

# Newcomers' labour market experiences & the pandemic: the role of social media for network building

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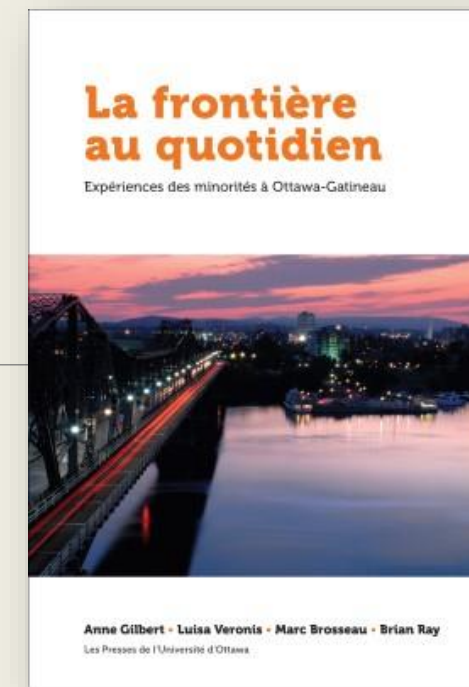


# Context

## Ottawa-Gatineau's labour market

- Interprovincial metropolitan area
- Asymmetrical bilingualism
- **Post-industrial city**: the prominence of public administration (federal government)
- Among **highest median income** in the country
- **Immigrants with highest levels of education**
- **Role of gender, region of origin and type of occupation**

[https://bmrc-irmu.info.yorku.ca/files/2021/04/FINAL-Research-Report-on-O-G-Employment-Profile\\_Revisions.pdf?x15611](https://bmrc-irmu.info.yorku.ca/files/2021/04/FINAL-Research-Report-on-O-G-Employment-Profile_Revisions.pdf?x15611)



Many Versions of Work in Ottawa-Gatineau's Labour Market: A profile of immigrant workers and their economic status in a post-industrial city

Research Report

**Brian Ray\***  
**University of Ottawa**

**April 2021**

# Research objectives

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- Examine the role of language and gender in skilled workers' experiences in navigating the labour market in the Ottawa-Gatineau region
  - Identify the impacts of the pandemic on newcomers' labour market experiences: challenges and strategies
  - Shed light on the role of social networks and social media use in a (post-)pandemic context



# Methodology

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## **Collaborative approach**

- SSHRC-funded Partnership: “Building Migrant Resilience in Cities-Immigration et resilience en milieu urbain” (BMRC-IRMU)
- Advisory committee: OLIP and local settlement organizations (employment)

## **Semi-structured interviews and selection criteria:**

- **40 newcomers** (< 5 years) who arrived as **skilled workers** or through **family reunification**
- **Women** and **men** from diverse origins
- **English** and **French** as first official language
- Variety of occupations & focus on **STEM**-related professions

## **Analysis:**

- **Social resilience, intersectional identities, & social networks**
- **Coding in multiple stages and use of Nvivo software**

# Participants' profile

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## 25 English-speaking participants

- Women (13), men (12)
- Immigration category: Skilled workers (15), family reunification (10)
- Arrival: before (13), just prior/during (12) pandemic
- **STEM-field: 5**

