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Refugees' Digital Equity, Inclusion, and Access in Public Libraries: A Narrative Review

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Introduction

On February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, triggering the evacuation of over 4 million refugees (UNHCR, 2022). The United States has committed to receiving up to 100,000 Ukrainian refugees (Keith, 2022). Refugees fleeing violence and entering new countries and cultures will require significant help from public and government institutions. Through the discovery of the information needs of these refugee groups, we can determine what role public libraries have in fulfilling those needs.

As libraries in the country consider how best to aid the incoming refugees from Ukraine, our initial research examined what services libraries are currently offering refugees. By analyzing the current literature on library services for refugees, libraries can be better prepared for what the information needs of Ukrainian refugees will be. Due to the reliance on technology in American society for a variety of socioeconomic needs, digital equity will be important for refugees for their mental well-being and social integration. In addition to understanding the information needs of refugees, there is merit in investigating what skills librarians will need to assist Ukrainian refugees. They are a group that have experienced great trauma, so a high level of cultural competence will be necessary for effective and compassionate service.

Considering the particular needs of Ukrainian refugees, and the increasing focus on digital equity and inclusion which has heightened since COVID-19, our research is guided by two questions that focus on the digital equity and inclusion needs of Ukrainian refugees in the United States. What have public libraries done historically to assist these critically, at-risk immigrants, and what services are they currently providing for these vulnerable groups? What is

it that library professionals need to know to respond, in equity-focused ways, to the wave of refugees that will arrive from Ukraine?

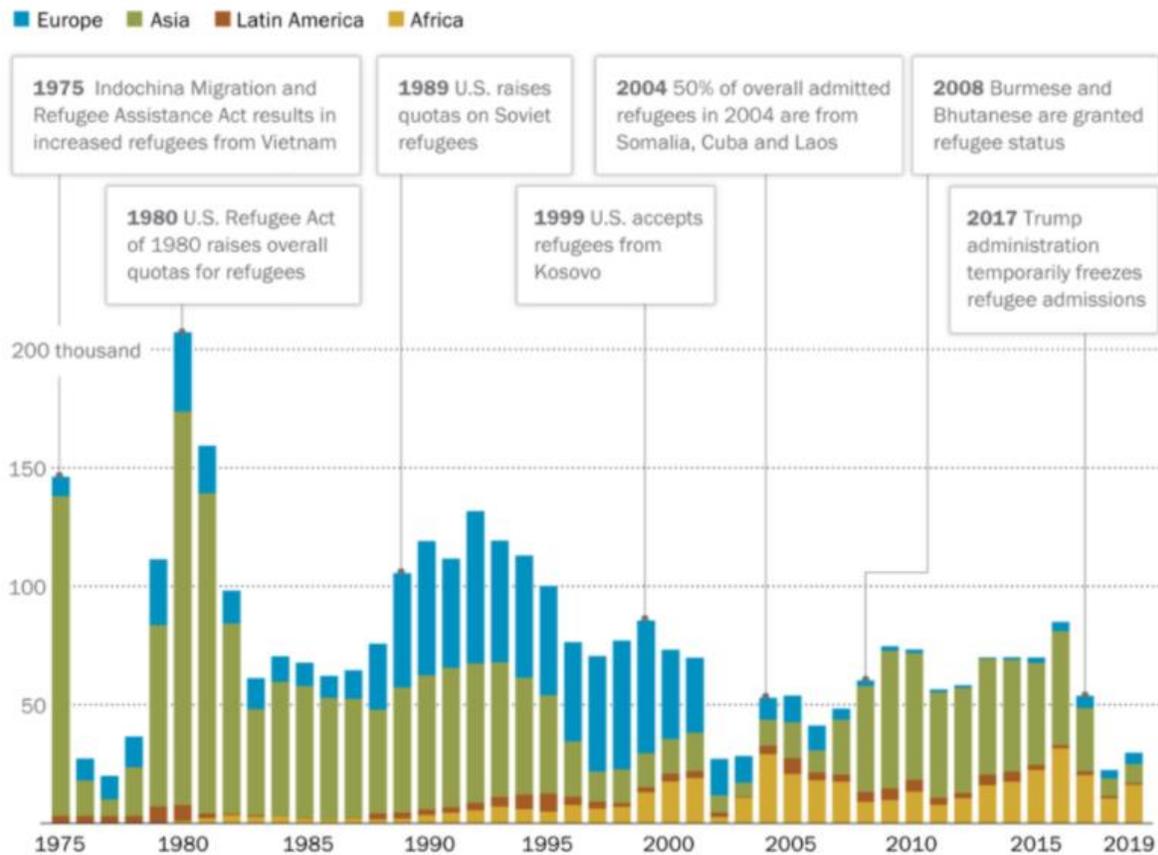
Background

The United Nations defines refugees as “people who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country” (UNHCR, n.d., para. 1). In accordance with this definition and the Refugee Act of 1980, the U.S. plans to admit 100,000 Ukrainian refugees, out of the 4 million displaced residents. However, Biden officials have stated “the effort could stretch beyond the current fiscal year ending on Sept. 30, [...] signaling that it may not move quickly” (Cook & Hesson, 2022, para. 7). This, in turn, has led many Ukrainian refugees “to the U.S.-Mexico border to seek asylum [...]. Last week, about 3,000 Ukrainians deemed by U.S. authorities to be particularly vulnerable were allowed to cross the border into the United States” (Cook & Hesson, 2022, paras. 13-14).

