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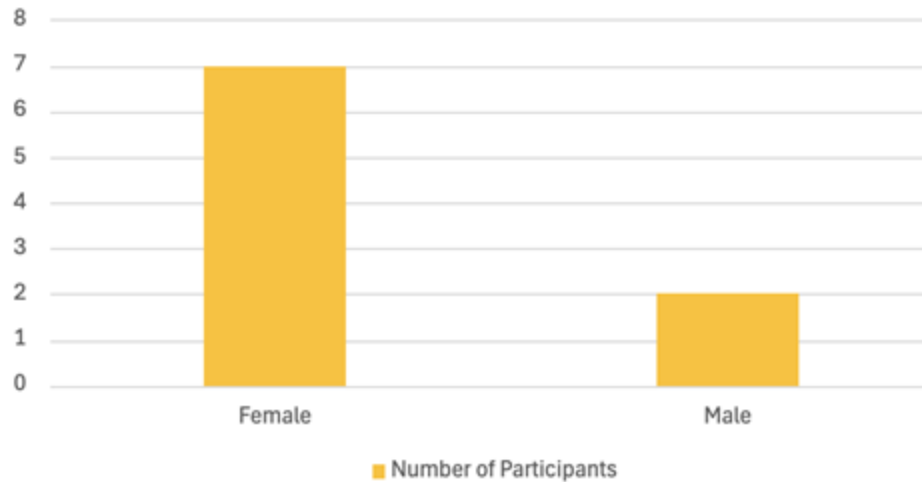
Exploring Inter-Ethnic Relationships in Alberta's Settlement Services Sector

P2P 2025 National Conference

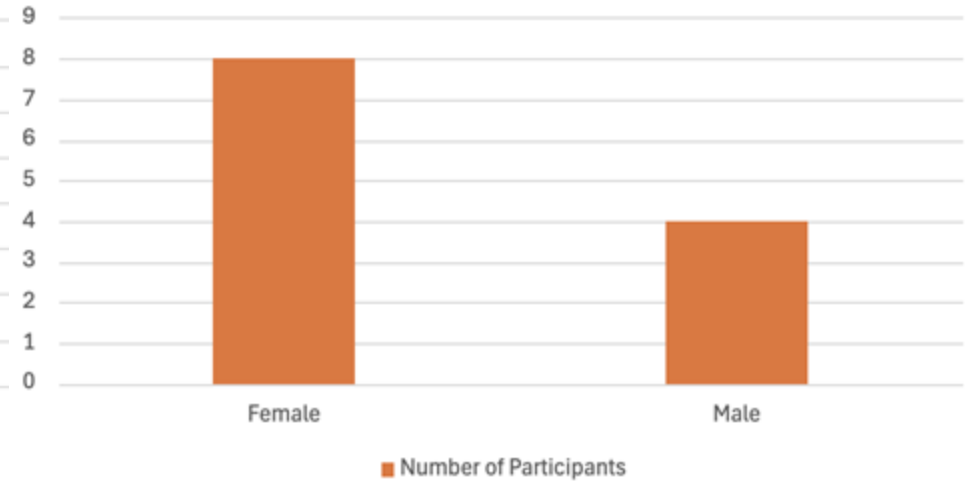
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Participant Demographics: Gender

