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The UN Refugee Agency

Canada



ECONOMIC MOBILITY PATHWAYS PILOT ALUMNI SURVEY REPORT 2023

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An early look at the refugee labour mobility experience

While most EMPP survey respondents have recently immigrated to Canada, participants generally feel well-integrated in their workplaces and have already experienced positive outcomes such as wage increases and promotions. The survey reveals respondents are grateful for the opportunity Canada has provided them but also indicate they are not yet contributing to their full potential.

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Acknowledgements

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Most importantly, we are immensely grateful to the alumni who generously shared their experiences and perspectives, without whom this report would not have been possible.

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Introduction

In 2018, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) first introduced its Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot (EMPP), Canada’s labour mobility complementary pathway.

As a complementary pathway, the EMPP provides legal immigration opportunities for persons in need of international protection through federal and provincial economic immigration programs and outside of refugee resettlement.

The EMPP works to reduce barriers so skilled refugees can access economic migration pathways into Canada. Five years after its launch and anticipating program growth linked to [recent policy changes](#), UNHCR surveyed EMPP participants and their dependents to understand their experiences and assess the program’s impact.

To date, most refugees have connected with job opportunities and immigrated through EMPP with the support of Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB), TalentLift (TL), or RefugePoint (RP), often working in partnership with other NGOs. According to IRCC administrative data, as of 31 October 2023, a total of 195 persons (77 principal applicants and 118 dependents) have arrived in Canada under the EMPP.



“I want to express my heartfelt gratitude for the incredible support I’ve received from TalentLift and other organizations involved throughout the process. And huge thanks to the EMPP program from the Canadian Government.”

Anonymous
EMPP Alumni

Representatives from Glen Haven Manor and the Pictou County Regional Enterprise Network meet with RefugePoint during a recruitment mission to Kenya to interview prospective candidates for care support roles. © Image courtesy of RefugePoint.

Research method

An online survey was conducted to gather feedback from EMPP candidates and their dependents who have arrived in Canada, covering their overall experience of coming to Canada and their settlement.

The survey was conducted in English for principal applicants, with additional questions for accompanying dependents. Survey results were anonymous, but respondents could voluntarily provide their contact information for future research.

Released on 13 November 2023, the survey was open for two weeks, closing on 1 December 2023. The survey was distributed via email to EMPP alumni through partner organizations. In total, 35 people completed the survey, resulting in a response rate of over 40 per cent.¹

RESULTS

Coming to Canada

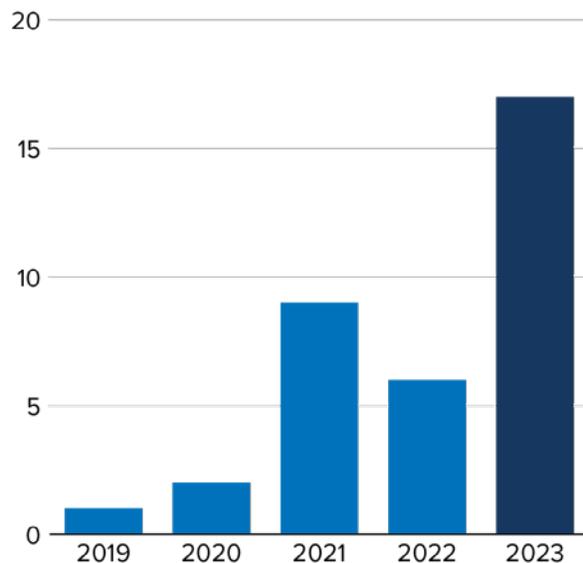
About half of the respondents indicated that they arrived in Canada prior to 2023. Only one person who completed the survey arrived in 2019 and no one who took the survey arrived in 2018, the year the EMPP was launched.

Of the 35 respondents, 16 were assisted by TBB, 11 by RP, five by TL, and three indicated that both TBB and TL were involved in their application to the EMPP program.

The EMPP initially piloted recruitment with refugees residing in Jordan, Lebanon, and Kenya, and its geographic reach has gradually expanded since then. Among the 28 respondents who answered the question, “Where were you living immediately prior to coming to Canada?” Lebanon (12), Kenya (8), and Jordan (5) emerged as the top countries of asylum. It is worth noting that half of the survey respondents are of Syrian nationality.

Figure 1

What year respondents arrived in Canada

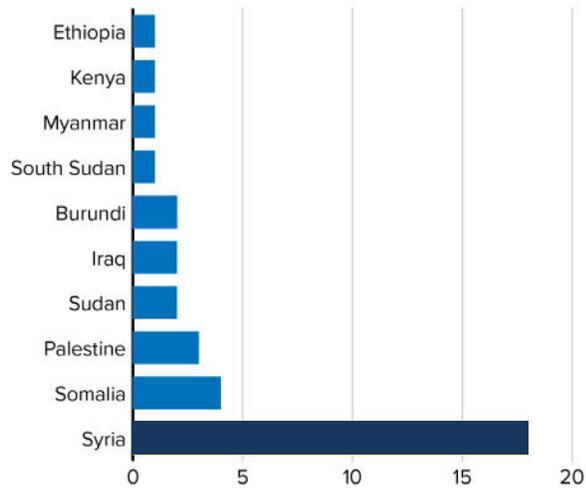


Source: UNHCR Canada
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¹ In instances where a response was non-applicable, it was removed from the survey results.

Figure 2

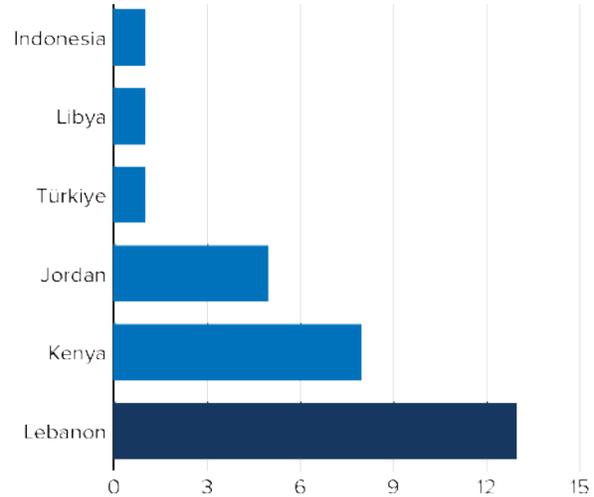
Respondents' country of origin



Source: UNHCR Canada
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Figure 3

Respondents' country of asylum



Source: UNHCR Canada
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Demographics

Out of the 35 survey respondents, the vast majority were men, with only two women. The average age of respondents was 35, ranging from 22 as the youngest to 43 as the oldest. Most survey participants (88 per cent) have achieved post-secondary education.

