

Evaluation of the Family Reunification Program

Evaluation Division
Audit and Evaluation Branch
Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

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Executive summary

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the relevance and performance of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's (IRCC) Family Reunification Program. This evaluation was conducted in fulfillment of the requirements under the 2016 Treasury Board *Policy on Results*. The evaluation was guided by the program outcomes and covered the period between 2014 to 2019, with an emphasis placed on the later years in the scope period.

Background

The Family Reunification Program is a longstanding component of Canada's immigration system and facilitates the reunification of immigrants and Canadians with members of their family. A majority (95%) of the Family Reunification Program is comprised of Spousal Reunification (including spouses, common-law partners, and conjugal partners) and Parents and Grandparents (PGP). Family reunification requires an IRCC-approved sponsor (i.e. a permanent resident or a Canadian citizen) who commits to financially support the person(s) they are sponsoring for a defined period of time.

Summary of conclusions

Overall, family reunification provides numerous cultural benefits to their sponsors and Canadian society, particularly through the knowledge transfer of cultural traditions, as well as helping to maintain a language other than English and French, thus contributing to Canada's multicultural society.

A majority of spousal clients are participating in the labour market, with 68% reporting employment income in their first year in Canada. While an older demographic, PGPs are also contributing via indirect economic supports to their households

(e.g., caregiving), which in turn, supported their sponsors in actively contributing to the labour market.

There is a high demand for spousal and PGP reunification, and the Family Reunification Program continues to reunite families and plays a role in attracting and retaining newcomers to Canada. However, clients and sponsors experienced challenges during their application process, namely related to the number of forms and website jargon. Furthermore, clients face the challenge of lengthy wait times for decisions on their applications, which are impacted by the volume of applications in comparison to admissions, and the additional work burden procedural requests (e.g. ATIP and litigation) place on officers and policy staff.

Summary of recommendations

There are three areas of recommendations for IRCC to undertake. These recommendations focus on awareness of settlement services, understanding of applications and requirements, and processing times.

Recommendation 1: IRCC should identify strategies to increase awareness of IRCC-funded settlement services among Family Reunification newcomers, as well as their sponsors.

Recommendation 2: IRCC should explore options for simplifying the spousal reunification application process, including clarifying the guidance on IRCC's public facing website.

Recommendation 3: IRCC should continue to implement strategies to reduce family reunification application processing times.

Evaluation of the Family Reunification Program – Management Response Action Plan (MRAP)

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: IRCC should identify strategies to increase awareness of IRCC-funded settlement services among Family Reunification newcomers, as well as their sponsors.

Response: IRCC agrees with this recommendation.

Departmental research on the Settlement Program has also identified newcomer awareness of IRCC-funded settlement services as an area of improvement. The recent 2023 Settlement Outcomes Report also highlighted this finding. Following the publication of that report, IRCC conducted further in-depth analysis to better understand how the awareness, uptake, and access of settlement services impact the outcomes of different newcomer groups. The results of this analysis identified those admitted through Family Reunification as a group of newcomers who would have benefitted from knowing about and using settlement services. The research also identified more detailed demographic characteristics to help identify who to target through outreach and awareness efforts. Finally, this type of in-depth analysis is also increasing IRCC’s understanding of how newcomers experience barriers that may prevent them from accessing services.

Action	Accountability	Completion date
IRCC will provide additional information on settlement services available to families pre- and post-arrival on relevant family sponsorship web pages.	Lead: Settlement and Integration Policy Support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family and Social Immigration Branch Client Support & Engagement Branch 	Q4 2024–2025
IRCC will share its latest settlement services awareness research results with partners and service provider organizations to better target those areas of need.	Lead: SIP Support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> FSIB and CSE 	Q3 2024-2025
IRCC will work with partners and service provider organizations to implement appropriate outreach efforts to increase awareness of settlement services.	Lead: SIP Support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> FSIB and CSE 	Q4 2024–2025

Recommendation 2: IRCC should explore options for simplifying the spousal reunification application process, including clarifying the guidance on IRCC’s public facing website.

Response: IRCC agrees with this recommendation.

In 2023, IRCC completed a Strategic Immigration Review, identifying key actions to be taken in the years to come, including making it easier for applicants to find the information they need. This includes making the IRCC website easier to navigate and empowering applicants by giving them more information about the status of their applications through ongoing service improvements.

As part of the Review, the department has also committed to streamline pathways and programs. IRCC will continue looking for opportunities to simplify complex pathways to reduce duplication and eliminate barriers.

Actions Undertaken/Ongoing

In late 2023, the Department launched the Explore Immigration programs tool to support the discovery of eligible programs for applicants. This tool includes a specific set of questions to support the discovery of the different ways individuals might be able to come to Canada or support someone coming to Canada through family reunification pathways.

As of 2023, clients can use the applications status tracker to find information about their applications, including those sponsoring a spouse, partner or child. IRCC is also simplifying the way applicants access their application status information in their single window online account, starting with a subset of applicants in the fall of 2023 and expanding through 2024.

Action	Accountability	Completion date
Through the Digital Platform Modernization programme, IRCC will launch a new online account with an easier to use interface and integrated case tracking, which will simplify applying for spousal reunification. Family class applicants will be rolled into this new online account by Q2 of 2025/26.	Lead: DPM3 Service Policy and Design (Digital Channel Division) Support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and Social Immigration Branch • Immigration Program Guidance • Client Support & Engagement 	Q2 2025–2026
IRCC will work to simplify navigation, information architecture and language for key spousal sponsorship content, including sponsorship “How to apply” content and the Help Centre, while removing any outdated or redundant content from the site.	Lead: Corporate, Marketing and Digital Communications Support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and Social Immigration Branch • Immigration Program Guidance • Public Affairs and Strategic Communications • Client Support & Engagement 	Q4 2024–2025

Recommendation 3: IRCC should continue to implement strategies to reduce family reunification application processing times.

Response: IRCC agrees with this recommendation.

In 2023, IRCC completed a Strategic Immigration Review, identifying key actions to be taken in the years to come, including getting application processing times back to service standards for key programs, and re-evaluate them.

Actions Undertaken/Ongoing

IRCC continues to work towards achieving the stated processing standards, so that applicants can obtain an immigration decision in a timely and predictable manner. Further, IRCC is committed to reviewing current service standards with a human-centric lens to ensure that Canada remains competitive globally. A key initiative includes:

- Embracing digital tools that allow officers to process requests from different parts of the world more effectively, and the use of Advanced Analytics to automate some determinations for routine cases. IRCC is currently exploring expanding the use of this technology to overseas spousal and partner applications.

IRCC is also prioritizing establishing service standards for programs that currently have none. This includes permanent residence streams, such as the Parent and Grandparents Program. A Service Standard Review examining these pathways is currently underway, with analysis anticipated to be complete by December 2024.

Action	Accountability	Completion date
IRCC will complete a review service standards for all family reunification programs to ensure that Canada remains globally competitive and continues to attract immigrants.	Lead: Service Policy & Design Branch (Service Strategy Division) Support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational, Planning & Performance Branch • Family and Social Immigration Branch • Immigration Program Guidance • Client Support & Engagement Branch 	Q3 2024–2025
IRCC will continue to test improvements to the website to better communicate wait times and ensure applicants understand how to apply processing times and service standard information to their own situations.	Lead: Service Policy & Design Branch (Service Strategy Division) Support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate, Marketing and Digital Communications • Operational, Planning & Performance Branch 	Q4 2024-2025
IRCC will launch an advanced analytics tool for overseas Family Class spouse and partner applications. This will enable quicker eligibility assessments for some applicants as the tool will approve eligibility on routine applications. The triage function of the new tool sorts applications and the processing efficiencies gained through the use of this tool will contribute to the goal of quicker family reunification of spouses and partners.	Lead: Operational, Planning & Performance Branch <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centralized Network • Global Network Support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and Social Immigration Branch • Immigration Program Guidance 	Q4 2023–2024

List of acronyms

ATIP	Access to Information and Privacy
GCMS	Global Case Management System
iCARE	Immigration Contribution Agreement Reporting Environment
IRCC	Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
IMDB	Longitudinal Immigration Database
NAARS	Needs and Assets Assessment and Referral Services
PGP	Parents and Grandparents Program
PNP	Provincial Nominee Program
YSA	Years Since Admission

Program Profile

Overview

The Family Reunification Program is a longstanding component of Canada's immigration system and facilitates the reunification of immigrants and Canadians with members of their family. Unlike most other IRCC immigration programs, eligibility criteria are centered on the relationship between the sponsor and the principal applicant. Family reunification applicants must have an IRCC-approved sponsor who is a permanent resident or Canadian citizen and signs a commitment to financially support the person(s) they are sponsoring for a defined period of time.

Program streams

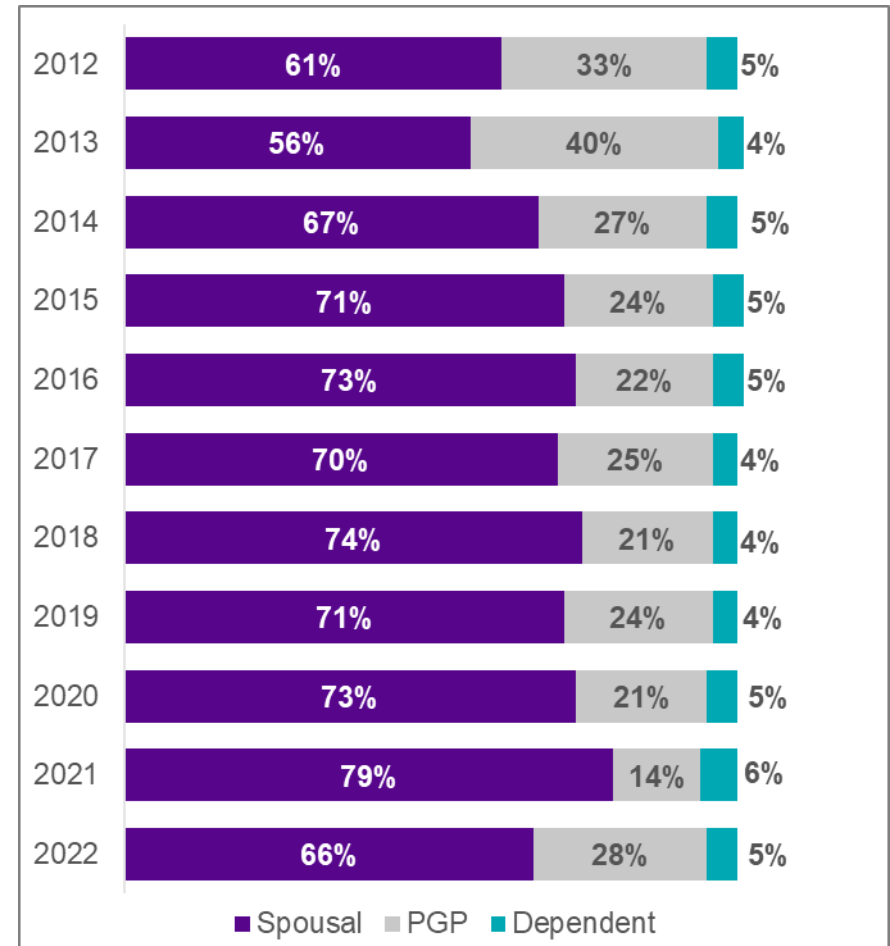
The Family Reunification Program can be grouped into four main streams, with the largest stream being Spousal reunification, comprising 68% of family reunification arrivals between 2014 and 2019. Parents and Grandparents (PGP) reunification comprises 25%, 4% for Dependent Children, and less than 1% for Other Relatives.

1. Spousal stream (Spouses, common-law, and conjugal partners)

This stream requires the principal applicant be the **spouse**, **common-law** or **conjugal partner** of a sponsor, and applications can be made from within Canada (for spouse or common-law partner only) or overseas (all 3 categories). Dependents can be included as a part of this application. IRCC **does not place a limit on the number of spousal applications it will accept in a given year**.

In general, the spousal stream does not have a minimum necessary income requirement for sponsorship, but the sponsor must sign a three year financial commitment to support the sponsored individual.

Figure 1: Breakdown of Family Reunification arrivals in Canada, 2012-2022



Source: IRCC Permanent Resident Data, as of March 31, 2023

Note: only the years 2012, 2015, 2018, 2019, and 2022 have 1% under "Other"

2. Parents and grandparents Stream

Applicants must be the **parent** or **grandparent** of the sponsor, and their spouse or partner, and dependent children may also be included.

Sponsors are financially responsible for the applicant(s) and must have a minimum necessary income plus 30% for three consecutive years preceding the date of the application.¹ In addition, sponsors are required to have a sponsorship undertaking for 20 years (or 10 years in Quebec), requiring that they commit to financially supporting their PGP for the duration of this period.

