



Human Rights Education Needs of Immigrants & Refugees in Alberta

A Needs Assessment Report



2007

Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies



Table of Contents

	Page
Acknowledgement	3
Executive Summary	4
Introduction	7
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• About AAISA• Background	
The Process	10
Findings	
A. Available Human Rights Education Resources	13
B. Immigrant and Refugee Survey Questionnaire	17
C. Settlement Worker Survey Questionnaire	23
Recommendations and Discussion	30
Conclusion	33
References	34
Appendices	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Appendix A - Questionnaire for Immigrants and Refugees• Appendix B - Questionnaire for Settlement Workers• Appendix C - List of Agencies Contacted for Participation• Appendix D – Participant Consent Form	

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Executive Summary

In the fall of 2006, Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (AAISA) embarked on a needs assessment in order to gain a better understanding of the human rights education needs of immigrants in Alberta and how immigrants can best access information through the settlement agencies that serve them.

Information was gathered through:

- Review of literature and documents about human rights education programs and services currently available for immigrants in Alberta.
- Two sets of questionnaires - One questionnaire was designed for and completed by immigrant and refugee clients of the various immigrant serving agencies. The other questionnaire was completed by staff of settlement agencies.

Apart from the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission and Canadian Human Rights Commission, the study identified eight organizations that currently provide human rights information services in Alberta.

Findings from the questionnaires show that both immigrants and settlement workers feel it is very important for immigrants to have human rights information. Most immigrants are not getting the human rights information and are frustrated when faced with harassment or discrimination and thus, are unaware that they can report incidents of discrimination they face.

Settlement workers consider it equally important for immigrants to have human rights information. The findings show that staff themselves did not have the relevant information and were not aware of the available community resources where they could refer their clients when advocacy was required.

The results of the study will help settlement agencies meet newcomers' need for information on human rights law and on how to deal with various forms of discrimination. Both immigrants and settlement practitioners have indicated a need for

education in many of the human rights areas such as legal rights and responsibilities, how to deal with discrimination and how the human rights process works.

The findings indicated that most settlement workers and immigrants felt that the information should be provided through easily understandable material in various languages and through DVDs and videos.

Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission has a great deal of human rights educational resources in printed material and on their websites. However, the information is not easy to understand and is not provided in different languages. The Canadian Human Rights Commission has the information available in French and English.

Based on the findings the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Immigrant serving agencies should provide human rights-related information on all the areas in the legislation to all newcomers during their orientation to Canada.
2. All immigrants, not only those, planning to work in Canada should be provided information on basic human rights in the workplace.
3. Settlement workers and counsellors, should be trained to understand the application of the human rights legislation. This will enable them to explain it to their clients and better assist them..
4. Settlement workers should be trained to understand the human rights process so they can explain it to their clients who may be afraid to file a complaint.
5. Newcomers be provided a period of orientation to various government offices and the police (City and RCMP) so they realize they are approachable and can assist when they encounter problems.
6. AAISA should translate human rights material into various languages spoken by newcomers. Make the information simple and easily understood.
7. AAISA should develop videos or DVDs on human rights in simple language with various scenarios involving real life experience of newcomers.

Note to Readers: Note that the terms *immigrants*, *refugees*, *newcomers* when used in isolation - refers to both immigrants and refugees

Introduction

In Alberta, the *Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act (the Act)* protects individuals in Alberta from discrimination in certain areas and grounds. The purpose of the *Act* is to ensure all those in Alberta are offered an equal opportunity to earn a living, find a place to live and enjoy services customarily available to the public without discrimination. Landed immigrants or permanent residents are entitled to the same rights and responsibilities under the *Act*. However, it is noted that most newcomers are often unaware of their human rights and responsibilities under the law within the workplace and in communities.

Appropriate and timely information about aspects of human rights that directly affect their lives as they settle and integrate in Canada and Alberta is essential. These include knowledge and understanding of human rights laws and related human rights issues, their rights and responsibilities and how to handle situations where their rights are denied or have been violated.

