Chapter 5
Precarity, Opportunity, and Adaptation: Recently Arrived Immigrant and Refugee Experiences Navigating the Canadian Labour Market

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5.1 Introduction

Canada relies on immigrants as key drivers of the country's population and economic growth. Composing a quarter of the Canadian labour market, immigrants accounted for over 80 per cent of population growth between 2017 and 2018 (Yssaad & Fields, 2018; IRCC, 2020). Recognising this benefit, the federal government has projected increasing admission levels by 1% of the population and reach 451,000 new permanent immigrants per year by 2024 (IRCC, 2022a). Yet beyond the numbers, and despite clear advantages of a smooth transition into the Canadian labour force, many migrants and refugees experience a multitude of barriers that impede their earnings and pathways to sustainable livelihoods. Research has examined various dimensions such as skill devaluing (Bauder, 2003; Creese & Wiebe, 2012), the effects of neoliberal restructuring (Bhuyan et al., 2017; Hiebert, 2006), bias and discrimination in hiring practices (Esses et al., 2007; Fuller & Martin, 2012), the role of points-based selection policies (Sweetman & Warman, 2013; Warman et al., 2015), and the impact of familial structures (Dyson et al., 2019; Shields & Lujan, 2019). Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic has introduced new dimensions that interplay with existing labour market barriers and enablers facing newly-arrived immigrants and refugees. In particular, job loss as a result of the pandemic was more significant for recently-arrived immigrants, who saw a reduced employment rate during the initial months of the pandemic compared to Canadian-born workers (Cornelissen & Turcotte, 2020).

The study presented in this chapter examines the employment-related needs, experiences, and aspirations of recently-arrived immigrants and refugees in the

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Greater Toronto Area. Using qualitative data collected through narrative-biographic interviews, the chapter presents first-hand experiences of individuals as they navigate labour market policies, settlement dynamics, and personal circumstances during their initial years in Canada. We have purposefully selected people from a variety of socio-demographic backgrounds, professions, country of origin, and migration pathway to Canada. We did not distinguish in terms of security of status (e.g. temporary migrants vs refugees or permanent residents) but rather in terms of not having arranged a job prior to coming to the country and hence not having had the chance to fully connect their pre- and post-migration experience.

The study's focus is on migrant agency in relation to labour market integration in their new country of residence. We specifically want to explore how pre-migration conditions and experiences inform their actions upon arrival and at a later stage. Our approach is inspired from a contextual understanding of migration as not simply about where one wants to go and what one wants to achieve but also about who one wants to become (Collins, 2017; Bal, 2014). We are particularly interested in how migrants assess their options and take action, reflecting also on past experiences, desires, and expectations, as well as how such information and experiences may be selectively processed in ways that favour some options over others (Koikkalainen & Kyle, 2016).

We chose the narrative-biographical approach because we feel this offers a special tool for connecting pre-migration experiences, expectations, conditions experienced, and the effort to shape such conditions and improve one's work position and overall employment situation. As we explain in the next section, migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees face significant barriers upon arrival in Canada, particularly underemployment and down-skilling. Thus, our study aims to contribute to a better understanding of how such barriers are navigated and superseded in different ways. Overcoming these barriers may involve improving one's professional situation but for others may involve setting on an alternative course of action. This chapter focuses on critical events and emerging reflections through the uncovering of specific 'turning points' and 'epiphanies' that arose as interviewees identified their experiences and needs in seeking employment. Turning points, significant life events or changes in circumstances, and epiphanies or transformational realisations about one's life or situation are conceptual markers that allow us to uncover and map the experiences and responses of individuals as they navigate labour market settlement in a new country. Linking the individual trajectories with broader structural conditions, we also employ the notion of precarity to make sense of the structural barriers that migrants face in their labour market integration journey.

The chapter is organised in four sections: first, we provide a brief overview of Canada's family, humanitarian, and economic immigration streams, including recent demographics and policy shifts with a view to presenting the context within which our biographical analysis is situated. We then discuss our methodological approach and the benefit of examining labour market settlement through micro-level analysis. The third section delves into the experiences of interviewees, mapped through the lens of central turning points and epiphanies. Here we also provide critical analysis

of existing policy interventions that pertain to the experiences revealed through the interviews. The final section provides a typology and discussion of actors that catalysed significant events and experiences for the interviewees, contributing to individual trajectories of labour market settlement.

5.2 Immigrant Labour Market Settlement: The Canadian Context

Canada's immigration system includes individuals arriving through both temporary and permanent immigration streams. Although the Covid19 pandemic resulted in a significant drop in immigration rates in 2020 (IRCC, 2022a), pre-pandemic levels showed increasing numbers across programs and in 2021 there were record levels of new permanent residents accepted in the country (IRCC, 2021a). Temporary migration channels such as the Temporary Foreign Worker programme and International Mobility Program bring in the largest group of workers, with approximately 405,000 arriving in 2019 (IRCC, 2020). Of these, 15.5 per cent had their temporary work permits replaced by permanent residence status (ibid.), while the majority return to their countries of origin after two years because of restricted pathways to permanency or a desire to return (Prokopenko & Hou, 2018). Permanent admissions, on the other hand, consist of three core categories: economic, family, and humanitarian streams. The largest population consists of those arriving through economic channels, averaging 173,000 per year between 2015 and 2019 (IRCC, 2020). Family-sponsored immigration is the second largest group, with an average of 80,000 family stream immigrants arriving per year (ibid.). In 2019, India, China, Philippines, Nigeria, and Pakistan made up the top five source countries for permanent immigration, composing about half of the overall population of permanent stream immigrants (ibid.). Finally, humanitarian streams include individuals granted permanent residency through private or government refugee sponsorship, applications based on humanitarian and compassionate grounds, and refugee claimants who are granted refugee protection status. Between 2015 and 2019, an average of 49,000 people per year arrived in Canada through all humanitarian streams combined (ibid.). Over the last 10 years, over 300,000 people have made claims for asylum at a port of entry or inland office, with rates building to an average of over 56,000 per year between 2017–2019 (IRCC, 2021b). Further, it is estimated there are up to 500,000 non-status migrants in Canada (Ellis, 2015), a population that faces limited access to rights and services such as health, housing, education, employment (Nyers, 2005).

Establishing employment is an integral part of immigrant and refugee settlement. Yet many newcomers arriving through family or economic streams land in Canada without pre-arranged employment and face a multitude of barriers as they navigate the new labour market landscape. Refugees face specific challenges as a result of the often-abrupt nature of their departure that may have interrupted career and educational plans and can result in having fewer networks in the receiving country.