According to the United States’ Department of State, “Since the passage of the Refugee Act in 1980, which incorporated this definition of refugee into the [Immigration and Nationality Act], the United States has admitted more than 3.1 million refugees” (United States Department of State, 2021). As detailed by the Pew Research Center in the graphic below, refugee admittance rates and origins fluctuate based on historical events, such as the aforementioned 1980 Refugee Act, the fall of the Soviet Union, and Trump administration’s capping refugee quotas (Krogstad, 2020). With the projected expiration of Title 42 in May 2022, as well as the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War, these statistics are expected to shift once again (Mayorkas, 2022).

The shifting origins of refugees to the U.S. since 1975

Number of refugees admitted to the U.S., by region of origin and fiscal year



Notes: Fiscal years end on Sept. 30 of the years shown. Data do not include special immigrant visas and certain humanitarian parole entrants or refugees admitted under the Private Sector Initiative. Europe includes Russia and former Soviet Union states. Asia includes Middle Eastern and North African countries. Africa includes sub-Saharan Africa, plus Sudan and South Sudan. Latin America includes the Caribbean. Source: U.S. State Department's Refugee Processing Center, accessed Oct. 1, 2019.

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(Krogstad, 2020).

As Ukrainian refugees seek protection in the U.S. through various channels, the U.S. needs to develop infrastructure and assistance programs in order to efficiently integrate incoming refugees. One effective means is preparing libraries, conduits for community building, with the tools, training, and funding in order to meet the needs of incoming refugees. As institutions dedicated to accessibility with a mission statement prioritizing a convenient venue to access

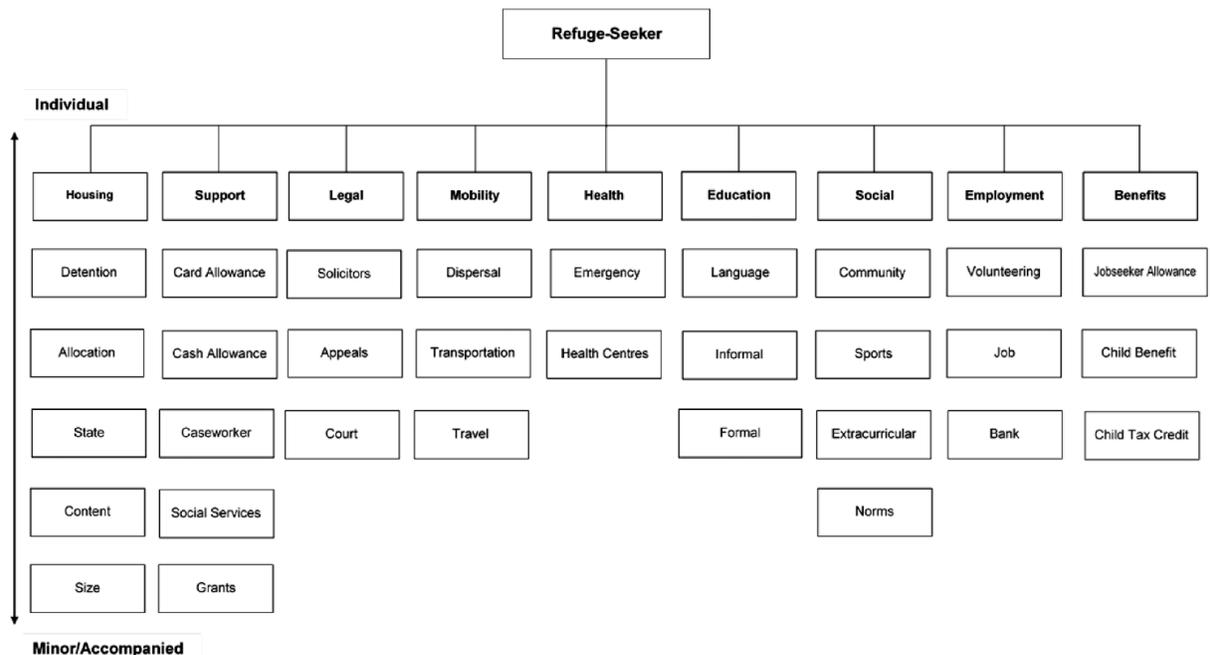
information, whether it be in-person or online, libraries and their staff must remain at the forefront of society's ever-changing trends.

It is important to note that the integration process can vary widely across cities, states, and even countries. In the United Kingdom, Oduntan and Ruthven investigated asylum seekers' information needs by following the steps needed to gain the legal recognition of "refugee status." Oduntan and Ruthven (2019) write:

"Refugees and asylum seekers are expected to successfully achieve integration [...].

However, integration studies have described these processes and systems as cumbersome, noting that there is little or no information to aid their navigation [and] have highlighted the devastating consequences on emotional health and other aspects of personal integration" (p. 792).

Through a series of qualitative interviews with asylum seekers at various stages of the refugee process, Oduntan and Ruthven developed the information needs matrix, illustrated below.



In this matrix, Odutan and Ruthven (2019) hope that “everyone concerned collectively shares it, which includes the refuge-seeker, the host society, policy makers and researchers” (p. 804). That is, the matrix itself is designed to function as a roadmap towards obtaining the needs for asylum seekers’ integration into the host society, via the concepts outlined in the top row of the matrix. Using this type of logic, host countries can develop specialized plans based on each person’s legal distinction and their specific needs due to said distinction, in order to effectively facilitate integration.

