



Edmonton Local
**IMMIGRATION
PARTNERSHIP**



EDMONTON NEWCOMER INCLUSION STRATEGY 2025 - 2030



February 2025

Land Acknowledgement



We respectfully acknowledge that we are located on the traditional homelands of the First Nations, Metis, and Inuit.

We honour the Elders, Knowledge Keepers and community members past and present who call this land home, and strive to understand our shared colonial history and work together towards a just future that includes and enriches all peoples.

This land acknowledgement is important to many migrants who have made Canada their new home.

It reflects a shared history of colonization – many migrants come from colonized countries who were displaced from their land and generations impoverished as a result of resource extraction. In Canada, Indigenous Peoples and migrants historically have and still do experience marginalization and racism that is rooted in colonial systems and institutions. Indigenous peoples and migrants have a shared understanding of the importance of community and land and the journey towards a just and inclusive society.

Acknowledgements

The draft Edmonton Newcomer Inclusion Strategy was the work of so many people who have given their time, effort and dedication to make the strategy development process a meaningful experience.

Our warmest thanks to the ELIP Shared Secretariat for their leadership, coordination and support in planning and organizing the two community validation sessions that enriched the draft strategy with insights from the ELIP members and the community.

We recognize the tremendous support from the City of Edmonton, through their staff and resources, that demonstrates City-community effort that should be sustained as ELIP moves forward with the Strategy implementation process.

More importantly our heartfelt thanks to all the members of the Edmonton Local Immigration Partnership (ELIP) ecosystem - those representing their organizations, community leaders and government

representatives who provided their best insights about the draft Strategy people with lived experience as newcomers.

We cherish the experience and insights they have shared - from joyful and painful moments to your hopes and dreams of a better life in this city. We hope that this Strategy is a faithful reflection of their contributions.





Newcomer Settlement and Inclusion in Edmonton: A Brief Context

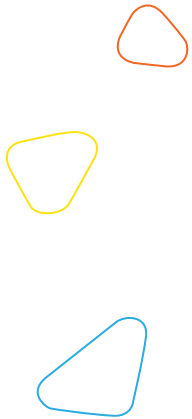
Canada has long been known as a cultural mosaic, made strong and beautiful by our people's cultural differences. One in four people living in Canada migrated here, and we welcome more newcomers each year, many of them choosing Edmonton as their new home.

Indeed, Edmonton has one of the fastest-growing migrant populations of any major Canadian city, welcoming more than 30,000 newcomers in 2023

alone. Many newcomers will stay in the Edmonton region, as there's a lot to like about living here. The cost of living is more affordable than the country's other large cities, and we have lots of diverse cultural communities that help newcomers to feel at home. In fact, of our city's 1.4 million people, 72% have migrated here themselves, or had parents or grandparents who settled here from international homelands. The experience of migration is a strong

part of our city's culture.

The decision to leave one's homeland is monumental, often driven by social, political, economic, and climate upheavals around the world. Indeed, global migration has continually increased over the last ten years, peaking at an unprecedented 281 million people worldwide in 2024, according to the International Office of Migration. These moves take great courage, as people trade familiar



landscapes and communities for the unknown. However, many migrants feel the trade is worth it, as they seek our comparative safety, stability and prosperity for their families.

Despite the promise of a better life in their new homeland, newcomers face many challenges, including:

- Finding jobs well-suited to their education and work experience.
- Securing appropriate housing that they can afford.
- Keeping themselves healthy and well, mentally and physically.
- Ensuring safety and security in their homes, workplaces and neighbourhoods.

- Navigating the experiences of racism and discrimination.
- Addressing negative shifting attitudes about immigration in public conversations.
- Ensuring that they have a voice in decisions that affect their lives.

In order to settle well in their new homes, migrants need to be intentionally and meaningfully planned for, welcomed, and included in our city. Therefore, an inclusion framework is essential in order to make sure the necessary infrastructure and programs are in place so that migrants can thrive and prosper in our city, for the betterment of all Edmontonians.



A newcomer is someone who was born outside Canada and who migrated here within the last ten years. Their reasons for coming here are as varied as their cultural backgrounds, as are the resources they bring with them, and their family and employment contexts. All migrants bring cultural wealth, knowledge and skills that benefit all Canadians.

The Need for an Edmonton Newcomer Inclusion Strategy



We need a new way to help people settle here, which is why we are presenting an Edmonton Newcomer Inclusion Strategy.

