



A Maytree idea
In partnership with The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation

SUMMARY REPORT

Perceptions of Employment Barriers and Solutions



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The employment rate of working-age immigrants with university education is lower than that of their Canadian-born peers. In recent years this gap has become more pronounced in the case of those who arrived less than five years ago. These newcomers also earn less than their Canadian peers.

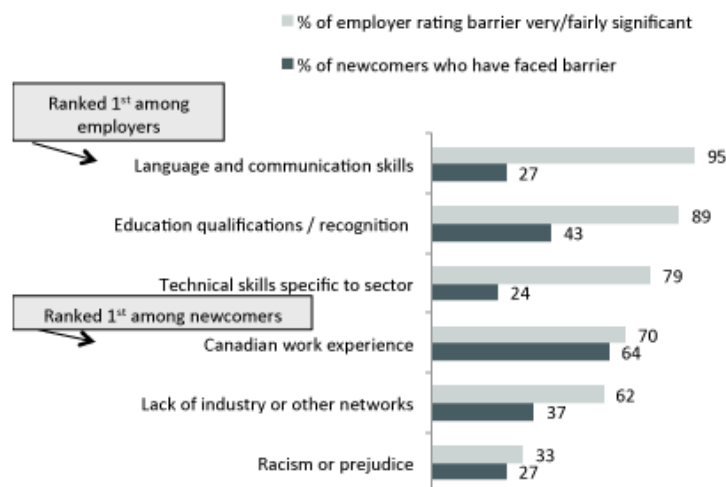
The Perceptions of Employment Barriers and Solutions study, commissioned by ALLIES and funded by the Province of Ontario, explored the perceptions of challenges newcomers face in finding and retaining employment. The study, conducted by R.A. Malatest & Associates, sought to better understand the types of supports that would encourage employers to hire newcomers for jobs commensurate with their international experience and education.

Key Findings

1 - Gap in Language and Communication Skills:

Among the employers interviewed for the study, 95% said concerns about poor language and communication skills stopped them from employing newcomers. In sharp contrast, only 27% of newcomers said they experienced challenges in this area. Findings of this research suggest that employers think of language skills in two different ways: ability to use language effectively to communicate with clients and colleagues; and ability to use sector-specific terminology required to work within their occupation.

Employer perceptions of barriers to newcomer employment and challenges faced by newcomers



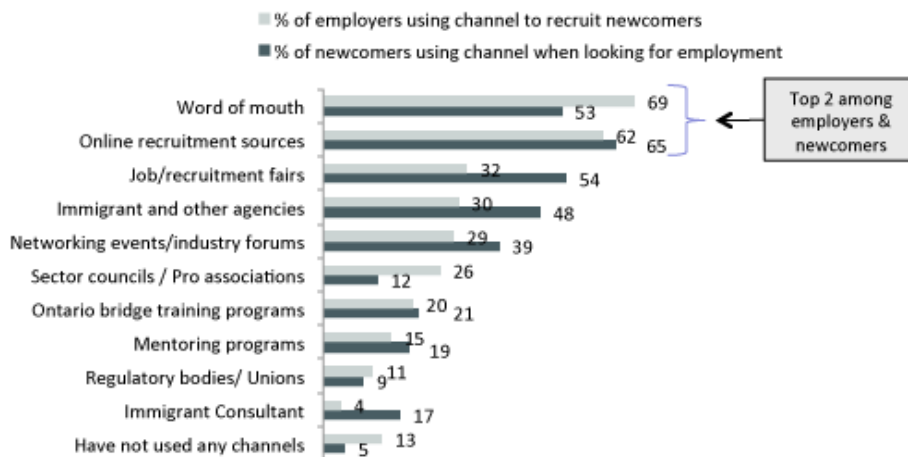
2 - “Canadian work experience” is an overused euphemism:

A majority of newcomers (64%) interviewed cited the lack of Canadian work experience as their most significant barrier to employment. Although 70% of employers also identified it as a barrier, focus group discussions with them revealed that it is only a barrier for positions that require an understanding of the Canadian landscape (e.g., jobs within the legal profession). Many acknowledged that “Canadian work experience” is actually a euphemism for understanding Canadian workplace culture and having the soft skills to adapt.

