



SASKATCHEWAN ASSOCIATION OF IMMIGRANT SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION AGENCIES

## Saskatchewan Association of Immigrant and Integration Agencies (SAISIA) Response to Royal Society of Canada Sector COVID Recommendations

August 2021

### Background:

Established in 1987, SAISIA serves newcomers by providing settlement and integration agencies in Saskatchewan with access to professional development and opportunities to network, as well as links to resources they can use to strengthen and enhance their internal procedures, client programs, and services. SAISIA is the voice of immigration and settlement agencies to the federal, provincial, and municipal governments, the community, and the public.

The Royal Society of Canada developed the RSC Task Force on COVID-19 which was mandated to provide evidence-informed perspectives on major societal challenges in response to and recovery from COVID-19. A Task Force established a series of Working Groups to rapidly develop Policy Briefings, with the objective of supporting policy makers with evidence to inform their decisions.

Canada has been seen globally as a leader in immigration and integration policies and programs and as an attractive and welcoming country for immigrants, refugees, temporary foreign workers, and international students. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed some of the strengths of Canada's immigration system, as well as some of the fault lines that have been developing and have deepened over the last few years. The Royal Society provides an overview of Canada's immigration system prior to the pandemic, and the policies and programs in place to support immigrant selection, settlement, and integration. On their web site, they discuss the system's vulnerabilities as revealed by the pandemic, and explore a post-COVID-19 immigration vision.

In a recent report, the Royal Society provided a set of recommendations for action by the federal and provincial/territorial. <https://rsc-src.ca/en/covid-19-policy-briefing/supporting-canada%E2%80%99s-covid-19-resilience-and-recovery-through-robust>.

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At a broad level, these recommendations include:

- A public education program on immigration (to promote an informed public), followed by a comprehensive review, whether in the form of a Royal Commission, task force, or other mechanism, to engage Canadians in a discussion of the future of immigration to Canada, and a recalibration of its policies and programs to meet Canada's own current and future needs and its global responsibilities.
- Immigration planning and federal settlement funding that takes into account both permanent and temporary residents.
- Expanded pathways to permanence for temporary residents.
- Targeted policies and programs that address the needs of vulnerable permanent and temporary resident groups.
- Special consideration of Francophone immigration.
- Public campaigns and civic engagement program expansion to promote positive attitudes toward immigrants, refugees, and immigration among established Canadians and to promote smaller jurisdictions to newcomers.
- A coordinated network of national promising practices in the incorporation of skilled immigrants in the workplace.
- Research to drive evidence-based policy and program redesign during the pandemic and beyond.
- Leadership on the Global Compacts on Refugees and Migration.

SAISIA summarized the priorities for a survey they distributed to Saskatchewan immigration agencies. The rankings provided are in response to this survey.

## Findings.

The priorities and a ranking of the responses are as follows. Surveys were sent to urban and rural SPOs in Saskatchewan. There were six urban responses were returned and seven rural surveys. There are some findings that can be ascertained from these responses.

## Summary of Urban Responses.

The respondents were asked to rank the following recommendations in order of the priority (#1 being top priority).

<b>We recommend that the federal and provincial/territorial governments:</b>	<b>Rank</b>
<i>Economic impact of the pandemic on immigrants and the potential for long-term scarring.</i>	
Within the context of programs designed to address economic scarring among the general population, <b>provide targeted funding for employment training/supports</b> for newcomers impacted during the pandemic and those coming in during the post-pandemic economic recovery period to combat deskilling and to prevent and counter scarring effects that may occur (e.g., employer incentives for onsite training and retraining, bridge training and laddering programs, mentorship programs and volunteer opportunities)	2
<b>Provide targeted funding for remedial initiatives</b> for immigrant and refugee children impacted by the pandemic (e.g., additional settlement workers in schools, homework clubs)	1

