

Refugees and Immigrants





19.7%
of DV homicide
victims
in Washington
were
foreign
born



Nearly
55,000
of Bellevue
residents
speak a
language
other than
English at
home

Racial & ethnic
discrimination noted as
a community concern


 **17%**
in
2015

 **25%**
in
2019



10% of Bellevue
households have
limited English
proficiency




Nearly **40%** of
Bellevue's population
is foreign-born

Refugees and Immigrants

Key Findings

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

Population Overview

The City of Bellevue's population continues to grow and diversify. Nearly 40% of Bellevue's population is foreign-born, up from only 13% in 1990. This is higher than Seattle (22%), King County (28%), Washington state (13%), and the U.S. as a whole (13%).¹ The term "foreign-born" includes immigrants (documented and undocumented) and refugees. Immigrants are people who petitioned to enter the U.S. to become lawful permanent residents. By comparison, refugees are those who are forced to leave the country of their nationality due to persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution, and asylees are foreign nationals currently residing in the U.S. awaiting refugee designation.

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

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

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

- Language Barriers
- Fear and Discrimination

Goal 1: Food to Eat and Roof Overhead

- In 2018, 42% of the 3,858 Bellevue residents served in Hopelink's food programs were immigrants or refugees. In addition, 1,088 individuals or 28% of the Bellevue residents who accessed food services reported Limited English Proficiency (LEP). Hopelink continues to have Spanish (32%) and Russian (34%) as the main languages spoken among Bellevue LEP clients accessing Food services. Farsi (5%), Chinese (6%) and Vietnamese (4%) are the next most common languages spoken among clients that report limited English proficiency.²
- This percentage of immigrants and refugees, and limited English proficiency has not significantly changed in the last 5 years and Hopelink continues to support culturally appropriate services. Bellevue continues to have a greater percentage of Immigrant/

Refugee and LEP clients than the overall Hopelink food program (42% vs. 33% immigrants or refugees; 28% vs. 21% LEP).³

- More than half of the roughly 3,500 Bellevue residents that Renewal Food Bank served in 2019 identify as immigrants or refugees.⁴
- Ninety percent of Immigrants/Refugees served by all Hopelink programs at the Bellevue Service Center reported being stably housed, 6% report being homeless or at-risk, 4% is unknown. In comparison, 79% of Non-Immigrant/Refugees served at the Bellevue Center reported being stably housed, 15% reported being homeless or at risk, 6% unknown.⁵
- 94% of Immigrants/Refugees whom accessed food bank at the Bellevue Service Center reported being stably housed, 4% reported begin homeless or at-risk, 2% is unknown. In comparison, 78% of Non-Immigrant/Refugees whom accessed food bank at the Bellevue Service Center report being stable housed, 16% report being homeless or at-risk, 6% unknown.⁶

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

- Eighty-five percent of parents in English-speaking household report having someone they could turn to for emotional support. Households who is primary language was not English reported a lower rate of having someone they could turn to for emotional support with 51% for Chinese speaking households, 47% for Russian speaking household, 55% for Somali speaking households, and 35% for Spanish speaking households.⁷
- With the increasing and complex needs of Bellevue residents, Mini City Hall (MCH) staff report a trend in spending more time with each customer as more agencies and organizations lack capacity to respond especially to those with limited English and cultural barrier issues. Currently, volunteer interpreters and city staff offer in-person assistance in Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese), Korean, Spanish, Russian, Ukrainian, Farsi, Hindi, Bengali and Urdu. City staff also have access to the dual-receiver language line, which provides an over-the-phone interpreter in more than 100 languages at Mini City Hall and throughout the city at community centers.⁸
- Many families from diverse cultures prefer their children be cared for by families, friends, or neighbors rather than in centers. Child Care Resources (CCR) supports a network of Kaleidoscope Play and Learn groups, drop-in play groups specifically designed to provide culturally appropriate support to caregivers and parents. In the 2017/2018 fiscal year, Kaleidoscope Play and Learn groups reached more than 6,000 King County children and their informal caregivers; over half of the participants spoke a language other than English at home.⁹ There are 4 such groups in Bellevue: 2 are facilitated in English, 1 is bilingual Spanish-English, and 1 is bilingual Mandarin-English.¹⁰
- Providers share that there is a need for more diverse staff who are not only bilingual but also culturally competent. However, there are recruitment challenges, in part because some positions are legally mandated to have a specific education level and the education obtained by many immigrants from their country of origin is not recognized in the U.S.¹¹

