

CANN E-Link: Final Evaluation Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

S.U.C.C.E.S.S. has been delivering the Community Airport Newcomers Network (CANN) at Vancouver International Airport (YVR) since 1992. CANN plays a vital role on the continuum of settlement services by offering basic needs assessments and referrals at the YVR port-of-entry. CANN E-Link is a pilot project funded by the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). The E-Link pilot is testing the use of technology to connect settlement provider organizations (SPOs) with newcomers proactively. It aims to increase the uptake of settlement services.

Previous studies found that settlement service usages are associated with better settlement outcomes. However, many newcomers are not aware of the free settlement services. Newcomers usually are busy to settle down into a new country during the first few months after arrival. It may not be of priority to search for settlement services. An E-Link SPO can offer settlement services to newcomers proactively if they agree to share their contact information.

Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) is the independent research and evaluation partner of the E-Link pilot. This report presents the pilot project's final research and evaluation results. The SRDC team interviewed CANN staff and partner SPOs to learn about E-Link's implementation. SRDC also collects administrative data from the E-Link system and survey data from CANN and E-Link clients. Combined with focus group interviews of E-Link and CANN clients, this evaluation shows that E-Link has been delivering substantial impacts and meeting the policy objectives of increasing the uptake of IRCC-funded settlement services and accelerating newcomers' settlement and integration journey.

CANN successfully developed the E-Link platform, even though it took longer than expected time for its development. The project implemented all key functionalities and the strong partnerships with SPOs helped the E-Link team adjust the platform to address the needs of the partner SPOs. E-Link was well received by SPOs, and the project recruited 48 partner SPOs, surpassing the planned target of 39. Partner SPOs found that E-Link worked as expected, though they faced some challenges, such as client non-responses, accuracies of contact information, progress tracking, mismatching newcomers' needs and service capacity (e.g., providing services in newcomers' language), difficulties in handling surges in arrivals, and challenges of using the E-Link platform. CANN could further improve the E-Link system and make it easier for SPOs to make use of clients' characteristics and needs. SPOs would like E-Link to expand its functionalities for service coordination, tracking, notifications, and easier integration into their own workflow through Excel or other data exchange standards.

Until the end of February 2024, 17,772 newcomers consented to be contacted by the referred SPOs at their destination through the E-Link system. The profile of E-Link clients is very similar to the profile of newcomers arriving in recent years. There is no specific reason to take part in the E-Link project, but newcomers reflected they prefer getting information, support, and services as early as possible.

E-Link increases the connection between newcomers and SPOs by 21.4 percentage points and reduces the time to the first settlement service slightly by an average of 10 days. It increases the usages of settlement services among newcomers by 12.7 percentage points (from 58.8% to 71.5%) in the first 6 months of settling in Canada. E-LINK has impacts on many types of settlement services: 17.3 percentage points on general services, 9.1 percentage points on employment services, 5.3 percentage points in language assessment, 5.7% in language instruction for newcomers to Canada (LINC), and 8.5 percentage points in community connection. The magnitudes of the service uptake increases are very substantial. E-Link has positive significant increases in service uptakes across many sub-populations.

E-Link clients are very satisfied with the referrals and getting support from SPOs because of CANN or E-Link. Newcomers have a hectic schedule during the initial settlement period, and they may not know where to get help. Many newcomers welcome the reach out by settlement service providers and their offer of settlement services. Some comparison group newcomers (who were not served by E-Link) said that they would have agreed to share their contact information through E-Link if it was offered.

There is evidence that E-Link accelerated clients' integration journey. E-Link clients are 14 percentage points more likely to get a referral to other settlement services, 4.3 percentage points less likely to not knowing where to find the settlement services they needed, and 7.5 percentage points more likely to know where to get employment services. E-Link increases the proportion of newcomers with a sense of hope about the future by 5.9 percentage points – suggesting that newcomers settled and integrated better in the first 6 months.

The delivery cost is about \$44.00 per E-Link client, of which about \$35.60 for E-Link's operation and \$8.40 honorarium to support SPOs reaching out to newcomers. After accounting for non-responses and the status quo, the cost of increasing an additional user of employment related services (ERS) because of E-Link would be around \$1,700. Since the impact of the employment related services on the accumulated earnings of a newcomer user in the first five years easily surpasses the \$1,700 threshold, E-Link is likely to be a cost-effective and economically viable way to increase settlement service uptake.

The evaluation team concludes that there are three key lessons learned based on the project's findings that are important to the settlement program:

Lesson 1: Proactive outreach to newcomers at a right time is important to increase access to the settlement supports and services they need and accelerates their integration, and it is only possible if there is a functioning information system with strong and trusted partnerships with settlement service providers.

Lesson 2: Applying behavioural insights to identify the best opportunities to engage and support newcomers along their settlement journey is the basis of E-Link's success. More research on newcomers' settlement journey is needed for designing effective engagement strategies between SPOs and newcomers.

Lesson 3: CANN E-Link can be considered as an example of a simplified implementation of the Dedicated Needs and Assets Assessment and Referral Services (DNS), and its strengths and challenges are informative to DNS' design and deployment.

The evaluation team recommends CANN follow the lessons learned from this pilot to further improve E-Link's system and delivery. The team also suggests CANN explore the possibilities of offering E-Link as a virtual pre-arrival service or partnering with interested SPOs to offer similar services in other ports of entry.

INTRODUCTION

CANN E-Link is a pilot project funded through the 2021 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) Service Delivery Improvements call for research proposals. The E-Link pilot is testing the use of technology to connect settlement provider organizations (SPOs) with newcomers proactively. It aims to increase the uptake of settlement services.

S.U.C.C.E.S.S. has been delivering the Community Airport Newcomers Network (CANN) at the Vancouver International Airport (YVR) since 1992. CANN delivery staff is the first point of contact for many newcomers. CANN offers newcomers need assessments, referrals, and orientation at the YVR port-of-entry. This service is available for newcomers who settle in BC or are transiting through YVR to another community in Canada.

CANN uses its Client Service System (CSS) to collect contact information and demographic data of landing newcomers. S.U.C.C.E.S.S. provides newcomers with information about settlement services and IRCC-funded SPOs by emails. Newcomers could use the information to contact the local SPO. However, this engagement or communications is a one-way approach and passive. CANN E-Link builds on this existing technology by testing a proactive outreach approach by SPOs to newcomers shortly after their arrival. E-Link SPOs offer immediate settlement services to newcomers instead of waiting for newcomers.

The technology that is being leveraged and tested in this project is an arrival e-notification and information sharing system that informs SPOs of newly arrived newcomers who are settling in their local community/region. To do this, S.U.C.C.E.S.S. developed new technology modules (the Client Referral Service System, CRSS) to add to the existing CANN CSS. These modules capture the newcomer's needs assessment information and contact information. The CRSS sends the information electronically (i.e., e-notification) to SPOs in the community where the newcomer will initially be staying. SPOs who receive the e-notification reach out to the newcomer to engage and support them in accessing settlement services appropriate for their needs.

The goals of the project are to implement and test the effectiveness of this technology to:

1. increase the uptake of IRCC-funded settlement services among recently arrived newcomers, and
2. connect newcomers and SPOs earlier so that their settlement and integration journey is accelerated.

The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) is the research and evaluation partner of the project. Before S.U.C.C.E.S.S. started delivering CANN E-Link in July 2022, SRDC created an evaluation framework for the pilot and various data collection tools. SRDC had collected survey data of CANN E-Link users and a counterfactual sample of comparison group users of CANN who are not provided with the E-Link services. The SRDC evaluation team gathered detailed information about E-Link from both participants and SPO staff during the project. This final evaluation report presents how E-Link was implemented, its effects on participants' outcomes and impacts in the 6 months after their arrival. Based on the findings from both implementation and the outcomes and impacts observed, the evaluation team concludes with a few lessons learned and draws the pilot project's policy implications.

CANN E-LINK – THE PILOT INTERVENTION

When newcomers land at Vancouver International Airport, CANN delivery staff collect their contact information and administer a quick needs assessment. The needs assessments cover areas such as settlement-related needs, service language needs, accessibility needs, and so on. Newcomers are **eligible** if the expected destination is within the four provinces (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba) covered by E-Link.¹

During the pilot periods when CANN E-Link was available to eligible newcomers (Mode Engage), CANN staff explained to clients the nature of this pilot project and got their consent for sharing their information with up to three SPOs near their expected residence. A person of each arriving newcomer household acted as the key contact for participation. Those who consented to take part in E-Link were **E-Link clients**.² There were also days that CANN E-Link was not available to eligible newcomers (Mode Research). Regardless, all eligible newcomers to the CANN Kiosk were asked to take part in a research and evaluation study to understand their settlement experience. Eligible newcomers who arrived on days that CANN E-Link was not available formed the **comparison group**. The comparison group is key in learning what difference CANN E-Link is making.

After the E-Link client information was collected and entered into the CSS, the CRSS shared information about individuals/families with the corresponding local SPOs by e-notification emails. Regardless of their E-Link client status, all eligible newcomers received a list of SPOs in their expected home area that they could contact directly for settlement services. Comparison group newcomers remained eligible for all regular settlement services. Figure 1 presents E-Link's enrolment process at the S.U.C.C.E.S.S. CANN kiosk.

Participating SPOs receiving E-Link notifications of the arrival of newcomers in their area would receive clients' contact information, service language needs, and settlement needs. These SPOs should record whether they contacted the E-Link clients and whether they provided services on the CRSS.

¹ In practice, E-Link may not be able to match a newcomer to a SPO in the proximity of the expected residing neighbourhood.

² In theory, it is possible that some newcomers arriving on the days of when E-Link is opened may not consent to participate in E-Link. They would be asked to participate in the research, if they consent to the research, they would be considered as part of the "program group" sample. However, there is no case where a newcomer consent to the research without also consenting to E-Link.

After newcomers completed their landing process at the airport, the activities they went through depended on whether they were E-Link clients or comparison group members. E-Link clients might:

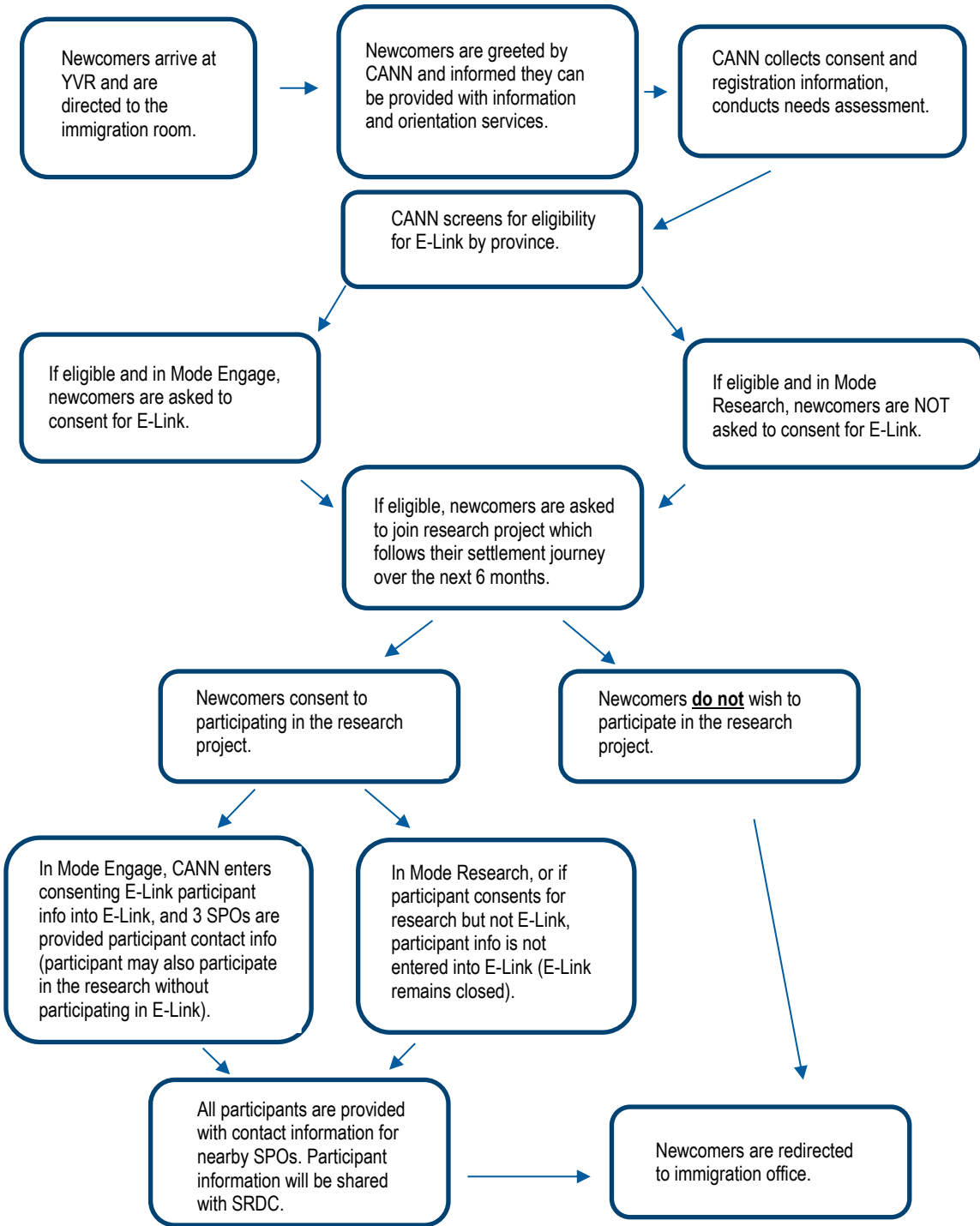
1. Be contacted by the SPOs shortly after arrival and schedule further settlement services.
2. Be contacted by SRDC for a baseline survey.
3. Contact the SPOs directly for services they need.
4. Use settlement services.
5. Be contacted by SRDC for a settlement experience survey 90 days after arrival.
6. Be contacted by SRDC for a follow-up survey 180 days after arrival.
7. Be invited by SRDC to participate in a focus group discussion with SRDC.

In contrast, those who arrive when E-Link was unavailable but agreed to take part in the study (comparison group) might:

1. Be contacted by SRDC for a baseline survey.
2. Contact the SPOs directly for services they need.
3. Use settlement services.
4. Be contacted by SRDC for a settlement experience survey 90 days after arrival.
5. Be contacted by SRDC for a follow-up survey 180 days after arrival.
6. Be invited by SRDC to participate in a focus group discussion with SRDC.

The only difference between the E-Link Clients and the comparison group in terms of activities was the proactive outreach of local SPOs to schedule further settlement services.

Figure 1 Flow chart of enrolment process



THE THEORY OF CHANGE AND THE EVALUATION

CANN E-LINK THEORY OF CHANGE

CANN and CANN E-Link target the “initial reception” stage of newcomers’ needs and priorities. According to the 2017 IRCC Evaluation of the Settlement Program, only 39% of newcomers who arrived in Canada in 2015 accessed IRCC-funded settlement services (IRCC, 2017). The 2021 IRCC Settlement Outcomes Highlights Report shows that settlement services are linked to successful settlement outcomes (IRCC, 2021). However, about 70% of newcomers surveyed were unaware of the free settlement services available to them. It is also crucial to reach newcomers early on when they need support.

Several factors may contribute to the low uptake of settlement services, including:

- Newcomers may not prioritize settlement services in their first few months after landing in Canada, when there are many competing priorities during the settlement journey.
- Lack of awareness of the availability of settlement services.
- Lack of understanding of settlement services.
- Misperception of settlement services’ usefulness.
- Skepticism about unfamiliar organizations or government agencies.
- Reliance on informal source (friends, family, and ethnic community) for settlement information and assistance.

Currently, it is entirely up to newcomers to reach out to SPOs even when they do not know where to get help and who they can trust. Because of a lack of current mechanisms to share information about newcomer arrivals and needs, it is challenging for SPOs to plan and provide early intervention services proactively that are responsive to newcomers’ immediate needs in a timely manner.

The settlement and integration of immigrants are complex and multifaceted (Kaushik & Drolet, 2018). Specifically, the lack of psychological and identity resource and social capital contribute to the barrier of lacking information and guidance on settlement services. CANN E-Link aims to address these factors and barriers in enabling more timely access to the needed settlement services.