In our research with communities, the key themes around newcomer inclusion are:

1. **Newcomers bring rich cultural wealth to their new homeland.**
2. **Despite this cultural wealth, there are ongoing problems finding suitable employment and housing, which impacts all aspects of a newcomer's life.**
3. **Public attitudes about immigration are shifting towards the negative.**

Therefore, this strategy must bring together many communities, organizations, and leaders to address the needs of newcomers:

- **To help with finding appropriate employment, housing, and education.**
- **To provide opportunities for connection and cultural exchange.**
- **To make sure that newcomers are safe and secure, and feel that they belong.**

WHAT WE HEARD

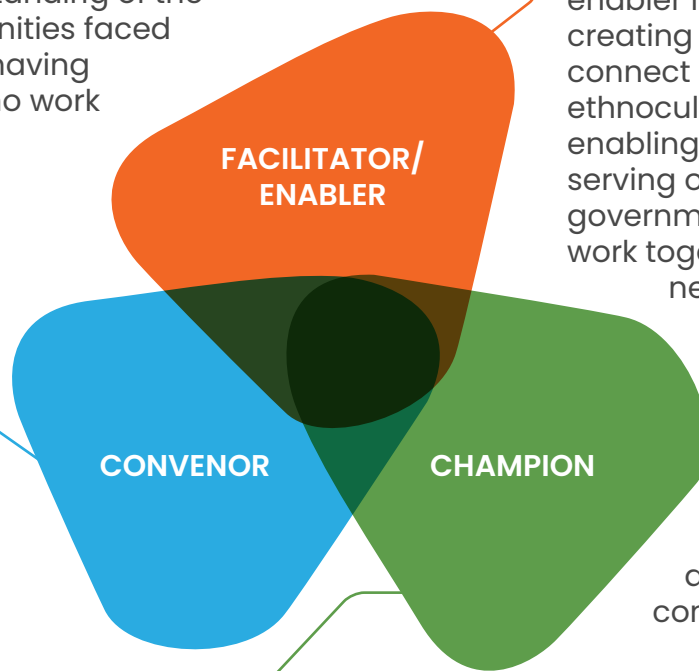
"Timing for these discussions is right."

The Role of ELIP in the Edmonton Newcomer Inclusion Strategy

The **Edmonton Local Immigration Partnership (ELIP)** is the city's largest collective of organizations and leaders from immigrant-serving and related sectors. ELIP's mission is to bring communities, organizations (including employers and all levels of government) and individuals together to co-create solutions to meet newcomers' hopes and needs. ELIP's work is grounded on working together in the midst of diversity, centering newcomers in the work and advancing equity. Thus, ELIP presents this **Edmonton Newcomer Inclusion Strategy** to guide its work in finding solutions to the many challenges newcomers face.

ELIP has a broad understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by migrants, while also having connections to those who work on the frontlines and in various communities. ELIP has three key roles in guiding the Edmonton Newcomer Inclusion Strategy:

CONVENOR
ELIP brings together groups who work with newcomers to better understand their issues and challenges, find solutions, and take action. This role includes organizing action groups, and hosting opportunities to find solutions to issues that newcomers face.



FACILITATOR/ENABLER
ELIP has many connections across systems and communities. Therefore, ELIP can organize information, design processes, and help community and systems players alike reduce the barriers that newcomers face. The role of facilitator/ enabler includes creating opportunities to connect newcomers with ethnocultural groups; enabling migrant-serving organizations and government agencies to work together on a specific need or opportunity; and connecting ethnocultural organizations to service providers and government institutions to address specific concerns.

CHAMPION
ELIP will lead by raising the profile of newcomer issues — and their potential solutions — within decision-making circles at the City of Edmonton and beyond. ELIP will research policies that impact newcomers, and propose new policies and programs that would improve their lives. ELIP will work with the City of Edmonton to educate newcomers about how they can participate in our city, so they better understand the opportunities available to help them settle more effectively into their new home.

ELIP's Vision

Edmonton is a city that welcomes, enables and nurtures newcomers to thrive, prosper and belong in their new homeland.

This vision means that Edmonton's residents, community organizations, service agencies, and municipal government actively engage and support newcomers by:

- Providing services, programs, and resources to help them get suitable employment, affordable and appropriate housing, healthcare, education, as well as other important services.
- Ensuring that they feel safe and secure, with a sense of belonging.
- Offering opportunities and spaces for them to practice and share their culture with others.



WHAT WE HEARD

"As a catalyst, ELIP must ensure that organizations and community leaders work together to offer tailored and relevant support to newcomers."

Our Guiding Principles

The Edmonton Newcomer Inclusion Strategy has been guided by the following principles:

1. Equity of access to resources and opportunities

Equity of access means differences among populations should not be barriers to life's chances or opportunities. Newcomers of all ages, genders, sexual orientations, races, ethnicities, abilities, faiths, and immigration status (especially those who are most vulnerable and marginalized), must have access to equitable opportunities, in order to increase their chances of succeeding in their new homeland.

2. Participatory capacity building

Participatory capacity refers to a newcomer's ability to take part in decisions and actions that impact their lives. This strategy is intentional in creating processes and spaces for newcomers, especially those with less power, to actively participate in our city. It also encourages institutional partners to build and develop relationships with newcomer communities to tap into newcomers' cultural wealth, and to improve newcomers' networks and access to power.

3. Inclusive solution-seeking processes

This principle recognizes that ELIP is a collective of diverse community partners with a wide range of perspectives, contexts, and lived experiences. The strategy strives to acknowledge, respect and embody multiple ways of knowing, working together, and fostering creative solutions.