Settlement practitioners work with Alberta's immigrant population and provide a direct link between newcomers and community services. They themselves must have the basic knowledge of the Canadian and the Alberta human rights legislation and the available community resources and services. This would enable them to effectively connect their clients with the required information when they feel that their human rights have been violated, or when a settlement counselor identifies a situation of discrimination.

The Alberta Association of Immigrant Servicing Agencies (AAISA), with financial support from the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Education Fund, contracted Edmonton Immigrant services Association to undertake a needs assessment project. The purpose of the project was two fold:

- 1) to gain a better understanding of the human rights education needs of immigrants in Alberta; and

2) to determine how best immigrants can access human right information and services through the settlement agencies that serve them.

The Alberta Association of Immigrant Servicing Agencies (AAISA) has been active since 1980 and was incorporated in 1987 as an umbrella organization of immigrant-serving agencies in Alberta. The organization is comprised of 20 member organizations from 8 communities across Alberta that serves more than 14,000 immigrants and refugees annually. AAISA works very closely with all levels of Government, mainstream agencies, ethno-cultural communities, and business communities across Alberta.

Background

This study is very timely as Alberta is going through an economic boom and facing a labour shortage. The Government of Alberta has estimated that the province would need 100,000 additional workers in the next 4-10 years to meet the growing demand for labour. As a result, the Alberta government is planning on increasing immigration and workers on temporary work visas. The government plans to bring in about 24,000 new immigrants to Alberta every year for the next four years.

A number of reports have indicated that most immigrants are unaware of their basic rights and responsibilities within the workplace and in communities. Immigrant serving agencies have identified a gap, the lack of human rights information provided to immigrants.

A large number of immigrants come from countries with no basic human rights protection. As a result they are unaware of the role human rights commissions and courts can play to protect their rights. This is further complicated by the fact that Canada has human rights commissions at two levels of government, the provincial and the federal. Immigrants are generally unaware of whom to go to when they face discrimination.

Most immigrants living and working in Alberta are protected under the *Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act*. The *Act* protects everyone in Alberta from discrimination (and harassment) in the main areas of employment, goods and services, tenancy (housing), accommodation and membership in trade unions and employer association. The *Act* ensures individuals in Alberta are not discriminated or harassed on the grounds of race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, religious beliefs, gender, mental and physical disability, marital status, family status, age, source of income and sexual orientation. Individuals that are discriminated or harassed in the areas and grounds protected under the *Act* can file a complaint with the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission. However, most immigrants are unaware of this and are frustrated when dealing with incidents of discrimination.

Being new to the Canadian system, immigrants might not be aware that even when the incident of discrimination they are faced with does not fall under the provincial human rights legislation it may fall under the federal human rights commission which administers the Canadian Human Rights Act. They may also be able to avail other processes such as options for dealing with the discrimination.

Many immigrants come from countries where they fear authorities and government officials. This creates a huge barrier and once in Canada, even when immigrants feel discriminated against, they are afraid to speak up or to report to anyone as they are fearful of reprisals. Most do not realize that human rights commissions in Canada have an arms length relationship with the government and that it is a quasi-judicial body. Neither do they realize that all human rights legislations in Canada protect individuals from retaliation for filing a complaint or for being a witness to a complaint.

This report includes several recommendations that settlement agencies can implement in order to provide the required information to newcomers to Canada and Alberta.

The Process

This phase of the project focused on assessing the human rights education needs of immigrants and refugees in Alberta. Immigrant serving organizations within Alberta are in a strong position to carry out this work. As was noted above, these organizations work closely with all levels of government, mainstream agencies, ethno-cultural communities, and business communities across Alberta, and possess the knowledge base and the partnerships required to gather the necessary information to make appropriate recommendations. However, although settlement practitioners from immigrant serving agencies are able to offer valuable insights, it is critical to communicate directly with members of the immigrant community in order to determine their information needs. Hence, the participants of this survey included immigrants and refugees and settlement practitioners.

Information Gathering:

Due to time constraints, information for this survey was mainly gathered through review of reports and documents, and through two sets of questionnaires.

