trafficking status and the application for a visa, while RSS and TAG funds intensive case management to help victims overcome often serious physical and emotional trauma. The Volag worked with 35 victims of trafficking in just two months—January and February 2006.

7. Special Initiative for Bantu and Liberian Employment

Employment-related services for refugees in Houston are for the most part paid out of RSS, TAG, MG, or discretionary grants such as UA or PC. The most successful strategies appear to be those that used additional resources to hire co-ethnic staff who understand the language and culture of difficult-to-serve populations such as the Bantu. A pilot project geared toward the Bantu was less successful.

In 2005, the Houston consortium attempted a pilot project to help Bantu and Liberian women learn English (standard American English in the case of the Liberians), achieve basic literacy skills, and obtain employment in the hotel sector. This project was funded primarily by the Texas Education Agency, and courses were arranged through HCC. Courses were held at one of the major hotels in downtown Houston and organized by a lead teacher who had experience in supervising housekeepers in hotels in Houston. The eight-week courses were a combination of vocational ESL and housekeeping training. In 2005, there were three classes of about a dozen students each. Eighty percent of the students were women, and most were Bantu.

The program was discontinued, and the HCC respondent felt it was not successful. The main problem was that instructors could not teach the students enough English in eight weeks, because most students were illiterate in their own language. The better hotels in Houston want their employees to be able to interact with their customers, and eight weeks of vocational ESL training was simply insufficient. Even before the end of the class, HCC had to provide a translator to help the students understand what was being said in class. The Bantu and some other students also had to learn how to do very basic things such as counting money and telling time within a very short period. Only a third of the 36 refugees enrolled in the program got jobs as a result of the training.

8. Community Support Outside the Consortium

Respondents across the board told us that Houston has been very receptive to refugees in recent years, and that there is strong support for refugee resettlement both among religious organizations and across many different ethnic communities in Houston. During the site visit, the research team learned that there was a hiatus in refugee resettlement during fall 2005, following Hurricane Katrina. While there was concern that the inflow of thousands of Katrina evacuees might have tapped the generosity of Houstonians, the team heard just the opposite during the interviews. In fact, the outpouring of support for Katrina evacuees had made fundraising for international refugees easier, and so much in-kind support for the evacuees was raised that there were some resources left over for the refugee programs. In general, the members of the Houston

consortium have strong relationships with religious congregations—Christian, Jewish, and Muslim—as well as many ethnic CBOs. Following are some specific examples of the types of community support refugees receive outside the RSS, TAG, and MG programs.

a. Resettlement assistance from ethnic and religious CBOs

The Islamic Society, a pan-Islamic organization, works with many different ethnic communities in Houston. A large number of different groups of recent refugees are Muslim, including Bosnians, Afghans, Iranians, Iraqis, and Sudanese. The Islamic Society has become involved in resettling the Bantu, at first through cash and in-kind donations to refugee programs operated by the consortium. More recently, the Islamic Society has hired its own refugee coordinator and opened a mosque in the largest apartment complex where refugees, including most Bantu, are resettled. The Islamic Society was not, however, included in the study site visit to Houston in April 2006.

The research team visited the Raindrop Foundation, a Turkish CBO with centers in several Texas cities. Raindrop provides extensive services to Meskhetian Turks, the most recent group of refugees to arrive in Houston. There are two paid positions in the organization (director and coordinator), and the rest of the staff are volunteers, mostly university students. The organization receives some United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees funding but is mostly supported by private donors from Turkish communities across the state.

Raindrop had helped resettle 30 Meskhetian Turkish refugee families—all from southern Russia—in the 11 months ending April 2006, and they planned to resettle 60 more families through the end of FY 2006. Raindrop provides many R&P-type services, for instance meeting refugees at the airport, setting up their apartments, and providing initial cultural orientation. The group has received extensive donations of items large and small, for instance leather couches and satellite dishes that families can use to view Russian and Turkish television programs. It also provides a level 1 ESL class, taught by professional ESL instructors who also speak Russian and/or Turkish. It has found some Turkish families housing, although many of these families live in the same apartment complexes as other recent arrivals. The CBO staff also work with the Volags to find these refugee jobs; in some cases, they find refugees jobs with Turkish restaurants or other co-ethnic employers, generally for \$6–7 an hour. Many Meskhetian Turks have also been placed in the same assembly-line manufacturing jobs as the Bantu and other recent groups. Some Turks are selective about their employment and, like the Cubans, do not want to take entry-level jobs at low wages. Others are well educated but are having difficulty getting their credentials translated; Raindrop is working with HCC to help the better-educated Meskhetians in this regard and to get them additional coursework or training when needed.

The Tzuchi Foundation—a worldwide organization—also helps during the initial resettlement for some refugees from a variety of origins, working with one of the Volags. The CBO helps with food, clothing, health care, and sending volunteers to the airport to meet new arrivals.

b. Volunteer work by university students

One Volag uses volunteers who are university students for cultural adjustment services. The university volunteers give refugees tours of the city, taking them to the zoo and on other outings. They also show refugees how to use the post office and how to open bank accounts. Another

Volag is working with a local university to set up a similar volunteer program, where students get “service learning” credits as interns, and plans to use these volunteers primarily to work with refugee youth. The Raindrop Foundation makes extensive use of university students as volunteers.

c. Reduced rent and adjustment services at apartment complexes

The Volags settle most refugees in several large apartment complexes across southwest Houston. These complexes offer reduced rent—in exchange for guaranteed occupancy—and, in some cases, additional services for refugees. They have large three-bedroom units, which can accommodate refugee families with many children. The complexes are located near each other, many major employers, and consortium agencies; they are on major bus lines that can take refugees to many other employers and other service providers. These apartments, however, are also located in a high-crime area; there was a shooting the weekend before the site visit at one complex, according to one of the staff interviewed.

The study’s site visit included one of the larger apartment complexes, which housed refugee families in 160 of its 810 units. At the time of the visit, another 80 units were housing Katrina evacuees, and other units housed low-income families with vouchers. This complex houses mostly Somali Bantu, Liberians, and Cubans but some other refugees as well. Many refugees stay in the same complex, or move among the subsidized complexes, for up to five years.

Refugees pay below-market rents at this complex. They sign one-year leases and abide by the same rules for payment, and eviction, as other tenants, under Fair Housing laws. But they have a lower rent than other tenants, a rent negotiated through formal agreements with the Volags. The Volags pay the full rent for four months for MG clients, and part of the rent for RCA clients; the apartment complex offers refugees their fifth month free. Thus, refugees only begin paying their rent during their sixth month, and even then the Volags sometimes help pay rent or help refugees obtain rent extensions from the complex. In some cases, refugees have to downsize from their first apartments in order to be able to afford the rent; in other cases, they bring in additional renters. The complex does not, however, allow overcrowding.

The apartment complex visited for the study also offers some special amenities for refugees. The complex pays refugees’ full utility bill—which can be quite high during Houston summers—while other tenants pay utilities over \$30 a month. There is a club room and a computer room with free Internet access; refugees, like other tenants, sign up for use of these facilities. There is a free summer lunch program, and the complex is developing summer activities for children and youth, as well as child care arrangements. BEI was holding a level 2 ESL class in one apartment on the day of the study’s site visit; the class included refugees of differing backgrounds and ages, and some children came with parents to the class.

The apartment complex manager has 22 years of experience working in different settings—including different low-income populations. She said, however, that she found the new African refugees—especially those from rural backgrounds—particularly challenging. To help with these populations, the complex hired a Somali woman who had worked in a Kenyan refugee camp to help with cultural orientation.

One of the large apartment complexes where many refugees live hired a Somali woman to help the Bantu and Liberians with cultural adjustment. She worked in Kenyan refugee camps for years, and speaks the five different languages that the Bantu speak, as well as five others. She helped some of the Bantu and Liberians learn how to use appliances, discard trash, and store their food properly—they were accustomed to storing several months' worth of food in open containers, and this had caused a rodent problem. Some of the refugees also picked through the garbage looking for cans to get a rebate or for other salvageable items. The Somali cultural worker also helped them arrange supervision for their children, as they were accustomed to letting their children roam free with no clothing, an unsafe practice in urban America. But she could only find other relatives or neighbors to take care of the children, because there are little or no formal arrangements for low-income preschool-age children available nearby; the waiting list for state-subsidized care is several years long.

D. Education Received in the United States

Only a small share of refugees responding to the survey (20 percent) reported pursuing a degree or certificate in the United States (*Table III.6*). Most of these reported pursuing a general postsecondary education: 33 percent were pursuing a bachelor's degree and 19 percent an associate's degree. One quarter were pursuing a vocational license, and 11 percent a high school diploma or GED. Most educational services—general postsecondary, vocational, and GED—are offered through HCC at its central or one of its satellite campuses. HCC usually helps refugees obtain federal financial aid for tuition when they pursue postsecondary education.

Table III.6: Education and Training Achieved in the United States

Measure	Percent
Pursued degree, diploma, or certificate by year of entry	
FY 2000	20.4
FY 2001	22.2
FY 2002	15.4
FY 2003	23.1
FY 2004	12.6
Total	20.4
Of those pursuing degree, type of degree/certificate	
Vocational certificate or license	24.6
High school diploma or GED	10.5
Associate degree	19.3
Bachelor's degree	33.3
Master's or Doctorate degree	*
Professional school degree	*
Other degree, diploma, or certificate	8.8
Obtained degree or certificate	19.3
Sample size	316

Source: Refugee Assistance Survey

* Indicates a category that contains fewer than five individuals

IV. OUTCOMES

A. Receipt of Cash Assistance and Food Stamps

1. TANF and RCA Assistance

Texas operates a PPP that places emphasis on rapid employment, in part because the TANF program has low eligibility and benefit levels in Texas. As a consequence, although most refugees get assistance through MG or RCA upon entry, TANF receipt rates are very low among refugees in Houston. Only 7 percent of refugees receive TANF during their first year in the United States, and shares receiving TANF are lower than this for the second, third, and fourth year after entry (*Table IV.1*). Almost half (48 percent) of refugees, however, received RCA during their first 8 months. Combining the shares receiving TANF and RCA—as they go to different populations—over half of refugees (55 percent) received one of these two forms of cash assistance within their first year after entry. However, Table IV.1 does not include data for the MG program; if these data were included, the actual share receiving any form of cash assistance during the first year would be close to 100 percent, as close to half of RSS and TAG recipients in the FY 2000–04 administrative data had previously received MG.⁴⁹

Table IV.1: Cash Assistance Receipt by Region of Origin

Measure	Major Region						Total
	Africa	Cuba	East Asia	Latin America & the Caribbean	Near East & South Asia	Other	
Received TANF (%)							
In first year after entry	9.4	1.4	8.0	1.1	17.2	4.2	6.9
In second year after entry	7.9	1.4	6.8	0.0	15.3	3.0	5.8
In third year after entry	3.3	0.8	1.6	3.7	12.0	4.0	4.0
In fourth year after entry	4.4	1.1	1.1	0.0	18.1	3.6	5.0
Received RCA (%)							
In first eight months after entry	45.5	58.1	36.2	58.7	41.1	41.9	47.9
Received any cash assistance (TANF or RCA) (%)							
In first year after entry	55.5	60.4	43.6	62.0	57.7	46.1	55.3
Sample size	627	444	163	92	163	167	1,656

Sources: TANF records, Refugee Cash Assistance records, Food Stamp records

During the site visits, staff reported that Cubans and other Latin Americans were more likely to receive RCA, as they were less likely to have children than other groups of refugees. The RSS

⁴⁹ An estimated 48 percent of RSS and TAG participants in the FY 2002–04 administrative data underlying Table IV.1 received MG, and about 40 percent of MG recipients went on to receive RSS and TAG services. Almost three-quarters (71 percent) of MG recipients who arrived during FY 2003–04—after the PPP was implemented and MG began serving families with children—later participated in RSS- or TAG-funded services or activities. Only a third (33 percent) of FY 2000–02 arrivals who received MG appear in the RSS and TAG data analyzed for this study (RSS and TAG data for the period before 2002 were unavailable).

and TAG data show the highest rates of RCA receipt (58–59 percent) among Cubans and other Latin American/Caribbean refugees. These groups also showed the lowest rates of TANF receipt (0–4 percent) across the first four years after entry. By contrast, 9 percent of African refugees and 17 percent of those from the Near East and Asia received TANF within their first year after entry. However, it was also reported that the vast majority of African refugees receive assistance through MG, as most have families with children.

According to site visit respondents, TANF benefit levels in Texas are very low and refugees are seldom referred to TANF. Unlike TANF, RCA and MG allow for rental assistance in addition to cash assistance. According to state welfare data for 2003–06, the average monthly TANF benefit for Houston refugees who entered in 2003 was just \$255 (*Table IV.2*). The average monthly benefit for RCA, which is usually spread across fewer people as it is given to refugees without children, was higher: \$354. Data on the average monthly benefit for MG were not obtained.

Despite providing higher levels of assistance, MG and RCA are strictly time limited. TANF is limited to 60 months.⁵⁰ MG is only available to refugees for six months, and RCA for up to eight months. In Houston between FY 2003 and FY 2006, the average length of RCA receipt among FY 2003 arrivals was just over four months, while the average length of TANF receipt was eight months (*Table IV.2*). In addition, MG and RCA can only be accessed once, upon initial arrival. TANF may be accessed several times until the lifetime five-year limit is reached. In the welfare data shown in *Table IV.2*, there are only a few cases in which RSS and TAG participants had received TANF twice, and only one case in which TANF had been received three different times. For the most part, then, refugees only received TANF for one spell, and this generally occurred for families that had exhausted their MG benefits. Site visit respondents reported that a few Somali Bantu and other hard-to-serve cases had received TANF benefits through the Texas Department of Human Services after MG expired. The TANF benefits, however, are lower than MG or RCA, and they do not include rental or other forms of housing assistance.

⁵⁰ Texas imposes the federal 60-month time limit on TANF receipt although has a shorter state time limit (12, 24, or 36 months, depending on the individual's educational background and work experience) that removes the adult from the TANF case.