The CANN kiosk at YVR raises the awareness of the availability of settlement services to help newcomers. The information and orientation provided should help improve the understanding of and access to settlement services. CANN E-Link is testing the difference made by facilitating SPOs reaching out to newcomers proactively to offer their services. SPOs specialize in serving newcomers, compared to general welfare service agencies, may also address the psychological barrier and identity resource and factor into their settlement self-efficacy. The proactive contacts of SPOs through CANN E-Link will facilitate the following engagement to newcomers:

- The SPO could start building relationships and trust with newcomers and facilitate access to settlement services. SPO delivery staff could provide social support to ease the mental burden and stress of the settlement journey, especially in the early months when many things are new.
- The SPO could help newcomers prioritize the actions they need to take, including getting timely services and support along their settlement journey.
- The SPO could serve as a reliable source of settlement information, referrals, assistance, and supports.

The enhanced social capital, psychological and identity resource, and information provided to newcomers early in their settlement journey are expected to speed up the take-up of settlement services and improve settlement outcomes.

Potential mediating factors

In a theory of change, an intervention may affect other factors and indirectly lead to the outcomes. These are called mediating factors.

Even though CANN E-Link is a relatively simple intervention, the experience of service usage from the initial contact may help build the confidence in further and more extensive settlement service usage. As a result, early service usage is a mediating factor for further service usage and better settlement outcomes.

Early connection with the SPOs may also increase newcomers' connections to the community, and subsequently the community serves as a resource to help newcomers' settlement's journey. Social network is an expected mediating factor of better settlement outcomes.

Potential moderating factors

The context and intersectionality of newcomers may affect the efficacy of an intervention. Moderating factors are those factors affecting the size of the outcomes.

A potential moderating factor for CANN E-Link is the newcomers' knowledge and familiarity with Canadian life. It is expected that those who have temporary resident status in Canada and those who have received pre-arrival services benefit less from the proactive contacts from CANN E-Link.

Since CANN E-Link can identify and provide settlement services quickly, it could be especially helpful for newcomers facing multiple barriers.

Expected outcomes

If CANN E-Link is successful, we would expect newcomers to be better informed about the settlement services available to them upon arrival in Canada, so that their settlement and integration journey is accelerated. More specifically, CANN E-Link should align with several outcomes that IRCC aimed to achieve with the Service Delivery Improvement program:

Immediate outcomes (0-3 months)

- Increased understanding of client settlement needs and linkages to other services: This CANN E-Link outcome is represented by an increase in the number of SPOs making proactive contact with newcomers, as well as an increase in the number of newcomers connected with a SPO and the average number of contacts with newcomers within the first three months.
- Access to IRCC-funded settlement services is facilitated: This outcome is reflected by an increase in the percentage of newcomers taking up services within the first three months and a lower percentage of newcomers who do not know where to get the settlement services they need.

Intermediate outcomes (4-6 months)

- Clients gain knowledge, skills, and connections to prepare for the Canadian labour market: This outcome has a few dimensions—it is expected CANN E-Link participants display a higher level of self-reported confidence in finding labour market information or accessing employment assistance services, and an increase in the percentage who found (or have a plan to find) employment.

- Partners deliver responsive and coordinated settlement and community services (from newcomers' perspective): It is expected that newcomers served by CANN E-Link have a shorter time to first post-arrival settlement service use, a higher percentage who report using a service that they needed, a broader range of settlement services used, and a higher likelihood of receiving a referral to other services.
- Consistent and responsive settlement program delivery: On one hand, if CANN E-Link is effective, participating SPOs would have a high level of satisfaction with the platform and the partnership with CANN. Newcomers would also display a higher level of satisfaction with settlement services in general, and their stress level from the settlement process should be lowered.
- Clients make informed decisions to settle and integrate in Canada: It is expected newcomers have a better life organization, such as finding a school to enrol their children, finding a doctor / accessing healthcare, getting their health card, getting their SIN card, opening a bank account, etc.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND ANALYSIS COMPONENTS

The two goals of CANN E-Link form the overarching research questions for the evaluation:

1. Does CANN E-Link increase the uptake of IRCC-funded settlement services among recently arrived newcomers?
2. Does CANN E-Link connect newcomers and SPOs earlier so that their settlement and integration journey is accelerated?

An impact analysis focusing on the outcome indicators of service uptake at various points of time and metrics of integration can readily answer the above two questions. However, as a pilot project, it is also important to assess who CANN E-Link benefits most, the challenges of service delivery, what works well and what needs improvement for its delivery, and its cost-effectiveness. The following are the additional research questions to be answered by this comprehensive evaluation:

3. Who are the clients of E-Link? What are the reasons for participation?
4. How is E-Link implemented? What are the challenges? Which components of E-Link work well? Which components of E-Link need improvement? Are there any surprises?

5. Are E-Link clients satisfied with the services?
6. Who benefits the most from E-Link?

To answer these research questions, there are 4 components of the evaluation analysis:

- A usage analysis of E-Link clients: The usage analysis will include summary statistics of the proactive outreach to the E-Link clients by SPOs, the usages of settlement services by E-Link clients compared to the comparison group newcomers, and E-Link clients' experience and satisfaction with the E-Link.
- An outcome and impact analysis of E-Link: This analysis focuses on how E-Link leads to changes in various settlement outcomes.
- Implementation research on E-Link delivery.
- A GBA Plus analysis of E-Link's impacts: The pilot's delivery and outcomes will be further dissected to examine intersectionality effects.

RECRUITMENT AND IMPACT EVALUATION DESIGN

Recruitment for the pilot project and the evaluation started in July 2022 and temporarily paused at the end of November 2022. Recruitments were limited to newcomers in the BC in the first month, but the project expanded quickly to cover newcomers to Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba from August 2022 onwards.

There are two alternating modes of recruitment:

- Mode Engage: If the mode of recruitment of the day was "Engage" (during the first half of each month), all eligible newcomers were asked to participate in (a) a research study to understand their settlement experience (b) the CANN E-Link referral services. Individuals recruited in the engage mode received CANN E-Link services.
- Mode Research: If the mode of recruitment of the day was "Research" (during the second half of each month), all eligible newcomers were asked to participate in a research study to understand their settlement experience. Individuals recruited in the research mode were in the comparison group.

How the engage and research modes are determined

The recruitment period for research and evaluation is divided into **monthly** cohorts. Recruitment starts in Mode Engage at the beginning of each monthly cohort and switches to Mode Research on the 16th day. S.U.C.C.E.S.S. emails CANN Kiosk staff about the switching to the Mode Engage on the first day of each month and the switch to Mode Research on the 16th day of the month.

Regardless of the cohorts and the recruitment modes, any newcomer willing to take part in the research and evaluation component received an email invitation to complete a baseline survey within 14 days after arrival. Only those who completed the baseline survey are in the research and evaluation analysis, as well as followed up with in subsequent surveys.

Since the comparison group newcomers were not offered the CANN E-Link services during the recruitment “Mode Research”, this comparison sample is directly comparable to the program group sample who may or may not take up the CANN E-Link service.

DATA SOURCES

The evaluation collects both quantitative and qualitative data from multiple channels. For surveys and interviews, the evaluation team customizes the instruments and protocols based on the research questions and the context of the target samples. The following lists the data sources used for this Final Evaluation Report.

Surveys

All volunteer participants to the research and evaluation study were asked to complete an online baseline survey within 14 days of arrival. This baseline survey is a quick survey aiming to collect contextual information that is not available from the CANN E-Link system and to establish a connection between SRDC and the newcomer to facilitate follow-up data collection. Respondents to the baseline survey received an honorarium as a \$5 virtual gift card of the person’s choice. SRDC conducted two rounds of baseline survey for this evaluation – from June 2022 to November 2022, and from April 2023 to July 2023. There were 1,353 newcomers (613 E-Link clients and 739 CANN clients of the comparison group) who completed the baseline survey.

Besides the baseline survey, newcomers also receive email invitations to complete two online follow-up surveys that aim to measure immediate and intermediate settlement outcomes. They are asked to complete the first follow-up survey 3 months after their arrival and a second follow-up survey 6 months after their arrival. To show our appreciation of their time in completing the surveys, each newcomer who completes a follow-up survey received an honorarium as a

\$25 virtual gift card of the person's choice. There were 673 (346 E-Link clients and 327 comparison group) and 780 newcomers (366 E-Link clients and 414 comparison group) who completed the 3-month and 6-month follow-up surveys, respectively.

Administrative data collected by CANN E-Link

Every participant's information and program group status captured by the CSS were forwarded to SRDC. E-Link clients' contact information was forwarded to the corresponding SPOs through the e-notification. S.U.C.C.E.S.S.'s CANN CRSS also asks SPOs to report the activities related to the E-Link clients, including:

- Whether (and when) the SPO proactively contacted the E-Link client.
- Whether the contact is successful.
- And whether services are provided.

The administrative data collected is largely used to describe the implementation of CANN E-Link.

E-Link staff interviews

SRDC interviewed the CANN Program Coordinator and Senior Resource Officer in May 2023 and February 2024. The interview focused on the implementation of the pilot, what worked well, what challenges they experienced, lessons learned, and the next steps.

E-Link partner interviews

SRDC interviewed 10 E-Link partner organizations in April-May 2023 and conducted two focus groups with SPOs in February 2024. The 2024 focus groups included an additional five new SPOs besides previously interviewed in 2023. The organizations were in British Columbia (9), Alberta (3), Saskatchewan (2), and Manitoba (1).

Newcomer focus group interviews

SRDC evaluators conducted two focus groups in June 2023 with newcomers who took part in E-Link (program group participants) and newcomers who did not (comparison group members). Both groups of newcomers had accessed settlement services six months after landing in Canada as permanent residents. Five participants attended each focus group. In total, seven participants were women, and six participants were married and had children. Their ages ranged from

late 20s to early 50s. Participants and comparison group members lived in British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan. Their countries of origin included Indonesia, China, Morocco, the Philippines, Nigeria, Hong Kong, India, and Bangladesh. Participants and comparison group members immigrated under the Skilled Worker, Provincial Nominee, Canadian Experience, and Family Class categories.

In January 2024, SRDC sought to conduct two more focus groups with newcomers from the program and comparison groups who indicated at all survey points they had not yet accessed settlement services. While selecting focus group participants, SRDC filtered out responses that indicated they do not need help to settle in Canada or that they were receiving information and support from family or friends in Canada. Only 29 program group participants matched these criteria, which shows how effective E-Link was in connecting newcomers who wanted settlement support with SPOs. Because of the small number of potential focus group participants for the program group, only two participants were successfully recruited to the planned focus group, but both failed to attend. As a result, no focus group was completed with program group participants who had not received settlement services at the 6-month survey point. The comparison group sample, after filtering for the same criteria, had a larger pool of 55 potential participants. Among this group, seven people responded to the focus group invitation and four people attended. Two lived in British Columbia and two lived in Alberta. Their countries of origin included Afghanistan, China, the Philippines, and India. They immigrated under the Skilled Worker, Provincial Nominee, and Family Class categories.

EVALUATION FINDINGS OF THE E-LINK PILOT

IMPLEMENTATION OF CANN E-LINK

Planned deployment of E-Link

In the original design of the project, the field-testing period was supposed to start in May 2022 and last for 18 months. Also, in the original plan, only newcomers to three BC communities with 24 participating BC SPOs would be recruited for the pilot during the first 12 months of the testing. The pilot testing would have expanded to newcomers to other areas with support from 5 Alberta SPOs, 5 Saskatchewan SPOs, and 5 Manitoba SPOs after the first 12 months.

The project also aimed to recruit a total of 1,054 newcomers, including those in the comparison sample, to take part in the research and evaluation. It was expected that approximately 24 BC SPOs would connect to 256 newcomers, 5 Alberta SPOs would connect to 153 newcomers, 5 Saskatchewan SPOs would connect to 57 newcomers, and 5 Manitoba SPOs would connect to 61 newcomers during the project. The project proposal aimed to recruit 527 newcomers who would be proactively connected to SPOs and 527 newcomers who would participate in the research component as the comparison group members.

E-Link staffing

E-Link has 1 Program Coordinator and 1 Senior Resource Officer working together to deliver the project. The Program Coordinator oversees the project budget and liaises with the funder. For decision-making related to the project, she consults with the Senior Manager. The Senior Resource Officer is the liaison for E-Link's SPO partners, works with S.U.C.C.E.S.S. IT department and external developers, and develops trainings for CANN frontline staff and brochures to promote the pilot. They both manage and adjust the E-Link platform and solve issues. In addition, over 30 frontline CANN staff obtain informed consent from newcomers arriving at Vancouver International Airport to participate in E-Link or to participate in the research and enter their information into the E-Link platform.

Delivery of E-Link

As outlined in the evaluation framework, E-Link switched between recruiting program participants in Mode Engage and comparison group participants in Mode Research in the middle

of each month. If they consent to taking part, CANN shares the contact information of Mode Engage participants with up to three of their E-Link partners based on the newcomers' postal code. Mode Research participants receive regular non-E-Link CANN services, in the form of a brochure with a list of local settlement organizations they can contact for help. Both groups of participants receive the SRDC surveys and are invited to participate in focus groups.

All CANN frontline staff received an initial training for collecting newcomer consent for participation in E-Link. CANN continuously trained new staff and gave reminders each month during their staff meetings. The interviewed CANN staff understood the importance of informed consent.

“What we always want to emphasize is if you see that the client is not quite understanding you, please do not add them. Please just put no and don't get them into the project. We emphasize the importance of the client to consent because we are sharing their email and phone number and some information to SPOs.”

(CANN staff)

As part of onboarding each E-Link partner, CANN provided an introduction to the pilot, training for the platform, and check-ins every 2 to 4 months, besides regular email communications. CANN provided a \$500 honorarium to all partners when they joined the project as an incentive for participation. Based on the numbers of clients contacted and served from June to December 2022, CANN provided an additional honorarium of between \$400 to \$4,500 to E-Link partners during the pilot period.³

CANN staff identified a few ways in which the delivery of E-Link differed from what was planned. Because of the complexity of building the platform, the pilot launched a month later than expected. In addition, CANN originally planned to use their existing system to send newcomer referrals to partner organizations, but in the end, they created a whole new separate platform. Initially, SPO partners would not have had access to the platform but would only receive a referral via email.

“It was better to have the new platform because with this big amount of clients, it's easier to manage and to make all these different changes without affecting our existing one... Also because SPO [partners] can have access [to the new platform]... so it was totally better for them to be able to access the separate system instead of an internal system.” (CANN staff)

CANN also did not expect that recruitment for SPO partners would be ongoing. They have been adding new organizations to the E-Link network, as CANN identifies new areas that newcomers

³ The service provider honorarium was eliminated after the pilot ended.

are settling in within the four participating provinces. CANN had initially planned to deliver E-Link just to newcomers settling in British Columbia for a few months before expanding to Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, but they decided they should cover all four provinces in the second month after seeing the large numbers of newcomers that were coming through the airport and could be recruited to this pilot. CANN surpassed its original target of recruiting 39 service providers and had referred clients to 48 SPOs by March 2024.

Challenges for CANN

The development of a functional platform was key to delivering E-Link and turned out to be more complex and time consuming than expected. Timelines were extended, and the pilot launched one month later than planned. CANN staff noted how difficult it was to find the right vendor and how they did not realize how expensive it would be to include all the features they wanted.

“In the contract, it was mentioned that the first phase would be just... a few months, a couple of months to develop, and in reality, it took over 6 months until we went live. As I said, we didn’t know how complicated it is to think about every single detail, to be able to pass the information to the developer, to be able to create the platform.” (CANN staff)

CANN staff mentioned a few glitches that they hoped to improve with the next set of modifications. These include being able to assign participants to organizations based on characteristics rather than only based on proximity. For example, currently, some non-Francophone newcomers are being referred to Francophone organizations based on their postal code, which also skews the SPO’s numbers in terms of service activities, since they could not provide services to all referred clients.

CANN staff also mentioned that while they were recruiting E-Link partners, finding the right contact person for each SPO was a challenge, especially in other provinces outside BC where they were not as familiar with the settlement organizations. Their emails would sometimes get lost if they only emailed the general email. However, once they found the right person, most organizations were eager to take part in the pilot and said that they had been waiting for a platform like E-Link. Only two organizations said they did not have the capacity to take part. Another challenge related to SPO recruitment is finding organizations in more rural or remote areas to support newcomers who are moving there.

