

The role of gender and language in the Ottawa-Gatineau labour market: English- and French-speaking newcomers' experiences and perspectives

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“I had taken assistance from different organizations like YMCA (...) and World Skills; they had resume building classes and they helped me to build my resume to make it more attractive and job ready. (...) So I think all of these really helped, but also the connection they had with World Skills. (EN #17)

Research objectives

- Examine the role of gender and language in skilled workers' experiences in navigating the Ottawa-Gatineau labour market
 - Understand skilled workers' strategies and challenges at the intersection of human capital and labour market characteristics
 - Shed light on the role of civil society organizations, especially in relation to the current pandemic context



Context

Ottawa-Gatineau's labour market

- **Post-industrial city**: the prominence of public administration (federal government)
- Among **highest median income** in the country
- **Immigrants with highest levels of education**
- **Brian Ray (2021): role of gender, region of origin and type of occupation**

https://bmmc-irmu.info.yorku.ca/files/2021/04/FINAL-Research-Report-on-O-G-Employment-Profile_Revisions.pdf?x15611

Many Versions of Work in Ottawa-Gatineau's Labour Market: A profile of immigrant workers and their economic status in a post-industrial city

Research Report

Brian Ray*
University of Ottawa

April 2021

Framework: Social Resilience

A perspective that

“stresses the transformative capacities of individuals, groups, and social institutions in dealing with challenges and simultaneously recognizes how power relations and institutional structures shape these capacities” (Preston et. al. 2021, 3)

Qualitative Methodology

Collaborative approach

- SSHRC-funded Partnership: “Building Migrant Resilience in Cities-Immigration et resilience en milieu urbain” (BMRC-IRMU)
- Advisory committee: OLIP and local settlement organizations (employment)

Semi-structured interviews and selection criteria:

- **40 newcomers** (< 5 years) who arrived as **skilled workers** or through **family reunification**
- **Women** and **men** from diverse origins
- **English** and **French** as first official language
- Variety of skilled occupations

Analysis (ongoing):

- **Coding in multiple stages and use of NVivo software**

Participants' profile

25 English-speaking participants

- Gender: 13 women, 12 men
- Immigration category: 15 skilled workers, 10 family reunification
- Time of arrival: 13 before pandemic, 12 during pandemic

10 French-speaking participants

(data collection still ongoing)

- Gender: 7 women, 3 men
- Immigration category: 8 skilled workers, 2 family reunification
- Time of arrival: 6 before pandemic, 4 during pandemic

Diverse origins: Africa (North, Sub-Saharan), Asia (East, South, Southeast), Eastern Europe, Latin America & Caribbean

➤ **Many had international experience: studies & professional**

➤ **Spoke multiple languages, incl. English and French**

Results

- 1. Participants' labour market strategies**
- 2. Participants' use of settlement services (and impacts of the pandemic)**
- 3. Participants' experiences with employment programs**

1. Newcomer labour market strategies

Settlement services

Social networks

- Family, friends, ethnic and religious community, professional networks

Internet and social media

- Some participants preferred doing things “their own way”
- Various social media (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, WhatsApp) and web-based platforms (e.g., Indeed, Kanata North, Glassdoor, Telegram messenger)

Volunteering

Studies / Canadian degree

- To build networks, acquire Canadian credentials in specific professional fields
- Focus on programs with coop option to gain Canadian experience

Self-employment/freelance

2. Using settlement services

Advice: CV, interviewing, volunteering, networking

Training, workshops, programs

Access to job listings & job fairs

For networking and references

“Anything (...) **interview** related in theory, or arranging the **CVs and cover letters**, and then **networking**, so they also do **good recommendation** and then they also **share current positions with you.**” (EN #17)

“...before we came, **we had joined OCISO, which is an immigrant services organization, and from there we learned about World Skills**, so when we came in, (...) I went to register with the World Skills.” (EN #1)

