

# LIRS/IPL Rapid Response Survey: Baseline Results

*An internal report prepared for Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service*

Immigration Policy Lab

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## Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Survey Description</b>	<b>2</b>
Purpose . . . . .	2
Survey Content . . . . .	2
Survey Process . . . . .	2
Sample and Response Rates . . . . .	3
Follow-up Surveys on WhatsApp and SMS . . . . .	5
<b>Summary of Results</b>	<b>5</b>
Refugee Integration (IPL-12) . . . . .	7
Employment and Benefits . . . . .	8
Food Security . . . . .	9
Health and Medical Care . . . . .	10
Housing Situation . . . . .	12
Children and Education . . . . .	13
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>14</b>

## Executive Summary

In the context of the simultaneous economic and public health crises in the United States, Lutheran and Immigration Refugee Service (LIRS) and Immigration Policy Lab (IPL) worked together to implement a Rapid Response Survey of over 1,000 refugees and recipients of Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs) resettled by LIRS between 2010-2020.<sup>1</sup> The data collected from this survey

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<sup>1</sup>If you have any questions or feedback regarding this report that you would like to communicate to the IPL team, please contact Laura Wagner ([lwagner@lirs.org](mailto:lwagner@lirs.org)).

provide an important snapshot of how refugees are faring during this challenging time.

The survey reveals that refugees are overwhelmingly part of the frontline workforce that continues to go to an office or worksite, rather than work remotely, and over 20% report being unemployed. Importantly, over 80% of respondents surveyed report having received stimulus checks demonstrating that this important economic support for many families is indeed also reaching refugees. Refugee households will continue to face challenges in coming months, however. Over 40% lack confidence that they will be able to afford the food they need in the coming weeks and over 30% have reported delaying medical care due to the pandemic.

For children in refugee families, the majority have experienced the transition from in-person to remote learning. And while most refugee households have internet access for educational purposes, over a third of households have inconsistent internet availability.

While this survey also provides an important snapshot of refugees' current situation, 62% provided a WhatsApp number and agreed to participate in follow-up surveys over the next 12 months. These monthly surveys conducted over WhatsApp will provide useful data to understand how and if the experience of refugees changes in 2021.

Lastly, this survey is also the first time a comprehensive and multi-dimensional measure of immigrant integration (IPL-12) has been collected across a large sample of LIRS' clients. Given this successful implementation, LIRS can continue to collect integration data in the future to understand how patterns of integration shift over time and identify which programs/policies are most effective in improving integration.

## **Survey Description**

### **Purpose**

The LIRS/IPL Rapid Response Survey was designed to meet a wide range of goals. First, the survey offers an opportunity to test a new data sharing approach that allows refugee resettlement agencies and researchers to collaborate in conducting surveys and data analysis on refugee populations in the United States. Second, the survey includes a multi-dimensional measure of integration (IPL-12) to generate a more detailed understanding of how integration varies across LIRS' client population. Third, given the current global pandemic and economic recession, the survey provides important information about how refugees are faring and coping. Lastly, the survey collects WhatsApp contact information of refugees to test a new low-cost automated survey technology developed by IPL. This will allow IPL to re-contact baseline survey respondents over time and could enable LIRS to run large-scale surveys with future refugee arrivals.

### **Survey Content**

The survey covers a wide range of topics that provide a holistic picture of refugee integration and well-being, including COVID-related questions specific to their current health, housing, education, food security, and employment situations. Due to data sharing limitations, the survey includes a range of previously asked demographic questions to recollect information about refugees'

experience in the US (resettlement location, resettlement date, US ties, co-sponsorship). The survey includes the IPL Integration Index (IPL-12), which measures economic, navigational, social, political, linguistic and psychological integration.

## **Survey Process**

IPL and LIRS began by collaborating on the development of a survey questionnaire. Once finalized, IPL contracted with a professional firm to translate the survey into the 15 languages spoken by a majority of LIRS clients and subsequently had each translation reviewed by a third party to ensure accuracy of the translations. LIRS and IPL then deployed a new data sharing approach to protect client information, while facilitating the development of a survey sample and deployment of the survey. To construct the list of LIRS clients for the survey sample, LIRS extracted contact information of principal applicants who still have active travel loans. Each client was assigned a unique 'Study ID' which allowed the LIRS and IPL teams to share non-WRAPS information across data systems. Using the online survey platform Qualtrics, IPL assigned each client a unique survey link associated with their 'Study ID'. LIRS staff and interpreters contracted through Compass (an interpretation service provided by The Center, an LIRS affiliate in Utica, New York) then piloted the survey using three modes of recruitment: email, text message (SMS), and phone calls.

