Portrait of the Arab Populations in Canada:

Diversity and Socioeconomic Outcomes

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On December 4, 2025, the proportion of Arabs with Palestinian ethnic and cultural origins who were Christian was corrected from 24.9% to 14.9%, in the section on Arab regional diaspora populations.

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An HTML version is also available.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français.

Note to readers

Data sources

This analysis was conducted principally using data from the 2021 Census of Population (long-form questionnaire). Data were also used from earlier years of the Census of Population long-form questionnaire (2001 to 2016) and the 2011 National Household Survey, and from the 2020 General Social Survey – Social Identity.

In 2021 and 2016, a sample of 25% of Canadian households received the long-form census questionnaire. In 2011, 33% received the voluntary National Household Survey, and, in 2006 and 2001, 20% received the long-form census questionnaire.

The long-form questionnaire covers the population in private households (that is, excluding those in collective dwellings such as nursing homes, rooming houses, military bases or prisons). The target population of the portrait when using census data was the population in private households in occupied private dwellings, meaning the portrait also excluded people who were living outside Canada on government, military or diplomatic postings.

The long-form census questionnaire includes Canadian citizens (by birth and naturalization), permanent residents, and non-permanent residents and their families living with them in Canada. Non-permanent residents are people who hold a work or student permit or who have claimed refugee status (asylum claimants, protected persons and related groups).

Foreign residents, such as representatives of a foreign government assigned to an embassy, high commission or other diplomatic mission in Canada, as well as residents of another country who are visiting Canada temporarily, are not covered by the census.

The 2020 General Social Survey – Social Identity covered non-institutionalized people (i.e., people in private households in occupied private dwellings) aged 15 years or over, excluding residents of the territories and of First Nations reserves.

Methods

This portrait provides descriptive analysis of the characteristics of Arab populations in Canada.

Definitions

For terms that are not defined here, refer to the Dictionary, Census of Population, 2021.

Arab populations: In this portrait, the Arab populations are defined as those who responded to the population group question with “Arab”; a write-in response that was considered consistent with “Arab” only, such as “Egyptian” or “Jordanian”; both of the above; or “Arab” and “White”. The inclusion of those who responded “Arab” and “White” differs from the standard definition of the Arab population from the “visible minority” variable. This inclusion is used in this portrait to be consistent with methods for other racialized groups in this portrait series (e.g., South Asian, Chinese, Black and Filipino), and to more fully reflect the characteristics of the Arab populations in Canada. (For more information, see the “Population of interest” section.)

The definition of the Arab populations excludes 2,815 Arabs (2021 data) who responded to the population group question with the combination of Arab, White and certain write-in responses. This population cannot be identified in a comparable way across census cycles.

The definition of the Arab populations also excludes 45,065 people who reported being both Arab and in one or more other racialized groups (including those who reported being Arab along with a write-in response that was not associated with “Arab” only, such as responses of “Middle Eastern” or “Kurdish”). This population cannot be identified in a comparable way across census cycles. Details on these populations were provided in a highlight box within the portrait.

Arabian Peninsula: In this portrait, the Arabian Peninsula is defined as Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Yemen.

Canadian-born: In this portrait, this term refers to people born in Canada, irrespective of their immigrant status. There are some non-immigrants born outside Canada (for example, children of Canadian citizens who were living abroad or travelling when their child was born) and a small number of immigrants born in Canada (for example, children of foreign diplomatic personnel).

Economic immigrant: This refers to an immigrant who has been selected for their ability to contribute to Canada's economy through their ability to meet labour market needs, to own and manage or to build a business, to make a substantial investment, to create their own employment, or to meet specific provincial or territorial labour market needs.

Educational attainment: "Educational attainment," "level of education" and "highest level of education" refer to the highest level of education that a person has successfully completed, using the classification of highest certificate, diploma or degree. The general hierarchy used in deriving this variable (high school, trades, college, university) is loosely tied to the "in-class" duration of the various types of education.

Employment rate: The employment rate for a particular group (age, gender, marital status, geographic area, etc.) is the number of people in that group who were employed in the week of Sunday, May 2, to Saturday, May 8, 2021, expressed as a percentage of the total population in that group. It is applicable to the population aged 15 years and over. The employed population includes people who did any paid work as an employee or a self-employed person; did unpaid work contributing directly to the operation of a farm, business or professional practice owned and operated by a related member of the same household; or had a job but were not at work because of factors such as their own illness or disability, personal or family responsibilities, a vacation, or a labour dispute.

Ethnic or cultural origin: This refers to the ethnic or cultural origins of a person's ancestors. Ancestors may have Indigenous origins, origins that refer to different countries or other origins that may not refer to different countries. Often referred to as a person's ancestral "roots," ethnic or cultural origins should not be confused with citizenship, nationality, language or place of birth.

Gender: This refers to an individual's personal and social identity as a man, woman or non-binary person (a person who is not exclusively a man or a woman) and includes the following concepts:

- gender identity, which refers to the gender that a person feels internally and individually
- gender expression, which refers to the way a person presents their gender, regardless of their gender identity, through body language, aesthetic choices or accessories (e.g., clothes, hairstyle and makeup) that may have traditionally been associated with a specific gender.

A person's gender may differ from their sex at birth, and from what is indicated on their current identification or legal documents such as their birth certificate, passport or driver's licence. A person's gender may change over time. Some people may not identify with a specific gender.

The sex variable in census years before 2021 and the two-category gender variable in the 2021 Census are combined in this analysis to make historical comparisons. Although sex and gender refer to two different concepts, the introduction of gender in 2021 is not expected to have a significant impact on data analysis and historical comparability, given the small size of the transgender and non-binary populations. For additional information on changes of concepts over time, please consult the *Age, Sex at Birth and Gender Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021*.

Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is sometimes necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses. In these cases, individuals in the category "non-binary persons" are distributed into the other two gender categories. Unless otherwise indicated, the category "men" includes men, boys and some non-binary people, while the category "women" includes women, girls and some non-binary people.

Generation status: This refers to whether a person or the person's parents were born in Canada.

- The term "first generation" includes people who were born outside Canada.
- The term "second generation" includes people who were born in Canada and had at least one parent born outside Canada.
- The term "third generation or more" includes people who were born in Canada and whose parents were both also born in Canada.

Immigrant: This refers to a person who is, or has been, a landed immigrant or permanent resident. Such a person has been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities. Immigrants who have obtained Canadian citizenship by naturalization are included in this group. In the 2021 Census of Population, it includes immigrants who were admitted to Canada on or prior to May 11, 2021.

Immigrant sponsored by family: This refers to an immigrant who was sponsored by a Canadian citizen or permanent resident and was granted permanent resident status based on their relationship either as the spouse, partner, parent, grandparent, child or other relative of this sponsor. The terms "family class" or "family reunification" are sometimes used to refer to this category.

Location of study: This refers to the country of the institution from which a person obtained their highest certificate, diploma or degree. It refers to the location of the institution granting the certificate, diploma or degree, not the location of the person at the time they obtained the qualification or were attending the institution.

Maghreb: In this portrait, the Maghreb is defined as Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Western Sahara.

Major field of study: This refers to the predominant discipline or area of learning or training of a person's highest completed postsecondary certificate, diploma or degree, classified according to the Classification of Instructional Programs Canada 2021.

Non-racialized non-Indigenous population: In this portrait, the non-racialized non-Indigenous population is defined as those who were not categorized as a "visible minority" using the visible minority variable; were not categorized as "White and Arab," "White and Latin American" or "White and West Asian" using the population group variable; and did not report First Nations, Métis or Inuit identity in the question on Indigenous identity. In contrast to the standard definition, it excludes people who reported being both Arab and White, both Latin American and White or both West Asian and White. For more information on the visible minority and population group variables, consult the *Visible Minority and Population Group Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021*.

Northern Africa: Northern Africa is made up of Egypt, Sudan, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Western Sahara. This follows the Standard Classification of Countries and Areas of Interest 2019 – Countries and Areas of Interest for Social Statistics, which was used to classify place of birth and place of birth of parents in the 2021 Census of Population.

Occupation: This refers to the kind of work performed in a job, a job being all the tasks carried out by a particular worker to complete their duties. An occupation is a set of jobs that are sufficiently similar in work performed. In the 2021 Census of Population, occupations are classified according to the National Occupational Classification 2021.

Place of birth: This refers to the name of the geographic location (in this portrait, the country or area of interest) where the person was born. The geographic location is specified according to geographic boundaries current at the time of data collection, not the geographic boundaries at the time of birth.

Racialized populations: In this portrait, "racialized populations" or "racialized groups" are defined as people categorized as "visible minorities" ("South Asian," "Chinese," "Black," "Filipino," "Latin American," "Arab," "Southeast Asian," "West Asian," "Korean," "Japanese," "multiple visible minorities" and "visible minority not identified elsewhere") according to the visible minority variable, as well as those categorized as "White and Arab," "White and Latin American" or "White and West Asian" according to the "population group" variable. The inclusion of the "White and Arab," "White and Latin American" or "White and West Asian" populations as part of the

racialized populations is a departure from the standard concept of the racialized populations. In this analysis, the racialized populations exclude Indigenous respondents. For more information about the derivation of the racialized populations, consult the *Visible Minority and Population Group Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021*.

Refugee: This refers to an immigrant who was granted permanent resident status based on a well-founded fear of returning to their home country.

Religion: This refers to a person's self-identified connection to or affiliation with any religious denomination, group, body or other religiously defined community or system of belief. Religion is not limited to formal membership in a religious organization or group. For infants or children, religion refers to the specific religious group or denomination, if any, in which they are being raised.

Southwest Asia: In this portrait, Southwest Asia is defined as Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula (Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Yemen), Jordan, Israel, and the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Southwest Asia and Northern Africa: In this portrait, Southwest Asia and Northern Africa are defined as Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula (Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Yemen), Jordan, Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Egypt, Sudan, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Western Sahara.

Sub-Saharan Africa: In this portrait, this refers to Western, Central, Eastern and Southern Africa, as classified by the Standard Classification of Countries and Areas of Interest 2019 – Countries and Areas of Interest for Social Statistics.

Unemployment rate: The unemployment rate for a particular group (age, gender, marital status, geographic area, etc.) is the number of people in that group who were unemployed in the week of Sunday, May 2, to Saturday, May 8, 2021, expressed as a percentage of the labour force in that group. It is applicable to the population aged 15 years and over. The unemployed population includes people who, during the above reference period, were without work but had looked for work in the past four weeks ending with the reference period and were available for work; were on temporary layoff because of business conditions and were available for work; or were without work, had a job to start within four weeks from the reference period and were available for work. The labour force refers to people who were either employed or unemployed.

West Bank and Gaza Strip: This designates the territories referred to in the Declaration of Principles, signed by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1993. It includes responses of Palestine. This terminology follows the Standard Classification of Countries and Areas of Interest 2019 – Countries and Areas of Interest for Social Statistics, which was used to classify place of birth and place of birth of parents in the 2021 Census of Population.

Year of immigration: This refers to the year in which a person obtained permanent residency in Canada. This may not be the same as the year that they first arrived in Canada.

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Portrait of the Arab Populations in Canada: Diversity and Socioeconomic Outcomes

by **Katherine Wall**

Introduction

Portrait of the Arab Populations in Canada: Diversity and Socioeconomic Outcomes is part of a portrait series that Statistics Canada developed to support the initiatives under Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy, which seeks to address racism and discrimination faced by racialized groups and Indigenous peoples.[1] This analytical paper aligns with the Disaggregated Data Action Plan, a whole-of-government approach led by Statistics Canada to enhance data collection, analysis and dissemination that is representative of the diverse populations in Canada. The topics explored in this portrait were shaped by informal consultations and engagement with Arab community groups and academic experts across Canada. The main data source used is the Census of Population, along with some data from the 2020 General Social Survey on Social Identity.

The goals of the portrait are, first, to give an understanding of how the wide range of immigration histories and countries of origin relates to the growth, geographic distribution and sociocultural characteristics of Arab populations[2] in Canada and, second, to outline their socioeconomic outcomes and the challenges and barriers they face in relation to factors such as education, employment, occupations, income, housing and discrimination. These portraits are important first steps in shaping inclusive policy-making decisions, guiding the process from initial conception to effective implementation.

An intersectional approach is used to explore the relationships between multiple diversity measures (e.g., place of birth, ethnic and cultural origins, period of immigration, religion). Gaining insights into the diversity of these growing populations is an important step toward understanding their unique characteristics and experiences. Understanding the differences between groups can inform programs and services geared toward Arab populations in Canada and highlight their contributions in Canada.

A brief history of Arabs in Canada

The term "Arab" was not used in census data during much of the time period discussed in this history section, so it relies on other terms used for ethnic or cultural backgrounds, as well as on places of birth in Southwest Asia and Northern Africa. These regions are used because, in the 2021 Census, they were the place of birth of nearly 95% of Arabs born outside Canada. Not all immigrants from these regions in past censuses would necessarily have identified as Arab, even if they came from predominantly Arab countries.

Immigration from Southwest Asia to Canada began in the 1880s. The Canadian government classified these immigrants as "Syrians," but most were from the area that is now Lebanon, which, at the time, was part of the Ottoman Empire (Abu-Laban, 1992). The first recorded immigrant from this region to Canada was Abraham Bounadere, who came to Montréal in 1882 (Abu-Laban, 1992). Immigration from this region grew throughout the 1880s, the 1890s and the first decade of the 1900s, concurrent with Canada's rising immigration from other regions such as Eastern Europe. These immigrants were predominantly Christian. Many were young, unmarried men seeking economic opportunity (Abu-Laban, 1992; Asal, 2020; Hennebry and Amery, 2013; Tabar, 2010).

In the following years, the growth of the Southwest Asian population in Canada slowed because of both direct and indirect restrictions on immigration. For example, the 1908 Continuous Journey Regulation amendment to the *Immigration Act* barred the entry of any immigrant who did not reach Canada via a continuous journey from the country of which they were a citizen. At the same time, the government prohibited steamship companies from offering direct voyages to Canada from South Asia or Japan (Mawani, 2017). The combination of this regulation and the absence of direct oceanic travel to Canada from much of Asia largely prevented Asian

1. This portrait series on racialized groups was funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage, Government of Canada.
2. In this portrait, the terms "Arab population," "Arab populations" and "Arabs" are used interchangeably to refer to Arabs in Canada. This paper often pluralizes the Arab population group (e.g., "Arab populations") in recognition of the plurality of ethnicities, nationalities and geographic groups that this group encompasses.

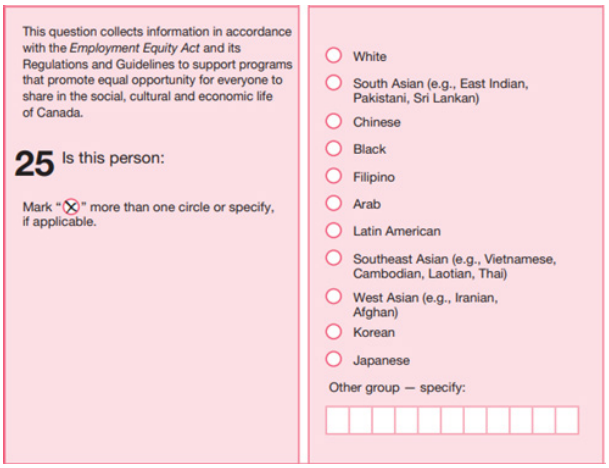
immigration from many regions (Mawani, 2017). Another restriction to immigration included the 1910 order-in-council PC 926 that required all "Asiatic" immigrants to have $200 upon arrival to be allowed entry (Abu-Laban, 1992; Mawani, 2017). For context, this was equivalent to a year's wages for an agricultural worker in Canada at the time (Statistics Canada, 1907), presenting a barrier to immigration (Abu-Laban, 1992). Immigration from Southwest Asia essentially halted until after the Second World War (Abu-Laban, 1992; Statistics Canada, 1951, 1961 and 1971). Growth in the Southwest Asian population in Canada during this time was largely made up of the descendants of those who had immigrated earlier.

During the 1950s, the main avenue for immigration from Southwest Asia or Northern Africa was through certain forms of family sponsorship (Hennebry and Amery, 2013; Kelley and Trebilcock, 1998). The removal of racial and nationality-focused restrictions on immigration over the course of the 1960s, and their replacement with points-based immigration focused on education and skills (Chui, Tran and Flanders, 2005), enabled greater Arab immigration. At that time, the main source countries of Arab immigration were Egypt and Lebanon[3] (Asal, 2020; Statistics Canada 1971 and 1981), and the majority of these immigrants were Christian (Asal, 2020).

Lebanese immigration to Canada grew again during the Lebanese Civil War (1975 to 1990), particularly at the beginning and end of the war. From the 1990s onwards, Arab immigrants to Canada came from a wider range of countries and were more likely to be Muslim. A major trend, particularly in the first decade of the 2000s, was rising Arab Muslim immigration from the Northern African countries of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia—all of which were once colonized by France (Rothermund, 2006)—to Quebec. The most recent major event in Arab immigration to Canada has been the admission of Syrian refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria, particularly from 2016 to 2019, with the highest peak of admissions in 2016.[4]

Population of interest

In this portrait, the Arab populations were defined and measured through the population group question in the Census of Population. Since the 2001 Census, "Arab" has been one of the population groups listed on the census questionnaire, based on the *Employment Equity Act* and its regulations. Respondents can choose to mark one or more population groups, or specify another group.[5]


This question collects information in accordance with the *Employment Equity Act* and its Regulations and Guidelines to support programs that promote equal opportunity for everyone to share in the social, cultural and economic life of Canada.

25 Is this person:

Mark "⊗" more than one circle or specify, if applicable.

- White
- South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan)
- Chinese
- Black
- Filipino
- Arab
- Latin American
- Southeast Asian (e.g., Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Thai)
- West Asian (e.g., Iranian, Afghan)
- Korean
- Japanese

Other group — specify:

Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population 2A-L questionnaire.

This portrait includes respondents who selected only the "Arab" category or provided a write-in response corresponding to that category (such as "Egyptian," "Jordanian," "Palestinian" or "Saudi Arabian"), or both, as well as those who selected both the "Arab" and "White" categories. The inclusion of those who selected both "Arab" and "White" is a departure from the standard definition and methods used in support of the *Employment Equity Act.*[6] It is done to be consistent with methods used for other racialized groups in this portrait series (e.g., the South Asian, Chinese, Black and Filipino populations) and to more fully reflect the characteristics of the Arab populations in Canada. For example, in 2021, over half of Canadian-born Arabs with at least one parent born in Canada reported being both Arab and White. The inclusion of those who selected both "Arab" and "White" increases the size of the Arab populations in 2021 from nearly 700,000 to nearly 800,000.[7] It increases the size of the Arab populations in 2001 from approximately 195,000 to approximately 233,000. For this reason, statistics reported in this portrait will differ from those shown in other Statistics Canada

3. There was also substantial immigration of Jewish Israelis and Jewish Moroccans to Canada in the 1960s (Statistics Canada, 1971 and 1981). Over 90% of Jewish people in Canada who were born in Israel or Morocco did not identify as Arab on the 2021 Census.
4. All information in this paragraph is based on the 2021 Census of Population.
5. For more information on the population group question and its derivation, refer to the *Visible Minority and Population Group Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021.*
6. Statistics Canada will continue to explore alternative ways to measure various population groups.
7. The definition of the Arab populations excludes 2,815 Arabs who responded to the population group question with the combination of Arab, White and certain write-in responses, and were categorized as "not a visible minority" in the visible minority variable. This group was included in the non-racialized non-Indigenous population. This was necessary for comparability to previous censuses.