Refugee claimants, in particular, face precarious labour conditions as the result of insecure immigration status while waiting for their protection claims to be determined.

Across immigration streams there remain gendered and racialised dimensions to labour market settlement (Li & Li, 2013). Immigrant and refugee women, particularly those who experience discrimination on the basis of race, report a lower employment rate compared to their male counterparts (Lamba, 2008; Senthanar et al., 2019; Yssaad & Fields, 2018). There are also particular disparities on the basis of race and country or region of origin. African-born immigrants – compared to European, Asian, or Latin American-born immigrants – have consistently had the lowest employment rate of all immigrant groups (Yssaad & Fields, 2018). This disparity has been seen across immigrant streams, including high and low wage earners and education levels (Creese & Wiebe, 2012). This points to the enduring systemic racism – and more specifically anti-Black racism – embedded in the Canadian labour market, which has been core to Canada's history of colonial immigration (Calliste, 1993; Hernandez-Ramirez, 2019; Kelley & Trebilcock, 2010).

The immigration pathway through which an individual arrives has been shown to have an impact on future economic integration in Canada (Kaida et al., 2019; Krahn et al., 2000; Picot et al., 2019). Workers from refugee backgrounds, for example, have been reported to have the lowest incomes of all immigrant groups in their initial years in Canada, and are more likely to be pushed into social assistance and need for settlement services than other immigrant categories (Abbott & Beach, 2011; Kaida et al., 2019; Wilkinson & Garcea, 2017). This trend has also been found in other refugee receiving countries such as Australia, United States, Sweden, and Norway (Ott, 2013). Research has also demonstrated a differentiated labour market trajectory depending on the refugee migration pathway. There are several programmes through which refugees can seek protection in Canada, including government resettlement, private sponsorship, and the In-Canada Asylum Program for those making claims for asylum on arrival or within Canada. Picot et al. (2019), for example, found that in the first year of arrival, asylum seekers who had made claims for protection in Canada through the In-Canada programme had the highest earnings compared to both government and privately-sponsored refugees. However, after 10 years, privately-sponsored refugees showed the highest earnings compared to the other two groups (Picot et al., 2019). These diverging outcomes have been linked to policy provisions directed to particular refugee streams. The Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP), for example, which provides income support for government-resettled refugees for 12 months after arrival, includes a clawback provision, dollar-for-dollar, if the recipient earns more than half of the monthly income entitlement (IRCC, 2019a). This has been reported to discourage the pursuit of employment during the initial year to avoid losing vital social assistance (IRCC, 2016). At the same time, research has also revealed that in the long-term, refugees have one of the highest-earning growth rates, some even surpassing economic and family class migrants after an average of 10–15 years (Abbott & Beach, 2011; Kaida et al., 2019; Picot et al., 2019; Wilkinson & Garcea, 2017).

Significant increases in refugee resettlement and asylum claims in Canada since 2015 resulted in a growing number of refugee newcomers entering the labour market. Between January 2015 and April 2022, Canada resettled over 190,000 refugees (IRCC, 2022b) and accepted over 125,000 refugee claimants between January 2015 and March 2022 (IRB, 2022). While economic integration is not the impetus for refugee protection, once in Canada finding work quickly becomes a major focus of refugee newcomers seeking to support themselves and their families as they settle in a new country.

Refugees' labour market integration has risen on the policy agendas of public, private, and not-for-profit sectors. The Canadian federal government included the economic independence and integration of refugees as a core priority in a 2019–2020 departmental plan and is currently exploring the potential for skilled refugee immigration through economic streams (IRCC, 2019b). A growing rationale for the business case for refugee employment has also gained the attention of major employers, with companies such as Starbucks developing specific refugee hiring programmes (Legrain, 2017). Indeed, refugees contribute to Canada's economic fabric, composing between 11–17 per cent of newcomers since 1990 (Wilkinson, 2017). However, evidence of a prolonged 'refugee gap' in employment indicates lower economic outcomes for refugees in comparison to other immigrant groups and those born in Canada (Ott, 2013).

One key aspect of hindered employment opportunities among all immigration streams is the de-skilling and credential devaluing of immigrants arriving with education and training obtained in other countries (Bauder, 2003; Esses et al., 2007). Overqualification, defined as the circumstance 'in which university degree holders (bachelor's degree or higher) hold jobs that require no more than a high school education' (Cornelissen & Turcotte, 2020, 1), has been found to have significant impacts on immigrant employment attainment in Canada. In a study using integrated data from the 2006 and 2016 Canadian censuses, Cornelissen and Turcotte (2020) report that newly-arrived immigrants and those who obtained their education outside of Canada were more likely to work in jobs below their qualification levels. A portion of this population experienced persistent overqualification lasting 10 years or more, especially those with non-Canadian credentials in medical fields. There are not only economic consequences of this misalignment between migrant credentials and available opportunities facing individuals and their families, but also a human cost tied to diminished psychological and personal life satisfaction (Frank & Hou, 2017).

While macro-level analysis of labour market trends has provided important insights into the state of migrant and refugee employment in Canada, less is known about the processes in which individuals navigate dimensions of precarity and agency in employment-seeking and how their perspectives and experiences may differ from the policy directives of policymakers and settlement service providers. Further gaps remain in understanding the particular experiences with enablers and barriers faced within this diverse population. It is our intention to address these gaps through the following micro-level analysis and narrative accounts that speak to individual experiences navigating complex economic, political, and social terrains that intersect with job finding, skills training, and employment.

5.3 Methodology

5.3.1 Interview Recruitment and Analysis

To examine the labour market experiences of recently-arrived migrants and refugees, we employed the narrative biographic method of interviewing and analysis. A total of 14 interviews were conducted between June and August 2020. The interviewees (seven women and seven men over the age of 18) came from nine countries (Bangladesh, Cuba, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestine, and Syria). Interviewees arrived in Canada through economic, family, and humanitarian immigration streams including family sponsorship, Express Entry, and the In-Canada asylum system. The inclusion criteria required that interviewees be over the age of 18, currently live in Canada, had arrived after 2013, and belong to one of the following groups: (a) resettled refugees who came either through government or private sponsorship; (b) former refugee claimants who succeeded in obtaining legal status in Canada; (c) refugee claimants currently waiting for a decision on their claim; (d) immigrants who arrived without pre-arranged employment. Recruitment was conducted using snowball and purposive sampling. After each interview, interviewees were asked if they could provide the researchers' contact information to any individuals who met the criteria and may be interested in interviewing with us. This resulted in several individuals getting in touch with us directly. Emails were sent to contacts at community, employment, educational, and settlement service organizations and a government newcomer office, and asked to distribute an invitation to interview to their networks.

