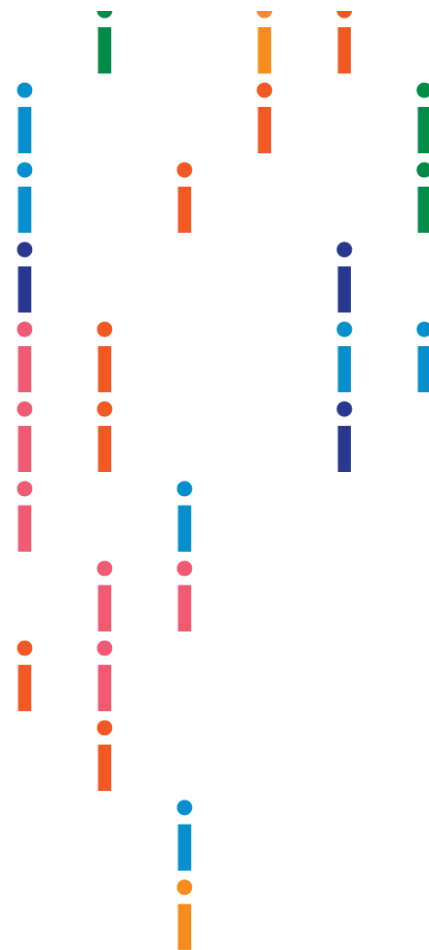




# Documenting the lived experience of resettled Syrian refugees:

## Research insights and lessons learned



# Workshop Panel

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Keith Neuman (Chair)

Environics Institute for Survey Research

Chris Friesen

ISSofBC

Nabiha Atallah

Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia

Leah Hamilton

Mount Royal University

# Research background

# Refugee resettlement in Canada

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- Resettlement of Syrian refugees in Canada became a gov't priority in 2015
- Approximately 50,000 refugees resettled in 2015 – 2019 through IRCC programs (GAR, PSR, BVOR)
- Resettlement outcomes monitored through IRCC Settlement Client surveys and ad hoc research by academics and SPOs
- We still do not have a full picture of what it means to be a resettled Syrian refugee in Canada - especially in understanding their holistic lived experience

# Syrian Refugee Lived Experience Project

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- National in-depth study of the lived experience of Syrian refugees living in Canada
- Utilized unique research model developed by the Environics Institute, combining survey methods and qualitative interviewing
- Builds upon current research with refugees by the federal gov't and others
- Funded by Contribution Agreement through IRCC

# Research objectives and intended outcomes

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- Generate new, policy-relevant insights into the lived experience of Syrian refugees
- Provide guidance to policy and settlement programming
- Build capacity for further research with other refugees and settlement populations
- Expand the public narrative around Syrian refugees in Canada

# Project in three phases

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- Phase 1: Consultation and design
- Phase 2: Research implementation
- Phase 3: Reporting, knowledge dissemination & community outreach

# Research methods

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- In-depth, one-on-one interviews with selected sample of 305 Syrian refugees across Canada who resettled in 2015-16
- Interviews conducted by telephone or webchat - mix of quantitative and qualitative questions
- Sample quotas for region, age, gender, and admission category (GAR, PSR, BVOR)
- Interviews conducted September 2020 – March 2021
- Participants received \$50 honorarium for their participation



# Topics covered

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- Situation prior to arriving in Canada
- Arrival in Canada (initial priorities, supports and challenges)
- Current life in Canada
  - Overall situation and experiences
  - Housing
  - Employment
  - Health and well-being
  - Sense of belonging
  - Response from other Canadians
  - Connections with local community
  - Children's experiences
- Future
  - Life aspirations
  - Hopes for children
  - Plans for relocation
- Personal & household characteristics

130 interview questions /  
31 were open-ended to capture  
qualitative responses

# Final sample profile

## Interview language

87% Arabic

13% English

Category	Number of interviews	% of Population	% of Sample
<b>Region</b>			
Atlantic	29	7%	10%
Central	168	67%	55%
Prairies	57	18%	19%
Pacific	51	8%	17%
<b>Admission category</b>			
GAR	168	54%	55%
PSR	101	38%	33%
BVOR	34	8%	11%
<b>Gender</b>			
Female	143	50%	47%
Male	162	50%	53%
<b>Age</b>			
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%
<b>Interview method</b>			
Video chat	50	-	16%
Telephone	243	-	80%
In-person	12	-	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

# Research highlights

# Refugees found Canada to be what they expected in many ways . . .

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

	%
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

## . . . and different in other ways

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

	%
<b>Worse than expected (NET)</b>	<b>62</b>
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

