

CAPACITY BUILDING THROUGH THE COVID-19 LENS:

HARNESSING INNOVATION AND MOBILIZING BEST PRACTICES FROM THE PANDEMIC



FOCUS AREA: EMPLOYMENT



COVID-19 CONTEXT



The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the existing employment vulnerabilities and barriers experienced by newcomers in Alberta. With the transition to Work-from-Home settings, newcomers have been over-represented in precarious industries such as *healthcare, transportation, factor work, agriculture, meat packing, and cleaning services*. These industries have large proportions of workers whose status in Canada are tied to their work visas, making the industry more susceptible to becoming more precarious (e.g., *limited bargaining power, increasing vulnerability to unfair treatment, abuse, and exploitation*) (Matilla-Santander et al., 2021).



PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS



CHALLENGES & BARRIERS

Organizational level

- Database transitions (physical papers to digitizing)
 - Special focus on **cyber security** to protect sensitive information
- **Fragmented service delivery in small centres** makes attracting and retaining newcomers challenging (e.g., *interpretation and translation services, support for workplace integration for newcomers with disabilities, industry specific mentorship or bridging programs*)

Client level

- Technological barriers (e.g., *access to appropriate technology such as laptops, sufficient and affordable internet service, digital literacy*)
- Relevant Canadian work experience (e.g., *Accessing bridging programs and/or meaningful mentorships*)
- Acceptance of foreign credentials
- Language barriers
- Fear of engaging in front line work

BEST PRACTICES

- Direct partnerships with employers (private sector) to connect the needs of the economy and pair them with newcomers
 - Demand-based approach connects newcomers with existing transferrable skills to the industries in demand
- Industry specific professional development resources
- Ensuring synchronous understanding of expectations for newcomers and service providers around job readiness

SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

- What are the barriers related to networking and mentorship opportunities for newcomers in relation to COVID-19?
- What have been the best practices and approaches utilized to combat the barriers associated with creating networking and mentorship opportunities?
- What are the industry specific challenges and opportunities seen during the COVID-19 context?
- How have agencies navigated pre-existing or emergent barriers within the employment services subsector of settlement amidst the public health context?
- What learnings from the COVID-19 context of employment service delivery are worthwhile to leverage into organizational capacity building and professional development?
- What approaches across agencies can strengthen the network of employment services and develop sector-wide capacity to support newcomers with emergent needs in relation to employment?
- What approaches have been developed to ensure effective employment service delivery to newcomers with complex needs or those who have traditionally been underserved?
- What specific issues have emerged from COVID-19 that have prompted you and your partner agencies to develop collaborative responses pertaining to employment services?