

**VERMONT DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
REPORT**

Promoting the Employment of New Americans in Vermont

Submitted On: January 15, 2020

Submitted To: The Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing & General Affairs
The House Committee on Commerce & Economic Development

Submitted By: Michael Harrington, Acting Commissioner
Vermont Department of Labor

Sarah Buxton, State Director
Workforce Development Division
Vermont Department of Labor

Sophia Yager, Deputy Director
State Workforce Development Board
Vermont Department of Labor



Background:

In Act 80 of 2019, the Vermont Department of Labor (VDOL) was charged with taking steps to promote the employment of New Americans. VDOL was pleased to accept the assistance of the Agency of Commerce and Community Development, the Department of Human Resources, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in the Department of Aging and Independent Living, State Refugee Office Director Denise Lamoureux, the Refugee & Immigrant Service Providers Network, the Community College of Vermont (CCV), the University of Vermont (UVM), the Vermont Chamber of Commerce, Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation, Vermont Businesses for Responsibility (VBSR), United Way of Northwest Vermont (United Way), Invest EAP, the Association of Africans Living in Vermont (AALV), and the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) in carrying out the work related to this report and offering information, data, feedback, resources and recommendations as described below.

In conducting the work of this report, VDOL committed to respecting the great deal of work that organizations like AALV, USCRI, Professor Pablo Bose, VBSR, United Way, the University of Vermont Medical Center, the State Refugee Director and others have done to highlight, serve, and respect the needs of New Americans as they integrate into Vermont communities. VDOL approached the issues presented by the Vermont Legislature in Act 80 as opportunities to convene stakeholders, assess the progress of key collaborations and initiatives, identify new challenges and findings, and publish the work and beliefs of many who have greater knowledge and direct experience with the issues at hand. As VDOL submits this report, it does not assert a higher level of subject matter expertise than the parties it references. Rather, VDOL completes its charge with commitment to continued learning and partnership, and with heightened respect for the complicated work happening every day by organizations serving these new Vermonters.

Report:

Sec. 9 (a) The State of Vermont shall take steps necessary to provide support to employers and to New Americans in the Vermont workforce as follows:

(1) The Department of Labor shall simplify the process and reduce barriers for employers seeking to access Department funding for English language classes.

VDOL has reviewed and considered its delivery of services to employers generally and specifically in relation to their desire to access funding for English language classes. VDOL has taken two steps that will reduce barriers for employers:

1. Informed and clarified for staff how they may refer employers to partner organizations (e.g. local adult education and literacy providers, CCV, UVM, AALV, USCRI, etc.)
2. Included information related to accessing English language classes in a forthcoming (general) business resource manual.

(2) The Department of Labor shall work with U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) Vermont to increase employers' awareness of free services available through USCRI Vermont, including on site English language classes.

VDOL staff and USCRI staff have taken steps to strengthen our organizational relationship and understanding of one another's programs and offerings. VDOL will provide its local field staff with information on USCRI services to make effective referrals for New American clients. VDOL will also help to promote USCRI programs and services for employers as part of a collection of employer best practices and resources for hiring and employing New Americans (see Sec. 3).

Two of the numerous support services provided to USCRI's clients include free, limited-duration interpretation services in the workplace as well as free English language classes at the USCRI office for up to five years after initial eligibility. Other services to serve both New American employees and employers include:

- English for Specific Purposes (ESP), a fee for service program to teach English language skills and vocabulary tailored to particularly industries and/or occupations
- Deployment of an onsite interpreter or onsite English classes in geographic areas or specific workplaces with high concentrations of English language learners

(3) The Department of Labor shall develop and make available to employers a collection of best practices for addressing the unique language, transportation, cultural, and other challenges New Americans face in the workforce.

VDOL has developed a list of resources and best practices for employers seeking to hire and employ New Americans (see Appendix A). This list will be available on VDOL's website and in their regional Career Resource Centers.

Professor Pablo Bose, director of UVM's Global and Regional Studies Program, and his team have conducted extensive research on the experience of New Americans in Vermont as part of the Refugee Resettlement in Small Cities project. They recently released a preliminary report entitled "New Americans' Employment Experience in Vermont" (see Appendix F) with the eventual goal to produce an employer toolkit for hiring New American workers. VDOL will continue to track Bose's work as it develops and share best practices with employers and service providers.

(4) The Department of Labor, in collaboration with the Community College of Vermont or other partners, shall explore the development of a work readiness certificate or program for New American employees.

VDOL and CCV have explored existing CCV programs and services for New American students and employees, as well as the potential for a work readiness certificate or program. Based on the existing programs and services detailed below, CCV is currently serving New American students, employs New Americans as an employer, and has worked directly with employers in meeting the specific educational and

training needs of current and prospective New American employees. Based on the current available resources offered through CCV, and its expertise in serving New Americans, VDOL has not identified a pressing need for a new work readiness certificate. VDOL will continue to support CCV in connecting and aligning its programs and services to the needs of jobseekers and employers.

Currently, CCV offers targeted support services in the form of specialized advisors for English Language Learner (ELL) students at the Winooski center and eTutoring. This highly rated resource allows ELL students to receive customized essay writing support from ELL-trained tutors and was used over 2,900 times in the past academic year. Approximately one-third of those sessions were provided to students who self-identified as ELLs. The service has been invaluable for students who are unable to get to their CCV center for help outside of class time.

CCV also offers a Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) to all students to help them earn credit for prior skills and knowledge. An average of one to two New Americans per semester complete the PLA course to earn credit for learning from their country of origin. English skills can be a barrier to portfolio classes, a component of the PLA that grants credit for learning acquired on the job, in the military, through volunteering, or self-study. CCV also partners with Adult Education providers in all center locations to help participants in adult education and literacy services (including New Americans) continue along their pathway to higher education.

CCV has created a new course, English for Academic Purposes, offered at the Winooski center, to introduce students to language use and cultural expectations in postsecondary settings and provide an opportunity to explore language conventions used in various disciplines. Additionally, Castleton University has developed a course, Education for All: Refugee Relocation in Rutland and Local School Contexts, to help teaches and service providers who work with ELL students and/or newly relocated refugee populations in schools or other educational and social environments. Course descriptions for both courses are included in Appendix B.

CCV has also identified several barriers for New Americans seeking to access financial aid:

- Language barrier: The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is not written in plain-language English and Spanish the only alternative language available. While the Spanish application may help some New Americans, many of Vermont's New Americans do not speak or read Spanish and have difficulty comprehending the English application. Many students also need their parents to complete certain sections of the FAFSA and New American students may struggle to explain the application questions to their parents.
- Family unit questions: The FAFSA asks applicants about the number of people in their household, which can be confusing for New American students whose families may have multiple generations and non-immediate family members living under the same roof. FAFSA questions are designed around a family unit as it existed in the 1960s but today's students come from more diverse family backgrounds, creating barriers for first generation, low-income students.

- Loans: For Muslim students, sharia forbids borrowing money with interest. While some students do it anyway, those who adhere more strictly to their faith cannot apply for nor accept federal education loans. Students who pay out of pocket and can only take one or two courses at a time often take longer to complete degree programs than those who can access student loans.
- Terminology, abbreviations, and acronyms: FAFSA, EFC, Pell, Direct Loan, AGI, IRS, etc. are just some of the terms used on the FAFSA that, coupled with institutional jargon, can be challenging for any student to comprehend, especially New American students.

VDOL will assist CCV and the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC) in their efforts to provide specific support to New Americans in overcoming the barriers identified above.

(5) The Department of Labor, in collaboration with the Vermont Chamber of Commerce or other partners, shall explore the development of a “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity” certificate or program, or similar initiative, for employers seeking to establish a New American–friendly workplace.

VDOL, with the assistance of the Vermont Chamber of Commerce (Chamber) and the Vermont State Workforce Development Board, has conducted initial outreach to businesses to gauge employer interest in a “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity” certificate, program, or initiative, as well as employers’ existing efforts in this area. Survey results indicate that a majority of responders do not currently offer a diversity, equity, and inclusivity training to employees, but they do hire or are interested in hiring New Americans and believe such a training or certificate would make their business more attractive to potential employees. A majority of responders are interested in receiving/accessing information on creating a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace and are somewhat to very interested in a training or certificate program. Survey questions and responses are included in Appendix C.

Based on these results, VDOL and the Chamber will continue to gather more detailed information and provide technical assistance to one or more business groups if they agree to develop a “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity” certificate, program, or initiative.

(6) The Department of Labor, in collaboration with the Department of Human Resources, shall explore measures to ensure that the State’s Employee Assistance Program offers services and support that is responsive to the particular pressures and challenges facing New Americans. The Departments shall share best practices with private employers that offer similar employee assistance programs.

