



COVID-19: Ethnic Media Lessons from 2020 for an Inclusive Recovery



This collage features the front pages of several ethnic media outlets. On the left, the Punjabi Post (ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਪੋਸਟ) is visible. In the center, the Arab Toronto Newspaper (عرب تورنتو) is prominent. On the right, the Hedy Gazeta (Hedy Gazeta) is shown. The collage also includes various advertisements for legal services, insurance, and real estate.



This collage features the front pages of several ethnic media outlets. On the left, Today Commercial News (加拿大商報) is visible. In the center, Contacto Directo (CONTACTO DIRECTO) is prominent. On the right, the Hedy Gazeta (Hedy Gazeta) is shown. The collage also includes various advertisements for legal services, insurance, and real estate.

中美將再舉行兩輪貿談

兩國代表團本月底下月初互訪 相向而行趨勢鞏固

【本報訊】中美兩輪貿易談判，在經過多輪磋商後，雙方代表團已於本月初在華盛頓達成初步諒解。據悉，兩國代表團將於本月底及下月初分別進行互訪，這顯示出中美貿易關係正朝著相向而行的趨勢發展。此次談判的進展，對於緩解全球貿易緊張局勢具有重要意義。

在貿易談判取得進展的同時，中方也積極推動人文交流。據悉，中方將歡迎更多美國各界人士訪華，這將有助於加強兩國在文化、教育、科技等領域的合作。此外，中方還將舉辦多場國際性活動，進一步擴大對外開放，促進全球經濟復甦。

SANDRA TORRES SUFRE DEPRESIÓN

HASTA EL MOMENTO SU ESTADO DE SALUD NO AMERITA HOSPITALIZACIÓN

La artista Sandra Torres ha estado sufriendo de depresión desde hace algunos meses. Aunque su estado de salud ha mejorado, aún requiere atención médica. Su familia y amigos están brindándole apoyo y cariño durante esta etapa difícil. Se espera que pronto pueda regresar a sus actividades habituales.

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Ya estamos recibiendo sus Anuncios Publicitarios para el 2020.



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What is this White Paper about?

By Blythe Irwin, MIREMS Outreach Director

MIREMS LTD. - Multilingual International Research and Ethnic Media Services - proudly presents its year long research into ethnic media coverage on the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 in the form of five articles. These articles were published or excerpted by New Canadian Media in its *Bridging the Mainstream-Ethnic Digital Divide in Covid-19 Literacy* project, which was made possible as a result of support from Canadian Heritage through its Digital Citizen Contribution Program. We would like to thank New Canadian Media for giving us the opportunity to write these pieces.

The white paper provides **an overview of the lessons learned in 2020 from engaging with diverse communities in the fight against the COVID-19**, which may be useful in 2021 as the pandemic continues. In order to capture coverage needed to produce this white paper, we spent a year regularly monitoring over 800 ethnic media outlets across Canada in 30+ language groups.

The 30+ language groups/communities whose ethnic media we tracked include Arabic, Armenian, Bengali, Caribbean, Chinese (incl. Cantonese & Mandarin), Farsi, Filipino, German, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Jewish, Korean, Muslim, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Somali, South Asian, Spanish, Sri Lankan, Tamil, Turkish, Ukrainian, Urdu and Vietnamese.

The ethnic media outlets we tracked spanned the four mediums of print, web, radio and TV and were mostly based in the metropolitan areas of Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal. These urban centres attract the most immigrants each year, thus resulting in a concentration of ethnic media outlets in Canada's most populated cities.

The actionable intelligence gained as a result of our ethnic media research **provides insight into the impact of COVID-19 on newcomers and racialized communities**, who have been some of the most affected by the pandemic. Out of the **1,130 translated ethnic media story summaries** we produced in 2020 for this report, 169 were focused on mental health, 193 on the economic impact of COVID-19, 350 on immigration and 118 on the culture vs. economy debate as a cause of the prevalence of COVID-19.





Our white paper is divided into five pieces, four written by MIREMS Editor-in-Chief Silke Reichrath and one by MIREMS President Andres Machalski. The following are brief abstracts:

1) Media Representation of Newcomer Communities with High COVID-19 Rates

Ethnic media have been instrumental in highlighting community initiatives to counteract the pandemic spread and in giving voice to grassroots opinions. It shows these outlets fulfill a very real need to translate government and expert messaging into culturally and linguistically relevant formats and in adding information from the grassroots. This channel is extremely influential in the fight against social media disinformation among newcomers.

2) Mental Health and Domestic Violence in the Ethnic Media

Stigma around mental health challenges is still widespread in newcomer communities and many newcomers are not aware of available supports through community organizations and settlement service providers, especially now that programs have moved online. In this context, ethnic media have a significant role to play in raising awareness around mental health issues, the impacts of the pandemic on different segments of the population, and the services available to them.

3) Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Immigration Communities

The ethnic media have fulfilled a valuable role during the pandemic in keeping their audiences informed about the latest public health guidelines regarding business openings and closures, and about benefits and aid programs available from the three levels of government. These outlets have raised awareness in general about how the pandemic is affecting the national and local economy, have featured charitable initiatives by the community, and have encouraged community members to support local businesses by buying local, particularly from smaller businesses. Recovery is only a matter of time, and ethnic media can be expected to do their share in reflecting community concerns and advocating for equity in the rebuilding process.



4) COVID-19 Impact on Immigration – Analysis

Over the pandemic year of 2020, the ethnic media has been instrumental in reporting on and clarifying government policy, processes and programs. Ethnic media coverage focused on the impact of COVID on immigration levels, border closures and travel restrictions, visa extensions for temporary residents stranded in Canada, work permit regulations, farm worker rights and COVID safety protocols, COVID-related accommodations for international students, modifications to the Express Entry draws, and the guardian angel program for front-line care providers. The ethnic media also documented the unique challenges different migrant constituencies face, reflecting the lived experiences of the various newcomer communities.

5) The Role of Ethnic Media in the War Against Pandemic, Pandemonium, Poverty and Panic

The ethnic media undeniably exists and is part of the communications fabric of our society, but it is one that is often ignored, despite its key positioning as a conduit to and from diverse communities. These outlets are essential to the central position diverse communications will play in restoring the social cohesion needed to overcome not only the COVID-19 virus, but its fall out. Canadian corporate and government leaders need to recognize the ethnic media as a key asset in the fight against COVID-19, which is at the same time a fight against social disruption, poverty, and mental anguish.

We are pleased to share this unique perspective with you. Walking in another's shoes is the start of a journey to create a more inclusive society as we recover from the pandemic together.

These particular shoes come from all over the world and belong to people from all backgrounds and walks of life who have come to Canada for a better life. We are the only company in North America which can provide you with access to this cultural confluence of information compiled in summary translation from the ethnic media. We look forward to hearing your feedback and hope you will join us on the road to an equitable recovery that includes all Canadians.

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Media Representation of Newcomer Communities with High COVID-19 Rates

By Silke Reichrath, MIREMS Editor-in-Chief

Executive Summary

- Minority populations in Canada are over-represented among COVID-19 cases because of their high proportion of frontline workers, inability to work from home or take paid sick leave, low income, crowded and multi-generational living arrangements and behaviour.
- Mainstream media have represented a controversy between those arguing that a culture of large gatherings around life events and annual festivities, hospitality and close-knit extended families engaging in home visits is driving the pandemic and others pointing to socio-economic factors.
- South Asian ethnic media have for the most part showed an almost unanimous desire to show that low income, type of employment and marginal socio-economic position drive the pandemic in their community. Ethnic media from other language groups have largely ignored the debate, with a few notable exceptions.
- Ethnic media have been instrumental in highlighting community initiatives to counteract the pandemic spread and in giving voice to grassroots opinions.
- They have also been highly influential in translating public health and political messaging into community languages and giving voice to community experts to explain the messaging in culturally appropriate ways.
- Since the pandemic disproportionately affects marginalized communities and communications is a major tool in the fight against the pandemic, the media communicating with these affected communities should receive disproportionate resources to channel the message.

