Visible Minority Newcomer Women Pilot: Lessons Learned – Retrospective Study of the New Partners Initiative

Final Report

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Introduction

The 2018 Federal budget states that employment is key to the successful integration of newcomers to Canada, as it supports their financial independence and allows them to make social connections and build and retain job skills. The Government of Canada recognizes that Visible Minority Newcomer Women (VMNW) face significant barriers to finding and keeping good jobs, including language challenges, lack of Canadian work experience, lack of professional and social networks, and gender- and race-based discrimination. Some women also deal with a lack of accessible childcare and limited or interrupted education in their home country. As a result, even those who are employed may be in precarious or low-income employment. To help reduce these barriers to employment, in 2018–19 the Government announced a $31.9 million investment in a pilot project to help visible minority newcomer women secure employment.

As part of the pilot, IRCC solicited proposals from eligible organizations that have not previously received funding from the department to design and implement programs to integrate VMNW into the labour market (referred to in this report as the New Partners initiative, funding, or stream). Through an Expression of Interest process, which distributed a total of $6.4M between 2019-20 and 2020-21, the department sought to attain this goal by funding organizations to develop innovative labour market integration approaches, to strengthen their capacity and eligible partnership-building, and/or to increase VMNW digital skills.

The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) received funding from IRCC to conduct a retrospective research study of the New Partners initiative. The research will support IRCC and the settlement sector more broadly by gathering evidence to strengthen settlement and integration services and improve outcomes for newcomer women and their families. This is the final report of New Partners Retrospective Study.

Objective of the study

The study was designed to document the implementation and outcome experience of the participating organizations and outcomes attained for participants in the programs. It also examined how the COVID-19 pandemic and other implementation factors affected service delivery. A major aim of the research was to identify promising practices and lessons learned to inform policy, programming and practice on employment supports.

The implementation and outcome research questions that guided the research related to what and how services were delivered, by whom and to whom, the working relationship between the organizations, employment and other outcomes for participants, and the partnership, and capacity and other outcomes for the organizations. Eighteen of the 21 funded organizations engaged with and provided data to support the research study.

Key findings

Despite the limitations of a retrospective study, SRDC was able to document the implementation and outcome experience for participants and organizations and to identify promising practices and lessons learned to inform policy, programming and practice on employment supports for VMNW.

Organization and participant profiles

The aim of the funding under the New Partners initiative is to encourage greater innovation in the delivery of settlement services for VMNW. This funding attracted a range of mainly non-profit organizations across Canada, all new to IRCC funding, to develop and deliver programs for VMNW. The new partners offered innovative approaches to employment for VMNW, and implemented a variety of programs offering a mix of employment-related services and supports not commonly provided to VMNW, such as job search assistance, digital literacy skills training, mental health support, job placement and follow-up support.

In addition to being a visible minority, the women participating in the programs were a diverse group. However, they tended to have been in Canada five years or less prior to program entry (74 per cent of participants), to speak English (87 per cent), to be between 25 and 44 years of age (77 per cent), to be married (65 per cent) and/or have children (64 per cent), and to have at least a high school education (83 per cent).

The program participants reported multiple barriers to employment before entering the program, such as job search skills and access to training. The programs were designed to address these and other challenges. Some challenges, such as low language ability and lack of childcare, were not directly addressed by the programs.

Implementation

COVID-19 had a significant impact on service delivery. All organizations switched from face-to-face services to virtual delivery, which forced them to make extensive changes to the curricula and number and timing of sessions, among other things. The speed and efficiency with which this shift was carried out demonstrated the flexibility and adaptability of program staff.

The pandemic hampered recruitment of both clients and employer partners. Some participants experienced difficulties related to access, for example low digital literacy skills, and technological issues (e.g., computers and Internet connection), as well as lack of placements, family distractions, and social isolation. Some of these issues were mitigated by staff. Still, virtual program delivery also enhanced accessibility for some participants by enabling them to overcome transportation and accessibility and expanded outreach and recruitment for some organizations. It also opened the eyes of organizations to the potential for virtual delivery in future programming.

Some of the key implementation lessons reported by program staff include: visible minority staff helped participants to be comfortable in the program; small cohort formats and individual support were beneficial to participants; and participants' low language skills and lack of suitable childcare limited access and thus needs to be addressed in future programming to better engage and support women with children.

Participant outcomes

Participants were generally happy with all program activities. Almost all (92 per cent) would recommend their program to other newcomer women.

Participation in the program appears to have led to employment. Participants reported a decline in many of the challenges to job entry reported prior to program enrolment and targeted by the programs, suggesting that the programs contributed to these changes. Over two-thirds of participants (69 per cent) were employed during or after the program, and many remained involved with activities such as education/training and volunteering after the program. Almost all participants indicated that they were happy with their jobs. Most (82 per cent) also felt accepted in their workplaces.

Many participants reported outcomes not directly associated with employment, such as improved human and psychosocial capital indicators (e.g., training, confidence, and networks) suggesting the potential for employment down the road. These intermediary outcomes are especially important for VMNW who are distant from the labour market and may experience multiple barriers to employment.

The Gender-Based Analysis Plus Analysis suggests that the programs may have worked better for lower-skilled VMNW, and childcare appears to be a significant barrier for VMNW with children regardless of other characteristics.

Organization outcomes: Partnership-building

Many organizations established important partnerships with community organizations that helped the programs with outreach as well as by referring participants to services not offered by the program.

Some organizations successfully engaged employers, which benefited participants by enabling them access to on-the-job experience, placements, and job opportunities. Employer partnerships also contributed to improving the delivery product, by ensuring the curriculum content addresses their needs so that trainees would be hired.

Working with IRCC

A majority of organizations were satisfied with their working relationship with IRCC. Moreover, all reported having had a good working relationship with their assigned IRCC program officer.

For a number of organizations, learning the IRCC reporting process required effort and time, particularly since many were first-time IRCC funding recipients and did not know the systems. Although childcare support was available, organizations noted some difficulties with the funding provisions, which did not always cover shorter term child-minding needs.

Capacity-building

The organizations indicated their participation in this program augmented their knowledge base in several areas, where it could be applied to future programming. This included knowledge of the value of individualized support, holistic treatment, informal peer groups, mental health supports, and working with employers. Some organizations have already applied what they learned from their programs to current programming.

Conclusion

The information gathered in this study has enabled us to identify some important lessons learned from the set of initiatives funded in the New Partners funding stream. The results have added to the knowledge base on effective ways to facilitate the transition of visible minority newcomer women into the Canadian labour market, which should in turn inform policy, programming and practice. The study showed:

1. The New Partners funding successfully attracted organizations new to IRCC funding to deliver different combinations of employment integration services targeted for visible minority newcomer women seeking to secure Canadian jobs but facing multiple barriers to doing so. The programs implemented addressed these. The study found that after the

programs, participants reported a decline in many of the challenges the programs were designed to address.

2. Program participants found employment after leaving the programs; others enrolled in education or training and/or entered volunteer positions. Importantly, participants indicated employment-related outcomes such as increased confidence and social networks and gains in psychosocial capital that are important intermediary outcomes to future employment.

3. Despite the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic which forced the organizations to change the mode of delivery, the funding enabled the organizations to enhance knowledge in a number of areas that could innovate future delivery of services to VMNW and to develop partnerships with other community and employers that should further facilitate that.

Despite these gains and the promising nature of the results of this study, there is still much to learn and to do to fully address the barriers to employment experienced by VMNW.

INTRODUCTION

The 2018 Federal budget states that employment is key to the successful integration of newcomers to Canada, as it supports their financial independence and allows them to make social connections and build and retain job skills. The Government of Canada also recognizes that visible minority newcomer women[1] (VMNW) face significant barriers to finding and keeping good jobs, including language challenges, lack of Canadian work experience, lack of professional and social networks, and gender- and race-based discrimination. Some women also deal with a lack of accessible childcare and limited or interrupted educational attainment in their home country. As a result, even those who are employed may be in precarious or low-income employment.

To help reduce these barriers to employment, in 2018–19 the Government announced a $31.9 million investment to help VMNW improve their employment and career development, the Visible Minority Newcomer Women Pilot, a three-year initiative administered by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). The pilot's goal is to improve the employment and career advancement of VMNW with varying skill levels and degrees of labour market attachment, by enabling them to overcome multiple employment barriers such as race, gender, skills, social supports, and knowledge of the Canadian labour market.

As part of the pilot, IRCC solicited proposals from eligible organizations[2] that have not previously received funding from the department to design and implement programs to integrate VMNW into the labour market (referred to in this report as the New Partners initiative, funding, or stream).[3] Through an Expression of Interest process, which distributed a total of $6.4M between 2019-20 and 2020-21, the department sought to attain this goal by funding organizations to develop innovative labour market integration approaches, to strengthen their capacity and

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[1] The term "visible minority" is used in the Employment Equity Act to define one of four designated groups. The aim of the Act is to achieve workplace equality and to correct employment disadvantages for the four groups. Visible minority persons are identified according to the Employment Equity Act as being non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.

[2] Organizations eligible for the New Partners initiative are those from the non-profit, public, and private sectors dealing with VMNW and not having received funding from IRCC to do so. Not-for-profit organizations include non-governmental organizations, non-profit corporations, community groups, umbrella organizations, regulatory bodies, and apprenticeship authorities. Private sector organizations are businesses (e.g., employers hiring newcomers, private language schools), while public sector are government entities (provincial, territorial, or municipal) and educational institutions. See Appendix A for the organization selection process.

[3] Much of what is contained in this section was drawn from the IRCC government website at: https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/partners-service-providers/funding/visible-minority-newcomer-women-pilot-initiative-funding-guidelines.html

eligible partnership-building, and/or to increase VMNW digital skills (see Appendix A for a fuller description of these objectives and how organizations were selected to meet them).

The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) received funding from IRCC to conduct a retrospective research study of the New Partners initiative. The research will support IRCC and the settlement sector more broadly by gathering evidence to strengthen settlement and integration services and improve outcomes for newcomer women and their families. This is the final report of New Partners Retrospective Study.

An important consideration in this research study, it should be noted, was the COVID-19 pandemic. The New Partners projects were implemented in 2019 and most projects ended March 2021 or earlier, which means projects delivered services to VMNW during the pandemic. The pandemic has negatively affected the Canadian labour market, and disproportionately for immigrants. According to Statistics Canada,[4] recent female immigrants experienced the largest increase in the rate of transition to non-employment during the initial contraction of the economy in April 2020. Moreover, during the partial recovery from May to July 2020, immigrants had lower transition rates from non-employment to employment compared to Canadian-born individuals, with recent[5] immigrant women displaying the largest gap. Therefore, how the pandemic affected the delivery of funded program services to VMNW formed an important part of the context for this research study.

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[4]   Hou, Picot, & Zhang. Transitions into and out of employment by immigrants during the COVID-19 lockdown and recovery. STATCAN COVID-19: Data to Insights for a Better Canada. Catalogue No. 45280001 (2020).

[5]   Recent immigrants are those who landed in Canada within the previous ten years.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

This section lays out the research questions that guided the study and the methodology used to gather the data to address those questions. SRDC used a utilization-focused approach to guide the research process, including the collection and analysis of data and the presentation of results. This approach ensured the information and results are useful to IRCC and the organizations it funds and other employment and settlement service providers. Engagement with the organizations in the New Partners funding stream was carried out in a collaborative, flexible, and practical manner.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

This study gathered evidence to assess the extent to which the objectives of the New Partners stream of the VMNW pilot were met. The study was designed to document the implementation experience of the participating organizations. In doing so, it also examined the extent to which objectives of the funded initiatives and other expected outcomes were attained for the organizations and participants in the initiatives. It also examined how the COVID-19 pandemic and other implementation factors affected service delivery. From the evidence gathered, SRDC identified promising practices and lessons learned to inform policy, programming and practice on employment supports. Such information will prove useful to government, service provider organizations, and VMNW themselves.

The specific research questions that guided the study are as follows:

Implementation questions

1. What did the initiative **deliver** and **to whom**?

2. Was it **implemented** as planned? If not, why not and what differed? Were there **challenges** to its implementation? Did **lack of capacity** play a role here? What were the **opportunities** along the way?

    ➢ What impact did the **COVID-19 pandemic** have on service delivery?

    ➢ What were **participants' delivery experience** with the initiative?

3. Since this was the **first time** the organizations had been funded by **IRCC**, what was their experience working with the department?

Outcomes questions

1. Did the initiative **achieve its intended objectives**? If not, why not and what differed?

2. What **employment and other outcomes** did the intervention promote for participants?

3. Did the intervention improve the **capacity** of the organization? In what ways, for example, in terms of delivery, research and partnerships?

4. What were, if any, observed **unintended consequences** of the intervention for service delivery and partner organizations, as well as for participants?

Questions at the global level

1. What insights does a **Gender-Based Analysis Plus** lens provide? Which **subgroups** of participants – as to age, skill/education level, immigration admission category, marital/family status, for example – who did the initiatives work best for, how, and why?

2. What are the **commonalities and differences** in implementation and outcomes across the different initiatives? What were the **common challenges** encountered in implementing and delivering the initiatives? How did the service providers overcome these common challenges?

3. What are the **common lessons learned**, **emerging promising and innovative practices**, and **recommendations** for policy, programming, and practice? This includes lessons learned on virtual service delivery for staff and participants?

DATA COLLECTION METHODOLOGY

To address the research issues in this study, we used four lines of evidence: documents review; survey of organizations; interviews with program coordinators; and survey of participants. We also assess the use of; and iCARE administrative data.[6] The data collection began with the engagement of the 21 organizations that received funding under this program. Of these, 18 agreed to participate in the study.

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[6]   iCARE (Immigration Contribution Agreement Reporting Environment) captures program data from IRCC's service providers. With the consent of the organizations, SRDC obtained iCARE data for nine organizations from IRCC and reviewed aggregate statistics from the program data entered into iCARE by the organizations to obtain participant numbers and information on program activities. However, the information was found not suitable for our analytical purposes; thus, it was not included in the study.

Table 1 outlines the data collection methodologies, including how many were reached in each line of evidence. See Appendix B for more detail on the methodologies and Appendix C for the research questions each methodology addressed. All ten research questions were in some way addressed by all lines of evidence, apart from the participant survey which was focused on learning about who benefited from the initiatives, their views on program delivery, and the effects the program had on them.

Table 1   Data collection methodologies

Data source	Process and content	No. of "respondents"
Documents review	Program documents were requested from organizations and shared with SRDC (sometimes obtained directly from IRCC with consent) comprising a few or much of the following: accepted proposals to IRCC (without dollar amounts), progress reports to IRCC, case studies, success stories and other program documents. Information was gleaned on initial program objectives, services provided, partnership-building, implementation challenges, and promising practices.	18 of 18 organizations
Organizational survey	Conducted online, this survey asked for information about the program's objectives, services provided under them, and the number of participants; and participants' employment and related outcomes, their most significant change experienced, and their satisfaction with the implementation and effectiveness of the program.	17 of 18 organizations invited
Organizational interviews	Conducted virtually (Zoom), apart from one conducted by phone, and following an interview guide, conversations were conducted with one or multiple persons involved in the delivery of the initiative, to gather information about their role, services delivered and successful elements, delivery challenges experienced, working relationship with IRCC, and partnership building.	15 of 18 organizations invited
Participant survey	Organizations were asked to email a survey invitation to participants in their program, containing a link to the online survey instrument. With participants' consent, the survey collected: information about their pre-program socio-demographics, education level, employment history, and social network; data on post-program employment indicators (employed or self-employed, wages, hours, job search, job satisfaction); and their views of the services they received from the program. A $50 gift card was provided to those who submitted a completed survey.	461 respondents across 13 organizations

ANALYSIS

SRDC conducted a thematic analysis of the data gathered from the above sources to address the research questions. We used NVivo to analyze the qualitative data from interviews, the VOXCO survey software itself to generate distributions of results in the organizational and participant surveys, and Excel to generate bivariate distributions of the participant survey results by descriptive variables (for the subgroup analysis). For details on the analysis, see Appendix B — Data Collection Methodology and Analysis.

Triangulation was used to corroborate findings from the multiple methods. The findings were compared across methods where the same research questions were posed. This enabled us to contrast findings, and both enhanced the results and gave us greater confidence in them, by providing insights from multiple perspectives.

Limitations

Here we identify a number of the limitations that affected the degree to which some research questions could be answered. It should be noted that some of the limitations are due to the retrospective nature of the research design.

- The level or rigour of the evidence gathered in retrospective studies is generally inferior to prospective ones where the outcomes of interest are stated at the start and metrics and data collection are designed to capture them throughout the project, including at the pre-program stage.

