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What Do Immigrants Do When They Can't Practise Their Professions? Immigrant Professionals in the Ontario Settlement Service Sector

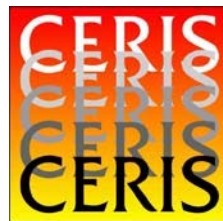
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ABSTRACT

Based on an online survey and in-depth interviews conducted from 2009 to 2010, this study looks at the reality of a particular group of foreign-born and -trained professionals in Ontario. These are the professionals who did not get to practise their respective professions after immigration, but acquired a new profession in the form of settlement work. The study identifies their pre-immigration education and work history, the reasons they left their countries of origin and sought permanent residence in Canada, the expectations they had, the choices they made about pursuing professional practice, the efforts they put towards that or some alternative goal, and their eventual professional reconstitution as settlement workers. Following the Canadian trajectory of these dual professionals offers three contributions to research into immigrant access to professions. First, their individual experiences reveal the social processes of inclusion in, and exclusion from, professional practice in Canada. Second, unlike immigrants who are de-professionalized in the post-immigration period, members of our target population have reinvented themselves as practitioners of a new profession and thus provide a more nuanced view of immigrant experience. Third, their common practice as settlement workers gives us insight into the dynamics of the emerging profession that is settlement work.

KEYWORDS

Immigrant access to professions and trades; recognition of foreign credentials; settlement workers; professionalization of settlement work

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INTRODUCTION

Existing research has paid scant attention to the choices that foreign-trained individuals make – and the strategies they use – under the given circumstances of receiving societies. Not all these individuals try to pursue professional practice in their original fields. If they try and fail to do so, what are the options available to them, and how do they choose one option over the other?

Three options await the foreign-trained when they can't practise their chosen professions: *exit*, *de-professionalization*, and *professional rebuilding*. Exit means that immigrants return to their countries of origin or move to a third country. De-professionalization may be considered an exit option, too, since it signifies departure from the professional field, but it is uniquely involuntary. It means unemployment or work that does not require any professional skills, and is unfortunately an all-too-common experience among the foreign-trained. In professional rebuilding (or re-professionalization), an immigrant professional acquires a new profession which may or may not be related to his or her original field.

Individuals choose the third option for various reasons. They may lose interest in their original fields or decide that it is not worth the expense or come to this decision after making several failed attempts to establish themselves in their professions. Some may see the “second profession” as an interim solution; others may pursue a second profession to avoid complete de-professionalization. They may even justify it as a continuation of their original practice. In any case, while it is socially bounded, professional rebuilding includes an element of “rational choice.”

Re-professionalization illustrates both micro and macro processes at work in the professions. At the micro level, immigrants are engaged in identity maintenance or reconstruction. Facing the prospect of identity loss and its possible destructive consequences, they turn to other avenues to find meaning again in their work lives. This is where the settlement service sector emerges as a familiar and credible alternative, because many of them have already been there, seeking help for their settlement and employment needs, but also engaging in community leadership and capacity-building.

Immigrant employment in the settlement service sector also reveals macro processes. The sector is still defining its professional and organizational standards. This allows a certain degree of permeability for immigrants, as well as for the Canadian-born, to access settlement work. It is no coincidence that, regardless of their previous lines of work, immigrant professionals have come to the settlement service sector “in droves” in the absence of other opportunities for meaningful employment. As the professionalization of settlement work deepens, however, we may expect a less permeable profession with, among other things, clear boundaries, entry rules, and performance measures.

Section 1 of this paper poses the research question within the context of immigrant access to professions, providing a brief overview of developments on the ground and in policy. Section 2 develops a sociological approach to immigrant access to professions, or lack thereof, by reviewing the literature on the sociology of professions and research in Canada and elsewhere.

Following a description of the research methodology in Section 3, we present the findings of the research in Section 4, using seven themes: demographic profile; pre-immigration education and work history; immigration to Canada; pursuing professional practice in Canada; shifting to settlement work; reflecting on professional journey; and implications for settlement work as a profession. Section 5 offers 13 recommendations put forward by the research participants for the economic integration of internationally trained professionals.

1. POSING THE QUESTION: IMMIGRANT ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

As a country of immigration, Canada has been experiencing a puzzling trend for some time. On one hand, since the introduction of the points system in the late 1960s, public policy has increasingly encouraged immigration by skilled individuals with higher levels of education, official language proficiency, and experience. As a result, each new generation of immigrants arrives with an average level of education higher than that of the preceding generation and that of the Canadian-born population. In 2006, for example, 51 percent of recent immigrants had a university degree compared to 28 percent of earlier cohorts and 20 percent of the Canadian-born population (Statistics Canada 2008, p. 17). On the other hand, immigrant economic performance has relatively but steadily deteriorated since the 1980s. Gone are the times when newcomers entering the Canadian labour market at a disadvantage could catch up to their native-born counterparts in earnings over time. Using aggregate data, economists have gathered evidence for the widening gap in employment, earnings, and wealth between recent immigrants and other participants in the labour market, former immigrants and the Canadian-born alike (e.g., Green and Worswick 2010; Picot 2008; Picot et al. 2007; Schellenberg and Hou 2005).

Pieces of this puzzle include: (a) the changing source country and demographic composition of Canadian immigration; (b) declining returns to foreign education and labour market experience; (c) generally deteriorating outcomes for new entrants to the domestic labour market; and (d) competition from Canadian-born new entrants with increasing levels of education (Green and Worswick 2010; Picot 2008; Schellenberg and Hou 2005).¹ Since the last two pieces are not immigrant-specific, we will explore the first two. The removal of racial preferences from Canadian immigration policy in the late 1960s marked a momentous shift from the European-centred “old immigration” to the more diverse “new immigration.” Today, four in every five permanent residents come from non-traditional source regions, namely, Africa and the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific region, and South and Central America (CIC 2010, p. 20). A similar proportion belongs to racial minority groups. In turn, this shift is at least partly responsible for what has become the main economic problematic of contemporary Canadian immigration, that is, the undervaluation and underutilization of foreign-earned credentials, skills, and experience (Alboim et al. 2005; Reitz 2005; Reitz and Banerjee 2007).²

¹ According to Green and Worswick (2010, pp. 78-79), 74 percent of the decline in immigrant entry earnings between the early 1980s and early 2000s can be accounted for by a combination of general new entrant effects, shifts in the source country composition, and declines in returns to foreign experience.

² Some (e.g., Collacott 2003; Grubel 2005) have argued that the poor economic performance of recent immigrants is a sign of their mismatch with the requirements of the Canadian labour market and thus of the dysfunctionality of Canadian immigration policy.

The undervaluation and underutilization of immigrant “human capital” have their costs to Canadian society as well as to immigrants and countries sending them. Attempts made at the turn of the century to quantify the aggregate economic cost of the problem – and the potential benefit from solving it – came up with striking figures (e.g., Bloom and Grant 2001; Reitz 2001; Watt and Bloom 2001). Yet it is the immigrants themselves who bear the brunt of the cost, economic and otherwise, together with their families. This experience is especially heightened in the case of immigrants who had invested heavily in a profession before coming to Canada.

Public awareness of, and policy response to, the problem began as early as the 1980s. As real life stories of immigrants with PhDs and MDs driving taxis and delivering pizzas made their way into the print and electronic media, “non-recognition of foreign credentials” took centre stage in immigration policy debate (Brouwer 1999; Chakkalakal and Janzen 2001; McDade 1988; Owen and Lowe 2008; Pluri Vox Media Corporation 2004; PROMPT 2004a, 2004b). Aside from anecdotal data, research provided a solid evidentiary base for this debate. Among those employed in 2006, for example, only 24 percent of foreign-educated immigrants (compared to 62 percent of the Canadian-born) were working in the regulated professions for which they were trained (Zietsma 2010).

Since the regulation of professions (and trades³) is under provincial jurisdiction, the provinces have been the main theatre of policy activity concerning immigrant access to this segment of the labour market. As a province receiving more than 50 percent of newcomers to Canada until recently (CIC 2010, pp. 30-31), Ontario has a major stake in the issue. The province formed a Task Force on Access to Professions and Trades in 1988. Making an inventory of barriers faced by the foreign-trained in accessing regulated professions and trades, the task force proposed a series of solutions (Cumming et al. 1989). Until the turn of the century, however, the provincial government did little to act on the recommendations of the task force, except for establishing an Access to Professions and Trades Unit in 1995 under the then-Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation. In 2004, the government commissioned a review of the appeal processes in Ontario’s regulated professions. The review (Thomson 2005), combined with the political mobilization of the immigrant advocacy and service sectors, paved the way for the *Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006*, the first legislation in Canada to bring some measure of accountability for regulatory bodies in their registration practices (Statutes of Ontario 2006, Chapter 31; see also Türegün 2008 for a description and analysis). Manitoba and Nova Scotia followed suit by passing similar legislation (Statutes of Manitoba 2007, Chapter 21; Statutes of Nova Scotia 2008, Chapter 38).

Although constitutionally limited in regulating occupations, the federal government joined the fray with, among other things, a Foreign Credential Recognition Program and a Foreign Credentials Referral Office. Recently, there are even signs of federal-provincial collaboration, a necessary condition of national progress in this area. In 2009, for example, the Forum of Labour Market Ministers from the federal, provincial, and territorial governments drafted a “pan-

³ Although professions and trades are generally mentioned together in discussions of immigrant access to regulated occupations, professions and professionals have received the bulk of the attention. One can think of three reasons for this: (a) the relative weight of professionals and trades people among the immigrant population; (b) higher levels of articulation and organization among professionals; and (c) a “middle class” bias towards professionals among research, advocacy, and policy communities.

Canadian” framework for the assessment and recognition of foreign-earned qualifications (FLMM 2009).

These efforts may have resulted in heightened public awareness of immigrants’ lack of access to regulated occupations and even in improved conditions for “foreign credential recognition” as the first step towards access. However, it remains to be seen whether these efforts will actually increase immigrant access. In the meantime, foreign-trained professionals – immigrants and refugees alike – continue to cope with the messy reality of the Canadian labour market.

This study looks at the reality of a particular group of foreign-born and -trained professionals in Ontario. These are the professionals who did not get to practise their respective professions after immigration, but acquired a new profession in the form of settlement work. The study identifies their pre-immigration education and work history, the reasons they left their countries of origin and sought permanent residence in Canada, the expectations they had, the choices they made about pursuing professional practice, the efforts they put towards that or some alternative goal, and their eventual professional reconstitution as settlement workers.

The next section describes a sociological approach to immigrant access to professions (or lack thereof). This framework will set the stage for the presentation of research design and findings in the sections to follow.

2. A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH

The beginnings of a sociological theory of professions can be traced to the work of Max Weber in the early 20th century. His concept of social closure is especially relevant to the access-to-professions question (Weber 1946, pp. 241-242; 1968, p. 342). As refined by “neo-Weberians” later in the century, the concept refers to a dual process of exclusion from, and inclusion in, group membership based on any (collective and/or individual) attribute, including race, language, religion, geographic or social origin, property status, and education (Collins 1990; Larson 1977; Macdonald 1995; Murphy 1988; Parkin 1979; Witz 1992). With exclusionary closure, social collectivities “seek to maximize rewards by restricting access to resources and opportunities to a limited circle of eligibles” (Parkin 1979, p. 44). As ineligibles, outsiders use inclusionary or usurpatory closure to “bite into” the privileges of those who are inside such collectivities.

Professions (occupations in general) are “ideal-typical” collectivities that rely on social closure for external demarcation and internal cohesion.⁴ The key closure mechanism they use is the certification of formally acquired expertise, including degrees, credentials, qualifications, and skills (Freidson 1994, pp. 159-163; Larson 1990). What is often called “credentialism” can thus be seen as a form of exclusionary closure “designed to control and monitor entry to key positions in the division of labour” (Parkin 1979, p. 48; see also Murphy 1988, chapter 8). Some even go so far as to suggest that professional credentials are more about the monopolization of

⁴ Gerald Larkin (1983, p. 15) calls external demarcation “occupational imperialism,” which “refers to attempts by a number of occupations to mould the division of labour to their own advantage ... to extend normative and legal boundaries as far as possible in their own interests.”

opportunities than about the requirements of actual work in Western “sinecure society” (e.g., Collins 1979, chapters 3 and 6).

Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of distinction complements Weber’s concept of social closure. According to Bourdieu (1984), what is often called human capital can be expressed as cultural capital in its institutionalized and embodied forms. Institutionalized cultural capital refers to formally recognized qualifications such as educational credentials. In connection with professional and other social group membership, embodied cultural capital or habitus can be defined as “a whole set of subsidiary characteristics which may function, in the form of tacit requirements, as real principles of selection or exclusion without ever being formally stated” (Bourdieu 1984, p. 102). The difference between institutionalized cultural capital and embodied cultural capital can be paraphrased, for example, as the difference between “person-job fit” and “person-organization fit,” respectively (Esses et al. 2006, pp. 120-125).

Shades of this theorization can be seen in studies of immigrant access to professions in Canada and elsewhere. Immigrant status itself is grounds for exclusion from, and discrimination in, professional practice. Studies substantiating this conclusion abound (Aycan and Berry 1996; Bambrah 2005; Colic-Peisker 2008; Fernandez 2007; Fernando and Prasad 1986; Ngo and Este 2006; Parlin 1976). Of particular relevance are studies by Harald Bauder and Erik Girard (Bauder 2003, 2005; Girard and Bauder 2007a, 2007b) using Bourdieu’s concepts of institutionalized cultural capital and habitus. For example, applying the concepts to the registration practices of Professional Engineers Ontario (a self-regulatory professional body) in relation to applications from foreign-trained engineers, they found that, for foreign-trained immigrants, the “unfamiliar habitus” of the engineering profession in Canada is a greater obstacle to professional access than recognition of credentials problems. In this context, the requirement of Canadian engineering work experience for one year serves the purpose of inculcating the Canadian habitus of the profession among foreign-trained engineers. “Until candidates internalize the habitus of the engineering profession in the form of Canada-specific professional practices and ‘ethics,’ they will not be licensed as a professional engineer regardless of how well they understand and can apply the scientific principles of engineering” (Girard and Bauder 2007a, p. 47). Thus, access to a profession is not just a matter of meeting formal qualifications but also one of possessing and fitting into the “culture” or habitus of the profession, including “soft skills.”

However, it is the combination of immigrant status with other attributes that is critical to the closure of professions to the foreign-trained. Given that the post-1980s deterioration in immigrant economic performance coincided with the progressive increase in the proportion of immigrants who are members of “visible minorities,” many studies have identified race and/or ethnicity as the key trait around which professional closure or distinction is organized. In a piece representing this view, Lorne Foster (2006) argues that behind the discounting or devaluation of foreign-earned credentials, skills, and experience is a systemic racism targeting minorities. Empirically grounded studies support this view by revealing the subtleties with which racial discrimination in the labour market is riddled. Of particular note is the detection of “aversive racism” in situations in which individuals with prejudice against racial minority immigrants have recourse to non-prejudicial justifications – such as lack of qualifications meeting Canadian standards and lack of Canadian work experience – for their discriminatory actions (Esses and

Dietz 2006; Esses et al. 2006; Dietz et al. 2009; see also Basran and Zong 1998). In other words, these justifications are mechanisms of “covering” discrimination against the foreign-trained who belong to a racial minority group. For women, immigrant or racial minority status makes it even harder to access professions and other occupations (Sorensen 1995).

One area to which existing research has paid scant attention are the choices that foreign-trained individuals make – and the strategies they use – under the given circumstances of receiving societies. Not all of them try to pursue professional practice in their original fields. If they try and fail to do so, what are the options available to them and how do they choose one option over the other?

Three options await the foreign-trained when they do not get to practise their destined professions: *exit*, *de-professionalization*, and *professional rebuilding*. Following Albert Hirschman (1970), who developed the famous “exit-voice” dichotomy in understanding individual or group responses to economic and political crises, we define the exit option as one of withdrawal from the territory of contestation. If they are not refugees, immigrants may return to their countries of origin or move to a third country for professional reasons. Especially in its move-to-a third-country variety, this option has been used by many health professionals in Canada. De-professionalization may be considered an exit option, too, since it signifies departure from the professional field.⁵ However, we will classify it as a separate option, because it is uniquely involuntary. Referring to a process defined by unemployment or work that does not require any professional skills set, de-professionalization is unfortunately an all-too-common experience among the foreign-trained.

The third option, professional rebuilding or re-professionalization, is the “next best thing” to practice in the primary profession. In this scenario, an immigrant professional acquires a new profession that may or may not be related to his or her original field. Many “bridging programs” across Canada are actually designed with a view to preparing their participants for employment on the professional “periphery.” Internationally, as early as the 1960s, the United States experimented with a program to retrain as social work assistants a group of Soviet bloc refugees with different professional backgrounds (Wojciechowski 1974). Likewise, following a state-sponsored mass immigration to Israel of Soviet-trained physicians (among other professionals) in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Israeli government helped some of them shift to other health professions, while implementing a graduated program to license the rest as general practitioners (Remennick and Shakhar 2003; Shuval 1998 and 2000; Shuval and Bernstein 1997).

These examples should not, however, be taken to conclude that the “third option” is limited to government or public policy initiatives. Individuals choose this option for various reasons. They may lose interest in their original fields and take another professional route. Or, after calculating the cost of getting back to their fields, they will decide that it is not worth the expense and opt for another profession that is less costly to pursue. Or they may reach this conclusion after making several failed attempts to find work in their professions. It is conceivable that some people practise a “second profession” as an interim solution or a springboard back to the original one.

⁵ It is interesting to note that, as early as 1988, the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants used the term “de-professionalization of immigrants” in a brief to the Task Force on Access to Professions and Trades in Ontario (OCASI 1988, p. 23).

Others may use it as a strategy to avoid complete de-professionalization. Some may even justify it as a continuation of their original practice. In any case, while it is socially bounded, professional rebuilding includes an element of “rational choice” as defined by theorists such as James Coleman (1990). Our study shows that all these motives can be found in the collective repertoire of internationally trained professionals.

Following the Canadian trajectory of these dual professionals offers three contributions to research into immigrant access to professions. First, their individual experiences reveal the social processes of inclusion in, and exclusion from, professional practice. Second, unlike immigrants who are de-professionalized in the post-immigration period, members of our target population have reinvented themselves as practitioners of a new profession and thus provide a more nuanced view of immigrant experience. Third, their common practice as settlement workers gives us insight into the dynamics of the emerging profession that is settlement work. In all three aspects, our study can be seen as a special, immigrant-centred exercise in the sociology of professions.

The employment of immigrants with various occupational backgrounds in the settlement service sector illustrates both micro and macro processes at work in the professions. At the micro level, in addition to making a decision to pursue settlement work as a second profession, these immigrants are also engaged in identity maintenance or reconstruction. For them, one of the building blocks of self is identifying with a profession and a professional community (cf. Shuval 1997, pp. 12-13). That identification has come to define who they are and where they fit in relation to others. However, the immigration process disrupts this identity. Facing the prospect of identity loss and its possible destructive consequences, they turn to other avenues to find meaning again in their work lives. This is where the settlement service sector emerges as a familiar and credible alternative, because many of them have already been there, seeking help for their settlement and employment needs, but also engaging in community leadership and capacity-building.

Immigrant employment in the settlement service sector also reveals macro processes such as the convergence of individual trajectories and the professionalization of a line of work. By convergence of individual trajectories, we mean the process whereby people of vastly different professional backgrounds end up in the same but a less prestigious profession. This recalls the issue of social closure on account of immigrant status, race, and sex, but also calls for a focus on public policy choices in relation to immigration and settlement. As an emerging sector, the immigrant- and refugee-serving sector is still defining its professional and organizational standards at the provincial level, not to mention the national level. This allows a certain degree of permeability for immigrants, as well as for the Canadian-born, to access settlement work. Immigrants come to the sector “in droves” in the absence of other opportunities for meaningful employment. As the professionalization of settlement work deepens, however, we may expect a less permeable profession with, among other things, clear boundaries, entry rules, and performance measures.

Professionalization, which corresponds to what Magali Larson (1977) calls the “professional project” (see also Macdonald 1995, pp. 8-12; Witz 1992, pp. 64, 138), is an intriguing process to observe. The settlement service sector provides a social laboratory for such observation.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is based on an online survey and in-depth interviews conducted from 2009 to 2010. The target population for the online survey were professionals working in the Ontario immigrant- and refugee-serving sector who had been trained abroad in areas other than settlement work. A call for participation in the survey was e-mailed in August 2009 to the 212 member agencies of the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI 2009) for circulation among their staff. An e-mail reminder was sent one month later. By way of a second reminder in October, the call was also sent to an anonymous list of employees drawn from the websites of these agencies. Throughout the recruitment process, the call was available online on the *Settlement.Org at Work* and *Integration-Net for the settlement community* websites.

Preceded by a letter of consent, the survey questionnaire was carried by a Canadian-based server. It consisted of closed- and open-ended questions concerning demographic information; pre-immigration education and work history; immigration to Canada; the pursuit of professional practice in Canada; the shift to settlement work; and reflections on the professional trajectory.⁶ A total of 228 responses were received to the questionnaire between August 11 and November 11, 2009. Seventy-three of these were excluded from the analysis for various reasons: 10 were repeat entries; 37 had insufficient (only demographic) information; 3 came from the Canadian-born and -trained; 20 came from the foreign-trained, but had no information on their Canadian experience; and 3 were by foreign-trained individuals who had no settlement work experience in Canada. The instability of the evolving Internet medium and the particular focus of the research account for the relatively high rate of exclusion. As a result, only 155 responses were included in the analysis.

A word of caution is needed here. Our sample is not random and thus has no claim to be representative. We do not know the size and composition of the foreign-born population in Ontario's settlement service workforce, which would be necessary to attempt a random sampling. Based on anecdotal evidence, we can only suggest that the foreign-born settlement service workforce is a much larger population than the respondents to this survey. As will become evident in the following section, however, our respondents represent a wide range of professions and have identified a wide range of issues concerning immigrant access to professions and employment in the settlement service sector.

From October 2009 to March 2010, we also had face-to-face, in-depth interviews with 19 respondents to the online questionnaire who had expressed interest in an interview and who gave their contact information. The interviewees were selected in consideration of representation from both sexes, regions of origin, primary professions, and settlement work positions. Of the 19 interviewees, five are men and 14 are women (a roughly proportional distribution, given the female-dominated workforce of the sector). Eight are from Africa and the Middle East, five from Asia and Pacific, four from South and Central America, and two from Europe. Professional categories represented by the group include science (4), engineering (1), medicine (1), social science (2), law (1), business administration and management (3), teaching (5), and community

⁶ The questionnaire is available online at: http://integration-net.ca:81/infocentre/2011/002_2.pdf.

development and social work (2).⁷ The group is equally diverse in terms of settlement work titles, including (frontline) settlement worker/counsellor (6), information counsellor (3), community/outreach worker (1), language instructor (1), program coordinator (4), and program manager (4). Based on the survey questionnaire, the semi-structured interview schedule allowed the interviewer to probe, and the interviewees to elaborate on, their professional journeys from the country of origin to Canada and Ontario. The interviews were conducted by the author in four locations: Alliston, Ottawa, Toronto, and Windsor.

Within the same time and space limits, the author also interviewed six settlement agency representatives (two men and four women), who are in a position to make hiring decisions (four executive directors, one program manager, and one team leader). All six are foreign-born (one in the Middle East, two in Asia, two in South and Central America, and one in Europe) and all but one are foreign-trained in areas such as social science (3, including the Canadian-trained interviewee), law (1), teaching (1), and social work (1). The semi-structured interview schedule for this group probed their experiences in settlement work, reasons for hiring immigrant professionals, explanations of and opinions on immigrant employment in the sector, and suggestions for improving access to professions.

While working with a relatively small sample, we were able to document via the survey and the interviews a measure of human experience sufficient to address the main theoretical and practical issues of concern. What follows is a presentation of that experience.

⁷ Initially, we were not planning to include social workers in the analysis on the grounds that settlement work is indistinguishable from social work. On second thought, however, we included them in the analysis to have their perspectives on the professionalization of settlement work.

