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**LIST OF COMMON LANGUAGES**

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Common Languages Spoken by Refugees & Immigrants

1. Somalia – Somali, Mai Mai
2. Iraq – Arabic, Kurdish
3. Mexico & Central America – Spanish, Indigenous Languages (Mixtec, K'iche, etc.)
4. Burma – varies by ethnicity
   - Karen – Sgaw Karen, Po Karen
   - Burmese
   - Kayah/Karenni
   - Arkanese
   - Shan
   - Chin
5. Democratic Republic of the Congo – Swahili, French, Portuguese, Bembe; may speak Kinyarwanda if they grew up in refugee camps
6. Sudan – Arabic, Dinka, Fur, Zaghawa
7. Eritrea – Tigrinya, Tigre, Kunama
8. Ethiopia – Amharic
9. Central African Republic – French, Kaba, Sango, Mbaï
10. Bhutan - Nepali, Dzongkha, Hindi
11. Rwanda – Kinyarwanda
12. Burundi – Kirundi
13. Syria – Arabic
14. Afghanistan – Pashto, Dari
15. Pakistan – Punjabi, Urdu
16. Liberia – Krahn
17. Uganda – Swahili, Buganda
18. Thailand – Thai (note that some Burmese refugees may also speak some Thai if they lived in refugee camps)
The Somalis

Their History and Culture
Diana Briton Putman & Mohamood Cabdi Noor
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Introduction

Today, about 1 million Somalis live scattered around the world. While the great majority are refugees living in neighboring countries in East Africa and in the Middle East, there are Somali communities throughout Europe and North America. The largest is in Toronto, Canada, where more than 10,000 Somalis have settled in recent years.

In the mid-1980s, small numbers of Somalis were admitted to the United States as refugees. In 1990, as a result of the civil war, their numbers increased. These refugees live in different parts of the United States, with larger concentrations in New York, Washington, D.C., Boston, Los Angeles, San Diego, Atlanta, and Detroit.

The Somali People

Before the civil war, the population of Somalia was estimated at 7.7 million people. It is believed that about 400,000 people died of famine or disease or were killed in the war, and nearly 45% of the population was displaced inside Somalia or fled to neighboring countries, to the Middle East, or to the West.

Ethnically and culturally, Somalia is one of the most homogeneous countries in Africa. Somalia has its minorities: There are people of Bantu descent living in farming villages in the south, and Arab enclaves in the coastal cities. A small number of Europeans, mostly Italians, live on farms in the south. But the great majority of the people are ethnic Somalis who speak dialects of the same language, Somali, and who practice the same religion, Islam. In a land of sparse rainfall, more than half the population are pastoralists or agropastoralists who raise camels, cattle, sheep, and goats. There are farmers, mostly in the south and northwest, and in recent years a new urban group of government workers, shopkeepers, and traders has emerged, but it is the nomadic way of life, with its love of freedom and open spaces, that is celebrated in Somali poetry and folklore.
Social Structure and Gender Roles

Somalis belong to clans and sub-clans. These hierarchical descent groups, each said to originate with a single male ancestor, are a central fact of Somali life. Understanding how Somali people relate to one another requires some knowledge of the clan system. In Somali society, clans serve as a source of great solidarity as well as conflict. Clans combine forces for protection, access to water and good land, and political power. The Somali clan organization is an unstable system, characterized by changing alliances and temporary coalitions. The ever-shifting world of clan politics is captured in a saying popular among nomads: My full brother and I against my father, my father's household against my uncle's household, our two households (my uncle's and mine) against the rest of the immediate kin, the immediate kin against non-immediate members of my clan, my clan against other clans, and my nation and I against the world.

While Somalia's political culture is basically egalitarian, social and political change have created new patterns of social life. In recent years, a new urban group, educated in Western-type schools and working as merchants or in government, has emerged. These urbanites enjoy more wealth, better access to government services, and greater educational opportunities for their children than do other sectors of society.

For Somalis who are settled or partly settled farmers, the village and its headman assume social and political importance. In rural areas, links to the cities remain strong, with rural relatives caring for livestock owned by the urbanites.

For all Somalis, the family is the ultimate source of personal security and identity. The importance of family is reflected in the common Somali question, *tol maa tahay?* (What is your lineage?). Historian Charles Geshekter notes, "When Somalis meet each other they don't ask: Where are you from? Rather, they ask: *Whom* are you from? Genealogy is to Somalis what an address is to Americans."

Somalis typically live in nuclear families, although older parents may move in with one of their children. Households are usually monogamous; in polygamous households (one fifth of all families), wives usually have their own residences and are responsible for different economic activities. Traditionally, marriages were arranged, since marriage was seen as a way to cement alliances. Increasingly, however, parents are willing to consider love interests if they think the match is suitable.

Somali culture is male centered, at least in public, although women play important economic roles in both farming and herding families and in business in the cities. Female labor is valued for productive tasks as well as for household chores, as long as the male is still seen as being in charge. In recent years, war, drought, and male migration have dramatically increased the number of female-headed households.

As the result of efforts by the socialist regime to improve opportunities for women, Somali women have more freedom to become educated, to work, and to travel than do most other Muslim women. Before the 1969 revolution, 20% of primary school students were girls; in 1979, the figure approached 40%.
Language and Literacy

Somalis speak Somali. Many people also speak Arabic, and educated Somalis usually speak either English or Italian as well. Swahili may also be spoken in coastal areas near Kenya.

Somali has adopted many Arabic words, both modern phrases to deal with modern institutions, such as government and finance, and older Arabic terms to discuss international trade and religion.

Somali had no written form until 1972, when a Somali script, based on the Roman alphabet, was adopted. Until that time, English and Italian served as the languages of government and education. This served to create an elite, since only a small proportion of Somali society who knew these colonial languages had access to government positions or the few managerial or technical jobs in private enterprise. The 1972 decision to introduce a Somali script fundamentally changed the situation. Somali officials were required to learn the script, and a countrywide literacy campaign was launched. Great progress was made in the development of national literacy, particularly in the rural areas, where previous literacy campaigns had failed. In 1975, government figures indicated a literacy rate of 55%, in contrast to a 5% rate before the adoption of the national script. Even if the government estimate is exaggerated a 1990 U.N. estimate put the national literacy rate at 24%. Somali progress in literacy has clearly been significant.

Education

In 1975, government figures indicated a literacy rate of 55%, in contrast to a 5% rate before the adoption of the national script.

Educational opportunities expanded after the Somali script was introduced in the 1970s as a medium of instruction at the primary, intermediate, and secondary levels. Basic education became compulsory. Secondary education, however, remained beyond the grasp of most Somalis. In the late 1980s, the number of students in secondary school was less than 10% of the total in primary schools. In recent years, an Islamic resurgence has led to a revival of Islamic education in both urban and rural areas.

Somalia's principal institution of higher learning, the Somali National University, was founded in 1970, with nine faculties. It later expanded to 13. Before the outbreak of civil war, the university had 4,000 students.

Two years of civil war destroyed most of Somalia's educational institutions, and many of the educated elite left the country. There are now attempts to restart education in clan enclaves.
Knowledge of English

Before independence in 1960, English and Italian served as the languages of administration and instruction in Somalia’s schools, while Arabic was used for unofficial transactions or personal correspondence.

Two years of civil war destroyed most of Somalia's educational institutions.

After the Somali script was adopted in 1972, Somali became the language of government and education. As a result, young people today have very little exposure to English or Italian until they go to college. Those who are middle aged and educated, however, often have some proficiency in English, Italian, Arabic, or Russian. In the last few years, private English classes have flourished in Somalia.

Values

Many Somali values are similar to American ones. Somalis believe strongly in independence, democracy, egalitarianism, and individualism. Like Americans, Somalis value generosity. Unlike Americans, however, Somalis generally do not express their appreciation verbally.

Somalis respect strength and often challenge others to test their limits. Somali justice is based on the notion of "an eye for an eye." Somalis are a proud people; excessively so, some would say, and their boasting can stretch the truth more than a little. Saving face is very important to them, so indirectness and humor are often used in conversation.

Somalis are also able to see the humor in a situation and to laugh at themselves. While Somalis can be opinionated, they are generally willing to reconsider their views if they are presented with adequate evidence. Somalis have a long history of going abroad to work or to study and are known for their ability to adjust to new situations.

Somalis deeply value the family. The strength of family ties provides a safety net in times of need, and the protection of family honor is important. Loyalty is an important value and can extend beyond family and clan. Somalis value their friendships; once a Somali becomes a friend, he is usually one for life.

Religion

Most Somalis are Sunni Muslims. Islam is the principal faith and is vitally important to the Somali sense of national identity, although traces of pre-Islamic traditional religions exist in Somali folk spirituality.

Among Somalis, there is a strong tradition of tariqa, religious orders associated with Sufism, a mystical current in Islam. Tariqas are social and religious brotherhoods that serve as centers of learning and religious leadership. Leaders of tariqas are said to have baraka, a state of blessedness, suggesting a spiritual power that may be invoked at the tomb of a leader.
Names

Somalis do not have surnames in the Western sense. To identify a Somali, three names must be used: a given name followed by the father’s given name and the grandfather’s. (Women, therefore, do not change their names at marriage.) Unlike English, which has mostly separate pools for given and family names, Somalis have one pool for all three names. As a result, many names are similar.

The Somali Language

The Sound System and Pronunciation

Somali uses all but three letters (p, v, and z) of the English alphabet. Of the thirty-three sounds, fifteen (b, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, s, sh, t, w, and y) are very much like their English counterparts.

Somali has seven consonants (c, dh, kh, q, r, x and ’ [glottal stop]) that do not match anything in English. The English sounds most likely to present difficulties for Somalis are those represented by the letters c, q, r, and x, since these letters are pronounced quite differently in Somali. For pronunciation of Somali letters, see p. 29.

In Somali, the consonants b, d, dh, g, l, m, n, and r can be doubled to indicate a sound which is pronounced with much more force than its single counterpart. Thus, Somalis often pronounce the doubled consonants in English words such as "bigger," "middle," "merry," "simmer," and "nibble" with more strength than they would be pronounced by a native speaker of English.

English vowels will present some difficulty to Somalis, since English lacks Somali’s one-to-one correspondence between vowel letters and sounds; in English, each letter has more than one sound, and each sound has more than one spelling. Typically, Somalis will pronounce English words the way they would pronounce them in Somali. Thus, boat might be pronounced "bow-at" with two syllables, and the word may might be pronounced "my."

Somalis may draw out English double vowels, as in noon or been, giving them the long sound that doubled vowel letters represent in Somali.

Tone occurs in Somali, but it is not as complex as in Chinese, in which every word has a special tone pattern. In Somali, tone rarely marks a difference in word meaning. This aspect of Somali is not likely to create a problem for Somalis learning English.
Prepositions

English prepositions can cause great difficulty for Somalis. Whereas English has a great variety of prepositions, Somali has only four, and they come before the verb rather than before the noun. Because they are so few, Somali prepositions have a wide range of meanings:

\textit{ka} 'from, away from, out of' and 'about, concerning'

\textit{ku} 'in, into, on, at' and 'with, by means of, using'

\textit{la} 'with, together with, in the company of'

\textit{u} 'to, towards' and 'for, on behalf of'

For example: \textit{Isaga u sheeg}. Tell it to him.  
\textit{Isaga ka sheeg}. Tell about him.  
\textit{Isaga ku sheeg}. Call him (a name).  
\textit{Qori ka samee!} Make it of wood!  
\textit{Guriga ku samee!} Do it at home!  
\textit{Isaga la samee!} Do it with him!

