Summary of Top-Level Survey Findings: Interim Report

Background

The newcomer and SPO surveys were conducted between May and June of 2021 and include responses from 1,017 participants in total. The objective of these surveys was to determine the key challenges facing newcomers prior to and during the pandemic, as well as identify opportunities for growth within the sector.

Main themes identified throughout the newcomer survey included employment concerns (i.e., unemployment and underemployment), general implications of COVID-19 on the immigrant community, information gathering, housing and affordability difficulties, issues related to discrimination, and settlement service access.

Main themes uncovered through the SPO survey involved the implications of COVID-19 on service delivery, access to technology and digital literacy, changes in settlement needs, upskilling and professional development within organizations, employment trends, challenges and developments, sector collaboration, funding concerns, as well as capacity for measurement within organizations.

These themes will inform the topics of our focus group discussions as well as our key informant interviews.

Newcomer Survey

Summary of general demographics

The newcomer survey was completed from May 18th – June 18th, 2021 by 628 respondents. There were 456 valid responses (respondents that completed the majority of the questions) who landed in Canada within the last 10 years. Invalid responses were included in the report in order to gather as much information as possible. We saw representation from across Canada with the exception of Nunavut and Yukon. The greatest representation of newcomers was from Ontario with 166 respondents, followed by The Prairies with 99 respondents. There were 92 respondents from Atlantic Canada, 40 from Quebec, 24 from British Columbia, as well as 1 from Northwest Territories. 418 responses were from unidentified regions in Canada.

Employment

At the time of the survey, 27.3% of respondents were currently unemployed and seeking employment. 51% were employed full-time, and 15.9% were employed part-time. In comparison with the non-immigrant Canadian population, a 27.3% unemployment rate for workers seeking employment is extremely high.

68.6% of newcomers surveyed are not currently working in their field of study. When asked why respondents were not currently working in their field of study, 17% cited academic reasons, including that they are currently enrolled in an academic institution or awaiting course enrollment. Half of those employed part-time said that they were currently enrolled in a Canadian academic institution. 59% of those who were unemployed and not seeking employment were also not enrolled in school.

16.6% discussed general difficulty in finding employment in their field due to a lack of opportunities, a lack of available work in their chosen field, or simply that they cannot find employment. 14% either changed their field or found work in another field. Only 37.6% of respondents who have a university master's degree or above (including a PhD) are currently working in their field of study. In addition, only 27.8% of respondents with a university bachelor's degree are working in their field of study.

The newcomers who are currently employed were asked what kind of employment they have. 74.8% responded that they were engaged with regular employment (consistent employment over a predetermined period of time). 14.4% were temporary, seasonal, and/or gig workers.

19% of respondents who have either a university certificate or diploma are working in temporary, seasonal, or gig work.

28.8% of respondents reported that they receive information about available training programs for immigrants from the internet. 28.5% reported getting that information from service providers.

The majority of newcomers reported that they get information about employment opportunities from the internet (54.6%). Only 16.3% reported getting employment information from service providers.

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When asked what other settlement services would meet newcomers' needs, the highest percentage (32.4%) responded with employment services. The second highest need was language training at 9.8%.

When asked how immigrant-serving organizations can assist newcomers with their search for employment, 12.2% responded with employer partnerships and connections, 7.6% responded with job placements, and 5.2% responded with job search support. 7% required help with CV building, 4.9% needed skills training, and 4.6% needed specialized support services. 4% also discussed needing assistance with adequate job placement within their field of study or expertise, and identified underemployment as a key issue.

The top settlement service most important to newcomers was job search support/job placement at 26%.

33.4% of newcomers reported being only somewhat satisfied with the accessibility of employment training and support services. Similarly, 29% reported being somewhat satisfied with the quality of employment training and support services.

Information gathering

In terms of obtaining information about settlement services, 24.3% of respondents gained this information from service providers. 23% obtained information from the internet, and 18% said that they did not know.