Goal 3: A Safe Haven from All Forms of Violence

- King County Sexual Assault Resource Coalition (KCSARC) reports increased demand from Spanish speaking refugees and immigrants over the past few years.¹²
- In 2011 (the most recent date for which data are available), 19.7% of domestic violence homicide victims in Washington State were born outside the U.S.; nearly one-third of these

victims were from Latin American and the Caribbean, and another quarter were from Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands.¹³

- In 2018, 38 Bellevue residents completed Refugee Women’s Alliance 8-week domestic violence support group.¹⁴
- Consejo Counseling Services’ Domestic Violence Advocacy Program provides counseling, outreach, and advocacy services to Latinx survivors of domestic violence; most of their clients are immigrants from Latin America who speak Spanish.¹⁵ Since 2017, Consejo has provided 54 Bellevue residents with domestic violence services.¹⁶

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

- Not being able to pay for dental bills (33%), doctoral bills (25%), or not being able afford or access medical insurance (24%) were substantial issues among consumer survey respondents, the vast majority of which were immigrants or refugees.¹⁷
- Asian Counseling and Referral Services (ACRS) reports an increasing need for mental health services among Chinese and Latinx school-aged youth. In response, the agency has hired more counselors to address this increasing need.¹⁸
- HealthPoint is a community-based, community-supported, and community-governed network of nonprofit health centers. HealthPoint has provided health services to nearly 60% of King County’s refugee population. In 2017, 31% of all HealthPoint patients (not just refugees), required an interpreter.¹⁹
- For more information about the intersection between health care and the immigrant and refugee population, please see the section within this chapter titled, “Language Barriers.”

“Immigrants that are documented and younger than 65 are having challenges finding employment. They have degrees and high-paying jobs in another country but are willing to take any job. They are told they are over qualified, and they often feel like they need to take qualifications off their résumé to get hired.”

~Staff, Bellevue Mini City Hall

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

- Although the lack of living-wage jobs was a consistent theme across community conversations, immigrant populations have a unique experience: “Immigrants that are documented and younger than 65 are having challenges finding employment. They have degrees and high-paying jobs in another country but are willing to take any job. They are told they are over qualified, and they often feel like they need to take qualifications off their résumé to get hired.”²⁰
- Staff at Bellevue College (BC) report that a major challenge for immigrant students is finding work with limited English so they can continue to pay for their college costs.²¹
- BC’s Preparing for Work program helps meet the refugee/immigrant community’s need for job and English skills training. Three classes are offered: Preparing for Work, On the Job Communication and Working in English. BC served 1,319 immigrant and refugee students in

the 2016/2017 fiscal year and approximately 1,800 in 2018/2019. They turn away about 60-100 people per quarter and refer them to either Hopelink or Jubilee REACH.²²

- In the first half of 2019, Jewish Family Services provided 58 Bellevue residents with employment services such as resume creation, job coaching, and skills training.²³
- For more information about the intersection between employment and the immigrant and refugee population, please see the section within this chapter titled, “Language Barriers.”

Additional Items for Consideration

Language Barriers

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

Top Languages Spoken at Home Other than English in Bellevue and Ability to Speak English, 2017

Language	Languages spoken by Bellevue residents		Bellevue Residents who report speaking English less than “very well”	
	Estimate	Percent of Pop 5 and Over	Estimate	Percent speaking specific language
Chinese (incl. Mandarin, Cantonese)	17,010	12%	8,217	6%
Other Indo-European languages	13,235	10%	2,656	2%
Other Asian and Pacific Island languages	9,356	7%	2,358	2%
Spanish	8,626	6%	3,189	2%
Korean	2,830	2%	1,458	1%
Russian, Polish, or other Slavic languages	2,645	2%	975	1%
Vietnamese	1,308	1%	604	0%
Other and unspecified languages	1,069	1%	150	0%
Tagalog (incl. Filipino)	841	1%	95	0%
German or other West Germanic languages	682	0%	0	0%
French, Haitian, or Cajun	578	0%	155	0%
Arabic	421	0%	68	0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey²⁴