- The study does not include a comparison group, and thus we are not able to determine the true impact or the difference that the intervention made on participant employment and other outcomes. That is, we were not able to determine causation — the counterfactual: what truly would have happened in the absence of the initiative. However, we endeavoured to identify factors possibly contributing toward the outcomes through subgroup analysis and other means.

- A retrospective study generally incurs a higher degree of recall bias: for some participants, it has been some time since they received the intervention. The researchers were mindful of this aspect in designing the tools and in the analysis and interpretation.

- The organizations typically emailed the survey invitation to a smaller group than the number of participants indicated, suggesting some participants left the program some time ago, were alumni only, or had changed their email address. Moreover, participants from six organizations were not part of the survey. Hence, the respondent sample in the participant survey is not necessarily a representative sample of the women who participated

across the programs in the pilot. Nevertheless, the sample is sizeable and provides numerous insights into the women's experiences and selected outcomes. We are fairly certain there is no bias in the sample against those with low language ability as participants were offered the opportunity to have a program coordinator assist them in the completing the survey if they needed it.

- For some initiatives, the number of respondents to the participant survey was either too small or small relative to the total number of participants in the program, which reduces our confidence that the respondent sample is representative of all participants in the initiative. This limited what the study could have said quantitatively about individual organizations' client outcomes. For some, there was a large enough number of respondents, but the goal of the study was not to measure outcomes at the organizational level.

PROFILE OF ORGANIZATIONS AND PARTICIPANTS

WHO WERE THE FUNDING RECIPIENTS AND WHAT DID THEY IMPLEMENT?

To profile the funded organizations and their programs, we used information from the organizational survey and interviews, buttressed with information from the documents review. This profile is of the 18 of the 21 organizations that received funding under the New Partners Stream in the Visible Minority Newcomer Women Pilot that agreed to participate in the research. The discussion below refers to Table 2. A fuller description of the 18 organizations and their respective funded projects is presented in Appendix D.

All but one of funded organizations were non-profit, although funding from the program was available to qualifying organizations in the public and private sectors as well. The one exception was a municipal government (City of Brantford). As Table 2 indicates, the 18 organizations represent a diverse group of organizations across Canada, with six in the greater Toronto area, four in other parts of Ontario (one serving a rural area), one in the Atlantic Provinces, four in the Prairie Provinces, and three in British Columbia. They range in size, with 11 organizations having less than 20 employees, and six having over 50.

The types of projects implemented varied greatly, as shown in Table 2. All projects targeted VMNW, but some added variations to the eligibility to align with their project and/or the organization's target group. These related to age (youth), ethnicity (e.g., of African or Syrian descent), skill level (e.g., lower skilled or higher digital skills), or language level (LINC[7] level-3 or higher). While they all focused on specialized programming for VMNW, some implemented more familiar employment-readiness training programs and technical skills training, with employment as the expected outcome for participants; others were more business, entrepreneurial or incubator focused with self-employment as the expected outcome. Some strove for both outcomes. One was a research project aiming to produce an employment pathways handbook, based on employment needs assessments and consultations with employers. Note that nine of the organizations targeted a specific sector, with three in retail sectors, two in each of information technology (IT) and food services, and one in each of landscaping and sewing.

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[7] Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) is a program provided through the National Settlement Program and funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada. There are eight levels, ranging from 1 (low beginner) to 8 (high intermediate).

Finally, note in Table 2 that **some organizations developed and implemented programs that leveraged or utilized their own resources**. Examples include: offering training and work experience (work integrated learning) in their own social enterprises (e.g., a community kitchen, retail stores) and/or made use of their own training programs, using funds to enhance intake, support and outcomes, and outreach assistance from members in their association.

Table 2   Summary of funded organizations and their projects

Organization	Staff size (S<20; M 21-50; L>50)	Location	Name of project *Leveraged own resources*	Target group, distinguishing traits	Objectives/services	Expected outcome	Sector (if applicable)
ACCESS Community Capital Fund	S	Toronto, ON	Pathways to Prosperity	VMNW With a business idea or interest	To introduce VMNW to business concepts and equip them with knowledge and tools of what is required to succeed in business in Canada; To help them develop their business ideas and plans to successfully launch in Canada; To create a network of like-minded individuals to strengthen social and professional networks.	Business	
African Canadian Resource Network Saskatchewan Inc. (ACRN)	S	Regina, SK	Bridging the Gap	VMNW Of African and other descent	To enable VMNW to find gainful employment or start their own businesses, by providing them with information about the Canadian labour market and business environment and job readiness and job search training.	Both employment & business	
African Communeities of Manitoba Inc. (ACOMI)	S	Winnipeg, MB	We Belong	VMNW Of African descent In Canada 2 to 7 years	To provide VMNW with basic employability skills and entrepreneurial skills; To increase their knowledge of Canadian workplace practice, language and culture, and their ability to navigate the workforce; To help them to apply this knowledge to meet employers' needs and to enter and remain in the local labor force, or to create a job for themselves.	Both employment & business	

Organization	Staff size (S<20; M 21-50; L>50)	Location	Name of project *Leveraged own resources*	Target group, distinguishing traits	Objectives/services	Expected outcome	Sector (if applicable)
Canadian Muslim Women's Institute (CMWI)	S	Winnipeg, MB	Newcomer Women Employment Training	VMNW, Lower skilled Language: CLB [8]3+	To provide VMNW with opportunities for work experience and ongoing support in the Canadian workplace; To help them improve their general English-language skills, by providing them with language supports; To provide them with technical skills for home and work; To develop networking relationships in training fields that will help them get a job; To address the lack of job opportunities for VMNW, by providing employers with ongoing support and resources.	Employment	Sewing, cooking, cleaning, childminding
Corporation of the City of Brantford	L	Brantford, ON	Connect, Support, Achieve	VMNW	To help VMNW access the skills training and education they need to find a job in the Canadian workforce; To reduce VMNW employment barriers relating to transportation, childcare, etc., by providing them with social supports; To connect them to mentors to afford provide them with knowledge of how to succeed.	Employment	

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[8]   Canadian Level Benchmarks (CLB) describe 12 levels of ability in four different areas of language skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Organization	Staff size (S<20; M 21-50; L>50)	Location	Name of project *Leveraged own resources*	Target group, distinguishing traits	Objectives/services	Expected outcome	Sector (if applicable)
Landscape Ontario Horticultural Association	M	Milton, ON	Walking in the Boots toward the Landscape/ Horticultural Sector	VMNW	To develop an innovative partnership that attracts VMNW to, and trains them for, landscape and horticultural careers; To improve career awareness, pathway navigation, development and advancement in the sector, resulting in solid employment outcomes; To build employer capacity to support sustainable employment relationships in the sector with VMNW, by providing cross-cultural diversity training for employers.	Employment	Landscape horticultural
MetroWorks Employment Association	L	Halifax NS	Deep Roots	VMNW With low English skills	To support VMNW in attaining employment, by providing (language training and) work-readiness workshops and volunteer opportunities in Canadian settings.	Employment	Food services

Organization	Staff size (S<20; M 21-50; L>50)	Location	Name of project *Leveraged own resources*	Target group, distinguishing traits	Objectives/services	Expected outcome	Sector (if applicable)
New Circles Community Services	S	North York, ON	A New Gateway to Employment *Leveraged own GLOW Clothing Bank business and learning platform*	VMNW Of Syrian descent Clients of GLOW Clothing Bank and/or living in catchment area LINC level-4+ English	To build community connections, by organizing and attending partner events and job fairs; To determine VMNW employment needs and obtain referrals to other agencies as needed; To identify the employment challenges of selected participants and enable them to overcome them, by providing job search assistance, digital and other skills training, real world work experience, and continuous support and mentoring; To facilitate the hiring of VMNW, by working with interested local employers to highlight the advantages of hiring VMNW and by acting as liaison for them, working with employers to place them.	Both employment & business	Retail
Newcomer Kitchen	S	Toronto Mississauga, ON	Willing to Work Entrepreneurship Training Program *Leveraged own community kitchen and own Facilitated Entrepreneurship Training Program*	VMNW Of Syrian descent Refugees In Canada < 5 years LINC level-3 English	To promote small-scale food entrepreneurship as a viable employment option for VMNW, by developing and applying its Facilitated Entrepreneurship Training Program; To provide opportunities for VMNW to explore their community and learn more about Canadian society.	Business	Food services

Organization	Staff size (S<20; M 21-50; L>50)	Location	Name of project *Leveraged own resources*	Target group, distinguishing traits	Objectives/services	Expected outcome	Sector (if applicable)
NPower Canada	L	Toronto, ON Calgary, AB	Digital Careers for Visible Minority Newcomer Women *Leveraged own NPower Canada Model*	VMNW With low income 18 to 29 years Residing in Alberta and Ontario	To launch low-income VMNW into digital careers, by providing employability and digital skills training, wraparound supports, and employer connections (and placements), to enable them to overcome systemic employment barriers.	Employment	Information technology
Syrian Canadian Foundation (SCF)	S	Mississauga, ON	Women's Entrepreneurial Program and Incubator	VMNW Of Syrian descent Refugees	To stimulate and assess entrepreneurial skills and provide customized career/business advice and referrals to relevant services, based on the assessments; To provide (for a few) language, business communication and entrepreneurial skills training; To incubate and accelerate (for fewer) a social enterprise start-up, by developing social capital, offering seed funding to kick-start a project, and providing professional business advice.	Business (incubator)	
Umoja Operation Compassion Society	S	Surrey, BC	Digital Connect	VMNW	To provide VMNW with practical skills/knowledge to participate in employment; To enhance job and technology skills; To provide on the job training (and experience) in a non-paid work placement.	Employment	

Organization	Staff size (S<20; M 21-50; L>50)	Location	Name of project *Leveraged own resources*	Target group, distinguishing traits	Objectives/services	Expected outcome	Sector (if applicable)
United Way of Bruce Grey	S	Owen Sound, ON	Rural Pathways for Newcomer Women	VMNW In rural communities	To identify the pre-employment needs and employment barriers of VMNW in rural settings; To develop, implement and evaluate employment pathways for them; To coordinate existing supports for VMNW, by working with employment services, employers and community services; To develop and distribute a new resource for VMNW, community services and employers that contains tools, approaches and programs supporting VMNW employment integration.	Research/ knowledge building	
Women In Need Society (WINS)	L	Calgary, AB	Helping Women Win! *Levered own Retail Ready program and retail stores*	VMNW With low income	To help VMNW find employment by providing them with onsite classroom training and experiential learning.	Employment	Retail
Women's Centre of Halton	S	Oakville, ON	Employment Supports and Digital Literacy for VMNW in Halton	VMNW With low digital literacy Refugees Live-in caregivers	To improve VMNW digital literacy; To assess their settlement and employment needs; To improve their life skills, by providing them with coaching and mentorship in 1:1 workshops; To improve their financial literacy.	Employment	

Organization	Staff size (S<20; M 21-50; L>50)	Location	Name of project *Leveraged own resources*	Target group, distinguishing traits	Objectives/services	Expected outcome	Sector (if applicable)
Women's Economic Council	S	BC, ON and St. John's, NL	Her Own Boss!	VMNW	To increase opportunities and confidence for VMNW to explore their self-employment goals; To increase their knowledge, skills and connections to prepare them for the Canadian labour market; To increase service providers' awareness and understanding of factors that limit VMNW access to, participation in, and success in these services.	Business	
YWCA Kitchener Waterloo	L	Kitchener-Waterloo, ON	In Her Shoes *Leveraged own Bricks and Clicks social enterprise store*	VMNW Who identify as transgender or non-binary	To enable VMNW to overcome employment barriers and to acquire job experience or start their own business, by providing them with employment and entrepreneurship training.	Both employment & business	Retail
YWCA Metro Vancouver	L	Vancouver, BC	Tech Connect for Newcomer Women	VMNW Who are internationally trained professionals (ITPs) and with IT backgrounds	To enable VMNW to understand the tech sector in Canada and its unique workplace culture; To enable them to communicate at work and to have robust professional and employer networks; To enable them to secure jobs commensurate with their skills, education, and experience; To create an avenue for tech employers to access an untapped talent pool of qualified candidates, namely VMNW.	Employment	Information technology

WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE INITIATIVES?

We used the participant survey data to produce a profile of participants of the funded programs. As noted, 461 participants, from 13 of the funded programs, responded to the survey.

Sociodemographic traits and human capital

It is expected that age, education, immigration admission class, time in Canada, language ability and education level and other individual traits influenced the women's experiences with the program and their outcomes. In this section, we present a profile of participants as to these characteristics and in the Outcomes section, we examine how they impacted post-program experiences and outcomes. The results described below indicate that, besides being a visible minority, a diverse group of newcomer women participated in the programs. But overall, it can be said that participants tended to have been in Canada five years or less prior to program entry, to be able to speak English (though we later raise some questions about language proficiency), to be in the prime working age group (25–55), to be married with children, and to have at least a high school education.

- **Time in Canada**: Most participants are newcomers. As Figure 1 shows, three in four (74 per cent) participants arrived in Canada within five years prior to beginning the program — a measure of newcomer status — reflecting of course the fact that the funded initiatives were for newcomers. Almost all respondents (92 per cent) reported being in Canada for 10 or fewer years. Only 8 per cent of respondents reported they had arrived more than 10 years ago.

Figure 1   Survey participants' length of time in Canada (grouped)
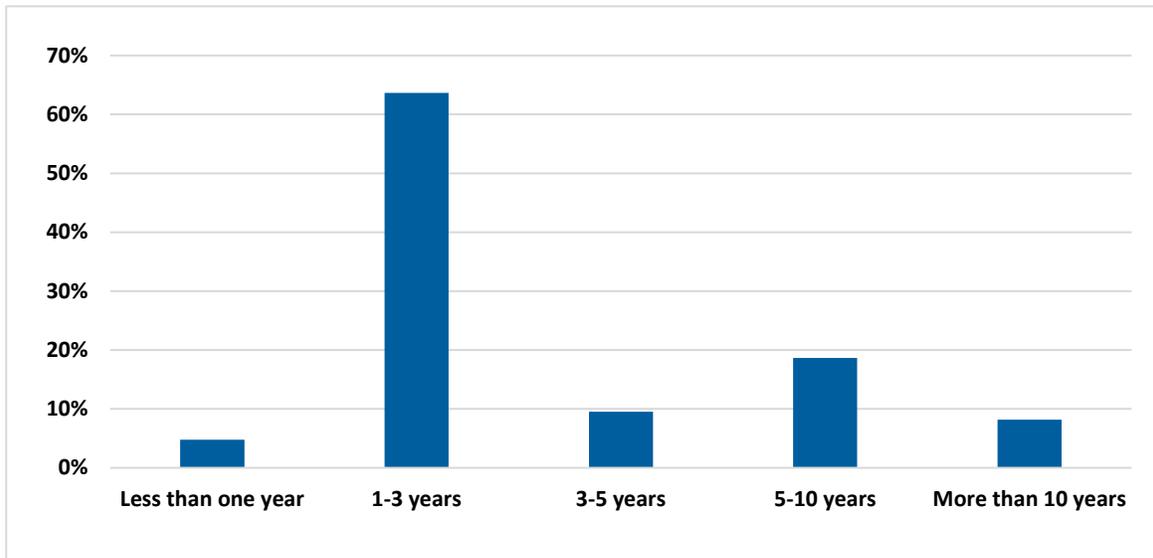
- **Admission category:** Most respondents arrived under the three main categories of economic class (25 per cent), refugees (36 per cent) or family class (29 per cent). A small proportion (10 per cent) of respondents were admitted in student, visitor, and other categories.

- **Language ability**: The majority of respondents (87 per cent) indicated an ability to speak English well enough to conduct a conversation. Only 2 per cent speak French and 8 per cent speak neither English nor French. At home, three out of five respondents (61 per cent) speak a language other than English and French, 37 per cent speak English, and the others use French.

- **Age**: The majority of participants are in the prime working age group. As Figure 2 indicates, the largest groups are the 25–34 age bracket (42 per cent), and 35–44 (35 per cent). Participants' average age is 35.

