

# Barriers to Newcomer Adaptation and Settlement in Regina, Saskatchewan

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Background**

Immigrants and refugees have traditionally gravitated to the larger urban centres such as Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. However, smaller urban centres are beginning to attract a larger proportion of these newcomers. According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada<sup>1</sup> (2013, 2016), Saskatchewan receives increasing numbers of immigrants and refugees each year, and admitted just over 15,000 in the period between July 2015 and July 2016. Regina's population growth was 11.8%, the fourth highest city of all Canadian cities (Statistics Canada, 2017). The recent influx of Syrian refugees has presented challenges as community service providers have needed to mobilize resources and offer supports to these newcomers within a tight time frame. For a city accustomed to supporting smaller numbers of newcomers, then, the recent increases have created a need to better understand how to add to the existing supports and services.

### **Purpose of Research**

The purpose of the research reported herein was to identify the barriers that newcomers experience as they adapt to living in Regina, Saskatchewan. The study was initiated by, and completed in partnership with, the Regina Region Local Immigration Partnership (RRLIP) with funding from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). The specific areas of focus were the barriers to accessing child care, educational opportunities, and employment, though newcomers participating in this research were also asked to describe other challenges they and their families faced in terms of navigating daily life in the new context. In order to gain a more complete understanding of their experiences, the newcomer participants were encouraged to share about the services and supports they had accessed while making the transition to life in Regina, as well as their recommendations for improvement to the existing range of services.

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<sup>1</sup> Now named Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

## **Methodology**

The data for this study were generated through a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods simultaneously to see if the two produced a similar understanding of the phenomenon. For the quantitative approach, the survey instruments used were two different questionnaires with primarily closed-ended questions designed by the research team and piloted with members of the target demographic. Both questionnaires were available on-line (on the RRLIP web site) or in hard copy as desired. The questionnaire for newcomers was available in six languages; English, Arabic, Hindi, Urdu, French, and Tagalog.

Quantitative data were collected from two groups of participants; first, community stakeholders eighteen years of age or older who had direct contact with newcomers through their volunteer or paid work; and second, newcomers who had been born outside of Canada, lived in Canada for less than five years, and were a minimum of eighteen years of age. The community stakeholder questionnaires were distributed to 80 (n= 80) different immigrant-serving agencies, employers, and service providers. Questionnaires were completed by 194 (n=194) community stakeholders and 305 (n=305) newcomers between November 2016 and February 2017. The research team used Qualtrics computer software to collect the data from the questionnaires. Subsequently, the data were imported into SPSS computer statistical software.

Qualitative data were collected in semi-structured focus group discussions with newcomers who had been born outside of Canada, had lived in Canada for less than five years, and were a minimum of eighteen years of age. These newcomers were recruited through snowball sampling and spoke to the researchers for an hour and a half to two hours. Between November 26, 2016 and February 23, 2017, we conducted 13 focus groups and a total of 96 (n=96) participants; 50 (n=50) women, 43 (n=43) men, and 3 (n=3) individuals who did not specify their gender, participated. Interpreters were provided if desired by the participants. All focus groups were recorded and transcribed. The data were analyzed by doing multiple readings, developing a coding framework engaging in focused coding, and completing a pattern-level analysis to identify themes.

## Findings

The findings in this study indicated that newcomers experience a variety of challenges with respect to accessing child care, educational opportunities, and employment. It should be noted that since the focus of the research was barriers experienced by newcomers, the tone of their responses and of this report is reflective of this emphasis. The newcomers who took part in the study did, however, also identify a variety of supports and services.

In terms of child care, these newcomers had strong preferences for their children's care. Many desired child care that was congruent with their own cultural practices and the dominant practices, stating that it was optimal for their children to retain their language and culture and have access to foods from their culture (such as *halal* foods). In contrast, some parents believed that they could reinforce cultural practices and first language in the home, and wanted their children in child care programs so they could learn to live in a multicultural and multiracial society. Like many other Canadian families, newcomers experience impediments such as lack of available child care spaces, high cost, and an inability to find child care that is easily accessible from home or by public transit. Due to the loss of their familial and social networks from their home countries, however, newcomers struggled to build the necessary local connections to overcome these barriers. In part, due to this lack of contacts and in part due to language barriers, many newcomers faced administrative barriers related to applying for subsidies, finding child care programs, and applying for wait lists. When they could not procure child care, many newcomers stated that they were unable to fully access employment, education, and language or job training opportunities. Some experienced feelings of isolation and loneliness as a result of not having the option to study or work.

Both newcomers and international students face a variety of obstacles while trying to access, or successfully complete, educational programs in Regina. Many of the newcomers participating in this research came to Canada with varying levels of education in their home countries (elementary to post-secondary) and there was a significant relationship between their educational level and ability to access services in general, though they were better equipped to access health care and housing. An overwhelming majority of the newcomers had accessed English language classes, but some continued their studies in high school upgrading, certificate or trades, or degree programs. Consistent with the scholarly literature, lack of English skills was seen as a major obstacle to pursuing further education or training. Many of the newcomer

students who came with academic achievements from their home countries had to “start over” in their education due to language barriers or lack of recognition for their credentials. Finances also influenced newcomers’ abilities to either complete further education or make ends meet as students. International students, in particular, reported paying astronomical tuition fees, and some did not feel they received “value” for their tuition in terms of assistance and supports. Furthermore, they experienced discontinuities between post-secondary educational institutions back home and in Canada including cultural differences in the classroom norms and expectations, difficulties with academic writing, and the need to improve their computer skills. Since they had left behind their families and friends, many participants experienced varying degrees of emotional stress, loneliness, and isolation. Finally, a number of international students cited instances where they felt that their instructors, classmates, academic advisors, or other institutional staff members demonstrated a lack of empathy or awareness on the part of others. In spite of this concern, many newcomers also explained that they had received educational supports from instructors, staff at the public libraries, and immigrant-serving agencies, although they primarily relied on family members, members of their cultural communities, or other newcomers for advice and assistance.

The newcomers participating in this research indicated that finding employment is one of the most challenging aspects of adapting to life in Regina. Moreover, many refugees expressed that it was very important for them to secure employment in order to make contributions to the Canadian economy in view of the supports they had received upon arrival. However, the participants consistently reported that the lack of Canadian experience, the requirement of Canadian references, the need for credential evaluation, challenges of credential recognition and labour market entry, language and age barriers, as well as gender and culture were impediments to obtaining and retaining employment. Many described how they needed to “start over” or “start from zero” in Canada, taking minimum wage jobs in order to support their families because their educational credentials and professional designations from their home countries were not recognized. The systemic devaluing of their educational attainments and experiences from back home contributed to a sense of inferiority and despair for some newcomers. Furthermore, they were expected to have Canadian experience to find employment, but it was difficult to secure a position without local experience and references. The loss of their social networks, lack of English language skills, age, gender, and cultural

background were other factors that sometimes exacerbated these issues. The hopes and fears that newcomers experience while attempting to survive in the new social, cultural, and economic environment are discussed in this report. Overall, the study demonstrated the multifaceted challenges that newcomers face in the Regina labour market.

Finally, shortage of affordable housing, cultural differences, lack of transportation and increasing public transportation fares, weather, and isolation are some of the additional factors that impact on newcomers' daily lives as they adapt to living in Regina. Newcomers affirmed that maintaining their cultures and languages and finding familiar foods could be difficult in the city, though this depended on the size of their ethno-cultural community. Language was a barrier to accessing services and supports for daily living. These factors demonstrate complex and profound integration challenges that cannot easily be solved without different levels of government and community support. For example, the shortage of affordable housing and increasing rental rates point to the continuing problem of a lack of social housing at the national and provincial levels. In many municipalities, including Regina, the rising costs of bus fares combined with other cuts in services affects the working poor in marginalized communities, including newcomers who have to rely on public transit. At the individual level, the isolation that manifests itself in the form of lack of social networks and support can also add to the mental and emotional stress for newcomers in Regina. These and others are among the issues that many participants experience while living in their new social environment.

## **Recommendations**

The focus group participants and questionnaire respondents made numerous suggestions for the improvement of services and supports in the City of Regina. These recommendations are as follows:

### **Child Care:**

- Increase government support to reduce the cost of child care.
- Increase the number of available child care spots, achieved via recruitment, and training, and retention of child care educators.
- Create opportunities for new Canadians to train as early childhood educators.
- Increase support for those who want to open licensed child care programs (funding for education and support or incentives for licensing).

- Integrate the cultural practices and languages of the families into programs.

### **Education:**

- Increase availability of interpretation services, in an increased number of languages, to assist international students at post-secondary institutions.
- Develop a network of support people from different cultural communities that could offer support or interpretation over the phone.
- Develop a mentoring program for international students.
- Increase coordination among agencies that serve newcomers so that newcomers can receive programming and support from different agencies, alleviating the need for a single agency to provide for all of a newcomer's needs.
- Educate post-secondary instructors on challenges and needs experienced by international or immigrant students.
- Implement additional supports for international students within departments and faculties in post-secondary institutions, such as support in securing practicum or co-op work term placements for students without work history in Regina or Canada.
- Improve communication about the necessary financial commitments to students before they enroll in university (a breakdown of how much they would pay per course, how many classes students typically enroll in each year, and the approximate tuition rate hikes each year), so that they could plan accordingly.
- Increase availability of and access to Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) and bridging programs for internationally educated professionals.
- Increase availability of English-language courses.
- Arrange to greet newcomer students at the airport.

### **Employment:**

- Provide employment related volunteer opportunities for newcomers.
- Provide opportunities for newcomers to practice English skills while working or volunteering.

- Ensure smoother processes for interprovincial credential recognition, which would allow Saskatchewan to recognize certificates from other Canadian provinces.
- Encourage immigrant service agencies to advertise their services and programs to various immigrant community associations.
- Ensure reciprocal learning between employers and newcomers that allows sharing and exchange of information regarding Canadian culture and other cultures.
- Ensure that English language instruction also includes training on Canadian labour laws.
- Ensure English classes are extended beyond one year after arrival in Saskatchewan and that the English classes also focus on providing pertinent information for newcomers, such as shopping advice and how to speak to children's teachers and doctors.
- Extend consideration for existing immigrant service agencies to provide online support to internationally trained individuals before arrival in Saskatchewan. For example, provide services to foreign-trained personnel that include video calls, webinars, and workshops on licensing in specific professions, licensing/certification processes in the skilled trades and regulated professions, regulatory bodies and registration processes, credential assessment; employment and training programs that can help immigrants get licensed/certified and find work in their field; financial assistance; as well as English and French language training programs.
- Consider employer subsidies as incentives to employers to train newcomers for potential employment.
- Consider more resources for employment counsellors to support newcomers as they navigate the Canadian labour market.
- Assist employers in findings ways to gather references from employees who are new to Canada.

**Adaptation and Settlement:**

- Create a mechanism for providing pre-arrival support (webinar, Skype calls, etc.) to help all categories of newcomers prepare for life in Regina.
- Offer an orientation to Regina upon arrival to newcomers from all immigration streams.
- Develop a centralized means of distributing information to newcomers (such as information at the airport).
- Provide opportunities for newcomers to call home upon arrival and during the settlement process.
- Increase social opportunities for newcomers and provide opportunities for newcomers to meet people and make Canadian friends.
- Promote settlement organizations and the services they offer through ethno-cultural community associations/organizations.
- Make interpretation services accessible at all essential services, such as hospitals and medical clinics. In cases where an interpreter is not readily available, there should be a mechanism in place to access interpretation services over the phone.
- Develop ways to enable newcomers to secure rental housing without local references.
- Increase the availability of indoor recreation opportunities for children.
- Increase the availability of services for newcomers at public libraries and other community spaces.

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## Introduction

Immigrants and refugees form a substantial proportion of the Canadian population. Moreover, Statistics Canada (2011) has predicted that the ethnocultural diversity of Canada will increase dramatically; by 2031, 29%–32% of the population is projected to be from a visible minority group and 25%–28% of the population will be foreign born. According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2013), Saskatchewan is receiving increasing numbers of immigrants and refugees each year. The recent influx of Syrian refugees, in particular, has presented challenges as community service providers have mobilized resources and offered supports to these newcomers within a tight time frame. In light of this demographic shift, this study reported on in *Barriers to Newcomer Adaptation and Settlement in Regina* was initiated by, and completed in partnership with, the Regina Region Local Immigration Partnership (RRLIP) with funding from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). The purpose of this study was to identify the barriers that hinder newcomers in adapting to life in the City of Regina. More specifically, this research explores barriers to accessing child care, education, and employment. Newcomers participating in the research were asked to describe the services and supports that they had drawn on in making the transition to life in Regina as well as to offer their suggestions for improvement.

This report is organized in six main sections. This introduction provides an overview of the context of immigration patterns, as well as the current immigration trends at the national and provincial (i.e., Saskatchewan) levels. The second section outlines the methodological approach used in this mixed-methods study (participant recruitment, participant demographics, data collection, data analysis procedures) and the strengths and limitations of the study. The third, fourth, and fifth sections detail the study findings in the distinct areas of child care, education, and employment. Child care will be addressed first as it establishes the context for workforce participation and accessing educational opportunities. In each of these key areas, the challenges and experiences of newcomers as they adapt to their life in Regina are examined. Finally, the concluding section outlines some of the additional challenges newcomers experience in their daily life as well as the recommendations that emerged from the study.

## **The Regina Region Local Immigration Partnership (RRLIP)**

The first Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) began in Ontario in 2008. At present, there are numerous Canadian communities that have LIPs - including Winnipeg, Calgary, Banff, and St. John's, with many others nearing implementation. The Regina Region Local Immigration Partnership (RRLIP) was formed in 2014 after the Regina Open Door Society (RODS), in collaboration with the Regina Regional Intersectoral Committee (now the Regina Human Services Partnership) successfully obtained funding from Citizenship and Immigration Canada to create the RRLIP (<http://rrlip.ca/pages/about>). The RRLIP is a collaborative community initiative designed to build on the community's strengths, support community level research, promote linkages between sectors, and engage collaboratively with a diversity of stakeholders to foster a more welcoming community where immigrants are fully engaged and integrated.

Early work of the RRLIP included building connections with organizations, hosting numerous community forums and completing a high-level scan of the community to identify resources and services, gaps, and priorities that aid in the integration and settlement of newcomers to Regina. In addition, to foster awareness about newcomer needs, challenges, and strengths, the RRLIP has, and will continue to develop, educational campaigns such as the Refugee Photo Project and Refugee Silhouette (both available on the project website at [www.rrlip.ca](http://www.rrlip.ca)).

In order to regularly connect with community, the RRLIP hosts a website with a news blog which includes information about the project, as well as local programs, resources and services that could be of benefit to newcomers, or those working or volunteering with newcomers. In addition, two project newsletters are regularly produced to inform the community of RRLIP's work and helpful community resources. The 'Newcomer News' is a plain language publication that allows new English learners to receive information about the community in an easy-to-read format. It has been designed to be utilized in by ESL classes, conversation circles etc., and by newcomers themselves. Other community outreach includes annual forums, which will allow opportunity to provide project updates, pertinent community information etc.

The Regina Region Local Immigration Partnership is directed by a multi-sector Partnership Council and informed by an Immigrant Advisory Table (IAT). The IAT includes

newcomers from various backgrounds and ethnicities, ages, genders, educational status, employment, and lengths of time in Canada. The combined knowledge and lived experience of this group informs the Partnership Council, and provides feedback and ideas to the committees and working groups. The RRLIP is in the early stages of establishing additional committees and working groups, with an example being the Canadian Housing Advisory Committee, organized to examine newcomer challenges in adapting to Canadian housing and to develop local solutions. The Partnership Council will guide and oversee the implementation of the newly developed *Diversity, Settlement and Integration Community Plan*. Working groups and committees will support the work. Based on the findings of this study (surveys, focus groups and literature review), the *Plan* captures the identified challenges and barriers within key priority areas and the actions required to obtain outcomes that reflect a welcoming, inclusive community.

## **Context of Immigration**

Historically, the number of immigrants arriving in Canada at any given time has fluctuated due to policy changes in immigration, Canada's economic situation, world movement of migrants and refugees (Statistics Canada, 2016a), and population needs. For much of Canada's immigration history, people from the British Isles have made up the bulk of immigrants to Canada, but other groups have also come in large numbers. United Empire Loyalists coming to the Canadian colonies in the wake of the American Revolution in the late 18th century were the first large, non-British or French group to immigrate (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada [IRCC], 2017a). Beginning in the nineteenth century, Canada began accepting large numbers of non-British immigrants. In the 1880s, the first wave of such immigration included Russians, Poles, Jews, Ukrainians, Germans, Italians, Dutch, and Scandinavians. At the turn of the century, Canada promoted settlement of the newly opened west and record numbers of immigrants arrived; the highest ever recorded number came in 1913 when more than 400,000 immigrants arrived (Statistics Canada, 2016a). The numbers of immigrants dropped with the onset of World War I, and this lull continued until after World War II with the exception of a second wave of Ukrainians fleeing communism and the Russian occupation from the 1920s until 1939 (IRCC, 2017a). The period of the Great Depression and World War II saw the lowest numbers of immigrants. Another major wave of immigration

began after World War II and while the British Isles were still the preferred source of immigrants, people were coming from across Europe and the Middle East including 250,000 displaced persons from Central and Eastern Europe (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017a).

In 1967, Canada introduced the point system, which resulted in a major shift in immigration patterns. For the first time, large numbers of immigrants came from Asia; China alone sourced 225,000 immigrants over the next 10 years (Statistics Canada, 2016a). In 1969, further policy changes were made following Canada becoming a signatory to the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. This meant that Canada would not return a person to their country of origin if that person had grounds to fear that their life or rights would be threatened (IRCC, 2017a). In 1978, changes to the *Immigration Act of 1976* allowed Canadian citizens to privately sponsor refugees. In the aftermath of the Vietnam War, more than 60,000 boat people from Southeast Asia were admitted between 1979 and 1980, many of whom were privately sponsored. Also in the 1970s, 7,000 Chileans, who fled the violence following the overthrow of the government in 1973, came to Canada, and 85,000 immigrants from the Caribbean and large numbers of Ugandans arrived (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017a). The 1971 Census shows that 28.3% immigrants were born in the United Kingdom and 51.4% immigrants were born in another European country.

In 1982, Canada adopted the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and in 1985 the rights under the Charter were extended to asylum seekers, which enhanced Canada's attractiveness to refugees. This was followed by the third wave of immigrants arriving, many from Eastern Europe (Immigration, Citizenship and Refugees Canada, 2017a). On average Canada admits approximately 235,000 immigrants per year. In 2011, the National Household Survey showed that people from Asia and Africa were the main source of immigrants in Canada in the first decade of the new millennium (Statistics Canada, 2016a).

In June 2002, the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA)* came into effect, in which four main categories of permanent immigrants were established: economic class, including skilled workers; provincial and territorial nominees; family class, that is, family members of Canadian citizens and permanent residents; and refugee class, or protected persons, which includes all categories of refugees, government sponsored and private

sponsored (Government of Saskatchewan, 2012a, 2014; Statistics Canada, 2015), and refugee claimants. The *IRPA* gives IRCC the authority to grant permanent residency to people who would otherwise not qualify, based on humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

The largest number of immigrants coming to Canada come as economic immigrants (62.8% of all immigrants in 2011), followed by family class (22.7%) and protected persons (8.8%; Statistics Canada, 2015). Approximately 26,000 refugees have arrived in Canada in the past ten years.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the immigration categories and the top ten home countries from which immigrants to Canada came in 2011.

**Table 1. Immigrants by Category According to Country of Birth, 2011**

Country of Birth	Economic	Family	Protected Persons	Other	Total
Philippines	31,802	4,354	23	304	36,483
China	20,653	7,582	1,297	502	30,034
India	17,329	9,044	353	262	26,988
Iran	5,765	858	796	107	7,526
United States	2,887	2,817	786	573	7,063
Pakistan	3,930	2,110	720	211	6,971
Haiti	2,497	1,557	2,136	355	6,545
Iraq	1,120	255	4,607	34	6,016
United Kingdom	3,625	1,359	6	190	5,180
Colombia	1,853	698	2,034	111	4,696
<b>Total</b>	<b>91,461</b>	<b>30,631</b>	<b>12,758</b>	<b>2,649</b>	<b>137,502</b>

(Statistics Canada, 2015)

## Current Patterns of Immigration

In the decade between 2001–2011, Canada’s population grew by 3.26 million and from 2011 to 2016, it grew by nearly 3 million people. Approximately two-thirds of Canada’s population growth from 2011 to 2016 was due to immigration (Statistics Canada, 2017). From July 2015 to July 2016, there were 320,932 new immigrants, representing the fastest growth since 2009-2010 when 270,581 and the highest since 1971 (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017a). Saskatchewan’s population grew by 6.3% during this time, whereby the number of people coming to Canada as immigrants was 15,564 and was almost the same as the number of births at 15,969 (Statistics Canada, 2017). Regina’s growth was 11.8%, the fourth largest population growth for metropolitan cities in Canada, significantly higher than Canada’s overall population growth of 5% (Statistics Canada, 2017).

In 2015/16, Canada resettled more than 39,000 refugees (IRCC, 2017a) many coming from Iraq, Syria, and Bhutan. More recent statistics show that between November 2015 and January 2017, Canada admitted over 40,000 Syrian refugees who have settled in 350 communities across Canada. Of these, 21,876 were government assisted refugees, 3,931 were blended visa office and referred refugees, and 14,274 were privately sponsored (IRCC, 2017a).

## **Trends for the Future**

Based on a report funded by IRCC, it has been projected that Canada's population by 2036 will consist of 30% first-generation immigrants and their children compared to 20.7% in 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2010). The projections used in this study were based on high and low growth scenarios. In a low-growth scenario, 24.5% of the population of Canada will be first-generation immigrants and their children. In high-growth projections, for example, Toronto's immigrant or child of an immigrant population could be as high as 81.4% compared to 74% in 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2010).

In the high-growth scenario, by 2036 Asians will make up the majority of immigrants in Canada consisting of 55%–58% of immigrants, while the European immigrant population will decline to 15%–18%. It is also expected that the African population in Canada will increase to 11% from 1% in 2001. Also based on high-growth projections, the working-age population will be 40% visible minorities, and 30% (between 10.7 and 13.8 million people) of the population will have a first language other than English or French (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2017).

Based on this study, it is clear that even with low-growth projections there will be an increasing number of immigrants living in Canada in the next few decades. Therefore, the need to have effective integration services will continue to be important.

Table 2 shows Canada’s population changes from 2015 to 2016.

**Table 2. Population Changes, July 1, 2015–June 30, 2016**

	<b>Canada</b>	<b>Quebec</b>	<b>Ontario</b>	<b>Manitoba</b>	<b>Sask</b>
Births	392,902	86,850	147,244	17,372	15,969
Deaths	269,012	62,650	102,701	10,676	9,577
Immigration	320,932	55,074	119,647	17,238	15,006
Emigration	64,305	9,819	28,908	1,687	859
Net temporary emigration	18,418	2,185	6,921	418	209
Returning emigrants	37,564	5,359	17,751	1,362	558
Net non-permanent residents	38,152	6,077	33,680	4,856	1,197
Net interprovincial migration	.....	-12,069	6,154	-5,900	-3,716

(Statistics Canada, 2016b, table 051-0004)

## **Education and Language**

The education levels of most immigrants when arriving in Canada is quite high. However, their foreign credentials are often not recognized, and they are forced to either return to school or work in entry-level jobs to survive, a topic which is further discussed in the report. Table 3 shows the number of immigrants with and without a post-secondary degree, aged 25–64, in Canada in 2006. This age group made up 81% of the labour force during that year (Statistics Canada, 2015). As the table shows, about two thirds (approximately 66%) of immigrants in this age cohort had a post-secondary certificate, diploma, or degree compared to 59% of Canadians in the same age group.

Table 3 shows the educational levels of all immigrants aged 25 to 64 who were in Canada in 2006.

**Table 3. Distribution of individuals aged 25 to 64 by postsecondary education status, immigrant status, period of landing and location of study Canada, 2006**

Immigrant status	All individuals	With post-secondary education			Without post-secondary education
		All individuals	Internationally-educated	Canada-educated	
Number					
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,382,115</b>	<b>10,541,860</b>	<b>1,649,965</b>	<b>8,891,900</b>	<b>6,840,250</b>
Canadian-born	13,148,925	7,784,240	154,915	7,629,325	5,364,685
Immigrants	4,076,700	2,643,895	<b>1,399,010</b>	<b>1,244,890</b>	1,432,805
Very-recent immigrants	681,860	516,700	450,045	66,655	165,165
Recent immigrants	556,565	391,405	288,775	102,625	165,165
Established immigrants	2,838,275	1,735,800	660,190	1,075,605	1,102,480
Non-permanent residents	156,485	113,725	96,035	17,685	42,760

**Source:** 2006 Census of Population, Statistics Canada.

Statistics Canada (2015)

Using the figures in Table 4, we know that 87% of very recent immigrants (those who have been in Canada less than five years) and 74% of recent immigrants (those who have been in Canada for six to 10 years) completed their post-secondary education outside of Canada, compared to 38% of established immigrants, most of whom were educated in Canada.

Approximately half of the internationally educated immigrants were women.

**Table 4. Profile of Internationally Educated and Canadian-Educated Immigrants, Aged 25–64**

	Canadian born	Canadian-educated immigrants	Very recent int'l educated immigrants	Recent int'l educated immigrants	Established int'l educated immigrants	Total int'l educated immigrants
<b>By sex</b>						
Women	3,979,765	628,265	230,830	143,630	324,000	698,460
Men	3,804,475	616,615	219,210	145,150	336,195	700,550
<b>By age groups</b>						
25–34	2,043,875	307,785	242,450	170,695	50,175	21,585
35–44	2,232,815	368,450	463,645	188,515	134,350	140,790
45–54	2,130,465	313,580	388,325	71,720	82,030	234,575
55–64	1,377,090	255,070	304,590	19,115	22,220	263,250
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,784,240</b>	<b>1,244,890</b>	<b>450,045</b>	<b>288,775</b>	<b>660,190</b>	<b>1,399,010</b>

Based on 2006 Census figures  
(Statistics Canada, 2015)

## **Language of Immigrants**

Official language proficiency is an important factor contributing to immigrant integration in Canada. Learning English or French was one of the major challenges cited by newcomers, followed by lack of Canadian work experience and lack of acceptance of foreign work experience or qualifications (Statistics Canada, 2015). In 2006, the majority (1,156,180) of internationally educated immigrants spoke either English (81%) or French (13%). Of those immigrants educated in Canada, 89% held Canadian citizenship and 64% of those who were educated outside of Canada were Canadian citizens (Statistics Canada, 2015). The top ten mother tongues spoken apart from English and French were as follows: Chinese languages, Tagalog, Spanish, Arabic, Punjabi, Russian, Polish, Urdu, Korean, and Romanian (Statistics Canada, 2015).

Despite the high post-secondary education levels of most immigrants, their wages in Canada are often quite low. The median employment income of immigrant taxpayers for 2006 was \$16,800. However, with more time spent in Canada, the income of the same cohort increased to \$26,000 in 2009 and to \$33,000 in 2014. The median annual income for immigrants who came under the Canadian experience class category between 2009 and 2014 was \$50,000. For immigrants who came under the provincial and territorial nominee programs, annual median income was \$24,000 between 2009 and 2014 (Statistics Canada, 2016f).

It is evident that newcomers' income varied depending under which category they were admitted. Skilled workers earned more in 2013 than any other immigrants. Their average income was estimated at \$49,000 in 2013, while the average income for refugee families was \$29,000 (Statistics Canada, 2015). The median income of refugees was the lowest of all newcomers, but their income also rose over time. In 2004, a cohort of refugees earned a median income of \$14,700 one year after landing in Canada which rose to \$18,800 five years after landing. Ten years after landing in Canada, they were earning \$24,000 (Statistics Canada, 2016f). These income levels reflect the extreme poverty of refugees coming to Canada, which creates additional barriers to acquiring Canadian education and/or Canadian equivalents to the education they may have received in their home country.

In 2006, the top occupations of immigrants (aged 25–64) were sales and service (32.1%), business, finance, and administrative (22.4%), manufacturing (14.5%), trades and

transport/equipment operators (13.9%), applied sciences (7.2%), and health (4.4%; Statistics Canada, 2015).

## **Saskatchewan Immigration Patterns and Trends**

Saskatchewan has become a major destination for immigrants since 2005 when the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program (SINP) was introduced allowing for an alternate and quicker means of entry of immigrants who qualified, based on specific criteria established by the province (Government of Saskatchewan, 2012b). Immigration provides an important tool for addressing Saskatchewan's labour market needs and demographic challenges by increasing the pool of workers in the province and enriching the ethno-cultural mosaic of our communities (Government of Saskatchewan, 2014, p. 5). Between 2006 and 2011, 12,000 new immigrants settled in this province (Government of Saskatchewan, 2012b). As of July 1, 2015 metropolitan Regina's population was estimated at 241,422, which was an 1.87% increase from 2014. In the past five years, Regina has experienced an average annual growth rate of 2.49% (Statistics Canada, 2016b). The two largest growth factors were immigration (3,593) and births (3,148) (Statistics Canada, 2016).

Historically, immigrants settled in larger centres in Ontario, British Columbia (Vancouver), and Quebec. More recent patterns show greater growth in the western provinces (Statistics Canada, 2017). The period from 2006 to 2011 was the first time since joining Confederation that the three Prairie provinces recorded the highest rates of population growth (Statistics Canada, 2017). Saskatchewan's population growth in 2011 to 2016 was 6.3% which was above the national population growth rate of 5%. Saskatchewan's 6.9% growth rate was also above the national growth rate of 6.7% in the period 2006 to 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2017).

Table 5 depicts the population growth in Canada and the provinces/territories.

**Table 5. Population and Growth Rate of Canada, Provinces, and Territories, 2006–2016**

Province	Population in 2016	Population growth rate 2006–2011 (%)	Population growth rate 2011–2016 (%)
<b>Canada</b>	<b>35,151,728</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>5</b>
Newfoundland & Labrador	519,716	1.8	1
Prince Edward Island	142,907	3.2	1.9
Nova Scotia	923,598	0.9	0.2
New Brunswick	747,101	2.9	-0.5
Quebec	8,164,361	4.7	3.3
Ontario	13,448,494	5.7	4.6
Manitoba	1,278,365	5.2	5.8
<b>Saskatchewan</b>	<b>1,098,352</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>6.3</b>
Alberta	4,067,175	10.8	11.6
British Columbia	4,648,055	7.0	5.6
Yukon	35,874	11.6	5.8
Northwest Territories	41,786	0.0	0.8
Nunavut	35,944	8.3	12.7

(Statistics Canada, 2017)

As shown in Table 5, Saskatchewan had the fourth highest growth rate in 2006 to 2011 and the third highest growth rate in 2011 to 2016. In both census periods, Saskatchewan’s growth was higher than the national average. In 2016, Regina showed an 11.8% growth rate, the fourth highest for metropolitan cities in Canada for the period of 2011 to 2016. Table 6 shows the population growth rates for the five fastest growing cities in Canada in 2016.