Verbs

Verbs usually come last in Somali sentences. As a result, Somali speakers of English may tend to put the verb at the end of a sentence.

Verbs usually come last in Somali sentences.

Somali lacks a passive voice. Instead of the passive, Somali uses the indefinite pronoun \textit{la} 'someone', as in \textit{Goormaa la dhisey?} "When was it built?" (literally, "When someone built?"). Using English passives correctly can be a major challenge for Somali students of English.

Somali has a present habitual and a present progressive tense, but they are not used in the same contexts in which these tenses are used in English. Somali uses the present progressive tense where the simple present tense would be used in English, and this feature of Somali may carry over into the English speech of Somalis. Somali speakers of English often make use of the present progressive tense ("I am going to work every day") where English speakers would use the simple present ("I go to work every day").

The Writing System

Somali has had a written form only since 1972. Because only a small segment of Somali society young adults who studied Somali spelling in school has thoroughly mastered Somali orthography, spelling mistakes are frequent.
The Grammatical System

Articles

Somali and English are quite different when it comes to the and a. The definite article in Somali has gender suffixes; like French, the Somali definite article has a masculine and feminine form.

Somalis can have difficulty mastering the English indefinite article (a/an) because their own language has no equivalent. In Somali, the concept of indefiniteness is expressed by the noun alone.

Nouns

Somali nouns are more highly inflected than are nouns in English. In English, nouns are inflected only for number that is, they have different forms for singular and plural. In Somali, not only does each noun have number, with eight kinds of plural forms; a noun is also inflected for gender (masculine or feminine) and case (nominative, genitive, absolutive, and vocative).

In Somali, differences in gender, number, or case are marked by grammatical tone:

ínan 'boy' inán 'girl' [gender]
díbí 'ox' dibí 'oxen' [number]
Múuse 'Moses' Mu'use 'Hey, Moses' [vocative case]

The system of case marking is so different between the two languages that mistakes are unavoidable. Typically, a Somali will drop the apostrophe-s possessive in favor of a tone change, e.g., "Mary book", with a rising intonation on the first syllable of "Mary".

Adjectives

In Somali, most adjectives are formed by adding -an or -san to a verb or noun. Thus, gaab 'shortness' becomes gaaban 'short', and qurux 'beauty' becomes quruxsan 'beautiful'. Somalis may coin some interesting English adjectives by a similar process.

Somali adjectives often occur with a short form of the verb to be suffixed to them. For example, yar 'small' becomes yaraa 'he was small'. As a result, Somali speakers of English tend to add aa to adjectives. Thus, instead of saying "small", they might say something that sounds like "small-ah". This may cause confusion, particularly among British speakers of English, who may think the speaker is saying "smaller".
Eritrean Refugees from the Shimelba Refugee Camp

Who Are the Refugees in Shimelba, and How Did They Become Refugees?

About 63% of the refugees being processed are Tigrinya and 33% are Kunama. The rest are ethnic Afar, Bilen, and Saho. Single men between the ages of 17 and 59 make up the majority of the caseload. There are a small number of young women, elderly, and families. There are more families among the Kunama than the Tigrinya.

The Tigrinya are a major ethnic group in Eritrea, where they number about 2.2 million and make up 50% of the population. They are generally from the urban areas of Eritrea. Most have received some formal education and are literate.

The Kunama are a marginalized minority in Eritrea, mostly populating remote and fertile rural areas near the Ethiopian border. Most are not educated, and few are literate.

Both groups of refugees began fleeing into Ethiopia after the outbreak of war between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 1998. Tensions between the countries had been high since Eritrea gained independence from Ethiopia in 1991 following a 30-year war, and in 1998, a border dispute sparked a two-year conflict that cost the two countries hundreds of millions of dollars and tens of thousands of casualties.

Many of the Tigrinya in Shimelba fled Eritrea to escape harsh compulsory conscription into the Eritrean national service. Conscripts in Eritrea serve either in the military or on a civilian work gang, often for an indefinite length of time. The Kunama fled Eritrea to escape persecution by the Eritrean government, which accused the Kunama of siding with Ethiopia in the 1998-2000 war.

Whatever their reasons for fleeing Eritrea, refugees who repatriate risk persecution. In Eritrea, it is illegal to cross the border into an enemy country, and refugees who do so are viewed as collaborators with an enemy state.
Eritrean Refugees from the Shimelba Refugee Camp

The Need for Resettlement

According to the UNHCR, there is no acceptable alternative to third-country resettlement for the refugees in Shimelba. Those who return to Eritrea face persecution, and their politically sensitive presence in Ethiopia rules out local integration as an option. Moreover, there is no guarantee of safety in Shimelba. The renewal of conflict in the area remains a threat. Located in one of the most highly militarized regions in the Horn of Africa, the Shimelba Refugee Camp is near the border of Eritrea, within striking distance of artillery shells. Should a new war begin, the camp would not be safe for the refugee population.

Refugee Camp Life

Shimelba Refugee Camp is located outside of Shiraro in Northern Ethiopia, about 45 kilometers from the Eritrean border. The climate is semi-arid. About 40 years ago, the area was dense forest with many wild animals. Today, after decades of environmental degradation, the landscape is barren. To find firewood, refugees must travel long distances or cut live trees. Water is scarce. Except for small streams in the rainy season, there is no water source near the camp.

Refugees live in two types of houses. The Kunama construct mud houses with grass-thatched tops, while the Tigrinya build mud brick houses with plastic sheeting covers or, in a few cases, corrugated iron sheeting. Because materials to construct houses are limited, living conditions are crowded, with five to eight people sharing a room. The houses have neither toilets nor running water.

Food is provided by the United Nations World Food Program. Refugees receive a standard monthly ration of wheat cereal, white bean legumes, lentils or peas, fortified vegetable oil, salt, and sugar. Many sell part or all of their rations for cash, which they then use for various household expenses. Many refugees report that their rations do not last the month.

The camp offers little opportunity for productive activity; boredom dominates daily life. Ethiopian government policy prohibits camp residents from working for wages and restricts most of them to the camp. Refugees found outside the camp without permits have been arrested and imprisoned. Men generally spend their time playing cards, shooting pool, chatting in small groups, and drinking coffee, tea, or arake (locally brewed liquor). Women prepare food, wash clothes, gather water and firewood, and take care of the children.

Life for young people in the camp is difficult and sometimes dangerous. Without the opportunity to obtain an education beyond high school or learn a vocational skill, young men feel that their lives are passing them by. Many of the young women in the camp live without the protection of parents or relatives. Some marry to gain protection from men, while others live alone or with other women.

Cultural Characteristics

Languages

The Tigrinya speak Tigrinya, a Semitic language, also spoken by the Tigrinya of Ethiopia, and one of the two languages of government in Eritrea. Arabic, the other language of government, is spoken by a small minority of Tigrinya. Because of the legacy of Ethiopian domination over Eritrea, many Tigrinya are able to speak Amharic, although they are reluctant to do so. In Eritrea, students are taught in their native language (mainly Tigrinya) in the early grades. English is taught as a foreign language beginning in Grade 2 and becomes the language of instruction in Grade 6 (at least in theory).

The Kunama speak their own language, Kunama. Those who are educated also speak Tigrinya. A few can communicate in Amharic and/or Arabic.

Religion

The Tigrinya are members of the Eritrean Orthodox (Coptic) Church. For the Tigrinya, their faith is central to their way of life. Believers accept the Bible as truth, but the canon includes books that are unique to the Coptic faith. Church services are conducted in Ge’ez, the ancient language of Ethiopia and Eritrea. It is considered the holy church language, just as Latin once was in the Roman Catholic Church.

Of the Kunama refugees being processed for resettlement, 55% are Catholic, 16% are Protestant, and 16% are Muslim. The Kunama also practice a traditional religion, which is monotheistic but without the hierarchies and the formal practices of Islam or Christianity. Educated Kunama are usually Christian.

A minority of refugees, about 8% of the camp population, are Muslim.

There are places of worship for each of the major religious groups in the camp, and most refugees attend service regularly. There are several Bible study sessions during the week for Christians, and on Fridays, Muslim refugees go to mosque and socialize in cafes afterwards. Most refugees fast according to the requirements of their faith. The different religious groups appear to live together in the camp harmoniously.
Family and Gender Roles

In a typical Tigrinya community in Eritrea, men are the basic providers while women stay home and take care of the families. Children also assist their parents at home, with girls playing a larger role than boys. Although most Tigrinya are from the urban areas of Eritrea and many women favor Western dress, notions about the role of women remain traditional. Kunama women work at home, cooking, cleaning, and raising children. They do not usually work outside of the home. Women are given fewer opportunities to attend school than men. Elderly women, however, hold a great deal of power over their younger family members. The Kunama place strong emphasis on relationships with the extended maternal family, and when a mother dies, her relatives take over the care of her children, even if the children’s father is still alive.

There are generational differences in gender roles among refugees in the camp. Generally, older married women are home-makers, while younger unmarried women are better educated and less traditional in outlook and behavior. This generation gap is partly the result of a young camp population that has come of age outside of a traditional family framework.

The high percentage of males among the Tigrinya camp population has been a source of problems. Without the stabilizing force of families—the primary unit of society for social control—traditional customs and norms are loose in the camp, compared to Eritrean society back home. Among young men, there is competition for women. Many women are pressured into marriage; some face sexual harassment or rape.

Leadership

Each group in Shimelba has its traditional forms of leadership, but because the camp is dominated by young, single men, few elders are available to influence and guide the camp community.

For the camp as a whole, there is a Central Committee that is elected by the camp population. The system also includes zone and block leaders. The role of the committee is to represent the refugees on various issues, to meet with officials from governmental and non-governmental organizations, and to support camp management.

Food and Dietary Restrictions

Both the Tigrinya and the Kunama eat injera, a kind of flat bread, served with a sauce made of beans, split peas, split lentils, and sometimes meat. Refugees make this bread from wheat flour; they also bake a traditional bread called himbasha. The Kunama generally do not eat pork. Muslims in the camp have had trouble finding meat that meets Islamic dietary standards.

Orthodox (Coptic) Christians and Muslims fast. For Orthodox Christians, fasting generally restricts the eating of animal products. Orthodox Christians fast every Wednesday and Friday, on special religious holidays, and for about 50 days before Easter. In total, these fasting days add up to over half the year. Eritrean Muslims, like Muslims everywhere, fast during Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. During this time, observant Muslims beyond the age of puberty refrain from eating and drinking from dawn until sunset.

Resettlement Considerations

Family Size and U.S. Ties

As noted previously, there are relatively few families in the camp. A small number of refugees have friends or family members living in the United States.

Health

Overall, the population is healthy. There are, however, HIV-positive persons and those living with AIDS. These individuals are highly discriminated against and stigmatized. Some refugees are disabled, and some women have been victims of sexual or gender-based violence.

