NAVIGATING INTEGRATION: A LITERATURE REVIEW ADDRESSING BARRIERS AND INEQUITIES IN SETTLEMENT SERVICES FOR RACIALIZED NEWCOMERS IN CANADA

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In 2022, 437,000 permanent residents settled in Canada. As part of the Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) Immigration Levels Plan, that number is set to reach 500,000 in 2026 with the expectation that these newcomers will be contributing to Canada's economic growth (IRCC, 2023). IRCC's Settlement Program is important in supporting the successful integration of newcomers by providing a wide range of services including assistance with housing, employment, language training as well as other essential services to help newcomers feel welcome in Canada. In addition to the growing number of newcomers arriving in Canada, the demographics of these newcomers are becoming increasingly diverse and settlement services need to work to be able to serve the variety of needs of these newcomers.[1]

While IRCC-funded settlement services are key in facilitating the smooth transition of newcomers, there remain numerous barriers to accessing them. Immigrants and refugees with permanent resident (PR) status and their immediate family members are eligible for settlement services, whereas temporary residents and refugee claimants are excluded.[2] As refugees have the highest usage of settlement services, specifically excluding refugee claimants from receiving support can exacerbate their settlement issues and needs.[3] Additionally, when these individuals eventually obtain Canadian citizenship, they no longer have access to these services. Moreover, settlement service options are greatly limited in smaller and rural communities information regarding services are often only available in English and French and various studies have reported on the difficulties newcomers have accessing health care and mental health services.[4]

For racialized newcomers, barriers to accessing settlement services are often multiplied. Discrimination, systemic inequities, and cultural barriers compound newcomers' struggles and underscores the need for a better understanding of the complexities of their settlement experience.[5] According to IRCC, the Settlement Program has been successful in its

1 Ashton et al., 2018

2 Praznik & Shields, 2018.

3 Ibid.

4 E.g. Sanmartin and Ross 2006; Ashton et al., 2018.

5 Este, Lorenzetti, and Sato 2018; Ferrer 2018; Guruge et al. 2010; Martinez-Brawley and Zorita 2011.

stated goal of helping newcomers integrate, as findings from the Labour Force Survey show that the "employment rates for immigrants are generally consistent with the national average".[6] However, these statistics fail to account for the reality that many racialized newcomers are underemployed or forced into survival jobs or gig work in order to support themselves and their families.[7] In Ng & Gagnon's study on Employment Gaps for Racialized Groups and Immigrants in Canada, immigrants from Asia, Latin America, and Africa have higher unemployment rates than native-born Canadians. The study shows that racialized immigrants who have been in Canada for fewer than five years are overrepresented in low paying industries such as hospitality, warehousing and manufacturing. Furthermore, racialized newcomers working primarily as temporary foreign workers in the agricultural sector face specific vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities are exacerbated by factors such as geographic isolation and dependence on employers, which limit their ability to assert their rights and report grievances.

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In Ng & Gagnon's study on Employment Gaps for Racialized Groups and Immigrants in Canada, immigrants from Asia, Latin America, and Africa have higher unemployment rates than native-born Canadians. The study shows that racialized immigrants who have been in Canada for fewer than five years are overrepresented in low-paying industries such as hospitality, warehousing, and manufacturing. Furthermore, as of 2021, around one-quarter of all workers in agriculture were temporary foreign workers.[11] Many of these newcomers are from countries like Mexico, Guatemala, and Jamaica and these workers often face specific vulnerabilities such as geographic isolation and heavy dependence on their employers, which can limit their ability to assert their rights and report any issues.[12] As Branker (2017) explains, the way immigrant human capital is valued in government policy, differs from how it is perceived and by employers in the labor market. This disparity often leads to poor employment outcomes for many immigrants.