Figure 2   **Age distribution of participant survey respondents**
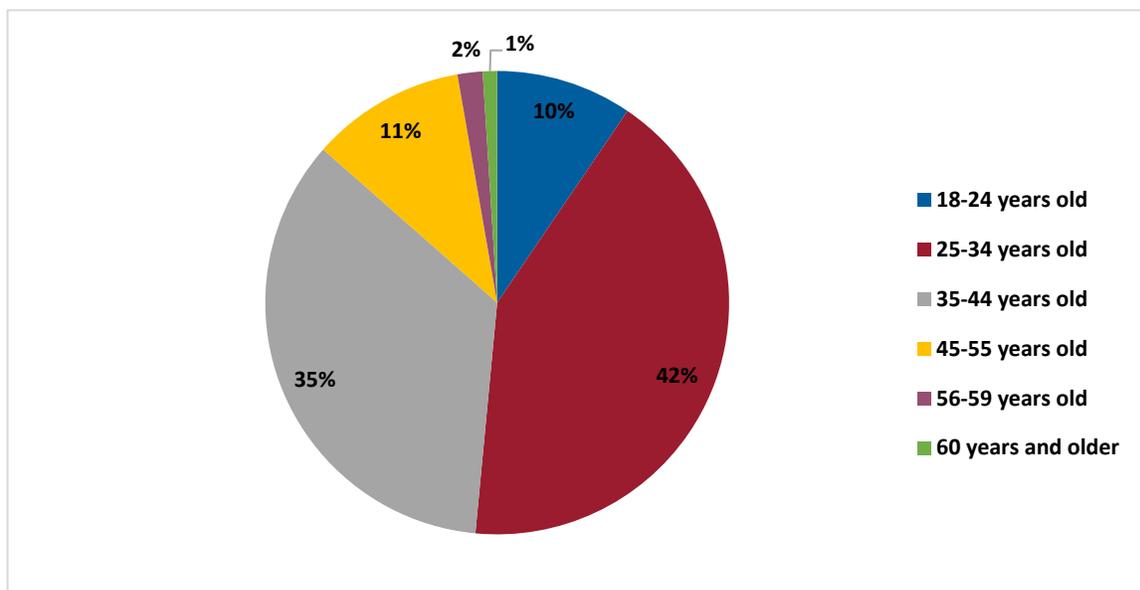
- **Marital/family status**: Two-thirds (65 per cent) of women are married or in a common-law relationship, while one-quarter (24 per cent) are single or have never been married. Just over one in three respondents (36 per cent) have no children. Of the women with children, 72 per cent have one or two children and 53 per cent have children under 5 years of age. Almost all (97 per cent) of those who do have young children have 1 or 2 children under 5 years of age.

- **Social capital**: Nearly nine in ten participants (88 per cent) indicated that their families and friends are very supportive, supportive, or at least neutral about their employment search.

- **Human capital**: In terms of highest level of education attained prior to entering Canada, most respondents had received a bachelor's degree (31 per cent) or a postgraduate degree (28 per cent) from their home country (Figure 3). As for participation in education and training activities **after** arriving in Canada (not shown in the figure), the top three education/training categories reported by survey respondents were language training (34 per cent), on the job training (22 per cent), and some training other than the program (21 per cent). About one in five (83 respondents (18 per cent) indicated they did not participate in any education or training in Canada.

Figure 3 **Survey respondents' highest level of education before coming to Canada**
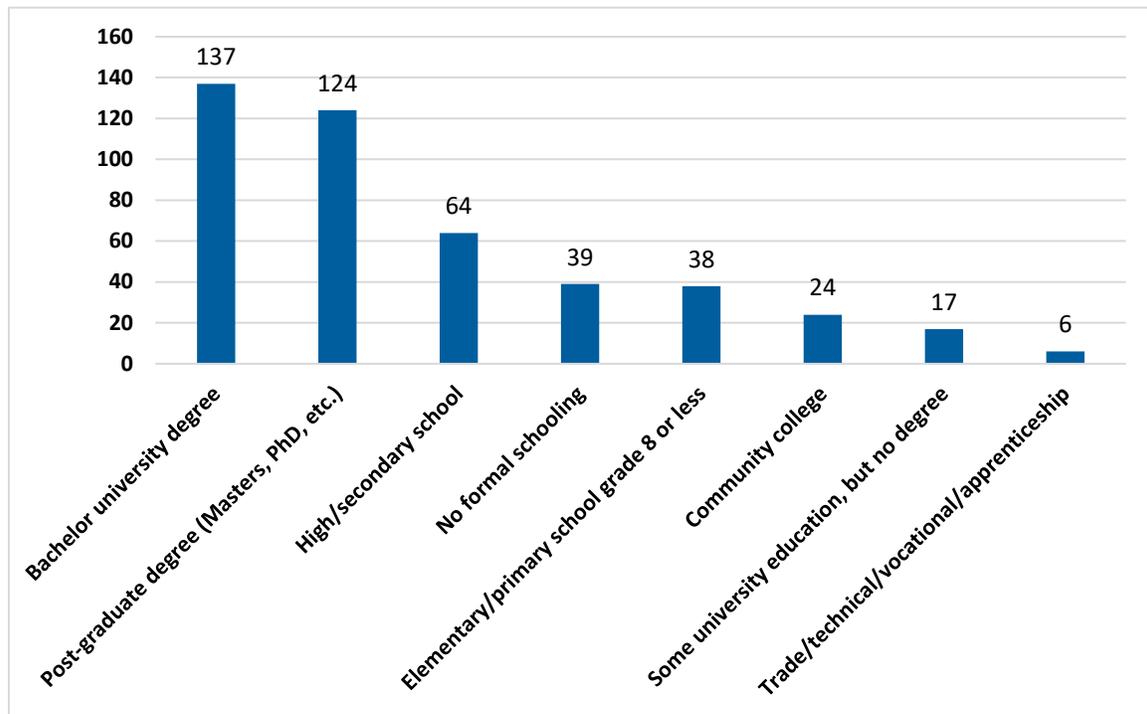
Pre-program labour market indicators

Over one-third (33 per cent) of respondents had no prior work experience before entering the program. About half (55 per cent) had prior work experience **either** outside Canada or in Canada and 13 per cent had prior work experience in **both** Canada and other countries. Note that one-third (33 per cent) had prior work experience **only** in Canada.

Employment barriers are an important element of prior labour market experience. To measure this, the survey asked participants to indicate, from a list of potential challenges that correspond to issues addressed by the programs, which ones they had experienced prior to enrolling. The bars in Figure 4 show the numbers of respondents reporting different challenges prior to the program and indicate the following, that:

▪ The top four challenges were lack of knowledge of where and how to look for work (reported by 36 per cent of respondents); lack of contacts/network (35 per cent); lack of knowledge of where to get training (31 per cent); and lack of recognition of work experience (30 per cent).

- Another tier of frequently identified problems (reported by 22-25 per cent of respondents) included: low language skills, childcare issues, and lack of recognition of educational credentials.

- Another group of barriers less frequently reported (by 16–20 per cent of respondents) comprised not doing well during interviews, lack of appropriate job skills, lack of a resume, and lack of transportation.

- Discrimination, disability, unavailability of education documents, and having to care for an adult family member were the least frequently reported challenges (2–6 per cent reported these).

- Only 4 per cent of respondents reported that they had experienced no challenges in finding employment before the program.

The results in Figure 4 indicate that **employment barriers that the VMNW participants faced correspond to those the programs aimed to address**, as suggested by the services and objectives of the programs shown in the preceding organizational subsection, and as we will show in the next Implementation section. **The main exception is language deficit,** with about one-quarter of participants citing this challenge (Figure 4); yet this was not explicitly addressed by the programs.

Figure 4   Challenges in getting a job before the program (%)
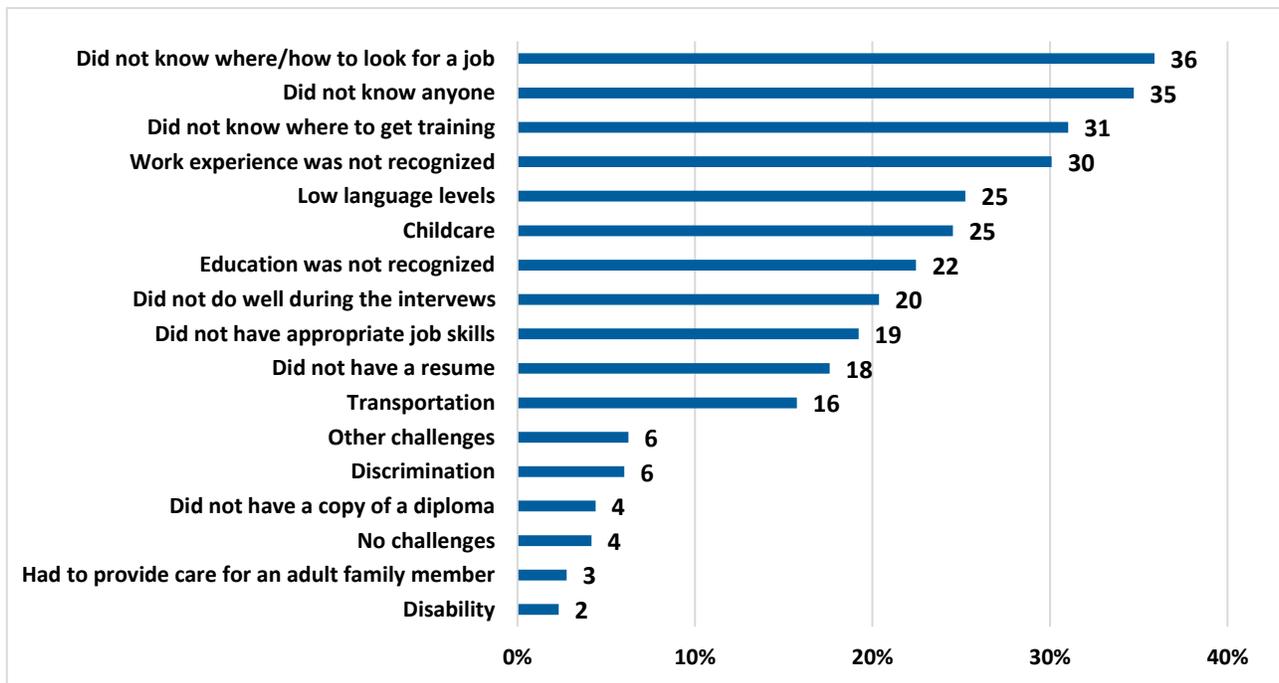
IMPLEMENTATION

The programs implemented with the New Partners funding addressed multiple barriers to employment for VMNW, many of which were acknowledged by the women in the participant survey, as observed above. This section looks at the implementation of the programs. Due to the retrospective nature of the study and limitations of the data sources, we will highlight some of the implementation challenges and any solutions, as well as opportunities along the way. We will not compare the implemented program activities, profiled in the preceding section, to what was initially planned, especially with COVID-19 being a major disruptor to services.

We begin with a look at the services that could be delivered by the organizations. Then we turn to delivery method, recruitment, and positive and challenging aspects of service delivery. This section concludes with a look at participants' views on their experience with the program.

WHAT SERVICES WERE DELIVERED?

The program descriptions presented in the previous section demonstrated the diversity in the initiatives implemented by the 18 service organizations and the variety of services offered, as well as features unique to each initiative. Figure 5 shows the types of services and the frequency with which they were delivered across the programs, based on results from 17 organizations responding to the organizational survey. As expected, the employment-related supports were the most common services provided. Most programs offered job readiness workshops, followed closely by job search, mentoring, digital skills training and job development. The 11 organizations that indicated services as "other" (than the choices listed in the survey) were asked to specify them, and, among these, there were several mentions of work experience/placements and entrepreneur skills training. A few organizations offered language skills training.

Figure 5   Services offered across the 17 programs
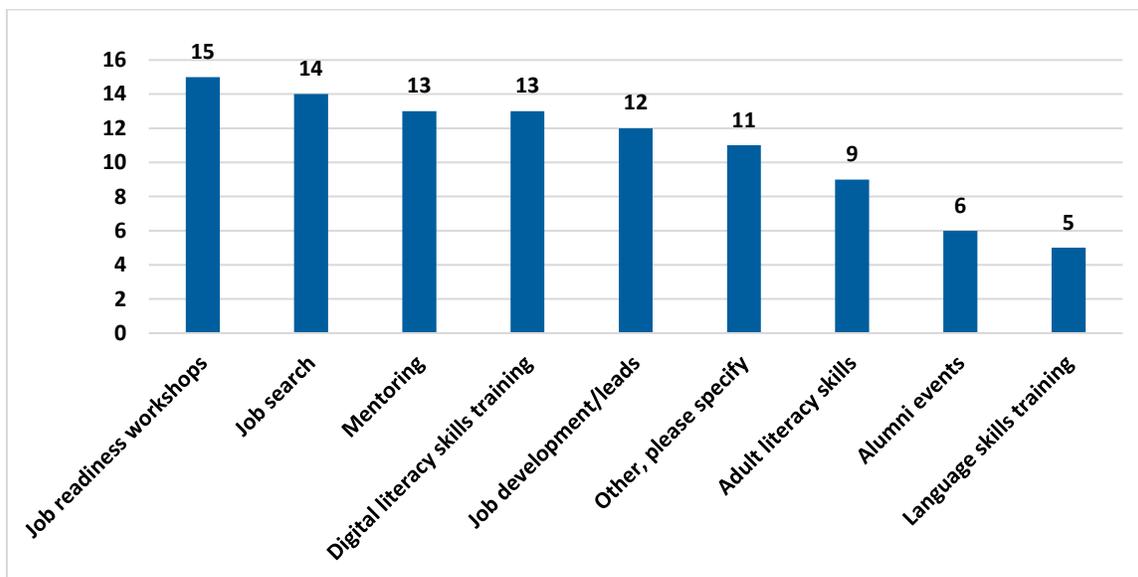
DELIVERY METHOD

Originally, the services provided by the funded programs were envisioned to be delivered in person, one-on-one or in workshops or classrooms. However, in the spring of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic firmly took hold, resulting in severe limitations on economic and social activities across the country. This affected not only the delivery method, as described below, but also recruitment, as will be discussed later.

The pandemic forced organizations to switch to virtual delivery. The pandemic necessitated extensive modifications to what was proposed. With the onset of the pandemic and consequent restrictions, in-person service provision had to be changed to virtual face-to-face delivery, as many centres closed in March 2020. In several cases, organizations gave up space already rented or at least arranged for with other organizations. In some cases, the pandemic delayed the start of some sessions or reduced the length of workshops.

Virtual services also meant that staff in many cases had to upgrade their technology and modify curricula for virtual delivery, in addition to altering instruction methods. Using Zoom to facilitate the online program worked well in being able to smoothly and easily deliver the program to participants. Organizations also utilized other platforms, such as Google Classrooms or Facebook, to communicate with participants or upload recorded sessions and documents that participants could easily access.

Capacity of staff with virtual delivery. Staff from a few organizations indicated that they themselves had difficulties delivering a virtual program, as they did not have suitable equipment at home or network issues to support their participants. Staff from a few organizations reported the difficulties of delivering the program over Zoom, particularly for topics that required more hands-on instruction.

Organizations felt that the adaptation to virtual delivery demonstrated flexibility. A few organizations expressed the view that, despite the extensiveness and rapidity of the changes in service delivery that had to be made, they felt that they were able to implement their programs successfully and smoothly to transition the in-person programs to either a virtual delivery program or a hybrid program.

RECRUITMENT

Organizations used a variety of approaches to reach and recruit VMNW for their programs. One source was the client pools in their organization's programs or programs of partner agencies in their umbrella organization. Indeed, with help from the membership organizations in umbrella associations, it expanded the program's reach to VMNW. Some programs sought the assistance of organizations in their community, by asking them to refer potential clients to them, to provide their client list to them, and to get the word out in their respective catchment area.

Some organizations recruited in places with access to VMNW. Some programs conducted outreach in places that were frequented by VMNW. For example, one organization operated a large clothing store and engaged patrons of the store for their program. Organizations also used social media. One organization had students helping them use social media for their outreach.

