

CAREER PATHWAYS FOR RACIALIZED NEWCOMER WOMEN PILOT PROJECT – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CONTEXT

On average, the labour market outcomes of racialized newcomer women in Canada are lower than their Canadian-born counterparts, particularly in the initial months and years after arriving in Canada. There are many potential explanations for these low labour market outcomes for racialized newcomer women in Canada. Reasons posited are associated with the intersecting identities of being a newcomer to Canada, identifying as a woman, and identifying as racialized or as a visible minority.

Job search assistance programs have been shown to be successful at improving job seekers' employment outcomes and, in Canada, there is a vast array of job search assistance and employment readiness programs that vary in duration from a few hours to several months and include activities such as resume writing skills, interview skills, language and other training, career counselling, and introductions to employers. However, prior to the Career Pathways for Racialized Newcomer Women (CPRWN) pilot, formerly the Career Pathways for Visible Minority Newcomer Women pilot, we are not aware of any government employment programs or services specifically targeted toward racialized newcomer women and designed to address their intersecting employment barriers.

In 2018-19, the Government of Canada announced a \$31.9 million investment to help racialized newcomer women secure employment. The Career Pathways for Racialized Newcomer Women Pilot Project, initially a three-year national pilot which was extended until 2022-23, that tests enhanced employment programming for newcomer women who identify as racialized, is one of the three funding streams in this initiative. The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) has received funding from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) to design, implement, and evaluate CPRNW.

THE CPRNW PILOT

Prior to its extension, the pilot project involved eight service provider organizations across Canada implementing 11 interventions based on four service delivery models. The overall goal of each model is to support racialized newcomer women in their successful integration in the Canadian labour market. The models differ by their target population (e.g., women with different skill/language levels and different initial distances from the labour market) as well as by the program activities involved. The models aim to address some of the common barriers racialized newcomer women face in their search for employment and in job retention.

The models are referred to as models 1–4. Model 1 takes a demand-led approach to support racialized newcomer women in finding employment in high-demand industries and sectors. One of its main components is a paid work placement. Model 2 offers support in the development of a clear career plan based on a thorough assessment of participants' skills and provides them with opportunities to connect with potential employers. Model 3 is a demand-driven approach that uses recruitment specialists working directly with employers/sectors with significant workforce needs to match them with women who have the skills, career interest, and abilities to perform the job. Model 4 consists of training, support, and paid short-term employment, including a wage subsidy to employers, to assist unemployed racialized newcomer refugee women in gaining meaningful Canadian work experience. These models are described in more detail in the project description section (page 10) of the report.

CPRNW program participants are relatively new arrivals to Canada (they joined the pilot, on average, 25 months after arriving in Canada), who are highly educated (85% have completed postsecondary education) and bring with them work experience from outside of Canada (91% have paid work experience outside of Canada). Many have also already had work experience in Canada (46%) before joining the pilot. Thirty-five per cent were working at the time of joining the pilot.

Two-thirds of participants had no young children (between 0 and 5 years of age) at home even though 60% had children (under the age of 18) suggesting that the presence of young children may have been a barrier to accessing the pilot services, particularly during the period of COVID-19 restrictions. Economic class (principal applicant) newcomers are the main participants of two of the four service models in the pilot (models 2 and 3) while family class newcomers are the main participants of model 1. Model 4 participants are refugees as expected.

REPORT OVERVIEW

This interim report provides an analysis of the short-term changes in outcomes and the impacts of the Career Pathways for Racialized Newcomer Women pilot, both on average and for women with different characteristics and experiences. Data from 1,162 participants collected between October 2019, the beginning of pilot programming, and November 30, 2021 is used in the analysis.

In order to investigate how well the program worked and for whom, we first explore the average changes in outcomes between the baseline (pre-intervention) and 3-8 months later. However, a simple comparison of participants' outcomes after the program with the value of those same outcomes before the program does not identify the impacts of the program. For example, some program participants may achieve the same improvement in outcomes over this period of time even without the program. This is especially true program participants in the CPRNW pilot as, had they not accessed the pilot programs, they may have accessed other, in some cases similar, job search programs offered by the same service provider organization or by other organizations.

In order to measure the difference the pilot programs are making, where feasible, a randomized controlled trial was implemented. Impacts of the program for these interventions are estimated by comparing average differences in outcomes at the time of the follow-up surveys between the randomly

assigned program group, who had access to the pilot programming, and the randomly assigned comparison group, who did not have access to the pilot programming.

Due to differences in the intervention design and implementation across the pilot SPOs, their targeted populations, and local conditions, the evaluation is conducted at three inter-related levels: the intervention level, the model level, and the overall project level. The quantitative analysis is conducted at the intervention level and at the model level (where appropriate) while most of the qualitative analysis is conducted at the model level. The quantitative and qualitative findings are then consolidated to inform the overall project level findings.

Differences in results at the intervention and model levels may be due to several factors including differences in local labour market conditions, the implementation of the model, characteristics of participants including their initial distances from the labour market, services comparison group members received, and/or how well the model actually works.

OVERVIEW OF THE FINDINGS

Overall, the pilot was implemented and delivered as planned and targeted racialized newcomer women at different stages of employment readiness. During the time period when participants were taking the program, comparison group clients also spent a substantial number of hours in career development and work-related training, despite the lack of access to CPRNW programming. However, program group participants had spent more time in training and program activities, particularly just after joining the program, compared to the comparison group. The impact analysis is estimating the incremental impacts of providing racialized newcomer women with specialized services above and beyond the other services they have access to and not compared to not having received any services at all.

