

RESETTLEMENT AID FOR BOSNIAN REFUGEES IN THE UNITED STATES

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DEDICATION

To my parents,

Hvala, volim te.

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Thank you to everyone who listened to me talk about this thesis in any form for all the support and encouragement. To my professors in the UH History department who helped me become a stronger reader and writer in graduate school, my gratitude is never-ending. I enjoyed every class and discussion, and all the feedback which helped me get to a point where I could write a thesis at all. Thank you especially to Mark Goldberg, who gave me all his kindness and assistance when in class, in meetings, and when reading my drafts. Also, to my committee, Sarah Fishman and Linda Reed, thank you for your feedback and support, I will not forget your enjoyment of my thesis and our discussion, which boosted my defense experience immensely. To my cohort, thank you for all the ideas and joy we shared over these past two years. I loved going to class and hearing everyone's perspectives and convictions, which strengthened my own growth. We laughed and we commiserated, and I will not forget all of the support everyone gave me in being confident in expressing my thoughts. Thank you to Debbie Harwell for her guidance and kind words. I have learned so much, for which I am grateful.

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ABSTRACT

Bosnian refugees arrived in the United States beginning in the early 1990s due to the Bosnian War. The process of getting to the United States was lengthy, and their problems did not stop when they reached the country. Though these Bosnian refugees were guaranteed resettlement assistance, the quality of the aid they received varied based on the agency that provided it. There were three main categories of refugee resettlement aid: aid through the federal government, aid through private agencies or media, and aid through faith-based agencies. This thesis examines the differences between the backgrounds of these groups and the political, economic, and cultural impacts each of these groups had upon Bosnian refugees. This research is based on government reports, legislation, interviews, community magazines, and agency information. It compares these categories and assesses their effectiveness in supporting Bosnian refugees upon their arrival in the United States. It argues local resources were the most effective at providing support to Bosnians, rather than large, systematized resource providers.

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Introduction

Bosnia and Herzegovina, referred to as Bosnia, is a Balkan country in Southeastern Europe. The country has three main ethnic groups: Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats. Each group has a strong tie to a religion, which helps form a significant portion of their group identity. Bosniaks are predominantly Muslim, Bosnian Serbs are predominantly Serbian Orthodox Christians, and Bosnian Croats are predominantly Roman Catholics.¹ For the purposes of this thesis, the use of Bosnians as a term to describe a population refers primarily to Bosnian Muslims but does expand to include any person who self-identifies as Bosnian and became a refugee due to fear of persecution.

Bosnians first moved to the United States as Southern Slavic immigrants prior to the twentieth century. Not much is known about Bosnians who arrived in the United States prior to 1900 beyond that they did exist. The information picks up starting at the end of World War I, Southern Slavs in the Balkans Peninsula were geographically and linguistically distinct from the Slavs of Western and Eastern Europe.² Yugoslavia formed as a conglomeration of Bosnians, Croats, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Serbians, and Slovenes in 1918, known as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.³ As such, when

¹ “Bosnia and Herzegovina,” in Karen Ellicott, ed., *Countries of the World and Their Leaders Yearbook 2020*, Vol. 1 (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, 2019), 285-298.

² Roger Portal, *The Slavs: A Cultural and Historical Survey of the Slavonic Peoples* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

³ Yugoslavia is also sometimes transliterated as Jugoslavia, literally ‘Land of the Southern Slavs’ during this period, until around World War II, when it assumed the English spelling in texts.

they immigrated to other lands, such as the United States, they fashioned a new identity as Yugoslavs (Jugoslavs) collectively, which acknowledged their similarities in new lands.⁴ By 1929, this self-identification also influenced political status, and the official name of the state was changed to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. This lasted until the monarchy was abolished in 1945, and Yugoslavia became the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia under a communist government.⁵

Thus, as the majority of Southern Slavic immigrants arrived in the United States in the twentieth century, this group identifier also referred to Bosnians who immigrated en masse to areas in the North and Midwest, such as Illinois, Ohio, and New York. They became part of South Slavic fraternal groups and benevolent associations. They also participated in nationalist discourse.⁶ This gave them a unique space to create a pluralistic national identity, where they participated politically in both the United States and Yugoslavia.⁷ These early Yugoslav immigrants left rural peasant life in Europe to work in urban, industrial sectors in the United States. They became part of the working class, as industrial jobs were the primary jobs available to them.⁸ Historian Dejan Kralj posits that

⁴ Dejan Kralj, "Balkans Minds: Transnational Nationalism and the Transformation of Southern Slavic Immigrant Identity in Chicago, 1890-1941," (Ph.D. diss., Loyola University Chicago, 2012), 4.

⁵ Ibid, 6.

⁶ Ibid, 7.

⁷ These spaces and groups would play somewhat of a role later with resettlement aid in the 1990s, but largely this area remains underrepresented in the research as to how large of a role they played.

⁸ Ibid, 15.

though the early Southern Slav immigrants were few in number, they planted a seed in the minds of those back in their homeland by sending letters that showed America as a land of opportunity, where work was abundant.⁹ Over time, as these early immigrants became more established in the United States, Bosnians back home came to view the United States as a nation with kin.

After World War II, there was another wave of Bosnian immigrants, who mostly continued the settlement pattern around Chicago. They were displaced by the war and soon after by the communist takeover of Yugoslavia. This group differed because they were more educated than the largely peasant population of the early 1900s; however, they had primarily lower-skilled jobs available to them.¹⁰ Still, the community prospered, despite being limited initially to these lower-paying jobs. Thus, it can be seen that early Bosnian voluntary immigration had a large effect on the northeastern portion of the United States and did succeed at establishing a community that held cultural ties to its homeland.

Migration continued sporadically through the Cold War period in the 1960s-1980s. Few scholars have explored the exodus of Bosnians or Southern Slavs in general from Yugoslavia during its communist period. Generally, it seemed most of that movement from anti-communists occurred during the 1950s. Meanwhile, those who arrived in the United States at that time encountered non-official anti-Slavic and nativist campaigns sponsored by McCarthyist policies. This decreased the power of ethnic

⁹ Ibid, 93.

¹⁰ Olivia Miller, "Bosnian Americans," in *Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America*, 2000. <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/157.html>

organizations especially with descendants of older immigrants.¹¹ Thus, the communities of Yugoslavs that had been building for the past fifty years became disjointed and generally less supportive of new arrivals.

This thesis focuses on a later wave of Bosnian migrants who established a Bosnian cultural community across the United States in the 1990s and early 2000s. The war in Bosnia took place from 1992 to 1995, and it caused massive resettlement out of the country for years afterward. As part of the breakup of the communist government of Yugoslavia, Bosnia declared its independence on April 5, 1992. Due to the divisions of its population into the three major ethnic and religious groups, the Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats fought over the land they had all settled in what became the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Army of Republika Srpska, a Serb-dominated faction, unleashed genocide against Bosnian Muslims. As a result, hundreds of thousands of Bosnians fled their newly independent nation as refugees.¹²

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees categorizes a refugee, based on the 1951 Refugee Convention as, “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political

¹¹ John Kraljic, “Yugoslav Communities in North America and the Tito-Stalin Split,” in Tvrтко Jakovina and Martin Previsic, ed., *The Tito-Stalin Split 70 Years After* (Zagreb: University of Zagreb and University of Ljubljana, 2020): 131-148.

¹² Ellicott, *Countries of the World*, 286-287.

opinion.”¹³ Bosnian refugees fled initially to European nations, such as Germany, Sweden, and Switzerland. However, they soon resettled in countries located further away, including the United States, Canada, and Australia. Within the United States, those who received organized aid did not get a choice as to where they initially resettled, and as a result, certain cities became clusters for Bosnians, such as St. Louis, Chicago, Jacksonville, and New York.¹⁴ More than twenty years later, the Bosnian refugee community has adjusted to life in America, both in these cities with large Bosnian populations and other smaller locales.

Though historians and other researchers have addressed some of the historical questions about Bosnian refugees in the United States, there has not yet been a detailed study into these combined aspects outlining the Bosnian refugee experience.¹⁵ In light of what can now be viewed as a successful resettlement in the United States, important

¹³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “What Is a Refugee?” UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency, accessed March 2023. <https://www.unhcr.org/what-is-a-refugee.html>.

¹⁴ Miller, “Bosnian Americans.”

¹⁵ For more on Bosnian migration, see: Muhammed Abdullah Al-Ahari, “Motivation for Bosnian-American Muslims Enrolling Their Children in Islamic Educational Programs: A Descriptive Case Study” (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2019).; Wai Hsien Cheah, Ajlina Karamehić-Muratović, and Hisako Matsuo, “Ethnic-Group Strength Among Bosnian Refugees in St. Louis, Missouri, and Host Receptivity and Conformity Pressure” *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 11, no. 4 (2013): 401–15.; Reed Coughlan and Judith Owens-Manley, *Bosnian Refugees in America: New Communities, New Cultures* (New York: Springer, 2006).; Barbara Franz, “Bosnian Refugees and Socio-Economic Realities: Changes in Refugee and Settlement Policies in Austria and the United States” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 29, no. 1 (2003); Fethi Keles, “From Displacement to Emplacement: Bosnian Muslims in Urban US” *Anthropology News* 52, no. 3 (2011): 14–14.

questions arise: What kinds of resources were available to help resettle Bosnian refugees? How did the resources and support impact their resettlement? Where did Bosnians receive support? What sorts of barriers did Bosnian refugees encounter during their initial resettlement in the U.S.? How did community building with fellow Bosnians play a role in the refugee experience? What was the role of language, and what kind of resources were given for language learning? What type of support did they receive from the local community?

This thesis argues though resettlement aid given to Bosnian refugees stemmed from a larger system, the most effective aid came from local resources, especially a local Bosnian community newspaper and existing Bosnian American communities. The system of refugee resettlement aid had three levels: the federal government, private secular voluntary agencies, and faith-based agencies. These three levels worked together to help provide resources and funding to all U.S. government-approved refugees, including Bosnians. Though the system and support varied per year and geographic area, the system, in the broadest sense, did not change expectations rapidly. The way agencies provided aid when refugee resettlement began in earnest in the 1980s was very similar to the system that Bosnians experienced during the 1990s and 2000s. Large parts of that system are still in place for refugees today. By examining how Bosnian refugees interacted with the different parts of the refugee resettlement system, this thesis speaks to the broader implications of immigration and refugees in politics, economics, and U.S. society.

The topic of Bosnian refugees in the United States has remained the focus of studies of smaller communities and has not reached into the study of Bosnians within the

larger refugee community or within the expanse of the entire country. The work on refugees and immigrants encompasses a broad subfield of history. This thesis builds on the work of anthropologists Jane Flegel Brooks and Leila McInnis, alongside sociologist Jennifer Karen Jackson, who studied particular communities of Bosnian refugees in the United States.¹⁶ Their findings place Bosnians in the broader context of the refugee resettlement system. Additionally, the work of Adna Karamehić-Oates and Ajlina Karamehić-Muratović on the integration of Bosnians into America discusses the role of borders in refugee work.¹⁷ Though borders are not a topic of this research, this thesis does elaborate on the role of integration and Americanization.¹⁸

¹⁶ Jane Flegel Brooks, “Power and Non-Economic Capital: Bosnian Muslim Refugees Navigating Resettlement in Washington, D.C.” (Ph.D. diss., American University, 2010); Jennifer Karen Jackson, “Living in Dallas: A Bosnian Refugee Community Study” (MA thesis, Texas Woman’s University, 2000); and Leila McInnis, “Catholic Charities of Tennessee Refugee Services: An Ethnographic Study” (MA thesis, East Carolina University, 2010).

¹⁷ Adna Karamehić-Oates and Ajlina Karamehić-Muratović, “Borders and Integration: Becoming a Bosnian-American” *Washington University Global Studies Law Review* 327, (2020): 1-19.

¹⁸ For more on Americanization see: Nicole Ives, “More Than a ‘Good Back’: Looking for Integration in Refugee Resettlement” *Refuge* 24, no. 2 (2007): 54–63.; Alan M. Kraut, “Doing as Americans Do: The Post-Migration Negotiation of Identity in the United States,” *The Journal of American History* 101, no. 3 (2014): 707–25.; Alan M. Kraut and David A. Gerber, *Ethnic Historians and the Mainstream: Shaping the Nation’s Immigration Story* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2013); Natalia Molina, “The Myth of the Unassimilable Mexican,” *Racism Review*, (November 2016): 1-10; Deborah Reed-Danahay and Caroline B Brettell, *Citizenship, Political Engagement, and Belonging: Immigrants in Europe and the United States* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2008).; and Carola Suárez-Orozco, Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco, and Irina Todorova, *Learning a New Land: Immigrant Students in American Society* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008).

