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RSC SRC

# Royal Society of Canada Report on COVID-19 and Immigration: Vulnerabilities Revealed and Recommendations for the Future

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# Presentations Today

- The Impact of COVID-19 on Immigrants, Immigration Policy and Programs
- Case Studies of Vulnerable Groups and Essential Workers: Agricultural Workers, Health Care Workers, and International Students
- The Impact of COVID-19 on Public Attitudes toward Immigrants
- The Impact of COVID-19 on Immigrant and Refugee Newcomers and Settlement Sector: Present Insights and Future Considerations

# The Impact of COVID-19 on Immigrants, Immigration Policy and Programs

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# Impact of COVID on Migrants: Admissions

- Border closures resulted in significant decrease in admissions:
  - All classes of permanent entries (economic, family, refugee)
  - All temporary entries (TFW, IMP, int'l students, asylum seekers)
- Exemption for essential temporary workers (e.g. agriculture and health workers), international students, and a few urgent resettled refugees
- Early exemption for asylum seekers, then revoked
- Only those already in Canada with Canadian experience as high skilled TFWs or international students being processed for permanent residency

# Implications

- Short and long term:
  - Labour market
  - Economic growth
  - Demographics
  - Family reunification
  - Humanitarian objectives
  - Colleges and universities
  - Regionalization
  - Francophone immigration
  - Particular sectors

# Impact of COVID-19 on Recent Migrants and Immigrants: More at Risk

- Lower incomes
- Denser neighbourhoods
- More crowded housing
- More dependent on public transit
- Less access to green space
- Riskier job and working conditions

# Impact of COVID-19 on Recent Migrants and Immigrants: Employment

- Recent immigrants lost their jobs more than Canadian born or longer term immigrants:
  - More concentrated in low wage jobs in affected sectors
  - Little opportunity for working at home
  - Shorter job tenure
  - Over-represented in precarious work
- Recent immigrants transitioned back to employment less than Canadian-born in early recovery
- These work interruptions will likely increase family earnings inequality, at least during the pandemic and economic recovery

# COVID Shone a Light on Migrants in the Labour Force

- Differential impact on migrant/racialized groups/women/regions/sectors
- Essential work does not always require high human capital
- Canada is dependent on TFWs and immigrants to do essential work
- Essential workers are often undervalued, under-employed; face increased risks/vulnerabilities; yet have inadequate protections
- Skilled immigrants in regulated professions face barriers to practice, even to do essential work

# Other COVID Related Learnings

- Many high human capital jobs can be done remotely from “home” (home could be abroad)
- Studies can be done remotely from abroad
- Need workers on the ground across labour market continuum, not just at high end
- Need steady supply of workers who will bring security to food, healthcare, and other sectors

# New Levels Announced: October 30, 2020

- Government announced increased levels for 2021-2024 in all immigration categories
- No announcement regarding policy or program changes to ensure new levels are met

# Policy Recommendations

## 1. Ensure increased targets for immigration are met:

- Ensure adequate resources and simplified procedures abroad and in Canada to ensure expeditious processing of increased applications in **all** immigration classes and temporary entrant categories to satisfy targets, long and short-term objectives and to respond to pent-up demand (economic, family, and refugee including GARs, PSRs, and refugee claimants)
- Review and expand criteria for immigration admission under **all** programs and pilots to respond to longer term demographic and regional needs, and to broader labour market needs beyond those requiring high human capital
- Select more applicants as permanent residents with their families from the outset, and develop more pathways to permanent residence for temporary workers at all points of labour market continuum, especially in essential occupations

# ... Policy Recommendations

## 2. Address potential scarring:

- Develop training and adjustment programs to prevent and counter a potential scarring effect for immigrants who have lost their jobs or enter Canada during an economic downturn
- Develop social initiatives for immigrant children who have been disadvantaged by disruptions in their education because of school closures or difficulties in online learning, in order to help them catch up and contribute effectively to the labour market as they grow older

# ... Policy Recommendations

## 3. Provide Protections for Temporary Entrants:

- Issue provisional temporary work permits to workers abroad who can work remotely until they can travel
- Expand workplace and housing protections for TFWs and enforce proactively to ensure employer compliance
- Introduce sector/regional/open permits not just employer-specific ones to reduce vulnerabilities
- Provide access to federally funded information and settlement services for temporary workers, refugee claimants, international students and their families

# Case Studies of Vulnerable Groups and Essential Workers: Agricultural Workers, Health Care Workers, and International Students

