
# REFUGEE CLAIMANTS IN BC:

## *Understanding Current Irregular Arrival Trends*

*Immigrant Services Society of BC* | *June 2018*

# Words of Thanks and Gratitude from Survey Respondents

"**CANADA IS GREAT** *and I like people and the country. We appreciate* **BEING IN A SAFE CANADA**. *I escaped a very unsafe country. I am so happy to see* **MY CHILDREN ARE HAPPY** *to be in Canada and safe.*"

"*I want to* **EXPRESS APPRECIATION** *to the Canadian government for what they offer to refugees.*"

"*First of all,* **THANK YOU** *for accepting me as a refugee claimant. We appreciate and respect Canada, and Justin Trudeau for* **OPENING THE DOOR** *for refugees.*"

"*My* **WORDS CANNOT EXPRESS HOW GRATEFUL I AM** *to the Government of Canada for welcoming us as refugees.*"

"**THANK YOU FOR HELPING US** *and giving us hope to* **REBUILD OUR LIVES.**"

# Contents

# Acknowledgments

The survey examined in this report would not have been possible without the refugee claimants who shared their time, experiences, and feelings with us. Your generosity of spirit and resilience in the face of ongoing challenges as most of you awaited your asylum hearings are inspiring. While we cannot name you here, please know we are grateful for your participation.

The work of collecting the data for the report could not have been done without the team at Settlement Orientation Services (SOS). Thank you for all of your input and ongoing efforts to make this project—and your clients—succeed. Thank you to Bayron Figueroa, Bonnie Wong, Elizabeth Galvez, Enrique Lopez, Meead Alharbi, Mojgan Radfar, Rawand Hasan, and Mona Hassannia.

Our appreciation also goes out to representatives from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, and BC's Ministry of Jobs, Trade and Technology for their feedback on our survey tool and early results.

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# Executive Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations

As a result of the recent unprecedented irregular refugee arrivals (i.e., crossing at land-based ports of entry) in Canada, ISS*of*BC undertook a self-financed, multilingual telephone survey of refugee claimant households who arrived in the province between October 1, 2016 and December 31, 2017. The objective of this 40-question survey was to better understand the profile and experiences of recent refugee claimants, and to learn from them to better assist with policy and program design.

Although the findings provide important insights into current trends and characteristics of refugee claimants in BC, ISS*of*BC cannot make claims to widespread generalizability to *all* refugee claimants who arrived during this time.

The potential survey sample was limited to one adult per household of refugee claimants who arrived in Canada during the set timeframe: October 1, 2016 to December 31, 2017.

## KEY FINDINGS

In total, 311 individuals participated in the survey, representing 55% of our target population (567 possible participants) and approximately 26% of new adult refugee claimants during this time.

### *Demographics and initial settlement locations*

- Refugee claimants participating in the survey were overwhelmingly young, male, well-educated, and able to speak English.
  - 72% had pursued education beyond high school, and 61% had university or graduate degrees.
  - 96% self-reported English language proficiency. Of those over three-quarters self-identified as having intermediate (36%) or advanced (40%) English.
- Respondents come from 46 different countries, with the largest concentration from the Middle East.
  - 51% are from three countries: Afghanistan (22%), Iraq (17%), and Iran (12%).
- Although many initially settled in the Vancouver (49%), Surrey (14%), and Burnaby (13%), there appears to have been eastward movement to more affordable suburbs after some time. At the time of the survey, 34% of respondents reported living in the Vancouver, 24% in Burnaby, and 20% in Surrey.

## *Arrival in Canada*

- Most of the refugees arrived in Canada at a land-based crossing, either by walking across the Canada–US border (59%) or by entering one of Canada Border Services Agency's (CBSA's) land-based ports of entry (8%).
- 91% of all respondents arrived in Canada directly in BC.
- When asked why they chose to come to BC, the top three reasons were geographic proximity to the US (25%), weather (24%), and presence of friends, family, and co-ethnics (24%).
- 68% of all respondents entered Canada via the United States. For the majority of these claimants, the US functioned as a transit country.
  - 76% spent less than one-year in the US.
  - 57% spent less than 3 months in the US.
  - 8% spent upwards of 5 years in the US.
- 67% of respondents reported having been outside their country of origin for over a year.
  - Respondents from Iraq (23%), Iran (20%), and Afghanistan (12%) were most likely to have spent less than one year outside their country of origin, but some individuals from these countries reported having been out of their country of citizenship for five years or more: Afghanistan (22%), Syria (22%), and Iraq (10%).
- 59% arrived in Canada as a single-person unit.
- 41% indicated they had one or more immediate family members (e.g., spouse, dependent minor children) who are not with them here in Canada
- Upon arrival, refugee claimants experienced several challenges, including finding housing (20%), obtaining employment (17%), and navigating the refugee claim process (15%).

## *Employment and self-employment*

- 85% reported having been employed in their home country or country of last habitual residence.
  - The top three types of employment were education professionals (13%), professionals (11%), and management (11%).
  - Many had been in high-skilled jobs, with 32% identified as National Occupational Classification (NOC) Skill Level A (i.e., professional jobs) and 20% as Skill Level B (i.e., technical jobs and skilled trades).
  - More than one in five had been self-employed.
- 57% of respondents were employed in Canada at the time of the survey on a full-time (38%), part-time (15%), or on-call, day labour, or seasonal basis (4%).
  - Almost 90% of respondents who were currently employed were working in construction, trades, manufacturing, and warehouses (34%); retail, food, and hospitality (32%); and service sectors (22%).
  - Current occupations reveal considerable de-skilling compared with occupations before coming to Canada, with over 90% now working in jobs categorized as Skill Level C (Intermediate—51%) or D (Labour—39%).

- A small number (fewer than 10) are currently self-employed.

## *Housing and income security*

- Although housing appears to have largely been identified for the refugee claimants without formal assistance from service providers or government offices, it is not possible to determine the type of assistance received from family and friends (e.g., referral or help in identifying and securing housing).
- The vast majority of respondents secured permanent accommodations either in an apartment (52%) or a house (44%). Four percent continue to be precariously housed or experiencing absolute homelessness.
- 27% said they spend between 51% and 75% of their monthly household income on housing, and 24% spend more than 75%.
- One measure of income insecurity is the use of food banks. Sixty-five percent of survey respondents reported no use at all of food banks, but this may not accurately reflect need because there may exist barriers to access.
  - 51% of food bank users are employed—30% on a full-time basis, 17% as part-time (17%), and 5% as on-call, day labour, or seasonal.

## *Physical and emotional health*

- Refugee claimants self-reported they and their families are in good physical and mental health.
  - Over 90% of respondents reported being in good (32%), very good (38%), or excellent (21%) physical health

## *Open-ended questions*

Analysis of the responses identified seven major themes:

- Gratitude and thanks
  - The opportunity to rebuild their lives in a country that offers freedom and safety has garnered widespread thanks and gratitude to the Government of Canada, Canadians, and service providers.
- Legal process and lack of permanent status
  - Delayed hearings and lack of permanent status result in claimants being forced to remain in a liminal space in which they are neither in their home country nor truly "in" Canada. This precariousness impacts mental health and delays family reunification.
- Obtaining permanent resident status
  - After obtaining protected person status, individuals are forced to wait up to two years longer while their application for permanent resident status is processed. This wait delays integration as individuals continue to lack access to services and supports afforded to permanent residents.
- Employment
  - The combination of temporary status (which includes having social insurance numbers starting with the numeral 9, which marks that mark them as temporary residents), time-limited work permits (and associated renewal costs), and employer hesitation in hiring temporary individuals makes

it difficult to obtain employment, particularly in their previous field of work. Long processing times for both initial and subsequent work permits increase both the difficulty in obtaining work and the likelihood of accessing provincial income assistance.

- Housing and shelter
  - Refugee claimants face difficulties in accessing housing because there is a lack of available affordable housing. As well, landlords who are looking for stability in their renters may be hesitant to rent to refugee claimants who have only temporary status.
- Availability of services and supports
  - Refugee claimants have access to only a limited number of pre-settlement and settlement services, which do not include free English language classes. Information on what services are available can be difficult to obtain, particularly when first crossing the border.
- Physical and mental health
  - The physical and mental health of individuals who are separated from their family members (spouse, children) and who experience delayed hearings and long processing times can be negatively affected. Even when families are reunited, re-establishing relationships can take a toll.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

From the results of the survey, ISS*of*BC offers the following recommendations to federal, provincial, and municipal governments.

**We encourage IRCC (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada) to:**

1. Expand eligibility for some federally funded settlement programming with a particular focus on employment assistance services and language classes to include refugee claimants.
2. Reduce processing times for permanent resident status.
3. Expedite processing of family reunification cases for protected persons.
4. Undertake a similar survey in other parts of Canada to better understand these recent arrivals in a larger context.
5. Increase the distribution of multilingual information for refugee claimants in Canada on a national basis.

**We encourage the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) and federal government to:**

6. Ensure sufficient staffing resources are put in place to reduce wait times for hearings and better meet previously established service standards.

**We encourage the Government of Canada and the Province of BC to:**

7. Undertake a whole government approach to minimize delays that increase claimants' reliance on provincial social assistance and to reduce administrative burden.

8. Ensure ongoing and enhanced funding to Legal Aid to meet the needs of refugee claimants in their asylum process.

9. Develop contingency plans for new arrivals to ensure timely access to key settlement and refugee claim supports, including housing.

**We encourage the Province of BC to:**

10. Expand targeted resources to help refugee claimants seek employment.

11. Provide housing search resources, including placement and accompaniment to view potential units.

**We encourage municipal governments within Metro Vancouver to:**

12. Expand eligibility for programs intended to provide low-income families with access to community programs (e.g., leisure access passes) to include refugee claimants.

# Introduction

Refugee claimants have been crossing the 8,891 km Canada–US border for decades, seeking protection and safety through irregular means (i.e., crossing between land-based ports of entry). The current growing global refugee crisis, human right abuses, and deteriorating conditions in various states, along with changes in Canadian policy in late 2016 (e.g., lifting of the Mexican visa requirement) have contributed to the current increase of refugee claims in Canada. Further, the heated debates about immigration and refugee issues during the 2016 US presidential election campaign, alongside Canada's "Operation Syrian Refugees," heightened the perception that refugees are invited and welcome to our country.

Soon after the US election, Canada began to see a significant and sustained increase in irregular migration. Many people in search of asylum walked across the US border into Canada, others used the US as a transit point into this country, and still others left the US after several years of residency. Images on TV of individuals and families — both young and old — crossing in snowy conditions and being met by RCMP officers were accompanied by media headlines such as "Trump bump? American refugee claims in Canada increased last month" and "To Escape Trump, Asylum Seekers Are Walking a Cold Road to Canada."[1]

A January 2017 tweet by Prime Minister Trudeau, reading "To those fleeing persecution, terror & war, Canadians will welcome you, regardless of your faith. Diversity is our strength #WelcomeToCanada," may have been interpreted by some as a further invitation to those seeking asylum to choose Canada.

Figure 1 shows BC monthly new arrivals drawn from ISS*of*BC/SOS data for 2015–2017. Although there are highs and lows

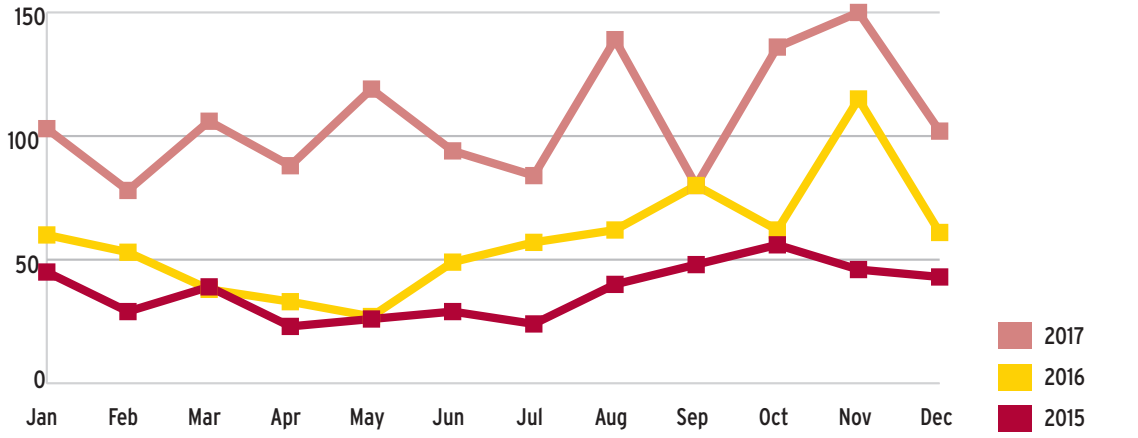


*Figure 1 - BC monthly arrivals for 2015–2017 (SOS data)*

1 *At the time of the survey, the US asylum process was marked by long delays to obtain a hearing (six-plus years), as well as an increase in the use of detention, raids, and deportation. While we cannot be certain, these may have been driving forces behind movement to Canada.*

within arrival trends, the year-over-year increase is notable, with arrivals two to four times those of previous years.

Unlike many other provinces, British Columbia provides targeted pre-settlement services to support newly arrived claimants through the refugee claim process, as well as free first-language clinical counselling. Additionally, the City of Vancouver provides funding for both housing search and placement services, as well as capacity building for refugee-claimant specific organizations. These services represent important supports to this highly vulnerable, at-risk population.

In British Columbia, Settlement Orientation Services (SOS) is the sole-funded pre-settlement program available through ISS*of*BC that specifically focuses on supporting refugee claimants. SOS has operated for over two decades as a specialized multilingual team serving refugee claimants within Metro Vancouver. From April 1, 2016 to March 31, 2017, SOS experienced a 76% increase in the number of new refugee claimants accessing services in BC, the third-highest receiving province in Canada. In 2017, close to 1,300 new refugee claimants accessed services through SOS, with many having walked across the US border into BC. See Figure 2 for SOS Annual Statistics for BC from 2013–2017.

