

**Alicia Lee Extended Abstract:**

Since the creation of the refugee resettlement program in 1980, the United States has resettled more than 2.3 million refugees (excluding Amerasian refugees). These refugee arrivals have become an increasingly visible and controversial immigrant group in the United States due to their growing immigrant proportion in non-traditional immigrant cities and their diverse ethnic backgrounds. Although refugees only comprise ten percent of the total immigrant population in the United States, they are a unique subset of immigrants due to the state's involvement and support in their resettlement process. How the state's involvement in their resettlement shapes their socioeconomic trajectory adds to the knowledge base of this interdisciplinary field and can provide insight into what services and support are influential in improving socioeconomic outcomes for labor immigrants and refugees.

This paper discusses the variation in socioeconomic status and resettlement experience between legally recognized refugees and non-refugee status immigrants in the United States. It uses the New Immigrant Survey to compare socioeconomic outcomes among immigrants who successfully applied for lawful permanent residence in 2003. Specifically, this paper explores resettlement location patterns and the relationships between the mode of reception, gender, household composition, employment, and income. Due to data limitations, few studies have been able to compare these different immigrant groups by official visa category and instead have relied primarily on ethnographic case studies or used proxy categories in large datasets such as the US census. The results of this investigation will help determine if there are significant differences in socioeconomic status and resettlement experience between these two immigrant populations and explore the relationship between these differences and the immigrants' access to government support services.

Assimilation theorists, Portes and Zhou (1993), argue that the current economy is operating as a dual-labor market, or segmented labor market, where immigrants are relegated to the secondary market that only provides poorly paid menial labor jobs that are often temporary and do not provide long-term financial stability. Portes and Zhou suggest that an immigrant group's path of assimilation varies by its country of origin, its racial identification upon entry into the US, its residential location, and its socio-economic background. Instead of theorizing a straight-line assimilation model, the theorists maintain that groups have different trajectories depending upon which American culture is their primary point of contact. They stipulate that the immigrant group's mode of incorporation has a strong influence on its assimilation trajectory. The modes are a combination of immigration policy, government reception and community reaction.

The structure of the resettlement services provided by the US government's refugee resettlement program creates a different point of contact for particular migrants than the co-ethnic social network that their compatriots might experience who arrived in the US by another means. The mode of incorporation for government-resettled refugees differs in two important ways, location of resettlement and the type of social service agency responsible for aiding in the refugee's social integration.

The United States Refugee Resettlement Program relies on the assistance of ten nonprofit organizations (and their contractors) to resettle the refugees successfully throughout various cities across the nation. The organizations are known as VOLAGS and operate under the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) located in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The US Refugee Admission Processing System (RAPS) located in Arlington, Virginia, is responsible for assigning refugee groups to particular states and VOLAGS. The cities selected as

sites for refugee resettlement are chosen due to their history of low welfare utilization and a favorable earned income potential relative to the cost of living (ORR Annual Report to Congress 2005). The availability of social services and established social support groups within the area are also considered in the decision-making process.

The traditional immigrant gateway cities of New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, and Miami, while still boasting the largest immigrant populations, no longer record the greatest incoming immigrant flows. Immigrants and refugees are resettling in new urban areas across the country, with Minneapolis, Phoenix, and Atlanta receiving record numbers of immigrants since the year 2000. California, New York, Florida, and Texas received the most refugees from the year 1983-2001 (ORR Annual Report to Congress 2005). There is evidence that immigrants are beginning to change their initial settlement patterns away from the traditional immigrant gateways partly in response to the density of the ethnic groups in the inner cities, employment opportunities, and affordable housing stock (Alba and Nee 1997, Singer 2004, Waters 2005).

The Office of Refugee Resettlement evaluates successful integration into the American society by three factors, employment status, English proficiency, and independence of welfare services. The employment status is measured by the employment-to-population ratio (EPR), labor force participation rate, and unemployment rate. The Office of Refugee Resettlement, operating under the State Department, conducts an annual survey of a random sample of all U.S. refugees who have resided in this country for less than five years. Analysis of the data collected by this survey is limited to regional comparisons of refugee groups.

This paper aims to contribute to the literature on refugee socio-economic outcomes by providing a comparison of immigrant groups by country of origin in addition to visa category.

Given the great degree of variation of migrant experience by country of origin as well as resettlement process, the ability to take these areas of variability into account in our analysis will allow us a more accurate representation of the status of refugees in the US.