REFUGEES AS IMMIGRANTS
Revelations of Labor Market Performance

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The characteristics of today's labor market have a greater effect on the job market integration of refugees than their post-arrival behaviors and attitudes. Therefore, voluntary agencies must take a more proactive role in advocating government policies related to the labor market. In addition, many variables, such as age, gender, and language proficiency, influence their performance in the labor market.

A contradiction between refugee admissions criteria and refugee resettlement policy has underscored the U.S. refugee program for the past two decades. Admissions criteria, based on humanitarian concerns, clearly views refugees as refugees. Resettlement policy, particularly the mandate of early self-sufficiency, unwittingly views refugees as labor migrants. Consequently, supporters of continued refugee admissions focus on various microhistories, particularly the refugee success story and how all migrants are "good" for the U.S. economy.

Most defenders of immigration base their advocacy efforts on studies focusing on broad categories—immigrants versus refugees, for example, or Hispanics versus Asians (cf. Fix & Zimmerman, 1995; Portes & Zhou, 1992). Few, however, examine the opportunities and constraints that refugees in particular have found in labor market entry. How refugees transfer their human capital—that is, their individual educational credentials, upbringing, and academic and professional titles, as well as their ability to form networks within and outside of their own enclaves—will hinder or enable their participation in economic life.

The research reported here develops a framework for both analysis and advocacy that considers public policies regarding refugee vocational placement and the characteristics of the labor market as part of the *demand* side of short-term socioeconomic integration, and the resources used by refugees, such as their cultural capital (pre-arrival educational and occupational attainment), and post-arrival attitudes and behavior as part of the *supply* side. In particular, it deals with the impact of an unregulated labor market upon Soviet Jewish refugees and the Jewish voluntary agencies that resettle them.

Three concepts underlie this framework.

1. The integration of refugees into the labor market generally entails initial downward mobility. Refugees not only flood a low-wage labor market but usually also face an initial transition from professional status to personal service work by obtaining employment characterized by little or no chances of job promotion, low unionization rates, and no benefits. Furthermore, a variety of independent variables, such as country of origin, ethnicity, gender, age, language proficiency, length of time in the United States, area of resettlement, and availability of social assistance, all influence their performance in the labor market.
2. Most discussion of labor market performance or lack thereof is dominated by discussion of the supply side, i.e., refugees' human capital and post-arrival attitudes and behaviors, rather than the interactive relationship between the

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supply and demand sides.

3. Voluntary agencies and MAAs (mutual assistance associations) engaged in refugee resettlement need to expand their focus to the labor market. As clients of government, these agencies influence the politics of contracting and social services that affect refugees. Government relations personnel in these organizations have traditionally directed their energies toward legislation concerned with immigration and immigrant policy (including welfare reform and budget proposals). Their focus on government regulation is usually confined to border control and workplace authorization, but not to the labor market itself, particularly the bottom third where refugees often find their first jobs.

The empirical findings are based upon two primary statistical sources. The first is employment data gathered for a sample of December 1990 Soviet Jewish refugee arrivals sponsored by HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society)-CJF (Council of Jewish Federations) affiliates. The data analyzed are presented only for refugees in nine metropolitan areas corresponding to those SMSAs (standard metropolitan statistical areas) in the 1990 U.S. Census with the highest proportion of foreign-born residents.[1] The second source is the Public Use Data Set of the 1993 Annual Survey of Refugees, conducted by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This survey, which interviewed a sample of refugee arrivals between 1989–93, can provide comparisons between refugees from the former Soviet Union and all other refugees. Because the concern here is with labor force participation, data are provided primarily for refugees in the labor force who are 18 to 64 years old.

The article first summarizes social programs available to refugees. It then compares Soviet Jews both to other refugees from the former Soviet Union and all refugees who have resettled in the United States between 1989–93. Next it develops a framework for their labor market integration, dealing with both the demand (public policies and prevailing labor market conditions) and supply side (refugees' human capital and post-arrival behaviors and attitudes). It then connects the demand and supply sides, and shows how both help or hinder labor market performance. Finally, it advocates a more proactive role for voluntary agencies in nurturing successful labor market incorporation for refugees.

THE U.S. REFUGEE PROGRAM

Refugees constitute a fraction of all immigrants admitted to the United States in each federal fiscal year (FY). As involuntary migrants, they face a particularly difficult adjustment process. Many suffer from physical and psychological conditions not usually found in the immigrant population as a whole, such as post-traumatic stress disorder. In recognizing these problems, the Refugee Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-212) allows refugees to gain access to social assistance to the same degree as American citizens. Their reception and initial placement, lasting 30 days, are made possible through cooperative agreements between twelve voluntary agencies and the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration of the U.S. Department of State. After this initial period,

[1]According to the 1990 U.S. Census of Population, the ten SMSAs with the highest proportion of foreign-born residents were, in descending order: New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, San Antonio, Dallas, San Francisco, Washington, DC, Boston and Miami. The CJF data include only those affiliates then participating in the Voluntary Agency Matching Grant Program, and as a consequence, San Antonio was not included in the analysis. Since Soviet refugees enter an immigrant labor market, it was determined that analysis of their economic integration in cities with large migrant—but small Soviet—populations would have more salience than merely examining the top ten destinations for Soviet Jews.

refugees are then placed in one of many refugee programs administered by ORR, such as the Voluntary Agency Matching Grant Program. HIAS administers this program for Soviet Jewish refugees on behalf of the American Jewish community. Over the past decade, ORR has drastically reduced (from 36 to 8 months) the period of eligibility for Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) while eliminating altogether its reimbursement for refugee receipt of means-tested social assistance programs such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and General Assistance (GA). However, after this 8-month period of government support ends, refugees remain eligible for other social assistance programs.