Following a successful small-scale pilot of 220 clients, LIRS staff sent survey invitations to the full list of clients in the sample. This included two emails to all clients with an email address followed by up to three contact attempts via SMS using a peer-to-peer messaging platform (CallHub). Using this platform, LIRS staff were able to send text messages, over 1,000/hr, which included the unique link to complete the online survey. For 84% of clients, the outreach materials and survey were available in a language that they could speak. Following these attempts to recruit participants via email and text message, IPL and LIRS created a random sample of the non-responders to receive follow-up phone calls. Because of resource constraints, only 1690 respondents in the sample were selected to receive a phone call. Between one and six call attempts were made to each client by either LIRS staff or interpreters from Compass. Throughout the survey process, there was regular communication between LIRS and IPL staff, including daily updates on survey completion through SmartSheets, that allowed the teams to efficiently focus on reaching out to those clients who had yet to respond to the survey. To test a sustainable and low-cost survey approach, no incentives were provided to respondents.

The pilot wave of the survey was conducted between July, 8 2020 and August 11, 2020. The full survey was conducted from August 5, 2020 to September 4, 2020.

## **Sample and Response Rates**

The sample used for this survey included 9693 refugees and SIVS who arrived between 2010-2020. 91% of the sample had contact information available (see Table 1). Our true response rate was 12%. Conditional on having contact information available, we achieved a response rate of 13%. The response rate among those selected to receive a phone call was 18%. For those arriving in the past five years (2016-2020), the response rate was 13%. For comparison, the Annual Survey of

Refugees, which provides a financial incentive to complete a survey, had a 25% response rate in 2017, but only included arrivals within the past five years (FY2012 - FY2016). The map below shows the states where respondents are currently living.

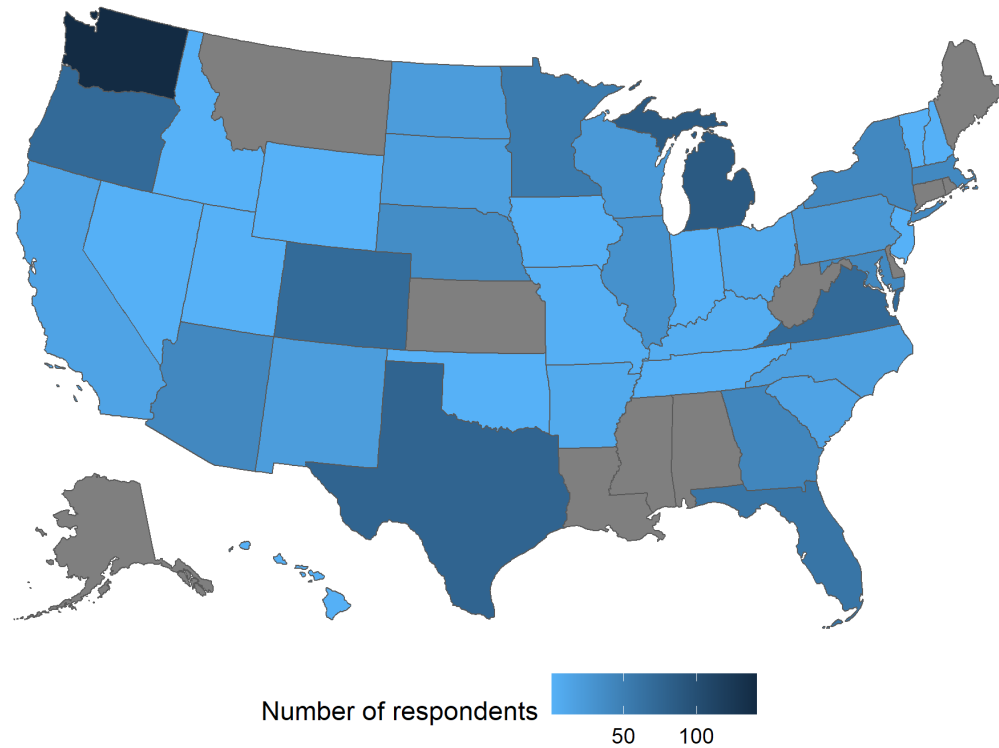


Figure 1: Number of respondents from each state.