This study of Bosnian refugees additionally explores migrant experiences within the broader history of U.S. immigration. The field of modern immigration history focuses on border crossings, both legal and undocumented, during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Prominent works in the field, such as Jacobson's *Whiteness of a Different Color* and Ngai's *Impossible Subjects*, examine the intersection of racialization and immigration.¹⁹ The role of Southern Slavs, and Eastern Europeans in general, changed over the course of the twentieth century. Scholars show how the national origin quota system created categories of racialized differences, shaping the lives of immigrants, who became marked as racial others. Over the century, American whiteness came to include European immigrants. Notably, such racialization influenced Bosnian Muslim resettlement, particularly as they experienced Islamophobia. Their proximity to whiteness sometimes shielded them against anti-Muslim prejudice, similar to how 20th-century European Jewish immigrants experienced race and whiteness in the 20th-century United States.²⁰ The othering of religious, ethnic, or racial groups affected immigrant

¹⁹ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998); and Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014). See also: K.N. Conzen, D.A. Gerber, E. Morawska, G.E. Pozzetta, and R.J. Vecoli. "The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U.S.A." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12, no. 1 (1992): 3–41; and Kim Korinek, and Thomas N Maloney, *Migration in the 21st Century: Rights, Outcomes, and Policy* Vol. 45. (Florence: Routledge, 2011).

²⁰ Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*; and Sarah Parvini, "Bosnian Muslims in Southern California May Not Fit the Stereotype but They Feel the Prejudice," *Los Angeles Times*, July 4, 2016. <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-bosnian-muslims-20160704-snap-story.html>.

communities' acculturation efforts. The study of how these othered groups formed in American society affects the study of how these groups were treated upon their arrival.

The role of refugee studies within the larger study of immigration history has greatly increased in the past two decades, and my project builds on this growing literature by using similar themes to explore how Bosnian refugees were able to settle in the United States. Historians such as Carl Bon Tempo, Maria Cristina Garcia, and David Haines examine refugees in the larger study of American immigration.²¹ Bon Tempo considers how foreign policy concerns, domestic political and cultural considerations, and the nation's economic health all affect receptiveness toward immigrants. To be able to study refugees, he argues, you also need to study the implementation of programs and laws.²² Garcia looks at geopolitical and domestic interests in the post-Cold War period. She shows that domestic concerns about national security caused the previous sympathy towards refugees and immigrants to dissipate.²³ The scrutiny of immigrants globally after

²¹ Carl Bon Tempo, *Americans at the Gate: The United States and Refugees During the Cold War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008); Maria Cristina Garcia, *The Refugee Challenge in Post-Cold War America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); and David Haines, *Safe Haven?: A History of Refugees in America* (Sterling, VA.: Kumarian Press, 2010). For more on refugees, see: Maria Cristina García, *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Kelly M. Greenhill, *Weapons of Mass Migration: Forced Displacement, Coercion, and Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2010); Donald M. Kerwin, "The Faltering US Refugee Protection System: Legal and Policy Responses to Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Others in Need of Protection," *Migration Policy Institute Report*, March 2011.; and Gil Loescher and John A Scanlan, *Calculated Kindness: Refugees and America's Half-Open Door, 1945 to the Present* (New York: Free Press, 1986).

²² Bon Tempo, *Americans at the Gate*, 2.

²³ Garcia, *The Refugee Challenge*, 1-3.

9/11 influenced the perspective of Americans, who were especially cautious of Muslims. Though American perspectives on Bosnian Muslim refugees do not feature heavily in this thesis, it is still important to note this as an influencing factor in resettlement aid for Bosnians during the early 2000s.²⁴ Finally, Haines took a less theoretical approach than the other two historians. He appeared at the intersection of the racial discussions posed by Jacobson and Ngai, though focuses on Vietnamese refugees and is similar to the smaller community-based approaches in Bosnian-focused studies. Haines explores the moral prerogative of the United States and its citizens to provide aid to refugees, even when race and ethnicity complicated the distribution of resources through political debating and discussion over who qualifies as a refugee.²⁵ This case study-based approach is common and works well when integrated with other works on U.S. refugee policies, as done in this thesis.

This thesis draws on surveys given to Bosnian refugees during the late 1990s, governmental documents on refugee policy and support, and contemporary media. Chapter One analyzes the role of the U.S. federal government in providing aid and resources for Bosnian refugees in the 1990s and 2000s. It gives historical context to the refugee legislation during the 1990s by listing preceding legislation. Within this chapter, there is also scrutiny of the limitations of governmental power and oversight. Chapter Two examines secular private agencies, VOLAGS, and also independent local support,

²⁴ Notably, this period had less data on Bosnian refugees in the United States, as the majority of Bosnians who qualified for refugee resettlement had already been established in the United States.

²⁵ Haines, *Safe Haven?* xiii.

such as the media. This chapter contrasts the effectiveness of aid from private agencies with governmental oversight and aid from local media support. Chapter Three centers on the role of faith-based organizations and voluntary agencies in resettling Bosnians, especially Bosnian Muslims. It discusses the background of the largest faith-based groups, such as Catholic Charities and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, as well as what oversight the federal government provides these groups of agencies. All three chapters contextualize the resettlement of Bosnian refugees within the larger United States refugee resettlement system while discussing the successes and limitations of each type of refugee aid source.

While Bosnian refugees faced similar struggles as other refugees when resettling in the United States, they established their own communities across the country. How were they able to do so? Which supports did they rely on? These questions, among others, will be answered in this thesis.

Chapter 1: Governmental Assistance to Bosnian Refugees

Throughout the 20th- century history of the United States, national identity centered around being a country of immigrants. Over the years, legislation and admittance policies changed drastically, as did public opinion and support for immigrants. This chapter explores U.S. government policies and support for immigrants and refugees through the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. It argues though immigration and refugee policies became more expansive over the years, the U.S. government was not able to provide enough assistance to successfully support refugee groups, including Bosnians during the 1990s. Beginning with a brief background on the number of Bosnian refugees who arrived and settled in the United States, this chapter tracks changes in United States immigration legislation because it allowed for the system of immigrant aid to become clear as it pertained to the system Bosnians would have encountered when they arrived. By learning how many Bosnians utilized the basis of these legislations, they take on new meaning in this context. Then the next section orders the steps of the refugee resettlement process, as it is important to understand how Bosnians entered the United States before studying the direct impact government aid would have had on them. Finally, this chapter closes with a discussion of Bosnian experiences with federal government refugee resettlement programs.

Bosnian Refugee Statistics

There were an estimated 3 million Bosnians living outside Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2009, a number which has risen from the early 2000s estimates of 2 million, likely due to natural population growth.²⁶ Much of this Bosnian diaspora resulted from the Bosnian War in the early 1990s, which led many of those estimated Bosnians to either voluntarily or forcibly leave their homeland. Much of their resettlement has been through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to nations such as Australia, Canada, Germany, and the United States. The UNHCR set the criteria for Bosnian refugees to include survivors of violence, ex-detainees, persons of ethnically mixed marriages, persons of mixed ethnicity, and persons with legal and physical problems. In addition, the categories expanded in 1998 to include those Bosnian refugees who moved to Germany and were in the process of being deported, as Germany received around forty percent of Bosnian asylum-seekers but would not issue them residency and began deporting them quickly after arrival. Many of those deported from Germany were then forced to apply to other countries, such as the United States.²⁷

The initial top refugee resettlement locations within the United States were Texas, California, Florida, and New York.²⁸ Later, the U.S. federal government began moving Bosnian refugees to St. Louis, Missouri. This was mainly due to U.S. resettlement

²⁶ Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina, "Bosnia and Herzegovina Migration Profile," March 2010.

²⁷ Charlotte Lindberg Clausen, "Law and Order," *The World Today* 55, no. 10 (1999): 15–16.

²⁸ Miriam Potocky, "Refugee Children: How Are They Faring Economically as Adults?" *Social Work* 41, no. 4, (July 1996): 366.

agencies that saw the city losing an economic base and population in the 1990s and they therefore directed a large number there. St. Louis is currently home to the largest number of Bosnians in the world outside Europe. According to estimates, in 2020 there were around 350,000 Americans of Bosnian descent living in the United States.

In the late 1990s, estimates showed that refugees from Bosnia represented the third largest group of refugees to the United States. Later, many Bosnians were able to use the family reunification portion of the resettlement program to join their families in the United States, which increased the number of Bosnian migrants to the United States. Statistics now indicate most Bosnians arrived in the late 1990s, with 37,000 refugees from Bosnia obtaining legal permanent resident status between 1992 and 2000. Thirty thousand refugees arrived to their third-party country, the United States, from Germany between 1996 and 1999. The total number of Bosnian refugees again increased from 2001 to 2008, with 81,000 refugees and asylum seekers gaining legal permanent resident status, according to the U.S. Census.²⁹ However, after 2010, there was a gradual decrease in census takers born in Bosnia, from 125,793 to 101,638 in 2016. Adna Karamehić-Oates posits that this gradual decrease suggests the majority of Bosnians in the United States entered in the late 1990s as refugees, many coming from other nations.³⁰

Metropolitan areas have been the first point of entry for refugees to the United States in most cases in the modern era. Most refugees from the 1990s onward arrived via airplane, usually located in a larger city or metropole. Thus, refugees have their first

²⁹ Adna Karamehić-Oates and Ajlina Karamehić-Muratović, “Borders and Integration: Becoming a Bosnian-American,” *Washington University Global Studies Law Review* 327 (2020): 14.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

encounters with U.S. culture and lifestyles in urban areas. However, depending on the type of city, their experiences varied. A Bosnian refugee who settled in an area with a large immigrant population, such as New York, Los Angeles, or Chicago, would likely have an experience that differed from those who settled in an area with fewer recent immigrants, such as St. Louis or Spokane. Cities with larger immigrant populations had more experience with incorporating newcomers, especially in schools and jobs. They would have more resources, such as English language classes or translators, available to recent refugees who might have immigrated without time to practice the English language. The dynamics of interaction with immigrants and native-born Americans would also provide a different environment for refugees. By settling in a larger city, a refugee might encounter a dissimilar dynamic to one presented in an area with fewer immigrants to set a precedence.

In metropolitan areas with fewer recent immigrants, especially St. Louis in the 1990s, refugees such as Bosnians had a larger impact on local economies and neighborhoods. It became easier to see changes in a more concentrated, monolithic community. St. Louis accepted almost 15% of the total Yugoslavian refugees received in the United States.³¹ Local and state support became vital alongside voluntary agency efforts to ensure immigrants to smaller cities were able to adjust to the United States and began to sustain themselves.

³¹ Audrey Singer and Jill H. Wilson, "Refugee Resettlement in Metropolitan America" *Migration Information Source*, (March 2007): 14.

Major U.S. Immigration Legislation

U.S. refugee policy during the twentieth century started with the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 following World War II. This differed from previous admission policies, which relied on quota systems to determine who was admitted based on national origin. Under the Emergency Quota Act of 1921, immigration restrictions limited the amount admitted in a year to only three percent of the number of residents from that country who already lived in the United States.³² Issued separately from the quota-centered immigration laws, the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 admitted 250,000 Europeans who were displaced and allowed for another 400,000 admissions later.³³ Though these people were not labeled as refugees, they were a predecessor group with similar defining terms.

In the following years, the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union became tense. This led to a change in immigration policy, with legislation beginning to focus on admitting people displaced or fleeing a communist regime. This affected countries such as Korea, China, Cuba, Hungary, and the former Yugoslavia, of which Bosnia was a part at the time. Cold War era policies relied on humanitarian grounds, which fit with the larger U.S. narrative of being superior to communist states. By taking in those who had seen the “failures” of communism and socialism, the U.S. government hoped to establish itself as having the moral high ground in its goal of

³² U.S., Congress, House, *Emergency Quota Act of 1921*, Pub. L. 67-5, 67th Congress, effective May 19, 1921.

³³ U.S., Congress, House, *Displaced Persons Act of 1948*, Pub. L. 80-774, 80th Congress, 2d Sess., effective June 25, 1948.

preventing the further spread of communism. The people admitted in this period were initially temporary refugees who would often be granted permanent residence status later, in line with future refugee legislation.

As the Cold War continued through the end of the twentieth century, the need for legislation to support these refugees more effectively became apparent. The Migration and Refugee Assistance Act was passed in 1962 as a result. It aimed to assist in the movement of refugees and migrants by contributing to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Much of the power of the act lay in allowing the President of the United States to determine what aid was necessary and to create agencies and projects to provide those services.³⁴ This act would be called upon by both Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama to deal with crises more than fifty years later.

The Cold War persisted, and the U.S. immigration system continued to need reform to keep up with changing political expectations. Just two years later, in 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Act, also known as the Hart-Celler Act, was signed into law. Previously, immigration was limited by a federal quota system. With the 1965 act, the U.S. immigration system was no longer based on national origin when restricting potential entrants. The new framework prioritized immigrants who were highly skilled and those who had family in the country to sponsor their settlement. Despite these limitations, the immigration each year increased, especially from origin countries outside

³⁴ U.S., Congress, House, *Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962*, Pub. L. 87-510, 87th Congress, adopted 1962.

of Europe.³⁵ Prior to this act, immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe were also at a disadvantage in American immigration policy, as the Immigration Act of 1924 specifically targeted immigrants from these regions.³⁶ Through this revision of policy, immigrants and refugees from Yugoslavia were able to arrive in the United States more easily in the years that followed.