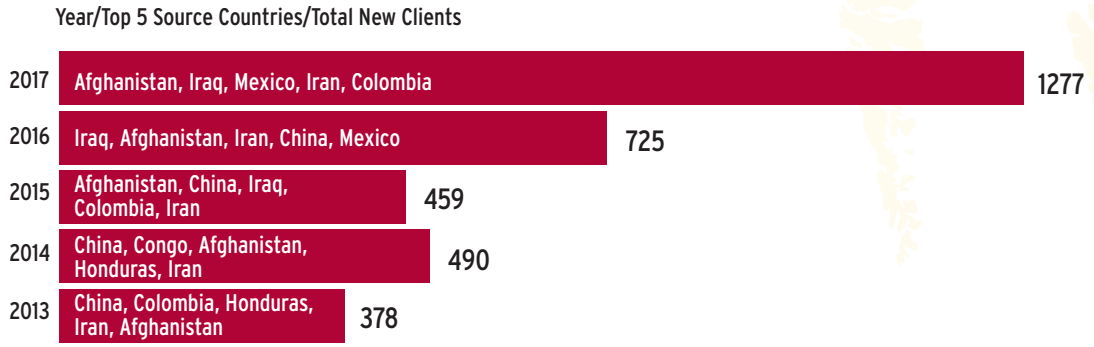


*Figure 2 - Historical context of refugees arriving in BC: SOS annual statistics 2013–2017*

Canada's refugee protection obligations are based on international law. The United Nations Convention on Refugees (1951) together with the subsequent Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (1967) form the basis of international refugee law. Article 1 of the Refugee Convention defines refugees as

> *"people who are outside their countries because of a well-founded fear of persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group, and who cannot or do not want to return home."*

Signatories to the Convention and/or Protocol are legally bound to offer protection to foreign individuals who come to their border seeking asylum or who make a refugee claim from within their borders. The countries must assess their claim for protection based on the refugee definition outlined in the Refugee Convention. While the media often portrays this as a choice, it is a legal obligation for all signatory countries, including Canada *(Sherrell and Walter, 2017).*

## HOW DO REFUGEES ENTER CANADA?

As a signatory to both the United Nations Convention on Refugees of 1951 and the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees of 1967, Canada welcomes refugees through two broad streams: overseas resettlement and inland protection. The former relates to individuals whose claims have been accepted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and recognized as "convention refugees" — and subsequently have been selected for permanent resettlement by Canada. The latter refers to those who make claims for asylum at the border, an airport, or inland at a Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) office.[2]

Upon arrival, refugee claimants must simultaneously negotiate a highly legalistic and complicated refugee claim process while beginning the settlement process, a task made more difficult for those with low English language proficiency and high levels of migration-related trauma (see Appendix A for an overview of the refugee claim process in BC).

Unlike the government's refugee resettlement or privately sponsored refugee programs, refugee claimants do not have the right to permanent resident status upon arrival in Canada. This is critical as it denotes both the possibility of being returned to their country of origin if they are unsuccessful in their claim *and* a lack of access to many of the services that would help them to

2 *For more information on Canada's refugee protection streams, see Kathy Sherrell and Kerstin Walter (2017) "From Global to Local: Refugee Pathways to Canada" AMSSA Cultures West. Vol 34(1): 14-17. Available online: www.amssa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/AMSSA_RefugeeExperience-sm.pdf.*

integrate in Canada (including language classes, as well as federally funded settlement and employment services).[3]

Those who receive a positive determination become recognized as "protected persons" and are given the legal right to stay and build a future in Canada. However, protected persons must then apply for permanent resident status, a process that my take up to two years. Unlike government assisted refugees and privately sponsored refugees—who are only charged a processing fee—protected persons must pay the application fee of $550 per adult and $150 per dependent child.

## WHO ARE REFUGEE CLAIMANTS?

Canada has a long history of admitting refugees, and over the years there have been highs and lows in the number of asylum claims in the country—including those made at both CBSA and IRCC offices. As Figure 3 shows, from 2009 to 2013 there was a steady decline. That was followed by slight increases in 2014 and 2015, and significant increases in 2016 and 2017. Refugee claims, like other forms of migration, are cyclical—influenced by border and immigration policies in Canada, as well as countries of origin and transit.

Very little is known about the recent influx of refugees. But given that over 63% of claimants will receive positive determinations and the ability to build a life in Canada, it is imperative we better understand the characteristics of this group.

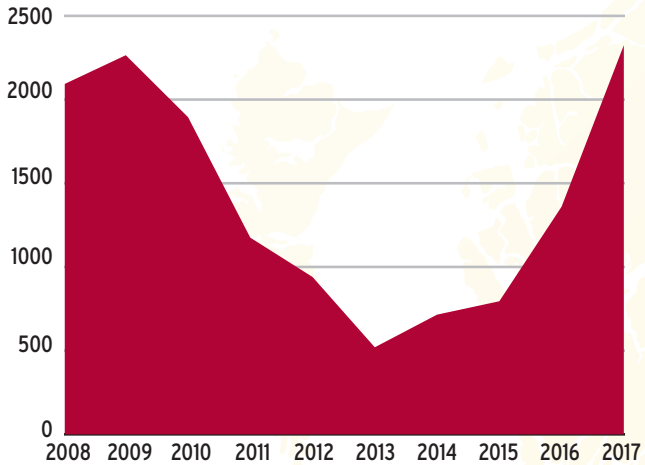


*Figure 3 - Asylum claims in BC, 2008-2017 (IRCC statistics)*

*3 The Government of BC provides targeted funding for settlement and employment services to meet the needs of temporary residents (including refugee claimants and temporary foreign workers), as well as naturalized Canadian citizens. Targeted settlement funding for refugee claimants will double from $425,000 to $1,450,000 annually beginning July 1, 2018. Refugee claimants remain ineligible for free Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) classes within Metro Vancouver.*

# Methodology

As a result of recent unprecedented and largely irregular refugee arrivals (i.e., crossing at land-based ports of entry) in BC, ISS*of*BC undertook a self-financed, multilingual telephone survey of refugee claimant households who arrived in the province between October 1, 2016 and December 31, 2017.[4] The objective of this 40-question survey was to better understand the profile and experiences of recent refugee claimants, and to learn from them to assist with policy and program design (see Appendix B for survey questions).

This report provides a point-in-time snapshot of refugee claimants arriving in BC, including insights into their:

- Human capital — English language proficiency, level of education, and previous employment experience (including self-employment).
- Migration experience — country of origin, mode of arrival, time spent in US (if any), and reasons for coming to BC.
- Early settlement experiences — housing, employment, health self-assessment, needs/worries, and challenges.

Potential respondents were identified through the SOS/ISS*of*BC internal database using a multi-stage process:

1. Identifying all clients who arrived between October 1, 2016 and December 31, 2017.
2. Excluding individuals 18 years and younger, as well as those individuals missing contact information (phone/cell phone).
3. Selecting one individual per household.[5] In total, 567 potential participants were identified for participation. Each response represents one household.

Given the precarious status, vulnerability, and importance of trust among refugee claimants, SOS staff who had existing relationships with them were trained to undertake the survey.[6] The survey was conducted by phone in eight languages from April 12, 2018, to May 4, 2018. Responses were entered directly into online survey software. No identifying information was captured within the online survey owing to data storage in the US.

When contacted, potential respondents were provided with information on the survey (including rationale and objectives) and clearly informed that their decision to participate — or not — would have no

*4 In undertaking this study, ISSofBC is not seeking to promote irregular migration or encourage individuals to come to Canada to seek asylum. Rather, ISSofBC seeks to better understand the characteristics of individuals who have been deemed eligible to claim asylum by the IRB, and as such will be in British Columbia for a minimum of two years.*

*5 While youth age 14 to 18 are recognized as having different settlement experiences, they were excluded from this survey owing to the need for parental consent.*

*6 Staff were paid for their time to carry out the survey over and above their regular salary. When asking survey questions, the provided no additional services.*

impact on their future service provision of services or the outcome of their refugee claim. Those who declined were thanked for their time and the conversation was ended.

Questions were asked in English or first language depending on the needs of the client. Participants were reminded of the ability to skip questions they were not comfortable answering. Consequently, response rates vary between questions. (Response rates are included in figures below).

For ethical reasons, individuals were not asked why they were seeking protection in Canada or why they did not claim asylum in transit countries. These types of questions were deemed too sensitive due to the precarious status of respondents.

Following the survey, respondents were asked to provide their updated mailing address to receive a $25 gift card as a token of appreciation for their participation. Gift cards were mailed to those providing an updated address captured elsewhere, not on the online survey.

# Survey Limitations

Although findings provide important insights into current trends and characteristics of refugee claimants in BC, ISS*of*BC cannot make claims to widespread generalizability to *all* refugee claimants who arrived during this time.

The potential sample is limited to those individuals who accessed pre-settlement services at SOS. Given that it is not unusual for people to have been in Canada for a period of time before making their claim, some potential respondents may have arrived in Canada prior to October 1, 2016.

The potential sample excluded:

- Individuals who were 18 years old or younger owing to issues of obtaining parental consent.
- Individuals without up-to-date contact information.
- Multiple members of households.

Further, no information was included from those who chose not to participate or did not answer or return calls.

This survey is, however, believed to be one of the largest ever carried out on newly arrived refugee claimants in Canada and, as such, provides important insights.

# Findings

In total 311 individuals participated in the survey, representing 55% of our target population (567 possible participants) and approximately 26% of new adult refugee claimant adults during this time.

## PERIOD OF ARRIVAL

**Respondents represented a good distribution of arrivals across each of the five quarters captured within this survey** (see Figure 4).

The quarter with the highest percentage of arrivals was July–September 2017 (28%), with 1 in 10 respondents having arrived in July 2017 alone. The lowest percentages arrived in January 2017 (3%) and December 2017 (2%).

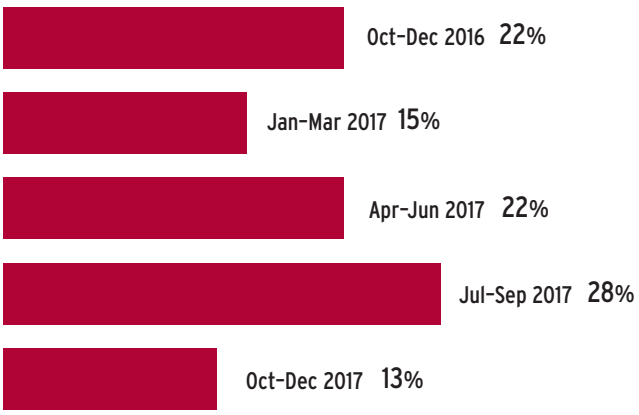


*Figure 4 - Arrival in BC by quarter (n- 310)*

## AGE, GENDER, AND LEVEL OF EDUCATION

**Refugee claimants participating in the survey were overwhelmingly young, male, well-educated, and able to speak English.**

Given refugee claimants are individuals who have self-selected to come to Canada to claim asylum, it is not surprising the age profile is quite young, with over 80% of them in the age range of 19–44 years (see Figure 5). Almost one out of two were age 19–34 years at the time of the survey. Three-quarters were age 25–44 years (42% age 25–34 years; 32% age 35–44 years).

Analysis of age and gender reveals the age distribution is similar by gender (see Figure 6).

Younger female respondents age 19–34 years were equally likely to have arrived by themselves as with family, while males of the same age range were three times as likely to arrive by themselves. Younger females (60%) were

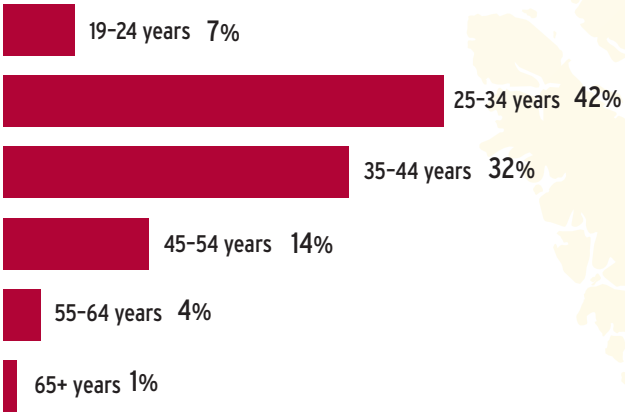


*Figure 5 - Age of respondents (n- 311)*

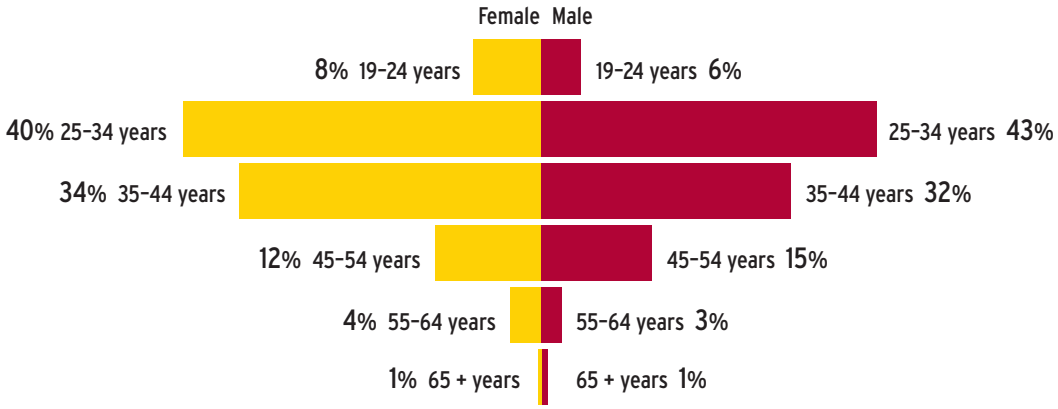


*Figure 6 - Age and gender comparison (n- 309)*

less likely to have arrived though the United States than were males (77%).

A small number of the refugee claimants were age 55 and older. Older male claimants (age 55-plus) were equally likely to have arrived by themselves as with other family members. Older females were almost as likely to have arrived by themselves (40%) as with other family members (60%). Further, unlike older females (60%), older males were more likely *not* to have arrived through the US (40%).

Although participants were provided with diverse gender options to identify with — including non-binary and the ability to self-describe — almost 70% identified as male (69%) and the remainder as female (31%).

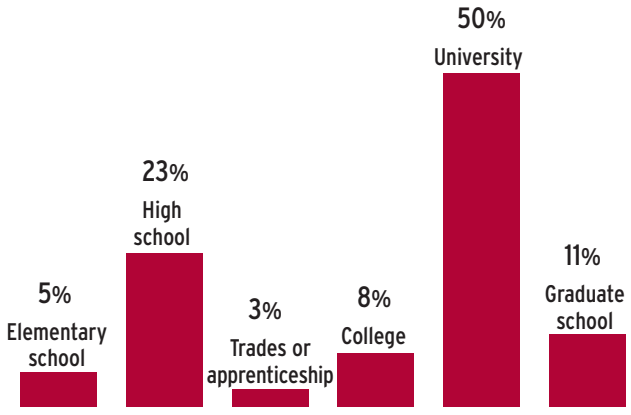


*Figure 7 - Level of education (n- 311)*

**Refugee claimants arriving in BC are highly educated, with almost three-quarters (72%) having pursued education beyond high school** (see Figure 7).