There were minor challenges at first when CANN frontline staff began recruiting participants for E-Link. Some staff were confused about the switch from Mode Engage to Mode Research each month. To mitigate this confusion, the Program Coordinator and Senior Resource Officer go to the CANN kiosk on the 1st and 16th of each month to ensure the consent forms and brochures

have been changed. CANN frontline staff also recruited some ineligible clients at first, who were going to provinces outside of the ones with E-Link partners. As a result, CANN modified their platform to automatically show the consent questions for each mode, and the eligible provinces and immigration categories.

In addition, some participants did not yet have Canadian phone numbers, and not all E-Link partners had the capacity to call international phone numbers.

Although CANN had plans to improve their platform and processes continuously, there were a few barriers that prevented them from making all the changes they wanted. They had planned to add the names of E-Link SPO partners to the email that participants receive when they consent to taking part in E-Link but could not do so because their CSS was undergoing a transition to make client information more secure. The CSS transition also prevented CANN from adding additional demographic information for E-Link clients and the rest of their family members, including gender and age ranges, to their referrals.

At the time of the interview, CANN was still working with their developer on making changes, including assigning only French-speaking clients to Francophone organizations and decreasing the radius for SPO allocation based on the client's postal code. Being able to allocate clients based on gender for women-serving organizations would be more complicated and may not be possible at this stage.

Modifications by CANN

As a result of continuous check-ins with E-Link partners, CANN was able to make modifications to their processes to help improve the referral system regularly. CANN heard some clients do not respond to SPO emails or are reluctant to provide their identification to receive services from SPOs. In order to mitigate this issue, CANN has asked E-Link partners to all use the same email subject line to reference CANN E-Link, in order to remind clients of their interactions with CANN staff where they consented for SPOs to contact them.

In addition, after receiving feedback from partners that there were typos in the client emails, they started using an email verifier and uploading the emails of clients to validate their emails. Once they identify an incorrect email, they go back to the paper copy of the form where the client wrote their email to correct the email, and then add a note to the platform that the email was corrected.

What worked well from the perspective of CANN staff?

Building strong partnerships with E-Link service providers was a positive outcome of working together on the pilot. Both CANN staff and the E-Link partners interviewed mentioned that the regular check-ins and email communication helped to improve the E-Link platform and contributed to a good working relationship between the organizations. CANN could also get direct contact information from their existing partners for potential new partners in other provinces, which made connecting to the right person easier. As news of E-Link spread, CANN noted that some new partners had already heard about them from other SPOs. SPOs from other provinces that are not currently eligible for E-Link have also expressed interest in participating. CANN staff also added that their process of orienting new E-Link partners also seems to work well.

CANN staff were pleased that their pilot could connect so many newcomers to SPOs. Their original target was 1,054 clients, but they ended up with over 17,000 clients. They heard many success stories of clients getting connected with their SPO partners and receiving services. They also received interest from other ports of entry who wanted to replicate and expand their platform to reach more newcomers. CANN shared its platform with other interested service providers.

Lessons learned by CANN staff

CANN staff spoke at length about the challenges of developing the platform, but that it was also a good learning experience for them. They also learned that the platform cannot be completely automated because there are many times where they need to make changes or resolve issues manually, and there is always the possibility for continuous improvement of the platform.

“For both of us, a lot was the IT part because we didn’t have much background, however now I think we understand of a lot how everything works and what will make it better to help [partners] manage referrals and what will make it easier.”
(CANN staff)

CANN also emphasized the importance of the platform for both newcomers and SPOs. They heard from their E-Link partners how excited they were about this program and how it would help them reach out to potential clients proactively. CANN also added that introducing newcomers to the services early on will make it easier for them to access them when they need help at a later point, even if they do not access services right away. During their final interview, CANN staff realized that the three-month case closing period they set for referrals might be too short, and that they were considering removing this function.

They also realized how much potential the platform has and how it can keep being improved. They keep the platform running with minimal support even without new additional funding after the pilot period ended. However, CANN cannot provide SPO honorariums or extensive support for using the E-Link platform.

Delivery of E-Link at partner SPOs

Most SPOs had a coordinator or administrator who received all E-Link referrals and then distributed the referrals to frontline staff based on clients' preferred language. Some organizations developed email templates in clients' first language to communicate with clients, while others mainly used English. In general, the interviewed SPOs indicated that the number of referrals they received aligned with their expectations and capacity, though some SPOs expected higher numbers of referrals, while other SPOs found it challenging to integrate E-Link referrals into their already busy workload. Most SPOs stated that they email the client within 2-3 business days of being assigned the referral from the coordinator; however, one SPO mentioned having a better response after waiting for five business days before contacting clients, as clients were able to settle a bit and recover from jetlag before receiving the email.

Challenges faced by partner SPOs

Client non-response was a challenge for most SPOs, though the response rate varied widely among the interviewed organizations. While some frontline staff experienced higher response rates of around 70%, others had lower response rates from less than 10% to 20%. SPOs also mentioned that newcomer email addresses were sometimes invalid. Some SPOs speculated that a small number of E-LINK participants intentionally provided invalid or fake contact information, as they did not understand what they were signing up for. Furthermore, not all SPOs had the ability to contact international phone numbers.

Additionally, some clients were reluctant to provide the ID SPOs need to record their service delivery into IRCC's Integrated Contribution Agreement Reporting Environment (iCARE). As a result, some SPOs provided services without entering the client in their records.

Some SPOs added registration information in their emails to referred clients. While this was an efficient way to connect clients to services, they had difficulty tracking all the clients who ended up registering for services but did not respond to their emails. As a result, the E-Link administrative data may actually underestimate the number of services E-LINK clients received from referred SPOs.

Although most of the interviewed E-Link partners received referral numbers that were in line with or below their capacity, one partner in particular was unable to provide services to the large

number of Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET) visa holders that were assigned to them through the E-Link platform. Because CUAET visa holders already receive settlement support from a designated case manager once they arrive in Canada, this E-Link partner no longer processes referrals for CUAET visa holders but still serves other eligible E-Link clients. Another SPO mentioned that their Ukrainian-speaking settlement worker was also overloaded with E-LINK referrals.

In terms of clients that were harder to reach, SPOs said that older clients seemed to not really understand why SPOs were contacting them. In addition, sometimes they provided their children's contact information, and the child responded that their parents did not need help from a settlement organization. SPOs were concerned that there could be a disconnect between what the child wants or think their parents need, and what their parents want or actually need.

“Especially after a few months or a year, because their children are busy with their life, then the seniors many times find they are actually very isolated. So I just don't know if there's a way for us to better reach this group of client.” (Staff at one E-Link partner SPO)

SPOs also mentioned receiving referrals that needed service in languages that they did not provide, and women-only organizations received male client referrals, as there was no way to automatically filter by gender or language at the client allocation stage.

Some E-Link partners mentioned a few challenges with operating the platform. Issues included not being able to sort clients by referral date, last activity, or assigned staff member, not knowing the difference between some of the service definitions such as service provided vs. service completed, not being able to add multiple office locations to user accounts, not being able to stay on the same page after completing an action, and not receiving a notification once the CANN team has addressed one of their issues in the platform. Most of these challenges are described in more detail in the 'SPOs' suggestions for improvements' section below.

What worked well from the perspective of partner SPOs?

E-Link partners enjoyed being able to connect with clients proactively. They also liked that the referral comes with a basic needs assessment that outlines what types of settlement support clients needed. They felt that the information they receive about the client is similar to their own intake process, which speeds up service delivery. For newer frontline staff who do community outreach, sometimes it is more difficult for them to recruit new clients. In this way, E-Link not only connects newcomers with SPOs, but also connects SPOs with new clients.

While not all SPOs had the ability to contact clients with international phone numbers, one SPO mentioned they used an app called Telegram to do so.

In general, E-Link partners felt that E-Link helped newcomers to access services faster.

“E-Link helps newcomers access a service in a timely manner and can connect with service providers more easily without having to look for providers themselves.” (Staff at one E-Link partner SPO)

“I think it definitely has helped bridge the gap between clients needing help, especially right after they arrive because some clients, from what I understand from the frontline staff, sometimes clients may not know that we’re out here. So if we are able to connect them with an SPO, like pretty much immediately after their arrival, I think that can help. You know, it would lessen the burden on them because they’ve already got so many other things.” (Staff at one E-Link partner SPO)

E-Link partners also enjoyed their working relationship and how responsive CANN staff were with resolving issues.

“It’s been wonderful. I really liked the professional way of training that we received at the beginning. [CANN staff] have been very supportive and always looked for feedback, and different ideas for them so that they can adjust and adapt according to what we’re hearing on this side.” (Staff at one E-Link partner SPO)

Some SPOs were happy with the training they received for the platform and felt the system was simple and easy to use. Other SPOs listed some challenges in using the platform, as described below.

SPOs’ suggestions for improvement

Partner organizations suggested the following improvements for E-Link. CANN was already aware of many of these suggestions, and some are in progress at the time of our interviews.

- Verify client email addresses before making the referral to a partner organization. Many E-Link partners mentioned receiving referrals attached to invalid email addresses.
- Emphasize to newcomers in a brochure that settlement services are free, and what services are offered.
- Add information in client file about age range, children, and level of education.
- While CANN has added a notification for SPOs to let them know when they want CANN to address an issue in a client file, SPOs said that there is no notification that they receive to let

them know their issue has been addressed. SPOs want the notification system to be used both ways instead of just one way. Add the ability for E-Link administrator to sort client list by assigned staff member so that they can monitor staff performance.

- Add the ability to sort client list by activity date to make it easier for staff to follow up.
- Remain on the same page of referrals after completing an action. Several E-Link partners mentioned that after clicking through each page to find a client referral, the system brings them all the way back to the first page after they have completed the action.
- Streamline adding multiple sites to user accounts. Some frontline settlement workers work from multiple office locations, but their user account is only tied to one location in the system. This makes referrals more time-consuming as the coordinator must manually make the referral to the frontline staff.
- Share contact information via email with clients of the three service providers they are being referred to.
- If referral numbers increase, increase funding to partners so that they can increase their staff hours.
- Add information about English proficiency (i.e., willingness to receive services in English) in addition to preferred language.
- Add ability to export comments on client files to Excel.
- Consider language of service of SPOs as a factor in client allocation, i.e. not allocating clients to SPOs that do not provide service in their preferred language.

RECENT AND UPCOMING CHANGES TO E-LINK

Although CANN had planned to improve their platform continuously, they encountered some barriers because of their CSS being in transition and some changes being more complicated than expected. Below are some examples of recent changes and some that were in progress at the time of the final staff interview.

- Adding search and reporting filters for date, status, province, city, client status, and notifications.
- Including the names of E-Link partners in the email that participants receive when they consent to taking part in E-Link, in order to increase their response rates and reassure them it is safe to share personal identification with the SPOs in order to access services.

- Adding an alert button within the platform so that CANN and its partners can more efficiently communicate with one another.
- Decreasing the radius size for assigning SPOs to clients. The current maximum distance works for rural areas but does not work as well for cities.
- Enhancing the reporting capabilities of the platform to more easily report on client numbers and other activities.
- Customizing assignment to SPOs based on client characteristics. For example, assigning only French speakers to Francophone organizations, or assigning only women to women's organizations.
- Adding more information about clients to the E-Link platform, such as their gender and age range.
- Add search bar functionality to non-manager profiles and add ability to search by client name rather than only client ID.

E-LINK PARTICIPATION

Recruitment of newcomers

Soon after the evaluation framework was drafted in March 2022, SRDC and CANN realized the number of newcomers coming to the CANN Kiosk has been substantially larger than the number that the project had planned for. However, it is unlikely that most CANN or E-Link users would respond to research and evaluation invitations. SRDC added a baseline survey to make sure the contact information collected at the CANN Kiosk is accurate and the participants are willing to be followed up with regarding the research and evaluation. Despite SRDC's difficulties in getting a response from E-Link participants, it was apparent that the project could reach the target research number of participants substantially earlier than the 18-month pilot period. SRDC paused recruitment for the research component of E-Link for 3.5 months between mid-December 2022 and April 2023, since the number of research participants recruited was already close to the original target at that point in time. SRDC and CANN also decided to increase the target number of participants for the evaluation from 1,054 to about 1,500.

Usages

Between July 2022 and January 2024, a total of 17,772 newcomers were eligible and recruited for CANN E-Link and they were referred to 48 SPOs near their destination. There were some recruited newcomers who were eligible but there were no partner SPOs near their destination and they were not referred. Among the 17,772 referred, participating SPOs attempted to contact 11,982 newcomers. The rates of attempting to contact referred newcomers vary from 0% to 100% among participating SPOs. Out of the 11,982 newcomers SPOs attempted to contact, 8,492 were not recorded as successfully contacted on E-Link's system. Only 3,490 were reported to be in contact with the referred SPO. Among those referred and contacted, 2,289 received services from the referred SPO, 260 received services from other SPOs, while the remaining either rejected services or there were no suitable services. Table 1 presents the numbers by city. The substantial drops off from referrals to successful contacts reflects capacity limit of the partner SPOs to conduct proactive outreach, the accuracy of contact information, the difficulties of using the platform by SPOs, and potentially hesitancy of newcomers responding to strangers' contacts.⁴ It should also be noted that E-Link's system may not capture all the SPO-newcomer contacts and the rates of actual connection to newcomers could be substantially higher. For instance, SPOs may not report result of contacts of any referred cases to the E-Link system if newcomers contact the SPOs before SPOs reaching out. We will turn to survey data to understand the effective contacts between SPOs and newcomers.

The proportions of newcomers connecting with SPOs are presented in Figure 2 for 3 different time frames: at the baseline survey shortly after arrival, in the first month, and in the first 3 months since arrival. At the baseline survey, the 52.9% of E-Link clients had had a contact with SPOs, and then 80.2% and 84.2% of the same group had had a contact with SPOs within 1 month and 3 months since arrival. The comparison group, in contrast, had lower contact rates in these time frames: 42.2%, 55.4%, and 62.8%, respectively. The differences in contact rate between these two groups amount to the impact of 10.7, 24.8, and 21.4 percentage point increase for the corresponding time frames, which are all statistically significant.⁵

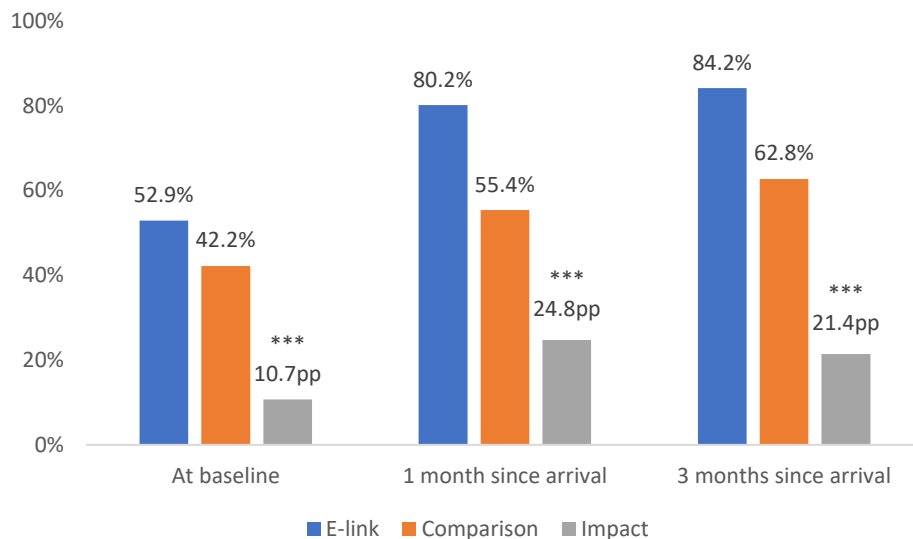
At the 3-month follow-up survey, newcomers were asked whether they knew where to find the settlement services they needed. While 13.1% of the comparison group indicated they did not know where to find the settlement services needed, the corresponding figure is lower at 8.7% among E-Link clients. The difference amounts to a 4.3 percentage point reduction in the lack of knowledge of settlement service location, which is a statistically significant.

⁴ The response rate to the research team's invitation to participating in the evaluation is also low at 27.3%.

⁵ Statistical hypothesis testing was conducted at the 10% level of significance for this report.