WHAT WE HEARD

"It's really about empowering the newcomer vs. giving handouts."

The Edmonton Newcomer Inclusion Strategy

OUR VISION

Edmonton is a city that welcomes, enables and nurtures newcomers to thrive, prosper and belong in their new homeland.

OUR STRATEGIC GOALS

Enable and facilitate newcomers to bring their voices forward on decisions and actions that impact their lives in the city.

Create and facilitate opportunities for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and problem-solving among service providers, employers, community leaders and advocates to better serve newcomers.

Advocate for the wider recognition of migrants' cultural wealth and foster reconciliation building with Indigenous peoples.

OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Advance the community voice

Research with, for, and by the people

Build an innovative newcomer inclusion resource hub

Enhance services to newcomers through collaboration and partnerships

Champion newcomer inclusion policies

Shift the narrative about migrants as city builders

Support Reconciliation and solidarity with Indigenous Peoples

ELIP ROLES

**FACILITATOR/
ENABLER**

CONVENOR

CHAMPION

Our Strategic Goals and Outcomes

The Edmonton Local Immigration Partnership (ELIP) will **provide leadership and coordination** in achieving these strategic goals and outcomes to fulfill the vision by the end of 2030.

GOALS	OUTCOMES
<p>1. Enable and facilitate opportunities for newcomers to bring their voices forward to policy-makers, service providers, employers, and the larger community about decisions and actions that impact their lives. (FACILITATOR/ENABLER)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newcomers are empowered to express their concerns, hopes, aspirations, and problem-solving ideas to those who make decisions that affect them. • Newcomers are using their unique talents and voices, thereby sharing their cultural wealth and knowledge with the broader community.
<p>2. Facilitate and create opportunities for collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and problem-solving among service providers, community leaders, newcomers, employers, advocates, and all orders of government to better serve newcomers. (CONVENOR)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who serve and work with newcomers are collaboratively identifying and implementing actions, initiatives and activities that centre newcomer voices. • Newcomers experience improved access to quality services. • Newcomers are more informed about available services to help with employment, housing, health, and other needs.
<p>3. Advocate for the wider recognition of migrants’ cultural wealth, as well as playing a role in Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. (CHAMPION)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edmontonians are aware of and appreciate the rich cultural wealth and contributions that newcomers bring and contribute to the city. • Newcomers and Indigenous people learn from each other’s history and culture. There are examples of newcomers and Indigenous people working together towards healing and Reconciliation.

Strategic Priorities and Potential ELIP Actions

Strategic priorities are the ideas that we consider most important to achieving our vision and goals. ELIP will work with newcomers, employers, governments, and community partners and leaders to take action on these strategic priorities.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES	POTENTIAL ELIP ACTIONS
<p>1. Advance the community's voices</p> <p>The power to be heard is the first step toward inclusion. ELIP will create opportunities and processes so that newcomers are informed, educated, and able to advocate for their own interests and well-being.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide diverse learning experiences for newcomers to improve their ability to participate and engage in ELIP and in the community.• Hold events and activities to engage newcomers so they can express their concerns, views, and goals, while ensuring that barriers to participation are addressed.• Use processes that account for different language and cultural backgrounds, allowing newcomers to participate in active and meaningful ways.
<p>2. Research with, for, and by the people</p> <p>Data created with, for, and by the people is richer and stronger in making visible the invisible. By centring newcomers in the research, ELIP will enhance the broader community's understanding, empathy, and action to support newcomers in Edmonton.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Partner with researchers to do community research on priority issues impacting newcomers, such as employment, housing, access to health and social services, and safety and well-being.• Design opportunities and processes where newcomers can identify, co-create, and participate in research activities.• Participate in the Race-Based Data Collection Table to ensure that newcomer voices are included in their initiatives.



3. Champion newcomer inclusion policies

Policy development is most powerful when it engages the newcomers who are personally impacted by the issues. ELIP will advocate for newcomers to be able to participate in discussions about and co-create policies that affect them.

- Build ELIP's capacity to engage newcomers in designing policies that impact their success and advancement, such as access to suitable employment opportunities, affordable housing, culturally responsive services, anti-racism, etc.
- Actively participate in developing the implementation plan for the City of Edmonton's updated C-529A Policy on Migrant Inclusion.
- Build ELIP's capacity, and that of its partners and community, to explore policy accountability processes and tools.

4. Build an innovative newcomer inclusion resource hub

ELIP will create a physical space, and an online space, where newcomers and workers in newcomer services can find and exchange information. The resource hub will be a platform for diverse, innovative, and inspiring ideas, tools, and learning opportunities. It will facilitate knowledge-sharing and problem-solving among newcomers, service providers, employers, community leaders, and advocates to better serve and work with newcomers.

- Bring together, through ELIP's Employment Action Table, employers, newcomers, and employment support agencies to find fresh and creative solutions to the persistent issues of underemployment and unemployment.
- Work with migrant-serving organizations in exploring initiatives to better serve vulnerable newcomers and migrants, such as refugee claimants, undocumented migrants, and privately sponsored refugees.
- Partner with social innovation groups through ELIP's action tables to design impactful solutions to chronic issues experienced by newcomers.
- Build on existing ELIP initiatives of mapping newcomers and resources by connecting with business and industry.

