



## Report: The Intersection of Gender and Employment Barriers for CSS GAR Clients

July, 2019

### Overview

When fleeing persecution and war, living in refugee camps, and escaping conflict, Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs) experience trauma in significant and multiple ways. While Canada is known as one of the most open and supportive countries for refugees in the world, refugees, and GARs in particular, still experience many challenges in their settlement and integration. As refugee women comprise almost half of the refugee population in Canada, special attention should be given to their needs (Awuah-Mensah, 2016). Women tend to experience unique barriers and challenges in their settlement process, linked to prior experiences of trauma and sexual violence, language barriers, limited literacy and work experience, lack of traditional support systems, childcare responsibilities, and cultural differences (SRDC, 2002). These barriers particularly influence women refugees' access to employment and their income levels.

Client Support Services (CSS) and our partner service provider organizations work to provide GARs with client-led support and programming to help them gain independence as they learn to navigate their new communities. Through regular home visits and client needs assessments, community referrals, health services, and life-skills workshops and orientations, CSS applies an empowerment-based approach to refugee settlement. A large component of this involves helping clients to access employment and prepare for the job market in Canada. Due to the gendered nature of refugee settlement, it is important to examine the ways in which men and women GARs have barriers to or access employment differently. Highlighting these trends will then allow us to fill any gaps in services and make recommendations for future programming to improve both women and men GARs' access to employment.

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- *What are the differences between male and female employment rates for active GAR CSS clients?*
- *What are the barriers to employment for male and female active GAR CSS clients? How do they differ?*
- *Do GAR women experience unique/more barriers to employment than GAR men?*
- *How can CSS address any issues or unique barriers to employment for GAR women?*

### Literature Review:

#### ***Refugee and GAR Women and Employment Rates: National Trends***

It is estimated that more than 80% of the world's refugees are women (Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2001). Although all refugees have significant needs in resettlement, women's experiences during war and flight, combined with the stressors they encounter in exile, result in their needs being quantitatively different than those of men. In both Canada and globally, women refugees consistently have lower employment rates than men, lack access to health services, and increased pressure as child-care providers (Vukojevic, 2018). There are a variety of intersecting demographic characteristics that influence employment rates, as well as integration overall, for both male and female refugees. Country of origin, education level, age, years since landing in host country, support received, and language are variables that impact refugee

economic and social integration (Picot et al., 2019; SRDC, 2002). While all of these factors are influential, it is essential to recognize the gendered natures of women refugees' experiences of integration and settlement (Vukojevic, 2018).

Overall, employment rates for male and female refugees tend to differ in Canada; however, males from refugee groups with low rates of employment, such as those from Somalia and Iran, correlate with low rates of employment and low earnings for female refugees (Picot et al., 2019). This trend applies to GARs as well. In a study conducted by Picot et al. (2019), the employment rate of female GARs was found to be lower than that of male refugees. In one year since landing, male GARs earn \$20,500 annually (adjusted income), while GAR women earn \$11,500 on average. Clearly, both gender and country of origin are indicators of employment status and earning levels, which therefore can exacerbate poverty issues for women refugees in low-income groups.

Both male and female GARs earn less on average than privately sponsored refugees and refugees from the In-Canada Asylum Program; in fact, one year after entry, privately sponsored refugees earned from \$2,400 (for women) to \$2,800 (for men) more than GARs in the first year in Canada (Picot et al., 2019). However, these differences decrease over time as refugees from all groups learn about job opportunities, experience job training, and integrate in their host communities (Ibid.).

### ***GAR Women Employment Rates and Barriers/Integration Challenges***

While the current available research on GAR women barriers to employment and economic integration is sparse, trends can be found in the literature that exists. For refugees coming from Africa, for instance, many of whom are GARs, there are a number of interrelated socio-cultural barriers that contribute to their high levels of unemployment in Canada; for instance, language barriers, racial discrimination, housing market constraints, accreditation issues, and insufficient income/government assistance (Danso, 2002). These challenges are compounded for women due to exponential stress, sexual assault, exploitation, and trauma during war and exile, and thus they endure increased economic difficulties, social isolation, sexism, role changes in the household, and other issues (Awuah-Mensah, 2016).

