



ROUNDTABLE DEBRIEF

Improving our understanding of temporary migrants in Canada

A report on the critical reflections, challenges and strategies for data analysis identified in a roundtable held October 2, 2020.

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The Data and Methods Lab at CERC Migration brought together a select group of academics and researchers in an online roundtable to critically assess the challenges associated with accessing data and information on temporary migrants in Canada. Temporary migrants are one of the least understood and researched categories of migrants in Canada; and yet they comprise a significant cohort of migrants who participate in the Canadian economy and society and who transition to permanent resident status. The event generated an informative and rich discussion on how to access data, design analysis, create new data sources and promote collaborations that help to improve our understanding of the social characteristics, employment trajectories and integration of temporary migrants, as well as the settlement and integration experiences of those who transition to permanent status.

Part I) Researching Temporary Migrants

In the first round of discussion, participants highlighted the difficulties associated with accessing information on the diverse categories and sub-categories of temporary migrants in Canada and proposed strategies to produce new data and information.

Challenges and Data Gap

A wide range of challenges was emphasized, including the irregular release of data, the lack of disaggregated data focusing on various groups and sub-groups of temporary migrants, the difficulties associated with data provision and technical challenges, such as limited data on the existing stock of migrants, and the complete absence of data on high-skilled temporary foreign workers who come to Canada under the International Mobility Program (IMP). These challenges make it difficult to examine the management of temporary migrants and their labour market

outcomes, particularly for high-skilled IMP workers before and after they become permanent residents.

Generating New Data

Developing a new database through a survey will help to overcome some of these data gaps and challenges. Designing a survey instrument that can identify and represent a sampling frame from the temporary migrant population will be crucial but difficult, as most temporary residents, especially IMP workers, are hard to trace, reach or remain in contact with due to the absence of any pre-existing sample frame.

One effective solution to this problem would be to conduct a series of surveys at small-scale geographic levels, such as community/neighbourhood or municipal levels. Such location-specific studies would allow us to get a good representative sample that captures the heterogeneity of different kinds of temporary migrants.

The sampling frame would be extraordinarily dynamic, but with the use of complex modelling techniques we may be able to start providing data that shows social and employment outcomes of comparatively less-studied groups of temporary migrants, such as high-skilled temporary foreign workers and post-graduate work permit holders.

Qualitative Study

Parallel to surveys, undertaking complementary, qualitative case studies through interviews and focus groups is another effective strategy to reveal experiences of a particular group of temporary migrants as well as the social processes that shape their experience. However, researchers will need to maintain a critical outlook, since the research process can shape the outcome, i.e., who is asking the questions (researchers, representatives of government organizations or service providers, etc.), which can influence the response of the participants.

Analysis Strategies

A framework of analysis needs to be established when designing the surveys and qualitative studies. An effective framework should incorporate three aspects: recruitment, retention and settlement of temporary residents across geographic locations.

- Intentionality captures migrants' plans before and after coming to Canada and how intention differs by streams, occupational categories and visa types, and examines how the differences across these groups impact their employment trajectories and pathways to transition.
- Retention helps to investigate whether migrants stay in the place at which they arrive, and figures out the mismatch between what they plan and do, especially in small cities where retention rates are comparatively lower than big cities.

- Finally, since temporary migrants are not eligible for government-funded settlement services, it is crucial to examine how temporary migrants navigate services and build social networks, and how their experiences are different from those of landed immigrants who have access to settlement services.

This kind of comprehensive framework will help to address the data gaps and politics of data collection while emphasizing community provision, social capital and migrants' rights, all of which are overlooked in existing databases.

Part II) Strategies to Analyze the IMDB and Settlement Services Modules (SSM)

The group discussed a number of strategies to analyze the IMDB-SSM, focusing on how the changes in policy over the last few years, especially how the emergence of a two-step migration process for temporary migrants, influences their use of settlement services as they transition to permanent status and their subsequent integration.

Pre-arrival Services Are Crucial

The examination of pre-arrival service use would be helpful to understanding who had access to services like counselling and orientation programs and whether they fared better in the job market, as presumably they would have more access to some of the soft skills that employers are increasingly looking for.

A Critical Look at the Services

A critical investigation of the nature of services that are included in the database is crucial since the data captured only general information on services that are funded federally. In reality, services are often developed by settlement providers in response to local requirements. The limitation of information on services needs to be recognized when reporting the analysis.

Involving Settlement Agencies

To ensure the analysis is comprehensive, researchers should collaborate with settlement agencies to understand how the agencies interact with the database, what their expectations are and if they use the data to improve service delivery. Such collaborative research will enable service providers to participate in the analysis and dissemination of findings and facilitate the development of future programs that bring mutual benefits for the agencies and the migrants.

An Intersectional and Comparative Lens

An intersectional and comparative framework of analysis is strongly recommended to investigate how gender, race and migration status, and other social characteristics

shape the use of services in cities as well as small towns and rural areas. An inter- and intra-group comparative approach across different geographic areas is also crucial to understanding the relative impact of service use on landed immigrants and the different streams of temporary migrants who obtained permanent status. The location-specific comparative analysis should be designed by keeping in mind the gendered and racialized processes that shape labour market opportunities and barriers for immigrants.

Longitudinal Analysis

Taking advantage of the longitudinal aspect of the IMDB, an examination of the temporal dimension of service use is necessary to improve our knowledge of how service needs of diverse groups change, especially for permanent residents who transitioned from temporary status. The increase and decrease in the use of a specific type of service indicates the varying degree of integration over time. With the progression of time, some residents might use more services or vice versa, indicating their differential needs and settlement experiences.

Mixed-Methods Approach

Given the constraints associated with data privacy and disclosure that often prevent researchers from accessing data on a small group of people or a small geographic location, it is important to adopt a mixed-methods approach to complement the IMDB database. Along with filling the data gap, qualitative case studies will help to reveal the social outcomes of engaging with settlement services, such as what kind of social network immigrants build as they access services and which factors shape some immigrants' ability to access settlement services over others.

The group concluded the workshop with ideas of collaborative initiatives between CERC Migration researchers, experts, and service providers to develop the analytical framework for the IMDB-SSM as well as to design and execute the survey of temporary migrants.