**Table 6. Population Growth Rate in Five Fastest-Growing Cities in Canada, 2016**

City	Population in 2016	Population growth rate 2006–2011 (%)	Population growth rate 2011–2016 (%)
Calgary, AB	1,392,609	12.6	14.6
Edmonton, AB	1,321,426	12.1	13.9
Saskatoon, SK	295,095	11.5%	12.5
<b>Regina, SK</b>	<b>236,481</b>	<b>7.9</b>	<b>11.8</b>
Lethbridge, AB	117,394	11.3	10.8

(Statistics Canada, 2017)

From 2011 to 2016, seven out of the 10 census areas with the highest population growth rates were located on the prairies: four in Alberta; two in Manitoba, and one on the Saskatchewan-Alberta border. In Saskatchewan, the number of private dwellings increased 5.6%, which was also the national average, but this was not enough to keep up with the population growth of 11.8% (Statistics Canada, 2017).

## **Immigration and Regina**

In 2014, 8,791 (78%) of all immigrants in Saskatchewan came through SINP (Government of Saskatchewan, 2014). The economic class accounted for 95% of those coming to Saskatchewan in 2009 (Government of Saskatchewan, 2012a) out of which 73% came under SINP.

In Saskatchewan, the top two destinations for all immigrants in all classes was Regina and Saskatoon. In 2014, Regina admitted 3,736 immigrants and Saskatoon admitted 4,369 (Government of Saskatchewan, 2014). Between 2012 and 2014, there were immigrants from 158 countries; under the SINP, people from 132 countries arrived in 226 communities. In the same period, immigration accounted for 74% of the population growth in Saskatchewan. Since 2007, the provincial nominee program has increased by 378%. In 2014, Saskatchewan admitted 1,233 people (10%) under the federal family class and 701 (6%) as refugees (Government of Saskatchewan, 2014). Out of all the immigrants coming to Saskatchewan in 2014, most were from Asia and the Pacific (72%), followed by Africa (11%) and Europe and the United Kingdom (11%). In 2014, the top countries of birth of immigrants were the Philippines (29%), India (21%), and Ukraine (10%; Government of Saskatchewan, 2014). Of the immigrants who came under the SINP, 33% were from the Philippines, 32% from India, 12% from Ukraine, 5% from Pakistan, and 4% from Bangladesh (Government of Saskatchewan, 2014). Consistently, immigrants from the Philippines have made Saskatchewan home since 2007 (Government of Saskatchewan, 2012b, 2014).

In 2014 the top occupation for all immigrants was classified as new workers, federal investors, federal entrepreneurs and other unrecorded labour skills (42%). The other occupations for immigrants in 2014 were in the skills and technical trades (22%), food counter attendants, kitchen helpers, and cooks (19%), clerical (12%), labourers (12%), professionals (7%), and managerial (5%; Government of Saskatchewan, 2014).

In 2014, the official language of most immigrants coming to Saskatchewan was English, spoken by 78% of the newcomers; none spoke French. Ninety-three percent of provincial nominees spoke English. Education levels were similar to Canadian levels. In 2014, 26% of the immigrants to Saskatchewan had a bachelor's degree, 17% had 10 to 13 years of schooling, 8% had a master's degree, and 1% had a doctoral degree (Government of Saskatchewan, 2014).

In addition, Saskatchewan admitted 660 refugees in 2014, out of which 74% were government assisted, 21% were privately sponsored, and 8% were refugees landed in Canada. The remaining 2% were either refugee dependants or blended visa or referred refugees (CIC News, 2016). For refugees, the top countries of birth were Eritrea (17%), Iraq (13%), Democratic Republic of Sudan (10%), Democratic Republic of Congo (10%), Syria (7%), Democratic Republic of Somalia (7%), and Ethiopia (7%), Burma (2%), Iran (2%) and an additional 22% were from other countries, not stated in the Saskatchewan Immigration report of 2012 to 2014.

Unlike the other immigrants, the most common mother tongue for refugees coming to Saskatchewan was Arabic (25%), Tigrigna (18%), Somali (12%), and Nepali (6%). For other immigrants, the most common mother language was Tagalog (26%), Chinese, Punjabi, and English (all 8%), Gujarati (6%) and Ukrainian, Urdu, Hindi, and Bengali (all 3%; Government of Saskatchewan, 2014). Overall, most refugees coming to Saskatchewan were between the ages of 15 and 49, with a large percentage of children under 14 years of age. For other immigrant groups, most were between the ages of 20 and 44.

Recent changes in world events included greater numbers of refugees coming from war torn countries. From November 2015 until January 29, 2017, Canada admitted 40,081 refugees from Syria; 21,876 were government sponsored, 3,931 were privately sponsored, and 14,274 were blended visa and office-referred refugees (IRCC, 2017b).

As demonstrated in Table 7, as of July 2016, Saskatchewan has accepted 1,188 refugees from Syria. It has also been reported that as of September 2016, Regina accepted nearly 650 Syrians, two-thirds of which were children (IRCC, 2017b). According to Saskatchewan government figures, Saskatchewan has accepted 1,236 Syrians (CBC News, 2016c).

**Table 7. Admission of Syrian Refugees to Saskatchewan by Immigration Category and Family Composition, November 4, 2015–July 31, 2016**

Family Size	Blended Sponsorship Refugees		Gov't Assisted Refugees		Privately Sponsored Refugees		Total	
	No. of families	Total persons	No. of families	Total Persons	No. of families	Total Persons	No. of families	Total Persons
1	3	3	17	17	2	2	22	22
2	3	6	7	14	1	2	11	22
3	3	3	14	42	2	6	17	51
4	5	3	40	160	3	12	48	192
5	3	15	56	280	2	10	61	305
6	4	24	39	234	-	-	43	258
7	-	-	20	140	-	-	20	140
8	1	8	12	96	-	-	13	104
9	-	-	8	72	-	-	8	72
11	1	11	1	11	-	-	2	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>1,066</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>1,188</b>

Based on 2016 data

(IRCC, 2017b)

In 2014, Saskatchewan admitted 3,398 temporary foreign workers, 5,049 students, and 3,398 people under the international mobility program (Government of Saskatchewan, 2014). Regina had 642 temporary foreign workers in 2014, 723 in 2013, and 470 in 2012. Of the temporary foreign workers, 73% were male and 27% female. Under the Temporary Foreign Workers Program (TFWP) Professional category in 2014, 33% were family physicians, 21% were specialist physicians, 13% university professors, 13% registered nurses, and 4% were civil engineers. In the Skilled and Technical category of the TFWP, 18% were cooks, 10% were food service supervisors, 8% were heavy duty mechanics, and 6% were agricultural workers/welders/machine operators. In the Managerial category, 24% were in construction, 11% in restaurant and food services, and 10% in retail and accommodation (Government of Saskatchewan, 2014). Foreign students came from China (30%), Nigeria (11%), India (9%), Saudi Arabia (7%), South Korea (4%), Pakistan (3%), United States (3%), and Iran (3%). Regina had 2,162 foreign students and Saskatoon, 2,302.

In 2014, Regina admitted 30% of all immigrants who came to Saskatchewan and Saskatoon admitted 36% (Government of Saskatchewan, 2014). Because of these numbers and the increasing number of refugees, Saskatchewan continued to grow by 6.3% (from 2011 to 2016), which was faster than the national growth rate of Canada at 5.9% in 2016, mainly due to immigration (Statistics Canada, 2017).

Regina's population was 236,481 in 2016 and the city grew 7.9% from 2006 to 2011 and 11.8% from 2011 to 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2017). Overall, Regina was the 4<sup>th</sup> largest city in Canada in terms of population growth. Calgary's population growth was 14.6%; Edmonton was at 13.9%; Saskatoon at 12.5%, Regina at 11.8%, followed by Lethbridge at 10.8% (Statistics Canada, 2017). The Prairie provinces received 27.9% of all new immigrants to Canada (CIC News, 2016). Saskatchewan admitted 15,006 new immigrants from July 2015 until July 2016 (CIC News, 2016).

Changes to the immigration system, with the introduction of the Express Entry selection system, have reduced processing times by 42%. This system allows the government to select individuals through the federal economic program (CIC News, 2016). Express Entry was first launched in January 2015 as a means to work through a backlog of applications. The government set a target to process up to 48,000 new arrivals through provincial nominee programs in 2016. The current Liberal government has been quite vocal in its support of immigration across all categories and sees immigration as an important part of the solution to demographic and labour challenges (CIC News, 2016). Canada wants to substantially increase the numbers of new immigrants in order to fill labour shortages and confront demographic challenges of an aging population (CIC News, 2016). Such a forecast will result in more new immigrants arriving in Regina, and it is imperative that they are offered the highest quality of settlement and language services so that they can be integrated into the labour force. This study will show that many newcomers are eager to contribute to the local culture and economy but are frustrated that their credentials are not recognized and by the limited access to the labour market and long wait lists. The following section will detail the methodology and methods used in this study.

## Methodology

### Overview of Methodology

The data for this study were generated through a mixed methods approach. Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner (2007) define mixed methods research as incorporating ideas of qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single research study. This methodology was chosen for several reasons. First, the research team aimed to collect data from as large a sample of participants as possible, which could more feasibly be achieved by means of two surveys. It was hoped that a large sample size might increase the possibility of accessing hard-to-reach newcomers who do not generally access services from immigrant-serving agencies. This approach had the advantage of allowing for a wide range of perspectives from members of many different ethno-cultural communities. The research team was able to better determine whether any of the barriers were encountered by a significant proportion of newcomers surveyed. In addition, the correlations or relationships between the variables could be explored in more depth (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015). Quantitative methods were also advantageous given the financial and time related resources that were available to the researchers. Qualitative methods permitted the research team to elicit the stories and perspectives of newcomers in focus group discussions. In this way, the team could gain a deeper or more complex understanding of the phenomenon under study—barriers to adaptation.

This study employed a triangulation design whereby qualitative and quantitative methods were used simultaneously to see if the two produced a similar understanding of the phenomenon (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015). In the case of this study, cross-sectional surveys were employed to collect quantitative data, while the qualitative approach for this research involved focus group discussions. After the study was approved by the University of Regina Research Ethics Board data were collected from three participant groups; one comprised key stakeholders who worked with newcomers and the other two groups consisted of newcomers.

**Methods.** The study was informed by data collected in three distinct sets. As described by Beresford and Evans (1999), the term “participants” is used in this study to mean people who are researched. The study also adopts the term “newcomer” to refer to immigrants and refugees who have been in Canada five years or fewer. Wilkinson et al. (2016) suggest that

focusing on newly arrived individuals creates an opportunity to examine their short-term and recent labour market experiences. In addition to examining newcomers' employment experiences, focus group discussions were also used to ask newcomers about their encounters with barriers to child care and education and experiences of living in Regina. In each participant group, the team studied a target population meeting specific criteria for inclusion as described below and used specific recruitment techniques to gain access to the participants.

**Participant group 1.** Survey data were gathered from a random sample of community stakeholders working directly with newcomers.

**Criteria.** These stakeholders comprised employees at immigrant-serving agencies, language instructors, conversation circle facilitators, and employers in businesses that employed a large number of newcomers. The criteria for inclusion were that the respondent needed to be at least eighteen years of age, able to read English, and had worked or volunteered with newcomers.

**Recruitment.** RRLIP staff made the initial contact with organizations to arrange for the recruitment of potential survey respondents through email. Several emails were sent out over the course of three months to invite stakeholders to respond, to provide them with the link to the survey, and to remind them of deadlines. Employers and service providers were asked to complete the survey as a means to share their insights and experiences gained from working with newcomers. With this information, the research team hoped to gain an understanding of the settlement services and supports that were available to newcomers. In addition, members of RRLIP and the research team contacted many stakeholders by phone or made in-person visits to businesses or organizations to request assistance. In many cases, RRLIP staff made multiple calls or visits to stakeholders in order to fully explain the study and obtain their assistance. RRLIP staff members were able to secure permission from one of the school boards to send the link to the survey home with newcomer parents. In total, 10 immigrant-serving organizations, 45 employers (i.e., restaurants, fast food services, health care agencies, grocery stores, and insurance companies) and 25 service providers (i.e., schools, libraries, child care centres, churches, post-secondary institutions, taxi and bus companies) were contacted and asked to assist with disseminating the surveys to their staff. Some of these employers then sent the information to many different branches. While 80 organizations in Regina were informed directly about this study, there was a link provided on RRLIP's website that may have been

accessed by respondents in organizations or businesses that were not contacted directly. No incentives were provided to this group to participate in the survey.

**Demographics.** In total 194 (n=194) community stakeholders completed this survey. Over 28% of the respondents identified themselves as settlement workers. The roles played by the community stakeholders ranged from language teachers to health care providers. Eighty-one percent of the community stakeholders were not immigrants, and 19% were.

**Participant group 2.** The second group of participants were a random sample of newcomers to Canada asked to complete an on-line or paper copy of the survey.

**Criteria.** The criteria for inclusion in the study were that the respondents had been born outside of Canada, had lived in Canada for less than five years, and were a minimum of eighteen years of age. However, it should be noted that there were some survey respondents who had lived in Canada for more than five years. This will be discussed in more detail in the strengths and limitations section of the report.

**Recruitment.** Working closely with the staff at RRLIP, the team identified possible organizations or individuals that might be able to assist in disseminating the survey link or a paper copy of the survey to newcomers meeting the criteria. The staff at RRLIP contacted organizations among their contacts that employ or provide services to newcomers. However, much of this work was done by visiting businesses, organizations, and conversation circles directly to request assistance. The team specifically targeted businesses serving or employing newcomers, such as ethnic food stores and restaurants. In total, 10 immigrant-serving organizations, 45 employers (i.e., restaurants, fast food services, health care agencies, grocery stores, insurance companies) and 25 services (schools, libraries, daycare centres, churches, post-secondary institutions, and taxi and bus companies) were contacted and asked to assist with disseminating the surveys to newcomers (n=80). Both on-line and paper copy surveys were distributed to newly arrived immigrants and refugees. The survey was used to inquire about barriers newcomers had faced as well as services and programs that the respondents found to be helpful in their settlement. The survey was written in English and then translated into Tagalog, Hindi, Urdu, French, and Arabic. The goal of translating the newcomer survey was to reach as many non-English speaking newcomers as possible. No incentives were provided to encourage newcomers to participate in the survey.

**Demographics.** In total, 305 (n=305) surveys were completed by newcomers in the various languages including English (191), Arabic (107), French (3), and Hindi (5). The research team did not receive any completed surveys in Tagalog or Urdu.

There were 104 men (34%) and 151 women (50%) who completed the survey. Fifty people (16%) who completed the survey did not indicate their gender. At least 24 respondents (8%) were between the age of 18 and 24 years old. Ninety-four respondents (31%) were aged 25 to 34 years old. There were 106 respondents (35%) between the age of 35 to 50 years old that completed the survey. Fifty-two respondents (17%) did not indicate their age. Regarding employment status, 93 respondents (31%) reported that they were working. There were 140 respondents (45%) unemployed. Seventy-two respondents (23%) did not report their current employment status. One-hundred and fifty-four (50.5%) respondents had accessed services at an immigrant serving agency while 59 (19.3%) had not. Ninety-two respondents (30.25%) did not answer the question.

**Participant group 3.** The final participant group comprised newcomers who were willing to speak to researchers about their experiences in a focus group.

**Criteria.** The criteria for inclusion in the study were that the respondents had been born outside of Canada, had lived in Canada for less than five years, and were a minimum of eighteen years of age. The participants did not need to speak English as translation was offered. However, in most groups the participants spoke English.

**Recruitment.** Both RRLIP staff and the research team worked proactively to invite participants to the focus groups. A snowball method was used, inviting potential participants by word of mouth through established connections in ethno-cultural communities and immigrant-serving agencies. Language instruction courses, conversational circles, care homes, post-secondary institutions, and agencies such as child care centres were examples of places where contacts were made with potential participants. The team was purposeful in trying to recruit participants from a diversity of cultural backgrounds. Many individuals were responsive to the research invitation though accommodations had to be made in terms of scheduling. The focus groups were arranged at the convenience of the participants to better facilitate participation. Each of the participants in the focus groups was given a \$25 gift card for Superstore to thank them for their participation.

**Demographics.** There was a total of 96 (n=96) participants who took part in the 13 focus groups. Fifty (n=50) women and 43 (n=43) men participated. None identified a gender other than male or female, though options were provided. There were three participants who did not complete their demographic profiles. As indicated in Figure 1 below, the majority of the participants were between the ages of 25 and 50.

**Figure 1. Focus Group Participants by Age**

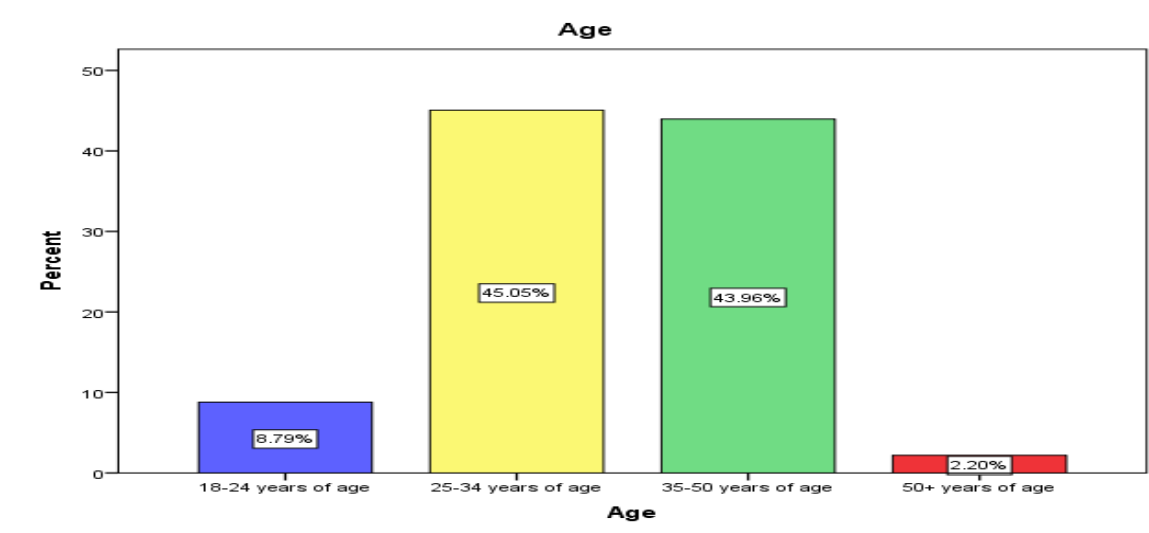
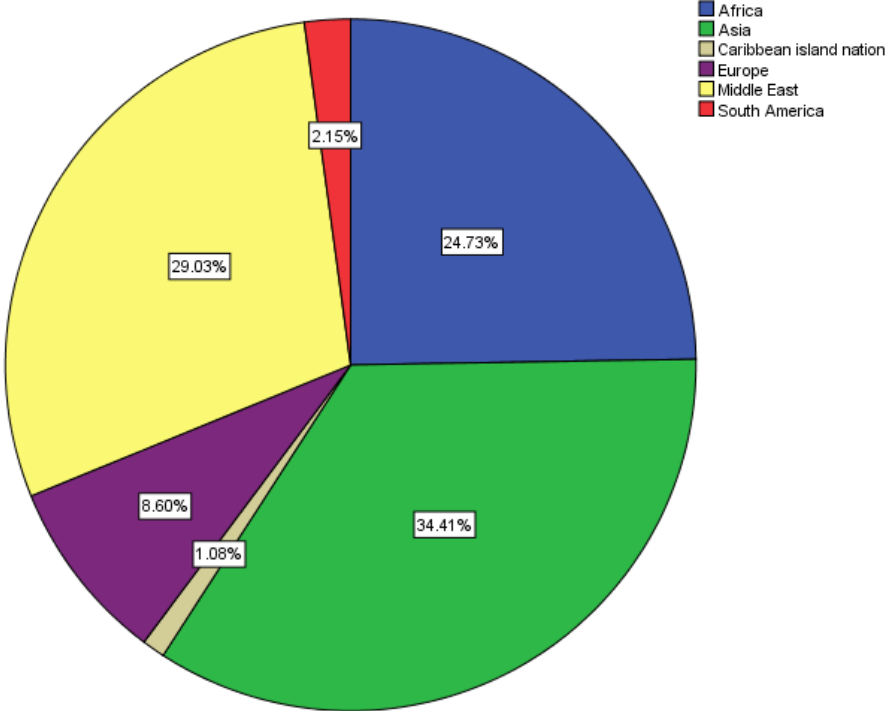


Figure 2 shows the continents from which the participants came. The largest group of participants were from Asia, followed by Middle East and Africa.

**Figure 2. Focus Group Participants by Continent**



Correspondingly, as Figure 3 indicates, the majority of the participants spoke Arabic, followed by Hindi. This is consistent with current immigration patterns that show many newcomers arriving in Canada from countries like India, Iran, Iraq, but more recently from Syria.

**Figure 3. Focus Group Participants by Language**

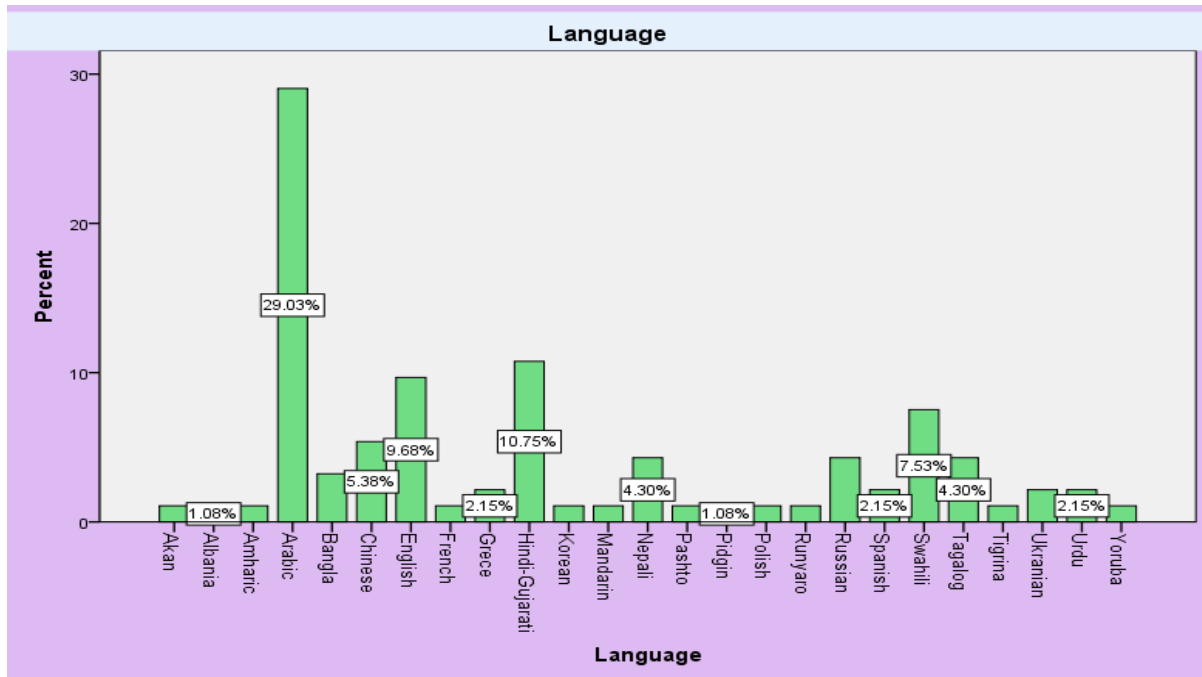


Table 8 shows that 35% of the focus group participants had at least a certificate, trade, or degree. Only 2% did not have formal schooling.

**Table 8. Focus Group Participants by Education**

Level of education	Number	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
No formal schooling	2	2.2	2.2	2.2
Elementary school	13	14.0	14.0	16.1
High school	23	24.7	24.7	40.9
Some post-secondary	5	5.4	5.4	46.2
Certificate, trade, or degree program	33	35.5	35.5	81.7
Post-degree or graduate program	17	18.3	18.3	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

**NB:** The numbers exclude the three focus group participants who did not complete the demographic profile.

**Table 9. Focus Group Participants by Immigration Streams**

Category	Number	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Refugee GAR	29	31.2	31.2	31.2
Other	2	2.2	2.2	33.2
Refugee	4	4.3	4.3	37.6
Family	7	7.5	7.5	45.2
Economic	1	1.1	1.1	46.2
SINP	26	28.0	28.0	74.2
Temporary worker	6	6.5	6.5	80.6
Student visa	18	19.4	19.4	100.0
Total	93	100.0	100.0	

As shown in Table 9, the majority of the focus group participants (31%) were refugees. The second-highest group of participants (28%) comprised individuals who arrived in Canada through the SINP.

**Study design.** The study design and methods used were similar for participant groups 1 and 2 as each involved cross-sectional surveys developed by the research team. Cross-sectional surveys are conventionally utilized to collect data at a single point of time. One of the strengths of this approach is that it permits measurement of community needs in term of programs and agencies, and can be used to evaluate existing services offered by agencies (Creswell, 2015). The survey instrument used for each participant group was a questionnaire which could be self-administered by the respondent. The majority of questions were closed-ended and the respondent could select an answer from a series of choices, thus ensuring consistency of responses and allowing for easier analysis (see Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015). Each questionnaire ended with an open-ended question asking if the respondent had any additional comments to share, allowing respondents to explain or amplify their responses. Different surveys were developed for participant groups 1 and 2. In both cases, the respondents were asked to provide consent before completing the questionnaire. Each of the instruments was piloted by members of the target population.

**Participant group 1.** A questionnaire was developed by the research team for the community stakeholders. An information letter about the larger study was also provided. In the questionnaire, the respondents were first asked some background questions about where they worked and their roles as well as some basic demographic information (if they are immigrants, which immigration stream they came through, how long they have lived in Regina/Canada, their home country, cultural background, and languages spoken. They were then asked a few

details about their work with newcomers including what percentage of the people they worked with were newcomers and what ethno-cultural groups they worked with. The remainder of the questions focused on barriers encountered by newcomers in the areas of education, employment, and child care, as well as living in Regina. The questions consisted of either ranking answers in order of importance or indicating the best choice on a scale. Finally, participants were asked if they wanted to add any comments and thanked for their participation. There were 27 questions in total. The survey was pilot tested first by members of the research team and staff at RRLIP and then by ten individuals in the target population. Revisions were made based on their feedback. Many of the revisions were related to the electronic format of the survey. The online survey was administered through Qualtrics using a secure login system administered through the University of Regina.

***Participant group 2.*** A different questionnaire was developed for the second participant group (newcomers). The respondents were asked to answer some background questions soliciting some of the same basic demographic information as in the other questionnaire. They were asked to answer closed-ended questions related to the barriers they encountered in the areas of education, child care, and employment, as well as their experiences of living in Regina. There were also some questions on supports and services. The questions consisted of ranking answers in order of importance or indicating the best choice on a scale. Finally, newcomers were asked if they wanted to add any comments and thanked for their participation. The design of the questionnaire for the newcomers needed to attend more carefully to language as many potential respondents were learning English. While the procedures were similar as for participant group 1, the team piloted the survey with more newcomers. Multiple iterations of each question were constructed. Once the questionnaire was completed, the individual translators for each of the language groups (Arabic, Hindi, Urdu, Tagalog, and French) provided comments, which were then addressed in a final set of revisions. These insights were particularly important as the translators could assist with nuances of the language used and determine how well the ideas could be conveyed in a different language. All versions were then revised according to their comments and it was again piloted. Again, the survey was provided through a secure login system administered through the University of Regina website.

***Participant group 3.*** The research team developed a series of questions for the newcomer focus groups using the main categories of daily living, employment, education, and

child care. The questions were provided to several newcomers for feedback. Several sets of revisions were made to ensure that the questions were at an appropriate language level for newcomers (Canadian Language Benchmark level 4–5). After the researchers tested the questions on the first focus group, further revisions were made. Some questions were quite open (e.g., tell us about your experiences with child care) while others were more specific (e.g., what barriers have you faced in locating child care?).

**Data collection methods.** The qualitative and quantitative data collection took place simultaneously between November 2016 and February 2017.

**Surveys.** In order to obtain as large a sample size as possible, both surveys were linked on RRLIP's website and were also provided to key stakeholders by email for dissemination to staff or newcomers. Several reminders were sent to encourage respondents to complete the questionnaire. In the case of some newcomers, however, the technology required to complete the survey online was often an impediment. Therefore, RRLIP staff visited a number of immigrant-serving agencies personally to administer paper copies of the survey and answer questions in language classes. Other potential respondents were provided with paper copies, which members of the research team then picked up later. As the study progressed, the team was able to secure permission from more large organizations and arrange with them to provide handouts with the questionnaire link to prospective respondents.

**Focus groups.** At the beginning of each of the focus group discussion, the researchers asked each participant to complete a short questionnaire designed to elicit demographic information. Then, the researchers provided the consent form to participants and orally explained the form in detail to ensure that they understood the terminology. The focus groups were intended to explore the range of key issues related to the newcomers' perspectives on their educational training and employment experiences, living in Regina, as well as child care access. Wilkinson (1998) and Wibeck (2007) argue that focus groups are of particular value because they allow researchers to analyze how people engage in collective sense-making. The clarification of information in a focus group format is useful to establish the participants' beliefs and experiences. We used semi-structured interviews, which involved the use of open-ended questions, designed to probe and stimulate discussion among participants and help set the tone for the discussion without using leading questions (see Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Wibeck, 2007). In the focus groups, the participants were asked questions about their

settlement experiences including barriers to educational, employment, and child care services in Regina. Team members would ask more general, grand tour questions (Spradley, 1979) to start and then would draw from a series of probes to clarify or amplify the responses of participants.