Research has highlighted the difficulties faced by groups such as Syrian refugees, who struggle with language barriers and credential recognition, impeding their employment opportunities.[13] Similarly, discriminatory practices in the labor market affect racial and gender equality in employment.[14] The elusive requirement for "Canadian experience" serves as a further barrier which prevents skilled immigrants and refugees from utilizing their qualifications.[15] Canadian experience refers to having prior work experience in Canada, which employers often consider as a key requirement for candidates in order to ensure new hires are a fit for the Canadian workplace. However, this requirement is a barrier for newcomers as it undervalues foreign credentials and experience which can lead to prolonged job searches, underemployment, and financial instability for newcomers.[16] The Ontario Human Rights Commission emphasizes that requiring Canadian experience can be discriminatory unless it is a proven job requirement.[17]

Thomas (2021) expands on this discussion by exploring the employment experiences of newcomers in mid-sized Canadian cities, revealing that systemic barriers and subtle forms of racism are pervasive. Thomas argues for equitable assessment of international credentials and stresses the importance of pre-arrival information, and funding for anti-racist programs to mitigate biases against foreign-born

6 Whalen, 2019.

7 Ng & Gagnon, 2020.

8 Este, Lorenzetti, and Sato 2018; Ferrer 2018; Guruge et al. 2010; Martinez-Brawley and Zorita 2011.

9 Whalen, 2019.

10 Ng & Gagnon, 2020.

11 Statistics Canada, 2022.

12 Statistics Canada, 2022.

13 Boss et al., 2022.

14 Branker, 2017; Thomas, 2021.

15 Kosny et al., 2020.

16 Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2023.

17 Ibid.

employees.[18] Racialized refugees in particular experience significant downward mobility and less job security compared to their pre-displacement employment[19], and they also face a number of unique barriers including lower levels of proficiency in the host country's language.

Employment is not only a key outcome for resettlement but also crucial for the mental health and integration of refugees into their host country.[20] Racism and discrimination impede the economic integration of newcomers and also creates barriers to accessing housing and education. This leads to socioeconomic disadvantages and contributes to broader cycles of poverty and exclusion. According to Berry and Hou (2016), discrimination can lead to lower levels of life satisfaction and hinder active engagement with their new community which in-turn impacts their mental health. Experiences of racism and discrimination are linked to adverse health outcomes, including stress, depression, and engagement in unhealthy behaviors, as highlighted in studies by Naidu et al. (2023) and Nakhaie & Wijesingha (2015). The challenges faced by specific subgroups of newcomers and refugees, urther emphasize the importance of targeted programs and interventions. Francis and Yan (2016) highlight the difficulties faced by young African newcomers in accessing formal support services due to limited funding and cultural barriers. Similarly, Muszynski and Gassim (2014) bring attention to the impact of racism on the health and well-being of refugees, emphasizing the need for policy changes to address systemic inequalities.

There is also evidence that racialized newcomers face systemic discrimination in various public service sectors, including health care. Issues such as language barriers, denial of service, and cultural insensitivity, discussed by Pollock et al. (2011), not only limit their access to essential services but also increase their chances of further discrimination and marginalization. Ratnayake et al. (2022) highlight the role of settlement service organizations in facilitating access to healthcare for immigrants. However, disparities in funding and service provision pose challenges, which calls for an increase in collaborative efforts between settlement agencies and health systems to address the health needs of immigrant populations effectively. Furthermore, racism influences social relationships and family dynamics among immigrants. For instance, Lorenzetti et al. (2023) show how the stress of racial discrimination impacts family wellness and the personal well-being of immigrant men, affecting their social roles and family interactions.

Mackay-Brown and Ashton (2021) criticize the one-size-fits-all approach to settlement services, arguing that such models often fail to consider the dynamic and individualized nature of integration, particularly the profound impact of discrimination and racism. They explain that integration models should more explicitly address these issues and recognize the responsibility of the receiving society and community in creating an environment of acceptance. However, as integration needs and expectations are highly location specific, the requirements for successful integration will vary across different communities. Jedwab (2006) advocates for a more personalized approach to integration, suggesting that it should be continuously redefined to meet the individual needs and circumstances of each newcomer. This perspective challenges the current model and emphasizes that ongoing adjustment is required for settlement programs and services to be successful.

It is a necessity to understand both the strengths and weaknesses of current settlement services in order to identify what these organizations are doing effectively to combat discrimination and racism and where they can improve. Understanding the gaps in knowledge and service provision for racialized newcomers will allow settlement services to develop targeted interventions that address specific needs and challenges.

18 Ibid.

19 Krahn et al., 2000; Picot et al., 2019.

20 IRCC, 2019b.