

**CITIZENSHIP AND EMPLOYMENT PRECARITY RESEARCH PROJECT
GTA AGENCY CONSULTATIONS
FEB 8, 11 and APR 8 2016**

CONSULTATION REPORT

Prof. Luin Goldring from York University and Prof. Patricia Landolt from the University of Toronto hosted three consultations for staff from settlement, employment and social service agencies who work with newcomers and precarious legal status migrants. The overall goal of the consultations was to discuss how issues of precarious legal status intersect with precarious employment and to identify research priorities that may become part of the CEP research project.

Consultation Objectives

1. Identify emerging trends in the field of settlement, employment and social service
2. Identify challenges faced by agencies in the provision of services for newcomers and precarious status migrants
3. Establish research priorities for the CEP project that will serve the needs of agencies
4. Identify persons and agencies interested in becoming involved in the CEP research project as partners and/or strategic advisors

Staff Participants (45)

Agencies Represented (35)

- Agincourt Community Services Association
- Albion Neighbourhood Services
- Bangladeshi-Canadian Community Services
- Canadian Centre for Accreditation
- Canadian Centre for Refugee and Immigrant Health
- Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto
- Catholic Cross-cultural Services
- Centre for Immigrant and Community Services
- Chinese and South Asian Legal Clinic
- City of Toronto – Family Residence Scarborough
- Colour of Poverty – Colour of Change
- Durham Region Unemployment Help Centre
- Ernestine's Women's Shelter
- FCJ Refugee Centre
- Jane/Finch Family Community Centre
- Harbourfront Community Centre
- Hong Fook Mental Health Association
- Jamaican Canadian Association
- JVS Toronto
- Mathew House Refugee Reception Services
- North York Harvest Food Bank
- North York Community House
- Polycultural Immigrant and Community Services
- Rexdale Community Legal Clinic
- Settlement Assistance and Family Support Services
- Sistering
- South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario
- St. Stephen's Community House
- The Lighthouse
- Toronto South LIP / WoodGreen
- Women's Habitat
- WoodGreen Community Services
- Working Women Community Centre
- YMCA of Greater Toronto
- Yonge Street Mission

HIGHLIGHTS OF CONSULTATIONS

There is a Growing Gap in Access to Services and a mismatch between programs and newcomer needs. Service providers across a number of sectors are coming into regular contact with precarious legal status (PLS) migrants. However, they are often unable to offer services and programs to this population because of funder eligibility restrictions. The service delivery sector is facing funding cuts, which institutionalizes and spreads precarity. Staff is experiencing job precarity. Together with tighter resources, this affects programming. These trends, together with policies that tie federal funding to serving persons in particular legal status categories, is producing a widening gap in access to services. Newcomers are increasingly paying for settlement services in the private sector. Funding patterns and access gaps are likely to contribute to long-term challenges for PLS migrants – a population that is here to stay.

Challenges that affect PLS Migrants impact entire Communities. PLS migrants and their families are facing complex issues – income insecurity, underemployment, limited career prospects, mixed-status situations within families, increasing surveillance, violence, etc. Moreover, legal status and employment precarity cuts across generations. Youth have specific employment needs; parents face housing and childcare challenges; seniors who worked for years in the cash economy have no access to pension benefits. The challenges experienced by a person with precarious legal status and/or precarious employment can have negative repercussions on family members – even those with permanent status or citizenship, and the wider community.

The Institutionalization of Networks of Precarization and Exploitation. Many newcomers, regardless of legal status, education and experience, encounter networks of exploitation that connect employers, employment agencies, low-end financial service institutions, ethnic networks, landlords (who are sometimes also employers), settlement lawyers and social service agencies. The landscape of profit seeking institutions is creating a complex and predatory economy that is becoming a distinct feature of the Toronto labour market.

Responses to Precarization

Many of the service providers and other institutional actors that interact with newcomers use different strategies to work with and support newcomers and their families. At the same time, newcomers and their families find ways to make do and get ahead. Recognizing the significant shifts in the settlement and employment landscape, the Persistent Precarity and Social Inequality Research Project aims to examine the implications of these intersecting changes for long-term patterns of social inequality in Toronto.

We will do this by analyzing:

- a) individual and family employment and legal status trajectories,
- b) networks of solidarity, support and exploitation faced by PLS newcomers and more established foreign-born residents and naturalized citizens.

The CEP research project hopes to look beyond the settlement process to examine experiences and interactions in a number of arenas (e.g. settlement, employment, housing, schooling, health, and legal counsel) and sub-groups (e.g. youth).