In a recent letter to the Trump administration, Governor Scott reaffirmed Vermont’s commitment to provide a welcoming home to refugees and requested increased refugee resettlement in our state (see Appendix D). VDOL and the Department of Human Resources (DHR) are committed to this policy as they work together to support New American state employees and their families.

DHR contracts with Invest EAP, a Vermont-based public and private non-profit collaborative housed in the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation that offers comprehensive Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services¹, resources, and information on a wide range of issues to all state employees and their families. A list of Invest EAP resources that can be helpful to New American employees is included in Appendix E. DHR also offers a Child Care Cost Reimbursement Program to help income-eligible state employees defray some of the high costs of child care.

DHR offers programs and services to state employees designed to promote greater cultural awareness and sensitivities among the employee population. Many of these programs and services also serve to attract and retain a more diverse workforce. DHR's supervisory-focused training and development programs and resources dedicate portions of the curricula to increasing the cultural competencies of supervisors. DHR identifies New Americans as a population within some of the trainings and programs offered, however none are designed with that population as the sole consideration.

DHR offers a broad spectrum of trainings that promote creating, implementing, and sustaining a workplace that is aware of and sensitive to cultural differences and mitigating the negative impact of implicit biases on the workforce and business practices throughout state government. These trainings are available to and designed for supervisors and non-supervisors and are available as stand-alone trainings and/or part of a program series curriculum. Trainings are offered in-person and online. Examples of these trainings include:

- In-person: Civility and Unconscious Bias; Supervisory Development Program; Vermont Certified Public Managers Program; customized trainings and consults for individual agencies/departments offered by CAPS and Field Operations staff
- Online: BizLIBRARY, DHR's online training vendor, offers a multitude of online trainings on topics related to diversity, cultural awareness, and implicit bias. Examples of courses are: FSD CWTP Intercultural Responsiveness; Diversity Toolkit: Barriers to Organizational Diversity; Diversity: Seeking Commonality (Manager Version); Diversity Toolkit: Developing a Diverse Workforce

DHR has also identified several barriers to employment for New Americans and strategies to address those barriers, including:

- Lack of cultural awareness and sensitivities possessed by supervisors and hiring managers. In response to these barriers, the curricula of the Supervising in State Government and the Vermont Certified Public Manager programs feature course matter that address promoting and effectively managing a diverse workforce.
- Lack of language translation functionality within Success Factors, DHR's talent management platform. The Recruitment Division will be looking into incorporating translation functionalities within Success Factors over the course of the next year.

¹ <https://www.investeap.org/about-eap>

- Lack of direct work experience possessed by some New American applicants as an impediment to meeting minimum qualifications for consideration for a State of Vermont position posted within Success Factors. DHR's Field Operations and Recruitment Divisions work with hiring managers to modify job descriptions and minimum qualifications where practicable in order to attract and create a wider and more diverse applicant pool.
- New American populations are overwhelmingly clustered in Chittenden County, whereas a large portion of State of Vermont positions and employment opportunities are situated in Washington County and other locations throughout the state. As an employer, the State of Vermont has continued to identify and arrange for greater availability of public transportation to the Waterbury State Office Complex and numerous Montpelier based worksites which should enable New American employees who rely on public transportation to work in either location.

(7) The Agency of Commerce and Community Development shall explore whether State marketing funds should be targeted to New Americans in other states to inform them of Vermont's inclusive workplace practices and employment opportunities.

The Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) explored whether or not state funds should be used to "target" New American populations in other states for the purpose of promoting and advertising Vermont as an inclusive place to live and work. Targeted marketing is a specific process of identifying customers in an effort to promote and advertise certain products or ideas. During this exploration requirement the Department of Tourism and Marketing made several observations and conclusions:

- For the purposes of marketing, the state does not target populations based on race, religion or ethnicity, but rather targeted marketing efforts are based on behaviors (interests, activities, spending patterns, travel trends) and location (geographic proximity and accessibility to destination).
- The Department of Tourism and Marketing is working to better understand the preferences of New American and refugee populations to integrate those preferences and points of view into current marketing efforts that promote Vermont as a friendly and safe place to live, work, and raise a family.
- Vermont is committed to welcoming New Americans and refugees to our state, as seen Governor Scott's recent letter to the Trump administration (see Appendix D).

Sec. 9 (b) To the extent not otherwise addressed in its work pursuant to subsection (a) of this section, the Department shall assess:

(1) recommendations identified in relevant studies and reports;

See Appendix F for a list of relevant studies and reports.

(2) cultural competency support needed in Vermont's employment settings;

(3) training, apprenticeship, and mentorship needs and opportunities;

- (4) tools and supports needed for refugees to effectively apply preexisting educational and professional credentials in Vermont settings; and*
(5) additional supports needed to ensure employment opportunities, including child care and transportation.

In response to the areas noted in Sec. 9 (b)(2-5), VDOL partnered with USCRI and AALV to conduct focus groups to gather information directly from New Americans regarding their experience in Vermont's workforce. Those reports are included in Appendices G and H. Highlights are included below:

Cultural competency support needed in Vermont's employment settings: New Americans cited English language skills as a major barrier to interviews, employment, and inclusion in the workplace. Some also described racism, discrimination, and lack of professional networks as additional barriers. Practical diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, stronger connections between employers and employees, stronger professional networks, pathways to advancement and professional development, and longer probationary periods could positively impact recruitment and retention of New American employees.

Training, apprenticeship, and mentorship needs and opportunities: New Americans highlighted the need for apprenticeships, paid internships, and paid summer employment opportunities for young New American students and workers, as well as improved access to GEDs and other training programs for those who did not complete high school. Mentoring is also a critical component to assist New Americans in navigating education and employment opportunities, as well as building stronger professional networks and providing personal support and role models.

Tools and supports needed for refugees to effectively apply preexisting educational and professional credentials in Vermont settings: While New Americans expressed the desire and motivation to find employment, many identified difficulty in receiving recognition for prior education or experience in their previous countries or in Vermont as a barrier to meaningful, gainful employment. Understanding high-demand skills and credentials, and how to earn them or receive recognition for them, can also be challenging for New Americans. Support in assessing existing skills and experience (or pathways to learning those skills) to receive licensure, accreditation, etc. can assist New Americans in navigating the Vermont labor market and securing meaningful employment.

Additional supports needed to ensure employment opportunities, including child care and transportation: Transportation access and affordability was identified as a major barrier to training and employment for New Americans, especially women and those working late shifts. Carpools, vanpools, or other employer-sponsored transportation support would provide more flexibility for New American workers. Child care availability and affordability were also identified as a significant barrier, especially for women and young workers. Unpredictable or inflexible work scheduling pose challenges in securing child care. The general cost of living (including housing) and low wages also contributes to career growth challenges. Access to culturally-

appropriate health care (including mental health care) is also critical in helping New Americans enter or reenter the workforce.

Conclusion:

The work of this report and its contents mark a renewed commitment to creating, improving, and aligning support for New American workers and employers of New Americans. The cross-disciplinary nature of existing work groups and the apparent acuity of individuals in advancing the interests of employers and New Americans in employment promises that the work will not stall. While government partners work to make financial resources available to help all individuals with barriers to employment secure permanent work, VDOL sees the value in attending to the specific barriers of New Americans in Vermont and will remain engaged in developing solutions and promoting best practices as they evolve.

Consideration:

VDOL would like to extend sincere thanks to Denise Lamoureux, Matt Thompson, Jennifer Borch, Laurie Stavrand, Anna Wageling, Amila Merdzanovic, Yacouba Jacob Bogre, Tiffany Kuene, Professor Pablo Bose, Connie Beal, Genevieve Habeck, Raquel Aronhime, Isabel Dunkley, Lucas Grigri, Alex Beck, and Charles Martin for their specific contributions to this report.

APPENDIX A: VDOL EMPLOYER BEST PRACTICES



Employer Resources and Best Practices: Hiring and Employing New Americans

Employment and Training Services

- The **Department of Labor's** regional Career Resources Centers offer training funds, workshops, case management, and more to New American jobseekers and employees. For more information, visit labor.vermont.gov/workforce-development/find-your-local-career-resource-center.
- The **Burlington Employment Agency** specializes in job placement and employment services for New Americans in Vermont. For more information, visit www.btvemployment.com or call (802) 503-6883.
- The **U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants Vermont (USCRI VT)** offers employment services to their clients and can help match employers with New American employees. For more information, visit refugees.org/get-involved/hire-global-talent/.
- The **Association of Africans Living in Vermont (AALV)** offers a health care occupational training program and a micro-agriculture training/assistance program to New Americans. For more information, visit www.aalv-vt.org/workforce-development.

English Language Classes

- **USCRI VT** offers English Language Learning (ELL) classes at their Colchester office or onsite to employers with a significant cohort of New American employees. USCRI also offers English for Specific Purposes classes that can be customized to various industries and employers. For more information, visit refugees.org/vermont-colchester-ell/ or call (802) 654-1704.
- **Vermont Adult Learning** offers free ELL classes to New Americans in locations around the state. For more information, visit www.vtadullearning.org/services/english-for-speakers-of-other-languages/.