Participants typically heard about the program mainly through word of mouth or from the organization itself. The participant survey asked respondents about how they learned about the program. The results (Figure 6) indicate that most respondents heard about it from their family and friends (36 per cent), or they had already been clients of the organization (27 per cent). Only 18 per cent were referred by other service providers. About one participant in five (19 per cent) found out about the program online, through social media (12 per cent) and/or the Internet (9 per cent)

Figure 6   Where participants learned about the program (%)
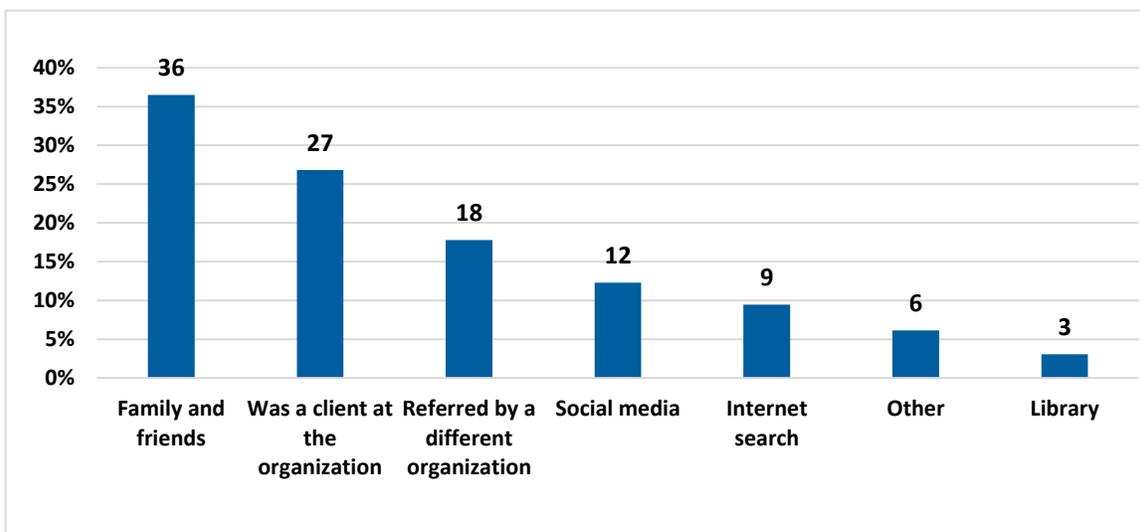
Prior to the pandemic, there had been some recruitment challenges. Staff mentioned that before COVID-19, some participants were not able to take part in the program due to childcare or family responsibilities. In addition, staff from a small number of organizations reported that participants lived far from the location of the program and could not find suitable transportation. A few organizations mentioned that some individuals who had registered did not start the program because they had found employment.

Overall, the pandemic hampered recruitment and was said to be the main reason why organizations did not reach their targeted number of participants. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations could not engage in community outreach to get the word out about their program and to recruit participants. Although organizations used social media platforms to promote their programs, staff noted that many women were not familiar with social media in their communities, which hindered recruitment efforts. As explained by one staff, "*So, even if you use social media, the people we serve [it is not their] primary means of communication. Primary means of communication for the African community women is social gatherings, there are social functions, weddings.*" Even for organizations in areas in which lockdown restrictions were eased and some in-person programming could restart, staff observed that participants were uncomfortable participating in the program in person, which, by word of mouth, made it difficult to recruit other women into the program.

Still, virtual program delivery increased accessibility for some and facilitated recruitment. Many organizations observed that transitioning to a virtual program broadened the reach of their program beyond their traditional geographical catchment area. It also helped with recruitment by addressing the transportation and childcare barriers to in-person services

mentioned above, therefore making the program more accessible to women facing these barriers. With virtual delivery, participants did not have to commute to class reducing both travel time and cost. In particular, a few organizations were better able to recruit women living in farther communities, to the degree that would not have been possible with in-person program delivery. Also, as many participants are mothers with children at home, the online format removed some childcare barriers to attending. For some, this meant that they no longer needed formal childcare when participating in the training and other services. One organization noted that virtual delivery enhanced the ease of communicating between communities, as it could be done over email or setting up a video call, rather than travelling between communities.

PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

In this section we rely on our interviews with organization staff to examine issues affecting how clients participated in the services.

Visible minority staff helped participants to be comfortable. Having staff who are visible minority women themselves, and the fact that the program was specifically designed for women, worked well in building trust between staff and participants, according to staff from four organizations. Staff were able to resonate with participants' "lived" experiences. Participants felt comfortable and safe in engaging in the program and sharing stories. As explained by one staff member, "*We do recognize the importance of keeping it separate in this way to just based on some of the issues that I've mentioned around the comfortability of being in a group of like-minded women where you can share, they feel more safe and comfortable to share in that way and realizing the cultural nuances as well.*"

Small cohort formats and individual support were seen to be beneficial. A few organizations shared that having small cohort sizes, namely four to eight participants per cohort, sometimes due to the pandemic, worked well to provide more individualized support to participants. One staff explained: "*Having a small group setting really helped the clients to have open discussions without feeling any type of judgment from others.*" Organizations that had specifically incorporated one-on-one support into the design of their program noted that this worked well, as it helped to meet participants' specific goals. One staff member interviewed further explained, "*So that [one-on-one support] worked very well, because a lot of them want different things, so having that one on one, meeting individual needs in the broader goal, I think it's something that has worked. Also recognizing that people have different needs. And so if we have somebody who wants to work in the support, we focus that person alone that line.*"

Low language skills were a barrier for some participants. Staff reported that VNMW with low English skills experienced access problems and hence required more intensive individualized support from staff to participate in the program. This was also true for programs that had

employer connections and work placements, as staff needed to act as interpreters between employers and participants.

Online programming created challenges to participation for some. Staff indicated that the switch to virtual delivery created a number of challenges for some participants, who, therefore, required more support from staff than anticipated. These comprised the following:

- **Social isolation**: Many staff observed that participants missed in-person interactions with virtual delivery.

  o Staff in some cases were able to address the lack of interaction by creating **informal virtual peer groups** (e.g., Coffee and Conversation clubs) where participants and their peers had a safe place to converse with each other and staff. Staff from a small number of organizations reported that they provided support to participants, particularly due to anxiety caused by COVID-19, that was outside their program responsibilities and which they were not equipped to handle. Regular updates on issues beyond the program were also provided and seen as helpful.

- **Family distractions**: Staff also observed that while participants with children no longer had to pay for childcare, they could not always fully engage in the program because they were also caring for their children at the same time, particularly when their children were participating in school online from home. Participants may not always have a private space in their home to take the virtual program.

- **Low digital literacy**: Some staff reported that they spent a lot of time and resources supporting participants with low digital literacy skills on how to use Zoom and resolve any issues that arose, as well as help them set up email accounts. This was particularly difficult as it was also the first time for many staff in using Zoom and delivering a program virtually. As explained by one staff, "*And the facilitator, in like a classroom... the facilitator would go around, if there's an issue, you raise your hand, she comes to you, looks at what you're doing, and then helps you out. Right now, virtually, if you run into a terrible issue, you're on your own.*"

- **Technological issues:** Access to computers, laptops and Internet stability posed challenges for participation in online programs. Although there were benefits for many participants to the online delivery method, some participants encountered delivery-specific challenges such as unstable Internet connections if children were simultaneously doing online schooling. Some participants used their phones or husbands' phones to participate in the program, which proved to be limiting as it was hard for participants to see the content.

o To mitigate this challenge, organizations recorded sessions so participants who missed a session could later catch up on their own time. A handful of organizations provided participants with laptops through their own laptop loan programs, loaning laptops from community libraries, or working with IRCC to purchase necessary equipment or data plans for participants.

The benefits and challenges that resulted from the transition to virtual services noted above echoed some of the results from the COVID-19 participant survey with VMNW in the Career Pathways for Visible Minority Newcomer Women (CPVMNW) Pilot Project. In addition to the reduced or no travel time and no childcare needed, the women in CPVMNW also liked being at home and developing digital skills. Relevant for this study, the CPVMNW survey noted that more than half of the women did not have access to fast Internet connection at home. It also found that some women with no children indicated the lack or in-person exchange as their primary challenge, whereas participants with children pointed to the difficulty of having a child at home and distractions in the home as challenges.

More detailed results from the CPVMNW participant survey are available at: https://cpvmnw.ca/wp-content/uploads/CPVMNW_COVID-19_Briefing_Note_English.pdf

PARTICIPANT SATISFACTION WITH PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Survey respondents were generally happy with all program activities. In the survey, we asked respondents to report their level of satisfaction with various aspects of the program. The results indicate that no less than 60 per cent reported being very happy or happy with any one service (Figure 7). The program components where the level of happiness was the highest (where the proportion reported being happy or very happy) were learning how to communicate with coworkers, information about Canadian culture, and mental health supports. The next eight highest categories were close behind to the mental health supports. The program components that the participants were least happy with were job referrals, work placements, and information on how to start their own business.

Figure 7   Survey participants' satisfaction with program activities (%)
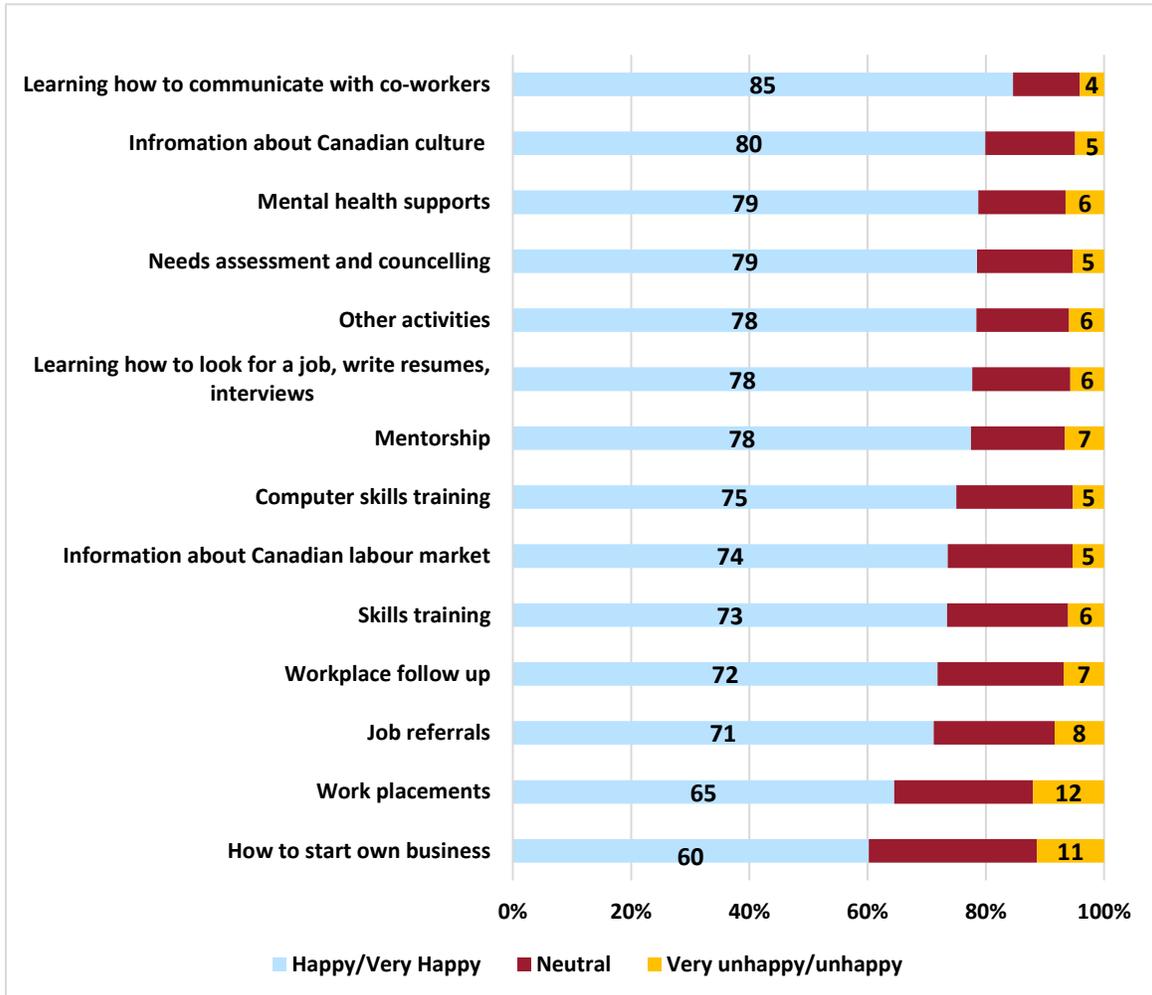
OUTCOMES

In this section, we examine the effects of the New Partners funding on both the organizations delivering the services and on participants. We present evidence both from the interviews conducted with organization representatives and from the participant survey.

We start by reporting on practitioners' views on the effects of the initiatives on participants. This is followed by the participants' reported employment experience post-program and finally their views of how the program affected them.

EFFECTS ON PARTICIPANTS: ORGANIZATIONS' VIEWS

The programs met participants' employment needs. More than half of the organizations interviewed observed that various components of the program helped to meet participants' needs. This was particularly true in the case in of gaining needed Canadian work experience or knowledge about the labour market, developing skills for employment readiness, and finding employment. Participants learned about the necessary skills and requirements needed to enter the Canadian labour market or to start their own businesses in Canada, as well as learning how to prepare a resume and cover letter that met the norms in the Canadian labour market and practicing interview skills. A few staff highlighted that participants were able to find employment after the program, and for some, in their desired fields. As further explained below, for organizations that developed fruitful relationships with employers, participants were able to find employment through these connections.

> *"All I can say is that, [I] am very happy with the training that I did get, because it help me a lot in finding job so easily in Canada, thank you."*

Participation in the programs increased confidence. The delivery staff in half of the organizations surveyed indicated that they had observed participants building their confidence throughout the program, as their English language, digital literacy levels, and relevant employment skills increased, and their networks grew. Enhanced digital skills speaks to one of the three overall priorities of the New Partners stream. Through participating in the program, one staff noted that participants could focus on themselves and on finding employment, instead of solely caring for their families at home. The participants corroborated the staff's observation in the survey as 85 per cent of participants strongly agreed or agreed that the program made them more ready and/or confident about working in Canada than they did before the program. This would suggest future employment for these clients, if not immediately so, as confidence is an important precursor to employment.

"I was already working before I signed up for the program but it gave me extra confidence to interact with my co-workers and not feel shy or disadvantaged, and also to start my business."

The programs helped participants to make friendships which helped them to endure the pandemic. From the perspectives of staff, participants were able to develop friendships with other women in the program, which was especially helpful during the pandemic when participants were isolated. Although participants could not interact with each other in-person during the virtual delivery of the program, staff noted that participants were still able to create meaningful relationships with each other. Some participants continued connecting with each other outside of the program through personal Zoom meetings and over WhatsApp.

One staff elaborated: "*the feedback we got was, you know, I've been stuck at home for this long, I don't have any contact with anyone else through any other program. So this is refreshing to at least have this platform to connect with other like-minded women.*"

Other participant needs were addressed. For those organizations who offered wrap-around support services, such as mental health counselling or conversation circles, staff reported that they were very well received by participants. This was true particularly during the pandemic when participants needed more mental health or emotional support.

LABOUR MARKET OUTCOMES: PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCE

This section looks at participant survey results related to various labour market indicators at the time of the survey (and the period since the program ended). Recall, that the data are based on 461 respondents in the 13 of the 21 organizations funded under the New Partners stream. The indictors considered include: challenges getting a job, current employment status, and the role the program played in getting a paid job, and quality of the current job.

Labour market outcomes, particularly employment status, should be seen with the following facts in mind. First, they should be viewed with a pandemic lens in that both post-program job placements and actual job opportunities have been negatively affected by it. It should also be borne in mind that employment of participants was not always the immediately expected outcome and that, for some participants, it had not been long since they had completed the program; indeed, some were still taking it at the time of the survey. As well, note that for those who are more distant from the labour market as some participants were, it would not be reasonable to expect some of them to enter employment soon after. Other factors that may affect the chances of this outcome would be the varying degree of job readiness, digital and language skills and other challenges participants have, as well as differences in the number of job opportunities in the local community, employer focus in the program, and the respective sector

targeted (if one was targeted at all) by the program. This is the reason why we also present results for intermediate outcomes, viewed as precursors to employment: human capital outcomes (education/training) in this section as well, as well as psychological outcomes (e.g., confidence and social networks) in a subsequent section on participants' views of their outcomes.

Challenges of getting a job (post-program)

Participants reported a decline in many of the challenges the programs sought to address. Comparing the proportions experienced for each challenge before and after program (Figure 8), we observe declines in challenges post-program related to lack of: knowledge of where to get training (31 per cent to 10 per cent of respondents), knowledge of where to look for a job (36 per cent to 16 per cent), recognition of job experience (30 per cent to 17 per cent), ability to build a resume (18 per cent to 7 per cent), and recognition of educational credentials (22 per cent to 13 per cent). In addition, a large decline is observed in the incidence of not doing well in job interviews (20 per cent to 11 per cent). While not definitive measures of program effectiveness, these results suggest that **the programs, as a whole, were effective in reducing the newcomers' employment barriers, as intended.** However, we observe a sharp **increase** in the proportion reporting no challenges in getting a job (from under 5 per cent before to 22 per cent after). This is most likely due to the fact that participation in the programs helped participants increase their knowledge of the labour market and awareness of their employment gaps and opportunities.

