

Resettling in the Canadian Prairies:

A Survey of Syrian Refugees in Canada's Prairies

A Final Report Submitted by

Lori Wilkinson, Joe Garcea, Pallabi Bhattacharyya, Abdul-Bari Abdul-Karim and Annette Riziki

Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada- Integration Branch, Prairies & Northern
Territories

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Chapter 1: Welcoming the Syrians: A Perspective from Western Canada

1.1. INTRODUCTION

1.1.1. Objective of the Chapter

This chapter is intended to provide context and methodological information about the development of the *Resettling in the Canadian Prairies: A Longitudinal Survey of Syrian Refugees in Western Canada* a report funded by Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

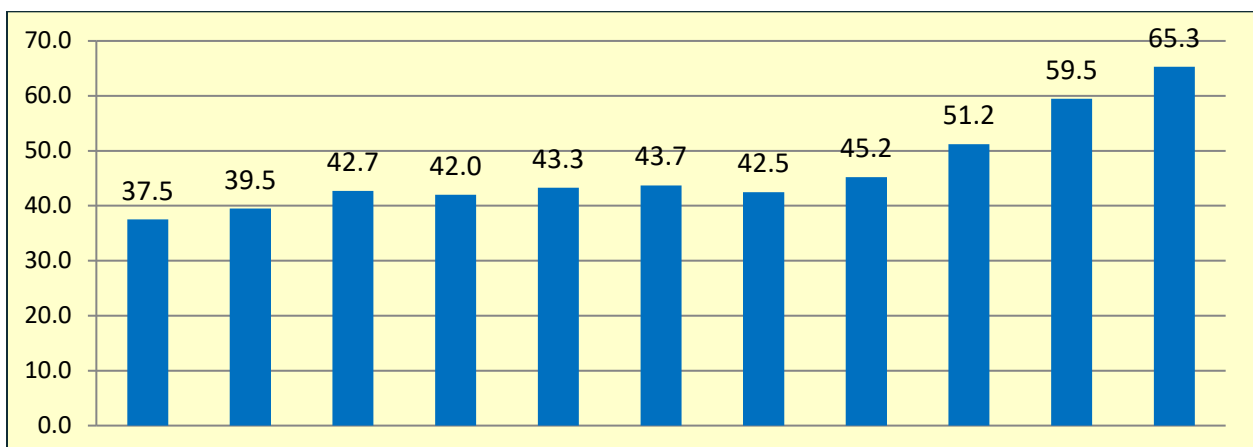
1.1.2. Organization of the Chapter

The chapter begins with a brief overview of refugee flows internationally. The purpose and objectives of the study are presented in the next section. A brief description of the methodology used in the study follows. The chapter concludes with a broad summary of the findings.

1.2. SETTING THE CONTEXT: REFUGEES INTERNATIONALLY AND IN CANADA

Sadly, the conflict in Syria is not unique. Millions of people have been forcibly displaced throughout our history. Despite our best intentions, the problem of forced displacement only seems to become worse, particularly in the last decade. According to the UNHCR (2017a), the numbers of internally displaced people and refugees has increased significantly in the past decade. As Table 1.1 shows, there are 65.3 million displaced people in 2015, an increase of 74% in just ten years.

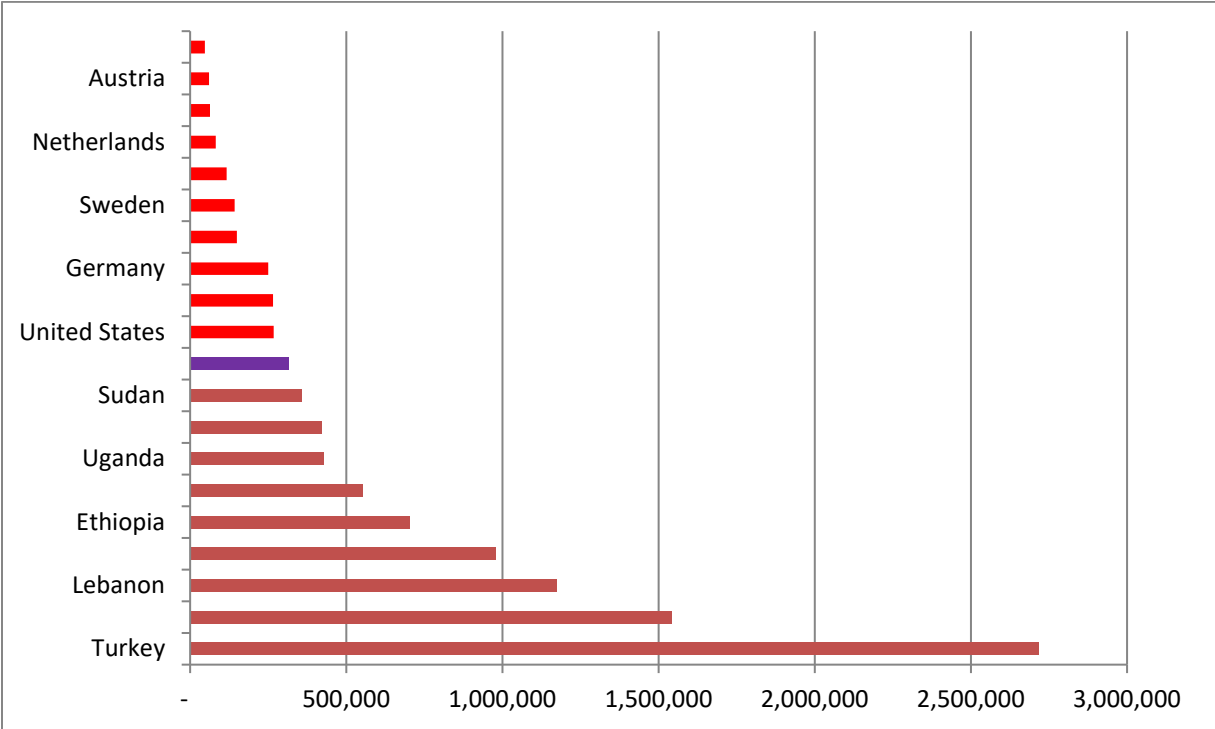
Table 1. 1: Displaced People Worldwide, 2005-2015



Source: UNHCR (2017a).

Of those 65.3 million displaced people, 21.3% are refugees but only 107,100 people were permanently resettled in a safe third country (UNHCR 2017b). As Table 1.2 shows, the task of housing and resettling refugees largely rests on countries that can ill afford and are ill-equipped to handle the burden. Although Canada’s track record of accepting refugees is better than most countries, there are clearly more refugees in need of resettlement.

Table 1. 2: Countries Hosting Refugees, 2015



Source: UNHCR (2017a)

Although the Syrian refugees arrived in Canada with much national and international fanfare, the reality is that this is not the first time we have made such a large humanitarian and resettlement commitment. In 1956, over 37,000 Hungarians fleeing the new communist regime found refuge in Canada. In 1979/1980, over 60,000 Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian peoples were resettled in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. They were an interesting group as they made up 25% of all newcomers to Canada that year. Between 1992 and 1994, over 11,000 Bosnian, Serbian and Croatians arrived in Canada. In 1999, we airlifted over 6,000 Kosovars to Canada in a period of just six weeks. More recently and with significantly less publicity, over 20,000 high needs Iraqi refugees were successfully resettled between late 2009 and early 2014 (CIC, 215). In short, despite the great publicity and excitement surrounding the arrival of the Syrians in late 2015 and early 2016, the reality is that resettlement on this scale is not a new initiative of the government and the settlement service providers in Canada.

The newly arrived Syrians, however, represent the largest number of refugee arrivals since 1980. In 2016, Canada welcomed 33,266 Syrian refugees in addition to the 13,434 refugees

arriving from other countries, namely Eritrea, Iraq, Congo and Afghanistan (Puzic 2017). They made up 71% of the total number of refugees arriving to Canada last year. Of the 296,340 immigrants and refugees arriving to Canada in 2016, Syrian refugees made up 11.2% of all newcomers to the country (IRCC, 2017b-calculations by authors).

1.3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to collect baseline information on the housing needs, language training experiences, job search experiences, and the use of settlement services of the newly arriving Syrian refugees in the three Prairie Provinces. This information is useful for the settlement provider organizations and to policy analysts to evaluate the country's response to the Syrian crisis and the arrival of a large number of refugees in such a short period of time. This study also provides valuable information to better prepare for the arrival of future refugees. Given that the number of refugees is unlikely to decline in the near future, a study of this sort is badly needed.

1.4. METHODOLOGY

An advisory panel, made up of participants from the Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (AAISA), the Saskatchewan Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (SAISIA), the Manitoba Association of Newcomer Settlement Agencies (MANSO), and the Social Science Research Laboratory at the University of Saskatchewan (SSRL), and employees of IRCC reviewed the survey instrument and contacted the 12 Refugee Assistance Providers (RAP) in the three provinces. Table 1.3 lists the participating RAP providers, representing all but three of the service providers in this region. Settlement workers from the participating agencies conducted the interviews and were provided a training manual. Team members, along with employees of the SSRL, were available online and by telephone to address any questions from the interviewers.

The survey instrument included sections assessing use and experience of settlement services, labour market intentions, language training, and housing needs, along with various demographic variables. The topics were selected by the advisory panel. Once the survey was finalized, ethics approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Boards at the University of Manitoba and University of Saskatchewan.

On average, the interviews took 23 minutes each. Participants were given a \$10 gift card from a local grocery store in most cases. In two instances, however, the RAP provider suggested giving the participants \$10 cash instead.

Table 1. 3: List of Participating RAP Agencies by Province

<p><i>Alberta</i></p> <p>Brooks and County Immigration Services Calgary Catholic Immigration Society Catholic Social Services (Edmonton) Catholic Social Services (Red Deer) Lethbridge Family Services-Immigrant Services</p> <p><i>Saskatchewan</i></p> <p>Moose Jaw Multicultural Council Regina Open Door Society Saskatoon Open Door Society YWCA Prince Albert</p> <p><i>Manitoba</i></p> <p>La Sociétéfranco-manitobaine/Accueil francophone (Saint-Boniface) Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council Inc. (Winnipeg) Westman Immigrant Services (Brandon)</p>

A survey of 632 Syrian refugees arriving to Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba was conducted between 14 and 31 March 2017. Participants were invited to participate in the study by their local RAP service provider. iCARE was used to identify potential participants and to obtain their contact information. Study participants were all aged 18 and over and one or more participants per household were interviewed in person, either at the RAP agency or in their home. The surveys were conducted in Arabic for almost all participants, although an English language translation was available. The SSRL loaded the survey online at Voxco.com. We had intended that the interviewers use the online data collection tool but we quickly learned that it was easier for the RAP providers to interview the participants at their houses and that many of the Syrians did not have Wi-Fi connections so a majority (79.5%) of the surveys were collected on paper while 20.5% were conducted online. The surveys collected on paper were then couriered to the University of Manitoba where research assistants entered the data manually. The SSRL cleaned and collated the data for the team. They are also responsible for storing the contact information for those participants wishing to participate in future surveys.

Additional detail on the survey methodology is located in the report “Methodological Report-Resettling in the Canadian Prairies” (Wilkinson et al., 2017) available upon request.

1.5. OVERVIEW OF REPORT FINDINGS

- Almost 90% of the sample are government assisted refugees (GARs). Of the privately sponsored refugees (PSRs) who were interviewed, almost all of them lived in Calgary. For this reason, PSRs can only be examined in Alberta.

- A majority of Syrians, regardless of the province of residence, spent some time in a hotel prior to relocation to permanent housing. Refugees destined to Alberta had the shortest hotel stays, an average of 14 days. Those arriving in Saskatchewan stayed in hotel for 17 days. The Province of Manitoba was able to avoid hotel stays, though many newly-arrived Syrians stayed in reception centres such as Welcome Place.
- The majority of those staying in hotels had very positive and satisfactory experiences. They were especially happy with the hotel staff, despite the language barriers. They also appreciated that the settlement service providers visited them at the hotel. The major challenges reported were too many people in a single room (15%) and quality of food.
- Refugees arriving in late 2015 and early 2016 were the most likely to stay in hotels prior to moving to their permanent housing. Those arriving in summer 2016 and later were less likely to stay in hotels.
- Permanent housing generally meets the needs of the refugees. Seventy percent indicated their housing was satisfactory. Families with children were just as likely as those without children to feel their housing met their needs.
- Almost all refugees (97%) indicated their mother tongue as Arabic. Only 7% could speak some English prior to their arrival to Canada.
- Almost all the refugees are enrolled in English language training. In their first three months in Canada, 60% are already enrolled in an English class. The highest rate of English class attendance occurs between 7 and 9 months after arrival.
- Females are slightly less likely to be currently attending an English language class in all provinces. The main reason the women are not attending a language class is due to the presence of small children or inadequate access to child care.
- PSRs are more likely to be seeking work during the first year in Canada and to indicate challenges to finding work. GARs are less likely to be seeking work and thus report fewer challenges.
- Males are more likely than females to report challenges finding work.
- When asked about services that would be helpful to receive prior to arrival, language training, foreign credential recognition and skills training were the top services requested.

1.6. ORGANIZATION OF REPORT

This report is organized into five chapters. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the survey sample. Chapter 3 examines the housing, language training, labour market experience and settlement service use. Chapters 4 (Saskatchewan) and 5 (Manitoba) follow the same order.

Chapter 2: A Snapshot of the Participants in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba

2.1. INTRODUCTION

2.1.1. Objective of Chapter

The objective in this chapter is to provide an overview of the data collected from Syrian refugees who participated in our study. We will also provide some comparisons to the demographic characteristics of the Syrians who arrived in the three prairie provinces from IRCC (2017) quarterly data posted on their website.

2.1.2. Organization of Chapter

We begin with an overview of the official IRCC data regarding the arrival of the Syrians to Canada. We end the chapter with an overview of some characteristics of our study's participants.

2.2. THE ARRIVAL OF SYRIANS TO CANADA

In an “average” year, refugees make up between 7% and 14% of all newcomers to Canada. The fluctuation depends partly on the number and size of international crises which produce refugees and the total number of newcomers Canada admits in a year. On November 5, 2015, the day after the federal election in Canada, the new government committed to bringing at least 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada before March 31, 2016. They met their goal on February 28, 2016. As the results in Table 2.1 show, the largest group of refugees arrived in the first quarter (January to March) of 2016. It also shows that the largest numbers settled in Ontario, Quebec and Alberta. In total, over 46,000 refugees arrived in Canada between 2015 and 2016, the largest number since 1980.

Table 2. 1: Refugee Arrivals by Province and Quarter, 2015-2016

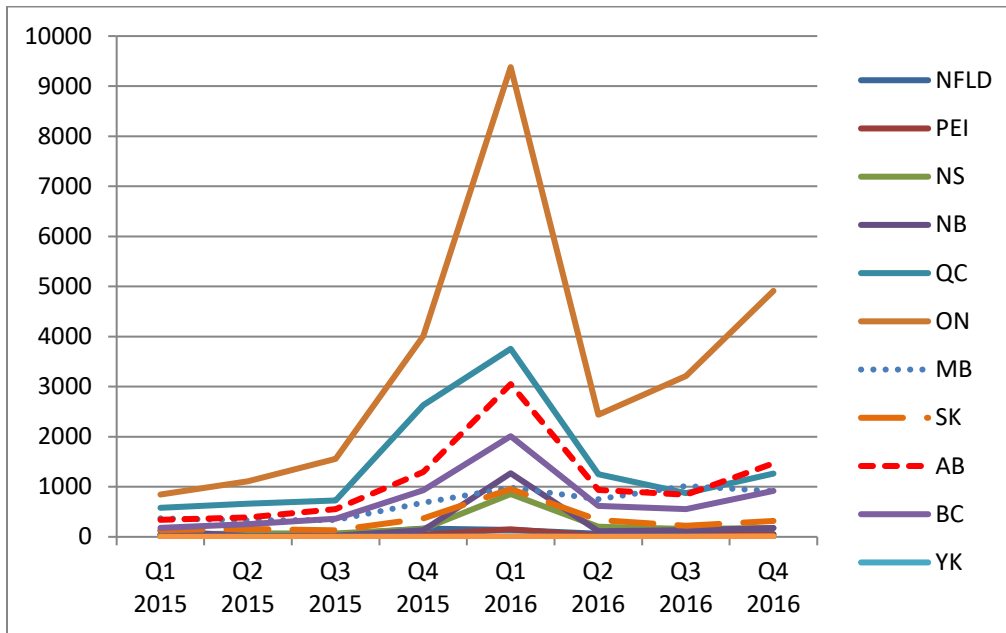
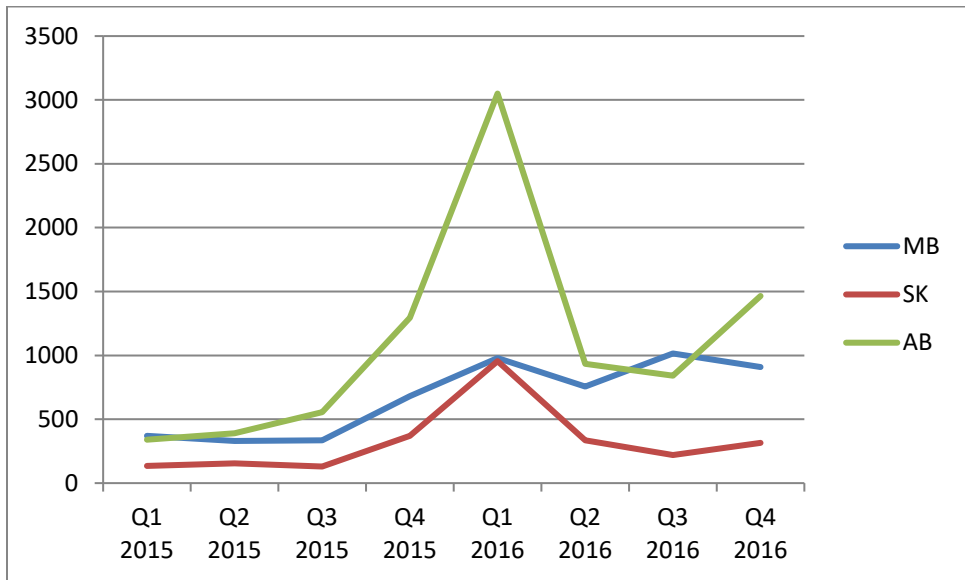


Table 2.2 isolates the data from the three Prairie Provinces in our study. In that period, 8,870 refugees arrived in Alberta, 5,375 in Manitoba and 2,615 in Saskatchewan. The settlement service providers and sponsors in all provinces worked very hard to find adequate housing and services for the newcomers in that short period of time. Although resources were stretched, the resettlement project could be considered a success in all three regions. Several new RAP service agreements were signed in all three provinces to deal with the increased number of refugees arriving to the region. Ireton (2015) reports that the trend in GARs being destined to Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, along with the increase in the number of privately sponsored refugee agreement holders, was happening as early as 2014.

Table 2. 2: Refugee Arrivals to the Prairie Region by Quarter 2015-16



Although Syrians have been in Canada for quite some time, their population was small. According to some estimates, less than 40,000 Syrians were living in Canada prior to the outbreak of the conflict. By the end of 2016, those numbers had nearly doubled the existing population of Syrians.

Nearly one in five (18.9%) of the Syrian refugees coming to Canada between November 5, 2015 and January 5, 2017 were destined to Alberta, Saskatchewan or Manitoba. The majority were GARs (67%), slightly higher than the national average (57%) during that time (Wrzesnewskyj, 2016). One in four were PSRs (25%), slightly lower than the national average (34%) (Wrzesnewskyj, 2016). BVORs, a new refugee category, accounted for 9% of the total arrivals to the prairie region, the same number as those arriving nationally (Wrzesnewskyj, 2016).

Table 2. 3: Refugees to Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta by Entrance Category, 2015-16

	<u>Blended Sponsorship Refugee</u>		<u>Government-Assisted Refugee</u>		<u>Privately Sponsored Refugee</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Manitoba	230	14%	1,265	78%	120	7%	1,615	19.7%
Saskatchewan	120	8%	1,275	87%	65	4%	1,460	17.8%
Alberta	360	7%	2,940	57%	1,835	36%	5,135	62.5%
Total	710	9%	5,480	67%	2,020	25%	8,210	100.0%

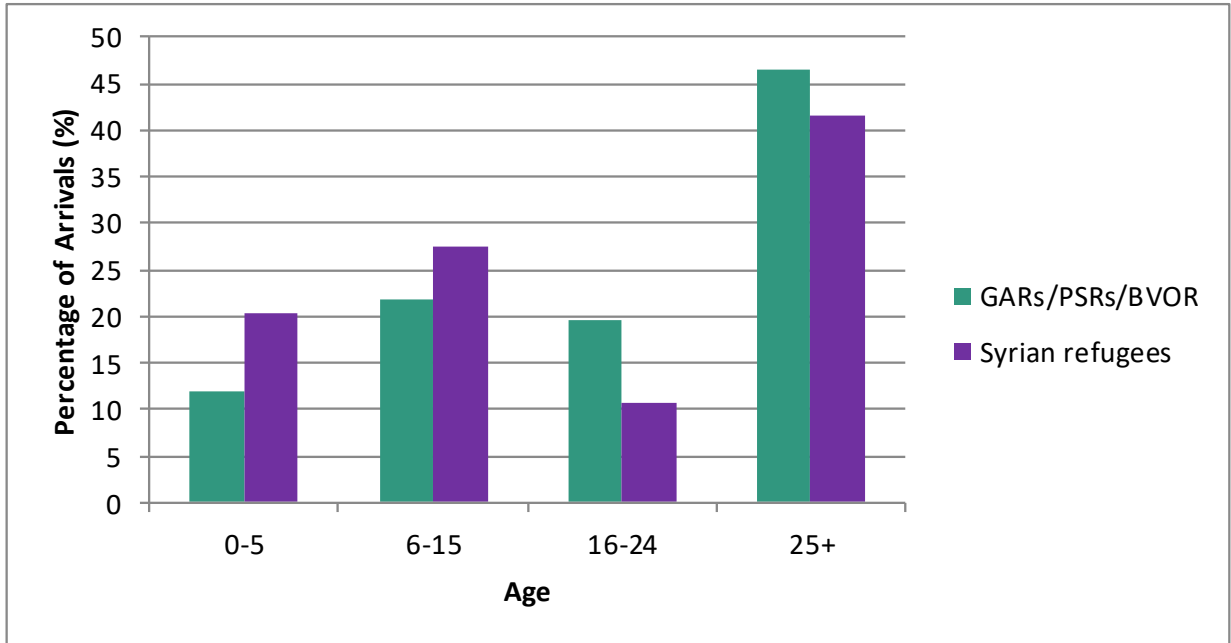
Table 2.4 shows the distribution of the new arriving Syrians by city and entrance class in the three Prairie Provinces. Calgary (2,185), Edmonton (2,090) and Winnipeg (1,415) saw the largest numbers of arrivals, followed by Saskatoon (610) and Regina (580).

Table 2. 4: Refugees by Province, City of Residence and Entrance Class, 2015-16

Province/Territory and Census Metropolitan Area		Blended Sponsorship Refugee	Government-Assisted Refugee	Privately Sponsored Refugee	Total
	Winnipeg	95	1,200	120	1,415
	Brandon	--	60	--	65
	Other - Manitoba	130	5	--	135
Manitoba Total		230	1,265	120	1,615
	Saskatoon	65	505	40	610
	Regina	20	550	10	580
	Moose Jaw	0	120	--	120
	Prince Albert	5	100	0	105
	Other - Saskatchewan	35	0	15	45
Saskatchewan Total		120	1,275	65	1,460
	Calgary	120	1,030	1,035	2,185
	Edmonton	155	1,270	665	2,090
	Lethbridge	--	230	35	270
	Red Deer	--	185	10	195
	Medicine Hat	10	150	0	160
	Brooks	--	65	5	75
	Other - Alberta	65	5	85	155
Alberta Total		360	2,940	1,835	5,135
Total		710	5,480	2,020	8,210

As with all refugees, the Syrian arrivals are young. Table 2.5 shows the age of arrival of Syrian refugees compared with the refugees arriving from elsewhere during the 2015/16-time period. The Syrians are, on average, slightly younger than other refugees.

Table 2. 5: Age at Arrival for Syrian and Other Refugees, 2015



Source: IRCC, 2016b

Very few of the newly arriving Syrians could speak one of our official languages prior to their arrival to Canada. Table 2.6 shows the distribution of those (self-report) who could speak English, French or neither official language at arrival. In Alberta, 30% of the arriving Syrians indicate they knew English prior to their arrival, close to the national average of 31%. In contrast, only 14% of those destined to Manitoba and 15% of those destined to Saskatchewan knew English prior to their arrival. Only 1% of those in Alberta could speak French prior to their arrival.

Table 2. 6: Self-rated English and French Language Knowledge Prior to Arrival, Syrians, 2015-16

Province/Territory and Official Language Spoken		Blended Sponsorship Refugee	Government-Assisted Refugee	Privately Sponsored Refugee	Total	
	English	75	80	65	220	14%
	Neither	150	1,130	55	1,335	83%
	OLS not stated	--	55	--	60	4%
Manitoba Total		230	1,265	120	1,615	
	English	45	140	30	215	15%
	Neither	75	1,090	35	1,195	82%
	OLS not stated	0	40	--	40	3%
Saskatchewan Total		120	1,275	65	1,460	
	English	140	300	1,080	1,520	30%
	French	0	5	30	35	1%
	Both French and English	0	5	20	25	0%
	Neither	210	2,575	690	3,475	68%
	OLS not stated	10	50	20	80	2%
Alberta Total		360	2,940	1,835	5,135	
English		1,215	2,455	9,840	13,510	31%
French		5	125	520	650	1%
Both French and English		--	40	155	195	0%
Neither		2,775	19,890	5,925	28,590	65%
OLS not stated		75	555	145	780	2%
Total		4,075	23,065	16,585	43,725	

Arabic is the language spoken most frequently by the Syrians arriving to Canada (92%). As Table 2.7 shows, refugees in the prairie region are not very different from the national distribution. A number of Kurdish speaking Syrians arrived in all three Prairie Provinces as well.

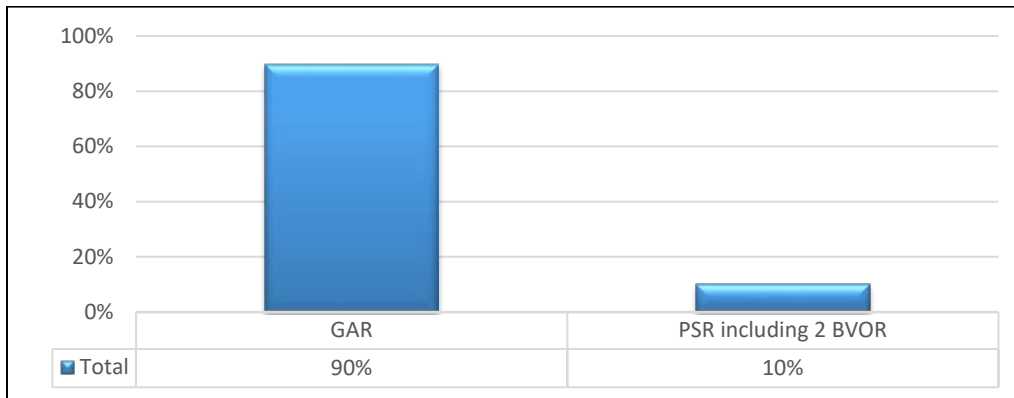
Table 2. 7: Mother Tongue by Entrance Class and Province of Arrival, 2015-16

Mother Tongues		Blended Sponsorship Refugee	Government-Assisted Refugee	Privately Sponsored Refugee	Total	
	Arabic	200	1,215	110	1,530	95%
	Kurdish	20	45	10	75	5%
	Other mother tongues	10	--	0	10	1%
Manitoba Total		230	1,265	120	1,615	
	Arabic	115	1,235	60	1,410	97%
	Kurdish	5	40	--	50	3%
Saskatchewan Total		120	1,275	65	1,460	
	Arabic	345	2,830	1,795	4,965	97%
	Kurdish	10	95	15	125	2%
	Other mother tongues	--	15	25	45	1%
Alberta Total		360	2,940	1,835	5,135	

2.3. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FOR ALBERTA, SASKATCHEWAN AND MANITOBA PARTICIPANTS

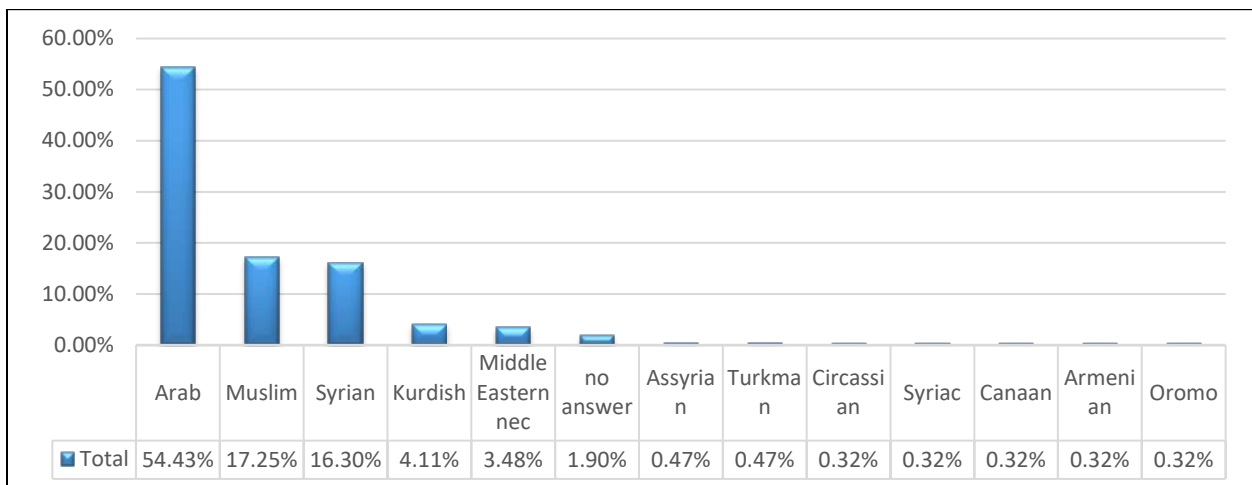
Our study involved 632 participants from the Prairie region. Alberta had the largest number of participants (N = 242) followed by Saskatchewan (N= 236) and Manitoba (N= 146). The GARs had the largest number of respondents (90%) in all three provinces and 10% of the participants were PSRs with 2 BVOR. Table 2.8 shows this distribution. GARs are over-represented in our study—precisely due to the recruitment strategy that saw the exclusive use of RAP providers to conduct the interviews. Nationally, GARs make up 67% of the new arrivals.

Table 2. 8: Government Assisted Refugees and Privately Sponsored Refugees, Prairie Provinces, 2017



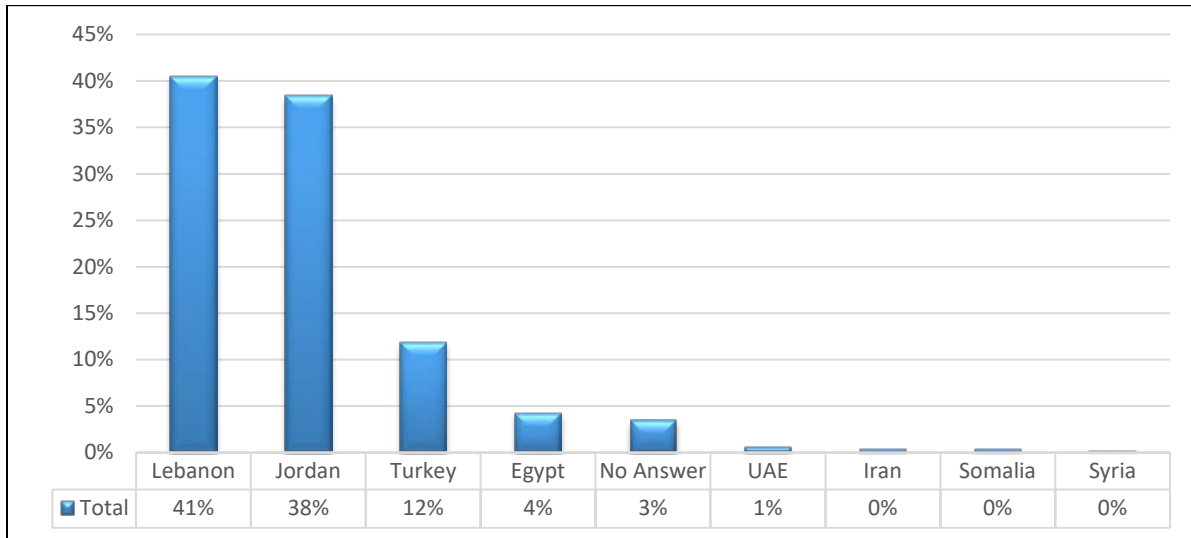
Participants were given an open-ended option for the ethnic origin question and could select more than one ethnicity. Table 2.9 explains the diversity of responses obtained. The majority of participants were identified as Arabic (54.43%). Those who identified as Muslim were 17%. Another 16% identified as Syrian and 4% were Kurdish. Few of the participants identified as Assyrian, Turkman, Circassian, Syriac, Canaan, Armenian and Oromo.

Table 2. 9: Ethnic Origin, Prairie Provinces, 2017



Prior to arrival in Canada, as shown in Table 2.10, most of the participants came from Lebanon (41%), followed by Jordan (38%) and Turkey (12%). Some had been living in Egypt (4%) and UAE (1%).

