WORKING PAPERS

Online Communications and Service Delivery in Canada's Settlement Sector: The State of Affairs

Stein Monteiro, Nevyn Pillai & Masoud Kianpour

Working Paper No. 2023/01
January 2023

The *Working Papers* Series is produced jointly by the Toronto Metropolitan Centre for Immigration and Settlement (TMCIS) and the CERC in Migration and Integration

www.torontomu.ca/centre-for-immigration-and-settlement
www.torontomu.ca/cerc-migration

Toronto Metropolitan University
Canada Excellence Research Chair in Migration & Integration
Toronto Metropolitan Centre for Immigration and Settlement

Working Paper

No. 2023/01

Online Communications and Service Delivery in Canada's Settlement Sector: The State of Affairs

Stein Monteiro
Toronto Metropolitan University

Nevyn Pillai
Toronto Metropolitan University

Masoud Kianpour
Toronto Metropolitan University

Series Editors: Anna Triandafyllidou and Usha George

Toronto Metropolitan University | Canada Excellence Research Chair in Migration & Integration | Toronto Metropolitan Centre for Immigration and Settlement

The *Working Papers* Series is produced jointly by the Toronto Metropolitan Centre for Immigration and Settlement (TMCIS) and the CERC in Migration and Integration at Toronto Metropolitan University.

Working Papers present scholarly research of all disciplines on issues related to immigration and settlement. The purpose is to stimulate discussion and collect feedback. The views expressed by the author(s) do not necessarily reflect those of the TMCIS or the CERC.

For further information, visit www.torontomu.ca/centre-for-immigration-and-settlement and www.torontomu.ca/cerc-migration.

ISSN: 1929-9915

Acknowledgements and contributions

We would like to thank Dr. Anna Triandafyllidou for her support in this project. We would also like to acknowledge 2 anonymous referees for their valuable feedback that contributed to a significantly better version of this study.

We would also like to acknowledge the support provided by our settlement service partner organizations in the "Virtual bridge: Delivering settlement services through social media" project, that contributed their expertise, time and effort. The people that assisted us were:

- **Amber Gail Miller Parker** at Saskatchewan Association of Immigrant Settlement and Integration Agencies (SAISIA),
- **Elie Bahhadi** at Jumpstart Refugee Talent,
- **Sadia Zafar** at The Neighbourhood Organization,
- **Adam Khadiri** and **Melanie Veerapen** at Atlantic Region Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (ARAISA),
- **Melissa Jay** and **Lucy Sherlock** at Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC (AMSSA).

We would like to acknowledge the financial support provided by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada through the Service Delivery Improvement funding stream.

Abstract

Past studies on technology-use in Canada's settlement sector during the COVID-19 pandemic have provided varying results on the usage and effectiveness of online platforms for communications and service delivery. This has made it difficult for stakeholders to accurately assess how the sector is performing in terms of its technology adoption and adaptation to the pandemic. This study establishes a Canada-wide baseline for online platform usage, effectiveness and inclusiveness during the pandemic, with a particular focus on social media platforms. We found that only about half of Settlement Service Provider Organizations were using social media to communicate and deliver services to newcomers. Similarly, only about half found that the platforms were effective in meeting the needs of their clients. There is evidence of inclusiveness for those who were not able to use online services, but access to services among newcomers living in rural areas only moderately improved, and there is no evidence of improved access for pre-arrival newcomers. We also gathered detailed information from 30 agencies on their use of social media in the delivery of services and communicating with new and existing clients. We found that social media platform usage and effectiveness was much higher than the Canada-wide average. But the inclusiveness of pre-arrival newcomers and rural dwellers was lower. Only about half the agencies were using a social media platform for service delivery and much fewer are using it for the delivery of pre-arrival services.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements and contributions i
Abstract ii
Overview 1
Why is it important to study social media and SSPOs' communications with their clients? 2
Establishing a baseline from previous studies 4
A baseline for platform "usage" and "effectiveness" 5
How are platforms used for service delivery? 7
Online services, quality and content 9
Inclusive technology for all 10
Partners' "usage" and "effectiveness" 12
Comparing partners' "usage" and "effectiveness" against the baseline 12
How are platforms being used for service delivery? 20
Platform inclusiveness 23
What are they posting? 23
Desired states, gaps and needs in digital communications 24
Conclusions and recommendations 27
References 29

Overview

The settlement service sector in Canada has transformed considerably during the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to transform post-pandemic. Before the pandemic, Settlement Service Provider Organizations (SSPOs), even while constrained by limited budgets, were able to provide a wide array of services primarily delivered by frontline staff to clients (Shields & Abu Alrob, 2020). With the effect of the pandemic, there have been significant changes in how work is done by frontline staff in serving their clients. Most service providers have been able to continue operations online with considerable government support.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) advised its settlement and resettlement partners[1] during the initial stage of the pandemic and lockdown to focus on critical services such as providing information and orientation, setting up medical appointments, interpretation services, crisis counseling, family supports, gender-based violence supports and referrals. These services were to be provided by telephone, email or online whenever possible. In cases where critical services needed to be provided in-person, primarily to refugee clients, IRCC compensated SSPOs for pay increases to the in-person staff and for the provision of protective equipment and supplies. In addition, IRCC began to provide some flexibility in SSPOs' ability to rearrange administrative costs associated with their funding agreements. For example, it added new capital spending expenses for laptops/cell phones/tablets for employees or to loan out to their clients, covered any costs associated with remotely working employees, and announced that any accrued vacation days can be paid out to employees and claimed as an eligible expense (Government of Canada, 2021). Online settlement services continued to be expanded after the first wave of the pandemic by SSPOs supported by government funders (BMRC - IRMU, 2022).

Given the level of government support, many SSPOs were able to transition to online service delivery relatively well, while some organizations faced ongoing capacity issues that were exacerbated by the pandemic. Even prior to the pandemic some SSPOs struggled with problems of inadequate staff skills to maintain and deliver services, insufficient capacity to mobilize community support for newcomers, and limited investment in governance and strategic planning (Ashton et al., 2016). In particular, SSPOs serving in small- and medium-sized communities have been facing these issues for a long time (Dennler, 2022).

This report establishes an overall baseline to assess individual SSPOs' ability to use online communications and service delivery tools during the pandemic using 4 studies that were conducted in 2020 and 2021. After establishing this baseline from the sector-level analysis, we will use in-depth survey data collected from 30 SSPOs to compare against the sector-level results.

As a part of a larger IRCC-funded project "Virtual bridge: Delivering settlement services through social media", we are partnered with 7 settlement service agencies across Canada. The agencies we are working with are (1) Accessible Community Counselling and Employment Services (A.C.C.E.S. Employment), (2) Jumpstart Refugee Talent, (3) The Neighbourhood Organization, (4) Atlantic Region Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (ARAISA), (5) Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC (AMSSA), (6) Saskatchewan Association of Immigrant Settlement and Integration Agencies (SAISIA), and (7) Immigrant Employment Council of BC.

Each organization is different in terms of services they provide and the type of clients they serve. SAISIA, ARAISA and AMSSA are associations of settlement service agencies in Saskatchewan, Atlantic region and British Columbia, respectively. The Immigrant Employment Council of BC is an employer-focused organization in Vancouver that aims at advancing the labour market position of newcomers by providing resources directly to employers so they can

[1] Referred to as "agreement holders" according to the IRCC Settlement and Resettlement program terms of funding.

hire newcomers more effectively. We do not include the Immigrant Employment Council of BC in this analysis because of their unique mandate. Finally, A.C.C.E.S Employment, The Neighbourhood Organization and Jumpstart Refugee Talent are members of the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) association but are considered as independent in this study. The data that we collect in this study is composed of 2 independent agencies, 10 SAISIA members, 8 AMSSA members and 11 ARAISA members, totaling 30 SSPOs.

Aside from the 4 prior studies and the data collected from the 30 SSPOs, we also use data collected from social media management platforms (i.e., Hootsuite and Sprout Social) from the partner organizations. While we look at all online tools in this study, closer attention is paid to the social media platforms that they are using to communicate and deliver services to clients.

Why is it important to study social media and SSPOs' communications with their clients?

In a recent study about newcomers' use of social media (Monteiro, 2022), about 62% of immigrants and permanent residents reported they use social networking websites and applications for any purpose, and 82% of newcomers specifically used it to connect with a person or group regarding immigration before coming to Canada. Facebook, QZone (a social networking site based in China), online discussion forums, LinkedIn and WhatsApp are among the widely used platforms to connect with family/friends living in Canada (Monteiro, 2021). For newcomers, social media is a major tool to learn about life in Canada, connect with people, and get information about needed services. In a similar vein, service delivery through social media is becoming an important component of SSPOs ability to serve their clients. Social media-based communication can disseminate timely information and promote services to new and existing clients in the face of unpredictable circumstances such as those caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, in addition to "what" services are being delivered, SSPOs are increasingly paying attention to "how" they are delivering services.

In the Settlement Sector and Technology Task Group study (Campana & Liu, 2022), 64% of SSPOs assessed client's digital literacy at intake and asked them about their communication preferences[2]. Similarly, 72% of SSPOs in the Digital Messaging for Settlement and Integration (DMSI 2021) study asked clients about their communication preferences at intake. During the pandemic, 94% of frontline staff (and 94% of management staff) indicated they found new ways of engaging newcomers[3]. We expect such digital literacy assessment practices to continue in the post-pandemic phase as more SSPOs expand services to hard-to-reach clients, such as those living in rural areas, pre-arrival newcomers, and those living with a disability. 87% of the management staff at SSPOs indicated that they were very likely or somewhat likely to expand their digital services post-pandemic[4]. Not surprisingly, among the future skill requirements within SSPOs, social media strategists, social media managers, website development and online communications skills were mentioned 72 times[5].

Interestingly, clients have adapted well to this new mode of remote service delivery. The Association of Canadian Studies-World Education Services (ACS-WES 2021) found that among those who used settlement services remotely (N = 132), 78% were very comfortable with using technology to access settlement services. In terms of SSPO staff's ability to use online technologies, studies are confident that digital literacy or skills among staff is not a major problem. However, we believe that while staff are skilled at using digital services, there is a disconnect between how those skills are being utilized. For example, in the aforementioned study, only 7%

[2] See question 8 in the study.

[3] See questions 22 and 56 in the Settlement Sector and Technology Task Group (SSTG) study.

[4] See question 60 in the SSTG study.

[5] See question 62 in the SSTG study.

of newcomers (N = 456) indicated that they found information about settlement services through a social media channel, but 9% were using social media for finding immigration policy information, 9% for training information, 11% for health policy information, 13% for general news about Canada, and 17% for employment opportunities. And among those who used a settlement service (N = 148), only 22% indicated they found them through a social media channel (ACS-WES 2021). This evidence indicates that newcomers are using social media for various reasons but not primarily for finding settlement services. This, we believe, is caused by the fact that service providers do not appear to have a visible presence on social media channels yet.

Social media has some advantages for newcomers over traditional media (i.e., telephone, email or in-person interactions): (1) it is easier to connect with family/friends on social media as well as make new connections, (2) it is relatively cheaper than telephone to access, (3) informal information networks have personalized information that cannot be obtained from formal settlement services, and (4) it is optimal for getting small pieces of information rather than investing time and effort in the full set of settlement services. But there are also some disadvantages: (1) information passed on social media can be untrustworthy, (2) sharing personal information online can put one at risk, (3) people need to know what they are looking for in advance because there is no needs assessment being conducted and referrals are minimal, and (4) there are varying socio-economic characteristics that impact newcomers' ability to effectively use social media platforms (i.e., the digital divide). Despite these disadvantages, social media usage among newcomers is growing and SSPOs need to meet their clients where they are.