The PGP stream has a cap on applications, and ranged from 5,000 to 30,000 per year between 2014 and 2020. Program caps are decided by the Minister.

IRCC has used various intake models to receive PGP applications. In 2014 to 2016, the Department used a **first-in application intake model** to manage applications. When the window of time came for clients to be able to submit applications, interested sponsors could submit their application. However, the Department had a target number of applications to receive and once that target was reached, the window closed. In 2017 to 2018, the Department used a **randomized selection model** to manage the intake of applications. The randomized intake model required sponsors to fill out an 'interest to sponsor' form during a specified period of time. From the individuals who completed an interest to sponsor, a set number of potential sponsors were randomly selected and invited to submit a PGP application. In 2019, a new intake was introduced whereby the Department opened a window to receive 'interest to sponsor' forms but closed the window once it reached a maximum number of forms. Then, the window closed and the invitations to apply were sent based on the order in which the 'interest to sponsor' forms were received.²

¹ The minimum income requirement is adjusted by the number of people that are being sponsored and updated on a regular basis. Due to COVID-19, the income requirements for the 2020 and 2021 tax years were reduced to a minimum necessary income (rather than the necessary plus 30%).

3. Dependent children stream

Applicants may be sponsored as a principal applicant, provided they have a **biological link** to their sponsor, or are **legally adopted** by their sponsor.

Adoptions have a provincial requirement, and in certain cases, the *Hague Convention on Adoption* may also apply. International adoptions require a legal adoption, as well as the immigration or citizenship process to live in Canada.

There is no cap on applications, and no income requirement. However, the sponsorship undertaking period is 10 years or until the dependent is age 25 (or 3 years if 22 or older when individual becomes a permanent resident), with the exception of Quebec where the undertaking is 10 years or until the age of 18 if the child is under 16, or 3 years or until the age of 25 if the child is 16 or over.

4. Other relatives stream

Applicants may only be sponsored through this stream under **very specific circumstances**.

A sponsor with no immediate or extended family in Canada and no relatives who could otherwise be sponsored (as defined under the Family Class) may sponsor one relative, connected by blood or adoption, regardless of age or relationship. In addition, an orphaned brother, sister, nephew, niece, or grandchild who is single and under 18 years of age may also be sponsored.

There is no cap on applications, and the sponsor must meet an income requirement for one year preceding the date of the application. For other relatives, there is a sponsorship undertaking period of 10 years (for both Quebec and the rest of Canada). For orphaned relatives, the sponsorship undertaking in Quebec is for 10 years or until the age of 18 if

² Canada, IRCC, 2023. *The Parents and Grandparents Program: Intake Report 2014 to 2019*.

the child is under 16, or 3 years or until the age of 25 if the child is 16 or over, and 10 years for the rest of Canada.

Super Visa

The Super Visa is an alternative pathway for parents and grandparents to reunite with their children and grandchildren in Canada. The Super Visa is an extended stay [Temporary Resident Visa](#) for parents and grandparents that allows applicants multiple

entries to visit Canada for up to 10 years. Prior to 2022, the length of time one could stay in Canada per visit using a Super Visa was up to two years. However, since July 4, 2022, the stay period per entry increased to five years.³ Parents and grandparents visiting on a Super Visa can also apply for two-year extensions to their stay while still in Canada.

³ Canada, IRCC (2022). *Enhancements to the super visa program for parents and grandparents will help reunite families more easily and for longer*. News release – June 7, 2022.

Evaluation Background and Context

Overview

The Evaluation of the Family Reunification Program was conducted to provide timely evidence and results information in support of policy development and program delivery as well as fulfillment of the evaluation requirements under the Treasury Board's *Policy on Results*. The evaluation assessed the relevance and performance of the Family Reunification Program since the last evaluation (completed in March 2014).

Evaluation scope

The evaluation examined the two primary streams of the Family Reunification Program: the spousal stream (including spouses, common-law partners, and conjugal partners) and PGP stream, as they comprised the vast majority (95%) of the Family Reunification Program's processed applications.

While the evaluation reviewed the period between 2014 and 2019, an emphasis was placed on the latter scoped years. As planning and scoping for the evaluation was undertaken in early 2020, the impact of COVID-19 on the program was unknown. Where applicable, the COVID-19 story is presented throughout the evaluation, when it demonstrates evidentiary context in the Family Reunification Program's results story.

Evaluation focus

The evaluation assessed two primary areas of focus:

1. **Program benefits:** This area of focus examined the extent to which Canada and reunified family members are benefiting socially, culturally, and economically from Family Class immigration in relation to the Spousal and PGP streams. This included an in-depth look at both the direct and indirect benefits of family reunification, including indirect contributions made by newcomers.

2. **Program access and integrity:** This evaluation examined newcomers' and sponsors' access to spousal and PGP streams, including potential barriers, as well as implications for program integrity.

In addition, the evaluation took into account various **Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+)** considerations for the program, in accordance with the Treasury Board Secretariat's *Directive on Results*.

Evaluation questions

1. What is the continued need for the Family Reunification Program? What is the value added for Canada and reunified families?
2. To what extent are sponsors and newcomers able to effectively navigate the family reunification application process?
3. To what extent do Family Reunification applicants face barriers related to gender and other GBA+ considerations with regards to program eligibility and application processes?
4. To what extent has the Family Reunification Program been ensuring consistent and defensible decision making and effectively maintaining program integrity?
5. To what extent is the Family Reunification Program operating efficiently?
6. What are the social, economic and cultural benefits for Canada and reunified families from spousal and partner reunification?
7. What are the social, economic and cultural benefits for Canada and reunified families from PGP reunification?

Methodology

Data collection and analysis took place from January 2021 to August 2022. The evaluation included **multiple lines of qualitative and quantitative evidence**.

Surveys

Four surveys were undertaken which examined user experiences with the application process, as well as questions related to economic, social, and cultural benefits.

- PGP Client Survey: A PGP client survey was sent to 57,500 individuals who immigrated to Canada via the PGP stream between 2014 and 2019, with **5,613 responses received** (response rate of 9.8%).
- PGP Sponsor Survey: A PGP sponsor survey was sent to 47,382 individuals who sponsored a PGP that arrived in Canada between 2014 and 2019, with **8,441 responses received** (response rate of 17.8%).
- Spousal Client Survey: A spousal client survey was sent to 212,972 individuals who had arrived in Canada between 2014 and 2019 through the spouse, common-law or conjugal partners streams, with **33,277 responses received** (response rate of 15.6%).
- Spousal Sponsor Survey: A spousal sponsor survey was sent to 200,031 sponsors of spouse, common-law or conjugal partners who arrived in Canada between 2014 and 2019, with **30,484 responses received** (response rate of 15.2%).

⁴ In Fall 2023, IRCC underwent a departmental restructuring resulting the creation of new branches and sectors. Branches and sectors within the report are referred to by their names at the time of analysis.

⁵ Although iCARE was launched in 2013 to replace a previous monitoring system, there was a transition period between the two platforms as functionalities were added to allow for reporting requirements up until

Key informant interviews

34 semi-structured interviews with 37 key informants were undertaken and included individuals internal to IRCC with representatives from Immigration Branch, Immigration Program Guidance Branch, Domestic Network, Centralized Network, International Network, Integrity Risk Management Branch, Client Experience Branch, Case Management Branch and Litigation Management Branch.⁴

Administrative data review

An administrative data analysis of spousal and PGP newcomers who **arrived in Canada between 2014 and 2019** was undertaken by examining data from the following databases:

- Global Case Management System (GCMS): operational statistics database on family class newcomers consisting of socio-demographic characteristics and processing data.
- Immigration Contribution Agreement Reporting Environment (iCARE): a database containing information on the number and type of IRCC-funded settlement and resettlement services accessed by newcomer clients, both pre-arrival and domestic.⁵
- Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB): a tax filer database from Statistics Canada, which consists of incidence of employment, average earnings, and social assistance usage data. Included data from the 2021 IMDB, regarding family reunification clients who arrived in Canada between 2009 and 2020 and filed taxes.

October 2015. In addition, data available in iCARE regarding Manitoba and British Columbia was not available for earlier years, as the federal government repatriated Settlement Services in 2013 and 2014, respectively. As a result, iCARE data for 2014 and 2015 may be underrepresenting the total number of individuals served by IRCC-funded settlement services.

Document review

The document review examined over 100 relevant documents, including: legislative and regulatory documents, IRCC documentation (i.e., policies, guidance, performance

measurement, research), IRCC survey reports, stakeholder reports (i.e. Canada Border Services Agency, Statistics Canada), and other relevant documents.

Limitations and Mitigations

Overall, the evaluation used complementary quantitative and qualitative data to reduce gaps and create integrated findings based on multiple lines of evidence.

Despite the limitations listed below, the evaluation ensured the triangulation of multiple lines of evidence, along with implementing the mitigation strategies to ensure that evidence and results are considered sufficient and that the findings are reliable and can be used with confidence.

Surveys

Surveys were undertaken with individuals who were aged 18 and older, arrived in Canada (or sponsored an individual who arrived) between 2014 and 2019, and had a valid email address.

- In order to mitigate the traditionally low response rate of PGP clients, the survey was available in **ten unique languages** to improve the accessibility of the survey. These languages were based on the most commonly identified mother tongue language within the administrative data and included English, French, Arabic, Spanish, Farsi, Romanian, Russian, Urdu, Vietnamese and Simplified Chinese.
- To facilitate client experience, the PGP client and sponsor surveys allowed respondents to **skip non-essential questions**, resulting in low number of responses for certain questions. Due to the skipping, results of certain survey questions are unable to be reported due to low sample size. This limitation was mitigated in the spousal surveys by requiring their responses.
- To ensure an accurate sampling of clients, **duplicate email addresses and those associated with immigration consultants or lawyers were removed** from the survey population.

A survey of officers was not administered due to resourcing constraints. This was mitigated by ensuring that **interviews were conducted with representatives from all IRCC networks processing components of Family Reunification files** (Centralized Network, Domestic Network, and International Network).

Administrative data

While IRCC obtains information from clients on their **immigration consultants and representatives** through the Family Reunification application forms (i.e., IMM 5476 Use of a Representative Form), the department is unable to extract this information from the individual immigration records in a format that allows for overall program reporting. Therefore, a full understanding of immigration consultant and representative usage was unable to be determined via administrative data, despite the information existing in the immigration records. In order to obtain information on immigration consultant usage, survey responses from clients and sponsors who reported using immigration consultants or representatives was used to provide an overview of the immigration consultant / representative usage.

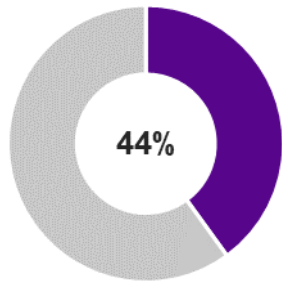
Profile of Family Reunification

Spousal reunification

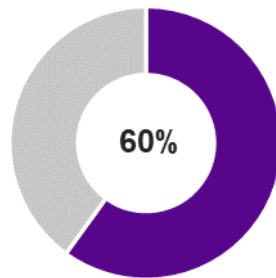
Between 2014 and 2019, 295,474 principal applicants arrived in Canada through the Spousal Stream with the Spouse category (91%) most commonly used, compared to 9% for the Common Law Partner category, and less than 1% for the Conjugal Partner category.

The Spousal Stream is comprised of young principal applicants with 44% of individuals under the age of 34. It is also comprised of a high percentage of females (60%). Francophone individuals made up 8%. A sizable number of individuals (36%) had previous permits, which were typically work or study permits in Canada.

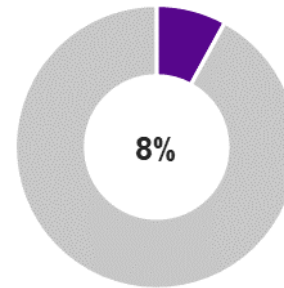
Figure 2: Socio-demographic characteristics of spousal reunification clients



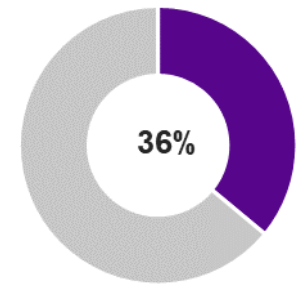
Almost half (44%) of Spousal Clients are between the ages of 18 and 34.



A majority (60%) of Spousal Clients are female



8% of Spousal Clients are francophone.



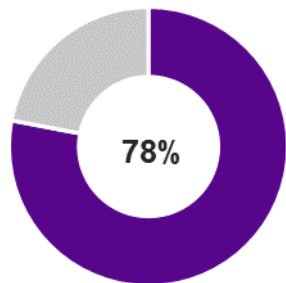
Over a third (36%) of Spousal Clients had a previous permit (i.e., study or work).