4. FINDINGS

A. Demographic Profile

Like other social services, immigrant and refugee settlement services are a female-dominated sector. Women constituted four-fifths (79 percent) – and men only one-fifth (21 percent) – of the 155 respondents to the survey. This is consistent with earlier studies of the settlement service workforce. For example, women constituted an even higher proportion (86 percent) of the respondents to a 2006 staff survey of Toronto’s immigrant- and refugee-serving sector (CSPC-T and FSA 2006, p. 8). Our respondents are also a relatively young group, with 58 percent being under 45; another 32 percent are in the 45–54 age bracket.

Four-fifths of the sample come from non-traditional source regions (Africa and the Middle East, Asia and Pacific, and South and Central America) – a ratio which is coincidentally similar to that of Canada’s permanent resident intake in recent years from these regions (see Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Region of Birth

<i>Region of Birth</i>	<i>Number (%)</i>
Africa and Middle East	33 (21.29)
Asia and Pacific	59 (38.06)
South and Central America	32 (20.65)
United States	1 (00.65)
Europe and United Kingdom	28 (18.06)
Did Not Answer	2 (01.29)
Total	155 (100.00)

We also asked respondents what ethnic group or groups they belong to. As shown in Table 2, three-quarters belong to racial minority groups, with another 6 percent declining to answer the question. Again, this ratio parallels recent trends in Canadian immigration.

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents by Ethnic Status

<i>Ethnic Status</i>	<i>Number (%)</i>
Chinese	16 (10.32)
South Asian	37 (23.87)
Black	18 (11.61)
Arab/West Asian	14 (09.03)
Filipino	4 (02.58)
Southeast Asian	2 (01.29)
Latin American	24 (15.48)
White	26 (16.77)
Other	4 (02.58)
Did Not Answer	10 (06.45)
Total	155 (100.00)

The sample also represents all major religious groups, but does not necessarily do so proportionally. It is noteworthy that more than 10 percent reported no religious or faith-based affiliation.

B. Pre-Immigration Education and Work History

Table 3 shows the high levels of education among immigrants and also their lack of access to occupations which they are trained for and generally have experience in. Eighty-eight percent of the respondents have a bachelor's or higher degree (43 percent bachelor's; 35 percent master's; and 10 percent doctorate, including degrees in medicine, dentistry, and veterinary medicine).

Table 3. Highest Level of Education Reached

<i>Level of Education</i>	<i>Number (%)</i>
Diploma/Certificate	18 (11.61)
Bachelor's	67 (43.23)
Master's	55 (35.48)
Doctorate	15 (09.68)
Total	155 (100.00)

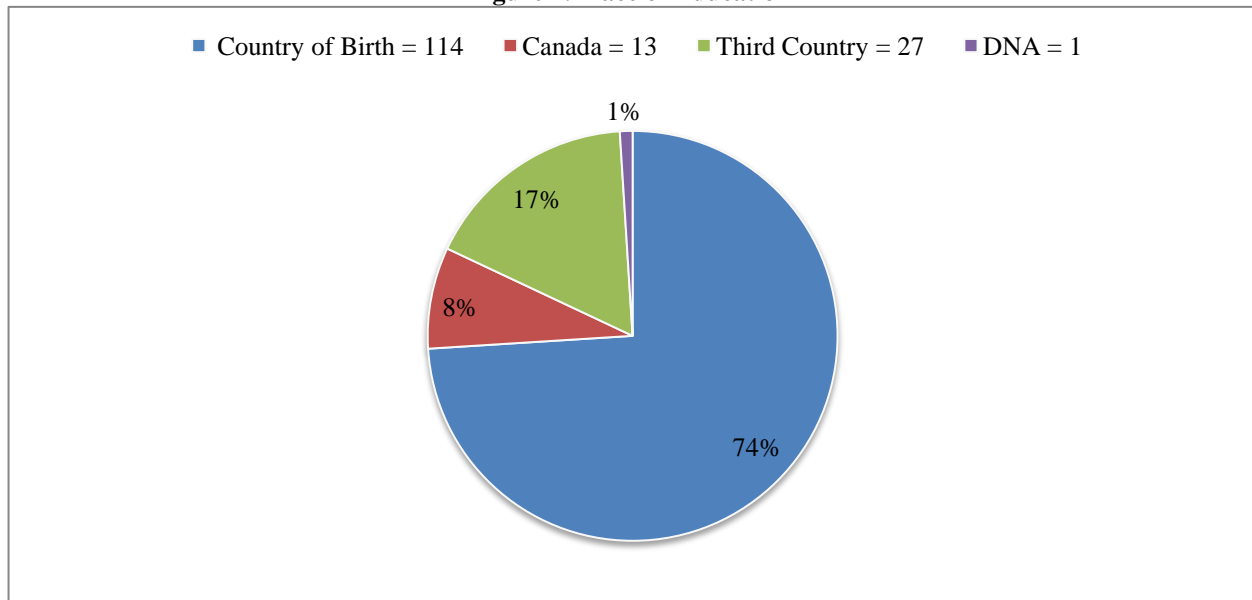
The respondents show a great variation in field of education. The top 10 fields of education, which account for 77 percent (119) of all (155) responses, are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Top 10 Fields of Education

<i>Field of Education</i>	<i>Number (%)</i>
Business Administration and Management	21 (13.55)
Education	18 (11.61)
Arts, Language, and Literature	17 (10.97)
Science	14 (09.03)
Law	11 (07.10)
Engineering	9 (05.81)
Social Science	8 (05.16)
Social Work	8 (05.16)
Journalism and Communication	7 (04.52)
Medicine, Dentistry, and Veterinary Medicine	6 (03.87)

As Figure 1 shows, three-quarters (74 percent) of the respondents earned their highest educational degrees in the country of origin and a further 17 percent in a third country,⁸ while 8 percent had obtained their highest degrees in Canada, but not before acquiring a profession in the country of origin.

⁸ Of that 17 percent, 40 percent (11 respondents) had their highest degrees in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Figure 1. Place of Education

Given the age composition of the sample, only 10 percent had earned their highest educational degrees before 1980 and a great majority (71 percent), in the 20-year span from 1985 to 2004.

Remarkably, four-fifths (79 percent) of the respondents reported having work experience in their fields of education before they had come to Canada. We asked these respondents about the capacity in which they had worked. The responses as expressed in terms of job titles vary widely, but all indicate core professional responsibilities. In cases where multiple responses are given, the most recently held job title is taken as the response. The top 10 titles, which account for 75 percent (91) of all (122) responses, are presented in Table 5. There is a noticeable skewness in the distribution towards teaching and managerial/administrative positions.

Table 5. Top 10 Pre-Immigration Job Titles in Field of Education*

<i>Job Title</i>	<i>Number (%)</i>
School Teacher	16 (13.11)
Manager	14 (11.48)
University Professor	8 (06.56)
Lawyer	6 (04.92)
Director	6 (04.92)
Coordinator	6 (04.92)
Engineer	5 (04.10)
ESL Teacher	5 (04.10)
HR Officer	5 (04.10)
Business Owner	4 (03.28)
Economist/Financial Analyst	4 (03.28)
Other Health Professional	4 (03.28)
Researcher	4 (03.28)
Rural Development Officer	4 (03.28)

* Since the 10th frequency (4) defines five job titles, the table includes 14 titles.

Those who practised their professions before coming to Canada did so for an extended period of time. Only 27 percent had professional employment in the pre-immigration period for five years or shorter. A majority (55 percent) worked between six and 15 years.

C. Immigration to Canada

When you implement an immigration policy and decide to bring trained people into the country, based on a point system, the next rational question which comes to my mind is, what am I going to do with all these people?

As can be inferred from the demographic profile of the sample, a great majority (86 percent) of the respondents are relatively recent immigrants arriving in Canada since 1995. An even greater proportion (92 percent) arrived directly in Ontario.

Concerning (im)migration category on arrival, 45 percent reported coming under the economic class; 26 percent, under the family class; 15 percent, as protected persons; and 11 percent, under other categories. Table 6 gives the full picture.

Table 6. (Im)migration Category on Arrival

<i>(Im)migration Category</i>	<i>Number (%)</i>
Economic Class	70 (45.16)
Family Class	41 (26.45)
Protected Person	24 (15.48)
Temporary Worker	2 (01.29)
Visitor	7 (04.52)
Student	8 (05.16)
Did Not Answer	3 (01.94)
Total	155 (100.00)

For those in a category other than economic and family classes or who did not answer the question on (im)migration category (44 respondents in all), we also asked if they had made a refugee claim within Canada. The group is split almost down the middle: 22 claimed refugee status, 21 did not, and one declined to answer.⁹

Sixty-four percent of the respondents have Canadian citizenship. We can infer that most of the remaining 36 percent were permanent residents at the time of the survey.

D. Pursuing Professional Practice in Canada

You go to a market and buy the best fruit; bring it home and put it in the fridge till it spoils.

In the context of the core interests of the study, we asked the respondents if they actually came to Canada with the expectation that they would practise the professions for which they are qualified. *Seventy percent had the expectation and 30 percent did not.*

⁹ At the time of the survey, 17 of the 22 refugee claimants were already permanent residents, four remained refugee claimants, and one did not mention status.

We cross-tabulated the presence and absence of expectation of professional practice in Canada by the variables presented in the previous sections. The results show that expectations vary significantly by age group, region of birth, level and place of education, pre-immigration employment in the field of education, and (im)migration category.¹⁰

While the expectation was higher than the average among the 35–44, 45–54, and 55–64 age groups (80 percent, 72 percent, and 80 percent, respectively), it was well below the average among the 25–34 age group (54 percent). In turn, this may be related to the pre-immigration employment status and the timing of immigration among the latter group. Less than half (47 percent) of those born in South and Central America and just under 66 percent of those born in Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States had the expectation, compared with 82 percent for the African- and Middle Eastern-born, and 78 percent for the Asian- and Pacific-born. The particularly low expectation rate among the South and Central American-born is intriguing, but may have to do with the pre-immigration field of employment.

As expected, the higher the level of education, the higher the level of expectation (50 percent for holders of diploma/certificate, 66 percent for bachelor's, 78 percent for master's, and 87 percent for doctorate). The expectation also varies with the place of education, with those who earned their highest degrees in the country of origin having an expectation rate of 69 percent (just about the average), those in a third country 85 percent, and those in Canada a mere 46 percent. It is highly likely that the high rate of expectation among those educated in a third country is a result of their employment status prior to immigration to Canada and that the low rate of expectation among the Canadian-educated has something to do with their (im)migration status and reasons for coming to Canada (e.g., further education). The importance of pre-immigration employment in the field of education is evident in the fact that 79 percent of those who had it (as compared with only 39 percent of those who did not have it) expected professional practice in Canada. Among the different classes of (im)migrants, protected persons had the highest rate of expectation (79 percent), economic and family class immigrants above average rates (76 percent and 71 percent, respectively), and others (temporary workers, visitors, and students) the lowest rate (41 percent). While the low rate among temporary workers, visitors, and students makes sense, given their original reasons for coming to Canada, the high rate among protected persons is indeed intriguing.

When asked what had led them to expect professional practice in Canada, the respondents answered in the way that reveals the contradictions of Canadian immigration policy and practices. As Table 7 shows, 44 percent mentioned their educational and professional assets, 12 percent linguistic assets, and 8 percent personal characteristics such as diligence and dedication to the profession. Thus, 64 percent emphasized individual, asset-based traits. Twenty-one percent were encouraged by systemic or situational factors, that is, the points system (6 percent), Canadian equivalency of education and degree (8 percent), and shortage of professionals in the field (7 percent). Nearly one-quarter (23 percent) of the respondents formed their expectations based on information provided by what we categorize as information agents, including Canadian officials in overseas visa offices, immigration consultants, and print and electronic media in

¹⁰ These and all other cross-tabulations with significant results can be found online at: http://integration-net.ca:81/infocentre/2011/002_3.pdf.

countries of origin. For 14 percent, Canada's reputation as a land of opportunities was the source of optimism about professional prospects.

Table 7. Reasons for Expectation of Professional Practice in Canada

<i>Reason</i>	<i>Number (%)*</i>
Educational/professional assets	47 (44.34)
Linguistic assets	13 (12.26)
Personal characteristics	8 (07.55)
Points system	6 (05.66)
Canadian equivalency of education and degree	9 (08.49)
Shortage of professionals in the field	7 (06.60)
Information agents	24 (22.64)
Canada's reputation	15 (14.15)
Other	15 (14.15)

* Since the respondents were allowed to give multiple reasons, the total number of responses (144) exceeds the number of respondents (106). Three of the 109 eligible respondents did not answer.