Table 1 E-Link referrals

Province / City	# of SPOs	# referred	# attempted contact	# in contact	# received services from the referred SPO	# received services elsewhere	# no services / info
Alberta	4	1,836	1,684	524	449	14	61
Calgary	3	1,066	1,015	290	255	4	31
Edmonton	1	770	669	234	194	10	30
British Columbia	38	14,502	9,138	2,568	1,473	243	852
Abbotsford	1	277	241	86	66	1	19
Burnaby	2	744	624	113	73	3	37
Coquitlam	3	765	602	153	99	13	41
Fort St. John	1	42	35	2	1	0	1
Langley	2	762	597	74	55	4	15
Mission	1	52	45	34	4	21	9
Nanaimo	1	131	129	38	32	1	5
New Westminster	1	209	41	10	3	2	5
North Vancouver	1	279	260	95	81	0	14
Penticton	1	130	130	26	19	7	0
Richmond	4	3,467	1,731	559	322	99	138
Surrey	6	2,572	1,916	712	190	52	470
Vancouver	12	4,877	2,606	586	502	12	72
Vernon	1	165	154	75	22	28	25
Whistler	1	30	27	5	4	0	1
Manitoba	2	485	361	85	65	1	19
Winnipeg	2	485	361	85	65	1	19
Saskatchewan	4	949	799	313	302	2	9
Regina	2	375	234	139	134	2	3
Saskatoon	2	574	565	174	168	0	6
Total	48	17,772	11,982	3,490	2,289	260	941

Figure 2 Proportion of newcomers having a contact with SPO since arrival

Note: Statistical significance of the estimated impacts is denoted by asterisks. *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$.

Profile of E-Link participants

Based on the administrative record for the program and baseline survey responses, the E-Link clients have the following profiles (Figure 3):

Over a half of the E-Link clients (53%) were women. Their average age was 36.

Over two-fifths of the E-Link clients (44%) arrived in Canada as economic class immigrants and 28% as family class immigrants. The rest of them (28%) were temporary residents, most of whom came to the country under the Canada-Ukraine authorization for emergency travel measure.

Approximately three-tenths of the E-Link clients (31%) arrived from Europe, most of whom were Ukrainian. Southern Asia and Southeast Asia each account for 21% and 24% of the clients respectively, while 12% are from East Asia. The remaining 12% of the E-Link clients are from West Central Asia and the Middle East, the Americas, Africa, or Oceania.

Approximately two-thirds of the E-Link clients (65%) intended to move to British Columbia, 23% to Alberta, 8% to Saskatchewan, and 4% to Manitoba.

Over two-thirds of the E-Link clients (70%) were married or in common-law relationships, and less than half (44%) were living or expected to live with children.

Over three-quarters of the E-Link clients (78%) had family or friends living in Canada to help them with their settlement needs.

Just under one fifth of the E-Link clients (18%) reported as having received pre-arrival settlement services before arriving to Canada.

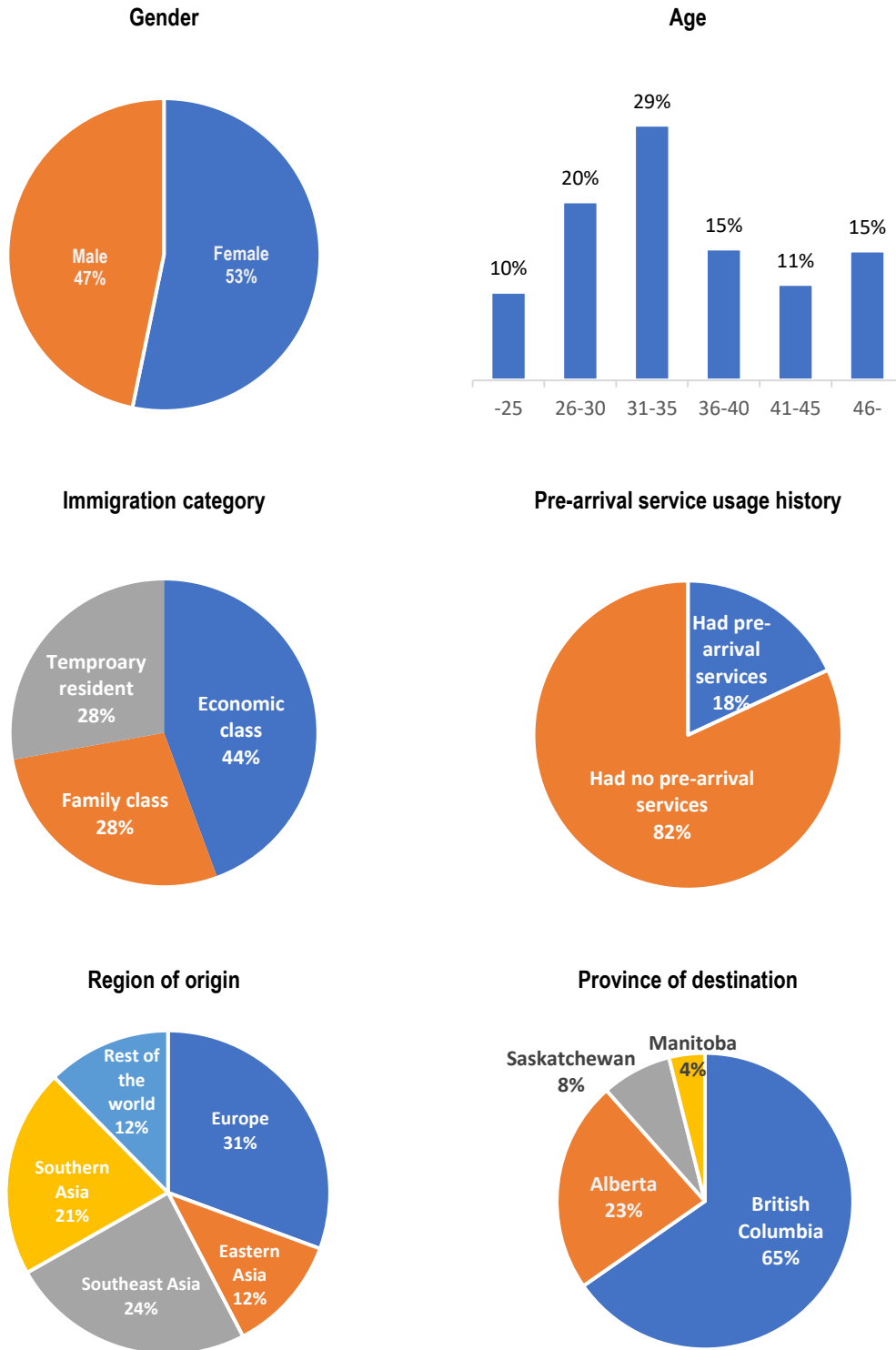
Most E-Link clients (71%) were unemployed and looking for a job, while 19% had jobs or job offers, or were or planned to be self-employed, and 10% of the participants were out of the labour force for various reasons including study or retirement.

The five most common immediate needs reported by the E-Link clients were getting Canadian ID (92%), opening a bank account (81%), finding a job (63%), adapting to a new culture (44%) and finding housing (43%). A significant proportion of the E-Link clients also reported the following as their immediate needs: making friends (36%), finding a doctor or accessing health care (29%), finding employment services (28%), learning English or French (27%), registering themselves or their children in school (22%), and skills training (20%).

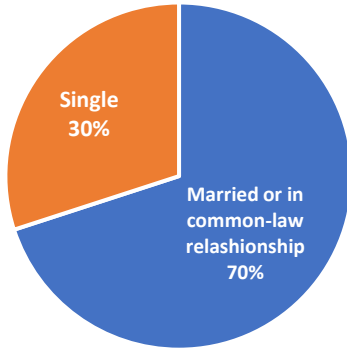
The comparison group members were very similar to the E-Link clients in terms of these characteristics, which suggests that the quasi-experimental approach adopted by this project was successful in balancing the profiles of the E-Link clients and comparison group. Notable exceptions are that the comparison group had a lower proportion of jobseekers (63% compared to 71% for the E-Link clients) but higher proportions of newcomers with a job or job offer (25% compared to 19% for the E-Link clients), and that the comparison group had a lower proportion of participants with family or friends in Canada to help them (73% compared to 78% of the E-Link clients). These differences in the distributions of jobseekers and the presence of family members or friends in Canada to help them are statistically significant⁶. In theory, these differences indicate mixed differences in their levels of settlement needs (e.g., job seekers may have higher needs for employment services but newcomers with family or friends may have lower needs). Controlling these differences in our estimation would improve the precision of the estimated impacts. Therefore, we use regression adjustment to account for them in our E-Link impact estimations.

⁶ Even with a randomized controlled trial, it is possible that some characteristics would be misaligned by chance. Regression adjustment improves the precision of the estimated impacts.

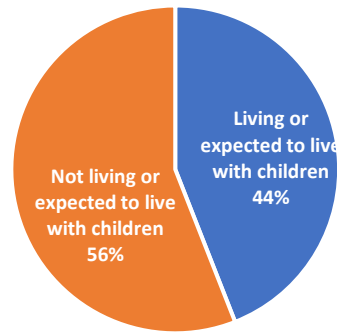
Figure 3 Profile of participants



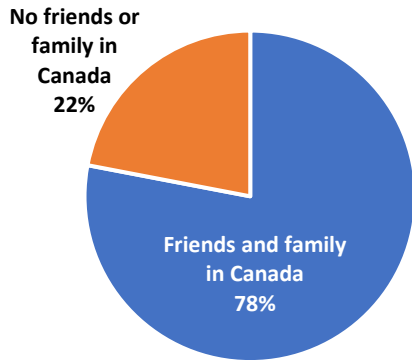
Marital status



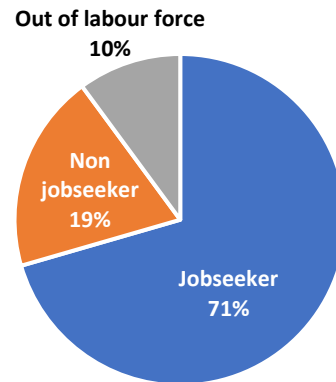
Presence of children



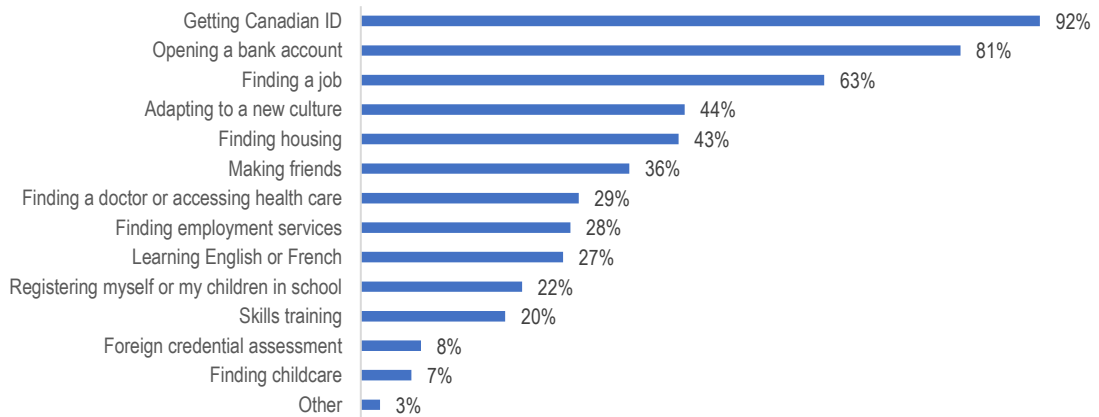
Presence of family or friend in Canada who can help



Job seeking status



Immediate needs



EXPERIENCE OF NEWCOMERS

Experience with the CANN and E-Link

E-Link focus group participants recalled having positive interactions with the CANN staff at the airport. They mentioned receiving pamphlets, and that staff highlighted specific organizations in their communities that could help them. They also mentioned that the consent process was straightforward and easy to understand. However, most respondents did not remember whether a service provider contacted them because of participating in E-Link. Most focus group participants had proactively reached out to SPOs, so they could not recall whether it was the SPO or themselves who made the first contact. According to their self-reported baseline survey data, one participant was not contacted by any CANN-referred SPOs, two reached out to CANN-referred SPOs, and two were contacted by CANN-referred SPOs.

Similar to E-Link participants, comparison group members had positive experiences with CANN staff when they landed at the airport. Comparison group members said that they appreciated being able to speak to someone who spoke the same language as them, and they generally found CANN staff to be welcoming and kind. All comparison group members remembered receiving pamphlets from the CANN staff that included useful information about settlement organizations in their final destinations. One comparison group member shared, *“I still remember the day we came to Canada. I appreciate how different cultures are embraced here. There was a man who can speak in my language and welcomed us. I feel very warm about that. And he gave me a lot of information and pamphlets for my province. It did help me a lot.”*

In the second focus group with comparison group members who had not accessed settlement services at 6 months, only one participant mentioned she was not in the right frame of mind to understand what she was signing up for when she agreed to be part of the research project. All other participants reported understanding what they signed up for and were happy with their experience at CANN.

Settlement needs and integration experience

E-Link participants and comparison group members had initial settlement needs, including finding housing, finding daycares or schools for children, obtaining identification and a driver’s license, finding a family doctor, and finding employment. While most E-Link participants had family or friends in Canada who helped them with some of their settlement issues, only one comparison group member in the first focus group spoke about having friends in Canada who supported her with her family’s settlement needs. Other comparison group members indicated that their neighbours and co-workers have been welcoming and supportive of their

settlement needs and helped them to learn about Canadian culture. One comparison group member, however, shared that because she and her husband did not know anyone in Canada, it was difficult to find references who could speak about their work experience, which hindered their ability to find employment. Some E-Link participants attended newcomers' welcome events and connected with others through these events or through volunteering.

Comparison group participants in the second focus group that had not accessed settlement services at the six-month survey point had similar settlement needs, including housing, employment, and health care. Two of the four were still looking for employment. One had an MBA degree and applied to hundreds of survival jobs but received no responses. She felt she was stuck in a loop of needing Canadian experience to get a job, but also needing a job first to gain that Canadian experience. The other also had a similarly challenging job search experience with no responses from employers. One of these participants also mentioned that landlords require proof of employment and a background check for rentals, which may not be possible for newcomers to provide. Two participants also mentioned that public transit was not very well connected, and housing was extremely expensive. They also mentioned wanting to increase their financial literacy and gain a better understanding of the Canadian tax system. One participant, despite doing internet research to address his own settlement needs, was still unsure about where and how to reach out to settlement organizations for help and had outstanding issues that he could not resolve on his own.

Experience with settlement service organizations

Several E-Link participants mentioned receiving pre-arrival services prior to landing in Canada. The ones who received pre-arrival services were highly satisfied with the services they received to prepare for their immigration to and settlement in Canada. Participants received help to prepare for what they would need to do in the first two weeks in Canada, and some received support in finding employment. As noted in the theory of change, E-Link focus group participants who received pre-arrival services seemed to indicate that the pre-arrival services were more helpful in addressing their settlement needs compared to post-arrival services. One participant mentioned that he still contacts his pre-arrival settlement organization for support, even after landing in Canada.

Among participants who received services at the six-month survey point, E-Link participants and comparison group members' experience with post-arrival services varied from a "light touch" to personalized support. E-Link participants who received less personalized services were overall less satisfied with the services they received. Participants also mentioned for certain issues, such as health care, they did not receive in-depth information or support from SPOs. Participants described having to navigate the health system mostly on their own or received information from friends. Furthermore, comparison group members could access immigrant serving

organizations within their province by reaching out to organizations listed in the pamphlets provided by CANN staff or through referrals from organizations or their children's school board. All comparison group members voiced satisfaction with and gratitude for the services they received. Comparison group members mentioned they could apply for child benefits, find out about how to enrol their children into school, about where to take English language examinations and where to access English courses, and learn to find and apply for jobs in Canada.

In terms of service accessibility, participants' responses varied. In certain communities, it was hard to access in-person services without a car. It was also difficult to find specific services outside of regular business hours, which made them inaccessible for people who worked full time. For example, people who worked full time could not access live workshops and could only rely on emails from SPOs. In contrast, comparison group members in the focus group all said it was generally easy to find and access services in their communities. One comparison group member explained that he had researched settlement services before arriving in Canada, which made it easy for him and his family to find and access services. Other comparison group members mentioned that booking appointments with settlement organizations was fast, staff from settlement organizations were quick to respond to their needs, and that settlement organizations were close to their home, which made it easy to seek supports in-person. Only one comparison group member said that there was a 15-day waiting period to obtain an appointment with a settlement organization, which may have been because of the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and changes to settlement organizations' mode of working. Comparison group members shared that if one settlement organization could not answer their questions, they would be referred to other settlement organizations where they could find appropriate support.

