

# RETENTION & INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES IN NL

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FEBRUARY 2018

# Retention & Integration of Refugees in Newfoundland and Labrador

REPORT PREPARED FOR THE HARRIS CENTRE FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND  
POLICY

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February 2018

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<sup>1</sup> This research project was funded by the Harris Centre of Regional Policy and Development through its Applied Research Fund and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada through the Targeted Research: Syrian Refugee Arrival, Resettlement and Integration. The authors gratefully acknowledge the refugees who kindly participated in our fieldwork, our interpreters Rouba Ishak and Hafez Seliem, and Susan Dean for helping connect us to this population.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study examines experiences of refugees that have settled in Newfoundland and Labrador and analyzes factors that can potentially enhance refugee integration and factors that can negatively impact their settlement experiences and retention in the province. The potential demographic and economic benefits of refugee settlement in the province cannot be realized if refugees come but then choose to leave.

First impressions of the province are an extremely important factor that impact refugees' decisions to stay in or leave the province, given that previous studies showed that the majority of refugees tend to leave the province relatively soon after their arrival. Newfoundland and Labrador could benefit from refugees' overwhelmingly positive impression of its people, whose friendliness, and welcoming and respectful attitude were lauded and sincerely appreciated. On the other hand, even after relatively short period of residency, many respondents have the impression of a potential scarcity of employment opportunities in the province. It is employment that was cited by our respondents as the primary reason for deciding whether to stay in the province or move somewhere else.

Ensuring that refugees can access health care is an important part of their physical and mental well-being. Among challenges to delivering health services for refugees are language barriers, health navigation and transportation. While addressing wait times for physicians and public transit inefficiencies is outside the purview of this study, simple remedies like creating a centralized directory of translation services and organizing health system navigation sessions are possible. Stigma about mental health continues to be a common problem and may be a reason why individuals tend to feel uncomfortable talking about the issue.

**Recommendation:** Settlement agencies should organize health system navigation sessions that include role-playing and other active learning strategies.

**Recommendation:** The Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism of Newfoundland and Labrador should create a centralized directory of translation services that refugees and other interested parties can independently access.

**Recommendation:** Settlement agencies and health care providers should change language used around mental health services, e.g. from "mental health" to "well-being", thus, refugees may be more likely to use the services.

**Recommendation:** Settlement agencies should disseminate information about mental health and addictions walk-in services so that individuals who are dealing with mental health or addictions issues have easy and confidential access to such services if needed.

English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction has been identified as a vital part of integrating refugees into their new homes and is an important first step to acquiring a career or making Canadian friends. The restriction on women with young children (our study found women were

most likely to stay home with the children) from attending language classes can prevent these women from learning English, which would significantly affect their ability to integrate into their community. Some of the refugees with special needs were not able to avail of the ESL service because it is not yet customized to meet their special needs.

**Recommendation:** An increase in funding for settlement agencies to offer expanded child care services could allow more women to attend English classes.

**Recommendation:** While settlement agencies may not have the capacity to deliver specialized services such as English sign language to newcomers, there may be opportunities to partner with other organizations to deliver this service.

**Recommendation:** Given that adult learners with different backgrounds and experiences will learn English at different paces, this should be reflected in the grading process for ESL. The movement through the program should be focused on progress rather than attendance to ensure that everyone can finish the program with a solid understanding of the English language.

**Recommendation:** Smaller classroom sizes would allow teachers to give more personalized lessons. However, this opportunity may be limited based on funding available.

**Recommendation:** While it was acknowledged that the ESL program is based on a Canadian standard and would be difficult to change, adding voluntary extra classes for conversational English might help newcomers learn “everyday English” and meet the demand from those who seek further English language instruction. Rather than one settlement agency offering all services, there may be opportunities to partner with other stakeholders to deliver this type of extra instruction.

While most of the newly arrived refugees were near the end of their one-year settlement assistance, their language skills were still weak and they were not quite ready to enter the labour market. Many in the older cohorts reported moving from the one-year federal assistance to provincial social assistance, which offered them less income and a disincentive to work as some reported trying to work part-time to increase their income, only to have their social assistance cut. This resulted in most people quitting their jobs rather than lose their social assistance benefits. Older cohorts with more labour market experience were generally unemployed or underemployed and there were several instances of racism in their workplace.

**Recommendation:** Employers should formally commit to diversity and inclusiveness and communicate this to staff both visually and regularly. This can include explicit recruitment strategies and policies related to immigrant and refugee hiring within a firm and developing relationships with community placement agencies.

**Recommendation:** Employers should utilize diversity training programs to educate all employees, including managers, immigrant and refugee workers.

**Recommendation:** Employers should include staff from different backgrounds in the decision making and social activities.

**Recommendation:** Employers should participate in mentoring programs for skilled immigrants and refugees who have yet gained employment in their chosen occupation.

**Recommendation:** Firms should commit to deliberate and explicit practices to prevent biases in the selection process. This can also include training for hiring managers to apply consistent and equitable interview and selection techniques.

**Recommendation:** Firms should remove Canadian work experience requirements.

**Recommendation:** The Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism of Newfoundland and Labrador should provide greater supports to immigrants and refugees proceeding with licensing/certification processes.

Social integration factors play an important part in immigrant integration and retention. Despite language barriers that hinder developing friendships with local people, most respondents had a mix of Canadian, ethnic and other immigrant friends. Diverse circle of friends creates a favourable environment for building strong local ties. Establishing a solid social network is crucial not only for social but also economic integration. Refugees generally arrive to Newfoundland and Labrador with low social capital, as they do not know many local residents. The language barrier also poses a challenge to successful social and economic integration. ESL classes are helpful but learning outside the classroom is indispensable for mastering the language.

**Recommendation:** Involvement in the local community is a valuable tool to building social capital, therefore raising awareness of the importance of community engagement should be prioritised by settlement agencies.

There are a number of barriers to settlement service delivery in the province including the funding process, lack of translated information or translation services, lack of cooperation between stakeholders, and lack of government action on identified gaps in service delivery. These issues were considered impediments to effective service delivery to newcomer refugee populations.

**Recommendation:** Increases in refugee in-takes should be complemented with greater funding for settlement agencies from the federal and provincial governments.

**Recommendation:** Refugee policies should be applied equitably to all cohorts.

**Recommendation:** The Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism of Newfoundland and Labrador should create a multilingual portal with detailed information on public services and Canadian housing standards and landlords' expectations.

Recommendation: Funding agencies should introduce multi-year funding schemes, which would help organizations fully meet client needs and spend less time filling out grant applications.

Recommendation: Newfoundland and Labrador's organizations that service immigrants and refugees should develop greater collaboration. This could be facilitated by multi-year funding if stakeholders are more secure in their funding and do not consider each other as competitors.

Recommendation: The provincial government of Newfoundland and Labrador should institute clear pathways for service providers to get involved in design and implementation of policies aiming to address gaps in services.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Project Background and Objectives

Canada's approach to refugees has taken a major shift with the new federal government in 2015. With the arrival of more than 40,000 Syrian refugees, Canada's settlement program is recognized as a best practice in the field. The arrival of refugees presents a great opportunity for Canada's smaller communities, including those in the Atlantic provinces, which are experiencing population decline, aging, out-migration, and labour and skills shortages. The importance of recruitment and retention of newcomers has been recognized in numerous policy documents over the years including Newfoundland and Labrador's Population Growth Strategy 2015-2025 and Immigration Action Plan 2017, Nova Scotia's 2014 Immigration Strategy, P.E.I.'s Annual Investment Report 2014-2015, and New Brunswick's Population Growth Strategy. Such strategies involve a variety of stakeholders in government and the non-profit sector to develop greater synergies and agreement around these topics.

The province of Newfoundland and Labrador receives low absolute numbers of immigrants compared to other provinces. Nevertheless, the share of refugees in the provincial intake of all newcomer groups is higher than in the rest of Canada. For example, in 2016, refugees constituted 27.3 per cent of the overall immigrant intake in Newfoundland and Labrador, while the share of refugees in the provinces with the highest absolute numbers for new arrivals to Canada – Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia – were 18.1 per cent, 13.4 per cent, and 10.8 per cent respectively (IRCC 2017a). The annual number of refugees arriving in Newfoundland and Labrador has consistently increased over the past years, rising from 130 in 2013 to 325 in 2016 (IRCC, 2017a; IRCC, 2017b).

Former refugees have been lauded for their contributions to community development (Jackson and Bauder, 2014; Devoretz et al., 2004). The challenge appears to be keeping them in small towns where economies are stagnant or struggling. Bringing in refugees will yield no benefit to the province if they leave. In this case, neither would they join the provincial workforce, nor would they contribute to stabilizing or increasing the population of the province. Newfoundland and Labrador has the lowest retention rate of refugees in Canada (Gien and Law, 2009; IRCC, 2014; Statistics Canada, 2015). A Goss Gilroy study (2005) highlighted that 35 per cent of the 144 refugees who arrived from January to October 2004 left the province within 10 months of arrival; and one third of them left within one month after their arrival. Ten years later and there has been little change in the retention rate of refugees in the province, which remains the lowest in Canada at 36 per cent (Figure 1).

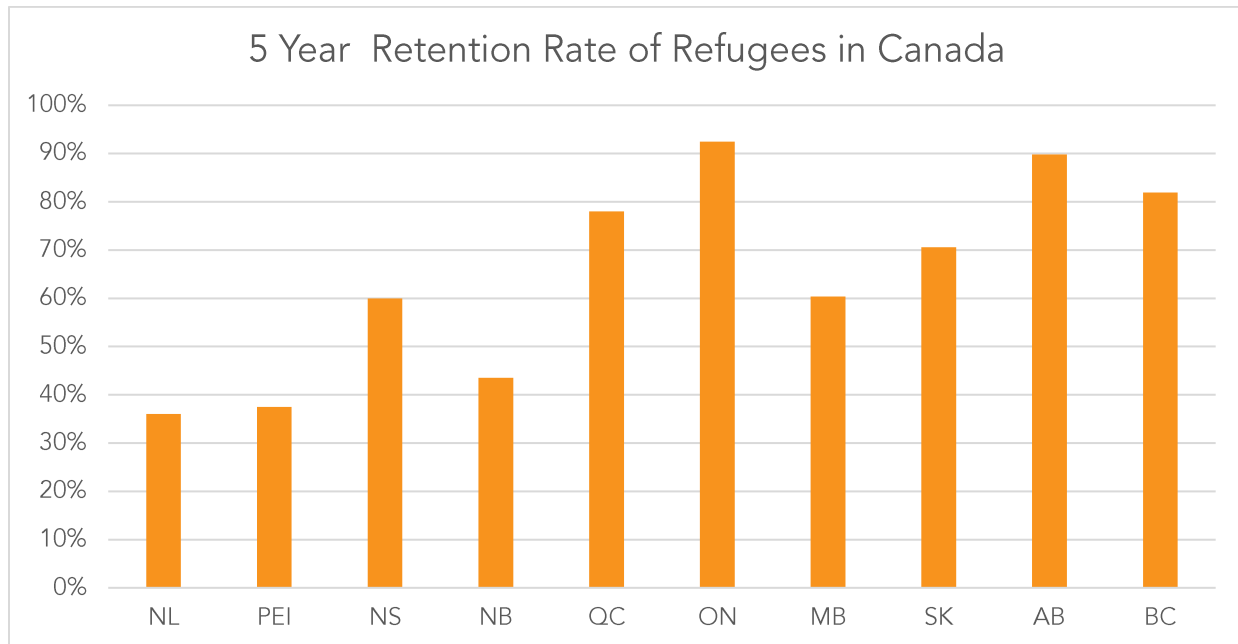


Figure 1: Retention Rate Five Years after Admission of the 2010 Cohort of Refugees (Source: Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2015)

This study aims to examine refugees' settlement experiences and analyze factors that enhance refugee integration in smaller communities and factors that negatively impact refugee settlement experience and their retention.

Previous studies examined Newfoundland and Labrador's immigration and retention for broad categories of newcomers (Gien and Law, 2009), adopted historical perspectives to migration (Burnaby et al., 2009), focused on particular issues like gender (Tastsoglou et al., 2014), language programmes (Bassler, 1990), health care initiatives (Duke and Brunger, 2015) or food security (Food Security Network of NL, 2009), or had small sample sizes of refugees (Goss Gilroy Inc, 2005; El-Bialy and Mulay, 2015). However, the experiences of refugees that have recently settled in the province have yet to be explored in detail. Refugees face great challenges during and after their arrival ranging from limited employment opportunities to housing suitability in addition to the potential effects of limited language proficiency and discrimination (Griffiths et al., 2010; Jackson and Bauder, 2014). Thus, determining possible factors affecting refugee settlement and integration in Newfoundland and Labrador would benefit both refugees and the province given refugees' potential social and economic contributions in the long-term.

## 1.2 Research Methodology

For this study, our research team conducted a total of 114 in-depth, semi-structured interviews in person with refugees in two sets. The first set comprised of 64 Syrian refugees, made up of 42 adults and 22 minors. The second set of interviews comprised of 50 non-Syrian refugees, made up of 41 adults and 9 minors from varying source countries, such as Sudan, Eritrea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Palestine, Nigeria, Liberia and Sierra Leone. We acknowledge that old cohorts' responses may have been affected by so-called "survival bias" given that those who were initially most dissatisfied with their settlement may have left the province.

Most refugees interviewed from both cohorts were Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs), though a portion of each cohort were privately sponsored by churches or families (Figure 2). The interviews ranged from 10 to 60 minutes depending on the level of detail provided by the interviewee. Interviews with Syrian refugees uncovered the experiences of newly arrived refugees, while the refugees from other countries who had been in the province longer, from 2 to 15 years, offered an insight into how these experiences evolved with the passage of time. We will refer to the Syrian refugees as "new arrivals" and to the refugees who have been in the province for longer periods than the Syrian refugees as "older cohorts".

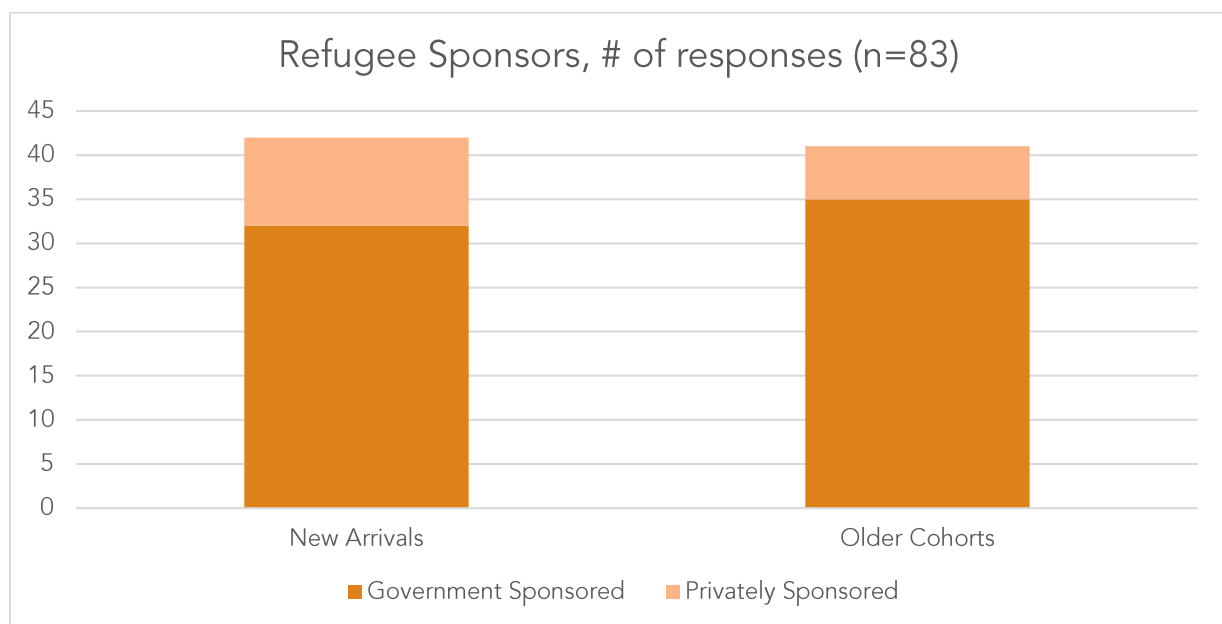


Figure 2: Refugee Sponsors, New Arrivals (n=42) and Older Cohorts (n=41)

We also interviewed 16 stakeholders involved in the settlement and integration of refugees, sourced from various community groups, private organisations and government agencies. These interviews lasted between 30 to 90 minutes. The interviews with refugees focused on their personal stories, their "perspectives and meanings", while interviews with stakeholders were factual, i.e. aiming to obtain "valid factual information" (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 150).

The study used a snowball sample starting with a list of refugees compiled using suggestions from the community group, "Support the Syrian Refugees in Newfoundland and Labrador." Posters detailing information about our study (both in English and Arabic) were sent to contact persons by email, who in-turn created awareness within the group. The assistance of interpreters was required for interviewing refugees, particularly the most recent arrivals.

The collected data were analyzed by using qualitative data analysis software NVivo.

This study received ethics approval from Memorial University's *Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research* on March 8, 2017.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This study builds on Lee's (1966) "push-pull theory" to explain the relationship between employment opportunities (pull) or social isolation (push) and migration. Settlement experiences and migration choices are also explored with regards to Becker's (1964) human capital theory and Bourdieu's (1972) social capital theory whereas education, language skills and social networks are expected to improve individual's employment outcomes and social well-being.

### 2.1 Labour Market Integration

Employment opportunities are considered one of the central push and pull factors. Poor job prospects in the initial destination are likely to encourage relocation (Goss Gilroy Inc., 2005; Houle, 2007; Derwing and Krahn, 2008; Hugo, 2008a; Carter et al., 2009; Griffiths et al., 2010; Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011). While refugees share similar employment and integration barriers to other classifications of immigrants, such as language barriers, lack of Canadian work experience, foreign credential recognition and discrimination, refugees face specific barriers that merit further investigation into their unique circumstances. Compared to economic immigrants, refugees are less likely to speak English or French, are less educated, and are more likely to suffer from mental or physical health issues. This means that refugees may need more specialized services in order to successfully integrate them into Canadian society (Yu et al., 2007).

Employment facilitates refugees' integration into Canada's social and economic networks, allowing them to build social capital (Jackson and Bauder, 2014). Employment is frequently cited by immigrants as the most important factor in determining whether they choose to stay in or leave their initial destination (Goss Gilroy Inc., 2005; Carter et al., 2009). Suitable employment has been shown to significantly reduce out-migration rates so long as it is congruent with immigrants' education and work experience (Goss Gilroy Inc., 2005; Houle, 2007). Some studies emphasize the importance of immigrants finding work early in the first few years after arrival (Devoretz et al., 2004; Houle, 2007; Jackson and Bauder, 2014). In her study of two nearby towns, Walton-Roberts (2004) finds employment rather than town size to be the key driver of settlement, as the larger town in the study was suffering from an economic downturn and was facing more difficulty attracting and retaining migrants. This could bode well for retention of newcomers to St. John's – if they can find a job.

Refugees generally arrive in Newfoundland and Labrador without knowing many local residents leading to difficulties in securing appropriate employment and housing. These difficulties are amplified through a lack of proficiency in Canada's official languages. Higher proficiency in the host country's official languages increases the probability of migrant retention as it facilitates their integration into the local labour market and community. Migrants possessing greater knowledge and competencies in the official language demonstrate a greater capacity to establish themselves economically more quickly, therefore they would be less inclined to relocate (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011). Insufficient language skills are a key determinant in

the departure of immigrants for areas with greater concentrations of their ethno-cultural communities such as larger cities (Hugo, 2008b; Le, 2008). Moreover, English/French proficiency in Canada is perceived to be one of the biggest barriers for refugees in finding suitable employment and housing (Teixeira, 2009; Jackson and Bauder, 2014).

Matching immigrants with jobs that correspond to their education and skills is considered to be of great importance in their retention, especially outside big cities (Goss Gilroy Inc., 2005; Houle, 2007; Hugo, 2008a; Griffiths et al., 2010; Lewis, 2010). However, many refugees upon arrival do not have access to desirable employment. They often do not possess sufficient or adequate information about the local labor market and are unable to access the same informal networks as job-seeking local residents to find more appropriate jobs (Derwing and Krahn, 2008: 196). The labour market in Newfoundland and Labrador presents the greatest challenge to the economic integration of refugees as they may be unable to find suitable employment when compared to economic class immigrants (Goss Gilroy Inc., 2005; Bevelander, 2016). As a result, refugees may experience a prolonged period of settlement and under-employment outside of their areas of specialization after their arrival (Goss Gilroy Inc., 2005; Teixeira and Drolet, 2016). When faced with poor job prospects, relocation from their initial destination is more likely to occur (Hugo 2008a; Carter et al., 2009).

## 2.2 Cost of Living and Housing

High cost of living, poor facilities, and especially the lack of affordable and suitable housing are important push factors (Hugo, 2008b; Carter et al., 2009; Griffiths et al., 2010; Cameron, 2011; Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2014; Taylor et al., 2014). The difficulties encountered by refugees in finding suitable employment are mirrored in their search for suitable housing. Much like employment, housing is consistently identified as one of the primary means by which immigrants integrate themselves socially and economically into their host society (Hugo, 2008a; Teixeira and Drolet, 2016). Hyndman et al. (2017b: 16) contend that “access to good-quality, suitable, affordable, and safe housing should be seen as a vital element of refugee settlement.” The availability of appropriate housing constitutes an important element in immigrant retention given that unaffordable housing and shortages in suitable accommodations can function as disincentives to long-term settlement (Griffiths et al., 2010; Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2014).

The high cost of housing is commonly highlighted as the primary concern amongst immigrants in finding appropriate accommodations (Carter et al., 2009; Griffiths et al., 2010; Cameron, 2011; Taylor et al., 2014). Many refugees operate under significant financial constraints from precarious and low-paying employment during their period of settlement affecting their ability to secure affordable housing (Walsh et al., 2016). The poor quality of housing stock in smaller communities and a lack of low cost rental properties may lead refugees to settle elsewhere (Teixeira, 2009; Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2014). Furthermore, refugees are often unable to find suitable housing given the size of their immediate and extended families. Overcrowding and insufficient space are frequently cited as concerns given that available

dwellings do not match the needs of these larger families (Hugo, 2008b; Carter et al., 2009; Teixeira, 2009; Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2014). However, research also shows immigrant retention is greater in larger population centers where rents can be higher and appropriate housing may be more difficult to find. This suggests that when other factors (suitable employment, presence of ethno-cultural communities, etc.) are considered, immigrants may be willing to cope with the financial demands of more expensive housing, but this is often on a contextual basis (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2014).

A lack of high quality and reliable housing information is also identified as a major barrier in finding suitable housing (Teixeira, 2009). Refugees consistently indicate the need for more readily accessible information related to the housing and rental markets of their initial destination (Carter et al., 2009; Cameron, 2011). For refugees in Canada, collecting and using information about housing vacancies in complex housing markets can be a stressful experience given their financial and language constraints (Teixeira and Drolet, 2016). While it is advisable to increase refugees' access to housing service agencies, real estate agencies or government organizations to assist in finding adequate housing, it is another issue in making sure these resources are utilized appropriately. As Teixeira (2009: 331) illustrates in British Columbia's mid-sized cities, immigrants may "feel more comfortable relying on personal networks rather than on more formal sources" in finding suitable housing.