Background

As noted by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) in its October 2020 report “From risk to resilience: An equity approach to COVID-19^[1],” the determinants of COVID-19 susceptibility – and of health in general – are racialized. They include material circumstances (income, housing, employment), psychosocial factors (social connections), biological factors (genetics), behavioural factors (nutrition, physical activity, substance use) and access to healthcare.

The PHAC analysis highlights the over-representation of newcomers (especially newcomer women) among high exposure workers including meat processing workers, personal care staff in residential care facilities and home care, and employees in service jobs, transport and retail. Low-income workers and members of larger households are also over-represented, two population segments that tend to overlap with newcomer status.



According to the report, differential exposure among newcomers is connected to the inability to maintain physical distancing due to the inability to work from home, the lack of paid sick leave and job security, reliance on childcare outside the home, crowded living conditions and possibly the use of public transportation.

Representation in the mainstream media

Several reports published in the Canadian mainstream media in November 2020 have been giving voice to a fiery debate about **the role of culture vs. economics among the causes of the high rates of COVID-19 transmission among visible minorities** in communities with high proportions of newcomers.

OMNI TV Digital Content Producer Eden Debebe published an article on the website of Vancouver's NEWS 1130 radio, referencing the high COVID-19 rates in the South Asian community and a statement by BC Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry that the increase of cases in the South Asian community is mainly due to weddings and celebration-of-life events. Henry acknowledged that front-line work also plays a role and that the increase in cases started with Thanksgiving. Debebe admonished community members to celebrate Diwali at home.

Global News broadcast a report by Mike Drolet on the overlap between COVID-19 hotspots in Brampton and Surrey with the locations of the liveliest Diwali celebrations in normal years. Drolet noted that local public health authorities pleaded for restraint and mostly got it, with only one parking lot line-up in Brampton needing to be disbursed by police. Two South Asian public health experts were quoted, who linked the high COVID-19 rates to multi-generational households, a tradition of large gatherings at home, front-line work and the inability to self-isolate in crowded housing.

Debate on the role of culture in COVID-19 transmission

South Asian Physicians Zain Chagla, Sumon Chakrabarti and Tajinder Kaura pointed to the role of culture in COVID-19 transmission in a Toronto Star article. They noted the role of hospitality, where a "guest leaving your house on an empty stomach is considered a travesty," and the tradition of living in large multi-generational families. They also mentioned that **"many well publicized COVID-19 outbreaks in Canada have been associated with South Asian events, such as weddings."** They warned of the impending Diwali celebrations. Together with the prevalence of "public-facing professions" and financial instability among newcomers, the authors state these cultural factors have resulted in a greater spread of the virus. Compounded with the pre-existing "high rates of underlying diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, stroke, and obesity within the South Asian population,"

South Asians are also at greater risk of adverse outcomes like hospitalization and death. Notably the goal of the authors is to call for targeted interventions including **culturally and linguistically appropriate communications materials** and awareness-raising campaigns involving community leaders.

A response to the article was published the following day on First Policy Response, written by a fellow South Asian author, Seher Shafiq. She expressed shock at what she saw as “pathologizing an entire race by using culture and values as explanations for higher COVID rates, stigmatizing already marginalized communities” and a matter of “shaming and blaming.”

Her explanation for the higher COVID-19 rates in racialized communities in general is their prevalence in precarious jobs in the service industry and gig economy where they have a lot of customer contact, cannot work from home, take transportation on crowded buses and go to work sick rather than lose a paycheque. She does concur with the impact of multi-generational, high-occupancy homes and gatherings during festivities like Diwali, but points out that Thanksgiving also led to a significant spike in cases.

Premier Kenney weighs in on Punjabi radio

On November 25, Premier Jason Kenney went on the air at the South Asian radio station Red FM in Calgary, linking the high rate of COVID-19 among the South Asian community in Calgary to the large multi-generational families and the tradition to have big family gatherings at home. The host of the program, Rishi Nagar, took his response to CBC News. He asked whether South Asians get infected more often because of their culture, or because they are front-line workers and cannot work from home. He also wondered why Kenney did not focus on anti-maskers, why there was no mandatory mask policy or effective contact tracing, and why no extra resources were dedicated to the most affected communities for PPE, top up wages or educational activities.

CTV News published a piece by Journalist Mark Villani objecting to Kenney’s comments, and the Edmonton Journal an opinion contributed by medical student Sharan Aulakh. Villani cited Dr. Mukarram Ali Zaidi, a spokesperson for the Canadian Muslim Research Think Tank, who demanded an apology from Kenney and said **North-East Calgary’s immigrant community is mainly employed in jobs that don’t allow them to work from home**, such as janitorial staff, taxi drivers or warehouse workers. Aulakh said Kenney missed the mark blaming South Asians, who are mostly essential frontline services, have limited access to compensated sick leave, and live in multigenerational housing due to financial constraints. Instead, she blamed Kenney’s inaction in the face of anti-mask protests, refusal to implement restrictions like mandatory masks, and failure to adopt the federal contact tracing app.

Overall, the mainstream media has generally taken the position of explaining high positivity rates in newcomer communities with systemic factors like the type of work people do, crowded housing and possibly the use of public transit. Public health and local government authorities are frequently cited as warning residents to celebrate festivities at home, whether it is Diwali, Thanksgiving or now Christmas.

In addition, **a lot of the debate in the mainstream media has been carried by authors from newcomer backgrounds or, at minimum, has cited experts from the affected communities.** Red FM, a prominent ethnic radio station, has become featured in the Alberta mainstream due to comments made by the premier on the station and the response of the program host.

Representation in the ethnic media

The debate reflected in a similar, but more defensive, way in the ethnic media. Numerous admonitions from municipal and public health authorities to celebrate Diwali at home, along with threats of bylaw enforcement, were passed on in all the South Asian media in the run-up to Diwali and Bandi Chhor Diwas. Two large gatherings in parking lots in Mississauga and Brampton made the news with wide coverage in South Asian media, but the high level of compliance overall was also highlighted. **Brampton Mayor Patrick Brown's speech in defence of Brampton's essential workers was also widely picked up in the South Asian media.** Warning of Diwali gatherings have now given way to warnings of Christmas gatherings.

Ethnic media bridging linguistic silos

In an interesting use of ethnic media to bridge silos between minority groups, **Patrick Brown and Portuguese-Canadian Councillor Martin Medeiros were interviewed on the Portuguese TV station FPTV on 19 November to explain the high rates of COVID-19 transmission in Brampton and speak out against the racialized finger-pointing and stigma against the Indian community.** They said Brampton's essential workers bear the brunt of COVID-19 and they are the 'unsung heroes' keeping the food processing, transportation and medical system running. Brampton is at the forefront of Canada's supply chain and Brampton truckers keep travelling to the US, where COVID-19 is out of control. They also again pointed to Brampton's disadvantage with respect to health care funding, the lack of hospital beds, and delays in getting an isolation centre.

Similarly, radio host Mark Strong at G 98.7 FM, a radio station with a primarily Black audience, picked up MPP Gurratan Singh's reaction that Brampton essential workers shouldn't be blamed for risking their lives in factories and trucks so that others can work from home. They also shouldn't be blamed for having only one hospital due to health care under-funding.



Mark Strong linked this defence of South Asians to the situation of Black people, who also suffer a lack of resources and live in crowded low-income housing, which also makes them less able to control and resist the pandemic.

A report by the Toronto non-profit ICES showing that most positive cases in the Greater Toronto Area were among racialized and immigrant populations received wide coverage. The Toronto Star article was picked up by PTC Punjabi TV and set off a flurry of pushback highlighting the role of Brampton essential workers working in factories, warehouses, food processing plants and trucking and keeping grocery stores stocked while other Canadians were working from home. OMNI Punjabi TV featured Jaskaran Sandhu of the World Sikh Organization of Canada commenting on the exposure essential workers have to live with and a tweet by Naheed Dosani, who said “continually blaming Brown people in Brampton for rising #COVID19 cases is unnerving & racist.”

