



# Safe employment integration of recent immigrants and refugees

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## Study objectives

We wanted to find out about the work integration of newcomers, including recent immigrants coming via different streams and both government and privately sponsored refugees

- Experience looking for work
- How newcomers prepare to enter the workforce, e.g. programs and resources accessed, where and when this happens
- Specific interest in whether newcomers know about their rights at work as they enter the workforce and whether they have received health and safety information/training

For those with Canadian work experience, we wanted to know about their first jobs, including what sort of employment preparation and training they received from their employer



## Methods

### ***Key Informant Interviews:***

- In-depth interviews with service providers, program developers, policy makers in the immigration/employment field
- See many newcomers or involved in program/policy development
- Approx 1 hour, audio-recorded (n=22)

### ***Focus Groups:***

- Recent immigrants and refugees who are looking for work/working (13 English and 5 Arabic)
- Recruited via settlement agencies – all involved in employment preparation and/or English language programs
- Approx 1.5 hours, 6-7 participants each (n=110)
- Data collected in the GTA, Eastern Ontario, Northern Ontario 3



## Methods

- Interviews and FGs were transcribed and translated
- Transcripts entered into Nvivo (qualitative data analysis software) for data storage and organization
- Transcripts reviewed by researchers and code list developed
- Data coded by two researchers, then organized thematically – inductive approach, but with an aim to address key research questions
- Identified themes, patterns, gaps and contradictions



## Focus group sample characteristics

- 55% women
- **Age:** (43%) <35yrs; (29%) 35-44yrs; (17%) 44-56yrs; (9%) >56yrs
- **Entry into Canada (stream):** economic (+spouses) (25%), humanitarian (35%), temporary (15%), family (9%), unknown (11%)
- **Region:** Middle East (54%), South Asia (15%) and South America & Caribbean (11%)
- **Time in Canada:** (70%) less than 3 yrs; (17%) 3-5 yrs
- **Education:** (73%) some university training
- **Diverse professions in home country**
  - engineering, education, skilled trade, business, health



## Findings – Looking for work

- Almost every participant, regardless of stream, reported great difficulty finding work – language barriers, lack of Canadian experience, foreign credentials

### Consequences:

- First jobs - poor quality, survival jobs
- Depression, anxiety and loss of hope (particularly for economic stream immigrants)
- Very high participation in “voluntary” work
- Use of community/family connections to find work



## First jobs

- First jobs were almost always characterized by precarity
  - temp agencies, short contracts
  - paid less than Canadian-born workers, some reported working for “cash only”
  - poor working conditions (lack of protective equipment, long hours)
  - lack of training
- Jobs and working conditions that are new to the participants
- Reprimanded when they were injured
  - continued working with the injury or left the job



*...I'm working at the freezer and I stay for eight hours, no giving us a break... I feel sick one day, sick like I can't breathe, and the cold... one day I passed out, don't feel good and no sitting [in the] room, nothing... Somebody came in and tell me, you'd better not say words [...] You're not allowed to talk, you're not allowed to talk. You talk to the next person, we change you for another department. (GTA, focus group #13)*

*I was working in a pizza store. I didn't know how to use the oven. So, that should have been part of the training because I burned myself several times... When I came to Canada I realized that there is a minimum wage. I didn't know it before. I wasn't paid the minimum wage. Like he talked about, we do a lot of cash jobs, which is wrong... but I don't know what to do about it. And getting the job is more important, so you ignore it. (Eastern Ontario, focus group #4)*





*“I work in factory. After I came here maybe for three months or four months, I was working in that, picking the package, the cartons, and keeping in the skids. And I told my supervisor it is very heavy, and the job without people. I am just one. And now I have a problem in my back. I feel that I can’t bend myself. He told me, remember, if you will go now, I will send a report against you to the temporary agency and I will tell them that you have a problem in your back...they will not call you again for any kind of job. And maybe they will cancel your file.” (GTA, focus group #9)*



*M: Did the people do anything when you fell down?*

*R: Yeah, my manager at the work are there. But, they don't help. Then, I went home and three or four days rested. But, I didn't go to the hospital, because I don't understand how to explain to the doctor.*

*M: You didn't want to go to the hospital, because you didn't know how to explain it.*

*R: Yes. So much, language is problem. Before, I couldn't understand. I'm looking just the face.*

*M: Your supervisor called you to come back? But, they didn't do anything else?*

*R: No.*

*M: And then you didn't go.*

*R: No.*

*(GTA, focus group #12)*



## Participation in ‘voluntary’ work

- Volunteering also first job for many newcomers – a double edged sword
  - Extended unpaid labour, long hours that never resulted in paid employment
  - Took time from language training, looking for paid work, other responsibilities

*It's helpful, yes, but it's eight hours per day. You are spending them and you are helping people and you're exhausted and you are out of your home and leaving your kids and your responsibilities. What is the return? No tokens. No, nothing. (GTA, focus group #9)*

- Also has consequences for H&S – many volunteers not covered under OHSA or WSIA



## Use of community, family connections, settlement agencies to find work

- Another double edged sword
- These jobs provided income and *some* experience but...
  - Were often poor quality and rarely in immigrant's field
  - Did not help with language learning
  - Businesses run by other newcomers – sometimes knowledge of rights/responsibility is missing or incomplete
  - When conditions of work were poor - SPs put in awkward position - did not want to lose connection with a potential employer
  - Resistance to speaking up due to personal connections



## Use of community/family connections to find work

*I think that this [chemical liquid] is not good for me, because all the time I have a runny nose, I cough and I sneeze. I think it's [chemical liquid], and I need to tell the manager that this one is not good for me. And then she told me if you say that, maybe you're going to lose your job. Because she said I need you to do [it]...And so it's very hard for me, because she's from my country. I know her in my country, we have a tradition. You have to respect somebody if she's older than you.... So, I have to respect her, but sometimes she abuse(s) [me]. (GTA, focus group #13)*



