

# Newcomer skilled workers' experiences in the Ottawa-Gatineau labour market during the pandemic

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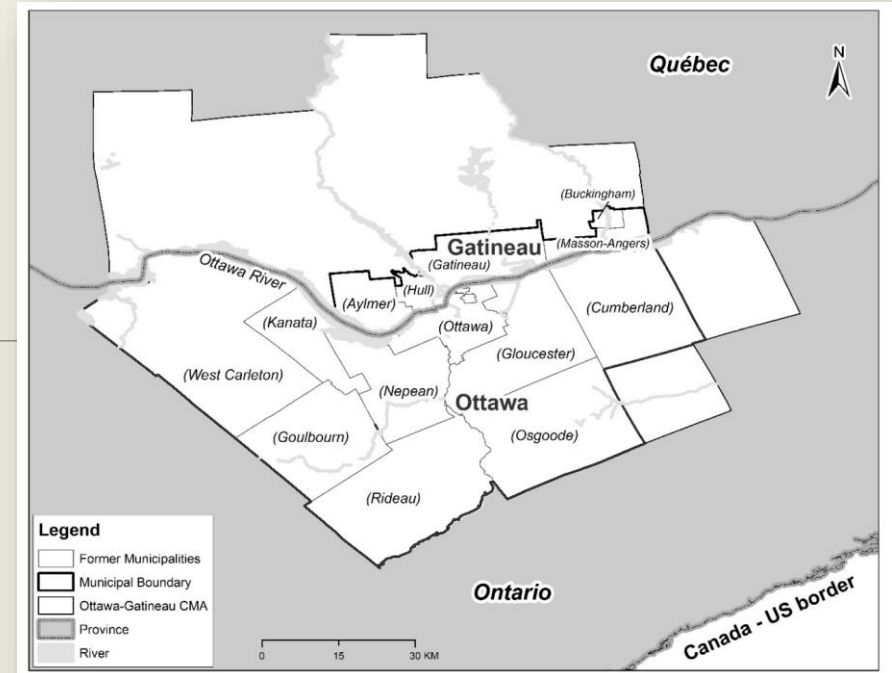


# Context

## Ottawa-Gatineau's labour market

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

[https://bmrc-irmu.info.yorku.ca/files/2021/04/FINAL-Research-Report-on-O-G-Employment-Profile\\_Revisions.pdf?x15611](https://bmrc-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

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# Research objectives

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- Examine the role of language and gender in skilled workers' experiences in navigating the labour market in the Ottawa-Gatineau region
  - Identify the impacts of the pandemic on newcomers' labour market experiences: challenges and strategies
  - Shed light on the role of civil society organizations, social networks and social media use in a (post-)pandemic context



# Framework: Social Resilience

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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

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## 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

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## 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

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1. Impacts of the pandemic on newcomer skilled workers
  - Comparison by time of arrival (before vs. during pandemic)
2. Newcomers' challenges on the labour market in a pandemic context
  - Impacts and challenges relating to the pandemic
3. Newcomers' labour market strategies
  - Settlement services, social networks, Internet and social media
  - Studies, volunteering, and self-employment

# 1. Impacts of the pandemic & economic integration

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## **Arrival *before* pandemic**

- Significant impacts: stress, quit job
- Less significant impacts: work from home, juggling children/work

## **Arrival *during* pandemic**

- **Significant impacts: networking, job search, not really knowing Canadian society**
- Less significant impacts: work from home, juggling children/work

“We were newcomers, so we had to start over from zero or from scratch. I couldn't meet many people, so I couldn't make a lot of friends. I try to do whatever I could (...), but it' hard to tell [how to socialize] because **I honestly don't know how is Ottawa without COVID.**” (EN #18)



# 2. Newcomer challenges in the labour market

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**Language:** 11 participants

- Language barriers/proficiency (1 in English, 2 in French), language norms/accents (8)