“I have contacted **World Skills and On-track and a Newcomer Central** of Peel. So those four organizations I was in touch with, but I got maximum. And like I would say, the very fine advice from the On-track people. (...) **And we had a lot of discussion about my jobs and everything and for my preparation of my interviews. So they supported me very well.** And she gave me good advice all the time.” (EN #8)

Using settlement services

➤ But some ambivalence on the usefulness of settlement services

“I joined there is one community here called World Skills. I have joined them to find a job, but they have given up because they are not. There was more to focus the accounting profession and other type of profession, or they have never seen profession like me. So getting those jobs is like academic job is a totally different ballgame altogether.” (EN#6)

“I would have reached out to Ottawa World Skills faster than I did, because I just reached out to them two months ago, if I knew about that in the beginning, they might have helped in finding me a job that really suits me or at least have given me some training and some advice. So I wish I knew about this since the day I came here.” (EN #19)

➤ **Partly also due to the pandemic context**

“And there was not much going on, (...) because everything was closed and stuff. So there's not much I could do. I tried to look for a job fair. There was no job fairs. **And then the online job fairs, they're horrible because you basically just get some information about a company.**” (EN#18)

“**I tried to reach out to some non-profit organizations and apply from the volunteer job, but I think is hard. I'm not sure is due to pandemic.** Even getting a volunteer job I think is hard for me. **I haven't got from any news** I reach out to. I can tell you I reach out to world skills. I reach out to the Ottawa Chinese Community Center, I reach out to INTAC something like the non-profit organization, and try to look for something like volunteer, as you mentioned. But I haven't heard from any news from them.” (EN #12)

3. Experiences with employment programs

- **World Skills' employment program**
- “Empowering Visible Minority Newcomer Women” to succeed in the Canadian labour market
 - 12 week, hands-on activities and training, mentorship/coaching, networking

Successful employment outcomes

“I got both positions through contacts that I made at World Skills during the (...) Empowering newcomer women program.” (EN #1)

“Once I got employment center, I was referred to a program that’s exclusively funded the by IRCC, (...), that supports visible minority newcomer women in terms of securing employment. So it provides them with training and the support to secure employment. So I joined that program and after joining that program, I took all my learnings into practice. I put it into action. And that’s how I got my first job in the same organization. (EN#21)

“I started as a temporary worker. I found the job, thanks to a project done by World Skills, which is called Empowering Immigrant Women to succeed in the Canadian labour market. I think that was the key for me to get this job, because before that, I didn’t have any idea about the resume, about how things are done here, interviews.”(EN #15)

Discussion & conclusions

Deployment of multiple strategies for labour market participation

- **Significant role of settlement services, especially employment programs**
- **But differences in use & perceptions of settlement services**
 - Gender and professional occupation, to some extent language
 - But little to no use of pre-arrival services

Pandemic context brought to light importance of targeted programs

- **Pandemic impacts varied significantly between participants: time of arrival, gender, occupational field, social networks, language**
- **Potential to better leveraging social networks & social media use**
 - Personal preferences
 - Pre-existing social media use/networks vs. using social media post-arrival
 - Presence and connectivity of ethnic/religious communities

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Our research participants

Our community partners

- Gatineau: SITO
- Ottawa: OLIP, World Skills

Our research team

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- *Preston, V. PI, Belkhodja, C., Gabriel, C., Lochhead, C., Douglas, D., Dyson, D., Zikic, J., Hennebry, J., Shields, J., Veronis, L., Hynie, M., Mandell, N., Bhuyan, R., Ghosh, S. and collaborators. Migration and Resilience in Urban Canada - Immigration et résilience en milieu urbain (BMRC-IRMU): Discovering Strengths and Building Capacity, Partnership Grant. Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, SSHRC#896-2016-1004, 2,499,525, 2016-2021 \$.*
- For more information on the project, see: <http://bmrc-irmu.info.yorku.ca/>



Thank you!

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