

Qualitative Report on the Employment and
Credentialing Barriers Study:

The Professional Level Immigrants

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Acknowledgement

This project was possible through the support and generosity of Mitacs Elevate Postdoctoral Fellowship Program, Brandon University, Centre for Aboriginal and Rural Education Studies (CARES), and Westman Immigrant Services (WIS).

The purpose of this qualitative report is to understand the experiences of the professional level immigrants in Brandon, Manitoba through their participation in interviews that were conducted between November and December 2022.

This report is the second report to be generated from the larger study that aims to address concerns with credentialing, ensure equity in the recruitment/employment process, and identify the supports that are required to build bridges between the immigrant professional population and local employers. Employers in Brandon have recently indicated shortages of qualified applicants for professional level positions and many qualified immigrants are faced with challenges of finding suitable employment.

Research has shown that the years of schooling and work experience that migrants accumulated before arrival in Canada are often not recognized and/or valued (Ferrer & Riddell, 2008; Guo, 2009; Kanu, 2008; Li, 2008). In fact, well educated immigrant professionals learn to ‘deskill’ their previous learning and work experience after arriving in Canada (Grant & Nadin, 2007; Guo, 2009; Li, 2008).

Many immigrants lack the background, connections, and support to navigate the Canadian labour market. As a result, immigrants are finding it difficult to find appropriate jobs in their field while they get stuck in low paying jobs (Ferrer & Riddell, 2008; Guo, 2009; Kanu, 2008). The findings from the professional level immigrant interviews provides insight into their experiences and needs and suggests implications for employers, Manitoba government, and Westman Immigrant Services (WIS).

This purpose of the larger project is three-fold:

To develop an understanding of how immigrant professionals in Brandon interpret the local labor markets’ expectations as well as the skills required to navigate and identify appropriate employment opportunities.

To identify the skills and qualities that employers in the area are seeking in potential professional level employees and the criteria that they are using to make hiring decisions.

To understand how Westman Immigrant Services (WIS) can make connections between the needs in the local labor market and the skills/knowledge of local immigrant professionals in order to facilitate the employment of professional level immigrants in the local area.

This portion of the research focuses on purpose #1 and the report documents and presents the interview data collected from the immigrant professionals between November and December 2022. In the following sections, I describe the methodology, present the interview results, and conclude with implications and summarizing statements.



Methodology

The qualitative aspect of the project investigated the experiences of six professional level immigrants residing in Brandon, Manitoba. The participants were those who volunteered to share their experiences in the interview phase of the study after completing the employment and credentialing barriers survey that was posted on the WIS's website.

The participants were asked to schedule convenient dates and times through Calendly for the interview to take place. Participants were given choices to meet in person or online for the interview. Four of participants met in person for the interview and two were interviewed through Zoom videoconferencing. The interviews with the participants lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. A cell phone was used to record and/or audiotape the interviews and used for backup during the Zoom interviews.

There were three males and three females that participated in this study. Pseudonyms were used for all the participants. The participants have been residing in Brandon between 1 and 12 years. All of the participants have earned at least a bachelor's degree in their countries of origin before relocating to Brandon, Manitoba. The interview data allowed the participants to share their personal experiences regarding their employment challenges in Brandon, Manitoba.

The information was collected through in person & online interviews

6 Professional level immigrant volunteers

3 Male participants

3 Female participants

Have been residing in Brandon between

1-12 years

Findings

The data for this study was analysed by using Nvivo software and by using interpretive comments. Interpretive comments allowed the researcher to obtain the overall and unique experiences of the six participants in this study. Interpretive comments helped the researcher to document key reflections alongside the interview transcriptions, so the data could be revisited for further in-depth analyses.

During coding and after clustering the relevant units of meaning from the participants' experiences, eight themes emerged: (1) career path, (2) purpose of migrating, (3) expectation in the new home, (4) job search and current employment in Brandon, (5) barriers to employment, (6) cultural community support, (7) WIS programs and services, and (8) recommendations for the government, employers, and WIS.

The themes were supported by the data from the participants and led to a deeper understanding of the experiences of the professional level immigrants and their challenges with finding suitable employment in Brandon.

Career Path

The professional level immigrants in this study were asked to describe their backgrounds including their skills and experiences in their countries of origin. All six participants have at least bachelor's degrees in various professions before arriving in Canada. They were in careers such as medical and health, agriculture, banking, education, social services, business, and non-governmental organization. The chart below shows the six participants and their educational backgrounds, skills, and experiences.

Two of the professional level immigrants in this study have bachelor's degree and four of them have master's degree as their highest educational qualifications.

The participants have skills and experiences in different areas such as the public health, agriculture, security and intelligence, accounting, social services, education, customer service, business consultant, for example. They were also gainfully employed in various sectors, such as private business, local or national government, non-for-profit agency, multi-national charitable organizations, public education, in their countries of origin.

The participants number of work years range between 7 and 20 years before migrating to Canada. The participants migrated to Canada between 2011 and 2022. Three female and male participated in this study.



Participant Demographic Chart

Name	Gender	Highest Educational qualification	Skills and experiences	Employment in country of origin	Number of work years	Year of Migration
Grace	F	Bachelor of Medicine	Public health practitioner	Government	17 years	2022
Ola	M	Bachelor of Science in Agriculture and Animal Nutrition	Agro-business consultant, physical security, anti-intelligence, and anti-terrorism	Private company and Government	16 years	2022
Amara	F	Master of Business	Accounting, auditing, compliance and control, customer service and management	Multi-national company and logistic business	20 years	2022
Alem	M	Master of Business	Social services, Academic Director, and High school principal	High school and international organization	20 years	2022
Tala	F	Master's degree in human Rights and Multi-level Governance	Social services and customer services	Program coordinator, English tutor, and consultant	7 years	2011
Akin	M	Master's degree in economics	Business development officer	Non-for-profit organization	8 years	2018

Note. This chart summarizes the demographic information about the participant professional level immigrants.

Purpose of Migrating to Brandon

The participants were asked about why they migrated to Canada and to Brandon. Some of the participants described finding better employment opportunities as one of the reasons for moving to Brandon. Other participants migrated to Brandon to give their children a better future in terms of education and conducive environment. Some of the participants relocated due to the quality of life they hope they would experience in Brandon – the predictable, stable, beautiful, and safe environment.

Employment and Career Advancement Opportunities

All six participants stated that they moved to Canada for the purpose of getting better employment, especially jobs commensurate to their qualifications and skills and experiences, as well as for career advancement. All the participants quit their jobs in their countries of origin and migrated to Canada. As such, the participants believed that Canada is a land of opportunity and that the move to Brandon would provide them with the opportunity to realize their potential. Tala believed that there was an opportunity for her to grow her career in Canada and described that that is one of the reasons she relocated to Brandon:

“In my mind, it’s like if [I] go to Canada, become permanent resident, there’s a first step for [me] to go into whatever career [I] want to do because there are more opportunities for [me] to do that. So, all of those options are here [in Canada] ...to get that opportunity for a better employment career, it’s really like the priority for me. So, career with its options.”

“Alem added: “It’s the first [for me], a better employment. Relating to that [is] excelling in my career, especially in leadership, business, and social services, so building a good career [in Canada]”. The participants believed that they would realize career advancement when they arrive in Canada.”



Photographer Adam, “Downtown Brandon”, 2019, via www.ebrandon.ca/buzzpost.aspx?buzz_id=265

Children's Futures

In addition, three of the participants expressed that they moved to Canada because of their children's education, children's future, and a better environment for their children to thrive. Grace described why she moved to Brandon:

"I will say education like a good school for my children. I consider it because at this stage in my life, I am not only thinking about myself, but I am also thinking about my children being in an environment whereby they can make use of their potentials like to the best of their abilities."

Ola added and explained that "one priority [for migrating to Canada] was [for my] kids. I wanted my kids to be in a better environment." Three participants expressed concern for their children's wellbeing and future and that that was one of the main reasons they migrated to Brandon.

Quality of Life

The participants were encouraged by their close relatives to move to Brandon. The participants described that they heard good stories about Brandon from relatives that have lived in Brandon for a long time. The participants described stories like, people in Brandon are friendly and welcoming, there is affordable housing compared to the rest of Canada, Brandon town has good quality of life, Brandon is stable, beautiful, and predictable environment, there are better opportunities in Brandon, and Brandon is a safe and secure place in terms of safety for physical safety and property. In describing the type of security newcomers can realize in Canada, Tala explained that:

"Security in a sense that the social services here in Canada are much better... [In Canada] healthcare is free, healthcare is universal. I don't have to worry if I need to go to the hospital and I don't have enough money with me. Security when it comes to... if one day I got sick, I cannot go to work and it's going to be [for] a long period, then I can have employment insurance. Security in a sense that when I get old, I know that I am still going to be taken care of regardless of whatever social or economic status I have. Of course, if you have a better economic status, the better services you will get."

