INTERSECTION BETWEEN TANF AND REFUGEE CASH ASSISTANCE

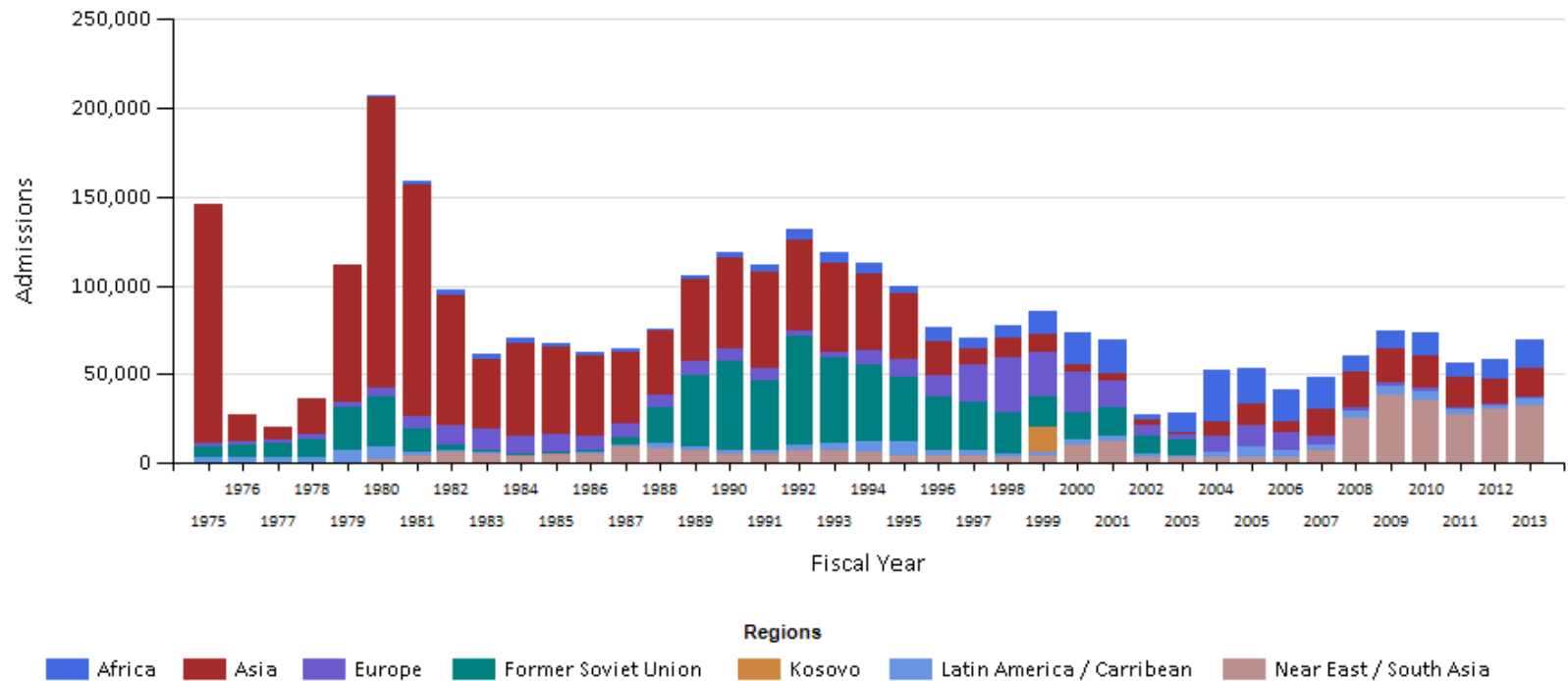## NAWRS CONFERENCE 2015

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OUTLINE

- Background on Refugees in U.S.
- Findings from Evaluation of Refugee Social Services (RSS) and Targeted Assistance Formula Grant (TAG) Programs
  - Conducted by The Lewin Group and the Urban Institute for ACF, Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR)
  - Researchers: Mary Farrell, Sam Elkin, Randy Capps, Bret Barden, Mike Mueller, Nancy Pindus, Everett Henderson
- Introducing New Study: Understanding the Intersection Between TANF and Refugee Cash Assistance Services
  - Conducted by Abt Associates and MEF Associates for ACF, Office of Planning Research and Evaluation in consultation with ORR
  - Researchers: Robin Koralek (Abt), Mary Farrell (MEF), and Sam Elkin (MEF)

I. BACKGROUND

REFUGEE ADMISSIONS BY REGION 1975 - 2013

CHALLENGES TO SERVING REFUGEES

- Little advance notice of arriving refugees
- Diversity of skill levels and work experience
- Limited time before cash assistance runs out
- Mental health issues
- Need for English language training