Table 2. 10: Country of Origin, Prairie Provinces, 2017



Of the participants in the survey, fifty eight percent were males and 42% were females. Eighty two percent of Syrians were married at the time of the interview. Those who were single or never married were 11% and participants who were living in common law were 4%. The remaining 4% indicated widowed, divorced or separated as their current marital status. The marital status of the respondents is shown in Table 2.11.

Table 2. 11: Marital Status, Prairie Provinces, 2017

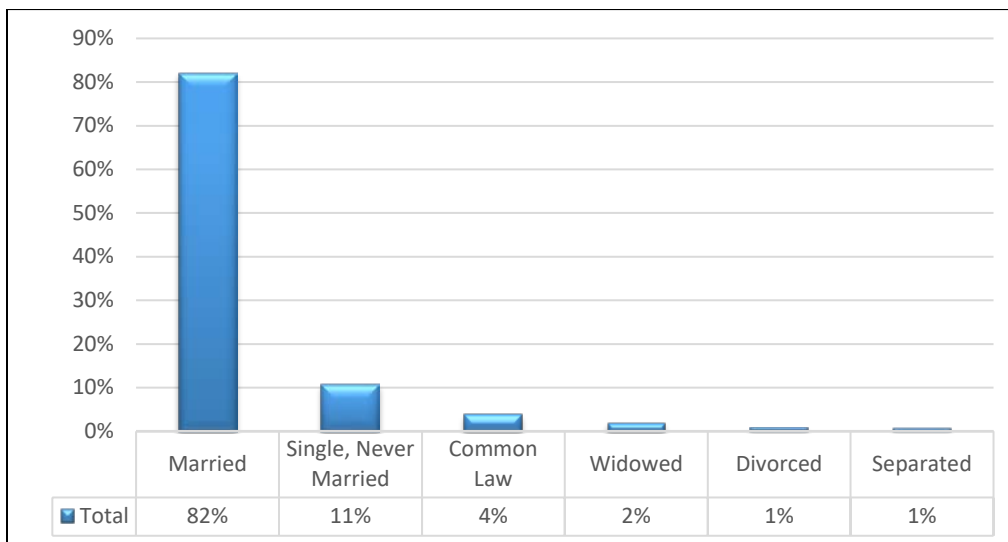
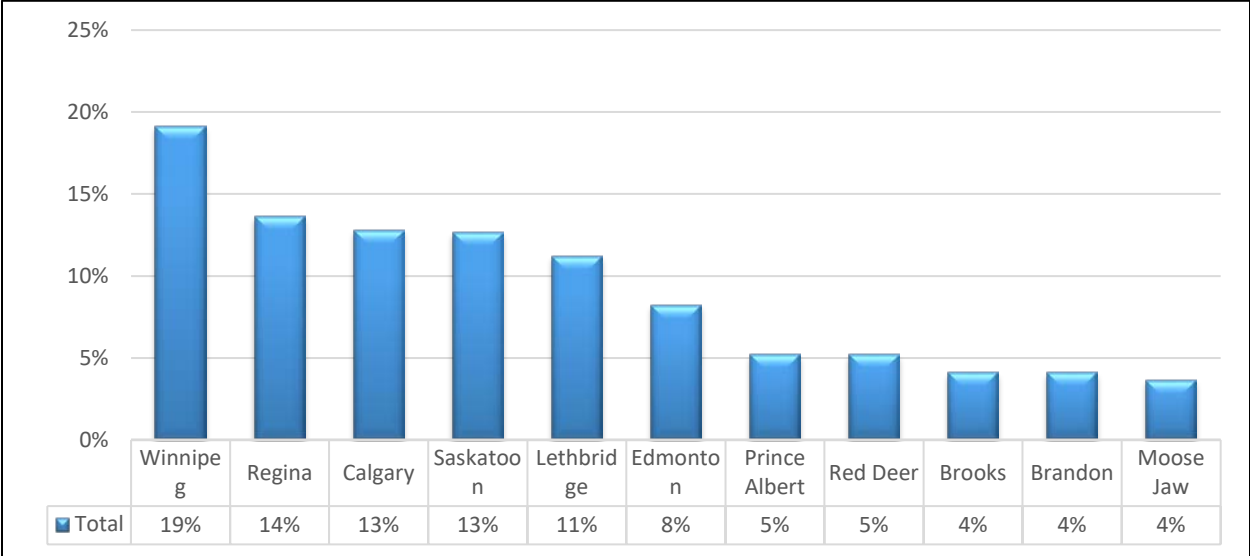


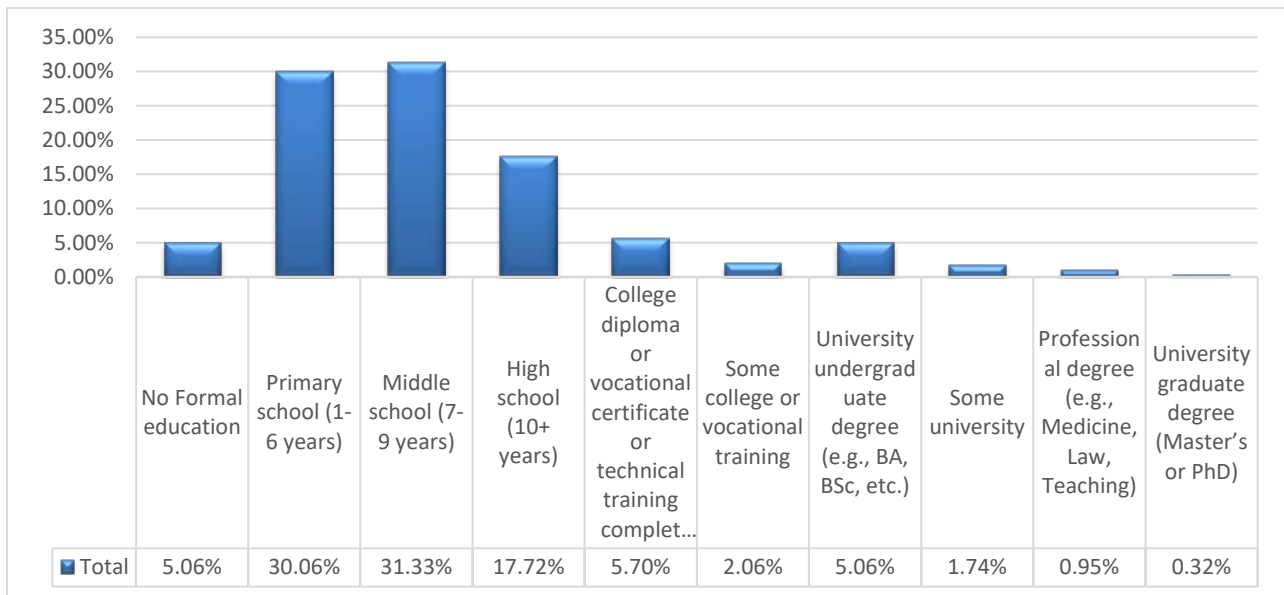
Table 2.12 shows that the majority of the Syrians were residing in Winnipeg city (19%) at the time of the interview, followed by Regina (14%), Calgary (13%) and Saskatoon (13%). Eleven percent were living in Lethbridge and 8% in Edmonton. Others lived in other cities such as Prince Albert (5%), Red Deer (5%), Brooks (4%), Brandon (4%) and Moose Jaw (4%).

Table 2. 12: City of Residence, Prairie Provinces, 2017



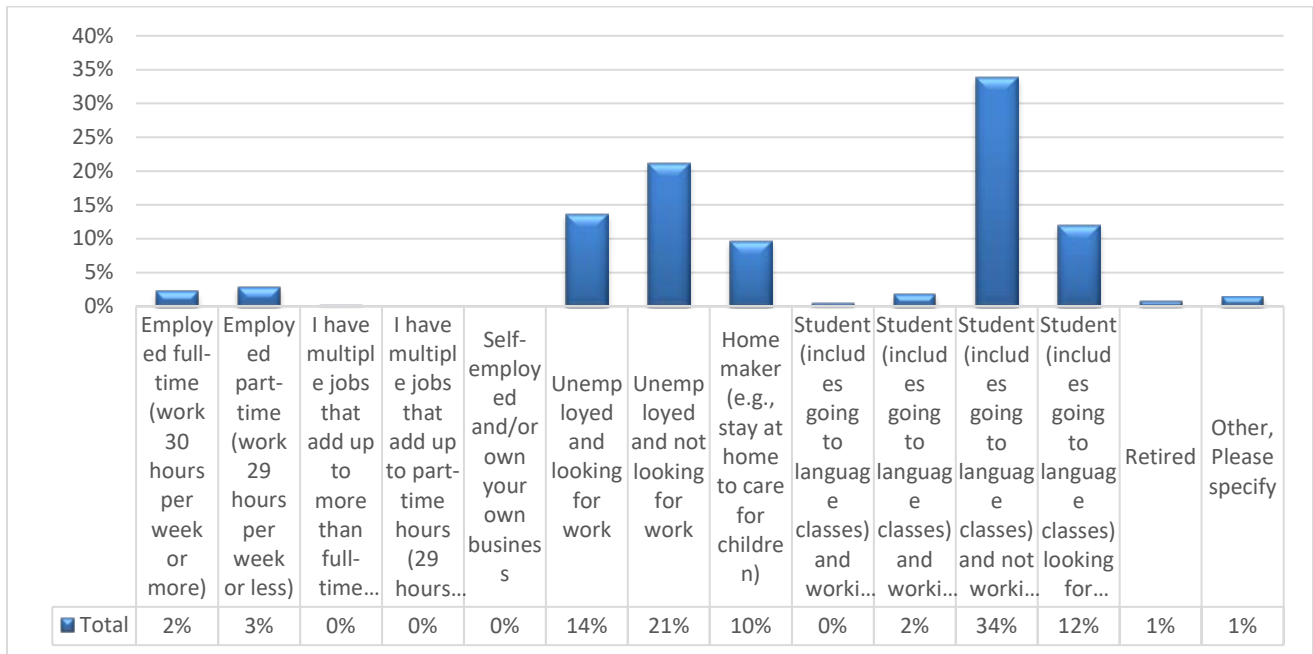
Close to one third of Syrians in Prairie Provinces have obtained middle school level education. Participants who have had their highest level of education as Primary school were 30%. Those with a high school diploma were 18%. Another 5.7% have had a college diploma and 5.6% a university undergraduate degree. Almost 2% reported to have had some university education. Approximately 1% had a professional degree in medicine, law, etc. to mention and a few around 0.3% have completed a master’s or PhD degree. The distribution is shown in Table 2.13.

Table 2. 13: Highest Level of Education, Prairie Provinces, 2017



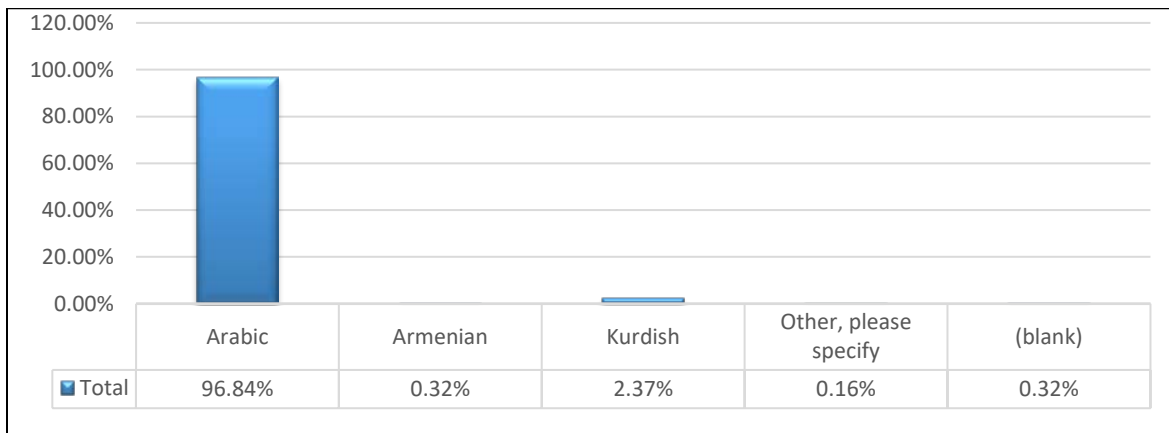
In comparison to the 12% of Syrians who are students while looking for a job, a little bit over a third indicated that their current employment status was student while not seeking for employment (Table 2.14). Only 3% have been able to obtain a part time employment and 2% have a full-time job. Surprisingly, 21% were unemployed and not looking for employment except the 14% of the Syrians who were unemployed and looking for employment. Twelve percent were homemakers.

Table 2. 14: Employment Status, Prairie Provinces, 2017



Ninety six percent of Syrian refugees that participated in the study reported Arabic as their first language. Another 2.37% speak Kurdish at home (Table 2.15).

Table 2. 15: Languages Spoken, Prairie Provinces, 2017



The majority of Syrian refugees in the Prairie Provinces who participated in the study had been here for 13-15 months.

The next chapter outlines the findings for the Syrians destined to Alberta.

Chapter 3: Syrians in Alberta

3.1. INTRODUCTION

3.1.1. Objective of Chapter

The objective in this chapter is to provide an overview of the data collected from Syrian refugees who were located in Alberta when the survey was administered. As noted in Chapter 2, a total of 242 refugees participated in the survey in Alberta. This included 77% GARs and 23% PSRs. It should be noted at the outset that Alberta was the only province in which a substantial number of PSRs were interviewed. Of the 242 refugees 30% were living in Calgary, 20% were living in Edmonton, 27% were living in Lethbridge and the remaining 23% were living either in Red Deer or Brooks.

3.1.2. Organization of Chapter

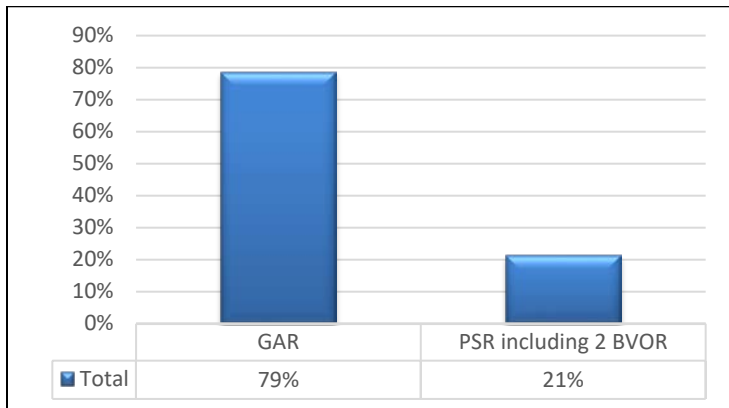
The overview of the survey data and commentary related to it is organized according to the major headings of the survey instrument, namely: (a) demographic profile of Syrian refugee respondents; (b) housing conditions, (c) language knowledge, (d) employment, and (e) settlement service use.

3.2. OVERVIEW OF INTERVIEW DATA

3.2.1. Demographic Profile of Syrian Refugee Respondents in Alberta

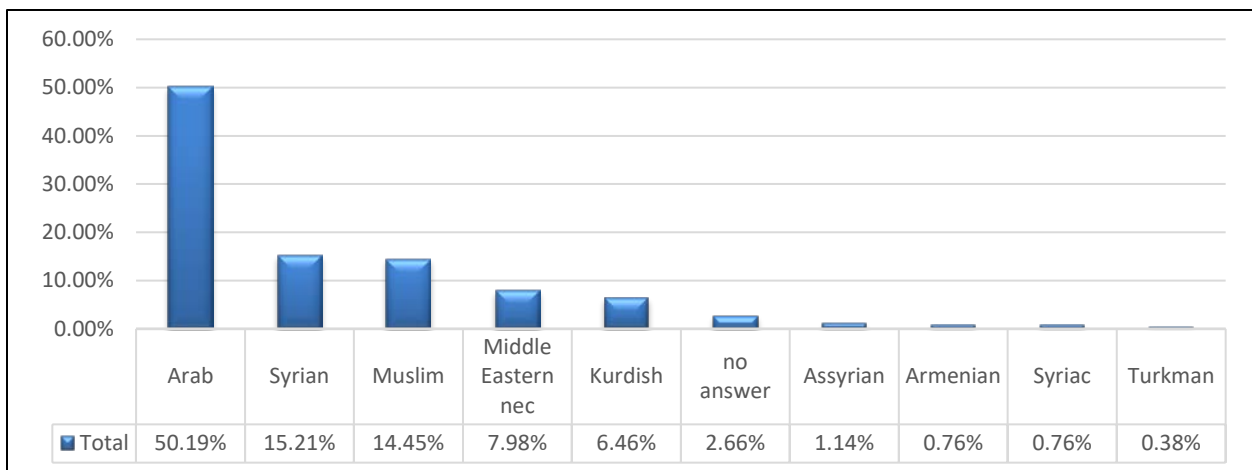
This demographic profile is based on 263 of the refugee respondents who came to Alberta between November 2015 and March 2017. This includes both GARs and PSRs. As in other provinces GARs represent the largest number of participants in the Alberta sample (77%). However, Alberta is the only province where a large enough group of PSRs was interviewed (N=54). Consequently, unlike the other provinces, some observations can be made regarding PSRs in Alberta.

Table 3. 1: Government Assisted Refugees and Privately Sponsored Refugees, Alberta, 2017



Ethnic origin is always a tricky question to ask. In some countries or cultures ethnicity is not a term that resonates with people and in some cases the translation of the word and concept is difficult. For this reason, we suggest the following table be read cautiously with this caveat in mind. The largest number of Syrian respondents in Alberta self-identified as Arabic (50%). The remainder self-identified as follows: Middle Eastern (8%). Almost 15% self-identified as Muslim (15%), Syrian (15%) and Kurdish (6%). A few others self-identified as Assyrian, Armenian, Syriac, and Turkoman.

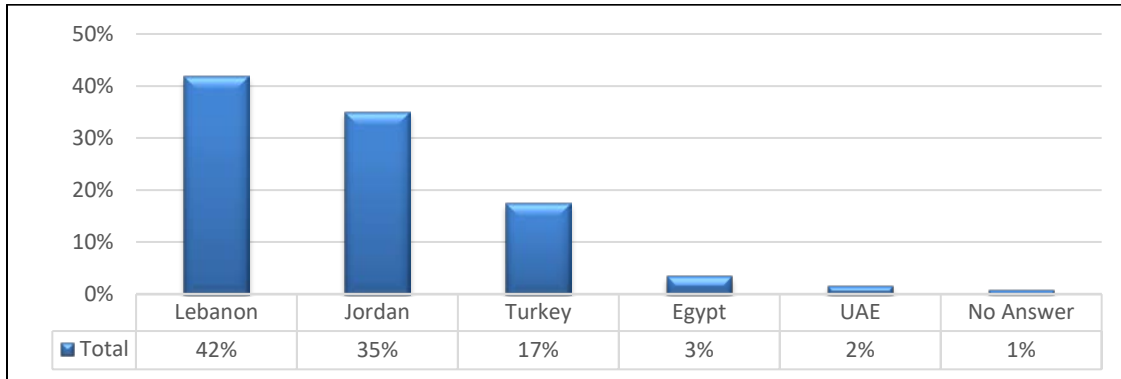
Table 3. 2: Ethnic Origin, Alberta, 2017



Prior to their arrival in Alberta approximately 33% of the respondents had been living in Jordan. 45.8% had been living in Lebanon, and 17.5% had been living in Turkey.¹

¹ Interestingly, one person indicated their country of origin prior to arrival was Winnipeg. We believe this person had been destined to Winnipeg but misunderstood the question in thinking we were asking about previous place of residence, rather than country of origin. Another four respondents indicated they had been living in the United Arab Emirates prior to their arrival in Alberta.

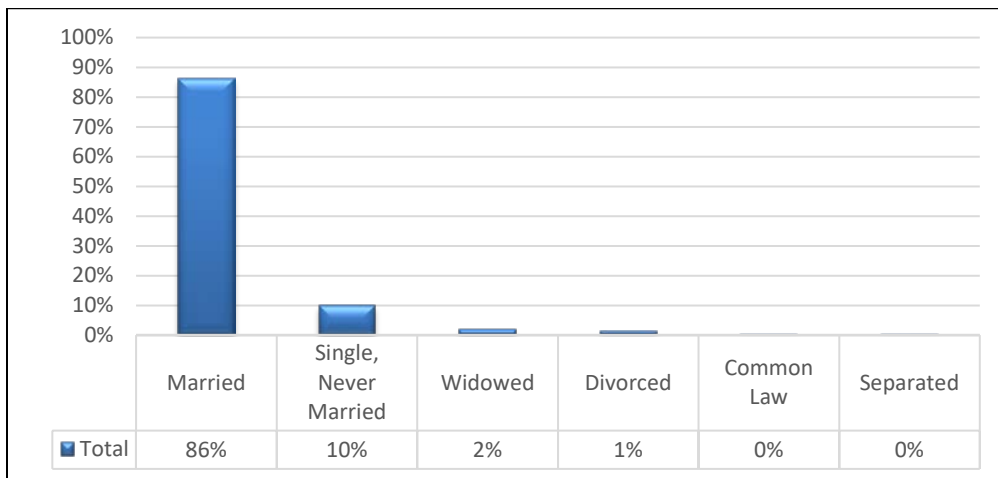
Table 3.3: Country of Origin, Alberta, 2017



Of the Syrians interviewed in Alberta for this project 55% self-identified as male and 45% self-identified as female.²

Almost all the Syrians destined to Alberta are married (85%). Of the rest, 10% have never been married, and the remaining 3.5% are separated, divorced or widowed.

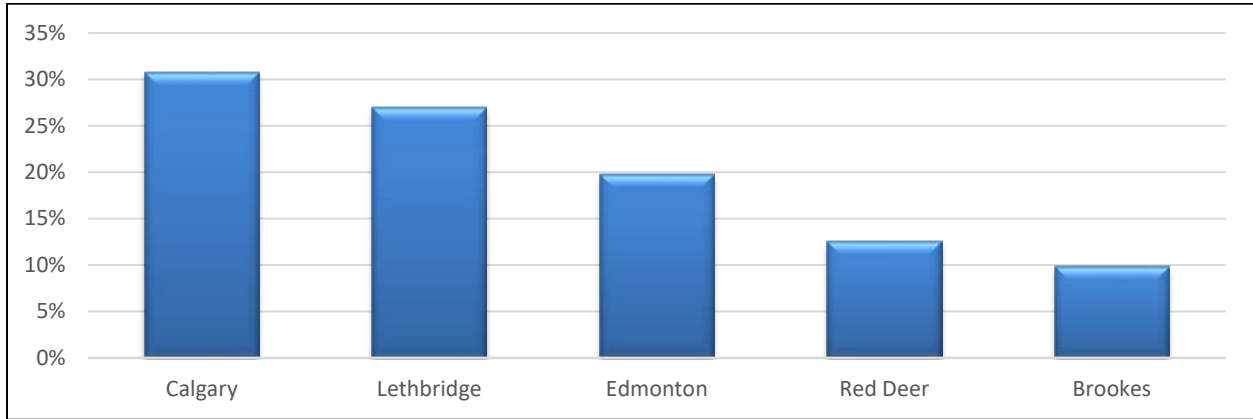
Table 3. 4: Marital Status, Alberta, 2017



The largest group of refugees interviewed was living in Calgary (30%) followed by Lethbridge (27%) and Edmonton (20%). A few interviewees also lived in Brooks and Red Deer.

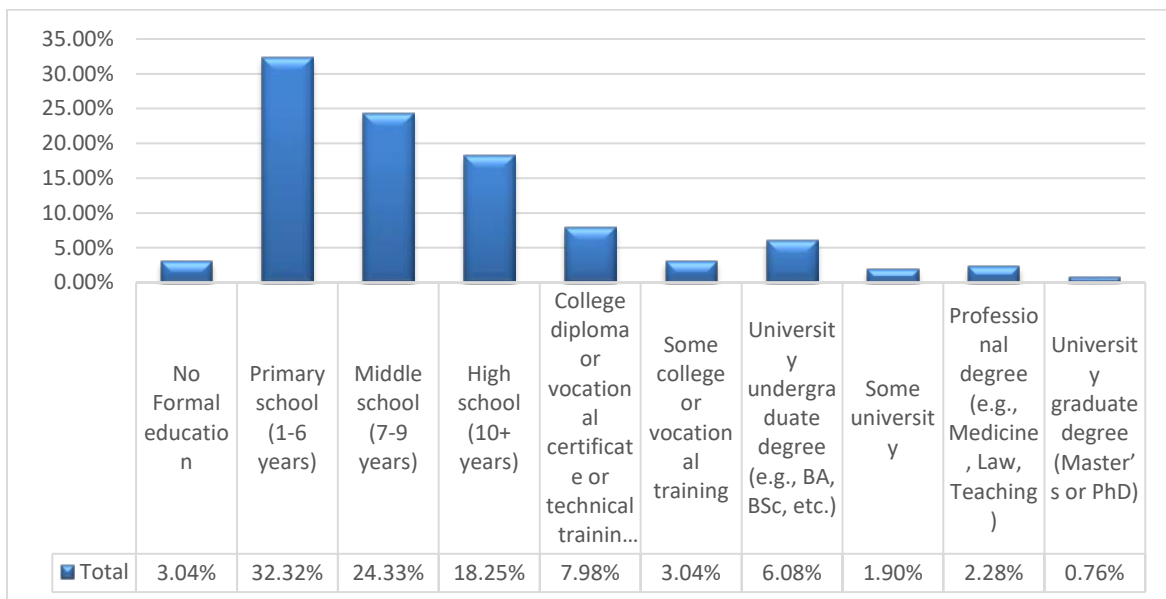
² Table not presented.

Table 3. 5: City of Residence, Alberta, 2017



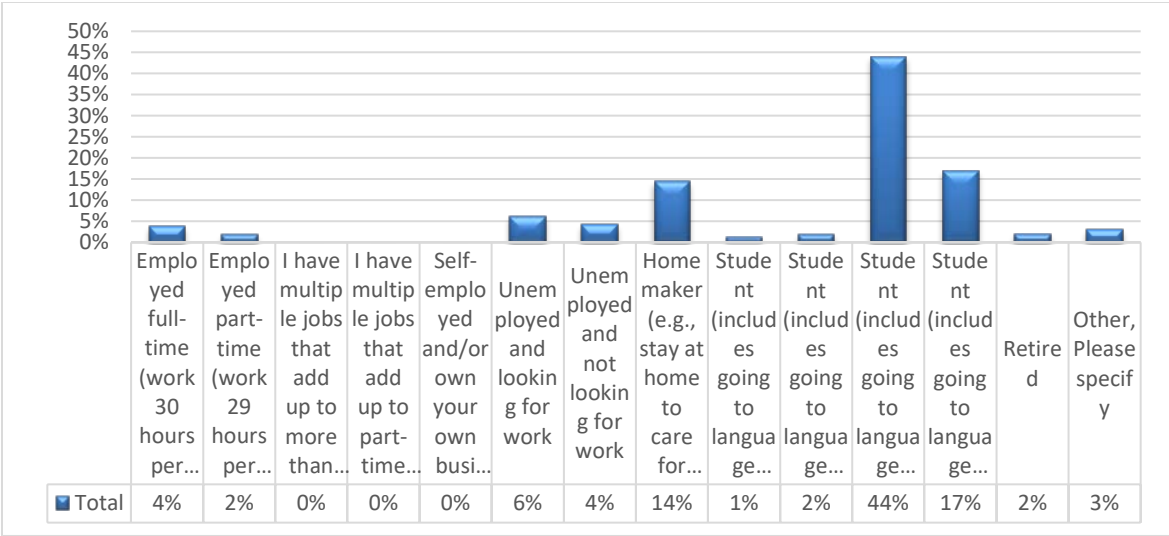
The Syrians arriving to Alberta have lower levels of education than previous immigrant groups. Among those interviewed 60% did not have a high school diploma, 18% had a high school diploma and another 8% had trade or vocational certificate. Another 3% had some trade school experience but no diploma or certificate. Almost 10% (9.2%) had a university degree. A majority of those (6.2%) had a bachelor’s degree while another 2.3% had a professional degree in law, medicine or related profession.

Table 3. 6: Highest Level of Education, Alberta, 2017



Among the respondents 4.2% of the Syrian refugees in Alberta had located full time work or a combination of jobs that added up to full time employment when they were interviewed. Another 2% were working part-time, and 3% were students (mostly in language training) and working a part time job. Collectively almost 10% of the Syrian refugees interviewed in Alberta were working. Most, however, were concentrating on learning English. Almost two-thirds of the Syrians interviewed were currently in language classes. Only 10% declared themselves as unemployed.

Table 3. 7: Employment Status, Alberta, 2017



On average, Syrian refugees in Alberta who participated in our study had been here for 11.8 months. Their family size was 5.3 persons per household and the average age of adults was 36.3 years and the average family had 3.5 children, though there was great variability in the number of children per household.

3.2.2. Housing Conditions of Refugees

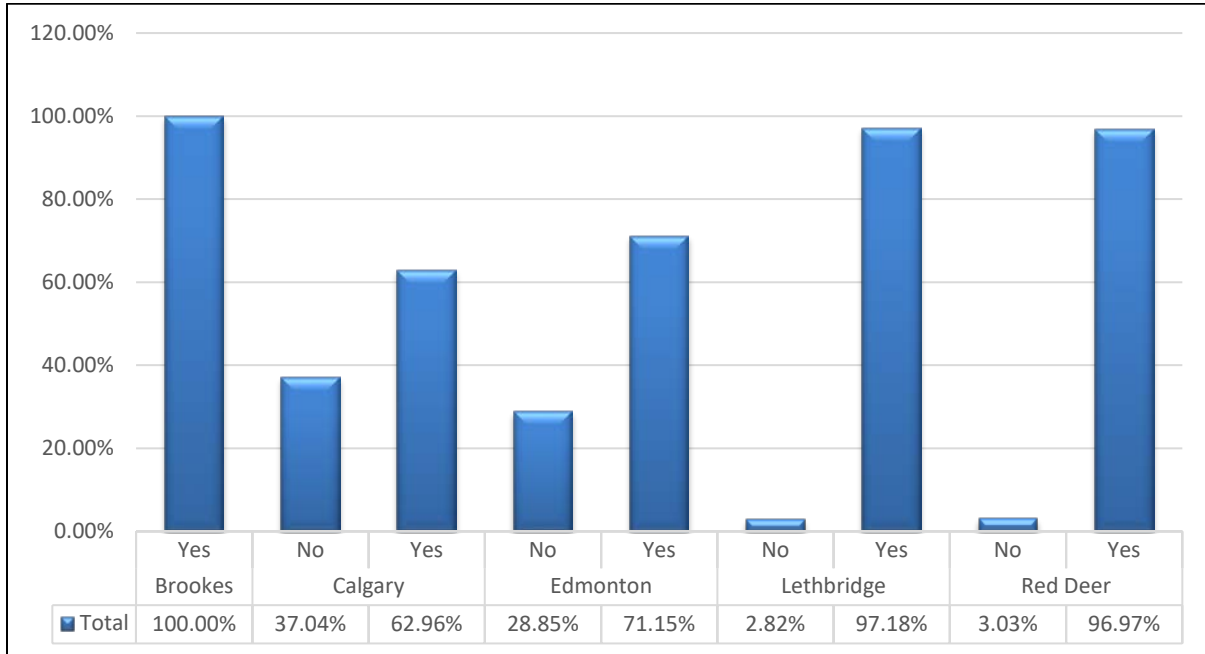
Much has been made of the problems in locating accommodation for the Syrians as they arrived in Canada. There were delays and as recent research by Rose and Charette (2017) suggest, many Syrians erroneously assumed that their first houses in Canada would be their only houses in Canada.³

Unlike respondents from the other two participating provinces, a large number of Syrians stayed in a hotel prior to relocating to their permanent accommodation. All the refugees destined to Brooks and nearly all of those in Red Deer and Lethbridge stayed in hotels initially,

³ The authors discovered in their interviews with participants in Montreal that because many of the Syrian refugees came from rural areas, the presumption was that they would never move from their houses—both in Syria and in Canada. It took a while for settlement service providers to convince some Syrian families that their rental housing was likely to be permanent and that Canadians relocate and move more often than people in Syria.

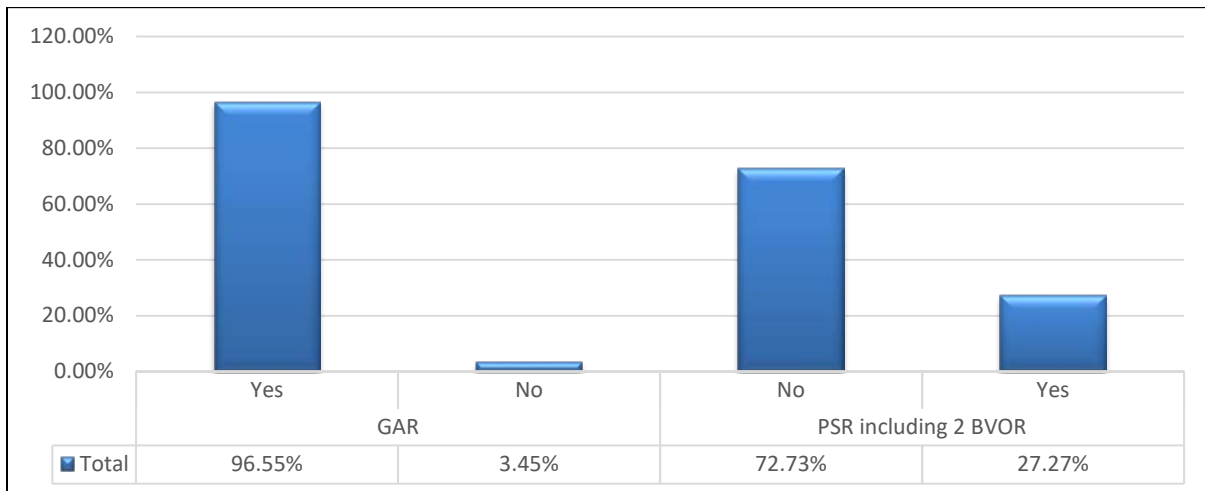
while about one-third of those destined to Calgary and Edmonton went straight to their accommodation at arrival (see Table 3.8).