However, focus groups have the potential to silence the voices of those who are not assertive in group settings. To address the issue of silenced voices, we created opportunities for every focus group member to provide their perspectives by encouraging them to share their ideas during the sessions. In one instance, we met separately after the focus group with a small number of participants who had more information they wanted to share but did not feel comfortable doing so in front of the whole group. Interpretation services were provided as needed or requested. In many cases, the groups were drawn from a particular class, program, or workplace which increased the level of comfort participants felt.

Where needed, interpreters were provided for focus group participants who did not speak English. To accommodate the schedules of the participants, the research team conducted the focus groups in the evenings and during the weekends. A total of 13 focus groups were conducted between November 26, 2016 and February 23, 2017 with 96 (n=96) participants. Each of the participants in the focus groups was given a \$25 gift card for Superstore to thank them for their participation in the focus group. Parking expenses and taxi vouchers also were provided to compensate participants for their transportation expenses. Child care was offered to the participants, though most declined.

**Data analysis.** The qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed using different means as described below.

**Surveys.** The research team used Qualtrics computer software to collect the data from the questionnaires. Subsequently, data from the survey results was imported into the SPSS computer statistical software to make advanced inquiries into the barriers to immigrant integration to understand the perspectives of the community stakeholders on ways to help immigrants to fully participate in the community and newcomers' experiences of employment, education, and child care services in Regina. In this study, we used the chi-square test to determine whether there is a significant association between the variables. Our sampling method was random and the expected frequency count for each cell of the table was at least 5.

We also created null and alternate hypotheses (Stat Trek, n.d.) As noted by Creswell (2007), the use of analytic computer tools can help researchers with rigorous data analysis.

**Focus groups.** Qualitative data were analyzed by doing multiple readings, developing a coding framework, engaging in focused coding, and completing a pattern-level analysis to identify themes. These themes provided insight into the newcomers' experiences and challenges of finding and retaining employment, as well as accessing educational opportunities and child care.

## **Strengths and Limitations**

The intent of using surveys was to include only newcomers who had lived in Regina for fewer than five years. However, the survey results uncovered that there were 47 participants out of the 149 respondents who had lived in Canada for more than five years. The main concern was that length of stay impacts a newcomer's adaptation and settlement experiences. For example, immigrants who have been in Canada for 10 years or more have different settlement experiences from those that have newly arrived. The data from the 47 participants were included in the survey results because it enriched the research findings in terms of our understanding not only of barriers to employment, education, and child care but also of our understanding of programs and services that help individuals overcome these challenges.

Prior to the launching of the survey, the research team tested out the final questions to make sure that there were no ambiguities. However, there is a possibility that respondents who completed the on-line version of the survey may have needed clarity on specific questions. The research team lacked the opportunity to clarify any survey information/questions for those respondents completing the on-line survey. However, there were opportunities to provide guidance and clarity for those respondents completing the paper version of the survey.

Member checking, which requires that researchers verify data with participants, was not applied in this study. The member checking method has been criticized for its potential to create confusion rather than confirmation/accuracy of information because participants can change their minds, leading to many different data interpretations (Angen, 2000; Morse, 1994; Sandelowski, 1993). Despite the criticism, it would have been ideal to include focus group participants in the interpretation and verification of the data. We struggled with treating focus group participants as passive providers of data while the research team had sole control of data

collection, analysis, and presentation of gathered data. We paid attention to this power dynamic between the researcher and the researched. For example, during the data analysis, our research team engaged in collective sense-making where we came together to clarify information from the focus groups. By engaging in a group process of data analysis, we were able to have rich discussions and debates, which were useful to establish and confirm the information provided by focus group participants regarding their experiences of the barriers to accessing employment, education, and child care, as well as living in Regina. Additionally, we have used detailed quotations throughout this study to reflect the focus group participants' stories and perspectives. This next section will address the challenges of securing child care, which is often a precursor to entering the workforce or pursuing further education.

## Child Care

Scholarly research confirms that access to child care enables full economic participation in the workforce as well as the pursuit of further education or training (Andr n, 2003; Graafland, 2000). Unfortunately, numerous obstacles impede access to child care programs. Some of these challenges are universal, such as cost and insufficient numbers of spaces in programs. Others are unique to newcomers to Canada, such as cultural and linguistic tensions, isolation and the absence of support networks, and administrative barriers. In this section, we will first provide an overview of the context of child care in Canada in general, and then turn to Saskatchewan and the City of Regina more specifically. This context will include a discussion of the general barriers to accessing child care as identified in research studies and policy documents as well as those which are more specific to newcomers. Then, the findings in this study will be presented in three parts: the barriers to accessing child care that newcomers reported experiencing, the impact of not having reliable child care, and newcomers' aspirations for and worries about child care for their children.

### Overview of the Context of Child Care

**Regulatory and curriculum frameworks.** In Canada, regulated early childhood education (ECE) services are under the purview of the public education system (kindergarten and early learning programs) and/or provincial child care legislation (regulated child care centres, family child care, and school-age care). In Saskatchewan, prekindergarten, kindergarten, and regulated child care programs are all situated in the Early Years Branch within the Ministry of Education. Family child care homes, after school programs, and child care centres are often referred to as "early learning and child care programs" while prekindergarten and kindergarten programs situated within the school system are often called "early childhood education" programs (Muttart Foundation, 2013). Prekindergarten and kindergarten classes are taught by degree-holding, certified teachers, whereas child care programs are staffed by early childhood educators with varied amounts of preparation ranging from an orientation course to a two-year diploma or a degree. In this report, the term "child care programs" will be used to refer to family child care homes (i.e., programs run within one educator's home for up to eight children or by two educators for up to twelve children), child care centres, and after school programs. Unlike other provinces, the vast majority of child care

programs in Saskatchewan are not-for-profit and the government does not use public funds to support for-profit programs, nor does it provide subsidies for these programs (Muttart Foundation, 2013).

The regulations, legislation, and curriculum framework and guiding documents function to provide oversight to child care programs. Jacobs and Adrien (2012) note that legislative acts provide a general structure for Canadian child care programs. Regulations, on the other hand, contain the specific rules relating to the act, providing a “baseline below which it is unlawful to operate” (p. 110). Regulations in Canadian programs generally emphasize protecting the health, safety, and well-being of children. Therefore, the supervision of children; the physical environment (furnishing, equipment, materials, space); hygiene, nutrition, and food services; staff-child ratios; emergency plans, injuries, medications, and illness; parent involvement; and record keeping are key areas in regulatory frameworks. The legislation and regulations in Saskatchewan, as in most provinces, do not attend to learning and programming or to specific groups such as newcomers to Canada. Licensed programs are subject to the Child Care Regulations and the Child Care Act (Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly, 2014, 2015). Regulated programs include full-day child care (or daycare) centres and licensed family child care homes. Saskatchewan has a comparatively higher proportion of spaces in these licensed family child care homes in relation to other provinces (Muttart Foundation, 2013) It should be noted that certain programs are exempt from the regulations, such as family child care homes (if desired by the operator), part-time preschool programs, and programs for school-aged children located within schools (Muttart Foundation, 2013).

Just over half of the provinces have provincial curriculum frameworks—Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Quebec (Prochner, Cleghorn, Kirova, & Massing, 2016). As Langford (2012) explains, these frameworks are generally holistic, flexible, and adaptable, rather than prescriptive and rigid. In Saskatchewan, prekindergarten and child care programs are guided by the *Play and Exploration Early Learning Program Guide* (Government of Saskatchewan, 2008) and accompanying documents *Play and Exploration for Infants and Toddlers* (Government of Saskatchewan, 2010) and *Essential Learning Experiences for Three-, Four-, and Five-Year-Olds into Practice Booklet* (Government of Saskatchewan, 2015). The curriculum is holistic, and is loosely framed around four areas of development—spiritual, physical, intellectual, and

social-emotional. While the regulations do not acknowledge the cultural and linguistic diversity of the population, the curriculum framework affirms that

as more children from different cultural backgrounds and with varying abilities participate in early learning and child care programs, educators are highlighting this rich array of perspectives. Educators include all children in activities, stories, discussions and experiences that expose new ways of cooperating, new information about cultural understandings, practices or languages and additional ways of supporting each other. Children are encouraged to value diverse viewpoints, cultures and abilities. Educators ensure all children can participate to their full potential. (Government of Saskatchewan, 2008, p. 18)

This curriculum framework is also one of only a few nationally that includes specific strategies for working with children who are learning English as an additional language (Prochner et al., 2016).

**Concerns with the provision of child care services.** Child care is a provincial concern and there is no national coordinated approach to early childhood services in Canada (Ferns & Friendly, 2014). Langford, Prentice, Richardson, and Albanese (2016) report that in 2003 Prime Minister Jean Chrétien's Liberal government began developing multilateral framework agreements on early learning and child care to support space creation. When Paul Martin succeeded Chrétien, his government endeavoured to create a universal national child care program to address issues of quality, accessibility, and equity and began negotiating this with the provinces (apart from Quebec which instituted \$5 a day child care in 1997). Unfortunately, with the election of the Conservatives in 2006, this plan was discarded which, in turn, negatively impacted families' access to high-quality, affordable child care (Langford, Prentice, Richardson, & Albanese, 2016). In a UNICEF (2008) ranking of early childhood services in 25 OECD countries, Canada was ranked second last, achieving only one of the ten benchmarks (50% of staff in accredited centres holding relevant qualifications). The benchmarks Canada failed to achieve included 80% of ECE staff being trained, having a national plan with priority for disadvantaged children, and the provision of subsidized and regulated ECE services for 25% of children under three and 80% of four-year-olds.

More recent studies measuring inequality and child poverty situated Canada below the OECD average for children's material well-being in terms of household income and living

space (Adamson, 2010) and in the lower third in terms of child poverty (Adamson, 2012). A 2010 UNICEF report cautioned that the benefits of quality early childhood programs are greatest for children from disadvantaged homes, thus more equitable access to these programs is essential (Adamson, 2010). In Regina, for instance, 24% of children under the age of six were living below the Low-Income Measure in 2011 (South Saskatchewan Community Foundation, 2015). In prekindergarten programs in Saskatchewan, “vulnerable” three- and four-year-olds have been the focus in order to provide equitable opportunities (Government of Saskatchewan, 2008). These programs generally run from Monday to Thursday for three hours a day. School divisions have been urged to utilize various criteria for enrolling children for these programs: children with single or teen parents, children from a family in crisis, isolation of a child’s family, children with language or communication delays, children facing social-emotional or behavioural challenges, or children with a home language other than English. The Muttart Foundation (2013) reported that the Saskatchewan government was working to increase the number of spaces in these programs, and this statement was further supported by the goals in the recently released Early Learning Plan.

**Canadian women’s workforce participation.** Overall, women’s participation in the Canadian workforce increased from 30% of women being employed in 1976 to 75% in 2009 creating a need for early childhood programs (Service Canada, 2011). In Saskatchewan, women’s participation is higher than the national average for mothers of children under the age of three at 69% and close to the highest for mothers of three- to five-year-olds at 75% (Statistics Canada, 2016b [table 051-0056], 2017). These relatively high rates of workforce participation have been attributed to Saskatchewan’s strong economy, as well as the shift in social roles (Muttart Foundation, 2013). In a comparative study of child care in Canada, Sweden, Finland, and Australia, Mahon, Antonnen, Bergqvist, and Brennan (2012) noted that the high cost of child care in Canada has hindered women’s efforts to combine work and care and participate fully in the labour force.

**Canadian families’ child care preferences and arrangements.** Drawing from a study conducted in 2011, Statistics Canada (Sinha, 2014) reported that 46% of all parents surveyed used some form of child care for their children under the age of 14. However, this varied depending on the ages of the children as 54% of parents with children under the age of four (concentrated most heavily on those with children ages two to four) and 39% with school-aged

children accessed child care. Only 26% of parents with infants under the age of one, however, organized child care for their children due to the availability of employment insurance benefits and a general preference for mothers not to work during this first year. In Saskatchewan, the rate of families using some form of child care over the previous year were noted as being just above the national average at 46%. These rates were higher among two-income families. Nationally, 33% families placed their children aged four and under in child care centres, 31% in family child care homes, and 28% with relatives or nannies. In the Prairie provinces, these private arrangements were more common (43%), perhaps due to the lack of spaces in regulated child care programs. Of those parents of infants under the age of one who did access child care, 58% of non-Quebec families made private arrangements. Location was cited as the primary reason why Canadian families chose a particular child care option; 33% of families surveyed mentioned location, 18% trust in the care provider, 11% affordability, 11% only option available, 8% the learning program, 7% business hours, 6% recommendation of someone, 4% safe, and 15% reported other reasons. Finally, 69% of families were very satisfied with their child care and 29% were satisfied. Families were not asked about their ethno-cultural or linguistic backgrounds. It should be noted that the data were collected from 22,435 respondents through telephone interviews in one of the official languages. Therefore, it is possible that very few newcomers participated in the study.

**Family child care preferences and arrangements in other contexts.** The Statistics Canada (Sinha, 2014) report is somewhat consistent with research findings wherein parents have been found to be reliant on informal (such as familial) or home child care for infants and toddlers and child care centres for preschool-aged children (Brady, 2016; Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011; Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2012; Tobin, Arzubigi, & Adair, 2013). Parents of infants often place their trust in family members who are seen to provide more loving care. In general, there is considerable variation among groups in terms of their care arrangements and preferences, but immigrant children are more likely than non-immigrant children to be cared for by their parents rather than in a child care program (de Moll & Betz, 2014; Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011). The findings of a German study (de Moll & Betz, 2014) suggested that immigrant parents may have fewer resources to pay for care. In a large-scale national study in the United States, Brandon (2004) found that immigrant parents were more likely to care for their own children than non-immigrant parents (59.2% versus 43.7%) and, in turn, less likely to utilize centre-

based care (13.9% versus 24.6%). In addition, one-parent immigrant families were more likely to access child care programs than two-parent families. The number of families reliant on care from relatives was fairly even. Brandon (2004) cited six research-based reasons for these gaps: differential access to child care programs due to lower socio-economic status, a preference for parental care to promote development of cultural identity, different work patterns, living in geographic locations with fewer services, language barriers, and lack of social capital needed to navigate the system.

Qualitative studies further elucidate some of the reasons newcomers choose a particular care option. In studies of African immigrants, many preferred to raise their own children, and finding a family member or a member of their cultural community to care for their child was their second choice (Ceglowski, Gilbert, Wiggan, Johnson, & Traore, 2011; Massing, 2015a; Obeng, 2007). Loss of culture is a concern of many newcomer families, particularly if their children had never visited their home country (Winterbottom, 2013). However, obtaining a spot in a child care program was viewed as a necessary precursor to continuing one's education or finding employment. In numerous studies, newcomer parents prioritized locating a child care provider who shared their own cultural values to ensure continuity in childrearing and socialization practices (Ebbeck & Dela Cerna, 2007; Obeng, 2007; Uttal, 1997). In cases where this was not possible, some intervened by providing information about their culture to educators (Uttal, 1997). Some parents emphasized the importance of having a care provider who spoke their language to enhance their child's cultural identity, as well as to ease communication between home and program (Ebbeck & Dela Cerna, 2007; Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2012).

Families who placed their children in child care programs expressed various preferences for their children's care. Some families choose formalized child care programs as they hoped they would learn English from native speakers through interactions with other children and educators (Obeng, 2007). Still, Sandstrom and Chaudry (2012) found that only 14% of the 145 families they surveyed specifically chose their program because it allowed for opportunities to learn English. Further to this point, some wanted their children to learn to live in both cultures (Ceglowski et al., 2011). Latin American immigrants in Uttal's (1997) study sought to improve their children's opportunities by placing them in a program in a more economically advantaged location, in the process sacrificing cultural continuity in

programming. Others hoped that child care programs would teach them the necessary skills for academic success (Obeng, 2007). In several studies, immigrant participants identified a number of optimal characteristics of an educator, including a love for children, patience, experience, having been screened, and possessing qualifications or certification (Ceglowski et al.; Obeng, 2007). These characteristics thus influence parents when choosing a program. In addition, they might hope for educators who respect their culture so their children do not experience racism or discrimination and for programs that serve foods similar to those in their homes (Ceglowski et al., 2011). In the section that follows, these barriers to accessing child care will be outlined, drawing both on policy documents and the research literature.

## **Barriers to Accessing Child Care**

There are significant barriers to accessing child care that affect a family's ability to secure a spot in a desired program. This is particularly true in the case of low-income, single parent, or immigrant families who may experience inequitable access to programs (Abrassart & Bonoli, 2015). As Karoly and Gonzalez (2011) have written, immigrants may also live in areas with fewer services, including child care programs.

**Lack of child care spaces.** Mahon, Bergqvist, and Brennan (2016) contend that the institution of the Universal Child Care Benefit after the 2006 election, a one-hundred-dollar taxable benefit for all families with children under the age of six, contributed to slowing the expansion of regulated child care spaces nationally as these funds were not being invested in space creation. In spite of the increase in women's workforce participation, in 2012 there were fewer than one regulated child care space for every four children in Canada, and the number of regulated child care spaces increased less than 1% between 2010 and 2012 (Ferns & Friendly, 2014).

Saskatchewan has, in recent years, experienced a "baby boom," bringing growing numbers of new families to the province (Muttart Foundation, 2013). In 2014, there were 163,700 children between the ages of birth and twelve in Saskatchewan (rounded estimate), 111,700 (or 68%) of whom had mothers in the paid workforce. One in six families was headed by a single parent, thus some form of child care would have been necessary for employment (Muttart Foundation, 2013). Since there were only 13,314 regulated child care spaces in the province in 2014, fewer than 12% of all families had access to regulated child care (Friendly et

al., 2014). Given the large numbers of families seeking child care in the province, the need for regulated ECE programs is acute.

The situation in Regina is very similar to that in the province as a whole. Regina is facing a shortage of child care spaces. According to the South Saskatchewan Community Foundation (2015), the number of spaces in regulated child care centres in Regina has increased from 2,989 in 2009 to 3,603 in 2015. The Regina public and Catholic school boards offer an additional 1,008 part-time spots in half-day prekindergarten classes. However, this number is insufficient, as in 2011 there were already 14,355 children under six years of age (South Saskatchewan Community Foundation, 2015). In view of these deficits, the recently released Early Years Plan for 2016 to 2020 affirms the government's commitment to increase the availability of early learning opportunities by improving access to preschools and child care centres and enhancing prekindergarten programs where possible (Government of Saskatchewan, 2016b).

**Lack of Qualified Educators.** The shortage of educators is very much related to the dearth of regulated child care spaces. Recruitment and retention of qualified educators is a significant issue in ECE, both nationally and provincially. While the requisite qualifications for early childhood educators vary from province to province, the Government of Saskatchewan has delineated three levels of qualification: level I requires three courses in early childhood or completion of an orientation course, level II is conferred upon completion of a one-year certificate program in early childhood, and level III requires completion of a two-year early childhood diploma program (Government of Saskatchewan, 2017). The majority of educators are certified at the assistant level (Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, 2009) and, therefore, have little educational preparation. Program license holders are to ensure that assistants complete the required training within six months of beginning employment (Government of Saskatchewan, 2017), and a minimum of 20% of educators employed in any one child care centre must be certified at level III.

In Canada, 60% of women working in centre-based ECE programs have post-secondary credentials (Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, 2007; Service Canada, 2011), and educators and directors have more education than in previous years (Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, 2012). In a 2009 nation-wide survey of ECE employers administered by the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (CCHRSC), over 50% stated

that recruiting qualified teachers was a human resource challenge they had faced in their work over the past year. Furthermore, 65% of employers maintained that high rates of staff attrition and turnover had been an issue in the past two years. In 2012, 65.5% of employer respondents indicated they had lost at least one permanent staff member over the past year, and most of these were qualified educators. Saskatchewan, at 59.3%, had one of the lowest percentages of new staff hired with ECE credentials. The challenges to recruitment included applicants who lacked skills, few applicants, lack of related work experience, lack of time or money for recruitment, and applicant dissatisfaction with salary. The majority of employers (62.6%) hired an applicant at a lower level of certification. Nearly one quarter of educators surveyed confirmed that they were seeking new employment, though only 12% of educators in Saskatchewan were looking for a new position (Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, 2012).

Compensation, in the form of wages and benefits, can be closely linked to recruitment and retention issues. In 2012, the median hourly wage in Saskatchewan was \$14.92 per hour, well below the national average of \$16.50 per hour (Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, 2012). Those educators holding an ECE diploma or a related degree earned above the average. For instance, program directors averaged \$22 per hour nationally and \$22.14 per hour in Saskatchewan. Fewer than half of educators surveyed had benefits such as pension, life, or disability insurance, though 63% reported having paid sick or personal leave days (Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, 2012). Educators working in unionized centres were more likely to have benefits than those in non-unionized workplaces. The general lack of public respect for ECE as a profession, as reflected in the compensation offered, has been perceived as a barrier to recruitment and retention. Many educators used ECE as a springboard to more socially recognized and valued professions (such as school teaching). Other barriers include job stress brought on by working conditions, relationships with clients, and external factors (Baumgartner, Carson, Apavaloaie, & Tsouloupas, 2009). In a Canadian study, stress has been found to decrease if educators have job satisfaction and a sense of control over their work (Wagner et al., 2013).

The availability of positions in the field means that ECE is sometimes an entry point into the Canadian workforce for immigrant women. New immigrants generally experience challenges in securing employment due to lack of Canadian experience, contacts, and

recognition of foreign experience or qualifications, or language barriers (Statistics Canada, 2007). Service Canada (2011) reported that ECE is a field in which positions are accessible to newcomers, thus it draws a higher percentage of immigrants (15%) than other occupations. Some newcomers who hold teaching credentials from their home countries that are not recognized in Canada work toward re-establishing themselves in their chosen profession by initially obtaining a diploma or seeking employment in ECE (Langford, 2007; Massing, 2015a, 2015b). The high cost and time commitment necessary to obtain an ECE diploma can also serve as an impediment for new Canadians (Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, 2009). It is unclear precisely how many newcomers are employed in early childhood programs in Saskatchewan. Given the accessibility of the field, though, recruitment and retention efforts might best be directed toward newcomers.

**Cost.** The high cost of child care is an overarching concern. In a comparative study of child care in Canada, Sweden, Finland, and Australia, Mahon, Anttonen, Bergqvist, Brennan, and Hobson (2012) note that the high cost of child care has hindered Canadian women's efforts to combine work and care and participate fully in the labour force. Indeed, an examination of the Province of Quebec, which offers \$5 a day child care, demonstrates that subsidized care positively impacts on mothers' labour force participation (Lefebvre, Merrigan, & Verstraete, 2009). Nationally, in 2012, the median monthly fees for child care centres were \$761 for infants, \$696 for toddlers, and \$674 for preschool aged children, according to a survey conducted by CCHRSC (Flanagan, Beach, & Varmula, 2013). The rates vary because provincial legislation requires a higher educator-to-child ratio when caring for infants and toddlers. In urban centres, where there is high demand for spaces, the fees may be much higher. In 2016, the Government of Canada introduced the Canada Child Benefit a tax-free benefit calculated based on familial income "to help them with the cost of raising children" to replace the Universal Child Care Benefit (Canada Revenue Agency, 2017). In spite of this initiative, child care costs are prohibitively high for many families.

The fees for child care in Saskatchewan are lower than the national average at \$650 per month for infant, \$561 for toddlers, and \$535 for preschoolers. Unlike many of the other provinces, nearly all of the regulated child care centres in Saskatchewan operate on a not-for-profit basis. Consequently, parent fees can be established on a cost recovery basis. While many provinces provide substantial tax exemptions to not-for-profit child care centres, in

Saskatchewan some municipalities have moved toward taxing at commercial rates. In Regina, for instance, a number of child care centres were recently informed that they would be assessed at a commercial rate, which has served to double their tax rates (CBC News, 2016). There are many concerns that this increased taxation will, in turn, be reflected in the fees, thus further restricting access to child care for some families.

The Government of Saskatchewan (2016) offers child care subsidies to assist families in meeting the costs of care in licensed programs so that parents can work, look for work, pursue education, attend approved pre-employment training, as well as in cases of medical or social needs. The amount of the annual subsidy is calculated on a sliding scale based on the family's income with those with a monthly income of less than \$1,640 receiving the maximum benefit. Factors such as the size of the family, the location of the child care program, and the ages of the children also factor into calculations of the subsidy. In Regina child care centres, the maximum subsidy is \$570 for infants, \$440 for toddlers, and \$405 for preschoolers. These figures are slightly lower than the average provincial fees. Families must complete an application to receive a subsidy and the amount is paid directly to the child care program. Over the next five years, the Government of Saskatchewan (2016) plans to simplify the process of applying for a subsidy, suggesting that this has been an issue for families.

The literature affirms that the high cost of child care is not unique to Canada and demonstrates the complexities inherent in the relationship between care and employment. As some scholars contend, high child care costs disproportionately affect low-income families who have limited resources, may work non-traditional hours, have variable work schedules, and/or have inflexible employers (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011; Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2012). Those who qualify for subsidies still suffer insecurity as salary fluctuations could cause them to lose this form of support. In a Dutch study, increasing the amount of the subsidy was found to be more effective in raising the labour supply) encouraging parents to enter the workforce) and labour productivity than were tax reductions, though lower fees was the optimal incentive (Graafland, 2000). A Swedish study of single mothers found that lowering the cost of child care enhanced labour participation among those who were already employed, in particular, moving them from part-time to full-time employment (Andrén, 2003). Brady (2016) contends that multiple informal and formal care arrangements pieced together by single mothers serve to strengthen workforce participation and enhance their employment trajectories. Informal

supports, such as care offered by family members, not only offer a temporary “safety net” but also allow single mothers to work more hours or complete their education and move into employment. Moreover, proximity to family may increase mothers’ labour force participation (Compton, 2015). A Norwegian study comparing western and non-western immigrant mothers found that a decrease in the subsidies offered negatively impacted mothers’ labour market participation, particularly in the case of non-western immigrant mothers. This study suggests that newcomers might be especially reliant on subsidized care and, correspondingly, responsive to economic incentives (Hardoy & Schøne, 2010).

Not only in Saskatchewan but nationally and in international contexts, many families encounter barriers to accessing child care. The dearth of regulated spaces, high cost, coupled with the shortage of qualified educators are some of the primary challenges faced by families of young children. Immigrants and refugees, however, experience some additional obstacles to accessing child care.

### **Additional Challenges Facing Newcomers**

**Cultural and linguistic tensions.** The Government of Saskatchewan (2016b) reported that for every increase of one hundred children in the province, 44 of them are immigrants. Close to ten thousand immigrant children came to the province between the years of 2008 and 2014. When exploring child care options, some immigrants are reticent to place their children in formal child care settings, which is a significant challenge when child care is needed (Brandon, 2002). Massing (2015a) found that this hesitancy was due to the discontinuity between dominant Canadian beliefs about child rearing practices and early socialization and those adhered to in newcomer families. Her participants, all students enrolled in an early childhood education college program, came from the Middle East, China, India, and various parts of Africa. Learning through play pedagogy used in Canadian child care settings, care practices, communication styles, and the perceived absence of the teaching of values such as respect were areas of tension. Accordingly, many of her participants relied on familial care or made informal arrangements with members of their cultural communities. These findings have been supported by research in other contexts as well. In their study of programs in five locations in the United States, Tobin, Aruzbiaga, and Adair (2013) found that immigrant parents preferred a more “academic” curriculum as opposed to play-based approaches.

Language acquisition and cultural consistency were two reasons cited by their participants. However, parents also expressed a concern that their children would lose their home language and culture. Ebbeck and Dela Cerna (2007) interviewed Sudanese newcomers in Australia who cited differences in childrearing practices such as discipline, feeding, toilet training, and the freedom given to children in the new context. Though they needed to access child care to study English, they were concerned that they had no influence over programming in the centres and their children would lose their culture. Winterbottom's (2013) research with Japanese immigrants suggested that they perceived there to be a lack of discipline and, correspondingly, morals in American preschools. In other words, newcomers find many areas of discontinuity between their home practices and those in child care programs.

Families also experience other issues once they have enrolled their children in a child care program. Winterbottom (2013) revealed that language was a frequent issue for parents when they needed to communicate with educators. Still others wanted particular ethnic foods incorporated into the child care setting as their children did not like the foods being served (Ebbeck & Dela Cerna, 2007; Obeng, 2007; Uttal, 1997; Winterbottom, 2013). In the American context, Ceglowski et al (2011) commented on cultural and linguistic barriers faced by families, and one participant reported that he had seen a black child being mistreated by the educator. When the educators were bilingual and bicultural, it enhanced their sense of trust. In addition, participants in Ceglowski et al.'s research confirmed that attending a child care centre helped their children integrate into American culture, thus easing their transition into schooling.

It is not always a seamless transition from home to program, though. In their study of Kurdish refugees in Ireland, Dolan and Sherlock (2010) found that while the participants believed that participation in child care facilitated language acquisition and later school success, language also presented challenges. Initially, the refugee children did not interact with the other children in the child care centre and the educators could not communicate with them, leading to frustration on both sides.

**Isolation and lack of support networks.** Newcomers also experience unique barriers to accessing child care due to the loss of the familial and social networks that they had in their home countries. Having such networks in the new context facilitates informal child care supports, perhaps in the form of family members or friends who can assume responsibility for

children (Fanning & Veale, as cited in Dolan & Sherlock, 2010). The presence of these contacts likewise allows families to locate openings in child care programs, share information about programs, and navigate the administrative structures (Dolan & Sherlock, 2010; Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011). Several studies have found that immigrant parents who have familial and social contacts in their community are more likely to ask these contacts to care for their children (Obeng, 2007; Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2012; Yesil-Dagli, 2011). In their study of 112 immigrant families, Sandstrom and Chaudry (2012) found that informal relative care was the most prevalent, and families preferred to entrust their child to a relative due to shared cultural beliefs and values. In general, single parents also seem to rely on family members to assist with child care (Brady, 2016), thus newcomers, in particular, may be disadvantaged once they lose these networks. Karoly and Gonzalez (2011) maintain that once newcomers have secured a space in a child care program, they are able to develop these familial support networks and improve their social capital.