Temporary legislation passage to assist in bringing in refugees, such as those mentioned prior, began to seem inadequate by the late 1970s due to the increasing number of Vietnamese refugees. Congress passed the Refugee Act of 1980 to standardize entry and services provided to refugees admitted into the United States. It amended both the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 and the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962. One of the major changes it introduced was the amendment of the definition of refugee to align with the one created at the UN Convention and Protocol on the Status of Refugees. A refugee, then, was someone outside of their homeland and unwilling to return because of “a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.”³⁷ Programs available to refugees upon their entry into the U.S. were grouped under the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), also created by the 1980 act. This meant the ORR would be in charge of making resources and programs for employment training, English

³⁵ U.S., Congress, House, *Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965*, Pub. L. 89-236, 89th Congress, adopted 1965.

³⁶ U.S., Congress, House, *Immigration Act of 1924*, Pub. L. 68-139, 68th Congress, enacted May 26, 1924.

³⁷ U.S., Congress, House, *Refugee Act of 1980*, Pub. L. 96-212, 96th Congress, Effective March 17, 1980.

language training, and ensure cash assistance and gender equality. In effect, the act provided not just an expansion of the number of refugees, but also sought to make sure they were well-supported upon their arrival. This tracks with the political rhetoric of making sure that immigrants were not a burden on the welfare state or did not overwhelm the system while attempting to provide an actionable plan that changes yearly based on global events.

The Office of Refugee Resettlement became a program in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services which offered support to refugees in the United States. Before World War II, the services that would later be offered by the ORR were instead primarily offered only by nonprofit voluntary agencies. The federal government took an increased role in financially aiding refugees, but until 1980, this was not a uniform policy or system. The ORR was “an attempt to design a coherent and comprehensive refugee admission and resettlement policy” by giving grants to those nonprofit agencies.³⁸ This generally made the federal government more able to provide for the refugees it took into the country. The ORR has resettled over 3 million refugees in the United States since 1975.³⁹

Prior to 2003, the only other major implementation of policy within the system of U.S. refugee and immigration services was the 1991 INS asylum offices opening. The United States Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) was the agency within the U.S. Department of Justice that administered federal immigration laws and monitored

³⁸ Norman L. Zucker, “Refugee Resettlement in the United States: Policy and Problems” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 467 (1983): 172.

³⁹ Office of Refugee Resettlement, “History,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, accessed January 2023, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/about/history>.

who was allowed to enter the United States, a task that became more notable throughout the twentieth century as increased attention was paid to national security, particularly during the Cold War era. In the late 1980s, the number of people who sought to enter the United States with claims of asylum, seeking protection and resettlement due to persecution, increased. INS created its first asylum offices in 1991, in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Newark, Arlington, Miami, and Houston. These offices contained groups of officers trained in international laws and global conditions which would allow them to work specifically on cases of refugees and asylees within the broader U.S. immigration system.⁴⁰

Finally, when discussing U.S. immigration policy in this time period, it should be noted that in 2003, under the Homeland Security Act, INS was split into three organizations: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). This generally governed the time period of focus of this thesis to create an endpoint for this research.

Refugee Resettlement Process

The refugee resettlement process involved numerous steps. First, refugees must have left their home in fear of persecution, often going initially to a neighboring country

⁴⁰ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, “Refugee Timeline,” accessed February 4, 2023. <https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/our-history/history-office-and-library/featured-stories-from-the-uscis-history-office-and-library/refugee-timeline>.

with very few of their possessions. When they reached another country that granted them asylum, they needed to register with the UNHCR, which would give legal refugee status. One could not be resettled in the U.S. without being provided refugee status by the UNHCR or a U.S. Embassy. To obtain this status, a person had to fall into the category of fearing persecution based on race, religion, nationality, social group, or political opinion. Simply leaving a country involved in war would not grant refugee status during the 1990s; a person had to prove they were a target of persecution. When legal refugee status was achieved, the UNHCR could provide documents and assistance to the refugee.

Usually, three scenarios resulted afterward. One, if the fear of persecution decreased, the person could return to their home country. Two, the person could live in the country of asylum if possible. Or three, the person could resettle in a third country. Though the third option was rare in refugee resettlement, it did happen, often due to political turmoil spreading into a neighboring country or sentiment moving away from refugee resettlement, and the country of asylum did not grant visas or green cards to a large number of refugees. Very few countries had refugee resettlement programs that enabled the UNHCR to resettle in a third country. During the 1990s, these included Australia, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Germany, and the United States.⁴¹

Third-country resettlement in the United States required even more steps and criteria. The State Department changed eligibility requirements and admission ceilings each year, dependent on budget and global affairs. In 1996, 14,654 refugees were allowed

⁴¹ U.S. Department of State. 1998. "Questions and Answers About the United States Refugee Resettlement Program." www.cal.org.

in from Bosnia-Herzegovina out of a total refugee count of 74,491.⁴² The State Department then oversaw the initial part of refugee resettlement in the U.S. by providing necessary forms and paying resettlement organizations to assist the refugee in completing the paperwork if needed. Most typically in the 1990s, this was INS form I-590, which covered biographical and family information.

After the necessary paperwork was filled out, an INS officer traveled to the country of asylum to interview the prospective refugee. If determined to be eligible, the refugee would be matched with an American resettlement organization by the Refugee Data Center in New York. If denied, a prospective refugee had thirty days to appeal the motion at the nearest INS district office, which would only reconsider a case if the application contained new information that was not available at the original INS interview.⁴³

Even after being deemed eligible, the refugee still had to complete multiple additional steps. First, the assurance process necessitated a written guarantee from the voluntary resettlement agency they were assigned to by the Refugee Data Center, given to the State Department that various basic services would be provided to the refugee upon their U.S. arrival. The resettlement agency determined where the refugee lived. Efforts were made to place the refugee with any family they had living in the United States at that time.⁴⁴

⁴² Immigration and Naturalization Service, "Refugees, Asylees, Fiscal Year 1998," *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, 1998.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

In 2001, the U.S. Department of State created guidelines for refugee resettlement housing. This “Operational Guidance to Resettlement Agencies,” outlined the minimum standards the state expected from voluntary agencies for housing. Though the guidance noted that compliance may not always be possible, it also commended those who went above the minimum for service provision. The categories listed for housing were: acceptability, safety, affordability, space, appliances/fixtures, garbage and extermination, disability accommodation, furnishing such as kitchen items, linens, cleaning supplies, and toiletries, food assistance, clothing, transportation, reception services, orientation, referral to services, home visits, health, and resettlement plan.⁴⁵

The expectation of the U.S. federal government that housing and assistance provided to refugees through agencies should be held to a minimum standard showed the evolution of care and attention given to refugees. Bosnians benefitted from this increased standard of care, especially those who arrived during the early 2000s when care increased and communities were already established. From expecting refugees to manage for themselves upon arrival to the U.S. to ensure their basic needs were met as much as possible, this change was noteworthy. The document noted, “the family should be able to assume payment of rent at the end of the R&P period, based upon the projected family income from all sources.”⁴⁶ Though they provide a decent standard of living to incoming refugees, the goal and intent of the program was to ensure they will be able to support themselves as quickly as possible. The required items, such as those for safety, showed

⁴⁵ U.S. Department of State. 1998. “Questions and Answers About the United States Refugee Resettlement Program.” www.cal.org

⁴⁶ Ibid.

the standard of living should be met at a minimum, despite the possessions, or lack of, the refugees arrive to the United States with.

The Department of State also noted that food should be “culturally appropriate, ready-to-eat,” showing the wide variety of origins of potential refugees in resettlement programs. As such, the steps taken by these agencies should be helpful to refugees who could not easily access their cultural foods and traditions, not just ensuring refugees can survive but that they can grow to thrive in their new homes. The timelines given in the Department of State document were also of interest. Refugees should have been signed up for various programs including social security, food stamps, school, and ESL services, within certain periods, generally 7, 10, or 30 days. The quick nature of the timelines shows the importance of rapidly providing access to resources for refugees to be able to adapt and provide for themselves. Assistance is given until it is generally not considered necessary, which considering the number of refugees in the United States in a given year, is admirable.

After housing was determined, refugees needed to prove they did not have any serious health risks that would pose a concern to public health. They could be deemed ineligible for resettlement if they did not meet health requirements. Another safety concern that would be checked would be a search in the State Department database for terrorists and other undesirables before arrival to the United States. It is notable that these requirements existed prior to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, and the subsequent War on Terror. The concern for immigrants and undesirables entering the United States as a threat to security has long impacted immigration conversations.

For the final step before resettlement, the refugee was given an orientation on American culture and on the necessity for self-sufficiency. Bosnians were expected to depend on themselves more than the government or agency. Then the International Organization for Migration would help them make travel arrangements, with the United States government paying any travel costs the refugee cannot afford at that time, with a promissory note for repayment later. After arrival in the United States, all responsibility for daily assistance of the refugees goes to the resettlement agency they were assigned to, they are no longer reliant on the U.S. government for that assistance.⁴⁷

Government Reports on Programs for Bosnians

When Bosnian refugees were settled into the United States, they were mostly aided by voluntary agencies, but those agencies were still required to provide information on their services to the federal government. In June 1993, the United States General Accounting Office prepared a briefing report for Victor Fazio Jr., a Democrat from California, in the House of Representatives. Entitled “Refugee Resettlement: Initial Reception and Placement Assistance,” it responded to his request for information on the initial resettlement assistance provided to refugees entering the United States. The primary stated objectives were to determine “what assistance the voluntary agencies agreed to deliver, how they provide the assistance, and whether they are fulfilling their

⁴⁷ Ibid.

agreements.”⁴⁸ Thus, the role of the federal government in refugee assistance after they were resettled was as an oversight agency and as fiscal backing.

Twelve voluntary agencies received about \$77 million by the Department of State’s Bureau of Refugee Programs in 1992 to provide that initial resettlement service to 131,481 refugees. There was no requirement that refugees receive the same assistance or that a certain amount per capita of the grant be spent on each refugee.⁴⁹ The funding was flexible dependent on each situation and refugee or what services they needed assistance with. Therefore, the federal and state governments were most useful when they allowed a broader range of funding to be used by the voluntary agencies in the manner they saw fit, instead of dictating a per capita amount because then refugee assistance could be personalized.

On the local government level, cities and their infrastructure also provided bureaucratic checks on refugee resettlement programs. A community assessment was conducted on Bosnian refugees in San Francisco by the San Francisco Department of Public Health and the International Institute of San Francisco. Its goals were to document the basic demographic characteristics of Bosnian refugees in San Francisco, begin enhancing community capacity to increase resource availability and seek information to guide future health programs and collaborations.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ U.S. General Accounting Office, “Refugee Resettlement: Initial Reception and Placement Assistance” (June 1993), 4.

⁴⁹ U.S. GAO, “Refugee Resettlement,” 6.

⁵⁰ Patricia Erwin, Yin Yan Leung, and Drina Iva Boban, “Bosnian Refugees in San Francisco: A Community Assessment,” *A Project of the Newcomers Health Program of*

The methods used to gather the information that provided the backing for the report were from a combination of Refugee Medical Center patient data, a voluntary health education assessment survey given to clinic patients, and interviews conducted with healthcare providers in the Newcomers Health Program. Since the agency providing the surveys was focused on healthcare, the majority of the report and questions centered around that issue as well. One non-health issue discussed at length was housing. They noted Bosnians were primarily resettled in the Tenderloin and Western Addition neighborhoods in San Francisco, largely due to the lower cost of rent.⁵¹ The housing market in San Francisco had long been limited and expensive, a phenomenon that continues to today. This made settlement in a city like San Francisco difficult. More Bosnian refugees were then resettled in the East Bay area, with providers and agencies trying to place families and those with similar backgrounds within the same neighborhoods. Settlement patterns like this led to small ethnic enclave formations in metropolitan areas. The report also noted a drive among Bosnian refugees to own their own homes. As a result, when they became financially stable enough, these people left San Francisco for other areas with lower housing costs. This also coincided with the concept of resettlement aid petering off after the first three to six months. The government and independent agencies expected rapid financial self-support from the refugees they resettled. When the federal aid declined, there were not many resources to

the San Francisco Department of Public Health in collaboration with International Institute of San Francisco, March 2001.

⁵¹ Ibid., 24.

tie the Bosnian refugees to San Francisco, or other sites of initial settlement, beyond outside factors like family.

From healthcare provider interviews, one frustration noted among the Bosnian community was with the extent of assistance offered to them.⁵² Coming from a country with a generally supportive public and centralized system of services to one with little safety net after the first few months was difficult. Service providers noted confusion with the sponsoring agency being misunderstood as part of “the government” and thus able to provide a larger array of services than they actually were.⁵³ This type of misunderstanding would be frustrating not only to refugees, but also those expected to provide services they could not. However, the differing political systems and public expectations of those systems were challenges that faced all groups of refugees to the United States.