Table 1: Response Rate

	N	%
<b>Total Sample (2010 - 2020 arrivals)</b>	<b>9693</b>	
<b>Total w/contact information (email or phone)</b>	<b>8814</b>	<b>91%</b>
Consented	1676	19%
Completed	1159	13%
<b>Total completed</b>	<b>1159</b>	<b>12%</b>
Online	856	74%
Phone	303	26%
<b>Total receiving phone calls</b>	<b>1690</b>	<b>17%</b>
Consented	348	21%
Completed	303	18%

## Follow-up Surveys on WhatsApp and SMS

One of the goals of the baseline survey was to collect contact information (WhatsApp numbers) to conduct ongoing monthly surveys over the next 12 months. These monthly surveys will help LIRS understand how refugees are recovering from the economic and health crises. IPL built a customized automated survey tool using Twilio, a digital communications platform. This tool will help LIRS understand how refugees are doing during the economic and health crises over time. 715 respondents completed the survey and provided WhatsApp numbers and consented to receive messages about a future survey. An additional 236 respondents completed the survey and provided cell phone numbers and consented to receive text messages for future surveys as well.<sup>2</sup> IPL conducted the first wave of WhatsApp/SMS surveys in September and will provide LIRS with a separate monthly memo summarizing results from those automated surveys. In the future, LIRS staff will have access to incoming messages and therefore can provide client support and assistance if clients communicate about topics or issues outside the scope of the survey.

## Summary of Results

Below, we provide a summary of results from the baseline survey. Table 2 below provides basic descriptive statistics for those clients that completed the baseline survey. Table 3 provides an additional comparison of the responders to the non-responders, using summary data provided by LIRS for the non-responding principal applicants. In Table 3, the smaller the difference is between the two columns, the more similar the respondents are to the clients who did not complete a survey. For example, the proportion of respondents who are female is very similar to the proportion of females that did not respond to the survey. In contrast, refugees from Ukraine are over-represented in the sample and refugees from Bhutan are under-represented.

Overall, the respondents are very similar to the non-respondents across most background char-

<sup>2</sup>Approximately 100 respondents provided consent to be re-contacted, but did not finish the baseline survey. IPL plans to include them in the follow-up surveys.

Table 2: Summary Characteristics

Characteristic	Value
Average Age	38.9
Average Household Size	4.9
Average Children in Household	2.3
Percent Female	34%
Percent of Respondents Married	71.9%
Percent Homeowners	14.8%
Percent Has Child in Household	80.1%
Average Years in US	3.4
Percent Citizen (total sample)	22.8%
Percent Citizen (out of those in the US for at least three years)	50.4%
Average IPL12 Score	0.47
Percent Employed in January	60.7%
Percent Employed in Last 4 Weeks	54.8%
Percent Nervous Most or All of the Time	24.2%
Average Income	\$26880
Percent Received CARES Stimulus	82.2%

acteristics. Because of that, we report non-weighted results in this report.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, we include an Appendix that summarizes various outcomes across age, gender, country of birth, years in the United States, and level of education.

<sup>3</sup>We include a summary table in the Appendix that shows a comparison of the non-weighted results to weighted results, and there is little change in the results.

Table 3: Respondent and Non-respondent Description

Characteristic	Respondents	Non-respondents
Percent from Afghanistan	14%	16%
Percent from Bhutan	2%	5%
Percent from Burma	7%	9%
Percent from the DRC	14%	16%
Percent from Iraq	21%	19%
Percent from Somalia	3%	4%
Percent from Syria	7%	4%
Percent from Ukraine	13%	7%
Percent Female	34%	36%
Percent Married at Arrival	36%	37%
Average Case Size	4	4.1
Average Case Size	4	4.1

## Refugee Integration (IPL-12)

To our knowledge, this is the first time that a resettlement agency has been able to assess multi-dimensional integration across a large sample of refugees. The IPL-12 provides an integration score, which is an index of six dimensions of integration (economic, linguistic, social, psychological, political and navigational). This measure combines and normalizes the six dimensions on a scale from 0 to 1, with 1 indicating the highest level of integration. As this is the first time LIRS has measured integration using the IPL-12, we do not have data to make a direct comparison or observe how integration may have changed over time. However, some observations are worth noting:

- Our expectation is that integration should be correlated with higher-levels of education and time spent in the United States. Figures 2 and 3 show that this expectation holds true among LIRS' clients, providing evidence of construct validity (i.e., that among refugees we are able to measure integration).
- While we do not have a perfect comparison group, prior research has found that a sample of immigrants, some of whom were refugees, participating in ESL classes in New York had an average integration score of .55. The average integration score of LIRS' clients is 0.47.
- Average integration for female respondents is 0.43 as compared to 0.49 for male respondents.

