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# NAVIGATING INTEGRATION: A LITERATURE REVIEW ADDRESSING BARRIERS AND INEQUITIES IN SETTLEMENT SERVICES FOR RACIALIZED NEWCOMERS IN CANADA

FATMATA KAMARA graduated in 2017 with a Master of Public Health from the École des Hautes Études en Santé Publique (EHESP) and a Master of Social Science Research in Health from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHES) in France. She is currently a Project Coordinator and Researcher at the Association for Canadian Studies, where she manages and contributes to projects focused on immigration, settlement and public health.

In 2022, 437,000 permanent residents settled in Canada. As part of the Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) Immigration Levels Plan, that number is set to reach 500,000 in 2026 with the expectation that these newcomers will be contributing to Canada's economic growth (IRCC, 2023). IRCC's Settlement Program is important in supporting the successful integration of newcomers by providing a wide range of services including assistance with housing, employment, language training as well as other essential services to help newcomers feel welcome in Canada. In addition to the growing number of newcomers arriving in Canada, the demographics of these newcomers are becoming increasingly diverse and settlement services need to work to be able to serve the variety of needs of these newcomers.<sup>1</sup>

While IRCC-funded settlement services are key in facilitating the smooth transition of newcomers, there remain numerous barriers to accessing them. Immigrants and refugees with permanent resident (PR) status and their immediate family

members are eligible for settlement services, whereas temporary residents and refugee claimants are excluded.<sup>2</sup> As refugees have the highest usage of settlement services, specifically excluding refugee claimants from receiving support can exacerbate their settlement issues and needs.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, when these individuals eventually obtain Canadian citizenship, they no longer have access to these services. Moreover, settlement service options are greatly limited in smaller and rural communities information regarding services are often only available in English and French and various studies have reported on the difficulties newcomers have accessing health care and mental health services.<sup>4</sup>

For racialized newcomers, barriers to accessing settlement services are often multiplied. Discrimination, systemic inequities, and cultural barriers compound newcomers' struggles and underscores the need for a better understanding of the complexities of their settlement experience.<sup>5</sup> According to IRCC, the Settlement Program has been successful in its

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1 Ashton et al., 2018

2 Praznik & Shields, 2018.

3 Ibid.

4 E.g. Sanmartin and Ross 2006; Ashton et al., 2018.

5 Este, Lorenzetti, and Sato 2018; Ferrer 2018; Guruge et al. 2010; Martinez-Brawley and Zorita 2011.

stated goal of helping newcomers integrate, as findings from the Labour Force Survey show that the “employment rates for immigrants are generally consistent with the national average”.<sup>6</sup> However, these statistics fail to account for the reality that many racialized newcomers are underemployed or forced into survival jobs or gig work in order to support themselves and their families.<sup>7</sup> In Ng & Gagnon’s study on Employment Gaps for Racialized Groups and Immigrants in Canada, immigrants from Asia, Latin America, and Africa have higher unemployment rates than native-born Canadians. The study shows that racialized immigrants who have been in Canada for fewer than five years are overrepresented in low paying industries such as hospitality, warehousing and manufacturing. Furthermore, racialized newcomers working primarily as temporary foreign workers in the agricultural sector face specific vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities are exacerbated by factors such as geographic isolation and dependence on employers, which limit their ability to assert their rights and report grievances.

For racialized newcomers, barriers to accessing settlement services are often multiplied. Discrimination, systemic inequities, and cultural barriers compound newcomers’ struggles and underscore the need for a better understanding of the complexities of their settlement experience.<sup>8</sup> According to IRCC, the Settlement Program has been successful in its stated goal of helping newcomers integrate, as findings from the Labour Force Survey show that the “employment rates for immigrants are generally consistent with the national average”.<sup>9</sup> However, these statistics fail to account for the reality that many racialized newcomers are underemployed or forced into survival jobs or gig work in order to support themselves and their families.<sup>10</sup>

In Ng & Gagnon’s study on Employment Gaps for Racialized Groups and Immigrants in Canada, immigrants from Asia, Latin America, and Africa have higher unemployment rates than native-born Canadians. The study shows that racialized immigrants who have been in Canada for fewer than five

years are overrepresented in low-paying industries such as hospitality, warehousing, and manufacturing. Furthermore, as of 2021, around one-quarter of all workers in agriculture were temporary foreign workers.<sup>11</sup> Many of these newcomers are from countries like Mexico, Guatemala, and Jamaica and these workers often face specific vulnerabilities such as geographic isolation and heavy dependence on their employers, which can limit their ability to assert their rights and report any issues.<sup>12</sup> As Branker (2017) explains, the way immigrant human capital is valued in government policy, differs from how it is perceived and by employers in the labor market. This disparity often leads to poor employment outcomes for many immigrants.

Research has highlighted the difficulties faced by groups such as Syrian refugees, who struggle with language barriers and credential recognition, impeding their employment opportunities.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, discriminatory practices in the labor market affect racial and gender equality in employment.<sup>14</sup> The elusive requirement for “Canadian experience” serves as a further barrier which prevents skilled immigrants and refugees from utilizing their qualifications.<sup>15</sup> Canadian experience refers to having prior work experience in Canada, which employers often consider as a key requirement for candidates in order to ensure new hires are a fit for the Canadian workplace. However, this requirement is a barrier for newcomers as it undervalues foreign credentials and experience which can lead to prolonged job searches, underemployment, and financial instability for newcomers.<sup>16</sup> The Ontario Human Rights Commission emphasizes that requiring Canadian experience can be discriminatory unless it is a proven job requirement.<sup>17</sup>

Thomas (2021) expands on this discussion by exploring the employment experiences of newcomers in mid-sized Canadian cities, revealing that systemic barriers and subtle forms of racism are pervasive. Thomas argues for equitable assessment of international credentials and stresses the importance of pre-arrival information, and funding for anti-racist programs to mitigate biases against foreign-born

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6 Whalen, 2019.

7 Ng & Gagnon, 2020.

8 Este, Lorenzetti, and Sato 2018; Ferrer 2018; Guruge et al. 2010; Martinez-Brawley and Zorita 2011.

9 Whalen, 2019.

10 Ng & Gagnon, 2020.

11 Statistics Canada, 2022.

12 Statistics Canada, 2022.

13 Boss et al., 2022.

14 Branker, 2017; Thomas, 2021.

15 Kosny et al., 2020.

16 Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2023.

17 Ibid.

employees.<sup>18</sup> Racialized refugees in particular experience significant downward mobility and less job security compared to their pre-displacement employment<sup>19</sup>, and they also face a number of unique barriers including lower levels of proficiency in the host country's language.

Employment is not only a key outcome for resettlement but also crucial for the mental health and integration of refugees into their host country.<sup>20</sup> Racism and discrimination impede the economic integration of newcomers and also creates barriers to accessing housing and education. This leads to socio-economic disadvantages and contributes to broader cycles of poverty and exclusion. According to Berry and Hou (2016), discrimination can lead to lower levels of life satisfaction and hinder active engagement with their new community which in-turn impacts their mental health. Experiences of racism and discrimination are linked to adverse health outcomes, including stress, depression, and engagement in unhealthy behaviors, as highlighted in studies by Naidu et al. (2023) and Nakhaie & Wijesingha (2015). The challenges faced by specific subgroups of newcomers and refugees, further emphasize the importance of targeted programs and interventions. Francis and Yan (2016) highlight the difficulties faced by young African newcomers in accessing formal support services due to limited funding and cultural barriers. Similarly, Muszynski and Gassim (2014) bring attention to the impact of racism on the health and well-being of refugees, emphasizing the need for policy changes to address systemic inequalities.