Interpretation and Translation Services

- **USCRI VT** offers interpretation and translation services in person and by phone in more than eight languages. For more information, visit refugees.org/serving-the-uprooted/services/interpreting-services or call (802) 654-1706.
- **AALV** offers document translation services, general interpretation services, health care- and state government-specific interpretation services. For more information, visit www.aalv-vt.org/interpret or call (802) 985-3106.
- **LanguageLine** offers virtual on-demand interpretation and translation services in over 240 languages. For more information, visit www.language.com/interpreting/on-demand.

- Use a “**buddy system**” to match new employees with incumbent employees who may speak their first language and/or can help them navigate verbal and written communication in the workplace

Cultural Humility

- Paid time off for important **cultural holidays**
- Opportunities for employees to learn about one another’s culture through **workshops, displays, food sharing**, etc.
- Employee training or handbook on **diversity and inclusion in the workplace**, as well as **cultural norms in the workplace** for New American employees

Transportation

- Organized **carpools or vanpools**
- Public transportation **stipends or other supports**

United Way Working Bridges

United Way’s Working Bridges is an employer collaborative that helps low-to-moderate wage earners navigate life issues, increasing employee retention and productivity at work for employers. Participation in Working Bridges means access to on-site resources coordination services for employees, customized training for supervisors and innovative workforce strategies.

For more information, visit unitedwaynwvt.org/workingbridges or call (802) 864-7541.

APPENDIX B: CCV COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

ENG-1015: English for Academic Purposes (3 Credits)

This course is an examination of the English language as used in an academic setting. Students will acquire and demonstrate reading, writing, and listening skills appropriate to post-secondary institutions in the United States. This course provides an introduction to the expectations, history, and design of English-speaking academic institutions, and is designed for non-native speakers of English.

1. Recognize and consistently apply the English language in a post-secondary academic setting.
2. Employ vocabulary and grammatical structures of the English language in verbal and written expression to:
 - a. Communicate and solicit basic personal and academic information, including program/major, course schedule, learning resources (texts, library, learning assistance), program requirements, and habits of success.
 - b. Participate in increasingly complex interpersonal exchanges, such as introductions, greetings, and requests associated with success in academic institutions.
 - c. Identify and comprehend academic jargon necessary for success in higher education.
 - d. Describe essential elements of academic life, including but not limited to, the connection between class and independent work, necessary level of investment, progression of courses from introductory to advanced, and the scaffolding and trajectory of educational institutions in the United States (primary school, secondary school, advanced certificates, Associate's, Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate).
 - e. Demonstrate the ability to recall information and recombine it using their own words in order to respond effectively to questions on selected academic topics.
3. Describe basic features, traditions, and elements of daily academic life in the United States.
4. Apply learned vocabulary, grammatical, and organizational structures to write academic papers.
5. Read and interpret materials from diverse academic disciplines and use English to demonstrate their comprehension, reflect on their reading, and apply their insights to other contexts.
6. Explain and apply cultural conventions regarding citation and academic honesty, including plagiarism, as practiced in U.S institutions.

For more information on the development of the course, visit now.ccv.edu/at-ccv-winooski-a-new-engagement-with-english/

Education for All: Refugee Relocation in Rutland and Local School Contexts

This course will support teachers and other social service practitioners who may work with newly relocated refugee populations in schools or other educational and social environments. Through an exploration of social and cultural frameworks related to teaching diverse student learners, this course aims to help teachers and others “on the front lines” understand where emigrated youth and community members might be coming from in terms of cultural, geographic, religious, linguistic, and economic backgrounds. As an intimate group of learners, we will dive into the issues that students face after living in refugee camps and the ways in which integration into American life might unfold, particularly in educational contexts. The course will also address institutional resources related to employment, housing, language training, education, and medical care.

Through a variety of guest speakers, slide presentations, short films, and other interactive teaching activities related to working with English Language Learners, this course aims to be a hands-on, dynamic exploration of teaching on the front lines to support teachers and others working directly with newly emigrated refugee youth and families. Students in this course will be able to guide particular areas of study as well, depending on their own areas of interest and specific needs. The course will be primarily face-to-face sessions, however, several dates over the course of the semester will be facilitated as online classes.

APPENDIX C: DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSIVITY CERTIFICATE/PROGRAM EMPLOYER SURVEY RESULTS

Total responses: 84

Question 1: Does your organization currently have an employee training, orientation, handbook, etc. on diversity, equity, and inclusivity in the workplace?

- Yes: 46.2%
- No: 53.8%

Question 2: Would your organization be interested in participating in a diversity, equity, and inclusivity program? (scale of 1-5, 1 being “not interested” and 5 being “very interested”)

- 1: 19%
- 2: 6.3%
- 3: 25.3%
- 4: 22.8%
- 5: 26.6%

Question 3: Would your organization be interested in earning a certificate for a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace? (scale of 1-5, 1 being “not interested” and 5 being “very interested”)

- 1: 24.4%
- 2: 3.8%
- 3: 15.4%
- 4: 24.4%
- 5: 32.1%

Question 4: Would your organization be interested in receiving or accessing information on creating a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace?

- Yes: 61.5%
- No: 20.5%
- Maybe: 17.9%

Question 5: Do you believe a diversity, equity, and inclusivity training, program, and/or certificate would make your organization more attractive to potential employees?

- Yes: 50%
- No: 24.4%
- Maybe: 25.6%

Question 6: Does your organization currently employ, or is your organization interested in hiring, New Americans?

- Yes: 61.3%
- No: 7.5%
- Maybe: 31.3%

APPENDIX D: GOVERNOR SCOTT'S LETTER re EXECUTIVE ORDER 13888

January 6, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Secretary Michael R. Pompeo
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. President and Secretary Pompeo:

This letter is in reference to Executive Order 13888, "*On Enhancing State and Local Involvement in Resettlement.*"

As Governor of the State of Vermont, I reaffirm Vermont's commitment to be a welcoming state and consent to initial refugee resettlement in Vermont in accordance with the terms of the Executive Order. This consent is valid unless or until withdrawn.

Since 1989, Vermont has welcomed almost 8,000 refugees, primarily from Bhutan, Burma, Bosnia, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq Somalia, Sudan, and Vietnam. Prior to 2017, Vermont was resettling an average of approximately 325 refugees per year. Through this consent process I hope to increase current resettlement to the level of 325-350 individuals annually. Vermont has never conditioned and will never condition refugee resettlement on a refugee's race, ethnicity, religion or national origin.

Vermont's refugee communities have made countless contributions to our state. Refugees help ensure a healthy sized and diverse student population. They help employers fill open positions, contributing to the community and local economy, and pay federal, state and local taxes. In recent years, refugees have entered employment in critical economic sectors including construction, health care, hospitality and hotels, manufacturing, customer service, education, environmental services, food service, maintenance, meat processing, office/accounting, packing, retail, transportation, and warehouse. Vermont has more open jobs than people to fill them; refugee communities are vital to Vermont's economic health.

I am also heartened by the fact that an average of 90-94% of these new Americans are economically self-sufficient within eight months of arrival in Vermont. In fact, the rate for fiscal year 2019 is 100%.

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
Secretary Michael R. Pompeo
January 6, 2020
Page Two

Vermont is facing serious demographic challenges that will only grow in the coming decade if we do not focus our efforts on reversing the trends. The year 2017 marked the first time in our state's

history that the number of seniors (aged 65+) was equal to the number of children under the age of 18.

If our demographics continue on their current trajectory, Vermont can expect even fewer workers to provide services across critical economic sectors, from health care, education, child care, and long-term care to utility operations, construction and essential state government functions. Moreover, this trend will result in fewer working-aged Vermonters paying income taxes, purchasing goods and services, starting businesses, filling jobs and contributing to our economy.

As Governor, I have made it my top priority to grow our workforce and attract more workers to our state. The Refugee Resettlement program is one tool in our toolbox when it comes to meeting this goal; to the extent other states may not consent to resettle refugees, I hope refugees will consider Vermont a welcoming place that can meet their needs.

I also write today to advise I will seek authority from Vermont's Legislature to consent to refugee resettlement on behalf of the State's counties and municipalities, but only after consulting with those local governments which indicate interest in initial resettlement, develop strong environments to support resettlement and regard refugee resettlement activity as a vital tool for growing Vermont's economy and reversing Vermont's aging demographic.

I am optimistic Vermont will grow the number of local communities with the capacity to resettle refugees, and, working with the Legislature, I hope to facilitate the consent process for doing so. Regardless of the path other states may choose, these families will always be welcomed in Vermont.