Margaret Walton-Roberts  
Wilfrid Laurier University



# The Pandemic Revealed Truths about Canadian Immigration and Society

- Health and economic crisis differentially impact racialized and marginalized communities
- Temporary agricultural workers are vital for Canadian food security
- Racialized immigrant women are overrepresented in key front line health care roles
- International students are highly vulnerable to pandemic related economic and mobility disruptions

# Temporary Agricultural Workers

- 2019 TFW = 20% agricultural sector, 60% of all TFWP in Canada
- Canada's food security threatened: Delays in work permit processing, recruitment barriers
- Pandemic exposes Canada's dependence on cheap foreign labour and the long-standing problem of poor working conditions
- \$58.6 million health and safety investment to protect TFWs announced for increased inspections, improving living quarters and emergency housing, PPE, and sanitary stations

# Front Line Health Care Workers

- 50% of LTC caregivers in some provinces are immigrants. 45% of the most recent immigrants in LTC have at least a bachelor's degree (Turcotte & Savage, 2020)
- Of all women infected with COVID-19 in Ontario, over 1/3 were health care workers, and ½ of those are immigrants and refugees (Guttman et al., 2020)
- Foreign-educated immigrants are over-represented in those with health-related education whose skills are being under-utilized (Hou & Schimmele, 2020)

# International Students

- 2019: there were more than 642,000 international students in Canada, with a 185% increase since 2010. Canada 3<sup>rd</sup> globally
- June 2020: 26% reported losing their primary source of income and 34% reported finding it difficult to afford rent or utilities (WES, 2020)
- Some flexibility in permit renewal for those in Canada, but disruptions from border closures immense
- Exposes vulnerability of PSE: projected losses of \$377 million to \$3.4 billion during 2020-2021 academic year (Stats Canada, 2020)

# Selected Recommendations

- Improve workplace protections and expand viable pathways for PR and TFWs
- Improve bridging and career pathways for immigrants in healthcare, and enhance transparency in regulatory processes
  - Develop a career laddering approach that allows workplace-based pathways for under-employed immigrant professionals towards both licensed/certified roles and non-licensed roles
  - Develop bridge training programs with on-site work experience and mentorship components leading to licensure in regulated occupations
  - Develop transitional limited licenses with pathway to full licensure
- Make post-graduate work permits renewable so former students can complete requirements for Permanent Residency (PR) in the COVID-19 job market; Remove time-limits and industry restrictions on work

# The Impact of COVID-19 on Public Attitudes Toward Immigrants

Leah Hamilton  
Mount Royal University



# Pre-COVID-19: Favourable Attitudes

- Canadians have some of the most positive attitudes toward immigrants and immigration in the world
  - Canada ranked as most accepting country for immigrants (Gallup's Migrant Acceptance Index, 2019)
  - Canadians saw immigrants as making Canada stronger because of their work and talent (Pew Research Center, 2018)
- These attitudes are not uniformly positive
  - Differences exist as a function of personal characteristics of responders and the immigrant groups in question

# Pre-COVID-19: Attitudes Have Varied Over Time

- Attitudes toward refugees and refugee claimants have varied considerably over time, depending on context
  - e.g., Peak of Trudeau government's 2015-2016 welcome for Syrian refugees vs. subsequent years
- Long history of exclusion and stereotyping of Asian immigrants

# During COVID-19: Vulnerabilities Revealed

- Public opinion surveys on Canadians' attitudes toward immigrants and immigration have revealed conflicting findings
- Some results suggest Canadians have become even more supportive of immigrants and refugees (Environics, 2020)
- Most Canadians agree that immigrants will help Canada's long-term economic recovery (Jedwab, 2020)
- Other results suggest Canadians may not be welcoming to immigrants (Newbold, 2020)
  - 20% say their attitudes have hardened
  - Majority say number of new immigrants should be reduced

# ... During COVID-19: Vulnerabilities Revealed

- COVID-19 may create conditions that lead certain people to hold more negative attitudes
  - Heightened sense of threat to personal health (Faulkner et al., 2004)
  - Increased feelings of economic threat (e.g., perceived competition for access to jobs; Esses et al., 2020)
  - Increased feelings of cultural threat
  - Rise in authoritarian leaders and increase in citizens' own authoritarian tendencies (Asbrock & Fritsche, 2013)
- Immigration "debates" may be out of the public eye, and attitudes toward immigrants may remain favourable (Dennison & Geddes, 2020)

