

OCSI

Ontario Council of Agencies
Serving Immigrants

MAKING ONTARIO HOME 2012

A study of settlement and integration
services for immigrants and refugees



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2008, OCASI – Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants undertook a strategic planning exercise to identify and set policy and program priorities. A key strategic priority that emerged and was subsequently adopted by the Council was the need to build its research capacity as part of its evidence-informed planning for sector capacity building and policy development. Making Ontario Home (MOH) was born out of this strategic imperative.

MOH is the first province-wide study in Ontario focused on immigrant and refugee use of settlement and integration services, and is one of the largest surveys of this nature of immigrants and refugees ever undertaken in Ontario. This study addresses the service use, satisfaction, and challenges of immigrants (including refugees, refugee claimants, migrant workers, and those without legal immigration status). Its purpose is to develop a deeper understanding of which immigrants and refugee needs are being met and how; which groups are well served and why; why do some newcomers not use settlement services; and how the settlement needs of immigrants and refugees across the province may best be served. It is the most comprehensive description to date of those who use settlement and integration services.

settlement and integration services. The types of settlement and integration supports examined included 1) language training programs and services, 2) employment and skills training programs and services, and 3) general settlement and integration services.

- 2) **A series of small focus group discussions and interviews** with service providers and with key groups of immigrants. The service providers shared insights based on their experiences about immigrants' needs and service use. Focus groups were also held with four specific populations (French-speaking, without legal immigration status, Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgender-Intersex (LGBTI), and immigrants with disabilities), selected to provide a deeper understanding of the specific needs of those who may not be well-represented in the survey.

POLICY AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS: For an analysis of the policy and practice implications of this study, please refer to OCASI's policy analysis document, which can be found at www.ocasi.org.

There were 2,530 respondents whose surveys were sufficiently complete for data analysis, with another 909 surveys too incomplete for analysis.

The study collected information in two ways:

- 1) **An online survey** available from January to April 2011, accessible in 11 languages, and open to all immigrants currently above the age of 18 years living in Ontario (including refugees, refugee claimants, migrant workers, and those without legal immigration status), who had arrived in Canada between 2000 and 2010. The survey contained three categories of questions: demographic information; migration history; and the need for, use of, and satisfaction with

More women (68%) than men (32%) responded. One-third, or 31.2%, of survey respondents arrived in Canada between 2000 and 2005, and 68.8% arrived between 2006 and 2010.

The language that was reported as most frequently spoken at home was English (18%). To a lesser extent, Spanish (13.8%), Arabic (8.6%), Mandarin (8.6%), and Tamil (4.5%) were reported as most frequently spoken at home.

A total of 158 countries were represented in the survey. The top five countries of birth in this study were: China (11.4%), India (9.5%), Colombia (7.6%), Sri Lanka (4.2%), and Pakistan (3.8%). People born on the continent of Africa (10.1%) and in the region of the Middle East¹ (10.0%) also represented about one-fifth of survey respondents².

Thirty-five percent of the respondents reported arriving as independent immigrants³, 31% as family class immigrants, 17.6% as refugee or refugee claimants, and 5.3% as international students. Two-thirds of the respondents had come with post-secondary education.

Almost one-third (32.2%) of the respondents indicated that they were not currently employed. They included 29.2% who were unemployed and looking for work and 3% who were not looking for work⁴.

The vast majority of respondents (85.6%) reported Ontario as their first province of settlement, and almost as many (80.5%) still lived in their first city of residence. For the 19.5% who had moved from their first city of residence, the top two reasons were to find better employment (32%) and to find affordable housing (27.4%).

More than 83% of the respondents had used one or more settlement support services. This included 39.3% who had used only one type of service, 27.4% who had used two types of services, and 16.3% who had used all three types of services. In addition:

- 54.7% used language training programs and services;
- 50% reported using employment and skills training programs and services; and
- 38.4% used general settlement and integration services.

REPRESENTATION: This survey is the most comprehensive description to date of immigrants and refugees who use settlement and integration services and programs. However, it was not designed to collect data from a representative sample of all immigrants and refugees who arrived in Ontario from 2000 to 2010. There were no appropriate sample frames or large sums of funds available to recruit such a sample. As a result, a targeted outreach strategy was used to reach a wide variety of immigrants and refugees. It must therefore be emphasized that the sample is not fully representative of immigrants and refugees in Ontario.