There is also evidence that racialized newcomers face systemic discrimination in various public service sectors, including health care. Issues such as language barriers, denial of service, and cultural insensitivity, discussed by Pollock et al. (2011), not only limit their access to essential services but also increase their chances of further discrimination and marginalization. Ratnayake et al. (2022) highlight the role of settlement service organizations in facilitating access to healthcare for immigrants. However, disparities in funding and service provision pose challenges, which calls for an increase in collaborative efforts between settlement agencies and health systems to address the health needs of immigrant populations effectively. Furthermore, racism influences social relationships and family dynamics among immigrants. For instance, Lorenzetti et al. (2023) show how the stress of racial discrimination impacts family wellness and the personal well-being of immigrant men, affecting their social roles and family interactions.

Mackay-Brown and Ashton (2021) criticize the one-size-fits-all approach to settlement services, arguing that such models often fail to consider the dynamic and individualized

nature of integration, particularly the profound impact of discrimination and racism. They explain that integration models should more explicitly address these issues and recognize the responsibility of the receiving society and community in creating an environment of acceptance. However, as integration needs and expectations are highly location specific, the requirements for successful integration will vary across different communities. Jedwab (2006) advocates for a more personalized approach to integration, suggesting that it should be continuously redefined to meet the individual needs and circumstances of each newcomer. This perspective challenges the current model and emphasizes that ongoing adjustment is required for settlement programs and services to be successful.

It is a necessity to understand both the strengths and weaknesses of current settlement services in order to identify what these organizations are doing effectively to combat discrimination and racism and where they can improve. Understanding the gaps in knowledge and service provision for racialized newcomers will allow settlement services to develop targeted interventions that address specific needs and challenges.

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18 Ibid.

19 Krahn et al., 2000; Picot et al., 2019.

20 IRCC, 2019b.

# RETHINKING REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN CANADA: ADDRESSING DISPARITIES AND UPHOLDING INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS

**HUMAIRA JALEEL** is the Founder and Executive Director of Healthy Muslim Families, a community organization dedicated to assisting newcomers by providing educational resources and services designed to strengthen and empower families as they navigate the challenges of establishing a new life in a different country.

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Canada's refugee resettlement process, though reflective of its commitment to human rights and multiculturalism, reveals significant disparities based on racial and national backgrounds. This article critically examines Canada's approach, particularly in the context of the contrasting treatment between Ukrainian refugees and those from Africa and the Middle East. Drawing insights from studies and organizations like Healthy Muslim Families, it highlights systemic discrimination in housing and employment faced by refugees. The article advocates for a more equitable, inclusive resettlement framework that aligns with Canada's international obligations, ensuring all refugees receive equal and fair treatment.

## RETHINKING REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN CANADA: ADDRESSING DISPARITIES AND UPHOLDING INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS

As a country that prides itself on a multicultural identity and a commitment to human rights, Canada's approach to refugee resettlement is a testament to these values. Yet, beneath the surface, the resettlement process reveals significant discrepancies that challenge these ideals, particularly when viewed through the lens of racial or national backgrounds. This article delves deep into the complex dynamics of refugee resettlement in Canada, enriched by insights from pivotal studies and service providers such as *Healthy Muslim Families*. The article aims to highlight the discrimination faced by refugees from diverse origins and propose an enhanced framework that better aligns with Canada's international obligations.

## CANADA'S RESETTLEMENT FRAMEWORK AND INTERNATIONAL LAW

Resettlement involves the organized transfer of refugees from the country where they have sought asylum to another country that has agreed to admit them, grant them permanent residency, and eventually offer them the opportunity to obtain citizenship. As a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, Canada commits to protecting refugees from persecution, an obligation rooted in both international law and Canadian values. However, the application of these principles has been inconsistent, often varying significantly based on the refugees' country of origin, revealing a selective approach to humanitarianism.

Resettlement starts with UNHCR coordinating with resettlement countries like Canada to identify refugees most at risk and facilitate their safe transfer. To be selected for

resettlement, refugees must be registered with UNHCR or state authorities in their asylum countries. Canadian visa officers then assess the referred refugees to determine their resettlement needs and conduct thorough medical, criminal, and security screenings. Once admitted, resettled refugees gain permanent resident status in Canada and, after meeting residency requirements, can apply for Canadian citizenship.

In Canada, refugees referred for resettlement by the UNHCR are typically admitted under one of two main programs: The Government-Assisted Refugees (GAR) program or the Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) program. Those admitted under the GAR program receive financial support from the Canadian government for up to a year post-arrival. Alternatively, the BVOR program involves a unique partnership between private sponsors and the government, where costs and responsibilities are shared. Private sponsors, including groups of Canadians and organizations such as faith-based associations, ethnocultural groups, or settlement organizations, provide social, emotional, and settlement support for twelve months, with financial responsibilities split evenly over the first six months with the government.

This comprehensive system is Canada's structured approach to refugee resettlement, highlighting Canada's commitment and the complexities involved in integrating vulnerable populations into Canadian society. The collaboration between governmental and non-governmental entities in these programs reflects a community-driven effort to support newcomers. However, disparities in the execution and accessibility of these programs leave much room for improvement, suggesting the need for ongoing evaluation and reform to ensure equity and effectiveness in meeting the diverse needs of all refugees.

## DISPARITIES IN TREATMENT AND PROCESSING TIMES

The Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET), implemented swiftly in 2022, marked a significant achievement in facilitating the rapid entry of over 100,000 Ukrainians into Canada. This initiative not only expedited their access to work permits and healthcare services but also stood as a globally recognized demonstration of effective humanitarian assistance. However, the expedited support extended to Ukrainian refugees sharply contrasts with the protracted and challenging resettlement process experienced by refugees from other regions, particularly those from Africa.

Documentation from the Canadian Council for Refugees, specifically the Nairobi Statement, sheds light on the extensive delays encountered by African refugees at IRCC offices. It highlights a glaring disparity in processing times when compared to other regions. The statement reveals that refugees in Nairobi may endure waits of up to 56 months from identification to departure for Canada. Such delays not only profoundly impact their safety and mental health but underscore a systemic issue that extends beyond mere administrative backlog.

The differential treatment and experiences of Ukrainian refugees, when contrasted with those from countries like Afghanistan, Syria, Sudan, and Chad, reveal a broader pattern of inconsistency and selective efficiency. The immediate mobilization of support for Ukrainian refugees in the early stages of the crisis demonstrated Canada's capacity for rapid response – a stark contrast to the bureaucratic inertia faced by refugees from other nations, who have been left to wait indefinitely.

This discrepancy was poignantly highlighted by a Sudanese refugee's observation: "We see others moving quickly through the system, but we feel forgotten, as if our lives matter less." Such sentiments, widely shared among refugees from less-publicized crises, spotlight the urgent need for reform in policy that ensures equitable treatment for all refugees, irrespective of their origin.

The evidence above points to Canada's undeniable capability to streamline and expedite the resettlement process. However, this capability must be applied more uniformly and equitably, aligning with the nation's international obligations and humanitarian commitments to truly embody the spirit of universal compassion and support.

## SYSTEMIC DISCRIMINATION IN HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT

Upon arrival, many refugees face the dual challenge of navigating a complex housing market and encountering significant barriers to employment. The "Precarious Housing and Hidden Homelessness" report highlights that a significant majority of refugees spend over 30% of their income on housing, with many experiencing hidden homelessness due to high costs, which are exacerbated by discrimination based on race, religion, or family size. As refugee families arriving in Canada do not have a credit history, references, or a stable source of income, housing becomes a major stress. This stress is further exacerbated by discrimination from landlords due to larger family size, unstable income, and lack of funds for deposits.

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<sup>1</sup> Bejan, Raluca, Maria Mallet-Garcia, Richard Lipinski, Chi Do, and Victoria Wolf Aviles. *A Tale of Two Contexts: The Ukrainian and Afghan Refugee Crises in Canada and the UK*. Dalhousie University & University of Oxford, 2023.

Moreover, the lack of awareness among refugees about their rights further compounds these issues. Many are unfamiliar with tenant rights or employment rights, making them vulnerable to exploitation. This gap highlights the urgent need for more robust educational programs that empower refugees to advocate for themselves effectively.

