



Web Conference: Orientation and Adjustment of Refugee Seniors

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International Organization for Migration (IOM) Nepal
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Funded by DHHS/ACF/Office of Refugee Resettlement and supported by DOS/Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration

Cultural Orientation Resource Center at CAL

Funded by the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration to:

- ▶ Research, develop and disseminate **resources** about refugee training and resettlement
- ▶ Provide **technical assistance** to refugee service providers on refugees' cultures, languages and orientation needs
- ▶ Develop a globally linked network to **exchange** refugee orientation information, concerns, and best practices

Funded by ORR to provide technical assistance on:

- ▶ **Enhanced and extended orientation** for **ORR-eligible clients** (refugees, asylees, entrants, etc.)
- ▶ **Characteristics, resettlement, and integration** of these groups

Widespread concern about refugee seniors

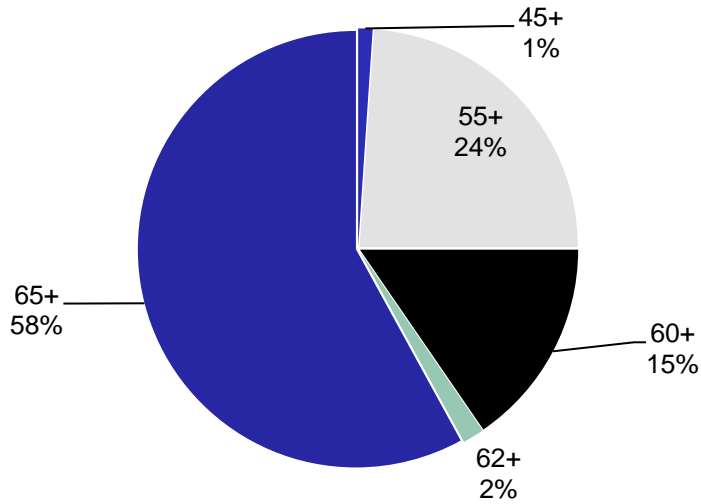
- ▶ Came to the COR Center's attention through a wide variety of sources:
 - Overseas CO program staff
 - Domestic service providers
 - ORR and PRM staff
 - COR Center home visits, focus groups, interviews, etc.

COR Center online survey

- ▶ Questions about orientation and adjustment of refugee seniors
- ▶ 96 completed surveys (out of 190 partial responses)
- ▶ 59 respondents willing to be contacted
- ▶ Being used to guide development of resources
- ▶ If you would like to participate, go to http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/orientation_for_senior_refugees

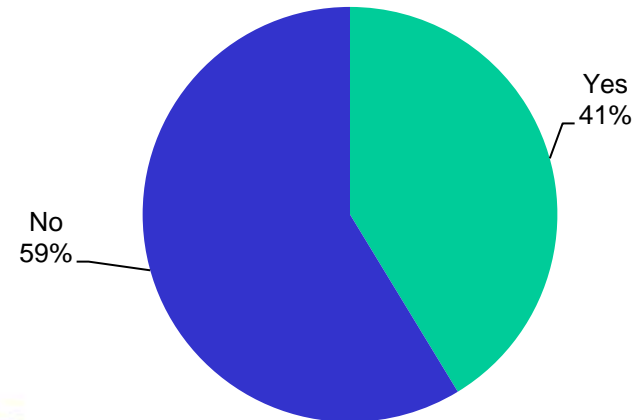
Responses to Online Survey

Age definition of a "senior"



Several respondents noted other criteria, such as health condition or family role (e.g. grandparent).

Orientation specifically for seniors



Senior-specific orientation and topics

Activities offered

- ▶ English language classes
- ▶ Orientation sessions
- ▶ Field trips
- ▶ Citizenship classes
- ▶ Social programs
- ▶ Volunteer opportunities, job clubs, mentors, tutors, etc.