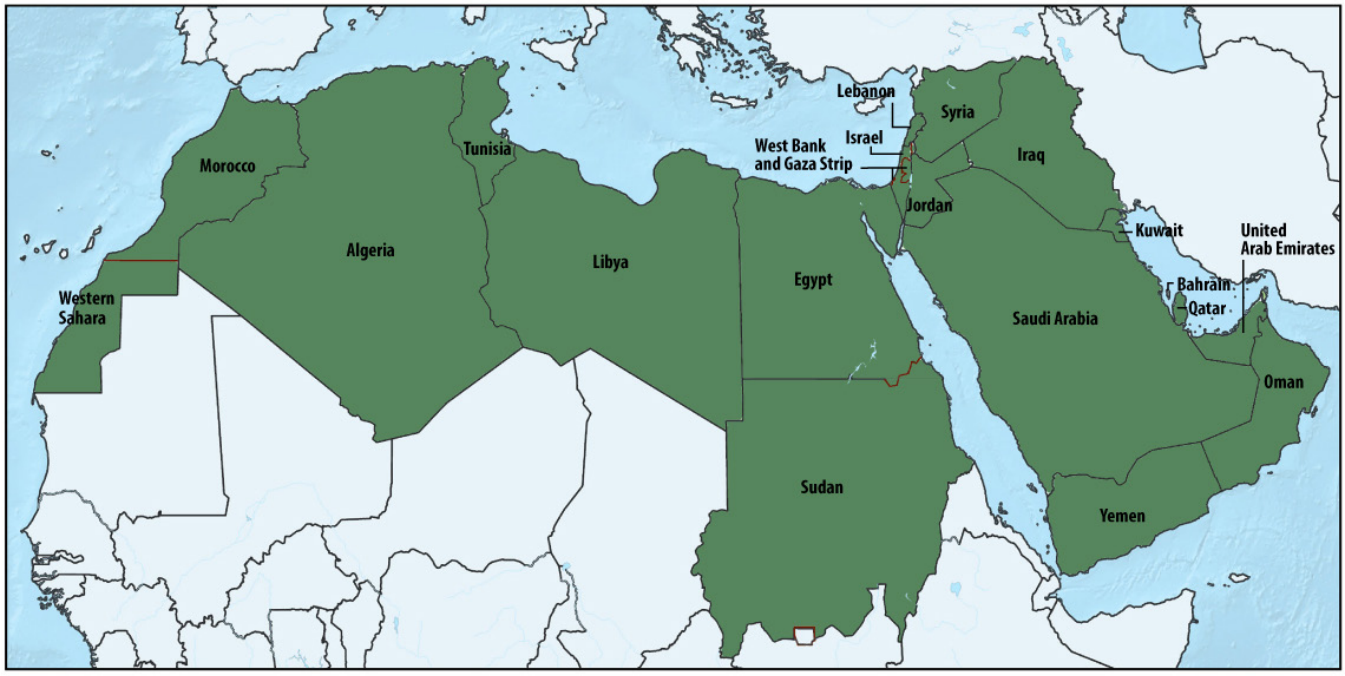
publications and in data tables from the 2021 Census. In line with this methodology, when reference is made to other population groups in this portrait, people who selected both "Latin American" and "White" are counted as Latin American, and people who selected both "West Asian" and "White" are counted as West Asian.

The non-racialized non-Indigenous population is defined as those who were not categorized as a "visible minority" using the visible minority variable; were not categorized as "White and Arab," "White and Latin American," or "White and West Asian" using the population group variable; and did not report a First Nations, Métis or Inuit identity in the question on Indigenous identity.

Details on populations who reported being both Arab and in one or more other racialized groups are provided in a highlight box. These populations are not included in the population of interest analyzed in this portrait, since they cannot be identified in a comparable way across census cycles. This approach is consistent with the methodology used in the rest of the portrait series. As of the 2021 Census, there were 45,065 Arabs in Canada who were both Arab and in another racialized group, representing 5.4% of all Arabs in Canada.

The main places of birth outside Canada that are analyzed in this portrait are in Southwest Asia and Northern Africa, the region shown in colour on the map below. In this portrait, Southwest Asia[8] is made up of Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula (Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Yemen), Jordan, Israel, and the West Bank and Gaza Strip.[9] Northern Africa is made up of Egypt, Sudan and the Maghreb (Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Western Sahara).[10,11] Nearly 95% of Arabs born outside Canada were born in Southwest Asia and Northern Africa.

Map 1
Geography of Southwest Asia and Northern Africa



Note: Global Affairs Canada provided advice and reviewed the depiction of international boundaries and other boundary features on the map. Note the representation of political boundaries on the map does not necessarily reflect the position of the Government of Canada on all international issues of recognition, sovereignty or jurisdiction.
Source: Natural Resources Canada, Atlas of Canada, Reference Map Series, MCR 0046, 2021.

8. "Southwest Asia" is used rather than "Middle East" as a more geographically neutral term. In consultations with community and academic groups and with other government departments, many participants opposed the use of the term "Middle East" as a concept that is vague and defined in terms of its location relative to Europe rather than in its own right.
9. "West Bank and Gaza Strip" designates the territories referred to in the Declaration of Principles, signed by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1993. It includes responses of Palestine. The terminology follows the Standard Classification of Countries and Areas of Interest 2019 – Countries and Areas of Interest for Social Statistics, which was used to classify place of birth and place of birth of parents in the 2021 Census of Population.
10. The Maghreb region also typically includes Mauritania. Few Arabs in Canada reported being born in Mauritania, so it is excluded from the region in this portrait. This keeps the region of Northern Africa consistent with the way it is constructed in the Standard Classification of Countries and Areas of Interest 2019 – Countries and Areas of Interest for Social Statistics.
11. The inclusion of a location in this portrait is based on the Standard Classification of Countries and Areas of Interest 2019 – Countries and Areas of Interest for Social Statistics.

Executive summary

- Arab populations in Canada more than tripled from 2001 to 2021, reaching 795,665 people, or 2.2% of the population of Canada. According to the latest available population projections, by 2041, Arab populations in Canada could number 1.4 million to 1.9 million people, constituting 3.1% to 3.6% of the population of Canada.[12]
- About 3 in 10 Arabs in Canada in 2021 were born in Canada, while nearly all the rest were born in Southwest Asia or Northern Africa.
- While the majority of people in Canada who were born in Southwest Asia or Northern Africa were Arab, 3 in 10 were non-Arab.
- The countries of birth of Arabs born outside Canada became more varied from 2001 to 2021. The share of Arabs who were born in Lebanon decreased by half, while the share born in countries such as Syria, Algeria and Morocco rose.
- As of the 2021 Census, over half (51.3%) of Arab immigrants in Canada who had been admitted from 1980 onwards were economic immigrants. Economic immigrants were the largest category of Arab immigrants for every year from 1980 to 2014. From 2015 to 2020, refugees were the largest group of Arab immigrants, mainly because of the admission of refugees escaping the conflict in Syria.
- Arab populations were young, with most Arabs living in families with children. In 2021, over one-quarter (27.0%) of Arabs in Canada were children under the age of 15.
- Arabs reported 253 different ethnic or cultural origins in 2021.
- As of the 2021 Census, 7 in 10 Arabs (70.1%) were Muslim, while 2 in 10 (21.2%) were Christian; more than one-third of Arabs born in Egypt, Lebanon or Iraq were Christian.
- Arabs made up less than one-third (31.4%) of the Muslim population in Canada in 2021.
- In 2021, nearly all Arabs had Arabic, English, French or some combination of these as their mother tongues. Over 95% knew either English or French, and over three-quarters knew both Arabic and at least one official language.
- In 2021, the majority (50.7%) of Arabs aged 25 to 54 had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with less than one-third (31.5%) of the non-racialized non-Indigenous population in the same age group. Arabs were more than three times as likely as the overall Canadian population to have degrees in pharmacy, dentistry or medicine, and 2.4 times more likely to have an earned doctorate.
- Despite their high educational attainment and high representation in key health fields of study, Arabs had lower employment rates and higher unemployment rates than the non-racialized non-Indigenous population. This was particularly the case for Arab women.
- Arabs also appeared to experience barriers to finding work related to their degrees: less than half of Arabs with foreign degrees in pharmacy, dentistry or medicine worked as pharmacists, dentists or physicians, respectively.
- In 2020, the median adjusted family after-tax income of Arabs was $40,400. This was lower than for any other racialized group in Canada, and it was below the overall Canadian median of $53,600.
- Despite these challenges, as of 2020, Arabs tended to report higher levels of confidence in several institutions (the federal Parliament, the school system, the justice system and courts, and major corporations) than the non-racialized non-Indigenous population, as well as a stronger sense of belonging to Canada, their province, their city or town, and their local community.
- As of 2020, nearly 4 in 10 Arabs reported having experienced discrimination at some point in the past six years. Arabs who experienced discrimination had lower levels of confidence in many institutions than those who did not report having experienced discrimination.

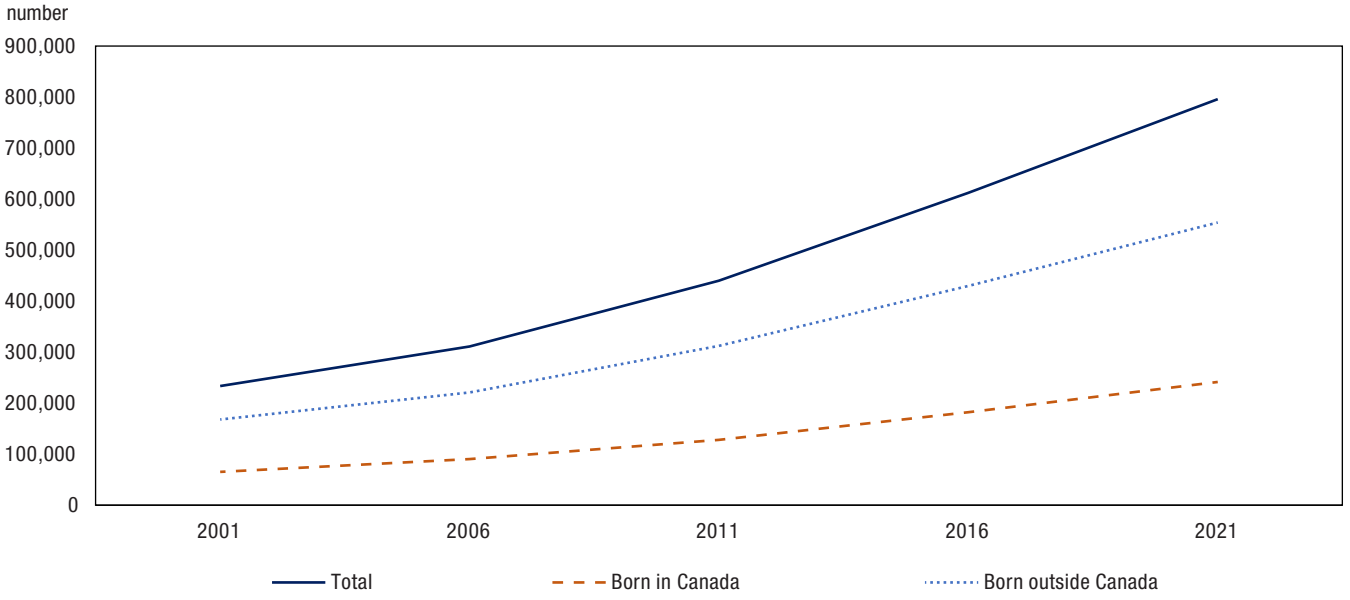
12. The population projections are based on the standard definition of the Arab population, which does not include people who report being both Arab and White. This differs from the definition used in the rest of the portrait (see the "Population of interest" section above).

Section 1: Demography, geography and immigration

The Arab populations in Canada more than tripled from 2001 to 2021

In 2021, nearly 800,000 Arabs lived in Canada, more than three times as many as in 2001 (Chart 1). They made up 2.2% of the population of Canada, more than twice as much as in 2001 (0.8%). Arabs were the fifth-largest racialized group in Canada, after the South Asian, Chinese, Black and Filipino populations. According to the latest available population projections by racialized group, and based on the low-growth and high-growth scenarios, by 2041 the Arab populations in Canada could number 1.4 million to 1.9 million people and make up 3.1% to 3.6% of the total population. Based on the same set of projections, the Arab and West Asian[13] populations would have the fastest growth rates among racialized groups (Statistics Canada, 2022).[14]

Chart 1
Arab populations by place of birth, Canada, 2001 to 2021



Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2001, 2006, 2016 and 2021; and National Household Survey, 2011.

The growth in the Canadian-born Arab population was slightly faster than the growth in the Arab population born outside Canada. The Canadian-born Arab population in 2021 was 3.7 times larger than it had been in 2001, while the Arab population born outside Canada was 3.3 times larger.

Nearly all Arabs in Canada were born either in Canada or in Southwest Asia and Northern Africa

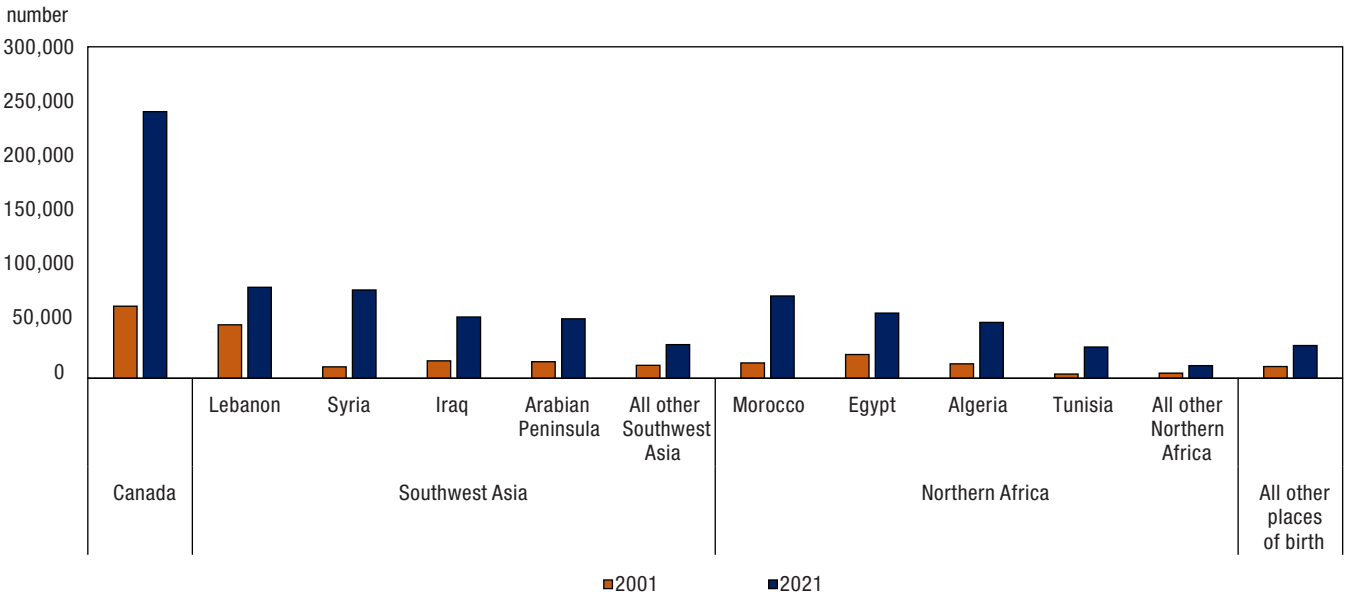
The most common country of birth for the Arab populations in Canada was Canada. In 2021, 3 in 10 Arabs (30.3%) had been born in Canada, slightly higher than in 2001 (27.9%). Among Canadian-born Arabs, 90.2% had a least one parent born in Southwest Asia or Northern Africa; most of the remainder (7.0%) had both parents born in Canada.

Nearly all the rest of the Arab populations in Canada were born in the regions of Southwest Asia (37.9%) or Northern Africa (28.1%). Other than Canada, the most common places of birth of Arab populations in Canada in 2021 were Lebanon (10.3%), Syria (10.0%), Iraq (7.0%) and the Arabian Peninsula (6.8%) in Southwest Asia, and Morocco (9.4%), Egypt (7.4%) and Algeria (6.4%) in Northern Africa.

13. The West Asian population was mainly Iranian and Afghan.
14. The population projections are based on the standard definition of the Arab population, which does not include people who report being both Arab and White. This differs from the definition used in the rest of the portrait (see the "Population of interest" section above).

The places of birth of the Arab populations in Canada have become more varied over the past two decades (Chart 2). While in 2001, one-fifth of Arabs in Canada had been born in Lebanon, that figure fell to one-tenth by 2021. In 2021, the number who had been born in Syria was more than seven times larger than it was in 2001, largely because of immigration from 2015 to 2019 related to the conflict in Syria. The number born in the western region of Northern Africa, known as the Maghreb (Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Western Sahara) was five times larger than in 2001.

Chart 2
Arab populations by place of birth, Canada, 2001 and 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2001 and 2021.

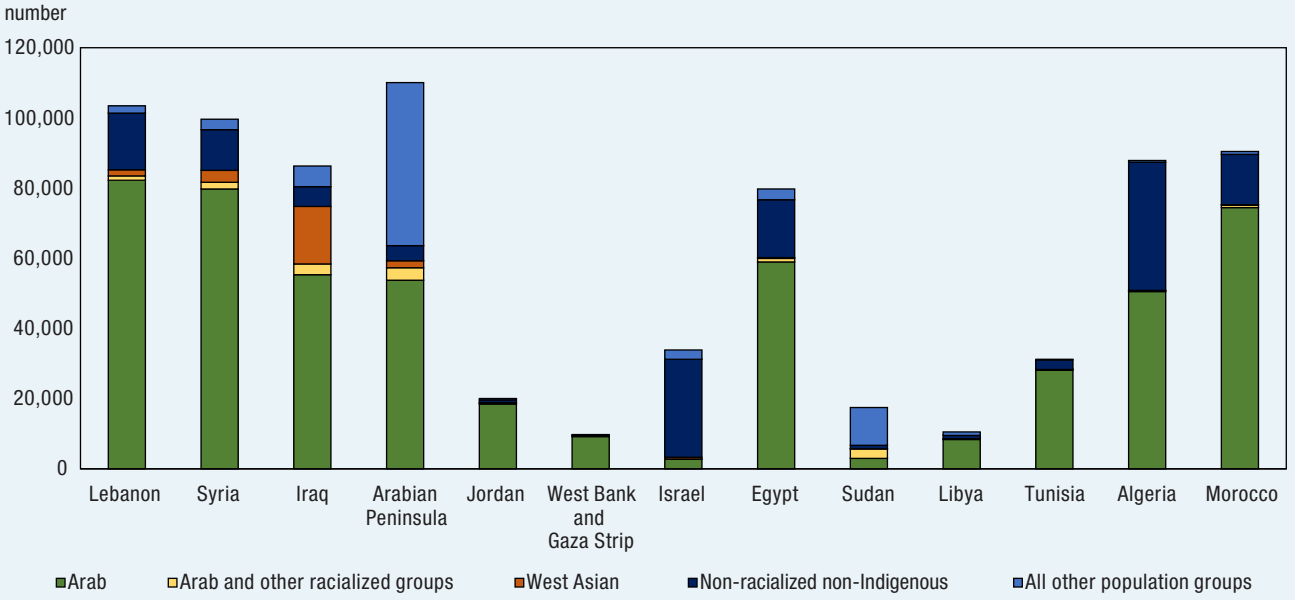
In 2021, among the 29,430 Arabs who were not born in either Canada or Southwest Asia and Northern Africa, the most common places of birth were the United States of America (6,705), France (5,600), Turkey (1,635), Iran (1,490) and the United Kingdom (1,425). There were also 4,835 born in sub-Saharan Africa, including Mauritania (710) and Somalia (700).

Three in 10 people in Canada who were born in Southwest Asia or Northern Africa were not Arab

Among people in Canada who were born in Southwest Asia or Northern Africa, 3 in 10 (30.8%) did not report being Arab in the population group question on the 2021 Census.[15] This included large populations from Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula, Israel, Egypt, Sudan, Algeria and Morocco (Chart 3).

15. This changes to 30.6% if the population includes the 2,815 Arabs who reported being both Arab and White and also provided certain write-in responses, who are counted in the non-racialized non-Indigenous population in the portrait to allow for comparability to previous censuses.

Chart 3
Populations born in Southwest Asia and Northern Africa, by selected population groups and place of birth, Canada, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

The non-Arab populations of the region were varied and differed by place of birth. Among those born in Sudan, 89.4% of the non-Arab population was Black, while 64.2% of non-Arabs born in the Arabian Peninsula were South Asian. Of non-Arabs born in Iraq, 58.9% were West Asian and another 19.0% were in the category "racialized group not included elsewhere," meaning they provided write-in responses (such as "Kurdish" or "Middle Eastern") that did not correspond to any of the 10 main racialized groups listed in the census. Among those born in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and the Maghreb, the majority of the non-Arab populations were non-racialized and non-Indigenous.[16]

Information on ethnic and cultural origins can shed further light on non-Arab populations. Non-Arabs included several Christian ethnic minorities, such as Armenians, mainly from Syria and Lebanon; Assyrians and Chaldeans, mainly from Iraq; and Coptic people, mainly from Egypt.[17] There were also Kurds from Iraq and Syria, Jewish Israelis, Berber (Amazigh)[18] populations from Algeria and Morocco, Kabyle populations from Morocco, and Jewish Moroccans. In addition, the non-Arab populations included people who did not report being in any of these groups or in any racialized group and only gave an ethnic or cultural origin associated with a country (e.g., Algerian, Lebanese).

Among people with certain ethnic and cultural origins mentioned above, there were some who reported being Arab in the population group question and some who did not. Of those born in Southwest Asia or Northern Africa, over half (61.6%) of the Coptic population reported being Arab, as did about two in five Berber (Amazigh) people (41.8%) and Chaldeans (39.9%), 29.0% of Assyrians, 25.7% of Kurds, 22.8% of Kabyle people, and 17.1% of Armenians.

