

SETTLING THE UNSETTLED

CLOSING THE URBAN-RURAL
IMMIGRATION GAP IN CANADA

ACTION  CANADA
BUILDING LEADERSHIP FOR CANADA'S FUTURE

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Amanda Affonso (Calgary, Alberta) is a strategist with Enbridge and has spent her career contributing to Canada's energy and environmental policy. Amanda is an avid volunteer in her community and recently led the building of Alberta's first accessible outdoor community rink. Amanda is a thought leader, team builder, and community activator.

Nabeel Ahmed (Milton, Ontario) is a management consultant at the City of Toronto working on technology policy issues, with experience in policy research and community engagement in smart cities, social enterprise and international development in Canada, Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan. Nabeel has a background in urban planning, public administration and business administration. As President of the Tessellate Institute, a Muslim charitable research institute, he also remains active in documenting and researching the Canadian Muslim community.

Lisa Beaucage (Smiths Falls, Ontario) is a member of the Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation. She is also a police officer in Ottawa currently working in the Diversity Resource Relation section with carriage of the Indigenous portfolio. Lisa is involved in the Indigenous community volunteering with both the Indigenous section of the Community Equity Council and Indigenous Women's Safety Table. She also has a master's degree in Canadian and Indigenous policy from Trent University.

Véronique Fournier (Québec City, Québec) is a PhD Candidate in international relations (Université Laval & KU Leuven) with a multidisciplinary background as a lawyer and business advisor. Véronique is a team builder, actively engaged in developing better science-policy relationships to improve diversity in environmental governance and increase citizen engagement in youth.



Kevin Wasko (Swift Current, Saskatchewan) is a practicing emergency physician and Physician Executive with the Saskatchewan Health Authority. He is passionate about clinical quality improvement and has led large-scale change within Saskatchewan's health care system.

Wendi Zhou (Brossard, Québec) is a policy analyst at Health Canada with a PhD in engineering, and has experience in science, health, and international sport policy. Wendi has been active in developing opportunities for youth and particularly underrepresented groups in STEM, dragon boat, and everything in between.

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This report seeks to build upon the amazing work already being done by so many and the work that needs to continue to advance immigration in Canada.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

If Canada is a country of immigrants, it is also, overwhelmingly, a country of urban immigrants. Yet it is outside Canada's biggest cities where immigrants and their skills, creativity, and investments are most dearly needed. This report asks: why do so few immigrants settle down in small and medium population centres in Canada, and how can we encourage them to do so?

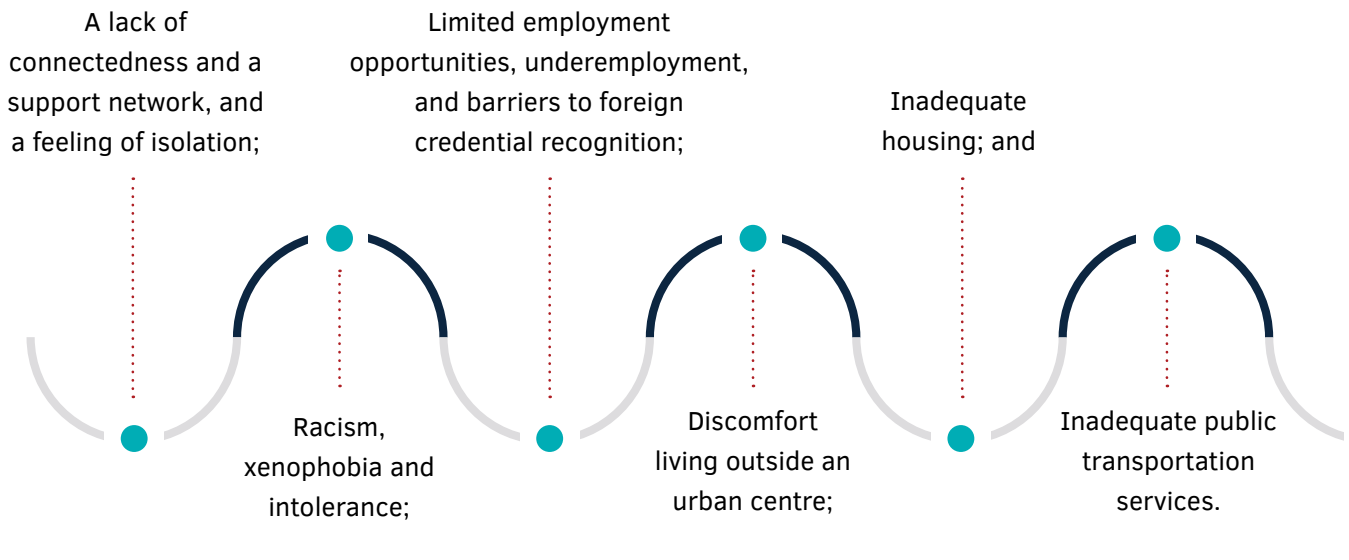
More than one in five Canadians are foreign-born¹ and immigrants play an integral role in contributing to our economy by filling gaps in our labour force, contributing to the tax base, and spending money on goods, housing and transportation.