Aside from meeting the target audience (i.e., newcomers) on social media, there are direct advantages for SSPOs in using these new platforms. In particular, SSPOs can use social media to increase public visibility of the services they offer, promote new initiatives, seek feedback from clients, build brand awareness and engage with the community (Albanna et al., 2022). Generally speaking, there is evidence that service delivery through social media increases brand trust (Gartner et al., 2021), strengthens relationships with other organizations and volunteers (Hou & Lampe, 2015), creates a sense of community with new and existing clients (Lovejoy & Saxton 2012), but is only moderately successful in fundraising (Albanna et al., 2022; Hou & Lampe, 2015; Nah & Saxton, 2013).[6] However, using social media to meet an organization's goals (i.e., fundraising, building brand awareness, community building or promoting services) is a skill that needs dedicated staff, resources and a strategy (Hou & Lampe, 2015). There are many factors that organizations must consider. For example, what is the most effective social media channel for particular types of content (Gartner et al., 2021; Hou & Lampe, 2015) and whether the organization's strengths in in-person service delivery can be translated onto social media platforms without compromising on service quality outcomes and processes?

This paper will provide the background knowledge about SSPOs' use of social media platforms to connect with newcomers and deliver services. The following section will provide an in-depth review of the data and reports produced by related studies on technology use among SSPO staff in Canada to establish a set of baselines for the sector. The baselines will then be compared with our own partners' use of technology to communicate and deliver services to newcomer clients. We will also present the results of the benchmarking survey we conducted on our partners and their member organizations. The results can tell us a lot about technology use among our partners. In addition to the benchmarking survey result, we also use data from Hootsuite and Sprout Social to determine if social media management software is a useful tool for our partner organizations, and to what extent they use these tools in their daily activities.

---

[6] Many of the advantages that we mentioned in this study are borne out of the need for SSPOs and non-profit organizations to engage with their clients in a more interactive and fluid way. Which was not supported by traditional websites. Social networking sites offer functionalities that allow for real-time interactions with new and existing clients (Lovejoy & Saxton 2012).

Establishing a baseline from previous studies

There are several related studies that consider online communications within the settlement sector in Canada. Four of the most relevant are:

1. Settlement Service & Technology Task Group (SSTG 2022; Campana & Liu 2022)
2. North York Community Housing (NYCH 2020)
3. Digital Messaging for Settlement & Integration (DMSI 2021)
4. Association of Canadian Studies - World Education Services (ACS-WES 2021)[7]

All the above studies conducted surveys on staff working at SSPOs. The studies were Canada-wide and technology focused. The purpose of each study was slightly different. The SSTG study aimed at understanding how SSPOs were transitioning towards hybrid service delivery. The NYCH study captures in more detail how frontline and management staff performed their jobs remotely. The DMSI study was focused primarily on the use of digital messaging for service delivery, while the ACS-WES study was conducted with the purpose of identifying the key challenges facing newcomers and SSPOs prior to and during the pandemic.

The categories of online media that are used across these studies are comparable. The 6 categories of "new" platforms are: (1) digital messaging (WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, WeChat, Viber, etc.), (2) social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, etc.), (3) live-stream and recorded video conferencing (Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts, etc.), (4) video creation/sharing (YouTube, Vimeo, Screencast, etc.), (5) online courses (Google Classroom, Moodle, Blackboard, etc.) and (6) cloud storage (Google Drive, OneDrive, Dropbox, etc.). The traditional modes of communication that are considered in these studies are text messaging (SMS/MMS) and email. A high-level overview of these studies is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of related studies

Study	Number of respondents	Time period	Frontline staff surveyed (%)	Management surveyed (%)
SSTG	389	October 2020 - March 2021	63.24	36.76
NYCH	234	30 March - 20 April 2020	76.49	51.28
DMSI	332	-	52.4	47.60
ACS-WES	254	11 May - 18 June 2021	(n/a)	(n/a)

Note: all the 4 studies were Canada-wide and captured responses from frontline staff/practitioners and management.

A project by D'Souza et al. (2022a, 2022b) uses data collected in partnership between Building Migrant Resilient Cities (BMRC) and Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) to assess the challenges, opportunities and needs of Ontario's settlement sector during the pandemic. The survey was conducted between 26 November and 23 December 2021 on 74 managers and 238 frontline staff working for OCASI member agencies. In addition to the 4 studies

[7] There were two surveys conducted by ACS-WES: a Newcomer Survey and an SPO Survey. We predominantly draw evidence from the SPO Survey, but the Newcomer Survey is also used to derive evidence related to the newcomers' perspective of service usage and quality.

mentioned, we refer back to the data collected by D'Souza et al. (2022a, 2022b) to compare our findings, where applicable.

A baseline for platform "usage" and "effectiveness"

This section will compile the available evidence from the 4 studies to provide a sector-level overview of the state of affairs in the settlement sector in terms of their online communications and service delivery.

We do not consider cloud storage (Google Drive, Dropbox, Box, Sync, etc.) and collaboration/project management/classroom tools (Google Spaces, Trello, Wrike, Asana, Moodle, Google Classroom, Canvas, etc.) as forms of social media or traditional mediums of communication. These software fall within the larger umbrella of 'digital communication skills' and are important for frontline and management staff at SSPOs when doing their daily work. These software contribute significantly to performing tasks efficiently when serving clients, as well as during hiring and onboarding of new employees to share with them documents in a secure online environment.

Table 2 summarizes the usage rate across 8 communications media from the 4 studies. We combined the frontline and management staff usage rate together, but the absolute values are also provided in the table for reference. From the 4 studies, we estimated the baseline averages across the 8 communications media forms.

Table 2. Platform usage rates, by study and type of online activity. Combined responses by frontline and management staff.

Study	Platform usage rates (%)							
	Social media	**Digital messaging**	**Text messaging**	**Live-stream video conferen-cing or recorded webinars***	**Cloud storage**	**Online courses**	**Video creation and sharing**	**Email**
SSTG	25.96	44.73	51.93	40.87	23.65	18.51	14.91	81.23
NYCH	32.48	46.58	48.29	63.25	28.21	26.50	19.66	70.51
DMSI	(n/a)	62.65	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)
ACS-WES	78.74	70.47	61.41	96.46	29.13	47.24	45.28	(n/a)
Baseline average	45.73	56.11	53.87	66.86	27.00	30.75	26.62	75.87

Notes:
*This estimate combines live-stream video conferencing and webinars. But a large number of frontline and management staff might be using both services, so there will be double-counting. These estimates account for the double-counting by removing those that were double-counted, so they are only included once in the estimates.
**Only includes live-stream video conferencing. The percentage of recorded webinars is provided in the SSTG study, but only at an aggregated level. Since we do not know how many frontline and management staff used both live-stream video conferencing and webinars, it cannot be removed from the total estimate. To avoid double-counting we only included the live-stream video conferencing usage rate.
Definitions:
1. Social media = Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, etc.
2. Digital messaging = WhatsApp, FB Messenger, WeChat, Viber, etc.

3. Text messaging = SMS/MMS
4. Live-stream video conferencing or recorded webinars = Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts, GoTo Webinar, etc.
5. Cloud storage = Google Drive, Dropbox, Box, Sync, etc.
6. Online courses = Moodle, Google Classroom, Canvas, etc.
7. Video creation/sharing = YouTube, Vimeo, Screencast, etc.
8. F = Frontline staff; M = Management

Questions used to calculate the baseline from the studies:

- We used the question "What online tools, channels, apps, etc., do you mostly use at work with your colleagues?" from the SSTG study
- We used the question "What communications tools are you (and your staff) using in your remote work?" from the NYCH study
- We used the question "What technologies does your organization use in delivering services?" from the ACS-WES study

The average baselines calculated in Table 2 are fair estimates of platform usage in Canada's settlement sector. Overall, email continues to dominate as the main mode of communication by frontline and management staff alike. Among the newer technologies, live-stream video conferencing or recorded webinar tools were very important for SSPOs surveyed in the 4 studies, followed by digital messaging and social media platforms.

Moreover, there is vast variation in the estimates of usage rate across the four studies. This makes assessment of usage in the sector difficult. Instead, a combined measure across studies produces a more accurate estimate of the sector-wide baseline because it averages out random errors.

The baselines so far have only touched upon the use of social media platforms, but its effectiveness as a means for service delivery or communicating with newcomers has not been discussed yet. Identifying the appropriate baseline for effectiveness is difficult because there are many different ways to define effectiveness. For the purpose of this study, we define a platform's effectiveness as its ability to serve many clients, attract new clients and/or clients themselves demanding more online services. With this definition in mind, we combined varying measures from across the 4 studies. Table 3 below shows the effectiveness of social media as a platform to deliver services and communicate with newcomer clients.

Table 3. Platform usefulness for communicating and delivering services to newcomer clients, by study

Study	Platform effectiveness rate (%)							
	Social media	**Digital messaging**	**Text messaging**	**Live-stream video conferen-cing or recorded webinars***	**Cloud storage**	**Online courses**	**Video creation and sharing**	**Email**
SSTG	35.65	50.46	48.61	74.07	7.87	18.52	19.44	90.74
NYCH	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)
DMSI	(n/a)	65.07 ****	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)
ACS-WES ***	47.50	49.72	51.28	46.12	51.35	42.50	44.35	(n/a)
Baseline average	41.58	55.08	49.95	60.10	29.61	30.51	31.90	90.74

Notes:
*This estimate combines live-stream video conferencing and webinars. But a large number of frontline and management staff might be using both services, there will be double counting. These estimates account for the double-counting by removing those that were double-counted, so they are only included once in the estimates.
***Numerator = the number of SSPOs that indicated an increase in the demand for service delivery since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Denominator = the number of SSPOs that used the column technology in delivering services.
****66.27 to communicate with clients, 63.86 to serve clients
Definitions:
1. Social media = Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, etc.
2. Digital messaging = WhatsApp, FB Messenger, WeChat, Viber, etc.
3. Text messaging = SMS/MMS
4. Live-stream video conferencing or recorded webinars = Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts, GoTo Webinar, etc.
5. Cloud storage = Google Drive, Dropbox, Box, Sync, etc.
6. Online courses = Moodle, Google Classroom, Canvas, etc.
7. Video creation/sharing = YouTube, Vimeo, Screencast, etc.

Questions used to calculate the baseline from the studies:
- We used the question “What online tools, channels, apps, etc., do you mostly use at work with your clients?” from the SSTG study
- We used the variables “Agencies that indicate that clients are asking them to communicate using digital messaging” and “Using digital messaging to serve clients” from the DMSI study
- We used the questions “What technologies does your organization use in delivering services?” and “Since the start of COVID-19, has the demand for service delivery at your organization?” from the ACS-WES study

The effectiveness measures are similar to the usage statistics from the previous table. Email ranked highly in terms of effectiveness, followed by live-stream video conferencing or recorded webinars, digital messaging and social media.

The results for usage and effectiveness are as expected. Live-stream conferencing and webinars strongly complement the language instruction, mentoring and coaching programs that SSPOs offer. Digital messaging platforms are important for providing clients with a degree of personalized service and attention. Moreover, social media platforms are also important for frontline staff because it allows for the sharing of rich media content that is engaging (i.e., short videos or images), building online communities of support (i.e., online discussion forums, Facebook Groups, LinkedIn groups or Reddit communities) and providing reliable information to clients (i.e., sharing information on immigration or health policy changes).

The baseline measures should be interpreted with some discretion. Firstly, the data collection in all 4 studies was started and completed during the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing lockdown, during which many settlement agencies had to shift to full online service delivery. At this point in time, many agencies are shifting towards hybrid service delivery to alleviate some of the disadvantages of the online mode, such as webinar fatigue and language barriers. We expect hybrid service delivery to grow further post-pandemic. Secondly, the SSPOs that were surveyed in the 4 studies may have been providing services to non-newcomer clients as well.

How are platforms used for service delivery?

SSPO staff are using technology for several reasons. Table 4 provides a breakdown of responses by frontline and management staff to questions 4 and 6 in the SSTG study: “What is (are) the reason(s) for you mostly using these tools?”.

Not surprisingly, 26.37% of frontline staff indicated “communication and getting my job done” as an important reason for using online technology tools in their work. Even 12.94% of responses indicated they only use apps that their clients can use, have access to or are familiar with. Aside from its effectiveness in service delivery, there are also efficiency aspects of technology use in the workplace, which is clearly shown by the 18.41% of frontline staff and 25.73% of management who indicated that “It is fast, safe, easy, free, flexible, and convenient”.