Topics

- ▶ Health; insurance programs
- ▶ Status and citizenship
- ▶ English language
- ▶ Cultural adjustment
- ▶ Services/programs available
- ▶ Safety, transportation, SSI, etc.

Successes observed

- ▶ “Everybody wants to go to ESL class to learn English. Many people know how to ride Metro Bus. They keep home clean and go to the hospital.”
- ▶ “Age-appropriate opportunities to learn have helped refugee elders retain their status as elders within their family and community.”
- ▶ “The class has helped seniors to be more confident in their skills – more independent, able to do things on their own, to interact with Americans, feel more adjusted, participate in American civic life.”

Challenges for agencies, for refugee seniors

For Agencies

- ▶ Funding (and staffing)
- ▶ Translation
- ▶ Transportation
- ▶ Space
- ▶ Outreach, cultural challenges, attendance, etc.

For Refugee Seniors

- ▶ Reluctance; dislike of change; negative attitude about learning
- ▶ Mobility and transportation
- ▶ Language
- ▶ Medical barriers
- ▶ Slow to learn
- ▶ Isolation, dependence, need for family involvement

Non senior-specific orientation; successes

- ▶ Majority of respondents note that seniors participate in standard orientation
 - ▶ Some note ESL classes, field trips, and employment orientation
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- ▶ “Refugee seniors report less depression and loneliness because they feel more a part of the community. The community garden has been of particular joy for refugee seniors.
 - ▶ “They have an opportunity to go to school which many of them were unable to do in their own country. They establish a sense of independence and self-worth...
 - ▶ “Senior’s needs are currently best met by the case manager providing individual attention and ongoing orientation outside of structured workshops.”

Challenges for agencies, for refugee seniors

For Agencies

- ▶ Transportation
- ▶ Language/interpretation
- ▶ Attendance, participation

For Refugee Seniors

- ▶ Perception of need and relevance
- ▶ Mobility and transportation
- ▶ Difficulty understanding; slower to learn
- ▶ Language/interpretation
- ▶ Medical barriers
- ▶ Isolation, need for family support

Other activities for seniors

Wide variety in various locations

- ▶ ESL, citizenship, health services, others noted previously
- ▶ Help with applications, complaints, and billing issues; cultural programming; lunches, mental health services....

Wish list

- ▶ ESL, citizenship, others noted previously
- ▶ Social programs
- ▶ Gathering place
- ▶ Transportation support
- ▶ Ethnic community building and support
- ▶ Art programs, etc.

Concerns regarding seniors

Respondent after respondent used the following words to describe refugee seniors:

- ▶ Depressed
- ▶ Isolated
- ▶ Marginalized
- ▶ Dependent
- ▶ Hesitant or reluctant to adjust
- ▶ Confused
- ▶ Slow to learn English

Other concerns noted:

- ▶ Little to no funding
- ▶ Medical issues
- ▶ Transportation

How to strengthen senior orientation in U.S.

- ▶ Orientation specifically for seniors
- ▶ ESL specifically for seniors
- ▶ Funding to support senior-specific orientation and ESL
- ▶ Increase interaction with Americans
- ▶ Social activities
- ▶ Connections with agencies providing services to aging
- ▶ Conducting needs assessment with refugee seniors
- ▶ Create discussion groups, conduct class in native language, develop tools for relatives, arrange field trips, fund community liaisons, develop video showing active seniors in U.S., etc.

COR Center Resources

- ▶ Presentations from this web conference
- ▶ *Providing Orientation to Refugee Seniors: Tips and Strategies* Digest addressing seniors in an educational context: ways to accommodate potential challenges and strengths
- ▶ Descriptions of programs providing orientation and other services to seniors; refugee senior case study
- ▶ Overseas CO lesson plans regarding seniors and families
- ▶ In development: brief video of interviews with refugee seniors of various ethnic groups on challenges and successes

All in “Seniors” resource package on COR Center Web site:

www.culturalorientation.net

- ▶ “Refugee Discussion” group: write COR@CAL.org to join