Most Soviet refugees are usually sponsored by local Jewish agencies that participate in the Voluntary Agency Matching Grant Program. Their participation in the Matching Grant Program usually ends with their first job placement or 120 days after arrival. Those who do not enter the labor force within their first four months in the United States are usually eligible for either RCA for an additional four months, or AFDC if they meet state or county criteria set for other legal residents.

ORR is a branch of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration of Children and Families (ACF), which also oversees the AFDC program. Moreover, the director of ORR also directs ACF. As a result, ORR has adopted the discourse of economic self-sufficiency and welfare dependency that is prevalent in the welfare debate. Private resettlement agencies socialize refugees during their first four months in the United States about welfare stigma (Ruiz, 1994; Tress, 1995). Refugees learn that their stipends are not entitlements and that those who "graduate" from an agency resettlement program to RCA administered by a public social service agency, rather than enter the labor force, are considered to be "on welfare," despite the legal and bureaucratic differentiation between RCA and welfare. Simply stated, within 120 days after arrival, many refugees come to be defined as a segment of the unworthy poor.

However, short-term labor market performance is a better indicator of refugee socioeconomic integration than self-sufficiency rates, i.e., "not receiving welfare." The latter do not capture the low employment rate, high poverty rate and low educational level of many refugees (Potocky, 1995a). By using the ORR Annual Survey of Refugees, this study can capture some of these other variables. The 1993 survey was chosen because it was the first annual study in which ORR interviewed refugees from the former Soviet Union. Because the study's analysis turns on the 1993 ORR survey, it provides only a snapshot of refugee integration and cannot be considered to be predictive.[2]

SOVIET REFUGEES

Since 1975, nearly 412,300 refugees from the former Soviet Union have arrived in the United States (ORR, 1995). Refugees from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have constituted approximately one-third of all persons admitted to the U.S. for humanitarian reasons. In FY 1993, 119,100 refugees were admitted, of whom about 43 percent came from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (ORR, 1994); in FY 1994, refugee admissions dropped to 112,100, of whom about 39 percent came from the former Soviet Union. Of the Soviet arrivals, approximately 80 percent are Jewish; the remaining are Armenian, Ukrainian Catholics, and Pentecostals.

Pre-migration data indicate that Soviet Jews are part of the immigrant population that is more educated than American-born workers. As Table 1 indicates, Soviet Jews are more than twice as likely to have a university degree than the refugee population as a whole (44.3 vs. 18.4 percent), increasing the average length of educational attain-

[2]The public use data sets of the 1994 were available after the analysis was completed; the 1995 annual survey is not yet available.

ment up to 11 years (ORR, 1995). However, there has been a gradual erosion of Soviet Jewish cultural capital. When comparing the educational attainment of the CJF sample (December 1990 arrivals) with the ORR sample (1989-93 arrivals), one finds that 53.2 percent of the first group have university degrees compared to 44.3 percent of the second. Moreover, the proportion of Soviet Jewish refugee arrivals who were in the professions before emigrating has declined by nearly one-sixth from FY 1991 to FY 1993.

Nevertheless, Soviet Jews still have a higher degree of professional attainment in their country of origin than have other refugees (see Table 1). They are more than twice as likely as all refugees to be academicians or scientists (20 vs. 9.3 percent), and more than three times as likely to be other types of professionals or technical workers (35.7 vs. 11.9 percent). Surprisingly, a relatively small proportion of 18 to 64 year old Soviet Jewish refugees, when compared to the refugee cohort as a whole, were full-time students prior to their arrival in the United States (7.7 vs. 32.8 percent).

DEMAND AND SUPPLY SIDE APPROACHES

Public Policies

Public policies, specifically the stated ORR policy of early self-sufficiency, are viewed by many resettlement personnel as the primary component of the demand side. By providing case management and vocational counseling, including job training, English language training, and job placement assistance, Jewish agencies—acting on behalf of the federal government—are major players in refugee labor market integration, particularly since noncompliance with the goal of early self-sufficiency might threaten their continued well-being as government subcontractors (cf. Smith & Lipsky, 1993). A characteristically unregulated labor market notwithstanding, government itself intervenes directly in labor market and training processes. In addition to benefitting from government disbursements for vocational services, refugees also participate in various public and nonprofit welfare-to-work programs and experimental workfare programs; receive discretionary grants from ORR for microenterprise startups; and obtain loans to further their professional training or start small businesses. However, the current policy of placing refugees in entry-level positions, rather than a program of long-term upward mobility leading to economic improvement over time, does not recognize that refugee economic integration is a very lengthy process (Potocky, 1995a).

Labor Market Structure

How much attention the architects and executors of refugee resettlement policies pay to labor market structure is questionable. As mentioned above, the emphasis on early self-sufficiency concentrates more on refugees accepting the first job offered than on the nature of the job itself (OIG, 1994; Ruiz, 1994; Tress, 1995). Factors such as segmentation of the workforce—whose theorists hold that the labor market is split or segmented into various impermeable parts with little mobility between them—receive scant attention in the formulation of vocational policies.