30% of respondents reported getting information about updates to health policy from the internet, 20.9% of respondents gathered information from various news outlet sources, and 11.3% obtained information from government reports and websites. Similarly, 50.6% of respondents got information about updates to immigration policy from the internet. The following largest percentage of respondents, at 15.7%, received their information about updates to immigration policy from social media.

It is evident that the majority of newcomers receive most information about health policy, immigration, employment opportunities and other general info about Canada from the internet. While these may be through reputable sources, they may also be through sources which provide false information.

Implications of COVID-19

53.3% of respondents reported that their income has been financially affected by the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. 23.9% reported that they lost the job they had before the pandemic, 28.7% had to settle for a new job with lesser pay, 41.9% reported that the pandemic has impacted their ability to meet basic financial obligations, and 40.6% reported that their capacity to assist/support members of their household has also been impacted.

Housing and affordability

The majority of respondents (28.9%) surveyed live in two-person households. 50.6% of respondents have children or dependents who reside in their household. 71.8% of respondents reported spending 30% or more of their income on housing. 73.5% of respondents with a university master's degree or above (including PhD) spend 30% or more of their household income on rent or mortgage. Spending 30% or more of income on housing may be attributed to a lower quality of life overall. In *Measuring housing affordability,* Luffman reports that according to Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), affordable housing refers to housing which costs less than 30% of before-tax housing income (Statistics Canada, 2016).

Discrimination

22.4% of newcomers reported that they faced employment discrimination. This includes not acquiring employment due to a lack of Canadian work experience or Canadian education, racialization, and/or gender. 8.6% of respondents reported being discriminated against on the basis of race (non-employment related). 8.6% of respondents also reported experiencing discrimination through healthcare institutions and/or healthcare employees. Of all respondents, an average of 16% said that they had experienced discrimination while accessing settlement services in general—the top three groups being 22% of Arabic respondents, 19% of Black respondents, and 17% of South Asian respondents.

Gender

69% of the survey respondents were female, and 29% were male. The remaining 2% of respondents indicated that they were non-binary, other, or preferred not to respond. Approximately the same percentage of men and women indicated that they were *not* working in their field of study (66% and 67% respectively.) A larger percentage of men (62%) were employed full-time, compared to 49% of women, and a greater percentage of women were unemployed and seeking employment (29%), compared to 17% of men. A higher percentage of men indicated they drove a car (53% compared to 49% of women) and in turn more women indicated they used public transportation (44% compared to 28% of men.)

Most women (59%) and men (66%) stated that they have *not* accessed settlement or employment services during the pandemic. Women and men were similarly affected by the pandemic in terms of income being affected and other issues, but slightly more women said that they had lost their job (26% of women compared to 20% of men.)

Both women and men considered job search support/job placement services as the most important settlement services. For women, the second most important service was employment training, and for men, the second most important service was general information about available services for immigrants.

Age

Most survey respondents fell within the 30-34 age group (24%), closely followed by the 39-35 age group (23%). The third and fourth most represented age groups were between 25-29 years old (15%) and 40-44 years old (14%). The age group most likely to be working in their field of study was between 45-49 years old (45%). The highest number indicating they were not working in their desired field was the 50+ age group, with 84% stating they were not. 77% of 18–24-year-old respondents were enrolled in a Canadian academic institution—they were also most likely to be employed part-time out of all respondents.

40–44-year-old respondents were most likely to be unemployed and seeking employment (34%) but most of this group was still employed full-time (50%). The two age groups most likely to be employed full-time were between 45-49 years old (59%) and the 50+ age group at 58%. Of those working, for temporary and seasonal gig work, the youngest age groups were most represented in this type of work—18-24-year-olds at 26%, and 25–29-year-olds at 29%. However, both groups were still more likely to be engaged in regular employment (consistent employment over a specified period of time).

The youngest age group (18-24 years) was most negatively affected by the pandemic in terms of losing income (68%) followed by the 30-34 age group (60%). Under half of the youngest age group had said they had lost their job (40%), however that was the largest percentage indicating job loss. The others had largely retained their jobs during the pandemic. The 40-44 age group was most likely to say that their capacity to assist or support members of their household was affected, at 48%.

