

A social resilience perspective on newcomer skilled workers' experiences of labour market integration: deploying gendered strategies in a pandemic context

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Research objectives

- Examine the role of gender and language in skilled workers' experiences in navigating the Ottawa-Gatineau labour market
 - Understand **skilled workers' strategies and challenges** at the intersection of **human capital and labour market** characteristics
 - Shed light on the **role of civil society organizations**, especially in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic context



Canada's Model of Immigration and Settlement: Best Practice?

Permanent residents enter Canada through a number of pathways & highly selective process

- Family stream
- Economic – the “best & brightest”
- Refugees & Humanitarian

Settlement Sector

- “A variety of non-profit organizations, including large multiservice agencies, as well as municipal services, community health clinics, post secondary institutions, and faith-based services” (Veronis 2019, 393)

Conceptual framework: Social Resilience

A perspective that

“stresses the transformative capacities of individuals, groups, and social institutions in dealing with challenges and simultaneously recognizes how power relations and institutional structures shape these capacities” (Preston et. al. 2021, 3)

Qualitative Methodology

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)

Personal semi-structured interviews and selection criteria

- **40 newcomers** (< 5 years) who arrived as **skilled workers** or through **family reunification**
- **Women/men** from diverse origins, **English/French** as first official language
- Variety of skilled occupations

Recruitment: World Skills (Ottawa) & SITO (Gatineau)

Analysis

- Coding in multiple stages and use of NVivo software

Participants' profile

25 English-speaking participants

- Immigration category: 15 skilled workers, 10 family reunification
- Gender: 13 women, 12 men
- Time of arrival: 13 before pandemic, 12 during pandemic

10 French-speaking participants

- Immigration category: 8 skilled workers, 2 family reunification
- Gender: 7 women, 3 men
- Time of arrival: 6 before pandemic, 4 during pandemic

Diverse origins: Africa (North, Sub-Saharan), Asia (East, South, Southeast), Eastern Europe, Latin America & Caribbean

- Many had international experience: studies & professional
 - A few spoke multiple languages, incl. English and French

Ottawa-Gatineau, Canada's national capital region

- **Interprovincial border**

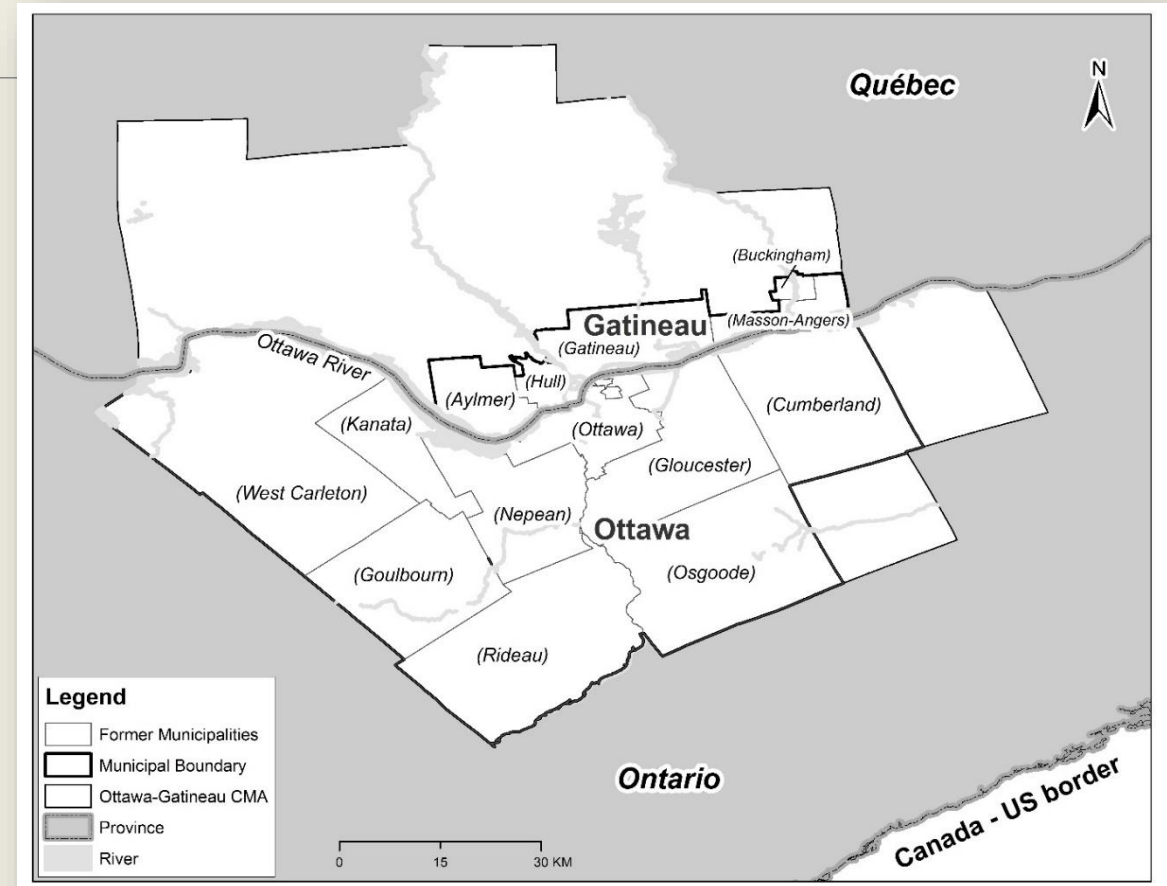
Region straddles two provinces – Ontario and Quebec

