



Syrian Refugee Lived Experience Project

Final Report

The study was conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research.

ENVIRONICS INSTITUTE FOR SURVEY RESEARCH

The Environics Institute for Survey Research sponsors relevant and original public opinion and social research related to issues of public policy and social change. It is through such research that organizations and individuals can better understand Canada today, how it's been changing, and where it may be heading.

For more information about this study, contact:

Keith Neuman, Ph.D.

The Environics Institute for Survey Research

keith.neuman@environics.ca



Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	7
Background	7
Syrian Refugee Lived Experience Project	8
About this report	10
Acknowledgements	10
Syrian Refugee Profile	11
Population profile	11
Research sample profile	12
Pre-Arrival Background	15
Place of residences	15
Occupational background	16
Pre-arrival orientation to Canada	17
Initial Settlement in Canada	19
Initial experiences in Canada: reality versus expectations	19
Biggest challenges upon arrival in Canada	23
Settlement supports	25
Private sponsor support	28
Government services support	34
Current Life in Canada	37
Satisfaction with life in Canada today	37
General perspectives on living in Canada	40
Housing	46
Household income	47
Language fluency	48
Employment	50
Health and well-being	53
Sense of belonging	55
Acceptance in Canada	58
Experiences with discrimination	64
Local community	67

Continued ...

Contents ... *continued*

Friendship connections.....	69
Relocation to another place	71
Extended family connections	74
Changing family roles	77
Children’s experience	79
Looking Ahead – Life Goals and Aspirations	83
Life goals.....	83
Aspirations for children	87
Appendix: Research Methodology	89



Executive Summary

Canada is a place populated mostly of people who have been arriving from elsewhere for almost 400 years, coming for economic opportunity, to join family or as refugees. In 2015, through an unprecedented national mobilization of government, the settlement sector and Canadian citizens, the country opened its doors to accept refugees fleeing the humanitarian crisis in Syria, resettling close to 40,000 refugees within the space of a year. How have these refugees fared in their new country and lives, and what can be learned from their experience that might benefit future refugees? These questions were addressed through a national research study conducted in 2020-21, consisting of in-depth interviews with a representative sample of 305 Syrian refugees who arrived in the 2015-16 period.

The research reveals that this cohort of Syrian refugees, as a whole, has successfully resettled in Canada in just a few years following their arrival in the country. Many encountered early challenges – as any such group of refugees would – in terms of navigating a foreign language, finding employment, dealing with the practicalities of finding a place to live and setting up a household, finding schools for children, and making sense of an unfamiliar culture. Most overcame or made significant progress in meeting these and other challenges, and – the diversity of this cohort in terms of background and circumstances notwithstanding – the predominant picture is one of people who have established new lives in a country they now consider their home. These findings largely confirm and expand upon previous research conducted in the initial years of this cohort's time in Canada.

Key findings

The following summarizes key findings across the dimensions of refugee experience covered in the study.

ARRIVAL IN CANADA. Some of the refugees received pre-arrival information about Canada, but this was far from comprehensive or sufficient to prepare them for what was to come. Some aspects of what they found once they landed were anticipated (notably the friendly welcome provided by Canadians), but they were more likely to

experience something unexpected, notably difficulties in finding employment, the cold weather and culture shock. Refugees identified various challenges during their early years of resettlement, in particular having to navigate in an unfamiliar language, as very few arrived with functional fluency in English or French.

SETTLEMENT SUPPORTS. Looking back over their early years in Canada, refugees recalled receiving helpful supports of various kinds, the most prominent being financial assistance, language training, help with accommodation, access to needed health care and emotional support. For those sponsored privately, most deemed the support they received as essential to their resettlement, and the relationship with sponsors proved enduring, with three-quarters of this group remaining in touch with their sponsors several years later. The types of government assistance most widely considered to be helpful included language training, health and dental care, and financial support.

CURRENT LIFE IN CANADA. With the benefit of several years of resettlement and adjustment, most Syrian refugees feel good about their current life in Canada, with almost nine in ten describing it to be very or generally positive. Across specific aspects of their lives, refugees were most widely satisfied in feeling safe and secure, being accepted by their local community, and with local schools. By comparison, refugees were much less apt to be satisfied with their financial security and employment situation. What refugees liked best about life in Canada was the safety and security it provides, along with the human rights protections in such areas as equality and freedom. What they liked least was the Canadian climate, as well as its unfamiliar culture and lifestyle, and being separated from family and friends living abroad. All things considered, in retrospect, almost all of the refugees interviewed said they were glad they came to Canada.

LANGUAGE ACQUISITION. Very few of the Syrian refugees arrived in Canada with a functional fluency in English or French, in terms of listening, speaking, reading or writing. With the benefit of immersion and the help of language classes, most made dramatic progress over the

subsequent few years – to the point where they rated their fluency in all four areas to be excellent or good. Moreover, those arriving with the least fluency (e.g., the youngest in the cohort, ages 18 to 24 when interviewed) demonstrated the greatest gains over time.

EMPLOYMENT AND OCCUPATION. About half of the refugees interviewed were employed full- or part-time (including those self-employed), which is below the level for the Canadian population-at-large. Most of those employed were working in sectors that typically provide entry-level opportunities, and only one in five reported being in a job or occupation that matched their education, skills and experience. Close to four in ten indicated the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted their employment situation, in most cases by reducing their hours of employment or eliminating their job altogether.

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING. Most refugees rated themselves to have generally good physical health, at levels slightly below, but generally comparable to, the Canadian population-at-large. This cohort was not doing as well in terms of mental health, with fewer than half describing it in positive terms, and almost as many indicating it to be only fair or poor. Three in ten said they experienced a considerable amount of stress in their daily lives, notably higher than the population-at-large. High levels of daily stress were most commonly reported by men, Government-Assisted Refugees (GAR) and those in financial hardship, and least evident among those ages 18 to 24.

SENSE OF BELONGING AND ACCEPTANCE. Most refugees expressed a strong sense of belonging to Canada, and for some this was a closer attachment than to their ethnic or cultural background. Indicative of this sentiment, almost everyone interviewed reported they had either become a Canadian citizen, were in the process of becoming one, or intended to do so when eligible. In almost all cases, refugees said they felt welcomed by others in their local community. They believed that Canadians as a whole are generally positive in their opinion of Syrian refugees, but at the same time feel the pressure of their host country's expectations of them to fit in and become productive citizens.

EXPERIENCES WITH DISCRIMINATION. About half of those interviewed reported experiencing discrimination at some point since arriving in Canada, although few reported this to be happening regularly. Refugees were most likely

to attribute this mistreatment to their ethnicity or culture, and less so because of their religion, language or gender. Few women linked experiences of discrimination to their gender, but they were more likely than men to attribute it to their religion (likely due to wearing a hijab). The likelihood of ongoing discrimination did not vary noticeably across the refugee population except by age, with younger people much more likely than their older counterparts to report such experiences, a pattern that is reflected in other racialized populations in Canada.

LOCAL COMMUNITY. Almost all refugees interviewed were generally, if not very, satisfied with their local community as a place to live. Most expressed no hopes or plans to relocate in the foreseeable future, whether to somewhere else in Canada or to another country. Those contemplating a move were most likely to do so to improve their employment prospects. Many refugees became involved with local organizations in their community, including mosques or churches, community centres and schools, as well as groups whose members were other refugees from Syria. Most refugees said they knew at least some, if not many, of their neighbours, and reported having close friends in Canada (other than family) they could count on when needed, many of whom were also Syrian.

EXTENDED FAMILY CONNECTIONS. Two-thirds of these refugees reported having family members living in their community or elsewhere in Canada. Almost everyone had extended family living outside the country, primarily in Syria, but also in other countries in the Middle East, Europe and elsewhere. Most refugees maintained regular weekly or daily contact with family abroad, primarily through social media networking platforms like WhatsApp. One in four said they had taken steps to sponsor family members to come to Canada, with about half of the remainder having given it consideration.

FAMILY AND CHILDREN. Most parents felt their children had done very well in adapting to life in Canada, including being accepted by others in school. They were most likely to credit the school system in supporting their children's adjustment, while pointing to language acquisition as the most notable barrier their children had to overcome.

Half of those interviewed said they experienced changing roles within their family since moving to Canada. This was most likely to entail increased responsibilities in such

areas as parenting and household finances, while others mentioned changes in how children were disciplined, and who in the home was employed. One in ten said they experienced greater independence in their lives, while a comparable proportion reported the opposite.

LOOKING AHEAD. Syrian refugees identified a range of personal goals they hoped to achieve in their lifetime, the most prominent being home ownership, completing their education, and realizing employment or career aspirations. Parents' wishes for their children's future were most likely to focus on them getting a good education, and having a good or happy life. Most refugees expressed optimism about achieving at least some of their life goals, basing this confidence on their own capacity to work hard and maintain a positive outlook, but also through the support of government and Canadian society. The most significant challenges to achieving life goals were seen to be financial and employment-related, as well as language fluency.

Group profiles

Syrian refugees arriving in Canada in 2015-16 are a diverse group, in terms of their background prior to arriving in Canada, demographic profile and life circumstances at the time of being interviewed for this study. The following section summarizes how this group's experience resettling in Canada compares across the most relevant dimensions to emerge from the research.¹

ADMISSION STREAM. Overall, the experiences and resettlement outcomes of the refugees interviewed were notably similar regardless of the admission stream through which they were granted acceptance by Canada.² Some differences emerged, but in most cases these were not robust enough to indicate a substantively different life experience. The most notable distinctions are as follows:

- **Government-Assisted Refugees (GAR)** were among the youngest adults (18 to 24) in this cohort, and as such had less education and employment experience (although they were no more likely to report financial hardship). These refugees rated their life satisfaction the same

as those who were privately sponsored, except for being less positive about their housing. This group also reported lower levels of physical and mental health, and higher levels of daily stress. They were somewhat less likely to have other family members living nearby or in Canada, and maintained more frequent contact with family living abroad.

- **Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSR)** tended to be older, have post-secondary education and be living in Quebec; this group was also less likely to identify as Muslim or as being religious. They arrived in Canada with the strongest fluency in English or French, but at the same time were the most likely to report early challenges with employment. They had the most positive physical and mental health outcomes, and were most apt to have extended family in Canada. This group was no more likely than others to report experiences of discrimination, but those who did were more likely to say they were bothered by it.
- **Blended Visa Office Refugees (BVOR)** is the smallest group, and included those in the middle age range (25 to 29) and with a high school education. In comparison with PSR, they were especially positive about their private sponsor support, and also stood out in feeling welcomed by their local community and by Canadians generally. Their level of overall life satisfaction in Canada was the same as GAR and PSR, but they were more likely to express strong satisfaction with specific aspects (e.g., safety and security, local schools).

AGE. Age also played a role in refugees' experience, with notable differences between the youngest cohort (18 to 24) and those ages 45 and older.

- **18 to 24.** The youngest age cohort was typically female and religious, with a high school education and admitted through the GAR stream. This group reported more positive early experiences in terms of their expectations about Canada, while at the same time being most likely to mention challenges with language fluency and culture shock. They were somewhat less apt than older

1 It should be noted that the number of refugees interviewed (N=305) limits the extent to which subgroup comparisons can be made. The distinctions drawn were not based on statistical significance and, in many cases, should be considered directional in nature.

2 These outcomes were measured at the time of the interview, which took place five to six years after arriving in Canada. It is most likely there would have been much greater differences in the needs and experiences of refugees across these different admission streams in the first few years of resettlement.

refugees to be satisfied with their current lives, especially in terms housing, local schools and acceptance by the local community. They were the most likely to report experiencing discrimination, although no more apt than others to feel bothered by it.

These younger refugees reported the most positive levels of physical and mental health, but at the same time indicated higher levels of daily stress. They were also most likely to report changes in their role in the family since moving to Canada, mostly in terms of increased responsibilities. This group arrived in Canada with the least amount of fluency in English or French, but made the most significant progress over the subsequent few years, to the point where they were more advanced than older members of this cohort. For this group, education was the most common life aspiration, and they were more optimistic than older refugees about achieving their life goals.

- **45 plus.** This cohort was more apt to be male, have the most education and be in the PSR stream. Compared with younger refugees, they were more apt to experience negative surprises upon arrival in Canada, and to mention employment and housing as their biggest challenges in the early resettlement period. They were among the most satisfied with their current lives in Canada, especially in terms of health care, acceptance in the community, housing and where they are currently living. They were the most likely to feel a strong sense of belonging to Canada, and least apt to report experiences of discrimination. While this group reported notable progress in learning English or French over the past few years, their fluency in all areas now lagged behind that of younger refugees.

GENDER. Some differences also appear between men and women.

- **Women.** As reported earlier, women were younger on average than men, and less apt to have post-secondary education or to be employed. They were more likely than men to find unexpected positive surprises upon arrival in Canada. They arrived with less fluency in English or French, and were more apt to say that language presented a major challenge – but, over time, their fluency levels caught up to those of men. Their satisfaction with life in Canada was similar to men, except

being somewhat lower in terms of financial security, and safety and security. They were no more likely to report experiencing discrimination, but those who did were more apt than men to attribute this to their religion. Women were more likely to say their role in the family changed upon moving to Canada, which took various forms. For them, the top life aspirations were completing their education, finding employment in their field, and improving language proficiency. They were most likely to base their confidence in achieving life goals on family support, religion and hope.

- **Men.** Men in this cohort tended to be older than women, with more education and income. They were more apt to be working and to express satisfaction with their financial security, but at the same time reported higher levels of daily stress. Compared with women, men had larger networks of friends and neighbours, although they were no more likely to express satisfaction with the quality of their friendships. Men's life aspirations were more likely to centre around employment and financial security; and their confidence in achieving those goals was based on working hard and government support.

REGION. The sample size is not sufficient to provide an in-depth comparison across all regions, so the following conclusions should be considered directional rather than conclusive. The most notable distinction was between refugees living in Quebec and British Columbia.

- **Quebec.** Syrian refugees in Quebec were more likely to be in the PSR stream, and with smaller households and higher levels of post-secondary education. Compared with those in other regions, this group was more likely to be Armenian and Christian. For these refugees, language fluency was highlighted as a significant challenge, but they also emphasized the support they received in the form of language training. This group was more likely than those in other regions to be satisfied with housing, and safety and security. They expressed less satisfaction with access to health care, but at the same time reported the most positive levels of physical and mental health. Quebec refugees were also the most positive in their assessment of public opinion toward Syrian refugees, and least apt to report experiencing discrimination. They also stood out in terms of having extended family members living in Canada, and being optimistic about achieving their life goals.

- **British Columbia.** This province had a high proportion of GAR from Syria, and those with lower incomes and living in public housing. This group has not fared as well as refugees living elsewhere in Canada, with lower levels of satisfaction in several areas, less positive physical and mental health, and more daily stress. They were least likely to report having extended family living nearby or somewhere in Canada, and expressed less optimism in achieving life goals.
- **Prairies.** Refugees living in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba tended to have lower than average incomes, and to report early challenges related to employment and the cold climate. They were among the most likely to express satisfaction with housing, health care access and local schools, as well as acceptance by the local community. At the same time, they were also more likely to be considering relocation to somewhere else in Canada.
- **Ontario.** Refugees settling in Ontario made up the largest group and, as a result, tend to define the average experience. They stood out in being among the most likely to report early challenges with employment and housing. In their current lives, they were the most positive in their satisfaction with safety and security, while least so when it came to financial security and the cost of living. Ontario refugees expressed the strongest sense of belonging to Canada.
- **Atlantic Canada.** Refugees in this region were also largely in the GAR stream, with large families, low incomes and less education. For them, the biggest early challenge was finding suitable housing. They were among the most satisfied in terms of financial security and local schools; and were doing well in terms of feeling welcomed by other Canadians, knowing many of their neighbours, having extended family nearby, reporting high levels of mental health, and optimistic about achieving life goals. At the same time, refugees in this region were less apt to be satisfied in terms of safety and security, and more likely to experience discrimination because of their ethnicity/culture or religion, and to be bothered by it.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME. Apart from other dimensions outlined previously, household income makes an important difference in how successfully refugees have been able to resettle in Canada, especially among the quarter of those interviewed whose household income was not enough to

live on (so that they were stretched or having a hard time). This group was most likely to include refugees who were women, living in Western Canada, single, with a university degree, and in the 34 to 44 year age group.

This low-income group fared less well than others across a range of areas, such as being more likely to experience negative surprises upon arrival, not getting the support they needed from private sponsors, being less satisfied with life in Canada (generally and across specific aspects), being less likely to be working in a job that matched their skills and experience, reporting lower levels of physical and mental health, being less apt to feel welcomed by their local community, and to feel Syrian refugees are viewed positively by Canadians as a whole. Refugees with inadequate incomes were also more apt to be bothered by experiences with discrimination, be less satisfied with their local community, more likely to consider relocation, and less apt to be glad about coming to Canada. Finally, this group was significantly less optimistic about achieving life goals, in comparison with refugees with more sustainable incomes.

Conclusions

Canada has a distinctive history and identity as a country made up mostly of people arriving from elsewhere – and, today more than ever, relies on immigration to build its population and keep communities thriving. This means the stakes are high in ensuring that newcomers can count on a welcoming home, and a successful path to resettlement and full citizenship. Refugees make up a tiny proportion of the immigrants who come to Canada each year, but they face unique challenges because of the circumstances they are fleeing, which include unsustainable and often life-threatening situations in their home countries.

This study demonstrates that the Syrian refugees who arrived in 2015-16 have, for the most part, been successful in resettling in Canada, and creating new lives for themselves and their families. They have acquired what is called “social capital”, a term used to describe the vibrancy of social networks, personal connections and social trust. These refugees exhibited levels of community connections, friendships and a sense of belonging to the country that in many respects are comparable to other Canadians.

Yet this positive story of refugee resettlement must be considered in the context of the unique circumstances in

which this particular cohort came to Canada. The timing of the global migration crisis and a federal election in the fall of 2015 led to the mobilization of political, government and civic leadership that was remarkable in terms of the number of refugees, the speed with which they were moved, and the scale of resources dedicated to their resettlement. This was a defining factor in the experience of these refugees, and well beyond what was available to refugees in previous times, other refugees during this period, and those who have come after. This demonstrates what can be accomplished with a concentrated effort, and perhaps what is required to ensure effective refugee resettlement and integration on a sustained basis.

What lessons can be gleaned from this research? The positive outcomes reported by refugees notwithstanding, their experiences have been uneven, and ongoing challenges remain. The evidence demonstrates that government agencies and settlement organizations need to give more attention to such areas as employment supports, pre-arrival information and managing expectations. This research is intended to document the lived experience and amplify the voices of these refugees, but does not extend to providing specific recommendations. Rather, the goal of this work is to inform those directly responsible for policy, program development and refugee support. The third and final

phase of the study focuses on knowledge dissemination and community outreach to promote awareness of, and engagement with, the research findings and their implications among government agencies, settlement organizations, refugee communities, the media and the Canadian public.

This study provides the most comprehensive picture to date of the lived experience of Syrian refugees in Canada. It builds upon earlier research by providing a national picture, covering a comprehensive range of areas and topics, and incorporating a qualitative component to provide refugees with an opportunity to speak about their lives in their own words. At the same time, the picture provided through this study is by no means conclusive or complete. The sample of participants was not large enough to support conclusive findings on subgroup comparisons, and included only a portion of the children and youth under 18 years of age (who made up 50% of this refugee cohort upon arrival). The research left out some relevant topics, such as the role and effects of trauma – a topic that could not effectively be addressed in a study of this type. Finally, this study covered a particular refugee population that arrived under exceptional circumstances, and tells us much less about the experiences of other refugees who are equally in need of our attention.



Introduction

Background

Canada has often been described as a settler nation – meaning that, while Indigenous Peoples have inhabited the land for millennia, people from many parts of the globe have been arriving and settling for more than 400 years. Today, almost one in four Canadians is first generation in the country, and an additional 400,000 newcomers arrive each year. Most immigrants gain admittance as part of the economic or family class, but some come to Canada as refugees fleeing conflict, persecution and threats to their lives.

For much of the past few decades, Canada typically welcomed a small number of refugees per year, in the range of 11,000 to 13,000. This changed dramatically in 2015 in response to the ongoing conflict in Syria, which has been described as one of the worst humanitarian disasters in recent history. Since the conflict erupted in 2011, 5.6 million Syrians found it necessary to flee their country for refuge in neighbouring countries, and another 6.6 million have been internally displaced.³ In 2014, the United Nations Refugee Agency appealed to the international community to help address this humanitarian crisis by accepting Syrian refugees who could no longer be safe in their own country.

In fall 2015, the newly elected federal government answered this call by significantly expanding the intake of Syrian refugees through the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Initiative, an unprecedented national mobilization involving all levels of government, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and Canadian citizens. With uncharacteristic speed and coordination, the effort succeeded in resettling close to 40,000 Syrian refugees by the end of 2016.⁴ This represented the most substantial intake of refugees from one source into Canada since the Vietnamese sponsorship program in the late 1970s.

Resettling this number of refugees in such an abbreviated time frame has presented major challenges for government agencies in terms security, logistics, and providing the initial

settlement supports to people arriving from a very different culture and with few resources. And the transition has been especially difficult for the refugees themselves, faced with such a dramatic change in circumstances, even if voluntarily chosen. These challenges notwithstanding, the process of arrival and initial settlement was largely accomplished, and the country's positive track record with refugee resettlement suggests that most in this group should, over time, successfully adapt to their new homeland.

At the same time, starting a new life in a foreign land with an unfamiliar language and culture is daunting, and especially for refugees from Syria who fled their country for safety and, in many cases, have spent years living in temporary refugee camps awaiting a permanent home. Even with many forms of support provided by governments, settlement networks and private citizens, successful resettlement is not a given. Learning English or French has proven to be a significant obstacle for many in terms of finding employment and learning how to navigate Canadian life. These refugees differ from those from previous cohorts in terms of having larger families and larger numbers of minors, less formal education, less fluency in either English or French, and more significant health issues. This makes it especially important to understand and monitor their experiences, in order to support these individuals, and better manage the process and outcomes for future arrivals.

Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) currently conducts regular comprehensive evaluations assessing key aspects of refugee resettlement and settlement (e.g., language acquisition, employment, education). Federal evaluations are undertaken to provide accountability for the public resources invested in federal programming, including refugee settlement, to highlight successes and challenges, and to provide recommendations for areas of improvement. In support of monitoring the Syrian refugee initiative, the department conducted client

³ These figures were as reported by the UNHCR in 2018.