### 2.3 Social Capital

Establishing a solid social network is extremely important for both social and economic integration of newcomers. Refugees often arrive at their point of entry in Canada with low social capital. Frequently conceptualized as "the resources individuals access through social interactions and relationships" (Sime and Fox, 2015: 525), social capital is often obtained and built through social ties to prior immigrants as they provide the requisite information and assistance to reduce the costs and risks of immigrant integration (Garip, 2008). In locations such as mid-sized cities, immigrants and refugees frequently rely upon their own ethnic networks in their search for suitable housing and employment upon their arrival (Teixeira, 2009). As such, refugees are generally settled in locations where they can more easily access informal family and ethnic-based support systems or formal assistance via government agencies and non-governmental organizations (Hugo, 2008b).

The location in which refugees settle affects not only their employment and housing prospects, but their social networks and their participation in community activities (Teixeira and Li, 2009). Teixeira and Li (2009) argue that the presence of a 'welcoming community' in a new society is a prerequisite for the successful social and cultural integration of immigrants. The 'successful settlement' implies that communities will encourage immigrants to participate in local activities (Wulff and Dharmalingam, 2008: 149). Refugees that develop strong local ties through activities such as volunteering and joining community organizations are less likely to relocate as they evaluate the importance of these local ties against other factors such as housing and employment opportunities (Wulff and Dharmalingam, 2008; Department of Immigration and Border

Protection, 2014). Refugees in small urban centers do report social and linguistic isolation, but this can be mitigated by a welcoming community (El-Bialy and Mulay, 2015).

The presence of ethno-cultural communities is considered an important factor in immigrant attraction and long-term retention (Derwing and Krahn, 2008; Carter et al., 2010; Pandey and Townsend, 2010). Immigrants seem to display a greater willingness to develop their lives in areas with a significant population of their own ethnic group (Han and Humphreys, 2005) as they are “willing to compromise their economic status to live close to their ethnic community” (Carter et al., 2009: 24). Refugees without attachments such as family, friends, and others from their ethnic community are more likely to face more problems upon arrival, increasing their likelihood to relocate to areas where such clusters exist (Lewis, 2010).

Local non-ethnic communities can facilitate settlement process, which would result in increased retention (Huynh, 2004; Goss Gilroy Inc., 2005). Immigrants who have friends from different ethno-cultural groups tend to be more satisfied with their settlement experience (Sapeha, 2015). Furthermore, participation in activities with people from the same ethnic or cultural group tend to decrease over time and maintaining ties with others from the same group becomes less important (Carter et al., 2010). Over time, the social networks of immigrants expand beyond their own ethnic and cultural groups as they integrate themselves in their community, increasing the likelihood of retention (Huynh, 2004; Carter et al., 2009; Carter et al., 2010).

One of the biggest barriers faced by refugees in finding suitable housing, employment, and building social capital is the level of racism and discrimination they face upon arrival (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2014). In small to mid-sized cities, refugees “represent a distinct and different group to the majority resident population” (Hugo, 2008b: 562). Higher levels of discrimination are associated with lower levels of life satisfaction, which is a push factor in the choice to relocate (Han and Humphreys, 2005; Griffiths et al., 2010; Houle and Schellenberg, 2010).

Communities’ attitudes towards refugees can be influenced by political and media discourses. The repetition of political rhetoric presenting them as economic burdens, unskilled labourers, ‘queue jumpers’ or potential terrorists has contributed to a deterioration of public attitudes towards them (Hyndman et al., 2017a). Refugees identify negative stereotyping and prejudices on the part of employers as barriers to their participation in local labour markets (Fleay et al., 2016). Such representations of refugees devalue their skills as they feel forced into undesirable ‘refugee jobs’ within the Canadian labour market (Jackson and Bauder, 2014). Similarly, prejudice and discrimination by landlords is a common practice, and immigrants looking to enter Canadian housing markets in mid-sized cities may have difficulties finding suitable housing. One-third of immigrants in a Kelowna, British Columbia study reported instances perceived as discrimination based on the ethnic and racial background information requested of them by prospective landlords (Teixeira, 2009).

However, in certain instances refugee status can be an impetus to finding employment and housing. Feist et al. (2015) found that it was more common for employers to hire those with

migrant status given their work ethic and their willingness to do jobs that local residents did not want to do. While refugees generally gravitate to jobs that are low skilled and labour intensive, caution must be taken to ensure that refugees' skills and work experience are not devalued in the long-term (Feist et al., 2015). Moreover, some communities and local governments have been proactive in attracting and welcoming refugees to their community and assisting them in adjusting to their new environment (Hugo, 2008b).

### 3.0 FIELDWORK RESULTS

Arriving in a new country, often with a new language and customs, can be a difficult process for refugees and requires an array of supports for successful integration. Previous studies have found stakeholders prioritize housing, access to language courses and navigation of services and identified other needs around income, legal representation and community orientation (Tastsoglou, 2014). We asked stakeholders what they felt were priority services for refugees and received a range of answers including employment, language, health, credential recognition, education, and access to information. One stakeholder emphasized how interrelated many of these priorities were, and how it highlights the need for a holistic approach to resettlement. Rather than focusing on a particular service, some stakeholders emphasized the hierarchy of services. For example, before one can acquire meaningful employment they must have some ability to speak English.

*"I think employment is perhaps a priority. A definite priority. Employment is difficult without language training. So, you kind of have to have language training in order to be successful with the employment. Most of the time, not all of the time but most of the time." (Stakeholder)*

*"First thing is employment and second thing is language and third would be mental wellness. They can do everything when they have those three things, they have to have a job, and to have a job they need to learn English, that's the best thing. Because so much frustration I see in woman's eyes, especially the woman with children staying home, that kind of scenario." (Stakeholder)*

Health was identified as a priority primarily for those who were sick. One stakeholder suggested that the most recent cohort of Syrian refugees had some serious health issues and that it was necessary for these to be addressed before they were able to move on to language training or employment. Another stakeholder agreed that health was a priority for the sick but even for those who were well, having that social net was important to feeling at ease in a new community.

*"Health is something that you need as it comes so it could be priority because you are a particular case, or it could be something like that this guy has been here and has never needed health, so it is case by case situation as opposed to the others. You come here and you are going to need education, you need employment, you need information no matter what. And eventually you get sick. It has to be there. If you don't see that health is available, you are going to be frustrated even though you don't need it. Just what if something happened." (Stakeholder)*

Other stakeholders acknowledged how integrating successfully into your community, by learning the language, finding meaningful employment, and building a social network, was a social determinant of health. This emphasizes the closed-loop feedback these services reinforce, as they are all intricately connected.

Answers were also based on what services stakeholders offered. Those who were more involved in creating welcoming communities for newcomers highlighted the importance of social events in resettlement.

*"They like most of the programs we do, they want to come out from their home, they want social, they want to learn." (Stakeholder)*

Access to information was identified as a gap because refugees were identified as having trouble navigating the system here in the province.

*"I would say that access to information in terms of you need any kind of service and you don't have where to go so you come here and we give you a straight answer. So you have to go to twenty places for people to give you twenty different answers and then you find out you were making the wrong question. So information is the main one." (Stakeholder)*

For youth, the priority was school, which serves both an educational function, i.e. teaching children English and a variety of other subjects, as well as a social function as students develop friendships, join social clubs or sports teams, and become part of their community.

For those who were more advanced in their resettlement, had language training, good health and were exploring the job market, credential recognition was indicated as a priority as well.

### 3.1 Settlement Assistance

Settlement organisations play a major role in the process of refugee arrival, settlement and integration. Credit for successful resettlement should be given not only to the government and supportive locals, but also the institutions that provide resettlement services (Lamba and Krahn, 2003).

There is only one organization in the province that is federally-funded to assist refugees with settlement. This settlement agency provides a range of services, such as ESL classes, assistance with finding and furnishing a home, greeting refugees at the airport, connecting them with medical services and translators, and showing them around the city. The agency also aims to identify and fill gaps in service delivery. All refugee respondents received settlement assistance from this organization in some way and some also received assistance from volunteers, private sponsors, churches, relatives and friends.

*"The [settlement agency] found the place and rented it for us. We rented it for a year with a lease. And now we moved to this house, two months ago. We received assistance only from the [settlement agency]." (New arrival)*

*"The [settlement agency] welcomed me at the airport. The [settlement agency] helped me with the school and helped us around the hospital." (New arrival)*

*"The [settlement agency] helped me to find out the house and rented and helped everything. Also, some volunteer from Arabic student helped me." (New arrival)*

*"They used to do everything. They find a place for you, take you to the store. Teach you how to buy stuff. They do everything for orientation. They orient us to do everything. It was very amazing to come like that. Even to get your papers, you don't do nothing. If you came with the government, you enjoyed." (Older cohort)*

Overall, refugee respondents found arrival and settlement services adequate, but there were suggestions for improvement on different fronts. Some respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the housing arrangements made on their behalf. Sometimes the settlement agency had difficulty connecting people to a translator and refugees had to find their own. One refugee reflected that issues with the settlement agency may be the result of underfunding.

*"The immigration helps you through the [settlement agency], but they don't have a lot of people. It is affecting a lot of people out there that are coming new. They don't have other people to help them and the [settlement agency] doesn't have much help. I think they don't have enough people. To someone they just take them to their house and show them where to go shopping just once but when you are new you need more than just that. You cannot know where the place was after only one time if you are new here. You cannot remember where they showed you. You need somebody to show you where is what cheaper and so. The [settlement agency] is not there for that. I think they need more people to cover it." (Older cohort)*

One stakeholder respondent pointed out that the initial stage of settling into a new location is like a grieving process, which could be the reason why new arrivals were more likely to have issues with settlement services than older cohorts.

Besides the federally-funded settlement agency, there are several other agencies and individuals that have stakes in the refugee settlement process in the province. Many of these agencies had partnership agreements with the settlement agency and receive funding from the provincial and in some cases, federal government.

Some local volunteers were also reported to have helped refugees settle in, by bringing them clothes and furniture. The involvement of volunteers seems to have become more pronounced over time.

*"We got some help from Canadian volunteers. She brought us clothes and some other stuff. Also, the [settlement agency] helped us." (New arrival)*

*"At the beginning, there weren't that many people to help us but nowadays we have our own volunteers to help us." (New arrival)*

One of the stakeholders, however, noted that volunteers can be unreliable and the best way to involve them in the refugee settlement process is to give them small tasks to which they can readily commit.

*"You cannot ask too much of volunteers. You have to have small tasks, so they can commit to that." (Stakeholder)*

Some refugees were privately sponsored by individuals or by organizations such as church groups. The federally-funded settlement agency acknowledged that most sponsorship groups are connected to them given that they are the only sponsorship agreement holder in the province. Some refugee respondents described receiving settlement services and funding solely from their private sponsors, while others received some social assistance from the government.

*"We received settlement assistance through sponsors. They helped us with finding the house and the things like furniture. We are not receiving money from the government, we are receiving it from our sponsors." (New arrival)*

*"No, I came as private sponsorship. No, no organization helped me, only my private sponsor." (Older cohort)*

The discussion with respondents who had been privately sponsored revealed that refugees in that category tend to become independent of settlement support quicker than the government sponsored refugees. This may be due to the personalized support that these individuals receive, though there also seemed to be an unwillingness for some private sponsors to assist refugees beyond their contractual duty.

*"I arrived here by family sponsorship, and the family that sponsor me make rent, the apartment and put some furniture for me and everything good. By family sponsorship, yeah, and they took me to grocery. They learned [me] the bus system and how to take it. In the first year there was much contact with them but after one year they travel to new scene. So, there is no much contact with them. Maybe every two months one contact or. And now I got my salary from the government so there is no need to contact with them much time." (New arrival)*

*"We are sponsored by church so at the beginning there was somebody helping us but after a while they told us that we have to be responsible for ourselves." (New arrival)*

This fact was augmented by observation from some of the stakeholders interviewed who both identified the more personalized support and community connections that privately-sponsored receive, and the large amount of resources required to settle a new family.

*"We do find that the privately sponsored families get on their feet quicker. That is another thing you could add. It is because they have so much help from the private sponsors. Normally it is a group of people or church. So there is a lot of people around to help them that they can call or ask or provide transportation to appointments or help them with school or help the children with school." (Stakeholder)*

*"Taking on private sponsorship is a big big commitment. It's expensive, and you are going to look after that family for a full year after they arrive." (Stakeholder)*

Stakeholders also pointed out that private sponsorship plays a significant role in helping refugees reunite with their family members.

*"The government policy is not going to open the door to everybody and let them become government sponsored refugees. However, the door is open to a lot more privately sponsored refugees. But finding private sponsors is not always easy." (Stakeholder)*

*"The private sponsorship program really has morphed into an extended family reunification program." (Stakeholder)*

Our stakeholder respondents reported a number of barriers to settlement service delivery in the province including the funding process, lack of translated information or translation services, lack of cooperation between stakeholders, and lack of government action on identified gaps in service delivery. These issues were considered impediments to effective service delivery to newcomer refugee populations.

Some stakeholders indicated frustration with the funding process for non-profit organizations. While facing high demand for their services, organizations had to deal with filling out rejected funding applications, which was considered to be a waste of time. This was a constraint on their time and energy, and especially frustrating when these organizations felt that they were working towards filling important gaps in the system.

*"Nowadays I am finding so much demand for our services, so many people need them. So sometimes I write the proposals and it takes our hours, and sometimes the proposal is not successful, you're not getting any money, so we have to budget with our small amount of money for the whole year. We go year-by-year, fiscally. Grant and funding is a big issue. I find sometimes with the resources, you can see so many organizations working, but when you look for the real support resources to offer the services in a culturally-appropriate way, there are the limits here." (Stakeholder)*

**Recommendation: Funding agencies should introduce multi-year funding schemes, which would help organizations fully meet client needs and spend less time filling out grant applications.**

Two stakeholders pointed to their limited ability to serve the newcomer community because they were not able to offer translated information or translation services. This was due to the lack of funding to fill this gap or the lack of single source to find translators. Instead, they had to rely on personal connections to offer translation services.

**Recommendation: The Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism of Newfoundland and Labrador should create centralized translation directory/services.**

Some stakeholders felt overwhelmed by the demand for their services. They wanted to offer more services but were constrained by capacity. Respondents also expressed a preference to have funding to hire staff rather than to rely on volunteers, who were found to be unreliable.

*"But at the same time, I cannot do anything yet, because for so many. Because I'm the only person trying to do all kinds of services and sometimes it's too much for an organization like us." (Stakeholder)*

While some organizations do partner to deliver certain programs or services, some stakeholders felt that the organizations involved in serving the newcomer population were too separate and there was not enough cooperation. This made it difficult to create awareness about services offered by different organizations, especially for newcomer populations who are most in need of the services but have smaller social networks to draw upon to learn about different services.

*"St. John's, NL is the most non-collaborative work, that's the biggest thing." (Stakeholder)*

*"There are two things. Each one is trying to take ownership of the things that they have to do. And they don't allow other organizations to understand the process... And the other one is the ill perception of competitiveness, like you are my competitor even though we are serving in different manner, we are providing dozen different services, and jealousy. Once somebody came to me and told me 'you are dealing with my clients and that is not right'. Why are you saying 'your clients', when did you buy them? I couldn't understand. That jealousy and that side of this is one of the things that prevents services to streamline." (Stakeholder)*

**Recommendation:** Newfoundland and Labrador's organizations that service immigrants and refugees should develop greater collaboration. This could be facilitated by multi-year funding if stakeholders are more secure in their funding and do not consider each other as competitors.

Some stakeholders emphasized that lack of information is a factor that can cause setbacks in refugee settlement and integration.

*"We haven't tried really hard for the province as a whole to recognize that the reason for the poor retention... is the lack of information. People get sick of asking and asking and asking, not getting an answer and wasting time. Like this lady, it took her two years to finally come here to understand that all she needed was a car ID that she can have at motor registration. That was it. All she needed. That was two years of her time going anywhere and asking. And she was already prepared to leave the province." (Stakeholder)*

**Recommendation:** The Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism of Newfoundland and Labrador should create a multilingual portal with detailed information on public services. Funding was recently allocated to the City of St. John's Local Immigration Partnership by the provincial government to develop and host an interactive, online map of services available on the Northeast Avalon (Advanced Education, Skills and Labour, 2017). This will be an important resource to serve the needs of the refugee community.

Another identified challenge was the lack of response from the provincial government on reports about immigration issues faced by the province. This led the stakeholder to give up on trying to make change at the provincial level.

*"I've been to Corner Brook, Gander, and Labrador, just trying to get information and inputs from immigrants and to meet with newcomers. We end up writing reports to the government. Nothing happens. So that's a challenge where you do so much work, and the government spends a lot of money, and you do research, you do all kinds of things and put it together. You have findings said at formal meetings with service providers and, at the end of the day, nothing is implemented from the recommendations. That is challenging." (Stakeholder)*

**Recommendation:** The provincial government of Newfoundland and Labrador should institute clear pathways for service providers to get involved in design and implementation of policies aiming to address gaps in services.

Barriers to service delivery identified by stakeholders tend to focus on difficulties accessing information and a lack of communication between immigrant settlement organizations and relevant government departments. Some organizations also complained of underfunding and a lack of stability year-to-year. Some issues, such as lack of translation services or information on services, could be remedied through low-cost centralized information mediums such as a website. Other issues, such as lack of cooperation between stakeholders or government initiative

on identified barriers, will require more deep-rooted changes in how these institutions operate. Issues with single-year funding for NGOs are not just a complaint in the immigrant service sector (Fang et al., forthcoming). Instituting multi-year funding for organizations could improve their service delivery by allowing them to plan long-term, spend more time with clients and enhance work security among staff.

### 3.2 First Impressions of Newfoundland and Labrador

Understanding refugees' first impressions of Newfoundland and Labrador is an important part of understanding their decisions to stay or to leave the province. In their 2005 study, Goss Gilroy Inc found that 35 per cent of refugees left within ten months of arriving in the province, suggesting that first impressions have a heavy impact on migration intentions. Our research found that a significant majority of respondents adapted to their new country and felt quite satisfied with their settlement: both new arrivals and older cohorts overwhelmingly reported that they felt a sense of belonging in their community (Figure 3). While some insisted that "everything is perfect," others had positive and negative things to say about their new home.

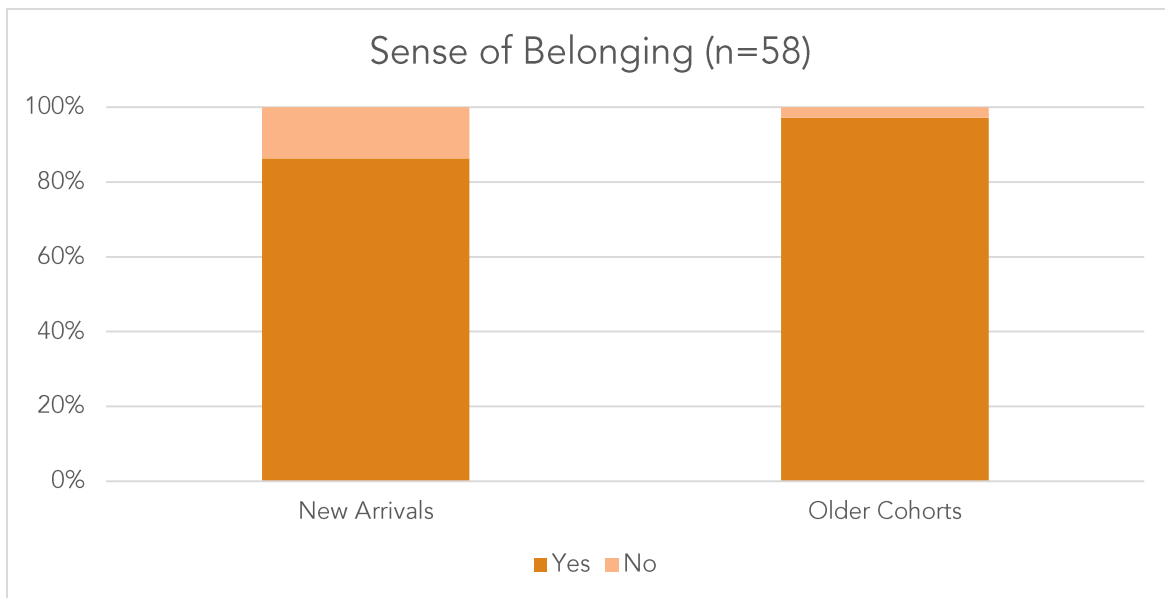


Figure 3: Individual Feelings of Belonging in their Community, New Arrivals (n=22) and Older Cohorts (n=36)

### 3.2.1 Positive Impressions

Of the factors examined as sources of positive impression on refugees, the friendliness of the locals had the highest percentage both among the newly arrived refugee respondents and the older cohorts. Food, feeling of safety, the natural environment, the weather, a lack of discrimination and high quality education for their children also had high ratings as positive factors (Figure 4). Previous studies have similarly found that friendliness of locals, quality of life and the natural environment had positive effects on newcomers' settlement experience (Gien and Law, 2009; El-Bialy and Mulay, 2015).

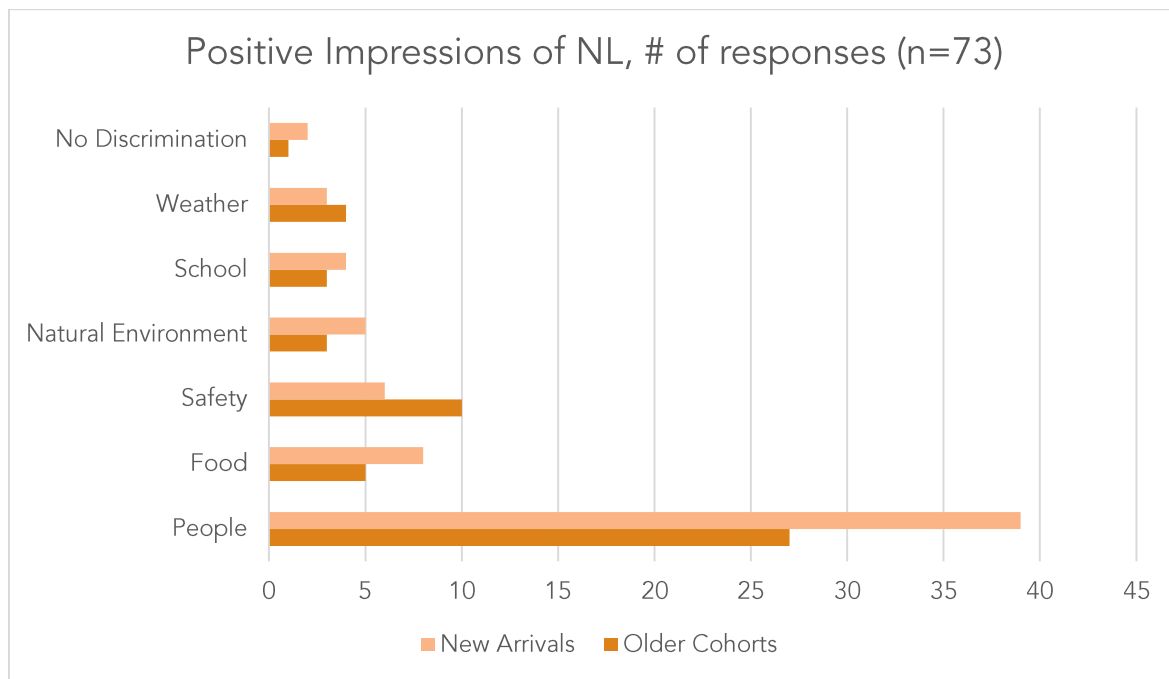


Figure 4: Positive Impressions of Newfoundland and Labrador, New Arrivals (n=40) and Older Cohorts (n=33) (some respondents had more than one answer)

The friendliness of people and the positive effect that it had on refugees' intention to stay was a common sentiment found in our interviews. Refugee respondents felt that people were welcoming, friendly and respectful, and simple things like a smile or a "hello" were highly appreciated.