Employment experience

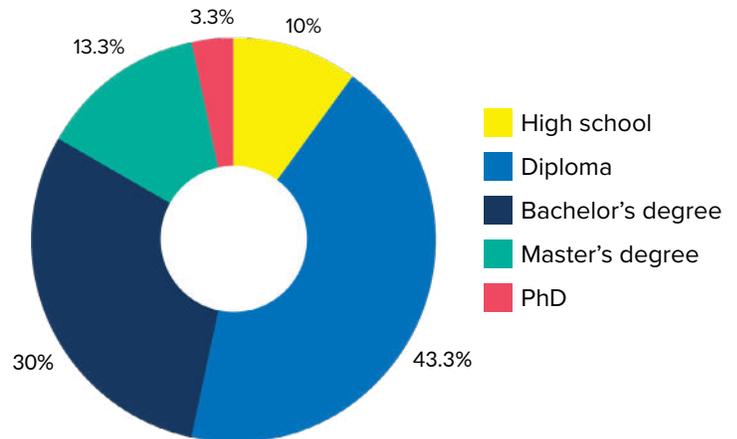
Overall, the survey revealed that the majority (69 per cent) of respondents were still employed in the same job that served as the basis for their entry to Canada. Among those who maintained their initial employment, 54 per cent received a wage increase, and 75 per cent were promoted.

Taking a closer look at the experience of those who have been in Canada for over a year, 56 per cent remained in their original employment. Among the 18 respondents who arrived in Canada before 2023 and were still in their original jobs, 89 per cent received a wage increase, and 56 per cent experienced a promotion.

In terms of work hours, the majority (66 per cent) of EMPP alumni reported working an average of 40 hours per week. Additionally, 23 per cent of respondents worked more than 40 hours per week, while 11 per cent worked fewer than 40 hours per week.

Figure 4

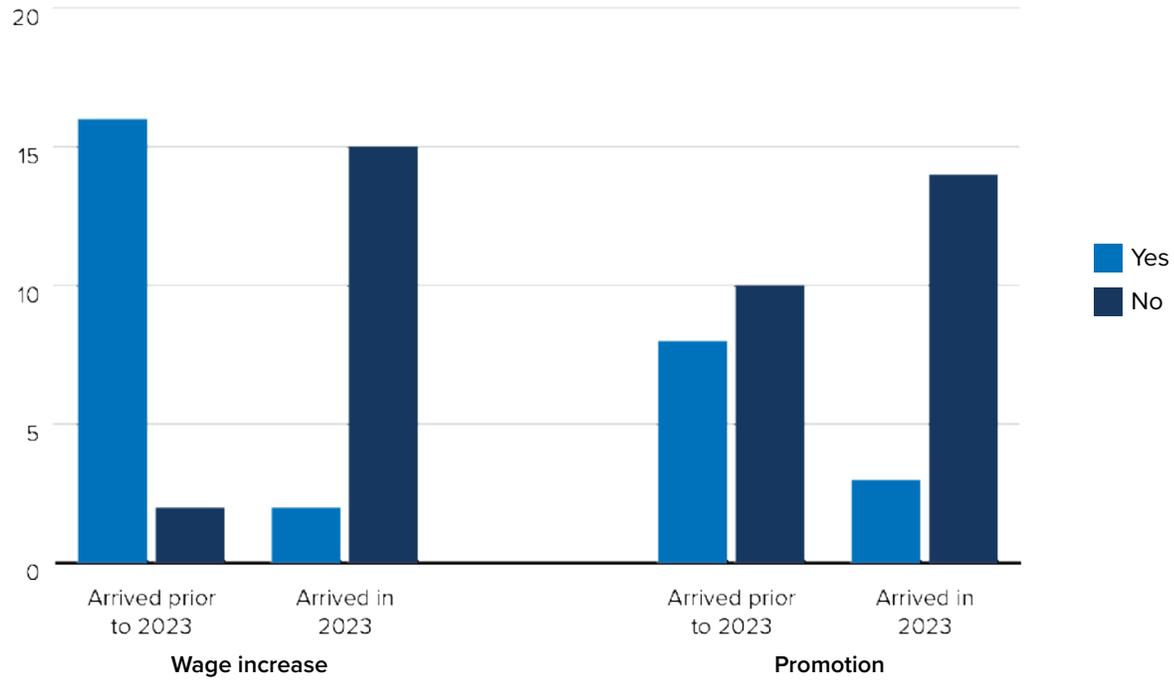
Respondents' highest level of education



Source: UNHCR Canada
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Figure 5

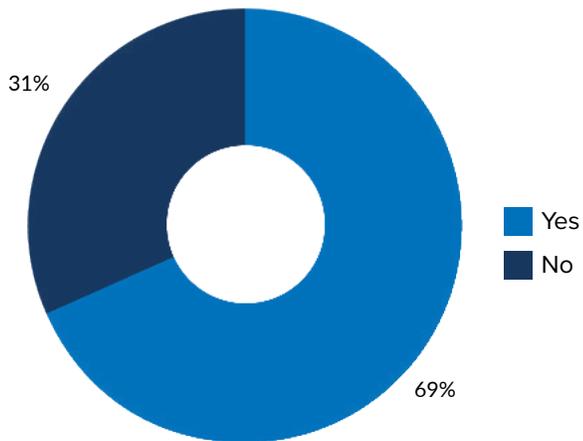
Promotion and wage increase data from all respondents



Source: UNHCR Canada
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Figure 6

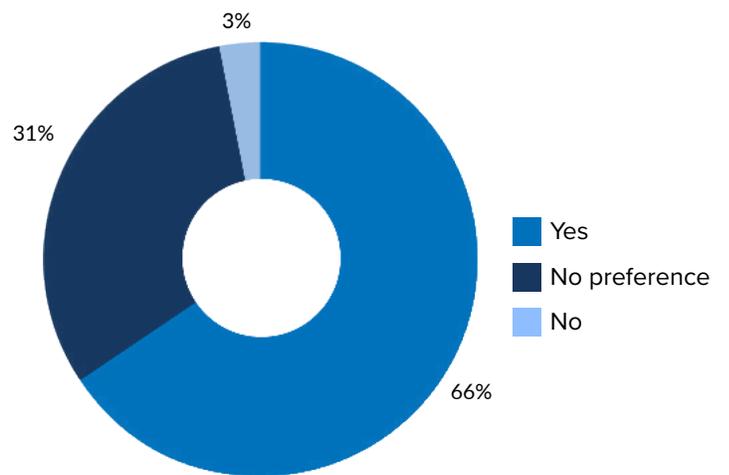
Retention of respondents at their original jobs
“Are you at the same job you came to Canada for?”



