

# Hamilton

## COVID-19 Pandemic

# REFUGEE COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT 2024



Funded by

**Arthur Levitt Public  
Affairs Center  
Innovation Project**  
*Clinton, NY*

In collaboration with

**On Point for  
College**  
*Utica, NY*

### IMPACT REPORT HIGHLIGHT

- *Physical Well-Being*
- *Emotional Well-Being*
- *Employment and Financial Impact*
- *Housing Stability*
- *Youth Education*



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

## ONPOINT FOR COLLEGE - UTICA

On Point for College is a non-profit organization with locations in Syracuse and Utica, NY. On Point helps traditional and non-traditional students overcome the barriers to higher education. Over 90% of students are first generation, with a majority being low-income. Providing comprehensive support to students from application through graduation and beyond, On Point empowers members of Utica's community and beyond to fulfill their dreams and achieve their potential. Benefiting both the individual and our community, On Point offers a vital service to the city.

For more information, use the link below:

<https://www.onpointforcollege.org>

## PARTNERS WITH RESOURCE AND SUPPORT

- Levitt Center and the Dean of the Faculty of Hamilton College provided financial support through an innovation project grant.
- OnPoint for College provided and helped supervise the interviewers. At OnPoint For College, we received assistance from Director Kevin Marken and Lead Advisor LuPway Doh. OnPoint for College also provided working space for this study.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

## MEMBERS WHO AIDED WITH SURVEY DESIGN AND INTERVIEW ADMINISTRATION

- Professor Stephen Ellingson designed the survey along with Professor Erol Balkan drawing on the model and some of the questions from the COVID-19 Refugee Community Impact Report conducted by San Diego Refugee Communities Coalition in 2020.
- Four OnPoint student interviewers from the three main refugee communities in Utica (Somalia, Myanmar, and Bosnia) conducted interviews on participants.

## VOLUNTEER AND INTERNS

- Daniel Leon, Dek Osman, Saw Kler and Mahira Patkovic carried out interviews. Daniel Leon and Dek Osman were also responsible for the initial data entry.

## SPECIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

- Photography courtesy of Nancy Ford, Robert Knight, Tatiana Kulalic, and LuPway Doh.
- Special thanks to Hamilton College Student Mia Horvath and Hamilton College Experiential Learning Coordinator Janelle Perry for their copy editing and design contributions.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2024, Hamilton College fielded a survey among Utica's refugee communities to assess the degree to which they were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. More specifically, the study focused on identifying the pandemic's effects on household finances, employment, housing, health, and education. The most significant effect was in the long-reach of COVID-19 on housing costs and stability. During the first year of the pandemic 72% of respondents reported that they spent more than 70% of their income for housing and that number remained the same in 2024. The share of income for housing by Utica's refugees is over 40% higher than the national average.

This effect was undoubtedly triggered by high rates of un- and underemployment during the pandemic as over a third of the sample said they lost their job(s) and over 50% experienced reduced work hours. Although employment has rebounded, the continuing high cost of housing has placed significant and ongoing financial burdens on the city's refugee communities. One bright spot in the study was that the negative effects of COVID-19 on educational outcomes for children has eased. During the first year 61% of participants reported that their children's schools was harmed by the lack of contact with teachers and mandatory on-line learning, by the inability of parents to provide adequate help or supervision with on-line classes, and by high rates of absenteeism. In 2024 less than a quarter of parents are worried that their children are falling behind.

Not all refugee communities were affected to the same degree or in the same way. Bosnians, who have lived in Utica longer than the other two communities in the study (those from Myanmar and Somalia) were less affected in terms of housing or employment, but 95% said the pandemic has a very negative impact on youth education. Refugees from Somalia were the most adversely impacted in terms of higher percentages reporting job loss, housing instability, and experiencing worse physical and mental health. Burmese parents reported the lowest rates of concern about educational problems for their children, and lower rates of unemployment.



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# INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine how COVID-19 has impacted different refugee communities in the Mohawk Valley. It is being conducted by Professor Erol Balkan and Professor Stephen Ellingson of Hamilton College in collaboration with On Point for College. This report is designed to inform solutions that meet immediate needs and address social and health inequities, as well as mobilize action.

Utica, New York is a city populated by refugees. Once an old manufacturing and industrial town, by the 1990s, Utica became deserted as it lost people and jobs over the last half of the 20th century. In the early 2000s, Utica was brought back to life by the mass arrival of refugees. Currently, refugees and their families comprise nearly a quarter of Utica's 60,000-person population.

Though the city holds families from all over the world, Utica's refugee population is predominantly led by Somali Bantus, the Karens (arriving from Myanmar), and Bosnians. Many have arrived in Utica in hopes of a new life, and to flee persecution and war. The relative affordability of Utica's homes is one of the city's greatest appeals, at least initially. Refugees take on a variety of jobs, including chefs, custodians, housekeepers, and a variety of factory jobs.



# INTRODUCTION



The Utica Refugee COVID-19 Community Impact Assessment is a report on the pandemic's effects on health, employment, and education. As a whole, the refugee population took a harder hit by COVID-19 than Utica's remaining population; within this near 15,000 person community, different groups were affected at different rates. This study examines these similarities and differences, and uses accounts and statistics to understand why.

## **The assessment process consisted of:**

- *Survey design and review.*
- *Recruitment and training of four student interviewers from OnPoint for College.*
- *In-person survey administration with 201 participants.*

Participants received gift cards after the completion of the survey.

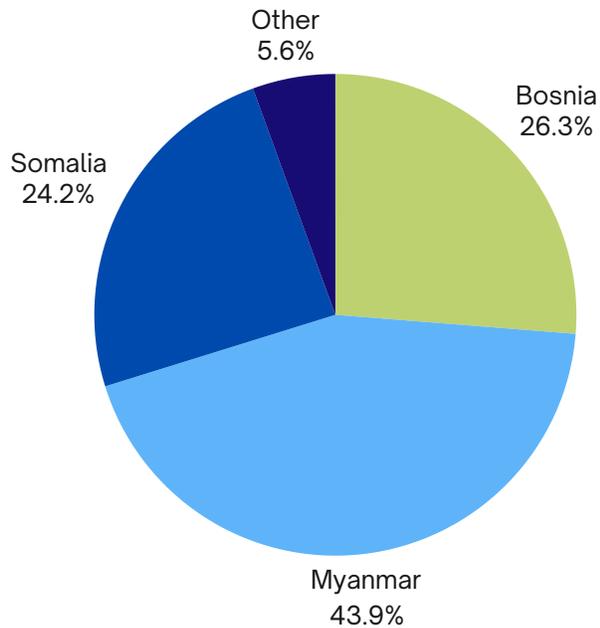
## **Survey Completion Time Range:**

May 2023 to September 2023



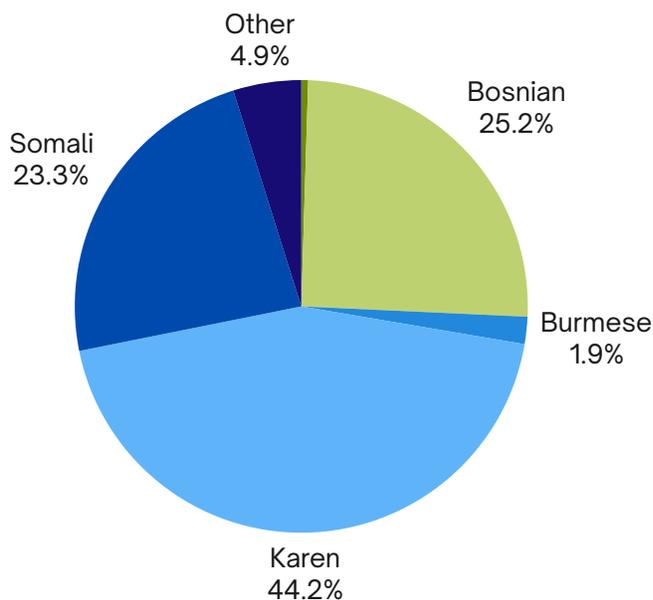
# SURVEY POPULATION

## Country of Origin



Utica's refugee population is strongly dominated by Somalis, Karens (migrating from Myanmar, formerly known as Burma), and Bosnians. Out of the 201 respondents, 198 indicated their country of origin: 52 were Bosnian (26.3%), 87 were Karen (43.9%), and 48 were Somali (24.2%).

## Primary Language Spoken in the Home



There were a total of 5 main languages spoken by the respondents. The most common primary languages are Bosnian (25.2%), Karen (44.2%), and Somali (23.3%).



# SURVEY POPULATION

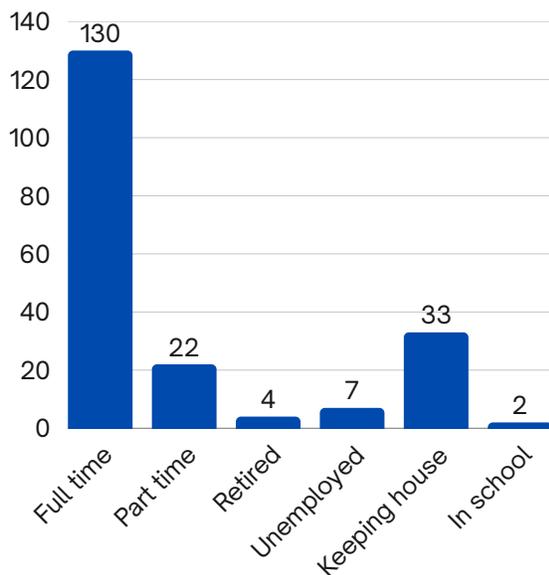


There were more female participants (62.1%) than male (37.9%). The majority participants were between the age 25 to 64 (88.1%); 7.5% were under 24 and 4.5% were 65 or older. 67.2% were married, 19.9% never married, 6.0% divorced, 6.0% separated, and 0.1% widowed.

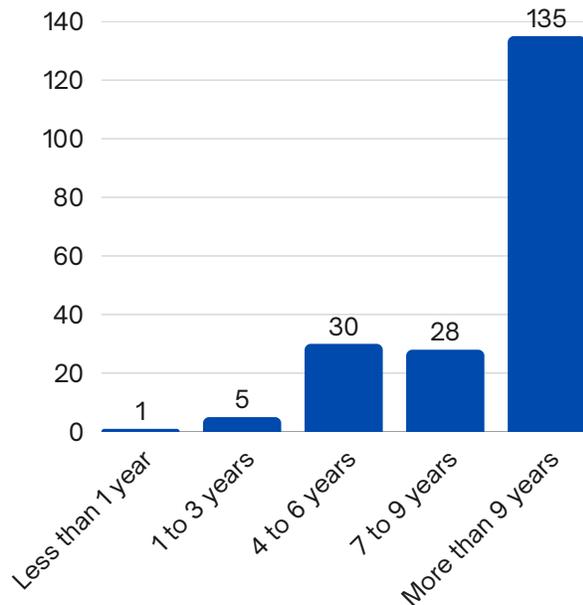
65.7% worked full-time, 11.1% worked part-time; 16.7% were house keeping; 3.5% were unemployed; 2.0% were retired. 1.0% of the participants were in school. The respondents had a diverse educational background: 23.7% had some high school education; 22.7% had high school diploma or equivalent; 12.4% had two-year or Associates degree, 10.8% with four-year or Bachelor’s degree, 4.1% with Master degree; 4.1% reported having no education.

Most lived in the current city for more than nine years (67.8%), 15.1% between four to six year, 14.0% between seven to nine years, 2.5% between one to three years, and less than 1% lived in their current city for less than one year.

**Employment Status (Count)**



**Time Lived in Current City (Count)**



# AREAS OF IMPACT

## Physical and Mental Well-being

- 54.2% of respondents said that COVID-19 worsened their physical health.
- 31.8% of respondents will definitely not be receiving future COVID-19 vaccinations or boosters, and exactly half of that group credit their decision to a lack of trust in the government.
- 62.2% of respondents believe that COVID-19 worsened their emotional health.
- 44.6% of the respondents said COVID-19's impact on their children's emotional well-being has gotten better compared to the first year of the pandemic; 24.0% have stayed the same; 12.3% have gotten worse.

