



**Azerbaijani Women's
Support Centre (AWSC)**

What Do Women Immigrants and Refugees want? A Glimpse over a Newcomer Experience

AWSC @ 2021

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Abstract

This paper presents findings from a survey conducted among the members of the Azerbaijani Women's Support Centre (AWSC). The survey was possible with partial funding from the National Council of Women, Canada. The answers to the survey questions highlight newcomers' experiences of settlement, job market, education, discrimination, as well as barriers that immigrant/refugee women of the Azerbaijani community experience in their resettlement. We hope that the survey findings will have important implications for funding for settlement services in the Azerbaijani community.

Keywords: immigrants, refugees, Azerbaijan, government, immigration services, support, discrimination, education, job, career

Introduction

Canada is home to millions of immigrants and refugees, as per Statistics Canada, 2017. Only between 2011 and 2016, Canada accepted approximately 1.2 million immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2017c). In 2016, more than 46,700 refugees only from Syria settled in Canada (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2017). Nevertheless, every year, Canada announces new programs for admitting new immigrants from other countries who choose Canada for many reasons, including humanitarian and economic reasons. Many of these immigrants and refugees take at least five years to settle in this new country.

Azerbaijani community in Canada is a relatively young community. However, immigration to Canada from Azerbaijan has increased in the past few years. Many members of the Azerbaijani community are determined to achieve success in this new country, despite they also experience issues related to adjustment to a new country. Some of these issues are related to obstacles facing immigrants, such as challenges regarding recognition of foreign credentials, employment, language needs, education, culture shock, and economic and social status changes.

By conducting this survey, ASWC aimed at exploring the main barriers for adjustment in Canada that the members of the AWSC report. We recruited research participants who met the following criteria to complete our survey:

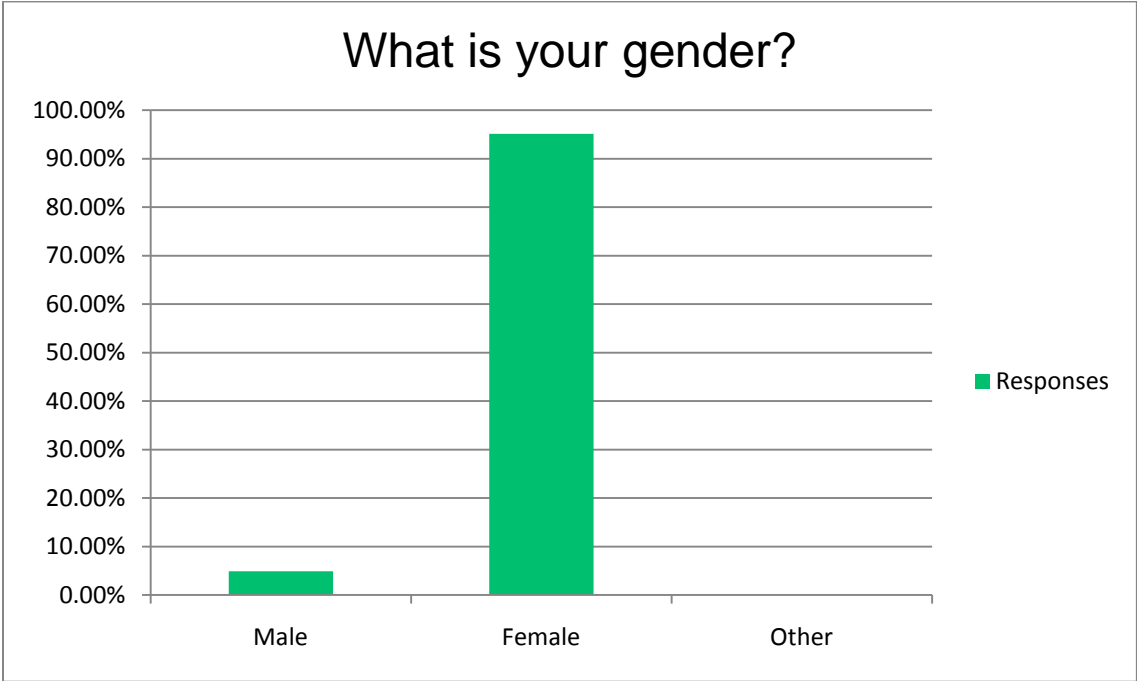
- ✓ the participants were at least 18 years of age;
- ✓ the participants currently resided in Canada;
- ✓ the participants were newcomers who lived in Canada for up to 10 years

The topics that might be covered in a survey were:

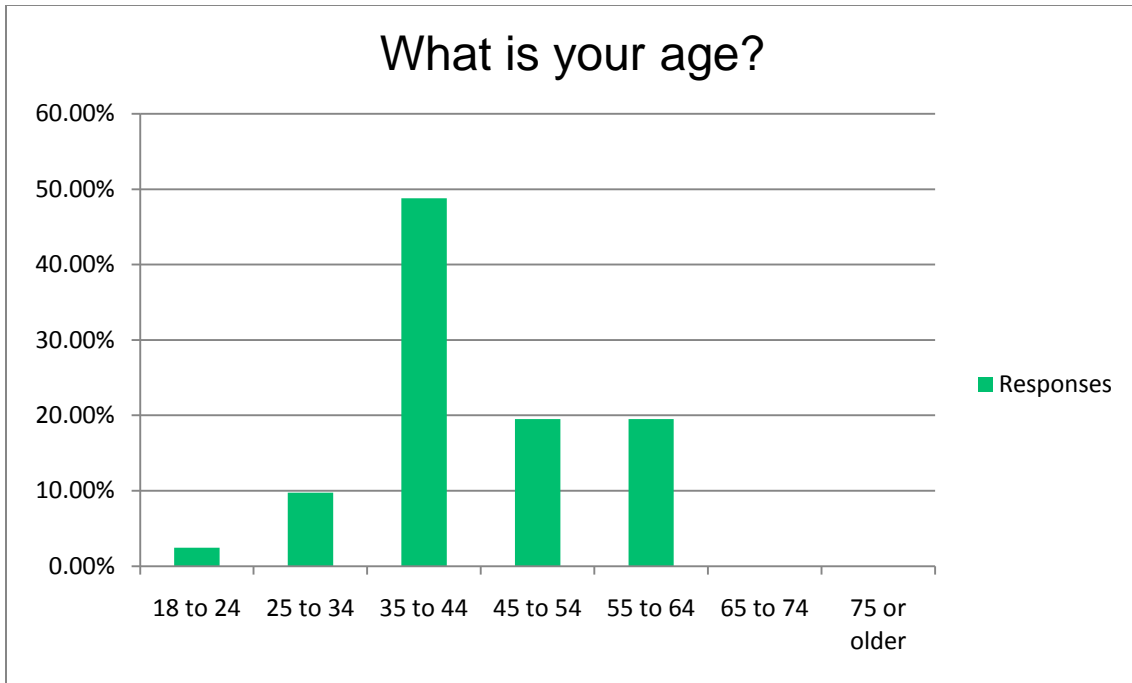
- ✓ settlement experiences
- ✓ services used
- ✓ access to community groups
- ✓ well-being and stressors.