Table 4. The number of responses (% of total) by frontline and management staff for using technology tools in their work, by reason

Reason	Number of frontline staff (% of total)	Number of management staff (% of total)
Covid	33 (16.42)	20 (9.71)
Communication and getting my job done	53 (26.37)	78 (37.86)
It is fast, safe, easy, free, flexible, and convenient	37 (18.41)	53 (25.73)
Communication on a massive scale	11 (5.47)	0 (0.00)
Video-based meetings are like face-to-face appointments	5 (2.49)	2 (0.97)
Professionalism	0 (0.00)	3 (1.46)
Clients unable to use virtual tools	3 (1.49)	0 (0.00)
Avoiding social isolation and providing emotional support	2 (1.00)	0 (0.00)
Client-based apps/tools[8]	26 (12.94)	6 (2.91)
Diversity of options for employers and/or clients; technical capacities	13 (6.47)	19 (9.22)
It is the only/available option	6 (2.99)	18 (8.74)
Screen sharing (doing things together)	1 (0.50)	1 (0.49)
Virtual communication is more effective than face to face[9]; Virtual communication can be more effective when there is a language barrier	2 (1.00)	2 (0.97)
Using virtual tools anyway (before the pandemic)	3 (1.49)	2 (0.97)
Teaching clients to use virtual apps	4 (1.99)	0 (0.00)
Customized use according to different cultural/age groups	2 (1.00)	0 (0.00)
Other	0 (0.00)	2 (0.97)
Total	**201 (100)**	**206 (100)**

Source: Settlement and Technology Task Group Survey Results, 2021.

[8] Apps/tools clients can use, have access to or are familiar with.
[9] E.g., when there is a language barrier or gap.

Online services, quality and content

The pandemic was a difficult time for many SSPOs because staff had to translate in-person services into an online format. During this process, the service offered will likely change in quality and content. We analyzed the open-ended responses from questions 20 and 21 in the SSTG study and found that going digital had an impact (mostly positive) on the quality and content of services provided by SSPOs. A point also confirmed by the OCASI survey, in which frontline staff received positive reports from clients about the online services they accessed during the pandemic (BMRC - IRMU, 2022).

Similarly, the responses in the DMSI study to the question “How is digital messaging useful for you as a settlement worker to serve your clients?” provides some indication of whether digital messaging is effective in service delivery. We also included responses from the NYCH and ACS-WES Newcomer Survey in Table 5.

Table 5. The perceived change in quality/content of services during the pandemic, by study

Study	Question	Number of positive responses (% of total; N)	Number of neutral responses (including not applicable)	Number of negative responses
SSTG	What have you learned about delivering remote/digital services during this time that has changed the way you provide services to newcomers and communities?*	111 (68.94; N = 161)	28 (17.39; N = 161)	22 (13.66; N = 161)
NYCH	What are you doing now that you think is actually a better way of getting things done?**	57 (57.00; N = 100)	32 (37.00; N = 100)	11 (11.00; N = 100)
NYCH	What has your clients’ experience been accessing services, getting the information they need as you shift to remote work?**	39 (34.82; N = 112)	29 (25.89; N = 112)	44 (39.29; N = 112)
DMSI	How is digital messaging useful for you as a settlement	40 (47.62; N = 84)	(n/a)	(n/a)

	worker to serve your clients?**			
ACS-WES Newcomer Survey	How comfortable are you with using technology to access settlement services?***	103 (78.03; N = 132)**** 72 (79.12; N = 91)*****	(n/a)	(n/a)

Notes:
*Positive responses include themes of patience, resilience, flexibility, creativity, innovation, efficiency, affordability, and the underestimate potential of what can be done remotely. On the negative side, themes include confidentiality and privacy issues, logistical issues (client may have no access to technological requirements), interactional/interpersonal issues (emotional support is difficult to provide remotely).
**Only responses from frontline staff are included here.
***This is not a direct measure of service quality during the COVID-19 pandemic but tells us how remote service delivery affects newcomer clients' experience of receiving services online.
****Among those that accessed settlement services remotely or in a remote/in-person format (N = 132).
*****Among those that use remote only services (N = 91).

These studies found that frontline staff felt positive about online service delivery and indicated only a minor change in process quality, that was moderately positive. It is important to note that the results for the change in process quality reported by staff is also capturing the convenience factor in delivering services online. However, what really matters here is whether clients felt there was a change in the quality of the service that was provided. We cannot gauge this with certainty without longitudinal data on client service usage and the outcomes from using those online services. From the ACS-WES Newcomer Survey we found that many clients were content with using digital tools to receive settlement services, but we still don't know whether there was a change in outcomes from online service usage relative to the same service being provided in-person.

Although we cannot say with certainty whether quality changed when moving from in-person to online/hybrid service delivery models, prior research on non-profit organizations have shown that content-oriented communication channels (i.e., Facebook or YouTube) have a positive effect on perceived process quality, while visually oriented channels (i.e., Instagram) create a positive effect on perceived outcome quality (Gartner et al., 2021). SSPOs could benefit from paying closer attention to the perceptions that are being created of the process and outcome quality associated with their service offerings from their choice of social media channel.

Inclusive technology for all

We are particularly interested in 3 groups of people: pre-arrival newcomers, newcomers living in rural areas and those unable to access online services. Each of these groups face unique needs, and during the pandemic, their needs became more visible. For example, pre-arrival newcomers are unable to access in-person services provided by SSPOs because they are still preparing to migrate to Canada. They are most in need of virtual orientation, assessment and referral services at a time of day that is convenient to them (due to time differences). On the other hand, rural dwellers living in Canada might have limited access to broadband internet services and transportation. Rural dwellers would need services to be dropped-off, mailed-in, in-home or virtual. Finally, those unable to access online services would first need to be assessed for digital literacy. They would need hybrid options available to them and also computer/smartphone training before they can access any of the SSPOs programs. In some cases, newcomers will also need device loans and internet access.

Table 6. Technology inclusiveness, by study

Study	Those living in rural areas	Those unable to access online services	Pre-arrival clients	New clientele
SSTG	43.62% (n=94) of SSPOs indicated expanding services to clients in rural areas during the pandemic?*	87.10% (n=93) of SSPOs indicated providing solutions to clients unable to access online services during the pandemic?**	(n/a)	57.38% (n=183) of SSPOs indicated helping onboard clients onto digital services before they have access to their services?***
NYCH	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)	23.36% (n=25) of SSPOs have seen new clients as a result of COVID-19?
ACS-WES	(n/a)	(n/a)	Only 14.57% (n=254) of SSPOs ranked pre-arrival clients as highest number of clients they have served	44.88% (n=254) of SSPOs indicated an increase in demand for services since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic

Notes:
*Question 45 from the SSTG study.
**Question 46 from the SSTG study.
***Question 9 from the SSTG study.

Table 6 shows that although service usage among newcomers increased slightly during the pandemic (see the last column on new clientele), it did not increase substantially for those living in rural areas. The increase in demand for services is a general trend among all non-profit organizations in Canada (Ontario Nonprofit Network & l'Assemblée de la Francophonie de l'Ontario, 2021). Similar to SSPOs, the majority of the increase among non-profit organizations was in urban centers like the Greater Toronto Area. In the survey of Ontario agencies, D'Souza et al. (2022) found that 44.68% of staff indicated an increase in the number of clients they served during the pandemic, and 68.09% indicated an increase in the number of clients from outside their local area.

Virtual delivery was the main way that SSPOs provided services to rural dwellers. Similarly, only a small percentage of SSPOs indicated providing pre-arrival services. On the other hand, aiding newcomers through non-digital channels if they were unable to use online services continued even during the pandemic. In particular, SSPOs were assessing newcomers' digital literacy skills, providing training so that they can access services online, providing hybrid options and accommodating them on platforms they are familiar with.

SSPOs have shown resilience in adapting to the needs of newcomers during the pandemic and to a degree have also been able to expand services to newcomers that were previously inaccessible. The success in shifting services online during the pandemic was also confirmed by D'Souza et al. (2022) among agencies serving newcomers in Ontario.

SSPOs ability to accommodate and serve newcomers that have limited digital literacy has been a strength of the sector considering in-person service delivery was the standard prior to the pandemic. There has been considerable investment in digital and hybrid service delivery during the pandemic, which provides SSPOs the capacity to expand services to pre-arrival newcomers and those living in rural areas without compromising on the needs of those with limited digital skills.

Partners' "usage" and "effectiveness"

This section compares the baselines we established in the previous section with the 30 agencies that we surveyed in March 2022. To summarize our findings from the baseline studies, we found that: only about half of the surveyed agencies were using digital tools to communicate and deliver services to newcomers. The majority were using live-stream video conferencing or recorded webinars. The results were about the same for platform effectiveness. Staff at the SSPO were mainly using these tools to communicate with each other and perform their job tasks while keeping their clients in mind about which tools to use. Moving services online was mostly positive and there was no indication of a significant change in service quality, as reported by frontline staff. There is strong evidence of inclusiveness for those who were not able to use online services, but access to services among newcomers living in rural areas only moderately improved. Finally, there was no evidence of improved access to pre-arrival newcomers.

We asked the surveyed agencies several questions about their usage of the top 6 social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube and Reddit) and any other social media, digital messaging or video streaming platforms that they might be using in communicating with their clients. We also asked them about the platforms they are using to deliver services.

Comparing partners' "usage" and "effectiveness" against the baseline

In total, 30 agencies responded to our survey. All the agencies operate at least one social media account. The agencies we surveyed far exceeded the baseline social media usage for the sector (i.e., 45.73% of the sector were using social media platforms for their work). We found that 6 agencies indicated they use a platform other than one of the six listed above, including Telegram, WeChat, WhatsApp and/or Vimeo. The frequency distribution of platform accounts and average monthly posts is shown in Figures 1 and 2. About 30% indicated having 3 accounts and more than 75% of agencies were using more than 3 accounts. However, average monthly posts are low. Many agencies failed to post at all, and among those that do post monthly there is considerable variation across platforms. Low usage rates among those that have accounts is not uncommon among non-profit organizations that have a limited number of staff to dedicate to communications efforts (Hou & Lampe, 2015).

Among the 30 surveyed agencies, only a handful had dedicated staff for communications and public relations. Those agencies with limited staffing capacity might be using social media but are unlikely to be using it frequently or effectively for public relations purposes. Communicating with newcomer clients in the settlement service sector is a unique skill that is learned through experience and/or professional development, which requires a dedicated public relations department for social media to be effectively adopted (Curtis et al., 2010).

On average, 22 monthly posts are made on Facebook (across 16 organizations[10]), 14 on Twitter (across 7 organizations), 13 on Instagram (across 12 organizations), 13 on LinkedIn (across 9 organizations), and almost nothing on YouTube and Reddit. Clearly, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn are the most commonly used platforms for communicating with clients. However, simply using a social media account is not informative of how effective SSPOs are using these platforms.

