

IMMIGRANT-SERVING AGENCIES RESPONDING TO COVID-19: A COMPARISON OF QUEBEC AND ONTARIO

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PROJECT: “IMMIGRANT-SERVING AGENCIES’ RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC: A SURVEY OF MANAGERS AND FRONTLINE WORKERS IN QC AND ON”

- Team members: Jayesh D’Souza, Jill Hanley, Valerie Preston, Moussa Seck, John Shields, Kelly Sung
- Partners: OCASI & TCRI

Methods:

- Online survey of managers of settlement agencies, who were then asked to distribute a link for an online survey for frontline workers to their staff. Phone follow-up in Quebec.
- Questions re: demographics, impacts of pandemic on agency funding & operations, impacts of pandemic on working conditions, views about return to the office & concerns for future
- Responses:
 - 50 agencies in Ontario, 27 in Quebec
 - 173 workers in Ontario, 89 in Quebec



CONTEXT – EFFORTS TO SERVE THE COMMUNITY IN THE MIDST OF A LOCK-DOWN

- Early days: fear and uncertainty
- Recognition that newcomers among the most vulnerable:
 - Social supports
 - Knowledge of public support services
 - Language barriers
 - Living and work conditions
- Commitment among agencies to serve their communities

CONTEXT: PUBLIC PANDEMIC RESPONSE IN QUEBEC VS. ONTARIO

- Prior to COVID: Qc agencies had more flexible funding model and mandate to serve broader range of migrants (i.e. TFWs & Int'l Students)
- COVID effects hit Quebec harder in early months
- Implementation of lock-down slightly different in two provinces (curfew in Qc; longer in Ont)
- TCRI unilaterally declared its members to be providing “essential services” in first weeks of pandemic = possibility to provide in-person services
- Qc government committed to maintaining funding during crisis

HIGHLIGHTS: MANAGER RESPONSES

- More layoffs of employees in Ontario (100% of agencies) vs. Quebec (33%)
- 87% of Ontario agencies shifted work entirely online vs. 37% in Qc
- 96% of Qc agencies were able to apply for new COVID-related funding, ON agencies turned more to fundraising (43%) and social enterprise (27%)
- 59% of agencies in both provinces reported increasing their services; only 2% ON decreased services vs 14% in Quebec – new clientele
- 72% Ontario agencies increased collaborations vs. 44% in Quebec

HIGHLIGHTS: MANAGER RESPONSES - FUTURE

- 63% of Qc agencies reported major changes to service offer vs. 38% in Ontario
- Staff relations were stable or improved in both provinces
- 26% of Qc agencies expect an *increase* in funding vs. 10% in Ontario
- 41% of Ontario agencies expect a *drop* in funding vs. 7% in Quebec

HIGHLIGHTS: WORKER RESPONSES

- During pandemic, health (ON 71%; Qc 61%) and economic difficulties (ON 48%; QC 43%) were top concerns
- Concerns about in-person work effects on family: ON 28%; QC 33%
- Generally satisfied with working from home (WFH): ON 79%; QC 69%
 - WFH seen as productive; only 14% in ON and 20% in QC felt less productive
 - WFH risks: mental health/stress related issues (46% vs. 34%); work-life balance (45% vs. 30%); and, social isolation and economic anxiety (44% vs. 48%)
 - 77% of Ontario want to WFH majority of time vs. 54% in Quebec

HIGHLIGHTS: WORKER RESPONSES

- Services to community overwhelmingly increased (ON 58% - Qc 71%) or maintained (ON 34% - QC 8%)
- Challenges: difficult outreach (ON 39% - QC 48%); digital access for clients (ON 78% - QC 80%)
- High perception of client satisfaction – only 4% client dissatisfaction in ON & 2% QC
- Confidence in their agency's response to COVID: ON 82% - QC 89%

OVER-ARCHING PORTRAIT OF SETTLEMENT AGENCIES DURING COVID

- Committed and resilient management and frontline workers
- Ability to rapidly adjust to shifting context – services maintained and expanded
- Workers overall satisfied with conditions and relationship with management
- Qc agencies served well by flexibility in funding system and mandate to serve broader clientele
- Ontario agencies facing more uncertainty looking forward

THANKS

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