Few Tigrinya use traditional healers. Instead they prefer to see doctors in Addis Ababa. In contrast, the Kunama consult traditional healers, most of whom are women. The Kunama do not object to Western medicine, but treatment should include clear instructions (for example, how to take medicine).

Exposure to Modern Amenities

The Tigrinya tend to think of themselves as a “civilized” people close to Western culture, as a result of the Italian colonization of Eritrea. They are generally familiar with phone cards, modern toilets, grocery stores, and household cleaning products, and those from the capital city of Asmara have experienced public transportation.

In contrast, the Kunama, who lived a more rural existence in Eritrea, have not been exposed to many household appliances, although most appear to know what a refrigerator is and what food ought to be stored in it. Children seem to fear modern toilets, and their use, although discussed in cultural orientation, will need more explanation after arrival.

Refugees from rural Eritrea who have lived in Shimelba for several years have been exposed to camp resources and facilities. A satellite television in the camp has exposed the refugees, at least visually, to life abroad.
Work Experiences and Vocational Training

Tigrinya refugees referred for resettlement have served in the military, run small businesses, and farmed. Most Kunama men worked as farmers and cattle herders in Eritrea, and most women worked as housewives.

Because refugees are not permitted to work outside the camp, fewer than 10% have worked in Ethiopia. These 10% have worked in Shimelba, mostly running small businesses—restaurants, beauty salons, grocery stores, and retail shops. Others have been employed by non-governmental organizations providing services in the camp.

Some vocational skills training is available in Shimelba. Three to four hundred refugees receive training in carpet making, electrical installation, dyeing and silk printing, tailoring, knitting, embroidery, and leather craftwork. The Tigrinya seem to show more interest in skills training classes than do the Kunama.

Education, Literacy, and English

Most of the Tigrinya have had some education and are literate in their own language. Many have completed Grade 10 and some have studied at the university level, although opportunities for higher education in Eritrea are limited because the government targets young men for military service.

Most Kunama have received no formal education; about 20% are literate in their own language. Kunama who are literate in their own language may be able to read and write Tigrinya and Amharic.

Preschool, primary, and secondary school education is available in the camp. Education is provided up to Grade 10. Refugee children who pass Grade 10 can attend high school in the nearby town of Shiraro.

In the camp, all children of elementary-school age are enrolled in school. The dropout rate, however, is high, especially among girls, who are much less likely than boys to receive family support for education and often leave school to help at home or get married.

It is estimated that about 25% of those referred for U.S. resettlement speak some English.

Informal education exists in Shimelba. For example, through an educational project called “Circles for Change,” adult refugees discuss issues of interest. Survival English classes are also available for students who want to improve their English language skills.
Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal

The United States has launched a program to resettle tens of thousands of Bhutanese refugees from refugee camps in Nepal. The refugees, almost all ethnic Nepalis from southern Bhutan, have been living in camps in eastern Nepal since they were expelled from their homes in Bhutan more than 16 years ago. The refugees are unable to return to Bhutan or to settle permanently in Nepal.

Of the more than 100,000 refugees in Nepali camps, the United States will consider for resettlement at least 60,000. The first small group of refugees is expected to arrive in the United States before the end of 2007, with larger numbers anticipated by March and April 2008.

This Backgrounder provides Reception and Placement (R&P) agency staff and others assisting refugee newcomers with an overview of the Bhutanese refugees to help them prepare for the refugees’ arrival and resettlement needs. The Backgrounder briefly discusses the causes of the refugee problem, explains the need for third-country resettlement, and describes the characteristics of the refugee population.

Causes of the Refugee Problem

The great majority of Bhutanese refugees are descendants of people who in the late 1800s began immigrating to southern Bhutan—lowland, malarial-infested regions shunned by the Druk Buddhist majority—in search of farmland. There they became known as Lhotsampas (“People of the South”).

Contact between the Druk in the north and the Lhotsampas in the south was limited, and over the years, the Lhotsampas retained their highly distinctive Nepali language, culture, and religion. Relations between the groups were for the most part conflict free. Under Bhutan’s Nationality Law of 1958, the Lhotsampas enjoyed Bhutanese citizenship and were allowed to hold government jobs.

In the 1980s, however, Bhutan’s king and the ruling Druk majority became increasingly worried about the rapidly growing Lhotsampa
work and earn a living. Only a small number of refugees have been able to acquire legal citizenship in Nepal. This occurs through marriage or descent.

With neither repatriation nor local integration a realistic possibility for the great majority of refugees, resettlement to a third country, such as the United States, has emerged as the only durable solution to the 16-year-old problem. The plan to resettle the refugees has been a divisive issue in the camps. While many welcome the chance to begin new lives in other countries, a group of politically active refugees opposes the resettlement plan, saying that repatriation to Bhutan is the only acceptable solution.

Characteristics of the Refugee Population

Camp Demographics

Approximately 107,000 refugees reside in seven camps in eastern Nepal: Beldangi-I, Beldangi-II, Beldangi-II Extension, Sanischare, Goldhap, Timai, and Khudunabari. A few hundred refugees are living outside the camps. The population is nearly evenly divided between males and females. Children under 18 make up a little more than 35% of the population, with nearly 8% under the age of 5. Adults age 60 and older make up nearly 7% of the population.

Ethnicity, Language, and Religion

Almost 97% of the refugees are ethnic Nepalis. The non-Nepalis include the Sharchop, Drukpa, Urow, and Khenpga ethnic groups. Nearly all refugees speak Nepali as a first or second language. UNHCR estimates that about 35% of the population has a functional knowledge of English.

Of the refugee population, 60% are Hindu, 27% are Buddhists, and about 10% are Kirat, an indigenous religion similar to animism. The percentage of Christians in each camp varies from 1% to 7%.

Need for Resettlement

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), many Bhutanese refugees say they want to return to their homes in Bhutan. Despite this desire—and despite numerous high-level meetings between the governments of Bhutan and Nepal to resolve the refugee crisis over the past 16 years—Bhutan has not permitted a single refugee to return home.

Local integration has not been possible for political reasons. Moreover, Nepali government policy denies the refugees two basic rights that are prerequisites for local integration: freedom of movement and the right to

population. Concerned that the demographic shift could threaten the majority position and traditional Buddhist culture of the Druk, Bhutanese authorities adopted a series of policies known as Bhutanization, aimed at unifying the country under the Druk culture, religion, and language. The policies imposed the Druk dress code and customs on the Lhotsampas and prohibited the use of the Nepali language in schools. Nepali teachers were dismissed, and Nepali books were reportedly burned. The government also established new eligibility requirements for Bhutanese citizenship that disenfranchised many ethnic Nepalis, depriving them of their citizenship and civil rights.

When the Lhotsampas began to organize politically to protest the policies, the authorities declared the activities subversive and unlawful. Some Lhotsampas became activists in the Bhutanese People's Party, which called for Bhutan's democratization. Smaller ethnic communities also began to advocate for a more democratic political system. In 1990, large-scale protests led to violent clashes with the police and army and to mass arrests. Ethnic Nepalis were targeted by the Bhutanese authorities, who destroyed the Nepalis' property and arrested and tortured activists. Individuals were forced to sign so-called "voluntary migration certificates" before being expelled from the country. In December 1990, the authorities announced that Lhotsampas who could not prove they had been residents of Bhutan in 1958 had to leave. Tens of thousands fled to Nepal and the Indian state of West Bengal.

Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal from page 1
Gender roles are distinct and clearly defined. Girls experience heavier household workloads than boys, a distinction that continues into adulthood. Women generally do not have equal access to information and resources and do not enjoy equal decision-making authority in the family and the community. In certain social groups, divorced and widowed women have a low position within the extended family and often must raise children without the support of family members. A female victim of sexual abuse or rape and her family typically face ostracism and harassment by the community.

Ties to the United States

The Bhutanese community in the United States is extremely small, with an estimated 150 Bhutanese living in areas surrounding Atlanta, New York City, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. As a result, almost none of the refugees have family ties in the United States.

Diet

A typical meal for the refugees consists of rice, lentils, and curry. Some people abstain from meat. Because of the Hindu belief that cows are sacred, Hindus do not eat beef, and as a result it is generally not available in the camp. Refugee camp residents commonly eat chicken and goat.

Exposure to Modern Amenities and the West

The camp population includes refugees with little exposure to urban amenities and very limited knowledge of life in the West. Refugees cook on solar rice cookers and with charcoal; most will not be familiar with modern cooking appliances and practices.

Traditional Practices that May Conflict with U.S. Customs

In addition to the occasional practice of polygamy, arranged and early marriages are a feature of traditional culture. Traditional medicine practices exist alongside modern medicine. Among Hindus, animals are sacrificed during festivals and marriage ceremonies.
Burmese Refugees

ABOUT BURMA (MYANMAR)

Burma is a country in southeast Asia, bordering India, Bangladesh, China, Laos, and Thailand. It is slightly smaller than Texas. It is divided into seven states, based on ethnicity – these states are Arakhan, Chin, Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Mon, and Shan.

In 1989, Burma’s military government advocated ending the use of Burma and Burmese, instead asking foreigners to use the word Myanmar for the country and its national people, and Bamar, Karen, or Chin depending on the person’s specific ethnic group. While the United Nations uses the name Myanmar, some foreigners and Burmese expatriates who oppose the military government insist on using the old names Burmese and Burmese to indicate their opposition. Additionally, due to the old usage, many people do not recognize the name Myanmar. In common parlance, therefore, Burman refers to the majority ethnic group of Burma, and Burmese describes the language, citizenship, or country.

KAREN REFUGEES

The Karen people are originally from Karen (Kayin) State, which covers roughly 12,000 square miles in southeastern Burma, next to Thailand. The region is primarily high mountains, rivers, and valleys, with some plains areas throughout. There are estimated to be between 3 and 6 million Karen in Burma, mostly living in rural farming areas (70%) with some in towns and cities. Under half of Burma’s Karen people live in Karen State now, however, due to migration and refugee exile.

Around an estimated 70% of Karen are Buddhist, Buddhist-Animist, or animist; 20 to 30% are Christian.

The Karen language is part of the Sino-Tibetan language group. It is tonal, meaning that any change in pitch changes the meaning of the word.

When Burma was under British colonial control, many Karen converted to Christianity although the majority retained their previous Buddhist or Animist beliefs. During British rule, the Karen became more involved in politics, education, and warfare (Karen soldiers fought for Britain against the Japanese in World War II). After Burma became independent, in 1948, the Karen people began to rebel against the new Burmese army and continue to push for self-determination.

The Karen National Union and its military, the Karen National Liberation Army, have been fighting for their territory for the past few decades; however, the Burmese army now controls most of Karen territory. Karen civilians have therefore fled Burmese-controlled areas, finding shelter in Thailand or less-stable communities of internally displaced people along the Thai border.