Segmented labor market theory is a useful explanation for refugee income poverty levels, welfare dependency, informal economic activity, and ethnic entrepreneurship. It holds that immigrants and American-born minorities are frequently found in the secondary or lower segments of the labor market and never as higher-priced labor. Although it is not the purpose of this article to review the literature on labor market segmentation and immigrants' role in it (see Bonacich, 1973; Piore, 1979; Sassen, 1986, 1988; Waldinger, 1989), one factor should be noted. Although there is disagreement within the literature, it assumes lines of demarcation between formal (salaried employee) and informal (i.e. cash jobs) labor markets, primary (benefits, promotions, union membership) and secondary (high job

Table 1. Highest Educational and Professional Attainment for Select Refugees in Country of Origin

	All Refugees	Soviet Jews	None or USSR Ethnicity	Other Soviet
Type of Education				
None	24.9	2.3	3.2	9.4
Primary school only	14.7	9.0	12.2	22.0
Training in refugee camp	.4	–	.3	–
Technical school certification	10.5	22.3	25.9	21.4
Secondary (or high school diploma)	31.7	18.2	20.6	28.9
University degree	18.4	44.3	36.5	13.8
Medical degree	1.3	2.8	2.1	2.5
Other	1.0	3.0	1.6	1.3
TOTALS	102.9	101.9	102.4	99.3
N =	2,431.0	429.0	378.0	159.0
Professional Attainment				
Academic and scientific	9.3	20.0	17.1	11.3
Professional and technical	11.9	35.7	29.9	14.0
Managerial	6.4	5.4	2.0	2.9
Clerical worker	2.1	5.5	3.8	–
Sales worker	1.6	1.8	1.2	–
Skilled worker	4.9	6.8	6.3	22.7
Semi- or unskilled worker	6.9	6.8	13.9	22.7
Service worker	6.4	8.2	10.6	8.4
Agricultural	10.5	–	2.4	4.2
Student	32.8	7.7	9.5	11.3
Housewife	3.0	.9	2.5	–
Military/police	4.5	1.4	2.5	–
TOTALS	100.3	100.2	101.7	97.5
N =	1,470	221	252	71

NB: Percentages may total more than 100, due to rounding.

Source: ORR 1993 Annual Survey of Refugees, recoded by Matching Grant Department, HIAS, and compiled by Berman Institute, CUNY Graduate School and University Center.

turnover, no benefits) sectors, and upper (knowledge-based) and lower (service-based) tiers in the primary sector. Furthermore, it postulates that a separate and distinct immigrant enclave sector may emerge as a means of bypassing the formal labor market altogether (cf. Portes 1995; Sassen-Koob 1989; Waldinger et al. 1990). But it is precisely because of economic restructuring and relatively unregulated labor markets in the United States (compared to Western Europe, for example), that these categories

are very fluid. Wilson and Martin (1982) for example, found that many Cuban refugees who had resettled in the Miami area held jobs whose statuses were in flux between the primary lower tier and the secondary sector. This "contested sector" (Wial, 1992) allows employers to decrease overhead. As a consequence, its jobs are usually not attractive to natives because of their weak job security and generally lower pay. Nevertheless, these jobs do not truly fit into the secondary sector, which is characterized by high job turnover, little or no chances of promotion, low unionization rates, and no benefits.

Boundary crossing occurs in ethnic entrepreneurship as well, which can be found in both immigrant enclaves and simply as non-enclave immigrant-owned firms. Although most studies (e.g. Portes & Bach, 1985; Waldinger, 1982) have examined these firms in fairly large, geographically concentrated clusters of businesses owned by the members of a single immigrant ethnic group, there are immigrant-owned small businesses that are not sufficiently numerous and economically integrated to form an enclave. In such businesses, owners are more likely to start out as owners soon after arrival, rather than to work as employees first. Taxicab driving, which can be operated by an individual or a small number of partners, is typical of these non-enclave enterprises (Wial, 1992).

Looking only at the demand side transforms refugees into objects of government programs and the labor market. However, refugees themselves have resources in competing for jobs. Their pre-arrival educational and occupational attainment, familial and job networks, and possible employment in firms owned by co-ethnics are all factors in their labor market integration as well. Consequently, it is necessary to look at a second group of explanations that emphasize the supply side perspective.

Human Capital Theories

Human capital theorists claim that all forms of capital, including individual educational credentials, upbringing, academic and professional titles (cultural capital), and social networks, including relationships with earlier emigrants (social capital), are mutually enforcing and are, to a certain extent, convertible (Bourdieu, 1992). Cultural capital is inalienably bound to the individual and is impossible to discard or remove. However, its value depends on the context in which its "owner" wants to put it to use. Usually, the society in which it has been accumulated offers the best context for its use.

Since human capital theories hold that cultural capital predicts later earnings, it would seem that there are good preconditions for Soviet refugee participation in the U.S. labor market. As shown in Table 1, Soviet Jews are more educated and more professionalized than both the two other Soviet refugee cohorts and the refugee population as a whole. Similarly, Soviet refugees earn more, on average, than all refugees, with Soviet Jews faring the best—$8.00 median hourly wage for Soviet Jewish refugees versus $6.35 for all refugees.

Yet the conversion of their cultural capital to American standards is generally problematic. Many Soviets either held positions with no American equivalent or have unrecognized qualifications. Moreover, both the refugees themselves *and* their service providers expect them to move either easily (emigres) or eventually (service providers) into high-tech and professional occupations, even though few possess the skills appropriate for a restructuring economy.

