

How do immigrant women, youth, and seniors experience settlement and services in Canada?

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What is this research about?

Canada leads Western nations in providing publicly funded settlement services to immigrants. According to IRCC, 39% of the adult permanent residents who arrived in the 2015 admissions year used at least one settlement service between January 2015 and April 2017. While provincial survey figures vary widely, they, too, show significant levels of service use among the newcomer population.

However, such surveys also point to large sections of the newcomer population who do need but cannot access settlement services.

This review of recent research on, and existing services for, immigrant women, youth, and seniors examines the following questions:

- a) What do we know about the settlement experiences, particularly outcomes, of these diverse groups of immigrants?
- b) What is out there in terms of services specifically targeting them?
- c) What impact, if any, do existing services have on immigrant outcomes?

The full report tackles each question in four areas of settlement: 1) labour market participation and income; 2) education and language training; 3) health, mental health, and well-being; and 4) social and civic participation.

What did researchers find?

The most glaring gap in the literature is the paucity of studies on the settlement outcomes–services connection. Although research on substantive aspects of settlement abounds, it does not say much about the impact of services on settlement outcomes for immigrant women, youth, and seniors. The lack of aggregate data may explain this gap. Another possible reason is the difficulty that researchers encounter when trying to isolate the role of services from other factors that might influence newcomers' settlement outcomes.

The few studies that problematize services–outcomes connections are anecdotal or qualitative in terms of evidence. Services related to orientation, networking, and language acquisition are cited as particularly helpful.

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What did researchers do?

With a systematic literature review, researchers analyzed 511 published and grey literature items in English for the period 2008–2017.

Using a scoping approach and a call for information to service providers, the service review profiled 341 existing services in Canada except for Quebec.

What did researchers find?

Some literature is critical of employment services as they are deemed to be contributing to the deskilling of immigrants, particularly women.

The literature highlights four groups of barriers to accessing services: a) barriers related to the organization and content of services; b) awareness of and information on services; c) geographic barriers; and d) affordability.

Operating in an environment of soft (short-term, project-based, and relatively stagnant) funding, heavy reporting, and tight deadlines, the non-profit sector faces challenges related to funding, accountability, and lack of intersectoral collaboration. And these issues affect the content and accessibility of settlement services to newcomers.

Also, stringent eligibility rules for federally funded services constitute a barrier for many vulnerable immigrants. For example, many immigrant women, particularly mothers with young children and those who must begin working full time upon arrival, become ineligible for language classes when they acquire Canadian citizenship.

Another aspect of service ineligibility is the exclusion of immigrants with temporary status.

As well, the content and scheduling of services—along with a general lack of awareness and information—can hinder the use of services. In some cases, language challenges and cultural practices may contribute to the lack of information about services.

Other contributing factors such as geographic barriers and unaffordability may combine to discourage newcomers from using settlement services.

How can you get involved?

This summary is based on the Knowledge synthesis phase of the research. Researchers are now completing primary research with key informants, service providers, and newcomers. If you are interested in participating, kindly contact Naolo Charles, project knowledge exchange officer, at naolo@yorku.ca.

Recommendations

Our knowledge synthesis provided 13 recommendations concerning research, policy, and service. Especially more large-scale, quantitative studies into the connections between immigrant-specific services and settlement outcomes are needed. In terms of both policy and service, we need to take families, not individuals, as the unit of analysis and practice. As well, relaxing eligibility rules to allow temporary migrants and recent citizens access to settlement services is in the public interest.

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