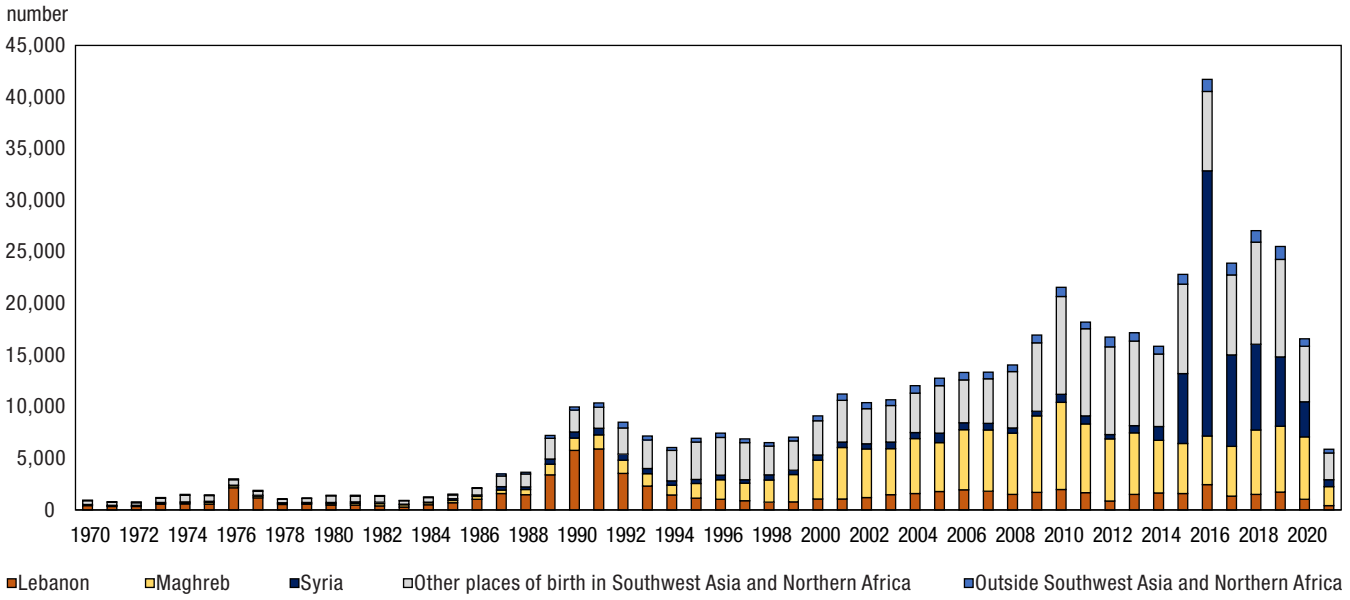
16. Nearly half of the non-Arab population born in Northern Africa gave a write-in response for the population group question, with some of the most common responses being "Kabyle" or "Berber" (mainly for those born in Algeria) and "Coptic" (mainly for those born in Egypt), and other responses including "North African," "Amazigh" and "Maghrebin."
17. Over 94% of the non-Arab population in each of these groups was Christian, based on the religion variable.
18. "Berber (Amazigh)" is used for populations categorized as Berber based on write-in responses to the census question on ethnic and cultural origins. This includes both responses of Berber and responses of Amazigh. The majority of responses were "Berber" or variations.

The main places of birth of Arabs in Canada differed depending on when they immigrated

The increase in the share of Arabs in Canada who were born in the Maghreb and Syria reflects changing immigration patterns over time, influenced in part by Canadian policies, as well as events in source countries.

The most common countries of birth for Arabs living in Canada in 2021 who immigrated from 1970 to 1994 were Lebanon (45.4%) and Egypt (12.2%). A major factor in immigration from Lebanon was the Lebanese Civil War, which lasted from 1975 to 1990. In 1976, the Canadian government brought in special measures to enable the rapid immigration of Lebanese refugees (Hennebry and Amery, 2013). The most common years of immigration for Lebanese-born Arab immigrants living in Canada in 2021 were 1989 to 1992; those who immigrated in the early 1990s included some who arrived in Canada during the last years of the civil war but obtained their permanent residency (i.e., "immigrated") later because of administrative delays in processing their applications (Mangat, 1995). The majority (57.8%) of immigrants from Lebanon who immigrated from 1989 to 1992 were economic immigrants. People from Lebanon made up a smaller share of Arab immigrants who arrived after the mid-1990s (Chart 4).

Chart 4
Arab immigrants who were admitted from 1970 to 2021 by year of immigration and place of birth, Canada, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

The 1990s, and especially the first decade of the 2000s, saw rising numbers of Arab immigrants from the Maghreb region of Northern Africa. These immigrants were largely from Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, which had been controlled by France from the 1800s or early 1900s until the mid-1900s.[19] They mainly settled in Quebec, which had partial control over its own immigration policy starting in 1991 and gave preference to immigrants who were fluent in French (Wood and Fetzer, 2022). Another factor affecting their immigration was the Algerian Civil War from 1992 to 2002.

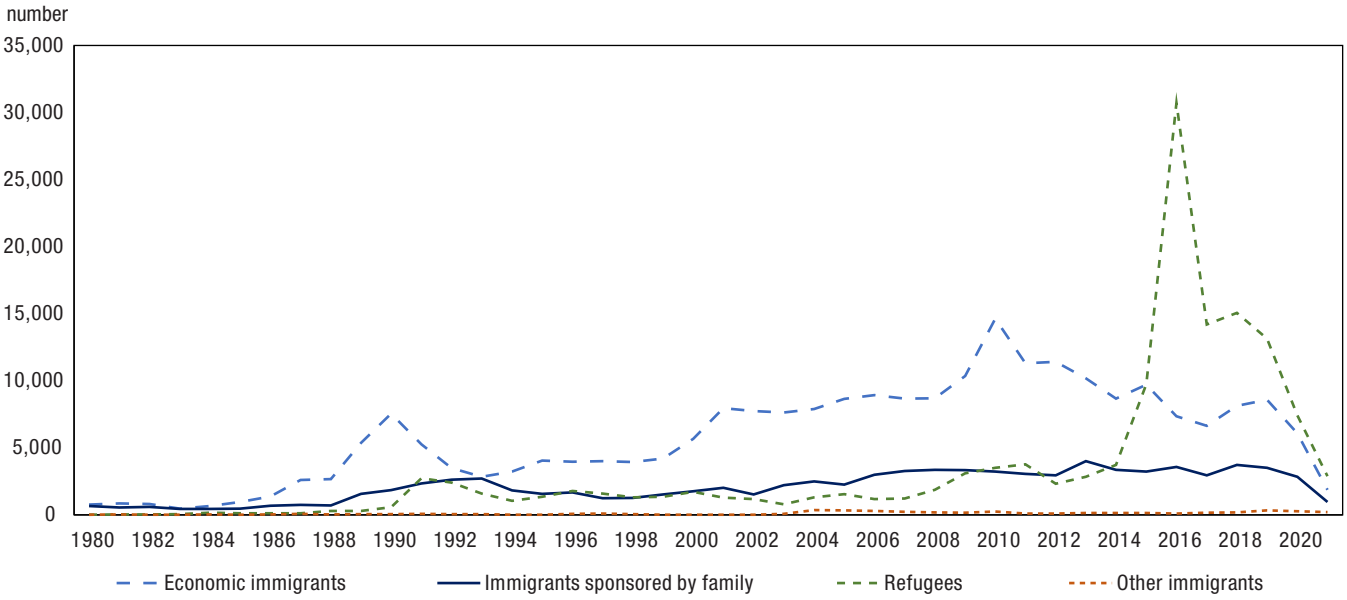
Syria was the most common country of birth of Arab immigrants from 2015 to 2019, as Canada responded to the Syrian refugee crisis. Two-thirds (66.0%) of all Arab refugees in Canada in 2021 had been admitted from 2015 to 2021. Conflicts and political upheavals in the region also influenced other Arab immigrants, with increases in Arab immigrants from Egypt (mainly economic) from 2010 to 2015, around and after the Arab Spring of 2011, and from Iraq (mainly refugees) from 2009 to 2019, following the military withdrawal of the United States from the country.

19. France colonized Algeria in 1830 and established a protectorate in Tunisia in 1883. In 1912, France and Spain set up protectorates over different parts of Morocco. Algeria, Tunisia and the French-controlled part of Morocco gained independence in the 1950s and 1960s (Rothermund, 2006).

A small majority of Arab immigrants were economic immigrants

In 2021, a little over half (51.3%) of Arabs in Canada who had immigrated from 1980 to 2021[20] were economic immigrants, while 29.5% were refugees and 18.4% were sponsored by family members.[21] Economic immigrants were the most common admission category of Arab immigrants for every year from 1980 to 2014. In contrast, from 2015 to 2021, refugees were the most common category because of the admission of refugees from the conflict in Syria (Chart 5).

Chart 5
Arab immigrants who were admitted from 1980 to 2021 by admission category and year of immigration, Canada, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

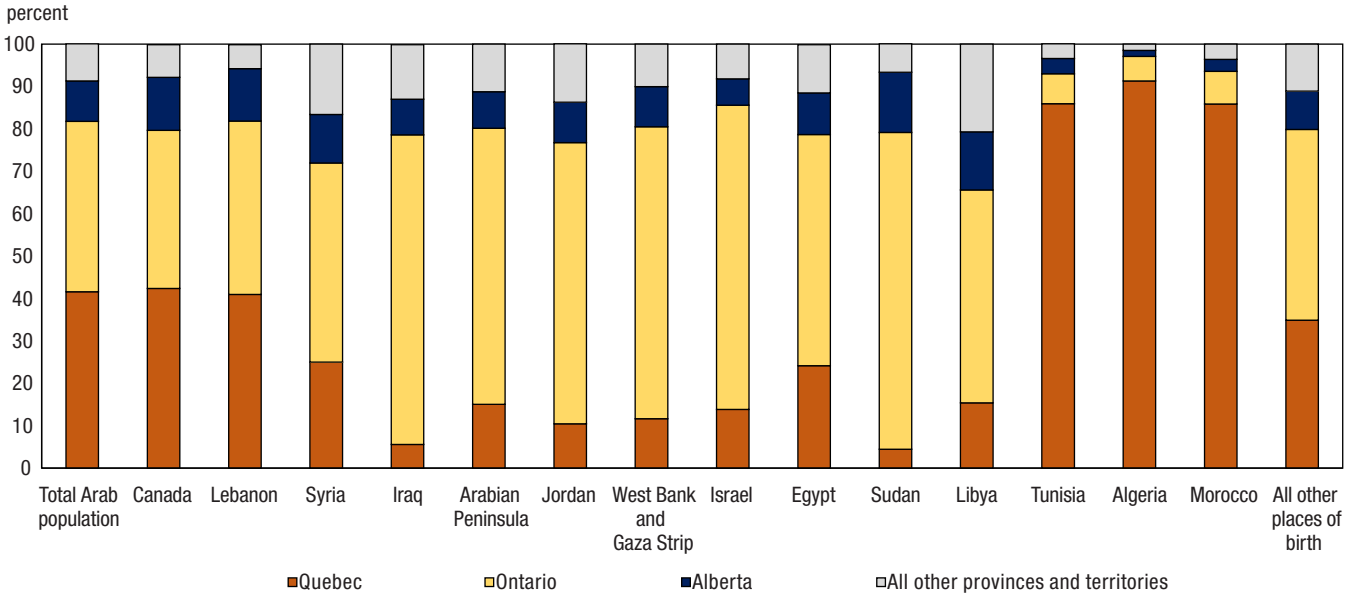
Economic immigrants made up the majority of Arab immigrants admitted from 1980 to 2021. The share of immigrants who were economic immigrants was particularly high among Arabs born in Egypt (77.3%), Algeria (71.1%), Morocco (70.4%), Tunisia (68.4%), the Arabian Peninsula (61.4%) and Jordan (58.8%). A little over half of Arab immigrants from Lebanon were economic immigrants (52.1%); another third (32.2%) were sponsored by family, reflecting the long-standing Lebanese presence in Canada, while 14.6% were refugees. Refugees made up the majority of Arab immigrants from Syria (78.3%) and Iraq (67.6%), both of which experienced major conflicts in the 21st century.

Arabs born in Northern African countries that were formerly colonies, mandates or protectorates of France tended to live in Quebec, while Arabs born in countries that were formerly colonies or mandates of Britain tended to live in Ontario

In 2021, the large majority of Arabs in Canada lived in either Quebec (41.6%) or Ontario (40.2%), while 9.5% lived in Alberta and 8.8% lived in other provinces and territories (Chart 6). The distribution was similar in 2001, although the share living in Ontario declined slightly (from 44.4% in 2001 to 40.2% in 2021), while the share in Quebec increased (from 39.1% in 2001 to 41.6% in 2021).

20. Data on admission category are not available for immigrants prior to 1980.
21. See the “Definitions” section for definitions of these admission categories.

Chart 6
Province of residence of Arab populations by place of birth, Canada, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

In 2021, over 80% of Arabs born in Morocco, Algeria or Tunisia lived in Quebec, while the majority of those born in Iraq, Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Israel, Egypt, or Sudan lived in Ontario. This pattern is related to colonial history and its impacts on language and culture. In the 1800s and early 1900s, France colonized Algeria and established protectorates in Tunisia and Morocco (Rothermund, 2006). After the First World War, France controlled Lebanon and Syria under the mandate system (Cleveland and Bunton, 2009). Britain colonized Egypt and Sudan in the 1800s and controlled Iraq, Jordan[22] and Palestine (now Israel and the West Bank and Gaza Strip) under the mandate system after the First World War (Cleveland and Bunton, 2009).

The provinces and territories of residence of Arabs born in Lebanon or Syria were more varied. Immigration from Lebanon to Canada began in the late 1800s, before the French mandate, when the region was still under the control of the Ottoman Empire (Abu-Laban, 1992). In 2021, 41.0% of the Arab population born in Lebanon lived in Quebec, 40.9% in Ontario, 12.3% in Alberta, and 5.7% in other provinces and territories. The Syrian-born population was mainly in Ontario (47.0%), with 25.0% in Quebec, 11.4% in Alberta, and 16.6% in other provinces and territories. The comparatively larger share of Syrian-born Arabs in provinces and territories other than Ontario, Quebec and Alberta can be attributed to the acceptance of Syrian refugees by provinces and communities across Canada.

Arabs living in Alberta were more likely to have been born in Canada (40.1%) than those in Quebec (30.9%) or Ontario (28.2%). Their next most common place of birth was Lebanon (13.4%). The origins of the Arab community in Alberta date back to Lebanese immigration in the early 1900s (Lac La Biche Museum, 2017). The Lebanese community grew further from the 1950s to the 1970s, with the reopening of Canada to immigration from Southwest Asia, followed by the start of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975. In the 2001 Census, over one-fifth (21.2%) of Arab immigrants who were born in Lebanon and immigrated from 1950 to 1979 lived in Alberta.

Arabs living in provinces and territories other than Quebec, Ontario or Alberta were more likely to be refugees (48.2%) than those in Ontario (39.9%), Alberta (36.6%) or Quebec (13.2%).

22. Called Transjordan at the time.

Over one-third of Arabs lived in Montréal

In 2021, nearly all Arabs (96.8%) lived in cities of 100,000 people or more (census metropolitan areas).

More than one-third of all Arabs in Canada (36.5%, or 290,070) lived in Montréal. The census metropolitan areas with the next-largest Arab populations were Toronto (145,815), Ottawa–Gatineau (78,815), Calgary (34,855), Edmonton (34,660) and Windsor (29,000). Overall, more than three-quarters (77.1%) of Arabs in Canada lived in these six census metropolitan areas.

Montréal was home to the large majority of Arabs born in Algeria (84.0%), Morocco (74.1%) or Tunisia (62.0%), while Toronto was home to more than one-third of Arabs born in Iraq (39.3%) or Egypt (36.2%).

The Arab share of the total population was largest in the census metropolitan area of Windsor, where 7.0% of the population were Arab, followed by Montréal (6.9%), Ottawa–Gatineau (5.4%) and London (4.5%).

Arab immigrants were slightly more likely to be men than women, whereas the opposite was the case for nearly all other racialized groups

A little over half (52.1%) of Arab immigrants were men, whereas among nearly[23] all other racialized groups and the non-racialized non-Indigenous population, the majority of immigrants were women. Among Arab economic immigrants, 56.1% were men, while among other racialized groups, this share ranged from 38.8% (Japanese people) to 54.7% (South Asians). The majority of Arab refugees were also men (53.0%), particularly among those who immigrated from 1980 to 2003 (61.2%), relative to those who immigrated from 2004 to 2021 (51.5%). The majority (61.7%) of Arab immigrants sponsored by family were women, as was also the case among all other racialized groups and the non-racialized non-Indigenous population.

The Arab populations were younger than the overall population of Canada, and most lived in two-parent families with children

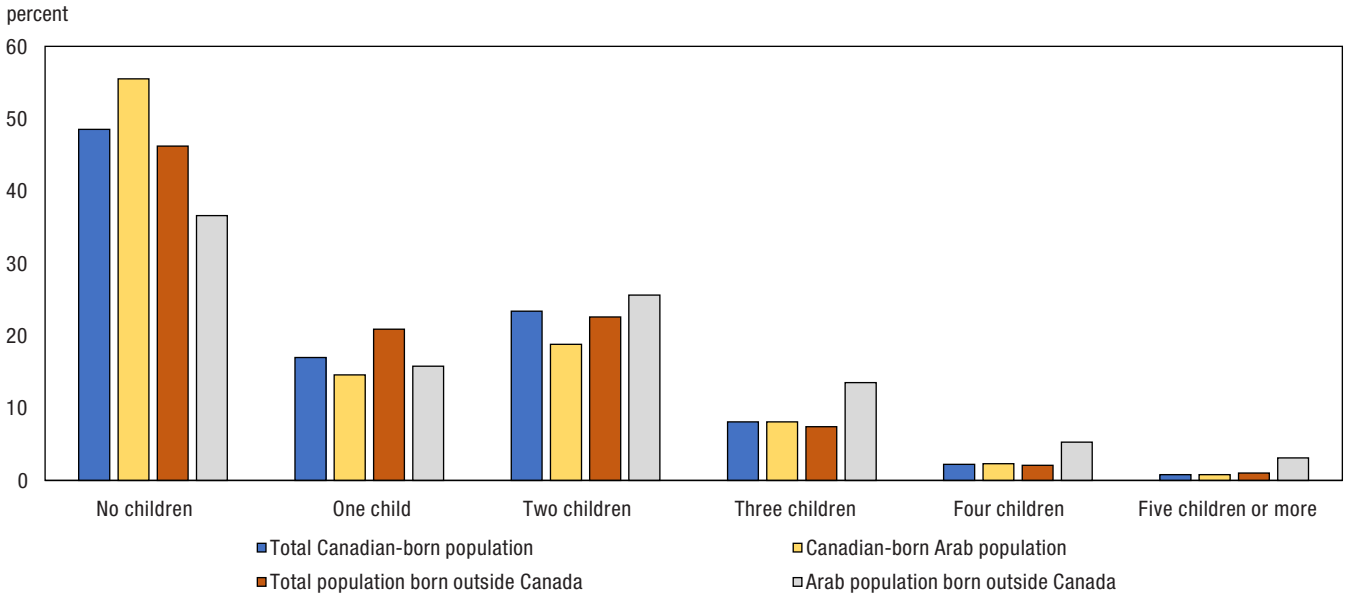
In 2021, over one-quarter (27.0%) of Arabs in Canada were under the age of 15. This was similar to the share for the Black populations (26.1%) but larger than that seen among other racialized groups.[24] The share of Arabs who were aged 65 and over was, at 6.1%, smaller than for any other racialized group. As a result, the median age of Arabs was 30.2, more than 10 years younger than the overall median age in Canada of 41.2. This was related to differences in family composition.

Most Arabs (63.6%) lived in households made up of a two-parent family with children. This was a considerably larger proportion than in the overall population of Canada (40.5%), and it was larger than in any other racialized group (the next largest was West Asians, at 51.1%).

Among Arabs aged 30 to 39,[25] 60.9% had at least one child aged 0 to 18 living at home, which was a higher share than among any other racialized group (the next highest was South Asians, at 56.8%), and a higher share than the Canadian average of 52.3%. This pattern was observed only among Arabs born outside Canada. In contrast, less than half (44.5%) of Canadian-born Arabs in their 30s had children aged 0 to 18. Arabs born outside Canada also tended to have larger families, with a little over one-fifth (21.9%) of those aged 30 to 39 having three children or more who were aged 0 to 18 and lived in the same household (Chart 7).

23. The exception was West Asian immigrants, 50.1% of whom were men.
24. Among people belonging to multiple different racialized groups, the share who were under the age of 15 was higher. This was true both for those who were Arab and in one or more other racialized groups (37.7% were under the age of 15) and for those who were in two or more non-Arab racialized groups (32.7% were under the age of 15).
25. This age range was chosen to minimize differences related to different age structures of populations.