A 2004 temporary ceasefire was reached between the KNU and the Burmese military government, but by 2006, that agreement had unraveled, and reports continue to emerge from Karen State detailing human rights abuses including forced labor, the burning of villages, arbitrary taxation, rape, and extrajudicial killing.
Karenni Refugees

Karenni (Kayak) state is the smallest state in Burma. Its total population is 260,000 and it covers 4,500 square miles, located immediately north of Karen territory. It was initially incorporated into independent Burma in 1948, but after 10 years was granted secession rights which were later not recognized by Burma. Since 1962, there has been a large Burmese army presence in Karenni state. A Karenni group, the Karenni National Progressive Party, continues to fight the Burmese military regime. Civilians in Burmese-controlled Karenni state areas are subject to human rights abuses such as forced labor, land confiscation, arbitrary taxation, and forced relocation. An estimated 1/3 of the population of Karenni state has been displaced since 1996. Around 20,000 Karenni refugees live in two camps in Thailand near the northwestern town of Mae Hong Son.

The Karenni language is part of the Karen subgroup of languages. Literacy rates among the Karenni are low. The Kayah dialect has its own script, but most literate Karenni use the Burmese language and script. In refugee camps, the use of the Karenni language declines, and the use of Burmese and English increases.

The Karen and Karenni Refugee Experience

Since 1984, waves of ethnic Karen and Karenni refugees have been relocating to Thailand. Thailand has not ratified the 1951 Convention Regarding the Status of Refugees. The Thai government allowed those fleeing Burma to set up temporary shelters along the western border; these early camps were organized like small village settlements, similar to the refugee’s home communities.

In 1995, when the Karen resistance capital fell to the Burmese army, many educated and primarily Christian Karen leaders were forced into Thailand. At the same time, the Burmese troops began to attack refugee camps in Thailand, so due to security concerns, the Thai refugee settlements were consolidated into a number of larger camps. By 2007, there were around 150,000 refugees in nine camps. Conditions are overcrowded and access is limited.

Refugees receive assistance from nongovernmental organizations, and maintain most of the organization and internal camp affairs with committees for education, women’s affairs, justice issues, and social welfare. Education is a high priority, and all camps have primary and occasionally middle schools. However, the poor conditions within the camps make learning difficult; overcrowding, poor facilities, shortages of books and equipment all contribute to the difficulty. There is also a lack of work opportunities for refugees, which reduces the perceived value of education. Since 2005, there has been increased discussion about improving educational and vocational opportunities, but the overwhelming majority of refugees in Thai camps have no work opportunities. Many have lived in camps for up to 2 decades or have never lived anywhere else, so the lack of employment opportunity can cause a great psychological stress.
The Chin people are primarily from Chin State, in Burma. Though *Chin* implies a single people with a single language, the Chin are actually made up of many peoples whose myriad languages (there are 20 to 25) are not mutually intelligible. The majority of Chin refugees resettled to the United States are Hakha Chin; additional groups include Falam, Mizo, and Tedim as well as many others. The Chin people are 90% Christian.

Chin state covers about 14,400 square miles, slightly smaller than Switzerland. Most of its natural resources are forest-based, with a large range of monkey and bird species, as well as teak and other hardwood trees. The main economic activity in Chin state is rice cultivation, with other crops like corn and wheat, and forest products like teak and pine wood. Within Chin state, there is very little infrastructure, including poor landline and mobile phone access.

Chin State was annexed to Burma in 1895 as part of continuing British colonization. The British allowed traditional Chin chiefs to govern their own areas if they would take orders from British officers. When Burma gained independence in 1948, the Chin people moved to govern themselves by a democratically elected parliament. Democracy did not last long, however, and in 1962 General Ne Win seized control of the government and imposed the Burmese Way to Socialism on the country. The Chin mainly went along with this until 1988, when the Burmans divided themselves into two groups – one wanting to maintain military rule, and one opposing military rule in favor of democratic government. Most Chin fell into this second group, and the Chin National Front was born. The military government started to persecute the Chin on religious and ethnic grounds, and support of the CNF is punishable by 10 to 15 years in prison. Many Chin have fled the country.

Chin state is heavily militarized, with 54 Burmese Army camps in the area as of September 2012. While ceasefire negotiations between the CNF and the government are ongoing, there are still security concerns for the Chin people and for human rights fieldworkers attempting to document violations as they occur. These violations include forced labor, arbitrary arrest and detention, sexual violence, and torture.

Burmese government policies discourage learning minority languages, including Chin languages. Chin languages are no longer taught in public schools, and private elementary schools may only teach Chin through Grade 2. Chin churches are effectively the only institutions which can preserve Chin language.

There are an estimated 20,000 to 25,000 Chin refugees in Malaysia, mostly men. Malaysia has not signed international refugee rights agreements, so the Chin are considered illegal immigrants in Malaysia and therefore receive little legal protection or assistance. However, the UNHCR in Kuala Lumpur managed to give protection to around 1,500 – 2,000 refugees. Due to their illegal status and lack of protection, Chin refugees are vulnerable to exploitation, especially in their workplaces, and commonly complain of harassment and extortion by the police. Chin asylum seekers have no access to healthcare or social services in Malaysia, although NGOs work with Doctors Without Borders to give them basic care.
MORE INFORMATION

For more information about the Karen, Karenni, and Chin refugee experience, as well as other groups, the following resources may be of use:

Cultural Orientation Resource Center: www.culturalorientation.net/learning/backgrounders


UNHCR 1951 Refugee Convention: www.unhcr.org/pages/49da0e-466.html


Information obtained from Catholic Charities of Northeast Kansas, and modified for use by Kansas City Public Schools.
The Iraqis: Their History, Cultures, and Background Experiences

Introduction

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that more than four million Iraqis have been displaced by the war in Iraq and its aftermath. Of these, about two million people have found asylum in neighboring countries, where many eke out a marginal living in poor, inner-city neighborhoods, often by working illegally for low wages as laborers, drivers, and restaurant workers. Most Iraqi asylees are living in Syria and Jordan, but Iraqis have also sought asylum in Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, and Turkey.

Because most Iraqis are unable to return to Iraq safely or to settle permanently in the countries to which they have fled, Western nations, including the United States, have begun to resettle those refugees who are considered by the UNHCR to be at greatest risk. The new Iraqi arrivals will be joining previous groups of Iraqi refugees resettled in the United States. After the 1991 Gulf War, an estimated 12,000 Iraqis were admitted to the United States, and in 1996, about 6,500 Iraqis who had links to a U.S.-sponsored coup attempt against the regime in Iraq were granted asylum.

Before Iraqis came to the United States as refugees, thousands entered the country as immigrants, and today there are thriving Iraqi-American communities in many American cities, with Detroit, Chicago, and San Diego hosting the largest populations. In the 2000 U.S. Census, 90,000 people claimed Iraq as their birthplace. Many of the 120,000 Christians who have fled Iraq since 2003 are believed to have relatives in the United States.

This Enhanced Refugee Backgrounder provides basic information about the history, cultures, and background experiences of the new Iraqi arrivals. It also looks at the experiences of refugees in the countries of first asylum and potential resettlement issues. For readers who wish to learn more about Iraq and its peoples, we provide a list of books, articles, reports, and Web site resources at the end of the Backgrounder.

This publication is intended primarily for refugee resettlement agency staff who will be assisting the refugees in their new communities in the United States. But others may find the Backgrounder useful, too. Local government agencies—the housing and health departments, the courts, and the police—may use the Backgrounder to provide the new arrivals with the services they need, while teachers may use it to help their students better understand events that are shaping their future world.

People

Iraq includes a number of diverse ethnic groups, religions, and languages. According to the CIA’s online World Factbook, Iraq’s population is currently about 28 million, of whom 75% to 80% are Arabs and 15% to 20% are Kurds, with smaller numbers of Armenians, Assyrians, and Turkomen. Islam is the predominant religion, practiced by 97% of the population. Of Iraqi Muslims, 60% to 65% are Shi‘i Arabs and 32% to 37% are Sunni Arabs or Kurds. A small number of Iraqis, including Ali-Illahis and Yazidis, are syncretic Muslims. Christians make up 3% of the population: Armenians, Assyrians, and Chaldeans are all Christians, and there are also some Arab Christians. Arabic, the national language, is spoken with some level of proficiency by all Iraqis.
Ethnic and Religious Communities in Iraq

After the creation of the Iraqi state, Iraqis began to develop a common identity. Over the last two decades, as the result of recent events—the Iran–Iraq War, the Gulf War, and the 2003 war and its aftermath—sectarian, tribal, and ethnic identities have become increasingly central to a person’s social identity. As a result, ties to a broader social unit are becoming harder to forge. In the recent past, many Iraqis intermarried across sects and ethnicities. Today, intermarriage is less common.

In this section, we look at Iraq’s different ethnic and religious communities. We devote more attention to Iraqi Christians than their relatively small numbers in Iraq would seem to justify because they represent a substantial proportion of the refugees currently being resettled in the United States.

Iraqi Arabs

Everyday behavior among Iraqi Arabs often reflects Islamic belief and custom. While one finds great differences in individual behavior depending on educational background and exposure to the West, some generalizations are valid for most Iraqi Arabs, if not for most Arabs.

Family Life

Among Iraqi Arabs, the family is the center of life, and an individual’s social status tends to be determined by his or her family. Personal preferences normally take a secondary place to family loyalty and duty, and individual behavior is constrained by the desire not to bring shame on one’s family. However, with modernization, individual achievement has gradually acquired a more important role.

Iraq, like other Arab societies, is patriarchal. The father has ultimate responsibility and authority and is rarely questioned. Male siblings tend to have more say in the life of the family than females, and they enjoy a bigger share of and greater control over family resources.

Traditional Arab homes are very private by Western standards. Older individual houses are behind high walls, totally sheltered from the street and from passers-by. Even in urban apartment buildings, family privacy is maintained. Inside a traditional home, there is usually a room, a kind of formal parlor, where the men of the family can receive male visitors without them seeing or having contact with the women of the family.

The traditional household of a typical man in his forties consists of himself, his wife, their unmarried sons and daughters, their married sons with their wives and children, the man’s mother if she is still alive, and frequently his unmarried sisters. The most powerful force in the household is often the man’s mother, revered by her sons and obeyed by her daughter-in-law. In recent decades, however, the trend among less traditional Iraqis has been to live in nuclear rather than extended families.

In Iraqi families, young children are adored and indulged. Older boys are allowed to attend the gatherings of the men, and by listening absorb many of the cultural values and attitudes that will shape their public behavior. Older girls are very carefully protected, sometimes to their own chagrin. They learn the domestic skills through participation.

Treatment of Women

Much has been written in the Western press about Arab women, who from a Western point of view often appear dominated and repressed. The status of women is a controversial issue in Arab society today—in part because it has gotten so much negative press in the West—and there are movements among educated Arab women for equal rights. In the more progressive countries, including Iraq since the days of the monarchy, women from upper-class families have always had access to education and have been able to
Refugees from Iraq

Women combine career and family. Under the various governments that followed the 1958 downfall of the monarchy, women gained important rights, including the right to vote in 1980. In recent years, Iraqi women have attempted to extend their rights to all Arab women.

At the heart of the treatment of women is the belief in a man’s honor and the honor of his family. Protection of women is a central tenet of Islamic society, and both men and women believe it to be necessary. Behavior that looks like repression to Westerners is often viewed by Arab women as evidence that they are loved and valued. Western female freedom is often interpreted by Arab women as evidence of neglect and immorality. Furthermore, men and women are believed to be different in their very natures, with women’s role properly centered around the home and family.