1 **Review of Reports and Documents** - Several reports and documents from various community organizations as well as from Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission and the Canadian Human Rights and Citizenship Commission were reviewed to:

- (i) gather information about human rights education or information on programs and services currently available to immigrants in Alberta.
- (ii) understand the findings from other studies that focused on human rights needs of immigrants in Alberta and elsewhere.
- (iii) determine the best method in which immigrants can access human rights information and services through the settlement agencies that serve them.

2 **Surveys** – Two sets of questionnaires were developed. One survey was designed for immigrants and refugees. The other questionnaire was designed for staff

from various immigrant serving organizations that provide settlement services in Alberta. The questionnaires focused on gathering human rights information and resources needs of immigrants and ways by which immigrants can best access the information and services. The last three questions were asked for demographic data, such as the gender, length in Canada, and educational levels of the immigrant respondents and role in the agency and length with the organization for settlement practitioners.

Participant Recruitment and Data Collection

Initially an introductory letter was sent to all immigrant serving organizations in Alberta explaining the purpose of the project and soliciting their support and cooperation with the project. The letter specifically requested the Executive Director's or their delegate's assistance with the recruitment of project participants, both immigrants and settlement practitioners from their agency. The organizations contacted included member agencies of the Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies as well as other community organizations that serve immigrants in Alberta (Appendix C).

Questionnaires and consent forms were distributed to all the organizations (Appendices A, B & D) with instructions to be completed by immigrants and refugees they serve and by the organization's settlement workers. Agencies were also given the option of completing the questionnaires on-line and e-mailing it or making copies and returning it by mail or fax. Three weeks after the surveys were distributed, e-mails were sent and phone calls made to all the organizations to ensure that they received the questionnaires and to ask them to assist with the distribution and completion of the questionnaires. They were asked to return the completed questionnaires to the researcher. Attempts were made to ensure that the immigrants surveyed were culturally and demographically diverse.

In addition, organizations were asked to set up interviews with immigrants and refugees as well as with settlement practitioners to gain in-depth understanding of their human rights education needs. None of the agencies responded to the phone and e-mail

requests for interviews.

FINDINGS

A. Available Human Rights Education Resources

Extensive research was conducted to gather information about available publications, resources and services on human rights education throughout the province of Alberta. Most of the existing human rights educational resources and programs were initiated by community organizations with financial support from the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Education Fund. A few of the resources provide information on specific human rights topics such as human rights in the workplace, Alberta's human rights legislation, publications and other resources. Most of the community resources and initiatives are aimed at fostering equality and reducing discrimination and racism. The resources were reviewed in order to identify resources and services that are aimed at educating newcomers or immigrants about human rights and responsibilities.

Consultations were held with relevant personnel from selected organizations to find out the accessibility of their programs and services to immigrant. The information gathered shows that most of the educational resources and programs related to human rights are designed for target audiences such as aboriginal, children, youth, and families, educators, and women. Very few of the resources and programs were primarily for or included immigrants. These resources and programs include the following:

1. A Guide to Rights and Responsibilities in Alberta Workplaces

The guide was produced by Alberta Human Resources and Employment and tailored to people who are new to the workplace, particularly youth and immigrants. It provides information on existing legislation and outlines the rules that both employees and employers must follow in Alberta workplaces. Topics covered include employment standards, health and safety, human rights and workers' compensation procedures and privacy of employment information. The book increases individual awareness of the rights and responsibilities that both workers and employers have in the workplace. It provides a list of phone numbers and websites directing the user to contact those

organizations for information to help them stay within the legislation.

2. Education and Information Services

The Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission's mandate is to foster equality and to reduce discrimination for those in Alberta. The Commission fulfills this mandate through public education initiatives and the investigation and resolution of complaints of discrimination.

The Commission offers a wide variety of human rights education materials and services related to employment. The information is provided by means of workshops and presentations on specific topics for various groups, including employers, employees, unions, professionals, educators, community groups including immigrant groups and organizations that serve them. The Commission also provides human rights information through brochures, information sheets and videos on discrimination and the law. Most of the information is available on the Commission's web site as well as in print version. The Commission's website lists publications and other resources related to human rights and diversity produced by various agencies in partnership with the Commission.

