

# Newcomers' labour market experiences & the pandemic: the role of social media for network building

---

LUISA VERONIS AND HUAN WANG, UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA  
PATHWAYS TO PROSPERITY 2021 NATIONAL CONFERENCE

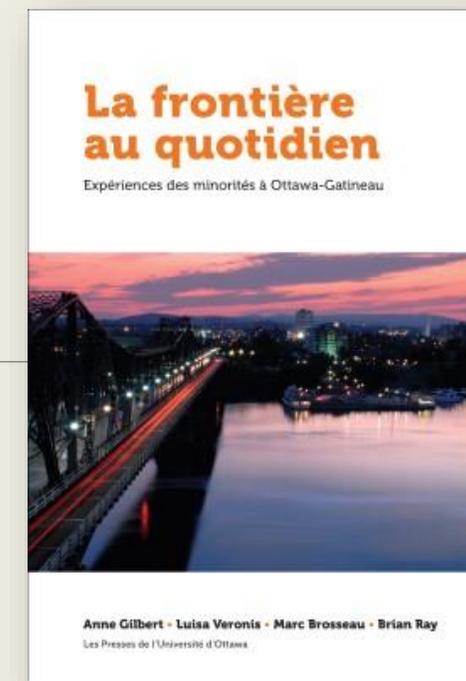


# Context

## Ottawa-Gatineau's labour market

- Interprovincial metropolitan area
- Asymmetrical bilingualism
- **Post-industrial city**: the prominence of public administration (federal government)
- Among highest median income in the country
- Immigrants with highest levels of education
- Role of gender, region of origin and type of occupation

[https://bmrc-irmu.info.yorku.ca/files/2021/04/FINAL-Research-Report-on-O-G-Employment-Profile\\_Revisions.pdf?x15611](https://bmrc-irmu.info.yorku.ca/files/2021/04/FINAL-Research-Report-on-O-G-Employment-Profile_Revisions.pdf?x15611)



Many Versions of Work in Ottawa-Gatineau's Labour Market: A profile of immigrant workers and their economic status in a post-industrial city

Research Report

**Brian Ray\***  
**University of Ottawa**

**April 2021**

# Research objectives

---

- Examine the role of language and gender in skilled workers' experiences in navigating the O-G labour market
- Focus on both individual and household strategies
- Identify the impacts of the pandemic on newcomers' economic integration



# Methodology

---

## **Collaborative approach**

- SSHRC-funded Partnership: “Building Migrant Resilience in Cities-Immigration et resilience en milieu urbain” (BMRC-IRMU)
- Advisory committee: OLIP and local settlement organizations (employment)

## **Semi-structured interviews and selection criteria:**

- Newcomers (< 5 years) residing in Ottawa-Gatineau
- Immigration category: skilled workers or family reunification
- Women and men from diverse origins
- English or French as first official language
- Variety of occupations & a focus on STEM-related professions

# Participants' profile

---

## 24 English-speaking participants

- Women (13), men (11)
- Immigration category: Skilled workers (14), family reunification (10)
- Arrival: before (12), just prior/during (12) pandemic
- STEM-field: 4

## 10 French-speaking participants (data collection is ongoing)

- Women (7), men (3)
- Immigration category: Skilled workers (8), family reunification (2)
- Arrival: before (6), just prior/during pandemic (4)
- STEM-field: 2

**Diverse origins:** Africa (north, sub-Saharan), Asia (East, south, southeast), Eastern Europe, Latin America & Caribbean

- **Many had international experience: studies & professional**
  - **Spoke multiple languages, incl. English and French**

# Results

---

1. Impacts of the pandemic on economic integration
2. Strategies
  - Social media
3. Impacts of the pandemic on family life and social integration

# 1. Pandemic & economic integration (1/3)

---

## Differences in time of arrival & whether they had secured a job

- STEM occupations

## Language

- English-speaking vs. French-speaking participants

## Social networks

- All participants quickly understood the significance of social networks in labour market integration
- Some participants activated social networks before arrival, including through social media; and some even secured jobs
- Others only became aware after arrival

# 1. Pandemic & economic integration (2/3)

---

The key role of social networks in labour market integration

**“One of the things I learned from the program I engaged in with World Skills that I needed to do more networking in terms of actually reaching out to people that work in these organizations, not just randomly applying online.** So that was one of the things I got to know I was doing wrong in my search for a job, I needed to reach out to real people, get their experience, get like their guidance, and then, of course, have them do introductions, because I noticed that the difference between here and back home is that over here they are big on somebody recommending you.”  
(EN #20)

**“It totally killed my networking because prior to that I was like a networking fire,** five meetings a week being able to say like “hey, I'm new, I have all of this experience, please can you meet with me, I'd like to know more about the organization”; I love information interviews, (...) when you meet somebody, you build a rapport with them. And so **it totally killed my ability to network (...)** also because the employers at the time were trying to navigate (...) with their own system, hiring processes, etc., and dealing with their own contingent of existing staff. **It was like a dead period for (...) any employment ability.”** (EN#9)

# 1. Pandemic & economic integration (3/3)

---

## Settlement agencies

- Advice (CV, interview, volunteering), training, job listings & job fairs
- But also ambivalence on the usefulness of settlement services

“I got both positions through contacts that I made at World Skills during the (...) Empowering newcomer women program.” (EN #1)

“I had taken assistance from different organizations like YMCA (...) and World Skills; they had resume building classes and they helped me to build my resume to make it more attractive and job ready. So it's the most important thing (...), to know about these things...” (EN #17)