Community initiatives to fill the communications gap

This OMNI report also started off a series of spotlights on constructive initiatives from within the South Asian community to counter the pandemic, featuring the Canadian Sikh COVID-19 Task Force. This task force, founded by Sikh physicians, was also highlighted by 5aabt. The task force was formed in an effort to create greater awareness about the virus and why it is hitting the community hard, and to share important messaging on what they can do to prevent transmission with South Asian communities in their language. The task force also addressed the taboo and stigma around getting tested for COVID-19 and telling anyone if a test is positive.

Another report on OMNI Punjabi presented the Canadian Muslim COVID-19 Task Force and Hindu COVID Task Force alongside the Sikh COVID Task Force. Spokespersons pointed out that not **only South Asians, but all marginalized populations are highly afflicted by COVID-19**. They try to translate the public health messaging and to develop and disseminate "culturally sensitive and culturally appropriate" information. The Hindu COVID-19 Task Force and the umbrella Canadian South Asian COVID-19 Task Force were also featured on the Tamil radio station CTBC, the Hindi Radio Shon – CINA and Punjabi WTOR Radio.

OMNI Punjabi also featured a public awareness campaign entitled "Humans in Brampton," which is trying to tell the stories of front-line workers on social media. Their message is that 'Brampton should be celebrated, not stigmatized.' Another spotlight on OMNI Punjabi reported on the COVID-19 Sikh Gurdwara Initiative, which distributed adapted cloth masks that can be worn with turbans and produced cardboard displays showing correct 2 m distancing equaling the length of an unrolled turban for use in gurdwaras.



Need for culturally appropriate local language information

Ethnic media also pointed out the fact that minority communities have special communications needs. **A talk show on Radio Humsafar 1350 AM on 22 November conveyed a sense that mainstream media never talked about the healthcare needs of Bramptonians (more hospital beds and testing centres) and that the government did not support ethnic media in its role of conveying the government's policies and plans to their communities. OMNI Punjabi TV reported on the lack of government communications targeting minority communities.**

The three levels of government release new numbers and information every day, some of which are contradictory and confusing even to people who speak English as a first language. The Canadian government and United Way funded a COVID-19 helpline for South Asians in the GTA with capacity in several South Asian languages, and the Peel Region COVID-19 website can be translated into a range of languages, but this is not enough.

The Tamil Canadian Centre for Civic Action called for local-language information not only about the public health guidelines but also about available supports. **The pandemic has disproportionately impacted marginalized communities, so the outreach to them should also be disproportionately resourced.**

Very few sources included critical comments about COVID-19 transmission during Diwali fireworks, international students disregarding the guidelines or lenient mask use. A talk show guest on a *Punjabi CIAO AM 530* program argued fireworks should not have been sold for Diwali. Residents interviewed on the street by *OMNI TV* mentioned that newly arriving immigrants and students do not observe the quarantine properly and that people were still planning Diwali get-togethers. Community members speaking to *Punjabi Zee TV* mentioned that many people came to markets and religious sites without masks. There were crowds at sweet shops before Diwali. An piece by Surjit Singh Flora on *Asia Metro* argued that “our touchy-feely instincts are getting in the way” as residents of Brampton just fail to follow the guidelines.

The main difference observed in the ethnic media from the mainstream is the high number of reports that defend the community as being affected by COVID-19 mainly due to their position as essential front-line workers and their economic marginalization and the concerted effort to communicate public health guidelines and information as they relate to the local culture, in local languages and pertaining to local festivities and events. In addition, ethnic media highlight initiatives taken within the community to raise awareness and meet community information needs. In this way, **ethnic media fulfill a very real need to translate government and expert messaging into culturally and linguistically relevant formats and in adding information from the grassroots.**

What to Do?

As Editor-in-Chief at MIREMS, my daily job has been to review the coverage of COVID-19 in the ethnic media since January of this year, and we see **the ethnic media are fighting a battle on three fronts**: One against the virus, including the fight against disinformation and disconnect between government and the governed; the other against polarized accusations from the mainstream of culture being the driver of pandemic spread; and a third against relative neglect in the distribution of government resources to off-set pandemic revenue losses.

Instead of viewing diversity as a barrier to communication with these audiences, would it not be natural to think of the matter differently? **The Brampton trucker, factory worker, grocery clerk and front-line caregiver new to the country and struggling in English are unlikely to follow the daily stream of press conferences on mainstream media.** So why not reach out to them with culturally adapted communications in their language through their media?

Viewed from a demographic perspective, we see ethnic media as a mature set of organizations with established audiences and a local advertising base. They are the successful outcome of the historical combination of population needs and government multicultural policies.

What is important is to recognize how influential this channel can be in the fight against social media disinformation. After thirty years of observation, even without the help of much in the way of available statistics, we think that they just might have the eyes and ears of their local audiences, as well as their mouths, above all on talk shows and in the streets.

A cultural – linguistic and demographic approach to COVID would also perhaps address the problem of generational understanding and conflict. It would make sense to educate the older generation who still read or listen to traditional media on the need to remain connected with the rest of the family over Zoom, not dinner. Getting the elders and guardians of culture on board could help catalyze a temporary shift in family traditions.

Our eye on the debate between ethnic media organizations and the government has always included lack of funding, but this has been exacerbated by COVID-19. Wage and rent subsidies do not reach most small outlets, and government advertising related to COVID-19 reached only a small proportion of outlets. **The pandemic has disproportionately impacted marginalized communities, so the outreach to them should also be disproportionately resourced.**

The only thing the ethnic media needs is government recognition and support as a channel with equal rights to English and French media.

See also an article from New Canadian Media: ["Unsung Heroes of Super Spreaders: Racial and Ethnic Minorities in COVID-19 Coverage"](#).

[1] <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/corporate/publications/chief-public-health-officer-reports-state-public-health-canada/from-risk-resilience-equity-approach-covid-19.html#a2>



Mental Health and Domestic Violence in the Ethnic Media

By Silke Reichrath, MIREMS Editor-in-Chief

Shadow pandemics – deadlier than the virus?

A firestorm around MPP Roman Baber’s expulsion from Ontario’s Progressive Conservative caucus brought the issue of mental health during the pandemic into the headlines of the ethnic media. The day after the stay-at-home order came into effect in Ontario, Baber was removed from caucus for publishing an open letter to Premier Doug Ford entitled “The Lockdown is Deadlier than Covid.” Baber pointed to an increase in overdose deaths, thoughts of suicide, eating disorders and anxiety in children, and unemployment since the start of the pandemic. He called for an end to the lockdown and increased hospital capacity once residents of long-term care homes in the red zones are vaccinated.¹

Ethnic media reported this incident widely, with some Russian groups embracing Baber as one of their own, while most reports relayed Baber’s and Ford’s positions without explicitly taking sides. Some dug a little deeper and looked at research by the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA). A CMHA survey showed a decline in self-reported mental health in September, especially among those with pre-existing mental health conditions, the unemployed, young adults and women.

Most reported anxieties were related to the pandemic itself, but particularly lower income Canadians and parents of young children also worried about finances, job loss and food security. About 10% cited concerns about safety from domestic violence.²

Similarly, an October report by the Health Quality Council of Alberta showed that 70% of Albertans reported mental health issues including maintaining relationships, difficulty sleeping, inability to exercise as normal, and loneliness.

A report funded by the Ontario government and Canadian Institutes of Health Research and released in November found that deaths associated with substance abuse had risen by 40% during the COVID-19 pandemic, with higher rates among men, older adults and people who recently immigrated.

