



## Patchwork, Sidelining and Marginalization: Services for Immigrant Youth

### Key Details

#### KEY WORDS

Immigrant youth, social services,  
educational services, social justice

#### POPULATION GROUP

Newcomer youth

#### STEPPING UP THEMES

Diversity, Social Inclusion & Safety;  
Civic Engagement & Youth Leadership;  
Coordinated & Youth Friendly  
Communities

#### RESEARCH ORIGIN

Canada

#### SOURCE

Academic article (peer-reviewed)

**“The patchwork, sidelining, and marginalization of immigrant youth services compromises the future of Canada. They risk making service providers and Canadian institutions become part of the development of a subculture of defeat and marginalization, in which children of immigrant families, denied their right to equitable, quality services, face life-long underutilization of human potential.”**

### 1. What is the research about?

Canada owes much of its recent population growth to the vast number of immigrants that choose to settle in the country. While many settlement and social agencies are available to provide programs and services to these newcomers, they are often fragmented and poorly integrated.

This article provides a critical review of gaps in programs and services for immigrant youth in Canada. It assesses whether these services adequately address the complex settlement needs of immigrant youth, and also whether they foster the full participation of immigrant youth in the Canadian society.

### 2. Where did the research take place?

The study looked at the programs and services in three Canadian metropolitan centers – Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver.

### 3. Who is this research about?

The programs and agencies included in this study ranged from immigrant-specific programs provided by settlement agencies to mainstream Canadian institutions and organizations within the social services and education sectors.

### 4. How was the research done?

The author relied on the list of settlement agencies across Canada offered by the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, then used information available online to organize the youth programs and services they provided into common themes. The selected programs from settlement agencies were critiqued based on the Settlement/Integration Continuum, while the work of mainstream organizations was assessed using the Cultural Competence Continuum. Lastly, the services provided at the three school boards were also evaluated in accordance to the quality of their ESL services.

### 5. What are the key findings?

**Settlement agencies** provided general support to the youth by focusing on concrete needs such as educational or language needs, rather than the deeper issues that newcomer youth faced such as cultural identity and trauma. Most importantly, the study found that programs made little effort to connect the youth to the wider community. This produces a risk of over-reliance on youths' intra-ethnic or immigrant networks.

Programs focusing on social justice or civic participation, which could help newcomer youth cope with racism and discrimination, were also lacking.

While the **mainstream organizations** studied provided add-on services for immigrant youth, the author suggests that more work is needed to fully integrate cultural diversity into their organizational structures and to make their programs more welcoming to newcomers and visible minorities.

Lastly, the research found that while there is a great deal of ESL funding provided to **schools**, the number of GTA schools reporting ESL learners but no ESL teacher has increased drastically. ESL funding is also often misused and diverted into covering overall costs of school administration. As a result, the quality of ESL instruction for immigrant youth has suffered, and dropout rates among ESL learners are high – between 61% to 74% in Alberta.

## 6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

This study shows the gaps in the programs and services provided to immigrant youth – a group of individuals with highly complex and multi-faceted needs due to the various linguistic, psychological, economic and acculturative challenges they face. Immigrant youth continue to experience a high unemployment rate, and struggle with both physical and mental health challenges as they try to integrate into mainstream society.

A number of recommendations have been raised in light of the findings:

1. Develop comprehensive immigrant-youth-specific services that address both settlement needs and promote active community participation
2. Undertake system-wide efforts to integrate cultural diversity into organizational practices
3. Improve coordination and collaboration between settlement, mainstream social service, and education organizations

4. Provide community development supports to receiving communities to adapt and change in the face of changing youth demographics
5. Involve immigrant youth during the planning, development, and evaluation of culturally responsive and youth-relevant services
6. Increase funding for immigrant youth services
7. Develop federal, provincial and municipal policies focused on the education, resettlement and integration of immigrant youth.



Ngo, H. V. (2009). Patchwork, sidelining and marginalization: Services for immigrant youth. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 7(1), 82-100.

### FIND IT ONLINE

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/15562940802687280>