Interview transcripts were analysed using Nvivo software. A coding framework of turning points and epiphanies was developed through a process of skimming, reading, and interpretation to organise information into categories, followed by a more thorough reading for thematic analysis including pattern recognition, coding, and category construction (Bowen, 2009). The data was also analysed through the conceptual apparatus of the precarity-agency-migration nexus, with attention paid to particular impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the interviewee experiences.

5.3.2 Researcher Positionality and Ethical Considerations of Narrative Biographical Approach

The writers of narrative biographies, as well as the readers, have a role in absorbing, interpreting, and reproducing the life stories and experiences of the participant (Denzin, 2001). The researcher also holds editorial control of the participant's retelling of stories, selecting what is relevant to share in the research context depending on the study's objectives and the researcher's own positionality (Clark-Kazak, 2009). Although all interviewees were provided the opportunity to request their interview transcripts, they had no control regarding the interpretation and

analysis of their responses for the current chapter. Here, the researcher acts as a gatekeeper of the information provided during the interviews and plays a critical role in ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. To this regard, all research data in this study was anonymised and de-identified. The participants were not asked to share any sensitive or personal experiences that did not involve the project's focus on labour market settlement. However, in the course of the interviews several experiences of personal trauma and hardship were shared with the interviewer. The interviewer provided time for interviewees to have time to recollect themselves after sharing an emotional story and when appropriate guided the conversation to align with the interview scope. Participants were also provided access to resources for counselling and mental health support after the interviews. To protect participant identities, all participants were assigned a pseudonym, chosen by the participant or provided by the researcher team. Finally, the interview excerpts selected for this chapter were anonymised to ensure no identifying information was shared, such as workplaces, countries of origin, or interaction with settlement service organizations.

Given the issues discussed above, it is integral to reflect on researcher positionality and power relations throughout the research process. The authors of this study are white, straight, female, settlers in Canada, and have obtained high levels of education. The researcher who conducted the interviews is Canadian-born and a doctoral candidate with no personal experience as an immigrant. The Principal Investigator was born in Europe and immigrated to Canada in 2018. These factors, as well as being researchers from a Canadian post-secondary institution, composed a differential power relationship between the researchers and the research participants. As the study progressed, the researchers worked to maintain an awareness of this imbalance and mitigate the effects, even though this was particularly challenging in an online interview context.

5.3.3 The Narrative-Biographic Approach

This study employs the interpretive narrative method which focuses on people's life experiences and stories (Denzin, 1989). Narrative research sits at the micro level of analysis, seeking to understand the ways in which individuals observe and recount experiences and events in their own life (Creswell, 2007). The researcher's task is to then draw out reported experiences within broader contexts, which in the case of this study, is settlement into Canada's labour market. Through personal narratives we examine the factors, internally and externally, that enable or act as barriers within the process of seeking and obtaining employment.

Within the narrative-biographical method are conceptual markers of turning points and epiphanies. Turning points are significant events in one's life that 'leave permanent marks' (Denzin, 1989, 8). In line with Triandafyllidou, Isaakyan and Baglioni in this volume, we have identified two overarching types of turning points: instrumental and emotional. Instrumental turning points include events induced by external factors such as changes in immigration status, being hired at a

new job, meeting an influential mentor, or starting a new training course. Emotional turning points are reactions to events that evoke difficult emotions such as grief, sadness, or anger (such as loss of a family member, leaving one's home country, or loss of job or career), as well as events that evoke positive emotions such as joy, hope, inspiration (such as birth of a child, entering a new relationship, or getting a new job). An epiphany is a transformational realisation that results from turning points (Denzin, 2001). Epiphanies mark a change in how one perceives their life experiences and choices, where the individual may adopt a new perspective that explains their current life trajectory and interactions with factors such as employment, family, and community. Importantly, turning points and epiphanies do not take place in a vacuum, but reside within the context of broader structural, historical, and cultural dimensions that make up one's life (ibid.). The turning points and epiphanies located in the narratives in this study are found to be influenced by a multitude of factors that stem from experiences of precarity and opportunity, as well migrant agency, that accumulate along unfolding settlement paths. In our analysis we also consider 'generative' epiphanies that empower the migrant and lead to a decision to move onward, and 'withdrawing' epiphanies that may lead to a feeling of disempowerment or withdrawal, a step backwards or stagnation.

5.4 Precarity, Agency, and Migration

In mapping the turning points and epiphanies shared by participants during the interviews we draw on concepts of precarity and agency in the context of migration to examine the relationships between migration pathways and labour market settlement that participants navigated their initial years in Canada. Specifically, in the context of employment, precarity can be conceptualised along dimensions of structurally-induced economic insecurity, such as temporary versus permanent employment, income reliability, availability of employment protections and benefits, and agency in work processes (Goldring & Joly, 2014). This chapter takes the position that precarity is best analysed as an experience rather than an identity (Neilson & Rossiter, 2008). Literature has shown that employment precarity in Canada is experienced at a higher rate among groups such as racialised people, women, and immigrants (Teelucksingh & Galabuzi, 2005; Goldring & Joly, 2014; Premji et al., 2014; Lightman & Good Gingrich, 2018). Such studies reveal the rippled effects of insecure economic settlement. Premji et al. (2014), for example, in a study of racialised immigrant women in Toronto, found that structural barriers to stable work resulted in adverse impacts to physical and mental health for the women and their families.

Despite the inequality faced by migrant groups, it is also important to acknowledge the strands of agency held by individuals and groups that are used to confront oppressive structures and evoke change at micro and macro levels. Even in situations of powerlessness due to structural or social constraints, individuals and groups can enact agency through collective organising or individual choices that alter their life

course. For migrants, agency can be conceptualised as one's capacity to manoeuvre the 'archipelago' of migration and settlement dimensions that includes a variety of actors and policies – 'islands' – that lie in their path (Triandafyllidou, 2019). The landscape of labour market settlement for the recently-arrived refugees and migrants in this study is layered with dimensions of precarity, opportunity, agency, and adaption to both long-standing labour market dynamics as well as new barriers and enablers brought on by the shifting sands of Canada's pandemic affected economy.