**Administrative barriers.** Newcomer families also experience administrative challenges in navigating the child care system due to language barriers and the loss of social and familial networks. As Ceglowski et al. (2011) found, families were reliant on members of their cultural community when choosing a child care program. Without these contacts, families may have difficulties understanding wait lists, filling out applications, and applying for subsidies. For instance, new parents are often unaware that they must plan ahead by visiting programs and asking to be placed on a waiting list. Without some form of assistance, they may find themselves unable to get a space when they need one. As Karoly and Gonzalez (2011) emphasize, filling out forms is time consuming and complicated, particularly if one does not speak English. According to Dolan and Sherlock (2010), the issue of cost is compounded for refugee families who are dependent on government support and often lack the language skills to be successfully employed. Karoly and Gonzalez (2011) similarly found that immigrant families were disproportionately affected by the cost of child care. Attaining a child care subsidy is often the only means of accessing child care and, in turn, educational or employment opportunities. Furthermore, in contexts where families are able to apply for subsidies to offset the costs of care, some newcomers have reported that administrative errors have impeded their ability to obtain assistance, while others were forced to switch their children to a less desirable program when their subsidy was cut off (Ceglowski et al., 2011).

## Findings

The participants who responded to our survey or participated in focus group discussions utilized a variety of child care services from relatives or friends, to child care centres, to family child care homes. Some of the participants commented that they had received support from RODS or other agencies to help them secure child care and navigate parenting in a new context. Those participants who were enrolled in Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programs, for instance, were grateful to secure on-site child care.

**Barriers to accessing child care.** Participants identified a number of barriers to accessing care for their children, although accessibility to child care varied depending on the individual's circumstances.

**Lack of spaces.** Some of the participants were able to obtain spaces for their children at the daycares attached to the program where they were studying. This situation was particularly true of students enrolled in LINC programs, which provide child-minding services. As one participant explained, "I have twin babies and after one year then I was able to go to SIAST [now called Saskatchewan Polytechnic]. I study English at SIAST and it has a very good daycare" (Focus Group, February 16, 2017). These participants often had to wait for a spot to become available, but not nearly as long as they might have for other child care centres.

Even in LINC programs, some participants found it challenging to access child minding due to the limited number of spots:

My wife was accepted to start English classes at Open Door but there weren't any available spaces for my daughters. They told us to look for a child care facility close to my current address. I did and I found just one available spot for one of the girls but didn't find a space for my other daughter. What was I supposed to do? (Focus Group, December 20, 2016)

As described by this participant, the available time slots did not always match the needs of the family:

There are certain issues with that daycare. For example, I asked them if they could transfer my daughter from the morning session and place her in the evening session so that I wouldn't have to drive several times to pick her [up] and my wife every day. They told me that there aren't any spaces in the evening session and suggested that I take her out of the morning session and put her name on the waitlist for the other session. That is

what I did and now, I've been waiting for almost four months and there are still no spaces available. (Focus Group, December 20, 2016)

Those participants who were unable to secure a space in a LINC program or did not qualify for these classes struggled to find child care. Numerous participants confirmed that more child care spaces were needed, as summed up by this participant: "That's been a huge concern in this province." (Focus Group, February 16, 2017). Many participants bemoaned the long wait to get a spot:

Yeah, child care in Regina, it's a long story for that one because [laughter]. They have a long waiting list for those daycares, yeah because I used to like the one at the University of Regina and I came before I had the baby and she's now two years. This is when they are calling me in, you have the spot. (Focus Group, November 26, 2016)

One participant described how she has been waiting over a year for a spot, and in order to study English, "I leave him with his father and elder sisters once they come back from school" (Focus Group, December 28, 2016). Another group of participants discussed the issues:

*Participant 1:* But that's a Canadian concern in general. I know friends of mine; if they're planning on having kids, they're applying for daycares before they've got a baby.

*Participant 2:* Yeah, oh yeah.

*Participant 3:* You need a daycare spot, you need to start.

*Participant 2:* People wait for years.

*Participant 3:* Before they conceive. (Focus Group, December 30, 2016)

Unavailability of child care was an impediment to entering the labour market or for pursuing an education, as described by this participant: "My wife had to turn down, like, three jobs because there was no where we could put our two-year-old" (Focus Group, December 30, 2016).

**Location.** In the newcomer survey, the respondents overwhelmingly felt that having child care was critical to accessing language training or going to work. Eighty-one percent felt it was "very important" to have child care that was easily accessible from home while 15% identified this as "somewhat important." When participants were reliant on public transportation, then finding a child care spot that was easily accessible by bus was perceived as "very important" by 68% of respondents and "somewhat important" by 36%.

Many participants felt that it was important to have child care close to home. One participant described the challenges related to finding child care at a close and convenient location:

Our children are supposed to be close to where we live or study. If an emergency happens, I would be close to the daycare or I would ask a friend, if I'm not able, to pick them up. What am I supposed to do if the daycare is 7 km far from where I currently live or study? I have tried to register my youngest child at the daycare at my elder children's school, after a while, I couldn't do it. I had to wait early in the morning for the daycare to open, and then drive to my language school and then at 11:30 I would have to drive back to the school to pick them up and then drive them for about 11 km to get them home and above all of that, I would have to drive back another 11 km to get back to my language school. After just 1 week, I couldn't do it, it wasn't feasible. . . . I had to drive 44km every day! (Focus Group, January 2, 2017)

**Cost.** The high cost of child care was a dominant theme in each of the focus groups. Some participants were aware of the provincial child care program in Quebec and lamented that Saskatchewan did not offer something similar. As one participant said: "My wish in Regina, more opportunities for affordable daycares, like I don't know, is it Quebec or Montreal? . . . This one [a centre in Regina] is crazy, it is very expensive" (Focus Group, November 26, 2016). A number of participants stated that the cost of child care prevented them from working. Once they paid for child care, there was so little left over from their pay that it simply did not make sense to join the workforce. One mother explained that there are "very nice day cares but it's too much cost so I stayed with them at home. I'm not working actually" (Focus Group, February 16). Others commented that paying child care costs limited them financially. As this mother commented: "Sometimes it's really hard as a single mom to take care of your child and then you have to go for work, right? Then all of the pay stuff goes in a babysitting, that's not fun" (Focus Group, December 20, 2016). The refugee participants were unique in that for their first year in the country they were supported by the federal government. While they greatly appreciated this support, many were unable to take advantage of this assistance due to the lack of spaces, as one participant described:

The government takes care of most of our daycare expenses. That is how it works during the first year. Once that's over, the parents are responsible for paying. Unfortunately, not

many children have found a space during the first year. (Focus Group, December 28, 2016)

In the newcomer survey, 79% of respondents felt that having a child care subsidy was “very important” to support newcomers in accessing education or employment opportunities, while 21% stated that subsidies were “somewhat important.” In reality, though, only 26% of respondents had subsidized child care for their children. Some participants in the focus groups who did have subsidies explained that they had to be careful to maintain their income level below the maximum allowed to obtain a subsidy otherwise “they will cut the money” (Focus Group, February 16, 2017). Still others had a subsidy, but looked for more affordable care options, such as friends and relatives, as this parent explained: “My income is not enough. Even the government, they pay money [subsidy] but my income is not enough to fulfill that. That’s why I decided not to put [my child] in day care and look for other [care]” (Focus Group, February 16, 2017).

***Impacts of not having dependable child care.*** In the newcomer survey, respondents were asked what challenges newcomers faced if they did not have appropriate child care. The primary obstacle that newcomers identified was finding and retaining employment, while their secondary concern was an inability to access language classes.

The null hypothesis was that there was no association between employed newcomers and their use of child care services. The alternative hypothesis was that there was a relationship between employed newcomers and their use of child care services. To accept or reject the null hypothesis, we chose the significance level of 0.05. A chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) was used to determine whether the relationship between employed newcomers and their use of child care services. We caution that a significant relationship is not necessarily causal or did not mean that one variable causes the other. As per the chi-square test results, it can be seen that employed newcomers were using child care centres ( $\chi^2 = 13.72$ ,  $df=2$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ,  $p^* = 0.001$ ,  $N=192$ ). The chi-square results also showed that employed newcomers were using child care services available at their English language classes ( $\chi^2 = 7.1$ ,  $df=1$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ,  $p^* = 0.008$ ,  $N=233$ ), confirming the benefits of having child minding services in close proximity to a program that is helping them gain English language skills. Surprisingly, the study did not find a strong relationship between employed newcomers and the use of child care centres that provide culturally sensitive services or programs class ( $\chi^2 = 1.76$ ,  $df=1$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ,  $p^* = 0.184$ ,  $N=233$ ).

For details of the chi-square results, see Appendix A. This finding was inconsistent with literature that suggests that newcomers tend to use child care centres that provide their children with opportunities to maintain their culture and language (Ebbeck & Dela Cerna, 2007; Winterbottom, 2013). However, when the survey asked participants to select their child care preferences, employed newcomers showed a strong preference for family child care homes that provide children opportunities to maintain their culture and language ( $\chi^2 = 3.94$ ,  $df=1$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ,  $p^* = 0.04$ ,  $N=233$ ). They also showed a strong preference for child care at work ( $\chi^2 = 3.93$   $df=1$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ,  $p^* = 0.04$ ,  $N=233$ ). Similarly, there was a strong preference for child care services received at their English language learning centres ( $\chi^2 = 7.35$ ,  $df=1$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ,  $p^* = 0.007$ ,  $N=233$ ). For details of the chi-square results, see Appendix B.

Consistent with other studies (e.g., Hardoy & Schöne, 2010), lack of access to child care negatively impacted labour force participation and educational opportunities. As expressed by one focus group participant who explained his friend's situation:

They didn't have anybody to stay with the child and he really lost time in terms of his attendance for English language skills. He was going five days before but when that problem or lack of child care . . . he had to cut back and go just two days and that was at night because that was when the parents could switch. . . . He was only going two days instead of five days . . . and that was because of the lack of child care. (Focus Group, November 26, p. 14)

Participants often had to explore creative options in order to be able to work, and their participation was highly dependent on the availability of others. As one father shared: "For my situation, it's very hard because I work full-time in the evenings. I work until three [a.m.]. Then my wife works nine o'clock in the morning to three o'clock in the afternoon." (Focus Group, February 16, 2017). This arrangement was far from ideal as the couple had very little time together. Another added: "We don't have any relatives here. Only three of us. It's very hard if you take your wife to work. You need to tell your roommate, 'hey, can you look after my baby for fifteen minutes?'" (Focus Group, February 16, 2017). In cases where spouses were separated, this required even more juggling. One mother described her child care arrangements before her husband came to Canada:

Before I have problem to take care of the baby. My dad, also, he's still going to . . . Regina Open Door to learn English, and I manage time. I took my baby to my brother's

house just for one hour. Then my dad take home [my baby] and like that. Now I bring my husband and it's a bit [more] comfortable for me. (Focus Group, February 16, 2017)

These participants made sacrifices and had to be quite resourceful to work or study at all.

Some participants noted additional challenges. A survey respondent claimed that “with very cold days in the winter time plus lack of transportation, many moms can feel isolated spending days at home.” Expanding on the themes of experiencing stress and feeling isolated, it was noted in the survey that this issue does “apply much more to mothers than fathers.” A respondent in the community stakeholder survey noted:

Some cultures do not believe in leaving their children with someone who is not a family member. Children in some cultures are raised by a village and thus moms isolated in an apartment in Regina are lost for parenting knowledge in a strange culture.

Congruent with the findings in other research studies, then, feelings of isolation were common. However, participants reported receiving interim assistance from agencies such as KidsFirst, a program that offers support to vulnerable families. One focus group deemed this support to be invaluable, providing them with vouchers for taxis so they could get out of the house, teaching them about parenting in the Canadian context, offering encouragement, and helping them find services. One participant shared: “I’m ready, happy to come here and learn something different than home. I’m happy to have this program” (Focus Group, February 16, 2017). More importantly, several participants stated that they got much needed help:

*Participant 1:* They provide us a psychiatrist, especially me, and she’s very helpful to me.

*Participant 2:* They help you if you’re depressed. (Focus Group, February 16, 2017)

Evidently community organizations can play a critical role in offsetting some of the challenges faced by immigrants in the area of child care.

**Aspirations and concerns related to child care.** When asked to share their worries and hopes for their children’s child care, the participants demonstrated that they had strongly held preferences.

***Cultural and linguistic continuity.*** The vast majority of participants were concerned about maintaining their cultural practices and home languages. However, participants were divided in terms of who would assume this task; some preferred to secure a child care provider

who could support their language and culture while others affirmed the role of child care centres in integrating their children into the dominant culture.

Consistent with their cultural beliefs and practices, many participants stated that in their cultures it was the norm for children to be cared for by parents or by members of the family. In this way, they could ensure that their children were raised by someone they trusted, as this participant shared: “Usually in our culture it’s like we more prefer our child to raised by our parents, it’s like we are not comfortable to sending our child to daycare” (Focus Group, December 20, 2016). As another participant explained, parents feel like they have missed a lot when they send their children to daycare:

Mostly what’s happening here is both wife and husband is working and putting kids in the daycare, they miss those memories like your baby’s first walk, when she calls first time like, “Mama,” or something, they miss all those memories and for what, like for money or for your job status? Then I work with old people and at that age the most of the thing they have is the regret of missing their children’s childhood or something. Just you work on, work on, work on, earn money, and put that money to the hospital and you admit and then you regret . . . not taking care of your kids, really? Yeah...either husband or wife take care of them and then grandparents will come and. . . . Yeah. (Focus Group, December 20, 2016)

Parental care was viewed as optimal with extended family filling the gaps. When they were able to do so, numerous participants had family members care for their children, as discussed here: “I have just a two-year-[old] daughter but I have my parents coming here every six months, so they take care of her” (Focus Group, December 20, 2016).

Imparting language and culture to their children was also cited as reason to access parental or familial care. In one focus group, the participants were acutely aware of how little time they had to teach their children before going to school:

*Participant 1:* We’re going to send them in schools anyways, like he’s sending his daughter in February there, so it’s just [a] matter of [time] until they go to school, it’s just [a] matter of two years, so it’s good to be spending time with them instead of sending . . .

*Participant 2:* Yeah, for two, three years they’ll come to know more about our culture and our language, right? . . . The first two, three years if they’re with me

or at least with someone who knows my language, right? They don't make a huge difference because I don't want my kids to talk English in my home. It's like it's more a personal thing. I express more feelings when I speak in my own language, it's simple. Even if I talk in English I cannot express all the feelings which I have, but when I speak in my language you can see it on my face . . .

*Participant 3:* I exactly know what you mean. I've got three children of my own, and I only speak my first language at home, TV is in my first language but unfortunately my children, my three children have forgotten their first language. (Focus Group, December 20, 2016)

Newcomers' hopes that their children would learn their mother tongue was not always attainable as parents often required child care to work or study, but did not have family or community contacts in Regina.

When newcomers accessed formalized child care programs, some discussed the lack of congruence between their own cultural practices and the dominant practices in the child care context. In the survey data, 33% of newcomers stated that they did not currently have child care that they believed was sensitive to their family's language and culture. In line with Obeng's (2007) findings, participants looked for an educator from a similar background. As one participant stated: "Being an immigrant and a black woman, I preferred that she [daughter] goes to someone who has that African experience" (Focus Group, November 26, 2016). In one focus group, the participants concurred that parental or familial care was their preference but if there was a child care program run by someone from their own cultural background, then that would "make a huge difference" (Focus Group, December 20, 2016).

Food was seen as one means of reinforcing the customs of the home. A group of Muslim participants noted that they had hoped to find a child care centre that would serve *halal* food to their children. As one woman commented, she hoped for "child care that provide food appropriate to maintain our cultural traditions." (Focus Group, December 28, 2016). Language was also a concern for some participants, as this father stated: "I only want my child to stay at the daycare for a couple of hours until her mother finishes her language classes. I don't my daughters to stay longer because I don't want them to forget how to speak Arabic" (Focus Group, December 20, 2016). Even though they wanted their children to learn English, several

fathers in another group appreciated having their children in a very diverse centre where there were educators who spoke their language (Focus Group, February 23, 2017).

***Learning to live in the new context.*** Other participants were less concerned about language and culture maintenance in the child care context because they felt they could take on this role. One Chinese couple discussed this issue:

*Husband:* So the language will be very important. China is a very big country so many people around the world speak Chinese so we will keep speaking Chinese in our family and I think, I hope the teachers in a day care will take care of my child there and my child will speak English very good. So, I don't worry about this.

*Wife:* If the teacher can speak Chinese it's better.

*Husband:* But both of us were teachers in China. We have certificates for Mandarin.

*Researcher:* So, you'll teach the language?

*Husband:* Yes, also for the culture. (Focus Group, February 16, 2017)

These participants acknowledged that they would assume the primary role in ensuring their child's language and cultural maintenance, but also felt it would be useful to have some kind of language bridging or continuity between home and the program if at all possible. Another participant stressed that they speak their language in the home. When asked if she felt it would be sufficient to only speak their language in the home, she replied:

I think . . . its a challenge, I'm not going to say it's not, but I'd rather she [daughter] has more of what she's going to need to become successful than something she will have as a luxury, because she's going to use it [their language] between the two of us. (Focus Group, Focus Group, February 16, 2017)

Learning to speak English was conceived of as a means of becoming successful in Canada. This parent's view that her home language was a "luxury" rather than an asset suggests that some newcomers feel they must abandon their own language and assume an identity as an English-speaking Canadian, rather than mobilizing their own linguistic funds of knowledge. Indeed, one parent even asserted that he wanted his children to receive formal English instruction in the child care centre (Focus Group, February 23, 2017).

Several participants mentioned that exposure to children from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds is an additional benefit to formalized child care programs.

*Participant 1:* No, because if they're kids and they're going to be integrating into this, you know, I would rather they mix from an early age.

*Participant 2:* Also, scared to death, because early age, my boy . . . when we first came, my boy was scared of white people.

*Participant 3:* Scared. Scared of white people.

*Participant 2:* Because he had never seen them. When we go to church and we put him in the nursery, he would run away from them. He would be crying, he wouldn't let them touch him.

*Participant 3:* But over time, now he's used to it, now he knows everybody.

Later in the conversation, the participants expanded on this theme:

*Participant 1:* But I want her honestly to learn [my language], and we're teaching her, but it's best for her to interact with everyone right now. I can say this— at her daycare, there is a little friend, she is very good friend of her. She came up one day and she was like “Mommy, are we black?” I was like “Where'd you get that?” She's like, “My friend said we are black.” I'm like “Who told you?” So she's like, “Are we black?” . . . I'd rather . . . we have an honest conversation around it at this age, and then she grows up knowing these different colors of people.

*Participant 2:* And accept everyone. (Focus Group, January 2, 2017)

Even though their children may have experienced some difficult situations in the child care program, these participants believed that their children would learn from them. Parents conceptualized the benefits of child care programs in terms of learning to navigate life in a multicultural and multiracial society.

***Safety and hygiene.*** In three of the focus group discussions, the participants stated that safety was of paramount concern to them. One mother explained:

First thing safe place for them, very good care, like a second mom for them there. For me, I leave my girl there and I would like in my heart to be very safe. I don't want to think about her; what's she's doing, how they will be doing with her. I like day care to have a very safe place for them there. It's very important for my kids actually, for me. Back home in my country Iraq we don't have day care. Always moms stay home with the kids so when I came to Canada it was my first time to put my girl there. It was very, very

hard for me. Oh, what are they doing now, but now it's okay. (Focus Group, February 16, 2016)

The notion that educators were a second home for the children was something the participants were very aware of: “the most important things there is to take care of our family like our own family member. That's the hope because we are new here” (Focus Group, February 16, 2017).

The participants in one focus group considered child care centres to be “safe,” while family child care homes were construed as “unsafe.” This perception emerged after the women had watched a number of online videos depicting family day home operators yelling at or hitting the children. “I'm scared like sometimes I saw the video on Facebook and the woman slapping. . . . Last night I saw one video and I showed my son and he's crying and ‘don't be showing me that’. Small babies, very small babies and they slapping the baby. I don't trust.” (Focus Group, February 16, 2017). Another participant added that “the conditions [in family homes] vary” (Focus Group, February 16, 2017). Some participants also commented on the qualifications of the educator: “I like the teacher to have a license. If one person is not licensed, I don't trust.” (Focus group, February 16, 2017). They perceived that educators in family child care homes were less likely to have these qualifications. Other participants emphasized that educators should be well-trained.

Other safety concerns centred around the hygiene practices in child care centres. Two participants explained:

*Participant 1:* I would like to see that every child has his own space to store his personal items without having to share it with others. Things like his cup, plate, spoon. When my son was accepted at his daycare, I used to keep an eye on him, I saw one of the employees feed the children with the same plate and the same spoon. When I saw this, I went to the person in charge and filed an official complaint. They never did it again [laughter].

*Participant 2:* Yes, cleanliness is something that many of these daycares lack.

*Participant 1:* Another thing is that the children sleep very close to each other. They might sometimes share the same blanket or pillow with other children. (Focus Group, December 28, 2016)

Like many parents, these participants wished for a safe and clean environment for their children. Although they were unaccustomed to using child care programs in their home countries, they seemed to prefer a more institutional program in Canada.

## **Conclusion**

In the City of Regina, newcomers experience many of the same barriers that many Canadian families do when seeking to secure access to child care programs, including the high cost, lack of child care spaces, and long waiting lists. Moreover, they often have little choice in programs due to the lack of availability and thus sacrifice their preferences and convenience for availability. However, the marginalized positions some newcomers occupy in terms of their English language abilities, precarious or low-paying employment, and undervalued educational status seem to exacerbate these issues. When parents have to work in minimum wage positions, even subsidized care is a strain on the family's resources. Moreover, child care is not always available at the times the family need. When working in entry level positions, families do not generally have the capacity to negotiate their hours of work and the same applies to those enrolled in language training classes with set schedules.

Lack of language skills is a substantial barrier to accessing child care for newcomers. Newcomers also experienced unique challenges related to the loss of their social and familial networks. While Canadian-born parents can rely on word of mouth to navigate wait lists and locate a program they like and can afford, newcomers have not yet established these networks. They seemed to be caught in an untenable position: they can begin to build new networks once they are working or studying, but they cannot access educational or employment opportunities without child care. The majority of participants expressed a strong desire to work and to make contributions to the Canadian economy but were thwarted in their attempts due to the lack of child care. Many of the newcomers who participated in this research desired child care that was close to home and accessible by public transportation if they did not have their own vehicle. The reality for a number of participants was that they had to take whatever was available and then they struggled to make it work for their family.

Many participants had strong ideas about what they wanted for their children's child care. A number of participants hoped to socialize their children in accordance with their own cultural and religious beliefs, values, and practices in order to instill a sense of pride in them

with respect to their cultural identities. This finding was consistent with other studies of immigrant parents. However, they perceived there to be a mismatch between the practices in child care programs and those in homes. Some juggled several care arrangements to ensure that their children were also being exposed to their home language and culture. On the other hand, some participants were cognizant of introducing their children to children from a variety of backgrounds. English language acquisition was also a concern as they perceived fluency as the key to success in the new context.

When families face challenges in accessing child care, the repercussions extend beyond hindering participation in the labour force or acquiring education. Child care programs are often newcomer families' first point of contact with formal institutional structures in their new country (Tobin, Arzubiaga, & Adair, 2013). Their experiences in these programs will, in large part, provide a foundation for their future involvement in their children's schooling. Access to child care programs enables newcomer parents to pursue employment, education, and training opportunities, thus aiding them in integrating into, and contributing to, the economic and social growth of the country. Furthermore, Brandon (2004) affirms that experience in child care programs has ample benefits for children. Through their enrollment in child care programs, newcomer children are able to accrue social capital, learn about living in the new context and get along with others in a diverse society, learn how to speak English, become familiar with the norms in Canadian classrooms, and learn how to interpret a teacher's instructions (Brandon, 2004). Delpit (1995) argues that access to this "culture of power" is crucial for culturally and linguistically diverse children. Newcomer families can also form networks, building bridging social capital through their contacts with educators and other families.

### **Education**

Canada has always been able to attract highly skilled immigrants. The levels of education and work experience are among the valuable assets they bring with them to Canada. Those who arrive in Canada with inadequate education or language abilities are continuously utilizing the different educational and work related programs that are offered by federal and provincial governments. Nevertheless, the increasing number of immigrants in the last decade, accompanied by the arrival of more than 40,000 Syrian refugees in the last two years, has placed more pressure on such services. These services include language training programs, occupational training programs, adult education programs, and other professional development

services. International students who have chosen to pursue their higher education in Canada are faced with similar challenges as they adjust to their new learning environment and host society. In this section of *Barriers to Newcomer Adaptation and Settlement*, some of the main challenges that newcomers and international students face while trying to adapt to their new lives will be examined and contextualized in the scholarly literature. First, we will look at the barriers faced by newcomers to Canada, specifically in Saskatchewan, and will then examine the specific barriers faced by international students who have chosen Saskatchewan in which to pursue their studies. Finally, the barriers experienced by participants in this study will be presented, followed by a discussion of the supports and services they identified as necessary.

## **Barriers Faced by Newcomers**

**Language.** According to several studies conducted within the Canadian context (Adamuti-Trache, 2012; Boyd & Cao, 2009; Ostrovsky, 2008; Rudenko, 2012; Weiner, 2008), learning a new language is one of the most challenging barriers for newcomers in terms of adapting to their new environment, as well as to finding employment. This is confirmed by a 2005 Citizenship and Immigration Canada study that concluded that the lack of knowledge of one of Canada's official languages was the most challenging problem faced by newcomers (Xue, 2007). In the same regard, Plante (2011) reported that limited language ability was a major barrier to integration into Canadian society. Despite such evidence, many newcomers are still unable to access language training programs that meet their demands and expectations for employment and education (Sutherland, Wheller, & Conrad, 2008).

**Programs for language instruction.** The federal government of Canada funds language services in both official languages for newcomers and protected persons through Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) and the *Cours de langue pour les immigrants au Canada* (CLIC). Launched in 1992, LINC is a free English language training program that offers permanent residences a chance to learn basic to advanced English (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2016b). LINC is funded by IRCC and uses the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) as the standard for assessing adult immigrants' English language skills and the *Standards linguistiques canadiens* (SLC) for its French learners. Both the CLB and the SLC are not tests nor are they standard curricula, rather, they are frameworks that

include various benchmarks aimed at evaluating the newcomer in four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2016).

LINC involves three stages (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2016b). First, newcomers are assessed to determine their level of language proficiency. These assessments are conducted by LINC-funded assessment centers across the country. The second assessment determines the personal circumstances of the newcomer and his/her readiness for language training. Finally, newcomers are referred to a language training provider within the community they live in to start classes. In Saskatchewan, there are six assessment centers that provide both LINC/ESL classes for newcomers. They are distributed across five major cities in the province: Saskatoon, Regina, Moose Jaw, Swift Current, and Yorkton (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2016). The second stage of LINC involves the language training itself. The method of language training delivery depends on the availability of spaces and resources. Currently in Saskatchewan, language training is provided as full-time, part-time, and home study. Classes are available at different times of the day. The progress of each newcomer is rated and monitored based on CLB/SLC level descriptors, and students are awarded LINC certificates upon successful completion of training (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2016b).

**Influences on language acquisition.** While such programs offer newcomers a chance to develop their language skills, internal and external factors beyond the control of the learner can influence their acquisition of a second language. According to Derwing and Munro (2009), other factors encountered when it comes to learning a new language include the quality of the learning environment, the age of the learner, the educational level of the learner, the influence that the first language has, and the learner's aptitude. In addition, long-term motivation is also a factor required to master a second language (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009).

**Age.** The effects of age at the time of immigration can have a critical effect on language learning (Hou & Beiser, 2006). Most of the available literature suggests that young newcomers are more capable of learning a new language than their older counterparts (Mesch, 2003; Remnick, 2004). Researchers have argued that the biological change that takes place in the first two decades of a person's life influence the capacity to learn and retain a language (Johnson & Newport, 1989; Weber-Fox & Neville, 2001). Other explanations related to the age factor include motivation and the length of exposure to the target language (Austin 2009; Ionin &

Montrul, 2010; Unsworth, 2007). According to the human capital model, immigrant youth are offered more incentives and enjoy longer periods of payback when learning the language of the dominant culture (Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003). Furthermore, several studies have indicated that older newcomers are considered at a disadvantage when compared to children or youth. Due to their multiple responsibilities, adult newcomers are often not able to immerse themselves fully in learning a new language, which results in fewer one-on-one interactions with native speakers (Gotseva, 2015; Rothman & Guijarro-Fuentes, 2010). Instead, they are taught in regular classroom settings where they have fewer opportunities to practice (Lew-Williams & Fernald, 2010) and where they learn grammatical rules and memorize basic words rather than discovering language relations from the ground up. Generally speaking, studies related to language acquisition have shown that there is a steady decline in language learning ability as a person ages (Birdsong & Molis, 2001; Hakuta, Bialystok, & Wiley, 2003).

**Motivation.** Motivation has also been shown to produce successful language learners because it results in confidence to interact with native speakers as well as to continue learning the language even after a specific goal has been accomplished (Balkir & Topkaya, 2009; Dörnyei, 1994; Ebata, 2008). Ellis (1994) defines language motivation as the attempt that learners make to learn a new language because of “their need or desire to learn it” (p. 715). In the same regard, Gardner (2001) explains that motivation in a classroom is closely related to the attitudes that a language learner holds towards the language instructor, other students, and coursework. According to Brewer and Burgess (2005), motivation is a basic and essential part of learning. In general, teachers recognize that once their learners are motivated, learning becomes more apparent, communication flows, and anxiety decreases (Gormley & Gill, 2007). The motivation of language learners greatly affects their willingness to take part in the process of learning, and it has been noted that whenever language learners leave the classroom environment feeling confident and motivated, they are more likely to use what they learned in other life situations (Wlodkowski, 1999).

The role of motivation when it comes to newcomers learning a new language has been recognized in several studies. For example, Ellis (1994) asserts that the length of time that immigrants require to learn another language depends on their motivation. Some language learners might be motivated by social as well as educational needs. Other learners, although highly motivated, may have family and economic obligations that prevent them from attending

language classes on a regular basis. Therefore, to meet the needs of learners who repeatedly enter and exit programs, a safe and welcoming classroom environment is necessary to enhance motivation and for learners to feel comfortable (Good & Brophy, 1994; MacIntyre, 1999).

***Sociocultural factors.*** A learner's economic status, as well as their cultural background, are additional factors that determine the way in which a newcomer grasps and develops needed linguistic skills. In a study of the social and cultural aspects of learning a foreign/second language, Rezaee (2011) concluded that it was vital to take sociocultural aspects into account when teaching a new language. More specifically, aspects of the language being taught, such as structure, might be completely different from the learner's first language.