5. Enhance services for newcomers through collaboration and partnerships

ELIP will initiate, facilitate, and support joint initiatives and partnerships for improved coordination and collaboration between newcomer leaders and communities and all orders of government.

- Design a culturally responsive and collaborative model for joint initiatives with service providers, employers, and community leaders. Initiatives will address critical challenges impacting newcomer success, like employment barriers. Also, increase newcomers' access to settlement services at critical points of entry such as airports and transit.
- Pilot the collaborative model within the first year of strategy implementation.

6. Shift the narrative

ELIP will actively promote and showcase the many rich contributions of newcomers as:

- City builders: Newcomers bring new ideas, approaches, and creative ways of thinking.
- Agents of local development: Newcomers are important participants in a city's growth and prosperity.
- Builders of resilience: Drawing on life experiences, newcomers can help Edmonton prepare for and recover from crises and disasters.

- Develop a robust communications plan that makes use of multimedia platforms, and that showcases the rich contributions of newcomers.
- Maximize the use of social media platforms to sustain this new narrative about migrants.
- Design a communication plan that will create awareness of ELIP's role in newcomer inclusion.

WHAT WE HEARD

"I really appreciate this priority. I think it is integral to have a narrative shift on what newcomers bring to the community. They are not just "recipients" but providers and likewise contributors to the community."

7. Support Reconciliation and solidarity with Indigenous Peoples

ELIP will foster communication of the shared stories of colonization and exploitation of both migrants and Indigenous Peoples, as a means of building respectful and principled relationships, grounded in Reconciliation actions.

- Initiate partnerships with Indigenous organizations and migrant-serving organizations to develop a “more inclusive history of the diverse Aboriginal peoples of Canada, including information about the Treaties and history of residential schools” into newcomer orientation materials, reflecting Recommendation #93 of the Truth and Reconciliation Report (TRC, 2015, p. 10).
- Incorporate Indigenous history and teachings into ELIP’s governance and operational practice.
- Support Reconciliation actions and Indigenous Peoples’ paths towards self-determination.
- Hold joint activities with Indigenous and newcomer groups and organizations to share learnings, concerns, and issues.



WHAT WE HEARD

“Service providers across all sectors are so busy doing the work and don’t connect enough. [We] would like to see more participation of agencies to come together and have that voice.”



Implementation Directions

Implementation is crucial in any strategic process, as it turns ideas into living, actionable steps. It involves aligning resources and ensuring commitments from all partners, especially the organization leading the work. This Edmonton Newcomer Inclusion Strategy provides a set of implementation directions to ELIP to move the strategic goals and priorities forward and to fulfill its vision.

the implementation of this strategy through its governance structure. This might require changes or additions to the governance structure to ensure the effective implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and accountability of the strategy.

1. Action Planning and Accountability

Action planning is the immediate next stage of strategy development, to identify specific steps to take for each strategic priority and goal. The community validation sessions held in the development of this strategy generated many concrete suggestions on actions and initiatives that could be included in the action-planning stage.

Action planning will involve the following steps:

- Organize ELIP members into action tables to work on key priority areas.
- Ensure that these action tables create spaces and processes

for newcomer involvement.

- Determine actions for each strategic priority, and set timelines for achieving these actions within the strategy’s five-year period.
- Estimate resources needed for each action, and where funding and commitments will come from.
- Identify responsibilities for achieving each action.
- Identify key expected outcomes for each action and how they will be measured.

Accountability is essential in strategy implementation. ELIP is responsible for managing

WHAT WE HEARD

“Inclusivity can be strengthened by inviting community and religious leaders to such workshops, as they are often the main point of contact for newcomers with challenges.”

ELIP will set the example for decision-making and action-taking processes that centre the voices of diverse newcomers and support collaboration with the settlement sector, business and industry, social services, and governments.

2. Resources and Commitment

Resources and commitments are critical to strategy implementation, and they are the lifeline for action-taking. The action planning process will identify sources of funding and in-kind commitment and support. Resources will need to be secured to fully fund and support the actions in the strategy.

3. The Role of the City of Edmonton

Local municipalities are key actors in any newcomer settlement and inclusion initiative, as they are the level of government closest to the people. The City of Edmonton, recognizing its commitment to newcomer inclusion, has recently updated and approved C529A Policy on Migrant Inclusion (previously C529 Policy on Immigration and Settlement). It is also engaged in major initiatives related to Anti-racism, Community Safety and Well-being, Affordable Housing and Homelessness, and Diversity and Inclusion,

among others. ELIP will work closely with City staff involved in creating the Migrant Inclusion Action Plan as well as these other initiatives, to ensure alignment with the Edmonton Newcomer Inclusion Strategy.