	%
<b>Better than expected (NET)</b>	<b>16</b>
More multicultural / open-minded / religiously tolerant	9
Transition easier than expected	4
More freedom of speech	2
People more helpful	2
Other (neither better or worse)	14
Nothing / no response	17

# Research provides deeper insights into the refugee experience through qualitative responses

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

*People here are open-minded which I was not expecting. Also, before we came here lots of people told us that we had to drop our religion and for my mother to remove her hijab to be accepted by the society here, but I was shocked how people here let you practice your religion without interfering in your personal life.*

Male, 18 - 24, Saskatchewan, BVOR, Arrived February 2016

*I was expecting that I was going to another planet. but everyone was very helpful. I thought that Canada will marginalize us as Lebanon did.*

Male, 35 - 44, New Brunswick, GAR, Arrived January 2016

*Health care system is lacking not as expected when you think of a G7 country (wait times are too long, lack of specialized care, etc.). Work is not as easy to find. School registration and acceptance can take a long time especially when there is a lack of language skills can be difficult to understand required steps.*

Female, 25 – 29, Newfoundland/Labrador, PSR, Arrived June 2016

# What refugees found to be most challenging when they first arrived in Canada – language barriers are the most common

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

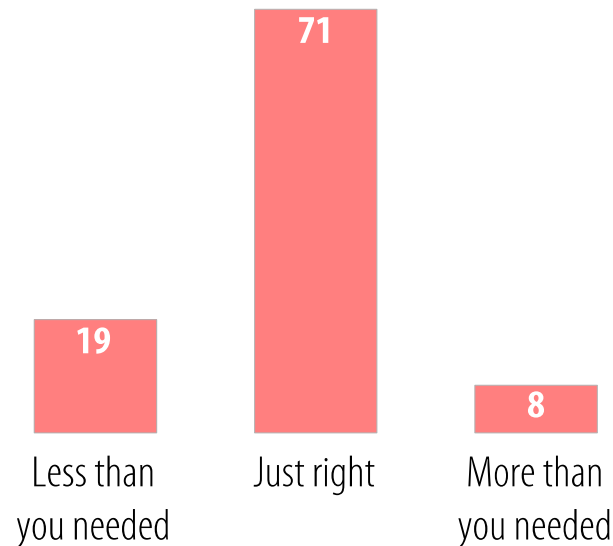
	%
<b>Language barrier</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Practical Necessities (NET)</b>	
Finding employment	15
Finding housing / accommodation	14
Lack of transportation/vehicle	6
Learning about public transit	5
Arranging for continuing education	4
Dealing with government bureaucracy	3
Communication with private sponsor	3

	%
<b>Adjustment To The Unfamiliar (NET)</b>	
Culture shock	11
Challenges with integration	10
Isolation / loneliness	9
Harsh weather	8
Other challenges	9
None / no response	5

## Most refugees with private sponsors say they received just the right amount of guidance and support

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23. I would like to ask you about the ways in which your sponsor tried to help you and your family get settled, and specifically the amount of advice and guidance you received about what to do and how you should do it. Would you say the amount of advice and guidance was:

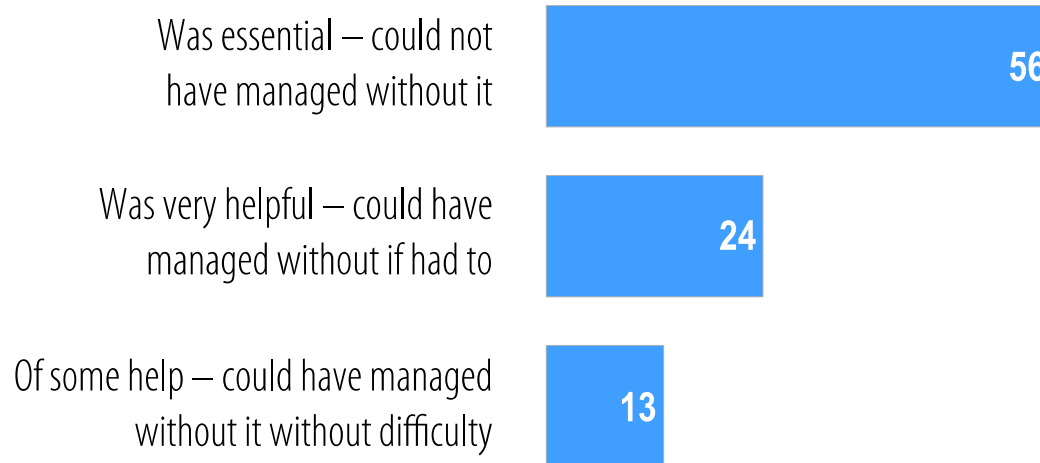




# A majority of privately-sponsored refugees describe the support received as *essential* to their resettlement

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23B. Which one of the following statements best describes the importance of the support provided by your private sponsor?