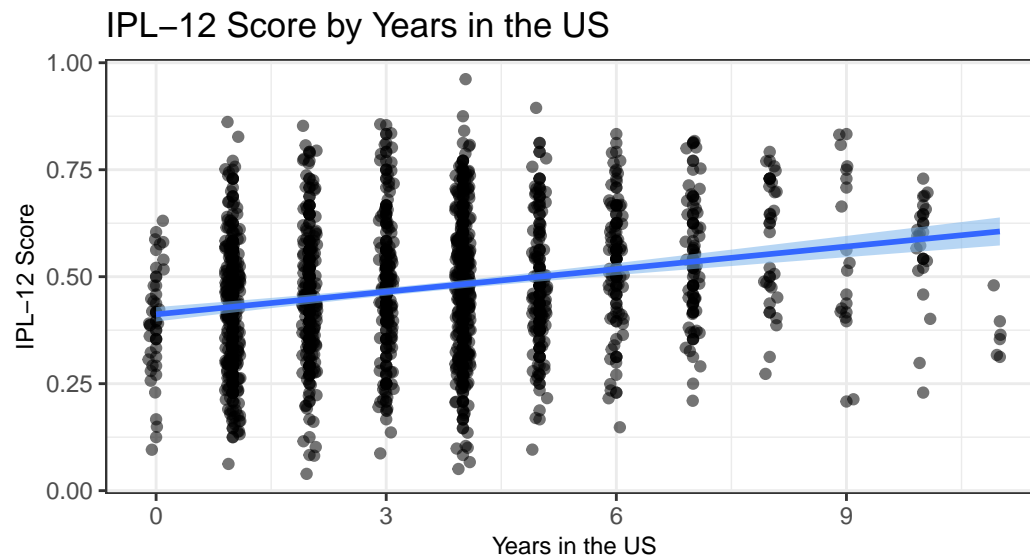


Figure 2: IPL-12 By Years in the US

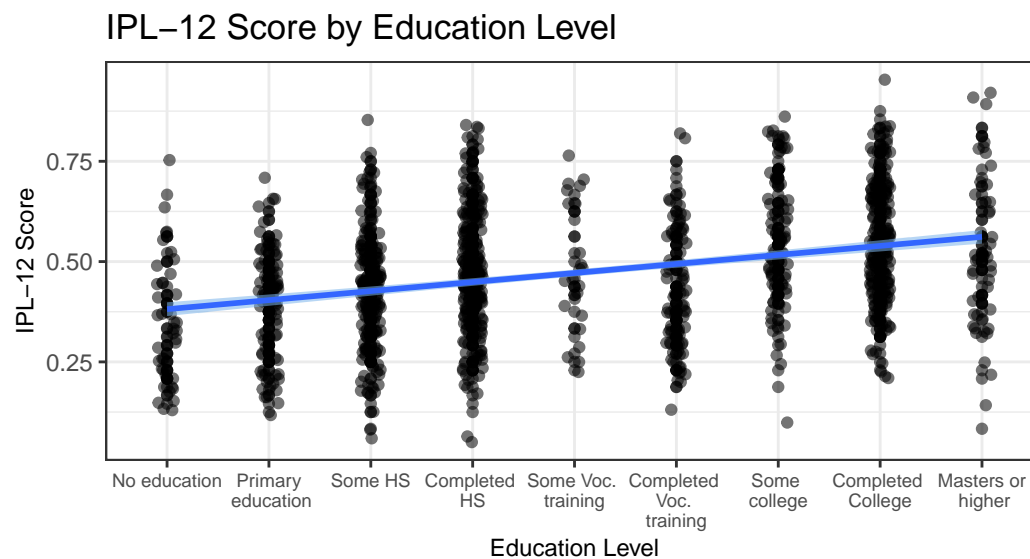


Figure 3: IPL-12 By Education Level

## Employment and Benefits

- Over half all respondents (55%) report being employed at the time of the survey as compared to 61% reporting being employed in January.<sup>4</sup> (Figure 4)
- At the time of the survey 38% of female respondents report being employed, while 64% of men report being employed.