⁴ Additional refugees were admitted over the subsequent two years, with the total reaching almost 60,000 by September 2018.

surveys with Syrian refugees who began arriving in 2015, and published a report in 2019 on the outcomes of their resettlement, drawing upon its own research and other sources.⁵ In addition, IRCC partnered with Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) in 2016 to award 27 grants to fund academic research projects intended to better understand Syrian refugees' immediate outcomes and challenges in such key areas as access to resettlement services, housing, education and social integration.⁶

This work has been invaluable in identifying outcomes on specific dimensions, but gaps remain in the evidence base regarding what it means to be a resettled Syrian refugee in Canada; that is, the lived experience of these individuals as they seek to make a new life in Canada and the challenges this entails. The agency and diversity of Canadian Syrian individuals – a mostly young generation moving from refugee, to immigrant, to citizen, and transitioning between education levels and occupations – remains to be fully understood.

Syrian Refugee Lived Experience Project

With the goal of building needed knowledge about the Syrian refugee experience in Canada, the Environics Institute for Survey Research conducted a major study with a national scope, focusing on refugees who arrived in Canada in 2015-16.

OBJECTIVES. The purpose of this research is to build upon previous work, to provide a holistic and deeper understanding of the experience of Syrian refugees several years into their resettlement experience and integration journey, that can generate valuable insights and provide direction for targeted initiatives and policy responses to improve the lives of these and other refugees who come to Canada. The long-term goal of the study is to contribute to more positive outcomes for Syrian refugees in terms of successful settlement and integration into Canadian society.

This study builds upon previous research conducted by IRCC and others to expand the understanding of the Syrian

refugee experience in Canada through a proven research model that is both empirically-based (representative of the target population) and in-depth (using qualitative methods) to gain new insight into important issues that have been identified, but have yet to be fully understood. Most of the previous research and evaluation with Syrian refugees was conducted during their arrival and initial settlement, and this new research focuses on how they are doing several years into their new lives in Canada.

In addition to providing direction to government policy and programs, the research is intended to support the work of others currently involved with Syrian refugees (e.g., settlement agencies, academic researchers, sponsor groups, refugees), by serving as a focal point for these stakeholders to gain new understanding, practical guidance, and the basis for creating new forums for engagement and activity.

The study is also intended to create an actionable template for further research with refugees from Syria and elsewhere. This entails documentation of the research model and applicable tools, as well as its benefits and outcomes.⁷ A specific outcome is to create new capacity within the Syrian community to conduct further research of its own that builds on this study.

Finally, the research findings are intended to help shape a more nuanced portrait of the Syrian refugee population and experience in Canada, for the benefit of the Canadian media, key institutions, the broader Canadian public and the refugees themselves. It is through such research that the lived experience of these refugees, both as individuals and as a group, can be more fully understood and validated.

This research was funded through Contribution Agreements provided by federal government department of Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada (S208716009, S238716007). The findings and conclusions drawn from the study are attributable to the Environics Institute, and do not necessarily represent the position of the Government of Canada.

⁵ *Syrian Outcomes Report*, Evaluation Division, Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada (June 2019).

⁶ Some of this research is presented in a co-edited volume (Hamilton, L., L. Veronis & M Walton-Roberts, *A National Project: Syrian refugee resettlement in Canada* (2020)).

⁷ This documentation will be presented in separate reports.

STUDY METHODOLOGY. The project methodology for this study is based on a unique research model developed by the Environics Institute that has been used successfully in conducting lived experience studies with urban Indigenous Peoples (*Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study*, 2010) and the Black community in the Greater Toronto Area (*Black Experience Project in the GTA*, 2017).

The project is being conducted in three phases:

Phase 1. Consultation and design. The initial phase entailed the scoping and design of the research to ensure it focused on relevant issues, and had the support of relevant stakeholders. This phase took place between September and December 2019, and included:

- **Research advisory group.** A Research Advisory Group (RAG) was formed consisting of 10 members, including senior representatives from leading settlement agencies across the country, academic researchers active in the field of immigration and refugees, and an ex officio IRCC representative. The group provided valuable input and feedback on the research approach, methodology and analysis, through meetings and ongoing correspondence.
- **Review of existing research.** The project team conducted a review of existing research and data, including published studies and reports prepared by IRCC.
- **Stakeholder workshop.** A one-day in-person workshop was held on November 1, 2019 in Toronto with a selected group of researchers and settlement agency representatives, including RAG members. The purpose of this event was to identify relevant insights from previous research and agency experience. A summary report was prepared.
- **Consultation with key informants.** The project team consulted with IRCC representatives and other active researchers to gain further insight into the context and issues surrounding Syrian refugees in Canada, to elicit additional guidance and build broader awareness for the project.

Phase 2. Research implementation. Based in part on the direction provided in Phase 1, a research methodology was developed consisting of in-depth, one-on-one structured interviews conducted by telephone and webchat with a representative sample of 305 Syrian refugees who arrived in Canada in the 2015-16 period.⁸ The survey sample was designed to cover the Syrian refugee population in all 10 provinces, with quotas established to ensure adequate representation by admission category, region, year of arrival, age and gender.

The interviews were conducted by Syrian or other Arabic-speaking Canadians recruited and trained by R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd., under contract to the Environics Institute. The interviews were conducted in Arabic, English or French (per participants' choice), with most (87%) being conducted in Arabic. The interviews were conducted over two periods: September 3 to December 10, 2020 and February 12 to March 31, 2021.⁹

The interview protocol was guided by the Phase 1 consultation and design process, and addressed a range of areas encompassing pre-arrival background, arrival in Canada, current life in the country, and outlook to the future. The protocol included approximately 125 questions, of which 35 were fully open-ended (providing participants with an opportunity to answer questions without prompted responses and in their own words). Interviews averaged 75 minutes in length.

A detailed description of the research methodology, along with the interview protocol, is presented in the Appendix.

Phase 3. Knowledge dissemination and outreach. Following the completion and publication of this report, the Environics Institute will broadly publicize the study findings and undertake outreach activities to engage with stakeholders across the country. The purpose of this phase is to promote awareness of, and engagement with, the study findings and implications among governments, the refugee community, settlement agencies and other organizations involved with refugee resettlement across Canada. Details about this activity will be posted on the Environics Institute website.

⁸ The original methodology was developed to conduct the interviews in person as per the previous Environics Institute projects, but this no longer became possible with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and consequent restrictions on travel and in-person contact in March 2020 (just as the fieldwork was about to commence). Twelve refugee interviews were conducted in person in early March, as a pilot phase to fine tune the interview protocol prior to a full launch.

⁹ The pandemic also resulted in a significant delay in the implementation of the fieldwork, which was originally scheduled to be completed by June 2020.

About this report

The following sections of the report present the results from the research, including comparisons across relevant subgroups of the Syrian refugee population (e.g., by admission category, region, age and gender).

The report includes selected verbatim responses to open-ended questions, which were recorded manually during the interviews and, in most cases, translated into English from Arabic.

Detailed data tables are available under separate cover, which present the results for all survey questions by population characteristics (see the study project page at www.environicsinstitute.org). All results are presented as percentages unless otherwise noted.

Acknowledgements

This research was made possible with the support of a number of individuals and organizations. The Environics Institute would like to acknowledge the invaluable guidance provided by members of the Research Advisory Group:

- Vicki Esses, University of Western Ontario (Chair)
- Nabihah Atallah – Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS)
- Mario Calla and Saba Abbas – COSTI Immigrant Services
- Beth Clarke – World Education Services
- Manolli Ekra – OCASI
- Chris Friesen – Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISSofBC)
- Leah Hamilton – Mount Royal University
- Suzanne Huot – University of British Columbia
- Lynn Weaver – Cowichan Intercultural Society / Canadian Refugee Sponsorship Agreement Holders Association
- Cathy Woodbeck – Thunder Bay Multicultural Association
- David Kurfurst – IRCC (ex officio)

Appreciation also goes to the team at R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd (Derek Hughes, Neha Khullar, the interview team) for their skillful implementation of a challenging research project. The project was made possible through Contribution Agreements awarded by the Government of Canada (Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada); and, notably, the ongoing support provided by Umit Kiziltan, Enrico del Castello, Lorna Jantzen, David Kurfurst, Klodiana Puro and Jessica Schafer. Finally, gratitude is offered to the 305 Syrian refugees across the country who took the time to share their perspectives and experiences in making Canada their new home.



Syrian Refugee Profile

Population profile

This research focuses on Syrian refugees who were resettled in Canada as part of the federal government’s *Syrian Refugee Resettlement Initiative*. This includes 39,636 individuals (in 11,800 family units) who arrived between November 4, 2015 and December 31, 2016. Refugees were processed and admitted to Canada through one of three Resettlement Programs:

- **Government-Assisted Refugees (GAR).** Government-assisted refugees were referred to Canada by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) or the Government of Turkey. This program has historically placed an emphasis on selecting refugees based on their need for protection (i.e., for safety and security). Upon arrival in Canada, these refugees receive financial support for up to 12 months, in addition to other forms of ongoing settlement supports (e.g., language training).
- **Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSR).** Privately sponsored refugees were identified and sponsored by Canadian citizens or permanent residents, through family members, religious congregations, other voluntary sector organizations or groups of friends. Upon arrival, these refugees receive financial support and other supports from their private sponsor(s) for their first year in Canada.
- **Blended Visa Office-Referred Refugees (BVOR).** This program encompasses a mix of government and private sponsor support. Refugees in this case were referred by UNHCR and identified by Canadian visa officers for participation in this program based on specific criteria. These refugee candidates were profiled on a designated BVOR website from which private sponsors could select a case for sponsorship. Upon arrival, BVOR refugees receive income and other forms of support from both the federal government and the private sponsors for their first year in Canada. This program is often described as “welcoming the stranger” because, in most cases, sponsors have no prior relationship to the refugees they choose to sponsor.

The table below provides profiles of this refugee population based on data collected by IRCC.

Syrian Refugee Resettlement Initiative population*
Characteristics at time of arrival in Canada (%)

REGION OF INTENDED DESTINATION	
Atlantic Canada	7
Quebec	22
Ontario	44
Manitoba/Saskatchewan/Alberta	18
British Columbia	8
ADMISSION CATEGORY	
GAR	54
PSR	38
BVOR	8
GENDER	
Female	50
Male	50
AGE	
0 – 17	50
18 – 29	15
30 – 44 years old	22
45 – 59 years old	9
60 plus	4
FAMILY SIZE**	
Single	34
2 to 3	18
4 to 6	39
7 plus	9
EDUCATION	
None	24
Secondary or less	57
More than secondary	14
Not stated	6

* Source: Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada

** 70% are spouses or dependents

Research sample profile

The adjacent table presents a profile of the Syrian refugees interviewed for this research, with comparisons to the target population where relevant (note the sample characteristics are based on when the interviews were conducted, which was five to six years after refugees arrived in Canada).

Research sample profile

Sample characteristics (at time of interview)	Number of interviews	% of Sample*	% of target Population
REGION			
Atlantic Canada	29	10	7
Quebec	28	9	22
Ontario	140	46	44
Manitoba/SK/Alberta	57	19	18
British Columbia	51	17	8
ADMISSION CATEGORY			
GAR	168	55	54
PSR	101	33	38
BVOR	34	11	8
GENDER			
Female	143	47	50
Male	162	53	50
AGE			
18 – 24 years old	44	14	–
25 – 29 years old	44	14	–
30 – 34 years old	45	15	–
35 – 44 years old	120	39	–
45 – 54 years old	34	11	–
55 – 64 years old	16	5	–
INTERVIEW METHOD			
Telephone	243	80	–
Video chat	50	16	–
In person*	12	4	–
TOTAL	305	100	100

* The 12 in-person interviews were conducted prior to the onset of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

The following tables provide an additional profile of the refugee sample on a number of other characteristics, such as household composition, language, education, identity and religion.

Sample profile – Education, language and identity

Research Sample (%)

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Elementary level (up to Grade 6)	11
Some secondary (Grades 7 to 9)	16
Completed high school (Grades 10 - 12)	29
College or Trade certificate/diploma	18
Undergraduate university degree	18
Graduate or professional degree	7

FIRST LANGUAGE

Arabic	88
Armenian	5
Kurdish	3
Turkish	2
Other (e.g., Aramaic)	1

ETHNIC GROUP IDENTITY

Arab	83
Armenian	5
Kurdish	3
Other (Syrian, Turk/Turkish/Turkman)	1

RELIGION

Muslim	72
Christian	23
None/no religion	4

IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

Very religious	10
Fairly religious	53
A little religious	25
Not at all religious	4
Prefer not to say	8

Sample profile – Household composition

Research Sample (%)

MARITAL STATUS

Married	58
Common-law/living as couple	10
Separated/divorced/widowed	7
Single/unmarried	25

NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN HOUSEHOLD

1 – 2	15
3 – 5	47
6 – 9	36
10 plus	1

CHILDREN LIVING IN CANADA

Yes	66
No	34

AGE OF CHILDREN (IF ANY)

Under 6 years old	57
6 – 10 years old	64
11 – 17 years old	53
18 plus	21

WHERE CHILDREN WERE BORN

In Canada	9
Elsewhere	50
Both in Canada and elsewhere	41



Pre-Arrival Background

The first part of the interview addressed aspects of refugees' background and circumstances, as well as what they received in terms of pre-arrival orientation to Canada.

Place of residence

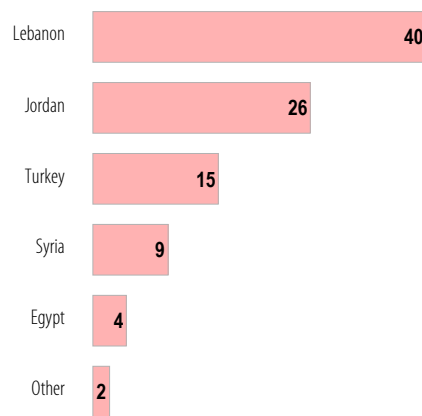
Almost all of these refugees lived in Syria at some point in their lives, but most were living elsewhere in the region prior to leaving for Canada – mostly in major cities, with few staying in refugee camps. This population is primarily urban in terms of where they have spent most of their lives.

Refugees in this population identify as Syrian and almost all of them (97%) lived in Syria at some point in their lives. But many have spent time in other countries in the region, in most cases out of necessity given the ongoing conflict in their country, and awaiting resettlement in Canada. Prior to leaving for Canada, this group was most likely to be living in Lebanon (40%), Jordan (26%) or Turkey (15%), with only about one in ten (9%) still in Syria during that period.

In this last country before resettlement, most report living in a major city (62%), with others staying in a village or town (19%), or in a rural area (9%). Few (8%) in this group say they were living in a refugee camp prior to leaving for Canada.

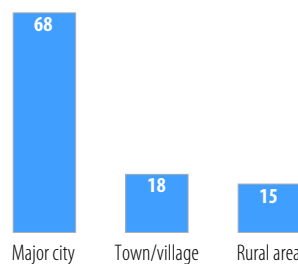
This population is largely urban in terms of its background. Two-thirds (68%) of this refugee group spent the majority of their time prior to coming to Canada in major cities (whether in Syria or in other nearby countries), compared with those who lived mostly in towns or villages (18%), or in rural areas (15%).

Last country of residence before coming to Canada (%)



Q.5
What was the last country you lived in before coming to Canada?

Where spent majority of time in last country before Canada (%)



Q.2
During your time in [last country before Canada], where did you live the majority of the time?

Occupational background

Just over half of this refugee group were employed or working when last living in Syria, with their jobs spanning a wide range of occupational sectors.

Among survey participants, just over half (53%) reported having been employed or working when last living in Syria, with the remainder indicating they were not employed at that time (24%) or never worked in Syria (22%). Such employment was twice as likely to be indicated by men (71%) as women (35%).

Those employed in Syria reported a wide range of occupational sectors, the top five being health care and social assistance (12%), retail trade (11%), professional/scientific/technical services (11%), construction (10%) and education (10%).

Men were more likely to be employed in construction, retail and professional/scientific/technical services, while women made up a greater proportion in health care and education.

Previous work/occupation in Syria

(%)

Health care / social assistance	12
Retail trade	11
Professional / scientific / technical services	11
Construction	10
Educational services	10
Manufacturing	7
Wholesale trade	5
Finance / insurance	4
Business management	3
Accommodation / food services	3
Agriculture / resource management	2
Arts/culture / recreation	2
Other	26

Q.4

(If employed in Syria) What was your work or occupation in Syria?

Pre-arrival orientation to Canada

Fewer than six in ten said they received any orientation about life in Canada before arriving in the country. Most identified, in retrospect, the kinds of information they would have liked to have, such as what to expect in terms of employment opportunities, the education system and weather.

WAS PRE-ARRIVAL INFORMATION ABOUT CANADA PROVIDED?

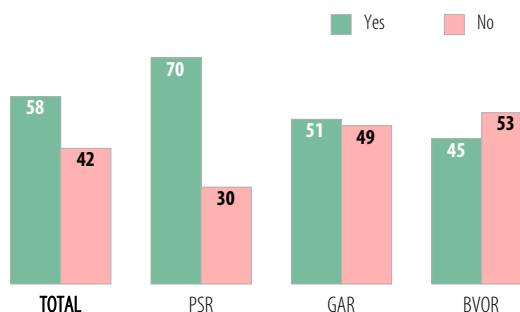
What kind of orientation, if any, did these refugees receive about the country they were about to make their new home? Fewer than six in ten (58%) said they received any orientation or specific information about life in Canada before they arrived in the country. Such orientation was more widely reported by refugees last living in Turkey (71%, compared with only 41% in Jordan), and those living in refugee camps (67%) or major cities (61%) (compared with villages/towns (55%) or rural areas (46%)). As well, refugees in the PSR stream were more apt to receive pre-arrival information (70%), notably those being sponsored by family and friends (74%). Such orientation was noticeably less common among refugees in the GAR (51%) and BVOR (45%) streams.

Likelihood of reporting pre-arrival orientation increases with educational attainment, rising from 53 percent among those without a high school diploma to 67 percent among those with some form of post-secondary education. Pre-arrival fluency in English or French did not appear to make a noticeable difference in whether this group received such information, except among the very few refugees who rated their listening fluency in either official language at that time to be excellent (85%).

Those who say they received some form of orientation or information about Canada pre-arrival say this came from a number of sources, including the Canadian government (33%), friends or family in Canada (26%), and international organizations such as the UN (23%).¹⁰ Others mention lawyers or immigration professionals (13%), their own personal research (3%), friends and family in Syria (3%), or other sources (5%).

Did you receive information about life in Canada before you arrived?

By admission category (%)



Q.7

Did you receive any orientation or specific information about life in Canada before you arrived in the country?

¹⁰ Canada Orientation Abroad (COA) is a global refugee initiative sponsored by IRCC and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to provide orientation and information sessions to refugees before departing to Canada. The program is located in most of the countries from which Syrian refugees were based prior to emigration, so was likely used by some of those participating in this study. Research by Esses et al. (A National Project, 2020) of Syrian refugees in London Ontario and Calgary Alberta found that very few received any information through the COA program.

What pre-arrival information would have been helpful. Refugees were asked to consider, in retrospect, what type of information or knowledge about life in Canada they would have most wished to have been given before they arrived.

More than eight in ten refugees interviewed identified one or more types of information that would have been helpful, the most common being information about employment opportunities (e.g., job market, how to find employment) (25%), a general introduction to life in Canada (23%), information about the education system (school age, post-secondary) (21%), and recognition of educational or professional credentials (16%).

Other themes covered include the weather in Canada (13%), opportunities for learning English or French (11%), and information about the specific community they were moving to (8%).

What information about life in Canada would you most wished to have had before arrival?

Top 12 categories (%)

Employment opportunities / had to find work	25
Canadian society / life in general	23
Education system / schools	21
Recognition of education / professional credentials	16
Weather in Canada	13
English / French language training	11
Specific community I am moving to	8
Health care system	6
Laws	5
How Canadians treat Muslims	5
Safety	5
Housing	5
Nothing	17

Q.9

Now looking back at your experience getting settled, what type of information or knowledge about life in Canada would you have most wished to have been given before arrival?

Q.9

Now looking back at your experience getting settled, what type of information or knowledge about life in Canada would you have most wished to have been given before arrival?

"I wish I knew that English or French languages are essential to find a job in Canada."

"Immigrants get shocked when they first arrive. Nobody tells them that their degrees are worth nothing here, they need to do degree equivalency and sometimes they need to study from zero."

"The cold is much worse than we expected; if they told us about it, we would have been at least prepared mentally."

"Also, some people told us that they're going to take our kids away from us, but when we came here we found out it's not true. It would have been nice if they assured us before we came."

"We were given a lot of wrong information like there is a lot of racism, too much openness and they scared us that Canada never sees the sun ... It would have been nice if somebody gave us the right information ... about education and work in Canada ... our rights and the laws here, about the society and culture and food."

"I just want to get information about how the people in Canada will treat me, because I'm a Muslim and wearing the hijab, and I felt that we did not get more information about the general life in Canada."

"That the Canadians are going to welcome us in an amazing way, there was a group waiting for us outside the hotel with gifts for us and the kids and food; we were surprised, I would have liked to know also that the area they're sending us to doesn't have Arabic schools."



Initial Settlement in Canada

The next section of the interview was retrospective, in which refugees were asked to think back to when they arrived in Canada in 2015 or 2016 (5 or 6 years before the interview took place). These questions focused on how the reality of resettlement compared with their initial expectations, the biggest challenges faced during this initial period, and the types of support received from government services and sponsors.

Initial experiences in Canada: reality versus expectations

Refugees identified various ways in which they found life in Canada to be as anticipated, notably the welcoming support from other Canadians. But they also found it different than expected – and mostly in negative ways, such as difficulties in finding employment and the cold climate.

People settling into a new place often find it to be not quite the same as expected or anticipated. The study asked refugees to describe in their own words how their experience in Canada was both similar and different from what they expected. The questions were presented in an open-ended format, and participant responses were coded into conceptually relevant themes.

WHAT WAS SIMILAR TO EXPECTATIONS. Refugees mentioned a range of aspects about life in Canada that fit with their preconceived ideas of what it would be like, almost all of which reflected positive experiences. The most common theme centred on the support they received from Canadians when they arrived, describing this in such terms as helpful, caring, friendly, respectful or welcoming (31%).

Others found that the country was what they expected in terms of it being safe and secure (15%), a free society and/ or one that respected human rights (e.g., not a police state) (15%), a good quality of life (11%), and opportunities for education (10%).

How experience in Canada was similar to expectations (%)

People are caring / friendly / welcoming / helpful	31
Community is safe and secure	15
Freedom / people have human rights	15
Good quality of life	11
Weather is cold	10
Opportunities for education	10
Equality / no discrimination / racism	7
Advanced / peaceful society	6
Beautiful / clean	4
Language challenges	4
Opportunities for employment	4
Can plan for the future	4
Cultural differences	3
Hard transition in first year	3
Other	9
Nothing / no response	21

Q.11a

In what ways was your experience similar to what you expected, once you arrived in Canada?

Some mentioned expected aspects of life in Canada that were not as positive, such as the cold weather (10%), language challenges (4%) and a hard transition in the first year (3%). One in five (21%) refugees did not offer any response to this question.

