

# ADDRESSING REMOTE WORK CHALLENGES FACED BY NEWCOMERS TO CANADA

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## Background

- Remote work has grown in popularity since the COVID-19 pandemic [1].
- 20% of Canadians work from home [2].
- Much has been said about the advantages and disadvantages of working remotely [1, 3, 4].
- Much less has been investigated about immigrants' experiences of remote work. However, immigrants accounted for 23% of Canada's population in 2021 [5].
- Remote work may offer unforeseen gains for newcomers or create/exacerbate vulnerabilities.

## Research questions

1. How did immigrants' labour market experience shape their engagement in remote work?
2. How did they manage their remote work in relation to their other daily occupations?
3. How did their remote work experiences influence their sense of inclusion within Canadian society?

## Methods

- Case study methodology [6].
- Semi-structured interviews with 21 participants who worked remotely at least three days per week.
- Part of a larger, ongoing project (*Bridging Divides*, CFREF)
- Data analysis using thematic analysis [7].

## Participants

- had immigrated to Canada within 10 years.
- were born in the Global South.
- lived in major cities in Ontario (16) or British Columbia (5).
- had been working remotely for at least 3 months.

### Most:

- had a graduate degree (86%).
- were between 25 and 44 years old (81%).
- worked 100% remotely or went to the office less than 4 times annually (81%).

## References

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## Key Themes

### Labour Market Value

Participants prepared for working in Canada by:

- Getting help from settlement agencies
- Leveraging existing skills/upskilling
- Accepting lower-level work

Nevertheless, they faced barriers:

- Rejection from employers re: Canadian experience
- Employment discrimination (overt/covert)
- Job scams from online job boards
- Feeling they were first in mind for layoffs

Most thought the work was helping their future but some felt their potential was unrealized.

### Occupational Flexibility

Participants enjoyed the following benefits:

- Freedom to structure their day
- Time to connect with those who matter, including family in different time zones

However, they expressed the following challenges:

- Lack of control over their space
- Tendency to overwork
- Difficulties negotiating “where work ends and where the house begins” (Reesa)

### Socialisation and Belonging

Working remotely led to social isolation for many participants, who felt hindered in their ability to integrate into Canadian society. This was due to:

- Lack of opportunity to understand Canadian office culture
- Lack of opportunity to practice English and Canadian small talk
- Lack of opportunity to network
- Lack of workplace visibility
- Hesitation to reach out to others

As a result, most participants indicated they would prefer a hybrid work arrangement, so they could benefit from flexibility and human interaction.

### Discussion

- We provide novel insights into immigrants' experiences of remote work and their sometimes conflicting needs.
- Despite blurred boundaries and tendency to overwork, the advantage of flexibility is prized among participants.
- Importance of guidance for newcomers.
- Importance of private sector buy-in to Canada's immigration plans.
- Critical role of workplace integration in wider integration into Canadian society for newcomers.
- Social isolation for immigrant remote workers has far-reaching consequences for their settlement experience.

### Recommendations

- Address employment discrimination.
- Regular health checks for remote workers.
- Improve communication for remote workers.
- Create a sense of community in the workplace.
- Reduce stigma against remote work.
- Implement boundaries for remote workers.
- Affordable co-working spaces to reduce isolation.

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