AM SESSION - Consultation Discussions/Activities

Taking Stock: What is happening on the ground?

For the morning session, attendees were asked to join small groups to discuss the challenges clients and service users were experiencing in the areas of settlement, employment and access to social services. They were to consider situations or examples that applied to a variety of legal status categories and vulnerable groups. These included:

Precarious Legal Status Categories

Refugee Claimants
Family sponsorship
Work permit holders
International students
Humanitarian and Compassionate applicants
Visitor Visa
No Visa
Denied Applicants
Permanent Residents
Naturalized Citizens

Vulnerable Groups

Women/ Gender
Youth
LGBTQI+
Racialized Communities
Religious Communities
Aboriginals/Indigenous
Persons with Foreign Credentials
Persons with Disabilities



L-R: Carmen Marquez, Ken Williams, Mary Mark, Rochelle Grandison, Almaz Reda, Jackeline Barragan, Maria Pereyra



Participants place notes on the taking stock chart

Participants reported back on the challenges faced by PLS migrants and vulnerable groups and discussed the challenges they experienced as staff/service providers. All attendees were asked to write these challenges on sticky notes that were then placed on a What's Happening Activity poster in order to share with the entire

group. Note-takers also recorded comments and discussion. The patterns and themes that emerged from the morning activity in both consultations are summarized below. Some themes overlap in different areas and were repeated to ensure accuracy.

SETTLEMENT CHALLENGES

Government funding cuts have put a strain on staff time, resources and the provision of quality service, despite unionization

- Settlement worker hours and paid vacation time have been cut. Yet, work demands continue to rise and some staff consistently work more than what they are paid for
- Settlement workers with specific language skills, such as Arabic and Bengali, are often hired on temporary part-time contracts but cannot build relationships with clients to help address their needs
- Workers are being pressured to provide all their services in one client visit, such a needs assessment and an action plan. However, certain clients, such as government assisted refugees (GARs), have complex cases and need more time with staff to understand the system and address housing, language, mental health, work and other needs.
- A decrease in funding has led to less training time for staff on immigration, citizenship, employment and other policy changes that affect clients
- Changes in immigration, refugee and related policies require ongoing training, but training is under-resourced
- Staff are not given training in gender/violence issues despite an increasing need to assist women in abusive situations
- Time constraints and restrictions on what staff can do mean some clients get turned away
- PLS migrants are showing up in all kinds of spaces leading to institutional and cross-sectoral complexity, leaving settlement workers unprepared. Networking and referral strategies that used to work are not as useful in this context

Settlement services are not funded to address the needs of newcomers who transition between various forms of PLS

- Settlement workers assist PLS clients but cannot count them in reports and do not receive funding for them; many PLS clients have the potential to attain their permanent resident status (PR)
- Settlement workers in schools and libraries are often the only social service providers that PLS clients come in contact with
- Despite frequent immigration policy changes, settlement workers are not trained on how these changes apply to specific PLS clients such as work

- permit holders in the live-in-caregiver program, farm-worker program and other temporary work permit holders as well as international students.
- Newcomers face difficulty accessing formal banking institutions, leading many to arrange payments for settlement services provided by lawyers and other private service providers through low-end money lending institutions that charge high interest rates and fees
 - Service providers in the outer regions of the GTA have difficulty building relationships and/or retaining clients because many people move frequently to find work and affordable housing

Non-governmental settlement services have more flexibility in whom they serve. However, raising funds for PLS migrant services is complex and often in conflict with prevailing migrant stereotypes and rumours.

- Agencies that raise funds privately need to protect the identities of PLS migrants and their families who visit their centres. This makes large awareness campaigns to find new donors very difficult to pursue.
- Negative misconceptions and rumours persist regarding PLS migrant services, especially for refugees and GARs, making it difficult to reach new donors who may believe that PLS migrants receive better services than PRs and Citizens.

Youth have specific settlement needs and challenges

- Schools that encounter PLS migrant youth do not consistently apply the Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) policy. Many PLS migrant youth are turned away and left without the learning and social networks that come with an elementary or high school education
- PLS migrants are barred from taking the GED (Secondary School Equivalency) exam
- Police presence in elementary and secondary schools is leading to a culture of vigilance/fear. Police do not adhere to the school board's DADT policy and they continue working with Canadian border services
- PLS migrants are charged international student rates to access post-secondary education, even if they have been living in the country for a long time. Loans to pay for tuition are not accessible
- Many youth who are reunited with their parents in Canada, after years of separation, have great difficulty establishing familial bonds with parents and struggle to adjust to school and a new way of life
- Youth are facing greater mental health challenges with few able to access the necessary support
- Many PLS youth resort to dangerous under-the-table work conditions with some resorting to sex work. Agency staff who encounter youth are not trained in gender/violence issues despite an increasing need to help clients in these areas.