It may be one thing to expect professional practice and quite another to actually do something about it. *However, when asked if they had actively tried to get back into professional practice once in Canada, the respondents answered in the positive at a level slightly higher (72 percent) than that of expectation.*

The results of cross-tabulation show that the presence or absence of an active search for professional practice in Canada varies significantly by region of birth, place of education, pre-immigration employment in the field of education, and expectation of professional practice in Canada. Only 56 percent of the South and Central American-born and 69 percent of those born in Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States actively tried, compared with 88 percent for the African- and Middle Eastern-born, and 73 percent for the Asian- and Pacific-born. Those who had been educated in a third country were involved in an active search at a higher level (89 percent) than that of the Canadian-educated (69 percent) and of those educated in the country of origin (68 percent). Eighty percent of those who had pre-immigration employment in the field of education (as compared with only 42 percent of those who did not have it) searched for professional practice in Canada. More emphatically, 89 percent of those who expected professional practice (as compared with only 30 percent of those who did not expect it) searched for it.

Table 8. Reasons for Not Actively Searching for Professional Practice in Canada

<i>Reason</i>	<i>Number (%)*</i>
Loss or change of interest	9 (21.43)
Pursuance of further education	4 (09.52)
Lack of English and accent in English	7 (16.67)
Lack of information, network, and other support	4 (09.52)
Personal or family need to survive	3 (07.14)
Lack of professional experience	5 (11.90)
Difference in professional system	4 (09.52)
Registration/employment difficulties	17 (40.48)
Discrimination and other barriers	7 (16.67)

* Since the respondents were allowed to give multiple reasons, the total number of responses (60) exceeds the number of respondents (42). Two of the 44 eligible respondents did not answer.

Before probing types of active search, we asked those who were not involved in active search why not. Table 8 lists the reasons in the micro to macro direction (from top to bottom). More than half of the responses (32 of 60) concern individual, asset-related reasons (first six rows) and the rest, systemic and situational reasons (last three rows). The latter group can be considered the responses of those who were discouraged by factors external to them.

The types of active search are shown in Table 9. Most respondents tried searching for a job (96 percent), seeking help from institutions and individuals (92 percent), taking job search workshops (71 percent), volunteering (65 percent), and taking (college, university, or other) courses to upgrade skills (56 percent).

Table 9. Types of Active Search for Professional Practice in Canada

<i>Type</i>	<i>Number (%)*</i>
Seeking help from institutions and individuals	102 (91.89)
Taking profession-specific language training courses	33 (29.73)
Taking courses to upgrade professional skills	62 (55.86)
Applying for registration to the regulatory body	47 (42.34)
Volunteering in an activity related to the profession	72 (64.86)
Taking job search workshops	79 (71.17)
Searching for a job related to the profession	106 (95.50)

* Since the respondents were allowed to give multiple reasons, the total number of responses (501) exceeds the number of eligible respondents (111).

Those who sought help from institutions and individuals were given a number of choices. As shown in Table 10, the majority of the respondents sought help from settlement service agencies (70 percent), individuals practising (or trying to practise) their profession (59 percent), and employers in the profession (58 percent).

Table 10. Seeking Help from Institutions and Individuals

<i>Institution or Individuals</i>	<i>Number (%)*</i>
Government agency	45 (44.12)
Professional regulatory body	49 (48.04)
Settlement service agency	71 (69.61)
Legal or professional advocacy organization	12 (11.76)
Individuals practising, or trying to practise, the profession	60 (58.82)
Employers in the profession	59 (57.84)
Family and friends	50 (49.02)
Other (educational institution, Internet, job placement agency)	9 (08.82)

* Since the respondents were allowed to give multiple reasons, the total number of responses (355) exceeds the number of eligible respondents (102).

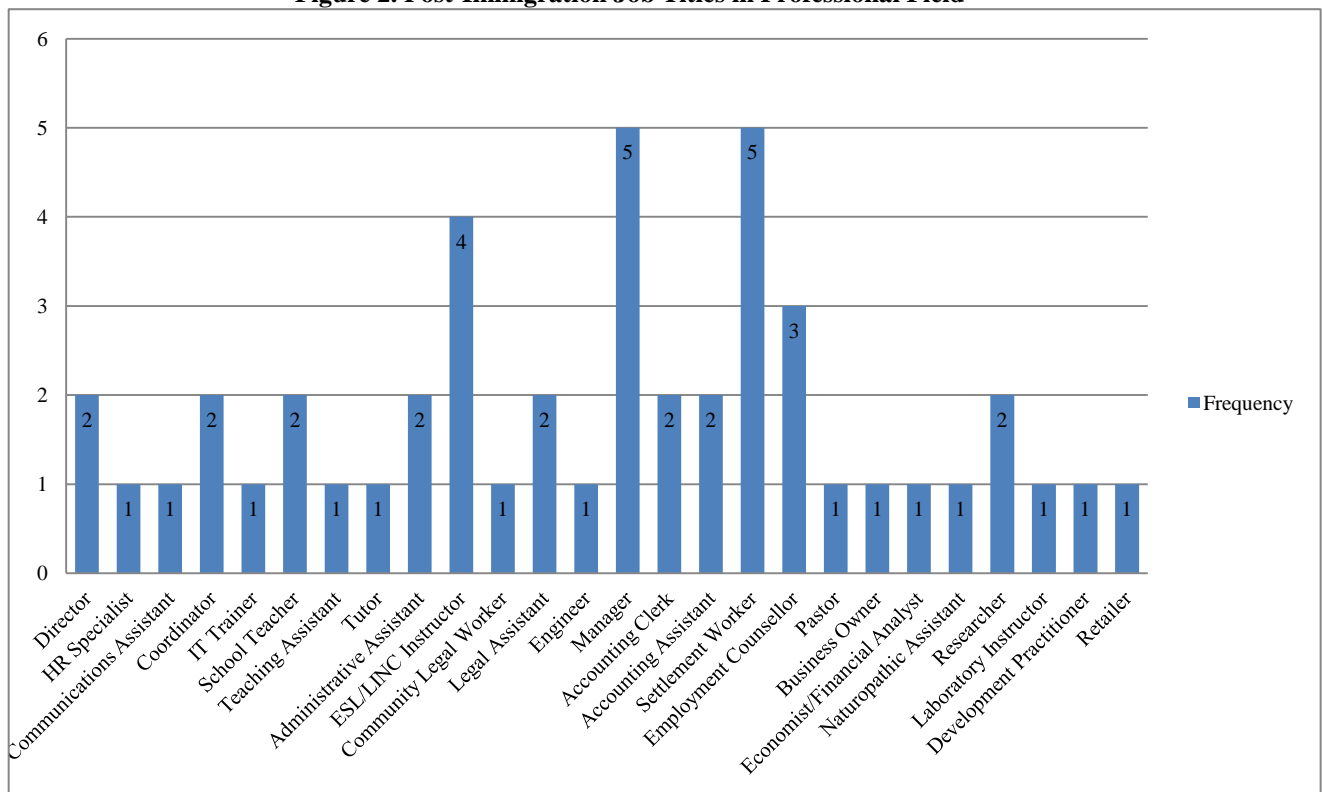
The fact that a sizable proportion (42 percent) of the respondents who were involved in some type of active search for professional practice in Canada actually applied for registration to a regulatory body led us to cross-tabulate this type of behaviour with other variables. Because of the small sample size, we were able to determine statistically significant relationships with only a few variables, namely, pre-immigration employment in the field of education, refugee claimant status, and taking courses to upgrade professional skills. Forty-five percent of those who had pre-immigration employment experience in their fields applied for registration, whereas only 21

percent of those who did not have that experience did so. Interestingly, among the respondents who arrived under non-economic and non-family classes, refugee claimants had a much higher rate of registration application than did the rest of the group (other protected persons, temporary workers, visitors, and students): 59 percent versus 14 percent. As well, 52 percent of those who took courses to upgrade professional skills (compared with 31 percent of those who did not take them) applied for registration.

Nearly half (23) of the 47 respondents applying for registration to a professional regulatory body reported that they were actually successful in their applications.

Forty-seven (or 44 percent) of the 106 respondents searching for a job related to their professions were successful. The result of job search varies significantly by pre-immigration employment in the chosen profession and taking job search workshops. Forty-eight percent of the job seekers who had pre-immigration employment in the chosen profession found a related job, whereas only 15 percent of those who did not have it reported success. Interestingly, only 38 percent of job search workshop participants, compared with 60 percent for non-participants, had success in job search.

Figure 2. Post-Immigration Job Titles in Professional Field



As reported in Figure 2, when asked about their post-immigration job titles in the professional field, one quarter (12) of the 47 respondents mentioned titles directly related to settlement work: ESL/LINC instructor (4), settlement worker (5), and employment counsellor (3). As will be discussed in greater detail later, these respondents form part of a larger group who see in

settlement work a connection to their primary professions because of their education and work in the pre-immigration period.

A majority (27) of those 47 respondents worked in their post-immigration professional jobs for three years or less with the tenure of the rest spreading from four to 18 years.

It is no coincidence that, when asked why they left their post-immigration jobs in the professional field, a large number (19) responded in the negative to say that they still keep their jobs. This is yet another indication of a group who relate settlement work to the line of work they had prior to immigration. Table 11 also shows that transition to settlement or other work is the reason cited most frequently (seven times) for leaving a post-immigration job in the original professional field.

Table 11. Reasons for Leaving Jobs in Professional Field

<i>Reason</i>	<i>Number (%)</i>
Continuing	19 (40.43)
Transition to settlement or other work	7 (14.89)
Further education	1 (02.13)
Resignation or retirement	2 (04.26)
Business downsizing or closure	2 (04.26)
End of contract	5 (10.64)
Volunteer or co-op position	2 (04.26)
Insufficient pay or hours	3 (06.38)
Dissatisfaction with job or employer	4 (08.61)
Did not answer	2 (04.26)
Total	47 (100.00)

It would be interesting to hear from those who were involved in some type of active search for, but could not achieve, professional practice in Canada. We thus asked them what they thought prevented them from getting back to professional practice, particularly in Ontario. According to Table 12, two-thirds (52) of the 78 possible responses put the blame squarely on systemic and situational factors (professional registration process, Canadian experience requirement, institutional/systemic barriers, and various forms of discrimination), while 19 responses held the individual and the family/community accountable (lack of preparedness, resources, and support):

Table 12. Self-Explanation of Prevention from Practising Profession in Ontario

<i>Self-Explanation</i>	<i>Number (%)*</i>
Lack of preparedness	11 (20.37)
Lack of resources	5 (09.26)
Lack of support	3 (05.56)
Professional registration process	26 (48.15)
Canadian experience requirement	13 (24.07)
Institutional/systemic barriers	5 (09.26)
Discrimination	8 (14.81)
Other reasons	7 (12.96)

* Since the respondents were allowed to give multiple reasons, the total number of responses (78) exceeds the number of respondents (54). Ten of the 64 eligible respondents did not answer.

It was also important to know what other types of jobs our respondents had in the Canadian labour market before turning to settlement work. Thus, we asked: “Did you have any job(s) in Canada not related to your qualification before your employment in the settlement sector?” Of the respondents, 69 percent said yes and 29 percent said no.

When we look at the sectors where these 106 respondents worked, we see a concentration in the low end of the service sector. Table 13 details this pattern: 43 respondents mentioned sales, marketing, and customer services; 20 respondents, what is generally called the hospitality industry; and 13 respondents, janitorial, maintenance, and housekeeping services. Thus, 76 respondents had worked in the most exposed segments of the service sector at some point in their Canadian labour market participation. Another 12 toiled in goods processing and circulation.

Table 13. Non-Professional and Non-Settlement Fields of Post-Immigration Employment

<i>Field</i>	<i>Number (%)*</i>
Sales, marketing, and customer services	43 (40.57)
Banking, finance, and accounting	3 (02.83)
Office administration	13 (12.26)
Hospitality industry	20 (18.87)
Janitorial, maintenance, and housekeeping services	13 (12.26)
Manufacturing, processing, warehousing, and repair	12 (11.32)
Information management and technology	6 (05.66)
Research, education, and consultancy	15 (14.15)
Health and social services	14 (13.21)

* Because of the multiple responses, the total number of responses (139) exceeds the number of respondents (106). Four of the 110 eligible respondents did not answer.