Refugees most likely to say they were not surprised to find Canadian people and communities to be helpful and supportive include those who are older, married and part

of larger households, as well as those who were privately sponsored by family members or groups of volunteers (with this experience least apt to be reported by those sponsored by religious and community groups). Finding the weather to be as expected was most widely reported by refugees settling in Atlantic Canada. Notably, responses to this question were largely similar regardless of whether or not refugees received pre-arrival information about Canada.

Q.11a

In what ways was your experience similar from what you expected, once you arrived in Canada?

"When we arrived, we knew it was a Western country. Knew the language would be an obstacle. Knew we had to learn the language."

"We were relying on the support of our sponsor, and they did as expected in terms of helping us getting settled and driving us to the places where we needed to be."

"We knew that we'll be staying in hotels for a while. We knew that we're going to have difficulty in language."

"A lot of expectations and lived up to the expectation. Goal was to be a life without problems. High quality life with normal problems. Not having to worry about safety and security."

"We didn't have a lot of expectations. It was basically fear of the unknown and starting a new life. But after we joined an organization, they helped us to get settled in."

"There is no racism towards Muslim people and the people here are very nice and respectful."

"I had no expectations. I arrived when I was 16 years old; I was mostly excited to travel."

WHAT WAS DIFFERENT FROM EXPECTATIONS.

Refugees were more likely to identify aspects about life in Canada upon arrival that were different from what was anticipated, in most cases being worse than expected. Six in ten (62%) refugees interviewed identified one or more ways in which their initial experience was worse than expected once they arrived in Canada, although none of the specific themes were mentioned by more than one in five. The most common surprises included finding it harder to find employment (22%), weather that was colder or more extreme (15%), culture shock (11%), taking longer to learn English (9%), and the absence of social life (7%).

By comparison, just one in six (16%) identified aspects of life in Canada that turned out to be better than expected, such as finding society to be more multicultural and tolerant (9%), and an easier transition into a new life (4%). A similar proportion (14%) answered the question with something that was neither positive nor negative, while others provided no response (17%).

Those most apt to report unexpected *negative experiences* (notably the difficulty in finding employment) include older refugees, those with higher levels of education, those in the PSR stream (in contrast with the BVOR group, who were least apt to report such experiences), and those who are not Arab and/or not religious. Such experiences were somewhat less apt to be mentioned by refugees living in B.C. and Quebec. Receiving pre-arrival information about life in Canada did not appear to make a difference in the likelihood of finding unwelcome surprises upon arrival in the country.

The minority of refugees who identified unanticipated *positive* aspects about life in Canada tended to be the youngest (18 to 24 years of age), have no more than a high school diploma, were privately sponsored by friends or family members, and did not receive pre-arrival information.

How experience in Canada was *different* than expected (%)

Worse than expected (NET)		62
Harder to find employment / lack of Canadian experience a barrier		22
Weather colder / more extreme		15
Culture shock		11
Took longer to learn English		9
Lack of social life / socializing		7
Quality of life worse than expected		4
Cost of living is higher		4
Education system not as good / higher cost		4
Everything takes longer		3
Bureaucracy is more complex		3
Poor infrastructure		2
Other negative experiences		6
Better than expected (NET)		16
More multicultural / open-minded / religiously tolerant		9
Transition easier than expected		4
More freedom of speech		2
People more helpful		2
Other (neither better nor worse)		14
Nothing / no response		17

Q.11b

In what ways was your experience different from what you expected, once you arrived in Canada?

Q.11b

In what ways was your experience different from what you expected, once you arrived in Canada?

"The weather, no language (not able to communicate). Canadians are not social like Arabs, they keep to themselves, no Arabs in the area, the help from the immigration office was good at the start but they left us on our own after; we couldn't even talk to a doctor with no language."

"The weather mostly. The culture was very different than what we thought. I didn't expect that cities won't have a lot of people hanging around in the streets. The streets are so empty."

"There is a gap in regards to validating previous work experience. A lot of skilled immigrants and refugees are working dead end jobs that don't utilize their skills. Was overwhelmed with the size of the city. Felt small and insignificant in a massive city (Toronto)."

"No jobs available for my skills and experience in the area they put us in. Also, there is racism with employing Arabs."

"I was expecting to be put in camps when we arrive to Canada but we were treated nicely and put in hotels."

"I thought I would be able to open a business with \$30,000 in the same field I worked at back in Syria in clothing sales. Life is expensive, daily life is costly."

"I didn't know Toronto was multicultural Didn't expect people to be as accepting towards Syrians – treated very well by everyone (especially school counsellors and teachers). Heard about the states – thought Canada and the U.S. would be the same, thought people would be racist."

"I had fears about racism but it wasn't there. I thought the culture difference would be an obstacle but it wasn't. Everyone lives peacefully."

"The issue of living in Canada for someone coming from the Middle East. It gives a culture shock. No one can give that information. Full-time is considered a luxury. Expected rent to be less (in Victoria). Expected work to be less relaxed. Eight hours of work is exactly eight hours, unlike the Middle Eastern job culture."

"Thought there would be easier access to employment that fits education. Expected there would be a process in order to be entered to university or a training provider to earn a certificate similar to education in order to use prior experience to match Canadian specifications. Your past education becomes a paper hung on the wall; you have to start from zero. And for someone over 40 years old with a family and responsibilities, it's not practical and nearly impossible."

Biggest challenges upon arrival in Canada

Refugees faced many daunting challenges during their initial settlement period, the most common being limited or no fluency in English or French. Other notable challenges included such areas as finding employment and a place to live, culture shock, loneliness and isolation, and the cold weather.

The interview posed an open-ended question asking refugees about the single biggest challenge faced when they first arrived in Canada (the question was framed to record only one response, but participants could volunteer more than one, and many did so). Far and away the most common challenge identified by these refugees was one of language – having little or no fluency in English or French (61%). This was the predominant response across the refugee population, especially among the youngest age cohort (18 to 24), those with no more than a high school diploma, and those who came from rural areas.

Other primary challenges involved various practical necessities of settlement, including finding employment (15%), suitable accommodations (14%), means of transportation (6%), learning about public transit (5%), arranging for continuing education (4%) and dealing with government bureaucracy (3%).

Another theme encompassed the broader challenges of settling in an unfamiliar place, including culture shock (11%), difficulties with integration (10%), isolation and loneliness (9%), and a harsh climate (8%).

These types of challenges are reported across the refugee population, with some variation in the emphasis given to each. Difficulties with finding employment were most common among those settled in the Prairies and Ontario, among refugees ages 45 and older, those in the PSR stream, those with a university degree, and those who are not Muslim. Finding accommodations was most apt to be mentioned by Ontario residents, refugees ages 45 and older, and those with large households (6 or more family members).

Culture shock was most apt to present an initial challenge to refugees ages 18 to 24, while integration issues were mentioned by those in the GAR stream, and loneliness and isolation among those privately sponsored by family and friends. Difficulties in adapting to Canadian weather was most common for residents in the Prairie provinces.

Single biggest challenge when first arrived in Canada (%)

Language barrier	61
Practical necessities	
Finding employment	15
Finding housing / accommodation	14
Lack of transportation/vehicle	6
Learning about public transit	5
Arranging for continuing education	4
Dealing with government bureaucracy	3
Communication with private sponsor	3
Adjustment to the unfamiliar	
Culture shock	11
Challenges with integration	10
Isolation / loneliness	9
Harsh weather	8
Other challenges	9
None / no response	5

Q.13

Thinking back to when you first arrived in Canada, what was your single biggest challenge at that time?

Q.13

Thinking back to when you first arrived in Canada, what was your single biggest challenge at that time?

"Communication due to lack of language. Finding the right information and people to talk to. Finding the right government resources that are available to refugees and newcomers. Lack of follow-up by immigration and settlement officials. Lack of telephone numbers/emails to relevant agencies and organizations."

"How to buy groceries, deal with people and the society, find Halal places. Knowing how to go around the city using public transportation and other essentials."

"Biggest challenge was finding a house. Were told if we wanted to find our own we can. Stayed in the hotel for 40 days. Biggest challenge was constantly thinking about school registration for children."

"I was not able to find a job in my specialty (welding). I worked in a construction company while I didn't know how to speak English, we used signs to communicate. The language was my biggest challenge."

"Language and how to communicate with people. Luckily, lived in an area with lots of Syrians so made things somewhat easy. When first landed, didn't leave the house for two weeks, didn't know how outside looked like. The kids didn't go outside. Not knowing where to go and get things. I cried the first time I went to the mall. I didn't know what to do, I felt like a stranger and overwhelmed, it was a really rough time. I always lived in the countryside; I'm not a city girl. I wasn't used to the quickness of it and it was extremely overwhelming for me, I don't have a strong personality and was put in a situation where I had to adapt quickly. I didn't know anyone and I tried my best to stay positive."

"Figuring out where to start and what to do, my parents trying to find jobs, and me finding a school and get adapted, how to use the bus system, no help from sponsor, adjustment to a new life."

"Finding a house. Hard to get shopping done without a car. Didn't know how get to the places that serves Middle Eastern foods."

"I had to get certificate equivalency from the designated authorities, but I didn't have any luck because I graduated more than 10 years ago. Therefore, they asked me to enroll in a program to be able to be able to do the equivalency."

"The first two or three months I felt alone because I did not know anybody. like no social life. The English language was hard in the beginning."

"Biggest challenge was (as a teenager) having bigger responsibility – learned the language fast, did a lot of paperwork for the family. With a big family (10 in total) I took charge of taking care of bills/insurance/banking issues."

Settlement supports

Refugees identified a wide range of helpful supports in getting settled in Canada, encompassing both what was provided and who provided it. At the same time, a majority also spoke of what they wished had been provided, but was not offered or available at the time.

The study asked refugees about the types of supports they received when they first arrived in Canada, specifically what they found to be most helpful, as well as what was missing.

MOST HELPFUL SUPPORTS IN GETTING SETTLED IN CANADA. The study asked refugees to identify who or what was most helpful to them and their families when first getting settled in Canada (asked as an open-ended question). Many types of help were mentioned, but none by a significant proportion of the sample. Most forms of assistance fit into two broad categories. The first of these (mentioned by six in ten) addressed the basic necessities of getting started in a new place, including financial support (24%), language training (14%), help with finding housing (13%) and health care services (10%).

The second category focused on who provided the assistance (mentioned by close to eight in ten), and included sponsors (12%), newcomer services provided by government (10%) and other organizations (12%), the church or mosque community (9%), translators (7%), relatives (5%), friends (4%), social workers (3%), and employers or work colleagues (3%).

Some refugees pointed out the most valuable support was in the opportunity to interact with others in their new community, including sending their children to local schools (13%). A handful (4%) indicated they did not receive any supports when getting settled (with this group most likely to have a university degree).

The emphasis given to these different types of settlement supports varied somewhat across the refugee population, although the general pattern was largely the same. Some differences reflect predictable distinctions, such as language training being most prominent among refugees in Quebec, and accommodation support mentioned by those with larger households and those living in Atlantic Canada.

Most helpful supports when getting settled in Canada (%)

Basic necessities	
Financial support	24
Language training	14
Accommodation / housing	13
Health / medical care	10
Type of provider	
Sponsor	12
Newcomer services – government	10
Newcomer services – other org.	12
Community services / supports	10
Church / mosque community	9
Translators	7
Relatives	5
Friends	4
Social workers	3
Employees / work colleagues	3

Q.16

Looking back on your experiences when first getting settled in Canada, who or what were the most helpful supports to you and your family in getting settled in the country and your local community?

SUPPORTS THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN HELPFUL.

Refugees were also asked what types of support *they wished they would have received*, but were not available when they first arrived in Canada (again, in an open-ended format). Six in ten offered a response to this question, ranging across 17 types of support, none of which was mentioned by more than one in six. At the top of the list was assistance with employment (15%), followed by community-level settlement services (11%), help with accommodation (11%) and integration supports (9%). Other categories (named by 6% or fewer each) included financial assistance, language training, help in navigating Canadian laws and bureaucracy, education, equivalency requirements, emotional support, transportation and translation services. Notably, about four in ten refugees interviewed said there was no type of needed support that was not available (33%), or did not otherwise provide a response to the question (9%).

As with most helpful supports, the ones that refugees wished they had received are also broadly similar across the refugee population. Those most apt to identify *any type* of missed assistance include refugees with a post-secondary education, those in households with three to five people, and men (65% identified one or more categories, compared with 52% of women). BVOR refugees (44%) were less likely to identify any type of missing support, in comparison with those in the GAR (58%) and PSR (62%) streams. GAR refugees were among those most apt to mention missing help with accommodation support; while PSR refugees stand out in identifying help with employment (along with BVOR refugees), community-level settlement services, navigating Canadian laws and bureaucracy, and education.

What supports do you wish you had but didn't receive?

(%)

Employment support	15
Community-level settlement services	11
Accommodation support	11
Integration support	9
Financial support	6
Language training	6
Navigating laws / bureaucracy	6
Education support	6
Equivalency support	5
Emotional support	5
Transportation support	4
Translation services	3
Other types of support	13
None / no support	42

Q.17

What types of support did you wish you had, but were not available when you first arrived in Canada?

Q.17

What types of support did you wish you had, but were not available when you first arrived in Canada?

"We were only given the options of two houses Lack of options with houses – one was far and needed a car and the other was downtown closer to hospital but smaller. Felt like we were forced to use certain services – were not given options in banks for example. Were left alone after the first two months, no follow up. Needed a car, volunteers couldn't drive them all the time. Public transportation in a small town is unreliable and infrequent."

"Somebody to tell us what to do exactly regarding our degrees so we can work, nobody knew how to answer these questions, not even at the university, specifically in my field of accounting, I didn't have a Canadian degree or experience and I felt stuck."

"Financial support at the start. When we arrived, we had no money for two weeks. There were times when I needed to buy food for my kids because they didn't like the food provided, not used to eating these things, and I couldn't."

"We wished to have an interpreter to make it easy for us to communicate."

"A lot of employers avoid hiring Syrians and they say it's about the language, although it's actually hidden racism. I want the organizers to ask themselves a question: how many Syrians now speak English very well? How many Syrians are now working and how many are unemployed? This will show them how well the system works. I wish we had a private sponsorship because it would have been more helpful in finding jobs."

"Emotional support, they provided us only one month with a person to help then after the month left us alone."

"I wish they told us before coming here about all the available services and organizations specialized in helping newcomers so I don't have to spend a lot of time looking for them by myself. There was no coordination between communities that work with churches and other settlement services."

"I had a great group to help all the time, so I was missing nothing."

Private sponsor support

Privately sponsored refugees received many forms of assistance, most commonly in finding housing, opening bank accounts and arranging transportation. For a majority – but not all – sponsor support was deemed essential to getting settled in Canada, and three-quarters remain in touch with their sponsors.

SPONSOR TYPE. More than four in ten of the refugees arriving in Canada through the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Initiative were sponsored privately by Canadian citizens and permanent residents in a volunteer capacity, mostly through the PSR stream, with some through the BVOR program. Of the 305 refugees interviewed for this study, 135 (44%) were privately sponsored through one of these two admission categories.

Of this group, almost half (46%) were sponsored by a religious organization (e.g., church, mosque, synagogue), with other sponsor categories including groups of private individuals (sometimes called a “group of 5”) (19%), family members (15%) or friends (9%) of the refugee, and other types of community organizations (6%). Almost all of the BVOR refugees were sponsored by religious organizations or groups of private individuals, while the PSR group spanned all of the sponsor categories.

Private sponsor type

By admission category (%)

SPONSOR TYPE	TOTAL	PSR	BVOR
Religious organization	46	43	62
Group of private individuals	19	18	23
Family members	15	17	5
Friends	9	11	–
Community organization	6	6	7

Q.19

Which of the following best describes your private sponsor?

TYPES OF ASSISTANCE PROVIDED. Private sponsors are expected to play an active role in helping refugees establish themselves during their first year in Canada, including financial support through funds raised in advance to cover housing and other costs of living. The extent of this support and assistance varied by individual, but a majority of refugees reported (from a list provided) receiving five of eight essential types of help getting settled, the most common being assistance in finding housing (70%), opening a bank account (68%), help with transportation (e.g., borrowing a vehicle or receiving rides to appointments) (68%), accessing health care (67%) and accessing language training (63%). Somewhat fewer say they received help in finding employment (47%), finding schools for children (40%), and help with identifying and enrolling in education or courses (35%).

Some refugees also volunteered other forms of support from their private sponsors (not listed in the question), such as emotional and social support (e.g., social visits and entertainment activities) (9%), financial support (9%), household items (e.g., phone, winter clothing) (4%), and help with paperwork and documents (4%). Notably, one in ten from this group indicated that either their sponsor did not provide any help (5%) or they did not need any (4%) (these refugees are most likely to be ages 45 and older, sponsored by friends or family, non-Arab, and with a university degree).

Refugees were more likely to report receiving the primary forms of settlement assistance if they had BVOR sponsors (versus PSR), large households (6 or more members) and no more than a high school education. Refugees settled in Ontario are somewhat less apt than those living elsewhere to indicate they received each of these forms of assistance from their sponsor.

Types of assistance produced by private sponsor

(%)

Finding housing	70
Opening a bank account	68
Transportation (borrowing vehicle, rides)	68
Accessing health care	67
Accessing language training	63
Finding employment	47
Finding schools for children	40
Accessing educational courses	35
Volunteered	
Emotional support / social activities	9
Financial support	9
Household items (phone, clothing)	4
Help with paperwork / documents	4
Other type of help	3
Did not receive any help	5
Support offered but not taken	4

Q.20b

In which of the following areas did you receive assistance, guidance or support from your private sponsor in helping you and your family get settled?

MOST HELPFUL TYPE OF PRIVATE SPONSOR

SUPPORT. Among the types of settlement support provided by private sponsors, which of these did refugees find to be most helpful? (The question was posed in an open-ended format, and framed to ask for a single response, but some chose to give more than one). Refugees were most likely to say that the most valuable help they received was in finding accommodations and housing (26%), or emotional or moral support (22%), followed by financial support (11%) and transportation support (11%). Smaller proportions mentioned that they most appreciated sponsors helping them or family members come to Canada; or help with employment, language training, education, newcomer information (e.g., child benefits) or getting health care.

Responses to this question are broadly similar between the privately sponsored refugee groups. BVOR refugees (and especially those sponsored by private individuals) were more likely to emphasize the emotional and moral support they received, while those in the PSR group emphasized the financial and employment help provided by their sponsors.

Most helpful type of sponsor support

(%)

Accommodation support	26
Emotional support	22
Financial support	11
Transportation support	11
Sponsoring myself / family	9
Employment support	7
Language support	7
Educational support (for adults)	6
Newcomer information	6
Navigating Canadian systems / bureaucracy	6
Integration support	5
Access to health care	5
Opening bank account	4
Other forms of support	6

Q.21

Thinking about what your sponsor provided, what did you find to be most helpful?

Q.21

Thinking about what your sponsor provided, what did you find to be most helpful?

"They were always encouraging us, they always said that we're here for you, if you need anything any time just call, don't give up. That made us feel at ease and that we are supported; it gave us self-confidence and a spirit to do anything we want."

"Providing a good housing since the day we came. It had good space and it was enough for us. The friendly and supportive way of communication with us that helped us to integrate faster with the society."

"Financial was the most important one, especially when you come and don't have a job."

"Moral support. Even showed us where and how to shop for groceries (Western-style shopping was different). How to navigate daily life and access health care. Child support benefits and schools."

LEAST HELPFUL TYPE OF SUPPORT. Refugees were also asked what types of support they found to be least helpful in establishing themselves in their new lives (also asked in an open-ended format). Notably, about eight in ten of those interviewed did not have anything to say about this, indicating either there was nothing in particular that wasn't helpful (61%) or otherwise did not offer a response (17%).

Those who provided an affirmative response to this question did so by identifying areas in which they found the support to be inadequate to their needs (rather than something that was unwelcome or not needed). This included a lack of wrap-around support (6%), the absence of clear or useful information (5%), lack of employment support (5%) or insufficient financial help (4%).

Q.22

And what, if anything, did you find to be least helpful? (private sponsor support)

"In many cases they were giving us misleading information which delayed the process in getting lot of services on time especially for my sisters. It was waste of time."

"No information on tenant laws and rent. Ended up paying a lot of money in the first three months in rent (tens of thousands of dollars). Wished the sponsor got involved earlier to help them find a place to live, as they ended up relying on family members here to help. Sponsor only gave pointers. . . Would have liked to know what the responsibilities of the sponsor are as they were not clear."

"I thought they would help me in enrolling to ESL courses, driving me around to make me familiar with the city. I wanted just some basic stuff to get me started but I didn't receive anything."

IMPORTANCE OF SPONSOR SUPPORT. Apart from the various types of assistance provided by sponsors, most refugees found the support they received to be very important in helping them get settled in their first year in Canada. A majority (56%) of refugees interviewed said their sponsor support was “essential and that they/their family could not have managed without it.” One in four (24%) indicated the sponsor support was very helpful, but they could have managed if they had to; while another 13 percent judged the sponsor support to be of some help, but they could have managed without it, with little difficulty.

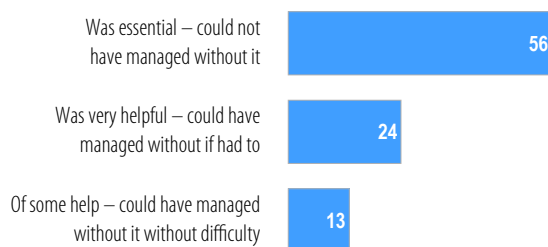
For whom was sponsor support most likely to be essential? This response was most widely voiced by BVOR-sponsored refugees (72% versus 51% in the PSR group), those with large households (88%), those with no more than a high school education (73%), those living in Western Canada (82%), and those ages 35 to 44 (73%). This view was also more evident among women (65% versus 47% of men), those of Arab identity (61% versus 37% of others) and those who are Muslim (66% versus 47% of others). Refugees most apt to say they could have managed without sponsor support include those living in Quebec (20%), and those with a college or trade school diploma (31%).

Another way to measure the impact of private sponsor support is how effectively sponsors managed to balance the amount of advice and guidance provided to refugees. Anecdotal evidence from other sources revealed some refugees felt their sponsors were not providing enough help, while others experienced the opposite – sponsors that “did too much” in ways that made them feel over-managed and patronized.

Among the refugees interviewed for this study, seven in ten (71%) judged the amount of advice and guidance to be “just right”, with the remainder indicating it was either less than they needed (19%) or more than they needed (8%).

The desired level of sponsor support was reported by a majority of refugees in all identified subgroups, but most widely noted among BVOR refugees (81% versus 68% among the PSR group), those with large households (89%), those with no more than a high school diploma (74%) and those who are Muslim (77%).

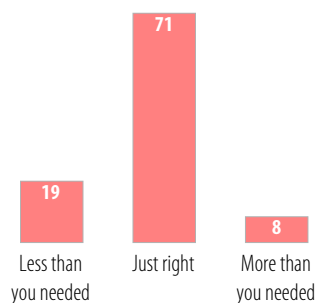
Importance of support provided by private sponsor (%)



Q.23b

Which one of the following statements best describes the importance of the support provided by your private sponsor?