Results

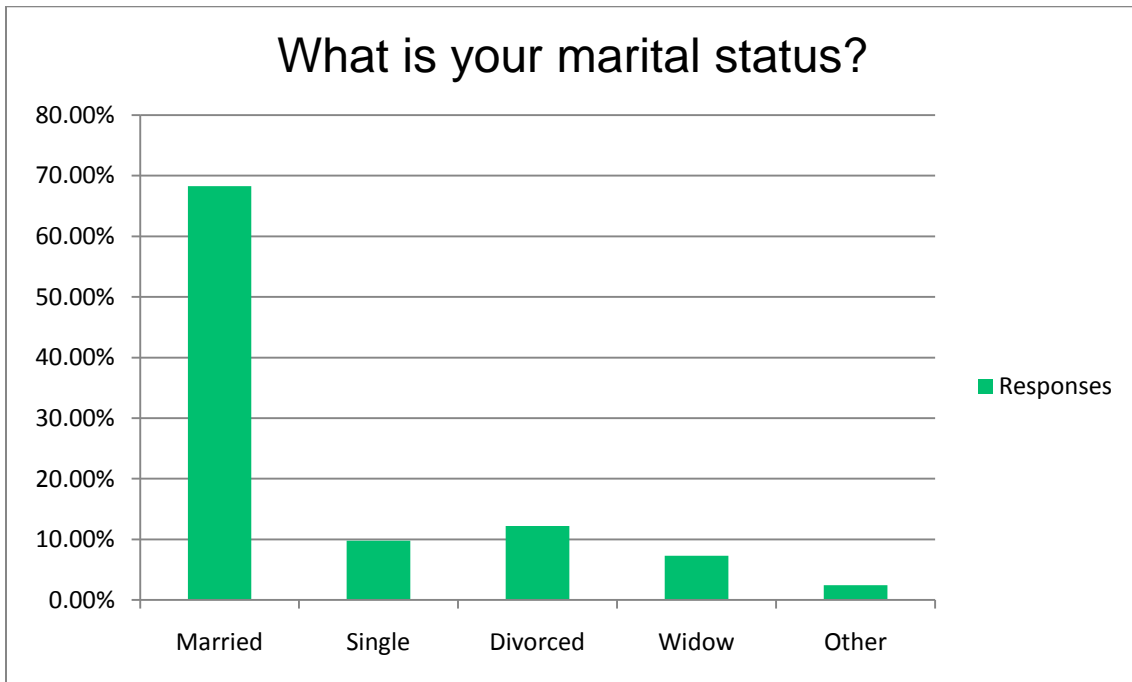
Overall, 41 members of the AWSC responded to the survey. 39 (95.1%) of respondents were female, and 2 (4.88%) were males.



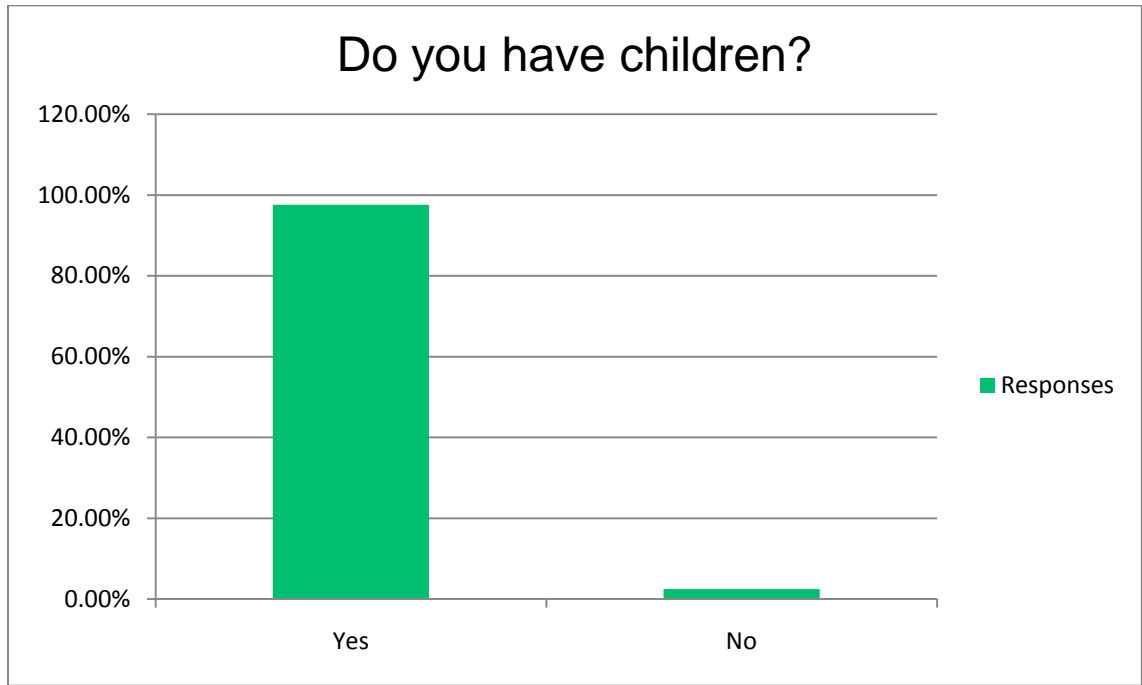
The majority of respondents indicated their age between 35-44 (20 – 48.78%), 45-54 (8 - 19.51%), 55-64 (8- 19.51%), 25-34 (4 – 9.76%) and 18-24 (1 – 2.44%).