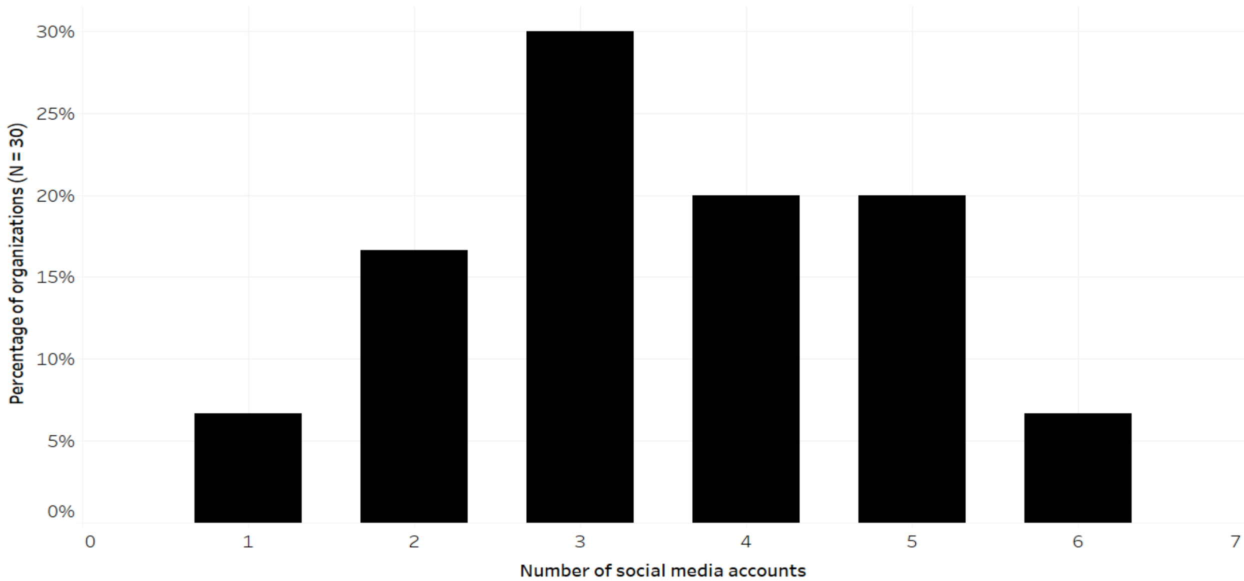

Figure 1. Frequency distribution of social media accounts

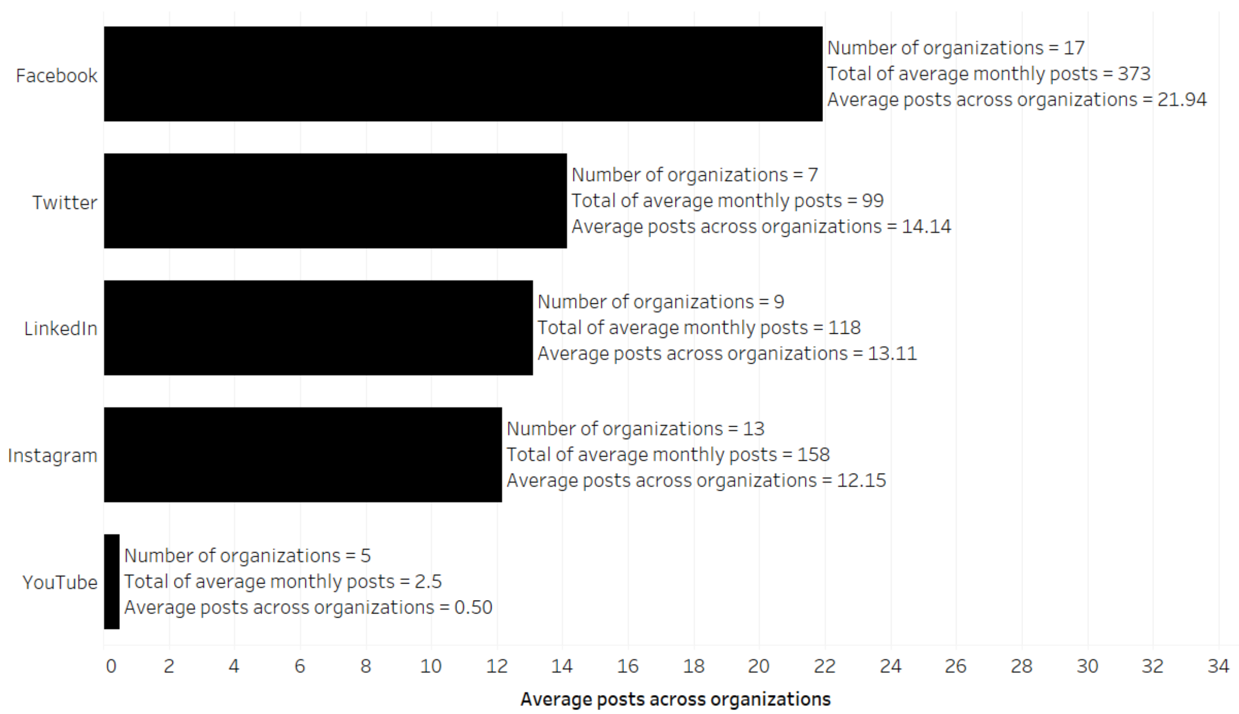

Figure 2. Average monthly posts across organizations by platform

[10] Note that one of the organizations that are included in the bar graph had 2 Facebook accounts. Both accounts are included in the bar graph as separate organizations.

In addition to the survey, we also encouraged our 6 partner organizations to use a social media management software to better manage their social media profiles. To facilitate this, we provided them with either Hootsuite or Sprout Social (two of the most frequently used social media management software) until the end of this project (i.e., January 2022 - March 2024). Social media management software is useful for small organizations to manage their staff's time more effectively when working with multiple social media platforms and also track their successes online (Hou & Lampe, 2015).

Jumpstart Refugee Talent, AMSSA and A.C.C.E.S Employment were already using software to manage their profiles. ARAISA, SAISIA and The Neighbourhood Organization began using Hootsuite for the first time. We purchased Hootsuite Enterprise and Sprout Social licenses for our partners. We will monitor their posting and engagement data throughout the project. Staff at the partner organization also received a 2-hour training session with an experienced Hootsuite representative on account administration and basics of Hootsuite's functionality. Staff also attended a 5-hour hybrid workshop organized by our team. The workshop provided a training and professional development opportunity for attendees to learn, network and discuss social media strategy building and create online content[11].

Among the 3 associations we partnered with, we asked them to invite selected member agencies to become a part of a single Hootsuite Enterprise account. We found that while there was interest in using the software, there were practical limitations to doing so. Firstly, there was hesitancy to learn a new software and move from an existing software they were already familiar with (if they were using a software other than Hootsuite). Secondly, there were billing issues in moving members from their existing Hootsuite plan to the enterprise version we were offering. And finally, some members did not see any significant advantage to using the software, especially among those members that did not already have a large social media presence.

Table 7 shows how partners were using Hootsuite and Sprout Social. Partners with zero "Average weekly posts from Hootsuite or Sprout Social" means they were not posting through the software but could have been posting directly on the platform. Partners used the software mainly to analyze their engagement statistics and only one out of the 4 partners were using it to schedule posts.

Table 7. Hootsuite and Sprout Social usage statistics by staff at the partner organization

Partner	Number of users logging in to use either Hootsuite or Sprout Social	Number of platforms connected to Hootsuite or Sprout Social	Average weekly posts from Hootsuite or Sprout Social	Log in frequency into Hootsuite or Sprout Social
Partner 1	2	1	0	Quarterly
Partner 2	4	4	17	Weekly
Partner 3	1	6	0	Monthly
Partner 4	3	0	0	Weekly
Partner 5	4	3	7	Weekly

Source: Requested from a Hootsuite Enterprise customer service representative and Sprout Social directly.
Notes:
1. Data is up to date as of 20 July 2022.
2. Partners had been using the software for about 5 months.

[11] The complete recording of the workshop is available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJWr8oyGzPU

Usage of the software was more frequent among the standalone organizations than the associations. This is expected since the associations' main goal is to assist their members and do not directly serve newcomer clients. Associations may share communications on their own social media channels that their members have posted, which allows members to expand their online reach even further. There are certain other communications advantages that associations provide their members, but the incentives are small for associations to have access to social media management software.

Overtime, there have been some significant changes to partners' activity on social media platforms. We extracted their engagement statistics from the software directly and summarized it in Table 8, Figures 3 and 4.

Table 8. Hootsuite and Sprout Social posting and engagement statistics

Partner	Platform	2021 - 22 follower growth rate	2021 - 22 Post engagem-ent rate	Images/statu-ses/links/vid-eos/carousel in posts between 2021-22	Number of posts that include a link	Number of mentions	Post with the highest engagem-ent
Partner 1	LinkedIn	106.72% (1)	13.71% (1)	3 images, 2 statuses	1	0	23
Partner 2	Facebook	12.46% (2)	5.48% (2)	none	0	0	54
	Instagram	24.72% (3)	7.10% (3)	31 images, 3 videos, 6 carousels	0	0	19
	Twitter	19.25% (4)	4.01% (4)	none	0	210	5
	LinkedIn	101.44% (5)	7.03% (5)	102 images, 13 videos, 50 statuses	1	0	114
Partner 3	Facebook	3.91% (6)	0% (6)	16 images, 2 statuses	0	0	0
	Twitter	0.11% (7)	5.19% (7)	none	0	88	106
	LinkedIn	5.3% (8)	5.98% (8)	none	0	0	25
Partner 4	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)
Partner 5	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)

Source: Hootsuite Enterprise and Sprout Social data dashboard.
Notes:
(1) Twitter engagement = Total engagement is calculated as the total number of likes, comments and shares on a post
(2) The 2021-2022 follower growth rate was calculated by taking the percentage of new followers in relation to total followers between August 2021 and 2022
(3) Post engagement rate formula: {[(Sum of all engagement) / Post] / Followers} *100
(4) On Facebook, the engagement features available to users are: Shares, Comments, Clicks, Follow, Reactions (Emoji reaction or likes) and views.
(5) On LinkedIn, the engagement features available to users are: Comment, Like or react, Share, Send, Click, views and private messages
(6) On Instagram, the engagement features available to users are: Saves/Bookmarks, Likes, Comments, Sends/Shares, Messages and views
(7) Status posts on LinkedIn are text posts.

(8) Carousel posts on Instagram are multiple photos, videos and gifs in a single post.
(9) Sample sizes: (1) n=277 (2) n=3,348 (3) n=782 (4) n=1,127 (5) n=2,383 (6) n=239 (7) n=3,660 (8) n=1,068

There is growth in the number of followers for the 4 platforms that are connected to Hootsuite (Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and LinkedIn) among all of the partner organizations. LinkedIn shows the fastest growth, followed distantly by Instagram. Even engagement rates have been consistently increasing over the period of analysis. Although we cannot conclude that the software has had any significant impact on communications among the partner organizations, it appears that the 2-hour training session with the Hootsuite representative and the 5-hour workshop did have an impact on software usage. This can be seen in Figure 3 by the agencies connecting new social media accounts to their Hootsuite account just a couple of days before the workshop and the steady increase in the number of followers/fans since the session.

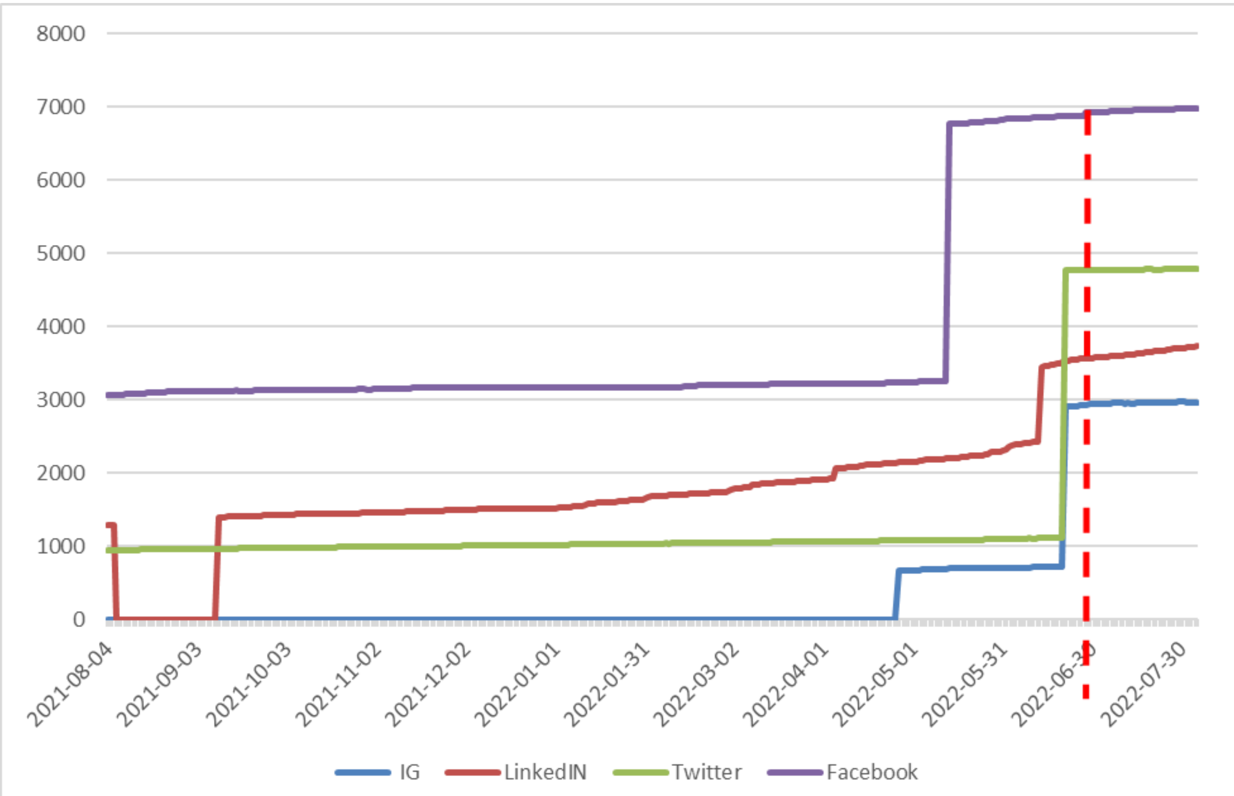

Figure 3. Number of followers on each social media platform across the 4 partner agencies on Hootsuite. The vertical dashed red line denotes the date of the 5-hour workshop on 23 June 2022.

