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Ahna Mullins
Cleveland State University

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Socioeconomic mobility of local refugees: An analysis of Syrian, Congolese and Ukrainian/Russian refugees

By Ahna Mullins (USRA)

With Drs. Vickie Coleman Gallagher, Tracy Porter, Sorin Valcea and Benjamin Baran

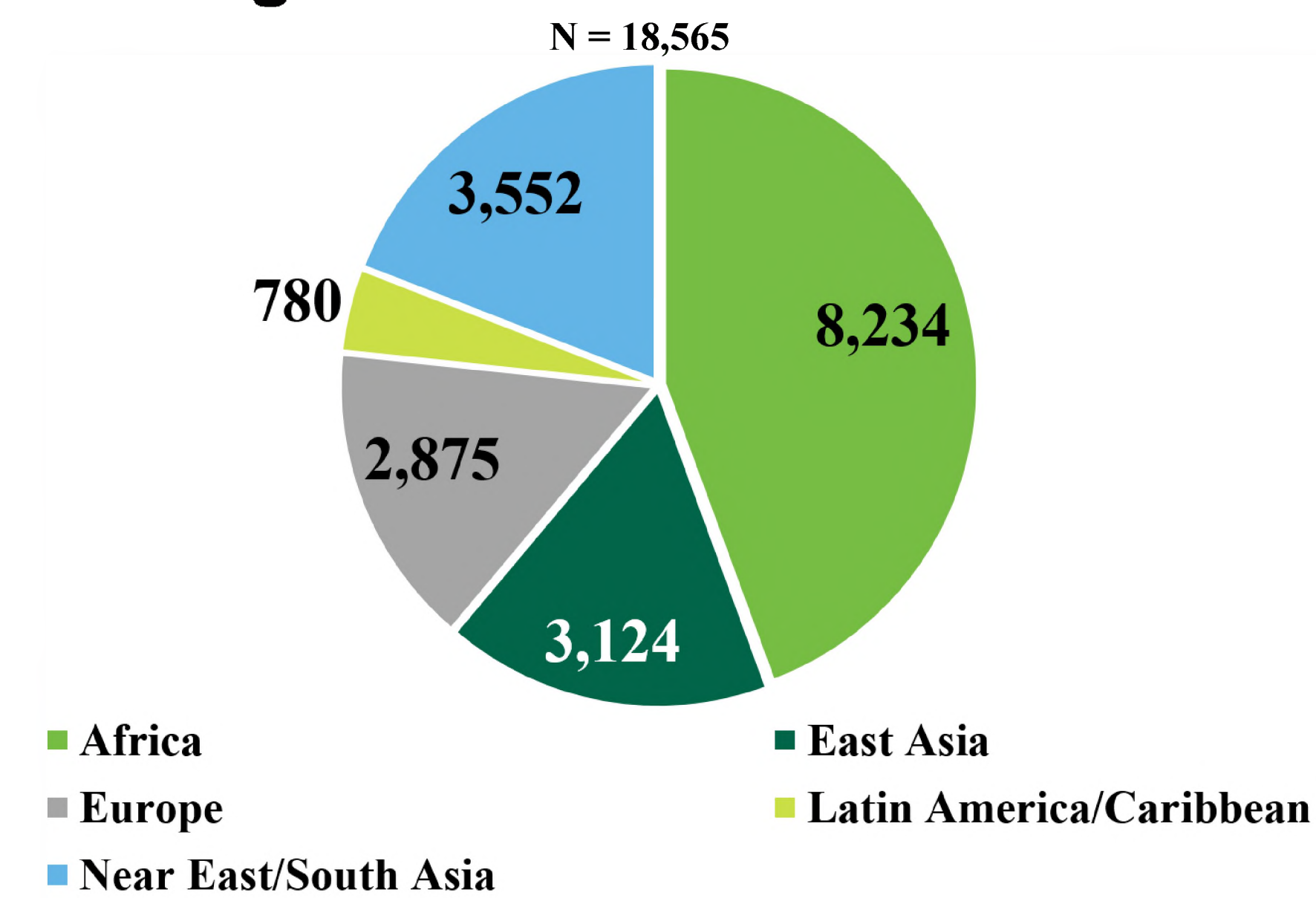
Abstract

In FY18, the United States has received 18,214 refugees with Ohio receiving 6.69% of that total, which places Ohio second only to Texas. In partnership with one of largest refugee resettlement agencies in Ohio, this study explored the experiences of refugees from Ukraine, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Syria. A literature review, interviews, and mini focus group suggest a diverse set of experiences, yet some common themes. Such themes include a can-do attitude, perseverance, and a long-term orientation towards success. In contrast to refugees from Syria and Ukraine, DRC refugees experience additional challenges due to prolonged residence in refugee camps. Some differences in gender dynamics across these three groups were also observed. Interviews with refugee-assistance employees revealed additional themes, including novel responses to managing relationships among employers, refugees, and other staff members.

