



# LESSONS FOR A POST- PANDEMIC RECOVERY

The role of ethnic media outreach and analysis

Based on reviews of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Metropolis Conference, on *Migrants, Migration and Mobility*, March 22-26, 2021, presented at the Multiculturalism @50: Diversity, Inclusion and Eliminating Racism, Metropolis Canada's 4th Annual Forum on Measuring Identities, October 6-8, 2021

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### **Contributors:**

Silke Reichrath, Editor in Chief, Spanish, German, French Media Analyst, with MIREMS since 2012.

Blythe Irwin, Senior Spanish Media Analyst, Sources and Outreach Director and Editor, with MIREMS since 2015.

Emily Guccione, Senior Italian Media Analyst and Editor, with MIREMS since 1990.

Marielle Francisco, Tagalog Media Analyst and Social Media Coordinator, with MIREMS since 2019.

Alice Valsecchi, Italian Media Analyst and Editor, with MIREMS since 2018.

Muskan Sandhu, Hindi and Punjabi Media Analyst, with MIREMS since 2020.

### **Advisor:**

Andrés Machalski, President and Chairman of the Board, with MIREMS and preceding similar ventures for 32 years. Languages: Spanish.

**For further information visit [www.mirems.com](http://www.mirems.com)**

## Preface: What is this White Paper about?

This paper originated with a series of Conference notes for internal use from the 23<sup>rd</sup> Metropolis Conference, held from March 22-26, 2021, on *Migrants, Migration and Mobility*. As the pandemic continues to occupy the front and centre of national and international discourse, we decided to share our thoughts with a wider audience, since we at MIREMS - Multilingual International Research and Ethnic Media Services - are privy to a unique source of intelligence on ethnic media by way of the daily monitoring and tracking of hundreds of multilingual media outlets we do for our clients.

We were searching for ways to share our learning when the Multiculturalism @50: Diversity, Inclusion and Eliminating Racism, Metropolis Canada's 4th Annual Forum on Measuring Identities, presented us with an excellent opportunity to do so. Much thanks to the organizers for this.

The basic thesis of our presentation is that multilingual media is a cornerstone of multiculturalism. Language together with image and sound are key components of culture, and media, which has all three of these elements, is one of the most relevant metrics for measuring identities and their position in the Canadian demographic mosaic. Ethnic media is a source for direct research of attitudes and opinions, and more importantly, a way of reaching those multilingual audiences through a known and trusted media source instead of through pretty posters that lack distribution.

In fact, it is in dealing with ethnic community outreach that Canadian media philosopher Marshall McLuhan's "the medium is the message" acquires even greater relevance when the challenge is rendering language barriers transparent, while avoiding the dangers of direct, culturally insensitive translation.

Bottom line, ethnic media relations and outreach are effective because they are culturally and emotionally affective.

For communicators trying to tackle multilingual communications the tendency is to shy away from understanding the audience and concentrate on the message. While it is not wrong to focus on getting the right message across, the effectiveness of the message will depend on how it resonates with the audience's reality and cultural framework. The tendency is to talk "at" speakers of languages other than ours, rather than talk "with" them.

Working with multilingual journalists is an excellent way of bridging that gap. We hope this paper helps you do so. Enjoy, and let us know what you think.

*Andres Machalski, President, MIREMS*

## Introduction: Why ethnic media outreach?

Amidst the coronavirus pandemic and pandemonium, many civil organizations have sprung into action to support the most marginalized and vulnerable people of our society. For each ugly facet uncovered, there is a concerned citizen and agency working to ensure that the pandemic recovery is an inclusive one. Many such people and organizations have adapted to an evolving landscape to better serve and aid immigrants, refugees, and other newcomers to Canada.

The previous Conference and this Forum feature settlement service providers, healthcare workers, employers, academics, and policy makers who are sharing their vital experiences in dealing with the pandemic and offering insights into what an inclusive pandemic recovery program can look like.

MIREMS—Multilingual International Research and Ethnic Media Services—presents this white paper to the Multiculturalism @50: Diversity, Inclusion and Eliminating Racism Forum.

Its purpose is to highlight the lessons learned from the 23<sup>rd</sup> Metropolis Conference and delineate their significance for ethnic media relations.

Drawn from a thorough review of several panels attended by MIREMS' analysts, the paper provides actionable intelligence to Canadian stakeholders who wish to walk the road to recovery that leaves no one behind while ensuring their own individual success, and who would like to engage in a dialogue with multilingual media while doing so.

It lays down specific steps that the healthcare sector, settlement services, higher education, and employers invested in a diverse workforce, should consider taking to succeed.

We hope that this white paper will act as a catalyst in instigating affirmative media relations action and change across public and private enterprises.

*The MIREMS Team*

## Lessons for Employers and DEI Managers

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As immigrants and other newcomers promise to form an integral part of pandemic recovery for several businesses, employers and DEI managers may want to consider reassessing and recalibrating their policies to best utilize incoming talent. In the following section, we discuss how moving away from networking-based hiring, looking beyond office confines to accommodate diverse talent, and having a proactive outreach strategy to engage with ethnic communities will help businesses take advantage of a highly variegated pool of candidates.