Amount of advice and guidance received from private sponsor



Q.23

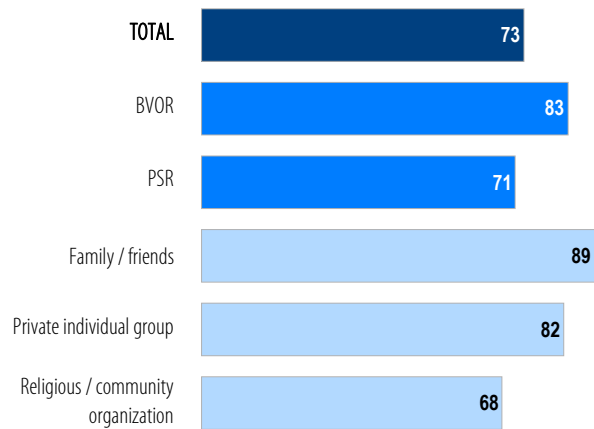
Would you say the amount of advice and guidance provided by your private sponsor was ... ?

Those most apt to say they received *less* advice and guidance than needed include those living in Ontario (27%), those 18 to 24 years of age (26%), those sponsored by family and friends (27%), those who are not Arab (25%), those with a university degree (25%), and those who are struggling financially (44%). Refugees who felt they received *more* from their sponsors than they wanted were more apt to be sponsored by a private group (22%) rather than religious/other organizations (4%), and family or friends (5%).

An additional indicator of the significance of private sponsorship is whether refugees chose to maintain a connection with their sponsors once the formal sponsorship period ended.¹¹ Three-quarters (73%) of refugees interviewed reported they are still in contact with their sponsor, five to six years after their arrival in Canada. This is somewhat more likely to be the case for BVOR (83%) than PSR (71%) groups, but is especially prevalent among those sponsored by family or friends (89%) (as would be expected, given the family connection).

Still in contact with your sponsor

Yes, by sponsor type (%)



Q.24

Are you still in contact with your sponsor?

¹¹ This is tangible indicator of a positive sponsor-refugee relationship, and also that sponsors continue to serve as a social connection.

Government services support

Refugees – especially in the GAR stream – reported receiving settlement assistance through a range of government services, most noticeably language training and access to health care.

The study also asked refugees about assistance, guidance and support provided through government services. This was the primary form of support available to refugees in the GAR stream, but some services were also available to those who were privately sponsored.

TYPES OF GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE PROVIDED.

Participants were asked which of eight types of assistance they received from government services in helping them get settled in Canada, and – not surprisingly – most were widely used.

Refugees were most likely to cite using services to access language training (79%) and health care (72%), as well as opening bank accounts (51%), finding schools for children (51%), finding housing (46%) and help with transportation needs (41%). Others mentioned help in finding educational courses (36%) and finding employment (24%), while another 17 percent volunteered other forms of support provided through government, such as financial support, household items and translation services.

As would be expected, these forms of assistance were most widely reported by refugees in the GAR admission category, but some are also mentioned by significant proportions of PSR and BVOR refugees (notably language training and health care).

Types of assistance provided through government services (%)

Accessing language training	79
Accessing health care	72
Opening a bank account	51
Finding schools for children	51
Finding housing	46
Transportation (borrowing vehicle, rides)	41
Accessing educational courses	36
Finding employment	24
Volunteered	
Financial support	7
Household items (phone, clothing)	3
Other type of help	6

Q.25b

In which of the following areas did you receive assistance, guidance or support from government services in helping you and your family get settled?

MOST HELPFUL TYPE OF GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE.

When asked which services from government proved to be most helpful (asked in an open-ended format), refugees identified language classes and related supports (27%), health and dental care (24%), and financial support (22%). Fewer mentioned such areas as educational support for adults (11%), housing (10%), schooling for children (9%), employment (7%) and child benefits (5%). One in ten indicated they did not receive any assistance from government (7%) or did not provide a response to the question (5%).

GAR stream refugees were more likely than those who were privately sponsored to identify these areas as being most helpful, except in the case of language training and employment supports. Language training was most widely mentioned by refugees living in Quebec (48%), and least so in Ontario (22%) and Atlantic Canada (16%).

Most helpful type of government support (%)

Language classes / support	27
Health / dental care	24
Financial support	22
Educational support (for adults)	11
Housing support	10
Educational support (for children)	9
Employment support / resources	7
General provision of information	6
Child benefits	5
Immigration support (air fare, translators)	5
Required documentation	4
Other types of support	7
Did not receive government support	7
No response	5

Q.26

Thinking about the services the government provided, what did you find to be most helpful?

Q.26

Thinking about the services the government provided, what did you find to be most helpful?

"It's a chain: everything was important to get us settled. Everything from financial support all the way to small things to opening a bank account helped significantly."

"Health care and also financial support from the government for people with chronic illnesses like my husband who can't work. The government supported us financially."

"They taught us English and they enrolled me in House Renovation Apprenticeship which helped me to find a job in this field."

"The warm welcome at the airport when we first arrived. They gave us permanent residency on the spot and said this country is your country now."

LEAST HELPFUL TYPE OF GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE.

As with private sponsor support, relatively few refugees identified any type of government assistance that they found to be of little or no help in getting settled. About seven in ten did not name anything that was not helpful (47%) or did not offer a response to the question (21%).

Those who mentioned some form of government assistance that was least helpful focused on where they found the support to be inadequate (as was the case with private sponsor support). The most often cited areas included lack of help with finding employment (7%), government employees who lacked the required knowledge (5%), inadequate support for language training (4%) and lack of financial support (3%). Others emphasized a more general lack of required information.

Q.27

And what, if anything, did you find to be least helpful? (government services)

"The English language school is useless, a waste of time; it takes years and you get out with almost nothing, I am translating and helping people who graduated from these schools now."

"I tried to find a job through them, they were not very effective, they always find you jobs at McDonald's or Loblaws. Not that there's anything wrong with these jobs, but they don't match your profile or resume and these positions do not give you the opportunity to get promoted and improve your lifestyle. Also, I found that the vast majority of people working in governmental offices are clueless and they don't have a clear picture with all the applications and they lack experience."

"Lack of financial support for families with one child made it difficult to support household bills and needs without working right away."

"Immigration/refugee officials. Some were rude and did not give enough information. Would drop them off and leave them alone. Dealing with the staff was stressful and the information was contradictory. I did not realize I was entitled to financial aid and other benefits like dental."



Current Life in Canada

The largest section of the interview focused on refugees' current life in Canada, encompassing general well-being (e.g., life satisfaction, sense of belonging), and specific domains such as housing, health and employment.

Satisfaction with life in Canada today

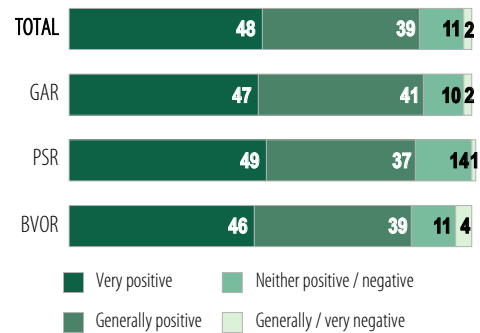
Most Syrian refugees were positive about their current life in Canada. Satisfaction levels were highest in terms of feeling safe and secure, being accepted by the local community, and with the local schools. Refugees were least apt to be satisfied with their financial security and employment situation.

OVERALL QUALITY OF LIFE IN CANADA. How are refugees feeling today about their life in Canada, now five to six years after arrival? Among those interviewed, the general sentiment was overwhelmingly good. Close to half (48%) said they feel *very positive* about living in Canada, with another 39 percent describing it as *somewhat positive*. One in ten (11%) reported feeling neither positive nor negative (or perhaps some of both), while very few (2%) said their overall feeling was negative.

The results of this question were strikingly similar across refugee subgroups. Very positive feelings were somewhat more evident among those in the oldest age cohort (45 and over) (54%) and those who currently have fully adequate household incomes (56%). The likelihood of describing their life in Canada as very positive was essentially the same by region, community size, admission category or sponsor type, gender, ethnic background and religion. Those most apt to provide an equivocal or negative response include refugees experiencing the most financial hardship (27%), those 25 to 34 years of age (20%) and those living in B.C. (19%).

How do you feel overall about living in Canada today

By admission category (%)



Q.28

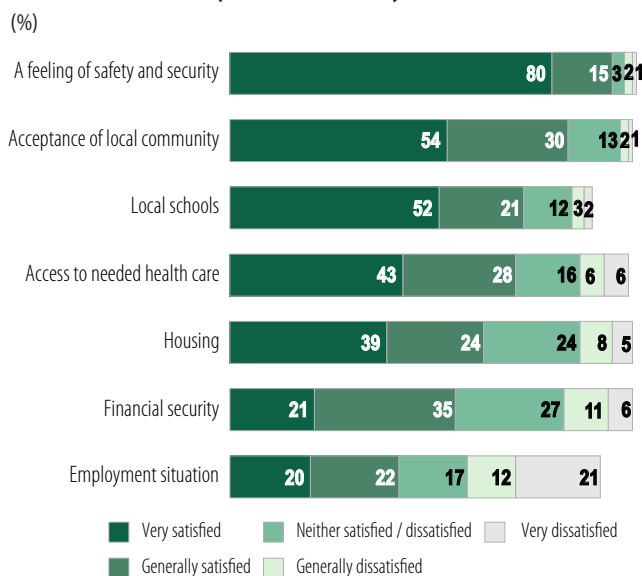
Now that you have been in the country for a few years, how do you feel overall about living in Canada?

SATISFACTION WITH SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF LIFE

TODAY. Refugees were also asked to rate their level of satisfaction with seven aspects of their life today. Refugees were most positive about having a *feeling of safety and security*, with almost everyone indicating they were very (80%) or generally (15%) satisfied, compared with only three percent who expressed dissatisfaction. Most also expressed satisfaction with their lives in terms of *acceptance by the local community* (84% very or generally satisfied) and *local schools* (73%); while smaller majorities were positive about *access to the health care services they need* (71%) and their *housing* (63%), in both cases with just over one in ten expressing dissatisfaction. Refugees were least apt to say they are very or somewhat satisfied with their *financial security* (56%) and their *employment situation* (42%).

Satisfaction with these aspects of life was broadly similar across the refugee population, but some differences were evident based on province of residence, age, admission category and household financial adequacy (see table below). As might be expected, whether or not refugees had enough income to live on was a primary determinant of how they were feeling about their financial security and employment situation.

Satisfaction with aspects of life today



Q.29a-g

How satisfied are you with each of the following aspects of your life today?

Satisfaction with aspects of life in Canada

Group differences

ASPECT	MORE SATISFIED	LESS SATISFIED
A feeling of safety & security	Ontario, Quebec, 1-2 person households, BVOR	British Columbia, financial hardship
Acceptance by local community	Ages 45 +, BVOR (esp. private individual sponsor)	Ages 18-24, financial hardship
Local schools	All provinces, ages 45 +, BVOR	—
Access to needed health care	Prairie provinces, ages 45 +, GAR	Quebec, financial hardship
Housing	Ages 45 +, 1-2 person households, BVOR, financially secure	British Columbia, GAR, financial hardship
Financial security	Quebec, Atlantic provinces, financially secure	Financial hardship
Employment situation	Quebec, 18-24, private group sponsorship, high school diploma	GAR, family / friend sponsorship, financial hardship

Q.29a-g

How satisfied are you with each of the following aspects of your life today?

WHAT PREDICTS OVERALL LIFE SATISFACTION?

What makes the most difference in determining refugees' overall satisfaction with their current lives in Canada? This question was explored through multivariate analysis that incorporated a wide range of factors that might be important predictors, including demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, region), employment and household income, social and family connections, experiences with discrimination, and satisfaction with specific aspects of their lives. The results of this analysis revealed that, among all the factors considered, the only one to emerge as statistically significant was satisfaction with one's current housing, and that the strength of this link was not especially strong.

What this suggests is that how these refugees judge their overall quality of life in Canada cannot be clearly explained by specific circumstances and experiences, such as their employment status, income, community supports or social networks. There may be, of course, other factors that make a difference that were not covered in this research. In any case, the potential for predicting quality of life among this group was limited by the fact that almost everyone was generally, if not very, positive about their lives in Canada.

General perspectives on living in Canada

Refugees most appreciate life in Canada for its safety and security, and human rights and freedoms. What they liked least is the cold weather, the unfamiliar culture, and being separated from family and friends. More than nine in ten were glad, in retrospect, they settled in Canada.

In addition to asking about current life circumstances, the study also posed broader questions about how refugees view living in Canada: what they liked best and least, if they were glad they came, and what advice they might offer to future refugees following behind them.

WHAT IS BEST ABOUT LIVING IN CANADA. Refugees were asked (in an open-ended question) what they like most about living in Canada. Almost everyone identified one or more aspects, but the two predominant themes were the safety, security and/or stability they have experienced since arriving from the Middle East (44%), and the existence of human rights protecting basic freedoms (e.g., speech, religion) and equality of treatment (38%). Others appreciated what they saw as a culture in Canada that is welcoming, kind and or open (22%), a stable government and rule of law (14%), good opportunities for the future (for themselves and their children) (12%), educational opportunities (12%), access to services such as housing and health care (9%), a sense of respect (8%) and the absence of racism (8%).

The relative emphasis given to these positive aspects about living in Canada was similar across the refugee population, with some variation. Mention of safety and security was most prominent among refugees with private sponsors, and especially those sponsored by private individuals, as well as those with a university degree. Human rights were most apt to be appreciated among Quebec residents and those with a university degree; while the welcoming culture was especially noted by those living in Atlantic Canada and those who are older.

What do you like *most* about living in Canada?

(%)

Safety / security / stability	44
Human rights (equality, freedoms)	38
Canadian culture (freedom / accepting)	22
Government / Rule of Law	14
Good opportunities for the future	12
Educational opportunities	12
Access to services (health, housing)	9
Diversity / no racism	8
Respect	8
Quality of life / work-life balance	8
Employment opportunities	7
Outdoor recreation opportunities	5
Other positive aspects	5

Q.30

What do you like most about living in Canada?

Q.30

What do you like most about living in Canada?

"Everyone is subject to the law. Sometimes the issue is with the law itself but at least everyone is subject to it. People are friendly."

"Living without having to worry about starvation, the government always helps if needed. Also, the social equality."

"Feeling good about my kids' future, good schools and jobs, they can depend on themselves without being dependent on their parents."

"That Canada has a very diverse community, friendly people, high level of safety, freedom, and the role of Canada as a nation in the world as well."

"It's an open-minded country. You have the freedom of speech; you can talk to officials and question them and they would be kind to you."

"I felt something I never felt back home, you're free with your personality and dress; no matter what you do, and no one cares about what you do, you have complete freedom to be yourself. Back in Syria, I had to iron my husband's shirt every day, since I landed here, I never ironed a shirt once! People are all the same, there is no separation of classes. You have the same value as a Member of Parliament or the Prime Minister."

"There is no racism here and humans have value here. We are treated very good and respected."

"Social and economic stability. Anyone who works faithfully can find good results. There is fairness in the distribution of wealth and opportunities."

"The most thing I like here is the kindness of the Canadian people and the way that they are accepting. Generally, life in Canada is very good and the job market is good."

"Education: it's a huge difference between here and Syria. Parents graduated from University in Syria and couldn't work in their field. Whereas here there are no restrictions on where to work."

WHAT IS LIKED LEAST ABOUT LIVING IN CANADA.

Refugees were also asked about what they liked least about living in Canada. Perhaps not surprisingly, the most common response was the weather (32%), followed by aspects pertaining to their displacement – the fact that it is a different culture or lifestyle than what they were accustomed to (19%), and being separated from family and others in their social networks (14%).

Also not liked were a number of challenging aspects about living in Canada, such as the lack of employment opportunities (including the inability to transfer employment credentials (15%)), the high cost of living (10%), problems in accessing health care (9%), lack of clarity around benefits and government rules (6%), and racism (4%). One in ten did not identify anything they liked least (6%) or otherwise did not provide a response (6%).

Among refugees interviewed, weather is most likely to be seen as the worst part of living in Canada among those living in Atlantic Canada (and least so in B.C.), as well as by those who did not receive any pre-arrival information about life in Canada. Difficulties with adapting to a different culture was most apt to be mentioned by B.C. residents and those who grew up mostly in rural communities; while employment challenges were emphasized by Atlantic Canadian residents, refugees sponsored by family or friends, or private individuals, and those with a post-secondary education. Finally, those disliking the high cost of living were most likely to live in Ontario.

What do you like *least* about living in Canada?

(%)

Canadian weather / climate	32
Different / unfamiliar culture and lifestyle	19
Not being near family / friends	14
Lack of employment opportunities	15
High cost of living	10
Health care system (wait times)	9
Lack of clarity around rules / laws (child benefits)	6
Racism	4
Other negative aspects	6
Nothing / no response	12

Q.31

And what do you like least about living in Canada?

Q.31

And what do you like least about living in Canada?

"Weather is very harsh. If I have a chance to live in a warmer place like Vancouver, I would move."

"Distance, being physically far away from homeland, not as easy to travel there to visit my mom and other sister (especially with anxiety of not having my citizenship). Feeling homesick and yearning for home."

"Finding work is difficult. I have a friend who came at the same time, he opened a business but it only lasted three months because it wasn't supported at all by the government."

"Government dealing is slow: applied for citizenship and five years in, still not a citizen. Other people who landed at the same time got theirs and it's causing a lot of stress to the family. Bureaucratic delays."

"Social life, everyone is on their own, people are afraid to interact with each other, Maybe our traditions are different. We like social life and to participate in it often. There are no social visits, or hardly any."

"Too much political correctness that exists sometimes, with the challenges to understand the differences in cultures; general culture is a little too politically correct; it hinders – everyone is too easily offended."

"Maybe it's just Toronto, but everything is expensive, insurance, cost of living."

"Health care, it takes a lot of time and waiting. Even for a family doctor, it takes a week to get an appointment, then takes months to see a specialist. The weather is depressing and dangerous to move around in the snow."

"That they give the child a lot of the freedom, like sometimes I feel there are no limits."

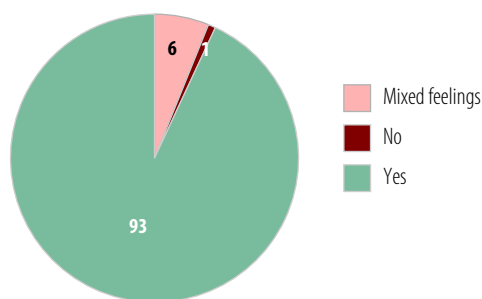
WAS MOVING TO CANADA THE RIGHT THING TO DO? How do refugees feel about choosing Canada as a destination several years back?¹² The problems and challenges encountered notwithstanding, almost all (93%) of the refugees interviewed said, looking back, they were glad they came to Canada. Of the remainder, six percent expressed mixed feelings about the decision, while fewer than one percent (two individuals) expressed clear regret, and another three refugees did not offer a response to the question.

This positive sentiment about coming to Canada is evident across the population, voiced by at least nine in ten in all identifiable subgroups, with the exception of B.C. residents (85% versus 12% expressing mixed feelings).

ADVICE FOR FUTURE REFUGEES. At the end of the interview, refugees were asked to look back on their experience and consider if there was one piece of advice they would offer to future refugees from Syria coming to Canada (asked as an open-ended question). Almost everyone interviewed offered at least one response, with most fitting into one of nine themes. The two most common types of advice were to work hard and/or be motivated (e.g., not just staying at home) (47%) and learning the language (English or French) as soon as possible (e.g., before arrival if possible) (43%).

Others emphasized the importance of looking for work right away (25%), following Canadians laws and systems (19%), getting to know Canadians in their community (15%), looking forward (rather than dwelling in the past (14%)), and sorting out educational credentials and degree equivalency as soon as possible (12%). One in ten (12%) refugees offered the advice that settling in Canada would be hard at first but would improve with time; while smaller proportions mentioned such tips as volunteering to help with integration, bringing funds and settling in one community rather than moving around.

Are you glad you came to Canada? (%)



Q.32
Looking back, are you glad you came to Canada?

Advice for future Syrian refugees coming to Canada (%)

Work hard / be motivated	47
Learn the language as soon as possible	43
Look for work right away	25
Follow Canadian laws / integrate	19
Get to know Canadians in your community	15
Always look forward / don't dwell on the past	14
Get degree equivalency right away	12
Will be hard at first, but will improve	12
Other advice	14

Q.103b
Looking back on your experience, is there one piece of advice you would offer to refugees from Syria coming to Canada?

¹² How much choice did these refugees have in where to relocate at the time they made the decision to emigrate to Canada? The available options likely varied by people's circumstances (where they were currently living, location of family members abroad), but for all there was a point at which a decision was made to go to Canada as a refugee.

Q.103b

Looking back on your experience, is there one piece of advice you would offer to refugees from Syria coming to Canada?

"If you live in Canada, you have to live like a Canadian. Don't bring your culture and demand everyone to live like you."

"To try to learn the language before coming here. Also, try to learn a skill if they don't have one, to be able to find a job here."

"The most important thing is to work on anything that they're offered and they can develop their skills with work. They should respect and obey the laws."

"To learn the language first. Read about the country and find out all you can about its traditions. Prepare yourself for everything and all hardships. Try to go somewhere where you know people so it's not as hard. Don't rely too much on the people around you, start doing things yourself."

"Try to stay away from your own community and mingle with other people in society, this will help them to learn the language better and understand the way of life here. Also, don't have a lot of kids; now the government is paying for it but in the future they'll be over 18 and you'll be stuck."

"The women shouldn't depend on their men 100% here. They need to learn how to drive, learn the language, get to know the country and their area, depend more on themselves."

"I found that whoever wants to find employment, they should have a volunteering experience in their specialty just to have the Canadian experience. Always find employment, it's good for your health and for your future and retirement."

"Don't just come and sit home. I advise you to come and start an investment as soon as you can; networking and building friendships come with time so don't focus on that and distract yourselves. Investments you make when you first come will shape your life."

"This is a new life and needs a lot of patience to find yourselves in it. The government helps but we need to be united and help each other to make it here."

"The most important thing is to manage expectations. Realize that no country is perfect. You will have normal problems versus having problems about safety and security. Canada is not a perfect country, but it's a good country with a self-correcting system that always corrects itself. You can do what you want in life, but you need to work hard, like anywhere, but here you have the tools for success."