Sincerely,

Philip B. Scott
Governor

PBS/kp

c: Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Carol T. O'Connell
Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
U.S. Department of State

APPENDIX E: INVEST EAP RESOURCES FOR NEW AMERICAN EMPLOYEES

1. Invest EAP: Our **24/7 call center utilizes the LanguageLine** interpreter service with an extensive list of languages and available translators
2. Navigating healthcare for employees:
 - The Community Health Centers of Burlington (CHCB) has a direct translation of their website in multiple languages, including Nepali: www.chcb.org/welcome/nepalese/
 - **All CHCB locations offer interpreter services at no cost to their patients.** Of course, this is usually telephone-based, but it does include many of the common languages spoken by New Americans in Vermont specifically.
 - Also, their Riverside Avenue Health Center offers **personalized welcome orientations to refugees, immigrants, and asylees.**
 - CHCB is a true "medical home" with **both physicians and dentists** on-site at some locations, providing this population with wraparound medical service.
3. **Health and dental coverage for children**: Dr. Dynasaur and the school-based dental centers in Burlington. EAP can help New Americans navigate these programs for their kids.
4. **USCRI**: several of our employers have hosted **free on-the-worksite ELL classes**, and others have had good success in referring small groups of employees or their families to USCRI-based free ELL classes in Burlington and Winooski. USCRI states: "Our English classes can be brought on-site to employers. If you have a significant number of New Americans in your workforce, we can collaborate to provide free work-site English language classes at times that work well for your employees and their work schedules." refugees.org/field-office/vermont/
5. Bhuwan Sharma, owner of the **New-American-focused Burlington Employment Agency**, is from Nepal; their mission is to "help connect Vermont companies with quality and reliable workforce especially from among the New American population groups." www.btvemployment.com
6. **The AALV**: "AALV helps new Americans from all parts of the world gain independence in their new communities through a range of integration services, including bridging case management, workforce development, behavioral health awareness, and interpreter services programming. With support from our multicultural, multilingual staff, our clients are able to smoothly transition to living and working in Vermont." www.aalv-vt.org/

APPENDIX F: RELEVANT REPORTS AND STUDIES

[New Americans Experience in the Vermont Workforce](#)

Pablo Bose, Isabel Dunkley, and Lucas Grigri
University of Vermont, Refugee Resettlement in Small Cities
January 2020

[Refugees in Vermont: mobility and acculturation in a new immigrant destination](#)

Pablo Bose
Journal of Transport Geography
2014

[Building sustainable communities: Immigrants and mobility in Vermont](#)

Pablo Bose
Research in Transportation Business & Management
2013

[Challenges and Opportunities for New Americans in Windham County](#)

Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation
January 2020

[Unlocking Skills: Successful Initiatives for Integrating Foreign-Trained Immigrant Professionals](#)

Margie McHugh and Madeleine Morawski
Migration Policy Institute National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy
February 2017

[At the intersection of immigration and skills policy: A roadmap to smart policies for state and local leaders](#)

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock
National Skills Coalition
September 2018

[Maryland Skilled Immigrants Task Force Annual Report](#)

Lauren E. Gilwee and Amanda Olmstead
Spring 2018

[Refugees as Employees: Good Retention, Strong Recruitment](#)

David Dyssegaard Kallick and Cyierra Roldan
Tent Partnership for Refugees and Fiscal Policy Institute
May 2018

APPENDIX G: USCRI REPORT

**Workforce Development Report to the Vermont General Assembly
Act 80 of 2019, Section 9:
Supporting New Americans in the Workforce
Prepared by U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants Vermont
01/10/2020**

Contents

Executive Summary

Cultural competency support needed in Vermont's employment settings

Training, apprenticeship, and mentorship needs and opportunities for New Americans

Tools and supports needed for New Americans to effectively apply preexisting educational and professional credentials in Vermont settings

Additional supports needed to ensure employment opportunities for New Americans, including childcare and transportation

Report Recommendations

Appendix

Executive Summary

On behalf of the State of Vermont, U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants Vermont (USCRI Vermont) has gathered information and issued recommendations pertaining to Act 80 of 2019, Section 9, ****Supporting New Americans in the Workforce****. Topics examined include cultural competency support needed in Vermont's employment settings; training, apprenticeship, and mentorship needs and opportunities; and tools and supports needed to effectively apply preexisting educational and professional credentials in Vermont; and additional supports needed to ensure employment opportunities, including childcare and transportation. Current and proposed additional services and resources are assessed. The report concludes with recommendations for action.

USCRI Vermont has also assisted with a manual on best practices for employers employing New Americans, being developed by University of Vermont professor Pablo Bose, PhD. The manual and related information will be issued separately by Professor Bose.

Cultural competency support needed in Vermont's employment settings

Vermont's immigration history has varied over time. Modern-day immigration continues to bring the Canadian and European populations that have historically immigrated to Vermont, but also populations from a wide range of countries with little immigration history in Vermont, leading to increased racial, ethnic, and religious diversity and the changes and complexity that follow. Currently, immigration to Vermont could be generalized as occurring in two main ways. Refugee resettlement, through a coordinated service delivery process, brings groups of refugees who have fled persecution to Vermont with goal of achieving early economic self-sufficiency through employment in first few months following resettlement. Non-refugee immigrants come to Vermont for a wide range of reasons, in non-coordinated, individualized processes and may or may not have networks of support.

Businesses and institutions that employ and/or serve people with refugee and immigrant backgrounds will benefit from training and technical support in increasing the level of multicultural understanding among management and employees; among U.S.-born and those with refugee and immigrant backgrounds. Instituting best practices to improve communication, and comfort levels in a multicultural setting can improve productivity, morale, and employee retention. Training and technical support recipients can avoid misunderstandings and counterproductive assumptions, further develop employee soft skills, and

also enhance customer/client service outcomes. Following are several examples of trainings and professional development opportunities designed by USCRI to accomplish these goals.

Refugee 101

Participants will learn about forced migration globally, legal instruments, refugee crisis globally, U.S. Refugee Program, and refugee resettlement in Vermont. Topics will include: the definition of refugees, asylum seekers, and asylees; an overview of the refugee resettlement process and refugee services in Vermont (including **refugee employment services**); information regarding the main refugee groups present in Vermont; and **considerations when employing refugees**.

Cultural Humility

Participants will learn about **Cultural Humility**, the lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and self-critique to fix power imbalances & develop partnerships with people and groups who can advocate for others and examine the culture of their agency/workplace using the cultural iceberg model. Additionally, participants will learn **best practices for working with interpreters**, as a way to provide linguistically-appropriate (and culturally-responsive) services to English Language Learners.

Cultural Humility resources:

- USCRI Cultural Humility Training sample PowerPoint slides (see appendix).
- Waters, Amanda & Asbill, Lisa. (2013) Reflections on cultural humility. *American Psychological Association Newsletter*, August 2013.
www.apa.org/pi/families/resources/newsletter/2013/08/cultural-humility

The Journey

Participants will be engaged in an educational role play, simulating the experiences of refugees fleeing their homelands, seeking refuge in a host country, and applying to be resettled.

Working with Interpreters

Participants will be trained about best practices working with interpreters and individuals in need of interpretation, with the goal of improving customer service/client service outcomes.

Professional Development for School Staff

Bringing the Resettlement Experience to the Classroom: Embracing and Empowering Refugees and Immigrants in our School Communities

Refugee and immigrant students in our classrooms present opportunities to build cultural awareness and to embrace the positive attributes of multicultural communities. With thoughtful planning, we can conscientiously move beyond highlighting the unique skills, strengths, and knowledge of refugee-background students and empower students to advocate and to act.

Proposal Rationale:

Understanding the unique stories of refugee-background students enables teachers to better appreciate the strengths these students bring to the classroom as well as the challenges they face in transitioning to life in the United States. Psychologists and social workers who engage with refugee children regularly reinforce their need for adults who are aware of their struggles and who listen to them, support them, and believe in them (*Psychology Today*, June 29, 2017). In addition to developing best practices for engaging refugee and immigrant students and their families in our school communities, teachers can learn to support and inspire refugee-background students to become peer leaders as they gain confidence in their voices and take pride in their strengths.

A 3-Pronged Approach:

Staff development, classroom education, and community action make up a multi-faceted approach to move beyond successfully supporting refugee and immigrant students in their classroom communities to encourage them to educate their peers and empower them to lead.

Ongoing professional development for teachers throughout Vermont on best practices for empowering refugees and immigrants in the classroom is an essential building-block to creating the next generation of leaders in the workforce and better preparing them to succeed in post-secondary career training opportunities.

Training, apprenticeship, and mentorship needs and opportunities for New Americans **English for Specific Purposes (ESP)**

For recent refugees and immigrants, learning English-language skills is essential not only for adapting socially but also for career laddering and gaining access to jobs that offer opportunities for real career advancement and family-sustaining wages and benefits.