Table IV.2: Cash and Food Stamp Payments and Spells for FY 2003 Entry Cohort

Measure	TANF	RCA	Food Stamps
Average monthly benefit amount ^a (\$)	255	354	263
Average number of months receiving benefit, FY 2003–06 ^b	8.2	4.6	10.5
Average number of spells, FY 2003–06	1.4	1.0	1.9
Number of spells (%)			
One	60.0	98.8	47.4
Two	36.0	1.2	31.1
Three	4.0	0.0	10.1
Four	0.0	0.0	10.1
Five	0.0	0.0	0.4
Six or more	0.0	0.0	0.9
Average spell length (in months)	7.0	4.5	6.4
Average length of longest spell (in months)	7.5	4.6	8.1
Sample size	25	162	228

Sources: TANF records, Refugee Cash Assistance records, Food Stamp records

Note: Benefit amounts in constant 2006 dollars

^a Average of benefit amounts includes only months where some benefits were received

^b RCA data represents payments through FY2005. From this point onward, all individuals in the sample are ineligible for RCA based on program time limits

2. Food Stamp Assistance

Shares receiving Food Stamps are substantially higher among Houston’s refugees, owing to the fact that many work at low-wage jobs while others receive low levels of cash assistance. In FY 2000–04, almost two thirds of RSS and TAG participants (64 percent) had ever received Food Stamps (*Table IV.3*). Most of this receipt was during the first year after entry—during which 61 percent received Food Stamps; however, a quarter of RSS and TAG participants were still receiving Food Stamps two, three, and four years after entry, suggesting longer-term dependency on this benefit. The most recent cohorts of refugees—FY 2003 and 2004—had Food Stamp receipt rates approaching 75 percent during their first year after entry, compared with just 30 to 40 percent in FY 2000 through 2002. The Texas Department of Human Services initiated their call center to handle Food Stamp and other benefit applications remotely in 2002, and this may have increased refugees’ access to Food Stamps starting in FY 2003. FY 2003 and 2004 were also the two years with the most Somali Bantu and Liberian refugees, who had large families and more difficulties entering employment relative to other refugee groups.

Table IV.3 Food Stamps Receipt by Entry Cohort

Measure	Year of Entry ^a					Total
	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	
Received Food Stamps (%)						
In first year after entry	31.9	26.2	41.1	72.6	74.1	60.9
In second year after entry	23.6	20.9	36.5	33.7	27.5	28.6
In third year after entry	25.7	24.1	29.4	21.8	--	24.8
In fourth year after entry	32.6	26.7	22.8	--	--	26.9
Ever received ^b	41.7	33.2	43.7	75.2	74.9	63.7
Sample size	144	187	197	303	830	1,661

Source: Food Stamp records

-- Data not available for third and/or fourth year after entry for these cohorts

^a Entry cohorts include only those refugees who received RSS and TAG funded services after June 2002, the inception date of the data.

^b Includes all benefits received through September 2006. This figure will include benefit receipt during partial years in the United States

The average Food Stamp benefit received by refugees entering in FY 2003 was \$263 in 2003–06, as high as the average TANF benefit and not far below the average for RCA (*Table IV.2*). Thus, Houston refugees rely on substantial additional assistance from Food Stamps to bolster low wages and cash benefit levels. In addition, a majority of refugees receiving Food Stamps had more than one spell of food stamp receipt (and 22 percent had three or more spells), suggesting a cycle in their Food Stamp use. Over this three-year period, refugees had been receiving Food Stamps almost a third of the time (11 months) on average.

Heavy reliance on Food Stamps among refugees in Houston highlights the importance of access to this benefit. Thus far, the call center system—which takes refugees’ initial applications for benefits from the Volags and allows changes to be reported over the phone—appears to be serving refugees well. If the plan to modernize and privatize Food Stamp and other human service systems in Texas goes forward, however, careful attention will be need to be paid to maintaining refugee access to this very important benefit.

B. Employment Patterns and Job Characteristics

1. Employment Rates

The vast majority of refugees in Houston were employed at some point, regardless of period of entry or region of origin. In 2000–04, 87 percent of all refugees had been employed at some point during their first four years after entry, according to unemployment insurance wage records of refugees in UI-covered jobs. Three-quarters were employed during their first year, and similar shares during subsequent years (*Table IV.4*). Employment was rapid, as half of refugees were employed within their second quarter after entry. There was not much variation in employment rates across entry cohorts.

Employment rates were even higher among refugees responding to the refugee survey (*Table IV.5*). Almost all (96 percent) of survey respondents had been employed at some point since

arriving in the United States, and over three-quarters (79 percent) were employed at the time the survey was administered, in summer 2006–spring 2007. There was not much variation in employment levels among survey respondents by either entry cohort or region of birth.

Table IV.4: Individual Earnings by Entry Cohort

Measure	Year of Entry					Total
	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	
Ever employed (%)	92.3	91.5	83.1	87.2	86.0	86.9
Quarter of entry	8.7	13.6	9.0	6.8	10.6	9.9
Quarter 2	54.8	54.8	47.1	42.9	55.0	51.7
Quarter 3	67.3	70.1	57.7	60.1	61.2	62.0
Quarter 4	66.3	69.5	60.8	65.5	62.3	63.8
Year 1	74.0	78.0	66.1	72.6	77.3	75.0
Year 2	77.9	76.8	70.4	77.7	70.8	73.2
Year 3	73.1	77.4	66.1	72.0	--	71.9
Year 4	76.9	80.2	64.6	--	--	73.2
Average number of quarters employed ^a						
Year 1	2.0	2.1	1.8	1.8	1.9	1.9
Year 2	2.7	2.7	2.3	2.6	2.4	2.5
Year 3	2.6	2.7	2.3	2.4	--	2.5
Year 4	2.5	2.7	2.2	--	--	2.4
Average earnings ^b (\$)						
Quarter of entry	751	1,906	1,545	2,277	1,201	1,459
Quarter 2	2,537	2,524	2,132	2,233	2,024	2,163
Quarter 3	3,454	3,592	2,996	3,204	3,052	3,170
Quarter 4	3,762	3,732	3,641	3,686	3,425	3,560
Year 1	8,477	8,660	7,690	7,510	6,783	7,339
Year 2	13,870	14,140	13,367	13,029	13,663	13,574
Year 3	13,813	14,915	15,272	14,875	--	14,829
Year 4	12,292	15,341	16,687	--	--	15,109
Annual earnings year 1 (%)						
None	26.0	22.0	33.9	27.4	22.7	25.0
\$1–4,999	21.2	22.0	21.2	29.1	34.2	29.5
\$5,000–9,999	26.9	28.2	25.9	25.7	25.2	25.8
\$10,000–14,999	23.1	20.3	14.8	12.2	13.3	14.7
\$15,000–19,999	1.0	4.0	2.6	4.7	2.6	3.0
\$20,000–24,999	1.0	1.7	1.1	0.7	1.0	1.0
\$25,000–29,999	0.0	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.4
\$30,000–34,999	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.1	0.1
\$35,000–39,999	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.2
\$40,000 or more	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.2	0.3

Table IV.4 (continued)

Measure	Year of Entry					Total
	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	
Annual earnings year 2 (%)						
None	22.1	23.2	29.6	22.3	29.2	26.8
\$1–4,999	12.5	11.9	14.8	14.2	14.6	14.1
\$5,000–9,999	9.6	14.7	11.6	15.9	10.7	12.1
\$10,000–14,999	14.4	13.0	14.8	19.3	16.0	16.0
\$15,000–19,999	32.7	23.7	16.4	16.2	15.0	17.5
\$20,000–24,999	3.8	7.9	5.3	7.1	8.1	7.3
\$25,000–29,999	1.9	2.3	3.2	2.7	3.3	3.0
\$30,000–34,999	1.9	2.3	2.6	1.0	1.7	1.8
\$35,000–39,999	1.0	0.0	0.5	1.0	0.7	0.7
\$40,000 or more	0.0	1.1	1.1	0.3	0.7	0.7
Annual earnings year 3 (%)						
None	26.9	22.6	33.9	28.0	--	28.1
\$1–4,999	12.5	13.0	10.1	13.9	--	12.5
\$5,000–9,999	5.8	11.3	11.1	8.8	--	9.5
\$10,000–14,999	19.2	11.9	13.8	13.5	--	14.0
\$15,000–19,999	24.0	24.3	9.5	15.2	--	17.1
\$20,000–24,999	8.7	8.5	11.6	11.8	--	10.6
\$25,000–29,999	2.9	3.4	5.3	5.4	--	4.6
\$30,000–34,999	0.0	2.8	2.1	2.0	--	2.0
\$35,000–39,999	0.0	1.1	1.6	0.3	--	0.8
\$40,000 or more	0.0	1.1	1.1	1.0	--	0.9
Annual earnings year 4 (%)						
None	23.1	19.8	35.4	--	--	26.8
\$1–4,999	15.4	14.7	9.5	--	--	12.8
\$5,000–9,999	13.5	14.1	8.5	--	--	11.7
\$10,000–14,999	19.2	9.6	10.1	--	--	11.9
\$15,000–19,999	18.3	17.5	13.8	--	--	16.2
\$20,000–24,999	7.7	12.4	9.5	--	--	10.2
\$25,000–29,999	1.9	5.1	7.4	--	--	5.3
\$30,000–34,999	0.0	4.0	2.1	--	--	2.3
\$35,000–39,999	1.0	2.3	0.5	--	--	1.3
\$40,000 or more	0.0	0.6	3.2	--	--	1.5
Sample size	104	177	189	296	815	1,581

Source: Texas unemployment insurance wage records

-- Data not available for third and/or fourth year after entry for these cohorts

Note: Earnings in constant 2006 dollars

^a Includes individuals who were never employed

^b Includes only individuals who were employed during the given period

2. Job Tenure and Turnover

When asked how many jobs it takes for refugees to achieve economic self-sufficiency, site visit and national study respondents generally reported it takes about three or four jobs. Data from the

survey support this hypothesis, as respondents averaged about three jobs since arriving in the United States (Table IV.5) Respondents in the country the longest—since 2000—had held 3.5 jobs on average, while those in the country the shortest amount of time—since 2004—held 2.5 jobs on average. Almost three-quarters of refugees in the survey (73 percent) had had more than one job in the United States (*Table IV.6*).

Table IV.5: Employment Outcomes in Current or Most Recent Job for Survey Respondents by Entry Cohort

Measure	Year of Entry					Total
	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	
Ever employed (%)	94.4	96.8	96.2	96.2	94.7	95.6
Average number of jobs had since coming to United States	3.5	2.8	3.0	2.7	2.5	2.8
Average weeks worked in past 12 months	33.5	40.6	41.9	43.2	38.9	39.5
Currently employed (%)	75.9	81.0	80.8	84.6	73.7	78.5
Of those currently working (%):						
Average number of jobs working	1.2	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.1
Average months at current job	33.4	35.3	25.3	18.7	15.9	24.8
Average number of hours working per week	41.6	43.4	44.9	45.2	41.2	43.1
Hourly wage in current or most recent job (%)						
\$0–\$5.14	*	*	*	*	7.0	6.6
\$5.15–\$7.74	18.8	25.9	29.2	30.4	43.0	31.1
\$7.75–\$10.29	37.5	31.0	31.3	30.4	33.7	32.9
\$10.30–\$15	18.8	29.3	16.7	19.6	15.1	19.6
\$15.01–\$25	14.6	*	12.5	10.9	*	8.0
More than \$25	*	0.0	*	*	0.0	1.7
Median (\$)	9	9	8	9	8	8.5
Average (\$)	11	10	11	11	8	10
Business or industry of current or most recent job (%)						
Construction	*	*	*	*	*	5.3
Education and health services	13.7	*	*	10.2	8.9	9.3
Financial activities	*	0.0	*	*	*	1.7
Government	*	0.0	*	*	*	1.7
Information	*	*	0.0	*	*	2.0
Leisure and hospitality	13.7	13.3	10.0	16.3	22.2	16.0
Manufacturing	15.7	25.0	22.0	24.5	26.7	23.3
Natural resources and mining	*	*	*	*	*	3.3
Other Services	*	10.0	*	*	6.7	7.0
Professional and business services	*	*	*	*	5.6	5.3
Transportation and utilities	19.6	11.7	16.0	10.2	6.7	12.0
Wholesale and retail trade	11.8	15.0	18.0	*	12.2	13.0

Table IV.5 (continued)

Measure	Year of Entry					Total
	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	
Occupation of current or most recent job (%)						
Management and business operations	*	*	*	*	0.0	2.3
Professional and related	*	*	12.0	10.2	8.9	8.7
Service	25.5	37.3	22.0	22.4	34.4	29.4
Sales and related	9.8	*	*	*	8.9	8.0
Office and administrative support	*	*	*	*	*	4.7
Farming, fishing, and forestry	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Construction trades and related	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	*	0.3
Installation, maintenance, and repair	9.8	*	*	*	5.6	6.4
Production	19.6	18.6	12.0	22.4	22.2	19.4
Transportation and material moving	15.7	20.3	30.0	28.6	14.4	20.7
Armed Forces	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
How found current or most recent job (%)						
Refugee service agency, mutual assistance association, or voluntary resettlement agency	*	11.9	12.0	12.2	18.9	13.4
Welfare or public employment agency	*	*	*	*	7.8	7.4
Private employment agency	11.8	*	*	*	10.0	8.7
Newspapers or other advertisements	17.6	23.7	16.0	20.4	13.3	17.7
Religious institution	*	0.0	*	*	*	2.3
College or job training program	*	*	0.0	0.0	*	2.0
Friend, relative, or sponsor	56.9	59.3	62.0	59.2	63.3	60.5
Other	9.8	0.0	*	*	11.1	7.4
Sample size	53	61	49	50	92	305

Source: Refugee Assistance Survey

* Indicates a category that contains fewer than five individuals

Despite holding multiple jobs, the average refugee responding to the survey had fairly long tenure at his or her current and first jobs. The average respondent had spent about two years (25 months) working in his or her current job (Table IV.5) and 15 months in his or her first job (Table IV.6).

