

ALBERTA SETTLEMENT SECTOR SURVEY 2023

Funded by



Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés
et Citoyenneté Canada

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Acknowledgement of Territories

This report was authored in “Calgary”, the place at the meeting of the Bow and Elbow Rivers, also known as Moh’kin’tsis in Siksikáí’powahsin/ Blackfoot, Wichispa Oyade in Stoney Nakoda, and Guts’its’i in Tsúút’ínà Gūnáhà. English was the original language of authorship of this report. We take this opportunity to reflect on the fact that the dominance of English, in Canada and worldwide, stems from racist colonial practices and prejudices that continue to operate today.

AAISA serves diverse people across of the Treaty 4, 6, 7, 8 and 10 regions and all twenty-two districts of the Métis Nation of Alberta. We hope to continue to grow our understanding and relationship with the traditional caretakers of these lands in our roles as signatories to broken treaties.

General Acknowledgement

AAISA is grateful to our funders, Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) for the opportunity to improve our services and contribute to the state of knowledge in the sector by conducting the annual Sector Survey, which IRCC has funded since 2019.

We would also like to extend our thanks to all agencies who participated in the survey. Our activities and perspectives only improve by the gracious contribution of your time and effort.

Questions about the survey and report can be directed to Research and Policy Lead Meghan Cunningham at mcunningham@aaisa.ca. General questions about AAISA can be directed to communications@aaisa.ca.



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Executive Summary

AAISA's 2023 Sector Priorities Survey collected responses from 45 leaders in the settlement and integration sector on their organizational structures and the challenges they see in the sector.

This year, certain questions were disaggregated by type of organization. For example, we learned that **language schools** are especially in need of resourcing. Language schools are much more likely than other types of organizations to rely on part-time labour, and language waitlists far exceed waitlists for other types of services.

Settlement organizations cited funding to various types of **employment services** as one of their top priorities. **Mental health** and **youth services** also top the list for both settlement organizations and generalized social-service organizations.

Agencies were interested in **professional development, collaboration** and **conferences and events**, as well as various types of **staff welfare improvements** and **updates to iCare**. They were also enthusiastic to learn more about **what initiatives are ongoing in government** to address issues they perceive in the sector.

These persistent priorities have been top-of-mind for Alberta agencies throughout the last year, and we can expect them to recur throughout the upcoming fiscal year.

Introduction

We live in a mobile world.

The World Bank estimates that in 2023, 184 million people live outside of their country of nationality.¹ Some of these people come to Canada, and come under many different circumstances. Many come with high qualifications, seeking economic opportunity or new horizons. Others have been forced to leave their homes because of unrest, war, discrimination, economic conditions, or climate change.

People who move countries for whatever reason share some challenges: new cultural context, the complexity of the immigration system, foreign certifications, and the stress of status precarity and/or status change. Often, they must also learn a new language and they face discrimination such as racism and xenophobia.

The settlement and integration sector serves the interests of newcomers and works toward the full and equal inclusion of newcomers in Canadian society. The Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (AAISA), a member association for settlement and integration agencies in Alberta, runs its yearly Sector Priorities Survey to capture currents of thought among sector leaders and form a strategic picture of their efforts. [The 2022 survey report can be found on the AAISA website in English and French.](#)

In the 2024-2025 fiscal year, many organizations in the sector will begin negotiations for the next five years of their funding contribution agreements with Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), the federal ministry which remains the primary funder for almost all settlement organizations. At the beginning of the fiscal year, IRCC and settlement sector agencies, working together, have significant opportunities to apply lessons of the past five years to continuously improve services.

¹ World Bank, 2023. Migrants, Refugees, Societies. Accessed at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2023>

At the beginning of the fiscal year, IRCC and settlement sector agencies, working together, have significant opportunities to apply lessons of the past five years to continuously improve services.

Meanwhile, AAISA applies what we learn from the Sector Survey to our own activities: practical research to inform and coordinate agencies, engagement to draw and maintain connections throughout the sector, and professional development to increase the capacity of sector practitioners.

Alberta's settlement providers have graciously shared their thoughts with our analysts through the Sector Priorities Survey in order to help accomplish these goals. The coming years will see even more engagement with stakeholders that will increase the survey's reach and impact. We are excited to bring this year's findings to all of our associates in the sector and to support agencies to find the tools they need in the data from 2023.



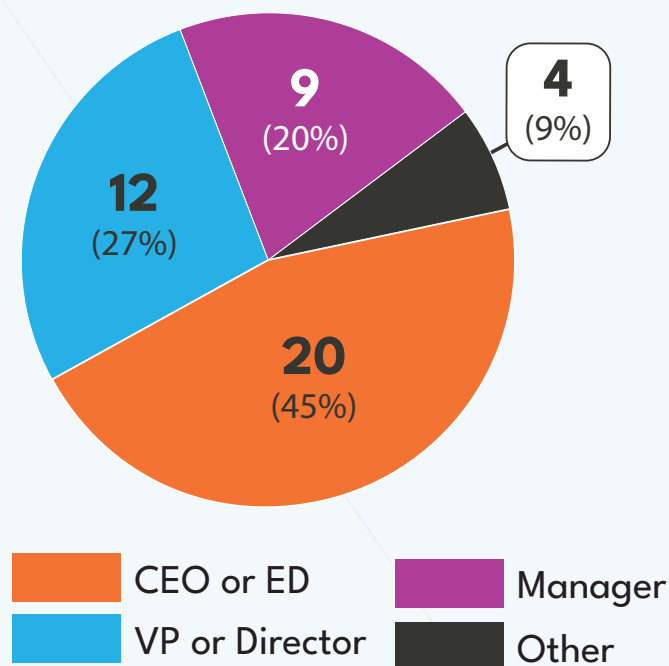
Methodology

Audience and Design of the Survey

As in previous years, only one survey response per agency was requested. Survey instructions suggested that an executive director, VP, or other member of leadership was likely best positioned to respond to questions.

Figure 1 shows which roles survey respondents held within their organization. More than 70% of respondents were in higher management, such as CEOs and VPs. 9% of respondents were not managers. All of these respondents identified themselves as coordinators using the open response. These results are similar to those in past years: 40% of respondents in 2022 were CEOs.

Figure 1
Roles of survey respondents ($n = 44$)



Because the survey requests responses from higher management, the survey outcomes reflect only their priorities and perceptions. The points of view of administrative staff, direct service staff, LINC/CLIC teachers, and other non-management staff are also important and likely differ from management. In the future, AAISA is interested in administering this type of priorities survey to staff.

This year, LIPs were initially included in the survey mailout. However, the design of the survey was not conducive to answers from LIPs. An inquiry specifically designed for responses from LIPs and the Réseau d'Immigration Francophone d'Alberta (RIFA) would gather more information about their perspectives in the sector.

The design of the 2023 survey was influenced by several new factors. When the survey was designed in spring 2023, agencies were in the process of discussing their considerations for IRCC'S 2024 Call for Proposals (CFP). The CFP is a five-year recurring funding application for contribution agreements that will extend between 2025 – 2030. The design of the “priorities” section below reflects that contemporary focus. We used an exploratory sequential mixed methods approach to shape this section with data from discussion groups held in February 2022. Further explanation of the design process is outlined in the Priorities section below.

As agencies and IRCC enter into discussions around new contribution agreements, we expect that conversations about the sector's priorities and needs will continue to evolve.

Outreach Process and Response Rates

2023's Sector Priorities Survey was delivered from September 2023 to January 2024, both in English and French. In English, 42 valid non-duplicate responses were received, and 3 responses were received in French.

In the initial mailout, 77 agencies were contacted. Mailouts included agencies funded by IRCC, as well as member agencies of AAISA, with a considerable overlap between the two categories. The partial responses of two LIPs, as discussed above, had to be excluded from the data.

Engagement with the survey in 2023 was somewhat

higher than engagement in 2022, with 45 responses received compared to 39 in 2022. However, the rate of response was lower. Around 60 organizations were contacted in 2022, meaning that 65% of contacted organizations responded. The 2023 response rate was 58%. This may mean that in the larger mailout list, there were new organizations contacted that did not respond.

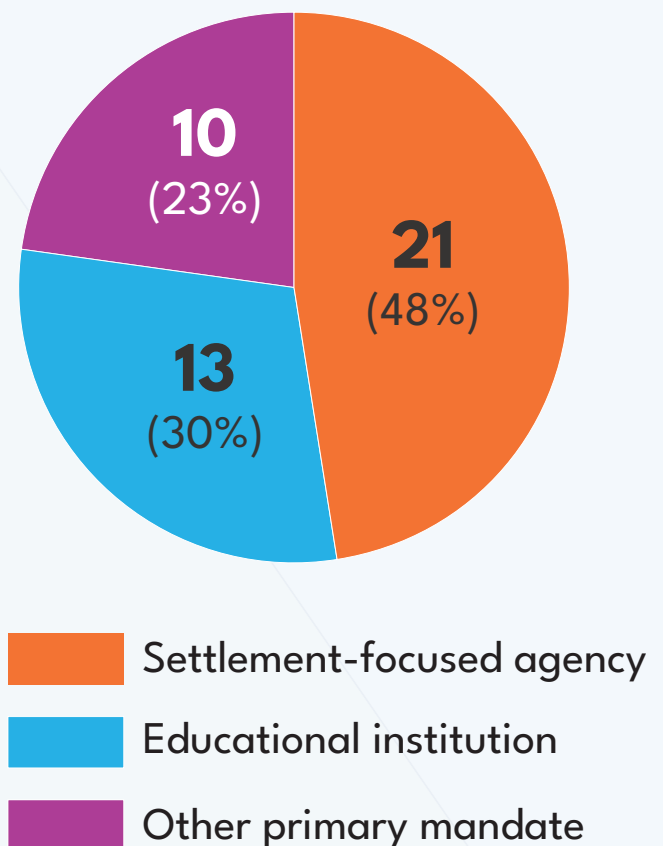
Demographics

Agency Information

Respondents were asked to provide information about their organization to contextualize their responses and to allow AAISA to track trends in the sector. The demographics in this section do not provide a representative sample of all agencies in the province. Agencies that respond to the survey might have different qualities than agencies that don't. For example, organizations that are more closely networked with AAISA, such as member agencies, may have been more likely to respond.

About half of respondents attested that their organizations had settlement as a main mandate. The other half were split between educational institutions, such as LINC/CLIC programs, and more generalized organizations which work with newcomers as part of another primary mandate.

Figure 2
Respondents' agency mandates ($n = 44$)



Staffing structures

On the following page, graphs are presented that show how many staff and volunteers responding agencies employ. Respondents submitted how many full-time staff, part-time staff, unpaid staff (volunteers) and internships were active at their organization.

Smallest and Largest Agencies

For analysis, we narrowed focus onto agencies with the most and least full-time staff. A total of 13 agencies employed 1 – 10 full time staff. This represented the plurality of responses (30%). Of these 13 respondents:

- **Four** (31%) stated their agencies had primary mandates in settlement
- **Two** (15%) stated their agencies had adjacent or general mandates
- **Seven** (54%) stated their agencies were language institutions

In the general sample, language institutions represented only 30% of respondents. This suggests that language institutions had fewer full-time staff on the whole. No educational institution had more than 100 full-time staff. This confirms that language institutions tend to be smaller organizations than other agency types, or at least that the language program tends to constitute a small portion of a larger organization, as in the case of larger colleges like Medicine Hat College, Bow Valley College and NorQuest.

On the other end of the scale, seven agencies (16%) that responded to the survey stated that they had 151+ full-time staff. Only one of these agencies stated that they also had 151+ part-time staff. This was a branch of a large international organization.

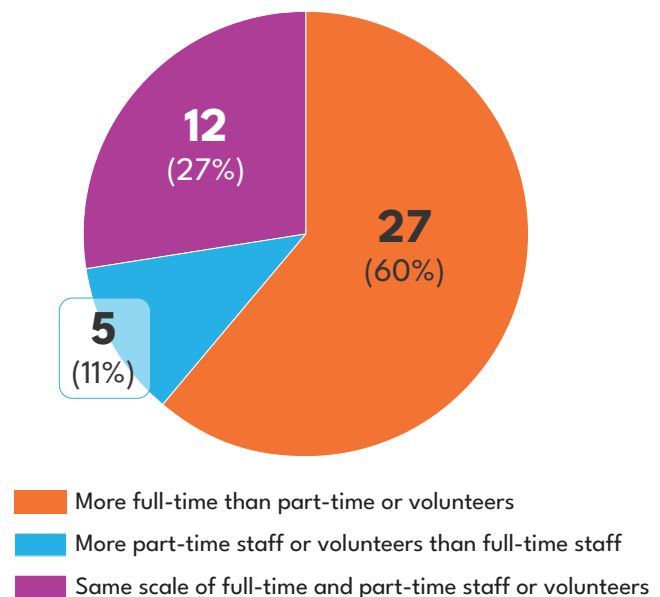
Proportion of Full-Time Staffing

Some organizations might hire few full-time staff, but many part-time staff or volunteers. If this pattern were relatively prevalent, it would suggest precarious employment in the sector, since, with some exceptions, part-time jobs are generally not as stable or long-term.

