# COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

# REPORT

**Insights into the Lives and Challenges of the Central Asian Diaspora in the U.S.**

**A Study of a Previously Unexplored Community**

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ACAA
American Central Asian Association
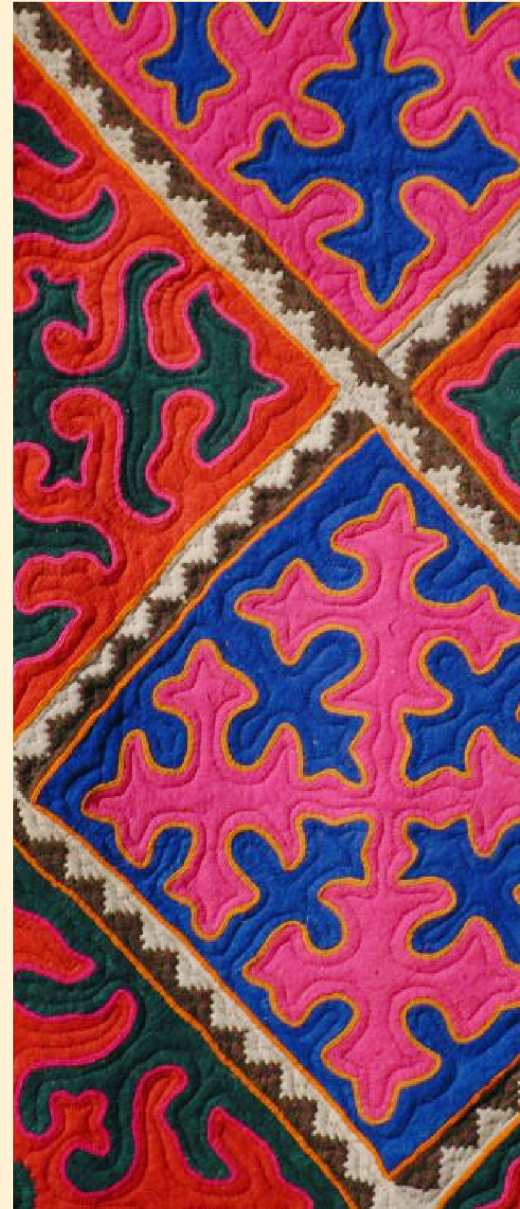
# INTRODUCTION

**Founded in Brooklyn, NYC, in 2021, the American Central Asian Association (ACAA) is the first non-profit organization to represent and serve the needs of the entire Central Asian community in the U.S.**

Our approach is rooted in (1) supporting vulnerable groups within the Central Asian community and (2) advocating for long-lasting change through larger community organizing initiatives.

We offer various services, including social, legal, educational, career, and mental health support, focusing on cultural and linguistic competence. While we support anyone who walks through our doors, we have developed expertise in serving the needs of individuals from the five Central Asian countries - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

In the U.S., Central Asians are often forgotten in the movement for racial justice. **Hundreds of thousands of Central Asians reside in the United States, yet there is no formal acknowledgment of their existence. The U.S. Census itself does not mention Central Asians under any racial/ethnic category.** This erasure hides the challenges that Central Asians face as a minority group, hinders their access to resources, and limits their power to organize and advocate for themselves on a systemic level.

Since our inception, we have dedicated ourselves to illuminating the lives, challenges, and concerns of the often-overlooked Central Asian community in the U.S. Through a meticulously conducted comprehensive needs assessment survey, **we are pioneering the first study on Central Asians in the U.S. This groundbreaking research not only informs our targeted programming but also brings to the forefront the systemic challenges encountered by Central Asians in the U.S**. It serves as a powerful tool in advocating for public support and recognition, ensuring that this community's voices and needs are heard and addressed effectively.

This report presents an analysis of 317 Community Needs Assessment responses gathered from July 12 to December 22, 2023, encompassing critical issues ranging from food access and healthcare to legal challenges and mental health within the Central Asian community.

# SURVEY METHODOLOGY

**Target Demographic:** Our survey targeted individuals above 18, living or having lived in the U.S., with a Central Asian background—either born in, ethnically tied to, or having lived in Central Asia for over 5 years.

**Survey Design:** Our survey included 35 questions, using multiple-choice, dropdowns, open-ended, and matrix ratings, streamlined and clarified based on a pilot test with 20 participants from June to July 2023.

**Sampling**:  We used convenience sampling via digital platforms like Telegram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram, where Central Asians are active, supplemented by collaborations with bloggers and popular Instagram pages, and bolstered by word-of-mouth for broader survey outreach.

**Data Collection:** The survey was self-administered, mainly through digital means, from July 12, 2023, to December 22, 2023. This approach was chosen due to the sensitive nature of some questions, such as those addressing sexual trafficking, homelessness, and unemployment. We received 471 responses, of which 317 met our eligibility criteria. Only one response per device was allowed to ensure data integrity.

**Data Analysis:** We used SurveyMonkey and Excel to collect and visualize the data, focusing on representing key patterns and insights.

**Objectives**:

- Guide program development for Central Asians in the U.S.
- Highlight diverse experiences within this community.
- Enhance awareness and advocacy for Central Asians.

# SURVEY METHODOLOGY

**Anonymity and Confidentiality:** We maintained participant anonymity by not collecting personal identifiers like names, birth dates, nor IP addresses. Participants were informed about the survey's voluntary nature, their rights, and response confidentiality at the outset and in advertisements.

**Limitations**: The survey's digital format and convenience sampling likely skewed participation towards active online users and certain social networks, not fully representing U.S. population ratios. Limited to Russian and English translations, the survey excluded non-speakers and risked misinterpretation by those with limited proficiency. Concerns about immigration status and cultural factors may have affected openness and introduced a positive response bias. These limitations and biases are important for interpreting the data and guiding future research.

**Ethical Considerations:** Our survey, covering sensitive topics such as sexual trafficking and unemployment, didn't require formal ethical approvals due to its non-invasive nature. It was structured as a voluntary questionnaire, allowing participants to skip questions. Thus, the survey focused on participant experiences without probing into personal narratives. This approach prioritized gathering valuable data while respecting privacy and comfort. We ensured participant confidentiality and communicated their rights, including withdrawal, without repercussions. The survey's aim was to enhance understanding and services for the Central Asian community, adhering to ethical practices in research.

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# DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

## GENDER

Among the survey respondents, 44% identified as female, 55% as male, and 1% chose not to specify their gender.

## AGE

The survey respondents were **predominantly from middle-aged groups**, with 34% between 30-39 years, 23% between 18-25 years, and 20% between 40-49 years. Participants between 26-29 years contributed 14%, and those in the 50-59 years category were 7%. The least represented were individuals between 60-69 years, at 3%.

## MARITAL STATUS

**Over half of the surveyed individuals are married**, constituting 52%. Singles account for 33%, followed by 12% who are divorced, and 2% are widowed..

## CHILDREN

Among the respondents, a **majority reported having no children** at 36%, while a considerable number have one or two children, at 18% and 20%, respectively. Fewer respondents have three to five children, with these categories progressively decreasing from 16% to 3%.
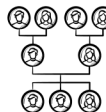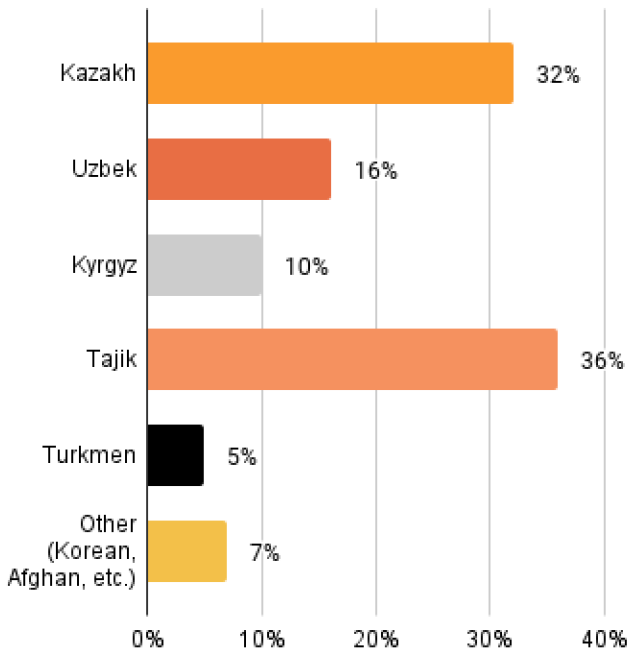
## RELATIVES

The survey shows that **68% of respondents have fewer than three relatives in the U.S.** Specifically, **30% have no relatives,** 16% have one, and 14% have two. There's a steep decline beyond this, with only 6% reporting between 10 and 15 relatives and just 1% having between 15 and 30 relatives. A minimal 2% have more than 30 relatives. These insights highlight a demographic with predominantly **small or non-existent family networks in the U.S., indicating a need for enhanced community support structures.**

# LANGUAGE & ETHNICITY

## Most respondents spoke Russian

English was the second most spoken language. However, 19% indicated they are uncomfortable speaking in English, and 29% indicated they are only somewhat comfortable speaking English. **It should be noted that the survey was available only in English and Russian, which may have skewed data towards these two languages**. The survey was available in Russian since Russian was the lingua franca in Central Asia during the Soviet Union.