***Impact of these factors.*** The impact of these various factors can be clearly seen in a study conducted by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2004) that examined the relationship between scores obtained on the Canadian Language Benchmark Assessment (CLBA) and a number of factors that influence a newcomer's ability to learn a new language (Derwing, Munro, Abbott, & Mulder, 2010). The results indicated that the country of origin, first language, language training in Canada, and occupation in Canada all had a degree of influence on adult immigrants' ability to learn and retain English (Derwing et al. 2010). Several studies have also shown that the social integration of newcomers not only depends on their ability to speak one of the two official languages in Canada, but also on the awareness of newcomers and Canadian-born citizens of each others' cultures (Derwing, Munro, & Thomson, 2008; Xue 2007).

***Other barriers to access.*** There is no doubt that language training programs are becoming increasingly necessary due to the expanding population of newcomers in Canada. However, it is also important to remember that many newcomers do not always take full advantage of the educational and professional opportunities that these programs offer (Picot & Hou, 2003; Schellenberg & Hou, 2005) because of various barriers to accessing language training programs. These barriers include, but are not limited to, eligibility requirements, long waiting lists, lack of program supports (e.g., child care), lack of transportation, personal barriers such as low self-confidence, and a lack of awareness of the available programs (Singh & Blakely, 2012; Ying Yee, Wong, & Janczur, 2006).

***Barriers to post-secondary studies.*** In a study of immigrants arriving in Canada in 2000/2001, nearly two-thirds were interested in further education (Adamuti-Trache, 2016). In a

2005 survey, 71% of newcomers believed that participating in the Canadian education system was “very important,” while 18% stated it was “important” in terms of integration (Banerjee & Verma, 2012). Completion of further education allows newcomers to develop local networks, establish credentials, learn relevant skills, and improve their confidence, thus enhancing future labour force participation (Anisef, Sweet & Adamuti-Trache, 2010; Banerjee & Verma, 2012).

However, newcomers face several barriers to attaining post-secondary education. Attaining the language skills required to be accepted into a post-secondary program—a minimum score on one of the accepted language proficiency tests—is one of the major barriers to higher education. Having foreign educational credentials recognized is also linked to success in higher education, but acquiring this recognition can be a difficult. Those newcomers who have not completed any post-secondary studies in their home countries are less likely to pursue higher education as they do not have a previous disposition toward further education or an established profession (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010; Banerjee & Verma, 2012). Immigration class, country of origin, age, and gender also have an impact on the likelihood that a newcomer will acquire further education. Adamuti-Trache and Sweet (2010) found that newcomers who came to Canada as skilled workers, as well as immigrants from Eastern Europe, South Asia, and Africa were most likely to enrol in educational institutions. Younger newcomers are more motivated to invest time and money in education as they have more years to accrue the benefits associated with having a Canadian education (Banerjee & Verma, 2012). Men have greater educational participation rates than women, perhaps because women are the primary caregivers in the family and/or cannot secure child care (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010; Banerjee & Verma, 2012). Many newcomers have cited finances as an impediment, feeling they must work instead of study in order to survive. However, Banerjee and Verma (2012) found that recent immigrants do somehow manage to finance their education.

### **Barriers Faced by International Students**

The international student population in Canadian universities almost doubled in the decade between 2004/2005 and 2013/2014 (Statistics Canada, 2016). While most international students to Canada have chosen Ontario, British Columbia, or Quebec to pursue their education, Saskatchewan has welcomed about 5,000 international students who are currently studying at several institutions across the province (Canadian Bureau for International

Education, 2014). Such a large number has benefited the Canadian economy by generating millions of dollars in government revenue, not to mention the cultural enrichment that these students add to both the Canadian society and their campuses. However, research indicates that such an increase in the number of international students in Canada is usually not accompanied by proper supports for foreign students to integrate and successfully complete their studies (Kanu, 2008). Scholars have devoted much attention to the barriers that international students face in their effort to live and adapt to their new environment. In general, these barriers fall into four main categories: academic, psychosocial, cognitive, and demographic (McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001). Academic barriers consist of the difficulty of language acquisition, unfamiliar academic approaches, different learning skills, and lack of prior academic achievement (Abbott Chapman, Hughes, & Wyld, 1992). Psychosocial barriers—motivation, anxiety, social and emotional support, perceived discrimination, and successful integration—have also been explored (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Cognitive barriers have to do with self-efficacy and a student's attribution style (McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001). Finally, Li, Chen, and Duanmu (2010) have focussed on demography—age, gender, and financial situation—and its relation to academic performance. This section highlights some of these challenges and provides suggestions to better facilitate students' adjustment to their new academic and social environments.

**Language.** Studies have shown that English proficiency level plays an important role in how well international students manage in English-medium institutions (Li et al., 2010; Wardlow, 1999). Most importantly, studies indicate that students with developed English language abilities are more likely to succeed academically (Daller & Phelan, 2013). However, language ability is linked to several other areas that impact student achievement.

**Lack of confidence.** Language proficiency is considered to be one of the greatest academic issues hindering smooth adjustment for international students in Western academic institutions (Terui, 2012). Language as a primary challenge to international students' academic achievement has been a focus of research conducted in Western higher education (see Sawir, 2005; Sawir, Marginson, Forbes-Mewett, Nyland, & Ramia, 2012). For example, Trice (2007) reported that limited English language skills appeared to be one of the main factors behind international students' feelings of being isolated and not accepted. In the same regard, Yang, Noel, and Saumure (2006) maintained that English proficiency had a major role in

international students' feelings of self-confidence and their ability to adjust to their new academic environment. Empirical studies have maintained that international students who possess higher English language abilities are more likely to have a better sense of their well-being when compared to those who have limited English language abilities (Sawir et al., 2012). Furthermore, Hendrickson, Rosen, and Aune (2011) found that international students with more developed language abilities are more likely to start relationships with students other than co-nationals or fellow international students.

***Unrealistic expectations.*** Some scholars have emphasized the existing relationship between international students' academic success and the scores they get on standardized tests such as TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and IELTS (International English Language Testing System) (Huong, 2001; Krausz, Schiff, Schiff & Hise, 2005). Other studies, however, have indicated that the relationship is weak or does not exist (Huong, 2001; Kerstijens & Nery, 2000). Academic institutions assume that international students will fully master the language of instruction prior to starting their studies (Guo & Chase, 2011; Ryan, 2011; Ryan & Viete, 2009), thus they do not necessarily receive supports in the host society to ameliorate any deficiencies (Duff, 2010). The idea that international students are responsible for being linguistically ready to compete with native English speaking students, or the misconception that everyday exposure to language and contact with native speakers will lead to language proficiency, are both unrealistic and imply that academic institutions should not have to accommodate linguistic difficulties faced by this group of students (Vasilopoulos, 2016).

***Lack of instructor support.*** Unfortunately, a large group of educators in Western countries still believes that it is not their responsibility to deal with language challenges faced by international students in the classroom and that they do not need to accommodate their teaching practices to meet such linguistic challenges (Andrade, 2010). For example, Sawir (2011) investigated the opinions of 80 faculty members in an Australian university on what it means to be an international student and whether or not the presence of international students in their classrooms would have an impact on their teaching practices. Interestingly, the study concluded that 34% of the instructors felt that they did not have to make any special accommodations for international students. Such practices have led researchers to argue that in many cases, instructors "do not bother to make the effort to understand [international students']

clumsy English, or to risk taking the conversation into unfamiliar territory” (Ryan & Viete, 2009, p. 306).

***Social barriers.*** Another theme that is consistent within the literature is related to how language has a direct effect on international students’ ability to socialize and start new relations with domestic students. Cheng and Fox (2008) examined the factors that influence academic acculturation among international students at 12 different Canadian universities. Participants emphasized that their inadequate English language skills was one of the main reasons for their lack of social contact with host nationals. Similarly, Swagler and Ellis (2003) concluded that language was one of the main barriers to social contact among Taiwanese graduate students studying in the United States.

A foreign language accent might also have negative social and cultural ramifications for international students. International students with an accent might at times feel rejected, labeled, or different (Dawson, 2013). Even for those who have been speaking English as a second language in their home countries, an accent might add to the pre-existing stress that these students face when trying to adapt to their academic environment. According to Lin and Yi (1997), international students with an accent are often hesitant to participate in class discussions because they assume that their accent will stand in the way of others comprehending the message they are trying to deliver. In addition, international students who are not familiar with local slang, idioms, and humour can feel incompetent in English conversations. In a study that explored 12 East and South Asian international students’ experiences with racial micro-aggressions at a Canadian university, Houshmand, Spanierman and Tafarodi (2014) reported that students disengaged from certain academic activities because of their accent. Further, participants from the same study reported “feeling ridiculed because of accented speech or language proficiency” (p. 381).

***Culture shock.*** In the process of acculturation, most newcomers experience various kinds of stress (Brown, 2000). Initially, immigrants are excited about arriving in a new country, but when they realize how different the new culture is from their native culture, feelings of discomfort can take over (Gormley & Gill, 2007). Like other newcomers, international students’ sense of cultural differences between their new environment and that of their host country causes stress. When trying to adapt to a new host institution, international students, like other newcomers, experience feelings of helplessness, anxiety, and depression

(Mori, 2000). In a study on cultural adjustment among Chinese students in Toronto, Zhang and Zhu (2014) discovered that students' experiences of culture shock was associated with feelings of stress, uncertainty, and excitement and was influenced mainly by the degree of social support these students received. In another study, Abukhattala (2004) examined the experiences of ten Arab undergraduate students studying at two English-language universities in Montreal. The study showed that language, differences in educational philosophies, cultural differences, and negative attitudes towards Arab students were the main reasons they experienced culture shock.

While the symptoms and intensity of culture shock might vary from one student to another, some of the typical symptoms of cultural discomfort include loneliness, dependence on people from one's home country, quick temper, lack of interest in trying new things, inability to work effectively, strong sense of loyalty to home culture, and unexplainable, frequent crying (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Kohls, 1995; Oberg, 1986; Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). Research suggests that communication and getting to know the new environment are two methods for students to overcome culture shock. For example, Pelling (2000) examined the factors contributing to culture shock among 24 international students at a university in western Canada. The study concluded that the three main factors contributing to culture shock were culture differences and misunderstanding, language and fear of contact, and social differences. In addition, speaking to friends from the same background, asking for help from religious institutions, meditation, and preparing cultural foods were among the main strategies that students employed to cope with culture shock. As mentioned previously, every student has their own way of dealing with stress and pressure while studying and living in a new environment. However, educational institutions need to be aware of such needs and should provide more services to assist students in dealing with these emotions. In the same regard, instructors should make an effort to understand at least the dominant culture(s) of his/her students, use simpler and more meaningful language, and at times, take a personal interest in the students.

**Financial concerns.** Another set of challenges that many international students face is related to their ability to finance their studies and everyday living expenses. While all international students admitted into a Canadian educational institution are required to provide proof of their ability to pay tuition fees, along with being able to financially support themselves

and any accompanying family members during their stay in Canada, international students still feel that they are not getting adequate services for the high fees they are paying compared to their domestic counterparts. In a study conducted on the first-year experience of international students in nine Canadian universities, Pidgeon and Andres (2005) found that while international students were aware of the high cost of tuition and living in a major Canadian city, they also insisted that the services (e.g., education, food, institutional merchandise) they were getting in return were unsatisfactory.

Another related financial concern of international students in Canada is the increase in tuition fees. While all students in Canada have faced dramatic fee increases over the last decade, tuition fees for international students have become particularly burdensome in recent years (Canadian Federation of Students, 2014). On average, undergraduate international students' tuition fees rose 5.6% to \$23,589 for the 2016–2017 academic year (Statistics Canada, 2016). In the same year, Canadian undergraduate students in Saskatchewan paid an average of \$7,177, less than a third of the international student rate (Statistics Canada, 2016). In addition, one study revealed that international students who have chosen to enrol in professional programs such as medicine, law, and dentistry have to pay an average of \$62,000 a year in tuition fees and living expenses (Canadian Federation of Students, 2014). Although tuition fees in Canada might be considered relatively low compared to other Western countries, they are still considered an obstacle to post-secondary education for prospective international students. Ultimately, continuous fee increases threaten Canada's ability to attract and retain international students.

In this overview, we have tried to examine some of the main challenges faced by newcomers and international students within the Canadian context. It is important to remember that Canadian newcomers and international students arrive from all over the world, represent all walks and stages of life, come with different levels of qualifications, and are increasingly diverse (Kottler & Kottler, 2002, p. v). It is also important to remember that newcomers learn and acquire knowledge in distinctive ways due to their different experiences, backgrounds, and levels of motivation. Meeting these diverse needs of newcomers requires the support and attention of both academic institutions and newcomer service agencies across Canada in order to provide them with a smoother transition to their new homes.

## Findings

**Educational profiles.** The respondents in the newcomer survey came with varying levels of education. Out of 240 respondents, 19% stated that their highest level of education was elementary school; 23% had completed high school; 7% had attended post-secondary but had not completed their program, 30% had completed a certificate, diploma, or degree program, and 21% had completed a post-degree or graduate program. Once in Regina, though, 73% of respondents had attended, or were currently attending classes. The vast majority of these respondents (80%) reported that these classes were focused on English language learning. The other 20% of respondents cited various programs including high school upgrading (2%), certificate or trades programs (4%), degree programs (8%), or post-degree or graduate programs (5%). Participants in the focus group discussions had accessed, or hoped to access, various educational programs, including language training offered informally through conversation circles (primarily held in churches) or more formally through LINC programs offered through agencies such as RODS; undergraduate or graduate degree programs at the University of Regina; and diploma or certificate programs at Saskatchewan Polytechnic. As noted in the methodology section, 25% of the focus group participants had completed high school, 5% had completed some post-secondary, 36% had completed a certificate, trade, or degree program, and 18% had completed post-degree or graduate studies. We elicited additional information about post-secondary studies from participants in the focus groups, as a higher proportion of them were enrolled in advanced studies.

**Significance test results.** A chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) was used to determine whether the newcomers' educational level had a relationship with their abilities to access services in Regina. The study sought to determine whether one's level of education had a relationship with finding, keeping and maintaining suitable housing, accessing health care and so on. A significant statistical relationship was to determine whether a relationship between two variables was more than a random chance. We caution that a significant relationship is not necessarily causal or did not mean that one variable causes the other.

The study's null hypothesis was that newcomers' level of education did not predict their ability to access services in Regina. The alternative hypothesis was that level of education attained by newcomers related to their ability to seek services in Regina. To accept or reject the null hypothesis, we chose the significance level of 0.05.

When we computed the chi-square test to determine a significant relationship between education and one's ability to seek services, we compared the p-value ( $p^*$ ) and the significance level of 0.05. Where the p-value ( $p^*$ ) was less than the significance level of 0.05, we rejected our null hypothesis. Similarly, where the p-value ( $p^*$ ) was greater than the significance level of 0.05, we accepted our null hypothesis that a relationship did not exist between one's level of education and their ability to access services.

The newcomer survey indicated that participants' level of education (i.e. grade 12 and higher) had a significant relationship with their ability to finding, keeping and maintaining suitable housing ( $\chi^2 = 13.09$ ,  $df=5$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ,  $p^* = 0.022$ ,  $N=237$ ). From the survey, there was also indication that participants with high school education and higher were more likely to effectively communicate with their neighbours and workmates ( $\chi^2 = 14.66$ ,  $df=5$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ,  $p^* = 0.012$ ,  $N=237$ ). Similarly, the ability to access appropriate healthcare was associated with the participants with high level of education ( $\chi^2 = 15.71$ ,  $df=5$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ,  $p^* = 0.008$ ,  $N=235$ ). Detailed chi-square results for education and ability to seek services are shown in the contingency table 1, Appendix C.

Based on the survey results, one can infer that newcomers with grade 12 education and higher were more likely to have the ability to access services like housing and health care, which is significant in the adaptation and settlement process in Regina.

**Barriers.** From the focus group interviews, we also learned about further barriers faced by newcomers in areas of education. Since most of the participants who commented on education were already enrolled in educational programs, the barriers that they identified were not necessarily related to access, but rather to the successful completion of a degree, diploma, or program. These barriers included the need to “start over” in their education, language issues, difficulties navigating between educational systems “back home” and in Regina, financial concerns, lack of empathy or awareness on the part of others, and emotional stress. As discussed in the previous section, lack of access to child care also served as a barrier to enrolling in educational programs.

**Starting over.** Some of the students had established educational credentials in their home countries that were not transferable in the Canadian context. For instance, they may have come to Canada hoping to secure employment in their field of training, only to find they had to return to school.

I just finished a degree in social work. I got here and they said, “You just need to register. No, your degree was not done in Canada. Therefore, you need to go back and do another degree.” I said, “No, it was social work.” They said, “Send all your documents,” and I sent everything. They reviewed and said, “Everything looks good, but the only country that will recognize this certificate is South Africa.” (Focus Group, December 2, 2016)

Consistent with findings in other studies, further education is thus viewed as a means of obtaining Canadian credentials and entering the job market without downgrading the professional standing they received in their home country (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010).

Still, the shift from being a professional in one’s home country to being a student in Canada led participants to feel a loss of status and sense of shame:

Everything you work [for] in your country, it doesn’t count anything. It won’t count. You say you are a professional in your country, but you are nothing here. You are just like [a] student and you are just like a fresh student, like an undergraduate student, graduating from the school and you are just sitting like them. Even if you have so much experience, even if you are so knowledgeable, even if you have a high status in your country, you are still nothing. . . . This was really hard. (Focus Group, December 2, 2016)

Although this theme was more prevalent in relation to accessing employment opportunities, some of the participants expressed the sentiment that they had to start over because their education back home was not valued or recognized in Canada. One participant summed up the dilemma for newcomers: “The degree we got in our country does not work here” (Focus Group, February 16, 2017). This situation was especially true for students with degrees in professional programs such as engineering, education, and social work that did not meet Canadian certification requirements. One participant, a teacher in her home country, was pursuing a master’s degree in education administration in Canada, but found she would need to go back and take an undergraduate degree to work in the field here:

Before I came I wanted to become a teacher here but actually I found it’s quite difficult. . . . I found to be an administrator here is quite different. Even to become a teacher I need to get a teacher’s certificate here. (Focus Group, February 16, 2017)

One participant was in limbo because the university would not transfer credits from his previous coursework so he got a job below his qualification level instead (Focus Group, December 20, 2016).

**Language.** For students who were studying in LINC programs, lack of English language skills was viewed as the main obstacle to pursuing further education or training. While some were studying in order to enter a post-secondary program, many other participants were aiming to secure employment, discouraged by the high level of English proficiency needed to secure admission to programs. One participant, for example, knew that her professional qualifications would not be recognized in Canada, but hoped to enter post-secondary training to gain qualifications in Canada. She was discouraged to be told her CLB assessment was too low for admission, even to a diploma program:

Back home I was a teacher. I teach in elementary school and I finish my grade 12 in English. We study from English, from elementary. . . . Like from preschool to up to grade 12. I was teaching and when I came here and I did my . . . that CLB test in Regina Open Door and I got on the level 4. I need to go to SIAST for the English. (Focus Group, February 16, 2017)

Many participants confirmed that language impeded their access to further education. One participant explained this dilemma while many others in the focus group concurred: “the English language is a problem, because at university they ask for high level of English language. So, this is a problem” (Focus Group, February 6, 2017). These participants felt they were trapped because they needed further education to advance their careers but were unable to enter post-secondary programs due to their limited English language proficiency. Another participant had hoped to continue her course of studies in Canada, but could not do so: “I love to be nurse but it’s not easy to get because my language, like English is not very well now to get like a course of the nurses, but I love to be a nurse” (Focus Group, February 16, 2017). Overall, participants felt that learning English gave them more opportunities: “First I learn English, then life is easy” (Focus Group, February 16, 2017). However, they did find they had to revise their goals and expectations. The data from students enrolled in post-secondary programs, though, suggest that should they decide to continue their studies, they will experience many additional language-related challenges.

**Financial concerns.** As in other research studies (e.g., Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010), finances were a dominant concern for participants, influencing their ability to pursue further education or making it difficult for them to make ends meet as a student. Students in language training courses were overwhelmingly grateful that they did not have to pay for these classes as they viewed English as a means of achieving their goals. Even so, they often had to consider how to support themselves while attending classes. A number of participants reported that financial considerations had influenced them to work rather than to study. As one participant explained, getting an education was contingent on others working to support the family so he had sacrificed his own dreams for his younger brother: “Because my brother is studying right now, and the difficulty is [it is] hard to maintain his studying and how to get the money to continue his education so here is the problem” (Focus Group, February 6, 2017). A few participants also stated that they appreciated being able to access high school upgrading classes for free, as this participant explained: “to date they are still for free. You only have to invest your time, hard work, and then you get a certificate for grade 12” (Focus Group, November 25, 2016). If their financial situation allowed them to leave the workplace or work fewer hours, participants were eager to take advantage of opportunities to access these free language or upgrading courses.

International students pay comparatively high tuition fees for post-secondary studies until they have attained permanent residency status in Canada. For example, in 2014 the average annual cost of tuition in Regina was \$17,776 for international students compared to \$5,926 for Canadian students or permanent residents (South Saskatchewan Community Foundation, 2015). Some participants noted that there was a discrepancy between the fees quoted in their letters of acceptance and the actual fees they paid (a result of the annual fee increases), which made it even more difficult to plan ahead. A number of participants stated that they had deferred their education in favour of employment. Some newcomers described how they navigated the system to achieve the requirements for permanent residency in order to eventually pursue a degree. Even so, there were concerns on the part of some participants that they would not have the ability to pay off student debt once they finished:

I’m looking at the recent news, which they had over the media that government is going to cut funds for social services, education, and health. So as a student sometimes I’m like wow. With all these student loans, how am I going to pay after school if the

government is cutting funds from those three areas? You know, it keeps me in a worried position. (Focus Group, November 26, 2016)

Education was seen as a means to securing better employment, but it was also a gamble for participants depending on the current economic situation.

Those participants who came to Canada as international students did not always fully understand how the tuition differential operated until they came to Canada and spoke to other newcomers. Several wished they had applied for a diploma or certificate program instead of a degree program so they could enter the workforce more quickly and avoid amassing large student debt. One student explained that even a diploma was a huge financial hardship: “I had paid over \$44,000 for just a diploma. . . . So when I thought about getting a degree that would be up to \$80,000” (Focus Group, December 11, 2016). While some participants’ families were able to sustain them financially, the families of other participants had made substantial financial sacrifices to ensure that they could pursue post-secondary studies in Canada. This participant was the eldest of seven children and her parents made huge sacrifices to send her to Canada so she would later be able to provide for her siblings:

It means a lot if you are not from a wealthy home like me because my parents sold a lot of stuff to put away the 22,000 I had. Twenty-two thousand is like 12 million in my currency. That’s a lot of money for one family to send out one person for study. (Focus Group, December 11, 2016)

Finances were a common preoccupation of all of the participants who were students, but particularly those paying international student fee rates.

A number of international students held the opinion that the astronomical fees they were paying entitled them to more supports than they were receiving. These considerations included assistance from the international office, their professors, and their academic advisors. The concept of receiving “value” for the tuition they had paid was a common refrain. However, their expectations were not unrealistic. For instance, one participant had to complete a co-op placement for her program, but had to secure this placement on her own:

The co-op office as I understand is supposed to help all the students, I mean ALL the students. Whether you’re international, whether you’re national, you’re a permanent resident or you’re a refugee, they have the authority and the right to make sure every student gets a co-op [placement]. As I’m talking today, I went for co-op three times and

I didn't even get an interview. I got three of my co-op interviews cancelled. . . . That is part [of] my education, I am paying for co-op, students pay 4,000 or 3,000 per co-op term, to get a co-op for experience which will help you, first-hand experience because it's considered to be my first-hand experience in Canada to help me out after my graduation. . . . I was expecting that the co-op office would do a one-to-one placement for every student, it's specified on the criteria for co-op that you do not need any experience to apply for co-op because that is your first experience. But that's not the case, that's not the case, they get students who already have the experience which are mostly Canadian students who already have the first-hand experience to go on working at the end of the school, and I did school without any experience. (Focus Group, December 11, 2017)

This student felt that the fees she was paying should ensure that she have equal access to a placement. However, having to apply and interview for co-op placements seemed to disadvantage students who did not have Canadian experience and connections.

Some participants asserted that they paid very much money for their studies and yet did not receive "value" in the form of support from their instructors.

I have had professors ignore my questions in class because they cannot understand what I am saying, because I am not speaking in "Canadian" English. I've had professors ignore my questions or just answer my questions vaguely because they can't understand what I'm saying. I don't feel I am getting that much attention for the amount of money I pay. (Focus Group, December 2, 2016)

Participants who expressed this view did not feel that their high rates of tuition entitled them to more services and supports than other students. Rather, they simply hoped that their instructors would extend the same courtesy and level of respect to them as they did the other students in the class.

Many international student participants looked for ways to cope with the cost of tuition. The majority hoped to defray the costs of their education by finding part-time work. However, they were only allowed to work 20 hours a week if they worked off-campus. Several participants noted that they were fortunate to find work on campus which enabled them to work more hours: "if you're working out of campus you only have 20 hours, so we are lucky enough to get jobs on campus" (Focus Group, December 11, 2016). However, being employed

meant they could not take a full course load and, correspondingly, were paying tuition and other expenses for a longer period of time.

Finally, the cost of housing was a concern for many international students. While off-campus housing was perceived as being less expensive than living in residence, a number of students started off in residence because it was easier than finding a roommate and a place to live. One additional advantage cited by several participants was being close to employment and classes, as explained by this participant: “It has been okay and lucky for me I’m able to work on campus for as many hours as I can” (Focus Group, December 11, 2016). However, leaving residence incurred a financial penalty that came as a surprise to a few participants:

I got a place off campus and I went to the office so I could . . . to tell them that I wanted to move and they were like “okay, once you move” then I’m going to forfeit my 400 dollars for damage or something. . . . One thing I notice about this Canadian stuff is, if you are to sign a contract, they don’t tell you deep down what . . . they just want you to sign. I feel it’s kind of dishonest because you didn’t tell me deep down what the contract is about and on the payment and after I sign if I just go get something else, you tell me it’s attached, like it was so annoying and I’m still battling with the institution right now because I’m like “I don’t even have the money.” It’s kind of a big struggle on it’s own, right? (Focus Group, December 11, 2016)

Many of the international students needed flexibility in terms of their living situation in order to offset the high cost of tuition, but language, the absence of local connections, and administrative barriers impeded their ability to move

*Navigating an unfamiliar educational system.* Although a number of the participants had some familiarity with post-secondary education back home, they encountered a number of discontinuities when enrolling in Canadian institutions. First of all, the norms and expectations about being a student were very different. In Canada, there is an expectation that students participate in class discussions, which is difficult for many international students who are accustomed to listening: “I think it’s learning some culture’s difference, because actually in Taiwan, when we are educated, students don’t speak. Only teacher will speak. Student will always be quiet, really silent” (Focus Group, December 2, 2016). One participant expressed the view that the expectation that they actively participate in class discussions and make oral presentations was challenging, especially since they needed to be able to use English in a

professional way: “Sometimes, I feel like I should go in engineering or something, because there you don’t have to deal with presentations and communications. You guys go and sit on the computer and play with the software” (Focus Group, December 2, 2016). The different expectations were not necessarily a negative experience for them. Back home instructors were very strict and gave them tests to keep them in line, but for some participants, Canadian classrooms offered more freedom: “Here you do what you want, you eat in class, or you talk” (Focus Group, December 2, 2016).

In addition, some students found that they needed to acquire new skills or advance their understanding of a particular skill in order to be successful students in Canada. For instance, it was an expectation that all students had a particular level of computer proficiency so some international students found themselves trying to catch up. As one participant commented:

Computer is a subject taught in our schools back home, but the level at which it’s taught is not the same level as in developed countries like Canada. So for sure when I came to school, like my first experience at the U of R, my first big class was in the education auditorium, the students, you know, are typing . . . so I wish I had those computer skills. I’m still learning. (Focus Group, November 26, 2016)

Computer skills have become an essential skill for post-secondary studies, yet a number of participants felt they did not have the necessary foundation.

The ability to use English for academic purposes was another skill many students felt they were deficient in. A number of students raised grammar and translation as a concern. One student shared her frustrations with translating her thoughts:

I always download the grammar systems, but it’s not helping so much. It’s just helping a little but it’s not that much. Sometimes, I still have grammar mistakes on here and sometimes, even you would think that’s logic, but when you’re used to the Chinese, the language logic is so different. When we talk about this, if we use it in Chinese, that is the logic things, but when you use it in English, they say, “Why is this sentence? Why do you say this sentence?” (Focus Group, December 2, 2016)

Assignments that required personal reflection were unfamiliar to participants accustomed to researching the ideas of others, not sharing their own experiences. When writing research papers, students can utilize their research resources or readings to guide them, but a personal reflection is not guided in this manner. The flexibility of such assignments was a concern to

this participant who feared misinterpretation: “Then, I was so much afraid to put my own thoughts, because then, I need to check my English. It’s the same thing where I am trying to tell her, or she is taking it differently” (Focus Group, December 2, 2016).

Struggles with academic writing were common among the international students who relied heavily on writing centres at their institutions. Unfortunately, these services were offered in short time blocks that were insufficient for their needs. Students needed to book multiple appointments to get through a 15–30-page paper. Often they had different people assisting them so there was no continuity and they would start over with each new tutor. Some students circumvented this issue by hiring a tutor, but this placed more financial pressures on them. One student described her frustration:

they just give you 30 minutes. To find someone to look at your 30 pages worth . . . and every week, they only have it two times. You can sign [up] for that two times and every time, it says 30 minutes, and every 30 minutes, they only look for two pages. (Focus Group, December 2, 2016)

Another student added:

We need somebody to look for the paper for us, but the school has a limitation with the times and the limitation for the teachers. . . . You’re past 15 minutes and in 15 minutes, you can do two pages. That was really frustrating. (Focus Group, December 2, 2016)

The inadequate resource of academic writing centres was also an issue when it came to academic integrity. For many of the students, knowledge as captured in text is something that is collectively shared, rather than owned by a specific writer. This difference of understanding about academic integrity meant students had to be very careful about plagiarism.

Consequently, many sought assistance from the writing centre or from tutors to check for plagiarism. However, the volunteers who assisted them were not always able to offer the specialized services they needed. As several participants commented, the only requirement to volunteer as a peer tutor seemed to be an ability to speak English. The dilemma faced by students is described here by one participant:

Although she went to the UR for help she still got caught for plagiarizing and she had to write another perfect paper and beg and cry before that thing was taken off her record. It means the professor didn’t even give her a second chance to go and fix the problem, just took it up to the . . . how they call it? The dean. They took it up to the

dean, she just took it up to the dean. At least consider that this is an international student, she just came here. (Focus Group, December 11, 2016)

In this particular case, the established academic integrity protocols in the institution led to this student being censured even though she had tried to avoid the problem.