Overall, this pattern is the minority. However, we observe an area of potential concern among language institutions. **Figure 3** below shows the distribution of organizations across three categories: organizations with more part-time staff than full-time staff, with more full-time staff than part-time staff, and with similar scales of part-time and full-time staff.

Figure 3

Proportion of full-time staffing ($n = 45$)



Of the five organizations which have more part-time than full-time staff, four are educational institutions. Several educational institutions have voiced to AAISA their perception that their hiring is challenged by a **lack of financial capacity** to ensure well-paying full-time jobs. Inefficiency and instability in staffing can result. Consultations with language institutions suggest that a key cause of this issue may be the fact that funding for hiring is handled class-by-class.

Figure 4 shows that of responding educational institutions, about a third show the pattern in which part-time staff and volunteers are more numerous than full-time staff (31%).

Figure 4
Proportion of full-time staffing by institution type (*n* = 45)

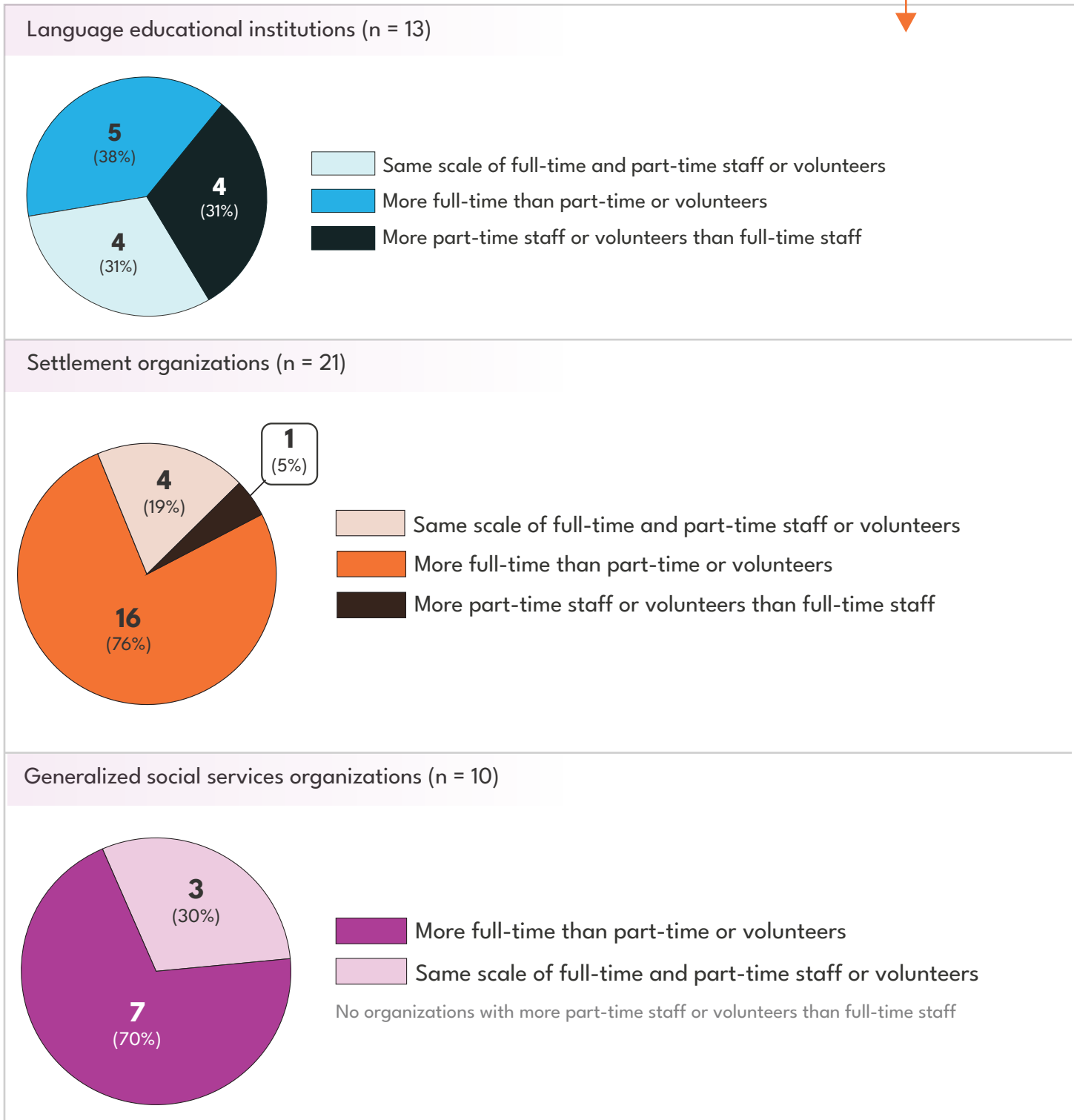
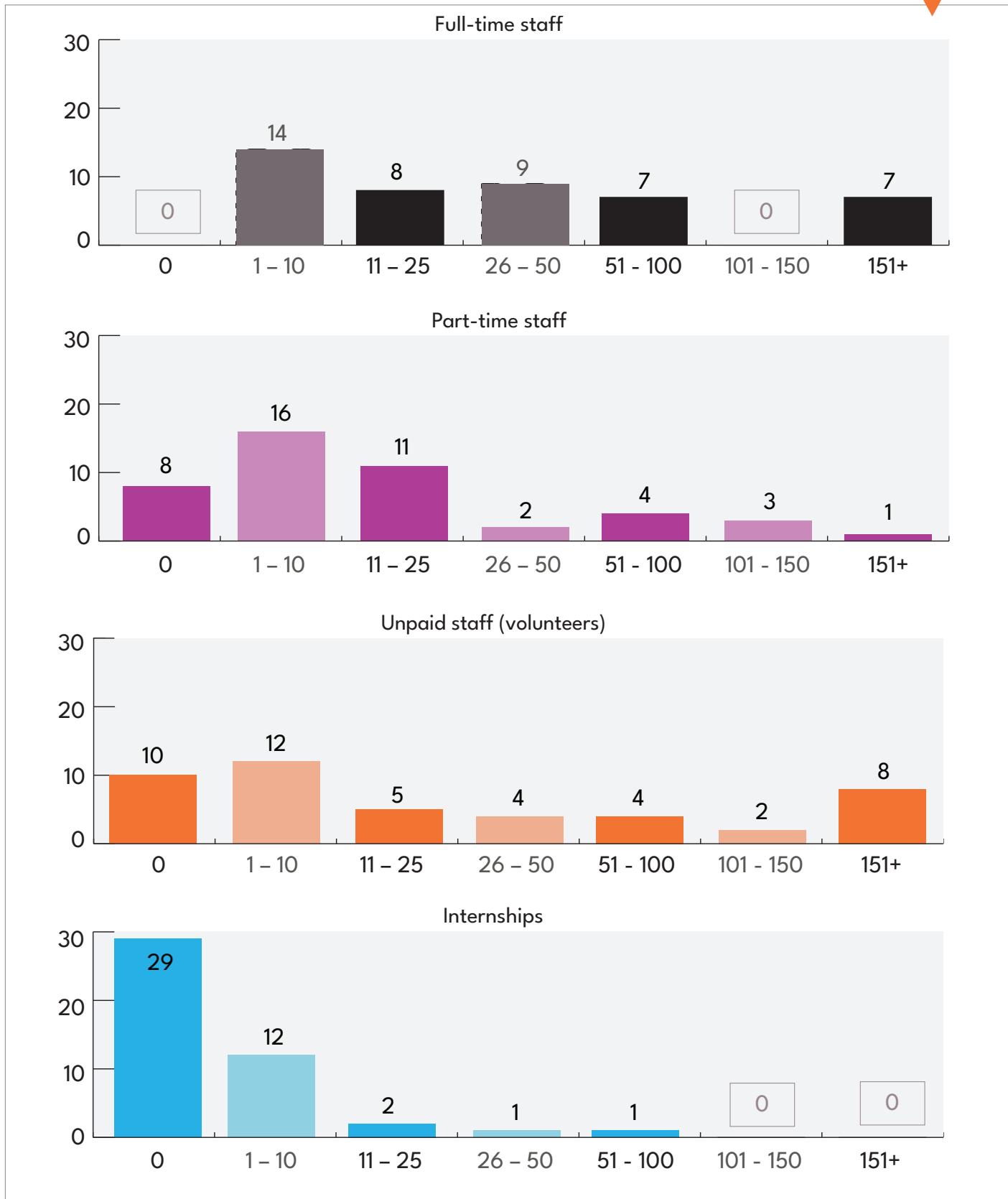


Figure 5 shows complete responses from all organizations.

Figure 5

Agency staff numbers (*n* = 45)



Service structures

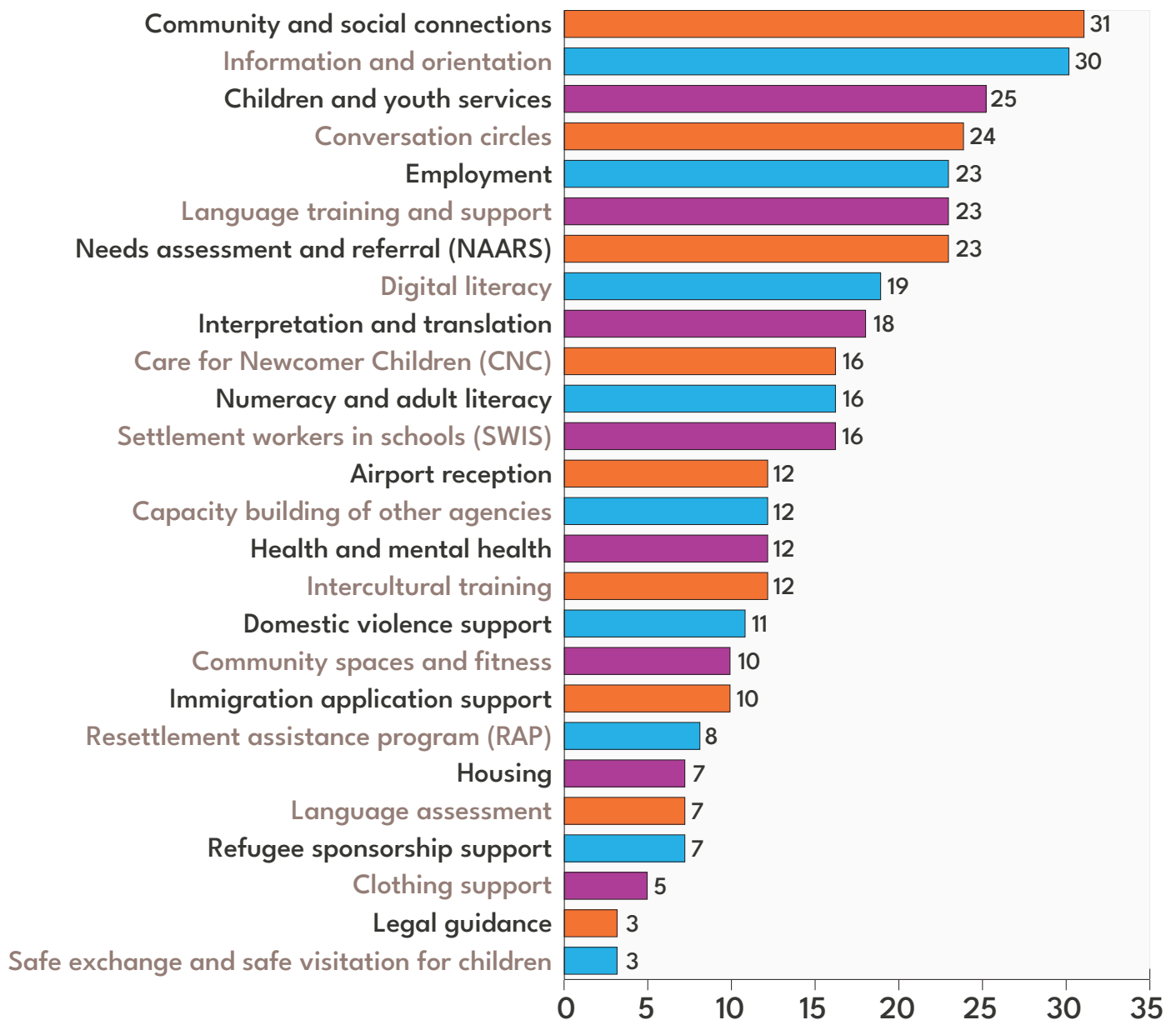
The Sector Priorities Survey attempted to sketch out the services available across Alberta. This inquiry allows AAISA to better shape supports and bridge agencies providing different services.