The detailed findings from Preston's (2011) report provide insight into the scale of these challenges. The report notes that more than 80% of newcomers spend over 30% of their income on housing, which is considered beyond the affordability threshold. It also identifies that a significant number of asylum seekers and sponsored refugees with large families often live in overcrowded conditions that exacerbate their risk of homelessness. Many report that their housing is poorly maintained and unfit due to issues like mold, vermin, and insect infestations. While asylum seekers and refugees report the most severe housing difficulties, the Preston report surprisingly notes that three-quarters of other immigrants also struggle with unaffordable housing. These difficulties persist even among those who have been living in Canada for 5 to 10 years.

This discrimination extends to employment as well, with the pervasive "Canadian experience" requirement often sidelining skilled refugees into unemployment or underemployment. Many refugees come with skills, higher education, and experience in their field. However, resettled individuals find it difficult to secure appropriate employment due to limited fluency in English and the non-recognition of professional credentials obtained from their country of origin. As a result, they are often forced to take lower-skilled positions that do not match their qualifications.

## **COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS REQUIRED TO REDUCE DISCRIMINATION**

To combat discrimination effectively in the resettlement process, both governmental and non-governmental organizations must collaborate more closely. Government agencies must take the lead in policy reform, ensuring that their initiatives are inclusive and actively counteract discriminatory practices. For example, they could implement oversight mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the equitable treatment of all refugee groups, ensuring that programs like CUAET are not exceptions but models for all resettlement efforts.

Non-governmental organizations, including community groups and advocacy organizations, play a critical role in supporting refugees on the ground. They can offer tailored services that address specific cultural and language needs,

which are often overlooked in government programs. NGOs can also serve as a bridge between refugees and government services, facilitating access and understanding.

## **ENHANCING INTEGRATION THROUGH POLICY AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVES**

The evidence suggests that the successful integration of refugees requires a multifaceted approach. According to one study, refugees benefit significantly from programs that address specific barriers at various ecological levels, from personal to systemic.<sup>2</sup> This approach supports not only immediate needs but also long-term integration, including job training programs that recognize foreign credentials and skills.

Community-based initiatives also play a crucial role. For instance, local agencies and groups partner with legal experts to provide workshops on rights and responsibilities in Canada, ensuring refugees understand how to navigate the complexities of the legal and housing systems. Additionally, increased funding for employment mentoring programs can link newcomers with established Canadians, fostering networks that enhance employment opportunities and social integration.

## **DISPARITIES IN RESPONSE TO THE CURRENT CRISIS**

The CUAET visa program, initiated in response to the Ukrainian crisis, functioned almost akin to a resettlement program by offering Ukrainians temporary residence, work permits, financial aid, and comprehensive integration services. This facilitated a swift and broad humanitarian response, allowing a significant number of Ukrainians to establish a temporary but stable life in Canada with an open pathway toward longer-term residency.

In stark contrast, the treatment of individuals from conflict zones like Gaza and Sudan highlights a significant disparity. While the Ukrainian program was expansive and inclusive, offering extensive support and rapid processing, the programs available to Gazans and Sudanese have been far more limited. These programs are often restricted to those with existing family ties in Canada, provide minimal financial support, and include stringent caps on the number of applications accepted. Furthermore, additional invasive security screenings for Gazans and delayed processing exacerbate the challenges faced by these populations,

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2 Janzen, Rich, Melodie Taylor, and Rebecca Gokiart. "Life Beyond Refuge: A System Theory of Change for Supporting Refugee Newcomers." *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees* 38, no. 2 (2022): 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.40892>

underscoring a differing approach that appears less about immediate humanitarian relief and more about controlled, limited intake based on bias and political interests. This variance in treatment raises questions about equity and the consistent application of humanitarian principles.

## CONCLUSION

As Canada continues to welcome refugees from across the globe, it must ensure that its settlement process not only meets immediate needs but also tackles deeper issues of racism and discrimination. Reflecting on these challenges and the real-life stories of the individuals we assist, it becomes increasingly clear that while Canada can expedite

resettlement processes, this capability needs to be applied more uniformly. Every day, the resilience and determination displayed by refugees beginning a new life in Canada inspires the work of frontline workers and service providers, driving us to advocate for a more inclusive and supportive resettlement framework.

Thus, the journey continues – not only for the refugees seeking a new beginning but also for advocates and organizations committed to making Canada’s celebrated multicultural mosaic a reality that truly includes everyone. As we move forward, we must keep pushing for a system that upholds the dignity and rights of all individuals, ensuring that Canada remains a global leader in humanitarian response and a true sanctuary for those in need.

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Janzen, Rich, Melodie Taylor, and Rebecca Gokiart. “Life Beyond Refuge: A System Theory of Change for Supporting Refugee Newcomers.” *Refuge: Canada’s Journal on Refugees* 38, no. 2 (2022): 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.40892>

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# RACISM & DISCRIMINATION FACED BY RACIALIZED NEWCOMER REFUGEE YOUTH IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

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This paper explores the unique challenges faced by racialized newcomer refugee youth in the Canadian education system, emphasizing how systemic racism and discrimination impact their integration process. Despite Canada's multicultural identity, these youth often encounter barriers related to their racial identity, immigration status, and cultural background. The article examines the intersectionality of these challenges, particularly in areas like education and employment. It offers policy recommendations such as anti-racism training, culturally responsive services, and advocacy efforts to address systemic issues. By fostering inclusivity and supporting refugee youth, Canada can ensure their successful integration into society.

Canada has long been known for its multiculturalism policy, welcoming newcomers from around the world. Despite this reputation, racialized newcomer refugee youth face significant barriers to settlement, largely due to systemic racism. These challenges are especially pronounced in the school system, where factors such as racial identity, language barriers, immigration status, financial instability, and social isolation intersect. Using intersectionality to examine how race influences the experiences of newcomer refugee youth in the education system is crucial. This approach helps us to understand their settlement journey, the challenges they encounter how the settlement sector can foster greater inclusivity to ensure their successful integration into Canadian society.

According to data from Statistics Canada, refugee youth make up a notable portion of the overall refugee population in Canada. Specifically, about 20% of refugees are under the

age of 18, highlighting the significant presence of young refugees within the broader refugee demographic. This statistic emphasizes the importance of targeted policies and programs to support the integration and development of refugee youth in Canada. However, due to structural barriers, newcomer refugee youth often fall through the cracks. The settlement process for newcomers typically involves several stages: pre-arrival preparation, arrival and initial adaptation, integration, and long-term adjustment. Each stage presents unique challenges, but for refugee youth, these challenges are amplified due to their intersecting identities and subjective life experiences, such as the trauma of displacement and resettlement.

During my work as a School Settlement Worker from 2015 to 2022, my substantial experience with newcomer Syrian youth was an introduction to the magnitude of systemic

discrimination in supporting refugee families, largely due to a lack of funds and resources. A National Project: Syrian Refugee Resettlement in Canada, modified by Leah K. Hamilton, Veronis, and Walton-Roberts provides a comprehensive overview of how Syria experienced one of the world's largest conflicts in recent years, resulting in a humanitarian crisis that displaced millions. During the 2015 Canadian election, the Liberals promised to resettle over 25,000 Syrian refugees. From November 2015 to January 2017, over 40,000 Syrian refugees settled in Canada (Hamilton, Veronis, and Walton-Roberts 2020) Notably half of these refugees were under the age of 18 at the time of arrival, compared to non-Syrian refugees (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada 2020). Given these numbers, it is important to acknowledge that Canadian schools welcomed a higher number of Syrian refugee youth in recent years. This population often came from conflict zones and experienced trauma while leaving home and during their migration journey (Sullivan and Simonson 2016). There was hardly a plan of action on how to settle these youth within the school systems. From my discussions with some of the schools I worked at, many were not prepared or trained on how to support these students beyond enrolling in school. This phenomenon unfortunately persists with students arriving from Afghanistan and Ukraine. The burden often falls on settlement workers, counselors, and teachers, who spend a large portion of their time ensuring students understand their courses and adapt to life in high school.