Figure 8   Challenges experienced before and after the program (in order of before and after differences)
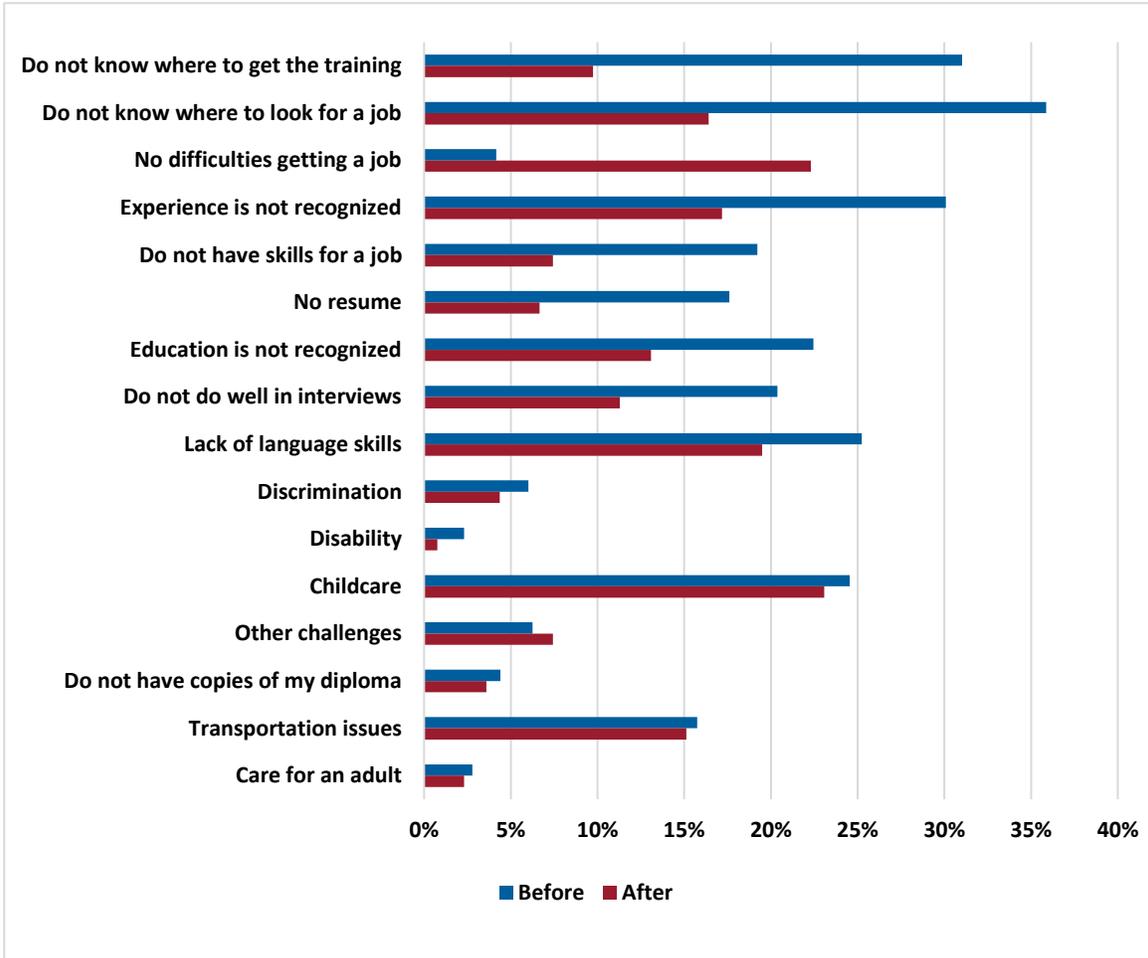
Employment status and characteristics of the jobs

Post-program, most participants had worked, and/or were in activities that could lead to employment. Two in five (41 per cent) were employed and 5 per cent were self-employed; some (12 per cent) had worked after the program but not at the time of the survey. Thirty-one per cent did not work after the program. A result of note is that 29 per cent enrolled in some kind of training to enhance their human capital and 14 per cent were volunteering, which also could help them to get a job. Fourteen per cent were on a parental leave. Of participants who were currently employed or were so after the program, 62 per cent found a job within three months, with another 24 per cent finding a job during the program.

We used survey data on average weekly hours worked to approximate the incidence of part-time employment among participants. Using the Statistics Canada definition, we assigned the part-time status to those working less than 30 hours a week. Using that definition, 26 per cent of the respondents are part-time employees.

Two-thirds of respondents (65 per cent) reported monthly earnings of $2,000 or less. However, the earnings are highly correlated with part-time employment. The vast majority (89 per cent) of respondents who were employed part-time were earning less than $2,000 a month. At the same time, just 50 per cent of full-timers made less than $2,000 a month.

Participants were happy in their jobs and the workplaces they entered. Among those who were employed, only 5 per cent said they were unhappy or very unhappy with their job. This is based on responses to a question asking participants to rate their level of satisfaction on a five-point scale from very satisfied to very unsatisfied. Similarly, a majority of participants (82 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed that they feel accepted in their current workplaces. Only 4 per cent of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

PARTICIPANTS' VIEWS OF OUTCOMES

Participants were asked for their perspectives on program effects. The results are presented in Figure 9, which shows the proportions of participants agreeing or not with statements about how the program affected them. All but two of the statements are specifically about the effects of the programs; these latter statements are reflections of participants' overall satisfaction with the program. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a five-point scale: strongly agree, agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree, and strongly agree. Below, we focus on the proportion who agreed or strongly agreed with the respective statements, indicative of positive outcomes for participants.

Participants rated the program very highly. Almost all respondents would recommend the program to others (97 per cent) and think that their program staff provided them with good support and advice (97 per cent).

A majority of participants believed that the program was effective in areas corresponding to the programs' objectives. As Figure 9 shows, a high proportion (77–85 per cent) strongly agree or agree that the program helped them to enhance their employment preparation; readiness or confidence to work in Canada; job search and interview skills; networking (meeting new people); knowledge of Canadian culture; knowledge of career path; and knowledge of skills and training needed. stress reduction. Less than one in ten participants disagreed with any of these statements.

Figure 9   Survey participants' views on program results
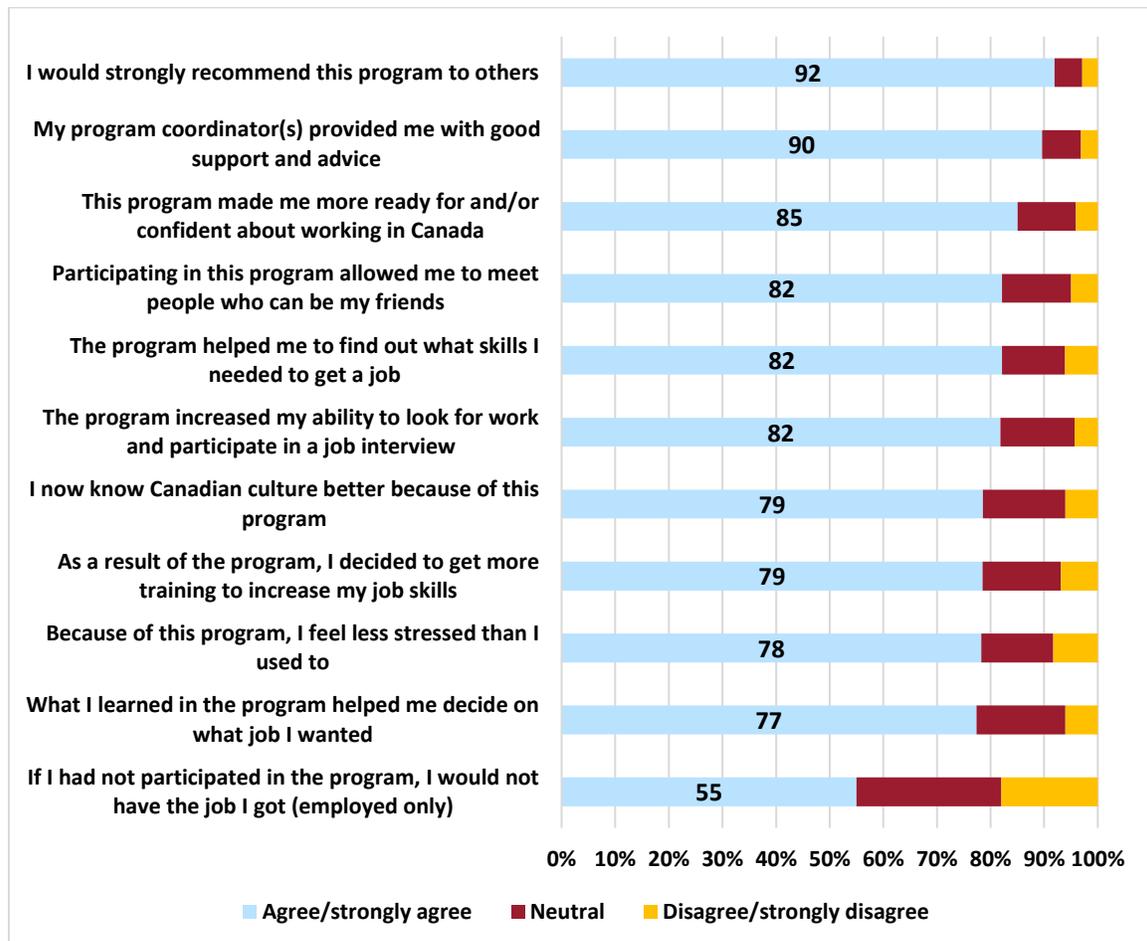
Note: Only those respondents who were employed or self-employed after the program were included in the last item.

It should be pointed out that many of the outcomes identified above are not explicitly employment-focused but are thought to be important indicators for measuring progress towards employment. These relate to enhanced human, social and psychological capital, specifically increased knowledge of skills needed and how to acquire them, improved confidence, reduced stress, and enhanced social networks ("meeting people"). The literature has shown that these are important intermediate outcomes on the road to employment and their attainment are positive indicators of future jobs for participating VMNW.

The results for the reported role the program played in getting participants their current or any job they entered post-program were more ambivalent (last item in Figure 9). Only (55 per cent) of the respondents who got a job after the program agreed or strongly agreed that they would

not have gotten that job if it was not for the program.[9] In other words, **just over half felt the program helped them get a job**. About one-fifth (18 per cent) disagreed with that statement and one-quarter (27 per cent) neither agreed nor disagreed.

We further examined the characteristics of respondents who disagreed that the program helped them find their job. We observed that those who found a job after the program, but disagreed that the program was instrumental in finding that job, are more educated, have fewer children, and are more likely to be economic class immigrants than the general sample. These respondents are also less likely to be happy or very happy with their current job (54 per cent) vs. the overall survey sample (70 per cent). The next section further explores how the different characteristics affect the participants' program experience and outcomes.

GBA+: VARIATIONS IN PROGRAM EXPERIENCE AND OUTCOMES BY SUBGROUPS

The challenges participants faced before and after their program, their employment status, program satisfaction and other program outcomes are likely dependent on their socio-demographic characteristics. For example, women with no children will not have challenges with childcare but may experience other issues in finding employment.

To better understand participants' program experience, challenges and factors affecting their outcomes, we used a Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) process to explore how the different characteristics may affect the way participants experienced the program and the results of that experience. The subgroups of interest are women with and without children, women with supportive and unsupportive social networks, women who came to Canada under different immigration categories, women with different language abilities and women with different education levels. Some of these characteristics (education, language ability and immigration category) are highly correlated, and thus should be interpreted together. We highlight below the program experience and findings that emerged from the GBA+ for two crosscutting variables: family composition and education/immigration category.

Program impact on low-skilled/vulnerable newcomer women

It is important to note that education, language skills and immigration category are correlated. Respondents admitted to Canada as refugees account for a higher portion of respondents with lower educational attainment; about one-third reported no formal education at the time of the

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9   Without a proper counterfactual, we are unable to clearly state the difference the program made in securing employment for participants.

survey. Language ability varies across the education levels, with almost all the respondents with bachelor's degree and above being able to speak English, French or both well enough to conduct a conversation. By contrast, 35 per cent of those with no formal schooling and 11 per cent of those with only high school speak neither English nor French.

Organizational survey results show one in three providers thought the program worked well for higher skilled newcomers. Indeed, in terms of the employment outcomes, 66 per cent of high skilled newcomers found employment after the program. Meanwhile only 40 per cent of the lower skilled newcomers are, or were, employed after the program. However, the organizations may not have been considering in their responses what would have happened in the absence of the program. According to the participant survey, only 50 per cent of higher skilled women (those with post-secondary education) agreed that they would not have found their jobs if it was not for the program, while 20 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed (see Figure 9 above).

Presumably, then, at least 20 per cent of the high skilled respondents believe that they would have gotten the job regardless of their program participation. However, 81 per cent of the low skilled participants (those with high school diploma or less) credit the program with finding their job, and only 7 per cent of those respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed that the program helped them find their job.[10] This implies a program impact of 74 percentage points. Thus, in terms of satisfying the participant's needs and providing significant assistance in finding employment, **the programs may have worked better for lower skilled newcomers**.

Challenges to labour market integration differed between women with higher and lower skills before and after the program. Low language skills were one of the top challenges for participants with high school education or less, both before and after the program. These participants also struggled with not knowing anyone, where to get training, and where to look for a job before the program. Childcare and not knowing where to look for a job were the top challenges reported by these participants after the program. For those with any post-secondary education, the top challenges before the program were childcare, not knowing anyone and lack of experience recognition. After the program, many of these participants did not experience any challenges. However, some still had childcare issues and lack of experience recognition.

The fact that many participants (25 per cent) with post-secondary degrees did not encounter challenges after the program is a positive sign. However, the proportion of participants facing challenges did not change significantly before and after the program — and the issues related to childcare and professional experience not being recognized were still present. This latter issue is described in more detail in the section below. For participants with low education levels, the

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[10]   There is a strong correlation between education, immigration category and language skills. Seventeen per cent of the economic class newcomers do not credit the program for the job, vs. 11 per cent of refugees.

program does seem to have helped with establishing social networks and assisting in getting information about training. The challenges before and after the program differed in incidence for this group. Once again, this provides some additional evidence that programs may have provided more substantial assistance to those with lower skills.

Experience of women with children

Women with different family compositions experienced different challenges getting work before the program. For women with no children, the top challenges were not knowing anyone, not knowing where to look for a job, and not knowing how to get training. For women with one or two children, childcare was the top challenge, followed by their work experience not being recognized and not knowing where to get training. Women with three or more children did not know how to look for a job, experienced issues with childcare and lack of language skills.

After the program, many women with no children experienced no difficulties in looking for a job. The ones that did have challenges, struggled with the recognition of their work experience and lack of language skills. For women with children, the need for childcare was the top challenge. These challenges are reflected in the employment indicators for these groups: 66 per cent of women with no children were employed after the program. The analogous number is 52 per cent for women with children. The monthly earnings difference is even starker, with 47 per cent of women with no children making more that $2,000 a month, compared to 28 per cent of women with one or two children and 20 per cent of women with three children and more. This difference is partially attributed to part-time employment: according to our calculations, 23 per cent of those with no children are employed part-time, while 26 per cent of women with one or two children and 38 per cent of those with three or more children are employed part-time.

The number of children appears to be correlated with the supportiveness of friends and family. Close to 16 per cent of women with children reported that their families and friends were unsupportive of their employment search compared to only 10 per cent of those with no children.

Four in five (80 per cent) of the women who have a supportive social network agreed/strongly agreed that the program reduced their stress levels. At the same time, only 67 per cent of those who have unsupportive family and friends agreed that they feel less stressed because of the program and 19 per cent disagreed and strongly disagreed. Given the correlation with the number of children, it is possible that the source of stress is from a combination of balancing program participation and childcare responsibilities in addition to not having a supportive social network.

Overall, **the lack of childcare seems to be keeping women with children from entering the labour market**, with lack of family supportiveness, correlated with the number of children, likely playing a role in increased stress levels, exacerbated by the pandemic.

ORGANIZATION PARTNERSHIP-BUILDING

In this section, we look at partnerships, both with community organizations and employers. Building such partnerships is important to the success of an initiative, in terms of both promotion, delivery and employment. We also present the experience of these first-time recipients of IRCC funding with the department.

Working with community organizations

Many organizations established meaningful partnerships with community organizations. Staff from more than half of the organizations stated that by building relationships with community organizations, they were able to recruit participants from them and promote their programs. These relationships also allowed staff to refer their participants to community programs or resources of interest, such as language classes. Staff highlighted that partnerships with community organizations were key in finding and recruiting participants, as some women may not have access to computers and social media to learn about the program. As well, the partnerships helped better coordinate the delivery of the services in the community for VMNW.

Being part of an umbrella organization was beneficial. A small number of organizations were part of an umbrella organization or were umbrella organizations themselves, in which various organizations worked together to coordinate activities and pool some resources. By working under an umbrella organization, staff explained that they were easily able to promote their programs and recruit participants. Also, because staff observed that many of their participants had low digital literacy skills, the umbrella organization played a key role in reaching out to women in other communities.