The growth in followers/fans between August 2021 and 2022 has been uneven across platforms. Partners' LinkedIn company pages experienced the largest growth in followers compared to Instagram, Facebook and Twitter (see Figure 4). This could be attributed to the importance of online social networking in job search among newcomers (Monteiro, 2022) and the fact that 46% of IRCC-funded SSPOs provided employment-related services[12] (Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017).

[12] Furthermore, 8% of SPOs Canada-wide were primarily employment-related service providers.

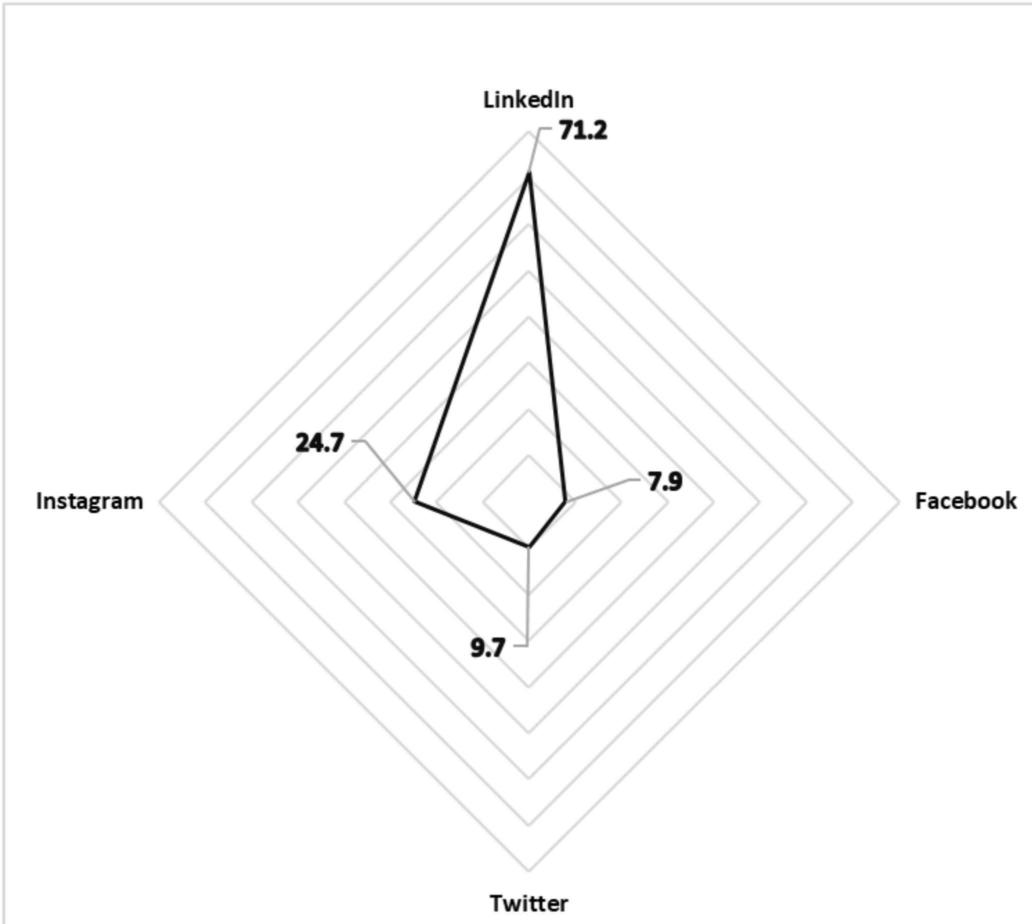

Figure 4. Average follower growth rate, by platform. The average follower rate is calculated as (Number of new followers / Number of existing followers) * 100.

To assess overall effectiveness of the 30 agencies' online communication and service delivery strategy, Figure 5 depicts the average number of followers in a bar graph. The text above each bar also shows the total number of followers, the number of social media accounts and total number of members. We have depicted statistics for members of ARAISA, SAISIA and ARAISA, and separately for the other 2 non-association members. ARAISA had the highest average numbers of followers among its members compared to the other two associations.

Associations provide many resources for their members, such as convening joint meetings and creating connections between members. This creates an ecosystem that elevates member agencies with limited experience in online communications. Based on our discussions with staff at the associations, we found that staff assist their members in their communication needs, provide training and professional development opportunities for their members and share innovative ways to improve communications capacity across their members.

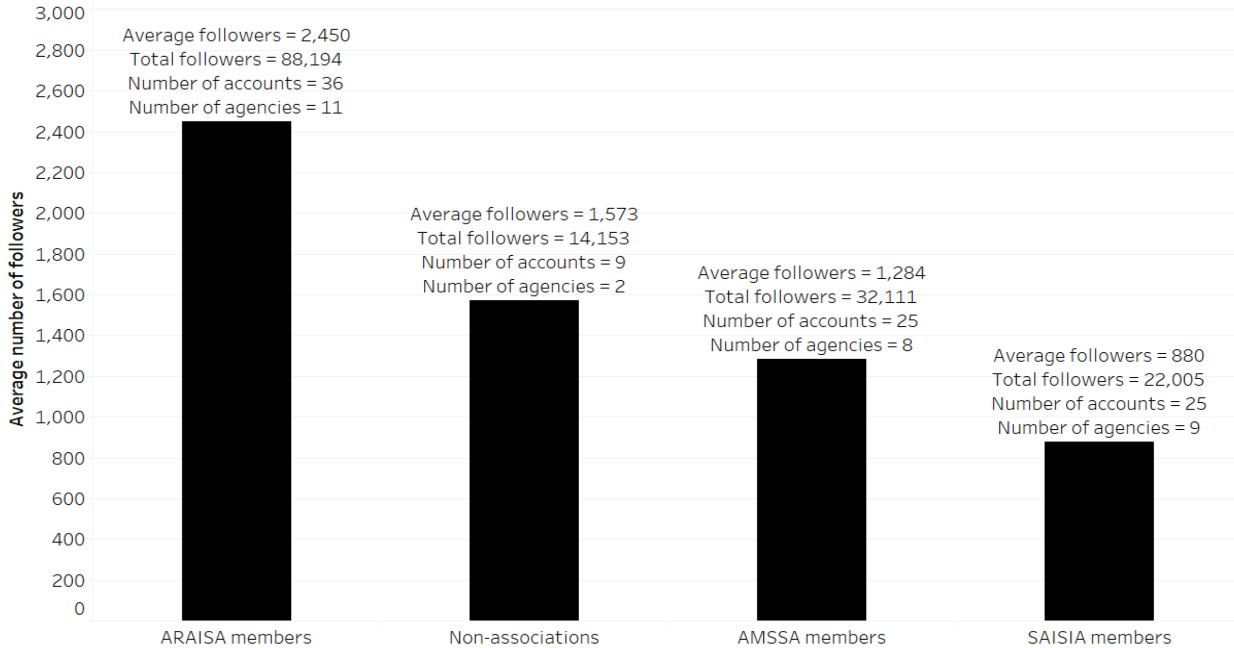

Figure 5. Average number of followers by type of agency (i.e., association or non-association). The description above each bar indicates the average number of followers, total number of followers and total number of agencies within each category of agencies.

The average or total number of followers is not an accurate representation of agencies' ability to reach existing and new clients, or platform effectiveness. There are many factors that correlate with the number of followers, including the location of these agencies. For instance, SAISIA and AMSSA members operate in low density areas compared to Jumpstart Refugee Talent and The Neighbourhood Organization, both of which are located in the large newcomer centers of Vancouver and Toronto. We will need to calculate more robust measures of platform effectiveness that better represent how these agencies are using social media.

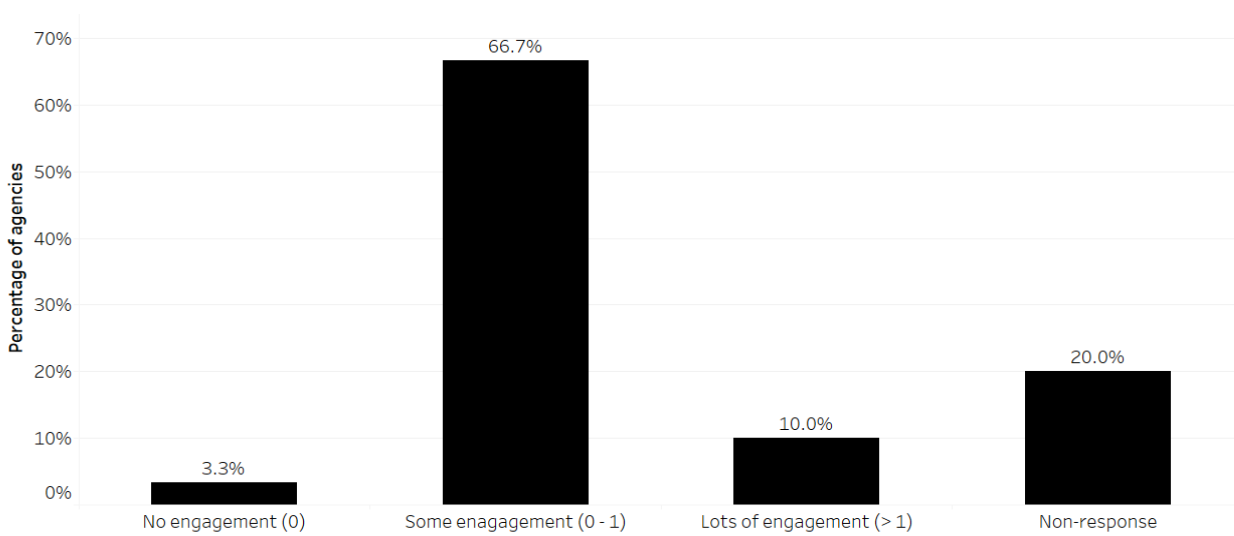

Figure 6. The percentage of agencies by engagement rate. The engagement rate is measured as the total number of engagements of their last post (i.e., number of comments, likes and shares on the last post) divided by the number of views on the last post.