<sup>4</sup>Note that the unemployment rate for the United States is usually calculated for only people working or actively seeking a job. This measure of employment is more comparable to the employment rate.



- 25% of respondents report losing hours of work between January and at the time of the survey.
- The vast majority of employed respondents (87%) report still going to work (office, store or work site) and only 8% report working from home. For comparison, the recent Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey<sup>5</sup> indicates that nationally 37% of adults live in a household where at least one adult has substituted some or all of their typical in-person work for telework because of the coronavirus pandemic.
- Among those that report being unemployed (n=261), 47% indicate they received unemployment benefits in the past 4 weeks. The median amount of employment benefits received over the last four weeks was \$1538.
- 82% report having received a CARES stimulus check or COVID-19 related government payment. In July 2020, according to the Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey, 85% of households reported receiving or expecting to receive a stimulus payment.

Work status at the time of the survey

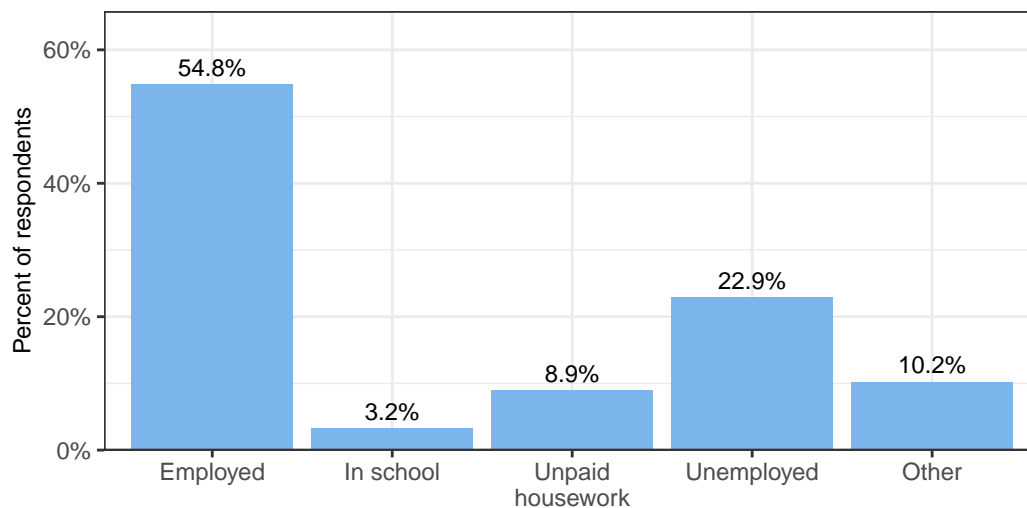


Figure 4: Work Status

## Food Security

- 18% of respondents report not having enough food to eat in the last four weeks. The recent Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey indicates that nationally 10% of adults were in households where there was either sometimes or often not enough to eat in the last 7 days. (Figure 5)
- 50% reported being 'not at all confident' or 'somewhat confident' that their household would be able to afford the kinds of food they need in the next four weeks.

<sup>5</sup>The [Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey](#) is a national survey conducted by the Census Bureau to collect up-to-date data on how COVID-19 is affecting households in the United States. This report uses it as a comparison to how respondents in the LIRS/IPL survey compare to the general United States population. Pulse data are from surveys completed between August 19 to August 31, 2020. Pulse data regarding stimulus payments are from surveys completed between July 16 to July 21, 2020.

- As shown in the map below, the level of food insecurity (as measured by reporting that a household often or sometimes did not have enough food in the last four weeks) varies across states, with some states having close to twice the level of food insecurity reported as others.