As new refugees arrive they face what Lloyd (2017) termed as a “fractured information landscape” (p. 37). Lloyd defines this fractured information landscape as a concept that is used to describe “how the experience and outcomes of uncontrolled displacement may impact on the knowledge bases of people who are forced to involuntarily leave their countries” (2017, p. 38). This means that refugees are now facing much uncertainty in the ways they approach the new information experiences they will encounter. Refugees must now reconcile any differences between how they find new information sources and learning the rules surrounding what constitutes valid information. At the same time, refugees are striving toward integration. According to Lloyd (2017), there are a few key markers of integration that “include success in: employment; housing; education; health; understanding and attainment of citizenship and rights; social connections within groups and across the community; understanding of the host nation’s culture and community; and language competence” (p. 40). This is where digital technologies and services could come into play as they might be able to foster integration.

However, as refugees arrive in the United States, they will lack adequate access to the Internet and Internet-capable devices. According to McCaffrey & Taha (2019), there has been a lot of research conducted “around the role of digital, Internet, and social media tools in

maintaining family and friendship ties within the country the refugees have just left” (p. 27). The authors also note that “there is a lack of literature on the role of digital technology in refugee integration processes” (McCaffrey & Taha, 2019, p. 27). With this in mind, it is important for public libraries to consider how their information practices and services can support this process of integration for refugees. An important question becomes how can public libraries support refugees with this integration process using available digital technologies and services?

Refugees need to feel connected to those family and friends that are still in the countries they have left behind. Internet access and internet capable devices are crucial in keeping these connections. According to the UNHCR (2016), “time and time again, refugees have demonstrated that connectivity is of critical importance to them” (para. 5). Several issues tend to plague refugees when it comes to ensuring they are connected. These issues include internet access, availability of Internet capable devices, and the associated costs of these materials. The importance of refugees being able to be digitally connected cannot be stressed enough. Besides being a way to stay connected to family who have stayed behind, “it’s also one of the best ways for them to access trusted sources of information about the asylum process and its changing procedures” (UNHCR, 2016, para. 13).

Being connected also opens up opportunities for entertainment. Entertainment in their native language may not be readily available locally, but through Internet access, they may be able to obtain this. According to UNHCR (2016), “many refugees, especially youth, use connectivity to educate themselves – learning a new language, continuing disrupted education, or mastering other skills they hope to put to use wherever their paths may take them” (para. 15). Having ready and affordable access to these services is where public libraries can step in to

provide. Within some public libraries, partnering with other community-based organizations that assist refugee populations may be helpful.

Another way to connect is through personal relationships. Refugees are often resettled in an area where there are many people from their country of origin. For example, many current Ukrainian refugees will be resettled in San Francisco and Chicago (Ronayne, 2022). This means that most refugees often will not have any relations in their host country but may be surrounded by people who are familiar with their culture and language. This is extremely important because as Ronayne (2022) stated, “having somebody who can help them navigate the cultural shock and navigate the system...it just makes things a lot easier and smoother” (para. 10). If libraries can offer programs tailored to refugee’s needs, it will aid in their societal inclusion and help improve their situation and mental health.

Research Strategy

Due to the complexity of the topic of digital equity and inclusion in refugee communities, and in particular the recency of the Ukrainian refugee crisis, we elected to conduct a narrative literature review following the guidelines provided by Onwuegbuzie and Frels (2016). A narrative literature review is defined by Onwuegbuzie and Frels (2016), “typically provide a broad overview of a topic, rather than addressing a specific question such as how effective an intervention is,” and, “cover a wide range of issues within a given topic” (p. 24). The goal of the narrative review is to summarize, and critique the current literature on our topic (Biskjaer, Dalsgaard, & Halskov, 2017).

We employed a multimodal search strategy exemplified by Hopkins and Martinez (2018) which included peer-reviewed articles, books and book chapters, and conference papers. Following their example, our strategy required that we find, analyze, and synthesize current

literature, and maintain an audit trail of the keywords and databases used. Additionally, like Hopkins and Martinez (2018) we adhered to the Onwuegbuzie and Frels (2016) step by step guide to minimize bias.

We were also inspired by Ayeni, Agbaje, and Tippler's (2021) highly detailed description of their search strategy. We used their example to establish inclusion and exclusion criteria by narrowing down a date range to search from 2017-2022 for the most recent information, and including only literature related to refugees' information needs and library programs and services related to refugees. We made the choice to include gray literature. Following the example of Ayeni, Agbaje, and Tippler (2021) we established clear exclusion criteria by eliminating articles discussing refugees settling in developing countries, as it would be difficult to make inferences between different cultures. We also eliminated non-English articles, and because our focus is on public libraries, we excluded literature from school and academic libraries.