Mental health and the ethnic media

Overall, **mental health concerns have not been a major focus of the ethnic media,** which has reported much more actively on COVID case counts and fatalities, the situation in hospitals, public health guidelines and restrictions, and the press conferences and statements of political leaders from the three levels of government.

¹ Roman Baber. “The Lockdown is Deadlier than Covid.” January 15, 2021.

² Canadian Mental Health Association et al. “Summary of Findings: Mental Health Impacts of COVID-19: Wave 2.” December 3, 2020.



Mentions of mental health in the ethnic media are usually related to announcements of government policies and funding and to publications on the matter, in keeping with ethnic media's function of informing their audiences and bridging the gap between mostly anglophone governments and research institutions on the one hand and a multilingual citizenry on the other hand.

At times outside major funding or publication announcements, **mental health issues come up in conversation with guests and callers on ethnic radio talk shows and in editorials.** They tend to link depression and mental health concerns to the isolation, disruption of supports and financial pressures of the lockdowns. The importance of access to places of worship for mental health has been highlighted several times. An Arabic radio program protested the closure of gyms in October because gyms promote good mental health. **An Afro-Caribbean talk show host found the stay-at-home order triggering and was concerned that it would become a pretext for the renewed carding of residents of colour.**

Impacts of the pandemic on newcomers

Newcomers are facing particular challenges during the pandemic. **Prolonged separations due to delays in the processing of spousal sponsorships and to travel restrictions contribute to the stress and suffering of the family members in Canada.** Many foreign live-in caregivers have reported that they are not allowed to go out during the pandemic, which has intensified their feelings of isolation and anxiety. **Experiences of racism have increased significantly, particularly in the Chinese community.**

A Statistics Canada report early in the pandemic found that immigrants were more concerned about their own and their families' health, their ability to maintain social ties and the risk of civil unrest than citizens born in Canada. Not surprisingly, a review of six Legers surveys in January 2021 showed a decline in mental health particularly among recent immigrants and ethnic minorities, as well as among women, single parents and the unemployed.

Several multicultural service providers have been featured in ethnic media to highlight what services are available and to call for more culturally appropriate services. For example, a Zoom call on mental health services for the Tamil community was covered in Tamil media, pointing to the compound effects of war trauma, immigration, "cultural mal-adaptation" and partner violence in the community.

TV features have reported on international students as being particularly at risk due to isolation and difficulties with online learning and employment. Employment has additional meaning for international students as part of their pathway to permanent residency, which is why the calls for an extension to post-graduate work permits and the announcement of an open work permit for post-graduates have garnered a lot of coverage.



Mental health issues among international students have been linked to the financial challenges they face as they need employment income to pay high tuition rates, rent and financial support to family members back home. Increasing drug use has become a concern among secondary and post-secondary international students due to stress and isolation.

Vulnerable populations – the elderly and the young

Concerns around the well-being of seniors are also prominent in the ethnic media. The City of Brampton set up a series of COVID task forces that were initially in the news a lot. They included a seniors' support task force helping seniors with practical issues like getting groceries. The City offered online exercise videos and a seniors' digital café, but seniors were asking for their clubs to be reopened so they could socialize, with precautions. The report by the military on elder abuse in five Ontario long-term care homes was widely covered. Changes in access to family members in seniors' residences and long-term care homes were frequently covered, and several features highlighted the fears and isolation of seniors living in congregate living facilities.

A central concern in ethnic media reporting was children's schooling, the opening and closing of schools, COVID cases in schools, and experiences with the online education system. **Somali and South Asian parents didn't want to send their children to school because of the risks of COVID-19 and the vulnerability of seniors living in their household**, but for many home-schooling wasn't an option without technology or Internet service, or when parents can't work from home.

While studying at home, newcomer children were at risk of forgetting English and missing the socialization experience that usually comes with being at school. Parents who are not fluent in English were often less able to assist with school work. Some hired tutors or put their children in small-group care programs that offered supervised online schooling along with leisure activities, but many families did not have access to this, and their children were at risk of falling behind. Some high school students were frustrated with delays in staffing for the online school option and felt that their career goals were in jeopardy.

Children studying online routinely spent all day in front of screens and did not have time to go outside during daylight hours. A study published in November by Maximum City on child and youth wellbeing found that two-thirds of children in online school said they were going outside less than once a day even in the fall. Some parents reported that their children were more aggressive and impatient due to the sedentary lifestyle. Other parents felt stressed working from home while supporting their children's education and guilty to not be able to pay sufficient attention to their children.

Several mental health professionals offered advice on children's mental health both while locked up at home and while returning to school under confusing and stressful circumstances. In September, a UNICEF Canada study found that Canadian children and youth fare relatively poorly in terms of mental health compared to other wealthy nations, and the Kids Help Phone reported that eight out of ten children were nervous and stressed about going back to school.

Seeking shelter in the storm

A number of reports looked at experiences of the homeless, from risks of COVID transmission at homeless shelters to a reduction in access to shelters because of spacing requirements. Several cities placed more homeless people in hotels, where they sometimes stayed for months at a time or, in at least one case, struggled with a sudden discharge onto the streets. **Some shelter residents are refugees, and as life at the shelters became more stressful and unsafe, this compounded past trauma.**

Shelters for victims of domestic violence reported an increase in calls for assistance. **One shelter catering to Muslim women and children reported a doubling of calls by April 2020 over pre-pandemic levels.** Limited attention was given to the issue in the ethnic media around the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women in November and the commemoration of the victims of the Montreal Massacre in December. OMNI TV aired a feature on the Shelter Voices 2020 report in early December, which presented the findings of a national survey of shelters and transition houses on how they have been affected by and how they have responded to COVID-19.

Government responses

Most of the mentions of mental health reflected governmental funding and policy announcements. In May, the Alberta government rolled out a \$53 million comprehensive mental-health package. Ontario matched \$1.9 billion in federal mental health funding for children, for a total of \$3.8 billion over ten years. Ontario invested \$12 million in online mental health support, including virtual Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, in May. In addition, Ontario announced \$14.75 million to expand access to mental health and addiction services in September, then another \$176 million for mental health and addiction services through the Roadmap to Wellness plan, and then \$24 million services for children and youth in October.

The federal government invested \$20 million in over 1,000 new projects for seniors through the New Horizons for Seniors Program, including online fitness programs, education and social connections, as well as food deliveries and help with medical appointments. The federal government also invested \$11.5 million in 32 projects to help the most vulnerable communities at the occasion of Suicide Prevention Day in September.



However, the September CMHA survey found very low rates of uptake. Fewer than 10% of respondents reported using government benefits and supports as a coping strategy. Use of virtual mental health resources to cope was at around 3%. This compares to substance use at 17%. The single most beneficial government policy may have been that of allowing people a 'social bubble' of ten people in Ontario. It was one of the measures widely reported and explained in ethnic media and was used by 33% of respondents in the CMHA survey.

However, this approach was problematic because, in practice, the bubbles were not exclusive and overlapped with contacts at work, so the concept was dropped with the resurgence of COVID.

A role for the ethnic media in mental health support

Stigma around mental health challenges is still widespread in newcomer communities. Many residents are not aware of available supports through community organizations and settlement service providers, especially now that programs have moved online. **Ethnic media have a significant role to play in raising awareness around mental health issues, the impacts of the pandemic on different segments of the population, and the services available to them.** In order to ensure uptake of government benefits and supports, funding needs to include a culturally and linguistically appropriate outreach component to the population groups most affected by the COVID pandemic and the shadow pandemics of isolation, mental health struggles, substance use, and domestic violence.



Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Immigrant Communities

By Silke Reichrath, MIREMS Editor-in-Chief

The ethnic media have fulfilled a valuable role during the pandemic in keeping their audiences informed about the latest public health guidelines about business openings and closures and about benefits and aid programs available from the three levels of government. They have also raised awareness in general about how the pandemic is affecting the national and local economy, have featured charitable initiatives by the community, and have encouraged community members to support local businesses by buying local, particularly from smaller businesses. In the recovery process, they can be expected to become an important voice for ethnically inclusive recovery initiatives.