Social capital complements cultural capital. Most refugee admissions have reserves of social capital awaiting them in the United States since the vast majority are family reunification cases. As a consequence, they have some notion about what to expect at the other end of their journey (whether these ideas are correct or not is not particularly relevant; see Doomernik, 1995; Lee, 1969). Relationships with earlier emigrants, including immediate relatives and other persons from the same region re-

settled in the same locale, inform the resettlement process as well.

Younger immigrants usually seek more and better opportunities, whereas older immigrants want to conserve what they have accumulated. That is, immigrants want either to improve themselves or retain what they have (Petersen, 1964). Most refugees, however, fit into the latter category, regardless of age. They seek to arrive at a similar societal station to the one they left behind, rather than view the streets of America as "paved with gold." Given their backgrounds, most refugees can take care of themselves, within or outside the formal economy (Doomernik, 1995). This emphasis on financial security to cover their needs—whether through social assistance, employment in the formal labor market, work in the informal economy, or a combination—flies in the face of public policies that emphasize self-sufficiency. As a consequence, resettlement workers tend to focus on refugees' post-arrival attitudes and behaviors.

Refugees' Post-Arrival Attitudes and Behaviors

Service provider evaluations and anecdotal evidence suggest that this "conservatism" of refugees interacts with public policies as *the* barrier to self-sufficiency. In a March 1995 survey of HIAS affiliates participating in ORR's Voluntary Agency Matching Grant program, vocational counselors were asked to rank-order barriers to employment. Behavioral causes were ranked as significant barriers. On a scale of 1 to 11, with 1 being the greatest barrier and 11 being the least significant barrier, unrealistic vocational goals and expectations scored a 2, whereas local economic conditions scored a 5. As a consequence, HIAS initiated a series of federally funded regional employment training seminars in Fall 1995 for vocational workers in its affiliated network. Led by a social worker and a job developer, they focused on psychosocial factors and the labor market in order to overcome "impediments to refugee self-sufficiency" (NCI, 1996).

Much of the literature on social work with immigrants and refugees focuses on their backgrounds, covering such topics as stages in the migration process or cultural perspectives, with a particularity for one refugee group (see Drachman & Halberstadt, 1992; Halberstadt, 1994), endowing each with an "exceptionalism" that makes practitioners resistant to contextualizing the experiences of their clients and their experiences with them within a larger framework. Another social work approach—deriving from an unemployment and underemployment perspective—has begun to examine refugees' behaviors and attitudes within the context of human capital transfer problems in a restructuring labor market (see Briar, 1992). This approach, however, is not as developed as the former.

Figure 1 summarizes the main characteristics of the demand and supply sides. The prevailing paradigm for refugee labor market integration is dominated by a mutual reinforcement of public policies and post-arrival attitudes and behaviors (the "Areas of concentration" column) in what frequently seems to be a "no win" situation. The performance of refugees in the labor market, which is partially dependent on their human capital accumulation, only indirectly informs public policies by molding post-arrival attitudes and behaviors. As a consequence, public policies treat post-arrival attitudes and behavior as distinct phenomena rather than epiphenomena informed by new arrivals' empirical and anecdotal knowledge of labor market conditions (usually from friends and relatives already in the labor market), as well as their human capital characteristics.

Labor Market Performance of Soviet Refugees

In ORR's *Annual Report to the Congress,* mention is made only of self-sufficiency rates and social assistance utilization. Wages and job type are not reported, supporting the hypothesis that public policies

are more informed by post-arrival attitudes and behaviors than any other demand or supply side factors. Moreover, numerous demand and supply side variables, including social assistance availability, strong versus weak voluntary networks, type of resettlement program, refugee's country of origin, and human capital characteristics, make it almost impossible to compare refugee self-sufficiency rates while they are still part of an ORR program.

In general, refugees enter the formal labor market with low wage jobs, and relative wages have been declining since this cohort arrived in 1989. The 1993 ORR survey reveals that nationally, about 12 percent earn wages just at or below the minimum wage of $4.25 per hour, and nearly half earned $6.35 or less per hour. The median wage (based on the 1994 ORR Annual Survey) was $7.09 per hour, compared to $11.55 per hour for all full-time U.S. workers (ORR, 1995).

Country of origin and ethnicity only partially predict wages. Several other variables inform labor market performance as well: cultural capital, gender, age, length of time in the United States, knowledge of English, area of resettlement, and availability of benefits. Let us now look at the role they play in post-arrival wage rates and professional status.

Education and Professional Status

Soviet Jews have greater cultural capital accumulation than any other group of refugees. Nevertheless, when cultural capital is converted, there is always an occupational "cost" of downward mobility. This cost increases with age and decreases with level of education, so a young, blue-collar worker will find it easier to be incorporated into a new labor market than an older professional, who is less likely to sacrifice his or her original type of employment or status (Doomernik, 1995).

Academicians and scientists face immense downward mobility upon entry into the U.S. labor force, regardless of national origin. About one-tenth (9.3 percent) of all refugees, regardless of national origin, had been employed in these positions (Table 1); of the refugees who were employed at the time of the survey, the proportion had dropped by about one-quarter (to 7.6 percent). Results of both this analysis of the ORR survey using four reference groups—all refugees, Soviet Jews, none or USSR ethnicity, and other Soviet refugees—and the separate 1990 Soviet Jewish sample shown in Table 2, demonstrate that approximately three-quarters of resettled refugees who had been in the professions had yet to find similar work in the United States.

