

AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY ACTION BY IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION ORGANIZATIONS: AN ESSENTIAL TOOL FOR RESILIENCE DURING THE PANDEMIC IN QUEBEC

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PROJECT: “IMMIGRANT-SERVING AGENCIES’ RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC: A SURVEY OF MANAGERS AND FRONTLINE WORKERS IN QC”

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- Partners: OCASI & TCRI

Methods:

- Online survey of managers of settlement agencies, who were then asked to distribute a link for an online survey for frontline workers to their staff. Phone follow-up in Quebec.
- Questions re: demographics, impacts of pandemic on agency funding & operations, impacts of pandemic on working conditions, views about return to the office & concerns for future
- Responses:
 - 50 agencies in Ontario, 27 in Quebec
 - 173 workers in Ontario, 89 in Quebec



BACKGROUND TO THE PANDEMIC – SETTLEMENT AS « AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY ACTION »

- Creation of *Secretariat for Autonomous Community Action and Social Initiatives* (SACAIS) in 2001
- Recognition of organizations according to following criteria:
 - Have the status of a non-profit organization;
 - Be rooted in the community;
 - The maintenance of an associative and democratic life;
 - Be free to determine their mission, orientations, approaches and practices.
- Leads to modest core funding, political recognition of their role

QUEBEC'S SETTLEMENT SECTOR LEADING INTO THE PANDEMIC

- Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées et immigrantes (TCRI) has 152 members across Qc
- Majority recognized by SACAIS
- Most were members of active Neighbourhood Councils (Tables de quartier)

CONTEXT – EFFORTS TO SERVE THE COMMUNITY IN THE MIDST OF A LOCK-DOWN

- Early days: fear and uncertainty
- Recognition that newcomers among the most vulnerable:
 - Social supports
 - Knowledge of public support services
 - Language barriers
 - Living and work conditions
- Commitment among agencies to serve their communities

CONTEXT: PUBLIC PANDEMIC RESPONSE IN QUEBEC

- COVID effects hit Quebec harder in early months
- Implementation of lock-down was heavy in Quebec (ex. curfew)
- Heavy fines for businesses, organizations and individuals not respecting the lock-down
- But not as long as some other provinces (ex. Ontario)

TCRI declared its members to
be providing “essential services”

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20 March 2020

OUTCOMES?

- Remained open to receive most vulnerable clients – able to shift budgets
- Actively involved in community council assessment and outreach efforts
- Strong partner for public health officials

HIGHLIGHTS: MANAGER RESPONSES

- Staff relations were stable or improved
- Only 33% of Quebec managers reported layoffs of employees (vs. 100% in Ontario)
- Only 37% of Qc agencies shifted entirely online (83% in Ontario)
- 96% of Qc agencies were able to apply for new COVID-related funding
- 59% of agencies reported increasing their services; 14% decreased services

OVER-ARCHING PORTRAIT OF QUEBEC SETTLEMENT AGENCIES DURING COVID

- Committed and resilient management and frontline workers
- Ability to rapidly adjust to shifting context – services maintained and expanded
- Workers overall satisfied with conditions and relationship with management
- Qc agencies served well by flexibility in funding system and mandate to serve broader clientele

THANKS

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HIGHLIGHTS: WORKER RESPONSES

- 71% reported services to their community increased (8% said level maintained)
- Main challenges: difficult outreach (48%); digital access for clients (80%)
- High perception of client satisfaction – only 2% perceived client dissatisfaction
- Confidence in their agency's response to COVID: 89%