Two of the four comparison group members who did not access services within their first 6 months did eventually access settlement services. One participant had an overall positive experience receiving help with completing her taxes. The other had mixed experiences – she received virtual services over zoom that were helpful, but also kept being redirected when she was on the phone with one SPO and eventually gave up. She noted it was close to the December holidays, so it might have been more “chaotic” around this time. She also recalled receiving a call back from another SPO, but that person wanted her to provide photos of her PR card, and she was sceptical about whether it was legitimate or a scam.

NEWCOMERS' SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

For CANN or E-Link

E-Link participants suggested it would be helpful if CANN could reach out to them prior to their arrival at the airport to let them know what to expect. They expressed that the landing process was a bit hectic. Besides the pamphlet with settlement organizations, participants suggested including a summary document that lists what to do or who to contact for various settlement needs, such as housing or employment. Comparison group members shared that information should be separated by topic into individual pamphlets, such as one pamphlet for employment. A couple of comparison group members who had experienced scams shortly after arriving in Canada suggested pamphlets should also address topics related to workplace rights (e.g., minimum wage and legal employment contracts) and how to avoid being a victim of fraud or scams in Canada as many newcomers lack knowledge about these topics and newcomers are easy targets.

When comparison group members were asked if they would have liked if CANN staff asked them if they wanted to share their contact information with immigrant serving organizations so that they could be contacted directly, all comparison group members said yes. One comparison group member further explained that it is difficult for newcomers to think of questions to ask as soon as they land in Canada because of the hectic landing process. She further explained, *“because when I first came to Canada, we have a lot to settle, we have a lot of things to do. So, if you can drop me an email and I could get back to you when I have time, then I could get through what I have to do before I reach out to you. It would be more convenient.”* Comparison group members in the focus group, however, did not think that having been contacted by settlement organizations would have helped them to find and access services more quickly. Many comparison group members in the focus group contacted settlement organizations a few days or weeks after arriving in Canada to find emergent supports, such as finding employment, obtaining SIN cards and driver’s licenses, or information about daycare or their children’s school. It should be noted that those willing to participate in a focus group might be more willing to contact an SPO compared to a typical newcomer.

All comparison group members that did not access settlement services within 6 months of arrival also agreed that they would have liked for CANN to share their contact information with SPOs. One participant said that she would have accessed services more quickly this way.

“Yeah, if they reached out to me, because when you just settled and you have like so many things in your mind that you kind of forget that “oh I can call these people and this and that” but, I would really appreciate if they took the initiative to reach out to me” (Comparison group member)

Two of the participants also mentioned that they did not refer to the brochures they received from CANN after landing and would prefer to receive information about SPOs and settling in Canada electronically when they obtained their Permanent Resident status.

“Your mind is not at its best condition, and it’s difficult to absorb the information on the brochure, like personally I never used it.” (Comparison group member)

For settlement organizations

E-Link participants and comparison group members had the following recommendations for settlement services:

- A hotline that newcomers could call to find services.
- A website that outlines basic information and covers all major settlement issues.
- A matching program that introduces a newcomer to a community member who has lived there for a longer period (whether immigrants or people born in Canada).
- Videos or webinars about various settlement topics that can be accessible at any time.
- More personalized guidance and information.

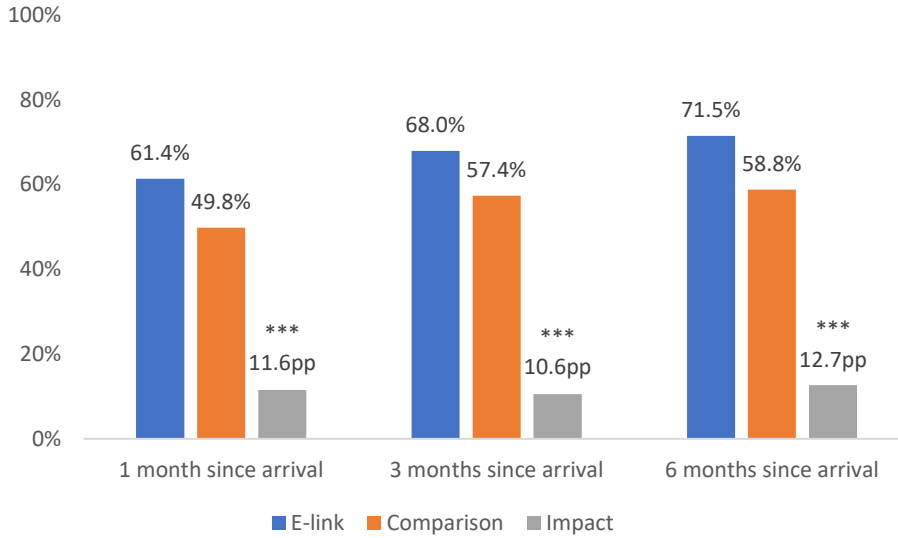
OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS OF E-LINK ON USAGES OF SETTLEMENT SERVICES

Figure 4 presents the proportions of the E-Link clients and comparison group members who used services offered by SPOs (usage rate) and the average number of services used (usage frequency) within 1, 3 and 6 months since arrival, together with estimated impacts of E-Link on these measures. The service usage rate is 61.4%, 68.0% and 71.5% for the E-Link clients, and higher than the corresponding figures of 49.8%, 57.4% and 58.8% for the comparison group.

Corresponding to these differences, the usage frequency is higher among the E-Link clients than among the comparison group (Figure 5, 1.71 vs 1.10 times within 1 month since arrival, 3.29 vs 2.00 times within 3 months since arrival, and 5.51 vs 3.12 times within 6 months since arrival).

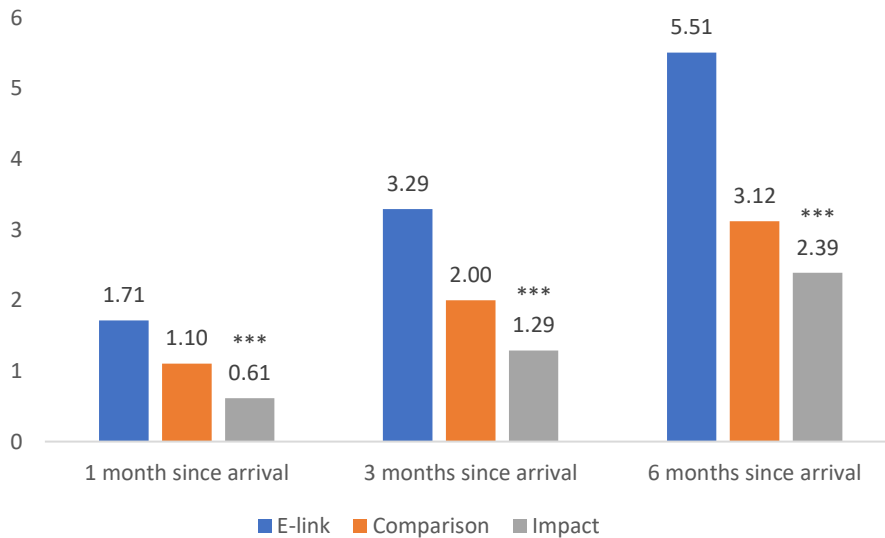
The impacts on both usage rate and frequency are both positive and statistically significant for all time periods considered. The impacts on usage rates range from 10.6 to 12.7 percentage points, and impacts on usage frequencies range from 0.61 to 2.39 times.

Figure 4 Proportion of participants using SPO services after arrival



Note: Statistical significance of the estimated impacts is denoted by asterisks. *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$.

Figure 5 Average number of services used by newcomers



Note: Statistical significance of the estimated impacts is denoted by asterisks. *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$.

Table 2 presents the service usage rates and frequencies within 6 months of arrival for various service types. The service usage is higher among the E-Link clients than the comparison group for all types of services. In particular, E-Link clients have substantially higher take-up rates of general settlement services, employment services, and community connection than that of the comparison group, which yields positive and statistically significant impacts on usage rates for these services (17.3, 9.1, and 8.5 percentage points, respectively). The impacts on usage frequency for these services are also all positive, and statistically significant for settlement service, employment service, language assessment and community connection.

Table 2 Usage rate and frequency by service type during 6 months after arrival

Service type	Service uptake (%)			Frequency		
	E-Link	Not E-Link	Impact	E-Link	Not E-Link	Impact
General Settlement service	43.3%	26.0%	17.3pp ***	1.12	0.53	0.59 ***
Employment service	41.5%	32.4%	9.1pp ***	1.62	1.03	0.60 **
Language assessment	21.4%	16.1%	5.3pp *	0.33	0.20	0.13 *
LINC/CLIC	16.9%	11.3%	5.7pp **	1.49	0.86	0.63
Community connection	27.7%	19.2%	8.5pp ***	1.26	0.63	0.64 *
Other service	7.2%	7.1%	0.1pp	0.15	0.11	0.03

Note: Statistical significance of the estimated impacts is denoted by asterisks. *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$.

Subsequent settlement service experience within the first 6 months

Time to the first settlement service

On average, E-Link clients received the first settlement service about 10 days earlier than the comparison group since arrival, among those who used settlement services within the first 6 months in Canada. However, the difference is not statistically significant between E-Link clients and comparison group clients. The results suggest that E-Link increases service uptake among those who would not have received settlement services within the first 6 months.

Referrals to other settlement services

E-Link clients are substantially more likely to receive a referral to other settlement services than newcomers in the comparison group. The difference is 14 percentage points. This is evidence that E-Link clients are receiving coordinated services to address their settlement and integration needs.

Meeting their needs

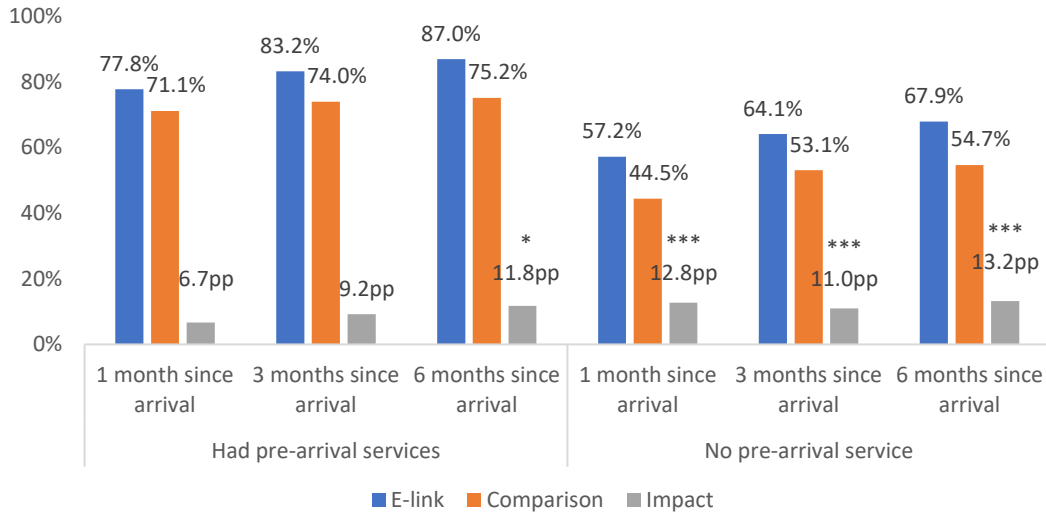
The 6-month follow-up survey asked respondents who received settlement services whether settlement services met their needs on a scale ranging from “not at all”, “very little”, “somewhat”, “to a great extent”, to “completely”. The proportion of respondents who selected “to a great extent” and “completely” was 39.4%, while 27.4% of the respondents selected “somewhat”. There is no statistically significant difference in meeting their needs between the E-Link clients and the comparison group. The finding suggests that additional settlement services used by E-Link clients are meeting their needs at a level similar to the typical experience of newcomers who used settlement services.

GBA Plus – Variation of impacts by subpopulations

The survey responses from newcomers also reveal differences in service usage behaviours across different characteristics. Notable differences related to the intersectionality (via the lens of GBA Plus) are described below.

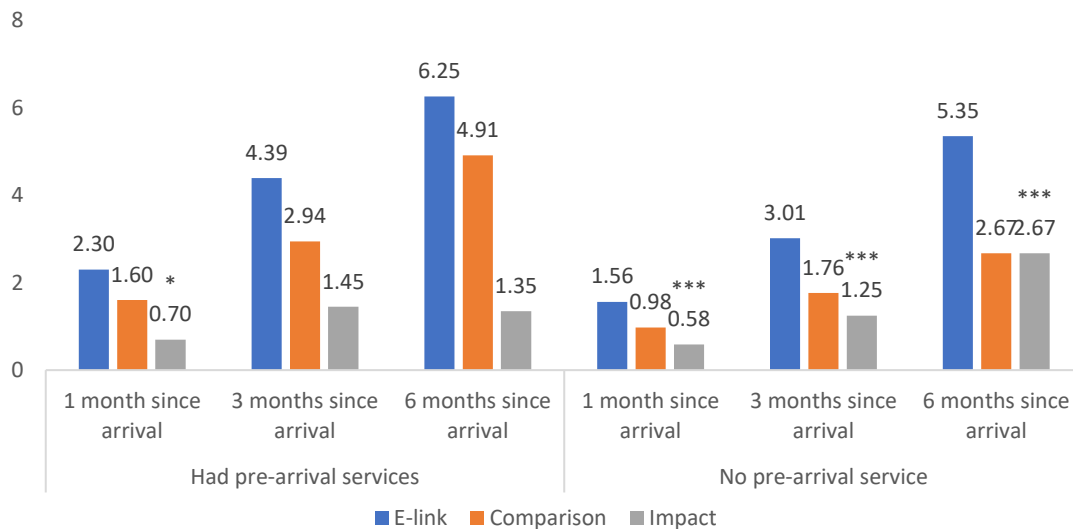
Pre-arrival service history: Usages of settlement services are higher for newcomers who received pre-arrival services than those who did not. E-Link has positive impacts on service usage rate (Figure 6) and frequency (Figure 7) for those who received no pre-arrival services, with both impacts staying statistically significant in all three time frames considered. Among those who received pre-arrival services, the impacts on usage rate are positive 6 months since arrival, while the impact on the usage frequency is positive and significant within 1 month since arrival.

Figure 6 Proportion of participants using settlement services by pre-arrival service history



Note: Statistical significance of the estimated impacts is denoted by asterisks. *** p < 0.01; ** p < 0.05; * p < 0.1.

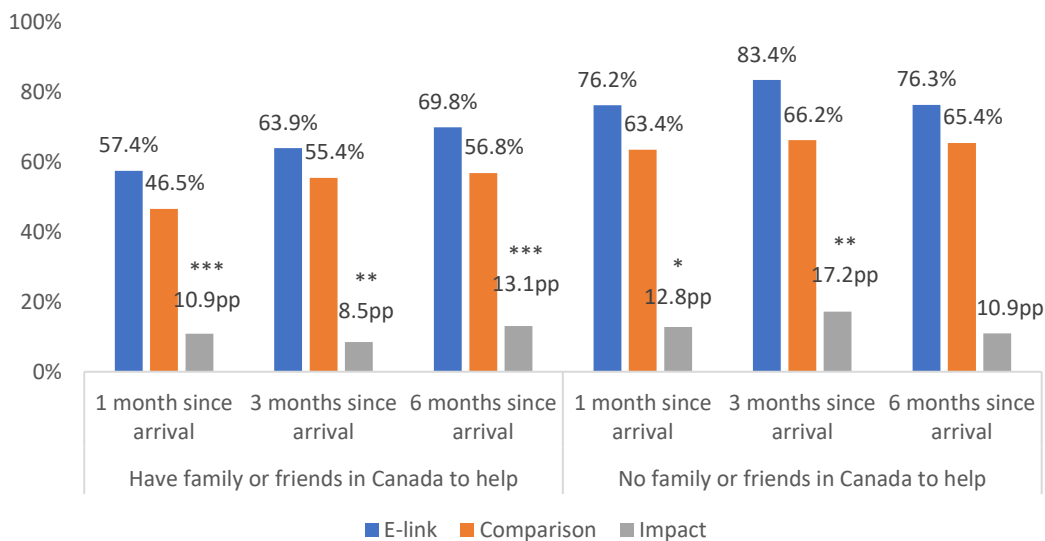
Figure 7 Average number of settlement services used by pre-arrival service history



Note: Statistical significance of the estimated impacts is denoted by asterisks. *** p < 0.01; ** p < 0.05; * p < 0.1.