The individual narratives shared during the interviews revealed several collective experiences such as the challenges of downward labour mobility, familial responsibilities, discrimination, the benefits of mentors and community, and hardship due to prolonged economic precarity. At the same time, there were also distinctive personal narratives and responses to different stages of settlement and employment contexts, some of which included more positive experiences with entering the Canadian labour market and finding suitable work. Examining the first-hand accounts provided by participants, we discuss the instrumental and emotional turning points that arose in the participants' stories and how they connect to insights that the respondents developed about their interactions with the Canadian labour market and more broadly about their own lives and identities.

5.4.1 Navigating Precarious Status

Within Canada's humanitarian stream, individuals who come to Canada as Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) and Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) are granted permanent residence on arrival. Refugee claimants, on the other hand, who make claims for protection through the in-land asylum system either from within Canada or at a port of entry, are subject to a tiered process of eligibility determination followed by a hearing by the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) before having access to permanent residence. Significant administrative delays at the IRB have resulted in prolonged waiting periods, growing to an average of 2 years by 2018 (Office of Auditor General, 2019). This uncertain waiting period has been shown to impede labour market participation, family reunification, and access to education and social services such as domestic tuition fees, bridging programmes, and federally funded employment and language workshops (Brouwer, 2005; Coates & Hayward, 2005; Jackson & Bauder, 2014; Renaud et al., 2003; Wayland, 2006).

Six of the interviewees came to Canada as refugee claimants. Uncertain immigration status, coupled with employer discrimination, was identified by several interviewees as a barrier to obtaining employment. The lack of secure immigration status contributed to income precarity, frustration, and stress, and was seen as a source of discrimination from employers during the hiring process. Adam, for example, was a doctor in his country of origin before coming to Canada to make a claim for refugee protection. Since arriving in Canada, Adam has applied for numerous jobs and worked in a fast-food restaurant, which he described as an

extremely degrading experience. He eventually found temporary employment coordinating a mental health programme and volunteers with refugees in his community. On several occasions, Adam was asked about his immigration status as a refugee claimant during interviews, which he felt became a source of discrimination from potential employers:

> I haven't any job. I'm just looking for a job. I apply a lot. Being a doctor, being a professional degree holder, I try a lot, but mostly they refuse me because I'm a refugee [claimant]. Why do they discriminate? Why do they discriminate with refugees and others? I don't know.

Rocky, another interviewee currently waiting for his refugee determination hearing, was also asked about his immigration status during job interviews – which he isolated as the point in which employers no longer pursued his application:

> The first thing when I was looking for official jobs, the first thing I encountered is that they were looking for someone who was a citizen. So I got some phone interviews before the actual interview, so most of them ask me what is your residency, so when I say I don't have permanent residence, they just told me "we are looking for someone for a long time, we are searching for someone who is a permanent resident or citizen." So they just stopped at that point.

Receiving permanent residency status after arriving in Canada, and the security such status provides, is an instrumental turning point for many newcomers. Yet for participants like Adam and Rocky, it is one that has remained out of reach. Instead, they contend with ongoing unpredictability because of their refugee protection status remaining in limbo. As Rocky described it, this led to feelings of being trapped in his current situation: 'Living with this uncertainty, like really living in a jail. You don't know what's going to happen after two days'. This lack of stability led Rocky to an epiphany that life had turned into one 'infinite loop' in which he had no control:

> I have to think again, every time it's like breaking a new plan. So back home that time I had some...when I arrived here I started looking for one year, after one year I had to start thinking again, kind of like beginning again. Kind of like I fall into an infinite loop. It's really hard to plan something.

Adam, who has been waiting for his hearing for over 3 years, spoke of the broader injustice facing refugee claimants: 'They are waiting for hearings. They have different issues for employment. But it's disgusting, I think. It just ruined the life of everyone'.

Another focal point of insecure immigration status that arose from interviewees was the lack of access to training and education, such as bridging programmes that require permanent residency. Restricted access to education, as well as the high cost of international student fees, has particular salience for refugees seeking to recalibrate their skills for the Canadian context (Brouwer, 2005). As Rocky shared, his plans to attend a post-secondary institution have shifted as a result of his ongoing wait for his refugee determination hearing:

> The expectation has changed, when I came and I was struggling I thought I'll start my study here. When you study you can start something. So I've been waiting for that thing to be done, that hearing thing, when that thing is done I can pay domestic fees at any college or university. It's been almost two years I've been waiting for that.

The interviewees who arrived through family or economic streams noted the positive aspects of not having to worry about their immigration status. Lisa, for example, who arrived through the Express Entry economic stream, shared how her secure immigration status enabled her to feel settled and less fearful:

> I like that I don't have to think about it. This...I'm settled. Mentally, I'm so settled. You don't want to walk around being afraid of cops, or... you know, small things, always wondering where...So, from an immigrant's perspective I think, and I know from my own perspective, coming with that paper and having that, being here legally is very important.

Certainly, gaining permanent residence status does not always translate into gainful employment opportunities, as noted by one interviewee, Sue, who had been granted Convention refugee status and permanent residency in Canada:

> Now I am a confirmed refugee, a protected person, I was thinking before because I wasn't a confirmed refugee, I wasn't getting any job, because they would say, "you're not protected you can just go anytime, we don't want to employ you for a short time". Now you are a convention refugee and still you wouldn't be able to get a job.

This was both an emotional and an instrumental turning point for our interviewees. They not only had to achieve secure status, but they had also to come to terms with the fact that they would keep facing barriers and that the onus was more on them to overcome them. This was a withdrawing epiphany that induced in several of our participants a broader sense of life in Canada as one based on waiting, struggle, and restricted opportunity.

The issue of employers requiring applicants to disclose residency status has been addressed in a Canadian provincial court. In 2019, the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario ruled in a landmark case that an employer who had asked job applicants to disclose their permanent residence status was in breach of the Ontario Human Rights Code (Haseeb v. Imperial Oil Limited, 2019 HRTO 271). The ruling made it illegal for employers to discriminate based on lack of permanent residence status. As of 31 March 2022, there were over 50,000 pending claims before the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB, 2022) – a population faced with ongoing employment precarity despite spending years in Canada. Despite recent small-scale regularisation measures, such as a temporary pathway to permanency for asylum claimants who worked in healthcare during the Covid-19 pandemic (IRCC, 2021c), there are ongoing barriers to labour market settlement in the wake of prolonged exclusion on the basis of immigration status.