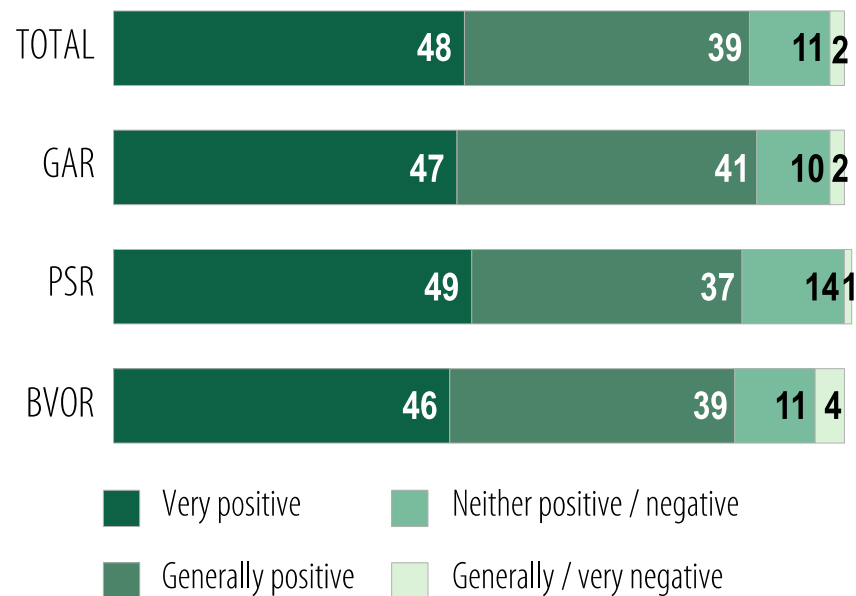
# Most helpful government services were those providing language, health and financial support

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

	%
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

# Most refugees are feeling positive about life in Canada at this point in their lives

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



## Feel **very positive** about life in Canada today:

### Satisfaction with housing:

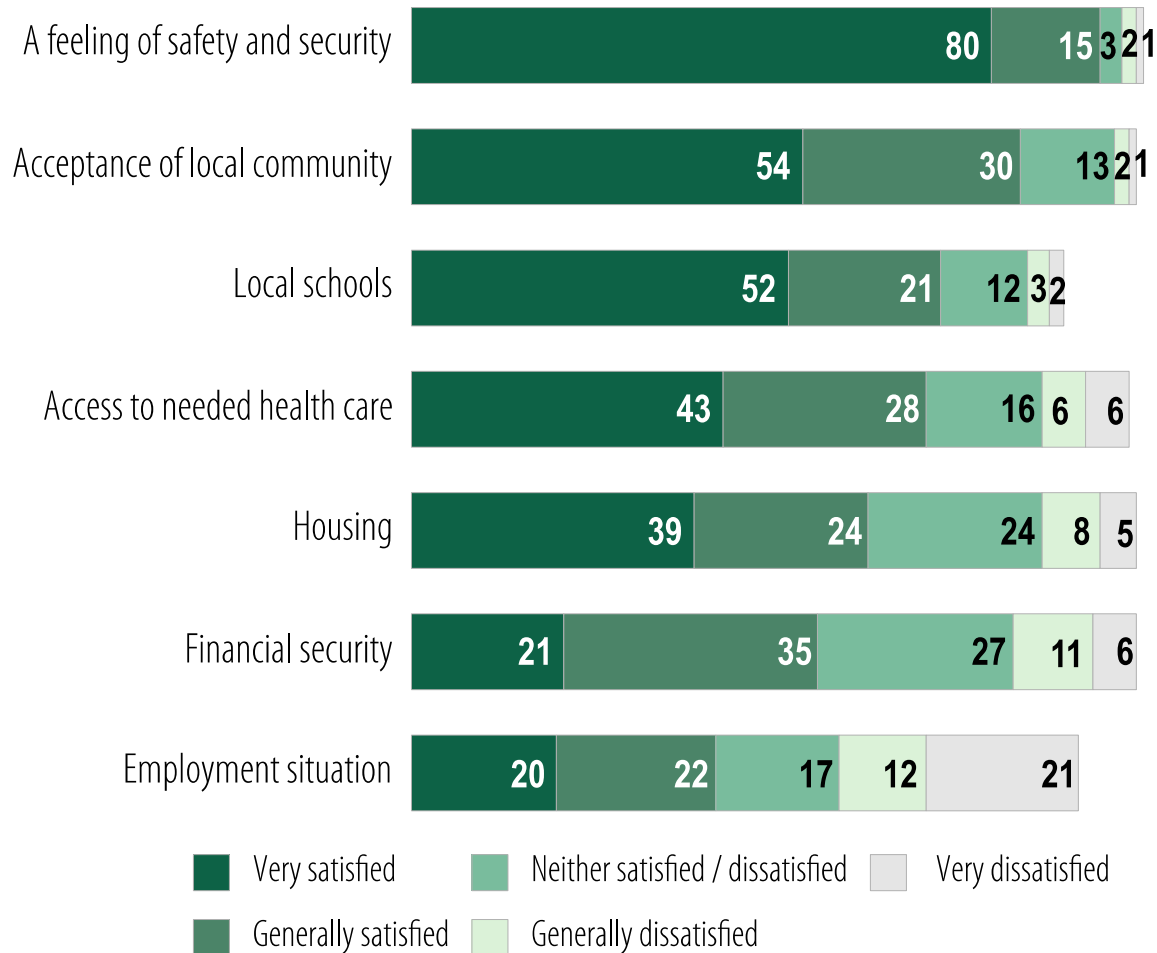
Very satisfied	64%
Generally satisfied	43%
Neither/dissatisfied	32%