A staff member from one organization explained the importance of being a part of an umbrella organization: "*I think it has worked well for us, because usually the African culture is that we are more comfortable with someone we know as an entry point. And so if you want to go to the community, you have to go with a member of the community. And so, once our reference points are members of the community, you find that the trust is faster. Building confidence is faster.*"

A few organizations experienced challenges developing partnerships with community organizations. For several organizations, staff indicated that there was some resistance among potential service delivery partners to collaborate on recruitment and share clients. One organization experienced miscommunication between their organization and community

organizations about each others' roles and responsibilities, which resulted in a delay to the start of the program, and ultimately contributed to its not getting off the ground. Other organizations experienced lack of feedback or replies from community organizations. This was particularly disappointing to staff of one organization, as they had been looking forward to learning from other organizations and sharing lessons learned.

> *"I think out of all of the components of our model, it really is that relationship building with employers and the ability to directly connect graduates with opportunities with our hiring partners [is] where we have, and certainly as a team, I think, the greatest sense of fulfillment, where, I mean, it's certainly exciting to see someone earn their certifications and acquire marketable skills, but [even more so] to then see them apply those skills in the real world and secure employment that has such a tangible impact on the quality of life of themselves and their families."*

Working with employers

It is important for employment programs to focus not only on working with the participants, but also the employers who would be providing the jobs and benefiting from the talent pool that the program would provide.

Some organizations successfully engaged employers, which was beneficial to participants. Some organizations engaged employers to provide job placements and volunteer opportunities to participants or connect participants with employers. Other programs worked to establish and continuously develop relationships with various employers, and, through these connections, some of their participants were able to find paid work placements or volunteer opportunities. This helped participants obtain their first Canadian work experience and practice their English skills, which would serve them well when seeking permanent jobs.

Working with employers contributed to improving the delivery product, which then benefits participants and employers. The connections with employers provided to the organization: access to coaches who worked one-on-one with participants to guide them through their industry of interest; participants in speaker's series, in which employers were invited to speak to participants about their experiences and their Canadian career journey; and input on curriculum design, the delivery of the training, and information on current labour market trends and opportunities. These things will contribute to a better product by increasing chances of participants gaining the skills employers seek and getting hired by them.

The pandemic negatively affected partnership building with employers for some programs. COVID-19 hindered some employer engagement opportunities. A few staff explained they faced challenges placing their participants in job or volunteer placements with employers during the pandemic, because employers were facing their own challenges, such as decline in business resulting in layoffs and having to transition their employees to working from home. These program staff worked diligently to stay in contact with employers, and once lockdown restrictions had eased, they noted that employers reached out to them again.

ORGANIZATIONS WORKING WITH IRCC

An eligibility criterion for organizations to be funded by this stream was that they had not received prior funding from IRCC; and for many of them, this was also the first time working on a government-funded program. Results from the organization survey indicate that just under three-quarters of responding organizations (11 of the 16) experienced challenges associated with being a new partner with IRCC. Many of the challenges are related to reporting and administrative policies.

Reporting requirements

Reporting process required effort and time, particularly as organizations were first-time IRCC funding recipients. Most of the program staff indicated difficulties submitting data in iCARE, preparing progress reports and submitting financial claims according to the guidelines set by IRCC. These were mainly due to lack of human resources to meet the data reporting deadlines and the "complicated" and "confusing" reporting process arising from unfamiliarity with the reporting platforms (for example, where to enter certain information). Staff felt constrained in answering certain template questions "*because they weren't accurately reflecting what was actually going on. And I was limited to selecting certain answers and ethically, didn't sit right with me.*"

Staffing was a factor in reporting difficulties. Some organizations worked to mitigate the reporting issue by hiring an employee to take on the role of data collection, reporting and submission to IRCC, which was said to be helpful by staff. A few said they would have liked an additional staff member to handle the reporting but felt they did not have the budget to do so. Some of the data reporting challenges were exacerbated by staff turnover. New staff had to be trained and to learn the data reporting requirements, which was time consuming. Others reported a change in IRCC program officers, which meant relationships between staff and the program officer had to be rebuilt.

Staff from a few organizations reported that they had trouble obtaining data for iCARE due to **privacy issues**. Some participants were reluctant about giving out their personal information or Permanent Residence cards because of privacy concerns, in which giving out private information back in their home countries could have been dangerous.

Childcare and transportation support

Organizations reported some difficulties with funding provisions for childcare and transportation, which were provided to increase VNMW participation in the funded programs. Reimbursements for childcare expenses must meet very specific IRCC guidelines in order to be eligible. Many would have liked greater flexibility in how these allocations could be used by program administrators. Consequently, the available of childcare supports did not always address the barrier it was intended to remove. Organizations also said that public transit was not always accessible to participants, especially when the roads were bad with snow and during the odd transit strike. Staff wanted to provide support such as mileage coverage, but this was not allowed as an eligible expense.

Satisfaction working with IRCC

Despite the challenges noted related to IRCC's reporting requirements and guidelines, **a majority of organizations were satisfied with their working relationship with IRCC**. Three-quarters of the (12 of 16) organizations answering the respective question reported being very satisfied or satisfied with the relationship. Just three were neither satisfied nor unsatisfied and another preferred not to say. Furthermore, responses to another organizational survey question indicate a majority became more comfortable working with government resulting from their experience in this program. On the degree to which the 17 organizations agreed with the statement "My comfort in working with government increased …", 10 specified strongly agreed and 4 agreed. In the individual interviews, almost all reported a good working relationship with their IRCC representative.

CAPACITY-BUILDING

An important intended outcome of funding under the New Partners stream is enhanced capacity of funded organizations to deliver programming to VMWW. We have already learned from the previous section that funding recipients would be interested in future arrangements with IRCC to implement such programs. In this section, we present evidence gathered mainly in the interviews, but also from the document reviews, concerning how the organizations' participation in this program would contribute to programming to serve VMNW in the future.

A few organizations reported that their participation in the program, and the pandemic-forced conversion of their programming into virtual delivery, opened their eyes to the value of this form of delivery. A number said participating in the program and the transition to virtual delivery gave them the impetus, if not the means, to enhance their digital capacity. Some said online services is something they will consider for the future, along with in-person delivery (hybrid).

For most organizations, however, increased capacity-building was understood and experienced in knowledge gained and lessons learned in serving VMNW that would or could be applied to future programming for this group, although how exactly it was or would be used was not always made clear. For example, one organization said their experience with the program enabled them to identify their strengths and then they learned how to leverage these strengths to build better future projects and to better serve future clients.

Some organizations have applied what they learned from their participation in the IRCC-funded program to current programs. One organization modeled a new program after the IRCC funded one, but this time included individuals whom they typically serve but who had not been eligible for the latter. Still another organization took everything they learned from the IRCC funded project and partnered with a neighborhood organization to continue delivering their program in a settlement agency.

Several organizations identified what they learned from their experience in the program that could or would be applied to future programs they implement for VMNW. These knowledge gains were of two types: programming and partnerships.

Programming

- Newcomers in their community need more **individualized support**, particularly for soft and employability skills training, which is knowledge that can be used in the future to develop a customizable model to deliver components of the program.

- Need to **holistically serve newcomer youth** in their program taking into account the lived experiences and the specific challenges faced by this and other newcomer groups.

- Value of **informal peer support groups**, which were implemented in their program and provided support to participants on issues beyond those related to the program.

- Need for a **mental health and other aspects of wraparound supports** for this type of VMNW programming.

- Need to implement a **pre-training program** for potential participants with low digital literacy and low language skills.

- Potential for **entrepreneurship** and **start-up incubators** to be programming options for this population group.

- Benefits of **innovation** or different approaches to integrating VMNW into the labour market.

> *"I think that, yes, we've collected things over the years less formally, but this was a very formal research project that has given us a real good, strong sense of what the gaps are in the community and for services and for the women themselves and the need to be responsive and innovative and flexible to give them choices so that they can participate and be set up to succeed in a certain way. So I found that was a great learning for us to test out different things. We had the autonomy to test out."*

Partnerships

- Need sometimes to **work with cultural/ethnic organizations** to promote and recruit candidates for their program.

- Importance of **engaging employers** to, in addition to securing placements, (1) understand what they need and get their help with the curriculum; and (2) learn about their anti-newcomer hiring biases to design cultural training to overcome them, which both will increase the chances of hiring program graduates in future programs,

  o One organization intends to incorporate employer engagement in future programming which they did not do much of before, while the other expressed the view that an employer advisory committee with newcomers is a successful way of obtaining employer input.

- Value of constructively and thoroughly **involving clients and employers** in program development and delivery, as it should create a lasting legacy of **collaboration** that will be beneficial to future programming.

- Need for a **job developer** to develop employer partnerships **and an employment specialist** to assist VMNW lacking resumes and connections with employers and potential job opportunities.

CONCLUSION

SRDC received funding from IRCC to conduct a retrospective research study of the New Partners initiative in the Visible Minority Newcomer Women (VMNW) Pilot. This funding was focused on attracting new partners to develop innovative labour market integration approaches, to strengthen their capacity and eligible partnership-building, and to increase VMNW digital literacy skills. The research study was designed to document the implementation experience of the participating organizations and the outcomes of the implementation for organizations and participants. Despite the limitations of a retrospective study, SRDC identified promising practices and lessons learned that will inform policy, programming and practice on employment supports for this target group. This information will prove valuable to governments, service provider organizations, and VMNW themselves.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

New Partners

The New Partners funding attracted a range of organizations across Canada; all but one of the funded organizations in this study were non-profits although the funding was available to organizations in the public and private sectors. The funded organizations implemented a variety of projects offering a mix of employment-related services and support, such as job search assistance, digital literacy skills training, mental health support, job placement, and follow-up support. The types of projects also varied greatly in other dimensions, such as eligibility of the specific target group of VMNW, employer engagement, location, sector, and expected outcomes (employment vs self-employment, community connections, a handbook). Some organizations developed and implemented programs that leveraged or utilized their own assets.

VMNW participants

In addition to being a visible minority, the women participating in the programs were a diverse group but tended to have been in Canada five years or less prior to program entry, to be able to speak English, to be in the prime working age group, to be married with children, and to have at least a high school education. Almost three in five have attained a bachelor or post-graduate degree.

The participants experienced multiple barriers to employment pre-program. The programs sought to address many of these challenges, such as lack of job search skills and technical job skills. However, only a small number of providers offered language skills services, while one-quarter of participants identified low language ability as a barrier. Also, women with different demographic and socioeconomic characteristics experienced different barriers, such as the need for childcare for those with children.

Implementation

COVID-19 had a significant impact on service delivery. All organizations switched to virtual delivery because of the pandemic, which forced organizations to make extensive changes to the curricula, and number and timing of sessions among other things. The speed and efficiency with which this shift was implemented highlighted the flexibility and adaptability of staff.

The pandemic posed challenges but also had its benefits. The pandemic hampered recruitment of both clients and employer partners and was said to be the main reason why organizations did not reach their targeted number of participants. Some participants experienced access difficulties, in terms of social isolation, family distractions, low digital literacy, technological issues (e.g., computers and Internet connection), lack of placements, and own staff capacity, some of which mitigated by actions taken by staff and learning by doing. Still, virtual program delivery enhanced accessibility for some participants by enabling them to overcome transportation and accessibility and expanded outreach and recruitment for some organizations.

Some key implementation lessons heard from program staff include:

- Visible minority staff helped participants to be comfortable in the program.

- Small cohort formats and individual support were seen to be beneficial to participants.

- Low language skills presented a barrier to participation for some, suggesting a need for minimum language requirements for future such programs.

- Lack of suitable childcare assistance continued to be a barrier for participants with children despite the childcare supports; this needs to be addressed in future programming in order to better engage and support women with children.

- Having to deliver services virtually opened eyes for some organizations to the expanded use and benefits of this service in the future, alongside in-person provision.

Participants were generally happy with all program activities, with no more than 12 per cent indicating being unhappy with any one activity. Almost all participants would recommend their program to other newcomer women.

Participant outcomes

According to organizations, the programs met participants' employment needs, helped them to increase their confidence, and helped them make friends which was especially beneficial during the pandemic.

Participants reported a decline in many of the challenges to job entry the programs sought to address from those reported to have been experienced prior to program entry, suggesting the program contributed to these changes. Steep declines were observed for a lack of knowledge of where to get training, knowledge of where to look for a job, recognition of job experience, ability to build a resume, and recognition of educational credentials.

Over two-thirds of participants were employed during or after the program. Many were involved in activities (education/training and/or volunteering) that could be associated with future employment. Almost all participants indicated that they were happy with their employment and four in five felt accepted in their workplaces.

A majority of participants indicated outcomes associated with employment, needs assessment, job search, mentorship, or workplace follow-up. But many indicated other outcomes such as improved psychosocial and human capital indicators (e.g., teambuilding and mental health support), which suggest progress towards employment down the road. These intermediary outcomes, along with reductions in psychosocial employment barriers, are important especially for VMNW who are distant from the labour market and may experience multiple barriers to employment.

The GBA+ analysis suggests that:

- The programs may have worked better for the lower-skilled newcomer women, though the higher-skilled also found employment through the programs; and

- Childcare appears to be a significant barrier for newcomer women with children, regardless of other characteristics.

Organization outcomes

Many organizations established important partnerships with community organizations that helped the programs with outreach. It also helped with referrals of participants to other services that were not offered by the program. Being part of an umbrella organization was beneficial as it provided an instant network of community partners for the program.

Some organizations successfully engaged employers, which was beneficial to participants, in terms of gaining access to on-the-job experience, placements, mentors, and actual job opportunities. Working with employers contributed to improving the delivery product, by ensuring the curriculum content addresses employers' needs so that trainees are hired.

The pandemic negatively affected partnership building with employers for some programs, which was a barrier to securing placements.

Working with IRCC

A majority of organizations were satisfied with their working relationship with IRCC. Moreover, all reported having a good working relationship with their particular IRCC program officer.

For a number of organizations, learning the IRCC reporting process and reporting process itself required effort and time, particularly as organizations were first-time IRCC funding recipients and did not know the systems. Organizations also reported some difficulties with the funding provisions for childcare and transportation. Childcare was especially prominent since many of the participants are mothers with children who required shorter term childminding which was not covered by the provisions.

Capacity-building

The organizations indicated the New Partners funding augmented their knowledge base in several areas. This is how enhanced capacity-building was understood and experienced by some organizations — i.e., as knowledge gained, and lessons learned in serving VMNW that would or could be applied to future programming for this group. These include knowledge of the value of individualized support, holistic treatment, informal peer groups, and mental health supports. Some also gained an increased appreciation of the importance of working with employers.

Some organizations have applied what they learned from their programs to current programming. Moreover, some organizations are seeking funding to continue their programs or parts of it. One organization has received funding from another source to expand their program to a different group of VMNW.

Also, during the funding period, staff realized, in short time, that they were able to deliver online services, which included face-to-face virtual interactions. Thus, this funding enhanced organization and staff capacity in the service delivery area, and, as noted above, some are considering virtual services in future programming alongside in-person delivery.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The New Partners funding was innovative in that it funded different programs that were adapted to meet the needs of a specialized group. The funding successfully attracted new partners that offered innovative approaches and different activities to the list of employment readiness programs traditionally provided in employment programs and services. These included work placements, demand-focused approaches, and incubators. Evidence was also found of some immediate employment gains, but also, perhaps more importantly, of enhanced confidence and social networks, which are key intermediary outcomes towards sustained employment. The evidence also indicates that the organizations gained knowledge that would enable them to provide programming in the future to better meet VMNW needs.

Like all IRCC funded programs, the New Partners programs had to be transformed from face-to-face to virtual delivery, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. The organizations successfully moved their programs online, demonstrating their agility and flexibility. However, it was not easy, especially for smaller organizations with staff who may not have the needed digital skills and equipment. Also, many of the funded organizations, were new to IRCC funding and reported difficulties with IRCC reporting requirements.

> *To better support smaller partners and those new to government funding, IRCC should consider providing more orientation and training to familiarize them with the reporting processes; these should be customized with the view that they are new to the systems. Also IRCC may want to inform organizations about the reporting requirements ahead of time, so they can plan and budget for this activity. In addition, to reduce the administrative burden, consideration should be given to simplifying the reporting systems and to making the data collection more relevant for both organizations and IRCC. This could result in more useful program information.*

The program experience provided valuable lessons learned, promising practices, and some evidence of outcomes. However, the level of rigour in this study was limited by the necessarily retrospective nature of the investigation. Moreover, gaps still remain in knowledge about how to deliver services to VMNW, which is an underserved and studied group.