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*“Diversity is our strength, including as a source of our economic strength. Net immigration contributed to half of Canada’s average GDP growth from 2016 to 2019, and nearly three quarters of its growth in 2019.*

*As our workforce ages, immigration ensures the Canadian economy continues to grow, that we attract more top talent and investment capital, and that we continue to create good jobs.*

*Welcoming immigrants is an important part of Canada’s recovery.”*

(Budget 2021, Department of Finance, Government of Canada)<sup>1</sup>

Recent social unrest has pushed for a renewed focus on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, or DEI, in the workplace. And while DEI forms an effective management tool that contributes to social justice in offices and beyond, it bodes well to remember that it is also a profitable business practice—evidence has time and again shown that “gender and ethnic diversity are clearly correlated with profitability” for businesses.<sup>2</sup>

Canadian employers are uniquely positioned to capitalize on this relationship as immigration levels promise to remain at an all time high. A prime focus of the Metropolis Conference ‘21 was the role several organizations play in settling newcomers and making them employable for the Canadian economy. On the other hand, the conference also shed light on the role employers and diversity managers can play in attracting and retaining newcomer employees and accommodating diverse talent.

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<sup>1</sup>Department of Finance, Government of Canada, “Budget 2021: A Recovery Plan for Jobs, Growth, and Resilience.” *Government of Canada*, April 19, 2021, <https://www.budget.gc.ca/2021/report-rapport/toc-tdm-en.html>

<sup>2</sup>Karsten Strauss, “More Evidence That Company Diversity Leads To Better Profits.” *Forbes*, January 25, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/karstenstrauss/2018/01/25/more-evidence-that-company-diversity-leads-to-better-profits/?sh=51b8d221bc7d>

**The conference suggested that the first step in diversifying the workforce is ensuring that hiring practices are conducive to locating and enticing a diverse pool of candidates.** A workshop on newcomer integration and employment services touched on the crucial evolution that needs to take place in talent acquisition policies to access such a pool: **a shift from networking-based hiring to skill-based hiring.**

Peter Hawkins, Managing Director, MELLOHAWK Logistics Inc, insisted on the value of networking for newcomers in their job hunt. He emphasized that “networking is how you find opportunity, networking is how you make connections, it really isn’t the best skilled person who gets the job, it is the person who is there at the right time.” Hawkins indicated that while employment services and tools like LinkedIn help job seekers in presenting themselves professionally, potential employees need to proactively network to obtain gainful employment.<sup>3</sup>

**A glaring issue with such an approach is that it overlooks the fact that networking “is not a skill that we all learn and is done differently in every country.”**<sup>4</sup> Thus, this oft adopted hiring practice is entrenched in an assumption that privileges a culture-specific approach, undercutting the very premise of diversity.

The problem with an emphasis on networking becomes even more amplified when applied to the context of lived newcomer experience—one of navigating an alien land. Immigrants do not have the luxury of pre-existing social networks and an undue reliance on networking for jobs adds another barrier to employment for a newcomer.

While settlement services can provide an entry point into employment networks, networking as a hiring practice is bound to place newcomers at a disadvantage. At its worst, a hiring practice that relies on “who you know” risks ghettoizing newcomers within their communities and major businesses within whiteness. Jake Hirsch-Allen, North America Workforce Development Lead, LinkedIn, indicated a solution: “we need to move from relying on [networking] to a better reality...where we [employers] for instance hire based on skills.”<sup>5</sup> This approach would be more intensive and elicit greater outreach, yet it would potentially reap much higher rewards for businesses through diversity driven growth.

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<sup>3</sup>Peter Hawkins, “When the Future is Now: Employment Services, Reskilling, and the Integration of Newcomers.” 23rd Metropolis Conference, March 22, 2021.

<sup>4</sup>Jake Hirsch-Allen, “When the Future is Now: Employment Services, Reskilling, and the Integration of Newcomers.” 23rd Metropolis Conference, March 22, 2021.

<sup>5</sup>Jake Hirsch-Allen, “When the Future is Now: Employment Services, Reskilling, and the Integration of Newcomers.” 23rd Metropolis Conference, March 22, 2021.

In reflecting on hiring and recruiting practices, corporations may want to consider that advertising or promoting available positions in the ethnic media would tap into the environment of the candidate through community networking.

While the presenters were partially right in their concern about the ghettoization of the ethnic job applicant, they did not seem to consider that ethnic groups are per se job search networks, and that ethnic media is the networking tool of choice. An ad that is one of thousands on Indeed will stand out in the community media.

**Diverse hiring, however, is only a part of the whole picture, an initiation into the larger cultural and economic reform of the workplace.** It needs to be nourished by fostering an environment of inclusion, one that cultivates acceptance and draws optimal contribution. In a discussion centered around employers as stakeholders in immigration integration, Sheh Shojaee, the Director of Operations and Strategic HR at CPHR BC & Yukon, affirmed that diversifying the workforce requires the existing management to gain expertise in DEI.<sup>6</sup>

It can be a challenge to manage individuals with varied work styles and ambitions as it is, let alone forming a well-oiled machine out of people who come from diverse cultures and professional environments. Thus, training in DEI can go a long way in harnessing collective knowledge, developing innovative solutions, driving business success, and increasing revenue through a sustainable model of inclusive team building.