There were 16.9% of survey respondents who reported not having used any type of support services. The top reasons respondents gave for not accessing services were: not needing assistance (35%); not knowing about the availability of services (29.9%); and needs being met before turning to a service provider (10.7%).

The top four settlement and integration challenges reported by respondents were: finding employment (61.8%); limited English language skills (32.7%); social isolation (26.5%); and finding housing (23.4%).

A significant number of immigrants and refugees accessed settlement and integration services within their first year of arrival. For those accessing employment and skills training programs and services, 53.8% used them in their first year. For those accessing language training programs and services, 67% used them in their first year. And finally, 68.9% of those who reported accessing general settlement and integration services did so in their first year.

1 Bahrain, Cyprus, Gaza Strip, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, West Bank, and Yemen (African and Middle Eastern countries are excluded).

2 The analysis of responses based on country of birth includes the region of the Middle East and the continent of Africa for practical reasons. Respondent numbers from these areas were too small to analyze by country, but were significant when aggregated.

3 Independent immigrants include primary applicants and their dependents arriving through the Federal Skilled Worker Program, the Provincial Nominee Programs and the Canadian Experience Class.

4 An important factor to consider in regards to the unemployment rate is that almost a quarter of all respondents (22.1%) arrived in 2010.

Key Findings

- 1) Employment was the highest concern for immigrants and refugees:
 - Nearly two thirds (61.8%) of the respondents identified employment as their most important concern;
 - Respondents in smaller towns reported more success finding jobs;
 - For employment and skills training programs and services, immigrant serving agencies were the main access point, except for youth employment services which were most often accessed at employment centres;
 - Those arriving since 2005 were more satisfied with bridge training programs for regulated professions or trades than those who had arrived before 2005.

- 2) Language training programs and services rated particularly highly for content and delivery, and limited English language skills were identified as the second greatest settlement challenge:
 - 70% or more of those who used the various language training programs and services rated them as satisfactory or very satisfactory, with the exception of French as a Second Language (50%);
 - Over 70% of those who used language training programs and services reported being satisfied with the six aspects of service delivery that were rated;
 - Nearly one third (32.7%) identified limited English language skills as a challenge;
 - For language training programs and services, immigrant serving agencies, schools, colleges and universities, and public libraries were all important locations of access.

- 3) Counseling and advice was the most highly used general settlement service:
 - 60.7% of those who used general settlement and integration services did so to access counseling and advice.

- 4) More than 83% of respondents had used one or more settlement support services:
 - 54.7% reported using language training programs and services;
 - 50% used employment and skills training programs and services;
 - 38.4% used general settlement and integration services.

- 5) There was a high degree of satisfaction with service delivery for all three program and service areas:
 - Rated very highly (by over 78% of respondents) for having a welcoming environment;
 - Rated quite highly (by over 68% of respondents) on staff understanding of their needs and quality of information.

- 6) Period of arrival correlated with significant differences in use of and satisfaction with services:
 - Compared to those arriving between 2000 and 2005, respondents arriving in the period 2006 to 2010 were more likely to have used services, more likely to have accessed them within their first year, and were significantly more satisfied specifically with LINC and bridge training programs for regulated professions or trades.

- 7) Those with higher levels of education were just as likely to use settlement and integration services:
 - There were no significant differences in the likelihood to use employment, language or general settlement and integration services based on educational levels;
 - However, those with higher levels of education were more likely to access employment and skills training programs and services in their first year of arrival.

- 8) No knowledge of settlement and integration services was a main reason for non-use of services:
 - For the 16.9% of respondents who had never used settlement and integration services, 29.9% had not used services because they were unaware of their existence.
- 9) For all three categories of services, transportation and distance to services were most often reported as a problem in accessing services.
 - In particular, of those accessing general settlement and integration services, 22.8% reported not having transportation as a challenge and 16.6% reported the services were too far from home;
 - Respondents from the Toronto area, and large and medium sized urban areas were more likely to identify distance to services as a problem.
- 10) Services for immigrants living with disabilities need to be better coordinated:
 - A focus group with immigrants living with physical disabilities found a significant need for greater coordination of services between immigrant serving agencies and organizations that provide services and supports to individuals living with disabilities, to ensure that this group's needs are being met.