Vulnerabilities of newcomer communities

Certain industry segments have been featured in the ethnic media that rely heavily on newcomers, including the taxi industry, the hotel and tourism sector, meat processing plants, long-term care and health care. Calls for the collection of race-based data on COVID-19 were generally supported. Over-crowded housing was highlighted as a source of vulnerability, especially for international students and migrant farm workers. **The coverage showed time and again how newcomers often work in essential jobs, which makes them more susceptible to virus exposure.**

Racism and discrimination, particularly against residents of Chinese origin, were enhanced by the public health crisis and perceived as a 'shadow pandemic.' Early in the pandemic, **low-income newcomers were particularly vulnerable to job loss in the service sector and had difficulty accessing benefits, some due to a precarious immigration status and others due to a lack of familiarity with the benefits system and sometimes the English language.** In addition, small businesses owned by immigrants are more likely to have fewer than five employees than those with Canadian-born owners, and being very small makes them more vulnerable to the shut-downs.

One of the sources of vulnerability for front-line workers in stores, health care, seniors care, food processing and trucking is the need to physically go to work and interact with customers, clients, suppliers and co-workers. This risk is compounded by the lack of paid sick leave, which motivates workers to go to work with mild illness rather than lose a day, or a week, of pay. Newcomers are over-represented in these usually low-paying jobs.



The call for paid sick leave as a missing tool in the pandemic tool box was more frequently mentioned in the ethnic media as the pandemic progressed and it became obvious that lock-downs of non-essential sectors had little impact in places like Brampton, with a high proportion of factory workers and truckers.

When the GTHA mayor joined the call for paid sick leave, this was widely reported. However, the federal Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit was not mentioned in this context; it only made the news with the scandal around payments to returning travelers for their quarantine.

Disproportionate impact on visible minorities

As far back as April 2020, ethnic media reported that Toronto Public Health began analyzing race-based and socio-demographic data related to COVID-19. They found that people in areas that have the highest proportion of recent immigrants are experiencing higher rates of COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations. **Peel Public Health found that four out of five cases were among South Asians, Blacks and Latinos. These findings were well covered in the ethnic media.**

The Ontario Federation of Labour, Ontario NDP, labour unions and community organizations called on the Government of Ontario to collect and publish provincial data on the differential impacts of COVID-19 on Indigenous, Black and other racialized people, women, individuals with disabilities, 2SLGBTQI+ people and immigrants. A study released in May by the Association of Canadian Studies (ACS) showed 42% of recent immigrants struggling to pay the rent or mortgage, as compared to 20% of more established people.

In his July financial snapshot, then finance minister Bill Morneau acknowledged that the crisis had exposed and amplified many inequalities in Canada. Women, youth, low-wage workers, racialized Canadians, Indigenous people and new immigrants all saw higher rates of job loss or reduced working hours in the early phase of the pandemic and slower benefits as the economy began to recover. Statistics Canada reported in a July Labour Force Survey that 42% of Filipino-Canadians, 40% of Southeast Asians and 47% of West Asian-Canadians experienced temporary or permanent job loss or reduced work hours, compared to 34% of white Canadians. While unemployment was at 10.9% overall in July, visible minority groups had significantly higher rates, such as South Asian (17.8%), Arab (17.3%) and Black (16.8%) Canadians.

A widely reported study by the non-profit research organization ICES found that **immigrants and refugees accounted for 43.5% of Ontario's COVID-19 cases from January to June, even though they comprised only one-quarter of the population.** Infection rates were highest among caregivers, refugees, residents in low-income neighbourhoods and individuals with low education levels. **Immigrants and refugees also had lower testing rates compared to long-term residents and significantly higher positivity rates.**



A University of Toronto study found that minority groups in Canada were more likely to live with multiple medical conditions putting them at higher risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19.

The Toronto Fallout Report by the Toronto Foundation in November confirmed again that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing inequities. The report found that Black, Latin American, Arab, Middle Eastern or West Asian Torontonians have COVID-19 infection rates at least seven times higher than White residents. People earning less than \$30,000 a year are just over five times more likely to catch the virus than those making \$150,000 or more.

Differential consequences of the pandemic for women

Some ethnic media reports pointed out that women have been disproportionately affected by both job losses and COVID infections. **Women are more likely to work in retail and service sectors that have seen the most job losses due to the shut-downs.** On the other hand, women are over-represented in health care, seniors care, education, grocery store sales and food processing, where they are exposed to infection. In Ontario, over 57% of all COVID-19 cases had been recorded in women by May. The ICES study found that 36% of adult females who tested positive for COVID-19 were employed as health-care workers, and 45% of these were immigrants and refugees. A study in November found that nurses, personal support workers and other health care staff in Ontario were exhausted and scared and still had inadequate access to personal protective equipment.

As mothers, women having a baby during the pandemic faced particular difficulties in transitioning between CERB benefits and maternity benefits in the Employment Insurance system. In addition, **mothers struggled to balance their work with taking care of their children.** Many women had to leave the workforce if their jobs required them to work outside the home, since daycares were closed. In Alberta, 85% of child care centres were still shut down in July. The labour force participation rate in Alberta remained relatively steady for men before and after the start of COVID-19, but for women, it had declined by 3.1 per cent in July. Federal government data also showed that more women have been forced to stay at home to take care of their children during the pandemic because of the high cost of childcare and the limited options.

Other women worked from home but dealt with high levels of stress supporting their children's online learning while working themselves. **Several features on multilingual TV showed newcomer women struggling with home schooling,** resorting to tutors and care providers supervising online learning, and weighing the pros and cons of sending their children to school when the option was available or enrolling them in online schooling. Mothers of older children mentioned how they left younger children in the care of older siblings but had to leave work regularly to check in on the children.

Immigrant women suffered a compounding of marginalized status as newcomers and as women in the early stages of the pandemic, but this dual effect reportedly disappeared over the summer. 20% of recent immigrant women employed in March did not have a job in April, compared to 13% of Canadian-born women. This gap narrowed to only 2 percentage points in June and virtually disappeared during July. Nevertheless, inequality within ethnic groups continued as the unemployment rate was higher among women than men in, e.g., the South Asian Canadian community and Black Canadian community even in August.

An Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) report in September based on the “She-Coverly Project” showed that women’s labour participation rate had fallen to its lowest level in 30 years in Ontario. It highlighted that **the pandemic experience had been especially challenging for already vulnerable groups, including racialized women, Indigenous women, single mothers, low-income women, newcomers and women with disabilities.**

Changes in the non-profit sector

A lot of stories appeared in the ethnic media about food banks and other charitable organizations working directly with the community. They saw a rise in clientele and were very active in raising food and monetary donations to support the community. For example, the Guru Nanak Langar Sewa Society supported the Knights Table soup kitchen, Punjabi Food Seva collected food for the community, and the YMCA set up a COVID-19 Response Fund in the GTA. Individual community members hosted drive-through parties to collect food for food banks. Care4Cause launched a free meal program, an Essential Care Program distributing hygiene and sports equipment to disadvantaged youth living in shelters, and a Funeral Services Aid Program helping with funeral costs for families losing loved ones to the pandemic. Several South Asian charities were featured as preparing meals for health care workers and first responders.

A study on newcomer charitable giving found in September that **the South Asian, Chinese, Filipino, Black, Arab and Iranian communities share a strong willingness to embrace community service.** They are driven to give and volunteer out of a sense of duty to advance the well-being of their communities and Canadian society generally. Empathy for those in need is deeply rooted in strong family and religious values.