Evaluations of worksite English language programs have traditionally focused on the benefits of the programs for participants. It's important to shift the conversation to include focusing on the effects of English language class participation on employers so that employers clearly understand the benefits and challenges of supporting worksite English classes.

When asked about whether employing limited-English-speakers poses a challenge in the workplace, employers' responses often vary depending upon the range of English-language communication that is required for employees to effectively complete work tasks in their business. For example: Are employees required to communicate with English-speaking customers? Do they work on multi-lingual work teams or do they interact exclusively with other employees who share their native language? Can work tasks be completed with limited English instruction from trainers? Is it necessary to communicate with English-speaking co-workers in order to accomplish work tasks?

Areas employers regularly identify as most impacted by a lack of English language proficiency are staff training, general employee communication, and team building. Customer service and productivity are also often mentioned concerns. One of the major concerns for a number of employers that have traditionally hired people with refugees and immigrant backgrounds is safety.

Worksite English language classes to provide ongoing support for employees with refugees and immigrant backgrounds can help address many of these concerns. A customized worksite English language curriculum allows the employer to identify the essential language skills for their business. Additionally, worksite English language classes lead to improved employee integration within the workplace community, increased work-site safety, greater employee efficiency and accuracy, and improved employee morale.

In addition to the immediate measurable workplace improvements attributable to English language training for employees with refugee and immigrant backgrounds, employers will reap long-term benefits from investing in these employees. Employers gain access to a pool of eligible and willing employees to fill vacant positions because people from refugee and immigrant backgrounds often share job opportunities and can recruit within their own communities. Investing in and promoting multi-lingual employees will also result in improved employee retention. Multi-lingual employees are valuable supervisors as they communicate easily and efficiently in multiple languages – improving efficiency in training, productivity in the workplace, and morale among new employees who feel welcomed and understood in their own languages.

To the extent that onsite English language training programs meet employers' needs and generate bottom-line benefits, they should become an integral part of employee training and development programs for

employers with significant numbers of employees with refugee and immigrant backgrounds. It's important for the State of Vermont to help employers fully-appreciate both the immediate and long-term benefits of providing worksite English language training to employees with refugee and immigrant backgrounds.

<https://raymarshallcenter.org/files/2017/10/FINAL-English@Work-10-3-2017-3.pdf>

Micro-credentialing for WIOA funding

WIOA funding for qualified professional development training programs for employees is helpful for employers in their efforts to further develop their workforce. However, the employees who benefit from these training opportunities are often not refugees and immigrants because many of them lack the foundational English or technical skills that will allow them to access training materials and fully participate in the training programs. As a result, employees with refugee and immigrant backgrounds do not have the same opportunities for advancement in the workplace as their coworkers. A funded micro-credentialing system would bridge this gap - providing training to refugee and immigrant employees who lack the foundational skills necessary to access the currently approved "upper level" training opportunities supported by WIOA funding.

One specific area that USCRI Vermont has identified in collaboration with Technology for Tomorrow is the need for English language supported basic technology training. There are numerous offerings on the WIOA approved list of state trainers who provide computer skills trainings in a host of different areas, however each of these courses requires a basic level of familiarity with a computer and with language specific to computers and the virtual world. Many refugees and immigrants have never had an opportunity to use a computer, so the most basic tasks (completing an application or employment paperwork, filling out a timecard, requesting vacation time, attaching a document to an email) can present challenges. Before employees can enroll in more advanced training opportunities, they need to master these basic skills. At present, there is not readily accessible funding available to employers to support foundational level training to prepare refugees and immigrants with the skills they need to access more advanced training opportunities that will make them more valuable employees and provide skills to advance in the workplace.

A state funded micro-credentialing program which recognizes and supports the foundational skills needed to access WIOA-funded training programs would help to fill the current opportunity gap that exists for many employees with refugee and immigrant backgrounds who are interested in advancing in the workplace.

Apprenticeship/Training

English language proficiency is regularly cited by Chittenden County employers as one of the greatest obstacles to hiring and promoting refugees and immigrants in the workforce. Training and apprenticeship opportunities need to incorporate English language support in order to make essential skills training accessible to this segment of the population. Providing relevant English language support would require curriculum modification in consultation with qualified English language trainers to make materials accessible and comprehensible for English learners (ELs) as well as classroom teaching support to help trainers adjust their teaching and presentation strategies to best reach students with limited English proficiency.

Organizations facilitating training and apprenticeship programs need access to funding to support these initiatives. The training organizations are often not able to bear the extra expense of EL support. The beneficiaries of well-trained job candidates are the employers themselves, who may, in fact, be sponsoring these trainings. Employers are also not likely to choose to take on the additional expense of providing English language support for skills-training sessions when there is an adequate pool of English-speaking candidates. Funding to support ELs needs to be readily accessible in order to convince

employers that it is worth the extra time and effort that it will take to train a group of refugee and immigrant students.

One example is a construction training program in Chittenden County described as “an intensive program designed to equip work-ready individuals, age 18 and older for an entry-level job in the growing construction field.” Participants have the opportunity to earn certification in OSHA10 -Jobsite and construction safety and an NCCER certificate in Introductory Craft Skills. When approached about the possibility of English language support to make this training more accessible to participants with limited English proficiency, the response USCRI received was “We had to hold higher English language standards for this next workshop due to companies being hesitant of hiring someone that is not proficient in reading, writing and conversing.” The State of Vermont and its employers cannot profess to have an interest in attracting and retaining refugees and immigrants to the state’s workforce without making a commitment to more inclusive training and hiring practices which support the success and advancement of refugees and immigrants in the workplace. If refugees and immigrants see employment in Vermont as a dead-end with the only jobs available to them being entry-level positions with companies that are not invested in their professional development, it will be difficult to keep families in Vermont and impossible to attract new employees. The state and its employers need to work together to invest in creating supported pathways to success for refugee and immigrant workers to ensure that they have the same opportunities and resources to grow that other Vermonters enjoy.

Mentoring

Mentors are instrumental in enabling people with refugee and immigrant backgrounds to prepare to enter the labor market, develop professional connections, and to navigate complex professional credential re-certification processes. Even if a professional does not get recertified/licensed, a mentor is extremely beneficial.

Mentors provide:

- Feelings of inclusion
- The chance to connect with a fellow professional on a professional level
- Practice with conversational English on a professional level
- Assistance with vocational English vocabulary
- Understanding of the profession in the U.S. and Vermont
- Access to unwritten rules, conventions
- Coaching about soft skills
- Understanding of regulations and standards of practice
- Context for previous experiences and education/how it is relevant to practice in Vermont
- Letters of recommendation for education, internship, licensing and/or employment
- Assistance with planning for re-certification and practice
- Assistance with educational, licensing and employment applications
- Networking opportunities for open pre-professional and professional positions

Tools and supports needed for New Americans to effectively apply preexisting educational and professional credentials in Vermont settings

Professional Credentialing Interview and Focus Group Results

In addition to conducting several individual interviews, USCRI convened a two-hour focus group of 9 professionals with refugee, asylee, and immigrant backgrounds to identify challenges, barriers, improvements, and solutions to supporting professionals with refugee and immigrant backgrounds in the Vermont Workforce, with a focus on professional credentialing/credential re-certification. Participants were originally from Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, China, former Czechoslovakia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Jamaica, Republic of Congo, and Syria. Ages ranged from 29-65 years old. Their

professional fields included: architecture, education, computer science, healthcare (public health, radiology), multilingual interpretation, and law. Some are currently pursuing additional education (ranging from undergraduate degrees through PhDs), while others have attained terminal degrees in their field (although some have had to start over and duplicate their education). Past and present employers include some of the largest employers in Vermont: Burlington School District, Community College of Vermont, Community Health Centers-Burlington, Howard Center, State of Vermont, UVM, UVM Medical Center, Winooski School District. Several participants serve on the boards of nonprofit service providers and community organizations and some have dedicated significant time to volunteering in the community.

Challenges and Barriers Identified:

Personal Challenges

- Financial
 - The U.S. refugee resettlement program requires early self-sufficiency (cash assistance is short-term). And non-refugee immigrants might not be eligible for any federal or state income support. The imperative for short-term self-sufficiency is at the expense of long-term workforce development.
 - Covering the high cost of living (esp. housing) when earning entry level wages.
 - Tradeoff between being a breadwinner for the family (sometimes also having to support relatives overseas) and incurring debt for education/training/credential re-certification: usually education/training/credential re-certification takes a back seat.
- Time
 - The most educated and employable members in the family are usually relied upon as the primary income earners and have little time to continue their education
 - It can be a lengthy, bureaucratic process to get credential re-certification. This increases the amount of time earning lower wages (e.g. a single parent participant is unable to go back through medical school again to work as an MD so she is working at UVM in order to get a PhD instead, wasting previous education and years of work, to work in an area outside of her original area of expertise.)
- Psychological/Emotional
 - Being the only person of color in a workplace, despite several hundred employees working there, was difficult (completely immersed in a white office culture).
 - Being stuck in a dead-end job, without the possibility of living up to your potential, can lead to depression. It also makes it hard for your children to imagine a better future in Vermont.
 - Starting one's life over and persevering through adversity requires substantial amounts of self-confidence, determination, and a willingness to explore, learn, and analyze anew. Building a professional network from scratch, learning technical terminology in English, identifying ongoing professional development resources, and keeping current with professional practice standards.

