

# What are the settlement needs of immigrant women in Canada and how can settlement services help?

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## What is this research about?

Canada is a top destination for immigrants. However, evidence collected from hundreds of scholarly articles reveals that immigrant women, who represent 11% of the population in Canada, are being disadvantaged, discriminated against and excluded from fully participating in Canadian society.

Our research highlights the importance of using a gender lens in the provision and the design of settlement services. Female immigrants continue to be overrepresented in low-paying and precarious jobs despite being highly skilled and educated.

While their gender and their immigration status expose female newcomers to multiple layers of discrimination, exclusion, responsibilities and stress, research finds that immigrant women from visible minorities actually experience an additional layer of barriers due to racism and stereotypes.

In fact, immigrant women hardly constitute a homogenous group. The limited scholarship on settlement services reveals both positive and negative settlement experiences.

While some immigrant women may have more positive outcomes than others, there is a common thread when it comes to the systemic barriers and challenges that they face.

From evidence of labour market exclusion, of systemic disadvantages on language outcomes, to the unfairness of caregiving responsibilities, the impact of gender-based violence, the rise of mental health issues and the low civic and political participation of immigrant women, our research unveils the scope of the work that still needs to be done to create more welcoming communities for immigrant women.

The primary goals of this research are to:

- a) Identify the settlement needs and outcomes for immigrant women in Canada
- b) Identify what role settlement services play in immigrant women's settlement

This research is part of a wider study on the settlement outcomes of Immigrant Women, Youth and Seniors, which is funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

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Gender lens

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## What did researchers do?

Through a systematic review of academic literature, researchers analyzed 171 scholarly articles published in English between 2008 and 2017, as well as relevant grey literature. An intersectional gender-based analysis allowed researchers to consider the heterogeneity of immigrant women who make up a growing proportion of the Canadian population in relation to broader trends in translational migration, temporary and precarious immigration status, and growing income inequality in Canada.

## What did researchers find?

Research reveals that 60% of recent Immigrant women with a Bachelor level of education or higher work in jobs that do not require a degree. Immigrant women need services that help them overcome underemployment but according to research that is critical of settlement services, far too many employment services channel women into low-paying jobs.

Immigrant women also tend to arrive in Canada with lower language skills than men. Language classes could offer crucial help to immigrant women but they cannot attend because of the need to work, the care of children or elderly, the lack of transportation or the ineligibility due to immigration status.

National population-based survey data also suggests that immigrant women experience similar or lower rates of abuse than Canadian-born women. Immigrant women, however, are less likely to access services or seek help due to lack of knowledge about services, isolation,

language barriers and fear of repercussions in their family or community. Immigrant women also experience higher rates of poor health and mental health than non-immigrant women. Barriers to accessing health care include lack of information and language proficiency, distrust of medical professionals, lack of transportation and ineligibility due to immigration status. The interconnectedness of immigrant women issues and the central role that they play as caregivers in a family unit call for a holistic approach to 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 from the settlement sector and immigrant women. If you are interested in participating, kindly contact the Research Lead.

## Recommendations

Settlement services traditionally target the initial years after “landing” in Canada. However, immigrant women need of settlement services is higher in periods of transition and vulnerability like transition in family status, post-war migration, pregnancy or parenting of young children or children with disabilities, domestic violence and temporary and precarious status. Settlement services for immigrant women during these pivotal periods must also involve immigrant women in the development of programs.

### About the author(s)

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Rupaleem Bhuyan’s research seeks to address gender-based violence in immigrant and refugee communities through advocacy, participatory action research, and engaged scholarship.

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