Table 3. 8: Percentage Staying in Hotels at Arrival by City of Residence, Alberta, 2017



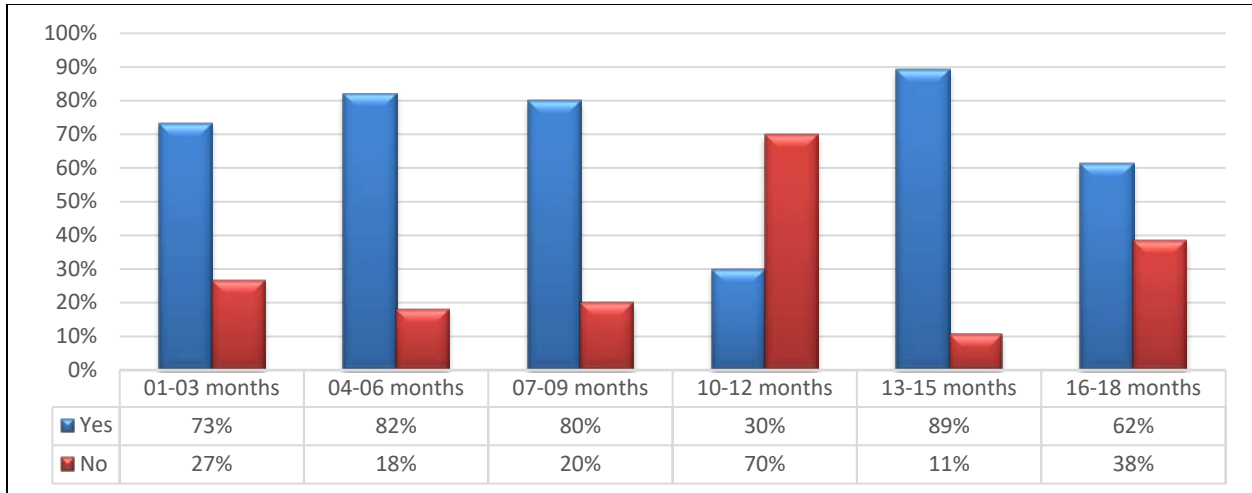
The chance of staying in a hotel among GARs was significantly higher than among PSRs. Almost all GARs stayed in hotels for a few days upon arrival, but three-quarters of PSRs went immediately to their rental accommodation (Table 3.9).

Table 3. 9: Percentage Staying in Hotels at Arrival by Entrance Category, Alberta, 2017



Those arriving earlier were more likely to have hotel stays than those Syrians arriving in later 2016 (see Table 3.9). Those arriving in winter 2016 (89%) were the most likely to stay in hotels for some period of time than those arriving more recently in winter 2017 (73%). This makes some sense as the operation to bring Syrians to Canada really didn't see people arriving until the third week of December in 2015. Those arriving in Canada in fall 2015 were the least likely to stay in hotels in Alberta (62%). The average length of hotel stay was just over two weeks (15.2 days).

Table 3. 10: Percentage Staying in Hotels at Arrival by Duration in Canada, Alberta, 2017



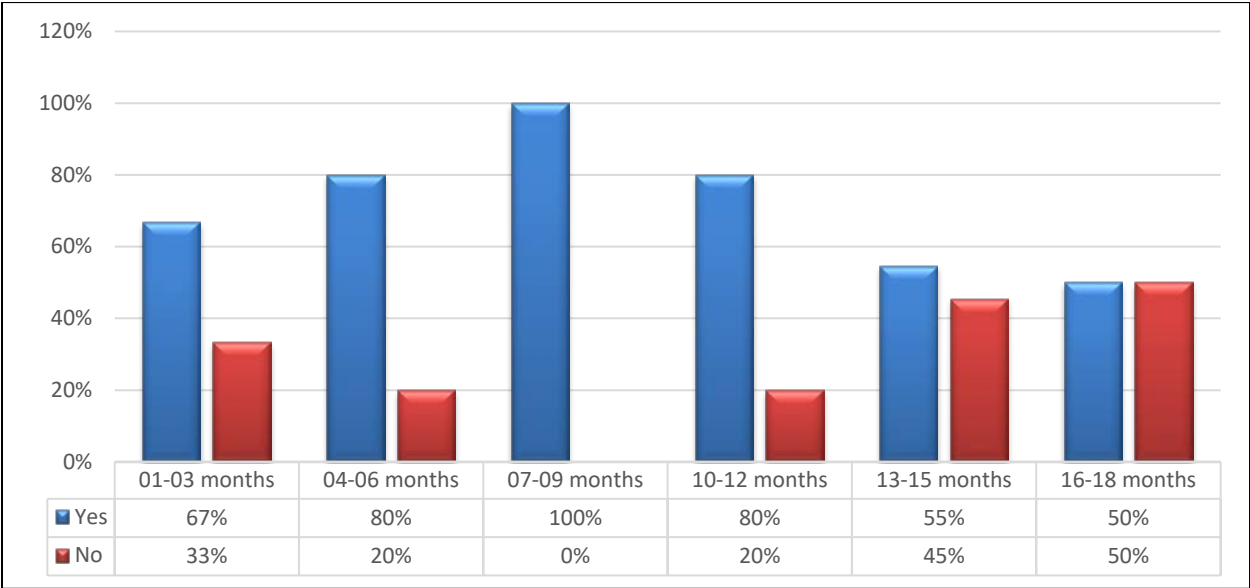
When asked to describe their time in the hotel, most were satisfied with the experience. The biggest complaints were difficulty communicating with hotel staff and settlement service providers due to language barriers. A small number complained about the quality of the food, nutritional value or the cultural differences in food. Some identified the problems of having a small room to share with the entire family. Like other surveys of its kind, many of the newcomers were surprised at how cold it was in Alberta and that the heaters in the hotel rooms couldn't keep them warm enough. One respondent commented, "the staff and interns didn't leave us alone and kept visiting. They let us know about the system here which gave us peace of mind that people are taking care of us". Another commented that once they met the staff at Lethbridge Family Services, they had wished they had arrived in Canada sooner. Almost all the participants said the hotel staff was friendly and efficient, even if they could not understand one another.

Nearly all the Syrians reported renting their home (98%) which is not surprising given the short period of time they had been in Alberta. Like their counterparts in other provinces, almost all the refugees interviewed in Alberta had rented accommodation.⁴ Only five of them indicated they had been able to purchase a home.

⁴ Table not presented.

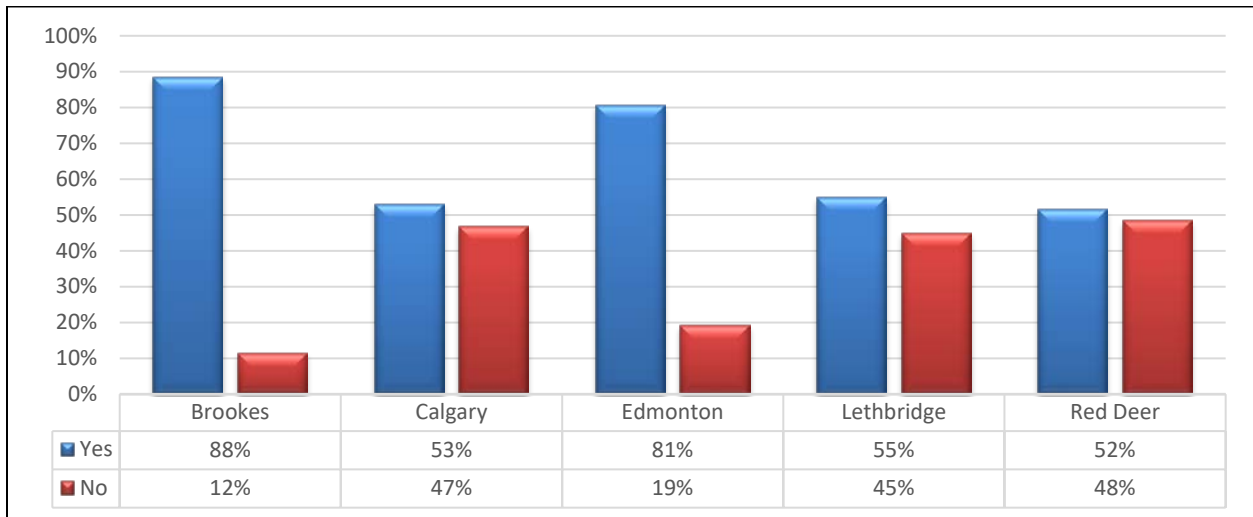
One-third of participants indicated that their current housing meets their needs. Table 3.10 shows how time in Canada influences their opinions on the adequacy of their housing. The most recent arrivals report the greatest satisfaction with their current house. Those 4 to 12 months in Canada (80%) report satisfaction with their current housing. Those least satisfied are Syrians in Canada for more than 13 months where satisfaction declines to 50%. We were unable to ask these respondents what might have changed their minds about their housing situation. Perhaps they moved in between accommodation or maybe they were realizing they were not conveniently located to schooling, language training or work. This question will be followed up in future waves of the study.

Table 3. 11: Does Housing Meet your Needs by Duration of Stay, Alberta, 2017



There was, however, variation in satisfaction with housing depending on the city of residence. As Table 3.12 shows, Participants living in Brooks (88%) and Edmonton (81%) were more likely to indicate that their housing was satisfactory than those living in Calgary (53%), Lethbridge (55%) or Red Deer (52%).

Table 3. 12: Does Housing Meet Your Needs? by City of Residence, Alberta, 2017



We asked participants who indicated that they were not satisfied with their current housing situation to elaborate. The biggest problem was size—about 15% felt their houses were too small. Another 10% were worried about paying the rent as they perceived it to be very expensive. Bed bugs and insects in the home were mentioned by a few of the respondents. Others felt the neighborhood was unsafe due to drunken behavior by their neighbors at night. A few who were living in basement suites felt it was inappropriate for a family.⁵

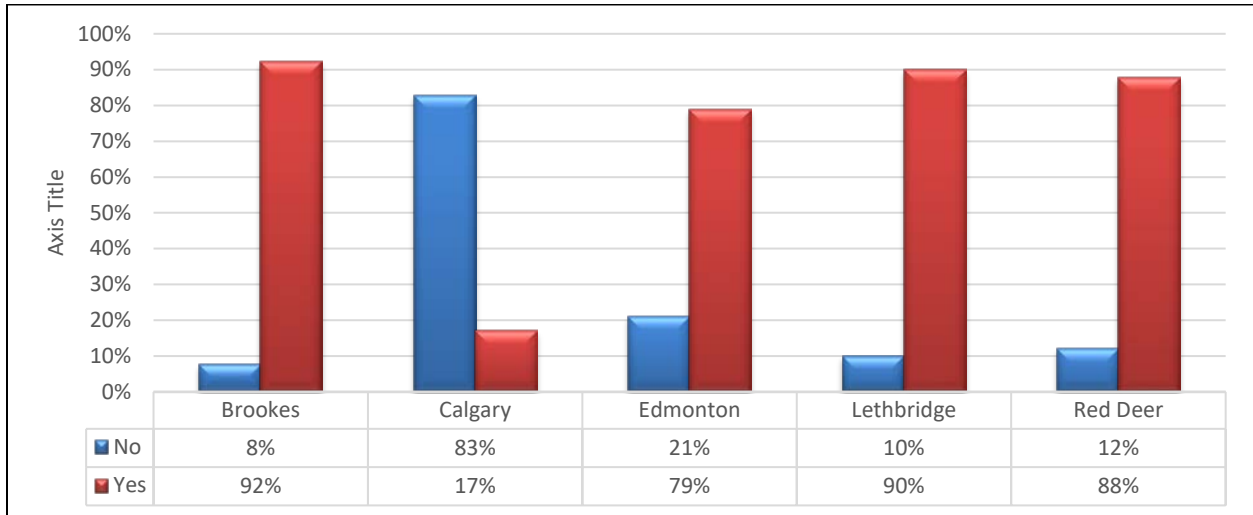
3.2.3. Language Knowledge

Almost all the participants (93%) indicated that Arabic was their first language⁶ and 5% indicated they spoke Kurdish at home. Only two-thirds of those interviewed in Alberta indicated they had taken language classes after they arrived in Canada. Given the large number of participants who could not speak English before they came to Canada, this was a surprising result. About 90% of those living in Brooks, Lethbridge and Red Deer had been registered in language classes. Equally interesting is that of the Syrians who were interviewed the percentage enrolled in in language classes was much higher in Edmonton (79%) than in Calgary (21%). As Table 3.14 shows below, all the PSRs who were interviewed were living in Calgary. The lower percentage of refugees seeking English language classes in Calgary is explained in part by the data released by IRCC (2016), which reveals that PSRs were significantly more likely to be fluent or had some knowledge of English prior to their arrival.

⁵ Research elsewhere warns that it is not appropriate to house refugees in basement units because for some individuals, basement suites are linked to bad memories of bad experiences, including torture.

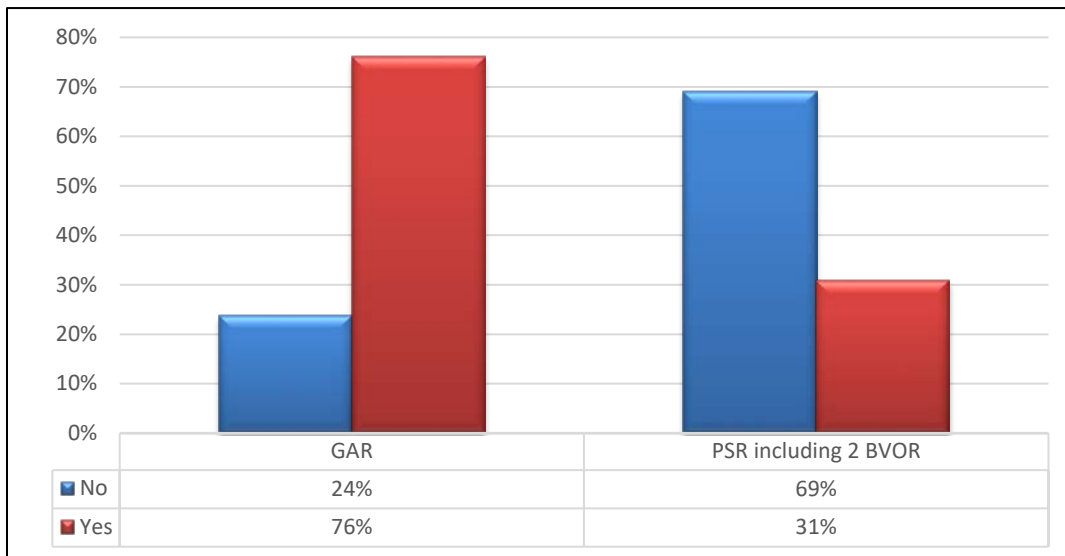
⁶ Table not presented.

Table 3.13: English Class Attendance by City of Residence, Alberta, 2017



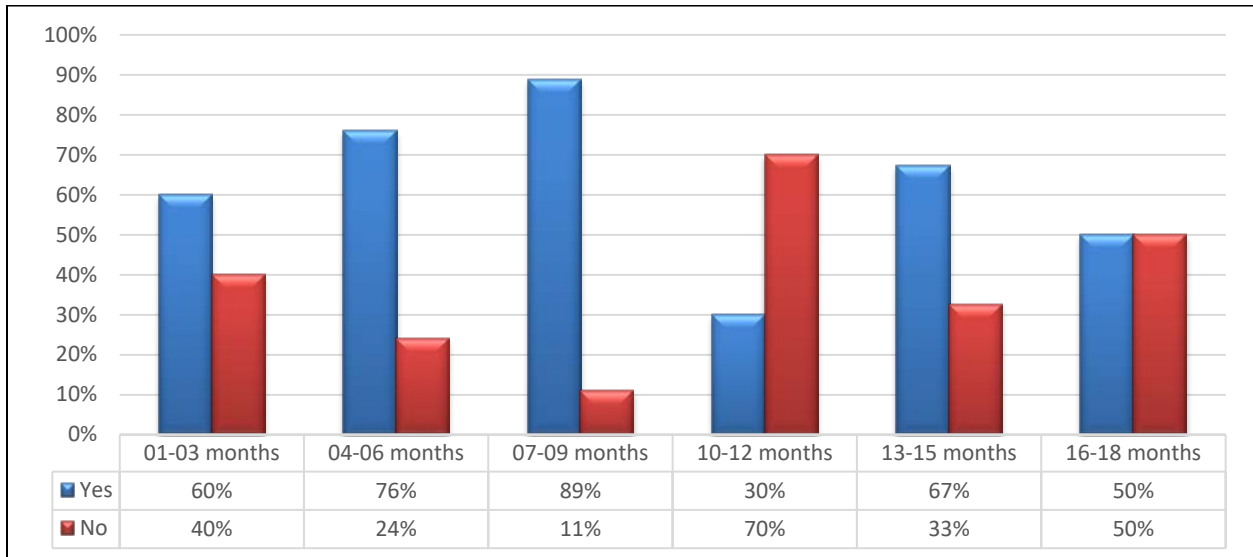
There is some difference in the rate of English language class attendance among the GARs and PSRs. GARs are more likely to attend an English language class (76%) than PSRs (31%). This is not surprising given the IRCC (2016) data released in January that reveals that PSRs are more likely to speak English than GARs. Readers are reminded that all the PSRs in the study were living in Calgary, which accounts for these differences between respondents in that city and their counterparts in other urban centres.

Table 3. 14: English Class Attendance by Entrance Category, Alberta, 2017



It can take time to access language classes. Suitable housing, health needs and getting kids into school are some of the reasons that delay refugees from entering language classes. Table 3.15 shows that as time in Canada increases, enrolment in language classes increases. The curious anomaly (those in Canada 10-12 months) reflects the PSRs in Calgary who are less likely to attend language classes.

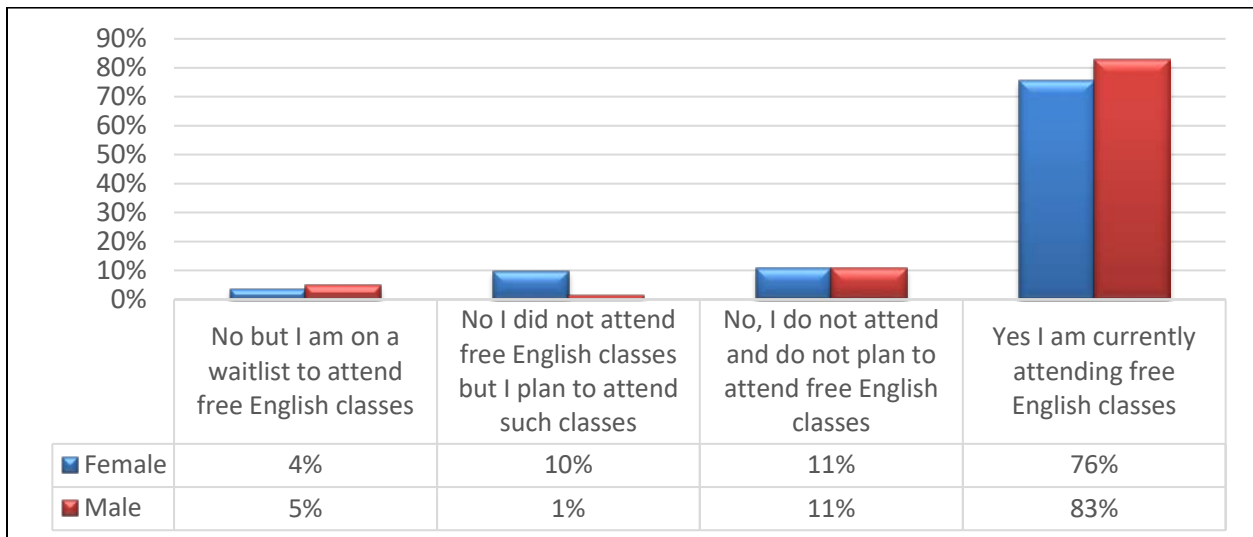
Table 3.15: English Class Attendance by Duration in Canada, Alberta, 2017



Eighty percent of refugee interviewees in Alberta were in English language classes. Another 10% were on a waiting list while the remaining 10% indicate had no need for language classes as they were functionally fluent in English.

Females (76%) were slightly less likely to attend free language classes than their male counterparts (83%). As a result, they were slightly more likely to be on a waiting list to attend English language classes (Table 3.16).

Table 3. 16: English Class Attendance by Sex, Alberta, 2017



All respondents were asked to rate their performance in English, regardless of how long they have been in Alberta. Whereas 33% indicated they had improved their English by “a little bit”,

26% indicated their improvement was significant. Just over 25% of respondents in Alberta indicated they had very little to no improvement in their English language skills since arriving in Canada.

Table 3. 17: Self-rated Improvement in English, Alberta, 2017

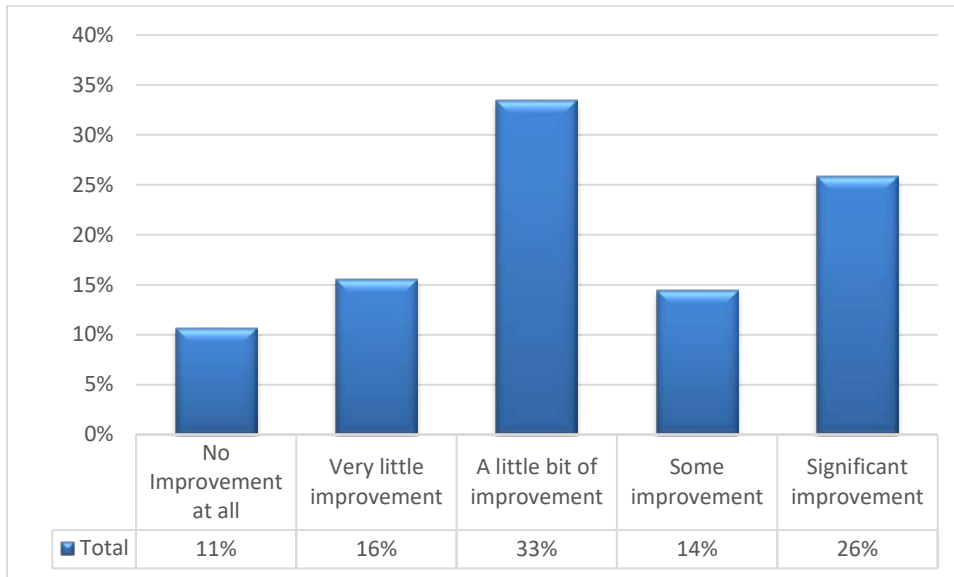
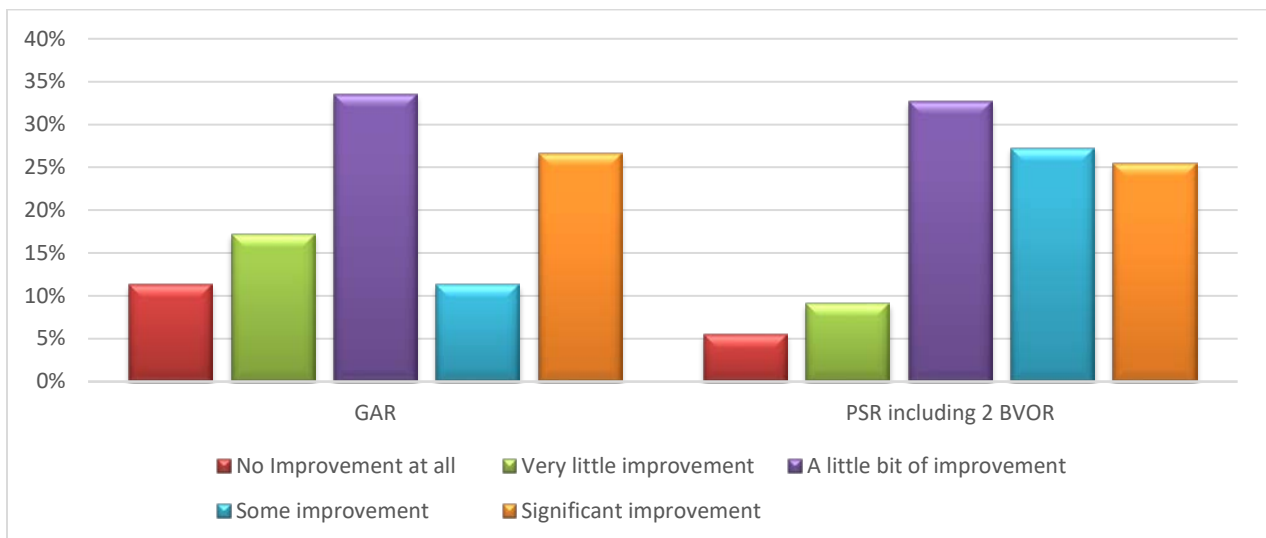


Table 3.18 compares English language improvement between GARs and PSRs. This chart indicates there is very little difference between the two groups.

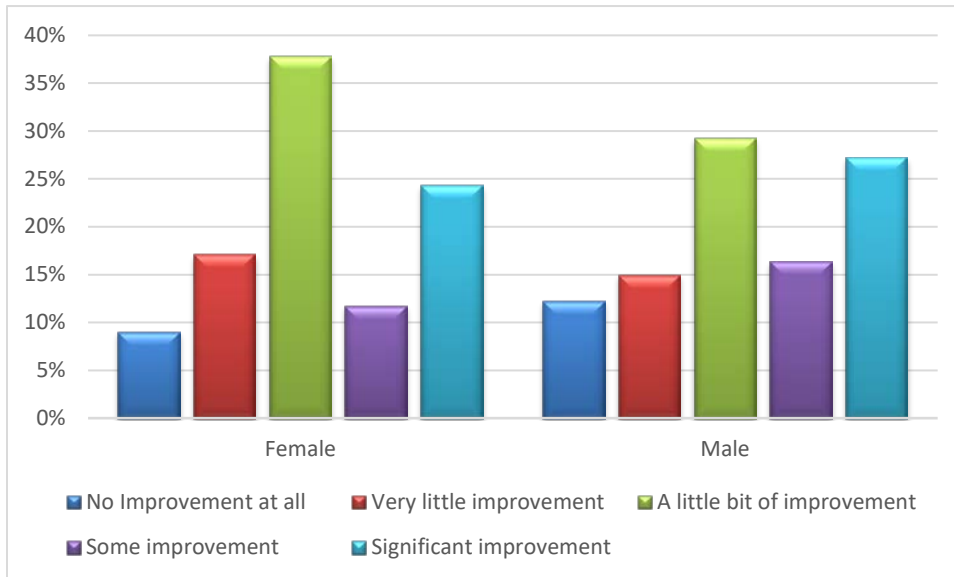
Table 3. 18: Self-rated Improvement in English by Entrance Category, Alberta, 2017



There was, however, significant differences between men and women and their self-rated improvement in English. Table 3.19 shows that women were more modest in their assessment

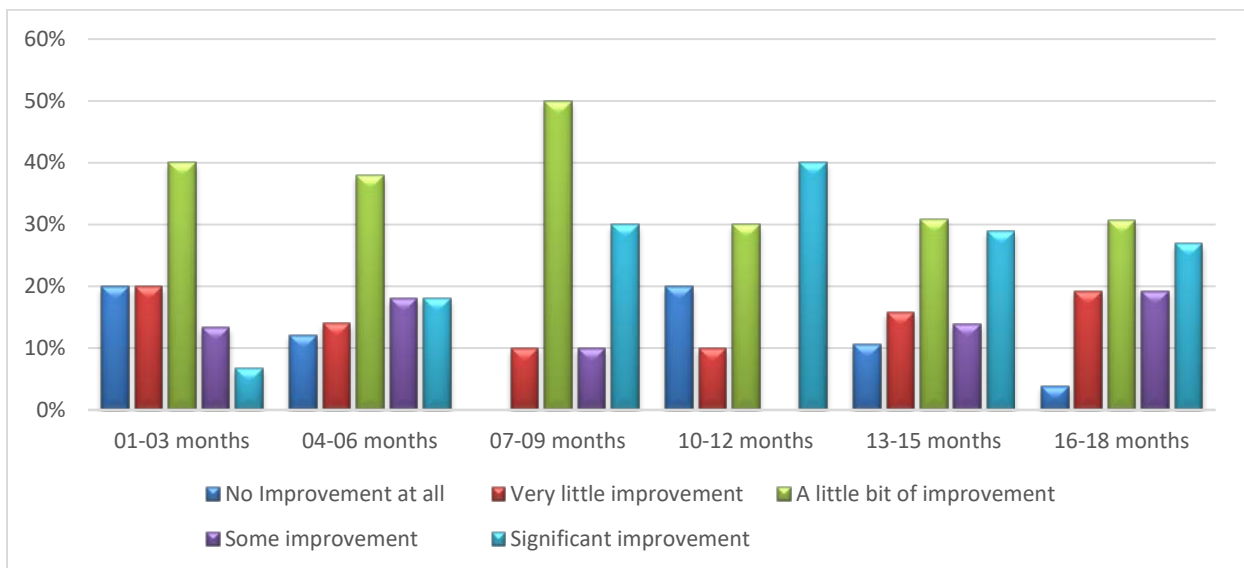
of their improvement in English. Only 24% of women indicated significant improvement in English compared with 27% of their male counterparts.

Table 3.19: Self-rated Improvement in English by Sex, Alberta, 2017



Not surprisingly, time in Canada increased English language improvement. As Table 3.20 shows, as time in Canada increases, so does improvement in English. Improvement scores begin to creep upwards at month 7.

Table 3.20: Self-rated Improvement in English by Duration in Canada, Alberta, 2017



Some participants indicated reasons why they could not attend English language classes. The most common reason was no access to daycare, which was a particularly significant issue for

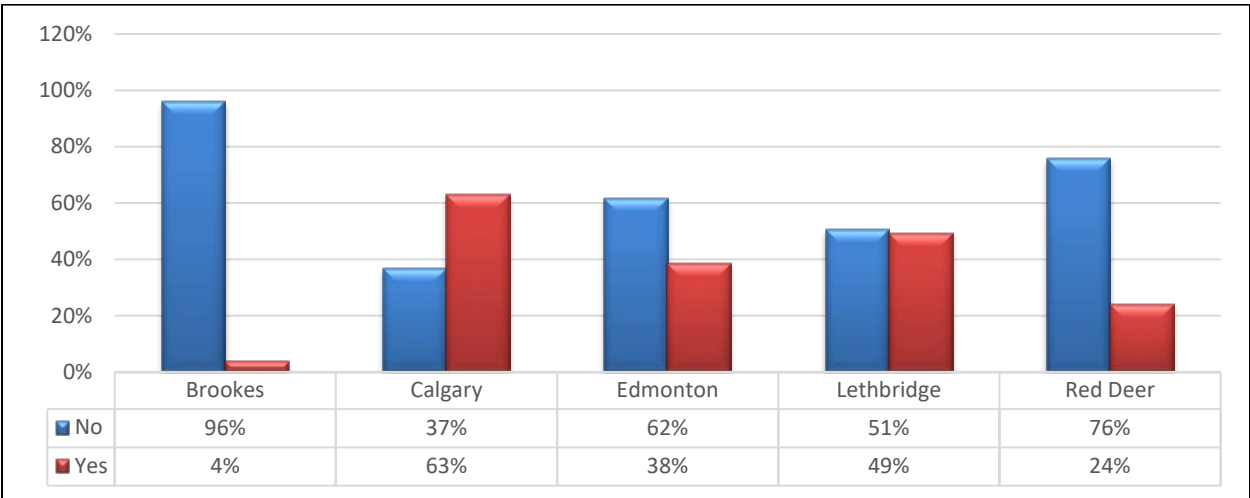
women. Almost as many indicated they were on a long wait list to access classes. Some respondents noted medical reasons as preventing them from attending a language class. A small number of people indicated that the level of English language training was not high enough for them and they required more advanced training than what they were offered. A small number of people complained about the time of day classes were offered as it conflicted with their work schedule.

3.2.4. Employment

Employment is a significant issue for most refugees. Many will have spent years in refugee camps or in secondary countries where they were not allowed to work. Employment provides some people with more than income; it also provides them with a sense of self-worth and wellbeing as in being valuable contributing members of their new community. This desire to work was clear in news stories about arriving refugees asking when they could start working. Although there are many success stories of refugees finding work and succeeding in their performing their work, the interviews confirmed that finding work does take time, particularly during a time when the Alberta economy faced a major downturn.