The recommendations the Public Health department made based on their observations of the Bosnian refugee community in San Francisco amounted to six broad items. The first was to increase the number of interpreters available, especially in the realm of health and social services, where Bosnians had expressed many health concerns went unanswered. This allowed Bosnians to read more complex materials and texts in their native language, relieving some of the burden of translation. The next suggestion was along the same lines, increasing the number of vocational and job training programs. Most Bosnian refugees had little time to develop their English skills prior to resettlement,

⁵² Ibid., 44.

⁵³ Ibid., 44.

so training and certification programs that would take this into account would have proved particularly useful.⁵⁴

The third suggestion from the Department of Public Health was to increase access to ESL (English as a Second Language) programs, especially for working adults, parents, and older refugees who might not have had the time to attend a more traditional ESL program, or a school such as their children might. The next suggestion echoed ideas presented in the first two suggestions, to translate materials on health care and social services. Due to the repetition of similar ideas, one of the largest issues the Bosnian community faced in San Francisco, and likely the larger United States, was a problem with the language barrier which rendered some services less useful. The fifth recommendation was to assist the Bosnian community in the creation of a Bosnian community center to offer programs and resources. The advised programs for this center were English and Bosnian classes, legal aid, job placement services, health education, housing information, daycare, and organizing social events. The document did not make suggestions on how this could be implemented, or who would fund a venture like this, but simply allowed the presentation of the idea. The final suggestion of the six was to develop and implement a standardized mental health screening tool, as well as a referral protocol for the Refugee Medical Clinic.⁵⁵ If programs and providers were more familiar with the Bosnian community, their stigmas, and their beliefs, they have been able to provide more culturally appropriate and useful suggestions.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 25.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 26.

Overall, the suggestions and recommendations given by the San Francisco Department of Health were broad. This allowed the health program, refugee service providers, and the Bosnian community to formulate their own approaches to the listed issues. In this sense, the department continued on the local level with the same ideas that guided the federal government's approach to refugees. They were able to bring refugees over and provide guidance and oversight to refugee service providers without stepping on any toes, and without having to create their own direct intervention, which would be time-consuming and likely more costly. It is unclear how much access the Bosnian community had to this report, but it seemed likely this was not widespread among them, largely due to the language constraints of Bosnian refugees, and the report had only been published in English.

In conclusion, the U.S. government spent plenty of time in the late 1990s compiling reports and research into the assistance that it provided to Bosnian refugees. These reports list both the quantitative and qualitative data around refugee resettlement. However, an examination of these reports makes clear that the U.S. government, both on the federal and local levels, was most concerned with the oversight of voluntary agencies. It funded these agencies and required reporting from them, but it did have a strong interest in the welfare and treatment of the refugees it admitted through a stringent process. Nonetheless, to fully understand the aid Bosnian refugees received upon their arrival in the United States, it became necessary to evaluate the contributions made by these voluntary agencies and other private providers of refugee assistance.

Chapter 2: Private Assistance Agencies and Media

Private assistance available for Bosnian refugees during the 1990s derived from two kinds of sources: private resettlement aid agencies and the media. These two kinds of private assistance are the center of discussion in this chapter. The first subsection focuses on voluntary agencies, detailing first the contextual background of their origin, which allows a subsequent analysis of the issues that derived from this kind of structural organization. Finally, this subsection ends with an examination of a private aid agency that did not receive government support or funding but continued to assist in the resettlement of Bosnian refugees in Washington, D.C. The second subsection examines the aid provided by media, specifically an in-depth analysis of *Plima Obiteljski Magazin*, a periodical created by Bosnians to advise other Bosnian refugees in the United States. This chapter argues that Bosnian refugees received the greatest amount of supportive aid from private agencies and media which did not receive government funding and subsequently did not receive their oversight or overwhelming bureaucratic issues.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ For more on private assistance for refugees, see: Ayse Cağlar and Nina Glick Schiller, *Migrants and City-Making: Dispossession, Displacement, and Urban Regeneration* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018); Nicole Dubus, “Social Workers’ Views of Ways to Engage Communities in Refugee Resettlement,” *Social Work (New York)* 67, no. 4 (2022); Adrian Glass-Moore, “North Dakota Leads Nation in Refugee Resettlement per Capita” *Inforum*. October 4., 2015. <http://www.inforum.com/news/3853303-north-dakota-leads-nation-refugee-resettlement-capita>.; and Anne C. Richard and Shelly Callahan, “Making Sense of U.S. Refugee Resettlement: Utica as a Model for the Nation” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 690, no. 1 (2020).

Voluntary Agencies

Beyond the support of the federal and local government in the United States, private support was also vital to Bosnian refugee resettlement. Private relief agencies, or voluntary agencies (Volags), who worked as nonprofit organizations, were assigned to refugees before they even scheduled their arrival in the United States. During the 1990s, these voluntary agencies worked with the Department of State's Bureau of Refugee Programs to help resettle Bosnian and other refugees. Only around 10 to 12 Volags were directly contracted with the Bureau. These few agencies provided initial resettlement services to refugees, or they would turn to their network of affiliates to provide those services.

Volag affiliates numbered over 500 by the mid-1990s.⁵⁷ They included independent agencies that provided resettlement services, affiliated religious organizations, and other regional offices. As an affiliate of an agency that received federal funding for refugee assistance, often they obtained Bureau resettlement funds for their services through the Volag with which they were associated. This funding was contingent on providing the Bureau of Refugee Programs with a detailed proposal on the program and financial plans for each year.

These agreements still allowed maximum flexibility for the Volags and affiliates because of the differing needs of refugees. There were two broad types of refugees within the program: free refugees and family reunification refugees. The former composed around 20% of total U.S. refugees in 1992 and are refugees who have no family in the

⁵⁷ U.S. General Accounting Office, "Refugee Resettlement: Initial Reception and Placement Assistance" (June 1993), 4.

United States and thus needed the Volag to supply all the assistance for their resettlement. On the other hand, the latter, family reunification refugees, which included the remaining 80% of U.S. refugees, had some support like a family member or friends who might be able to provide some resettlement assistance.⁵⁸ The majority of Bosnian refugees fell into this category at the beginning of their resettlement in the 1990s, but as the amount of Bosnians in the United States increased over the decade, the number that fell into this latter category subsequently decreased. Even within these two types, the needs of a certain refugee would vary from person to person. Not every refugee would need every type of assistance available from their Volag.

Despite this knowledge, all refugees were entitled to core services, such as pre-arrival, reception, having a case file, and basic needs support, for at least 90 days. Most of the resources and support during this period could still be delegated to an affiliate agency or even to the refugees' relatives.⁵⁹ Bosnians at the beginning of their resettlement period did not have many established relatives in the United States, and relied on assigned affiliate agencies more. As such, even though Volags were expected to complete responsibilities such as meeting a refugee at the airport and taking them to their housing, these responsibilities could instead have been fulfilled by family or friends instead of an agency representative. To make sure requirements had been met in the time frame, the Volag would still have needed to have case file documentation for each refugee.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 5.

The need for documentation continued the interaction with the government refugee assistance mentioned in the previous chapter. Both worked together to ensure that refugees received the necessary services during the correct time period. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) noted that when the casefile indicated refugees had not been given a service in the time period, it was always due to external factors: for example, children were not enrolled in school within the first thirty days because they were not able to get fully vaccinated, or even, experienced difficulty in scheduling an appointment for health screenings within the same period.⁶⁰ In both examples, the outside problem related to outside scheduling, especially within the medical field, instead of with the Volag themselves. However, the GAO also noted that in its interviews with refugees about their experiences with Volags, only two felt they could have received more assistance from their voluntary agency. In both of those cases, it involved employment assistance and not health-related problems.⁶¹ Thus, core services were clearly fulfilled by the Volag within the given time periods in most cases during the 1990s.

Beyond the basic refugee resettlement in the United States, voluntary agencies also participated in other services in the overall resettlement process and policy. Volags testified before Congress on the number of refugees allowed to enter in a fiscal year, as well as what their status and benefits should be when they entered. They also conducted preadmission screenings overseas and managed overseas refugee camps. They gave advice on the naturalization process. Volags also would help refugees after they obtained

⁶⁰ Ibid., 8.

⁶¹ Ibid.

U.S. citizenship with mental and physical-health assistance.⁶² This mental health help was not always the amount necessary for a given group; for example, the trauma of the war left a large number of Bosnian refugees in need of better mental health services than was offered through Volags. In short, they contributed to almost all steps in the refugee process, beyond just the basic 90-day housing and job search assistance.

However, those broader Volag assistances were an amalgamation of several national voluntary agencies. Within American society, each Volag had a different approach to refugee resettlement services. They provided fluctuating approaches to the governmental requirements set out each year. Some agencies believed refugees should only receive the bare minimum assistance as instructed by governmental oversight; others thought refugees experienced trauma prior to their U.S. arrival and therefore required more assistance. Organizationally, Volags differed in the amount of structural centralization they required in order to run effectively. There was a spectrum from those with high degrees of centralization to those that had a central office but delegated to other smaller agencies. Some Volags had a decentralized administration working to coordinate various independent affiliates that implemented services for refugees.⁶³ The networking available depended heavily on the structures in place. It is clear that local chapters were the ones that interacted most with the individual refugees, no matter which structural setup the Volag utilized.

⁶² Norman L. Zucker, "Refugee Resettlement in the United States: The Role of the Voluntary Agencies," *Michigan Journal of International Law* 155, no.3, (1982).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 14.

Volags often assisted refugee resettlement in ways federal and local governments could not. Since volunteers carried out most of the work at the agencies, the cost of resettlement drastically decreased, even when just considering the amount saved in employee pay. Volags were also able to utilize gifts and donations from the surrounding community. These gifts included money, shelter, clothing, food, transportation, and other goods.⁶⁴ The inclination to donate to a smaller, refugee-focused group rather than the government stemmed from a conception of the government as well-funded, as well as the stronger connections forged between individual donors and Volags within their own local communities. Volags were also more closely embedded in their local communities. They focused solely on refugee resettlement, so they had pre-existing connections to call upon within a smaller field. This interconnection and location were crucial to effectively move a refugee into a community, especially through affiliate agencies, which would already know businesses and employers willing to hire refugees or to sponsor funding.⁶⁵

Probably the largest advantage Volags had over government agencies was their flexibility. Volags were able to respond to different kinds of crises quickly because that was their focus. The bureaucracy of the federal government was intentionally designed, and they could not move quickly. Moreover, the government was beholden to its constituents.⁶⁶ There were no larger global political entanglements for Volags to consider

⁶⁴ Ibid., 16.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 17.

the way the federal government had to. Volags were also not competing to stay in office; their funding was guaranteed if they met the given requirements of a fiscal year.⁶⁷

There were, of course, still problems that existed in every kind of system, especially a large one such as a Volag. The number of Volags and affiliate agencies made broader communication and consistency difficult to achieve. It was very possible for a refugee to get lost in the cracks of the system, missing funds or support because it was assumed someone else had provided them.⁶⁸ These were developments that occurred in any sort of large-scale assistance, and the best hope to prevent those issues was to continue governmental regulation of Volags and consolidation of the system to an extent.

In Washington, D.C., during the 1990s, a charity existed known as Diana's Place, originally created to help Latinx/es, but it played a large role in resettling Bosnian, Kosovar Albanian, and Iraqi families. Though not contracted by the federal government to do so, Diana's Place was one of the unofficial affiliate agencies that worked through word of mouth to find and assist Bosnian refugees in their resettlement in the United States. The program director, Deborah, began by making calls to refugee resettlement agencies, that thought she was trying to take their funding and told her there were not any Bosnian refugees in Washington, D.C.⁶⁹ Eventually, through her connections, she was able to stumble upon the first Bosnian family that Diana's Place would help. This family had been relocated by an agency to three separate cities, unable to be placed together for

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 18.

⁶⁹ Deborah was interviewed by Jane Flegel Brooks and declined to give her full name for anonymity, she will be referred to by her first name subsequently.

some undisclosed reason, likely due to limited resources or a lack of interest by their caseworkers. Diana's Place was able to move them together into their own resettlement building.⁷⁰ Looking at personal stories like this highlights the gaps and missing narratives that do not exist within a formal government report. Often, smaller local agencies and assistance groups provided the most effective aid to individual refugees.

The next Bosnian family was also directed to Diana's Place by chance. Deborah was approached at lunch by a waiter who told them of a Bosnian family who had resettled in D.C. and needed help. Their apartment was not in great shape, and the wife had a hard time adjusting due to her poor English skills. However, her husband had decent English and wanted to go to school to get certified to work. They were able to stay at Diana's Place and translate for the first family mentioned. This is where word of mouth moved the agency even further, as the family told Diana's Place of another that was even more worse off than them. This new family was also able to enter the program with Diana's Place and receive similar assistance.⁷¹

After the first few families, Deborah was finally able to communicate with a refugee resettlement agency, who told them of a family who was unhappy with their housing. Diana's Place was able to resettle two of the families who lived in this unsatisfactory building. Only a few months later, several Bosnian families resided within a multiple residence building run by Diana's Place, despite the alleged lack of Bosnian

⁷⁰ Deborah (director of Diana's Place), interview by Jane Flegel Brooks, "Power and Non-Economic Capital: Bosnian Muslim Refugees Navigating Resettlement in Washington D.C., 2003- 2006," Unarchived material.