Table IV.6: Employment Outcomes in First Job in United States from Survey by Entry Cohort

Measure	Year of Entry					Total
	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	
Had multiple jobs in United States (%)	70.4	76.2	75.0	69.2	71.6	72.5
Of those ever working:						
Average months spent at first job	15.2	19.2	16.7	15.6	10.8	15.1
Average number of hours working per week at first job	40.5	40.3	41.8	43.3	39.4	40.8
Hourly wage in first U.S. job (%)						
\$0–\$5.14	10.2	*	12.0	12.8	18.4	12.9
\$5.15–\$7.74	51.0	60.7	50.0	51.1	49.4	52.4
\$7.75–\$10.29	28.6	21.3	26.0	31.9	25.3	26.2
\$10.30–\$15	*	9.8	10.0	*	6.9	7.1
\$15.01–\$25	*	0.0	*	*	0.0	*
More than \$25	*	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Median (\$)	7	7	7	8	7	7
Average (\$)	8	7	8	21	7	7.4
Business or industry of first U.S. job (%)						
Construction	*	*	*	12.5	*	6.4
Education and health services	*	*	*	*	*	4.4
Financial activities	*	*	*	*	0.0	*
Government	0.0	0.0	*	*	*	*
Information	0.0	0.0	*	0.0	*	*
Leisure and hospitality	12.2	19.7	16.0	25.0	21.3	19.2
Manufacturing	40.8	23.0	24.0	25.0	40.4	31.6
Natural resources and mining	*	*	0.0	*	1.1	2.0
Other services	*	*	*	*	7.9	7.4
Professional and business services	*	*	*	0.0	5.6	4.7
Transportation and utilities	*	*	*	*	*	4.4
Wholesale and retail trade	20.4	18.0	20.0	16.7	9.0	15.8
Occupation of first U.S. job (%)						
Management and business operations	0.0	*	*	0.0	0.0	*
Professional and related	*	*	10.0	*	5.6	6.7
Service	22.4	36.7	28.0	27.1	36.7	31.3
Sales and related	*	*	*	*	*	6.7
Office and administrative support	0.0	*	*	*	*	2.7
Farming, fishing, and forestry	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Construction trades and related	*	*	*	*	*	4.0
Installation, maintenance, and repair	*	*	*	*	5.6	5.7
Production	38.8	25.0	20.0	25.0	30.0	27.9
Transportation and material moving	20.4	13.3	16.0	*	11.1	13.5
Armed Forces	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Table IV.6 (continued)

Measure	Year of Entry					Total
	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	
How found first U.S. job (%)						
Refugee service agency, mutual assistance association, or voluntary resettlement agency	52.9	34.4	32.0	32.7	33.3	36.5
Welfare or public employment agency	*	*	10.0	*	5.6	5.3
Private employment agency	*	*	*	*	*	3.7
Newspapers or other advertisements	*	*	*	12.2	8.9	7.3
Religious institution	*	*	*	*	5.6	4.0
College or job training program	*	0.0	0.0	*	0.0	*
Friend, relative or sponsor	31.4	47.5	56.0	46.9	47.8	46.2
Other	*	9.8	*	*	13.3	9.6
Sample size	51	61	50	49	90	301

Source: Refugee Assistance Survey

* Indicates a category that contains fewer than five individuals

RSS and TAG providers mentioned that Cuban and other Latin American refugees tended to change jobs more often than their other clients, but the survey data do not support their supposition. Latin American refugees responding to the survey actually reported having relatively standard average tenure in both their first jobs (14 versus 14 and 17 months for other refugees) and in their current jobs (26 versus 18 to 31 months) (*Table IV.7*). Cuban and other Latin American refugees had had 3.2 jobs since arrival, however, which was higher than the average for African refugees (2.8) and refugees from other countries (2.5). It is likely that these refugees were able to obtain employment faster and change jobs more easily, thus allowing them to accumulate more employment experience in the United States.

Table IV.7: Employment Outcomes in Current or Most Recent Job for Survey Respondents by Region of Origin

Measure	Region of Birth		
	Africa	Latin America	Other
Average number of jobs had since coming to U.S.	2.8	3.2	2.5
Average weeks worked in last 12 months	37.5	41.5	40
Currently employed (%)	73.3	80.0	82.9
Of those currently working (%):			
Average number of jobs working	1.1	1	1.1
Average months at current job	18.4	25.7	30.6
Average number of hours working a week	40.7	45.4	43.6
Hourly wage in current or most recent job (%)			
\$0–\$5.14	10.9	*	6.1
\$5.15–\$7.74	37.3	28.6	26.3
\$7.75–\$10.29	30.9	39.0	30.3
\$10.30–\$15	17.3	15.6	25.3
\$15.01–\$25	*	10.4	11.1
More than \$25	0.0	*	*
Median (\$)	8	9	9
Average (\$)	8	12	10
Business or industry of current or most recent job (%)			
Construction	*	12.5	*
Education and health services	11.3	11.3	5.7
Financial activities	0.0	*	*
Government	*	*	*
Information	*	0.0	*
Leisure and hospitality	16.5	11.3	19.0
Manufacturing	31.3	13.8	21.9
Natural resources and mining	*	*	1.9
Other services	*	*	14.3
Professional and business services	5.2	7.5	*
Transportation and utilities	13.9	12.5	9.5
Wholesale and retail trade	6.1	18.8	16.2
Occupation of current or most recent job (%)			
Management and business operations	*	*	*
Professional and related	*	11.3	12.5
Service	37.4	21.3	26.9
Sales and related	*	13.8	8.7
Office and administrative support	*	*	6.7
Farming, fishing, and forestry	0.0	0.0	0.0
Construction trades and related	*	0.0	0.0
Installation, maintenance, and repair	*	6.3	8.7
Production	22.6	12.5	21.2
Transportation and material moving	21.7	31.3	11.5
Armed Forces	0.0	0.0	0.0

Table IV.7 (continued)

Measure	Region of Birth		
	Africa	Latin America	Other
How found current or most recent job (%)			
Refugee service agency, mutual assistance association, or voluntary resettlement agency	20.9	*	13.5
Welfare or public employment agency	13.9	1.3	4.8
Private employment agency	13.0	6.3	5.8
Newspapers or other advertisements	26.1	8.8	15.4
Religious institution	5.2	1.3	0.0
College or job training program	*	0.0	*
Friend, relative, or sponsor	49.6	71.3	64.4
Other	5.2	13.8	4.8
Sample size	118	84	111

Source: Refugee Assistance Survey

* Indicates a category that contains fewer than five individuals

3. Industries and Occupations of Employment

a. Industries of employment

Manufacturing and leisure/hospitality were the two most common industries of refugee employment, both in the survey and according to the case study respondents. Almost a quarter (23 percent) of survey respondents were employed in manufacturing in their current job, and 16 percent were employed in leisure/hospitality, and these industry shares were mostly consistent across the 2000 to 2004 entry cohorts (Table IV.5). African survey respondents were the most likely to be employed in manufacturing (31 percent), while Latin Americans were the least likely to be employed in this industry (14 percent, as shown in Table IV.7). Latin American respondents were also less likely to be employed in leisure and hospitality (11 percent) than African or other respondents (17 to 19 percent).

Manufacturing has been a mainstay of refugee employment—especially for lower-skilled refugees—in Houston for years, even though the industry lost some jobs between 2000 and 2004. As described earlier, manufacturing accounted for 9 percent of Houston MSA employment, or 200,000 jobs, in May 2007. The leisure and hospitality industry did not experience a downturn, but has grown steadily since 2000, and has also reached over 200,000 jobs, or 9 percent of the area’s economy.

Latin American survey respondents were more likely to hold jobs in construction and retail trade than were African and other respondents (Table IV.7). Construction is a common industry of Latino immigrant employment nationally and one of the larger industries in Harris County, employing 192,000 workers, or about 10 percent of all workers in 2005.⁵¹

⁵¹ U.S. Census Bureau, “Harris County, TX: Selected Economic Characteristics: 2005,” American Community Survey 2005. Available at <http://factfinder.census.gov>.

b. Interviews with employers in manufacturing and leisure/hospitality industries

During the visit, two employers were interviewed that have hired large numbers of refugees in these two most common industries of refugee employment. The first employer is a manufacturer of marine seismic cables that are as long as football fields. These cables are attached to ships at sea as well as oil rigs and are used for communication and to measure the movement of the ocean. About 150 employees are temporary hires who work mostly on the assembly line and in sewing and soldering positions. The entry-level job on the assembly line involves attaching floaters and other things to cables; with some training and dexterity, assembly-line workers can move up to sewing or soldering positions. Entry-level jobs pay \$6.25 an hour and include holiday, vacation, medical/dental and overtime. Soldering positions pay from \$7 to \$11 an hour. There are about 100 permanent employees who are primarily engineers, supervisors, and managers; temporary workers who stay on long enough can get permanent supervisory positions. The plant has seen huge demand for new cables and cable repair since Hurricane Katrina, which devastated much of the infrastructure in the Gulf of Mexico. The plant is working at full capacity with two 12-hour shifts but cannot expand because of space limitations.

The refugees working at the plant start at assembly-line jobs and almost all are hired through a temporary employment firm. The manager said that 200 of 250 of the temporary employees at the plant are refugees, and this includes almost all the assembly-line workers. At the time of the visits, about one third of the refugee employees were Vietnamese, one third were African (including Sudanese, Liberian, Congolese, Ethiopian, and Eritrean), one sixth were Latino, and smaller shares were Russian, Croatian, and Afghani.

Although the manufacturer prefers employees with at least a high school degree and most refugees lack even a 9th grade education, there is lower turnover among refugees than other employees, and the refugees are generally hard workers. Seventy-five to 80 percent of temporary workers do not speak English; there are plant supervisors who speak Spanish and Vietnamese, but other workers sometimes have difficulty communicating with supervisors. There have also been problems with some refugee workers' personal hygiene. In addition, there have been problems with retention among Cubans: between 30 and 40 Cubans were hired in the two months before the visit, but only 8 of those employees remained. Retention has not been a problem with other refugees.

The entry-level jobs on the assembly line are physically demanding but pay well because of overtime. About half the workers are men, and about half are women; men tend to do the most physically demanding jobs and women do more jobs requiring dexterity, such as sewing. Most workers put in 60 hours a week in 12-hour shifts, with 20 hours at 1.5 times the normal wage, so essentially refugees are earning twice the amount they would with a \$6.25 an hour job and a standard 40-hour week.

The relatively high earnings enable refugees to save money quickly during their initial resettlement period, and the Volags consider this employer a good place for an initial placement. The human resources manager at the plant has a strong working relationship with a job developer at one Volag, and she contacts him whenever she has openings, which is usually every week. This job developer then shares the openings with colleagues across the consortium. As a result,

refugees from all four Volags are referred here frequently. The manager is very satisfied with her experience working with the Volags and refugees.

This employer tends to be popular among refugees because of the overtime pay, the fact that non-English speakers can get entry-level positions, and the proximity of the plant to the apartment complexes where most refugees live. Employees who refer other people for jobs receive bonuses, and many refugee employees have been referred this way.

The second employer is a major international hotel chain (and therefore part of the leisure and hospitality industry) with several hotels in the Houston area. The main downtown hotel employs more than 800 people. Refugees are hired for all entry-level positions but most typically for housekeeping or dishwashing because of language barriers. These jobs start at \$6.50 an hour for 32 to 40 hour weeks (depending on scheduling), and carry benefits after 90 days. If refugees have an employment history (e.g., as a busboy) and better English, they can work at higher-paying jobs in the kitchen. Because of rapid turnover, there are about 50 openings in these entry-level jobs every month. The employment manager has hired roughly 100 refugees in the two years she has been working at the hotel.

When interviewed, refugees are asked if they are willing to be flexible in their work shifts. Many refugees cannot work nights or weekends because buses do not run at those times, and they have no other form of transportation. The hotel usually is able to place these refugees in daytime slots, but refusing to work weekends is not an option in the hotel business. Refugees generally made their own informal transportation arrangements, as the hotel did not provide any transportation assistance. The manager interviewed for the study suggested that refugee agencies might create a van pool or provide some other sort of transportation for refugees to the hotel.

The interview also includes a basic test of rudimentary English skills. Though the many entry-level jobs require little English, refugees should at least know basic greetings, how to ask people their names, and be able to receive basic instructions. The hotel has some supervisors who speak Spanish, French, and Arabic.

The Volags bring refugees in for group interviews, and the Volag staff usually translate and discuss the job and transportation issues. The employment manager emphasizes that they will be doing entry-level cleaning and washing jobs—not glamorous jobs—and does not want them to be surprised by what they are doing once they start working. The Volag staff explain the work environment at the hotel to the refugees, and generally they feel comfortable working there. In fact, one Volag employment specialist told us that many refugees—particularly women—prefer hotels to manufacturing because the work is less physically demanding, the environment is cleaner, and the hours are more flexible.

The employment manager at the hotel reported that refugees generally make faithful employees because they stay on the job for at least six months. This is lower turnover than for other employees. She did not differentiate among different groups of refugees in this regard.

The three major problems refugees encounter working at the hotel are high expectations, language barriers, and transportation difficulties. Some refugees have worked in professional positions and have difficulty adjusting to entry-level hotel work. Others have difficulty reading

anything, including signs, and can make mistakes as a result. Few refugees who work at the hotel drive their own car. Many take the bus to work, and this means that sometimes they are late or do not come to work at all. These issues are issues in refugee employment generally, as discussed in the final section of this report.

c. Occupations of employment

Service occupations were the most common job category for refugees surveyed (29 percent). Production (i.e., manufacturing) and transportation occupations were also common, at about 20 percent each (Table IV.5). Nine percent of survey respondents overall held professional jobs. African survey respondents were the most likely to work in both service occupations (37 percent) and production occupations (23 percent, as shown in Table IV.7). Both Latin American and other respondents were more likely to hold professional jobs (11 and 13 percent, respectively) than were African respondents. Latin American respondents had the highest share in transportation and material moving (31 percent), which corresponds with their high shares working in transportation and construction industries. They also had a relatively high share in sales occupations (14 percent), most likely because so many retail businesses in Houston operate in Spanish. A low percent of African respondents, by contrast, held sales jobs—which most likely reflects their difficulties in learning English (or Spanish) sufficiently well to work in sales.

For their first jobs, refugees surveyed were less likely to hold professional jobs (7 percent, see Table IV.6) than in their jobs at the time of the survey (9 percent, see Table IV.5). Refugees were more likely to hold production jobs for their first than current jobs (28 versus 19 percent). And they were less likely to hold transportation jobs for first than current jobs (13 versus 21 percent). About the same share held service jobs for first as current jobs (31 versus 29 percent). Thus, the survey suggests there has been some mobility—out of the production jobs in which so many refugees are placed by RSS and TAG providers and into transportation and other occupations.

4. Wages and Earnings

Wages are generally low for Houston's refugees, although there is some wage progression over time. At the time of the survey (2006–07), the median wage in the current job ranged from \$8 to \$9 an hour for respondents in all entry cohorts, 2000 through 2004 (Table IV.5). The median wage was just \$7 for the first job in the United States (Table IV.6). Wage progression was only \$2 an hour or less on average, even for refugees arriving in 2000 and 2001—that is, for those who had been in the country more than five years by the time of the survey.

At the time of the survey, 71 percent of all respondents earned less than twice the minimum wage (\$10.30), and 7 percent earned less than the minimum wage (\$5.15) in their current jobs (Table IV.5). Eighty-four percent of the most recent entry cohort (2004) earned less than twice the minimum wage, but this share only fell to 65 percent for the oldest cohort (2005). Thus, the vast majority of Houston's refugees were still earning relatively low wages even several years after arrival. For their first jobs, however, 92 percent of refugees earned less than twice the minimum wage (Table IV.6), so there was some improvement in this statistic between the first and current jobs.