## Employment and Financial Status

- 55.5% of respondents reported their financial status to have been worsened by COVID-19.
- 43.8% of respondents' employment status has been worsened; 32.7% lost a job; 53.1% experienced reduced work hours; 14.9% were unemployed for at least six months.
- COVID-19 reduced household income for 47.7% of respondents from 2019-20, and 40.3% after 2020.
- COVID-19 made it harder for 47% of respondents to cover housing costs from 2019-2020, and 46.2% from 2020 onward.

## Youth Education

- 32.7% of respondents reported a very negative impact of the first year of COVID-19 on their children's education; 28.2% reported their children experienced a somewhat negative impact.
- Respondent's worry that their children might fall behind in school changed from 22.2% (extremely worried), 23.6% (very worried), 18.7% (somehow worried), and 15.8% (a little worried) during the first year of the pandemic respectively to 2.0%, 13.7%, 8.3%, and 19.5% now.



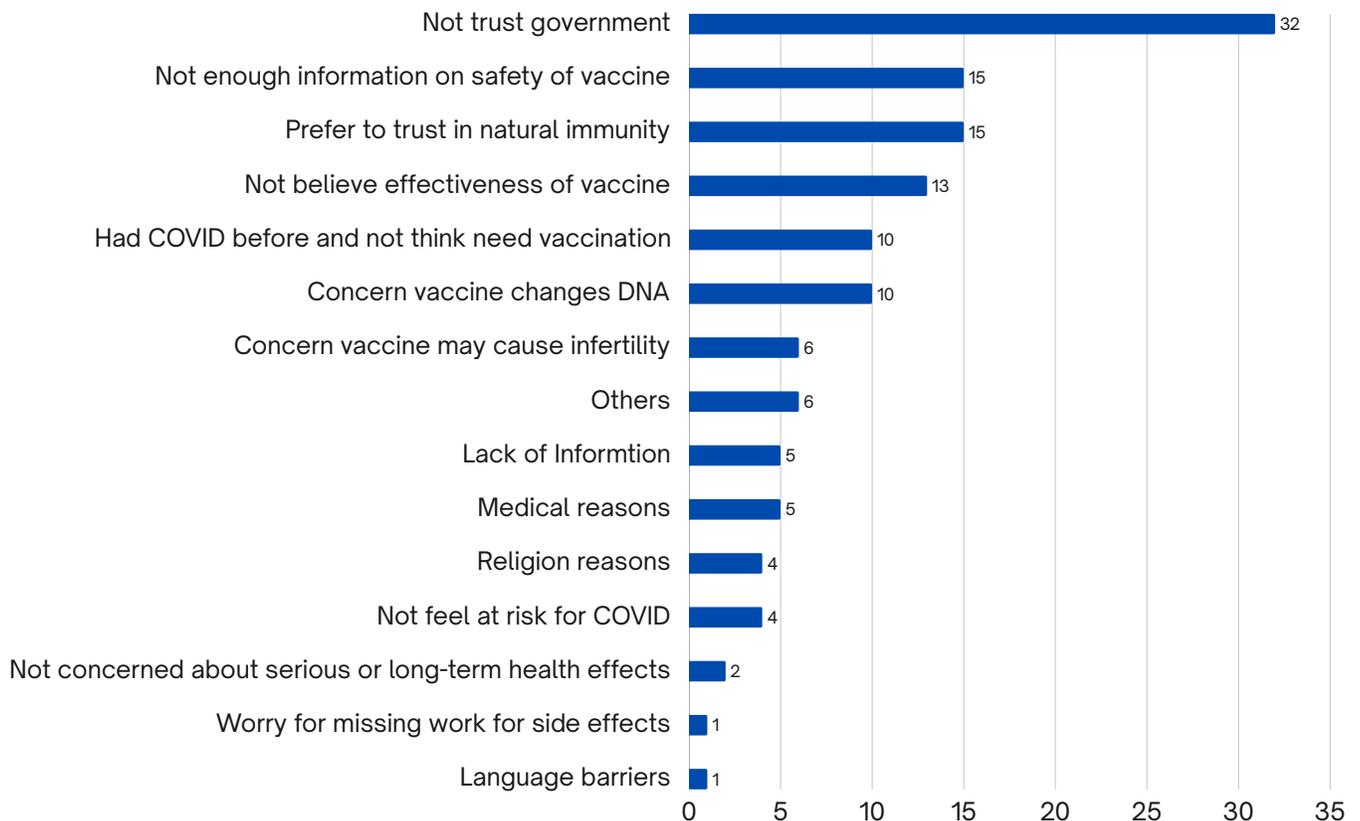


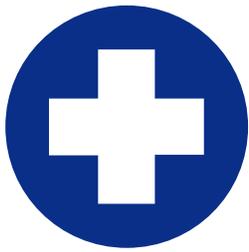
# PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

A lack of trust in the government, insufficient information, and general hesitations pose large barriers to COVID-19 healthcare access. Moreover, the pandemic contributed to decreasing trust in the government, further exacerbating the negative attitudes toward vaccination. Especially within underserved communities like the ones being studied, access to proper healthcare has historically been limited due to language barriers and transportation difficulties.

Only 15.7% of respondents were certain they would receive future vaccinations or boosters, 45.5% responded maybe / they will wait to see, 7.1% had families who are divided, and 31.8% were definitely not receiving future vaccinations of boosters.

## ***Barriers to Vaccination (Count)***

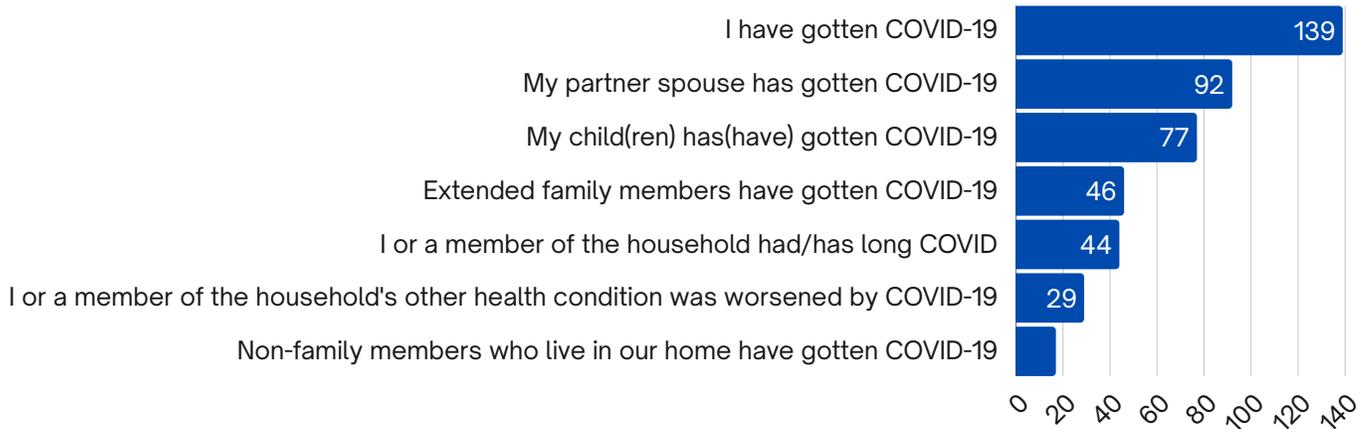




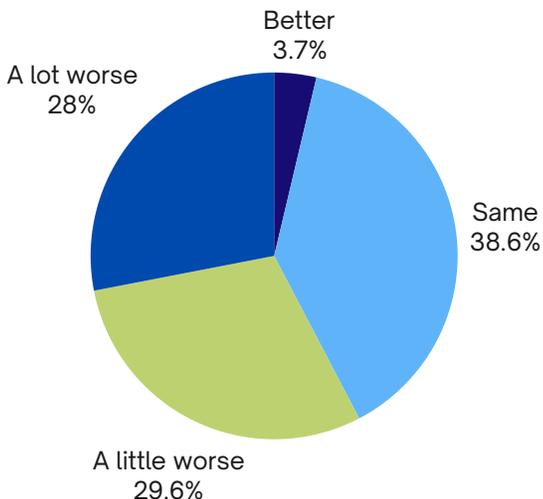
# PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

73.2% of this survey’s respondents have had COVID-19, and 48.4% reported that their partner or spouse has had COVID-19. This pandemic has had a profound impact on the observed community, reaching the majority of respondents. For those vaccinating themselves and/or their families (61.6% for vaccinating all; 18.7% for some adults in the household; and 38.4% for vaccinating children between ages of five and 11), the most reported motivations were self protection against the virus (71.2%), familial protection (65.6%), and job requirements (52.1%).

## COVID-19's Impact on Physical Health (Count)



## Question: How has COVID-19 impact your physical health?



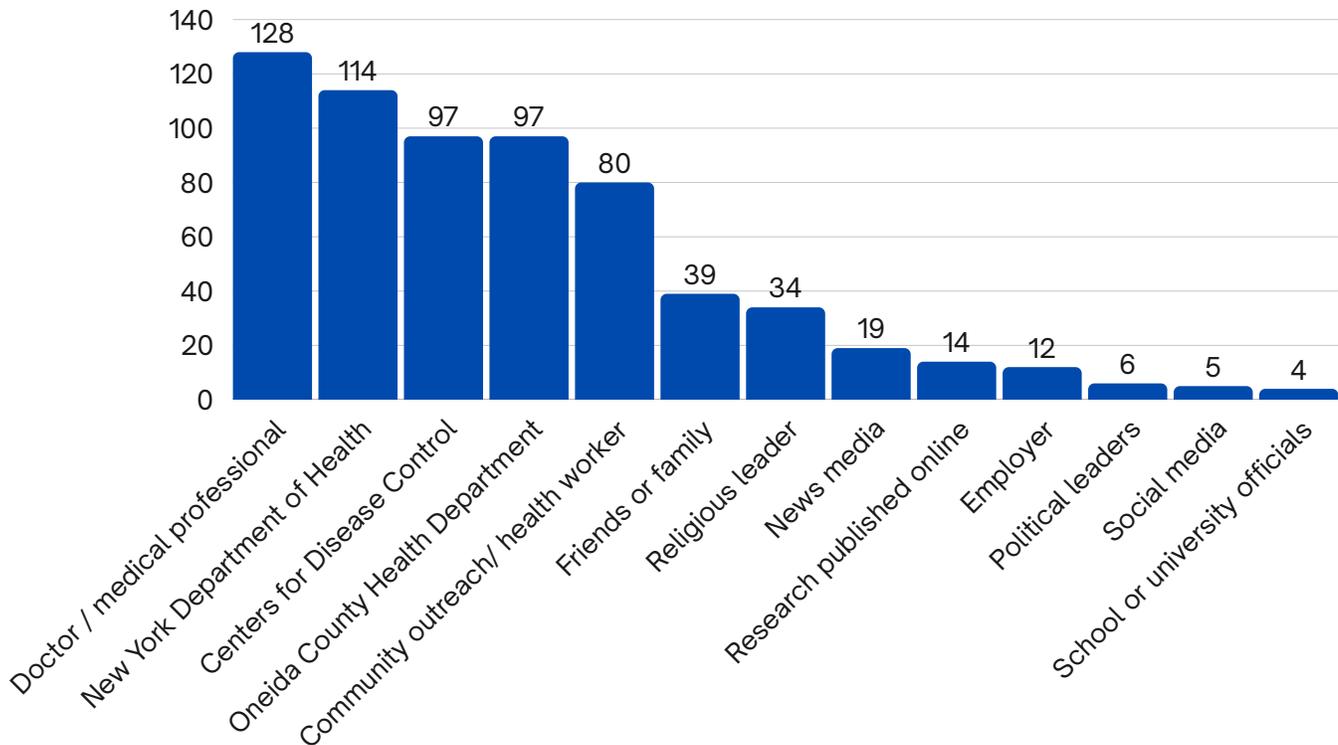
For the majority of respondents, COVID-19 worsened physical health. For 29.6% physical health was a little worse, and for 28%, it was a lot worse. As noted, the vast majority of respondents have had COVID-19, 23.2% of the respondents or a member of their households suffered from long COVID. 15.3% reported worsened other health condition in their household.





# PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

## Most Trusted Source of Information for COVID-19 (Count)



For many respondents, doctors/medical professionals, the NY Department of Health, the CDC, and the Oneida county health department were the most trusted sources of information for COVID-19. However, other references such as religious leaders and friends/family were also valued by the survey's respondents. Despite widespread skepticism toward the government, many people still turned to trusted sources like the CDC for accurate COVID-19 information. Although distrust was a barrier for some, these organizations remained vital for reliable health guidance during the pandemic. Many people also sought guidance from familiar, trusted voices within their communities for support and accurate information during the pandemic.





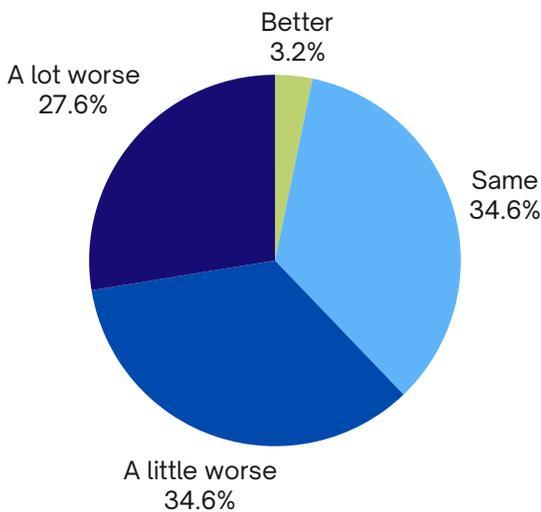
# EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING



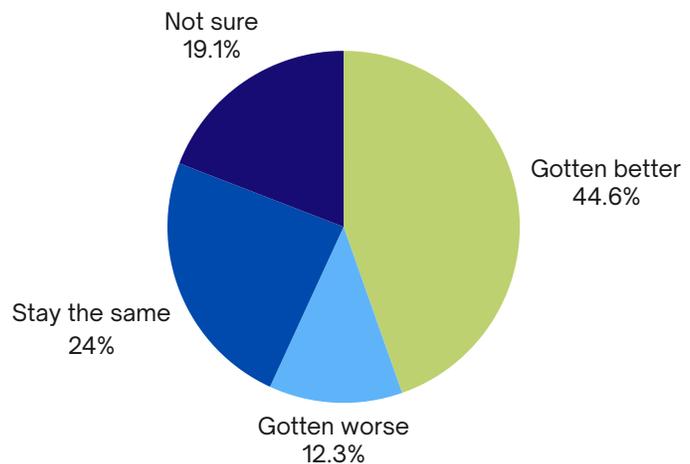
*I was scared to go out, and really afraid of being discriminated by other races*

— Father's health has worsened due to fear of the amount of death and worsening patients of the hospital.

**Impact of COVID-19 on Respondent's Emotional Health**



**Impact of COVID-19 on Child's Emotional Well-being Compared to First Year of the Pandemic**



Beyond the physical effects of COVID-19, the virus has taken a toll on the mental well-being of many. Multiple respondents mentioned fear for safety in their interviews. Levels of stress, anxiety, and depression were heightened. A majority of respondents (62.2%) believe that their emotional health was worsened. This deterioration was driven by factors such as social isolation, economic uncertainty, and the constant fear of illness. The disruption of daily routines and limited access to mental health services further worsened the decline in emotional well-being during the pandemic.

Respondents reported a mixed impact of COVID-19 on their children's emotional well-being compared to the first year of the pandemic. 44.6% of the respondents said COVID-19's impact on their children's emotional well-being has gotten better compared to first year of the pandemic; 24.0% reported the impact have stayed the same; 12.3% have gotten worse.





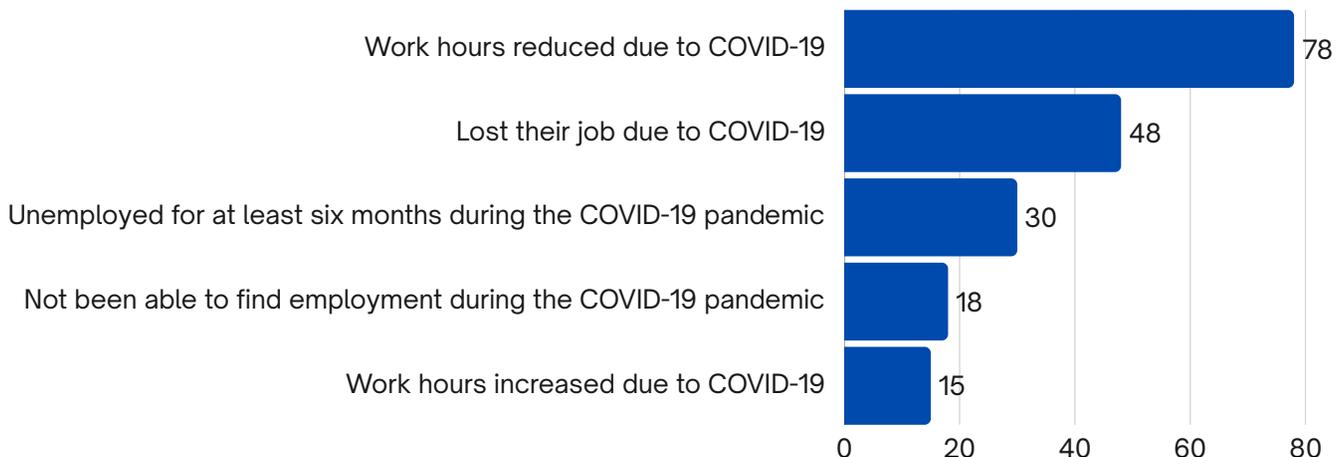
# EMPLOYMENT AND FINANCIAL STATUS



***Inflation caused by COVID-19, gas prices and necessary supplies (food, hygiene, etc.) has made it difficult as we are living paycheck to paycheck***

The COVID-19 pandemic led to widespread job losses and financial instability, with many people facing reduced income, unemployment, and economic uncertainty. For 47.7% of respondents, COVID-19 reduced household income for the first year of the pandemic, and 40.3%, continued to see their incomes reduced. As depicted below, COVID-19 affected the employment of majority of respondents had their employment negatively. Besides reduced work hours, serious outcomes reported with high frequency included job loss, unemployment, and difficulty to find employment.

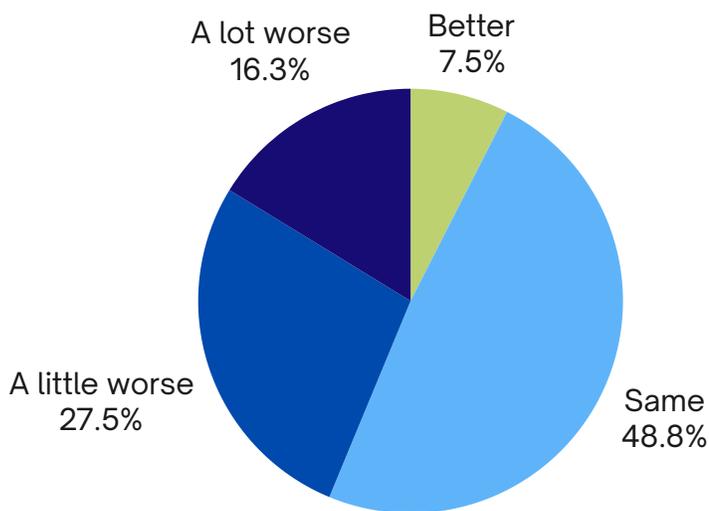
## ***COVID-19's Impact on Employment for the Respondent or A Member of Their Household (Count)***



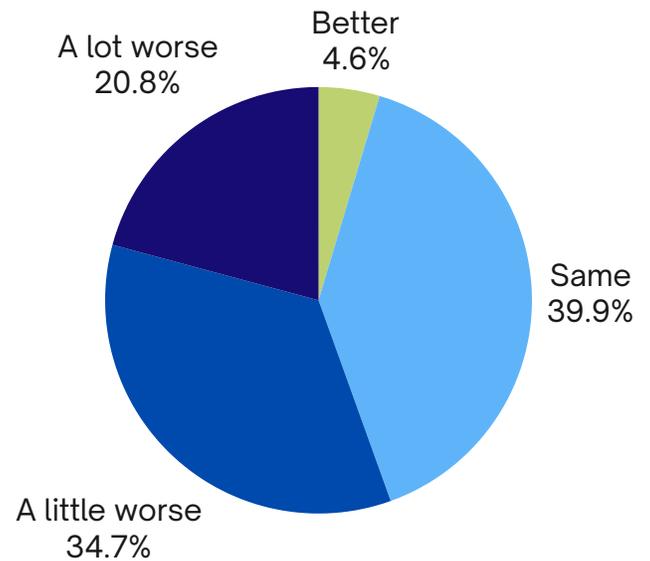


# EMPLOYMENT AND FINANCIAL STATUS

**COVID-19's Impact on Employment Situation**



**COVID-19's Impact on Finance**



The COVID-19 pandemic had a severe impact on the employment and financial status of refugees. The data indicates a marked decline in job security, with a significant percentage of respondents reporting job losses (32.7%) or reduced working hours (53.1%). This financial instability was further compounded by limited access to support services, leaving many refugees struggling to meet basic needs. The pandemic not only disrupted employment opportunities but also deepened the economic vulnerability of refugee communities, making financial recovery a significant challenge. 43.8% of the respondents reported the pandemic had negative impact on their employment status and 55.5% said COVID-19 made their finance situation worse.



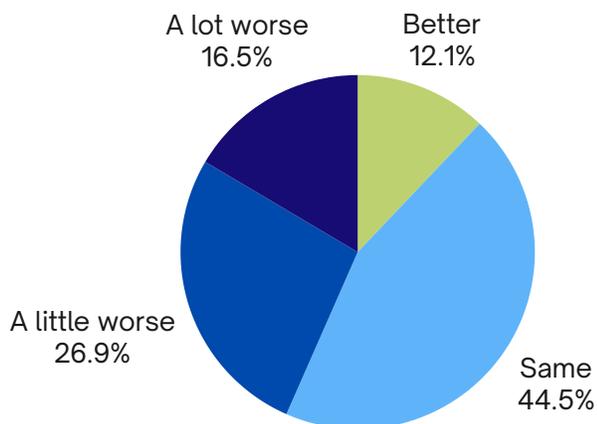


# HOUSING STABILITY



*My husband's company shut down and we hardly can afford the house's payment at the time. On top of that, my family had to borrow some money from friends to cover the house's bills*

## COVID-19's Impact on Housing Stability



For 43.4% of respondents, COVID-19 worsened their housing stability; 16.5% said it made stability “a lot worse”.

Respondents told stories of being unable to pay house bills, relying on friends and family, and living each week paycheck to paycheck. Much of this decline in housing stability stems from COVID-19’s impact on job and other economic insecurities.

Beyond measuring a decline in housing stability, this survey found that 47% of respondents reported that COVID-19 made it harder to cover housing costs from 2019-20, and 46.2% found that it made it harder to cover costs from 2020 onwards. Many people cited inflation and COVID-19’s effect on the economy for such burdens. 11.5% were recipients of housing vouchers from 2019-2020, and only 6.0% of respondents are current recipients. However, this is greater than the average overall percentage of non-refugees in the Utica area.





# HOUSING STABILITY

## Theme 1: Inflation and COVID-19s effect on housing finances

Our hours were reduced during COVID-19. Made it hard to pay bills

Inflation has made it difficult to pay rent

Inflation is crazy. Bills are double

COVID-19 has increased renting cost making me live pay to pay

Inflation has made it hard to pay bills

Had to get second job to cover bills

Prices of everything increased

It has been really hard keeping up with rising utility bills

The lack of work cause bills to (pile) up and were backed up on rent

Everything went up. Utilities / mortgage taxes. Pay stayed the same

Many people struggled to cover housing and other financial costs during and after the pandemic. For the surveyed group, inflation and other drastic effects from COVID-19 played a large roll in their inability to cover bills, rent, and utilities. Many respondents told a similar story of increased rent, bills, and living costs, yet the same or even decreased salary. These conditions were unsustainable for many, forcing them to lose their homes, acquire roommates, get secondary jobs, or rely on friends and family to stay afloat.