<b>We recommend that the federal and provincial/territorial governments:</b>	<b>Rank</b>
<i>Immigration Levels and Admissions</i>	
Allocate additional resources to the processing of applications in all immigration classes and temporary entrant categories, both in Canada and abroad, to ensure that targets are met.	2
Review permanent resident admission criteria for economic entrants under Express Entry, Provincial Nominee Programs, and all pilots to ensure that they can better respond to the range of labour market and demographic needs across the country beyond those requiring high human capital.	3
Develop provincial and territorial multi-year immigration plans including forecasting permanent and temporary resident admissions, demographic shifts, and settlement patterns.	1
Include in the Annual Report to Parliament target ranges for temporary to permanent resident conversions by temporary resident categories, as well as three-year projections for the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, the International Mobility Program, the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program, international students, and refugee claimants.	3

<b>We recommend that the federal and provincial/territorial governments:</b>	<b>Rank</b>
<i>Settlement and Integration Sector (health, technology, community social and other supports including housing, women and gender, funding , and others).</i>	
Within a broader social policy agenda, develop, implement, and evaluate the outcomes of universal basic income pilots that include newcomers residing in different regions.	15
Within a broader social policy agenda, develop more low-cost housing options that include newcomers across the country.	4
Review shelter allowance rates for newcomers.	11
Pilot an expansion of universal health care coverage to include temporary foreign workers, international students, and refugee claimants.	8
Review Interim Federal Health coverage and the eligibility timeframe for refugees, and current Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) income support rates to adequately support complex, special need government-assisted refugee cases.	7
Establish a national settlement trauma informed clinical mental health program, in multiple languages, that specifically targets refugee newcomers within their first five years in Canada.	3
Within a broader gender-responsive COVID-19 plan, provide targeted funding for supporting immigrant women impacted by social isolation and increased risk of family violence during the pandemic (including in smaller, rural, and remote communities).	6
Develop settlement-informed multilingual domestic violence supports.	1
Develop a central repository of public health and emergency information in multiple languages that can be a ready source of information for settlement agencies, Local Immigration Partnerships, and Réseaux en immigration francophone to access and disseminate when the need may arise.	13

Explore ways to ensure that newcomers have the capacity to access multilingual information and support online or by phone, including expanding self-service newcomer client portals.	5
Provide funding to ethno-specific organizations to increase their capacity to provide designated community space, public education and engagement, community development, and other targeted supports to immigrants/temporary residents and racialized minorities.	12
Increase eligibility for some federally funded settlement services to include international students, temporary foreign workers, and refugee claimants.	2
Provide targeted settlement funding for supporting temporary entrants who transition to permanent residence.	14
Maintain online citizenship testing and ceremonies as a complement to those that are in person.	11
Review settlement funding allocation models and procedures based on what we have learned during the pandemic.	8
Design a multi-level national plan to support at-risk populations including newcomers with low digital literacy and limited access to technology to ensure that targeted national settlement core program funding includes digital literacy supports in all program areas.	10
Create a national technology capital replacement budget or mechanism to ensure current settlement service providers have the capacity to continue and expand a hybrid service delivery approach post-COVID.	9
As a component of professional development, provide targeted funding for digital literacy training to settlement service providers, including those serving smaller, rural, and remote communities.	9

## Recommendations from the Urban settlement organizations.

The following recommendations are in a loosely prioritized order by highest audience rankings and by the number of rankings in each theme area.

1. Planning and Administration. The urban respondents prioritized items relating to provincial and territorial multi-year planning and forecasting. These included suggestions for targeting funding to different audiences and organizations. One such priority was to review funding allocation models after the pandemic including funding ethno-specific organizations to provide support to newcomers.

2. Health. The urban respondents supported the establishment of a national trauma clinical mental health program in multiple languages and somewhat favoured a central repository of public health and emergency information. However, they did recommend expanding health care coverage for refugees and increasing RAP income support rates and coverage to include temporary foreign workers, international students, and refugee claimants.

3. Technology and Access to Technology. The urban respondents ranked several recommendations higher that reinforced the concept of ensuring that newcomers have the capacity to access multi-lingual information either online or by phone. They suggested a multi-national plan to support newcomers with low digital literacy and access to technology and a national technology replacement budget/mechanism and targeted funding for digital literacy training to SPOs including smaller

communities. They recommended maintaining online citizenship testing and ceremonies to complement those in person.

4. Women and Children. The urban respondents chose targeted funding for immigrant and refugee children as a priority of the economic impact of the pandemic. Their #1 priority for the settlement sector recommendations was development settlement-informed multi-lingual domestic violence supports. They prioritized target funding for supporting immigrant women impacted by social isolation and increased risk of family violence during the pandemic.