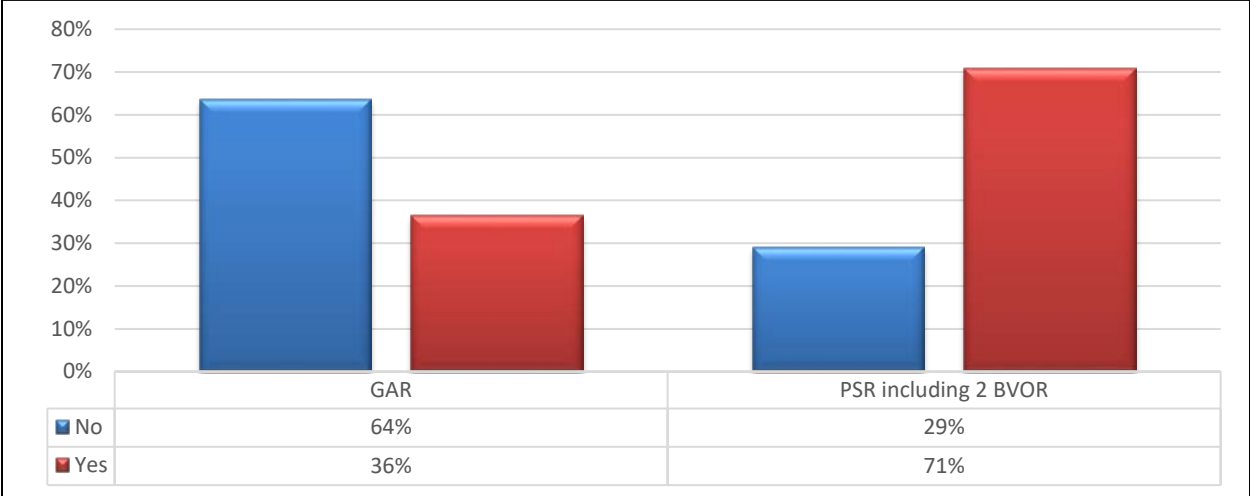
Not everyone was looking for work during the initial period after their arrival. Most adults who were not working were enrolled in fulltime English language classes. This focus on language training is quite understandable given that finding a job in Canada is largely dependent on the ability of newcomers to speak one of our official languages. That said, a surprising number of Syrians were already looking for work. Nevertheless, 44% of Syrians interviewed in Alberta identified a challenge in locating work. Table 3.21 shows those identifying challenges finding work by their city of residence. More specifically is shows that such challenges were faced by 66% of those living in Calgary, 50% of those living in Lethbridge and 33% of those living in Edmonton. Substantially fewer of those living in Brooks and Red Deer indicated they faced such challenges, probably largely since respondents from these two cities were more likely to be currently enrolled in full time English language classes.

Table 3.13: Difficulties Finding Work by City of Residence, Alberta, 2017



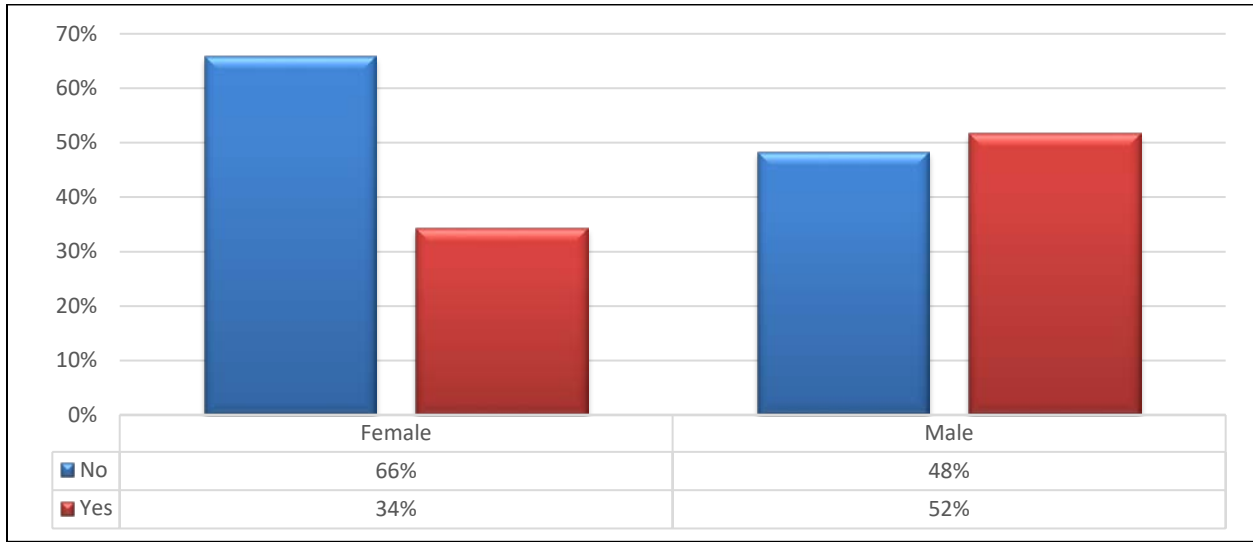
Again, PSRs indicate more difficulty finding work. Because they are more likely to speak English upon arrival and have been in Canada a bit longer than the other refugees, they are more likely to be active in the labour market. Nearly 75% of all PSRs have experienced some difficulty in the labour market since their arrival to Canada.

Table 3.14: Difficulties Finding Work by Entrance Category, Alberta, 2017



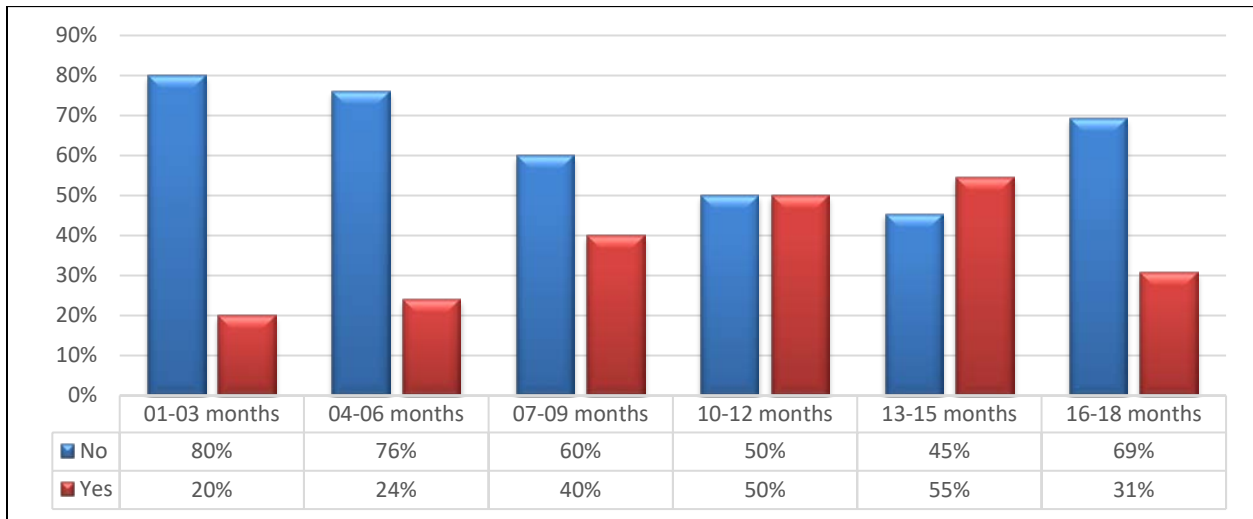
The interviews revealed a difference in the proportion of men and women experiencing difficulties in finding work. As Table 3.23 shows, whereas the proportion of men experiencing difficulties and those who are not are approximately the same, the proportion of women experiencing difficulties compared to those who are not is substantially lower. This is likely due in part, though not exclusively, to cultural norms that give higher priority to men in a household finding work.

Table 3.15: Difficulties Finding Work by Sex, Alberta, 2017



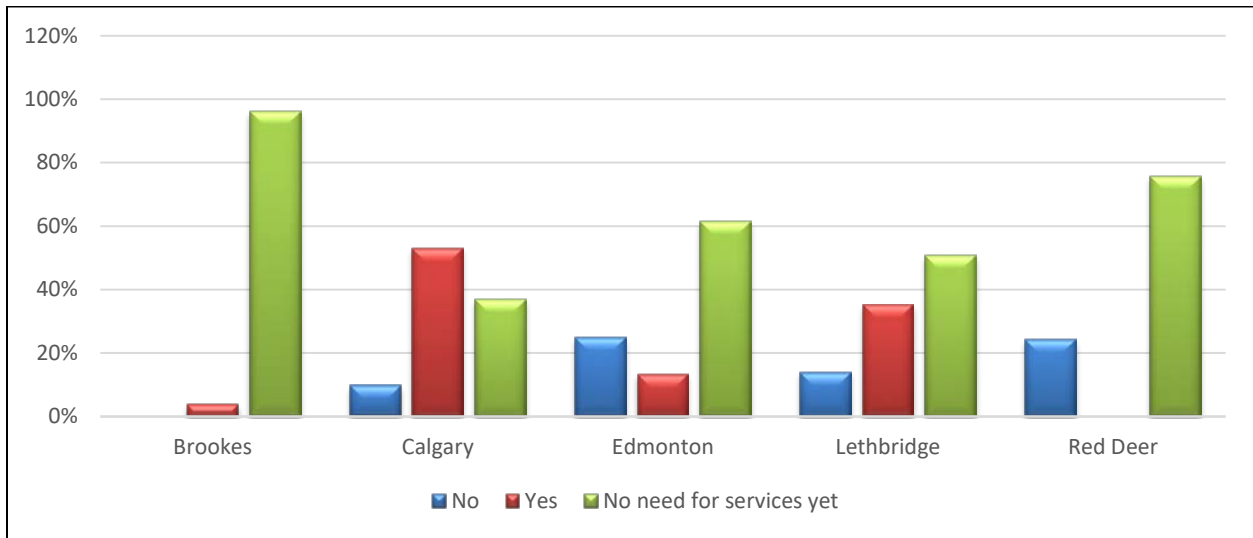
As with other aspects of resettlement, difficulties finding work tend to decline over time. Table 3.24 shows that pattern.

Table 3.24: Difficulties Finding Work by Duration of Stay in Canada, Alberta, 2017



Over half of those interviewed in Alberta indicated they had not sought services to help them find jobs. Nevertheless, nearly one-third of them, including many of those enrolled in English classes, had already accessed services to help them find a job. The highest proportion of those accessing such services were located in Calgary and Lethbridge.

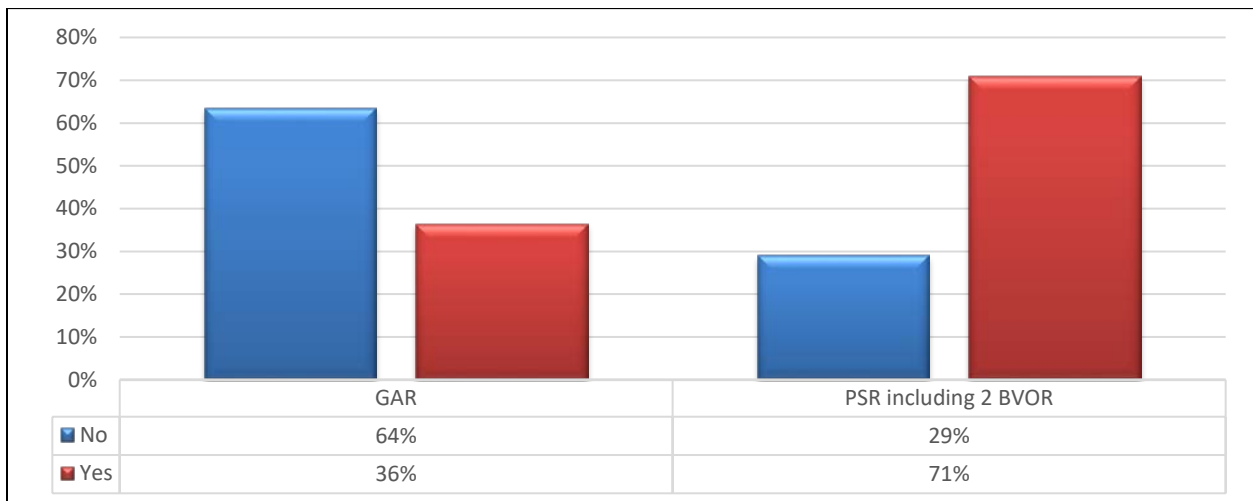
Table 3. 25: Used Employment Services to Find Work by City of Residence, Alberta, 2017



As with other variables in this survey, there are marked differences between GARs and PSRs.

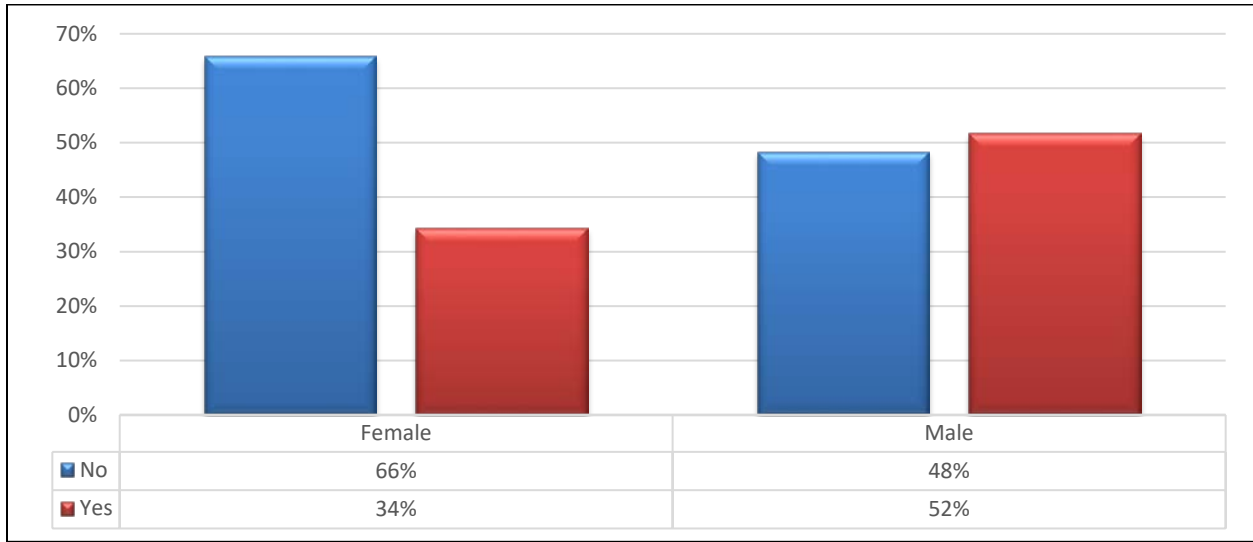
Again, PSRs indicate more difficulty finding work. Because they are more likely to speak English upon arrival and have been in Canada a bit longer than the other refugees, they are more likely to be active in the labour market. Nearly 75% of all PSRs have experienced some difficulty in the labour market since their arrival to Canada (See Table 3.26).

Table 3. 26: Difficulties Finding Work by Entrance Category, Alberta, 2017



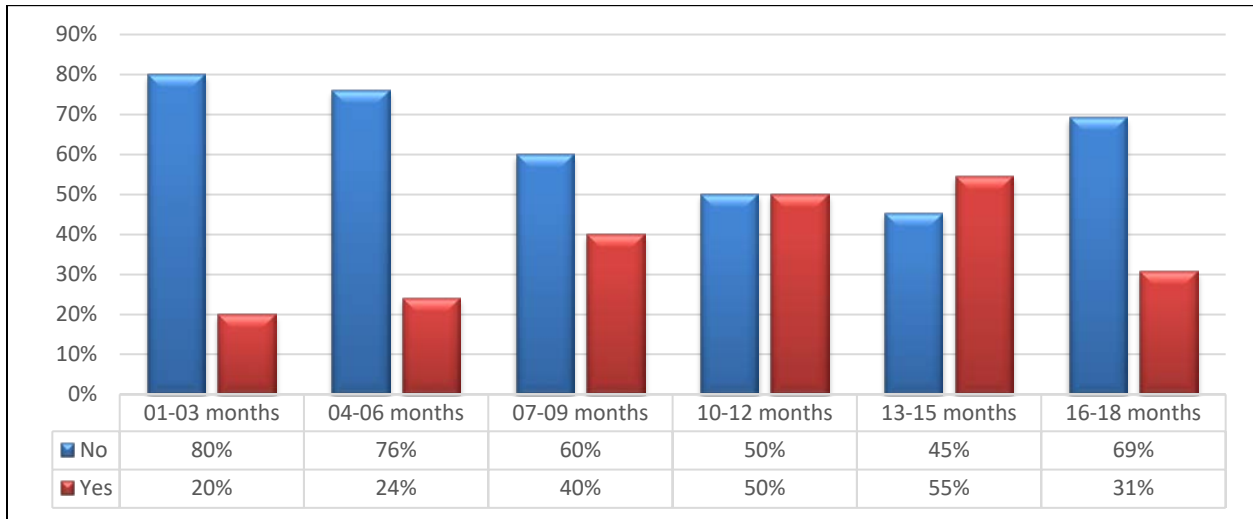
Not surprisingly, men experience challenges differently than women. Table 3.27 shows that just over half of men have already experienced difficulty finding work compared to one-third of women.

Table 3. 16: Difficulties finding Work by Sex, Alberta, 2017



As with other aspects of resettlement, difficulties tend to decline over time. Challenges finding work are no exception. Table 3.28 shows that pattern.

Table 3. 28: Difficulties finding Work by Duration of Stay, Alberta, 2017



3.2.5. Settlement Service Use

All survey participants in Alberta were asked whether they had accessed settlement services and to name the type of organizations from which they received such services. Almost all Syrian refugees interviewed in Alberta indicated they had accessed some form of settlement services since their arrival to Canada. Moreover, almost all (92%) indicated they had received assistance from an immigrant settlement agency—which is not surprising because in this study, we used RAP providers to locate participants and to conduct the interviews. The interviews revealed that the refugees also received settlement services or supports from a variety of other organizations. This included: ethno-cultural organizations (41%), religious organizations (18%), libraries (15%), and community centres (17%). A few indicated that they also received services or supports from universities, mainstream (non-immigrant) organizations, and online resources.

All participants were also asked to identify services that would have been helpful for them to receive prior to their arrival to Canada. Table 3.29 reveals their top answers. The majority wanted foreign credential assessment (14%), skills/training to get a job (15%), or orientation to the Canadian economy (13%). Taken together, the services related to employment 44% of the participants. Another 16% indicated they needed language assessment and training. It is important to note that given that nearly all participants had accessed or at least tried to some settlement service in Alberta, no one was eligible to answer the question “why haven’t you accessed services?”.

Table 3.29: Top Services Required Prior to Arrival in Canada, Alberta, 2017

Top Services Required Prior to Arrival in Canada, Alberta 2017	
Foreign credential recognition	14%
Skills/training to get a job	15%
Connection to employers	2%
Orientation to Canadian economy	13%
Language assessment and training	16%
Orientation to Canadian culture	6%
Help finding housing	1%
Translation of documents	1%
Other	17%
Nothing. I was prepared	16%

Other activities and services mentioned by participants but not part of this table include a frustration over the waiting time to come to Canada (though we suspect it is the waiting time in their secondary country rather than the wait between being selected to come to Canada and actually arriving—which was done in record time for most participants). Others indicated they didn’t have enough time to prepare to come to Canada. They would have appreciated more time to gather their belongings and say, ‘good bye’ to their family and friends. Some also

wanted the government to know about persons they characterized as “fraudulent immigration officers” operating in the Middle East. Others wanted information about how to sponsor family members left overseas.

The next chapter examines the findings of the participants from Saskatchewan.

Chapter 4: Syrians in Saskatchewan

4.1. INTRODUCTION

4.1.1. Objective of Chapter

The objective in this chapter is to provide an overview of the data collected from Syrian refugees who were in Saskatchewan when the survey was administered. As noted in Chapter 2, a total of 226 refugees participated in the survey in Saskatchewan. This included 98% GARs and 2% PSRs and/or BVORs. Of the 226 respondents 39% lived in Regina, 36% lived in Saskatoon, 15% lived in Prince Albert, and 10% lived in Moose Jaw.

4.1.2. Organization of Chapter

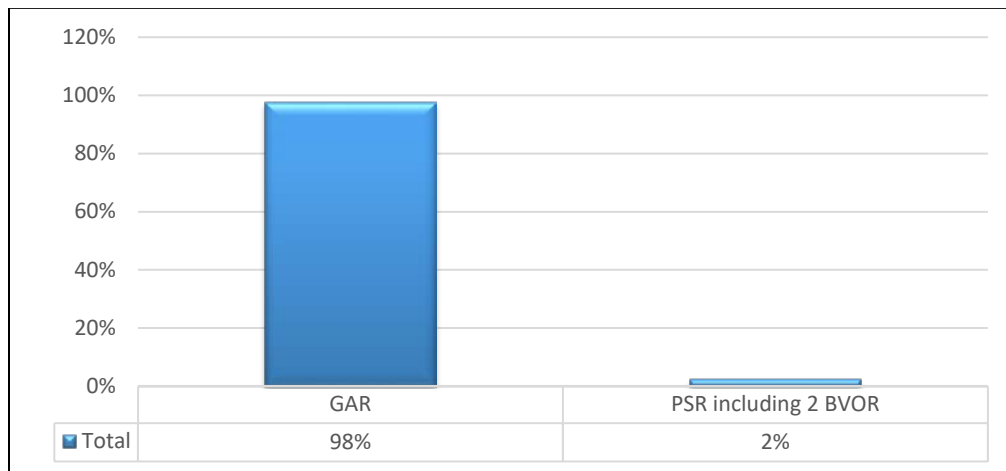
The overview of the survey data and commentary related to it is organized according to the major headings of the survey instrument, namely: (a) demographic profile of Syrian refugee respondents; (b) housing conditions, (c) language knowledge, (d) employment, and (e) settlement service use.

4.2. OVERVIEW OF MAJOR FINDINGS

4.2.1. Demographics

In Saskatchewan, the Syrian refugees interviewed resided mostly in Regina and in Saskatoon (Table 4.1). The other respondents resided in Prince Albert and Moose Jaw. Almost all participants were GARs (98%) and the other 2% were PSRs including 2 BVORs⁷.

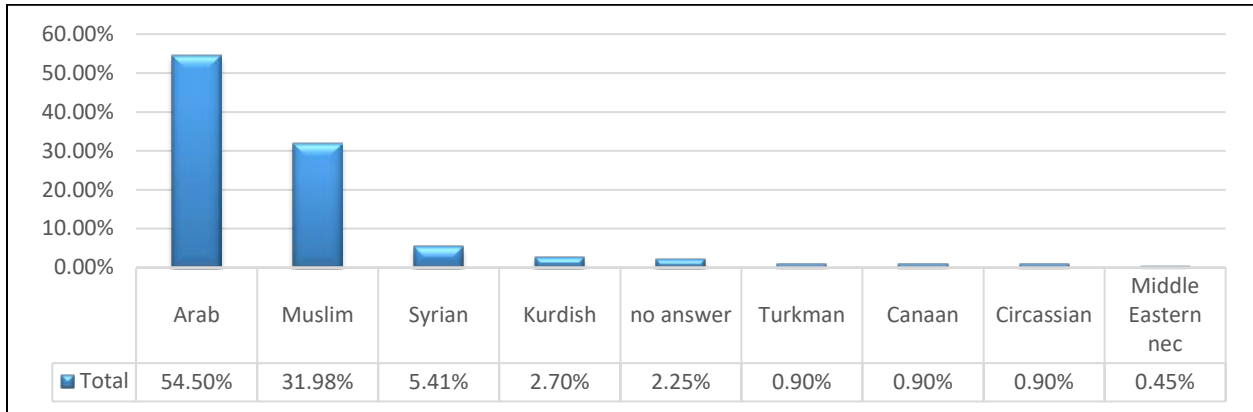
Table 4. 1: Government Assisted Refugees and Privately Sponsored Refugees, Saskatchewan, 2017



⁷ Because of the small numbers of PSR respondents in Saskatchewan, they will not be separated in any analysis.

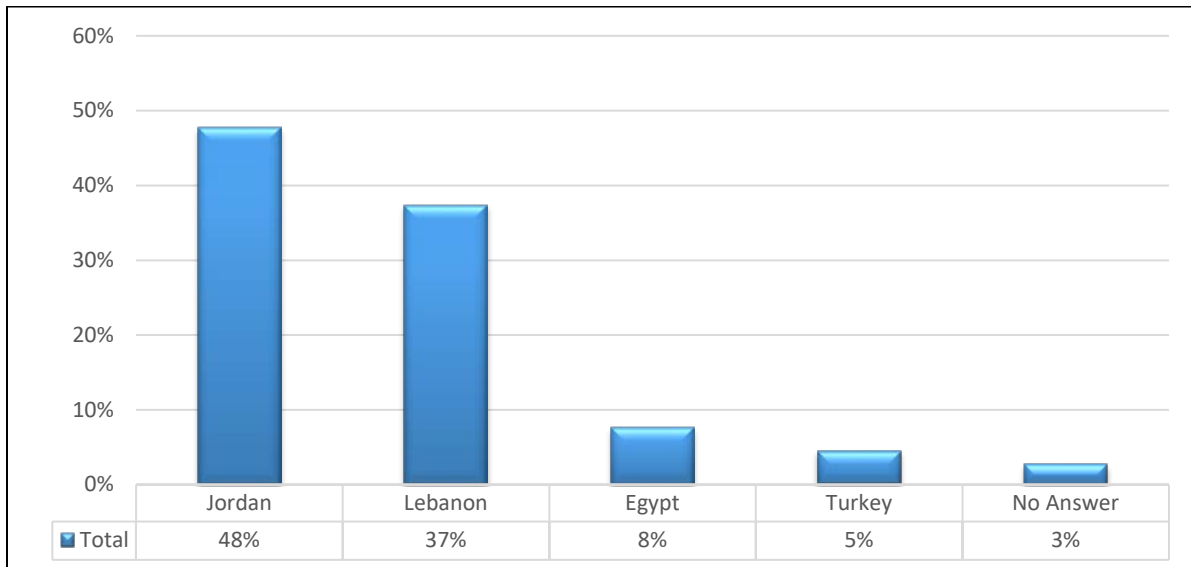
Table 4.2 shows the different ethnic origins of the respondents. The largest number of participants identified Arabic (54.5%) as their ethnic origin, followed by Muslims (31.98) Syrian (5%), and Kurdish (2.7%). A few others identified as Turkman, Canaan, Circassian and Middle Eastern.

Table 4. 2: Ethnic Origin, Saskatchewan, 2017



Prior to coming to Canada, most Syrian refugees had lived in Jordan (48%) and Lebanon (37%) (Table 4.3). Most of the rest had lived in Egypt (8%) and Turkey (5%).

Table 4. 3: Country of Origin, Saskatchewan, 2017



Of the Syrians who participated in the study 53% were males and 47% were females. In terms of marital status, 73% were married, 12% were single (i.e., never married), and 10% were living under common law arrangements. The remaining 4% were widowed or separated (Table 4.4).

Table 4. 4: Marital Status, Saskatchewan, 2017

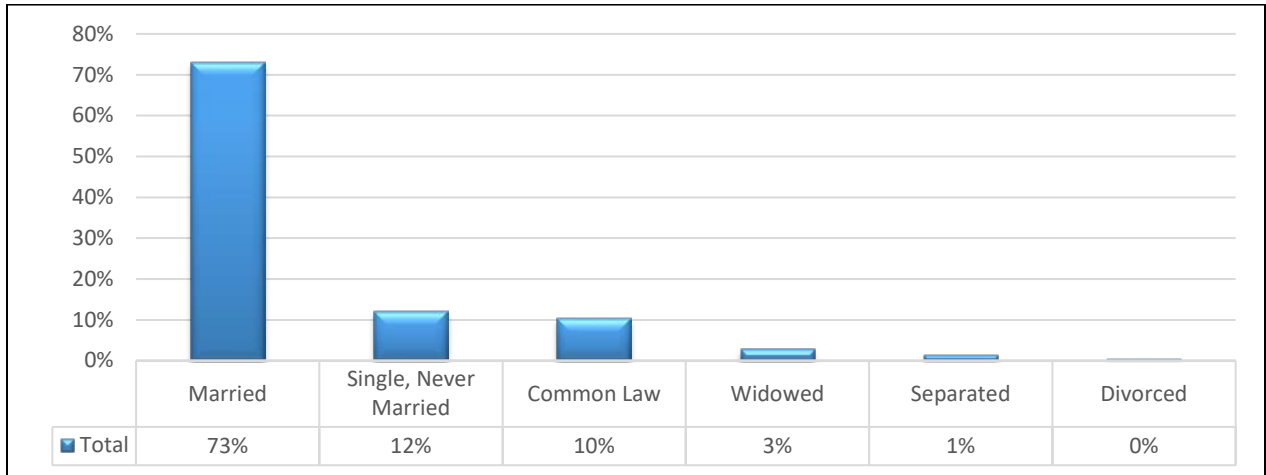
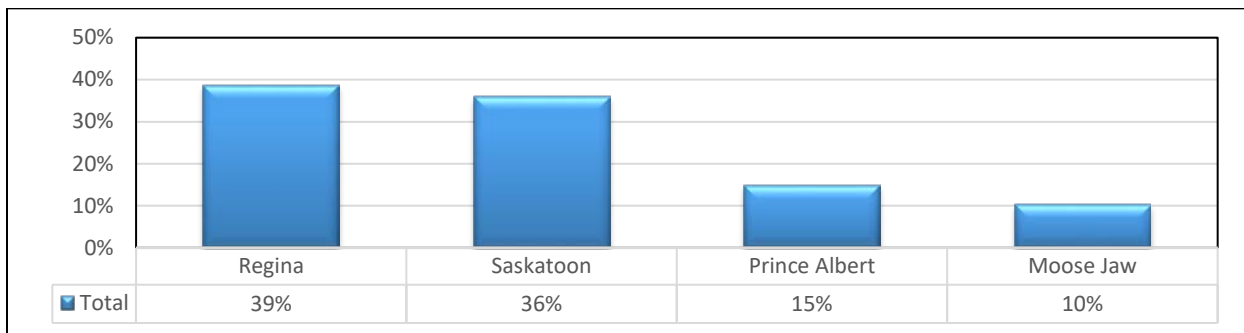


Table 4.5 shows that 75% of participants were resettled in either Regina (39%) or in Saskatoon (36%). The remaining lived in Prince Albert (15%) and Moose Jaw (10%).

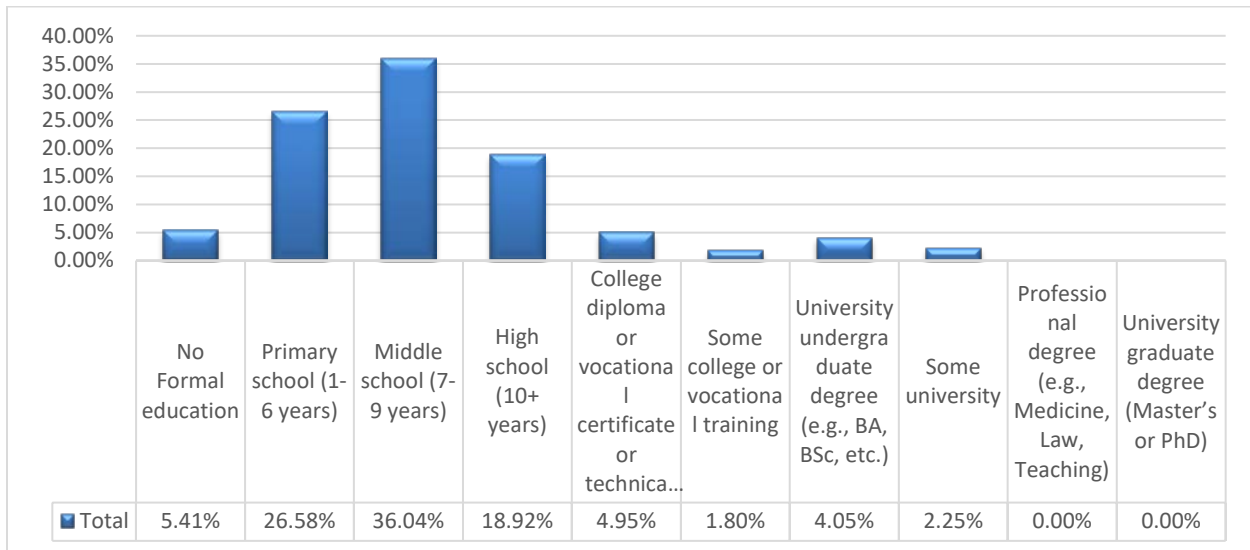
Table 4. 5: City of Residence, Saskatchewan, 2017



As shown in Table 4.6, less than 10% of participants in Saskatchewan indicated they had earned either a college diploma (4.95%) or a university undergraduate degree (4.05%). Another 4% had some university education (2.25%) or some college or vocational training (1.80%).

