

# ALBERTA SYRIAN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT EXPERIENCE STUDY

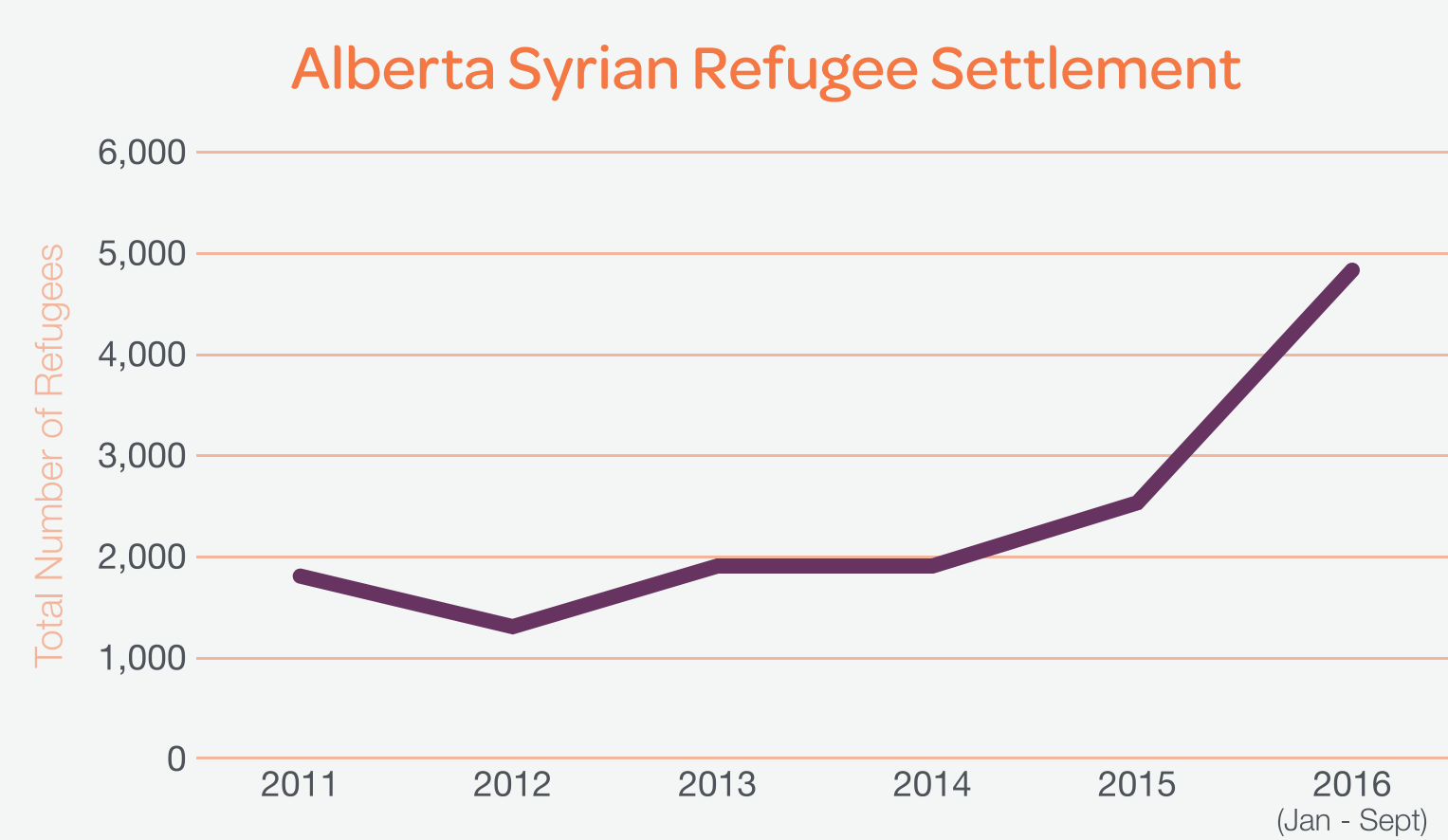


AAISA in collaboration with HABITUS Consulting Collective and Dr. Julie Drolet, Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Work at University of Calgary



## INTRODUCTION

Given the limited knowledge of Syrian refugees' lived experiences in their settlement and integration process, AAISA conducted a research study to understand their early resettlement experiences (within 6-18 months of arrival) in Alberta during 2015 and 2016. Alberta is one of the top three destinations for refugees after Ontario and Quebec. Building off the *Provincial Needs Assessment: Improving Refugee Resettlement in Alberta*<sup>1</sup> report, this study contributes to a body of knowledge about refugees' unique needs, barriers and experiences. The results can be used to inform programming and policy decisions at the provincial and federal levels.