Soviet Jews showed gains as semi- and unskilled workers. This growth may reflect the devolution of skilled to semi- or unskilled labor such as meat packing, which has relied heavily on immigrant labor (Wial, 1993). This devolution, along with the dramatic rise of refugees working in service jobs, is also indicative of a restructuring economy, for many of the refugees sampled work in cities that would have accommodated them with manufacturing jobs a generation ago (Gans, 1992).

Gender

Employers of women are more likely to pay lower wages throughout the economy. This is a structural condition that will override refugee status, even though such a status can exacerbate the negative impact on wages. A comparison of hourly wages by gender reveals that in all four reference groups, women are more likely to be clustered in jobs that pay less than $10 per hour (see Table 3). The median hourly wage for women was $6.00, compared to $6.50 for men. The biggest gender gap was for Soviet Jews, with the male median hourly wage ($9.75), being approximately one-third higher than it is for females ($7.00). It is also worth noting that the ratio of all refugee men to women earning $15 or more per hour is about 1.7:1, a ratio that increases across the Soviet refugee groups.

Figure 1. Demand and Supply Side Characteristics

	Areas of Concentration	Areas of Structured Obliviousness
Demand Side	**Public Policies:** **GOVERNMENT EMPHASIS ON:** • Early employment (within 120 days of arrival) • Welfare stigma • Dealing with post-arrival attitudes and behaviors **LESS GOVERNMENT (BUT MORE VOLUNTARY AGENCY) EMPHASIS ON:** • Human capital characteristics • English language training • Job training and retraining **LITTLE EMPHASIS ON:** • Long-term career paths • Social rights	**Labor Market Conditions:** **RELATIVELY UNREGULATED:** • Low median and mean salaries 4 years after arrival • Few or no benefits (e.g. medical insurance, pension plans, paid vacation • High job turnover • Little or no chances of promotion • Low unionization rates
Supply Side	**Post-Arrival Attitudes and Behaviors:** • Refugees retain what they had or improve themselves • Unrealistic expectations of labor market • Resistance to downward mobility in formal labor market and surrender of social rights, esp. medical coverage	**Human Capital Characteristics:** **CULTURAL CAPITAL:** • Highly skewed levels of education and professional attainment (very high and very low) **SOCIAL CAPITAL:** • Pre-existing networks through family reunification and chain migration • Propensity for informal economic activity due to survival conditions in countries of origin and refugee camps

The "double disadvantage" (Raijman & Semyonov, 1995) that refugee women face as both women and as refugees is less evident with regard to obtaining a job and more evident with regard to occupational status. Here spatiotemporal considerations come into play as well. Earlier studies of working women indicate that journey-to-work distances for men and women differ significantly, with women tending to work closer to home. This affects wages, as lower status jobs tend to have shorter work trips (Hanson & Johnston, 1985; Sassen, 1990, 1995; Singell & Lillydahl, 1986). Anecdotal evidence suggests that women are not only more likely to enter the labor force before men but are also more likely to work outside the home in the United States than they were in their country of origin. Nevertheless, the status loss among women is far greater than the loss experienced by men (Table 4).

In general, refugee men were more likely than women to recover professional and technical positions; they were also more likely to find work as skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled laborers than women, who are heavily represented as service workers. As cultural capital decreases, the correlation between gender typing and job description increases, so that higher proportions of women are employed as service workers and higher proportions of men are found as semi- and unskilled workers. Simply stated, gender is a powerful discriminator among the refugee population.

Age

The prolonged U.S. pattern of transition from school to adult labor market, culminating in first jobs with low wages (Faist, 1995) has parallels to refugees as well. In general, the younger a refugee is upon labor market entry, the lower his or her wages. However, older refugees also face great difficulties in their adjustment to a new labor market. As a consequence, a pattern emerges in which median hourly wage rises with age, but then falls again. For those refugees 18-34 years old, this figure is $6.00/hour; wages increase slightly for the 35- to 49-year-olds to $7.00/hour but then fall again to $6.00/hour for the 50- to 64-year-old cohort. The corresponding median hourly wages for Soviet Jewish refugees are $7.00, $9.38, and $8.38. Two caveats are in order here. First, given their cultural capital formation, there is a proportionately lower representation of college-aged Soviet refugees who are in the U.S. labor market. Second, in order to claim full-employment for all its citizens, the former Soviet Union offered full pensions to female workers on their 55th birthdays and to male workers on their 60th. This point is relevant since many refugees had retired prior to migration and then find themselves with a choice between low-wage labor and social assistance, depending upon availability.

Length of Time in the United States

As refugees become more "settled," their social capital increases. These social networks affect both informal and formal labor market performance (Grossman, 1989; Portes, 1995; Rumbaut, 1989; Sassen-Koob, 1989). Employers in the formal labor market frequently favor hiring groups of emigres and word-of-mouth recruitment in which current employees bring their close friends and relatives to fill vacant jobs. They are very supportive of more senior workers coaching "their" recruits on the job and helping them with the language; for example, by translating instructions. Such

Table 2. Type of Work for First U.S. Job of December 1990 Matching Grant Eligible Soviet Jewish Refugee Arrivals in the Nine Largest Immigrant SMSAs

Type of Work	% Employed in F-USSR	% Employed in U.S.	% Change
Academic and scientific workers	33.6	8.1	-76%
Professional and technical workers	33.6	18.6	-45%
Managers	2.5	1.2	-52%
Clerical workers	7.4	9.3	+126%
Sales workers	1.6	7.0	+438%
Skilled workers	15.6	25.6	+164%
Semi-skilled and unskilled workers	4.0	16.3	+408%
Personal service workers	4.0	15.1	+378%
TOTALS	102.3	101.2	
N =	122	86	

NB: Percentages may total more than 100, due to rounding.