The pattern of earnings reported in the unemployment insurance data suggest there is little upward progression in wages after the second year in the United States (Table IV.4). Refugees arriving between FY 2000 and 2004 averaged roughly \$7,000 to \$9,000 in their first year after entry, mostly because their earnings were very low (only \$1,000 to \$2,000 for the most part) in their first and second quarters after entry—when many refugees did not yet have their first jobs. More than half of refugees (55 percent) earned below \$5,000 during their first year, and more than three-quarters (81 percent) earned less than \$10,000. Average earnings rose substantially to \$13,000 to \$14,000 in the second year, presumably because refugees held jobs and attained earnings in all four quarters of the second year.⁵²

There is little wage progression in any entry cohort from the second to third year (only \$1,000 to \$2,000, if any, on average), and among the three cohorts with four years of employment history, only one cohort (2002) experienced a sizeable increase in average earnings between years three and four. Even four years after entry, refugees were only earning \$15,000 a year on average, and almost two thirds (63 percent) of refugees earned less than \$15,000. At just \$15,000 in annual earnings, the average refugee—based on a family of four as average household composition—would be likely to be eligible for Food Stamps and other ongoing public support.⁵³ The average refugee with a spouse and two children would need a second worker or substantial public benefit or other income sources to bring his or her family income above the federal poverty threshold, which was \$20,614 for a family of four in 2006.⁵⁴

Houston's low wages for refugees may be in part a function of the overall low cost and low wage structure of the area. In fourth quarter 2005, Houston's composite cost of living index—89 based on 100 as the national average—was ranked 140th of the top 154 metropolitan areas in the country by population. Seven of the 14 metropolitan areas with lower costs of living were also in Texas, and all were in the South. New York City, by contrast, had a cost of living index of 204, Chicago's was 117 and several California metropolitan areas had indexes over 150. Houston's index for housing costs was only 73, and its rank on housing costs was 147; six of the seven other areas with lower housing costs were in Texas. New York City had a housing cost index of 375, and several California areas had indexes over 200.⁵⁵

There is some variation in refugees' wages by region of origin, but not as much as one would expect given large differences in educational attainment and industries and occupations of employment. African respondents to the survey had a slightly lower median wage (\$8 an hour) than other respondents (\$9 an hour) for their current jobs (Table IV.7), and the same median wage (\$7 an hour) for their first job in the United States (**Table IV.8**). There is limited wage progression (only \$1 to \$2 an hour on average) for any of the three origin groups that can be disaggregated in the data. African respondents were also somewhat more likely to have wages below twice the minimum wage (\$10.30 an hour) in their current jobs (78 percent) than either Latin American (69 percent) or other respondents (63 percent, see Table IV.7). African

⁵² The data described here include all four quarters of the first year after entry; however, many refugees do not work during the first and/or second quarters of their first year.

⁵³ Total household income data cannot be calculated from the survey data, and so it is not possible to calculate an exact poverty level for the refugees in the survey.

⁵⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, "Poverty Thresholds 2006", available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/threshld/thresh06.html>.

⁵⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, "Cost of Living Index--Selected Metropolitan Areas: Fourth Quarter 2005," *The 2007 Statistical Abstract The National Data Book*. Available at <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/tables/07s0709.xls>.

respondents also had the highest share working below the minimum wage (11 percent). In their first jobs, almost all African respondents (96 percent) had jobs paying below twice the minimum wage, and 15 percent had wages below minimum wage. The shares of other respondents with first jobs paying less than twice the minimum wage and below the minimum were similar.

Table IV.8: Employment Outcomes in First Job in United States for Survey Respondents by Region of Origin

Measure	Region of Birth		
	Africa	Latin America	Other
Had multiple jobs in U.S. (%)	74.2	77.6	66.7
Of those ever working:			
Average months spent at first job	13.7	14.4	17.1
Average number of hours working per week at first job	39.0	40.2	43.2
Hourly wage in first US job (%)			
\$0–\$5.14	14.8	7.6	15.0
\$5.15–\$7.74	53.9	51.9	51.0
\$7.75–\$10.29	27.0	27.8	24.0
\$10.30–\$15	4.3	8.9	9.0
\$15.01–\$25	0.0	*	*
More than \$25	0.0	*	0.0
Median (\$)	7	7	7
Average (\$)	7	8	7
Business or industry of first U.S. job (%)			
Construction	6.0	9.0	4.9
Education and health services	*	5.1	4.9
Financial activities	*	*	*
Government	*	*	*
Information	*	0.0	*
Leisure and hospitality	16.4	23.1	19.4
Manufacturing	46.6	21.8	22.3
Natural resources and mining	*	*	*
Other services	7.8	5.1	8.7
Professional and business services	*	7.7	4.9
Transportation and utilities	*	*	8.7
Wholesale and retail trade	10.3	17.9	20.4

Table IV.8 (continued)

Measure	Region of Birth		
	Africa	Latin America	Other
Occupation of first U.S. job (%)			
Management and business operations	*	*	*
Professional and related	4.3	9.0	7.8
Service	31.9	34.6	28.2
Sales and related	5.2	6.4	8.7
Office and administrative support	*	6.4	*
Farming, fishing, and forestry	0.0	0.0	0.0
Construction trades and related	4.3	*	3.9
Installation, maintenance, and repair	*	5.1	8.7
Production	34.5	24.4	23.3
Transportation and material moving	14.7	7.7	16.5
Armed Forces	0.0	0.0	0.0
How found first U.S. job (%)			
Refugee service agency, mutual assistance association, or voluntary resettlement agency	55.2	16.0	31.7
Welfare or public employment agency	6.9	*	4.8
Private employment agency	*	*	*
Newspapers or other advertisements	6.0	7.4	8.7
Religious institution	8.6	*	*
College or job training program	0.0	*	*
Friend, relative, or sponsor	28.4	65.4	51.0
Other	11.2	8.6	8.7
Sample size	118	84	111

Source: Refugee Assistance Survey

* Indicates a category that contains fewer than five individuals

The small differences in hourly wages between Latin American and African refugees in Houston have some possible explanations worth further exploration. First, it may be that because of language difficulties, Latin American refugees are unable to translate their relatively high levels of education and job experience—including professional experience in many cases—into high-paying jobs in Houston. Their reliance on jobs within the Spanish-language labor market (e.g., in construction, services, and retail trade) may be severely limiting their potential for economic advancement. Second, although they have very low educational attainment and in many cases lack basic literacy skills, African refugees are still managing to get jobs well above the minimum wage in most cases, although they do not often get high-paying jobs. It would appear that for the most part, resettlement agencies are succeeding in placing African refugees in manufacturing, service, and other jobs that pay a living wage in Houston. These issues will be explored in more detail in section V of the report, which provides findings from statistical analysis of factors affecting wages and earnings of various groups of refugees. The small amount of wage progression and poverty-level earnings four years after entry suggest that while Houston’s refugees can find work, they also are struggling to make ends meet. The occupations and industries in which they work—whether services generally, manufacturing for the Somali Bantu,

or ethnic enclave employment for Cubans and Vietnamese—do not on average pay enough for refugees to rise out of poverty within their first five years in the United States.

5. Full-Time Work

Despite low wages, refugees are finding stable, full-time work in Houston. As mentioned earlier, job tenure averages about two years for current jobs among refugees surveyed (Table IV.5). Further, the average number of hours respondents were working in the current jobs at the time of the survey actually *exceeded* 40 for all entry cohorts and origin groups (Tables IV.5, IV.6). Refugees are also working just over one job on average. Thus, a substantial share of refugees are working overtime in order to make ends meet.

6. Job Search Strategies

Site visit respondents told us that most of their recent placements had been in manufacturing and leisure/hospitality, and so it is not surprising that employment shares in these industries are higher for Africa refugees—who were more likely to have received job placement services—than for Latin American refugees, who seldom used these services. In fact, at the time of the survey (2006–07) nearly 21 percent of African survey respondents had support in finding their current jobs through refugee service agencies, compared with much fewer Latin American respondents (Table IV.7). The large majority of Latin American respondents relied on support from their friends in finding their current jobs (71 percent), versus only half of African respondents.

Variations by region of birth in use of formal job search services were even greater for refugees' first jobs in the United States. Over half (55 percent) of African survey respondents had used a refugee service agency to find their first jobs (*Table IV.8*). By contrast, 32 percent of respondents from other world regions and only 16 percent of Latin American respondents had used such job search services. Two-thirds (65 percent) of Latin Americans relied on family and friends to find their first jobs.

These survey findings suggest that Africans are more likely than other refugees in Houston to use RSS and TAG programs to help them find jobs. This may result from their relatively low levels of formal education, which make it harder for them to find jobs on their own, or the fact that they have relatively small co-ethnic and same-language communities in Houston. Because African refugees tend to live in apartment complexes nearby refugee service providers, they may also be more likely than other groups to take advantage of RSS- and TAG-funded employment services. On the other hand, Latin American refugees have mostly been able to find jobs—even their first jobs—through co-ethnics. The large Spanish-language economy and refugees' relatively high levels of education and job experience have helped Latin Americans in this regard.

C. Employment Benefits and Health Insurance Coverage

Health insurance coverage through employment is a standard indicator for evaluating the RSS and TAG programs, but only half or fewer of refugees surveyed were offered health coverage or other benefits through their employers. The most common benefit offered to survey respondents by their current employers was paid vacation (52 percent), followed by health insurance

coverage (47 percent), a retirement plan (40 percent), and dental coverage (39 percent). Only 37 percent were offered sick days with full pay (*Table IV.9*).

Table IV.9: Employment Benefits and Health Care Coverage by Entry Cohort

Measure	Year of Entry					Total
	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	
Benefits offered from current or most recent job (%)						
Sick days with full pay	46.0	42.1	38.0	37.5	28.1	37.1
Paid vacation	56.0	61.4	52.0	52.1	44.9	52.4
Dental benefits	36.7	47.4	42.0	35.4	34.1	38.7
Retirement plan	43.8	44.6	46.0	35.4	34.5	40.1
Health plan or medical insurance	46.9	61.4	48.0	43.8	40.4	47.4
Health insurance in prior month (%)						
Private health insurance coverage	42.0	43.0	42.0	33.0	29.0	36.8
Public health insurance coverage	22.0	20.0	*	10.0	19.0	15.9
Other insurance coverage	*	*	0.0	*	*	3.5
Uninsured	42.0	40.0	52.0	56.0	51.0	48.1
Sample size	54	63	52	52	95	316

Source: Refugee Assistance Survey

* Indicates a category that contains fewer than five individuals

The share of respondents insured through employers or other private sources at the time of the survey was only 37 percent, suggesting that the take-up rate for employer coverage is about 80 percent (37 percent covered by versus 47 percent offered private health insurance). Almost half of respondents (48 percent) were uninsured at the time of the survey, and only 16 percent received coverage through Medicaid or other sources.

There is some progression in employee benefit offerings across the cohorts surveyed: shares of respondents entering in FY 2000 with health plans, sick days with full pay, retirement plans, and paid vacations were 7 to 11 percentage points higher than shares for respondents entering in FY 2004. There was also some improvement in private health insurance coverage (from 29 to 42 percent) across the entry cohorts. But, like wages, refugees' job benefits and insurance coverage only appear to rise slightly with their length of U.S. residency.

Survey respondents who are neither Latin American nor African in origin are the most likely to be offered benefits through their jobs. Respondents from other world regions are more likely to receive all five types of job benefits inquired about in the survey. The greatest gap is in health insurance coverage: 58 percent of respondents from other regions were offered health insurance by employers, compared with just 43 percent of African respondents and 40 percent of Latin American respondents (*Table IV.10*). Private health insurance coverage is 10 percentage points higher for other respondents than African or Latin American respondents; but African refugees made up some of this gap in insurance through public coverage.

Latin American refugees in Houston do not fare better in terms of job benefits or health insurance coverage than African refugees, despite substantially higher educational attainment and more previous job experience.

Table IV.10: Employment Benefits and Health Care Coverage by Region of Birth

Measure	Region of Birth		
	Africa	Latin America	Other
Benefits offered from current or most recent job (%)			
Sick days with full pay	35.4	35.0	40.6
Paid vacation	49.6	47.5	59.4
Dental benefits	31.9	40.0	45.5
Retirement plan	32.1	40.0	49.5
Health plan or medical insurance	43.4	40.0	58.0
Health insurance in prior month (%)			
Private health insurance coverage	34.2	34.1	43.6
Public health insurance coverage	19.5	12.9	15.7
Other insurance coverage	*	4.7	*
Uninsured	48.3	53.6	43.6
Sample size	120	85	111

Source: Refugee Assistance Survey

* Indicates a category that contains fewer than five individuals

D. Child Care

Only about a third of survey respondents with young children (under age 13) have ever placed their children in non-parental care, and only a quarter have used child care regularly (*Table IV.11*), despite the fact that most are working. In the majority of refugee families in Houston, therefore, parents are taking care of young children, meaning one parent must stay at home. Given the low wages that refugees earn in Houston, the lack of child care options means that they often cannot have a second wage earner to lift their families out of poverty. Further, some refugee families—especially more recent African arrivals such as Somali Bantu and Liberians—are single-parent families and are reliant on child care to work at all. Generally low levels of child care availability and financing in Houston make this difficult.

When they do find child care, the vast majority of respondents pay for their own child care (72 percent), and some (18 percent) have free child care provided by relatives or friends. Only 21 percent have child care paid by the government or a nonprofit organization, showing the very low reach of child care subsidies into Houston’s refugee communities. In addition, children were in care only an average of 26 hours a week, far less than the 40 hours or more worked by the average refugee respondent.

Table IV.11: Child Care and Transportation by Entry Cohort

Measure	Year of Entry					Total
	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	
Use of child care						
Families with children under age 13 (%)	61.1	58.7	57.7	50.0	52.6	55.7
Of families with children under age 13:						
Ever placed children in child care (%)	24.2	43.2	40.0	30.8	24.0	31.8
Ever used child care regularly (i.e., at least once a week for at least a month) (%)	*	23.8	13.5	11.5	10.5	24.4
Among those with child care:						
Child care paid for by ^a (%)						
Self	-	-	-	-	-	73.2
Government program	-	-	-	-	-	14.3
Employer	-	-	-	-	-	*
Community or nonprofit org	-	-	-	-	-	*
Provided free by friend or family member	-	-	-	-	-	18.2
Hours per week in child care	-	-	-	-	-	25.7
Transportation						
With valid driver's license (%)	83.3	92.1	80.8	84.6	69.5	80.7
Access to car or truck to get to work (%)	90.7	92.1	86.5	90.4	71.6	84.5
Ever received transportation assistance (%)	92.5	92.1	86.5	90.4	71.6	84.8
Sample size	54	63	52	52	95	316

Source: Refugee Assistance Survey

- Not calculated due to small sample size

* Indicates a category that contains fewer than five individuals

^a Categories not mutually exclusive

Despite their relatively high share of single-parent families, African respondents with young children under age 13 were no more likely than Latin Americans to have their children in nonparental care, and only slightly (6 to 7 percentage points) more likely than other respondents to have children in care (*Table IV.12*). They also have children in care more hours a week on average than the other groups. A much larger share of African respondents with children in care, however, had their child care paid through government or nonprofit agencies (38 percent) than Latin American respondents (16 percent) and respondents from other world regions (6 percent). Thus, to some degree, African refugees are receiving substantial child care support through resettlement agencies and other programs. Latin American and other refugees are far more likely to pay for their own care or arrange it informally through friends or family members. Given their larger family sizes and higher prevalence of single parenting, African refugees have the greatest need for child care support.