Within the context of this Strategy, the following areas could be put forward for the City's participation in its implementation:

- Coordinating services and fostering partnerships to address chronic and persistent newcomer challenges, such as employment and housing, use of facilities for cultural and sports activities, community safety and well-being in neighbourhoods, etc.
- Helping to raise awareness about equity and anti-racism, particularly highlighting migrants' cultural wealth and shifting perceptions about immigration.
- Partnering and supporting ELIP's

WHAT WE HEARD

"We need more activities to engage newcomers and exchange information."

role as Convenor. Bringing together key institutional and business leaders, along with migrant-serving and community organizations, to improve newcomer success in core areas of integration (such as housing and employment).

4. ELIP Governance

The Edmonton Newcomer Inclusion Strategy will inspire a review of ELIP's current governance structure and how it aligns with the requirements of managing its implementation. Foremost is ELIP's ability to engage people with lived experience in its decision-making processes.

ELIP should consider dedicated staff support to ensure effective oversight, guidance, and accountability of the strategy implementation.

Capacities needed include:

- An overall guidance, oversight, and coordinating role to oversee the various parts of the implementation process.
- A focused role to design and implement an engagement plan that includes creating a participatory approach within ELIP to incorporate newcomers' lived experiences and make them an integral part of the decision-making process.
- A communications role to design and implement internal and external communication plans that reinforce ELIP's mandate and actions among its members, creating awareness of ELIP's role in the

community, and fostering positive and authentic perceptions about migrants and immigration

- A strong evaluation and monitoring capacity within ELIP to ensure accountability of the strategy's implementation

5. Evaluation and Monitoring

Knowing expected outcomes and how they are measured is crucial to the success of strategy implementation. Intended outcomes have been defined in the strategy. The next step is to determine how these outcomes will be measured. Grounded in the strategy's guiding principles, those who are impacted by the actions in the strategy should be primary participants in the evaluation process.



WHAT WE HEARD
"Newcomers see themselves as contributors — resources, skills and experiences."



Immediate Next Steps

The **Edmonton Newcomer Inclusion Strategy** will need to be approved/accepted by the ELIP Council to start its implementation. The approval process should include designating a team responsible for working on the implementation directions.

Appendix A

Migrants

An umbrella term, reflecting a person who moves away from their place of usual residence, whether within a country, or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons (International Office of Migration).

In this document, the term migrant refers to people who have any immigration status: skilled workers, refugees, family-sponsored, those with work permits or visitors' visas, and those who are undocumented.

Newcomers

Newcomers are the focal population in this strategy.

We offer a definition drawn from the official IRCC definition and the literature:

A **Newcomer** is someone who was born outside Canada and who migrated here within the last **ten years**. Newcomers vary widely in terms of their cultural background, the reasons for and manner

of their migration, the resources they bring with them, and the environments they settle into.

Newcomers are multidimensional individuals of varying age, gender, sexual orientation, ability, race, ethnicity, marital status, education, and occupation and many more. Each of these identities interact and intersect with each other at any one time that may place them in vulnerable or privileged circumstances.

Newcomers: Shared Experience

Separation from their social networks of family and community and must build new networks in the new homeland.

Limited and inadequate access to social and material resources to pursue their migration pathway to succeed.

Face social exclusion from employment, housing and health due to immigrant status and discrimination on the basis of race, language, and/or religion.

Definition of Terms

Inclusion

In this context, inclusion means:

- Appreciating the strengths and gifts that newcomers bring to the community.
- Believing that newcomers belong, deserve to be safe, and are an important part of the community.
- Building an understanding of why newcomers might have difficulty settling and creating new lives here.

Engagement

Within the context of this strategy, engagement is the process of inviting newcomers to participate in decisions and actions that matter most to them.

Civic Education

Civic education within this newcomer context means providing newcomers with the tools, knowledge, and ability to engage with municipal, provincial, and federal governments.

Appendix B

The Context of Newcomer Settlement and Inclusion in Edmonton

Newcomer settlement and inclusion in Edmonton need to be understood from both the global and local landscapes of migration, newcomers' core challenges (from their own perspectives), and public perceptions of immigration.

As we mentioned in the introduction, global migration rates have continued to rise over the last decade. Indeed, last year, 281 million people, or 3.6% of the world's population, moved around the globe to seek a better life, to escape from war, political turmoil, and natural disasters (*International Office of Migration, 2024*). While some migration can be beneficial for both individuals and countries, it can also cause issues of deep inequity and strained resources. Solutions to global challenges continue to elude decision-makers around the world, which results in significant numbers of people being displaced due to issues beyond their control.

Canadian immigration policies maintain the

planned target of welcoming 500,000 new international arrivals by 2026. In 2024, that target was 485,000 newcomers. (*2023 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration*)

International migration isn't the only kind of migration on the rise. Indeed, 300,000 people moved across the country, [interprovincially](#). In 2023. Statistics Canada reported that Alberta had the largest increase in population, adding 55,107 people to our province, which is the largest of this type of increase since 1972. This reverses a trend from 2016 to 2021, when more people left Alberta than arrived from other parts of Canada.