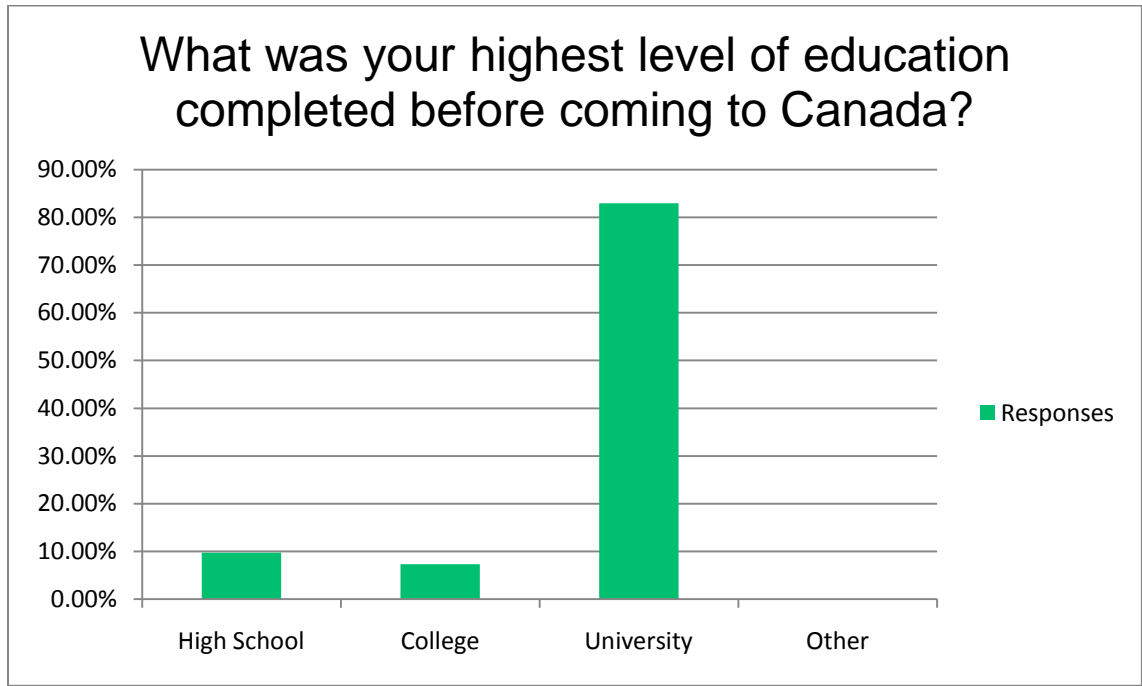
Twenty-eight of participants (68.29%) reported that they were married, 5 (12.20%) divorced, 4 (9.76%) single, and 3 (7.32%) widow.



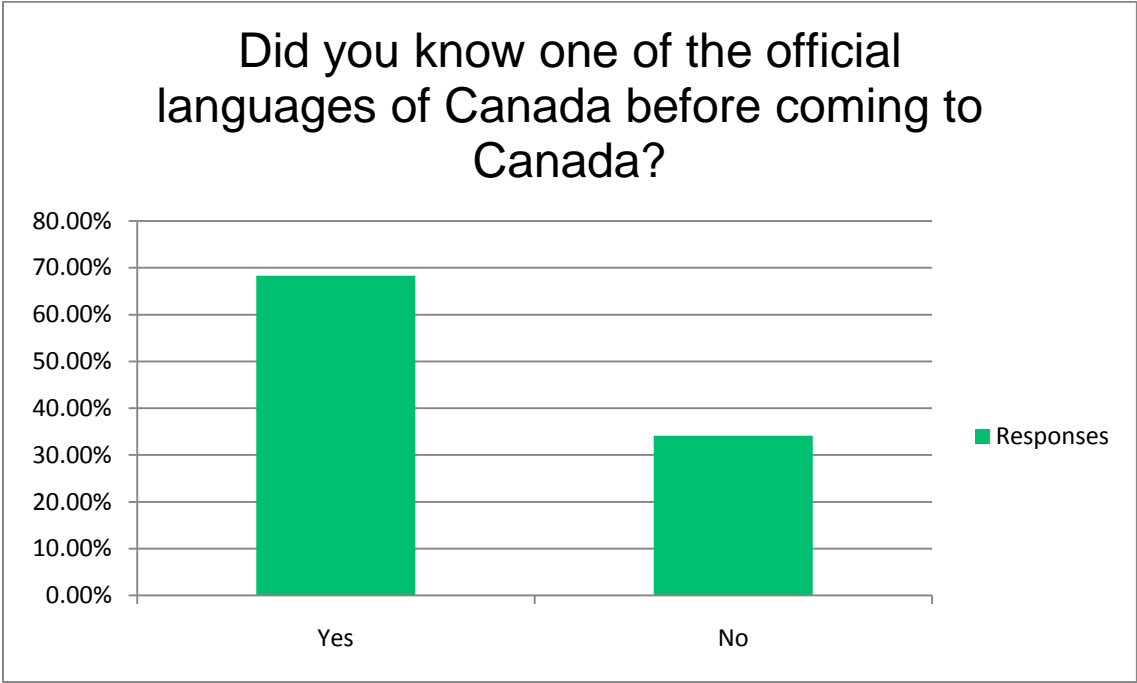
Forty participants (97.56%) indicated that they have children. Only 1 (2.44) reported having no child.