### **Methodology**

The data included in this report is based on the most recent needs assessments conducted for all active male and female CSS clients aged 18+. In total information from needs assessments of 876 male clients and 911 female clients were included in the data.

Responses to the following questions in the Needs Assessment Matrix were included in this report:

-25. *Are you currently employed?*

- 26.1A. *Are you currently experiencing barriers to finding employment?*

These responses were recorded from each site onto the Efforts To Outcomes (ETO) database and then amalgamated into reports to highlight trends in the data. For both questions, the response 'Other' was excluded in this dataset since it is not possible to analyze what this response entails in this report.

### **Limitations**

While this information points to trends in CSS GAR men and women's employment status and barriers, there are some limitations to the accuracy of this data due to data collection methods. Validity is hindered

due to the fact that not every CSS client aged 18+ is included in the sample. This is because not every active client has had a needs assessment conducted. Moreover, this data does not show how employment rates and barriers can change over time, as the sample includes active clients who have had any number of needs assessments, ranging from the first assessment (A1), until their final assessment (A4 or higher). As GARs become more independent, employment rates can increase; however, this is not reflected in this dataset. Moreover, as the responses to these questions are self-reported by GAR clients, it is not possible to get a complete picture of the barriers to employment or their reasons for being unemployed. Reasons such as job discrimination, mental health issues, etc. are left out from this.

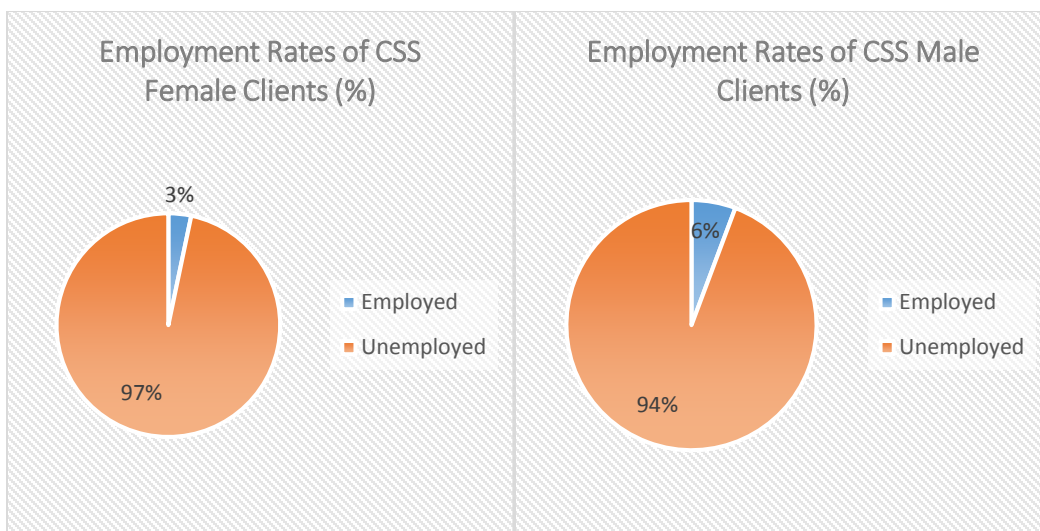
The validity of these findings is also limited by the way that the responses to the questions answered in the Needs Assessment Matrix were recorded into ETO. For both employment status and barriers to employment, multiple responses can be recorded for any active client. This made coding difficult and meant that the total number of responses to each question outnumbered the number of clients included. Even still, the data reflects general overall trends in employment status and barriers.

Finally, between the employment status and barriers to employment categories in ETO, there is some overlap. For instance, the response of 'Not ready' was included in both categories. For the purposes on this study, it is presented under the category of employment status rather than barriers to employment.