According to some students' narratives, not all teachers are culturally sensitive or understanding of their unique challenges, such as fear of asking questions, lack of understanding of course material due to stress, and minimal student-teacher time. Hadfield, Ostrowski, & Ungar (2017) explain that Canadian teachers lack cultural competency in dealing with refugee youth. Due to the lack of such training in the school system, refugee students experience higher mental health challenges. The pressure to learn English quickly and efficiently is problematic for many refugee youths, and these intersecting stressors create barriers to successful social and academic integration and academic integration in school. In Ontario, students in grades 9 and 10 are segregated into three streams: "essentials" (local workplace programs), "applied" (for colleges), and "academic" (university). This system can be detrimental for newcomer youth as they may be placed in the lower stream if they lack certain prerequisites (Nichols, Ha, and Tyyskä 2020). This type of structure in the education system can impact young adults' career choices and hinder their socioeconomic success, particularly for refugee youth. This suggests that discrimination is embedded in how the education system favours specific groups of people over others.

Moreover, I have often seen refugee youth experience discrimination and racism due to their religious beliefs, such as identifying as a Muslim, wearing a headscarf, or attending Friday prayers. Misunderstanding and feelings of being

racially judged indicate that students cannot excel effectively in schools when they experience hostility. Such an atmosphere negatively impacts students' mental health, affecting their "grades and graduation rates, which limits post-secondary choices for immigrant youth (Nichols, Ha, and Tyyskä, 2020, 8).

Furthermore, I have also witnessed many refugee youths being exploited in their work settings due to a lack of knowledge about workplace rights and the ability to fight for fair working conditions. Newcomer youth are generally "vulnerable to workplace exploitation" as they lack information about Canadian employment standards (Nichols, Ha, and Tyyskä 2020 14). Nichols, Ha, and Tyyskä (2020) explain that if newcomer youth are placed in low-wage jobs, especially in areas where language skills are not a priority, we risk creating a "long-term cycle of precarity and poverty" (p.13). Due to structural racism in job recruitment, intersecting variables such as language, gender, and status all play a role in their socioeconomic pathway.

The settlement journey of racialized newcomer refugee youth in Canada is fraught with challenges, many of which stem from systemic racism and discrimination. Educators must uphold refugee youths' desire to learn and support their education by fostering a positive and encouraging environment. Everyone involved in the process, including administrative staff, teachers, settlement workers, and mentors, must remove any preconceived negative ideas and prejudice towards these students. Guo, Maitra, and Guo (2019) quote Stewart (2011), stating that "the education system must become more prepared and knowledgeable about the experiences and needs of refugee students to more adequately address their diverse learning needs" (p. 7).

In the school system, teachers often struggle to understand the unique life experiences of refugee youth. Nichols, Ha, and Tyyskä (2020) provide a comprehensive list of policy changes and recommendations, including fully funded settlement programs, better streaming methods, mentorship, teacher training, anti-racist policies, and much more, aimed at changing "societal attitudes surrounding immigrants, race, and ethnicity" (p. 15). We must understand that Canada's future economic growth will significantly rely on the contribution of immigrants. Therefore, as a society, we must make our education system inclusive to meet the needs of refugee youth who are going to be part of our future.

Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort from the settlement sector, policymakers, and the broader community. By fostering inclusivity, advocating for systemic change, and providing culturally responsive support, Canada can better ensure that all newcomers have the opportunity to thrive and contribute to society. As a nation built on diversity, we must uphold the values of equity and inclusion, making Canada a true haven for those seeking a new beginning.

To combat racism and discrimination and support the integration of racialized newcomer refugee youth, the settlement sector must take proactive and systemic approaches to offer the following:

- **Anti-Racism Training:** Settlement service providers should undergo comprehensive anti-racism training to understand the biases and systemic barriers that racialized newcomer youth face. This training should be ongoing and mandatory to ensure that all staff are equipped to provide inclusive and equitable support.
- **Culturally Responsive Services:** Services should be tailored to meet the unique needs of racialized youth. This includes providing language support, culturally appropriate counseling, and community-based programs that reflect the diverse backgrounds of newcomer youth.
- **Advocacy and Policy Change:** The settlement sector should advocate for policy changes that address systemic racism and discrimination. This includes pushing for better employment equity policies, anti-discrimination laws in housing, and equitable access to healthcare and education.

- **Community Engagement and Empowerment:** Building strong connections between newcomer youth and their communities can foster a sense of belonging and mutual support. Community-led initiatives and partnerships with racialized communities can help refugee youth navigate the settlement process and build social networks.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Implementing mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of settlement services in addressing racism and discrimination is crucial. This includes collecting data on the experiences of racialized newcomer youth and using this information to inform service improvements and policy advocacy.
- **Public Education and Awareness:** Raising awareness about the contributions of racialized newcomers and the challenges they face can help combat stereotypes and foster a more inclusive society. Public education campaigns can promote understanding and solidarity among all Canadians.

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# IMMIGRANTS, ‘NON- IDENTIFIABILITY’ AND THE CHALLENGE OF TACKLING HATE ONLINE

**JACK JEDWAB** is President and CEO of the Association for Canadian Studies and the Metropolis Institute. He holds a Ph.D. in Canadian History from Concordia University. Prior to 1998, he served as executive director of the Quebec branch of the Canadian Jewish Congress. He is an author and contributor to academic publications, government reports and newspapers across the country in the fields of immigration, multiculturalism, diversity, human rights and official languages. Following three decades of wide-ranging research on public opinion and demographics, he is regularly consulted by media and government bodies alike for his expertise and insights on issues of import in the public sphere. He has taught and lectured at McGill University, the Université du Québec à Montréal and Concordia University, offering courses ranging from public policy to the history of immigration and minority groups, to sports in Canada.

The author describes important limits to the effectiveness of online harms legislation in combating hate. He contends that too frequently the language employed by perpetrators of hate often masks their targets making it very difficult to pursue. He contends that online harms legislation will encounter challenges in protecting immigrants who are not designated as an identifiable target of hate. He concludes that it is essential for the government, educators, and civil society to work together on public education strategies to address this issue effectively.

## INTRODUCTION

In Canada and globally, concerns are growing about the expression of hate and its increasing presence online. According to the UN’s Special Rapporteur on Minorities Issues’ thematic report<sup>1</sup>, national, ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities<sup>2</sup> are recurring targets of hate speech, with 70% or more of hate crimes or hate speech on social media directed at these groups. The report also highlights that migrants and refugees are especially vulnerable to racism and discrimination which can be accompanied by hateful rhetoric and incitement (de Varennes, 2021).

A report by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) observed that between 2009 and 2016, levels of police-reported hate crimes in Canada saw minor fluctuations, with the first significant spike occurring in 2016. This rise coincided with the rise of populist politics and inflammatory rhetoric directed at immigrant, racialized, and religious minority groups (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2024)

In recent years, governments in pluralist democracies have attempted to enact legislation to combat the spread of hate online. In Canada, the *Online Harms Act* (Bill 63), represents the federal government’s latest effort to address this

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1 [www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-minority-issues](http://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-minority-issues)

2 [www.ohchr.org/en/minorities](http://www.ohchr.org/en/minorities)

critical issue. The proposed legislation aims to protect individuals – notably children – from harmful content, including sexual exploitation and hate speech. It seeks to achieve this via modifications to the *Criminal Code* and the creation of a Digital Safety Commission (DSC). The bill places the responsibility on social media to regulate harmful content. If the legislation is adopted, the DSC will establish a set of regulations and have the power to levy fines against companies that break the rules (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2024)

The Canadian Race Relations Foundation (2024) asserts that “freedom of speech does not mean freedom to commit acts of hate”, emphasizing that the online harms legislation is overdue and addresses a glaring gap that has long posed a threat to people in Canada. Many religious and racial minorities support the need for the legislation. There is however a persistent concern, notably amongst civil liberties organizations, about potential infringements on free speech, as those tasked with enforcing digital safety may struggle to differentiate between hate speech and offensive language. Over 15 civil society groups have urged Canada’s Justice Minister to separate the child protection provisions from other aspects of the legislation.