We find important improvements in career adaptability and employment outcomes after participants joined the pilot. However, we also see that comparison group members participated in a substantial number of hours of employment readiness training over the same period as CPRNW programming. They also show gains in career adaptability and employment outcomes over this time period. However, on average, program group participants do show gains in career adaptability measures above and beyond those of comparison group members, indicating statistically significant impacts of the program.

Our Gender Based Analysis Plus investigates the differential changes in outcomes and impacts of the pilot by considering characteristics that are likely related to how participants experience the programming, their employment readiness, and how beneficial the programming may be for them. We find that the program increased the career adaptability of participants who had more recently arrived in Canada, those who were not currently working, and those younger than 40 years of age. Moreover, there is some evidence that model 2 participants with young children at home benefited less from the program in terms of increases in career adaptability and employment outcomes suggesting they may not have been able to participate fully in the programming and in the labour market.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FINDINGS

Implementation

The evidence presented in this report demonstrates that the Career Pathways for Racialized Newcomer Women service delivery models have, largely, been implemented as planned. However, services initially planned as in-person pivoted to virtual and hybrid programming during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The models successfully delivered a range of services including group training workshops, individualized support, job matching, job placements, and job retention support.

Job placements for models 1 and 4 were difficult in part, because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Conditional on having a job placement, completion of the job placement and subsequent employment were high for model 1 participants. The percentage of model 4 participants with job placements was relatively high. However, compared to model 1, the percentage who successfully completed the placement and the percentage who remained employed after completing their placement was much lower.

Among model 2 participants, 51% to 87% completed an essential skills portfolio. The majority were referred to essential skills enhancements and most took up the training.

For model 2 and 3 interventions with a job matching component, most participants were matched with two or more jobs despite the pandemic. However, the number of job interviews from the matched jobs were low and less than 30% of participants received a job offer.

Overall, participants report high levels of satisfaction with the interventions and would recommend them to other newcomer women looking for employment.

The vast majority of participants completed most of the group training if it was deemed necessary for them by program staff.

Career adaptability

We find evidence of statistically significant improvements in measures of career adaptability (career decision-making self-efficacy, job search clarity, job search self-efficacy) in all four models. These measures have been shown to be important steps in the transition to commensurate employment.

- Increases of between 10.4 and 40.4 percentage points in the average likelihood of reporting high levels of career adaptability (career decision-making self-efficacy, job search clarity, or job search self-efficacy) depending on the SPO and the survey (for those with statistically significant changes).

There are some similar improvements over the same time period for CPRNW comparison group members, likely reflecting the effects of existing employment and settlement support services.

However, we find statistically significant impacts in measures of career adaptability for CPRNW participants; they show improvements above and beyond any changes comparison group members may have experienced over the same time period.

- Impacts of between 11.6 and 26.4 percentage points in the average likelihood of reporting high levels of career adaptability (career decision-making self-efficacy, job search clarity, or job search self-efficacy) depending on the SPO and the survey (for those with statistically significant changes).

Program participants who were, either not working, in Canada for less than one year, or younger than 40 experienced larger increases in their career adaptability and employment outcomes.

Model 2 participants who were younger than 40 when they joined the pilot, those without children under the age of five, with paid work experience in Canada, and/or not working at the time of the baseline survey have larger impacts on career adaptability outcomes.

Employment

We find evidence of statistically significant improvements in employment outcomes including the likelihood of working, wages, and hours of work for CPRNW participants.

- Increases of between 21.3 and 58.4 percentage points in the likelihood of working depending on the SPO and the survey (for those with statistically significant changes).
- Increases of between 212% and 673% in weekly earnings (\$112-\$543) depending on the SPO and the survey (for those with statistically significant changes).
- Increases of between 7 and 25 weekly hours of work depending on the SPO and the survey (for those with statistically significant changes).

There are some improvements over the same time period for CPRNW comparison group members, which reduces the likelihood of finding program impacts.

There are early signs of improved job quality for some model 2 participants.

- Average impacts of 235% in the weekly earnings for World Skills Employment Centre model 2 at the time of the first follow-up survey and average impacts of 14.3 percentage points in reporting high levels of job satisfaction for Achēv model 2 at the time of the second follow-up survey.

Model 2 participants with low essential skill scores when first joining the program and/or those with children under 5 have smaller increases in the likelihood of working, weekly earnings, and weekly hours of work. Low levels of essential skills and the presence of young children at home may be two important barriers to participants being fully able to participate in and benefit from the pilot programming.

Other outcomes

We also find evidence of statistically significant impacts on social networks and financial well-being among some model 3 participants, indicating accelerated social and economic integration among newcomers closest to the Canadian labour market.

- At the time of the second follow-up survey, average impacts for World Skills Employment Centre model 3 of 13.0 percentage points in the probability of high financial resilience and of 16.6 percentage points in the probability of a high level of network strength with people of the culture, ethnic background, or language.

NEXT STEPS

This interim report presents findings for the CPRNW pilot for participants enrolled in the first 20 months of the project. It provides an analysis of the short-term changes in outcomes and program impacts and an exploratory analysis of the effectiveness of the programs for various subgroups. These findings should be considered as preliminary as programming and data collection are ongoing (as of the writing of this report). These results will be revisited in the next report, which will include an analysis of all data from 2019–2023.