Source: UNHCR Canada
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Figure 7

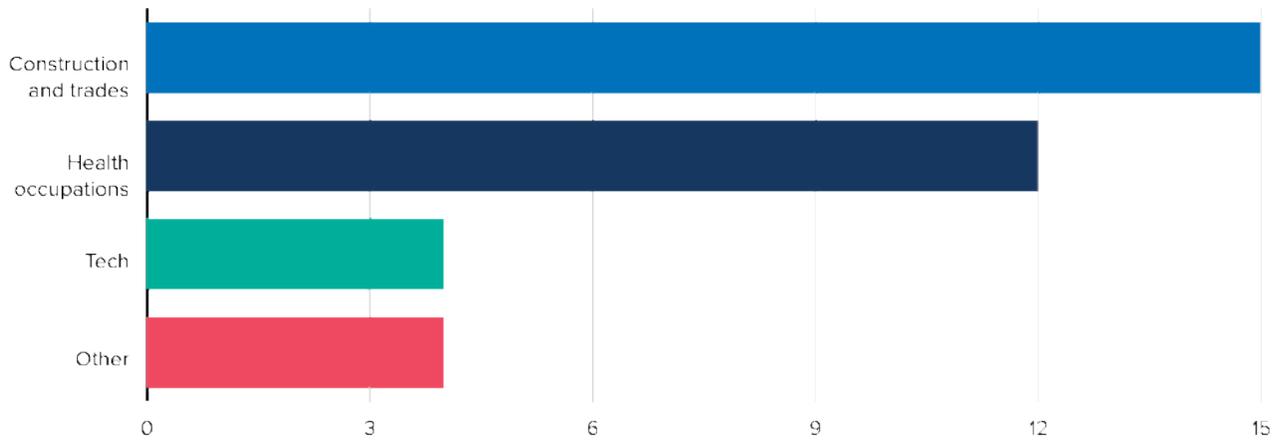
Respondents’ desires to migrate to Canada
“Did you originally want to move to Canada?”



Source: UNHCR Canada
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Figure 8

Respondents' sectors of employment



Source: UNHCR Canada
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Settlement

When asked to rate their integration into their workplace and community on a five-point scale, the survey results show that principal applicants generally feel more integrated into their employment than their community.

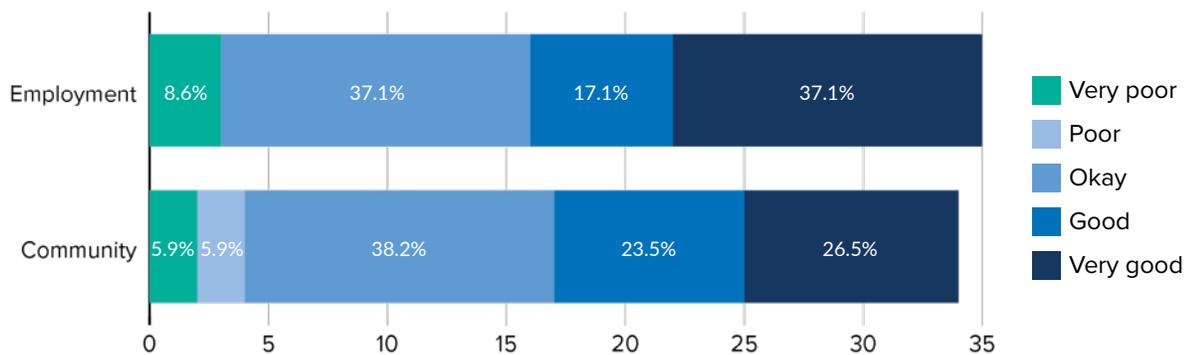
Among all respondents, 54 per cent described their workplace integration as “good” or “very good,” while 49 per cent said the same for community integration. However, when focusing on the 18 respondents who have been in Canada for over a year, workplace integration slightly increased to 56 per cent, while

community integration decreased to 44 per cent for the same indicators.

Respondents were asked to identify the top five barriers and challenges they faced when settling in Canada. The results overwhelmingly indicate that finances (57 per cent), transportation (54 per cent), and housing (51 per cent) were the primary challenges reported by the respondents. Despite certain fees being waived for EMPP candidates and access to immigration loans to cover settlement costs and travel, finances remain a significant source of stress for many.