- Youth and newcomers face the similar challenge of being new entrants in the labour market

Skills training, education and English language skills are essential for PLS migrants to attain their legal status yet few to no programs exist

- PLS migrants with in-demand apprenticeship skills and experience are not given the option to retrain or a path to legal employment and/or more permanent forms of legal status
- Many newcomers are not able to take advantage of free ESL classes due to employment time constraints that make it difficult to receive the training needed to leave precarious jobs.
- ESL Training centres do not receive enough funding for all who qualify leading to long waiting list
- Persons applying for citizenship must pass an English test but training is not easily accessible

Many newcomers remain unaware of settlement services

- Many migrants continue to rely on family, ethnic and neighbourhood networks for advice on legal status issues
- Clients who access services are overwhelmingly female, yet men have unique challenges that also need to be addressed
- PLS migrants do not receive the same settlement service information like those arriving with PR status because they are not considered immigrants or residents
- Promotional materials given at the airport are not having the desired effect of informing migrants about settlement services
- Migrants who arrive through family sponsorships and who do not speak English are particularly vulnerable if they suffer from abuse and family violence and are kept away from community or government services
- PLS migrants from English speaking countries are often not referred to settlement services because many do not attend English language classes

Settlement agencies are not allowed to address systemic barriers through partnerships or advocacy

- Settlement agencies are pressured to focus on target numbers, e.g. how many PR clients served in a month. Time is not provided for settlement agencies to meet with each other to build relationships and partnerships between settlement groups or to connect with advocacy groups and policy makers to address issues and/or the increase in service demands
- Settlement agencies cannot advocate on systemic issues for fear they will lose government funding
- There is a lack of coordination and communication between settlement agencies as many compete for the same clients in the same area.

Immigration policies are in conflict with employment and other regulations, making it difficult for PLS migrants and service providers to make decisions on how to move forward

- Humanitarian and compassionate applicants are asked to prove they can sustain themselves, often through job letters from employers. Yet, these applicants are not legally entitled to work in Canada. Employers who hire PLS workers for precarious under-the-table work are often not willing to provide job letters for fear of reprisal or fines
- Despite Toronto being designated a sanctuary city, migrants continue to live in fear of accessing social services to which they are entitled. Many live underground without access to a bank account and other necessities to avoid calling attention
- Police services were listed under the sanctuary city policy but they continued to work with CBSA. Police who work in schools are not aware of or do not follow the school board's DADT policy. Settlement workers are unsure of how to counsel clients on issues that require immediate police intervention
- PLS migrants have been advised into applying for status under certain PLS categories in order to obtain critical medical and legal services. Yet, these actions may be detrimental to their long-term ability to apply for permanent resident status
- Settlement workers are not legally allowed to fully assist newcomers with forms and applications. Many resort to recommending lawyers that charge a fee for service

EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES

Precarious employment conditions are increasing for all newcomers

- As the economy weakens and middle to high income earners experience job precarity, there are ripple effects for the cash economy, i.e. less demand for informal child care arrangements, personal support, cleaning, snow shovellers, etc. leading to more competition between PLS migrants
- Employment sectors are increasingly racialized. Migrants from specific ethnic communities are being funnelled to specific sectors to find work, e.g. Somali – parking lots, Vietnamese – nail salons, Portuguese- construction, Spanish/Russian – cleaning, etc.
- Migrants are channeled to poorly paid unstable jobs through personal networks and/or sometimes through employment agencies due to strict banking regulations that prevent PLS migrants from accessing formal financial services, low-end money lending institutions are filling the void by providing services, such as loans and paycheque transactions at high interest rates/fees

The Employment Standards Act offers little to no protection for many workers

- Many newcomers hold on to survival jobs for fear that unemployment will be worse. Many are unaware of their legal rights or forms of recourse
- PLS migrants with legal work permits who are injured on the job often do not report employers if they are at fault for fear of being deported
- PLS migrant workers with legal work permits who are part of a union often cannot receive legal counsel nor can they seek paid legal help because of their union membership
- Farms workers are starting to show up in the GTA due to a number of problems with the program and with employers. Some are in need of legal and other services that are not available in their area, or have suffered violence and persecution and are on the run