⁷¹ Ibid.

refugees to resettle in Washington, D.C. Many of these people were unhappy with the buildings they lived in, which were located in dangerous areas of town or unclean. Many were also given subpar housing items, such as jars instead of cups, by the resettlement agency which initially placed them in the city. These were resettlement agencies that received funding either directly from the federal government or through a cooperating Volag and should have been reporting the conditions in their required documentation.⁷²

Eventually, Deborah met with an unspecified government agency worker through one of her connections and was able to report the discovery she had made of the terrible living conditions many Bosnian refugees experienced. Even though the resettlement agency had been given grant money to set up households, many of the refugee houses still lacked basic items, such as cups, and it was clear the money from the grant was being used elsewhere in their budget.⁷³ The affiliate agency had to explain this to the government oversight agency. Though some of the agencies clearly did the best they could, others still made errors with the resettlement of Bosnian refugees in Washington, D.C., which could have echoed a larger trend in Bosnian resettlement across the United States that had gone unreported. These errors seemed to be common among refugees of many different backgrounds, and seem to speak to systematic issues with Volags, in which the scale and time-constraints limited the feasibility of providing thorough aid for every client. Many of the reports and documents listed previously in this thesis did not mention any similar issues, but that does not mean they did not exist.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

Other programs run by Diana's Place were similar to those mentioned by other agencies. These included a food pantry, a women's program, programs for children after school and over the summer, workshops, and case management.⁷⁴ Thus, the program spanned a longer time period than the traditional Volag or affiliate agency, and was committed to provide its participants, including Bosnian refugees, with services that would truly help them become well-established in their new country. Many of these services were either funded by individual donations or through volunteer work, including pro-bono work by professionals such as plumbers. This was a way for Diana's Place to give refugees and others they helped with numerous services without overexerting their budgetary means, which was important because often they did not receive government funding for the refugees they assisted.⁷⁵

An important service provided by Diana's Place, one not mentioned often by other documented agencies, was mental health support. They were able to work with service providers to connect Bosnian refugees who needed assistance with free or low-cost services for mental health care.⁷⁶ This was especially helpful because many Bosnian refugees had Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or depression from their experiences during the war. Mental health trauma in Bosnians is often studied separately from their experiences as refugees but should be studied together because of its connection to the resettlement process. The availability of mental health services and practitioners could and would affect their experiences in the United States, especially in coping or

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

employment. Diana's Place caseworkers often had to schedule appointments and follow-ups for Bosnian refugees, particularly those who spoke little to no English. Many of the initial appointments were necessary for agencies to receive their governmental grants, but smaller groups like Diana's Place also continued to schedule and attend appointments past the initial three-month mark.⁷⁷ The bureaucracy and language issues were only two of the barriers that Bosnian refugees encountered during the resettlement process.

Another difficulty for many refugees was dealing with government bureaucracy. Items like green cards or food stamps involved many hurdles before most refugees were able to receive them. If a person missed their appointment for food stamps, it would often be weeks before another appointment opened up. Volags did not generally assist with the scheduling of these appointments nor how to navigate such a complex system. The number of forms required, all in English, was also astounding. The complexity of the governmental system made it difficult for any refugee who was interacting with several agencies at once to navigate in an era without accessible internet websites, especially if they did not speak English well. Food stamps were also complicated because of the eligibility requirements, though agencies often filed for food stamps for their incoming refugees before they arrived. By the time the refugees received food stamps, they sometimes had already gotten a job. This job meant they made too much money to qualify for the food stamps already received, and the government required those funds to

⁷⁷ Ibid.

be paid back if the refugee used them at all.⁷⁸ Insurance and green cards ran into similar issues with time constraints and applications.

Private agencies did their best to assist the refugees, but even they would get bogged down in the bureaucratic hoops presented by the government. Volags and other agencies faced a similar problem. Sometimes the funding did not exist, or by the time a refugee learned of a program, they might have been ineligible. Some caseworkers were less knowledgeable or simply did not care to learn to provide thorough assistance. Many of the issues in the Bosnian refugee experience, and indeed the larger experience of refugees to the United States, was that government regulations and restrictions limited the assistance they could receive from private agencies and Volags. Budgetary concerns also affected the entire system of government and agency interactions. This led to many refugees living in unsuitable conditions or being unable to apply for aid that would reduce their stressful transition. A subsequent issue derived from the limited time of assistance. Many programs ended support after 90 or 120 days, and refugees were left to fend for themselves afterward, with limited English skills or job training. They would also be tied to the housing they were settled in, often for economic reasons, even if the housing was unsuitable.⁷⁹ Thus, support would also need to come from actors who worked outside of the typical governmental system.

⁷⁸ Jane Flegel Brooks, "Power and Non-Economic Capital: Bosnian Muslim Refugees Navigating Resettlement in Washington, D.C." (Ph.D. diss., American University, 2010), 129.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 130.

Plima Obiteljski Magazin

One group that provided support outside of the government and affiliate system for refugees was the media, particularly in an era when the internet was not accessible to families and groups with low socioeconomic status, such as newly arrived refugees. The most popular Bosnian language magazine was *Plima Obiteljski Magazin*, located in St. Louis, Missouri, home to the largest number of resettled Bosnians in the United States. The name translated to Ocean Tide. The magazine was published every two months from 1997 to 2000. Edited by journalist Dijana Groth, the magazine was published in Bosnian as a response to the increase of refugees from Yugoslavia during the 1990s. The publication incorporated important information and advice for newly arrived refugees with popular culture from the former Yugoslavia.

The first issue published was Mar/Apr 1997, which was not archived. The next issue, *Plima* May/June 1997, ran the headline “Krediti Za Kuću” or “Credit for Your House.” Though the issues and articles were published in Bosnian, the magazine also ran paid ads in English, often from the same agencies or businesses throughout the three-year span. Consistent ads from the McClain family Saturn dealership, the Sappington Farmers Market, local law firms, import grocery stores, and travel agencies dotted the pages of *Plima* with the hope of attracting a large, previously unestablished customer base. Even in the first few issues, *Plima* established itself as a bridge between two worlds, connecting local St. Louis businesses with Yugoslav namesakes like popular bands: Crvena Jabuka and Bijelo Dugme, and even contained the “Horoskop” (Horoscope) section.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ *Plima Obiteljski Magazin*, May/June 1997, 15.

Plima became a key resource for newly arrived Bosnians. Issue no. 2, May/June 1997, for example, gave advice on ensuring children were safe on playgrounds and with strangers. The concept of stranger danger was not as large an issue in Bosnia before the war; children grew up in neighborhoods with the same people, especially in the smaller villages. This was a drastic contrast with the new American cities they moved into, where the large expanse of land and the language barrier made it hard to know the people living around them. These kinds of cultural differences were important to note for Bosnians who would not have known differently. This issue also had an article on the legal aspects of workplace injuries. Many jobs that Bosnian refugees were able to obtain when they first arrived in the United States were manual labor jobs that had little to do with their occupation prior to resettlement. These were jobs like meatpacking or warehouse jobs that would hire people with little experience or English language skills. However, these were also jobs that incurred a high risk of workplace injury, and Bosnian refugees were not well versed in the legal system of the United States, or the kinds of work-related compensation available to them. For example, this article listed three rights in Missouri: 1) medicinska njega/ medical care, 2) naknada izgubljene zarade/ compensation for lost wages, and 3) naknada za trajnu ozljedu/ compensation for permanent injury. The protection of rights, especially workers' rights, for new arrivals should have been a priority, but many businesses would be okay with workers not fully understanding their rights for cost-saving reasons.⁸¹ *Plima Magazin* thus advocated for refugees in a confusing new system.

⁸¹ Ibid., 12.

Another story in this issue was about Praznici u Americi/ Holidays in America. The issue describes the history of holidays celebrated in early summer, including Mother's Day, Memorial Day, and Father's Day, and explained how they were celebrated in America, as they did not exist in Bosnia and the refugees would have no experience with them.⁸² This is an additional way to acclimate new refugees, who might have heard of these holidays from those around them, but did not understand their importance or history. The history of a holiday such as Memorial Day or the Fourth of July would not be immediately known to a Bosnian refugee. The context of these holidays was necessary for Bosnians to feel at ease celebrating a new holiday.

Finally, the main story from the headline, "Kuća je prava investicija/ A house is a real investment," detailed loans and economic practices surrounding purchasing a house in the United States. In numerous interviews and articles about Bosnians in America, a primary goal for most was to own their own home. This was important culturally, as many Bosnians left behind ancestral homes when they fled as refugees, and land was a significant tie to ancestry, passed down through generations in a way not achieved in the more recently settled United States. Homeownership in the United States then became a way for Bosnian refugees to continue the tradition of passing down land to the next generation and it also gave a sense of stability with housing that an apartment owned by someone else did not achieve. In addition, the initial apartments they settled in were often run down, or in terrible condition, and home ownership was the ideal next step for Bosnian refugees to establish themselves on their own terms. Homeownership for

⁸² Ibid., 4.

Americans was an avenue to wealth accumulation, which differed from the cultural connotation for Bosnians. Bosnian refugees who owned a home would then be able to achieve success in a manner that befitted both cultures. The article discusses things like FHA Conventional Loans, mortgage and interest rates, and home insurance. All of these were important in a conversation about the feasibility of homeownership for an individual. Having these concepts explained in detail in their native language made homeownership more accessible to magazine readers.⁸³

The Jul/Aug 1997 issue continued along the same themes of assisting Bosnian resettlement. It included an article on how to *sprječite ljetne nezgode*/avoid spring accidents, where local plants like poison ivy and other potential injuries that could occur at a park in the Midwest were described. Local hazards and dangers which were not grown in Bosnia would have been important to note, especially before a child encountered something like poison ivy of their own accord and needed a difficult to schedule doctor's visit.⁸⁴

Of large interest was surely the piece entitled: "Sticanje državljanstva/ Gaining citizenship." Centered around the image of an American flag, the author elaborates on the process of gaining U.S. citizenship. The complexity of the U.S. citizenship process made it difficult to navigate, with numerous forms, procedures, and interviews to be conducted to be considered for citizenship. The regulations and legislation were ever-changing. The article pointed out that there were even new laws in place, and to ensure the information

⁸³ Ibid., 15.

⁸⁴ *Plima Obiteljski Magazin*, Jul/Aug 1997, 3.

was correct, they consulted with the director of the Immigration Law Project.⁸⁵ These types of articles attempted to make complex issues appear in a more straightforward manner by suggesting tips and whom to contact for additional support.

The next issue, Sep/Oct 1997, discussed traffic laws, various touristic cities across the United States, further holidays like Halloween, and auto insurance. This further pushed assimilation started by the citizenship article. Having a car allowed for further movement and independence from the resettlement agency and the potential for a job further from home. Similar to the American transition during the 1950s, where the introduction of a cheaper style of automobile allowed Americans who worked in the city to move their families further away into the suburbs. Bosnians had no real need for a car in their homeland, the public transportation system was more robust, and they lived in smaller cities or villages where they also worked. This resettlement in America required Bosnian refugees to work hard to afford a car, which would allow them to live in safer neighborhoods, often further from their jobs. In this sense, the transition to life in the United States required Bosnians to Americanize their transportation usage alongside other economic and cultural facets.

Nov/Dec 1997 spoke about a folk festival in St. Louis, where a band called Veseli Bosanci (Happy Bosnians) played. It also discussed driving under the influence, Thanksgiving, and “na koji način štediti novac? /in which manner to save your money?” A common element in these issues was saving money and other economic advice, which was important to refugees who arrived without much money or support. Due to the low-

⁸⁵ Ibid., 7.

paying, low-skilled jobs that Bosnians were limited to when they arrived in the United States, they were economically impoverished and reliant on Volags for the first few months unless they had established extended family to support them. This meant that economic advice on how to save money wherever possible was badly needed and would have been sought when reading an advice magazine.

The 1998 issues continued in the same vein. One notable advertisement was from the Princeton Review, a test-prep company that sought doctors to take their USMLE (United States Medical Licensing Examination) review course. Though medicine was a universal field, terms and best practices varied from country to country. Practicing in the United States required specific licensing, despite a refugee's status as a doctor back in Bosnia. An interesting factor in this advertisement in particular was the language in which it was printed. The majority of ads in the issues of *Plima Magazine* were translated into Bosnian by the editors or perhaps by the business itself. This signaled they were appealing to a general audience, who might not yet have developed the necessary skills to read English, and also, it made sense for a magazine intended to assist and comfort Bosnians in a new country. The difference with the Princeton Review advertisement was that it was written solely in English. To take and successfully pass a USMLE and to be a successful physician in the United States, a certain level of English mastery was expected, reflected in the English-only ad. Only those who had that bare minimum English fluency would be able to read the advertisement and thus feel comfortable taking a USMLE course in English.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ *Plima Obiteljski Magazin*, May/June 1998, 5.