**Furthermore, employer responsibility needs to extend beyond the office, now more than ever as the boundaries between the home and the office are erased** and social media oscillates from hysterical laughter to vexation over Zoom mishaps.

Immigrants are often weighed down by the burdens of settling in a new country, and this can put immense pressure on their professional performance and their ability to find suitable professional opportunities. To ensure that their businesses can capture the best of what immigrant talent has to offer, employers must take stock of the immigrant experience outside of the immediate workplace and adopt policies that accommodate that experience.

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<sup>6</sup>Sheh Shojaee, "Moving from Intent to Action: Employers Leading the Way in Immigrant Labour Market Integration." 23rd Metropolis Conference, March 22, 2021.

Manu Varma, Principal Strategist at Bettr.me, incisively argued that employers must be involved in assisting immigrants even before their first day on the job by simply being aware of the variety of challenges immigrants face. Leading by example, Varma disclosed that his business offers to take care of housing for immigrant employees for the first 90 days of employment.<sup>7</sup>

The relevance of this kind of outreach to achieving targets such as increased awareness of diversity, greater inclusion, and hopefully the elimination of racism, hardly needs highlighting.

From our point of view as media analysts, this is an interesting use of ethnic media, which tends to be local in many cases. If an HR manager, or for that matter a marketer, wants to understand the social geographical and economic environment of the populations that may feed the workforce or buy the product of the corporation, analyzing the local media of the community may lend valuable information.

**The employer's role in DEI management needs to be proactive and not reactive.** In the context of immigrants and ethnic communities, employers need to make a conscious effort in reaching out to and hiring from a segment of prospects with unique skills, expertise, and enthusiasm, and retaining them thereafter. Effective DEI management necessitates a deep dive into the ethnic communities it intends to engage. And while it can be a challenge to do so, the process can be made smoother by accessing the right channels of communication and knowledge such as multilingual ethnic media, the first point of assimilation into Canada for many immigrants.

On the path of integration, the first “go to” source for immigrants is their community media. To newcomers, it is an invaluable source where they can access information on how to find work, as well as network through their community organizations. However, these platforms often are echo chambers divorced from mainstream job search and professional organizations. **Job ads, above all corporate ones, are scarce in the ethnic media; diverse job seekers among the audience are not.**

By drawing on actionable ethnic media intelligence, employers can become aware of the various industries of interest in different ethnic communities, formulate ideal strategies to attract new talent, comprehend the issues immigrants face while settling in Canada, and mitigate the barriers that they face in the workplace. Newcomer grooming must go hand in hand with reframing best employment practices, and effective and targeted media relations, both in terms of outreach and scanning, should be explored.

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<sup>7</sup>Manu Verma, “Moving from Intent to Action: Employers Leading the Way in Immigrant Labour Market Integration.” 23rd Metropolis Conference, March 22, 2021.

### **To Do List for Employers Aiming to Capitalize on DEI:**

- **Shift from networking-based hiring to skill-based hiring**
  - **Train and build a robust DEI management team**
  - **Look beyond office confines to accommodate diverse talent**
  - **Formulate a proactive outreach strategy to engage with ethnic communities**
  - **Take advantage of access to ethnic media intelligence**
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## Lessons for Communicators in the Health Sector

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Like each one of us, the Canadian health sector currently stands fatigued yet resilient, and in need of some support. Going forward, as the world builds and rebuilds, healthcare will require ancillary assistance in attaining its pandemic recovery objectives. In the following section we delineate how collaborating with newcomer agencies, translation services, ethnic media houses, and ethnic media intelligence organizations will provide the sector the very help it needs to pull the nation out of the pandemic quagmire.

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Living through the COVID-19 pandemic has been like living a prolonged nightmare that permeates all levels of consciousness. However, even as the pandemic continues to impact every single aspect of human society possible and transform life as we know it, first and foremost it remains a health pandemic—a reality that every healthcare professional is acutely aware of. It then follows that a robust disease prevention and recovery strategy is to helm effective pandemic recovery, be it through all-inclusive vaccination drives or consistent mental health support. Given Canada's highly diverse populace, such a strategy will need to address variegated social circumstances and will require a creative methodology. The Metropolis Conference '21 strived to shed light on this very aspect of pandemic response in its discussions around healthcare that were informed by an immigrant and refugee centric lens, wrapping up with a number of suggestions for the sector.

For one, given that mass vaccination is the current big task, **the healthcare sector should collaborate with newcomer agencies to implement a robust vaccination drive and ensure that policy decisions and outreach are culturally aware.** In a panel discussion focusing on what the pandemic has revealed to healthcare workers so far, Dr. Annalee Coakley at the Calgary Refugee Health Program noted that working early on with vulnerable communities such as temporary workers was highly effective and **collaborating with newcomer serving partner agencies was imperative in redressing and containing outbreaks such as the ones at meat packaging plants.** It is important to build on this knowledge and prioritize collaboration with newcomer service providers in the vaccination efforts amongst immigrant communities, especially since many immigrants are frontline, essential workers.