PGP reunification

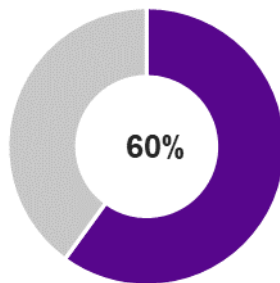
Between 2014 and 2019, 100,588 individuals arrived in Canada through the PGP Stream. The PGP Stream is comprised of 64% principal applicants and 36% of the principal applicant's spouse or dependent.

In contrast to the Spousal Stream, PGPs tended to be in an older demographic with 78% over the age of 65. Like the Spousal Stream, the PGP Stream is comprised of a higher percentage of females (60%). Most PGP clients are married or in a common-law relationship (75%). Of the PGPs who arrived in Canada between 2014 and 2019, 15% held a Super Visa.

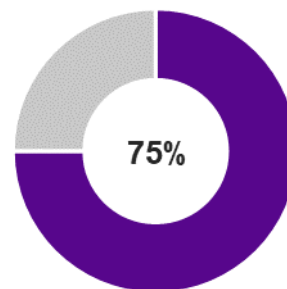
Figure 3: Socio-demographic characteristics of PGP clients



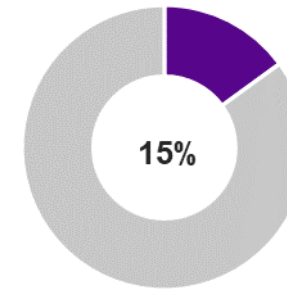
A majority (78%) of PGP clients are over the age of 65.



A majority (60%) of PGP clients are female.



A majority (75%) of PGP Clients are married or in common-law relationships

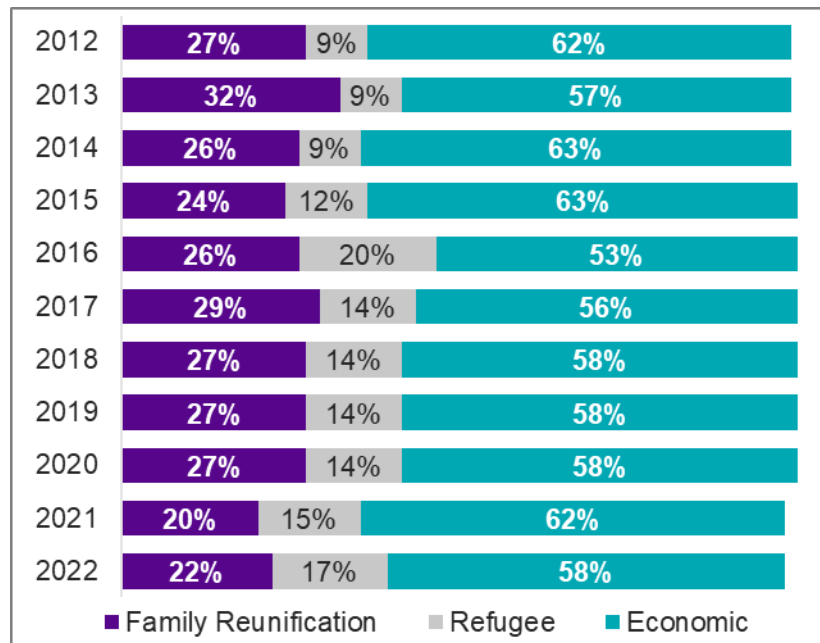


15% of PGP clients had a Super Visa.

Need for the Family Reunification Program

Between 2014 and 2019, family reunification is the **second largest immigration class**, comprising approximately 27% of annual permanent resident admissions to Canada, with approximately 470,080 individuals arriving in Canada.

Figure 4: Arrivals in Canada by immigration category, 2012-2022

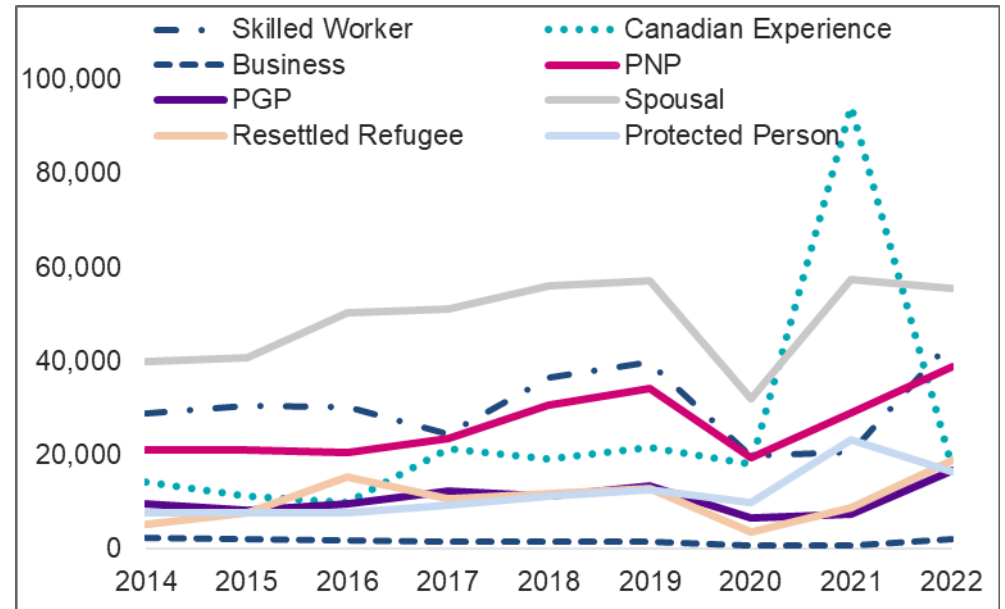


Source: IRCC Permanent Resident Data, as of March 31, 2023

Note: The percentages do not add to 100% because some arrivals were classified as “other” and those are not included in this chart.

In addition, spousal reunification admits the **highest number of principal applicants of all immigration programs**.

Figure 5: Arrivals of principal applicants by immigration category and landing year



Source: IRCC Permanent Resident Data, as of April 30, 2023

Documents and interviewees highlighted that family reunification continues to be a **Government of Canada priority** as it plays an integral role in attracting, retaining, and integrating immigrants who go on to contribute to Canada.⁶ Interviewees highlighted that family reunification is **complementary to the economic and refugee lines of business**, allowing those immigrants to reunite in Canada with their families.

This was further demonstrated by surveyed PGP sponsors, of which 98% had immigrated to Canada themselves, mostly as economic immigrants (67%). While results were mixed regarding whether the potential to sponsor **influenced their decision to move to Canada**, 41% indicated that it influenced their decision.

⁶ Canada, IRCC (2022) CIMM – Family Reunification – March 3, 2022.

Cultural Benefits of Family Reunification

Finding 1: Overall, family reunification provides numerous cultural benefits to their sponsors and Canadian society, particularly through the knowledge transfer of cultural traditions, as well as helping to maintain a language other than English and French, thus contributing to Canada’s multicultural society.

Interviewees highlighted that the sponsorship of family members helps immigrants better integrate into Canadian society as they have their social and family ties in Canada to support them.

Spousal

Over half of spousal client survey respondents reported contributing to at least one form of cultural benefits. In particular, a majority (92%) reported participating in cultural traditions, 72% reported helping to maintain a language other than English or French, 63% attended or organized community cultural events, and 55% volunteered in their community.

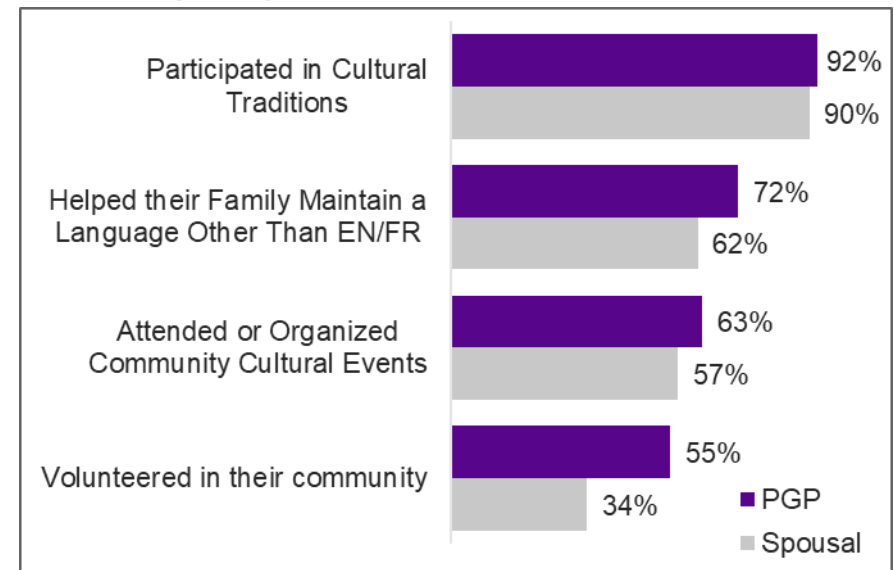
PGP

Many interviewees expressed that the biggest cultural benefit of PGP reunification was knowledge transfer – in particular, grandparents transmitted cultural knowledge and practices, as well as language skills outside of English and French to their grandchildren. The transmission of cultural knowledge was confirmed by surveyed PGP sponsors, where 19% indicated that one of the reasons why they sponsored their PGP is to help maintain their heritage.

While PGP contributions also positively impact social cohesion and cultural diversity and multiculturalism, documents highlighted that PGP presence in Canada helps immigrant households maintain their cultural traditions while also demonstrating and communicating their heritage onto future generations of Canadians and society as a whole.⁷

Bringing and sharing diverse experiences were highlighted as an intercultural bridge between a PGP’s culture and their new Canadian home. For example, 90% of surveyed PGP clients reported sometimes or often participating in cultural traditions, and 57% reported sometimes or often organizing community cultural events.

Figure 6: Surveyed PGP and spousal clients reported participation in cultural activities



Source: Survey of PGP Clients; Survey of Spousal Clients

Note: Percentage includes those who reported “sometimes” or “often”.

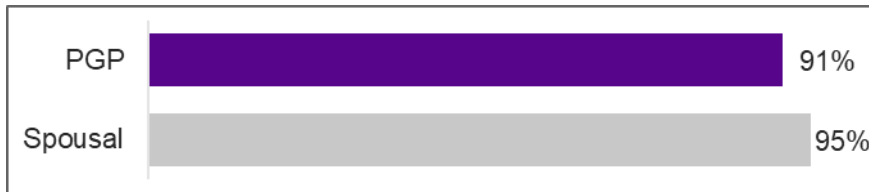
⁷ Avila-Yipton, Carmen (2017). *The Economic and Social Costs and Contributions of Parent and Grandparent Immigration*. University of Ottawa.

Social Benefits of Family Reunification

Finding 2: Being reunited with their families and the emotional support provided were of primary importance for newcomers to Canada under the Family Reunification Program.

Evidence highlighted the social benefits of family reunification, particularly in providing emotional support.

Figure 7: Surveyed PGP and spousal clients reported providing emotional support to sponsor/family



Source: Survey of PGP Clients; Survey of Spousal Clients

Note: Percentage includes those who reported 'sometimes' or 'often'

Spousal

Similar to cultural benefits, interviewees highlighted that reuniting with a spouse contributes to social benefits as reunification allowed the couple to support each other socially and emotionally, and helped create greater stability in their lives.⁸ This was confirmed by the spousal clients survey which reported that a large majority (95%) sometimes or often provided emotional support to their sponsor or family.

PGP

Within PGP reunification, the desire to see their sponsor or other family members more often was the main driver for reuniting in Canada. When asked to identify the main reason for moving to Canada, 71% of surveyed PGP clients reported it was to see their sponsor more often. Comparatively, when asked to identify the main reason for sponsoring their PGP, 74% of surveyed PGP sponsors wanted to see their parent/grandparent more often.

In sponsoring, 42% of surveyed PGP sponsors wanted to give their parent/grandparent emotional or social support and 33% reported it was to give their family a better quality of life.

Similarly to spousal clients, a majority of surveyed PGPs (91%) reported sometimes or often providing emotional support to their sponsor or family.

⁸ Canada, House of Commons (2017). *Family Reunification – Report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration*.