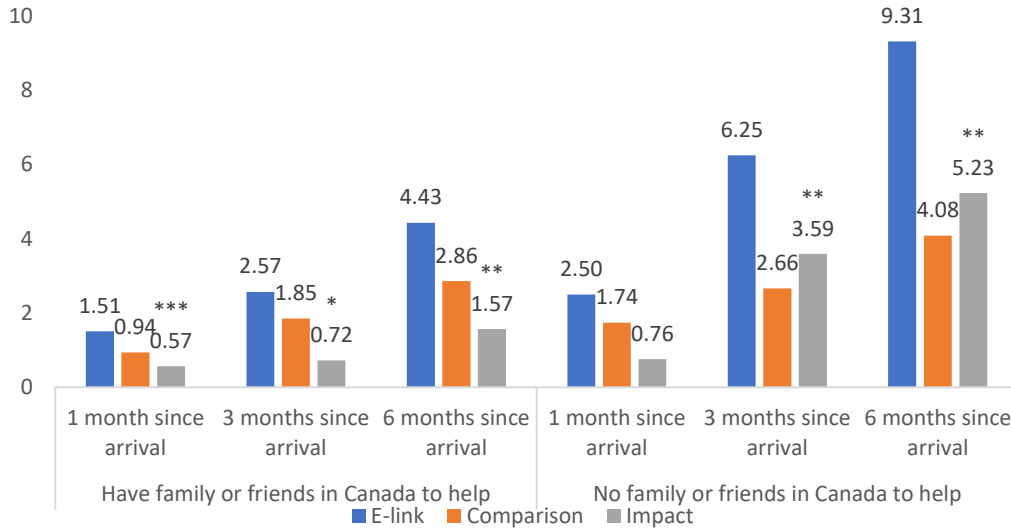
Presence of family or friends in Canada who can help newcomers: Unsurprisingly, newcomers without family or friends in Canada to help them seem to have higher needs for the settlement services, with 83% of the E-Link clients in this group taking up services within 3 months since arrival as opposed to 64% of the E-Link clients who has family and friends in Canada (Figure 8). The impacts on service usage rate are comparable between the two groups (a 9-17 percentage point increase in usage rate for both groups for both time frames), but the impact is mostly statistically significant except for those without family and friends in Canada for 6 months since arrival. The impact on service frequency (Figure 9) is positive and statistically significant for both groups 3 and 6 months since arrival, but the impact is greater for those without family and friends (5.23 vs 1.57 times 6 months since arrival, for example).

Figure 8 Proportion of participants using settlement services by the presence of family or friends who can help



Notes: Statistical significance of the estimated impacts is denoted by asterisks. *** p < 0.01; ** p < 0.05; * p < 0.1. The usage rates decline from 3 months to 6 months since arrival for the subgroup without family or friends in Canada to help. This is because of survey non-response creating differences in sample of respondents between the 3-month and 6-month follow-up surveys.

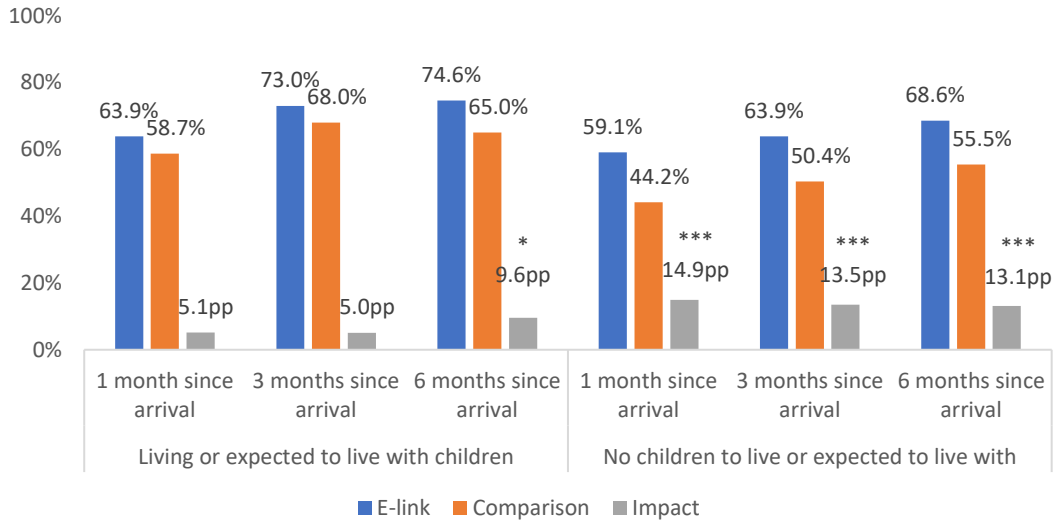
Figure 9 Average number of settlement services used by presence of family or friends who can help



Note: Statistical significance of the estimated impacts is denoted by asterisks. *** p < 0.01; ** p < 0.05; * p < 0.1.

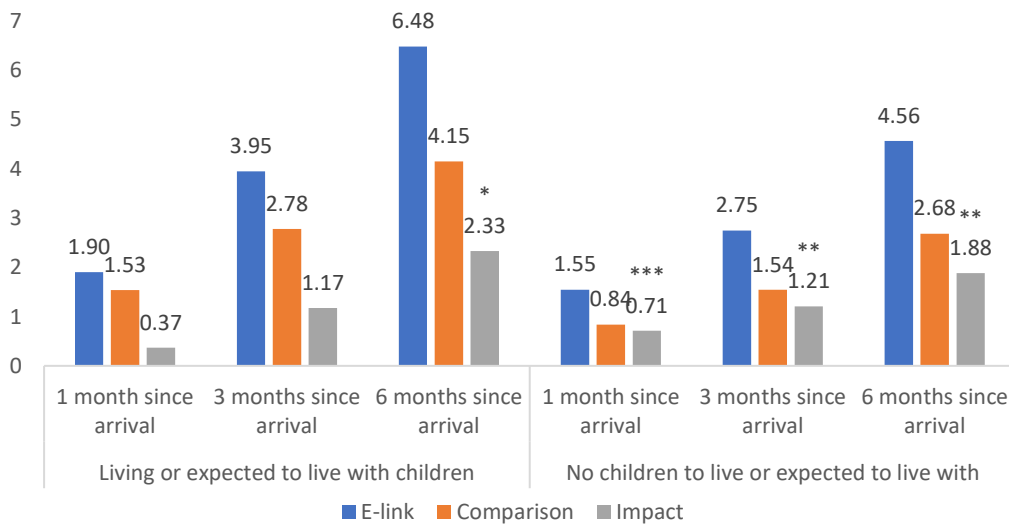
Presence of children in household: Newcomers living or expected to live with children have a higher service usage rate and frequency than those without children living or expected to live with them (the usage rate of 74.6% vs 68.6% (Figure 10) and the usage frequency of 6.48 vs 4.56 within 6 months since arrival for the E-Link clients (Figure 11). For both time frames, the impacts are positive and statistically significant for those without children (a 13.1 percentage point increase in usage rate and an increase in usage frequency of 1.88 times within 6 months since arrival) for all time frames, while the impacts for those living or expected to live with children are statistically significant only within 6 months since arrival (a 9.6 percentage point increased in usage rate and an increase of usage frequency of 2.33 times within 6 months since arrival).

Figure 10 Proportion of participants using settlement services by the presence of children



Note: Statistical significance of the estimated impacts is denoted by asterisks. *** p < 0.01; ** p < 0.05; * p < 0.1. The usage rates decline from 3 months to 6 months since arrival for the subgroup living or expected to live with children. Survey non-responses create differences in the analysis samples of respondents between the 3-month and 6-month follow-up surveys.

Figure 11 Average number of settlement services used by the presence of children

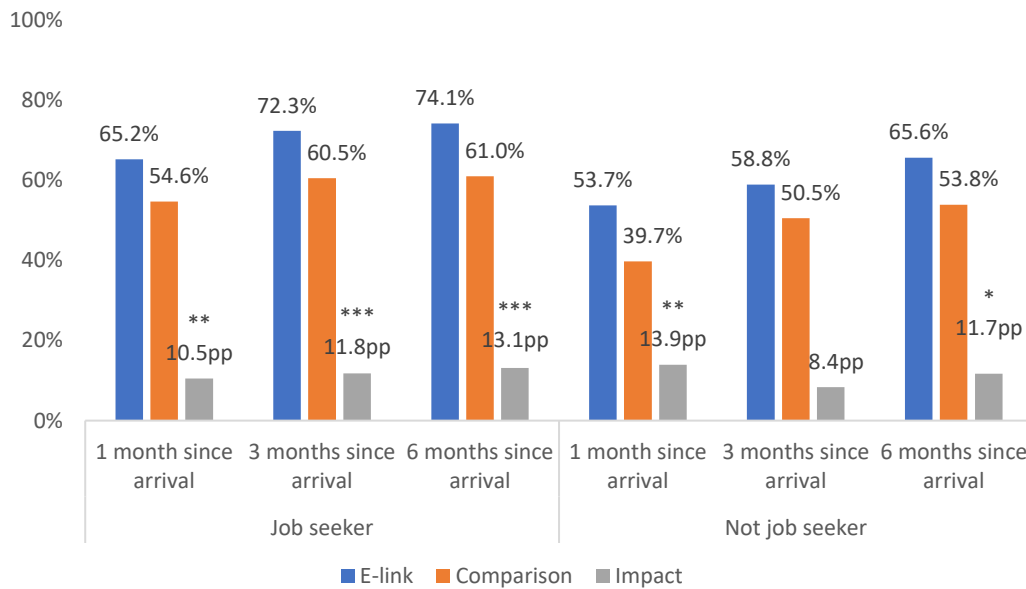


Note: Statistical significance of the estimated impacts is denoted by asterisks. *** p < 0.01; ** p < 0.05; * p < 0.1.

Job seekers: The E-Link clients looking for a job had a higher usage rate and frequency than those not looking for a job (74.1% vs 53.7% and 6.76 vs 2.46 within 6 months since arrival) as shown in Figures 12 and 13. The impacts on usage rate and frequency are positive and statistically significant for jobseekers for all time frames (a 13.1 percentage point increase in usage rate and an increase in usage frequency of 4.43 times within 6 months since arrival). In contrast, only the impacts on usage rate within 1 month since arrival and 6 months since arrival are positive and statistically significant for non-jobseekers (an 11.7 percentage point increase in usage rate within 6 months since arrival, for example).

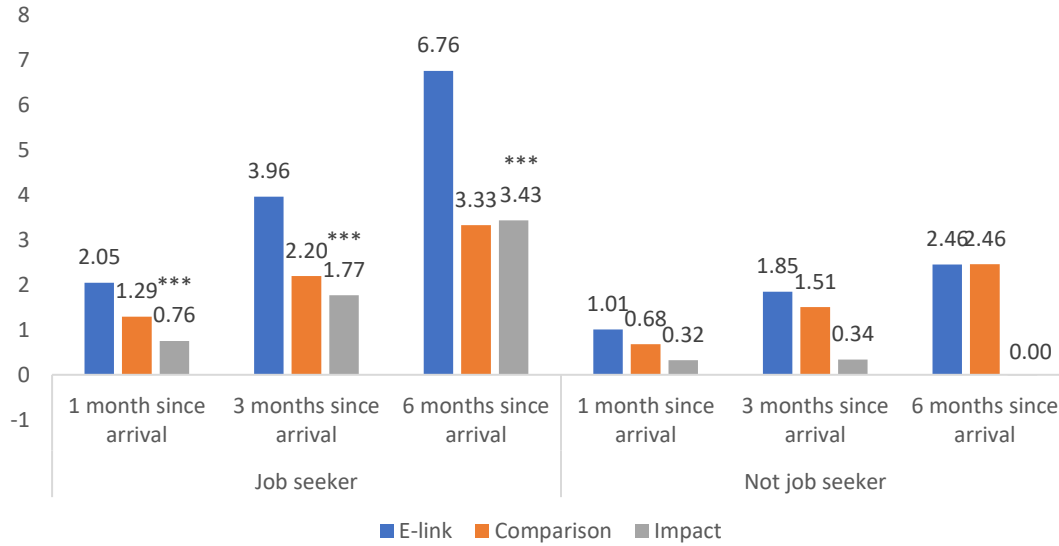
Unsurprisingly, job seekers have a higher usage rate and frequency of employment services than non-jobseekers (47% vs 27% and 2.0 vs 0.6 times among E-Link participants within 6 months since arrival, for example). The E-Link program has no positive and statistically significant impact on usage rate and frequency of employment services for non-job seekers, while it has a positive and statistically significant impact on usage rate for job seekers within 6 months since arrival (a 11.8 percentage point increase).

Figure 12 Proportion of participants using settlement services by the job seeker status



Note: Statistical significance of the estimated impacts is denoted by asterisks. *** p < 0.01; ** p < 0.05; * p < 0.1.

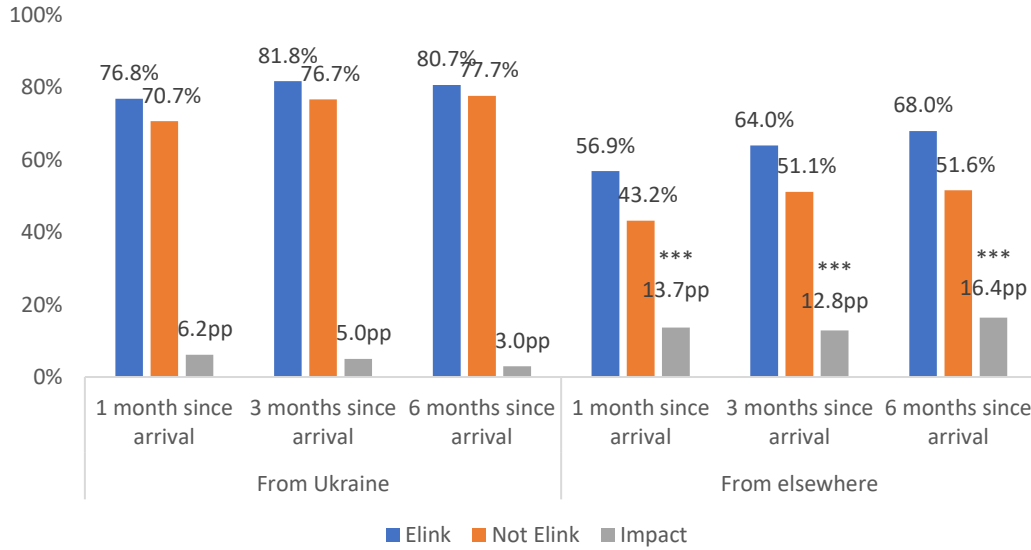
Figure 13 Average number of settlement services used by job seeker status



Note: Statistical significance of the estimated impacts is denoted by asterisks. *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$.

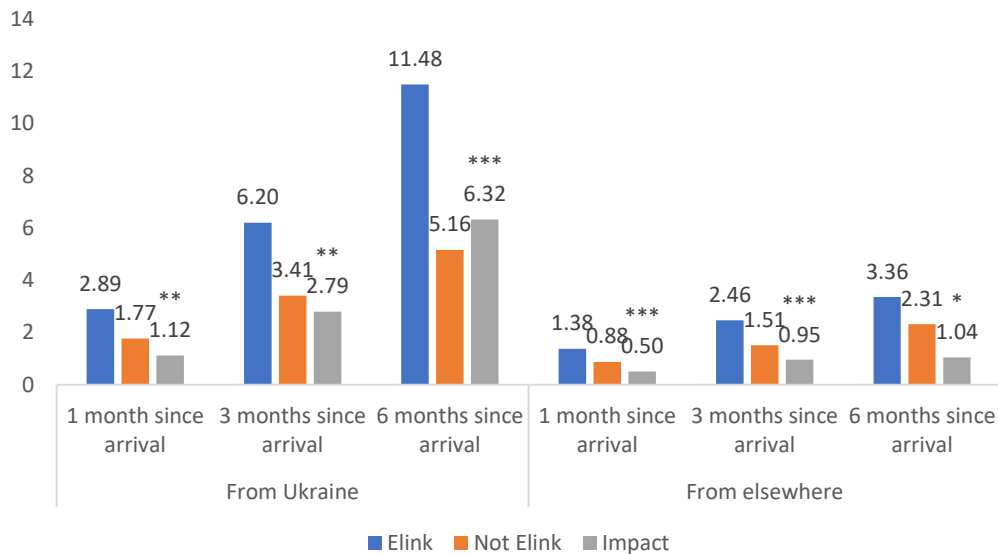
From Ukraine: A non-trivial number of newcomers in the sample are Ukrainians who came to Canada through the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET). Unsurprisingly, newcomers from Ukraine used more settlement services (Figure 14) but E-Link has no significant impact on settlement service usage rate among them. However, E-Link’s impact on the service usage frequency (Figure 15) is higher among Ukrainians. Since many Ukrainians arrived through the CUAET visa have organizations supporting them before they arrived in Canada, it is not surprising that there is no statistically significant impact on service uptake, but their complex needs could be further supported through more services if they are proactively contacted by SPOs.