Finally, even when participants had completed post-secondary studies in their home countries, they encountered very different expectations and norms. One student wrote a report using the method that had always worked for her in her studies back home, but then failed the assignment: “I just came here and went through the same thing but they were expecting something totally different” (Focus Group, December 2, 2016). Some participants felt as though there were norms that were invisible to them, and consequently they needed to re-learn how to be a student.

***Emotional stress.*** Depending on how long they had been in Canada, participants experienced varying degrees of emotional distress as well as loneliness and isolation. They not only had to navigate a new and unfamiliar environment, but also left behind their established familial and social networks. Some participants even left their children back home and came to Canada to study, as explained by one student:

Then, I think if probably I had the chance to come with my kids, it wouldn't have been so bad, but because of the immigration policy, I couldn't raise enough money to be able to pay for my school and able to come with my kids, because the amount of money that is slapped on you, if you are bringing one kid, you are bringing two, you are bringing three, you can't afford, but you need to go to school. (Focus Group, December 2, 2016)

Finances and administrative barriers in securing visas often influenced students' decisions to come without family. However, it was an added stress for these students to be living in Regina entirely on their own while worrying about families back home.

Most of the international student participants felt they had little support due to the separation from their networks, as this participant explained:

You just arrive and you think when you're outside, it looks like heaven on earth. Get inside heaven, that is when you realize . . . no, it's not as you thought. Not that there are no resources out there, there is just no one showing you this is what you do. This is where to get anything. You adjust on your own. (Focus Group, December 2, 2016)

This participant had an idealized vision of how her life as a student in Canada would be, and once she arrived, was disillusioned to find there was a disconnect between her perception and reality. Participants described sitting alone in their apartments without much contact with others because it was difficult to meet people in their classes or in other venues on campus.

Connecting with family and friends back home eased the loneliness for some participants, but a number of them cited challenges in communication. Gaining access to a phone was a prevalent topic of concern, as this participant summarized:

So, if you come to Canada and you don't know anybody, you're going to suffer for the first year, you'll be under a lot of stress. Another one is going to get a phone, if you don't have credit card, if you don't have a credit history you can't get a phone unless you get a phone under another person's name, I get pre-approved under another person's name. If you don't know anyone who has a credit card who's willing to help, you won't get a phone and will not be able to talk to your family back home. (Focus Group, December 11, 2016)

While the participants in these focus group discussions were managing to cope, nearly every participant knew of other students who had abandoned their studies and gone back home. One participant explained:

I met this lady from Ghana. She did exactly what I did. The only challenge, the only difference was she had a seven-year-old and a nine-year-old. She came in and spent a week. She was literally losing her mind. She said, "Okay, I need to go back," because she wasn't doing anything, just every day, turning into a mad woman. I saw her and she looked so unkempt. I went up to her and I greeted her, and I said, "Oh yeah, how are you?" I greeted her and she looked confused. I said, "Why are you here?" She said, "I need my money. I need to go back." "Go back to where?" "I am going back to Ghana." "You came for a visit?" "No, I came for classes." "What? So, why are you going back?" "I can't cope anymore." "Why can't you cope?" Because I thought maybe it was the same thing that I was going through. Hers was worse, because she spent a week without talking to her kids. She had no phone. She had no means. Within that week, she was literally dying. (Focus Group, December 2, 2016)

The feelings of loneliness and isolation experienced by most participants, therefore, were compounded for those who had left their spouse and/or their children back home.

In view of these challenges, several students wanted their instructors to understand why it was sometimes difficult for them to prioritize academics. In one focus group, a participant voiced the sentiments of the group:

They [instructors] should know that we have so many challenges, because like for my case, I don't have my husband here, I don't have my child here. I'll be thinking of them. You would call and they would be crying, and you'd also be crying at times. It's so difficult for us, emotionally, psychologically, you might not even have the mind to study, but you know you came here for academics, and if nothing at all, that should be your top priority. (Focus Group, December 2, 2016)

To add to this pressure, some students felt compelled to continue their studies because their families had made substantial sacrifices to send them to Canada.

It should be noted that the participants who were international students seemed to experience the separation from familial and social networks in their home countries more acutely than those enrolled in language-training programs. One of the possible reasons for this is that language programs are populated with people experiencing similar challenges, and consequently, their instructors and classmates support them in making the adjustment. International students, in contrast, often came to Canada alone and find it more difficult to connect with others. One student commented that it was challenging to break into established social circles: "It's difficult making friends too especially when I'm, because it's very difficult to get into their [Canadian students'] circles" (Focus Group, December 2, 2016). Mature students, in particular, found they had little in common with classmates, as this participant detailed: "I'm a mature student and most of my fellow students were like 19, 20, 21 so chances are 99.9% that those people won't be your friends. That's for sure" (Focus Group, December 20, 2016). Most mentioned feeling lonely.

In discussing the impact of separation with international students, it seemed that those students who had been in the country longer had developed some coping strategies or had met other international students who assisted them. Even in the focus groups, students in their third or fourth semester advised those in their first semester "it will get better" (Focus Group, December 2, 2016). Anisef, Sweet, and Adamuti-Trache (2009) characterize these interactions as enabling the development of "bridging social capital"—social capital acquired through connections with persons from different backgrounds to access resources that would otherwise

be unavailable to them. These social networks allow immigrants to build connections and gain greater access to information and resources in the host country than if they only associate with people from their own cultural communities. It seemed as though students who were able to form contacts with members of their cultural communities or other international students were aided in coping with the emotional stress of leaving home and navigating student life in Canada.

*Lack of empathy or awareness on the part of others.* Canadian instructors, advisors, and classmates are also an important resource for international students as they facilitate the development of bridging social capital. However, many international students who were enrolled in post-secondary programs believed that their instructors and classmates were either unaware of cultural differences and the challenges immigrant students faced or were unwilling or unable to empathize with their struggles. One international student explained that she had left her own children behind to come and study in Canada, and had difficulty concentrating on her studies as a result. She described her experience with her instructor in one of her courses:

I went through classes and in class, it was even worse, because it's sad but even the lecturers don't understand. I took a class and I was doing a presentation. Then, my topic was on child soldiers in Uganda. . . . I picked the topic and then I am doing a presentation. Then, I got to a slide where I had to talk about the impact of . . . I am talking about kids who are getting out to go and fight, and then they come back into the community. Then I am trying to talk about the impact. . . . Okay, I totally went blank. I didn't know what I was talking about. I just stood. I'm standing there and thinking. I am just watching the slide, and the slide is watching me. Then I thought, I am facing the class and my instructor was the one looking at a student as if, "Oh my god, are you guys seeing that?" That was my instructor! I was just like, "Oh my god, where am I?" Okay, I push and move, just passed the slide, because I wasn't able to talk about the effect when I started thinking of my own kids. Then I checked and my instructor was like looking at students and, okay, all right. I moved and then I finished. I went through my slides fast and then finished. I grabbed all the stuff that I had there. I went and sat down. . . . From then on, I had no idea what I was doing but those are some of the challenges. The person you think is your instructor would never leave Regina forever, will have lived here and never gone out. You would think that they feel or they even

understand that you come from somewhere and things could be different. No, they don't get that. That was what I faced when I came in, and I felt like my instructors just didn't have a clue what to do, because sometimes the person that you meet, the person that you talk to or you meet almost every week, that person can either make or break what really happens to you. (Focus Group, December 2, 2016)

Students frequently perceived that their perspectives were marginalized in the class and their classmates did not acknowledge their strengths and contributions. Another student felt that instructors needed to assume responsibility for ensuring that their classroom environment was inclusive of all learners:

I found the things that I did on my own, projects that I did on my own, I got good marks but projects with other kids, they just find it hard to just accept that you also have views and you also understand actually what you're talking about, right? Plus of all that shock that you speak English. I understand their point of view, they find it hard but I just wish that there was a way the professors would make it a little bit easier for all of us to blend into one another and understand each other and not treat each other like you're different, I'm different and even if we sit together, your views are not going to matter. (Focus Group, December 11, 2016)

When other students rolled their eyes, made them feel "stupid," expressed impatience with their English, claimed not to understand their accents (even if English was the participant's first language), or simply avoided contact with them, participants were discouraged. After the United States election, one participant was feeling depressed about what it would mean for minorities when one of his classmates entered wearing a Donald Trump hat: "He's showing me who he stands with and the value of somebody he stands with, so I feel like racism is there. It's just not that pronounced and people think it's okay but it's not" (Focus Group, December 20, 2016). Another participant voiced concern over the perception that they were not "paying their way" as students. In response to a Canadian co-worker who complained that international students took their spots in programs and studied for free, this student challenged that perception: "Okay, you paid \$3000 for your program. I paid \$13,000 for the same program for one year. It's not free. I pay for my school. I pay for my home. I pay for my tuition. I pay for everything" (Focus Group, December 20, 2016). Many participants in the student focus groups affirmed that their instructors and classmates needed to travel or at least to leave Regina so

they would better understand how to work alongside people from diverse backgrounds and become more open-minded.

In other cases, the participants simply felt that instructors did not understand how much time and effort it took for them to understand the class and complete their assignments compared to Canadian students. A number of participants claimed that their instructors were unwilling to accommodate their needs, as this international student described:

We're trying to understand what the professor is saying in class, you have to do extra work to read after, make sure I got everything. [The professor says], "you are not allowed to record my lectures, you are not allowed to take pictures of my lectures." That's the only way we try, some students from China, most of them, they record the lectures so when they go home they can try to put it slow and understand. (Focus Group, December 11, 2016)

These participants contended that even just being permitted to record the lectures would have allowed them to understand and be successful in the course. It must be noted, however, that other participants found their instructors to be very supportive, as amplified in the next section.

Several participants believed that their academic advisors did not always fully understand the unique challenges faced by international students. As one participant endeavoured to balance paying tuition with organizing her courses to meet the prerequisites for her final practicum, her advisor gave her advice she found to be unrealistic:

My academic advisor is like "well you can still take the five, the full load." I'm like "there's a financial implication to that, I'm paying over 10,000." She's like "no." I'm like "do you even know how much I pay as an international student?" (Focus Group, December 11, 2016)

She was discouraged that her advisor did not know the financial stresses faced by international students. Another participant said that her advisor told her to take a computer course because it was "easy" even though the student had little exposure to computers. This kind of uninformed advice was unhelpful for the student:

We booked an appointment and I was a little bit disappointed because the advisors give you the same specifics, we have the same exact classes they have to give to everyone. So computer science, it was my weakness, and I told them, I was like "I'm not so much into computers" and stuff like that so why will it be my first class for my first semester?

She's like "no it's so easy, just a walk in the park." When she talked about computers I was like "no, I am not good at that, how about we take it to the next semester?" She's like "no, it's just you learn the monitor, the mouse and stuff like that." When I went to class, oh my god. I felt like I had fallen, they had just thrown me in water so I would think, there shouldn't be just specific classes for everybody just because it's the first semester, they should know that some people from different cultures, different countries and some classes are going to be really, really complicated for them. So I wanted to take classes like math and she's like "no that's going to be hard for you," but because of where I come from, I just study, I'm used to studying so things like computers was hard for me, I told her but just because that's what she's used to giving to everybody, she thought it was going . . . so it was so hard for me, that class I just barely passed. (Focus Group, December 11, 2016)

While academic advisors have the expertise to guide students in building their timetables and choosing courses needed for their program of study, some international students seemed to require more nuanced and specialized support.

One final circumstance in which participants experienced a lack of awareness related to language tests administered by immigrant-serving agencies. Some participants came from countries where English was the official language yet they were required to take a test to determine their placement in relation to the CLB. This participant, a professional who completed his university education in England, was frustrated with this situation:

When I first came, I accessed RODS and then they told me I had to do English first. I said in Nigeria English is the official language. Everywhere we speak English, in school, in the offices, churches, mosques. We speak English. It is the official language so why do I still need to go through RODS test, whatever. They said it is the rule. . . . I went to the test and when I was chatting with the examiner, she was like "what are you doing here?" I said, "I was told to come." She looked at the reading, speaking, listening, whatever and she said, "This is the highest I've recorded in recent time. I have never seen anyone scoring this high." I said, "well, I was told to come here."

(Focus Group, December 30, 2016)

Participants in this situation understandably were insulted to be told they had to write an English proficiency test. Others reported that their children had been incorrectly placed in an

English as an Additional Language class even though English was their home and first language, as this parent described:

The assumption is immediately that if you are coming in from somewhere, then you have a language barrier. You can't speak English. My kids were taken and they were shown where they were going to do their English as a second language class. The little guy, it's sometimes good to be young, because you can say what is on your mind. He's like, "Why do I have to learn the second language again?" They said, "No, it's English as a second language, because English is not your first language." He said, "No, I don't need that." They said, "Yes, you need it." He said, "No, I can speak good English."

(Focus Group, December 2, 2017)

These examples are illustrative of the lack of awareness of some Canadians, even those who work with immigrants, about other countries. One participant summed up this perspective:

If you meet someone who is well-exposed [to other cultures] you will know. You tell them, they know, they understand because they've been there . . . they know where you are coming from. You don't need to explain yourself. But those people are few. (Focus

Group, December 20, 2016)

Those people who were aware of the struggles experienced by newcomers were a tremendous source of support.

**Supports.** While many participants had had negative experiences with an instructor, everyone could also cite at least one who had rendered invaluable assistance. Based on their comments, instructors who were more experienced at teaching immigrants, such as LINC instructors, seemed better equipped to assist them in dealing with challenges. The smaller class size of such programs may also play into the level of support given by instructors. A participant who completed high school upgrading classes described her experience:

My experience was that the teachers are really good. Being a newcomer and you have all those mixed feelings in your head, you don't know if one day you would be able to attain your goal as someone who had a job back home. But the teachers were really open minded and willing to help immigrants. . . . You see the way they are treating us, they are down to earth, you know, that man—don't even remember his name—but he was a really good mathematics teacher who always came to me and ask, "do you have any problem?" Even when I am shaking, I would say "yes, I have." Then he would, I

don't know what to say. I think he knew. He would look in my eyes and say "yes. She is struggling." (Focus G, November 26, 2016).

Instructors in LINC and job preparation classes were variously described as "patient," "down to earth," "open-minded," "nice," and "willing to help" (Focus Group, November 26, 2016). Participants appreciated how their instructors aided them in overcoming obstacles to employment and higher education. More informally, some participants accessed language learning at the library and cited the people working there as a source of educational support: "The public libraries offer a lot of services including English tutoring" (Focus Group, December 30, 2016).

Post-secondary classes were often larger and more impersonal in the sense that participants had less contact with their instructors. However, some participants also encountered allies in the course of their post-secondary studies. One international student described her professor as "a living angel" who intervened and helped her when she had nearly given up hope:

At one point because I was so stressed out, I wasn't eating. I couldn't even face [the] social work association. He stood up and said "Look, this is what you need to do," and I said "yeah," and I go home and I'm crying, I'm not eating and sleeping. He stood up and said, "Did you write [the association]?" "No." He actually wrote to them on my behalf. . . . Just the little things that he did. He said, "you need this document? I got the documents." I asked "Can you write . . . ?" He explained, "I'm writing on behalf of this person." They [the association] responded. Those are the some of the things that just make you feel like, oh, there are people in Regina. (Focus Group, December 2, 2016).

Many participants appreciated the supports offered by various immigrant-serving agencies such as RODS and the institution's international office. Since the staff in these offices had experience working with immigrants and knowledge about some of the challenges they faced, they were a resource to newcomers. These agencies arranged for them to get into classes they needed and assisted with various other issues related to adapting to life in Regina. For example, this participant explained that the international office assisted with navigating various administrative challenges:

When I first came here there was a challenge because I came on scholarship and we had people making contacts for us, as well. They [the international office] basically take

care of international students. And they have interpreters there, too. When I wanted to renew my study permit they were quite helpful. Yeah, they were quite helpful. They understand what you are going through as an international student and sometimes they send us a general reminder if you need to update your passport or anything. (Focus Group, December 30, 2016)

The primary means of support referenced by the majority of participants, however, was that offered by other newcomers they knew from their home countries, classes, or cultural communities. Once they knew they were coming to Canada, some were very resourceful in using social media or other connections to find someone from their country who might be able to advise them:

The first challenge was adapting to the culture and getting a place even from back home because you need a place to stay and the option to stay on campus was too expensive so I had to look for a place out. So what happened was I just had to ask anyone I knew that was out of the country, didn't know anyone who was in Canada to help me. I found a few people on Facebook and I got in contact. (Focus Group, December 11, 2016)

One participant met a group of people who lived in Canada while still in her home country. She got their contact information, and then subsequently connected with two of them:

I applied for [university] and then I got in, so my family only had enough for the tuition, I didn't have a place to stay or anything like that. . . . So I moved into their apartment, into their home and they provided accommodation and everything, would pick me up from the university, take me back. It was like a really, really soft landing for the whole year. (Focus Group, December 11, 2016).

In cases when there were established familial networks or cultural community groups, participants benefited from having a support network. A few participants had family members to rely on. One participant stated: "I was lucky that I have family here to help me integrate although they were limited to a certain extent. . . . My aunt helped me through the application to apply to social work" (Focus Group, December 20, 2016). Another participant was having difficulties with the transition and relied on a community group:

So I started losing my mind, where do I go? They told me there was Daughters of Africa, so I went there, and they were the ones who took me through Canadian culture or something. They gave me training (Focus Group, December 02, 2016).

Lack of language skills impeded the access to assistance as newcomers were in the process of adapting to living and studying in the Canadian context. Therefore, finding people who spoke their home languages and understood their cultures was significant. LINC classes, conversation circles, or other classes populated by immigrants were critical in terms of connecting newcomers with other newcomers. One participant confirmed that other newcomers were a tremendous resource:

The support system is just your family, friends, and then people you just meet. Sometimes, you go to Open Door and you meet fellow immigrants. Then they tell you, “You’ve got to do this. You’ve got to do that.” (Focus Group, December 2, 2016)

Given the unique challenges experienced by international students, support from classmates was especially important. One participant believed that other newcomers were more approachable than Canadian classmates: “your fellow minorities, you can easily become friends with them than from people who are mainstream because, I don’t know, it’s easier” (Focus Group, December 20, 2016). In one focus group, the participants discussed the impact of forming these connections:

*Participant 1:* They helped me a lot, because I was more close to them, because they are the immigrant, they have the same story, they have the same background, so I could more close with them. I open up with them, and they were more welcoming, because they know . . .

*Participant 2:* How it feels.

*Participant 1:* They have gone through the same challenges, and they helped me. “Don’t worry, second semester’s gonna be way easier.” I remember, every time anything happens, I have something I have to complain, I just call [another participant]. (Focus Group, December 2, 2016)

In conclusion, participants drew upon the assistance of others to navigate aspects of the educational system as well as life in Regina. While other immigrants were the dominant source of support, librarians, instructors, and individuals working in immigrant-serving agencies also aided participants.

## Conclusion

The majority of the participants in this research were enrolled in language training programs. However, students enrolled in post-secondary institutions gave more detailed information about the barriers they experienced. There are two possible reasons for this gap. First of all, the international students seemed to have previous educational experiences in their home countries which they could compare to their experiences in Regina. Second, the language training programs were tailored to newcomers and, consequently, may have offered more specialized supports. The barriers experienced by participants in this research included the need to “start over” in their education, language issues, difficulties navigating between educational systems “back home” and in Regina, financial issues, lack of empathy or awareness on the part of others, and emotional stress.

Post-secondary education or training courses were perceived as a means to improve one’s employment options. However, language was the primary barrier to further education for many participants who felt that knowing English would make all aspects of their lives easier and assist them in entering educational programs or the workforce and moving ahead. For one participant, life in Canada represented opportunities she would not have had back home in Afghanistan where girls stopped going to school in grade five and stayed home to cook and clean. She hoped to learn English so she could fulfill her dream of becoming a nurse (Focus Group, February 7, 2017). Still, newcomers were frustrated when their progress was slow and they had to revise their goals due to the high level of English proficiency needed to enter post-secondary programs. For international students, the issue of language was more nuanced as the CLB test affirmed they were proficient, but the institutional norms created barriers in terms of academic writing and communicating ideas in presentations. Language is a pervasive barrier for international students, creating a power imbalance between international students and their instructors and classmates (Hsieh, 2007; Li, 2016). When participants could not express their ideas at the same level of proficiency as they could in their home language, some felt inferior, like a “junior high student” (Focus Group, December 11, 2016).

As various studies confirm, international students have specific needs that must be supported by institutions and programs, but lack of cultural awareness and understanding of the complex issues facing international students are common barriers (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010). International students experience varying degrees of culture shock as well as

discrimination, anxiety, confusion over expectations, and feelings of isolation (Boafo-Arthur, 2013; Gu, Schweisfurth, & Day, 2010; Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). Institutionally, these academic, social, and cultural needs are often unacknowledged and unmet (Sinacore & Lerner, 2013). In this research, students in their first two semesters experienced a sense of loneliness and stress more acutely, but those in their second year of studies reported they had adapted somewhat to these challenges. Other studies confirm that feelings of isolation are enhanced by separation from family and social networks back home and a lack of financial resources to maintain communication with these networks (Boafo-Arthur, 2013), and this was true for some participants.

Financial constraints are a prevalent concern for many international students and add pressure to an already stressful situation (Gu et al., 2010). Schulte and Choudaha (2014) found that that it was important for institutions to be transparent about the tuition costs and opportunities for institutional financial assistance and employment. Some participants in this study complained that they were told one figure and arrived in Regina to find their tuition would be higher and, as they were not permanent residents, they were ineligible for the majority of the scholarships. For the most part, the international student participants did not experience issues with finding part-time jobs, though they primarily sought unskilled positions in the service industry. Participants in language training also worried about finances, but were predominantly focused on language acquisition as a means of improving their situations.

Still, many of the international student participants came with an understanding of how post-secondary studies operated and were disillusioned to find that much of what they knew was not valued in the new context. The marginalization of their own knowledge and experiences in their post-secondary studies in Canada was consistent with findings in other studies (e.g. Hsieh, 2007; Wu et al., 2015). Academic writing conventions and the emphasis on reflective writing and oral presentations were common areas of discontinuity (see also Maringe & Jenkins, 2015).

Studies of international learners suggest that racism is a fairly common experience (Boafo-Arthur, 2013; Brown & Jones, 2013; Lee & Opio, 2011), but only one of the participants used the word “racism” in relation to their experiences as a student. This may be encouraging, though the focus group format may have inhibited discussion on this issue. Those participants studying in post-secondary programs spoke rather in terms of a lack of

understanding or awareness of other cultures on the part of instructors, classmates, or advisors, that is, some participants experienced discrimination and exclusion, and were not given the support they needed. Conversely, if instructors treated them the same as Canadian students, they sometimes struggled because they needed a additional support or explanation to overcome linguistic or cultural barriers. This finding resonated with the literature on international student experiences wherein national students seemed to prefer interacting with individuals from similar cultural backgrounds or seemed uncomfortable with minority background students, thus further enhancing their sense of isolation (Sinacore & Lerner, 2013; Wu et al., 2015).

Since the focus of our research was on barriers to accessing further education, the participants tended to focus on negative aspects of their experiences. The tone of their responses and of this report is reflective of the questions asked by members of the research team. However, it must be noted that the participants were also very appreciative of the supports offered by various agencies, departments, and individuals. During the focus group discussion, they sometimes asked if they could also discuss their positive experiences and shared that they found Canadians overall to be “friendly.” Consistent with other studies (e.g., Sinacore & Lerner, 2013), they preferred to access support from fellow immigrants who they felt could understand their experience first hand, but they also cited instructors, tutors, counsellors, agency staff, and administrators who aided them in disentangling the various administrative and language obstacles they faced. Individuals who had more experience with diversity or with working with newcomers were perceived to be more attuned to the challenges these participants experienced and better prepared to offer them supports.

## **Employment**

As the relevant literature indicates, finding employment is one of the most challenging experiences for newcomers (Schellenberg & Maheux, 2007). In this study, we used both quantitative and qualitative data to examine more deeply the extent of these employment challenges and barriers as experienced by newcomers in Regina. More illustratively, we used quantitative data from both the community stakeholder and newcomer surveys to examine the overall employment difficulties from the employer/service provider and newcomer perspectives. The focus groups provided most of the qualitative data, and the participants consistently brought up the lack of Canadian experience, the requirement of Canadian references, credential evaluation, challenges of credential recognition and labour market entry, language and age barriers, as well as gender and cultural impediments as barriers. These issues and concerns are discussed in more detail and they demonstrate the multifaceted challenges newcomers face in the labour market.

### **Community Stakeholder Survey Results**

We now turn to some of the results from the community stakeholder survey. From survey results, 90% of the community stakeholders indicated that accessing appropriate employment was the most important factor in the resettlement of newcomers in Regina, which is consistent with Kuyini's (2013) findings in his study of refugee adaptation to new contexts. The survey results also indicated that accessing employment in Regina required newcomers to have language skills and knowledge of the work place culture (email protocol, dress code, and so on), which community stakeholders strongly agreed with (rated at 82% and 70% respectively). At the same time, the survey showed that newcomers encountered difficulties in resume writing, job interview preparation, and accessing hidden job markets. In addressing some of these challenges, 88% of the community stakeholders noted that immigrant-serving agencies have the potential to assist newcomers gain these skills including language and employment training. Schools also were rated as extremely important at 52% and perceived by community stakeholders as vital settings for providing newcomers, especially youth, with the skills necessary for adaptation and settlement in Regina. Regarding informal supports to

newcomers, community stakeholders rated families as extremely important at 45%, indicating the significance of close social networks for newly arriving immigrants to Regina.

The community stakeholder survey also allowed participants to provide written comments. Worth noting from the survey was the concern that some newcomers were dropping out of English language skills training to pursue employment. The survey respondents noted that individuals who were dropping out of the language training programs were not equipped with English language skills to maintain jobs. Students dropped out of the language programs because of the multiple challenges faced by many newcomer families including child care responsibilities and limited financial support.

Another survey respondent noted:

With regard to finding jobs within newcomers' skill areas, there should be a much stronger link between immigration policies (newcomers who get credit for foreign schooling and work experience when they immigrate to Canada) and the professional organizations that control Canadian jobs and classes for upgrading (number of graduates is capped and no spaces are reserved for newcomers). It is misleading for newcomers to arrive in Canada based on their education and work experience in their previous country of residence only to find that neither the schooling nor the experiences are marketable in the Canadian work force without additional training, upgrading (community stakeholder survey).

The problem of credential recognition was not only noted in the survey results but also raised in the focus groups, indicating the importance of this long-standing employment barrier for newcomers as discussed later in the employment section.

## **Newcomer Survey Results**

For this study, a chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) also was applied to determine whether there was a significant association between two variables. Access to a vehicle, having a driver's license, bridging programs, upgrading skills, self-employment assistance, workplace language training, job search help, support work environment and mentoring were some of the services that participants were asked whether they found them beneficial and related to their experiences of gaining and retaining employment in Regina.

Our null hypothesis was that utilization of any aforementioned services could not predict that newcomers with grade 12 or higher would gain and retain employment in Regina. The alternative hypothesis was that use of any of those above-mentioned services helped or related to the newcomers' (grade 12 or higher) experiences of gaining and retaining employment. To accept or reject the null hypothesis, we chose the significance level of 0.05.

When we computed the chi-square test to determine a significant relationship between employment and services utilized by newcomers to gain and retain employment, we looked at the  $p$ -value ( $p^*$ ). Where the  $p$ -value ( $p^*$ ) was less than the significance level of 0.05, we rejected our null hypothesis. Similarly, where the  $p$ -value ( $p^*$ ) was greater than the significance level of 0.05, we accepted our null hypothesis that a relationship did not exist between services utilized by newcomers and their experiences of gaining employment.

Survey participants with grade 12 or higher indicated that a supportive work environment ( $\chi^2 = 65.78$ ,  $df = 10$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ,  $p^* = 0.00$ ,  $N = 181$ ) related to their experiences of gaining and retaining employment in Regina. Likewise, the survey results from participants with grade 12 and higher indicated a strong association between job mentoring and gaining employment in Regina ( $\chi^2 = 68.25$ ,  $df = 10$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ,  $p^* = 0.00$ ,  $N = 184$ ). Detailed chi-square results for employment and services are shown in the contingency table 2, Appendix D.

The newcomer survey also indicated that the participants' level of education (i.e. high school and higher) had a significant relationship with their ability to gain and retain employment in Regina ( $\chi^2 = 16.58$ ,  $df = 5$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ,  $p^* = 0.005$ ,  $N = 237$ ). The newcomer survey confirmed that many participants, especially those with college and university education were currently working. These survey results are unsurprising but confirm the importance of education in relation to seeking and finding work.

From the survey, we could not draw any significant relationship between gender and employment among newcomers in Regina ( $\chi^2 = 2.79$ ,  $df = 1$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ,  $P^* = 0.095$ ,  $N = 233$ ). Detailed chi-square results for employment and services are shown in the contingency table 3, Appendix E. The relationship between gender and employment is further discussed in the focus group findings section below.

## Focus Group Findings

**Starting over.** When discussing their employment experiences, many focus group participants frequently used the terms “starting everything all over again,” “restarting” and “back to zero” to describe their transition to work in Regina. The experience of “starting over” was profound for many of the focus group participants and led to a number of key themes being expressed: a lack of Canadian experience, the requirement of Canadian references, credential evaluation, challenges of credential recognition and labour market entry, language and age barriers, as well as gender and cultural impediments. Each of these barriers are explored in this section of the report to develop further understanding of the difficulties that newcomers encounter when seeking employment in Regina. In the context of employment, the hopes and fears that newcomers experience while attempting to survive in a new social, cultural, and economic environment are also examined in this section.

Before discussing the participants’ experiences of finding and retaining employment, as well as their hopes and fears, it is useful to examine Thomas’s (2015) conceptualization of employment experiences of immigrants in Canada. Thomas contends that immigrants to Canada undergo three phases of employment: survival, transitional, and meaningful opportunities. Survival employment means that newcomers are engaging in employment that is unrelated to their training and educational background. Thomas argues that it is not uncommon for newcomers to take survival jobs to support their families with the aspirations that their children will be able to succeed in Canada or to rephrase, newcomer parents are making sacrifices with the hope and optimism that their children will be successful in the new home environment. Transitional employment occurs when foreign-trained newcomers have access to entry level jobs that are not exactly equivalent to the employment status they held in home countries. Thomas goes on to say that transitional employment can lead to “meaningful” employment, or job satisfaction, because the employment position matches previous foreign experience and credentials (p. 163).