## LANGUAGES

Russian
92%

Kazakh
33%

Kyrgyz
11%

Tajik
36%

Turkemn
7%

Uzbek
23%

Englsih
72%

## ETHNIC BACKGROUND

Kazakh — 32%
Uzbek — 16%
Kyrgyz — 10%
Tajik — 36%
Turkmen — 5%
Other (Korean, Afghan, etc.) — 7%

The largest ethnic group represented in this survey is Tajiks, followed by Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, Koreans, Afghans, Azerbaijani, and others, respectively. It should be noted that **these ratios are not representative of population ratios in the U.S.** Data is skewed due to convenience sampling.
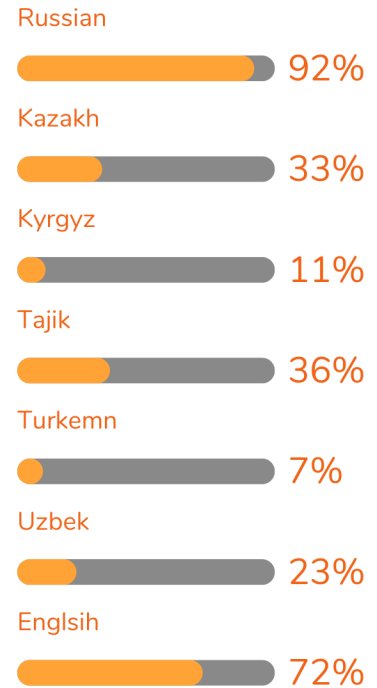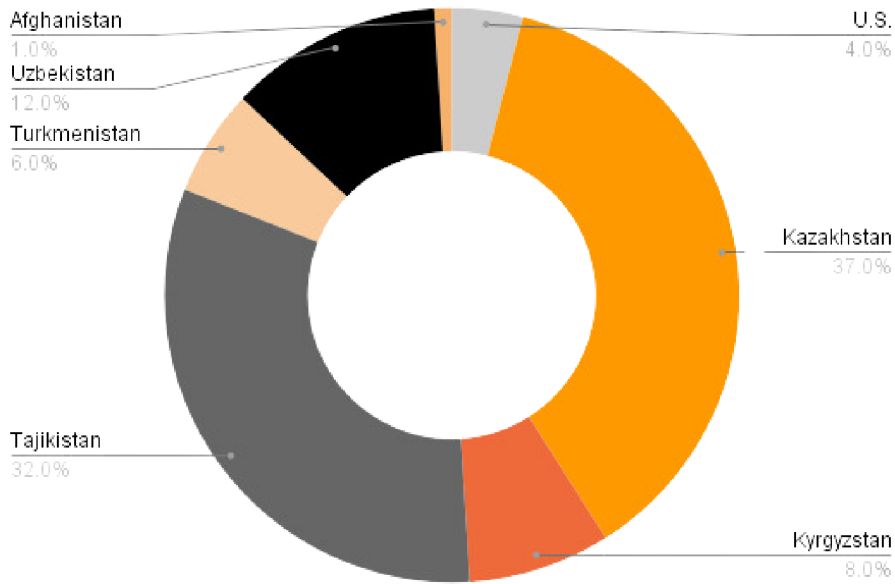
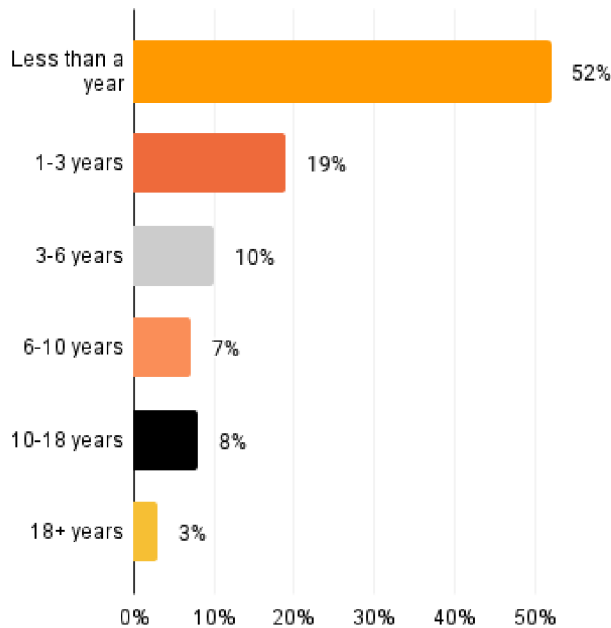## COMFORT LEVELS SPEAKING ENGLISH

- 23% are very comfortable
- 29% are comfortable
- 29% are somewhat comfortable
- 19% are not comfortable speaking English.

# IMMIGRATION

## BIRTH PLACE

Afghanistan 1.0%
Uzbekistan 12.0%
Turkmenistan 6.0%
Tajikistan 32.0%
U.S. 4.0%
Kazakhstan 37.0%
Kyrgyzstan 8.0%

## LENGTH OF RESIDENCE IN THE U.S.

- Less than a year: 52%
- 1-3 years: 19%
- 3-6 years: 10%
- 6-10 years: 7%
- 10-18 years: 8%
- 18+ years: 3%

**The Central Asian community in the U.S. is relatively new and expanding.**
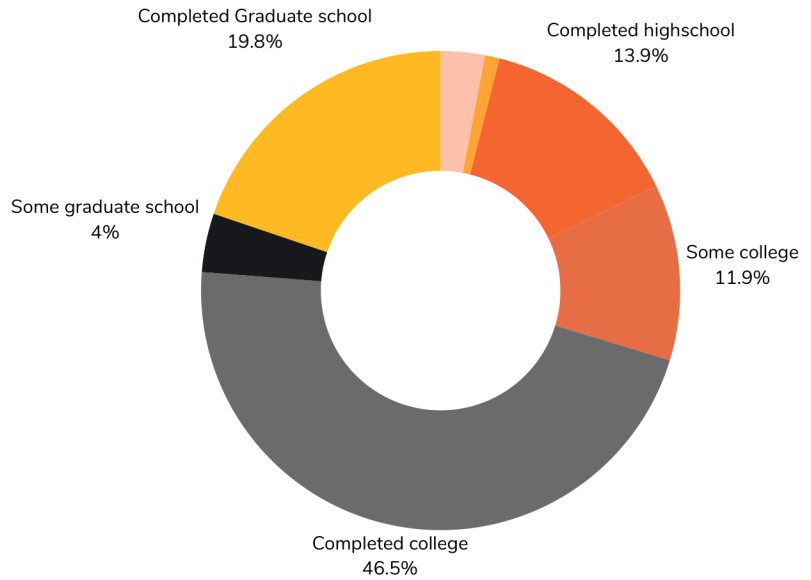
The data indicates that most respondents have been in the U.S. for under a year, with a significant 71% having resided for less than three years. Furthermore, a small percentage, 4%, were born in the U.S., highlighting that the community primarily consists of first-generation immigrants, with minimal second-generation immigrants.

