

Negotiating ‘false hope’: Advocacy responses to migrant worker aspirations in Alberta

By Dr. J. Adam Perry
McMaster University
On the Move Partnership

20th National Metropolis Conference
Calgary, Alberta
March 23, 2018



Policy Research

Statistical Research

Field Research

Online Survey Research



On the Move Partnership



- 7-year national scale research program
- Investigating employment-related geographical mobility (E-RGM) and consequences for workers, families, communities, and government policy
- Broad understanding of how people engage in mobility for work
- Within this, my own work examines TFWs' experiences of inter-provincial mobility

My project

- How and why are TFWs engaging in inter-provincial migration?
- How do immigration policies shape TFWs decisions to move internally?



Why move?



- Inter-provincial migration is one creative means that TFWs can engage in to increase their chances to transition to permanent residence (PR)
- Examining how workers negotiate pathways to PR became a focal point of the research
- What does this mean for people working in TFW support services?

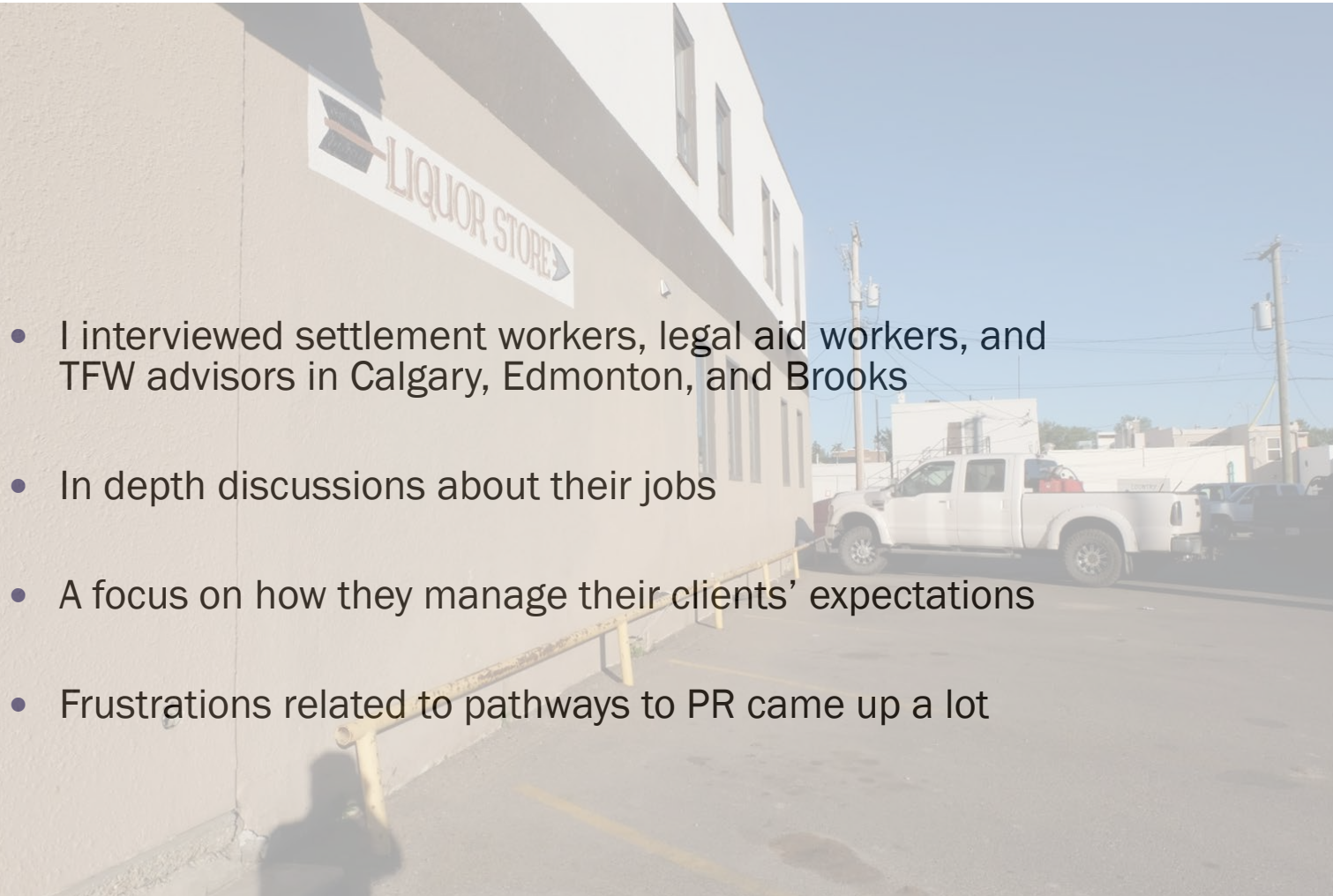
Settlement workers in Alberta

- Alberta funds settlement services for migrant workers in 8 communities
 - Provide information and referrals and other basic services
- Also funds a TFW advisory office to deal with ES and HR violations
- Despite these initiatives, front-line workers report difficult challenges (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2016)

TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKER SUPPORT SERVICES



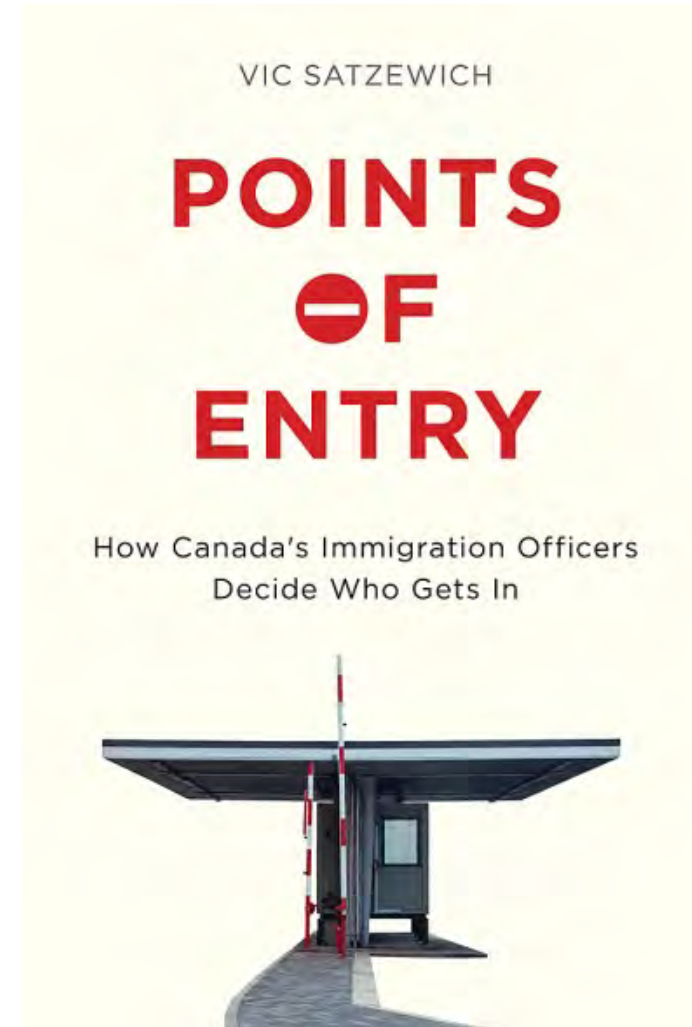
Methods



- I interviewed settlement workers, legal aid workers, and TFW advisors in Calgary, Edmonton, and Brooks
- In depth discussions about their jobs
- A focus on how they manage their clients' expectations
- Frustrations related to pathways to PR came up a lot

Theoretical Framing

- Street-level Bureaucracy (Lipsky, 1980)
 - Public service workers are active in the creation of policy from the ground up
 - What is the impact on street-level discretion on public policy?
- This concept has been applied in the Canadian context of late:
 - Ontario Works (Baker Collins, 2016)
 - Ontario Employment Standards Officers (Tucker et al., 2016)
 - Canadian Visa Officers (Satzewich 2014, 2015)



Why apply this to settlement workers in Alberta?

- Unique chance to understand how the discretionary actions of social service workers may or may not affect labour migration policies from the ground up



'I Just Provide Information'

Adam: As a settlement worker, what are you supposed to be doing with migrant worker clients?

SW3: General information. Just we cannot talk about settlement in a way that it is permanent residency. So it is temporary and you have to tell them it is temporary and blah blah blah. Basically, it's support service right? So connect them with resources, but actually there are no resources.



But... Clients Desire PR

SW1: Everyone wants it. Everyone. Who wouldn't want to stay in Canada? They have come in to taste the opportunities here. Everyone wants it. There was a couple here last week from Mexico. They have just come. This was the first time I have seen them. They have come less than a month, and already they want to know their options to permanent residency.