Several authors (e.g., Barkin, 1967; Hendriks et al., 2018; Osiname, 2018) described different elements that might positively influence migrants' lives which may vary for individual migrants when they arrive in their destination countries. These elements may encompass safety, security, freedom, education, gender and income equality, and/or health care accessibility (Barkin, 1967; Hendriks et al., 2018; Osiname, 2018). The participants stressed that quality of life with its benefits was one of the purposes they migrated to Brandon. children's wellbeing and future and that that was one of the main reasons they migrated to Brandon.

The participants relocated to Brandon for various reasons. They moved to Canada to secure better employment and advance their careers. They migrated to give their children a better future, so they can experience quality education and for them to achieve their potentials in a flourishing environment. The participants also got information from their close relatives that encouraged them to migrate to Brandon.

The information included that Brandon region is a pleasant and welcoming town, inexpensive accommodation compared to the rest of Canada, the opportunity to experience good quality of life, a stable, beautiful, and predictable environment, availability of better opportunities, and a safe and secured Brandon in terms of safety to life and property.

This finding is consistent with Doyle's (2004) study that indicates that finding a better opportunity in the receiving country is often the reason for voluntary migration. Doyle (2004) explained that voluntary migrants (e.g., skilled labor specifically targeted by the receiving country's economic policies; see OECD, 2019) move with the initial intention of establishing permanent residence in their host countries. All six participants were excited to migrate to Canada and were hopeful to find new opportunities and start their lives in Brandon.



Expectations and Experiences of Canadian Employment

Four of the six participants described what they were hoping would happen before and after they arrived in Brandon in terms of finding suitable employment. The participants stated that according to the Manitoba Government, their occupations and fields of work are in demand in Manitoba, so they imagined that they would find jobs based on their qualifications, skills, and experiences as soon as they arrive in their new home. Participant Grace explained her expectations:

“I hope that I will be able to secure a public health job based on my experience and based on my qualification and based on the fact, that public health coordinators, program officers and policy researchers were listed [by the Manitoba Government] as occupations in demand in Manitoba. So, I did hope that, you know, I will find employment easily along that line.”

Grace expressed her frustration when she could not find a job in her career path because of the demands of getting credentialed in Canada. She explained that she was not anticipating this issue before leaving her country of origin.

Tala also described how her expectations did not match with the reality of Brandon in terms of finding employment in her profession.

Tala explained the gap she found and described her reality since she arrived in Brandon:

“There is a lot I was thinking [about] Canada. I have been saying it over and over that Canada for me is a land of opportunity. Canada for me is like my ride to all of those things that I have in my head that I will accomplish. And stepping into here and I am like, okay, no, I don’t think it’s going to happen within the next year, three to even five years.”

Tala expressed disappointment and described her experience in terms of finding suitable employment with her skills and qualifications:

“I was thinking that I would be employed in a week to a month time [when I arrived in Brandon]. That was my timeframe. Unfortunately, the employment did not come in. If everybody [within my community in Canada] is saying that, oh, you’re good enough or your English skills are quite good enough. You have the administrative skills to back it up. You have all the other necessary skills for you to be employable. But it took what? 11 years in the making to get to where I am, and a lot of schooling in between and putting myself in debt just to get that proper education to be more *Canadianized* in a sense.”

Participant *Ola* also explained that he was hoping to get a job that would harness his skills and was confident he would get it when he arrived in Brandon. Ola described his reality in terms of employment in the first weeks he arrived in the new home:

“You know I was thinking as soon as I get here maybe the following week I will start working. But it took me over a month, and I was panicky. In fact, there was a time I had to be thinking if this place is for me. The first month was silent [and] for sending resumes and all that... and I was like what’s going on, is this how it is going to be, you know? And so, there was a day I had to apply to a car wash just to get something.”

Ola explained that after about six weeks of sending out his resume, he started getting responses for some of the positions he had applied. Galarneau and Morissette (2005) confirmed that unemployment rates for recent immigrants with university degree were at least three times that of the Canadian born.

As such, Makwarimba et al. (2013), Osiname (2022), Phythan et al. (2009), and Richmond (2001); all indicated that the non-recognition of work qualifications obtained outside of Canada seriously disadvantages immigrants in securing employment in Canadian society. This situation contributed to economic difficulty that then led to ongoing poverty for migrant professionals, as some of them continued to work in menial jobs (Phythan et al., 2009). Two of the participants described that they had less expectations in terms of securing employment that was commensurate with their professions.

Amara understood that she needed to make some sacrifices and adjustments in order for her to transition to life and work in Brandon. As such, she explained that she realized that she needed to settle and work in low paying jobs for a while before she can gain an upward mobility in term of employment and getting to where she wanted to be in her career. Amara added:

“My expectation was that when I came to Canada, of course I had a good career in my country, and I was well prepared in terms of my education and experience. So, I had to work hard to reach where I was, but when I moved to Canada, my expectation was like especially for the first 5 to 10 years, it was like minimum. So, I said maybe I could work [menial job] for a while or anything that is available.”

Akin also described how he was not expecting too much in his new home. He expressed that the information he gathered in terms of getting jobs from relatives gave him the understanding and exposure that he was going to start from the scratch when he arrived in Brandon. Akin explained that:

“I was not placing any unrealistic goals or expectations before I came to Brandon. So, in terms of work, I already had the mind that... of course you can do survival jobs, it’s just for a short time. Don’t get stuck there. So, I was coming with the mindset that even if I would have to start afresh, let me just do something to get into the system. Once I am in the system I will move and push forward. I was actually expecting all I have seen in Canada.”

Expectations and Experiences

Cangiano (2014), Guo (2009), Kanu (2008), and Li (2008) confirmed that immigrants are found in underprivileged employment sectors and low-paying jobs and that they experience higher unemployment rates within the Canadian labour market. The two participants expected to work in low-paying jobs when they arrived in Canada but were surprised that they could find employment in their professions although not commensurate with the qualifications. For example, Amara got a job in her field of work, as an accountant, even though the position did not correspond with the rank she held in her country of origin, she expressed that she is still delighted to be working in her line of work in Brandon.

Four participants in this study explained that their expectations did not match with the reality of what they experienced in Brandon. The participants expressed frustration and disappointment about securing employment as soon as they arrive in Brandon. They quickly realized that the labour market in Brandon is different than what they had expected and what they believe they knew about Canada. For example, one participant found that she needed to get credentialed in order to get employment in her profession (see Guo, 2009).

Other participants wondered why they could not find employment despite having the qualifications and skills to be employable. Two participants were not disappointed with the reality they experienced when they arrived in Brandon. The two participants explained that they did not have any unrealistic expectations about Brandon. They knew they had to make sacrifices and start newly and understood it will take some time to get to where they would like to be in terms of their careers. The participants are hopeful as they contribute to the economic and social development of Brandon.

Job Search Process and Current Employment in Brandon

The participants were asked about their job search since they arrived in Brandon. They explained that they joined different groups on WhatsApp where people came together to provide information for employment opportunities. The participants also used online platforms such as E-Brandon, indeed, LinkedIn, and Glassdoor to look for employment. Two participants indicated that they went to Westman Immigrant Services to get job information and/or postings when they were actively searching for employment. Ola confirmed that “the first thing was [the] two groups that I joined, they post job openings here and there. I registered on Indeed and Glassdoor, even before I left Nigeria. Then, Westman Immigrant Services has also been helpful”. He explained that when he arrived in Canada, he changed his profile on his resume to show that he now resides in Canada:

“So, as soon as I got here, I changed [my profile] to Canada and I think this helped [because] back in Nigeria nobody was even calling me so when I got here I changed everything, I added in [my resume] my Canadian number, and I started applying and I said initially it was radio silent; I did not hear anything [from the employer] later on, I started getting to hear from them. So, I started getting to understand how it works [in Canada].”

Amara added:

“I started my job search by going online, all the links that were given to me during the arrival services where we registered for indeed, job Canada...the same links they gave to me at WIS. So, I took it seriously and I was always on it everyday and when I started applying for jobs that are not in my field, I applied for sales job, I didn’t get those jobs and I now started applying for the real job that I am supposed to apply for and then I started getting feedback.”