At the time of the site visit in 2006, few formal child care arrangements were available for refugees in Houston because the waiting lists for subsidized care in neighborhood centers were months long. As a result, most refugees must rely on friends, family, and other informal arrangements for their child care. In two-parent families, the mother often stays home while the father works. But many recent refugees, especially those from Africa, are arriving in single-parent families.

In one case, a single mother arrived with five children, ages 17, 12, 5, 3, and 6 months. MG case managers went over the work and child care options with her, but they could not find any formal arrangements for her. Additionally, she and her children speak a rare Sudanese language. Since her neighbors speak the same language, the case managers were searching for options for these neighbors to take care of her children. One neighbor was already taking care of her own 6-month old twins while her husband was at work. At the time of the study's visit to Houston, the child care arrangements for this family were unresolved.

E. Transportation

Houston is a geographically large and dispersed metropolitan area, and refugees mostly live in a handful of apartment complexes in the southwest section of the city. Until they learn to drive and can afford cars, refugees are limited to employers near where they live or on a reliable bus route. Thus, helping refugees overcome transportation barriers is essential to promoting their self-sufficiency in Houston. In almost all cases, this means helping refugees obtain driver's licenses, as public transportation is inconvenient and unreliable in most of Houston.

Over 80 percent of refugees surveyed had a valid driver's license, access to an automobile, and had received transportation assistance, presumably through refugee resettlement agencies in many cases (Table IV.11). Only the most recent cohort surveyed (FY 2004) had significantly lower shares on these measures (about 70 percent), most likely reflecting the fact that some had not yet completed their driver's education courses. About three-quarters of African refugees had a license, an automobile, and had received transportation assistance; this was somewhat below the shares (around 90 percent) for the other refugee groups (Table IV.12). Despite these minor differences by entry cohort and origin, it appears that almost all refugees in Houston have obtained transportation assistance, automobiles, and licenses by their second year after entry.

Transportation nonetheless remains a significant barrier during the first year and for the first job placement. As a result, Houston RSS and TAG providers have provided various forms of transportation assistance. The consortium experimented with carpooling refugees to a manufacturer in the suburbs, but few refugees worked there as of the site visit. Almost all refugees who are only prepared for entry-level jobs are placed in a small number of manufacturing plants and hotels located near where they live or easily accessible by bus for their first jobs. Although the consortium provides refugees with bus tokens and orients them to using the bus system, many times refugees get lost or miss buses and miss appointments or lose jobs as a result.

Transportation Difficulties Cost a Refugee a Job

This case illustrates how transportation difficulties, combined with health problems and other employment barriers, can make employment difficult for some refugees. A single male refugee arrived from Africa in 2004, with limited education and work experience in his home country. He got a job interview near where he lived about two months after arrival, but he needed surgery. When he recovered from surgery, he began his job search anew. He applied for a janitor position, went with a job specialist to the interview, and was accepted for the job. The employment specialist showed him the bus route and schedule, but the client did not show up for work the first day and claimed that was because the bus did not show up. The employer gave him a second chance, and he showed up for work late the second day, again because of problems with the bus. He was fired from his job. The employment specialist found him another job at a manufacturing plant in the suburbs and he was provided transportation, but he could not keep up with the pace of work there and lost that second job. He applied for three more jobs—and each time he was given extensive orientation to the bus system. He finally found stable employment at a grocery store after about eight months, just as his RCA grant was expiring. He was still employed there after 90 days, but lost his job after eight months because of a sexual harassment allegation. The client's physical health and conduct at work delayed his self-sufficiency, but the difficulty of navigating Houston's bus system added to his difficulties.

A Family Arrives Sick, Pregnant, and with Multiple Employment Barriers

The following case illustrates the multiple linguistic, cultural, and health difficulties that Volag staff have encountered with some recent refugee arrivals in Houston. In 2005, a married couple arrived with a young child and another one on the way. The parents spoke no English and had no formal education, and they spoke a rare African language that the staff at the Volags had difficulty understanding. The mother had never worked; the father had worked as a porter at a refugee camp.

Difficulties with adjustment began the very first day. Their case manager showed them how to use the stove to cook on their first day, but they did not prepare themselves any meals for the first two to three days; the case manager had to come back and cook for them. The mother was malnourished, and she was referred to a nearby health clinic for prenatal care. The baby was born healthy by C-section, but there was no one at the hospital who could communicate with them, so the case manager was on call for interpretation during the delivery and for several days afterwards. Once the mother and child were released from the hospital, other refugees in the apartment complex helped with interpretation and with the baby.

The husband was also malnourished and became very sick just after arrival; the case manager took him to the same clinic. When the family received the medical bills, they could not understand them or figure out how to pay them. They could not read medication instructions either, so they forgot to take their medications.

The case manager took them to the local WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) clinic, where they enrolled in the program and obtained formula and monthly vaccinations for the infant. But they were unaccustomed to the WIC diet, and did not like milk, cereal, or eggs, so they threw away a lot of the WIC food away at first. The case manager worked with them and they eventually changed their diet.

Despite the birth of the child and all of these health issues, the case manager worked closely with the father to get him employed within the MG time frame. The father began taking ESL at the apartment complex and completed three months of instruction; he learned some reading and writing during that time. About three months after arrival, he began working as a dishwasher at a hotel, for \$6 an hour. Six months later, at the time of the visit, he was still employed there, and had received a small raise. The family's MG expired after six months, and they began paying their own rent.

This family, like many others, needed intensive case management to help them overcome severe difficulties when they were initially resettled. Their health, nutrition, child care, literacy, and language issues needed to be addressed before they could begin searching for employment. This family had the same case manager through the R&P, MG, and follow-up periods; the case manager understood some of their rare language. Without the efforts of this case manager and the support of the refugees already resettled in Houston, this family would likely have had a much more difficult time obtaining self-sufficiency. As this case shows, some refugee families clearly require additional resources for their resettlement; Houston receives many such cases.

Table IV.12: Child Care and Transportation by Region of Birth

Measure	Region of Birth		
	Africa	Latin America	Other
Use of child care			
Families with children under age 13 (%)	52.5	63.5	53.2
Of families with children under age 13:			
Ever placed children in child care (%)	33.3	35.2	27.1
Ever used child care regularly (i.e., at least once a week for at least a month) (%)	27.0	25.9	20.3
Among those with child care:			
Child care paid for by ^a			
Self	61.9	78.9	81.3
Government program	23.8	10.5	6.3
Employer	4.8	0.0	0.0
Community or nonprofit organization	14.3	*	0.0
Provided free by friend or family member	5.0	15.8	37.5
Hours a week in child care	31.6	26.8	15.5
Transportation			
With valid driver's license (%)	72.5	85.9	85.6
Access to car or truck to get to work (%)	76.7	88.2	90.1
Ever received transportation assistance (%)	76.7	88.2	90.9
Sample size	120	85	111

Source: Refugee Assistance Survey

* Indicates a category that contains fewer than five individuals

F. Monthly Income

Incomes for refugee families surveyed appear to be just above the federal poverty threshold.⁵⁶ The average monthly income for all respondents surveyed—including income from the respondent's spouse—was just under \$1,740 in 2006–07, or about \$20,800 annually (**Table IV.13**). This was slightly over the federal poverty threshold for a family of four in 2006 (\$20,614).⁵⁷ Almost all the income reported came from earnings; only about \$100 came from public sources such as cash assistance, Food Stamps, or disability benefits. The most recent cohort (2004) had a lower average monthly income (\$1,500) and more of this income came from public sources (\$150), and the highest monthly incomes (about \$2,000) were for the 2002 and 2003 cohorts. As with the wage data, there is not much evidence of progression incomes among the entry cohorts, except between 2004 and all the earlier cohorts. Once again, this suggests that

⁵⁶ It is not possible to calculate poverty rates for families because the survey did not ask about income from all members, only from the respondent and spouse. As a result, in this section of the report the average incomes is compared to the poverty level for a family of four, as the average refugee household in the survey had 3.7 members (Table II.3).

⁵⁷ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "2006 HHS Poverty Guidelines." Available at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/06poverty.shtml>. Without food stamp benefits (considered an in-kind transfer rather than income by the Census Bureau, and therefore not generally used in poverty measurements), the total income is \$1,684 a month, or approximately \$20,208 a year.

economic advancement in Houston slows considerably or ends altogether after the second year for more refugees on most indicators.

Table IV.13: Average Monthly Income by Entry Cohort^a

Measure (\$)	Year of Entry					Total
	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	
Earnings	1,578	1,530	1,954	1,936	1,344	1,619
Cash assistance	20	0	4	11	42	19
Food stamps	46	70	12	33	83	54
Disability income	17	36	13	66	20	29
Unemployment compensation	28	9	0	7	0	8
Other income	11	15	13	0	7	9
Total income	1,700	1,660	1,996	2,053	1,497	1,738
Sample size	54	63	52	52	95	316

Source: Refugee Assistance Survey

^a Income includes income of survey respondent and respondent's spouse if spouse lived in the respondent's household

Single survey respondents with children had by far the lowest incomes and the lowest shares of income from work. Single respondents with children had average earnings of about \$1,000 a month and almost \$200 in income from public sources, for a total of about \$1,200 in income; Food Stamps alone was a significant source of income, at about \$100 monthly or \$1,200 annually (**Table IV.14**). With only \$1,200 in monthly income, or about \$14,500 annually, the average single-parent refugee family in Houston lived well below the poverty threshold at the time of the survey. Many African refugee families, especially Somali Bantu and Liberians, fit this below-poverty scenario.

By contrast, singles and couples without children averaged about \$1,500 to \$1,600 in earnings with less than \$60 in additional income from public sources. Married couples with children had the highest average earnings (over \$1,800) and total incomes (over \$2,000). Thus earnings were almost twice as high for married than single respondents with children, presumably because in many cases both the respondent and spouse worked in the married families. The average married refugee couple with children had an annual income of about \$24,000, or about 20 percent above the federal poverty threshold for a family of four (though still within income eligibility thresholds for Food Stamps and many other public support programs).

Table IV.14 Average Monthly Income by Family Type^a

Measure (\$)	Single or Not Living with Spouse		Married and Living with Spouse		Total
	No children in household	Children in household	No children in household	Children in household	
Earnings	1,519	1,014	1,579	1,865	1,619
Cash assistance	7	21	0	30	19
Food stamps	8	106	35	76	54
Disability income	10	51	32	37	29
Unemployment compensation	4	0	0	13	8
Other income	8	22	0	7	9
Total income	1,555	1,214	1,647	2,027	1,738
Sample size	103	41	25	147	316

Source: Refugee Assistance Survey

^a Income includes income of survey respondent and respondent's spouse if spouse lived in the respondent's household

African survey respondents had the lowest average monthly income: \$1,500, compared with \$1,800 to \$1,900 for Latin American and other respondents (*Table IV.15*). Their incomes were lower in part because earnings were lower for African than other respondents, but also because a higher share of African refugees lived in single-parent families and presumably a higher share had only one earner. African respondents had the lowest average monthly income from earnings, but respondents from other world regions had slightly higher income from public sources (about \$150 versus \$120). Latin American respondents had far lower average income from Food Stamps or disability (under \$20) and no income from cash assistance at all. When compared with Latin American respondents, African and other respondents showed much higher connection to RSS and TAG services, employment services generally, assistance with child care, and public benefits receipt. The amount of assistance received through public benefits is also very low for Latin Americans, another sign that they are the group most disconnected from the service delivery system.

About three-quarters (74 percent) of refugees responding to the survey reported sending money back to family and friends in their native country. The share of refugees sending remittances was higher for the 2002 entry cohort, which might reflect the relatively high share of Cubans and Bosnians—who are higher earners—in FY 2002 than the other years. The FY 2003–04 cohorts have not been in the country as long as the FY 2002 cohort, however, and over time their remittance contributions are likely to climb somewhat. About half (54 percent) of refugees reported remitting more than \$1,000 since entering the country, and the average amount remitted was almost \$3,000. Average remittances increased over time, with the FY 2000 cohort remitting over \$4,000, versus about \$3,000 for FY 2002–04 cohorts, and just under \$2,000 for the FY 2004 cohort (*Table IV.16*).

Table IV.15: Average Monthly Income by Region of Origin^a

Measure (\$)	Region of Birth		
	Africa	Latin America	Other
Earnings	1,385	1,838	1,703
Cash assistance	6	0	47
Food stamps	81	13	57
Disability income	32	5	46
Unemployment compensation	7	0	14
Other income	7	6	13
Total income	1,518	1,862	1,880
Sample size	120	85	111

Source: Refugee Assistance Survey

^a Income includes income of survey respondent and respondent's spouse if spouse lived in the respondent's household

Table IV.16: Remittances by Entry Cohort

Measure	Year of Entry					Total
	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	
Ever sent remittances to friends or family (%)	72.2	81.0	86.5	73.1	65.3	74.4
Total amount sent since entry (%):						
\$1–\$500	16.1	23.4	32.5	25.8	29.1	26.0
\$501–\$1000	9.7	17.0	7.5	19.4	38.2	20.1
More than \$1000	74.2	59.6	60.0	54.8	32.7	53.9
Average (\$)	4,168	3,357	2,958	3,098	1,901	2,970
Sample size	54	63	52	52	95	316

Source: Refugee Assistance Survey

G. Housing

Despite low wages and incomes, more than a quarter of refugees responding to the survey (28 percent) owned their own homes in 2006–07 (**Table IV.17**). Homeownership rates exceed 30 percent for the three survey cohorts that had been in the United States at least five years by the time of the survey: FY 2000, 2001, and 2002. Homeownership for refugees may be relatively high in Houston because the cost of housing is so low; as mentioned earlier, Houston was ranked 147th out of 154 in the cost of housing in 2005.⁵⁸ The homeownership rate was the lowest (18 percent) for the most recent cohort (FY 2004). Almost half of Latin American respondents (45 percent) owned their own homes, as did over a third (36 percent) of respondents from other world regions (**Table IV.18**). The homeownership rate for Latin American survey respondents

⁵⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, "Cost of Living Index--Selected Metropolitan Areas: Fourth Quarter 2005," *The 2007 Statistical Abstract The National Data Book*. Available at <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/tables/07s0709.xls>.

was almost as high as the rate for all Houston residents in 2005 (48 percent).⁵⁹ By contrast, only 8 percent of African survey respondents owned their own homes.