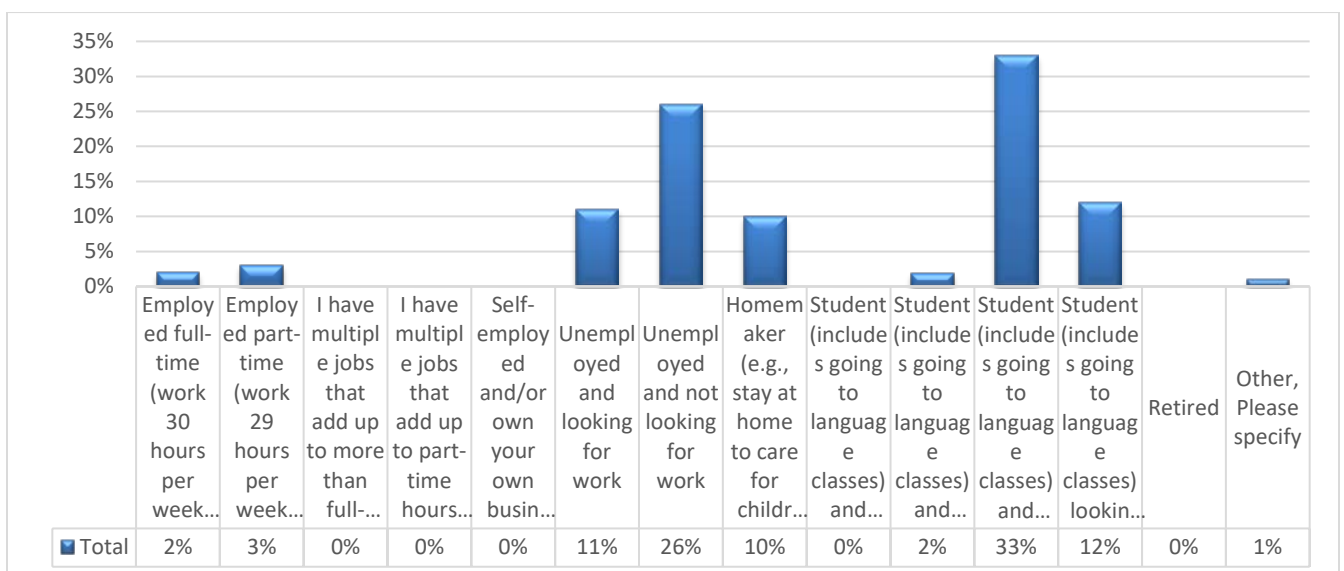
Approximately 19% of the respondents had a high school diploma. Over 50% had a middle school (36%) and a primary school education (26.58%), and 5.41% had no formal education.

Table 4. 6: Highest Level of Education, Saskatchewan, 2017



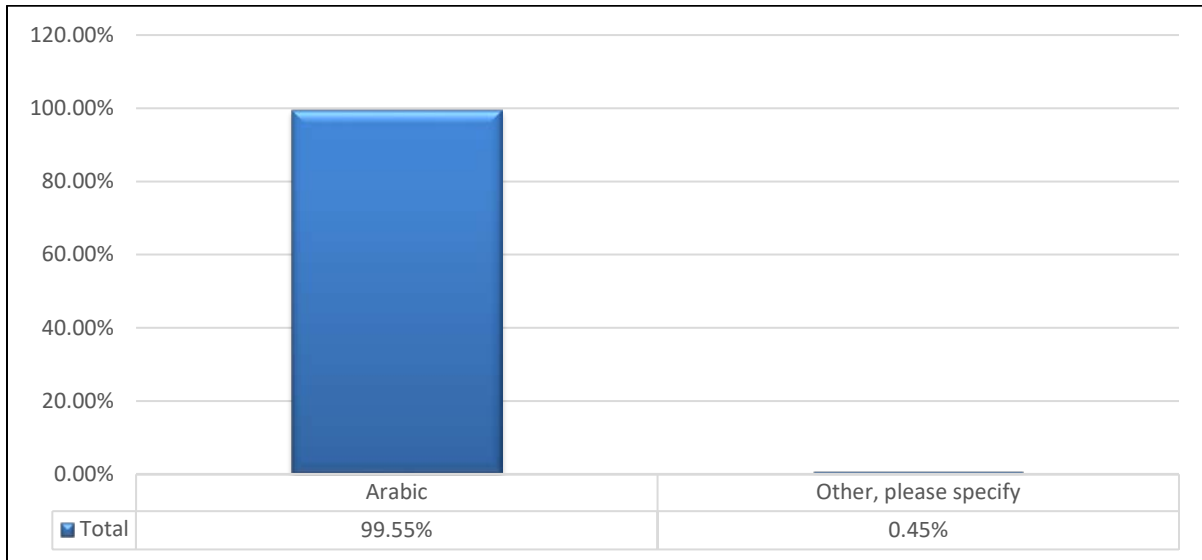
In describing their employment status at the time of the interviews a substantial percentage (33%) indicated they were students and not working and 12% indicated they were students and looking for employment at that point in time (Table 4.7). Most of those who identified themselves as students were enrolled in language classes. Only 2% of those who self-identified as students indicated they were working part time. Of the remaining participants in the survey 26% indicated they were unemployed and not looking for work, and 11% indicated they were unemployed and looking for work. About 5% were employed either on a part time (3%) or full time (2%) basis. Another group of respondents (10%) indicated current employment status as homemaker. The remaining few indicated they were employed either on a full time or part time basis.

Table 4. 7: Employment Status, Saskatchewan, 2017



As shown in Table 4.8, almost all Syrian refugees interviewed in Saskatchewan indicated Arabic as the language they most often spoke at home (99.6%).

Table 4. 8: Languages Spoken, Saskatchewan, 2017



4.2.2. Housing Conditions

Almost all the Syrian refugee arrivals (91%) stayed in hotels for some period of time upon their arrival to Saskatchewan. There was, however, significant variation by city. Table 4.9 shows the differences by city of destination. Almost all those refugees destined to Moose Jaw (100%), Prince Albert (94%) and Saskatoon (99%) spent some period of time in a hotel. A smaller, but not so insignificant number (80%) stayed in a hotel in Regina.

Table 4. 9: Percentage Staying in Hotels by City of Residence, Saskatchewan, 2017

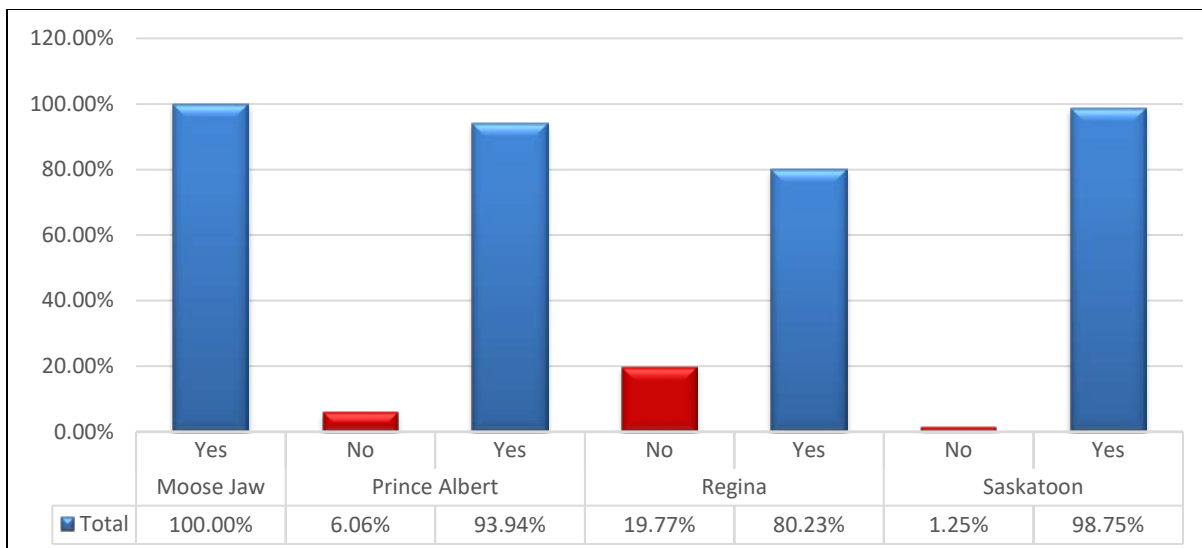
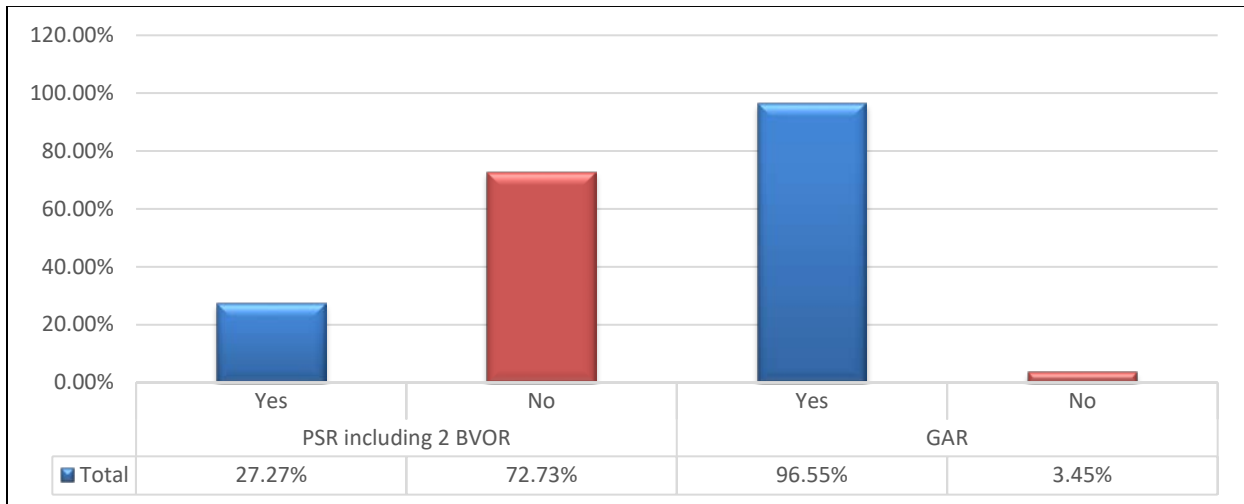


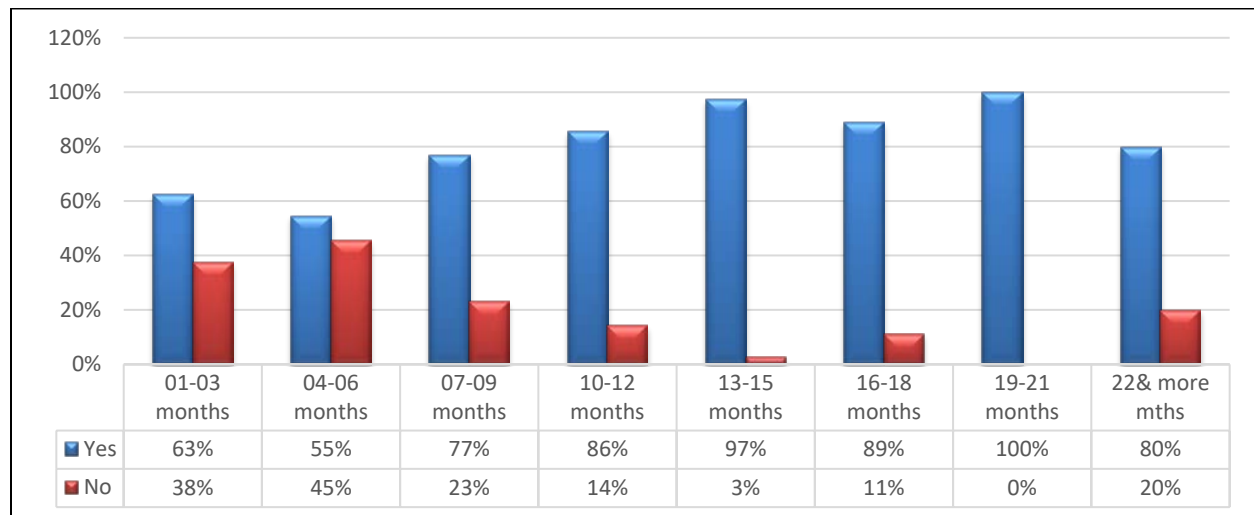
Table 4.10 shows that the vast majority of those interviewed in Saskatchewan were staying at hotels. The main reason for this is that in Saskatchewan GARs greatly outnumbered PSRs. The general practice is for GARS to stay in hotels until they are in other types of transitional or permanent housing. By contrast, during the intake of Syrian refugees most PSRs arrived in accommodation in apartment buildings or houses that had been pre-arranged by their sponsors.

Table 4. 10: Percentage Staying in Hotels by Entrance Category, Saskatchewan, 2017



Like the other provinces, the GARs who arrived in Saskatchewan in the fall of 2015 and early 2016, were most likely to be temporarily housed in hotels. As Table 4.11 shows, these are the groups most likely to stay in this type of temporary accommodation. Almost all the early arrivals stayed in hotels. The more recent arrivals, however, are less likely to stay in a hotel (55-63% among those six months or less in Saskatchewan compared to 100% among the fall 2015 arrivals).

Table 4. 11: Percentage Staying in Hotels by Duration in Canada, Saskatchewan, 2017



The average number of days the new Syrian arrivals stayed in hotels was just under 18 days, a bit longer than their counterparts in Alberta.⁸ Much like their counterparts in Alberta, the majority (71%) of Syrians in Saskatchewan were satisfied or very satisfied with their hotel stay.⁹ Only 12.5% of those who stayed in a hotel were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. The reasons they gave for being dissatisfied were similar to those in other provinces. The biggest challenges were the size of the room and having to share with many people for weeks at a time. It was particularly difficult for families with large numbers of children. One respondent indicated that they “thanked God for being in Regina” and were glad to be safe. Another respondent indicated at first, she cried, but then she realized she was safe. A few of the families expressed concern about whether the food was halal. One family was disappointed when they asked for Syrian food but were given Greek food instead. A few families felt they did not have enough food to feed their children while they stayed at the hotel. Hotel staff was rated as friendly and helpful, even when communication was difficult. The settlement service workers who met with the families at the hotel were also described as being extremely helpful and patient.

Not surprisingly, all the participants in our study were currently renting their accommodation in Saskatchewan. In response to the question on whether their current residence met their needs. Two-thirds indicated that it met their needs and one-third indicated that it did not. Those who had children in their households were far more likely to indicate their current house did not meet their needs (32%) compared to those without children (11%).¹⁰

Table 4.12 shows a link between the number of months in the country and satisfaction with current accommodation. The most recent arrivals (those in Canada 6 months or less) were the

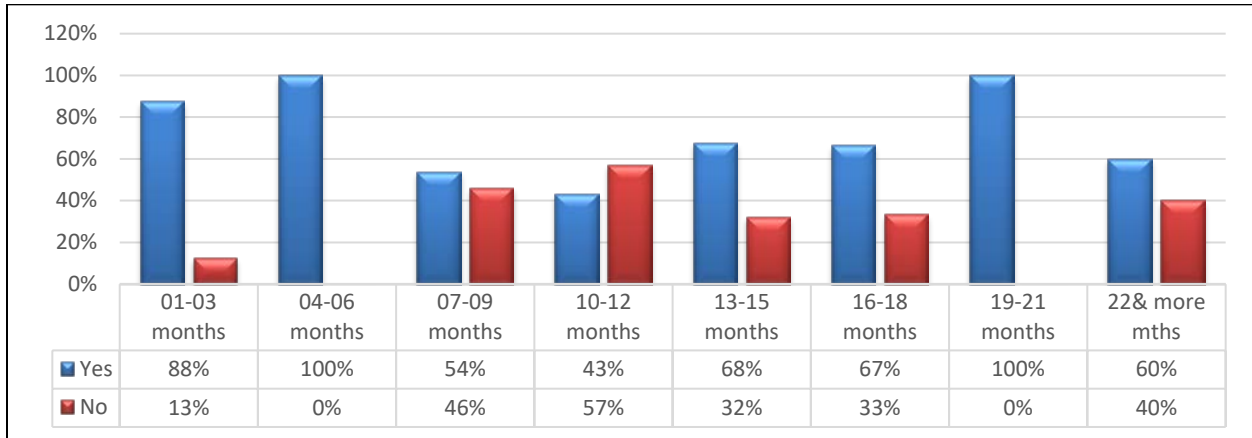
⁸ Table not shown.

⁹ Table not shown.

¹⁰ Table not shown.

most satisfied with their current accommodation. Those who had resided in Canada for 7 to 12 months were the least satisfied with their current housing conditions.

Table 4. 12: Does Housing meet your Needs? By Duration of Stay, Saskatchewan, 2017



City of residence does have some effect on satisfaction with current housing situation. Table 4.13 shows the greatest proportion of Syrians living in Regina (80%), Moose Jaw (78%) and Saskatoon (70%) felt that that their current housing situation met their needs. By contrast, only 27% of those living in Prince Albert felt that it met their needs.

Table 4. 13: Does Housing meet your Needs? by City of Residence, Saskatchewan, 2017

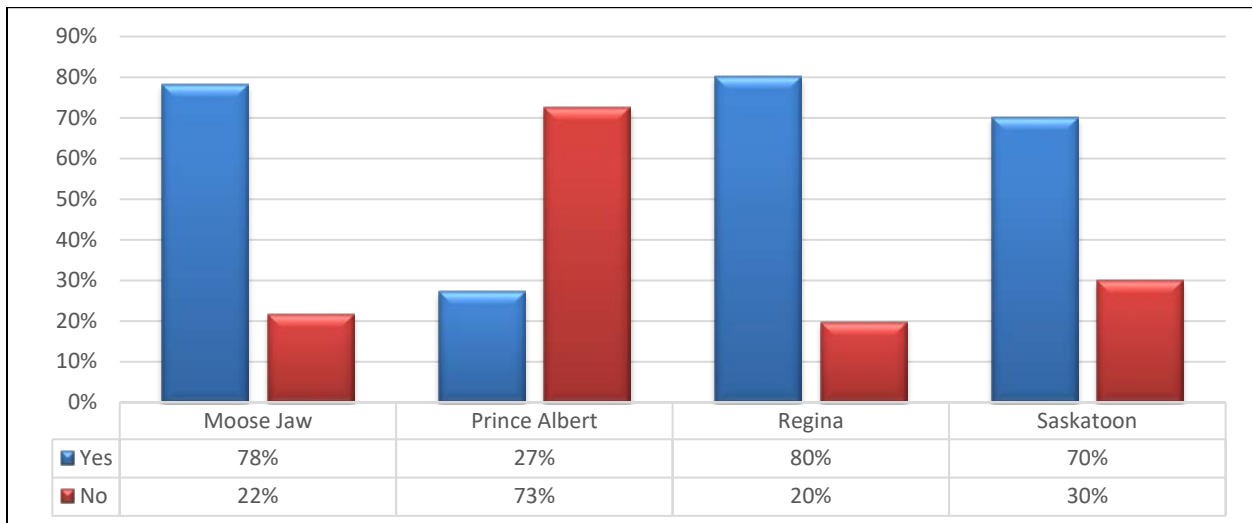
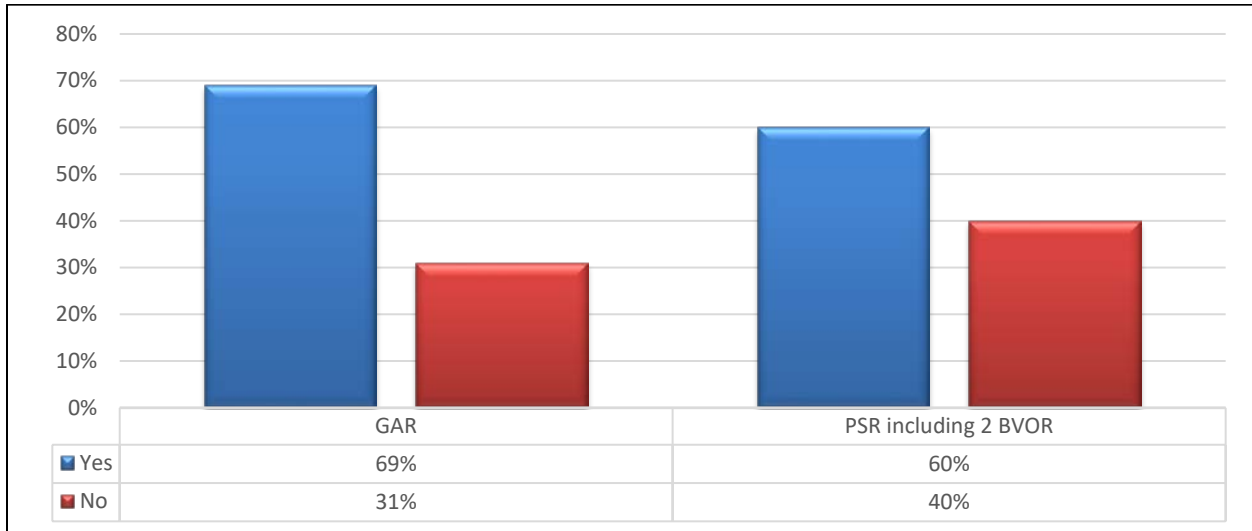


Table 4.14 shows satisfaction with current accommodation comparing GARs and PSRs in Saskatchewan. There were no significant differences between the two groups.¹¹

Table 4. 14: Does Housing meet your Needs? by Entrance Category, Saskatchewan, 2017



When asked to specify what was wrong with their current housing, seven participants indicated bedbugs or mice. About 15% indicated their current housing was too small to accommodate their family. Others were concerned about the distance from schools and the lack of appropriate and safe places to play. One family said they were having “troubles” with other Syrians in their apartment block. Another 15% worried that their house was too expensive for them. About 5% of the participants indicated that heating in their house was not adequate. A couple of the families complained about living in the basement and worried about their security and mentioned that the house brought back bad memories from Syria.

4.2.3. Language

Almost all respondents (97%) indicated that Arabic was their first language, and many did not speak English. Not surprisingly, therefore, the need for English language classes was high. Whereas approximately three-quarters of the survey participants in Saskatchewan were currently enrolled in a language class, approximately one quarter were not.¹² Table 4.15 shows the distribution of those in language classes by city of residence. Of all the Syrian refugee respondents in the four largest cities in Saskatchewan who were interviewed the percentages of those in English language classes were as follows: Moose Jaw (100%), Prince Albert (100%), Saskatoon (89%), and Regina 52%.

¹¹ Readers are cautioned in drawing any generalizations or conclusions, however, given the small number of PSRs in the Saskatchewan sample.

¹² Table not shown.

Table 4. 15: English Class Attendance by City of Residence, Saskatchewan, 2017

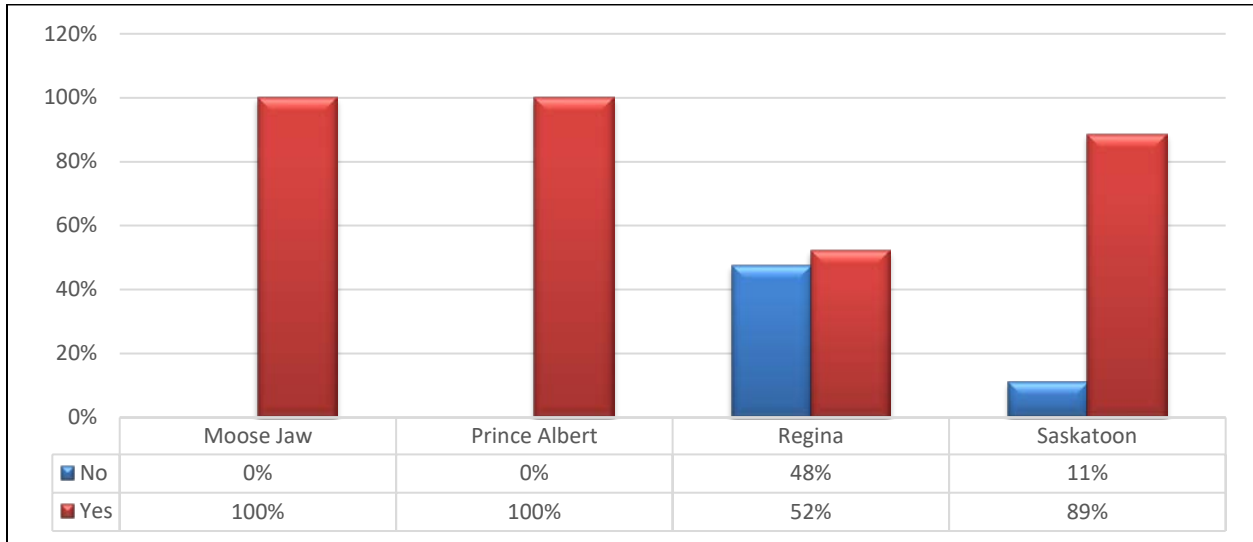
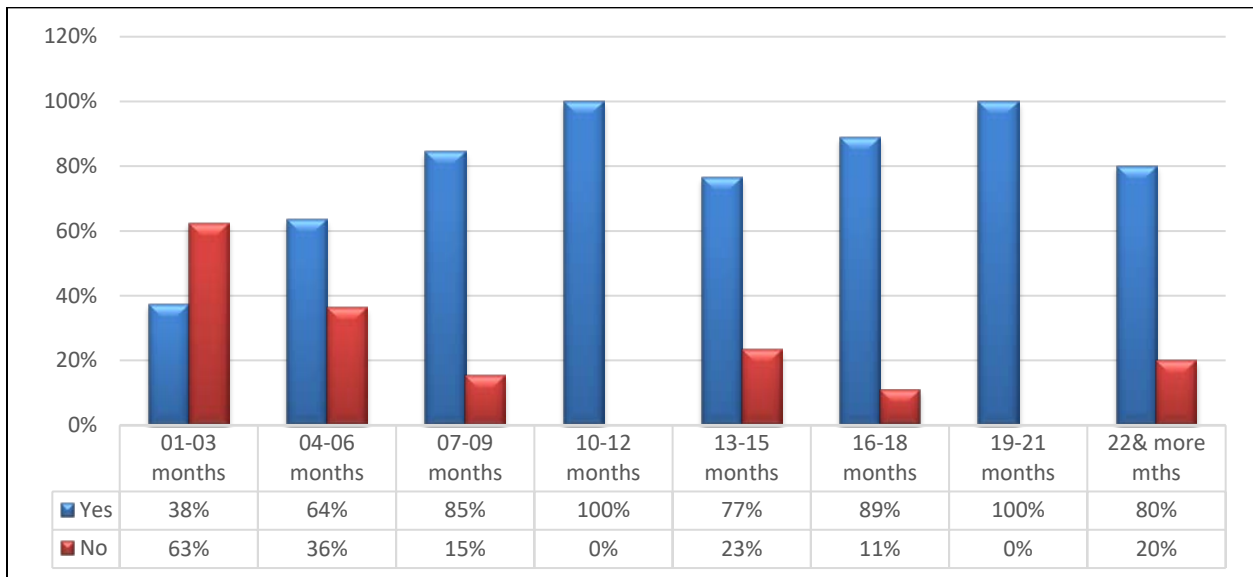


Table 4.16 shows how time in Canada relates to current attendance in a language class. Not surprisingly, those most recently arriving in Saskatchewan are the least likely to be currently enrolled in an English language class. Only one-third of those who had lived in Canada 1-3 months and two-thirds of those who had lived in Canada 4-6 months in Canada were enrolled in an English language classes.

Table 4. 16: English Class Attendance by Duration in Canada, Saskatchewan, 2017



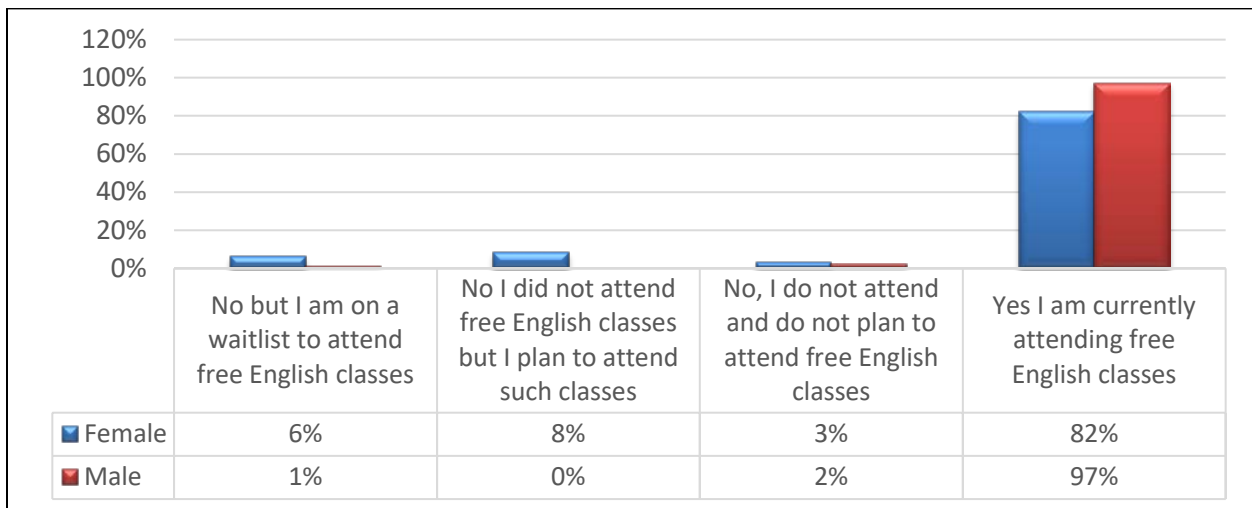
Those who were not currently in an English language class were asked to explain why.¹³ Those who responded provided the following explanations: 4% indicated that they planned to attend

¹³ Table not shown.

classes but were still not on a wait list, 3% indicated they were on a wait list, and 2% indicated they did not plan to attend an English language class. There is not much variation by city of residence.

Although the numbers of people not attending English language classes were small, some differences between the sexes were evident. As Table 4.17 reveals, females (6%) were more likely than males (1%) to be on a waitlist, of these and females were also more likely to plan to attend English language classes (8%) than males (0%).

Table 4. 17: English Class Attendance by Sex, Saskatchewan, 2017



Of the participants who were not currently in English language training, the largest group indicated that having a baby or young child and challenges in getting child care support were the main reasons preventing them from attending. A few indicated they were currently too ill to attend classes, and a small number of people indicated that transportation to language classes was a problem.

All participants were asked to rate their English language ability since they arrived in the province. The objective was to determine whether they believed that their English was improving. Table 4.18 shows the provincial distribution. Nearly half indicated some or significant improvement in their English, and one third indicated a little improvement, and one-quarter indicated very little to no improvement.

Table 4. 18: Self-rated Improvement in English, Saskatchewan, 2017

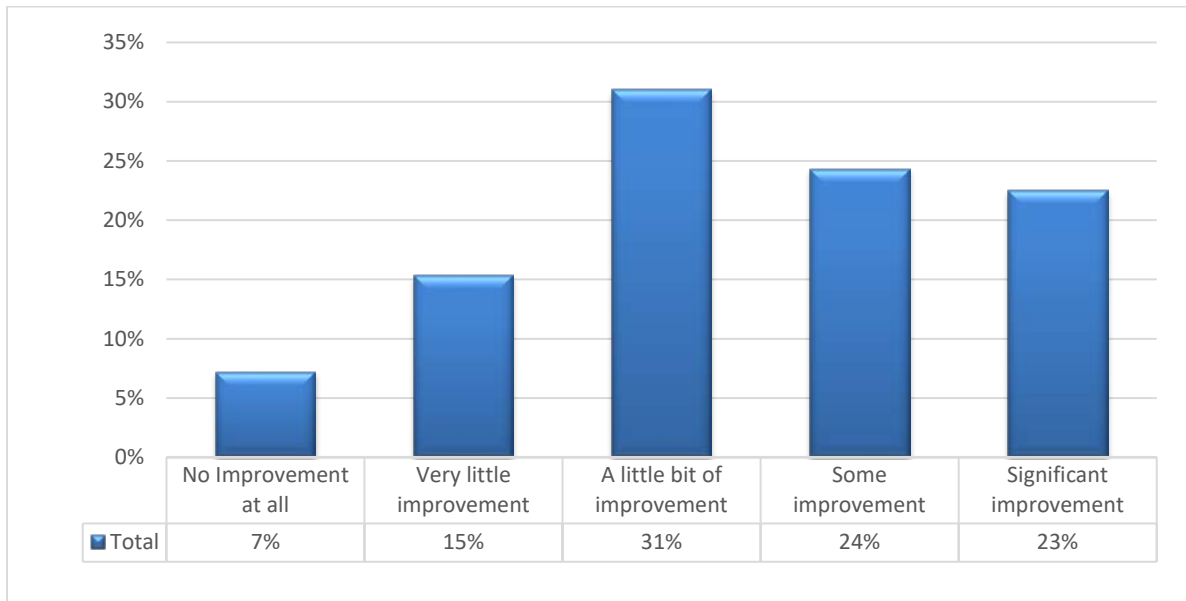
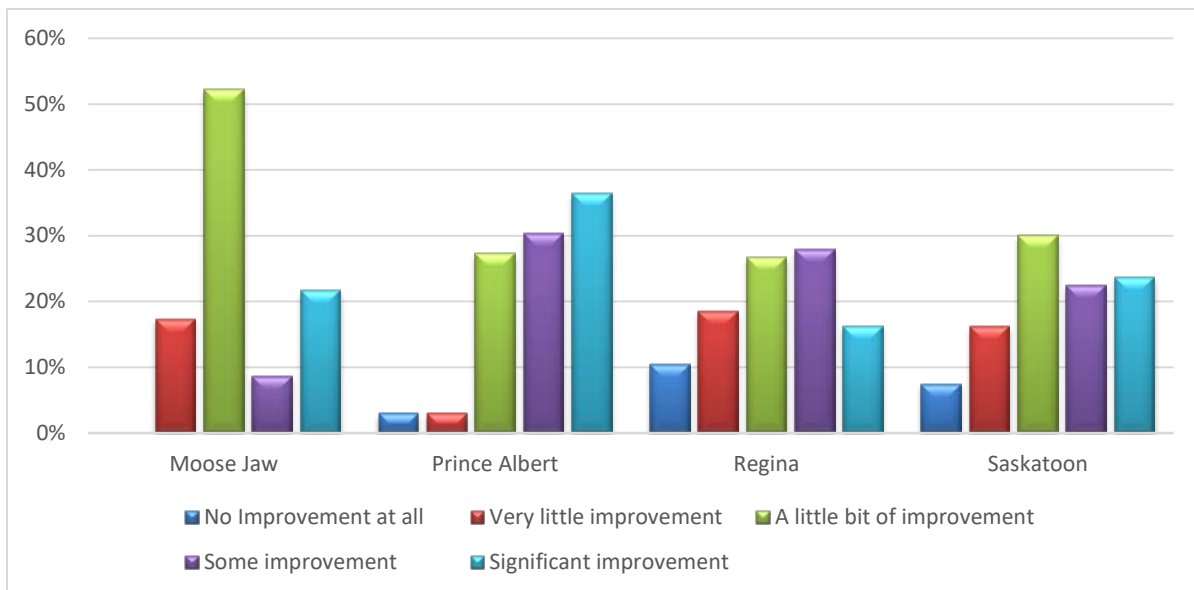


Table 4.19 shows how self-rated improvement in English varies by city of residence. Whereas 52% of participants in Prince Albert indicated their English had improved significantly since arrival, only 25% quarter of participants living in the four other cities indicated that their English had improved.