Economic Outcomes of Spousal Reunification

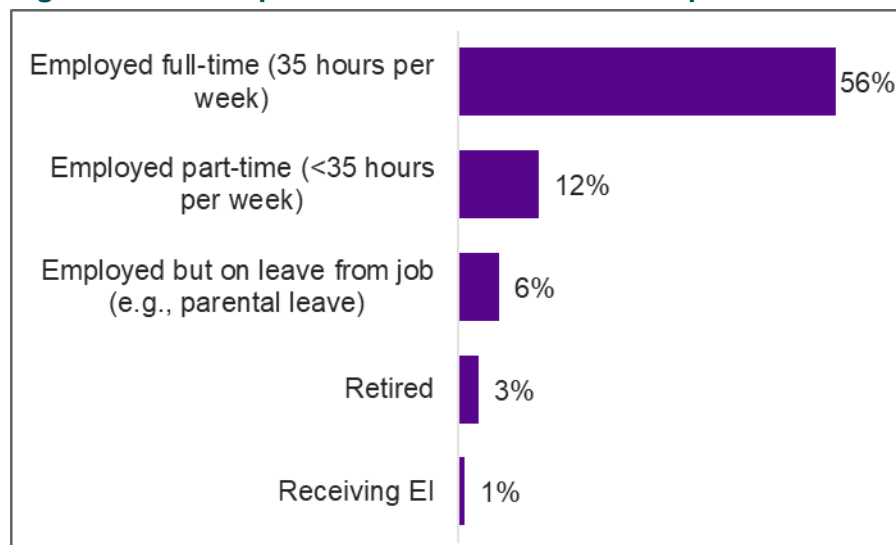
Finding 3: A majority of spousal clients are participating in the labour market, with 68% reporting employment income in their first year in Canada. This rate was generally stable over 10 years after arrival in Canada.

Interviewees highlighted that spousal reunification has economic benefits for Canada, both directly and indirectly. Spousal clients contribute directly by entering the workforce themselves and indirectly via unpaid labour (e.g., caregiving) that allows their sponsor to work or upskill, contributing to helping more people enter the labour market.

Direct economic benefits

Over two-thirds (68%) of surveyed spousal clients **self-reported being employed, either full time or part time.**⁹

Figure 8: Self-reported economic activities of spousal clients



Source: Survey of Spousal Clients.

This was confirmed through the IMDB¹⁰, which indicated that 68% to 69% of spousal principal applicants had employment income (wages, salaries and commissions) during the first ten Years Since Admissions (YSA) in Canada. In addition, the median employment income ranged from \$22,800 to \$35,900 during the first ten YSAs.

Male spousal principal applicants had higher incidences of employment income compared to women, with male incidences of employment starting at 82% in YSA 1, and decreasing slightly over time, while female incidence of employment income was 59% in YSA 1, and slightly increasing over time.

In terms of incidence of **self-employment**, spousal principal applicants saw a slight increase as YSAs progressed, with incidence of self-employment ranging from 12% to 16%.

In terms of **investment income**, spousal principal applicants had a steady increase in incidence of investment income, ranging from 10% to 18%.

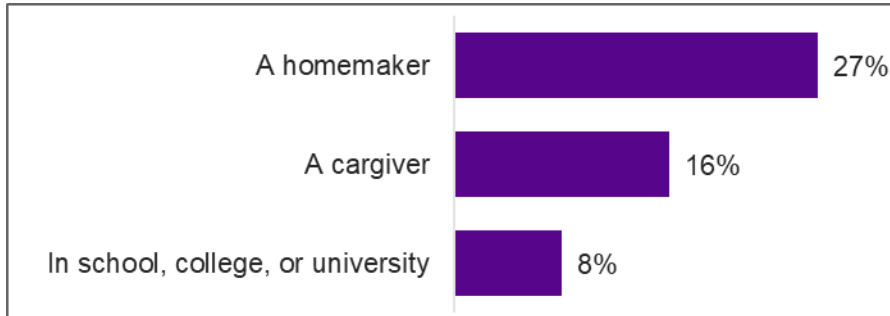
⁹ Additional breakdowns of spousal clients economic outcomes can be found in Annex A.

¹⁰ For more information regarding IMDB methodology undertaken by Statistics Canada: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-633-x/11-633-x2022009-eng.htm>

Indirect economic benefits

Surveyed spousal clients also identified contributing to indirect economic contributions with 27% reporting being a homemaker.

Figure 9: Self-reported indirect economic activities of spousal clients



Source: Survey of Spousal Clients.

Social assistance usage

Overall, spousal clients had low incidences of Employment Insurance (EI), Social Welfare Benefits, and Old Age Security (OAS).

- Employment Insurance: Spousal principal applicants had incidences of EI benefits ranging from 10% to 16%. Female spousal principal applicants had higher incidences of EI benefits, compared to male spousal principal applicants.
- Social Welfare Benefits: Spousal principal applicants had low incidences of social welfare, ranging from 2% to 5%.
- Old Age Security: Spousal categories had very low incidences of OAS – ranging from 0% to 1%.

Direct Economic Outcomes of Parents and Grandparents Reunification

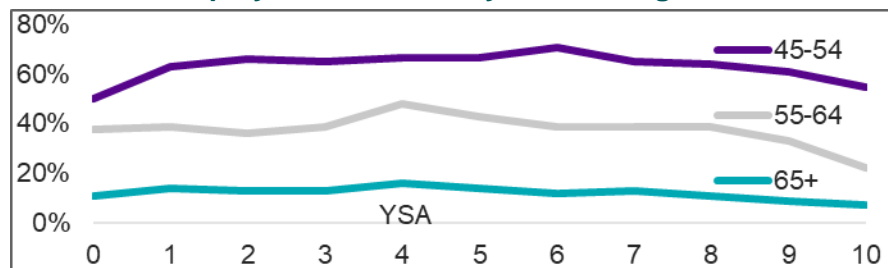
Finding 4: While PGPs are comprised of an older demographic than other immigration categories, PGP clients are directly contributing to Canada's economy.

As a part of the Family Reunification Program, the PGP stream was not intended to produce economic benefits, though it is expected to limit undue costs to the public. IMDB data¹¹ demonstrates that some PGPs are working in Canada and reporting investment income.

Though some PGPs participate directly in the labour force, PGP principal applicants overall had relatively low incidences of employment, with a range of 19% to 28% having employment income within their first ten years in Canada. The median employment income ranged from \$11,600 to \$16,400.

However, incidences of employment differed by age. For example, PGP principal applicants who were between the ages of 45-54 had higher incidences of employment, compared to those who were 65+.

Figure 10: Percentage of PGP principal applicants with employment income, by YSA and age at arrival



Source: IMDB 2021. PGP clients who arrived in Canada between 2009 and 2020 and filed taxes.

In terms of self-employment income, PGP principal applicants had a higher incidence of self-employment income in earlier YSAs, with a decrease by YSA 10. This ranged from 13% to 7%. However, female PGP principal applicants had higher incidences of self-employment compared to males, with an average of 4% difference in most YSAs.

In terms of investment income, the PGP category fluctuated, with an incidence range of 13%-16%. PGP principal applicants who were aged 65+ had the highest incidence of investment income, compared to other age groups.

Figure 11: Percentage of PGP principal applicants with income, by YSA and income type



Source: IMDB 2021. PGP clients who arrived in Canada between 2009 and 2020 and filed taxes.

¹¹ For more information regarding IMDB methodology undertaken by Statistics Canada - <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-633-x/11-633-x2022009-eng.htm>

Social Assistance usage of Parents and Grandparents

Finding 5: Overall, PGPs had varying levels of social assistance uptake, primarily dependent on age, with younger PGPs accessing EI, and older PGPs accessing OAS and Social Welfare in YSA 10.

An **undertaking** is required for all sponsors of Family Reunification clients, promising to give financial support for the basic needs of the individual(s) being sponsored. Basic needs include food, clothing, shelter and other needs for everyday living, dental care, eye care and other health needs that are not covered by public health services.

Prior to 2014, the length of undertaking for PGP sponsors was 10 years, increasing to 20 years after 2014.¹² The length of undertaking for residents of Quebec is 10 years.¹³

Old age security

PGPs had **steadily increasing OAS usage**, starting with 1% in YSA 1 and increasing to 10% in YSA 9, and 41% in YSA 10.¹⁴

When examined by socio-demographic characteristics:

- **Females** had slightly higher usage than males
- Those **aged 65+** had a slightly higher uptake than those between the ages of 55-64.
- There was minimal differences of OAS rates among **education levels**.

While undertakings require a PGP sponsor to be financially responsible for the PGP for 20 years, OAS eligibility begins if an individual has lived in Canada for at least 10 years since the age of 18, resulting in an increase in uptake at YSA 10. However, PGPs would be eligible for a partial OAS pension if they have lived in Canada for at least 10 years, which is the equivalent of 1/40th of the full monthly pension for each year in residence after the age of 18.

In addition, Canada has **social security agreements** with nearly 60 countries, allowing the time living and contributing to another country to be counted as residence in Canada. They can help a PGP to qualify for both the OAS pension and for foreign benefits. As a result, this would allow for certain PGPs to be eligible for OAS, before they've reached YSA 10.¹⁵

¹² Note: Regulatory amendments came into force on January 1, 2014. PGP sponsorship applications received before the pause of PGP application intake – implemented on November 5, 2011 – will be assessed based on regulations that were in force at the time. PGP sponsorship applications received as of January 2, 2014 will be assessed based on the amended regulations. Source: Canada Gazette (2013). *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*. Vol. 148, No. 1 – January 1, 2014. <https://gazette.gc.ca/rp-pr/p2/2014/2014-01-01/html/sor-dors246-eng.html>

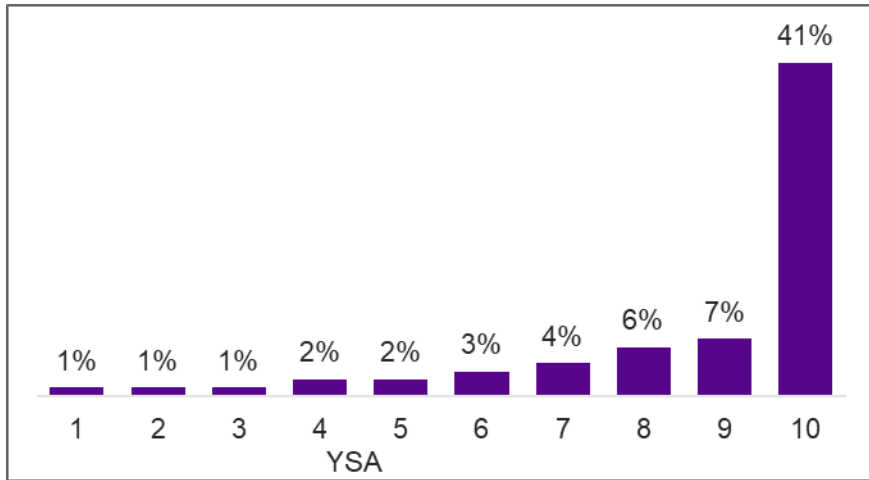
¹³ Canada, IRCC (2023). Help Centre - *How long am I financially responsible for the family member or relative I sponsor?*; Government of

Quebec (2023). Understanding the responsibilities and obligations related to the undertaking.

¹⁴ Note: Changes to PGP length of undertaking occurred for application received after January 2, 2014. Impacts of these changes on social assistance usage (including OAS, EI, and social welfare), will not be evident until IMDB 2024.

¹⁵ Canada, ESDC (2023) *The Old Age Security Program Toolkit*. www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/old-age-security/reports/oas-toolkit.html

Figure 12: Percentage of PGP principal applicants with incidences of OAS usage, by YSA



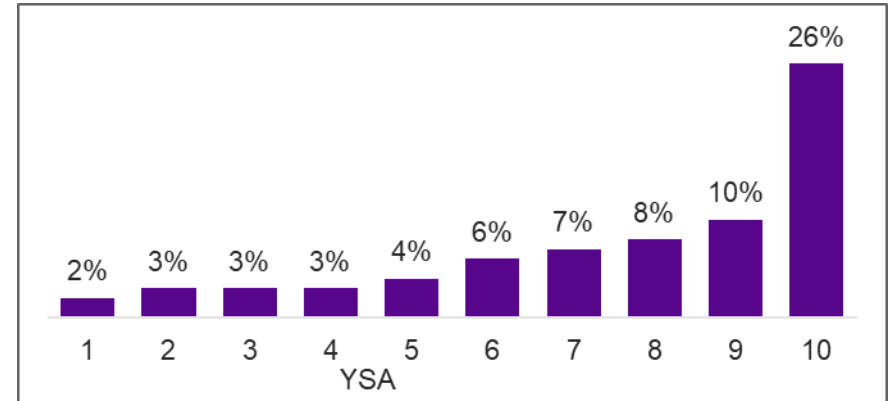
Source: IMDB 2021. PGP clients who arrived in Canada between 2009 and 2020 and filed taxes.

Note: PGP clients who applied for permanent residence prior to 2014 had a 10 year undertaking, compared to those who applied after 2014, who had a 20 year undertaking.

Social welfare benefits

Incidence of social welfare benefits increased among PGP principal applicants as time passed – with 2% in YSA 1 and increasing to 10% by YSA 9 and 26% in YSA 10.¹⁶

Figure 13: Percentage of PGP principal applicants with incidences of social welfare benefits, by YSA



Source: IMDB 2021. PGP clients who arrived in Canada between 2009 and 2020 and filed taxes

Note: PGP clients who applied for permanent residence prior to 2014 had a 10 year undertaking, compared to those who applied after 2014, who had a 20 year undertaking.