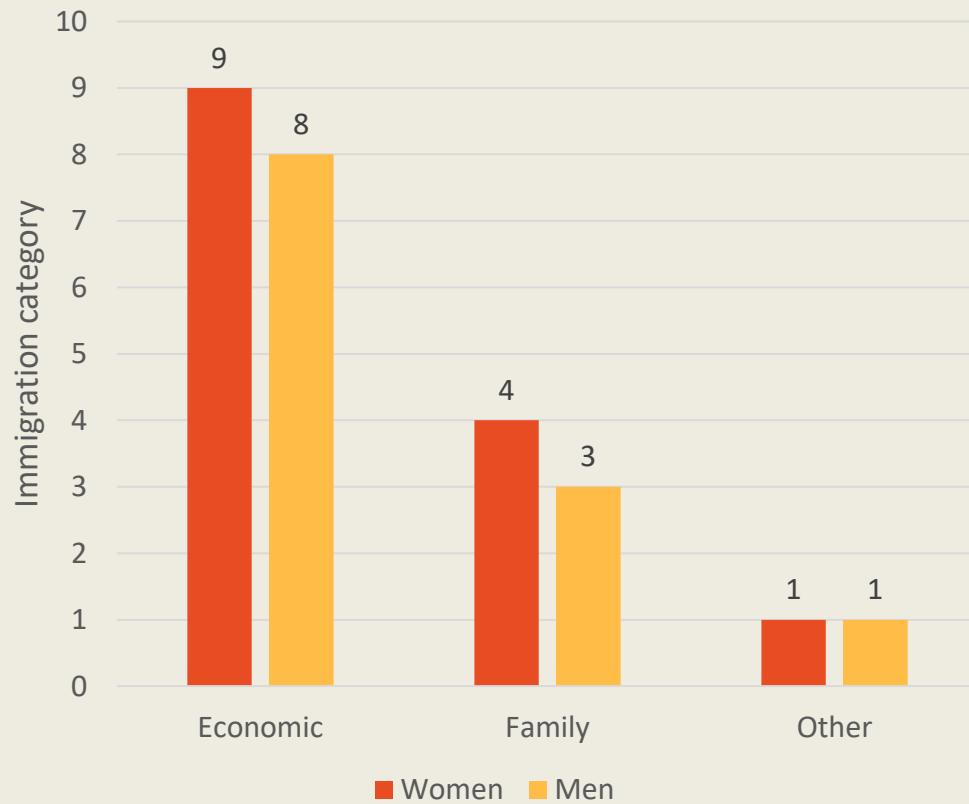
## Additional 10 French-speaking participants (data collection is ongoing)

- Women (7), men (3)
- Immigration category: Skilled workers (8), family reunification (2)
- Arrival: before (6), just prior/during pandemic (4)
- STEM-field: 2

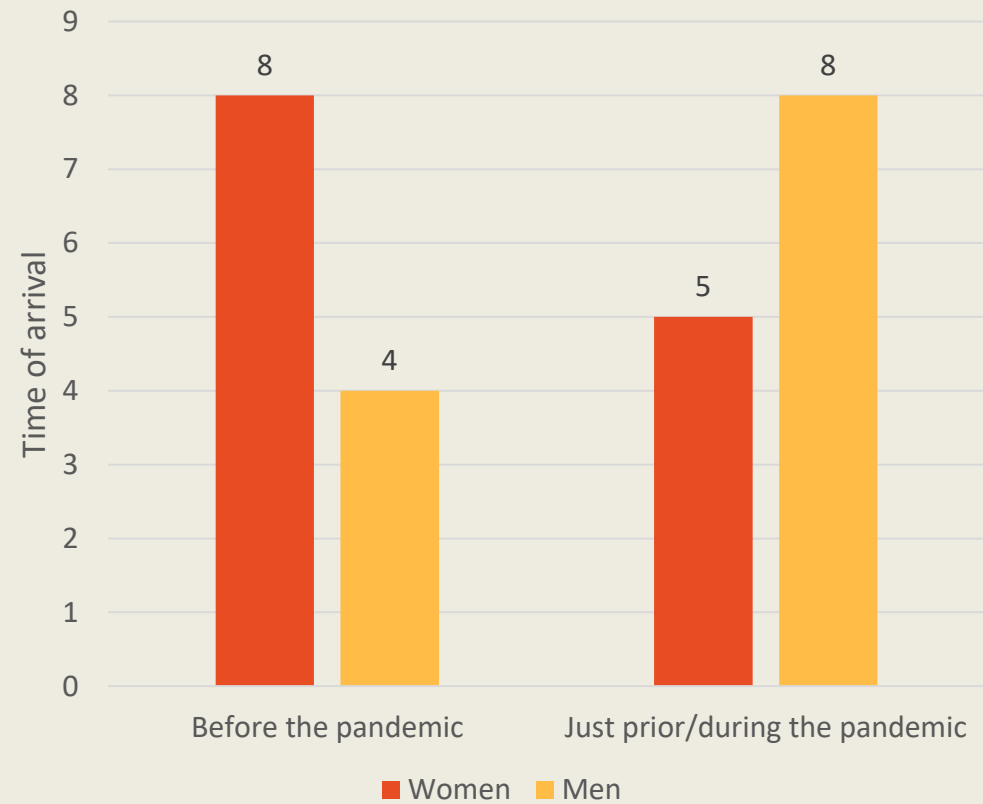
**Diverse origins:** Africa (north, sub-Saharan), Asia (East, south, southeast), Eastern Europe, Latin America & Caribbean

