



Safe Work Integration of Newcomers: Employer Perspectives

Please do not publish or distribute these slides outside of personal use without the permission of the author

Başak Yanar

October 13, 2020
IWH Speaker Series

Research team and funding

Research team: Kay Nasir, Amani Massoud, Sibghat Usmani, Stephanie Premji, Peter Smith

Funded by the
Government
of Canada

Financé par le
gouvernement
du Canada

| Canada 

The views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of IRCC.

Acknowledgements

Study partners:



Background

- Canada welcomed close to 300,000 permanent residents from over 185 countries since 2016 and plan to grow annual immigration levels*
- Accessing rewarding and safe work is vital for economic integration of immigrants and refugees into Canadian society
- Recent immigrants and refugees are more likely to work in hazardous jobs, temporary/shift work; and less likely to receive training and have knowledge of occupational health and safety (OHS) and worker rights
- Employers play a crucial role in the safe work integration of recent immigrants and refugees

*Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2018 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration

Study Objectives

- Examine the expectations, practices, and experiences of employers in relation to safe employment integration of recent immigrant and refugees in Canada
- Examine the experiences of immigrant-serving organizations that work with employers in promoting safe and sustainable work integration

Methods

- In-depth interviews with 35 employer representatives (33 employers), 21 service providers from immigrant serving organizations who work with employers, 5 key informants who represent the interests and concerns of employers
- One-hour phone/in-person interviews focused on the pathways, barriers and facilitators to the hiring and training of recent immigrants and refugees and safe work integration
- Thematic analysis approach was used to examine core experiences, underlying assumptions, shared and divergent perspectives

Employer profile



- 33 employers: 13 in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), 20 outside the GTA
- 4 micro, 10 small, 13 medium, 6 large businesses
- Diverse industries: manufacturing, hospitality, construction, food services, agriculture, professional/technical services, IT & marketing
- Role of interviewees: owner, HR manager, OHS specialist, department manager



Findings: Recruitment & Onboarding of Recent Immigrant and Refugees

Findings

- Labour shortages experienced in certain industries was a key driver of recruitment of recent immigrants and refugees.
- Recent immigrants and refugees were mostly considered for entry-level positions and short contracts.
- Employers' background and familiarity with immigration facilitated recruitment and onboarding

“I was a newcomer, an immigrant here, so I’m part of the minority, so I always try to give newcomers understanding their background and knowing their potential....I truly feel I have that level of empathy to say I understand that they have the potential, but just not been given the opportunity...” (E 107, large employer)

Findings

- Language and cultural fit were common themes discussed by employers in relation to recruitment and work integration.
- Employers provided language supports and engaged in cultural onboarding.
“...we make a big deal in the job coaching of what is it that employers are looking for...people who follow rules...show up on time...What the next employer will want...I’ll tell...I’m trying to help you so that you can be a long-term productive member of society in Canada” (E102, Medium employer)
- Some employers were involved in settlement needs of recent immigrant and refugee workers.



Findings: Safe Work Integration of Recent Immigrant and Refugees

Findings

- Most employers reported that recent immigrants and refugees lacked safety knowledge and awareness.
- This lack was often attributed to different safety standards practiced in the newcomer workers' home countries

“...the refugees are very poor on safety. So, we need to spend more time on safety than we do with a Canadian. If I tell you, don't put your hand in the machine unless you have the guards down, you won't do it. For them, you have to say, absolutely not. They think they can save time by taking the guards off, or by, I'll just wear sandals instead of steel toes, because I always wear sandals.” (E 102, medium employer)

Findings

- Ensuring that newcomer workers with language barriers understood OHS was a key challenge.

“...We need these individuals to understand because as it is a rough industry, health and safety is number one for us, so we need them to have a full understanding of our safe operating procedures. And sometimes it can be a challenge having them understand...” (E 104, medium employer)

Findings

- Some employers reported challenges in managing workplace health and safety due to different cultural and religious practices of newcomers.

“...the women were wearing long skirts...scarves...that’s a safety hazard because it can get caught...I said...I know it’s your religion and I respect that...but...this is safety...so, they all came in with pants under their skirts...still had [scarves] but wearing toques...that was fine...that was very new for me, and I didn’t even think of that ever potentially happening...the more that I work with different religions, I’m going to run into different things” (E104, Medium employer)

Findings

- Some employers, especially small businesses, experienced resource/capacity challenges related to OHS

“It’s one thing to be a large corporation with a safety team, but we have massive amounts of small companies or two-man teams, with literacy rate issues...I would say 90% of them are overwhelmed by what their responsibilities are and trying to keep up with what they’re supposed to be doing.” (K 303, key informant)

Findings

- Settlement agencies played a role in helping employers in recruitment and onboarding as well as advocating for newcomers' safety and rights at the workplace

“..I had to intervene because then I had to question the contract initially was signed. So, it took me a couple of weeks, back and forth with the employer to argue the quality of the training, with the workplace health and safety standards that they didn't follow. How much they put my client at risk, the fact that the contract they gave my client to sign they didn't cover a lot of things that they should have. So, I had to work with the employer and the client until the client gets fully paid.” (S 210, service provider)

Discussion

- While we interviewed a diverse group of employers, common themes from the interviews provided insights related to employers' experiences, resource needs and challenges in hiring and working with newcomer workers.
- Language, cultural fit, settlement needs, and safety knowledge and practices of recent immigrant and refugees were described as challenges by employers.
- Most employer supports were informal practices depending on the willingness and the resources of the employer.

Discussion

- Employers may lack resources to provide training to workers with language challenges and may not know how to work with cultural diversity.
- Providing training and resources to employers who hire newcomers — especially to small businesses — on managing health and safety and injury prevention can help create safer workplaces.
- Immigrant service agencies can be an important resource and support to employers, however, this requires resources and funding
- Creating avenues for collaboration between policy makers, community-based organizations and employers can better ensure safe work integration.

Limitations

- Sample size
- Generalizability
- Social desirability

Thank you



byanar@iwh.on.ca



@basakyanar



This document/slide is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.

Keep up on evidence-based practices from IWH



Sign up online for our monthly e-alerts, our quarterly newsletter, event notifications and more: iwh.on.ca/subscribe



Follow @iwhresearch on Twitter:
twitter.com/iwhresearch



Connect with us on LinkedIn:
linkedin.com/company/institute-for-work-and-health



Subscribe to our YouTube channel:
youtube.com/iwhresearch



**Institute
for Work &
Health**

Research Excellence
Advancing Employee
Health