5.4.2 Taking a 'Step Back' – Downward Labour Mobility

Labour market settlement encompasses more than the number of immigrants employed; it also pertains to meaningful participation in labour markets that provide a stable and enriching livelihood. Research has shown that a significant number of migrants and refugees in Canada are working in jobs that do not match their skill sets and previous employment experience in their home countries, indicating a trend of

downward occupational mobility that lessens their earning potential (Jackson & Bauder, 2014; Krahn et al., 2000; Lamba, 2008). Of the 14 interviewees, three were working in jobs comparable to those they held in their previous country of residence. Several of the interviewees described the process of 'taking a step back', where they came to understand that they would need to take on opportunities below their professional level or desired career objectives. For most interviewees, this resulted in taking survival jobs to make ends meet while attempting to enter their respective fields through additional training, networking, and ongoing job seeking.

As one participant, Penelope, explains, this hindered her self-confidence as she worried that the lower-paid job would have a negative impact on how she would be perceived by people in networking circles:

> For me, I started in a job that wasn't. . .I felt like I could do so much more. I felt so limited, like I work in a daycare and in my country, I was a psychologist. It's tough. And then for example, I have a job and I want to move on to a mental health job, if I'm going to network, what am I going to say, I work in childcare? I don't think that's going to, you know, what are they going to think? Are they going to believe that I have the skills? So that's also really hard, how do I get to that next step if what I am doing right now doesn't really show what I can do.

Rocky, an IT professional in his home country, worked as a busser in a restaurant and is looking for more entry-level work. He described the shift in his employment objectives after arriving in Canada and realising the challenges faced in finding work at his career level:

> My career objectives have changed up in a whole way. I came here unprepared, I didn't have any plans to live in another country, so without planning anything I came here, what I used to do was a decent job and everything. So it's not related to the labour intensive jobs that I am searching for right now. I was thinking at least if I can get any kind of job I'll at least be starting. I'll get some meaningful thing.

For some, this process was perceived as a stepping-stone to gain Canadian experience required by employers. Coco, an educator from Latin America who worked as a Covid-19 screener in a hospital, felt his current work experience was providing him with skills and opportunities to translate into future work opportunities:

> I mean, I am enjoying what I am doing, and as a second thought, I have to say, "Okay. This will be good for me." Because it's not forever this job. And I am trying to find a career maybe in which I can little by little move forward.

Another participant, Asad, also had a more positive outlook towards his job, which was different from his previous career in office automation technology. He explained how his current job was providing him with the necessary skills and cultural knowledge to navigate the Canadian workplace:

> Here it's a different culture, different experience. Of course, I have very good experience in my role, in my profession. But now I'm in a new country, new people, new business relationship, a new nature of the business, actually. So we need to communicate with people, we need to be close to the people, and try to perform the job with the people who are living here. It's different, different mentality, different type of relationship. So that's the reason I accepted to work part-time in [a home improvement company]. Even if it's away from my profession, from my experience, but I needed to be close to the people, to know, to learn how

> I communicate, what's the culture of the people here, and that helped a lot. Because it gave me more experience, how to communicate, how to bridge my experience and how I can contribute with the community here.

Another example is Abdul, a nutrition specialist and researcher from East Africa who faced hurdles getting his credentials recognised to start working in his field in Canada. As a result, he has volunteered, worked as a research assistant, and more recently as a personal support worker during the Covid-19 pandemic. Gary, a social services worker from West Africa, has been earning income by driving for a rideshare company. He explained how not being able to work in his field made him feel that he was unable to give back to Canadian society with the skills and experiences he arrived with and wanted to provide in exchange for living in Canada. The process of 'taking a step back' was presented by these interviewees as a process induced by requirements for Canadian experience that pulled them into lower-paying jobs below their career level. This became a turning point in their labour market settlement, where they took lower-paying jobs and often enrolled in re-skilling and educational courses at the same time. A common epiphany came forward: despite the difficulties, 'taking a step back' is a difficult yet imposed part of an immigrant's entry into the contemporary Canadian job market.

While acknowledging that the new 'migrant self' is different from who the person was before migration and accepting their new circumstances was an important turning point, we also found that for some participants this became a broader epiphany, not just in relation to their professional life. Interviewees expressed a theme of adaptation as they navigated the uneven terrain of entering the labour market as an immigrant. For example, Asad shared an epiphany that his experience with the Canadian labour market was one of adaptation rather than a transfer of skills:

> It's not easy to transfer your history to a new area, it won't happen at all. I need to adapt to the people, to the life here first, then I can transfer my experience in a way that the people here can take the benefit of my experience.

On one level, this took the form of discovering what language is suitable to describe professional identities in Canada, a hidden curriculum of norms and expectations. Penelope, who immigrated from Latin America through family sponsorship, explained her transition:

> There's a sense of professional identity that you come with and then you come here and it's like, you can't call yourself a psychologist, you can't call yourself a psychotherapist either and you have to learn, what is it that you can say. I learned to say I am a mental health professional.

Lisa, a healthcare manager from East Africa who studied and worked in the United States before coming to Canada, also described learning about the 'correct' language to use during an interview:

> One interview, I remember I qualified, and one of the managers, one of the hiring managers, was very open to me. She told me, "We can tell you're qualified by your resume. You know your stuff, but you need to understand, you're using a lot of American language. You have to learn the Canadian language." They told me that.

This exchange, as well as meeting a mentor who explained how the Canadian job market operates, was a turning point for Lisa. She came to learn about the hidden expectations of the labour market, as well as how she should be presenting herself to employers. This led to ongoing frustration with the lack of transparency in the job-finding process and what Lisa described as the 'battleground' of looking for work. Reflecting on what she wants for her life and why she came to Canada, Lisa had the realisation that she might fare better by starting a consultancy business and working for herself, as in her words, 'by the end of the day as a human being, all I want to do...I came here to Canada to have a good life, and to work'.

Babs, who arrived in Canada as a refugee claimant from West Africa, spoke about adaptation as 'part of the game':

> Everybody should be able to adapt to situations or things. Because initially when you come to a new country, a lot of people will tell you "in my country, I was the director of this. I was the director of that." But when you change your destiny, when you change where you're living now, you just have to move along with the situation of things around you. . .Some will say, "Yeah. I was a bank manager in my country and you're expecting me to come and work in the factory." That's how that's the same thing, and I owned my own business in my country, but here I am today. This is part of the game; this is part new life. It's a different thing entirely. You'll surely get to wherever you're getting to.