Figure 14 Proportion of participants using settlement services by source country



Note: Statistical significance of the estimated impacts is denoted by asterisks. *** p < 0.01; ** p < 0.05; * p < 0.1.

Figure 15 Average number of settlement services used by source country

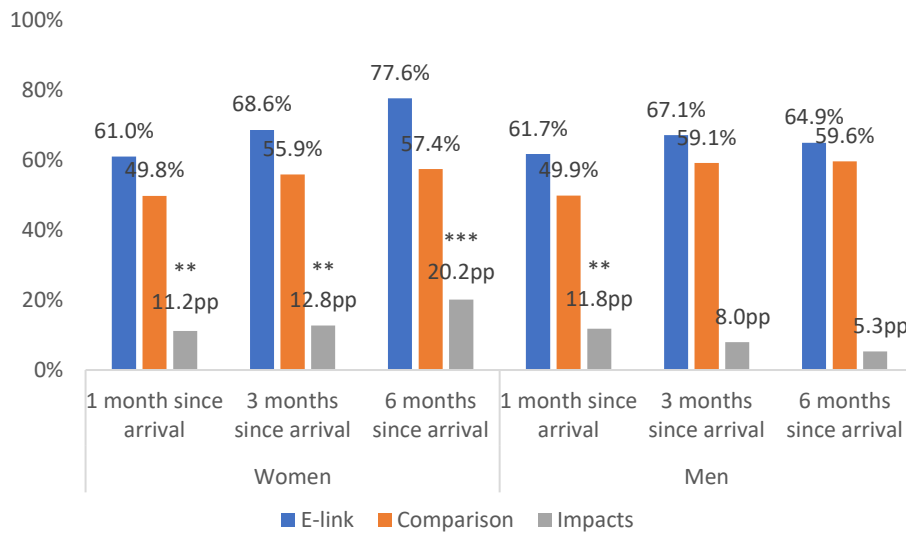


Note: Statistical significance of the estimated impacts is denoted by asterisks. *** p < 0.01; ** p < 0.05; * p < 0.1.

Women vs Men: While both women and men in the comparison group have similar service uptake and usage frequencies, the impacts are higher among women for both measures after 6 months since arrivals (Figures 16 and 17). The impact on service usage is a 20.2 percentage point increase for women compared to a 5.3 percentage point increase for men, and the impact on usage frequency is 3.73 times for women compared to 0.99 times for men within 6 months following arrival.

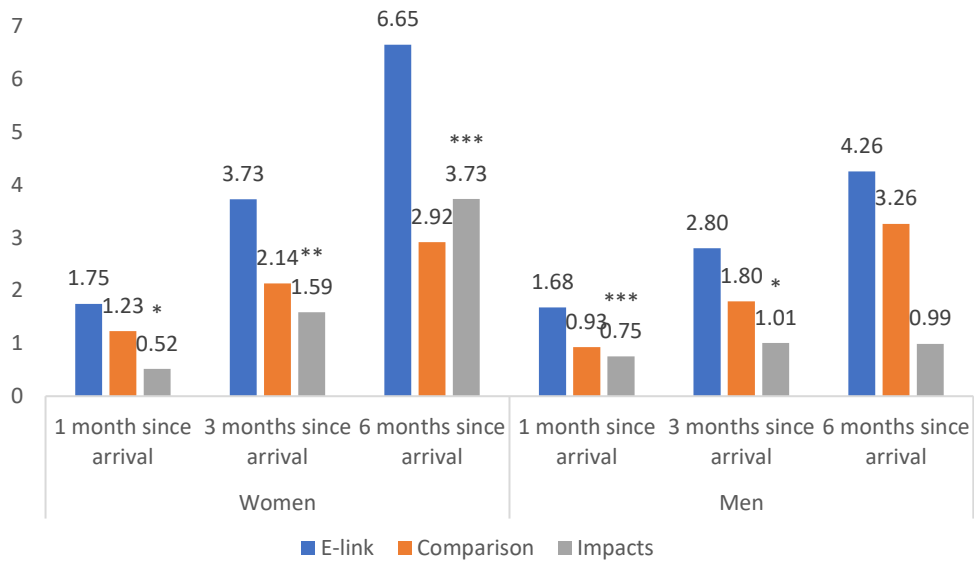
Within 6 months since immigration, the E-Link’s impacts on service uptakes are positive and statistically significant for all service categories for women, while the impacts are positive and statistically significant for general settlement service and employment services for men. The gender differences in E-Link’s impacts by service categories probably reflect the gender differences in settlement needs.

Figure 16 Proportion of participants using settlement services by gender



Note: Statistical significance of the estimated impacts is denoted by asterisks. *** p < 0.01; ** p < 0.05; * p < 0.1.

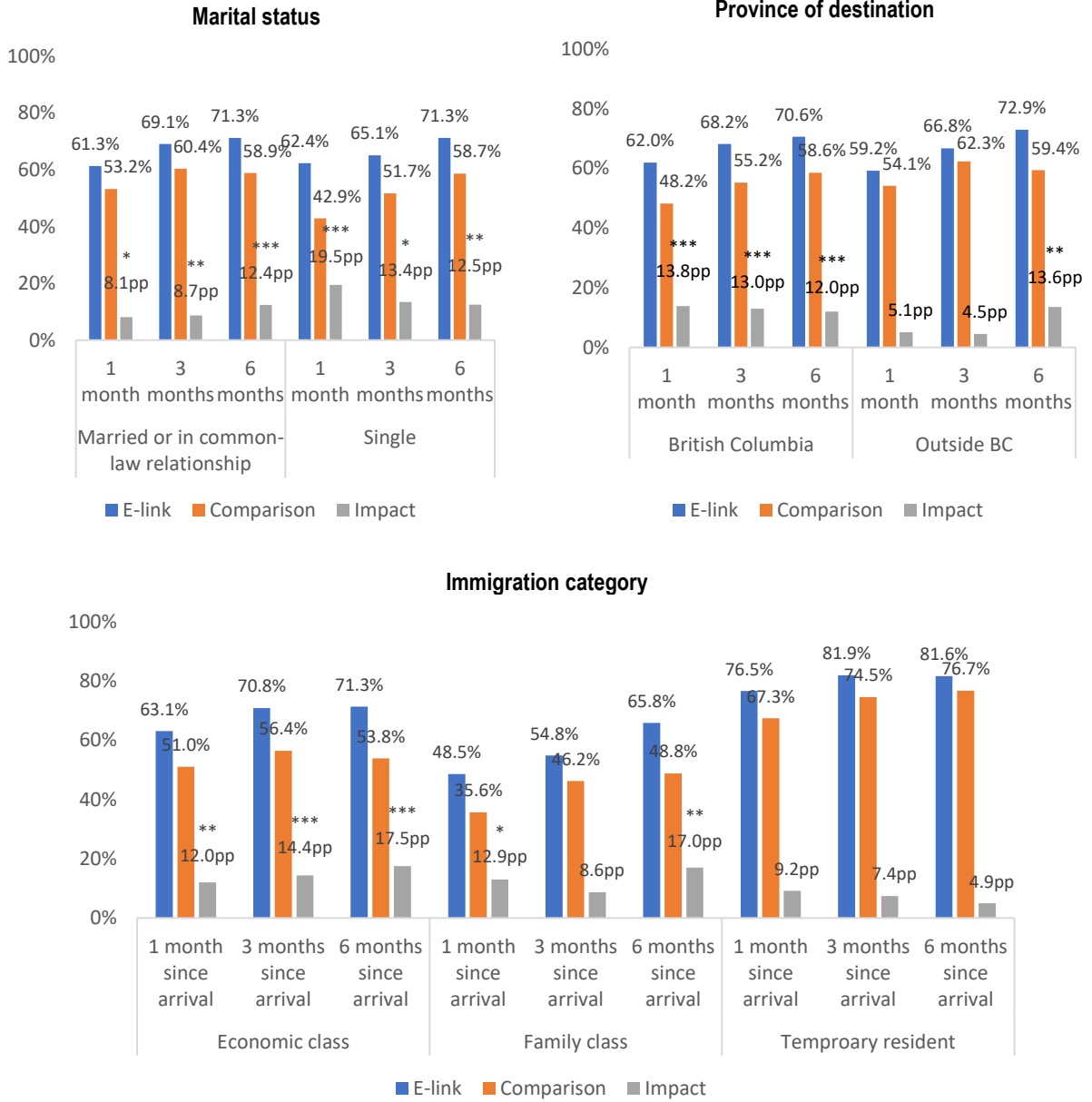
Figure 17 Average number of settlement services used by women and men



Note: Statistical significance of the estimated impacts is denoted by asterisks. *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$.

The evaluation team also examined the variations in impacts by marital status, province of destination, and immigration category. However, the variations in impacts are not notable (Figure 18).

Figure 18 Variation of the proportion of participants using settlement services by characteristics

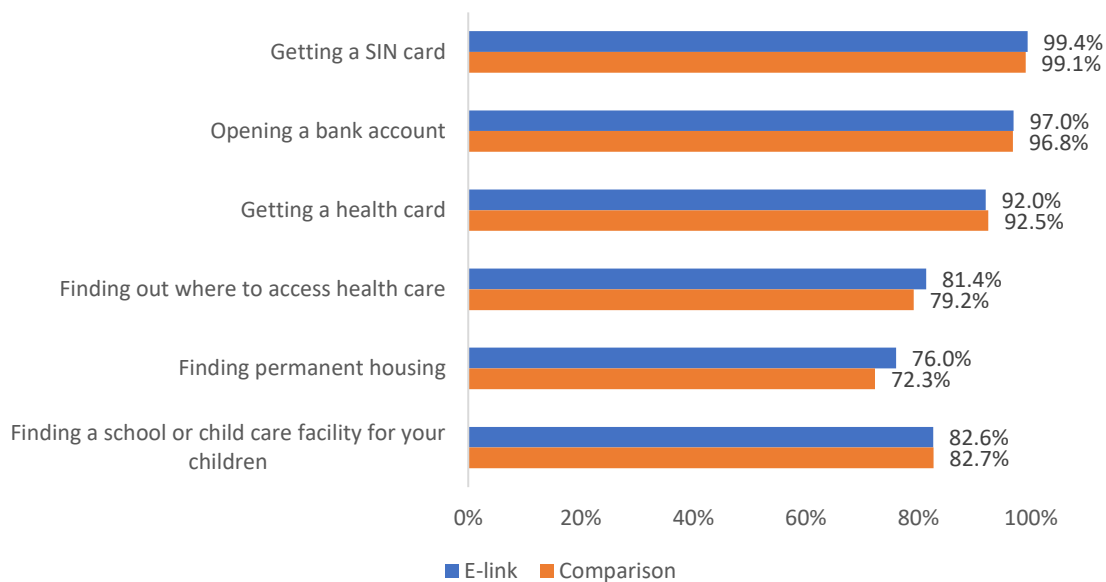


Note: Statistical significance of the estimated impacts is denoted by asterisks. *** p < 0.01; ** p < 0.05; * p < 0.1.

OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS OF E-LINK ON NEWCOMERS' SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION

In the 6-month follow-up survey, participants were asked whether they had completed activities related to settling in Canada including getting a SIN card, opening a bank account or a health card, etc. Figure 19 presents the proportion of respondents who completed each activity. As shown in the figure, most participants had completed these activities, and there are negligible differences between E-Link clients and the comparison group.

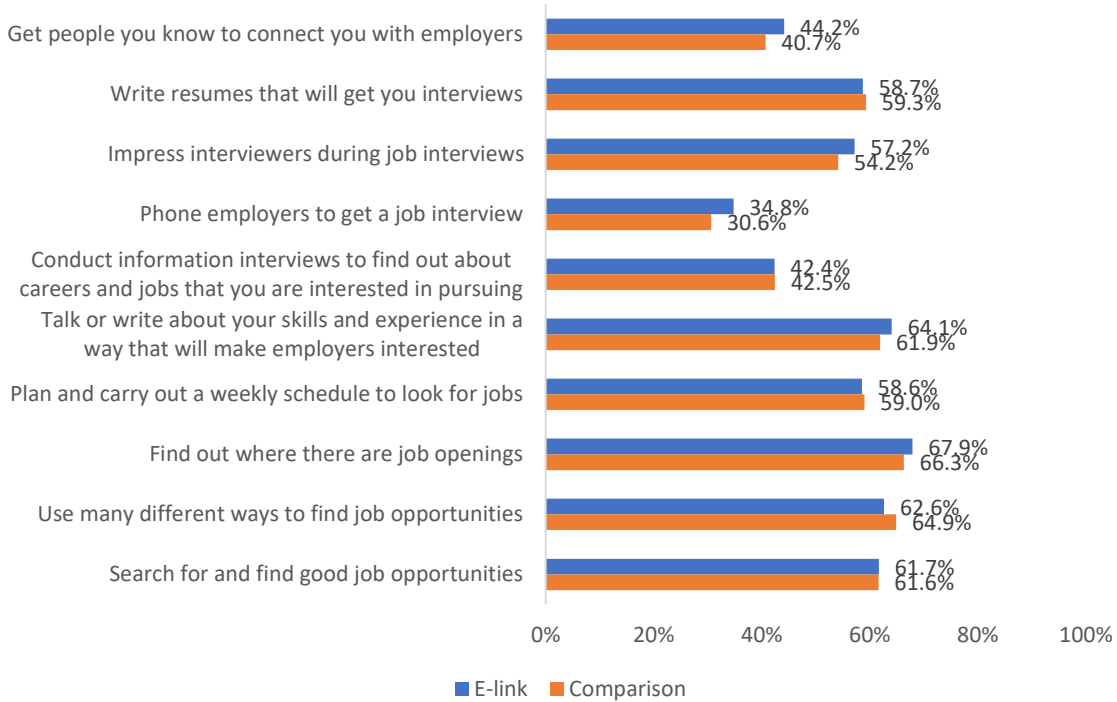
Figure 19 Organizing life in Canada 6 months since arrival



Similarly, there was no statistically significant difference between the E-Link clients and the comparison group in proportion of individuals who had found employment or had planned to find employment at the time of the 6-month follow-up survey.

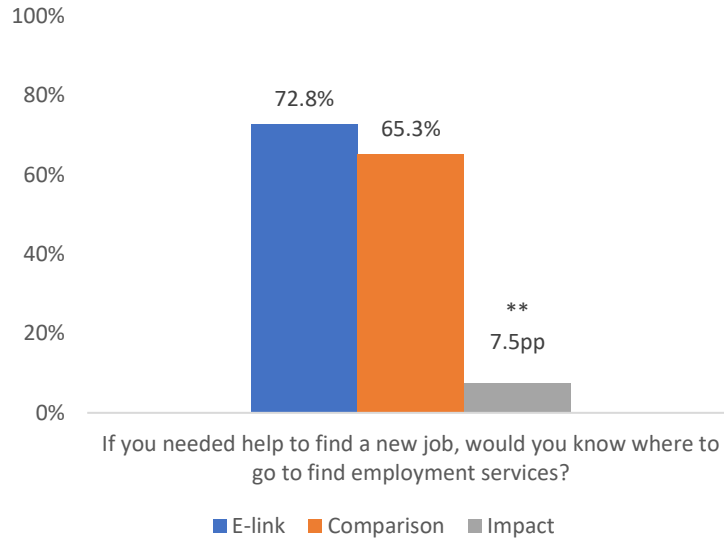
The participants were also asked in the same survey to report their confidence in carrying out various job search activities using a 5-point Likert scale consisting of “totally confident”, “mostly confident”, “moderately confident”, “slightly confident” and “not at all”. Figure 20 presents the proportions of E-Link and comparison group respondents who were totally or mostly confident in each activity. The differences between the two groups in these measures were small and none of the differences was statistically significant.