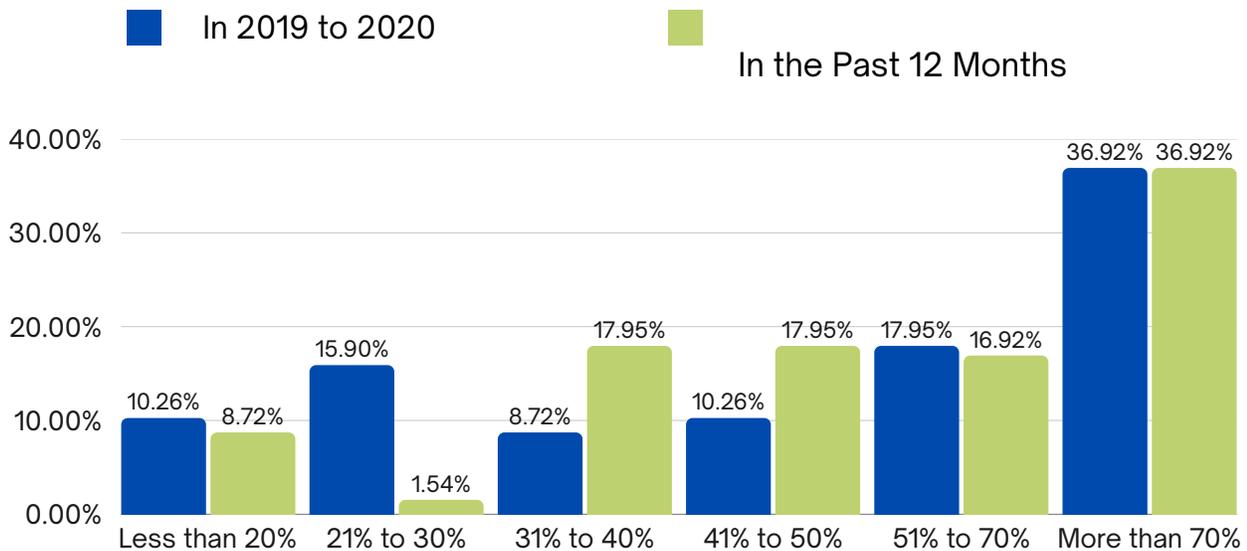




# HOUSING STABILITY

As inflation continued to increase the price of living, many families began to spend larger percentages of their household income on housing costs each month. Seen below, in both 2019-2020 and onwards, the majority of respondents spend more than 70% of their total income on housing costs. The national average, sourced from the US Bureau of Labor Services, is 29% of total income (1). The difference is drastic. According to these data, most respondents had less than 30% of their income to spend on healthcare, groceries, transportation, children expenses, and more. For most, this is unsustainable.

## *Approximate Percentage of Total Household Income Spent on Housing Costs Each Month (Count)*



<https://www.fool.com/the-ascent/research/average-monthly-expenses/#:~:text=The%20average%20household's%20monthly%20expenses,up%2033%25%20of%20typical%20spending.> (1)





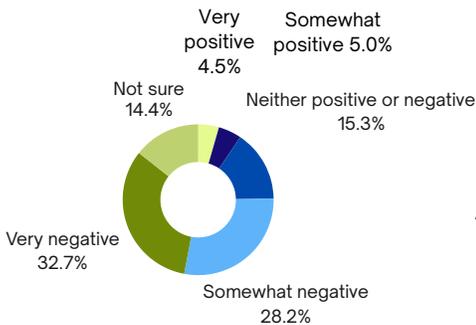
# YOUTH EDUCATION



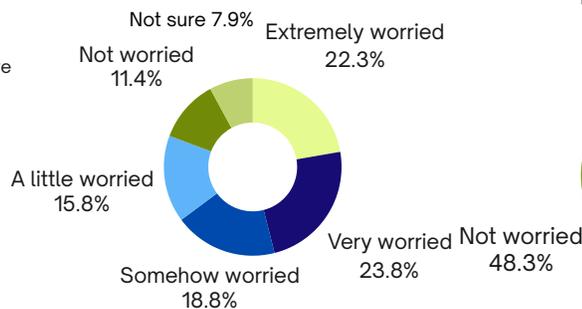
***Children can't attend school, afraid school will no longer be a priority. Feelings of stress, anxiety, and bit of depression***

The survey captured the challenges children from refugee families faced during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as their parents' worry over their mental health and academic performance. The survey evaluated COVID-19's impact on education, mental health, as well as academic performance during and after the pandemic of the first three children (if applicable to the respondents). All children were in kindergarten through twelfth grade in high school.

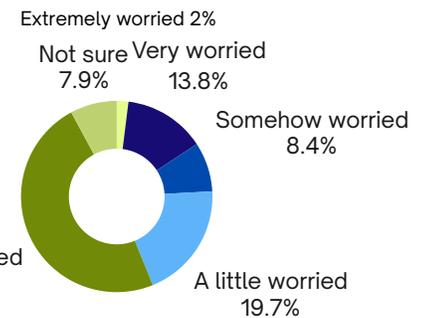
**Impact of First Year of COVID-19 on Child's Education**



**Parent's Worry That Child Might Fall Behind in School During the First Year of the Pandemic Because of COVID-19**



**Parent's Worry That Child Is Still Behind in School Now Because of COVID-19**



32.7% of respondents reported a very negative impact of the first year of COVID-19 on their children's education; 28.2% reported their children experienced a somewhat negative impact. A total of 9.4% of the respondents reported that COVID-19 had a positive effect on their children's education. On average, respondents expressed less concern about their children's academic performance at the time of the survey as compared to during the first year of the pandemic.

Respondents' concerns about their children falling behind in school decreased over time. Initially, 22.2% were extremely worried, 23.6% very worried, and 18.7% somewhat worried. These numbers dropped to 2.0%, 13.7%, and 8.3%, respectively, at the time of the survey. The proportion of respondents expressing no worry increased significantly, from 11.3% to 47.8%. The level of uncertainty remained stable at 8.0%.





# YOUTH EDUCATION

Respondents expressed a variety of additional concerns related to education during the pandemic. Many respondents worried that their children couldn't focus on online classes as well as in a physical classroom. Some noted that studying from home made their children "lazy" and "careless" about learning. A few were worried that the risk of contracting COVID-19 could affect school attendance, thereby impacting their education. One respondent specifically expressed concern that their child might not be able to graduate on time.

## Theme 1: Parent's Worries in Children's Efficacy in Online Learning

"Afraid child will fall behind: [We] came right when COVID-19 started so [we] worried about children's ability to adapt and learn efficiently."

"COVID-19 pandemic made my child's education shrinking downhill because they only used to face to face learning but not online."

"Children were happy that they got to stay home, but their educations were dropped. Learning through online made it harder for my children and they could not focus much."

"[My children] could not learn through online classes at all. They could not focus and it was hard for them."

"As a working parent, I could not watch my children on their time on their learning process. But I think learning through internet made my children a bit lazy because of less assistance in person."

"Studied at home made my children a bit lazy because they did not do homework on time. Furthermore, when they did not understand online instructions that had been giving out they tend to leave it like that without reaching out for help."





# YOUTH EDUCATION

While parents wanted to help with their children's education, some respondents indicated they lacked the ability and knowledge to help with their children's online learning. Language barriers, lack of knowledge with school's subject and technology were the main barrier to support online education.

## Theme 2: Parent's Lack of Ability to Help with Online Education

"I was worried for my children's education during COVID-19 because we as parents could not help them and they struggle through online classes."

"Not going to school was difficult as we do not understand English so we cannot help them. Worried for the sake of education."

"It was hard to teach things I did not know."

"Going to school remotely made thing difficult. Because they (children) are not advanced in technology. We as parents could not assist out children with technology at all."

Besides parents' inability to help, it was hard for children learning at home to seek help from the teachers.

## Theme 3: children's Lack of Assistance from Teachers

"Learning remotely at home has affected my third child's education in a way negative way because of less assistance in person and she could not focus learning through online class."

"I was so worried for my oldest child because when she needed help with homework we could not help her and learning through online was hard to ask for help."

"Child was starting to fall behind, not having any one-on-one with teachers."





# YOUTH EDUCATION

## Theme 3: Children’s Lack of Assistance from Teachers — Con’t

”They struggle with homework, and hard to reach or seek assistance.”

“Online classes made it very difficult for my children because they did not know where to get help during that time.”

In addition to creating barriers for students’ learning process, COVID-19 also developed issues with school attendance. Lack of transportation and vaccination requirement to attend school physically posed challenges for education.

## Theme 4: Inconveniences

“During COVID-19, our child[ren] [were] not provided with transportation or buses so we had to take them ourselves when they were allowed back at school. Children's grades stayed consistent.”

“COVID-19 made it worse for everyone. Due to vaccination, was unable to attend school.”



# AREAS OF IMPACT

## Somalia

- COVID-19 severely impacted Somalis' health, with 97.2% reporting worsened physical health (vs. 57.7%) and significantly more experiencing emotional health struggles for themselves and their children.
- Somalis faced greater challenges in housing and employment, with 72.3% reporting job loss (vs. 32.7%) and 86.1% reporting worsened housing stability (vs. 43.4%).
- A higher proportion of Somalis (32.9%) were very worried their children were academically behind post-pandemic, compared to 15.6% of the full population.

## Myanmar

- Fewer Burmese (53.8%) contracted COVID-19 compared to the full population (73.2%), though their physical health were similarly affected.
- Burmese reported fewer job losses (10.7% vs. 32.7%) and showed a faster decline in reduced household income (54.1% to 40.7%) than the full population (47.7% to 40.3%) moving away from the pandemic.
- Burmese parents' serious worry about children falling behind dropped from 27.5% at the start of the pandemic to none by the time they completed the survey.

## Bosnia

- Only 30.8% of Bosnian households were vaccinated, compared to 60.7% of the full survey
- Only 17.3% of Bosnians believed COVID-19 worsened stability compared to 39.3% of the full survey population
- A significantly higher percentage of Bosnian respondents (95.2%) reported a very negative impact on youth education compared to 32.7% of the full survey.



# SOMALIA

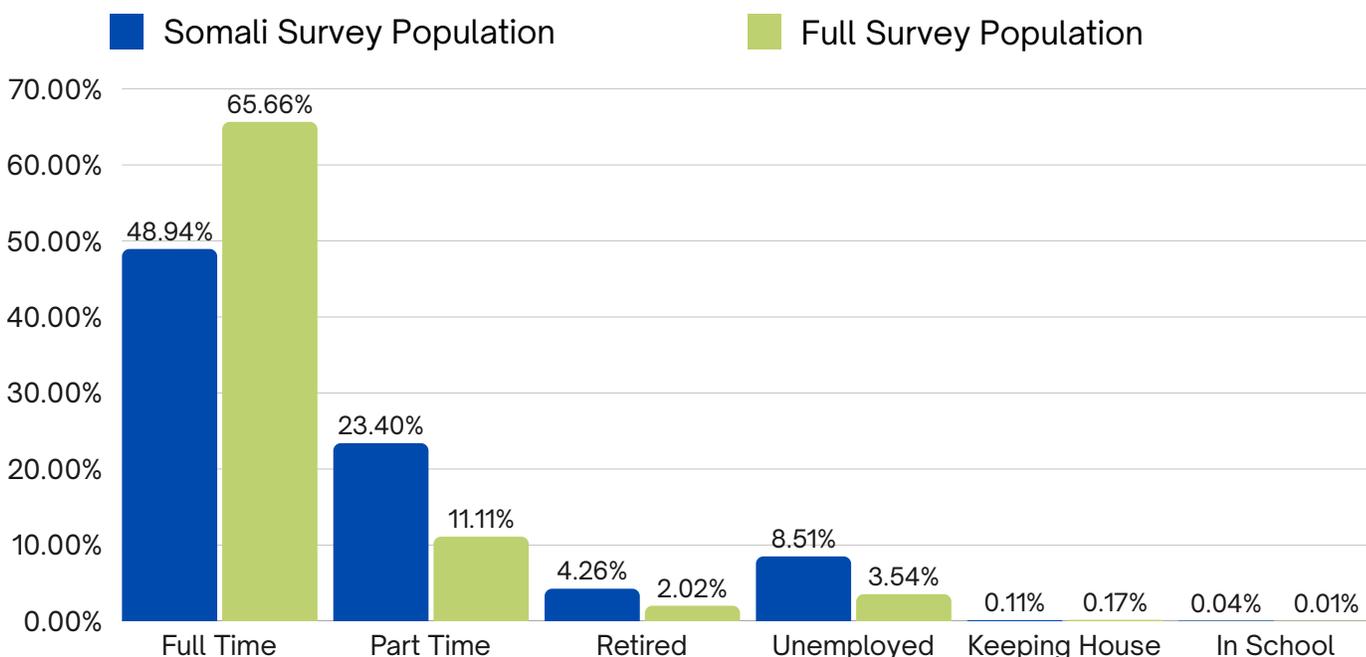
48 out of 201 (23.9%) respondents are from Somalia.