Some of the participants explained that WIS was helpful and supportive when they were asked to describe their experiences with job searching. Another participant described how he was persistent with his job search, he applied for jobs consistently while making efforts to understand Brandon labor market. This is how Akin described his job search when he arrived in Brandon:

“I felt there was a need for me to launch into the deep and begin to apply, so I can’t really count the [number] of applications that I did. I just kept sending my resume and I applied for several jobs, more than 50 jobs. Sometimes when I am going through the street of Brandon, I see that I have applied into different and several businesses and organizations, so I know a lot of brands. Not that I was just applying for all jobs, but then I just want to make myself visible as much as possible and to get some information from the employers.”

The participants described their current employment in Brandon compared with the job they were doing in their countries of origin. Grace who was a medical doctor and public health practitioner in her country of origin, explained why she is currently training and working as a pharmacy assistant in Brandon despite the shortages of doctors in Brandon and in Canada as a whole. Grace explained:

“There’s that limitation whereby I first need to sit for the exams [and it’s] about 3 stages. [I need to] have a good pass at the exams and then get registered with the Medical Council of Canada before I can work as a clinician and the process takes a minimum of three years at least.”

Ferrer and Riddell (2008), Guo (2009), Kanu (2008), and Li (2008) confirmed that the work experience and credentials that migrants amassed before arriving in Canada are usually not recognized and valued. As such, the prior learning and work experience of migrant professionals are repeatedly treated with suspicion and as inferior (Guo, 2009). The immigrant professionals in this study have learned to ‘deskill’ their prior learning and work experience after arriving in Canada (see Guo, 2009).

In her current job, Grace learned and observed that there is a large number of individuals that need medication for one reason or another and needed to refill their medication on a monthly or regular basis. She expounded that she is now learning and having to appreciate the volume of work that pharmacy assistants do in their work. Grace added:

“[I now spend] 10 hours stretch on my feet, even when I was assisting surgeries, I think the longest I have done on my feet was about 6-7 hours but working as a pharmacy assistant I stand for at least 9 ½ hours excluding [my] break time. So, yes, it’s really a lot of work, they do longer hours [and] I am getting to really appreciate the volume of work that they do.”

Ola has worked in different jobs since he arrived in Brandon; he had worked in Walmart as a salesperson and worked as a customer service representative in another organization. He described this experience as a learning curve for understanding the labor market in Brandon.

Ola explained that his main duty, as an employee of CP Rail, is to make sure that the freight goods of customers get to their destinations. In the process, Ola described the nature of his job:

“It’s very risky and you work under harsh conditions. Sometimes I might be in the snow outside for 8 hours. You know, doing somethings on the train and all that, but at the same time you get to just move and all. I might be called by 12:00 a.m. at midnight and say we have movements [to go to] Saskatchewan or Winnipeg. And I will have to quickly dress up and go to the office and the train will take us there.”

Although Ola described his job as very risky, he explained that he enjoyed his current job because it takes him around within the province and to other provinces. Ola added: “I am not that [person] that likes to sit down, I am a very active person, I will say this is the most interesting, very adventurous [job] for me.” Participant Ola explained that he enjoys his current job more than most jobs he has done in the past.

Three of the participants are currently working in social services and working and supporting newcomers. They described their motivation for working in this sector and the process of securing the job. Tala explained that after she graduated from the university, she got into jobs she was not happy doing and then went back to graduate school to give her an edge, so she could work in social services.

Tala clarified that she wanted to learn how she could impact newcomer communities with her knowledge and experience of diversity, inclusion, and human rights and support the experiences of newcomers in Brandon. This is how Tala described her current employment:

“What I have right now is one of my best jobs because it’s what I wanted to do. Social services for me are such a big thing because I know the struggle as a newcomer. And working with newcomers and even if my experience may not align with them, just to have that person to understand where they are coming from with their struggles, it’s very important.”

Tala is grateful that she is working in social services and looking after the welfare of newcomers in her current job. Alem worked as an educational assistant when he arrived in Brandon and because of his background in working with youth and family, he chose to work with newcomer children and their families in Brandon. He expressed that his experience of being an educational assistant helped him when applying for employment as a social worker, he added: “It is like my dream job, and I would like to excel in that [job]”.

Alem explained that he believed in his skills and qualifications and when the opportunity presented itself, he found a job in social services providing services for children and families in the community. Alem expounded:

“So, I went for the [social service] position. And finally, I was lucky enough to get it. And my probation period was successful. I received good comments which motivate me to even do more for newcomers and contribute to the organization.”

Many scholars (e.g., Cangiano, 2014; Ferrer & Riddell, 2008; Guo, 2009; Kanu, 2008; Li, 2008) explained that immigrant professionals continue to find themselves in underprivileged employment sectors and low-paying jobs, and many experience higher unemployment rates in the labour market of their host countries. Although some of the participants in this study are in low paying jobs, they continued to help and support newcomers in Brandon and hope someday they would experience upward mobility and able to realize their potential or goals of supporting newcomer families across Manitoba and Canada.

The participants in this study described their job search for couple of jobs in Brandon. They used online platforms such as indeed, LinkedIn, Glassdoor, and E-Brandon, to look for employment in their field of work. Some of the participants visited Westman Immigrant Services for support with finding suitable employment when they arrived in Brandon.

The participants were active and persistent in their search for jobs and in trying to understand the Brandon labor market. Some of the participants were unable to work in their profession when they arrive in Brandon.

For example, one participant that has a medical degree, could not work as a medical practitioner in Canada because there were limitations, and she could not easily transfer her credentials into Canada. As such, she would have to take several levels of exams before she would be allowed to practice in her profession, so she is currently working as a pharmacy assistant.

Another participant is currently working for CP rail with no background or experience in the job. Many of the participants worked in different several jobs before they could find their desired employment. Three participants are currently employed in the social services sector supporting and assisting newcomer children and families in the community.

All the participants expressed that they are happy in their current employment because it provided them with the opportunity to learn more about the job, support newcomer children, youth, and families in the community, and become active to move within and around the province.

Barriers to Employment in Brandon

The participants in this study described different barriers to finding employment when they arrived in Brandon. These barriers included: the non-recognition of their credentials, the lack of Canadian work experience, and lack of work references. These barriers to employment negatively impact the migrant professionals as they work to navigate their new home and work environments.

Employment in Brandon

Credentialing Barriers

Five of the participants explained that they could not transfer their previous credentials and/or qualifications to find suitable work in their professions in Brandon, so they had to switch careers and hopes that they can navigate the requirement for getting credentialed. They explained that the process of getting credentialed is expensive, frustrating, complex and time consuming (see also Guo, 2009). Grace shared her own experience and opinion about this issue:

“I needed to change career or find employment in another sector. So, in my opinion, I will use the clinical aspect as an example, I am not against asking people to get their credentials assessed or for them to write exams, but there are numbers of programs that can make the process shorter or that can give leverage to newcomers when you talk about writing exams, credentialing costs money.”

“The first stage of exams for a doctor costs about \$1300. The second stage costs over \$3000. If I am not able to find employment [and] if I am still spending the money [that] I brought from my home country or am not able to find employment within a reasonable time, there is no way mental health issues and depression won't come in because I don't know how I am going to pay for the exams.”

Grace explained that she has to write the exams to be qualified or certified as a medical practitioner in Canada and become economically independent, but she won't be able to write them because of the cost. She made suggestions for how to support internationally educated medical doctors or public health practitioners in Canada. She hoped that international trained doctors be given the opportunity to work under the supervision of licenced Canadian medical practitioners with ongoing residency with the goal of practicing independently in Canada and hoped that they would be financially stable to write the licensure exams.

She believed the suggested process would ease the challenges that internationally educated medical practitioners are facing in Canada. Grace explained that this consideration would be a win-win situation for both newcomers and the community. She added:

“In my opinion and speaking as a public health practitioner, I cannot just understand why we have such shortage of doctors and nurses in the health sector. Doctors are overworked with burnout syndrome. Some are even threatening to resign because of mental health issues, you know, they want the work life balance, and we have immigrants who are doctors and nurses who are health professional. They are already in Canada but unable to help with this shortage because of these barriers. I just can't understand it from a public health perspective.”

Although participant Alem has a Master of Business Administration degree from his country of origin, he expressed that he could not use the degree in Brandon because he was not given the opportunity. Alem provided suggestions for how newcomers could be supported to use their skills and experiences:

“More needs to be done on integrating or welcoming or giving chances to immigrants. If there are gaps in terms of skills and experiences, then they should be provided with ongoing trainings. So, empowerment is needed in nursing, social work, and so on.... Life is hard for immigrants, so there should be a better way of having them participate [in the labor market]. So, I think the gap is there.”