3 - Use of only a few channels for recruitment:

While word-of-mouth and online recruitment sources ranked high among employers and newcomers, use of all other channels was significantly less among employers. Among newcomers, the use of job/recruitment fairs, immigrant and other employment agencies was significantly higher than employers. Employers tend to use sector councils and professional associations at a higher rate than newcomers.

Recruitment channels used by newcomers and employers



4 - Pre-arrival information gap:

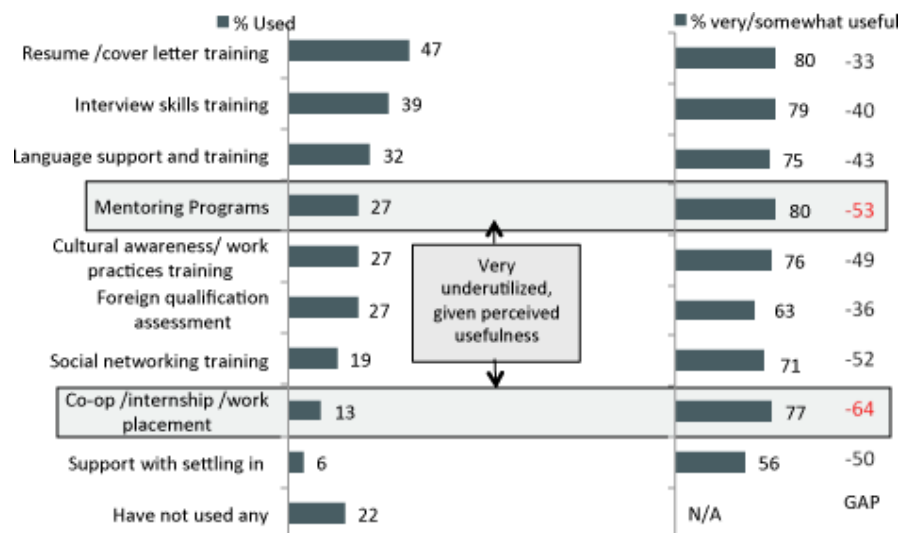
Many newcomers do not have the necessary information needed to successfully integrate into the labour market when they arrive. They often realize what they need to do only after having lived here for a while and struggled to find employment. Overall, newcomers felt that their expectations had not been well managed during the pre-arrival assessment process. Many suggested that more targeted information would have helped them be better prepared.

The issue is not that the information is not available. Often newcomers do not know where to find the pertinent information, which resources are reliable, and how not to be overwhelmed by the volume of information available.

5 - Newcomer supports, tools and resources are underutilized:

Newcomers are underutilizing resources available to assist them in finding employment commensurate with their skills and education. Given their perceived usefulness by those who have used these supports, the most underutilized were internship/placement programs, mentoring programs, and social networking training. Focus group discussions with newcomers revealed that a primary reason for the underutilization of these resources is that they are often unfamiliar with the concepts of networking and mentorship. As a result, they do not actively seek out these opportunities. With respect to internships and other work placements, literature suggests that eligibility and not lack of awareness is the reason for low usage of this support among newcomers.

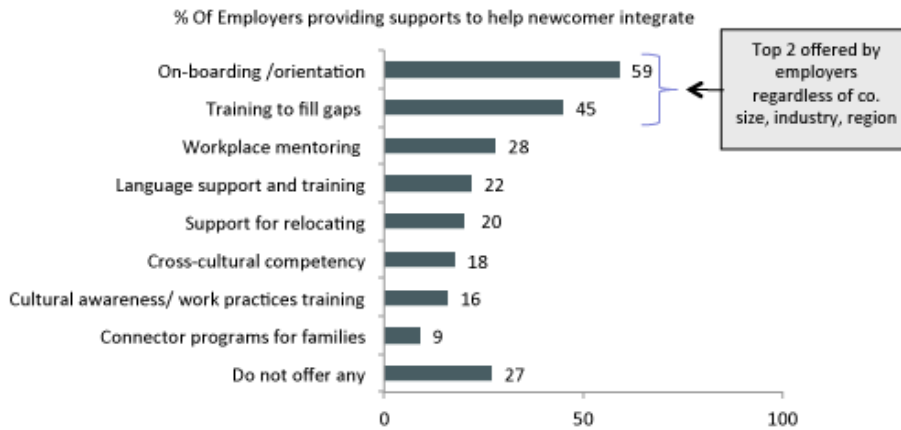
Newcomer use and perceived usefulness of training and support services