When examined by socio-demographic characteristics:

- there was minimal difference between genders
- the 65+ age category had the highest incidence of Social Welfare benefits usage by YSA 10 (29%), compared to those in the 45-54 age category who had 13% usage in YSA 10.
- There was minimal differences between education levels.

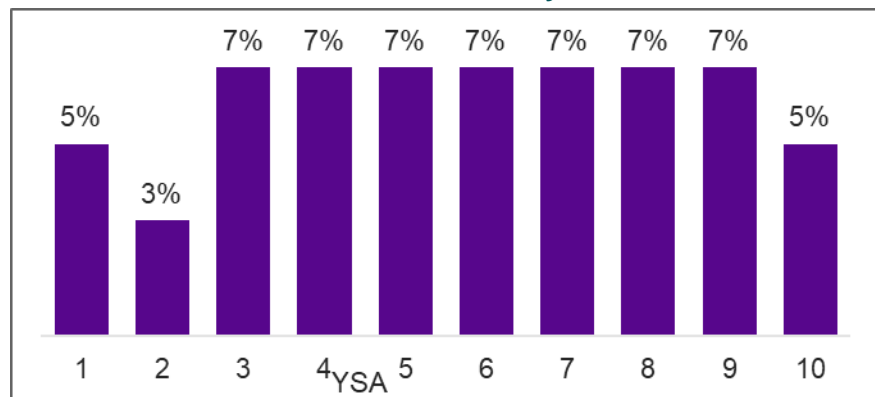
¹⁶ Note: Changes to PGP length of undertaking occurred for application received after January 2, 2014. Impacts of these changes on social

assistance usage (including OAS, EI, and social welfare), will not be evident until IMDB 2024.

Employment Insurance

PGP principal applicants had an average of 7% Employment Insurance incidence over the first ten YSAs.¹⁷

Figure 14: Percentage of PGP principal applicants with incidences of EI benefits, by YSA



Source: IMDB 2021. PGP clients who arrived in Canada between 2009 and 2020 and filed taxes.

Note: PGP clients who applied for permanent residence prior to 2014 had a 10 year undertaking, compared to those who applied after 2014, who had a 20 year undertaking.

When examined by socio-demographic characteristics:

- PGP principal applicant **males** had higher incidences of EI Benefits compared to females, with a difference of 5% for most YSAs
- the **45-54 age category** had the highest incidence of EI benefits ranging from 13%-17%. This is in comparison to those aged 55-64 whose EI benefits ranged from 5-9%, and those aged 65+ (1-2%).
- PGP principal applicants with **secondary or less** had higher incidences of EI benefits, 5% higher than other education levels in most YSAs.

¹⁷ Note: Changes to PGP length of undertaking occurred for application received after January 2, 2014. Impacts of these changes on social

assistance usage (including OAS, EI, and social welfare), will not be evident until IMDB 2024.

Indirect Economic Outcomes of Parents and Grandparents Reunification

Finding 6: A majority of surveyed PGP clients provided various indirect economic supports to their households, which in turn, supported their sponsors in actively contributing to the labour market.

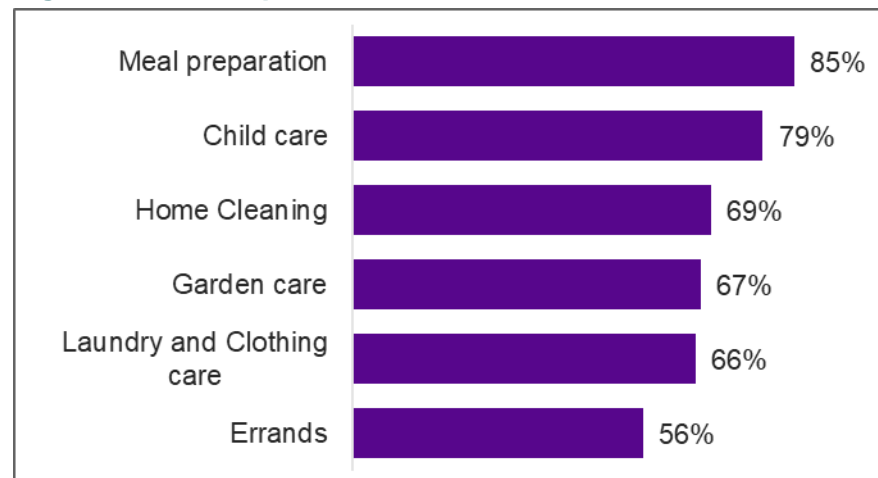
Indirect economic benefits

According to research, unpaid contributions of PGPs or the costs that families would incur if PGPs were absent from their households are substantial but subjective in nature and thus difficult to measure.

Unpaid work is both an important aspect of economic activity and an indispensable factor contributing to the well-being of individuals, their families, and societies.¹⁸ Unpaid work is sometimes referred to as the 'invisible area of production' and/or the care economy. This work includes: cleaning, meal preparation, caregiving, domestic work, shopping, and volunteer work.

A majority of surveyed PGP clients reported undertaking at least one household task, most commonly meal preparation (85%), followed by child care, and house cleaning.

Figure 15: Self-reported indirect economic activities of PGPs



Source: Survey of PGP Clients. Percentage of surveyed PGP clients who reported 'sometimes' or 'often' performing these activities

¹⁸ Gerrant, Pesando and Nowaka (2014). The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes. OECD Development Centre, December 2014.

Gender-based analysis+

A disaggregation of the PGP client survey data by gender revealed that women (87%) were more likely than men (82%) to report sometimes or often engaging in meal prepping. As well, women (71%) were more likely than men (65%) to report sometimes or often performing home cleaning. However, men (60%) were more likely than women (49%) to report sometimes or often running errands.

PGP clients provide considerable economic assistance to their family members by enabling sponsors to be more productive and more active labour force participants.¹⁹ In particular, 33% of PGP sponsors reported that having their PGP in Canada allowed them to work full-time, 20% reported being able to work more hours, 11% reported being able to go to school/study, and 10% were able to return to work. More women (12%) than men (8%) reported that having their PGP in Canada helped them return to work.

In addition, studies suggest that PGPs enhance gender equality for immigrant mothers by encouraging the participation of visible minority women in the workforce. A review of qualitative studies found a substantial positive impact of grandparent care and proximity on labour force participation of adult children, especially daughters.

According to studies from across the world, intergenerational co-residence or close geographical proximity to parents and/or in-laws increases the probability that a woman (particularly a mother) will engage in paid work. According to multiple studies, much of this is attributable to the childcare role of played by grandparents. A woman's ability to share the burden of housework with co-residing parents was also found to increase labour supply.²⁰ If PGPs were not undertaking the work of caring for families, the task would most probably fall on (immigrant) women.²¹

¹⁹ Avila-Yipton, Carmen (2017). *The Economic and Social Costs and Contributions of Parent and Grandparent Immigration*. University of Ottawa.

²⁰ IRCC (2020). *Quantitative studies on the impact of grandparent care and proximity on labour force participation of their adult children especially daughters*.

²¹ IRCC (2019). *Diagnostic: Measuring the contributions of Parents and Grandparents*.

Supporting Settlement and Integration

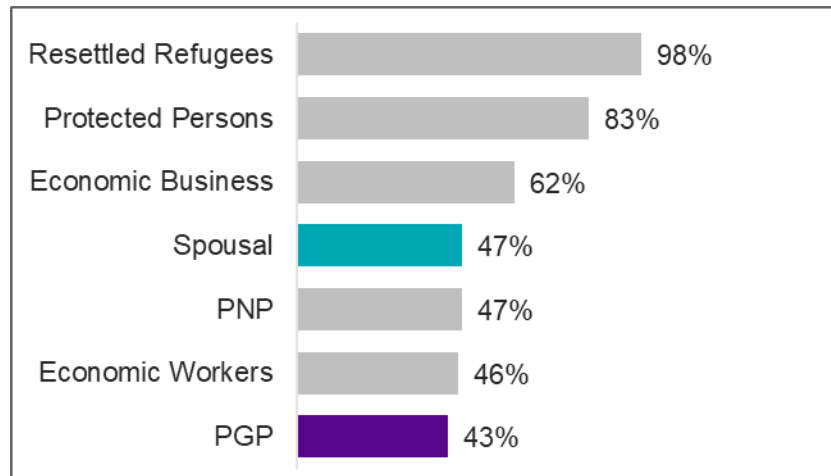
Finding 7: Spousal clients receive integration support mostly from reunified family members and settlement services; however, some clients are unaware of settlement services.

Finding 8: PGP clients have low uptake of IRCC-funded settlement services, and primarily receive settlement support from their sponsor.

Accessing settlement services

Family reunification clients have **lower uptake of IRCC-funded settlement services than other immigration categories**. Spousal (47%) uptake of IRCC-funded settlement services is comparable to the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) (47%) and Economic Workers (46%), while PGP has the lowest uptake of IRCC-funded Settlement Services, with 43%, compared to resettled refugees (98%) and protected persons (83%).

Figure 16: IRCC-funded settlement service usage by immigration category



Source: iCARE and PR Data. Adults who arrived in Canada between 2014 and 2020, and accessed IRCC-funded settlement services between 2014 and 2022, and recorded in iCARE. Excludes those destined to Quebec.

Awareness of settlement services

Nearly two-thirds (60%) of surveyed **spousal clients** were aware of settlement services in Canada, and of those, half (51%) said that they used settlement services. When asked if the services they used were helpful to their settlement in Canada, most (69%) said to a moderate or large extent. As for the surveyed spousal clients who were unaware (40%) of settlement services, **most (68%) reported they would have used settlement services** had they been aware of them.

Two-thirds (67%) of surveyed PGP clients reported that they were aware of settlement services, and of them, 39% of PGPs used the settlement services. Of those who reported using settlement services, 74% indicated that the services helped them settle into Canada to a moderate or large extent. As for the other one-third (33%) of surveyed PGP clients that were unaware of settlement services, **37% reported that they would have used settlement services** if they had been aware of them.

Settlement and integration

When asked what sources of support helped them settle in Canada, the top responses of surveyed **spousal clients** were that **their sponsor helped them (87%)**, followed by their friends (31%), the internet (28%), and an organization that helps immigrants at 15%.

Similarly, when asked what helped them settle in Canada, the top responses of surveyed PGP clients were that their sponsor helped them (87%), followed by their other family members (25%), performing daily tasks (i.e., shopping, taking public transportation) (23%), and the internet. Approximately 14% of PGP clients reported that an organization that helped immigrants helped them settle.

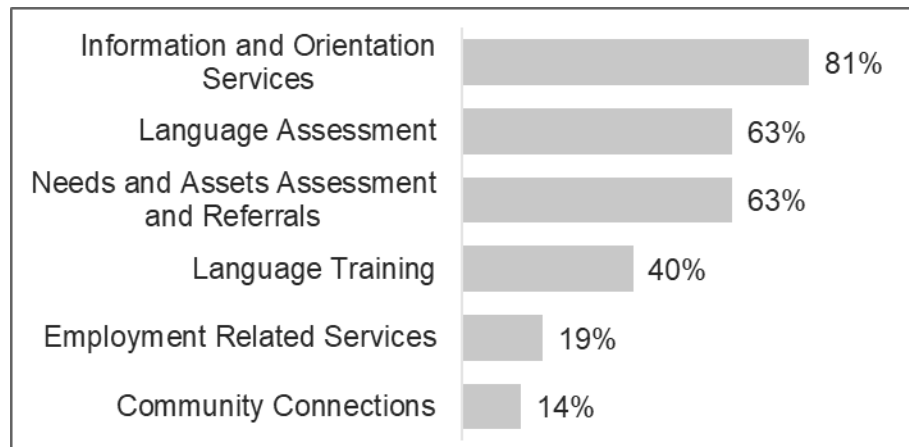
IRCC-Funded Settlement Service Uptake

Although both PGP and spousal streams are in the same Family Reunification Program, both types of clients had distinct settlement and integration experiences.

Spousal

As previously mentioned, 47% of spousal clients accessed an IRCC-funded settlement service. According to iCARE data, Spousal clients were most likely to access information and orientation service (81%), followed by a language assessment (63%) and Needs and Assets Assessment and Referrals (NAARS) (63%). Spousal settlement uptake is similar to that of Provincial Nominee clients, who had comparable rates of settlement service usage.