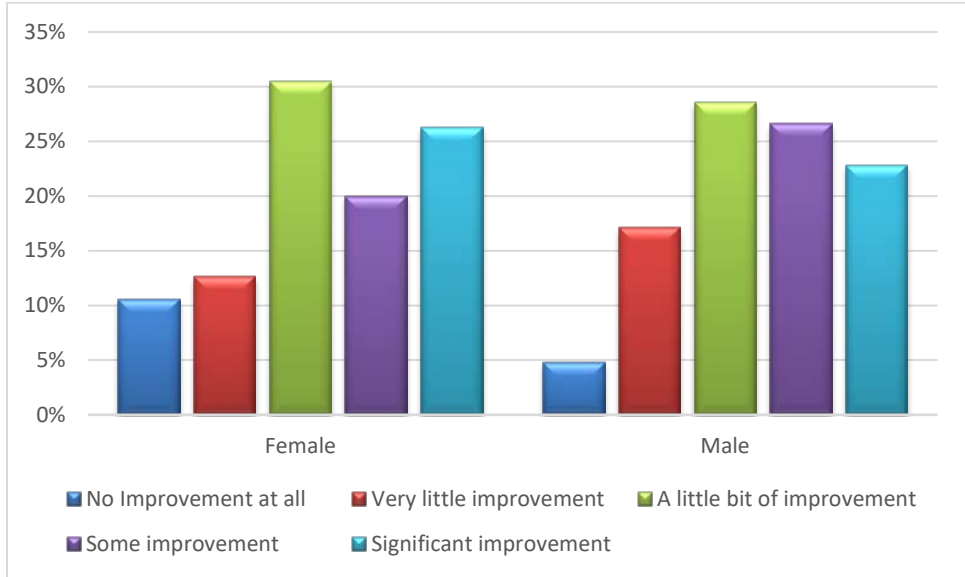
Table 4. 19: Self- rated Improvement in English, by City of Residence, Saskatchewan, 2017



There were minor sex differences in self-rated English language improvement among the participants in Saskatchewan. Table 4.20 shows these findings. Females were slightly more

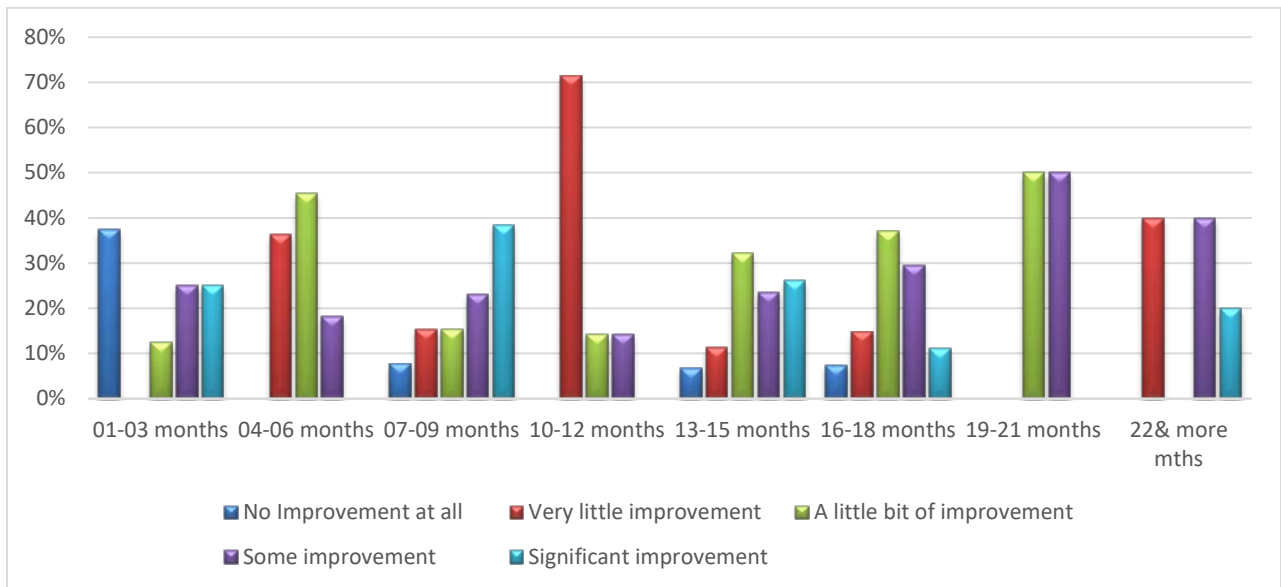
likely to rank their language improvement more positively than males, but the difference was not large.

Table 4. 20: Self- rated Improvement in English, by Sex of Respondents, Saskatchewan, 2017



As time in Canada increases, so does self-identified level of improvement in using the English language. Table 4.21 shows that. Those in Canada for 1.5 years or longer are more likely to indicate significant or some improvement in their English language ability.

Table 4. 21: Self-rated Improvement in English, by Duration of Stay in Canada, Saskatchewan, 2017

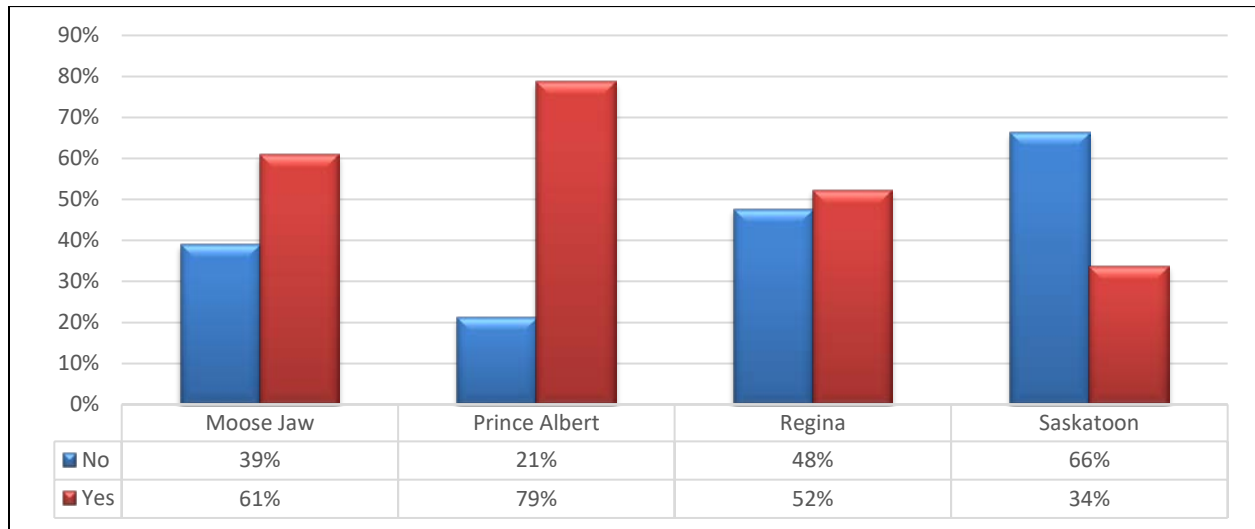


4.2.4. Employment

Not surprisingly, because the vast majority of participants have not been in Canada for very long and are busy with full-time English language training, half of those who participated in the survey indicated they experienced difficulty finding work in Saskatchewan.¹⁴

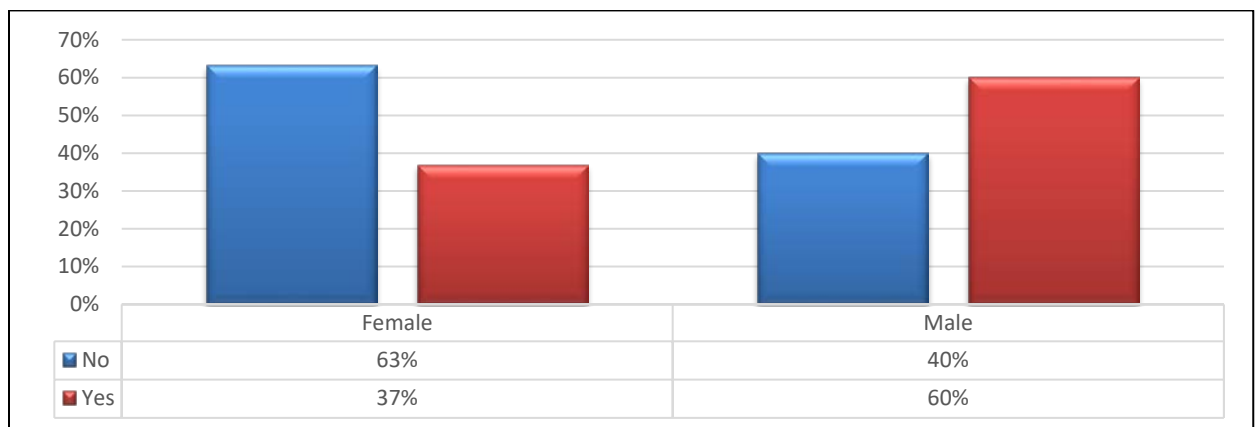
Table 4.22 shows how city of residence differences among those experiencing challenges finding work and those who do not. Nearly 80% of those in Prince Albert and 61% of those in Moose Jaw indicated they had trouble finding work. By contrast only 52% of those living in Regina and 34% of those living in Saskatoon indicated they had difficulty finding work.

Table 4. 22: Difficulties in Finding Work- by City of Residence, Saskatchewan, 2017



The responses of those interviewed indicated that males (60%) are more likely than females (37%) to have difficulty finding work (Table 4.23)

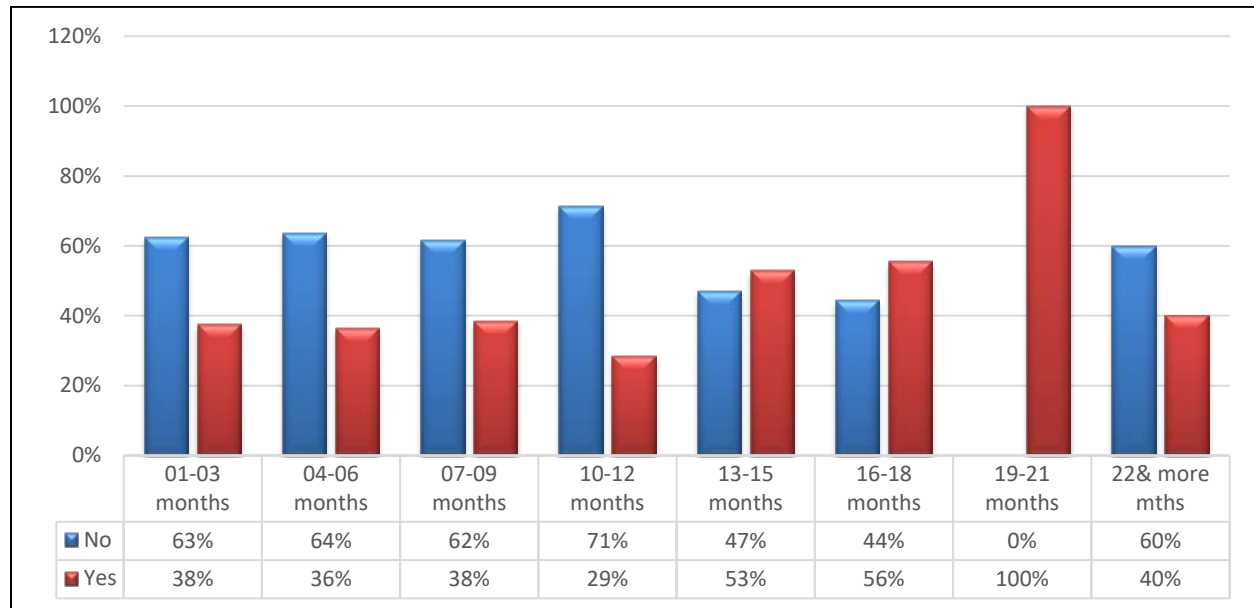
Table 4. 23: Difficulties in Finding Work- by Sex, Saskatchewan, 2017



¹⁴ Table not shown.

As months in Saskatchewan increased, so did the number of participants indicating that they experienced difficulty finding work. By month 13, more people indicated having difficulty finding work than indicating no difficulty. Two years after arrival, however, only 40% indicated experiencing difficulty finding work.

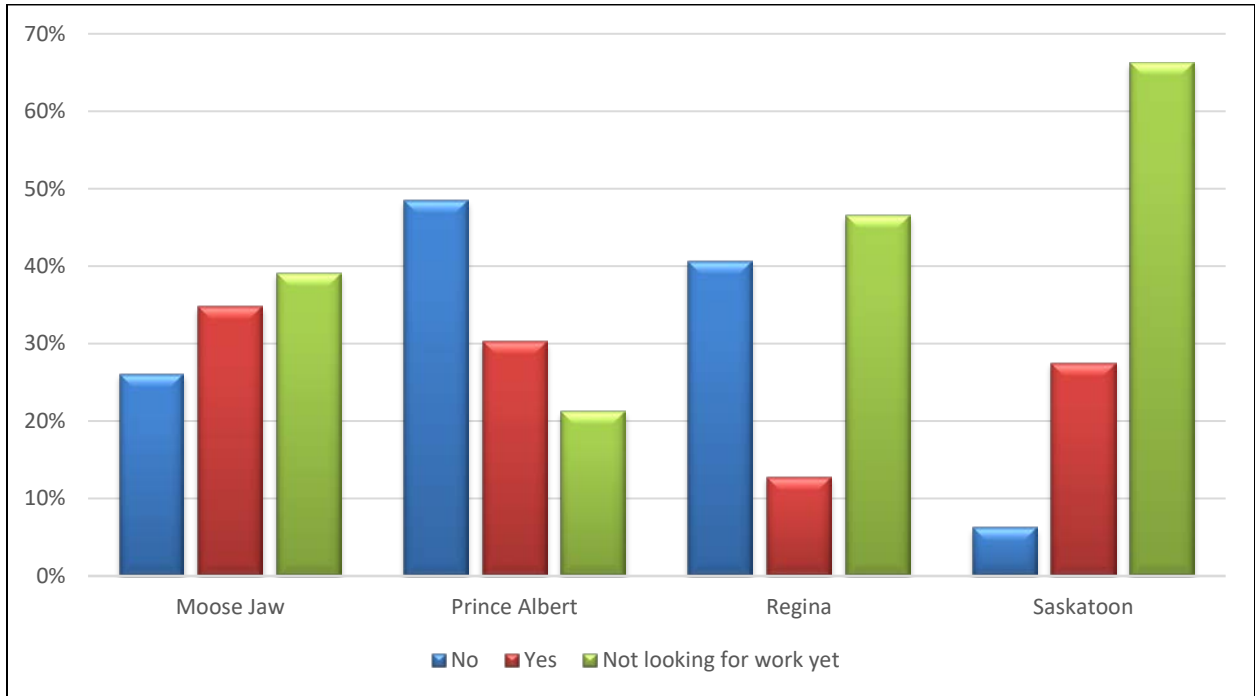
Table 4. 24: Difficulties in Finding Work- by Duration of Stay in Canada, Saskatchewan, 2017



When asked why they were having difficulty, nearly half of the sample indicated language problems. Transportation to the job was another significant barrier for many as was foreign credential recognition. Some indicated that employers would not hire them because they did not have “Canadian” experience. A former restaurant owner in Syria indicated that it would take him a very long time to set up a restaurant in Saskatchewan because of his poor English skills, but also because of his ignorance of Canadian tax and business law. Another participant, however, indicated he was lucky to find a job in a restaurant where they needed an Arabic speaking waiter. A few of the participants were bewildered about how to apply for jobs online. They had very little experience using computers before and the task was very challenging for them.

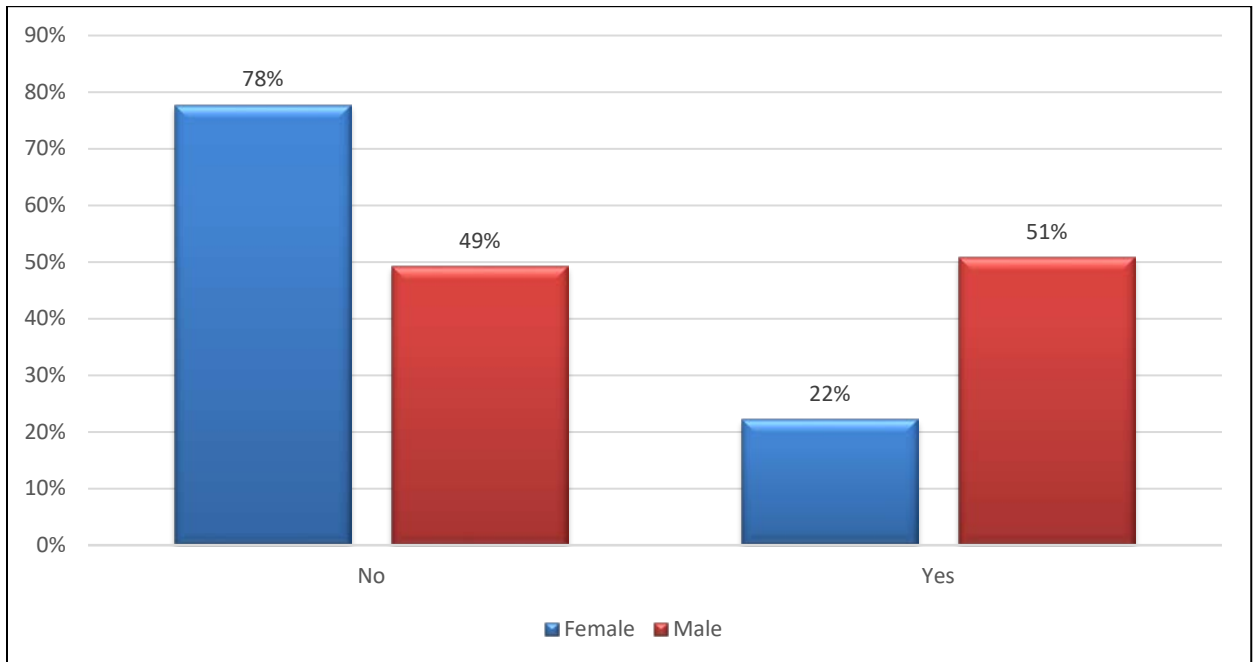
Just over one-quarter of the participants living in Saskatchewan had already used employment services to look for work. Table 4.25 shows the differences by city of residence in using employment search services. Fewer participants in Regina and Saskatoon had used employment services than those living in Moose Jaw or Prince Albert. This was likely more due to ease of access to such services than any differences either in the types or preferences of refugees settling in these communities.

Table 4. 25: Used Employment Services to Find Work by City of Residence, Saskatchewan, 2017



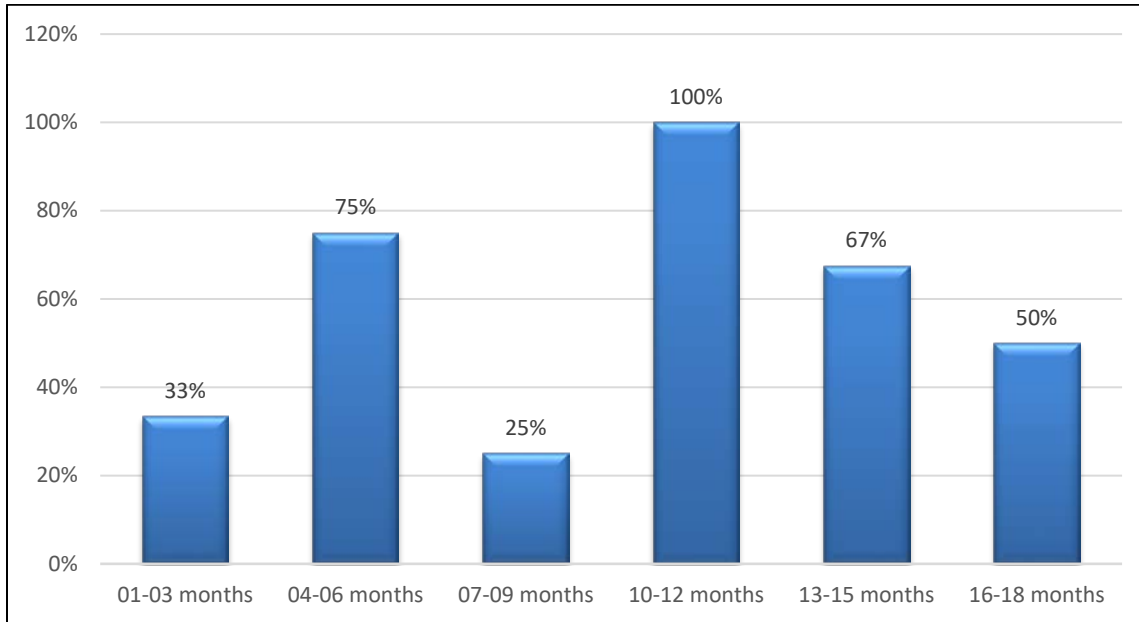
There were clear sex differences in accessing employment services. As Table 4.26 reveals significantly more men (51%) had accessed these services than women (22%) (Table 4.26)

Table 4. 26: Used Employment Services to Find Work by Sex, Saskatchewan, 2017



The responses of those interviewed in Saskatchewan suggests that the period in which employment services were sought by the largest number of Syrians is between their 10th and 12th months in Canada. Table 4.27 shows this distribution.

Table 4. 27: Used Employment Services to Find Work by Duration in Canada, Saskatchewan, 2017



4.3.4. Settlement Service Access

In response to the question of whether they had received settlement services, 75% of the participants indicated they had received settlement services. The fact that 100% did not provide that particular response is a bit perplexing. The reason it is perplexing is that a condition of being selected for the study was to be interviewed by an official of the settlement service provider organization from which refugees received services. All the interviews were conducted by workers at Resettlement Assistance Program agencies either at the agency's office or at the home of the refugees.

In response to the question on where they had received their settlement services, two-thirds indicated receiving such services from an immigrant settlement agency. This is also a perplexing finding given that the participants in this study were supposed to be receiving services from an immigrant settlement agency (and were interviewed by these very agencies). Religious organizations, ethno-cultural associations and libraries were among the other more popular responses to this question. Nearly 10% of the sample indicated they received support services from the United Nations. This suggests that perhaps the interviewers in Saskatchewan were a bit confused about this question, and could also account for the fact that they received such low response rates to this particular question.

Participants were asked to identify the problems for which they needed support services the most. Table 4.28 provides some of the most common responses to this question. Getting more English language classes (66%) and finding child care (61%) were identified as the most common problems for which they needed help. Transportation issues were mentioned by nearly 20% of respondents and lack of services in the community (14%) or lack of information about available services (15%) rounded out the top five. A few participants identified also identified other problems or needs, and they did so without prompting. This included the following: finding a physician, lack of a mosque in their community, lack of and culturally appropriate food, and racial or religious discrimination.

Table 4. 28: Difficulties in Getting Help you Need

Difficulties in Getting Help You Need	
Lack of information about services	15%
Lack of services in your community	14%
Language classes	66%
Lack of childcare	61%
Transportation	19%
Financial difficulties	2%
Finding suitable clothing	3%
Service eligibility	1%

Even though nearly one-third of participants indicated they did not receive settlement services, when asked what prevented them from accessing services, there were very few answers. Less than 5% indicated language barriers, and a small percentage also pointed to challenges of transportation and access to child care.

Finally, in response to the question of what services would have been helpful to receive prior to their arrival to Canada, those interviewed identified several matters listed in Table 4.29. The matters most highly valued by respondents includes: foreign credential assessment (45%), access to language assessment prior to arrival (45%), skills training appropriate for work in Canada (29%), better orientation to Canadian culture (26%), better orientation to Canadian economy (20%), connections with employers (16%), and translation of documents (14%). Interestingly, 7% indicated they wished they had their teeth fixed prior to coming to Canada. This was interesting because some participants complained that the cost of dental care in Canada was too high and that they could have had it done cheaper overseas.

Table 4. 29: Beneficial Services Prior to Arrival in Canada, Saskatchewan, 2017

Beneficial Services prior to Arrival in Canada, Saskatchewan 2017	
Assessment of foreign credentials	45%
Skills training	29%
Connections with employers	16%
Orientation to the Canadian economy	20%
Language assessment	45%
Orientation to Canadian culture	26%
Help obtaining housing	6%
Translation of documents	14%
Help developing a pre-departure plan	9%
Dental help	7%
Help getting correct spelling of name	0%

Chapter 5 concludes with an examination of the findings from the participants in Manitoba.

Chapter 5: Syrians in Manitoba

5.1. INTRODUCTION

5.1.1. Objective of Chapter

The objective in this chapter is to provide an overview of the data collected from Syrian refugees who were in Manitoba when the survey was administered. As noted in Chapter 2, a total of 146 refugees participated in the survey in Manitoba. Of these 98% were GARs, and the remaining 2% reported being BVORs and province-sponsored refugees. Moreover, the respondents lived either in Winnipeg (82%) or Brandon (18%).

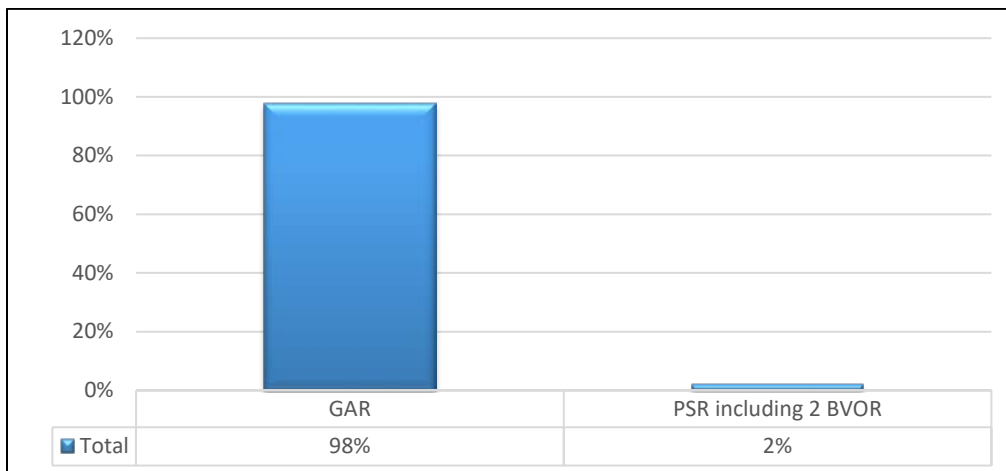
5.1.2. Organization of Chapter

The overview of the survey data and commentary related to it is organized according to the major headings of the survey instrument, namely: (a) demographic profile of Syrian refugee respondents; (b) housing conditions, (c) language knowledge, (d) employment, and (e) settlement service use.

5.2. DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 5.1 shows the highest number of respondents in Manitoba were Government Sponsored Refugees (GARS) (98%). Also, the remaining 2% were privately sponsored refugees and two reported to be Blended Visa Office Refugees (BVOR)¹⁵.

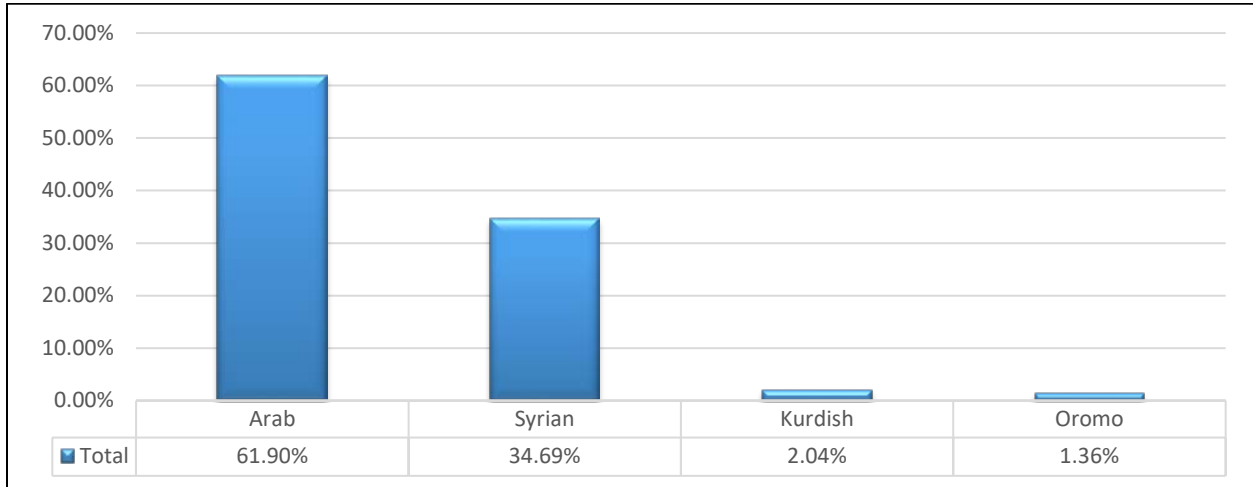
Table 5. 1: Government Assisted Refugees and Privately Sponsored Refugees, Manitoba, 2017



¹⁵ Like the results for Saskatchewan, we were unable to analyze the PSRs and BVORs separately due to the very small numbers of Syrians in these groups.

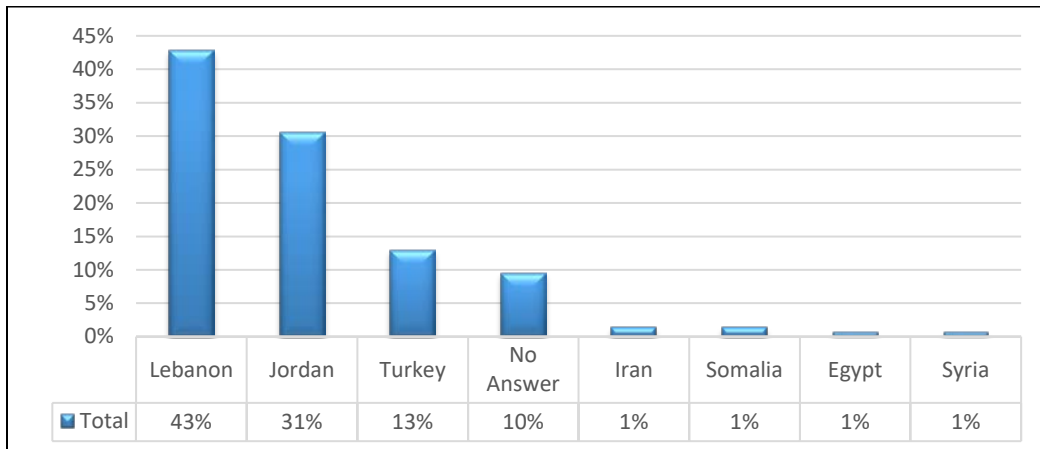
In terms of ethnicity (table 5.2), most of the Syrians in Manitoba were identified as Arabic (61.90%). Another 34.69% identified as Syrian. Less than 4% were identified as Kurdish (2%) and Oromo (1.36%).

Table 5. 2: Ethnic Origin, Manitoba, 2017



Before arriving to Canada, the highest percentages of Syrian refugees interviewed were living in Lebanon (43%) and Jordan (31%) as shown in Table 5.3. Only 13% resided in Turkey. A few others came from Iran, Somalia¹⁶, Egypt and Syria.

Table 5. 3: Country of Origin, Manitoba, 2017



Sixty seven percent of the participants in the study were male and 33% were female. The highest number of Syrian refugees who arrived in Manitoba were married (88%). Only 10% were single or never married. A few were widowed or divorced (Table 5.4).

¹⁶ Oromo ethnicity Syrians originate from Somalia.

Table 5. 4: Marital Status, Manitoba, 2017

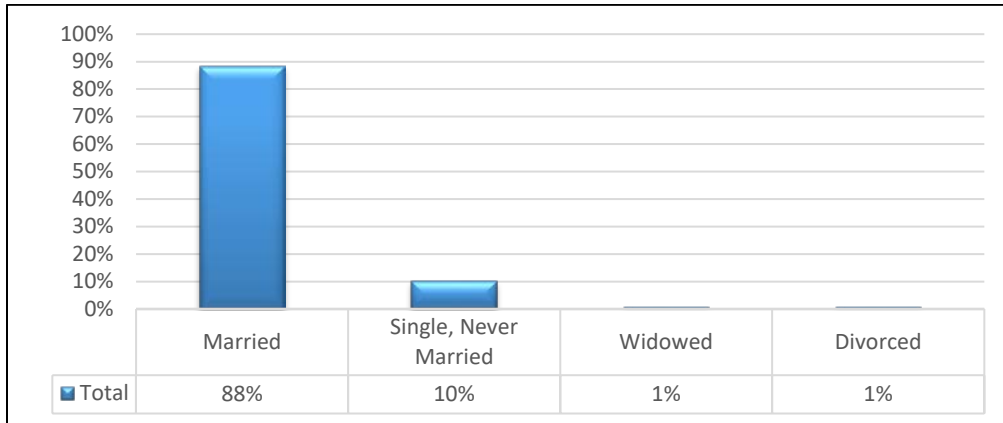


Table 5.5 reveals that of all Syrian refugees interviewed the greatest percentage lived in Winnipeg (82%). The rest lived in Brandon (18%).

