



News Release
For Immediate Release
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Study finds immigrants in London and Toronto experience serious legal problems that adversely impact their lives in Canada, highlighting their need for better access to justice

On January 18, Statistics Canada released results from a [new survey](#) about serious problems or disputes experienced by people living in the Canadian provinces. In addition to this national survey conducted on behalf of the Department of Justice and other federal departments, a number of qualitative studies were commissioned to examine the experiences of specific groups in Canada.

Researchers Alina Sutter and Victoria Esses from the [University of Western Ontario](#) and [Pathways to Prosperity](#) were commissioned to investigate the experiences of immigrants living in London and Toronto. Partners on this project were the South London Neighbourhood Resource Centre (London) and COSTI Immigrant Services (Toronto). Funded by the Department of Justice and by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, their recently released research paints an in-depth portrait of the serious problems and disputes that immigrants face in these communities. The study included 21 interviews with recent immigrants and a few individuals seeking permanent residence, conducted in August – December 2020. The findings show what types of serious legal problems immigrants face; what factors seem to contribute to these problems; the strategies they used to resolve their problems; and the economic, social, and health impact of experiencing these problems. The study concludes with a set of recommendations for improving newcomers' access to justice.

Research Highlights

Overall, the serious legal problems that the interviewees faced included immigration problems, housing problems, family issues and relationship breakdowns, employment-related problems, and problems in obtaining government assistance/services. For example, an immigrant was sponsored by family members who harassed and verbally abused him and forced him to work for pay below minimum wage. These sponsors also opened credit cards in his name without his knowledge, putting him into severe debt, and eventually kicked him out of their house. This person could not find help and attempted suicide. For more examples, the full report is [here](#).

Factors contributing to serious problems of this sort included unfamiliarity with Canadian laws and individuals' rights, unfamiliarity with basic Canadian customs and norms for everyday living, self-reported discrimination, inefficient communication from the government and government agencies, and factors associated with the pandemic. The interviewees often did not know where to go to obtain help. They reported having limited networks in Canada that could help them navigate the system to resolve their problems. They tended to receive help from individuals with whom they were already in contact in some other capacity (e.g., teachers,

family doctors, settlement workers), and refugees and those who were sponsored by family members had particular difficulties because of language barriers.

Close to 60 percent of the interviewees eventually sought legal advice and representation from legal aid, paralegals, immigration consultants, and lawyers. Those who chose not to seek legal advice or to resolve their problems through the legal system indicated that they feared the consequences of pursuing legal actions and worried about the financial costs of obtaining legal advice.

Economically, interviewees reported that they were forced to borrow money, apply for social assistance, and endure poor living conditions due to the financial consequences of their legal problems. With regards to social consequences, the interviewees mentioned tensions with family members, ruined friendships, and reduced collegiality within work settings. For physical and mental health consequences, they reported sleep deprivation, headaches, blood pressure problems, stress, depression, and loneliness.

The report concludes with a set of recommendations focused on providing more information to newcomers about how and where they can obtain legal advice, and increasing the availability of affordable professional legal services for immigrants.

About The Pathways to Prosperity Partnership

The [Pathways to Prosperity \(P2P\) Partnership](#) is a national partnership funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada designed to provide an evidence base for settlement and integration policies and programs in Canada. As the leading immigration research network in Canada, P2P has a proven track record of productivity and effectiveness, completing projects for government departments and practitioners that have been widely cited and integrated into the organization and operation of these groups.

About the Network for Economic and Social Trends at Western University

The [Network for Economic and Social Trends \(NEST\)](#) is the flagship research and policy alliance in the Faculty of Social Science at Western University. NEST produces policy and practice relevant research through a multidisciplinary approach using advanced data creation, management, and analytic techniques. NEST also aims to train the next generation of applied researchers through mentorships, fellowships, and the new MA in Research for Policy and Evaluation.

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