Increased life expectancy and low fertility rates have contributed toward an aging population and workforce, leading to severe risks of unmet labour market needs and sub-quality public services.¹ Immigrants constitute an important component of the solution to this challenge, and yet rural areas, and small and medium population centres, which are most in need of a population growth injection, face difficulties in

bringing in and integrating newcomers. Smaller communities also offer a unique set of benefits that are not always understood or conveyed; the compact size of the community can provide a more integrated settlement experience where safety, security and connectedness are felt by the newcomer.




Based on 38 interviews carried out across the country in the fall of 2021, this report employs a structured tool—the Value Proposition Canvas—to identify the needs of newcomers, in addition to the barriers to integration that they face to settling outside large urban population centres. The pains encountered and gains desired by immigrants are illustrated through six case studies focusing on small and medium population centres (defined as areas with populations between 1,000 and 100,000). Although settlement agencies and actors offer a variety of products and services as pain relievers and gain creators, several gaps still prevent the creation of a welcoming environment where immigrants can settle and feel at home.

Major gaps identified through our research include:



To address these gaps, we have identified a number of recommendations to help communities approach immigration settlement and retention as a whole-of-community affair. Settlement service providers, governments, employers, and community members must come together in a coordinated approach to truly make a community welcoming for all.

Our key recommendations, most of which apply to multiple stakeholders, are to:

- 
Employ evaluation tools to assess current gaps and identify targeted solutions;
- 
Create a municipal roundtable on immigration;
- 
Engage service providers and employers in all aspects of immigration;
- 
Develop an anti-racism strategy;
- 
Implement an immigrant mentorship program;
- 
Leverage technology;
- 
Subsidize housing solutions;
- 
Provide accessible transportation options;
- 
Encourage long-term incentives through employers; and
- 
Promote local attractions and amenities.

DEFINITIONS

CENSUS METROPOLITAN AREA (CMA):

An economically integrated and spatially contiguous area formed by one or more adjacent municipalities on and around a population centre (known as the core). A CMA must have a total population of at least 100,000 of which 50,000 or more must live in the core based on adjusted data from the previous Census of Population Program.²

ECONOMIC IMMIGRANT:

This category includes immigrants who have been selected for their ability to contribute to Canada's economy through their capacity to meet labour market needs, to own and manage or to build a business, to make a substantial investment, to create their own employment or to meet specific provincial or territorial labour market needs.³

IMMIGRANT:

A person who is, or who has ever been, a landed immigrant or permanent resident.⁴

POPULATION CENTRES:

Areas with a population of at least 1,000 and a population density of 400 persons or more per square kilometre. Taken together, population centres and rural areas cover all of Canada.⁵ Population centres are classified into three groups, depending on the size of their population:



Small population centres,
with a population between
1,000 and 29,999



Medium population centres,
with a population between
30,000 and 99,999



Large urban population centres,
with a population of
100,000 or more.