- **Many had international experience: studies & professional**
  - **Spoke multiple languages, incl. English and French**

# English-speaking participants' profile

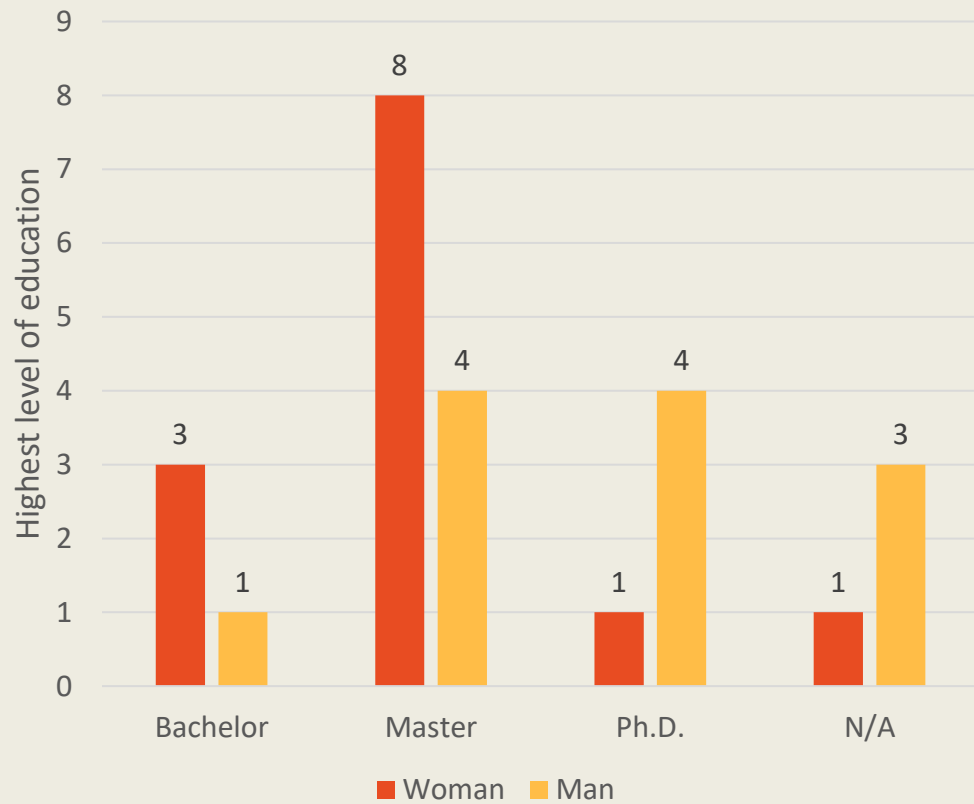


Immigration category & gender

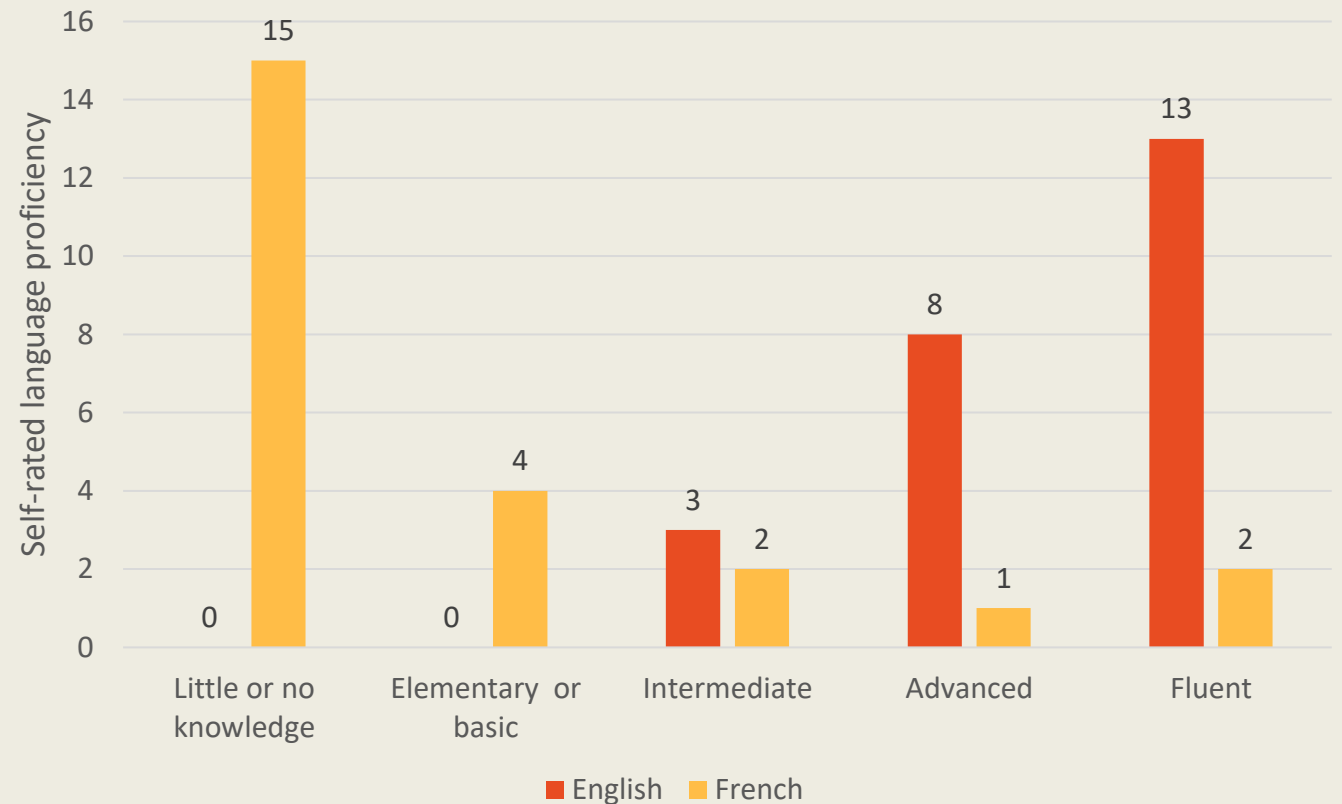


Time of arrival & gender

# English-speaking participants' profile



Levels of education & gender



Self-rated proficiency in English and French

Employment Status	Do not have a job	Have a job in their field	Self-identify as under-employed	Have a job but not in their field	Self-employment
Time of Arrival					
Before the pandemic Total: 12 (4 men, 8 women)	<b>2</b> 0 man 2 women	<b>9</b> 3 men 6 women	*None*	*None*	<b>1</b> 1 man 0 woman
During the pandemic Total: 13 (8 men, 5 women)	<b>1</b> 0 man 1 woman	<b>4</b> 2 men 2 women	<b>6</b> 5 men 1 woman	<b>2</b> 1 man 1 woman	*None*
Total: 25 (12 men, 13 women)	<b>3</b> 0 man 3 women	<b>13</b> 5 men 8 women	<b>6</b> 5 men 1 woman	<b>2</b> 1 man 1 woman	<b>1</b> 1 man 0 woman



# Results

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1. Impacts of the pandemic on newcomers

2. Newcomers' challenges on the labour market in a pandemic context

- Impacts and challenges relating to the pandemic
- Comparison by time or arrival (before vs. during pandemic) and gender

3. Newcomers' labour market strategies

- Settlement services, social networks, Internet and social media, studies, volunteering, self-employment, etc.

# 1. Impacts of the pandemic & economic integration

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## Arrival before pandemic

- Significant impacts: stress, quit job
- Less significant impacts: work from home, juggling children/work

## Arrival during pandemic

- **Significant impacts: networking, job search, not really knowing Canadian society**
- Less significant impacts: work from home, juggling children/work

“We were newcomers, so we had to start over from zero or from scratch. I couldn't meet many people, so I couldn't make a lot of friends. I try to do whatever I could (...), but it' hard to tell [how to socialize] because **I honestly don't know how is Ottawa without COVID.**” (EN #18)

# 2. Newcomer challenges in the labour market

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**Language:** 11 participants

- Language barriers/proficiency (1 in English, 2 in French), language norms/accents (8)