Institutional Challenges

- Financial
 - The cost of credential re-certification and/or continuing education can be prohibitive (one is paying to replicate training/education/experience that one already spent time and money acquiring, perhaps going into debt, but which is not fully recognized).
- Policy
 - Lack of equity: There was unanimous agreement that people with refugee and immigrant backgrounds are often arbitrarily held to a higher standard of proof, just because their credentials were obtained from a system or institution not familiar to the Vermont-based reviewer.

- There are unnecessarily cumbersome and/or burdensome policies for transferring credentials or being allowed to take licensure exams.
 - In some cases, the process is rigid and inefficient (insensitive to the specific individual’s situation), requiring years of retaking courses when one knows the content very well. The result is that many succumb to having their credentials certified at a lower level and effectively becoming deskilled.
 - Paraphrasing one participant: I had a law degree from my country and then attended Vermont Law school for an LLM degree. I was not allowed to take the Vermont Bar exam, but I was allowed to take the New York Bar exam and I easily passed it. I could practice law in New York State, but I have decided to make Vermont my home (I have husband from here and we have kids now). I would have to apprentice in immigration law for five years to be able to practice in Vermont.
 - According to more than one participant, the Vermont Agency of Education Peer Review (Alternative Route to Licensure) Process, designed for those without traditional educator preparation at a U.S. college or university, is very cumbersome.
 - It is not possible to transfer CCV “prior learning” credits to other programs, which would improve the credential re-certification process.
- There is not always a clear pathway to credential re-certification that would allow someone to provisionally work in that field while re-certifying (which benefits both the employee and the employer). Someone new to the U.S., even if they are an expert in their field, will be challenged in navigating the nuanced requirements to be certified in Vermont and sometimes must spend hours reviewing the internet, books, and journals to gain information on current standards and professional practices in their field.
- Regulatory bodies are perceived as being stuck between traditional ways of operating and evaluating and trying to find how to innovate and adapt to a rapidly changing, globalized world. Addressing this shortcoming could attract people with refugee and immigrant backgrounds and support those already in Vermont looking to practice their professions.
- Need-based and other financial assistance resources that are available for credential re-certification should be clearly identified (otherwise it takes an exceptional amount of research and self-advocacy to obtain assistance).
 - Refugees and asylees are considered Vermont residents from Day 1 but must wait one full year to be considered a Vermont resident per Vermont Student Assistance Corporation and be eligible for financial aid. If a refugee or asylee can prove they reside in Vermont and didn’t reside elsewhere in the U.S. prior, why not waive the one year waiting period?
- National Standards for Cultural and Linguistic Appropriate Services in Health and Health Care (CLAS)² are being used in health field in Vermont, but such standards are not evenly and systematically applied to other agencies and services.

Structural Challenges:

- Housing/Career Options
 - A participant estimated that more than 200 Bhutanese refugees (approximately 50-60 families) who had made their home in Vermont moved primarily to Ohio and Pennsylvania, mostly due to lack of affordable housing in Vermont (“In Ohio, you can buy a nice, large house for under \$200,000”), but also the ease of starting businesses. When elderly dependent parents are in need of full-time care, it is also easier to be approved to be their paid caregiver.
 - Many refugees and immigrants live in multigenerational households. Grandparents can help with childcare and household chores, enabling both parents to work. It is very difficult to find affordable rental housing with more than three bedrooms. Most new construction/redevelopment in Chittenden County is two bedroom or smaller. Most of it is not affordable.

² <https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?vl=2&vlid=53>

- There are many families ready and financially capable of buying homes, but either they cannot afford a large enough home to house their extended family, or they compare the wages and professional opportunities in relation to home prices in other states and decide to move elsewhere.
- Biases:
 - “Refugees are a ready-made workforce. They come with a strong work ethic. The U.S. brings refugees, expecting them to fill entry-level jobs. However, there are those that arrive ready to fill mid-level jobs, too.”
 - To paraphrase a participant: When I was resettled fifteen years ago, we were told if you work hard, if you improve your English, you will get a better job. I now have a B.A. and a master’s degree from Vermont Law School. I applied to 9-10 jobs that I have the qualifications for at one organization, I had phone screenings, but I did not receive any interview or job offers. However, when a white person I know applies for a job there, they get it. Our race, names, or accent is the problem. When you open your mouth, and they hear an accent, they ask “where are you from?” [instead of questions about qualifications for the job]. I will always be black. I like my name – I shouldn’t have to change it just because they aren’t comfortable trying to pronounce it. Until I die, I will have an accent. The problem won’t go away. The State requests studies and reports, says it values diversity, but unless there are laws protecting against discrimination, and enforcement of the law, nothing will change. People smile at you, but underneath their thinking is different.
 - To paraphrase another participant: Many people in Vermont, and elsewhere, are hired not based upon qualifications, but based upon personal connections. The only way people of color can get their foot through the door and get an interview is through networking. “As minorities, we are the last to get hired, and the first to get laid off.” People with refugee and immigrant backgrounds need help with networking. If most of their peers are in entry-level jobs, it makes networking so much more difficult for higher-paying professional jobs.
- Missed opportunities for recognizing/developing talent in Vermont:
 - Paraphrasing one participant: Whenever multilingual professionals are not supported in being able to practice their profession in Vermont, it is a loss on several levels. The professional has diminished career potential, but also the public loses out on their talents and their communication abilities. A more positive outcome, for example, would be when a lawyer or tax accountant from a refugee or immigrant successfully serves a start-up business owner from their refugee or immigrant community. With the trusting professional relationship and good communication, the entrepreneur is more likely to succeed and contribute back to the economy (in terms of taxes, employment, and services provided). This in turn could encourage others to start businesses and others to move to Vermont and follow in their footsteps. But the negative outcome could discourage entrepreneurship and result in an exodus of entrepreneurs and capital.
 - There is a perception that U.S.-born children who are fluent in English (but who have parents with refugee or immigrant backgrounds) are by default placed in English Language Learner classes instead of mainstream classes, irrespective of their English fluency.
 - There is a perception that high school students categorized as English Language Learners are not enrolled in the classes needed to prepare them for post-secondary education (instead they are filling seats in classes which they don’t need to take, just to keep those classes from getting too small).
 - There is a perception that high school graduates categorized as English Language Learners are not given equal consideration as mainstream students would be by UVM and other local colleges and universities, and therefore must transfer there later, wasting time and money.
 - Young adult professionals are graduating from Vermont institutions and are struggling to find work in their field or at a level commensurate with their education. They hear from friends and relatives in other states that it is easier to get professional jobs there and so they reluctantly move from Vermont.

- Consultative bodies and groups to encourage diversity and support refugees and immigrants are important, but not always conducive to participation by many people with refugee and immigrant backgrounds. Referencing the Refugee & Immigrant Service Providers Network (RISPNet) meetings, one participant noted, with concurrence from others: “Everything is about us, without us.”³ He said that the State needs to do direct outreach at the local community level, so that the State and employers can hire us, retain us, support us in our work, and understand the cultures you are working with.
- The State is offering large tax incentives for people to move to Vermont from out-of-state. That is important, but the State should also be doing more to help those already here who want to stay but need additional support/assistance getting that first job commensurate with their education and experience.
- For critical jobs needed in our economy, it is much more cost-effective and a much shorter process to recruit people with refugee and immigrant backgrounds already in Vermont, who wants to stay, and support them in getting their credentials re-certified than to fund the education of someone for 18+ years and hope to keep them in Vermont after graduation.

Improvements and Solutions:

- Don’t just make nice pronouncements about how VT is a welcoming state that values diversity. Back that up with instituting new laws and policies, and enforcing existing laws and policies, that support people of color and those with refugee and immigrant backgrounds. Take concrete action against discrimination in employment, for both applicants (e.g. using test applicants, similar to housing discrimination investigations) and incumbent employees.
- Examine other states’ laws and policies (particularly states with innovative best practices, those of similar size population, and those bordering Vermont from where people with refugee and immigrant backgrounds might move). Develop programs and adapt existing programs/credential re-certification processes. If you build a clear pathway where people can see a job at the end, they will pursue the opportunity and tell others.
- The State should invest in supports and offer incentives for people with refugee and immigrant backgrounds to re-enter the workforce as part of a credential re-certification program (for specifics see section below, *Additional supports needed to ensure employment opportunities for New Americans, including childcare and transportation*)
- Address the affordable housing crisis and it will be easier to attract/retain professionals.
- The State, industry groups, and businesses could hire professionals with refugee and immigrant backgrounds as ambassadors/recruiters to recruit others to move to Vermont. Trust is needed to make the leap to move to Vermont. Having someone who speaks the same language or who has similar life experiences will go a long way to building that trust.
- Translating program and recruitment materials into other languages and making it easy to distribute materials via social media (e.g. Facebook, What’s App, and YouTube) will extend the reach of recruitment. Once a credential re-certification program is operational, providing brief real-life testimonials and success stories from people with refugee and immigrant backgrounds (in their languages) could also be effective.