Chart 7
Presence and number of children aged 0 to 18, for population aged 30 to 39, by place of birth and selected population groups, Canada, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

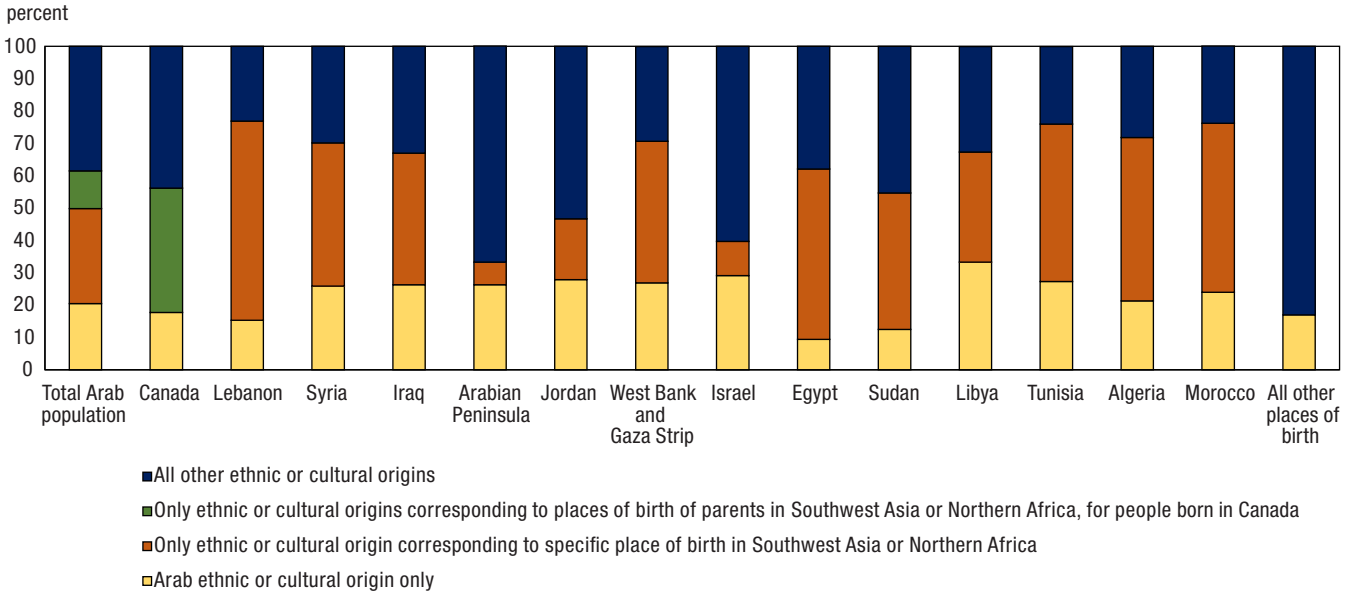
Arabs were less likely to live in multigenerational households (5.9%) compared with the overall population of Canada (6.6%). They were also slightly less likely to live in one-parent families (8.8%) than the Canadian average (9.2%).

Section 2: Ethnocultural, religious and linguistic diversity

The main ethnic origins reported by the Arab populations were "Arab" or an origin corresponding to their place of birth

Approximately 2 in 10 Arabs (20.5%) reported "Arab" as their only ethnic or cultural origin. Another 4 in 10 (41.0%) reported either only an origin corresponding to their place of birth in Southwest Asia or Northern Africa (for example, people born in Lebanon whose only ethnic or cultural origin was "Lebanese") or, for those born in Canada, only origins corresponding to the places of birth of their parents in Southwest Asia or Northern Africa. The majority of Arabs born in Lebanon (61.6%), Egypt (52.7%), Algeria (50.5%) or Morocco (52.2%) reported an ethnic or cultural origin associated with their place of birth (i.e., Lebanese, Egyptian, Algerian or Moroccan, respectively) as their only origin (Chart 8).

Chart 8
Summarized ethnic and cultural origins of Arab populations by place of birth, Canada, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

In total, about 3 in 10 Arabs (29.0%) reported Arab as an ethnic or cultural origin (either alone or in combination with other origins); it was the most commonly reported origin. The share ranged from 11.1% of those who were born in Canada to Canadian-born parents to 44.5% of those born in Yemen. Among Arabs born in Southwest Asia or Northern Africa, the lowest shares reporting Arab as an ethnic or cultural origin were among those born in Egypt (16.9%) and Lebanon (19.7%).

After "Arab," the nine next most common ethnic and cultural origins reported by Arab populations in Canada were Lebanese (16.6%), Egyptian (9.2%), Syrian (8.9%), Moroccan (8.9%), Algerian (6.0%), Iraqi (5.1%), Palestinian (5.1%), regional origins such as "Middle Eastern" (4.5%) and Muslim (3.9%). In total, Arabs reported 253 different ethnic or cultural origins.

There were significant Arab populations who reported ethnic and cultural origins corresponding to places that were not their place of birth. This was particularly common among Arabs born in the Arabian Peninsula. Some common ethnic or cultural origins of Arabs born in the Arabian Peninsula were Palestinian (17.6%), Egyptian (10.3%), Syrian (8.8%) and Lebanese (7.4%). A similar pattern was seen among those born in Jordan, 22.8% of whom reported Palestinian ethnic or cultural origins and 6.9% of whom reported Syrian ethnic or cultural origins. For some other places of birth, this pattern was present to a more limited degree. For example, the ethnic and cultural origins of Arabs born in Lebanon also included Palestinian (3.6%) and Syrian (3.1%). For more information on this, see Box 2, "Arab regional diaspora populations."

In addition, many countries in Southwest Asia and Northern Africa have ethnic or cultural minority populations whose identity can overlap with the Arab identity. Among Arabs in Canada, 16.2% of those born in Egypt reported Coptic ethnic or cultural origins; 9.6% of those born in Algeria, 7.4% of those born in Morocco and 3.1% of those born in Tunisia reported Berber (Amazigh) ethnic or cultural origins; 5.8% of those born in Algeria reported Kabyle ethnic or cultural origins; and, among those born in Iraq, 4.8% reported Chaldean ethnic or cultural origins and 4.1% reported Assyrian ethnic or cultural origins. Additionally, there were also people born in Southwest Asia and Northern Africa who belonged to ethnic or cultural minority populations and did not report being Arab on the population group question in the census, including Armenians born in Lebanon and Syria, Kurds born in Syria and Iraq, and Jewish people born in Morocco.

The majority of Arabs who were born in Canada to Canadian-born parents reported Lebanese ethnic or cultural origins (56.2%), being descended from early Lebanese immigrants to Canada. Some also reported Irish (13.0%), English (10.5%), Scottish (10.5%) or French (9.8%) origins, as Arab Canadians married Canadians of other backgrounds.

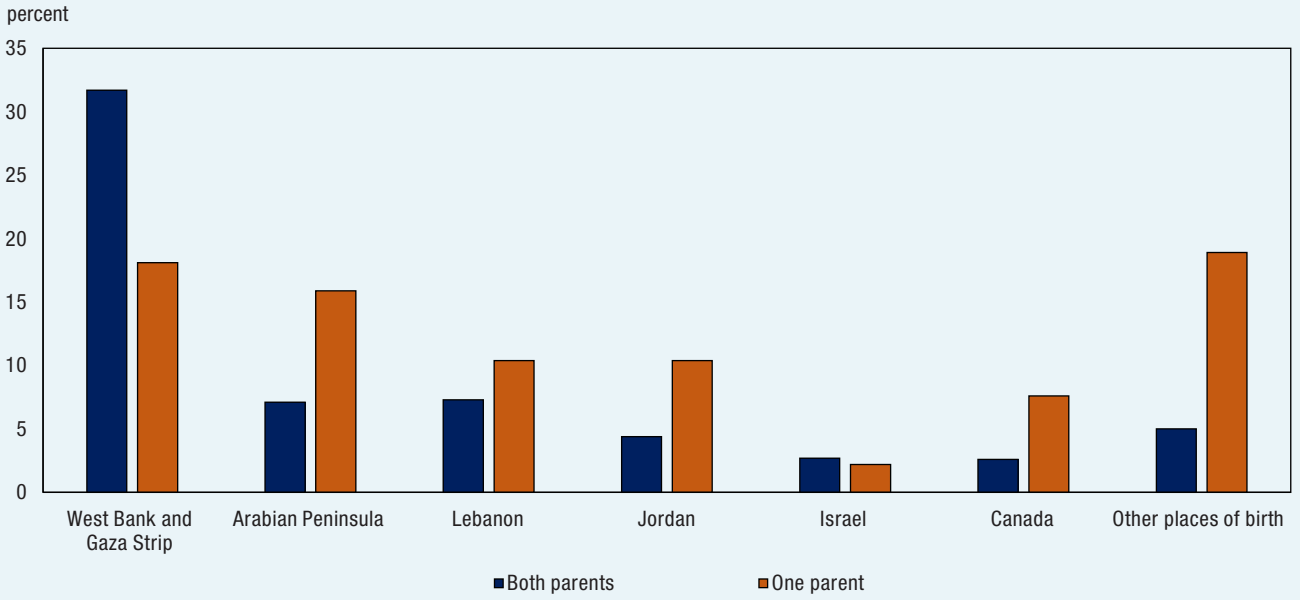
Arab regional diaspora populations

Most individuals born in Canada report ethnic or cultural origins associated with another place in the world. This reflects the fact that most Canadian-born people, other than Indigenous populations, have ancestors who migrated to Canada from another country at some point in history. However, international migration throughout history is not unique to Canada, and many who have migrated to Canada may also have origins that do not necessarily correspond to their place of birth. This is true for the Arab populations in Canada, as well as others. Similar to the pathways taken to migrate to Canada, some of these prior migrations may have been for family or economic reasons, but in other cases, individuals and families left their place of origin as refugees because of conflict or fear of persecution.

Analyses of connections between place of birth, place of birth of parents, and ethnic and cultural origins in the Arab populations show substantial populations who had ethnic and cultural origins corresponding to one place but were born in another place.[26] For example, 18.2% of Arabs with Syrian ethnic or cultural origins (12,945) had a birthplace other than Syria or Canada; 12.5% (9,170) with Egyptian ethnic or cultural origins had a birthplace other than Egypt or Canada; 10.4% (4,250) with Iraqi ethnic or cultural origins had a birthplace other than Iraq or Canada; and 8.4% (11,035) with Lebanese ethnic or cultural origins had a birthplace other than Lebanon or Canada.

The largest of these diaspora populations was Arabs with Palestinian ethnic or cultural origins. In total, 40,275 Arabs in Canada reported Palestinian ethnic or cultural origins, and less than half (46.9%) were born in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (12.8%) or Canada (34.0%). The majority (53.1%, or 21,400 people) were born in other places, including the Arabian Peninsula (23.4%), Jordan (10.5%) and Lebanon (7.3%), as well as smaller shares born in Syria (3.2%) or Israel (2.3%). The places of birth of their parents were similarly varied: just under half (49.8%) had at least one parent born in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This included 31.7% who had both parents born in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and 18.1% who had one parent born there and one born elsewhere. Other common places of birth of parents included the Arabian Peninsula, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel and Canada (Chart 9).

Chart 9
Places of birth of parents for Arabs with Palestinian ethnic or cultural origins, Canada, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

26. People respond to the question on ethnic and cultural origins with varying levels of detail. For example, as noted in the previous section, about one in five Arabs reported "Arab" as their only ethnic or cultural origin.

These findings highlight the limitations of the place of birth variable in providing a complete understanding of the Arab population with Palestinian ethnic or cultural origins. For this reason, some additional details on this population are provided here.

Arab immigrants with Palestinian ethnic or cultural origins tended to have been in Canada longer than other Arabs: they were comparatively more likely to have immigrated to Canada from 1980 to 2000 (31.3%) compared with Arabs overall (22.2%), and less likely to have immigrated from 2011 to 2021 (33.0% vs. 46.5% for Arabs overall). Arab immigrants with Palestinian ethnic or cultural origins who immigrated to Canada from 1980 to 2021 were more likely to be economic immigrants (61.8%) compared with Arab immigrants overall during this period (51.3%), and were less likely to be refugees (18.9%) than Arab immigrants overall during this period (29.5%).

While most Arabs in Canada who had Palestinian origins were Muslim (78.2%), 14.9% were Christian, 6.8% had no religion or had secular perspectives, and 0.2% had other religions. Of Christians with Palestinian origins, 44.2% reported being Catholic, 29.0% were Orthodox, 4.8% were other denominations and 22.1% reported simply being "Christian" without specifying a denomination.

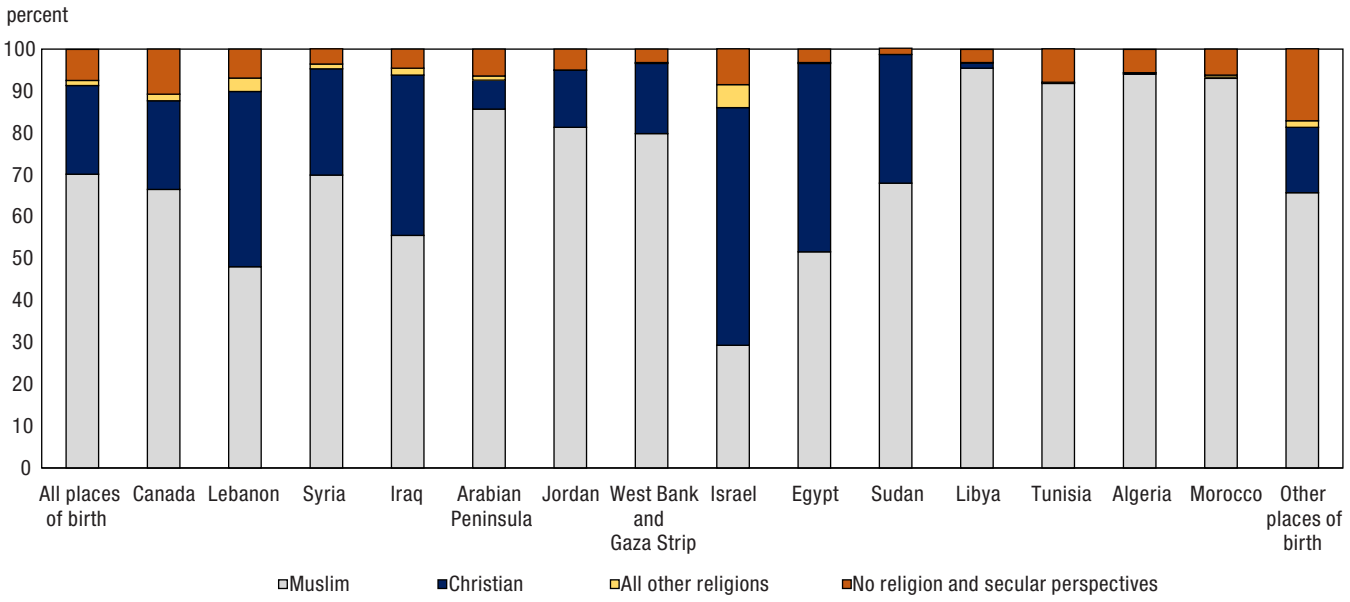
Arabs in Canada who had Palestinian ethnic or cultural origins were, on average, highly educated: 59.2% of those aged 25 to 54 had a bachelor's degree or higher, which compares with 50.7% for the overall Arab population in the same age group and 36.6% for the overall population of Canada in the same age group. The share who had no certificate, diploma or degree (that is, who had not completed either high school or any postsecondary credential) was 4.5%, compared with 10.5% of the overall Arab populations and 8.2% of the overall population of Canada.

Seven in 10 Arabs were Muslim, but Arabs made up less than one-third of all Muslims in Canada

In 2021, 70.1% Arabs in Canada were Muslim,[27] 21.2% were Christian, 7.4% had no religion or had secular perspectives, 0.8% were Druze, and 0.5% had other religions. In 2001, 20 years earlier, 57.0% of Arabs in Canada were Muslim and 37.2% were Christian.

The proportion of Arabs in Canada who were Muslim varied considerably by place of birth. Over 90% of those born in the Maghreb were Muslim, as were 85.7% of those born in the Arabian Peninsula and 81.3% of those born in Jordan. In comparison, about half of Arabs born in Lebanon, Egypt or Iraq were Muslim (Chart 10).

Chart 10
Religion of Arab populations by place of birth, Canada, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

27. Very few Arab Muslims specified a particular Muslim group (e.g., Sunni).

While the proportion of Arabs who were Muslim was larger than the proportion among any other racialized group, Arabs did not make up the majority of Muslims in Canada. In fact, they made up less than one-third (31.4%) of the Muslim population in Canada. There were more South Asian Muslims (595,085) in Canada than Arab Muslims (558,020),[28] and there were also substantial groups of West Asian Muslims (212,450), Black Muslims (183,670), and Muslims who were not part of a visible minority group and not Indigenous (136,715),[29] among others.

Over one-third of Arabs born in Egypt, Iraq or Lebanon were Christian

Over one-third of Arabs in Canada who were born in Lebanon, Egypt or Iraq were Christian: 45.0% of those born in Egypt, 41.9% of those born in Lebanon and 38.3% of those born in Iraq. One-quarter (25.4%) of Arabs born in Syria were Christian. These four countries were the most common places of birth for Arab Christians born outside Canada. Along with Canadian-born Arab Christians, they accounted for 90.9% of Arab Christians in Canada.

Large Christian populations among Arab immigrants to Canada sometimes reflect the religious composition of source countries, and sometimes do not. Lebanon has a large Christian population (Tabar, 2010), whereas Christians are a small share of the overall population of Iraq (Reuters, 2021) but a much larger share of immigrants from Iraq to Canada. Both Egypt and Iraq have Christian ethnic minority groups—for example, the Coptic population in Egypt and Assyrians and Chaldeans in Iraq.

Smaller Arab Christian communities also constituted a significant portion of Arab immigrants to Canada from specific countries. Among Arabs in Canada born in Israel, over half were Christian (56.7%), and a similar proportion of Christians was observed among Arabs born in Israel who had Palestinian ethnic or cultural origins (59.1%). Additionally, Christians made up 30.7% of Arabs born in Sudan, 16.8% of Arabs born in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and 13.6% of Arabs born in Jordan.

Arab Christians were mainly a mix of Catholic (41.1%) and Orthodox (27.5%), though over one-quarter (28.2%) did not report a specific denomination. Catholics were the majority of Arab Christians born in Lebanon (55.4%) and nearly half of those born in Iraq (49.7%), while the majority of those born in Egypt were Coptic Orthodox (51.6%).

Another religious minority among Arabs was the Druze (5,990). They were mainly from Lebanon: 79.5% were either born in Lebanon or had at least one parent born there, while most of the rest (16.3%) were born in Syria or had both parents born in Syria. More than 4 in 10 Druze Arabs (43.7%) lived in Alberta.

Canadian-born Arabs who had one or both parents born in Canada were less likely to report a religious affiliation. One-quarter (25.0%) of those with one Canadian-born parent and 30.7% of those with both parents born in Canada reported having no religion or having secular perspectives. Canadian-born Arabs with both parents born in Canada—mostly descendants of earlier immigrants from Lebanon—were more likely to be Christian (39.7%) than Muslim (26.8%).

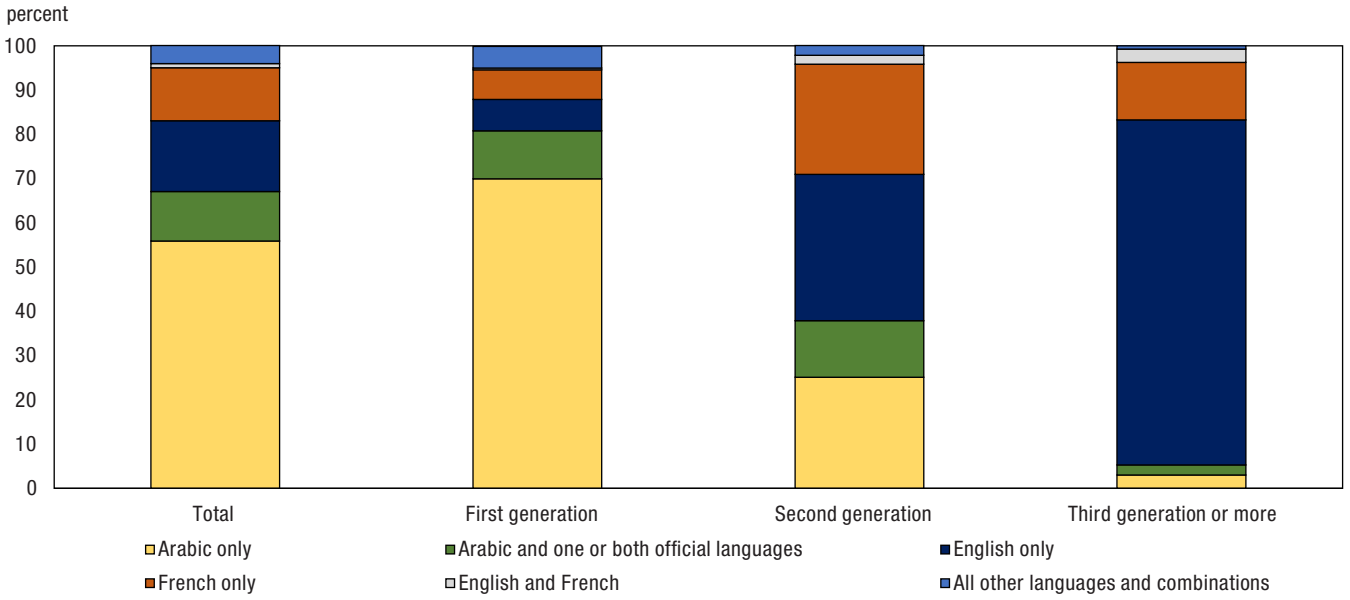
Arabic, English and French were the main mother tongues of Arab populations in Canada

The most common mother tongues by far among the Arab populations were Arabic, English and French. Overall, 96.9% of the Arab populations had at least one of these languages as a mother tongue. A mother tongue is the first language a person learned in childhood and still understands. A person may have multiple mother tongues if they learned multiple languages simultaneously in early childhood.