*"People are very nice in here. As I was coming I thought I was going to move away from here but as I met the people then I changed my mind and now I want to stay here." (New arrival)*

*"The first impression was good, that it has good people. Everybody is smiling, goes shopping and say hello. People smile." (New arrival)*

*"The people are nice, they go out of their way to help, they are willing to work with you, they try to understand as much as they can." (Older Cohort)*

*"People have been really nice. Some of people are very nice. I even have a friend, lady, she took care of my children and my family. She is from here and she was to us like we were her family. Up to this time she's done so much for us. Every time I meet her she is very kind to me. From the moment I've been here she's been very helpful." (Older Cohort)*

The work of volunteers greeting people at the airport and helping them settle in were key aspects of the positive impressions some people had made of the province.

*"I got a very good welcoming from Canadians. ... I met many volunteers that helped me. Around 20 persons welcomed me." (New arrival)*

*"The people, when we came in 2002, were very nice to us. When we came here every welcomed us. The [settlement agency] took a good care of us, rent an apartment for us, integrated us. They did all the necessary things that they have to do for the refugees to fit in the system. That is the first." (Older Cohort)*

As most of the refugees who came to Newfoundland and Labrador had children, the education of their children was a particular topic of concern and people were happy to have their children in school and to feel that they were receiving a good education. The relatively low cost of Memorial University was also discussed as a positive as their children would have opportunities for a university education once they were older.

*"The most important thing for me are my children that they are in school." (New arrival)*

*"Some friend referred to me that Newfoundland has the best public schools for the kids and also that the fees at the university is cheaper so I prefer that." (New arrival)*

After fleeing a civil war and living in refugee camps where security was low, safety was a prominent concern for the refugees we interviewed. Importantly, people felt safe in St. John's. They found there was a low crime rate, a friendly police force, and a feeling of security in their community. Some representatives from the police force had visited the ESL school for 'Police Week' and this left respondents with positive impressions of the police.

*"The good thing is safety. I feel safe here." (New arrival)*

*"Also, the police is very good here. I met them two times. [Interviewer: What for?] In the police week, they visited the school and I was there. I found them very good." (New arrival)*

*"The things that I like the most about Newfoundland is the sense of safety and the community environment. You feel safe here, you can walk anywhere. You can get lost in the woods... It doesn't mean that there is no crime. It is like in any other place. So basically, safe." (Older cohort)*

*"Yeah, St. John's is quiet and the most important thing is the safety. Safety is very good here. Even in the night we can go out no problem. Even my daughter! The other night she went to cinema and she came back no problem." (Older Cohort)*

The natural landscape of the city, the small size, and the feeling of opportunity were also discussed as positive aspects of St. John's.

*"My kids like snow and as we lived in Lebanon I promised them that when they arrive there would be snow and then we were happy and until now we are enjoying the snow." (New arrival)*

*"I really like the city. I think it is very beautiful and the nature is very nice." (New arrival)*

*"What I most like about Newfoundland it is a very quiet province and it is not huge. For a refugee, it is better to stay here. If they need to go back to school or find a job this province is small and is quiet for them to learn how to live." (Older Cohort)*

*"What I like about Newfoundland is the people here are very welcoming here. Being here in Newfoundland is like you get a chance. You can achieve a lot if you apply yourself if you put your time in it. Back home, you can achieve things too, but it is a lot harder, a lot more competitive. You cannot do much home unless you have education. Whereas here everyone has an opportunity. If you apply yourself, you can achieve whatever you can achieve." (Older Cohort)*

### 3.2.2 Negative Impressions

What some considered as positive aspects, like food and weather, were found to be the most negative aspects by other respondents. Poor public transport, snowy sidewalks and bad weather were identified by El-Bialy and Mulay (2015) as sources of stress for newcomers, while Gien and Law (2009) found that poor climate, better quality of life and more job opportunities elsewhere

were reasons that people left the province. In our study, we found new arrivals were more likely to cite cost of living and missing family members as negative impressions while older cohorts tended to refer to discrimination, social isolation, and lack of jobs. Other negative impressions of Newfoundland and Labrador that respondents cited were housing, lack of help from community or settlement service providers, problems with the health care system and language barrier (Figure 5).

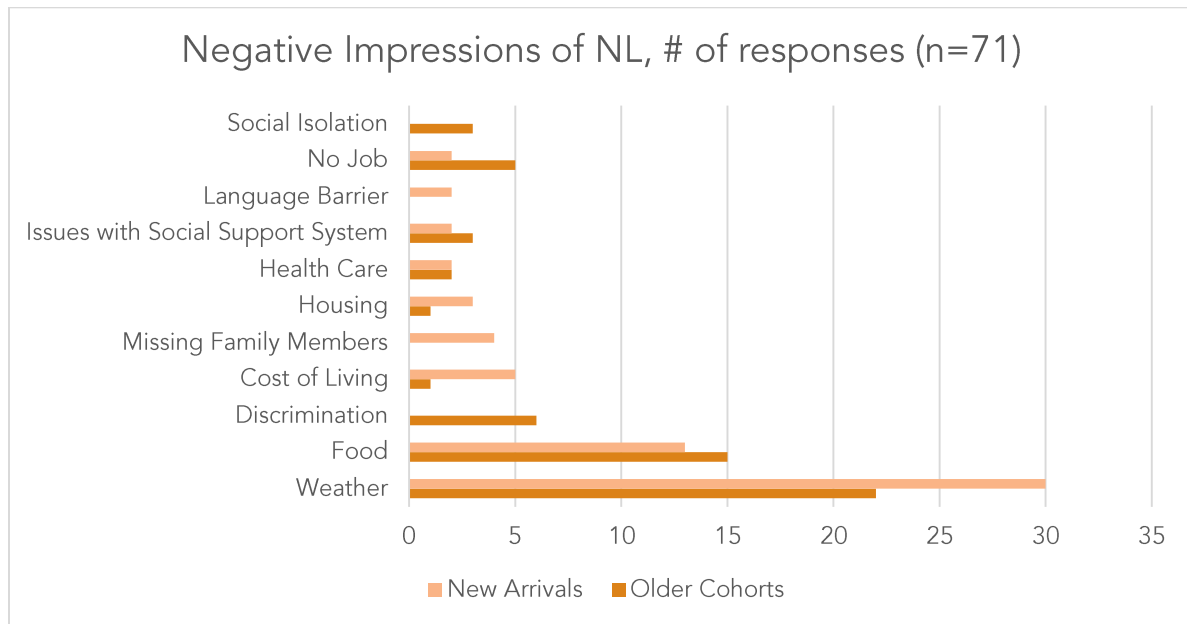


Figure 5: Negative Impressions of Newfoundland and Labrador, New Arrivals (n=38) and Older Cohorts (n=33) (some respondents had more than one answer)

For both new arrivals and older cohorts, the weather ranked high as a source of negative impressions. Coming from a much warmer climate, many refugees had trouble adapting to the winter in Newfoundland and Labrador. They found that the weather was very cold and that it was very hard at first, but some said they had gotten used to the climate or found it a minor problem. One respondent, a farmer, was concerned about the prospects continuing his profession in this climate.

*"I don't like the weather because home I worked as a farmer. I would like to work as a farmer here as well but because of the weather it is difficult." (New arrival)*

*"The weather was very different than the one in Lebanon or in Syria. It was a bit difficult for the family." (New arrival)*

*"For the weather, I think that in the beginning it is really not easy. It is very hard when you have kids and you don't have transportation, it is very difficult. As far as you are going further with your life it will be getting easier but it is not easy." (Older cohort)*

Some respondents felt that the government could be more proactive in getting residents outside during the winter, which would make the weather easier to handle. In recent years, the City of St. John's has offered more winter activities, such as a free outdoor skating rink and low-cost ski and snowshoe rentals in public parks. Newcomers, however, may not be aware of these services.

*"About the climate. There is not a lot to say about the climate because it is very cold but also the government is supposed to do something related to activities for children in the winter. Winter is long and you can organize a place for children to gather because they are very bored in the winter inside the house. It is hard for them to stay in the house in the winter. It is better to go to some place that the government supports. Even if it was a low amount of money. Just to let the children to enjoy their time during winter without being so bored." (Older cohort)*

The availability and cost of food was also an area of concern. Respondents struggled to find certain foods, especially bread, and complained about the high cost of fruit and vegetables. Previous studies have found that food was a key component of refugees' well-being and that newcomers may be eating more fast food and processed foods because they are common and cheap (Food Security Network of NL, 2009). Some respondents found that when they first arrived they had trouble finding specific groceries but that this had improved over time. There seemed to be a high demand for certain Arabic foods, as it was described to sell out quickly.

*"There is a need for more Arabic food and some we can't find at all. We would be happier if there is access to those kinds of food. Like the bread, there is no place baking this kind of bread." (New arrival)*

*"Nowadays we are familiar with places like Dominion or Costco and they have some Arabic food. Things are getting better. ... The Arabic stuff is much less because the problem is that whenever we find something then it is sold out soon. We would need more Arabic supplies." (New arrival)*

*"We had challenges about the food. It is hard to find international food here. Our diet is mostly vegetables and it is hard to find our kind of vegetables here. You have to order it from Toronto, it is too expensive". (Older cohort)*

Older cohorts emphasized that there was little variety in food when they arrived but new demand has sparked change in the local market as businesses have begun supplying certain goods. This has also been an avenue for newcomers to start businesses to cater to diverse tastes.

*"If I had to talk about food obviously, I came from somewhere you know different part of the world it wouldn't be something that I necessarily wanted but when we first came there were not so many varieties of things that we could get but we are getting diverse, our community is getting bigger and bigger, larger and larger, and many and many small businesses are opening, so we started getting and also we are getting familiar with the community and we started getting so many things we are used to [eat] with." (Older cohort)*

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The Food Security Network of NL (2009) identified food as a key component of immigrant and refugees' well-being. They found that to deal with lack of availability, newcomers were bringing food home in their travels and were worried their children would not be exposed to their traditional foods. They recommend the expansion of refugee orientation or creation of food education workshops to familiarize newcomers with buying and preparing local foods, how to identify nutritional information, and determining which foods can be substitutes for cultural cooking. They also suggest lobbying local grocery stores to carry a greater diversity of foods, or encouraging newcomers to start their own businesses related to food.

**Recommendation: Settlement agencies should expand their refugee orientation to include food education workshops or partner with other organizations to offer food education workshops.** Our survey did find that immigrant-serving agencies were partnering to organize social events that revolved around cooking. These tended to be focused on women but as we found women were more likely to cook in the home, this targeted approach may be best.

**Recommendation: Grocery stores should carry a greater diversity of foods, which would benefit both newcomers and all residents due to increase variety of food on offer.**

**Recommendation: Settlement agencies and the Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism should encourage newcomers to start their own businesses related to food and facilitate the process.**

While some of the older cohort respondents reported that many refugees adjusted to the local food and craved their home country food less, others pointed to the difficulty adjusting to the local food even after several years of living in the province.

*"The only problem when I came was the food... The food is a problem until now.... They should encourage us to bring our food because we cannot just depend on their food. We have here only one African store and they don't have most of the things. The African store here is Nigerian, so they only bring Nigerian stuff. We have Sudanese, Sierra Leone and other people." (Older cohort)*

Some respondents felt isolated from their community and from social support networks. They had trouble talking to locals with thick accents or who spoke very fast, or did not like their housing accommodations. Others were frustrated with the wait times for healthcare.

*"Maybe I had some difficulties when I arrived. ... The accent was very hard and they speak very fast here." (New arrival)*

*"When I arrived at the place, they found for me was a bit strange for me. I don't like the structure of this house. [I dislike] the noise from upstairs. We are going to leave this house." (New arrival)*

*"I don't like the time waiting at hospitals. Whenever you go there even with emergency case you have to wait a long time. The doctors and nurses are perfect but there is a problem with the waiting." (New arrival)*

*"The health care system in Newfoundland is not bad. When you go to Health Sciences the only thing is the wait time. They are very informative, and they would help you. But think about it like this: you go there you sit there for 8 hours. If I go to the emergency room I don't spend there less than 5 hours and sometime up to 8 hours. Then you see the doctor and see you for two seconds and then he goes and then you only see the nurse. So, I don't feel like they take you that seriously. (Older cohort)*

Depending on where an individual came from, household appliances, utilities and care could be very different than what they are used to. Some older cohorts of refugees found adjusting to their new houses a challenge as they didn't know how to use certain appliances or had issues with their landlords because of cultural differences.

*"By the time I came I was [assigned] to a social worker, they called them settlement worker. They don't tell us a lot of stuff. They don't give us much information. What they do is they help you find a house but back home we don't have modern houses like this. When you are given a house here they are supposed to help me like a kind of orientation: this is the toilet, this is the kitchen and how it works. All that orientation nobody was there to give us actually an orientation. Going for shopping was really a challenge for us because there was nobody to direct them this is what to do. She requested if the government could give us somebody to help us. They need to be close to us to handle... to hold us well. They need to carry us through the process because we were new we didn't know much and to guide us in everything. So if they don't tell me I won't know." (Older cohort)*

Both cohorts were concerned about their career prospects. Older cohorts shared negative experiences with discrimination while new arrivals were also concerned about family members from back home.

*"I can't find a job. Maybe because the language and, also the job position here is not very much." (New arrival)*

*"There is not many jobs as in other provinces. Not that many job opportunities here." (Older cohort)*

*"The first important thing they don't hire to give you jobs. Even when you get a job when you meet the people there, they smile to you, make everything but they always start together, they always tell you 'Oh you are getting more money here and go your country, be rich.'" (Older cohort)*

*"Now, apart from the nice people here there are also bad people. I had some very bad experiences when I was growing up here. Some people told me to go back to my country and so." (Older cohort)*

*"But the only problem that I have is that I have three sons in Syria and that cannot come here because they have their own family in Syria and I was permitted to bring my own family only. My sons are married. They are in Lebanon and I am upset because they cannot join me." (New arrival)*

### 3.3 Health Care

Proper physical and mental health care services are imperative to ensure the landed refugees are healthy and happy in their new home. The federally-funded settlement agency provides a significant amount of health services through its own facilities by having a health settlement worker on staff, and a public health nurse, nurse practitioner and blood collection services on site. These services begin as soon as refugees arrive, and the agency has a physician on call for the night of arrival in case somebody needs to be immediately brought in to the hospital. The agency also offers interpretation services for clients and provides transportation for all first

appointments. Afterwards, clients are shown how to navigate the bus system for further appointments.

Settlement workers in the school system work closely with public health nurses in schools. This is important particularly in terms of getting children caught up on their vaccinations as settlement workers help arrange vaccinations and ensure that parents are informed and can consent in their first language.

Among the interviewed stakeholders, five were involved in refugee health, either formally through specific refugee health clinics or informally by connecting refugees to health practitioners, for example, by driving them to appointments. There are many determinants of physical and mental health, including income, housing and community supports. Poor housing with mold, along with poverty and social isolation were discussed as challenges to providing health services for refugees.

*"We do full family history, full physical, blood work, all the screening so we find a lot of people with a lot of health issues that they have never been attended to. We also identify issues through our screening process and blood work diseases and things that people did not know they had. Like hepatitis B or C or HIV. All kinds of different illnesses. Sometimes tropical illnesses. Anything from hypertension, heart disease and all the regular things that people have." (Stakeholder)*

Funding was again discussed as a challenge for some stakeholders, especially with the sudden influx of Syrian refugees. One stakeholder reported having to fund the expansion through internal efforts, largely by taking on a significant increase in volunteer work to meet demand. Afterwards, the organization was successful in receiving more funding after presenting their costs and benefits.

*"We were recognized for the work we were doing and because we were going unfunded, we just did it ourselves. And then when the Syrians crisis happened, in the sense when all the Syrians came to Canada, in late December, January and February, we had 220 Syrians coming within 2.5 months. So we had to see all of them and of course they had a lot of medical issues because they were sleeping in dire circumstances: for three years in transition countries and also head injuries because of the war. And then we had no extra help, we did everything on our own. [The central health organization] or government did not have to spend a dollar. We did all of that for free." (Stakeholder)*

It was noted that navigating the health system and bus routes can be easier for refugees who have a community of people from similar ethnic backgrounds and who speak their language. For those without such a community to rely on, life in St. John's can be isolating. This was found particularly true for mothers with small children and seniors, as it can be more difficult to take opportunities to expand their social circle.

One gap that stakeholders identified and addressed was that refugees were overwhelmed with the paperwork required to navigate the healthcare system. To address this, a policy was introduced that gave each individual a zippable plastic bag where they can store all of their healthcare information, i.e. MCP card, RAH card, appointments, and medication. This not only helps individuals organize their medical issues but was found to be important for the referrals, as individuals can bring all of their information to the specialist who can then ensure that they are receiving the best treatment for their issue.

Stigma about mental health continues to be a common problem in Canada and may be a reason why respondents were uncomfortable talking to us about the issue. Some individuals were more open to talking about their experiences and a program within the public school system suggests that refugees do carry trauma from their experiences living through a war. Changing the language from “mental health” to “well-being” may be one way to better engage newcomers in this conversation, and having programs where trained professionals meet with individuals, e.g. through open office hours, may create a more welcoming environment for newcomers to discuss their mental health.

**Recommendation:** Settlement agencies and health care providers should change language used around mental health services, e.g. from “mental health” to “well-being”, thus, refugees may be more likely to use the services.

**Recommendation:** Settlement agencies should disseminate information about mental health and addictions walk-in services so that individuals who are dealing with mental health or addictions issues have easy and confidential access to such services if needed.

### 3.3.1 Physical Health Care

Partnerships with the medical community were discussed as important aspects of delivering health services to refugees. The federally-funded settlement agency has partnered with charity groups who deliver vision and hearing screening, and with local dentists and pharmacists to help facilitate the delivery of oral care and prescriptions. They also operate a refugee-specific health clinic through a partnership with the university’s faculty of medicine and a hospital in St. John’s. The partnership, called the MUN Med Gateway Project, was started in 2005 as a student-initiated project. The settlement agency’s role is to connect new arrivals to the clinic, provide interpretation services, and remind individuals about appointments. The Gateway initiative aims to introduce refugees to the Canadian health care system by conducting a medical history and

screening, providing referrals to specialists for certain conditions, and connecting newly arrived families to a local physician. The Gateway project also has a separate well-women night where an all-female staff offers women specific examinations and screenings, as well as education on contraceptives. As finding family doctors became more difficult, the physicians who started the Gateway Project opened their own refugee-specific health clinic in 2015.

The project avoids many issues of other student-run initiatives that have transient staff and limited budgets, as they connect refugees to family physicians after the initial evaluation. There is a benefit to the students, as they gain experiential learning in cross-cultural health care, and has been well-received by the students, as the majority volunteers with the project and have been the key motivators in additions to the project (Duke and Brunger, 2015). This project is creating a new generation of doctors who are gaining important experience in working with different cultural groups, but whether this sensitivity has filtered out to other branches of the health care system is uncertain.

In Gien and Law's 2009 study, respondents cited "health care and social services" as a reason for moving from the province, but the discussion focused more on the social determinants of health and well-being, such as employment and social support, as being pull factors. Our study asked Syrian refugees targeted questions on their experiences with the physical and mental health care systems to understand if more work needs to be done in this area. While there were some complaints made of the province's healthcare system, respondents overall reported positive experiences.

All respondents among the new arrivals and the older cohorts reported seeing a doctor since their arrival. This was expected and points to the success of the MUN Med Gateway Project. Where issues arise, students are also able to refer patients to more specialized services.

*"I visited a family doctor. From the first week, I visited my family doctor and he made general check." (New arrival)*

*"I visited a doctor and the doctor referred me to another doctor because I have a problem with my back." (New arrival)*

*"Oh yes, I have my family doctor. The very weekend I arrived, he was a very good man. He just retired this year. I've been with him since we came here. He was a very good doctor." (Older cohort)*

However, some of the older cohorts complained that they still had not seen a family doctor. This might be a gap in the system, as the MUN Med Gateway Project is a more recent initiative and those who arrived before it started missed out on the opportunities it provides.

*"He says when we were in [the settlement agency] they took us to a doctor but until today they didn't give us any family doctor." (Older cohort)*

The settlement agency provides translators when refugees visit the doctor and this has been a vital part of their visit. For some, this has been an easy experience, but for others, finding a translator has been difficult. This language barrier can have serious implications as those who are sick may have difficulty relaying their symptoms without the help of a translator.

*"As my wife needed to go to a doctor we asked for a translator but many times the [settlement agency] couldn't find anybody. So there were problems with translation because many times I had to go without a translator and also for my wife. One time she was very sick and we called the [settlement agency] to get a translator. They told me to find a translator myself." (New arrival)*

*"There were some issues at the beginning and it was a little bit complicated because of lack of language to get through the doctor and specialist and we got it." (Older cohort)*

Through the physical screening process, the doctors have found that individuals often have health issues that were undiagnosed. Approximately half of the Syrian respondents and 80% of the older cohorts of refugees reported having visited a doctor (Figure 6) because of a physical ailment, such as problems with their back, breathing, eyes, hearing, foot, kidneys, gallbladder, and diabetes. For new arrivals, their ailments were not all directly related to conditions in the home country, but most were, and they were left untreated until respondents arrived in Canada. This points to the importance of the MUN Med Gateway Project, as it ensures that this vulnerable group with a high rate of injury can see a physician quickly upon arrival.

