

A Snapshot of Newcomers: Final Report

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Reviewed by Madeleine Wong

This report, funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, provided a descriptive summary of the challenges and problems encountered by newcomers who had been in Canada for five years or less, and were permanent residents or Canadian citizens. The objectives of the study were:

- 1) to seek information about how newcomers find out about settlement services;
- 2) to determine what settlement services are accessed;
- 3) to find out what sources of information other than formal settlement services newcomers access; and
- 4) to learn what newcomers think in retrospect would have facilitated their settlement in Canada.

A total of 248 newcomers were interviewed, of whom the majority (62%) were from Metropolitan Toronto. The remaining newcomers were interviewed in Ottawa, Windsor and Thunder Bay. Of those interviewed, 53.2 percent were males and 46.8 percent were females. The results of the survey and interviews show that a preponderance of newcomers demonstrated a heavy reliance on support networks of families and friends for access to social amenities—health, school, housing, as well as employment opportunities. Community and government agencies were relied on for access to language training, social assistance, legal aid, community services, and employment initiatives.

Most of the newcomers interviewed had completed the equivalent of high

school and had a working knowledge of English. There are some geographical variations with respect to the problems encountered by newcomers in Canada, but these were not significant. In Toronto, the major obstacle newcomers faced was securing housing, followed by the lack of Canadian experience as a requisite for securing employment, poor job market, language barriers, and discrimination and prejudice. In Ottawa, the number one problem newcomers faced were language barriers, followed by problems in securing housing and employment in a poor job market. In Windsor, housing problems, discrimination and prejudice were the major obstacles while, in Thunder Bay, employment problems, discrimination and prejudice were the major obstacles encountered by newcomers. In general, the biggest challenge facing newcomers, upon arrival in Canada, was securing employment. The most common helpful hint for adjustment to Canada suggested by the newcomers was learning English or French, followed by advice on job seeking, job opportunities and availability.

This report, as the title aptly points out, gives only a snapshot of the experiences of newcomers in Canada and, as such, some significant aspects of newcomer integration are overlooked. Even though the study indicated that the participants interviewed came from different source countries, the results of the interviews homogenized these newcomers and their experiences of integration. However, characteristics such as age, class, culture, and migration experiences, among other characteristics, can differ among

newcomers. Furthermore, although the authors maintain that it was not the intention of the study to capture the full range of behaviour, attitudes and emotions that might be indicative of different facets of integration, it should be noted that newcomers adapt to the host society in ways that reflect cultural values and norms, time of immigration, social and demographic characteristics, housing and labour market conditions, and the perceptions of the dominant society. In failing to elaborate on these characteristics and issues, this study lacks analytical significance.

A further limitation of this study is that the variables and results in the survey are not broken down by gender, thereby obscuring the different integration experiences of men and women newcomers. Finally, the fact that most of the participants in this study were recruited at Citizenship and Immigration Canada offices, where many were applying for Canadian citizenship, privileged a certain cohort (those who would be accessing Citizenship and Immigration) over other newcomers, for example, refugee claimants many of whose claims are still being processed. In addition, the fact that the interviews were conducted in English privileged a specific class of newcomers—the highly educated. Because of these limitations, I doubt whether the participants in the study constituted a representative sample of newcomers to Canada. I also have reservations about the claim that the information collected can possibly be an adequate representation of the experiences of newcomers. ■

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