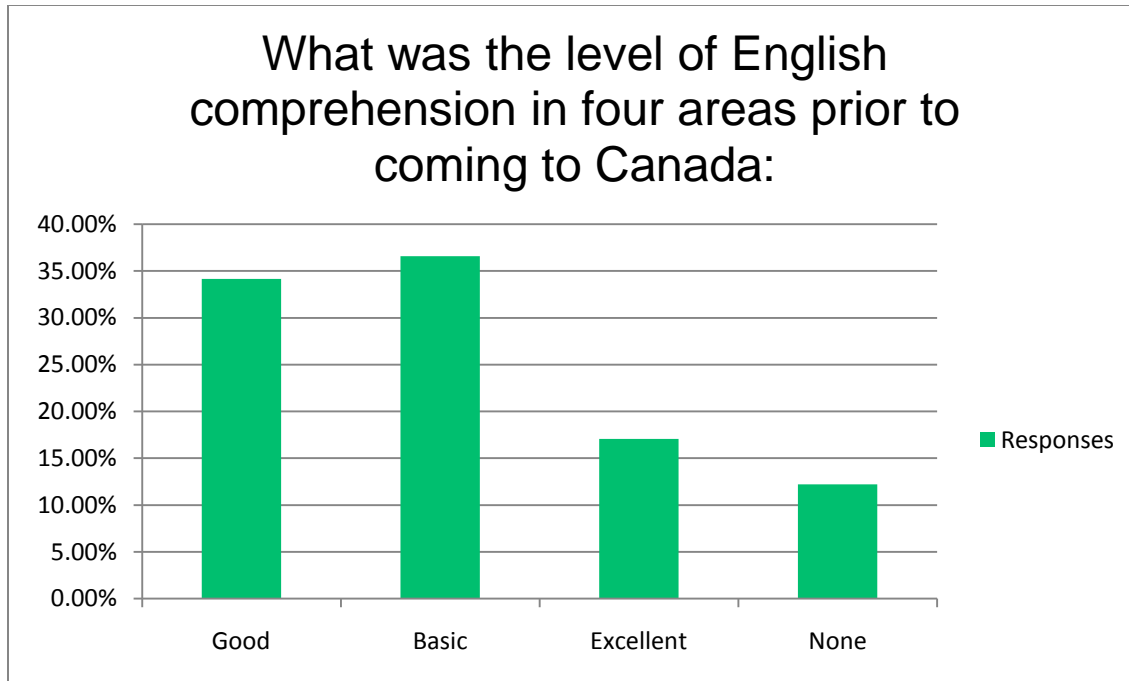
Thirty-four participants (82.93%) reported that they have a university education, 4 (9.76%) high school, and 3 (7.32%) college education.



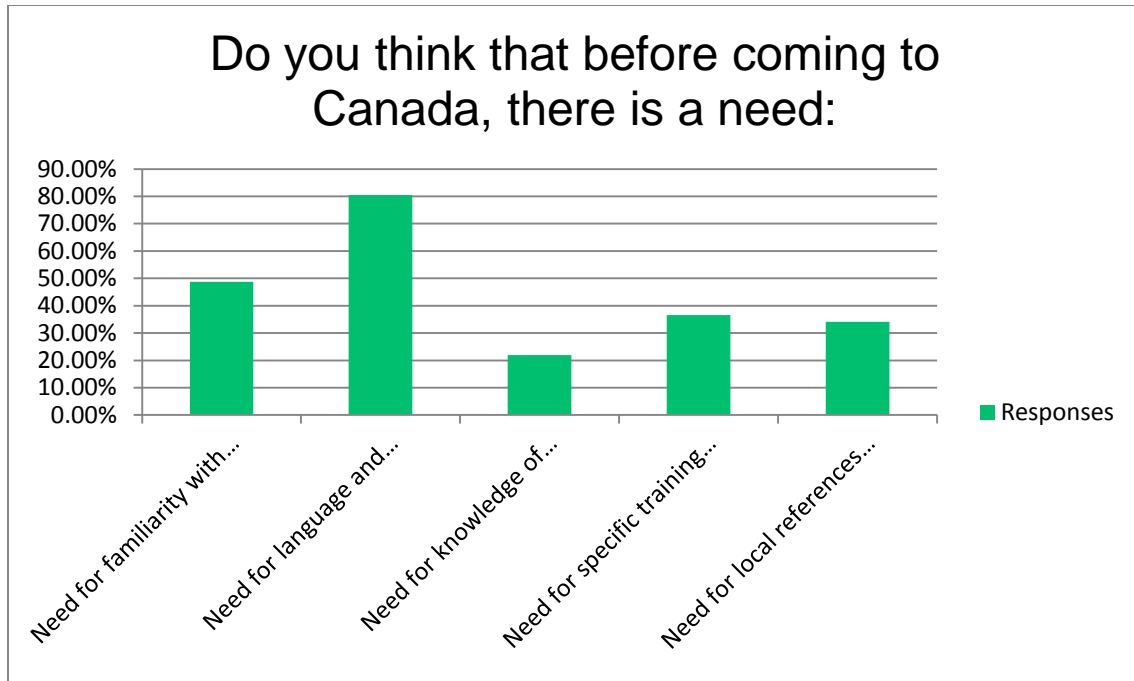
Twenty-eight participants (68.29%) reported that when they came to Canada, they knew one of the official languages of Canada. Only 14 (34.15%) reported that they did not know any official languages before coming to Canada.