However, overall the pandemic has been detrimental to the non-profit sector. **Out of more than 140 non-profit organizations who cater to newcomers and refugees, 78% had lost income from fundraising in May, 87% had to interrupt the services they are offering, 44% had to lay off staff, and 21% had to close their doors.** Over half were at risk of having to close permanently within six months from May without an injection of cash.





For example, the Kids Cancer Care Foundation of Alberta was expecting an 80% drop in revenues for 2020. At the same time, 52% said demand for their services has increased.

The federal government announced a \$350 million Emergency Community Support Fund later in May, to be distributed by the United Way Centraide Canada, the Canadian Red Cross and the Community Foundations of Canada through an application process. Another \$25 million over five years were announced for small grants to Black community organizations. The Government of Alberta supported COVID-19 response efforts by offering to match donations up to \$2 million to eight designated Alberta-based registered charities made between April 15 and May 31. The Government of Ontario set up a \$83 million Resilient Communities Fund.

In addition to the loss of most fundraising events and a drop in donations due to a general sense of financial uncertainty in the population, a lot of non-profits focus on cultural activities, festivals, events and performances. Most of these activities were canceled or moved online. Organizations differed widely in their agility and access to know-how and technology to move their programming online, but even for those who were successful, this generally meant staff reductions and a decline in community engagement.

In Alberta, the Community Initiatives Program Project-Based grant stream re-opened for applications in September with a focus on events, festivals, programs and projects delivered in innovative and creative ways that align with public health measures. This signaled a shift away from front-line COVID relief and towards projects that improve and enrich the quality of life in the community. Municipalities including the City of Brampton hosted a range of online cultural events in 2020 and set up COVID-19 relief funds for artists to stabilize the sector.

Another area within the non-profit sector that is of importance to newcomer communities are the faith organizations. They have continued to operate but have had to shift in-person attendance online at times and, at less restrictive times, have had to follow strict public health standards for in-person attendance. Capacity was limited, food services restricted to take out, and strict hygiene and masking protocols in place. Several reports mostly around major festivals like Diwali emphasized the rules established at the local places of worship.

Government supports and economic recovery

Numerous reports in the ethnic media focused on the range of support programs offered by the different levels of government, especially rent relief, the wage subsidy and the CERB. Some of the coverage addressed issues around the eligibility of temporary foreign workers and international students for the different benefits, with some confusion in the reporting as to who was eligible. **There was concern both about programs leaving temporary residents out and about documentation requirements being too lenient, leaving room for fraud.**





Many reports in the summer and September were optimistic about a quick recovery in the job market. The Fall Economic Statement reported that 80% of the jobs lost early in the pandemic had been recovered. The need for childcare was highlighted frequently to allow parents to return to work. Most recently, the news that leisure travelers can access the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit during their quarantine caused an uproar, especially in view of reports of numerous federal and provincial politicians traveling over the Christmas holidays in a context of rapidly rising infection numbers.

In the fall, with economic recovery and rebuilding seemingly within reach, calls reverberated in the ethnic media to ensure that this process addresses racial inequalities.

For example, Colour of Poverty – Colour of Change (COP-COC) released a Reconstruction and Reset Plan for Canada. It calls for policy and legislative initiatives that will reduce and/or eliminate systemic racism in employment, health, housing, immigration, justice, and poverty. World Education Services recommended that Canada’s post-pandemic economic recovery should focus on immigrants. **While the recent increase in cases has meant a return to strict lockdowns, recovery is only a matter of time, and ethnic media can be expected to do their share in reflecting community concerns and advocating for equity in the rebuilding process.**



COVID-19 Impact on Immigration – Analysis

By Silke Reichrath, MIREMS Editor-in-Chief

How did the media cover the unique challenges of migrants in Canada during the pandemic, including new arrivals, international students, temporary farm workers, asylum seekers, undocumented migrants and immigrants approved but stuck in their home countries because of international travel restrictions?

The ethnic media has covered the unique challenges migrants in Canada face from two perspectives – conveying government policy and programs to their audience, and reflecting the lived experiences of the various migrant communities. In the latter reflection of migrant stories, concerns as well as proposals to decision-makers have been formulated, channeled and amplified.

Immigration Policy

The ethnic media always pays close attention to any changes to immigration policy. In the age of COVID, this has meant a lot of coverage on the impact of COVID on immigration levels, border closures and travel restrictions, visa extensions for temporary residents stranded in Canada, work permit regulations, farm worker rights and COVID safety protocols, COVID-related accommodations for international students, modifications to the Express Entry draws, and the guardian angel program for front-line care providers. **In addition to relaying the IRCC news releases in full or in summary, ethnic media also air frequent interviews with immigration lawyers and consultants and with Immigration Minister Mendicino and local MPs about immigration rules and processes.**

While conveying immigration-related information from the government to newcomer communities had made up the largest proportion of immigration-related coverage, **the ethnic media has also played a role in reflecting and highlighting the situations of different communities of temporary residents and newcomers in Canada. Of particular concern in 2020 were temporary foreign workers, international students, asylum seekers, and undocumented workers.** As non-permanent residents, they have a more precarious status with limited and often unclear access to the pandemic benefits programs. They also face struggles to maintain and extend their status. At the same time, they have enjoyed unique opportunities in 2020 to get permanent residence or more flexible work permits.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Temporary foreign workers have been deeply affected by COVID, particularly in meat processing plants and on farms across the country. At the same time, farms have struggled with the delay in the admission of seasonal workers and a reduction in their numbers. At one point, Mexico stopped sending agricultural workers until Canada improved safety measures in the congregate living arrangements on the farms.



Nevertheless, COVID continued to plague certain farms over the growing season, and migrant workers were blamed for evading testing to avoid unpaid down time or dismissal. A case before the Ontario Labour Relations Board highlighted the difficulties agricultural workers face in speaking out against unsafe working conditions.

International Students

International students in Canada have faced financial difficulties because many lost their jobs or were unable to find work, and only a small proportion qualified for the CERB.

Most have stayed in Canada since any return to Canada after a visit to their home country would have been uncertain. In addition, ticket prices have been high, and many countries closed their borders. Many students feel it is unfair that they are charged the same high international student tuition rates when the courses are now online and student services not available.

Students working in health care and other frontline work are now allowed to work full-time as their work is essential. However, for many this work does not count toward permanent residence as it is not skilled work in their field. As a result, protests have been held across the country to ask the government to make post-graduate work permits renewable so that students would have more time after graduation to gain the required work experience for permanent residence.

Some international students have been stranded in their home countries because, even with visas issued before March 2020, they had to show a requirement to be present in Canada. In some cases, students were returned from the airport because their argument for why their presence in Canada was necessary was not accepted. New international students have been allowed to study online and count these studies for up to 50% of their degree towards the post-graduate work permit. IRCC has also set up a two-stage study permit approval process that gives an interim approval for online studies without all the necessary documentation being submitted. However, **international students studying online from their home countries face difficulties with the time difference, Internet access, censorship, an inability to purchase study materials and the high cost of tuition without the concomitant ability to work in Canada.**

Asylum Seekers

Asylum seekers have faced delays in the processing of their claims as IRCC has been low on human resources and needed to adapt to an online work environment. In-person hearings were cancelled. **Many asylum seekers, especially in Quebec, have been working in health care and in long-term care settings. Ethnic media have reflected lobbying efforts to gain these workers a path towards permanent resident status in recognition of their essential contributions in high-risk work settings.** These efforts have resulted in the government announcing the guardian angel program for front-line health and personal support workers.

Family Reunification

Another concern reflected in the ethnic media has been around family reunification.

While the government has allowed immediate family members of Canadian citizens and permanent residents to join their family in Canada, travel restrictions have posed hardships for unmarried couples and adult children wishing to visit their parents, particularly in end-of-life situations. Temporary residents have particularly suffered from the prolonged separation from their loved ones and the uncertainty surrounding travel restrictions.

The processing of spousal sponsorship cases has stalled, and **the ethnic media reported repeatedly on protests organized to ask the government to resume processing sponsorships.** The government has responded by committing to processing a limited number of cases by the end of the year.