This picture becomes even clearer when the nature of the jobs is factored in. As Table 14 shows, 77 of the respondents held “survival jobs” as sales/service assistants, representatives, or associates (51) and as manual workers (26). Only 15 of the respondents had jobs with administrative, coordinating, supervisory, or managerial content.

Table 14. Post-Immigration Job Titles in Non-Professional and Non-Settlement Fields

<i>Job Title</i>	<i>Number (%)*</i>
Sales/service person	51 (48.11)
Office assistant	13 (12.26)
Other (occupation-specific) assistant	10 (09.43)
Administrator, coordinator, supervisor, or manager (ACSM)	15 (14.15)
Non-ACSM occupational position	15 (14.15)
Manual worker	26 (24.53)

* Because of the multiple responses, the total number of responses (130) exceeds the number of respondents (106). Four of the 110 eligible respondents did not answer.

Yet it is also important to note that the majority (72) of the respondents stayed in the non-professional and non-settlement field for a relatively short time, three years or less. This is testimony to their success in getting out of the cycle of “survival jobs” and in eventually reinventing themselves as professionals in the settlement service sector.

When asked why they had left these jobs, the respondents overwhelmingly cited dissatisfaction with job content and a desire to practise their primary professions or a new profession such as

settlement work (Table 15). Only 23 (or 21 percent) of the 110 respondents left such jobs out of necessity (business downsizing or closure, end of contract, and insufficient pay or hours).

Table 15. Reasons for Leaving Post-Immigration Jobs in Non-Professional and Non-Settlement Fields

<i>Reason</i>	<i>Number (%)</i>
Career change	3 (2.73)
Transition to settlement work	17 (15.45)
Return to primary profession	8 (7.27)
Search for better employment	10 (09.09)
Further education	11 (10.00)
Business downsizing or closure	10 (09.09)
End of contract	4 (3.64)
Insufficient pay or hours	9 (8.18)
Dissatisfaction with job or employer	23 (20.91)
Other	5 (4.55)
Did not answer	10 (9.09)
Total	110 (100.00)

E. Shifting to Settlement Work

I know from my own experience what people go through as newcomers. While fighting for successful immigrant integration, I am fighting for myself as well.

Table 16 lists the reasons why respondents had contacted a settlement agency for the first time in Ontario (or another province, as the case may be). The single most important reason for 55 (or 35 percent) of the respondents was seeking help for employment in the primary profession. This was followed by volunteering (18 percent), looking for work at the agency (15 percent), and seeking help for initial settlement needs (15 percent).

Table 16. Reasons for First Contact with a Settlement Agency

<i>Reason</i>	<i>Number (%)</i>
Seeking help for initial settlement needs	23 (14.84)
Seeking help for employment in the primary profession	55 (35.48)
Volunteering	28 (18.06)
Looking for work at the agency	24 (15.48)
Other	9 (05.81)
Did not answer	16 (10.32)
Total	155 (100.00)

Seventy-three (or 47 percent) of the respondents got their first settlement job in the same agency that they had contacted for the first time in the settlement service sector.

The chances of having the first settlement job in the first settlement agency contacted vary very significantly by age group, volunteering in an activity related to the primary profession, and reason for first contact with a settlement agency and fairly significantly by pre-immigration employment in the chosen field, province of arrival, and (im)migration category. The likelihood was 86 percent for the 55–64 age group, 63 percent for the 25–34 group, 52 percent (just below the average: 53 percent) for the 45–54 group but only 33 percent for the 35–44 group. It appears

that volunteering in an activity related to the primary profession reduces the likelihood of first settlement agency contact–first settlement job match: 41 percent for those who volunteered but 72 percent for those who did not volunteer. Likewise, those who approached a settlement agency for the first time to seek help for employment in the area of professional qualification were much less likely to get a settlement job there than those who were looking for work at the agency: 36 percent versus 74 percent. Also, the likelihood was smaller for those who had pre-immigration employment in the field of education (50 percent versus 68 percent for those who did not have), for those who came from another province (27 percent versus 55 percent for those who first arrived in Ontario), and for economic class immigrants (40 percent versus 61 percent, 62 percent, and 67 percent for family class immigrants, protected persons, and others, respectively).

In giving their reasons for seeking employment in the settlement service sector, the respondents placed heavy emphasis on altruism as well as on continuity with pre-immigration professional activity. Fifty-two mentioned that they wanted to help newcomers by using, among other things, their personal experiences in coming to and settling in Canada. Similarly, 12 respondents wanted to give back to the ethno-cultural or broader community. Another group, comparable in size to the one emphasizing altruism, made a connection between settlement work and main line of work in the country of origin: 32 reported having either education, experience, or interest in the settlement service sector while 30 saw their primary professions as relevant to settlement work. As Table 17 shows, only 20 respondents sought employment in the sector out of necessity.

Table 17. Reasons for Seeking Employment in the Settlement Sector

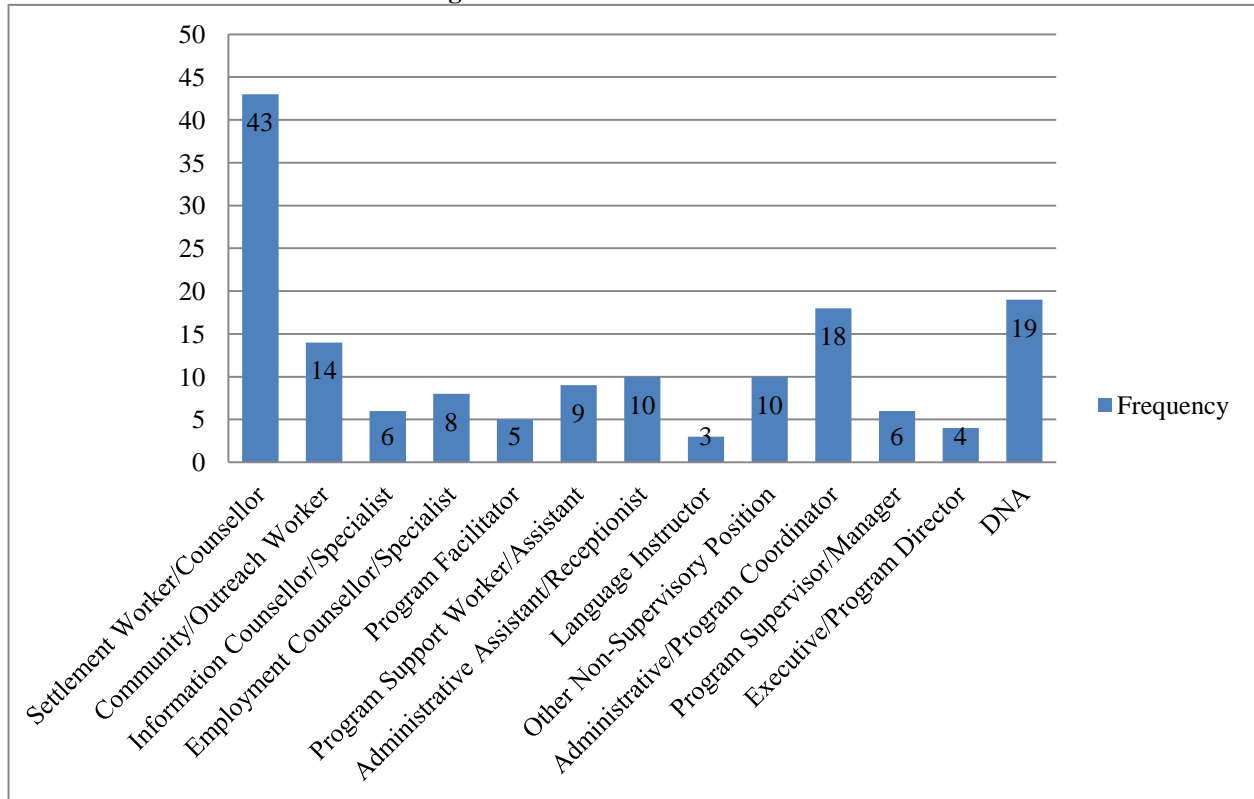
<i>Reason</i>	<i>Number (%)*</i>
Helping newcomers	52 (39.39)
Contributing to community	12 (09.09)
Multicultural environment	6 (04.55)
Education, experience, and interest in the sector	32 (24.24)
Relevance of primary profession/work to settlement work	30 (22.73)
Referral by various parties	8 (06.06)
No other opportunities	20 (15.15)
Other	18 (13.64)

* Since the respondents were allowed to give multiple reasons, the total number of responses (178) exceeds the total number of respondents (132). The rest of the sample (23 respondents) did not answer this question.

In parallel to their young demographic profile and recent immigrant status, the respondents are relative newcomers to the settlement service sector as employees: 114 (or 74 percent) of them began working in the sector in 2000 or later and 84 (or 54 percent) in 2005 or later.

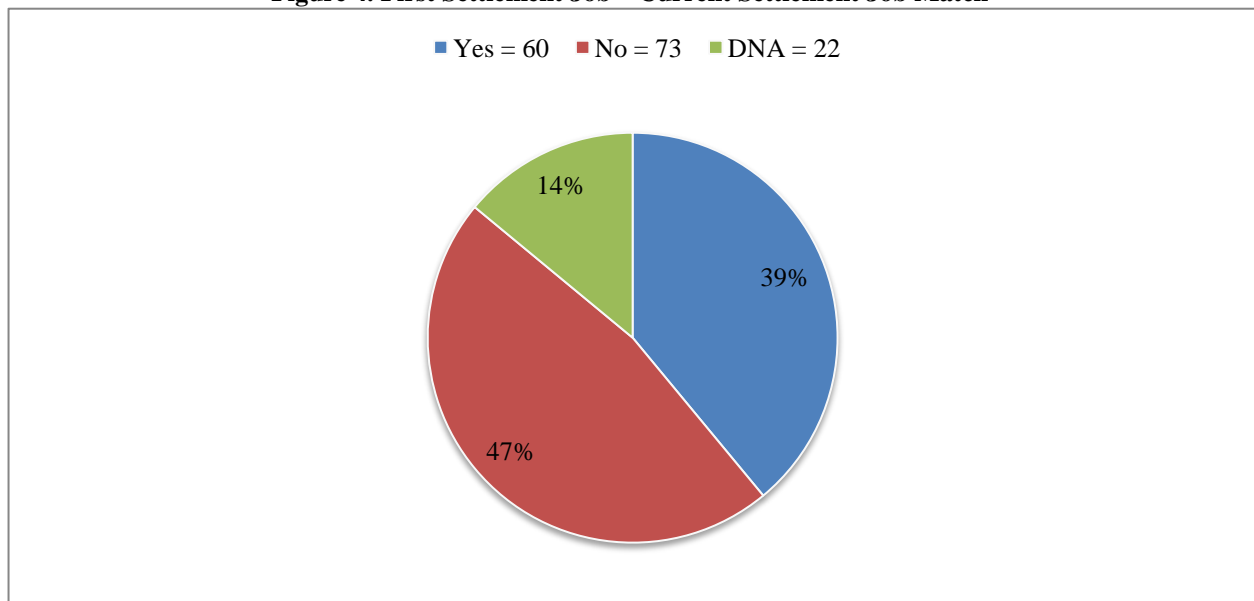
Expectedly, in their first sectoral employment, a large majority (108 or 70 percent) of the respondents had a non-supervisory, “frontline” position such as settlement worker/counsellor, community/outreach worker, administrative assistant/receptionist, program support worker/assistant, and employment counsellor/specialist. Only 28 (or 18 percent) held a position which entailed coordinating, supervisory, managerial, or directorial responsibilities while 19 (or 12 percent) did not respond (Figure 3).

Figure 3. First Settlement Job Titles



As shown in Figure 4, when asked if they still held the same position, 60 (or 39 percent) responded in the positive (no change in job title) and 73 (or 47 percent) in the negative (change in job title), which indicates a considerable degree of positional mobility. Twenty-two (or 14 percent) did not answer (DNA).