REFUGEE:

This category includes immigrants who were granted permanent resident status on the basis of a well-founded fear of returning to their home country. This category includes persons who had a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or for political opinion (Geneva Convention refugees) as well as persons who had been seriously and personally affected by civil war or armed conflict, or have suffered a massive violation of human rights.³

RURAL AREA:

All areas outside population centres. Taken together, population centres and rural areas cover all of Canada.⁵

SMALL METROPOLITAN AREA:

A census metropolitan area with a population between 100,000 and 500,000.²



OVERVIEW

Successful immigration is more than simply attracting and bringing in newcomers, but also welcoming them, making them feel at home, and giving them the opportunity to thrive.

Initiatives over the past two decades to recruit and settle immigrants outside large urban population centres have had inconsistent effectiveness.⁶ Immigrant settlement patterns and ensuing population growth trends are not evenly distributed across the country, and many small and medium population centres struggle to retain newcomers.⁶ With dwindling and aging populations, a shrinking labour force will have significant implications for Canadian prosperity.⁷

In this report, we present six case studies highlighting immigration settlement and retention in the communities of Brooks, Alta., Fredericton, N.B., Rimouski, Que., Smiths Falls, Ont., Swift Current, Sask., and Whitehorse, Yukon. These communities were intentionally selected to focus on the retention struggles outside large urban population centres.

We examined immigration and settlement programs, attraction factors to newcomers, and

lived immigrant experiences. To do so, we carried out 38 interviews with immigrants to Canada and other stakeholders, analyzed services offered by settlement agencies and other organizations, and reviewed literature on the topic.

This work focuses on the municipal level and aims to empower community service providers to contribute to enhanced newcomer and resident support, inform the public sector to revive and sustain local economies through a work force strengthened by immigrants, and encourage the private sector to keep good employees through informed retention plans. The report identifies enablers and barriers to the successful long-term settlement and retention of newcomers outside Canada's large urban population centres, and provides recommendations that may be adopted by multiple stakeholders.

Quality of life has been a prevailing theme; culture, community, and connectedness help people to feel settled. Fostering an environment of inclusion and diversity, while addressing barriers such as racism and xenophobia, will enable towns to truly welcome newcomers.



OUR CHALLENGE

Canada has a rapidly aging population and a tight labour market due to declining fertility rates and mortality levels over the past 40 years.⁷ This has led to labour market gaps and declining consumption and housing activity, which are crucial to sustained economic growth. While the population in Canada grew by 1.7 million people to over 35 million from 2011 to 2016,⁸ over 80% of this growth is attributed to permanent and non-permanent immigration.⁹

The Government of Canada has stated that “Economic immigrants are a central pillar of Canada’s economic recovery and future economic success: they are educated, fill targeted labour market and skills shortages, they contribute to innovation, workplace

diversity, and have the skills needed to quickly integrate and adapt to the Canadian labour market.”¹⁰ Immigration thus has significant implications for infrastructural development and maintenance, innovation, cultural development, and social service delivery.

Approximately 60% of labour migrants who arrived between 2006 and 2016 settled in the Montreal, Vancouver, or Toronto Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs), with newcomer retention rates of 85%, as compared to retention rates of only 58% in small metropolitan areas.¹¹ The imbalance of distribution is even more pronounced at the provincial level; in 2019, 84.4% of all immigrants settled in Ontario, British

Columbia, Alberta, and Quebec.⁹

Many communities outside of large urban population centres have not benefited similarly from migration and have continued to experience declining populations,^{12, 13} leading to labour market shortages,^{14, 15} and increased costs of public services per capita.

In response to this imbalance, federal and provincial governments have promoted migration outside of large urban population centres, including through regional programs such as the Atlantic Immigration Program, Rural and North Immigration Pilot, and Francophone immigration, in addition to provincial nominee programs. However, while these programs have been able to attract growing numbers of immigrants to small and medium population centres, retaining immigrants in these areas and achieving long-term settlement remains challenging.

For instance, the five-year retention rate for immigrants that landed in 2014 was only 42.4% in New Brunswick, compared to Ontario's retention rate of 93.7%.¹⁶ In fact, all provinces and territories report retention rates of 73% or lower, except for Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, and Quebec (in declining order).¹⁶

These low rates highlight the necessity of adequate settlement services and programs to promote immigrant retention, without which communities will not meet their labour market needs. Our challenge therefore lies in developing policy solutions to support the long-term integration and retention of immigrants outside large urban population centres.