Very few Houston refugees responding to the survey received public housing assistance. Only 12 percent lived in public housing at the time of the survey, and only 5 percent had received Section 8 vouchers to help them pay for housing in the private market (Table IV.17). Housing assistance receipt was slightly higher in the FY 2001 cohort and among African refugees. Only 4 percent of Latin American respondents received public housing assistance, just as so few Latin American respondents had received other forms of public assistance (Table IV.18). Study respondents said that there is a two- to three-year waiting list for public housing in Houston, and that lack of housing assistance there has led to some secondary migration to other states.

Table IV.17: Housing by Entry Cohort

Measure	Year of Entry					Total
	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	
Housing (%)						
Own with mortgage or loan	31.5	32.3	40.4	23.1	17.9	27.6
Own without mortgage or loan	0.0	0.0	*	*	0.0	*
Rent	64.8	64.5	57.7	73.1	81.1	69.8
Occupy without payment of cash rent	*	*	0.0	*	*	1.6
Public programs (%)						
Public housing	*	19.4	*	13.5	9.9	11.7
Section 8 housing	*	9.8	*	*	*	5.1
Receipt of energy assistance	*	7.9	*	11.5	6.6	6.8
Number of bedrooms in home (%)						
No bedrooms	*	0.0	*	*	*	2.2
1 bedroom	27.8	27.0	25.5	30.8	36.8	30.5
2–3 bedrooms	51.9	65.1	60.8	57.7	54.7	57.8
4 or more bedrooms	16.7	7.9	11.8	*	*	9.2
Crowded Housing (%)						
2 or more household members per room	9.6	7.9	*	9.6	17.0	11.2
Average monthly housing expenses ^a (\$)	660	650	728	652	644	663
Sample size	54	63	52	52	95	316

Source: Refugee Assistance Survey

* Indicates a category that contains fewer than five individuals

^a Housing expenses include rent and mortgage payments

⁵⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, "Houston City, Texas: Selected Housing Characteristics: 2005," *American Community Survey 2005*. Available at <http://factfinder.census.gov>.

The most common types of housing were one-, two-, and three-bedroom units. Over half of all survey respondents lived in housing units with two or three bedrooms, and there was not that much variation by entry cohort or region of birth. Between 26 and 37 percent of survey respondents lived in units with one bedroom (Table IV.17).

Table IV.18: Housing by Region of Birth

Measure	Region of Birth		
	Africa	Latin America	Other
Housing (%)			
Own with mortgage or loan	7.5	45.2	36.0
Own without mortgage or loan	0.0	*	0
Rent	90.0	51.2	62.2
Occupy without payment of cash rent	*	*	*
Public programs (%)			
Public housing	18.1	3.6	11.0
Section 8 housing	7.6	*	5.4
Receipt of energy assistance	11.0	*	6.4
Number of bedrooms in home (%)			
No bedrooms	*	*	*
1 bedroom	35.0	35.7	21.6
2–3 bedrooms	57.5	52.4	62.2
4 or more bedrooms	5.8	10.7	11.7
Crowded Housing (%)			
2 or more household members per room	17.6	*	9.1
Average monthly housing expenses ^a (\$)	559	754	707
Sample size	120	84	111

Source: Refugee Assistance Survey

* Indicates a category that contains fewer than five individuals

^a Housing expenses include rent and mortgage payments

About 11 percent of survey respondents lived in crowded housing—defined as two or more people per bedroom (Table IV.17). The crowding rate was higher among the FY 2004 entry cohort (17 percent) and among African survey respondents (18 percent). Latin American respondents had the lowest crowding rate (less than 6 percent).⁶⁰ African respondents also paid less in average housing costs (about \$550 a month) than Latin American and other respondents (\$700–750 a month, Table IV.18). African respondents also had relatively low average incomes and high shares of single parent families with children.

Large families combined with low incomes have created some housing difficulties for African refugees, especially Liberians and Somali Bantu. Bantu focus group participants told us that their average family size is more than six, and that families of six are not permitted to live in two-bedroom apartments in Texas. For the most part, it is difficult for them to find housing with more

⁶⁰ Exact percentage suppressed owing to small sample size.

than two bedrooms, because almost all the Bantu are renters. Therefore, families must sometimes live in multiple apartments. Because rent is expensive and there are many children in Bantu families, crowded housing is a common though uncomfortable practice. Bantu focus group participants told us that crowded housing is “not a matter of choice but a matter of survival.” And they stressed that living together helps keep their kids away from crime and drugs because of better supervision.

There was no progression in housing unit size or average monthly housing costs for refugees across the entry cohorts surveyed. Average housing costs fell within a tight range (\$640–660 a month) across all four cohorts except for FY 2002 (\$728 a month). There were no substantial differences in shares of respondents living in larger units across the cohorts. The lack of progression in housing costs is another indicator pointing to the limited economic progress of Houston’s refugees over time. More than five years after arrival, many refugees were still living in low-cost housing. RSS and TAG providers and other site visit respondents said that many refugee families stay in the same low-cost complexes in southwestern Houston for years, further evidence of limited mobility.

V. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

This section outlines the methodology and findings from the statistical analyses performed to analyze administrative data and data from the survey of refugees. The statistical analysis expands on the descriptive analysis discussed earlier in this report through presenting the findings from the multivariate regression analysis. While descriptive analysis illustrates how outcomes vary by participant characteristics and services received, it does not establish clear relationships between participant characteristics, services received and outcomes as the approach controls for only one factor at a time. Regression analysis, on the other hand, examines the partial effect of each parameter on an outcome while holding all other variables constant⁶¹. The results of the analysis demonstrate which client characteristics or conditions are statistically associated to various client outcomes, and also how strongly they are related. (See section C below for limitations of regression analysis.)

A. Data Used

The regression analysis utilizes data from the administrative sources as well as the data from the survey of refugees. The two sources were analyzed separately given different samples and information collected.

Sociodemographic data was provided by both the administrative and the survey data. The sociodemographic variables include the following:

- year of entry cohort dummies
- age at entry and age at entry squared
- country or region of origin
- sex
- marital status
- education at entry
- number of minors in the household (provided by the survey only)
- asylee status (provided by administrative data only)
- English ability (at time of survey in the survey data; at time of entry in the administrative data)

⁶¹ Technically, this analysis estimates an equation of the form $Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{1i} + \beta_2 X_{2i} + \dots + \beta_n X_{ni} + \epsilon_i$, where Y_i is the value of the outcome for person i , the variables X_{1i} through X_{ni} are the explanatory variables for person i in the model that are hypothesized to affect the outcome, ϵ_i is the error term of the equation accounting for unexplained variation in outcome Y_i across the sample, and the β terms are the coefficients for each explanatory variable which estimate the relationships of X_{1i} through X_{ni} to the outcome Y_i .

Service receipt variables were provided by both the administrative and the survey data. The service receipt variables from the survey include the following:⁶²

- job assistance (job search, subsidized employment)
- education assistance (vocational skills training, adult basic education, GED)
- supportive services (transportation, subsidized childcare, translation)
- English as a Second Language

Service receipt variables from the administrative data include all the same variables as the survey as well as two additional variables: driver's education service and case management/orientation service.

Labor market outcomes available from the administrative and survey data varied. The outcomes variables include the following:

- current employment status at time of survey (provided by the survey only)
- current or most recent hourly wage (provided by the survey only)
- employment status two years after entry (provided by the administrative data only)
- earnings two years after entry (provided by the administrative data only)

B. Regression Models

Ordinary least squares regression analysis was used to determine the relationships between the participant characteristics, services received, and outcomes. This approach permits researchers to determine the partial effect of specific characteristics, such as age, while holding constant other characteristics, such as gender. A "linear probability model" was used to estimate the relationship between either receipt of services or employment and wage outcomes and individual characteristics and services received.⁶³ The dependent variable is estimated as a linear function of the explanatory variables. An advantage of this model is that the statistical results are easily interpreted; the regression coefficients show what the effect of a one unit change in an explanatory variable has on the outcome variable. The interpretation of coefficients depends on what outcome is being analyzed. If the outcome is binary,⁶⁴ such as employment in a year or ever received a service, then the coefficients can be thought of as the percentage point change in the probability of the outcome occurring for a one unit change in the explanatory variable. If the

⁶² When analyzing survey data, individuals were excluded from the analysis if they were missing service receipt values due to skip pattern errors.

⁶³ In the cases where values were missing for an explanatory variable, and the missing values for that variable were relatively few, a dummy variable was assigned indicating a missing value for the variable. In cases of missing values for continuous explanatory variables, the individual was assigned the mean value for the variable in addition to including the dummy variable indicating a missing value.

⁶⁴ Binary outcomes are those that have two dichotomous possibilities: the event occurs or the event does not occur.

outcome is continuous,⁶⁵ as occurs in the case of wages, then the coefficient shows the unit change (dollars in the case of earnings) in the outcome arising from the change in the explanatory variable. If the outcome is the *natural log* of a continuous variable, then the coefficients represent percentage point change in the value of the outcome (e.g., being male increases earnings by 15 percent).

It should be noted that the linear probability models can be inefficient and produce biased estimates when looking at binary outcomes.⁶⁶ However, recent studies suggest that in some contexts linear probability models still produce reliable estimates even when examining binary outcomes.⁶⁷ Given the ease of interpretation of linear probability models, this approach was adopted.⁶⁸

Two different regression models were used to analyze the data. The first model examines services received as a function of the socio-demographic information and other services received. That is, participation in either job-related services or language-related services was predicted based upon individual socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender) and other types of services received (e.g., education services, supportive services).

The second regression model looks at labor market outcomes as a function of service receipt and socio-demographic information. The regression analysis of the survey data using this model looks at employment status and earnings at the time the survey was administered. The regression analysis of the administrative data using this model looks at long term employment outcomes, specifically employment status and earnings two years after entry.

C. Limitations of Analysis

As with all studies using regression analysis, this analysis has some potential limitations. While regression analysis shows the relationship of independent variables to the dependent variables, this does not necessarily imply causality. Two important conditions must be met to imply causality: (1) All relevant independent variables must be included in the analysis, and (2) There is no measurement error in the explanatory variables.

Both types of specification error may be present for the analyses. Subjective qualitative variables, such as knowledge of English, are likely to suffer from measurement error. Another example is that personal motivation may play a significant role in determining employment status, but this characteristic is not measured (and would be difficult to quantify), and thus may lead to specification error. In some cases, receipt of a particular service is likely linked to a variable that is missing or available only with error. In such situations, often referred to as

⁶⁵ Continuous outcomes are those for which, within the limits the outcome ranges, any value is possible. For instance, in the case of earnings, any value greater than or equal to zero is possible.

⁶⁶ See, for example, William H. Greene (1997) *Econometric Analysis third Edition*. Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, p. 873 and G.S. Maddala (1983) *Limited-Dependent and Qualitative Variables in Econometrics*. New York City, NY: Cambridge University Press, p. 15.

⁶⁷ See Joshua D. Angrist and Alan B. Krueger (2001). "Instrumental Variables and the Search for Identification: From Supply and Demand to Natural Experiments." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 15, No. 4 pp. 69–85. Angrist and Krueger consider the use of linear probability models in a different context, but their general point, that such models are not necessarily worse than the logit and probit models, is valid in this case.

⁶⁸ Nonlinear probability models, specifically probit regressions, were also performed to verify the accuracy of the coefficients obtained from the linear regressions with binary outcome variables. The results were consistent with the coefficients presented in this report, and are available upon request.

“selection bias,” the estimated coefficient for a characteristic of interest may be biased and give a false impression on the direction of the true relationship. For example, if assignment to ESL is based on need and the data contain a poorly measured variable on initial English ability, the estimated coefficient for receipt of ESL in an earnings or wage equation may in part reflect the low level of English among the ESL participants rather than the course having a small or negative effect on earnings. Because it is likely that not all the relevant independent variables are captured in the data, the findings must be interpreted carefully. Although the findings will shed light on what participant characteristics and services are *associated* with various outcomes, the patterns observed are not necessarily causal. To estimate causal models, more sophisticated statistical models must be estimated or participants must be assigned to activities randomly.

D. Findings

1. Service Receipt

Employment Services. Statistical analysis of receipt of RSS and TAG employment services verified the pattern discussed earlier in section IV: that African refugees tend to receive these services more often than other refugees, while Cuban and other Latin American refugees receive them less often.⁶⁹ In a model using data from the refugee survey and controlling for a number of different factors, Sudanese and other African refugees were the groups most likely to receive employment services (*Table V.1*). Cuban, Vietnamese, former Soviet and Eastern European, and other refugees were significantly less likely to have received employment services. This finding matches what RSS and TAG providers and other case study respondents said, and also what the descriptive statistics suggest: that Cuban and Latin American refugees had broader co-ethnic job networks and therefore were less reliant on employment services to find their jobs. Over a third of all Harris County residents are Latino (though most are of Mexican origin), yielding a very large set of Spanish-speaking job networks in the area. It would appear from the statistical analysis that Vietnamese refugees, who boast a community over 60,000 strong in the county, are also less reliant on employment services, possibly because of co-ethnic employment networks. The same appears true for former Soviet and Eastern European refugees, who are also less likely to receive employment services, although their communities are not as large in Houston. The statistical model here controls for refugees’ year of entry, age, gender, family composition, and educational attainment—none of these controls show a significant association with the likelihood of employment service receipt. Receipt of an education service (most likely GED, adult education or a community college course) is the only other type of service receipt to show a significant association with employment service in this model.

A model using similar data from administrative data shows similar results. Cuban refugees are once again less likely to receive employment services than Sudanese or other African refugees. Vietnamese refugees are also less likely to receive employment services, although the coefficient for the Vietnamese group is not statistically significant. Among the controls, men were more likely than women to receive employment services, while those who were married were less likely to do so. In the administrative model, receipt of education services was also positively

⁶⁹ The regression analyses conducted for the study allowed for finer disaggregation of country-of-origin groups than in the descriptive analyses.

associated with receipt of job assistance services, but receipt of ESL and case management were both negatively associated with employment services.

English as a Second Language. The pattern of ESL receipt was somewhat different in both the survey and administrative data models. In the survey data, Sudanese and former Soviet/Eastern European refugees were more likely than non-Sudanese African refugees to have received ESL since arrival, but there were no significant differences for Cuban or Vietnamese refugees. In the administrative data, Cuban, Vietnamese, Sudanese and other non-African refugees were all more likely than other African refugees to have received ESL.