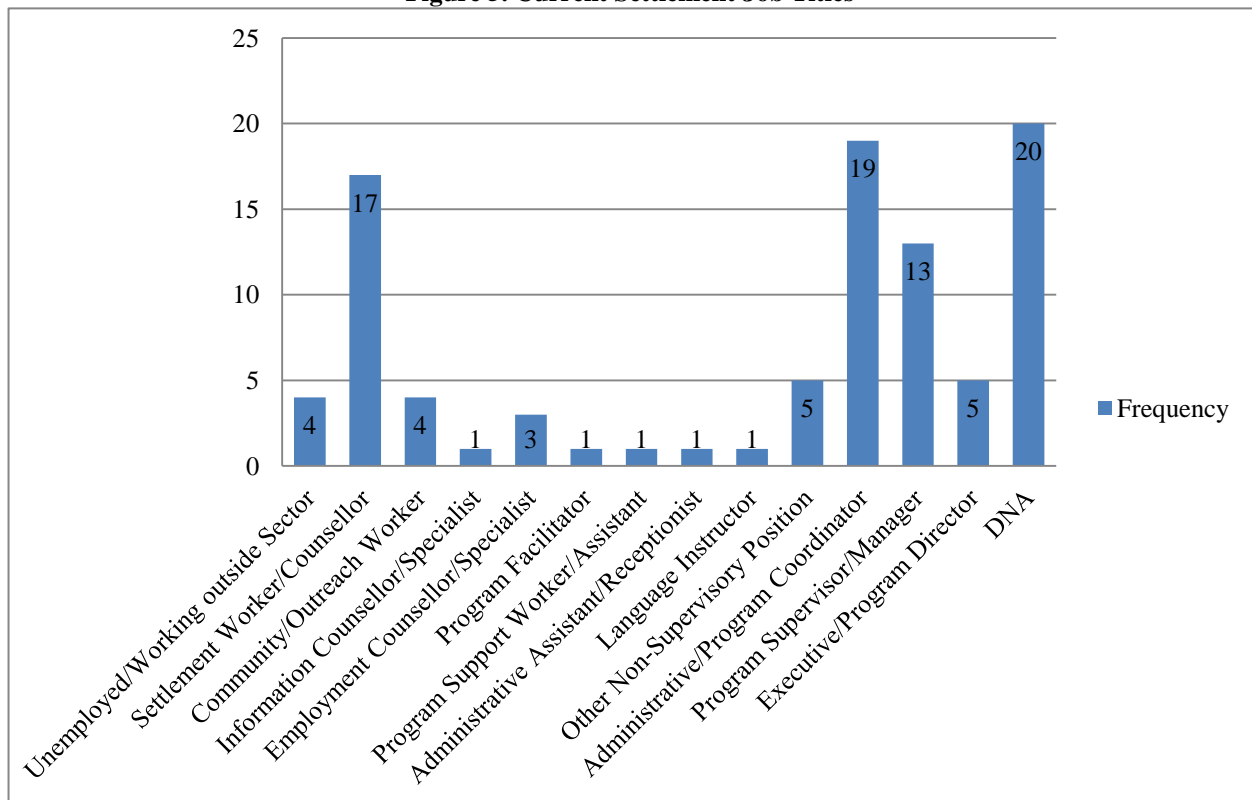
Figure 4. First Settlement Job – Current Settlement Job Match



The presence or absence of positional mobility varies very significantly by sex, (im)migration category, citizenship status, result of the search for a job related to the profession, and first settlement agency contact–first settlement job match. Sixty-two percent of women, compared to only 29 percent of men, changed position. Interestingly, protected persons (refugees) had the highest level of positional mobility, followed by members of economic class (58 percent), family class (53 percent), and other classes (27 percent). Canadian citizens had a higher level of positional mobility (62 percent) than that of those who have not acquired Canadian citizenship yet (39 percent). This finding may be related to the fact that Canadian citizens are likely to have spent more time in Canada. Only 39 percent of those who reported finding a job related to their country of origin professions, compared to 67 percent of those who could not find such a job, changed position – which may indicate a higher degree of job satisfaction among the former group. As well, those who found the first settlement job in the first settlement agency they contacted were less likely to change position than are those who found the first settlement job in an agency different from the one they first contacted: 47 percent versus 66 percent.

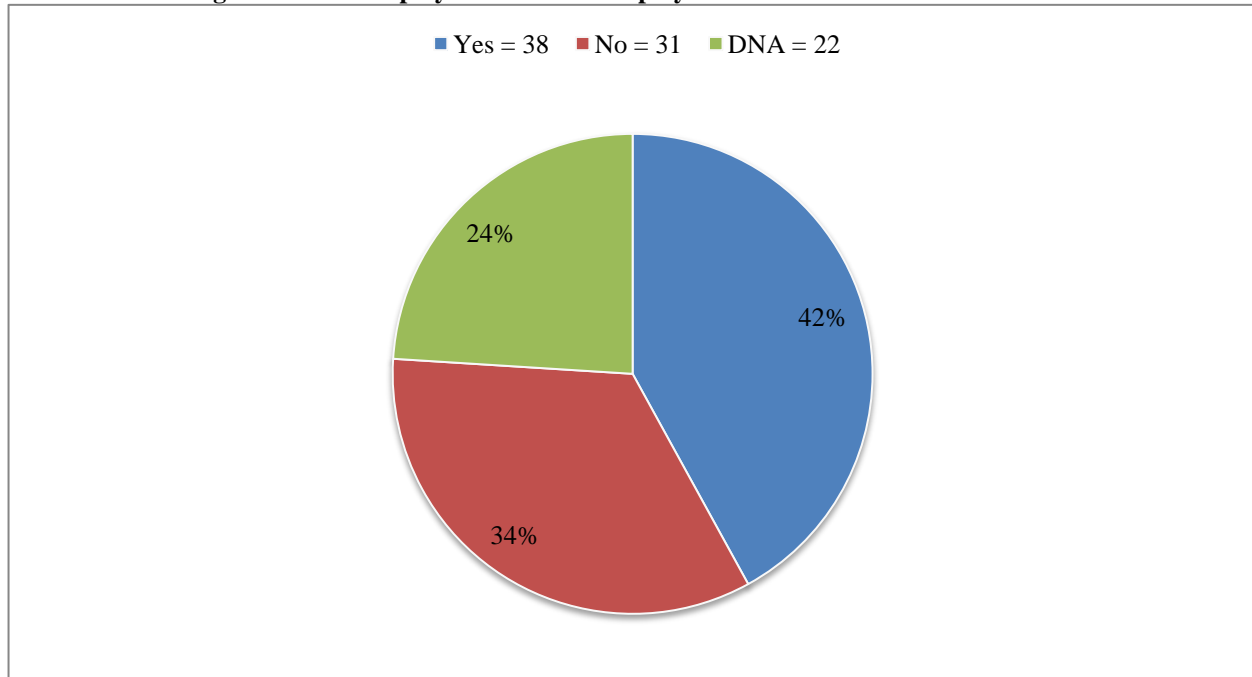
When we look at the current settlement job titles, in Figure 5, of those who experienced positional mobility, we can see a clear shift towards positions involving coordination, supervision, management, or direction. The number of respondents holding such positions is 37 (19 administrative/program coordinators, 13 program supervisors/managers, and 5 executive/program directors), almost equal to the number of respondents still holding non-supervisory positions (38).

Figure 5. Current Settlement Job Titles



An interesting question for us was whether those who had experienced positional mobility also experienced organizational mobility, that is, had changed employer in the sector. Of the 91 respondents to whom the question applied, 38 had stayed with the same employer, 31 had a different employer, and 22 did not answer (Figure 6).

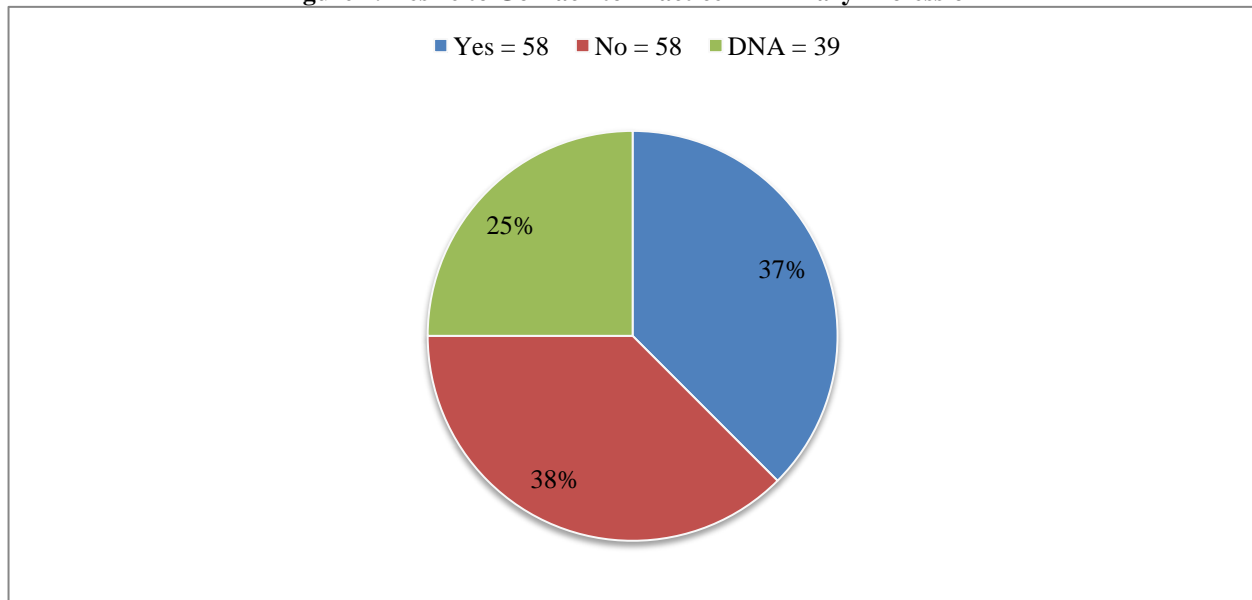
Figure 6. First Employer – Current Employer Match in the Settlement Sector



Those who found their first settlement job at the first agency they had contacted were much more likely to change position within the same agency than were those who had found their first settlement job at an agency other than the one they had contacted for the first time: 79 percent versus 33 percent.

Another interesting finding related to professional development is that two-thirds (or 104) of the respondents have received some form of professional training since joining the sectoral labour force. This is a promising sign for the professionalization of settlement work in Ontario. Participation in professional training varies significantly by age and citizenship status which, in turn, reflect period of arrival and time spent in Canada. The 45–54 age group has the highest level of participation (91 percent), followed by the 55–64 (86 percent), 25–34 (71 percent), and 35–44 (68 percent) age groups. Likewise, Canadian citizens have a higher level of participation than that of non-citizens (83 percent versus 67 percent).

To gauge respondents' satisfaction with settlement work, we asked if they had ever wished to go back to practice in their primary professions since joining the sector. The sample is split right down the middle: 58 said "yes," 58 said "no," and 39 did not answer – which can also be taken as a sign of vacillation (Figure 7). When we added the proviso "given the opportunity," the number of those who wished to go back to primary professional practice increased only slightly, to 64, with no change in the number of respondents choosing not to answer.

Figure 7. Desire to Go Back to Practice in Primary Profession

Working in the chosen field prior to immigration and taking courses to upgrade professional skills once in Canada positively affect the desire to go back to primary professional practice. Fifty-four percent of those who had pre-immigration employment in the chosen field, compared to only 30 percent of those who did not have, wished to go back to practice in the primary profession. As well, 62 percent of the respondents who had taken courses in Canada to upgrade their professional skills wanted to return to their original fields, compared to 42 percent of the respondents who had not.

When we asked about their satisfaction with settlement work for its own sake (or independently of the primary profession), the respondents expressed overwhelmingly positive feelings. Of the 124 respondents who answered, all but 13 found the practice “extremely,” “very,” or just fulfilling, rewarding, or satisfying. The most common reason for satisfaction (mentioned by 49 of the 111 respondents concerned) is the opportunity to help newcomers settle in Canada, which, for many respondents, is a form of giving back or “paying it forward,” as one respondent put it. “Putting a smile on a client’s face” was cited frequently in this context. For example, one respondent had this to say:

Having clients that share the same struggles that you went through to adapt to life in Canada makes you more persistent and determined to find a solution. Accordingly I feel more related to my job and the results are always rewarding when you see that you helped in putting a smile on the face of those who are suffering. It is at the same time related to education, since I am educating people and passing the tools that help them go on their own and be good citizens in this country.