### Number of close friends:

20 plus	67%
11 – 20	59%
1 – 10	45%
None	38%

# Refugees are least likely to be satisfied with their finances and employment

29a-g. How satisfied are you with each of the following aspects of your life today?



# Refugees are most likely to value the country's human rights and safety

30. 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

# At the top of dislikes is Canada's weather, followed by issues of culture, social isolation and other challenges

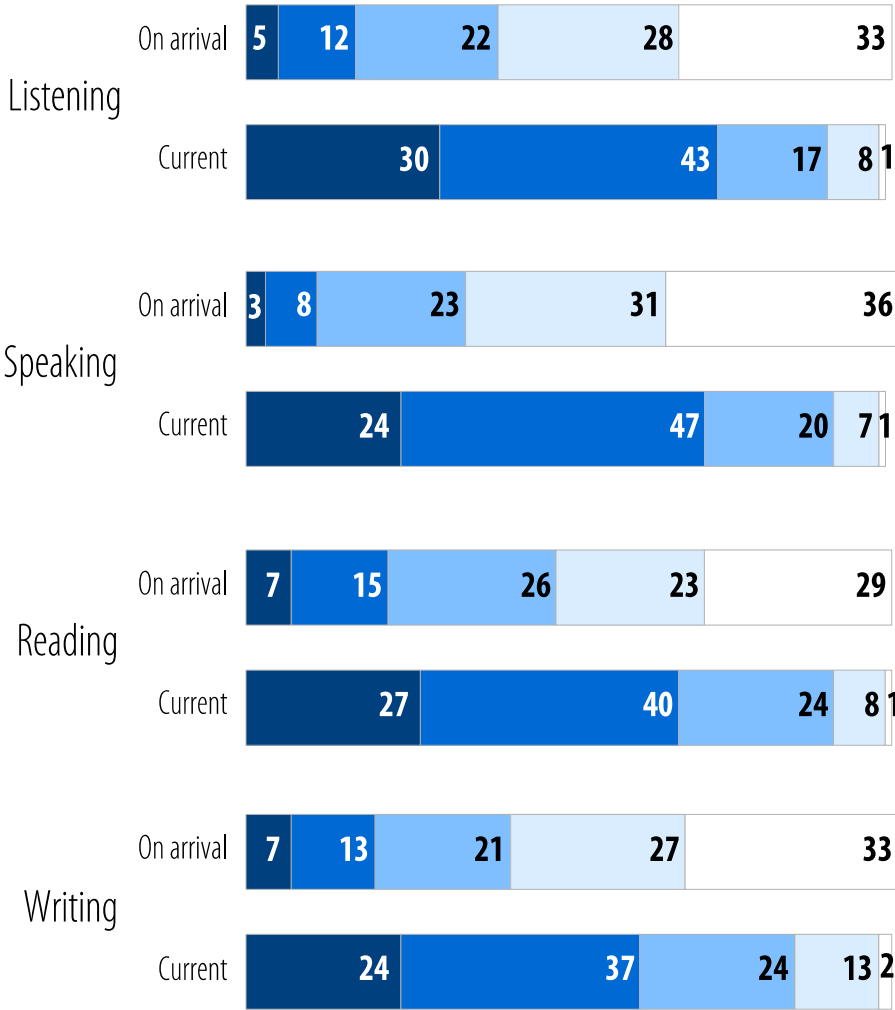
31. And what do you like least about living in Canada?