Training for Employment counselors is not comprehensive enough

- Employment counsellors are not regularly trained in legal status issues and how these affect employment options
- Staff are not given training in gender/violence issues despite an increasing need to assist women in abusive situations. Many clients in shelters resort to sex work, especially youth, due to the fact that they are not being properly assisted to explore other options

Skills training programs for newcomers and PLS migrants are not accessible

- Many PR workers are unaware of EI, language training and other services despite being in the country for many years
- Skills training, post-secondary education and English language training are not funded for PLS migrants
- Guidelines for government funded Employment Service Providers are not clear on whether to provide services to PLS migrants. Lack of clarity means it is up to the discretion of front-line staff and management to serve PLS migrants. The ad hoc provision of services depends on the values, ethics and the directives received by front-line staff

Volunteering, internships, job readiness programs and other career-building opportunities are not accessible

- Newcomers who are dependent on low-wage precarious work may not be aware of or do not have the time and resources to pursue volunteering or other career building opportunities
- PLS migrants are not entitled to many job readiness programs. For example, the Investing in Neighbourhoods Initiative is only available for OW recipients
- Many migrants are reluctant to take unpaid opportunities because they do not understand how it could lead to paid work
- Job training programs are not accessible to parents as many do not provide child care

Recognition of foreign credentials is a cumbersome and expensive process that encourages newcomers to take precarious low wage jobs just to get by

- Newcomers in precarious jobs are left with little time and money to pursue foreign credential recognition, even if they have skills that are in high demand
- Newcomers who are able to get their credentials assessed may lack the English skills or Canadian experience demanded by employers
- The process for getting credentials recognized takes too long and many newcomers do not end up working in their field
- Programs that exist to retrain newcomers with foreign credentials are not open to PLS migrants

Precarious low wage jobs force parents to struggle to care for their children

- Childcare is expensive and the hours are not flexible, making it difficult for parents to take low paying part-time jobs to gain Canadian experience
- Some parents resort to sending their children back home to be raised by extended family until they can afford to build a life in Canada. However, many children who are brought to Canada, after years of separation from their parents, struggle to adjust. Years of separation and dashed expectations take an emotional toll on everyone and can lead to family breakdown

Youth have specific employment challenges

- Post-secondary education/training that can lead to stable employment is financially out of reach for many PLS youth
- Internships and volunteers jobs are difficult to access without stable financial and emotional support
- Under-aged PLS youth who lack legal guardians or who have difficult parent/legal guardian relationships do not have the support needed to address labour disputes or dangerous work situations
- Youth and newcomers face the similar challenge of being new entrants in the labour market

ACCESS TO SOCIAL SERVICES, HOUSING & CROSS-SECTORAL CHALLENGES

HOUSING

- Affordable housing in the GTA is scarce. Many workers resort to living far from jobs with poor access to transit while others live in cramped quarters
- Families are moving frequently to secure work and affordable housing
- PLS migrants cannot legally apply for affordable housing
- Service providers in the outer regions of the GTA have difficulty building relationships and/or retaining clients because many migrants move frequently
- Some employers offer precarious work along with room and board leading workers to become even more vulnerable if they lose their job
- Many landlords do not accept persons on OW
- The shelter system is housing an increasing number of women and children who suffer from family violence

MENTAL & PHYSICAL HEALTH

- International students, especially young and underage students in the secondary school system, need additional mental health and social support services to navigate the challenge of living on their own and to regularize their legal status
- PLS migrants and newcomers are in critical need of mental health services to deal with family separation/breakdown
- Clients need medical care to improve their health in order to work but the money for care or surgery is expensive.
- Migrants who arrive through family sponsorships and who do not speak English, may suffer from abuse and family violence and remain unaware of mental health and other services

OTHER

- Staff in a broad array of social services do not have the resources to identify or begin to address their clients' settlement and employment issues
- Agency staff that work in the areas of health, food security, etc. do not know where to send PLS clients for settlement and/or employment advice. Client identity and protection is not always guaranteed.
- PLS migrants are showing up in all kinds of spaces leading to institutional and cross-sectoral complexity.

PM SESSION - Consultation Discussions/Activities

Making Research Relevant to the needs of Communities

Attendees were asked to discuss how the challenges identified could be address through research. Specifically, what types of data (qualitative or quantitative) would address knowledge gaps and what types of tools and/or resources could help staff in their work with clients or assist in advocacy campaigns. These research requests and knowledge gaps are summarized below:

Impact of Global Economy/Economic forces

- How does the current global economy impact the incidence of precarious work in the GTA?
- How does the economy impact settlement decisions for people in different PLS categories?
- How to PLS migrants and newcomers navigate one of the most expensive cities in Canada?
- How do economic shifts and settlement policy changes in one province affect migration patterns and service providers in another province?