The large majority (70.0%) of the Arab first-generation population reported Arabic as their only mother tongue, while English or French were the mother tongues of the majority of the Canadian-born Arab population, both second generation and third generation or more (Chart 11).

28. This remained the case if Arabs who were also members of another racialized group were included in the count of Arab Muslims.
29. The population that is not part of a visible minority group (racialized group) and not Indigenous is the group referred to as the "non-racialized non-Indigenous population" elsewhere in the paper.

Chart 11
Mother tongues of Arab populations by generation status, Canada, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Bilingualism or multilingualism was common. Nearly all Arabs (95.5%) reported knowing at least one official language (English or French) well enough to have a conversation, and a little over three-quarters (77.6%) knew both Arabic and an official language (English or French). The majority of Canadian-born Arabs knew Arabic (57.5%), and nearly half spoke it at home on a regular basis (46.8%). In addition, more than 3 in 10 Arabs (31.8%) knew both English and French—well above the Canadian average of 18.0%.

Additionally, 4.1% of Arabs had mother tongues other than Arabic, English and French (including ones spoken in combination with one or more of those languages). Mother tongues reported by more than 1,000 Arabs in Canada included Assyrian Neo-Aramaic (5,695), Chaldean Neo-Aramaic (4,275) and unspecified Aramaic (1,080); Kabyle (4,745); Kurdish (2,505); Armenian (1,990); Coptic (1,740); Persian languages (1,415; includes Farsi, Iranian Persian and Dari); and Turkish (1,205). There was a total of 82 different mother tongues within the Arab populations.

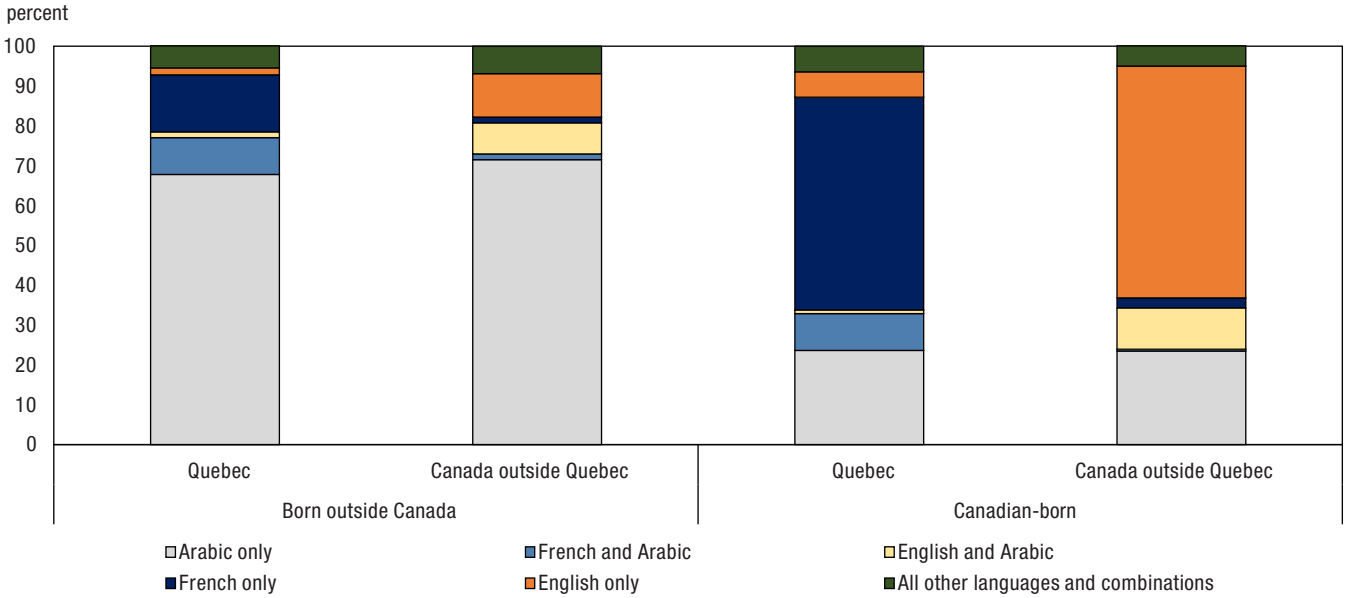
Many Arabs define the Arab population as anyone who speaks Arabic.[30] Among the population of Canada, 626,070 people had Arabic as a mother tongue, 643,740 spoke Arabic regularly at home and 838,045 knew Arabic well enough to have a conversation. People who were either Arab or both Arab and in another racialized group made up 88.2% of people with Arabic as a mother tongue, 85.2% of people who spoke Arabic regularly at home and 80.1% of people who knew Arabic. Of the 19.9% of people who knew Arabic but did not report being Arab on the population group question, 11.0% were not part of a racialized group and not Indigenous, 3.9% were Black, and 2.3% were West Asian.

Among Arabs with an official language as a mother tongue, French predominated in Quebec, while English predominated in Canada outside Quebec

Mother tongues of Arabs differed by province, with French being more common in Quebec and English being more common in Canada outside Quebec (Chart 12). In Quebec, 14.3% of the Arab population born outside Canada and over half (53.4%) of the Canadian-born Arab population had French as their only mother tongue, while few had English as their only mother tongue. In the rest of Canada, the situation was reversed: 10.9% of the Arab population born outside Canada and over half (58.2%) of the Canadian-born Arab population had English as their only mother tongue, and few had French as their only mother tongue. Also, among those with multiple mother tongues, the mother tongues generally included both Arabic and French in Quebec and both Arabic and English in Canada outside Quebec.

30. This is based on the results of community consultations.

Chart 12
Mother tongues of Arab populations by place of birth and province of residence, Canada, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

In total, including those with multiple mother tongues, 68.2% of Canadian-born Arabs in Quebec had French as a mother tongue, and 71.8% of Canadian-born Arabs in Canada outside Quebec had English as a mother tongue. Most Arabs born outside Canada also spoke English or French at home. Three-quarters (75.3%) of the Arab first-generation population living in Quebec spoke French at home on a regular basis, and nearly three-quarters (73.8%) of the Arab first-generation population living in Canada outside Quebec spoke English at home on a regular basis.

Arabs belonging to multiple racialized groups

In 2021, about 1 in 20 Arabs in Canada (5.3%), or 45,065 people, were members of multiple racialized groups (Arab and at least one other).[31] They were a very young population, with a median age of 22.0.

Including overlap between three or more groups, 37.4% of Arabs belonging to multiple racialized groups were Black, 21.5% were West Asian, 17.3% were South Asian, 15.5% were Latin American, 8.4% were Filipino, 6.7% were Chinese, 4.2% were Southeast Asian, 2.5% were Japanese and 2.2% were Korean. One-tenth (10.0%), or 4,497 people, were members of 3 or more of the 10 main racialized groups included on the census.[32]

Categories are non-exclusive: throughout this section, statistics for people who were, for example, Arab and Black include people who also belonged to additional groups. In some cases, reporting of multiple population groups may have been affected by diverse identities or a lack of a category in the census questionnaire that matched a person's identity. Of Arabs who were counted as members of multiple racialized groups, 8.6% did not report being in any other of the 10 main racialized groups but reported being Arab along with a write-in response of another racialized group (most often responses such as "Middle Eastern" or "Kurdish"). Additionally, some people who reported being both Arab and West Asian may have been influenced by perceived overlap between those two categories.

Nearly half (47.8%) of Arabs belonging to multiple racialized groups were born in Canada. The only groups for whom this share was under 40% were those who reported being Arab along with only a write-in response (30.6%) and those who were Arab and West Asian (35.5%). People who were Arab and West Asian included, among others, some members of Southwest Asian ethnic minorities, such as Assyrians and Chaldeans. The majority of them had both parents born in Southwest Asia and Northern Africa (54.3%), with common combinations being both parents born in Iraq (30.5%), both parents born in Syria (9.4%) or both parents born in Lebanon (6.9%).

31. This group is not included in the analysis of Arabs elsewhere in the portrait. See the "Population of interest" section at the start of the portrait for more information.
32. These 10 groups are South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Arab, Latin American, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean and Japanese.

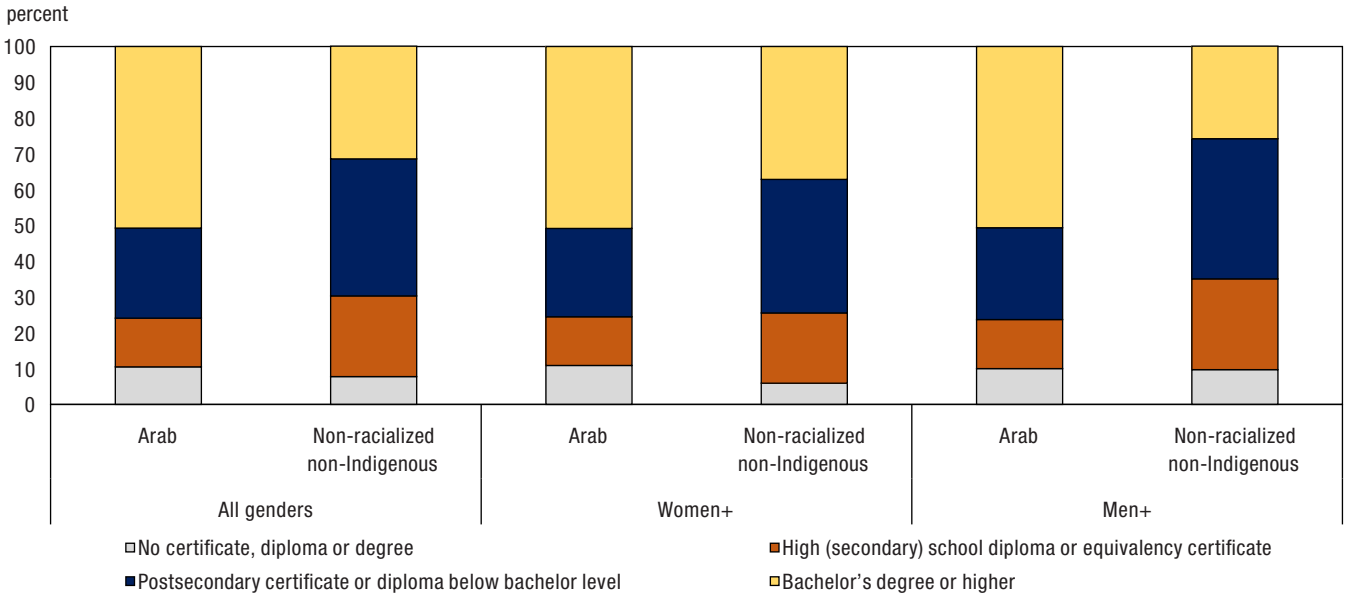
Overall, 22.9% of Arabs belonging to multiple racialized groups had one parent born in Southwest Asia and Northern Africa and the other parent born in another region outside Canada. However, this proportion varied by group: it was 37.6% for the Arab and Filipino population and 35.6% for the Arab and Latin American population, but 11.6% for the Arab and Black population. There were many other combinations of places of birth of parents for different groups. For example, among people who were both Arab and Black, one-quarter (25.5%) had both parents born in Sudan and nearly one-fifth (19.4%) had both parents born in sub-Saharan Africa (most often Somalia, Ethiopia or Eritrea). Nearly one-quarter (24.1%) of people who were Arab and South Asian had both parents born in Southern Asia. People who were Arab and Latin American included 12.9% with both parents born in Central and South America and the Caribbean, and 11.6% with both parents born in Southwest Asia and Northern Africa.

Section 3: Education and economic inclusion

Nearly half of Arabs had a bachelor's degree or higher

Based on the 2021 Census, Arabs in Canada were highly educated, with the majority (50.7%) of those aged 25 to 54 having a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with less than one-third (31.5%) of the non-racialized non-Indigenous population (Chart 13). At the same time, the share of Arab women who had no certificate, diploma or degree (i.e., had not completed either high school or a trades, college or university credential) was higher (10.9%) than that of non-racialized non-Indigenous women (5.9%).

Chart 13
Educational attainment of Arab and non-racialized non-Indigenous populations aged 25 to 54, Canada, 2021



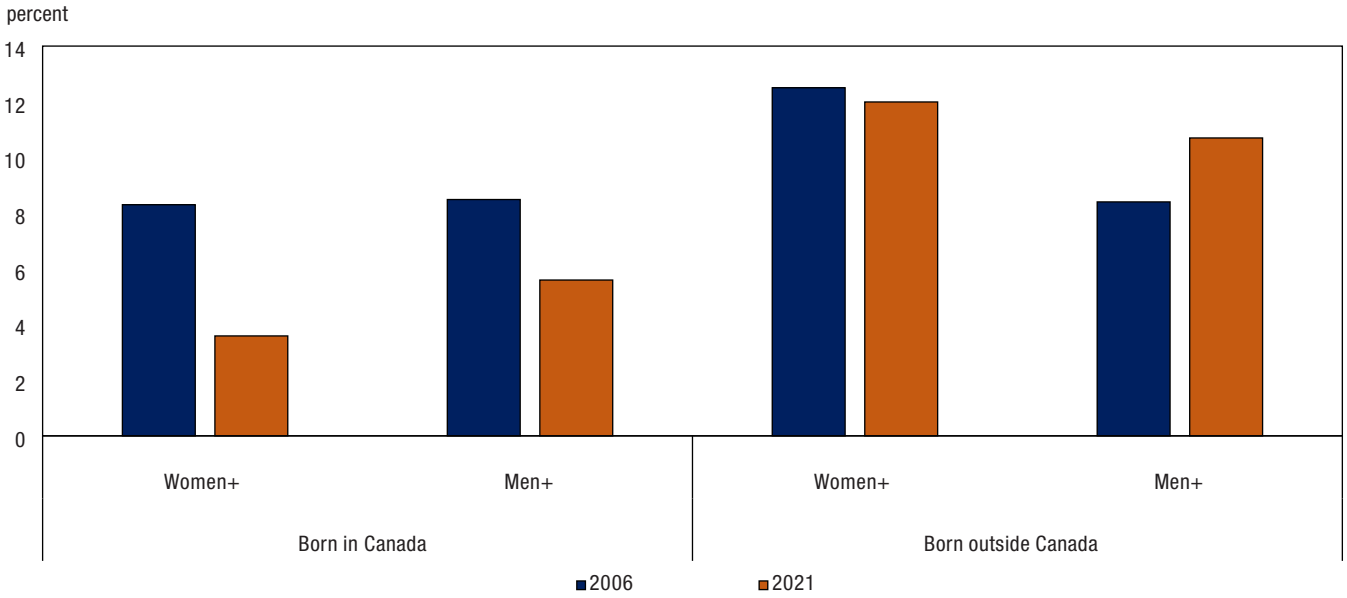
Note: Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is sometimes necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses. In these cases, individuals in the category "non-binary persons" are distributed into the other two gender categories and are denoted by the "+" symbol. The category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary persons. The category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary persons.
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

The share of Arabs aged 25 to 54 who had a bachelor's degree or higher ranged from 31.4% of Arabs born in Syria to 84.2% of Arabs born in Egypt. Among Arabs born in Syria or Iraq, there were large educational divides, with people being more likely to have either no certificate, diploma or degree (33.1% of those born in Syria and 24.5% of those born in Iraq) or a bachelor's degree or higher (31.4% of those born in Syria and 36.1% of those born in Iraq), while fewer had middle levels of education, such as a college diploma or high school completion, as their highest level of education. As mentioned previously, most Arabs born in Iraq or Syria came to Canada as refugees, while most Arabs born in Egypt were economic immigrants.

Trends over time in educational attainment among the Arab populations differed by gender, and between those born in Canada and those born outside Canada. Increases in educational attainment from 2006 to 2021 were most pronounced among Arab women born in Canada. This was seen both in a decrease in the share with no certificate, diploma or degree and in an increase in the share with a bachelor's degree or higher.

The share of Canadian-born Arab women aged 25 to 54 who had no certificate, diploma or degree dropped by more than half from 2006 to 2021, from 8.3% to 3.6%, and the share also decreased among Canadian-born Arab men, from 8.5% in 2006 to 5.6% in 2021 (Chart 14). However, the proportion of Arab men born outside Canada who had no certificate, diploma or degree rose from 8.4% to 10.7%. This was primarily because 33.4% of Syrian-born Arab men, most of whom came to Canada from 2015 to 2021, had no certificate, diploma or degree. Among Arab men born outside Canada who were not born in Syria, the share with no certificate, diploma or degree in 2021 was 7.6%.

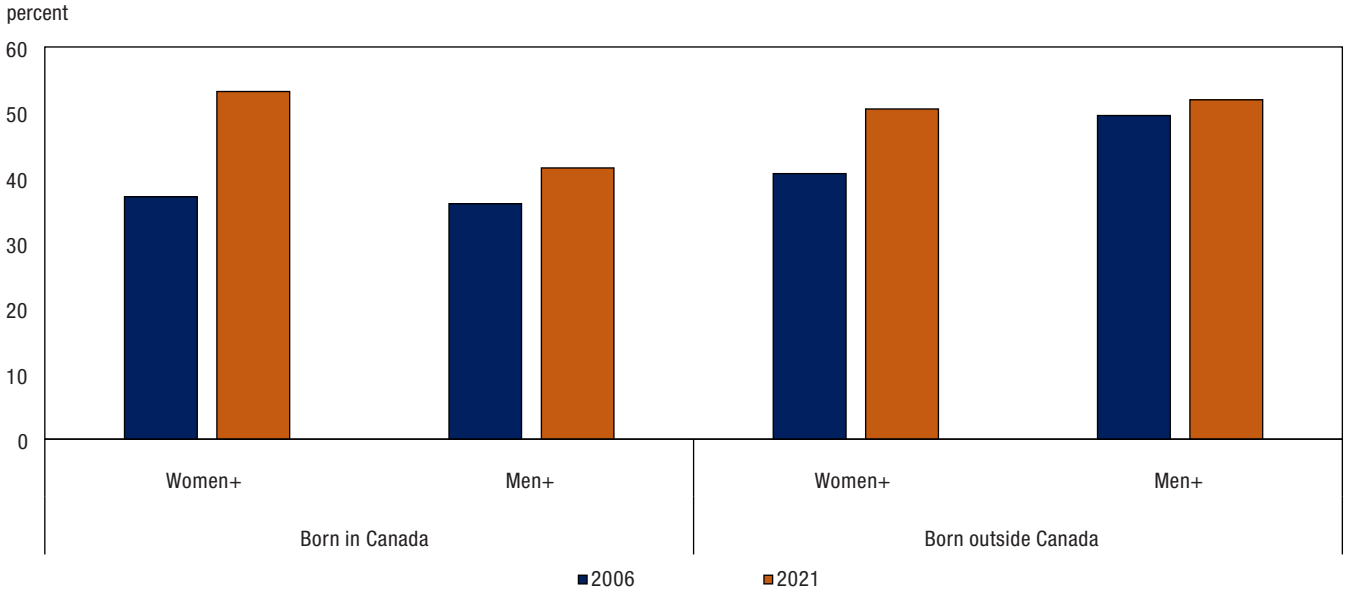
Chart 14
Proportion of the Arab populations aged 25 to 54 who had no certificate, diploma or degree, by gender and place of birth, Canada, 2006 and 2021



Notes: The sex variable in census years prior to 2021 and the two-category gender variable in the 2021 Census are combined in this chart. Although sex and gender refer to two different concepts, the introduction of gender is not expected to have a significant impact on data analysis and historical comparability, given the small size of the transgender and non-binary populations. For additional information on changes of concepts over time, please consult the *Age, Sex at Birth and Gender Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021*.
Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is sometimes necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses. In these cases, individuals in the category "non-binary persons" are distributed into the other two gender categories and are denoted by the "+" symbol. The category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary persons. The category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary persons.
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2006 and 2021.