	%
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

# Language skills improved dramatically since first arriving in Canada

98/99. What was your fluency in [English/French] when you first arrived in Canada, and now today, in terms of:

- Excellent
- Good
- Only fair
- Poor
- None at all



# Refugees feel strongly connected to Canada, and more so than to their ethnic/cultural community

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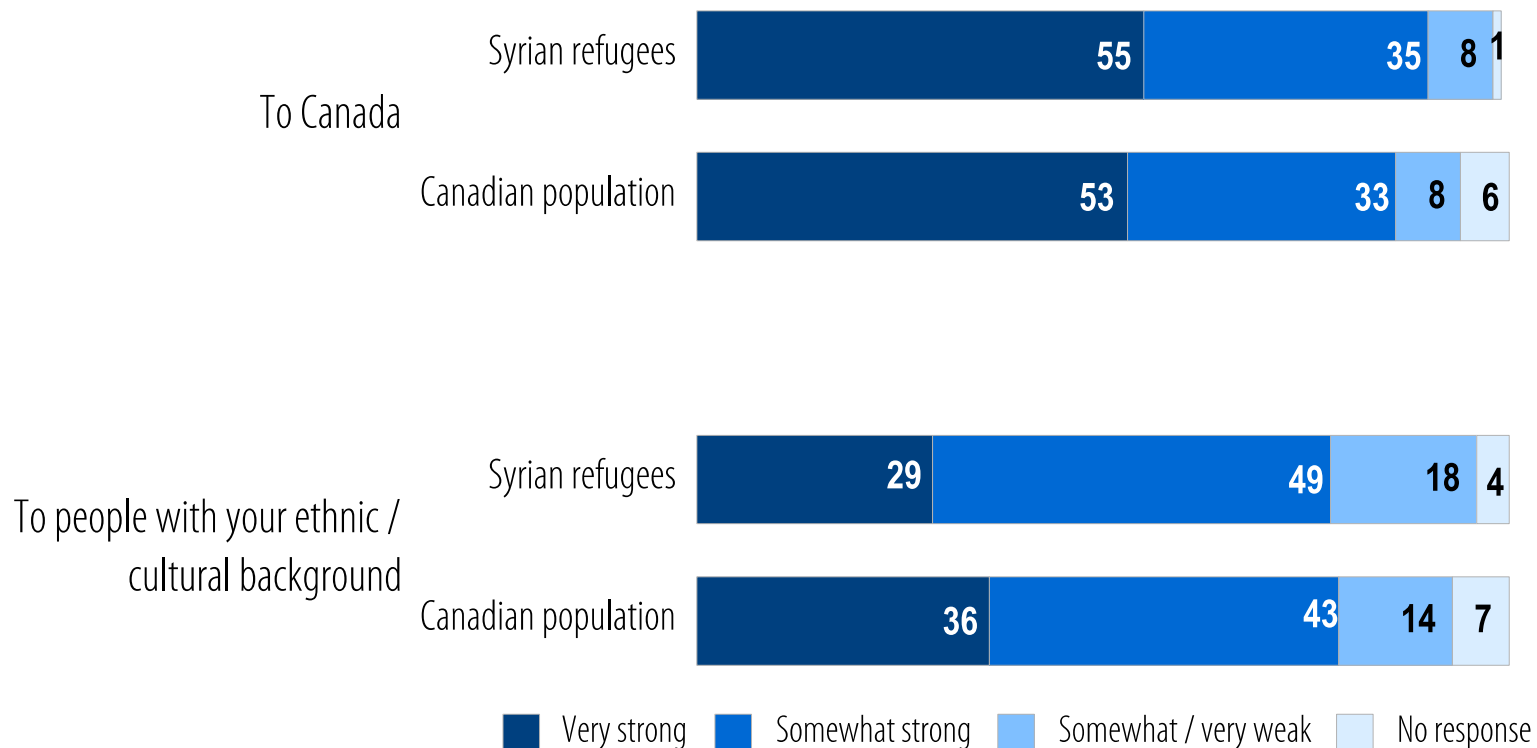
43/44. How would you describe your sense of belonging . . . ?