Such a joint effort will help address culturally specific concerns such as religious beliefs and language barriers. **Dr. Coakley emphasized the importance of reaching out to ethnocultural communities to offer proactive education and address vaccine hesitancy by providing information in their languages** so that people can book appointments and get vaccinated in a timely manner.<sup>8</sup>

**Ethnic media presents a significant channel to reach multilingual communities as well as the Anglophone or Francophone ones with proactive outreach messaging.**

The challenge of how to navigate that channel lies in understanding the coordinates as well as the cultural environment, and then devising innovative strategies for message delivery.

We have developed strategies in the past with clients whose message ran against the grain of popular religious beliefs or prejudices (sometimes not completely founded on doctrine) about the consequences, in this world or the next, of life saving practices such as stem cell research, organ retrieval and blood donation. These strategies ranged from hiring journalists from those communities to write syndicated opinion pieces advocating those practices, to arranging interviews with spokespersons with the right language skills and understanding of the community, and engaging the collaboration of ethnic radio programs in community health drives and campaigns.

These ideas are not new in themselves, but what is unique is the creative spark that leverages understanding not only of the message, but of the audience mind set, and establishes a connection between the two.

**The other major challenge for pandemic recovery is to overcome the pandemic that plagues the mind.** The Canadian Mental Health Association recently stated that “we can only emerge from this pandemic with resolve and resiliency if we promote and protect the mental health and wellness of Canada's people while being vigilant about ensuring that we view all investments — and innovations — with an eye to creating equity.”<sup>9</sup> This speaks to **the need for adequate measures to address the impact of cultural and language barriers in mental healthcare**, where it is even more amplified. **Access to services in one’s language is one of the social determinants of health, and thus language services are integral to providing effective healthcare.**

<sup>8</sup> Annalee Coakley, “What is COVID-19 Revealing? Lessons Learned from the Health and Settlement Sector.” 23<sup>rd</sup> Metropolis Conference, March 23, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Michel Rodrigue, “MHCC applauds Budget 2021 investments to redress mental health inequities.” Cision, April 20, 2021, <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/mhcc-applauds-budget-2021-investments-to-redress-mental-health-inequities-835826918.html>

Aamna Ashraf from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health revealed that language gaps had a major impact on COVID patients' mental health as interpreters were often the last to know about the COVID cases in their units and were turned away from hospitals without further information.<sup>10</sup> Such gaps must be overcome by ensuring that relevant authorities are sensitized to the need for language accessibility and that healthcare agencies seek out translation services.

**Finally, this collaborative approach needs to go beyond settlement or translation service providers and extend to other direct modes of communication with immigrants. This is where the ethnic media can play a role, not only as conduits, but as active promoters.**

Jean McRae, Chief Executive Officer, Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria, remarked that **there is a lack of reliable information in various immigrant languages.** She noted that outreach in languages other than English and French is not as strong as it could be, and people should be able to quickly access information in the language they are most comfortable in.<sup>11</sup>

We would go further and say that **there is a lack of engagement with the opposing forces.** Telling anti-vaxxers that vaccines are good until one is blue in the face seldom gets results. Calling anti-maskers “yahoos” does not endear them to masking. Finding out why they are antivaxxers as a starting point may have more success. Overcoming objections is the main task of any proposal, and that of vaccines is no different.

In this context, Canadian ethnic media is a very well-placed medium of outreach since it not only serves as a lifeline to most newcomers as they integrate into Canadian life, but it is an empathetic “us” voice, not a sympathetic institutional one. When “selling speak the language of the buyer” applies as much to vaccines as it does to consumer products, and language is not just the right words, but the right meanings and the right deliverer.

Throughout the pandemic, local media has played a pivotal role in keeping multilingual communities informed, countering misinformation, and spreading awareness. MIREMS' White Paper on “COVID-19: Ethnic Media Lessons from 2020 for an Inclusive Recovery” was released early in 2021 [12].

<sup>10</sup> Aamna Ashraf, “Mental Health and Interpreters: Key Considerations in COVID -19.” 23rd Metropolis Conference, March 24, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Jean McRae, “What is COVID-19 Revealing? Lessons Learned from the Health and Settlement Sector.” 23<sup>rd</sup> Metropolis Conference, March 23, 2021.

[12]. Silke Reithrath et al, <http://www.mirems.com/covid-19-white-paper.html>

Most recently, the ethnic media has become rife with community opinions and debates on vaccination. The future of pandemic recovery is still a matter of debate, even among experts – the race between variants and vaccines is far from over, and in an immigrant country such as Canada with vast international networks, the statement that we will only be safe when the whole world is vaccinated is especially relevant. Those who are tracking the logistics are talking 2024, even 2025 before this pandemic is brought under control.

However, long before that we will be dealing with the impact of the virus on the social, cultural, ideological, mental, economic, and of course physical wellbeing of the Canadian population in all its multi-generational, ethnic, and linguistically diverse reality.

Thus, **for any organization hoping to address vaccine and other pandemic concerns, ethnic media intelligence and outreach are invaluable**; as made evident by McRae, outreach to the ethnic media significantly contributed to Fraser Valley’s handling of its outbreak. Similarly, McRae also pointed to the need for actively reaching out to newcomers for assistance with mental health rather than waiting for them to ask for help.