Source: Refugee Resettlement Program CJF, compiled by Matching Grant Department, HIAS.

Table 3. Frequencies of Hourly Wages in 1993 for Employed Refugees Controlled for Gender

Hourly Salary	All Refugees	Soviet Jews	None or USSR Ethnicity	Other Soviet
$1–5.99				
Women	45.1	30.6	33.3	40.0
Men	39.0	22.7	19.4	9.1
$6–9.99				
Women	39.7	37.1	44.4	50.0
Men	39.0	28.0	41.9	63.6
$10–14.99				
Women	10.4	22.6	13.9	10.0
Men	14.2	32.0	19.4	18.2
$15 and above				
Women	4.7	9.7	8.3	–
Men	7.9	17.3	19.4	9.1
% employed at or below minimum wage				
Women	8.4	9.7	4.2	10.0
Men	14.4	8.0	4.8	4.5
Median hourly wage				
Women	$6.00	$7.00	$6.59	$6.20
Men	6.50	9.75	8.50	7.25
N Women =	297	62	72	20
N Men =	367	75	62	22

Source: ORR 1993 Annual Survey of Refugees, compiled by Berman Institute, CUNY Graduate School and University Center.

new employees are usually of high quality, since co-workers are only likely to bring into the workplace new workers who will be dependable. Employers often see additional benefits in these social networks since they strengthen worker cooperation and eliminate many costs of recruitment and training (MN, 1995; Sassen, 1995).

Despite these networks, the ORR data reveal that refugees who had arrived in the United States in the months preceding the survey were no less likely to be in the labor force than those who had arrived four years earlier. That is, approximately four-fifths of all 18- to 64-year-olds surveyed were employed sometime in 1993, regardless of arrival period (Table 5). Although this contradicts the findings of some (see Rumbaut, 1989), it corroborates more recent studies that demonstrate that length of residence in the United States seems to have a negligible effect on labor market participation (Potocky, 1995b).

English Language Proficiency

As Table 6 demonstrates, lack of language proficiency is usually no barrier to employment. Approximately one-fifth of all working refugees claim to know no English at all. However, there is a positive correlation between increasing salaries and knowledge of English (Table 7), so that median hourly wages steadily increase with language profi-

Table 4. Pre- and Post-Arrival Professional Attainment for Soviet Jewish Employed Refugees by Gender

	Male		Female	
	I	II	I	II
Academic and scientific	12.6	3.2	27.3	15.4
Professional and technical	38.7	27.0	32.7	15.4
Managerial	9.9	1.6	.9	5.8
Clerical worker	.9	4.8	10.0	5.8
Sales worker	.9	–	2.7	3.8
Skilled worker	11.7	9.5	1.8	–
Semi- or unskilled worker	9.9	20.6	3.6	1.9
Service worker	3.6	31.7	12.7	50.0
Agricultural	–	–	–	–
Student	9.0	–	6.4	–
Housewife	–	–	1.8	1.9
Military/police	2.7	1.6	–	–
TOTALS	99.9	100.0	99.9	100.0
N =	111	63	110	52

Legend: I: In former Soviet Union
II: As proportion reporting post-arrival employment information

Source: ORR 1993 Annual Survey of Refugees, recoded by Matching Grant Department, HIAS and compiled by Berman Institute, CUNY Graduate School and University Center.

ciency for all four refugee categories. It should also be noted that both Soviet Jews and those who gave "None or USSR" as their ethnicity tended not to be in the labor force if they knew no English.

Area of Resettlement

Nearly half of all refugee arrivals in FY 1993 initially resettled in either California (26 percent) or New York (20 percent). Refugees from the former Soviet Union are concentrated in New York (42 percent in FYs 1993 and 1994), California (16 percent) and Illinois, Washington, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts (4 to 6 percent each) (ORR, 1994, 1995).

Refugees by and large settle in urban areas. Like other immigrants, they are disproportionately concentrated in relatively few cities and tend to remain there. Their continued presence, along with newer arrivals, has little if any impact on the levels and growth rates of wages in those areas (Sassen, 1995). Indeed, it has quite the opposite effect. Generally, the higher the proportion of immigrants in a given SMSA, the lower the median starting hourly wages. For example, Soviet Jews in New York and Los Angeles earned less than those who had resettled in SMSAs with smaller proportions of immigrants. Indeed, Dallas and Houston are the only two destinations where the general cost of living may be a contributing determinant of wages.