Housing

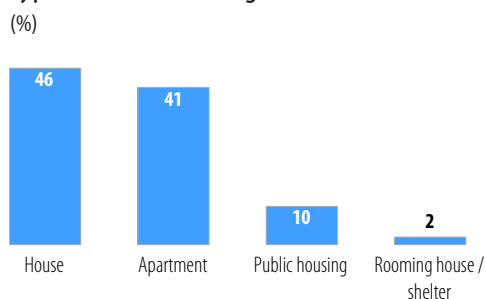
Most refugees live in either houses or apartments, with a small proportion relying on public housing. In addition to support provided by government and sponsors, many took additional steps to find housing, including online searches, and networking through friends, acquaintances and other contacts.

TYPE OF HOUSING. The study asked refugees about their current housing. Most reported living either in a house (single family dwelling) (46%) or an apartment (41%), with another 10 percent residing in public housing, and two percent in something less permanent (shelter or rooming house). Living in a house is most common among refugees living in the Prairies (63%) and Atlantic Canada (57%), among those 18 to 24 years of age (58%), and those in households with six or more people (66%). Public housing was most apt to be reported by B.C. residents (34%).

Satisfaction with current housing was most widespread among refugees living in single family houses (46%) in comparison with those living in apartments (30%), with the latter group most apt to say they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Those living in public housing were more likely than not to express satisfaction (39%) than dissatisfaction (20%).

STEPS TAKEN TO FIND HOUSING. The study asked refugees what steps they took, if any, to find housing apart from any assistance and supports provided by government agencies, sponsors and others. The most common strategies included online searches (27%), seeking help from family, friends and acquaintances (24%), or from organizations in their communities (e.g., YMCA) (19%). Others contacted real estate agents (8%), their mosque (6%), or specific buildings and property managers (5%). One in four refugees interviewed reported not taking any additional steps to find the housing they needed.

Type of current housing



Q.33

I would like to ask about your housing. Which of the following best describes where you currently live?

Steps taken to find housing

Online searches	27
Contact friends / family / acquaintances	24
Contact community organizations	19
Real estate agent	8
Mosque	6
Contact property management / building	5
Other steps	1
None / no response	23

Q.34

Apart from any assistance and supports you received from government agencies, sponsors and others, what steps, if any?

Household income

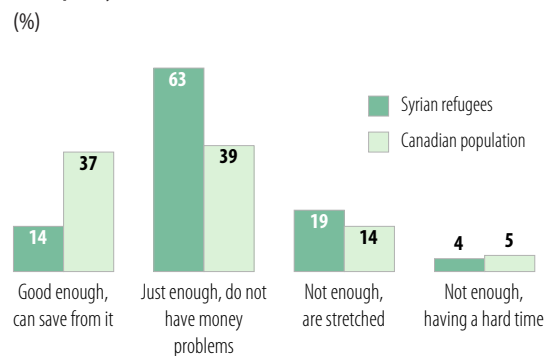
Most refugees said they have enough household income to live on without major problems, but relatively few were able to save much of what they earn or receive. One in four reported not having enough to cover living costs, with some experiencing financial hardship.

ADEQUACY OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME. The research included one measure of income and finances, an established benchmark indicator widely used in Environics Institute surveys that focuses on the adequacy of household income upon which to live.¹³ For the refugee population, about one in six (14%) reported their household income was “good enough and they were able to save from it”, and a majority (63%) indicated it was “just enough so that they did not have major problems.” For the remaining quarter, their household income was not enough to live on and feeling stretched (19%), or were having a hard time (4%) (this last category reflecting financial hardship).

To place these results in perspective, they can be compared with the financial adequacy of the Canadian population-at-large, as measured on a national survey conducted by the Environics Institute in Spring 2021.¹⁴ Canadians as a whole are almost three times as likely as Syrian refugees to report having household incomes that are good enough and they can save from it (37%), compared with about half as many who say their incomes are not enough to live on (19%).

Among refugees, those who report having enough income and can save from it are most likely to be living in Quebec or Atlantic Canada (21% each), in one to two person households (23%), BVOR-sponsored (23%) and/or by religious or community groups (21%), and men (20% versus 9% of women). Refugees most apt to say their income is *not enough* to live on include those 35 to 44 years of age (29%) and those with a university degree (31%). As outlined in previous sections of this report, financial adequacy has a noticeable impact on how refugees experience life in Canada, in terms of life satisfaction and related dimensions.

Adequacy of household income



Q.103

Which of the following statements best describes your total household income at the present time?

¹³ This type of measure has proven more useful than ones that record income in dollar amounts, which can be misleading since they do not factor in lifecycle differences, debt and other circumstances (e.g., that may place some high income household in financial distress).

¹⁴ Race Relations in Canada 2021 Survey. Environics Institute for Survey Research

Language fluency

Few Syrian refugees arriving in Canada had any functioning fluency in English or French – but five to six years later, more than six in ten rated their ability to listen, speak, read and write to be excellent or good. The greatest gains were made by younger refugees and those with a high school diploma.

The findings from this study confirm that limited fluency in English or French was among the most significant challenges facing Syrian refugees in getting established in Canada.

The research asked refugees about their fluency in either language, first upon arrival and then currently, revealing that most made substantial progress over time in mastering the language(s).

When they arrived in Canada, fewer than one in five of those interviewed considered their fluency of English or French – specifically in terms of listening, speaking, reading and writing – to be either excellent or good, compared with roughly six in ten who rated it as poor or nonexistent.¹⁵

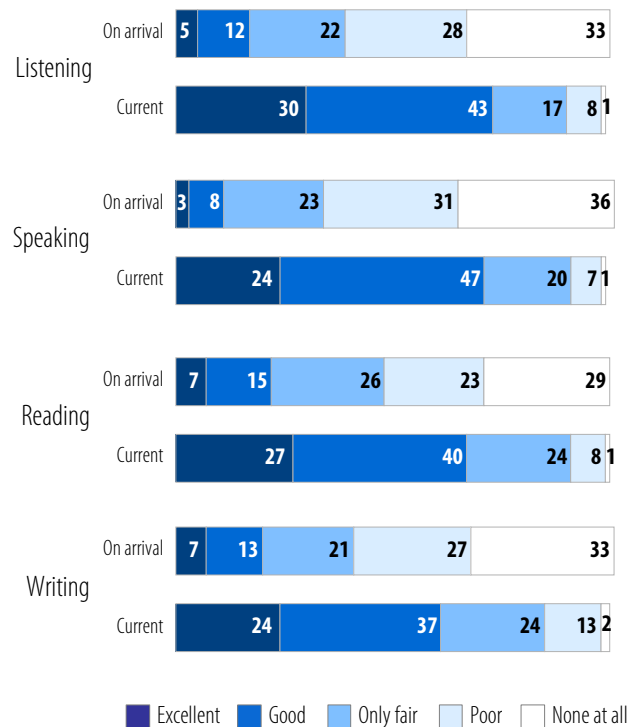
Refugees expressed the least confidence in being able to *speak* the language of their new home.

By the time refugees were interviewed for this survey (five to six years following arrival in Canada), most had made substantial progress. More than six in ten rated their fluency in all four aspects to be excellent or good, compared with only about one in ten who considered their ability to speak English or French to be poor or nonexistent with respect to listening, speaking and reading (with 15% giving this self-assessment for writing).

At the time of arrival, fluency in English or French was most strongly linked to education; refugees with a university degree were among the most likely to say they had excellent or good command of the language (especially when it came to writing). Across the country, refugees living in Quebec tended to rate higher skills, while those in B.C. the least so. Men gave themselves somewhat higher proficiency in listening and speaking, while women did so when it came to reading and writing.

Language fluency in English or French

On arrival and current (%)



Q.98

What was your fluency in [English/French] when you first arrived in Canada, in terms of ... ?

Q.99

And how would you rate your fluency in [English/French] today, in terms of ... ?

¹⁵ Refugees were first asked if they were more comfortable speaking English or French, and the following questions about fluency were then based on the preferred language. Almost everyone expressed greater comfort with English (94%) compared with French (5%), while another one percent said they were equally comfortable in both languages. Those living in Quebec at the time of the interview were evenly divided between those most comfortable in English and those most comfortable in French or equally in both languages.

Once settled into new lives and communities five or six years later, fluency in all four areas improved dramatically across the refugee population. The most significant gains were reported by refugees ages 18 to 24 and those with no more than a high school diploma; those without a high school diploma were less likely than others to report progress in all four areas of language fluency. B.C. residents reported the most improvement in terms of speaking, reading and writing; while those in Quebec recorded the greatest gains in terms of listening comprehension. Language improvement was largely similar across admission categories, but gains in speaking and writing fluency were most pronounced among those sponsored by friends and family, while reading comprehension showed the most improvement among

refugees in the GAR stream. Finally, women were most likely to report progress in their listening and speaking skills (closing the gap with men), while men were more apt to record gains in reading comprehension.

Does having fluency in English or French contribute to a more positive life satisfaction? This does not appear to be the case, as those with more developed language skills were marginally less likely to describe their current life as *very positive*.¹⁶ As well, language skills do not make a difference in refugees' satisfaction with housing, community acceptance, local schools, or feelings of safety and security, but those who have stronger listening comprehension were somewhat more apt to be satisfied with their employment opportunities and financial security.

¹⁶ This finding would appear to be counterintuitive, as it should be assumed that stronger fluency in English or French would directly contribute to more successful outcomes in such areas as education and employment. But the data may point to other characteristics of refugees who have mastered a new language; for instance, they may also have higher expectations about life in Canada that have yet to be fully realized.

Employment

About half of the Syrian refugees were employed full- or part-time, most of whom are working in sectors that typically provide entry-level opportunities. Only one in five were working in an occupation that fully matches with their education, skills and experience.

CURRENT EMPLOYMENT STATUS. Employment/work has been one of the primary challenges facing newly-arrived Syrian refugees, who have had to deal with limited language fluency, unrecognized credentials, and a lack of Canadian work experience. How did this 2015-16 cohort manage after five to six years in Canada?

Roughly half of refugees interviewed were currently working, either full-time (33%) or part-time (18%). This group includes three percent reporting to be working multiple jobs, and another seven percent who were self-employed. The other half were not currently working, which includes those currently looking for work (18%), those not looking for work (18%) and students (11%). The adjacent table shows how the employment profile of refugees compares with that of the Canadian population.

Full-time employment was most widely reported by refugees ages 25 to 34, those in one or two person households, those privately sponsored (and especially those sponsored by private individuals (72%)), those with post-secondary education and those previously employed in Syria. Self-employment was most evident in Atlantic Canada (13%) and among BVOR stream refugees (especially those sponsored by private individuals (25%)). Part-time work was most commonly indicated by residents of Ontario and Quebec, those ages 18 to 24, BVOR stream refugees, and those with no more than a high school diploma.

Refugees most apt to be *looking for work* live in the Prairie provinces, ages 45 and older, and sponsored by friends and family. Those not employed and not looking for work include B.C. residents, those without a high school diploma, and those who consider themselves to be very religious.¹⁷ Men were more than three times as likely as women to be working full-time (51% versus 15%), with women more apt to be not looking for work or a student (45% versus 13% among men).

Current employment status

(%)

	Syrian refugees	Canadian population*
Working full-time	26	38
Self-employed	7	7
Working part-time	18	11
Not working (net)	48	20
Unemployed and <i>looking for work</i>	18	6
Unemployed and <i>not looking for work</i>	18	10
Student	11	4
Retired	—	23

* Survey on employment and skills, Wave 2, Environics Institute and Future Skills Centre (2021)

Q.35

Which of the following best describes your current employment status?

¹⁷ The relationship between not employed/not looking for work and strong religiosity is due to the fact that refugees who describe themselves as “very religious” are more likely to be women and/or without a high school diploma.

EMPLOYMENT IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC. What impact did the COVID-19 pandemic have on the employment situation of Syrian refugees? Almost four in ten responded in the affirmative, most of whom lost work either in the form of reduced hours (21%) or being laid off (9%). A much smaller proportion of this group ended up with more work, through a new job (3%) or increased hours and/or pay (2%).

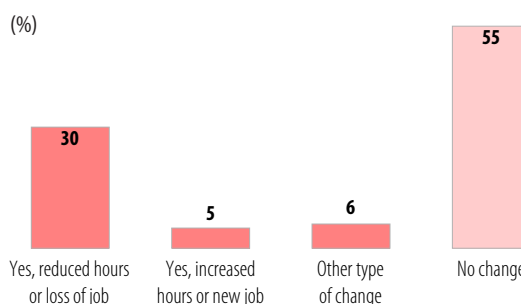
Loss of hours or jobs was most apt to be reported by refugees in Quebec and Ontario, and those sponsored by private individuals.

OCCUPATION AND MATCH WITH SKILLS. Those currently employed were asked about their current occupational sector, in an open-ended question (with responses then coded into standard occupational categories).¹⁸ The top five occupational categories reflect the ones that typically provide the most opportunities for newcomers to Canada, and include transportation/ warehousing (18%), retail trade (15%), miscellaneous services (other than public administration (13%)), accommodation and food services (12%), and construction (11%).

How well do current (or most recent) occupations match refugees' education, skills and experience? Just one in five (21%) said their current work fully matches up with their qualifications and experience; and most indicated this was only somewhat the case (30%) or not at all (40%). Refugees most likely to be employed in jobs that match their capabilities include residents of Atlantic Canada, those ages 25 to 44, those without a high school diploma, and those who were not previously employed in Syria.

Notably, there is little difference in the responses of men and women. Across occupational sectors, only those working in construction or professional/scientific/technical services were more likely than average to report their current jobs fully matched their education, skills and experience.

Did the COVID-19 pandemic affect your employment situation?



Q.35A
Did your employment situation change as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?

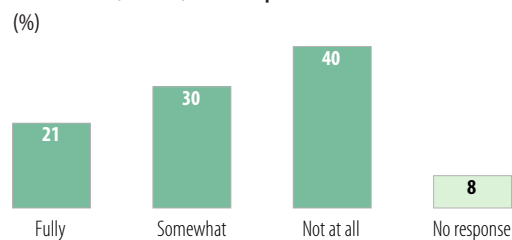
Current or most recent occupation

(%)

Transportation / warehousing	18
Retail trade	15
Miscellaneous services	13
Accommodation and food services	12
Construction	11
Professional / scientific / technical services	8
Health care / social assistance	7
Educational services	4
Arts / culture / recreation / entertainment	4
Manufacturing	3
Management of companies / enterprises	3
Other	4
No response	5

Q.36
What is your current, or most recent occupation?

How well does your current occupation match your education, skills, and experience?



Q.37
Would you say your current or most recent occupation matches your education, skills and experience fully, somewhat, or not at all?

¹⁸ Those who lost their jobs during the pandemic were asked to identify their most recent occupation.

EMPLOYMENT STRATEGIES. The study asked refugees who were currently or recently employed about steps taken to find work in Canada, apart from any assistance and supports they received from government agencies, sponsors and others. Most provided at least one response, the most common being networking with friends, family

members and acquaintances (43%); conducting online searches (e.g., LinkedIn) (29%); and taking advantage of local community resources such as job fairs (13%). Others mentioned making enquiries with potential employers (9%) and volunteering (4%).

Health and well-being

Syrian refugees were generally positive in their self-assessment of physical health, and somewhat less so in terms of mental health. Three in ten said they experienced a considerable amount of stress in their lives, in some cases as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

PHYSICAL HEALTH STATUS. How are Syrian refugees doing in terms of their health and well-being? The study included several standardized benchmark questions commonly used in national surveys (by Statistics Canada and the Environics Institute). When asked about their physical health, half described it to be excellent (28%) or very good (23%), compared with three in ten (31%) who said it was “good”, and just under one-fifth who reported it to be fair (13%) or poor (5%).¹⁹

Among refugees, positive physical health (excellent or very good) was most commonly reported among those living in Quebec (70%), those ages 18 to 24 (79%), those with no more than a high school diploma (64%), and those in the PSR (61%) or BVOR (63%) streams. Fair or poor physical health was most evident among residents of Western provinces (27%), those ages 45 plus (27%), refugees in the GAR stream (26%), those without a high school diploma (30%) and those in financial hardship (27%). There was comparatively little difference in the reported physical health status of men and women.

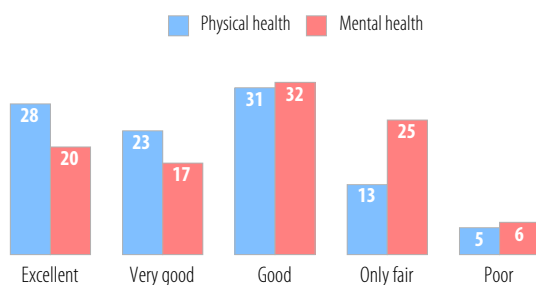
The reported physical health of Syrian refugees was somewhat, but not significantly, less positive to that of the Canadian population-at-large (in 2021), of which six in ten (60%) said their physical health was excellent or good, compared with just one in ten (11%) who described it as fair or poor.²⁰

MENTAL HEALTH STATUS. In comparison with physical health, Syrian refugees were somewhat less positive about their current mental health. Fewer than four in ten described their mental health to be excellent (20%) or very good (17%), compared with one-third (32%) indicating it is good, and a similar proportion who said it was fair (25%) or poor (6%).

The reported mental health of Syrian refugees is noticeably less positive than that reported by Canadians in general (in 2021), of whom six in ten (59%) said it was excellent or very

Physical and mental health status

(%)



Q.40

In general, would you say your physical health is excellent, very good, good, fair or poor?

Q.41

In general, would you say your mental health is excellent, very good, good, fair or poor?

good, compared with one in ten (12%) who described it as fair or poor.²¹

Refugees most apt to report positive mental health tend to be the same ones with positive physical health, including Quebec residents (48% excellent or good), those 18 to 24 (50%), those sponsored by family or friends (64%), and those with no more than a high school diploma (47%). Fair to poor mental health was most likely to be indicated by refugees living in the Prairie provinces (45%) and those experiencing financial hardship (46%).

¹⁹ This positive outcome is consistent with the findings of an earlier research project with Syrian refugees in Toronto (Tuck, et al., in Hamilton, Verona & Walton-Roberts, *A National Project* (2020)).

²⁰ Source: Statistics Canada: Canadian Community Health Survey (2021).

²¹ Ibid.

DAILY STRESS. Apart from the self-assessment of general mental health, to what extent do refugees experience stress in their daily lives, encompassing physical and/or mental stress? Using a benchmark question from Statistics Canada, one in five said their life was not very (14%) or not at all (6%) stressful. Half (50%) described their lives as “a bit stressful”, while three in ten indicated it was quite a bit (16%) or extremely (14%) stressful. By comparison, this high level of daily stress is reported by one in five (20%) of the Canadian population-at-large.²²

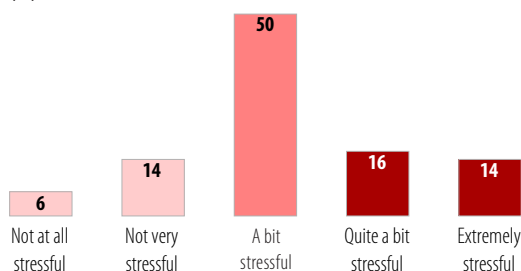
The likelihood of experiencing a low-stress life was similar across the refugee population, while a high-stress life (quite a bit or extremely stressful) was most commonly reported among residents of B.C. (40%), men (38% versus 23% among women), GAR stream refugees (37%) and those in financial hardship (39%).

IMPACTS OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC. Among refugees who reported that their lives were at least “a bit stressful”, a majority indicated this was due at least in part to the COVID-19 pandemic conditions being experienced at that time. Seven in ten said their life stress was linked to the pandemic to “a high extent” (26%) or to some extent (46%), compared with those who said this was not at all the case (28%).

Increased stress due to the pandemic was most likely to be reported by refugees in the Prairie provinces, those 25 to 34 years of age, those with children under 10 years of age, those sponsored by religious and community groups, and those who are financially secure.

Amount of stress in your life

(%)

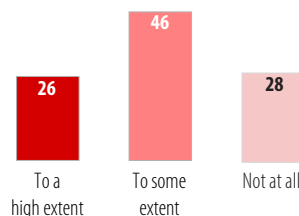


Q.42

Thinking about the amount of stress in your life—that is, physical or mental stress—would you say that most days are:

Was your stress related to the COVID-19 pandemic?

(%)



Q.42A

To what extent is this stress related to the COVID-19 pandemic and its restrictions?

²² Ibid.

Sense of belonging

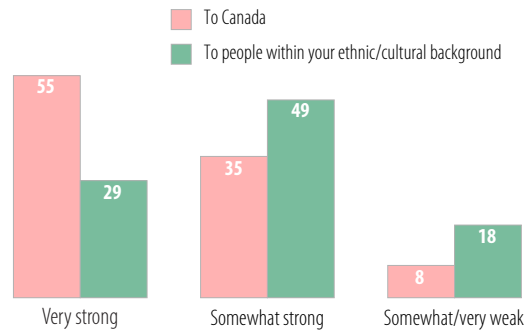
Most refugees expressed a strong sense of belonging to Canada, and for some this was more so than their attachment to their ethnic or cultural background. Almost everyone in this cohort has either become a Canadian citizen or intended to become one once eligible.

ATTACHMENT TO CANADA. With this population of Syrian refugees now five to six years into their new lives (in a place very different from where they came from), many have developed a strong sense of identity with their new country, demonstrating rapid acculturation into broader society.²³ More than half (55%) of those interviewed said they feel a very strong sense of belonging to Canada, with most of the rest describing it as somewhat strong (35%). Few felt a somewhat (7%) or very (1%) weak sense of belonging to their new country.

A very strong sense of belonging to Canada is evident across the refugee population, but most widespread among those who are ages 45 and older, those with less than a high school education, and those who are very religious, as well as those with the highest level of overall life satisfaction. This level of attachment was somewhat less evident among refugees 18 to 24 and those with a university degree, but in no identifiable group did more than one in seven express a weak sense of belonging to their new country.

Sense of belonging

(%)



Q.43

How would you describe your sense of belonging to Canada?

Q.44

How would you describe your sense of belonging to people with the same ethnic or cultural background as you?

²³ The concept of acculturation is drawn from the work of Canadian psychologist John Berry, who defines acculturation as the process of cultural and psychological change that takes place following migration and settlement (Berry, 2003, 2018).

ATTACHMENT TO ETHNIC OR CULTURAL

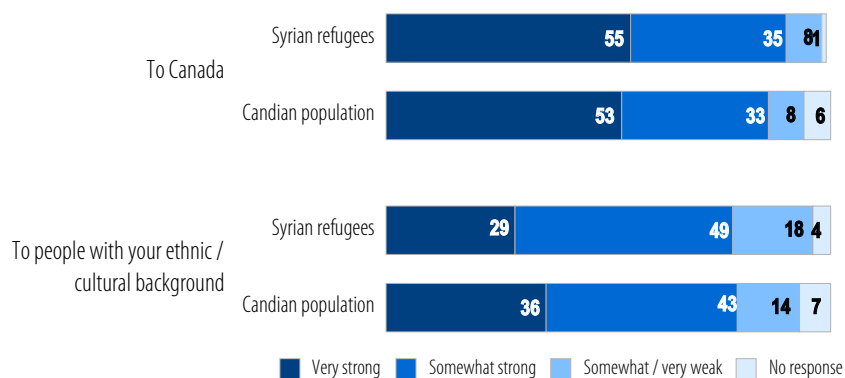
BACKGROUND. Most refugees also expressed a clear attachment to their ethnic or cultural background, but not to the same degree as they did to Canada. Close to eight in ten said they felt a very (29%) or somewhat (49%) strong sense of belonging to their ethnic or cultural background, compared with those who described it as somewhat (15%) or very (3%) weak. Responses to this question were largely similar across the population, with a very strong attachment most widely reported by refugees without a high school diploma, and weak attachment most evident among those in one to two person households.