Ethnic media is the ideal place for proactively encouraging immigrants to seek mental health services when the need arises. There could be health radio phone ins or multilingual “You Asked Us” columns. Community media could be the missing piece in the puzzle of Canada’s pandemic recovery program and its role should not be underplayed. It doesn’t take more than understanding the nature of community networking to understand how an appropriate health related Q&A sent to a local ethnic media outlet can end up being discussed over a weekend family gathering in an inter-generational setting.

#### **To Do List for Healthcare Sector Communicators:**

- **Collaborate with settlement agencies for a robust vaccination drive**
- **Collaborate with translation services to ensure accessibility of healthcare services**
- **Sensitize authorities of language accessibility**
- **Collaborate with ethnic media for effective outreach**
- **Use ethnic media intelligence to fine tune healthcare services**

## Lessons for Service Providers in the Settlement Sector

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In recent memory, the COVID-19 pandemic has perhaps been the greatest challenge for Canadian immigration. While the government has announced lofty immigration targets and is tweaking its policies to meet them, the pandemic appears to have completely transformed the landscape incoming newcomers will interact with. In the following section, we highlight the steps the settlement sector can take to ensure that a seamless integration of immigrants into Canada continues to be successful.

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*You are walking down the street in the snow, dragging two bags of groceries in sub-zero temperatures that you have never experienced before. You are figuring out why your Forex card did not work at the store—it is supposed to cover your expenses until you open a bank account and get a job at a packaging factory promised by your third cousin's neighbour from back home. That is, until your professional medical experience receives credential recognition. This reminds you that you need to reach out to one of those settlement agencies to help you in the process. Oh, and there is a pandemic raging, your glasses fog up as you adjust your mask.*

The role of the Canadian settlement sector has never been as central as it is today. The federal government has set ambitious immigration targets for the next three years with the aim to bolster a post-pandemic economy. The convoluted immigrant experience, however, is now shrouded in another layer of uncertainty as industries and the world at large evolve to keep up with COVID-19, and the newcomer settlement playbook recalibrates itself. In this context, the Metropolis Conference provided a timely opportunity for researchers and settlement and integration services providers to present their strategies for adapting to changing circumstances and share their experiences and insights that speak to the sector at large.

A ubiquitous, much maligned feature of adjusting to the brave new world has been a shift to virtual platforms. Settlement service providers and clients have been no exceptions to this change and experienced mixed results, suggesting that **hybrid services will be the way to go.**

Several organizations initially struggled to make the shift and acquire the IT tools needed. Once up to speed, evidence showed that the online environment reduced opportunities for inter-personal bonding and required patience to accommodate children and other interruptions. Yet it allowed for greater inclusion of clients with children and those living outside major urban centres. Online service provision also allowed for cost-effective scaling and more flexible service options.

Virtual services, however, create the risk of most vulnerable clients with the least access to and familiarity with digital platforms falling through the cracks. **Settlement service providers thus should offer their services online and offline to ensure greater reach while simultaneously ensuring that digital services and skills themselves become more accessible.**

For example, the Calgary Immigrant Women’s Association’s (CIWA) English learning program, on being moved to an online learning platform, made it necessary for facilitators to provide laptops, internet access, and digital literacy training to women learners.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, when the OWN Tech Initiative was moved online, women became more employable by learning how to do their job remotely.<sup>13</sup>

**The need for competency in digital skills points to a greater need for employment services to reskill its clientele to make them employable in a rapidly changing landscape.** In a panel discussion centered around the need for future skills and reskilling, Sue Sadler, SVP, Services and Program Innovation, ACCES Employment, defined “disruption” as something when what you used to do just does not work anymore. She argued that the fundamental tool required for people to cope with “disruption” is simply the mindset for future competency. Sadler stressed that a person’s belief about their ability to develop new skills and knowledge must be addressed first for them to engage in new learning.<sup>14</sup> This mindset is the foundational skill that needs to be cultivated in newcomers so that they are able to acquire new skills such as digital ones.

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<sup>12</sup> Jyoti Agnihotri and Abigail Prasad, “Newcomer Women: From Tech Literacy to Careers.” 23<sup>rd</sup> Metropolis Conference, March 23, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Suzanne Grant, “Newcomer Women: From Tech Literacy to Careers.” 23<sup>rd</sup> Metropolis Conference, March 23, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Sue Sadler, “When the Future is Now: Employment Services, Reskilling, and the Integration of Newcomers.” 23<sup>rd</sup> Metropolis Conference, March 22, 2021.

**The pandemic also requires settlement services to become innovative in addressing issues of isolation and seclusion that have intensified for immigrants.** While mental health services form an important redressal system, community projects can close the gaps left by professional mental health services. One such pilot project undertaken in rural Canada promotes social and economic well-being through religious literacy that supports various communities.