The following will look at the rise of hate expression, the groups most affected, public concern over its online presence, and the extent to which Canadians believe legislation can effectively curb this phenomenon. It will also explore whether such laws can meaningfully protect newcomers from vilification.

## DOCUMENTING HATE EXPRESSION IN CANADA

According to the RCMP, between 2015 and 2022, the most common motivations for hate crime were based on hatred of race/ethnicity (7,204 incidents, representing 45% of police-reported hate crimes), religion (4,455 incidents, or 28%), sexual

orientation (1,653 incidents, or 10%). Additionally, hate crimes related to sex/gender accounted for 289 incidents (1.8%), while other motivations, such as mental or physical disability, language, age, occupation, or political beliefs, represented 710 incidents (4.4%).

Canadians have observed a steady increase in the dissemination of hate, as reflected in Table 1. In May 2024, approximately three-quarters of Canadians agreed that hate is on the rise in the country, compared to two-thirds who held this view in February 2024.

As shown in Table 2, a majority of Canadians report frequently encountering expressions of hate online. Women are more likely than men to report seeing such content, and among age groups, the youngest cohort (ages 18 to 24) has the highest percentage, with 70% stating they often witness hate speech online.

Table 3 shows that among those who believe that hate is on the rise in Canada, two-thirds say they frequently encounter hate online, compared to only one-third of those who do not believe hate is increasing in the country.

One of the most common forms of online hate targets immigrants, seeking to position immigrants as threats to personal, national, economic, and cultural security (Costello, 2021). When asked to rank groups they believe are most likely to be victims of hate and prejudice, no single group is identified by a majority of Canadians. However, Muslims are frequently cited, with just over one in five Canadians selecting them as the most vulnerable, followed by Indigenous persons, immigrants, Jews, and LGBTQ+ individuals. (See Table 4)

When the results are broken down by age cohort, it is observed that there has been a rise in the perception of immigrants as the most vulnerable group. Among the 18 to 34 age group, more than one in five now view immigrants as particularly vulnerable to hate and prejudice. (See Table 5)

TABLE 1. “HATE IS ON THE RISE IN MY COUNTRY (CANADA).”

	Total	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+
February 23–26, 2024	66%	53%	64%	60%	65%	68%	76%
May 17–20, 2024	74%	69%	78%	69%	78%	69%	78%

Source: Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies, February 23–26, 2024 and May 17–20, 2024

TABLE 2. “I OFTEN SEE EXPRESSIONS OF HATE ONLINE.”

	Total	Male	Female	Between 18 and 24	Between 25 and 34	Between 35 and 44	Between 45 and 54	Between 55 and 64	65+
Canada May 17–20	58%	54%	63%	70%	65%	63%	57%	51%	52%

Source: Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies, February 23–26, 2024 and May 17–20, 2024

TABLE 3. I OFTEN SEE EXPRESSIONS OF HATE ONLINE VS. HATE IS ON THE RISE IN MY COUNTRY.

Canada	Hate is on the rise in my country		
	Yes	No	
I often see expressions of hate online – Please respond YES or NO to the following:	Yes	66.3%	36.0%
	No	33.7%	64.0%
Total		100.0%	100.0%

Source: Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies, February 23–26, 2024 and May 17–20, 2024

TABLE 4. OF THE FOLLOWING GROUPS PLEASE RANK IN ORDER WHICH YOU CURRENTLY CONSIDER TO BE MOST LIKELY TO BE THE VICTIM OF PREJUDICE/HATE IN...

	Canada	
	February 23–27	May 17–20
Muslims	24.5	22%
Indigenous Peoples	17.5%	17%
Immigrants	13.5%	15%
Jews	13%	15%
LGBTQ+	15%	15%
Black persons	11.5%	13%
Asians	4%	4%

Source: Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies, February 23–26, 2024 and May 17–20, 2024

TABLE 5. RANK IN ORDER WHICH YOU CURRENTLY CONSIDER TO BE MOST LIKELY TO BE THE VICTIM OF PREJUDICE/HATE IN...

	Canada					
	18–34		35–54		55 plus	
	February 23–26	May 17–20	February 23–26	May 17–20	February 23–26	May 17–20
Jews	6%	13%	9%	11%	16%	19%
Muslims	18%	16%	18%	22%	24%	26%
Indigenous Peoples	19%	20%	17%	18%	13%	14%
Black persons	12%	16%	9%	15%	9%	9%
Immigrants	13%	21%	10%	14%	10%	12%
Asians	5%	5%	4%	4%	2%	3%
LGBTQ+	11%	10%	13%	16%	14%	17%
None of the above/Other	17%		20%		12%	

Source: Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies, February 23–26, 2024 and May 17–20, 2024

## HATE CRIME VICTIMIZATION AND TARGETED GROUPS: IMMIGRANTS ARE NOT AN IDENTIFIABLE GROUP

There are several provisions within the *Criminal Code* of Canada that address hate crimes amongst relevant examples one finds:

- **Advocating genocide (subsection 318.1);** for example, a subject openly advocates for the genocide of all people of a specific religion or religious group.
- **Public incitement of hatred where likely to lead to a breach of the peace (subsection 319.1);** wherein a subject wilfully promotes hatred against any identifiable group. For example, a protest leader who addresses a group of people by saying “You must go and commit violence against [names a specific identifiable group]” is publicly inciting hate.
- **Wilful promotion of hatred (subsection 319.2);** anyone who, by communicating statements other than in private conversation, wilfully promotes hatred against an identifiable group. The statement can be spoken, written, or recorded and can include gestures, signs, photographs, and drawings.
- **Wilful promotion of antisemitism (subsection 319 (2.1));** for example, writing or publishing antisemitic articles that promote Holocaust denial narratives.
- **Conversion therapy offenses (sections 320.101–104; subsection 273.3(1));** any form of treatment that attempts to actively change someone’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Hate crimes are defined as criminal acts that are found to have been motivated wholly or in part by hatred toward an identifiable individual or group. These groups, as outlined in subsection 318(4) of the *Criminal Code* of Canada, are distinguished by race, religion, national or ethnic origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or mental or physical disability (Justice Canada, 2024)

For its part, the proposed *Online Harms Act*<sup>3</sup> would specifically target seven types of harmful content:

Mischief motivated by hate about religious property (subsection 430 (4.1)); for example, vandalizing a place of worship like a church, synagogue, temple, gurdwara, or mosque.

- Content that sexually victimizes a child or revictimizes a survivor;
- Intimate content communicated without consent;
- Content used to bully a child;
- Content that induces a child to harm themselves;
- Content that foments hatred;
- Content that incites violence; and
- Content that incites violent extremism or terrorism.

## WILL ANTI-HATE LEGISLATION WORK?

Beyond the debate over whether the *Online Harms Act* could infringe on free speech, there remains doubt about its effectiveness in curbing hate speech, given the sheer volume of hate expression on social media. A March 2024 Leger survey reveals that while 70% of respondents support the government's plan to regulate online content, only 40 % believe the legislation will create safer online platforms. Furthermore, 50% expressed distrust in the government's ability to protect free speech, while 43% felt the government was worthy of such trust (Taylor, 2024).

## CONCLUSION

Canadians recognize that immigrants are often targeted by hate online, often portrayed as unable to adapt or associated with fears of violence and terrorism. The rise in anti-immigrant hate expression threatens cohesion thus making it

essential to identify and understand the factors that direct individuals toward such malicious online content. Online attacks that explicitly refer to immigrants often mask the specific groups being targeted, allowing perpetrators to dismiss accusations of hate speech and discrimination. Given the limits of the online harms legislation in protecting immigrants from online vilification, the government and civil society need to work together on public education strategies to address this issue effectively.