In terms of what respondents found to be the most important settlement services, most age groups (aside from the 45-49 age group and the 50+ age group) found job search support/job placement services to be most important—especially the 35–39-year-old respondents. For the 50+ age group, general information about services available to immigrants was most important. The 45-49 age group found employment training to be practically as equally important as job search support/job placement services.

Pathways to Canada

Of all respondents, 21% immigrated as a skilled worker through Express Entry, 14.3% immigrated through family sponsorship, 9% through the provincial nominee program, 4.9% as refugees, 4.7% through International Experience Canada (two-year work/travel visa), 2.5% both as asylum seekers and through the Atlantic/Rural/Northern Immigration pilot, and 1.1% as caregivers. Only three respondents indicated that they are undocumented workers (0.47%).

Settlement service access

Only 24.5% of respondents accessed settlement or employment services during the COVID-19 pandemic. 49.4% of respondents who have children and/or dependents living in their household accessed settlement or employment services. 61% of respondents who reported having their income affected by the pandemic accessed these services, and 25.3% of respondents who lost the job they had before the pandemic accessed these services. 29.2% of respondents who had to settle for a new job with lesser pay accessed services. For respondents who were financially impacted to the point of affecting their ability to meet basic financial obligations, 46.1% accessed services.

For respondents who indicated that "information about available services for immigrants, job search support/job placement, and employment training" were the most important settlement services they sought—these respondents accessed settlement services at a higher rate than those who selected other settlement services as most important (such as "financial literacy or settlement orientation"). 31% of respondents who reported "job search support/job placement" as the most important settlement service accessed services during the pandemic.

The largest number of newcomers who had *not* accessed settlement or employment services during the pandemic were accordingly those who were employed full time (68%). For those who were unemployed and seeking employment, about half (52%) said they did seek those services, while 57% of those employed and not seeking employment still accessed those services. Across the board, most indicated they were "somewhat satisfied" with employment training and support services. With regards to professional licensure support and language training services, most respondents indicated that this was non-applicable to them. (This could mean they do not need/didn't know about them/didn't access them, etc.)

SPO Survey:

Summary of general demographics

The SPO survey was completed from May 11- June 18, 2021 by 389 respondents with 254 valid responses (respondents who replied to the majority of questions). The invalid responses were included in the report in order to gather as much information as possible. The SPO survey saw representation from across Canada, with the exception of Nunavut. The highest number of respondents serve clients in the Prairies (85) followed by Ontario (64), and British Columbia (50). There were 39 responses from Atlantic Canada, 32 in Quebec, as well as 4 in the Northern Territories (Yukon and Northwest Territories). 115 responses were from unidentified regions in Canada.

The highest percentage of SPOs throughout Canada provide services in English, French and "other", which includes over 30 different languages (31.4%). Of the organizations surveyed, most respondents work at organizations which employ between 11-49 employees (26.48%) and serve between 101-1000 clients per year (36.2%). Most organizations serve clients who have been in Canada for up to two years. Most respondents were unaware of how much their organization's annual budget was, however the highest percentage of respondents who did know reported that their annual budget was less than $500,000.

Implications of COVID-19

Across Canada, 43% of respondents reported that since the start of COVID-19, demand for service delivery at their organization has increased. Within small organizations which employ 1-10 individuals, 45% reported an increase in demand for service delivery. At organizations which operate on a budget of less than $500,000, 53% reported an increase in demand as well.

Of all respondents surveyed, 75% reported that the needs of the immigrants and refugees served has changed since the start of the pandemic. Respondents from British Columbia reported the highest percentage of "needs of immigrants and refugees served" changing, at 90%. Only 19% of respondents reported that the needs did not change, and 7% reported that they did not know.

The highest percentage of how immigrants and refugees' needs have changed since the pandemic was in relation to digital literacy and accessibility (25%). This includes access to internet-connected devices as well as the capacity to adequately use these devices as a source of information and social connection. This was followed by mental health service needs, reported by 17% of respondents, exacerbated by social isolation, anxiety related to job loss, as well as fear and increased levels of domestic violence throughout the pandemic. Social/financial assistance needs were reported by 16% of respondents, as food security issues as well as government assistance programs increased (i.e., CERB, EI). Additionally, SPO workers reported that clients were coming to them with more complex needs. The need for COVID-19 health related services and more in person support received a negligible response.