3. Human Rights Education Handbook for Immigrants and Refugees

Edmonton Immigrant Services Association has developed a human rights education handbook for newcomers. The handbook is based on insights from community conversations related to the experiences of refugees, immigrants and the agencies that serve them. The handbook is being used in Adult Basic Education classes to provide new Canadians with information about aspects of human rights that directly affect their lives as they settle and integrate in Canada and Alberta. It helps new immigrants and refugees understand human rights laws and related human rights issues, their rights and responsibilities and how to handle situations where their rights are denied or have been violated. The handbook also provides contact information of provincial and federal government human rights offices.

4. Addressing Work Place Inequities in the Non-Profit Sector

This community-based initiative was undertaken by the Alberta Network of Immigrant Women based on identified inequities (including human rights issues) immigrant women face in the workplace. The purpose of the initiative was to provide information to immigrant women and voluntary organizations on employment rights and ways to create more equitable and respectful workplaces. The participants also learned skills to help them address cross-cultural difficulties they face.

5. Information and Support

The Calgary Workers' Resource Centre offers workshops on employment -related legislation, rights, benefits and entitlements such as Employment Standards, Employment Insurance, Workplace Health and Safety, Canada Pension Plan Disability Benefits and Alberta Labour Relations Code. It assists individual workers with employment issues in contacting agencies such as Workers Compensation Board, Employment Standards, and Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission. The Centre has no specific programs for immigrants but one of its target groups is immigrants. Their workshops can be re-formatted to fit the immigrants' needs and are available to any community group or agency. The Centre works with other non-profit organizations like Calgary Immigrant Aid Society to provide employment-related workshops including human rights information to immigrants. The Centre plans to print employment-related information in the major languages that immigrants bring to Canada.

Although their mandate is not exclusively to serve immigrants, the Calgary Workers' Resource Center and the Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre provide educational information to immigrants on request from agencies and have indicated that they would be willing to provide more workshops and presentations to immigrant groups if there was a need.

6. Workshops and Presentations

The Canadian Human Rights Commission provides a limited number of workshops to employer organizations on request. These workshops focus on human rights legislation and its application in the workplace. The material of the Canadian Human Rights Commission is printed in English and French.

B. Immigrant and Refugee Survey Questionnaire Findings

The findings presented in this section are from the 62 immigrants and refugees who completed the survey. Where possible, data is reported in tables. For the most part, quantitative data is reported as N for the number of respondents, and percentage (%) indicating the proportion of responses.

Demographics

Gender

Of the 62 immigrants and refugees who responded to the survey, 34 indicated that they were female and 28 were males.

Table 1: Respondents by Gender

	N	%
Male	28	45
Female	34	55
Total	62	100

Period of Residence in Canada

Respondents were asked how long they have lived in Canada. Over half (54%) indicated that they had lived in Canada for a year or less. 29 percent had lived in Canada for up to 3 years. 17 percent of the respondents had lived in Canada for 5 years and more.

Table 2: Period of Residence in Canada

	N	%
Less than one year	33	54
Up to 3 years	18	29
Up to 5 year and more	11	17
Total	62	100

Level of Education

Most of the respondents reported high levels of education with 75 percent reporting post secondary education. 34 percent had completed a 4 year degree program, 18 percent had graduate degrees, 10 percent had some post-secondary education, 5 percent had doctorate or professional degrees, 8% had received diplomas, 13% had completed high school. 8% had not completed high school and 3% did not indicate.

Table 3: Highest Level of Education

	N	%
Doctorate or professional degree	3	5
Graduate degree	11	18
4 years degree	22	35
Some post-secondary education	6	10
Two years Diploma	5	8
High school	8	13
Less than high school	5	8
Did not indicate	2	3
Total	62	100

Knowledge of Rights and Responsibilities in Canada

Immigrants and refugees were asked if they knew what their rights and responsibilities were in Canada. Only 39 percent indicated that they knew their rights and responsibilities while more than half of the respondents, 61 percent, reported that they did not know what their rights and responsibilities were.