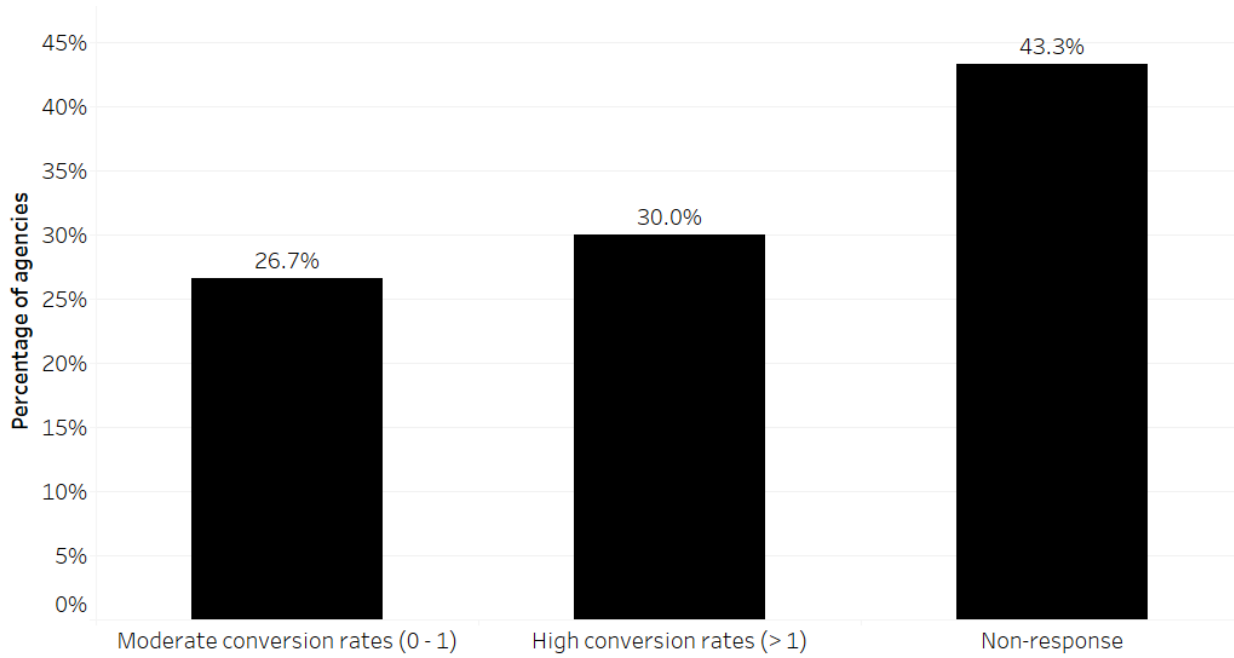

Figure 7. The percentage of agencies by post-follower conversion rate. The post-follower conversion rate is measured as the number of new followers in the past month divided by the average number of posts per month.

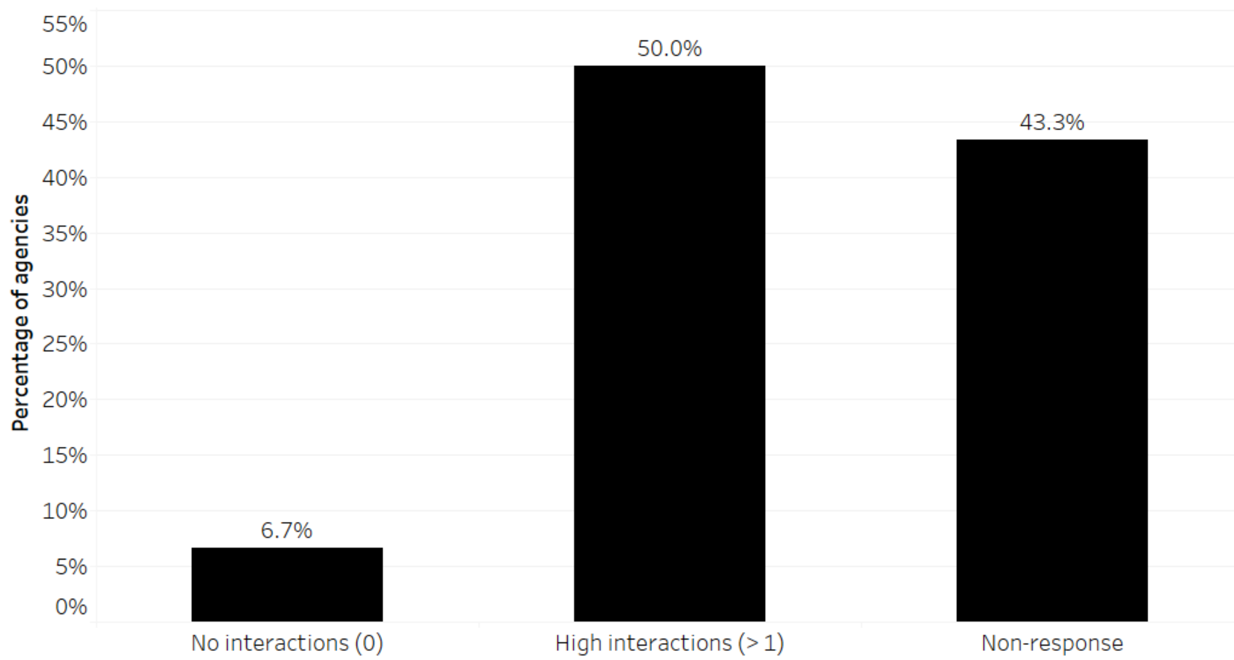

Figure 8. The percentage of agencies by total number of direct messages or mentions received in the last 3 months

Figures 6, 7 and 8 show the percentage of agencies that we surveyed (N = 30) by the engagement rate, post-follower conversion rate and direct interactions, respectively. In all three figures we group the effectiveness statistics as 0 (zero), 0 - 1 (greater than zero and less than one), > 1 (greater than one) and non-response. The engagement rate is the average number of likes, comments and shares per view on each agency's last post. The engagement rate can be interpreted as the effectiveness of posts in generating feedback from followers and non-followers and is a fair measure of the agency's virtual reach. The post-follower conversion rate is calculated by dividing the number of new followers in the last month by the average number of posts per month. It can be interpreted as the average number of new followers per post in the last month. The post-follower conversion rate is a fair measure of the effectiveness of post content in attracting new followers. Finally, direct interaction is simply the number of times that a member receives a direct message or mention from a client or potential client through a social media platform.

The majority of agencies (76.7%) had some engagement with their posts, were able to convert posting content into actual followers (56.7%) and even had direct interactions with clients on social media platforms (50.0%). Our immediate impression is that agencies are posting content that is moderately engaging their audiences but need to focus attention on content that will generate new fans/followers.

These platform effectiveness measures are different from the one we calculated as the baseline for the sector as a whole. The baseline measure of social media effectiveness (41.58%) is based on whether frontline SSPO staff at agencies were able to use social media to communicate and deliver services to clients. The measures have some commonalities because they capture whether clients are being met online. We find that the 30 agencies we surveyed received some engagements from their posts that were much higher than the system-wide baseline we calculated. However, the share of agencies that were able to convert posts into followers and/or received direct interactions was only moderately higher than the baseline. Overall, we conclude that the agencies we surveyed have slightly better platform effectiveness than SSPOs Canada-wide.

How are platforms being used for service delivery?

IRCC-funded pre-arrival services are provided by a few SSPOs, such as A.C.E.S.S Employment, YMCA of Greater Toronto and the National Capital Region, JVS Toronto, COSTI Immigrant Services and Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS). These organizations are larger with greater capacity for online delivery and oriented to employment-based services. Funding was later expanded to other programs. Among the agencies that currently offer some pre-arrival services, the most commonly provided services using a social media platform are employment-related services, orientation services and networking events. And among those that offer post-arrival services, the most common ones are community connections events, networking events, information sessions in banking, finances, tax preparation or housing, and employment-related services.

Figure 9 provides a detailed view of the platform usage for service delivery. Zoom was mentioned in the delivery of 14 different post-arrival services and 13 pre-arrival services. Zoom is the most important application for the delivery of pre- and post-arrival services. But there were vast differences in the usage of online platforms for service delivery between pre- and post-arrival services. Zoom, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and Facebook are being used for post-arrival services. But for pre-arrival services, there is much less usage of these platforms. Pre-arrival services, as expected, use live-streaming and digital messaging services.

The closeness in usage between Zoom and Facebook could be explained by Zoom's ability to live stream to Facebook seamlessly. The much higher usage of Facebook in post-arrival services than in pre-arrival services could be explained by the fact that Facebook is unavailable in countries like China and Russia. WhatsApp does not rank very highly in the delivery of post-arrival services but does rank relatively higher among pre-arrival services. LinkedIn and Twitter were significantly more important for the delivery of post-arrival services than for pre-arrival services. On their Twitter and LinkedIn page, SSPOs share links and reminders to attend an event or workshop. SSPOs were also providing consultations through direct messaging.

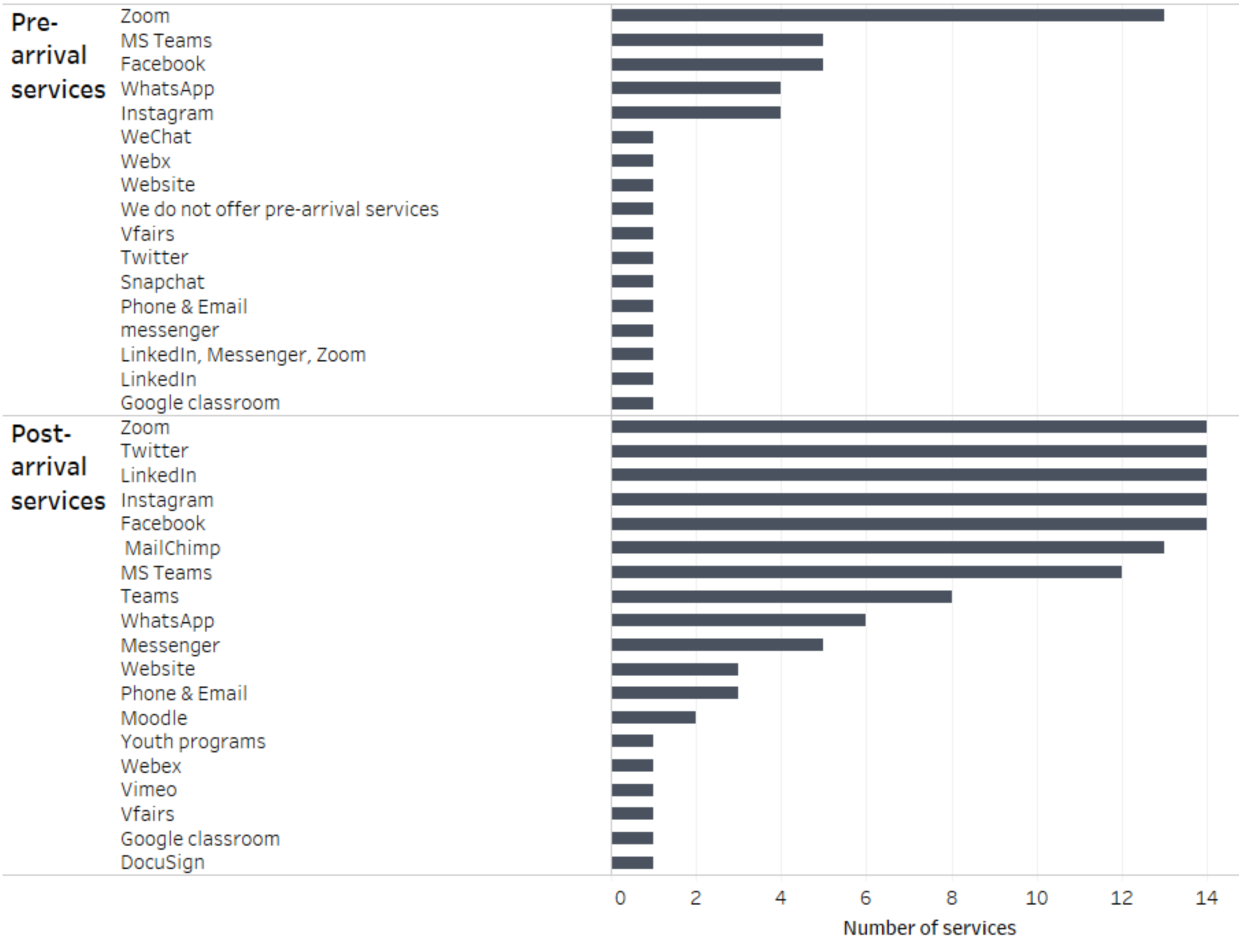

Figure 9. The total number of times that a platform is mentioned, the number of organizations that mentioned the use of the platform in delivering services, and the number of different services that use the platform

See Figure 10 for a full breakdown of the number of organizations that provided pre- and post-arrival services on a social media platform, while Figure 11 depicts a similar figure for the unique number of social media platforms used by organizations. There were 8 and 7 different types of social media platforms mentioned by agencies in the provision of pre-arrival orientation services and employment-related services, respectively. Interestingly, 14 different social media platforms were mentioned in the provision of post-arrival referrals, networking events, assessment services and employment-related services. The figure also shows the platforms that were mentioned by the organization.