## Not really knowing Canadian society...

“We were newcomers, so we had to start over from zero or from scratch. I couldn't meet many people, so I couldn't make a lot of friends. I try to do whatever I could (...), but it's hard to tell [how to socialize] because **I honestly don't know how is Ottawa without COVID.**” (EN #18)

# Strategies

---

**Mobilization of social networks:** family, friends, ethnic community, religious

## **Internet and social media**

- Some participants preferred doing things “their own way”
- Internet searches (Indeed, Kanata North, Glassdoor) and social media

## **Went back to study**

- In order to build networks
- Focus on programs with coop option (to gain Canadian experience)
- Acquire Canadian credentials in specific professional fields

“I recently try to work on my resume, I study another program at Algonquin, like accounting and bookkeeping because I want to increase my chance to get a job. But I'm not sure is my background, my language or COVID-19. I sent many resumes, but I haven't heard from any employer even get an interview.” (EN #12)

# Social media

## All participants used social media

- LinkedIn, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter
- Many found them useful & **6 participants got jobs** through LinkedIn, Indeed

“But I found that LinkedIn was a very powerful tool here, to get to make connections. So, I reached out to the recruiter of the company and there was a position that I was interested in, (...), I would like to work as a customer success manager, actually. So I did express my interest, they did not have an opening for a customer success manager, **but they really liked me**. So they said, how about you give a start as an on-boarding specialist? And as soon as we have an opportunity for a customer success manager, we can get you there. So **it was via LinkedIn**. I reached out to the recruiter, the recruiter got me in touch with my manager and that's how I got employed.” (EN #20)



# Social media: variety of uses

---

**LinkedIn:** network building, communicating with HR / recruiters

**“They connected with me via LinkedIn, and they saw my profile and they called me and then I got one phone interview and I got one interview with one HR screening interview, and then I got five back to back interviews with them. It was pretty well structured recruitment process.” (EN#14)**

**Facebook:** advice & information from FB groups (e.g., Brazilians in Canada), network building, FB ads:

**“I've used Facebook group called *Ladies who Work*. It's been really helpful, but it's more the jobs that are posted there are more of like an hourly paid jobs and it's not like full time permanent. So it's basically just entry level jobs. But yet it was really very good to see a community helping out.” (EN#20)**

**“But not Facebook for jobs, Facebook I was just only using for attending the webinars, which with the other events that are organized by such communities to give us guidance about getting jobs and employment opportunities.” (EN#8)**

# Social media: variety of uses

---

**WhatsApp:** advice, information & contacts from social/ethnic networks

**“We have a very strong WhatsApp group where we welcome newcomers and give them all the tidbits.** Usually we connect them with people in the profession. So I was connected with a few HR professionals there and they helped me so that we were writing my resumé, allowing me to freelance in the organization or volunteer in the organization doing HR stuff.” (EN#1)

**“We use WhatsApp Brazilian groups or Facebook groups or whatever where they discuss the possibilities, what everyone is doing,** what the other's doing, all kinds of stuff. So we talk a lot. I read a lot of everybody's experience. I don't have a direct mentor, but I hear a lot of different perspectives from different people that took different paths.” (EN#18)

# Social media use

---

➤ But others did not like them or did not find social media useful

“I was applying a lot through LinkedIn, Indeed, and there were times when my resume was not even seen.” (EN#17)

“And I use a lot of Indeed, I find that there was fewer response.” (EN #3)

“And there was not much going on,(...) because everything was closed and stuff. So there's not much I could do. I tried to look for a job fair. There was no job fairs. **And then the online job fairs, they're horrible because you basically just get some information about a company.**” (EN#18)

# Pandemic & family and social integration

---

## POSITIVE

**Family bonding and quality time together**

Liked working from home: convenience, flexibility – especially for those with children

Bought a home

## NEGATIVE

Social isolation

Stress

Health: access to family doctor & services

Separation from family abroad

Juggling work & children's home schooling

Impact on children: friendships at school, well-being (e.g., no sports)

# Discussion & conclusion

---

## **Influential factors**

- Social & professional networks, occupation (esp. STEM), language

## **Differences in social media use**

- Personal preferences
- Pre-existing social media use/networks vs. using social media post-arrival
- Presence and connectivity of ethnic communities

## **Significant differences in use & perceptions of settlement services**

- **But little to no use of pre-arrival services**

# Acknowledgements



## Our research participants

## Our community partners

- Gatineau: SITO
- Ottawa: OLIP, World Skills

## Our research team

- Christina Gabriel & Akaysha Humniski, Carleton U; Handy Leroy, uOttawa

This study was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada through the Partnership “Building Migrant Resilience in Cities/Immigration et résilience en milieu urbain” (BMRC-IRMU)

- *Preston, V. PI, Belkhodja, C., Gabriel, C., Lochhead, C., Douglas, D., Dyson, D., Zikic, J., Hennebry, J., Shields, J., Veronis, L., Hynie, M., Mandell, N., Bhuyan, R., Ghosh, S. and collaborators. Migration and Resilience in Urban Canada - Immigration et résilience en milieu urbain (BMRC-IRMU): Discovering Strengths and Building Capacity, Partnership Grant. Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, SSHRC#896-2016-1004, 2,499,525, 2016-2021 \$.*
- For more information on the project, see: <http://bmrc-irmu.info.yorku.ca/>



# Thank you!

---

LVERONIS@UOTTAWA.CA

HWANG373@UOTTAWA.CA