Table 4: Knowledge of Human Rights and Responsibilities in Canada

	N	%
Yes	24	39
No	38	61
Total	62	100

Importance of Human Rights Information for New Immigrants

The respondents were asked to indicate how important it is for new immigrants and refugees to be informed about human rights in Alberta and in Canada. Majority of the respondents, 87 percent, indicated that it was very important for newcomers to be informed about human rights. 12 percent felt it was fairly important and only 1% did not know.

Table 5: Importance of Human Rights Information for New Immigrants

	N	%
Very Important	54	87
Important	7	12
I don't know	1	1
Total	62	100

Received Human Rights Information

Although majority of immigrants and refugees surveyed indicated that it is very important for newcomers to be informed about human rights in Alberta, only 24 percent of them reported that they had received some human rights information when they first arrived in Canada. Most of the respondents 76 percent indicated that they did not receive any human rights information or did not know whether they had received any information at all.

Table 6: Received Human Rights Information upon arrival in Canada

	N	%
Received human rights information	15	24
Did not receive human rights information	47	76
Total	62	100

All the respondents who had reported that they received human rights information indicated that the information was provided as part of employment preparation programs and focused on human rights at work. The topics included prohibited grounds of discrimination, how to file a complaint with the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission, dealing with discrimination, rights and responsibilities at work and general orientation to Canada.

Participants indicated that they had received human rights information from immigrant serving agencies such as Calgary Immigrant Aid Society, Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers and Millwoods Welcome Centre for Newcomers (during employment preparation programs) Catholic Social Services and the Making Changes Program. They also received information from colleges such as Norquest, MacEwan and Mount Royal. Some reported that they had received information through the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission workshops and Canada Immigration Centres.

Experience with Discrimination

A very small number of respondents (13%) reported that they or someone they knew had experienced discrimination. One reason for this is that most immigrants do not know to articulate incidents of discrimination. Most would brush it off as a bad incident while others would not want to describe their experiences with discrimination for fear of reprisal.

Table 7: Experience with Discrimination

	N	%
Yes	8	13
No	54	87
Total	62	100

The next question asked the respondents who indicated experience with racism to share their stories. The following are examples of the stories shared:

One respondent wrote:

I phoned for a vacant apartment and was told it was available. When I got there, as soon as he saw me, I was told the apartment was taken (within 15mins).

Another respondent wrote:

I have a degree in French Language and Literature. I applied for a bilingual customer care representative position. I successfully completed the two initial stages, which were a telephone interview in English and French and a written aptitude test. I was then invited by phone to a one -to-one interview with the manager. When the manager saw me entering the interview room the manager was shocked. First thing he said was “where did you learn French?” The interview was cold. He did not seem interested in my qualifications. He went on to tell me that my French was “Français de la France” and that in Canada I need Quebecois French. I was not offered the job – instead I was offered a job as an English speaking representative, a position that paid less than that of a bilingual representative. The bilingual position was offered to a white, Anglophone Canadian who had learnt French in high school like myself and had no ties to Quebec.

Another respondent wrote:

I was hired in a corporate office in Edmonton. I can speak and write fluently in English. Management said that I was doing a good job, they appreciated my work. Then one day they told me, sorry, this is your last day. And that was it, there was no explanation. They escorted me to the door. I was shocked and I kept asking myself what I did wrong.”

Information and Resources for Newcomers

All the respondents felt that they would have been better able to deal with their issues if they had information on their rights and what they could have done. They indicated that the following human rights information, resources or programs would be very useful for new immigrants and refugees in dealing with the issues:

- 1 Rights and responsibilities in the workplace under the human rights legislation
- 2 Dealing with discrimination and harassment

- 3 How does the human rights legislation protect my rights?
- 4 What should I do if I feel a business has discriminated against me?
- 5 Cultural sensitivity training for managers and supervisors

Preferred Format for Presenting Information

Immigrants and refugees were asked for their preference for specified format for presenting information about human rights. Most of the respondents preferred printed material (46%), followed by workshops and presentations (35%), Videos/ DVD's (33%), materials in simple, easily understandable language (32%), and meeting with a counselor or intake worker (31%).