The project's raison d'être is that the social isolation many Canadians are facing can be detrimental to health and that engagement and interaction are associated with positive outcomes. By promoting understanding about different religious, spiritual, and non-religious communities, individuals can live and engage better in a post-pandemic society.<sup>15</sup>

The conference further highlighted a major barrier within the sector: the inability to track newcomers through their settlement journey, punctuated by the lack of two-way communication amongst different stakeholders. This issue brings to light **the need for a robust data collection system that will help develop a storehouse of knowledge and encourage coordinated efforts within the sector.**

This is precisely what Calgary's Newcomer Knowledge Hub is trying to achieve. The Hub will serve as a repository of aggregated anonymous newcomer data by drawing on comprehensive data sets and has the potential to change the sector as information is synthesized and evaluated from different perspectives. The aim of the hub is to comprehend trends in the newcomer experience and respond accordingly by identifying services that are not required anymore and adding new ones that are needed. The system aims to be valuable to everyone including policy makers, settlement service providers, investors, NGOs, and researchers.<sup>16</sup>

The Knowledge Hub's ambition of mining the newcomer experience, converting it into data, and producing actionable intelligence raises the question of what the ideal methodology of recording newcomer experience is. While surveys, interviews, and studies are an excellent source of gathering relevant data, ethnic media is an often-ignored piece of the puzzle. For most immigrants, community media is the first point of social integration into Canada. Radio hosts and newspaper editors often double up as counsellors who address newcomer anxieties and act as their voice. Ethnic media ends up becoming the primary avenue where newcomers receive information and can put forward their opinions in their own language.

<sup>15</sup> Elnaz Aliasl, W. Y. Alice Chan, and Jayde Roche, "Rural Canada: A pilot project to promote social and economic well-being through religious literacy." 23<sup>rd</sup> Metropolis Conference, March 23, 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Hyder Hassan, "Immigrant Services Calgary's Knowledge Hub." 23<sup>rd</sup> Metropolis Conference, March 24, 2021.

Thus, **having an ear to ethnic media sources is imperative if one is to fill the gaps in data collection.** The relevance of community media as a source of invaluable intel, however, is not limited to a platform like the Knowledge Hub. It is indeed indispensable to any organization engaging with and working for the upliftment of the immigrant community. Listening to ethnic media must form a foundational part of the “know your audience” guidebook for the settlement services sector. Furthermore, several immigrants remain unaware of the services and support available to them and often hold back from reaching out. Multilingual media is a key tool in spreading awareness, interacting directly with newcomers, and addressing any reservations towards service providers. A medium that is trusted by the community and engages with immigrants in their native language ought to become an integral part of all settlement strategies.

#### **To Do List for the Settlement Sector:**

- **Establish a hybrid model of online and offline services**
- **Ensure that the most vulnerable populations can learn digital skills**
- **Cultivate the mindset of future competency in newcomers**
- **Address loneliness through community projects such as religious literacy**
- **Use ethnic media as a source of immigrant experience intelligence and an effective channel for outreach**

## Lessons for Higher Education Institution Recruiters

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International students have come to form an integral part of the Canadian higher education ecosystem. The pandemic and its aftermath, however, threatens to disrupt this ecosystem and have an adverse impact on both prospective students and educational institutions. In the following section we delineate how expanding prospective student pools, bridging educational gaps, reassuring students of accessible mental health programs, and incorporating ethnic and international multilingual media in its outreach can help the higher education sector ride the pandemic wave and reach calmer shores.

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In the year 2017-18, international students paid almost 40% of all tuition fees and accounted for almost \$4 billion in annual revenue for Canadian universities. The figure appears even more astounding when compared to the proportion international students make of the total student population—14.7%. In pandemic times, however, universities could see an income decline of anywhere between 0.8%-7.5% of projected revenues.<sup>17</sup>

Federal policies, such as remote education fulfilling eligibility requirements for the post graduate work permit, have ensured that international student enrollment is not entirely decimated. At the same time, the dismal situation of revenue deficits has not been helped by the fact that the federal budget of 2021 has made no provisions to address the issue. In such a scenario, what steps must be taken by universities and colleges to ensure that international students continue to support Canadian higher education financially?

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Metropolis Conference suggested that **expanding the pool of prospective students will increase the odds of higher international student enrollment**. Currently, India and China are the source of more than half of incoming international students. As pointed out in a panel discussion around international students and COVID-19, Canada seems to lay undue focus on student intake from Asia, as opposed to attracting students from Africa and Latin America.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Statistics Canada, “Financial information of universities for the 2018/2019 school year and projected impact of COVID–19 for 2020/2021.” *Statistics Canada*, August 8, 2020, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/201008/dq201008b-eng.htm>

<sup>18</sup>“International Students in Canada: Their Predicaments amidst COVID-19 + Labour Market Preparation.” 23<sup>rd</sup> Metropolis Conference, March 25, 2021.

The pandemic has made evident that a disproportionate pool of selection can have a disproportionate impact on revenue generation, and so educational institutes must not become complacent in expecting a steady student intake from specific countries. Furthermore, to make up for impending revenue deficits, universities and colleges need to address pandemic-driven trust deficits.

**Prospective students must be assured of their professional and personal well being in a post-pandemic society.** Employment services often direct their services towards immigrants and refugees. As a result, while students acquire the skills required by their educational programs, they are often left to their own devices when it comes to the soft skills essential to access the Canadian job market.

Chris Anderson, manager at the Immigrant Employment Council of British Columbia, affirmed that international students studying computer science require not only computer science education, but also the “soft skills” that will help them transition into Canada’s job market.<sup>19</sup> Thus, despite having superior educational credentials, international students often struggle to be called for interviews, and are forced to accept underemployment since they are under pressure to support themselves.