Gender of Service Users



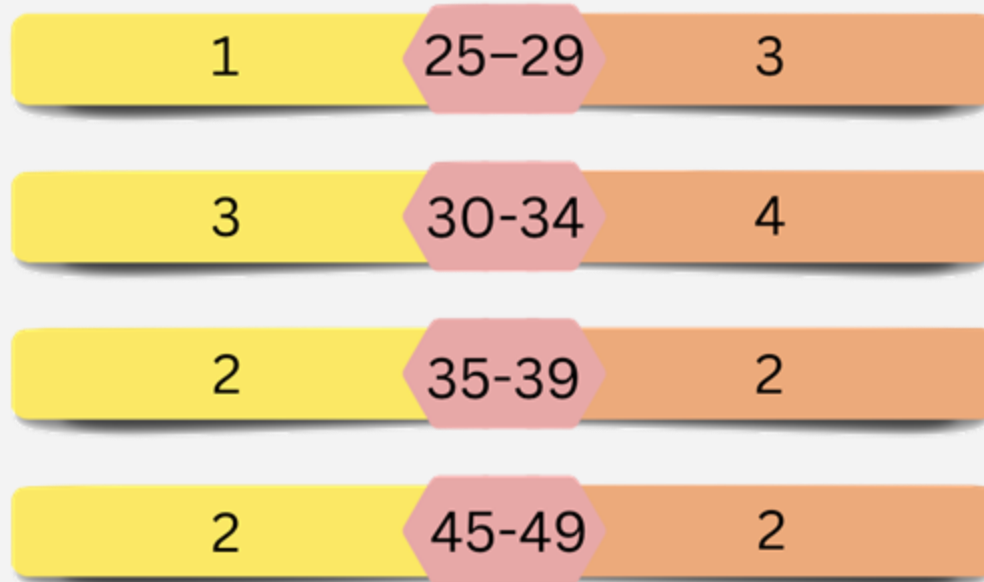
Gender of Service Providers



Age

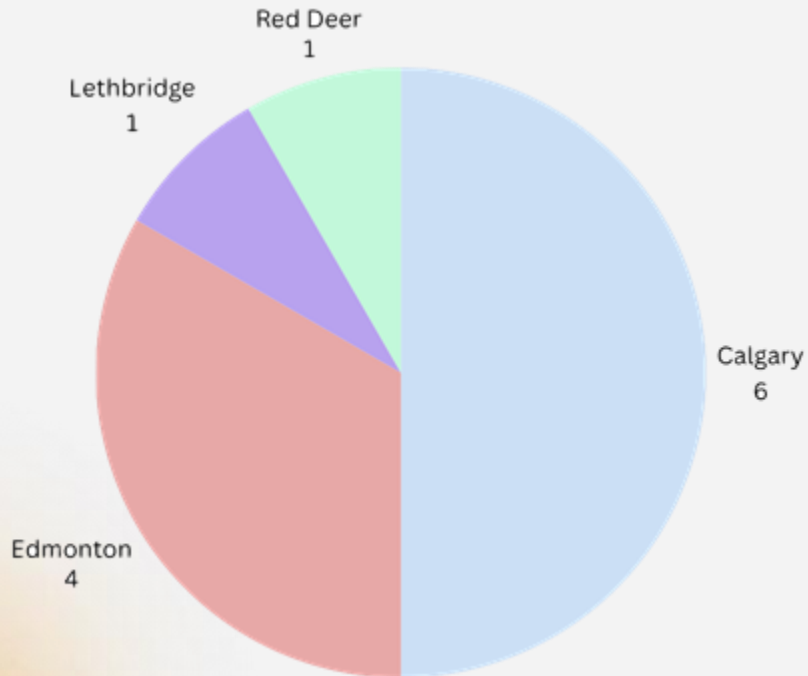
Service Users

Service Providers

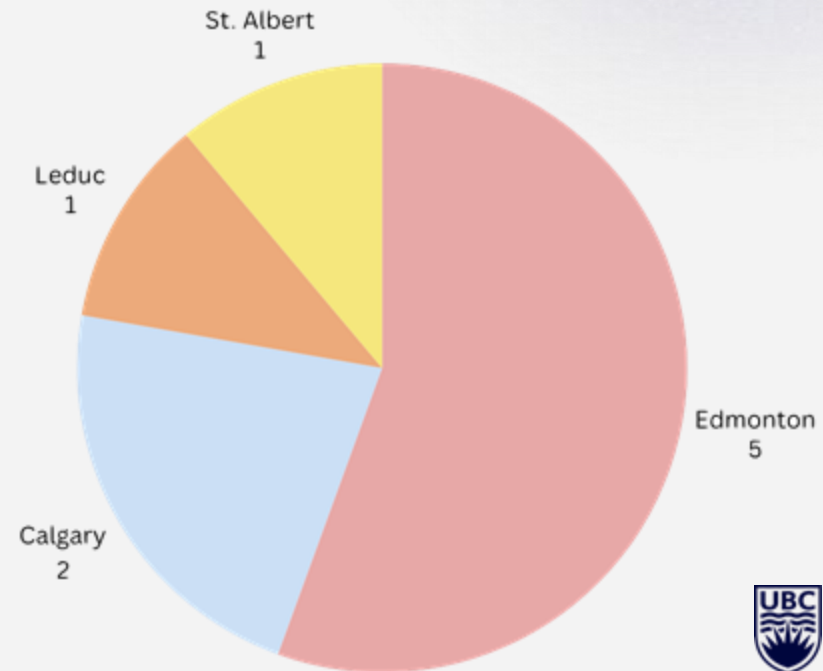


City

Service Users



Service Providers



Key Findings





Settlement Sector Supports



Settlement agencies provided holistic support, addressing both practical and emotional needs to help newcomers adapt

**Employment
Assistance**

**Language
Training**

**Systems
Navigation**

Referrals

**Mental Health
Services**

Settlement Sector: Challenges

- Newcomers and service providers reported waitlists and overwhelmed services.
- Despite receiving support (e.g., resume building), additional barriers remain.

“Sometimes you do not even know what to ask, but they would suggest things like, ‘Oh, this is the food bank.’ If you have problems with rent, they told me to go to a church called St.Paul... Sometimes they would even call people for you and let them know you are coming’ It is very helpful” [Newcomer, Edmonton]

Settlement Sector: Challenges

Negative Experiences:

Some participants reported feeling a power imbalance in their interactions with service providers, where the provider's authority or perceived superiority led to feelings of discomfort or humiliation.