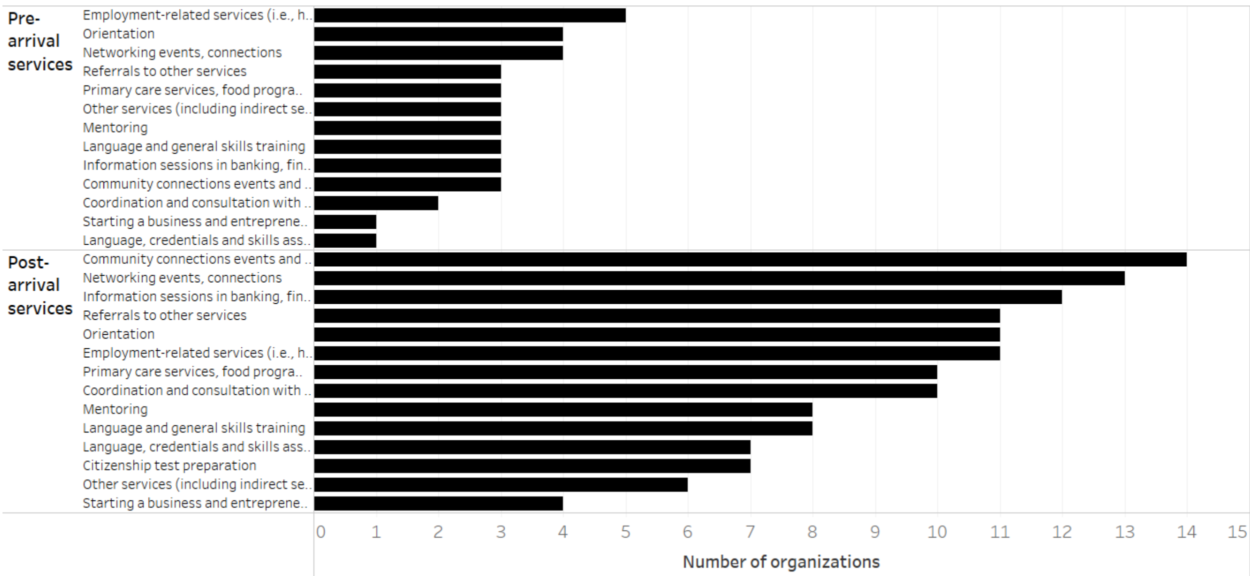

Figure 10. The total number of organizations that used a social media platform in the delivery of services, by pre- and post-arrival service type

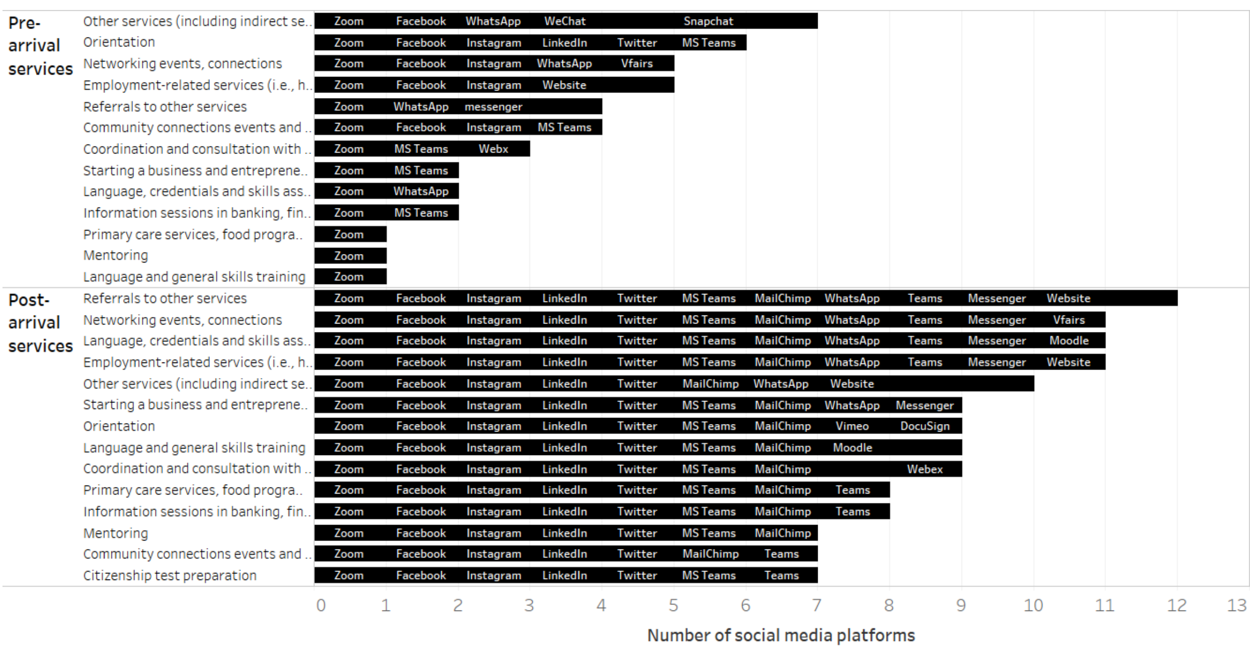

Figure 11. The number of social media platforms that were used in the delivery of services, by pre- and post-arrival service type

Overall, we find that only about half the surveyed organizations were using a social media platform for service delivery and much fewer are using it for the delivery of pre-arrival services. However, compared to the Canada-wide baseline, few surveyed agencies were serving pre-arrival newcomers. The majority of agencies were using social media platforms for post-arrival service delivery. And they were using a wide variety of platforms to serve newcomers. This corroborates our findings from the baseline studies that frontline staff are digitally literate, they are assessing the digital literacy of their clients, and delivering services to newcomers on platforms that they are already familiar with.

Platform inclusiveness

In the survey we asked the agencies what percentage of their clients are living in a rural area, living with a disability and/or are outside of Canada (including pre-arrival newcomers). Since all of the agencies we surveyed were using a social media platform, we assume that individuals from these groups benefited from these platforms. However, we did not ask SSPOs how these groups benefited from the platforms and to what degree they were using them. The results of the survey are provided in Table 9. Given the large share of non-responses to this question, it is difficult to develop an interpretation with certainty.

From the data that is available for interpretation, 10.00% of agencies serve rural dwellers exclusively, but none serve persons with disabilities or pre-arrival newcomers exclusively. And 26.67% of agencies serve rural and non-rural dwellers alike. Similarly, 20.00% of agencies serve between 0% - 10% of their clients who are living with a disability. However, most agencies do not serve pre-arrival newcomers and those that do serve them, represent only a small proportion of their clients.

Table 9. The percentage of agencies (N = 30) that serve clients living in a rural area, living with a disability and/or living outside of Canada (including pre-arrival newcomers)

% of clients	% of agencies that serve clients living in a rural area	% of agencies that serve clients living with a disability	% of agencies that serve clients living outside of Canada
0%	6.67%	3.33%	26.67%
0% - 10%	20.00%	20.00%	6.67%
10% - 100%	6.67%	0%	6.67%
100%	10.00%	0%	0%
Non-response	56.67%	76.67%	60.00%

Comparing these survey results to the 43.62% of SSPOs that indicated expanding services to rural dwellers in the baseline studies, the surveyed agencies serve a much smaller rural base. Similarly, while only about 14.57% of SSPOs Canada-wide indicated serving pre-arrival newcomers, much fewer surveyed agencies serve pre-arrival newcomers as a part of their client base. Overall, the share of pre-arrival newcomers and rural dwellers that represent our surveyed agencies' client base is much smaller than the national averages.

What are they posting?

These agencies frequently post content simultaneously across all platforms. Agencies share news, they post registration links to online Zoom webinars (such as training programs, workshops and orientation events). Posts are usually followed by reminders of the date, time and location of their events and the last date to register.

Agencies are also sharing literary publications, videos and podcasts pertaining to settlement and immigration, ensuring that their audience is up to date with policy changes and news that might impact them.

We also came across fundraising posts that encourage their audience to donate to their cause. They do this by drawing attention to collaborations with local businesses, authors and artists to create a unique donating experience that also connects their audience to the community. Local businesses who support or who have received support from agencies are featured on posts. Agencies also post personal stories and testimonies from their clients as part of the giving experience. Agencies also collaborate widely with each other on these spaces by retweeting or re-sharing each other's posts showcasing their shared efforts.

The content that is posted on social media platforms fits what we had expected. Non-profit organizations share mostly information and try to engage in dialogue with their fans/followers for the purpose of relationship- and community-building (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012).

Desired states, gaps and needs in digital communications

This section provides the key finding of this survey. We asked agencies to rank (on a 4-point scale) desired states, gaps and needs in digital communications as they see it within their organizations, or the sector as a whole. Table 10 provides a high-level depiction of the desired states, gaps and needs as envisioned by the 30 agencies.

The table should be interpreted by comparing the responses within each question. For instance, question (a) in the first section of the table asks agencies to rank 4 states that they would like to see in their agency's digital communications. 3 agencies ranked "A complete knowledge of available technologies that is consistently updated" higher than "Access to tools that can be utilized by staff", but 10 agencies ranked it the other way around. Since the majority of agencies ranked it the other way around, we could conclude that access to tools is preferred to a complete knowledge of available technologies.

Table 10. Number of organizations that ranked the <row> response higher than the <column> response

Question (a): Based on your experience, please rank the following **desired states** that you would like to see in your organization's digital communications				
	A complete knowledge of available technologies that is consistently updated	Access to tools that can be utilized by staff	Staff are skilled enough to use available technologies	Staff are aware of how the settlement sector works as a system to develop and use new technologies
A complete knowledge of available technologies that is consistently updated	-	3	4	4
Access to tools that can be utilized by staff	10	-	6	8
Staff are skilled enough to use	9	7	-	7

available technologies				
Staff are aware of how the settlement sector works as a system to develop and use new technologies	9	6	3	-
Question (b): Based on your experience, please rank the following **gaps** that you see in your organization's digital communications				
	There is currently no complete way to identify the technologies that are available and what works	It is currently difficult to access which tools are required	Staff are not digitally skilled enough or have the training required to use new technologies	Staff do not have the right tools and resources required to assess how the system performs
There is currently no complete way to identify the technologies that are available and what works	-	4	4	7
It is currently difficult to access which tools are required	7	-	4	8
Staff are not digitally skilled enough or have the training required to use new technologies	10	9	-	7
Staff do not have the right tools and resources required to assess how the system performs	8	9	6	-
Question (c): Based on your experience, please rank the following **needs** that you see in your organization's digital communications				
	A repository of available technologies that are tried and tested for the sector with a list of features, cost comparisons and effectiveness	Need tools to test and evaluate	Need training and workshops	Better collaboration across the sector through workshops, roundtable discussions and conferences
A repository of available technologies that are tried and tested for	-	7	7	8

the sector with a list of features, cost comparisons and effectiveness				
Need tools to test and evaluate	3	-	4	6
Need training and workshops	7	9	-	8
Better collaboration across the sector through workshops, roundtable discussions and conferences	5	8	5	-

We summarized the agencies' preference ranking of the 4 available choices for each of the questions by identifying which pair of choices received a higher ranking by the majority of agencies:[13]

- For question (a), the ranking of agencies' desired states with their digital communications are as follows
    1. Staff are skilled enough to use available technologies
    2. Access to tools that can be utilized by staff
    3. Staff are aware of how the settlement sector works as a system to develop and use new technologies
    4. A complete knowledge of available technologies that is consistently updated
- For question (b), the ranking of agencies' gaps in their digital communications are as follows:
    1. Staff are not digitally skilled enough or have the training required to use new technologies
    2. Staff do not have the right tools and resources required to assess how the system performs
    3. It is currently difficult to access which tools are required
    4. There is currently no complete way to identify the technologies that are available and what works
- For question (c), the ranking of agencies' needs in their digital communications are as follows (note that the 1st and 2nd items were ranked equally for this question):
    1. Need training and workshops
    2. A repository of available technologies that are tried and tested for the sector with a list of features, cost comparisons and effectiveness
    3. Better collaboration across the sector through workshops, roundtable discussions and conferences
    4. Need tools to test and evaluate

[13] Where > is read as "preferred to".