In 1998 articles focused on purchases, protection from abuse, mutual funds, the EESA (Eastern European Service Agency), job application assistance, natural disaster advice, Medicaid sign-up assistance, green card application, making a website, life insurance, and refinancing your house.⁸⁷ The general tone of the magazine continued to provide helpful assistance for everyday life in America.

Two other types of notable, recurrent advertisements began to appear in the 1998 issues, which would appeal to readers seeking employment. The first was directed toward linguists and appeared only in English, similar to the Princeton Review one. TRW S&ITG ran a language support program for peacekeeping forces in the Balkans. It advertised in *Plima* to find people who were bilingual in English and Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian with U.S. citizenship. The goal was to send these individuals to Bosnia to support U.S. military operations. An advertisement like this in a magazine for Bosnians made sense, as it had a large reader population who spoke Bosnian. In addition, the types of tips posted in the magazine spoke to a newly arrived population not yet qualified to become U.S. citizens. During the Cold War, a similar phenomenon occurred when the U.S. government sought an increasingly educated population to admit as regular migrants, such as Indians or Pakistanis, who immigrated to America for more employment opportunities.⁸⁸ However, an argument could be made that the established

⁸⁷ Ibid., 14.

⁸⁸ See: Uzma Quraishi, *Redefining the Immigrant South: Indian and Pakistani Immigration to Houston During the Cold War*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020); Robin Smith, “Acculturation Strategies of Cold War and Post-Soviet Immigrants in the United States” (Ph.D. diss., ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2021). For other U.S. government influences on migrations, see: David Bacon, *The Right to Stay Home: How US Policy Drives Mexican Migration* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013);

Bosnian American population would also read a magazine like this for news about their homeland and also for the popular culture, music, and sports articles.⁸⁹

The issue also included a one-time advertisement for a new medical program. The Archbishop's Commission on Community Health had a project for St. Louis immigrants who wanted to continue their medical or social science careers. It offered a 12-week training course for nurse assistant certification, and it specifically sought those "imigrantima koji žive u St. Louisu [koji traže] nastavak karijere u medicinskim i socijalnim poljima/ immigrants who live in St. Louis who seek to continue their career in medicine or social programs," such as nurses, doctors, social workers or anything else related to the medical field. Unlike the Princeton Review advertisement, it was written in Bosnian, and it aimed at providing greater language and transition aid to those who were newly arrived. This ad and its counterparts in *Plima Magazin* sought to provide private assistance to Bosnian refugees in hopes of easing their transition and making them eligible for a higher paying position.⁹⁰

The other new advertisement that was introduced in 1998 was from Adriatic Sunshine Travel. It soon claimed the end cover slot of the magazine in every subsequent issue. The travel ads featured bold, colorful images of different locations across the Balkans in hopes of becoming the dominant travel booking agency for people traveling

Frank D. Bean, *At the Crossroads: Mexican Migration and U.S. Policy* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997); and Jorge Durand and Douglas S. Massey, "Evolution of the Mexico-U.S. Migration System: Insights from the Mexican Migration Project," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 684, no. 1 (2019): 21–42.

⁸⁹ *Plima Obiteljski Magazin*, Jan/Feb 1998, 8.

⁹⁰ *Plima Obiteljski Magazin*, Jul/Aug 1998, 15.

back to their homelands. They noted, “Naši klijenti uvjerali su se u brze usluge na maternjem jeziku, odličnu organizaciju a sve uz najniže cijene na američkom tržištu,” or “our clients swear by our fast work in their native language, excellent organization, and all this with the lowest prices in the American market.” Adriatic Sunshine Travel hoped to appeal to its audience through its convenience and relatability. Booking a trip home would hopefully be easier and cheaper through a local agency that could work with vendors in two different languages. This would appeal to Bosnians who would miss their homeland, and even if they could not afford or were not politically able to return at the moment, they would remember the bright images for future travel.⁹¹

In 1999, both types of advertisements continued to appear in the magazine. This occurred alongside articles that covered topics such as children’s education, tax usage, technology help, drug and alcohol use, registering to vote in Bosnia from overseas, the lottery, and Bosnian-American cultural conferences. Notably, these issues turned further away from earlier topics like economic and political settlement assistance and instead moved to more everyday interests. Technology blurbs, especially those about new devices and Y2K, became more frequent. This seemed to indicate a shift in the audience, presuming there were fewer new immigrants who needed this information or that they could simply look at back issues for this kind of information. There were no updates to things like immigration policy in the 1999 articles, which would have ostensibly been published if the magazine felt the audience was still interested in that type of assistance. The final runs of *Plima Magazin* occurred during the year 2000. The first issue opened

⁹¹ *Plima Obiteljski Magazin*, Nov/Dec 1998, 36.

with a piece on the 2000 Census, explaining its importance and how to complete the information. They also talked about technology usage, HIV/AIDS, aid for abused women, specialty savings, and driving enforcement. These last two issues in 2000 seemed to be the two that least emphasized private aid and support for Bosnian refugees in both economic and political matters. Though the issues were still very important as a community resource, they were not aimed directly at new refugees the way earlier ones were, and information seemed to proceed toward a more social tilt.

Plima Magazin filled a special role for the St. Louis Bosnian refugee community and likely the Bosnian refugee community across the United States, though it cannot be known how widespread the information became. Written by Bosnians for Bosnians in their own language, it contributed to the private assistance that was immediately available for all Bosnian refugees, as it did not require a refugee to be fluent in English to understand the information. Since it contained a letter to the editor and asked for correspondence, *Plima* was able to flexibly align itself to community needs and interests. It also did not contain any of the limitations that other private assistance groups like Volags or affiliate agencies did, in that it was not beholden to government funding and could act as it liked. The magazine also was more effective because it had a genuine interest in its target population, it truly wanted Bosnians to be successful in America, while some agencies and caseworkers were apathetic at best to the interests and successes of the Bosnian refugee community and individuals.

Overall, private, non-governmental sources of aid to Bosnian refugees in the United States included Volags and their affiliates, alongside the media. These groups were essential to the flourishing of Bosnian refugees, though with varying degrees of

impact. These groups were secular and driven to help Bosnians mostly through financial and social means. This differed from the final type of group Bosnian refugees received assistance from, religious organizations.

Chapter 3: Religious Assistance to Bosnian Refugees

In examining U.S. refugee resettlement, evidently, government and secular agencies and affiliates could not handle the entirety of refugee resettlement alone. As a result, religious or faith-based organizations and affiliates entered the picture. Even prior to the 1980s, religious organizations stepped up to provide a large portion of refugee resettlement aid. Government affiliate programs administered some of this assistance in partnership with the Office of Refugee Settlement. Some programs included large national partner organizations, such as the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Church World Service, the Ethiopian Community Development Council, the Episcopal Migration Ministries, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, and Lutheran Family Services, among other organizations.⁹² This chapter explores the structure of some of these religious agencies and how they interacted with Bosnian refugees during the 1990s and early 2000s. Religious tradition guided how these organizations viewed immigration and refugee policy, as well as the aid they provided.⁹³

⁹² Janet Bauer and Andrea Chivakos, “What’s Islam Got to Do with It? American Pluralism, Ethnographic Sensibilities, and Faith-Based Refugee Resettlement in Hartford, Connecticut,” in Julie Adkins, Laurie A. Occhipinti, and Tara Hefferan, ed., *Not by Faith Alone: Social Services, Social Justice, and Faith-Based Organizations in the United States* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2010), 1.

⁹³ For more on religious aid to refugees see: Stephanie Boddie and Ram A. Cisaan, *Faith-Based social services: Measures, Assessments, and Effectiveness* (Binghamton, N.Y.: The Haworth Pastoral Press, 2006); Michael Edwards and David Hulme, eds., *Beyond the Magic Bullet: NGO Performance and Accountability in the Post-Cold War World* (West Hartford: Kumarian Press, 1996); Marie R. Griffith and Melani McAlister, eds., *Religion and Politics in the Contemporary United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants*

This chapter focuses on how Bosnians were given direct aid mostly through religious organizations that received grants from the federal government. It explores how these organizations expanded to work with immigrants from all kinds of backgrounds, which led mostly Christian organizations to work with Bosnians who were majority Muslim. Though the sources for this chapter are mostly secondary, it is still important to study how organizations that were responsible for the bulk of direct support interacted with Bosnians. This chapter argues the support faith-based organizations gave to Bosnians was often criticized as being insufficient.

Catholic Church Immigration Organizations

In regard to Bosnian refugees during the 1990s, Catholic Charities offered the bulk of faith-based refugee resettlement across the United States. As such, it becomes important to understand the history of Catholic groups who gave aid to immigrants because it gives context to their expansion of aid from Catholic immigrants to immigrants of all kinds of religious and ethnic backgrounds. Much of this was contingent on the political trends, but also on the increasingly interconnected relationship of Catholic aid organizations and the United States federal government.

The Catholic Church has had a long-standing religious tradition of shaping immigration trends in the United States. This extends to their attempt to influence the public sphere on several issues, including immigration. A large part of this interest in immigration and assistance stems from the early 20th century when Catholics immigrated

(Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2006); and J. Bruce Nichols, *The Uneasy Alliance: Religion, Refugee Work, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

en masse to the United States. Between 1900 and 1920, over 3.5 million Catholics immigrated to the United States, though there had been Catholics in America since the colonial era.⁹⁴ With this influx in the 1900s, Catholics were able to create communities of their own when they were excluded by the Protestant majority for alleged illiteracy, disease, immorality, and un-Americanism. These communities centered around parish networks, country of origin, or ethnic groups.⁹⁵ However, the creation of these communities, often by poor or working-class Catholics, became a burden for church leaders who realized they lacked an organizational framework with which to provide support.

Catholic immigrant aid increased as the United States joined World War I in 1917, and American archbishops sought to help Catholic immigrants find homes and jobs as a way to contribute to the war effort.⁹⁶ This set the stage for immigrant resettlement throughout the twentieth century, with a focus on ensuring immigrants and refugees could rapidly support themselves in the United States. Prominent Catholic clergy met in August 1917 at the National Catholic War Council to organize the activities of American Catholics, which became the National Catholic Welfare Council in 1919 at the end of the war. They developed a department to create materials for adult citizenship classes and

⁹⁴ James Hennesey, *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1981), 207.

⁹⁵ American Catholic History Classroom, "The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Immigration: The Founding of the Bureau of Immigration," The Catholic University of America, accessed February 2023.
<https://cuomeka.wrlc.org/exhibits/show/immigration/background/immigration-intro>.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

parochial schools. Catholic aid increased in 1920, when community members became aware of Protestant organizations targeting Catholic immigrants at Ellis Island.⁹⁷ Thus, the NCWC established its own Bureau of Immigration in 1920 with the intent of assisting new Catholic immigrants to establish homes and jobs.⁹⁸ From the start, it was clear that Catholic organizations that aided immigrants were created to help only Catholics, mostly to prevent them from being recruited by other religious groups and potentially converting away from the Catholic Church. For example, Bosnians, referred to as Yugoslavs in extent material, had been arriving at Ellis Island at this time and settled in areas in the Midwest but were not able to access any aid provided by the Catholic Church to immigrants.

By the end of the twentieth century, Catholic aid had extended to all incoming migrants, including Muslims, not only Catholics. The NCWC, later the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, had spent almost a century becoming involved with immigration and reform on a broader scale. In 2003, for example, it issued the pastoral document “Strangers No Longer” to provide guidance to Catholics on issues surrounding immigration and refugees.⁹⁹ The Catholic Church increased its collaboration with the U.S. government on immigration issues and lobbied to preserve the human dignity of

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ American Catholic History Classroom, “The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Immigration: So What? Why Does This Topic Matter? Issues of Continuing Relevance” The Catholic University of America, accessed February 2023. <https://cuomeka.wrlc.org/exhibits/show/immigration/bigissues/immigration-issues>.

migrants alongside the right of sovereign nations.¹⁰⁰ As a result of this increased interest, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops became the largest voluntary agency involved with refugee resettlement by the 1970s. As a national-level affiliate agency, they had a national office that oversaw both regional and local diocesan offices across the United States. They matched refugees and immigrants with local sponsors, including individuals, families, private groups, civic groups, and parishes.¹⁰¹ They differed from other agencies because they stressed refugee sponsorship as a moral commitment over a legal one and focused on resettling refugee families into adoptive communities.¹⁰² Other agencies simply claimed their services were complete at the end of a predetermined assistance period, with little emphasis on assimilation.

Sponsors received assistance from Catholic Charities, social services offices, and state and federal programs. Local Catholic Charities' migration and refugee services ran independently, but they received funds and support from the national agency. Though Catholic Charities were structured in ways particular to their locales, most websites for local organizations used the same verbiage, from Houston to Wheeling to Seattle. These websites answered basic questions, such as, "Is it difficult to sponsor a refugee family?" or "Who can act as a sponsor?" or "What are the general responsibilities of sponsorship?" The goal was to simplify the refugee sponsor process and attract volunteers. Information provided in the answers centered around this moral obligation and worked through local

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Norman Zucker, "Refugee Resettlement in the United States: The Role of the Voluntary Agencies," in *Michigan Journal of International Law* 3, no. 1, (1982): 163.