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3 [www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/online-harms.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/online-harms.html)

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# REIMAGINING SETTLEMENT SERVICES SO THAT THEY ARE ANTI-RACIST AND ANTI-OPPRESSIVE: THE CARES (CO-DESIGNING FOR ANTI-RACISM AND EQUITY IN SETTLEMENT) PROJECT

**JULIE RODIER** is a Principal Research Associate at the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC), a not-for-profit research organization. She has extensive experience collaborating with community and government stakeholders in carrying out evaluations and research projects that are evidence-based and feasible in real-world settings to produce useful and relevant results for diverse groups. Much of Julie's work focuses on ensuring the long-term vitality of French-language minority communities and on improving integration and employment outcomes for newcomers to Canada.

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Established in 1991 as a non-profit research organization with a mission to raise the standards of evidence in social policy and programs, the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) is a full-service research and evaluation firm that designs and manages projects of many sizes and types across Canada, including program evaluations that involve formative, summative, implementation, impact and cost-benefit analyses; strategic program reviews; and policy analyses. To date, we have conducted over 450 projects across a wide range of sectors, including education and training, employment, migration, youth development, and health and well-being. SRDC is currently involved in leading and/or evaluating numerous projects focused on workforce development, essential skills training, demand-led approaches, and innovative solutions to support populations with significant and/or multiple barriers to employment.

*This study is the result of the collective efforts and contributions of the entire CARES project team.*

## INTRODUCTION

CARES is a research project funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, concluded in March 2024. SRDC investigated how racism and discrimination affect newcomers' access to and experiences with settlement services. This project brought together lived experience, and professional experience to identify essential, meaningful, and achievable changes. The generated insights are a first step in reimagining settlement services free from oppression and racism.

## METHODOLOGY

Our research project was conducted in two phases: inquiry and synthesis, and co-design.

Phase 1 involved gathering insights and inputs from newcomers based on their lived experiences, collecting information from immigrant-serving organizations (ISOs), and reviewing existing literature. This information was synthesized and used to facilitate the co-design workshops in Phase 2. As part of

this phase, we consulted with newcomers mainly through 17 focus groups (n=104 newcomers; in French and English) and an online survey (n=351). We also consulted with ISOs through an online survey (n=125).

Phase 2 brought ISOs and newcomers together through three (2 in EN, 1 in FR) co-design sessions to identify and develop ideas, priorities, and ultimately, actionable insights to remove racism and all forms of discrimination in settlement services. These sessions were conducted online with 47 individuals (17 from ISOs, and 30 newcomers).

A Gender-based Analysis Plus lens was applied throughout the project to ensure that project activities were inclusive and equitable.

## EXPERIENCES OF RACISM, DISCRIMINATION, AND OPPRESSION IN SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION SERVICES

One of the key aims of this project was to understand the experiences of racism, discrimination, and oppression of newcomers in settlement and integration services. Half of the newcomers we consulted were satisfied with the settlement services they received. The varied satisfaction levels can potentially be explained by the experiences of discrimination and unfair treatment reported by participants, which was the primary focus of this research. In the newcomer survey, participants reported race (55%) as the top reason for their experience with discrimination followed by physical appearance (22%), language (22%), sexual orientation (11%), and religion (10%) while accessing settlement services, echoing existing research (Mohamed et al., 2022).

We grouped the experiences shared by newcomers and service providers into three categories: individual and interpersonal levels, organizational level, and a replication of oppression found outside of settlement services.

### INDIVIDUAL AND INTERPERSONAL LEVELS

Many newcomer participants described experiencing racism, discrimination, and oppression in their interactions with individual service providers while accessing settlement and integration services. Although not named directly by newcomers, participants indicated several instances of racial microaggressions such as being treated differently by service providers compared to other clients because of their race or ethnicity, being neglected by service providers, and being ignored or talked down to by service providers.

Newcomers who accessed settlement and integration services described encounters with service providers who were not

culturally understanding or sensitive to their needs, aligning with previous research findings (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019). These experiences of racism and oppression contributed to newcomer participants' feelings of frustration and disrespect. Service provider survey respondents acknowledged this perspective, explaining that settlement organizations lack service providers who understand the differing cultural needs of their newcomer clients and thus neglect to ask key questions to understand newcomers' unique situations. Newcomer participants noted that service providers' lack of cultural sensitivity enabled power imbalances and contributed to the marginalization of newcomers, consequently leading to feelings of discomfort for some newcomers when accessing settlement and integration services.

Black newcomer participants shared situations where service providers made negative assumptions about their education or field of work based on racial stereotypes. Both ISOs and newcomers agreed that service providers often make assumptions about the kinds of support or services newcomers need based on their country of origin or appearance. Participants described how being treated unfairly due to prejudice or receiving differential treatment compared to other non-Black newcomers contributed to the exclusion and marginalization of Black newcomers.

### ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

Many newcomer participants described their experiences of oppression at an organizational level, where they were treated merely as a checkbox or part of a daily quota to be met by settlement organizations. Participants expressed frustration at not being seen as whole individuals and not receiving meaningful support, leading them to question the true intentions of settlement and integration services.

Newcomer participants' perceptions of service provider's lack of sensitivity and empathy due to the need to meet bureaucratic requirements, further highlighted the oppressive dynamics that exist at an organizational level. This dynamic often results in newcomers not being seen as individuals with unique needs and experiences but rather subjected to impersonal and insensitive treatment.

Unfortunately, these experiences reflect an administrative dynamic that one settlement provider participant referred to as "funding and reporting are based on colonial structures which create barriers for holistic service delivery." Funding and eligibility constraints within the settlement sector, as outlined by service providers participating in CARES, align with other research on the systemic environment that settlement services operate within (Thomas, 2015). In other words, while service providers understand the need to support newcomers holistically, one participant emphasized the tension between need and systemic constraints.

From this perspective, these findings emphasize how funding and reporting requirements may limit the ability of service providers to offer holistic support to newcomers.

### REPLICATION OF OPPRESSION

Newcomers described situations where some service providers replicated oppressive practices commonly experienced while looking for employment and perpetuated discrimination from employers. Newcomer participants shared that service providers encouraged them to Anglicize their names on resumes or dismissed them as being overqualified without offering meaningful support on how to navigate the job market effectively. Several newcomer participants also spoke about service providers dismissing their individual employment goals and interests, despite their previous education and skills, and instead suggesting they pursue other paths or pushing newcomers to find “survival” jobs to obtain their initial Canadian work experience. This approach may replicate oppressive norms that devalue the needs and aspirations of newcomers.

### IMPACTS OF RACISM, DISCRIMINATION, AND OPPRESSION ON ACCESS TO SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION SERVICES

When newcomer participants were asked to reflect on the impacts of discriminatory, racist, or oppressive experiences they had when accessing settlement and integration services, several participants reported these negative experiences decreased their self-confidence and sense of belonging in Canada. These encounters negatively affected their mental health and made them feel uncomfortable accessing future services because they feared they would encounter similar experiences.

Service provider respondents explained that racist and discriminatory experiences could negatively impact newcomers’ trust in settlement services, self-confidence, sense of belonging, and physical and mental health (Drolet & Teixeira, 2022; George and Selimos, 2017; Thomas, 2021). These negative effects contribute to additional barriers and delays for newcomers to successfully integrate into Canada, as they face challenges accessing the settlement and integration services they need.

### TOWARDS ANTI-OPPRESSIVE AND ANTI-RACIST SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION SERVICES

The co-design sessions brought together newcomers and ISOs to build on the experiences of racism and discrimination in settlement and integration services shared in this project. The

aim was to reimagine settlement and integration services to be anti-racist and anti-oppressive.

“For me, an ideal settlement service is one where you feel welcome and supported, so that you don’t go there with worries, come back with the same worries, or come back feeling even more stressed. At least a place where, even if you don’t necessarily have solutions to all your problems, you still have support until you’re truly operational on the Canadian territory. And I also think that settlement services should be able to provide information in real-time and to everyone, to all those who have access to these settlement services. I’m thinking, for instance, of circumstances where people who use the same settlement service receive different information. For example, you meet another newcomer who uses the same settlement service as you, and he has information that you don’t and tells you that he received it from that service. It would be nice if everyone was informed, I don’t know, maybe by sending emails when there’s an update. Why not inform everyone through the same service or channel? [...] Support is very important.” – Translated from a participant in the French co-design workshop.