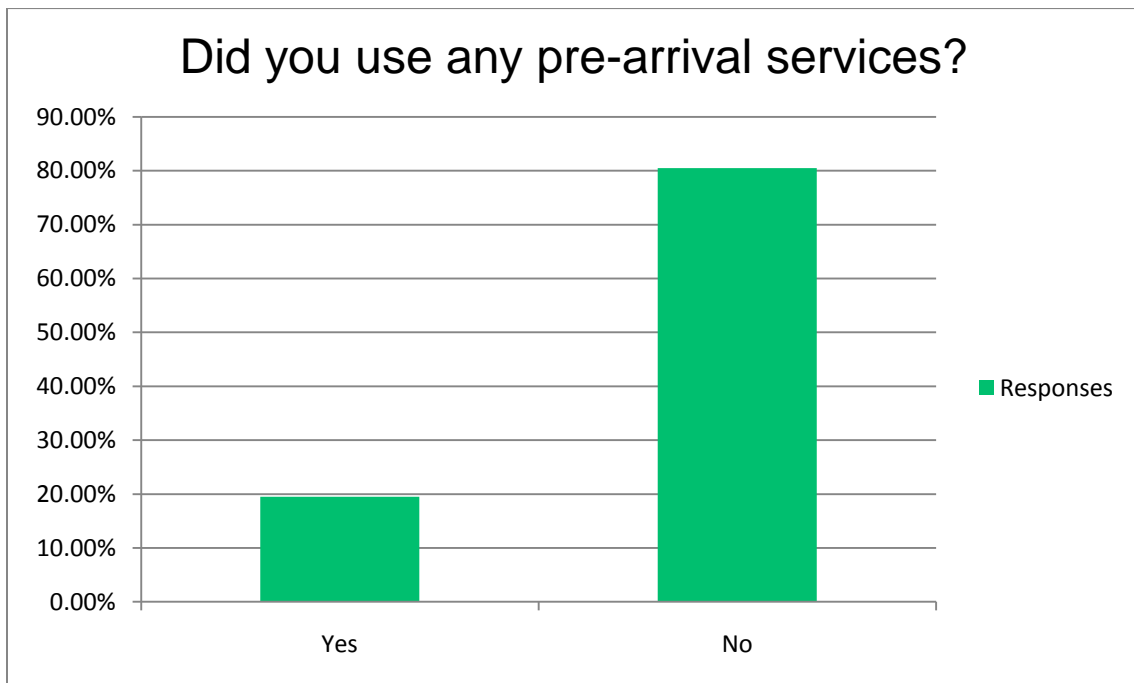
However, 15 (36.59%) reported that their level of English comprehension was basic; 14 (34.15%) reported that it was good, and 7 (17.07%) reported that it was excellent.



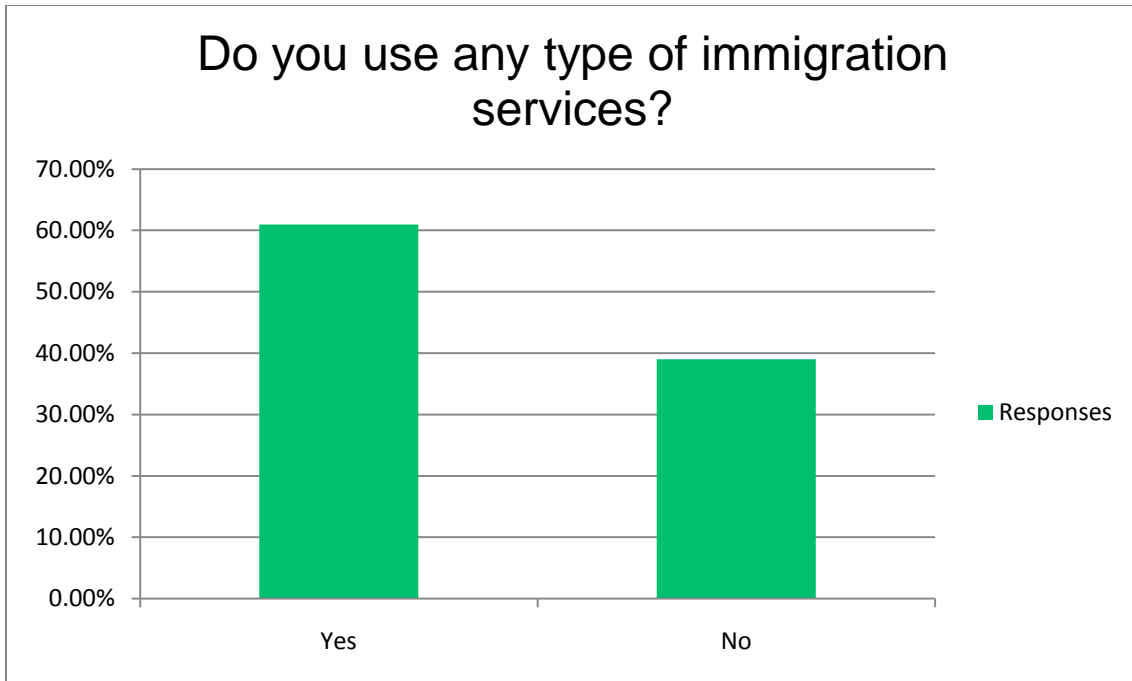
In respect to the question about the need for familiarity with “Canadian culture” (encompassing practices, policies, law, standards, etc.), 20 (48.78%) responded positively. Regarding the need for language and communication skills, 33 (80.49%) reported positively. Among the participants, 15 (36.59%) indicated the need for specific training or education; 14 (34.15%) indicated a need for local references and connections, and 9 (21.95%) stated the need for knowledge of Canadian business practices (including policies, laws, procedures, qualification requirements, etc.).



33 (98.49%) revealed that they did not use pre-arrival services. Only 8 (19.51%) reported that they used pre-arrival services.

