

EVIDENCE BRIEF

Immigration Experience of Francophones in a Minority Language Context in Canada: Challenges and Implications

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Francophone immigrants are a growing community and an important part of the Francophone minority population of Canada. Linguistic and cultural adaptation is particularly important for the integration of Francophone newcomers. Yet integration can be problematic for those who face multiple personal, economic and social contextual factors. This study explored the challenges faced by Francophone immigrants and the impact on their integration into Francophone minority communities (FMCs).

KEY FINDINGS

Individual interviews with Francophone immigrants living in Ottawa, Saskatoon and Winnipeg revealed nine categories of interconnected challenges they faced following their arrival to Canada, specifically: language barriers, employment, disorientation, climate, isolation and difficult social integration, financial insecurity, housing, discrimination and transportation.¹

- **Language barriers** represent a significant challenge for a majority of Francophone immigrants. Although Canada is a bilingual country, English is the dominant language outside of Quebec, which can often hinder one's ability to find a job, access health services in French and integrate socially.
- Many mentioned the challenges surrounding the **search for employment**. Beyond a lack of proficiency in the main language, previous education or work experience abroad is often not recognized in Canada, which can require a return to school and can have a direct impact on the well-being of newly arrived individuals. In the absence of employment, financial security becomes precarious, which has a direct impact on the search for adequate housing that is near the workplace, offers a healthy environment for their family, and is situated near the ethnic community to which they belong.
- The **disorientation** or sense of being "lost" in the Canadian system leads to challenges in finding housing, enrolling children in school or accessing government services. These challenges are compounded by a fear of assimilation, a loss of cultural identity and a lack of social networks, all of which contribute to feelings of isolation.

¹ Here we present the three most commonly reported challenges. We encourage reading the entire article for a detailed discussion of the other challenges.

REPERCUSSIONS

The challenges that Francophone immigrants faced after arriving in Canada had an impact on their mental health, interpersonal relationships and physical health.

- **Mental health:** most Francophone immigrants shared that they had experienced negative emotions or feelings after arriving in Canada as a result of the stress that seemed to be pervasive; including feelings of depression, anxiety, sadness, loss of self-esteem and mood disorders.
- **Impact on interpersonal relationships:** Difficulties in finding a job, financial insecurity and the distance from one's social networks in their country of origin are at the heart of interpersonal breakdowns, which contribute to feelings of isolation.
- **Physical health:** Immigration can also have negative consequences on physical health. For examples, participants experienced cardiovascular problems, stomach ulcers, headaches, non-specific pain, respiratory disorders, sleep disorders, menstrual problems, joint problems, and weight gain or loss. These difficulties are mainly attributed to the stress of immigration.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The results of this study support the development of strategies to facilitate the integration of Francophone immigrants. For example, it is suggested that:

- the federal government informs immigrants of the realities of the Canadian context and the specific challenges of the minority language context before they arrive in Canada;
- the federal government creates Francophone immigration corridors that recognize the professional experience and training obtained abroad;
- host communities and organizations be mindful of the well-being of newcomers by enhancing their efforts to facilitate employment and financial stability.

MODERATING FACTORS

The effect of the challenges associated with immigration, however, appears to be moderated or influenced by a combination of factors.

- **Aggravating factors:** Having children or dependents is an additional source of stress. A lack of support from the host community amplifies the challenges faced (such as finding a job, navigating the public service system or isolation). The accumulation of challenges can overwhelm available resources and result in a state of burnout.
- **Protective factors:** Social support upon arrival is considered essential to reduce the impact of such challenges. Reconnecting with family members or friends who are already in Canada and are familiar with the public service system can facilitate integration. The same is true for the level of reception of the host community and the presence of Francophone organizations that support newcomers. Finally, some personal factors were reported as sources of resilience, including having realistic expectations, a positive attitude, a desire to integrate fully, a religious faith and being well prepared before arrival.

For more information, see: Archambault, H., de Moissac, D., Levesque, A., Kinkumba, B., Gueye, N. R., Tempier, R., & Alimezelli, H. T. (2021). [Expérience d'immigration de Francophones en contexte linguistique minoritaire au Canada: défis et répercussions sur la santé mentale](#). *Reflets*, 27(2), 113-148.

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This evidence brief was developed in partnership with the Ontario SPOR Support Unit Francophone Initiative. Visit us at <https://savoirmontfort.ca/en/francophone-initiative/>