That said, women in many Arab countries play a more central role in public life than is immediately apparent. Before the Gulf War and the 2003 invasion and occupation, Iraqi women were generally among the most liberated in the Arab world and were better integrated into the workforce than in most other Arab countries. In 1959, the Code of Legal Status granted women political and economic rights. That year, Iraq became the first country in the Arab world to have a woman cabinet member, and many women in Iraq are scientists, doctors, judges, and teachers. Interaction between men and women in the workplace is expected, although there are extensive controls over social interaction between the sexes.

**Beliefs and Values**

Iraq’s recent wars and economic sanctions have taken a heavy toll on the status of women. More restrictive behavior and more conservative clothes, including the covering of the hair and the body, have reappeared on a wide scale, largely due to the emergence of fundamentalist groups in society. Recent years have also seen an increase in honor killings, the killing by a family of a female relative believed to have shamed the family in some way.

Hospitality is a cherished Islamic tradition, and anyone who has lived in a Muslim country has a store of personal experiences of hospitality extended freely without any expectation of return. The belief in fate or predetermination also has considerable influence in Iraqi life. There is an almost universal belief that everything depends on the will of God, a belief that contrasts sharply with the American notion that people are masters of their own destiny. Dignity, honor, and reputation are also values highly esteemed by Iraqis.

In Muslim society, there is a much greater difference between public and private behavior than in Western societies. In traditional families, it is an invasion of privacy, for example, for a man to ask another man how his wife is; one asks instead how his family in general is, or how his children are. Arab men and women do not express affection of any sort in public, including holding hands, although affection is often publicly expressed among friends of the same sex, including hugs and repeated kisses. Arab women are usually deferential to their fathers, brothers, or husbands in public. The friendships that commonly exist between men and women in the West are rare in the Arab world.

**Names**

Arabs traditionally do not have last names parallel to Western family names. Each extended family has a name, of course, and in recent times that name has come to be used as a last name, especially in Western circles where last names are a requirement.

An Arab woman does not take her husband’s family name, but in formal situations gives her own and her father’s names. Nawal, married to Hussein, is formally Nawal Ali Nasser (“Nawal, the daughter of Ali of the Nasser family”). For Western purposes, Hussein uses the name Hussein al-Jamil (“Hussein of the al-Jamil family”). Their son Nizar is Nizar Hussein al-Jamil, and their daughter Amira is Amira Hussein al-Jamil.
Many Arab names are taken from the Old Testament and have parallels to Old Testament names in English. For example, Ibrahim is Abraham in English, Yahya is John, Dawud is David, and Yusuf is Joseph. Issa or Eisa is parallel to Jesus, and is a very common name among Muslim men. Miriam, or Maryam, is parallel to Mary.

**Iraqi Christians**

There are three main Christian groups in Iraq: the Assyrians, the Chaldeans, and the Jacobites. Before the 2003 war in Iraq, Assyrians and other Christians numbered a little more than 1 million, comprising between 4% to 5% of the Iraqi population. Of the 450,000-500,000 Iraqi refugees in Jordan, between 100,000 and 150,000 are Christians. In Syria, Christians are believed to make up 200,000 to 300,000 of the 1.2 million Iraqi refugees.

The three Iraqi Christian communities are culturally similar, sharing many of the same traditions and beliefs. All three see themselves as the original people of Iraq with linguistic and geographic roots that go back thousands of years. In ancient times, they spoke Aramaic, the language that once dominated the region. After the coming of Islam, Aramaic was spoken largely in rural areas, and today it exists in Iraq mostly as the liturgical language of the Christian communities, although some Iraqi Christians speak modern Syriac, an Aramaic language. The communities usually speak Arabic and Kurdish along with their own languages. For the urbanized groups, Arabic is the daily spoken language.

While the Chaldean and Jacobite Christian communities have stayed out of the struggles between the Arabs, the Kurds, and the British, the Assyrians have a long history of clashes, first with the Ottoman Turks and then with the Iraqi government. In recent years, some Assyrians have supported the Kurdish nationalist movement.

As with other Middle Eastern communities, Iraqi Christian life revolves around the family and extended family. Families are headed by men and are generally patriarchal. Women are in charge of the household and are expected to be nurturing and understanding, while children are taught to respect and revere their elders. The extended family plays a significant role in family affairs, with members often visiting and helping one another. Strong extended family ties remain a valued ideal, even among immigrant communities in the West. Traditionally arranged by parents, marriage is an important event that usually takes place between individuals from the same region or the same villages. Dating does not occur, divorce is mostly unknown, and widows usually do not remarry.

Historically, Iraqi Christians have worked as farmers, builders, artisans, craftsmen, businessmen, and social service providers. Christian women enjoy more freedom than many of their Arab neighbors, and before the war they entered professions such as teaching, education, and architecture. Men have tended to enter professions and business, especially in recent years. Iraq’s Christian communities are known for their entrepreneurial spirit and strong work ethic and the high value they place on education.

Like others in the Middle East, Iraqi Christians value hospitality and believe that if guests come to visit they should be invited to eat. Their food is generally similar to that of their neighbors; a typical meal consists of vegetables, lamb, beef, and grain. Although some older women in the rural areas wear darker, more traditional clothing, most Iraqi Christians today wear Western clothes.

Christians celebrate Christmas and Easter, although Eastern Christians, such as Armenians, Assyrians, and Jacobites, celebrate at different times than Christians in the West. Chaldean Christians, who practice a form of Catholicism, celebrate their holidays at the same time as Catholics in the West.

**Kurds**

The Kurds are an Indo-European ethnic group who for centuries have inhabited an area that stretches from Syria and Turkey through Iraq and Iran. More than 4 million Kurds, about 18% of the population of Iraq, live in northeast Iraq. Arbil and Sulaymaniyah, the fourth and fifth largest cities in Iraq, are entirely Kurdish. The Kurds claim the province of Kirkuk, which contains the second-largest developed oil fields in Iraq, the largest being in the south of the country.
The culture of the Kurds is close to that of their Iranian, Iraqi, and Turkish neighbors. The Kurds have their own Indo-European languages, most closely related to Pashto and Baluchi, spoken in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and less closely related to Iranian Persian. The Kurdish languages have been influenced by Arabic and Persian, and to a lesser extent by Turkish, Armenian, and Aramaic. Today, most Iraqi Kurds also speak Arabic, although few Kurds born in Iraq in the last two decades speak Arabic fluently.

Most Kurds are Muslim. Kurdish women have faced fewer restrictions than other Muslim women in dress or work outside the home. Kurdish identity has become increasingly important to Kurds in recent decades, particularly since the Kurdish rebellions in Iraq and the subsequent repression by the central government.

In recent years, the Kurds have taken important strides toward autonomy. Under the new Iraqi constitution, the Kurds were granted a federal Kurdish region with wide executive and legislative powers. Kurdish experience in running governmental agencies has added to their influence. Iraq’s president is a Kurd, as are the deputy prime minister, the foreign minister, the deputy chief of staff of the army, and several other senior officials.

Economically, the Kurds are enjoying one of the most promising developments in their recent history. Having largely escaped the sectarian violence that wracked the rest of the country, the Kurdish region has become Iraq’s most stable and prosperous area. It has attracted foreign investors, and while unemployment remains high, government and foreign and domestic companies have hired large numbers of people. Many villages destroyed during the 1975 Kurdish revolt have been rebuilt, and roads, hospitals, schools, and universities have been constructed or expanded. This generally optimistic picture has been marred in recent months by rising tensions among the Kurds, the Turkomen, and the Iraqi Arabs over the future of oil-rich Kirkuk, claimed by both Kurds and other Iraqi Arabs. In addition, the Kurds’ claim that they have the constitutional right to sign their own deals with foreign companies has strained their relations with the central government. The area has also witnessed increasing attacks by the Turkish military and, to a lesser extent, the Iranian military against Turkish and Iranian Kurdish rebels operating in the mountainous border regions between Turkey and Iran.

Many Kurds have fled the violence in Baghdad, Mosul, and other areas to the relatively safe Kurdish regions. Others have fled Iraq to neighboring countries, particularly Jordan and Syria. An estimated 30,000 to 35,000 Iraqi Kurds live in the United States, with Nashville, Tennessee, hosting the largest community. Most of the Iraqi Kurds in the United States were resettled here after the collapse of the 1974–1975 revolt against the Iraqi government.

**Education and Literacy**

According to UNESCO, Iraq had one of the best educational systems in the Middle East before the 1991 Gulf War, with high levels of literacy for both men and women. Institutions of higher education were of an international standard, particularly in science and technology.

The Iran–Iraq War, the Gulf War, and the economic sanctions took their toll on Iraq’s educational system. Enrollment fell, and the school system began to collapse. Since the 2003 invasion, more than one third of Baghdad’s schools have been damaged by bombing. Many others have been burned and looted.
There are no up-to-date studies on the status of education in Iraq today. A 2004 UN survey indicated that only 55% of young people between the ages of 6 and 24 were enrolled in school. The study found a literacy rate of 74% for youth between the ages of 15 and 24, with a higher literacy rate for the 25 to 34 age group. Female literacy appears to have dropped dramatically. In a 2004 UNICEF article about the survey, UNICEF’s representative in Iraq said that the school system was “effectively denying children a decent education.”

According to the United States Agency for International Development, almost 3,000 Iraqi schools have been “rehabilitated in full or part” since 2003, 20 million new textbooks have been supplied, and tens of thousands of teachers have received technical assistance. However, security concerns continue to hamper efforts to develop the country’s educational system, especially in Baghdad, where the lack of security has closed down most schools. Elsewhere the situation varies greatly. In the Kurdish north, where security is relatively good, the educational system is functioning the best.

**Iraqi Arabs as English Language Learners**

Because of Iraq’s historical connections with Britain, English has generally been the Western language of choice among Iraqis. Most educated Iraqis have at least some ability to speak English, although they might read more English than they speak.

Speakers of Iraqi Arabic will face most of the same challenges in learning English that all Arabs do. The following describes some of the common challenges.

**Pronunciation**

Arabs tend to have difficulty with many of the English vowel sounds, largely because there are relatively few vowels in Arabic and relatively many in English. Arabs will probably have difficulty hearing and pronouncing the different vowels of *sit* and *seat*, *bet* and *bat*, *shut* and *shot*, *boat* and *boot*, and *bait* and *beet*.

Arabs typically pronounce the English *r* as they do in their own language: The Arabic *r* is made with the tip of the tongue, and the double *rr* is a strong trill, as in Spanish or Italian. The effect in English may be striking, although it probably will not impede understanding.

The confusion of *p* and *b* is a common problem for most Arabs but not for Iraqis, who have a *p* in their dialect.

**Grammar**

Questions in English will cause problems (as they do for many English language learners), because they involve changes in word order—for example, “He is studying” versus “Is he studying?” In Arabic, the difference between a sentence and its parallel question is carried only by the tone of voice, as it is in English with “He’s studying?”
Another potential problem is the words *should* and *would*. Arabic sentences that express the ideas conveyed by *should* and *would* have very different structures.