Like the full survey population, more Somali respondents were females (79.1%). The majority (79.2%) were between the age of 25 and 64. Fewer respondents were married (37.5% compared to 67.2% in the full population), and more were never married (39.6% compared to 19.9%).

The majority of respondents were distributed across three categories: living in the city for four to six years (37.0%), seven to nine years (32.6%), and more than nine years (28.3%), indicating a fairly even spread among the arrival across a wide time period.

Similar to the full population (65.7%), most Somali respondents worked full-time (49.0%). However, unlike the employment distribution for the full survey population, more Somali participants worked part-time (23.4%) compared to keeping house (10.6%). The majority in both groups had either attended some high school or had a high school diploma. Two Somali respondents had four year or Bachelor's degree and above.

### Employment Ratio Distribution



# SOMALIA

**More Somalis reported COVID-19's impact to have strongly affected finance, physical health, emotional health, employment, and housing stability compared to the full population.**

## 01. Well-being

- A larger ratio of Somali respondents (97.2%) said that COVID-19 worsened their physical health as compared to 57.7% for full survey population.
- Significantly more Somali participants's family (89.1%) held non-negative attitudes toward future vaccinations, comparing to 61.1% for the full survey population.
- COVID-19 impacted Somali's emotional health more severely, with significantly more reporting worsened emotional health for themselves and their children.

## 02. Financial Status

- Among those with worsened job conditions, a larger ratio of Somali than the full survey population reported job loss (72.3% vs. 32.7%) and difficulty finding work (27.7% vs. 12.2%).
- COVID-19 had a greater impact for Somalis compared to all participants on housing stability (86.1% vs. 43.4%) and ability to cover housing costs (around 65% vs. around 45%).
- Since the start of COVID-19, a higher percentage of Somalis received government housing benefits (38.2% to 18.8% ) compared to all participants (11.5% to 6.0%).

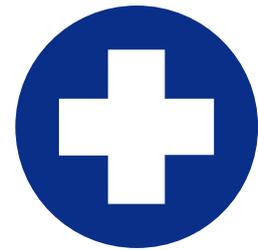
## 03. Youth Education

- A significantly lower proportion of Somali participants (47.4%) reported negative effects of first year of the COVID-19 pandemic on their children's education compared to the full survey population (60.6%).
- A higher proportion (32.9%) reported being very or extremely worried that their children was still academically behind after the pandemic, compared to the full population (15.6%). Fewer Somalis (39.2%) expressed little to no worry, compared to 67.3% in the full population.



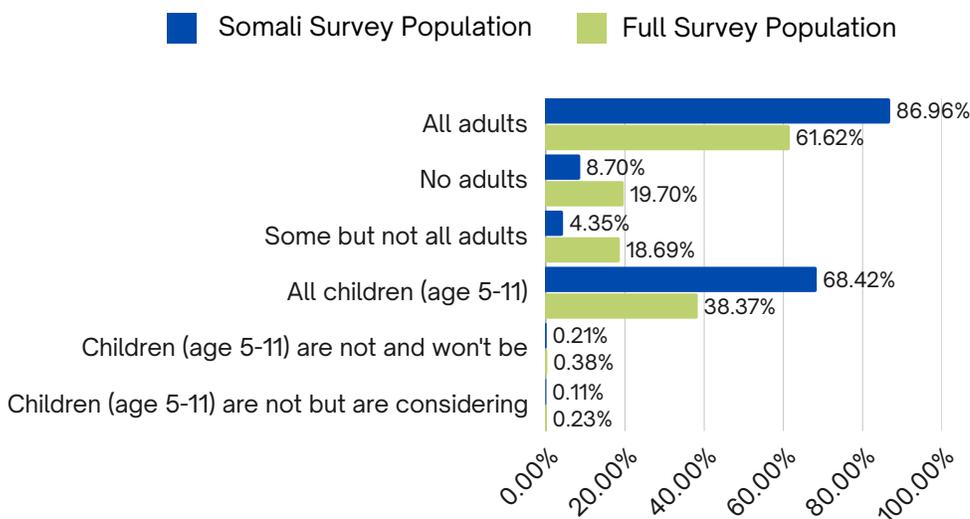
# SOMALIA

## WELL-BEING



COVID-19 had a greater negative impact on Somali respondents than the full population. 80% of Somali respondents had COVID-19, with 46.7% reporting long COVID in their household. Additionally, 97.2% of Somalis said COVID-19 worsened their physical health, compared to 57.7% of the full population.

### Vaccination Status for Adults and Children (Age 5-11) in the Household



Somali participants were more open to vaccination than the full survey population. 87.0% reported all adults in their household were vaccinated, 4.4% had some but not all vaccinated, and 68.4% had children aged five to 11 vaccinated, as compared to 61.6%, 18.7%, and 38.4% for the full survey population.

A larger portion of Somali participants (89.1%) held positive views on future vaccinations, with 32.6% planning to get vaccinated when available, and 56.5% remaining cautious. The main motivations for vaccination were self-protection (67.4%), family protection (65.1%), and job requirements (62.8%). The NY Department of Health (67.4%) and doctors (63.0%) were the most trusted sources of COVID-19 information.

Of the 15 surveyed refugees who found the mental well-being evaluation not applicable, 14 were Somali. Still, significantly more (32 of 33) Somali respondents reported that COVID-19 worsened their emotional health, compared to 62.2% of the overall population. Significantly more Somalis reported a worsening effect of COVID-19 on their children's emotional health (20.5% vs. 12.3%) compared to the overall sample.



# SOMALIA

## FINANCIAL STATUS

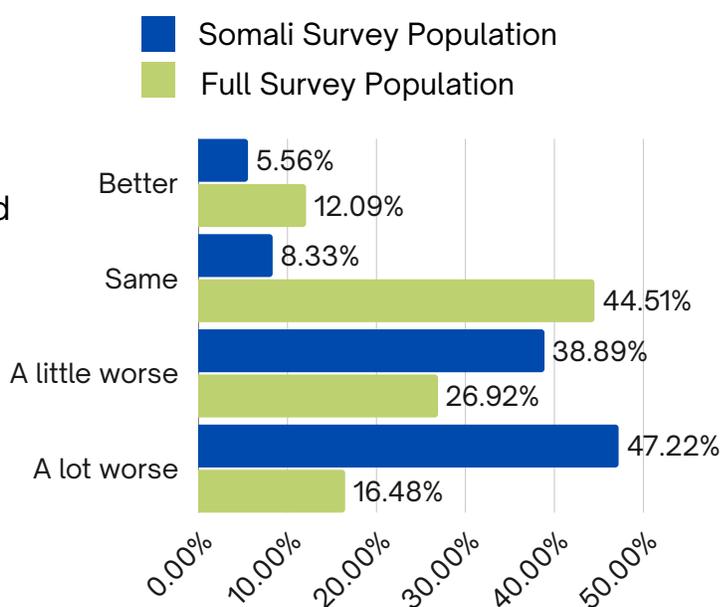


In general, Somali respondents reported a larger financial impact from COVID-19 than the full survey population. A total of 76.2% of Somali participants, compared to 43.8% of the full survey population, reported that the pandemic negatively impacted their employment. Among those who experienced worsened job conditions (n=16 Somalis, n=63 full population), COVID-19 affected household employment in various ways. A larger percentage of Somalis reported job loss (72.3%) and difficulty finding work (27.7%) compared to the full population (32.7% and 12.2%).

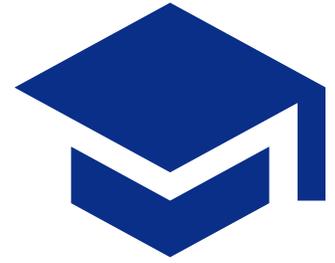
The percentage of Somali participants reporting reduced household income remained steady, decreasing slightly from 72.7% during the first year of COVID-19 to 71.1% after 2020. In contrast, the full population saw a lower ratio for reduced income, 47.7% during the start and 40.3% after 2020, with about half of the full population reporting no impact on their work hours during both periods.

COVID-19 significantly impacted housing stability for Somalis, with 86.1% reporting worsened stability compared to 43.4% of the full population. Those struggling to cover housing costs increased slightly among Somalis (63.8% to 66.7%) but decreased slightly in the overall population (47.0% to 46.2%). Somalis had consistently higher rental rates (75.0%) and lower mortgage ownership (20.8%) compared to the full population during both the first year of the pandemic (50.3% and 44.8%) and the past 12 months (43.8% and 51.7%). Although Somali reliance on government housing benefits decreased from 38.2% to 18.8% since COVID-19 began, it remained higher than the full sample (11.5% vs. 6.0%).

### COVID-19's Impact on Housing Stability



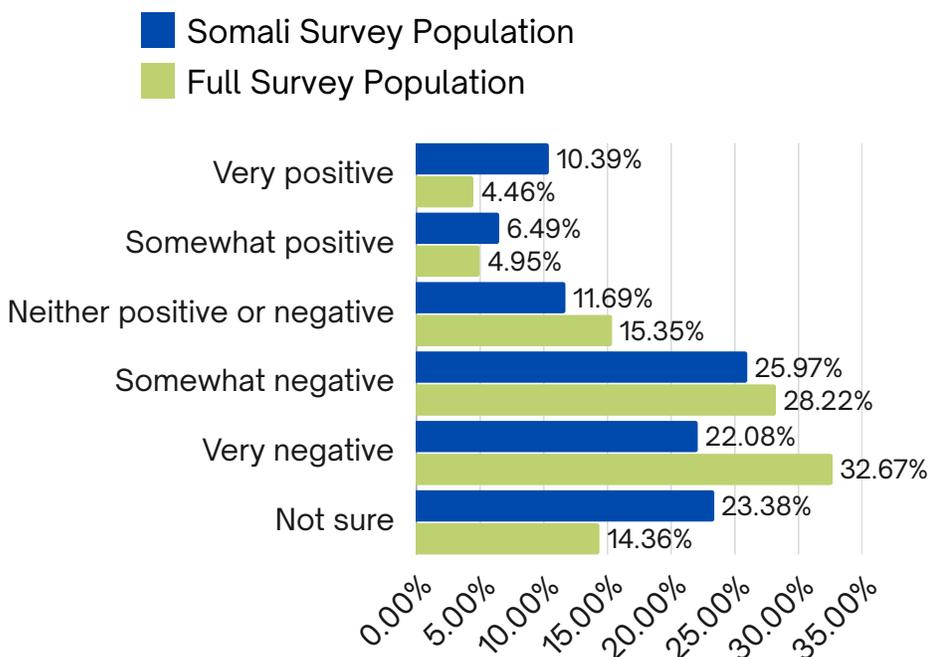
# SOMALIA YOUTH EDUCATION



Most Somali participants' children are in Fifth (13.8%), Sixth (12.5%), Eighth (12.5%), and Ninth Grades (11.3%), while the full survey population is more evenly spread out, with the highest in Kindergarten (12.1%) and Eighth Grade (10.2%).