Figure 20 Self-confidence in job search activities 6 months since arrival



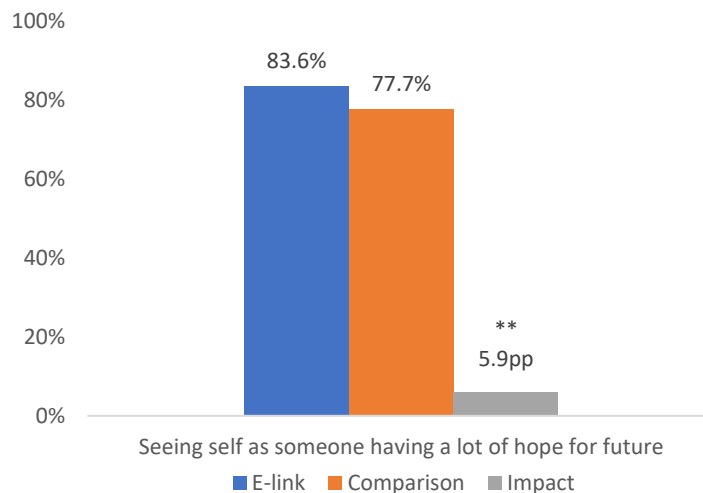
In contrast, when asked whether they would know where to find employment services if they needed help to find a new job in the 6-month follow-up survey, a larger proportion of E-Link clients responded affirmatively than that of the comparison group (Figure 21), implying a statistically significant 8 percentage point impact.

Figure 21 Knowledge of employment services location



When asked about their sense of satisfaction in life in the 6-month follow-up survey, both E-Link clients and the comparison group reported a similar high level of life satisfaction. However, when asked about their sense of hope about future in the same survey, the E-Link clients felt more hopeful than the comparison group. Specifically, the proportion of individuals agreeing with the statement that they see themselves as someone who have a lot of hope for the future were higher for the E-Link clients than for the comparison group at the statistically significant level (by 6 percentage point), as presented in Figure 22.

Figure 22 Sense of hope about the future



COST EFFECTIVENESS OF CANN E-LINK

The initial development cost of the E-Link platform is proportional to the scale of Service Delivery Improvement projects at about \$229,000 for 7 months to prepare, which is low relative to the typical IT system development cost of comparable complexity. The approach of focusing on key functions and features based on CANN's experience could be the practice of keeping the development cost low and manageable.

Since the platform development is a onetime investment, it is not considered as a cost of ongoing operation of the E-Link. Subsequent adjustments to the system should be considered ongoing operating costs unless the system is redesigned and re-developed. The cost-effectiveness of E-Link would be based on the ongoing operating/delivery costs (including any further adjustments to the platform) but not the initial development.

Given the E-Link generated a total 17,772 referrals, the delivery cost is about \$44 per E-Link client, of which about \$35.60 for E-Link's operation and \$8.40 honorarium to support SPOs reaching out to newcomers. It is difficult to assess whether E-Link's \$44 per client is cost effective, as there is not much public information about comparable needs and asset assessment and referral services.

It is usually more useful to assess the economic viability of an innovative service like E-Link through a comprehensive cost and benefit analysis. Given that there is no negative outcome, it is possible to assess its economic viability based on a partial cost and benefit analysis with a single outcome and all the operating costs accounted for. Since E-Link is effective for a minimum of 29.1% of the clients who have a record of connecting to the referred SPOs, with a 9.1 percentage point impact on usage of employment related services, the cost of increasing an additional user of employment related services (ERS) would be around \$1,700. For comparison, Appiah, Miyairi, and Hui (forthcoming) show the accumulated impact of ERS on earnings surpasses \$20,000 in the first five years. E-Link's benefit generated through employment related services would exceed the cost of E-LINK. E-LINK is also bringing other tangible and intangible benefits of social integration for the increased usage of settlement services besides employment related services.

E-Link is very likely to be a cost-effective and economically viable way to increase settlement service uptake. Given that the E-Link system is scalable, the program delivery cost per referral as an ongoing program would have been even lower than \$44. However, the budget to deliver E-Link as an ongoing program may want to examine whether the honorarium to SPOs (at \$8.40 per client) was sufficient for SPOs to reach out to newcomers, as some SPOs have reported limitation of their resources.

KEY FINDINGS BY RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE E-LINK PILOT

The CANN E-Link Interim Evaluation Report shows three highly encouraging findings: (1) CANN E-Link delivered substantial impacts and met the policy objective of increasing the uptake of IRCC-funded settlement services among recently arrived newcomers, (2) It connected newcomers and SPOs earlier, (3) It accelerated newcomers' settlement and integration journey. This final evaluation report confirms the findings from the interim evaluation report with additional evidence, and the research team finds even more positive results from the analysis of the comprehensive data collected.

Since the E-Link pilot was designed not only to estimate E-Link's outcomes and impacts but also to learn how to improve newcomers' access to settlement services, it would be best to summarize the key findings by answering the six research questions set up in the evaluation framework.

1. Does CANN E-Link increase the uptake of IRCC-funded settlement services among recently arrived newcomers?

E-Link increases the usages of settlement services among newcomers by 12.7 percentage points in the first 6 months of settling in Canada. E-LINK has impacts on many types of settlement services: 17.3 percentage points on general services, 9.1 percentage points on employment services, 5.3 percentage points in language assessment, 5.7% in language instruction for newcomers to Canada (LINC), and 8.5 percentage points in community connection. These impacts are above and beyond that the 58.8% of the comparison group newcomers who received settlement services. It should be noted that the comparison group newcomers could have a higher service uptake rate than a typical newcomer to Canada because comparison group members received a pamphlet from the CANN Kiosk listing the settlement service provider organizations they could contact. The magnitudes of the service uptake increases are very substantial.

2. Does CANN E-Link connect newcomers and SPOs earlier so that their settlement and integration journey is accelerated?

E-Link increases the connection between newcomers and SPOs by 21.4 percentage points and shortens the time to the first settlement service slightly by an average of 10 days. E-Link clients are 14 percentage points more likely to get a referral to other settlement services, 4.3 percentage points less likely to not knowing where to find the settlement services they needed, and 7.5 percentage points more likely to know where to get employment services.

Newcomers are generally good in basic life organization, though E-Link clients might have a slight advantage in handling the most challenging issue in housing and health care. E-Link increases the proportion of newcomers with a sense of hope about the future by 5.9 percentage points – suggesting that newcomers settled and integrated better in the first 6 months. E-Link clients appreciate the reach out by SPOs and the settlement information they received early. The project’s evidence suggests that newcomers’ settlement and integration journey is accelerated by E-Link.

3. Who are the clients of E-Link? What are the reasons for participation?

The profile of E-Link clients is very similar to the profile of newcomers arriving in recent years – about 44% are economic class immigrants, 28% family class, and 28% are temporary residents (mostly Ukrainians). Only 18% have used pre-arrival services. However, the majority (78%) have friends and family in Canada, suggesting many have access to help their settlement and integration from their friends and family. Also, the majority are jobseekers (71%) and so finding a job (63%) is among the top three needs, besides getting a Canadian ID (92%) and opening a bank account (81%). There is no specific reason to participate in the E-Link project, but newcomers indicated they prefer getting information, support, and services as early as possible.

4. How is E-Link implemented? What are the challenges? Which components of E-Link work well? Which components of E-Link need improvement? Are there any surprises?

CANN successfully developed the E-Link platform, even though it took longer than expected time for its development. Gradual development and revisions addressed the complexity of the system and the services, and the team found some glitches and limitations of the system that they had to prioritize some revisions over the others. Despite this, the E-Link team implemented all key functionalities and the strong partnerships with SPOs helped the team adjust the platform to address the needs of the partner SPOs. Even though the team did not plan to have continuous recruitment of SPOs, but they ended up recruited more partners with more destinations area covered than the original target.

Partner SPOs found that E-Link worked as expected, though they face some challenges, such as client non-responses, accuracies of contact information, progress tracking, mismatching newcomers’ needs and service capacity (e.g., providing services in newcomers’ language), difficulties in handling surges in arrivals, and challenges of using the E-Link platform. SPOs provided many suggestions for further improvements and CANN has a plan to implement these improvements if funding is made available.

CANN could further improve the E-Link system and make it easier for SPOs to make use of clients’ characteristics and needs. SPOs would like E-Link to expand its functionalities for

service coordination, tracking, notifications, and easier integration into their own workflow through Excel or other data exchange standards.

5. Are E-Link clients satisfied with the services?

E-Link clients are very satisfied with the referrals and getting supports from SPOs because of CANN or E-Link. Newcomers have a hectic schedule during the initial settlement period, and they may not know where to get help. Many newcomers welcome the reach out by settlement service providers and their offer of settlement services. Comparison group newcomers said that they would have agreed to share their contact information through E-Link if it was available. The percentage of E-Link clients who received services that meet their needs is very similar to the percentage of newcomers who are not E-Link client.

6. Who benefits the most from E-Link?

Through our GBA Plus analysis, we found that E-Link has positive impacts on service uptakes across many sub-populations. There are impacts among those with and without using pre-arrival services, those with and without friends and family in Canada, jobseekers or not, those with and without children, women and men. There are two notable subgroup results from our analysis. (1) Temporary residents such as the CUAET visa holders may not be benefited by E-Link through increased connection to a SPO since they probably have an existing connection to supports and services they needed before their arrival or E-Link SPOs do not have the service capacity to address their needs. However, CUAET visa holders are still benefited by E-Link through an increased number of services used. (2) The impacts on women's service uptake are increasing over time but decreasing for men and they have different needs for services. It may take a longer time for women to experience the benefits. We conclude that the E-Link system benefits all arriving newcomers.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE E-LINK PILOT

Pilot studies like CANN E-Link test whether a pilot intervention or program would be successful in real life, and there are many lessons learned from the successes and challenges during the implementation. E-Link's substantial positive impacts provide substantial insights into how to improve access to settlement services. The challenges are also helpful in further improvement of the system and future program design. The evaluation team concludes that there are three key lessons learned based on the project's findings that are important to the settlement program.

Lesson 1: Proactive outreach to newcomers at a right time is important to increase access to the settlement supports and services they need and accelerate their integration, and it is only possible if there is a functioning information system with strong and trusted partnerships with settlement service providers.

CANN E-Link shows that a functioning system would allow SPOs reach out to newcomers arriving in the area proactively and increase newcomers access to their settlement services, but the positive impacts would not happen had the E-Link system failed to notify SPOs about newcomers' needs and arrival, or if SPOs did not trust the CANN or the system. Despite the challenges of platform development, CANN staffs' knowledge about the workflow and the needs of partner SPOs helped the deployment of a functioning platform. The continuous engagement with partners to collect feedback helped CANN to make many adjustments to the platform and implementation. Seeing the tangible results from E-Link also reinforces SPOs' willingness to join the project. Indeed, CANN E-Link has surpassed its original targeted number of partnered SPOs substantially and quickly expanded its coverage area from BC to Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba earlier than planned.

CANN E-Link could be further improved with better contact information (in terms of accuracy and the diversity of channels), as well as passing on the details of newcomers' needs identified from the needs assessment. The platform could improve its user interface and ways of usages to facilitate SPOs' own workflow. The implementation could also use some additional tweaks to improve newcomers' trust and confidence about the destination's service providers, such as assurance that the services are provided to newcomers free through funding from the Government of Canada. Ideally, the platform could help SPOs at the destination to keep track of the settlement progress and coordinate their services if multiple providers are involved. Finally, the program should take into consideration of the resources needed by SPOs to reach out to arriving newcomers—and increase the funding accordingly.

It should also be noted the cost of E-Link system development is proportional to the general scale of Service Delivery Improvement projects, i.e. it is relatively small compared to typical IT platform development. The approach of focus on essential functions and features based on CANN's own experience led to its successful deployment. Functions and features could be further developed and added to the system based on real usage experience and needs. Given that CANN/E-Link is basically a "centre" dedicated to "Needs and Assets Assessment and Referral Services", IRCC may want to adopt a similar pragmatic approach to develop an information system for the Dedicated NAARS Service Provider model.

Lesson 2: Applying behavioural insights to identify the best opportunities to engage and support newcomers along their settlement journey is the basis of E-Link's success. More research on newcomers' settlement journey is needed for designing effective engagement strategies between SPOs and newcomers.

CANN E-Link has been effective in getting newcomers' attention because it is offered to all newcomers at the port of entry right before they start the landing process in the immigration office. CANN's capability to conduct a quick needs assessment using the language of the newcomers also helps its reception. The proactive outreach by the referred SPOs at the right time probably "nudge" newcomers to consider settlement services available during a hectic period of settling in Canada. The model of E-Link services is consistent with newcomers' behaviours during their initial settlement. Based on the findings of E-Link, similar systems and services could be deployed to other ports of entry for all eligible newcomers to increase their settlement service uptakes. CANN is unique in Canada since it is located inside the immigration office of the Vancouver International Airport that newcomers must pass through, and CANN can conduct a quick needs assessment for all landing newcomers. Many immigrant information kiosks in other Canadian airports are located outside the restricted area, while providers of needs and assets assessment and referral services inside the airport could only offer services to arriving refugees. **CANN E-Link model of serving all arriving newcomers should be replicated in other major ports of entry.** Ideally, similar services in other ports of entry are using the CANN E-Link platform to notify partnered SPOs—both to provide a unified interface to the SPOs and to leverage the strong partnership network established by CANN E-Link.

However, even with the application of behavioural insights to its design, there are still some challenges to overcome. For example, SPOs found many newcomers do not respond to their contacts despite their consent to allow SPOs contacting them. Some SPOs reported that they have a better success in contacting clients a few days after they land instead of right after they arrive to allow newcomers adjusting to the time difference. There is also evidence that women may not use settlement service early on, but they will use services after a few months. **Further research on the SPOs' engagement timing and strategies is needed to maximize E-Link's benefits.**

Lesson 3: CANN E-Link can be considered as an example of simplified implementation of the Dedicated Needs and Assets Assessment and Referral Services (DNS), and its strengths and challenges are informative to DNS' design and deployment.

IRCC is moving its settlement program towards the DNS model, where one or more dedicated agencies would conduct the standardized needs and assets assessment and provide referral to suitable SPOs. CANN E-Link shows it is feasible to have a centre conducting quick needs assessment and providing referrals to SPOs based on service availability and the proximity of the SPO to the newcomer's destination. Even though CANN is operated by SUCCESS, which is also a SPO, other SPOs are willing to partner with CANN since the referrals are based newcomers' needs only.

CANN E-Link is offered to newcomers at a major port of entry before newcomers start the landing process at the CBSA counter. It is one of the best opportunities to reach newcomers at scale and increase uptake of settlement services. With the volume of newcomers CANN handles at the Vancouver International Airport, CANN could offer a quick needs assessment in many languages of the newcomers and effectively engage them with the settlement services. However, many newcomers would be tired after their travel, and they have yet to start the landing process. The environment limits the length of the needs assessment that CANN can conduct. Despite this limitation, partnered SPOs found CANN implemented a similar intake process that they would have done themselves, and the quick assessment did not become an issue. However, the DNS model aims for a more comprehensive assessment to ensure consistency. Even though it is possible to call back clients after their arrival to conduct a more comprehensive needs and assets assessment, each additional step before getting the services they needed would increase attrition and decrease service uptake. Based on E-Link's implementation experience, the design and implementation of the DNS model should prioritize accessibility over consistency.

As newcomers prefer to get settlement information and prepare for their integration before they arrive in Canada, a potential opportunity is to expand CANN E-Link into a virtual NAARS for newcomers right before their arrivals. Similar to leveraging the touch point of the landing process, recruitment to this virtual NAARS should go through IRCC's notice of approval to the permanent resident application.

As of the time of writing, SUCCESS has planned to make E-Link a regular component of the CANN services. The evaluation team recommends CANN follow the lessons learned from this pilot to further improve E-Link's system and delivery. The team also suggests CANN explores the possibilities of offering E-Link as a virtual pre-arrival service or partnering with interested SPOs to offer similar services in other ports of entry.

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