“She told me in front of others... ‘You should be grateful for the course because you didn’t pay.’ I cried because of how she treated me aggressively.”
[Newcomer, Calgary]

Relationships in the Settlement Sector: Building Trust

Newcomers highlighted that reliable and consistent follow-through from service providers was important for building trust.



“

*They clearly tell you what they have and what they can do [...]
And there is always follow up.
[Newcomer, Calgary]*

”

Relationships in the Settlement Sector: Building Trust

- Kindness and patience helped newcomers feel more comfortable, fostering trust with settlement support service providers.
- Service delivery is person-oriented, prioritizing emotional safety and interpersonal relationships.
- Service users appreciated safe spaces where they could speak freely **without fear** of judgment.

Ethnic Relationships in Settlement



- Newcomers often form initial bonds within their ethnic groups for comfort and practical support.
- Shared language and cultural similarities provide security during settlement.

Ethnic Relationships in Settlement

Example: Ethnic-specific Telegram groups offer support in housing, bureaucratic processes, and access to culturally specific resources.

“There are lots of groups in Telegram... They help each other to find jobs, tell you how to get the driver license, and groceries[...]" (Newcomer, Calgary)

Ethnic Relationships in Settlement

These bonds offer comfort and practical support, especially during initial culture shock.



“

“In Saskatoon, [agency 1] connected us to an employment counselor...she was from Iran, and it was easy for us to talk to the person as she spoke the same language, because the first days we arrived we are shocked. Sometimes we feel shocked, so it is better to talk and consult, get consultant from the person, from our own language” (Newcomer, Calgary)

”

Exploring Interethnic Relationships

- English classes foster bonding between inter-ethnic relationships.
- Participants valued guidance on cultural behaviors, such as how to address strangers and navigate public systems.



Exploring Interethnic Relationships

Nonverbal & Observational Learning:

- Newcomers often learned cultural norms and social cues through observation, especially when language barriers made direct communication difficult.
- Newcomers built inter-ethnic relationships through social media but preferred in-person services for relationship building.

“I have to change here. I have to change some behavior and words, some gestures.”

“You observe how people behave—like holding a door for someone behind you—and you adapt.”

[Newcomer, Calgary]

Challenges in Interethnic Relationships

- Fear of racism led some newcomers to withdraw and avoid social interaction.
- Fear of trauma often made it hard to connect with others.



Challenges in Interethnic Relationships

“I was scared of interacting with people. I did not know what to expect because of the racism I heard about...I had mixed feelings. I was scared of interacting with people... I did not want to go out there and then start adding on problems [...] So, I was a bit scared and skeptical about going out there and just being myself, and I just kept to myself”



Fear and Trauma Shape Interethnic Relationships

Barriers to Trust:

Trauma and fear of racism often prevented newcomers from fully engaging.

Role of Settlement

Agencies: Positive experiences helped newcomers feel safe and build trust.



Importance of Culturally Sensitive Care:

A client hesitated to speak openly when paired with an interpreter from a group that their family had a history of conflict with, highlighting the complexity of interethnic relationships in service settings.

Fostering Interethnic Relationships: Culturally Responsive Services

- Participants cited the importance of recognizing cultural patterns and avoiding assumptions/stereotypes.
- Effective strategies used by service providers include humor, kindness, empathy and reflexivity as the practice of self-awareness and critical reflection



Newcomers' Awareness of Indigenous Issues in Canada

- Most newcomers had little to no education on colonization or issues faced by Indigenous populations.
- Those with awareness of the topic expressed sadness and a strong interest in learning more, gaining knowledge through settlement agencies or personal research.

Competing Priorities: Some newcomers were focused on their own survival and meeting basic needs, limiting their capacity to engage with this learning.

Fostering Interethnic Relationships: Advocacy Through Intersectionality

- Service providers used their own diverse identities and experiences to advocate for clients facing negative treatment from systems (e.g., school systems).
- Leveraging privilege was described as a strategy for using an aspect of privilege/power that is societally perceived as being more effective in pushing for clients' needs.



Advocacy and Intersectionality

“

There's also an interesting question about, **do people respond to me because I'm a white Canadian, or do they respond to me because I have “manager” in my title?** I know that's also part of the discussion. But it is an unfortunate reality that very often, to get things done, we have a settlement worker and a client who are most often from the same background, but not always. They are navigating and negotiating together and can provide emotional support and content. **But as soon as we really need to push something and kick it into high gear with a public service partner, a school partner, or a healthcare partner, then it has to be me.** One of my friends called it being a 'Karen' for justice.

”

Thank you.



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