There is considerable overlap in strength of attachment to both Canada and one’s ethnic/cultural background. Almost half (47%) of the refugees interviewed expressed very or somewhat strong levels of belonging to both Canada and their ethnic or cultural background, compared with only six percent who felt strongly attached to neither. By comparison, only eight percent said they felt very strongly attached to Canada but weakly connected to their ethnic/cultural background, and even fewer (1%) expressed the opposite set of attachments.

The attachments of Syrian refugees were notably similar to those of the Canadian population-at-large, with refugees being marginally less likely to express a strong sense of belonging to their ethnic or cultural background.

Sense of belonging

Syrian refugees and Canadian population* (%)



* Source: General social survey (2022)

Q.43
How would you describe your sense of belonging to Canada?

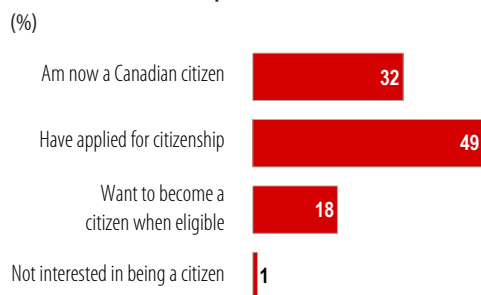
Q.44
How would you describe your sense of belonging to people with the same ethnic or cultural background as you?

CANADIAN CITIZENSHIP. Another key indicator of acculturation and attachment for migrants is the intention to become a citizen of their new country of residence. Permanent residents living in Canada become eligible for citizenship after five years, coinciding with the period when refugees in this study would be able to apply.

At the time the interviews were conducted, one-third (32%) of refugees reported they were already Canadian citizens, with another half (49%) indicating they had submitted their applications. Almost everyone else (18%) said they wanted to become a citizen once they become eligible, while only two of those interviewed (1%) expressed no interest in citizenship. Citizenship status was primarily a function of when refugees arrived in Canada: Most who arrived in 2015 indicated they were already a citizen, while a majority of those arriving in 2016 were in the application stage.

Parents with children in Canada likewise were keen to have their children become Canadian citizens once they become eligible. Most (69%) reported their children were already citizens or the application process was underway, or had this intention once they become eligible (29%). Just two percent said they were undecided or did not provide a response to the question.

Canadian citizenship



Q.90

Have you now become a Canadian citizen, or do you want to become a Canadian citizen when you are eligible to do so?

Acceptance in Canada

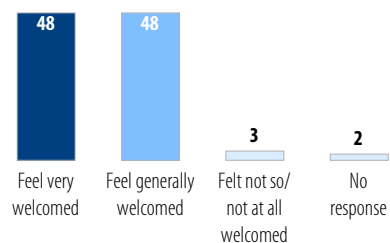
Most Syrian refugees said they were made to feel welcome by others in their local community, and believe most Canadians have a positive impression of them as a group. At the same time, they felt that Canadians have expectations of them about fitting into society and becoming productive citizens.

WELCOMING BY THE LOCAL COMMUNITY. If refugees now have developed a strong attachment to being Canadian, how well do they feel accepted by their adopted country? Almost everyone interviewed reported that they and their family were made to feel very welcome (48%) or generally welcome (48%) by other people in their community. Very few said they did not have a welcoming experience (3%) or did not provide a response (2%).

Refugees most likely to say they felt very welcome include residents in the Prairie (56%) and Atlantic (61%) provinces, as well as those in the BVOR stream (68%), and those who consider themselves to be very religious (69%). This type of experience was less apt to be reported by those sponsored by friends and family (34%), and those who are in financial hardship (36%). Relatively few in any group described their reception as not so much or not at all welcoming, but this experience was more evident among refugees living in B.C. (9%) and those who are not Arab (6%).

Reception by your local community

(%)



Q.46

To what extent do you feel you and your family have been made to feel welcome by other people in your local community?

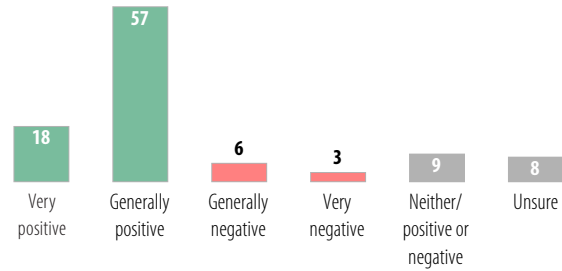
WHAT CANADIANS THINK OF SYRIAN REFUGEES.

Apart from their own experiences, how do refugees imagine they as a group are seen by other Canadians? Most believed that Canadian public opinion of Syrian refugees was very (18%) or generally (57%) positive, compared with one in ten who thought it was generally (6%) or very (3%) negative. The remainder characterized public opinion to be neither positive nor negative (or perhaps a mixture of both) (9%), while a similar proportion (8%) were unsure or did not offer a response.

Those most apt to say that Canadians held a positive impression of Syrian refugees include residents of Quebec (87%), those sponsored by private individuals (91%) and those who are Muslim (80%), with this less apt to be reported among those living in Atlantic Canada (57%; although 32% in this group believe public opinion was very positive). The view that Canadians hold a negative opinion of Syrian refugees was most evident among those sponsored by family and friends (18%), and those with a university degree (15%). Not surprisingly, refugees who felt Canadians hold very positive views of them are also the ones most likely to say they have been made to feel welcome in their local community.

How Syrian refugees are seen by other Canadians

(%)



Q.47

From what you have seen or heard, how do you imagine refugees from Syria as a whole are seen by other Canadians?

WHAT CANADIANS EXPECT FROM SYRIAN

REFUGEES. The study also probed refugees' sense of acceptance by asking about what types of expectations they feel are being placed on them by other Canadians, as newcomers being given refugee status and support. Almost everyone interviewed offered one or more responses to this question (which was asked open-ended), most of which were framed in positive rather than negative terms.

More than eight in ten refugees believed that Canadians expect them as a whole to make a positive contribution to the country and local communities, in various ways. This was most likely to be expressed in terms of refugees being expected to work or study (59%), to contribute to society (39%), to integrate or settle into Canadian society (30%) and/or more broadly support the economy and country (25%). Others cited perceived expectations around more specific forms of integration, such as speaking English or French (11%), abiding by Canadian laws (8%), giving back as volunteers (8%) and to be "successful" (7%).

By comparison, only one in ten identified negative expectations they believe Canadians have of Syrian refugees as a group, such as being a burden to society (4%), will "take" rather than "give" (4%), will fail (2%) and cause problems (1%). Six percent did not offer any response to the question. The pattern of responses was broadly similar across the refugee population.

What do you believe Canadians expect from Syrian refugees?

(%)

Positive expectations (net)	86
Work / study	59
Contribute / be productive / not a burden	39
Integrate / settle into Canadian society	30
Support the economy / country	25
Speak English or French	11
Abide by Canadian laws	8
Give back as volunteers	8
Succeed	7
Other positive expectations	6
Negative expectations (net)	9
Be a burden	4
Take / rely on a charity	4
Fail	2
Other negative expectations	3
Other	4
No response	6

Q.48

Based on your experience so far, what do you believe Canadians as a whole expect from refugees from Syria when they settle in the country?

Q.48

Based on your experience so far, what do you believe Canadians as a whole expect from refugees from Syria when they settle in the country?

"I think the Canadians expect us to work and give back to the community, because they think we are only here to take and take. It is always difficult at the beginning for the newly arrivals but after few years and after learning English, they can improve themselves and find jobs."

"They expect us to work, pay taxes, and follow the Canadian laws, speak one of the official languages, respect the Canadian culture, and integrate in terms of speaking the language very good."

"A lot of people have a positive point of view about Syrians, expectations of integrating and entering the system. To get educated and raise their kids here so they would work and become part of a new society."

"Contribute to the general wellness and well-being of the community or country or would be viewed as a burden on society. Not to do crime, pay taxes, and contribute to the society. But they can't change who you are, so they expect you to keep your tradition, every ethnic group in Canada (Scottish, Irish, etc.) kept their traditions, that's what makes Canada what it is."

"We as Syrians were able to fit in. A Canadian told me that we were one of the few communities that fit in very quickly. They need people to work in service more than they need help in professions like medicine or engineering."

"To be grateful for what the country did for them, participate in building the country, work, and work on themselves to be better."

WHAT REFUGEES WISH OTHER CANADIANS WOULD UNDERSTAND ABOUT THEM.

This research reveals that most Syrian refugees have felt welcomed in Canada and by others in their local community, and are making good progress in establishing new lives for themselves. But they are still newcomers in the process of resettlement, with much still to be learned by them and by others in their community. The study posed the question: *“Is there one thing you wish Canadians understood about refugees from Syria who now live in this country?”*²⁴

More than eight in ten of the refugees interviewed offered one or more responses to this question. The most common things they wished other Canadians understood about them are the struggles they face as newcomers (e.g., language barriers, finding employment) (27%), the impact the conflict in Syria has had on their lives (e.g., trauma, the need to heal) (21%), that not all Syrians are the same (19%), something about Syrian culture and history (19%), that Syrians are hard working and want to be productive (18%), and that they did not choose to be refugees (16%).

Others mentioned wishing that Canadians better understood that Syrians want peace, that the bad actions of a few do not represent the whole, that as immigrants they have dignity, to better understand Islam, and that Syrians are not racist. One in six did not identify anything they wished Canadians understood about them (8%) or did not otherwise provide a response to the question (8%).

What you wish Canadians understood about Syrian refugees

(%)

Struggles refugees face as newcomers	27
Impact of the civil war (trauma, need to heal)	21
Not all Syrians are the same	19
Syrian culture and history	19
Syrians are hardworking / want to be productive	18
Did not choose to be refugees	16
Syrians want to live in peace	10
Actions of the few “bad” ones do not represent the whole	9
Immigrants have dignity	5
Islam	4
Syrians are not racist	4
Other	6
Nothing / no response	16

Q.49

Is there one thing you wish Canadians understood about refugees from Syria who now live in this country?

²⁴ This question was inspired by a similar one included in previous Environics Institute research with the country's urban Indigenous population (2010) and with Black people living in the Greater Toronto Area (2017).

Q.49

Is there one thing you wish Canadians understood about refugees from Syria who now live in this country?

"We are hardworking and productive people but face difficulties in Canada because of the language barrier."

"Don't have a stereotype about Syrians, we're all different and come from many backgrounds. Different religions, different areas, different education, we're not all the same."

"We are not like you see in the news. Not terrorists and we're peaceful and want to live in peace. Left our country because of war that was out of our control."

"To understand that they're saving lives, that they're saving us from hunger and being killed or ending in refugee camps, because some Canadians are angry that they're paying taxes for us."

"Learning English is not as easy for some, especially those who are illiterate in their native language. It creates a lot of pressure on the individual and family."

"There is a lot of expectations. Most of us need time to heal from the war. Our people are scared to deal with strangers because of the war; you can't force people to heal fast."

"We are people who have dreams, education, aspirations, we are well-educated from back home and we are very knowledgeable about other societies and different cultures."

"Not all fingers are the same length. Not all Syrians are the same. Different social and cultural backgrounds."

"I didn't come for money or benefits, Syrians don't want money or anything, they just want peace. In Syria, my parents worked and we had a lot of things. But towards the end, there was no security, which I think comes first. This is what Canada gave us."

"When we left our country, it wasn't by our choice. We don't want to be a burden to people here, most of us just came to work and restart our lives. A lot of Canadians think that we're here to live off the government and their tax dollars. I just want Canadians not to judge from far without knowing our situation."

"My message is that they should understand that we are humans just as they are, they have children and we have too and we just want the best for them. It doesn't matter which culture or background you're coming from: a human is a human."

"That we're nice and productive people, we have a culture and education, and want to participate in building this country."

Experiences with discrimination

About half of Syrian refugees reported experiencing discrimination, which they were most likely to attribute to their ethnicity or culture, but also their religion and language. Relatively few said this happened on a regular basis – but, for most, the experience bothered them at least somewhat.

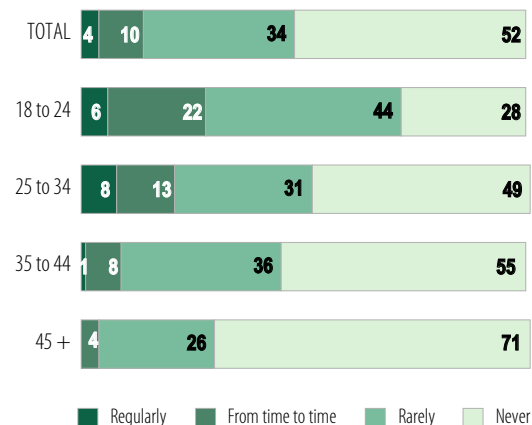
Canada is an ethnically and racially diverse society, but also has a long legacy of racism and discrimination against people who are seen to be different, often including immigrants. This population of Syrians has not escaped this experience, although it appears to be less so than the Canadian population-at-large.

EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION. The study asked refugees how often they have experienced discrimination or been treated unfairly since arriving in Canada. One in seven said this has happened regularly (4%) or from time to time (10%), with the remainder indicating it has happened rarely (34%) or not at all (52%).²⁵

Reports of regular or time-to-time discrimination does not vary noticeably across the refugee population, except when it comes to age: this type of experience was most commonly reported by those ages 18 to 24 (28%) and 25 to 34 (21%), and much less so among those ages 35 to 44 (9%) and older (3%).²⁶ By comparison, there is no difference in the frequency of discrimination between men and women. As well, such experiences are not correlated with current life satisfaction, health status, mental health status or daily stress, but are linked to the likelihood of feeling very welcomed by others in their local community.

Personal experience with discrimination

By age (%)



Q.49b

Since arriving in Canada, how often have you experienced discrimination or been treated unfairly?

²⁵ This question was added to the study once underway, with the results based on a subsample of 241 (79% of the full sample).

²⁶ This age-related pattern with reported experiences with discrimination has been found in other Environics Institute research with such groups as Muslims, Indigenous Peoples and other racialized populations.

BASIS OF DISCRIMINATION. Those reporting discrimination or mistreatment (at least rarely) were asked if they thought this was because of their religion, ethnicity or culture, language and/or gender. Refugees were most likely to believe they were mistreated because of their ethnicity or culture (51%), and somewhat less so due to their religion (37%) or language (33%), and least so in the case of gender (6%).

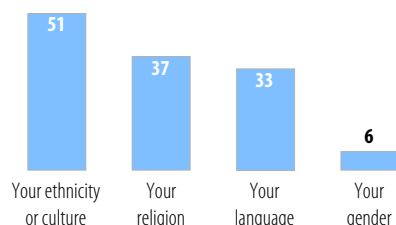
Discrimination due to both ethnicity/culture and religion was most apt to be identified by younger refugees and those who are Muslim. Women were no more likely than men to say they were discriminated against due to their gender, ethnicity/culture or language, but were more apt to believe it was because of their religion (45% versus 29% among men; likely due to wearing head coverings such as the hijab).

For purposes of comparison with the population-at-large, close to four in ten (38%) Canadians as a whole reported experiencing discrimination in the past five years due to one or more reasons (e.g., race or ethnicity, language, gender, age, physical appearance).²⁷

Those reporting experiences of discrimination were also asked in what types of situations or settings this took place. Refugees said this type of mistreatment was most likely to happen public spaces (46%), followed by the workplace (32%), in university and school settings (26%), on public transit (21%), in restaurants and stores (16%), and when using public services (11%). Fewer mentioned such occurrences in their neighbourhood, when dealing with the police and courts, and at border crossings. Mention of specific settings does not vary much by basis of discrimination, except that those attributing it to their gender were more likely than others to say they experienced this type of treatment in public spaces, university/school settings, on public transit and in the workplace.

Basis of discrimination experienced

Those experiencing discrimination in Canada (%)

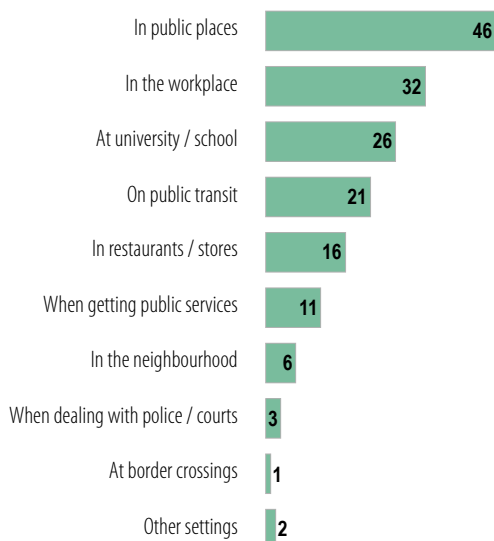


Q.50a-d

As far as you can tell, did you experience discrimination or unfair treatment because of:

Where discrimination has taken place

Those experiencing discrimination in Canada (%)



Q.51

In what situations or settings have you experienced discrimination or been treated unfairly?

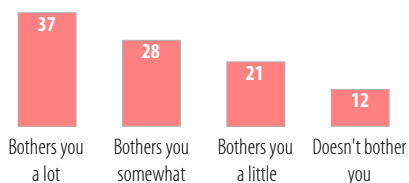
²⁷ Source: Statistics Canada. General Social Survey (2021).

HOW MUCH DISCRIMINATION BOTHERS YOU. What impact does such discrimination have on refugees' well-being? Those who reported such experiences were asked the extent to which this bothered them – and, for many, it has been significant. Close to four in ten (37%) said this type of mistreatment bothered them a lot, with another 28 percent indicating it bothered them somewhat. The remaining third reported the discrimination they've been subjected to bothered them only a little (21%) or not at all (12%).

The likelihood of being significantly bothered by discrimination was somewhat higher among Muslims and refugees with financial hardship, and least evident among those living in the Prairie provinces.²⁸ Not surprisingly, such impact increases along with the frequency of experiencing such treatment. Those who said they were bothered a lot or somewhat by discrimination were somewhat less likely to be very positive about their overall life in Canada, but no less apt to report feeling welcomed by Canadians in their community.

How much discrimination experience bothers you

Those experiencing discrimination in Canada (%)



Q.52

Thinking about the experiences of discrimination and unfair treatment you mentioned, overall how much have they bothered you?

²⁸ Subgroup analysis for this question is limited due to the smaller subsample of refugees reporting discrimination (N=132).

Local community

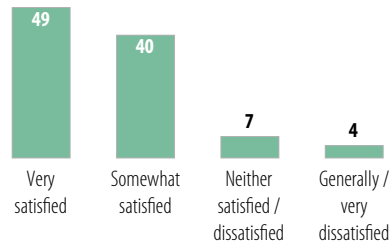
Almost all refugees were generally, if not very, satisfied with the local community as a place to live. Many have been actively involved in local organizations such as mosques, churches, community centres and schools; and four in ten said they knew most or many of their neighbours.

Satisfaction with local community. Refugees were asked about their level of satisfaction with the local community as a place to live at this point in time.²⁹ Almost all of the refugees interviewed said they were very (49%) or generally (40%) satisfied with the community in which they are living. The remainder indicated they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (7%), generally dissatisfied (2%) or very dissatisfied (2%). Satisfaction levels were notably consistent across the population, but those most apt to be very satisfied include refugees ages 45 and older (66%); while this experience was least evident among those with a university degree (34%) and those in financial hardship (35%). No more one in ten in any identifiable group expressed clear dissatisfaction with their local community as a place to live.

The handful dissatisfied with their current community as a place to live were asked why this was the case (in an open-ended question). The most common reasons pertain to the high cost of housing, feeling unsafe, their own financial challenges, and cultural issues (note: because only 16 refugees were asked this question, none of these reasons was mentioned by more than six individuals).

AVAILABILITY OF FAMILIAR FOOD. One reason why refugees were satisfied with their local community was because they are able to find familiar food. Almost eight in ten (78%) reported they were always able to find the food they like and know how to prepare. Much smaller proportions said they could usually find what they want, but some types of food could not be found (13%), or often found it difficult to find important food (7%). Only one percent indicated they could not find food they know and like. Experience with food access was consistent across the population, except among Atlantic Canadian residents, where only 60 percent said they could always find what they were looking for.

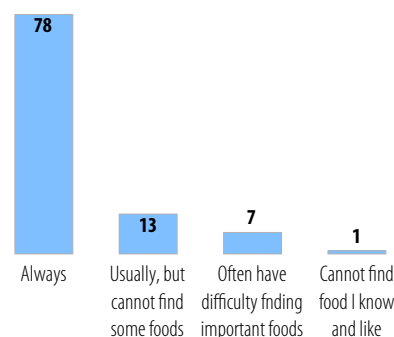
Satisfaction with local community as place to live (%)



Q.53

How satisfied are you with this local community as a place for you and your family to live at this point in time?

Able to find the food you like? (%)



Q.39

Are you able to find the food you like and you know how to prepare?

²⁹ For this section, "local community" was defined as the neighbourhood or city in which they currently resided.

PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS. The study asked about active involvement in each of five types of organizations in the local community over the past 12 months. Refugees were most likely to report such involvement with mosques or churches (38%) and community centres (35%), followed by schools (33%), recreation centres (30%), and groups or organizations whose members are refugees from Syria (23%).

Participation rates were generally similar across the refugee population, but in each case, it was those 18 to 24 years of age who were most likely to be active. Participation in mosques or churches was more commonly reported by the minority of refugees who are Christian (65% versus 30% of Muslims).

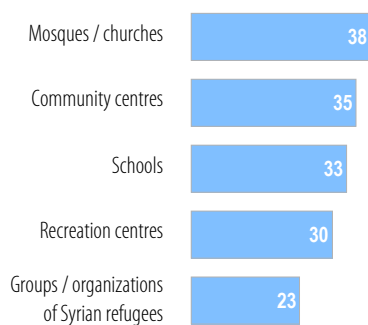
This Syrian cohort was notably active with local organizations compared with other Canadians, based on a separate Institute survey in which comparatively few first-generation Canadians reported involvement with a religious organization (15%) or one catering to a specific ethnic or immigrant community (5%).³⁰

KNOWING ONE’S NEIGHBOURS. How well do refugees know their neighbours? Four in ten said they knew many (26%), if not most (15%), of the people in their neighbourhood; and almost six in ten indicated they knew few (48%) or none (10%).