Other reasons given for satisfaction with settlement work practice include use of education, degree, and transferrable skills; professional development and promotion opportunities; gaining a new experience; and opportunity for employment. Some of those who expressed satisfaction

qualified their statements by pointing out issues such as heavy workload, lack of advancement opportunities, low salary, strict requirements for client eligibility, stressful relations with clients, need for more direct services, lack of opportunities for full use of professional skills, and high staff turnover.

As for the 13 respondents who did not express satisfaction with settlement work, five simply reserved judgement, since they did not know, were not in direct settlement service, worked only as volunteers, or were unemployed at the time. The rest found settlement work not fulfilling for such reasons as lack of direct service opportunity, challenges of the work, lack of program-specific training, unstable employment, heavy workload, low salary, and client dissatisfaction.

F. Reflecting on Professional Journey

And the best part was that I was working with CIDA in Pakistan, but I couldn't work with CIDA here, because at that time CIDA was hiring Canadian citizens only.

When the respondents reflect on their entire professional trajectories, they express nuanced opinions about both their primary professions and settlement work. Perhaps provocatively, we asked how they felt about *not* practising their primary professions. Of the 111 respondents who answered, 13 thought that in settlement work they were already partly or wholly practising their primary professions. Most of these respondents have a social work or teaching background. Some of them, however, are trained in fields such as law. For example, someone who has a law degree made this statement: “I feel good because I do not think I have left it. Advocacy and settlement sector work on clients’ rights and the system rules; so I feel connected with the knowledge I have acquired as a lawyer.”

Forty-one respondents were content with not practising their primary professions either for no particular reason or for reasons such as the conscious career choice to move to the settlement service sector, similarity between their primary professions and settlement work, the opportunity to work with and help newcomers, and the ability to use skills and experience acquired for and in primary profession. To quote another lawyer concerning the last reason: “The feelings change over the time. Practising law in Canada is not the same as in my country of origin. I am another person now as well, and my interests are different. I think that, as long as I am using my analytical skills in my job and learning new knowledge, I am happy.” This respondent, who is currently working as a project coordinator at a settlement service agency, also touched on this during the in-depth interview: “I studied to be a professional ... to use the mind to the service of a cause, to the service of others, to use knowledge in different ways. It could be assisting people to divorce; it could be assisting people to set up a business. Now I am using my knowledge, my experience in assisting people to mobilize from point A in which they are not happy to point B. So it is the same thing that I was doing here.”

Thus, for 54 (nearly one half) of the respondents, not practising the primary profession was not an issue: 41 were fine with it and 13 thought that they had never left their primary professions. For the other half (55 respondents, excluding two who were neutral), however, this was an issue of varying magnitude. Twenty-one respondents still miss their primary professions but take comfort in the fact that they are able to use their analytical skills in serving newcomers. There is

again the same dynamic at play here, which establishes a bridge between primary profession and settlement work. Quoting professionals with different backgrounds is revealing in this context:

I was a professor in a university and I wished to get my PhD in Canada and stay in university as a researcher or professor. However, leading and teaching people every day and making them happy in providing services also make me extremely happy and [is] fulfilling as well.

The respondent quoted above, who is a physiologist working in a managerial capacity in the sector, had a more revealing statement during the in-depth interview: “I am not in the place that I feel I was supposed to be. ... I am not fulfilled yet.”

A settlement program manager with graduate degrees in biotechnology and business administration gave this account of the self-transformative process she went through:

I can say that, when I started working [in the settlement service sector] ... I had lots of problems. What the heck was I doing, you know. Some of the people, I know, my family ... not everybody, but some people, would tell me, “You are throwing away all of your education.” Obviously, there is a period of ... insecurity or doubt. Okay, am I doing the right thing? What the heck am I doing? ... Generally, I would have been making double the amount of money [that] I am making ... in settlement. ... But ... because of the sense of fulfillment that the settlement work did, that’s what kept me through it. It’s a passion. It’s like going every single day to work with a feeling of joy.

The following quote does not need any introduction:

My mind is always in teaching. Though I assess adult immigrants for their English in order to be placed in proper levels in a LINC program, and it is related to education, in some instances, still my passion lies in the teaching field. I am a Senior English, ESL, Special Education specialized teacher, which one can[not] find combined together in one teacher easily. I hope someday I will contribute in this delicate and rewarding profession.

A settlement program coordinator with degrees in law and economics wrote: “Sometimes I miss my profession. ... However, I very much enjoy working in the settlement services area and doing community development.” Yet, when probed during the interview, she had second thoughts: “Ah, I don’t like the way that it went. Ah, no, actually, if I only knew, I probably would have not made this decision to come to Canada.”

Likewise, another program manager with background in writing and performing arts had mixed feelings: “I think I have missed my opportunity in life to do what I always loved and thought I would do all my life. However, I have enriched my professional life with new jobs that I didn’t even know I could do.” In the in-depth interview, she was more upbeat:

But, on the other hand, I ended up doing what was close to me... something I discovered just before I immigrated to Canada. ... I was involved in opening the first shelter and I was asked, based on my previous experience in performing arts and media, to provide workshops for children with postwar trauma. So I created several workshops for them, worked with them, heard horrific stories, but they enriched me in many ways. So when I arrived here, I continued in a way helping newcomers. ... So it was kind of a circle, it was probably meant to be. I felt very comfortable with every single job that I had here. But this personal regret, well, maybe one day it might come true. I may open up something.

A settlement counsellor made an interesting analogy between her job and teaching as her original field:

I am trying to find a connection between my job and my primary profession and that[']s what made me love it. I am being an educator here, delivering information to clients and trying to explain processes and policies around. It is compared to educating a child, where you start by holding his/her hand and afterwards empowering him to go on his own in this life providing him with the tools to survive. I am using in fact teaching strategies and facilitation skills that I learned in the teaching diploma in offering presentations and workshops to clients.

She had this to add in the in-depth interview:

I miss my job. I miss being in the class. ... I still feel that courage to teach. I still feel it inside. I miss that. Partially, I'm satisfied in my job but there's a partial need that I have or a partial passion for teaching that I'm satisfying through my job here. But – being in a class – this is the part that I'm missing.

Another settlement counsellor, who was practising medicine before coming to Canada, established a similar connection after expressing her desire to practise medicine again:

You know, I am helping people at the clinic and I am helping people here. So, to me, I am doing the same thing. I am helping people. ... I feel comfortable helping people with information. ... I know how long it took me, how hard it took me to figure out, know where, what, who.

For the remaining 34 respondents, inability to practise their primary profession was clearly a disappointment. These are the words which they used to express what they feel: resigned, disappointed, wasted, loser, nostalgic, sad, hopeless, demoralized, disadvantaged, perplexed, depressed, guilty, frustrated, bitter, regretful, and betrayed. Some even directed outright anger at the Canadian immigration system. The following three quotes attest to some of these feelings.

I felt that I have been betrayed by my new country, as it has all the opportunities for me to practise my profession. I feel all that I have a lot to share from another perspective and that Canada, my country, is not benefiting from my previous experience. Overall, I feel that we have been marginalized for non-valid reasons.

This respondent is an outreach coordinator with a background in demography. When probed during the interview, he added a more personal dimension: “It was a setback ... I was really dissatisfied. I am not happy ... Right now I am having a lot of sleepless nights...”

Another respondent was equally disappointed:

I feel like I have got lost in the middle of the way. I was educated and trained ... to do something and now I am doing something completely different! I am still dreaming of practising my primary profession if I get time and financial resources to do that, taking into account [the fact that] putting food on table for my family and securing the shelter is the priority.

This quote from an entomologist working as settlement counsellor is more specific on the professional disconnect:

Uprooted, derailed, wasting of 11 years of postsecondary education and 20 years of experience. General reduction in vitality and strength of mind, resulting from a debilitating feeling of being disconnected, not keeping up to date with research due to lack of scientific journals and books in the public library or access to such information.

In the interview, the same respondent resorted to this analogy: “It’s like Boeing 747 pilots ... find[ing] themselves driving a golf cart. Is there a connection? ... There is no connection.”

Another area we explored was the respondents’ perspectives on how this transition to settlement work affected their personal and family lives. Of the 107 who answered, 16 thought that the transition either had no such effect or did not apply to them. Many in this group considered settlement work their primary profession. Forty-five respondents reported only positive experience for themselves and their families. As 21 of these respondents said, helping newcomers – others in general – figured most prominently as a factor contributing to this experience. Only three respondents gave purely economic reasons for their positive transition experience.

The following two quotes are exemplary of what made the transition a positive experience for most in this group:

Working in the settlement sector has been wonderful, because it empowered me very much, gave me information about the process of immigration that was not available to me before. Also working with professional people of diverse background[s] has enriched me. I have been able to use my law background to assist other people in their settlement in a new country. ... Personally today I feel very happy because working in the settlement sector has been a continuation of my professional life. Besides that my family is proud of my accomplishments.

I encourage my family and my children to [get] more actively involved in the community, especially in issues affecting newcomers, and encourage respect and awareness of diversity issues in the community. I feel that the transition into settlement work has provided me with increased opportunities to become a better community leader. I am currently involved in various boards, area initiatives, and my husband mentors professional immigrants. One of my children has received recognition in his school for his role in the society.

For 28 respondents, the transition to settlement work was a mixed blessing. On the positive side, personal and/or professional satisfaction, helping newcomers, pay and hours of work, and children's education were mentioned. Stress related to work, loss of income, lack of time for family, loss of status and self-confidence, and inability to use skills and experience were factors on the negative side.

The following quote illustrates what unfolds within the family when one member loses established professional connections.

In the beginning, my family members were not happy to see me working in a different field, especially in a field that is not rewarding socially and financially. I have lost a lot as a parent. I worked hard to keep my family. At the end I was able to regain the confidence of my family. Both my daughters got the best education and jobs. My wife too secured a job that she likes.

The quote is about not being able to use previously acquired skills and experience:

We were able to meet our financial needs and settle down. This is a satisfying job. However, I am not utilizing my skills and experience fully and do not have an opportunity to utilize them in my current position, which makes me sad and frustrated. In my family life, observing the way my children are "taught" at school and my involvement with the school council and teachers make me feel sad ... [about] ... my knowledge ... not being used. ... My children also have expressed their concerns and appreciate my input in their academic work.

For the remaining 18 respondents, the transition was a negative experience for a variety of reasons including, notably, loss of income, stress related to work, inability to use skills and experience, and stress in the family. One respondent put it emphatically:

I cannot think straight. I have two kids, cannot provide them the basic necessities of life, cannot answer their "whys." Why we do not have a car anymore? Why can't we go to the movies anymore? Tons of "whys." They were used to a very luxurious life back home, with two cars and all they wanted; they used to get it.

G. Implications for Settlement Work as a Profession

Like doctors, we only see people when they are in trouble, but no one takes that into account when choosing \$23 an hour as our reward.

We now shift our focus from foreign-trained professionals working as settlement workers to what this means for the development of settlement work as a profession. Like broader social service, settlement service has its origins in the voluntary work of community, mostly church-based, groups. In fact, the current use of the concept of settlement in relation to services to immigrants and refugees dates to the establishment of “settlement houses” in late 19th-century Britain. Transplanted to North America shortly thereafter, these houses “tried to bridge the gap between rich and poor, between educated and non-educated, by asking concerned individuals, the ‘settlers’ and ... all those who wanted to work with the poor to move into the poor areas and ‘settle’ there” (Amin 1987). Settlement house workers were typically women who, motivated mostly by religious (Christian) duty, gave their time and service entirely for free: “These settlement workers saw and recognized social inequalities in a paternalistic framework. They wanted to relieve the sufferings of the poor in the name of social harmony and Christian duty” (Amin 1987).