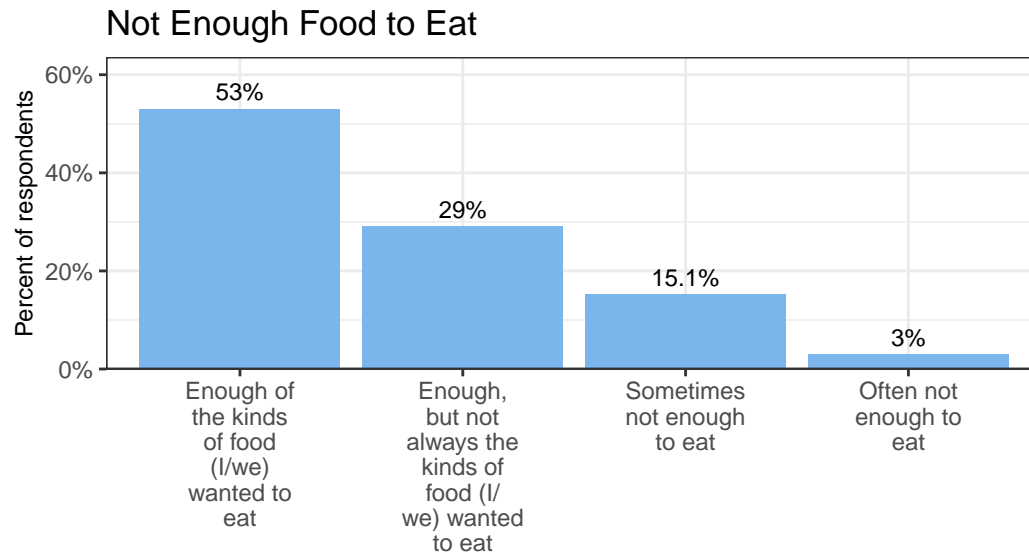


Figure 5: Not Having Enough Food to Eat

## Health and Medical Care

- 24% of respondents report feeling nervous ‘most’ or ‘all of the time’. (Figure 7)
- 28% of respondents report delaying medical care due to COVID-19 in the past 4 weeks. During a similar time frame, according to the Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey, 35% of adults nationally reported having delayed medical care due to the coronavirus pandemic.

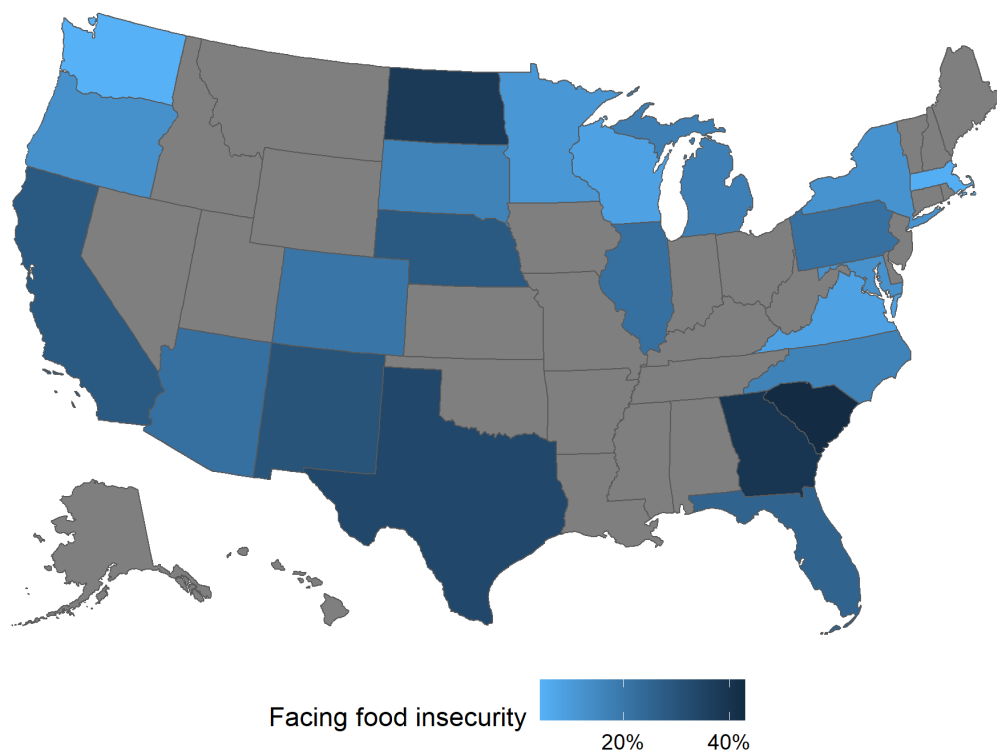


Figure 6: Percent of households facing food insecurity.