Knowing most or many of one’s neighbours was most likely to be reported by those living in Atlantic Canada (62%) and those who are very religious (62%), while least evident among refugees with large households (33%) and those with a university degree (28%). Men (49%) were more likely than women (34%) to say they knew most or many of their neighbours.

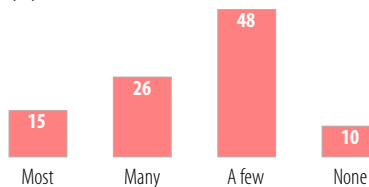
Syrian refugees participating in this study were more likely to know their neighbours, in comparison with other Canadians, notably first-generation Canadians, among whom fewer than three in ten reported to know most (9%) or many (19%) of their neighbours.³¹

Involvement with local organization in past 12 months (%)



Q.57a-e
In the past 12 months, have you been actively Involved with any of the following organizations in your local community?

How many people do you know in your neighbourhood? (%)



Q.58
Would you say that you know . . . of the people in your neighbourhood?

³⁰ Social Capital in Canada Survey 2022. Environics Institute and Canadian Community Foundations of Canada.

³¹ Ibid

Friendship connections

Most refugees have a few close friends they can count on, and they tend to also be from Syria. Almost everyone was generally, if not very, satisfied with the quality of their friendships in Canada and Syria.

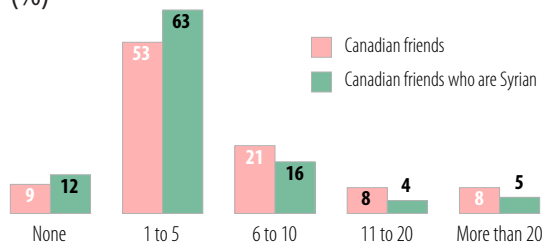
NUMBER OF CLOSE FRIENDS. Having close friends is an important resource for anyone, and may be of particular value to refugees getting established in a new place. The Syrian refugees interviewed were most likely to report having between one and five close friends (defined as people who are not relatives, and who they can feel at ease with, can talk to about what is on their mind, or call on for help). One in five (21%) have between six and ten such friends, while one in six (16%) said they have more than 10 that fit this description. One in ten (9%) reported having no one who they considered to be a close friend.

Refugees most likely to have a large number of close friends (more than 10) are those ages 45 plus (27%), men (23% versus 9% among women), and those who are non-Arab (25%) and/or Christian (31%). Those who reported no close friends were most apt to live in B.C. (22%), in the GAR stream (13%), have either no high school diploma (12%) or a university degree (14%), and experiencing financial hardship (14%).

Along with knowing more neighbours, Syrian refugees could also count on more close friends than other Canadians. In a separate recent survey, only one in four (25%) first generation Canadians reported having more than five close friends they can rely upon.³²

Those reporting one or more close friends said that most of them are also from Syria. Two-thirds (64%) of this group indicated the number of close friends from Syria is in the same number range as they have in total. Very few appeared to have multiple friendships with Canadians who are not also Syrian.

Number of close friends (%)



Q.59

How many close friends do you have in Canada; that is, people who are not your relatives but who you can feel at ease with, can talk to about what is on your mind, or call on for help?

Q.60

And how many of these close friends are also from Syria?

³² Ibid

SATISFACTION WITH QUALITY OF FRIENDSHIPS.

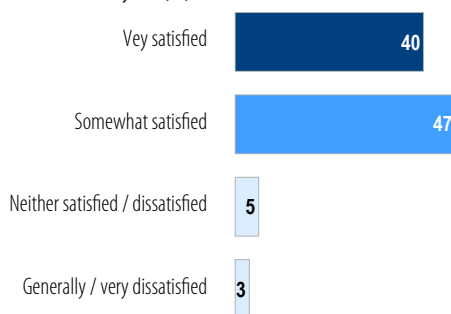
Apart from the number of close friends refugees have, how satisfied are they with the quality of friendships, whether in Canada or elsewhere? Most said they were very (40%) or generally (47%) satisfied with the quality of the friendships they have, compared with few who were neither satisfied/dissatisfied (5%) or clearly dissatisfied (3%). Those most apt to be very satisfied include refugees 18 to 24 years of age (52%), and those sponsored by family and friends (64%). Satisfaction was also strongest among refugees who have a large number of close friends, especially if they are also Syrian.

STEPS TAKEN TO MAKE FRIENDS. The study asked refugees what steps, if any, they took to make friends in the local community, apart from any assistance or supports received from government services or sponsors. Most identified one or more strategies, the most common being through school or university (26%), meeting people in their neighbourhood (22%), through the workplace (19%), through language classes (19%), and at the mosque or church (12%).

Others mentioned making friends with others during in the process of arrival (e.g., on planes, at the arrival hotel), through volunteering, through existing friends and at community centres.

Satisfaction with friendships

Canadian and Syrian (%)



Q.61

How satisfied are you with the quality of friendships you have here?

Steps taken to make friends in local community

(%)

Through school / community	26
Meeting neighbours	22
Through work	19
Through language classes	19
Through mosque / church	12
People met while coming to Canada	9
Volunteering	8
Through other friends	8
At community centre	7
Going to events / meetings	4
Through children's school / day care	4
Other steps	8
None / have no friends	10

Q.62

Apart from any assistance and supports you received from government agencies, sponsors and others, what steps, if any, did you take to make friends in the local community?

Relocation to another place

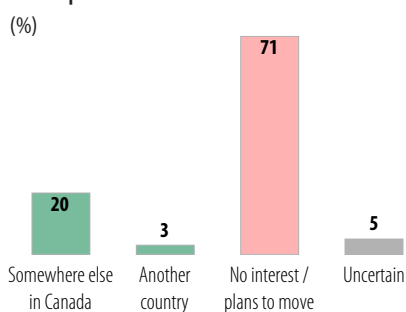
Most Syrian refugees had no hopes or plans to relocate, while some were thinking about moving somewhere else in Canada, and a few considered another country. A majority would like to return to Syria to visit, but very few expressed any interest in living there again.

HOPES AND PLANS TO MOVE ELSEWHERE. With refugees now having had several years to get settled in Canada, most appear satisfied to remain in the community they now call home. Seven in ten (71%) said they have no hopes or plans to move somewhere else in Canada or to another country when it is possible to do so. One in five (20%) indicated a desire or intention to move somewhere else in Canada, while three percent considered leaving for another country.

Refugees most likely to be thinking about moving within Canada include Prairie province residents (32%) and those with a university degree (28%). Few in any group expressed interest in relocating overseas, but this was most evident among those who consider themselves to be very religious (12%). Uncertainty about moving was most noticeable among refugees living in Quebec (15%). As might be expected, hopes and plans to relocate increased as satisfaction with one's current local community declined.

Those refugees thinking about relocation were asked *where* they hope or plan to move. This group identified a range of options, the most common being somewhere in Ontario (46%) (e.g., Toronto, Ottawa, London), followed by B.C. (20%), Alberta (11%) and Montreal (8%). Other countries mentioned include Turkey (5%) and Dubai (5%). Among those who were asked this question, one in six (16%) did not offer any potential destinations.

Have plans to move somewhere else



Q.86

Do you have hopes or plans to move to somewhere else in Canada, or to another country, when it is possible to do so?

REASONS FOR MOVING. Refugees contemplating relocation were also asked why they might move to their desired destination (asked in an open-ended question). No one reason predominated, but the most common motivations pertained to finding employment (or better employment) (39%), to improve overall prospects (24%), a matter of personal preference (22%), to find a lower cost of living (16%), and to enjoy more favourable weather (14%).

RETURN TO SYRIA? What interest do refugees have in returning to Syria, whether just to visit or to once again live? A modest majority (54%) of those interviewed said they would like to return to Syria to visit, but very few (3%) expressed a desire to live there again. One in four (24%) had no interest in either visiting or living in Syria again, while others remained unsure at that point in time (16%) or did not offer a response to the question (4%).

Interest in returning to Syria to visit was greatest among refugees with large households (67%) and those sponsored by private individuals (66%), with this desire least apt to be shared among Quebec residents (48%) and in the BVOR stream (38%).

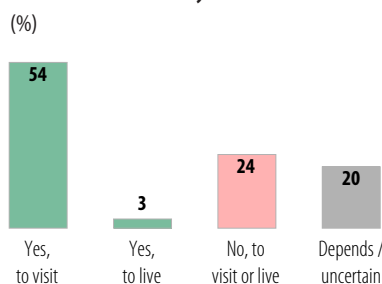
Reasons for moving to desired place



Q.88

And what is the main reason you would like to move to this place

Like to return to Syria?



Q.89

Would you like to return to Syria to visit or to live, when it is possible to do so?

Q.88

And what is the main reason you would like to move to this place?

"I want an area with more Arabs in it, with more chances to find a job, better health system with more services for disabled people. Also, I am used to live in big, crowded areas."

"Because I feel I am in the middle of nowhere. Winnipeg is too cold."

"Because I love the French language."

"Living expenses is less there and the chance to own a home is easier. Owning a home where I live now is almost impossible."

"Vancouver has more social life and I have a lot of friends there. There are more job opportunities. The current place we live in is not safe."

DOES COMMUNITY SIZE MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Syrian refugees were resettled in communities of varying sizes across Canada, ranging from the largest metropolitan areas to small rural areas. What difference has this made in their life experiences? An analysis comparing those living in three types of communities (major urban centres, smaller cities, town/village/rural areas) reveals few notable differences, as overall satisfaction with one's local community was the same regardless of community size.

Refugees living in the small population communities were marginally more likely to express strong satisfaction with the quality of their lives overall, and in terms of their housing, employment, financial security and access to health care; this group was also a bit more apt to feel welcomed by local residents, and knew most of their neighbours, but they were also somewhat more likely to consider relocation. Refugees living in major urban centres were more likely to be very satisfied with their friendships.

Extended family connections

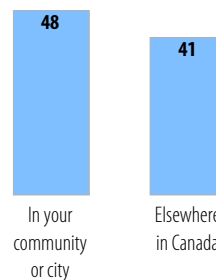
Many Syrian refugees have extended family living in their community and elsewhere in Canada. Almost everyone has family still living in Syria, and elsewhere in the world. Refugees have kept in regular contact with overseas family, primarily through social networking platforms like WhatsApp.

EXTENDED FAMILY IN CANADA. While Syrian refugees find themselves in a new country and unfamiliar society, many also benefit from the presence of other family members outside their own household. Close to half (48%) reported to have other family members living somewhere in their local community or city, and four in ten (41%) indicated they have extended family living in other parts of Canada.

There is some overlap between these two groups (about six in ten report having family both in their community and elsewhere in Canada).

Local extended family is most common for refugees in Quebec and Atlantic Canada, as well as those who were sponsored by friends and family; this is least apt to be the case for those living in B.C. Refugees most likely to have extended family elsewhere in Canada include residents of Quebec, and those sponsored by religious and community organizations; it was least apt to be reported by those in the GAR stream. While refugees may appreciate having extended family locally or somewhere in Canada, their presence in itself does not appear to have any positive impact on overall life satisfaction, feeling welcomed in the local community, or plans to remain there for the time being.

Have family members living in Canada (%)



Q.64a-b

Apart from the people living in your household, do you have other family members living:

EXTENDED FAMILY ABROAD. Not surprisingly, almost all (91%) refugees interviewed said they have extended family living outside of Canada, covering a wide range of countries. These relatives were most likely to be in Syria (82%), with significant proportions in Turkey (30%), Germany (29%), Lebanon (29%), Jordan (27%) and the USA (18%).

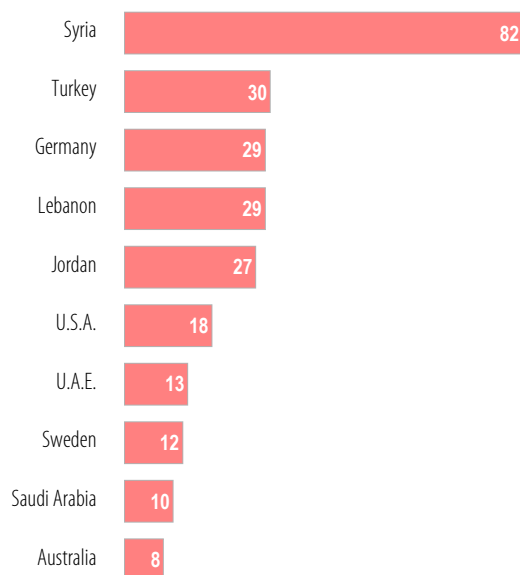
Extended family in Syria and other countries may not be close by, but refugees have kept in regular contact with them – even five to six years after arriving in Canada. Close to four in ten (37%) reported being in contact with family members outside of Canada daily or almost every day, with a similar proportion doing so several time a week (41%). By comparison, very few of the refugees interviewed said they have such contact no more than few times a year (5%) or almost never (1%).

Daily or almost daily contact with family overseas was most commonly reported by refugees living in Quebec and Atlantic Canada, by women, those in one to two person households, GAR stream refugees or those sponsored by private individuals, and those who are Muslim. Contact with family overseas on an infrequent basis (no more than several times per month) was most evident among refugees 18 to 24 years of age (33%).

The predominant means of communication with family overseas has been through social networking platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, used by almost all (95%) of the refugees interviewed. By comparison, only one in four (25%) said they communicated with family members abroad by phone, and very few mention using text (3%) or email (2%) for this purpose.

Where family members outside Canada live

Top ten countries (%)

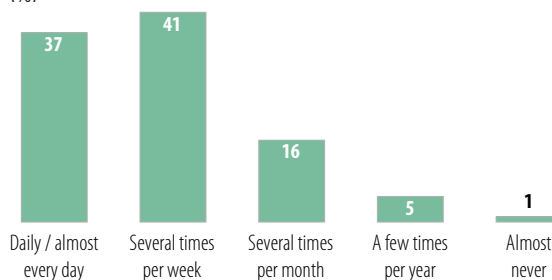


Q.65

Which other countries do your family live in?

Frequency of contact with family outside of Canada

(%)

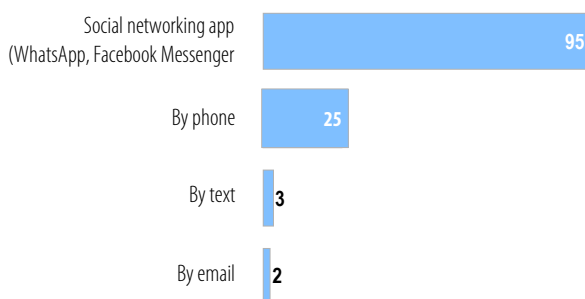


Q.66

How often do you keep in contact with family members living outside of Canada?

Means of connecting with family outside of Canada

(%)



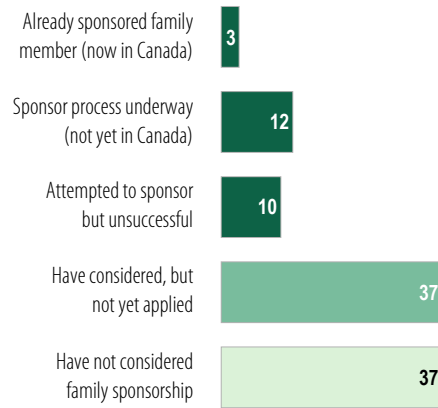
Q.67

By what means do you typically connect with family members living outside Canada?

FAMILY SPONSORSHIP. Many of the refugees coming to Canada from Syria were sponsored privately by family members or friends. Refugees interviewed for this study were asked whether they themselves have sponsored, or considered sponsoring, immediate family members to come to Canada. A small proportion reported to have either already sponsored a family member who is now in Canada (3%) or were in the process of doing so (12%). Others said they attempted to do this but were unsuccessful (10%), or had thought about it but have not yet proceeded with an application (37%). The remainder (37%) indicate they had not as of yet considered sponsoring family from overseas.

Refugees most likely to have taken the initiative in sponsoring family members include those living in Atlantic Canada (32% either completed or in process), and those who themselves were sponsored by family members or friends (24%). Those who had not considered it are most apt to be 18 to 24 years of age (52%).

Have or considered sponsoring immediate family members (%)



Q.68
Have you sponsored or considered sponsoring any of your immediate family members (e.g. parents, grandparents, siblings, children) to come to Canada?

Changing family roles

Half of Syrian refugees report experiencing changing roles within their family since moving to Canada, involving greater or fewer responsibilities in such areas as household finances, parenting and caregiving, and one's independence. Such changes were most common for women and those ages 18 to 24.

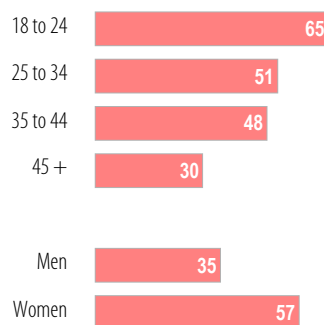
Refugees who live in multi-person households were asked if living in Canada noticeably changed their role within their family, relative to the role of other family members. Almost half (47%) responded in the affirmative. This group was most likely to include women (57% versus 35% of men), those 18 to 24 years of age (65% versus 30% among those 45 plus), and those who were single (58% versus 42% who are married).

When refugees were asked how their role in the family has changed (in an open-ended question), the most common themes centred around increased responsibilities for looking after the household generally (45%), while others were more specific in mentioning more responsibility for parenting or caregiving (36%), greater responsibility for finances (23%), and changes in how children are raised or disciplined (10%). One in ten (10%) reported they had greater independence than before, while a slightly smaller proportion indicated the opposite (7%). Some said they either were now working when they previously did not have to (7%) or had stopped working now that they were in Canada (5%).

Some changes were more common within specific groups. Women were more likely to mention increased responsibilities generally, and for household finances; they were also more apt than men to say they now had either increased independence or decreased independence, and to now be working when previously they were not. The youngest refugees (18 to 24) were most likely to say they now had increased household responsibilities generally, while those ages 35 to 44 reported increased parenting roles, and changes in how children were raised. Married refugees were most apt to say they now had either more or less parenting responsibilities, while single people were most likely to report increased responsibilities generally, greater financial responsibilities and increased independence.

Role in family has changed since moving to Canada

By age and gender (%)



Q.70

Has living in Canada noticeably changed your role within your family, relative to the roles of other family members?

How role in family has changed?

(%)

Increased responsibilities – general	45
More parenting / caregiving responsibilities	36
More financial responsibilities	23
Change in how children are raised / disciplined	10
More independence	10
Now working, when didn't before	7
Less independence	7
Less parenting / caregiving responsibilities	6
No longer working, when was before	5
Other changes	9

Q.71

In what way or ways has your role within your family changed?

Q.71

In what way or ways has your role within your family changed?

"I had more responsibility in taking care of my family and changed the way I used to discipline my kids. In Syria, it is ok to shout on your kids but here it is not accepted so this made me a calm person."

"They depend on me more than before, especially that I speak good English now, I have to go everywhere with my parents to translate for them, used to do the same with my siblings but now they can manage on their own."

"I give my wife more responsibilities to form social connections and form friendships with surrounding people."

"I don't have to worry about rent and clothing because of the government support, but I have more duties at home like driving the kids to and from school, and help in the house."

"Mostly of financial level. My wife used to work in Syria but her salary was only about 10% of mine and we didn't rely on it at all. However, when we came here, her income has become significant to the house and very essential."

"I am responsible for everything in the house, as well as for everything that has to do with school and doctors. I am responsible for all the paperwork with the government and others. My husband is working all the time and has no free time."

"In Syria I had all my kids around me and I was feeling cared for but now all my kids are in different countries and away from me and that reduced my role as a mother."

"In the Middle East, if you go to school, that's your only job. Unlike here where I have to contribute to the household and get a job while going to school."

Children's experience

Most parents believe their children have done very well in terms of adapting both to life in Canada and being accepted by others at school. They were most likely to credit the school system in supporting their children's adjustment, while pointing to language as the most notable barrier.

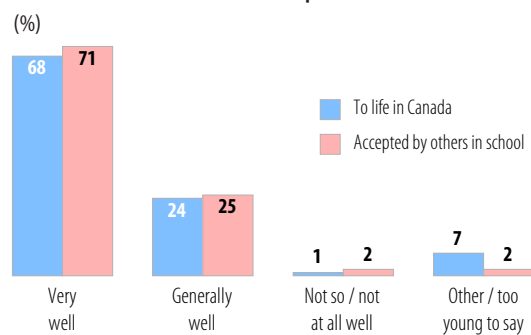
Two-thirds of the refugees interviewed have children living in Canada, mostly in households containing three or more people but, in some cases, including a household with a single parent and child. Children in these households span a range of ages, encompassing under six (50%), between six and 10 (57%), between 11 and 17 (57%), and 18 years plus (28%).

Most of the children of Syrian refugees were born prior to arriving in Canada (56%), with some parents reporting some of their children were born outside the country and some once they arrived (36%). A small proportion of mostly younger parents (7%) had all of their children in this country.

ADAPTATION TO CANADA AND SCHOOL. Most refugee parents believe their children who were not born in this country have adapted well to life in Canada so far. About seven in ten (68%) said they have adapted very well, with another quarter (24%) describing the transition as having gone generally well. Only one percent (2 refugees) felt their children had not done well in adapting to Canada, while another six percent thought their children were still too young to judge. Assessment of children's adaptation was roughly the same across the different age ranges of the children.

Parents were equally positive about how their children not born in Canada were doing in school. Seven in ten (71%) reported their children were doing very well in terms of being accepted by others their own age, compared with one-quarter (25%) who felt they were doing generally well, and only two percent who did not think it was going well in this regard.

How well children have adapted



Q.76

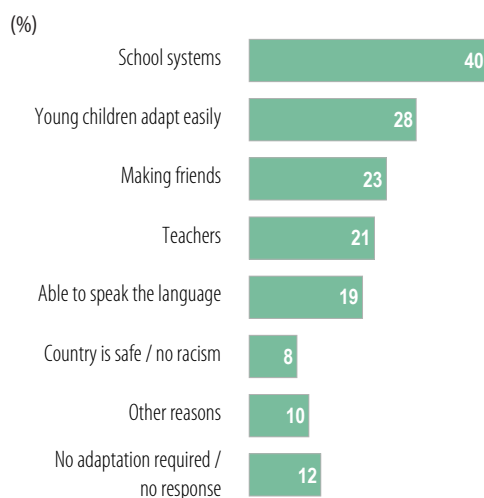
How well would you say your children have adapted to life in Canada so far?

Q.77

Thinking now about your children that are currently in school, how well have they been accepted by others their own age?

SUPPORTS TO LIFE IN CANADA. What do parents believe has made the most difference in their child(ren)'s success in adapting to life in Canada so far? In response to this question (asked in an open-ended format), refugees were most likely to point to the school system generally (40%) or teachers in particular (21%), while others mentioned the fact that young children typically adapt easily to change (e.g., picking up the language, learning the culture) (28%), the fact that they made friends (23%), being able to speak the local language (19%) and the safety of the country (8%). Some pointed out other factors, while some insisted that no adaptation was required (implying it was seamless).