A significantly lower proportion of Somali participants (48.1%) reported negative effects of first year of the COVID-19 pandemic on their children's education compared to the full survey population (60.9%). Despite the smaller ratio of Somali respondents identifying physical negative effects, a higher proportion (32.9%) reported being extremely or very worried that their children was still academically behind after the pandemic, compared to the full population (15.6%). Fewer Somalis (39.2%) expressed little to no worry, compared to 67.3% in the full population.

## Impact of First Year of COVID-19 on Child's Education



### Parent's Worries in children's Efficacy in Online Learning

"My children were easily distracted and [had a] hard time focusing and learning their school work."

"Staying at home had a effect due to them being lazy"

"The children very scared for their life and were unable to focus on school. When school started back children were still not used to school."



# MYANMAR

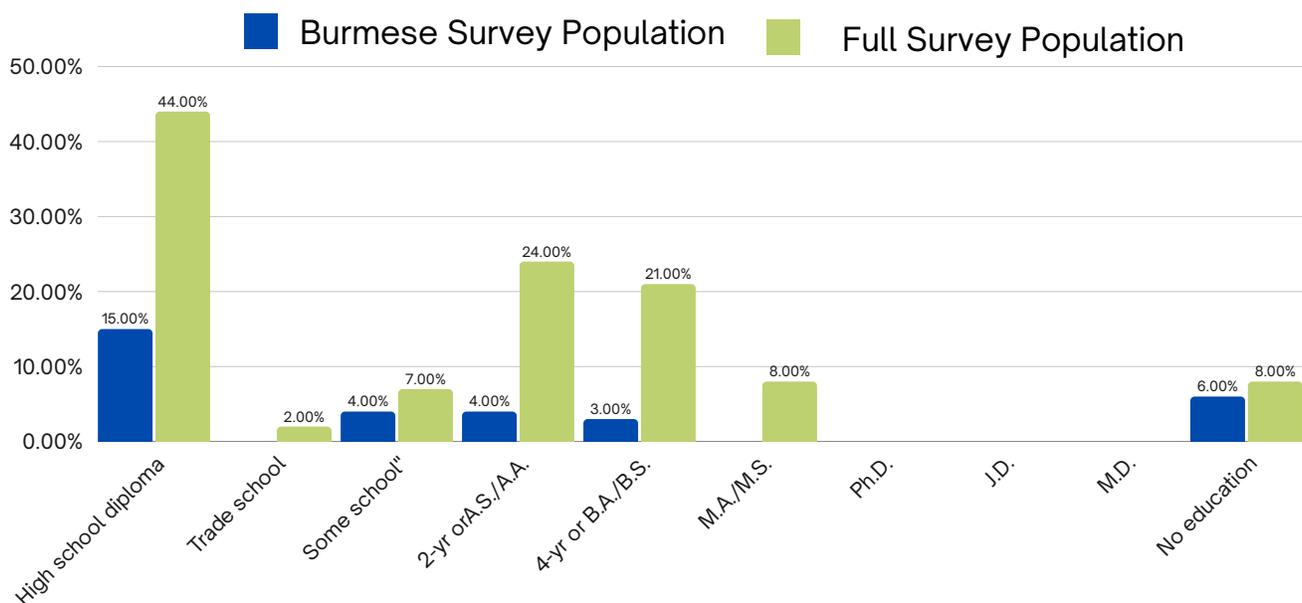
87 out of 201 (43.3%) respondents are from Myanmar.

Burmese respondents had a more balanced gender distribution (57.5% female, 42.5% male) compared to the overall population (62.1% female, 37.8% male). Most (93.1%) were aged 25–64. Additionally, 82.8% of respondents were married, significantly higher than the 67.2% observed in the full population, while a smaller proportion (3.4%) had never married, compared to 19.9% in the general population.

Most respondents (72.4%) had lived in their current city for over nine years, 23.0% for four to nine years, and 4.6% for less than four years.

Most Burmese respondents worked full-time (59.8%), comparable to the full population (65.7%), while a higher proportion kept house (28.7% vs. 16.7%). Burmese respondents were more likely to have a high school education or less (70.2% vs. 46.4% in the full population). They also had lower representation in higher education, with fewer holding 2-year degrees (7.0% vs. 12.4%) or Bachelor's degrees (5.3% vs. 10.8%), and none reported advanced degrees, compared to small percentages in the full population.

## Education Ratio Distribution



# MYANMAR

## 01. Well-being

- Significantly fewer Burmese (53.8%) contracted COVID-19 compared to the full population (73.2%), but COVID-19 worsened their physical health similarly to the full population.
- More Burmese (75.9%) expressed non-negative attitudes toward future family vaccinations, with 68.6% reporting all adults in their household vaccinated.
- Burmese respondents trusted medical professionals (89.3%) and community workers (82.1%) as COVID-19 information sources significantly more than the full population.

## 02. Financial Status

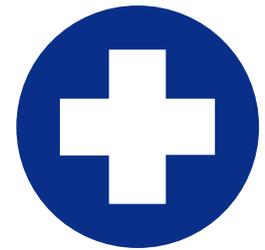
- Burmese experienced fewer job losses (10.7% vs. 32.7%) and less difficulty finding work (4.0% vs. 12.2%) than the full population during COVID-19.
- The percentage of Burmese reporting reduced household income declined faster (54.1% to 40.7%) than in the full population (47.7% to 40.3%).
- Burmese were less negatively impacted on housing stability, with more reporting improved stability (21.8% vs. 12.1%) and fewer reporting it worsened significantly (4.6% vs. 16.5%).

## 03. Youth Education

- Burmese parents reported a similar negative impact of the first year of the pandemic on their children's education (67.8%) as the full population (60.9%) but a significantly lower positive impact (3.3% vs. 9.4%).
- Serious worry among Burmese parents about their children falling behind dropped from 27.5% at the start of the pandemic to none within 12 months, while slight worry increased to 86.8% (vs. 67.3% for the full population).
- A key concern among Burmese parents was their children's lack of concentration and motivation during online classes.



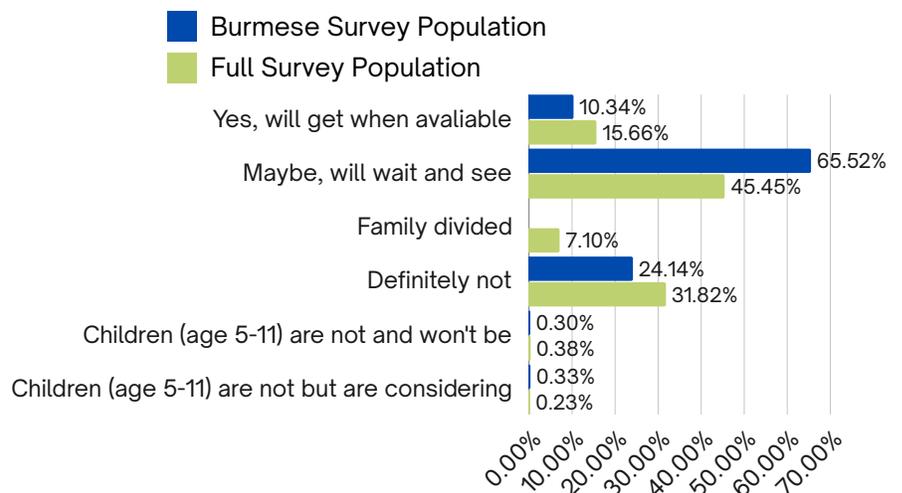
# MYANMAR WELL-BEING



Significantly fewer Burmese (53.8%) had COVID-19 compared to the full population (73.2%). In general, COVID-19 has worsened the physical health of the Burmese population, with proportions reporting worse (51.7%), unchanged (42.5%), or better (5.7%) physical health closely mirroring those of the full population.

Burmese participants were, in general, open to vaccination than, similar to the attitudes reported by the full survey population. 68.6% reported all adults in their household were vaccinated, 24.4% had some but not all vaccinated, and 69.8% either vaccinated or are considering to vaccinate their children aged five to 11 vaccinated.

### Family's Overall Attitudes Toward Future Vaccination or Booster



More Burmese respondents (75.9%) than the full population expressed non-negative attitudes toward future family vaccinations, with 65.5% taking a cautious stance. Their top motivations—self-protection (89.0%), family protection (82.9%), and job requirements (43.9%)—matched the full population, though more Burmese cited self and family protection (71.2% and 65.6%). Worry about the health of elderly was a frequently mentioned theme in the survey. Trusted COVID-19 information sources for Burmese included medical professionals (89.3%), community workers (82.1%), the NY Department of Health (76.2%), Oneida County Health Department, and CDC (65.5%), all significantly more trusted than by the full population.

Burmese respondents were roughly split between reporting worsened (54.0%) or constant (41.4%) emotional health during COVID-19, while similar proportions reported their children's emotional health improved (41.8%) or stayed the same (38.5%).



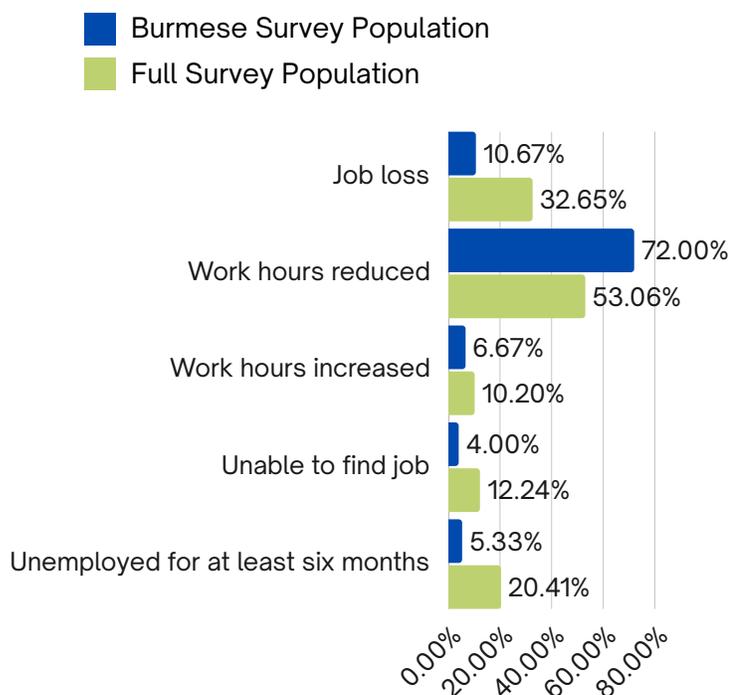
# MYANMAR FINANCIAL STATUS



Burmese respondents reported financial impacts from COVID-19 similar to the full survey population: 53.5% of Burmese and 55.5% of all participants reported negative financial effects, while 45.9% of Burmese and 43.8% of all participants experienced worsened employment. Respondents also reported on COVID-19's impact on household employment. However, a significantly smaller percentage of Burmese reported job loss (10.7%) and difficulty finding work (4.0%) compared to the full population (32.7% and 12.2%).

The percentage of Burmese participants reporting reduced household income decreased from 54.1% during the first year of COVID-19 to 40.7% after 2020. This decline was faster than that of the full surveyed population, which dropped from 47.7% to 40.3% over the same period.

## COVID-19's Impact on Employment



Burmese were less negatively impacted by the pandemic on housing stability than the full population, with more reporting improved stability (21.8% vs. 12.1%) and fewer reporting it worsened significantly (4.6% vs. 16.5%). Fewer Burmese received government housing benefits during the first year of COVID-19 (5.8% vs. 11.5%) and up to the survey period (1.2% vs. 6.0%). Burmese saw a larger increase in mortgage ownership since the pandemic began (39.1% to 51.7%) compared to the full population (44.8% to 51.7%). Additionally, 65.5% of Burmese spent over 70% of their income on housing at the start of the pandemic, a ratio unchanged up to the survey period, compared to 35.8% of the full population.