**Canadian experience:** 10 participants

**Lack of familiarity with Canadian labour market/workplace culture:** 8 participants

**Training/accreditation process:** 7 participants

➤ **Impacts/challenges related to the pandemic:** 5 participants

**Social networks:** 4 participants

**Discrimination, racism, xenophobia:** 4 participants

- Experiences of *othering*, discrimination on the labour market

**Immigrant status:** 2 participants

## 2. Impacts/challenges of the pandemic on labour market participation

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“Unfortunately, I tried to get another job some other opportunities, but I couldn’t get the positions. Because sometimes **the boundaries are quite clear that they need at least one-year Canadian working experience. And it takes longer progress during the pandemic.** Things became slow. I applied three jobs through my friends. But it didn’t work out. I sent my CVs and I heard nothing from them. (...) **The big challenge is because many businesses has been affected in a bad way, some of the businesses went bankruptcy. And even for the jobs it’s getting fewer. So many people lost the job.**” (STEM #5)

“**I tried to reach out to some non-profit organizations and apply from the volunteer job, but I think is hard. I’m not sure is due to pandemic.** Even getting a volunteer job I think is hard for me. **I haven’t got from any news** I reach out to. I can tell you I reach out to world skills. I reach out to the Ottawa Chinese Community Center, I reach out to INTAC something like the non-profit organization, and try to look for something like volunteer, as you mentioned. But I haven’t heard from any news from them.” (EN #12)

# 3. Newcomer labour market strategies

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**Settlement services**

**Mobilization of social networks**

**Internet and social media**

**Volunteering**

**Studies / Canadian degree**

**Self-employment/freelance**

# Using settlement services

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Advice: CV, interviewing, volunteering, networking

Training, workshops, programs

Job listings & job fairs

Networking and references

“Anything (...) **interview** related in theory, or arranging the **CVs and cover letters**, and then **networking**, so they also do **good recommendation** and then they also **share current positions with you.**” (EN #17)

“I had taken assistance from different organizations like YMCA (...) and World Skills; they had **resume building classes** and they helped me to build my resume to make it more attractive and job ready. (...) So I think **all of these really helped, but also the connection they had with World Skills**, because if not, (...) **it was impossible for me to know about this job because they didn't post it.** (...) So that's where I know how important it might be, **networking**. They contacted directly World Skills to know if they knew about someone that can go to an interview that was willing to go to an interview. (EN #17)

# Using settlement services

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## ➤ Successful employment experiences, especially among women

**“I got both positions through contacts that I made at World Skills during the (...) Empowering newcomer women program.” (EN #1)**

**“Once I got employment center, I was referred to a program that’s exclusively funded the by IRCC, (...), that supports visible minority newcomer women in terms of securing employment. So it provides them with training and the support to secure employment. So I joined that program and after joining that program, I took all my learnings into practice. I put it into action. And that’s how I got my first job in the same organization. (EN#21)**

**“I started as a temporary worker. I found the job, thanks to a project done by World Skills, which is called Empowering immigrant women to succeed in the Canadian labour market. I think that was the key for me to get this job, because before that, I didn’t have any idea about the resume, about how things are done here, interviews.”(EN #15)**

# Using settlement services

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- But also ambivalence on the usefulness of settlement services, especially among male participants

“I joined there is one community here called **World Skills**. I have joined them to find a job, but they have given up because they are not. There was more to focus the accounting profession and other type of profession, or they have never seen profession like me. So getting those jobs is like academic job is a totally different ballgame altogether.” (EN#6)



# Social Networks

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**General sense that networks are essential to get a job**

**Diverse mobilization of social networks**

- Family and friends: advice, referrals
- Ethnic and religious community: advice, information, referrals, social media, volunteering
- Professional networks: through settlement organizations (advice, referrals), volunteering, social media

**Combining social networks and social media**

# Social Networks

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**“What worked for me was knowing someone that was in the company that spoke a little bit about me and then I got to the interview. Because I feel that one of the hardest things here is that people look at your resume as if it would describe yourself. So that’s not quite what, it’s not true. And what I’ve seen a lot is it’s hard to get an interview, that’s the hardest part. Every interview I’ve done I was hired. But the difficulty was to get to the interview. So because they see the piece of paper, if they don’t see all that they want, but honestly, I mean, I can, and that’s one of the things that I think that helped me. (...) So, what helped me was to have someone that could deliver personally my resume and say he’s a good guy. You should talk to him. Right? While a lot of the other jobs that I applied before, I couldn’t even talk to anybody. I would just submit my resume and that’s it. I didn’t even hear back from them, you know, so.” (EN#12)**

# Internet and Social Media

## Nearly all participants used social media

- LinkedIn, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter
- Some used social media before arrival (STEM-field), others picked up after arrival (advice from settlement services, due to the pandemic)
- Rather than using settlement services, some participants preferred doing things “their own way”
  - Internet searches (Indeed, Kanata North, Glassdoor) and social media
- Some participants found social media very useful (especially among STEM professionals)
  - Networking, interviews
- But others less so...