Figure 17: IRCC-funded settlement service usage by spousal clients



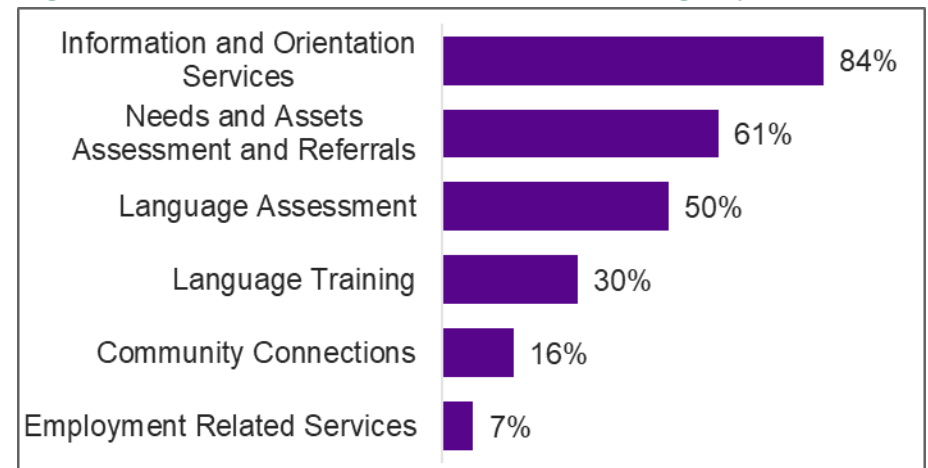
Source: IRCC, iCARE. Includes Spousal clients who arrived in Canada between 2014 and 2020, over the age of 18 who had accessed an IRCC Funded Settlement Service between 2014 and 2022. Excludes Quebec.

PGP

PGP clients have a lower uptake of IRCC-funded settlement services compared to other immigration categories.

However, of those who did access IRCC-funded settlement services, 84% accessed an information and orientation service, followed by NAARS (61%), and Language Assessment (50%).

Figure 18: IRCC-funded settlement service usage by PGP clients



Source: IRCC, iCARE. Includes PGP clients who arrived in Canada between 2014 and 2020, over the age of 18 who had accessed an IRCC Funded Settlement Service between 2014 and 2022. Excludes Quebec.

Navigating the Application Process

Finding 9: The family reunification application process can be difficult for clients and sponsors to navigate.

Most interviewees highlighted that the Family Reunification Program’s application process can be difficult to navigate.

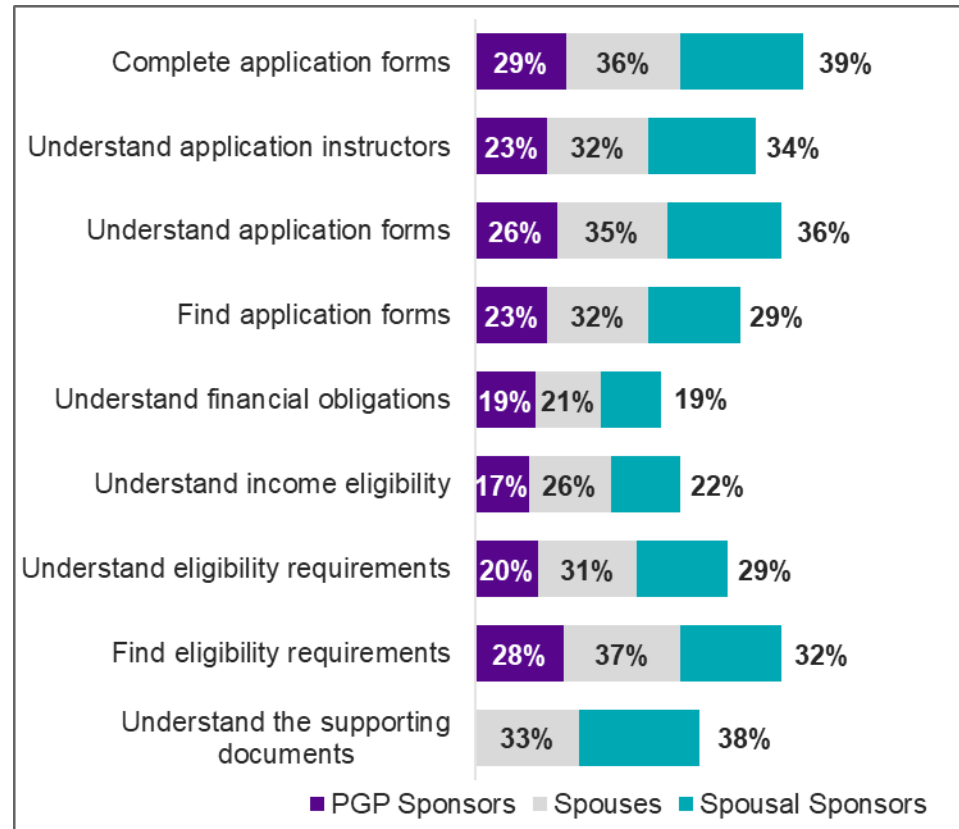
Of the surveyed clients and sponsors who reported completing the family reunification application process without help from an immigration consultant or lawyer, a majority said that various aspects of the application process were somewhat easy or very easy. However, a sizable portion reported that various aspects of the process were somewhat hard or very hard. Specifically:

- **Surveyed spousal clients** reported challenges finding eligibility requirements, and completing and understanding the application forms.
- **Surveyed spousal and PGP sponsors** also reported challenges in completing and understanding the application forms and understanding supporting documents (spousal sponsors only), as well as finding eligibility requirements.

While confusion could be the result of any number of things, the following reasons have been identified in the documentation that may be contributing to confusion among PGP clients and sponsors:²²

- complex systems with many recent changes (4 different intake systems since 2011);
- distrust by clients and inaccurate media reporting;
- and a broad lack of information, especially consolidated and accessible information, on IRCC’s website;

Figure 19: Survey respondents who found family reunification application process to be somewhat hard or very hard



Source: Survey of PGP sponsors, Survey of Spousal Sponsors, Survey of Spousal Clients.

Notes: Responses include those who indicated 'somewhat hard' and 'very hard'. Surveyed PGP sponsors did not receive the “understanding supporting documents” survey question.

²² IRCC (2021). *Parents and Grandparents Program: Current Program and Next Steps*.

Challenges and Barriers in the Application Process

Finding 10: Family Reunification clients and sponsors experienced challenges during their application process, namely related to the number of forms, website jargon, and language barriers.

Finding 11: Immigration consultants and representatives are being used by Family Reunification clients and sponsors to help them navigate the application process, though the extent to which they are being used is difficult to measure.

Interviewees highlighted that the information provided by IRCC (i.e. on the forms and on the IRCC website) to assist with the application process **requires the applicant to sift through large amounts of information**. For example:

- **Spousal Reunification:** Interviewees noted that spousal applicants have difficulty determining which situation is most appropriate (i.e., spouse, vs. common law vs. conjugal), as the definitions are not always easy to understand.
- **PGP Reunification:** For the present randomized intake model, one first has to submit an interest to sponsor form, receive an invitation to apply, then submit an application. In addition, the PGP application process changed over the years, with various intake models and timelines for when invitations to apply are sent. It was also noted that, although not required, clients in this stream often rely on sponsors to complete most of the application forms.

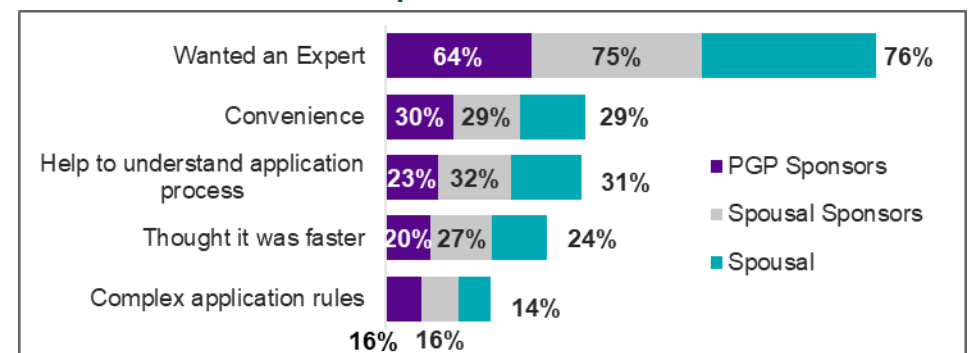
Interviewees also noted that although application processes have changed over time, there are many forms applicants and sponsors must complete and submit to IRCC, along with additional documentation, which sometimes depend on individual circumstances. This means that clients and sponsors need to have a fair understanding of English or French in order to navigate the process in order to successfully navigate application information and the IRCC webpage. This may be particularly challenging for some clients, as there is no minimum language requirement for the Family Reunification Program.

Immigration representatives

Using an immigration consultant or representative is optional for applicants, and if they choose to do so, they face **additional costs** on their immigration journeys. Survey results indicated that 31% of spousal clients, 23% of spousal sponsors, and 11% of PGP sponsors reported using **immigration representatives, either consultants/lawyers/notaries**.²³ Interviewees felt that the high use of immigration consultants is indicative of the challenges clients face when navigating the application process.

When asked why they used an immigration representative, most survey respondents indicated they **wanted an expert** to ensure that their application was completed correctly, followed by convenience, and help to understanding the application processes.

Figure 20: Survey respondents reasons for using an immigration consultant or representative



Source: Survey of PGP sponsors, Survey of Spousal Sponsors, Survey of Spousal Clients.

²³ This is an underestimation of usage due to data limitations.

Processing Applications

Finding 12: There is a high demand for the spousal and PGP reunification, as it continues to reunite families and plays a role in attracting and retaining newcomers to Canada. However, clients face lengthy processing times.

While there is a high demand for family reunification, interviewees reported that the timely processing of applications can be difficult for clients as the program also experiences a high volume of procedural requests, including Access to Information and Privacy (ATIP) requests and litigation.

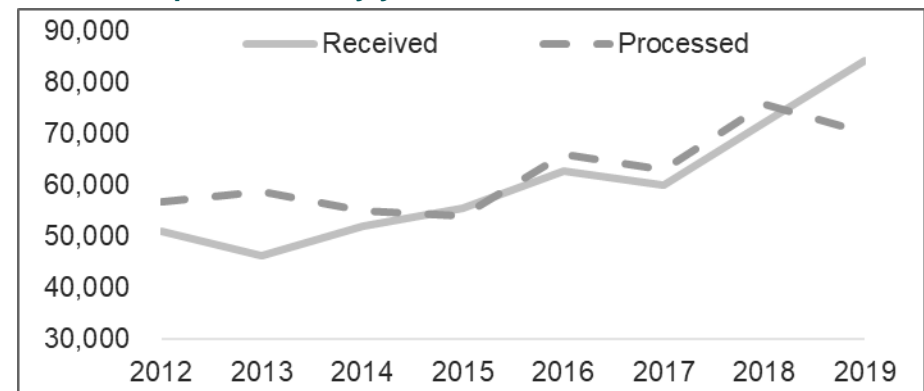
Some interviewees indicated that responding to **ATIP requests** took up capacity in the department to process applications and perform policy work; however, it was also noted that the department is contributing to the number of ATIPs it receives, as most ATIPs are from clients and representatives whose application has gone past the anticipated processing times and had no other way to find out information about their application status.

Interviewees also highlighted the impact of **litigation** on the Family Reunification Program. Some interviewees felt that litigation slows down the ability to do policy work because of the time spent preparing work related to the litigations. Interviewees also noted that officers often do not have sufficient time to provide specific and detailed reasons in their decision notes. This has led to challenges as sometimes documented decisions may not provide sufficient information to satisfy the court, which can lead to a successful client appeal. When appeals by clients are successful, an officer must process the application again, which takes time away from processing a new application. Also, successful appellants are **allowed to provide new or additional information** that was not included in their original application for decision-making. IRCC Case Processing Officers make decisions based on the information available to them at the time of application submission, but the appeal process allows an application to be processed a second time with new, additional information, which can result in a different outcome.

Processing spousal applications

The demand for spousal reunification has increased over time, with 55,695 applications received in 2014 jumping to 74,094 in 2019. Currently, the spousal stream has no limit on the submission of applications. However, there is a target number of applications the department will process from this stream each year. When the submission of applications outpaces the number of applications processed per year, this can lengthen processing times for clients.

Figure 21: Total spousal applications (in persons) received and processed, by year



Source: IRCC, COGNOS (MBR) extracted as of January 2021.