In the administrative data, job assistance receipt is negatively associated with ESL receipt (in models explaining determinants of both ESL and job assistance), which further strengthens the argument that refugees placed in jobs early are less likely than other refugees to take ESL. None of the other types of service receipt showed significant associations with ESL receipt

In the survey data analysis, the most recent entry cohort was significantly less likely than earlier cohorts to have received ESL services. In the administrative data analysis, the opposite pattern emerges: more recent cohorts (2003 and 2004) are actually *more likely* to receive ESL than the earliest cohort in the data (2002). The reasons for the opposite pattern in the survey versus administrative data are unclear and might be due to differences in the samples, or to receipt of ESL through sources not funded with RSS and TAG, which is captured by the survey but not by administrative data.

Table V.1: Regression Results: Houston Service Receipt

Survey Data			Administrative Data		
	Job assistance since arrival	ESL since arrival		Job assistance since arrival	ESL since arrival
Fiscal Year Cohort^a			Fiscal Year Cohort^b		
2001	-0.091 (0.287)	-0.104 (0.202)			
2002	0.111 (0.231)	-0.124 (0.189)			
2003	-0.101 (0.282)	-0.143 (0.107)	2003	0.029 (0.569)	0.212 (0.000)***
2004	0.005 (0.951)	-0.150 (0.066)*	2004	0.054 (0.286)	0.307 (0.000)***
Sociodemographic Characteristics			Sociodemographic Characteristics		
Age at survey	0.007 (0.764)	0.005 (0.826)	Age at entry	-0.001 (0.944)	0.005 (0.586)
Age at survey squared	-0.000 (0.664)	-0.000 (0.823)	Age at entry squared	0.000 (0.981)	-0.000 (0.679)
Male	0.051 (0.371)	-0.090 (0.117)	Male	0.172 (0.000)***	-0.005 (0.852)
Married or living together	0.040 (0.536)	-0.014 (0.823)	Married	-0.123 (0.000)***	0.019 (0.475)
Total minors in household	-0.004 (0.851)	-0.027 (0.167)			
Completed high school	0.055 (0.359)	-0.047 (0.437)	Completed high school	0.136 (0.000)***	-0.020 (0.487)
			Speaks English well at entry	0.015 (0.657)	-0.123 (0.000)***
			Asylee	-0.009 (0.849)	-0.264 (0.000)***

Table V.1 (cont'd)

Survey Data			Administrative Data		
	Job assistance since arrival	ESL since arrival		Job assistance since arrival	ESL since arrival
Country of Birth^c			Country of Origin^c		
Sudan	0.224 (0.001)***	0.202 (0.033)**	Sudan	0.092 (0.051)*	0.188 (0.000)***
Cuba	-0.141 (0.096)*	-0.108 (0.234)	Cuba	-0.098 (0.013)**	0.140 (0.001)***
Vietnam	-0.209 (0.069)*	0.022 (0.847)	Vietnam	-0.036 (0.544)	0.154 (0.010)***
Former USSR/Europe	-0.233 (0.031)**	0.173 (0.073)*			
Middle East	-0.134 (0.198)	0.114 (0.281)			
Other, non-African	-0.233 (0.016)**	0.055 (0.573)	Other, non-African	-0.093 (0.007)***	0.133 (0.000)***
Service Receipt since Arrival			Service Receipt since Arrival		
Education	0.119 (0.043)**	-0.039 (0.547)	Education	0.082 (0.071)*	0.066 (0.169)
Job assistance		0.040 (0.520)	Job assistance		-0.122 (0.000)***
Supportive services	0.095 (0.398)	-0.093 (0.385)			
ESL	0.038 (0.522)		ESL	-0.120 (0.000)***	
			Case management	-0.106 (0.000)***	-0.033 (0.213)
			Driver's education	-0.029 (0.273)	-0.008 (0.762)
Constant	0.488 (0.288)	0.862 (0.055)*	Constant	0.567 (0.000)***	0.216 (0.152)
Observations	316	316	Observations	1674	1674
R-squared	0.131	0.093	R-squared	0.144	0.122

Sources: Refugee Assistance Survey, RSS and TAG program data provided by the state

Notes: Robust *p* values in parentheses: * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

^a 2000 is the excluded category

^b 2002 is the excluded category

^c Other Africa is the excluded category

2. Job Outcomes

Employment. There were not many factors strongly associated with employment in the models based on either survey or administrative data. The high levels of employment among almost all different groups of refugees are likely part of the explanation for this pattern. In both models, men are more likely to be employed than women (*Table V.2*). This would support findings from the site visits that in many two-parent families, the women do not work. It could also explain the relatively low receipt of employment services among women, along with their higher use of ESL and case management—which are not tied to employment.

There were no significant variations in employment among refugees by country of origin, except for Vietnamese refugees who were more likely to work than non-Sudanese Africans according to the survey data but less likely to work according to the administrative data. This could be explained in part by the fact that employment is measured at the time of the survey for the survey group but employed any time in the second year after entry for the administrative data. It could also be true that Vietnamese refugees break away from service providers more quickly than other groups because they find employment through co-ethnic networks. In other words, those Vietnamese refugees who come to the consortium for RSS and TAG services—especially in their second year after entry—are more likely to be those who are unemployed than those who do not come seeking services.

There was also no significant variation in employment by educational attainment or by English language ability. Together, these findings suggest that virtually all refugees—or at least men—are able to find employment in Houston regardless of their demographic and socioeconomic characteristics.

In the survey model, only supportive services—not employment services—are significantly and positively associated with employment. In the administrative model, however, job assistance is significantly and positively associated with employment, along with a range of other services, including ESL, case management, and driver's education. The positive association of this range of RSS and TAG services with employment suggests that the program's full menu of services may help refugees find jobs, at least their first jobs. Further, the lack of variation among countries of origin or by demographic characteristics when controlling for service receipt suggests that these services assist refugees to find employment regardless of their origins and other characteristics.

Table V.2: Regression Results: Houston Employment Outcomes

Survey Data			Administrative Data		
	Currently employed	Hourly wage (natural log)		Employment in year 2	Earnings in year 2
Fiscal Year Cohort^a			Fiscal Year Cohort^b		
2001	0.025 (0.736)	-0.022 (0.774)			
2002	0.052 (0.491)	-0.020 (0.822)			
2003	0.041 (0.596)	-0.063 (0.515)	2003	-0.015 (0.787)	-1,911.179 (0.148)
2004	0.048 (0.498)	-0.159 (0.043)**	2004	-0.107 (0.061)*	-2,393.267 (0.077)*
Sociodemographic Characteristics			Sociodemographic Characteristics		
Age at survey	0.040 (0.043)**	0.022 (0.163)	Age at entry	0.009 (0.342)	411.973 (0.034)**
Age at survey squared	-0.000 (0.059)*	-0.000 (0.096)*	Age at entry squared	-0.000 (0.211)	-6.631 (0.014)**
Male	0.252 (0.000)***	0.239 (0.000)***	Male	0.064 (0.019)**	3,488.304 (0.000)***
Married or living together	-0.081 (0.114)	-0.093 (0.074)*	Married	0.044 (0.113)	1,370.484 (0.028)**
Currently employed		0.203 (0.000)***			
Total minors in household	-0.009 (0.626)	0.034 (0.023)**			
Completed high school	0.031 (0.550)	0.075 (0.152)	Completed high school	0.008 (0.783)	1,278.705 (0.073)*
Speaks English well at survey	0.046 (0.367)	0.079 (0.101)	Speaks English well at entry	0.046 (0.167)	2,385.027 (0.001)***
			Asylee	0.004 (0.928)	892.018 (0.376)

Table V.2 (cont'd)

Survey Data			Administrative Data		
	Currently Employed	Hourly Wage (natural log)		Employment in Year 2	Earnings in Year 2
Country of Birth^c			Country of Origin^c		
Sudan	0.057 (0.512)	-0.097 (0.222)	Sudan	-0.039 (0.387)	-417.946 (0.718)
Cuba	0.055 (0.449)	0.234 (0.002)***	Cuba	-0.020 (0.606)	168.420 (0.853)
Vietnam	0.154 (0.067)*	-0.019 (0.833)	Vietnam	-0.158 (0.022)**	-2,231.523 (0.065)*
Former USSR/Europe	0.116 (0.181)	0.233 (0.011)**			
Middle East	-0.030 (0.757)	0.056 (0.557)			
Other, non-African	0.075 (0.371)	0.185 (0.004)***	Other, non-African	-0.065 (0.068)*	190.218 (0.805)
Service Receipt since Arrival			Service Receipt since Arrival		
Education	0.003 (0.949)	0.022 (0.664)	Education	0.004 (0.922)	451.991 (0.629)
Job assistance	0.021 (0.674)	-0.005 (0.921)	Job assistance	0.172 (0.000)***	2,430.145 (0.000)***
Supportive services	0.194 (0.075)*	0.138 (0.160)			
ESL	-0.057 (0.242)	-0.077 (0.124)	ESL	0.053 (0.046)**	1,121.618 (0.049)**
			Case management	0.051 (0.058)*	-312.587 (0.608)
			Driver's education	0.080 (0.004)***	1,347.989 (0.040)**
Constant	-0.361 (0.367)	1.373 (0.000)***	Constant	0.481 (0.003)***	-213.693 (0.950)
Observations	316	286	Observations	1192	1192
R-squared	0.219	0.339	R-squared	0.085	0.099

Sources: Refugee Assistance Survey, RSS and TAG program data provided by the state

Notes: Robust *p* values in parentheses: * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

^a 2000 is the excluded category

^b 2002 is the excluded category

^c Other Africa is the excluded category

Wages and earnings. The models for wages and earnings, based on the survey and administrative data, respectively, largely match what was shown in section IV earlier through descriptive data analysis and what was learned from the site visits. In both the survey and administrative data, the most recent entry cohort of refugees (2004) had significantly lower wages and earnings than any of the other entry cohorts.

Cuban and former Soviet and Eastern Europe refugees earned significantly higher wages than non-Sudanese African refugees based on the survey data model, but they did not have significantly higher annual earnings in the administrative data model.

In both models, men earned substantially more than women.

Educational attainment and English language ability showed mixed results. In the survey model, neither had a significant association with wages. But in the administrative data model, both were significantly and positively associated with earnings.

Finally, the administrative data model once again suggests the importance of employment assistance and related RSS and TAG services in enhancing refugees' economic advancement. Job assistance, ESL and driver's education were all positively associated with earnings. Although the largest increase is associated with job assistance, showing clearly the centrality of this service to RSS and TAG, nonetheless ESL and driver's education are shown to be important services in both the employment and earnings models.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Houston consortium resettles a diverse and constantly changing group of refugees, like many other resettlement sites around the country. Diverse flows have created challenges for Houston RSS and TAG providers, especially in serving the least educated groups of refugees such as the Somali Bantu and Liberians. Additionally, the low benefits provided through the Texas welfare system have pushed the state and the Houston consortium to offer refugees with children MG instead of TANF benefits. As a result, almost all refugees arriving in Texas can only expect to receive cash benefits for up to six months through MG and eight months through RCA. This has led the consortium to push for rapid employment of all employable refugees, as refugees must become self-sufficient before their benefits expire.

Demographic diversity, a low-benefits environment, and the push for rapid employment have driven the Houston consortium to some important successes. First, refugees become employed quickly and remain employed: about half of all refugees in the RSS and TAG programs are employed within six months and three-quarters by the end of the first year. Second, employment is reasonably stable: average job tenure exceeds one year for refugees who have been in the United States for two years, and tenure rises to almost three years for refugees in the country five years or more. Third, TANF receipt is very low—just 7 percent during the first year after entry and lower after that. Fourth, although refugees' earnings reached a plateau after two years and remained earning just \$15,000 four years after entry, the cost of living in Houston is very low relative to other major U.S. cities. Finally, despite difficulties at first in employing Bantu, Liberians, and some other recent groups, the consortium was able to find additional funding to help serve these groups and adapt to their needs by hiring bilingual, bicultural staff. Thus, the consortium has been very successful in promoting the short-term self-sufficiency of refugees through the RSS and TAG programs.

Challenges to the longer-term economic advancement of refugees, however, remain. Key features of Houston's rapid-employment focused program could complicate longer-term advancement, and many of these features are common to the RSS and TAG programs generally. First, refugees must find employment so quickly—within just two to three months in most cases—that they might not have time to learn English and basic skills adequately to promote their future career advancement. This is much more of a problem for the Bantu, Liberians, and other less-educated groups, and the Houston consortium found that in many cases it took longer than six months just to find them initial employment. Second, once in a job, refugees find it very difficult to pursue further ESL, education, or training. Most refugees drop their ESL after they start working because of time constraints, as most work full time and many work overtime, on shifts or on evenings and weekends. Only 6 percent of refugees in the RSS and TAG programs take vocational training classes, and on-the-job training is no longer offered. The types of jobs in which the consortium initially places refugees—primarily manufacturing and leisure/hospitality—generally do not include much training or opportunities for advancement. Third, the rapid employment model creates further challenges for single-parent families in the absence of subsidized child care, which is very limited in Houston. It is difficult to imagine how a single parent could manage to learn English, find a job, and make informal child care arrangements all within the space of a few months.

The results from this evaluation therefore raise several questions about the long-term self-sufficiency and economic advancement of refugees in Houston. Will they remain in entry-level jobs surviving on incomes averaging just \$20,000, or will they manage to improve their human capital and find better jobs? Will they continue to rent apartments in the neighborhoods in which they were originally resettled, or will they eventually be able to afford their own homes? How will the children of refugees fare if their parents do not manage to find better jobs and improve their housing conditions? Are there risks that refugees and their children will fail to integrate fully leading to economic and residential segregation along with multigenerational poverty? Past refugees—particularly those from Vietnam, the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe—have been very successful in integrating in the United States. But as the Houston example has shown, some newer groups of refugees are more challenging and their long-term prospects are less certain. Future research on the longer-term trajectories of refugees would be necessary to answer these questions, as this evaluation was based on outcomes during the first five years.