II. EVALUATION OF RSS/TAG

BACKGROUND ON REFUGEE SOCIAL SERVICES (RSS) AND TARGETED ASSISTANCE FORMULA GRANT (TAG)

- Formula grant funds to states (RSS) and counties (TAG)
- Goal: help refugees achieve economic self-sufficiency and social adjustment
- Eligibility: Up to 5 years after date of entry
- Services include:
  - Case management
  - Employment services (job search, placement, and follow-up)
  - English language training
  - Short-term training and education
  - Day care and transportation
  - Translation or interpretation services
  - OJT and skills recertification
  - Other
- Serves refugees and other related groups (e.g., asylees, Cuban/Haitian entrants, Amerasians, and trafficking victims)

EVALUATION OF RSS/TAG

- Conducted in 2006 and 2007
- Focused on services provided in three communities: Houston, Miami, and Sacramento
- Implementation and Outcome Study
- Data Sources:
  - RSS and TAG program data
  - Administrative data (cash assistance, Food Stamps, UI wage records)
  - Survey: 955 completes
  - Focus groups: 3 groups in each site
  - Field research: 2 visits to each site

PROGRAMS OPERATED UNDER DIVERSE CIRCUMSTANCES

- Houston
  - Most diverse: Over 30 different languages spoken by refugees
  - Notable share with low education (22% never had attended school when they arrived)
  - Primarily served "free cases"
- Miami
  - Most arrivals were Cuban/Haitian entrants
  - 80% had at least 12 years of education, and many had professional degrees
  - Haitians faced more challenges; lack of Spanish a barrier in Miami
- Sacramento
  - Resettled family reunification cases from Eastern Europe and Laos (Hmong)
  - 86% arrived with high school degrees
  - Most had large families; average household size was 4.7 individuals

WELFARE CONTEXT MATTERS

- Houston
  - Low TANF benefit state; focused on rapid employment
  - Public-private partnership: *resettlement agencies* provided cash and medical assistance and employment services
  - Just 7% received TANF in first year after entry
- Miami
  - Low TANF benefit state; focused on rapid employment
  - State-administered program
  - 25% received TANF in first year after entry
- Sacramento
  - Offers more generous TANF benefits; emphasized ESL
  - County-administered program
  - 62% received TANF in first year after entry

PROGRAMS RELIED ON EXPERIENCED PROVIDERS AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

- Houston
  - Had consortium of five Voluntary resettlement agencies and two education providers
  - Met regularly and coordinated services within community
- Miami
  - Extensive network of services providers administered through workforce agency, community college, and public school district
- Sacramento
  - Well-established network of Mutual Assistance Associations (MAAs)

MAJORITY OF REFUGEES FOUND EMPLOYMENT; INCOME WAS MODEST

- From UI wage records, rates of employment were
  - Houston: 75% (year 1); 73% (year 2)
  - Miami: 70% (year 1); 77% (year 2)
  - Sacramento: 37% (year 1); 55% (year 2)
- From survey, annual family income ranged from $21,000 (Houston and Miami) to $25,000 in Sacramento
- Analysis conducted just before great recession

PROMISING STRATEGIES

- Strong coordination between service providers
- Bringing ESL instruction where refugees lived
- Integrating ESL in employment settings
- Certification and career laddering programs
- Cultural competency provided by former refugees

III. NEW STUDY: UNDERSTANDING THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN TANF AND REFUGEE CASH ASSISTANCE SERVICES

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What do we know about how different states and localities administer benefits and services?
  - Do certain approaches or services seem most promising in assisting refugees in achieving economic self-sufficiency and obtaining stable employment?
- To what extent are states integrating TANF, Refugee Cash Assistance and associated services?
  - How are these programs being integrated?
  - Does the integration of these services show promise for better serving refugee populations?
- What data are currently collected?

OVERVIEW OF APPROACH

- Consultation with Experts
  - State refugee coordinators
  - Voluntary agency staff
  - Researchers
- Consultation with ACF program offices
- Survey of state refugee coordinators
  - Document diversity of state policies and practices
  - Identify promising practices and common challenges
  - Inform site selection
- Site visits to 8 communities
  - TANF staff
  - Local resettlement agencies staff
  - Staff of MAAs and CBOs that serve refugees
  - Focus groups of refugees

STAY TUNED

- Special topic reports
  - Promising strategies
  - Collaborations between state-administered and community organizations
- Final report
- Ongoing dissemination activities

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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