The high proportions of foreign-born workers currently found in large cities is further compounded by their changing economic bases. When the first wave of Soviets refugees began to resettle in the New York City metropolitan area in the mid-1970s, manufacturing provided about 16 percent of all New York City jobs; in 1995, it provided only about 9 percent of all jobs (Bruni, 1995). New York's primary economic base is finance, insurance, and real

Table 5. Proportion of Refugees Employed in 1993 by Arrival Period to the United States

Time of Arrival	All Refugees	Soviet Jews	None or USSR Ethnicity	Other Soviet
During 1993	83.0	81.3	84.6	85.7
October–December 1992	81.4	82.9	79.1	83.3
January–September 1992	83.6	88.5	80.4	64.3
1991	82.8	80.2	86.9	78.6
1988–1990	82.5	87.6	81.8	75.0

Source: ORR 1993 Annual Survey of Refugees, compiled by Berman Institute, CUNY Graduate School and University Center.

estate, making the transfer of cultural capital of refugees coming from non-market economies even more problematic. As a consequence, refugees are more likely to be employed as service workers than any other category. According to the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, these positions now represent about 35 percent of New York City's labor force, compared to 23 percent in the mid-1970s (Bruni, 1995), many of which are in hotels and restaurants (MN, 1995). Hence, immigrants' disproportionate concentration in certain SMSAs also means that they are a disproportionate share of low-income workers. As a result, there is a relative decline in wages in these areas for all workers compared with regions lacking a significant immigrant population.

The relatively higher wages for all Soviet refugees, regardless of ethnic origin or sex, is also related to "replacement" factors. Because they live in predominantly Jewish neighborhoods, either alongside Jewish Americans or as replacements for elderly first-generation immigrants who began to die out in the 1970s (Orleck, 1987), they have greater geographic and social access to jobs traditionally dominated by earlier waves of European migrants. They are also the only refugee group who are white Europeans. In workplaces dominated by pecking orders of race and ethnicity (see Faist, 1995; Kirschenman & Neckerman, 1991), this is significant as well.

Availability of Benefits

The availability of medical insurance and other workplace benefits—or the lack thereof—has frequently been cited as one variable inhibiting early labor force participation by refugees. Forbes (1985) found that the linkage of AFDC and Medicaid has been identified as a key disincentive to work. Cambodian respondents to a 1988 San Diego research study told the investigators that they considered their Medicaid stickers to be "more valuable than gold" (Rumbaut, 1989, p. 127). In the March 1995 HIAS survey of service providers, nearly all (75 out of 77) respondents cited "reluctance to accept jobs without benefits" as the most frequent reason why they thought new arrivals were disinclined to enter the labor force.

Since refugees tend to enter the formal labor market in secondary or contested sector jobs, which are increasingly characterized by no or few employer contributions into medical or pension plans, it is not surprising to find that less than one-seventh of all refugees receive medical insurance through their own employment. Although Soviet Jews are almost twice as likely to have employment-related medical coverage than all refugees, they are also more likely than other refugees to depend on Medicaid or RMA (Refugee Medical Assistance) to cover costs related to medical care: 47.3 vs. 31.9 percent. Some of the reliance on Med-

icaid or RMA may also be due to a higher proportion of elderly among Soviet arrivals (13.1 percent compared to 7.1 percent of all refugees surveyed), but in the choice between stigmatized social rights (welfare) and self-sufficiency, the former is often preferable, particularly for those households with small children.

Finally, a comment is in order about food stamps. Food stamps are the one form of means-tested social assistance made available to the working population. The proportion of Soviet refugee households receiving food stamps exceeds the sum total of those receiving any other form of government assistance. This fact captures the income poverty of these households and is another demonstration that self-sufficiency and economic integration are not synonymous.

SUMMARY

Based on the data, it is now appropriate to draw some preliminary conclusions about the prevailing demand-supply-side model in which public policies concerning refugee labor market integration (the demand side) interact primarily with refugees' post-arrival attitudes and behaviors (the supply side). The matrix presented in Figure 1 suggests that a relatively unregulated labor market, combined with human capital transfer problems, influenced refugees' post-arrival attitudes and behaviors, the focus of current public policies.

To understand how refugees view a labor market that informs their behaviors, this article examined the role of several variables, including cultural capital formation, ethnicity, gender, age, length of time in the United States, language proficiency, area of resettlement, and availability of benefits, in labor market performance. Table 8 provides a summary of the results.

Some of these findings verified conventional wisdom—that Soviet Jews were doing better than other refugee groups. Yet some of the discoveries were surprising. Although there is little differentiation of their cultural capital by gender, Soviet Jews were the one reference group in which gender was the greater predictor of wages. The second unexpected finding concerned age. We suspected that 34- to 49-year-olds would have greater short-term earnings than younger workers. We did not expect, however, that 50- to 64-year-olds, some of whom had already retired prior to migration but others of whom were at the peaks of their careers, would have earnings comparable to the 18- to 34-year-olds. Finally, we did not anticipate results that showed that length of time in the United States was inconsequential in terms of refugee employment.

Although this study did not focus on so-

Table 6. Knowledge of English of Employed Refugees

Self-Description	All Refugees	Soviet Jews	None or USSR Ethnicity	Other Soviet
Not at all	19.0	9.3	9.4	10.4
Not well	40.5	39.1	42.1	48.7
Well	33.9	44.0	40.9	34.8
Very well	6.6	7.7	7.5	6.1
TOTALS	100.0	100.1	99.9	100.0
N =	1,555	366	318	115

NB: Percentages add to more than 100 due to rounding

Source: ORR 1993 Annual Survey of Refugees, compiled by Berman Institute, CUNY Graduate School and University Center.