Edmonton has one of the fastest-growing immigrant populations of any major Canadian city, with a remarkable increase in new arrivals since 2016, and more than 30,000 newcomers in 2023. Once they arrive in Edmonton, newcomers tend to stay in the region, putting the city consistently in the top three major Canadian cities for retention of immigrants.

Indeed, between 2010 and 2020, Edmonton had a newcomer retention rate of 81.7%, the highest among Canadian cities(1). This is reflected in the city's population of 1.4 million people, of which 40.3% identified as a visible minority(2), and 72% as 2nd and 3rd generation immigrants.

This context is the basis for developing the Edmonton Newcomer Inclusion Strategy for the Edmonton Local Immigration Partnership (ELIP).

WHAT WE HEARD

"Faith-based organizations are key for connecting as it is where immigrants often gather because of the safety and community that is created."

Chronic and Persistent Systemic Problems Hindering Newcomers' Inclusion

The migration journey is a lifelong process of striving to be included and to feel a sense of belonging in a new homeland. It is a joint effort between the newcomers and the host country to create conditions for inclusion — systems, institutions, and attitudes that are welcoming and responsive to newcomers.

The reality of newcomers includes enduring struggles — the result of unresolved systemic gaps and barriers. These are some of the persistent challenges:

1. Reasonable and suitable employment: the persistent and most elusive hope of all newcomers

Employment is the cornerstone of one's life in a new country. Many newcomers are not able to find work that uses their talents and skills to earn a fair income. This promise of immigration — good work as part of a better life — contradicts the realities of underemployment and unemployment, particularly among racialized newcomers.

Despite a noticeable increase and improvement in employment support programs for newcomers, barriers persist, including the continuing devaluation of foreign credentials,

and limited access to employment support (such as language training and Canadian workplace orientation and experience). These barriers to appropriate employment have led to many newcomers working in low-paying, entry-level jobs and precarious employment conditions, despite strong skill sets and advanced education.

WHAT WE HEARD
"I would like to transition into a more professional job, but the opportunities are menial jobs. I feel like I'm not giving my best self, and I'm losing out. I'm using my hands, not my brain. I was a chemical engineer back home."

2. Housing inequity: more than an immigration problem

After income and employment, housing concerns are the next most pressing issue experienced by most newcomers. Housing issues are far more complex than the lack of affordable housing among many newcomers. These issues include:

- Rent absorbing most of their income (72.2 %)(3).
- Complicated application processes for subsidized housing disadvantage newcomers who are not familiar with the local housing market.
- Inadequate housing to meet diverse needs of migrants from larger family sizes and multigenerational households(4).
- Negligent and unresponsive landlords who leave migrant families in

crowded, unhealthy, inadequate homes for years.

While public investment in housing sharply lagged population growth in the three decades prior to 2017, there has been increased investment in housing over the past 8 years. The National Housing Strategy, adopted in 2017, resulted in over \$85 billion in investment in programs to address housing availability and affordability. However, the reduced availability and increased cost of housing persist, impacting much of the general population, adding additional barriers for newcomers. This complex issue is driven by many factors, including rising construction costs, post-COVID 19 supply chain challenges, and increased demand(5).

WHAT WE HEARD

“You can feel downcast because you were at the peak of your career back home, and then have to start all over here. Experience from back home doesn’t count for anything.”

3. Struggling to be healthy in an unequal society: immigration as a social determinant of health

Migrants need to be healthy so that they can satisfy their needs, reach their goals, and adjust to their new environment. The “healthy immigrant effect” revealed in the early 2000s is still true today, confirming that the health status of newly arrived economic immigrants (people who move here for job opportunities and a better standard of living) is typically higher than the general population, and declines over time, partly because of the stresses of integration that are not found across other classes of migrants(6).

An increasing incidence of chronic diseases (diabetes, heart diseases, and mental illnesses) is rooted in stressors from daily living, pre-migration trauma, and culture changes, particularly gender role conflicts. The COVID pandemic has further amplified the pre-existing health inequalities among migrants, especially those in poor socio-economic conditions who were more vulnerable, including those who had lost their status.

Immigration must be seen and understood as a social determinant of health in its own right. It influences social relationships that directly affect newcomer health, as shown in the “healthy immigrant effect.” Beyond looking for solutions on an individual level, this perspective calls for tackling structural and systemic factors that impact health, such as:

- More inclusive healthcare practices
- Proactive, deep engagement

with migrant communities

- Advocacy for fair immigration, economic, and health policies.

4. Safety in our communities: perception and reality

Cities and neighbourhoods are the destinations where newcomers first experience being welcomed and included – or being excluded and ignored. The most painful experience that can happen to a newcomer is being told to go back to where they came from. Newcomers have described being called names, being attacked, or just being ignored and excluded. Many don't feel safe in their own neighbourhoods, having seen thefts and violence. Many sense a lack of trust in their neighbours, and most newcomers keep to themselves.

Edmonton has seen a rise in hate crimes targeting Black and Muslim women. At least 15 attacks on Muslim women occurred in Edmonton and Calgary between December 2020 and October 2021.