> *If a similar funding initiative is implemented, an evaluation should be planned at the start to gather the appropriate data at baseline, during and sometime after; to establish the evaluation mindset with organizations; and to organize a "community of learning" where the service providers can share and discuss common issues.*

Our study has identified service gaps and challenges for a number of groups. While targeted programming for VMNW appears to have worked, according to the service providers and participants, we have shown that VMNW are not a homogenous group and general programs may not work for all. The study identified gaps in the following areas:

- **Skilled VMNW**: Overall, the programs did not appear to work as well for skilled VMNW. Employment Social Development Canada is also carrying out work in employment supports for skilled newcomers (e.g., Foreign Credential Recognition Program and Canadian Work Experience Pilot). This may be an opportunity to share results and increase coordination between the departments to determine ways to better support skilled newcomers.

- **Demand-focus**: Working directly with employers proved beneficial in the development of training, and graduates from which, that would be more relevant to employers' needs. If employment is a main focus for the programs, delivered activities should be more labour market focused, bringing in employers on the demand side. There may also be an associated need for cross-cultural training to modify employer attitudes about hiring newcomer women.

- **Language skills**: Most programs did not specify a language level for eligibility. It may be helpful to have a language level requirement to better target programs and services for the right groups of women to ensure the services received are useful for them, and that they do not disproportionately consume too much instruction and administrative time.

- **Childcare provisions**: Women with children face steep barriers to entering the labour market. Childcare for this group remains an issue, even with childcare support provided by IRCC, and likely even beyond the pandemic. Allowing more flexibility in the provision of childcare supports as well as addressing structural issues for this group may be needed since the current childcare reimbursement guidelines still leaves childcare as an issue for VMNW with children.

- **Pandemic**: The COVID-19 pandemic, which forced organizations to deliver services virtually, uncovered challenges for certain groups of VMNW, which may or may not linger after a protracted recovery, suggesting that:

    o Programming to help women with low digital skills and/or technology issues participate with virtual delivery is needed. This will likely be true after the pandemic, when virtual delivery will be more likely employed. The lack of digital skills is preventing, and will prevent, this group of women from participating in online training, as well as better jobs that require increasingly greater levels of digital literacy.

- o Mental health support delivered by the programs during the pandemic was needed and valued by newcomer women, especially during the early pandemic periods.

- o In general, training and employment related support are needed to help VMNW through the recovery and prevent them from falling further behind in the labour market.

In this study, we have gathered information that has enabled us to identify some important lessons learned from the set of initiatives funded in the New Partners stream. The results in this study added to our knowledge base about effective ways to facilitate the transition of visible minority newcomer women into the Canadian labour market, which should inform current and future policy, programming, and practice. However, there is still much to learn and to do to fully address the barriers to employment experienced by VMNW with different characteristics and varying degrees of labour market readiness and attachment.

APPENDIX A: PILOT OBJECTIVES AND ORGANIZATION SELECTION PROCESS

Under the New Partners initiative in the Visible Minority Newcomer Women Pilot, IRCC funds eligible organizations that have not previously received IRCC funding to:

- Develop **innovative** approaches to increase VMNW participation in the Canadian labour market;

- Enhance their **capacity and partnership** capability in working with VMNW to address their labour market needs; and

- Provide activities that increase the **digital skills** of VMNW.

Organizations seeking funding had to identify one or more of these objectives for their initiative. The organization selection process for the New Partners initiative was conducted in two stages. In Stage 1, IRCC sought and received 211 letters of interest, containing short project descriptions, and assessed them to determine which might be of interest to the Department. All letters of interest were assessed by a pair of IRCC staff. Assessors' recommendations were reviewed by departmental subject matter experts and senior management to ensure consistency and potential for success and other considerations such as avoiding duplication between projects.

Of the 211 Stage 1 letters of interest, 46 were asked to submit detailed project proposals for consideration in Stage 2. The 41 proposals that were received underwent a review similar to Stage 1. The proposals had to demonstrate a solid understanding of the target client group, the employment and other barriers they faced, as well as their complex circumstances with respect to, for example, skills and education, geographical location, and language levels. The proposals also had to ensure there would be an integrated approach to programming by means of partnership with organizations with expertise serving the VMNW community and/or with employers hiring them. Based on these criteria, 21 projects delivered by service providers in six provinces were selected for funding and are the object of this study.

APPENDIX B: DATA COLLECTION METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

To begin the data collection process, the project team engaged and invited the project representatives from each of the 21 funded organizations to participate in the study and prepared them for the data collection needed by SRDC to support the study. SRDC researchers worked to find a contact name and information via an Internet search, phone calls and emails. Some assistance from IRCC was sought and obtained for some of the organizations as to the contact information. Organization representatives were contacted by phone or by email. Once reached, we sent a covering email message and letter introducing the study and specifying the documentary information needed and assistance we would later need to conduct the study, as described below. A letter of authenticity from IRCC was made available upon request. Assurance was given that information collected for this study would not be associated with identified organizations. In the end, we engaged 18 of the 21 funded organizations.

SRDC collected data for study using five lines of evidence, the methodologies for each of which are described below.

Documents and administrative data review

All 18 organizations engaged for this study provided program documents, comprising: some or all of the original proposal, narrative reports or other progress reports submitted to IRCC, and other miscellaneous documentation such as case studies or promotional materials issued by the organization. Three of the organizations were too busy to provide this material to us, so instead we received their permission to obtain the documents directly from IRCC. It should be noted that the documentation received varied across organizations as to comprehensiveness.

SRDC reviewed the organizations' initial proposals to understand what was planned for the respective programs, key program components and activities, and expected outcomes. The quarterly and annual narrative/progress reports described progress to date and identified promising practices and challenges encountered along the way. This information, along with other evidence from the organizational and participant surveys, addressed research questions 1, 2, and 6.

SRDC also reviewed iCare participant data for nine initiatives, as entered by the respective delivery organizations, and obtained from IRCC by individual consent of each organization.

Organizational survey

The survey of organizations was designed to collect primarily quantitative data on their programs, with the follow-up interviews intended to gather more qualitative information, enabling the interviewees to expand upon their more limited responses in the survey. Specifically, the survey asked organizations for information on their size and the number of people involved in the delivery of their program, the program's objectives and services provided under them, and the number of participants and the number who ended up in a job after the intervention. We also asked for their views of and satisfaction with various implementation and effectiveness elements of the program. As well, there were questions to enable identification of the "most important change" — accounts from the project staff of change that has been the most significant and why. This data source addressed all research questions.

In November 2020, SRDC developed an organizational survey instrument and, in December, invited the 18 engaged organizations to participate in the online survey. Over the months of December 2020 and January 2021, the representatives of 17 organizations responded. The one representative who could not cited competing demands on her time. All but one of these organizations participated in the subsequent interviews.

Organizational interviews

The purpose of the organizational interviews was to enable project delivery staff to provide details and insights to help us understand the implementation, particularly challenges to the implementation due to the COVID-19 pandemic among other factors. In addition, we discussed with interviewees the opportunities and success factors they discovered during the implementation, their perspective on outcomes and successes realized for the organization, particularly in terms of delivery capacity and partnership-building, and the influence of external variables and specific contexts that may have affected the implementation and observed employment and other outcomes for the target participant group. This data source addressed all research questions.

In January 2021, semi-structured virtual/telephone interviews were conducted with the project manager and/or other delivery staff at 15 of the 18 engaged organizations that agreed to be interviewed. In all but one case, Zoom was used to conduct the interviews. One of these organizations completed the interview but not the organizational survey.

Participant survey

The main purpose of the online participant survey was to profile participants, to understand their perspective on program delivery, and to measure outcomes for them Where possible, these

data will be used to address specific research questions focused on implementation and outcomes at the participant level. Thus, data were gathered in the survey about:

- Sociodemographic traits: family characteristics such marital status and number of children, education level, language ability, disability, newcomer status, social network, household size and income;

- Pre-program work indicators: experience in trying to find a job, and whether or not they had worked for pay in Canada and/or elsewhere;

- Views on aspects of program delivery: satisfaction with information received about Canadian culture and labour market, needs assessment and counselling, job referrals and advice, social and mental health supports, work placements and follow-up, and training as to communication skills, digital skills, job search, entrepreneurial skills and technical skills;

- Post-program work indicators: looking for paid work, experience trying to find employment, and hours worked and earnings if employed; and

- Views on the extent to which they felt the program: improved their ability to look for a job, to know how to train for one, and to find one;[11] increased their confidence and reduced their stress; and improved their social networks.

We created an invitation for each organization to email[12] to their program participants, containing the survey link to the online survey instrument. In the invitation and introduction to the survey (which were "personalized" with the names of the organization and program), it was made clear to participants that these data were being collected for research purposes only and that their responses would not be identified or shown to the organization. As an incentive for respondents, a $50 gift card at the store of their choice was made available as a thank-you to those who completed and submitted the survey. Note that for participants to be emailed the voucher, a participant had to have provided her name and email address near the end of the survey and to have clicked on the submit button, the latter to encourage them to go to the end of the survey. The names were never associated with the respective responses and were destroyed after the vouchers were all processed.

SRDC asked 15 organizations on February 16 to distribute a survey invitation to all participants in their respective funded program to participate in the survey. (The other two of the 18 engaged organizations were not invited, as one did not launch its program and one ended the program

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[11] Note that not all programs were focused on achieving employment for clients, at least in the immediate term.

[12] We assumed all participants had an email address.

earlier with only a few participants. One other organization was conducting its own surveys.) We initially gave participants 14 days to respond (to March 5), and on March 3 we asked organizations to remind their clients and at the same time extended the deadline to March 7.

We initially obtained 539 completed responses from women[13] who participated in the services of 13 organizations. The survey was estimated to have taken respondents about 15–20 minutes to complete.

We cleaned the data in four stages to ensure the responses in the analysis are robust. First, we deleted all duplicate observations and a few erroneous entries, which reduced the sample size to 510 observations. Second, we deleted all observations where the survey was completed but it took the respondent under five minutes. The reasoning was that, given the average completion time (15–20 minutes), it was unrealistic for someone to have carefully completed the survey in five minutes or less. Third, we calculated the age of the respondents (a date of birth was entered) and deleted all those who were under 18 years old. Fourth, we deleted those who responded that they had more young children in the household than the total number of children in the household. Errors such as this suggested careless survey completion.

Finally, we deleted the entries where the respondents picked "Not Applicable" to all program activities options. To our knowledge, every program studied in this research included at least one of the activities that we presented as options in the survey. If a respondent chose "Not applicable" to all of the options, she was either not taking the survey seriously or had not participated in the program fully. In either case, to maintain the quality of the data, this type of response was deleted. **The final sample contained 461 completed surveys.**

Analysis

The qualitative data gathered in the document review, interviews and surveys provided us a picture mainly of the **delivery/implementation** experience. Specifically, these data enabled us to find out about: delivery challenges experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors; effects of the funded initiative on organizational delivery capacity and partnership building; and innovative practices implemented and success factors. SRDC analyzed the data gathered using both predetermined codes aligned with specific lines of inquiry, as well as emergent codes to capture new concepts and ideas. The qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed and summarized by common themes related to the research questions. We first started with the results from the organizational survey, itemizing each challenge and practice in organization-specific spreadsheets. To these results, we added information identified in the personal

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[13]   This sample includes those who answered "Prefer not to say" to the gender question.

interviews and then in the documents review. This enabled us to identify and triangulate common practices and challenges, as well as best practices and lessons learned.

For the quantitative data collected in the surveys we used VOXCO, Excel and Stata to analyse the data and create charts. This analysis focused on participant traits and outcomes. Using mainly means and proportions/distributions, we first **profiled** participants (prior to the assistance provided) in terms of their socioeconomic, labour market and other descriptive attributes. Examples include: age, newcomer type, language ability, disability status, education level, family/marital status and prior labour market status. For **outcomes**, we computed client labour market and other relevant measures (as reported during or after the program). Examples include the proportions of participants: completing the program, experiencing difficulty finding a job after the program compared to the proportions before, employed/self-employed, and in part-time jobs. One other type of outcome measure for participants we computed from the survey was the proportions saying their participation in the program contributed to certain outcomes such as increased language ability, increased confidence, enhanced networks, and reduced stress.

We should note again some potential limitations of the participant data. Attaining employment or self-employment was not always the immediate expected outcome of all initiatives with their employment or entrepreneurial skills training. Research and an employment pathways handbook were another expected outcome in one project. Also, note that some programs delayed by the pandemic did not have as much time post-program as they were expecting for participants to get a job or start a business. Also, the pandemic prevented or hampered efforts to find placements for participants.

Once we assessed the quality and quantity of data we collected from participants, we were able to identify which **subgroups** we could disaggregate the survey data by. With only 17 organizations in the organization survey, it was not feasible to disaggregate results in organizational survey by subgroups.

The results from the quantitative and qualitative data were integrated where appropriate to address the various research questions. (See Appendix C Research Questions by Line of Evidence.)

APPENDIX C: RESEARCH QUESTIONS BY LINE OF EVIDENCE

Research question	Documents review	Organizational survey	Organizational interviews	Participant survey
Delivery/Implementation				
1. What did the initiative deliver and to whom?	✓	✓	✓	✓
2. Was it implemented as planned? If not, why not and what differed?	✓	✓	✓	
What role did the pandemic play in delivery? Were there other challenges to implementation? Did lack of capacity play a role here?				
What were the opportunities along the way?				
What were participants' views on service delivery?				✓
3. How well did the organization work with IRCC, it being its first-time working with the department? Was it able to meet reporting and other requirements?	✓	✓	✓	
Outcomes				
4. Did the initiative achieve its intended objectives? If not, why not and what differed?	✓	✓	✓	
5. What employment and other outcomes did the intervention contribute to for participants?	✓	✓	✓	✓
6. Did the intervention improve the capacity of the organization? In what ways? Did it lead to partnership-building with service delivery organizations and employers?		✓	✓	

Research question		Documents review	Organizational survey	Organizational interviews	Participant survey
7.	What were, if any, unintended consequences of the intervention for service organizations, participants, partner organizations and others?		✓	✓	
Global questions					
8.	What insights does a Gender-Based Analysis Plus lens provide on the question of which subgroups of participants the initiatives worked best for, how and why?	✓	✓	✓	✓
9.	What are the commonalities in implementation and outcomes across the different initiatives?	✓	✓	✓	✓
10.	What are the common lessons learned, emerging best, promising, and innovative practices, and recommendations for policy, programming, and practice?	✓	✓	✓	✓

APPENDIX D: DESCRIPTIONS OF ORGANIZATIONS AND PROGRAMS

Herein are profiles of the 18 engaged funded organizations and their initiatives funded under the New Partners stream of the VMNW pilot. The profiles were based on information gathered in documents received from the organizations, information from their websites, and data gathered in the organization survey conducted for this study. The size of the organizations is noted in red: **S** (<20 staff), **M** (21-50 staff) and **L** (>50 staff).

S ACCESS Community Capital Fund — Pathways to Prosperity

ACCESS Community Capital Fund is an organization that serves the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area, and more recently in Alberta. ACCESS delivers programs to help newcomers launch their business ideas or upgrade skills and credentials (including foreign credential recognition) to work in Canada. Many of their clients are newcomer women.

ACCESS implemented **Pathways to Prosperity** with the aim to support VMNW interested in starting a small **business** in Canada. The program developed and implemented was called *Women's Business Accelerator Program*. An important eligibility criterion was that participants have a business idea or ideas they would like to develop during the program. The program introduced participants to business concepts within the Canadian landscape and offered them foundational training to gain essential business skills needed to develop and build a profitable business. The program delivered individual sessions covering business ideation, business plan development, marketing, finances, legal matters, mentoring, and other topics. It also sought to create and strengthen participants' social and professional networks. Facilitation of business loans, referrals and personal coaching were provided. Financial assistance with childminding and transit was offered.

S African Canadian Resource Network Saskatchewan Inc. (ACRN) — Bridging the Gap: Empowering Visible Minority Newcomer Women to Realize Full Potential

The African Canadian Resource Network (ACRN) Saskatchewan Inc. was created as a result of community-based research and collaboration that identified a need to establish an enduring organization to support the diverse, growing and dynamic African Canadian community in Saskatchewan. It is an umbrella organization bringing together over 17 community agencies. ACRN is dedicated to building capacity of the African Canadian community in the province in strategic areas such as public and business leadership and to enhancing social and cultural connections within and outside the community. It offers programs and services to support participation and integration of African-descent Canadians, immigrants, and refugees into Canadian society.