Table 7. Median Hourly Wages of Employed Refugees by Knowledge of English

Self-Description	All Refugees	Soviet Jews	None or USSR Ethnicity	Other Soviet
Not at all	$5.52	–	–	$6.65
Not well	5.55	6.50	6.00	6.50
Well	7.00	9.25	7.90	7.25
Very well	8.00	9.00	8.25	10.37
Very well to not at all/not well wage differential	145%	138%	138%	156%
N =	1,555	366	318	115

Source: ORR 1993 Annual Survey of Refugees, compiled by Berman Institute, CUNY Graduate School and University Center.

cial assistance utilization, nearly half of all refugees live in the two states, New York and California, that have the highest social benefits in the United States, and there is no doubt that the availability of different safety nets affects subsequent occupational and economic adaptation (Rumbaut, 1989). But New York and California also have relatively high unemployment rates, decreasing manufacturing bases, and high immigrant populations, all of which drive wages down. In these two states, it is unclear which variables are independent, etc.

Toward a New Resettlement Model?

As government subcontractors, Jewish agencies represent the welfare state to refugees, providing a buffer between state policy and service delivery. They reinforce prevailing government policy emphasizing work norms, self-sufficiency, and markets; and they serve as a vehicle for pushing expanded government provision (Smith & Lipsky, 1993). But in their capacity as private, voluntary organizations they also have important functions in the formation of welfare state politics and policy.

Current refugee advocacy focuses almost exclusively on maintaining the status quo, i.e., maneuvering proposed changes in immigration and social policy legislation so that voluntary agencies can maintain their own positions as political players. Once these programs are maintained—if indeed they can be—complementary service provision can continue to execute public policy by asking how service providers can modify refugees' belief systems that place social rights (such as expectations of health insurance) on the agenda and convince refugees that entry-level positions will result in higher status jobs.

Readers of Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* will recall how Alice must run as fast as she possibly can to remain on the chessboard and twice as quickly to move. The preceding analysis has suggested that implementors of public policy, from the directors of federal offices down to vocational and caseworkers dealing directly with refugees, are very much like Alice on the chessboard, with no energy left over to challenge the status quo itself.

Inarguably, labor market entry is one of the key components to the successful integration and incorporation of refugees. Yet neither current resettlement policy nor concomitant advocacy focuses on labor policy, only on immigration and social policy. Indeed, a policy of early self-sufficiency, combined with a low degree of labor market regulation and little government aid in helping citizens and noncitizens find work, seems to be an oxymoron in this context.

Table 8. Summary of Key Variables and Short-Term Labor Market Performance

VARIABLE	OUTCOME
Professional Attainment	• Great downward mobility for academicians and scientists with devolution to semi-professional positions • Skilled labor devolves to skilled labor • Increase in service sector jobs
Ethnicity	• Soviet cohorts have higher mean and median hourly wages, but professionals face greater downward mobility than refugee arrivals as a whole
Gender	• "Double disadvantage" at play • Lower hourly wages and occupational status for women • Wage gap greatest among Soviet Jews • Greatest occupational/gender gap is in service sector and skilled labor
Age	• Questionable effect: median hourly wage rises from 18- to 34-year-old to 35- to 49-year-old cohorts, but 50- to 64-year-olds have similar median hourly wages to the youngest workers. • Exception is "Other" Soviets, who show a continual decline in wages
Length of Time in the United States	• Negligible effect on the likelihood of working ("self-sufficiency")
Language Proficiency	• Lack of English no barrier to employment • However, median hourly wages steadily increase with knowledge of English
Area of Resettlement	• The higher the proportion of foreign-born residents in a given SMSA, the lower the median hourly wage • Correlation of wages with area's general cost of living not demonstrated except perhaps in Dallas and Houston
Availability of Benefits	• Only 13.8% of all refugees receive medical insurance through employment • Soviet Jews have workplace-related insurance at significantly higher rates (24.4%) than other refugee groups surveyed

The United States is a "reluctant" welfare state (Smith & Lipsky, 1993). However, if refugee resettlement—broadly speaking—is a public-private partnership, then it is the responsibility of the voluntary agencies to initiate the functional equivalent of an active labor market policy that includes job placement that matches people to jobs, job training that teaches new job skills to people to eliminate shortages of skills or production bottlenecks, and job creation through direct efforts to create jobs.

Some agencies have begun to develop such programs with government funding. Two examples are noteworthy. The first is HIAS's National Corporate Initiative (NCI), which identifies multinational corporations that will encourage their branches in those metropolitan areas where refugees have resettled to hire them. In addition, the NCI has identified businesses that will offer refugees a career track with their entry-level initial job offers. The second is the discretionary grant program ORR has initiated for microenterprises. In FY 1994 ORR awarded six continuation awards and six new awards totalling $1.375 million to voluntary agencies to develop and administer

approximately 300 microenterprise programs. This initiative may legitimate an informal sector used to supplement social assistance, but it also creates and preserves ethnic group resources (i.e., social capital) that facilitate mobility out of the secondary sector.

Although in embryonic form, both initiatives demonstrate that there are pre-existing frameworks that can help refugee advocates support tighter labor market policies. Policy implementation need not turn solely on modifying refugees' post-arrival attitudes and behaviors. By focusing on the labor market and the formulation of a fair rate of exchange for refugees' cultural and social capital, a public policy can be formulated that integrates the supply (refugees) and demand (government and labor market) sides. That is the real challenge for the U.S. refugee program.

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