Citizenship

While citizenship ceremonies have been held online, citizenship testing was suspended. This left some permanent residents in limbo as their applications for citizenship were not processed further. Ethnic media picked up the petition for online testing, and the government has responded with a pilot project facilitating online citizenship tests.

Over the pandemic year of 2020, ethnic media has been instrumental in reporting on and clarifying government policy, processes and programs. It has also documented the unique challenges different migrant constituencies face and has been part of successful lobbying efforts for concrete solutions.



The Role of Ethnic Media in the War against Pandemic, Pandemonium, Poverty and Panic

By Andres Machalski, President, MIREMS Ltd. and MIREMS International Inc.

1. Who says it, does matter

As founder and President of MIREMS, the only ethnic media monitoring and analysis operation in Canada, I have been the daily spectator since 1988 of Canada's ethnically diverse news reel. A linguist by profession, as I turn 71 what has become important to me beyond translation is how language, and therefore culture, influences both the deliverer and the receiver of messages, because this influences their action on reality, which is what matters.

Thirty-five years of observing and analyzing multilingual media in Canada taught me that in this the speaker is as important to understanding the meaning of the message as is what was said. That is the key to cross cultural communications.

Yes, the medium is the message, but in Canada the message needs to be multilingual, because that is one of the keys to Canadian exceptionalism. **Multiculturalism as an inclusive policy instead of assimilation is the main reason why Canada has such a vibrant ethnic media serving its diverse population.**

Canadian corporate and government leaders need to recognize this industry as a key asset in the fight against COVID-19, which is at the same time a fight against social disruption, poverty, and mental anguish. This fight has the attention of large segments of our diverse population which communicate in languages other than the official ones and are most affected by the Four Horsemen of COVID-19: Pandemic, Pandemonium, Poverty and Panic.

2. Ethnic medias are essential to COVID-19 recovery

Every day I listen to the reports from across Canada from government officials announcing statistics on COVID-19, exhorting people to follow guidelines, reporting on vaccines and answering questions from the media. I listen to the questions attentively and to who poses them: the usual rote of CBC, Canadian Press, The Post and so on – mainstream Anglophone and Francophone media.

I strain my ears to see if I hear Sing Tao, Punjabi Post or Corriere Canadese as the journalists' credentials. No success to date. Maybe I missed them? Or did the media conference organizers miss them, and their audiences?





Reports from our media analysts show **provincial politicians tend to silo the ethnic media in special events**, as recently in a Zoom meeting with Ontario Minister of Education Stephen Lecce. Alberta offers separate conferences for ethnic outlets.

The intention may well be to grant special attention to this segment, but the price is isolation and the danger of contradictory messaging.

Besides, none of this attention matches the pace of COVID-19 news, nor does it provide ethnic media with equal opportunities of access to information, and **ethnic media voices have trouble reaching mainstream ears.**

By and large reporting from major announcements is done indirectly, from Canadian Press and other releases. Our Montreal Italian consultant asks: Do ethnic media have any correspondents on Parliament Hill, or in other provincial capitals to ask questions? How many have the financial means and human resources to have someone on site?

Both ethnic media organizations, the Canadian Ethnic Media Association and the National Ethnic Press and the Media Council of Canada, hold special meeting with politicians, unfortunately mostly around election time. They have campaigned for decades for protection and inclusion of this unique Canadian media segment, with scant results. Their key word here is financial support.

Every day on mainstream print, electronic and social media I see a multitude of goodwill ad messages from corporations reaching out to their afflicted customers and workers, reassuring them that they have their backs, in sometimes stark contrast with what investigative journalism reveals of the real inside policies in play.

While I find reporting on the policies, I cannot find those positive messages advertised in ethnic media outlets. Of course, we have heard the repeated push back from ad agencies – the lack of statistics, ignorance of content to guide placement, the need for translation and the failure of the ethnic media organizations to generate their own savvy media brokerage are some of the excuses. Not a winning strategy, in my view.

3. The marginalization of ethnic media has become a systemic barrier to inclusion

In fact, the excuses may have become a systemic barrier to the use of a highly effective communications channel to multilingual audiences having trouble making sense of vaccine differences that confuse even official language speakers.

Aside from any value judgement, **the ethnic media undeniably exists and is part of the communications fabric of our society, Sadly, it is one that is often ignored, despite its key positioning as a conduit to and from ethnic communities.**

These ethnic medias are essential to the central position diverse communications will play in restoring the social cohesion needed to overcome not only the COVID-19 virus, but its fall out.



4. The war on COVID-19 has become more than ever a communications war

Most wars are, but this is a war carried out in a diverse, multilingual, and multicultural theatre. The set of instructions to enable people to reimagine their lives post pandemic are more complicated than a mere shelter in place order, and these are mediated by cultural traditions and community beliefs that impact all generations.

The general message is that the vaccine heralds a “return to normality,” but this is dangerous if the returning normality is precisely the one that caused the current disaster. We must do better.

If there is any real analysis of the COVID-19 communications experience, there will be increased awareness in Canadian society of the need for corporations, as well as governments and NGOs, to include speakers of other languages in their communication strategies, above all during a war against a virus rife with confusing and fake news.

The time has come to recognize the contribution of ethnic media to building Canada, supporting the fight against fake news, and often being an element in government decisions. **Diversity has to be recognized as a Canadian asset in the fight against COVID-19, not a barrier.** Integrating the voices of Canada’s ethnic communities with the mainstream while respecting their idiosyncrasy is but respectful acknowledgement of equal standing.

5. Ensuring ethnic media financial viability is key to the fight against COVID-19

To be frank, **the biggest challenge for multilingual and ethnic media is ensuring the financial viability of that media so that it can continue to bring those voices forward.** The surest way to kill diversity in Canada is to starve the lines of communication. and this becomes crucial when statistics reveal that the victims of misinformation are the very racialized communities who are overly impacted by the pandemic in crowded housing, ill-informed and over exposed due to their work.

In a constructive spirit I would like to comment on the May 8, 2020, Minister Guilbeault announcement of the \$500 million [COVID-19 Emergency Support Fund for Cultural, Heritage and Sport Organizations](https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/news/2020/07/final-components-of-phase-2-of-the-covid-19-emergency-support-fund-for-cultural-heritage-and-sport-organizations-announced.html), the complicated breakdown of which (see <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/news/2020/07/final-components-of-phase-2-of-the-covid-19-emergency-support-fund-for-cultural-heritage-and-sport-organizations-announced.html>) seems to net more than \$75 million earmarked for ethnic media support. **Ethnic media outlets report that applications for COVID funding through the Canadian Media Fund are full of bureaucratic hurdles.**

Seven months later, our inquiring minds are wondering – where is the money? We asked our team of 50 language consultants who monitor around 600 ethnic media outlets daily if they had seen any advertising from the Federal Government regarding COVID-19, a campaign that was apparently awarded to Cossette Advertising of Montreal. The answer was – none. Some ads from provinces, from cities and MPs. From the Feds – crickets. What happened?

The answer seems to be blowing in the wind.



What Major Canadian Outlets Are Saying About Their Ethnic Media Counterparts

“There is no magic bullet to fix vaccine hesitancy, but engaging the ethnic press will help in communities that need it. It’s not just about dollars — we need the government to send public health experts onto ethnic shows, press releases to be translated into as many languages as possible and regular government-led briefings for ethnic media.”