As a qualified chartered accountant, Amara explained that her qualification was not recognized in Canada and that she knew she would have to change careers because she was having challenges with credentialing. Amara described the process of getting credentialed and becoming a chartered accountant in Canada:

“They asked me to pay for the registration fee and register under CPA [Chartered Professional Accountants]. After that I will now do certificate assessments all over. Meanwhile I already had all the certificate assessments with WES [World Education Services – Credential Evaluations], and they said it's different from the CPA assessment. It will cost about \$900 and that could be a lot for some of us, newcomers.”

Amara added:

“Where I came from, I was already a senior manager, I was running the entire finance department. I was working with 24 countries in Africa, so when I was coming to Canada, I knew it might not be exactly like that...so I was prepared that when I get [to Canada] I am going to do the CPA because my professional qualification is not given recognition.”

Although Amara was prepared to sit and write for the exams, she found that the process of getting credentialed in her profession is expensive, complex, and discouraging. She expressed that she has many newcomer friends who are facing similar issues and are stuck in menial jobs just to survive. Ola supported Amara's statements and explained that he used his grade 12 diploma to secure his current employment.

He suggested that newcomers who are professionals need to do away with their high qualifications when searching for employment and that they should plan to use their degrees to advance themselves once they are on the job. This is how Ola reaffirmed his position:

“So, the first thing I tell people is to take out all your heavy degrees from wherever you are coming from...it's best for you to start with your grade 12 results, most especially we that are [newcomers], use your grade 12 result to start your jobs in Canada and from there advance.”

“I noticed that 70 to 80 per cent of employers here, when they look at the degrees that you have, they don't care about all the degrees that you bring in from somewhere.”

The qualifications that the participants in this study brought from their countries of origin were not recognized in Brandon thereby, hindered them from securing employment in their desired professions.

Canadian Work Experience Barriers

All the six participants expressed that the lack of Canadian work experience has presented a big problem for finding meaningful employment in Brandon. The participants problematized a lack of Canadian experience, for example, Grace, who had worked in Europe and Africa for many years questioned the request for Canadian work experience by employers.

She emphasized that this demand for Canadian work experience works to the advantage of employers because it would allow them to pay newcomers less salary than their Canadian counterparts with the same experience, skills, and qualification. Grace believed the challenge of Canadian work experience is limiting for both newcomers and employers as organizations are finding it difficult to fill some positions and the professional level immigrants are stuck in menial jobs. In addition, Grace shared additional perspective on the concept of Canadian work experience:

“[When] I studied in the UK and unlike Canada, there is no phrase like UK experience, or Ukraine experience, but in Canada, that phrase is there everywhere you go. [In Canada, they say you] don’t have Canadian experience. If I have worked in Africa, I have worked in Europe, and I have worked in other countries and I come to Canada, and they are telling me [I don’t have] Canadian experience, [then] that can be very deep because Canada is not isolated from the whole world.”

In problematizing the term Canadian experience, Tala asked series of questions to understand the real meaning of the phrase and questioned its significance to the reality of newcomers in Canada:

“If I want [to have] a Canadian experience in administrative, [for example] how am I going to get that if I am working in another field in another job, but it’s like those survival jobs can get you the Canadian experience because you already have been working with Canadians. So, Canadian experience is working with [White] Canadians, is that what they are telling me?”

In trying to get Canadian work experience, Tala ended up in several jobs that she disliked, and she was always unhappy working in these jobs. She argued that going to school in Canada also involves having that Canadian experience because she had to learn about the culture, the people, and the geographical landscape of Canada.

As such, she expressed that she made connections with White Canadians. Upon graduating from the university, Tala explained that she was still experiencing the barrier of Canadian work experience. She added that it was hard for her to keep hearing that she’s not Canadian enough, and that her certifications were not *Canadianized* enough.

Canadian Work References Barriers

Participant Alem voiced similar complaint as Tala’s, Alem explained that employers need to throw out the phrase Canadian work experience with reference to employment because it’s impossible for new immigrants to have worked in their fields in Canada. Alem asked employers to look for alternative ways to evaluate newcomers. Alem provided an example of how his current employer assessed him:

“So, they have to really take [Canadian work experience] out of it...they either have to do a test or like an aptitude test to test [newcomers] like the job I have now, they tested us, we had two weeks in the classroom and we wrote an exam that we have to score 90 per cent before you are employed and start the job.”

Amara added:

“Canadian experience, I don’t know if it’s the law that is making employers to ask for it, and if it’s not the law, they can just find a way to adjust it and make it basically based on what the person can do, not really where the person is coming from. This is the country that we want to build, we want immigrants to come in and build this place.”

The lack of Canadian work experience posed a great challenge for the participants to secure meaningful employment in Brandon.

Tala made the connection between Canadian work experience and Canadian work reference to deepen the understanding of the challenges that newcomers encounter in Brandon. This is how Tala described this connection between Canadian work experience and Canadian reference:

“It made me think like so Canadian experience also pertains to having someone vouch for you and looking for referrals because I don’t have enough to show that my skills, my attributes, my experiences are not enough for me to get that position. There is someone who tells employers that she’s really good. And my references cannot tell them that because what they are not in Canada.”

In her current job, she illustrated that it feels frustrating to see newcomers who are highly qualified for positions and could not fill those spots because of these barriers of Canadian work experience and references. She explained that employers may think newcomers could not meet the job expectations or the demand of the job and that these ways of thinking are placing thick barriers on newcomers’ ability to find suitable and meaningful jobs. Tala wants employers to be more open to reaching out to newcomers’ references outside of Canada.

Impact of Barriers

Two participants described the consequences of these barriers (i.e., non-recognition of credentials, lack of Canadian work experience and work reference) in their lives. The participants explained that they were depressed and ended up having student debt trying to work through these barriers and striving to meet the expectations of their new home. Participant Tala shared her experience:

“It was like I had never experienced depression before [then], it came to a point that I really went to see one of the counselors in [town] just to talk about how I am going to structure my mind again. Because everything that I have been trying so hard to do is working against me. I don’t want to hear that “it’s not you, it’s that the society, the system is structured that way and it will take some time for them to open to the possibilities.” If you want to have a better economy stop blocking off the talents that you already have in your community.”

Grace added:

“You know, when you are looking for employment and you’re not finding employment in your career line, one may develop depression and it can be stressful, draining, and all that. I mean looking for work can be challenging and frustrating. It can affect families. It can affect relationships.”

Participant Tala expounded that she had to put herself through a lot of schooling when she arrived in Canada just to navigate and negotiate these barriers of non-recognition of credentials and her lack of Canadian work experience. As a result, she has so much student debt just to navigate the complexities of her new home Tala Shared that:

“I wish that I was more financially reliant on myself and not put myself into student debt just to gain that Canadian experience and be more Canadianized in order to get my foot into the door, at least like a foot into the career that I want.”

The resulting consequences associated with the employment barriers impacted some of the participant’s mental health, financial stability, and adjustment to life in Canada. Ferrer and Riddell (2008), Guo (2009) and Kanu (2008) argued that a large percentage of recent immigrants continue to have trouble adapting to the Canadian labour market and that they may experience barriers such as cultural differences, discrimination, and non recognition of their human capital. The participants in this study experienced barriers to finding suitable employment in Brandon. They encountered barriers such as non-recognition of credentials (Guo, 2009; Kanu, 2008) and lack of Canadian work experience and work references (Ferrer & Riddell, 2008, Guo, 2009). All the participants could not transfer their credentials and qualifications to find work that matched their qualifications when they arrived in Brandon (see Guo, 2009).

Suggestions from Participants

Two participants provided some suggestions for how employers or the government can provide support for assisting international educated professionals or newcomers with the credentialing process. The participant suggested providing supervision opportunities for newcomers on the job with ongoing internship while they work to navigate the credentialing process. Another participant also suggested an ongoing training for newcomers to fill any gap that is present in their skills and experiences.

One participant provided suggestions for newcomers who are professionals since their credentials are not recognized, he recommended that professionals should set aside their advanced qualifications when seeking employment and that they should present their lowest qualification (i.e., high school diploma) to get hired and then plan to use their advanced degrees and qualifications to move ahead on the job.

Guo (2009) confirmed that even with efforts at getting employment by migrant professionals, employment is not guaranteed despite the shortages of labor force, migrant professionals still need to find ways to establish the required credentials.

The lack of Canadian work experience and references presented difficulties for the participants in finding meaningful employment in Brandon.