The ideas and recommendations we heard from can be grouped into four categories:

1. Individual level (what people working in settlement organizations can do)
  - **Client empathy:** to better understand client needs, barriers, and experiences.
  - **Client-centered:** adjust service delivery to meet the needs of the client.
  - **Unconscious biases:** avoid assumptions based on characteristics such as ethnicity, culture, appearance, and gender.
  - **Information:** help clients navigate the system by sharing updated resources.
2. Interpersonal (how people and their interactions with clients matter)
  - **Trust:** building trust is a process that includes transparency, consistent communication, and generative listening.
  - **Diversity:** helpful to have staff working at organizations who understand the experiences of racialized newcomers.

3. Organizational (how organizational policy and strategies can reduce oppression)

- **Training:** anti-oppressive and anti-racist training not only for front-line staff but agency-wide including decision makers.
- **Accountability:** safe process/procedures for clients to provide feedback or file complaints.
- **Policy and practice:** implement anti-racist, or respectful workplace policies and practices that are regularly reviewed.

4. Societal (macro-level, or what changes and advocacy will help change systemic oppression)

- **Funding:** build anti-racism activities into funding proposals (e.g., include community of practice and lived expertise).
- **Reconciliation:** meaningful partnerships with Indigenous organizations to ensure newcomers learn about Canada's colonial impact.
- **Advocacy:** work with other groups (e.g., employers) to reduce systemic barriers

By fostering a climate of understanding, empathy, and respect at all levels, settlement services can not only facilitate better settlement and integration for newcomers but also uphold the principles of fairness and dignity for everyone.

*For additional information on this project, contact Julie Rodier, Principal Research Associate, at [jrodier@srdc.org](mailto:jrodier@srdc.org). The report can be found on SRDC's website at <https://srdc.org>.*

## CONCLUSION

This research highlights the various ways newcomers encounter racism and oppression within settlement services. The pervasiveness of systemic racism and oppression undermines the purpose and effectiveness of settlement services, which are meant to help newcomers successfully settle in Canada. This underscores the importance of proactive measures to address racism and unfair treatment in the settlement sector.

Efforts to promote equity and inclusion must go beyond simply acknowledging these issues. It is crucial for stakeholders within settlement organizations, policymakers, and communities to actively recognize and tackle these challenges. Taking specific and intentional steps to dismantle discriminatory structures and create supportive and empowering environments is essential. This involves actions as described in the CARES report, such as ongoing commitments to educating service providers about different cultures, ensuring diversity among those delivering and leading settlement services, delivering settlement services that are trauma-informed and person-centered, and making anti-racism within organizations a priority. Moreover, the voices and experiences of newcomers themselves must be central to these efforts, ensuring changes are responsive to their unique needs and realities.

# NAVIGATING SETTLEMENT: FOSTERING INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS AND COMBATING RACISM IN SETTLEMENT SERVICES

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In August 2023, the Association for Canadian Studies launched the “Identifying Best Practices in Combatting Discrimination in the Settlement Process: A Qualitative Assessment,” a year-long project funded by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). The study sought to explore the challenges faced by racialized newcomers in accessing settlement services and aimed to identify effective strategies to combat discrimination. Settlement services play a crucial role in helping newcomers integrate into Canadian society. This article explores the experiences of racialized newcomers when accessing settlement services, highlighting both positive and negative aspects. Drawing on thematic analysis, the study identifies key areas of satisfaction, such as employment support, basic needs assistance, and community-building efforts. However, newcomers also encountered challenges, including discrimination, inadequate support, and a lack of cultural sensitivity. Recommendations for improving these services include enhanced communication, personalized support, and fostering cultural sensitivity.

## INTRODUCTION

Settlement services in Canada are designed to assist newcomers in navigating their new environment, offering resources such as employment training, language classes, and housing support. However, racialized newcomers often face unique challenges when accessing these services, ranging from discrimination to unmet expectations. This article evaluates the efforts of settlement organizations in fostering anti-racism practices and creating inclusive environments for newcomers in Canada. This paper discusses the importance of proactive measures, such as anti-racism training, clear reporting

mechanisms, and community engagement, to ensure that settlement organizations can effectively support newcomers and create discrimination-free environments.

## METHODOLOGY

120 racialized newcomers from five regions (British Columbia, Manitoba, Alberta, Ontario, and Quebec) shared their lived experiences, with a specific focus on the racism and discrimination they encountered. Additionally, 31 settlement

workers were interviewed to provide insights into the efforts made by organizations to address these issues and highlight areas where further improvements are needed.

Using semi-structured interviews with both newcomers and staff from immigrant-serving organizations, the study identified key barriers, knowledge gaps, and shortcomings in service delivery.

## ASSESSING ANTI-RACISM EFFORTS IN SETTLEMENT ORGANIZATIONS

The settlement workers were asked about their organizations' commitment to anti-racism. While most felt that efforts were being made to create racism-free environments, many acknowledged that significant gaps remain.

When asked if their organization is committed to anti-racism practices and policies, 90% of respondents (n=28) said yes. For these respondents, all highlighted diversity as a key indicator of anti-racism initiatives by highlighting the visible presence of anti-racism messaging and a diverse, multi-national team within their organizations.

A few participants mentioned that their organizations have zero-tolerance policies against racism. However, in some cases, the zero-tolerance policy is a three-strike policy before any action is taken to let someone go.

“If they hear that you have misbehaved against a client, then you have to have a meeting with the manager and you get a warning. Next time he writes down. So you have it on writing that you have misbehaved or something like that. Then the third time I think they kick you out”. – Settlement Worker, Toronto

The settlement workers who felt that their organizations were leading the way in fostering environments committed to anti-racism are those who actively educate and engage both their staff and the broader community, fostering an environment where diversity is celebrated, and inclusion is deeply embedded in their operational practices.

However, some settlement workers, particularly those who are racialized newcomers themselves, expressed a reluctance to heavily emphasize anti-racism policies and programs. One worker suggested that overemphasizing racism could inadvertently magnify the issue, preferring instead to downplay it.

“My personal thing is that if you put so much emphasis on a problem, it becomes a bigger problem. That's my thing, so I don't put too much pressure on it... I'm not too keen on like, you know, making policies. Like there are policies already set, but I'm not going to make a big deal

out of it, because once you make a big deal, that's when people actually make a bigger deal out of it”.

– Settlement Worker, Prince George

This attitude may stem from concerns that overemphasizing racism could magnify the issue or foster a sense of victimhood rather than empowerment. Some fear that poorly implemented anti-racism policies could lead to tokenism instead of genuine inclusion. Additionally, there is concern that focusing too much on racism might divert attention from other essential newcomer needs, like employment and housing (Banerjee, Verma, & Zhang, 2023).

Another participant pointed out that merely having a diverse team might not be sufficient to address systemic issues of racism and discrimination

But I think as a service provider we need a lot of training to unpack a lot of internalized racism or even our own biases and prejudices of stereotyping people....I think at this time we are moving a lot forward in terms of providing training to the staff on understanding, anti-oppression framework and working from that lens. However, we all get caught up in our day to day, and it really just trickles down to you as a person, how you're going to mitigate or behave with your client who's in front of you. (TOR-003)

Finally, a settlement worker in Montreal explained that she often feels the need to navigate her clients to more specialized cultural settlement services to protect them from potential discrimination.

“We do refer them to resources and settlement organizations that also work with racialized people and that they can refer them properly to the neighbourhoods that are mainly racialized people. As you know, Parc Ex, a mostly immigrant neighbourhood and we have resources there that allow other people to access their basic needs without being racially profiled. And I think it's sad because you should be able to refer them to all the resources available and there are so many, but we just rely on those that we know are gonna be safe, are gonna be open, are also gonna give them the information that they need”.