# Refugees feel strongly connected to Canada, and more so than to their ethnic/cultural community

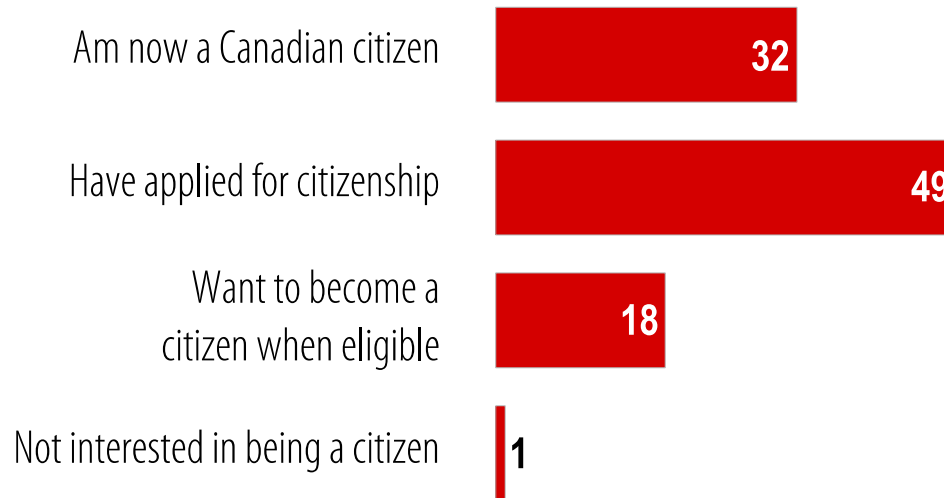
43/44. How would you describe your sense of belonging . . . ?



## Citizenship is a goal for almost all refugees interviewed

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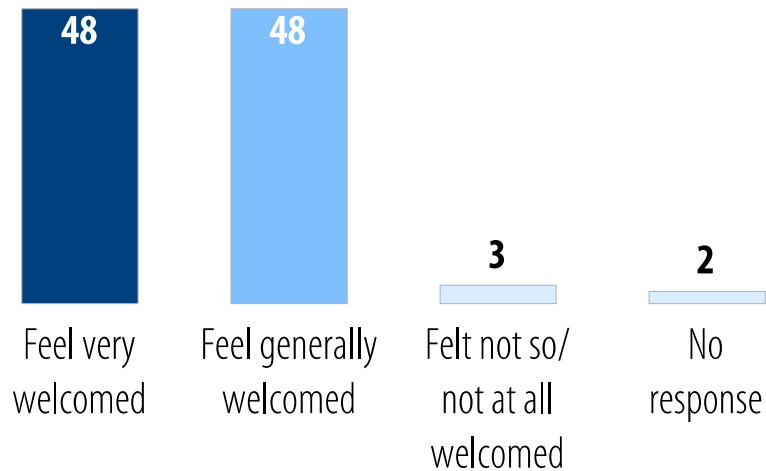
90. *Have you now become a Canadian citizen, or do you want to become a Canadian citizen when you are eligible to do so?*



# Syrian refugees feel generally if not fully welcomed by other Canadians where they live

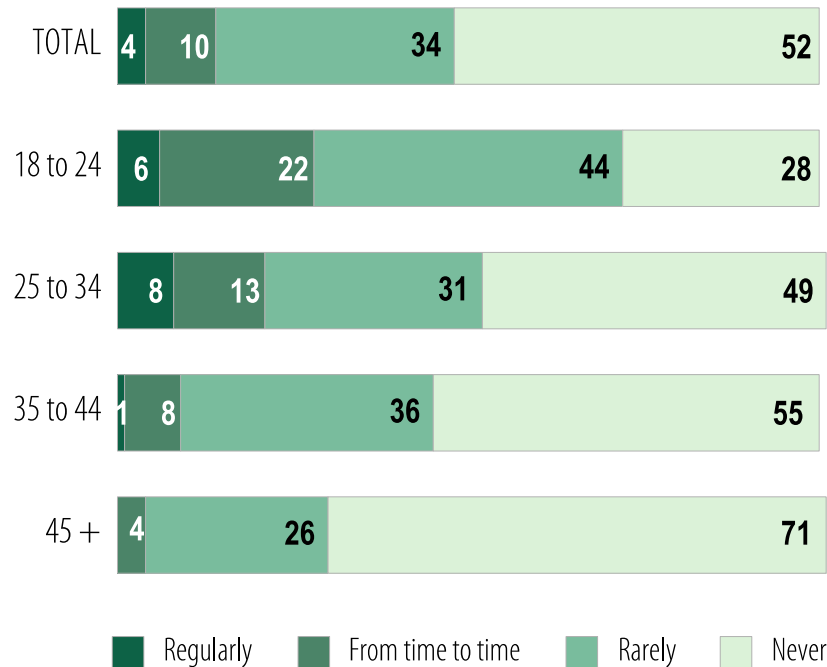
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46. To what extent do you feel you and your family have been made to feel welcome by other people in your local community?