Table 8: Preferred Formats

Format	N	%
Printed material	29	46
Workshops and presentations	22	35
Videos/DVD	20	33
Materials in simple, easily understandable language	20	32
Meeting with a counselor or intake worker	19	31
Posters	17	27
Multilingual Information Sheets	16	25
Confidential telephone hotlines	12	19
Human rights information on AAISA's website	12	19

C. Settlement Worker Survey Questionnaire Findings

Where possible, data is reported in tables. For the most part, quantitative data is reported as N for the number of respondents, and percentage (%) indicating the proportion of responses.

Demographics

Gender

35 settlement workers completed the survey questionnaire -11 males and 24 females.

Table 9: Percentage of Respondents who reported Gender

	N	%
Male	11	31
Female	24	69
Total	35	100

Number of Years with the Organization

More than half of the respondents indicated that they had worked in a settlement agency for five years and more. The rest had worked in a settlement agency for less than five years.

Table 10: Percentage of Respondents Number of Years with Organization

	N	%
Less than one year	4	11
Between 1 – 4 years	11	31
Between 5 – 10 years	14	40
Over 10 years	6	17
Total	35	100

The respondents' who completed the questionnaires played various roles in their organizations such as settlement workers, settlement counsellors and program coordinators, managers and team leaders.

Importance of Human Rights Education

The majority of respondents believed that it is very important for new immigrants and refugees to be informed about human rights in Alberta and Canada.

Table 11: Importance of Newcomers Being Informed about Human Right

	N	%
Very important	30	86
Important	3	9
Did not know	2	5
Total	35	100

Provision of Human Rights Information

Despite the assertion that human rights education was important for immigrants and refugees, only 57 percent of the respondents reported that their organizations provided human rights information to their clients. The rest indicated that their organization did not provide human rights information or that they did not know.

When human rights information was provided to clients, it included the following topics:

- 1 General information on human rights laws
- 2 Rights and responsibilities in the workplace and in tenancy,
- 3 Racism and racial discrimination
- 4 Domestic violence and child abuse,
- 5 Canadian citizenship

Human Rights Challenges for New Immigrants

In response to question number four which asked the respondents for their perceptions of the biggest human rights challenge for new immigrants, the following were noted:

- 1 Language and different culture
- 2 Different religious beliefs
- 3 Racism and racial discrimination
- 4 Adapting to new legal system

- 5 Accreditation of foreign qualification
- 6 Lack of awareness of rights and responsibilities

To elaborate on some the challenges a settlement counselor who was also an immigrant stated that:

“...she was refused employment in a fast food restaurant unless she removed the hijab that she was wearing.”

Reports or Witnessed Issues of Discrimination

Less than half of the respondents reported having personally or as an agency noticed or had reports of any issues of discrimination from their clients. The highest number of incidents noted by a particular organization in the past two years was two. The most frequent human rights issues addressed by the settlement agencies were discrimination in housing and employment. Some of the issues newcomers brought to the attention of settlement practitioners included:

- 1 Differences in religious beliefs
- 2 Racism at work, community and school
- 3 Sexual harassment
- 4 Housing and services
- 5 Pay equity
- 6 Non-recognition of foreign qualifications

Settlement workers identified a number of work-related discrimination issues. Sharing an incident that was discussed with a client, a settlement counselor reported that:

“...one of her client was refused the opportunity to rent an apartment because of their cultural, ethnic background.”

Another settlement counselor stated that newcomers are generally fearful of going to government agencies or the police because of the distrust and fear of these organizations in their country of origin.