# EDUCATION

## EDUCATION
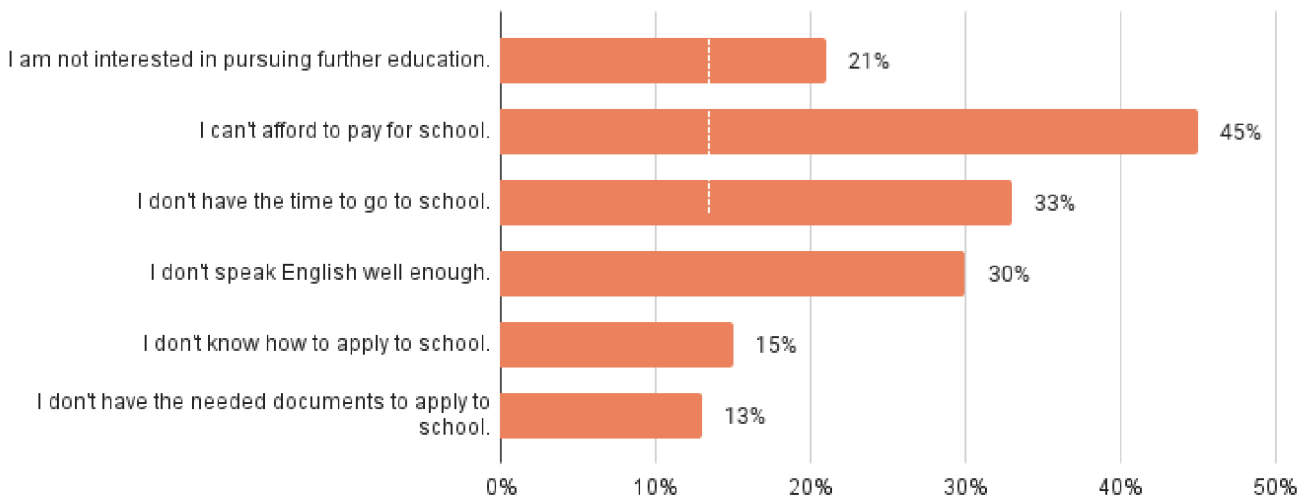
**70% of respondents have completed higher education.**



Completed Graduate school
19.8%

Completed highschool
13.9%

Some graduate school
4%

Some college
11.9%

Completed college
46.5%

## EDUCATION IN THE U.S.

**66% of respondents indicated that they have not received any education in the U.S.** 29% have completed or attended some higher education institution in the U.S., while 6% of respondents either attended or completed high school in the U.S.

## EDUCATION BARRIERS:

**Financial limitations, time constraints, and language barriers emerge as the top challenges hindering respondents from pursuing further education**, suggesting that affordability, flexible learning schedules, and language support could be critical areas for intervention to increase educational access.



| | |
|---|---|
| I am not interested in pursuing further education. | 21% |
| I can't afford to pay for school. | 45% |
| I don't have the time to go to school. | 33% |
| I don't speak English well enough. | 30% |
| I don't know how to apply to school. | 15% |
| I don't have the needed documents to apply to school. | 13% |

# INCOME & EMPLOYMENT

## INDIVIDUAL INCOMES
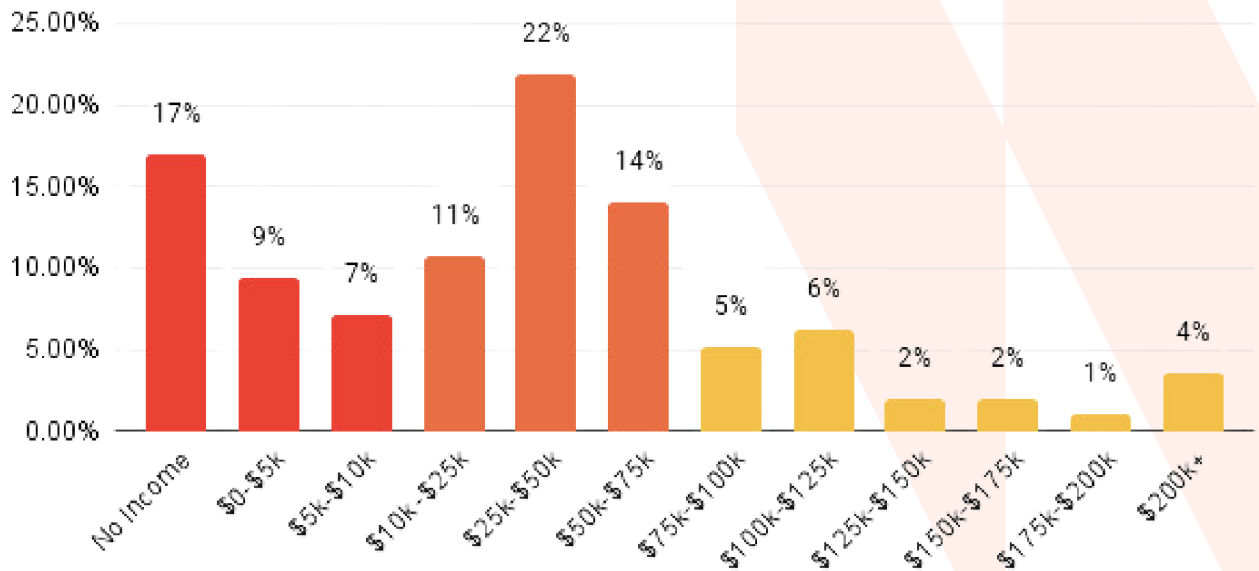


According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the 2022 median household income in the U.S. was $74,580 (or roughly $75,000). **80% of respondents had an income below the national median household income**. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the 2022 poverty threshold for an individual in the U.S. was $14,880. **33% of respondents had an income less than $10,000, placing them under the individual poverty threshold.**

## EMPLOYMENT
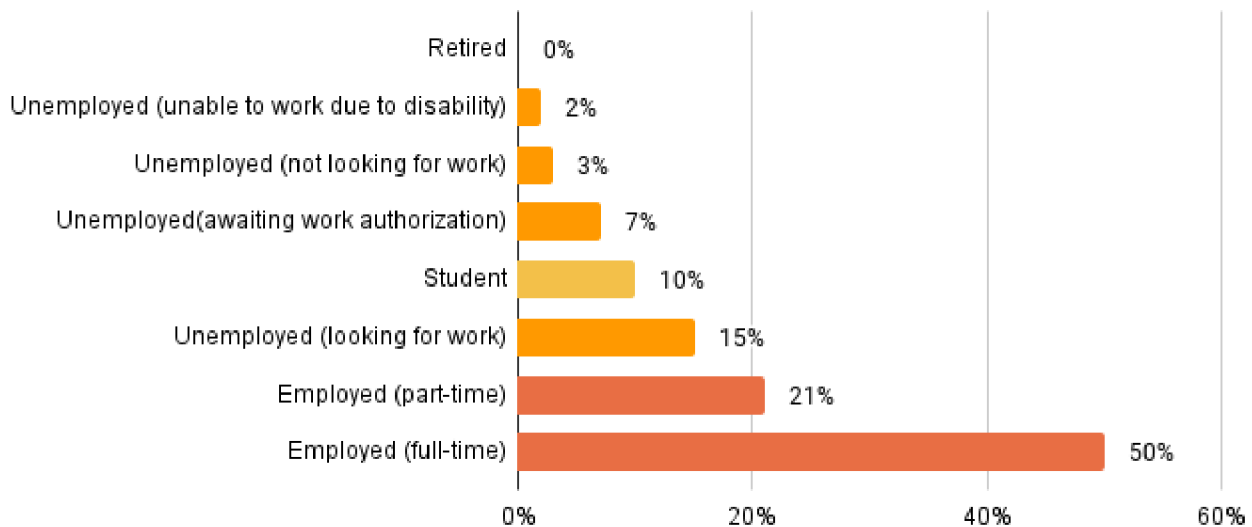
# EMPLOYMENT INSIGHTS

50% of all respondents stated that they are currently employed full-time, while 21% are employed part-time. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, 83% of workers are employed full-time, while 16% are employed part-time.