*"The only problem I have is I had an accident on my foot. [Interviewer: Here or from back home?] From home." (New arrival)*

The higher rate of illness or injury within the older cohort population is to be expected, as they have been in Canada for a longer period of time and as one respondent aptly explained,

*"Yeah, because I am a human, I am a person." (Older cohort)*

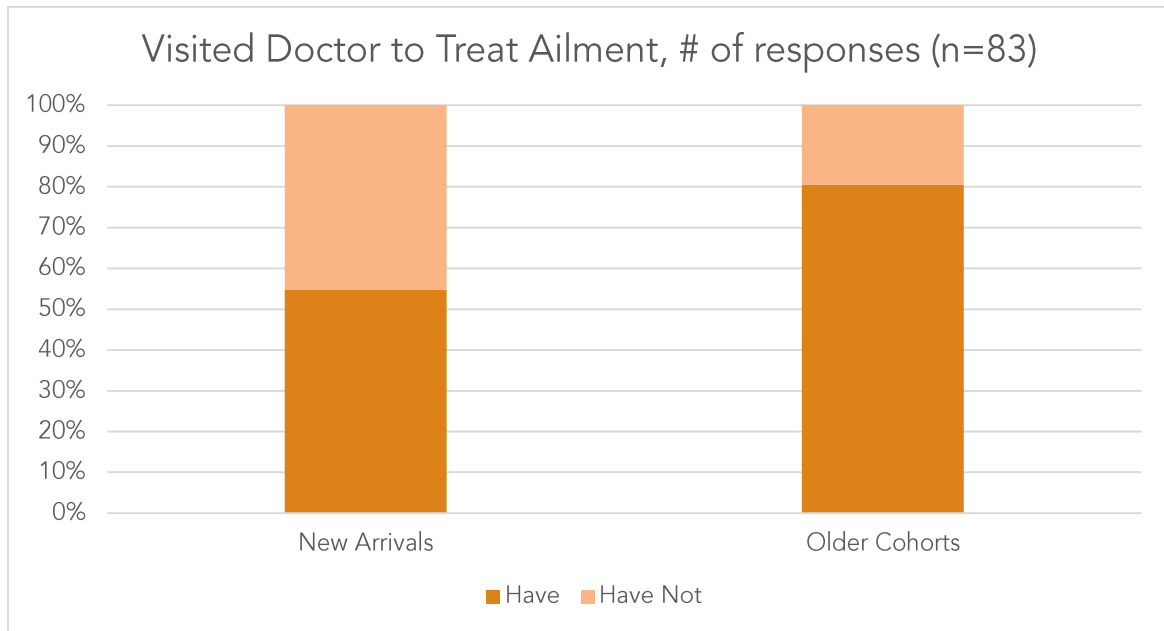


Figure 6: Visited Doctor to Treat Ailment, New Arrivals (n=42) and Older Cohorts (n=41)

New arrivals and older cohorts reported similar experiences with the health care system (Figure 7). New arrivals were more likely to report strictly positive experiences with the health care system than older cohorts, who often had caveats for their generally positive experiences. Older cohorts would report that their experience with the health care system was “positive, but...” or “there is only one problem,” suggesting they wanted to stress that they were grateful for the help they received but did have occasional issues accessing services.

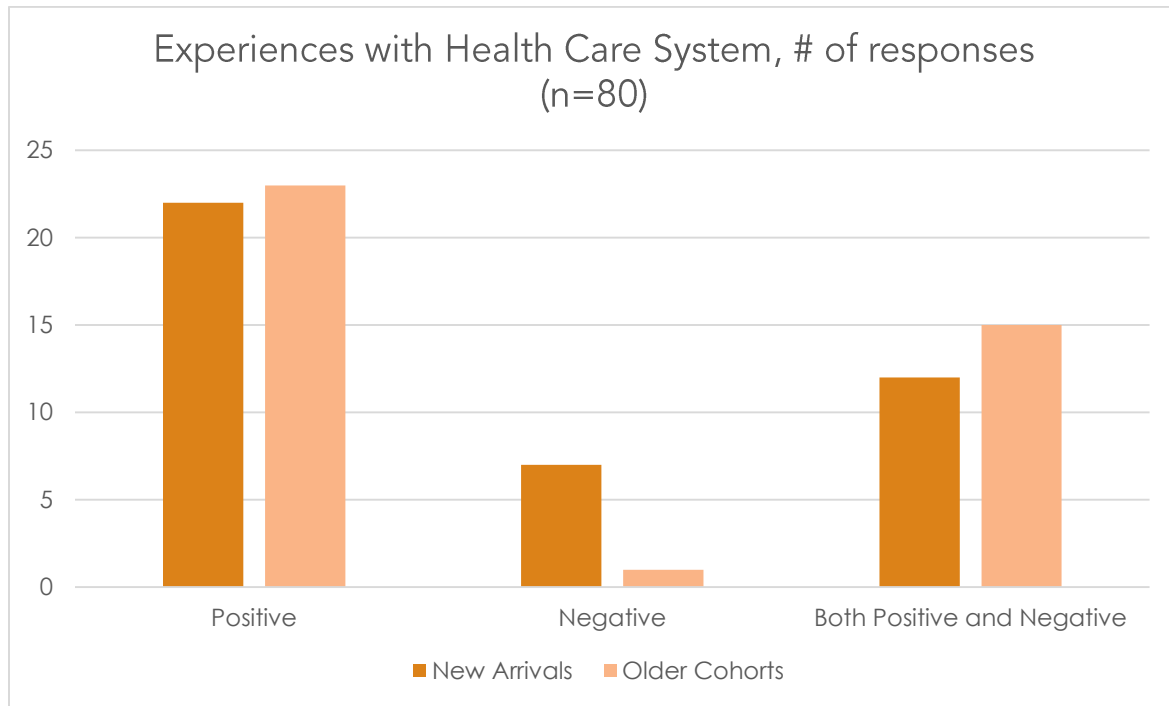


Figure 7: Experiences with Health Care System, New Arrivals (n=41) and Older Cohorts (n=39)

Previous research has found that doctors in NL may be insensitive to the needs of certain groups, such as Muslims (Reitmanova and Gustafson, 2009). While the Syrians all reported positive experiences with their physicians, some older cohorts complained of misdiagnoses and feeling like doctors were not taking them seriously.

*"He got a surgery in the [hospital] two weeks ago but I don't he got referred from the family doctor. He went to see the family doctor and he sent him home that he doesn't need to a specialist but after that he went to school and his illness went worse and worse so he went to hospital. When they saw him there the situation was very bad and he got a surgery immediately. The family doctor wasn't helpful." (Older cohort)*

*"The health care system in Newfoundland is not bad. When you go to [the hospital] the only thing is the wait time. They are very informative and they would help you. But think about it like this: you go there you sit there for 8 hours. If I go to the emergency room, I don't spend there less than 5 hours and sometime up to 8 hours. Then you see the doctor and see you for 2 seconds and then he goes and then you only see the nurse. So, I don't feel like they take you that seriously." (Older cohort)*

Other complaints tended to focus on long wait times. Stakeholders acknowledged this as a general issue with the health care system, especially if one needs to see a specialist.

*"I don't like the time waiting at hospitals. Whenever you go there even with emergency case you have to wait a long time. The doctors and nurses are perfect but there is a problem with the waiting." (New arrival)*

*"It is negative. ... like it is really a long time. You will take a long long time. ... Waiting is so tough here." (New arrival)*

*"What I heard before was that Canada is the best with the health care all over the world but when I came I felt like it is not a very good health care system. My wife was saying about waiting that we have to wait a lot. I am saying that it is not just about the waiting but also the treatments and dealing with patients." (Older cohort)*

Long wait times are a common problem in the Canadian health care system. The College of Family Physicians of Canada (2006) found that only 27% of Canadians were able to see a physician with a same-day appointment and that 25% of Canadians had to wait 6 days or more to visit a physician. This may be due to a low supply of physicians as Canada ranks 26 out of 30 OECD countries on ratio of physicians per capita. There are also long wait times between referrals. Barua and Ren (2016) found that in 2016 patients in Newfoundland and Labrador waited 14.5 weeks from referral by general practitioner to appointment with a specialist and it can take another 11.5 weeks from an appointment with a specialist to treatment. This was an improvement from previous years, but higher than what specialists agree to be clinically "reasonable". These studies highlight the inefficiencies in Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador's health care system that are affecting refugees.

Despite having a family physician, respondents reported having to go to the hospital directly, rather than consult with their family physicians first. This may be due to long wait times for primary care or specific needs.

*"When I arrived, I saw a family a doctor but now every time I need a doctor I go to the hospital." (New arrival)*

*"I haven't seen my family doctor for 6 months... every time I go there I cannot see him. I call and gets an appointment but when I go there the doctor is not there." (New arrival)*

Some issues remain untreated, and respondents report being moved from doctor to doctor trying to find the cure for their ailment. This may be because of language barriers, where refugees are having difficulties relaying their conditions, or inefficiencies in the healthcare system.

*"Yeah I have. I have a lot of problems. I have some and I saw a lot of doctors. My family doctor, and the hospital doctors, doctors at the hospital, so I saw some doctors. ... They still do not diagnose the problem yet but. So, I have also another appointment. ... Yeah, the family doctor is referring me to several doctors." (New arrival)*

*"My family doctor does not give me a decision for what I have. I visit her a several times and she doesn't know what I have." (New arrival)*

*"The problem is for you to get some kind of treatment they have to first know what you are ailing from. For me, until now I don't have peace. My eyes are still bothering me because I was told it is some kind of dirt in my eyes. I was given prescription eyeglasses but until now my eyes have not improved yet. Until today, I don't see any improvement." (Older cohort)*

*"It is good but the only concern I have about the family doctors here is that they are always trying their best to create a problem before even... they would take a long time before sending you to a specialist even though you can save a lot of time and save him from suffering by referring him directly to a specialist to deal with the problem. My wife has problems with her stomach and she spent almost 9 months just taking pills and doing some tests without being referred to a specialist." (Older cohort)*

Respondents also reported needing medical services that were not covered by their insurance. This was a common problem for those who required medication and dental care. Lack of information on available health coverage was often the cause of such complaints.

*"Also I have problem with medications because I must pay them. Sometimes I must pay \$600 for the medications." (New arrival)*

*"Yes, almost everything but we were not sure about the dental insurance. The first year was covered but we didn't know about it. This is the only thing that we did not benefit from." (New arrival)*

The physicians interviewed did not find that specific age groups or genders needed more care, but rather that there were problems in all age groups that needed attention. This could be direct care, treating an illness, or preventative, by ensuring that disease does not spread. The only common factor between all refugees was that they had unattended health issues. Beyond physical illness, one stakeholder identified drug addiction as an issue within immigrant youth. They expressed concern that this group was being overlooked and may be in need of specific programming.

Among challenges to delivering health services for refugees are language barriers, health navigation and transportation. Having low English language fluency can make it difficult for individuals to relay their symptoms or issues. The federally-funded settlement agency offers interpretation services for appointments, but it can take time to coordinate and some refugees may go directly to the hospital without referring to the settlement agency. The hospital has a telephone interpretation service that can be used instead, but for example, there was a case where a Syrian woman used the service, and the person on the telephone spoke a different dialect of Arabic and the woman could not understand what was being said.

For those refugees who are not used to a complex health system, health navigation or knowing where to go to get what services can be difficult. Transportation to and from appointments can also be a challenge for newcomers, as they are often low-income and the bus system can be confusing.

*"We need more in terms of health navigation. The [settlement agency] is already recognised as a major contributor in this area, but much more can be done, with the involvement of the community at large and organizations helping with things like transportation to medical appointments and medical investigations and things like that. ... Somebody there to answer questions that refugees have." (Stakeholder)*

**Recommendation: Settlement agencies should organize health system navigation sessions that include role-playing and other active learning strategies.**

Overall, the MUN Med Gateway Project has proven its value through the high rate of refugees who have seen a doctor upon arrival and been able to access medical assistance for additional services. While addressing wait times for physicians and public transit inefficiencies is outside the purview of this study, ensuring that newcomers can access health care is an important part of their physical and mental well-being. This might involve simple remedies like creating a centralized directory of translation services, so that newcomers can independently access assistance in relaying their symptoms to a trained medical professional.

**Recommendation: The Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism of Newfoundland and Labrador should create a centralized directory of translation services that refugees can independently access.**

### 3.3.2 Mental Health Care

Mental health is an important aspect of individual well-being. After experiencing the devastation of living in a war-torn country, many refugees come to Canada suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (McDonald and Sand, 2010; Hinton et al, 2012). Yet, Newfoundland and Labrador has been fairly limited in its provision of mental health care services for the wider

population, and this has been felt keenly by immigrants. In their 2009 study, Reitmanova and Gustafson found mental health care information and services for immigrants in St. John's severely lacking as informants found information hard to access and were largely unaware of what services were available. Immigrants were loath to search out services unless there was an emergency due to stigma and when they did seek services, found them culturally insensitive.

Several organizations have social workers on staff and are able to provide crisis counselling and referrals to clients. As part of their resettlement program, the federally-funded settlement agency has each refugee meet with a social worker and settlement counsellor in the first few days of arrival. Referrals are facilitated through partnerships with the mental health community and in emergency situations the settlement agency is able to refer a client to a professional within 24-48 hours. There is also a support group for those trying to bring loved ones to Canada to help them deal with the difficulties associated with that process. Settlement workers in the school system work with guidance counsellors to ensure that children are receiving the right resources.

Stakeholders identified the provision of mental health care services as a key part of their work because of the need in the refugee community.

*"They need counselling, they are victims of violence, they need housing, they need education for their children support, a lot of one-on-one service. Because of my profession in social work, I do a lot of counselling with the newcomers, refugees, children." (Stakeholder)*

Nobody in our sample of newly arrived refugees reported seeking out mental health services and rather, seemed a little offended at the question. This may be due to the question being lost in translation or cultural stigma around seeking mental health services. One stakeholder pointed out that the concept of mental health is a Westernized concept and therefore, instead, they talk more about wellness with their clients. Some of the older cohorts however, reported that they had accessed mental health care.

*"I have youth councillor. I used to go there to talk about my life." (Older cohort)*

*"I closely work with so many people here who help our students with mental health but I never have had to go through that situation you know. But it's been amazing some of the psychiatrists; they come here as well and then talk to the students. I think we have at [a high school]. I have another co-worker there and we have a program that every week psychologist come there and talk to the students. You know sometimes if they are a single male or single girl who come here who go through that difficulties sometimes because they wouldn't know if their parents are alive or any siblings or relatives are alive. And also social isolation is a big challenge here because the weather. I think they won't get to go outside more frequent. They are always inside their home. And maybe you know so many thoughts would trigger them to be in such difficulties. But it is become really great help to at least come out talk to come out of their shell and talk to others it would really help." (Older cohort)*

### 3.4 Language

English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction has been identified as a vital part of integrating refugees who do not speak the language into their new homes and is an important first step to acquiring a career or making Canadian friends. Four of the stakeholders we interviewed provided language training for refugees, either formally through a dedicated school system or structured volunteer program, or informally based on perceived need.

The federally-funded settlement service agency is the only organization that offers the Canadian Language Benchmarks ESL classes. These run five hours a day, five days a week and include three child care programs on site. The agency also offers evening classes, advanced or sector-specific language training, space and preparation for proficiency exams (such as CELPIP, IELTS and TOEFL), tutors for one-on-one language training, and itinerant teachers who visit individuals in their homes who cannot or do not want to attend the language school. There is also an online ESL program for permanent residents who live outside of St. John's and an after-school program for youth. This broad array of language programs emphasizes the range of language skills and personal circumstances that refugees have which must be addressed to provide comprehensive language training.

The provincial government, through the school district, offer the LEARN program for minors that takes place during school hours. As part of the "Sharing Our Cultures" festival, a festival which creates space for newcomers to share aspects of their culture with the local population, youth also have the opportunity to avail of programs that teach writing and research skills. This festival partners with the university, who are involved in project management and coaching students on their presentation skills.

Most new arrivals in our study reported attending ESL classes every weekday since they arrived in the province. They described the service as being helpful in improving their English language skills (Figure 8). Respondents were in various stages of the program and most planned to continue their studies until they had finished all six levels.

*"I go to school every day. From 9 to 2, since the first day." (New arrival)*

*"It's good. People in the school are doing their best to get the best service." (New arrival)*

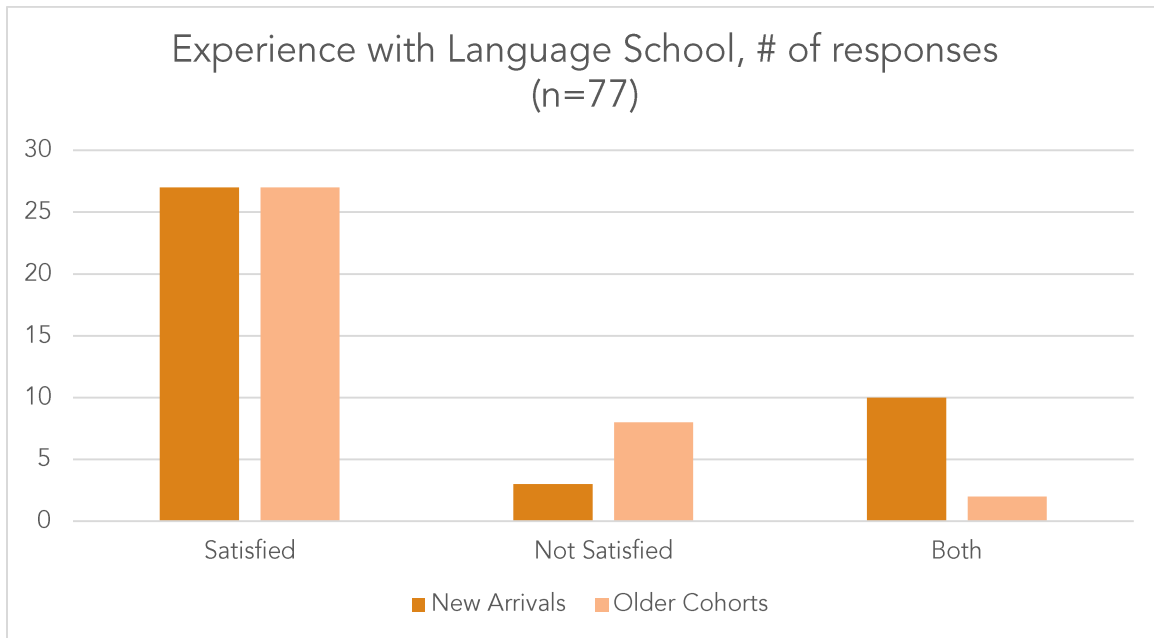


Figure 8: Experience with Language School, New Arrivals (n=40) and Older Cohorts (n=37)

The ESL school was described as being culturally sensitive to the needs of attendants and the break offered for religious holidays was highly appraised. The daycare offered by the organization helped some families attend classes, but others with very young children had difficulty attending the program. It was common to find parents having to either alternate the attendance of the classes or to send only one parent, which in most cases tended to be the father of the household.

*"In Ramadan, I have holiday but before that I went every day because the children are in the daycare." (New arrival)*

*"When I arrived, I went to school one day, a next day my wife went but now the youngest go to school or kindergarten so now I can go to school every day." (New arrival)*

*"I have a small boy and I am pregnant so I cannot leave home." (New arrival)*

Respondents of the older cohorts were also satisfied with the ESL classes, though not all availed of the service. Some already knew English before arriving, some had small children to take care of and one person reported dropping out early to start working.

*"I can say the classes are very helpful, especially for those whom English is not their first language. For my case, I already spoke English, I wrote and I finished high school so I needed something a little bit higher than ESL so I had to move on. But it is a very good program." (Older cohort)*

Some people emphasized the social aspect of the school, which is important for a newcomer moving to a new place.

*"Yeah, there is the benefit of making some friends there. Just for the social stuff and for the fun. Also, if you meet with the people from the school you know more about what you want to know and you get more assistance for you. But it was fun anyway meeting people from other countries and have some activities." (Older cohort)*

*"Yes, that time, when you come, just that you don't have any job, anywhere to go, you have to go and meet people." (Older cohort)*

For those who cannot attend classes because of young children or sickness, a teacher comes to their house once a week for personal instruction. This provides them with some instruction but many were unsatisfied with the service, as they felt that it was not offered enough and that it was difficult to concentrate when they were in the home and had to attend to the needs of their children.

*"There is a teacher coming in once a week but it's really hard for me because I'm so busy like a baby and with the dialysis things and everything so I cannot be concentrating with her." (New arrival)*

*"They are good but it's not like going to school you know, going to school is better than taking those lessons at home. ... So it's only once a week which is not that much. And only like an hour and half that's it. And the babies and the children are around here so it's not that much good when you all are busy with the children." (New arrival)*

The restriction on women (our study found women were most likely to stay at home with the children) with young children from attending language classes can prevent these women from learning English for two years upon arrival. This would significantly affect their ability to integrate into their community. This issue has been identified in other parts of Atlantic Canada as well, suggesting it is a general issue for women with small children (Tastsoglou, 2014).

**Recommendation: An increase in funding for settlement agencies to offer expanded child care services could help mitigate this problem and allow more women to attend English classes.**

Some of the refugees with special needs were not able to avail of the ESL service because it is not yet customized to meet their special needs. Hearing problems were a more common ailment among the newly arrived refugees, and this highlights the need for partnerships between the ESL service providers and community organizations that offer specialized services, such as the Hard of Hearing Association.

*"It is difficult for me because of the hearing problems. So until now I cannot speak English." (New arrival)*

**Recommendation:** While settlement agencies may not have the capacity to deliver specialized services such as English sign language to newcomers, there may be opportunities to partner with other organizations to deliver this service.

While new arrivals were more likely to have both positive and negative experiences with the language school, older cohorts were more likely to report negative experiences. Those who were unsatisfied felt like they were being pushed ahead without really feeling comfortable at higher levels of English. One person felt that the system was overburdened and there were not enough teachers to provide help.

*"People who are attending the classes almost every day will go from level to level but some people who are really good and able to speak stay at the same level because they are not attending the classes that much. That is unfair. When you are speaking with the people in level 4 or 3 you will be shocked because they still won't be able to say something... If they are coming every day for three months you go to next level even if your writing is very bad. For me it is not important to come every day but to learn the language. The system is not as fair as it should be." (Older cohort)*

*"We want to learn English even if we don't have teacher. The English at school... they don't have enough teachers. After school, we don't know where to go to get help. The conversation classes, after school program... if someone leaves the school after school it is over... I could be paired maybe with 2 or 3 people to converse. I believe that is how I could improve. At school, the English is kind of basic and other immigrants from other country that don't speak English they prefer to speak their own language not English. So it is not very convenient place for conversation." (Older cohort)*

For those with families still in war-torn Syria, paying attention to their studies can be difficult.

*"The teacher is good but sometimes when the teacher explains something I am thinking about my son in Syria. Hopefully they can join me. Everything would be much easier if they could join me here." (New arrival)*

There were also concerns from older participants who recognized that they were slower learners.

*"Learning language after 60 is difficult but they do their best with me." (New arrival)*

*"It's easy for children but hard for an older man." (New arrival)*

*"Learning new language is very slow to master the language. It depends on each person. Like I am an old man so I am slow but I am trying." (Older cohort)*

Stakeholders pointed out several challenges that refugees face when learning English, including being illiterate in their own language and unfamiliar with a school setting. It was identified as more difficult to deliver ESL training to refugees who do not possess a strong base from which to learn a new language.

*"A low level of education... can be a barrier, it's not always, but it can be a barrier... to even learning the language." (Stakeholder)*

*"If you have someone who has never sat in a classroom and has never sat in a structured learning environment, to sit in a classroom on a daily basis from nine to two-thirty and be taught... can be very challenging." (Stakeholder)*

**Recommendation:** Given that adult learners with different backgrounds and experiences will learn English at different paces, this should be reflected in the grading process for ESL. The movement through the program should be focused on progress rather than attendance to ensure that everyone can finish the program with a solid understanding of the English language.