As such, some of the participants ended up in jobs that they disliked and made them unhappy. Another participant wondered if Canadian work experience meant working with White Canadians. Also, the participant interrogated if attending colleges or universities in Canada eliminates the burden of Canadian experience. One participant linked Canadian work experience with Canadian work reference and considered having White Canadians serve as references to get employment.

Two participants experienced depression and financial instability as a result of these barriers. The participants recognized that the challenges of non-recognition of qualifications and Canadian work experience with reference to employment are limiting for both newcomer professionals and employers because organizations are finding it difficult to fill positions in their organizations and the professional level immigrants are stuck in menial jobs.

This issue needs urgent attention for both employers of labor and newcomer professionals to reach their goals and potential. The participants suggest that the phrase Canadian work experience with work reference concerning employment should be tossed out and that employers need to find other meaningful ways to assess newcomer professionals’ skills, qualifications, and experiences. Finally, the participants asked the employers to be more open to connecting with newcomer professionals’ references in their countries of origin.

Cultural Community Support

The participants in this study received support from their ethnocultural communities in finding employment when they arrived in Brandon. The participants accessed assistance from their friends and close relatives who have been living in Canada for a long time.

Some of the participants also received support with job hunting from members of their churches and from an online cultural group. Participant Akin expressed that his close relatives sponsored him and his family to come to Manitoba through the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program and they were instrumental in finding employment for him when he arrived in Brandon. Akin shared:

“My cousins were the ones that were really [supportive] at the initial stage. [They said] oh, will you do this? Will you do Paladin? Will you do Maple Leaf? Will you go to Walmart? They were giving that information. That oh you can start from these jobs. So, it was from my relatives that I got that information of where you can go get jobs and stuff like that.”

Tala also described how her ethnocultural community supported her with finding employment in the community. Tala described how her community supported her with finding her past and current employment in Brandon:

“They were the ones who referred [me] to go first for health care because that was one of the biggest things here. I don’t think I would have known if there are any open positions in my current company where I work. If I also didn’t have those connections in my community.”

White’s (2012) highlighted the importance of migrants’ relationships and connections within their communities and to one another had helped them thrive in their host countries. Similarly, Osiname (2022) found that the bonds and relationships that African immigrant families established within their community helped them to realize a sense of security, comfort, belonging, identity, and ultimately familiarity in Canada.

As such, community connections and relationships helped Tala to find meaningful employment in Brandon. Participant Ola also described that he joined an online group where people from his country of origin come together to support each other with information about finding employment.

This group helped Ola and his wife to learn about job postings in their fields and provided an opportunity for them to communicate with individuals who share similar experience in Brandon. Participant Alem described the kind of support in terms of jobs he got from his community in Brandon and expanded on some of the tensions that the community is experiencing due to the political issue that is currently happening in his country of origin. Alem shared his concern:

“Yes, I got support with employment, but it was just for labor jobs [menial jobs]. Otherwise, I have a big community. Unfortunately, it is divided due to the political instability going on in the country, so I wasn’t happy about what I experienced here within the community because no matter what they are now in Canada.”

“So, they should have a different attitude and approach towards what’s going on in the country. I believe that when you are living in a better country where you have a civilized way of lifestyle, you should be civilized, as well.”

Alem believes that the community is stronger when they work through their differences to better support one another.

Two participants expressed that they received support from members of their church when they arrived in Brandon. Participant Amara shared her experience with the church he attended in Brandon and how they provided employment support for her:

“The church that I joined here through one of my country persons. Most of the people there are from my country of origin, and they ask if I am new and looking for job. I remember somebody in the church tried to help me when I told him that I applied to Maple Leaf, he asked me which role I applied for, and I told him...it was just a few days after that conversation that I got a telephone interview from Maple Leaf.”

Participant Ola added:

“So, going to church, you meet people, you fill forms as a first timer, and they tell you about this and that and some will follow up based on newcomer. And people asked us if we have been able to get something and then they asked series of questions: Can you apply for this job? What is your area? Some people will tell us “I will try and see who I can talk to”. I can say several of the jobs that I applied for were through the church connections.”

Makwarimba et al. (2013) affirmed that cultural support expands social networks and increases support for migrant families.

The participants in this study demonstrated that they got support from their ethnocultural communities; close relatives, friends, churches and through online groups that helped them with securing employment in Brandon.

These groups provided the participants with information that they needed to navigate their new home and to find employment. One participant was disappointed to know that his community in Brandon is divided because of the political instability in his country of origin.

The participants all agreed that without the support of, and connections in, their cultural communities they would not be able to navigate the complexities with employment when they arrived in Brandon.



Westman Immigrant Services: Programs and Services

The participants in this study shared their experiences working with Westman Immigrant Services (WIS) and how they accessed the programs and services that WIS offered to newcomers in the Brandon area. For example, some of the participants described how WIS assisted them to refine their curriculum vitae and provided them with information about job vacancies and/or postings when they first arrived in Brandon. Grace shared:

“I am a beneficiary of the services rendered by Westman Immigrant Services. They took me as a client, and they helped me with my resume. I mean, the Canadian style of CV writing they help me with that, and they also offered assistance in terms of letting me know the available job vacancies or positions on a weekly basis.”

Amara added:

“When I came [to Brandon], the only source of assistance that I accessed was at Westman Immigrant Services. So, the employment team supported me. They gave me some of these job websites and from there I picked it up for myself to check and whenever I had any questions, I always contacted them, and they were always there to help”.

Amara also explained that the employment team at WIS supported her with assessing her resume to confirm if it fits the positions she was applying for. All the participants explained that WIS facilitated direct contacts with employers for them to find work in Brandon. They shared their experiences with the team at WIS and how WIS supported and aided their job applications. Amara explained that:

“When I told the employment team at WIS that I applied to Maple Leaf for a financial analyst job, they asked me to quickly send the job details and everything to them and later they sent me a form to fill and send back to them. They said that they will send it to someone at Maple Leaf. I think the same thing when I applied for the Westoba Job, they told me they have a direct contact there. So, they sent my resume and cover letter to somebody at Westoba.”

Akin also shared his experience with working with WIS and how they help make direct contact with an employer for him:

“I remember the lady [at WIS] reached out to a company and they said someone retired at the company, so they are looking for someone to work but getting to their job I found that it is a lot of physical work, you know. Again, at one point they even recommended some organizations to my wife to work for them. Yes, they reached out to, and have direct contact with, some employers for me that I would not have naturally met.”

The participants also described that the employment team at WIS worked to prepare them for job interviews when they were called for interviews. Ola described how the interview preparation process helped him and his wife:

“There was a time I was applying for a job, and it was an agriculture job, and I needed to do an interview. I went to WIS and one of the staff there prepared me [for the interview]. You know, like a simulated interview and so basically WIS has been helpful in preparing me and my wife [for interview] and building our confidence during the interview [process].”

Amara added:

“My experience working with WIS was fantastic. The team there are always very helpful...In fact when I got my Zoom interview and was preparing for the interview with Westoba and I told the team at WIS, they organized a mock interview for me to practice and all. So, they were really helpful. My experience with WIS in terms of job was very wonderful.”

The participant in this study expressed that they had positive experiences working with the team at WIS and with accessing WIS’s employment services.

The Bridging to Employment Program – MALTI

Furthermore, the participants particularly described the bridging to employment program that WIS offers. The program was designed to help newcomers gain employment and provided them with skills to find sustainable employment in Brandon. Some of the participants who participated in the MALTI program shared their experiences and the impact of the program for newcomers.

Ola shared:

“There’s a program that WIS offers that I know of, and my wife is involved. They called it the MALTI program. They train people for the job market which is a very fantastic aspect of what they do, so that’s one of the best ways to help newcomers who are finding jobs. I also know that they help in training people English language [particularly] newcomers that cannot speak English very well.”

Alem added:

“When I went to WIS, they told me about the MALTI program...in that case I went for it. The MALTI course opened my mind to different resources and opportunities, so by the time I graduated from the MALTI course, I got about four (4) jobs. One of the employers was where I did my practicum, and it was in a school. Alem explained that the MALTI program provided an opportunity for him to connect with employers of labour and that WIS facilitated this opportunity.”



MALTI program. Source: WIS



MALTI graduation. Source: WIS

Other Programs and Services

The participants also mentioned other programs that are being offered by WIS such as the “Welcome to Brandon” program that teaches newcomers about owning houses, understanding Brandon neighborhoods, shopping for food, cleaning houses, for example. The participants believe WIS has provided them with what they needed to navigate and adjust to life in Brandon.