# During COVID-19: Experiences of Racism

- Clear evidence of “CoronaRacism” (IOM, 2020)
- Immigrants more likely (42%) than the Canadian-born population (9%) to indicate they feared COVID-19 related stigmatization (Statistics Canada, 2020)
- Asian and Black respondents perceive more race-based harassment and attacks (Statistics Canada, 2020)
- 30% of Canadians of Chinese ethnicity have been personally threatened or intimidated (Korzinski, 2020)

# Recommendations - Overview

- Two-pronged approach
  1. Develop a robust data collection and dissemination plan
  2. Proactively improve public attitudes while reducing racism

# Recommendations – Collect and Disseminate Data

- Monitor Canadians' attitudes using a longitudinal, multi-method approach
  - During ups and downs of pandemic and post-pandemic recovery
  - Assess factors that may affect public attitudes (e.g., perceptions of threat, authoritarianism)
- Examine immigrants' perceptions of public attitudes, belongingness and experiences of racism
  - Careful attention should be paid to individuals of Chinese ethnicity
- Collect, monitor, interpret, and share robust data on COVID-19 testing, infection, and hospitalization rates, systematically examining the role of ethnicity, gender, immigration status, and other vulnerabilities
  - Communicate about structural inequities that contribute to these disparities
  - Remain vigilant about fake news

# Recommendations – Improve Public Attitudes Proactively

- Important for politicians to frame immigration in terms of long-term benefits to Canada
- Highlight essential role immigrants have played in Canada's COVID-19 response
- Balance economic arguments with a discussion of our humanitarian commitments
- Fund indirect settlement programs that foster positive relations between immigrants and host community members
  - Consider the role of virtual contact

# The Impact of COVID-19 on Immigrant and Refugee Newcomers and the Settlement Sector: Present Insights and Future Considerations

Chris Friesen  
CISSA-ACSEI and Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia



# Newcomer Vulnerabilities

- Delayed settlement and integration processes – differential impact determined by English or French fluency, knowledge, familiarity, and access to technology
- Inequitable access to up-to-date health advisories and information on emergency income supports available
- Heightened awareness, needs and impact related to poverty among some immigrant and refugee families
- Increased racism and racist attacks, particularly anti-Asian and Black populations – increased their feelings of vulnerability

## ... Newcomer Vulnerabilities

- A rise in family violence and domestic abuse
- Deteriorating mental health – feelings of social isolation, loneliness, and depression
- Disproportionate challenges for single parents with multiple children at home

# Settlement Sector – Service Provider Vulnerabilities

- Suspended services temporarily and then rapidly morphed to hybrid delivery models
- Inadequate or outdated technology tools and infrastructure as well as inconsistent staff digital literacy skills
- Challenges delivering RAP essential services and settlement case management programs to vulnerable, at risk newcomer families (e.g., escort accompaniments, home visits)
- Initially accessing PPE for staff and some clients

## ... Settlement Sector – Service Provider Vulnerabilities

- Staff training and support to manage working from home while dealing with their own competing demands
- Ensuring security and privacy of client information or sufficient band width for various software conferencing platforms while working from home
- Managing staff productively, morale and work-life balance/boundaries
- Lack of skills/capacity to respond to increased racism and domestic violence incidences

# ... Settlement Sector – Service Provider Vulnerabilities

- Resumption of some in-person services while meeting the demands of converting offices and classroom spaces to meet local public health guidelines in addition to creating agency safety plans and protocols
- Lower PR landings in 2020 and likely 2021 – does this mean a future drop in IRCC national settlement funding allocations beginning 2022?
- Higher percentage of PR landings who were former TR's and an inability to support TR service gaps and growing needs (e.g., IRCC restrictive settlement program eligibility)
- Will future hybrid service delivery approach impact the need for physical office space?

# Recommendations

- Government of Canada
  - With the massive confusion experienced by non-English and French speaking newcomers trying to access various F-P-T COVID emergency supports, develop pilots and evaluate universal basic income model
- IRCC
  - Develop with the sector a multi-dimensional national plan to support at-risk newcomer populations with low digital literacy and no access to technology
  - Expand IRCC program eligibility to include temporary residents (e.g., refugee claimants, international students, migrant workers)

# ... Recommendations

- IRCC
  - Establish a national settlement trauma informed clinical mental health program that specifically targets refugee newcomers within their first five years in Canada
  - Build upon and expand greater flexibility within IRCC funding agreements with a greater focus on immigrant outcomes
  - Develop with the sector a national sector capacity building approach including training and tools to increase settlement staff ability to appropriately support newcomers experiencing racism, family and domestic violence
  - Create a national technology capital replacement budget to ensure current service providers have the capacity to continue and expand a hybrid service delivery approach post-COVID

# Full Report Will Be Available Early in the New Year

