



Reception House
Waterloo Region

Employment Supports for Refugees: Challenges, Opportunities, and Innovations

**Highlighting Current Gaps and Introducing an Innovative
Pilot Program**

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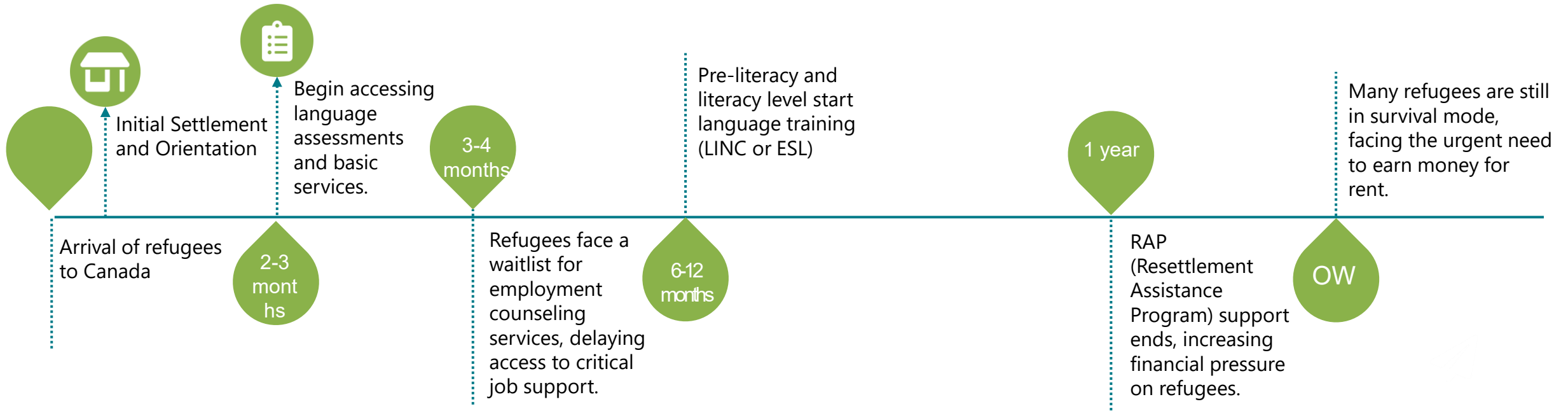


Introduction

Why Employment Supports Matter for Refugees

- Employment is vital for helping ease integration into their new communities.
- Builds independence, confidence, financial stability, and a sense of purpose and can contribute to overall wellbeing.
- Tailored employment supports help address and overcome systemic barriers to workforce entry.
- Support navigating employment services and pathways to employment are key activities especially for new arrivals and for those who do not have high-level language skills or readily transferable employment experience.

Timeline of the First Year for GARs (Government-Assisted Refugees)



Key Challenge: By the end of the first year, pre-literacy and literacy-level refugees are only just beginning to learn the language, while simultaneously dealing with the immediate pressures of financial stability and potential eviction.



Refugee-Specific Barriers

Barriers Refugees Face in Securing Employment

- **Unrecognized Credentials:** Difficulty validating foreign qualifications, compounded by limited English proficiency at pre-literacy or literacy levels.
- **Language Proficiency:** Many jobs require conversational fluency, creating significant obstacles.
- **Resource Limitations:** Barriers include lack of digital skills, limited internet access, transportation challenges, and insufficient childcare support.
- **Systemic Barriers:** Challenges with understanding and navigating Canadian job markets, increased waiting times for services due to increased needs



Gaps in Access to Employment

Barriers to Accessing Language and Digital Skills Support

Long Wait Lists:

- Significant delays for employment services, language assessment and enrollment in English classes leave refugees without immediate support.

Pre-Literacy Challenges:

- Refugees with basic literacy skills often face limited class options that cater to their needs.

Digital Skills Deficit:

- A lack of digital skills makes it difficult to search for jobs and integrate into modern workplaces.

Combined Effect:

- These gaps delay integration and limit access even to survival employment opportunities.



Pilot Program Overview

AI Driven Tailored Solution to Address Service Gaps

- **What We Did:**
 - Developed employment-focused English classes, including modules for pre-literacy clients.
 - Integrated digital literacy training to equip participants with essential tech skills.
 - Provided wraparound support, such as transportation subsidies, interpretation and technology access.
- **Program Features:**
 - English learning linked to workplace scenarios: resumes, interviews, team communication and safety instructions.
 - Digital skills for practical use: email, job applications, and navigating online resources.
 - Supportive services to reduce participation barriers.

The Role of Integrated Training

A Comprehensive Approach to Language and Digital Skills

- **Why It Matters:**

Learning English and digital skills together is essential for success in today's job market.

- **Supporting Beginners:**

Focus on basic language and digital skills to include everyone.

- **Practical Use:**

Teach workplace vocabulary and digital tools to help with real tasks like applying for jobs and communicating online.



Program Impact and Initial Observations

Key Achievements of the Pilot Program

- **Participant Outcomes:**

- **High Engagement and Motivation:**

In the first month, participants demonstrate a high attendance rate and strong motivation.

- **Skill Development:**

Participants practice digital and language skills daily, helping them grow and gain confidence in completing various tasks.

- **Communication and Language Success:**

Participants show improved communication skills and increased engagement in basic conversations.



Current RH Employment services

- Intake and Needs Assessment
- Referrals and follow ups
- Job search training
- Job board specific for low literacy level refugee job seekers
- WHMIS, Health and Safety Workshop in languages other than English
- Employment Orientation in languages other than English
- Employee outreach



Planned activities

- **AI Job-Search Workshop:** Tailored specifically for clients with low literacy levels.
- **Canadian Workplace Culture Orientation:** Designed for clients with low literacy to understand workplace norms and expectations.
- **Interview Preparation Workshop:** Focused on helping clients with low literacy levels prepare for job interviews.
- **Networking Opportunities:** Providing platforms for clients to connect with potential employers and peers.



RH Solutions to Gaps and Barriers to Employment



Next steps

- **Expand Successful Programs:** Scale up the pilot program based on initial success.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Regularly assess and refine services to meet evolving needs.
- **Community Involvement:** Foster partnerships with local businesses and organizations to support refugee employment.



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