



BREAKING INTO THE CANADIAN MEDIA INDUSTRY: ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL BARRIERS FOR FIRST-GENERATION IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE JOURNALISTS



A group of immigrant journalists at the NCM Ottawa workshop (Feb, 2020)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY– A MISSED OPPORTUNITY: Immigrant and Refugee Journalists

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NEW CANADIAN MEDIA
THE PULSE OF IMMIGRANT CANADA

QUOTE

The media industry has yet to tap into the talents and experiences of first-generation immigrant and refugee journalists in Canada, despite the changing demographics. It's a missed opportunity.

New Canadian Media launched a study - the first of its kind - last fall to hear the perspectives of polished journalists to explore the experiences and socioeconomic prospects for first-generation immigrant and refugee journalists in Canada. Our small team, led by members of the NCM Collective, spent months seeking out their stories. We received over a hundred survey responses and conducted dozens of interviews.

What we found is that while many come with years of experience in the media from their home countries, and quite a few have gained international recognition, most have struggled to break into the Canadian media industry. All would like to continue doing what they do best in Canada: journalism. But time and again, they have come up against a variety of hurdles, from immigration hassles and language barriers to financial difficulties and mental health problems.

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Echoing the struggles of immigrants in other industries, these highly qualified individuals are unable to practice their profession. This, even as the Canadian media seeks to diversify its workforce to better reflect the realities of the Canadian population -- of which first and second-generation immigrants make up an increasingly large share.

These journalists come with a unique set of skills, perspectives and experiences that would be an asset to the Canadian media industry. They are a reservoir of untapped potential.



EMPLOYMENT

- While 78% of migrant and refugee respondents have worked in the media for over 5 years, and 93% would like to continue their career as journalists, only 29% of respondents are currently employed in the Canadian media industry.
- Two out of five immigrant and refugee journalists work as freelancers in the media industry or other sectors in the "gig" economy

SOCIOECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES

- 59% of immigrant and refugee journalist respondents make less than \$40,000 annually, significantly less than Canada's median total income and the average salary of journalists in Canada.

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

- The vast majority (81%) of refugee journalists who responded to the survey consider language skills the key barrier to finding employment. This is less of an issue for immigrant journalists (19%).

- While many report difficulties with English, all the survey respondents understand the language. Most (over 70%) are fluently bilingual or multilingual, with some having published in French (22%), Spanish (14%), Hindi, Turkish, and Arabic (28%). A significant number (51%) of journalists also reported being able to read or understand Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, and Bengali alongside their fluency in English, French, or Spanish.

MENTAL HEALTH

- 49 per cent of immigrant and refugee journalists have experienced emotional or psychological difficulties as a result of not being able to practice their profession.

JOURNALISM

- Immigrant and refugee journalists are more likely to publish in or contribute to the diaspora or community press more than any other form of media in Canada.
- About 4 out of 10 have published in established international media outlets.
- A similar proportion (39%) report having been able to publish in mainstream Canadian media.

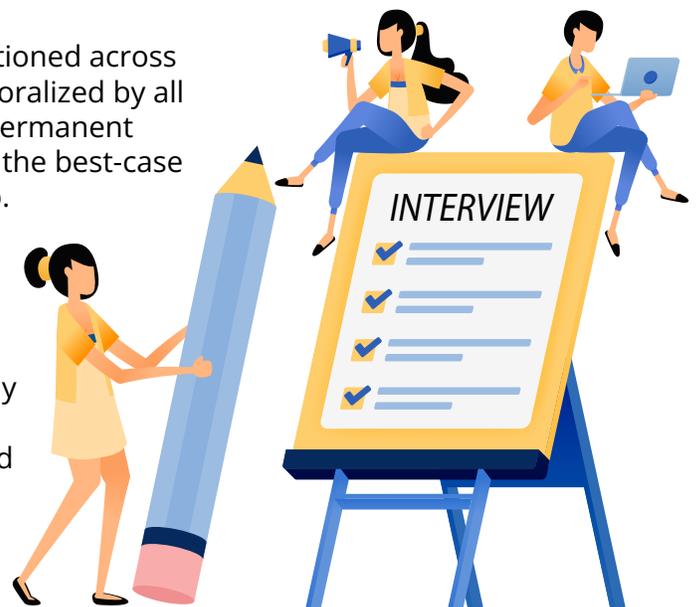
The interviews conducted with 47 journalists (18 refugees; 29 immigrants) complete the picture and echo some of the survey responses.

Over half of the interviewees reported experiencing economic and financial difficulties in Canada. Some mentioned the stress of freelancing work in the gig economy.

Immigration issues are a constant source of anxiety mentioned across the interviews. A number of journalists report being demoralized by all the paperwork involved in applying for work permits or permanent residency status -- a process that can often take years, in the best-case scenario -- so as to be able to land a stable, long-term job.

Almost all of the refugee journalists interviewed reported being separated from their loved ones at one point or another as a result of Canada's immigration policies.

While language came up frequently as a problem in nearly all of the interviews, for some the barriers are cultural. One journalist characterized the "closed-mindedness" and "cold passive-aggressiveness" of anglophone Canadian culture as deeply problematic, especially when doing interviews or working with editors and publishers.



At least two journalists mentioned the lack of depth and interest in international issues in Canadian mainstream media as discouraging, and contrary to the kind of journalism they would rather do. More than a few, especially European journalists (from France, Spain and Serbia), are considering returning to their home countries to try their luck there.

Locked out of the mainstream media industry, some share the sentiment of being trapped or limited to publishing in diaspora or community newspapers – where jobs are often low-paid and precarious. At least two journalists who have managed to work for the mainstream media feel they are pigeon-holed into covering certain “ethnic” or “diversity” topics, while not being taken seriously when they attempt to cover issues not related to their own communities.

For still others, the problems are existential. For refugee journalists, in particular, the feeling of being twice reduced to silence, in a country that offers them safety but not purpose, can be all the more painful. In this half-way house, emotions gravitate between gratitude and disappointment, hope and resignation. Between what they have lived through and the everyday reality of most Canadians who seem rarely interested in what they have to say, the gulf can appear unbridgeable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Immigrant and refugee journalists believe more could be done to better integrate them into the Canadian media landscape. In our survey, journalists selected a variety of options that would help integrate immigrants and refugees into the media landscape. The three most popular options mentioned by the respondents:

- Opening up more permanent staffing positions for ethnic reports (83%)
- Mentorship opportunities (76%)
- More internships geared toward international students and immigrants



Some of the journalists mentioned that the Canadian government should invest in concrete financial and language support so as to facilitate their entry into the media industry. Media companies could also open up more permanent positions for first-generation immigrant and refugee journalists.

Finding ways to bridge them into the industry would allow the Canadian media to benefit from their unique perspectives. Immigrant audiences in Canada are generally unconvinced that mainstream media outlets are geared towards their interests, with audiences seeking greater representation of racialised groups as well as more international news coverage. Our study found that these are precisely the two main themes that immigrant and refugee journalists tend to cover the most in their reporting. In other words, they are prepared to take on topics that are of most interest to immigrants who take up an increasingly large share of the Canadian media’s target audience.

A couple of journalists also highlighted the importance of investing in Canada’s public broadcasting service to devote more space to international coverage. In this way, the CBC/Radio-Canada could, for example, tap into the knowledge and native language skills of refugee and immigrant journalists.