To address this issue universities should provide training that focuses on filling the gap between educational qualifications and employment training. Higher education institutes, then, must assure students of their employability and professional advancement in a pandemic hit economy.

Similarly, given the serious impact of the pandemic on mental health, **prospective students must be supported by their institutions in adjusting to evolving educational spaces.** As opposed to immigrants, who often arrive as families, international students arrive alone and are at risk of isolation and loneliness, a tendency amplified by the pandemic. As Dr. David Firang from Trent University explained, international students find themselves in a bind because although immigrants are considered vulnerable to the coronavirus, officially, foreign students are not.

These students’ lack of permanent resident status also makes it easier to overlook them.<sup>20</sup> This speaks to the need for focusing on the students’ overall experience rather than academic performance alone, and universities should take the lead in doing so. University messaging should convey empathy for its students and commit to addressing pandemic-induced isolation, be it through sufficient mental health services or community programs.

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<sup>19</sup>Chris Anderson, “International Students in Canada: Their Predicaments amidst COVID-19 + Labour Market Preparation.” 23rd Metropolis Conference, March 25, 2021.

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**Canadian ethnic media is exceptionally well placed to send out this message and should form a significant part of any higher education institution's outreach strategy.** International students often pick universities and colleges based on the feedback they receive from family and friends already living in Canada. Information dissemination through community media ensures that the efforts made by educational institutions to accommodate international students are brought to the attention of prospective students.

Furthermore, ethnic media is often where international students have a voice and can put forth their opinions and concerns. To make sure that they are not speaking into a void, universities should utilize the invaluable intel that can be mined from ethnic media platforms regarding the international student experience and expectations. If colleges and universities want to continue attracting international student talent, they must step up and make the effort.

There is another dimension in which multilingual media can play an important role for university recruitment, and that is promoting and tracking their image in the target communities' homeland media in order to make Canada a top of the mind destination again for students considering studying abroad.

However, we must own the fact that Canadian society is not easy to adapt to. A newcomer to Canada must learn the habits not only of the majority culture, but of the demographically hegemonic group in each neighbourhood.

We tend to consider learning English or French to be a benchmark of a student's capability to integrate successfully into Canadian society, and sometimes overlook the contextual cultural issues that have a delayed impact on a newcomer's success. It is also important to ensure an environment that respects diversity, promotes inclusion and does its best to eliminate racism in the academic sphere as well as in the workplace.

Again, if language is important to multiculturalism, both are important to education and adjustment of newcomers at the different stages of settlement.

There is a moment of cultural alienation that happens once the initial hurdles of settlement, either as a student or a landed immigrant, have been overcome. It is in the questioning of the individuals' identity in the new society – they knew who they were back home – and the drastic career changes when one has to reinvent oneself – where media, from traditional print, radio and TV to more digital forms of communication can help the finding of that new identity in a communal sense, because being part of an ethnic community in Canada is part of what being Canadian is all about.

**To Do List for Higher Education Institution Recruiters:**

- **Expand prospective student pool beyond Asia**
- **Bridge the gap between educational training and employment training**
- **Reassure prospective students of accessible mental health programs**
- **Incorporate ethnic and international multilingual media in its outreach and marketing strategy**

## Concluding Thoughts

The Metropolis Conference was an excellent opportunity for Canadian stakeholders to reflect upon what an inclusive pandemic recovery manifesto would look like. Acting as a platform for organizations working with immigrants, refugees, and other newcomers at the grassroots level, it outlined actionable steps for settlement services, employers, the healthcare sector, and higher education institutions.

MIREMS sent six of its senior consultants to attend different workshops at the Conference. As in a previous 2016 conference, the ethnic media was not only missing in action but also in thought, despite what Ryerson University Professor April Lindgren calls [“A Settlement Service in Disguise”](#) in her pioneer case study on the City of Brampton’s municipal communication strategies and ethnic media outreach (2015, *Global Media Journal -- Canadian Edition* Volume 8, Issue 2, pp. 49-71.) Following her thinking, the ethnic media would seem to be a significant part of the outreach equation for any organization involved in dealing with the surrounding community, be it a municipality, a not-for-profit organization, a corporation, a provincial ministry or a Federal Government agency.

Government policy and decision makers were also conspicuously absent from much of the workshop roster outside of the keynote panels. While funded by IRCC, in this sense, the conference was a missed opportunity for networking and exchange between governmental and non-governmental stakeholders; especially since the gap between the government and “the governed” has been starkly visible in the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on newcomers and in the government’s struggle to reach out through appropriate modes of communication.

Thus, a key overarching takeaway of the conference is that **a more proactive strategy of communication with newcomers needs to be adopted**, one that is steeped in linguistic and cultural understanding. If immigrants are to pave the way to pandemic recovery, the least one can do is speak through media most accessible to them and listen to them where their voices are the loudest. When selling, speak the language of the buyer, whether the sale is of job opportunities, health services, financial support or consumer products.