"We believe
if we inspire
change within the
workforce it will
trickle down into
the community
and make it a
better place."

*Sumayyah Emeh-Edu,
Canopy Growth*

METHODOLOGY

Conceptual Framework

Developing immigrant settlement policy solutions that reflect the values and goals of modern-day Canadian society is only one of our objectives. We also aim to provide a practical tool that organizations can use to enhance the inclusion of newcomers in Canadian society, namely a conceptual framework called the Value Proposition Canvas (Figure 1).¹⁷ It addresses each stage of the settlement process as a value chain, from policy adoption to its efficient and localized implementation. We demonstrate the value of this canvas by applying it to assess what is happening on the ground. Ultimately, this analysis illustrates how to design effective strategies to ensure successful long-term settlement.

The canvas acts as a map to analyze the fit between the needs of newcomers and the services offered to them, thereby evaluating the value proposition created by public policies and local initiatives.

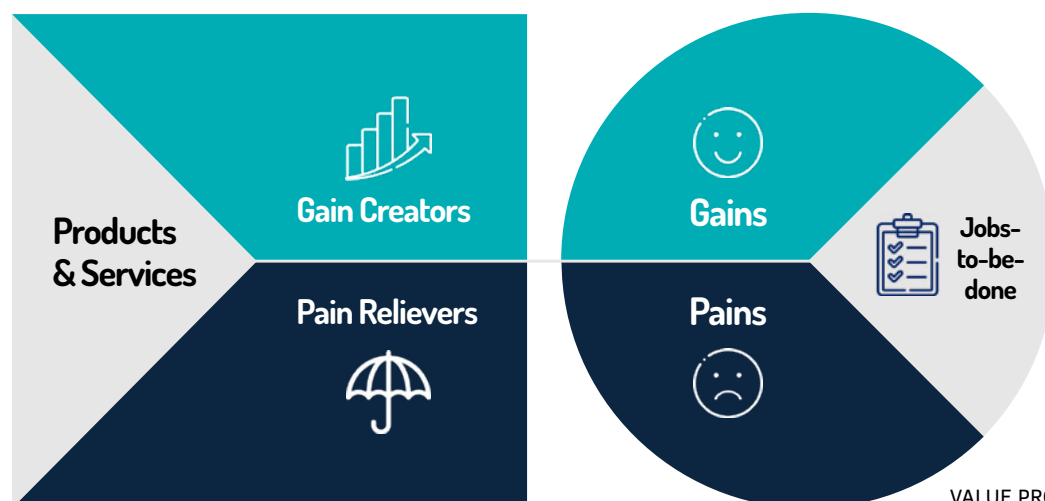


FIGURE 1
VALUE PROPOSITION CANVAS ¹⁷

Value Proposition Canvas—Left

- Products & Services illustrate what is offered to newcomers in terms of settlement programs and services;
- Gain Creators describe the resources that create benefits and positive experiences for them; and
- Pain Relievers depict the methods that remove or alleviate barriers to settlement.

Value Proposition Canvas—Right

- The job-to-be-done is the long-term and satisfactory settlement of newcomers outside a large urban population centre;
- Gains refer to benefits that they expect or desire before, during, and after settling in a new community; and
- Pains represent barriers that they experience throughout their attempts to settle.



After we identify the products and services offered to newcomers, we can assess how they either create gains or relieve pains. The canvas structure then helps to connect expected gains and experienced pains with the ones that the value proposition respectively creates and relieves. Through this process, we can easily recognize the needs that are not currently addressed or satisfied. We can generate tangible calls to action, keeping in mind the “fit” of the proposition. This visual framework proposes a common language when communicating across different governance levels (federal, provincial, municipal) and sectors (public, private, non-profit), as well as with the target group.

We can also identify a multitude of “jobs”, as settlement involves numerous diverse tasks, responsibilities, and actions. By splitting the job-to-be-done into several activities, we could obtain greater detail and a more in-depth perspective of newcomer needs and applicable strategies. However, focusing on a single job

provides a consolidated canvas that facilitates both understanding of the settlement value proposition and a common discussion starting point among different communities.