The share of Canadian-born Arab women aged 25 to 54 who had a bachelor's degree or higher rose from 37.1% in 2006 to 53.2% in 2021 (Chart 15). There was a smaller but still substantial gain among Arab women born outside Canada (from 40.6% in 2006 to 50.5% in 2021), while increases among Arab men were comparatively smaller. As a result, the share of Canadian-born Arab women who had a bachelor's degree or higher went from being similar to that of Canadian-born Arab men in 2006 to being over 10 percentage points higher than that of Canadian-born Arab men in 2021. The share of Arab women born outside Canada who had a bachelor's degree or higher was 8.9 percentage points lower than that of their male counterparts in 2006, but by 2021, this gap had narrowed to 1.4 percentage points.

Chart 15
Proportion of the Arab populations aged 25 to 54 who had a bachelor's degree or higher, by gender and place of birth, Canada, 2006 and 2021



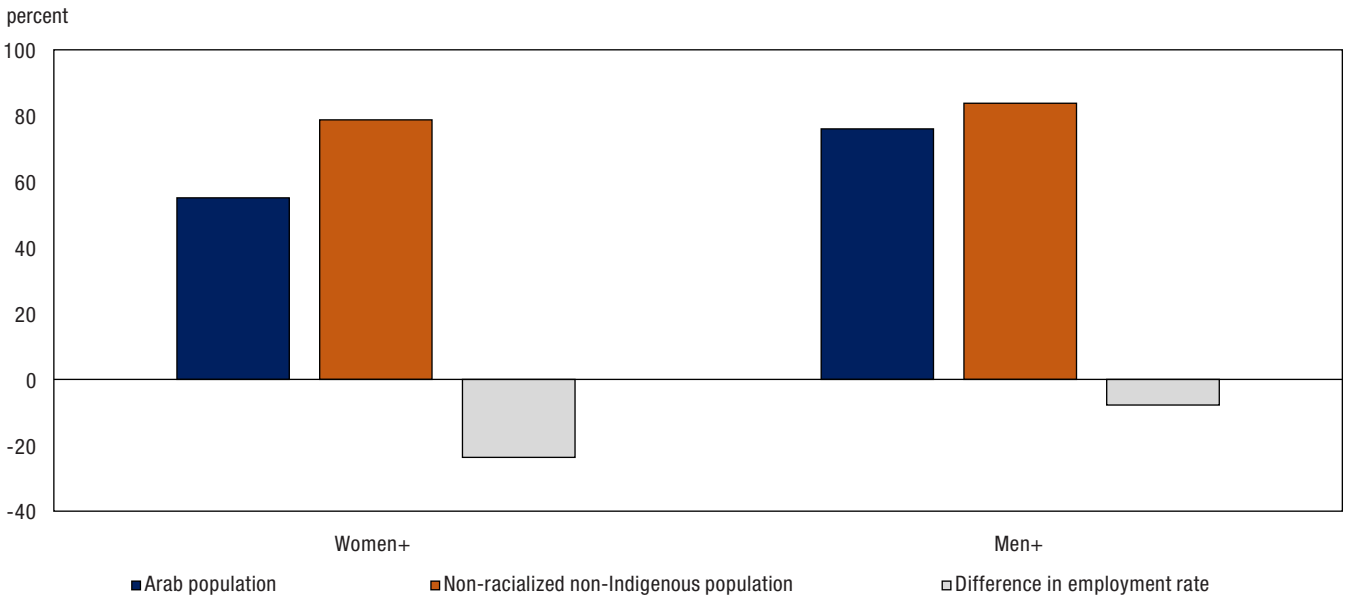
Notes: The sex variable in census years prior to 2021 and the two-category gender variable in the 2021 Census are combined in this chart. Although sex and gender refer to two different concepts, the introduction of gender is not expected to have a significant impact on data analysis and historical comparability, given the small size of the transgender and non-binary populations. For additional information on changes of concepts over time, please consult the *Age, Sex at Birth and Gender Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021.*
Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is sometimes necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses. In these cases, individuals in the category "non-binary persons" are distributed into the other two gender categories and are denoted by the "+" symbol. The category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary persons. The category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary persons.
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2006 and 2021.

Arabs had lower employment rates than the non-racialized non-Indigenous population, particularly for Arab women

Arabs, and especially Arab women, had large gaps in employment relative to the non-racialized non-Indigenous population.[33] The employment rate of Arab women aged 25 to 54 was 55.1% as of May 2021,[34] compared with 78.8% among non-racialized non-Indigenous women in the same age group, a difference of 23.7 percentage points (Chart 16). There was also a gap in the employment rate among men, though a much smaller one, at 7.8 percentage points.

33. A detailed examination of all factors that may relate to employment rates is not in scope for this portrait, which serves as an overview of the Arab populations. This section does not take into account differences in immigrant status or admission category, which may play a role in some of these gaps.
34. The reference week for labour force status (employed, unemployed or not in the labour force) in the 2021 Census was May 2 to May 8, 2021.

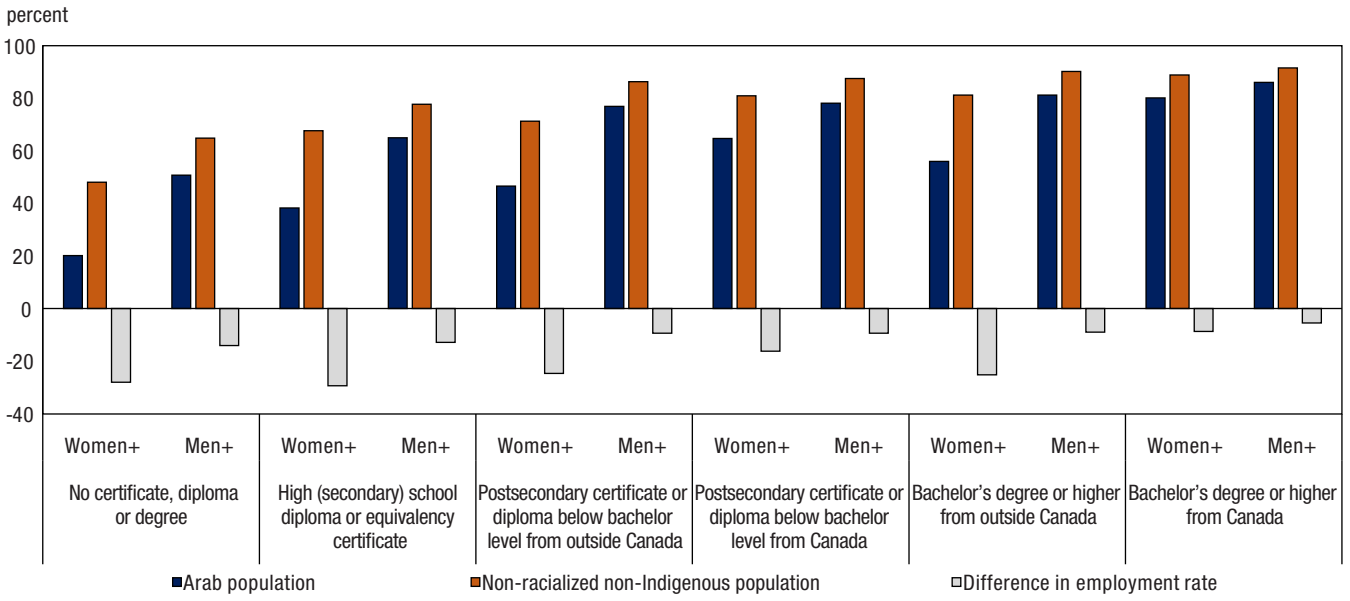
Chart 16
Employment rate of Arab and non-racialized non-Indigenous populations aged 25 to 54 by gender, Canada, May 2021



Note: Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is sometimes necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses. In these cases, individuals in the category "non-binary persons" are distributed into the other two gender categories and are denoted by the "+" symbol. The category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary persons. The category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary persons.
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Gaps in employment rates between the Arab and non-racialized non-Indigenous populations existed at all levels of education and after accounting for location of study (Chart 17). The gaps were largest for Arab women without a postsecondary credential and for Arab women with a postsecondary credential from outside Canada. As one example, Arab women with no certificate, diploma or degree had an employment rate of 20.1%, less than half that of non-racialized non-Indigenous women with the same level of education (48.1%).

Chart 17
Employment rate of Arab and non-racialized non-Indigenous populations aged 25 to 54 by gender, educational attainment and location of study, Canada, May 2021

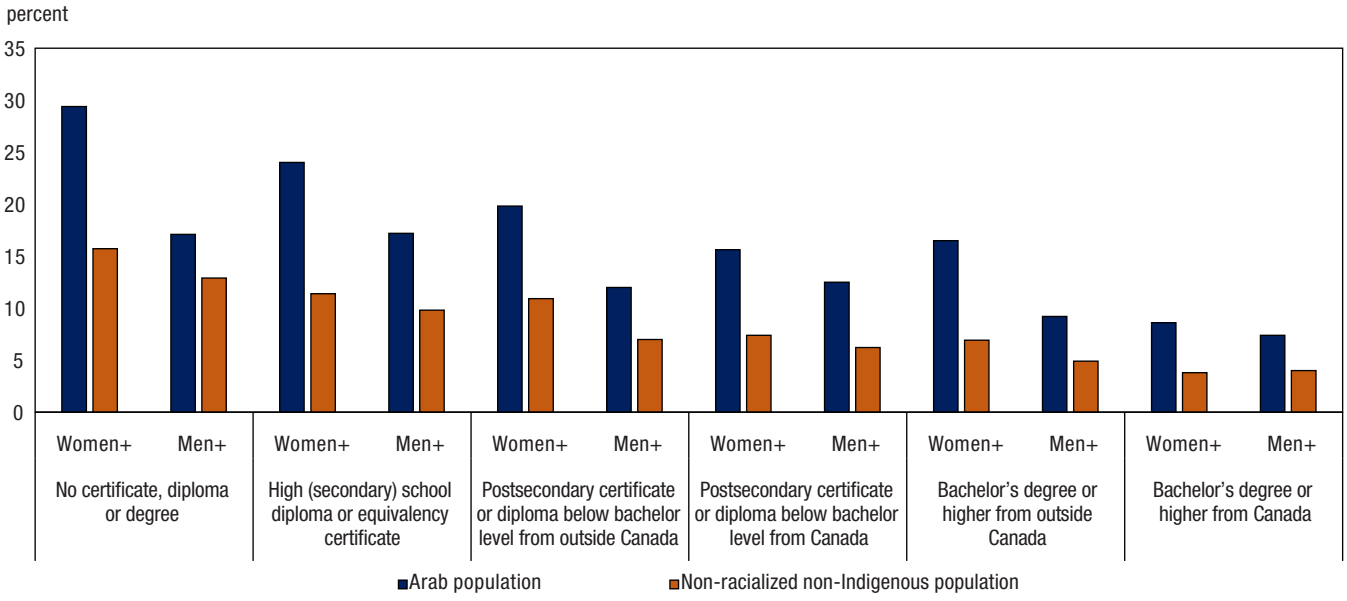


Note: Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is sometimes necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses. In these cases, individuals in the category "non-binary persons" are distributed into the other two gender categories and are denoted by the "+" symbol. The category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary persons. The category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary persons.
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Among Arabs aged 25 to 54 who were born outside Canada and had a bachelor's degree or higher, a little under two-thirds (64.0%) completed their highest level of education outside Canada. This share was higher among women (67.7%) than men (60.6%). The employment rate of Arab women aged 25 to 54 with a foreign degree was 55.9%, lower than that of non-racialized non-Indigenous women in the same age group who had high school as their highest level of education (67.6%).

The unemployment rate of Arab women with a Canadian bachelor's degree or higher was 8.6%, more than twice as high as that of non-racialized non-Indigenous women with a Canadian bachelor's degree or higher (3.8%) (Chart 18). The gaps in the unemployment rate between Arabs and the non-racialized non-Indigenous population were larger for women than men in all cases, and largest for women who had no postsecondary credential or who had a postsecondary credential from outside Canada.

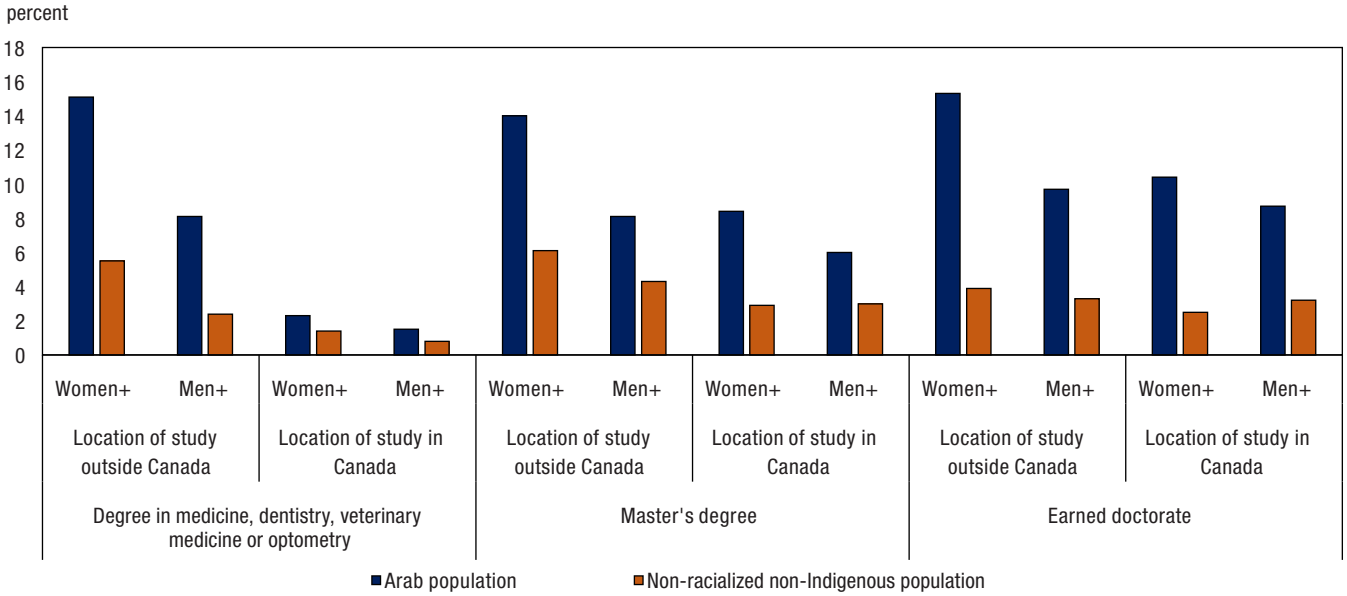
Chart 18
Unemployment rate of Arab and non-racialized non-Indigenous populations aged 25 to 54 by gender, educational attainment and location of study, Canada, May 2021



Note: Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is sometimes necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses. In these cases, individuals in the category "non-binary persons" are distributed into the other two gender categories and are denoted by the "+" symbol. The category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary persons. The category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary persons.
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Even Arab women with the highest levels of education had elevated unemployment rates. Unemployment rates of 14.0% to 15.3% were seen for Arab women who completed one of the following credentials outside Canada: a master's degree; an earned doctorate; or a degree in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine or optometry. Arab men with these degrees had unemployment rates ranging from 8.1% to 9.7% (Chart 19). Unemployment rates were also elevated among Arab women with a Canadian master's degree (8.4%) or earned doctorate (10.4%). In contrast, among non-racialized non-Indigenous women and men with a Canadian master's degree or earned doctorate, unemployment rates ranged from 2.5% to 3.2%.

Chart 19
Unemployment rate of Arab and non-racialized non-Indigenous populations aged 25 to 54 with selected degrees above the bachelor level, by gender, educational attainment and location of study, Canada, May 2021



Note: Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is sometimes necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses. In these cases, individuals in the category "non-binary persons" are distributed into the other two gender categories and are denoted by the "+" symbol. The category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary persons. The category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary persons.
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

There were differences in unemployment rates among Arab women by religious affiliation (Table 1). For example, among Arab women aged 25 to 54 with no certificate, diploma or degree (who were mainly born outside Canada), the unemployment rate was 33.1% for Muslims and 21.6% for Christians. In general, among Arabs with a Canadian postsecondary credential, those born in Canada had lower unemployment rates than those born outside Canada. However, among women with a bachelor's degree or higher completed in Canada, the unemployment rate was higher for Muslims born in Canada (7.5%) than for Christians born outside Canada (5.9%) or people with no religion or with secular perspectives born outside Canada (6.6%). For Arab Muslim women born outside Canada who had completed a bachelor's degree or higher in Canada, the unemployment rate was 11.4%.

Table 1
Unemployment rate of Arab women aged 25 to 54 by educational attainment, location of study, place of birth and selected religions, Canada, May 2021

Highest certificate, diploma or degree, location of study and place of birth	Total	Christian	Muslim	No religion or secular perspectives
	percent			
No certificate, diploma or degree	29.4	21.6	33.1	28.3
High school diploma or equivalency certificate	24.0	18.2	26.9	20.9
Postsecondary certificate or diploma below bachelor level from outside Canada	19.8	16.7	21.0	15.2
Postsecondary certificate or diploma below bachelor level from Canada	15.6	14.0	16.3	14.9
Born outside Canada	16.1	15.9	16.3	15.2
Born in Canada	13.9	10.4	16.3	14.4
Bachelor's degree or higher from outside Canada	16.5	12.9	18.0	13.1
Bachelor's degree or higher from Canada	8.6	5.7	10.6	6.8
Born outside Canada	9.6	5.9	11.4	6.6
Born in Canada	6.5	5.5	7.5	7.1

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Arabs were much more likely than the overall population of Canada to have degrees in health fields such as pharmacy, medicine and dentistry

Some of the major fields of study where Arab representation was highest, relative to the overall Canadian population, were pharmacy, dentistry and medicine. All the figures in this section and the sections on occupation relate to the population aged 25 to 54. Arabs were 4.4 times more likely than the overall population to have a pharmacy degree,[35] 4.0 times more likely to have a degree in dentistry[36] and 3.3 times more likely to have a medical degree.[37] Arabs accounted for more than one-tenth (10.8%) of people aged 25 to 54 with a pharmacy degree, 9.6% of those with a dentistry degree and 8.1% of those with a medical degree.

Arabs were also highly represented in language and literature fields, as well as law. They were 27.5 times more likely than the overall population to have a bachelor's degree or higher in Arabic language and literature, 3.6 times more likely to have one in French literature, 3.4 times more likely to have one in language interpretation and translation, and 2.5 times more likely to have one in English literature. They were 1.8 times more likely than the overall population to have a law degree.[38] One arts field where Arabs were highly represented was interior design. They were 3.2 times more likely than the overall population to have a bachelor's degree or higher in interior design.

Furthermore, Arabs were highly represented in applied sciences and related fields. They were 2.8 times more likely than the overall population to have a bachelor's degree or higher in architecture, 2.4 times more likely to have one in engineering, and 1.9 times more likely to have one in computer and information sciences and support services.

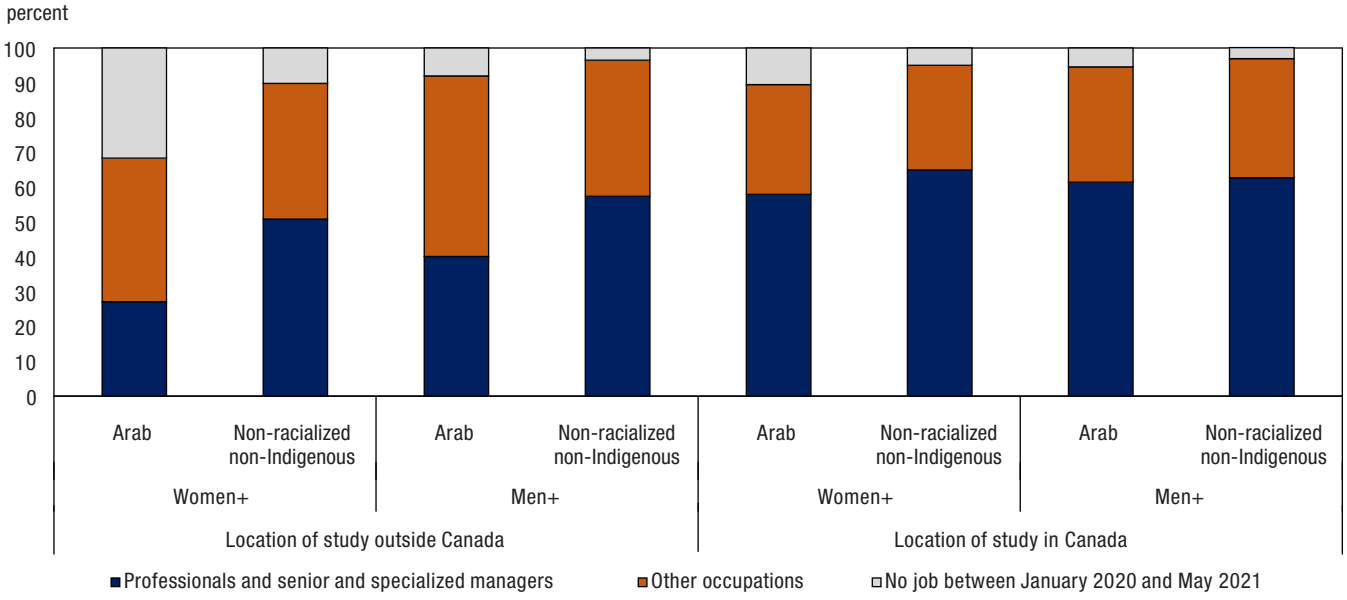
Finally, Arabs were 2.4 times more likely than the general population to have an earned doctorate.