Overall, we find that agencies would like to see their staff skilled enough to use available technologies. Even one of the gaps identified was that staff did not have the right skills to use new technologies and there is a need for training and workshops. This response conflicts with findings in the baseline studies, where frontline and management staff were found to be digitally savvy. This indicates that there is a lot of variation in digital literacy among SSPO staff that system-level data covers up.

Another interpretation is that while SSPO staff might have been able to cope with technology needs presented during the pandemic, there is still some uncertainty about new technologies that emerge in the future. This is further corroborated by the second ranked need in question (c): “A repository of available technologies that are tried and tested for the sector with a list of features, cost comparisons and effectiveness”.

Access to tools was ranked highly as a gap and a goal to achieve for agencies. But the need for tools to test and evaluate was ranked low among agencies. This ranking makes sense because training and a repository of available tools is a prerequisite to having access to those tools. Even though a repository of available tried-and-tested technologies was ranked as highly needed for agencies, it was not ranked highly as a desired state or existing gap. This indicates that agencies would like to have access to useful tools but are not willing to adopt and test potential new tools. Agencies are risk averse in the face of uncertainty created by the pandemic and rapid technological change. There is a need to adapt to these changes in the sector with digital skills training and with external assistance/expertise in what new digital communications technologies should be adopted.

Finally, collaboration and knowledge of how the sector develops and uses technologies was not highlighted as a desired goal or need for agencies. Although, it was ranked high as a gap in the sector. This indicates that sector knowledge on how digital communications technologies are being financed, developed and used by others is something that agencies are unaware of.

Conclusions and recommendations

In this paper, we utilized data from past studies on technology-use in Canada’s settlement sector to establish a system-wide baseline for platform usage, platform effectiveness and inclusiveness during the COVID-19 pandemic. We found that only about half of Settlement Service Provider Organizations (SSPOs) were using digital tools to communicate and deliver services to newcomers. The majority were using live-stream video conferencing or recorded webinars. The results were about the same for platform effectiveness.

Staff at the SSPO were using these tools to communicate with each other and perform their job tasks while keeping their clients in mind about which tools to use. There is strong evidence of inclusiveness for those who were not able to use online services, but access to services among newcomers living in rural areas only moderately improved, and there is no evidence of improved access for pre-arrival newcomers.

We also conducted a survey on 30 SSPOs that allowed us to extract more detailed information on how they were using social media platforms in the delivery of services and communicating with new and existing clients. We found that social media platform usage was much higher than the system-wide average. In addition, platform effectiveness was higher than the baseline estimates. In terms of inclusiveness, the share of pre-arrival newcomers and rural dwellers that represent the surveyed agencies’ client base is much smaller than the system-wide average. Finally, we found that only about half the surveyed organizations were using a social media platform for service delivery and much fewer are using it for the delivery of pre-arrival services. Similar to the Canada-wide baseline, only few agencies were serving pre-arrival newcomers. The majority of agencies were using social media platforms for post-arrival service delivery, and they were using a wide variety of platforms to serve newcomers. This fits the inclusiveness findings from the baseline studies that frontline staff are digitally literate, they are assessing the digital literacy of their clients, and delivering services to newcomers on platforms that they are already familiar with.

Finally, we also asked the SSPOs that we surveyed about the goals, needs and gaps they perceive within their organizations and the sector as a whole. We found that agencies would like to see their staff skilled enough to use available technologies, but there is a lot of variation in digital literacy among SSPO staff. Due to the pandemic, there is uncertainty about new technologies that may emerge in the future. Agencies would like to have access to useful tools but are not willing to adopt and test potential new tools because they are risk averse in the face of uncertainty created by the pandemic and rapid technological change. There is a need to adapt to these changes in the sector with digital skills training, with external assistance/expertise in what new digital communications technologies should be adopted.

Based on this sector-wide analysis of online tools usage in the settlement sector, there were some sector-level gaps that were identified that need to be addressed. These sector-level gaps are:

- More research on whether there has been a change in outcomes (or a change in perceptions of process and outcome quality) for newcomers from the transition towards online service usage, relative to the same service being provided in-person.
- Expanding awareness of available virtual services to pre-arrival and rural newcomers.
- Provide more resources for communication teams at settlement provider associations so that they can assist their members with training and professional development opportunities, create a collaborative environment for sharing innovation, and build capacity.
- Policy makers should consider developing a comprehensive policy for digital literacy across SSPOs in the sector.

In the survey we conducted with the 30 agencies there were some additional recommendations identified:

- Partners and their members can consider expanding services to rural dwellers and pre-arrival newcomers closer to the national average.
- Partners and their members must be provided more digital skills training opportunities.
- Partners and their members need external assistance/expertise in their adoption of new digital communications technologies.

Finally, it should be noted that the change in quality when moving from in-person to online services was not assessed in the benchmarking survey. This is a drawback of the survey which we hope to incorporate in future work.

References

Albanna, H., Alalwan, A. A., & Al-Emran, M. (2022). An integrated model for using social media applications in non-profit organizations. *International Journal of Information Management*, *63*, 102452. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2021.102452

Ashton, W., Pettigrew, R. N., & Galatsanou, E. (2016). Assessment of settlement services systems in western and northern Canada: Perceptions of settlement provider organizations. *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, *48*(3), 69–89. https://doi.org/10.1353/ces.2016.0026

BMRC - IRMU. (2022, May 5). *The future of the Ontario settlement sector: Learning from the global pandemic* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQugGClSgyc

Campana, M., & Liu, J. (2022). *Settlement sector and technology task group survey—Full data*. Settlement Sector and Technology Task Group. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/363800971_Settlement_Sector_and_Technology_Task_Group_Survey_-_full_data

Carboni, J. L., & Maxwell, S. P. (2015). Effective social media engagement for nonprofits: What matters? *Publisher*. https://scholarworks.iupui.edu/handle/1805/7368

Curtis, L., Edwards, C., Fraser, K. L., Gudelsky, S., Holmquist, J., Thornton, K., & Sweetser, K. D. (2010). Adoption of social media for public relations by nonprofit organizations. *Public Relations Review*, *36*(1), 90–92. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.10.003

Dennler, K. (2022). *Making rural immigration work: Settlement services in small and rural communities*. The Conference Board of Canada. https://www.conferenceboard.ca/product/making-rural-immigration-work-settlement-services-in-small-and-rural-communities-2/

D’Souza, J., Ekra, M., Preston, V., & Shields, J. (2022a). *Pandemic response survey results OCASI agency frontline workers*. BMRC-IRMU. https://bmrc-irmu.info.yorku.ca/files/2022/04/OCASI-Frontline-Results-Final.pdf?x15611

D’Souza, J., Ekra, M., Preston, V., & Shields, J. (2022b). *Pandemic response survey results OCASI agency management*. BMRC-IRMU. https://bmrc-irmu.info.yorku.ca/files/2022/04/OCASI-Management-Results-Final.pdf?x15611

Esses, V., McRae, J., Alboim, N., Brown, N., Friesen, C., Hamilton, L., Lacassagne, A., Macklin, A., & Walton-Roberts, M. (2021). Supporting Canada’s COVID-19 resilience and recovery through robust immigration policy and programs. *FACETS*, *6*, 686–759. https://doi.org/10.1139/facets-2021-0014

Foltin, Z., Minta, A. A., & Hui, T. S.-W. (2022). *Assessment of IRCC settlement service impacts*. Social Research and Demonstration Corporation.

Gartner, J., Fink, M., Floh, A., & Eggers, F. (2021). Service quality in social media communication of NPOs: The moderating effect of channel choice. *Journal of Business Research*, *137*, 579–587. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.08.026

Government of Canada. (2021, November 26). *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and service providers: Providing services to your clients* [Guidance]. https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/coronavirus-covid19/settlement-resettlement-providers/providing-services.html

Hou, Y., & Lampe, C. (2015). Social media effectiveness for public engagement: Example of small nonprofits. *Proceedings of the 33rd Annual ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 3107–3116. https://doi.org/10.1145/2702123.2702557

Ihm, J. (2015). Network measures to evaluate stakeholder engagement with nonprofit organizations on social networking sites. *Public Relations Review*, *41*(4), 501–503. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2015.06.018

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. (2017). *Evaluation of the settlement program* (Research and Evaluation) [Evaluation Division]. Government of Canada.

https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/ircc/documents/pdf/english/evaluation/e2-2016-settlement-en.pdf.

Liu, J. (Jo), Ekmekcioglu, C., & Campana, M. (2021). *From silos to solutions: Toward sustainable and equitable hybrid service delivery in the immigrant & refugee-serving sector in Canada*. AMSSA. https://www.amssa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/EN-Settlement-Sector-Technology-Task-Group-final-report-and-recommendations.pdf

Lovejoy, K., & Saxton, G. D. (2012). Information, community, and action: How nonprofit organizations use social media. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *17*(3), 337–353. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2012.01576.x

Monteiro, S. (2021). *Newcomers' learning about the Canadian labour market on social media*. Tableau Public. https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/stein.monteiro2258/viz/Pre-arrivalnewcomerslearningabouttheCanadianlabourmarketonsocialmediaplatforms/Dashboard1

Monteiro, S. (2022). Social media and internet usage rates on employment outcomes among newcomers in Canada. *CERC-RCIS Working Papers*, *2022/2*. https://www.torontomu.ca/content/dam/centre-for-immigration-and-settlement/tmcis/publications/workingpapers/2022_2_Monteiro_Stein_Social_media_and_internet_usage_rates_on_employment_outcomes_among_newcomers_in_Canada.pdf

Nah, S., & Saxton, G. D. (2013). Modeling the adoption and use of social media by nonprofit organizations. *New Media & Society*, *15*(2), 294–313. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444812452411

Namisango, F., Kang, K., & Rehman, J. (2019). What do we know about social media in nonprofits? A review. *PACIS 2019 Proceedings*, *16*. https://aisel.aisnet.org/pacis2019/16

Ontario Nonprofit Network, & l'Assemblée de la Francophonie de l'Ontario. (2021). *COVID-19: State of the Ontario nonprofit sector one year later*. Ontario Nonprofit Network. https://theonn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/2021_ONN_State-of-the-Ontario-Nonprofit-Sector.pdf

Praznik, J., & Shields, J. (2018). *An anatomy of settlement services in Canada: A guide*. Building Migrant Resilient Cities (BMRC-IRMU). https://bmrc-irmu.info.yorku.ca/files/2018/07/An-Anatomy-of-Settlement-Services-in-Canada_BMRCIRMU.pdf

Settlement Sector and Technology Task Group. (2022). *Settlement sector and technology task group survey—Full data.* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/363800971_Settlement_Sector_and_Technology_Task_Group_Survey_-_full_data

Shields, J., & Abu Alrob, Z. (2020). *COVID-19, migration and the Canadian immigration system: Dimensions, impact and resilience* (Research Report). Building Migrant Resilient Cities (BMRC-IRMU). https://km4s.ca/wp-content/uploads/COVID-19-Migration-and-the-Canadian-Immigration-System-Dimensions-Impact-and-Resilience-2020.pdf

Shields, J., Drolet, J., & Valenzuela, K. (2016). Immigrant settlement and integration services and the role of nonprofit providers: A cross-national perspective on trends, issues and evidence. *RCIS Working Papers*, *2016/1*. https://www.torontomu.ca/content/dam/centre-for-immigration-and-settlement/tmcis/publications/workingpapers/2016_1_Shields_John_Drolet_Julie_Valenzuela_Karla_Immigrant_Settlement_and_Integration_Services_and_the_Role_of_Nonprofit_Service_Providers_A_Cross_National_Perspective_on_Trends_Issues_and_Evidence.pdf

Waters, R. D., Burnett, E., Lamm, A., & Lucas, J. (2009). Engaging stakeholders through social networking: How nonprofit organizations are using Facebook. *Public Relations Review*, *35*(2), 102–106. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.01.006