

Chapter 31

The COVID-19 Challenges and Opportunities for Immigrant Career Development

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, its disproportionate impact on immigrants' careers and employment opportunities, and the dire need to address inequitable career development opportunities. COVID-19 has also highlighted the anti-immigrant sentiment and structural barriers that impact immigrant career experiences and outcomes. A second interrelated obstacle to immigrant career development paths are recent executive orders signed by Donald Trump in the United States against immigrants and refugees as well as global anti-immigrant and refugee policies such as Brexit and the Citizenship Amendment Act. Immigrant workers require advocacy, protection, and avenues to receive continued support during and post-pandemic. Resources for immigrant employers and employees including international resources, avenues for advocacy, and recommendations to service providers are discussed.

BACKGROUND

A study conducted in 2017 stated that 27% of immigrants that are identified as highly educated are not employed, whereas, an additional 26% hold jobs that require substantially less education than their degrees (The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2017). In addition, of immigrants that are highly educated with domestic qualifications 20% are not employed and 18% are overqualified for their jobs. Some of the differences for these barriers include education in different countries though other studies have shown this does not make a significant difference. Immigrants that are in careers that are regulated and require licenses or certificates to ensure public health and safety,

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face additional barriers. Immigrants that hold certificates that are not regulated also face challenges as there is limited information about the credentials. In theory these workers could apply for the positions but because employers lack information about their training and education, they are unable to gain work experience in their new host country. Due to the lack of work experience in their new host country they have limited references thereby losing opportunities to successfully access these jobs. In 2013 there were 232 million international migrants that were documented due to globalization and various other factors (United Nations [UN], 2013). This trend grew exponentially from trends reported in 1990 where there were a reported 154 million international migrants. Current trends suggest these numbers will increase at a rate of 1.6% per year with the Global North growing at twice the rate than the Global South.

In response to these patterns and the needs of countries, more countries are supporting the rise of irregular migration (UN, 2018). As of 2011, approximately 73% of the 195 countries that had been surveyed planned on maintaining current immigration policies; 16% of the countries planned on decreasing immigration trends, and 11% had an interest in increasing immigration policies. It is important to note however there may be significant shifts in these trends in the last 7 years. The propensity towards increased immigration policies is also increasingly geared towards attracting highly skilled workers in host countries.

According to the International Office of Migration (IOM) there are 258 million international migrants (IOM, 2018). Of these figures 5 million migrated to OECD countries, 4.8 million accounted for international students, 150.3 million were migrant workers, 68.5 million people were victims of forced displacement, and 50 million were individuals that were considered to be irregular migrants. In 2015 migrants contributed to approximately 9.4% of the gross domestic product (GDP) in the United States and 6.7 trillion dollars to the economy. In 2017 migrants sent \$466 billion dollars in remittance to low- and middle-income countries. Most international migrants live in Asia, Europe, and North America. Approximately 48.5% of the 150.3 million migrant workers reside in North America, and North, South, and Western parts of Europe. Another 12% of migrant workers live in the Arab regions. These trends in migration also represent important areas to consider when reviewing immigrant career development pathways that represent skilled and unskilled workers, and those with varying degrees of education.

It is especially important to note the complexities and interconnections of the changing world as problems rooted in culture, economics, and history require a multidisciplinary and transnational framework (Stevens & Wedding, 2004). Psychologists and practitioners need to be knowledgeable about the immigrant experience, various categories of immigration status, and recognize that immigrant experiences may differ in order to best address the needs of rising immigrant populations (Robila & Akinsulure-Smith, 2012). The Covid-19 pandemic is a critical incident that has shaped and will continue to shape immigrant career experiences and outcomes. Psychologists and practitioners will need to develop the competencies to support working-class immigrant communities that have been greatly impacted by the structural, social, and health disparities that existed prior to COVID-19 and have been exacerbated throughout the pandemic.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The guiding framework for this chapter is the collection of work that comprises perspectives on migration and access to resources in the adjustment experience of immigrants. This collection will be delineated into three frameworks: 1) social constructivism from an international psychology perspective (Chirkov,

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