## KEY METHODS

- Mixed methods approach
- Complementary quantitative and qualitative methods were used to address research questions focused on access to settlement services, personal resettlement needs and welcoming communities.

### Review of Literature:

A brief review of literature was conducted on refugee resettlement and an analysis of the uptake of settlement services by destinations and categories (GARs, PSRs and BVORs).

### Community Forums and Survey:

In collaboration with RAP providers, community forums were held in 5 cities.

- Forums introduced study to the participants and provided an opportunity to conduct the survey.
- The first language survey in Arabic was designed to gain a deeper understanding of Syrian refugees' experiences.
- Sample size was 100.

### Interviews:

The study conducted a deep dive into experiences of resettlement and welcoming communities through in-depth interviews.

- 20 interviews with Syrian refugees were conducted using the services of Arabic speaking research assistants.
- Participants were given a \$25 gift card to compensate them for their time and attention to the research.

## LIMITATIONS

Given the budget and timeline limitations, the sample size was small and geographically restricted. Participants were mainly selected through the community forums organized by RAP providers leading to a skew in sampling with more GAR representation. Due to budgetary restrictions interviews could only be conducted in four cities (Lethbridge excluded).

## ANALYSIS

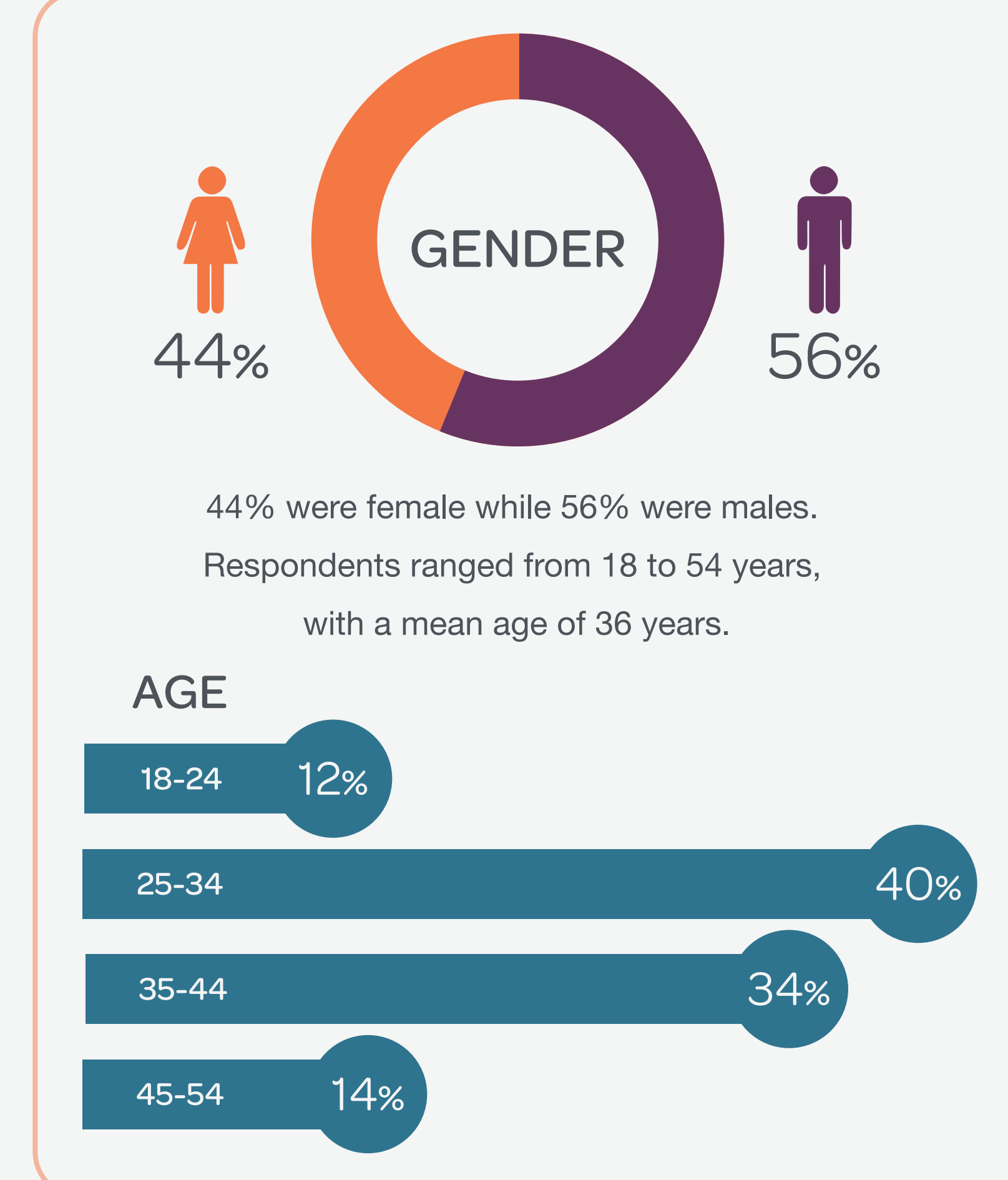
The final report includes a joint analysis of mixed method data where qualitative data and quantitative data was compared and contrasted to develop an enriched understanding. Through a discussion of multiple dimensions of the data, the report is able to provide a critical picture of the experiences of refugee resettlement in Alberta.