Safety in schools has also been a challenge for many young newcomers. They struggle to speak a new language, they experience bullying, and they see the challenges their parents face, as they strive to understand how the school system works.

5. Disengagement from civic life: challenges to civic inclusion

Community members in many engagement reports spoke about their feelings of disengagement from local government and the need for community space to build connections.

Loneliness and isolation are central to the newcomer experience. A space for gathering is the primary need – first, to build social bonds within the cultural communities where newcomers can find comfort and familiarity, and then to foster connections with other cultural communities and networks. Engagement reports indicate that participants were not aware of the City's role in their lives,

Belonging to the new homeland means migrants must experience three equalities to make the full transition to citizen:

1. Human rights guarantees access to justice when these rights are violated
2. Knowledge and skills are utilized to achieve rewarding livelihoods to reduce socio-economic inequalities.
3. Full representation and participation in the civic and political process is the final frontier of integration when they participate in public decision-making.

or how Canadian municipalities work. Most of them had not participated in public engagement activities organized by the City of Edmonton, regardless of their length of residency.

6. Overarching problem: Inequity and racism

In accessing employment, services, and resources to live a secure and stable life, newcomers spoke of challenges often related to their identity as racialized individuals. Many of the problems that they face are rooted in the inequity and racism that is historically entrenched in Canada's immigration policies. It starts with favouring certain groups to be accepted into the country, and an unfair immigrant selection system

focusing on skills that inevitably will not be recognized in the Canadian employment sector. From language barriers to cultural differences to racial discrimination, this inequity is extended once the newcomer starts to access services and support needed for settlement and integration. This systemic inequity is aggravated when a newcomer has disabilities or is openly LGBTQIA+, further limiting access to employment and other basic needs.

Income Inequality among Migrants: Impact of Systemic Racism

29.3% of immigrants experienced overqualification at least once, compared with 16.1% of non-immigrants; nearly 10% of immigrants were persistently overqualified.

For every dollar earned by a white male, racialized men earn 78 cents and racialized women earn 57 cents.

20.8% of racialized Canadians live with low income compared to 12.2% of non-racialized Canadians

Vital Signs Report on Systemic Racism. 2022

Undocumented Migrants: a new municipal reality

In 2020, an estimated 30,000 to 50,000 people may have been undocumented in Alberta(8,9). There are no estimates available for the city of Edmonton. Undocumented migrants tend to live in large urban areas because jobs are more accessible, housing – whether adequate or not – is more available, and they are more likely to find cultural and faith connections. Most importantly, big cities allow for anonymity and the opportunity to “blend in.”

A growing “undocumented migration industry” exploits undocumented migrants by advising workers – both in their home countries and in Canada – on how to migrate, spreading false hopes and taking advantage of their desperation. Many such agencies also abuse workers once they get

to Canada. Individuals involved may be travel agents, labour recruiters, human smugglers, immigration lawyers, unscrupulous landlords, employers, and at times, acquaintances, family, and friends(8). This exploitation has remained unchecked and no one is being held accountable.

The invisibility of undocumented individuals in our city does not relieve municipalities of their responsibility to work with migrants and communities to address this challenge. Cities must help propel a new narrative and create supportive infrastructure and frameworks to help undocumented people. They must support citizens to see undocumented migrants as intrinsic to our city, and even support changes to ensure they have pathways to become legal citizens of Canada.



WHAT WE HEARD

“People are being exploited. There’s exploitation in the system, and we don’t have access to legal services. We aren’t aware where there are free services.”

C529A Migrant Inclusion Policy and C606 Access to Services Without Fear Policy

On May 21, 2023, City Council passed a motion for Administration to provide *“an updated policy on immigration and settlement in alignment with relevant intersecting policies and engagement with newcomer communities to a future Committee meeting.”* The review and community engagement resulted in a proposed updated policy to be presented to City Council in 2024.

The updated policy, now called *C529A Migrant Inclusion Policy*, put forward a key insight that could be integrated into a newcomer inclusion strategy. It emphasizes the central role of the City of Edmonton in welcoming newcomers

by collaborating with the community and drawing on newcomers’ cultural wealth and strengths. Genuine and authentic power-sharing between decision-makers and community members can be achieved through equitable access to information, resources, support, and decision-making.

Integral to this policy review is that a stronger *C-606 Access to Services Without Fear Policy* is also being recommended to ensure that undocumented migrants are supported in the city. These two policies are envisioned to build a sturdy foundation for City initiatives that create conditions for newcomers to thrive in Edmonton.



WHAT WE HEARD

“As time goes by, I’ve started to question if I made the wrong decision to come to Canada. [I’ve been] having accommodation issues, and [spent] 3–4 months without any job. Finally got a seasonal job in hospitality . . . I am still financing my family back home . . . Missing them growing up. My child just started school.”