In this study, many of the focus group participants were in either the survival or transitional phases of employment. There was also a small percentage of focus group participants that were still unemployed due to language barriers as well as cultural and religious impediments.

**Canadian work experience.** The ability to achieve social and economic integration is integral to adjusting to life in the new context (Cassidy, 2016; Goldmann, Sweetman, & Warman, 2011; Magro & Ghorayshi, 2010; Reano-Alvarez, 2012). During the focus group discussions, participants consistently indicated that they were required to have Canadian work experience. One participant stated that “it is better if you had Canadian experience then if you could get a job and start working then you can go back to school.” Thomas (2015) writes that employment is a major factor necessary for the meaningful inclusion of newcomers in Canadian society (p. 8). In her research, Thomas argues that the expectation is for newcomers to learn about Canadian workplace culture if they lack “Canadian experience.” According to Thomas, the expectation of newcomers to adapt to the Canadian workplace is taken for granted, and many new Canadians do not question this as a requirement for employment. In our research, participants were not only bewildered by the expectation of having “Canadian experience” but also raised questions about this work paradox. For example, one participant noted: “They ask for previous experience in Regina, so if we are new in Regina, how are we going to get that experience and first, we need a job to get experience, right?” (Focus Group, December 20, 2016).

“Canadian experience” has been explored in Canadian research. For example, in her work on barriers to immigrant employment, Chaze (2009) cites Liu and comments that the requirement for “Canadian experience” is a work condition placed on newcomers, which is impossible to fulfill. In citing Liu, Chaze (2009) indicates that the requirement of “Canadian work experience” is a “cultural parameter” erected by employers as they are questioning the newcomers’ language abilities and performance (p. 57). To rephrase this, employers question whether the newcomer worker will be a good fit and have an understanding of the Canadian work culture. Schellenberg and Maheux (2007) add that newcomers encounter a catch-22; they are expected to have appropriate Canadian work experience to find a suitable job, at the same time, they encounter difficulties finding a job to gain the needed experience. Thomas (2015) concludes that some adjustment, which in our view can be in the form of job training and mentoring, is necessary for newcomers who are attempting to enter the Canadian labour force. Thomas (2015) goes on to say that there is an equal need for employers and communities to promote social change and develop workplaces that accommodate and include professionals from diverse backgrounds (p. 173). Some of the study participants indicated that they

volunteered, which not only helped them to gain Canadian work experience but also to obtain Canadian references, a topic that is discussed in the next section.

**Requirement of Canadian references.** For many participants, the transition to Canada from their home countries meant a loss of their social network. This loss also implied that newcomers were regularly faced with their inability to provide references when seeking employment. One focus group participant noted:

I think, yeah, getting work as well is very difficult because most employers ask for Canadian experience, and remember you're coming to a place, you're moving to a new place you leave your social connections behind so it's like you're all restarting everything all over again, so with job applications it's really, really very difficult to get into work. (Focus Group, December 20, 2016)

A similar comment was made by another study participant: "We're immigrants, we're coming from [an]other country, we can't have a local reference or a Canadian reference for [a] job, it's hard for us when you [are new] (Focus Group, December 20, 2016)." In their research on employment barriers for immigrant engineers in Canada, George and Chaze (2014) noted that employers in Canada relied heavily on past employment reference checks. The authors noted that this practice of reference checking is inherently discriminatory, especially for newcomers attempting to enter the labour market. George and Chaze go on to say that the reference check requirement is a form of pre-employment discrimination. This form of discrimination is indirect because it appears to apply to all job seekers and therefore is perceived as a normal practice by employers. However, the practice has unintended adverse impacts on newcomers who have no social network to provide information on their suitability for potential employment in Canada. Another participant commented:

Most people, most employers don't want to call Africa because I understand. . . The time difference is there, when you're in the office here, they are sleeping over there. So, if you have to catch them in the office, you have to stay late here. So, I understand that part of it. The lady, my counselor at RODS was my first reference on my resume. So, it really helped. (Focus Group, December 30, 2016)

This quotation highlights not only the dilemma faced by immigrants when they lack local references but also the difficulties that employers encounter when making hiring decisions

involving reference checks for newcomers. One participant provided a justification for employers who preferred to hire Canadians rather than newcomers:

So why would my employer go through all these hoops when there's someone who already has a permanent residency or is a Canadian and can do maybe 50% of the responsibilities even if I can do like 100%, they will go with the person who is more available and won't have to deal with that, right? (Focus Group, December 11, 2016)

Overall, having reference checks for employment is a necessary requirement for most jobs. However, this requirement causes an extra burden for most newcomers without a work history in Canada, leading to the question of how can employers alter this long held practice of employment reference checks. In the following section, we discuss the subtheme of credential evaluation as a central element of the employment barriers faced by newcomers in Regina.

**Credential evaluation.** Credential evaluation and assessment was an important concern for study participants. Understanding credential evaluation/assessment and credential recognition can be confusing because the two designations are regularly used when referring to foreign education and training. Di Blasio (2017) states that credential recognition is distinct from credential assessment. Credential recognition is governed by provincial regulatory bodies whereas credential assessment/evaluation is managed by agencies such as World Education Services (WES) in Toronto, International Credential Evaluation Service (ICES) in Burnaby, BC, the International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS) in Edmonton; and the Service des équivalences d'études in Quebec. According to Di Blasio (2017) and Krahn, Derwing, Mulder, and Wilkinson (2000), credential assessment agencies do not have the authority to decide whether one's international studies and work experience are comparable to those required by employers in Canada. The credential assessment agencies can only assess three aspects: 1) confirmation of the studies completed, 2) verification of the institution where studies were completed, and 3) comparison of the completed studies with similar educational programs in Canada. Di Blasio (2017) concludes that newcomers have to be aware that professional regulatory bodies such as those for engineering and teaching do not necessarily accept the assessments completed by credential assessment agencies, which implies that provincial regulatory bodies make the final decisions regarding the credential recognition, a process which will be further explored later in the report. Some participants experienced challenges in having their credentials evaluated. One participant reported that

you can't find a skilled job. . . . I was an accountant. . . . I tried applying for an accountant job [but] because of the lack of Canadian experience and some of my credentials . . . [when] they [credential assessment agency] sent my transcript they told [me] that I need to go back and do another two or three years at the university so that I could go back to the field. . . . I felt discouraged. (Focus Group, November 28, 2016)

Another participant stated: "When I came here [to Canada], I came with a degree and a professional background for accounting from England. For me to transfer to CPA, the so-called CPA program here, was really, really hard for me" (Focus Group, December 30, 2016).

The above comments reflect some of the newcomer perspectives regarding credential evaluation/assessment. Some participants who had undergone credential assessment expressed concern about the waiting times and the costs of the assessments. The study findings on credential evaluation is also confirmed by existing literature that assessment of foreign credentials takes years, and newcomers are faced with high costs for fees, exams, and retraining (Di Blasio, 2017).

**Challenges of credential recognition and labour market entry.** The discussion of credential assessment is linked to credential recognition and labour market entry because completing credential evaluation does not necessarily mean securing employment. On the question of credential recognition, participants noted three main challenges: 1) the inability to transfer their education qualifications from their home countries and the impact on their self-esteem and confidence, 2) the valuing and devaluing of credentials based on country of origin, and 3) problems of interprovincial educational transfers. Each of these three aspects and the available literature will be discussed in this section to further illustrate challenges faced by newcomers in Regina.

In her work on the challenges facing immigrants in Edmonton and Winnipeg, Thomas (2015) argues that employers and professional regulatory associations perceive credentials from different countries as less valuable than Canadian degrees and certificates. Becklumb and Elgersma (2008) report that there are more than 50 regulated occupations and more than 400 regulatory bodies in the 13-separate provincial/territorial jurisdictions. According to Becklumb and Elgersma (2008), the regulated occupations include engineering, medicine, nursing, teaching, and so on. Regulated occupations make up only about 15% of Canada's labour market. Di Blasio (2017) also states that the work of the provincial regulatory bodies mainly

consists of 1) evaluating one's international transcripts, 2) setting Canadian exam requirements, 3) interviewing potential foreign-trained newcomers, 4) arranging for job mentoring, 5) collecting professional references, and 6) providing guidance for completion of further studies in Canada, particularly in the areas of industry legislation, ethics, technical courses, and professional English. Achieving credential recognition means that foreign-trained workers can obtain accreditation or licenses, permitting them to work in their professional fields. Within non-regulated occupations, which consist of 85% of the labour market, the general educational qualifications of immigrant candidates are evaluated by employers responsible for hiring professionals and skilled workers (Becklumb & Elgersma, 2008). Both the regulated and non-regulated credential recognition systems create anxiety and result in life altering experiences for newcomers (Di Blasio, 2017) including highly skilled foreign-born workers.

**Inability to transfer their education qualifications from their home countries.**

As noted above, in the focus group discussions, three key barriers related to credential recognition were identified: First, the inability to transfer the educational experiences from their home countries was one of the challenges related to credential recognition. One participant noted:

It's hard, you did your degree of nursing and you come here [to Canada] and work as [a] care aide or something, like at very low level job. It's really hard for our parents or to someone to say at least. (Focus Group, December 20, 2016)

Another participant said: "My dad, he is so proud of me, and I was like, 'No, you come here and see me. I am different now'" (Focus Group, December 2, 2016). A rather disconcerting remark was made by another participant who said: "You worked so much over there [in my home country] and over here [in Canada] you are nothing. You are just down [heartbroken and shameful]" (Focus Group, December 2, 2016).

In all these excerpts, participants were not only reporting on their inability to use their acquired education from their home countries but also expressed the shame that they felt when they failed to maintain the job/social status expected by family in their home countries. Within the new social and cultural environment, this shame can deny newcomers the confidence needed to enter into their respective fields of work. For example, one participant noted:

Before you go for any job you've already got this little voice at the back of your head saying, "well, am I even going to make it? Am I even good enough?" Because of that, that has been planted at the back of your head, sometimes you lose the job before you even get to that job, before you even go to a job interview, because you are no longer you, because you're adapting. Who is this, am I going to . . . the person, the actual you is sitting right next to you. (Focus, Group, December 2, 2016)

The inability to transition into one's field of work is perceived by some newcomers as their own personal failure (George & Chaze, 2014) rather than the result of structural barriers that hinder them in accessing jobs in their line of work. Thomas (2015) noted that discrimination is one of the structural barriers to employment, especially for newcomers. She also provided an example of internalized oppression that is a problem when immigrants incorrectly believe that their skills are inferior to Canadian-acquired credentials and experience, leading some newcomers to think that there are no alternative explanations for the barriers faced in the labour market other than their own failings.

**The valuing and devaluing of credentials.** Second, the valuing and devaluing of credentials based on the country of origin was another form of systematic oppression and a barrier identified by the study participants. For example, one person stated:

I was a teacher for six years and . . . I was approved and they sent my credentials to Minister of Education in Regina and . . . they said that you are qualified to teach but you have to look for a school where they can take you as a teacher. . . . When I talked to immigrant teachers from Africa . . . they said it's better to go back to school in Canada and get a Canadian transcript. . . . I qualified for the nursing program, now I'm switching . . . to social work. (Focus Group, November 26, 2016)

This participant's credentials were recognized by the provincial professional regulatory body for teachers, but the challenges of obtaining work remained because the hiring decisions and the valuing of the credentials was highly dependent upon employers. In their work regarding foreign education for newcomers, Buzdugan and Shiva (2009), as well as Krahn et al. (2000) noted that immigrants from developing countries experienced the most significant credential devaluation because of discrimination. Buzdugan and Shiva (2009) also reported that the devaluation of foreign credentials reflects prejudice against overseas educational credentials or the insignificance of non-Canadian credentials in the Canadian labor market. For example,

Buzdugan and Shiva's (2009) idea of the non-usefulness of foreign credentials and work experience is neatly captured in the remark made by one participant:

I have worked for 25 years in mending sewing machines in Syria and I also did the same thing in Jordan. Before arriving to Canada, the people in charge told me that that I was going to settle in a province that had sewing factories. When I arrived to Saskatchewan, there was nothing [laughter]. (Focus Group, January 2, 2017)

Several authors including Li and Li (2013), Block and Galabuzi (2011), Lightman and Good Gingrich (2012), and Buzdugan and Shiva (2009) have reported that labour market discrimination can negatively affect the income of immigrants, which often leads to poverty among this population.

Another common theme among newcomers was the unavoidable need to return to school to obtain Canadian credentials and switch their career goals, which can be an expensive process, particularly for individuals who are beginning their lives in a new country. This pattern of returning to school to gain Canadian education is reflected in the previous quotation and the comment below:

I had eight years of working experience from back home and I had finished my degree as well but when I came here [to Canada] I had to reapply again to go back to school. I decided to take social work because that's something I passionately love to do. The [school] credits I transferred were very little. It's like more like whatever I had studied before wasn't regarded really that highly. If there's that adjustment going into education, it's quite different. (Focus Group, December 20, 2016)

Another participant stated that even if you already hold a diploma from Syria, you are required to get another degree from a Canadian institution (Focus Group, January 2, 2017).

Wilkinson et al. (2016) argue that having a Canadian education can protect some immigrants, but it does not guarantee higher occupational mobility. The requirement to have a Canadian degree or certificate also aligns with Wilkinson et al.'s (2016) idea that newcomers regularly do not financially benefit from their foreign credentials. Boyd and Schellenberg (2007) point out that economically skilled immigrants are valued and admitted to Canada based on their high levels of education and corresponding potential to economically contribute to the labour market (p. 7). However, once in Canada, their education is devalued or not recognized by potential or current employers. Wilkinson et al. (2016) conclude that Canada's focus on

bringing in highly skilled immigrants is what leads to frustration on the part of newcomers because their foreign credential are not recognized, which is a concern that was highlighted in the survey findings as well. The selection of immigrants falls under federal/provincial/territorial immigration policies, while professional accreditation or regulatory bodies operate under separate provincial/territorial jurisdictions. Still lacking is a system that enables selected immigrants to find work in the fields they were educated and trained in.

Some Canadian provincial jurisdictions including Ontario have developed programs such as Global Experience where in-person, telephone, and online support is provided for internationally trained individuals before and after arrival in Ontario. For example, services provided to foreign-trained personnel include video calls, webinars, and workshops on licensing in specific professions, licensing/certification in the skilled trades and regulated professions, regulatory bodies and registration, credential assessment, employment and training programs that help immigrants get licensed/certified and find work in their field, financial assistance, as well as English and French language training programs (Global Experience Ontario, n.d.).

**Interprovincial educational transfers.** Third, there were three focus group participants who identified challenges of interprovincial credential recognition that frustrated them. Below are excerpts from a discussion about interprovincial credential recognition among the three participants.

*Participant 1:* Like I suppose . . . me and the [two other] girls we have [nursing] licenses from Ontario. So we are good to go as a nurse, right, but again in Saskatchewan they are asking for all the paperwork again we had completed. We have the license, right?

*Participant 2:* What's the difference, it's all in the Canada, right? It's only different province, I didn't understand that yet, like . . .

*Participant 1:* It's all in the same country but . . .

*Participant 3:* Yeah. the main thing is like they both were nurses in Ontario, all they [accreditation body] had there to do is transfer the license here, but what they did, like they went through all the process again, which they already did in Ontario. On top of that they had to clear [my] English

exam. They were working as RPNs in Ontario, so they had that experience. They're here, all they need to do is transfer but instead of that they're asking for English exam from, so . . .

*Participant 1:* Yeah, just to transfer again we had to pay money, we had to go through all the paperwork, the processing time, it's [a] waste of time, energy, money, everything.

*Participant 3:* It's like they're saying they need more nurses but they're not supporting, yeah (Focus Group, December 20, 2016).

This discussion between three participants highlights an important factor, which can be easily ignored because credential recognition is regularly associated with an assessment of foreign education for newcomers. Less attention is paid to the existing credential recognition processes involving interprovincial/territorial educational transfers. The varying requirements and standards in different Canadian provinces/territories pose labour market entry challenges to not only immigrants but also for Canadian-born workers. However, the problem of interprovincial credential recognition is magnified for newcomers because of additional challenges such as racial and gender discrimination, as well as having accents and names that can be easily be screened out for job interview opportunities. George and Chaze (2014) conclude that issues of credential recognition cannot be separated from the racial and gender discrimination because they intersect to produce complex labour market entry barriers for newcomers. As discussed in the next section, language is another factor that needs to be understood when examining the labour market barriers for newcomer.

**Language barriers.** Language proficiency has been shown to be one of the requirements for entry into the Canadian labour market. Chung, Hong, and Newbod (2013) state language can be a barrier for immigrants for many services including healthcare, housing, and employment. Bernhard (2012) writes that it takes immigrant children between two and five years of intense English instruction to learn the basic communication skills, and children's linguistic abilities develop much faster than adults, suggesting that acquiring English as an additional language can take longer than five years for adults. Bernhard (2012) contends that there is a positive correlation between language abilities and factors such as academic performance. A lack of English language skills can also have a profound effect on finding and

keeping employment. According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2014), 27.5% of permanent residents do not speak one of Canada's official languages upon arrival.

Some of the study participants had the required language skills because they came from English-speaking countries. Other participants did not have English language skills or were in the process of developing the English language skills required to function in the host society, which posed a number of employment challenges for them. For example, one participant stated: "For me, it's been difficult finding a job because [I] speak [limited] English. I understand [what people are saying], but I don't speak it" (Focus Group, February 7, 2017). The comment illustrates the challenge caused by a lack of English skills, which deepens the problem of labour market entry and the inability to fully participate in the larger society.

Another participant remarked that:

Most people, even Canadians, they think we are fool[s], or stupid, but there are some, they are able to understand us. Because they take [time to] listen carefully, and try to explain [information] sometimes more than one time. Couple times. And we [get] it. Even for me, for example, I work with Russian guys. They speak Russian all day. So, I can't practice my English over there. (Focus Group, February 7, 2017)

This quotation reflects not only the attributes of personal deficiency that can be associated with the inability to speak English but also how a newcomer's environment makes it difficult for them to develop English language skills. Some of the study participants were receiving English language instruction from RODS, for which they were grateful. However, the hours of language instruction were not enough to help them master English. Current literature indicates that the inability to develop English language skills constructs the learners as the educational problem and the onus of solving this dilemma rests with them (Burton, 2016). Individualizing language learning problems and the negative attributes attached to those who lack English skills can heighten the hardships faced by newcomers seeking to enter the labour market. Entering the labour market with limited English skills would mean performing precarious work.

In discussing language barriers, participants also mentioned the challenges of having an accent. One participant stated:

Accent is the killer. It's not even English, what kills people is the accent. When you go for an interview a lot of people say "you have a strong accent." That is how they put it.

If your accent is strong they don't even listen to what you are saying anymore. (Focus Group, December 2, 2016)

In a separate focus group, another participant commented that “our accent also deprive[s] you from getting a job” (Focus Group, December 30, 2016). Accents can be perceived as a sign of limited English language skills. Munro (2003) contends that an accent is seen by employers as a marker of difference and a proxy for foreign ancestry. Foreign accents are considered to be undesirable and incompatible with high status jobs. Further, Creese and Kambere (2003) posit that a foreign accent is a socially defined phenomenon and that British and American accents result in higher social and economic rewards for their speakers than other accents. Challenges of language and accent were not the only employment barriers that focus group participants raised; work impediments connected to their age were also discussed.

**Age barriers.** The discussion of age was sporadic in the focus group interviews. Majority or 74% of the focus group participants were between the age of 18 and 50 years old which is consistent with the 2012 report by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration, which indicates that immigrants to Saskatchewan tend to be young. At least 9% of the focus group participants were 50 years and older. There 17% of the focus group participants that did not complete their age profiles. Although concerns of age were not widely discussed in the focus groups one participant viewed age as an impediment to labour market entry:

I am 42 years old . . . working in whatever position is not something that I might be ashamed of, it's just that the 25 years of experience [as an electrician] that I have, what am I supposed to do with them? Throw them in the garbage? (Focus Group, January 2, 2016)

Even for Canadian-born workers, seeking employment during their later adult years can be challenging, but for newcomers, concerns of age can add to complexities of credential recognition, assessment, language barriers, and so on. The above excerpt raises concerns about job retraining and the associated difficulties for older newcomer workers who are seeking suitable employment given the age discrimination in employment.

Issues of access to employment for younger newcomer immigrants did not emerge in this research, but Lightman and Good Gingrich (2012) indicated that this age group has the highest incidence of low pay in Canada (p. 126). Lightman and Good Gingrich (2012) add that

this younger age group is likely to have the highest levels of unemployment in comparison to the older immigrant population. Younger people do not possess the required work experience, a factor that is often used to justify their exclusion from the labour market. Clark-Kazak (2012) argues that age is increasingly being recognized as a marker of “difference” among the immigrant populations (p. 2) because it can be a factor that can be used to value or devalue labour.

**Gender and cultural barriers.** Some women cited additional challenges in entering the labour market due to cultural differences in working with men and spoke about their apprehension and need to find ways to work alongside men while adhering to their religious beliefs. One focus group participant stated:

It’s not a matter of being arrogant, it’s just because of our culture and religion that we are not permitted to sit with foreign men. Even when we are in school, our teacher could tell how uncomfortable we are sitting next to men. . . . We are forced to be with men, but that doesn’t mean we like it. (Focus Group, December 28, 2016)

The other challenge for women was finding ways to develop their English language and employment skills while caring for their children. The high unemployment rates for female newcomers is well documented in current literature. Males are significantly more likely than females to be employed. Females (10.3%) are slightly more likely to be unemployed and looking for work than males (8.3%). The proportion of female immigrants who are not looking for a job (including students and retirees) is double the percentage of males (Wilkinson et al 2016, p. 11).

**Hopes and fears for survival.** Concerns about a lack of Canadian experience, the requirement of Canadian references, credential evaluation, challenges of credential recognition, language barriers, as well as gender and cultural impediments are overlapping problems facing immigrant job seekers, and these problems created fear among this population in Regina. A plethora of Canadian studies including Schellenberg and Maheux (2007), Wilkinson et al. (2016), and George and Chaze (2014) have identified the same employment concerns for newcomers. These employment barriers and concerns are not typical for Canadian-born job seekers but are unique to new immigrants (Schellenberg & Maheux, 2007), making them vulnerable to fear, anxiety, insecurity, and poverty. In this study, the expressed fear and anxiety of participants confirms the limited choices that newcomers have in terms of finding and

keeping employment. For example, many study participants experienced fear and insecurity over losing their jobs. Some of the participants were concerned about cutbacks/layoffs or being fired. They were afraid of calling in sick. For example, one participant described her fear:

Immigrant people they really work sincerely here, because they have a certain sense of fear. “If I lose the job, where am I going to go?” . . . Like right now, I never call in sick or nothing, because I have a sense of fear. If something happens I am going to lose the job. Then what am I going to do? That’s why people are sincerer [committed to their jobs]. (Focus Group, December 2, 2016,)

Another participant stated:

In my community, most of the people have two jobs, and then why are they having a second job? In case you’re fired. If I lose the first, I am going to go the second [job]. They don’t care about the money. They already have, but they have the sense of fear, insecurity that they will easily lose their job. (Focus Group, December 2, 2016)

What Thomas (2015) calls “survival employment” is neatly captured by the comments below.

One participant stated:

Everything is different. My job is different. I have [had] my own job, and now I make subs [sandwiches]. And it’s no. . . . But okay, I came here for a better life for my children. (Focus Group, February 7, 2017)

A statement made by another focus group participant also confirmed that some newcomers were taking survival jobs to support their children:

Like me, I don’t want to change nothing. I am working hard, my husband likes his work, [we] are working hard, and we just take care of our daughter, making sure she has a better life. And that's all. (Focus Group, February 7, 2017)

These comments reflect some of the newcomers’ experiences of working in jobs that are unrelated to their education and training, but they have to survive and make sacrifices for their children in the host receiving country. An example of living under fear was provided by one focus group participant:

Yeah, but we work sometime 80 hours in the week. . . . No benefits nothing. No overtime [pay] nothing. Zero. Just discouraged. . . . Okay, but nobody call [about my rights]. You are afraid. [If] you lost your job. . . . I asked for this raise for example,

yeah. Three years, no give raise. I say, what [about a] raise. Say thank you [be thankful you have a job, says the employer]. Do you have job. (Focus Group, February 7, 2017)

The quotation above shows two important things: 1) newcomers are likely to work long hours to ensure a better future for their children, and 2) temporary foreign workers are taken advantage of by employers but are fearful of raising issues of minimum wage, job safety, and working hours (as per Soparlo, 2015). There is often a lack of understanding of the laws in place to protect workers from abuse and exploitation. Gross (2014) states that the easy access to a large supply of foreign labour has led to the kind of negative experiences of newcomers as expressed in the previous quotation.

For one participant, being unemployed heightened his fear that he was not a good role model for his son:

You know what, suppose that you are unemployed and stay unemployed for the rest of your life, do you actually think that your son will one day want to work? No, he would like to become like you, he wouldn't care, he would think of you as his role model and since his role model doesn't care if he is employed or not, he will start to believe that having a job is not really necessary in life. As you, he will become dependent on others or the government to survive. Is that what you want for your child? (Focus Group, January 2, 2017)

Conversely, the same participant expressed the hope that immigrant children growing up in Canada would have better opportunities than their parents:

Of course not, but again, that's [depending on the government for welfare] not going to happen because of the demands placed on him by the society to find a decent job. And to compare our situations with that of our children is really inaccurate, we are different, they will grow up in a society that will teach them what it means to become a productive citizen, not to mention their ability to acquire the language much faster than us.

Some participants discussed “dumbing down” resumes to get a job below one’s qualifications:

But in my back home, I work[ed] in the bank. So if I mention my experience in [my] resume that I work in bank, it doesn't go with the image of those kinds of jobs. That's totally different. (Focus Group, February 16, 2017)

Working multiple jobs, long work hours, low wage jobs, and not taking sick time are some of the factors that intersect and overlap to produce precarity for this population, which also leads to fear and anxiety as they adapt to Regina.

## **Conclusion**

To summarize, in the discussion of the barriers to employment as experienced by newcomers, many of the focus group participants stated that they were not involved in meaningful work, rather they held survival jobs to earn an income and marginally meet their basic needs. Other participants were not participating in the labour market, which impacted their security, self-worth, and self-esteem. Although, it was not discussed at great lengths, it is reasonable to suggest that many participants experienced poverty because they worked at survival jobs. Soparlo (2015) reports that 22% of recent immigrants in Regina are living below the low income cut off compared with 14% of other groups. Immigrants to Canada have been found to have higher rates of unemployment than non-immigrants regardless of region of birth (Gilmore, 2008). The implications of unemployment and underemployment have been well-documented in Canada. For example, lack of work contributes to newcomers' vulnerability to conditions of social exclusion. This marginalized condition can be described as having a domino effect, leading newcomers to experience depression, fear, anxiety, and stress, which taken together can impact their family's health (Bryan & Denov, 2010; Galabuzi, 2004, 2010). When immigrants and refugees continue to encounter numerous labour market challenges as they acculturate to Canadian society, they are less likely to feel integrated socially or within the community (Wilkinson et al., 2016). However, there is also some research indicating that after 11 years in Canada, immigrant labour market outcomes are either on par with or even better than Canadian-born outcomes. This suggests that after experiencing significant economic barriers in their early years in Canada, immigrants tend to adapt and "integrate," and perhaps their higher than average rates of education lead to relatively rapid upward mobility over time (Lightman & Good Gingrich, 2012, pp. 138–139). This potential transition from labour market challenges to upward socio-economic mobility aligns with Thomas's (2015) idea of newcomers moving from survival jobs to meaningful employment.

## **Adaptation and Settlement in Regina**

While survey and focus group questions specifically asked newcomers about barriers to education, employment, and child care, newcomers also spoke about challenges specific to life in Regina. In this section, particular attention is paid to issues of culture, housing, transportation, weather, isolation, and access to supports and services. Throughout the study, these factors were brought to our attention because the participants perceived them as challenges to the successful settlement in a new community. Similarly, in her report, which involved community consultations with key stakeholders in Regina, Soparlo (2015) concluded that housing, healthcare, food security, and public transportation affect adaptation and settlement in a new community.

### **Barriers Faced by Newcomers**

**Culture.** Participants spoke of difficulties like trying to find their cultural foods in Regina. Available information indicates that Regina has approximately 30 ethnic grocery stores (Regina Region Local Immigration Partnership, 2016) and a number of ethno-cultural community associations, but as a relatively small city with a population of 247,224 the availability of goods and services may not be as wide-ranging as in a larger urban centre. The accessibility of such opportunities is also highly dependent on the size of the ethno-cultural community in Regina, as some ethno-cultural communities have a larger population and/or have been established in the community for a greater length of time.

Participants spoke of wanting to adapt to life in Regina while still maintaining their own language and culture and passing these teachings on to their children. One person stated that “There’s also that challenge to maintain your own culture, being in another culture too.” (Focus Group, December 20, 2016) Another participant commented:

I only want my child to stay at the daycare for a couple of hours until her mother finishes her language classes. I don’t my daughters to stay longer because I don’t want them to forget how to speak Arabic (Focus Group, January 2, 2017).

The expressed desire to retain parts of one’s culture is consistent with Este’s (2007), finding that immigrants want to embrace “Canadian values” while keeping some of their cultural practices that they consider important.

**Housing.** Newcomers spoke of the challenges that they encountered trying to secure rental housing upon arriving in Regina. While settlement agencies can provide information on housing options, securing affordable housing remains a significant challenge for many newcomers. The vacancy rate in Regina at the end of 2016 was 5.5% (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2016). While this was an improvement over the low vacancy rates of past years, rents continue to rise, making housing unaffordable for many families. The average rent in Regina in 2016 was \$1,023, with rent being approximately \$1,109 for two bedrooms and \$1,327 for three or more bedrooms (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2016).

The family of one participant was approved for housing through the local publicly funded social housing program, but they did not qualify to rent a dwelling that was large enough to accommodate the number of children that they had. Other participants applied for social housing but remained on the waiting list for months while others received housing, leading them to wonder if their applications had been misplaced. Those who qualified for and received social housing were appreciative, but many stated that the long wait times impeded their settlement in Regina.

Requesting references is a common practice among landlords and rental housing corporations in Regina. As when entering the job market, a lack of local references can seriously hinder newcomers' chances of finding rental housing. One participant summed this up by saying:

Then another thing is they ask you to bring, they need a note from your previous landlord. My landlord wasn't here . . . so then how do I get a note from my previous landlord? It's just from one problem to the other (Focus Group, December 2, 2016).