The Value Proposition Canvas has been widely used in the business world, and adapted here to a format using terminology more appropriate for public policy.

The canvas accounts for the complex considerations affecting public decision-making, and complements the process by visually illustrating the results of the analysis. Using this innovative method, the development process maintains focus and structures policies and their implementation around the target group: newcomers. The use of the canvas before the process emphasizes what must be learned about newcomers and what must be tested in the value proposition, while the use of the canvas afterward will assist in analysis and evaluation of the “fit” of the proposition with the needs and expectations of newcomers.

Case Studies

To support our research and help populate the canvas, we conducted six case studies featuring small and medium population centres across Canada. These communities fall outside any Census Metropolitan Area, as defined by Statistics Canada.⁵ The communities studied are Brooks, Alta. Fredericton, N.B., Rimouski, Que., Smiths Falls, Ont., Swift Current, Sask., and Whitehorse, Yukon. They range in population from 8,780 (Smiths Falls) to 58,220 (Fredericton).



CREATING SPACES: FREDERICTON, N.B.

Sebastián first arrived in Canada as a Peruvian international student, working toward his Master's Degree in urban planning at McGill University. While Montréal was a great city, he found it difficult to integrate socially. An opportunity later arose to move to Fredericton and he took it. Starting out with the City of Fredericton as a planner,



he was able to put his education to good use, and eventually took on the role of community liaison. Building on his experience and passion, Sebastián's work took on an immigration focus. Working together with NouLAB, he led an initiative to create spaces for community engagement. This project sought to create areas for long-time interaction for newcomers: places where people could share and learn about different cultures, talk to each other, and build a community. These spaces included a Living Library and a Convo Café, which both served as great opportunities to develop meaningful conversations with community members and create deeper interactions across cultures.



ACKNOWLEDGING DIVERSITY: SMITHS FALLS, ONT.

As the mayor of Smiths Falls, Shawn Pankow, willingly acknowledges, there is much work to do within the town when it comes to recognizing and accepting diversity. It is through this lens that Mr. Pankow and his counsel commissioned a study on racism and diversity within the community, requesting that residents of visible and ethnic minorities participate, to gain a more complete understanding of the needs of all members of the community.

We carried out 33 interviews, both remote and in-person, with stakeholders across the identified population centres. Stakeholders included settlement agency employees, immigration consultants, municipal leaders, public servants at the municipal and provincial/territorial levels, RCMP and local police forces, private enterprises, and both recent and non-recent immigrants. Interviewers used a guiding set of questions to ascertain the enablers and barriers within the communities in question in relation to immigrant settlement. The impact of racism and xenophobia was deliberately raised in each interview.

Five contextual interviews were also conducted, in-person or virtually, to gain an understanding and appreciation of the enablers and barriers to immigrant settlement on a national scale. The interviewees were representatives from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, the Canadian Index of Migration and Inclusion, the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, the

Institute for Canadian Citizenship, and the Immigrant Employment Council of British Columbia.

While particular attention was paid to exploring the role that xenophobia and racism have on settlement across geographies, the interviewers sought to uncover other barriers and enablers to settlement outside of major urban centres. The method used to uncover key enablers and barriers was consistent with grounded theory, whereby revelation occurs through interviews rather than a predetermined hypothesis. Inductive analysis determined the various themes that impact settlement across these settings.* The interviewers then validated the themes identified through the analysis and compared them to those identified through similar work identified in the literature review. These themes populated the Value Proposition Canvas, which identified the gaps and opportunities, created connections, and helped formulate recommendations.