Figure 9

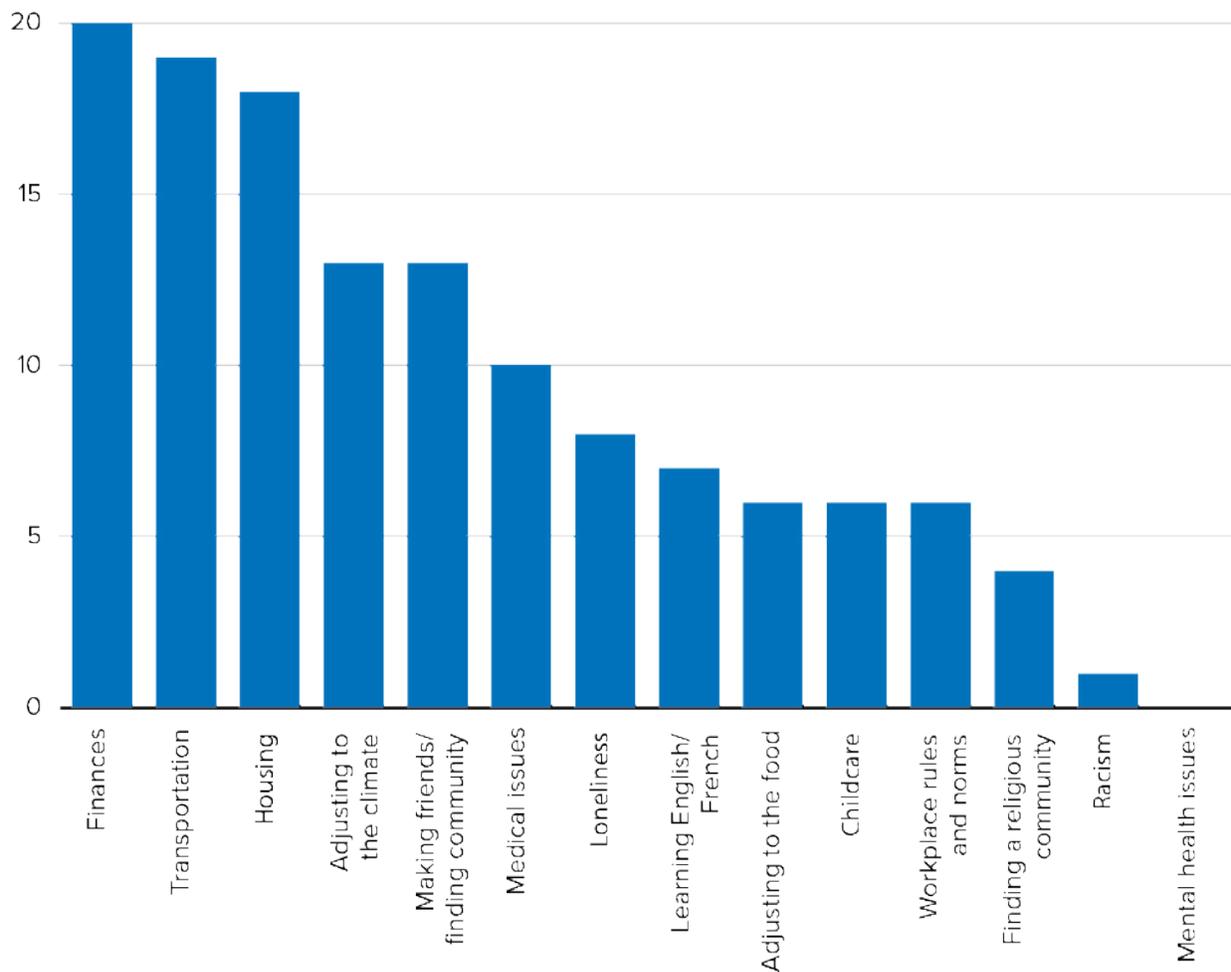
Respondents' integration into employment and community



Source: UNHCR Canada
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Figure 10

Settlement challenges identified as most important (top five)



Source: UNHCR Canada
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One survey respondent noted, “There are great financial difficulties at the beginning.” Another said that their “...financial capabilities, quite frankly, ... were very weak [and] ... it was very difficult and expensive to secure furnished housing ... especially in light of the homeowners’ refusal to rent to new arrivals without guarantees, a large balance in the bank, etc.” Concerning transportation, one respondent categorized it as “a major challenge.” Eight respondents answered that loneliness was a challenge. One respondent said that “loneliness and depression [are] great, especially in the first year.” These experiences are similar to the typical challenges faced by newcomers to Canada as part of their settlement experience.

The survey also asked respondents to indicate which sources of assistance were important to them on a five-point scale — from not important to extremely important. This question had a non-applicable option as some services only apply to some respondents. The most important sources of assistance (ranked important and higher) were internet resources, employers/ co-workers, and government services. Neighbours/ community members, religious groups, and other newcomers were among the respondents’ least important sources of support.

One EMPP alumni said, “I have been fortunate to meet many kind and open-minded individuals who have helped me feel at home.” However, another respondent said, “Everything [is] bad, government services, work are very very bad.”

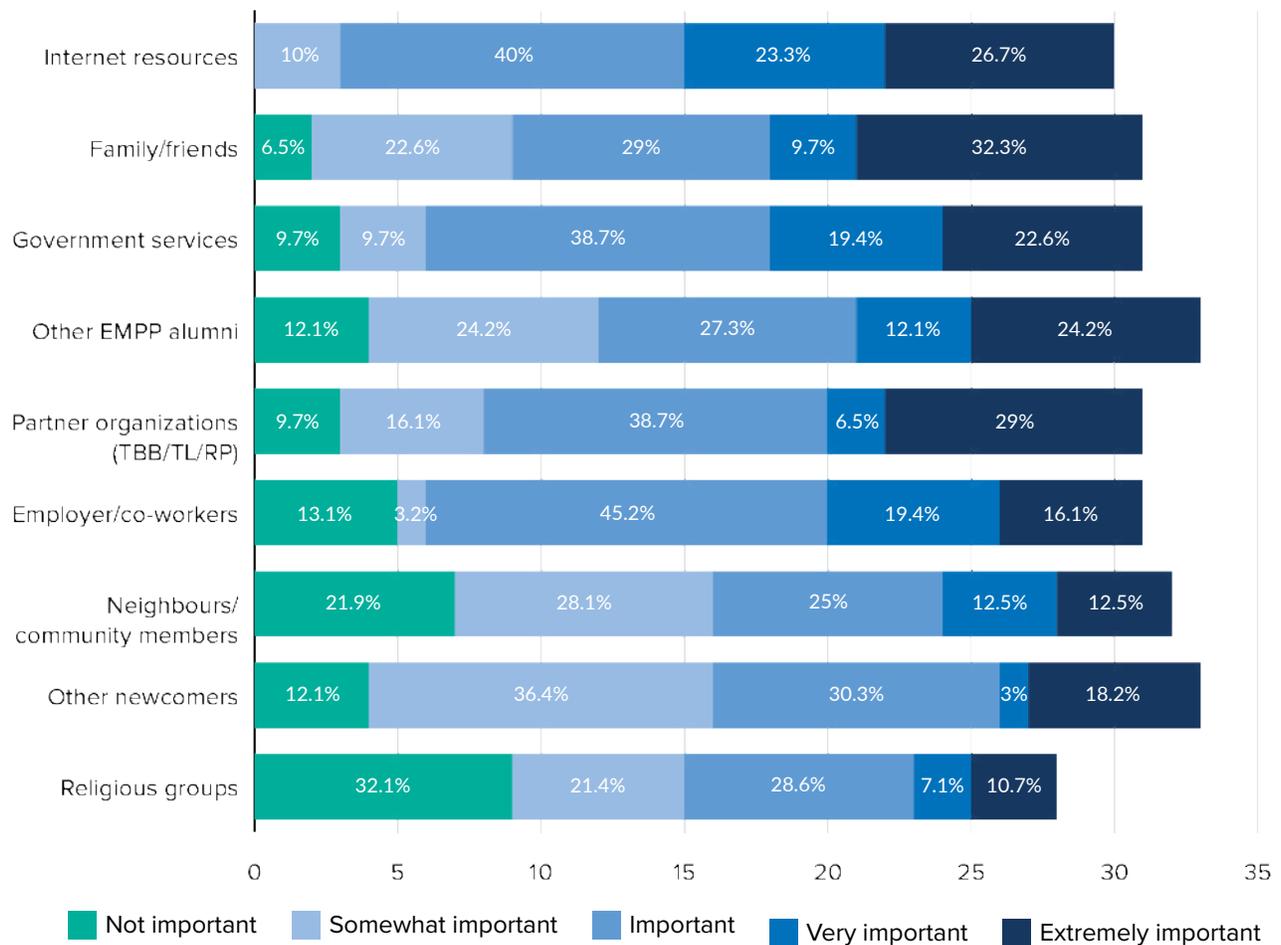
One respondent who indicated they hold a bachelor’s degree in civil engineering stated, “I am not able to find a job that meets my experience or career profile. Every employer just wants to hire me as a construction [labourer], assembly worker, or welder.”

