Executive Summary: Settlement processes for new immigrants in Alberta[1]

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This research examines settlement supports offered by nonprofit and civil society organizations (NPOs/CSOs) for immigrants in Canada, particularly Alberta and western Canada. We engaged multiple methods to examine immigrant settlement support, including: (1) a systematic literature review examining immigrant settlement support in Canada; (2) a survey of immigrants in the Lethbridge area; (3) a content analysis of immigration discussions on Reddit; and (4) interviews with NPO/CSO personnel in small to mid-sized cities in western Canada.

The systematic literature review (led by PhD candidate Marietta) was the core of this research, analyzing 283 articles focused on Canadian immigration supports. The most common issues identified included systemic, cultural, and resource-related challenges. Specific topics frequently identified included: (1) employment challenges; (2) lack of recognition of prior credentials; and (3) cultural adaptation. The literature largely focused on major metropolitan areas, leaving a knowledge gap regarding small to mid-sized communities. Trans-disciplinary research identified more barriers to settlement than did intra or inter-disciplinary work, suggesting that engaging NPOs/CSOs with academic researchers may provide more comprehensive results.

Our small-scale survey of local immigrants (N = 77; team effort) indicated that participants came to Lethbridge primarily because of friends and family. The key challenges include: (1) employment; (2) finances; (3) transportation; and (4) loneliness. Reluctance to participate may suggest a general lack of trust in external organizations.

 The content analysis (led by MSc candidate Koshuta) examined 161 online discussion posts made on the subreddit "*What do you wish you knew before you migrated or when you were thinking about migrating to Canada?*" Individuals were seeking knowledge and support in the following areas: (1) economic; (2) technological; (3) social; (4) weather and climate; and (5) employment. These may be areas where NPOs/CSOs should provide further information.

 Finally, interviews (led by Dr. Basil) were conducted with NPO/CSO personnel. First, a focus group (3 participants) refined the interview guide. Results from 7 interviews revealed the following themes: (1) rigid policies make it difficult to help when needed; (2) foreign credentials are often devalued, and immigrants are often under-employed; (3) cultural barriers pose a challenge; (4) operational resource constraints make service delivery difficult and limit capacity; and (5) NPOs/CSOs desire greater collaboration among immigrant-serving organizations. Though a survey was initially intended for this group, we switched to interviews due to a low survey response rate.

A smooth immigrant settlement process benefits both immigrants and the communities in which they settle. Smooth settlement allows immigrants to become satisfied, participative members of the community more quickly. These results suggest that greater government flexibility, and more creative sector collaborations would benefit immigrant settlement efforts. This research also facilitated the attainment of a SSHRC grant that is seeking to address these issues through a community-based participatory social marketing effort.

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[1] PhD Candidate Janelle Marietta and MSc Candidate Makayla Koshuta played integral roles that significantly contributed to this research. References to "we" and "team" refer to Basil, Marietta, and Koshuta.