* According to Patton, "inductive analysis involves discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one's data. Findings emerge out of the data, through the analyst's interactions with the data, in contrast to deductive analysis where the data are analyzed according to an existing framework."¹⁸



DIAGNOSIS

The Canadian Landscape

The complex and differing social and economic dynamics across regions have made it impossible to implement a “one size fits all” approach to immigration, particularly outside large urban population centres.¹⁸ Several programs have been initiated across Canada over the years with varying degrees of success. Comprehensive studies have been completed at both the community and provincial level, but very little research is available on immigration into small and medium population centres in Canada on a national scale.^{19,20}

Despite the need for immigrants to settle there to fill labour force shortages, many small and medium population centres struggle to retain newcomers over the long term. A review of existing literature demonstrates that part of this failure can be attributed to a lack of community support and missing sense of belonging for newcomers, in addition to issues of racism and xenophobia.²⁰ Canadians may not be as friendly as the stereotype suggests. A report by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on Improving Settlement Services Across Canada highlighted, among others, the importance of social immigration in settlement in rural areas as a key best practice.²¹

It's cold here: Lessons learned from the welcome perceived by newcomers to Brandon, Manitoba (2021)

Michelle Lam explored some of these issues while focussing on the medium population centre of Brandon, Manitoba, and the inconsistent perceived friendliness of both current residents and new immigrants.²⁰ Though existing residents believed they were friendly and inviting, newcomers did not echo the sentiment, with many feeling that they were an unwelcome nuisance among the community. Long-time residents did not recognize the contradiction of their statements; many considered themselves welcoming of immigrants while noting that different accents were an inconvenience. The article concluded that the current settlement structure is skewed against newcomers, who are marginalized and discriminated against. It also made recommendations centred around a community approach to settlement through education within the classroom as well as the community.

Every kid from Brazil is not a soccer star: Exploring race as a factor in service provisions for immigrants in Truro, Nova Scotia (2013)

Grace McCaffrey had similar recommendations while studying the small population centre of Truro, Nova Scotia.¹⁹ She argued that a grassroots approach to education, visibility, acceptance, and assimilation is how municipalities can promote and achieve successful immigration and long-term settlement within the community. Through these four approaches, McCaffrey then asserted that the community itself must be willing to transform their mindset from judgment based on stereotypes to accepting responsibility for both overt and invisible racism within the community. Citing a history of white privilege in colonized countries, McCaffrey argued that Canada's foundations are based on racist ideology and that this ideology manifests itself in political and social behaviours to influence Canada's immigration and multicultural policy. To combat deep-rooted habits, Canadians must commit to tangible efforts from all levels of government, as well as the general public.

Beyond the big city: How small communities across Canada can attract and retain newcomers (2019)

In partnership with Pathways to Prosperity, Victoria Esses and Charlie Carter conducted case study research for the Public Policy Forum on five small or medium population centres in Ontario.²² The authors analyzed data on newcomer recruitment and retention rates and performed community consultations with stakeholders to identify priority areas. Short-term recommendations included reviewing current immigration policies, community planning and strategy, promotion and marketing, programs and services, cultural and religious amenities, employment, diversity and inclusion, and francophone immigration. Long-term recommendations involved reviewing all previous recommendations and categories in addition to implementing a housing, transportation, and childcare strategy.

Community Experiences

[Click here to view our Community Profiles](#)



"You don't integrate into Canada, you integrate into a local community."

*Patrick MacKenzie, Executive Director,
Immigrant Employment Council of BC*

Policy Responses: Distribution and Devolution

The federal government has launched a series of initiatives over the years to attract more newcomers to small and medium-sized communities and rural areas, steadily devolving greater autonomy and control over the immigration process to subnational governments.

One such program is the Provincial Nominee Program, a jointly administered federal, provincial, and territorial immigration program that has decisively helped to shift immigration landing patterns outside of the traditionally popular provinces of Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec. Through over 60 immigration streams distributed across 11 provinces and territories (PTs), including regional/rural initiatives like the Yukon Community Pilot, PTs

may nominate individuals to meet their labour market needs and encourage regional economic development.^{23, 24}

In March 2017, following the launch of the Atlantic Growth Strategy, the federal government also launched the Atlantic Immigration Pilot, which focused on supporting the Atlantic provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland & Labrador, and Prince Edward Island. The pilot was designed around three main features: an employer-driven model, settlement requirements for applicants, and multi-party governance with a variety of stakeholders. The pilot ended on Dec. 31, 2021, and subsequently turned into the Atlantic Immigration Program after a positive evaluation showing that expected outcomes were being met.²⁵