Beyond taking a step back, our participants also experience an epiphany of adapting, of being one's new self as demanded by circumstances in a new local labour market. Paradoxically, taking a step back was a generative epiphany that led to a feeling of agency, of taking back control even under adversity. This epiphany involved both an instrumental turning point – it was about changing career path or settling for less but also most importantly an emotional aspect of accepting that in the new country you are no longer the same 'self' as in the country of origin or previous country of residence.

5.4.3 Navigating the COVID-19 Pandemic

Unsurprisingly, a significant instrumental turning point of 2020 that impacted all interviewees was the Covid-19 pandemic. Participants' stories revealed a plurality of impacts on their employment status and well-being. For those who had not been working, the pandemic exacerbated existing fault lines of precarious labour market status. Rocky, who was focusing on getting out and networking, described the impact of the pandemic on his plans:

> I was pushing myself a bit out before the pandemic, I started doing some volunteering, so because of the pandemic, everything is shut off. I used to like pushing myself to get out, talk to people and deal with the social anxiety, but with the pandemic everything has died.

Conversely, some interviewees explained how opportunities for employment emerged as a result of the pandemic. As Lisa explained:

> It's weird. I work in the mental health field, so the one thing I'm so grateful in my field... There's always a need in the health field. So, I am grateful in that way. So, right now with the Covid, it's helping me, and I'm praying because of... It's sad that it's there, but because of my public health background, it will open more opportunities.

For others who were working when the pandemic began, the first months of the global health emergency made them appreciative of employers and union environments that maintained pay and ongoing employment during the initial lockdown months in Ontario. Babs, who installs medical equipment, was initially paid by his employer while staying home during a province-wide pandemic lockdown in Ontario in the spring of 2020. He used this time to take online training courses and volunteer in the community. As soon his employer was unable to keep paying employees, Babs applied for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), financial support from the federal government in response to the Covid19 pandemic and job shutdowns. For Babs, the prospect of looking for more work in his field was significantly hindered by the pandemic and ongoing city shutdowns, as the nature of his work requires onsite installation:

> Even when I check on jobs online, you can't really go out there because of the nature of job I want to do. Working from home isn't the nature of my job, I have to be out there on the field.

Reema was an educator in a South Asian country before coming to Canada with her children in 2018. Her husband remained in their country of origin to finish his current job, so she has had to manage the job-finding experience while taking care of her young children. Reema was completing a teacher training programme when the Covid-19 pandemic erupted. While noting the slowing of available job postings because of the pandemic since completing her programme, she explained how suddenly moving to online teaching during the pandemic has prepared her for a post-pandemic labour market in post-secondary education:

> I am very hopeful because in the middle of my teaching, it was March that the pandemic hit. I was doing my co-op in January. So I was two months already into teaching the college class when the pandemic hit. The things all together, they were changed, and they were switched to being online altogether. That was a big new learning for me also as a teacher and as a student, both at the same time. So I feel myself very much equipped to be teaching right now, because I've already been a student learning how to teach. I experienced teaching online also. That was very different from what I used to do in [country of origin]. So I feel myself very well equipped for the job sector right now.

She shared that she felt hopeful about her employment chances of getting a job after the pandemic restrictions are reduced:

> I've been applying continuously to different colleges and I'm in touch with a few of my teachers also just to know if there's any opportunity anywhere around. I know that colleges are really working hard, because a lot of people are returning back to the colleges. There are classes that are going on and people are getting enrolled in the system in the colleges. They need teachers. Obviously they do. So I'm quite hopeful that if things get a bit better, a bit more normal, then probably I can get a job.

For Penelope, the pandemic reduced the amount of risk she was willing to take in looking for a new job:

> It makes me feel like I am trapped because it doesn't seem like a lot of employment options right now. I know there are people hiring but in general seems like there are less, so it makes me...like maybe if there wasn't a pandemic, then maybe I would have quit it already and gone somewhere else. But as things are now even if I'm not completely satisfied where I'm at, I am hesitant to make a move.

The impact of the pandemic was different among female- and male-identified interviewees. Research has demonstrated a gendered element of immigrant economic settlement in Canada, with women less likely to find work than their male counterparts (Lamba, 2008; Lightman & Good Gingrich, 2018; Senthanar et al., 2019). A 2016 evaluation of Canada's resettlement of Syrian refugees found that a lack of suitable childcare was a significant factor in Syrian refugee women not having sufficient time to search for employment opportunities (IRCC, 2016). The women in our study navigated these new challenges in different ways; several indicated the challenges of balancing familial and childcare responsibilities with job-finding and their overall economic settlement. Reema, in particular, who arrived in Canada with her two children before her husband, explained the impact of taking on childcare as well as her job-finding pursuits:

> It's a personal thing for me, probably that. Because I'm living here alone and I have two small children, so I am doing things that are for...I can only commit part-time. I cannot give a full-time commitment to a job or education at this point in my life. It's majorly that.

Sue, who came to Canada as a single mother with her two children, described similar challenges: 'I have not even started doing anything, yet. I am the single mom of two kids, which is the area for me that is the most frustrating, for you to be all alone with kids and not have a job'. Rashida, a software tester from a South Asian country, immigrated to Canada with her husband and children. She spoke of the challenges of navigating her field in Canada while balancing childcare responsibilities, in addition to a lack of support in Canada as family remained overseas:

> The IT sector is always upgrading continuously, and I almost forgot many things which I learned. I need some time to practice them, to prepare me. To prepare me for a job interview. To prepare me for English-speaking and to gain some knowledge, and also for networking, but I cannot do this before my children. I do not have the support from any relatives. Also, I am not able to get any partial childcare. It will be more delayed for me to go back to the workforce. It's making me unhappy.

The additional complexities of job-searching and halted plans due to the pandemic heightened existing challenges, such as familial responsibilities and gendered dynamics. The pandemic's onset was a turning point that led to both generative and withdrawing epiphanies. For Reema and Lisa it opened up new possibilities and led them to realise that in the midst of a broader crisis new opportunities arose of which they could take advantage. For others like Sue, this situation introduced new layers of uncertainty to the already difficult process of finding work and finding a sense of stability, and led to withdrawal; as Sue expressed it, 'the only thing I want at this point is stability. When you are talking about stability, it's a job'.