5. Housing. Two housing-related recommendations were ranked #4 and #11. They suggested more low-cost housing options and a review of shelter allowance rates for newcomers.

6. Targeted funding to marginalized clients. The urban respondents recognized that more settlement services (ranked #2) and funding should be provided to international students, temporary foreign workers, and refugee claimants. Also included is expanding health care coverage (see #2 above).

## Summary of Rural Responses

Seven responses from rural SPOs were returned.

The respondents were asked to rank the following recommendations in order of the priority (#1 being top priority).

We recommend that the federal and provincial/territorial governments:	Rank
<i>Economic impact of the pandemic on immigrants and the potential for long-term scarring.</i>	
Within the context of programs designed to address economic scarring among the general population, <b>provide targeted funding for employment training/supports</b> for newcomers impacted during the pandemic and those coming in during the post-pandemic economic recovery period to combat deskilling and to prevent and counter scarring effects that may occur (e.g., employer incentives for onsite training and retraining, bridge training and laddering programs, mentorship programs and volunteer opportunities).	1
<b>Provide targeted funding for remedial initiatives</b> for immigrant and refugee children impacted by the pandemic (e.g., additional settlement workers in schools, homework clubs).	2

We recommend that the federal and provincial/territorial governments:	Rank
<i>Immigration Levels and Admissions</i>	
Allocate additional resources to the processing of applications in all immigration classes and temporary entrant categories, both in Canada and abroad, to ensure that targets are met.	1

Review permanent resident admission criteria for economic entrants under Express Entry, Provincial Nominee Programs, and all pilots to ensure that they can better respond to the range of labour market and demographic needs across the country beyond those requiring high human capital.	1
Develop provincial and territorial multi-year immigration plans including forecasting permanent and temporary resident admissions, demographic shifts, and settlement patterns.	2
Include in the Annual Report to Parliament target ranges for temporary to permanent resident conversions by temporary resident categories, as well as three-year projections for the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, the International Mobility Program, the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program, international students, and refugee claimants.	3

<b>We recommend that the federal and provincial/territorial governments:</b>	<b>Rank</b>
<i>Settlement and Integration Sector (health, technology, community social and other supports including housing, women and gender, funding, and others).</i>	
Within a broader social policy agenda, develop, implement, and evaluate the outcomes of universal basic income pilots that include newcomers residing in different regions.	1
Within a broader social policy agenda, develop more low-cost housing options that include newcomers across the country.	7
Review shelter allowance rates for newcomers.	9
Pilot an expansion of universal health care coverage to include temporary foreign workers, international students, and refugee claimants.	2
Review Interim Federal Health coverage and the eligibility timeframe for refugees, and current Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) income support rates to adequately support complex, special need government-assisted refugee cases.	8
Establish a national settlement trauma informed clinical mental health program, in multiple languages, that specifically targets refugee newcomers within their first five years in Canada.	3
Within a broader gender-responsive COVID-19 plan, provide targeted funding for supporting immigrant women impacted by social isolation and increased risk of family violence during the pandemic (including in smaller, rural, and remote communities).	6
Develop settlement-informed multilingual domestic violence supports.	10
Develop a central repository of public health and emergency information in multiple languages that can be a ready source of information for settlement agencies, Local Immigration Partnerships, and Réseaux en immigration francophone to access and disseminate when the need may arise.	5
Explore ways to ensure that newcomers have the capacity to access multilingual information and support online or by phone, including expanding self-service newcomer client portals.	14
Provide funding to ethno-specific organizations to increase their capacity to provide designated community space, public education and engagement, community development, and other targeted supports to immigrants/temporary residents and racialized minorities.	4
Increase eligibility for some federally funded settlement services to include international students, temporary foreign workers, and refugee claimants.	11
Provide targeted settlement funding for supporting temporary entrants who transition to permanent residence.	13
Maintain online citizenship testing and ceremonies as a complement to those that are in person.	14
Review settlement funding allocation models and procedures based on what we have learned during the pandemic.	10
Design a multi-level national plan to support at-risk populations including newcomers with low digital literacy and limited access to technology to ensure that targeted national settlement core program funding includes digital literacy supports in all program areas.	12

Create a national technology capital replacement budget or mechanism to ensure current settlement service providers have the capacity to continue and expand a hybrid service delivery approach post-COVID.	12
As a component of professional development, provide targeted funding for digital literacy training to settlement service providers, including those serving smaller, rural, and remote communities.	15

## Recommendations from the Rural settlement organizations.

The following recommendation are in a loosely prioritized order by highest rankings and by the number of rankings in each theme area.