This section of the survey included particularly long and complex questions. Part of AAISA's evaluation process for the survey moving forward will review what requests would best balance this demand on respondents with the need for data, and where else this data could be found. For example, hypothetically, service information ought to be uploaded by agencies to sites like HelpSeeker and 211. Encouraging agencies to regularize the frequency with which they update these external databases would permit AAISA to analyze and communicate this data without further burden.

First, the survey requested that respondents select, from a given list, which services their agency offers. This list of options was derived from previous annual editions of the survey. Analysis is provided under [Figure 6](#).

Figure 6

Services provided by respondent agencies ($n = 45$)



Most Commonly Provided Services

The most commonly provided services were **community and social connections** (31 respondents) as well as **information and orientation** (30 respondents).

The next most common services: children and youth services, conversation circles, employment, language training and support, and Needs and Assets Assessment and Referral (NAARS).

Least Commonly Provided Services

The least commonly provided services were safe exchange and safe visitation, legal guidance, and clothing support.

Considering these cases shows how the information derived from the survey as-is sometimes leaves observers with further questions. Are these services rare because of low demand? Are they rare because few organizations employ required specialists? Are organizations outside the sector meeting the need already? Or does the rarity of these services represent an un-addressed gap? Not all of these services are eligible for

funding from major funders; financial factors possibly play a role in service rarity.

All the agencies offering safe exchange and safe visitation for children are agencies with 151+ full-time staff. The picture is relatively similar for legal guidance, and more varied for clothing support. Large agencies with multiple funding sources may be the only ones positioned to provide these particular services.

Each low-provision service likely presents different answers to these questions. Follow-up with organizations about their needs with regards to rare services would potentially fill in the picture.

Other Responses

Twelve agencies also filled in the “other” open response to provide information about services that they provided which were not offered as official responses. These responses are shown in the highlight below.

Other services offered

- LGBTQ+ services
- Services for newcomers with disabilities
- Support for women
- CALP-funded language classes
- Financial assistance (career loans)
- Senior services
- HIPPY and cross-parenting programs
- Volunteering
- Settlement services for Temporary Foreign Workers
- Entrepreneurship support for women
- Youth programming
- Community development and capacity building
- Skills-specific training
- Cultural, artistic and community activities

Itinerant services

The survey next asked about itinerant, online and other distance services. As reviewed in **Figure 7**, almost 70% of agencies said that they provide services in some format outside their main headquarters-based services.

The most commonly provided itinerant services were **community and social connections** and **information and orientation**, while the most commonly provided online services were **information and orientation** and **language training and support**.

Rural Communities and Geographical Service Gaps

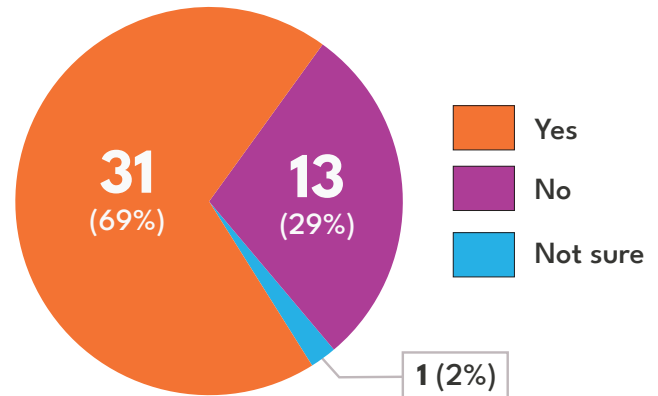
AAISA has an ongoing interest in the provincial picture of service provision in small and rural locations. There are likely between **65 and 75 small towns** in Alberta with a population made up of 10% or more newcomers¹. In many of these towns, hundreds of newcomers are living with no settlement-informed services. What's more, the Statistics Canada data from which these numbers are derived was also collected prior to the Ukrainian crisis, during which tens of thousands of Ukrainian evacuees have come to Alberta, with a significant minority relocating to rural areas.

AAISA is as interested in centres where **no member agency provides services** as those where they do. Determining where there may be unmet need is a major purpose of service mapping.

Itinerant and online service delivery is not the only way to increase service coverage: for example, generalized social service agencies in small towns can be empowered to better serve newcomers through connections with the settlement sector. However, for newcomers in very small towns, a flexible and robust itinerant and online service network may make a significant difference.

Figure 7

Provision of itinerant, online and other distance services
(n = 45)



Comparing Itinerant and Non-itinerant Service Offerings

In **Figure 8** and **Figure 9** on the following page, we highlight service rates and numbers for the most and least commonly provided itinerant services and compare them to their non-itinerant counterparts. Once again, without a clear benchmark to determine the “ideal” service rate, little comment can be made on whether these service rates need to be increased, or whether they reflect demand. However, if a service is very common in the city, but very uncommon on an itinerant basis, it might cause us to wonder whether an unmet need exists for that service in rural areas.

Three services showed no itinerant offerings at all: Care for Newcomer Children childminding, language assessment, and clothing support. There may be specific reasons why these services cannot be offered on an itinerant basis. For example, language assessment is purposefully funded as a centralized effort. Without further information, these services were exempted from the analysis.

¹ AAISA Immigration to Small Towns Dataset, available on request, from Statistics Canada data. Our definition of “small town” is a town with a population of 10,000 or less.



 Agencies providing this service on an itinerant basis
 Agencies providing this service overall

Figure 8

Most commonly provided itinerant services

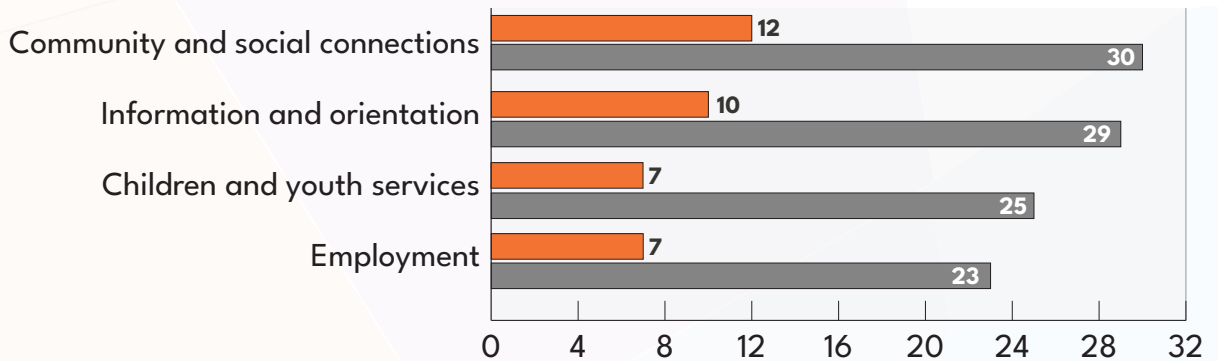
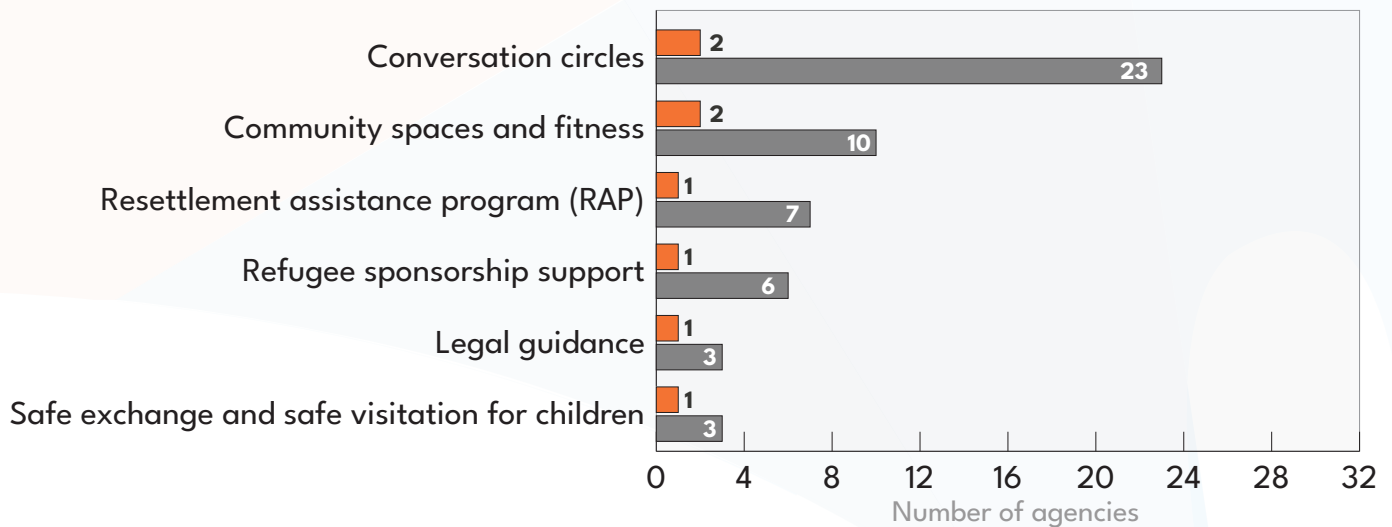


Figure 9

Least commonly provided itinerant services



The most commonly provided itinerant services mirror the most commonly provided services overall. On average, for any given service, there are about **30%** as many program offerings on an itinerant basis as there are offerings overall.

One noticeable exemption is conversation circles. **Conversation circles** are among the most commonly provided services overall, but few itinerant options are available—only about **9%** as many program offerings. Conversation circles are sometimes held by CALPs and public libraries in small towns. However, partnerships with settlement agencies might still be a benefit to these providers. This is an example of how sector survey data can suggest fruitful areas for stakeholders to investigate expansions in service.



Access more information about rural settlement by reading AAISA’s 2023 research report, “[Support Networks for Rural Newcomers to Alberta.](#)”

Waitlists

This report has already discussed that one of the major questions provoked by reporting about services is how demand for services can be measured. Asking about waitlists is an efficient way to learn about this demand. Although many factors influence the length of waitlists, if a service has a long waitlist, we can at least reasonably assume there is more demand for that service than currently available.

For almost all services, at least some agencies reported a waitlist. This suggests that more newcomer services are needed in Alberta across the board. However, for some services, especially language services, the disparity between need and resources was especially notable.

First, in **Figure 10**, we show the services for which the greatest percentage of agencies providing that service reported a waitlist. For example, although only a few agencies offer language assessment, due to the centralized nature of this service, a concerning majority of those few agencies reported a waitlist. On the next page, in **Figure 11**, we show the five services for which the most agencies reported a waitlist overall.