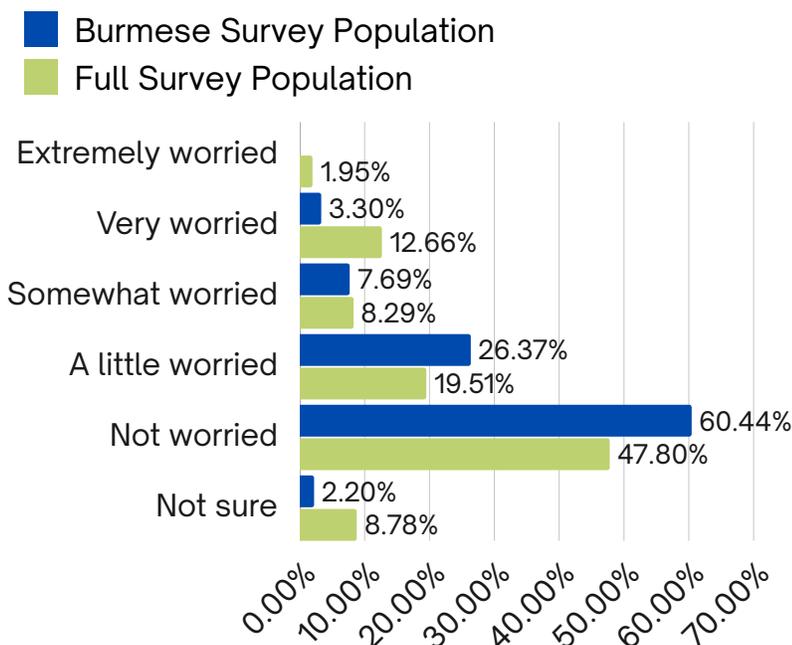
# MYANMAR YOUTH EDUCATION



Most Burmese participants' children are in Kindergarten (17.6%), Third (13.2%), and First Grade (11.0%), with a relatively even distribution of children in other grades.

Burmese participants (67.8%) reported a similar negative impact of the first year of the pandemic on their children's education as the full population (60.9%) but a significantly lower positive impact (3.3% vs. 9.4%). Worries during the first year of COVID-19 about children falling behind in school were comparable between Burmese (36.3% serious, 37.4% slight) and the full population (45.8% serious, 27.1% slight). However, current serious worry among Burmese parents (3.3%) is significantly lower than the full population (15.6%), while slight worry (86.8%) is significantly higher than the full population (67.3%). Burmese parents' extreme worry dropped entirely from 27.5% at the start of the pandemic to none within 12 months of the survey.

## Current Worry that Child(ren) Were Academically Behind



## Parent's Worries in Children's Efficacy in Online Learning

"As a working parent, I could not watch my children on their time on their learning process. But I think learning through internet made my children a bit lazy because of less assistance in person."

"Children were happy that they got to stay home, but their educations were dropped. Learning through online made it harder for my children and they could not focus much."



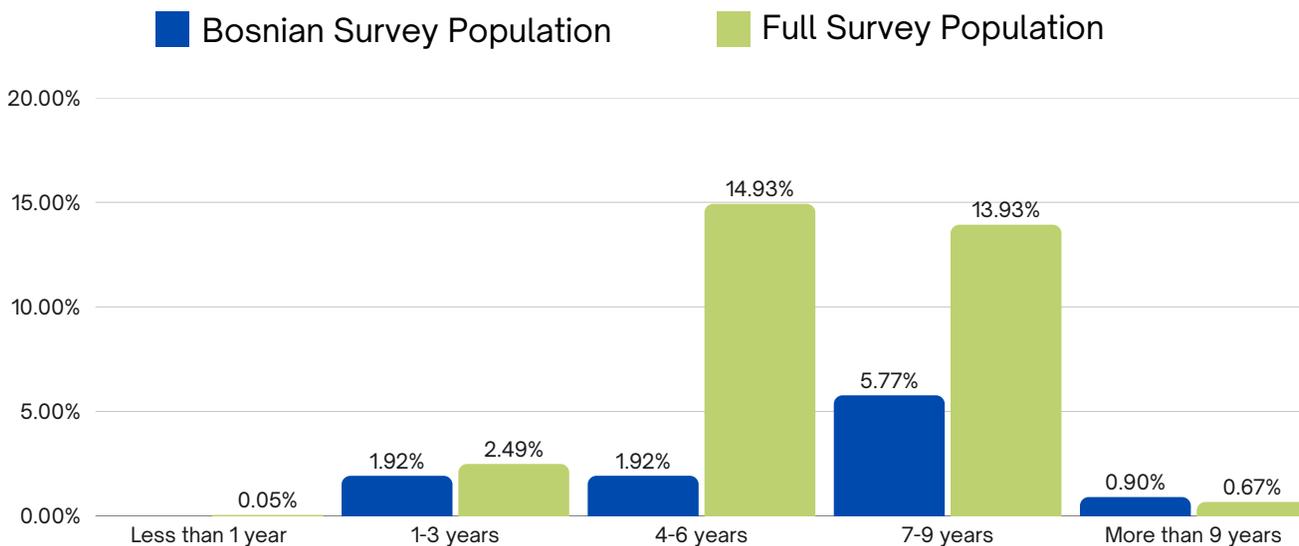
# BOSNIA

52 out of 201 (25.9%) respondents are from Bosnia.

Similar to the entire population, more Bosnian respondents were female, and the majority of respondents were aged between 25 and 64 years old. Comparable to the entire surveyed population, 67.3% of respondents were married, and the subsequent marital status questions reflected the entire population's very similarly.

Significantly more Bosnians have lived in Utica for a long time. A strong 90.4% of Bosnian respondents reported to have lived in their city for more than 9 years, compared to only 67.2% of total respondents.

### ***Living in City Length Distribution for Bosnian and Full Survey Population***



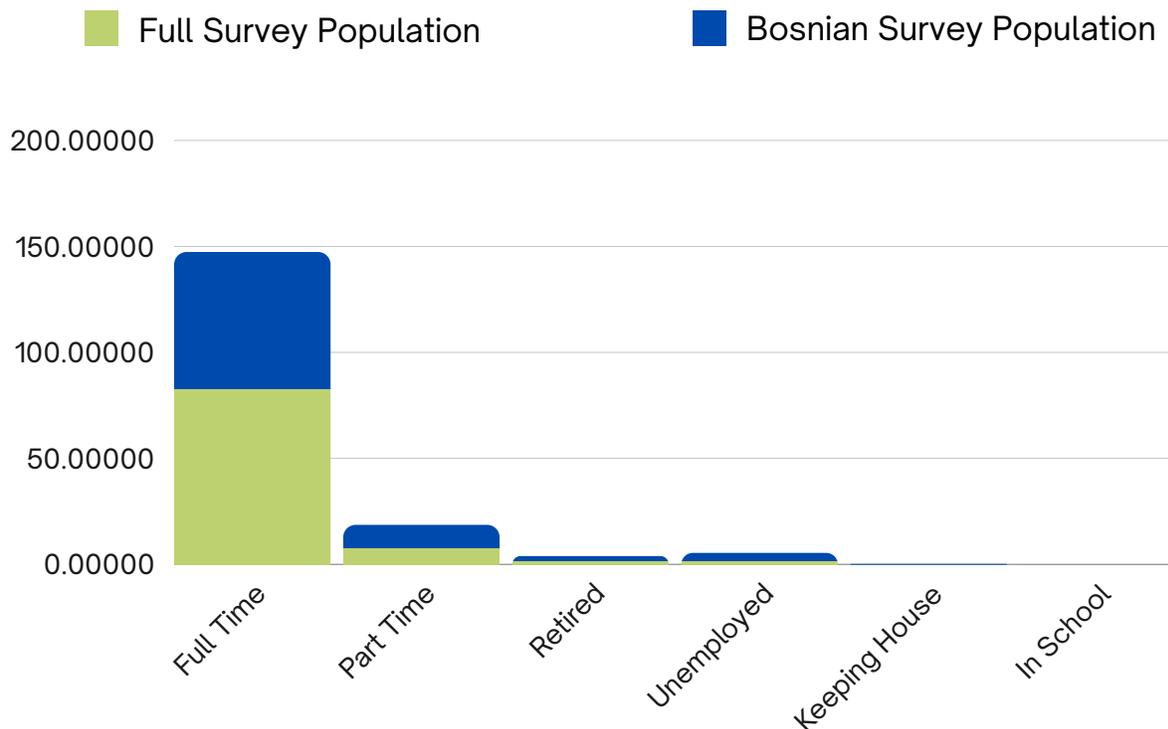
Similarly, more Bosnians respondents reported to work full-time jobs than the total group of respondents. The vast majority of Bosnians, 82.69%, work full time jobs. However, this is only true for 64.78% of the total population.

Notably more respondents from the full survey reported their employment status as “keeping house” (16.4% compared to 5.77%).



# BOSNIA

**Employment Ratio Distribution for Bosnian and Full Survey Population**



Levels of education also varied between Bosnia and the full survey population. For example, 28.84% of Bosnian respondents earned a 2-year or Associates degree compared to 11.94% of the total population. Similarly, 28.84% of Bosnians earned a 4-year or Bachelor’s degree, which is notably greater than the 10.45% of the full survey.

Due to a combination of factors including period of mass arrivals, overall city acceptance, and more, the Bosnian population of Utica appears to be more settled within the city.



# BOSNIA

## 01. Well-being

- More Bosnians (96.2% vs 73.2%) have had COVID-19 than the full survey population
- Bosnians reported a lesser emotional and physical effect from the virus than the full survey
- Only 30.77% of Bosnian households were vaccinated, compared to 60.70% of the full survey
- Bosnians reported much higher rates of distrust in the government than the full survey population
  - More Bosnian respondents made comments referring to COVID-19 as a “hoax” or made up

## 03. Youth Education

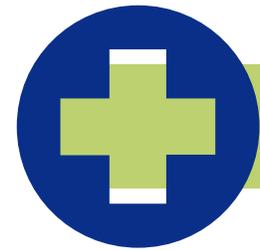
- All Bosnian respondents reported some educational impact from COVID-19, compared to 15.3% of the full population reported no impact.
- 95.2% of Bosnian respondents reported a very negative impact on youth education, significantly higher than 32.7% of the full survey.
- Similar proportions of Bosnian respondents and the full population were extremely worried about children falling behind in school (20.0% vs. 22.2%).
- Post-pandemic, both groups showed reduced concern about children remaining behind in school.

## 02. Financial Status

- On average, Bosnians reported a lesser financial impact than the full survey
- In 2019-2020, 11.54% of Bosnian respondents experienced reduced incomes vs 46.27% of the total population. In 2020-onwards, the study shows 11.54% vs 39.30%.
- Only 17.31% of Bosnians believed COVID-19 worsened stability compared to 39.31% of the full survey population.
- Bosnians reported a much lower employment impact from COVID-19 than the full survey population

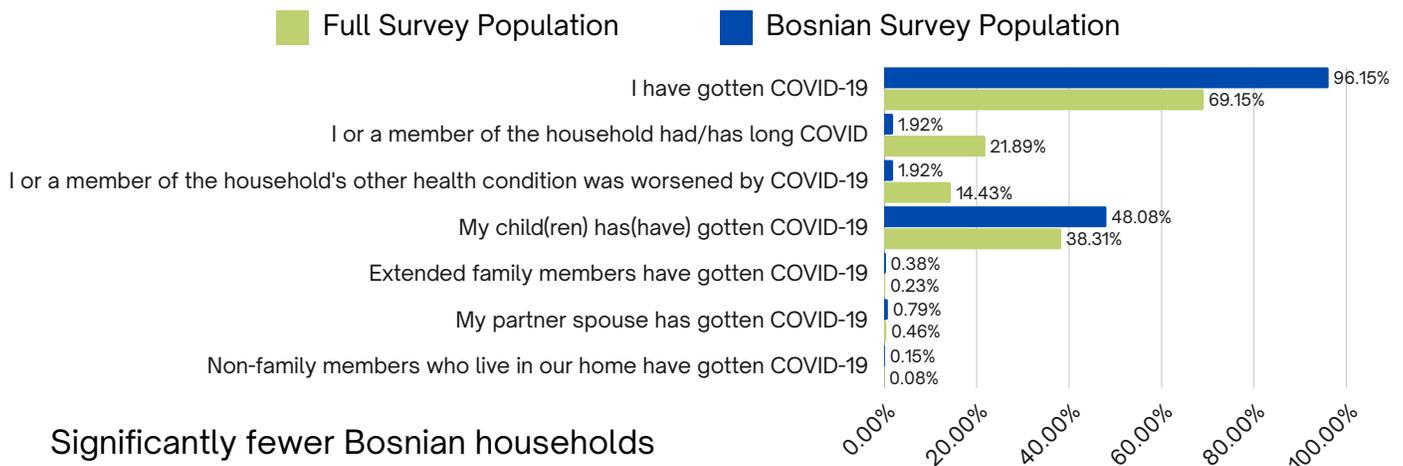


# BOSNIA WELL-BEING



A larger percentage of the Bosnian respondents contracted COVID-19 (96.2% vs 73.2%), and have partners (78.9% vs 48.4%) and or children (46.1% vs 40.5%) who caught the virus. However, a larger percentage of respondents from the full survey population had long COVID (28.9% vs 23.2%). According to the survey, 44.2% of Bosnian respondents said COVID-19 worsened their physical health, and 53.9% reported their emotional health to have worsened. Although small, this is less than the full survey population which reported 57.6% and 62.2% of respondents who believe their physical and emotional, respectively, health was worsened.