5.5 The Role of Mediators in Labour Market Settlement: Individuals, Networks, and Institutions

The events and perspectives discussed above arose as individuals navigated their way through the complexities of migration, family life, job-seeking, working, and global events such as the Covid-19 pandemic. While macro level actors such as governmental agencies and policy played an important role in dimensions that impact employment opportunities like immigration status, interviewees also discussed the micro (e.g. personal and professional contacts) and meso (e.g. civil society and educational institutions) levels of actors that served to both enable and hinder the process of seeking employment in Canada.

5.5.1 Personal and Professional Networks

Several interviewees described the impact of engaging with a particular individual or group that had a positive influence on their experience with job-seeking or working. These actors ranged from unplanned interactions with strangers to family and community-based support networks. Most interviewees discussed how meeting a particular person, often unexpectedly, changed the course of their job search. Lisa, for example, noted the benefit of engaging with a mentor with a shared cultural background:

> I met with this mentor. And I think for me, the biggest blessing is...which I didn't know. . .it worked for me because she was African. We both didn't know each other, our last names were different. That connection was very important because from an African perspective, she told me some of the expectations, some of the challenges.

Lisa also described meeting other people from her country of origin who provided advice on the kinds of employment she might expect to get and how to navigate the job-seeking environment:

> They tried to tell me what things I need to do in terms of interviews, and in terms of just giving it time, because I came here thinking, okay, I'll have a full-time job. And they're like, "No, most companies here will not hire you full-time. You will start as casual" and that was very foreign to me. Just getting that information was very, very, very helpful.

Reema benefitted from learning from family members about how to navigate the initial years in Canada:

> I actually had an example of a wonderful family member who arrived. He's my brother-in-law. He completed immigration before we did. It was actually him that we saw as an example. After he went into Canada and he got settled, then we decided that we need to do it, too. If he can do it, probably I can do it. It was that. He had a very good experience. He was an engineer by profession. When he came here, he started doing his masters right away. Because of the engineering degree and the master's that he did, he got a job right away.

While meeting and learning from personal and professional contacts proved helpful in several interviewees' job searches, often serving as both emotional and instrumental turning points in the newcomer's settlement in Canada, there was also frustration from the realisation that some of the most important job-finding information would come from networking instead of more formal or organised channels. As Yasmeen described it:

> ...that concept of networking, like going to events and job fairs, it's not actually efficient...There are many jobs which are actually unadvertised. They were just recruited by networking relations, volunteers, interns. So, immigrants usually do not have access to these jobs because they are less qualified in this part, let's say. Because you cannot ask an immigrant who's coming to this country with, let's say, two kids and say, "Hey, go and volunteer." That doesn't make any sense because you should provide at least something that makes sense to him or her. So, the lack of the real information is a very bad thing.

5.5.2 *Settlement Services and Educational Institutions*

At the meso level, participants shared a variety of experiences engaging with actors such as settlement agencies and educational institutions. Several of the interviewees were disappointed with employment programmes where they felt their needs beyond resume assistance were not adequately met. Gaps in a continuation of services and feelings that agencies were more concerned with quantity of people served than the quality of programming led to a lack of confidence in the role settlement providers play in securing employment. One interviewee shared that after continuously going to an employment resource centre for assistance with her resume, there was little support for the process of looking for specific jobs to apply for and how to make the necessary connections for networking. It wasn't until the employment agency referred her to a mentoring programme that she was able to learn from another newcomer about the nuances of applying to jobs in the Canadian context as a recently-arrived immigrant. Challenges with settlement services then led individuals to rely on more personal networks. Coming to understand this process was described by several interviewees as a waste of their time, prolonging job searches and hindering their self-confidence.

Others shared more positive interactions with settlement actors. Reema, for example, spoke of the benefit of accessing settlement services and building a network through her children's school:

> I am a changed person now, yes. And definitely these settlement services, the support system that I've built around me, even from my kids' schools...I remember there were a lot of workshops for the parents volunteering in the school. I used to go to the school every day. I volunteered there for two months. There were a lot of things that were being offered to the newcomer parents, especially. So all of that, that helped me to rebuild my confidence and made me feel more comfortable here. And then by the time I went back to my college, I was ready to learn. I had overcome all of my homesickness, my anxieties, my depression. I was settled by then. So when I went into the college, I was ready to learn.

In addition, the teacher training programme she attended provided another network that supported her intentions of teaching in Canada:

> That's because you build a good network around you. Your colleagues, your teachers, everybody around you. That's a very successful programme. We had a very good group of colleagues working together. We were trained once again to be teaching. It was a wonderful programme, and I learned a lot from there. Right after we graduated, before, actually, we graduated, the pandemic hit. Afterwards, I also got an opportunity to teach. It was a cool art programme.

Attending training courses and settlement programmes provided experience in the Canadian context that many interviewees recognised was important to leveraging their skills with Canadian employers. Despite largely already having the skill sets and experience required for job opportunities, each encountered the demand for 'Canadian experience' that diminished the value of their credentials and experience outside of Canada. This led some interviewees to remove their foreign credentials from their resume and instead highlight any Canadian volunteer or training courses they had attended. The importance of Canadian experience was routinely positioned by employers and employment programmes, contributing to an epiphany for many interviewees that their previous experience was less valued. Penelope pointed out some broader questions this brought forward in the questioning of her worth as an immigrant:

> I've been told that employers want to know that you can adapt to the Canadian work culture, so my assumption is if I don't have Canadian work experience, you're assuming that I won't integrate well or I won't understand the social rules or politics of the work environment. I'm not sure. Or in my field they use a particular system to report information, are you assuming that I won't know or that I am not able to learn? I assume that you think I won't be as capable if I'm not Canadian.

In summary, our conversations with participants shone a light on a plurality of turning points that led to generative and withdrawing epiphanies and shaped how they experienced their initial years in Canada and introduction into the Canadian labour market. Table 5.1 summarises the different levels of actors and factors of intervention and non-intervention.