The goal of ACRN's **Bridging the Gap** program to support and empower VMNW, particularly those of African descent, to realize their full potential and settle in Canada by finding gainful employment or starting their own **business**. Its intent was to remove unique settlement and integration barriers faced by VMNW, who are isolated and often have difficulty accessing information. It provided participants with essential information and training about the Canadian labour market and business environment. Specifically, this assistance consisted of employment readiness workshops, delivered in batches of five to six weeks, where training was provided in labour market data usage, resume writing, interview skills, entrepreneurship in Saskatchewan, and Critical Anti Oppressive Practices.

S African Communities of Manitoba Inc. (ACOMI) — We Belong Project

ACOMI is an umbrella organization of African organizations and individuals of African heritage; it has a small team and operates in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Its mission is to deliver and promote programs and activities in culturally appropriate manners to enhance the social and economic needs of the African community in Manitoba, while preserving the common cultural heritage and recognizing its uniqueness.

ACOMI's **We Belong** project was targeted at VMNW who have been in Canada between two and seven years. The ultimate goal was to help participants find and secure employment opportunities including **entrepreneurship**. It offered participants one-on-one training and support that were responsive and relevant to the clients' particular needs, with a goal of enhancing their skills and readiness for and their knowledge of the Canadian labour market. Follow-up was also provided to them on job prospects and how to retain employment. Childminding and transportation financial assistance was offered.

S Canadian Muslim Women's Institute (CMWI) — Newcomer Women Employment Training

CMWI is an organization based in Winnipeg, Manitoba. It provides programs and services that aim to support newcomer women in their social and economic integration leading to self-sufficiency, financial independence, and a greater sense of belonging. Its mission is for Muslim women to empower women, families, and communities and to build a successful, strong, and harmonious diverse society.

CMWI's **Newcomer Women Employment Training** program delivered training to Muslim VMNW that aimed to build on their strengths and prepare them for jobs in the sewing, cooking, cleaning, and childminding areas. Besides the technical occupational training, participants also received employment-readiness assessment and essential skills training as well as post-program support and follow-up. If needed, onsite childminding, bus tickets and interpretation services were offered during the program. Training in each specific area took six weeks, and training in all four areas 24 weeks.

L Corporation of the City of Brantford — Connect, Support, Achieve

The City of Brantford, in partnership with its community, is committed to responsible leadership through sound fiscal management and the delivery of quality programs and services for the citizens of Brantford. Among its many programs, it delivers, within the Health and Human Services Commission Ontario Works, housing, employment, and childcare services. The City actively develops and supports partnerships, both within and outside Brantford.

Connect, Support, Achieve sought to increase the employment of VMNW in Brantford and their representation in the local workforce by enabling them to access needed skills and education. The program delivered three main activities: place-based employment-related training, mentorship, and digital literacy skills development. In addition, it connected women with mentors who had successfully integrated into the Canadian labour market, thus affording them meaningful knowledge of how to succeed in the labour market. It also provided participants with financial social supports to reduce barriers to obtaining employment, such as transportation and childcare.

M Landscape Ontario Horticultural Trades Association — VMNW Walking in the Boots toward the Landscape/Horticultural Profession

Landscape Ontario (LO) Horticulture Trades Association is a professional association of landscape and horticulture employers and employees located in nine regional chapters offering products and services across 10 commodity sectors. The chapters meet to network, discuss, and organize projects that bring the industry together and economic, environmental, and other benefits for local communities. It aims to create opportunities for the future workforce to explore careers and pathways to support the profession. LO also offers its members professional development opportunities.

Landscape Ontario proposed to pilot the **Walking in the Boots** model to promote the employment of VMNW (who have not worked in Canada before) in the landscape and horticultural industry in Canada. It aimed to do this by increasing participants' awareness and knowledge of career pathways in the sector, as well as career development and advancement opportunities in it. The pilot planned to provide VMNW with training and access to resources and support to enable them to acquire the knowledge, skills, and connections to integrate into the industry. The project was also to involve employers: it planned to provide cross-cultural diversity training potential employers of VMNW, as well as the VMNW themselves, in order to build capacity to foster sustainable employment relationships.

L MetroWorks Employment Association — Deep Roots

MetroWorks (formerly HRDA Enterprises Ltd.) provides training and employment opportunities for people with barriers to employment. Its vision is to empower individuals to fully engage in their communities and to achieve economic independence. It is located in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

The goal of MetroWorks' **Deep Roots** was to support the women's movement towards employment. It offered job search assistance and job readiness training along with volunteer placements in food-oriented social enterprises—bakery, kitchen, café, farm, urban farm and mobile food market—operated by MetroWorks. Specifically, the program provided participants with: one-on-one employment needs assessment, referrals, counselling and resume-building; training for work readiness preparation in group-based workshops; personalized support/mentoring; and volunteer placements in employment settings, which provided them also with the opportunity to practice their English. When the women were ready to enter the labour market, the program helped them to build their résumés and to connect to employment opportunities. It also provided support for childminding and transportation.

S New Circles Community Services — A New Gateway to Employment: Empowering VMNW to overcome barriers to entering the labour force

New Circles Community Services is located in North York, Ontario. It fosters strong and caring communities by providing basic necessities such as food and clothing to low-income individuals living in poverty. It also provides employment skills training and settlement support to these individuals. The aim of these programs is to help clients integrate socially and economically into the community. New Circles operates *GLOW (Gently Loved Outfits to Wear)* the largest clothing bank in Toronto designed to offer a retail shopping experience respecting clients' dignity, but also serving as a learning platform to develop employment skills.

The project **A New Gateway to Employment** (formerly Employment for Visible Minority Newcomer Women) engaged VMNW who were patrons of GLOW and/or lived in the service catchment area, where newcomers make up a majority of residents. The intent of the program was to build community connections for the women, aiming to engage them in skills training and promote successful outcomes by providing them with individualized support and job placements with employers. The women were paired with an intake worker who conducted a one-on-one needs assessment and connected them with community resources based on their needs, while helping them to navigate and access them. These resources could have been employment counselling, language training, employment readiness training, or existing digital and retail skills training programs. Job search assistance was also provided under the program.

S Newcomer Kitchen Inc. — Willing to Work

Newcomer Kitchen is a non-profit organization, operating a revenue-generating social enterprise in the Toronto and Mississauga, Ontario. It started by inviting Syrian refugee women to cook a weekly meal in their kitchens. The meals are sold online, and profits are shared among the cooks. Newcomer Kitchen provides an early intervention that affords newcomer women with pre-employment prerequisites such as a permanent address, literacy skills, and professional experience. It leverages the women's existing skills to address barriers to their social and economic participation in the community. The "kitchen" serves as a hub to connect newcomers to opportunities while gaining Canadian work experience.

Newcomer Kitchen's **Willing to Work** program facilitated entrepreneurial training of VMNW, promoting small-scale food entrepreneurship as a viable economic option for them. Participants were refugee women in the greater Toronto Area who had been in Canada for five or fewer years. Applying its own *Facilitated Entrepreneurship Training Program*, Newcomer Kitchen engaged the women through a business lens but also provided opportunities for them to practice English, gain experience about employment, explore their community, and integrate more into the Canadian society. Following needs assessment, the program delivered work-integrated learning consisting of several modules related to small business opportunities in food services. The women worked in business cohorts to produce and sell traditional food and, at the end of or during the modules, they carried out business activities such as hosting public events to sell the food.

L NPower Canada — Digital Careers for Visible Minority Newcomer Women

NPower Canada is a registered charity that started in Canada in Toronto to help low-income, diverse young adults launch into Information Technology (IT) careers on the basis of its *NPower Canada Model*, which bridges the gap between the jobseekers and Information IT employers seeking and hiring them. It carries this out by providing free skills training and certification, social and life skills services, corporate mentors and coaches, job placement support, and post-training career advancement support. NPower consults with a range of employers to ensure the training curriculum prepares participants with the technical and professional skills most sought after by industry. This model has now been implemented in Canada in another province (Alberta) and for different populations of youth.

The **Digital Careers for Visible Minority Newcomer Women** aimed to remove systemic barriers preventing VMNW from participating in meaningful jobs and successfully settling in Canada. It focused on low-income VMNW aged 18 to 29 years, and sought to connect them to the IT sector, drawing on its *NPower Canada Model*. The funded project provided IT-focused career exploration, digital literacy training, career development and employer connections for training

graduates. Some participants further benefited from components of NPower's model not part of the project, namely IT skills training and industry certifications.

S Syrian Canadian Foundation (SCF) — The Women Entrepreneurship Program & Incubator

The Syrian Canadian Foundation, located in Mississauga, Ontario, was established with inspiration from the Government of Canada's commitment to resettle Syrian refugees in Canada. It engages with partners and volunteers to develop culturally customized services for Syrian newcomers and other diverse communities. It aims to foster skills and talent among newcomers and people of diverse backgrounds while building welcoming and inclusive communities and promoting cross-cultural exchanges.

The **Women Entrepreneurship Program and Incubator** provided entrepreneurial training and funding for refugee VMNW who wanted to be an entrepreneur in Canada but did not have the knowledge and capital to do so. It was geared to women with higher levels of language skills. The program addressed these needs with activities in three project phases. First, it offered all participants a workshop assessing their career and entrepreneurial skills, along with customized career/business advice and referrals to opportunities and services align with their needs. Second, some participants moved on to take a three-month intensive business and entrepreneurial skills training workshop that includes language and business communications skills training, business concept development, business plans, marketing, building networks and regulations. A small group of women with a winning business idea from the second phase moved to the final phase where they had the opportunity to receive seed funding and implement their idea as a start-up for a 10-month incubation period. They received mentoring and guidance from the project to help build the start-up and move forward successfully in the incubation phase.

S Umoja Operation Compassion Society — Newcomer Digital Connect

Umoja is a charitable organization located that supports newcomer immigrants and refugees living in Surrey, BC who find it difficult to integrate due to obstacles such as poverty, language, employment, culture, feelings of isolation and hopelessness. UMOJA provides various culturally sensitive programs to help families, children and youth successfully integrate into Canadian society.

Umoja's **Newcomer Digital Connect** program delivered in partnership with Progressive Intercultural Community Services (PICS) sought to engage and support VMNW by building their digital literacy skills and employment capacity, in order to help them prepare for and enter the Canadian labour market. The program offered a 12-week program with two additional weeks of unpaid community-based work experience. The program included training delivery for basic and enhanced digital literacy skills, job search and employment/workplace skills along with job

development, mentorship, and follow-up support. Childminding and transportation assistance
was available.

S United Way of Bruce Grey — Rural Pathways for Newcomer Women in Grey Bruce

The United Way is an autonomous organization that builds upon the strength of volunteers and
voluntary action by engaging the whole community for the benefit of the community. The Board
of Directors, volunteers and staff aim to build caring communities and respond to a broad range
of local unmet human needs in the Bruce and Grey Counties. It is currently focused on
three priority areas called: From Poverty to Possibility; Healthy People, Strong Communities;
and All that Kids Can Be.

The **Rural Pathways for Newcomer Women in Bruce Grey** pilot research project aimed to
develop, identify, and evaluate new pathways to employment for VMNW in rural communities
lacking settlement services, and release the findings in a handbook. It carried out this work in
collaboration and conversations with community agencies and VMNW, as well as employers, all
of whom were represented on two advisory committees for the project. It initially conducted a
survey with VMNW in the community to identify pre-employment and employment needs and
barriers. It also surveyed employers and employment service providers in the community. The
information collected was used to develop, implement, and test resources and tools, with
advisory committee input, to help the women and the community address the identified barriers.
The resulting learnings, resources, and tools (Pathways to Employment for Rural VMNW
Handbook) produced were shared among employers, community agencies and others in the
community to better support employment and integration for newcomer women going forward.
Assistance with childminding and transportation was made available when needed.

L Women In Need Society (WINS) – Helping Women Win!

Women In Need Society (WINS) is a charity in Calgary, Alberta founded to provide basic needs,
resources and support to women and their families. It operates five thrift/retail stores (on
location and online), in addition to their Donation Centre. The revenue from the thrift operations
support WINS programs and services for vulnerable women and families, including Retail Ready,
a retail training program. The majority of participants in WINS programs are Visible Minority
Newcomer Women.

Helping Women Win provided employment training and work experience to help VMNW find
employment in the retail and warehousing sectors. The program leveraged on WINS retail stores
and donation warehouse, to provide onsite training placements and experiential learning to its
Retail Ready clients. The participants gained direct experience and built their skills in a safe
place, where they could practice their English and learn about the workplace culture. It consisted
of four weeks of classroom training and two weeks of work experience in a WINS' store or
warehouse.

S Women's Centre of Halton — Employment Supports and Digital Literacy for VMNW in Halton

The Women's Centre of Halton, located in Oakville, Ontario, was founded to provide needed aftercare to support women leaving shelters to enable them to successfully return to the community. It acts as the first contact point for access to programs and services for women. The Centre aims to meet women's basic needs to enhance safety, self-esteem, and self-sufficiency and to empower them through participation in selected programs and services. In addition to information and referrals to community resources, the Centre develops and delivers programs and services such as peer support, counselling, education, seminars and workshops in Oakville and Milton, Ontario.

The Women's Centre developed and implemented **Employment Supports and Digital Literacy for VMNW in Halton** to help participants prepare for employment or self-employment in the Canadian labour market. This was done by first identifying and assessing barriers through activities, in individual and group sessions, to explore career options, advance life skills, build digital skills and identify individual employment goals. The women were also provided with job search assistance and post-hiring supports enabling job retention and career advancement.

S Women's Economic Council — Her Own Boss! Self-Employment to Bridge Settlement and Economic Security

The Women's Economic Council (WEC) is a national organization advocating for women-centred Community Economic Development (CED) in Canada. It was formed when several women and women's organizations observed barriers that prevent women's full participation in the growing CED movement. WEC focuses on economics, but ultimately, it wants to improve lives for women in Canada and uses women-centred CED as the means to achieve that by providing the tools and resources they need and by working in partnership with their communities.

WEC implemented **Her Own Boss**, a national action research project that arose from previous research on barriers VMNW experience in accessing community services, such as a lack of awareness and suitability. Eligible participants were VMNW living in lower mainland British Columbia, northern and eastern Ontario, or St. John's metro area, Newfoundland. The project aimed to better understand how services relating to business, co-operatives and social enterprise development can be improved by collaborating with community partners, with a view to making systemic changes enabling VMNW to access basic business knowledge and acquire and digital literacy skills, while exploring self-employment as a viable pathway for VMNW. The project served to not only introduce women to existing services and the community, but to connect them to service providers. It engaged and worked with stakeholders and VMNW to learn how to enhance existing services and test new models so VMNW can confidently create and implement their self-employment plans. Employment counselling was also provided.

L Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Kitchener-Waterloo — In Her Shoes, An Online Entrepreneurships and Employment Training Program

The YW has a rich history of over 150 years. It was found by Christian women concerned about housing and community supports for local young women. YW is dedicated to serving women and their families in the Kitchener-Waterloo community. It aims to improve the lives of women and youth by providing a range of programs and services to develop skills and help them improve their lives and become self-reliant. Programs include shelter, supportive housing, education, employment and entrepreneurship, childcare, and leadership development. It also advocates for system level changes to effect positive changes where women, families, youth, and children thrive in inclusive communities.

YW's **In Her Shoes** was an employment and online entrepreneurship training program for VMNW who identify as transgender and non-binary person. The program focused on building computer and digital literacy skills, employment and entrepreneurship skills, and e-commerce and digital marketing skills. Participants gained experiential retail skills and experience with the YW's own *Brick and Clicks* social enterprise store that sells new and used women's accessories. They also got to develop their own small online business ideas. Eight weeks of entrepreneurial training was provided at two levels: novice, for those primarily focused on business who have a business idea area; and beginner: for those interested in both business and employment but focused on finding employment first. The training curriculum content was adapted to the needs of individuals. The women also received mentorship and post-program support. Childminding and transportation financial assistance was offered.

L Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Metro Vancouver — Tech Connect for Newcomer Women

The founders of the YWCA Metro Vancouver women were women who were concerned about the salvation, safety and living conditions of young women who are new to the city. It opened in 1897 to provide housing and services to women arriving in Vancouver who were searching for education or employment and is now one of the largest and most diversified non-profit organizations in BC. Through advocacy and integrated programs and services that foster economic security, wellness and equal opportunities, the YWCA Metro Vancouver aims to build brighter futures for women and their families.

The **Tech Connect for Newcomer Women** (TC) project is designed to support unemployed or under-employed VMNW who are internationally trained professionals (ITPs) with information technology (IT) backgrounds to secure jobs that are commensurate with their skills, education, and experience. It aims to help participants better understand IT employment and the workplace culture and to strengthen their professional and employer networks in Canada. The project offers participants activities in three phases: customized group workshops on a variety of related

topics to help participants better navigate the Canadian workplace culture and meet
expectations; individualized job development, coaching and mentoring; and assistance
establishing employer connections and job shadowing.

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