Another question inquired about the areas in which EMPP principal applicants would have liked to receive additional support. Of the 35 responses, 23 indicated a need for further education opportunities. Many comments highlighted the demand for additional education due to degrees and certificates obtained before arriving in Canada not being recognized, leading principal applicants to work in positions below their qualifications.

A respondent with a master’s in mechanical engineering expressed that they “want to make [their] career in Mechanical Engineering recognised so that [they] can open [their] own business.” Another said, “prior education ... was not accepted and [there are no] bridging or upgrading options available for me.” Many hoped to have their credentials recognized, further their education, pursue rewarding employment opportunities, and make a positive impact on their communities.

Figure 11

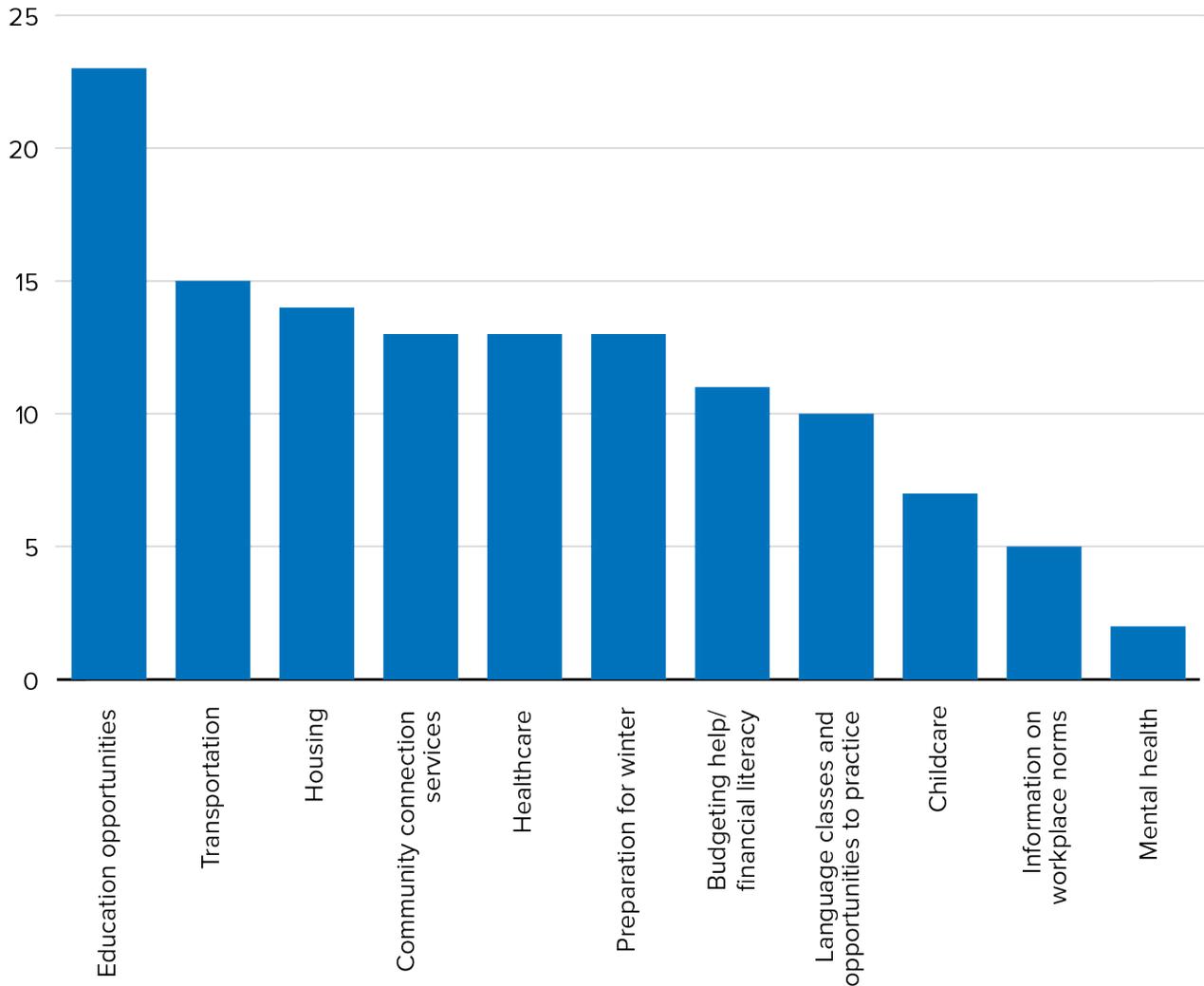
Respondents’ opinion on the importance of major sources of help in the settlement process



Source: UNHCR Canada
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Figure 12

Areas of desired extra support when settling in Canada (top five)