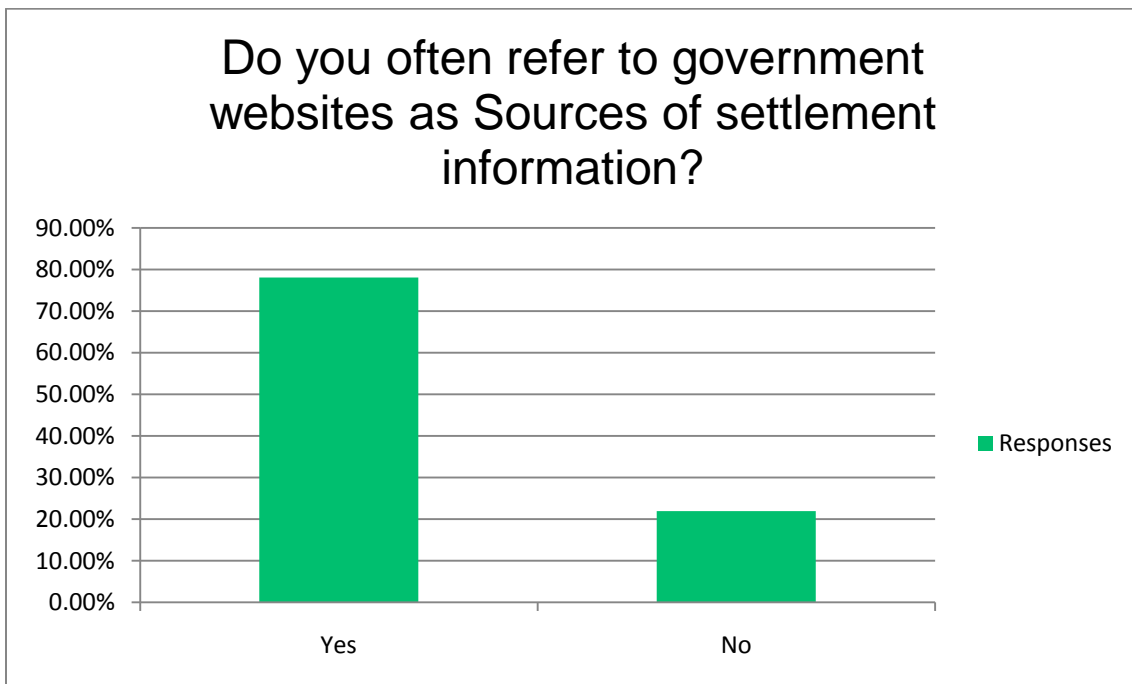


Among the participants, 25 (60.98%) used f immigration services did you receive.

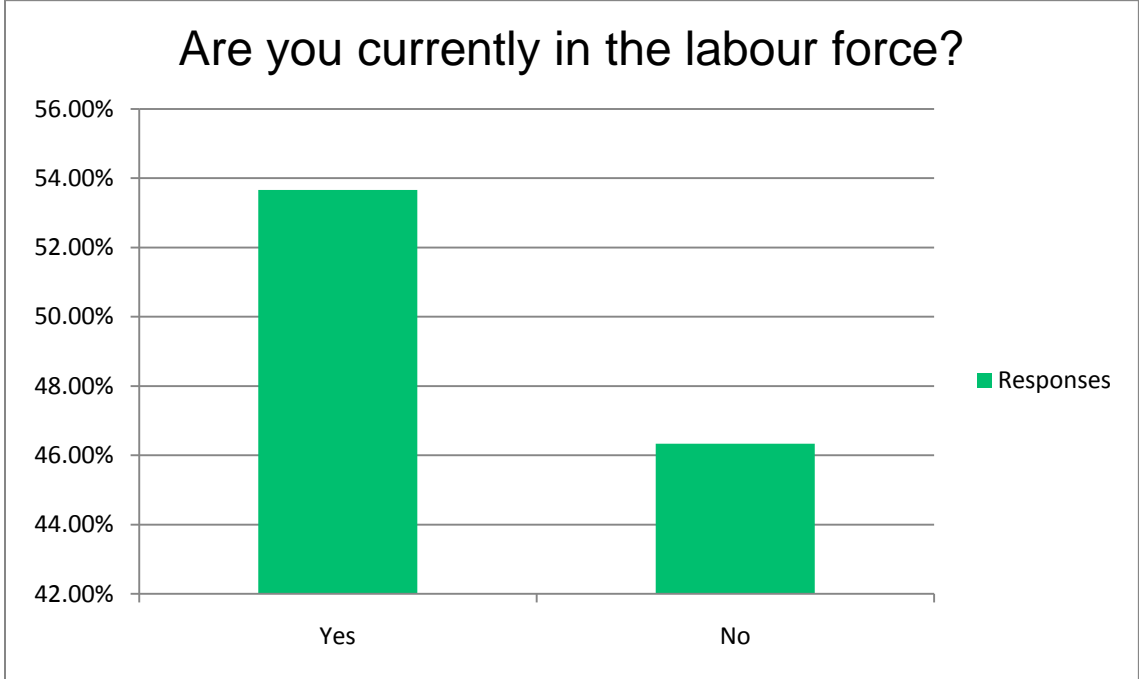


Thirty-nine participants responded to the question: “How likely is it that you would recommend this service to a friend or a colleague?”; only 11 (28.11%) reported that positively.

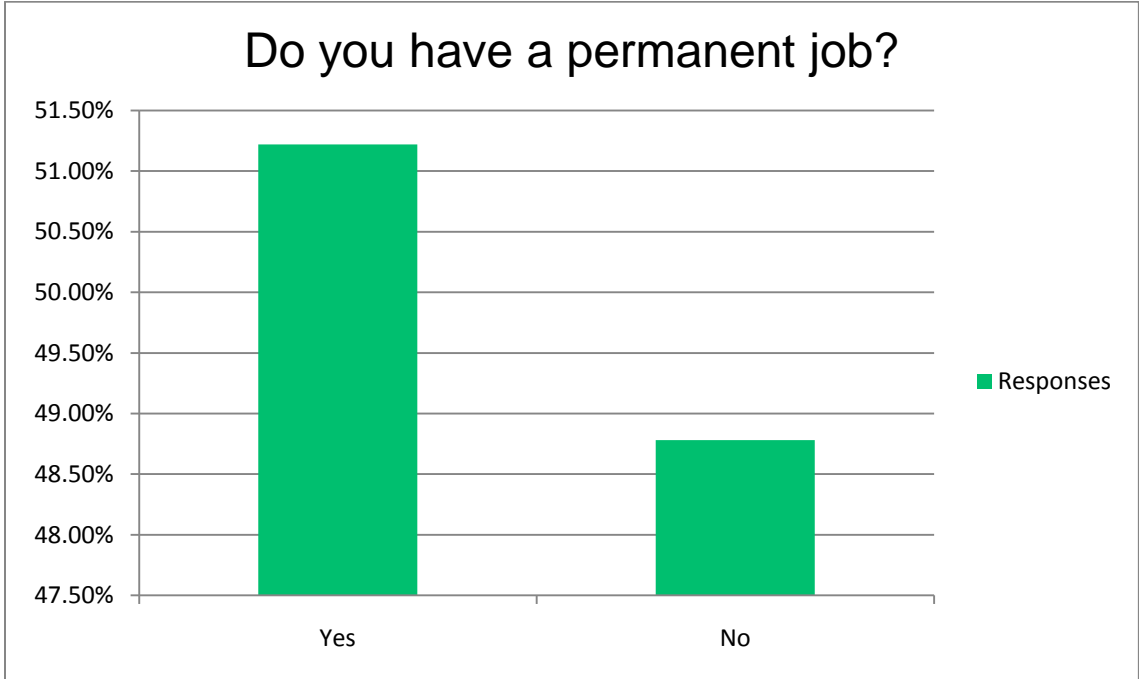
In respect to the question, “Do you often refer to government websites as Sources of settlement information?” 32 (78.05%) participants reported positively, and 9 (21.95%) said, “No.”