How Respondents Dealt with Human Rights Issues

In response to the question of how they dealt with human rights issues newcomers brought to their attention, settlement practitioners indicated that they:

- 1 Discussed possible solutions with the clients
- 2 Referred them to relevant government departments
- 3 Referred them to community organizations such as the Northern Alberta Association on Race Relations
- 4 Asked the client to contact Alberta Human Rights & Citizenship Commission
- 5 Accompanied the parents to their children's school to discuss the issue with school personnel

Although some of the respondents indicated that they referred their clients to the Alberta Human Rights & Citizenship Commission, they were not sure if the issue was one that the commission dealt with. Most of the respondents stated that they would have been of greater assistance to their clients if they had been more informed about the human rights legislation and the role of the commission.

Required Information and Resources to Deal with the issues

With regards to the issues and challenges respondents identified above, respondents indicated that newcomers needed the following information and resources to help them deal with the issues:

- 1 Dealing with racism and discrimination
- 2 Rights and responsibilities
- 3 Human rights in the workplace
- 4 Grounds that are protected under Alberta's human rights legislation
- 5 Legal responsibilities for human rights at work and who is protected
- 6 Hiring practices
- 7 Preventing gender-based discrimination

Question number six asked the respondents to share information about individuals,

organizations or programs that contribute to new immigrants' human rights education in Alberta. Respondents either chose to focus on organizations and programs rather than individuals or they didn't know any individuals that provide human rights education to newcomers. The following organizations were noted:

- 1 Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission through referrals (Edmonton and Calgary offices)
- 2 Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations (NAARR),
- 3 John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Understanding – workshops on racism
- 4 Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry – rights in the workplace
- 5 Calgary Workers' Resource Centre
- 6 Edmonton Immigrant Services Association
- 7 Catholic Social Services (Edmonton and Red Deer)
- 8 RCMP
- 9 Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre

Suggested Human Rights Information and Resources for Newcomers

Question number seven asked settlement practitioners for suggestions of human rights information and resources that would be useful for newcomers. A list of possible topics was provided and respondents were asked to choose the ones they thought would be useful to newcomers. More than half of the respondents indicated that newcomers would need all of the information and resources listed below:

- 1 Ways of dealing with racism (57%)
- 2 Dealing with sexual harassment and other gender issues ((54%)
- 3 The Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship & Multiculturalism Act (47%)
- 4 Rights and responsibilities in the workplace (40%)
- 5 The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (22%)
- 6 The Canadian Human Rights Act (20%)

A few respondents (n = 7) suggested that AAISA should give priority to developing materials on human rights issues that are pertinent to new immigrants and refugees.

Some of the above results are low and it could be due to the broad categories that were listed or that settlement practitioners feel that immigrants and refugees do not need detailed information about the various legislation (human rights, Charter). They need useful information that is directly applicable to them and easily understood.

Format for Distributing Information

Settlement practitioners were asked for suggestions and their preference on the format in which the human rights information should be distributed. A majority of respondents, ninety one percent, preferred presentations and workshops. More than half of the respondents preferred multilingual information sheets (57%) and video tapes (54%). Thirty seven percent of the respondents preferred confidential telephone hotlines and twenty nine percent preferred integrating materials into agency's newsletters, magazines and bulletins. Interestingly, the least preferred formats were posters and flyers and e-mail each with fourteen percent.

- 1 Presentation and Workshops (91%)
- 2 Multilingual Information Sheets (57%)
- 3 Video tapes/DVD (54%)
- 4 Confidential telephone hotlines for newcomers (37%)
- 5 Materials integrated into agency's newsletters, magazines and bulletins (29%)
- 6 Posters and flyers (14%)
- 7 E-mail information (14%)

Suggestions on workshops/videos

A number of respondents suggested that the human rights education workshops and presentations for newcomer should focus on human rights issues that are pertinent to new immigrants and refugees such as hiring practices and questions that can be asked during an interview, not being discriminated when trying to rent a place or in knowing that services have to be provided equally to everyone. Videos /DVD's that are developed should feature vignettes of common human rights situations faced by

immigrants and refugees.

Recommendations and Discussion

Recommendation 1

Immigrant serving agencies provide human rights and related information to all new immigrants and refugees in an easy to understand format as part of their orientation to Canada.