Additional supports needed to ensure employment opportunities for New Americans, including childcare and transportation

Interview and Focus Group Participants recommended the following supports:

³ "Nothing About Us Without Us!" ([Latin](#): "Nihil de nobis, sine nobis") is a [slogan](#) used to communicate the idea that no policy should be decided by any representative without the full and direct participation of members of the group(s) affected by that policy. This involves [national](#), [ethnic](#), [disability-based](#), or other groups that are often thought to be [marginalized](#) from political, social, and economic opportunities. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nothing_About_Us_Without_Us

- Provide financial support to offset the cost of credential re-certification.
- Provide financial support to enable working parents to continue their education.
- Provide funding for paid professional internships.
- Fund Career Navigators: Individualized career counseling that is tailored for people with refugee and immigrant backgrounds (ideally provided by experts in this field).
- Mentors: volunteer professionals from relevant fields help can professionals with refugee and immigrant backgrounds understand the process of obtaining credential re-certification; understand the professional standards and practices for their profession in Vermont; and build a network of professional connections, leading to employment opportunities. (A refugee or immigrant might be very educated and experienced, but they arrive without local employment references or connections.)
- Easily accessible and culturally appropriate employment-focused health and mental health services to get people ready to return to work. (Refugees and asylees led full, productive lives before forcible displacement. They may have experienced trauma and/or deprivation from health care and other basic services. But with support, they can return to leading full, productive lives.)
- Ensure childcare that is affordable, convenient to access (especially via public transportation), and has service hours that can accommodate jobs outside Mon-Fri, 9-5. (There is frequently a waiting list for childcare centers and Head Start programs.)
 - Home-based childcare providers are now required by the State to have a high school diploma or GED, which prevents approval for many otherwise highly qualified people with refugee and immigrant backgrounds from becoming certified home-based childcare providers.
- Expand short-term transportation support for those starting a job without their own transportation (beyond *Ready To Go* program for Reach Up recipients). A young, single person with an engineering degree was unable to accept a job offer with the State of Vermont because he did not yet have his own personal vehicle, a necessity for the job.

Report Recommendations

1. Assist employers in making their workplaces culturally and linguistically supportive of employees with refugee and immigrant backgrounds by identifying Vermont-specific training and technical support resources and providing referrals. Identify/allocate funding for small to medium businesses employing significant numbers of people with refugee and immigrant backgrounds.
 - a. Cultural trainings (potentially state-funded)
 - b. Professional development opportunities (contract or fee for service)
 - c. Technical support/consulting (contract or fee for service)
2. Ensure that existing and future training, apprenticeship, and mentorship opportunities are culturally and linguistically appropriate and are readily available for professionals and pre-professionals, with special commitment to professions in high demand.
 - a. Workplace English classes (English for Specific Purposes, ESP) to improve workplace interpersonal communication skills and technical vocabulary.
 - b. Micro-credentialing programs to prepare professionals and pre-professionals with foundational skills needed before accessing Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)-funded training opportunities.
 - c. Ensure that WIOA-funded trainings meet CLAS standards. Apprenticeships and trainings should include English language learning support to ensure equity in linguistic accessibility (especially for entities receiving federal funding⁴) and to enhance work performance.

⁴ Federal regulations and statutes applicable to people with refugees and immigrant backgrounds and/or limited English proficiency include:

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1968

<https://www.justice.gov/crt/fcs/TitleVI-Overview>

- d. Support expansion of mentorship programs for both current professionals and young pre-professionals. This requires recruiting volunteer professionals with expertise in the relevant fields of mentees. Professional associations and business groups would be important partners.
3. Capitalize on the underutilized skills of people with refugee and immigrant backgrounds who have preexisting educational and professional credentials by providing clear, well-developed pathways to employment in Vermont that include mentoring referrals, financial support for credential re-certification (e.g. grants, retroactive educational loan forgiveness, tax credits, etc.)
4. Expedite entry into professional jobs in Vermont by funding the development of an intensive “turnkey” type program for several top priority, high-demand careers that provides comprehensive assistance (from credential re-certification through referral to employers) with personalized service and mentorship. Such a program has the potential to draw in professionals from other states as well. State-Employer partnerships would play a key role.
5. Expand workforce participation through supporting the professional development and employment readiness of workers with refugee and immigrant backgrounds.
 - a. Fund Career Navigators with expertise assisting people with refugee and immigrant backgrounds in entering/re-entering the workforce. Navigators will provide guidance, referrals, and hands-on assistance with pre-employment work readiness support, job applications, interviews, and short-term post-employment support to retain employment.
 - b. Facilitate employer-service provider partnerships to provide employee workplace-based supports (i.e. United Way of Northwest Vermont Working Bridges⁵ model) to promote employee success.
 - i. Resource Coordinators to help problem-solve and make referrals.
 - ii. Income Advance Loan Program to meet emergency needs and build savings/credit.
 - iii. Workplace financial literacy classes
 - c. Ensure that childcare is locally available, affordable, and convenient to access, and has service hours for jobs outside Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm.
 - d. Expand (beyond Reach Up recipients) short-term transportation referrals and financial support for those starting a job without their own transportation.

https://www.lep.gov/faqs/042511_Q&A_TitleVI_and_Regulations.pdf

Executive Order 13166

<https://www.justice.gov/crt/executive-order-13166>

<https://www.lep.gov/13166/eo13166.html>

https://www.lep.gov/faqs/042511_Q&A_TitleVI_and_Regulations.pdf

⁵ <https://unitedwaynwvt.org/workingbridges>

Appendix



The iceberg concept of culture

Surface Culture
Above sea level
Emotional level: relatively low

Deep Culture

Unspoken Rules
Partially below sea level
Emotional level: very high


Unconscious Rules
Completely below sea level
Emotional level: intense

food • dress • music
visual arts • drama • crafts
dance • literature • language
celebrations • games

courtesy • contextual conversational patterns • concept of time
personal space • rules of conduct • facial expressions
nonverbal communication • body language • touching • eye contact
patterns of handling emotions • notions of modesty • concept of beauty
courtship practices • relationships to animals • notions of leadership
tempo of work • concepts of food • ideals of childrearing
theory of disease • social interaction rate • nature of friendships
tone of voice • attitudes toward elders • concept of cleanliness
notions of adolescence • patterns of group decision-making
definition of insanity • preference for competition or cooperation
tolerance of physical pain • concept of "self" • concept of past and future
definition of obscenity • attitudes toward dependents • problem-solving
roles in relation to age, sex, class, occupation, kinship, and so forth

AFS Intercultural Programs Inc., Copyright 2010

refugees.org



The iceberg concept of culture

Surface Culture
Above sea level
Emotional level: relatively low

Deep Culture

Unspoken Rules
Partially below sea level
Emotional level: very high

Unconscious Rules
Completely below sea level
Emotional level: intense

**In small groups,
please consider:
Icebergs of
“_____ Services”,
for x country & (your agency)**

*Roles of individual, government, expectations,
navigating the system, etc.*

AFS Intercultural Programs Inc., Copyright 2010

refugees.org

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE *PROFESSIONAL*?

PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETER: WHY DOES IT MATTER?



3

refugees.org

BEST *EVOLVING* PRACTICES

DO	DON'T
Hire a PRO!	Family, child, or volunteer interpreter
Schedule enough time	Rush
Pre- & Post- Session	Jargon, acronyms, slang, idioms
Pause; be ready for clarifications	Chain questions together
First person "How are you?"	Third person "Ask her how she is doing."
Learn greetings and name pronunciation	Mumble
Check in: speed, volume, clarity	"Explain this"
Provide feedback	Worry
Reach out for help!	Feel alone!

4

refugees.org

APPENDIX H: AALV REPORT

NOTES – AALV EMPLOYMENT FOCUS GROUPS

Two sets of focus groups were convened at AALV on January 8-9, 2020. The first was focused on the experiences of youth and men from the refugee community while the second looked at the experiences of women. We asked three sets of questions:

1. What has been good in your employment experiences in VT?
2. What have been obstacles and barriers in your employment experiences in VT?
3. What would you suggest for improving New Americans' employment experiences in VT?