Ola shared:

“The welcome to Brandon training that we went for [taught] us about housing, how to rent apartments, how to get stuff basically about Superstore, neighborhood Brandon, and other places. They also teach us about how to clean the bathroom and gas cooker. You know, it is really helpful, and I think I would just say that WIS is well positioned for Brandon [because] you will be able to get all the stuff that you need to learn there.”

Tala added that “If you are a newcomer, WIS is the first organization that you need to go get all the information and support you will be needing.” She expressed that WIS programs and services have improved since she newly arrived in Brandon and that these programs and services are beneficial for newcomer’s integration and adjustment in Brandon. The participants agreed that everything they learned from working with WIS are valuable. The participants also explained that the staff at WIS are very open, particularly the employment team.

They described the team as friendly, very open, approachable, and very helpful. They expounded that the employment team always shows positive attitude and are not judgemental and that they are inclusive and respectful of everyone.

The participants in this study benefitted from the programs and services that WIS offers to newcomers in Brandon and surroundings. The participants confirmed that WIS helped them to refine their resumes when they arrived in Brandon and that WIS provided them with information about job vacancies and postings. Participants expressed that WIS facilitated direct contact with employers for them.

WIS assisted them with submitting and following up with their job applications with prospective employers. The employment team at WIS prepared the participants for job interviews by organizing simulated interviews before their actual interviews. Participants are impressed and appreciated the bridging to employment program (e.g., MALTI) and other programs and services (e.g., Welcome to Brandon) that are being offered by WIS that continue to support newcomer families in Brandon. Finally, the participants are thankful for the openness, positive and polite attitudes of the WIS employment team.

Recommendations for the Government, Employers, WIS, and Newcomers

The participants in this study made some recommendations for the Government of Manitoba, employers of labor in Brandon, Westman Immigrant Services, and newcomers to Brandon. Participants believed these recommendations could make a difference for helping newcomers adjust, adapt, and integrate to life in Manitoba. As well, they believed these recommendations have the potential to help newcomers navigate and negotiate the complexities of their new home environment.

Recommendations for the Government

The participants expressed that government policy with regards to immigration needs to change for newcomers to find meaningful employment in Brandon. They asked the government to develop employment policy that is inclusive, empowering, and adaptable toward skilled immigrants and/or newcomers for them to use their talents in the province. Participants also stressed the benefits of these inclusive and adaptive employment policy to the local community. Participant Alem shared that inclusive government policies would benefit local communities and the province as a whole:

“The policy in terms of employment [I mean] policies related to newcomers need to be more accommodative and inclusive. Believing in the skills and credentials of newcomers could contribute a lot to the community. Immigrants in general are coming with lots of energy and expectations, not only to [the] benefit [of the province] but to contribute to the holistic aspect of the community, so the policies should be more inclusive.”

Participant Alem suggested that an inclusive government policy with regards to employment and credentialing would provide opportunities for employers to accommodate newcomers in various areas of expertise and provide newcomers with better ways to integrate into the Canadian labor market. Participant Tala expounded that the government needs to adapt and recognize that newcomers bring with them different abilities and skills and they need to find ways to recognize these talents.

She posed a series of questions and suggested the need for government to effectively channel newcomers’ talents in the community to create sustainable economic resources to make Brandon a wonderful city. She asked the government to lift the lid that is preventing migrant professionals from securing jobs in their fields.

Tala asked series of questions:

“How do we adapt? Because it cannot always be the newcomers adapting to what is here, but we can also adapt to what the newcomers can bring to us. Why are you putting a lid? If you are saying newcomers don’t have the Canadian knowledge set, then how are we going to help them to get that Canadian knowledge set? We need to utilize those talents and experiences that they are bringing into the Canadian market, especially in Brandon.”

All the participants suggested that the government needs to support employers’ transition programs for newcomer professionals to move easily into their professions in Brandon. They also recommended that the restrictions on credentialing need to be reconsidered and that the government needs to find alternative ways or less cumbersome ways to assess the skills and qualifications that newcomers are bringing with them from their countries of origin. Participant Akin provided an example of a transition program that might help skilled newcomers into their professions:

“I want a situation whereby government partners with private sectors, so when skilled workers come to Brandon, they are attached to different organizations for at least three months and government can support the initiative by paying the workers minimum wage just to give the skilled newcomers the experience that they needed [in Canada].”

Akin expounded that such an initiative would reduce the labour shortages that Manitoba employers are experiencing. The participants all agreed that government need to be deliberate and act promptly in their effort to integrate skilled workers into the Canadian labor market. To that end, an inclusive, empowering, flexible, and accommodative employment and credentialing policy with regards to immigrants would make a difference for newcomers’ successful adjustments and adaptations in Brandon and Canada as a whole.

One participant asked the government to encourage and empower newcomers to become entrepreneurs. She explained that it is not every newcomer that wants to work for employers of labour and that newcomers can also contribute to the advancement of Brandon’s economy by becoming employers of labor.

She asked the government to provide opportunities in terms of loans and subsidies for newcomers who have background and experience in business and have run successful businesses and can demonstrate that they would also be successful in Canada. She inquired about the requirement for starting a business and found that the cost of securing a business loan is very high and complex. Participant Amara shared that:

“I was trying to go into this vending machine business [and] the money that is being required by the company is high for me. If the government can support newcomers in Brandon in terms of business loan, you know. When someone is a Permanent Resident [in Canada], the person has come to stay. Like the government support people in the areas of housing and medical, they can support people that wants to do business, as well. It is not everybody that comes to Canada wants to do a paid job.”

The participant suggested that government should support goals and aspirations of newcomers who are willing to become entrepreneurs. She concluded that when government invests in different entrepreneurial initiatives it would be a win-win situation for the government, newcomers, the local community. The participants also recommended that the government should increase funding for the existing programs and services that are available to newcomers in the province, particularly the MALTI program that is being offered by WIS.

They explained that the program only allows 10 participant newcomers every quarter of the year which they considered small compared to the large number of immigrants that are moving to Brandon. The participants agreed that these suggestions would support the smooth adjustment, integration, and adaptation of newcomers to Brandon, as well as ease the difficulties of navigating and negotiating their new home.

Recommendations for Employers

The participants provided some recommendations for employers of labour in Brandon and area. They suggested that employers need to do more by encouraging observation periods and internships for newcomers to integrate into their chosen professions in Canada.

Participant Grace suggested that skilled newcomers could shadow a colleague at work to help them get the contextual knowledge they needed to thrive in their careers. She argued that skilled newcomers are already equipped with the knowledge in their fields and that they just need some mentorship on the job to become familiar with the Canadian workplace culture and labor market. Grace shared:

“Employers want people who are punctual [and] people who are dependable. [Employers] want [individuals] who can think outside the box, who can work under pressure. And a number of these skilled newcomers can do that already. So, anyone can learn the technical aspect, I am working as a pharmacy assistant, I have never worked as a pharmacy assistant before, but I have been able to gain some of the technical skills because I have been shown by a colleague or by my supervisor or employer at work.”

Grace expounded that because skilled newcomers are educated individuals, it would be less challenging for them to learn faster within the Canadian context, so employers need to support initiatives that would support their successful integration in the workplace in Canada.

Participant Ola also described that employers are requiring job applicants to score excessively high marks on employment tests before they are offered jobs. He explained that his current employer demanded a 90 per cent score to become an employee during the employment process, and he considered that to be unfair to newcomer professionals. He described the process of securing his current job as stressful and terrifying because he did not know what to expect and was unsure if he would get the job. Ola shared:

“That is one of those things that I feel that maybe some companies should investigate and do something about because someone that I know also spoke about the pass mark and he said that actually the pass mark [to get a job] in Canada is 70 per cent. He said in some cases the pass mark is even 50 per cent but my company asked us to score 90 per cent before we can pass and be employed.”

Ola asks employers to approach recruitment with fairness for newcomers, so they can have a chance of working in their desired jobs. This approach to hiring would provide equal employment opportunities for newcomer professionals.

Recommendations for WIS

The participants understand that WIS has positioned itself as the voice of immigrants and/or newcomers, so they provided some recommendations that would improve WIS's programs and services to better support newcomer population in Brandon. The participants suggested that WIS needs to be proactive in presenting the challenges that newcomers are facing and be persistent in providing recommendations to the government for how to solve these issues.

