

School-Work Transition Barriers for Newcomer Youth in Alberta

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WHAT THE RESEARCH IS ABOUT

OVERVIEW: This study looked at the experiences of newcomer youth, aged 16 to 30, who were ready to make the transition from school to work, after participating in high school or certificate/diploma-level post-secondary education.

OBJECTIVE: To examine the barriers and facilitators that impact the school-to-work transition of newcomer youth in Alberta and provide community and policy recommendations to improve transition outcomes.

RESEARCH JUSTIFICATION: Newcomer youth face various challenges during their transition from school to work—including racism, communication barriers, financial literacy, limited work experience, and lack of mentorship. Nevertheless, many newcomer youth are able to successfully navigate school-to-work transitions. This study broadens our understanding of barriers and enabling factors that impact school-to-work transition for newcomer youth.

HOW THE DATA WAS OBTAINED

This study took a qualitative approach that integrated the perspectives of youth and service providers. A multi-investigator, multi-source triangulation strategy was used to analyse data and validate the findings. Interviews were carried out with four youth from Somalia and Syria, and five staff from ASCC and NorQuest College who supported newcomer youth during transition. Policy and procedure documents used to support transition efforts at ASCC were analyzed. Key themes were pulled from the interviews and documents, which were then validated by 12 community-based youth who had not been involved in the original research.

WHAT THE STUDY FOUND

Barriers that negatively impact school-to-work transition:

- › Lack of Canadian work experience
- › Lack of language fluency and educational qualifications
- › Limited social networks
- › Cultural differences
- › Poor job search strategies
- › Transportation difficulties
- › Negative stereotypes about newcomer youth

Facilitators that positively impact school-to-work transition:

- › Social networks
- › Paid employment training programs
- › Volunteer opportunities
- › Canadian educational qualifications
- › Soft skills
- › English language proficiency
- › Mentorship

RECOMMENDATIONS

- › **Mentoring:** mentoring emerged as a vital support for newcomer youth, however ASCC faced challenges finding and matching mentors to youth in transition. There is a need for mentors who share the same ethnocultural backgrounds as the youth, and for mentors who are qualified to prepare youth for the workplace.
- › **Holistic approach:** the barriers that newcomer youth encounter are interconnected; hence a holistic mitigation response is preferable over isolated efforts that target single barriers in isolation.
- › **Collaboration:** there is opportunity to leverage shared understandings to enhance collaboration among key players—such as educators, employers, and community organizations—to address barriers and facilitate transitions.
- › **Funding:** more targeted funding for newcomer youth organizations who support the transition to employment is required to address the unique challenges youth face.
- › **Further research:** this study raised additional questions around the school-to-work transition experiences of newcomer youth. Further research should examine the role of key actors and dynamics involved in successful and unsuccessful transitions, look at the parallels and differences between newcomer youth integrating into the Canadian job market from high school, college, and undergraduate/ graduate studies, and incorporate a larger geographical focus.

[View Project Webpage](#)

ABOUT CYRRC

The Child and Youth Refugee Research Coalition (CYRRC) is a network of researchers, service providers, and government partners working together to produce and share research that facilitates the integration of young refugees and their families in Canada and beyond.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Child and Youth Refugee Research Coalition.

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