Source: UNHCR Canada
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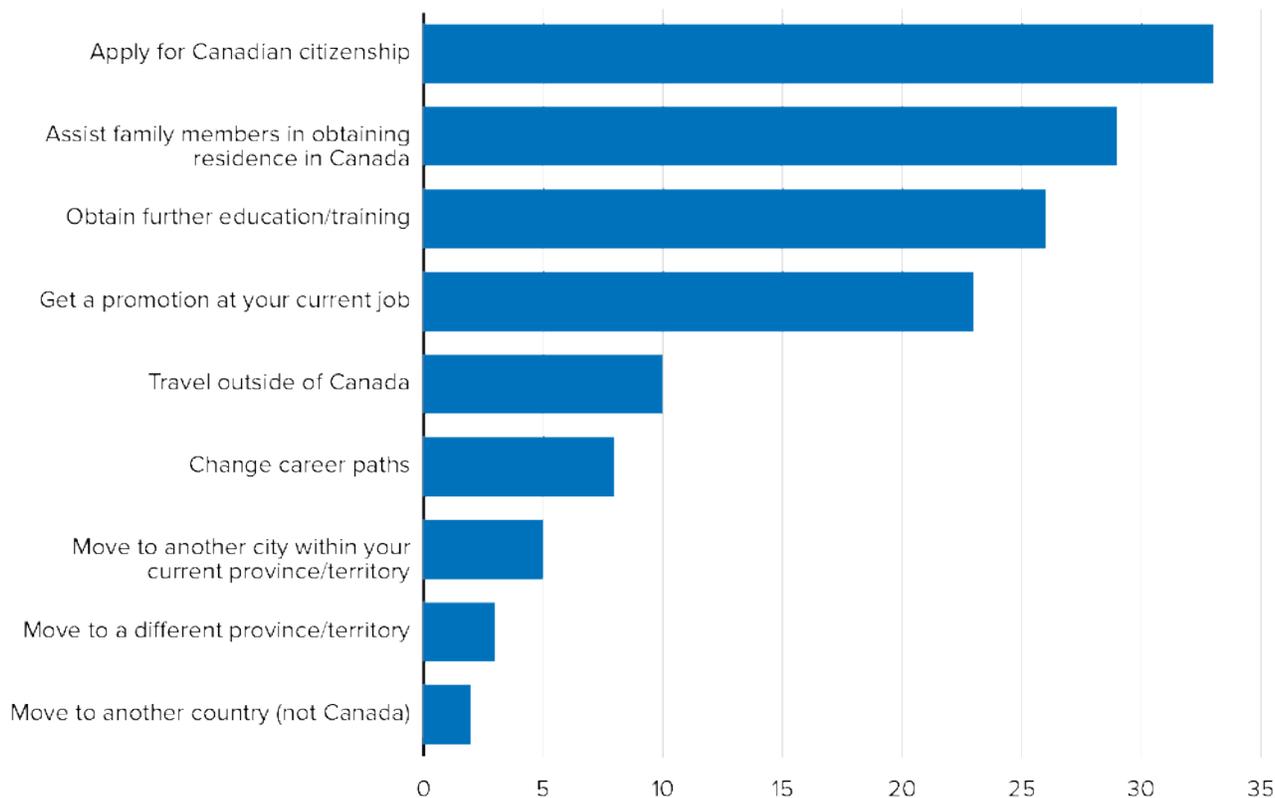
Future goals

UNHCR was interested in learning about what EMPP alumni hope to achieve in the future. When asked about their goals for the next five years, an overwhelming number of respondents stated they wished to obtain citizenship. Notably, 66 per cent said they wish to stay at their current job. Not surprisingly, 29 out of the 35 respondents indicated they wanted to

assist other family members in coming to Canada. One respondent suggested that when it comes to settlement, “family reunification support would go a long way.” Another highlighted the difficulty of achieving their goal to travel outside Canada without a Convention Travel Document.

Figure 13

Respondents' goals for the next five years (multiple answers were permitted)



Source: UNHCR Canada
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Dependants

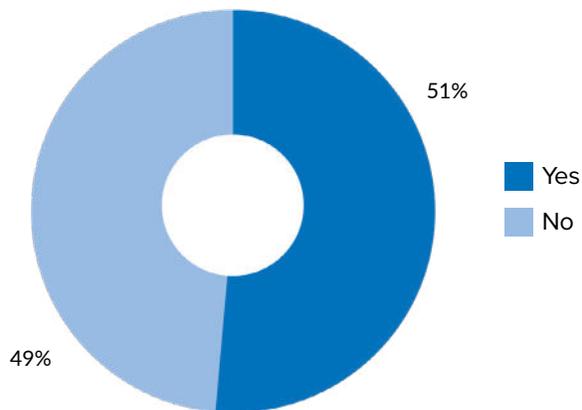
The EMPP allows principal applicants to include their dependants as part of their application for admission to Canada. While half of the surveyed EMPP alumni had dependants join them in Canada, six respondents indicated they left them behind.

Further research is required to understand why these respondents chose not to, or were unable to, come as a family unit.

Many of the respondents who brought their dependants came with both a spouse and child(ren). The average age of child dependants is seven, with the youngest being one year old and the oldest being 15.

Figure 14

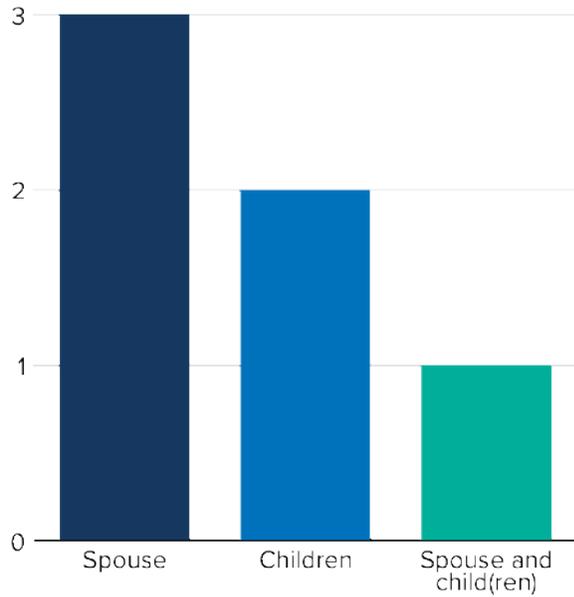
Respondents who had dependants come with them to Canada



Source: UNHCR Canada
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Figure 15

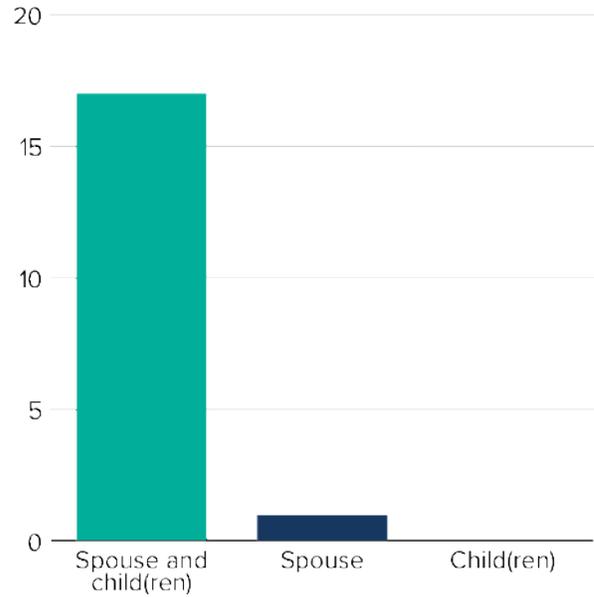
Type of dependents that did not come to Canada with the respondents