**One in two have university degrees, and a further 11% have at least some graduate education.**

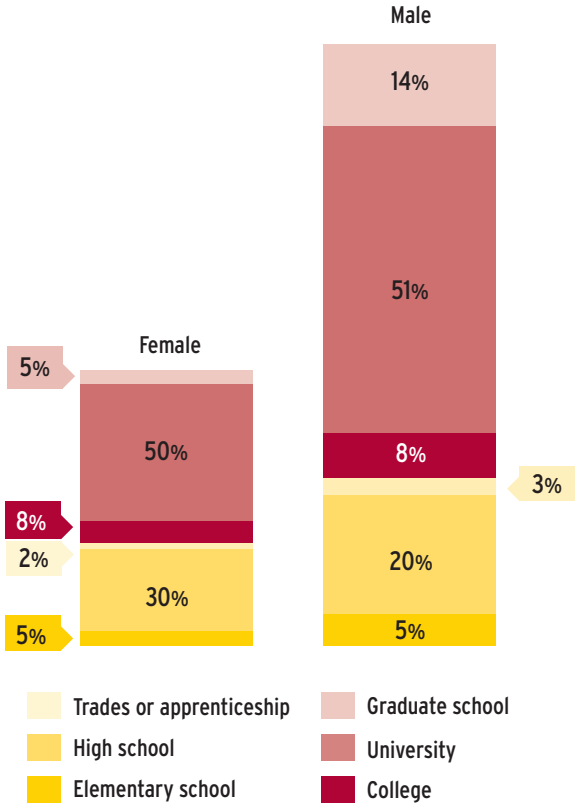


*Figure 8 - Level of education by gender (n- 309)*

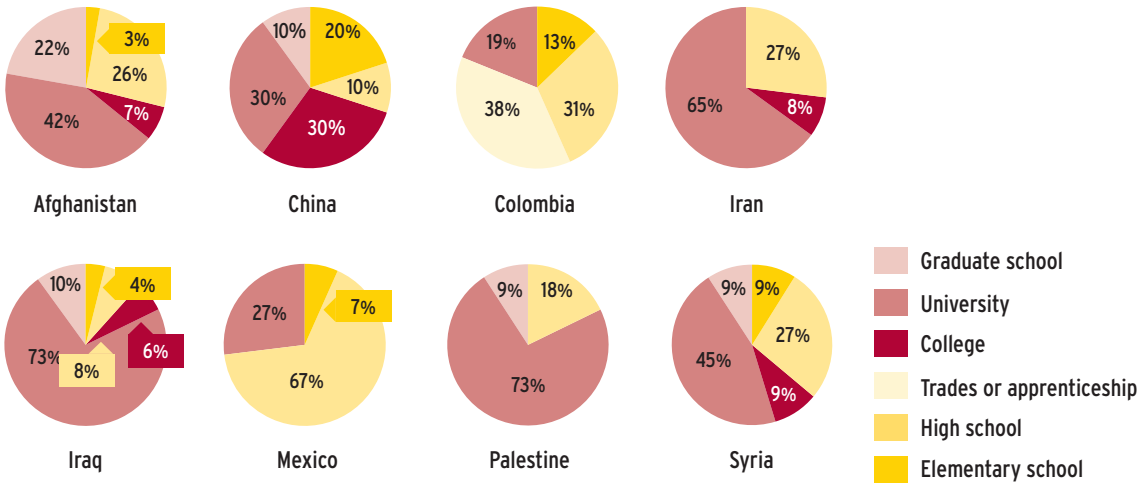


*Figure 9 - Level of education by country of citizenship for countries (n- 220)*

Respondents included many lawyers, medical professionals/specialists, engineers and other professional designations, as well as taxi drivers, sales people, and bank staff.

Figure 8 shows that females (35%) were more likely to have arrived with high school or elementary-level education compared with males (25%), and less likely to have arrived with graduate-level education (5% females versus 14% males). There were no significant gender differences in university, college, or trades and apprenticeship.

The analysis of education level for countries represented by 10 or more respondents revealed that those from Mexico were the most likely to have arrived with high school education (67%), while those from Palestine (73%), Iraq (73%) and Iran (65%) were more likely to have arrived with university education (see Figure 9). One in five (22%) of respondents from Afghanistan arrived with a graduate degree.

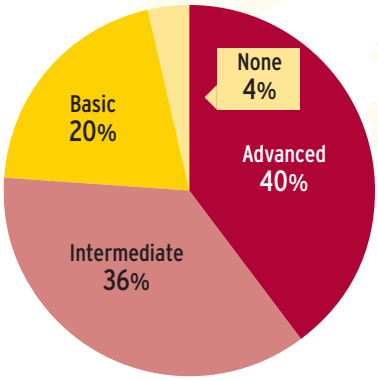


*Figure 10 – Self-reported current English language ability (n- 306)*

**Ninety-six percent of all respondents self-reported some English language proficiency, with over three-quarters identifying their ability as intermediate (36%) or advanced (40%)** (see Figure 10).[7]

Despite the high levels of language proficiency, the lack of access to free Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) classes emerged in open-ended questions, as did the need for better language skills to obtain higher-paying jobs.

7 *Language proficiency is self-reported – not CLB-tested – and relates to current language, not language upon arrival. As such, individuals may have either over- or underestimated their language skills or increased language proficiency over their time in Canada.*

## COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP

**Refugee claimants participating in the survey identified 46 countries of citizenship, with the largest concentration from the Middle East** (see Figure 11).

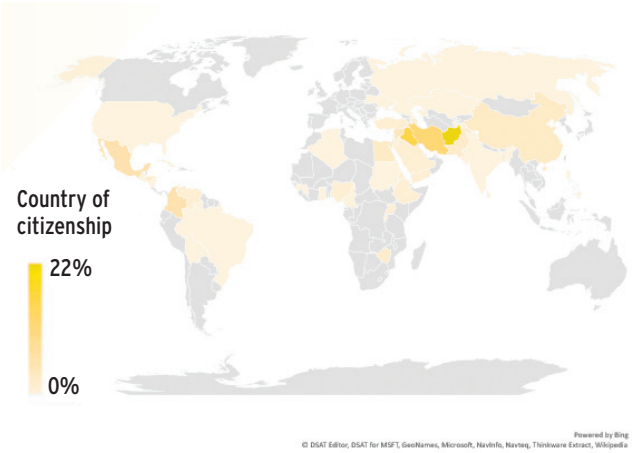


*Figure 11 - Country of citizenship (n- 309)*

The top three countries — Afghanistan (22%), Iraq (17%) and Iran (12%) — account for 51% of all respondents. Thirty-eight countries had fewer than 10 respondents. It is notable that 5% of respondents (and 7% of the sample) were from Mexico given the long-term significance of Mexico as a country of origin for refugee claimants.

## CITY OF RESIDENCE—UPON ARRIVAL AND CURRENT

To better understand the settlement geographies of refugee claimants, participants were asked two questions about their city of residence:

- What city do you currently live in?
- What city did you live in during your first three months in Canada?

It is important to note there were significant differences in response rates between these two questions, with 97% providing their current location compared with 54% of respondents stating where they lived in the first three months after arrival. The lower response to the second question may be the result of individuals not having moved to a different city since arrival.

### *Upon arrival*

Almost half of all respondents initially settled in the City of Vancouver, which is perhaps not surprising given the concentration of specialized services for refugee claimants available (see Figure 12). Over three-quarters of respondents lived in the Cities of Vancouver (49%), Surrey (14%), and Burnaby (13%). It is noteworthy that the remainder of the respondents, although fewer in number, settled in communities across all of Metro Vancouver and the Fraser Valley, including Abbotsford, Aldergrove, Langley, Maple Ridge, Pitt Meadows, and the Tri-Cities (Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, and Port Moody).

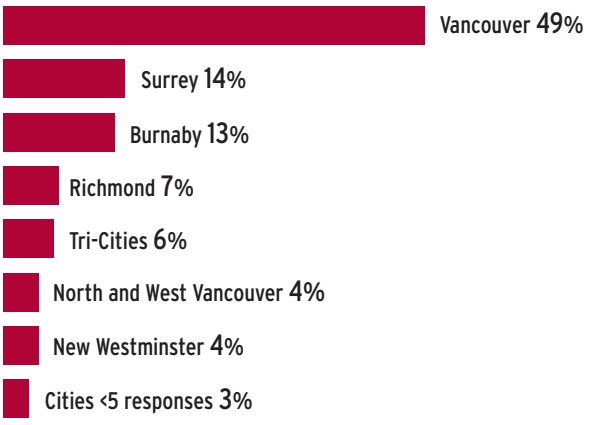


*Figure 12 - City of residence in first three months (n- 169)*

## *Current*

Respondents currently live in 14 cities across Metro Vancouver and the Fraser Valley, with almost 80% of them residing in Vancouver (34%), Burnaby (24%) and Surrey (20%) (see Figure 13). Of note was the number of claimants residing in the Tri-Cities (8%), North and West Vancouver (4%) and Richmond (3%) given these are not areas normally associated with refugee claimant settlement.

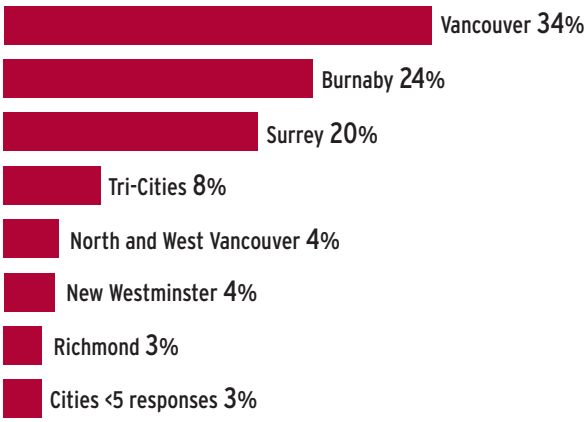


*Figure 13 - Current city of residence (n- 300)*

Other cities of residence included Abbotsford, Delta, Langley, Maple Ridge, and White Rock. **There appears to have been an eastward movement from Vancouver and Richmond to more affordable cities as people have begun settling, but the significant difference in response rates between the two questions makes it difficult to assess with any certainty.**

Analysis of the current city of residence responses for the top countries of citizenship represented in the survey revealed that Afghan claimants have largely settled in Burnaby and Vancouver; Iraqi respondents in Burnaby, Surrey and Vancouver; and Iranians in Vancouver and the Tri-Cities (see Figure 14).

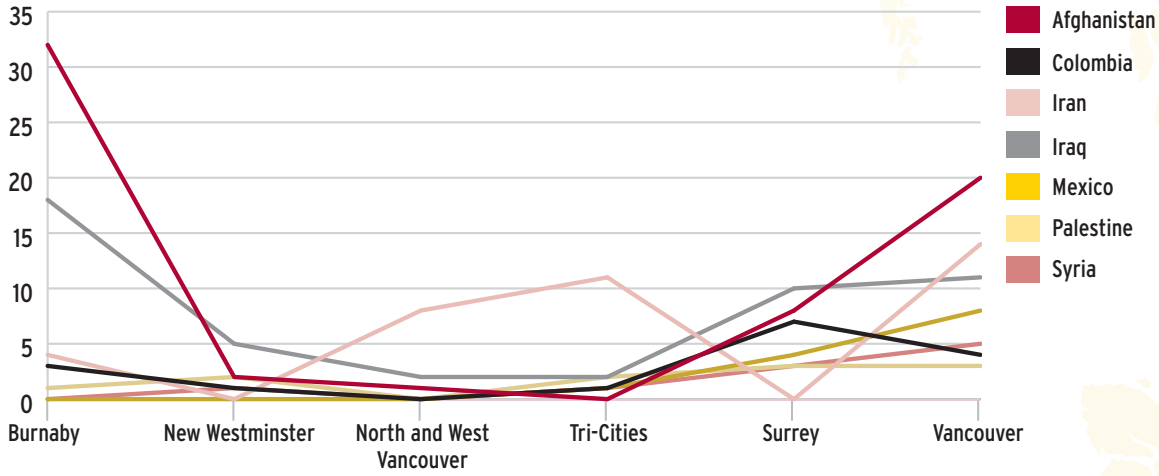


*Figure 14 - Current city of settlement among countries of citizenship with 10 or more responses (n- 198)*

# Arrival in Canada

**Entry to Canada was predominantly via land-based crossings, either by walking across the Canada–US border (59%) or at one of Canada Border Services Agency's (CBSA's) land-based ports of entry (8%)** (see Figure 15). The remainder arrived in Canada via air (22%) or indicated their initial entry was for the purpose of visiting, studying, or working in Canada (11%).

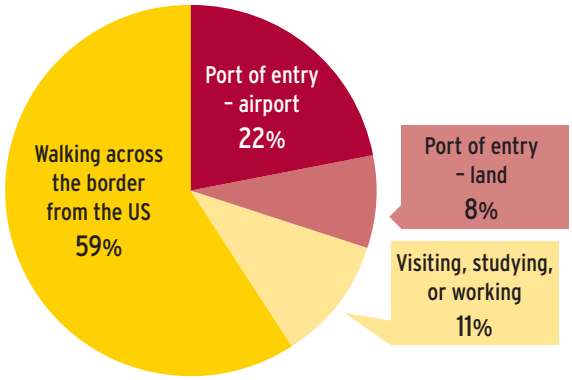


*Figure 15 - Entry to Canada (n- 302)*

Analyzing the mode of arrival by region of origin highlights significant variations (see Figure 16). Entry to Canada for the purposes of visiting, studying, or working was significantly higher among individuals from Africa (37%) and South and Central Asia (36%), while individuals from the Middle East (13%) were more likely to have crossed at a land-based port of entry. Respondents whose country of citizenship was Mexico or the US were most likely to have entered Canada by air (80%), while those from South and Central America (including Bahamas and Cuba) were the most likely to have entered Canada by walking across the border.

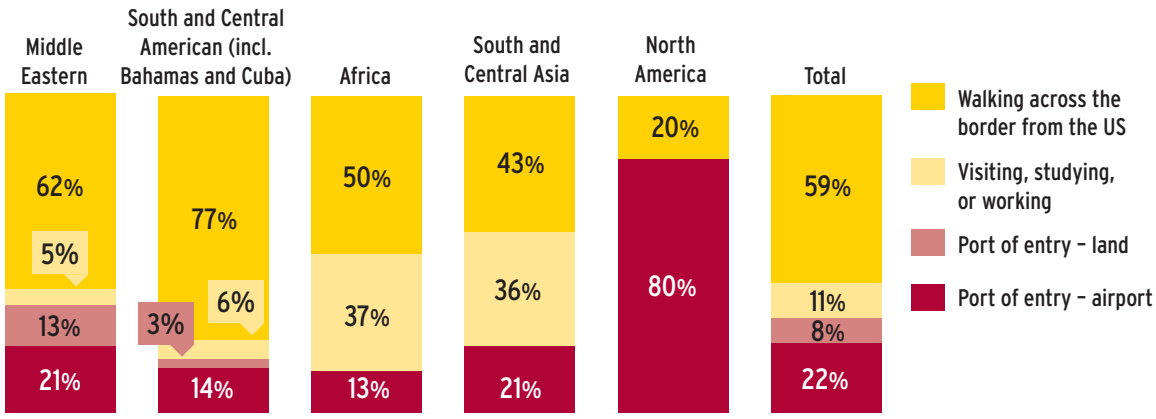


*Figure 16 - Mode of entry to Canada by country of citizenship (n- 302)*

**Ninety-one percent (91%) of all respondents arrived directly in British Columbia,** with smaller groups having arrived in Ontario (4%) and Quebec (4%) (see Figure 17).