## Preparation to enter the workforce

- Most newcomers had participated in some employment preparation programming – typically resume building, networking, “cultural competency training”
- When asked “*Have you received any H&S training or resources?*” “*What do you know about your rights as a worker?*” The vast majority of participants
  - Had extremely limited knowledge about employment standards
  - Knew nothing about the responsibility of their employer (vis-a-vis training, safety equipment etc.)
  - Did not know what to do if asked to do something unsafe or if they were injured



*M: So, you said you never received any information about [health and safety]. Did you receive any information about your rights as a worker, like what you're entitled to?*

*R: No.*

*R: No.*

*R: No.*

*R: No.*

Rights = Worker's responsibility on the job

OHS = mainly WHMIS, on-line training, signing a contract

Safety = of the client/customer (e.g. food handling)



*M: [Employer] didn't give you any advice about which kind of [protective equipment] to buy for working with that?*

*R: No. I didn't ask them, either. I think that was my responsibility, to get the right [protective equipment]. (GTA, focus group #11)*

*M: You know when you were saying that with some of the training, did you ever receive any kind of materials that sort of told you about your rights or what to do if you're injured? Anything around that?*

*R1: At the beginning they give a bunch of papers.*

*R2: A contract.*

*R1: Yeah, they give so many papers and we have to sign it. In my case, they give and we need to sign all of the papers before we come to work.*

*R2: And when we start to read, they will look at your face that the person is first time reading the papers. (Northern Ontario, focus group #5)*





## Preparation to enter the work force

- Programs, when offered, tended to be “one offs” and focused on basic human rights and employment standards
- Programming was described as being “client driven” = if newcomers did not ask, information was not provided, but...
  - Newcomers focus on simply finding work and hope to find good jobs
  - They don’t know what they don’t know



## Preparation to enter the work force

- Most SPs only had capacity to provide basic information
  - Organizational resources already stretched, high work load
  - Funding structures limit programming
- Little to no follow up on employment outcomes/experiences
- Referrals to other websites when newcomers had a problem (e.g Ministry of Labour, Welcome to Canada guide)

You may need financial assistance to start a business. Through the Canada Small Business Financing Program, the federal government makes it easier for small businesses to get loans from financial institutions. For more information, visit [www.ic.gc.ca](http://www.ic.gc.ca) or call **1-866-959-1699**.

The municipal government in the city or town where you live is another good source of information and support for starting a business. Visit your city's municipal website and look for the section on business. You can also use the Blue Pages of the telephone book to find a municipal information number you can call or a service centre you can visit.



## Employees' rights

In Canada, provincial and federal labour laws are designed to protect employees and employers. These laws set minimum salaries, health and safety standards, hours of work, parental leave and annual paid vacations, and they provide protection for children. There are also laws that prevent employers from treating employees unfairly based on sex, age, race, religion, disability or sexual orientation. You should learn about provincial and federal labour laws before you begin work in Canada. For more information, see Table 8.1.

You have the right to join a labour union in Canada and it is often an involuntary requirement whether you choose it or not. Union fees will be deducted from your salary.

If you feel that your employer or union has treated you unfairly, you may ask for advice or assistance from an officer of the ministry responsible for labour in the province or territory where you work (see Table 8.1 for contact information). You can also visit a Service Canada Centre to talk to a federal government labour affairs officer (see the Blue Pages or [www.servicecanada.gc.ca](http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca) for locations).



## Implications and recommendations

So how can we prepare newcomers to safely integrate into the labour market? – no easy answers *“It has to be done at many different times, in many different ways”*

- It has to be (much more) systematic
  - Individuals leave programs, come back, stop and start – one time workshops won't do
  - The onus can't be on newcomers to ask for programming
- It has to start early - at lower LINC levels
- It can't involve (only) sending people to websites
- It can't (only) depend on the employer doing his/her part



## Implications and recommendations

- It should involve the settlement sector
  - Settlement organization described as important, trusted resource – can raise issues/questions without worrying about job security
  - BUT if the settlement sector is to be involved, it **must** include an infusion of (**sustained**, not one-off) funding and expertise
- It should involve tracking long term outcomes - this has to be requested by policy makers and requires financial and human resources for organizations



## Implications and recommendations

- There is a focus on what is expected of workers/newcomers, not on what workers are entitled to

*Basically, the conversation always revolves around the host community and not about the newcomers...nobody leads you by the hand and says, this is your right and this is what you deserve. Rather, this is what **we want**, this is what **we expect**...When I went to school for ESL, the teacher would say, like, you came here as newcomers, so you have to respect the rules and laws of this land. Which is a given. She would give you a list of have-tos, a to-do list, but she never mentioned what Canada needed to do for newcomers. (GTA, focus group #10, Arabic)*

- There is a need to balance this focus



## Implications and recommendations

- Diffusion of responsibility = Assumption that information and resources were being offered by someone else
  - SPs: some employers assume if worker recruited via settlement agency they had received training
  - Some policy makers assumed employers, job readiness programs provided training
  - A **champion** is needed (in an organization and/or more broadly, e.g. the MoL)
- Update existing employment resources for newcomers to include health and safety and employment rights information, what to do if injured



## What else? What's next?

- OHS research often does not include recent immigrants or linguist minorities – this is a problem
- Consider the invisible “other” (not principal applicants, spouses of students, etc.)
- How to reach newcomers who do not access settlement services for employment preparation
- We do not know (much) about the experiences of employers who hire recent immigrants – what are their needs? What challenges do they face? What are best practices?





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**Final report will be posted on:**

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