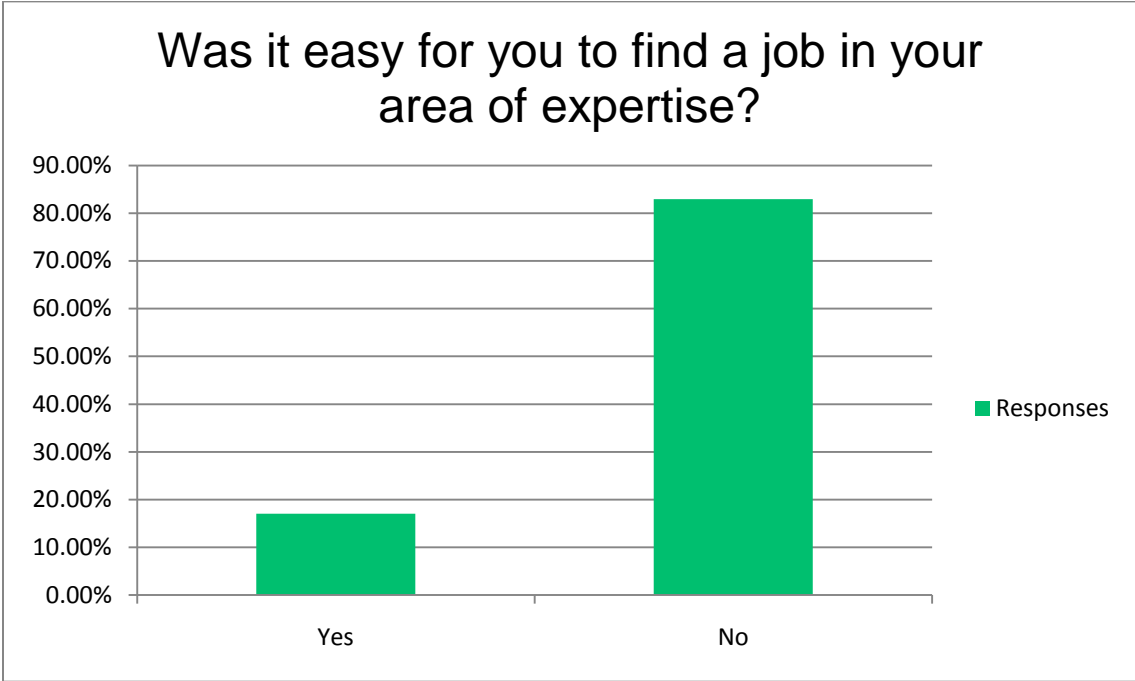
Among the participants, 22 (53.66%) responded that they are currently in the labour force, and 19 (46.34%) responded that they are not in the labour force.



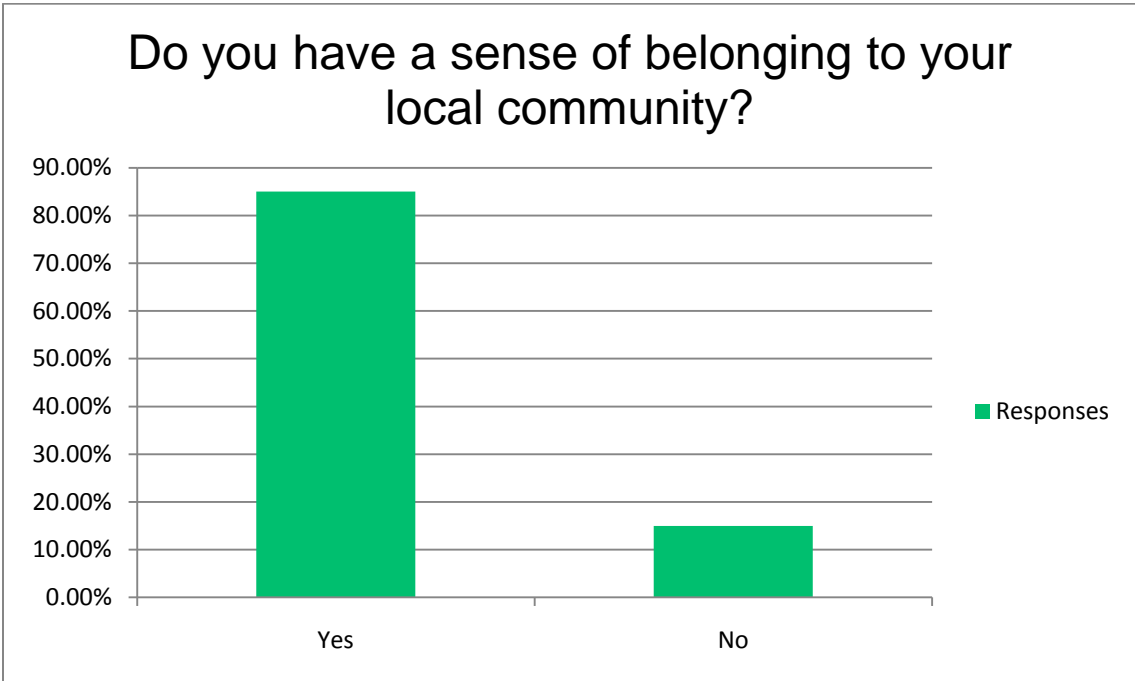
21 (51.22%) reported that their job is permanent, but only 20 (48.78%) reported that they do not have a permanent job.