The most recent pilot is the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP), which is a community-driven program designed to help smaller communities attract skilled workers and immigrants. Eleven communities were selected to deliver the RNIP, on the condition that they must be either under 50,000 people and at least 75 km from the core of a Census Metropolitan Area, or up to 200,000 people and considered remote, based on the Statistics Canada Remoteness Index.²⁶

The government also operates initiatives to welcome and support newcomers, including the Welcoming Francophone Communities Initiative,²⁷ Canada Connects,²⁸ and the Resettlement Assistance Program.²⁹

Building on the success of these programs, the Municipal Nominee Program (MNP) was envisioned to ensure that immigration better responds to unique regional needs, and to encourage immigration to underserved

communities.²³ The MNP is a new economic immigration program that was mandated to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) in 2019, in order to “allow local communities, chambers of commerce, and local labour councils to directly sponsor permanent immigrants.”³⁰

The program has not yet been launched, but IRCC carried out public consultations for it in 2020, requesting input on the specific objectives of the MNP and indicators of success. The majority of responses indicated that the focus of the program should be on increasing the role of communities in immigration, as well as on distributing the benefits of immigration to underserved communities. The top criteria for selecting communities to participate in the MNP were labour shortages and experience in welcoming and retaining newcomers. The highest ranked measure of success for the program was high retention rates in selected municipalities.³¹



“Smaller cities are sometimes at the forefront of trying innovative things to attract newcomers because they rely on immigrants for economic growth, especially when Canadians aren’t being trained.”

*Paul Holley, Research Director,
Canadian Index for Measuring Integration*

A COMMUNITY DRIVEN SUCCESS STORY: MORDEN, MAN.

One shining example of community-driven settlement done right is the city of Morden's immigration program, now recognized worldwide through word-of-mouth. Located about 100 km south of Winnipeg, Morden is a small and growing city with about 15,000 residents. Facing a labor shortage and population degrowth, Morden chose to proactively attract skilled workers by offering formal support to newcomers applying to the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program (MPNP).

Launched in 2012, their Community Driven Immigration Initiative is a success story both in replenishing the local workforce and in retaining newcomers over the long-term. About half of Morden's population growth was attributed to immigration between 2011 and 2016³² and around 80% of workers remain in the area.³³ This retention rate stems from a robust selection process that focuses on people who want to be part of a small town and from the extensive services and assistance provided upon arrival.

Prior to selection, Morden settlement services ensure that expectations are clear and that newcomers have a good sense of what the community and jobs will be like. Newcomers are not left on their own upon arrival but are taken care of. This significant personal touch is made



possible only through the tight-knit community of a small town. The city also developed a welcome inclusion toolkit for employers to apply in the workplace and works with community organizations to provide further assistance and services. Creating connections lies at the center of Morden's hosting strategy and focuses on connecting newcomers to other new arrivals and to the community.

Speaking of a social Christmas gathering organized through the local church, Immigration Coordinator for the City of Morden Shelly Voth explains: "They can just feel connected; they can meet people who have lived here for a while. It just helps them make friends when they first come to Morden... we invite a lot of other people from the community who have been here longer, and it is a great way to help people understand what newcomers are like and what different countries are represented. The people that come to meet the newcomers always feel really enriched by getting to know the people who have made the brave step to move."³⁴

Morden ensures that newcomers match the needs of Morden employers, but also that the community reception matches the needs of newcomers: a double-sided strategy that has proven to be highly efficient.

Enablers and Barriers

Building on findings from research on the Canadian landscape, recurring themes to immigrant settlement were identified through interviews conducted with community members in each of the six case study population centres. These themes were labeled as enablers, outlined in Table 1, or barriers, outlined in Table 2 (defined in more detail in Appendix I). They were then organized according to overall frequency throughout all interviews and the number of communities where the issue was raised in at least one interview.