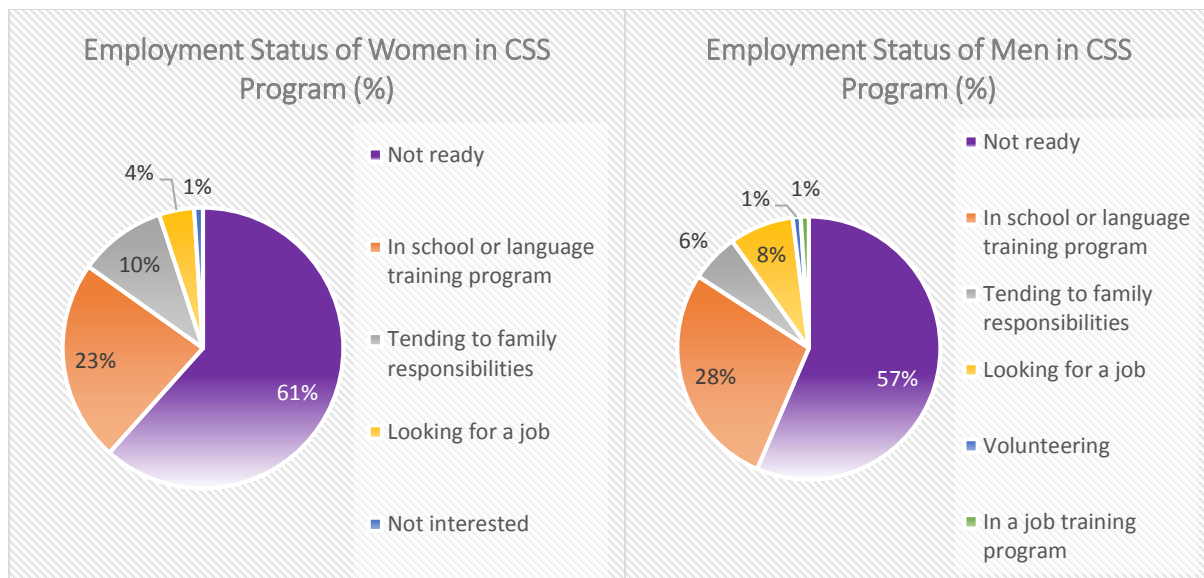
## Results and Analysis:

### *Gender and Employment Status*

The pie charts below present employment rates for active female and male CSS clients. The national and international trends consistently indicate that male refugees (and GARs) have higher employment rates than women, and the data below indicates that this is also true for CSS clients. While 50 (6%) male CSS clients are employed, 30 (3%) female CSS clients are employed. Clearly, the vast majority of both male and female GAR clients are unemployed. It is possible that this is in part because GARs come from vulnerable groups and countries with low rates of employment, in which case low rates of employment for men correlate with low rates and low earnings for female refugees (Picot et al., 2019).