¹⁰² Ibid., 163.

Catholic churches. For the Catholic Charities of West Virginia, for example, sponsor responsibilities included helping with locating housing, providing home furnishings and clothing, assistance in finding employment and encouraging self-sufficiency, and arranging education for children and even ESL classes for adults.¹⁰³ This aligned with the governmental expectations of provided aid for refugee resettlement agencies that received grants. However, the verbiage of the website indicates the sponsors who worked with this Catholic charity provided the bulk of the assistance with little or no direction given to them by the overseeing agency. These church volunteers then felt morally, not legally or financially, responsible for making sure the refugees received the aid they were guaranteed upon their resettlement.

The structure of the system sometimes presented problems for efficient refugee resettlement. Independent sponsors did not have access to the extent of resources that national agencies or even a small local agency would, nor would they have the community connections that an agency would have spent years building up. Presumably, these volunteer sponsors were doing this out of goodwill and free time, but mistakes happened. A positive take on this situation would be that individual sponsors working alongside a faith-based agency like Catholic Charities would be able to access these resources and work with other sponsors who are also resettling refugees nearby. They might also be less overwhelmed by the demands of refugee resettlement and be able to

¹⁰³ “Becoming a Sponsor,” Catholic Charities of West Virginia, accessed February 2023. <https://catholiccharitieswv.org/migration-and-refugee-services/>.

give more attention to a refugee and their families than a caseworker with many refugees to assist in a standardized agency.

Bosnians in Dallas surveyed by a master's student through their affiliation with Catholic Charities in the late 1990s expressed varying levels of satisfaction with their experience in the United States. The study addressed areas like the migration process, employment, satisfaction with life, and future goals. All 37 participants were enrolled in an English as a Second Language class for adults offered through the Catholic Charities Migration and Refugee Services.¹⁰⁴

The Catholic program in Dallas settled the majority of the Bosnian refugees together in the Bachman Glenn apartment complex. During the 1990s, the area was surrounded by low-income apartments and liquor stores, and refugees grew weary of the quality of life the neighborhood provided.¹⁰⁵ Despite the living conditions in the settlement placement given by Catholic Charities, the settlement did bring the advantage of friendship and community for its residents, who could easily connect with other refugees in a small area. Over ninety percent of the survey participants responded that they had friendships with other Bosnian refugees they met in their apartment complex or neighborhood.¹⁰⁶ These friendships forged through proximity allowed refugees to support each other with issues they encountered in their new homes, often working through the difficult circumstances and living conditions together. The relationships were not

¹⁰⁴ Jennifer Karen Jackson, "Living in Dallas: A Bosnian Refugee Community Study" (MA thesis, Texas Woman's University, 2000), 39.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

facilitated directly through Catholic Charities of Dallas, but they were still a result of the settlement aid the agency carried out. In contrast, only eight percent of respondents reported meeting Bosnians either at work or at a refugee camp. But forty-three percent of respondents replied “Unknown” to the question “Where did you meet these Bosnians?” comprising around half the participants.¹⁰⁷ The broad nature of the unknown answer did provide limitations on correlating Catholic Charities of Dallas with the majority of Bosnian refugee friendships forged while in the United States, but still showed a strong connection between the two.

The survey also assessed resettlement experiences. Though a majority of the participants did not answer this section’s questions, those who did addressed the best and worst parts of their resettlement experience. Participants described the kindness of the resettlement workers and the organization of the process as the best parts of resettlement.¹⁰⁸ But among the worst parts were the living conditions of the apartments, the process of moving to the United States, and the lack of support. One respondent noted refugees coming to America needed to be given more information about cultural differences and the way of life “because it happens that people who are not well informed have a lot of problems and if they don’t solve them, they decide to go back.”¹⁰⁹ Many of the responses showed that the negative side of refugee resettlement agencies extended to faith-based agencies. Even in a smaller scale agency, caseworkers could be impersonal, and housing assignments could be subpar. Moving to a new country with little

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 42.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 45

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 46.

background could be overwhelming, and most Bosnian refugees did not receive enough support or information to ease their transition.

In particular, housing was an area of complaint for many respondents. They noted the dirty conditions and the high crime rate of the area of resettlement. Around 38% said they did not feel safe where they lived, both with the lack of security and the age of the apartment complex. One wrote, “We were forced to sign the contract for a year... The apartment stinks and it’s full of bugs. You can’t feel fresh air.”¹¹⁰ Lack of choice in housing accommodations seemed to be a complaint that spanned Bosnian refugee resettlement across the United States, regardless of which agency sponsored. Partly due to the high cost of living in cities, resettlement agencies sought economically feasible options for their refugees. Agencies also intended to make refugees economically independent as soon as possible, and they deemed that lower housing costs would serve this goal. An older, cheaper apartment in a bad area was fiscally easier for a refugee making the minimum wage to continue rent payments on their own.

One area in which Catholic Charities of Dallas did provide solid support centered on English language acquisition. Language acquisition in a new country was necessary to daily life, both in regard to obtaining a job and also meeting basic needs, such as housing and buying food. The survey was conducted through the Catholic Charities of Dallas evening ESL classes. The organization also provided childcare during the night classes. This enabled parents who worked all day to use the free childcare and work on their own linguistic advancement without incurring additional costs. Of the 37 survey respondents,

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 49.

most of whom had been living in the United States for less than a year, most felt they were not learning English as fast as they would like, totaling around forty-six percent.¹¹¹ This shows how crucial English acquisition was to U.S. refugees, especially at the beginning of their move. Rapid language learning enables better self-advocacy and contextual understanding, which are necessary for situations that quickly change, like refugee resettlement. Since language acquisition happens over time and with practice, it made sense for Bosnian refugees who had been in the United States for a longer period to feel more confident in their abilities than those in the ESL classes who had been in the country only for a few months. Though ESL classes are one component of that daily life language learning, they did still help refugees with their English and provided a space to practice with others on a similar level.

One potential problem with Catholic Charities' resettlement of Bosnian refugees in particular concerned religious differences. Though Catholic Charities expanded beyond the 1917 ethos of only providing resettlement to Catholic immigrants, they were still non-secular, even though they derived their aid philosophies from Church teachings. To this day, according to their website, "Catholic Charities USA's approach to migration is rooted in the Gospel and Catholic social teaching," which affected how they provided services to immigrants and refugees in the United States.¹¹² Part of the change to assisting non-Catholics grew from the transition of faith-based resettlement agencies

¹¹¹ Ibid., 47.

¹¹² "Immigration and Refugee Services," Catholic Charities USA, accessed March 2023, <https://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/our-vision-and-ministry/immigration-refugee-services/>.

from operating on a voluntary basis to a non-profit that received government grants.¹¹³ Sara L. McKinnon argues the rhetoric of the narrative presented by faith-based resettlement agencies made strong ties between volunteering with refugees and actual missionary work, with direct references to biblical scripture. Volunteers would have been called to serve, not to build relationships or improve the lives of others, but for the salvation of refugees and volunteers.¹¹⁴ In this sense, the shift of refugee populations served became parallel to their original theological reason for assisting: to become the ones assisting refugees and immigrants with a hope of salvation or conversion. Of course, this conversion was never explicitly stated or enforced but instead shown through the Christian nature of their deeds.

The way refugees were portrayed in faith-based narrative images also played a role in how agencies constructed their own identities as providers. Volunteers were “agents of change,” and refugees were “voiceless, uprooted, and vulnerable.”¹¹⁵ These representations, McKinnon argues, were not problematic on their own but were problematized by their lack of stories that clashed with the Christian refugee-in-need narrative.¹¹⁶ It made refugees one-dimensional and presented them as in need of a savior.

¹¹³ Sara L. McKinnon, ““Bringing New Hope and New Life”: The Rhetoric of Faith-Based Refugee Resettlement Agencies,” *The Howard Journal of Communication*, 20: 314, (2009).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 320.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 321.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 321.

Indeed, this contrasted with governmental expectations that refugees be self-supported within three months of resettlement.

Bosnian refugees often came from a Muslim background, whether they practiced the religion actively or not. The Catholic Church agencies' motivation for assisting Bosnians was rooted in their obligation to help refugees regardless of origin or background, a stipulation tied to funding. Another factor for some agencies, especially those that requested to sponsor Muslim refugees in particular, was to build inter-faith understanding. This was also motivated by other groups in a community, who demonstrated anti-Muslim hatred. However, this argument seemed to become more prominent only after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.¹¹⁷ Then faith-based organizations would seek to sponsor Muslim refugees specifically to counter Islamophobia in their local community. Groups also became more popular to sponsor with increased media attention on a particular refugee crisis or with U.S. involvement.¹¹⁸ All of these factors contributed to the availability of sponsors in certain areas and times. Thus, the differences in religion should not be an important factor in the treatment of refugee groups by faith-based assistance agencies, especially as many of these groups were minorities who fled their country of origin for religious reasons.

The set-up of Catholic Charities, as well as other faith-based VOLAGS, was very secularized. In 2002, one employee of Catholic Charities noted if someone came to them wanting to convert to Catholicism, "we don't even know how to do it because it's not our

¹¹⁷ Jessica Eby et al. "The Faith Community's Role in Refugee Resettlement in the U.S.," *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 24, No. 3, (2011): 594.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 595.

mission statement.”¹¹⁹ The voluntary nature of Catholic immigration assistance had changed so much that beyond the mission statement and guiding principles, the national refugee and immigrant assistance agency made little acknowledgement of its religious heritage. This is where it differed from local agencies, like the Catholic Charities of Dallas, or other regional offices, where they contracted out to local churches within the parish to find volunteers. Those local volunteers and offices relied more on the religious mission of the Catholic Church as the basis for their work with refugees. The national agency, which derived its funding from grants from the federal government, was more limited in its ability to include theological principles in its work with individual refugees.

With smaller faith-based agencies, there was still a push to be culturally and religiously sensitive. The Catholic Charities of Tennessee, for example, provided their refugees with lists of churches, mosques, or temples dependent on their religion or denomination. They also did not permit their employees to enter into discussions on religion with refugees.¹²⁰ This did not always work, especially because the agency did not provide information on the different cultures to their employees, so cultural differences were not always noted, such as considering refusing offers of food or drink.¹²¹ Thus, while Catholic Charities did not attempt to Americanize the refugees they resettled, they did not always do their utmost to ensure cultural sensitivity was upheld.

¹¹⁹ Tricia C. Bruce, “Contested Accommodation on the Meso Level: Discursive Adaptation Within Catholic Charities’ Immigration and Refugee Services,” *The American Behavioral Scientist* 49, no. 11, (July 2006): 143.

¹²⁰ Leila McInnis, “Catholic Charities of Tennessee Refugee Services: An Ethnographic Study” (MA thesis, East Carolina University, 2010), 69.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

Other Faith-Based Agencies

Though the majority of literature on faith-based refugee resettlement covers Catholic Charities and the US Congress of Catholic Bishops, there were other agencies that based their aid on religion. One such agency was Lutheran Social Services, which has operated across the United States since the nineteenth century. Another organization with Lutheran ties is the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS), which works with the Office of Refugee Resettlement on a national scale.

LIRS first derived from an organization of American Lutherans in the 1860s, which originally formed to protect Lutheran immigrants to the United States. Similar to Catholic organizations, it sought to help people within their own denomination and then grew to encompass services from immigrants with different religious and cultural backgrounds. In 1939, LIRS officially came into existence with the increase in U.S. immigration around World War II.¹²² This also solidified their shift to helping immigrants from all backgrounds, especially when they partnered with the ORR since the office required its partner agencies to provide aid without discrimination.

Lutheran Social Services (LSS), on the other hand, was not nationally encompassing, and these agencies were limited to a geographic region, usually in the Midwest. Similar to LIRS, they also provided refugee resettlement services to people of all backgrounds if they qualified for refugee resettlement under federal government regulations. LSS of North Dakota ran several different programs. It was founded as an adoption agency but grew to encompass helping with issues such as immigration,

¹²² “80 Years of Welcome,” Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, accessed March 2023, <https://www.lirs.org/80-years-of-welcome/>.

housing, disaster relief, poverty, and addiction. One program for refugees run by LSS of North Dakota is New American Services (NAS), funded mostly by the Department of Health and Human Services in North Dakota but also by the State Department, LIRS, and Episcopal Migration Ministries.¹²³ The interaction of the different agencies and tiers of refugee resettlement agencies allowed LSS to function on the local level most effectively.