1. Planning and Administration. The rural respondents chose targeted funding for employment training/supports as their priority for the economic impact of the pandemic. They chose as their first priorities for immigration levels and admissions: allocating additional resources to processing applications to ensure targets are met; and those of reviewing permanent resident admission criteria for economic entrants in related programs.

In settlement and integration, rural respondents' #1 priority was that of evaluating the outcomes of universal basic income pilots in different regions. This was followed by providing funding to ethno-specific organizations to increase their capacity to provide support to newcomers.

2. Health. Rural respondents ranked highly two priorities: an expansion of universal health care coverage to include temporary foreign workers, international students (#2), and refugee claimants ; and the establishment of a national clinical mental health programs in multiple languages (#3). Other highly ranked priorities were those of a central repository of public health and emergency information in multiple languages and a review of interim federal health coverage for refugees, and RAP clients include income support complex cases.

3. Women and Children. The rural respondents rated two specific related recommendations as #6 and #10. These included targeted funding for immigrant women in social isolations that are at risk of domestic violence and that of multi-lingual domestic violence support for women. These rankings were lower than those of the urban respondents.

4. Technology and Access to Technology. The rural respondents cited several priorities related to technology but the rankings were in the mid to lower range. Two priorities for clients included a multi-national plan to support at-risk newcomers with low digital literacy and the maintenance of online citizenship testing and ceremonies to support in-person events. Other priorities cited dealt with technology infrastructure and the digital literacy of SPOs to support newcomers.

5. Housing. The rural respondents rated more low-cost housing and review shelter allowance rates as #7 and #9. There are moderate rankings but noteworthy.

6. Target funding to Marginalized Clients. The rural respondents rated two recommendations as #11 and #13 relating to targeted funding. They suggested increasing the eligibility of some federally funded services to international students, temporary foreign, workers, and refugee claimants (see Health also) and to provide targeted settlement funding to support temporary entrants transition to permanent residency. They did rank universal health care to these clients as #2 (see Health above).

Comparisons of Rural to Urban Responses.

### Settlement and Integration of Immigrants and Refugees

The rural respondents said their priority was to fund programs designed to target employment training/support for newcomers because of COVID. The urban respondents selected as their priority the target of funding for remedial initiatives for immigrant and refugee children impacted by the pandemic.

### Immigration Levels and Admissions

The first two priorities of rural respondents were to allocate additional resources to the processing of applications ...to ensure that targets are met and to review the permanent resident admission criteria for economic entrants ...to ensure that they can better respond ....

The priority of urban respondents was to develop provincial and territorial multi-year immigration plans including forecasting...patterns.

### Settlement and Integration Sector (health, technology, community social and other supports including housing, women and gender, funding , and others).

To analyze and compare the responses, three categories were developed. The Urban and Rural statement were grouped into those that had similar responses, those what were somewhat different and those responses that were opposite in ranking.

Similar rankings by both urban and rural respondents were those that focused on:

Planning and Administration:

- Review settlement funding allocation models and procedures based on what we have learned during the pandemic.



#### Health

- Review Federal Health coverage and eligibility timeframe for refugees and current RAP...
- Establish a national settlement trauma informed mental health program...

#### Housing

- Targeted settlement funding supporting temporary residents who transition to permanent residence.

#### Technology

- Maintain online citizenship testing and ceremonies as a complement to in-person.

#### Women and Children

- Provide targeted funding supporting immigrant women impacted by social isolation....

### Somewhat different rankings by rural and urban respondents focused on:

#### Health:

- Pilot an expansion of universal health care coverage to include temporary foreign workers, international students, and refugee claimants.
  - This was ranked higher by urban respondents.

#### Housing:

- Development more low-cost housing options .....
  - This was ranked higher by the urban respondents.
- Review shelter allowance rates for newcomers
  - This was ranked a bit higher by rural respondents.