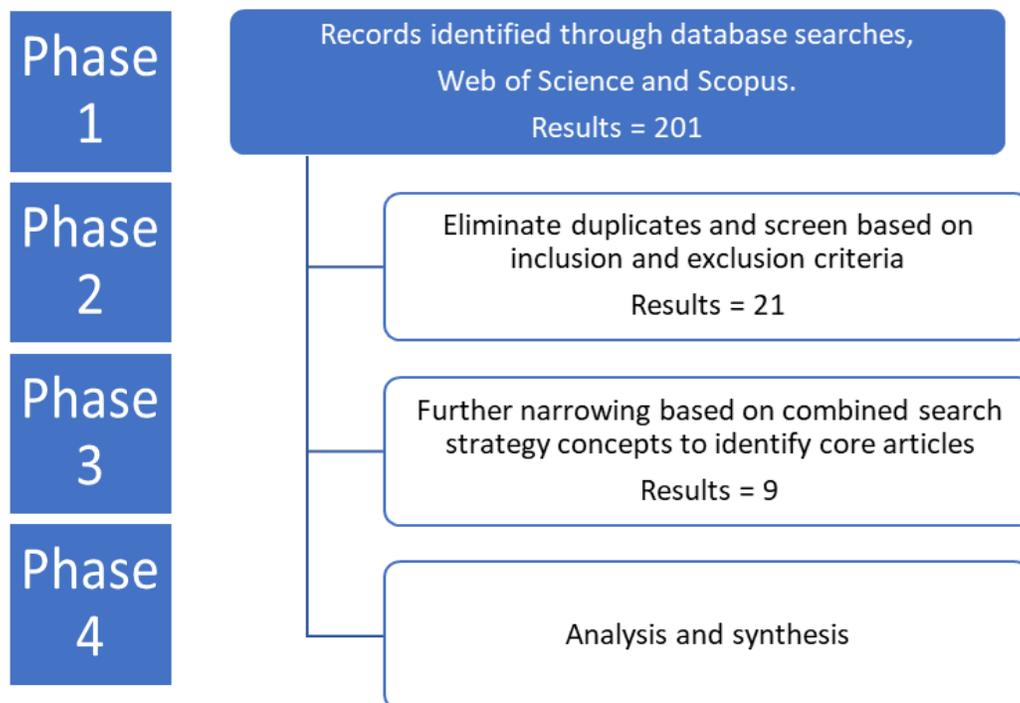


Based on Ayeni, Agbaje, and Tippler's (2021) example, we established 3 keyword concepts for our search strategy. The keyword concepts were either about refugees, libraries and

information needs, and digital equity and inclusion. The concept groups reflect our research group's focus on digital equity and inclusion and our research topic on how public libraries are currently serving refugees. When searching databases, we combined words from the keyword groups to find relevant results.

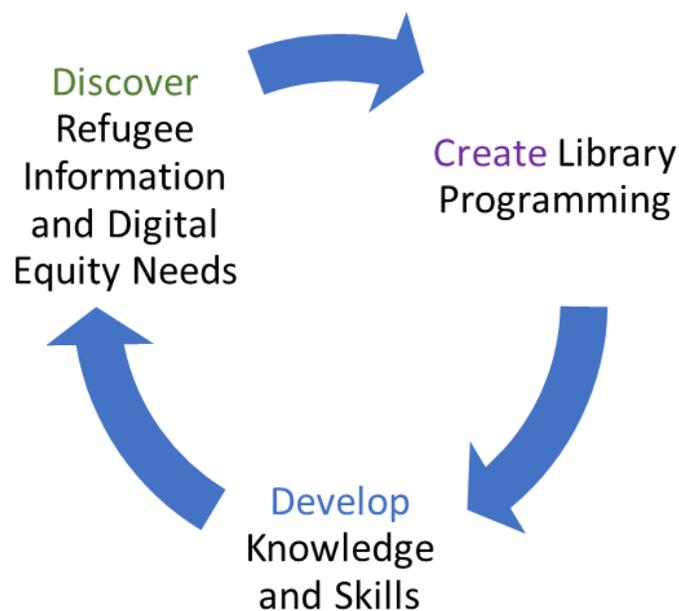
Concept 1: Refugees	Concept 2: Library and Information Needs	Concept 3: Digital Equity and Inclusion
Refugee Undocumented Migrant Immigrant	Library Fractured information Landscape Technology adoption	Digital equity Digital inclusion Digital divide Digital inequity Integration Social Inclusion

In the first stage of our search strategy, we searched for the above keywords in the Scopus and Web of Science databases. We had a total of 201 search results. In the next stage, we eliminated duplicates and screened each article based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, we excluded 180 results, leaving 21 remaining. The third phase involved a further narrowing which resulted in 9 of the articles containing both the library and refugee concepts which became our core articles with the remaining being used in the background and introduction sections. The fourth stage required analysis of the articles and their concepts which were then synthesized to create the narrative literature review.



The research goal of this literature review was to consolidate and analyze the current literature on refugees and libraries, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the issue which was discussed by Kosciejew (2019) and influenced our research process. Our intention was to examine the critical role that public libraries play in providing access to information to refugees in a technologically reliant world which will be expanded upon in the following sections. The first section will explain refugees' information and social inclusion needs and the importance of technology in meeting those needs in an equitable manner. The next section will discuss current library services and programming to assist refugees in accessing their information and social inclusion needs. The third section will explore the skills librarians and library staff will need to develop to better serve refugees as there was a noticeable gap in the current scholarly conversation that we extrapolated from the literature. Finally, the conclusion

offers avenues for further research, as well as suggestions for developing and investigating supplemental aids for librarians.



Analysis

During our analysis of the literature, we found several major areas that answered our research questions. Building a thoughtful understanding of refugee needs can help libraries to prepare and understand what to expect in the event of a sudden increase in refugees, whether from Ukraine or another country. We explored the current literature on library programs and services that help refugees to integrate into their new information ecosystems. Finally, we found little information on the skills and knowledge library staff need to best support refugees, and we felt that this was important to include for public libraries to know what may be expected of them.

Refugees and Information and Communication Technology

For Social Inclusion

Access to information and communication technology (ICT) plays an important role for the social inclusion of refugees. AbuJarour et al. (2021) refer to social inclusion as “having the opportunities and resources to participate fully in economic, social and cultural life” (p. 459). ICT tools such as smartphones and social media can be critical for the integration of refugees into new cultures. Smartphones are prevalent among this group because they are affordable and perhaps more importantly, mobile enough to accompany them on their journey. It is one of the few technology tools they can bring with them from their homes to their new destination. Smartphones aid refugees in connecting to internet services, which is important for inclusion, because accessing services such as employment, education, and social networks are increasingly reliant on internet connections. Access to these tools became crucial in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in order to avoid viral transmission in face-to-face interactions.