– Settlement Worker, Montreal

While many settlement organizations are committed to fostering inclusive environments, there are significant areas for improvement. Fostering inclusive environments requires more than just diversity; it demands ongoing education, consistent policy enforcement, and proactive engagement with both staff and the broader community. Only through these comprehensive efforts can settlement organizations effectively support newcomers and combat discrimination.

## EXPERIENCES OF RACISM WHEN ACCESSING SETTLEMENT SERVICES

The majority of newcomers interviewed expressed positive experiences when accessing settlement services and reported no discrimination/racism in settlement services. However, 11% of newcomers interviewed throughout this study shared experiences reflecting both overt and subtle biases when accessing settlement services. When interviewing settlement workers, 95% reported that they had not witnessed or heard of any racism or discrimination within their organizations, insisting that any discrimination and racism faced by newcomers was solely outside of settlement organizations. However, the accounts shared by newcomers indicate a different reality. It is possible that newcomers experience higher levels of racism and discrimination within settlement services than is currently understood, as they may not feel comfortable reporting such incidents in the very environment in which they occurred. Moreover, during our interviews, settlement workers noted the lack of clear reporting mechanisms or structures for addressing these issues, begging the question that if settlement workers themselves are uncertain about where and how to report instances of discrimination, how are the newcomers expected to navigate the process?

### RACIAL BIAS AND STEREOTYPING BY SERVICE PROVIDERS

One form of discrimination encountered by newcomers is racial bias and stereotyping by service providers.

For example, a newcomer of Chinese descent recounted an interaction with an employment counselor. The counselor dismissed the newcomer's aspirations to switch to a career in education.

"So as I said, most of the people are helpful and friendly. But, the last experience [accessing settlement services] was with a little bit racist. I went to get employment information because I wanted to change careers. My employment counselor said "You're Chinese, you're good at math, you can only do an office job, you should not change to the education system because you wouldn't be good at it, that is not what Chinese people are good at" which I heard from a Korean lady.... I think it's not really makes sense because you won't know if I don't try. You won't know. I'm not qualified for that job, right?"

(VAN - 002)

### UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES AND PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT

Real or perceived inequality in service delivery also exacerbates feelings of discrimination. Newcomers have observed that certain groups receive preferential treatment.

"But, you know, [redacted] I observe that the government providing the settlement program differently for different groups of people. I saw that there are many new Ukrainian newcomers and they got more support. They got job immediately, they got housing immediately. But we are struggling to find those kinds of services... I don't know if it be because they are white and blond and blue eyes or not, but..." (VAN-003)

One newcomer recounted her difficulties with intracultural discrimination she experienced directly from settlement workers when she arrived in Calgary. Her story highlights the need for more equitable and culturally sensitive practices in settlement services to ensure all refugees receive the necessary support for a successful integration process.

**Newcomer:** But then, last year, the English was not good. But I asked him, my English is not good how can I ask? But he told me, here [are] some people from your country, they come to help with you because they are understood your language. But one Friday because we lost a big bag in Toronto airport. Inside this bag was my son's clothes, diapers and baby formula. He was almost six months. But also, I was pregnant one month. He used baby formula. I called this phone number, and he answered me. He was from our country. But the language is different. Our country is different people. For example, different tribes. I don't know if you heard about that but each tribe ha a genocide. I am Hazara but in our country it is different than Pashtun, but Pashtun is Taliban. He was Pash-tun. When he understood I am Hazara, he told me, oh, we don't have baby formula. Why, he is a six month old baby, how can I find baby formula for him?

We didn't know where the market is, how can we find it? We didn't have phone to call for ask someone. Yeah, it was so bad. My son was so crying. I called again, please, we need formula for my son and also we need diapers for him. He was saying we don't have formula. But my husband was going to the reception and my husband told me, oh, they gave another lady two packets of formula. My husband followed her and he knocked the door and asked her how can you find the formula? [She said] here is formula, you can go to reception, there are agents...

But I talk to a counsellor... I can't stop crying because it was so bad. For one day, my son didn't have formula. He was so crying. But she [the counsellor] was asking me why? What happened here? We have more formula. Why? What happened? But she emailed the manager. The manager came here and knocked on the door and said what happened? I think he was also from my country. It was same language which is Pashtun. But I [told him] I don't have formula. I asked him [the man at the

reception] three or four times and he told me we won't have formula for baby tomorrow or after tomorrow, you need to wait. But he [the manager] is saying to me "Oh, it is so bad I apologize, please forget it" and he brought me a bottle of formula and diapers and he asked me, please don't talk with anyone. Don't share this with anyone.

## HOW TO FOSTER INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS IN SETTLEMENT

1. Develop Extensive Anti-Racism Training for Settlement Workers
  - Implement mandatory, ongoing anti-racism training for all settlement workers. This training should focus on identifying and mitigating implicit biases, understanding cultural diversity, and promoting equitable treatment of newcomers.
  - Create detailed training modules incorporating case studies, role-playing, and interactive discussions. Training should be regularly updated based on new research and feedback from participants.
2. Establish Clear and Accessible Reporting Mechanisms for Racism and Discrimination
  - Implement a transparent system for reporting incidents of racism or discrimination within settlement services for both settlement workers and newcomers. This system should allow all reporting to be done anonymously as well as be easy to access and navigate, ensuring newcomers feel safe and supported when raising concerns.
  - Develop an online reporting platform with multilingual support.
  - Make sure there is a structured follow-up process to address reported incidents promptly and effectively.
3. Create Accountability and Feedback Process within Settlement Agencies
  - Create mechanisms to hold settlement agencies accountable for addressing incidents of racism and discrimination, including regular audits and feedback loops from newcomers. This will ensure issues are identified and resolved promptly, enhancing trust and efficacy.
  - Introduce anonymous surveys for newcomers to provide feedback on their experiences, using the data collected to inform continuous improvements.
4. Integrate Anti-Racism Policies into Settlement Services Frameworks
  - Embed anti-racism policies into the core operational frameworks of settlement services. These policies should clearly outline standards and practices for equitable service provision and be actively implemented and monitored.
  - Develop comprehensive anti-racism policies in collaboration with experts and community stakeholders. Regularly review and update these policies to address emerging issues and incorporate best practices.
5. Promote Awareness of Cultural Nuances Among Settlement Workers
  - Enhance training programs to include education on cultural nuances and regional differences among newcomers. Settlement workers should understand that individuals from the same country may have distinct languages, customs, and cultural practices.
  - Incorporate modules on cultural nuances into existing training programs. Use case studies to illustrate potential misunderstandings and provide practical strategies for addressing these issues effectively.
6. Encourage Community Engagement and Intercultural Dialogue
  - Encourage initiatives that promote intercultural dialogue and engagement between newcomers and local communities by organizing community events, cultural exchange programs, and discussion groups that bring together newcomers and long-term residents.
7. Strengthen Advocacy and Legal Support for Newcomers
  - Establish partnerships with legal aid organizations to offer free or low-cost legal services. Provide training for settlement workers on how to support newcomers in accessing these resources effectively.
8. Create Safe Spaces for Newcomer Voices
  - Establish forums and platforms where newcomers can share their experiences, concerns, and suggestions regarding racism and discrimination. These spaces should be confidential and action-oriented, ensuring that newcomer voices are heard and valued.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while settlement organizations in Canada are making efforts to foster inclusive environments, significant gaps remain, particularly in addressing systemic racism and discrimination. Newcomers continue to face challenges, including implicit biases and a lack of cultural sensitivity in the services provided. The experiences shared by both settlement workers and newcomers highlight the need for more comprehensive anti-racism training, improved reporting mechanisms, and stronger accountability measures within these organizations. Addressing these issues requires a collaborative approach, with ongoing engagement between settlement agencies, the government, and communities to ensure that all newcomers feel supported, respected, and empowered throughout their settlement journey.

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