Figure 10

Percentage of agencies providing a given service with a waitlist

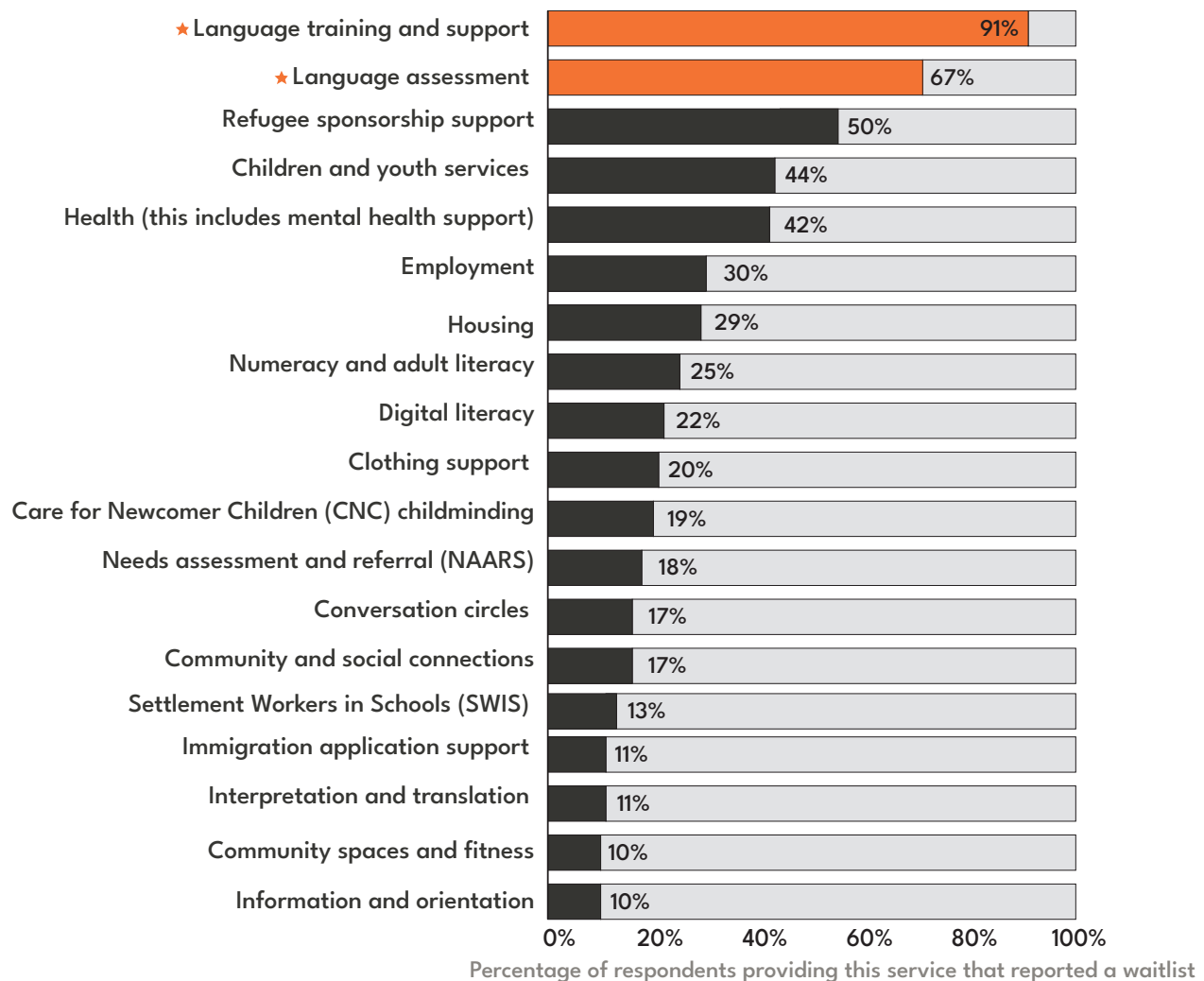
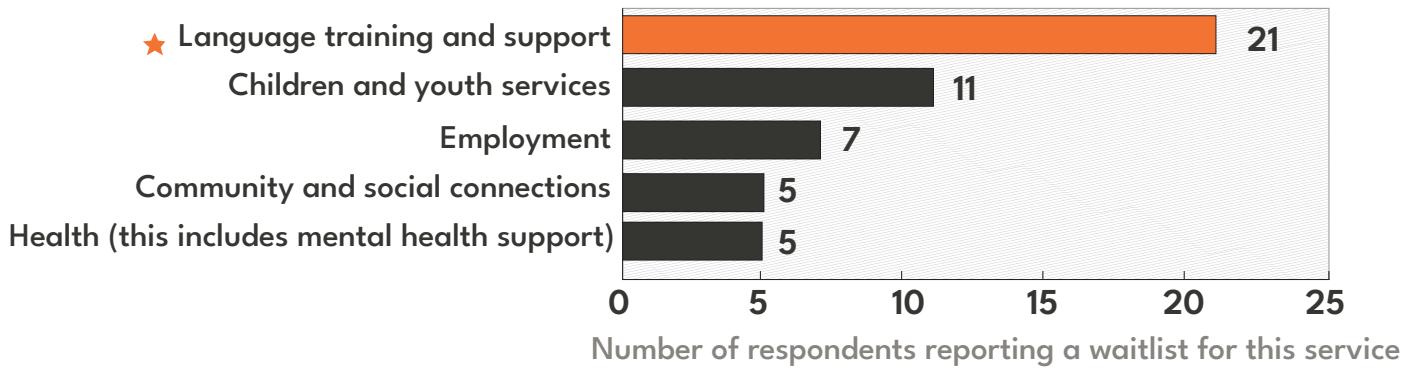


Figure 11

Services most commonly reported with a waitlist



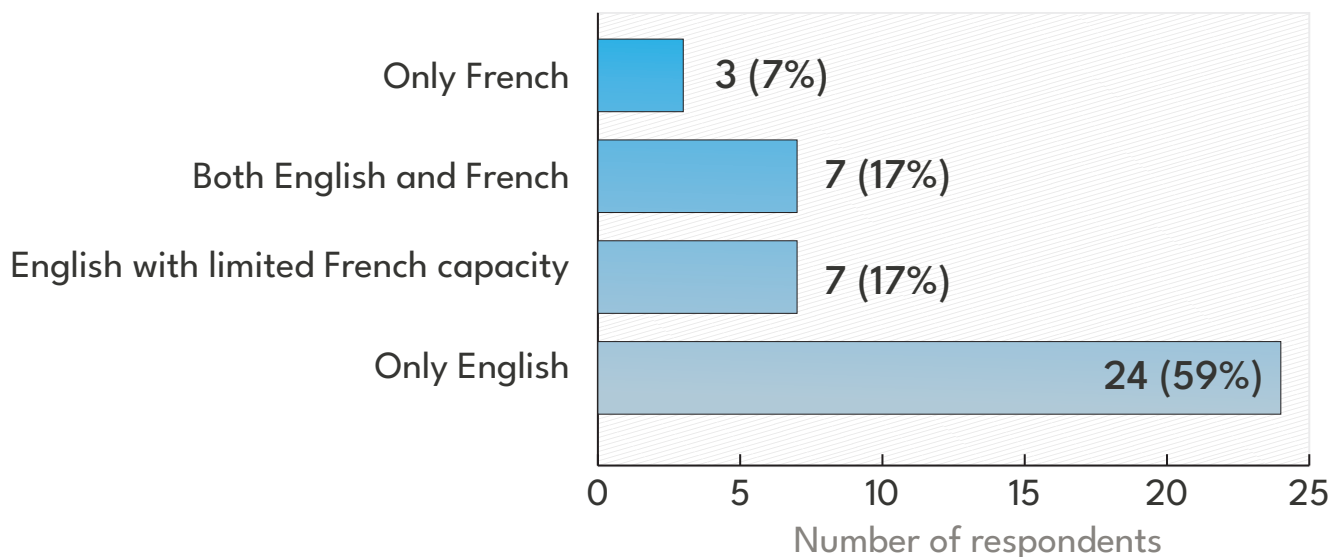
These results point to a significant under-resourcing of language services given a high level of demand, even compared to other services for newcomers, with refugee sponsorship support, employment services, children and youth services, and health also in need of greater capacity.

Official language and other languages

Just under 60% of the respondent agencies stated that English was the only official language in which they provided services. A further 17% stated that they had limited French capacity. Finally, just under a quarter of respondent agencies stated that they offered services in both English and French or in French only.

Figure 12

Official language of service (n = 41)

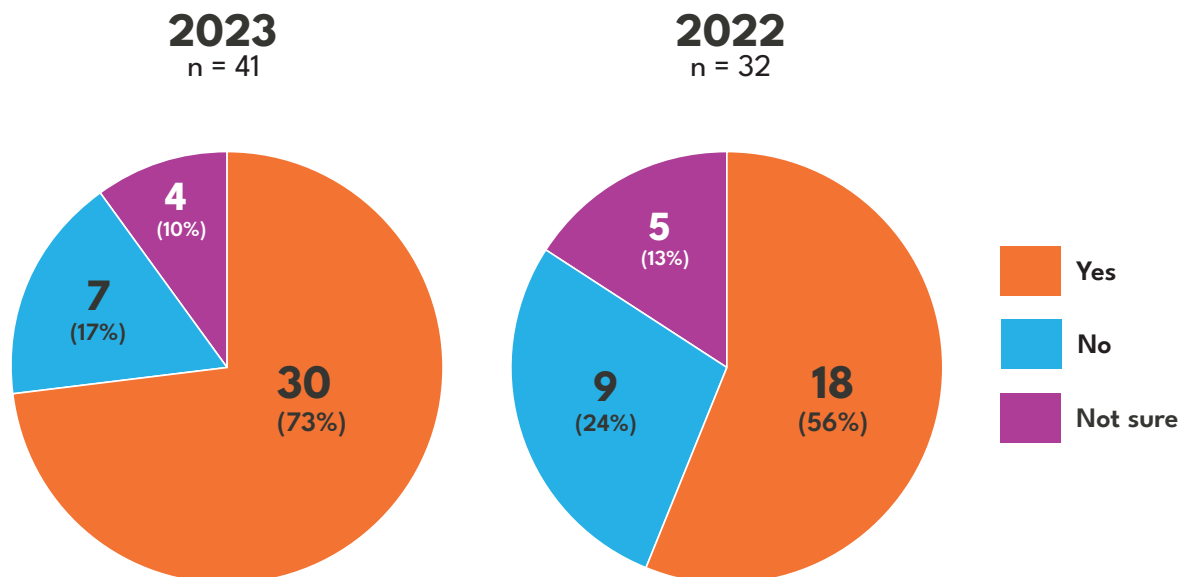


Francophone Integration Pathway participation

In order to provide clients with access to services in their official language of preference, IRCC instituted the Francophone Integration Pathway. This initiative requires protocols referring French-speaking clients toward Francophone agencies. The Sector Priorities survey suggests that, in the last year, participation in this initiative has improved considerably. In 2022, only 56% of respondents stated that their agency operated a functioning cross-language referral pathway, whereas in 2023, such a pathway was maintained by a full 73% of respondents. In **Figure 13** below, the 2022 numbers are reproduced side by side with the 2023 numbers.

Figure 13

Francophone Integration Pathway participation



Non-official Languages of Service

This year, AAISA also asked respondents to discuss other languages of service.

The provision of services in non-official languages differs from agency to agency, in part because the availability of non-official language programming typically depends informally on which languages are spoken by staff at individual organizations.

Some respondents interpreted this question as referring to this type of informal one-on-one settlement programming. Others refrained from attesting to non-official language programming if the basis on which it was offered was informal. They preferred responses such as “Various languages spoken by staff” or “Limited language capacity” e.g., a single staff member.

The question of how to protect staff’s work-life balance and the scope of their work, for example, while still providing services to clients in their mother tongues when possible, is a potentially complex one for which clear guidelines are not in place at all organizations.

An interesting corollary of this fact is that Francophone and Anglophone organizations have **substantially different non-official language provision patterns**, since their staff tend to come from different places in the world. Francophone organizations had much better coverage for sub-Saharan African languages overall, including Kirundi, Lingala, Swahili, and Kinyarwanda, among others. This demonstrates another reason that lines of referral between Francophone and Anglophone organizations are so crucial. Clients who speak these languages may benefit from services in their mother tongue at a Francophone agency even if they also pursue other services in English.

The most common non-official language for programming overall was Arabic, followed by Spanish. Almost 27 other individual languages were named by one or two agencies as languages in which they could provide services, listed below. Because agencies interpreted this question in such different ways, this list should not be considered exhaustive. However, it provides a good sense for the depth and breadth of capabilities at service agencies.