6 - Employers not using supports available:

A significant majority of employers (68%) said they were not using any of the supports available to them for hiring newcomer talent. Just 17% used funded internships and just 11% used wage subsidies. One reason for the underutilization of these supports is that the majority of employers have no trouble hiring for the available positions from within their company. As a result, the majority (7 in 10) are not proactively looking for fresh talent (much less newcomer talent). In the absence of significant challenges in finding talent, many employers do not see the benefit in using the incentives and supports available to them to hire qualified newcomers.

Employer use of supports and incentives



Recommendations

While recommendations aimed at employers and newcomers are good-practice suggestions, those aimed at non-profit agencies and governments call for concerted action.

For employers:

- Adopt organizational good practices (see below)
- Ensure top-down support from senior management
- Establish reporting mechanisms that demonstrate the use of inclusive practices

Organizational good practices

- Job postings on sites that are frequented by newcomers
- Revisit Canadian work experience requirement in job ads
- Credential equivalency tools
- Anonymized resumes
- Culturally balanced hiring team
- Culturally appropriate interviewing techniques
- Interviewing targets for newcomers and analysis of recruitment patterns
- Diversity training
- Mentoring newcomers
- Supporting cultural/religious practices
- Connect with local community organizations

For settlement, immigrant serving and employment agencies:

- Take the lead in helping newcomers develop a settlement plan
- Encourage immigrants to complete appropriate preparatory work
- Maintain connections with newcomers to ensure constant support
- Promote services to increase usage by newcomers

For governments:

- Ensure “destination” website is user friendly, promotes the importance of a settlement plan, and helps newcomers connect with a settlement agency (see box)
- Review and enhance current language training and tests as they may not be preparing newcomers to meet employers’ expectations
- Promote bridge-training and other training and mentoring programs
- Promote available tools and their benefits to employers
- Educate employers on the business case for hiring newcomer talent
- Combine education of employers to recruit newcomers with promotion of subsidies
- Promote credential equivalency tools to employers (particularly SMEs)
- Regulate the immigrant consultant profession or provide a list of accredited consultants

“Destination” website should include:

- Checklist of steps to take before arrival
- List of challenges to anticipate
- List of government funded immigrant serving agencies
- List of businesses that value diversity
- Links to resources, programs, sector specific information
- Checklist to assess credentials

For newcomers:

- Pre-arrival, link with an immigrant serving agency to develop a settlement plan that outlines the steps they need to take to integrate into the labour force
- Post-arrival, check in with an immigrant serving agency regularly to receive support in filling gaps in their skills that come up while seeking employment
- Post-arrival, network and get involved in the community to refine communication and “soft skills”
- Regularly check in with service agencies to address hidden issues

Methodology of the Study

- Surveys with employers (n=301) and newcomers (n=310);
- Focus groups with employers and newcomers across five cities: Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton, London, North Bay (n=70); and
- Ideation session with 20 stakeholders.

NEWCOMERS (n=310):

- Highly educated group (94% university degree/MA/PhD)
- Considerable work experience (81% with previous work experience in *related field*)
- Over half currently employed full-time (40%) or part-time (15%)

EMPLOYERS (n=301):

- 7 in 10 do not *proactively look* for newcomer talent but are hiring newcomers (70% have hired in past 2 years)
- 47% had no difficulty finding suitable candidates, newcomer or not (most difficult to hire for managerial positions)

Acknowledgements

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