5.6 Concluding Remarks

The importance of Canadian networks and experience in supporting newcomers' labour market integration has been well-documented in the relevant academic literature and policy analyses. Earlier Canadian earnings (which are taken to demonstrate previous employment in Canada) for newly-landed immigrants is an important factor in shaping their initial labour market trajectories, cushioning newcomers from deskilling and downwards mobility (Crossman et al., 2020; Hou et al., 2020). It is notable that security of status – notably permanent residency and hence full socio-economic rights – does not suffice for skilled people to find jobs in their profession even if they fulfilled all the formal requirements for immigration and assessment of

Table 5.1 Typology of Actors and Turning Points

	Personal/friends/ family (micro)	Professional contacts/ employers (meso)	Civil society support (meso)	Educational/training institutions (meso)	State policies/ support (macro)
Interviewee 1	Lack of family support (–) Childcare demands (–)		Lack of free counselling (–)		Secure immigration status (+) Lack of childcare (–)
Interviewee 2	Family and friend support in job finding (–)	Discrimination – lack of Canadian experience (–)	Mentoring programme (+)		Secure immigration status (+)
Interviewee 3	Friends with shared experience (+)	Meeting a mentor with shared cultural background (+) Workplace politics and hidden expectations (–) Discrimination – lack of Canadian experience (–) Meeting a professional contact who assisted with resume (+)			Secure immigration status (+)
Interviewee 4		Contact made through networking (+)	Employment programmes (+) Mentoring programme (+)	Interpersonal skills training (+)	Secure immigration status (+)
Interviewee 5		Discrimination – lack of Canadian reference (–) Lack of networking opportunities (–)	Connections made at a non-profit centre (+) Library as resource for settlement services (+) Lack of information on job finding process (–)	Free online training (+)	Secure immigration status (+)
Interviewee 6		Discrimination – immigration status (–)	Career counselling (+)	High tuition costs with international student status (–)	Precarious immigration status (–)

Interviewee 7		Contract work (−)	No progress from networking group (−)	Recertification courses	Precarious immigration status (−) Challenges of credential recognition (−)
Interviewee 8	Childcare demands (−) Lack of familial support (−)	Discrimination – lack of Canadian experience (−)	Mentoring programme which was not helpful (−)		More secure immigration status (+)
Interviewee 9	Familial responsibilities (−)	Lack of discrimination (+) Advice from manager (+)		Employment course (+)	Precarious immigration status (−)
Interviewee 10			Exclusion from networks and organizations (−)	Reskilling courses (−)	Precarious immigration status (−) Lack of credential recognition (−)
Interviewee 11	Loss of family members (−)	Discrimination – immigration status (−)	Community from volunteer groups, giving back (+)		Precarious immigration status (−) Lack of credential recognition (−)
Interviewee 12	Husband living abroad (−) Family members as role models (+) Childcare demands (−)		Connecting with people at settlement service programmes (+)	Teachers college training (+)	Secure immigration status (+)
Interviewee 13	Lack of friends and family support (−)	Challenges of the hidden job market (−) Discrimination – Canadian experience (−)		Interpersonal skills course (+) Lack of impact of training courses in job search (−)	Secure immigration status (+) Lack of credential recognition (−)
Interviewee 14	Friends (+)	LinkedIn (+)	Co-op placement course through newcomer organization (+)	Interpersonal skills course (+) Career related course (+)	Secure immigration status (+)

their educational credentials. Several studies (Esses et al., 2007; Creese & Wiebe, 2012; Premji et al., 2014) have also documented the experiences of discrimination faced by many newcomers. This study builds on this literature and carries it further by not only looking at migrant agency, notably the capacity of migrants to navigate and overcome barriers and shape their own livelihoods, but also the interplay between cognitive and emotional aspects (notably epiphanies) that they have during the process, structural discrimination, and their concrete steps in shaping their employment situation and professional future in Canada.

Our analysis has shown that a secure legal residency status is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a positive labour market experience in Canada. While those with uncertain status – such as waiting for their asylum application to be determined – faced particularly high barriers, those with Permanent Resident status also faced hurdles as they were still stigmatised as 'outsiders' to the Canadian labour market. Assumptions by employers regarding immigrants' lack of experience in the ways in which people act, behave, or relate in Canada was even a barrier for an informant who was a qualified professional who had worked in the United States for several years before moving to Canada. Thus, our study suggests that our understanding of 'precarity' should include not just legal or economic precarity but overall as being classified as a 'stranger' or 'newcomer'. The quote from Penelope in the previous section is telling in this regard: 'I've been told that employers want to know that you can adapt to the Canadian work culture, so my assumption is if I don't have Canadian work experience you're assuming that I won't integrate well or I won't understand the social rules or politics of the work environment.'

Navigating these barriers has required several of our interviewees to take a 'step backwards' and accept mentally and emotionally that their skills, education, and professional experience are not equally valued in their new country of residence. This often came at a significant financial and emotional cost to our participants. On the other hand, it also became a source of resilience for several of our informants who took this acceptance as an invitation to change their professional path and find a career that would be feasible and rewarding in the new context. The interplay between the instrumental and emotional factors and how a 'step backwards' can lead to a generative epiphany and to migrant empowerment is a very important finding, without of course this meaning that it justifies discrimination or deskilling. It shows however how a narrative biographical perspective reveals important aspects of agency that would otherwise remain hidden.

While this research was not aimed to be a case study on the Covid-19 pandemic, it has unavoidably included the specific challenges of the pandemic times as our fieldwork developed during the summer and fall of 2020, with pandemic restrictions in full swing. The study highlights how the pandemic has become a magnifying lens of the challenges and hurdles that immigration entails and particularly for recently-arrived immigrants, but also how the turning points that it provoked led to both generative and withdrawing epiphanies. The family and employment challenges were an important aspect that conditioned the migrant workers' dealing with the pandemic.

Turning our focus to the actors that mediated and shaped the labour market integration process for our informants, we find that these can be categorised into three distinct groups: individuals, networks, and institutions. These groups of course are closely interconnected. While individual relationships included family and friends, or friends of friends, they partly overlapped also with professional networks. People met at work or at a training or settlement programme and became friends. Advisors and social workers gave important support and became friends too. At the same time these professional networks developed in various directions were often initiated as part of formal policy programmes aimed at supporting newcomers' labour market integration. While several interviewees lamented the superficial use of performance indicators (i.e., number of people served) by settlement actors, they also spoke about how some programmes fostered the insider knowledge and personal connections that they needed to navigate the labour market. What transpires as one of our most important findings, beyond the crucial dimension of full immigration status, is that the positive emotional and cognitive experiences that our interviewees had – whether in personal, informal, or formal settings – were vital for their well-being. These experiences enabled them to take decisions and move forward where possible. Even when such decisions involved settling for less or for something different than what they initially aspired, they were experienced positively when mediated by a sense of being recognised as individuals, for who they are. We should strive towards improving the relative policies and practices supporting newcomers in their labour market integration pathways, but this study also shows that beyond Canadian experience, what people need is a recognition of their individual value, history, and a secure trajectory for their future.

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