Source: UNHCR Canada
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Figure 16

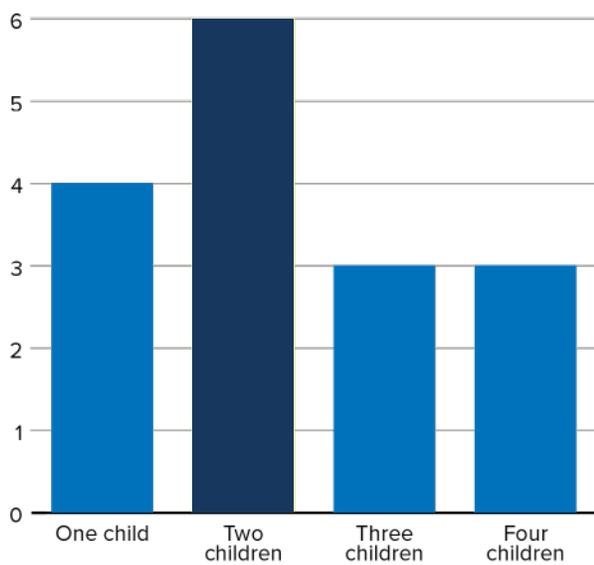
Type of dependants that came with the respondents to Canada



Source: UNHCR Canada
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Figure 17

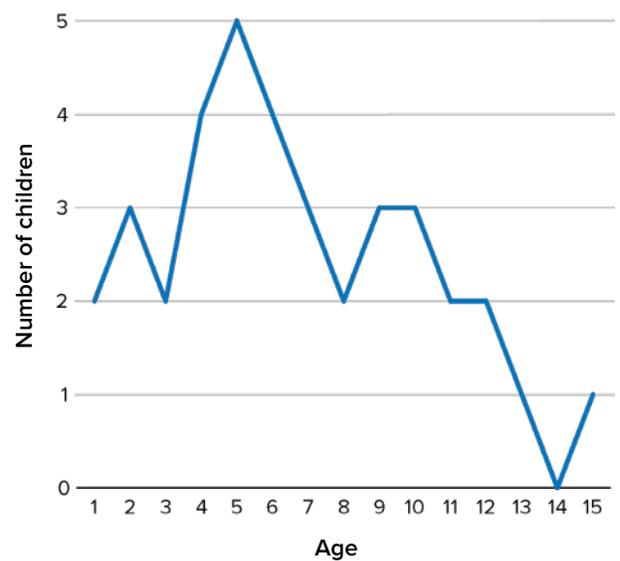
Number of child dependants in each family that came with the respondents to Canada



Source: UNHCR Canada
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Figure 18

Age distribution of child dependants that came with the respondents to Canada



Source: UNHCR Canada
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The results overwhelmingly show that children integrated much better into school, work, and the community than spouses. Of respondents with spouses, 56 per cent thought their spouses were integrating poorly or very poorly into employment, and 22 per cent thought the same for their integration into the community.

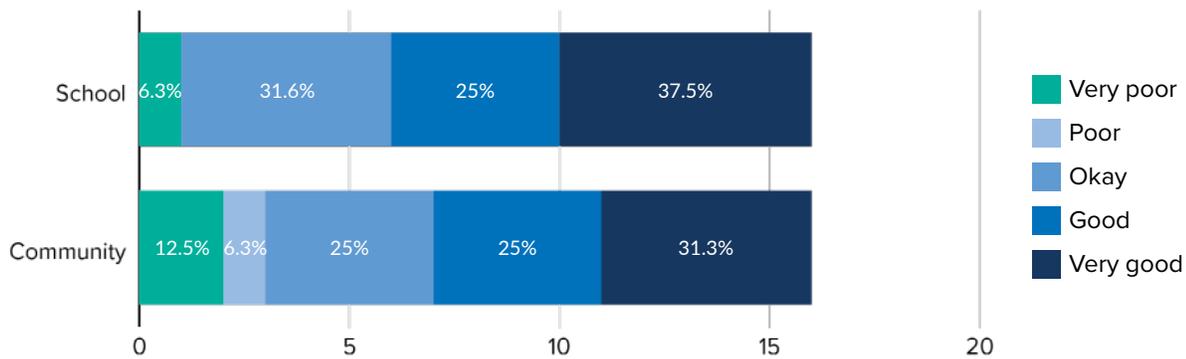
EMPP eligibility requires only the principal applicant to be proficient in English or French, resulting in some spouses needing to learn a new language upon arrival in Canada, significantly impacting their short-term

integration. One respondent noted that “my wife [is] on the waiting list for more than eight months” for English classes.

When asked in what areas the EMPP alumni thought their dependents would have liked to receive additional support, 12 out of 17 respondents wished they had additional support help with school and education for their dependents. Following support for education, language classes, the opportunity to practice English/French, and childcare were the other most requested services.

Figure 19

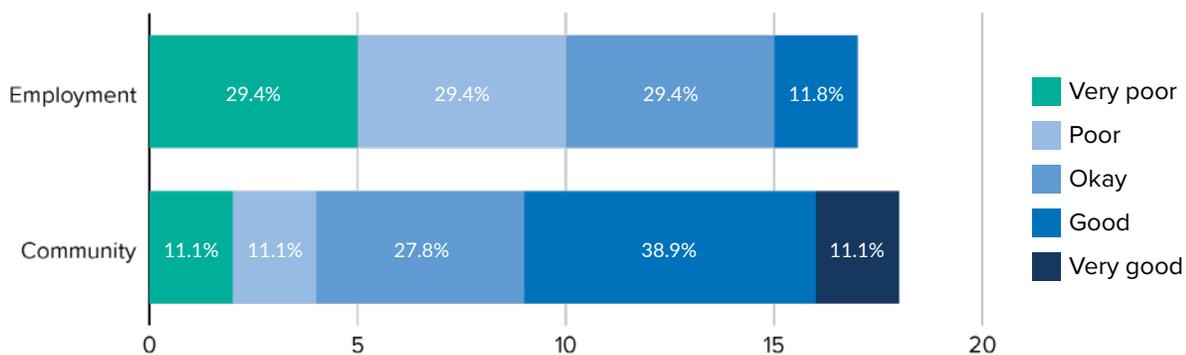
Respondents view of their child(ren)'s integration in their community and schooling in Canada