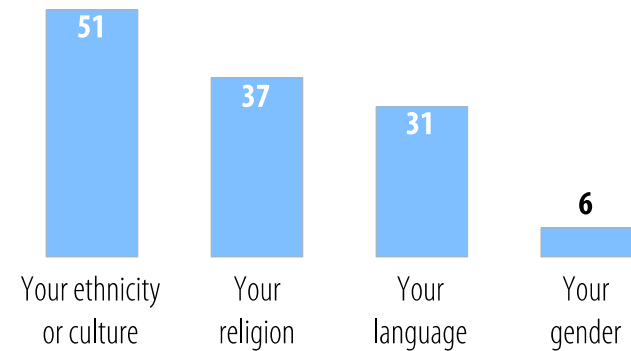


# Some experience discrimination and mistreatment, most likely due to their ethnicity and culture

49b. Since arriving in Canada, how often have you experienced discrimination or been treated unfairly?



Experienced discrimination because of:



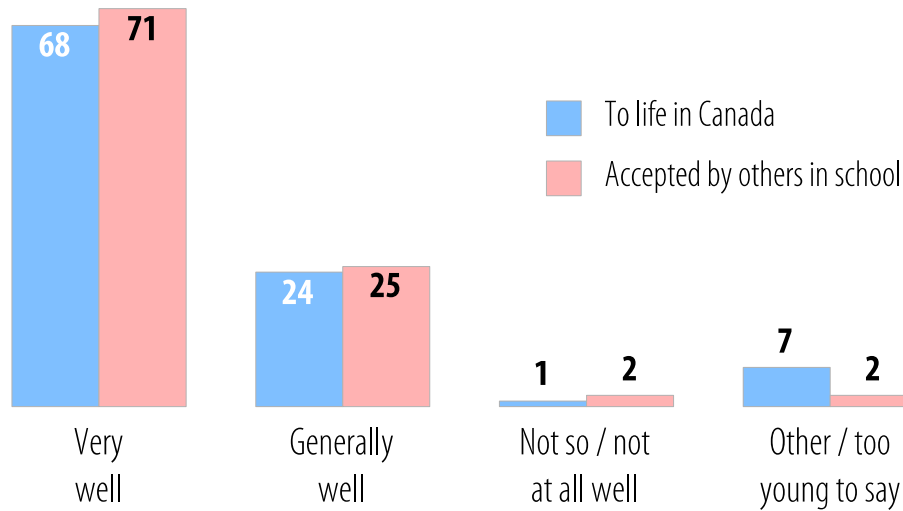
# Refugees open up on what they wish other Canadians understood about refugees like themselves

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

	%
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
Do 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

# Most parents believe their children have adapted well to life in Canada

76. How well would you say your children have adapted to life in Canada / been accepted by others in school?



# Refugees express a wide range of lifetime goals for themselves

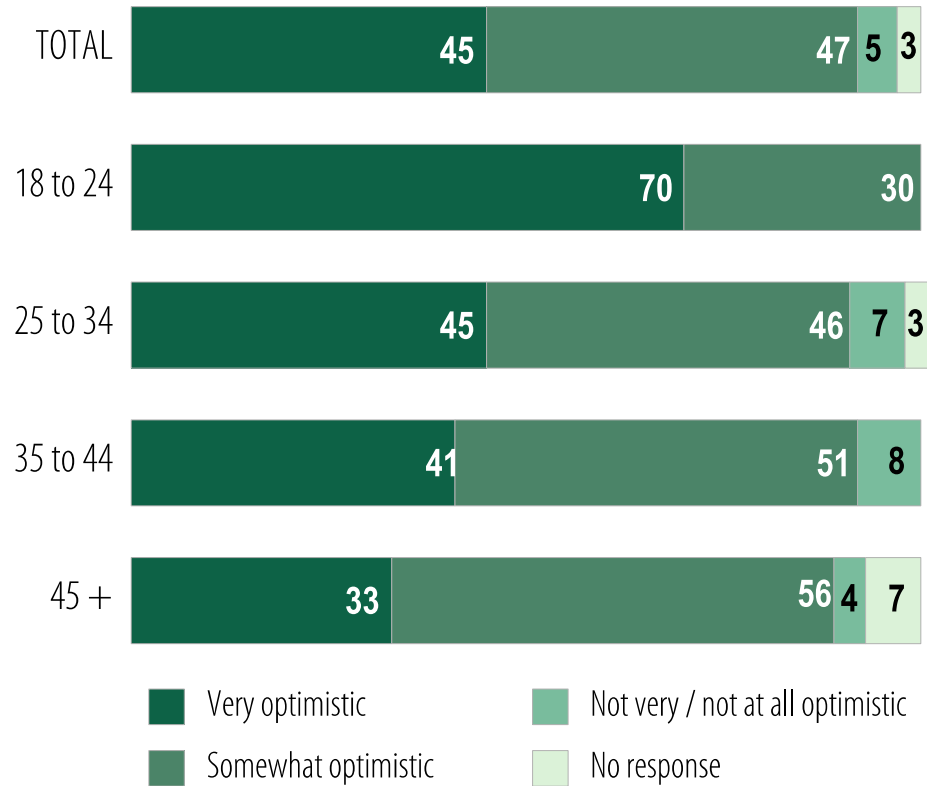
81. And today, what would you say are the three things you most want to achieve in your lifetime?