Other participants cited challenges of understanding rental agreements and, at times, a lack of transparency from those that they rented from.

They don't tell you "oh, this is the penalty." . . . I feel it's kind of dishonest because you didn't tell me deep down what the contract is about . . . and now you're telling me I have to pay for January and February if I'm going to move out this December and it's \$1,600 (Focus Group, December 11, 2016).

Language barriers also intensified challenges in this area, as newcomers not fluent in English often struggled to understand rental agreements.

**Transportation.** Transportation is a challenge for many newcomers. Most newly arrived immigrants do not own cars and therefore rely on the bus for transportation. Newcomers are more likely to use public transportation than the general population of Regina (Soparlo, 2015).

In the newcomer survey, respondents rated transportation as an issue. Fifty-two percent indicated that lack of transportation affected their ability to find and retain employment, 52% found themselves unable to attend school without transportation, 60% were unable to obtain household goods for their families (e.g., buy groceries), and for 60%, their ability to find and retain appropriate child care was affected by the lack of transportation.

At \$3.25 for a cash fare for a single adult ride or \$92 for an adult monthly pass (\$2.75 and \$66, respectively for youth aged 5–14; Regina Transit, 2017), riding the bus can be expensive, especially for large families. We also heard that learning the bus system and planning routes can be confusing for newcomers. While the Regina Transit website features mapping software to help people plan their routes, literacy and language skills may be a barrier (Soparlo, 2015). A lack of access to a computer or smart phone can also be a barrier to successfully navigating the bus system. Some participants stated that they had to walk a significant distance from their home to the bus stop. Newcomers also cited the lack of bus service on Sunday as a barrier to getting to work, doing errands, and participating in social activities.

Others spoke of the challenges of learning the rules associated with driving and owning and operating a vehicle in Saskatchewan. Successfully completing driver education can be difficult for individuals who are not fluent in English.

**Weather.** Focus group participants spoke of the difficulty adjusting to the weather in Regina. Immigrants and refugees come from all over the world and for many, Regina's winters with temperatures averaging lower than -20°C (The Weather Network, 2017) can be hard to get used to. In addition, many newcomers have not seen snow before. The first winter in Regina can be shocking for many newcomers, especially if they arrive during the winter without appropriate clothing for the season. One focus group participant, a government-sponsored refugee, spoke of the first time she witnessed snow falling all day and all night and of having difficulty walking through the snow. She said that her family was connected with a home

visitor through a local settlement service organization and that this worker taught them what kind of clothing was needed for winter and helped them to purchase it.

**Isolation.** Isolation was a significant problem for many newcomers to Regina. Newcomers who participated in the focus groups spoke of the difficulty of being away from their family and support network after arrival. Several were in Regina on their own, with their spouse and children remaining in their home country. All newcomers experienced the loss of extended family, friends, and social support networks.

Newcomers also spoke of loneliness and the challenges of meeting people in Regina and making new friends. Those with limited English skills reported that language hindered their ability to connect with people. It has been demonstrated that establishing friendships and social connections plays a crucial role in maintaining physical and mental health and well-being for newcomers (Zhao, Xue, & Gilkinson, 2010). Depending on their country of origin, some newcomers are greeted by a large and welcoming cultural community upon arrival, while other newcomers are alone. Newcomers who had friends or family who were more established in Regina tended to rely on these social connections for information about available services and help with transportation and interpretation. If friends and family are unaware of programs and services that are available in Regina, newcomers can miss getting connected to these supports. For example, one person stated:

The support system is just your family, friends and then people you just meet. Sometimes you go to the [settlement service organization] and you meet fellow immigrants. Then they tell you “you’ve got to do this. You’ve got to do that” (Focus Group, December 2, 2016).

Another person noted:

The [settlement service organization] did all they could to help us out. It’s just that we need certain things to be changed. We hope that the newcomers who will arrive after us will have an opportunity to avoid some the barriers that we had to deal with (Focus Group, January 2, 2017).

Another person from the focus group added:

It’s important to mention that although the [settlement service organization] had its mistakes, we can’t deny the help and support they offered us once we arrived to Regina. They helped us with our papers, accommodation, the hotel that they booked for us.

Let's be honest, we didn't know anything when we arrived, they helped us with almost everything. Our point is just to help other newcomers avoid the difficulties that we had to go through when we first arrived and to point out some of what needs to improve in order to provide better services for other future newcomers. (Focus Group, January 2, 2017)

Supports that are especially valuable to newcomers are language classes. Language teachers not only help newcomers improve their English skills, they teach them valuable skills and information pertinent to navigating life in Regina. If students receive mail that they do not understand, they can show it to their teacher and receive help deciphering it.

In the surveys and focus groups, newcomers listed a variety of agencies that provided them with assistance and support. A woman who arrived as a refugee, spoke of the assistance they received from a local church: "We didn't speak English, just Arabic. So, it was very hard for my husband and me and my little girl. So, they found everything for us. A job for my husband, an apartment. So, they are still up until now with us. They are very perfect people." (Focus Group, February 16, 2017)

Some focus group participants experiencing racism and discrimination, either directly or indirectly. One participant mentioned seeing someone driving in Regina with a confederate flag on their truck and stated, "it's not so welcoming, it's scary, especially with elections that's just happened in the US" (Focus Group, December 20, 2016). Another spoke about her challenges working in a helping profession: I came here to help you so it hurts us sometimes and our feelings when you're wholeheartedly helping someone and they just ignore you just because of your color of your skin or you're not a Canadian and they don't let you help them.

**Access to supports and services.** As evidenced in other parts of the report, newcomers spoke of a number of barriers and challenges to receiving supports and services. Immigrants stated that some agencies offer programs and services specifically for refugees, and they feel that they face many similar challenges and could benefit from access to the same services. There can often be long wait times for access to services. This can include government programs, language programs, and access to child care.

As in nearly every other category, language continued to play a large role in the lack of access to service. Some participants spoke about the differences between communicating in the English that they had learned in their home country versus the English that is spoken in

Canada. For example, one participant stated, “I know English but the North American English is different from British English and Uganda is British colony, the English back home is different from North American English” (Focus Group, November 26, 2016). Another person noted, “I am from the Ukraine. I think I know English, but I come to Canada and I understand I don’t know English. Because my school program is different school program from Canada.” (Focus Group, December 20, 2016)

Participants also commented on the added difficulty in comprehension stemming from use of jargon and slang by Canadian-born English speakers. Accent also added to communication difficulties. Some newcomers told us that it was challenging for them to understand the accent and pronunciation of Canadian English. Other newcomers, who spoke functional, sometimes even fluent, English told us that their accent was a barrier. Canadian-born people may not understand the newcomer’s accent or may assume that the newcomer does not speak very good English or cannot understand them.

One participant spoke of stopping conversations mid-way due to communication challenges. The participant stated that “you have conversation, you stop it because you feel like, okay I can’t understand you, you can’t understand me” (Focus Group, February 7, 2017), while another spoke of fluent English speakers ending the conversation due to the same challenges. The participant added that “even when we approach someone who speaks fluent English and that person sees that your English is terrible . . . they would simply walk away.” (Focus Group, January 2, 2017)

Throughout the study, we heard from newcomers who could not further their education or career goals until they increased their English language skills. For many that we spoke to, improving their English was their most immediate goal. One summed it by saying, “First I learn English and then life is easy” (Focus Group, February 6, 2017). The length of time that it takes to developing conversational English is a tremendous barrier, as newcomers told us that more than basic English skills are needed to navigate situations like visiting the doctor or shopping.

Some men also spoke of the additional barriers that their wives face, especially when it comes to language. One man shared that he is currently employed and has the opportunity to speak English in the workplace, whereas his wife is currently not working. His wife is taking English classes, but because it takes a long time to learn a new language he was concerned

about her isolation and inability to participate in community life to the same extent that he was able to. Another man, currently single, expected he would marry a woman from his home country. He expressed concern that when his future wife joined him in Regina, she would not know English and it would be very difficult for her.

When it comes to receiving medical care, language barriers can have significant impacts on newcomers' health because they may fail to correctly follow the advice of medical professionals, miss follow-up appointments, or take medications incorrectly. One man recalled taking his wife to the doctor, but neither of them being able to understand anything the doctor said when he spoke to them following her examination (Focus Group, January 2, 2017).

Language barriers can also create delays in newcomers accessing medical help when additional appointments are needed. One participant stated:

I once went to an appointment with a physician and an interpreter from the [settlement service organization] was supposed to meet me at the clinic. This interpreter was late, I'm not sure why, but the people at the clinic told me that they can't wait and that I need to book a new appointment. I tried calling to ask for someone who might be willing to interpret on the phone, but the physician refused and made it clear that he wants the interpreter to be physically present (Focus Group, January 2, 2017).

Another family was denied access to interpretation services by the same settlement service organization. When the husband requested an interpreter to assist at the hospital when his wife had her baby, "they replied that it was not their business to be involved in such situations" (Focus Group, January 2, 2017).

At times, newcomers were surprised by differences in medical services from their home country, including long wait times in clinics and hospitals and the long wait for referrals to specialists. A language teacher had told their students that it is very important to have a family doctor, but after a year, the student was still unable to find one. Another participant echoed that: "We found it difficult to find a family doctor here. We have searched for several months, but still. We call, [they] say the list is full" (Focus Group, February 16, 2017). Others cited challenges in accessing medical services, stating that depending on one's immigration status, newcomers may not be eligible to receive healthcare immediately upon arrival.

Many newcomers that we talked to had operated their own businesses before immigrating to Canada. Several participants had trouble accessing information regarding permits and requirements for opening a business in Canada.

## **Conclusion**

Shortage of affordable housing, cultural differences, lack of transportation and increasing public transportation fares, weather, and isolation are some of the factors that further impede the settlement of newcomers in Regina. What these factors demonstrate are complex and profound integration challenges that cannot easily be solved without different levels of government and community support. For example, the shortage of affordable housing and increasing rental rates point to the continuing problem of lack of social housing at the national and provincial levels. Silvius (2016) explains that in the current context of the housing shortage, the short-term goal should be to focus on teaching clients (i.e., newcomers) budgeting skills. The notion of teaching budgeting skills deserves merit but it also assumes that individuals have income, which in the case of some newcomers is limited. Long-term housing intervention remains largely in the hands of governments and communities.

In many municipalities, the rising costs of bus fares is a reality (CBC News, 2016c, 2016d, 2016e, 2017). The CBC reported that raising bus fares combined with other cuts in services, would affect the working poor in marginalized communities including newcomers who have to rely on public transit.

At the individual level, the isolation that manifests itself in the form of lack of social networks and support can also add to the mental and emotional stress for newcomers in Regina. These and others are among the issues that many participants experience while living in their new social environment.

## Recommendations

### Introduction

Our recommendations are organized according to the four broad categories that formed the core of this study: child care, education, employment, and living in Regina. We anticipate that these recommendations will help to inform RRLIP's strategic and action plan. We have used quotations from newcomers and community stakeholders, provided in italicized script, to illustrate the real-life implications of our recommendations.

### Child Care Recommendations

*Yeah, financial is the . . . like mostly we're always talking about daycare . . . they have the subsidy, right. Then also . . . my income is not enough. Even government, they pay money, but my income [is] not enough to fulfill that. That's why I decided to not put [my child] in a daycare. (Newcomer)*

**RECOMMENDATION I:** Increase government support to reduce the cost of child care.

*I think what would help people to access child care is government funding . . . opportunities for people to go to school and attend that early childhood education certificate so that if they have those open opportunities for people to attend that certificate they can have more privatized daycares, just to expand on the need for child care in Regina. (Newcomer)*

**RECOMMENDATION II:** Increase the number of available child care spots, achieved via recruitment, and training, and retention of child care educators.

**RECOMMENDATION III:** Create opportunities for new Canadians to train as early childhood educators.

**RECOMMENDATION IV:** Increase support for those who want to open licensed child care programs (funding for education and support or incentives for licensing).

*. . . child care that provide food appropriate to maintain our cultural traditions.  
(Newcomer)*

*Being an immigrant and a black woman, I preferred that she [daughter] goes to  
someone who has that African experience. (Newcomer)*

**RECOMMENDATION V:** Integrate the cultural practices and languages of the families into child care programs.

## **Education Recommendations**

*The translators . . . if those could be put in more than one place, they can help a  
lot. (Newcomer)*

**RECOMMENDATION VI:** Increase availability of interpretation services, in an increased number of languages, to assist international students at post-secondary institutions.

*If you're coming from maybe, say for example you're coming from [one country],  
you want to talk to somebody from [that country], you can call this number and  
talk to somebody. Sometimes it's just talking to somebody who really understands  
what you are doing and where you are coming from. It can solve a lot of  
problems. I know that there are people from different countries in Regina, all you  
need to do is put that out if you are interested to talk to students or just give us  
your number. That would be really good. (Newcomer)*

**RECOMMENDATION VII:** Develop a network of support people from different cultural communities that could offer support or interpretation over the phone.

*At least half of the international students . . . they need such kind of help. They don't know how to find a house, don't know how to find a car, even don't know how to spend their leisure time. They don't know how to work on their homework or assignments. They don't know how to find this help. I worked back in . . . [my country] for many years so I have the experience to handle these kinds of social problems. (Newcomer)*

**RECOMMENDATION VIII:** Develop a mentoring program for international students.

*[The settlement service organization does] not assist international student[s], so if you're going [there] for help you won't really have much help because they send you back to the [university] and the [university] won't give you any help. (Newcomer)*

**RECOMMENDATION IX:** Increase coordination among agencies that serve newcomers so that newcomers can receive programming and support from different agencies, alleviating the need for a single agency to provide for all of a newcomer's needs.

*At least, if we can't have any support from anybody [else] at all, then teach new instructors. They are people who we are directly connected to, at least on a daily basis, or probably once a week, they should be able to help us. (Newcomer)*

**RECOMMENDATION X:** Educate post-secondary instructors on challenges and needs experienced by international or immigrant students.

*The co-op office as I understand is supposed to help all the student[s], I mean ALL the student[s]. Whether you're international, whether you're national, you're a permanent resident or you're a refugee, they have the authority and the right to make sure every student gets a co-op [placement]. As I'm talking today, I went for co-op three times and I didn't even get an interview. I got three of my co-op interviews cancelled. You have co-op [placements] which specify that you must be Canadian or you must be permanent resident. If you are not Canadian or a permanent resident, that's one of the criteria to apply for a co-op work. That is part of my education, I am paying for co-op, students pay \$4,000 or \$3,000 per co-op term, to get a co-op for experience which will help you, first-hand experience because it's considered to be my first-hand experience in Canada to help me out after my graduation. But still yet, the co-op office cannot do that.*

*(Newcomer)*

**RECOMMENDATION XI:** Implement additional supports for international students within departments and faculties in post-secondary institutions, such as support in securing practicum or co-op work term placements for students without work history in Regina or Canada.

*Having issues with paying my tuition because it wasn't what I planned for. Also, last month, students of Canada were doing a protest for increase in fee[s], there is nowhere in that post that they put out which shows increase in fee[s] for international student[s], international students go through an increase in fee[s] every fall, every fall. I came here, fee was \$12,500 and next fall it went up to \$13,000 and now I think it's \$16,000 for five classes, for one semester.*

*(Newcomer)*

**RECOMMENDATION XII:** Improve communication about the necessary financial commitments to students before they enroll in university (a breakdown of how much they would pay per course, how many classes students typically enroll in each year, and the approximate tuition rate hikes each year), so that they could plan accordingly.

*Prior learning assessment and recognition sometimes are not recognized. one is expected to take some classes to upgrade yet one has the background education.*

*(Newcomer)*

**RECOMMENDATION XIII:** Increase availability of and access to Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) and bridging programs for internationally educated professionals.

*I had to wait five months to get in the English school. every time I go to ask about when will I start attending the classes, they would tell me to wait my turn.*

*(Newcomer)*

**RECOMMENDATION XIV:** Increase availability of English-language courses.

*I was expecting the [university's international student office] to do something to receive me from the airport and help me with settling down but they only give you that option if you're going to be [living] on campus.*

*One of the things, I had spoken with one person from the international office about trying to organize picking up students from the airport. I picked up a student from my country, she just sent me an email on Facebook and she came here in the winter, she has never been to Canada, she has never been out of [her country]. She came here in the winter by midnight and the [campus] doors were locked. Although she was on campus, still the international office could not help to pick her up from the airport because she was arriving that late. So arriving here in Regina in the heart of winter, that cold, you don't even have warm clothes and arrive on campus and the doors are locked. . . . I had spoken with someone at the international office about that and there was nothing they said they could do.*

*(Newcomer)*

**RECOMMENDATION XV:** Arrange to greet newcomers at the airport.

## Employment Recommendations

*I personally think employers still will not employ new immigrants because they feel like they don't have the necessary experience. One thing I think as new immigrants should do is maybe, I know it's difficult, but look out for places where you can do volunteer work because that one helps you get that Canadian experience. (Newcomer)*

*Provide a job/volunteer experience program where positive local references can be built up and will be available when applying for employment. (Community Stakeholder)*

**RECOMMENDATION XVI:** Provide employment related volunteer opportunities for newcomers.

*Look at us, all of us are unemployed. It can't be that we are only here to take English language classes. I do understand that learning English is very important, but there must be another way for us to work instead of staying home all day. For example, we tried to suggest to them [RODS] that a lot of the Arabs in Regina speak English fluently, why don't those people, who might be currently working, why don't they act as both supervisors and interpreters for 20 of us, wherever they are working. A lot of people who have been in Canada and Saskatchewan for a long time are willing to volunteer as interpreters to the Syrians who have arrived. Why don't you take advantage of them, at least for now, until we learn the language? I have to be honest and say that the language classes that we go to aren't helping us. We go to class and learn a couple of words and then go back home for the rest of the day. There isn't any kind of exposure to the real English that we need in order to survive in this new place. (Newcomer)*

**RECOMMENDATION XVII:** Provide opportunities for newcomers to practice English skills while working or volunteering.

*Yeah. the main thing is like they both were nurses in Ontario, all they [accreditation body] had there to do is transfer the license here, but what they did, like they went through all the process again, which they already did in Ontario. (Newcomer)*

**RECOMMENDATION XVIII:** Ensure smoother processes for interprovincial credential recognition, which would allow Saskatchewan to recognize certificates from other Canadian provinces.

*I think if the regional immigration organization[s] that help immigrants, if it can reach out to different community organizations to let them know, “This is who we are, this is the way we can help,” it’s a more effective way of reaching out to immigrants through the community because if I don’t know anything about the organization within the community but then my home organization is maybe hosting something and they do communicate there and tell us, “Okay, if you’re an immigrant these services are available.” (Newcomer)*

**RECOMMENDATION XIX:** Encourage immigrant service agencies to advertise their services and programs to various immigrant community associations.

*Me, I think [it is] mainly cultural and spiritual differences. . . . You have to respect us so that we can respect your culture and we expect the same from the coworkers or whatever, whomever we are working [with]. (Newcomer)*

*Yeah, but we work sometime 80 hours in the week. . . . No benefits nothing. No overtime [pay] nothing. Zero. Just discouraged. . . . Okay, but nobody call [about my rights]. You are afraid. (Newcomer)*

**RECOMMENDATION XX:** Ensure reciprocal learning between employers and newcomers that allows sharing and exchange of information regarding Canadian culture and other cultures.

*Employees also need to know their workplace rights, e.g., breaks, overtime, holidays. (Community Stakeholder)*

**RECOMMENDATION XXI:** Ensure that English language instruction also includes training on Canadian labour laws.

*This isn't necessarily a service however, it needs to be acknowledged that English is not an easy language to learn/understand. This takes time. Moving to a new country is overwhelming. I don't know if we should rush people into the workplace before they can comprehend the language. It does nothing for their self-esteem to go into a workplace and struggle. Nor does it encourage employers to hire newcomers. (Community Stakeholder)*

*More resources are needed for language training, especially for those in low skill employment to increase opportunities. (Community Stakeholder)*

**RECOMMENDATION XXII:** Ensure English classes are extended beyond one year after arrival in Saskatchewan and that the English classes also focus on providing pertinent information for newcomers, such as shopping advice and how to speak to children's teachers and doctors.

*Before arriving to Canada, the people in charge told me that that I was going to settle in a province that had sewing factories. When I arrived to Saskatchewan, there was nothing [laughter]. (Newcomer)*

**RECOMMENDATION XXIII:** Extend consideration for existing immigrant service agencies to provide online support to internationally trained individuals before arrival in Saskatchewan. For example, provide services to foreign-trained personnel that include video calls, webinars, and workshops on licensing in specific professions, licensing/certification processes in the skilled trades and regulated professions, regulatory bodies and registration processes, credential assessment; employment and training programs that can help immigrants get licensed/certified and find work in their field; financial assistance; as well as English and French language training programs.

*Employer subsidies would provide incentives to employers to train newcomers for potential employment. (Community Stakeholder)*

**RECOMMENDATION XXIV:** Consider employer subsidies as incentives to employers to train newcomers for potential employment.

*Employment counsellors need to become like caseworkers. These individuals need to be supported from start to finish, rather than simply provide a drop-in service. . . . I would like to see counsellors carry a caseload of clients that they guide through the entire job search process (resume development, skills assessment, cover letter development) for various positions, and also promotion of clients to targeted employers. (Community Stakeholder)*

**RECOMMENDATION XXV:** Consider more resources for employment counselors to support newcomers as they navigate the Canadian labour market.

*Most people, most employer[s] don't want to call Africa because I understand. The time difference is there, when you're in the office here, they are sleeping over there. So if you have to catch them in the office, you have to stay late here. So, I understand that part of it. The lady, my counselor at [settlement service organization] was my first reference on my resume. So, it really helped.  
(Newcomer)*

**RECOMMENDATION XXVI:** Assist employers in finding ways to gather references from employees who are new to Canada.

## Adaptation and Settlement in Regina Recommendations

*[Although not all newcomers have an orientation], we got orientation regarding Canada. They show us the video, how is the weather and how is the tree, maple leaves. They gave us orientation how to use toilet, how to use light, how to use the shower, hot and cold. Like that we got the orientation. When we came, we are a little familiar with that after we got that training. We got the home visitor from the [settlement service organization] help us lots to adjust. (Newcomer)*

**RECOMMENDATION XXVII:** Create a mechanism for providing pre-arrival support (webinar, Skype calls, etc.) to help all categories of newcomers prepare for life in Regina.

*I'm from government sponsorship process, and I got one of the home visitor from the [settlement service organization]. . . . She teach [taught] us what to wear in winter, what kind of clothes we need to buy. That home visitor help[ed] us to adapt here.*

*All immigrant people need one orientation class. . . . Let them know what is their duty. . . . Like I think how could it improve my life. (Newcomer)*

**RECOMMENDATION XXVIII:** Offer an orientation to Regina upon arrival, to newcomers from all immigration streams.

*The thing is about the advertising about these services because many of people don't know that these services are available to have them . . . available at the airport, the information. Like when I came to Canada it was available on the Toronto airport, the information, but here in Regina it's not. (Newcomer)*

**RECOMMENDATION XXIX:** Develop a centralized means of distributing information to newcomers (such as information at the airport).

*[In Toronto] they were even giving out free SIM cards for calling, like ten-dollar SIM cards to call, to call back home that you have reached safely. So when I was going to church there, every Sunday I'll get a calling card for five dollars. With that calling card I could call back [home]. (Newcomer)*

**RECOMMENDATION XXX:** Provide opportunities for newcomers to call home upon arrival and during the settlement process.

*For me it's like friends mostly, because the main thing when I came to Regina I don't know anyone, I was by myself, so I came here, I made some friends and for me it's like what they said or what knowledge they had, it was. . . . For me I was looking everything online, online helps for jobs where I have to apply and everything but for other than that my friends were more helpful for me. Remember this is a new place, you have to rebuild everything all over again, you need to make new friends, it's not easy. I feel like if I'm a minority and somebody who's also a minority were taking the same classes, I think we'll be friends with them much more [easily] than somebody else and maybe share our experiences and find out, "Oh, how do you do this?" "Oh, I did it this way, I did it this way," yeah. In terms of making friends . . . and Regina, Regina is very small, people have their friends, so I don't think it's easy to. (Newcomer)*

**RECOMMENDATION XXXI:** Increase social opportunities for newcomers and provide opportunities for newcomers to meet people and make Canadian friends.

*I think if the [immigrant service agencies] that help immigrants . . . can reach out to different community organizations to let them know this is who we are, this is the way we can help, it's a more effective way of reaching out to immigrants through the community because if I don't know anything about the organization within the community but then my home organization [association] is maybe hosting something and they do communicate there and tell us, Okay, if you're an immigrant these services are available for you if you want any help on ABC and this, this is how you can [contact] them, I think that would be very strategic.*  
(Newcomer)

**RECOMMENDATION XXXII:** Promote settlement organizations and the services they offer through ethno-cultural community associations/organizations.

*Once, my wife had a medical condition with one of her eyes, and we went to a nearby clinic, the physician there examined her, but the problem was that we didn't understand a word of what he was saying. (Newcomer)*

**RECOMMENDATION XXXIII:** Make interpretation services accessible at all essential services, such as hospitals and medical clinics. In cases where an interpreter is not readily available, there should be a mechanism in place to access interpretation services over the phone.

*Then another thing is they ask you to bring, they need a note from your previous landlord. My landlord wasn't here . . . so then how do I get a note from my previous landlord? It's just from one problem to the other. (Newcomer)*

**RECOMMENDATION XXXIV:** Develop ways to enable newcomers to secure rental housing without local references.

*For me and my family, I would like to have a school gym that opens on either Saturday or Sunday. What I want is an indoor gym that my children, and other children, may use in such cold weather. I would like to be able to run around, play soccer, or do any other physical activity with my children on the weekends. I would also like for this gym to be free of charge. (Newcomer)*

**RECOMMENDATION XXXV:** Increase the availability of indoor recreation opportunities for children.

*The public libraries offer a lot of services including English tutoring. (Newcomer).*

**RECOMMENDATION XXXVI:** Increase the availability of services for newcomers at public libraries and other community spaces.

## Conclusion

To summarize, *Barriers to Newcomer Adaptation and Settlement* details the barriers newcomers face in accessing child care, education, employment and settlement services in Regina. Newcomers have concerns about the impact of not having reliable child care, as well as aspirations and worries regarding child care services. The report concluded that affordable and reliable access to child care programs enhances newcomer families' access to employment, education, and training opportunities, thus aiding them in integrating into, and contributing to, the economic and social growth of the country.

*Barriers to Newcomer Adaptation and Settlement* also examines some of the main challenges that newcomers and international students face while trying to adapt to their new lives in Regina. Newcomer students regularly have to “start over” in their education despite their academic achievements in their home countries. This study also indicated that newcomer students encounter language issues, difficulties navigating between educational systems “back home,” and in Regina, financial issues, lack of empathy or awareness on the part of others, and emotional stress. We concluded that newcomer students experience devaluation of their knowledge and education.

*Barriers to Newcomer Adaptation and Settlement* showed that finding employment is one of the most challenging experiences for newcomers. The participants consistently reported the lack of Canadian experience, the requirement of Canadian references, the need for credential evaluation, challenges of credential recognition and labour market entry, language and age barriers, as well as gender and cultural impediments. The hopes and fears that newcomers experience while attempting to survive in the new social, cultural, and economic environment were discussed in this report. Overall, the study demonstrated the multifaceted challenges that newcomers face in the labour market.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Employment and child care use

		Child care centre	Family child care home	Relative/family member caring for children	Friend caring for children	Parent caring for children	Child care at work	Child care at schools	Child care at language classes	Care sensitive to culture and language
Employment	$\chi^2$	13.72	0.08	1.76	0.95	4.47	0.37	0.59	7.1	1.76
	df	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	N	192	233	233	233	233	233	233	233	233
	P-Value	0.001	0.77	0.18	0.32	0.03	0.53	0.43	0.008	0.184

The shaded areas show how employment and child care services are related.

## Appendix B: Employment and child care preferences

		Child care centre	Family child care home	Relative/family member caring for children	Friend caring for children	Parent caring for children	Child care at work	Child care at schools	Child care at language classes	Care sensitive to culture and language
Employment	$\chi^2$	2.08	3.94	1.75	1.76	0.12	3.93	0.004	7.35	2.36
	df	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	N	140	233	233	233	233	233	233	233	233
	P-Value	0.14	0.04	0.18	0.18	0.72	0.04	0.94	0.007	0.12

The shaded areas show the association between employed newcomers and their preferred child care services.

## Appendix C: Level of education and ability to seek services

		Banking	Financial budget	Margining household finances	Location grocery stores	Bus routs	employment	Workplace culture	Communicating	Finding housing	Using appliances	Accessing healthcare	Healthcare needs	Hygiene Standards	Dental care	Healthy food	Parenting practices	Community supports	Canadian culture
Level of education	$\chi^2$	6.91	2.10	4.72	2.99	26.22	16.58	10.27	14.66	13.09	3.28	15.71	6.71	31.62	9.69	8.9	2.82	5.17	6.21
	df	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
	N	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	235	237	237	237	237	237	237	237
	P*	0.22	0.83	0.45	0.70	0.00	0.005	0.068	0.012	0.022	0.65	0.008	0.24	0.00	0.08	0.11	0.72	0.39	0.28

The shaded areas show the association between newcomers with grade 12 education or higher and their ability to access different services (learning the bus services, housing, health care and so on).

## Appendix D: Level of education and services used to gain employment

		Mentoring	Job search help	Workplace language training	Self-employment assistance	Pre-employment courses	Upgrading skills	Supportive work environment	Foreign credential recognition	Prior Learning Assessment	Bridging programs for internationally educated professionals	Obtaining a driver's license	Access to a vehicle
Level of education	$\chi^2$	68.25	4.28	10.27	14.86	14.85	17.12	65.78	8.71	11.35	14.76	16.65	17.41
	df	10	5	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
	N	186	189	190	177	181	179	181	173	176	175	174	182
	P*	0.00	0.50	0.41	0.137	0.138	0.072	0.00	0.560	0.33	0.141	0.082	0.06

The shaded areas show how mentoring and a supportive work environment can help predict the ability of gaining and retaining employment by newcomers with grade 12 education or higher.

## Appendix E: Cross tabulation of gender and employment

		Are you currently working?		Total
		Yes	No	
Are you:	Male	31	62	93
	Female	62	78	140
Total		93	140	233

	Employment Status	
Gender	Chi-Square	2.79
	df	1
	N	233
	P*	0.095