Source: UNHCR Canada
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Figure 20

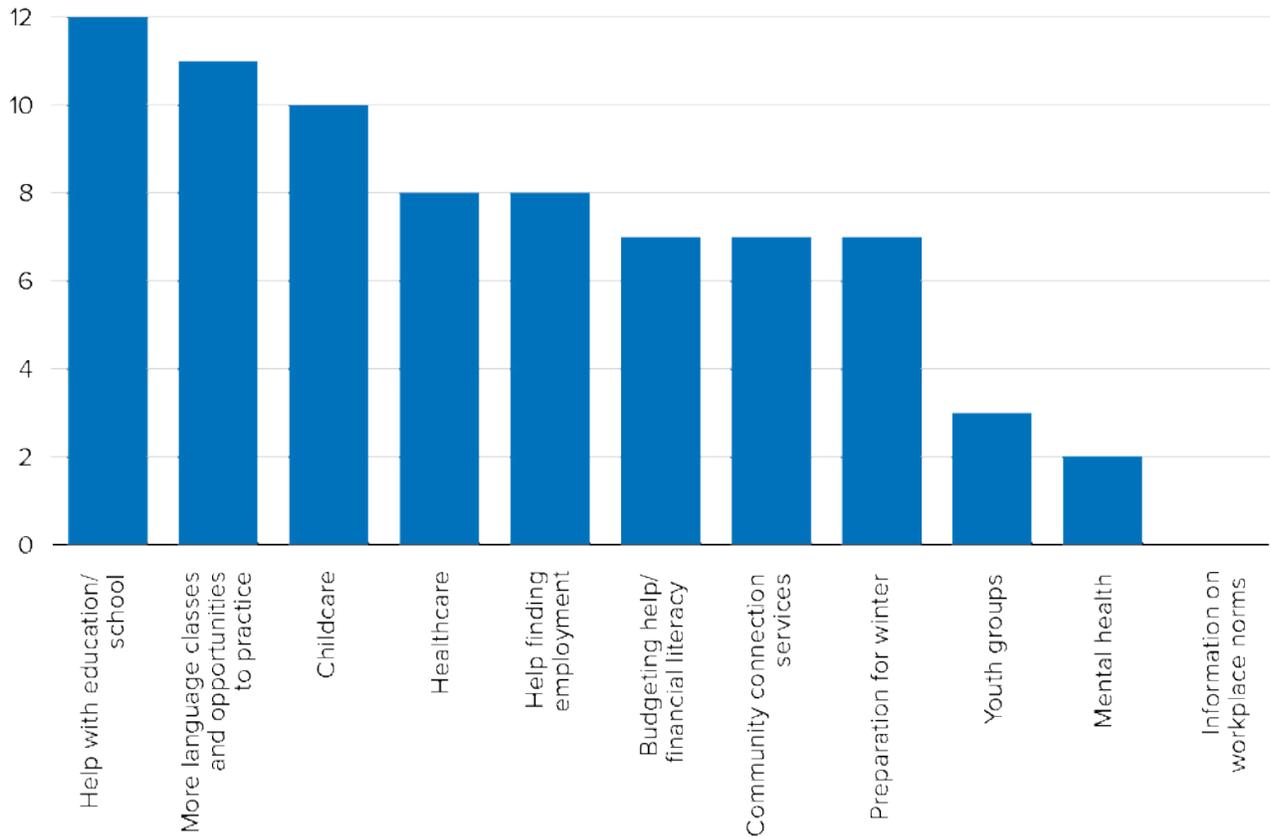
Respondents view of their spouse's integration in their community and employment in Canada



Source: UNHCR Canada
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Figure 21

Respondents' views of areas their dependant(s) needed additional support (top five)



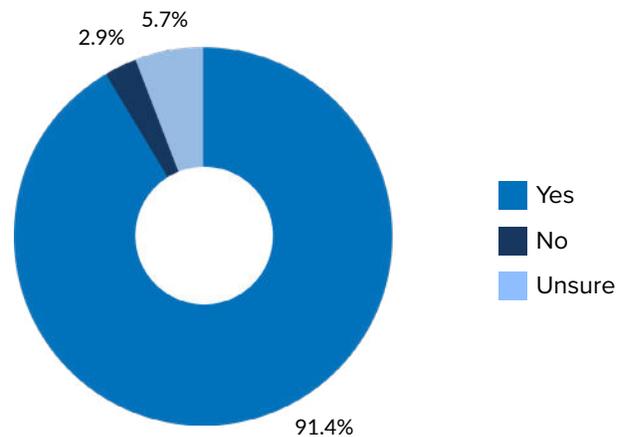
Source: UNHCR Canada
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Overall experience

At the end of the survey, respondents had the opportunity to add comments and leave contact information. In the comments quoted throughout this report, many EMPP alumni expressed deep gratitude towards Canada, their communities, and the partner organizations that supported them throughout their journey. The comments reflected an overall sentiment of gratitude among EMPP alumni, acknowledging the challenges and hardships of living in Canada while expressing appreciation for the opportunity. When asked if they would recommend the EMPP to friends and family, 91 per cent of survey respondents answered yes.

Figure 22

Respondents' opinion on if they would recommend the EMPP



Source: UNHCR Canada
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Looking ahead

Refugee labour mobility as a complementary pathway is gaining momentum in providing solutions for refugees and displaced persons.

With this growth comes an interest in understanding the experience of those who navigate this pathway.

Receiving communities and governments are eager to gain more knowledge of the settlement needs of this group, recognizing that their selection was based on the principal applicant's skills and work experience — rather than their vulnerability.

Settlement in a new country takes time. Two-thirds of the respondents have been in Canada for less than two years. Many of the survey respondents have expressed their willingness to participate in future research. UNHCR aims to continue monitor the progress of alumni and their families.

In addition, increase in arrivals through the EMPP is anticipated in the future.

An expanded candidate pool that includes arrivals from a more diverse range of countries of asylum and refugee circumstances will improve our understanding of the EMPP's impact.



Syrian refugee Ziad Al-Shayeb is a skilled carpenter but has been unable to find regular work in Jordan. © UNHCR/Nisrine Benyahia