Highlights

Barriers

- Language and culture
- Lack of accreditation
- Transportation
- Wages/lack of advancement
- Cost of living
- Medical issues
- Transportation
- Childcare

Best Practices

- Paid probationary period
- Paid cultural holidays
- Internship/paid training programs
- Employer-provided transportation
- On-site interpretation

Recommendations

- Funding for transportation and drivers
- Paid internship and training programs
- Invest in youth through apprenticeship programs
- Recognize existing skills and experience in New American population including through formal accreditation
- Practical diversity, equity and inclusion programs for employers providing background on New American employees
- Increase wages and pathways for advancement for better retention outcomes
- Build bridges and better relationships between employers and employees

Here are some more detailed responses we gathered from the discussions:

Significant Barriers

Language and Culture

- Several participants said that their lack of English or speaking with an accent (or their last name) was held against them in either not getting an interview, not getting a job, or being made fun of at work

- Others mentioned the difficulties, especially for older refugees to learn a new language
- A majority mentioned the importance of learning English however, both practically and as a way of fitting in within a workplace
- A number of participants complained that they felt like they were being exploited because of their lack of language
- Several participants felt that racism and discrimination towards them (because of race, ethnicity, religion and lack of language skills) were also important barriers for them
- Being seen as outsiders is an issue, whether because of a lack of connections and networks and the sense that you need to know the employer or to know people to get good jobs
- A particular concern was raised regarding youth in the community who have had disciplinary problems and ended up in the criminal justice system. Even for those who wish to reform, being incarcerated leaves them with few options afterwards and little chance to advance, improve or turn around their lives. Youth thus have little sense of being able to reform and join/rejoin the workforce
- Youth said that they had to choose between learning English, concentrating on homework and getting a low-paying job, with the latter often taking precedence and their grades suffering as a result

Lack of accreditation

- A common theme was a lack of recognition of prior education or experience whether in their previous country or even in informal settings in Vermont. Many participants saw this as a real challenge to meaningful work
- If you didn't have opportunity to go to school how do workers become prepared and gain skills when they arrive in the US? Several participants said that they needed to know how to gain the skills that employers are looking for or how to get them to recognize the ones they already have
- Participants said that they were really motivated to get a job and succeed at it but their lack of formal education made it really difficult to actually participate in the workforce (several pointed out that even with years of experience working in a childcare or medical field they found it difficult to get regular work, for example)

Wages/Lack of Advancement

- Many participants said that they did not have any problems getting work but most of this work was very low waged and they mention problems with not getting paychecks on time and not knowing who to approach to have this redressed
- Lack of advancement was mentioned as a significant issue, including the inability to get supervisory or advanced positions or increase in salary. Several participants asked why their wages have not risen, why the nature of their work has not improved and said they have not had any social mobility as a result
- Youth in particular complained that they would get fired from factory jobs often over misunderstandings and then could not get hired in another job
- Several participants were concerned that there were not enough supports to help them grow and advance in the workplace. This has led to a real difficulty in retaining workers in certain kinds of workplaces
- A common theme was questions about whether there existed pathways to advance in their jobs; workers accepted they need to start at an entry-level but were concerned that native-born employers were able to advance more easily even if they had less experience
- Many participants reported that they expected that they would start out with entry-level jobs but work their way up; now they say they are accepting the reality that they cannot advance and are settling down into mediocre jobs

Cost of Living

- Many participants talked about the cost of living and especially if they are in the metro Burlington area. They complained about how expensive it is to live in Burlington and that they are living paycheck to paycheck
- The priority is stable living which impacts on their ability to match skills, interests and jobs
- The cost of living and of housing in particular were mentioned as especially stressful issues
- Several women said that Vermont is so expensive that they are always working and that families with young kids are really suffering with the lack of parents at home which leads to disciplinary problems in schools and in the community
- Some participants said that the need to work was a barrier to more participation in community organizations and volunteer work in the broader community

Medical Issues

- Some participants mentioned medical conditions that prevented them from taking up certain (or any) jobs
- The lack of adequate medical insurance, especially for seasonal or part-time work was a factor for some participants

Transportation

- Transportation was mentioned as a huge issue by many participants.
- Many asked about the possibility of carpools or vanpools; the lack of transportation appeared to disproportionately affect women workers
- Several workers mentioned that their shifts ended at 9:30PM but this meant that they missed the bus and had to wait in the cold till 11:00PM to catch the bus

Childcare

- Childcare was also a significant issue mentioned by almost all participants
- Some older children mentioned that they could not take jobs because they had to care for younger family members
- Women mentioned having to depend on friends for childcare as it was unaffordable.
- Other women mentioned staying home and not entering the workforce because they could not balance between childcare and work.
- Several said that they were worried that if they took jobs and left children at home that DCF would take them away
- Others talked about the sporadic nature of work and that it was impossible to plan a budget or to balance between work and care of kids

Best Practices

- Rhino Foods was mentioned in particular for some of their practices including their one-week paid probationary period that allowed the employer (and employee) to get to know if it was a good fit
- Rhino Foods was also mentioned for providing paid cultural holidays to workers (a few other employers were similarly mentioned)
- Such practices were seen as an incentive to remain at a workplace
- Another model program is the collaboration between Old Spokes Home and Spectrum Youth and Family Services to provide training to youth as bike mechanics (several participants suggested expanding this program through fully-funded internships with similar partners)
- Some participants said that their workplace provides transportation to and from work (though they also said that they did not know if the cost for this was deducted from their wages)

- One participant said that their workplace recognized that they have arthritis in their hands and if the water for washing was too cold they could switch tasks with another worker (however due to difficulties with language and communication they did not know how to ask for the switch nor to communicate needs to a supervisor)
- Several African participants mentioned that their workplace provided on-demand translation and interpretation but only for languages (such as Nepali) that they do not speak and the employers did not seem to know that they had different languages

Suggestions for Improvement

- Provide funding for employers or service providers to purchase vans for transportation to and from work and hire drivers. Removing transportation barriers for those who don't have cars or depend on the bus was seen as a key component of success
- For those who drop out, there should be easier and more clear access the GED
- Create paid internship and training programs, developing training jobs and longer probationary periods to allow New Americans to adjust
- Invest more in high school students, building on existing models like the summer job training program developed by Old Spokes Home and Spectrum
- Help to recognize both practical skills and experience, help New Americans receive recognition for their qualifications
- Provide practical forms of diversity and equity training for prospective employers (this includes information about the backgrounds, language and cultural needs of specific New American communities and how to address specific conflicts that might arise)
- Raise minimum wage to \$15/hr to provide more economic stability
- Several participants hoped that their communities could build relationships with HR people to positively impact recruitment, interviews and retention (for example allowing interpreters in the interview or training processes)
- In general participants suggested building better bridges between employers and New American communities and not having temporary agencies be the main go-between
- Another specific suggestion was to give training to high school dropouts, especially in trades and construction, drivers, CDL, pre-LNA, and general skill-training
- Participants asked if the state can spend money on grants to entice workers to VT, perhaps a similar fund could be established as a 'start-up' of \$10,000 or \$7500 if they are starting a job in the state

Attendees: Women's Focus Group on Employment Issues

Country	Name	Gender M/F	Age	Contact
DR Congo	Mwasimuke Florence	F	45	
DR Congo	Uzima Bora	F	27	
DR Congo	Mwajuma Ntirampeba	F	38	
DR Congo	Bigelegele Machozi	F	46	
DR Congo	Furaha Venas	F	44	
DR Congo	Mwatumu Alimasi	F	32	
DR Congo	Awa Bashikungoma	F	21	
DR Congo	Claudine Silvia	F	21	
DR Congo	Makuba Jerve	F	36	
DR Congo	Nadine Zena	F	24	

Attendees: Youth and Unemployed Focus Group on Employment Issues

Country	Name	Gender M/F	Age	Contact
Somalia	Hassan Kassim	M	23	
Cameroon	Samuel Dingba	M	25	
Bhutan	Rabin Dahal	M	21	
Somalia	Aden Haji	M	25	
Bhutan	Phal Ghimire	M	45	/
Bhutan	Tek Rai	M	50	/
Bhutan	Dhan Rai	M	52	/
Bhutan	Rita Ghimire	F	78	/
Nepal	Doma Sherpa	F	32	/
Bhutan	Harish Bhattari	M	24	/
USA	Brandon Gray	M	27	
Somalia	Abdillahi Hassan	M	45	
DR Congo	Boniface	M	17	
DR Congo	Jeremia	M	15	/
DR Congo	Oliver	M	15	/
DR Congo	Patient	M	15	/
DR Congo	Jima	M	15	/
DR Congo	Munanga Ikumi	M	53	/
Somalia	Asha Madey	F	36	/
Somalia	Kassim Jamal	M	32	/