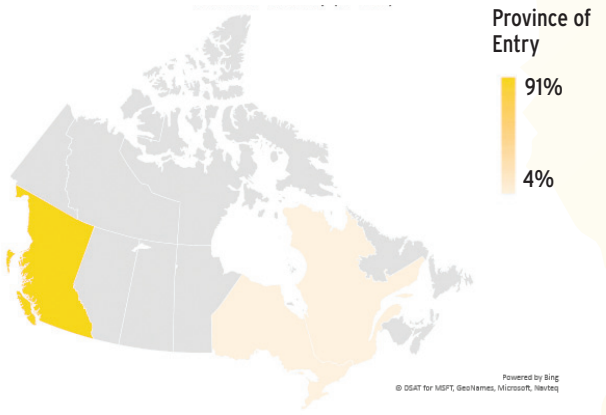


*Figure 17 - Province of entry (n- 306)*

**Respondents were asked why they chose to come to BC either directly or through secondary migration to better understand their motivations.**[8] **Geographic proximity to the US (25%), weather (24%), and presence of friends, family, and co-ethnics (24%) were the top three themes that emerged** (see Figure 18). Being close to the US border and to friends and family still living in the US was particularly important for those who had previously been living on or near the west coast (e.g., Washington, Oregon, California, and New Mexico). One person from China reported choosing BC based on nearness to country of origin. For others, the presence of family, friends, and co-ethnic communities in BC provided promise of support. One in 10 respondents indicated there was no particular reason for coming to BC.

Individuals who arrived in BC via secondary migration cited as reasons the availability of assistance (e.g., family, friends, ethnocultural community), BC having an English-speaking environment, and weather.

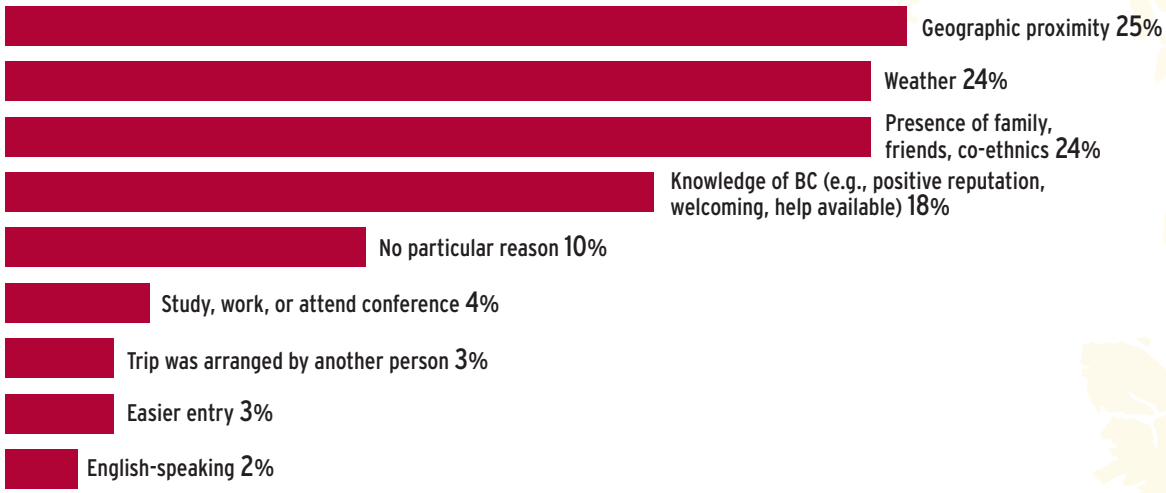


*Figure 18 - Why respondents chose to come to BC (n- 135, multiple responses)*

*8 Responses were coded according to themes. Percentages shown in Figure 18 represent the frequency of themes as a percentage of responses to the question. Individual responses may contain multiple themes (e.g., geographic proximity and weather). Consequently, the total percentages exceed 100%.*

## TIME SPENT IN US

**Sixty-eight percent of all respondents entered Canada via the United States.** Over three-quarters (76%) of individuals who came through the US reported having spent less than one year there (see Figure 19). Of those, a high proportion (57%) spent less than three months there, suggesting that the US functions as a transit country for individuals seeking entry to Canada to claim asylum. On the other end of the scale, 8% of respondents had spent five years of more in the US.

Over 60% of individuals spending under three months in the US were from Afghanistan (30%) and Iraq (32%), which accounts for 49% of all participants from Afghanistan and 73% of participants from Iraq. Peak arrivals times for those who had spent less than three months in the US were October through December 2016 (30%) and July through September 2017 (30%). Eighty percent of people arriving between October 1, 2016 and December 31, 2017 had spent less than three months in the US.

Like the findings in the larger profile, individuals who had spent five years or more in the US were more likely to be male and able to speak English. They were less likely to have arrived with high levels of education, with over half reporting high school or elementary education. Previous occupations included lower-skilled jobs. Further, they were more likely to have arrived as an individuals without a spouse or dependent children left behind. None arrived within the first four months of the survey period.

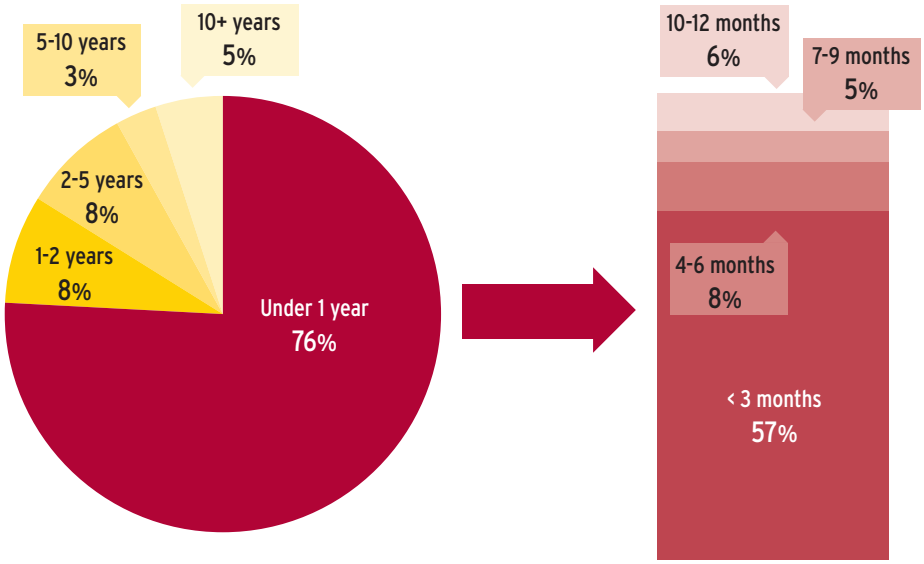


*Figure 19 - Time spent in the US (n- 202)*

## INDIVIDUALS WHO DID NOT COME THROUGH THE US

The top three countries of origin for those who did not arrive through the US were Iran (34%), Mexico (12%), and China (8%). These individuals were more likely to have arrived with university (55%) or high school (23%) education. Approximately one-third indicated they had come to Canada to visit, work or study.

## TIME SPENT OUTSIDE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

**Two-thirds of all participants reported having been outside their country of citizenship for more than a year (67%)** (see Figure 20). Respondents from Iraq (23%), Iran (20%), and Afghanistan (12%) were the most likely to have spent less than one year outside their country of origin, while those from Afghanistan (22%), Syria (22%), and Iraq (10%) reported having been out of their country of citizenship for five years or more.

## INITIAL ARRIVAL IN CANADA

**Fifty-nine percent of respondents arrived in Canada as a single person unit** (see Figure 21). Over half the individuals arriving by themselves came from Afghanistan (28%), Iraq (18%), and Iran (9%).

The analysis of mode of arrival by country of citizenship (with 10 or more respondents) reveals 7% of participants from Mexico arrived by themselves compared with 75% of participants from Afghanistan.

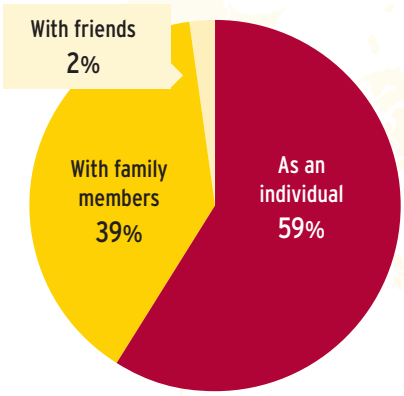


*Figure 21 - Arrival as individual compared arrival with family members or friends (n- 306)*

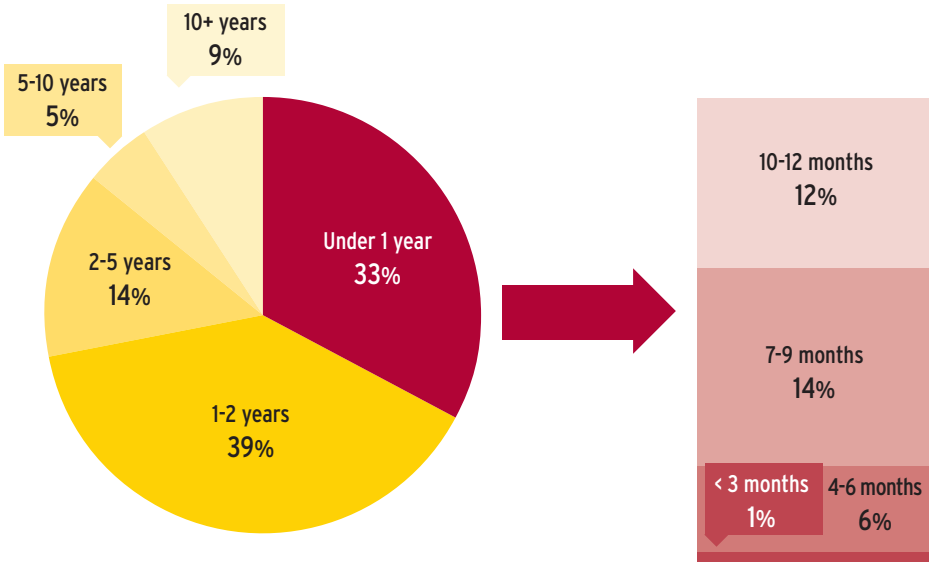


*Figure 20 - Time spent outside country of origin (n- 294)*

Three-quarters (74%) of respondents who arrived as part of a family did so with one (25%), two (17%), or three (31%) other family members (see Figure 22). Almost one in ten (9%) arrived as part of a large family group of five or more members.

**Whether individuals came to Canada alone or as part of a family/friend grouping, family separation is a reality for many.** Forty-one percent of all respondents indicated they had one or more immediate family members who are not in Canada (e.g., spouse, dependent children). Family separation from spouses or dependent children was significantly less likely to be reported by those who arrived as a family (24%) compared with those who arrived by themselves (50%).

## CHALLENGES UPON ARRIVAL

**Refugee claimants reported experiencing several challenges upon arrival, including finding housing (20%), obtaining employment (17%), and navigating the refugee claim process (15%)** (see Figure 23).[9] One client reported having spent

| | |
|---|---|
| Finding housing | 65% |
| Finding employment | 55% |
| Refugee claim process | 48% |
| Income level/security | 38% |
| Language | 35% |
| Health/mental health | 20% |
| Isolation | 19% |
| Transportation | 15% |
| Schools | 12% |
| Food | 11% |
| Childcare | 4% |
| Lack of information/services | 2% |

*Figure 23 - Challenges upon arrival (multiple responses)*

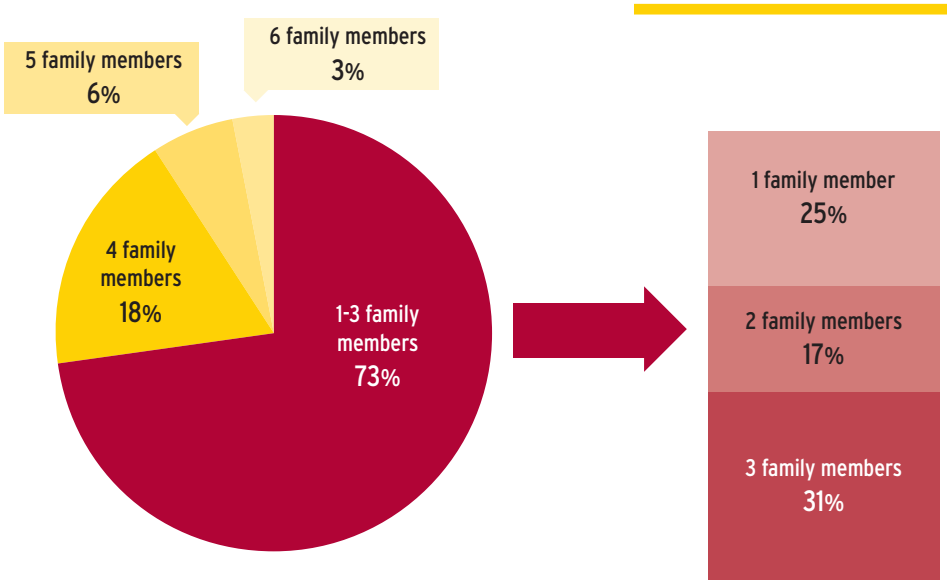


*Figure 22 - Number of family members respondents individual arrived with (of those who arrived as part of a family) (n- 117)*

9 *Responses were coded according to themes. Percentages shown in Figure 9 represent the frequency of themes as a percentage of responses to the question. Individual responses may contain multiple themes (e.g., housing, employment, income security). Consequently, the total percentages exceed 100*

three days on the streets before finding shelter, while others had challenges in obtaining or paying for housing in Vancouver. While lack of information accounted for approximately 2% of the challenges, that theme permeated many of the other challenges faced. One client reported *"I was lost with the streets, I knew nothing about BC and the system,"* while another indicated *"I didn't know anything, such as finding housing, job, [continuing] school."*

Respondents indicated that information about refugee claimant-specific services at SOS were most frequently provided by family and friends (39%) and provincial or federal government agencies such as CBSA and IRCC (27%). The paucity of services or information available in Metro Vancouver may be even more daunting for those crossing the border in other areas of BC. One respondent who initially crossed the border in the Okanagan, for example, spoke of having to travel to Vancouver to access legal assistance and pre-settlement services.

# Employment and Self-Employment

## COUNTRY OF ORIGIN/LAST HABITUAL RESIDENCE

Most participants reported having been employed in their home country or country of last habitual residence (85%). The high level of education among respondents is evident in the types of employment held. **The top three types of employment were education professionals (13%), professionals (11%), and management (11%)** (see Figure 24)**.** Others reported having worked in a plethora of occupations, including banking, sales, military personnel, and government officials.

The analysis of employment in country of origin/last habitual residence by National Occupational Classification (NOC)[10] code provides insight into the extent to which jobs were in low- or high-skill occupations.

Almost one-third (31%) of respondents reported having previously worked in Skill Level A professional jobs and 20% in Skill Level B technical jobs and skilled trades (see Figure 25). Sixteen percent worked in Skill Level 0 jobs.