The verb to *be* in present-tense sentences also presents challenges. In Arabic, there are no parallels to *is* and *are*, so the Arab learner of English is likely to say, “I Iraqi” or “What your name?” instead of “I am Iraqi” or “What is your name?”

**Writing**

Legible handwriting is usually a challenge for Arabic speakers learning English. In Arabic handwriting, it is not necessary for the letters to be written on the line, as English letters are. Arab learners therefore need a lot of practice in writing so that their letters are all the same size and written more or less on the line. Arabs also have difficulty with capitalization and punctuation, a predictable result of the lack of capitalization in the Arabic alphabet and the very different punctuation conventions.

**Education**

Educational opportunities for children in the three main asylum countries of Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria have recently improved. In September 2007, the number of Iraqi children in Syrian schools increased greatly after the Syrian Ministry of Education launched an effort to raise the number of Iraqi students to 100,000. In Jordan, thousands of young Iraqis enrolled in schools after the government decided to permit all Iraqi refugee children in the country to attend public schools, regardless of whether their parents have residence permits. In Lebanon, Iraqi children have the right to a free public education, but places are limited and Lebanese children have priority. In response, UNHCR, through its implementing partners, provides children with education grants and offers vocational training for those who need it. UNHCR also provides grants to university students.

**Educational Levels and Literacy**

Before 2003, education in Iraq was mandatory through Grade 6. As a result, most Iraqis adults have acquired at least basic reading and writing skills. The elderly, laborers, farmers, and vendors typically have fewer literacy skills.

**English Proficiency**

English proficiency among Iraqi refugees varies widely. A minority, usually the highly educated, speak English well. Others speak no English at all. Most have at least a basic proficiency.
Refugees from Syria

EDUCATION

In pre-conflict Syria, free public education for all became a government goal. Post-secondary education was highly subsidized in an effort to meet the country’s development needs.

Success was mixed. On the one hand, high rates of primary school attendance were achieved for both boys and girls. On the other hand, primary school attendance in rural areas frequently remained far below the national average, and in many places dropout rates were high at the secondary level, especially among girls. At the post-secondary level, government support greatly expanded access to higher education. But for many young Syrians the education they received did not meet labor market needs and as a result did not lead to stable employment—a failure that has fueled much of the youth discontent, according to some Syria experts.

A second major thrust of the government was universal literacy. In the early 1980s, an estimated 42% of the population could not read or write. By the early 2000s, Syria’s adult basic literacy rate had risen to over 90% for men and over 77% for women, according to the CIA World Factbook.

The conflict has taken a severe toll on the country’s school system. In 2013, UNICEF reported that many schools had been severely damaged or were being used by armed groups and displaced persons seeking shelter. School attendance rates had plummeted—down to 6% in some areas. The report cited insecurity, lack of teachers and resources, and damaged buildings as among the causes of the decline.

The People

Syria is a culturally diverse country with a pre-conflict population of 22 million people. Its population is relatively well educated, and quite young, with a median age of 22. It is estimated that almost 60% of Syrians lived in urban areas before the fighting caused massive displacement.

ETHNIC, LINGUISTIC, AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Arabs, including Muslims and Christians, make up nearly 90% of Syria’s population. Kurds, the second largest ethnic group, make up about 10% of the population. There are other, much smaller ethnic groups, such as the Armenians and the Turkomans. In Syria, ethnic identity and native tongue are closely tied.

All Syrians speak colloquial Arabic, and the great majority can also read and write in Modern Standard Arabic. The Syrian dialect is closest to Lebanese/Palestinian/Jordanian dialects (known as Levantine or Shami Arabic), sharing with them a very similar grammar and vocabulary. Kurds from Syria and Syriac Christians speak Arabic as native or near-native speakers and may know how to read and write it. In addition, Kurds may speak Kurdish, and Syriac Christians may speak Syriac. Armenians speak Armenian and are able to speak colloquial Arabic, but may not know how to read and write the language very well. The Turkomans speak a variation of Turkish; they also speak Arabic, but most do not read and write it. Many resettled Syrians will have a basic knowledge of English, but only a small number will be proficient in the language. Some will also speak some French, German, Russian, or another foreign language, depending on their schooling.

Syria has a history of religious tolerance and pluralism and is a much more secular society than many of its Muslim neighbors. Syria’s population is 90% Muslim (74% Sunni Muslim and 16% Alawite, Druze, and Ismaili). Christians, comprising 10% of the population, include Arab Christians (Greek Orthodox and Catholic), Syriac Christians, Aramaic-speaking Christians, and Armenian Orthodox and Catholics. There is also a small Kurdish-speaking Yazidi community whose religion has been linked to Zoroastrianism and ancient Mesopotamian religions. A small Arabic-speaking Jewish community left Syria in the 1990s.
Refugees from Syria

Parenting
Syrians parent closely, helping children with schoolwork and monitoring all activities as best they can. Children in pre-conflict Syria were free to run around and play together in their neighborhoods or villages, which were seen as very safe spaces. Traditionally, girls who have passed puberty are less likely to play outside and more likely to stay home or help with chores. If they do go out, they go with other girls or older siblings. Boys often monitor the behavior of their sisters, and older girls and sometimes boys help take care of younger siblings.

Syrians are very affectionate with children—even the children of strangers—and will hold them on their laps, tousle their heads, and kiss the cheeks of babies and children. Children are expected to shake hands when they meet new people and show respect for elders. Corporal punishment is common and accepted, and children will be disciplined with scolding and slaps to the face and hands (but not to the bottom).

As in other Arab societies, names in Syria reveal family relations. On a document, a child’s given name is his or her first name, and the second name (whether the child is male or female) is the father’s first name, while the last name is either the family name or the first name of the grandfather on the father’s side. A woman does not take her husband’s name in marriage. By Islamic law, any property or wealth that a man or woman brings to a marriage remains in that person’s name alone, and does not become joint property.

Gender Roles and Relations
Among the upper and more educated classes, women work outside the home, and can be found in a wide range of professions, including medicine (at all levels), office work, government service, education, laboratory work, computer science, and social work. Wealthier families support the education and employment goals of both girls and boys, and are likely to hire women from outside the family to help with household chores and childcare. In middle-class urban and rural households, fewer women work outside the home, particularly if there are young children, as mothers want and are expected to stay home and care for their children.

These women generally have lower educational levels and less access to professional or skilled employment. Women in rural areas help out with family work outside the house, in agriculture and subsistence labor, in addition to their household chores. Poor women work in menial, low-wage jobs; such work is generally seen as demeaning and evidence that their husbands and families cannot provide for them. Religiously conservative families (both Muslim and Christian) place more emphasis on women staying home with children as a duty.

More highly educated men and women (whether Muslim, Christian, or non-religious Druze) socialize with one another. Conservative Muslim women from less educated families do not socialize with men outside of their families. In greeting one another, members of the opposite sex are likely to shake hands, although devout Muslim women do not shake hands with unrelated men. Instead, they may nod and put their hands on their hearts.

Regardless of religion or social background, Syrian men and women are quite affectionate with members of the same gender. It is very natural for two Syrian men or women to hold hands, lean on and touch each other, and greet each other with kisses on the cheeks.

CUSTOMS

Family and Family Relations
Families are generally large and extended in Syria. They include not only parents and children but also grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Among family members, there are close bonds of love and support as well as responsibility and supervision. Family members feel a duty to take care of each other and make sure no one does anything that will negatively affect other family members. Family reputation is as important as individual freedom. Improper behavior by women or the failure of men to live up to the code of honesty and generosity can ruin the honor of the family. In general, Syrian society is patriarchal, and everyone is under the protection and authority of the oldest man. Women are believed to be in need of protection, particularly from the attention of unrelated men. Although older men are the family decision makers, women and younger men engage in a great deal of negotiation and non-confrontational actions to achieve their own goals.
EDUCATION

Educational levels will vary greatly among Syrian newcomers, but it is expected that most adults will arrive in their new communities with at least some elementary school education and a basic ability to read and write their own language. Many will also bring useful social media skills. Syrians under the age of 30 tend to be very technology savvy, using social media applications to communicate with friends and family, share information, and organize activities. Even older Syrians have a basic knowledge of email and Skype. These skills will help newcomers adjust to the widespread use of computers in Western countries, as well as facilitate community-building post-resettlement. Most children will arrive with little or no ability to speak, read, or write English or any other Western language. Some will have very limited previous schooling, and will need special support in subject matter areas as well as in the language of instruction.

PARENTING. Syrian parents often do not provide the same level of adult supervision that is the norm (and in some cases, the law) in many Western countries today. It is also customary in Syria to discipline children physically. Syrians will need to understand the laws and customs regarding neglect and abuse in their new communities.

SHOWING AFFECTION FOR OTHER PEOPLE’S CHILDREN. In Syria, it is considered completely normal for someone to walk up to a stranger’s child, pick her up, kiss her on the cheek and give her candy, and exclaim how cute she is. Syrians will need to know that in other countries this behavior may be considered extremely inappropriate.

COMMUNICATION STYLE. Syrians may communicate in a more intense way than is the norm in the resettlement country. They may stand closer to one another when they talk, speak in louder voices, and use more gestures.

Syrians exchange more niceties in conversations than may be common in resettlement countries. It is an everyday courtesy to inquire about another’s health, even when the people are not well acquainted.
Refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The Congolese Caseload

Basic Demographic Characteristics

**FAMILY SIZE AND COMPOSITION**

Congolese families range in size from 1 to 14 individuals. Just under half (48%) of the principal applicants (PAs) in the caseload are single, while 35% are married and 12% are widowed. The remaining 5% include those who are divorced, separated, in common-law marriages, or whose status is unknown. Single mother PAs make up approximately 20% of the entire Congolese caseload. The range in size of travel groups is from 1 to 17 when hard cross-referenced cases are taken into account. The average travel group size is 6 individuals.

**AGE AND GENDER**

The Congolese caseload is relatively young, with nearly 55% under the age of 18 and an additional 18% between the ages of 18–25. Only slightly more than a quarter of the caseload is over the age of 25, and only 3% of the population is 50 years of age or older, a stark indicator of the hardships this population has suffered. There are slightly more females (51%) than males (49%) in the caseload.

**UNACCOMPANIED AND SEPARATED REFUGEE MINORS**

The Congolese minor caseload includes unaccompanied and separated minors of all ages (below 18 years of age). Unaccompanied minors are referred alone, with other minors, or with a non-relative adult caretaker. Separated minors are referred with an adult relative caretaker. The unaccompanied and separated Congolese minors are spread throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, with the majority residing in Uganda and Rwanda.

Unaccompanied minors that are referred alone or with other minors are destined for the Unaccompanied Refugee Minor (URM) program. During RSC Africa interviews, staff explain to the minors that if approved for resettlement, they will enter the URM program upon arrival to the United States.

**EDUCATION, LITERACY, AND ENGLISH**

According to self-reported data collected during refugee processing, almost all of those individuals 18 years or older for whom data were obtained have had some formal education, with about one-third reporting some primary schooling and a little more than half reporting intermediate, secondary, or technical school education. The percentage of those with post-secondary education (pre-university, university, professional school, or graduate school) among those who reported their education level was similar to the DRC national average of 5%.