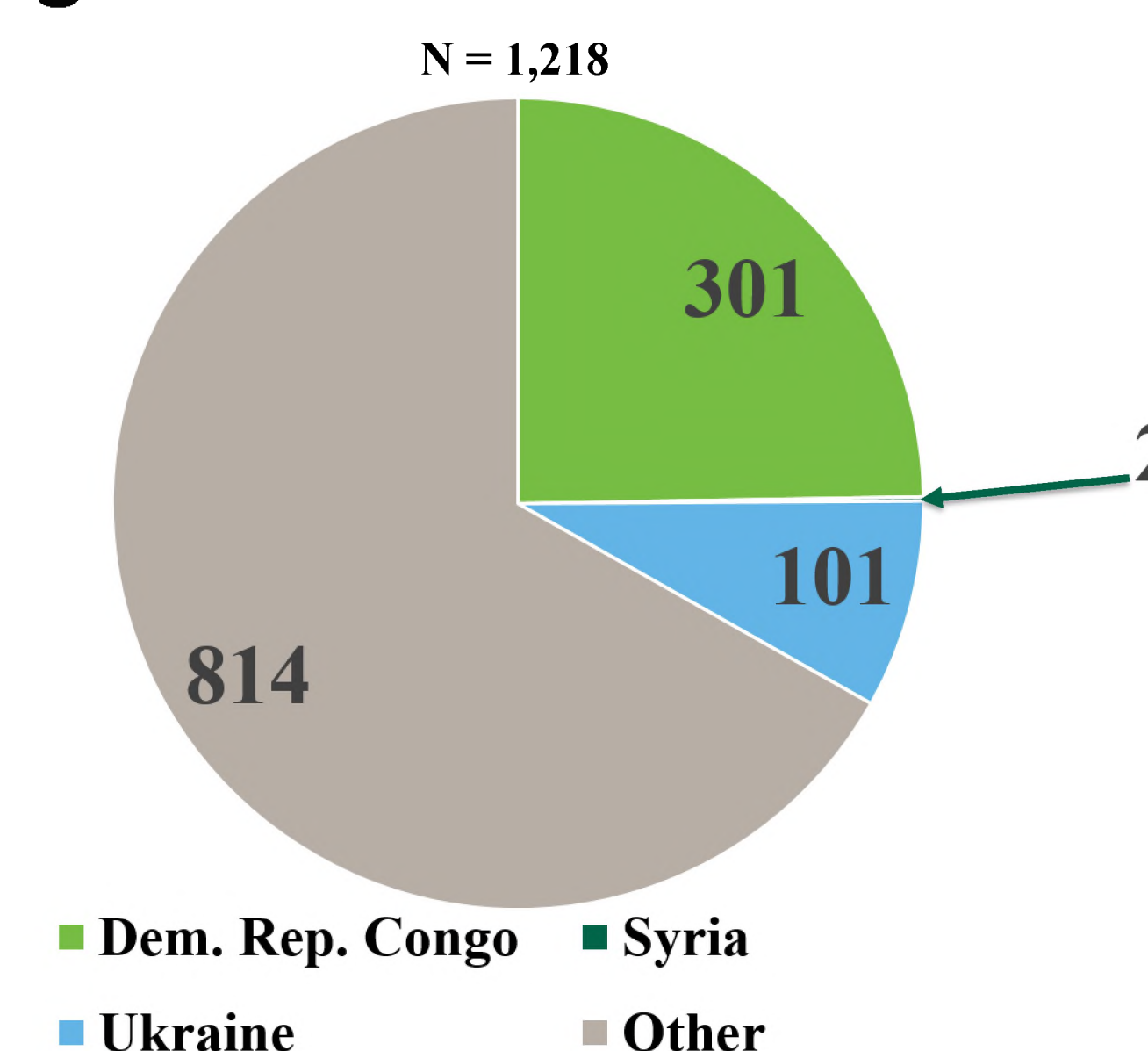
Methods

- Mini focus groups of 2-5 and single interviews utilizing a semi-structured discussion guide
- A group of Congolese refugees consisting of two women and two men (and one male Congolese interpreter)
- A group of Syrian refugees, consisting of one woman and two men
- A group of Ukrainian refugees, consisting of a man, a woman, and a Ukrainian interpreter who lives within the community
- Three employees to contribute to insights and interpretation of refugee similarities and differences by gender and country.
- For the refugees:
 - Ages ranged from 25 to 48 and time spent in the United States ranged from three months to five years.
 - All had experience with job seeking, although some were still unemployed.
 - All subjects, except one, had children (ranging anywhere from three to ten).

Refugees Arrivals in US FY18



Refugees Arrivals in Ohio FY18



Background

- A refugee is someone who is displaced due to a fear of “persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion”—U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
- Congolese (Democratic Republic of the Congo)
 - Political unrest and localized violence
 - Catholic
- Syrian (Syria)
 - Civil war
 - Muslim
- Ukrainian (Ukraine)
 - Religious persecution
 - Protestant

Findings

Democratic Republic of the Congo

- Lack of understanding of government infrastructure, leading to feelings of distrust and stress
- Taxes and paying for basic necessities
- Egalitarian family unit to promote vocational success
- Higher level of special needs

Syria

- Positive vocational outlook / hopeful about future
- Confident in figuring where they fit well in workforce
- Newfound independence for female workers

Ukraine

- Large family settlements and churches, with amenities to:
 - Find homes
 - Find jobs
 - Learn English
- Manual labor / trades
- More regulated and safer / physically easier to work in U.S.

Common Themes

- “I can and will do anything that they give me”
- Perseverance
- Government distrust due to home-country distrust of gov.
- English learned by immersion
- Hope for their children, and pride in educational and vocational successes for their children's future

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