APPENDIX A: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SURVEY SAMPLE

Appendix Table 1 Characteristics of Refugee Survey Sample by Entry Cohort

Demographic characteristic	Year of Entry					Total
	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	
Gender (%)						
Male	55.6	58.7	53.8	75.0	53.7	58.5
Female	44.4	41.3	46.2	25.0	46.3	41.5
Age (%)						
18–25	*	*	9.6	13.5	18.9	11.4
26–35	31.5	41.9	25.0	34.6	37.9	34.9
36–45	37.0	35.5	48.1	36.5	27.4	35.6
46–55	25.9	12.9	17.3	11.5	15.8	16.5
Over 55	0.0	*	0.0	3.8	0.0	1.6
Marital status (%)						
Married	64.2	65.1	69.2	63.5	55.3	62.4
Living together but not married	*	0.0	*	3.8	*	3.2
Divorced or separated	*	7.9	*	9.6	10.6	8.6
Widowed	*	*	0.0	1.9	*	3.5
Single, never married	20.8	22.2	17.3	21.2	26.6	22.3
County of birth (%)						
Afghanistan	0.0	*	*	*	*	2.8
Angola	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	*	*
Azerbaijan	0.0	0.0	0.0	*	0.0	*
Bahrain	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	*	*
Bhutan	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	*	*
Bolivia	0.0	*	0.0	0.0	0.0	*
Bosnia and Herzegovina	*	*	13.5	*	0.0	5.4
Burma (Myanmar)	0.0	*	0.0	0.0	*	1.6
Burundi	*	*	0.0	*	0.0	*
Cameroon	0.0	*	*	*	*	2.2
Canada	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	*	*
Chad	0.0	0.0	0.0	*	0.0	*
China, People's Republic of	0.0	0.0	*	0.0	0.0	*
Colombia	0.0	*	*	*	*	3.2
Congo, Democratic Republic of the	13.0	0.0	*	*	*	4.4
Croatia	9.3	0.0	0.0	*	0.0	1.9
Cuba	9.3	12.7	44.2	19.2	25.3	22.2
Ecuador	*	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3
Eritrea	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	*	*
Ethiopia	*	*	*	*	*	2.8

Appendix Table 1 (continued)

Characteristic	Year of Entry					Total
	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	
Former Soviet Union (U.S.S.R.)	0.0	*	0.0	0.0	*	*
Former Yugoslavia Republic	*	*	*	*	0.0	1.6
Ghana	0.0	*	0.0	0.0	0.0	*
Guinea	0.0	0.0	0.0	*	0.0	*
India	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	*	*
Iran	*	*	*	*	*	3.2
Iraq	*	*	*	0.0	*	2.5
Kuwait	*	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	*
Lebanon	*	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	*
Liberia	0.0	*	0.0	*	5.3	3.2
Malaysia	*	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	*
Mauritania	0.0	*	0.0	0.0	0.0	*
Nepal	0.0	0.0	0.0	*	0.0	*
Nicaragua	*	0.0	0.0	0.0	*	*
Nigeria	0.0	0.0	*	0.0	0.0	*
Pakistan	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	*	*
Rwanda	*	0.0	0.0	0.0	*	*
Serbia and Montenegro	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	*	*
Sierra Leone	*	*	0.0	*	*	*
Somalia	*	*	0.0	*	22.1	8.5
Sri Lanka	0.0	0.0	1.9	*	0.0	0.6
Sudan	*	28.6	1.9	15.4	5.3	11.4
Togo	*	*	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.9
Vietnam	9.3	14.3	9.6	*	5.3	8.5
Spent time in a refugee camp (%)	66.7	50.0	11.8	46.2	47.4	45.2
Time Spent in a Refugee Camp (%):						
Up to 6 months	11.8	0.0	20.0	9.1	21.4	11.9
6 Months to 1 year	17.6	*	0.0	*	9.5	9.0
1 to 5 years	41.2	32.3	60.0	40.9	21.4	33.6
More than 5 years	29.4	64.5	20.0	45.5	47.6	45.5
Secondary U.S. migration (%)	*	*	15.4	15.4	18.9	12.0
Planning to apply for citizenship (%)	100	95	96	96	100	98
Sample size	54	63	52	52	95	316

Source: Refugee Assistance Survey

* Indicates a category containing fewer than five individuals

Appendix Table 2: Characteristics of Refugee Survey Data by Region of Cohort

Demographic Characteristic	Region of Birth		
	Africa	Latin America	Other
Gender (%)			
Male	56.7	52.9	64.9
Female	43.3	47.1	35.1
Age (%)			
18–25	16.7	10.6	6.4
26–35	42.5	30.6	30.0
36–45	28.3	40.0	40.0
46–55	11.7	17.6	20.9
Over 55	*	*	*
Marital status (%)			
Married	53.8	63.5	70.9
Living together but not married	*	8.2	*
Divorced or separated	8.4	15.3	*
Widowed	6.7	0.0	*
Single, never married	30.3	12.9	20.9
Spent time in a Refugee Camp (%)	74.2	10.7	40.0
Time Spent in a Refugee Camp:			
Up to 6 months	11.6	66.7	4.8
6 months to 1 year	10.5	0.0	7.1
1 to 5 years	26.7	16.7	50.0
More than 5 years	51.2	16.7	38.1
Secondary U.S. migration (%)	10.0	17.6	9.9
Planning to apply for citizenship (%)	99.2	100.0	94.5
Sample size	120	84	111

Source: Refugee Assistance Survey

* Indicates a category that contains fewer than five individuals

GLOSSARY

Amerasian: Certain Amerasians from Vietnam who are admitted to the U.S. as immigrants pursuant to Sec. 584 of the Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 1988 (as contained in Sec. 101(e) of Public Law 100-202 and amended by the 9th proviso under Migration and Refugee Assistance in title II of the Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Acts, 1989 (Public Law 100-461 as amended) and “was born in Vietnam after January 1, 1962 and before January 1, 1976 and was fathered by a citizen of the United States.” Amerasians are admitted to the United States as immigrants, rather than refugees. They and their immediate relatives are entitled to ORR-funded refugee services and benefits to the same extent as refugees.

Asylee: Under Section 208 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, individuals who meet the legal definition of refugee, but who apply for asylum status after they are already present in the U.S. or at a port of entry. Asylum applicants can have any (or no) immigration status when they apply. Asylum status can be granted by either a USCIS asylum officer or by an Immigration Judge with the U.S. Department of Justice’s Executive Office of Immigration Review. Asylees are eligible for ORR-funded refugee benefits and assistance beginning on the date of their final grant of asylum.

Cuban/Haitian Entrant: (a) Any individual granted parole status as a Cuban/Haitian Entrant (Status Pending) or granted any other special status subsequently established under the immigration laws for nationals of Cuba or Haiti, regardless of the status of the individual at the time assistance or services are provided; and (b) Any other national of Cuba or Haiti
(1) Who: (i) Was paroled into the United States and has not acquired any other status under the Immigration and Nationality Act; (ii) Is the subject of exclusion or deportation proceedings under the Immigration and Nationality Act; or (iii) Has an application for asylum pending with the Immigration and Naturalization Service; and (2) With respect to whom a final, nonappealable, and legally enforceable order of deportation or exclusion has not been entered. (Refugee Education Assistance Act of 1980, Pub. L. No. 96-422)

Economic Self-Sufficiency: For the purposes of programs administered by the ORR, earning a total family income through unsubsidized employment at a level that enables a family unit to support itself without receipt of a cash assistance grant.

Date of Entry: An ORR term for the date on which individuals become eligible for ORR benefits and services. For refugees this is their date of arrival in the U.S. (as recorded on the Form I-94 Arrival/Departure Record). For Cuban/Haitian entrants this is the date they were granted Cuban/Haitian entrant status, which is typically the date of their parole into the U.S. For asylees this is the date of final grant of asylum (as noted on the approval letter or immigration court order). For victims of a severe form of trafficking it is the date of certification or eligibility (as noted on the certification or eligibility letter), or date they were granted a T visa.

Legal Permanent Resident (LPR): A non-U.S. citizen (i.e., alien) who has been given permission to remain permanently in the U.S., subject to continued compliance with the Immigration and Nationality Act. LPRs are sometimes called “immigrants” and the I-551 which

is evidence of LPR status is commonly known as a "green card". After five years in LPR status and if otherwise not ineligible an LPR is eligible to apply for naturalization to become a U.S. citizen. LPRs who obtained LPR status by marriage to a U.S. citizen are eligible to apply for naturalization in three years.

Matching Grant: The ORR discretionary Matching Grant program is an alternative to public cash assistance offered through the voluntary agency (Volag) network. ORR provides matched funds to participating Volag affiliates that are required to provide employment services, case management, maintenance assistance (which includes provision of food or food subsidies, housing, and transportation) and cash allowance. Enrollment in Matching Grant services must be within the first thirty-one days of eligibility, with maintenance assistance provided for at least four months, and case management/employment services continuing through 180 days (six months). Services are designed to assist refugees enter employment, achieve self-sufficiency, and not access public assistance.

Medicaid: Medicaid is a state administered program, jointly funded by the states and federal government that provides medical coverage to eligible persons based on age, income, and/or disability status. Eligible groups include children, adults with dependent minors, and SSI recipients. Each state sets its own guidelines regarding eligibility and services.

Mutual Assistance Associations (MAA): A non-profit, community-based organization promoting successful refugee resettlement comprised of refugee populations. Generally, MAAs are small grass-roots organizations that work in specific communities and geographic areas. ORR encourages states to give special consideration to MAAs in contracting refugee services.

Parolee: An alien permitted entry to the U.S. for humanitarian reasons or when determined to be for significant public benefit. Parole does not constitute a formal admission to the United States and confers temporary status only. Absent a change in or adjustment of status, parolees must depart the U.S. when the conditions supporting their parole cease to exist. There are several types of parole, including parole authorized as part of an overseas parole program (such as the U.S. has with Cuba), port-of-entry parole, deferred inspection parole, advance parole, humanitarian parole, or public interest parole.

Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Program: States have the option of entering into a partnership agreement with local resettlement agencies for the operation of a public/private refugee cash assistance (RCA) program. The partnerships facilitate the successful resettlement of refugee by integrating cash assistance with resettlement services and ongoing case management. Through these public/private RCA programs, States are permitted to include employment incentives that support the refugee program's goal of family self-sufficiency and social adjustment in the shortest possible time after arrival.

Reception and Placement Program: Upon arrival, refugees are provided initial resettlement services through cooperative agreements to voluntary agencies (Volags) by the Department of State. These initial "nesting" services cover basic food, clothing, shelter, orientation, referral, and other services for the first 30 days after the refugee's arrival in the U.S.

Refugee: 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 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. The term “refugee” is distinguished from “asylee” in that “refugee” refers to individuals admitted into the U.S. under Section 207 of the Immigration and Nationality Act and determined to be refugees before arriving in the U.S., while asylees are aliens in the U.S. who are determined to meet the legal definition of “refugee” and are granted asylum in the U.S.

In this report, the term “refugee” is often used inclusively to refer to anyone eligible for ORR benefits and services (such as RSS or TAG), including refugees, asylees, Cuban-Haitian entrants, Amerasians, victims of a severe form of trafficking, and Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs) who have held one of these statuses in the past.

Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA): A short-term need-based cash benefit available to ORR-eligible populations for up to eight months from their date of entry. Refugees who meet the income and resource eligibility standards of TANF or SSI, but are not otherwise eligible for those programs, such as single adults and childless adults, and meet other eligibility requirements may receive benefits under RCA.

Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA): Short-term need-based medical insurance available to ORR eligible populations for up to eight months from their date of entry. Refugees who meet income limits and other eligibility requirements, but are not eligible for Medicaid or the State Child Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), may receive benefits under RMA. All recipients of Refugee Cash Assistance but not Medicaid or SCHIP, are eligible for RMA.

Refugee Social Services (RSS): Intensive social services provided to help refugees obtain employment, achieve economic self-sufficiency, and realize social adjustment. Programs that administer RSS services are funded through the Office of Refugee Resettlement, which provides both state grants and direct-service grants. The programs provide employability and other services which may include employment assistance, job training, English language training, and social adjustment. Refugees and other ORR eligible populations are only eligible for this program for the first 60 months from their date of entry.

Section 8 Vouchers: Federal housing assistance for low-income renters provided under the Housing Choice Voucher Program. Assistance is in the form of direct payments to private landlords and limits the monthly rent payment paid by the tenant.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI): Federally-administered program that provides assistance for individuals who are aged, blind, or disabled and have limited income and resources as established under title XVI of the Social Security Act.

Targeted Assistance Formula Grant (TAG): The targeted assistance program funds employability and other services for refugees who reside in areas of high need. These localities are defined as counties or contiguous county areas with unusually large refugee populations, high

refugee concentrations in relation to the overall population, or high use of public assistance among refugees. Targeted assistance services are similar to refugee social services except targeted assistance prioritize serving clients who are long term cash assistance recipients compared to newly arrived refugees. Refugees and other ORR eligible populations are only eligible for this program for the first 60 months from their date of entry.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF): State-administered program, jointly funded by the states and federal government, that provides cash assistance and work opportunities to needy families with dependent children. States are granted wide flexibility to develop and implement their own welfare programs.

Victims of a Severe Form of Trafficking: Individuals who are subjected to (1) Sex Trafficking, which is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act⁷⁰, in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person forced to perform such an act is under the age of 18 years; or (2) Labor Trafficking, which is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery. Victims of trafficking are eligible for ORR benefits and services and other federal benefits provided they have been certified as a victim of trafficking by ORR.

Voluntary Agency (Volag): Public or private agencies that provide initial reception and placement services to newly-arriving refugees under cooperative agreements with the Department of State. Currently, the Department of State has such agreements with nine national Volags and one state government agency (Iowa). Local affiliates of these national agencies are also referred to as Volags and are responsible for providing initial "nesting" (Reception and Placement) services covering basic food, clothing, shelter, orientation, referral, and other services for the first 30 days after admission for refugees, and often serve as providers of other services, including RSS, TAG or Matching Grant.

Wilson/Fish Alternative Program: Wilson/Fish is an alternative to the traditional publicly-administered refugee resettlement program (as outlined in the ORR regulations) for providing integrated assistance (cash and medical) and services (employment, case-management, ESL and other social services) to refugees and others eligible for refugee benefits. The purpose of the Wilson/Fish program is to increase refugee prospects for early employment and self-sufficiency and reduce their level of welfare dependence; promote coordination among voluntary resettlement agencies and service providers; and to ensure that refugee assistance programs exist in every State where refugees are resettled.

States that determine that a public/private RCA program or publicly-administered program modeled after its TANF program is not the best approach for the state may apply to establish an alternative approach under the Wilson/Fish program. If a state withdraws from all or part of the refugee resettlement program, a public or private nonprofit organization may apply to operate refugee programs in the state under the Wilson/Fish program.

⁷⁰ Any sex act on account of which anything of value is given to or received by any person.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

For definitions of immigration statuses, see USCIS Glossary (<http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.eb1d4c2a3e5b9ac89243c6a7543f6d1a/?vgnextoid=b328194d3e88d010VgnVCM10000048f3d6a1RCRD&vgnnextchannel=b328194d3e88d010VgnVCM10000048f3d6a1RCRD>)

For definitions of services provided to refugees and related populations, see websites of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/>) and the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (<http://www.state.gov/g/prm/>). Particularly useful subpages of these websites include:

- ORR programs page: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/programs/index.htm>
- ORR benefits and services page: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/benefits/index.htm>
- Most recent ORR annual report:
http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/data/05arc2.htm#_Ref532867079
- Regulations governing programs administered by ORR:
http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/policy/orr_regulations.htm
- Most recent PRM report on proposed refugee admissions:
<http://www.state.gov/g/prm/refadm/rls/rpts/52366.htm>