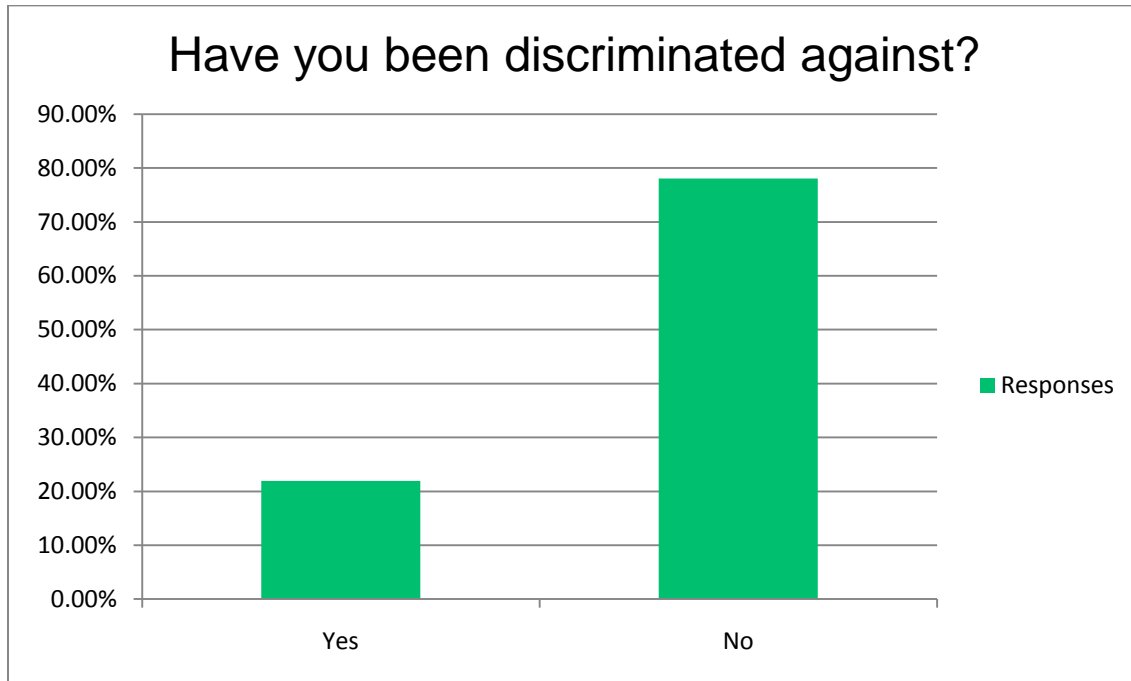
Among the participants, 34 (82.93%) responded that it was not easy to find a job in their area of expertise. Only 7 (17.07%) responded positively to this question.



The majority of the participants (34 – 85%) reported that they have a sense of belonging to your local community. Only 6 (15%) reported that they do not have a sense of belonging.



Thirty-two participants reported that they had not been discriminated against. However, only 9 participants (21.95%) reported “yes” to this question.



Some respondents also reported that “Covid destroyed our lifestyle. We lost our job. People are suffering from depression and scared;” “It will take min. 5 years for adaptation to the new country.”

The next session will discuss the findings of the survey.

Discussion

Resettling in a new country takes many years as they need to become familiar with the job market, learn the official language, build social connections, etc. Although immigrants and refugees are considered “human capital,” the host country might neglect to respond to the needs of the immigrants/refugees that might delay their resettlement. This survey explicitly demonstrates the needs of the women in the Azerbaijani community in their effort to resettle in Canada.

One of the strengths of the women in the Azerbaijani community is their education. The members of the AWSC are very educated before coming to Canada. They also have some level of competency in English. However, with their education, they did not easily find a job in their areas of expertise. Those who did find a job reported that they do not think that their job is permanent. The difficulties regarding finding a job are critical barriers in resettlement in Canada as it tells us about economic survival and the sense of belonging. Although we did not ask this question here, many research studies also indicate that the lack of affordable child care services is one reason for barriers before women enter the job market.

The majority of the participants feel connected to their ethnic community. In general, connection to the ethnic community helps them build social connections and professional networking, keep their ethnic identity, and share their challenges and find support. Such connection is also spiritual as it helps them to make new meaning in their new life in Canada.

Although not many reported facing discrimination in Canada, some indeed faced unpleasant experiences that they named “discrimination.” According to *The Settlement & Integration Needs of Immigrants: A Literature Review* by Jill Murphy, dated August 2010, “Discrimination, including discrimination based on race, is a major barrier to immigrant settlement and integration, and to fostering welcoming communities.” (p. 12)

In general, discrimination occurs when newcomers do not experience tolerance regarding their diverse backgrounds, including their cultures, the level of familiarity with speaking in English or French, employment, education and training and health and social support. Such experience is also related to immigrants’ struggle for accessing resources, programs, and opportunities. Discrimination and unjust situations also prevent immigrant and refugee women from feeling socially included. Murphy (2010) defines social inclusion as, for example, “making sure that all children and adults are able to participate as valued, respected and contributing members of society. It is, therefore, a normative (value based) concept . . . [it] reflects a proactive, human development approach to social well-being that . . . requires investments and action to bring about the conditions for inclusion . . . [I]t calls for validation and recognition of diversity as well as recognition of the commonality of lived experiences and the shared aspirations among people....” (p. 10).

The survey also reveals that the majority of immigrants refer to government websites for information and guidance. However, they might also find it confusing. Therefore, designing and structuring information on government websites requires special care as many immigrants and refugees might find them confusing.

The settlement and integration services also play an essential role in meeting the needs of immigrants and refugees. In the first five years in Canada, some need support in language training, affordable housing, affordable childcare, access to the job market and training specific to the job market. In this regard, the Azerbaijani women rely on various settlement and integration services. Some Azerbaijani organizations, such as AWSC, offer settlement and integration without being funded by the Canadian government. The advantage of such access to free counselling and integration services at AWSC is that the service users feel getting better and more transparent information regarding community resources for immigrants and refugees. However, lack of funding disables AWSC from providing follow-up services to women who have different needs and priorities according to their level of education and familiarity with English and/or French.

Conclusion

This survey highlighted many issues and challenges facing immigrant and refugee women in the Azerbaijani community. We have highlighted key factors that impact the level of resettlement

that needs prioritization. Despite challenges, the women in the Azerbaijani community are educated and are familiar with one of the official languages that help them to get access to the job market. Nevertheless, the survey also highlights the importance of a settlement and integration service offered at AWSC. This survey will help the board of the AWSC to focus more on offering this service in the next few years.