Some of the participants suggested that WIS could support newcomers in the area of career counselling. They explained that WIS needs to provide newcomers with the information that they required to navigate the complexities of getting credentialed and also encourage them to take continuing education courses in their professions that might prepare them for their desired jobs. Amara shared:

“WIS can encourage newcomers on what and what they need to do. For example, while newcomers are waiting for employers to contact them after submitting their job applications, WIS can encourage them to take some courses, do some learning, or other things that can prepare them for the kinds of jobs they are looking for. This [initiative] can support newcomers who want to get some level of additional skills and knowledge that will prepare them for the next available job.”

Grace added:

“I want to believe that they get feedback... they have discussions with immigrants and are able to put up all the challenges and proffer recommendations or suggestions to the Canadian government. I suggest they should do that, but if they are doing that, I suggest they should not relent, they should keep doing that basically.”

The participants believed WIS is doing a good job within the community, and they want them to continue with the existing programs and services and, as such, they believe they can do more with providing information for newcomers to get credentialed in their various careers. In doing more for newcomers, participant Tala provided suggestions for how WIS can get businesses interested in hiring newcomers in Brandon. She asked WIS to provide a more sustainable programs that would empower newcomers to achieve their potential.

She recommended that WIS needs to work with organizations and businesses, as well as the government to develop different bridging programs that would allow the utilization of the human resources within the newcomer population.

She suggested that such an approach would lead to economic development of Brandon. Tala shared her experience:

“I have witnessed that many newcomers' talents are not being utilized and organizations are not using what the newcomers are bringing [from their countries of origin]. What they are doing is putting lid on our talent bank. [For example] you keep on saying there is a lack of IT people, but there is like a lot of IT people out there. Because of many constraints, I have an IT professional working at Walmart. I have someone who is also very qualified to be a professor who cannot get into Brandon University. I know that person can make a difference for students.”

Tala stressed the need for WIS to create awareness within the community and to reach out to and orientate organizations about equity, diversity, and inclusion. The participants asked WIS to work with both small- and large-scale organizations to facilitate workshops that would validate the value and benefits of hiring skilled immigrants in their organizations.

They all agreed that organizations need to take advantage of the talent bank within the diversity of newcomers in the community to help them reach their goals.

The participants suggested for WIS and employers to come together to discuss and develop pathways for a successful collaboration. Tala expounded:

“It is like a working process, and I know WIS is really working hard on reaching out to different businesses in the community to get those connections, so yes, but I feel like we need to sit down and have [community] consultation. For example, what do businesses want? What do WIS have? What can organizations offer in order to prepare newcomers for the demands of their businesses?”

Tala stressed the need for constant consultations between and among different sectors including at the local, private, and provincial levels. Akin supported Tala’s perspective and expressed that one of the best strategies or ways WIS can better provide employment support for its clients is to make connections with as many employers as possible within the community to understand how they can both work together.

This is because providing employment services is one of the primary services that WIS offers within the Brandon area—Akin explained, “the more employers WIS connects with the better for them and their clients”.

He recommended that WIS needs to undertake courtesy visits to businesses and organizations to partner with them if possible. Akin added that the larger the database of employers that WIS has the better the quality of services they would deliver to their clients. This connection is crucial for the success of organizations, WIS, and newcomer professionals. To that end, WIS needs to make connections between the needs in the local labor market and the skills of newcomer professionals to facilitate the employment of skilled newcomers within the community. This approach would be beneficial for Brandon community at large.



WIS main building. Source: WIS

Recommendations for Newcomers

The participants provided recommendations for newly arrived professionals based on their experiences with Brandon labour market. These suggestions were based on how they navigated the complexities their new home environment. The participants in this study described how they had to be tenacious and positive to find success despite the challenges they encountered when it came to securing employment and negotiating the labour market in Brandon.

Participant Grace recommended that newcomer professionals need to remain committed to applying for their desired jobs and be hopeful that someday they would achieve their goals:

“Be determined and remain positive. As small as [Brandon] is and you know it may take time, the challenges will not last forever. So, just be positive and be determined you will get there. You know, they should keep searching and keep putting out their CVs for job applications. If they are hopeful, then you know they will get there someday.”

Participant Alem added:

“I am an optimistic person. I have a positive attitude towards life, human beings, and society. So, I was hopeful that things were going to be fine when I moved to Canada. I believed that I was well prepared for any challenges or to cope with any circumstances in life. So, because of all these experiences, I was positive about life [in Canada] and I want newcomers to do the same.”

The participants asked newcomer professionals to be hopeful, determined, and positive about the future in the new environment. Participant Ola suggested that newcomers should build social networks within their ethnic community to realize a sense of familiarity and belonging, as well as to get information to navigate the labour market in Brandon. Ola shared based on his experience:

“You need to consult and talk to [your] people. You won’t even know anything about it if you say you want to be on your own. The best thing is actually to interact and socialize [within your community]. That is what has helped us.”

Participant Akin also shared how he built a network within the immigrant community during one of the trainings he attended in the community and how that experience had helped him to realize a sense of belonging in Brandon. Alem shared a similar experience:

“My classmates, the people who were taking the training are also immigrants and we had to inform each other about jobs, you know, referring, recommending, and so on. So, I have to respect them and learn from them. Share my experiences with them, believing in our capacity and pushing each other to seek more.”

The immigrant community and ethnocultural community of the participants provided them with a sense of place, comfort, affirmation, and belonging that gave them stability and helped them to remain determined and positive.

Two participants stressed the need to be patient when seeking employment and provided personal experiences for how they navigated and negotiated the complexities of finding their desired work in Brandon. Ola expressed that:

“When I moved to Canada, I was really tensed up about getting a job, you know, so I will tell [newcomers] to be calm. The advice I would give to [newcomers] and what I learned was, you have to first look for a job in the night, so that you have the opportunity in the day to apply for what you really want for yourself, and you would also have the time to go for interviews during the daytime.”

Alem added:

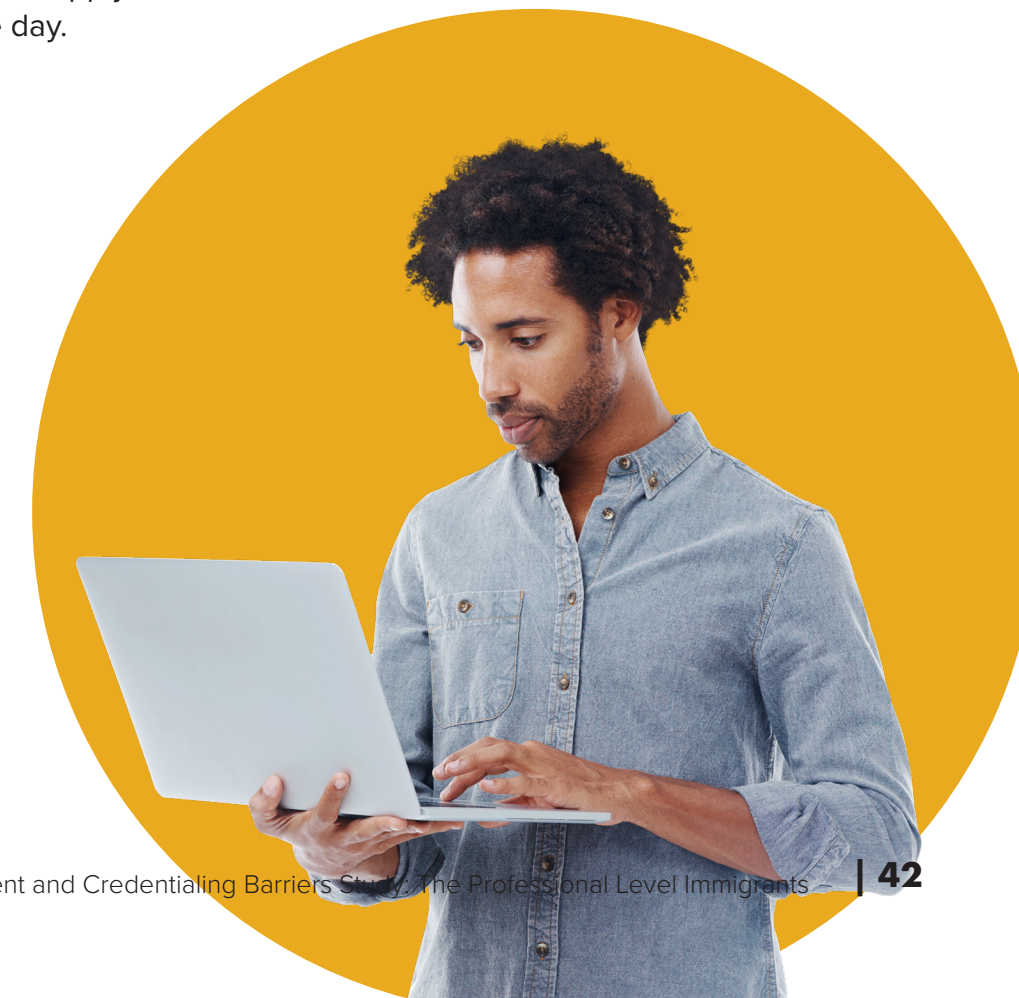
“[I said to myself], I would not expect anything or a miracle [when I get to Canada]. So, I will have to calm down, navigate the environment and really pay attention to the area where I can fit in. so, two things, prepare yourself and build your confidence with less expectations at the same time.”