“Canada’s Chinese language press isn’t just combating misinformation from Canada, it’s combating misinformation from around the world. The same goes for outlets publishing in Polish, Spanish and every other language under the sun.” - *Maria Saras Voutsinas, Executive Director at National Ethnic Press and Media Council of Canada*

<https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2021/02/01/engage-the-ethnic-press-to-combat-vaccine-hesitancy.html>

“Les médias multiculturels permettent de joindre certaines des communautés les plus marginalisées et les plus touchées par la pandémie, dont certains Ontariens qui ne parlent ni l’anglais ni le français.” – *Myriam Eddahia, Radio-Canada journalist*

<https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1771672/medias-multiculturels-ontario-covid>

“One of the things we are most proud of as Canadians is multiculturalism, yet, there’s a divide: a lack of ethnic and linguistic diversity on mainstream media. This is why multicultural and ethnic media is a much-needed voice for minority communities across Canada. Along with providing language and culturally sensitive critical health information and public communication, these mediums foster a sense of culture, and community for the minority and immigrant Canadians.” – *Dr. Amanpreet Brar, General Surgery Resident in the Department of Surgery, UofT*

<https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2021/01/14/as-canadians-were-proud-of-diversity-so-why-is-multicultural-media-being-left-in-the-dark-about-covid-19-information.html>





“We have witnessed an alarming level of pandemic ignorance among ethnocultural communities whose news sources are anything but mainstream. Critical instructions and messages are not being delivered to these vulnerable diverse communities in the fight against COVID-19. In view of Canada’s diverse ethnocultural population, why have these audiences not been given an equitable opportunity to receive important, life-saving, factual information in their language of comfort?” – *Canadian Ethnic Media Association*

<https://canadianethnicmedia.com/project/the-need-for-adequate-and-equitable-recognition-of-canadas-ethnic-media/>

“As we head into the second wave, and develop an inclusive vaccination strategy, it’s still not too late to incorporate language-specific radio and television shows as an important tool in our armamentarium to deliver critical health related information to the most vulnerable communities.” – *Dr. Amanpreet Brar*

<https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2021/01/06/i-went-on-punjabi-radio-to-share-covid-information-with-my-community-i-learned-that-multicultural-media-has-been-kept-in-the-dark.html>



Moving Forward: Incorporating Newcomer Perspectives into Your Communications Plans

By Blythe Irwin, MIREMS Outreach Director

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is a global unpredictable variable which will have a continued impact on immigrant communities within Canada. Reports show these are being disproportionately affected, thus requiring tracking of the ethnic media to help ensure newcomer perspectives are being taken into consideration when crafting outreach plans to marginalized groups.

The ethnic media act as an essential conduit of information to their multilingual audiences on a variety of topics such as government announcements, vaccination information, economic and financial support initiatives, health and safety policies, measures to assist businesses, multicultural consumer marketing, etc.

According to data from the most recent Canadian census (2016), nearly 8 million Canadians report having a mother tongue other than English or French. Engaging with newcomer communities via the ethnic media will become even more essential this year given Canada's plan to welcome a record number of 401,000 permanent residents in 2021 in order to make up for the shortfall in 2020 and help the Canadian economy recover from the pandemic.

As a result of the ongoing pandemic, we foresee a rise in COVID-related news in the ethnic media which will be crucial to track in order to connect with the country's multilingual populations. Regarding the importance of tracking the ethnic media, a quote from Toronto's Milenio Stadium Portuguese newspaper says it best:

"Media organizations are struggling to grasp the cultural diversity of rapidly evolving Canadian cities. They are using outdated language and concepts to engage with the realities of multiculturalism, diversity and cultural identity. The gap which they have created is being filled by ethnic newspapers, which are booming at the cost of the mainstream. Ethnic media seems to be fulfilling all the needs of many newcomers."



MIREMS Ethnic Media Services

The following presents an outline of our services which can assist your media relations so that its scope of vision is enriched with a more in-depth inclusion of the increasingly diverse voices in Canada:

Outbound Communications

We can provide you with a list of verified email addresses of ethnic media outlets across Canada. We can also send out press releases or material on your behalf via our story sharing channel.

It's recommended that this service be used in conjunction with our ethnic media monitoring so we can then track any pick-up or reactions to your material. Establishing a two-way communication channel with the ethnic media is essential in order to connect with media representatives and ensure your message is being heard by multilingual audiences.

Translated Story Summaries (Advisories)

Our advisories provide you with regular ethnic media coverage so you are always up to date with actionable insight based on trending topics, opinions and reactions among Canada's diverse communities in relation to your area of interest. Each day you will receive a report containing translated story summaries on your keywords or topics from the past day of reporting in the ethnic media.

In addition to a story summary written in idiomatic English or French, you will also receive important metrics about the story such as the headline, original language, journalist, source type (radio, print, web, or TV), publication name, frequency of publication, city, date of publication or broadcast, type of story (news, column, talk show, etc.), length of story, position of story and tone. An example of our advisory format is as follows:



Canada - Vaccination

Vaccine discussion – Spanish

Description: Fabian Merlo - The long-term care system is failing patients and their families, and it has been doing so for decades. A light has been shone on the tragedy occurring in this area due to inaction. This inaction is making us slow with vaccinating. How can we link these two themes together? Because an interesting news report came out asking why Canada doesn't have its own vaccines. What happened is that Canada's vaccine labs have been without funding, which they haven't had since 1980, as various governments took away investments from vaccines in labs. The most recent blow came from the previous Stephen Harper administration which also took away funding. Last year Trudeau was then in a position regarding needing vaccines. He was faced with the decision regarding starting up the labs or getting vaccines from abroad. The quickest way was to purchase the vaccines. That's why so many vaccines were purchased. We have 800 million doses purchases, which is about eight doses for every person. However, the vaccines aren't arriving. Labs aren't managing to distribute the vaccines and they are delayed. We're so behind that it is embarrassing for the Canadian government. Meanwhile the US is vaccinating people at a most impressive rate. The US is vaccinating around 1 million people per day. Even Chile has vaccinated half a million people in three days...Chile! Here in Canada, we are very behind, and it's embarrassing.

RADIO - CHIN 91.9 FM Spanish (Daily5) - Toronto, 08/02/2021 - TALK SHOW, 3 mins, 05/05, Spanish, NEG - 230W

Full Translations and Transcriptions

We can translate your press release, announcement or advertorial into 25 different languages, producing an idiomatic and culturally relevant text that takes into account the local dialect so your message gets across the linguistic barriers faced by Canada's newcomers.

If upon reading one of our daily advisories you would like to delve further into the background of the article or broadcast to fully understand the context of what was said and who said it, then we can provide a quick turn around on a translation or transcription into English.

A translation is a rendering of an article into a target language, while a transcription is a translated word for word rendering of a radio, TV or video broadcast into text. Getting a look at the entire article or broadcast allows for greater clarity of sensitive content, enabling you to reach out to the affected community with the full knowledge of what was reported in the ethnic media.

Executive Overview Reports

Upon request, one of our experienced media analysts will write a concise review of coverage over a specified time period. This overview will perform a quantitative and qualitative analysis of articles and news by keywords, topics of interest and tone, while highlighting salient information using our extensive knowledge of the ethnic media outlets.

The executive overview report provides an in-depth look at trends, targeted subjects and stakeholders, offering actionable insight into the perspective of local diverse communities as portrayed through the ethnic media. The media analysis provided in this report is the final loop in a circle which begins with translation, outbound communications, and tracking the coverage of your message in the ethnic media.

Conclusion

The big picture conclusion is a confirmation of the intrinsic value added by the ethnic media to the Canadian media scene and society, namely:

- a) for their reflection of and advocacy for the needs of different immigrant communities (by ethnic origin and by status, i.e. student/temporary worker/small business owner etc.) and
- b) for their reach as a communication channel to immigrant communities, based on language, on culturally appropriate messaging and on using spokespersons from the communities.

Since they do add value and have something special to offer, governments, businesses, academia etc. should include them in their outreach and research/analysis.

Please don't hesitate to get in touch with us and we would be pleased to discuss how we can help you connect with Canada's ethnocultural communities and get your message out to the ethnic media's multilingual audiences. We continue to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on immigrant communities across various areas including health, immigration, labour, education and race relations.

For further information you may contact:



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