- **Linguistic geography: asymmetrical bilingualism**

“**Ottawa** is the larger of the two cities, is dominated by English speakers, and historically has received the lion's share of international migrants. In contrast **Gatineau** is about one-third the size of Ottawa, and French speakers are the numerical and social majority”
(Ray & Gilbert 2020, 1489)

- **Post-industrial city**

Most of its employment is found in the service sector, almost no manufacturing (Ray 2021)



Map of the Ottawa-Gatineau CMA

Immigrant narratives

Focus on settlement services, but participants used a variety of strategies for labour market participation

- 1. Positive experiences with settlement sector & employment services**
- 2. Mixed experiences with settlement sector & employment services**
- 3. Promising strategies for employment success**

1. Positive experiences

Advice: CV, interviewing, labour market information, volunteering

Training, workshops, programs

Access to job listings & job fairs

For networking & 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 man, during pandemic)

World Skills really **gave us all the information on the work environment**, on **how to network**, how to **make a CV**, how to write a **cover letter**. (FR#6 woman, before pandemic)

...I decided to get into in-touch with World Skills. They helped me **understand how the labour market works**, ... how my **CV needs a revamp according to the expectations here**, ... they also told me the **importance of LinkedIn**, ... so that's how I started building on it. (EN#20 woman, during pandemic)

World Skills, ontrack... Those ... organizations I was in touch with, but I got maximum. ... **the very fine advice from the ontrack people**. (...) And we had a **lot of discussion about my jobs** and everything and for **my preparation of my interviews**. So **they supported me very well.**" (EN#8 man, during pandemic)

2. Mixed experiences

- A number of participants expressed ambivalence on the usefulness and efficacy of settlement services, especially regarding employment

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 ... focus [on] the accounting profession and other type of profession, or they have never seen profession like me. So getting those jobs ..., like academic job, is a totally different ballgame altogether.” (EN#6 man, during pandemic)

I went to several organizations. For me, frankly maybe, that's me all...**the counselors talked to me, they are professional but they don't know me. They say the same things for everybody. That's a problem.** In the field of project [management], I worked a lot, I have a lot of experience ... So, I told SITO, Carrefour Jeunesse my experiences **but they don't give anything or advice** because they don't understand, they are nice but they don't help me **because they don't understand anything in this field.** ... They gave a lot of help on the papers, on the documents, explained how to live here. Yes, that's very good, thank you very much, **but to look for a job, that's another thing...** (FR#9 woman, during pandemic)

➤ **In part, the ambivalence seemed linked to the pandemic context**

“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 man, during pandemic)

“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 woman, before pandemic)

3. Promising strategies for employment success

- **Participating in specialized employment programs or workshops**
- **World Skills: “Empowering Visible Minority Newcomer Women”** to succeed in the Canadian labour market
 - 12 week, hands-on activities and training, mentorship/coaching, networking

...I was referred to a **program that’s exclusively funded 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, woman-during pandemic)

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 woman, before pandemic)

Other successful employment outcomes

... I started to look for a job. And then I **discovered SITO**, I participated in a **program that helps newcomers to prepare, to find a job**, because it's a little different from my country ... **There is the CV ... the way of interviews, the culture, it's not the same**, so it was interesting ... It was a 5-week program ... I was able to get a job. (FR#7 woman, before pandemic)

...I go to employment organization, such as **YMCA** and then they usually give great **suggestions with jobs and [searching]**, such as arranging the **CVs and cover letters**, and then **networking**, so they also do **good recommendation** and then they also **share current positions** with you. We went to (...) **Ottawa Chinese Community [Center]**. I took a **three months IT course** from them and then I **get the job reference** from the course. **So once you go through the course they are happy to find a job for you. They always share some positions, which is in the job market or maybe in their network. That's when they gave me a foundation of how IT field works in Canada. And then after three months, I had some skills of Canadian IT job market.** (STEM #2 man, before pandemic)

Discussion & conclusions

Settlement services have the potential of fostering newcomer resilience

- **Settlement services, especially employment programs were identified as making a difference by many participants**
 - Most participants relied on multiple strategies
 - Questions arise regarding the long-term viability of specific programs
- **Experiences differ as to the use and efficacy of settlement services**
 - Gender dynamics shaped experiences
 - Next steps: closer analysis of the impacts of the pandemic
 - Further research relating to types of occupation, country of origin, language

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Our research participants

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Our research team

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- For more information on the project, see: <http://bmrc-irmu.info.yorku.ca/>



Thank you!

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