Two agencies

- Somali
- Urdu
- Hindi
- Mandarin
- Chinese (dialect not specified)
- Japanese
- Ukrainian
- Kirundi
- Lingala
- Swahili
- Kinyarwanda

One agency

- Tigrinya
- ASL
- Bangla
- Cantonese
- Oromo
- Russian
- Hungarian
- Punjabi
- German
- Gujarati
- Tagalog
- Polish
- Slovene
- Azerbaijani
- Wolof
- Dioula
- Kikongo

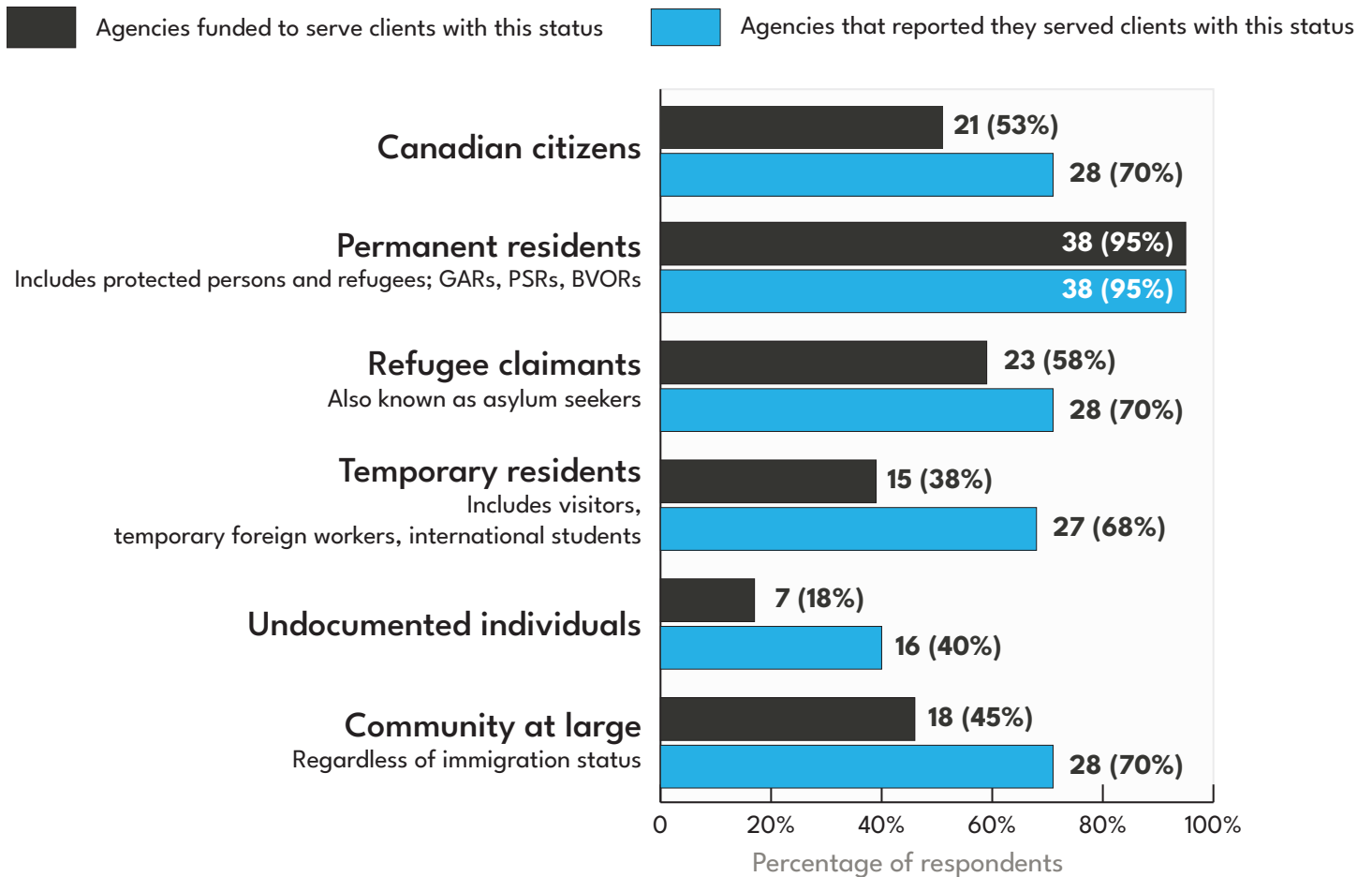
Funding structure and funding restrictions

The Sector Priorities Survey asked agencies to describe their sources of funding. We also asked agencies to describe the immigration statuses of people they serve. In April 2024, Statistics Canada estimates that **non-permanent residents in Canada outnumber recent immigrants 2 to 1**.¹ However, with some exceptions for particular programs such as the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET visa), non-permanent residents are generally not eligible for IRCC-funded settlement services. This means that agencies which are exclusively federally funded receive no funding for those services if they choose to serve non-permanent residents rather than turning them away.

Figure 14 shows that, while nearly all agencies that responded to the survey serve permanent residents, about 70% also serve clients who are not incorporated into IRCC funding calculations, such as Canadian citizens, refugee claimants, temporary residents, undocumented people, and the community at large.

Figure 14

Services provided to clients of various statuses ($n = 40$)



¹ Statistics Canada (2024). Immigrants and non-permanent residents statistics. Accessed at https://www.statcan.gc.ca/en/subjects-start/immigration_and_ethnocultural_diversity/immigrants_and_nonpermanent_residents (April 4, 2024)

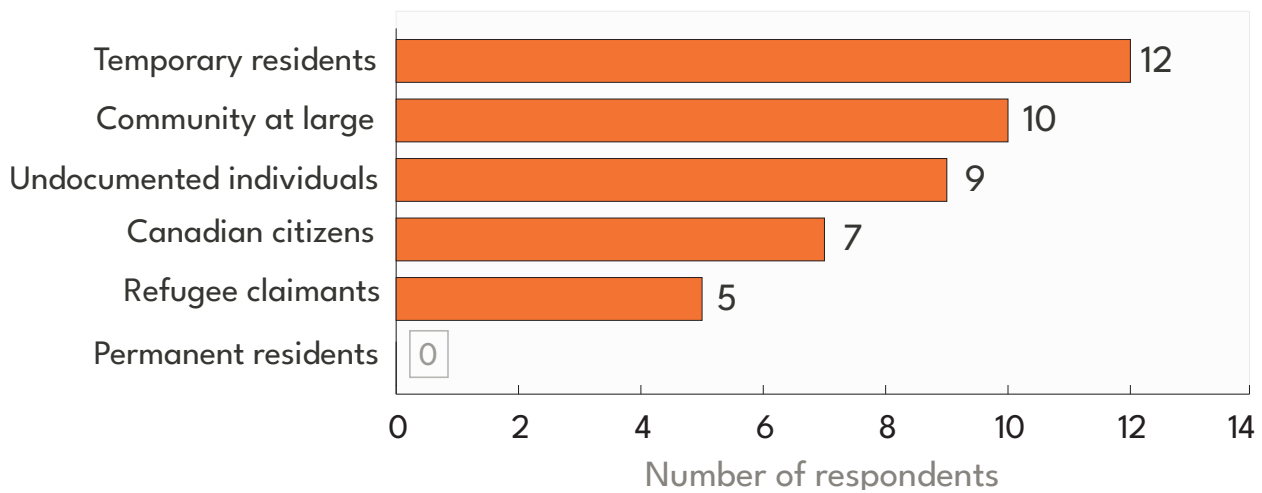
As in previous years, there is a significant shortfall in funding for newcomers who have these statuses, which is outlined further in **Figure 15** below.

The greatest shortfall is for temporary residents. Of the 28 agencies that serve temporary residents, 12 of those agencies do not receive any funding to deliver those services.

One possible method to bridge the shortfall is to further diversify agency funding, for example with provincial and third-party sources. Other government departments, such as ESDC, which operates the Temporary Foreign Workers program, may also have a mandate to fund services to non-permanent residents.

Figure 15

Number of agencies serving newcomers of the given status without funding

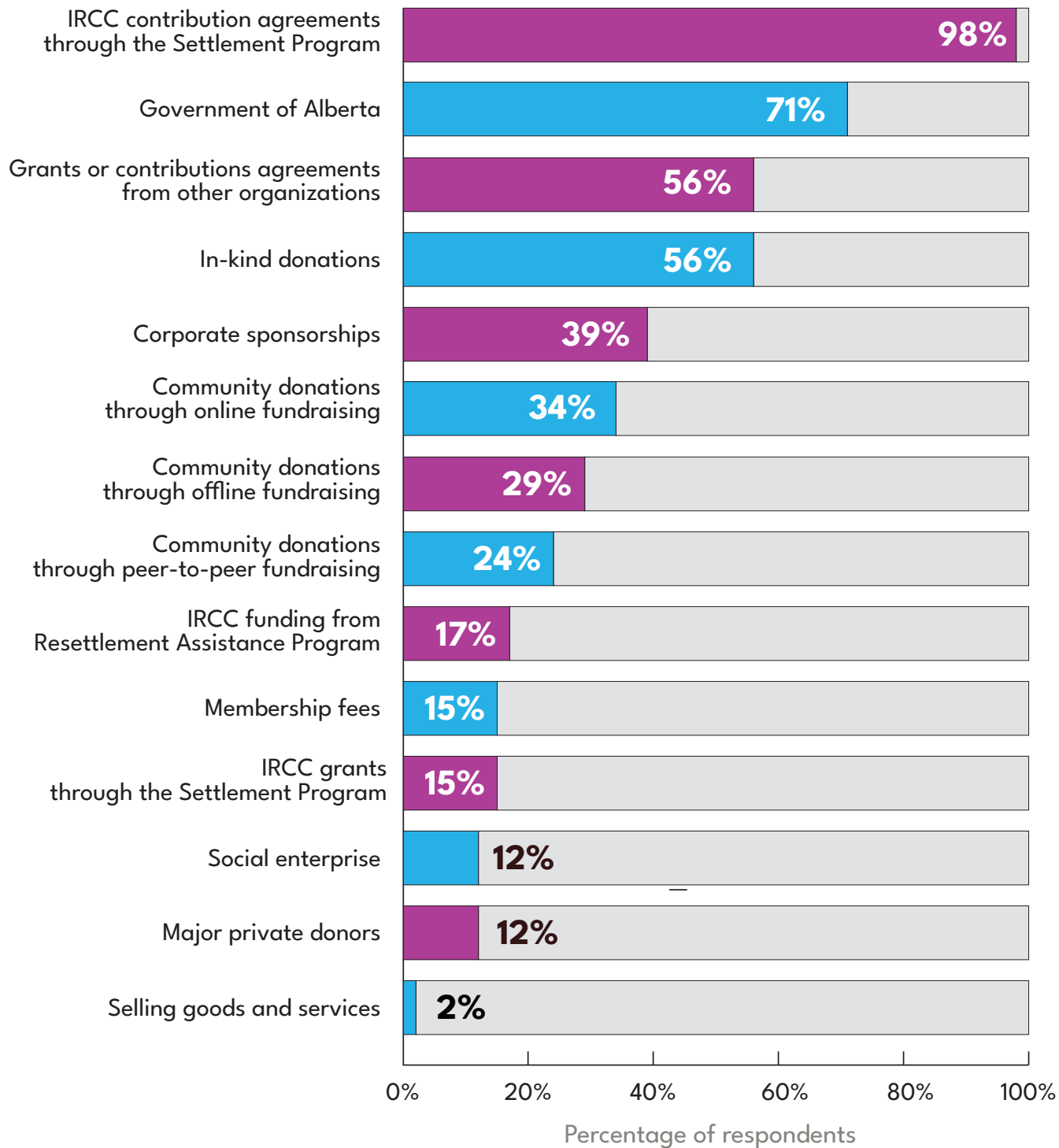


Sources of Funding

To overview the current funding landscape, respondents to the sector survey were asked to outline their sources of funding, and the results are reported in **Figure 16** on the following page.

Almost every responding agency receives IRCC funding through contribution agreements, but about 70% of those agencies also receive Government of Alberta funding. About 60% of respondents receive grants from other organizations and in-kind donations, that is, donations of goods and services.