Arabs with degrees from outside Canada faced barriers to finding work related to their field of study

Among those aged 25 to 54, fewer than 3 in 10 Arab women (27.1%) and 4 in 10 Arab men (40.1%) with a bachelor's degree or higher completed outside Canada were working in professional occupations (that is, occupations typically requiring at least a bachelor's degree) or in senior or specialized management occupations (Chart 20).[39]

35. This refers to people who had a bachelor's degree or higher and whose major field of study of their highest credential was in Classification of Instructional Programs Canada 2021 code 51.2001 Pharmacy (PharmD, BS, BSc, BPharm).
36. This refers to people who had a degree in medicine, dentistry, optometry or veterinary medicine (including those who had also completed a master's degree or an earned doctorate) and whose major field of study of their highest credential was in Classification of Instructional Programs Canada 2021 codes 51.04 Dentistry (DDS, DMD), 51.05 Advanced/graduate dentistry and oral sciences (Cert., MS, MSc, PhD), or 60.01 Dental residency/fellowship programs.
37. This refers to people who had a degree in medicine, dentistry, optometry or veterinary medicine (including those who had also completed a master's degree or an earned doctorate) and whose major field of study of their highest credential was in Classification of Instructional Programs Canada 2021 codes 51.12 Medicine, 51.14 Medical clinical sciences/graduate medical studies or 61. Medical residency/fellowship programs.
38. This refers to people who had a bachelor's degree or higher in Classification of Instructional Programs Canada 2021 codes 22.01 Law (LLB, JD, BCL) or 22.02 Legal research and advanced professional studies (post-LLB/JD).
39. Professional and senior and specialized management occupations refer to occupations classed as professional under the Variant of the National Occupational Classification (NOC) 2021 Version 1.0 for Analysis by TEER (Training, Education, Experience and Responsibility) categories, as well as those in the categories 00 Legislative and senior managers; 10 Specialized middle management occupations in administrative services, financial and business services and communication (except broadcasting); 20 Specialized middle management occupations in engineering, architecture, science and information systems; 30 Specialized middle management occupations in health care; 40 Managers in public administration, in education and social and community services and in public protection services; and 50 Specialized middle management occupations in art, culture, recreation and sport.

Chart 20
Occupational category of Arab and non-racialized non-Indigenous populations aged 25 to 54 with a bachelor's degree or higher, by gender and location of study, Canada, 2021

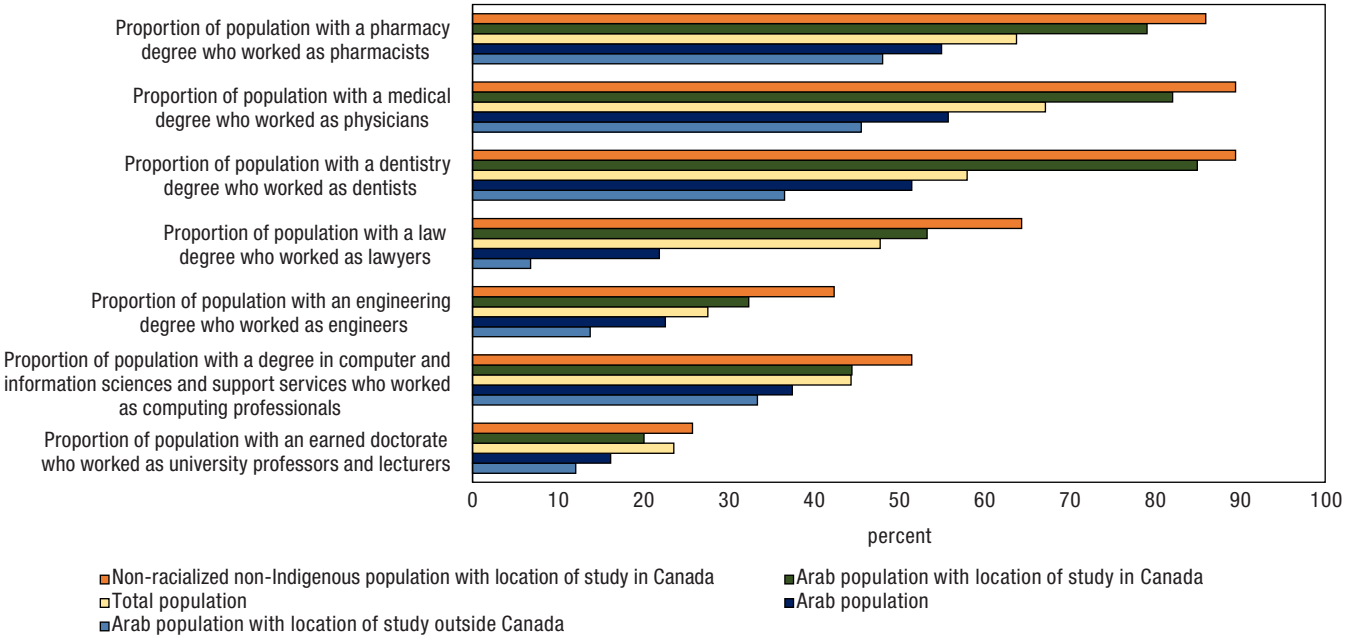


Note: Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is sometimes necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses. In these cases, individuals in the category "non-binary persons" are distributed into the other two gender categories and are denoted by the "+" symbol. The category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary persons. The category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary persons.
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Arab women with a bachelor's degree or higher from outside Canada were especially likely to be without work: 31.7% of them did not have a job at any time between January 2020 and May 2021. Although much of this time was during the COVID-19 pandemic, people who had a job in January or February 2020, before the start of the pandemic-related shutdowns, would be recorded based on their occupation at that time, even if they did not have a job during the pandemic.

Low job match for Arabs with foreign degrees was also seen when looking at specific fields of study where Arabs were highly represented, such as degrees in pharmacy, medicine, dentistry and engineering (Chart 21).

Chart 21
Proportion of Arab and non-racialized non-Indigenous populations aged 25 to 54 with selected degrees who worked in selected occupations, by location of study, Canada, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Less than half of Arabs with a foreign degree in pharmacy or medicine worked as pharmacists (48.1%) or physicians (45.6%), respectively. In some examples from other fields, 13.8% of Arabs with a foreign engineering degree worked as engineers, and 6.8% of Arabs with a foreign law degree worked as lawyers. Among people with an earned doctorate, a little over one in four non-racialized non-Indigenous people who obtained their degree from a Canadian institution (25.8%) worked as university professors, compared with one in five Arabs who obtained their degree from a Canadian institution (20.1%) and less than one in eight Arabs who obtained their degree from an institution outside Canada (12.1%). These figures were consistently lower for Arab women than for Arab men. For example, 30.0% of Arab women with a foreign medical degree worked as physicians, compared with 59.5% of Arab men with such a degree.

Among Arabs in non-professional occupations, women often worked in childcare and men in transportation occupations

Overall, more than 6 in 10 Arabs aged 25 to 54 who had a job at some point between January 2020 and May 2021 (60.1%) worked in non-managerial occupations that did not typically require a bachelor's degree or higher, slightly less than the share of the non-racialized non-Indigenous population in the same age group (63.9%) who worked in such occupations.

In some of these occupations, Arabs were particularly highly represented. Arab women were especially likely to work in occupations related to caring for children. Compared with women overall, they were 4.3 times more likely to work as student monitors, crossing guards and other occupations, and 2.4 times more likely to work as early childhood educators and assistants. In fact, the most common occupation of Arab women was early childhood educators and assistants.

Arab men were 5.0 times more likely than men overall to work as taxi and limousine drivers and chauffeurs. It was the third most common occupation of Arab men. Their most common occupation—transport truck drivers—was also the most common occupation of non-racialized non-Indigenous men. Arab men were also 5.8 times more likely than men overall to work as hairstylists and barbers.

Arabs had the lowest incomes of any racialized group in Canada

Adjusted after-tax income of economic family for all persons

The adjusted after-tax income of economic family concept is used in this portrait series to measure income for each person. In this income concept, a person's income is measured as the after-tax income of their economic family (persons who are related to each other and live in the same household), adjusted for the number of people in the economic family. The adjustment for family size is because of economies of scale: for example, two people living together would typically have lower expenses for things such as housing than two people living separately. The adjustment for family size is done by dividing the after-tax income of the economic family by the square root of the number of people in the economic family. This adjustment allows income to be analyzed in a comparable way between population groups with different family sizes.

Arabs had the lowest median adjusted family after-tax income of any racialized group in Canada, in both 2015 ($30,733)[40] and 2020 ($40,400). The corresponding figures for the non-racialized non-Indigenous population were $49,346 in 2015 and $53,600 in 2021.

Based on data from 2020, 15.6% of Arabs were in poverty,[41] compared with a Canadian average of 8.1%. This was the third-highest rate, after the Korean population (19.0%) and the West Asian population (15.9%), and similar to the Chinese population (15.3%). It was a substantial decrease from 2015, when Koreans, West Asians and Arabs were also the three racialized groups most likely to be in poverty, but the poverty rate for each of them was over 30%.

The Canadian Income Survey showed a decline in the overall poverty rate from 2015 to 2019, before the pandemic. In 2020, the poverty rate fell by more than one-third compared with 2019; it fell by half among children, who made up a larger share of the Arab populations than the overall population. This decline was associated with the benefits provided as part of the COVID-19 pandemic response, such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit. In this way, 2020 was an anomalous year for income. The end of such benefits, coupled with inflation and housing price increases since 2020, means that these statistics should not be considered representative of the current situation.

Syrian refugees

Syrian refugees are a large group of recent immigrants who are mostly Arab and who have faced particular challenges, escaping conflict with few resources and, in some cases, arriving in Canada only shortly before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Syrian refugees who were Arab made up 8.6% of the Arab populations in Canada in 2021 and 38.3% of Arab immigrants who were admitted to Canada from 2014 to 2021. Their experiences and characteristics differ from those of the overall Arab populations, and disaggregating them is important for understanding their socioeconomic outcomes and informing policies to address the challenges they face.

For the purposes of this analysis, Syrian refugees are defined as refugees who either were born in Syria or had a parent born in Syria, and who immigrated from January 2014 to May 2021.[42] By this definition, there were 82,070 Syrian refugees in Canada as of May 2021.

This section discusses all Syrian refugees, not only those who reported being Arab. Arabs who were not a member of any other racialized group made up 83.7% of Syrian refugees, and Arabs who were also a member of another racialized group made up 1.8% of them. (The rest of Syrian refugees mainly reported being White, West Asian or part of a racialized group other than the 10 main ones.)

40. Income figures from 2015 are adjusted for inflation to be consistent with 2020 figures.
41. Because this portrait includes people who reported their population group as both "Arab" and "White," differing from the standard concept, this figure is not the same as the published poverty rate of the Arab populations using 2021 Census data, which was 16.1%. Similarly, the rate for the West Asian population includes those who reported their population group as both "West Asian" and "White," and it thus differs from the official published rate.
42. This population includes over 99% of all refugees who either were born in Syria or had a parent born in Syria and who lived in Canada as of May 2021.

Because of the sponsorship of Syrian refugees by Canadians across the country, the provinces and cities where Syrian refugees lived were more varied than for the Arab populations. While the provinces with the largest shares of Syrian refugees were those with large pre-existing Arab populations—Ontario (48.5% of Syrian refugees), Quebec (21.6%) and Alberta (11.3%)—they were followed by British Columbia (7.6%), Nova Scotia (3.0%), New Brunswick (2.5%), Manitoba (2.3%) and Saskatchewan (1.9%). Each of these provinces was home to over 1,000 Syrian refugees, and Newfoundland and Labrador and Prince Edward Island were each home to several hundred.

Syrian refugees faced many challenges, escaping conflict with few resources and often with lower levels of education. In Canada, housing was often difficult to find, especially for large families. Their main year of immigration was 2016 (32,565 people), but many immigrated in 2017 (12,030), 2018 (11,535) or 2019 (10,005). Those who arrived in 2019 had a year or less in Canada before the pandemic hit, further disrupting daily life and work.

Nearly three-quarters of Syrian refugees (74.0%) lived in households made up of a two-parent family with children, and the median size of these families was five people (i.e., two parents and three children).[43] Syrian refugees' incomes were low, with a median adjusted after-tax economic family income of $29,000 (compared with $51,600 for Canada overall), and 27.5% were living in poverty (compared with a rate of 8.1% for Canada overall). In addition, most Syrian refugees (95.3%) lived in cities of 100,000 people or more. All this meant that high housing prices and the low amount of rental housing for large families in Canada presented a major challenge for Syrian refugees. In 2021, over half (57.3%) of Syrian refugees were living in housing that had too few bedrooms for the size and composition of the household,[44] and 39.1% were living in housing that cost more than 30% of their before-tax household income. These figures included 20.0% who were living in housing with both of those characteristics.

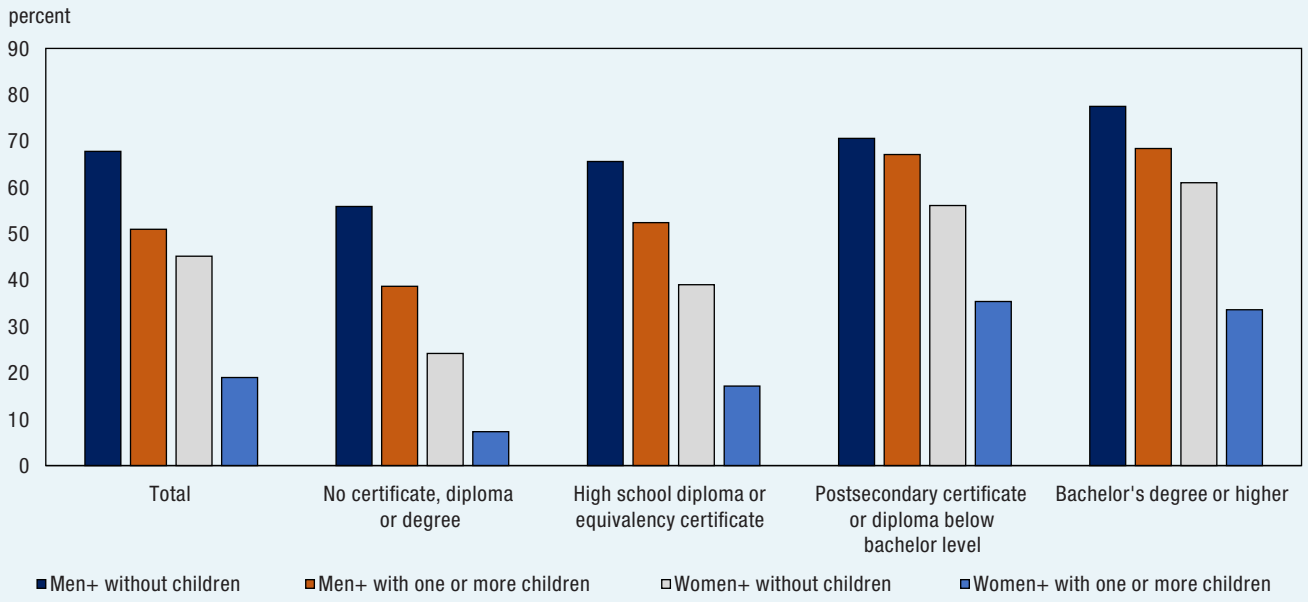
Despite these challenges, most Syrian refugees learned English or French. Three-quarters (75.0%) of Syrian refugees had Arabic as their only mother tongue, while 12.0% had English as one of their mother tongues and 1.9% had French as one of their mother tongues. By 2021, most (83.4%) reported knowing at least one official language (English or French) well enough to have a conversation, and 11.3% knew both English and French. Knowledge of English or French was highest among children under the age of 15 (90.7%) and youth aged 15 to 24 (93.1%), while it was 78.1% among those aged 25 to 64, and lower (37.2%) among the relatively small number of Syrian refugees (fewer than 3,000) who were aged 65 or over. By 2021, the majority (55.4%) of Syrian refugees spoke English or French at home on a regular basis, with or without other languages. Two-thirds of Syrian refugee children under 15 (67.0%) spoke English or French at home on a regular basis, as did 61.7% of youth aged 15 to 24.

Some Syrian refugees had relatively low levels of formal education. Among those aged 25 to 54, more than 4 in 10 (41.8%) had neither a high school diploma nor any postsecondary credential. At the other end of the spectrum, over one-fifth (22.6%) had a bachelor's degree or higher. Educational attainment was relatively similar between women and men.

The pandemic and the competing demands of work and family posed a particularly large challenge for employment. As of May 2021, 56.3% of Syrian refugee men and 24.6% of Syrian refugee women aged 25 to 54 were employed. Employment rates were higher for men than women, and for those with higher educational attainment and without any children under the age of 18. They were lowest for women with children who had neither a high school diploma nor a postsecondary credential (Chart 22).

43. A Statistics Canada article on Syrian refugees using data from the 2016 Census similarly found that most Syrian refugee families were families with children (Houle, 2019).
44. See footnote 46.

Chart 22
Employment rates of Syrian refugees aged 25 to 54 by level of education, gender and whether they had children under age 18, Canada, May 2021



Note: Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is sometimes necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses. In these cases, individuals in the category "non-binary persons" are distributed into the other two gender categories and are denoted by the "+" symbol. The category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary persons. The category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary persons.
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Syrian refugee youth, who may have gained greater skill in English or French than their parents, often assisted their families. One-quarter (25.7%) of Syrian refugee youth aged 15 to 24 who were living with their parents were employed in May 2021: 17.3% of those aged 15 to 19 and 42.1% of those aged 20 to 24.

Furthermore, 42.7% of Syrian refugee youth aged 20 to 24 attended a postsecondary institution in the 2020/2021 school year, including 18.0% who were both in postsecondary education and employed. Postsecondary attendance among Syrian refugees in this age group was higher among young women (48.4%) than young men (38.0%), while young men were more likely to be employed (43.5%) than young women (33.2%).

Syrian refugees of any age who had an occupation mostly worked in non-professional, non-managerial jobs. Two of the top five occupations among both women and men were food counter attendants, kitchen helpers and related support occupations; and retail salespersons and visual merchandisers. Among women, the other three occupations in the top five were cashiers, early childhood educators and assistants, and industrial sewing machine operators. Among men, the other three occupations in the top five were delivery service drivers and door-to-door distributors, taxi and limousine drivers and chauffeurs, and construction trades helpers and labourers.

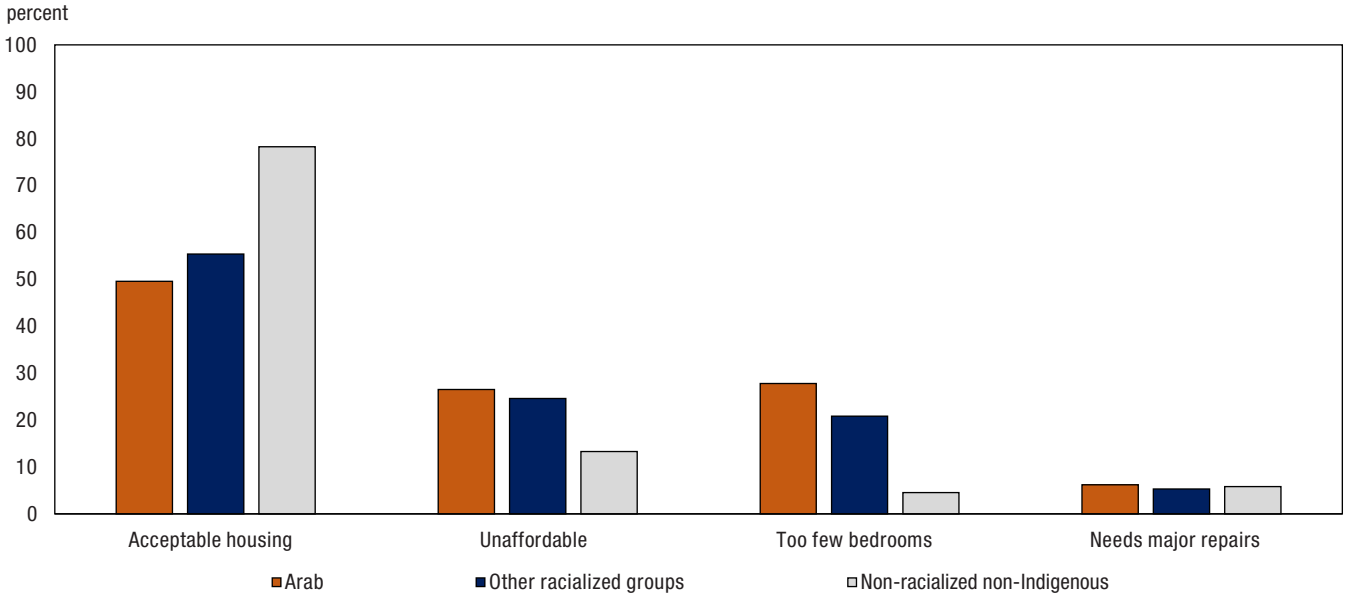
Section 4: Social inclusion and housing

As of 2021, half of Arabs lived in housing that was either unaffordable, crowded or in need of major repairs

Acceptable housing refers to whether housing meets the following three indicator thresholds established by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC): it costs less than 30% of total before-tax household income,[45] it has enough bedrooms for the size and composition of the household,[46] and it is not in need of major repairs.