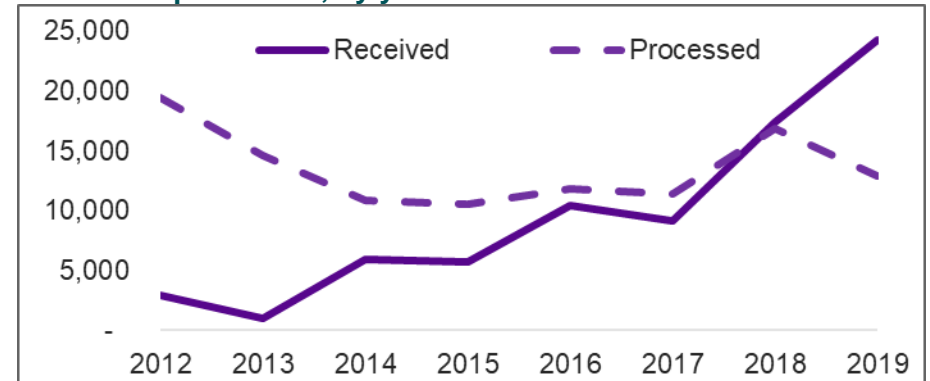
Note: Data is presented at the person level, not the case level. Spousal data includes FC1, FCC, FCE.

In 2021, 36% of all **mandamus**²⁴ applications, which are those for which the court commands IRCC to take a decision, were attributed to spousal applications. Documentation noted that there is a direct link between the number of mandamus applications and the growing inventories, which can be attributed to priorities shifting in 2020 and 2021, and capacity issues tied to delays caused by COVID-19. These mandamus litigations have been identified in the media, and are having a reputational impact for IRCC.²⁵

Processing PGP applications

High demand for PGP and limited available admission spaces contributed to efforts to redesign the Program from 2011 to 2014. Prior to 2011, there were no application submission caps, but there were admission targets, which resulted in a large inventory.²⁶ To reduce the inventory, a moratorium on new applications was established from November 5, 2011 to December 31, 2013. Changes that came into force in 2014 restricted eligibility and established intake controls. Over time, these measures have helped to reduce inventory and shorten processing times.

Figure 22: Total PGP applications (in persons) received and processed, by year



Source: IRCC, COGNOS (MBR) extracted as of January 2021.

Note: Data is presented at the person level, not the case level.

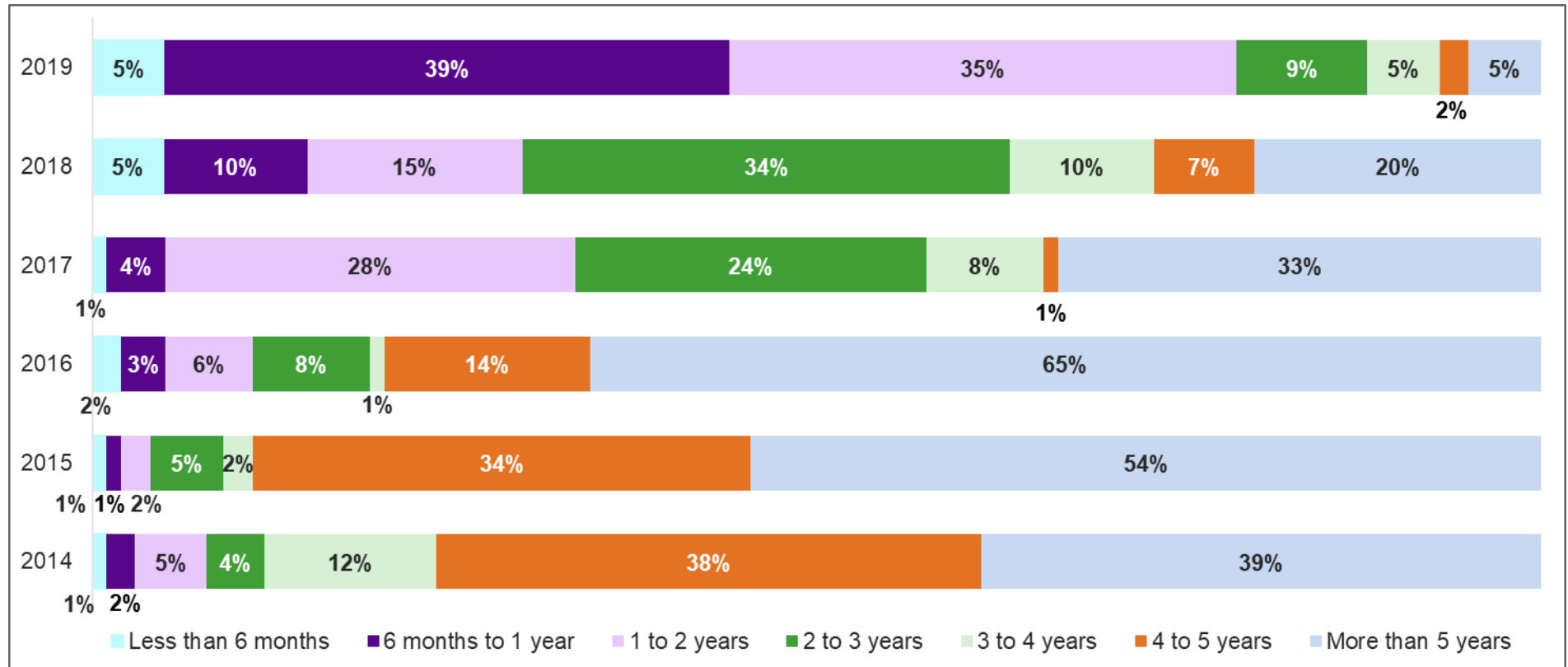
Processing times have been an issue for the PGP program as demand continued to exceed the annual number of spaces allocated to PGP admissions under the Immigration Levels Plan. Examining the positive decisions rendered on PGP applications between 2014 and 2019, a majority of PGPs who arrived between 2014 and 2016 had been waiting for over 4 years for their application to be processed, with processing times trending downwards after 2017. For PGPs who arrived in 2019, 44% of waited a year or less for their decision.

²⁴ Mandamus is a writ issued by a superior court commanding the performance of a specified official act or duty.

²⁵ IRCC (2022). *Increase of Mandamus Applications – Trends and Analysis for the Family Class and Skilled Workers Categories*.

²⁶ Canada, IRCC (2023). *The Parents and Grandparents Program: Intake Report 2014 to 2019*.

Figure 23: Duration of time between PGP applications received by IRCC and positive decision



Source: IRCC, Administrative Data Cut. January 2021.

Note: Data only includes positive decisions.

Though admission targets have contributed to process time improvements, more processing challenges were evident during the **COVID-19 pandemic**. As with all immigration programs and streams, PGP experienced an increase in processing times and there again exists a backlog of applications to be processed that may have been in part due to challenges COVID-19 imposed on application processing. The backlog may also be a result of more applications received than needed to meet admissions targets.

Super Visa

IRCC has approved 133,406 Super Visa applications between 2012 and 2019. Aside from 2012 when the Super Visa was launched, approximately 17K Super Visa applications were approved every year between 2012 and 2019. For individuals who submitted a Super Visa application between 2012 and 2019, 95% were processed in less than 6 months.

Super Visa holders who transitioned to permanent residents through the PGP stream

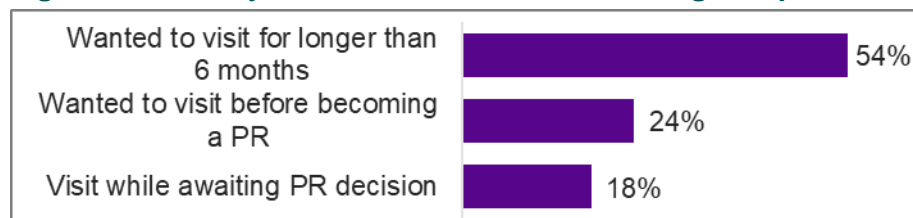
Of the PGPs who landed as permanent residents in Canada between 2014 and 2019, 15% had previously utilized a Super Visa.

Compared to PGPs who did not have a previous Super Visa, those who did have a previous Super Visa were more likely to be female (64% compared to 59%), separated, divorced, widowed or had an annulled marriage (30% compared to 22%), and less than 65 years of age (30% compared to 21%).

Utilizing a Super Visa

Of the PGP client survey respondents, 31% indicated they had used a Super Visa prior to immigrating to Canada. Of those, over half (54%) reported using a Super Visa because they wanted to visit their family for more than 6 months at a time, followed by 24% who said they wanted to visit before becoming a permanent resident, and 18% who reported visiting while awaiting a decision on their permanent residence.

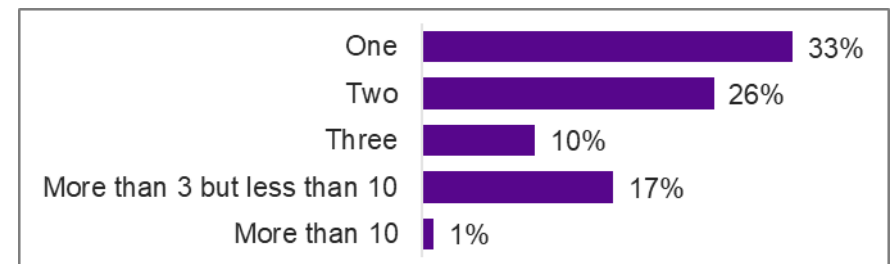
Figure 24: Surveyed PGP clients reason for using a Super Visa



Source: PGP Client Survey

Over half (59%) of surveyed PGP clients who used a Super Visa reported using their Super Visa 1 to 2 times before transitioning to permanent residence, while 17% reported traveling on their Super Visa more than 3 times but less than 10.

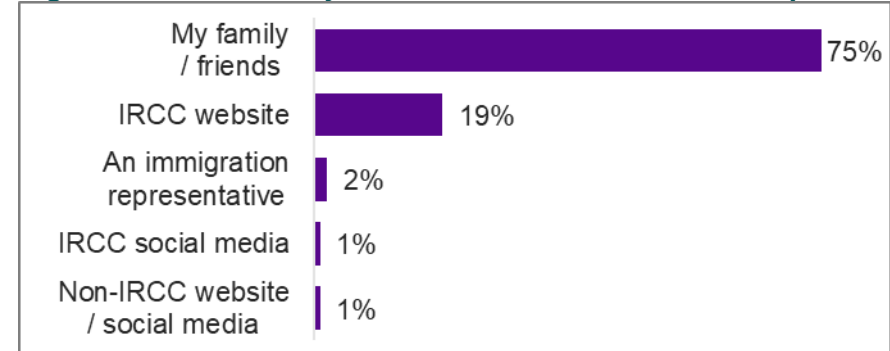
Figure 25: Number of times surveyed PGP clients used their Super Visa prior to transitioning to permanent residence



Source: PGP Client Survey

When asked how they learned about the Super Visa, most (75%) reported from family and friends, followed by IRCC's website (19%).

Figure 26: How surveyed PGP clients learned about super visa



Source: PGP Client Survey

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

Overall, the Family Reunification Program is providing numerous benefits to Canada. The high demand for the Family Reunification Program is a reflection of its importance to newcomers, and the program itself plays a role in attracting and retaining newcomers to Canada.

Family reunification is contributing to Canada's multicultural society by helping to ensure a knowledge transfer of cultural traditions as well as maintaining a language other than English and French. Reunited families are able to provide emotional support to each other, which was of primary importance for family reunification newcomers. In addition, a majority of spousal clients are participating in the labour market, and PGP clients are contributing to Canada's economy via indirect economic supports in their households.

Recommendation 1: Settlement

Settlement and integration services support was found to be mainly provided to spousal and PGP clients by their sponsors and reunited family members. PGP clients were found to have low uptake of IRCC-funded settlement services, and some spousal clients were unaware of settlement services.

Given the reliance on settlement support provided via sponsors, it would be beneficial for IRCC to increase the level of awareness among sponsors of IRCC-funded settlement services, particularly for spousal sponsors.

Recommendation 1: IRCC should identify strategies to increase awareness of IRCC-funded settlement services among Family Reunification newcomers, as well as their sponsors.

Recommendation 2: Applications

Family reunification clients and sponsors reported experiencing challenges during the application process, namely related to the forms and website jargon that exists on IRCC's website. In addition, immigration consultants and representatives are being used by family reunification clients and sponsors to help navigate the application process. As a result, IRCC should explore simplifying the public facing guidance and application process, while balancing the need to ensure the necessary details are provided.

Recommendation 2: IRCC should explore options for simplifying the spousal reunification application process, including clarifying the guidance on IRCC's public facing website.