- In the phone/online survey, 21% of respondents said that people not speaking or understanding English well enough to function in society was a moderate or major problem.²⁵
- Participants from the Asian & Pacific Islander Police Advisory Group report challenges finding and accessing services due to language barriers: “Information often isn’t available in languages other than English, and interpretation is usually not available.”²⁶ This theme was echoed by participants in the Bellevue Diversity Advisory Network (BDAN).²⁷
- Limited English proficient individuals are at greater risk for experiencing medically adverse events (e.g., surgical infections, line infections) and medical errors due to language barriers.²⁸ ICHS reports an increase in patients who are limited English proficient, from 1804 patients (38%) in 2016 to 2391 patients (41%) in 2018.²⁹
- Language barriers and the lack of translated transit information available as written materials, signage, and announcements are significant obstacles among immigrant and refugee communities.³⁰
- Public Health Seattle-King County (PHSCK) clinics provided language interpretation for 29,521 visits in 2016. This is down from 39,019 visits in 2014. At the Eastgate Public Health Clinic, where many Bellevue residents go for services, 7,624 interpreted visits were provided in 2016. The largest percentage of interpreted visits were in Spanish (94%).³¹
- Approximately 10% of Bellevue households and 6% of King County households had LEP in 2017. About 30% of these Bellevue households speak Spanish and 24% speak an Asian or Pacific Island language.³²
- Regardless of language proficiency, nearly 55,000 Bellevue households speak a language other than English at home; 55% speak an Asian and Pacific Island language, 29% an Indo-European language, and 14% Spanish.³³ In the Consumer Survey, approximately 90% of respondents spoke a language other than English at home. The most commonly spoken languages were Mandarin and Vietnamese.³⁴
- Hopelink’s English for Work (EFW) program teaches English language learners how to search for jobs and speak about their skills and experience. In 2018, nearly 300 clients were served. Of those who completed the course, 74 percent had significant gains in their English language skills, and 17 percent improved their employment status. Of all employed students who completed the course, their average wage when exiting the course was \$15.30 per hour.³⁵
- Jubilee REACH, a family center in the Lake Hills neighborhood, offers free ESL classes at the beginner, intermediate, and advanced level. In 2019, more than 200 students from 23 countries attended ESL classes. The organization also offers Talk Time classes, which provide opportunities to practice conversational English on a wide range of topics.³⁶

“Where can someone call to get information in their primary language? Written communication needs to be offered in several languages for community posting and mailings; doctor’s offices need to provide interpreters for assessment and appointments, and we need more ESL classes in the community.

~Participant, Eastside Neighbors Network Community Conversation

Fear and Discrimination

A substantial amount of fear among immigrants and refugees stems from the federal government's proposed administrative redefinition of "public charge." An individual seeking admission or permanent residency in the U.S. is deemed inadmissible if they are likely to become a "public charge," meaning they will become primarily dependent on the government for support. Use of these programs, though legal, could be used against immigrants in their attempts to gain permanent residency status.

- More than half of provider survey respondents reported increased fear related to immigration status was a substantial barrier to clients accessing services.
- Across all community conversations, a major theme was that many refugees and immigrants are refusing services and disengaging from other public or private systems.³⁷ The most commonly cited reason for doing so was the perception that accessing resources is not safe for them or their family due to their citizenship status. MCH saw many people immigrants (especially those who are undocumented) withdraw their families from housing, medical care and nutrition programs; staff say clients are being "forced to choose between having their basic human services needs met or keeping their immigration status."³⁸
- Staff at ICHS also report challenges "Across all sites, we have found that immigrants and refugees have become increasingly reluctant to access services to which they are entitled because of the hostility toward immigrants expressed by the current presidential administration and its increasingly aggressive actions toward immigrants. This has created great reluctance among immigrants to enroll in needed federal programs, endangering their health and economic well-being."³⁹
- Staff from MCH share that increased ICE activities in the area have further fueled fear and, coupled with increasing reports of verbal abuse and intimidation, have led many immigrants to "choose not to engage and live in isolation."⁴⁰
- Eastside Legal Assistance Program (ELAP) also reports increasing need of legal support regarding immigration. They are receiving calls from clients who are fearful of what will happen with DACA and what options they might have for citizenship. In 2018, they held trainings for service providers on helping parents complete a Safety Plan for their children. They also held community forums on general immigration issues and on the Public Charge issue.
- Although racial and ethnic discrimination did not rise to the level of a top-tier community or household problem in this year's survey, both remain a concern. Twenty-five percent of respondents rated it as a moderate or major community problem, and 9% of households said it was a moderate or major problem.

"Immigrants (documented and undocumented) are skeptical about apply[ing] for any services – they are concerned about ICE getting their information and/or affecting future citizenship. Many are choosing not to enroll. Fear is for both public and private agencies; they think that if they get services they or their kids will have to pay back, and there are rumors certain nonprofits are turning their information into ICE."

~Key Informant Interview,
Bellevue School District

Endnotes

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