The MIREMS team of ethnic media consultants sees stories on immigration, integration, education and legal issues, labour, health and safety, immigrant challenges and struggles every day, in some 30 different languages and yet ethnic media seems not to be on the radar of policy makers and service providers as one of the most valuable resources on immigration they can find. When asked about it, government officials acknowledge the importance of ethnic media, but admit that it's not being used to its full potential. There is still separation between mainstream media and ethnic media press conferences, messaging and language specifics.

But does there have to be? Shouldn't ethnic media be an integral part of the communication mix, a two-way channel for an open dialogue between governments, service providers and immigrant communities?

After all, with growing immigration and yet-to-be-improved integration processes, ethnic media will continue to grow and be a viable component of immigrant life in Canada. It is also a valuable channel to the hearts and minds of Canada's diverse population. In striving for equity and inclusion, the ethnic media should be engaged as partners, not mere recipients, of outreach services guided by adequate diversity management strategies.

It is generally agreed that translation of the message is a good idea, above all if the recipients are strong in their homeland tongue. While the actual offering may be in English or French, having your story published in the language of the community will give it the extra emotional attention of the ethnic media audience, as it will connect with their hearts as well as with their minds.

If a newcomer sees the information in their mother tongue it helps give an additional base of understanding for when they undertake the process of applying for job or service in English. The value of explaining something in their mother tongue also has to do with the media environment in which a story is placed, which is in another language and is received in a community that speaks that language around the dinner table.

It is possible that the message may be received by someone related to your potential client, who does not speak English well, but can direct the candidate to reach out to you.

Translation also helps ensure that the newspaper publishes the story since many publications do not print any English stories and the task of translating text from English to their language is extra work not be appreciated by the media outlet, since it adds unpaid labour to space costs. The space can be earned by the value of the content, but the translation cost is over the top.

When the community reads these newspapers, such as Toronto's daily Punjabi Post for example, they are expecting to read in Punjabi, see: <http://punjabipost.ca/pages/23-Apr-2021.pdf>. The same applies to the daily Chinese Sing Tao newspaper: <https://www.singtao.ca/vancouver/?variant=zh-hk>, the weekly Toronto Tamil newspaper Canada Ulahathamilar: [http://www.worldtamils.com/e-paper/04\\_16\\_2021\\_e-paper.pdf](http://www.worldtamils.com/e-paper/04_16_2021_e-paper.pdf); or the weekly Toronto Farsi newspaper Iran Javan: <http://iranjavan.net/magazin/1373/flipping/#1>.

Finally, as the saying goes, "translation betrays." Therefore, at MIREMS we advocate trans-creation based on meaning, using the language of the media, not the dictionary, and allowing control of the message to avoid any misunderstanding.

Of course, whether translated or not, the delivery of the message must be addressed. Aside from reaching out to the media channels via email or a phone call, care must be taken not to address newcomers as the "other". In the case of writing for ethnic media outlets, newcomers are the subject, and need to be talked to, not at or about, to raise interest and promote engagement in what is being offered to them.

To close the outreach loop, it is a good idea to monitor the ethnic media outlets for pickup of press releases, stories or interviews. This is the measure of success of the campaign, which is related to the news value of the content, supported by activity destined to draw attention to that content. A successful outreach campaign using content rich, low-cost alternatives to advertising allows for a more sustained effort. A yearlong sustained PR outreach campaign to ethnic media may have a better ROI than a short TV sprint for the same dollar value.

**Our analysis suggests that a continuous presence in the ethnic media space, dealing with the outlets as active allies, will result in an increased awareness among both individuals and the community organizations that assist them.**

**This White Paper was prepared for a Workshop at the Multiculturalism @50: Diversity, Inclusion and Eliminating Racism, Metropolis Canada's 4th Annual Forum on Measuring Identities, October 6-8, 2021.**

The title of the session was **Ethnic Media for Outreach Professionals: strengthening DE&I initiatives by engaging multicultural community media, co-organized with the** Canadian Ethnic Media Association (CEMA), New Canadian Media (NCM) and Andrew Griffith (Multicultural Meanderings).

Names of presenters with email address, affiliation and titles of their presentation:

- Madeline Ziniak, C.M., O.Ont. Chair, Canadian Ethnic Media Association, [madeline.ziniak@gmail.com](mailto:madeline.ziniak@gmail.com): “Forty years on: The history and causes of organized ethnic media”
- George Abraham, Publisher, New Canadian Media, [publisher@newcanadianmedia.ca](mailto:publisher@newcanadianmedia.ca): “Ethnic journalism then and now: a key to understanding cultural diversity”
- Silke Reichrath, Editor in Chief, MIREMS, [editorinchief@mirems.com](mailto:editorinchief@mirems.com): “What you would find if you could read thirty languages: joining the multilingual conversation”
- Andrew Griffith, fellow of the Canadian Global Affairs Institute and the Environics Institute, former director general of Citizenship and Multiculturalism (now Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada): [agriffith232@gmail.com](mailto:agriffith232@gmail.com): “Ethnic media political campaign relations: lessons from 2019 for the future”
- Blythe Irwin, Sources and Outreach Director, MIREMS, [sources@mirems.com](mailto:sources@mirems.com): “Getting to know and reaching out to your ethnic media”
- Andres Machalski, President, [hq@mirems.com](mailto:hq@mirems.com): “Forty-four years of ethnic media relations: lessons learned”