Refugees can also use ICT to “learn about their host country” (AbuJarour et al., 2021, p. 460). They can learn about the culture, geography, and the language of their host country, which can significantly improve their sense of inclusion. ICT allows refugees to conquer “everyday problems, comply with laws and regulations, and orientate to a new culture and society” (Andrade & Doolin, 2016, p. 407). Employment and education services are also heavily reliant on technology, and access to ICT is critical for social and economic success.

ICT is also important for mental health because it is a familiar reference that provides them a sense of control. AbuJarour et al. (2021) write that since technology, such as smartphones, are a part of “people’s daily experience, they develop an ICT identity—a relationship with technological devices” (p. 461). It provides a sense of connection in a new environment and helps them “build social capital and transition in their new surroundings” (p. 461). Denying information access to this marginalized population very likely pushes them to the

edges of society and will make social survival difficult because they will not be able to connect with people of their own culture. ICT tools consistently create opportunities, thus ultimately promoting social inclusion for refugees (Andrade & Doolin, 2016).

For Information Needs

The first point of contact for refugees will be during the arrival process with government officials, and that can be complicated due to language barriers and bureaucratic procedures. ICT can help bridge those language barriers by providing language translation assistance, as well as allowing refugees to seek assistance online from refugees who have already gone through the process (p. 459). AbuJarour et al. (2021) provides an example of an app designed by Syrian refugees, named *BureauCrazy*. The app is designed to assist fellow refugees navigate their way through “German bureaucracy” (p. 460). These apps help to “consolidate information and manage data across different government levels to ease the complex bureaucratic process and provide e-services that allow asylum seekers to digitally fill out forms or book appointments at governmental offices” (p. 460). The creation and use of apps demonstrate the need for ICT development to not only reduce the frustration and angst felt from government procedures, but to increase social inclusion for refugees.

Additionally, those who are forced to become refugees in another country will need to find shelter. They will likely use the internet and their smartphones to find places to stay. Two Harvard University students understood this information need, and “created a website connecting thousands of Ukrainian refugees with hosts around the world offering them a safe haven” (Elassar, 2022). The inspiration for the website came from meeting with Ukrainian Americans and hearing their stories and requests for help. By creating a website that links refugees directly with places that can provide shelter, they are giving them the agency to have some control in a

time where they have very little control of their circumstances. Refugees can use their own devices, in their own language, to find accommodations that are best for their situations. Sometimes the accommodations are just a mattress in a living room, or just food and clothes. However, it is the human connection that is important. These two students identified an information need for Ukrainian refugees and developed a product to fulfill that need.

Notably, libraries can use technology to help with refugee integration. They do not have to create their own platforms but can provide links to websites like the ones these two students have created to fulfill the information needs of Ukrainian refugees. Another relevant technology resource libraries can provide is an internet browser extension called NewsGuard. NewsGuard is created by trained journalists who rate news websites based on the nine basic journalistic practices. This extension's mission is to deter the spread of misinformation and provide reliable sources to the public (NewsGuard, 2022). Having access to this tool will allow refugees the ability to trust the information they are receiving about their home countries.

Ultimately, access to information is a human right and libraries eliminate the information and social barriers that refugees face when settling in a new area. These offered services can be confusing if one is not technically proficient, if there is a language barrier, or if someone is unaware of local customs. This is where community organizations, such as a library, can offer to assist in improving all three of these factors. Librarians are seen as information navigators and will help refugees “find, access, and use the information they need to learn about and navigate their new surroundings” (Kosciejew, 2019) thus allowing refugees to gain skills necessary to become independent.

For Digital Literacy

As we have seen so far, smartphones are versatile devices that facilitate access to a variety of resources, and for refugees displaced by rapidly developing situations, such as Ukrainian refugees fleeing war, smartphones are small enough to quickly store in case of an emergency. However, it is important to keep in mind that smartphones may not be as easily acquired in other countries, thus librarians must be equipped with the resources and skills in order to make online resources accessible to all potential refugees through teaching digital literacy. Andrade and Doolin (2018) mention a government funded initiative in New Zealand, that provided a basic computer class for refugees. The program was designed to improve their digital literacy skills. The course “offers recently arrived families with school-aged children a 30-hour basic computer-training, which covers topics such as logging on to a computer, using a web browser, creating and using an email account, and basic word processing.” (p. 151) At the completion of the course, participants received a “refurbished desktop computer and software, as well as broadband internet connection and technical support free of charge for one year” (p. 151). It should be noted that the courses did not have a required time frame for completion. The course was taught at different intervals, and the course ranged from within three years, to six years after arrival. It was important to maintain flexibility in the training process, and to allow participants to complete the program at their own pace. Providing digital literacy instruction is a critical service the library can offer to improve digital equity and inclusion for refugees. Libraries can also go further by providing technology for refugees to use at home. The article also noted that arrangements were made for individuals to keep their internet access after the first year. Libraries can partner with other government agencies and private industries to supply funding for providing technology, while librarians can provide the training. The library, as a

community-based organization, can provide such programs to improve digital equity among refugees.