Nearly 20% of those aged 18 years or older report no ability to read and write, suggesting that some of those who attended school did not learn to read and write. It can be assumed from what is known about school attendance in the DRC that most of those who cannot read or write are female.

More than half (59%) of the Congolese in the caseload do not speak any English, and higher percentages do not read or write the language. However, a significant minority (29%) say they speak some English, with smaller percentages claiming some reading and writing knowledge of the language. The percentage of those who claim to speak English well is 11%. About the same percentage say they can read and write the language well.

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2 Most of the content in this section is based on information provided by Resettlement Support Center (RSC) Africa and the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, Office of Admissions, Refugee Processing Center.
Languages, Beliefs, and Customs

Languages

The Banyamulenge, Hutus, and Tutsis speak the same central Bantu language, Kinyarwanda, with the Banyamulenge speaking a dialect of Kinyarwanda called Kinyamulenge. Each of the other Congolese ethnic groups has its own native language. Many refugees are also bilingual in Kiswahili, considering it a second native language. Even those who are not native speakers of Kiswahili can usually communicate in it, and as a result Kiswahili functions as the language of communication between people who have no other language in common. French is the language of instruction at the secondary level in the DRC, and refugees who attended secondary schooling in the home country should have a good knowledge of that language. Even those with only a primary school education may have basic French proficiency. A small percentage of refugees know Lingala, a Bantu language widely spoken in western DRC. Refugees in Uganda, Rwanda, and Tanzania will also have been exposed to some English, either through school, popular media, or English-speaking local communities.

Family and Family Roles

Among the Congolese, the nuclear family is only one part of a much larger extended family that includes grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews, nieces, and even those not related by blood.

Traditionally, family roles are well defined. Men protect and provide for the family, while women take care of the children and perform household chores. In rural areas, men and women sometimes work together outside, with men doing the physically difficult chores (such as tilling the soil) and women performing the less strenuous tasks (such as planting seed). In rural areas, women are largely dependent on men and subservient to them, but urban women, particularly those with higher levels of education, tend to be more independent and have more say in family matters.

Although women are generally expected to stay home and take care of their husbands and children, events since the mid-1990s have changed traditional roles, turning women into wage earners and even family breadwinners. In recent years, men who have worked in the government have at times not been paid enough to support their families (and in some cases not been paid at all), and their wives have been forced to work outside the home, usually running small businesses, to bring in needed income.

Both boys and girls begin helping out at home at a young age, with boys working closely with their fathers and girls with their mothers. Taking care of younger brothers and sisters is generally a girl’s job. Girls in towns and cities are much more likely than those in rural areas to attend school, but they would still be expected to help with the housework.

Parenting

It is said in the DRC—and throughout Africa—that a child belongs to the parents when still in the mother’s womb, but after birth he or she belongs to the community. Village children spend most of their time outside the house and may roam freely, eating and even sleeping in neighbors’ houses. Children learn traditional values and norms not only from their parents but from other adults as well.

Children who misbehave are usually spanked or hit with a rope or a stick. They may also be denied permission to play with other children or refused food for a meal. Children may be disciplined not only by their parents but by their older brothers and sisters as well.

While parents will talk to their children about many things, one topic is rarely discussed: sexuality. After a girl has had her first menstruation period, an aunt may talk to her about sexuality and the risk of pregnancy. For a boy, it may be an elder who passes on information, but almost never the father.

Traditional Practices That May Conflict with U.S. Laws or Customs

Congolese women tend to marry at a much younger age than is common (or lawful) in the United States. As previously noted, the practice of bride price is common.

Congolese may often call a distant family member (or even someone not related by blood) their son, daughter, brother, or sister. This wider use of biological terms has created confusion both for overseas processing and for establishing legal relationships in the United States.

Congolese often discipline their children physically and will need to understand U.S. norms and laws regarding child abuse. Traditional notions of community responsibility for childcare may conflict with Americans’ parenting practices. Congolese children commonly care for younger children when parents are away, a practice that may cause problems in the United States.
PARENTING
Two parenting issues are notable regarding the Congolese: the physical disciplining of children and inadequate supervision. The tendency of Congolese to discipline their children physically can be heightened by fears that they are losing control of their children: As in other newcomer communities, Congolese children typically learn English and adjust to the new culture at a much faster rate than their parents. The natural tendency to use children for English language support can undermine traditional family roles and increase generational tensions. Early ESL for adults can help parents become less dependent on their children. Congolese parents may also benefit from discussion of strategies other than physical punishment for disciplining children. Alternatives to physical discipline such as time-outs and withdrawing privileges (for example, television and Internet) may be unfamiliar to refugee parents.

Inadequate supervision is an issue that is rooted both in culture and financial realities. What may be neglect in the United States — allowing children to roam about freely on their own — may be normal in the DRC. Children may also be left unsupervised at home or out in the community because both parents are working and cannot afford daycare.

HYGIENE
Personal hygiene, in particular the need to bathe regularly and use deodorant, was repeatedly mentioned as an issue that needs to be discussed with new arrivals, particularly those from rural areas. The topic was brought up several times, unsolicited, as a work issue. Refugees need to be advised of American standards for cleanliness, as well as related products for personal care.

SCHOOLING
The single biggest problem noted for Congolese children in school is a lack of previous education, as school systems typically make grade placements based on age, rather than knowledge level. Newcomer schools are particularly effective in helping students catch up in content-area knowledge while learning English in an academically and socially supportive environment. After-school tutoring also helps.

Socially, students were said to be adjusting reasonably well. Newly arrived children and their parents greatly benefit from an orientation to U.S. schools, focusing on American styles of learning and teaching, expected classroom behavior, extracurricular activities, and expectations of parental involvement. Agencies are also advised to make sure that children have appropriate clothing, shoes, and school supplies, to reduce the risk of bullying.
The following demographic information is based upon data regarding refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program pipeline as of January 28, 2014.

**Gender**

**Male 49%**

**Female 51%**

**Age**

- **Up to 4** 13%
- **5–17** 41%
- **18–59** 45%
- **60+** 2%

**Note:** total = 101% due to rounding

**Native Languages**

- **Kinyarwanda** 36%
- **Kiswahili** 32%
- **Kinyamulenge** 6%
- **Other** 18%
- **Unknown** 6%

**Note:** total = 98% due to rounding

**Ethnicity**

- **Tutsi** 33%
- **Banyamulenge** (also spelled Banyamulenge) 15%
- **Hutu** 11%
- **Bembe** (also spelled Bemba and Mbembe) 8%
- **Fulero** (also referred to as Bafulero and Fuliru) 4%
- **Luba** (also referred to as Lu-Lua, Baluba and Maluba) 4%
- **Mushi** (also referred to as Bashi) 2%
- **Hema** 1%
- **Other** 20%
- **Unknown** 1%

All groups making up 1% of the total are shown; groups under 1% are included in “Other.”

**Note:** total = 99% due to rounding

**Education Ages 5–17**

- **None** 0%
- **Kindergarten–Primary** 52%
- **Intermediate–Secondary** 7%
- **Unknown** 41%

**Note:** total = 101% due to rounding

**Education Ages 18 & Older**

- **None** 1%
- **Kindergarten–Primary** 17%
- **Intermediate–Secondary** 29%
- **Technical School** 3%
- **Post-Secondary** 5%
- **Unknown** 46%

**Note:** total = 101% due to rounding

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**At a Glance: Refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo**

**Cases:** 4335

**Individuals:** 13305

**Average Case Size:** 3

The average travel group size is 6.

**Countries of Asylum**

- Rwanda 32%
- Namibia 3%
- Uganda 25%
- Zimbabwe 3%
- Kenya 10%
- South Africa 3%
- Burundi 7%
- Malawi 2%
- Zambia 6%
- Mozambique 2%
- Tanzania 5%
- Other 2%

**Religion**

- Christian 96%
- Other 1%

**Languages**

Native languages include Kinyarwanda [36%], Kiswahili [32%] and Kinyamulenge [6%], with 18% of the caseload reporting another native language. Kiswahili often functions as the language of communication between people who have no other language in common. Some refugees may have basic or high-level French proficiency, while refugees in Uganda, Rwanda, and Tanzania will also have been exposed to some English. A small percentage of refugees know Lingala, widely spoken in western DRC.

**Literacy**

Approximately 65% of the adults self-report the ability to read well in one or more languages.

**Health**

As survivors of severe trauma, many will have special physical and psychological health needs.

**Exposure to Modern Amenities**

Some Congolese have lived in semi-urban and urban environments; the majority have not.

**Work Experience**

The caseload includes farmers and herders from rural areas, unskilled workers and professionals from urban areas, and small traders.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>English</strong></th>
<th><strong>kiSwahili (Swahili)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome</td>
<td>Karibu (sg) Karibuni (Kenya or Tanzania)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hello</td>
<td>Habari (inf)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are you?</td>
<td>Jambo (sg) Hamjambo (pl) Sijambo/Jambo sana (reply)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine</td>
<td>Habari? Hujambo? Habari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What's your name?</td>
<td>yako? Habari gani?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My name is ...</td>
<td>Mzuri / Sijambo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where are you from?</td>
<td>Jina lako ni nani?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm from ...</td>
<td>Jina langu ni ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleased to meet you</td>
<td>Unatoka wapi?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good morning</td>
<td>Natoka ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good afternoon</td>
<td>Nafurahi kukuona / Nimefurahi kikutana nawe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good evening</td>
<td>Habari ya asubuhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good night</td>
<td>Habari ya mchana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodbye</td>
<td>Habari ya jioni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good luck</td>
<td>Usiku mwema / Lala salama (sleep well)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheers/Good health!</td>
<td>Kwaheri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have a nice day</td>
<td>Kila la heri!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand</td>
<td>Maisha marefu! Afya! Vifijo!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't understand</td>
<td>Nakutakia siku njema!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please speak more slowly</td>
<td>Naelewa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please write it down for me</td>
<td>Sielewí</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you speak English?</td>
<td>Tafadhali sema polepole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you speak Swahili?</td>
<td>Waweza kuiandika?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, a little</td>
<td>Unazungumza kiingereza?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excuse me</td>
<td>Unazungumza kiSwahili?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't do that/Stop!</td>
<td>Ndiyo, kidogo tu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorry</td>
<td>Samahani nipishe (to get past) Samahani (to get attention or say sorry)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please</td>
<td>Usifanye hivyo!/Acha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you</td>
<td>Samahani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
<td>Tafadhali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No thanks</td>
<td>Asante / Asante sana (sg) / Asanteni (pl)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where's the toilet?</td>
<td>Asante kushukuru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get well soon</td>
<td>Apana asante</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you say ... in Swahili?</td>
<td>Choo kiko wapi?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help!</td>
<td>Uguu pole/Uta pona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unasema aje ... kwa Kiswahili?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Msaada!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kirundi Words and Phrases

Notes: rw makes an "gw" sound, c always sounds like "ch", and e's on the ends of words are pronounced.