Table 5. 5: Place of Residence, Manitoba, 2017

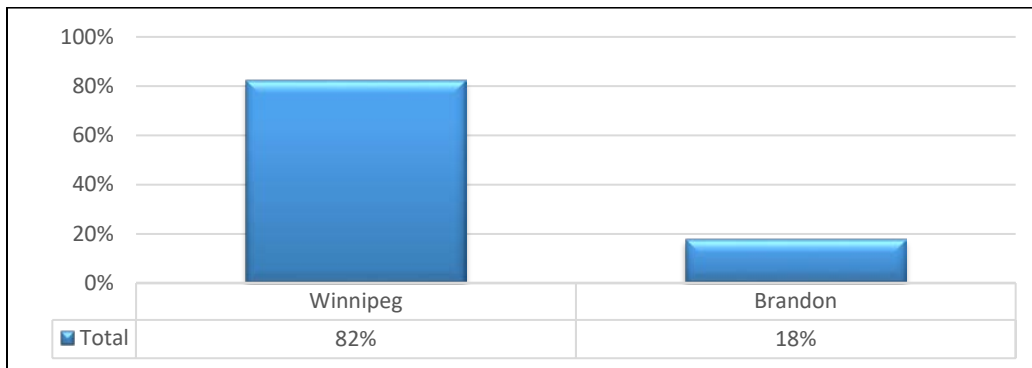


Table 5.6 reveals that only 8% had no formal education. Those who reported middle school (36.73%) and primary school (31.29%) as their highest level of education made up the greatest percentage. This was followed by the approximately 15% with a high school diploma. A small percentage indicated having obtained a university undergraduate degree (4.76%) or a college diploma (2.72%). A few reported having some university or some college or vocational training.

Table 5. 6: Highest Level of Education, Manitoba, 2017

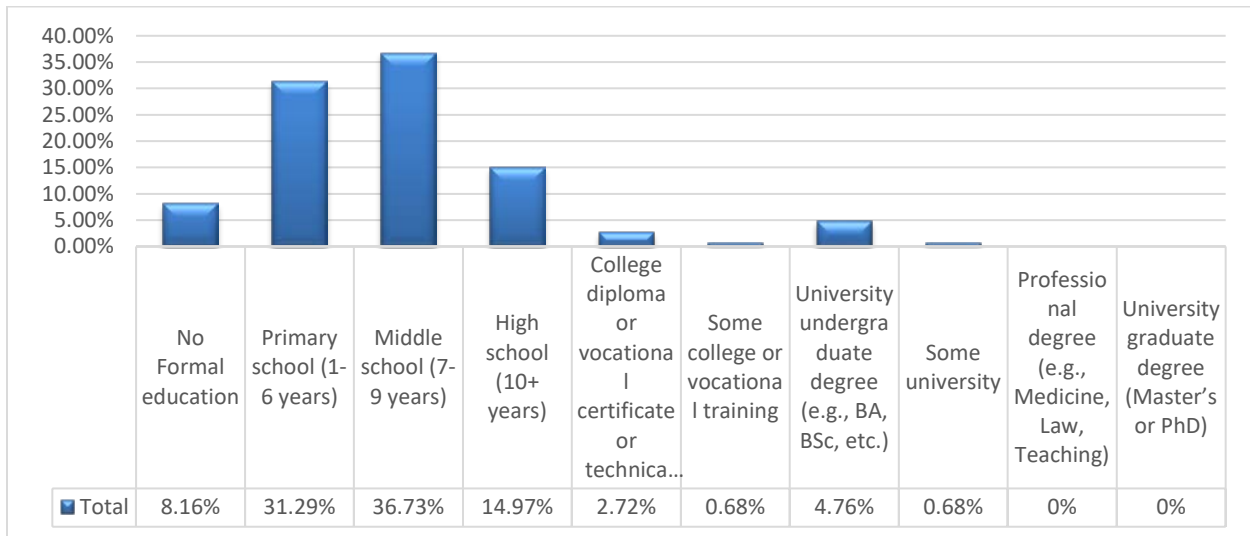
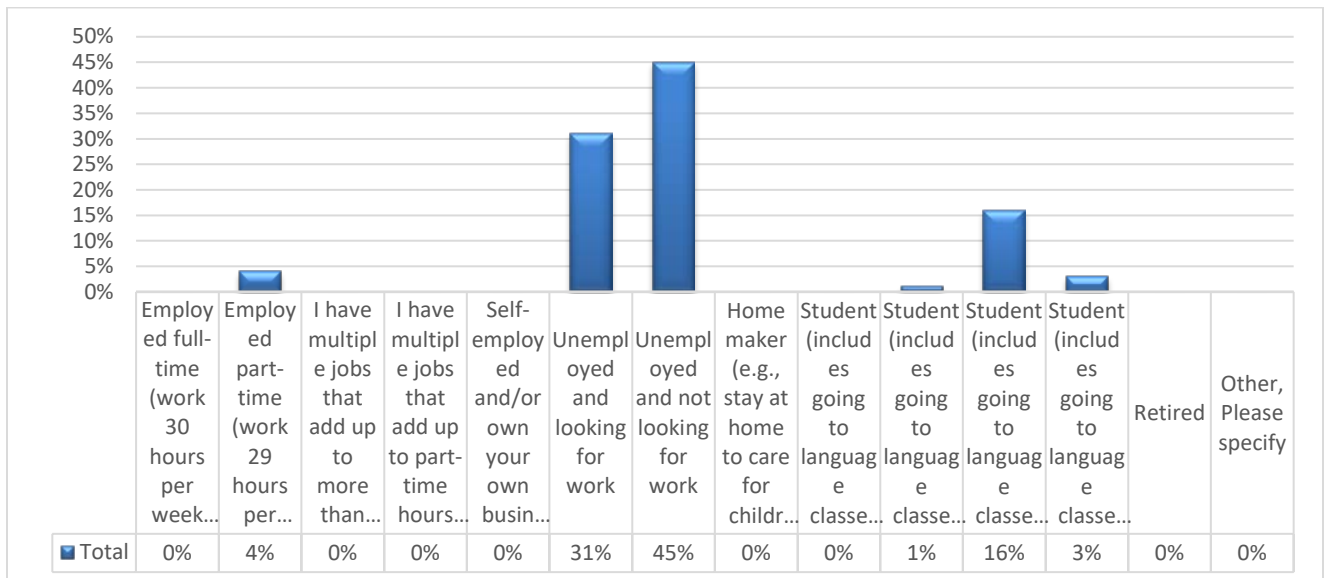


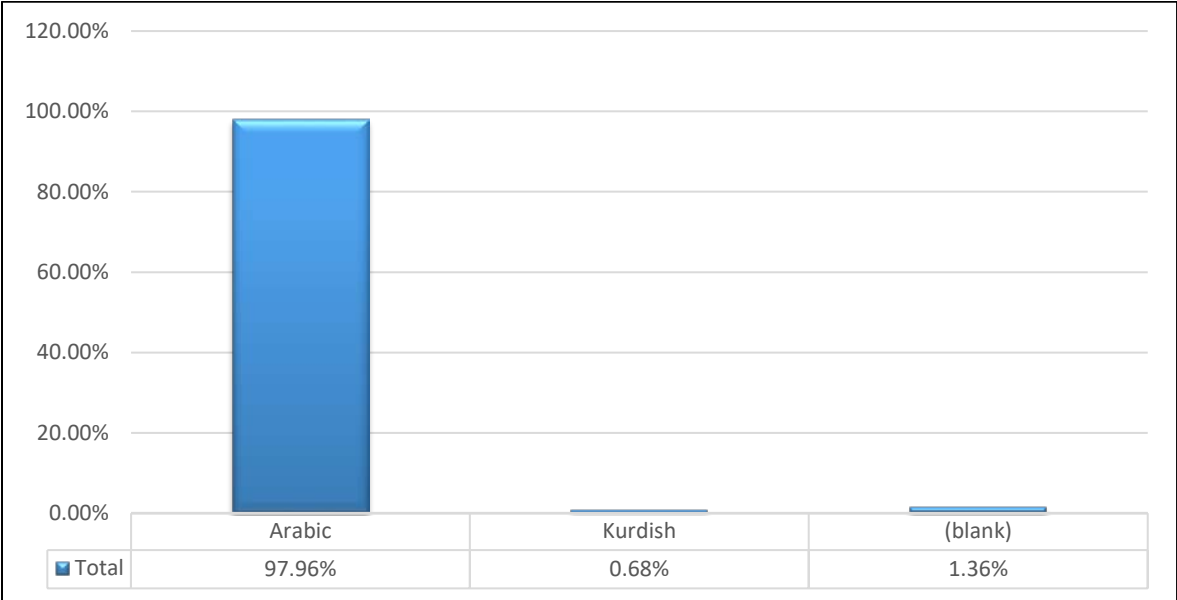
Table 5.7 reveals that three-quarters of Syrian refugees interviewed in Manitoba were unemployed with a majority not looking for work (45%), and a smaller percentage were looking for work (31%). However, only 4% were employed part time. That table also reveals that of 23% of respondents indicated they were students and that, the majority of those who identified themselves as students (16%) were not working, only 3% were looking for a job, and 1% had a part time job.

Table 5. 7: Employment Status, Manitoba, 2017



As shown in Table 5.8, most of the Syrian refugees interviewed in Manitoba indicated that Arabic was their first language and the language spoken at home (97.96%), and a few indicated that it was Kurdish (0.68%).

Table 5. 8: Languages Spoken, Manitoba, 2017



5.3. HOUSING CONDITIONS

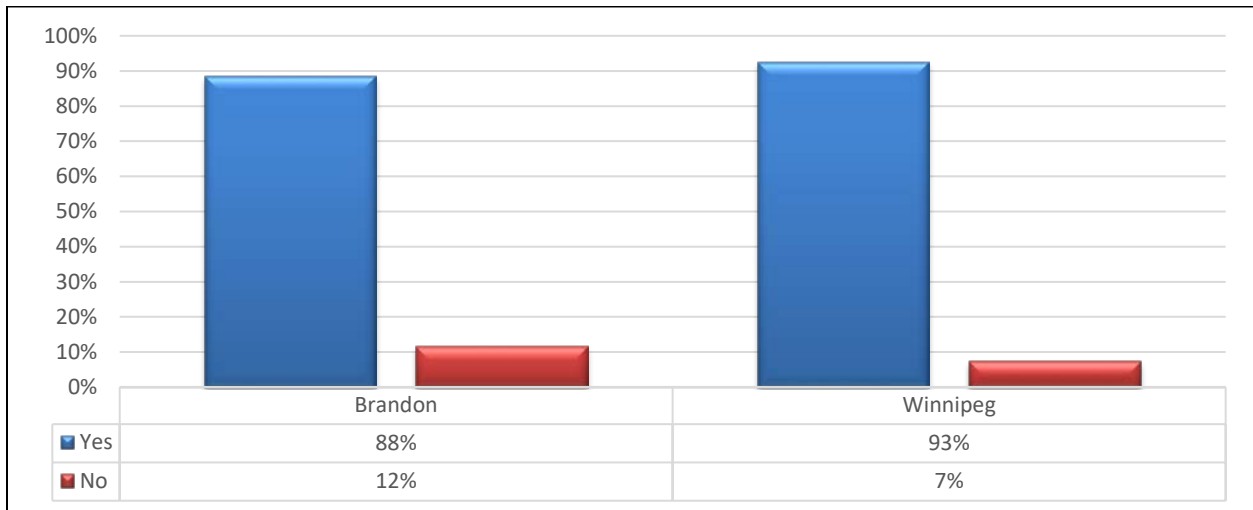
Much of the initial press coverage of the new Syrian refugee arrivals to Canada focused on the long waits many of them had to endure before being placed into permanent, rather than transitional, housing. Waiting for permanent housing delays settlement, employment and language training for all refugees. Parents cannot start English language training as their classes are sometimes tied to the neighbourhoods where they live. Children cannot start school as their school districts are also tied to neighbourhoods. Syrians going to Manitoba, however, were in a better situation than most. According to media reports and correspondence with the RAP service providers and other immigrant settlement organizations in the province, none of them had to stay in hotel accommodation¹⁷.

Like their counterparts in Alberta and Saskatchewan, over 90% of Syrian refugees rent their accommodation.¹⁸ Table 5.9 shows the distribution of renters for Winnipeg and Brandon.

¹⁷ Many of the GARs, however, stayed at reception centres such as Welcome Place until permanent accommodation could be located.

¹⁸ Table not shown.

Table 5. 9: Percentage Renting their House- by City of Residence, Manitoba, 2017



The participants were then asked about the appropriateness of their current accommodation. Most of the participants (82%) indicated that their housing situation meets their needs. Those with children (22%) were slightly more likely than those without children (18%) to indicate that their housing situation does not meet their needs.¹⁹ Table 5.10 shows some slight differences in assessment of housing situation by time in Canada, but these differences are not very large except for those arriving 7 to 9 months earlier. Among that subgroup 50% of respondents indicated they were unhappy with their housing situation.

¹⁹ Table not shown.

Table 5. 10: Does Housing meet your Needs? By Duration of Stay in Canada, Manitoba, 2017

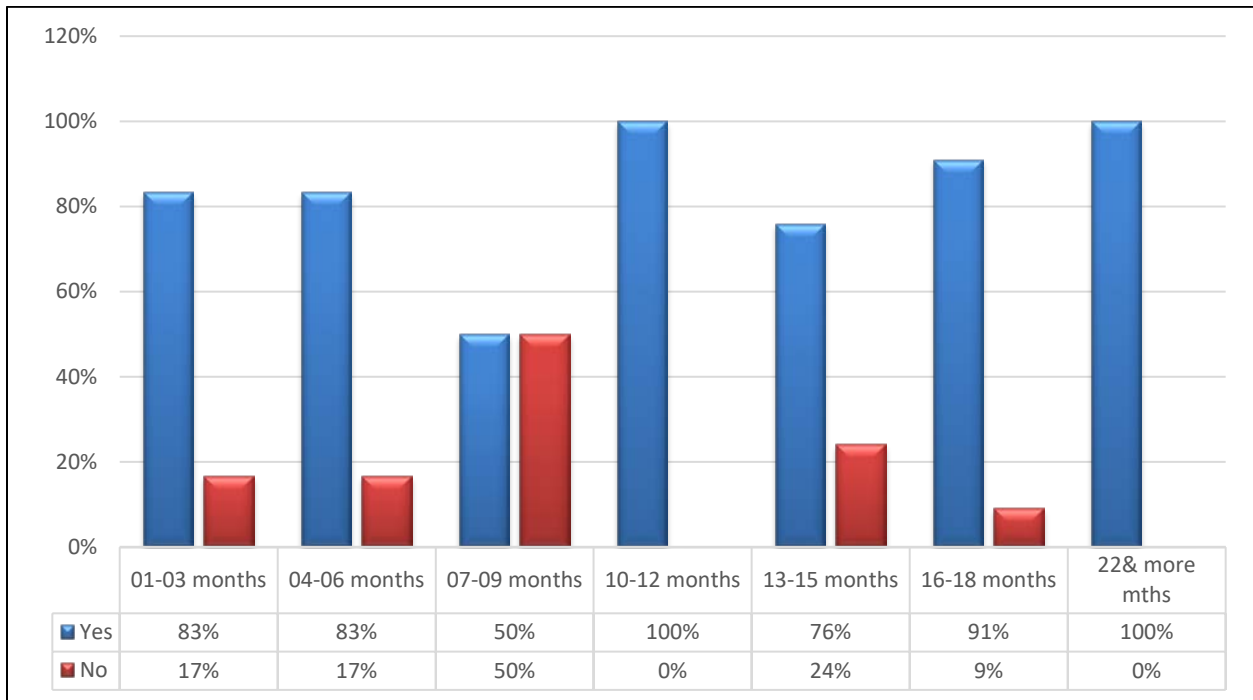
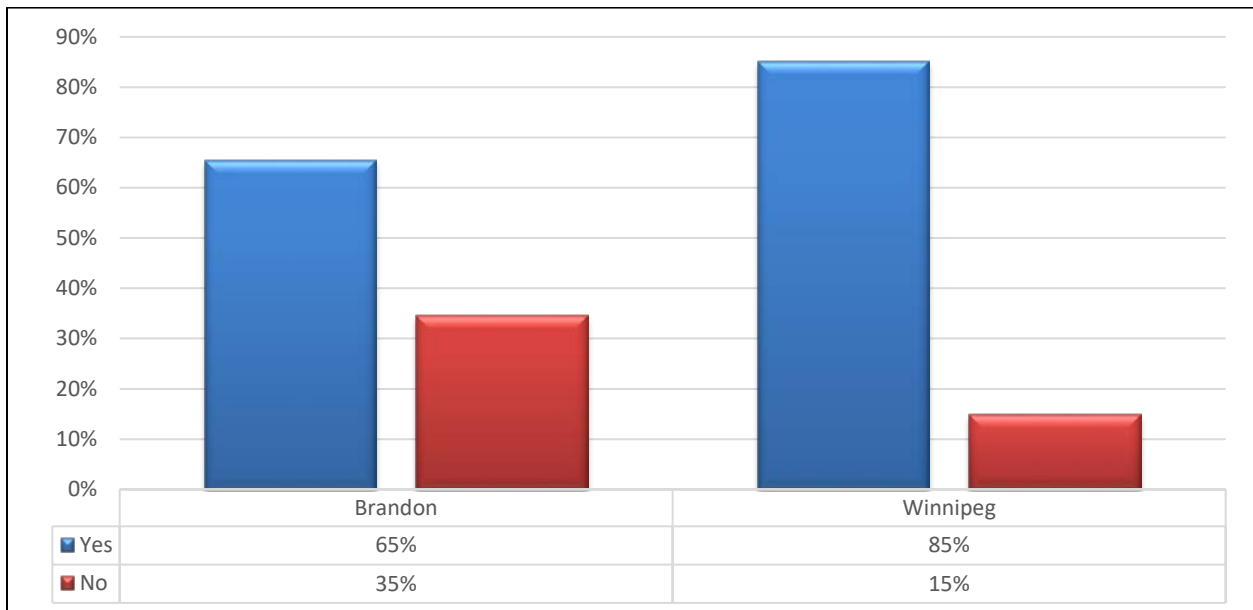


Table 5.11 shows that the respondents living in Winnipeg (85%) were more positive about their assessment of their housing situation than their counterparts in Brandon (65%).

Table 5. 11: Does Housing meet your Needs? by City of Residence, Manitoba, 2017



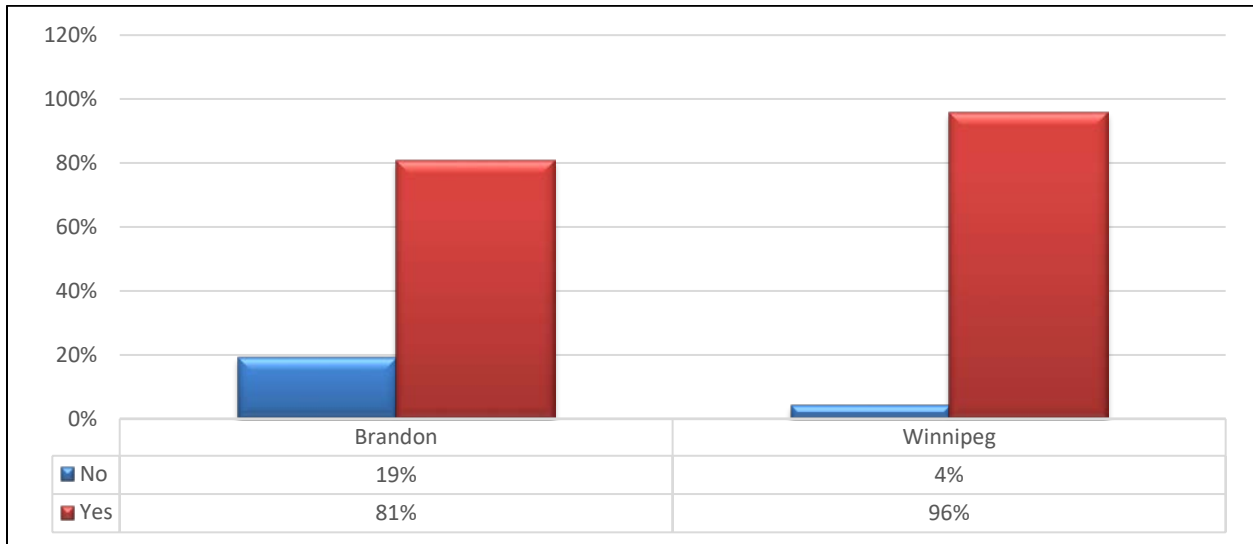
Respondents had several notable complaints regarding their housing situation. Whereas 10% felt that their accommodation was too expensive, 7% felt it was too small. A small number of

participants indicated their house was too far away from school and three participants indicated that their house was situated in a neighbourhood they perceived to be unsafe. The respondents in Manitoba cited fewer complaints regarding their housing than their counterparts in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

5.4. LANGUAGE

Nearly all respondents to the survey in Manitoba (99%) indicated that Arabic is their first language (Table 5.12). The majority (93%) of those respondents indicated that they had accessed English language training since their arrival to Canada. Those living in Brandon (19%) were more likely not to attend an English language class at that point in time than those living in Winnipeg (4%)²⁰.

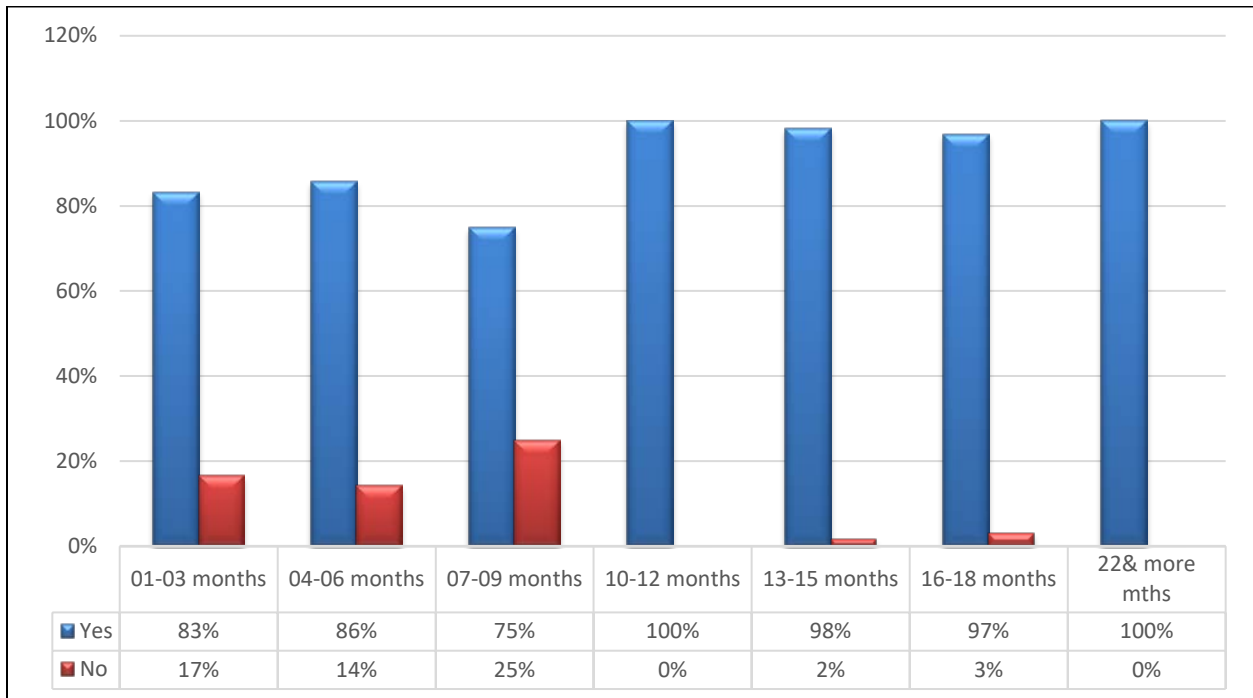
Table 5. 12: English Class Attendance by City of Residence, Manitoba, 2017



An analysis of the responses of the refugees interviewed in Manitoba also reveals a correlation between length of time in Canada and the enrollment in English language classes. Table 5.13, which shows the distribution, reveals that by the tenth month of residence in Manitoba, virtually all refugees interviewed had been enrolled in at least one English language class.

²⁰ Readers should note that of the two RAP providers in Winnipeg, one is Accueil francophone. Respondents were specifically asked if they were attending English and/or French language classes. The findings for Manitoba indicate that they are attending English language classes. All of the surveys completed by Accueil francophone were conducted in Arabic.

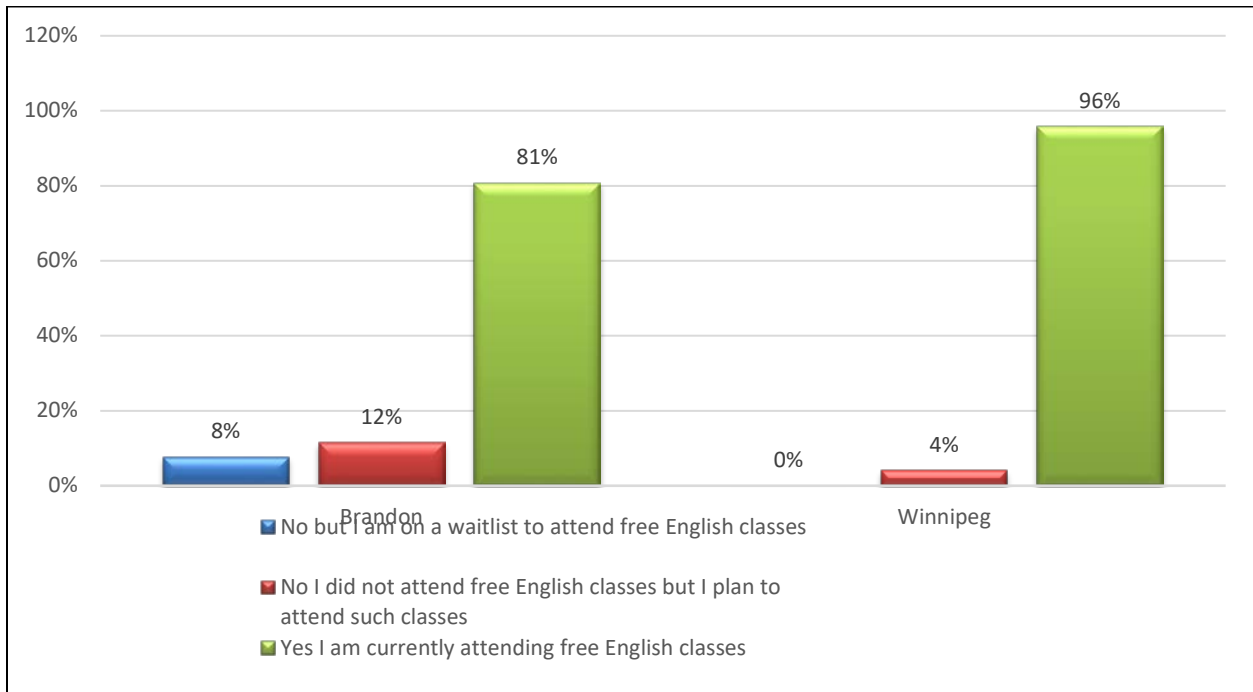
Table 5. 13: English Class Attendance by Duration of Stay in Canada, Manitoba, 2017



Whereas 5% of the Syrians interviewed in Manitoba were in the waiting list to enter English language training, just 1% was intending on enrolling soon.

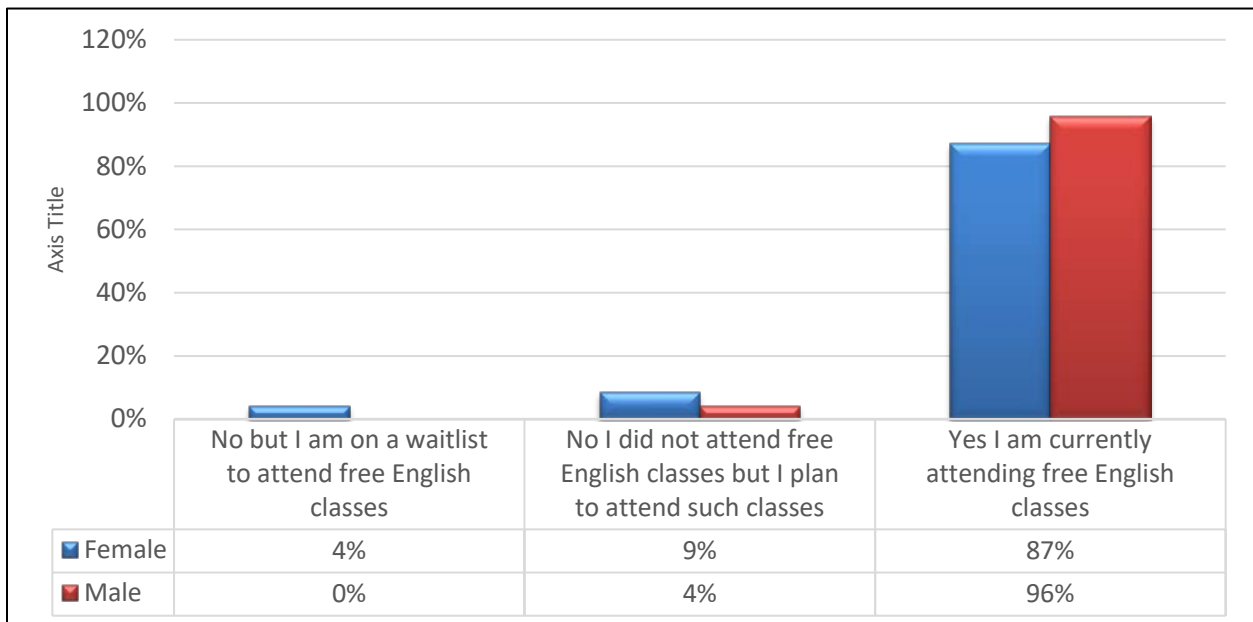
There were some differences between the respondents in Brandon and Winnipeg as shown in Table 5.14. In Brandon, 8% of the respondents were currently on a wait list for English language classes, and another 12% had intended on enrolling in English language classes.

Table 5. 14: English Class Attendance by City of Residence, Manitoba, 2017



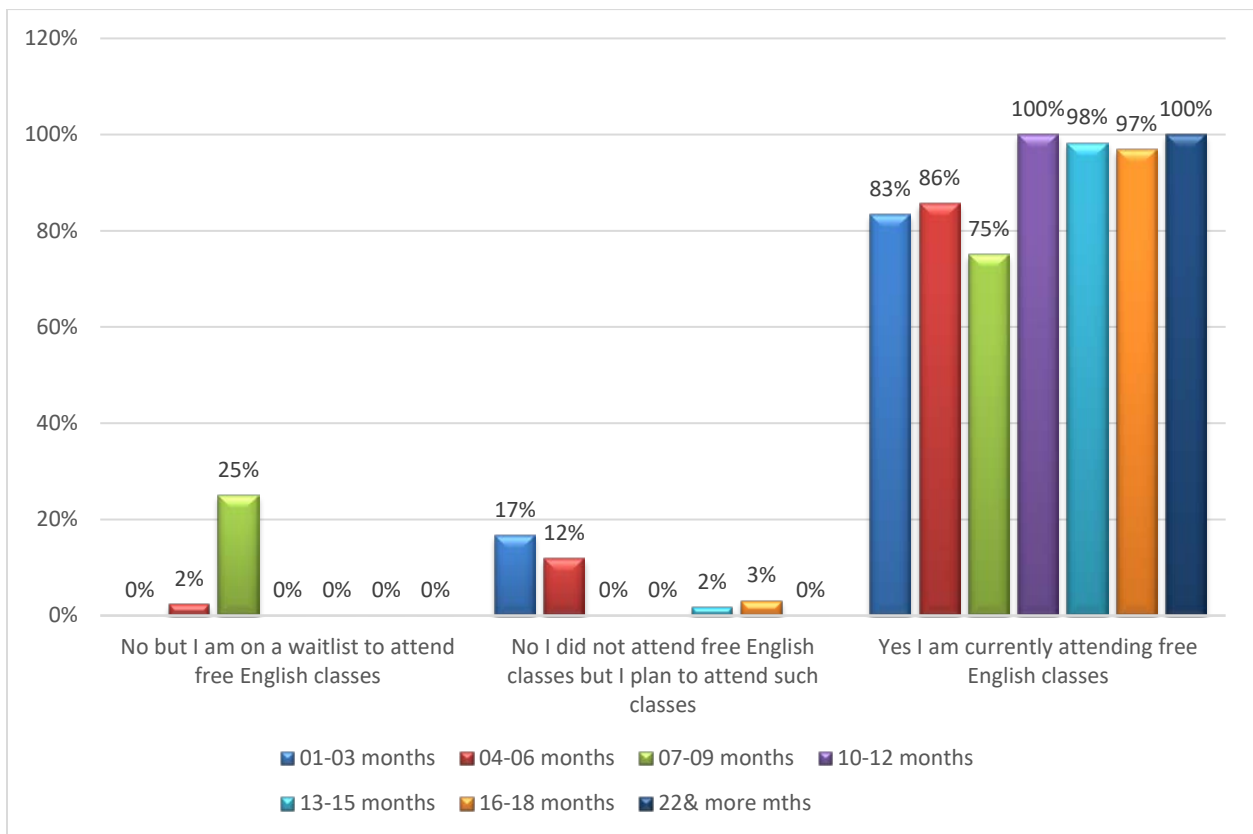
There were small sex differences in accessing English language classes among men and women. Table 5.15 shows that women are slightly more likely to be on wait lists or intending to enroll in English classes in the future when compared with men.