“My husband and I were discussing the Quebec incident [mass shooting]. We managed to completely avoid talking about it in front of my kids. We are genuinely worried about it because we go pray in the masjid (mosque) on a daily basis and I wouldn't want there to be fear in me or my kids from going to a masjid.”

– GAR woman 5

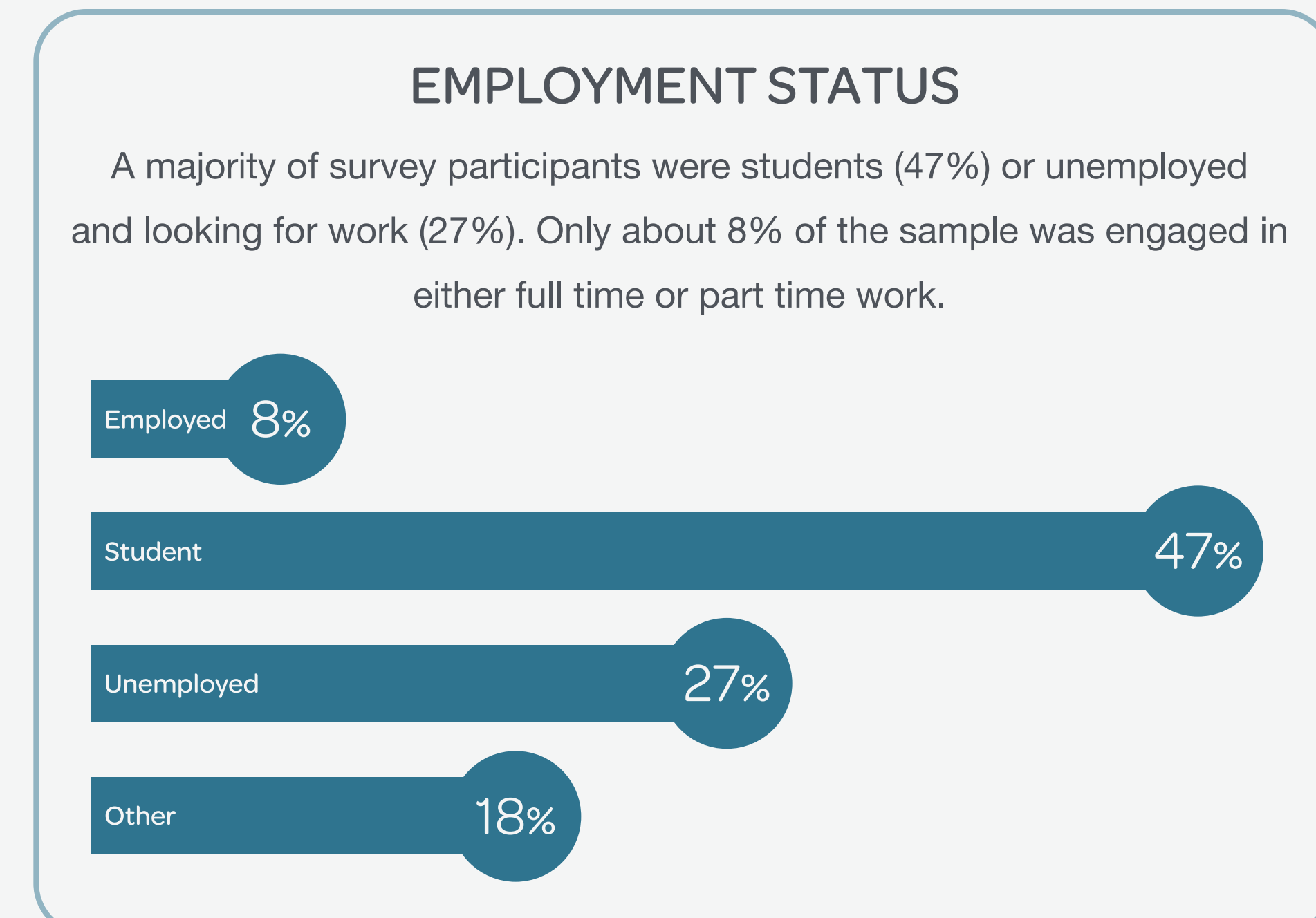
## FINDINGS

### Survey Participant Demographics:



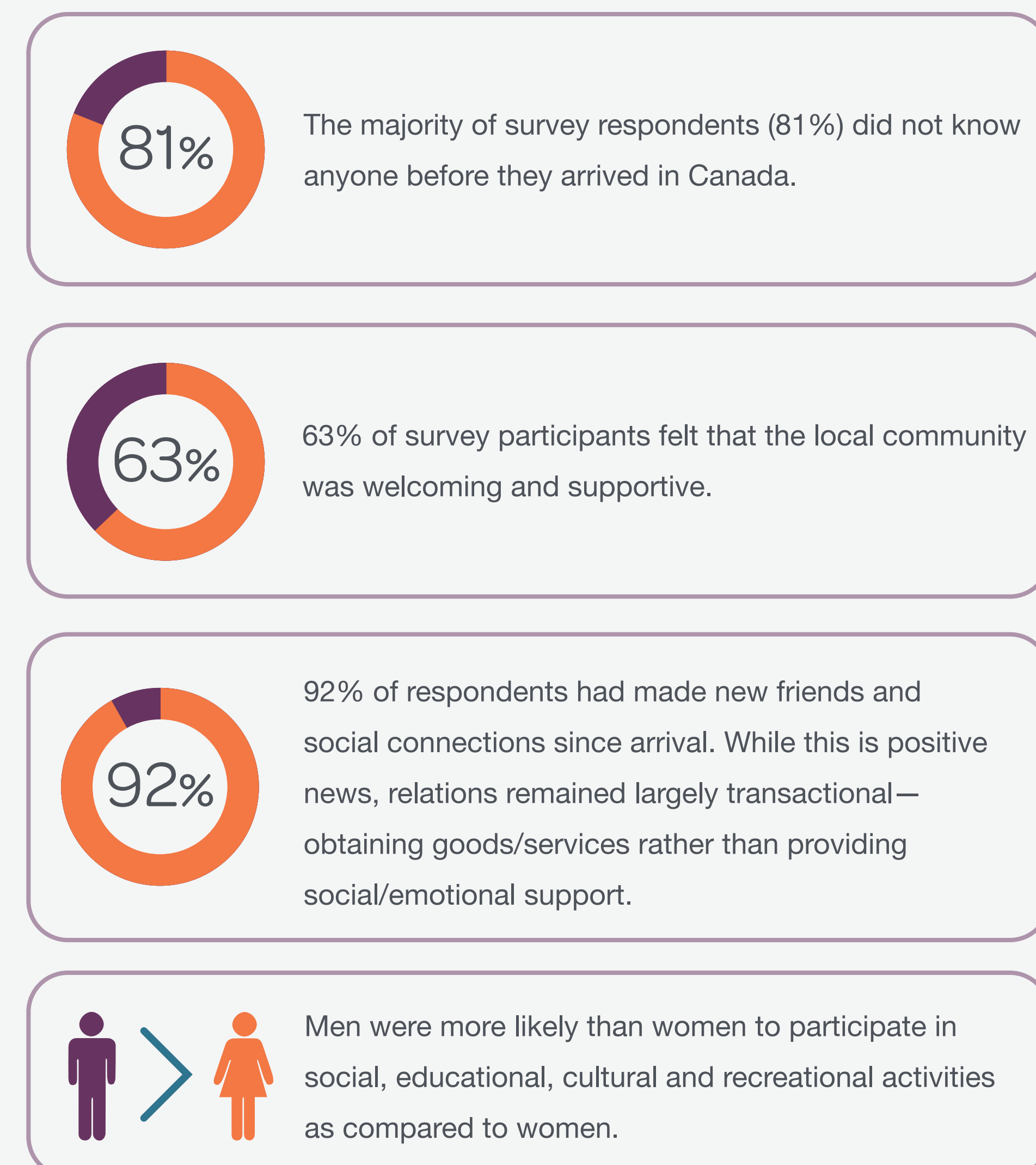
### Employment:

Employment continues to be a challenge for Syrian refugees. Many emphasized the key role employment plays for their financial stability, autonomy but also settlement—not just for the individual worker but also their resettled family and/or household unit.



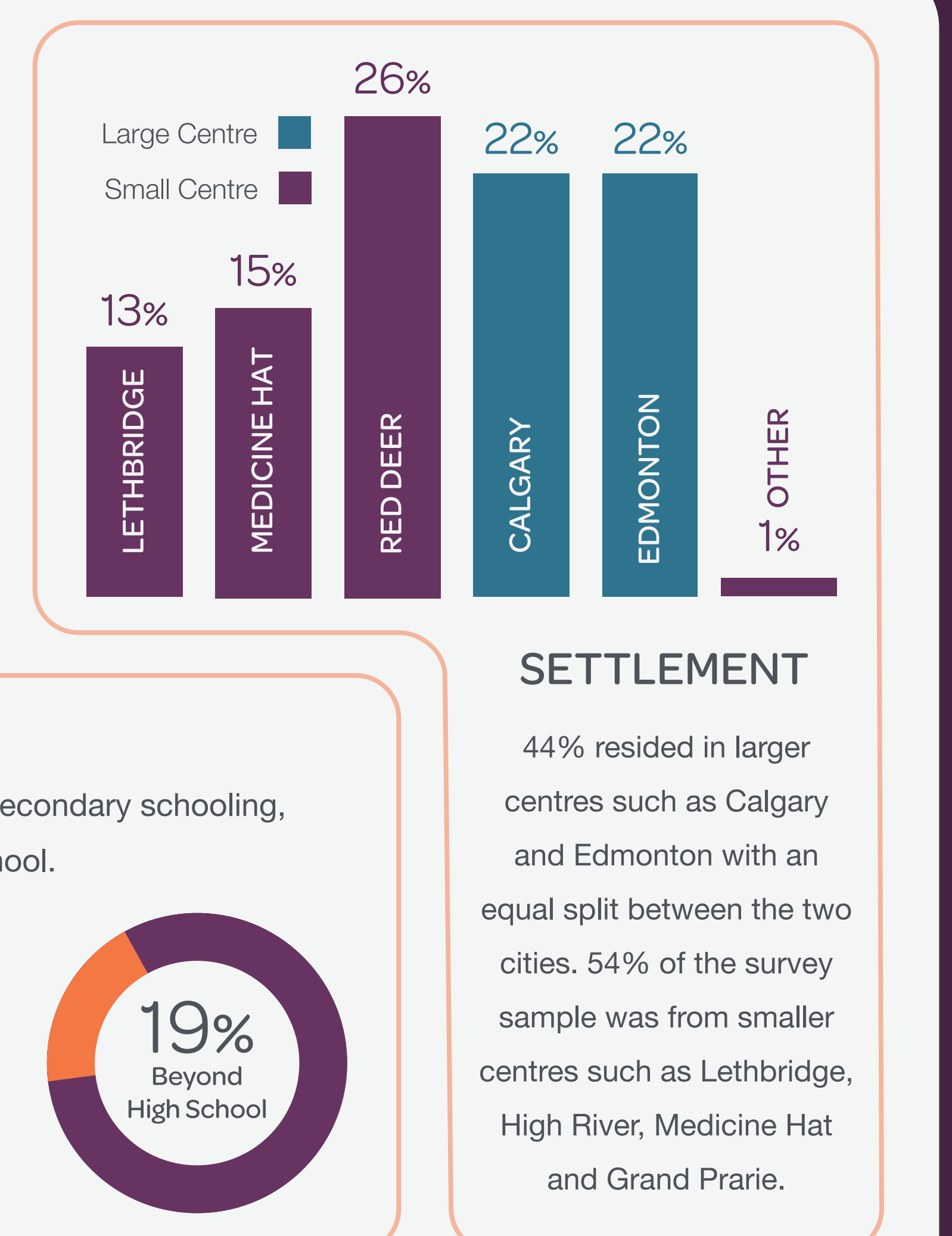
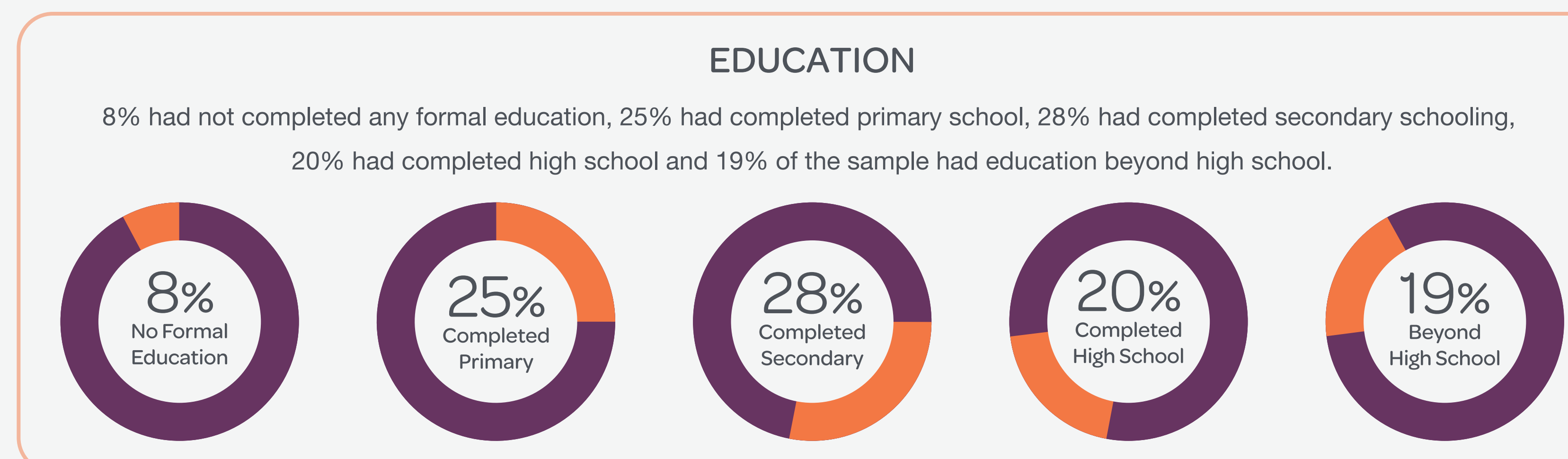
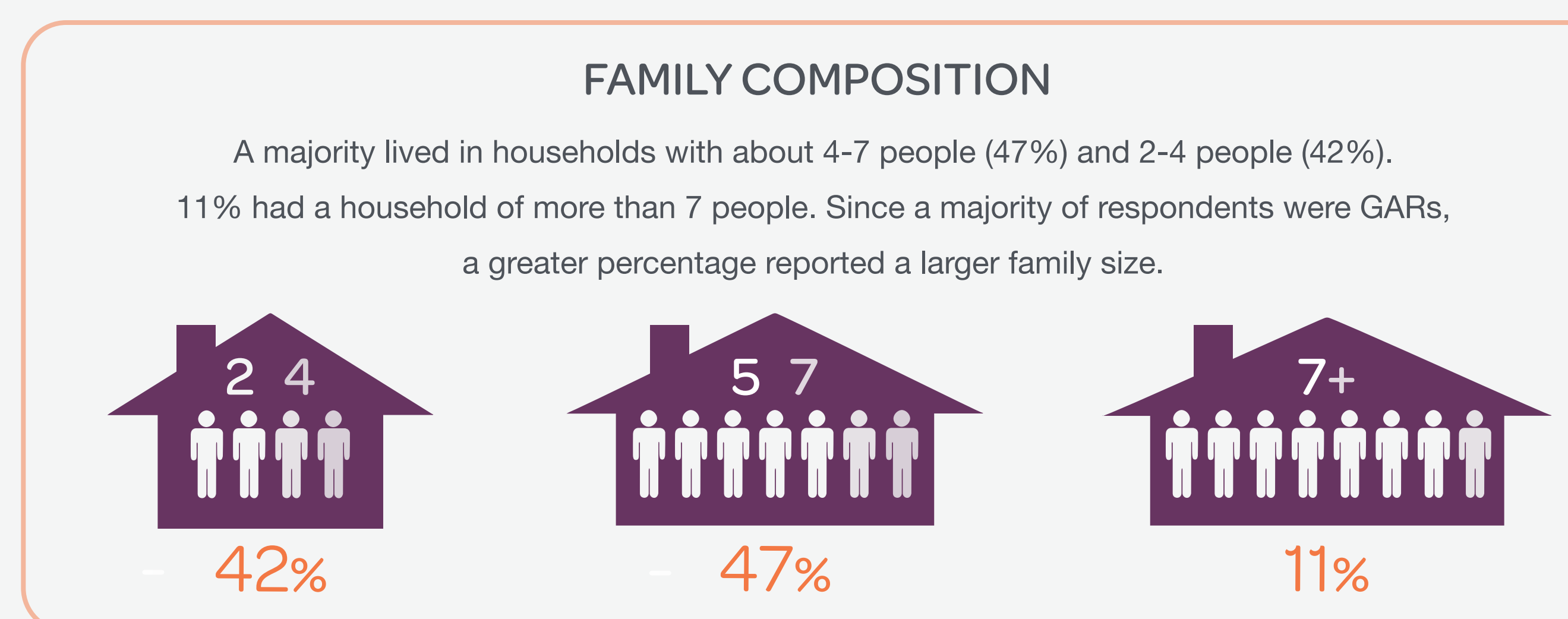
### Social Connections:

Many respondents reported a sense of belonging to Canada. However, adjustment to social life, struggling with their identity, making new friends and building social capital threatened their sense of belonging and caused insecurity in their uncertain environment.

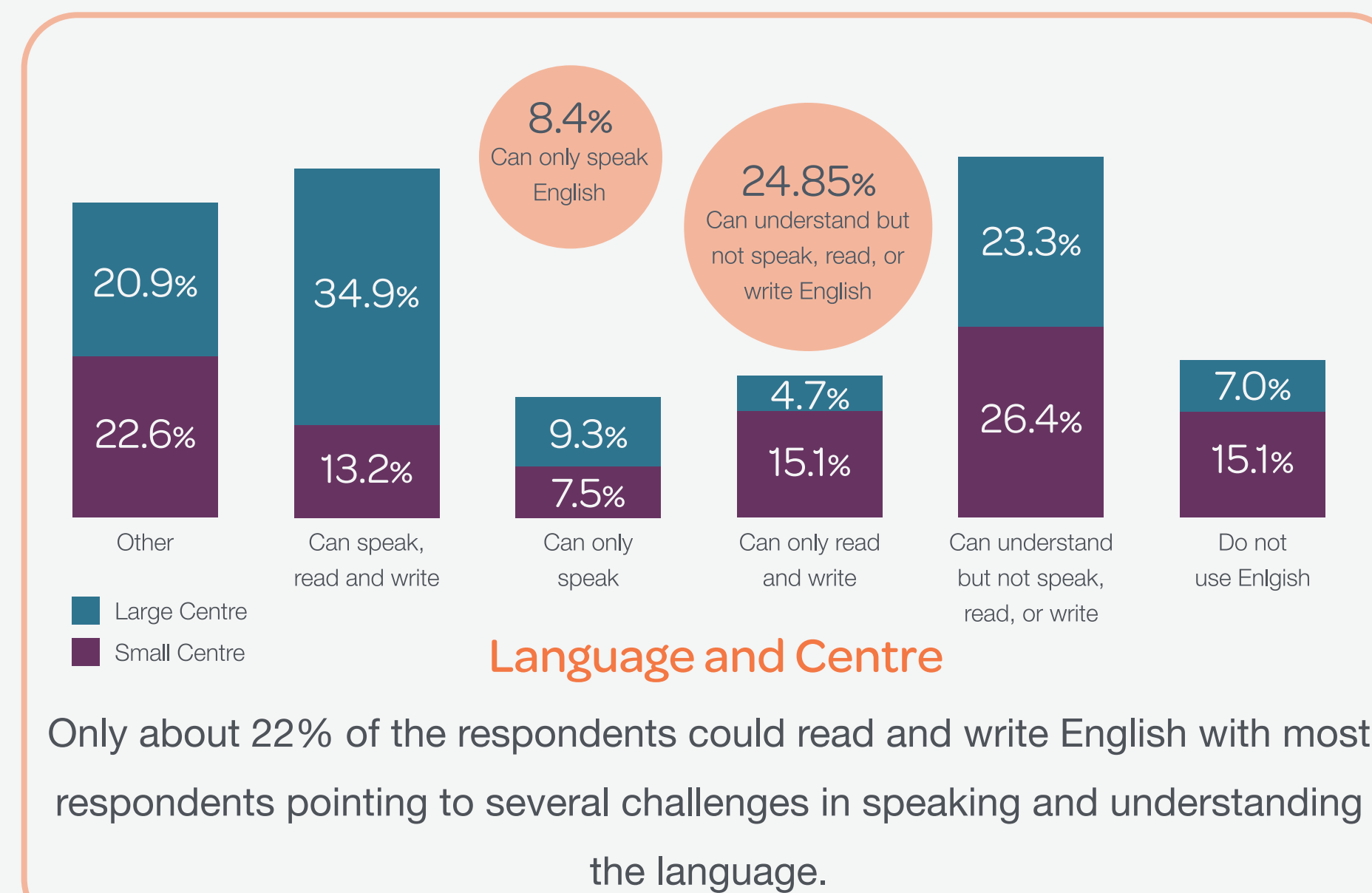


1. Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies, *Provincial Needs Assessment: Improving Refugee Resettlement in Alberta*, Calgary, 2016.

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- Language not only impacts the refugees' ability to find and secure employment but to also foster social connections within their community and systems such as schools.
- Challenges included lack of opportunities to practice the language while others who were not literate in Arabic were struggling to both learn basic language skills as well as learning appropriate usage.



“The thing that we experience most difficulty with is the language. Sometimes we go places but we cannot communicate because we don't know the language very well. The school language is different than the street language....”

– GAR man 5

“My personal qualifications are much, much higher than I do now ... It hurts me that I had to work at the produce section at a grocery store because my degree qualifies [me] to do much more ... I had a good experience here but again finding work is most important. ...Through contacts, I was able to get another job. It's a little better than the grocery store but there is a lot of gap between my qualifications and the type of work I do. I consider myself advancing little by little.”

– PSR man 3

## CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Syrian refugee population presents an important opportunity to better understand how to support short-, medium- and long-term settlement and integration. In order to support successful settlement, it is critical to address the barriers and challenges in language proficiency, employment, housing, mental health and social well-being. Given the current socio-political and economic global climate, these refugees are also facing several challenges including Islamophobia, racism and discrimination, some of which were also reported in this study. [Read the full report here.](#)

- ### Recommendations to Improve Refugee Resettlement in Alberta:
- Future research needed to explore gender differences among Syrian men and women as well as children and youth population to provide services tailored to their needs
  - More professional development and training opportunities to increase sharing of best practices and focus on skills in counselling, crisis care, conflict management, and referral support
  - Develop policy to cater to refugees' needs and capacities. Suggestions include providing longer support for incoming refugees both in terms of funding and services; increasing funding for refugees with physical or mental disabilities; greater involvement of refugees in settlement case planning, choosing settlement location suited to their needs
  - Creation of a peer navigator model to operate in compliment with RAP providers can help strengthen support services
  - Adopt a trauma informed lens when working with refugees at client, staff, agency and system levels
  - Draw on a strengths-based model in needs assessment to identify areas of support or enhancement and in the process, empower clients
  - Adopt employment strategies such as entrepreneurship training, support for informal income-generating activities, bridging programs (e.g., construction, hospitality, trades, food industry), health and safety training, job readiness programs, on-the-job support, and appropriate work placements.
  - Embed social well-being in all settlement outcomes