# Internet and Social Media

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**6 participants** got jobs through LinkedIn, Indeed

- Networking with HR, recruiters, managers
- Interviews & offers (1 participant got job offer prior to arrival in Canada)

**“But I found that LinkedIn was a very powerful tool here, to get to make connections. So, I reached out to the recruiter of the company and there was a position that I was interested in, (...), I would like to work as a customer success manager, actually. So I did express my interest, they did not have an opening for a customer success manager, **but they really liked me.** So they said, how about you give a start as an on-boarding specialist? And as soon as we have an opportunity for a customer success manager, we can get you there. So **it was via LinkedIn. I reached out to the recruiter, the recruiter got me in touch with my manager and that's how I got employed.**” (EN #20)**

# Social media: variety of uses

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**LinkedIn: network building**, communicating with HR / recruiters

**“They connected with me via LinkedIn, and they saw my profile and they called me and then I got one phone interview and I got one interview with one HR screening interview, and then I got five back to back interviews with them. It was pretty well structured recruitment process.”** (EN#14)

**Facebook: advice & information** from FB groups (e.g., Brazilians in Canada), network building, FB ads:

**“I've used Facebook group called *Ladies who Work*. It's been really helpful, but it's more the jobs that are posted there are more of like an hourly paid jobs and it's not like full time permanent. So it's basically just entry level jobs. But yet it was really very good to see a community helping out.”** (EN#20)

**“But not Facebook for jobs, Facebook I was just only using for attending the webinars, which with the other events that are organized by such communities to give us guidance about getting jobs and employment opportunities.”** (EN#8)

# Social media: variety of uses

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**WhatsApp: advice, information & contacts** from social/ethnic networks

**“We have a very strong WhatsApp group where we welcome newcomers and give them all the tidbits.** Usually we connect them with people in the profession. So I was connected with a few HR professionals there and they helped me so that we were writing my resumé, allowing me to freelance in the organization or volunteer in the organization doing HR stuff.” (EN#1)

**“We use WhatsApp Brazilian groups or Facebook groups or whatever where they discuss the possibilities, what everyone is doing,** what the other's doing, all kinds of stuff. So we talk a lot. I read a lot of everybody's experience. I don't have a direct mentor, but I hear a lot of different perspectives from different people that took different paths.” (EN#18)

# Internet and Social media

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- But other participants did not like or did not find online services/social media useful

“I was applying a lot through LinkedIn, Indeed, and there were times when my resume was not even seen.” (EN#17)

“And I use a lot of Indeed, I find that there was fewer response.” (EN #3)

“And there was not much going on,(...) because everything was closed and stuff. So there's not much I could do. I tried to look for a job fair. There was no job fairs. **And then the online job fairs, they're horrible because you basically just get some information about a company.**” (EN#18)

# Discussion & conclusion

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## **Main influential factors**

- Social & professional networks, occupation (esp. STEM), language (and gender)

## **Pandemic challenges and impacts**

- Varied significantly between participants: time of arrival, gender, occupational field, social networks, language

## **Multiple strategies for labour market participation**

- **Significant differences in use & perceptions of settlement services**
  - **But little to no use of pre-arrival services**
- **Leveraging social networks & social media use**
  - Personal preferences
  - Pre-existing social media use/networks vs. using social media post-arrival
  - Presence and connectivity of ethnic/religious communities



# Acknowledgements



## Our research participants

## Our community partners

- Gatineau: SITO
- Ottawa: OLIP, World Skills

## Our research team

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- *Preston, V. PI, Belkhodja, C., Gabriel, C., Lochhead, C., Douglas, D., Dyson, D., Zikic, J., Hennebry, J., Shields, J., Veronis, L., Hynie, M., Mandell, N., Bhuyan, R., Ghosh, S. and collaborators. Migration and Resilience in Urban Canada - Immigration et résilience en milieu urbain (BMRC-IRMU): Discovering Strengths and Building Capacity, Partnership Grant. Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, SSHRC#896-2016-1004, 2,499,525, 2016-2021 \$.*
- For more information on the project, see: <http://bmrc-irmu.info.yorku.ca/>



# Thank you!

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