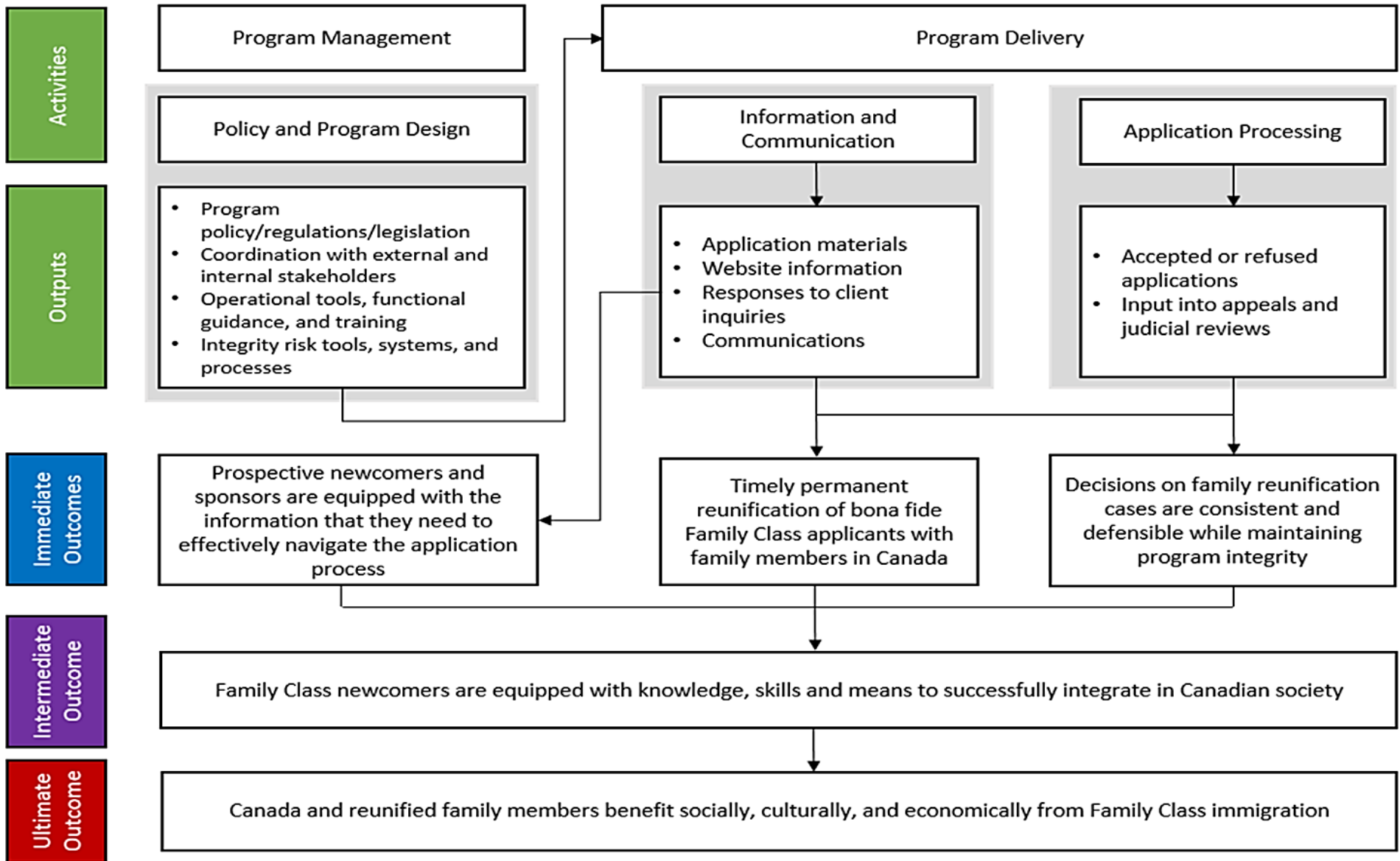
Recommendation 3: Processing Times

While IRCC has made notable progress in reducing its processing times for family reunification, particularly for PGP, clients still continue to face challenges in receiving timely decisions on their immigration applications. In addition, procedural requests such as ATIP and litigation can contribute to increasing the burden on the department to process in a timely manner.

As a result, IRCC would benefit from continuing to identify and implement strategies to reduce the processing time and operational impact of family reunification processing.

Recommendation 3: IRCC should continue to implement strategies to reduce family reunification application processing times.

Annex A: Family Reunification Program's Logic Model (2017)



Annex B: Socio-Demographic Breakdown of Employment Income for Spousal Newcomers

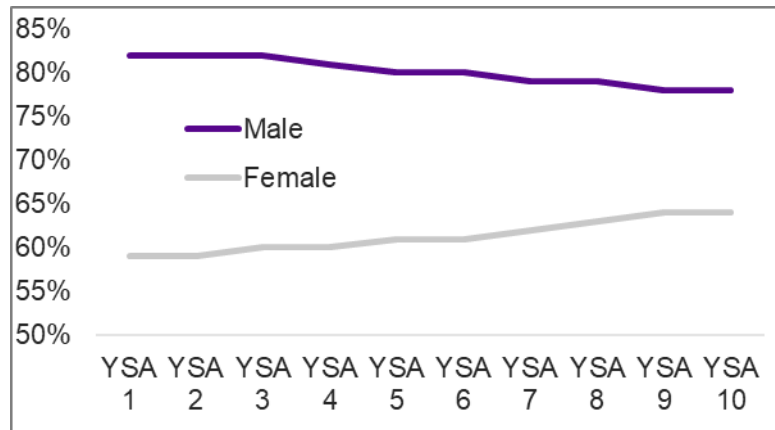
In terms of median employment income (wages, salaries and commissions) for spousal principal applicants, regardless of education level, ranged from \$22,800 to \$35,900 over the first ten Years Since Admissions.

When broken down by socio-demographic characteristics, spousal clients experienced some differences by the following aspects.

Gender

Spousal principal applicant males had higher incidences of employment income compared to women. The incidence of employment income for males was 82% in YSA 1, and slightly decreased overtime. Comparatively, Female incidence of employment income was 59% in YSA 1 and slightly increased over time.

Figure 27: Percentage of spousal principal applicant incidence of employment income, by YSA and gender



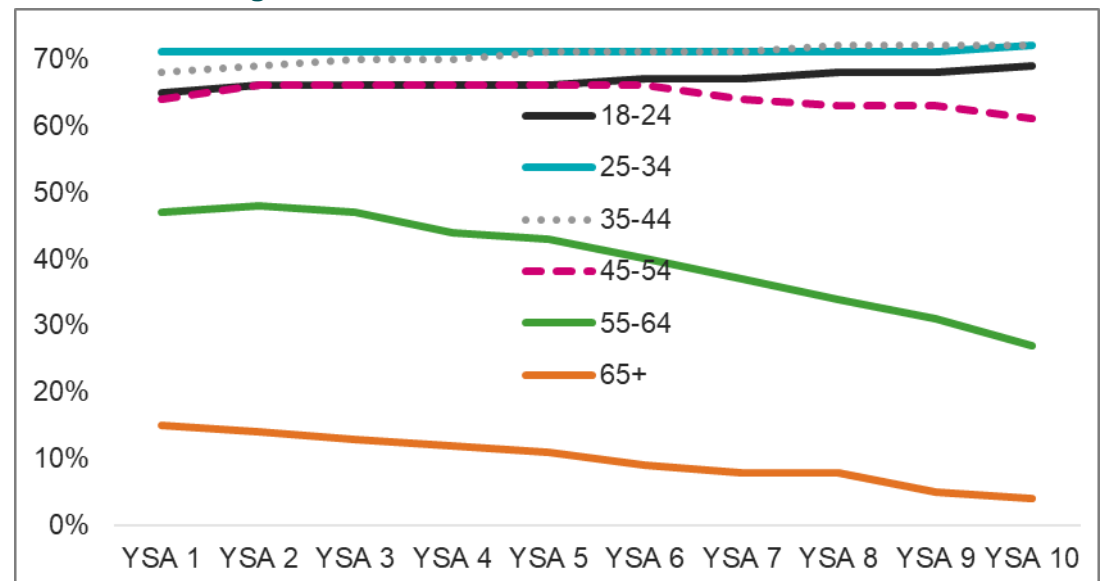
Source: IMDB 2021. Spousal PA clients who arrived in Canada between 2009 and 2020 and filed taxes.

Age

Spousal clients²⁷ between the ages of 25-34 and 35-44 had the highest incidences of wages, salaries and commissions.

These two age groups averaged 71% incidences of employment. Spousal clients aged 55-64 and 65+ had the lowest incidences of employment.

Figure 28: Percentage of spousal incidence of employment income, by YSA and age at arrival



Source: IMDB 2021. Spousal PA clients who arrived in Canada between 2009 and 2020 and filed taxes.

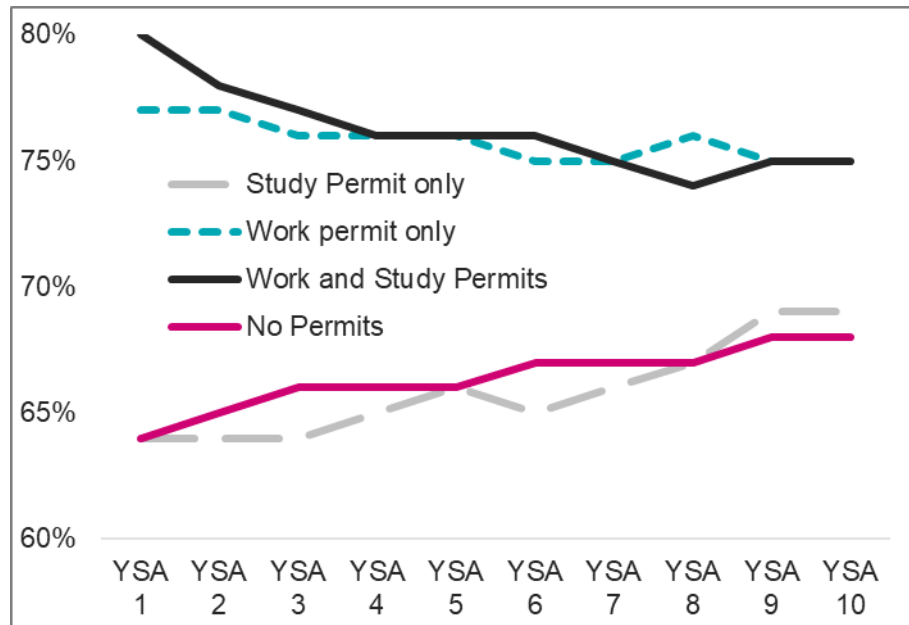
²⁷ IMDB breakdown by age include principal applicants, as well as spouses and dependents.

Previous Permit

Spousal principal applicants with previous study and work permits and those with work permits only had the highest incidence of employment income, averaging 76% of principal applicants having an incidence of employment income.

Spousal principal applicants with study permits and no permits had the lowest incidence of employment income, averaging 66% of PAs having an incidence of employment income.

Figure 29: Percentage of spousal principal applicants incidence of employment income, by YSA and previous permit

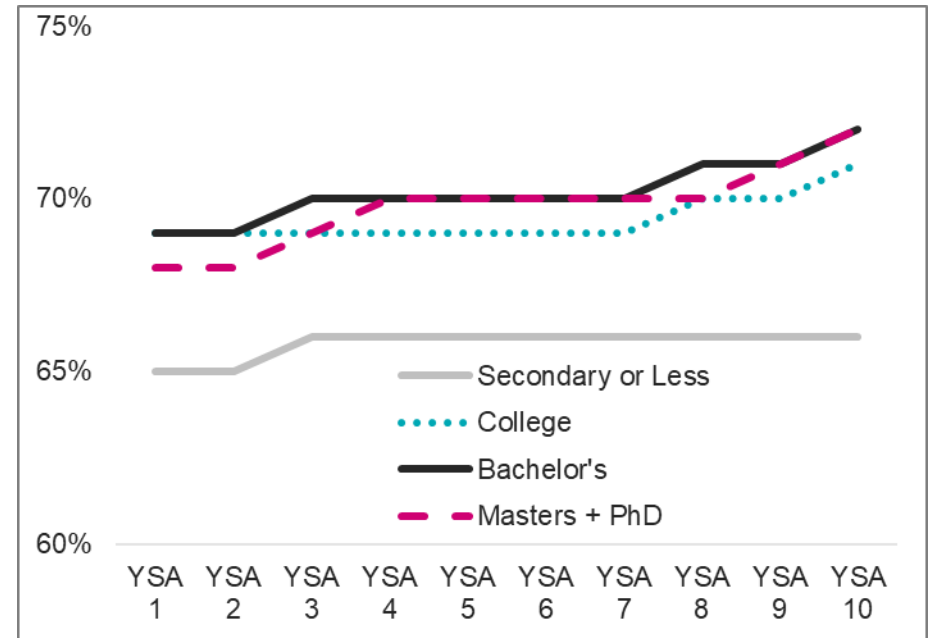


Source: IMDB 2021. Spousal PA clients who arrived in Canada between 2009 and 2020 and filed taxes.

Education Level

Spousal clients with an education level of secondary or less had the lowest incidence of employment income, with an average of 66% during their first ten years in Canada. Those with college, bachelors or masters and doctorates had similar incidences of wages, salaries and commissions, all with averages of 70%.

Figure 30: Percentage of spousal principal applicants incidence of employment income, by YSA and education level



Source: IMDB 2021. Spousal PA clients who arrived in Canada between 2009 and 2020 and filed taxes.