In the case that refugees own or eventually obtain a smartphone, various forms of web and app portals act as a source of easily accessible information. Yavuzdemir (2019) explains that refugees often use their phones to gain information from social media and communication apps like WhatsApp. Refugees can tell the difference between government and non-government documents, but struggle to recognize appropriate information sources and distinguish between fake news, highlighting an increased need for digital literacy. A lack of fluency in the English language also affects the ability to determine whether what people see on their smartphones is misinformation or fact-based reports.

Child refugees are a particularly vulnerable population and librarians should consider their digital literacy needs while maintaining a receptive approach to more sensitive issues. Raabe (2018) discusses how the International Youth Library in Munich, Germany created programs for children that “encouraged a range of artistic expressions to tell and visualize stories with autobiographical grounding” (p. 62). This allowed for “bridges between home and exile or between past, present, and future” (Raabe, 2018, p. 62). Librarians developed concepts to overcome language barriers and avoid retriggering patrons’ trauma responses. Literacy has always been crucial for the development of children, including the element of playing to learn. Creating plays, scripts, artwork, and more at the International Youth Library allowed children to heal from the resettlement trauma they had faced while also advancing their literacy.

Current Library Programs and Services for Refugees

Library programming for refugees does not end at facilitating access to resources to help with acclimation to a foreign society. Using surveys, Shepherd et al. (2018) studied how refugees

and other newcomers from a wide range of countries used the public library. Notably, almost half of respondents, 47%, reported finding the library themselves, while 53% used the library after a recommendation from a friend, relative, or their children. This could mean that libraries have an opportunity to improve outreach to refugees, like the Ukrainian refugees that will be entering the United States. Additional findings report that 39% of refugees use a variety of digital equity and inclusion resources including library computers, Wi-Fi, and other technical devices. Respondents also noted ways the library helped them, with 60% saying the library helped them look for jobs, contact friends and family in their home country, or learn a new skill, such as how to use the computer. These surveys reveal that refugees and newcomers can be heavy users of public library services and resources, with many relying on digital equity and inclusion resources. Additionally, identifying outreach methods to refugee groups is an important skill that library staff may need to improve to help refugees find the library.

Library programming for refugees in particular can manifest in a variety of ways, but librarians should take the time to actively seek out refugee needs directly from refugees themselves. Densly and Ross (2012) developed a set of programs at the Pima County Public Library for refugees from various countries across different age groups. The program's development included the following elements: context, implementation, structure, materials, publicity, funding, partnerships, and identifying and acknowledging the community's language needs. Library management recognized the wide array of languages spoken and understood by refugees, but took the time to see if there was a language they were more comfortable with, as opposed to just working with the most common language. Management also noticed refugees struggled to understand the library's role and function, as well as a lack of computer skills, which prevented them from finding new jobs and integrating into American society. In response, the

library hired new multilingual staff for their computer assistant and instructor positions, who taught basic computer skills and job-hunting skills, respectively. The library also expanded their foreign language dictionary materials to assist in language acquisition and integration. Programming was developed based on real-time feedback, resulting in changing the curriculum to a drop-in, individualized basis, allowing students to bring children to lessons, and purchasing USB drives and bus passes to alleviate costs associated with the lessons. Throughout the development of each program, while library staff had anticipated some of the patrons' needs and issues with facilitating said programs, staff also remained receptive to patrons' suggestions and critiques as they were working with refugees with varied cultural backgrounds, needs, and digital literacy levels.

However, it is important to note the importance of culture and language preservation during the integration process (Grossman, et al., 2021). Sophia Rodriguez's research at the Hartford Public Library centered on immigrant youth who had arrived in the U.S. within the last two years and the library's role in creating a space for belonging. The library staff, in conjunction with schools and Rodriguez, developed a curriculum for immigrant students that gave them "the opportunity to engage with digital technologies to learn about the city and community, and all of the resources available to them" (Rodriguez, 2019, p. 141). One of the students stated that they "designed a project for other newcomers like us to help them when they arrived so we can make the school better for kids. [...] we translate it into different languages since we have so many here" (p. 141). The project includes digital reference materials to assist newly arrived students in navigating the school system. The program creates an opportunity for newly arrived students to develop English language skills, along with an understanding of the resources available to them both physically and digitally.

As we saw in Rodriguez's research, digital technologies and resources assist in the integration process for newly arrived immigrants. In this regard, libraries should consider making said technologies widely available to patrons. Kosciejew (2019) discusses how public libraries and ICTs, like tablets, computers, or smartphones, can significantly empower refugees by allowing free and equitable access to information that can fulfill a wide range of needs. Access to quality information and ICTs is necessary for social inclusion and integration into new communities with unfamiliar surroundings, and builds resilience. An unfortunate effect of displacement that refugees suffer from is a fractured information landscape, which disrupts people from normal life situations and forces them into new and unfamiliar information landscapes. ICTs allow refugees to know where they will be welcomed, how to find jobs and shelter, where they can find basic necessities like food and healthcare, and help them stay connected to friends or family. By providing access to information and ICTs, public libraries play a crucial role in refugee integration and help to build trust and resilience.

While many government resources are available in various languages and smartphones feature apps that can translate written language, there is a strong push in American culture to learn English at a conversational level. Libraries often offer "English as a Second Language" courses. These programs are key to aiding refugees in their new host country because it allows them the ability to learn a new language, socialize within their communities, and provides them with the skills necessary to learn the culture and ways of their host country. As Biglin (2021) wrote, "the library not only acts as a place to foster social connections and alleviate feelings of loneliness, but it was a place with a practical function [...] learning to speak English" (p. 7). Ultimately, learning to speak the host language allows refugees to fit into the current society.