Figure 16
Sources of funding for respondent agencies (n = 41)

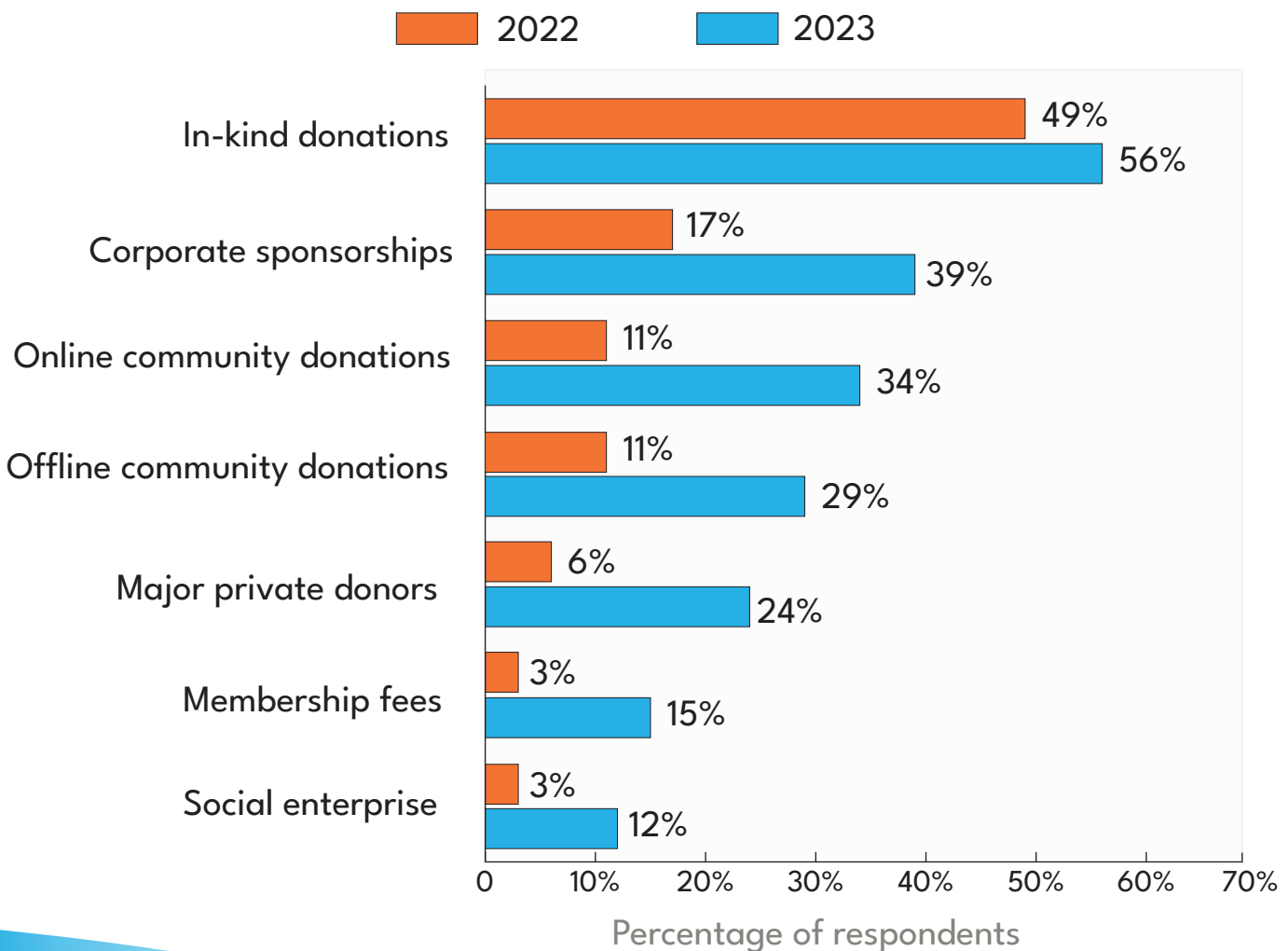


Diversification of Funding

This was the first year that agencies were asked to specify the source of their grants. In future years, more comparisons can be made about increasing diversification of funding sources. This year, some comparable response options from 2022 can point preliminarily to a good possibility that agencies have recognized the need for multiple regular sources of funding.

For example, in 2022, only 17% of agencies stated that they benefited from corporate sponsorships—almost 39% of respondents reported corporate sponsorships in 2023. Membership fee funding increased from only 3% to 17%, and social enterprise from 3% to 12%. Differences in the ways the questions were asked, or differences in the respondent sample, likely also contribute to these increases. Either way, they point to a promising trend. **Figure 17** shows the changes between the percentages of the response sample reporting each type of funding, where the options were reasonably similar.

Figure 17
Diversification of funding from 2022 to 2023



Priorities

Priority Section Design Methodology

Both questions and multiple-response answers in this section flowed from notes made by AAISA facilitators at focus groups held among IRCC-funded Alberta SPOs after the Prairies and Northern Territories (PNT) Summit in winter 2023.

These notes were analyzed using an emergent coding methodology. The process organized agency concerns and feedback into multiple categories, within which specific topics repeatedly surfaced. For example, our analysis showed that calculating compensation for sector staff, service eligibility for temporary residents, and employment-focused language services were significant priorities for discussion group participants (among 40 or 50 other themes).

These priorities point to different analyses, different actors, and different modes of intervention. It happens that many main themes fit fairly neatly into categories suggested by CFP 2019:

- Direct services
- Indirect services
- Administration of IRCC funding to agencies
- Transparency and reporting from IRCC
- Client eligibility for IRCC-funded services

Analyzing Ranked Priorities

Ranked data can be analyzed in several ways. For 2023, we have relied on a weighted average rank.

This measure can be unintuitive. The weighted average rank gives a good idea how important an item was considered compared to other items by the respondents within that specific set. However, the numbers **can't be compared between questions**. For mathematical reasons, an item with a weighted average rank of 2.00 in one question isn't "more important overall" than an item with a weighted average rank of 1.60 in another question.

In the quantitative survey design, these categories were each repurposed into priorities questions, and the topics were used as response options. The aim was to quantify and verify the trends in priorities captured by the qualitative analysis. This method also allows AAISA to minimize (without eliminating) the bias of survey designers in setting out the questions and responses, which otherwise would substantially influence what topics respondents were guided to highlight as priorities.

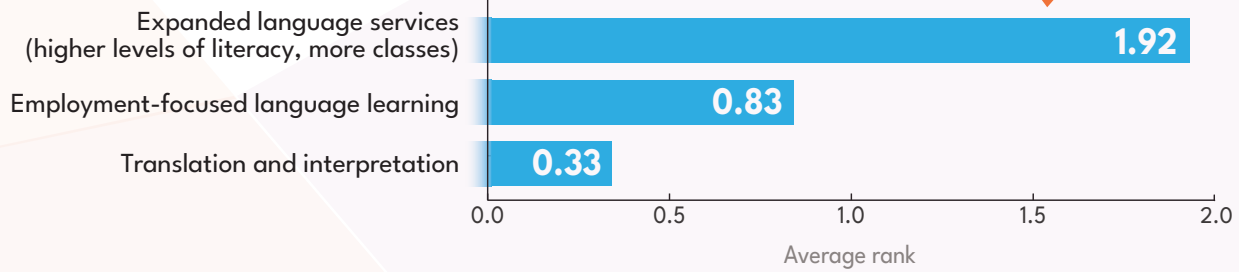
446 discussion group comments were ultimately incorporated into this analysis.

Questions in this section were phrased to suggest feedback on the structure of the Call for Proposals, with the idea that the data could be used to quantitatively package some of the comments which were requested from SPOs during the PNT Summit. We consider that the questions asked are valid proxies to explore sector priorities in general, but proper caution should be given to the format's possible effect on the response trends.

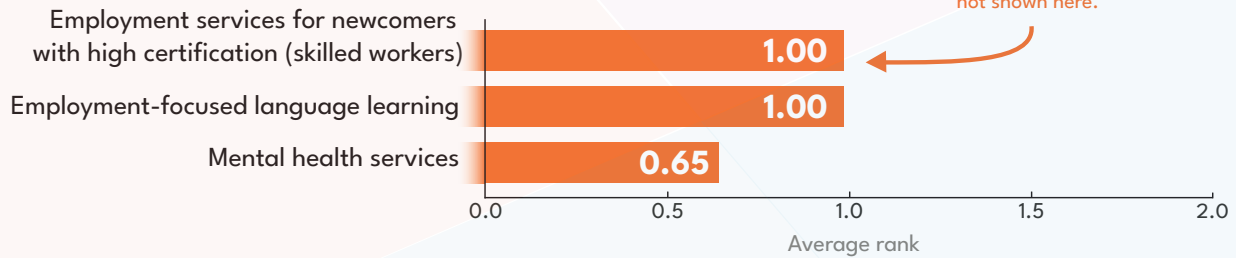
This year, priority responses were disaggregated according to **organization type**. For each question, the priorities of language organizations, settlement organizations, and general service organizations are reported separately. As we might expect, the priorities of agencies differ based on their mandate in important ways.

Priorities: Direct Services

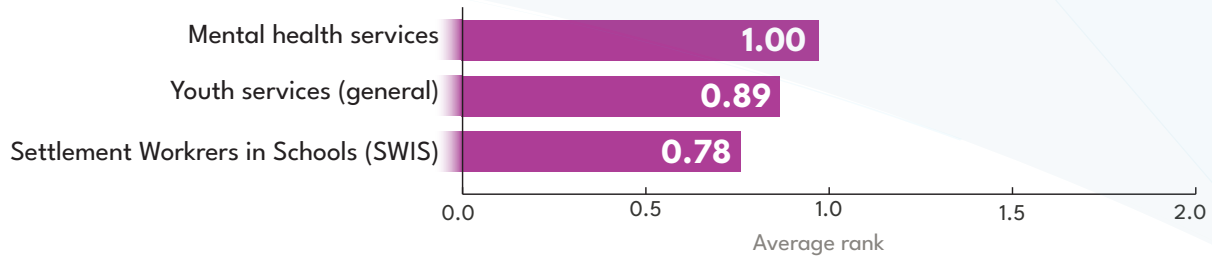
Language learning institutions



Settlement organizations



Generalized social services organizations



Direct service priorities

In the original PNT Summit discussion groups, direct service was the second-most common topic of feedback (after administrative feedback). Almost 130 comments were made on direct service – related topics.

The relevant question on the Sector Priorities Survey was phrased around the idea of “customized services.” Most of the specific recommendations for direct services concerned particular improvements or extensions to base services, which seemed to reflect the spirit of the “customized service”. Asking about priorities for “customized services” meant asking agencies which of these specific extensions to the already-funded base services they were most interested in seeing supported.

Priorities differed significantly between different agency types.

As might be expected, the top priorities for language institutions were language-related. The use of the more general “expanded language services” response option, rather than several more specific options, unfortunately leaves us unable to say which program extensions

survey respondents most favour. The strong preference for this option may point toward a useful line of future in-depth inquiry.

For settlement organizations, the top two priorities were related to employment. Mental health services are significant in both generalized service and settlement organization priorities, and both of the other top priorities for generalized services are related to services for children and youth.

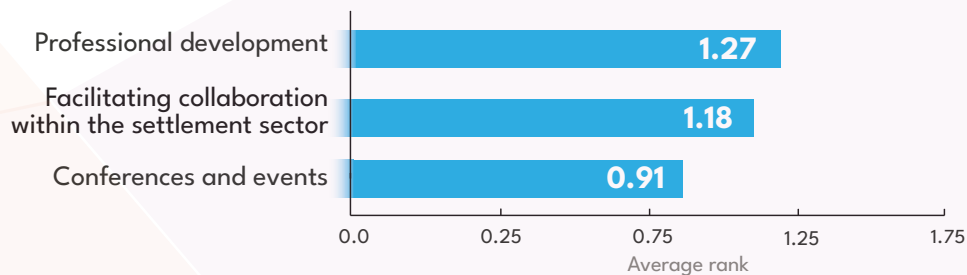
Agencies were also given the option to fill in their own preferred priority. The open responses received were:

- Informal language training
- Specialized language services -gender, age specific, literacy
- Student resources
- Family violence support
- Career loans/financial literacy
- Specialized support for the most vulnerable newcomers (housing, etc.)
- Entrepreneurship for newcomers, youth and women

Question asked	Options offered
<p>If it were up to you to select three “customized services” for CFP 2024, which would you select?</p> <p><i>Explanatory note provided: (In 2019, the Call for Proposals was structured around “base services” and “customized services.” [More information was provided at a given link.] Examples of base services include general language services and general employment services. Customized services are certain priority issues to which special attention is provided.)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment services for newcomers with high certification (skilled workers) • Employment-focused language learning • Expanded language services (higher levels of literacy, more classes) • Youth services (general) • SWIS • Francophone services (general) • Francophone youth services • Disability and accessibility services • Mental health services • Translation and interpretation • Community connections • Legal assistance • Other (please specify)

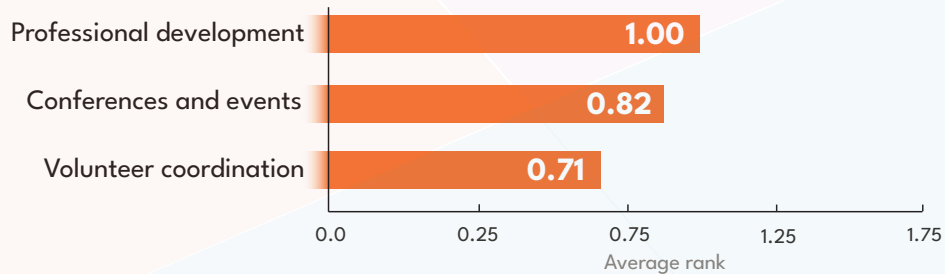
Priorities: Indirect Services

Language learning institutions

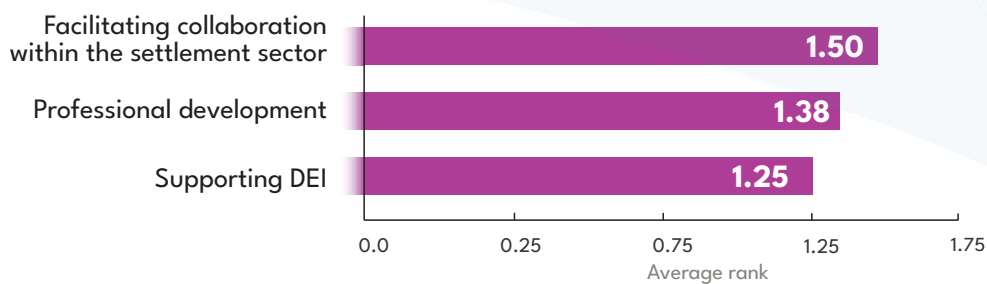


Recall that average ranks are not comparable among priority types. Note the different scale of the axis between direct service priorities, indirect service priorities, and so on.