Participants Alem and Ola added that their openness to information and their willingness to adapt and to identify opportunities within the community were important components that helped them to navigate the Brandon labour market. The two participants suggest that newcomer professionals need to believe in their skills, abilities, and education and that with persistence and perseverance newcomers to Brandon would find at least a job they would appreciate.

The participants provided some suggestions for newly arrived professionals in Brandon. They asked newcomers to be committed to applying for jobs, demonstrate positive attitudes, and be hopeful for the future. The participants suggested that newcomers need to make personal connections with their ethnocultural community for social support that would keep them grounded and help them realize a sense of belonging within the community.

They also asked newcomer professionals to remain calm, to have confidence, and to trust the process while they persist and persevere with finding their desired jobs. One participant suggested that newcomers need to work night shifts for a period of time so they can apply for jobs and attend interviews during the day.

Lastly, participants recommended that newcomers should be open minded about finding employment in the fields that are similar to their careers and push themselves to recognize work opportunities within the community.



Summary

The professional level immigrants in this study moved to Canada between 2011 and 2022 and possessed skills, experience, and educational qualifications that have positioned them to be gainfully employed in Brandon. They have also worked in different sectors that include private business, local or national government, non-for-profit agency, multi-national charitable organizations, and public education. The participants have worked in their professions between seven and 20 years.

They migrated to Brandon for a number of reasons and based on the information they got from their close relatives living in Brandon:

- 1 Better career opportunities**
- 2 For their children to thrive in a better environment & have a better future**
- 3 For conducive, welcoming, predictable, safe and economically cheap and stable environment**
- 4 The opportunity to experience good quality of life**

The participants were optimistic and glad to begin their lives in their new home. As such, the participants described that they were hoping to find jobs that are based on their qualifications, skills, and experience. They expressed disappointment and frustration that their expectations did not match the reality of Brandon.

For example, many of the participants were puzzled they could not find jobs in their professions or employment that commensurate with their qualifications, skills, and experiences when they arrived in Brandon. Two of the participants expressed that they were not disappointed when they arrived in Brandon because they did not set any unrealistic goals.

They understood that they needed to make efforts and sacrifices to achieve their career objectives. Some of the participants also realized that they needed to get credentialed or go back to school to find suitable employment in their chosen professions. The participants used different online platforms such as LinkedIn, Glassdoor, E-Brandon, and indeed to search for employment. They also used social media platforms, like WhatsApp, and joined groups to get information related to employment. Some of the participants expressed that they went to WIS for employment assistance.

The participants were persistent with looking for employment in their fields and worked to understand the Brandon labor market. They got employed in several different jobs. Some of the participants found employment in low paying and high-risk jobs, but they still appreciated the new knowledge they were gaining from their current employment. Some of the participants expressed that they enjoyed their current job compared to their past employment. For example, two participants work in social services providing support for newcomers. Another participant got employment that help him to move within and around the province.

The participants described the non-recognition of credentials, lack of Canadian work experience and work reference, as the challenges or barriers to finding suitable employment in Brandon. The participants expressed that the process of getting credentialed is expensive, complex and time consuming.

As such, the participants could not transfer their qualifications to be able to find work. Participants provided some suggestions for how local and national government can better support professional level immigrants with a straightforward credentialing process. They asked the government to consider providing supervision opportunities, and ongoing training, for example. They also hoped the government would find alternative ways to evaluate newcomers and reach out to their references outside of Canada. Some of the participants experienced depression, frustration, and financial instability because of these barriers.

One participant also confirmed that employment barriers can negatively affect relationships. As such, they asked for the phrase “Canadian work experience” to be eliminated for newcomer professionals, so they do not get stuck in menial jobs. Attention to these barriers would lead to economic stability and growth for newcomer professionals. Additionally, reducing barriers to employment would support employers of labor as they seek to fill positions when they lack qualified applicants.

The ethnocultural communities of the participants provided support for them when they arrived in Brandon. For example, the communities provided informational, emotional, instrumental, and affirmational support that are important for the participants’ adjustment and integration, as well as for them to find meaningful employment in Brandon. The participants stayed connected with individuals within their church communities that helped them with finding employment.

One participant described the instability within his cultural community group that resulted from conflict in their country of origin. This conflict has continued to negatively impact individuals within his community in Brandon. Overall, the ethnocultural communities of the participants have helped them to navigate the complexities of their new home environment.

The participants in this study shared their experiences with WIS programs and services that have helped them with employment, social integration, adaptation, and adjustment in Brandon. WIS provided the participants with information about job vacancies, facilitated direct contacts with employers for them, prepared participants for job interviews, for example.

Participants shared and praised how the bridging to employment program called MALTI has supported newcomers to find meaningful work within the community.

They also described other meaningful programs and services such as the interpretation program, the Welcome to Brandon program that provided newcomers with accurate information about owning houses and understanding Brandon neighborhoods, for example, that WIS offers within the community. They described the employment team at WIS as friendly, open, respectable, supportive, inclusive, respectful, and positive.

The participants provided recommendations for the government, employers, WIS, and newcomer professionals. They suggested the need for inclusive, empowering, and adaptable employment policy for newcomers.

The participants emphasized the benefit of this initiative to the local community and to the province. The participants asked the government to recognize the talents within the community and effectively channel these resources to create sustainable economic growth in Brandon and Manitoba.

They asked the government to consider many of the issues around credentialing that are preventing newcomer professionals from securing employment in their professions and suggested that the government should provide alternative ways to assess the skills and qualifications that newcomers are bringing from their countries of origin.

One of the participants recommended that government needs to create entrepreneurial programs to encourage and empower newcomers who are willing to consider that path. She stressed that there are newcomer professionals who have great business backgrounds and that they should be given the opportunity to become self-employed.

She suggested that government can provide support in terms of loans and subsidies for newcomers to successfully become entrepreneurs.

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The participants agreed that government needs to increase funding for the existing newcomer programs and services within the community, particularly the MALTI initiative offered by WIS.

The participants also asked employers of labor in Brandon to support newcomer professionals by encouraging observation periods, internship, and mentorship for them to transition into the labor market and work culture. As such, participants suggested that employers need to find ways to support newcomers' successful integration into the workplace. The participants asked for fairness in the recruitment process for newcomers to have a chance of working in their professions.

The participants in this study recommended the need for WIS to be active and persistent in communicating with the government the current challenges that newcomers are facing in the community. They suggested that WIS could provide support for newcomers in career counselling, encourage newcomers to take courses that would give them advantage in the labor market, for example.

Although the participants agreed that WIS was already doing a great job within the community, but they stressed that many of their programs and services could be strengthened and improved. They suggested that WIS needs to find ways to provide programs and services that are sustainable to help newcomers achieve their potentials.

They recommended more bridging to employment programs, so that the human capital within the community would be utilized. The participants asked WIS to create more awareness around equity, diversity, and inclusion within the community.

They suggested that WIS could organize workshops and then invite organizations to attend resulting in a reaffirmation of the values and benefits of hiring immigrants within the community.

The participants also asked WIS to organize community consultations where they can have the opportunity to discuss important issues and collaborate to develop pathways for newcomers to successfully integrate into the labour market. The participants stressed the importance of this collaboration as crucial to the development and growth of Brandon.

The participants provided recommendations for newcomer professionals who are arriving in Brandon based on their experiences with the labor market. They asked newcomer professionals to be positive and determined in their new home environment and that they need to be persistent in their approach to finding employment

Although the participants recognized that newcomers would encounter challenges in terms of employment in the first few months of their arrival, however they encourage newcomer professionals in Brandon to be hopeful about the future. They also encouraged newcomers who are arriving in Brandon to consider building social networks within their ethnocultural communities because these communities might provide significant support that would help them realize a sense of belonging and connection to Brandon.

One participant asked newcomers to consider finding overnight employment that would allow them the time to apply for jobs and attend interviews during the day. Lastly, the participants suggested for newcomers to be open to information regarding employment and be willing to adapt and identify job opportunities in their environment.

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