What has made the most difference in your children's success?



Q.79

What has made the most difference in your child(ren)'s success in adapting to life in Canada so far?

Q.79

What has made the most difference in your child(ren)'s success in adapting to life in Canada so far?

"Their young age so it's easy for them to adapt fast to a new culture. Also, the school system here is good which makes it easy for them to blend into the society".

"Children see people from different cultures. Adapting the way of thinking of native people (Quebecois)."

"Activities and friends at school, and programs for the older kids at the neighborhood house and the youth centre."

"The kids were so young when they arrived here so they learned the language fast and integrated with the society easily."

"My kids saw other kids for the first time in Canada. When we were in Libya, it was under war and the kids were not old enough to form friendships and meet other people. So Canada marked the beginning of their lives."

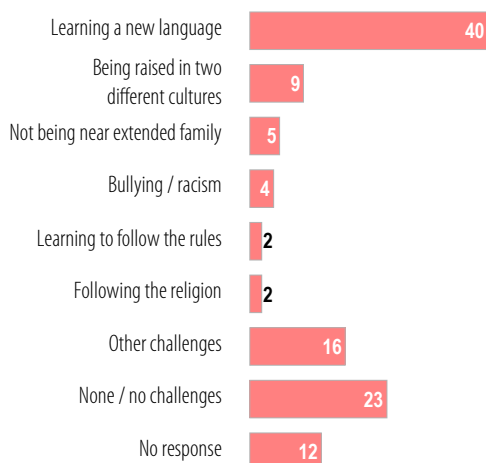
"This country charms children. The education system here attracts the children and motivates them to adapt and integrate."

"People are very kind. There are a lot of people like them. The education system is welcoming, and designed to make children feel welcome and it integrates them."

BIGGEST CHALLENGES FACING CHILDREN. When asked what they believed to be the biggest challenge facing their children in adapting to life in Canada (also open-ended), parents were most likely to say it was learning a new language (40%).

Others identified challenges related to being raised in two different cultures (9%), not being near extended family (5%), and bullying or discrimination (4%). One-third of parents stated their children faced no particular challenges in adapting to life in Canada (23%) or did not offer a response to the question (12%). Mention of a language barrier was most common in Quebec, and least so in Ontario.

Biggest challenge for your children in Canada (%)



Q.80
What would you say has been the biggest challenge facing your children in adapting to life in Canada?

Q.80

What would you say has been the biggest challenge facing your children in adapting to life in Canada?

"Raising them using two cultures. I find it challenging to keep sense of attachment within my kids in regards to our language and traditions."

"The language barrier. My daughters face a bit of discrimination because they don't have friends in classes. There is a barrier because my daughters wear hijab and that makes her not approachable by other students which makes them difficult for them to contribute more in school."

"Lack of language skills (in the early days). Cultural shock: differences in people, food, school system. Left their cousins and left without knowing when and if they will see them again – lived and grew up together in Syria (they were living side by side when I was working abroad in Lebanon before and during the early days of the war). They were lonely and depressed for the first while when they didn't have friends and were away from their familiar surroundings."

"There is too much freedom for children and the different cultures."

"No, they didn't have major problems because they are young and they learn fast. However, at the beginning they were getting bullied a lot at school and I couldn't go to the school to talk to the administration about it because of the language barrier but after they became stronger at English the bullying stopped because they knew how to express themselves better."

"Language. There was some insults from other students and they couldn't stand up for themselves at the beginning until they were able to speak English fluently."



Looking Ahead – Life Goals and Aspirations

The final section of the interview asked refugees to look ahead to the future, and speak about their goals and hopes for the future – both for themselves and their children.

Life goals

Syrian refugees have many life goals, but most prominent are owning a home and completing their education. Most were very optimistic about achieving at least some of their aspirations, but cited such obstacles as financial security, poor language skills, employment challenges and COVID-related delays.

TOP LIFE GOALS. Refugees were asked to identify the three things they most want to achieve in their lifetime (as an open-ended question). Many goals were mentioned, but at the top of the list were to buy or own their own home (42%) and complete their education (including receiving equivalency for what was earned prior to coming to Canada) (39%). Two other common themes relate to work and career (finding or improving upon employment (35%), starting or expanding a business (22%)) and family and children (sponsoring other family members to come to Canada (24%), ensuring children finish their education (22%)).

Smaller proportions highlighted such goals as achieving financial security (13%), making a good life for themselves and their families (12%), improving their language proficiency (11%) and getting Canadian citizenship (10%).

The range of life goals was broadly similar across the refugee population, with some variation. Placing a priority on finishing one’s own education was most prominent among those ages 18 to 24, women and those who have no more than a high school diploma; while emphasizing one’s children’s education was mentioned most frequently by refugees 35 to 44 years of age and those with large families. In terms of work and career goals, women were more apt to say they want to find or improve their employment situation, while men were more likely to focus on starting or expanding a business. Refugees living in Atlantic Canada were the most likely to say they would like to sponsor other family members to come to Canada.

What you most want to achieve in your lifetime (%)

Buy / own my own home	42
Complete my education	39
Work and career	
Find / improve employment	35
Start / expand own business	22
Find employment in my field	16
Family and children	
Sponsor family to come to Canada	24
Ensure children finish education	22
Get married / settle down	11
Secure children’s future	11
Financial security	13
A good life for me and my family	12
Improve language proficiency	11
Get Canadian citizenship	10
Good health	6
Give back to society	6
Travel	6
Other life goals	2

Q.81

And today, what would you say are the three things you most want to achieve in your lifetime?

Q.81

And today, what would you say are the three things you most want to achieve in your lifetime?

“Start my own business and work independently in something that I enjoy doing. Completing my education.”

“That my children get their higher education, this was our main goal in coming Canada.”

“My utmost goal is to be able to sponsor someone from my relatives to come and reunite with my father or mother.”

“To find the work that I had, to live my past life. Travel and living life comfortably.”

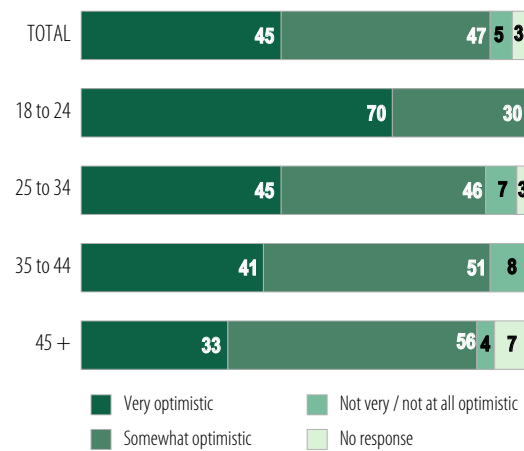
“To create new programs for newcomers and immigrants.”

CONFIDENCE IN ACHIEVING LIFE GOALS. How do refugees feel about the prospects for achieving at least some of their life goals? Close to half (45%) said they were very optimistic about making this happen, with most of the rest indicating they were somewhat optimistic (47%). Only five percent did not share this optimism.

A positive outlook about the future was most evident among younger refugees; 70 percent of those ages 18 to 24 said they were very optimistic, compared with fewer than half as many (33%) among those 45 and older. Notably, perspectives were also shaped by financial circumstances; strong optimism was expressed by two-thirds (67%) of those who felt financially secure, but by only about one-quarter (23%) of those who were experiencing financial hardship (although only 9% of this group said they were not very or not at all optimistic in achieving some of their life goals).

Optimism in achieving life goals

By age (%)



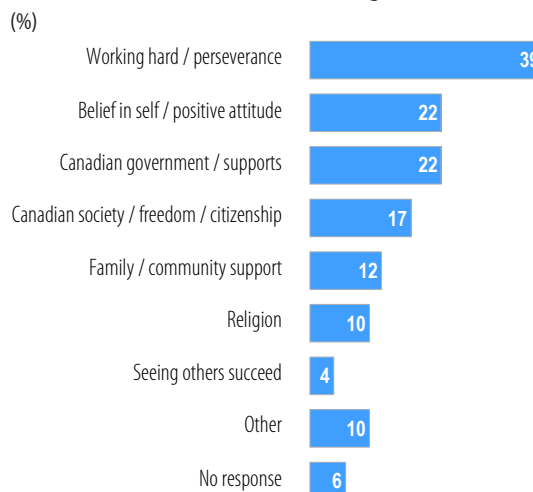
Q.84

How optimistic are you now about eventually achieving at least some of your life goals?

BASIS FOR HOPE AND CONFIDENCE. What gives refugees hope or confidence in achieving their lifetime goals? In response to an open-ended question, they were most likely to point to success coming from working hard and perseverance (39%). Other reasons included believing in oneself (22%), the Canadian government and the various supports provided to refugees (22%), Canadian society in terms of the freedom and opportunities provided (17%), family and community support (12%), and one's religion (10%).

Reasons for hope and confidence in achieving life goals vary somewhat by age group. The youngest refugees (18 to 24) were the most likely to mention working hard, belief in self and family/community support; while the oldest (45 plus) were the most apt to point to government support. Gender also appears to play a role in outlook, with men emphasizing hard work and government support, and women placing greater emphasis on family or community support, and religion.

Basis of confidence to achieve life goals



Q.82
What gives you hope or confidence in being able to achieve your lifetime goals?

Q.82

What gives you hope or confidence in being able to achieve your lifetime goals?

"The Canadian system gives me hope, even though it took me well over three years to navigate with little information, but still believes that the Canadian government system is in place to help people."

"My faith and believe in Allah, and I believe nothing is impossible."

"In this country if you work hard you achieve what you want."

"I am giving my whole time to work on these goals and I have them set in my mind so I know exactly what I want."

"I'm confident that I'm working hard for it and I adapt very easily. I am not afraid to try different things and paths to achieve my goal."

"Looking at the past, and realizing where we are now. The emotional support I get from my wife and daughter. Every time I look at them, I am motivated to do more for them."

"The law stands with people in this country, so nobody can steal or scam and get away with it."

"The nature of the country makes it easy to achieve my goals. The Canadian system is built to give chances to people who want to achieve something in their life."

"Living in a free country like Canada is a huge part of it. Knowing that the country, even though no country is perfect, is a free democracy, so by virtue of that, it's a self-correcting system, something that is not available in the Middle East. Confidence in the system, no one is above the law, everyone is accountable for their actions."

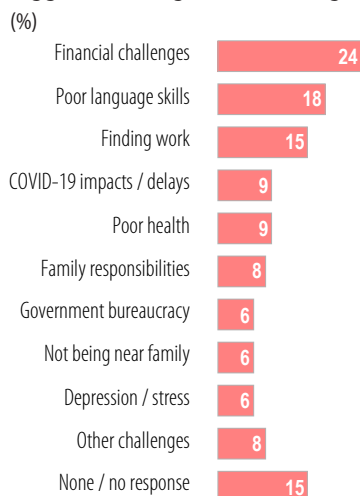
"When I get my diploma in Sociology, I'll be able to help kids who don't know what they want in life and try to steer them in the right direction. This is what gives me hope."

"When I see welcoming and kind people who don't judge and discriminate against you. When I meet people who give more than they take."

BIGGEST CHALLENGES. What do refugees find to be the biggest challenges to achieving their life goals? No one obstacle emerged as pre-eminent, but the most common challenges were financial (24%), poor language skills (18%), finding work (15%), COVID-19-related impacts and delays (9%), and poor health (9%). One in six (15%) said they saw no particular challenges or did not otherwise offer a response to the question.

Challenges to life goals were similar across the refugee population. Depression/stress was most likely to be mentioned by those ages 18 to 24, while those in one to two person households were most apt to emphasize struggles with COVID-19-related impacts and not being near family.

Biggest challenges in achieving life goals



Q.83

And what do you see as the biggest challenges facing you in achieving these goals?

Q.83

And what do you see as the biggest challenges facing you in achieving these goals?

"Difficulty finding a job and how it will affect my family life negatively. Also, financial difficulties."

"The interest on any loans from the banks. I'm working on a project with three of my friends and this is the main thing stopping us to complete the project. The high expenses that keeps going up every year."

"To find the time to finish my studies as I am responsible for everything in the house and the kids with nobody to help."

"Everything is slow in Canada. Still can't find the work I want after four years."

"Biggest challenge will be to ensure financial security to take the course after completing adult high school. Everything up to now was free."

"For the time being it's COVID-19: I can't register at school and I lost a whole year. Also, finding a daycare for my youngest so I can attend school: there was no vacancy."

"Language limits. No matter how long you stay here it will never be perfect. Rules regarding sponsorship are complicated."

"I have a sick husband and I must take care of him. I can't do anything because I have to be with him all the time."

"Challenges in studying the language – still at Level 4. Not able to talk to a lot of people to strengthen language due to COVID-19. Anxiety about still not having citizenship: failed citizenship test. Felt overwhelmed when I took it the first time and worried it would happen again."

"The laws that treats us like refugees, like asking us for credit or tax history to be able to do anything here, that stops us from achieving a lot of things because we don't have history here."

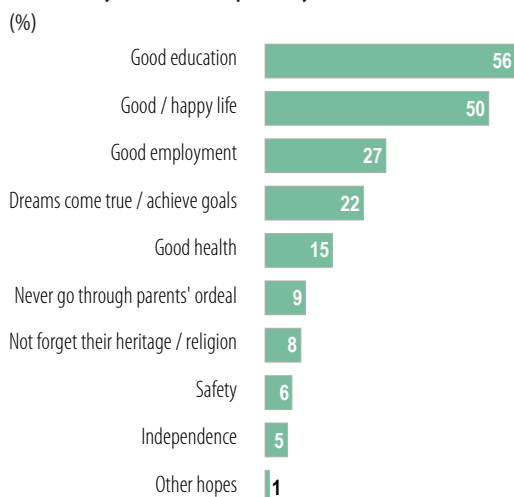
Aspirations for children

Refugees have many hopes for their children, especially when it comes to getting a good education and being well-employed. Financial challenges were the most common worry about their future well-being.

HOPES FOR CHILDREN'S LIVES. What do refugees hope for their children's lives as they grow up? In response to this open-ended question, parents emphasized a getting a good education (56%), and having good and happy lives (50%).

Others said they hope their children will realize good employment opportunities (27%), will achieve their life dreams and goals (22%), enjoy good health (15%) and never go through what their parents had to endure (e.g., leaving their home to seek safety elsewhere) (9%). Responses were largely similar across the refugee population interviewed.

What do you most hope for your children?



Q.92

What do you most hope for your children in their lives as they grow up?

Q.92

What do you most hope for your children in their lives as they grow up?

I wish my children to grow up to be good "Syrian Canadian" citizens. I don't want them to forget their heritage and culture and want them to be successful.

For their life to be better than ours. To settle and find good jobs and good life without having to go through a war like we did.

That they don't forget their religion, culture and that their original country is Syria.

To finish their school and go to higher education. Serve the society; be active contributors to society.

I wish that they have a happy life. I wish they don't judge people and don't be judged. I wish they work on themselves and not just rely on anything; regardless of what they choose to do, they shouldn't rely on anything.

I wish they have good education and obtain a university degree. It's going to be easier for them and it will enable them to give more to the society.

To be effective and contribute to the society while still holding on to where they come from. They can hold two identities: Syria and Canada. I hope they'll be able to afford to go to university because it can be very expensive.

To have good health and may God help them so they won't require assistance from anyone.

My daughter loves to study about space and astronomy, while my other kids love hockey. I hope they follow what they like.

BIGGEST CHALLENGES FACING CHILDREN. Parents were asked what they see as the biggest challenges or obstacles their children will face in realizing their own goals (open-ended). Refugees were most likely to expect that financial issues will be their children's biggest challenge (27%), followed by the risk of losing their heritage (13%), finding employment (8%) and discrimination or racism (7%). Some believe the biggest obstacle their children will confront is their own decision-making or will (8%), while almost one-quarter (23%) stated they did not see any particular obstacles limiting their opportunities.

Younger parents (ages 25 to 34) were most likely to anticipate their children facing challenges in losing their heritage, and experiencing discrimination or racism; while those 45 and older were more apt to emphasize their children's own decision-making and finding employment. Fathers tended to worry more about financial issues and their children's decision-making, but also insisted that they will face no obstacles; while mothers were more apt to mention the challenge of finding employment or did not offer any response to the question.

Biggest challenges facing your children's future (%)



Q.93

What do you see as the biggest challenges or obstacles that your children may face in realizing their own goals in life?

Q.93

What do you see as the biggest challenges or obstacles that your children may face in realizing their own goals in life?

"The biggest challenges or obstacles my children may face is the length of school and how costly it may end up being."

"Financial difficulties. I can't save for them. But they shouldn't have this problem here; there are student loans and there is good help for young people who want to go to school."

"I hope they don't face racism. But I think they may be judged because of their names."

"I am just worried that they will ditch our culture completely. I want our children to embrace our culture and religion."

"Maybe the bullying, especially if it's about the religion or culture."

"It's tough to find jobs; the challenge would be to live well and buy a home."

"The culture here is very different than our culture due to our religion and some beliefs here doesn't match our beliefs in our home and country. Also, there is food that we can't have due to our religion so sometimes they may find it difficult to cope here."

"I think that since he came at a younger age, he will not have a lot of challenges. Canada fosters the factors of success."



APPENDIX: Research Methodology

The research was designed and managed by the Environics Institute for Survey Research, with the implementation carried by a leading survey research supplier, R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., under subcontract.

Interview protocol (Questionnaire)

Phase 1 of the project entailed a consultation process with key stakeholders and experts to ensure the research focused on relevant issues germane to Syrian refugee resettlement in Canada, and was informed by previous research and on-the-ground experience. This included the formation of a standing Research Advisory Group, with representatives from leading settlement agencies across the country and academic researchers. The research team reviewed existing research and available data on Syrian refugee resettlement, and consulted with other relevant informants (e.g., IRCC representatives, academic researchers) to gain further insight.

This consultation provided the basis for the design of an interview protocol (questionnaire) to be conducted in person, which contained approximately 130 questions, of which 30 were open-ended (to which participants responded in their own words rather than selecting among pre-set options). The protocol was based on the model developed by the Environics Institute for lived experience research of this kind, and included selected questions drawn from previous surveys with Syrian refugees and other populations. The protocol was developed in English, and subsequently translated into French and (Levantine) Arabic. Because most of the interviews were to be conducted in Arabic, the Arabic translation was reviewed by a translation company (cApStAn Linguistic Quality Control, Inc.) which specializes in providing translations for surveys conducted in Arab countries.

Prior to being finalized, the protocol was pilot tested with 12 Syrian refugees recruited in the Ottawa-Gatineau area, to evaluate the overall interview process, the effectiveness of the protocol generally and specific questions (e.g., question sequence, question comprehension), and how participants felt about the experience. The results of the field test were used to make final adjustments in preparation for the rollout of interviews across the country. Because few changes were made to the protocol, the field test interviews were retained for inclusion in the final sample. A final version of the interview protocol is available from the Environics Institute upon request.

Just as the pilot testing was completed in mid-March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 virus to be the cause of a worldwide pandemic, resulting in most institutions across the country shutting their doors and imposing new protocols to reduce spread of the virus and protect public health. As a result, the study implementation was suspended since it was not safe to conduct in-person interviewing, and it was not clear when conditions would become safe to proceed. As it became clear that the lockdown conditions would need to be maintained for some time, and in-person interviewing would not be possible, the methodology and interview protocol were revised to administer the interviews remotely by telephone or through web chat platforms such as WhatsApp. The sampling design was revised to expand the scope beyond the initial selection of 20 communities, to encompass refugees living anywhere in the country.³³

Once the interview protocol was retooled for remote administration, a field test was conducted with 43 refugees in September and October 2020 to evaluate the recruitment process and interviewing by telephone or web chat. The field test confirmed the viability of the new method, and resulted in minor adjustments to the recruitment and protocol text.

³³ This change in the sample design was made possible by switching the interview mode from in-person to telephone/web chat. The initial plan focused on 20 communities, to manage the costs of interviewers travelling to meet with participants in person.

Sample design and recruitment

The target population for this study consisted of Syrian refugees who resettled in Canada as part of the federal government's Syrian Refugee Resettlement Initiative, and arrived between November 4, 2015 and December 31, 2016. This group totalled 39,636 individuals (in 11,800 family units), from which this study would select a representative sample of refugees to be interviewed, with quotas established to ensure the sample reflects the population based on refugees' age, gender, admission stream, region and community size. The original plan called for interviewing 300 refugees across 20 selected communities in three categories (large urban centres, smaller cities, towns and villages).

Recruitment of study participants was accomplished through IRCC, which maintains a comprehensive database of refugees. The study team created an invitation message (in Arabic, English and French) which IRCC then sent via email to a selected sample of refugees in its database, inviting one person per household to participate in the study – and asking them to respond directly to the study team at Malatest if interested in participation. A reminder email was sent several weeks after the initial invitation. A total of 3,500 invitations were sent.

Refugees who responded to the invitation completed a registration form to answer several questions about their background and language preference, and then confirmed for participation in the study if they met the criteria for inclusion (i.e., fit with the required sample profile). Those invited to participate were provided with a brief explanation of the research, and signed a consent form to confirm their understanding of what was entailed and verify their consent to participate. Participants were given a \$75 honorarium upon completion of the interview in recognition of their time and contribution to the project, and offered a copy of the final research report once it became available.

Interview administration (fieldwork)

Interviews were conducted by interviewers recruited, trained and managed by R.A. Malatest, in Arabic, English or French, as preferred by participants (87% were conducted in Arabic, and the remainder in English). Interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 2.5 hours (based on how much participants had to say in response to open-ended questions), with an average length of 75 minutes.

Interviewing was conducted over two periods: September 15 to December 14, 2020, and February 12 to March 31, 2021.³⁴ A total of 305 interviews were completed with eligible Syrian refugees, with quotas successfully filled for region, gender and admission stream. A profile of the final sample is presented in the body of the report.

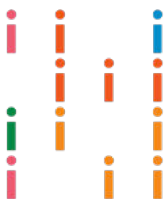
Data coding and tabulation

Following completion of the fieldwork, the verbatim responses to open-ended questions in Arabic were translated into English for purposes of analysis. All responses were then coded into conceptually relevant themes and sub-themes, and incorporated into the full data file containing all interview questions.

Detailed data tables were prepared, presenting the results for all questions by a number of participant characteristics, such as region, admission stream, age, gender and education. These tables are posted on the Environics Institute website at <https://www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/project-details/canadian-syrian-refugee-lived-experience-project>. A complete data file (excluding all personal identifiers) is available for non-commercial use upon request through a data licence from the Environics Institute.

For more information, contact **Dr. Keith Neuman** at: keith.neuman@environics.ca

³⁴ The gap in the interviewing schedule was required in order to address an administrative requirement associated with the IRCC Contribution Agreement.



**Environics
Institute**
For Survey Research

The Environics Institute
for Survey Research

info@environicsinstitute.org
www.environicsinstitute.org