



Problem statement

People who are displaced and fleeing persecution are most of all seeking safety and protection. But, how do newly arrived refugees and humanitarian entrants in Australia learn about local natural hazards, such as bushfires, storms and flash flooding, and what do they do to feel safe and secure?



Research idea

In 2017, a University of Wollongong doctoral research project – Resilient Together – conducted 26 in-depth interviews with refugee and humanitarian entrants from Burma, Congo, Iran, Iraq, Liberia, Syria and Uganda, currently living across the Illawarra region of New South Wales, Australia.

Resilient together

Engaging the knowledge and capacities of refugees for a disaster-resilient Illawarra

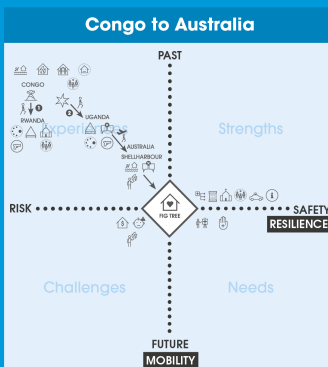
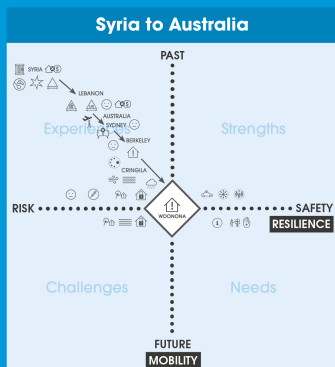
Person-centred mapping tool

The research project developed a person-centred mapping tool – the resilience narrative map – to understand refugees' experiences, beliefs and practices for feeling safe and secure.

Resilience narrative map template



Resilience narrative maps can reveal important insights about how people consistently strive to move from conditions of risk to safety, relying on their experiences, skills and relationships, in and across places.



The resilience narrative mapping tool is multi-scalar and can also facilitate an understanding of the collective experiences, strengths, challenges and needs narrated by a household, group or community.

The maps reveal three strengths in the Illawarra

Caring for each other

Well-knit and cohesive families, neighbours and communities can be foundational for disaster resilience. Care for and by families, neighbours and communities, helps refugee and humanitarian entrants through multiple crises, including natural hazards.

"I come here, if they support me, I live well. If nobody supports me I think I will just die by myself, so I rely on the compassion and trust of the people that I know... how they support me... psychologically, especially."
Elderly refugee from Burma, male

"I like to work... with our people and help them... to know this country. And when I hear something, I will tell about (it to) the others also. This is, uh, I think it is in my body, this thing to help people. Everything I know, I must tell them. So if they have any trouble, uh, they can, uh, manage it. Sometimes, they called me to manage, uh, or solve their problems. When they have knowledge, they can use their mind to do many things. Without knowledge, they cannot do anything."
Elderly refugee from Iraq, female

"...we know the government, yes, they will come. But if we're helping ourself first, you know... that the way it is, in Africa."
Former refugee from Congo, female

"...the lava... is coming... with shaking... That was... very bad experience. And then... it didn't end there. It come and take all the town... You know, it's like a end of the world, when you are there and you experience that kind of thing... I call myself, I'm a survivor, me and my kids. You know?... That's why we say... you have a short time in life. If we can mend, it's better. Helping each other... supporting each other... Don't just sit and say, Oh, it's their problem. It's for all of us."
(Experience of surviving the Nyiragongo volcanic eruption near Goma in 2002)
Former refugee from Congo, female

Responsive institutions and services

Access to dedicated settlement institutions and services, justly enforced laws and rules, and clearly stated emergency plans and procedures, contribute to perceptions and practices of safety.

"Especially, I like the police, the way they work. There are rules. It's safety for us."
Former refugee from Congo, female

"...here, there are procedures for everything."
Refugee from Syria, male

Faith in prayer and community

Placing faith and trust in acts of prayer, places of worship, and community services, provides tremendous daily support for people's experiences of security and well-being as they settle into the Illawarra.

