

Asylum Seekers in Quebec: Language and francization

Nicole Ives & Jill Hanley

McGill University School of Social Work

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Background

- Fundamental to short-term and long-term settlement goals for asylum seekers is settlement country official language proficiency
- Language proficiency facilitates
 - labour market integration
 - access to and information about health and social services
 - development of social capital
 - communication and relationship building with the broader society
- Also addresses loneliness and isolation from limited to no proficiency in official languages

Theoretical Framework

- Study adopted the Holistic Integration Model (Hynie, Korn, & Tao, 2016) to analyze our data with regard to long-term integration outcomes
- Integration is conceptualized as a pathway through social, subjective and interactional integration considering social identity, personal history and socioeconomic context.
- Interactional integration factors include asylum seekers' language proficiency in the host country language, which is "a necessary facilitator to other aspects of integration"

Methods

- Multimethod approach
- Data sources:
 1. Data obtained from IRCC, MTESS and IRB
 2. Structured questionnaire
 3. Semi-structured interviews with a subsample of 31 asylum seekers
 4. Focus groups (9) with 49 community workers in Montreal and Montérégie, representatives of religious groups in Montreal, and PRAIDA managers and frontline workers
- Survey sample
 - 324 asylum seekers
- Study inclusion criteria: 18+ years; having applied for asylum in Quebec between Jan 1, 2017 and Dec 31, 2018; having lived in Quebec for 3+ months.
- Interviews in person between July and October 2019 in French, English, Spanish, Arabic, Haitian Creole and Punjabi.

Results

- Portrait of the sample
- Impacts of language on the settlement process
- Francization

Languages spoken at home in Quebec

Languages	# of participants	%
Neither French nor English	132	40.7
French or French and another language	74	22.8
Just French and English or French, English and another language	23	7.1
English or English and another language	94	29.0
No answer	1	0.3
Total	324	100

Respondents' perceptions of their proficiency in official languages

- For French (speaking, oral comprehension, reading and writing):
 - 34.4% of respondents considered it to be good to excellent
 - 25.8% considered their level to be acceptable
 - 39.8%, as poor to none
- For English, respondents' perceptions of their level are somewhat better than in French
 - 55.8% of respondents considered their level to be good to excellent
 - 20.1% found it acceptable
 - 24% considered it to be low to zero, which represents difference of nearly 10 percentage points compared to perception of same level of French

Impacts of language on settlement process

- Asylum seekers: Language one of biggest challenges in settlement process
- Community stakeholders: access to information most important obstacle; for allophones, difficult to understand information offered in French and English and difficult to obtain it
- Strategies adopted by respondents to overcome language barrier to obtain public services
 - 31.3% of respondents were “doing their best to communicate”
 - 29.4% used *Google Translate* or a similar application
 - 22.9% asked a family member or a friend to translate
 - 11.7% received help from an interpreter provided by organization

Francization

- Services offered:
 - Asylum seekers have access to full-time and part-time francization courses offered by the Ministry of Immigration, Francization and Integration (MIFI)
 - No tuition fees are required
 - If they go part-time, no access to financial support measures for participation in courses and childcare costs offered to others
 - If they go full-time, they can receive \$188/week only if neither the person taking course nor spouse is receiving social assistance.
 - Can receive financial assistance for childcare costs of up to \$ 25/day per child.

Francization

- Learning French:
 - 70.4% of non-Francophone respondents took francization courses
 - 28.2% would have liked to have taken them, but were unable to
 - Three people (1.4%) said that they were not interested in francization
- Obstacles to francization:
 - Lack of access to subsidized childcare
 - Need to be at home to care for children
 - Class schedule not convenient
 - No places available in francization courses in neighbourhood

Discussion

- Asylum seekers demonstrate openness and willingness to learn French
- Demonstrate resilience in learning new language, communicating across language barriers
- Bill 96 – Quebec's latest proposed language law, proposes punitive, exclusionary approach with communication in French only after 6 months in the province.

Recommendations

- For part-time francization courses, offer asylum seekers same financial assistance for their participation and for childcare as is offered to other immigrants
- Facilitate access to interpretation services throughout health and social services network as well as in various public services that serve asylum seekers and other new arrivals
- Encourage the hiring of multilingual staff in the public and parapublic sectors in positions that involve contact with asylum seekers and other new arrivals
- Holistic Integration Model suggests welcoming, inclusive, supportive approach most effective to encouraging language learning