Overall, the conclusion may be drawn that COVID-19 has had broad implications for service delivery, particularly for smaller organizations with less fiscal resources. The pandemic has changed the needs of immigrants and refugees served within most organizations, particularly in relation to digital literacy and accessibility, mental health services, and the need for social/financial assistance.

Top settlement needs of newcomers based on landing intervals:

0-12 months in Canada: Settlement orientation (20%), Language training (18%), Housing services (14%)

1-5 years in Canada: Employment training (15%), Language training (15%), Cultural integration e.g., networking (13%)

5-10 years in Canada: Employment training (17%), Job placement (17%), Cultural integration e.g., networking (15%)

10 or more years in Canada: Health and mental health services (17%), Cultural integration e.g., networking (17%), Job placement (15%), Employment training (15%)

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Technology:

Across all responses, the most widely used technologies that organizations use in delivering services include live-stream video conferencing (1-on-1 or groups, including Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts, Microsoft Teams, etc.), social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, etc.), as well as webinars (Zoom, GoTo Webinar, Microsoft Teams, etc.).

The most widely used CRM software used by organizations is OCMS, followed by a customized databases and SalesForce. In terms of the most important digital tools used at organizations, respondents listed communication and web conferencing platforms (including Zoom, Teams, Google meet, etc.), different applications for communication, including WhatsApp and Messenger, as well as e-learning platforms, such as LMS, Moodle, and Avenue.

Digital literacy:

When asked about the digital literacy of the staff, 49% of respondents reported that overall level of literacy (ability to effectively use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information) was “good”. 31% reported that digital literacy was “very good”, while 17% reported that staff digital literacy was “fair”. Only 2% reported that digital literacy was poor, indicating a general positive level of literacy among all organizations. In cross referencing with other indicators such as region and/or size of organization, all reports of digital literacy remained high overall.

Upskilling and professional development:

Across all regions, 71% of respondents reported that there are sufficient opportunities for employee upskilling and professional development within their organization. Ontario respondents reported the highest percentage at 81%. The region with the lowest percentage of respondents reporting sufficient opportunities for upskilling and professional development was the Atlantic region at 60%. When asked what prevents employees from having the ability to upskill/pursue professional development, 40% reported a lack of staff time, 32% reported insufficient budget, and 15% reported insufficient training opportunities. A lack of interest in upskilling/professional development was only reported by 6% of respondents.

Employment-related services:

The majority of organizations surveyed offer employment-related services. Across all regions, 76% offer employment-related services. British Columbia and Ontario reported the highest percentage of organizations offering employment-related services, at 84% and 81%. Quebec reported the lowest percentage at 64%. Organizations with the lowest grouping of employees (1-10) are less likely to offer employment-related services than any of organizations with 11-250+ employees. Organizations which serve only 1-100 clients were also less likely than organizations with a larger client base to offer employment-related services. Organizations with higher budgets ($500,000 upwards) reported offering employment-related services significantly greater than organizations that operate on less than $500,000.

83% of SPO organizations across Canada work with employers to help newcomers find jobs. The Ontario region reported the highest percentage of SPOs that work with newcomers at 90%. The lowest percentage was British Columbia at 66%, followed by Quebec at 67%. The Atlantic, Prairies, and other regions of Canada all reported that their organizations work with employers to find jobs above 85%.

Across Canada, 77% of service providers encourage clients to use professional networking platforms such as LinkedIn when providing employment-related services. Organizations which have 250 employees or more, service over 1000 clients and operate on an annual budget of $5,000,000 or more, reported encouraging professional networking platforms between 85-97%. Meanwhile, smaller organizations with lower budgets reported encouraging the use of platforms between 64-71%.

Labour force challenges

According to the SPO workers surveyed, the greatest labour force challenge newcomers face when trying to enter the labour force reported across regions is a lack of Canadian work experience (27%), followed by a lack of language proficiency (23%) as well as lack of credential recognition (17%).