"I trust in God, and, uh, I know... I will be safe. That's my opinion. For all the community, not just for me."
Refugee from Iraq, female

"...when something happens, in my church, there are other people that come, and tell us what to do, like, ... in the time of emergency, you have to prepare yourself. So you have to do a storage, like, uh, when you buy food, you make sure you don't just buy food, just for today. But when you buy food, you should be able to keep some, so that when there's an emergency, you can be able to have something in the home, to eat. I make sure I keep something..."
Former refugee from Liberia, female

"...we need more people who can speak... our own language... to make sure that... people are listening. There should be more programme... at Churches... Like the government can... train the people and send them at different Churches. I think it's going to be more useful if they could get that information to Church."
Refugee from Uganda, female

Also

Past experiences can be valuable

Past experiences with natural hazards and crises can significantly contribute to refugee and humanitarian entrants' beliefs and practices of disaster resilience in the Illawarra. 18 of the 26 research participants experienced at least one, and in some cases, multiple natural hazards before coming to Australia.

But

Settling in to new places can be challenging

The resilience narrative maps also reveal that timely access to hazard and risk information, fair access to safe, secure and healthy housing, as well as access to culturally appropriate support and resources for home preparedness, remain significant needs for refugee and humanitarian entrants settling in the Illawarra.

Hazard and risk information

It can be important for refugee and humanitarian entrants to know where they will live, what potential hazards exist in their new environment, and how to keep safe. Ten of the 26 research participants reported being caught unaware by bushfires, flash flooding, hail, heavy rain, lightning and strong winds in their first years of arrival.

"If you don't have information, it's a risk. It's a high risk for you and your family, because you don't know what to do... you still think about your security, you've been in a country where you're not secure, so your priority is security..."
Asylum seeker from Congo, male

"...it has to do with the knowledge of the location... of the areas where we live. Here, if there is flood, or there is a bushfire, I don't know where to run. I don't know to which direction, but from where I used to live or came from, I knew the location, if there was a flood on the other side I knew where to run, to which mountain, to which forest. And here we live in a city so where do I run if there is a natural disaster?... because I don't speak the language of the country, I don't read, so it's difficult. I don't know."
Elderly refugee from Burma, male

Safe housing

Experiencing a natural hazard in the first year of arrival is closely related to the perceived quality and location of housing in the first year of arrival.

Nine of the 26 research participants reported having lived in what they perceive as unsafe, insecure and unhealthy housing within the first weeks and months of arriving in the Illawarra.

"Our first accommodation... we heard the, the sound of sea. I feel as, uh, I am in... unsafe place".
Refugee from Iraq, female

"She's afraid of the wind even now. Her place is near the beach... She's thinking, if that tree that is near the window falls into the window, she's thinking that she would die. It's not safe house. It's really, really old. She's saying, because of a wind it just shake like this. So, what happen if a tree fall down? She thinks that it's good and safe for them to cut the tree, yeah. She's saying that, I have no idea what to do after... or if there is a fire. So, what do you have to do?"
Afghan refugee from Iran, female

"It's very big problem to rent house in Australia."
Refugee from Syria, female

In-home preparedness

Women, the elderly, the disabled and physically isolated households can often be left out of information sessions and training conducted by local institutions and services. All elderly research participants and most female research participants with young children, prefer in-home preparedness training and support in their vernacular language, from a member of their own community.

"Yesterday you have lots of wind, but me think, where go? Maybe house broken, I have five daughter. Me not drive... near the sea, I feel unsafe. And after stealing (house breaking), I feel unsafe. I wish to make plan to make me safe at home and, first aid as well."
Refugee from Syria, female

"I only know that I have to run out of the house and leave the house. I have no idea what will happen after that."
Refugee from Iran, female

"And one day, if we have to evacuate from this area, normally everyone has their own car but we don't."
Refugee from Burma, male

Strengths

Needs