Settlement

- What is the impact of funding cuts to the settlement sector?
- Data on how many people are accepted for PR status based on all PLS applicant categories. How many people are accepted under what streams and on what grounds?
- Data on the impact of immigration changes and how they affect each PLS category. Express entry seems to be delaying things, especially for international students, and pushing more migrants into PLS
- What is the role or impact of the Fairness Commissioner that is supposed to assist PLS migrants applying for legal status?
- What settlement programs are working? Which ones are not? An evaluative tool to understand the process
- What are the challenges faced by front line settlement workers and how does this affect their mental health/stress?
- What do success/failure stories look like based on ethnicity/social class?
- How can we fight stereotypes re PLS migrants? We need narratives/stories on how people become PLS to challenge myths.
- Who are the connectors? What does the fabric of service community/industry look like?
- What are people's survival strategies? We need stories to humanize their experience.
- A comprehensive list of new/emerging PLS status categories
- What are the implications or impact of not sharing data between agencies? We lack the big picture?

- What is a migrants' first encounter with the system and what is the impact of the first visit?
- What strategies are migrants using to settle/secure work and other resources such as housing?
- Why do people migrate? (Look at COO)

PLS impact on families

- How does precarious employment and PLS effect children and the extended family members that eventually join migrants in Canada?
- How does a sponsorship breakdown effect on children?
- What is the impact of PLS on the mental health of families?
- What are the intergenerational effects of PLS?

Employment

- What is the relationship between employers and PLS populations? What are the structures of exploitation that keep PLS migrants in precarious jobs/situations?
- How can organizations figure out a way to hire non-status persons or PLS migrants? Some migrants are more qualified than PR candidates. How can agencies that work on these issues hire these candidates?
- What do employers think of PLS migrants and newcomers?
- What are the labour market trajectories for youth who successfully get into the job market?
- When people are focused on finding employment, what else get's neglected?
- What employment and job readiness programs can help encourage employers to hire newcomers? How can these be replicated for PLS migrants and vulnerable groups?

Awareness of Services/Realities

- What services were migrants aware of? What services did they access? What were you told to do? What information helped/didn't help?
- How do you address public misinformation or public backlash against PLS migrant issues/services?

Women/Gender/Youth

- What is the incidence of violence against women for PLS migrants?
- How many women/youth are forced into sex work because of PLS
- What was the impact of the family sponsorship 2-year live-in requirement on women sponsored to Canada? Government tried to address marriage fraud but this has created more problems.

- What are the long term outcomes of being young and unemployed?
- What is the impact of PLS on youth mental health?

Education/Foreign Credential Recognition

- How can the accreditation system learn how to process migrants from countries where internationally recognized credentials are not granted? E.g. Eritrea does not provide credentials for graduate pharmacists
- Of persons who get their foreign credentials recognized, how many work in their field?
- Are workers from certain races/ethnic groups/sectors getting their credentials recognized sooner? How many and how?
- What are the career trajectories of persons who do not get their credentials recognized? How many are there and what are their stories?

Advocacy

- Who belongs? Who is excluded? How are people left out of the political participation process and how does this contribute to precarious conditions: homeless, abuse, sex trade, etc.
- What are the barriers that prevent agencies from doing advocacy work? Many boards are afraid of approving advocacy related projects based on funding cuts to charities that did political advocacy work.

Research Concerns

- How and with whom will this research be shared and for what purpose?
- Research should result in the creation of advocacy tools for service providers. It should lead to policy recommendations and changes to policy
- Collecting data from PLS population carries risks. How do we maintain confidentiality, protect their information and encourage them to participate?
- Many service providers cannot discuss legal status issues
- Revealing strategies on how people work around the system to settle in Canada may be dangerous for PLS migrants.
- Voice recording/photography are ways you can capture voices of persons at-risk
- Community-based research: make sure persons facing these challenges are involved in the research process; i.e. do community consultations

NEXT STEPS

The CEP research team will present this report in April, 2016, at a gathering with staff from non-profit institutions that conduct research, provide funding and advocate on settlement and employment issues.

Staff members who attended the agency consultations and expressed an interest in becoming involved in the project as advisors/partners will also be contacted between April and May 2016, to discuss the extent of their involvement.

The design phase of the CEP project will begin once partnerships have been secured and a working/advisory group has been established.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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