Based on these thresholds, half (50.4%) of Arabs were living in unacceptable housing as of the 2021 Census, compared with 29.0% of the overall population. This was a higher rate than for any other racialized group, except West Asians (59.7%). The most common unacceptable housing situations of Arabs were living in housing that had too few bedrooms (27.8%) or in housing that was unaffordable (26.5%). The share of Arabs living in housing with too few bedrooms was higher than that of any other racialized group except Filipinos (28.7%). The share of Arabs living in housing that needed major repairs was much lower (6.2%) (Chart 23). These figures included people who had housing where more than one of these conditions applied (9.7%); in most cases, this was housing that was unaffordable and also had too few bedrooms (7.0%).

Chart 23
Housing acceptability by selected population groups, Canada, 2021



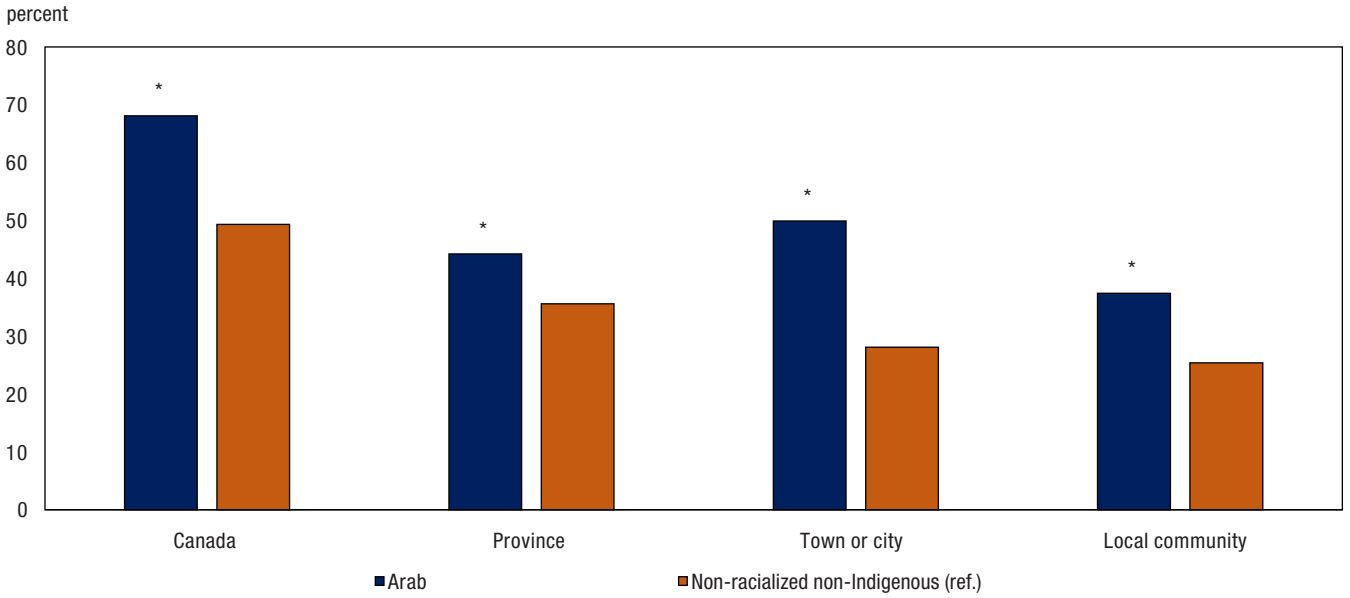
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

As of 2020, Arabs were more likely to report having a very strong sense of belonging to Canada than the non-racialized non-Indigenous population

Despite facing challenges connected to housing, employment and job match, the proportion of Arabs who had a very strong sense of belonging to Canada (68.1%) was significantly higher than that among the non-racialized non-Indigenous population (Chart 24). This was likewise the case for their reported sense of belonging to their province (44.2%), their city or town (49.9%), and their local community (37.4%).[47]

45. This indicator is referred to as housing affordability. Housing affordability is assessed for owner and tenant households with total household income greater than zero in nonfarm and nonreserve private dwellings.
46. This indicator is referred to as housing suitability and is defined by CMHC's National Occupancy Standard. In a household made up of a couple and their children, the standard is that the couple will share a bedroom; two children under the age of 5 of any sex will share a bedroom; and two children aged 5 to 17 of the same sex will share a bedroom. In all other situations, people will each have their own bedroom. Housing with too few bedrooms to allow this (for example, where the number of bedrooms means a child needs to share a room with the parents, three or more children need to share a room, or children aged 5 to 17 of opposite sexes need to share a room) is considered unsuitable.
47. These data, as well as the data on confidence in institutions and experiences of discrimination, are from the 2020 General Social Survey – Social Identity, conducted from August 2020 to February 2021.

Chart 24
Proportion of Arab and non-racialized non-Indigenous populations with a very strong sense of belonging to selected communities, Canada, 2020



* significantly different from reference category (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey – Social Identity, 2020.

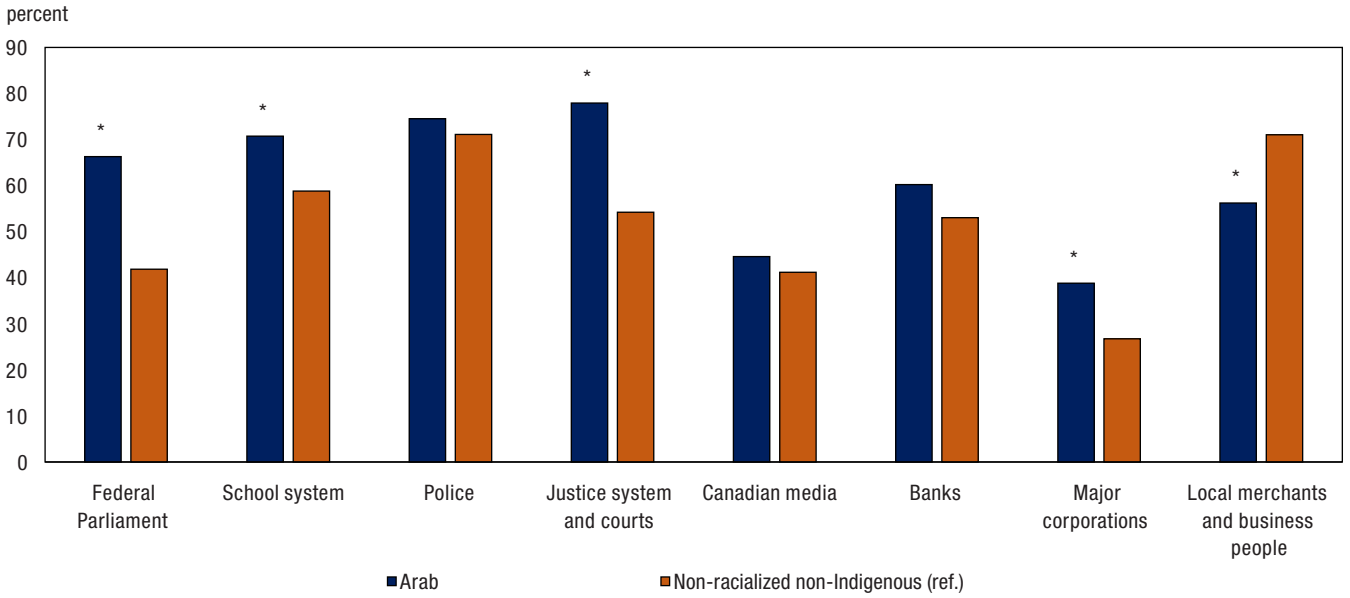
In the overall population, immigrants were more likely than non-immigrants to have a very strong sense of belonging to Canada,[48] their province, their city or town and their local community. This may have been a factor in the results for the Arab populations, as immigrants make up a larger share of the Arab populations than of the non-racialized non-Indigenous population. However, Arab immigrants were significantly more likely than non-racialized non-Indigenous immigrants to have a very strong sense of belonging to Canada (72.6% of Arab immigrants vs. 58.2% of non-racialized non-Indigenous immigrants), their city or town (52.9% vs. 35.2%) and their local community (40.3% vs. 30.9%). The non-immigrant Arab population could not be analyzed because of insufficient sample size.

Arabs were more likely than the non-racialized non-Indigenous population to report high confidence in governmental institutions

Two-thirds or more of Arabs reported having high[49] levels of confidence in governmental institutions, including the federal Parliament (66.3%), the school system (70.7%), the police (74.5%), and the justice system and courts (77.9%). The share of Arabs with high levels of confidence in the federal Parliament, the school system, and the justice system and courts was significantly higher than that among the non-racialized non-Indigenous population (Chart 25). The share with high levels of confidence in the police was similar among both groups.

48. This is consistent with previous research, such as that by Stick et al. (2023).
49. Confidence was rated by respondents on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest. Responses of 4 or 5 were classified as "high confidence," responses of 3 as "middling confidence," and responses of 1 or 2 as "low confidence." People who did not respond to the question were excluded from the analysis.

Chart 25
Proportions of Arab and non-racialized non-Indigenous populations with high levels of confidence in selected institutions, Canada, 2020



* significantly different from reference category (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey – Social Identity, 2020.

In terms of confidence in private businesses, Arabs (38.8%) were significantly more likely than the non-racialized non-Indigenous population (26.7%) to have high levels of confidence in major corporations. However, Arabs (56.2%) were less likely than the non-racialized non-Indigenous population (71.0%) to have high levels of confidence in local merchants and business people.

In 2020, nearly 4 in 10 Arabs had experienced discrimination in the past six years

In 2020, nearly 4 in 10 Arabs (38.9%) reported having experienced discrimination at some point in the past six years.[50] They most frequently faced discrimination based on their ethnicity or culture (29.0%), religion (22.2%), race or colour (16.6%), or language (14.7%). Discrimination based on religion was experienced by a larger share of Arab Muslims (31.6%) than other Arabs (10.1%).[51] Discrimination based on sex was experienced by 13.3% of Arab women.

More than one in five Arabs experienced discrimination at work or when applying for a job or promotion (22.3%), and more than one in six experienced discrimination in a store, bank or restaurant (17.5%). Other circumstances in which they faced discrimination were when attending school or classes (10.9%), when dealing with the police (3.7%), when crossing the border into Canada (2.3%), when dealing with the courts (0.8%), and in other situations (6.1%).[52]

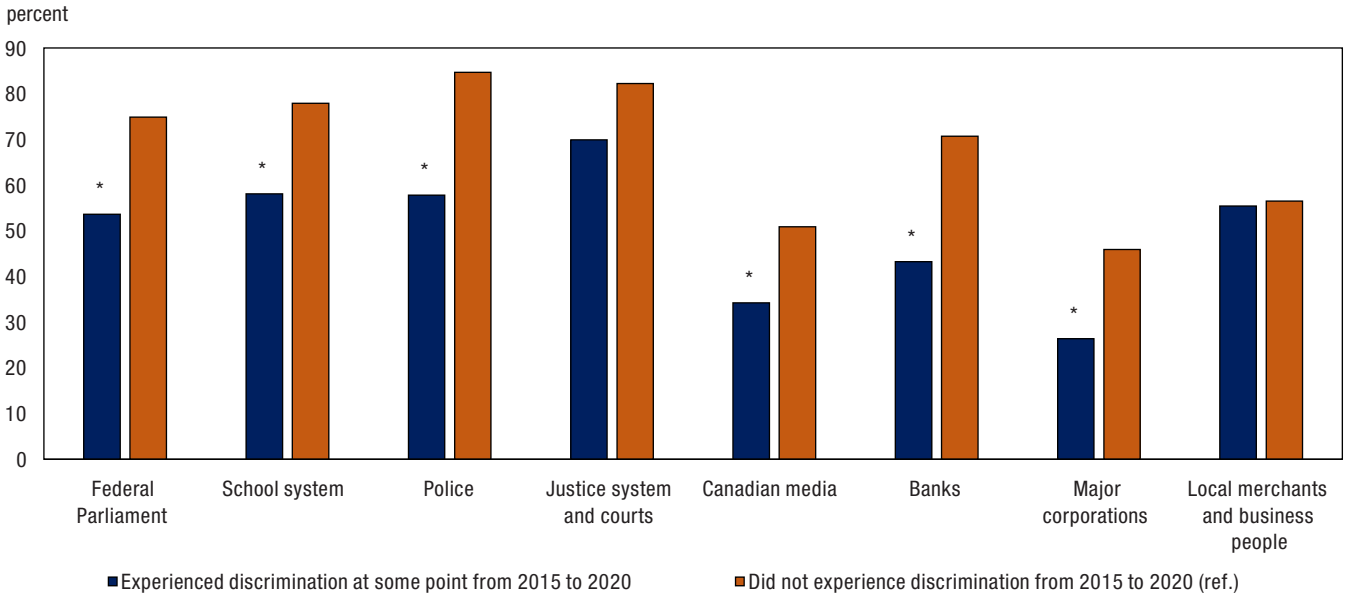
There were no significant differences between Ontario and Quebec in Arabs' experiences of discrimination, either overall or for particular types or situations.

50. The specific reference periods of the questions asked on the 2020 General Social Survey – Social Identity, carried out from August 2020 to February 2021, were "in the 5 years before the Covid-19 pandemic" and "since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic." Questions regarding the two reference periods have been combined in this portrait's analysis (an answer of "Yes" for either reference period was treated as "Yes"; an answer of "No" for both reference periods was treated as "No"; and combinations of "No" for one reference period and non-response for another were treated as non-response and excluded from the analysis).
51. The figure for non-Muslim Arabs should be interpreted with caution because of the small sample size.
52. Not everyone interacts with schools, the police, border crossings or the courts, so these figures do not show what percentage of people who had such interactions experienced discrimination.

Arabs who experienced discrimination had lower confidence in institutions

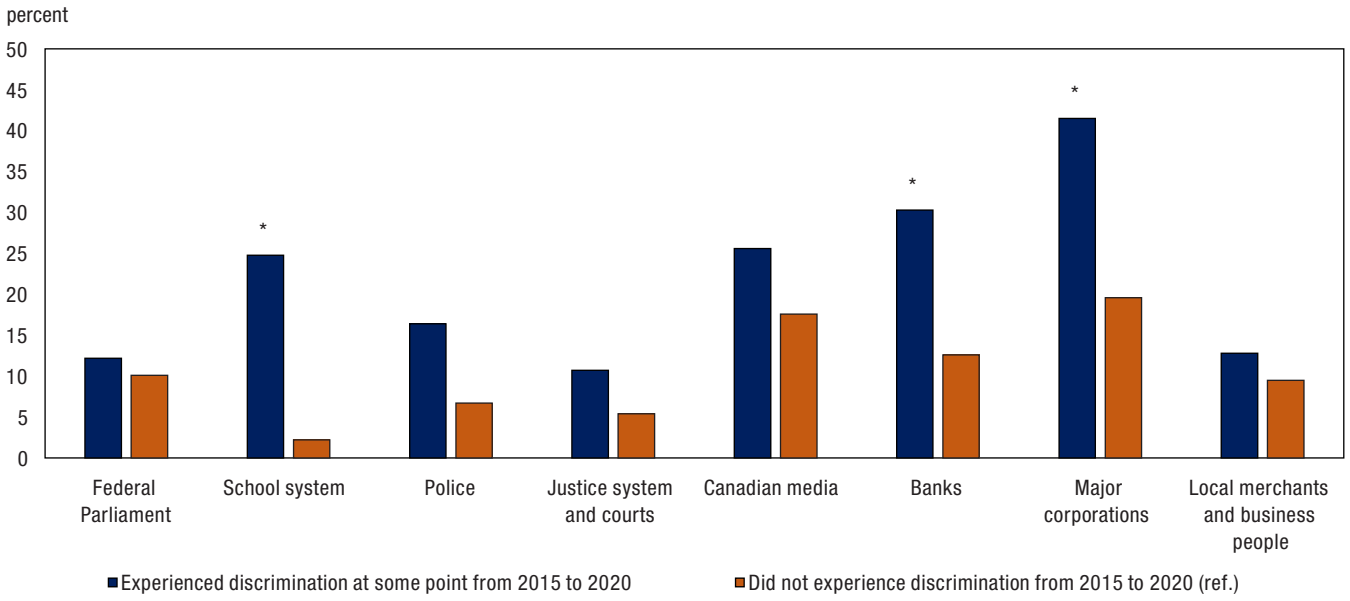
Arabs who had experienced discrimination had significantly lower levels of confidence in many institutions, including the federal Parliament, the school system, the police, the Canadian media, banks and major corporations (charts 26 and 27).

Chart 26
Proportion of the Arab populations with high confidence in selected institutions, by experiences of discrimination, Canada, 2020



* significantly different from reference category (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey – Social Identity, 2020.

Chart 27
Proportion of the Arab populations with low confidence in selected institutions, by experiences of discrimination, Canada, 2020



* significantly different from reference category (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey – Social Identity, 2020.

Approximately one-quarter (24.8%) of Arabs who had experienced discrimination (in any situation, not only in schools) had low confidence in the school system. In contrast, very few Arabs who had not experienced discrimination had low confidence in the school system (2.2%).

Confidence in local merchants and business people did not differ significantly between Arabs who had experienced discrimination (in any situation) and those who had not. In contrast, Arabs who had experienced discrimination (in any situation) were less likely to have high confidence in banks and major corporations and more likely to have low confidence in these institutions.

Conclusion

Arab populations in Canada have been shaped by a varied and rich immigration history over the course of nearly 150 years, beginning with Lebanese immigration to Canada in the late 1800s. While nearly all Arabs in Canada were born in Southwest Asia and Northern Africa or had parents or grandparents born there, they came from a wide range of countries across these regions, and their places of birth became more varied over the two decades from 2001 to 2021. Three in 10 Arabs were born in Canada, some as children and grandchildren of immigrants and others as part of families who had been in Canada for more than a century.

Arab communities had diverse backgrounds, differing between and within places of birth. Arabs born in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia mostly lived in Quebec and were mostly Muslim. Many other Arab communities included substantial Arab Christian minorities, not only from Lebanon, but also from Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Israel, and the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Place of birth can also be reductive in understanding identity because of large diaspora populations within Southwest Asia and Northern Africa. For instance, significant Arab populations reported ethnic and cultural origins corresponding to places that were not their place of birth, including those with Palestinian and Syrian origins. Furthermore, not everyone from Southwest Asia or Northern Africa identified as Arab: some were members of ethnic minority groups, such as Kurds, Coptic Egyptians, Assyrians and Chaldeans from Iraq, and Kabyle and Berber (Amazigh) populations from Northern Africa, while others identified with their country of birth or their region (e.g., North African, Middle Eastern) and did not conceptualize themselves as Arab.

In terms of socioeconomic outcomes, many Arabs were highly educated and were highly represented in certain fields of study experiencing high labour market demand, such as pharmacy, medicine, dentistry and engineering. Their knowledge and use of English and French were high. Even so, they experienced barriers to finding work related to foreign degrees in these fields and faced elevated rates of unemployment, especially for Arab women. This created challenges relating to low income, poverty, and unaffordable or crowded housing, especially since many were part of families with children. Additionally, high educational attainment was not universal, and those with lower levels of education, including many Syrian refugees, faced even greater employment and housing challenges and higher rates of poverty. Finally, many Arabs reported having experienced racial or ethnic discrimination, as well as, among Arab Muslims in particular, religious discrimination. Despite these experiences, Arabs were more likely than the non-racialized non-Indigenous population to report high levels of confidence in institutions and a very strong sense of belonging to Canada and their local communities.

Data gaps remain in some areas. The sample size did not permit disaggregation of data on experiences of discrimination, confidence in institutions and sense of belonging by immigrant status. There is also much room for future research to build on the findings in this portrait, for example, by looking in more detail at how socioeconomic outcomes differ between groups of Arabs from different countries and with different immigration histories and religions, as well as whether the socioeconomic characteristics of non-Arabs from Southwest Asia and Northern Africa are similar to or different from those of Arabs from the same region.

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