Settlement organizations



Generalized social services organizations



Indirect service priorities

In the original PNT summit groups, “indirect services” was among the less common topics. 25 comments on this subject were identified.

The wording of this question was tailored to the original use case: the proposed feedback document to IRCC on sector priorities. Because the indirect services component of CFP 2019 did not select “priority services” per se in the same way as direct services, we asked about which indirect services benefit most from IRCC funding. The services that benefit the most, we reasoned, could be considered top priorities for the purposes of IRCC funding.

Across the agency types, professional development, facilitating collaboration within the settlement sector, and conferences and events emerged as three important priorities for funding and support.

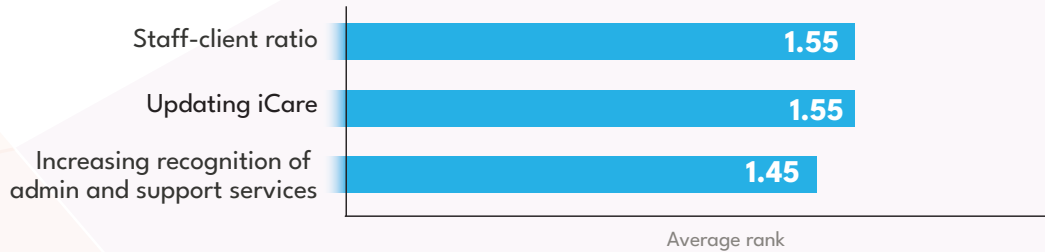
The context and wording of the original question might limit the broader application of this finding. For example, agencies might have considered volunteer coordination “more important” in some general way, but followed survey directions by selecting an option that required more direct funding support. Nevertheless, these responses may be of use both to agencies and funders, as well as to AAISA. They point toward the activities in this category for which agencies most value support, and the three major activities chosen are some of those under AAISA’s mandate.

Two open responses were provided for this question. One open response on indirect services cited the importance of research as a fourth top priority. The other was moved to the direct services section for consideration alongside more similar priorities.

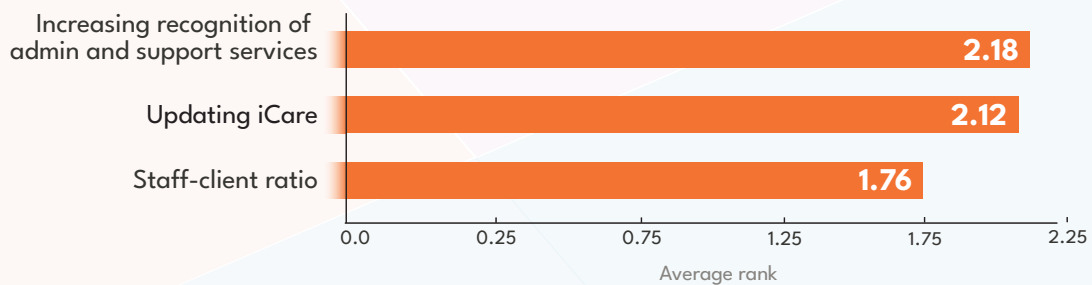
Question asked	Options offered
<p>In your opinion, what are the “indirect services” where IRCC funding is most integral to your ability to perform that service?</p> <p><i>Explanatory note provided: (Funding under the Settlement Program is divided among direct and indirect services. Most funding goes to direct services, which are delivered to clients directly, such as language and employment services. However, the Settlement Program also funds projects to build capacity in the settlement sector in various ways. These projects are referred to as indirect services.)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitating collaboration within the settlement sector • Facilitating collaboration outside the settlement sector • Research • Volunteer coordination • Conferences and events • Professional development • Supporting Diversity, Equity and Inclusion strategies within organizations

Priorities: Administration

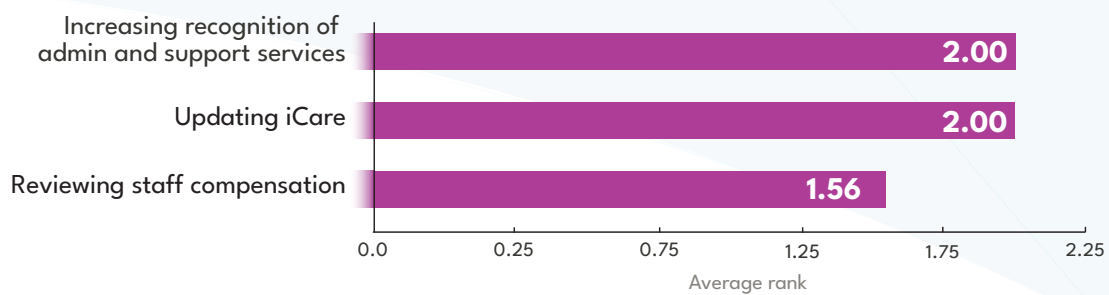
Language learning institutions



Settlement organizations



Generalized social services organizations



Administration of IRCC funding

Comments about the methods by which federal funding is administered and distributed were by far the most common topic of discussion in the PNT summit groups. Almost 244 comments were counted in the notes, compared to the next highest, direct services, with 130. This represents a potential wealth of useful feedback. Issues of staff recognition and compensation (as funded by IRCC in this case), flexibility in use of funding, handling of surplus funds (“slippage”), reporting, and so on were collected under this category.

The most recurring selections across all three organization types were “Increasing recognition of admin and support services” and “Updating iCare”, but “staff-client ratio” and “reviewing staff compensation” are also prominent. Notably, for language organizations, staff-client ratio is an absolute top concern. Language organizations have attested previously to AAISA that the inability to

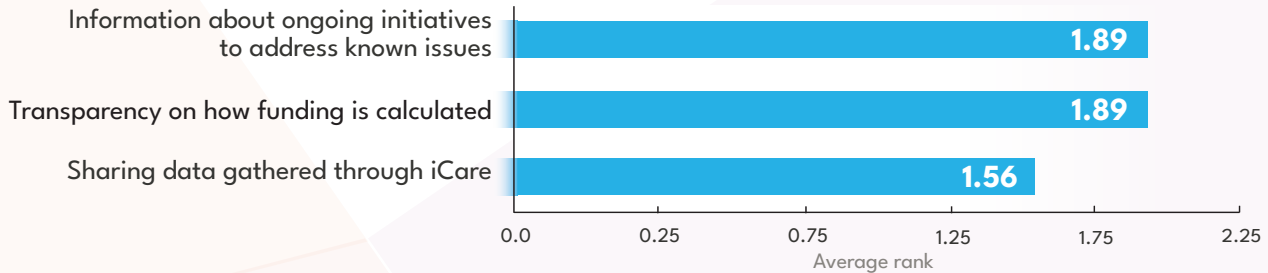
fund support staff such as classroom assistants out of normal LINC/CLIC funding has been a significant difficulty in delivering efficacious services in the classroom. This concern also dovetails with the desire across all types of agencies to see administrative and support staff get proper due. Administrative and support staff serve as binding and coordinating agents in many agencies without which services could not be provided.

Updates to iCare are a regular discussion among agencies and among federal funders. Exactly which updates are desired is a complex conversation which undoubtedly differs from agency to agency. Further investigation could reveal specific feedback that might be of help to funders in developing future versions of the software.

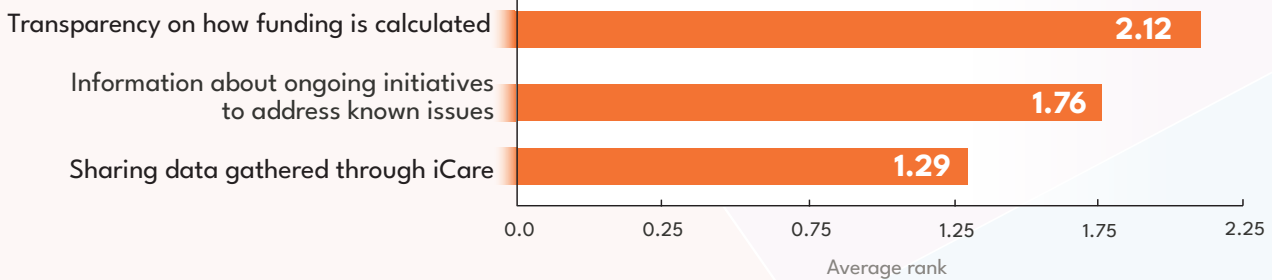
Question asked	Options offered
<p>If you could change anything about the way that IRCC funding is administered, calculated, and distributed, what would be your top three priorities?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing staff compensation standards: benefits, salaries, higher-paid specialist positions • More flexibility in budget reporting • Strategy for equitable administration in unforeseen emergency circumstances (such as COVID-19, the takeover of Afghanistan, and the war in Ukraine) • Different treatment of slippage dollars • Increasing recognition of the importance of administrative and support services, such as HR • Revising expectations for small centres • Revising expectations around staff-client ratio • Updating iCare

Priorities: Transparency and reporting

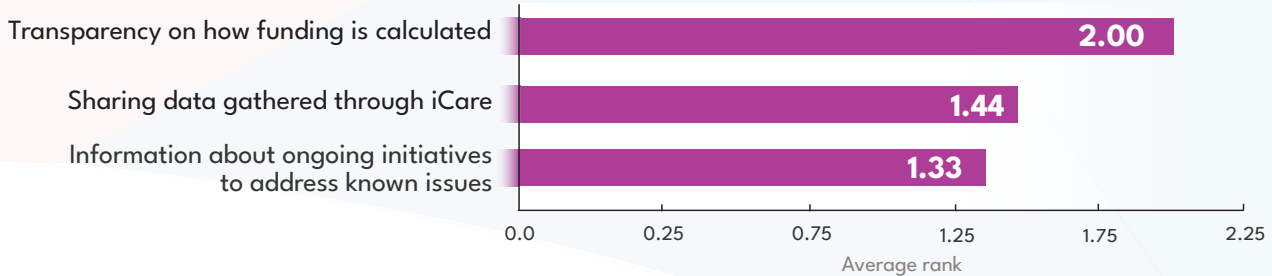
Language learning institutions



Settlement organizations



Generalized social services organizations



Transparency and reporting

In this category, AAISA assembled comments that had to do with information that agencies wanted to receive from federal funders. As a mediator in the transmission of information from IRCC to agencies in Alberta through meetings like the Settlement Sector Call, AAISA is equally interested in learning what types of information we may be able to help convey.

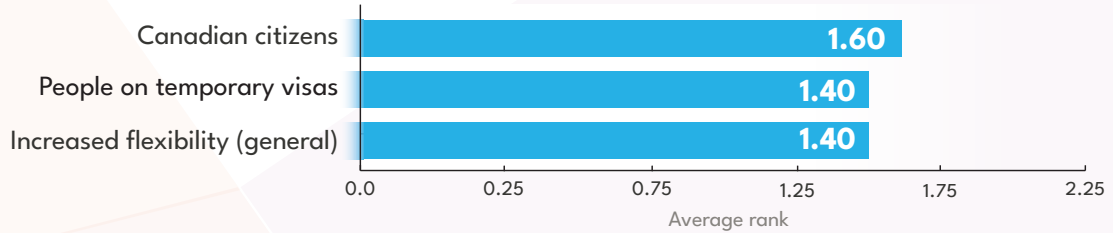
On this topic, 31 comments were counted in the original PNT Summit discussion groups.

Since only four options were presented, it is not surprising that the top three options recurred among all organization types. For settlement organizations and generalized organizations, “transparency on how funding is calculated” was the top priority. For language organizations, “information about ongoing initiatives to address known issues” took this place. “Sharing data gathered through iCare” also appeared.