Shifting Narratives on Immigration

For decades, Canadians have appreciated the importance and benefits of immigration. However, a recent poll conducted by Environics Institute in 2023 revealed two startling findings (7):

- For the first time, Canadians are questioning how many immigrants are arriving, rather than who they are and where they are coming from. More than four in ten Canadians now strongly (23%) or somewhat (21%) agree there is too much immigration to Canada, up 17 percentage points since one year ago.

- The public is now evenly divided between those who agree (47%) and disagree (47%) with the statement that “Canada needs more immigration to increase its population.” This represents an 11-point decline in agreement from a year ago, reversing an upward trend recorded between 1993 and 2022.

This changing public opinion on immigration can have negative impacts across economic, social, and political sectors, hindering migrant-supporting policies and programs. Most of all, it will likely express

itself in aggressive behaviours in our streets, workplaces, schools, and neighbourhoods. Changing public opinion means that the newcomer-serving sector and communities must step up to articulate a commitment to inclusion, to people-centred approaches, and to action for change led by and with newcomers — a focal point of the Edmonton Newcomer Inclusion Strategy.

These guiding frameworks have emerged in the last ten years, as more research has documented the persistent challenges of newcomers during a time of increasing migration.

Dimensions of Integration (Ager and Strang)

This framework describes the critical processes and outcomes of newcomer integration (10). These include markers of, and means to, integration (employment, housing, education and health), social and community connections, facilitators, and foundations.

1. Markers and Means: Employment, Housing, Education and Health

These key areas are fundamental to a smooth settlement process that can pave the way for successful integration.

Employment

promotes economic independence, planning for the future, and meeting members of one's new homeland. It provides opportunities to develop skills, which restores self-esteem and encourages self-reliance.

WHAT WE HEARD

"Getting a job is hell."

Housing affects overall physical and emotional well-being, as well as the ability for individuals and families to feel "at

home." Housing must be considered in terms of affordability, appropriateness of conditions, and social and cultural impacts.

Education

provides skills and competencies to support employment and enable people to become more active and contributing members of society.

Health is essential for active engagement in society. Barriers to accessing mainstream health services and resources negatively impact one's health.

2. Social and Community Connection: Social capital of bonding, bridging and linking

Social and community connection consists of:

- **Social Bonds:** connections within groups of natural affinity (cultural, religious, etc.)

- **Social Bridges:** connections between groups of natural affinity, such as connections with different ethnocultural and Indigenous groups.
- **Social Links:** Connections between people and structures of the state, ensuring that levels of access to government services, programs, and policies are in line with their realities.

3. Facilitators

Refers to actions that remove barriers to integration, such as learning a new language, and building an understanding of the new homeland's cultural practices.

Safety and stability are essential facilitators associated with friendliness, and lack of harassment and intimidation. Other facilitators include stable living conditions, and not having to move from place to place, so there is

opportunity to develop lasting relationships and access to services and support.

4. Foundations

Citizenship and Rights (or Citizenry) include human dignity, equality, cultural freedom, justice, security, and independence. These are attained by involving all sectors of society, including governments and elected officials, community and religious leaders, education systems, etc.



WHAT WE HEARD
"The emphasis on raising awareness of migrants' cultural wealth and contributions to city-building is commendable."



The Multidimensional Immigrant and Community Cultural Wealth Model

An emerging concept of newcomers describes a shift away from a labour market-centred “one-dimensional immigrant” focusing solely on economic skills and contributions. Instead, there is a recognition that newcomers come to Canada as whole individuals with **multidimensional assets** beyond their ability to work. They bring more than just individual human capital such as education and employment skills; what comes with them is their tremendous resilience to overcome adverse circumstances and barriers.

This resilience and strength comes from their community cultural wealth (11), a rich mosaic of cultural assets migrants bring to their new homeland. Dr. Yosso’s concept of community cultural wealth reveals a resource that has often been overlooked in the discourse of immigrants’ contribution to local communities.

Edmonton benefits from this cultural wealth in terms of the following:

- **Aspirational capital:** Newcomers who come to Edmonton are full of hope and dreams for the future – the very reason for migration. They have immeasurable resilience to fulfill these dreams in the face of real and perceived barriers.
- **Linguistic capital:** Edmonton is home to people who speak multiple languages – a rich trove of intercultural communication capacity that can be a source of social innovation in public service and social enterprise.
- **Social capital:** The majority of newcomers come to Edmonton with their families and/or their extended familial and community networks. The wisdom, values and stories from their home communities offer diverse perspectives of family life and relationships that many of us can learn from. The supportive relationships within their cultural communities can teach us about collective strength that enables them to survive and thrive in an unfamiliar environment.
- **Navigational capital:** Maneuvering through social institutions to access resources and opportunities is a skill. In navigating the complex processes of migration – wading through institutional hurdles, finding resources, looking for refuge and sanctuary – newcomers develop remarkable skills that can be applied to day-to-day life as well as a community in crisis.
- **Resistance capital:** Many immigrants from colonized countries have engaged in social justice efforts. We can learn from their experience of securing equal rights and freedom, tackling challenges in the midst of scarcity, and believing in the collective power of people.

WHAT WE HEARD

“The strategy pays attention to the intersectionality of immigrants.”

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