When asked how their ESL classes could be improved, respondents were generally eager to learn more and utilize their skills in their daily lives. Suggestions around this included lowering class sizes, limiting Arabic speaking in the class, having tutors visit their homes, focusing more on speaking rather than writing, and incorporating practical information such as driving lessons. Some respondents also felt there was a greater need for health-related or child-care accommodations. While some requested longer classes, others suggested the classes were too long. The variety of suggestions given highlights the diversity of needs for attendees that community organizations have to meet.

*"... a recommendation that I would like to make to the government would be to create more vocational programs. Refugees have so many skills and so much work they could offer... I would recommend government create a program... You know encourage people to be what they were already professional and trained for... Like at the end they will just end up going to Tim Horton's. I don't mean that working at there is something that you don't need a skill but it's totally unrelated and challenging already for them." (Older cohort)*

Respondents did find that having students from other parts of the world in their classroom helped restrict the use of Arabic and forced people to speak English to communicate with each other, which helped their speaking skills. Creating a community for the Syrian refugees and introducing them to each other can help prevent feelings of cultural isolation, but some recognize that the classroom may not be the best place for this type of social interaction.

*"If the classes were more mixed with other, non-Arabic people, it would help [me] more. It would be better." (New arrival)*

Smaller classroom sizes could ease some of these problems, potentially by helping teachers better restrict the use of Arabic in class, focus more on speaking and terms used in their daily lives, and offer specialized services for those who have hearing problems. Making the ESL program more tailored toward settling refugees into the community by teaching them everyday English was recommended by a stakeholder as well. However, the organization providing ESL may be dealing with structural issues that limit their ability to offer smaller classroom sizes.

*"The thing is that they are not concentrating on speak. They are concentrating on writing and others in the school. While the speaking is very important. ... when I am in the school I will be able to understand almost everything but when I am going outside the school I can't understand anything. People speak very fast. The school is not focusing on the right things" (Older cohort)*

*"The emphasis on language should be more on... everyday English, useful English, not big translation, and writing. I saw women who were going there for seven to eight years, they were coming back but no job." (Stakeholder)*

*"The school is so small that they couldn't even handle all the newcomers. It is related to the church not to the government so it would be better if they made it bigger so they could hold all the people." (New arrival)*

**Recommendation:** Smaller classroom sizes would allow teachers to give more personalized lessons. However, this opportunity may be limited based on funding available.

**Recommendation:** While it was acknowledged that the ESL program is based on a Canadian standard and would be difficult to change, adding voluntary extra classes for conversational English might help newcomers learn "everyday English" and meet the demand from those who seek further English language instruction. Rather than one settlement agency offering all services, there may be opportunities to partner with other stakeholders to deliver this type of extra instruction.

Overall, respondents enjoyed and benefitted from their ESL classes though some gaps remain. Given the unprecedented influx of refugees, it is likely that organizations did have capacity issues that exacerbated problems highlighted by respondents unsatisfied with classroom sizes. There are also issues with teachers meeting participants in their home, therefore other alternatives, such as a specific class for mothers with young children that includes daycare, should be considered. Adding voluntary classes or working with other organizations to expand conversation partner programs could also help address concerns for those who want to learn more or focus on their speaking skills. Partnering with other organizations that offer services for the hard of hearing or the deaf could improve language services offered to these participants and given the frequency of the problem, is a concern that should be addressed.

Refugees come from diverse levels of needs and competence in literacy. Some come with a certain level of literacy in English language while others have not had any exposure to the Roman alphabet. Each group of refugees and individuals will experience different levels of challenges in taking on a second language. For instance, those with previous knowledge of English language may need only to acquire the proper pronunciation, while others need to take on a whole new linguistic venture. Acquisition of a second language for refugees is a complex process and with a large influx of refugees, organizations may be strained to meet everyone's needs.

It is also important to remember that refugees are under emotional distress and many of their family members are still living in war-torn countries or refugee camps. This can limit their

concentration and commitment to their education, and emphasizes that participants will not complete their education at the same speed. This will be affected by their age and family responsibilities as well. Creating space for people to pursue their education at their own speed is important for participants struggling with personal difficulties and constraints.

### 3.5 Cost of Living and Housing

Most respondents emphasized that the cost of living in Newfoundland and Labrador, including housing expenses, is high. Many reported that their income, even when they combine the government funding and child benefit, could barely cover their basic living expenses (rent,

utilities, and groceries). Emergencies and extra expenses such as summer camps for children could not be attained without sourcing for external funds.

*"No, it is not enough to do all of the stuff. I have six children and their needs are getting bigger and bigger, so I have to cover all of their needs, so that is why it is so." (New arrival)*

*"It was enough at that moment but most of the money went to rent and utility and there was no... You had to restrict food and clothing and supplies, especially for the children because you have to choose between the food and school supplies and that kind of stuff. Supplies for us too. We were studying as well so we needed some supplies and there were none. So that put a little bit of complications but anyhow it was enough." (Older cohort)*

The high cost of food was also identified as a concern for respondents.

*"One cucumber is \$3. It is too much. There are things that we need a lot and it is very expensive." (Older cohort)*

One respondent from the older cohort noticed a difference in the cost of living over time.

*"St. John's is a lot harder than it was when I first arrived here. The cost of living went up and most of the workplaces went off business and when you work it is barely enough to just come by so you literally live from paycheck to paycheck. It doesn't give you a chance to move ahead." (Older cohort)*

Families who live under the same roof with their adult children tend to share the responsibility of paying for the rent and utilities. This seemed to put them in better financial condition than families who had more young children.

*"Each member of the family has own salary, but they live together in one house. So the utilities and rent are paid by every member of the family." (New arrival)*

Due to inability to cover their expenses, some turned to borrowing from friends or financial institutions which left them in debt.

*"Because it wasn't enough I used this Visa and the Visa is full now and I have to pay it. That is \$6600. I cannot use it anymore because it is too much. And this \$1500 and that one is full too. ... I cannot use it anymore. I owe them that. They need from \$6600 on this and \$1500 on this and this also \$1500. So almost \$10,000 that I have to pay now immediately. That is a problem. The groceries and all of it. Food, insurance, my daughter.... it is very hard." (Older cohort)*

*"Sometimes it's really like enough but some months we borrow some money from a friend and then we give it back to him. So it depends on the month. ... But anyway, it is better here than Lebanon." (New arrival)*

Housing plays a vital role in the resettlement process. Suitable and affordable housing can enhance integration while negative housing experiences can lead to poor health and subsequently poor social and economic outcomes which will in turn hinder the integration process (Carter et al., 2009). Many factors determine whether the housing experiences of refugees in Newfoundland and Labrador are positive or negative. Two factors that stood out from our study were the role of the settlement agency and the cost of living.

The federally-funded refugee service agency in the province is the key provider of housing services. It is mandated to show each refugee family two homes that are within walking distance to a school, close to a grocery store or on a major bus route, and are clean and affordable. Other considerations include keeping extended families close together and distributing children across different schools, so that one school is not saturated with new arrivals. Newcomers have the prerogative to choose one of the houses shown to them or to look on their own. If they choose the latter route, the agency provides them with information on how to find alternative housing.

As part of their resettlement allowance, each family receives furniture that is allotted to them, such as beds, a couch, a table and chairs. The settlement agency works with a local furniture store to supply these goods. Families also receive a furniture allowance to buy a few necessities to furnish their new home, such as blankets, and dishes. The agency has partnered with another organization to help newcomers with additional furniture and also counsels newcomers on how to best spend their income.

Our refugee respondents received housing assistance from either the settlement agency, private sponsors, or moved in with relatives who were already residing in the province. This assistance involved the securing of a house, assistance with signing contracts and leases with landlords, and purchase of furniture.

*"The [settlement agency] was responsible for that. I think the immigration gave them money to furnish our home. They gave us bed, pot everything at that time. They used to do everything. They find a place for you, take you to the store. Teach you how to buy stuff. They do everything for orientation. They orient us to do everything. It was very amazing to come like that. Even to get your papers, you don't do nothing. If you came with the government, you enjoyed." (Older cohort)*

*"I arrived here by family sponsorship, and the family that sponsored me rented the apartment and put some furniture for me, and everything is good." (New arrival)*

The settlement agency partners with several organizations to deliver services such as housing associations and property management groups. These partnerships are important to ease the process for landlords to rent to newcomers with low language fluency because if an issue arises

and they are unable to communicate to their tenant what the issue is, they can contact the settlement agency to sort it out. However, one stakeholder identified that some immigrant tenants had privacy concerns with this arrangement and would prefer if the settlement agency was not involved. Without the settlement agency and access to translation services, landlords often rely on crude technologies to translate. This could be remedied with a separate organization of interpreters they could approach for translation services.

**Recommendation: The Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism of Newfoundland and Labrador should create a centralized directory of translation services that both refugees and landlords can independently access.**

One stakeholder also suggested there was need for greater education for newcomers on Canadian housing standards and landlords' expectations. There were cases when tenants carried out installations in their home without consulting their landlord or Canadian building codes. These were issues that the stakeholder felt could have been prevented if newcomers were given more information about Canadian housing standards and expectations.

**Recommendation: The Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism of Newfoundland and Labrador should create a multilingual information portal, including information on Canadian housing standards and landlords' expectations.**

There were several complaints among respondents about their housing. Some had moved into accommodations arranged on their behalf before finding out that the housing units were not suitable. However, they found out that they could not make changes because they were locked into contracts with landlords. They expressed the desire for shorter leases of about six months, rather than the more common one-year term leases.

*"I wasn't satisfied with my first house. ... It was very expensive. I paid \$1450 without utilities. Here it is cheaper. I pay now \$750. ... I had to finish the lease, one year. After the lease was finished I moved. [Interviewer: Did they [settlement agency] help you with the moving?] Yeah, they helped me. [Interviewer: So you think that [settlement agency] did a good job at the beginning?] Yes, everything was good except for the expensive rent. It would have been better if the initial lease was shorter, maybe six months." (New arrival)*

Respondents complained of getting stuck in leases, but as explained by one of the stakeholders, it is highly unlikely that one can rent any apartment or house without signing a lease. To explain this to newcomers, settlement service agencies provide an orientation that covers budgeting, signing a lease, and tenant obligations, rights and responsibilities. Stakeholders did acknowledge that some information may be missed in this orientation, due to a large volume of information in a turbulent time in newcomers' lives, which may explain the concerns from landlords about tenants not understanding their obligations and expectations.

The need for refugees to have a say in the choice of housing before lease agreements are signed on their behalf came to the fore when a respondent described the negative impact that the choice of a housing had on her family member's health.

*"The first six months were not that much good, it was rough. Especially with the house, we are not satisfied. And my husband has asthma because of this place so we wish we had some other place. ... We have a lease with this house, so we will move whenever the lease is over." (New arrival)*

Most respondents complained about the cost of housing in the city. Some other points of dissatisfaction with housing include discomfort with communal living that entailed the use of shared laundry facilities and noise, furniture that was old or not functioning properly and the long wait list involved in the process of getting government-sponsored housing.

*"The rent is very expensive here and especially in winter the electricity is going to be very high." (New arrival)*

*"We bought new furniture, because almost everything at home was useless." (New arrival)*

*"Some other refugees got so many housing from the government. Right now, I have the problem that my wife has a child and is not working. She has nothing from the government. My wife cannot speak English. I am the only person supporting the family and I have the problem here that I was laid off three months ago. So, I have financial problems with everything. When I put application you never got. Some other refugees, when you go around St. John's, everybody has NL housing but we've never got any profit or any benefits that we should get." (Older Cohort)*

Barriers to providing housing identified by stakeholders included wheelchair accessibility, size of family, distance to school, and refugees' expectations. These barriers can increase the wait times for families looking for adequate housing. Stakeholders reported that there were not many houses that were wheelchair accessible on the market, which limited what they could offer their clients. Similar to the social assistance program, the housing allowance that families receive does not change based on the size of the family. Families receive \$372 each month, which is much less than the cost of a house that would fit a family of six. This amount is supplemented with the child tax benefit but limits housing options. Stakeholders also found that landlords were not used to renting to very large families and were sometimes wary of the prospect. Therefore, having a relationship with the settlement service agencies was important in easing such fears.

**Recommendation: Housing allowances should reflect actual costs of housing in specific areas.**

With the large influx of Syrian refugees in a short time period, it became difficult to find houses that met all the needs of the large families, as the housing market in St. John's is fairly small and inflexible. This meant that some families were paying high rent. One stakeholder found that almost all of the Syrians applied for public housing and at least half of them have transitioned to

public housing, which can offer lower rents. Another stakeholder estimated that 80 per cent of the Syrians were still in the same house they had been placed in upon arrival, and that the other 20 per cent had moved to public housing or out of the province. The reason for the difference between these estimates is unclear. One stakeholder felt that there was little they could do about the amount of affordable housing available and suggested that this could be better addressed through a national or provincial housing strategy.

**Recommendation: A national or provincial housing strategy is necessary to help newcomers and residents who are struggling to access housing.**

Another stakeholder noted that there was only one high school with a specific ESL program for immigrants. This limited housing options for newcomers, as they wanted to be close to the school and were unable to afford the public transport for multiple children if they did not live in the school bus catchment area, given that the long winters made it difficult for students to walk or cycle to school. Some refugees expected that when they arrived in Canada, everything would be free, including their housing and furniture. This made them wary of giving up their income to pay for rent and furnishings. Refugees may also have a fear of commitment to a new house, as they may feel uncomfortable in their new neighbourhood or wary of potential violence.

Providing housing that meets all expectations is limited by local availability and outside the control of settlement service agencies. These agencies are restricted to local real estate conditions and a large influx of refugees in a short period of time can strain what few options are available. The large Syrian family sizes and special needs accommodations can further exasperate local offerings. As suggested, this could be remedied with a federal or provincial housing strategy. Creating partnerships between settlement service agencies and landlords was identified as an important aspect of successful integration because despite a thorough welcoming orientation, issues may arise that require third party intervention through a translator or service provider.

### 3.6 Economic and Labour Market Integration

Refugees have been known to occupy disadvantaged economic positions and experience downward occupational mobility. Their previously acquired human capital and educational

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qualifications have been found to have little value in the Canadian labour market. Acquisition of additional human capital in Canada is said to be of little to no help in improving this condition (Lamba and Krahn, 2003; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2006; Bloch 2007). English language proficiency plays a major role in determining labour market participation and the kind of employment refugees have. Low English language skills have been found to make refugees prone to having either no jobs or low-skilled and precarious jobs (Bloch, 2002). The low economic power often puts many refugees in difficult financial situations and is a huge potential push factor.

The federal government or private sponsor offers monthly income to refugees for one year after their arrival in Canada. This is often subsidized with the federal government's Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB). Many respondents claim that the income support from the government does not effectively cater to their basic need of funds for rent, utilities and groceries. Those who have children make up for the deficit through the UCCB. While the UCCB helps to alleviate some financial burdens, minors who turn 18 in the course of the one-year period have a two-fold disadvantage: at the time of arrival, they do not qualify to receive the government's income support but receive the child benefit income. However, once they turn 18 years of age, they cease to receive the child care benefit and are not qualified to receive governmental support.

*"It is really not enough but when you get the child support that can help you." (Older cohort)*

*"Yea that is when you came as resettlement you get an allowance from the immigration for one year. Pay your house rent and the money you have to. Although it is not enough. It is very little. Like \$1150 we have been receiving to have to pay for the apartment they're telling me was \$650 to pay your bills so maybe remaining \$200 you have to money to eat." (Older cohort)*

After one year, refugees are still settling. Individuals may still have low language skills, limiting their employment opportunities to low-wage work if they have employment at all. These low-paid jobs do not effectively absorb the shock generated by the dip in income support. Our study reveals that the termination of this governmental income support gives rise to a dip in the finances of an average refugee family.

*"My husband is working here and the income is really so low. He is making almost \$1000 like a month and the children then is \$900 so, it's almost only \$2000 on average so, they couldn't even make the rent, the rental thing and utility. And the government is not helping them with anything." (New arrival)*

*"I was on my own. I am owing the government. I never knew that if you find the job the money they give you for the supporting until you get a job I will have to pay it back. I was receiving it until they cut it off. They came and asked me if I was working. I said yes. How long? I said for the past 6 months. And they took it." (Older cohort)*

Four of the interviewed stakeholders were involved in helping immigrants with access to employment. These stakeholders were both formal organizations with paid staff available to deliver programs, and informal organizations who were able to connect immigrants to

opportunities based on personal social connections. Formal program development and informal social networks that fostered human and social capital facilitated refugees' access to employment. Educational programs focused on professional development, mentoring, occupation-specific language training, or business creation, while networking opportunities connected immigrants to internships, volunteer positions or employment opportunities.

The federally-funded settlement agency delivers services to clients based on an individual's language skills. Those with lower-level English skills are able to avail of professional development programs that provide counselling and help clients map out their career plans, and afterwards connect them with a volunteer or part-time job opportunity, which would allow them to continue attending the language class or return after their internship. This organization also delivers language training for newcomers and incorporate the employment program into the classroom by teaching students about different aspects of working in Canada. They also offer programs for those with higher-level English focused on professional development and climbing the corporate ladder. This range of services allows newcomers with varying language skills access information to excel in the labour market.

Stakeholders felt that language was a critical piece of settlement and integration, especially into the labour market, and that while an individual may not be fluent in English, creating opportunities for them to work and study was important to their overall settlement experience.

*"Employment is difficult without language training. So, you kind of have to have language training in order to be successful with the employment. Most of the time, not all of the time but most of the time." (Stakeholder)*

Administering employment services to young adults aged 18 to 25 was also highlighted as being of particular importance. These youth, too old for high school and too young for the adult language program, were identified as having a diverse range of needs that were slipping through the cracks. Therefore, one organization, with the help of the federal government, recently began an academic bridging pilot program to help young adults transition more smoothly from school to the workplace.

Providing immigrant and refugee women opportunities to take skills from home and translate them into the labour market or turn them into a viable business was found to be particularly important in reducing their vulnerability and getting them outside the home. One organization involved in this work found that leadership qualities, rather than language, was a bigger barrier to searching or keeping a job.

*"We mostly focus on the employment, even for jobs, we make them ready to take any kind of services here. Even for going to a job or keeping a job, they need to have faith in them. We do leadership qualities, people have less faith in themselves that they can do that." (Stakeholder)*

*"We encourage them [to use and develop] what they got from their own country, not like you have to learn, go to school here, get a PhD and get a government job." (Stakeholder)*

Stakeholder respondents noted that creating programs for women requires offering child care and some organizations were not able to offer this service to refugee families with a large number of children. They admonished that many government organizations do not consider how a lack of child care can limit participation in their activities. These organizations complained of budgeting issues and their lack of space to offer better child care services to their clients.

One organization provided language training that focused on conversational English, as they found that their clients who could speak in English were more successful in the job market than those who could write in English.

*"We try to teach them every day, it's not like grammar or writing, they are scared of English, too much of writing things, but they're extremely good at talking, and if you work with [grocery store] or work with homecare you don't need that much." (Stakeholder)*

Credential recognition was recognized as a barrier for immigrants and refugees seeking employment. This was referred to as a "vicious cycle" as newcomers need to get certified to find employment, but to get certified they need to work a certain number of hours, and they cannot find employment to work those hours without being certified.

There are several formal organizations that are involved in credential recognition for refugees. Some offered more informal help to newcomers with document authorization, while others had formal initiatives partnering with credentialing agencies and regulators to help refugees get their credentials assessed and recognized. This is based on one-on-one counselling sessions that are customized according to an individual's skill sets and long-term plan.

One specific challenge for credential recognition of refugees is that they often arrive without the proper documentation. Often these individuals are fleeing a war, or their house has been destroyed, so they have lost post-secondary transcripts or diplomas. Furthermore, because of the differences in regulations across countries, a person may be trained in a particular profession but are not qualified to practice in Canada because of specific rules around the occupation. One stakeholder also emphasized that before individuals reach this stage, they must have the language skills to enter the workplace and therefore, employment programs must work closely with language programs to ensure that individuals are ready to join the labour market.

"Canadian experience" is another barrier to refugees' labour market integration, as it can prevent newcomers from getting an opportunity to acquire that kind of experience. One stakeholder noted that the Ontario Human Rights Commission found this was a human rights violation because it can allow companies to limit immigrants' employment opportunities. The hidden job market was also singled out as a barrier to refugees finding employment.

**Recommendation: Employers should remove Canadian work experience requirements.**

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One stakeholder pointed to a lack of cultural competency with employers and some organizations that served immigrants. This made it difficult to offer effective supports for immigrants. They found that their time was often tied up in soothing clients who became frustrated in their workplace due to misunderstandings or lack of sensitivity.

**Recommendation: Employers should utilize diversity training programs to educate all employees, including managers.**

Difficulties starting a business and lack of information from the government on the process was also noted as an obstacle. One stakeholder used an example of a group of doctors in a rural area who had faced difficulty in starting their own practice in Newfoundland and eventually relocated.

Organizations often partner with each other, with government agencies or with employers to deliver employment support services. These organizations act as bridges connecting immigrants to employment opportunities or other support services. Having good relationships with employers was identified as important in ensuring that organizations understood the needs of employers and creating an open dialogue about issues that may arise in the workplace. These organizations often hosted roundtable discussions with employers to discuss the success or challenges of different programs they offered and any lessons learned. This was identified as a long process but imperative to the success of their employment programs.

The federal government cuts funding after one year because it is assumed that refugees will have learned English or French and secured employment within that time period. Few of the newly arrived respondents were employed when we carried out our study. One respondent reported having experienced success in the labour market, in terms of having found a job that was satisfactory. A few other respondents had found jobs but were dissatisfied with their employment, either because of low pay or cultural differences in work expectations. Other respondents declared a desire to work but lacked confidence in their level of mastery of English or were hesitant because they had encountered difficulties while navigating the labour market.

*"I like to learn English first... I can work as a taxi driver or as a mechanic because I worked this job in Syria. I tried to work like that here but it was difficult without the language, so I decided to learn the languages first and then to look for a job." (New arrival)*

*"[I need] connections. If your English is well then you don't [need] connections but if you don't have English, then you need connections." (New arrival)*

Most newly arrived respondents had general plans to start a career in Canada, though some did not intend to work, likely to be women and due to cultural factors (Figure 9a). Those with specific plans on where they would like to work were the second largest group. A larger proportion of the newly arrived refugee respondents had specific plans to work compared to the older cohorts. They were interested in pursuing employment they had held in their home country. These careers were largely in the trades and included a range of occupations such as mechanics, construction workers, nurses, farmers, botanists, drivers and bakers. Some cited that they would like to start

their own business in Newfoundland and Labrador in the same fields where they had experience. However, they were concerned about the uncertainties of starting a business in a new country where they were unfamiliar with business practices and other factors.