- **Respondents are employed less frequently as full-time workers when compared to the national average.**
- **Over a quarter of respondents are currently unemployed.**
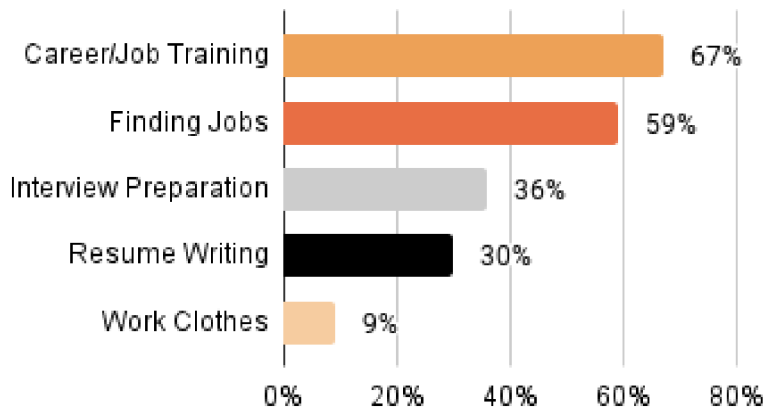- **Most unemployed respondents (81%) are looking for work or awaiting work authorization.**

**59%** More than half of the respondents request assistance with finding jobs

# EMPLOYMENT NEEDS

Respondents indicated a need for the following employment support:

# RESIDENCE

## STATE RESIDENCE
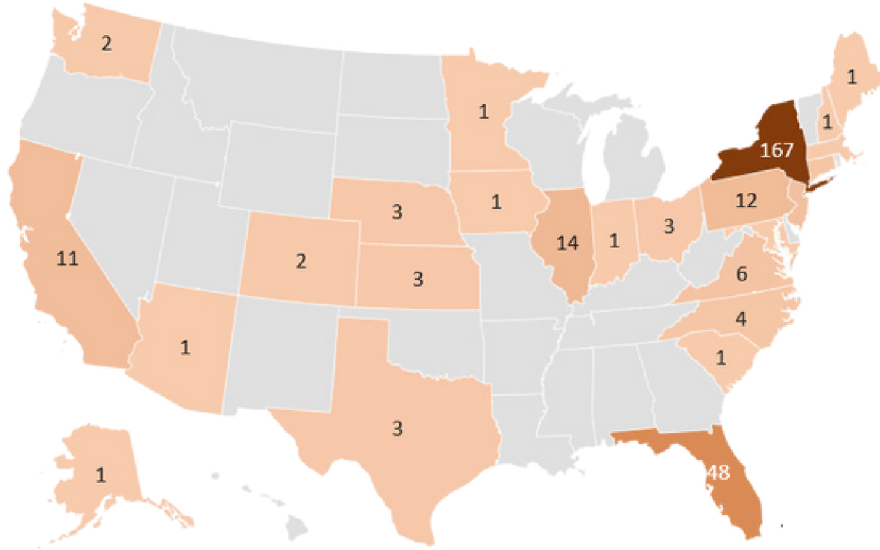


## TOP 10 CITIES

- Brooklyn
- New York
- Miami
- Los Angeles
- Chicago
- Philadelphia
- Tampa
- Fort Lauderdale
- Hollywood
- Queens

## REASONS FOR CHOOSING RESIDENCE



| Reason | Percent |
|---|---|
| Employment opportunities | 49% |
| Proximity to family or friends | 41% |
| Community | 28% |
| Lifestyle and attractions | 25% |
| Environmental quality (clean air, green spaces, etc.) | 22% |
| Affordable cost of living or housing | 21% |
| Safety and low crime rate | 17% |
| Higher education or academic pursuits | 9% |
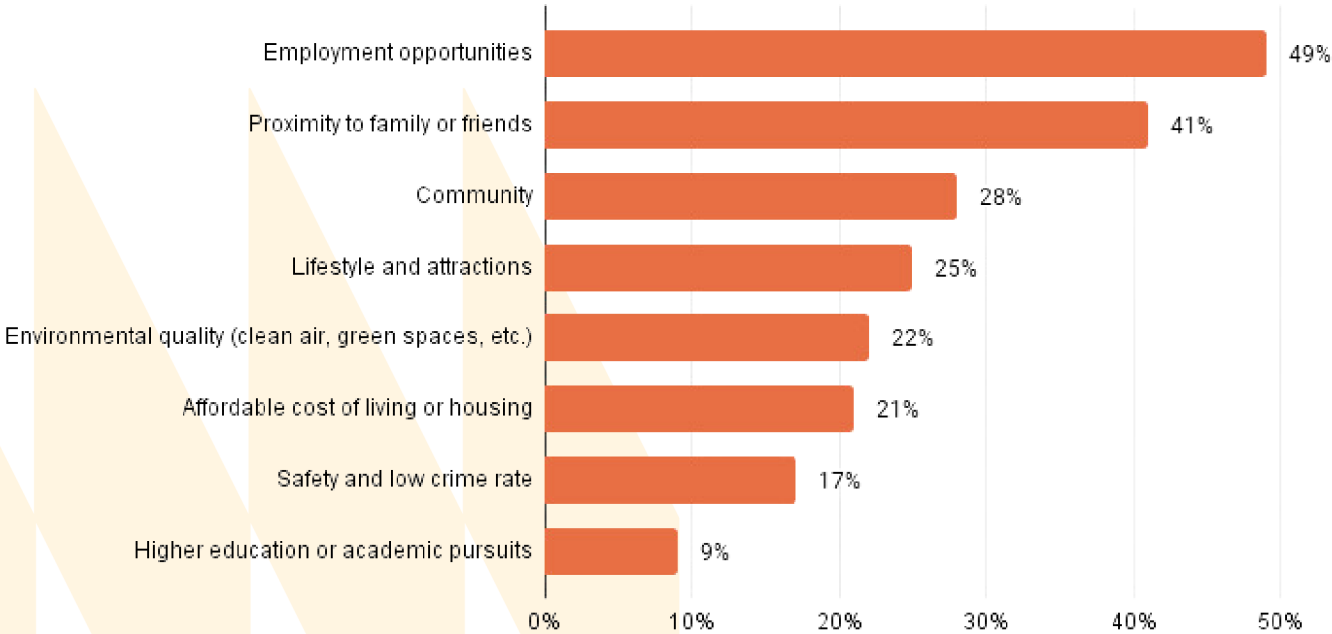
# HOUSING

## LIVING ARRANGMENTS

**Over 80% of respondents rent their housing, with 18% renting a room.** 9% of respondents reported that they owned an apartment or house, compared to the 66% homeownership rate in the U.S. in 2023 (according to the U.S. Census Bureau). Using the same national data and accounting for the disproportionate number of respondents from the Northeast, **the homeownership rate among respondents still falls short of the northeast homeownership rate** of 63%.



Staying in a shelter
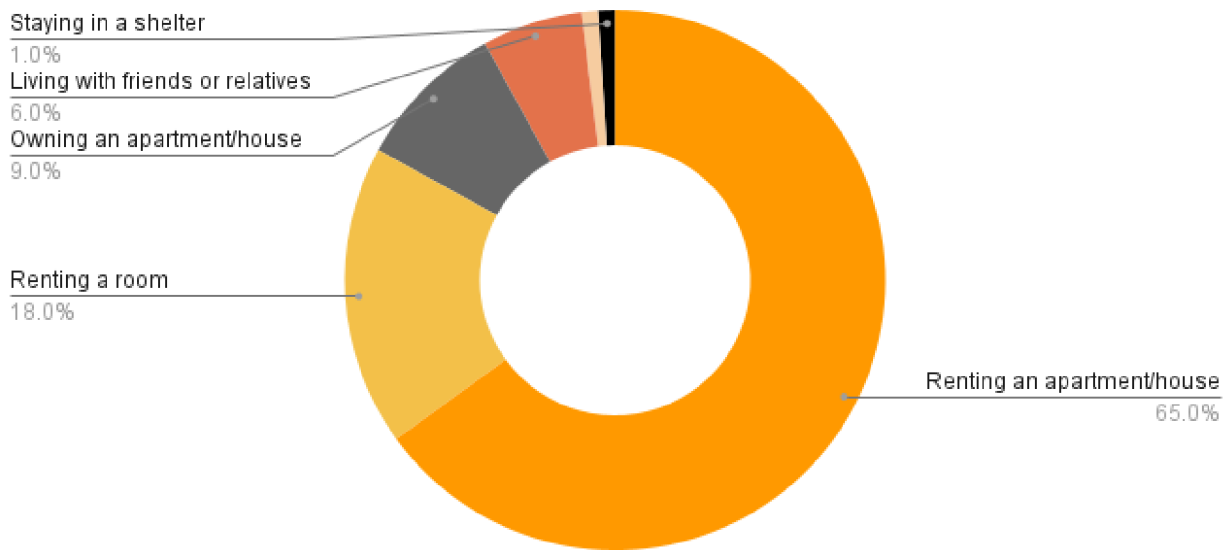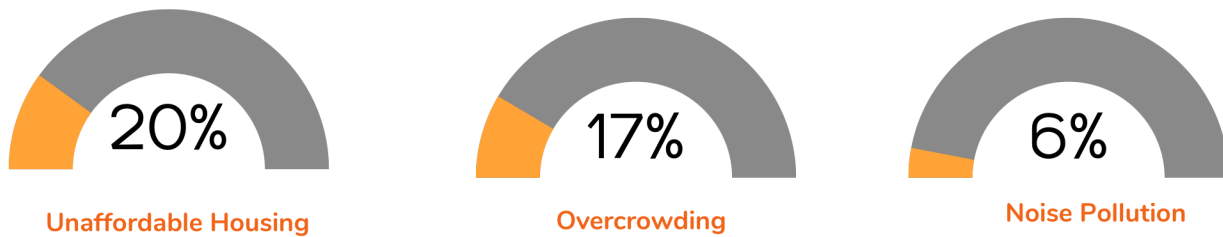1.0%
Living with friends or relatives
6.0%
Owning an apartment/house
9.0%