### *Gender and Employment Status: Unemployed CSS Clients*

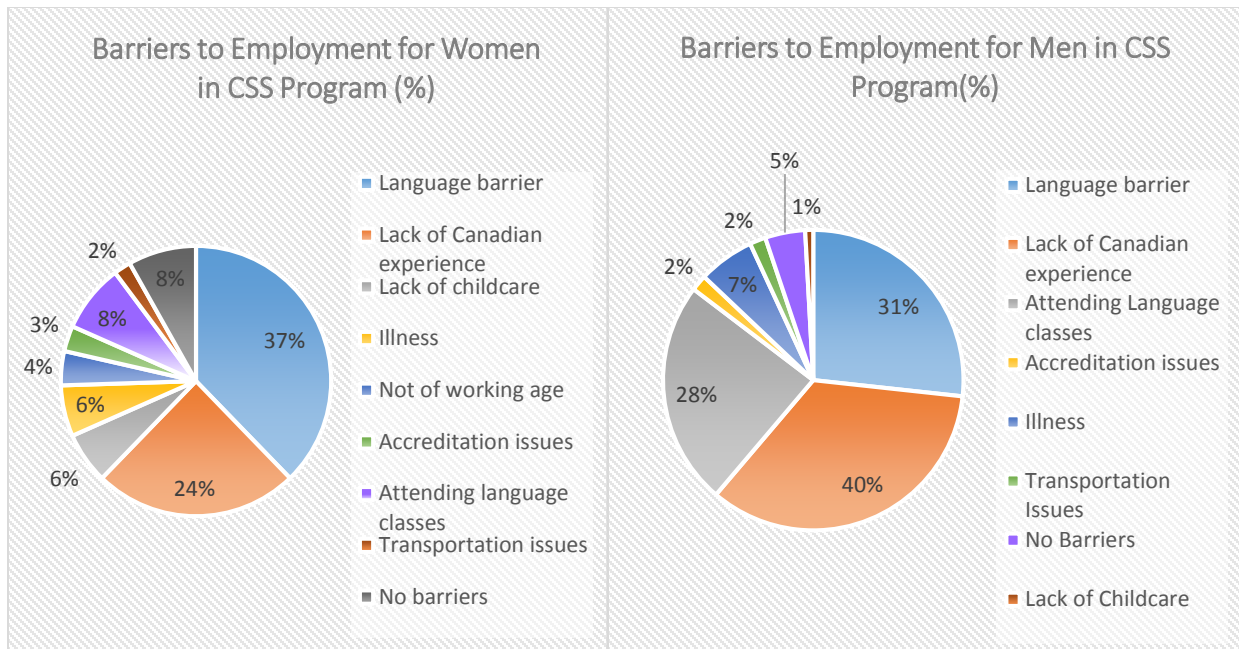


The data above presents a breakdown of the employment status of both men and women clients who are unemployed. For both, the majority of respondents reported that they are not employed because they are 'Not ready.' For women, this percentage is 61%, while for men it is 57%. As CSS clients are in their first year of settlement, this is not surprising; however, it would be valuable in the future to examine how this statistic is related to the length of time that they have been in Canada/how many needs assessments they have had. For both men and women GARs, the next greatest response to this question was 'In school or language training program' (28% for men, 23% for women). Clearly, more males than females are currently in school or language training programs, but for both genders, this could be improved.

The figures begin to differ by gender for the third highest percentage; for men, this is 'Looking for a job' (8%) and for women this is 'Tending to family responsibilities' (10%). These statistics are also consistent with national trends, particularly regarding women and family responsibilities as they face the double burden of childcare and employment. Awuah-Mensah (2016) found that lack of childcare is often a major issue for refugee women as they seek employment. For men, higher percentages of CSS clients are either looking for a job or volunteering, while less than 1% of women respondents answered 'Volunteering'. The same goes for those who answered that they are 'In a job training program.' While only 1% of men answered this, no women in the sample were in a job training program. Awuah-Mensah (2016) found in her study that few women know of professional training centres, and even so, childcare and transportation prevent them from joining these programs. Finally, while 1% of women said that they were 'Not interested' in employment, zero men responded this way, which could be consistent with cultural values that focus on women's role in the household and men's role in economically supporting the family.

Clearly, while the majority of both men and women GARs are 'Not ready' for employment in their first year of settlement in Canada, there are subtle differences in their reasoning for being unemployed that are consistent with broader trends and gender roles.

### **Gender and Employment Barriers**



The above pie charts present the distribution of barriers to employment for clients by gender. It should be noted here that case workers are only prompted to answer question 26.1A, “Are you experiencing barriers to finding employment?” in the Needs Assessment Matrix on ETO if 26. “Are you currently?...” is answered as “Looking for a job; In school; In a job training program; Volunteering; or Other.” As a result, it is presumed that those who do not indicate those responses do not have barriers to employment. Since 28% of women did not list barriers because they fell under those categories (excluding ‘Other’) and another 8% listed that they did not have barriers to employment, it is assumed that 64% of women GAR clients identify as having barriers to employment. For men, 38% can be presumed to not have barriers to employment, along with the 5% who indicated that they have ‘No barriers.’ Therefore, 57% of men can be presumed to have barriers to employment. While it is clear that both men and women identify as having barriers to employment, more women have barriers than men. This aligns with the literature referenced above.

The greatest employment barriers for GAR women and men tend to be similar. Both men and women clients found ‘Language barrier’ and ‘Lack of Canadian experience’ to be the greatest barriers to employment. However, more women than men found ‘Language barrier’ to be a barrier. This aligns with Awuah-Mensah’s (2016) findings that “language barriers and literacy issues are one of the major setbacks in a GAR woman’s life... it is a huge obstacle for GAR women who may have had little or no education from their home countries due to reasons such as war, women not given a chance to get education, or no access to education at all.” Language proficiency (English/French) is an important determinant of employment and earnings among newcomers in Canada (SRDC 2002), as well as women’s empowerment and confidence-building. Lack of Canadian experience and understanding of the ‘system’ is also known as a common barrier for refugees (Ibid.).