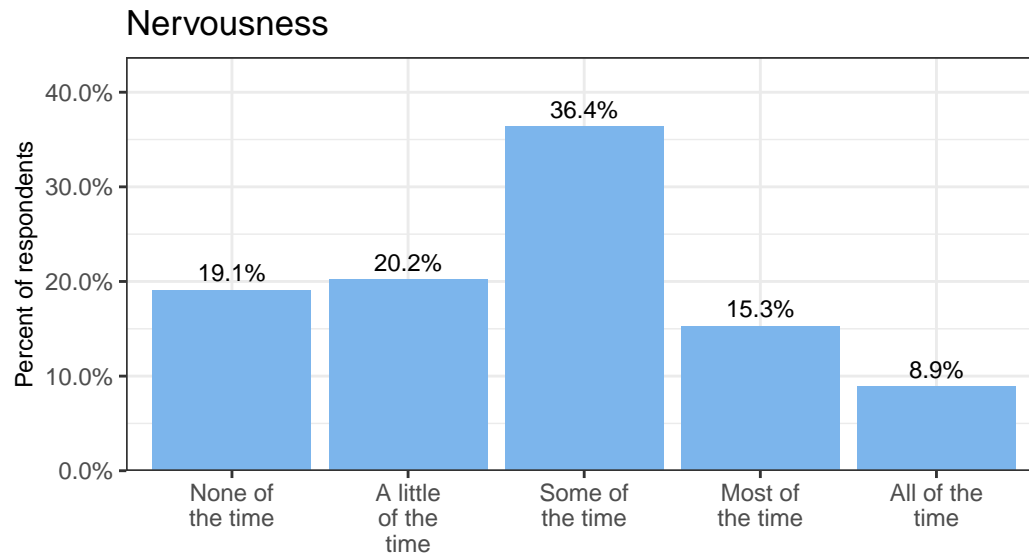


Figure 7: Nervousness

## Housing Situation

- The vast majority of respondents (84%) report renting their current home, while only 15% report owning their home. Among those who have been in the US for longer than 3 years, home ownership is 23%, as compared to 7% for those respondents who have lived in the US for 3 or fewer years. (Figure 8)
- 17% of respondents indicate that their most recent housing payment was late or deferred. The Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey, 15% of households reported not being caught up on rent for a similar time period.

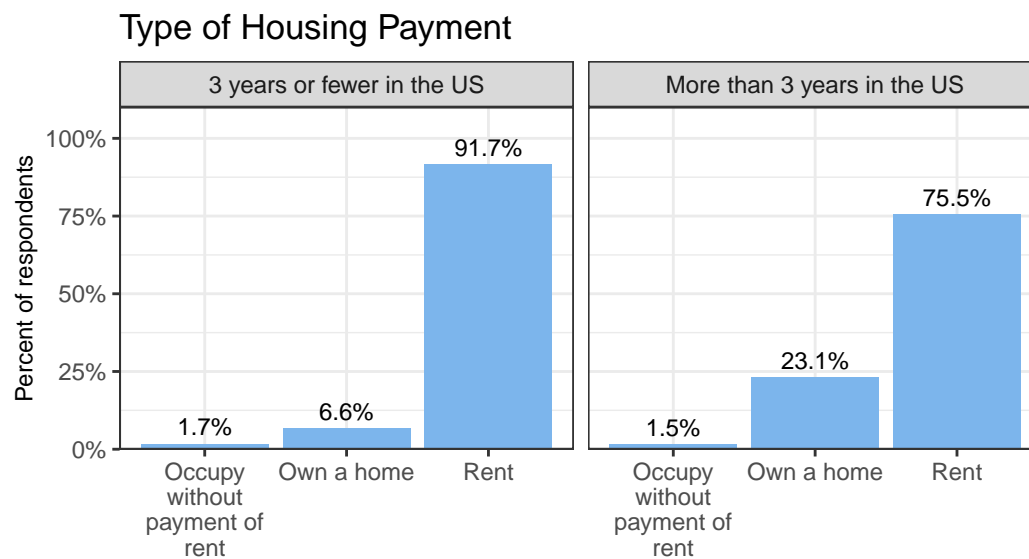


Figure 8: Housing Payment Type

## Children and Education

- Among households with school-age children (n = 582), the vast majority (82%) report that classes were moved to a distance learning format. (Figure 9)
- Most households (89%) report the internet is always or usually available for educational purposes. According to the Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey, among those households reporting, 74% always or usually have access to the internet.