Over one in five respondents reported having been self-employed prior to

| | |
|---|---|
| Education (e.g., teacher, professor, dean, instructor) | 13% |
| Management (e.g., directors, managers) | 11% |
| Professional (e.g., architect, doctor, gynecologist, veterinarian, lawyer, judge) | 11% |
| Food, retail, and hospitality | 8% |
| Construction, trades and manufacturing | 8% |
| Business owner/developer (e.g., Import/Export) | 6% |
| Services (e.g., janitorial, nails, hair, security) | 6% |
| Student, intern, activist, researcher | 6% |
| Engineering and sciences (e.g., geologist, biomedical engineer) | 5% |
| Financial (e.g., accounting, banking) | 5% |
| IT and telecommunications | 4% |
| Administration/office work | 3% |
| Driver (e.g., taxi, delivery, Uber) | 3% |
| Government (e.g., diplomat, worker) | 3% |
| Media and entertainment (e.g., journalist, choreographer) | 3% |
| Tourism/travel | 3% |
| Military | 2% |
| Artisans and handcrafters | 2% |
| Human resources | 1% |

*Figure 24 - Employment in country of origin/ last habitual residence (n- 266)*

*10 The NOC system is used to classify jobs/occupations based on job duties and type of work. For immigration-related purposes, the main job groups are Skill Type 0 (management jobs), Skill Level A (professional jobs usually requiring a university degree), Skill Level B (technical jobs and skilled trades usually requiring a college diploma or training as an apprentice), Skill Level C (intermediate jobs usually requiring high school or job-specific training), and Skill Level D (labour jobs requiring on-the-job training). For more information, see www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/immigrate-canada/express-entry/become-candidate/eligibility/find-national-occupation-code.html*

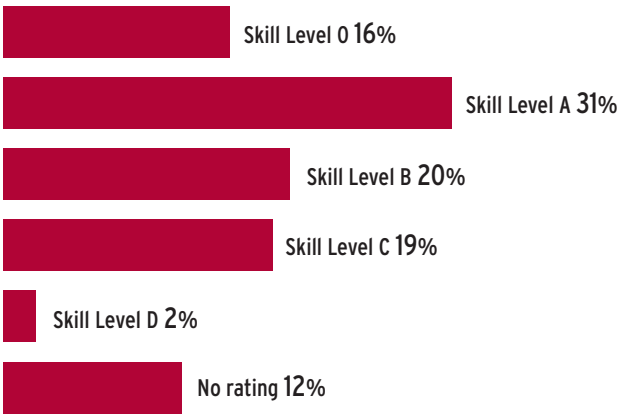


*Figure 25 - Employment in country of origin/last habitual residence by 2016 NOC code (n- 267)*

| | |
|---|---|
| Food, retail, and hospitality | 17% |
| Services (e.g., janitorial, hair and nails, security) | 15% |
| Tourism/travel | 10% |
| Construction, trades and manufacturing | 10% |
| Business developer/owner (e.g., Import/Export) | 10% |
| IT and telecommunications | 7% |
| Artisans and handcrafters | 5% |
| Professional (e.g., pharmacy assistant, lawyer) | 5% |
| Health services (e.g., clinic) | 3% |
| Financial (e.g., accounting, banking) | 3% |
| Media and entertainment (e.g., journalist, choreographer) | 3% |
| Engineering and sciences (e.g., geologist, biomedical engineer) | 3% |
| Taxi company (e.g., owner, driver) | 3% |
| Education (e.g., teacher, professor, dean, instructor) | 3% |

*Figure 26 - Self-employment in country of origin/last habitual residence (n- 59)*

coming to Canada, with businesses ranging from import and export, real estate, and tourism to education, health services, and law. Food, retail, and hospitality (17%) was the primary type of self-employment and included owners of bakeries, clothing store, furniture stores, and grocers (see Figure 26).

## IN CANADA

**At the time of the survey, 57% of respondents were working full-time (38%), part-time (15%), on-call or day labour (3%), or seasonally (1%)** (see Figure 27)**.** Early labour market attachment — particularly in full-time employment — is a positive indicator for integration. It is encouraging to note that 68% of respondents who were working had full-time employment.

Individuals working full time were 19–34 years old (59%), university or graduate school educated (60%), and male (89%).

Age and gender represent significant barriers to employment for refugee claimants. Labour market participation rates decrease with age, from over 80% of individuals 19–24 years to 33% of individuals age 55 and older.

Although approximately 48% of respondents who were not working were female, this accounted for 66% of all female respondents (compared with 33% of male respondents). Half of all male respondents were employed full time compared with 14% of female respondents.

Further analysis revealed no significant variation according to level of education between those who were working (all categories) compared with those who were not working.

**Almost 90% of respondents who were employed at the time of the survey were working in construction, trades,**

| | |
|---|---|
| Construction, trades, manufacturing, and warehouses | 34% |
| Retail, food, and hospitality | 32% |
| Services (e.g., taxi driver, security, settlement agency, home support) | 22% |
| IT and telecommunications | 3% |
| Professional (e.g., architect, biomedical engineer) | 2% |
| Media and entertainment (e.g., ad design, marketing) | 2% |
| Self-employed—home based | 2% |
| Self-employed—business | 1% |
| Administration and office work | 1% |
| Agriculture | 1% |
| Education-related | 1% |
| Financial (e.g., banking, accounting) | 1% |

*Figure 28 - Current employment by sector (n- 170)*

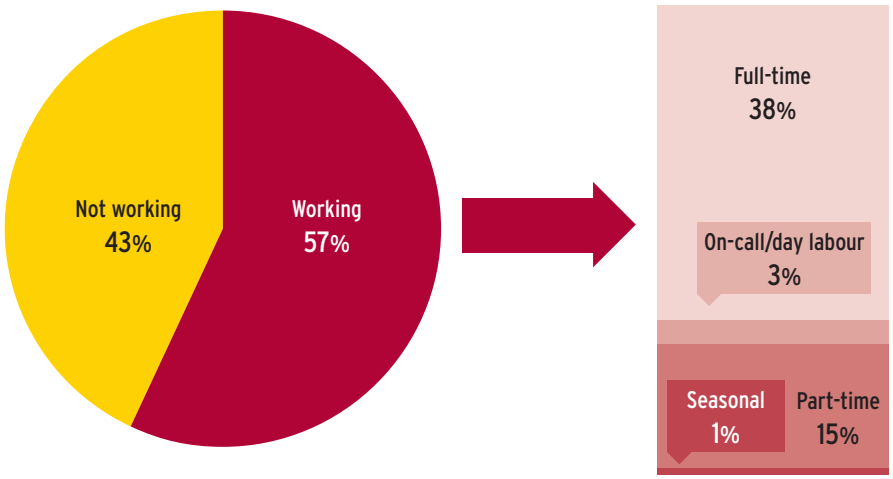


*Figure 27 - Current employment by type (n- 306)*

**manufacturing, and warehouses (34%); retail, food, and hospitality (32%); and service sectors (22%)** (see Figure 28). Opportunities for full-time (39%) and on-call employment (43%) were greatest in the construction, trades, manufacturing, and warehouses sector, while part-time (53%) and seasonal (67%) jobs were more likely to be in retail, food, and hospitality sectors.

A small number of individuals (fewer than 10) noted they are currently self-employed, primarily in services such as cleaning, moving, accounting, tourism, and advising.

The analysis of employment by 2016 NOC codes reveals significant de-skilling, particularly when compared with employment by country of last permanent residence/last habitual residence (see Figure 29). Respondents who are working are much more likely to be working in lower-skilled occupations, with 90% in jobs categorized as Skill Level C (51%) or D (39%) compared with 21% (19% Skill Level C, 2% Skill Level D) prior to arrival in Canada.

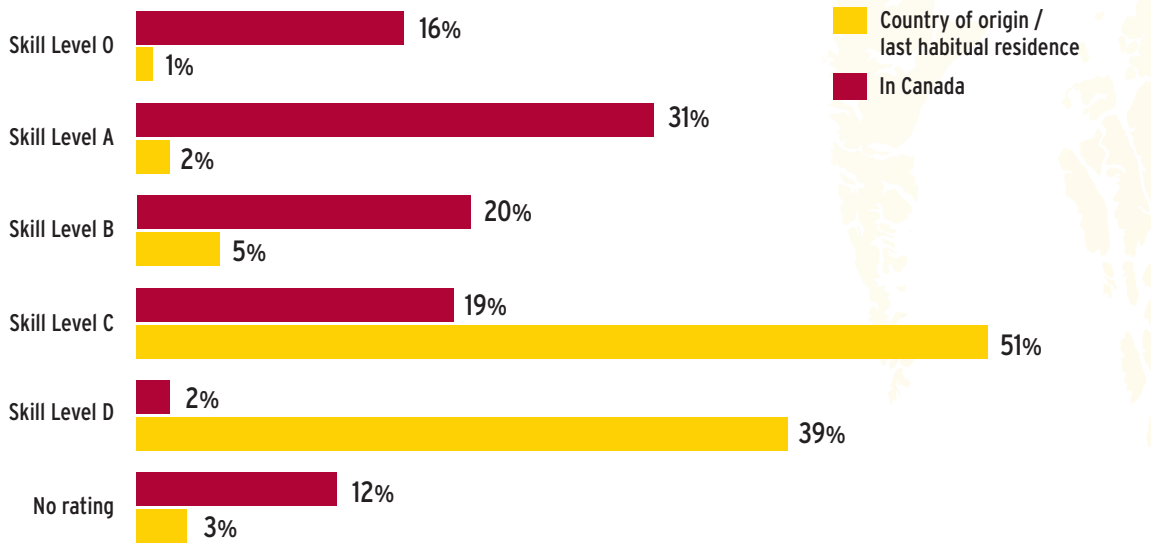


*Figure 29 - Employment by 2016 NOC comparing country of origin/last habitual residence with employment in Canada*

# Housing and Income Security

## SOURCES OF ASSISTANCE IN FINDING HOUSING

When asked who helped them find housing when they arrived in Canada, respondents most frequently answered family and friends (41%) and Welcome Centre service providers (25%) (see Figure 30). Almost one-fifth of respondents indicated they received no help (18%) or that they had found housing on the Internet (5%).

**Although housing appears to have largely been identified without formal assistance (e.g., from service providers, government offices), it is not possible to determine the type of assistance received from family and friends.** For example, did these individuals provide a referral to a service agency or help them to directly to identify and secure housing. In other surveys targeting newcomers, agency staff may be identified as a "friend," perhaps because a professional settlement service sector did not exist in their country of origin.

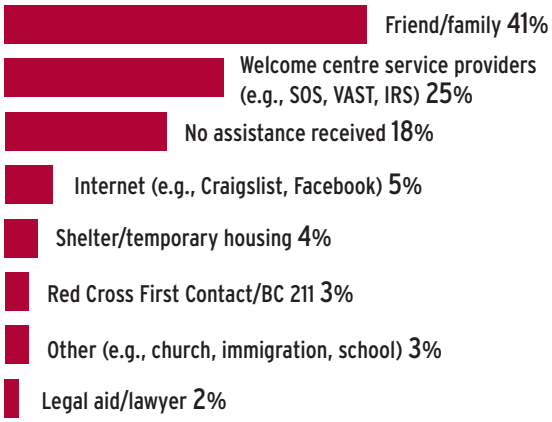


*Figure 30 - Sources of help in finding housing (n- 186)*

## CURRENT ACCOMMODATIONS

**Although the vast majority of participants said they had secured permanent accommodation in either an apartment (52%) or a house (44%), it is alarming to note that 4% continue to be precariously housed (e.g., staying with family or friends, hotel/motel) or experiencing absolute homelessness (e.g., living on the street, in a shelter)** (see Figure 31).

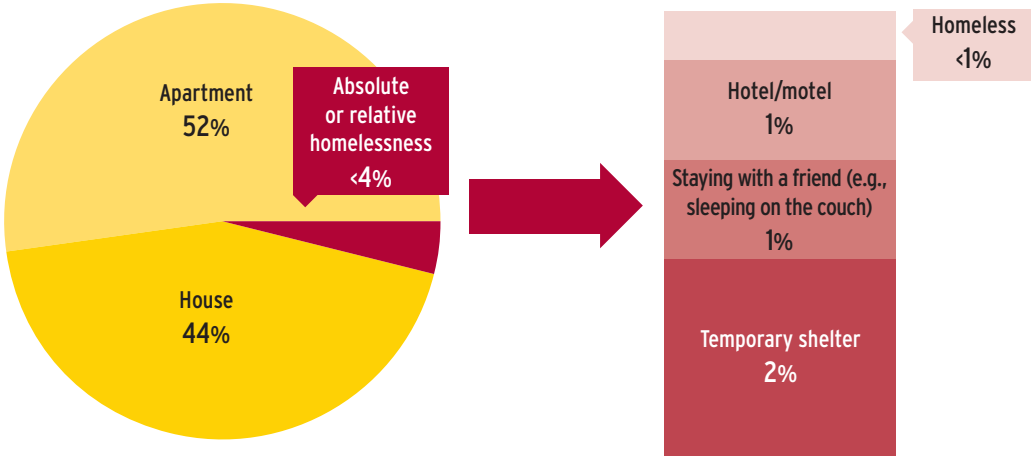


*Figure 31 - Current housing (n- 302)*

Three-quarters of those who are precariously housed or experiencing absolute homelessness are males ages 35–44 who arrived by themselves. Almost 60% of those who are precariously housed are working — either full-time (25%), part-time (25%), or as on-call or day labour (8%).

In spite of their relatively short period in Canada, 81% of respondents report having changed housing at least once since their arrival in BC. Almost one in five have done so three or more times.

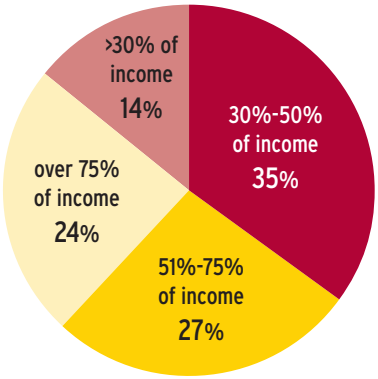


*Figure 32 - Percentage of income spent on housing (n- 296)*

## AFFORDABILITY

In Canada, housing is considered "affordable" if it accounts for less than 30% of household income. While it is encouraging to note that 14% of respondents meet this affordability criterion, more than half are facing "critical housing affordability issues" (defined as spending more than 51% on housing) (see Figure 32). **At the time of the survey, 27% were spending 51% to 75% of monthly household income on housing, and 24% were spending more than 75%.**

Over 40% of individuals facing critical housing affordability challenges were employed — 24% full-time and 16% part-time (see Figure 33).