As we move down the list of barriers, there are clear differences between men and women (which echo the findings of SRDC (2002), Awuah-Mensah (2016), and Vukojevic (2018)). For instance, while 28% of men list ‘Attending language classes’ as a barrier to employment, only 8% of women do so. This is especially interesting given the fact that ‘Language barrier’ is the greatest employment barrier for

women. Clearly, there is a need for more support and opportunities for women GARs to attend language classes, such as childcare (which 6% of women listed as a barrier to employment, consistent with the finding that lack of childcare can often prevent women from accessing settlement supports and services (Awuah-Mensah, 2016) and transportation (which 2% of women listed as a barrier). For both genders, 'Illness' is listed as a barrier, indicating that special attention should be paid to health concerns through the provision of health services at sites and through community capacity building with health centres.

While this presents a comprehensive list of GAR barriers to employment, this is not exhaustive. SRDC (2002) also lists mental health issues related to trauma (especially for women), cultural differences, and discrimination in hiring as barriers to employment. Due to the sensitive nature of these barriers, it is not possible to gather accurate statistics on these topics in the context of a needs assessment.

## **Recommendations**

From these findings, it is clear that, while CSS provides both women and men GARs with essential supports in gaining employment, there is still work to be done for both genders in this area, with unique barriers facing women. Therefore, we have developed recommendations for both further research as well as for the CSS program more specifically:

- There is a gap in the literature regarding refugee women's barriers to employment. More research needs to be conducted in this area, with a specific focus on GAR women in Canada.
- Future research/reports should focus on how gender and employment intersect with country of origin, education levels (this was examined but excluded from this report as there was not seen to be a clear correlation with the sample), and number of needs assessment to provide a more in depth and holistic account of GAR women and men's barriers to employment.
- Echoing Vukojevic (2018), future studies/reports should examine the needs of different groups so as to provide services to remove their barriers (such as LGBTQ+).
- Community Capacity Building should focus on connecting women to language training programs and childcare services, as these are major barriers to employment for women.
- Future needs assessments should examine how discrimination, cultural factors, lack of social networks and mental health issues act as barriers to employment (specifically for women).
- Data collection methods should be developed to make barriers clearly separate from employment status (i.e. in ETO, 'Tending to family responsibilities' should be listed as a barrier rather than an employment status).
- In ETO, caseworkers should be able to list barriers for all responses to employment status (except for those who are working or self-employed).

## **Conclusion**

Between 2015 and March 2018, 48% of the approximately 100,000 refugees resettled in Canada were women. The 2017 budget included funding of CAD \$27.7 million over three years, beginning 2017-18 to resettle Yazidi women and girls who were being targeted by Daesh fighters in northern Iraq and Syria. Building on these efforts, the government in 2018 committed to further increase the number of vulnerable refugee women and girls to be resettled to Canada as GARs. The 2018 budget proposes further funding to welcome an additional 1000 refugee women and girls from various conflict zones around the world beginning 2018-19. As of November 2018, Canada has already resettled over 300 women and girls including their family members as part of the 1000 person commitment (Liebig, 2018).

Due to the immense focus of the government on accepting refugee women and girls into Canada, there is great need for the consideration of gender in the provision of settlement services. As discussed, women's needs completely differ from those of men, and with refugee women, there are other factors that can affect their access and use of resources. There is extensive literature on the significance of social and settlement support in the integration of newcomers, especially as it enhances their health (Stewart et al., 2013) but the unique challenges of refugee women indicate that the one-size-fits-all approach to providing newcomer services needs to be re-examined.

This report confirms that the CSS's regular conduction of Needs Assessments for GARs is essential to track clients' progress in settlement and to identify and address barriers. More specifically, this report reveals that, while CSS and partner agencies are providing essential supports to GARs as they seek employment in their new communities, certain barriers (such as language and lack of Canadian experience) still persist. This is especially the case for women GARs, who come to Canada with unique traumas and barriers to employment. Continuing to research national and international trends on GARs gender and employment, as well as assessing GAR men and women's employment status and barriers, is essential to ensure that CSS and SPOs have the tools and knowledge to address any issues and provide essential services for GARs to help them gain independence in Canada.

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