	%
Buy / own my own home	42
Complete my education	39
<b>WORK AND CAREER</b>	
Find / improve employment	35
Start / expand own business	22
Find employment in my field	16
<b>FAMILY AND CHILDREN</b>	
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

# Refugees are optimistic about achieving life goals

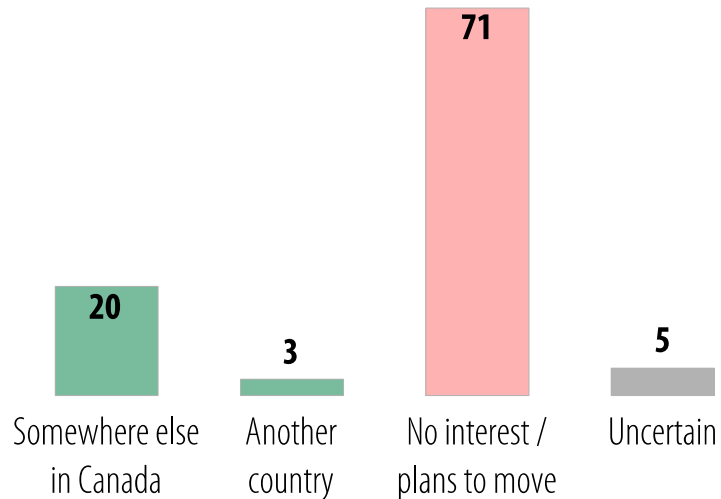
84. How optimistic are you about eventually achieving at least some of your life goals?



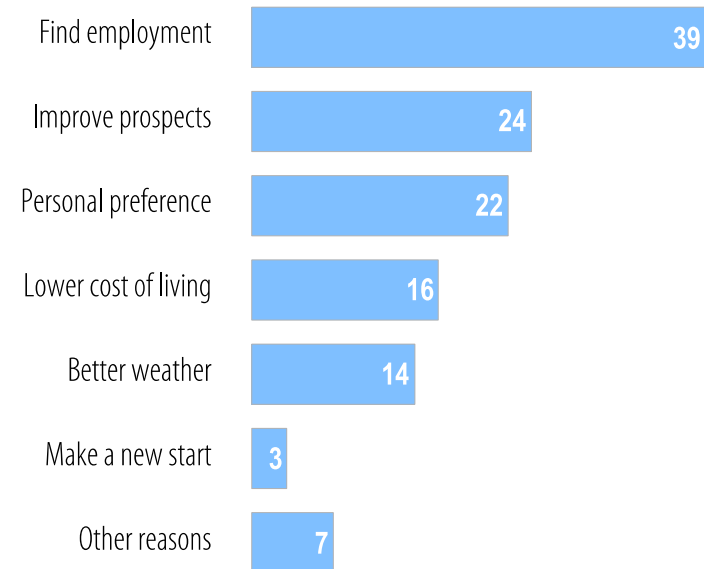


# Few are looking to relocate, and in most cases it's to find better employment prospects

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?



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



# What refugees offer as advice to new refugees coming to Canada

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103B. Looking back on your experience, is there one piece of advice you would offer to refugees from Syria 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
Will be hard at first, but will improve	12
Other advice	14

# Conclusions

# General conclusions

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- Overall, these refugees have been mostly successful in resettling in Canada and establishing sustainable new lives for themselves and their families
- In most areas, positive outcomes are evident across this cohort, despite the diversity in their backgrounds and circumstances
- Outcomes are largely similar across admission streams, age groups, gender and region; the least successful group include those with inadequate incomes
- Employment and under-employment continue to be the most significant challenge facing refugees at this point in their lives in Canada

# Next steps

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- December 2022: Public release
- January – March 2023: Public and community outreach across the country
  - Share study findings and insights with key audiences (settlement community, gov't agencies, Canadian public, media)
  - Engage with relevant communities to support informed initiatives and policy responses
  - Promote a constructive public narrative about the Syrian refugee experience in Canada
- For more information: Jobran Khanji – Community Outreach Coordinator  
[jobran.khanji@environics.ca](mailto:jobran.khanji@environics.ca)

# Panel Discussion