Renting a room
18.0%

Renting an apartment/house
65.0%

## PREVALENT HOUSING ISSUES



20%
**Unaffordable Housing**

17%
**Overcrowding**

6%
**Noise Pollution**

The issue of unaffordable housing has emerged as the most significant challenge, followed by overcrowding and noise pollution.  Less common housing issues included safety concerns or crime in the neighborhood (4% response), issues with landlords 4%), lack of basic facilities (4%), and lack of accessibility for disabilities (2%). **These findings emphasize the urgent need for interventions that tackle housing affordability and improve living conditions.**

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# RESULTS SNAPSHOT

## MOST PREVALENT SOCIAL ISSUES

The chart highlights key difficulties faced by Central Asian individuals while residing in the U.S., with unemployment and healthcare costs as the foremost hurdles. The presence of unpaid labor and domestic violence underscores systemic exploitation and safety concerns. Infrequent yet impactful instances of LGBTQ+ discrimination and sexual assault call for urgent, inclusive support measures. This data points to complex challenges that necessitate comprehensive social and policy strategies tailored to this community's unique experience in the U.S.

| Social Issue | % |
|---|---|
| Unemployment | 52% |
| Difficulty Affording Health Care | 41% |
| Unpaid Labor | 25% |
| Domestic Violence | 25% |
| Difficulty Affording Food | 24% |
| Homelessness | 23% |
| Sexual Assault | 10% |
| LGBTQ+ Discrimination | 10% |
| Sexual Trafficking | 9% |
| Gun Violence | 7% |
| Forced Marriage | 7% |

% of respondents reporting an experience in
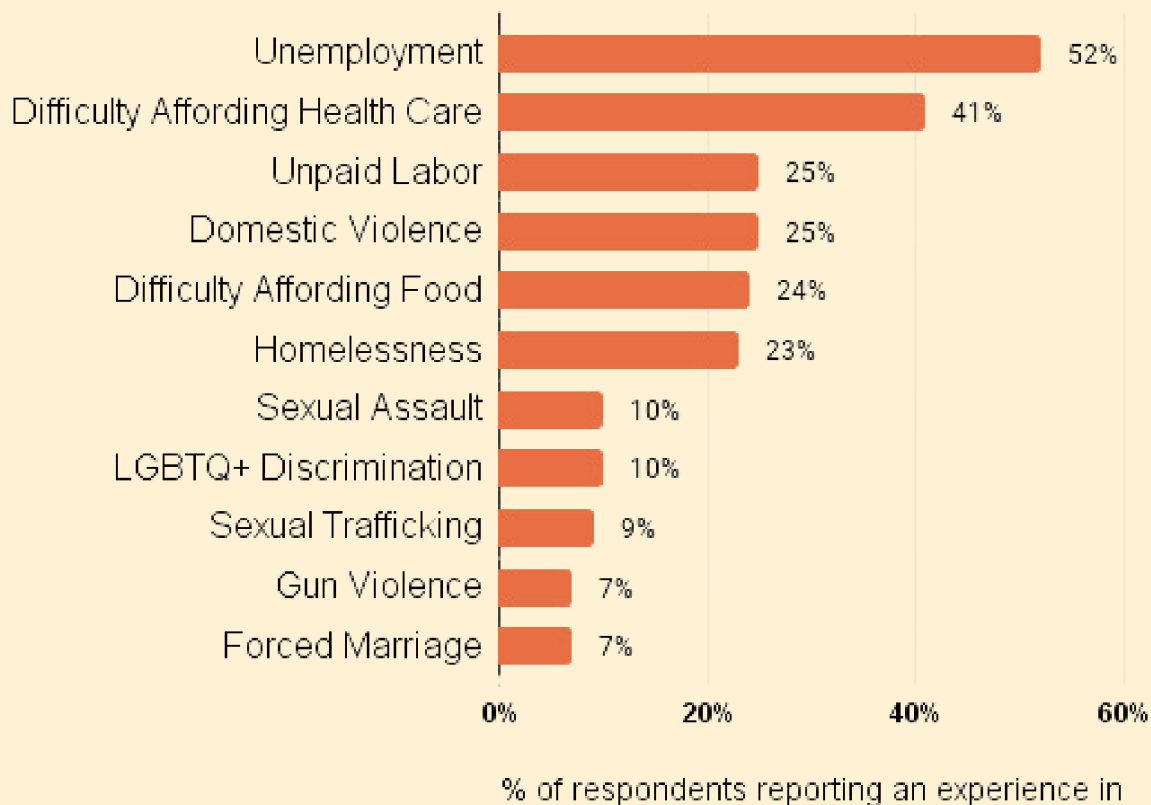
# MOST PREVALENT SOCIAL ISSUES

## EXPERIENCED BY SURVEYED CENTRAL ASIANS IN THE U.S. BY GENDER

| Issue | MEN | WOMEN |
|---|---|---|
| UNEMPLOYMENT | 54% | 52% |
| DIFFICULTY AFFORDING HEALTHCARE | 40% | 43% |
| UNPAID LABOR | 27% | 24% |
| DOMESTIC VIOLENCE | 19% | 30% |
| DIFFICULTY AFFORDING FOOD | 26% | 23% |
| HOMELESSNESS | 29% | 20% |
| SEXUAL ASSAULT | 7% | 12% |
| LGBTQ+ DISCRIMINATION | 11% | 9% |
| SEXUAL TRAFFICKING | 10% | 9% |
| GUN VIOLENCE | 9% | 7% |
| FORCED MARRIAGE | 6% | 8% |
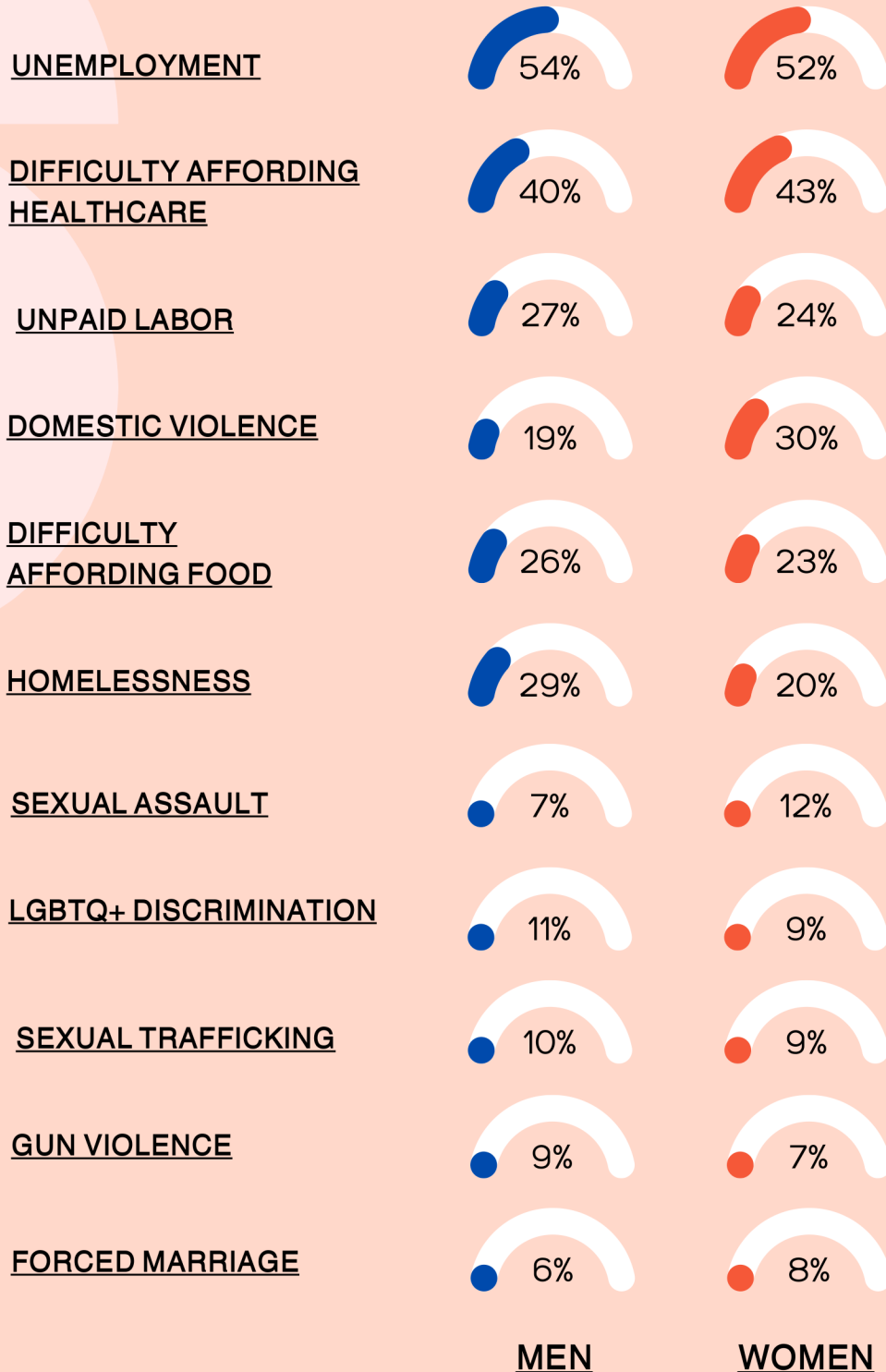
# MOST PREVALENT SOCIAL ISSUES