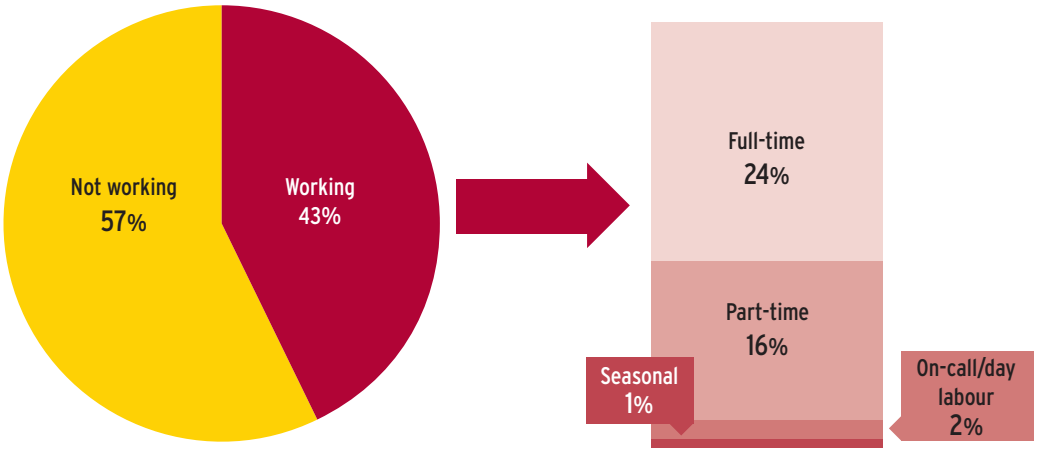


*Figure 33 - Employment type for individuals allocating 51% or more on housing (n- 151)*

## INCOME SECURITY

**One measure of income security (or, perhaps, more aptly defined as income "insecurity") is the u se of food banks.** Sixty-five percent of respondents reported no use at all (see Figure 34). One in 10 respondents depends on food banks on a weekly basis, while an additional 5% access food banks monthly.

It is important to note, however, that food bank use may not accurately reflect actual need. Individuals may not use food banks for many reasons, including:

- An inability to access the services during non-work hours.
- A lack of money to pay for transportation.
- Being faced with unfamiliar or culturally inappropriate foods (e.g., non-halal, pork).
- In some cases, poor quality/expired food provided at the food bank.

Further, the perceived shame associated with being dependent on food banks may contribute to individuals under-reporting use or simply deciding not to access this service in spite of need.

Fifty-one percent of all food bank users reported being currently employed on a full-time (30%), part-time (17%), on-call/day labour (3%) or seasonal (2%) basis (see Figure 35).

High rates of employment among food bank users suggest that while individuals have been able to obtain employment, incomes are insufficient to meet household needs.

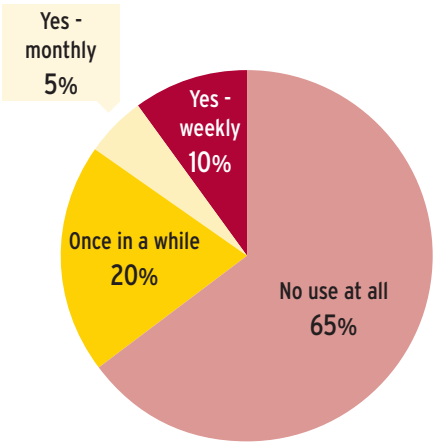


*Figure 34 - Food bank usage (n- 305)*

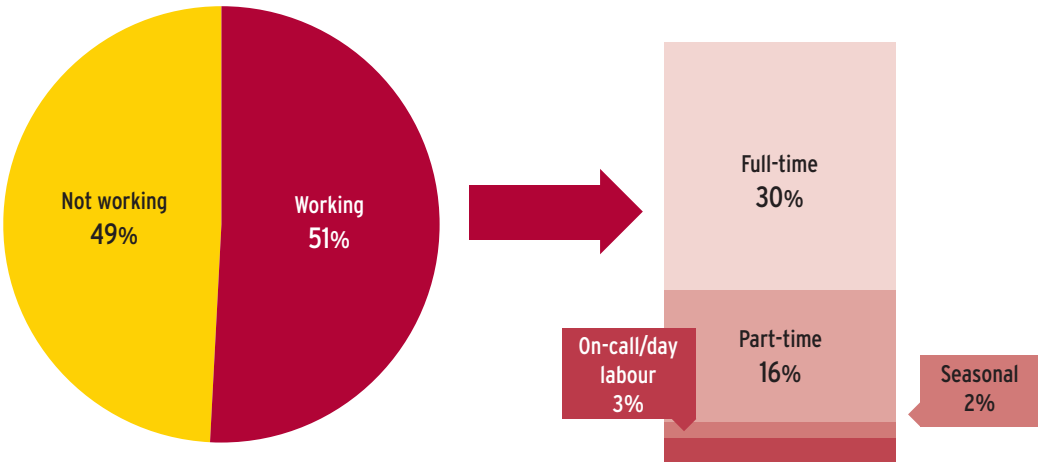


*Figure 35 - Food bank users by employment status (n- 107)*

# Physical and Emotional Health

Respondents were asked a series of questions about their physical and emotional well-being and that of their families.

Refugee claimants self-report they and their families are in good physical and mental health. Over 90% of respondents reported being in good (32%), very good (38%), or excellent (21%) physical health.

Those with families reported they are in good (30%), very good (45%), or excellent (15%) health. Fifty-four percent report being emotionally healthy—25% are happy and 29% content.

# Open-ended Questions

To better understand the issues facing refugee claimants in BC, respondents were asked two open-ended questions:

- What is your most pressing need or worry?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell SOS or the government?

Analysis of the responses to open-ended questions identified seven major themes:

- Gratitude and thanks
- Legal process and lack of permanent status
- Obtaining permanent resident status
- Employment
- Housing and shelter
- Availability of services and supports
- Health and mental health

Highlights of responses to the two open-ended questions are presented below, followed by the discussion of the main themes overall.

**It is important to note that while family reunification emerged as a theme, it was often directly linked to other issues (e.g., the impact of delayed legal processes on family reunification).** As such, it has not been broken out separately in the discussion.

## MOST PRESSING WORRY

Respondents were asked to reflect on their most pressing worry or concern. For many, the answer was the refugee claim itself (34%), followed by issues related to family separation/reunification (30%), employment/work permits (29%), housing (15%), and obtaining permanent resident status (9%) (see Figure 36).[11] As temporary residents, claimants have restricted access to services (e.g., for language classes, interim federal health program) or are required to pay higher fees (e.g., for education or training programs). It is therefore not surprising that language/ English classes (9%), health (8%), education

| | |
|---|---|
| Refugee claim (e.g., process, delays, decision, appeals) | 34% |
| Family separation/reunification | 30% |
| Employment/work permit | 29% |
| Housing | 15% |
| Language/English classes | 9% |
| Permanent resident status | 9% |
| Health (e.g., physical, mental health, coverage) | 8% |
| Education | 5% |
| Financial security | 4% |
| Temporary status | 4% |
| Access to services/supports (e.g., settlement, childminding) | 3% |
| Safety | 2% |

*Figure 36 - Need or worry (multiple responses)*

*11 Responses were coded according to themes. Percentages shown in Figures 36 and 37 represent the frequency of themes as a percentage of responses to the question. Individual responses may contain multiple themes (e.g., claim process and family reunification). Consequently, the total of percentages exceed 100.*

(5%), financial security and temporary status (4% each), and access to services (3%) are concerns among respondents.

## MESSAGE FOR SOS OR THE GOVERNMENT

Finally, respondents were asked if they had any messages for service providers they may access or for the government. For many, answering this question represented a rare opportunity to have their voice heard by policy makers and organizations. Almost half responded with messages of thanks and gratitude (45%) (see Figure 37). Other key themes that emerged were the refugee claim process (21%), access to services (15%), and housing and shelter (13%), as well as family reunification and permanent resident status (11% each).

| | |
|---|---|
| Thanks and gratitude | 45% |
| Refugee claim (e.g., process, appeal, decisions, hearings) | 21% |
| Access (e.g., to ESL, information, services) | 15% |
| Housing and shelter | 13% |
| Family reunification | 11% |
| Permanent resident status (e.g. processing time) | 11% |
| Employment (e.g., job search, professionals, work permit) | 7% |
| Education | 3% |
| Financial support | 3% |
| Health/mental health | 2% |
| Support | 2% |
| Lack of satisfaction/desire for better services | 1% |

*Figure 37 - Message for government or service providers*

## MAJOR THEMES

The seven common themes that emerged through both questions are examined below. Where possible we have included participants' words in order to honour their experiences.

### *Gratitude and thanks*

The opportunity for refugees to rebuild their lives in a country that offers freedom and safety garnered widespread thanks and gratitude to the Government of Canada, Canadians, and service providers. Many committed to doing their best, if their asylum claims are accepted, to contribute to Canada.

> *"I am **GRATEFUL** to the Government of Canada."*

> *"From the day I came to Canada, I have been very **IMPRESSED** with everything in Canada. The treatment that I received, and the freedom I have. I am impressed with the fairness, we are all equal."*

> *"I'd like to **THANK THE GOVERNMENT AND ORGANIZATIONS** such as SOS. Without this support we would be lost in this process."*

> *"**THANK YOU** to the government for [accepting us] as protected persons. We will work hard to be good citizens."*

### *Legal process and lack of permanent status*

When refugee claimants arrive in Canada, they must simultaneously navigate the legal process to be recognized as protected persons and to initiate the settlement process (e.g., obtaining housing, employment). In undertaking what may be a dangerous journey with no guarantee of success, many come by themselves, leaving spouses and dependent minor children behind with the hopes of reuniting once permanent status in Canada is received.

Delayed hearings, lack of status, and — in some cases — negative decisions followed by appeals — increase stress and make it more difficult for participants to begin settling in Canada. For claimants, the ability to move forward with any settlement in Canada depends on receiving a positive determination from the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) on their claim. As the number of individuals entering Canada to claim asylum has increased, so too have the wait times for IRB hearings. In February 2018 the IRB abandoned legislated hearing times because of significant system pressures. Consequently, later arrivals may now be waiting 18 months to two years to obtain a decision on their claim.

In some cases, respondents noted their hearings have been cancelled and no new date scheduled, leaving them in a state of prolonged uncertainty.

> *"My hearing date took **TOO LONG**. It feels like I am in limbo."*

> *"**WE WISH TO HAVE OUR HEARING SOON** so we can go on with our lives and plans."*

> *"I am worried about my status here and the hearing date being **POSTPONED**."*

> *"I worry about my hearing being **POSTPONED** and feel no stability/no status yet."*

> *"Our hearing is **POSTPONED** and we are so concerned."*

> *"I received a **DELAY OF MY HEARING** and I do not have a date right now."*

> *"**I FEEL UNSTABLE HERE**. Although I'm happy now, I don't know what will happen to me."*

For refugee claimants, the normal stresses associated with settling in a new country (e.g., learning the language, living in a new cultural environment) are amplified by the precariousness caused by lack of status and the worry of receiving a negative decision and having to leave the country. Claimants in Canada live in a liminal state marked by being outside their country of origin without the option for a safe return, yet not fully being "in" Canada.

> *"We wish the hearing date didn't take this long and be delayed. We escaped war and seek protection and safety. We are very stressed and having the hearing date being **DELAYED** is making our life harder."*

"*My family is in a country of war. My family is at risk; they are not in a safe country. They ask me every day to bring them to Canada because their life is at risk. I wish the government would consider that and* **ACCELERATE MY HEARING**."

"*I am* **WORRIED ABOUT MY SAFETY** *if I go back to my home country.*"

"**I WORRY WHETHER WE CAN STAY OR NOT**."

"**MY ONLY REQUEST IS NOT TO SEND ME BACK** *to China. I can overcome any other challenge.*"

"*I have been in Canada since July 2017 and since then I am waiting for my hearing. My hearing was scheduled in September 2017 but …* **POSTPONED**. *Since then I have not heard any new dates from IRB or my lawyer. This causes health problems to myself. I would like to request the Canadian government* **EXPEDITE MY CASE** *or at least give me hearing dates. Currently I cannot decide whether I am staying here or not because I don't have any decision from the IRB.*"

A small number of respondents who had received negative decisions on their refugee claim expressed their concern about pending decisions on appeals.

"**I WORRY ABOUT MY CLAIM OF REFUGEE**; *I am in the process of appeal.*"

One person's most pressing worry was the pending "*decision of CBSA's appeal on our positive IRB decision*."

### *Obtaining permanent resident status*

Unlike other refugees settling in Canada, individuals seeking asylum do not arrive with the right to permanent residence. For refugee claimants, family reunification depends on a positive determination on their refugee claim, as well as obtaining permanent resident status. Even for those who receive a positive decision, they still face the long processing time to become a permanent resident — currently about two years. This wait is an additional stress on refugees who are concerned about the safety of family still abroad.

"*Through having status, I can live my life normally. I immigrated to Canada because my life was threatened.* **I AM WANTING MY PERMANENT RESIDENT STATUS**."

"**I WISH THE PROCESS FOR PERMANENT RESIDENT STATUS APPLICATION [WAS] FASTER** *than the current time so we can bring our family*

*members to Canada. It's hard to live without a family."*

*"The permanent resident status application* **TAKES TOO LONG**. *I have had no response since I submitted it nine months ago."*

*"I want my family to come to me. The hearing is long and permanent resident status* **TAKES TOO MUCH TIME**. *I need my family."*

*"I worry about the* **LONG PROCESSING TIME** *of [my] permanent residency application. My young kids need me."*

*"I look forward to being united with my kids.* **I WORRY FOR THEIR SAFETY**."

*"I think for accepted refugees,* **IT IS BETTER TO HAVE A SHORTER TIME TO HAVE THEIR PERMANENT RESIDENT STATUS**. *That will help them to integrate in the Canadian society better and faster."*

Delays in hearing and permanent resident processing stages delay integration for newly arrived refugee claimants.

Further, unlike sponsored refugees, protected persons must pay to apply for permanent resident status—currently $550 per adult (including the principal applicant) and $150 for each dependent child—potentially creating a significant financial barrier.[12] An innovative program introduced by Vancity credit union mitigates this barrier by providing successful refugee claimants with access to an interest-free loan to pay the permanent resident status fees.[13]

Respondents to the survey included a number of single mothers who expressed their concerns about the financial challenges of being a single parent, as well as the need to pay for a lawyer for custody of their minor children.

### *Employment*

Finding and obtaining employment is a central concern for refugee claimants, of course, because they need to support themselves and their family. As well, they need funds to apply for permanent resident status and family reunification. Because they are temporary residents, refugee claimants require a work permit before they can be legally employed in Canada, and currently, employment authorizations take six weeks to four months to process and may be valid for periods as short as six months to two years. Further, claimants must pay the costs of obtaining a work permit themselves.

These delays in processing and short time periods offered on work permits present additional barriers to employment

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*12 For sponsored refugees, the permanent resident processing fee for the head of household is included within the Government Transportation Loan; the fee for additional family members (e.g., spouse, dependent children) is waived.*

*13 For more information on Vancity's investment and support for immigrants and refugees, see www.vancity.com/AboutVancity/News/Backgrounders/Immigrants*

and contribute to income insecurity. One respondent, for example, spoke of the challenges of having to renew their work permit every six months.