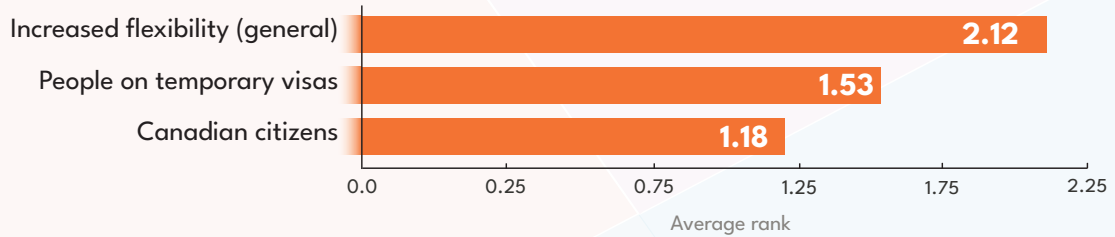
Question asked	Options offered
In which categories of information would you most like to see more clarification and reporting from IRCC program administrators? Please rank your priorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More information about what initiatives IRCC is undertaking to address known issues• Transparency on how funding is calculated• More guidance to apply for funding• Sharing data gathered through iCare and other methods

Priorities: Client Eligibility

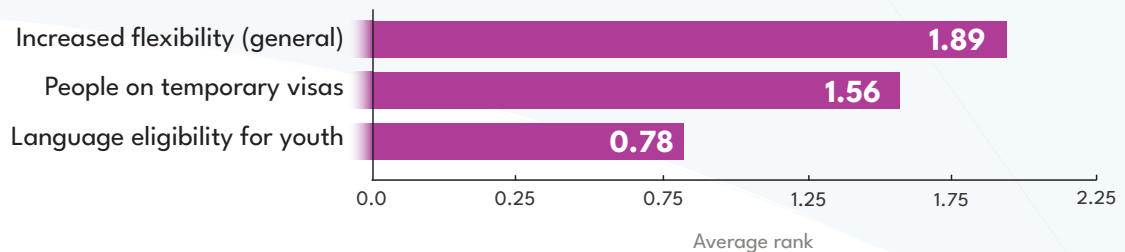
Language learning institutions



Settlement organizations



Generalized social services organizations



Client eligibility

Client eligibility is regularly discussed among service providers. Many vulnerable client groups are ineligible for federal services. Eligibility for services is a far-reaching and entrenched conversation in the sector on many sides. About 15 comments were made during the PNT summit groups on eligibility, making it the least frequent topic of discussion that still warranted a category of its own.

Conversation around eligibility for services often centres around these different specific groups of newcomers and their unique needs.

Across all organizations, “people on temporary visas” were prominently selected as a top priority for eligibility. However, for language institutions, it is notable that “Canadian citizens” were the priority with the highest average rank. Since citizenship requires only CLB/NCLC 4, language institutions often suggest that citizens should continue to be offered higher CLB/NCLC

levels to enhance their inclusion in their new country of citizenship.

Among general social services organizations, and in line with the focus of their direct services priorities around youth, the eligibility of young people for language services was also considered a high priority. Currently, people under 18 are not able to access LINC, which can be a significant difficulty for them if they enter an English school system with a low language level.

Question asked	Options offered
<p>If you could revise client eligibility for IRCC funding, how would you rank your priorities?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eligibility for people on temporary visas • Language eligibility for youth • Eligibility for Canadian citizens • Eligibility for undocumented people • Generally increased flexibility for eligibility

Comparing the quantitative and qualitative analyses

In this section, we return to the qualitative coding analysis that was performed on the PNT Summit discussion notes. How did the conversations at the PNT Summits in early 2023 compare to the priorities agencies reported during the sector survey? Was there continuity between these two measures, with six months of distance between the data collection points?

Overall, our comparison of our analysis of the PNT Summit discussion groups and our analysis of the survey responses shows a reasonable level of continuity given the differences in the response settings. This reinforces the validity of the results.

Places where continuity is not obvious could be explained by a number of factors. Different agencies from the relatively small sample of Alberta IRCC-funded organizations might have participated in the discussion groups as opposed to the survey. The different data collection methods also likely had an effect. The discussion groups were characterized by unstructured discussion and note-taking. Unknown factors such as facilitator prompting and un-recorded conversation might have influenced the flow of ideas. On the formal survey, the presentation of questions may have provoked different types of thinking.

Because of the nature of the data, it is not possible to segment out the discussion group coding according to organization type. Overall, the administrative and direct service categories received by far the most pieces of feedback, with hundreds of comments each.

Unlike in the survey responses, the most revisited comments on the topic of **administration** in the discussion groups had to do with staff compensation. Under this code in the analysis, we collected mentions of benefits and salary. “Reviewing staff compensation” was offered as a possible response in the survey under the administration question. However, it only reached the top three priorities among generalized social services organizations. Survey respondents from language and settlement organizations were more likely to prioritize updates to iCare, staff-client ratios and recognition of admin and support services.

In terms of **direct services**, employment services, services for skilled workers, and mental health were

all top priorities for participants in the discussion groups. Survey results suggest that these issues remained top-of-mind for sector leaders in summer and fall 2023. Only among language organizations, which understandably focused on language-specific priorities, were the results substantially different.

In **indirect services**, discussion participants focused on the need to facilitate collaboration, which also appeared as a top priority for survey respondents, where the response was made more specific to distinguish between collaboration inside and outside the sector, with collaboration inside the sector preferred. To join this priority, professional development, which was a relatively rare topic among discussion participants, shot to the top of the priority list in the survey, along with conferences and events. The specific wording of the question related to indirect services on the survey may have contributed to this change.

Under the category of **transparency and reporting**, agencies remained interested in similar issues in both discussion groups and survey responses. The top priorities in both cases included information about IRCC’s initiatives to solve known ongoing issues, which might include outreach such as progress reports and feedback-seeking. Another appearance in both sets of analysis was transparency of funding calculation, which in discussion groups had further precision: agencies wanted more understanding of the reasons funding organizations might differ between organizations and officers. Sharing iCare data and other IRCC data presented more of a priority to survey respondents than to discussion group participants, who had more frequently discussed guidance in applying for funding.

Interestingly, on the final topic of **service eligibility**, eligibility for Canadian citizens far outshot its original presence in discussion groups. There, participants focused more on general questions of eligibility and eligibility for people with temporary visas, and these also appear at the top of the survey responses. However, it is possible that being offered “eligibility for citizens” explicitly as an option, when conversations in the sector often revolve around the eligibility of people on temporary visas, prompted agencies to realize that eligibility for citizens was an equal or greater priority.



Ways Forward

What are you curious about?

The sector survey has now been operational for five years, and evaluation has been ongoing throughout successive deliveries. The new term of AAISA's own contribution agreement, as well as the terms of other agencies' agreements, could provide an excellent moment for evaluation of the survey. AAISA hopes to capitalize further on the opportunity provided by the survey to address gaps in information perceived by direct service agencies, AAISA, IRCC, and other stakeholders.

Multiple proposals have been forwarded within AAISA for alternative methods to more effectively collect and utilize the data that the sector survey provides. For example, AAISA may review the possibility of conducting qualitative interviews with sector leaders once every two years which could additionally build relationships and permit in-depth discussions about sector trends. Another possibility would be to conduct a larger-scale survey that would access responses from other categories of staff outside management and address some of the data needs member agencies have expressed, such as the need for updated information around salary and benefits provided to staff in the sector. Further possibilities may be revealed through a process of evaluation and consultation with key stakeholders.

An evaluation would entail in-depth review of the survey's delivery mech-

anisms as well as individual questions to ensure that all the survey's requests are aligned with the needs of Alberta's settlement sector organizations as well as IRCC.

In advance of this request for evaluation, we encourage agencies and other stakeholders to begin considering: What are you curious about? What information would help you provide services more effectively and efficiently? Where do you perceive data gaps? And how would you prefer to participate in a process of data collection and analysis to bridge those gaps?

Data permits us to make informed decisions about the way that we manage services, and to communicate with others about the needs of the sector. AAISA aims to support member agencies and other IRCC-funded agencies by aligning this opportunity for data collection directly with the decision and communication opportunities that participants in the survey perceive. We are eager to find new possibilities in this next chapter.

On the final page, we have aggregated some of the questions that analysis of this survey data surfaced. These issues may be amenable to investigation by further surveys or other methods depending on the priorities of our stakeholders.

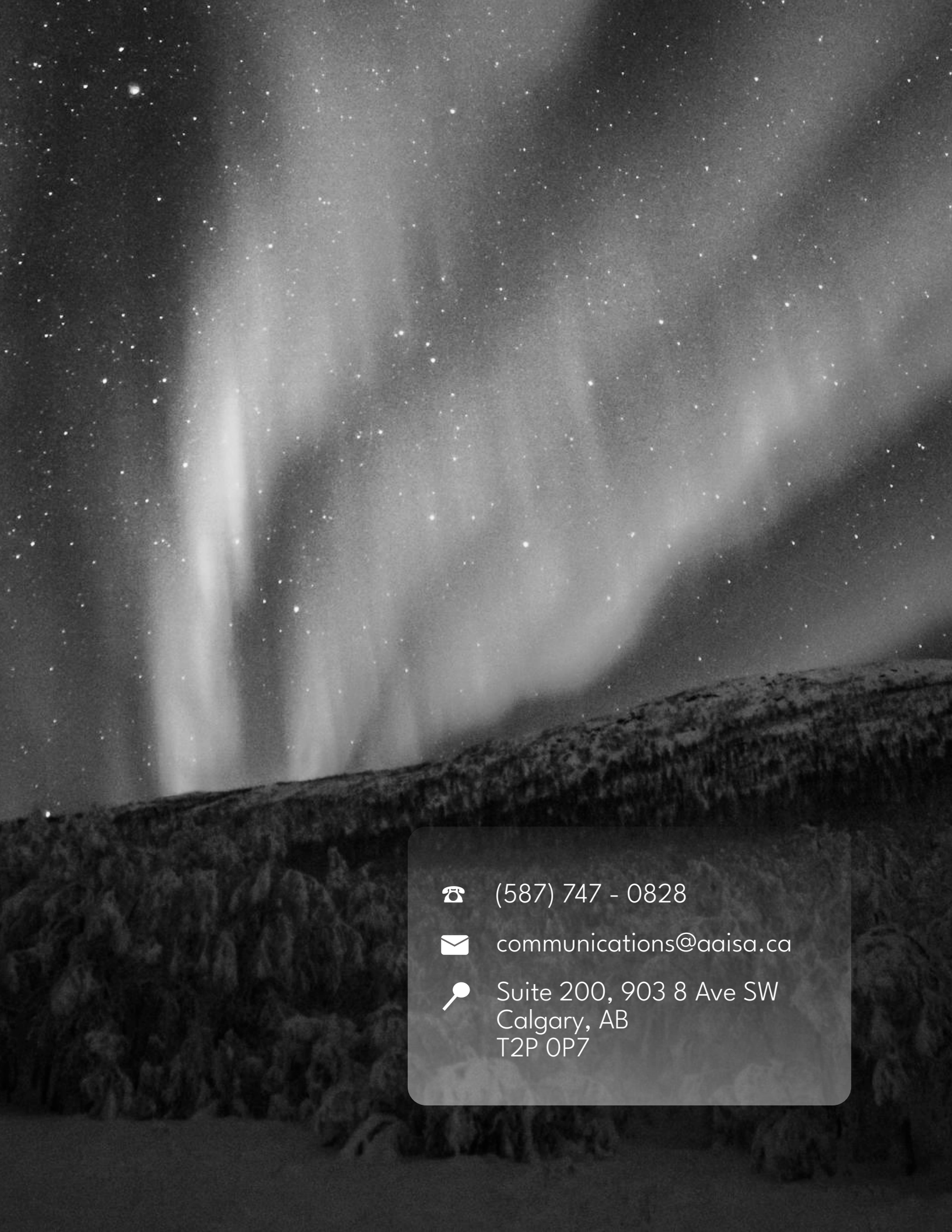
Further Questions


- What does this picture of demographics and priorities look like for direct service staff, administrative staff, LINC/CLIC teachers and other non-management practitioners?
- What does the picture look like for LIPs, and what other types of inquiry could be made with a focus directly on LIP staff?
- What further details could we uncover about staffing practices and patterns in the sector?
 - AAISA ran a survey with this focus in 2022: the Health of the Sector Survey. This survey was targeted at direct-service staff. Note that, while this survey inquired about staff's satisfaction with their positions, their compensation, and other organizational factors, it did not inquire about their opinions around gaps in services or service priorities.
- How could AAISA better capitalize on the data we gather about what member agency services are offered where?
- Service mapping: How could AAISA further collaborate with institutions like HelpSeeker to ensure that service mapping addresses the needs of all stakeholders?
- Service alignment: How could AAISA support verifying and measuring areas of unmet need for rare services?
- What more could we learn with in-depth inquiries to drill down into these general responses?

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A black and white photograph of the Aurora Borealis (Northern Lights) over a snowy mountain range. The aurora appears as a bright, vertical band of light in the dark, starry sky. The foreground shows a dark, snow-covered mountain ridge.

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