*"I would like to establish a bakery over here. [I have] experience with working in bakery. I have experience with the work in bakery from start to end. I am looking for how to get the license and the funding. I need legal help and legal information how to start own business. Also, I would very appreciate if somebody could help me with the estimation of how much would it cost and what type of money I need for a project like that. I don't know how to estimate it." (New arrival)*

*"After finishing studying language, I would like to get a certificate to establish a farm. I would like to start my own farm [cow farm]. The weather is different, that is why I need different agriculture, technology and farming techniques. I don't like the weather here." (New arrival)*

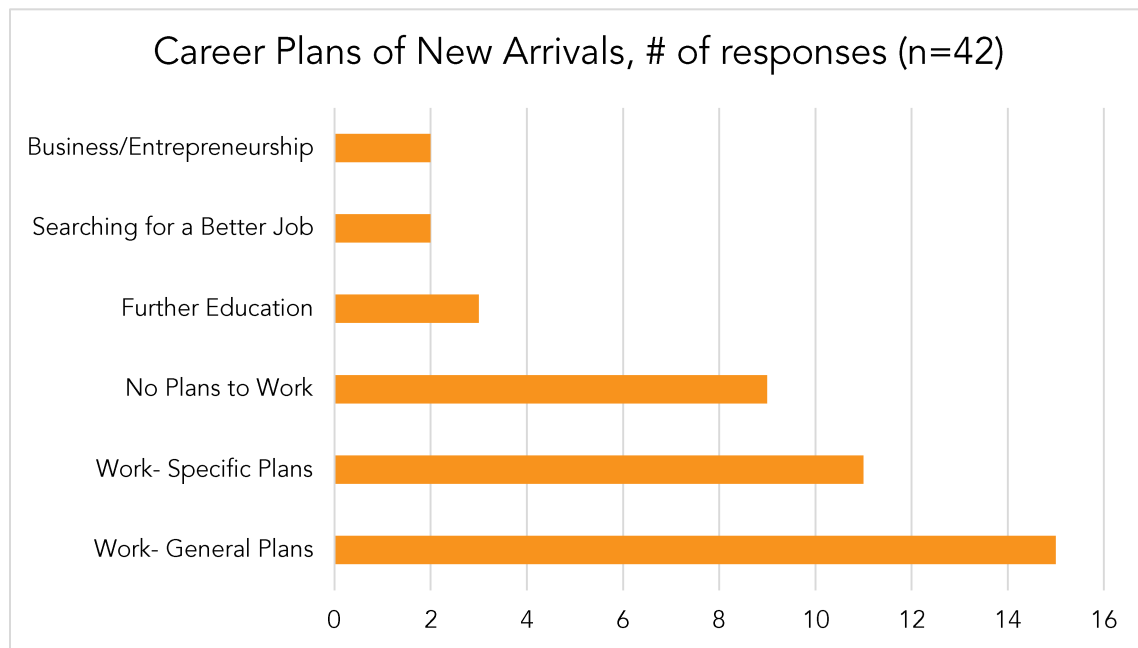


Figure 9a: Career Plans of New Arrivals

One stakeholder suggested that because many of the new arrivals had skills in the trades, their employment prospects were better compared to those who were more educated. This is due to higher demand in the labour market for trades-based jobs.

*"You will find PhD students, you will find people with Master's degrees working [at Tim Horton's]. Whereas the Syrians may be out working in gardening, landscaping, painting, plastering, mechanic work, and cars. So, they're actually doing better in terms of employment." (Stakeholder)*

Those who did not plan to go to work were all women who expressed their preference to stay home and take care of their family. However, some did suggest that once their children were older, they might consider looking for a job.

*"No, I am not planning to work, even someone offered a job. Since I was in Syria I wasn't working." (New arrival)*

*"I am studying English and have a little baby. When [the baby becomes] older I am going to think about finding a job." (New arrival)*

Some respondents cited a desire to further their education before they pursue employment. This was largely for the purposes of continuing in the career path they previously had in the home country and the lack of assurance that the credentials they held were sufficient for them to secure the desired employment in Canada.

*"After learning language, I will try to get certificate as a mechanic because I worked as a mechanic in Syria before I come here." (New arrival)*

**Recommendation:** The Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism of Newfoundland and Labrador should provide greater supports to immigrants proceeding with licensing/certification processes.

Diverse labour market experiences were observed among the older cohorts (Figure 9b). While a higher percentage was already in some kind of employment compared to the new arrivals, only about a third of all respondents were employed at the time of the interview. Those who were employed tended to work in low-wage service sector jobs such as home care. Many complained that they did not receive enough hours or their wages were too low. One person had to quit their job because it was not enough to sustain their family and they chose instead to receive government assistance.

*"I really plan doing this job. I am looking after these people. Since I came here, this is my job so I am so into them. The only thing my plan is I have to go back and do some course. I did it before but in the States but they don't take it here. Besides, my license expired. I have to renew it. So I will have to go and do a course. I am working on something and after I am finished then I do the course." (Older cohort)*

*"Career plans: being independent, to develop own business, have access to a little bit of education to improve." (Older cohort)*

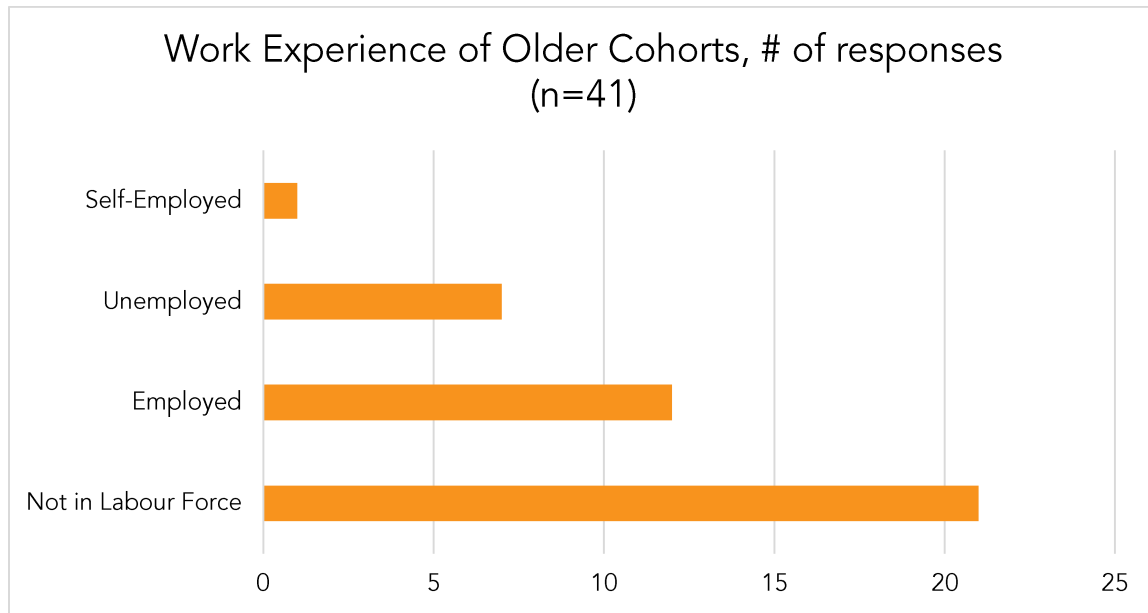


Figure 9b: Labour Market Integration of Older Cohorts

While grouped as “older cohorts,” a third of those interviewed were still in language school at the time of the study and planned to pursue employment opportunities after mastering English. Those who reported not being employed and not looking for work were generally women who were staying home to take care of their children, though there were some men who reported having health issues that restrained their ability to join the labour force.

*“I am not working right now because I have a problem with knee.” (Older cohort)*

*“My previous job I got a lot of experience. Like I said at the beginning. They don’t allow you to be talking too much. So now when I learnt my lesson if I got my second job, if I do get employment, then I know what to do. Don’t talk at all. If somebody do something wrong, I won’t talk because when you talk you would get problem. If I get a job, I will keep quiet. I won’t talk because they don’t like for someone to speak the truth. I will keep quiet and when they ask me I will say “I don’t know.” Because if you talk you get called into the office and will be dealt with. We have no right to say what somebody did wrong. So I keep quiet and let the supervisor to do the job.” (Older cohort)*

The high prevalence of refugees to work low-wage service sector jobs suggests limited options in the labour market. Settlement agencies offer many supports for newcomers seeking employment, but there may be other issues facing refugees in the labour market such as credential recognition and discrimination. These are difficult hurdles to overcome but more proactive approaches from the employer side could help.

**Recommendation:** Employers should formally commit to diversity and inclusiveness and communicate this to staff both visually and regularly. This can include explicit recruitment

strategies and policies related to immigrant and refugee hiring within a firm and developing relationships with community placement agencies.

Recommendation: Firms should commit to deliberate and explicit practices to prevent biases in the selection process. This can also include training for hiring managers to apply consistent and equitable interview and selection techniques.

Recommendations: Firms should include staff from different backgrounds in the decision making and social activities.

Recommendation: Employers should participate in mentoring programs for skilled immigrants and refugees who have yet gained employment in their chosen occupation.

### 3.7 Social Capital

Welcoming communities are an extremely important integration and retention factor. Strong local ties can outweigh potential economic gains from relocation (Wulff and Dharmalingam, 2008). Interaction with ethno-cultural communities is considered a factor contributing to retention of newcomers (Han and Humphreys, 2005; Derwing and Krahn, 2008; Carter et al., 2009; Carter et al., 2010; Lewis, 2010; Pandey and Townsend, 2010). Local non-ethnic communities can facilitate the settlement process, which would result in increased retention (Huynh, 2004; Goss Gilroy Inc., 2005). Immigrants who have friends from different ethno-cultural groups tend to be more satisfied with their settlement experience (Sapeha, 2015).

#### 3.7.1 Social Ties

To learn more about refugees' social networks, we asked whether most of their friends were from the same ethno-cultural group, were Canadian or were a mix of Canadian and foreign-born friends. New arrivals were more likely to have friends primarily from within their ethno-cultural group while those who had been here longer had a more diverse social network. One person in each of the two cohorts reported having no friends (Figure 10).

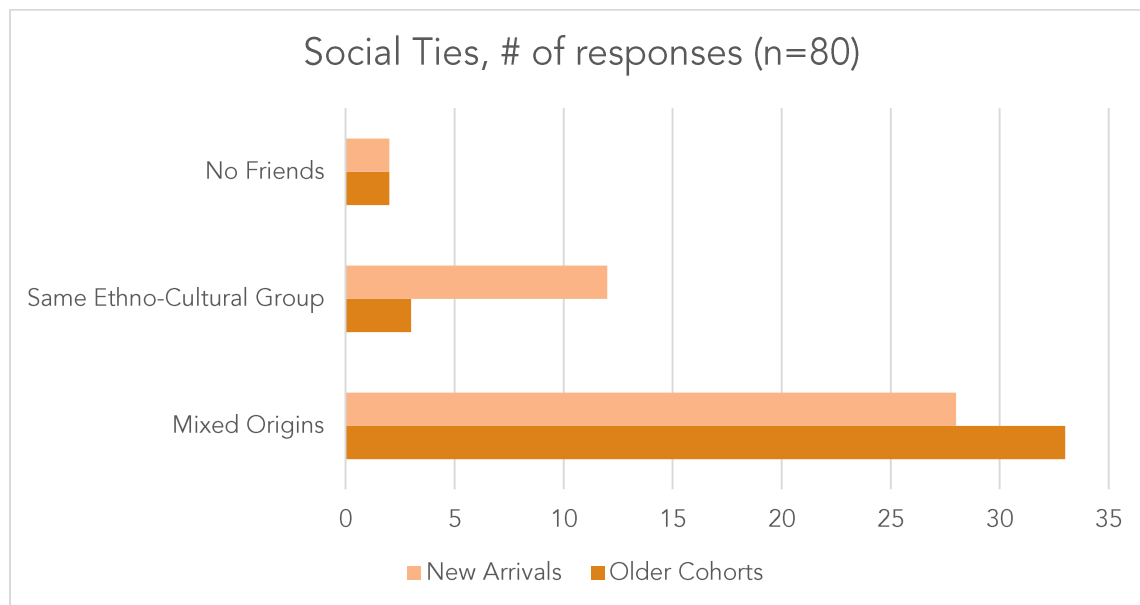


Figure 10: Social Ties of New Arrivals (n=42) and Older Cohorts (n=38)

Those with diverse social networks often reported that the ESL school and their neighbourhood were the most common places for them to make new friends. Those who volunteered with the settlement agency or other groups, as well as those who held some form of employment were also more likely to develop friendships, as opposed to those who did not have such links.

*"Yeah, I know a lot of Canadians and also other foreigners: Syria, Sudan, Congo... Mostly from the school. We are friends in the school now." (New arrival)*

*"People from the neighbourhood started to visit me and we became friends." (New arrival)*

*"I have friends but I don't have much time to meet them... From Canada and from my country, and other countries." (Older cohort)*

*"I came from... a refugee camp there and we are more than one hundred people living in this community so most of the time I'm really close to them. And you know if I'm working I have friends, co-workers, they are my friends now. So I have friends from both." (Older cohort)*

Those who were friends with only people from the same ethno-cultural origins cited language barriers as reducing their access to a wider variety of friends. In contrast, others pursued friendships with Canadians as a means to improving their language skills.

*"I have friends, immigrant friends, but I don't have Canadian friends only like cause of the language maybe is a problem." (New arrival)*

*"Mixture, I have a lot of Canadians friends as well. My sponsor introduced me to Canadian people so I can practice English with them. Also, I have a lot of Arab friends I know from the school." (Older cohort)*

Several respondents reported having no friends due to medical issues, which limited their ability to attend social events or connect with peers. Other respondents who reported having no friends felt that the people they interacted with were mere acquaintances and not "real" friends.

*"Yeah, I am thinking that I cannot make friends because all of them are not able to be a friend for me because I am doing dialyses. I feel like my life is all about like hospital." (New arrival)*

*"We cannot say that they we have friends here. There are people that come to say "Hi" but they are not real friends." (Older cohort)*

Given the low language skills of most of the new arrivals, it would be expected to see a greater tendency to remain within their ethno-cultural network. The higher tendency, however, of new arrivals and older cohorts to have diverse social networks does suggest that newcomers are being welcomed into their community and maintaining relationships that can aid in their settlement experience.

### 3.7.2 Community Involvement

Many of the stakeholders interviewed were involved in organizing social activities for refugees through regular programming, special events or festivals, or informal gatherings. This was discussed as an opportunity to promote interaction, engage clients and combat social isolation. The refugees not only participated in these events, but also had opportunities to volunteer.

To deliver community outreach, community organizations were partnering with each other, Memorial University and different layers of government. The federal and provincial governments have provided funding to different organizations, while the university was identified as supplying volunteers for events and programs. Community organizations have an important role in offering volunteer opportunities for newcomers as well as hosting events that are open to the public.

Several stakeholders we interviewed either focused entirely on community outreach or included it as part of their programming. Some organizations worked as connectors, creating opportunities for newcomers to volunteer in the community, engaging the public to volunteer for different immigrant-focused programs and events, or helping newcomers on a daily basis by taking them to the doctor or going through their mail. Others were hosts, offering diversity training to firms, and organizing diversity or multicultural events and festivals that are open to the public, or events in urban and rural settings where youth could share information about their home countries and traditional cultures.

Creating interaction between newcomers and locals through these avenues was described as “very powerful” in educating the public on diversity and multiculturalism, and creating opportunities for newcomers to not only share their culture, meet locals and better integrate into their communities, but earn an income as well, as some of these events included space for newcomers to sell food or crafts. Stakeholders reported receiving positive feedback from both refugees and locals about these types of events. This contributed to dispelling concerns that locals may have had negative attitudes about newcomers. One stakeholder did feel that locals were too polite and afraid of offending newcomers, so they did not try to interact with them. They suggested that there are impolite questions locals should not ask, but that it was important for locals to make more of an effort to know newcomers.

*“The festival, basically, we bring in local and immigrant performers, musicians, dancers and storytellers. They are asked to perform on stage. So giving the opportunities for immigrants to show us their culture and share it with the local population and then the local population and those that we bring from the community will also have fun. So sharing their own culture as well with newcomers. And that helps in so many ways. In the area of cultural performances, we see how people get to know each other actually very well because they interact. Not just on stage but overall.” (Stakeholder)*

The stakeholders interviewed emphasized their ambition to do more to facilitate refugees’ involvement in community activities, but that they operate under a number of constraints. Funding was considered the main challenge to provide community outreach services. One

stakeholder who operates a multicultural festival reported that they struggled to pay artists or to advertise their events, while others complained operating budgets limited their ability to deliver services because they were unable to afford translators, transportation or child care. These barriers make it difficult for refugees to attend events.

*“Other things we found is taking them on little outings is very helpful for them. Because I met a woman who was five years here and didn’t even see the Signal Hill. So we do a little bit of summer and winter outings with some seniors, and some of our volunteers, women, but because of the limited funding we cannot do much.” (Stakeholder)*

*“Transportation is the challenge. That’s why I filter in money to actually transport whether it’s by taxi or bus or whatever to get them to where the program happens to be so that they’re not lacking that or they are not been disadvantaged.” (Stakeholder)*

Greater involvement in one’s community by volunteering or attending local events can expand an individual’s social network and help them integrate into their community. To assess refugees’ community involvement, we asked whether they attended a community event or were involved an organization, and whether they volunteered (Figure 11).

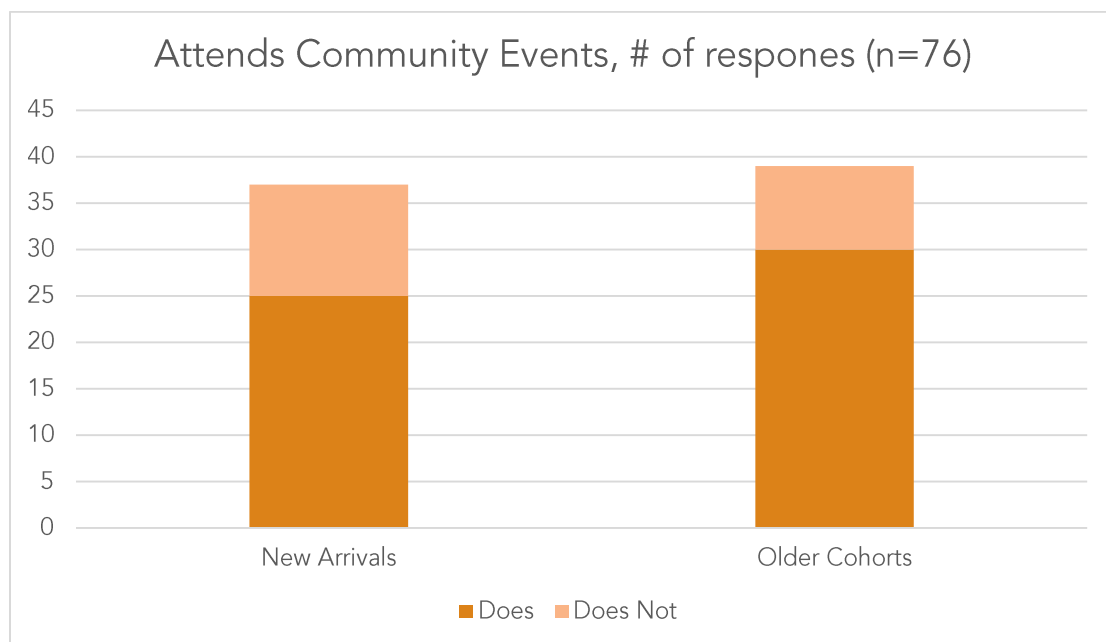


Figure 11: Attends Community Events and/or is Involved in Community Organizations, New Arrivals (n=37) and Older Cohorts (n=39)

Most respondents in both cohorts attended community events or were involved in community organizations. These events tended to be hosted by the settlement agency, who offer a range of group activities and events that appeal to certain audiences such as a family group and sports teams. The settlement agency has been proactive in encouraging refugees to attend events by personally calling and inviting individuals.

*"One time the [settlement agency] made a cooking competition and I participated. Each one brought food and we were tasting each other's to win. I participate in the [settlement agency]. I don't know another organization." (New arrival)*

*"Whenever the [settlement agency] calls us about some event I am participating." (New arrival)*

*"I am going to a program of the [settlement agency] for women. Once a month they gather the women together and [we] are doing things together like cooking or language or stuff like that. We socialize together. Apart of that I'm not a part of any community organization." (New arrival)*

*"I attend social events. I support sports. I am not a sport person but I go and cheer up." (Older cohort)*

The older cohort respondents carried out more community activities outside the [settlement agency]. The church or mosque was a popular source for community events. Others also mentioned being involved with community groups based on their country or region of origin. These were identified as being formal and informal.

*"Yes, I go to the mosque, and we have everything common there. When you have problems, you talk to them, so you can always go ahead." (Older cohort)*

*"As a group yes, we have a group of Sudanese women and I participate in the African community when we are getting together... The African Community, we have an association but with the Sudanese women we just have a group of women." (Older cohort)*

Respondents in the older cohort were much more likely to volunteer (Figure 12). Generally, new arrivals felt that they were still too early in their resettlement to volunteer or as one new arrival explained, "I have a volunteer but I am not volunteer." Several new arrivals volunteered through a religious or cultural organization. Those in the older cohort tended to volunteer translation services or presenting their culture at different events. The role of newcomer volunteers offering translation services emphasizes the value of growing existing linguistic communities, as newcomers can become connected and help each other in situations where an interpreter is required. Multicultural events that showcase art and food can be educational opportunities for residents and a powerful means of enhancing a sense of belonging for both locals and newcomers. Some of the older cohorts of refugees also volunteered for newcomer service providers, health care providers, religious organization, their children's schools and other neighbourhood activities.

*"I did volunteer twice in my son's school. Also, another time in my own school." (Older cohort)*

*"I used to volunteer at church and in school. We used to do recycling and fundraising." (Older cohort)*

*"Sometimes with [the hospital] and everywhere. Especially with the old people. They don't have anyone there especially during the lunch time or supper time. I give them supper and food. I appreciate it and I would be happy when I do that." (Older cohort)*

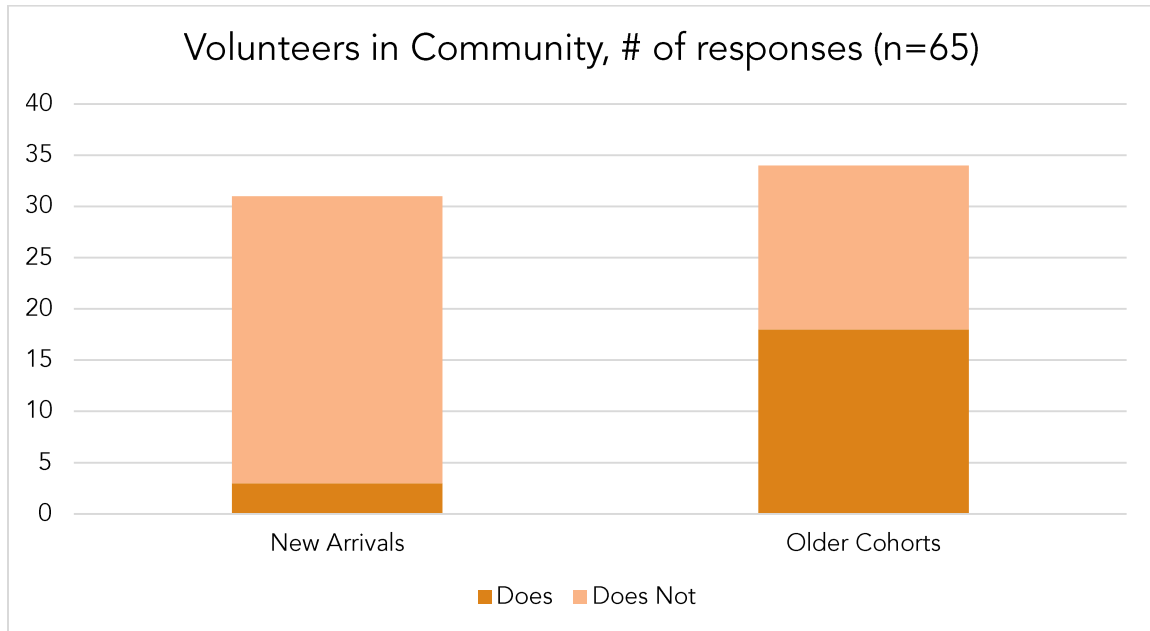


Figure 12: Volunteers in Community, New Arrivals (n=31) and Older Cohorts (n=34)

Reasons for not participating in events were largely based on being too busy or tired. Others reported that language barriers limited their ability to attend events or volunteer for organizations. Among the older cohorts, the barriers were more based on being low-income and having to focus on school or work.