Part of the reason refugees in the 1990s were resettled in Fargo, North Dakota was the labor shortage and lack of ethnic diversity. Bosnians, Sudanese, and Somalians were hired in manufacturing plants in the state, which helped not only the refugees who needed to become self-sufficient rapidly but also the economy of North Dakota, which was experiencing a mass exodus of their youth who sought more opportunities elsewhere.¹²⁴ One issue that LSS experienced was an increased demand for interpreters and increased reporting requirements for their employees. Staff who worked for LSS had to create reports and files for all the refugees they resettled, differing from the expectations for church sponsors who were volunteers and had less stringent reporting requirements.¹²⁵ This corresponded with other faith-based organizations, who were able to rely on volunteers to ease the burden of refugee resettlement. It also highlights a systematic problem with refugee resettlement. Though the United States only accepted a select number of refugees in a fiscal year and tried to spread them across the country,

¹²³ Jennifer Erickson, *Race-ing Fargo: Refugees, Citizenships, and the Transformation of Small Cities* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 46.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

there were still issues with resettling large numbers of people who had very little outside support in a new country. LSS of North Dakota is a microcosmic example of this issue.

Just like other agencies, LSS experienced logistical issues with assisting a large number of new arrivals. In the late 1990s, it had rapid staff turnover, with little or no training for workers and up to hundreds of cases at a time. As such, it was not a shock to learn staff failed to meet new arrivals at the airport or set up an apartment before refugees arrived.¹²⁶ The large number of caseloads in such a small city contributed massively to this organizational disaster. In response, some refugees became caseworkers, potentially to attempt to improve the situation for others, and they often found themselves living in the same buildings as clients. These refugees turned caseworkers found it hard to separate their own lives and settlement with their constant work and existence near clients.¹²⁷

Overall, local agencies developed unique struggles like this lack of work-life balance. It seems harder to imagine such a problem in a large agency, where a refugee might also become an employee of a resettlement agency but could likely work in a different geographic area or at least not live in the same buildings.

Another issue experienced by LSS of North Dakota in the late 1990s was general negative attitudes toward the aid they provided. It received criticism from all ends of the spectrum, from those who supported refugees and thought they needed more support than what was given, to those with nativist ideologies who were staunchly anti-immigration, to even other nonprofit organizations and the state who criticized the mismanagement.¹²⁸ It

¹²⁶ Ibid., 53.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 53.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 54.

seemed like no one supported LSS, especially due to the lack of communication from the agency. Refugees in the late 1990s occupied a place outside the typical immigrant system, where they lacked the resources, education, and sometimes the attitude to Americanize rapidly, which isolated them from the community in which they were placed. Alongside this, they often had little to no family or friends to support them, and caseworkers such as the ones at LSS of North Dakota were overwhelmed or inexperienced. This also complicated the relationship of local agencies, as well as faith-based ones, who were a visible target for criticism of the system. A faith-based resettlement agency balanced in a careful spot with both too much regulation from the state side and not enough oversight in regard to training and volunteers.

By August 2001, the North Dakota Office of Refugee Resettlement had all but shut down the refugee resettlement program in Fargo, which accounted for over 75% of total refugee arrivals in all of North Dakota between 1991 and 2000. This was announced to be due to management problems, and the majority of refugees for the rest of 2001 were sent to North Dakota for family reunification rather than new refugees.¹²⁹ This showed that steps were able to be taken to ensure more organization in refugee resettlement and also that criticism towards the mismanagement of refugee cases would be taken seriously in some areas. One factor that might have contributed to this was the small nature of the cities in North Dakota, where the number of refugees arriving was less than in other, larger cities. Problems were more likely to be noticed and remarked upon rather than spread across a larger geographic area with less chance of oversight.

¹²⁹ Devon A. Hansen, "Bosnian Refugees' Adjustments to Resettlement in Grand Forks, North Dakota," *Great Plains Research* 13, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 276.

Despite the issues with LSS, Bosnian refugees in Grand Forks, who were surveyed in 2000 about their experiences, still noted the Center for New Americans (part of LSS of North Dakota) resettlement coalition as the most helpful in getting resettled, with about 33% of respondents indicating that answer choice.¹³⁰ Similar to other Bosnian refugees surveyed in the same period in other cities, those in Grand Forks also saw areas for improvements in providing more job opportunities, English language training, housing, and education.¹³¹ Since these issues were reoccurring, it seemed to be a larger scale issue with refugee resettlement during the 1990s.

Local newspaper sources indicated the most successful LSS operations occurred in areas such as Waterloo, Iowa, where jobs in the meatpacking industry were deemed undesirable by young Iowans who were leaving the state. Bosnians with meatpacking experience were recruited by LSS from nearby larger cities, and generally seemed to express more contentment with having skilled employment.¹³² It seemed the most satisfaction emerged from faith-based organizations that were able to match Bosnian refugees with fulfilling jobs.

Catholic Charities and Lutheran Social Services were the most well-documented faith-based resettlement agencies for Bosnian refugees during the late 1990s and early 2000s, but they were by no means the only ones. Other religious groups also established their own refugee resettlement aid programs across the United States and contributed to

¹³⁰ Ibid., 283.

¹³¹ Ibid., 283.

¹³² Ted Landphair, "Bosnian Refugees Find a New, Satisfying Life in the Heartland," in *The Voice of America*, (May 2005).

helping Bosnian refugees. Among these are World Church Service (WCS), World Relief Corporation (WRC), Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM), and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS).¹³³ Muslim relief organizations also existed, but by 2001 they were limited in receiving state-mediated resources. For instance, the Bush Administration's Faith-Based Initiative mainly focused on Christian organizations. Due to post-9/11 persecution and surveillance, alongside general public paranoia, the government limited how much Islamic charities could help refugees and immigrants.¹³⁴ Thus, these groups were not well documented in Bosnian refugee resettlement and assistance, even prior to 9/11, especially because they were not federally funded with grants that enabled them to work on a national scale. These groups worked mostly in their local communities as a result.

Looking on a smaller scale, in Hartford, Connecticut, during this time, some Muslim faith-based organizations were still able to provide post-resettlement services. These included the Muslim Coalition of Connecticut, the Muhammad Islamic Center of Greater Hartford, and the Islamic Association of Greater Hartford. Christian and Jewish groups, however, still provided the majority of these services in Hartford.¹³⁵ Often refugees would work or volunteer for the faith-based agency that assisted them, even if they were not part of that particular denomination. As such, Muslims were well

¹³³ EMM was mentioned previously as working with LSS of North Dakota with Bosnian refugee resettlement, especially with providing part of their funding.

¹³⁴ Bauer and Chivakos, "What's Islam Got to Do with It?" 2.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

represented in the resettlement process.¹³⁶ This contributed to the improvement of refugee resettlement organizations because it allowed those familiar with the cultural background and the language to help ease the transition of newer arrivals. In addition, sometimes even if an organization was geared toward Muslims, ethnic, cultural, or linguistic differences prevented groups like Bosnian or Kosovar Muslims from participating in them. For example, in Hartford, some Bosnians did not feel comfortable in multi-cultural mosques for these reasons and preferred to pray and celebrate Ramazan (Ramadan) with their own community of Bosnians.¹³⁷ So, just because a faith-based resettlement agency matched up with the religion of the group they assisted did not always mean the resettlement process was successful.

All major faith-based refugee resettlement agencies did share some similarities. Their assistance was based on religious belief along the themes of hospitality, divine concern, the prominent role of refugees in religious history, service to those in need, and the sanctity of human life.¹³⁸ These themes expanded beyond simply helping those who shared the same faith and also beyond the missionary zeal that previously was associated especially with Christian aid organizations, though the rhetoric often echoed similar sentiments. The goal had changed from converting to aiding with an emphasis on volunteers' relationship with spirituality and the Divine. This was partially due to the

¹³⁶ Ibid., 6.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 8.

¹³⁸ Stephanie Nawyn, "Welcoming the Stranger: Constructing an Interfaith Ethic of Refuge," *Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2006): 146.

majority of these refugee assistance agencies receiving federal funds at some level, which came with the stipulation of a certain level of secularism attached. In regard to the secular approach, the rhetoric took an angle of human rights emphasis. This was not explicitly religious and ostensibly stemmed from World War II international human rights discourse, but it still had roots in numerous religious traditions.¹³⁹ These religious roots tied to the ethics of a situation and encourage both employees and faith volunteers to support the organizational mission.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 149.

Conclusion

Driven by war, Bosnian refugees during the 1990s entered the United States without much preparation or prior planning. Some were able to rely on family members or friends who had already established themselves in the United States, but many did not have connections in place before arriving. These Bosnians had to rely on agencies with which they were unfamiliar and had varying levels of expectations for the support they would receive from these agencies. Though ostensibly this support came from a single caseworker in one agency for each refugee and their family, behind the scenes, the interactions and support derived from several sources. This research has shown that during the 1990s, Bosnian refugees felt most aided by local resources, such as community publications and connections they developed, rather than through the resettlement system. This does not discount that refugee resettlement aid came from the government, private secular agencies, and faith-based agencies that often worked together in providing not only funding but also resources for Bosnian refugees when they arrived in the United States. These agencies provided the most well-known and researched aid but fell short in notable areas.

This working relationship did not occur without hurdles. Agencies conflicted with one another about what support would be given to an individual Bosnian refugee. This often resulted in gaps in funding or poor housing conditions. The federal government did not provide much personal aid to refugees; instead, it directed people to nationally recognized voluntary agencies, which received government funding. In a trickle-down method, these VOLAGS also then directed refugees to smaller regional agencies, both

secular and faith-based, that became the point of contact for Bosnian refugees. Though this funding came with federal oversight and regulations, in such a large system where tens of thousands of refugees arrived each year, it was impossible to ensure everyone received equitable funding and support.

The scale of the system was one of the biggest problems overall. The federal government was too large to help each individual refugee, and conversely, some private agencies were too small to have enough resources and community connections to help when large amounts of refugees were resettled in a geographic area. Even nationally recognized VOLAGS were not immune to issues that derived from scale. They could be too big to provide effective oversight and too small to create large-scale changes when a problem arose. As a result, the goal of the refugee resettlement system was to provide a baseline amount of aid, determined each year by the federal government, and to try to encourage refugee self-sufficiency as rapidly as possible.

Due to this focus on migrant self-sufficiency, all three types of agencies lacked in were housing and caseworker support. Often Bosnian refugees noted the poor conditions and location of the temporary housing they were given, and it made the list of complaints whenever they were surveyed or interviewed. Part of this was the lack of funding devoted to each refugee unit, but part was also due to a lack of caseworker support. Caseworkers were frequently overburdened with too many cases and too much administrative work to be able to fully devote their time to helping individuals. Subsequently, Bosnian refugees turned to their new-found communities to help each other out.

These methods of community support were more effective than systematized assistance, as they were personalized to customized needs. Bosnian refugees were

assigned housing in the same apartment buildings or neighborhoods whenever possible, and the poor conditions, along with the language barrier to English, resulted in a sense of camaraderie. Other community resources, like magazines and newspapers, offered information on resources and employment in a multi-lingual manner. These kinds of resources were notably more useful in giving a sense of satisfaction to Bosnian refugees, who felt the government and agencies did not do enough to help them. These media and community resources also prevented the rapid Americanization of Bosnians, who were able to interact with their cultural community instead of leaving behind all ties of their heritage in their haste to learn English and gain sustainable employment.

This thesis shows the bigger picture of the support that Bosnian refugees received in their initial resettlement period, but it also raises questions surrounding the longer-term impact this aid had on Bosnians in the United States. More than twenty years later, how many Bosnian refugees have remained in the United States despite experiencing a difficult time during resettlement? Have their views changed on the aid they received with more time to reflect? What are their thoughts on the broader resettlement system? These questions show there are still more areas for research into Bosnian immigrants. Another interesting perspective to consider for further research would be a comparison with the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, which resulted in another refugee crisis in Eastern Europe.

Keeping these points for further study in mind, this research contributes to the literature on refugees and migration in the United States by analyzing the aid that Bosnian refugees received, using governmental reports, interviews with Bosnians, and media from the period. It combined points from several other works on the refugee

resettlement system overall to explore how it impacted Bosnian refugees in particular. There has not yet been a work that comprehensively studies how Bosnians were integrated into the resettlement system using all three agencies as a focal point. There have been studies into individual Bosnian populations within the United States, but only looked at how they worked with one agency within a limited geographical area. This thesis offers a larger narrative of the resettlement of Bosnians in the United States. Finally, this is also the first work to study the effect of media publications such as *Plima Magazin* on Bosnians in the United States, especially in the broader context of Americanization.

Bosnians have become a settled ethnic community in the United States over the thirty years since their initial migration began. By studying where and how they were resettled across the country, it shows their long-lasting impact on American society. For example, the choice of settlement of Bosnian Muslims in St. Louis could have an impact on elections. As Bosnian Americans become citizens and register to vote, they could be put off by politicians who tout anti-Muslim, anti-refugee rhetoric and sway votes in Missouri.¹⁴⁰ Local policies and politics impact the nationwide economy and political situations, so it becomes significant to study and contextualize these policies.

¹⁴⁰ Ryan Schuessler, "How Missouri's Bosnian Vote could cost Donald Trump- and turn the state blue," *The Guardian*, (September 4, 2016).

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