**Canadian experience:** 10 participants

**Lack of familiarity with Canadian labour market/workplace culture:** 8 participants

**Training/accreditation process:** 7 participants

➤ **Impacts/challenges related to the pandemic:** 5 participants

**Social networks:** 4 participants

**Discrimination, racism, xenophobia:** 4 participants

- Experiences of *othering*, discrimination on the labour market

**Immigrant status:** 2 participants

# Impacts/challenges of the pandemic on labour market participation

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“Unfortunately, I tried to get another job some other opportunities, but I couldn’t get the positions. Because sometimes **the boundaries are quite clear that they need at least one-year Canadian working experience. And it takes longer progress during the pandemic.** Things became slow. I applied three jobs through my friends. But it didn’t work out. I sent my CVs and I heard nothing from them. (...) **The big challenge is because many businesses has been affected in a bad way, some of the businesses went bankruptcy. And even for the jobs it’s getting fewer. So many people lost the job.**” (STEM #5)

# 3. Newcomer labour market strategies

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Settlement services

Mobilization of social networks

Internet and social media

Volunteering

Studies / Canadian degree

Self-employment/freelance

# a. Using settlement services

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**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)

## a. Using settlement services (cont'd)

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### ➤ Successful employment experiences, especially among women

**“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)**

## a. Using settlement services (cont'd)

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### ➤ 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)

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➤ **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)

## b. Social Networks

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**General sense that networks are essential to get a job**

**Diverse mobilization of social networks**

- **Family and friends:** advice, referrals
- **Ethnic and religious community:** advice, information, referrals, social media, volunteering
- **Professional networks:** through settlement organizations (advice, referrals), volunteering, social media

➤ **Combining social networks and social media**

**My husband**, having lived in Ottawa when he was young has a number of social networks, **he tried very hard to leverage his network to help me**, which at the same time makes me realize how extraordinarily lucky I was (...). **If you don't have somebody to use as Canadian reference, I think it is very difficult to find a job.** (EN #9, Woman, During)

I was looking for a mortgage broker and my real estate agent contacted a law firm, which is the law firm that I'm working at, and **the guy working there was a Brazilian as well. I talked to him and we started chatting and he said they're looking for someone. So, I forwarded him my resume. And we had the interview the same day they hired me.** (EN #18, Man, During)

**I had been trying to speak with many professionals in the field throughout COVID as well. The positions that I applied for without someone 'on the inside' didn't get interviews, while the applications I filed with a connection I had a call back.**  
The kind and open people help. (EN #16, Woman, During)



# c. Internet and Social Media

## Nearly all participants used social media

- LinkedIn, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter
- Some used social media before arrival (STEM-field), others picked up after arrival (advice from settlement services, due to the pandemic)
- Rather than using settlement services, some participants preferred doing things “their own way”
  - Internet searches (Indeed, Kanata North, Glassdoor) and social media
- Some participants found social media very useful (especially among STEM professionals)
  - Networking, interviews
- But others less so...



## c. Internet and Social Media (cont'd)

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**6 participants** got jobs through LinkedIn, Indeed

- Networking with HR, recruiters, managers
- Interviews & offers (1 participant got job offer prior to arrival in Canada)

**“But I found that LinkedIn was a very powerful tool here, to get to make connections. So, I reached out to the recruiter of the company and there was a position that I was interested in, (...), I would like to work as a customer success manager, actually. So I did express my interest, they did not have an opening for a customer success manager, **but they really liked me.** So they said, how about you give a start as an on-boarding specialist? And as soon as we have an opportunity for a customer success manager, we can get you there. So **it was via LinkedIn. I reached out to the recruiter, the recruiter got me in touch with my manager and that's how I got employed.**” (EN #20)**

➤ Variety of usages: LinkedIn (network building), Facebook (advice & information), WhatsApp (advice, information, & contacts)

## c. Internet and Social media (cont'd)

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- But other participants did not like or did not find online services/social media useful

“I was applying a lot through LinkedIn, Indeed, and there were times when my resume was not even seen.” (EN#17)

“And I use a lot of Indeed, I find that there was fewer response.” (EN #3)

# Discussion & conclusions

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## 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

# Acknowledgements



## 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 \$.*
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# Thank you!

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