## COVID-19's Impact on Physical Health for Bosnian and Full Survey Population



Significantly fewer Bosnian households (30.8%) were vaccinated when compared to the full survey population (60.7%). For those who are vaccinated, the predominant reason was requirements for a job (70.4%). For those who were not vaccinated, the largest preventions were a lack of trust in the government (55.8%), and a preference to trust in natural immunity (21.2%). The Bosnian respondents appeared to have a much stronger distrust in the government, as the full survey population only reported 15.9% of respondents who cited a lack of trust for their anti-vacc motivations.

### Lack of Trust

- “Made us doubt the government”
- “Can't trust the gov't”
- “Will not trust any future pandemics”
- “Lose our trust in the government and stability of the country”
- “COVID-19 was a hoax to manipulate people and control us”
- “Government made the whole thing up”
- “It made me not trust the government”

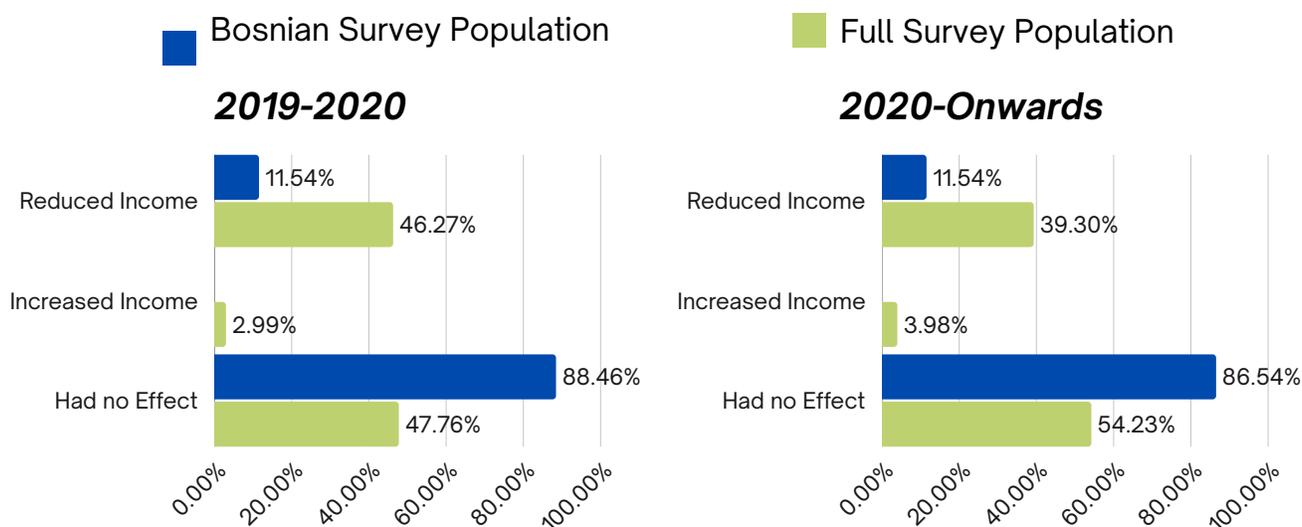


# BOSNIA FINANCIAL STATUS



Overall, Bosnian respondents reported a lesser financial impact from COVID-19. 40.4% of Bosnian respondents reported that COVID-19 worsened their financial status, which is less than the full survey population's 47.8%. Seen below, a much lower percentage of Bosnians experienced reduced incomes compared to the full survey in 2019-2020 (11.5% vs 46.3%), and 2020-onwards (11.5% vs 39.3%). Instead, many reported that COVID-19 had no effect on their household income.

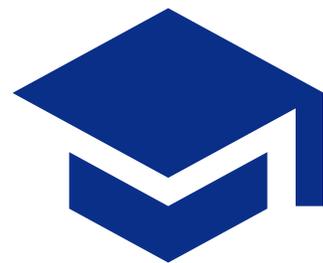
## COVID-19 Impact on Household Income



In terms of housing stability, only 17.3% of Bosnians believed COVID-19 worsened stability compared to 39.3% of the full survey population. Similarly, for respondents and their household members, only 9.6% lost their job, 9.6% had reduced work hours, 1.9% have been unable to find employment since the pandemic, and 1.9% were unemployed for six or more months during the pandemic. These numbers are drastically lower than those of the full survey population (23.9%, 38.81%, 9.0%, 14.9%).



# BOSNIA YOUTH EDUCATION

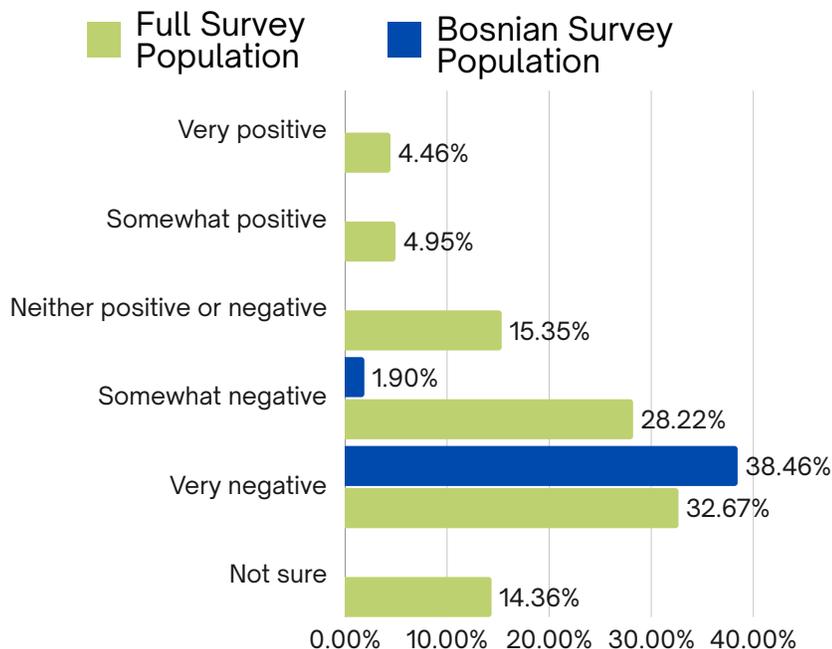


Like the full survey population, Bosnian respondents had children evenly ranged across grades.

While 15.3% of the full population reported no educational impact from the first year of COVID-19, no Bosnian respondents shared this view. Instead, significantly more Bosnian respondents reported a very negative impact of the pandemic on youth education.: 95.2% of Bosnian respondents reported COVID-19 to have a very negative impact on youth education, compared to 32.7% of the full survey. Bosnian respondents had a similar proportion to the full population of those extremely worried their children would fall behind in school (20.0% vs. 22.2%). Post-pandemic, both the full survey and Bosnian respondents expressed reduced worry that their children were still behind.

Overall, there were very limited distinctions between how the Bosnian population and full survey responded to COVID-19’s impact on youth education.

## Impact of First Year of COVID-19 on Child's Education (%)



### Parent's Worries in Children's Ability to Keep Up

“Child was starting to fall behind, not having any 1-on-1 with teachers”

“Online classes put my daughter behind in all her grade and the length of the screen time was very unhealthy”

“Child fell behind and (had) a hard time catching up”

“Very hard to adjust to online learning”



# RECOMMENDATION FOR ACTIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected refugee communities in Utica, with varying degrees of impact across physical well-being, emotional well-being, financial and employment status, housing stability, and youth education. The survey data reveals stark disparities among Somali, Bosnian, and Burmese populations under each subject area:

## Physical and Emotional Well-being

- **Most impacted population: Somali respondents**
  - 97.2% of Somali participants reported worsened physical health, significantly higher than 57.7% of the full population. Additionally, 46.7% of Somali households experienced long COVID compared to lower rates in other groups.
  - 32 out of 33 Somali respondents (97.0%) reported worsened emotional health, compared to 62.2% of the full population. Moreover, 20.5% of Somali respondents noted worsened emotional health in their children, higher than the 12.3% reported by the general sample.

## Finance, Employment, Housing

- **Most impacted population: Somali respondents**
  - 72.3% of Somali participants experienced job loss, more than double the full population rate of 32.7%. Additionally, 76.2% of Somali participants reported negative employment impacts from the pandemic, compared to 43.8% of the full population.
  - 76.2% of Somali respondents reported negative financial effects, compared to 55.5% in the full population.
  - 86.1% of Somali participants reported worsened housing stability, nearly double the 43.4% rate in the full population. Furthermore, a higher proportion of Somali households (66.7%) spent over 70% of their income on housing, compared to 35.8% of the general population.



# RECOMMENDATION FOR ACTIONS

## Physical and Emotional Well-being

- **Most impacted population: Bosnian respondents**
  - 95.2% of Bosnian respondents reported a very negative impact on youth education, compared to 32.7% of the full population. This was accompanied by concerns about their children falling behind academically, consistent with the broader impact of online learning and school disruptions.

This report underscores the need for targeted interventions that address the unique challenges faced by each community, focusing on their most critical areas of impact.



# RECOMMENDATION FOR ACTIONS

## Physical Well Being

### 1. Access to Healthcare:

- Partner with local clinics and community health centers to address long COVID and chronic conditions exacerbated by the pandemic.

### 2. Vaccination Campaigns:

- Address vaccination gaps and hesitancy by engaging trusted medical professionals and community workers to improve trust and uptake in populations.

### 3. Health Programs:

- Develop culturally tailored health workshops focusing on nutrition, exercise, and post-COVID rehabilitation to support physical recovery.

## Emotional Well Being

### 1. Mental Health Resources:

- Collaborate with local organizations to provide multilingual and culturally sensitive counseling.

### 2. Youth Support Services:

- Provide school-based mental health resources for children.



# RECOMMENDATION FOR ACTIONS

## Financial Status / Employment

### 1. Job Creation Initiatives:

- Address the high job loss rates in Somali population through skill-building programs and collaborations with local employers to provide tailored job opportunities.

### 2. Financial Assistance:

- Increase access to financial aid for recovering populations, with special attention to groups reporting high housing and food insecurities tied to employment loss.

## Housing Stability

### 1. Housing Assistance:

- Increase housing vouchers, especially for Somali households with higher rent burdens and lower homeownership rates.

### 2. Overcrowding and Eviction Risk Mitigation:

- Develop policies addressing overcrowding and eviction fears, as seen across narratives, focusing on families in high-density rental units.

## Youth Education

### 1. Targeted Academic Support:

- Provide intensive tutoring and after-school programs for Bosnian children who experienced the greatest negative impacts.

### 2. Parental Digital Literacy:

- Offer training for parents (especially Somalis) to support online learning, focusing on technology use and language barriers.

### 3. Infrastructure for Learning:

- Collaborate with schools to ensure continued access to educational resources, addressing concerns around motivation and teacher assistance.



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# COVID-19 Pandemic Refugee Community Impact Report

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