## INSIGHTS

### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), between 2003 and 2012, 37% of women and 10% of men experienced serious violent crimes from domestic violence. A smaller proportion of women in our survey (30%) reported experiencing domestic violence when compared to those in the BJS survey (37%), but a **greater proportion of men in our survey (19%) reported experiencing domestic violence when compared to those in the BJS survey (10%). In both surveys, women were more likely to experience domestic violence.**

### SEXUAL TRAFFICKING

According to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, in 2021, the overwhelming majority of victims and survivors in human trafficking situations were women (85%), while men comprised 13.5% of victims and survivors. On the contrary, **Central Asian men and women are equally likely to be the victims of sexual trafficking**, according to our survey. Respondents to our survey who suffered from sexual trafficking were evenly split between men and women at 10% and 9%, respectively.

### UNPAID LABOR

1 in 4 respondents in our survey reported that they experienced unpaid labor while living in the U.S.

### HOMELESSNESS

According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH), in 2022, around 0.18% of the U.S. population was experiencing homelessness compared to the 23% of Central Asians who have experienced homelessness while living in the U.S. and 2% currently experiencing homelessness. It should be noted that the majority of our respondents (71%) have resided in the U.S. for less than three years, supporting the conclusion that **Central Asians are disproportionately affected by homelessness**. Our survey also revealed that 29% of males and 20% of females in this community have encountered homelessness, a contrast to the significant gender gap in the national ratio, where 70% of those experiencing homelessness are men and 29% are women. In both surveys, **men were more likely to experience homelessness.**

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# MOST PREVALENT SOCIAL ISSUES

## INSIGHTS

### FOOD INSECURITY

25% of males and 23% of females in the surveyed community have encountered difficulties in accessing affordable food. These **rates were significantly higher than the national average** reported in the U.S. by the Department of Agriculture, where 17.3% of households experienced food insecurity in 2022.

### HEALTHCARE

More than **4 in 10 respondents (41%) reported difficulty affording healthcare,** with a slightly higher proportion among females when compared to males. According to the Commonwealth Fund 2023 Health Care Affordability Survey, 51% of adults faced difficulties affording healthcare.

### SEXUAL ASSAULT

**1 in 10 respondents have experienced sexual assault.** According to a 2018 study by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 8 in 10 women and 4 in 10 men experience sexual harassment or assault in the U.S.
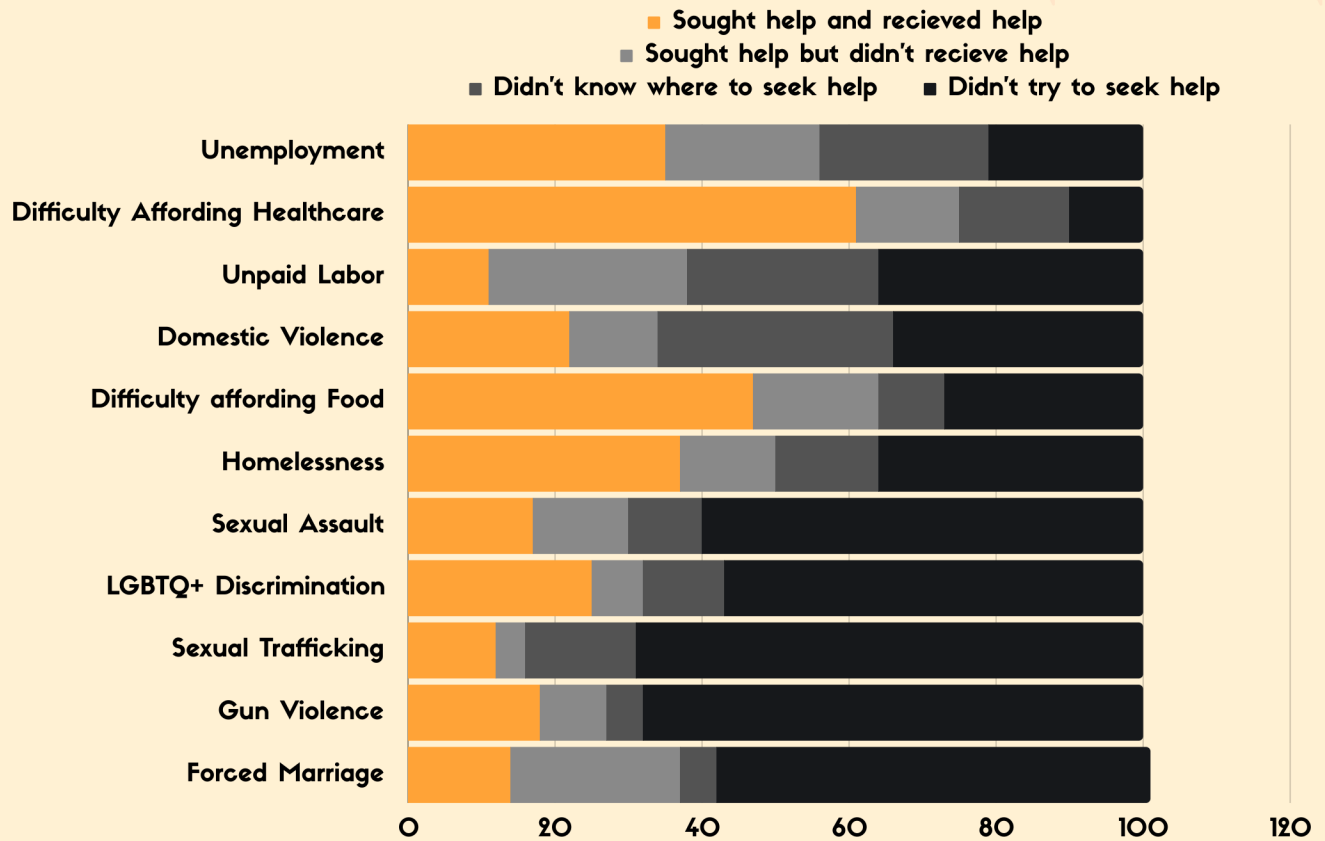
### FORCED MARRIAGE

**1 in 14 respondents reported experiencing a forced marriage. Women were more likely to report experiencing a forced marriage** (1 in 12 women) when compared to men (1 in 16 men). This is in contrast to the findings of a 2013 study sponsored by the Department of Justice, which found that men were more likely to report experiencing a forced marriage (1 in 7 men) compared to women (1 in 11 women) in the U.S.