> "**GETTING MY EXPIRED WORK PERMIT IN ORDER IS MY MAIN NEED.** *Also, to get stable housing.*"

> "**I NEED MY WORK PERMIT** *to be able to work.*"

> "**I NEED MY WORK PERMIT URGENTLY**; *it's been delayed twice.*"

Further, some employers may be unwilling to hire and onboard refugee claimants who have a short-term visa. The stigma of having a social insurance number that identifies them as refugee claimants (beginning with the numeral 9) alerts potential employers to the claimant's possible short-term residency and may be a deterrent to finding employment. These barriers increase the likelihood of claimants being forced to depend on provincial income assistance.

A recent proposal for a pilot project to ease some of these constraints is in the works. Under the proposed plan, work and study permits will be automatically provided to refugee claimants, offering great potential to ease some of these constraints. The project uses the Global Case Management System and aims to efficiently process work and study permit applications when certain requirements are met, rather than requiring the refugee claimant to submit a separate application. While not yet in place, the project has been approved, and once implemented it has great potential to ease some of the constraints and facilitate entry into the labour market.

> "*I found an opportunity in my field, part time, but* **WHEN THEY FOUND OUT I AM A REFUGEE [CLAIMANT] THEY LET ME GO**. *I had three other interviews for job opportunities in my field: when I mentioned I am a refugee [claimant] they did not get back to me.*"

> "*I worry about my future.* **I NEED TO FIND A JOB** *and further my education.*"

> "**[I WISH I COULD GET THE] ASSESSMENT OF MY DEGREES FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM**. *Also, licensing by Transport Canada requires having permanent resident status.*"

> "**VALIDATE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE THE SCHOOL CERTIFICATE IN MY FIELD OF WORK** *as a registered nurse.*"

> "**FINDING A PROPER JOB IN CANADA IS DIFFICULT**. *I was a professional worker in Afghanistan. Obtaining my own job in Canada requires a permanent resident card which I don't have right now.*"

> "**I HOPED OUR EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND COULD BE EVALUATED AS CANADIAN STANDARDS**."

Respondents conveyed a desire to work in their previous field of study and employment. A number spoke of a need for assistance—such as coaching—to help professionals and people who do not speak English find employment.

> "*Provide* **MORE EDUCATION AND COACHING** *to help people to find jobs in their fields.*"

> "*Provide* **MORE SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE THAT DO NOT SPEAK THE LANGUAGE**, *such as a coaching program.*"

> "*I can't get a job which I have experience in because I don't have permanent residence and* **MOST COMPANIES REQUIRE PERMANENT RESIDENT STATUS**."

Like other newcomers to Canada, refugee claimants struggle to obtain employment when Canadian experience is required.

> "**I HAVE HAD A HARD TIME FINDING EMPLOYMENT** *due to not having Canadian experience. I would like to be given an opportunity to earn in this society.*"

Unlike other groups, however, refugee claimants were less likely to cite lack of Canadian experience as a barrier to employment: rather, their most frequently cited barrier was legal status.

There was also widespread recognition from claimants that English language proficiency is important to succeeding in finding employment.

> "*I worry about my hearing and the* **LACK OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILL** *to get a job.*"

> "**NOT KNOWING ENGLISH MADE IT SO DIFFICULT** *for me to look for a job.*"

> "**I WANT TO FIND THE JOB I AM LOOKING FOR ACCORDING TO MY EXPERIENCE**."

For those with preschool and school-age children, the cost and availability of childcare places additional constraints on their ability to obtain employment.

> "**I CAN'T PAY FOR DAYCARE AS IT'S EXPENSIVE.**"

Further, refugee claimants are not eligible for subsidy programs such as Canada Child Benefit or childcare subsidies, further reducing already limited childcare options.

> "*Please help families with* **MORE SERVICES SUCH CHILDCARE**, *so both parents and kids can have better chances to integrate themselves in this society.*"

> *"I wish the Government of Canada would consider refugee claimants for BC Housing and child tax benefit.* **IT'S REALLY DIFFICULT TO LIVE ON INCOME ASSISTANCE ONLY FOR FAMILY OF SIX**. *And extend the employment services for refugee claimants to start building their life."*

> *"We are here for safety. We had a tough time and we came here seeking protection. We* **HOPE WE CAN GET THE CHILD TAX BENEFIT** *when we enter Canada. To have kids with very limited financial resource is very difficult."*

The pressures of family separation can amplify the financial burden among individuals struggling to find employment in Canada or meet basic needs (e.g., food, housing).

> **"I WORRY ABOUT MY FAMILY BACK HOME**. *I have no money to support them. I need to find a better job to support my family."*

### *Housing and shelter*

The challenges of obtaining housing in Metro Vancouver market are well-known, so it is not surprising that housing was one of the key themes that emerged in the survey.

Unlike other refugee groups (e.g., privately sponsored refugees and government assisted refugees), refugee claimants are not provided with shelter or housing upon arrival. Rather, they are responsible for identifying and obtaining this basic need. While some respondents reported that they were able to find accommodation, either through service providers, friends and family, or their own housing search, others spoke of having stayed in shelters, often in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTSE), where safety is a concern. While there is limited housing search assistance available, the need outstrips the demand.

> **"WE NEED SHELTERS FOR REFUGEE CLAIMANTS** *who have just arrived. The ones that exist are not safe because we have to deal with persons with addictions and mental problems. We do not feel safe in those places."*

> *"We wish we get* **HOUSING ASSISTANCE** *and shelters when we come first to the country."*

> **"HOUSING SHOULD BE IN SAFE PLACES**, *not in DTES, so they won't be exposed to another danger."*

One respondent's concerns about housing related to his precarious legal status in Canada. Some landlords do not want to rent to refugee claimants because they could be deported at any time.

> *"I worry about my hearing, whether we'll be given*

*protected person status. I worry that if our landlord knows about our refugee claimant status, our landlord* **WOULDN'T RENT THE HOUSE TO US**.”

Concerns about the high cost of living or crowded housing conditions were also widespread. Respondents indicated they recognized the need to earn a better income to obtain more suitable housing, and also that they will likely require bigger housing once the family is reunified. And even though refugee claimants are eligible for BC Housing after making their claim, they face long waitlists for inadequate number of subsidized units.

“*My family which we are* **FOUR MEMBERS LIVING IN A ONE-BEDROOM APARTMENT**.”

“**PROPER HOUSING** — *too many people living in a small place.*”

“**I WORRY ABOUT HIGH RENT**. *If my wife and child arrive, I need a bigger place.*”

“**I NEED A PRIVATE PLACE TO LIVE WITH MY KIDS** *instead of staying at my sister's place.*”

“*As a single mom, I am financially in need. With two children, it is so difficult to manage life. I and my children live in one room. They cannot invite any friends over.* **THERE IS NO SPACE**. *I cannot rent any bigger place because it is so expensive to even rent a one-bedroom apartment.*”

“*To regulate housing market-speculation. It is* **VERY HARD TO FIND AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND IN GOOD LIVING CONDITIONS**.”

### *Availability of services and supports*

Lack of permanent status impacts many aspects of a person's daily life, including gaining access to employment, education, services, and — in some cases — housing.

“*I wish that refugee claimants got more support [like those given to] convention refugees and protected persons. I feel we are a second-class citizen because we don't have many services. Wherever I go,* **THEY TELL ME YOU CAN'T ACCESS THE SERVICE** *because you are not a convention refugee yet. For example, Work BC, English language schools are not available for claimants. We don't want to depend on social welfare,* **WE WANT TO GET SOME SUPPORT** *to improve our language and get jobs.*”

“*There should be* **MORE PROGRAMS AVAILABLE** *for refugee claimants and protected persons.*”

> *"Waiting hearing date.* **NOT ABLE TO GO SCHOOL WITH THE REFUGEE ID**.*"*

Many settlement services funded by the federal government require permanent resident status, while those with temporary status seeking to access post-secondary education are charged international student rates. At present, refugee claimants are not eligible for free federally or provincially funded Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) classes anywhere within Metro Vancouver. Individuals seeking to improve their language proficiency must access free, volunteer-run English conversation practice circles or pay for classes at international student rates.

> *"Employment—enrollment in the employment programs provided by non-profit organizations* **(MOST OF THE PROGRAMS REQUIRES PERMANENT RESIDENT STATUS**.*"*

> *"***LEARNING ENGLISH TO BE ABLE TO FIND A BETTER JOB**. *Also, credential recognition."*

> *"My* **MOST PRESSING WORRY IS STUDYING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE**. *Everywhere we go they are requiring permanent resident status [to access classes]."*

> *"***ENGLISH CLASSES FOR REFUGEE CLAIMANTS ARE LIMITED**. *We need training classes for refugee claimants who are ready to learn and be prepared for employment."*

> *"***ENGLISH CLASSES ARE RARE** *for refugee claimants. In terms of looking for a job, I need to be able to speak the language."*

> *"***LET YOUNG PEOPLE LIKE ME GO TO SCHOOL**. *Refugee claimants shouldn't be considered as international students."*

> *"The government must provide more facilities and programs for refugee claimants. T***HERE ARE MANY LIMITATIONS FOR REFUGEES** *which stop them having a normal life in Canada."*

While refugee claimants appreciated the supports provided by agencies such as SOS, the Vancouver Association for Survivors of Torture (VAST), Inland Refugee Society (IRS), and the Legal Services Society (LSS), many said there were just not enough services available, particularly upon arrival, and that there was a lack of interpreters to help them access other services. The overall lack of funded, specialized services is further compounded for those who arrive crossing the border at land-based ports of entry.

> *"I wish the Government of Canada referred refugee claimants on the borders to organizations that can help refugees.* **THERE WAS NOT ENOUGH INFORMATION** *when I came to Canada."*

As demand has increased, so too have wait times for limited services. For some, the challenges of waiting for appointments is magnified by the need to travel long distances from outer suburbs to Vancouver-based specialized services, which adds to their financial burden.

> *"If there is too many people we have to go back home without being helped. It is difficult to get an appointment.* **TRAVEL TO VANCOUVER WAS CHALLENGING** *because I did not have money for the bus to go back."*

> **"THERE IS A LACK OF INTERPRETERS** *in some services in Vancouver. Not knowing English makes it difficult to move on."*

The Province of BC is to be commended both for providing targeted funding for refugee claimants — including mental health services — as well as their response to increased arrivals of refugee claimants in BC. Additional targeted funding has enabled the production of six short, multilingual videos in five languages outlining key aspects of the refugee claim process. Videos are posted online at ***sosbc.ca*** and are intended to provide up-to-date information to refugee claimants without having to access services in person.

Effective July 1, 2018, the Province of BC has provided additional funds to support the settlement and mental health needs of refugee claimants throughout Metro Vancouver and the Fraser Valley regions. In addition to reduced costs for transportation associated with travelling one zone as opposed to three, refugee claimants will be able to access bus tickets — something that had not previously been available.

Further, the launch of Newcomer.info — a web-based two-way first-language texting system introduced by ISS*of*BC in partnership with the Vancouver Community Network — will allow refugee claimants to sign up to receive timely information by text, potentially increasing access to much-needed information and reducing the need to obtain in-person services for some issues.[14]

### *Physical and mental health*

Finally, concerns about physical and mental health were brought forward by respondents. Limited insurance coverage — particularly dental coverage — as well as concerns about family members who have not yet received their Medical Services Plan coverage make it difficult for some respondents to access health care.

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*14 Newcomer.info is an adaptation of the StreetMessenger system (www.streetmessenger.io) introduced by Vancouver Community Network to provide critical information to homeless or hard to house individuals across Metro Vancouver (e.g., shelter availability). Newcomer.info has integrated sending and receiving information. As such, ISSofBC—including SOS—will be able to respond to individual questions and create Frequently Asked Question sheets where appropriate that can be texted out and posted on the BC Refugee Hub (refugeehub.issbc.org) and SOS websites (sosbc.ca).*

Further, in spite of overall positive responses concerning physical and mental health, refugee claimants spoke of the challenges associated with isolation, worry, and stress caused by delayed hearings, as well as prolonged family separation and ongoing concerns about their family member's safety.

> *"I am so* **STRESSED AND WORRIED** *about my wife's and child's safety in Afghanistan."*

> *"People face the challenge of not knowing the future. Since the hearing date is out of our hands, the* **WAITING CAUSES MENTAL HEALTH [PROBLEMS]**. *We are not productive because we do not have peace of mind about our future."*

> *"The hearing date has been cancelled. Not knowing what is awaiting for my family makes me very* **CONCERNED AND DEPRESSED**."

> *"As a protected person who applied for permanent resident status, it is taking a long time to process for my family to join me. We are all so* **STRESSED OUT** *and emotionally down. My family is almost torn apart. I have never been dependent on welfare or anybody financially. I just need my family to enter Canada as soon as possible."*

# Recommendations

The following recommendations arise from the survey.

**We encourage IRCC (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada) to:**

1. **Expand eligibility for some federally funded settlement, employment, and language classes to include refugee claimants.** With over 63% receiving positive determinations, early access to services will limit the potential for long-term economic scarring, and improve integration to successfully build a life in Canada.
2. **Reduce processing times for permanent resident status.** Although individuals who have received a positive determination can begin to build their new life in Canada, the prolonged processing times of up to two years for permanent resident status extends liminality and the precarious state of protected persons.
3. **Expedite processing of family reunification cases for protected persons.** Currently refugee claimants may wait four to six years from the time their claim is submitted until they are reunited with their spouse and dependent children. Such separations can threaten mental health and adds to the work of rebuilding family relationships once they are reunited in Canada.
4. **Undertake a similar survey in other parts of Canada to better understand these recent arrivals in a larger context.** Given high levels of human capital among refugee claimants in BC, it would be beneficial to conduct targeted research into certain aspects of our findings, including access to employment, education, and training.
5. **Increase the distribution of multilingual information for refugee claimants in Canada on a national basis.** Given the importance of the asylum hearing, it is critical that refugee claimants have ongoing access to factual and up-to-date information to ensure they don't fall through the cracks or encounter any misinformation. The information sheets produced by IRCC on the refugee claim process are critical in conveying up-to-date and accurate information and dispelling common misconceptions. IRCC is encouraged to disseminate multilingual information in multiple formats (e.g., infographics, short videos). Having such effective resources will give greater capacity to service providers and help them focus their staffing resources on the more critical aspects of the claim process.

**We encourage the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) and federal government to:**

6. **Ensure sufficient staffing resources are in place to reduce wait times for hearings and better meet previously established service standards.** When hearings are postponed, it is critical that refugee claimants are provided ongoing information about their estimated new date. The current lack of information escalates the sense of

precariousness for refugee claimants as they are unable to plan for the future.