SW2: I would say 90% of their concern is immigration concern, so basically options for permanent residency are the most popular topic.



'My hands are tied'

SW3: You're working with these really desperate people and you have been working with them for a long time and like seeing all these changes I cannot say that I really don't care and that I just do my job, so it's more personal to me.


And the things we cannot do because of the mandate and the funding conditions and then there is no resources, so we are limited really. We are scrambling actually in finding where to refer clients to and finding ways to help.



'My hands are tied'




SW4: Many of our clients that come and say, 'ok this is my history of working in Canada, this is my education, what can I do to stay here? what are my options?' and for a lot of them there are not really that many viable options if any at all to stay in Canada and to achieve permanent residency.

SW1: The most difficult cases are those cases you can't do anything about, but they think you have to do something. Those are the very difficult ones, because they assume you will be able to help them out, but your hands are tied.



**ALL
TEMPORARY
Workers Have
PERMANENT
RIGHTS**

Find out your rights in Alberta. Call the Temporary Foreign Worker Helpline:
1.877.944.9955

ladores
derechos
Alle Zeitarbeiter haben
permanente Rechte
Ang Lahat ng mga Temporary
Worker ay may mga
所有临时工人都有固定权利
了解你在阿尔伯达省的权利。

So What of Discretionary Power?



- Provincially-funded advocates may not have a lot of ‘wiggle room’ in advancing worker-friendly policies from the ground up
- That doesn’t mean street-level discretionary powers don’t influence policy
- It is employers and not settlement workers who mediate workers’ everyday relationship to the state

Employers as Street-Level Bureaucrats

SW1: One employer brought his temporary foreign worker here. He had just arrived. He arrived on Friday and Monday they were here, together. I wasn't comfortable talking to both of them at the same time. And I was telling the temporary foreign worker his rights, whatever he has to do and that after 1 year, because he is an auto service technician, after one year he could apply for permanent residence. And the employer said to the worker: “only if you play your cards well”. Right in front of me!



Employers as Street-Level Bureaucrats



SW3: Everything is employer driven, from the top to the bottom, and because when you are working with an employer and you are restricted to just work... like ok the employer says: 'I am going to extend the LMIA to extend your permit' and you just keep on working with that false hope.

Some employers they sincerely do it but a lot of times they don't. They just don't do it. They don't want to extend the work.

Employers as Street-Level Bureaucrats

- Employers socialize workers to the expectation of government services, from basic health care to options for PR
- It is not settlement workers, but employers who oversee the eligibility of workers for government benefits and sanctions

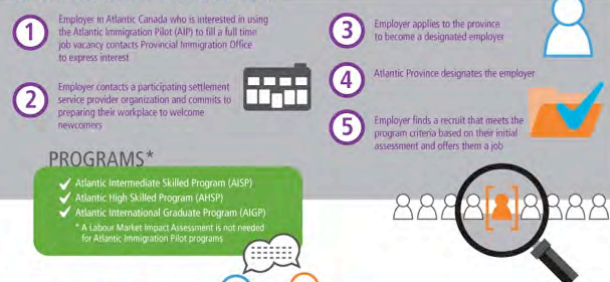


Future Research

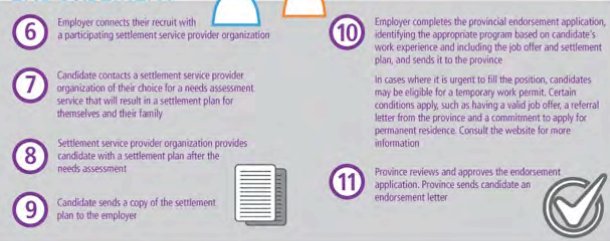
ATLANTIC IMMIGRATION PILOT

A step by step guide

EMPLOYER DESIGNATION



ENDORSEMENT



IMMIGRATION APPLICATION



For more details on the Atlantic Immigration Pilot, see
www.canada.ca/atlantic-immigration

- How does employer discretion affect immigration policy?
- How do we advocate for policies that are not driven by employer demand?

The On the Move Partnership is a project of the Safetynet Centre for Occupational Health & Safety Research at Memorial University. It is supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council through its Partnership Grants funding opportunity (Appl ID 895-2011-1019), Innovate NL, CFI, and multiple universities and community partners.



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

InnovateNL

INNOVATION.CA

CANADA FOUNDATION
FOR INNOVATION

FONDATION CANADIENNE
POUR L'INNOVATION