Table 5. 15: English Class Attendance by Sex, Manitoba, 2017



The correlation between time in Canada and enrollment in English classes emerges here too. Table 5.16 shows that whereas 25% of those arriving to Manitoba between 7 and 9 months earlier were on a wait list for English language training, of those in Canada for 1-3 months, 17% were not currently enrolled but planned to enroll in the future. These two percentages suggest that as the tenth month approaches, there is greater recognition of the importance of functional fluency in English and a corresponding increased demand for English language classes. As the tenth month approaches, there is greater recognition of the importance of functional fluency in English and a corresponding increased demand for English language classes.

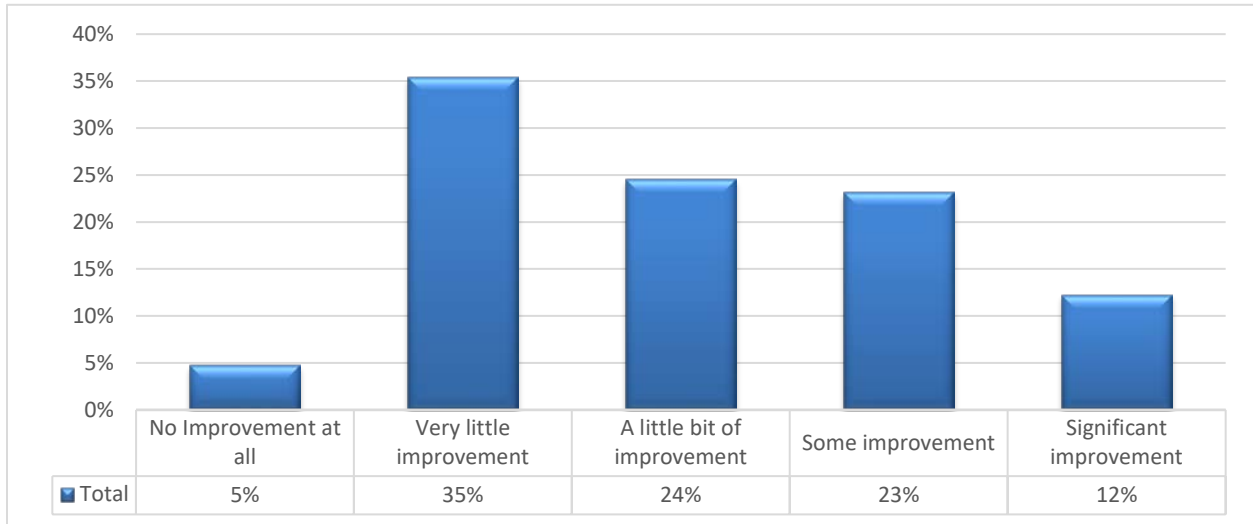
Table 5. 16: English Class Attendance by Duration of Stay in Canada, Manitoba, 2017



It is noteworthy that when the small number of participants who had not yet accessed English language training were asked what prevented them from doing so, all of them indicated that they were currently on a wait list and this is what prevented them from accessing language training.

We then asked participants to rank their improvement in learning English since they arrived in Canada (Table 5.17), nearly 66% indicated some or a very little improvement in their English language since arriving to the country.

Table 5. 17: Self-rated Improvement in English, Manitoba, 2017



There was some city of residence differences in self-assessment of English language ability (table 5.18). Participants living in Brandon were more positive about their English language assessment than their counterparts living in Winnipeg.

Table 5. 18: Self-rated Improvement in English by City of Residence, Manitoba, 2017



Unlike the other two provinces, there were no significant sex differences in English language self-assessment. Table 5.19 shows the distribution.

Table 5. 19: Self-rated Improvement in English by Sex, Manitoba, 2017

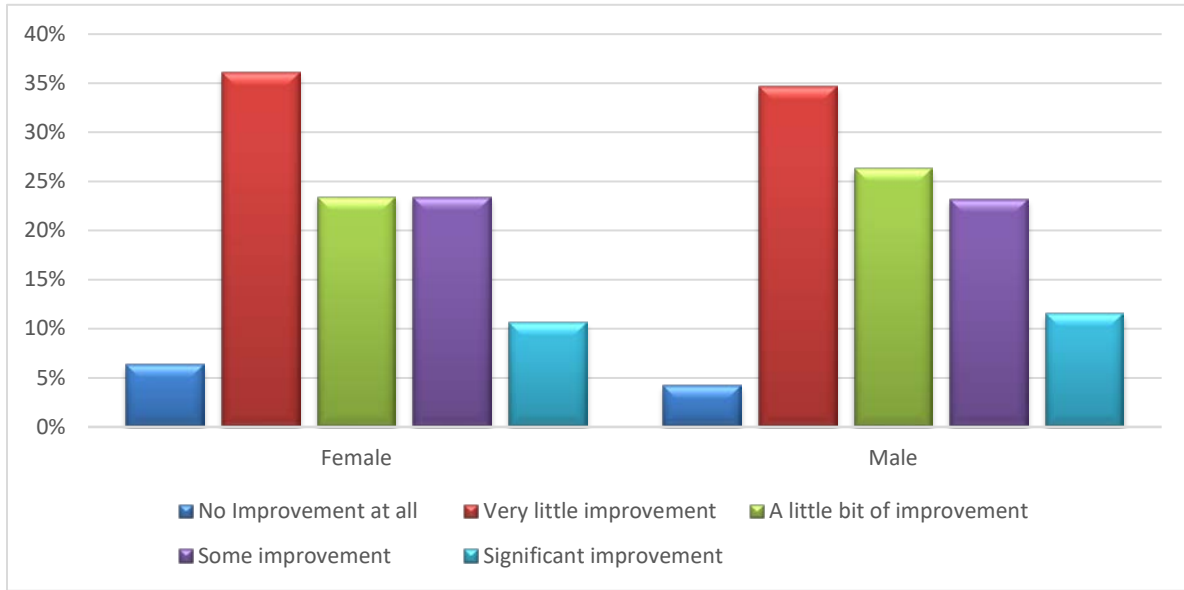
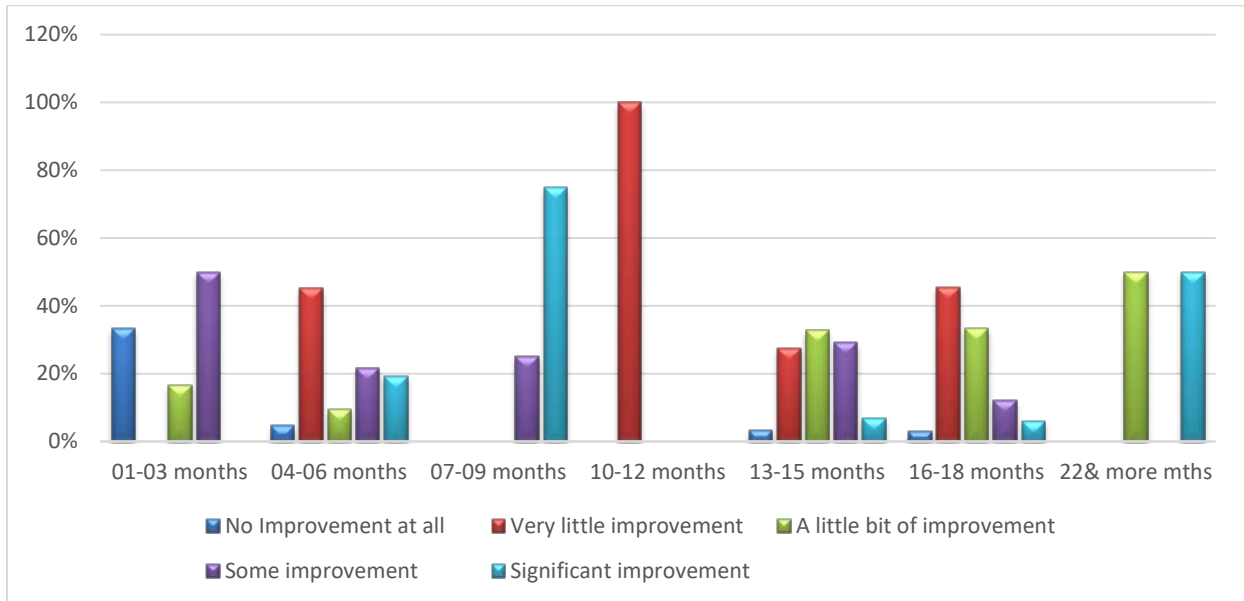


Table 5.20 shows that as time in Canada increases, so does self-assessment of English language ability. At the two-year mark, 50% of the respondents in Manitoba indicated their proficiency in English had increased significantly.

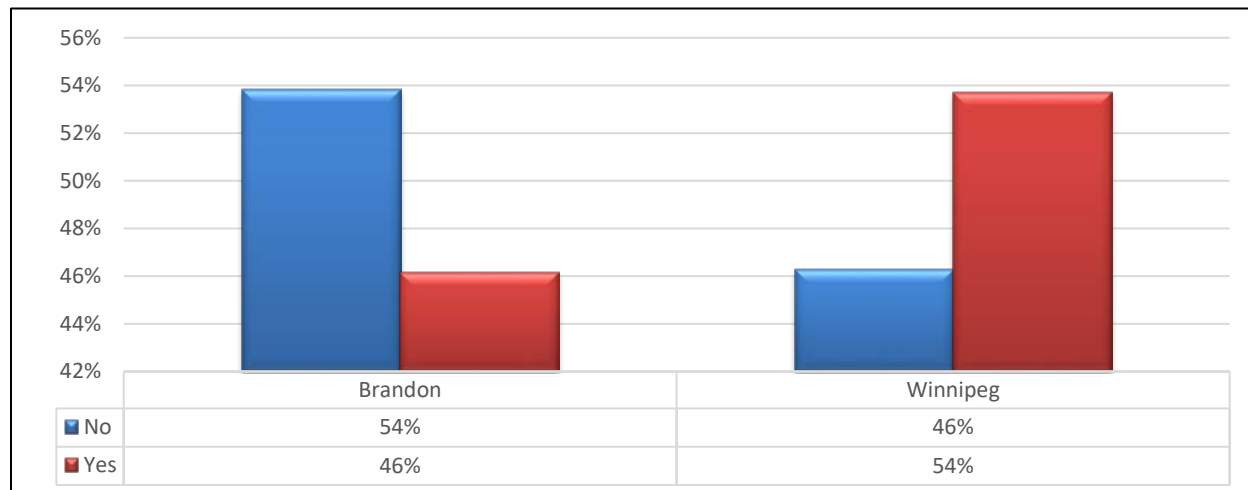
Table 5. 20: Self-rated Improvement in English, by Duration of Stay in Canada, Manitoba, 2017



5.5. EMPLOYMENT

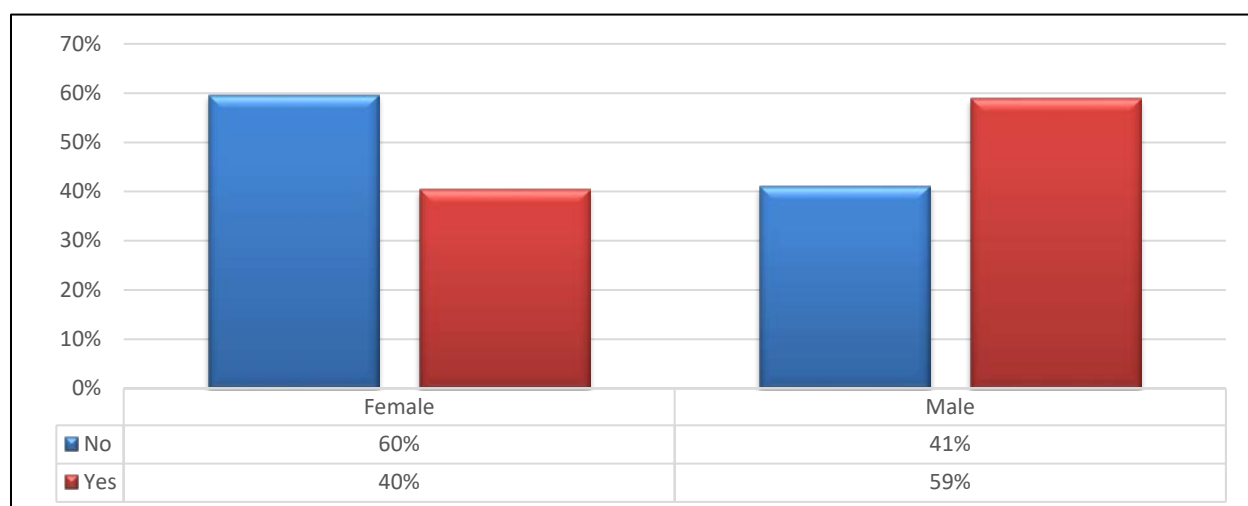
Like the other two provinces, a large number of the refugees interviewed in Manitoba (52%) indicated that they experienced difficulty finding work in the province. Table 5.21 shows the distribution for Winnipeg and Brandon. Over half (54%) of those living in Winnipeg indicated problems finding work compared to only 46% of those living in Brandon.

Table 5. 21: Difficulties Finding Work- by City of Residence, Manitoba, 2017



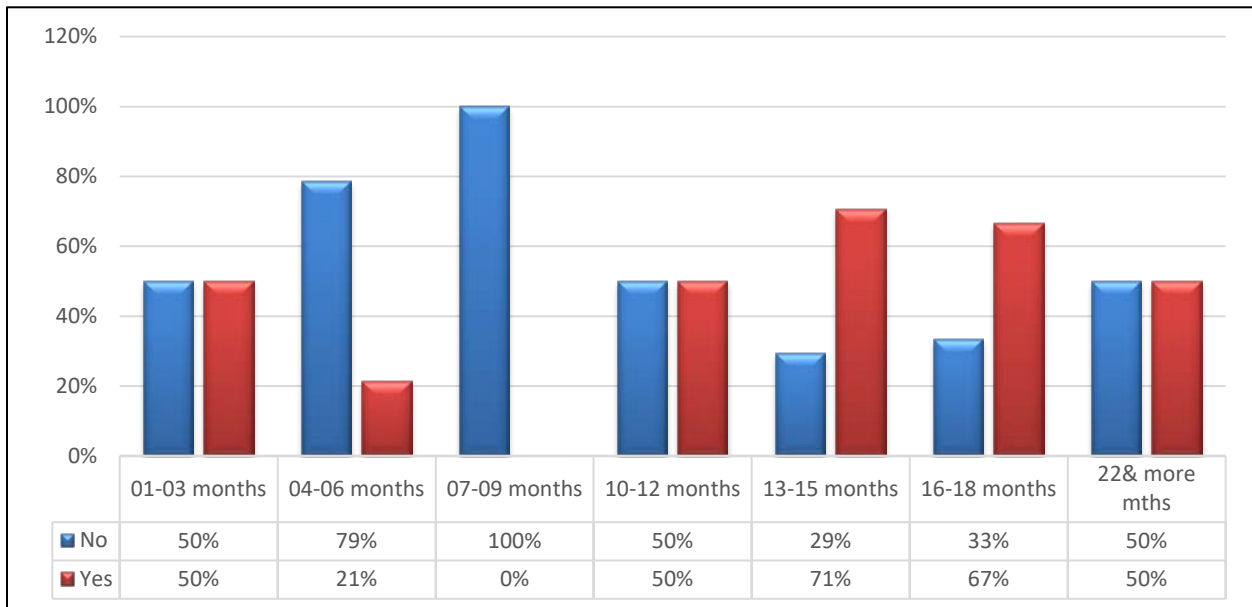
As was the typical pattern among men and women in the general population, Syrian males (59%) interviewed in Manitoba were more likely than their female counterparts (40%) to experience difficulty in finding work (Table 5.22).

Table 5. 22: Difficulties Finding Work by Sex, Manitoba, 2017



Again, as time in Canada increases, so does the propensity for refugees to discover challenges in finding work. Table 5.23 shows the distribution by time in Canada. Those in Canada for a year or more were more likely to experience challenges finding work in the province. This trend can be explained by the fact that very few refugees, and particularly government assisted refugees (GARs), are likely to be seeking employment during their first year in Canada when they are busy with settlement activities including language training, and receive assistance under the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP).

Table 5. 23: Difficulties Finding Work- by Duration of Stay in Canada, Manitoba, 2017

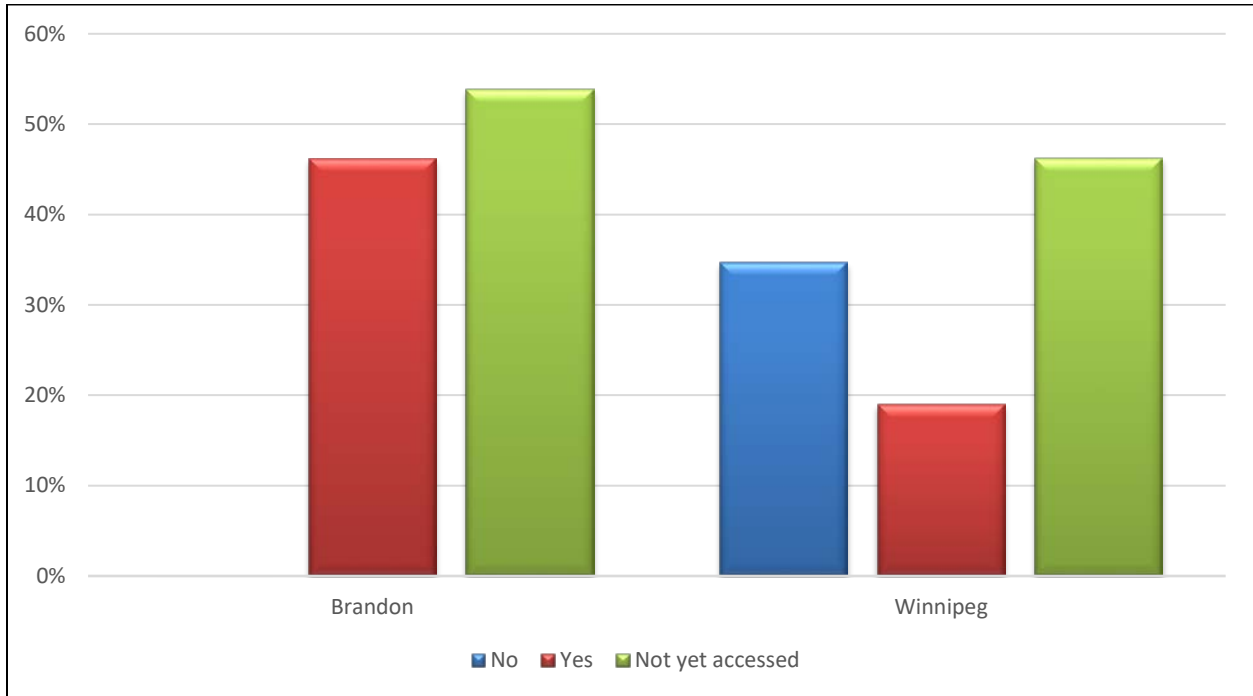


In explaining the biggest barriers to finding work in Manitoba, a large percentage of respondents pointed to insufficient knowledge of the English language and smaller percentages pointed to the availability of daycare and transportation.

In terms of accessing employment services, 25% of the refugees interviewed in Manitoba indicated they had used an employment service of some sort.²¹ There were some differences by city of residence. Whereas, 45% of refugees of Brandon participants indicated that they have accessed such services, only 18% of their counterparts in Winnipeg did so.

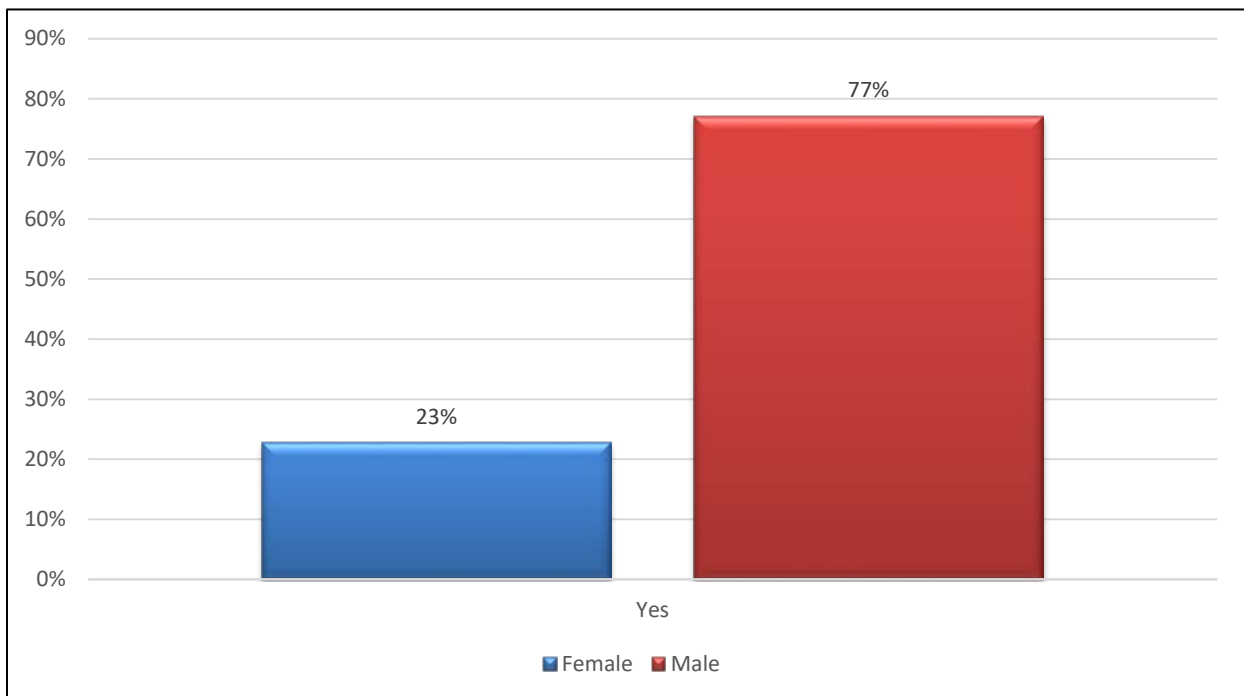
²¹ Table not shown.

Table 5. 24: Used Employment Services to Find Work by City of Residence, Manitoba, 2017



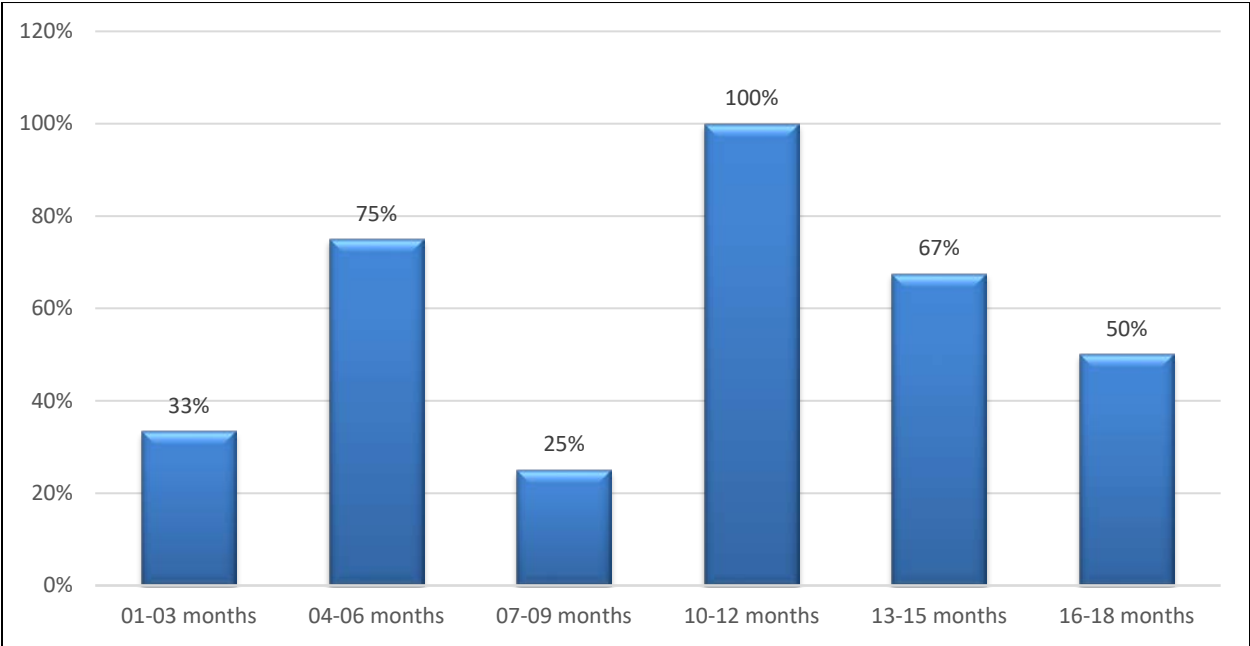
There were significant sex differences in accessing employment services among the refugees to Manitoba (Table 5.25). Only 23% of females and 77% of males accessed employment services.

Table 5. 25: Used Employment Services to Find Work by Sex, Manitoba, 2017



Time in Canada increases the propensity to use employment services among refugees in Manitoba, but not in the way we would predict (Table 5.26). Accessing employment services peaks at month 10-12 (100%) and declines thereafter. This, along with other data collected for this survey both in Manitoba and in the other Prairie provinces suggests that there is something significant about the 10th to 12th months that warrant further investigation in understanding what occurs during that particular period in the resettlement of refugees in the three Prairie provinces, and possibly also in other provinces.

Table 5. 26: Used Employment Services to Find Work by Duration of Stay in Canada, Manitoba, 2017

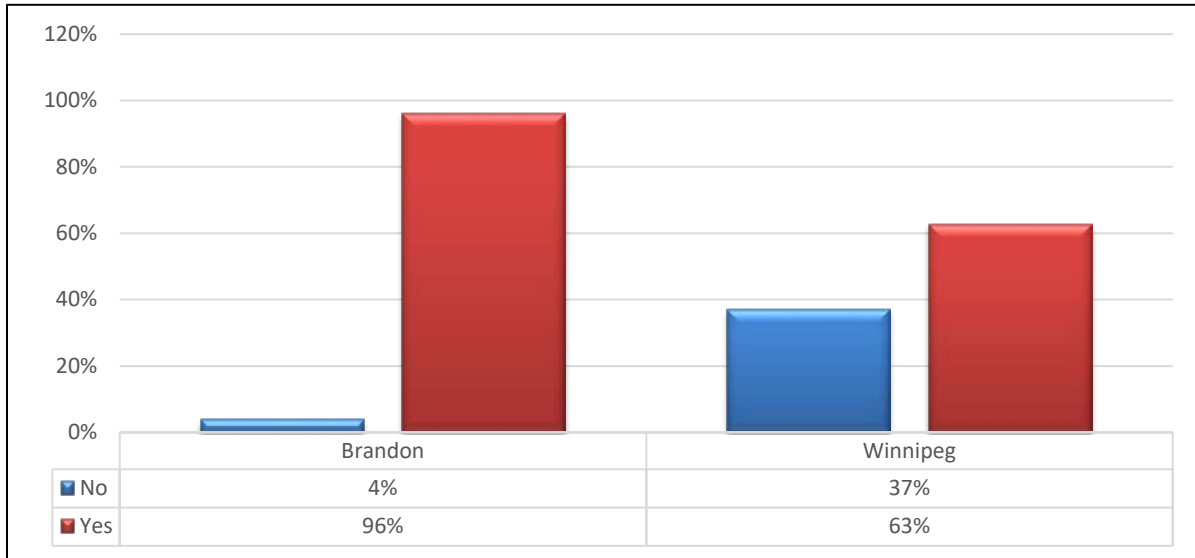


5.6. SETTLEMENT SERVICE USE

Only two-thirds of the refugees living in Manitoba indicated that they accessed settlement services even though they were interviewed by their local RAP settlement service worker.²² Like the participants in Saskatchewan, we suspect there was some confusion about what a settlement service is for refugees living in Manitoba (Table 5.27). The confusion seemed greatest in Winnipeg where only 63% indicated receiving settlement services compared with 93% of the participants in Brandon.

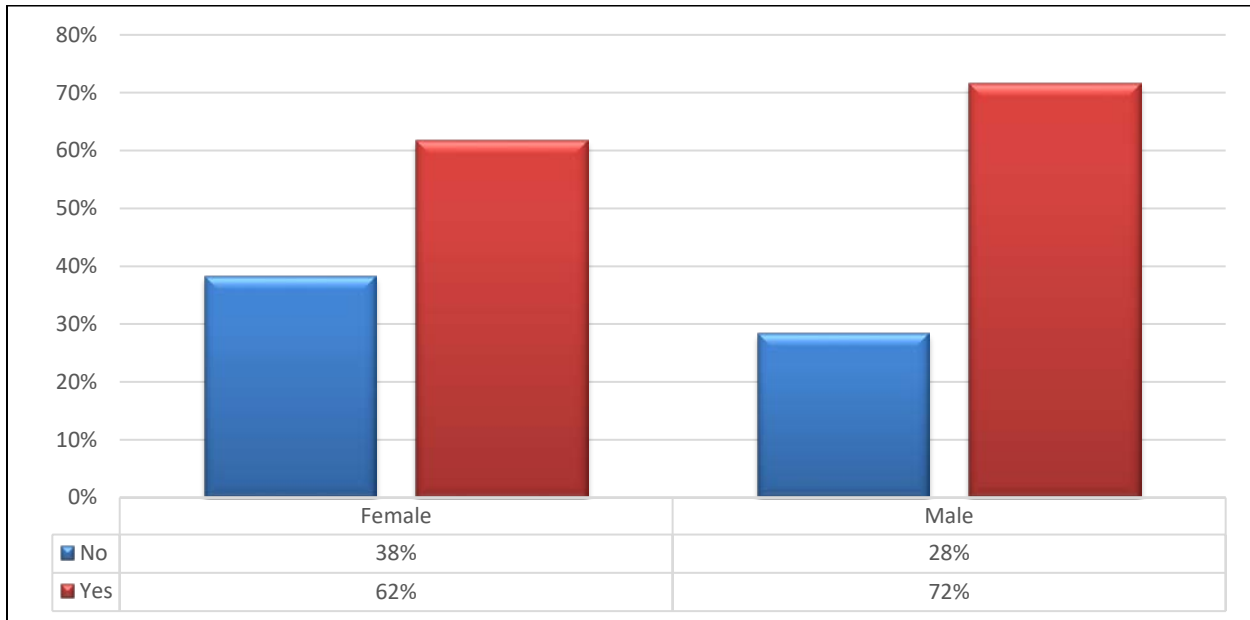
²² Table not shown.

Table 5. 27: Used Settlement Services by City of Residence, Manitoba, 2017



In Manitoba, as in the other Prairie Provinces there were sex differences related to accessing settlement services (Table 5.28). Males (72%) were slightly more likely than females (61%) to indicate that they had received services from a settlement agency.

Table 5. 28: Used Settlement Services by Sex, Manitoba, 2017



Of those receiving settlement services, most indicated that they went to a settlement agency for help. Ethnocultural community organizations, religious institutions, libraries, community centres, and universities were also mentioned by participants.

When asked if anything prevented them from accessing services, only two factors were identified, namely language difficulty and not knowing what services are available. These were identified by only 10% of respondents by only 10% of respondents.

Table 5.29 lists what respondents in Manitoba deemed to be the top needs prior to their arrival to Canada. Approximately 29% of participants in Manitoba asked for orientation to Canadian culture and values prior to their arrival. Another 26% felt that developing a comprehensive pre departure plan was important. A total of 64% felt that several needs related to employment had to be addressed. This is not unexpected as many Syrians were extremely anxious to find work as soon as possible. Many had not been employed in years and it is understandable that they wanted to become self-sufficient as soon as possible.

Table 5.29 Top Services Required Prior to Arrival, Manitoba, 2017

Beneficial Services prior to Arrival in Canada, Mani	
Assessment of foreign credentials	15%
Skills training	21%
Connections with employers	16%
Orientation to the Canadian economy	12%
Language assessment	15%
Orientation to Canadian culture	29%
Help obtaining housing	5%
Translation of documents	4%
Help developing a pre-departure plan	26%

Finally, participants were asked to identify the difficulties they experienced as they settled into Manitoba. Table 5.30 summarizes their responses. Accessing language classes or problems communicating were mentioned by 73% and approximately 20% indicated a lack of information about available services. An additional 3% of participants who said they were confused about where they could get the help they needed could be added to this particular cluster of respondents. Approximately 25% of participants in Manitoba indicated they had experienced financial difficulties since they arrived. Moreover, 15% indicated problems with figuring out or accessing public transportation systems available to them, and another 13% said that they could not find appropriate child care.

Table 5. 29: Difficulties in Settling into the Province, Manitoba, 2017

Difficulties in Settling into the province, Manitoba	
Lack of information about services	20%
Lack of services in your community	6%
Language classes	73%
Lack of childcare	13%
Transportation	15%
Financial difficulties	24%
Finding suitable food	1%
finding physician	5%
confusion about where to get help	3%

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