The top three soft skills that newcomers are reported to need assistance with include communication skills (30%), presentation skills (15%), and conflict management (13%). Time management as well as leadership and initiative were also notably mentioned, at 12% and 11%. A lack of communication skills was most predominantly noted by service providers within all sizes of organizations.

Region-specific in-demand occupations

Regionally, in-demand occupations are reported in order of prevalence as follows:

AB: Retail, accounting, administration, engineering, essential workers, healthcare, service
BC: Healthcare, retail, service, construction, hospitality, trades
MB: Manufacturing, service, healthcare, customer service, retail
NB: Labour work, call centres, factory work, service, healthcare
NL: Health, tech, IT
Northern Territories: Construction, healthcare, customer service, government
NS: Healthcare, food service industry, agriculture
ON: Service, business, labour, trades
PEI: Healthcare, construction, early-childhood education
QC: Early child-hood education, healthcare, administration
SK: Healthcare, accountants, engineers, hospitality

Representatives from each region spoke widely of healthcare as an in-demand occupation. As we have discovered through our literature review, as well as through the newcomer survey, many internationally educated health professionals are unemployed or under-employed due to a lack of accessible bridging programs, credential recognition and/or equivalency testing.

Licensure and other services

Across all regions, only 44% of organizations surveyed offer support around professional licensure/credential recognition. Atlantic Canada had the highest percentage of respondents whose organizations offer support these at 62%. Ontario had the lowest percentage of respondents who work at organizations which offer credential recognition/support at 31%.

When comparing organizational size, budget, and number of clients served, there is a positive correlation between organizations with greater resources, and higher percentage of offering these supports.

When asked what services are not currently offered but respondents would like to offer newcomers, 20% of all service providers selected upskilling programs to meet changing skills needs. 17% would like to offer support for foreign credential recognition/professional licensure, and 16% would like to offer employment programs tailored for labour market shortages as well as anti-racism and cultural sensitivity training.

Collaboration with other stakeholders

81% of SPOs reported collaborating with community-based organizations "often". The second most noted collaboration is with other service providers in the same geographic region (68%), the federal government (57%), followed by provincial government collaboration (52%). The lowest levels of collaboration are reported with the municipal government (8% of respondents reported they "never" collaborate) and the private sector (7%).

Organizational capacity and culture

91% of service providers across Canada either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that their organization has been able to respond quickly to changing circumstances brought about by recent events. Only 4% somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed. In Quebec, however, 10% of service providers somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.
Across the nation, 56% of SPOs strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that securing long-term funding is a challenge for their organization, indicating that securing long-term funding is a challenge with current funding models.

33% of respondents strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that their organization is incentivized to focus on outputs rather than outcomes. 27% somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed. Respondents from British Columbia reported the highest percentage to strongly agree or somewhat agree with that statement at 47%.

92% of respondents "strongly" or "somewhat agreed" that their organization partners with other local organizations to provide services to immigrants and refugees. Responses were similar across regions, aside from Quebec, who reported 9% to "somewhat disagree" with the statement.

77% of SPO employees strongly or somewhat agreed that they can easily share and access knowledge about best practices with other organizations in the sector. Only 8% strongly or somewhat disagreed with the statement. However, in British Columbia, 11% somewhat disagreed.

Funding challenges

Out of the following—testing innovative projects/pilots, scaling up existing successful projects, implementing long-term programs and services, building partnerships, staff upskilling and professional development—implementing long-term programs and services was ranked the most difficult to secure funding for by 32% of SPO workers across Canada. The second most difficult, ranked by 17% of SPO workers, was staff reskilling and professional development. Scaling up existing, successful projects was ranked most difficult by 14% of respondents, and building partnerships was ranked as most difficult by only 9%.

Congruently, building partnerships was ranked least difficult by 32% of respondents, scaling up existing successful projects was ranked least difficult by 20% of respondents, staff upskilling by 19%, and testing innovative projects/pilots as well as implementing long-term programs and services were each ranked least difficult by 14% of SPO workers.