Conversation-based programming

Johnston (2019) and Johnston and Audunson (2019) discuss conversation-based public library programming for refugees with language cafes. Conversation-based programming aims to improve language skills which are essential for information exchange and integration. Johnston (2019) examines refugee conversation programming through the lens of Contact theory, which views contact with minority groups, like refugees, as important to reduce prejudice. The methodology used was questionnaires and observations, and findings indicate that conversation-based programming was important for both the refugees by expanding social networks and fostering integration, and citizens by reducing prejudice.

Johnston and Audunson (2019) examined public library conversation-based programming using the theory of the public sphere and social capital theory. The theory of the public sphere posits that through communication, multicultural societies need to form a public sphere from which to determine public opinions and social norms. Social capital theory posits that social ties can bridge social groups and is necessary for intergroup communication. Using a case study, Johnston and Audunson (2019) found that conversation-based programming improved language skills, expanded social networks, promoted information exchange, and helped refugees to integrate politically, as the conversations were political debates. The article highlights how libraries can help bring marginalized voices, like refugees, into the public sphere.

The programs explored by Johnston (2019) and Johnston and Audunson (2019) are not specifically digital equity related, however we believe these programs are imperative for digital equity and especially inclusion as they allow for access to information. Their findings show that conversation-based programming supports essential language skills and fosters integration and knowledge exchange. Martzoukou (2018) discusses the important of language skills and highlights language barriers to refugee everyday information needs including health (most health

services have apps, portals, or telehealth), housing, rights/entitlements (most government programs have online applications with few language options), and job seeking. For libraries, language is needed to share information and provide technology and digital skills. Therefore, while some language programs might not be entirely digital, language skills and conversation-based programming is essential for digital equity and inclusion. A further consideration would be providing hybrid or virtual conversation programming to mirror the increasing use of Zoom and other meeting platforms in real world situations. To ensure successful conversation-based programming requires facilitator training for library staff, the following section will expand on other types of library training needed to meet the needs of refugee patrons.

We see this type of anxiety and struggle to integrate into American society across traumatic instances that displace populations. Recently in 2020, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic added another layer of trauma and barrier to equity for refugees in the U.S. Falicov et al. (2020) found “that racial minorities, and under-resourced and immigrant families are the communities most likely to be negatively affected by healthcare disparities and to experience the heaviest burden of [COVID-19 related] disease” (p. 866). Focused in San Diego county’s immigrant community, with both documented and partially documented status, Falicov et al. examined local Student-Run Free Clinic Project (SRFC) locations and the modifications made during the initial shelter-in-place measures from early 2020. The SRFC utilized telehealth sessions via computers and phone calls in order to offer mental health services, as well as consultations from the legal clinic. By leveraging the community’s trust in the organization, the SRFC connected immigrant families with their loved ones in a way that avoided viral transmission while maintaining their emotional relationships.

Library Skills, Knowledge and Training

While analyzing the literature, we discovered there was a gap describing the skills and knowledge for libraries to better serve refugee populations. As libraries across the United States prepare to accommodate incoming Ukrainian refugees, staff should consider improving certain skills and knowledge. There are specific skills that librarians and staff can develop to provide more effective programs and services to refugees. According to Flinner et al. (2019), public libraries should offer professional development opportunities for staff and volunteers. Some considerations include determining in what areas staff need relevant skills. Some of these skills could include English language instruction, digital literacy instruction, marketing, outreach, and advocacy.

The librarian skills required to assist refugees in integration, inclusion, and language skills include English as a second language (ESL) training to help newcomers learn the language quickly. Once refugees gain basic language skills they can participate in conversation-based programming and feel more comfortable seeking assistance and fulfilling information needs. In addition to ESL instruction, to ensure successful conversation-based programming, librarians ideally should consider facilitator training.

Privacy

An important skill and knowledge set for all librarians and library staff is protection of privacy. While this is ethically imperative for all library workers, it is even more important to refugees and marginalized groups, who may not be aware of uses of their personal information. Gomez et al. (2020) demonstrate the importance of privacy for refugees and vulnerable groups through a free to download card game called Mind the Five. The game trains library staff on protecting the privacy of refugees, allows for reflection on ways to better help vulnerable populations, and builds empathy among players. Protecting privacy is an important library skill

and ethical knowledge that should be part of all library staff training programs. Another important skill for libraries to continuously learn and practice is cultural competence, which will be discussed further in the following section.

Cultural Competence Among Service Providers

To progress their goals for digital equity and inclusion for refugees, it is important for librarians to understand the population they are providing services to. Refugees are forced to leave their home under difficult and often very traumatic circumstances, so a high degree of cultural competence is required for libraries to establish trust within the refugee community, and become a reliable source of information. Lau and Rodgers (2021) highlight three important lessons for developing cultural competence when engaging refugees. The first is “self-awareness and respect for cultural diversity”, the second is cultural knowledge, and the third is having support from library leadership and partnering with the community. (pp. 130-131).

Self-awareness for librarians means understanding “one’s own culture, race, ethnicity, gender, and class in relation to refugee clients and recognizing power imbalances.” (Lau & Rodgers, 2021, p. 126). It is important for service providers to recognize their own biases and cultural attitudes in regards to refugees and of the countries they come from. Awareness of these issues will allow librarians to “avoid making assumptions, generalizations, stereotypes, or judgments about other cultures” (p. 126). Citizens from other countries bring their own values with them, and some may be very different from those who provide them services. Acknowledging different cultural views without judgment will be important for open and honest communication. This leads to the second lesson in cultural competence, which is cultural knowledge.