#### Technology:

- Design a multi-level national plan to support at-risk populations including newcomers with low digital literacy and limited access ...
  - The urban respondents ranked this a bit higher than the rural respondents.
- Create a national technology capital replacement budget/mechanism ....
  - The rural respondents ranked this a bit higher than the urban respondents.
- Provide targeted funding for digital literacy training to SPOs ....
  - The urban respondents ranked this somewhat higher than the rural respondents.

#### Women and Children

- Develop settlement-informed multi-lingual domestic violence supports.
  - Ranked #1 by urban respondents and #10 by rural respondents.

## Opposites and greatest differences

### Planning and Administration:

- Within a broader social policy agenda, develop, implement, and evaluate the **outcomes of universal basic income pilots** that include newcomers residing in different regions.
  - This was ranked #1 by rural respondents and #15 by urban respondents.

### Health:

- Develop a **central repository of public health and emergency information in multiple languages** that can be a ready source of information for settlement agencies, Local Immigration Partnerships, and Réseaux en immigration francophone to access and disseminate when the need may arise...
  - This was ranked #5 by rural respondents and #13 by urban respondents.

### Technology:

- Explore ways to ensure that newcomers have the capacity to **access multilingual information and support online or by phone**, including expanding self-service newcomer client portals.
  - Ranked # 14 by rural respondents and #5 by urban respondents.

Provide **funding to ethno-specific organizations** to increase their capacity to provide designated community space, public education and engagement, community development, and other **targeted supports** to immigrants/temporary residents and racialized minorities.

- Ranked # 4 by rural respondents and #12 by urban respondents.

### Target Funding to Marginalized Clients:

- **Increase eligibility for some federally funded settlement services** to include international students, temporary foreign workers, and refugee claimants.
  - Ranked #2 by urban respondents and #11 by rural respondents.

## Summary and Recommendations for Saskatchewan settlement organizations.

Based on the responses to the surveys, the following recommendations are suggested as priorities for SIASIA and Saskatchewan, in so ranking order.

- The urban settlement providers are asking for more planning, administrative, and forecasting processes to be put in place. The urban SPOs often have the most newcomers arriving on short notice; they must be ready often for larger numbers.
- The rural settlement providers seem to be more focused on the employment and the training needs of newcomers. Newcomers who move to rural areas are often relocating for jobs or sponsored by an organization.
- All respondents are asking for a review of allocation models and procedures during and since the pandemic. There are many lessons to be learned from these changes made during this time.
- Health care is a concern for newcomers to Saskatchewan. Specific concerns are those to expand service to RAP clients, international students, and temporary foreign workers. RAP and international students tend to be more often located in urban centres and temporary foreign workers may be located in rural areas.
- The increased use of technology during the pandemic has forced many changes. Both urban and rural respondents indicate that they plan to/wish to use of hybrid methods of service in the future. The urban SPOs want a multi-level plan to support low-digital literacy clients. Rural SPOs seem to want more support for the SPOs themselves and an updated technology infrastructure. All respondents want more accessibility to information for their clients in multiple languages online. This may be more critical to rural newcomers as the diversity and availability of multi-lingual SPOs may not be as great.
- Low-cost housing options are more challenging in urban centres and both rural and urban respondents want shelter allowance rates for newcomers reviewed.
- Domestic violence and social isolation with the risk of domestic violence is an urgent concern, specifically in urban centres.
- Providing funding to ethno-specific organizations to increase their capacity to provide community support was popular with both rural and urban respondents although not ranked the same. There may be more specific organizations in urban centres who are providing or can provide this support to newcomers. There may not be as many specific organizations in rural areas. Can the urban organization reach out to rural Saskatchewan to assist specific groups of newcomers?

The urban SPOs ranked some recommendations lower than those of their rural counterparts such as supporting temporary entrants to permanent residence and a central depository of public health and emergency information. Some of these lower, urban responses may be because there are more services for newcomers in urban centres. Also, there are more ethno-specific organizations available to provide support to newcomers. These factors may be considered and solutions may be available.

Further investigations into these recommendations may be warranted as the number of responses was low. However, there may be further evidence in the Prairie/Northern Territory region to further support these findings.