*"I can't volunteer for anything but the language may be the obstacle for me." (New arrival)*

*"I am not participating in any community events, because I don't have time." (New arrival)*

*"I worked as volunteer for the [hospital] for around a year. Now, I can't because I started school." (Older cohort)*

*"I would like to do some volunteering too but now I have to work to get money to pay for what I have to pay. I would enjoy helping people if I didn't need to pay back the money. It is a great idea." (Older cohort)*

Given the high proportion of respondents who indicated they had a mix of Syrian and Canadian friends, the newly arrived refugees seem to be integrating well into their community. This is facilitated by community organizations who offer different services and events meant to engage the newcomer population. Some respondents, however, did indicate that they were socially isolated, mostly because of health-related issues. This highlights the importance of physical health to social well being.

Community organizations are struggling to deliver these valuable services. Budget constraints were a major concern for stakeholders interviewed, as was the lack of stability in year over year funding. With limited funding, community organizations were unable to offer translation services, transportation and child care, which they felt limited their ability to serve the newcomer population.

### 3.8 Transportation

Being able to navigate and travel through the city is essential for residents attending school or work, going shopping or enjoying leisure activities. Gien and Law (2009) found that some newcomers found transportation problems were causing them difficulty finding work in St. John's, while El-Bialy and Mulay (2015) found it was a significant source of strain for refugees. To learn whether this was still an issue for the refugee population, we asked respondents about their primary mode of transportation and their experiences traversing around the city.

The car was found to be the primary mode of transportation for most respondents, though new arrivals were more likely to have a car and older cohorts were more likely to use public transport, taxis or walk (Figure 13). Some families shared one vehicle and took turns using it.

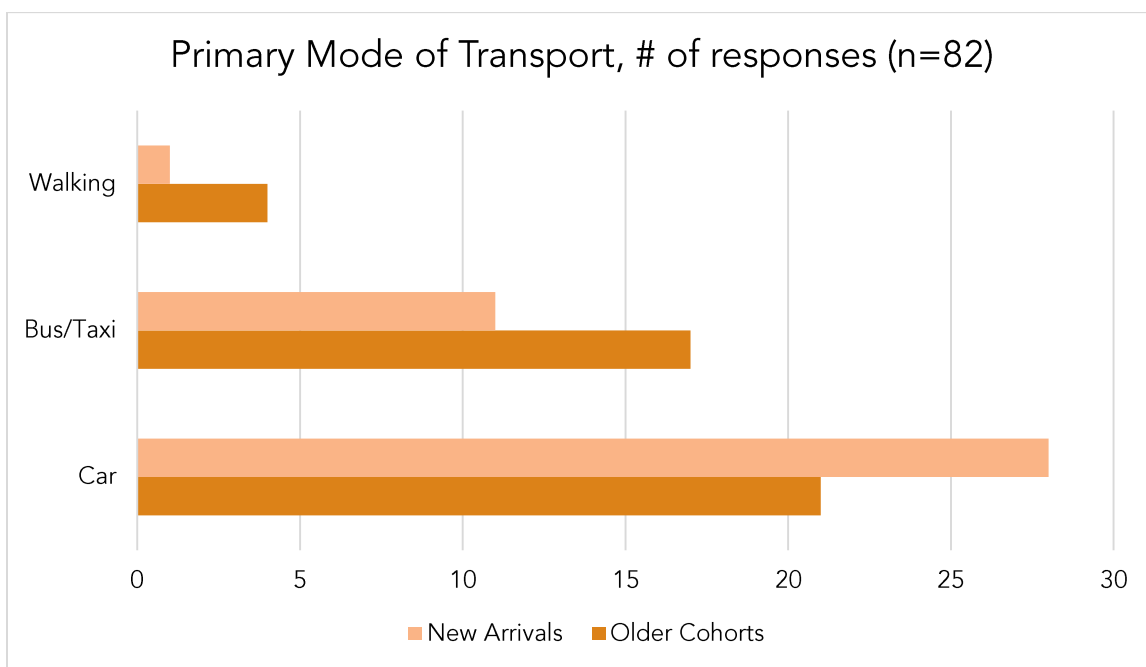


Figure 13: Primary Mode of Transportation of New Arrivals (n=40) and Older Cohorts (n=42)

Those who had cars reported initially using public transportation but claimed that they had to opt for privately owned vehicles for a variety of reasons, including the cold weather. As the newly arrived refugee families tended to have a large number of children, transportation of children was also given as a reason for purchasing a car. Those who did not own vehicles would often use public transportation or get rides from friends, private sponsors, or the settlement agency. These rides were especially used to travel to medical appointments.

*"The medical appointments and other like dentist things so, the sponsorship will pick us up but the other things we will go by bus or taxi." (New arrival)*

*"The Association used to send transportation to bring us to our medical appointment." (New arrival)*

*"From my house to school I take the bus. From other places sometimes I get some help from my friends or from people from the church. Sometimes, we walk." (Older cohort)*

*"The family I met that I was babysitting for, they did everything for me. They used to pick me up from school. I used to live away from them but they found housing for me and applied for it for me. Then I was living close to them and I changed to school but anytime when there was snow or the weather was bad they picked me up. When they went to shopping they would tell me and I went with them. Anywhere I wanted to go they would pick me up." (Older cohort)*

The majority of respondents reported a positive experience with transportation (Figure 14), though this was greater within the new arrival population than the older cohorts. Those who reported positive experiences were more likely to have purchased a car. Several reported good experiences with the bus system but preferred to acquire their own mode of transportation. This suggests that people did have trouble with other modes of transportation and took steps to procure their own vehicle instead.

*"I don't have a car. I use buses, it is not difficult. It's good. I don't have any problems with it." (New arrival)*

*"It's easy because I was driving before I came here. It was good to use bus but car is better." (New arrival)*

*"The bus is convenient but difficult with the kids." (Older cohort)*

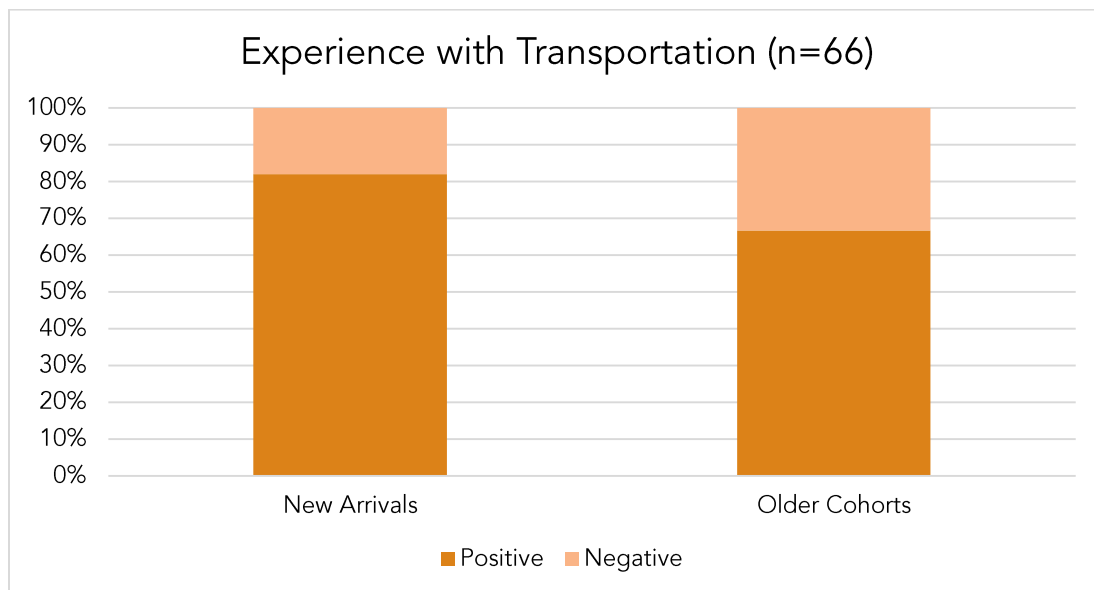


Figure 14: Experience with Transportation of New Arrivals (n=39) and Older Cohorts (n=27)

Having a volunteer from the settlement agency show them how to use the bus system improved people's experiences with this mode of transport. However, not everyone was able to avail of this service and some reported transportation challenges such as feeling stuck at home, having difficulty navigating the public transport system or being overly reliant on taxicabs before they bought a vehicle.

*"My experience with the bus system was good. If you know the schedule, you don't need to wait much. First, I did not know there were schedules for the buses so I went and waited but once I knew about the schedules I didn't need to wait. The [settlement agency] took us around and told us how to use the bus. That was good." (New arrival)*

*"We have a car now. Before that we used to stay home and not to go out that much but whenever we wanted to go to the mall we took the cab. We were not using the buses." (New arrival)*

Those who reported negative experiences had trouble navigating the bus system and found they were waiting a long time for the bus. This was aggravated by cold winters and the language barrier. They also found taxis to be expensive and cited a desire to purchase a vehicle.

*"It's a little bit difficult to travel around the community. Traveling during the winter is a little bit hard for me. The language thing is a barrier also for me also. It's hard to explain to the bus people where you are going." (New arrival)*

*"It is not very easy for me to go by bus. It is a little bit hard and most of the times we will call our friends to pick us up. Especially the timing issue when the bus is arriving and so. We don't know the timing and it's better for us to walk than to wait for the bus. Sometimes we even wait for an hour. We didn't talk with the people from the [settlement agency] about how to use the bus system." (New arrival)*

*"I wish that my husband had a car because it is easier to travel around the city with your own car. Taxis are very expensive here." (New arrival)*

The older cohorts had other reasons to be disgruntled with the transportation system and some even considered the transit as being substandard and a major factor hindering the integration of refugees in the province.

*"Metro bus here is useless. It is really hard. I keep telling everybody that it is the reason number 3 why people leave this province because transportation... Imagine, in St. John's, it is hard having metro bus, how it is in a smaller community: Gander, Corner Brook. There is no public transportation there." (Older cohort)*

*"... we think about building like infrastructure and all these millions of dollars into a park or somewhere. But what if a bus cannot reach that place? For example, if you would like to go to Bowering Park would you take a metro bus? Is it convenient for people? It is very hard. You have to go to take a Metrobus, go to Village Mall, take another bus... and it's a process and for a newcomer or for any people who have accessibility difficulties, they*

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*have to take couple of buses and it's already challenging. I recommended if there was a chance if the city or municipal government could provide transportation could be so convenient that you take one bus and be there. There are places like that now we have a hospital. Recently I think we have a hospital ...there is blood work, and all these things... people have to go there and it's hard to be there. Taking bus is challenging." (Older cohort)*

In terms of offering programs, one stakeholder noted that transportation was a significant barrier for newcomers. To ensure that individuals were able to access their services, this stakeholder would offer transportation to clients, but this was an added expense to their organization.

*"Transportation is a huge challenge for us. A big part of our budget goes for transportation, and a lot of them, about 90% of them, have no transportation so before you're offering any services, I have to find the transportation." (Stakeholder)*

*"That we have ability, we know, we feel that. But we cannot do that because of limitations for funding, transportation, resource, people. That one thing we find is very limited." (Stakeholder)*

Given that many families reported feeling constrained by their income, the decision to purchase a car with the added expenses of insurance and gas, suggests that having reliable, accessible transportation was an important aspect of their household well-being. Respondents were familiar with alternative public and private transportation systems but their decision to invest in their own vehicle implies that these were not considered sustainable options and that the public transportation system in the city continues to be a problem for newcomers.

### 3.9 Experiences of Refugee Minors

Our research team conducted 22 interviews with newly arrived minors and 9 older cohorts under the age of 18. Minors were interviewed separately from their parents but to ensure psychological comfort, the interviews were conducted in the same premises. Interpreters were present when necessary.

All minors were enrolled in school ranging from Grade 1 to Grade 12. Participants were asked a series of questions related to their impressions of Newfoundland and Labrador, primary means of transport to and from school, the predominant ethnic make-up of their friend groups, and their experiences in English language classes.

The initial and current impressions of the province overall as indicated by respondents were positive. The people, school and feeling of safety in Newfoundland and Labrador received high praise from interviewees with many stating:

*"People are lovely and friendly." (New arrival)*

*"I like the people and the safety here." (New arrival)*

*"I found it very nice to live in a country where everyone is accepted in and we are trying to help people who don't have a place to live." (Older cohort)*

*"Yes, I like school. In Canada, school is very good. If you have a problem or if you need anything the school gives it to you for free. If you need a book or a pen the school gives me. It is very good." (Older cohort)*

Responses to the weather and climate of the province were mixed. Some were excited by the novelty of experiencing winter for the first time, whereas others expressed discontent over Newfoundland and Labrador's cooler climate.

*"I liked [winter] because I didn't see it before, so I liked it." (New arrival)*

*"It's cold, and I don't like the cold weather." (New arrival)*

*"...another thing, I don't really like snow." (Older cohort)*

While many of the newly arrived refugee minor respondents felt that their experiences have been positive, a few expressed dissatisfaction about their first few months in the province given a lack of friends at the time or their lower language proficiency which they felt isolated them from others.

*"At the beginning, I didn't see anything. I stayed home I didn't go outside. Because I didn't know anybody." (New arrival)*

*"The language, [I] couldn't communicate with people." (New arrival)*

*"Because sometimes the teachers are just talking and we listen and I don't get what they are saying." (Older cohort)*

All respondents were enrolled in English classes taking place either every day or 2-3 times per week. Previous studies have found that children received very little ESL training in the public school system (Quaicoe, 2011; El-Bialy and Mulay, 2015), but our study, similar to Liu (2015), found that the situation had improved. While a majority stated they were satisfied with the current state of classes, respondents did have some suggestions on how they could be improved. Some felt more practice with Canadians and more individual exposure to English with teachers would be of benefit to them.

*"Sometimes we have a different teacher for the Syrians only. And sometimes the whole class have English too... It would be better if we could practice with the other Canadians more. More mixed classes." (New arrival)*

*"I think for us, not English, they take someone and they talk with him and every day they give him things to read to get better." (New arrival)*

One of the stakeholders emphasized the importance of having cross-cultural friendships for sharpening language skills.

*"...friendship is the key, getting them to make friends cross-culturally. So, they are speaking the language and improving in it. Whereas if they are speaking their own language all the time, I find that the children who have a network where they speak their own language all the time, they do not expose... because they speak it with their friends at school then they go home and they speak it with the parents. They need more opportunities to speak English. So I always try when they are in the program to pair them with others. Particularly if they're very new but once they get a little bit accustomed to it then maybe pairing them up with local children or with others from the group that speak English well." (Stakeholder)*

Almost all respondents indicated having a large group of friends at their respective schools and usually did not specify the ethnicity of their school friends unless specifically prompted to during the interview. Half of the respondents indicated a mixed friend group at school and the other half did not specify the ethnic make-up. However, when asked of the ethnic make-up of their friend groups outside school, a greater proportion indicated their neighbourhood friend group had mainly other immigrants while their social groups are more mixed at school.

Some respondents indicated some form of participation (registered and/or informal) in activities outside of school through organizations such as "The Youth School with the [settlement agency] and [the] Boys and Girls Club" or sports including soccer, basketball, and hockey.

The primary means of commuting to school among refugee minor respondents was by walking, followed by private car and public transport. One of the interviewed stakeholders gave us some insight into the experiences of refugee minors with transportation.

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*"I think that for settlement and for high school, transportation is the challenge... I'm more concerned about transportation to get them to their schools and why we're not offering the literacy program in other schools. Even if we had one in the west end and one in the east end and one in Mount Pearl or something because it's just a matter of putting another teacher who have the expertise to teach in school. Instead of trying to get them across. Children come there late, and there are lots of other challenges." (Stakeholder)*

Overall, youth seemed to be adjusting well to their new homes. Being enrolled in school helped them both learn English and develop social networks, which appear to be quite diverse. While one child did report feeling bullied at school, they indicated having a strong social network of support and there were no reports of direct racism. This is in contrast to reports of racism reported by youth in previous studies (Baker, 2015). In our interviews, youth tended to have a firmer grasp on the English language than their parents, which points to the success of the local school curriculum and the advantages of having a social network that includes native-English speakers.

### 3.10 Settlement Satisfaction

Refugees were asked about their overall satisfaction with their settlement experience. These responses were coded "satisfied" if people were generally happy with their settlement despite some issues and "unsatisfied" if respondents explicitly said they were unhappy or responded to the question with an issue they had faced during their settlement.

Most new arrivals were generally happy with their settlement experience (Figure 15) but did face several issues. Those who were satisfied tended to cite the help of volunteers and the importance of having their children in school and in a safe environment. Those who were unsatisfied tended to focus on the high cost of housing and missing their family members back home.

*"I am satisfied. The most important thing for me are my children, that they are in school. But still there are many things that can be improved." (New arrival)*

*"We are satisfied. Even though it is very hard because we are new here, but we are satisfied." (New arrival)*

*"Everything is nice except the only problem that I have is that I hope that my family will be able to join me. They are in Jordan now." (New arrival)*

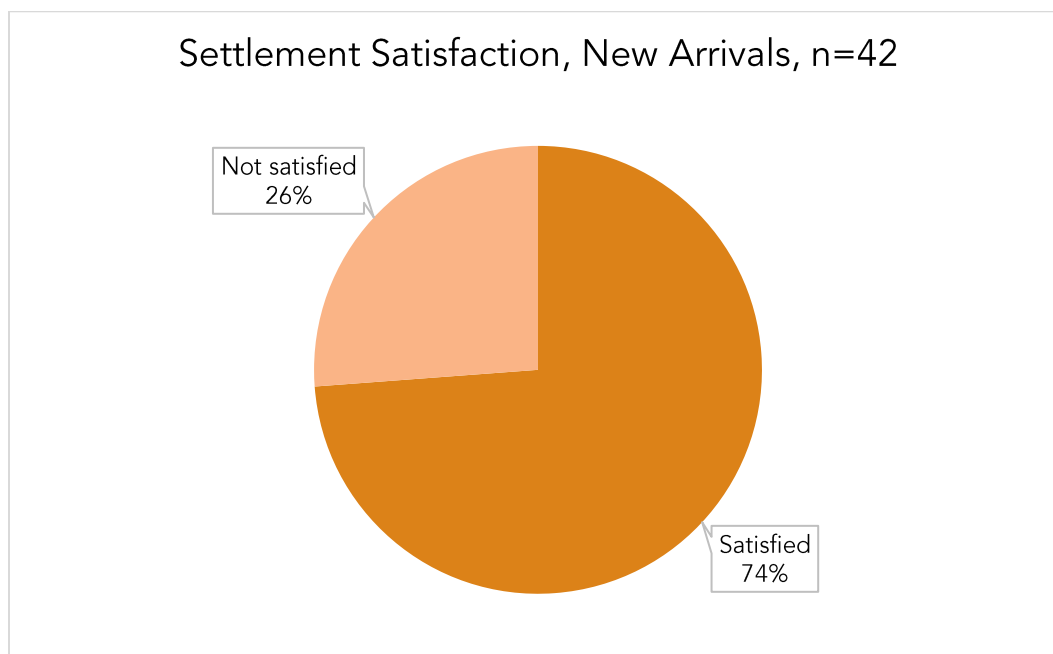


Figure 15: Overall Satisfaction with Settlement Experience, New Arrivals

Many respondents acknowledged that at first, the settlement experience was difficult for them but that things have improved since.

*"At the beginning it was a little bit hard because we took a house which was so expensive. The rent is so expensive for us but now-a-days it is better and things are getting better, and better." (New arrival)*

The difficulties that are faced by those in first years of resettlement is contrasted with the overall settlement satisfaction reported by older cohorts of refugee respondents. Over time, those who were initially unsatisfied were either able to improve their situation, or left. This resulted in complete satisfaction for those respondents who have remained. The reason for this greater satisfaction over time was discussed in our interviews where respondents emphasized how in the

beginning, everything was difficult and first impressions may not be the best measure of a new place. While it can be hard to come to a new place with different weather, food and customs, over time refugees reported becoming accustomed to their new home.

*"Nothing is easy at the beginning. Like when you get here you find all things are new. You are starting new life and nothing is easy in the beginning of everything but as long as you got so far things looks good. People are good, the churches that we have, schools they have. People are very friendly and Newfoundland is very peaceful. There are no real crimes. It is a very nice place. For the weather, I think that in the beginning it is really not easy. It is very hard when you have kids and you don't have transportation it is very difficult. As far as you are going further with your life it will be getting easier but it is not easy." (Older cohort)*

*"By time, I like it... it is getting easier. We had to learn life and staying in the weather. We had to learn to eat the food... and after we needed to go back to school. It was tough. But by the time it got better." (Older cohort)*

Our interviews suggest that the community roots and extra volunteer time provided by private sponsors may help refugees integrate more quickly into their new homes. However, these pathways may be riskier as private sponsors are only accountable to their family for one year and may cut off all ties thereafter, which could potentially isolate these refugee families. Some sponsors may even cut off ties sooner. However, this path is still an important asset for humanitarian government policies and allows those affected by disaster in other countries to bring family members to Canada.

Government-assisted refugees can depend on greater stability in their sponsor but with the volatility of government policies, staff in small areas may not be able to accommodate large increases of refugees in short periods of time. Sudden in-flows of large families can overwhelm staff and put strains on service delivery.

**Recommendation: Increases in refugee in-take should be complemented with greater funding for settlement agencies from the federal government.**

With the heavy focus on the Syrian refugees, some other groups of refugees felt that they were discriminated against by the government and the agencies that work to resettle them. The federal government did introduce policies that were specific for the Syrian refugees. For example, there were certain Syrian cohorts who did not have to pay back the travel loan, which covers the cost of the flight that other refugees have to pay. This was a point of frustration for some older cohorts.