Refugees will be busy learning the language and culture of their host countries, but according to the studies cited by Lau and Rodgers (2021) it is important to refugees that service providers know the history and culture of their home countries (p. 130). While Ukrainian culture is not as different from the United States, as middle eastern or African countries, it will still benefit librarians to learn about the culture and history of Ukraine, particularly its relationship with Russia. This will also provide librarians with a better understanding of what life was like in Ukraine before the war, and what the similarities and differences are when compared to the United States. Part of the learning process is being willing to engage and listen to refugee stories. Librarians are excellent at reviewing the literature on a topic, but engaging with “empathy and respect” and being a patient listener will paint a better story than any book.

Some refugee groups, like those from Ukraine, may be distrustful of government services which means public libraries may have to negotiate outreach to these groups carefully. In a poll from Gallup (Bikus, 2019), only 9% of Ukrainians had confidence in their government; it should be noted this poll occurred before the 2019 election of President Zelenskyy. Additionally, Kalenluk and Halushka (2021) from the Anti-Corruption Action Center in Ukraine note the rampant corruption in the Ukrainian government, with recent reforms and policies starting to improve the situation. As a government institution, it will be important for librarians to separate themselves from immigration services or other government institutions that refugee groups might distrust. It should be made clear that librarians are there to help by providing information and resources, but do not have any influence over immigration decisions or connections to the immigration department of the government. This will require efforts in outreach and collaborations with refugee support groups and agencies within the community. Libraries can also work with cultural groups in the community, as described by Ronayne (2022) who describes

new Ukrainian refugees, meeting with earlier Ukrainian refugee groups who fled to the United States after the 2014 Russian annexation of the Crimean peninsula.

Despite this potential barrier, public libraries can help to build trust among government wary refugees. Public libraries offer more contact-facilitating opportunities in low-stress situations that allow refugees to have positive experiences (Varheim, 2014). Some of the programs discussed include women's reading groups and homework assistance for children. The library offers a safe space for refugees to watch and engage in their new cultural surroundings that helps build trust. With a successful outreach program to attract refugees to the library, libraries can then build trust through refugee introductory programs.

Another important aspect for better cultural competence is to understand the language needs of refugees. Libraries should make sure they are offering accurate translations of library documents, and work to improve the collection of materials they have for their target communities. This goes beyond just using Google translate services, but actually having a native speaker inspect translations for proper grammar, structure, and context. Having documents translated properly can demonstrate a level of effort for inclusivity that is important for building trust. To accomplish these goals, librarians will need the support of the entire organization.

Organizational commitment, and support from the community is important for advancing cultural competence (Lau & Rodgers, 2021, p. 130). Library leadership will need to show a commitment to cultural competency by "demonstrating a commitment to staff diversity" and supporting staff in creating services for refugees. Providing staff training on cultural competence and ensuring that policies are inclusive are also instrumental in creating a welcome environment. Libraries should also partner with community organizations that work with refugees in order to develop a relationship with those they are trying to help, and to include them in the process.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research will be valuable in the future for public libraries as the UNHCR (2022), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, expects an increasing number of refugees from climate change related events. Therefore, studying the needs of refugee groups will help libraries to better understand and prepare for increasing refugee crises in a changing world. While refugee groups might be from different countries and cultures, their information, integration, and digital equity needs will require the same level of cultural thoughtfulness from library staff.

With the impending arrival of refugees from Ukraine, and an awareness that refugee migrations due to climate or other reasons are likely to increase in the future, public libraries must understand and be ready to serve refugee patrons with various needs in an equitable and inclusive manner. To be better prepared for incoming refugee groups, it is helpful to look at programs and services that other libraries are currently providing. By analyzing this literature, public libraries know what to expect and how to meet the needs of refugees. Additionally, we took the scholarly discourse in a new direction by presenting avenues for library staff to improve their knowledge and skills to better serve refugee patrons as this was something that was missing from current research.

Some limitations we found during our review of the literature was a lack of information on the knowledge and skills librarians need to develop to work with this library user group. There is a lack of refugee-specific training available to analyze and implement. We based our training and knowledge analysis on literature describing programs and services, and expanded on that research by exploring the skills required to effectively and successfully execute programming. Further research is needed in order to analyze what training opportunities are

currently offered that can apply to both refugee-oriented services, and can also apply to working with other marginalized groups. Currently, the American Library Association (2022) offers valuable resources in their Literacy Clearinghouse webpage for librarians and library staff assisting refugee patrons with low literacy and English skills. By assembling resources that address refugee needs, librarians can work together to develop training modules that reflect those needs.

However, the distrust in government by some refugees (Bikus, 2019; Kalenluk & Halushka, 2021) creates an additional barrier to work through that requires carefully navigating establishing the library as a reliable source of information, meeting refugee information needs, and building trust in a culturally competent way. Further training in technology and the evolving technological needs of refugees reflects another gap in the literature. How can libraries leverage new technologies to meet refugee needs? Is augmented reality, virtual reality, or the capabilities of the Meta virtual world something that will benefit this population? These are areas that would benefit from further research.

Additionally, further research avenues are presented as telehealth and online portals become ubiquitous in the health fields, refugees might need additional assistance in accessing health information and services in an equitable and inclusive manner. As noted throughout the paper, refugee groups often suffer from trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other medical or mental health issues (Biglin, 2021). Consequently, we agree with Grossman et al. (2021) that future research should explore how public libraries can assist refugees to access information regarding health and well-being, with special consideration for collaborations between libraries and public health institutions.

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