In the Canadian context as well, the initial period of immigrant and refugee settlement service was defined by a female-dominated workforce operating on the principle of volunteerism. The launch of the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program in 1974 provided the first real impetus for the professionalization of settlement work in Canada. In delivering the federally organized and funded program, community-based settlement service agencies gained a modicum of stable funding. Even then, however, settlement service relied largely on the volunteerism of mainstream Canadians.

With the shift in immigrant intake from traditional to non-traditional source regions in the 1980s, newcomer needs became more complex and the service workforce became more diversified. Agencies began to use the ethno-cultural, particularly linguistic, affinity with the clients served as one of the main criteria of recruitment. This criterion, as well as volunteerism, would diminish in importance in the ensuing efforts for professionalization, but both have remained part of this sector.

In our in-depth interviews with settlement workers and particularly agency representatives, these and broader issues of sectoral capacity-building came up frequently. Concerning the ethno-cultural affinity of individual service providers with their clients, the interviewees drew attention to both advantages and disadvantages. They emphasized that, for newcomers, being served by people of the same ethno-cultural background provides an important buffer in the transition period. Service in one’s first language is said to be critical to this process. As one agency representative mentioned, the ethno-cultural affinity with the service provider “gives you a sense of home; it gives you a place where you do not constantly have to negotiate the differences; it gives you some time to absorb and deal with the change, cultural shifts that are happening, with the life shifts that are happening. It also comes with a sense of familiarity, cultural familiarity, and linguistic familiarity.”

On the negative side, agency representatives pointed out the erosion of confidentiality that this affinity may lead to, especially in small communities. Another concern raised had to do with changes in the composition of the newcomer population. If a person were to be hired simply because he or she spoke the language of a client group, agency representatives reasoned, a cessation of intake from that group would render his or her position redundant. They thus urged for an all-round development of the settlement worker.

Concerning volunteerism in the sector, interviewees acknowledged its potential for newcomers to gain the so-called Canadian experience and for service agencies to recruit staff. However, they also noted that volunteerism is often used as a source of free labour. Moreover, as one agency representative pointed out, immigrants hardly get to use their occupational skills when volunteering in the sector, which is a reflection of the general immigrant labour market experience. Another respondent had the following observations:

I think volunteerism is very good, but we need to help newcomers, professionals to go ... where they can get a good experience. ... They don't understand the importance of working for free. "Why do I have to work for free?" It's very challenging, because they ... still don't have a steady job and you ask them to volunteer. Sometimes, it's really, really hard. They are supporting the family or they are looking for the family members to come. And they can't give the best of themselves. Because when you volunteer, you have to have a higher spirit. You have to be in a mood where you give your all, to share your time, your joy with people around you. You can say, "Oh, this person is doing things really, really good." But that's not always the case. People do that because they want to get something to put on their résumés. So, they miss the point. They miss the point. They are volunteering, but their spirit is elsewhere.

One thing that is certain about the immigrant labour force in this sector, however, is its contribution to settlement work in terms of vocational dedication. Three sources cultivate this dedication. First, all foreign-born and -trained settlement workers have first-hand experience in immigration and settlement, which gives them a deeper understanding and appreciation of these processes. Second, many were also involved in leadership and capacity-building with their ethno-cultural communities before moving to settlement service. Some continue in this work. Third, most settlement workers with an immigrant or refugee background were practising (mostly) another profession before coming to Canada, as our sample demonstrates. The transferable skills and norms that come with it contribute greatly to the ethos of settlement work.

For all these reasons, a majority of our respondents conceive of and practise settlement work as a "calling" in the Weberian sense of the word (*beruf*), regardless of its disadvantages in pay and working conditions. They emphasize the personal, inner satisfaction they get from, and the social obligation they feel towards, their work with and for newcomers. This bodes well for the professionalization of settlement work, since vocational dedication is one of the hallmarks of any profession.

However, in order for settlement work to become a full-fledged profession, this ethos has to be complemented with provincially and nationally established standards for workforce training,

licensing, and on-the-job performance measurement. In turn, full professionalization would necessarily entail a certain hardening of the boundaries of settlement work and thus a certain closure to potential entrants. This brings back the whole issue of access to professions for immigrants.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS BY AND FOR IMMIGRANT PROFESSIONALS

Let's be concerned about immigrants ... as much as we are concerned about trees. ... Just as we do not waste paper out of concern for trees, so we should not waste years of education out of concern for immigrants. ... Let's start the green movement around immigrants.

In concluding the online survey, we asked respondents what they could suggest, based on their experience, to help immigrant professionals get back to professional practice in Canada. The majority (73 or 63 percent) of the 116 respondents who answered made suggestions which concern the role of the individual immigrant. These suggestions are grouped under eight headings below:¹¹

1. Have a positive attitude in your quest for professional practice in Canada.

One respondent wrote: “Keep in the company of people who talk positively about settlement. Don't get influenced by negative talk.”

2. Develop a career strategy with short- and long-term goals and pursue it with full determination.

The dictum “Never give up!” was used by nine different respondents.

3. Work on your English (or French) as a second language.

As one interviewee put it, “No language, no paradise.” Two particular suggestions of note were that immigrant professionals begin working on their English (or French) in the pre-arrival stage and that they focus on profession-specific language training in the post-arrival stage.

4. Gather all necessary documentation, and learn requirements, for professional registration in Canada – if possible – before leaving your country.

The words “preparedness” and “research” came up frequently in the context of this suggestion.

5. Once in Canada, have your credential(s) assessed by a recognized agency and contact the occupational regulatory body in your province to start the registration process.

6. Engage in (re)training if you have any identified skills gap in your occupation.

¹¹ Two respondents wrote simply: “Do not come to Canada!”

7. *Seek help from settlement/employment counsellors, network with professionals and employers (who are potential mentors), and volunteer in an activity related to your field.*
8. *Be flexible and open-minded in your quest for professional practice, take up temporary “survival” jobs if necessary, go where the jobs are, and be prepared to transfer your skills to another field if “Plan A” does not materialize.*

One of the interviewees who also completed the online survey explained why she could not get back to her profession as follows: “Probably, my story could’ve been different with me living in a big city. Yes, probably, probably so ... There, you’re gonna have other issues [though]. ... Will you be able to afford the cost of living? ... But, from the professional point of view, the opportunity will definitely increase.”

The rest (43 respondents or 37 percent) emphasized systemic or situational factors in their recommendations. We can group these recommendations under five headings:

1. *The credential recognition process, and the general information/orientation and settlement service, should start before prospective immigrants depart for Canada.*
2. *The credential recognition process should be simplified and give more value to prior learning and experience.*

One respondent simply wrote: “Deregulate regulatory bodies.” Another respondent struck a more conciliatory tone by implying the need to work with regulatory bodies: “There is still a lot of discrimination in the way of evaluation, which could simply be based on lack of awareness of other countries’ education systems and industry standards. For example, there are many FTPs [foreign-trained professionals] who are not competent in writing and/or presenting their work experience portfolio in a way to satisfy a North American regulatory body or convince [it about the] equivalency of [their] qualifications.”

3. *Federal and provincial governments should help immigrant professionals register in their professions by subsidizing or underwriting the cost of registration and any training necessary to bridge them to professional practice.¹²*
4. *Settlement and employment services geared towards immigrant professionals should be offered by qualified counsellors at “one-stop” centres to avoid the “vicious cycle” of referrals and duplication.*

¹² Not all respondents had faith in government action. One respondent commented bitterly: “Immigrant professionals are not the problem. You should know this by now. The problem is Canada and its racist approach which deems any foreign qualification and experience as not good enough for Canada. Hence, immigrants stay trapped in a circle of jobs and not careers. It is a deliberate attempt to keep invisible minorities at the margins of Canadian society. With this country’s long immigration history, you will think someone somewhere would have developed a policy that will enable immigrants to ... transition to work in their field in Canada. That has not happened and will never happen, because behind the facade of ‘an immigrant-friendly Canada’ is a deep racist mindset that is yet to fully accept and accommodate immigrants from particular continents.”

The following quote from an in-depth interview is exemplary of the feeling among those who made this suggestion:

What I find extremely frustrating is [that] many, many similar services we provide, but none have concrete results for the clients. Each one goes in circles, from one centre to another, receiving mainly the same services or information, but nothing more. People still do not get jobs in their line of work, still face the same settlement barriers with jobs, and we as service providers do not have formal training and complete information to help a client further. We all know just a little and are unable to help more than referring the client from one agency to another. We should all be trained to provide services and given maximum information.

5. Immigrants need to be employed meaningfully for successful integration to occur. It is thus imperative that employers, public and private alike, are convinced of the economic benefits of hiring and retaining immigrant professionals and that they are given incentives to employ these professionals.

One respondent wrote: “More emphasis is required to educate employers within the area to convince them how beneficial it is to hire a new immigrant who brings a lot of experience from the other side of the world, who has a different set of eyes to look at the operations, and who may be able to suggest new initiatives based on his background and diversity at a reasonable wage.”

One particular suggestion concerning the involvement of employers in immigrant economic integration was to provide tax incentives to them for hiring newcomers. As one agency representative pointed out, it is one thing to win the battle about the recognition of foreign-earned credentials and it is quite another to get the holders of these credentials employed in meaningful jobs. She thus advised reaching out to employers: “This is gonna benefit you, this is gonna benefit our economy. ... We are saying [not only] that we are willing to work within our tax system to support you in investing in internationally trained professionals, [but also] that this is going to be about economic growth and [that] it’s a win-win situation.”

Providing tax incentives to employers for hiring newcomers is by definition a public policy choice. This again shows the need for government leadership. All three levels of government – federal, provincial, and local – should fully engage in the economic integration of internationally trained professionals.

CONCLUSION

This study makes three contributions to research into immigrant access to professions. First, using concepts from classical sociology, it sheds light on the social processes of inclusion in, and exclusion from, professional practice in the case of a particular group of foreign-born and -trained professionals in Ontario. These individuals did not get to practise their respective professions after immigration, but acquired a new profession in the form of settlement work. Most of the professions represented by the group are regulated under provincial jurisdiction in Canada. The Canadian experience of the group reveals various forms of exclusion from these professions, including discouragement, lack of a level playing field, and outright refusal by

employers. However, seeing that regulated professions were closed to them, our respondents found a way to get back to professional practice in the form of settlement work as an unregulated, emerging, and thus more permeable profession. Practising settlement work represents different things for different individuals in the group: it is out of necessity for some, a springboard to the primary profession for some others, and a continuation of the primary profession for quite a few others.

Second, the study draws attention to a more nuanced immigrant experience and, in so doing, gives proper credit to human agency, which is largely lacking in the literature on immigrant access to professions. Unlike those immigrants who are de-professionalized in the post-immigration period, our target population reinvent themselves as practitioners of a new profession by making a strategic use of resources at their disposal. They thus act upon the structural or systemic barriers which figure so prominently in existing literature. In this sense, our emphasis on the micro-to-macro transition serves as a corrective to the over-researched macro-to-micro transition.

Third, the common practice of our respondents as settlement workers gives us insight into the dynamics of the emerging profession that is settlement work. Their attraction to and retention in the immigrant- and refugee-serving sector show a profession in the making with its still-to-be-defined boundaries, training and licensing rules, and performance measures. With their diverse backgrounds, these immigrants and refugees also contribute to making settlement work a profession by using transferrable skills and, more critically, carrying over the professional ethos from their pre-immigration lines of work. This again has an effect on the systemic forces that distanced them from professional practice in the first place.

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CERIS - The Ontario Metropolis Centre is one of five Canadian Metropolis centres dedicated to ensuring that scientific expertise contributes to the improvement of migration and diversity policy.

CERIS - The Ontario Metropolis Centre is a collaboration of Ryerson University, York University, and the University of Toronto, as well as the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, the United Way of Greater Toronto, and the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto.

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The Metropolis Project

Launched in 1996, the Metropolis Project strives to improve policies for managing migration and diversity by focusing scholarly attention on critical issues. All project initiatives involve policymakers, researchers, and members of non-governmental organizations.

Metropolis Project goals are to:

- Enhance academic research capacity;
- Focus academic research on critical policy issues and policy options;
- Develop ways to facilitate the use of research in decision-making.

The Canadian and international components of the Metropolis Project encourage and facilitate communication between interested stakeholders at the annual national and international conferences and at topical workshops, seminars, and roundtables organized by project members.

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