**We encourage the Government of Canada and the Province of BC to:**

7. **Undertake a whole government approach to minimize delays that increase claimants' reliance on provincial social assistance and to reduce administrative burden.** The recent announcement that hearing times will be reduced to one year is a positive start, but the entire government approach must change to minimize delays for claimants that increase their reliance on provincial social assistance, and to reduce administrative burden. Some needed changes include:

- Providing automatic provision of work permits upon being deemed eligible to make a refugee claim.
- Ensuring work permits are valid for four years in recognition of the time it takes to obtain both protected person status and permanent resident status.
- Ensuring the immigration medical exam (IME) is valid for the same period—four years—to avoid the need to reissue it at the claimant's expense.

8. **Ensure ongoing and enhanced funding to Legal Aid to meet the needs of refugee claimants.** The refugee claim process is highly legalistic, requiring specialized knowledge. Providing refugee claimants with the necessary supports required to navigate the claim process ensures those in need of protection do not receive negative determinations because they were missing information or making incorrect assumptions.

9. **Develop contingency plans for new arrivals to ensure timely access to key pre-settlement and refugee claim supports.** The recent influx of arrivals has taxed service providers and placed pressure on an already-difficult housing market. Ensure contingency plans exist for key supports, including initial shelter and ongoing housing (e.g., temporary housing during the claim process), as well as increased staffing to aid in processing IRB hearings in a timely manner.

**We encourage the Province of BC to:**

10. **Expand targeted resources to help refugee claimants seek employment.** Refugee claimants arrive in BC with high levels of human capital and a desire to be economically independent. Helping them obtain employment and become economically self-sufficient results in their contributing to the Canadian economy and reducing their dependence on BC Income Assistance and other forms of financial support.

11. **Provide housing search resources, including placement and accompaniment to view potential units.** These services are similar to those provided to government assisted refugees and reduce the potential for vulnerable claimants to be taken advantage of in the rental market.

**We encourage municipal governments within Metro Vancouver to:**

12. Expand eligibility for programs intended to provide low-income families with access to community programs (e.g., leisure access passes) to include refugee claimants.

# Conclusion

Canada is a signatory to both the United Nations 1951 Convention on Refugees and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, which together form the basis of international refugee law and allow for individuals to legally seek asylum in this country. The safe third country agreement between Canada and the US has resulted in refugee claimants entering Canada through irregular means, such as walking across the US–Canada border. Refugee claimants have been doing this for decades, and this will continue as long as there are people in desperate situations who seek safety and protection through all possible means.

This current phenomenon is not unique or new; what is new is the number of daily arrivals. Canada's immigration system is predicated on a controlled, orderly flow of immigrants into the country, but the recent high rate of the spontaneous arrivals of refugee claimants as seen here in BC and elsewhere in Canada leaves governments and service providers unable to predict and plan. The current arrival trends across Canada call for alternative means of communication and support services to ensure that refugee claimants receive a fair and expeditious asylum hearing.

The most recent refugee claimant arrivals are primarily young, well-educated, and English-speaking. Many bring valuable work experience as professionals (e.g., lawyers, doctors, engineers), as well as self-employment experience. These are characteristics that should set them up well for integration if their asylum claims are accepted.

But when they arrive in BC, these claimants face navigating complex settlement and legal processes—a situation made more difficult by the relative lack of access to English language classes and other largely federal funded settlement services—as well as extended delays in processing refugee claims and applications for permanent resident status. They are not able to access many key supports and employment opportunities because of their temporary legal status, and unlike other temporary residents (e.g., temporary foreign workers), who can return to their country of origin, refugee claimants cannot—they are here because they have fled persecution and come seeking asylum and to build a new life in Canada.

Starting to build that life is very difficult because of the structural barriers they face when they arrive. Long delays in applying for a protected person claim, waiting for their permanent resident status, trying to find employment in a climate that often demands Canadian experience, and being separated from family for up to six years are all barriers that delay rebuilding their lives and greatly increase the likelihood of needing provincial income assistance and other supports.

Finally, these delays in hearing and processing times cost government resources, too—time spent reviewing renewals for work permits and immigration medical exams, for example. In the end, no one wins by the delays.

We end this report by sharing some of the survey respondents' words to our open-ended questions:

"*Canada is a great country. Thank you for* **OPENING THE DOOR** *for refugee claimants.*"

"*I am very* **GRATEFUL AND THANKFUL** *to the Canadian government for opening their door. I would have been killed if I wasn't accepted.* **EVERY DAY IS A BLESSING FOR ME**."

"*To the Government of Canada:* **THANK YOU** *for the help to hundreds of people that come looking for safety and thank you for* **LISTENING TO OUR VOICES**."

"*We are happy because* **WE ARE SAFE**."

# Appendices

## APPENDIX A: OVERVIEW OF THE REFUGEE CLAIM PROCESS IN BC

### Refugee Claim Process (BC CONTEXT)

#### First 24 Hours

After walking across the border, asylum seekers themselves contact or are picked up by either police or directly by CBSA (Canada Border Services Agency) or they make their claim at an IRCC (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada) office.

Upon arrival at YVR, the individual expresses their need for protection to a CBSA officer. They are interviewed and an intake form is completed as well as security checks. They may be asked to come back the next day if more time is needed. If necessary, an interpreter will be called (either in person or over the phone). Once this procedure is completed, they are given the First Contact brochure for services.

CBSA or IRCC officers screen the identity of the asylum seeker and complete security checks which can take up to 8 hours for each person.

Emergency care is provided if needed. Depending on need and availability, food and blankets are also provided.

#### Next Two Weeks

CBSA has 72 hours to decide if they are eligible to make a refugee claim. If eligible their case is referred to the IRB (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada) and they have 15 days to submit the Basis of Claim (BOC) form to IRB.

For those who cannot prove their identity or have criminal convictions for serious crimes, they are detained until they can prove that they are not a risk, or they will be deported.

CBSA and IRCC refers refugee claimants to the Canadian Red Cross First Contact Program, which assesses the needs of the claimants and refers them on appropriately to agencies such as Inland Refugee Society of BC (IRS) and Settlement Orientation Services (SOS).

During this time they are referred to SOS for assistance with their paperwork and referral to legal aid, and to IRS for necessities such as food, clothing and shelter. A limited number are referred to transitional housing with Journey Home Community, Inasmuch Community Society, and Kinbrace Community Society.

Once an asylum seeker has submitted the BOC and opened their refugee claim, they receive the Refugee Protection Claimant document. With that document they are able to do the medical exam, receive the medical certificate and become eligible for provincial social assistance, a work permit, as well as a temporary social insurance number.

Asylum seekers are eligible for IFHP (Interim Federal health Program) that provides them with basic and supplemental health services including the coverage of one Immigration Medical Exam.

#### Next 2 Months and Beyond

IRB hears most claims within 60 days (sometimes longer due to backlog). Refugee claimants access help preparing for their hearings through refugeeclaim.ca (READY Tours and the Hearing Preparation Guide) and the VAST-SOS "Getting Through It" Weekly group. If the claim is accepted, the person receives the Protected Person Status and can apply for Permanent Residence.

Support services received after IRB acceptance include: settlement services including orientation and information, language assessment, employment program accessibility, trauma therapy, and connections to help integration into their communities.

#### IRB Rejected Claims

Refugee claims that have been rejected by the IRB will have a chance to appeal to the IRB appeal division. BC is one of the provinces that continues to provide supports during the appeal process.

If the appeal is rejected, they have 30 days to leave voluntarily before the federal government issues a removal order.

## APPENDIX B: SURVEY QUESTIONS

### Refugee Claimant – Pre-Settlement Survey (2018)

#### INTRODUCTION

We are undertaking a brief survey of Refugee Claimants who have arrived in BC from October 1, 2016 to December 31, 2017 in order to learn more about how they are doing, as well as to understand some of the challenges they may be facing. Below please find an introductory script to be used when calling the clients.

#### SCRIPT:

"Hello, my name is …. I would like to speak to ….., is s/he available?

Hello, …. I am a Research Assistant at ISSofBC. I would like to ask you a few questions about how life is going for you and your family in BC.

We're reaching out to all Refugee Claimants who have arrived in BC from October 1, 2016 to December 31, 2017. The answers you provide will help us provide better support to refugee claimants and also inform policy and programming changes by the Canadian and BC governments.

Participating in the survey will not have any impact on services that will be provided to you, nor will it affect your immigration application or status.

All personal information will be kept strictly confidential - your name and phone number will be kept separate from your responses.

All participants' responses will be summarized and shared in a written report. Your name will not be used in any reports.

If you do not wish to answer any of the specific questions, please let me know and we can skip it. Can I ask you some questions?

If no, thank the client and hang up.

If yes, begin asking questions.

## INTRODUCTION

**1.** (For you only) Did client consent to participate?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

## DEMOGRAPHICS

**2.** What month and year did you arrive in BC?

**3.** What city do you currently live in?

**4.** If you are comfortable providing it, what is your postal code?

**5.** What is your country of citizenship?

**6.** What is your gender?

- ○ Female
- ○ Male
- ○ Non-binary
- ○ Self-Identify Preference (please specify)

**7.** What is your age? *[Interviewer - read options]*

- ○ 19-24 years
- ○ 25-34 years
- ○ 35-44 years
- ○ 45-54 years
- ○ 55 - 64 years
- ○ 65 years and older

**8.** What is the highest level of education you had attained?

- ○ Elementary school
- ○ High school
- ○ College
- ○ Trades or apprenticeship
- ○ University
- ○ Graduate school
- ○ None

## COMING TO BC

**9.** How did you enter Canada?

- ○ Walking across the border from the US
- ○ Port of entry – airport
- ○ Port of entry – land
- ○ Visiting, studying or working
- ○ Other – please specify

**10.** Which province in Canada did you initially enter?

- ○ BC
- ○ Manitoba
- ○ Ontario
- ○ Quebec
- ○ Other

**11.** Why did you choose to come to BC? *[ Interviewer - Prompt only if needed - eg family/friends, weather) ]*

**12.** Did you enter Canada from the United States? If no, skip to question 14.

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

**13.** If so, how long were you in the United States? *[Interviewer - do not read options, record responses as appropriate ]*

- ○ Under 3 months
- ○ 4-6 months
- ○ 7-9 months
- ○ 10-12 months
- ○ 1-2 years
- ○ 2-5 years
- ○ 5-10 years
- ○ Over 10 years

**14.** How long have you been outside your country of origin? *[Interviewer - do not read all responses, let client respond and record response appropriately]*

- ○ Under 3 months
- ○ 4-6 months
- ○ 7-9 months
- ○ 10-12 months
- ○ 1-2 years
- ○ 2-5 years
- ○ 5-10 years
- ○ Over 10 years

**15.** How did you hear of our services at SOS?

- ○ Friend/Family
- ○ Provincial or Federal Government Agency
- ○ Internet
- ○ Community member
- ○ Religious organization
- ○ Red Cross First Contact
- ○ Other (please specify)

**16.** What challenges have you encountered since arriving in BC? *[ Interviewer - do not read options, record responses appropriately]*

- ○ Finding Housing
- ○ Finding employment
- ○ Refugee claim process
- ○ Income level/security
- ○ Health
- ○ Isolation
- ○ Language
- ○ Food
- ○ Transportation
- ○ Schools
- ○ Childcare
- ○ Other (please specify)

**17.** When you arrived did you come:

- ○ By yourself
- ○ With family member(s)
- ○ With friends

**18.** How many family members did you come with? *[Interviewer - do not read responses, record individual's response ]*

- ○ 1
- ○ 2
- ○ 3
- ○ 4
- ○ 5
- ○ 6
- ○ 7
- ○ 8
- ○ 9
- ○ 10 or more

**19.** Are there other immediate family members (spouse or dependent children) who are not here in Canada? If no, skip to question 21

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

**20.** If yes, how many spouse/dependent children do you hope to bring to Canada if your claim is successful? *[Interviewer - do not read responses, record their answer as appropriate ]*

- ○ 1
- ○ 2
- ○ 3
- ○ 4
- ○ 5
- ○ 6
- ○ 7
- ○ 8
- ○ 9
- ○ 10 or more
- ○ Prefer not to answer

**21.** How would you currently rate your English language ability?

- ○ None
- ○ Basic
- ○ Intermediate
- ○ Advanced

## EMPLOYMENT

**22.** Were you employed in your home country or country of last habitual residence? If no, skip to question 26

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

**23.** If yes, what was your previous occupation?

**24.** Before you came to Canada - Were you self-employed? If no, skip to question 26

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

**25.** If yes, please indicate type of business

**26.** Have you had paid employment since arriving in Canada?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

**27.** Are you working now? If so, full-time or part-time? If no skip to question 29

- ○ Not working
- ○ Working - full-time
- ○ Working - part-time
- ○ Working - seasonal
- ○ Working - on-call/day labour

**28.** What type of paid work are you doing?

**29.** If self-employed, what type of business?

## HOUSING

**30.** Who helped you find housing when you arrived in BC?

- ○ Friend/family
- ○ Inland Refugee Society
- ○ SOS
- ○ Religious organization
- ○ Red Cross First Contact
- ○ Refugee Serving Agency
- ○ Kinbrace or Journey Home
- ○ BC211
- ○ Shelter/temporary housing
- ○ No assistance received
- ○ Other (please specify)

**31.** What city did you live in during your first three months in Canada?

**32.** What type of accommodations are you currently living in?

- ○ Homeless
- ○ Temporary shelter
- ○ Staying with a friend (e.g., sleeping on the couch)
- ○ Staying at a church or mosque
- ○ Apartment
- ○ House
- ○ Hotel/motel

**33.** What percentage of your monthly income is spent on housing? *[Interviewer - don't read options, record their response as appropriate ]*

- ○ >30%
- ○ 30%-50%
- ○ 51%-75%
- ○ Over 75%
- ○ N/A – I do not have permanent housing (e.g., staying in a shelter, homeless)

**34.** How many times have you changed housing since coming to Canada? (eg # of times moved) *[Interviewer - do not read options]*

- ○ 1
- ○ 2
- ○ 3
- ○ 4
- ○ 5
- ○ 6
- ○ 7
- ○ 8
- ○ 9
- ○ 10 or more

## HEALTH AND FAMILY WELL-BEING

**35.** How would you rate your physical health?

- ○ Excellent
- ○ Very Good
- ○ Good
- ○ Fair
- ○ Poor

**36.** If applicable, how would you rate your family member's physical health?

- ○ Excellent
- ○ Very Good
- ○ Good
- ○ Fair
- ○ Poor

**37.** How do you feel emotionally? (eg overall do people feel very happy? happy? sad? depressed? scared?)

- ○ Happy
- ○ Content
- ○ Stressed
- ○ Depressed
- ○ Scared

**38.** How often - if at all - do you use the food bank?

- ○ Yes - weekly
- ○ Yes - monthly
- ○ Once in a while
- ○ No use at all

## FINAL QUESTIONS AND REFLECTIONS

**39.** What is your current most pressing need or worry?

**40.** Is there anything else you would like to tell us or the Government of Canada?

Thank you for sharing your time to answer the questions; we appreciate your input.

To thank you for your participation, we would like to offer you a $25 gift card.

Could you please tell me your address so we can mail it to you
*[Interviewer : record on excel sheet, not here]*