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# SEEKING HELP FOR PREVALENT SOCIAL ISSUES

## INSIGHTS

Respondents who indicated an experience with social issues were asked to indicate if they sought and received help with their issues.
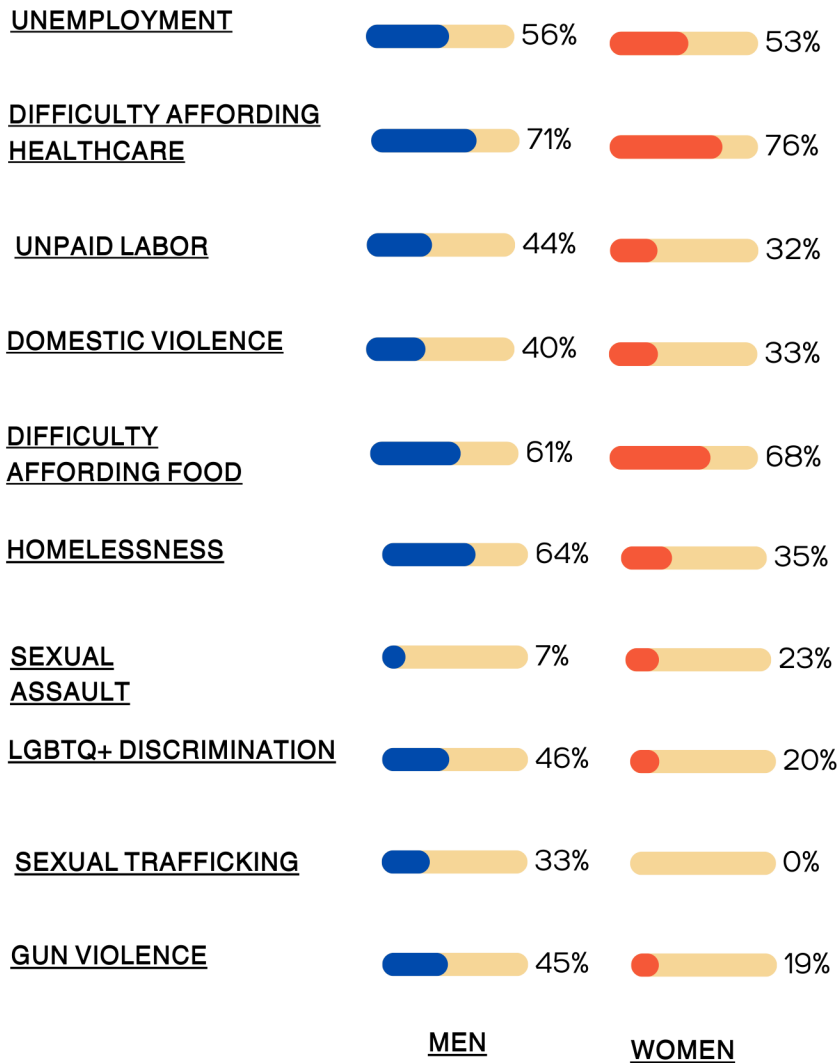
- **Aside from facing difficulty affording healthcare for all other social issues, most respondents did not receive or seek help.**
- **Over half of those experiencing LGBTQ+ discrimination, sexual trafficking, gun violence, and forced marriage did not try to seek help. This points to potential barriers or stigma associated with seeking help.**
- **The majority of respondents who experienced unpaid labor and forced marriage sought help but did not receive help.**
- **32% of respondents who experienced domestic violence did not know where to seek help.**



Legend:
- Sought help and recieved help
- Sought help but didn't recieve help
- Didn't know where to seek help
- Didn't try to seek help

Categories (y-axis):
Unemployment, Difficulty Affording Healthcare, Unpaid Labor, Domestic Violence, Difficulty affording Food, Homelessness, Sexual Assault, LGBTQ+ Discrimination, Sexual Trafficking, Gun Violence, Forced Marriage

x-axis: 0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100, 120

# SEEKING HELP FOR PREVALENT SOCIAL ISSUES

## BY GENDER

### % OF RESPONDENTS EXPERIENCING SOCIAL ISSUES WHO SOUGHT HELP

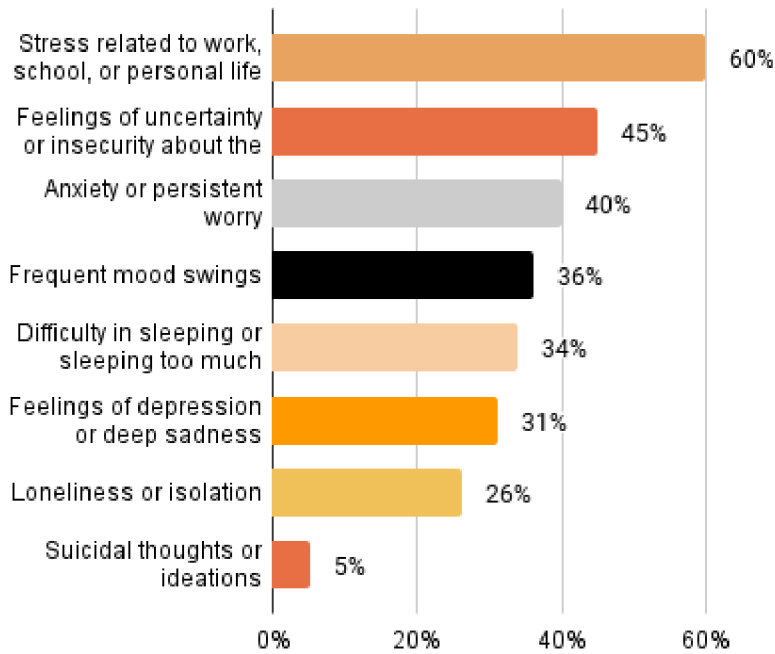| Social Issue | MEN | WOMEN |
|---|---|---|
| UNEMPLOYMENT | 56% | 53% |
| DIFFICULTY AFFORDING HEALTHCARE | 71% | 76% |
| UNPAID LABOR | 44% | 32% |
| DOMESTIC VIOLENCE | 40% | 33% |
| DIFFICULTY AFFORDING FOOD | 61% | 68% |
| HOMELESSNESS | 64% | 35% |
| SEXUAL ASSAULT | 7% | 23% |
| LGBTQ+ DISCRIMINATION | 46% | 20% |
| SEXUAL TRAFFICKING | 33% | 0% |
| GUN VIOLENCE | 45% | 19% |

- 100% of women and 67% of men who experienced sexual trafficking did not seek help.

- 93% of men and 77% of women who experienced sexual assault did not seek help.

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# MENTAL HEALTH

## ASSESSMENT OF STATE AND ATTITUDES

## MENTAL HEALTH STATE



| Category | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Stress related to work, school, or personal life | 60% |
| Feelings of uncertainty or insecurity about the | 45% |
| Anxiety or persistent worry | 40% |
| Frequent mood swings | 36% |
| Difficulty in sleeping or sleeping too much | 34% |
| Feelings of depression or deep sadness | 31% |
| Loneliness or isolation | 26% |
| Suicidal thoughts or ideations | 5% |

### SURVEY DATA FROM CENTRAL ASIANS INDICATES SIGNIFICANT MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

High-stress levels are widespread, with a notable prevalence of anxiety and worry. Uncertainty about the future is also common, pointing to a pervasive sense of insecurity. Emotional instability is evident from frequent mood swings and a considerable number struggle with sleep issues and depression. Loneliness is reported by a significant minority, potentially exacerbating other mental health issues. Although fewer in number, the occurrence of suicidal thoughts is critically concerning, highlighting an urgent need for mental health support in this population.

## MENTAL HEALTH CARE

The surveyed **Central Asian community exhibits a range of preferences for the cultural background of their therapists**. Around 40% are comfortable going to a non-Central Asian therapist, and 34% prefer a Central Asian therapist.