Immigrants come to Canada with little or no information on the legal and social systems here. When they arrive, they are not provided sufficient information to deal with issues of racism and discrimination. As a result, when they experience discrimination, they do not know what to do or where to go for help. It is important that they receive the information required to act when they face discrimination or harassment.

Recommendation 2

All immigrants, not only those, planning to work in Canada should be provided information on basic human rights and responsibilities.

Settlement agencies that provide human rights information provide it only during employment preparation programs for immigrants. As seen from this study, immigrants can be discriminated and harassed not only at the workplace but in housing and when trying to obtain services. The *Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act* protects everyone in Alberta from discrimination in areas such as employment, goods and services, tenancy, accommodation and membership in unions and employer associations. It is important that newcomers know of the human rights legislation and how it protects them.

Recommendation 3

Train settlement workers and counsellors, who speak different languages, in understanding the application of the human rights legislation. This would enable them to assist their clients better, especially with completing the complaint form and the complaint process.

When someone faces discrimination, they can file a complaint at the Alberta Human Rights & Citizenship Commission. However, the Commission only provides services in English. Further, the complaint form that individuals need to complete in order to file a complaint is only printed in English. As we know, not all newcomers are fluent in English. Even those that are fluent in English may not understand the technicality of the human rights process and legislation. Therefore, it is important that settlement counselors are trained in this aspect of the legislation.

Recommendations 4

All settlement workers should receive training in understanding the human rights legislation and be made aware of available community resources to enable them to help their clients better.

Recommendation 5

Newcomers' orientation should include orientation to the various relevant government offices including the police (City and RCMP) in order to assure them that they are approachable and can assist when they encounter problems.

Newcomers may have a fear of government and police due to experiences in their country of origin. Therefore, they are reluctant to approach government offices or to report to the police or RCMP when they are threatened, hurt or discriminated against. Familiarizing them with government and other offices helps allay their fears about these bodies.

Recommendation 6

Translate human rights material into various languages spoken by newcomers. Make the information simple and easy to understand.

Human rights commissions have extensive printed material that can be picked up from the commission or downloaded from the website. All the material at the Alberta Human

Rights Commission is only provided in English. The Canadian Human Rights Commission only has material printed in English and French. Newcomers, who face language barriers, would not be able to use this material. Material translated into different languages would help them understand the working of the Commissions and make them more aware of its role.

Human Rights commissions also have information on the website. However, not all immigrants are computer literate nor do they have easy access to computers. Even those who are computer literate might not be able to access the information easily.

Recommendation 7

Develop videos or DVDs on human rights education with various scenarios involving real life experience of immigrants and refugees.

The Alberta Human Rights Citizenship Commission developed a video called “Discrimination and the Law” which uses experiences of a diversity of individuals and variety of incidents to explain discrimination and harassment. The video is used to inform Albertans of what they can do when faced with harassment or discrimination. AAISA could modify the video and have it translated into different languages to explain issues of discrimination and harassment that are pertinent to immigrants and refugees.

Conclusion

In Canada, federal and provincial laws protect the human rights of all individuals. The existence of legal protection at various levels reflects the importance of human rights in Canadian society. In Alberta, the *Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act* (*the Act*) protects individuals in Alberta from discrimination in certain areas and grounds. Even though it is illegal, harassment and discrimination do occur. This study found that immigrants and refugees face discrimination, harassment and racism and are unsure how to deal with it. Most immigrants and settlement workers are not aware of how the *Act* protects every person in Alberta from discrimination. It is important for immigrants to understand the human rights laws and issues so they know how to handle situations when their rights are denied. The study affirms that it is very important for newcomers to receive appropriate and timely information about human rights as part of their orientation to Alberta and Canada. The study has also provided valuable information on how human rights education for new immigrants and refugees in Albertan can be enhanced. It is important that AAISA acts on developing materials and services for educating immigrants about human rights as well as training all settlement workers about human rights laws so they will be better equipped to assist their clients.

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