### Children's Schooling

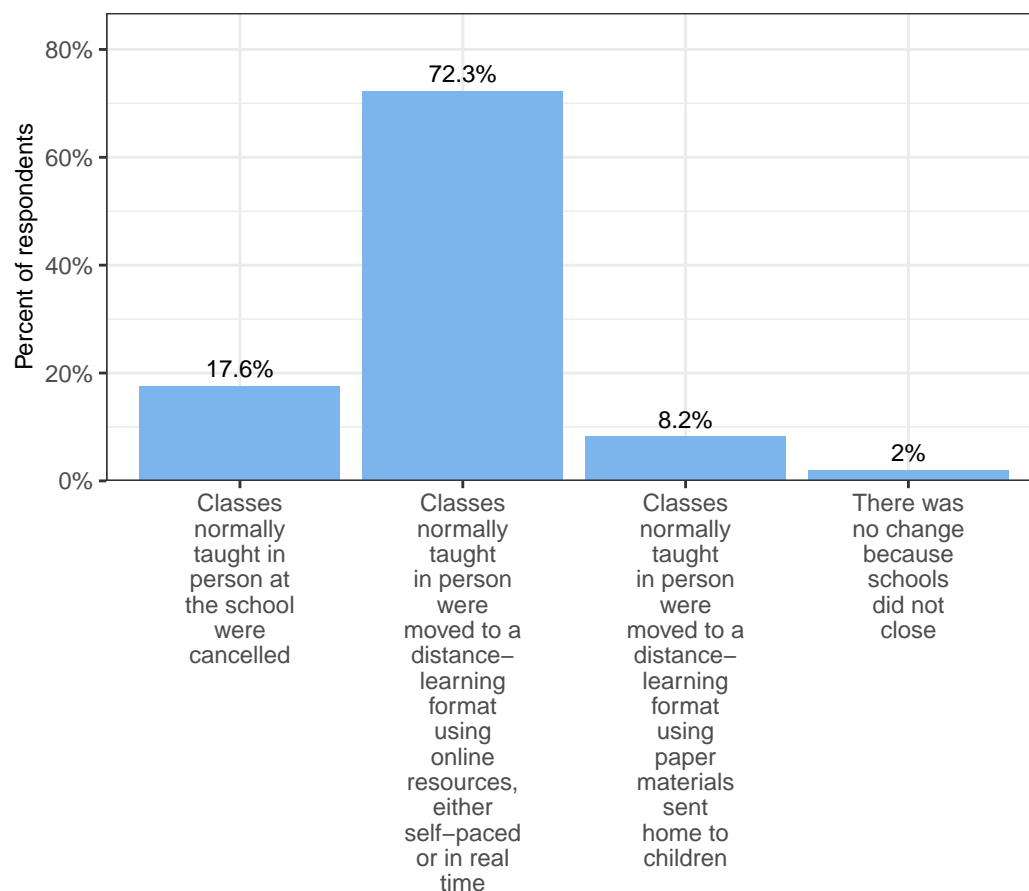


Figure 9: School Status

## Conclusion

Data provided by the 1,159 principal applicants as part of the LIRS/IPL Rapid Response survey provide important information about the current situation of refugees in the United States as they navigate work, education, and healthcare during this challenging time. This survey also serves as a model for how resettlement agencies and researchers can collaboratively develop and implement large-scale surveys of refugee clients. Additionally, by collecting up-to-date contact information from clients (i.e., WhatsApp and cell phone numbers) as well as consent to send future surveys, LIRS and IPL have created an opportunity to stay connected with refugee clients

over the coming months to understand their ongoing challenges and progress over time. We hope this survey and data can both provide LIRS with actionable insights to inform programming and strategy, while also serving as a model to continue data-driven learning about future refugee arrivals as well.

## **Acknowledgements**

The LIRS/IPL Rapid Response Survey would not have been possible without the extraordinary effort of a wide range of team members across LIRS. We are grateful to Laura Wagner, Sierra Steffen, Kirsten Sabares-Klemm, Patrick Nowlan, Huda Muhammed, Bruktawit Tamirat, Hassan Akbari and Saba Imran for their coordination, data management, and survey implementation. We also acknowledge the contributions of IPL team members Jennifer Fei, Saurabh Khanna, Michael Hotard, and Duncan Lawrence.