*"What is the difference between Syrians and Eritrea, Sudanese and other people? We are the same so why they help the Syrians with volunteers and whatever and not the other people? It is not fair. The Syrians if they say to them "oh yeah this car... you have to go with this car" they say "no, why we go with this car", "why we buy this sofa we like this". No. They should accept what they give us. Not because we don't know. We know*

*everything. We are not thrown out from our country because we are hungry. No. We have a bad situation, so why other children need help and other not? Everybody is the same. Some people have all the volunteers and a lot of support and some don't." (Older cohort)*

*"Especially the refugees that came around 2015. They came as whole, 25,000, the government didn't let them to pay for their tickets. It is not just me saying it. Ask other people from Iraq and so. Why is it like that? If you can just let other people hear that. Why are there such different in nationalities? It varies by nationalities. Why? We are here as refugees and we went through a lot of trauma. We had to go to Indonesia for a big... they went through a lot of stuff. It is not only some refugees that have to go through war. They are the same and they have war home too." (Older cohort)*

### **Recommendation: Refugee policies should be applied equitably to all cohorts.**

Stakeholders highlighted that the media played a major role in driving the pronounced support for the Syrians. There was also a lot more media and hence, community attention to the Syrian refugees than to other groups of refugees, which resulted in more donations being given to the Syrians. This was said to be a challenge across the country and while the organizations involved did try to shield the other refugees from this disparity, they understood that people talked and discovered the preferential treatment. Still, they were hesitant to denounce the discrepancy in donations or community support to the Syrian refugees.

*"It doesn't make it easier if you're a refugee and you hear that your neighbour doesn't have to pay." (Stakeholder)*

Stakeholders mentioned that they took the opportunity to teach donors about the bigger refugee picture and found that people were willing to expand the scope of their donation once they understood that there were more than just Syrian refugees finding a new home in the province. There were also attempts by the resettlement agencies to match donations so that the difference was less obvious. Furthermore, not all the refugees felt resentment or begrudged the Syrian arrivals and some were very understanding of their plight.

It would be hard to build social ties and develop a sense of belonging if refugees experience discrimination. Unwelcoming environments would push all newcomers to move somewhere else (Griffiths et al. 2010; Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2014). Discrimination negatively impact integration and the desire to stay (Han and Humphreys, 2005). Higher levels of perceived discrimination tend to result in lower quality of life (Houle and Schellenberg, 2010). Discrimination in the workplace was reported by some of the refugees.

*"The main problem in NL is living in this province because of work. There is no work. Even if there is work but the companies don't hire other people. They just give it to their relatives. That is why people are leaving to other provinces. That is a problem in NL. You can find a job but when they see that you have a little bit of language barrier then they*

*judge you and they cannot hire you. Some people put resume to millions of places and they got not. For example, if I can get a job and then for my friends if I am working in a company I can ask for him. I speak to somebody, so they can hire him. That is the only thing to get a job.” (Older cohort)*

*“As I told you before people they are friendly, talk to you, but only one thing that they cannot give you job. That is one of the thing. And certain points, if you are half different, even somebody came from, ok Syria now, they just come up in the map, but like example, this one from Columbia, you are from Africa, you have different treatment. Even if you be black, even if you are two black together, you are Columbia, but you are from Africa, you have different treatment. They take those people treatment better than they.” (Older cohort)*

One stakeholder, whose job was to provide advice to those who felt that their human rights had been violated, did find a small but growing number of complaints based on race and ethnic origin in the past. They also found that while historically those who filed complaints against these violations tended to be doctors and professors, there was a growing range of occupations filing complaints against these abuses. The stakeholder was unable to assess whether these were immigrants or refugees, but it does point to potential discrimination in the workplace that racial minorities may face. They noted that there were also instances of international students arriving at houses for rent, only to find out that the house was suddenly unavailable when they showed up. While again, they did not have cases where there were specifically refugees who were affected by this, they did contend that it takes a certain knowledge of the system and willingness to act for individuals to file a complaint, so there is the potential that individuals have experienced this type of discrimination without pursuing justice.

The Canadian government disperses government-assisted refugees throughout the country to help boost the population of more isolated areas, but once they arrive, refugees are free to move elsewhere. Refugee retention could help bolster Newfoundland and Labrador’s declining population and if they leave, it is a missed opportunity for the province. In our study, respondents were asked about their intention to stay in the province or move somewhere else.

Overwhelming, newly arrived respondents were uncertain of their future and whether they would be able to successfully settle in St. John’s or move elsewhere in Canada. Older cohorts were more likely to report that they intended to stay, but they too were uncertain about their future, and some did intend to leave (Figure 16).

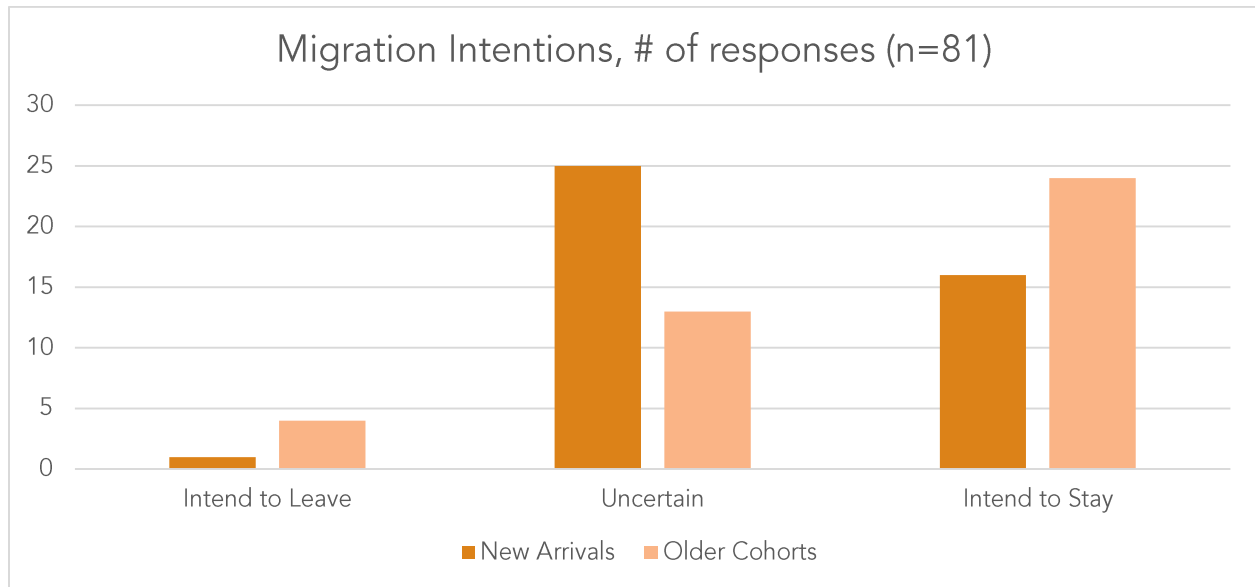


Figure 16: Migration Intentions of New Arrivals (n=40) and Older Cohorts (n=41)

Among the reasons for staying in the province were safety, friendly people, and good educational opportunities in St. John's. Altogether this made it a good place to raise their kids, whose well-being was often mentioned.

*"We like it here. It is very safe place for the children to grow up so we would like to stay here."*  
(New arrival)

*"People are very nice in here. As I was coming I thought I was going to move away from here but as I met the people then I changed [my] mind and now I want to stay here."* (New arrival)

*"Yeah, for me, I think I belong here. I want to raise my children here and I feel like this is my home."* (Older cohort)

After the long journey required to move to refugee camps in other countries, some were simply happy to have the stability of somewhere to call home and did not want to start over again.

*"We haven't seen any other places to know if this one is preferable but we don't prefer to go to any other places to start again from the beginning. We've just [started] from the beginning and we don't want to experience it again."* (New arrival)

At the same time, several respondents specified that finding a job would determine their decision to stay in the province or relocate.

*"I don't have intention to move. But based on job. If I can find job outside I can move, or if I can find a job here I will stay."* (New arrival)

*"I like the people here and if I find a job here I will stay." (New arrival)*

Though one respondent was particularly optimistic about finding employment in the province.

*"I don't have any intention to move from the province. I like here that I have, I can get job easily because I work as mechanic and I can get it easily." (New arrival)*

As most new arrivals were still in school (learning English) and were not ready yet to enter the labour market, their decision was still uncertain. Some respondents had begun to search for work but were unemployed at the time of the interview. Respondents cited a perception of better jobs in Toronto, Montreal, and Alberta. Some suggested that they were living off of savings that would soon run out and were worried about finding adequate employment to take care of their family. The high cost of moving was given as a reason why some individuals had not moved yet. A few respondents referred to the small size of the city, weather, and lack of Arabic foods as influencing their decision.

*"Now, I am not thinking about leaving the province because my children are very satisfied in the school and the education system but in the future if my husband won't find the job then we will leave. We cannot stay in a place without a job." (New arrival)*

*"It is a lovely province, but the problem is that there is no job for my husband so this is the problem. ... He is searching for a job and if he was able to have a job that would be perfect." (New arrival)*

For those who were uncertain or intended to move, employment opportunities were the biggest factor in their decision and was a significant factor in why people they knew had left the province (Figure 17). Many respondents indicated that their families liked living in St. John's, but they were worried about finding employment.

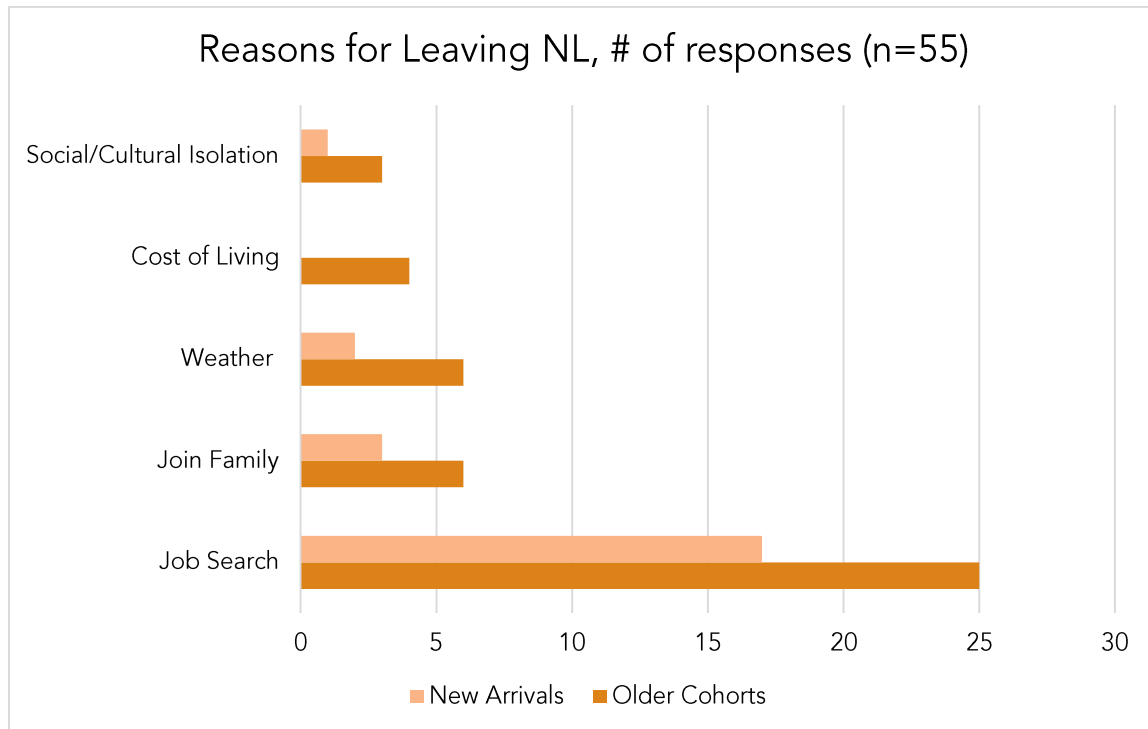


Figure 17: Reasons for Why They Would or Someone They Know Has Left Newfoundland and Labrador, New Arrivals (n=25) and Older Cohorts (n=30) (some respondents had more than one answer)

Some respondents knew other refugees that came to the province and already moved away to the USA or other parts of Canada such as Toronto. The main reasons for leaving were joining their families or friends or finding employment in their new destinations.

*"Yes. [Interviewer: Where did they go?] To Ontario. [Interviewer: And do you know why did they leave?] For work because here, you know, it is a small city. [Interviewer: So if they had a job here you think that they would have stayed?] Yeah, they would." (New arrival)*

*"Yes, I know somebody who went to Alberta to find a job. They found a better job over there. Got their own place. Life works better for them there than here. Also some of them to Toronto. Somebody went there to find the kind of education they were looking for." (Older cohort)*

Older cohorts of refugees gave a wider range of answers to the question of why their friends had moved away from the province. While there was still an emphasis on jobs, others also mentioned the cultural and social isolation and discrimination pushed them out of the province. One respondent emphasized the importance of jobs not only for sustaining family in Canada, but back in their home country as well.

*"Since I've been here for 15 years I've seen a lot of people coming and going because there are no jobs, they don't like the place, it's too cold and some people didn't like the people here and how they were treated. There are many different reasons I've seen*

*people leaving for and I know many people that are going to leave once they get their education. There are more opportunities in the mainland than here.” (Older cohort)*

*“Either their friends are somewhere else or finding jobs makes them move because they have a lot of people behind them to take care of. What they are getting is not enough to take care of themselves and assist people at home. People don’t realize they care for also for the extended family not only whom they got here with them. That is a different idea than we have here. Mostly they move for a job to take care of their family at home. That is why people are moving. If people can settle and will have a job I don’t think so many people would move because it is quiet here.” (Older cohort)*

After experiencing such a traumatic life event it is no wonder that refugees may feel uncertain about their future. Many respondents were eager to learn English, find meaningful employment and settle down, though not necessarily in Newfoundland and Labrador. Despite being new to the province, they were aware of the precarious economic situation and were wary of future employment prospects. This was overwhelmingly given as the deciding factor in their decision to migrate. However, many indicated that for the moment they were happy to stay in the province. They had positive experiences with local people and service providers, which made them feel welcome in their new homes. Many refugees told us they would like to stay, if they find a job. This highlights how friendly locals can be beneficial to the settlement experience, but economic integration and stability are paramount.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

This study examines experiences of refugees that have settled in Newfoundland and Labrador and analyzes factors that can potentially enhance refugee integration and factors that can negatively impact their settlement experiences and retention in the province.

Refugees face several barriers that impede their successful social, cultural, and economic integration into their host society. They face innumerable challenges during and upon their arrival in a new country as they adjust to the extensive demands of their frequently rapid departure. There are a multitude of factors at play which can influence the degree to which refugees will be able to integrate themselves effectively or drive them to settle elsewhere. The potential demographic and economic benefits of refugee settlement in Newfoundland and Labrador cannot be realized if refugees come but then choose to leave.

First impressions of the province are an extremely important factor that impact refugees' decisions to stay in or leave the province, given that previous studies showed that the majority of refugees tend to leave the province relatively soon after their arrival. Newfoundland and Labrador could benefit from refugees' overwhelmingly positive impression of its people, whose friendliness, and welcoming and respectful attitude were lauded and sincerely appreciated. On the other hand, even after relatively short period of residency, many respondents have the impression of a potential scarcity of employment opportunities in the province. This negative perception is a serious push factor. It is employment that was cited by our respondents as the primary reason for deciding whether to stay in the province or move somewhere else.

Ensuring that refugees can access health care is an important part of their physical and mental well-being. Overall, the MUN Med Gateway Project has proven its value through the high rate of refugees who have seen a doctor upon arrival and been able to access medical assistance for additional services. Among challenges to delivering health services for refugees are language barriers, health navigation and transportation. While addressing wait times for physicians and public transit inefficiencies is outside the purview of this study, simple remedies like creating a centralized directory of translation services and organizing health system navigation sessions are possible. Thus, newcomers would be able to independently access assistance in relaying their symptoms to a trained medical professional.

**Recommendation: Settlement agencies should organize health system navigation sessions that include role-playing and other active learning strategies.**

**Recommendation: The Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism of Newfoundland and Labrador should create a centralized directory of translation services that refugees and other interested parties can independently access.**

Stigma about mental health continues to be a common problem in Canada and may be a reason why individuals tend to feel uncomfortable talking about the issue. Refugees do carry trauma

from their experiences living through a war. Changing the language from “mental health” to “well-being” may be one way to better engage newcomers in this conversation, and having programs where trained professionals meet with individuals, e.g. through open office hours, may create a more welcoming environment for newcomers to discuss their mental health.

**Recommendation:** Settlement agencies and health care providers should change language used around mental health services, e.g. from “mental health” to “well-being”, thus, refugees may be more likely to use the services.

**Recommendation:** Settlement agencies should disseminate information about mental health and addictions walk-in services so that individuals who are dealing with mental health or addictions issues have easy and confidential access to such services if needed.

English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction has been identified as a vital part of integrating refugees who do not speak the language into their new homes and is an important first step to acquiring a career or making Canadian friends. The restriction on women with young children (our study found women were most likely to stay at home with the children) from attending language classes can prevent these women from learning English for two years upon arrival. This would significantly affect their ability to integrate into their community.

**Recommendation:** An increase in funding for settlement agencies to offer expanded child care services could allow more immigrant and refugee women to attend English classes.

Some of the refugees with special needs were not able to avail of the ESL service because it is not yet customized to meet their special needs. Hearing problems were a more common ailment among the newly arrived refugees, and this highlights the need for partnerships between the ESL service providers and community organizations that offer specialized services, such as the Hard of Hearing Association.

**Recommendation:** While settlement agencies may not have the capacity to deliver specialized services such as English sign language to newcomers, there may be opportunities to partner with other organizations to deliver this service.

**Recommendation:** Given that adult learners with different backgrounds and experiences will learn English at different paces, this should be reflected in the grading process for ESL. The movement through the program should be focused on progress rather than attendance to ensure that everyone can finish the program with a solid understanding of the English language.

**Recommendation:** Smaller classroom sizes would allow teachers to give more personalized lessons. However, this opportunity may be limited based on funding available.

**Recommendation:** While it was acknowledged that the ESL program is based on a Canadian standard and would be difficult to change, adding voluntary extra classes for conversational

English might help newcomers learn “everyday English” and meet the demand from those who seek further English language instruction. Rather than one settlement agency offering all services, there may be opportunities to partner with other stakeholders to deliver this type of extra instruction.

While most of the newly arrived refugees were near the end of their one-year settlement assistance, their language skills were still weak and they were not quite ready to enter the labour market. Many in the older cohorts reported moving from the one-year federal assistance to provincial social assistance, which offered them less income and a disincentive to work as some reported trying to work part-time to increase their income, only to have their social assistance cut. This resulted in most people quitting their jobs rather than lose their social assistance benefits. Older cohorts with more labour market experience were generally unemployed or underemployed and there were several instances of racism in their workplace. Higher levels of unemployment and discrimination have been identified as a push factor in the literature. While the federally-funded settlement agency offers a variety of programs to help newcomers find meaningful employment, there are still barriers within the labour market for these newcomers and this can be a push factor for refugees.

**Recommendation:** Employers should formally commit to diversity and inclusiveness and communicate this to staff both visually and regularly. This can include explicit recruitment strategies and policies related to immigrant and refugee hiring within a firm and developing relationships with community placement agencies.

**Recommendation:** Employers should utilize diversity training programs to educate all employees, including managers, immigrant and refugee workers.

**Recommendation:** Employers should include staff from different backgrounds in the decision making and social activities.

**Recommendation:** Employers should participate in mentoring programs for skilled immigrants and refugees who have yet gained employment in their chosen occupation.

**Recommendation:** Firms should commit to deliberate and explicit practices to prevent biases in the selection process. This can also include training for hiring managers to apply consistent and equitable interview and selection techniques.

**Recommendation:** Firms should remove Canadian work experience requirements.

**Recommendation:** The Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism of Newfoundland and Labrador should provide greater supports to immigrants proceeding with licensing/certification processes.

This study found that the new arrivals, who came in large numbers, had difficulty finding affordable housing and there was a reported general lack thereof in the area. This is outside the

scope of the settlement agencies, and perhaps rather reflects the difficulties of having a large number of refugees arriving at the same time. While this should not prevent the government from bringing in refugees, it should be considered as part of their funding. Rather than a set amount, using average rent prices to calculate how much assistance newcomers ought to receive should be considered.

**Recommendation: Housing allowances should reflect actual costs of housing in specific areas.**

Social integration factors play an important part in immigrant integration and retention. Despite language barriers that hinder developing friendships with local people, most respondents had a mix of Canadian, ethnic and other immigrant friends. Diverse circle of friends creates a favourable environment for building strong local ties.

More involvement in local community activities could contribute to retaining newcomers in their initial destination. While most respondents were involved in community activities, their participation was mainly restricted to events hosted by the federally-funded settlement agency. Among reasons for not participating in a wider range of community activities were being busy or tired, which does not come as a surprise given that our respondents only arrived recently.

Insufficient language proficiency understandably limits refugees' ability to get involved in events and organizations that are not affiliated with newcomer-friendly settlement agencies. At the same time, establishing a solid social network is crucial not only for social but also economic integration. Refugees generally arrive to Newfoundland and Labrador with low social capital, as they do not know many local residents. The language barrier also poses a challenge to successful social and economic integration. ESL classes are helpful but learning outside the classroom is indispensable for mastering the language, which was also pointed out in our interviews.

**Recommendation: Involvement in the local community is a valuable tool to building social capital, therefore raising awareness of the importance of community engagement should be prioritised by settlement agencies.**

Bringing in a relatively large number of people from the same country did seem to have positive effects on the feeling of community. Several stakeholders noted that the Syrians were often in contact and gave each other advice on where to buy certain goods or access certain services. Many reported having friends who were mostly Syrians, which may point to an isolation from others, but given that they are in the early stages of learning English, the comfort of being able to communicate in your native tongue can have positive effects on the resettlement process. While private sponsors tended to have more friends from outside their ethnic community, others did report that volunteers or neighbours had helped them with daily tasks and that this helped them settle. Since the presence of ethno-cultural communities is considered a pull factor, this concentration of refugees from the same area could help encourage the new arrivals to stay while the larger social circles of older cohorts suggest that over time, newcomers will meet more people, which also has positive effects on their retention.

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**Recommendation:** Increases in refugee in-take should be complemented with greater funding for settlement agencies from the federal government.

**Recommendation:** Refugee policies should be applied equitably to all cohorts.

There are a number of barriers to settlement service delivery in the province including the funding process, lack of translated information or translation services, lack of cooperation between stakeholders, and lack of government action on identified gaps in service delivery. These issues were considered impediments to effective service delivery to newcomer refugee populations.

**Recommendation:** The Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism of Newfoundland and Labrador should create a multilingual portal with detailed information on public services and Canadian housing standards and landlords' expectations.

**Recommendation:** Funding agencies should introduce multi-year funding schemes, which would help organizations fully meet client needs and spend less time filling out grant applications.

**Recommendation:** Newfoundland and Labrador's organizations that service immigrants and refugees should develop greater collaboration. This could be facilitated by multi-year funding if stakeholders are more secure in their funding and do not consider each other as competitors.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government of Newfoundland and Labrador should institute clear pathways for service providers to get involved in design and implementation of policies aiming to address gaps in services.

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