Less than **a third of the population feels comfortable talking about mental health concerns with either family or friends.**

Contrary to certain coping stereotypes, a resounding majority, 76%, **disagree with using drinking as a coping mechanism, and 77% disagree with smoking to feel better.**

**41%**
Indicated that they can't afford therapy

**88%**
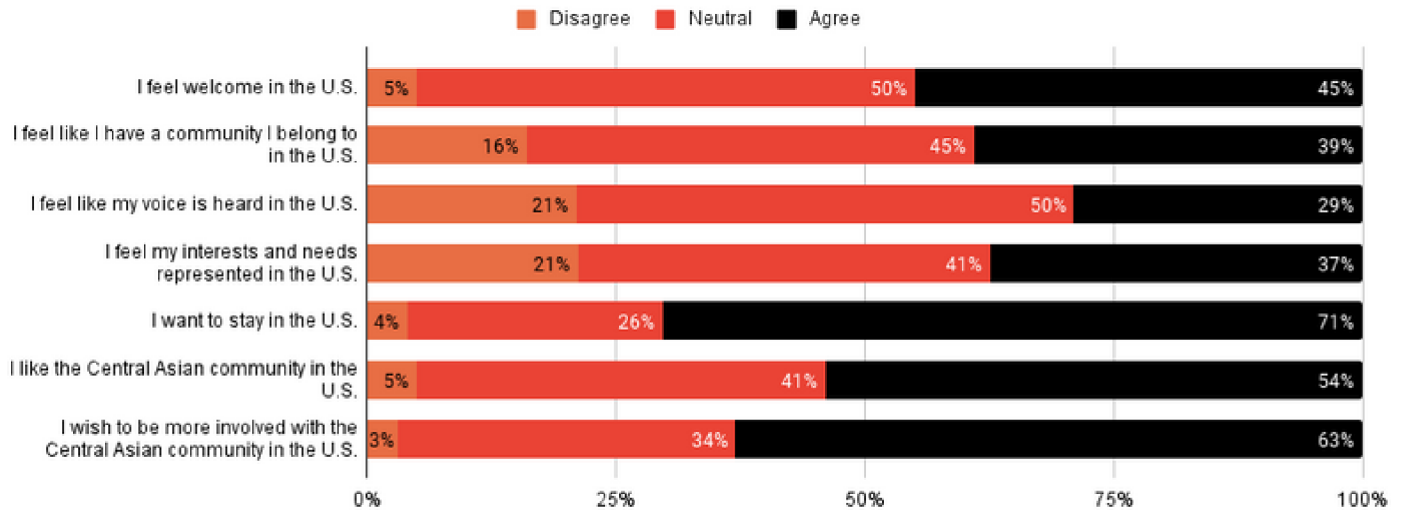Indicated that Mental Health is important

**34%**
Indicated that they would like to go to therapy

**49%**
Indicated that they are satisfied with their life

# VIEWS ON LIFE IN THE U.S.

## INSIGHTS



**The responses suggest that Central Asians in the U.S. feel largely integrated and content, but they also highlight areas where there is room for growth in terms of representation and engagement.**

The sentiments of Central Asians in the U.S. suggest a generally positive experience with respect to their integration into American life. A substantial majority feel welcome and have a sense of belonging to a community, which underscores the inclusiveness they experience. However, there is a noticeable divide regarding feeling heard; while half of the respondents feel that their voice is heard in the U.S., a fifth feel the opposite, pointing towards potential challenges in civic participation or representation.

The perception of how well their interests and needs are represented is moderately positive, although a fifth feel their needs are not adequately addressed. This could indicate policy or community support gaps that align with their specific concerns.

The desire to remain in the U.S. is very strong, with a significant majority expressing their intention to stay. This indicates a favorable view of their overall living conditions and opportunities in the country. Additionally, the data reflects a strong affinity towards their ethnic community, with the vast majority appreciating the Central Asian community in the U.S. This suggests a well-established network that provides cultural cohesion and support. Moreover, a majority desire to be more involved in their community, which could mean there is active interest in strengthening community ties and increasing their impact within the broader social context.
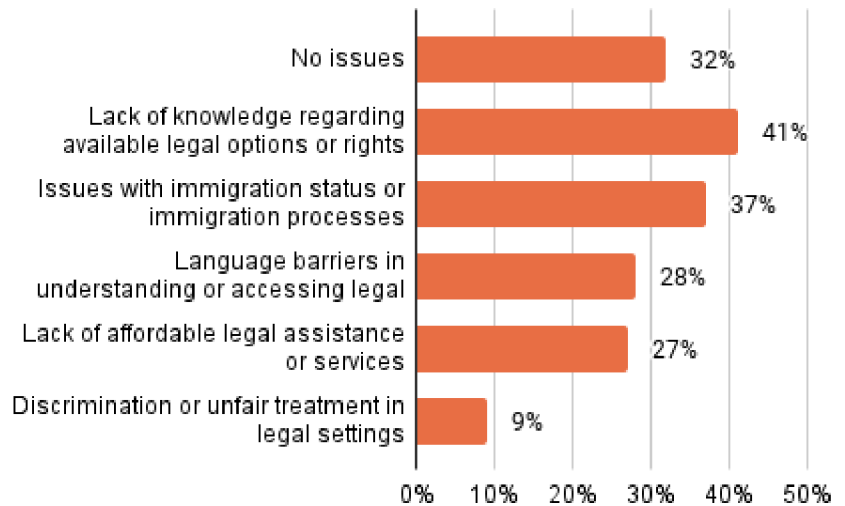
# LEGAL SUPPORT & RACIAL IDENTITY

## RACE

**Central Asians are frequently left out of the racial and ethnic categories in the U.S., leaving many confused about how to identify.** The U.S. Census Bureau, the standard reference for defining racial and ethnic groups, doesn't include Central Asians in any of the defined categories.

In our survey, the majority (75%) identified as Asian, followed by 30% who identified as White or European. This selection reflects the geographical location of Central Asia between Europe and Asia.
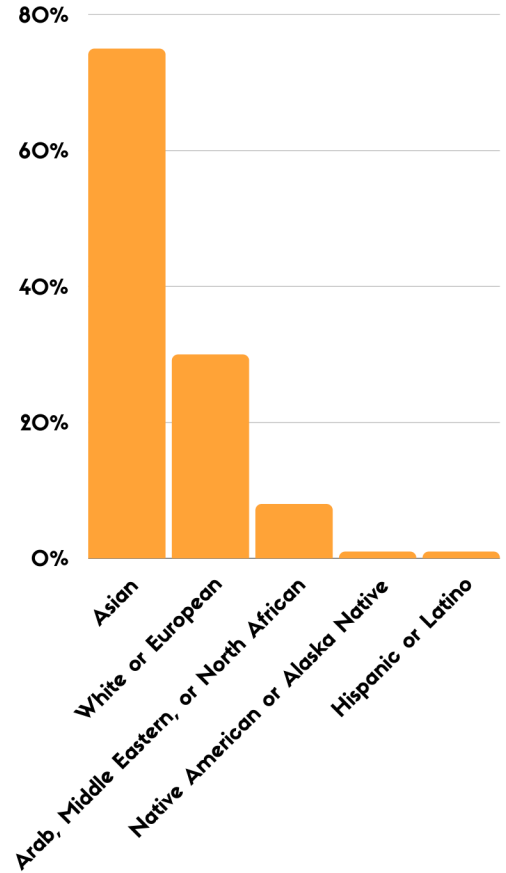


## LEGAL BARRIERS

- A significant 41% of respondents lack knowledge about their legal options and rights, indicating a critical need for legal education and resources.
- Challenges with immigration processes and language barriers affect 37% and 28% respondents respectively, highlighting systemic obstacles for non-native speakers in navigating legal systems.



No issues — 32%
Lack of knowledge regarding available legal options or rights — 41%
Issues with immigration status or immigration processes — 37%
Language barriers in understanding or accessing legal — 28%
Lack of affordable legal assistance or services — 27%
Discrimination or unfair treatment in legal settings — 9%

# CONCLUSION

This Community Needs Assessment Report highlights critical needs of the Central Asian community.

Prioritizing initiatives like language and cultural integration, fostering social connections, respecting ethnic diversity, and providing educational, employment, and mental health support are essential. These efforts are significant for addressing specific challenges such as language barriers and cultural isolation and enhancing the wider society. Supporting the Central Asian community promotes diversity and inclusivity and strengthens societal cohesion, benefiting everyone involved.

## RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES

### 01

**Language and Integration Programs:**

Develop programs for language learning and cultural integration, aiding communication and adaptation for recent immigrants with varied English proficiency.

### 02

**Mental Health and Resource Access:**

Offer mental health services and improve access to community resources to address psychological well-being and cultural isolation.

### 03

**Educational and Employment Support:**

Provide targeted education and employment assistance to facilitate socio-economic integration.

### 04

**Community Connection Initiatives:**

Create initiatives to foster social networks and support for families, especially those with limited familial ties in the U.S.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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