Yes
No
Thank you
Sit down
Children
Come
Here
There
Go in
To try
What is your name?
My name is ____
Friend
How are you?
Good Morning
Good Afternoon
It is peace? (as a greeting)
Let's go!
To speak
To sing
to look
To be quiet
Me
You
this
that
Where?
I don't know
What is this?
What is this in Kirundi?

Ego
Oya
Urakoze (or murakoze, if you're thanking a crowd)
Icara hasi
Abana
Ingo
Ngaha
Hariya
Genda mu
Kugerageza
Witwa gute?
Njewe Nitwa
Mugenzi
Nisawa?/nibyiza
Mwaramutse
Mwiwiriwe
N'amahoro?
Tugende!
kuvuga (the command, "speak!" is vuga)
Turirimbe
Kuraba /kureba

Guhora
Njewe
wewe
iki
ico
hehe?
Sindabizi
iki n'igiki?
Iki n'iki mu Kirundi?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Arabic Transliteration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hello, I'm very pleased to meet you</td>
<td>marhaba ana saeed b-mareftak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you speak English?</td>
<td>hal tatakallam al ingliyziyya?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you understand English?</td>
<td>hal tafham al ingliyziyya?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>na-am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>laa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand</td>
<td>fahamt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not understand</td>
<td>Laa afham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please repeat</td>
<td>aiyd laww samaht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good morning</td>
<td>sabaah il- khair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good evening</td>
<td>masa il-khair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good night</td>
<td>tisbih ala khair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hello</td>
<td>marhaba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hello (response)</td>
<td>ahlana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodbye</td>
<td>ma-a is-salaama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are you?</td>
<td>kayf haalak? (male); kayf haalik? (female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine</td>
<td>bikhair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How old are you?</td>
<td>kam umrak?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My age is ...</td>
<td>umriy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who?</td>
<td>meen?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What?</td>
<td>matha?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why?</td>
<td>limaat?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When?</td>
<td>mataa?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where?</td>
<td>ayn?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where from?</td>
<td>min ayn?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where to?</td>
<td>ila- ayn?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How?</td>
<td>kayf?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much?</td>
<td>bikam?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleased to meet you</td>
<td>fursa saaiyda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My pleasure</td>
<td>b-kull suruwr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your name?</td>
<td>maa ismak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are you?</td>
<td>kayf haalak? (male) kayf haalik? (female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine, thanks. And you?</td>
<td>bi-khair, shukran, wa-anta?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where do you live?</td>
<td>ayn taskun?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's so good to see you</td>
<td>ana masruwr bi-ma-arafat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, thanks</td>
<td>laa, shukran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thanks for everything</td>
<td>shukran ala kull shay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good luck!</td>
<td>Hadha muwafqaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't feel well</td>
<td>ana ashaar bataab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm sick</td>
<td>ana mareed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Vietnamese Basics

Hello.

Xin chào. *(seen chow)*

Hi.

Chào. *(chow)*

Hello. *(on the phone)*

A-lô. *(AH-loh)*

How are you?

Khỏe không? *(kweh kohng?)*

Fine, thank you.

Khoẻ, cảm ơn. *(kweh, kuhm uhhn)*

What is your name? *(formal, to a man (forties or older, depending on the sensitivity of the person you address))*

Ông tên là gì? *(ohng ten la zee)*

What is your name? *(formal, to a woman (forties or older, depending on the sensitivity of the person you address))*

Bà tên là gì? *(ba ten la zee)*

What is your name? *(informal, to a male who is not quite middle-aged AND/OR is not significantly older than you)*

Anh tên là gì? *(ang ten la zee)*

Note: Anh is an umbrella term for any older male figure. It's literal meaning is "older brother".

What is your name? *(informal and also flattering, to a female who is not quite middle-aged AND not significantly older than you)*

Cô tên là gì? *(koh ten la zee)*

My name is ______ .

Tôi tên là ______ . *(Toy ten la _____ .)*

Please.

Làm ơn. *(lam uhhn)*

Thank you.

Cảm ơn. *(kuhm uhhn)*

You're welcome.

Không sao đâu. *(kohng sao doh)*

Yes *(affirmative)*

Vâng *(vuhg)*

Yes *(affirmative, respectful)*

Đà *(Northern : zah, Southern : yah)*

Yes *(correct)*

Đúng *(doong)*

No.
Không. (kohng)  
I'm sorry.

Xin lỗi. (seen loy)  
Goodbye

Tạm biệt (tam byet)  
I can't speak Vietnamese [well].

Tôi không biết nói tiếng Việt [giỏi lắm]. (thoy kohng byet noy tyeng vyet [zoy luhm])  
Do you speak English?

Biết nói tiếng Anh không? (byet noy tyeng ang kohng)

I don't understand.  
Tôi không hiểu. (toy kohng hee-oh)

Where is the toilet? (this phrase may be considered impolite)  
Cầu tiêu ở đâu? (koh tee-oh uh doh). More formal and common: Nhà vệ sinh/wc ở đâu?

Be back soon  
Sẽ quay lại sớm (se-ay kway lie-ay sohm)

now  
bây giờ (bay zuh...)

later  
lát nưa (laht? neu'uh?)

before  
trước (cheuck?)

morning  
sáng (sang?)

afternoon  
chiều (chew)

evening, night  
tối (toy), đêm (dehm)

[edit]

today  
hôm nay (home nai)

yesterday  
hôm qua (hohm quah)

tomorrow  
mai (my)

the day after tomorrow,  
ngày mốt (SV) (ngay moak)/ ngày kia

this week  
tuần nay (twuhn nai)

last week  
tuần qua (twuhn quah)
next week
tuần sau (twuhn sao)

The days of the week are simply numbered, with the exception of Sunday:

Sunday
chủ nhật (choo nyoht.)

Monday
thứ hai (teu? hai)

Tuesday
thứ ba (teu? ba)

Wednesday
thứ tư (teu? teu)

Thursday
thứ năm (teu? nuhm!)

Friday
thứ sáu (teu? sao?!)

Saturday
thứ bảy (teu? bai?)

Karen

How are you
What is your name
Come here
Are you sick
Do you understand
Good morning
Show me your paper
Did you eat your lunch
Do you need the restroom
Drink

Oh sue ah
na me de lah
hel la e
na oh dah su ba ah
nur nah bur ah
Wo lur re Gow lur gay
ha pwah ya nur lee
naur aw nur moo too dah au we
Nah eh do lay lar da ha law aw
aw tea
**Burmese**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Burmese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hello</td>
<td>mango la baw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are you</td>
<td>nay ko la</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your name</td>
<td>nay may bay low ca lay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s nice to meet you</td>
<td>do A yea da one ta ba day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Morning</td>
<td>manga la naw net kin baw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give me your work</td>
<td>Thin yet sigh u et go bay baw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Come here</td>
<td>De mah lah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toilet</td>
<td>ain dah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you need bathroom</td>
<td>ain dah dwah chin lah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>yeah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drink water</td>
<td>yea thout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you want to drink</td>
<td>Yea thout chin lawh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you want</td>
<td>Thn baw lo chin lay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have a headache</td>
<td>Gown ki lah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you understand</td>
<td>The baw pow lah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like this</td>
<td>De ha go ji lah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which one</td>
<td>Bey wa lay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Some Basic Somali Expressions**

- *Ma nabad baa?* Hello. [literally, "Is it peace?" standard greeting]
- *Waa nabad.* Hello. [literally, "It is peace." in response]
- *Subax wanaagsan.* Good morning.
- *Maalin wanaagsan.* Good day.
- *Galab wanaagsan.* Good afternoon.
- *Habeen wanaagsan.* Good evening.
- *Iska warran?* How are you? [literally, "Tell about yourself."]
- *Magacaa?* What is your name?
- *Yuusuf baa la i yiraahdaa.* My name is Joseph.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Approximate Pronunciation (capital letters indicate stress)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hello</td>
<td>Hola</td>
<td>OH-la</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good morning</td>
<td>Buenos días</td>
<td>BWAY-noss DEE-ahs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good afternoon (also used in the evening)</td>
<td>Buenas tardes</td>
<td>BWAY-nahs TAR-dayss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are you? (informal)</td>
<td>¿Cómo estás?</td>
<td>CO-moh eh-STAHS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are you? (formal)</td>
<td>¿Cómo está?</td>
<td>CO-moh eh-STAHS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine, thanks, and you?</td>
<td>Bien, gracias, ¿y usted?</td>
<td>BEE-in, GRA-seeahs, ee ooh-sted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sit down, please (informal, to a student)</td>
<td>Siéntate, por favor.</td>
<td>See-IN-tah-tay, poor fah-VOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your name?</td>
<td>¿Cómo te llamas? (informal, to a student)</td>
<td>CO-moh tay YA-mah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>¿Cómo se llama? (formal, to a parent)</td>
<td>CO-moh say YA-mah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>¿Cómo se llaman? (to a group)</td>
<td>CO-moh say YA-mahn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>¿Cómo se llama tu mamá/papá?</td>
<td>CO-moh say YA-mah too ma-ma/PAH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your mom’s/dad’s name?</td>
<td>¿Cómo se llama tu mamá/papá?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When?</td>
<td>¿Cuándo?</td>
<td>KWAN-do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where?</td>
<td>¿Dónde?</td>
<td>DON-day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why?</td>
<td>¿Por qué?</td>
<td>Poor kay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How?</td>
<td>¿Cómo?</td>
<td>COh-mo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What?</td>
<td>¿Qué/¿Mande? ¿Cómo? (last two are more polite)</td>
<td>Kay/MAHN-day?CO-mo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May I use the restroom?</td>
<td>¿Puedo ir al baño?</td>
<td>PWAY-doh ear all BAH-nyo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you need to use the restroom?</td>
<td>¿Necesitas ir al baño?</td>
<td>Neh-say-SEE-tahs ear all BAH-nyo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your phone number?</td>
<td>¿Cuál es tu número de teléfono?</td>
<td>Kwahl ehs to NEW-meh-row day te-LE-pho-no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where are you from?</td>
<td>¿De dónde eres?</td>
<td>Day DON-day air-ehs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you understand?</td>
<td>¿Comprendes?</td>
<td>Cohm-pren-days?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Come here.</td>
<td>Ven aquí.</td>
<td>Behn ah-KEY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How old are you?</td>
<td>¿Cuántos años tienes?</td>
<td>KWAN-tohs AH-nyoss TEE-in-ehs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you speak English?</td>
<td>¿Hablas inglés?</td>
<td>AH-blahs EEN-glays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t speak Spanish.</td>
<td>No hablo español.</td>
<td>No AH-blow ehs-pan-NYOL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All eyes up front.</td>
<td>¡Todos mirándome!</td>
<td>TOE-dos me-RAHN-doe-may</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Useful Links

www.brycs.org
www.unhcr.org
www.culturalorientation.net

Additional information about resources available within the district can also be found at
http://www.kcpublicschools.org/Page/941

Information about education in Central America:

http://www.classbase.com/countries/El-Salvador/Education-System
http://www.everyculture.com/Cr-Ga/El-Salvador.html

http://thisishonduras.com/People_and_Culture.htm
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Honduras
http://www.classbase.com/countries/Honduras/Education-System

http://www.everyculture.com/Ge-It/Guatemala.html
http://www.classbase.com/countries/Guatemala/Education-System