TABLE 1: ENABLERS BY FREQUENCY

Enabler	Total Frequency	Community Frequency
Connectedness / Integration to Broader Community	11	5
Strong Support Network	9	4
Employment Opportunities	6	5
Good Place to Raise a Family	6	3
Safety / Security	5	3
Ease of Navigation	4	3
Access to Religious Centres	4	2
Local Leadership	3	3
Affordability	2	2

The most frequently cited enabler was a feeling of connectedness, otherwise referred to as being integrated into the community. This element was identified as the key factor in successful settlement. Another crucial enabler noted was the existence of a strong social support network. Employment opportunities also featured prominently. Several residents also indicated that their community felt safe and like a good place to raise a family.

TABLE 2: BARRIERS BY FREQUENCY

Enabler	Total Frequency	Community Frequency
Racism / Xenophobia and Intolerance	19	6
Discomfort Living Outside an Urban Centre	9	6
Underemployment / Barriers to Foreign Credential Recognition	9	5
Inadequate Housing	8	4
Inadequate Access to Educational Opportunities	6	4
Inadequate Access to Health Care	5	4
Inadequate Public Transportation	5	3
Inadequate Access to Language Education	4	4
Feeling of Isolation	3	3
Inadequate Access to Childcare	2	2
Lack of Family Supports	2	1

"Realizing that Canada is being built on diversity and then putting some in front of others helps no one."

Julien Munganga, Intake worker, Accueil et integration Bas-Saint-Laurent (AIBSL)

—TRANSLATED FROM FRENCH

UNINTENTIONAL EXCLUSION: SWIFT CURRENT, SASK.

Icasiana, an immigrant mother from the Philippines, described her experience settling in Swift Current and volunteering at her children's school. She described friendly but superficial conversations with fellow parents. No one intentionally set out to make her feel unwelcome. However, there was a lack of awareness amongst several parents who were born and raised in Canada and longstanding members of the community. Their familiarity with each other and discussion of shared experiences made Icasiana feel subtly excluded from conversations. She was unintentionally made to feel like an outsider, did not feel welcomed in the environment and ultimately limited her volunteering at the school.



Racism, xenophobia, and intolerance were commonly cited as barriers to successful settlement. Though this issue was often noted as subtle, systemic or existing as an undertone, it was universally acknowledged across all six population centres, though not in every interview conducted. Underemployment and barriers to foreign credential recognition was another impediment that frequently emerged,. It was mentioned in several interviews that people often leave small or medium population centres to have their credentials assessed in large urban population centres and end up staying in that larger centre. Inadequate housing was brought up by eight interviewees

across four communities, referring to either a lack of housing in general or housing affordability. Discomfort living outside an urban centre, inadequate access to health care, and inadequate public transportation were equally referenced, across several communities. Relating to the discomfort in living outside an urban centre, several interviewees described the culture shock that certain newcomers experience when moving from a city of several million people to one of thousands. Finally, concerns regarding inadequate access to health care ranged from access to basic primary care services to access to specialty services, such as those for a child with special needs.

"City of Brooks is 35–40% visible minorities and 30 years ago we would have been in the single digits. Immigration has been rapid. We are the most diverse community in the country per capita basis. Over 100 languages spoken here."

Barry Morishita, Mayor, Brooks

EMPLOYMENT BINDS A COMMUNITY: BROOKS, ALTA.

What binds the immigrants to Brooks, Alta. is economic opportunity. A major meat packing plant provides significant employment to the community. The Temporary Foreign Worker Program created a channel for the plant to hire immigrants and refugees for the roles they needed filled. While there have been challenges, this initiative also led to the development of many innovative approaches to retain newcomers in the community and keep the meat packing plant competitive. Employee dependents can also access benefits such as tuition for post secondary education.

Settlement Value Proposition Canvas

The six population centres studied are characterized by a wide range of geographies, demographic profiles, labour markets, and socio-economic realities. Nevertheless, a number of themes emerged consistently throughout the interviews, which supplemented research findings from published literature. Despite their diverse circumstances, most newcomers to Canada share many similar goals and challenges: they look for jobs, housing, and a community in which they can settle over the long term.

The Value Proposition Canvas tool is used to present the consolidated case study findings (Figure 2), while focusing on the job-to-be-done: the long-term and satisfactory settlement of newcomers outside large urban population centres. Sticky notes emphasize the dynamic development process, which permits ideas to be easily moved around, added, or withdrawn as our knowledge and circumstances evolve.

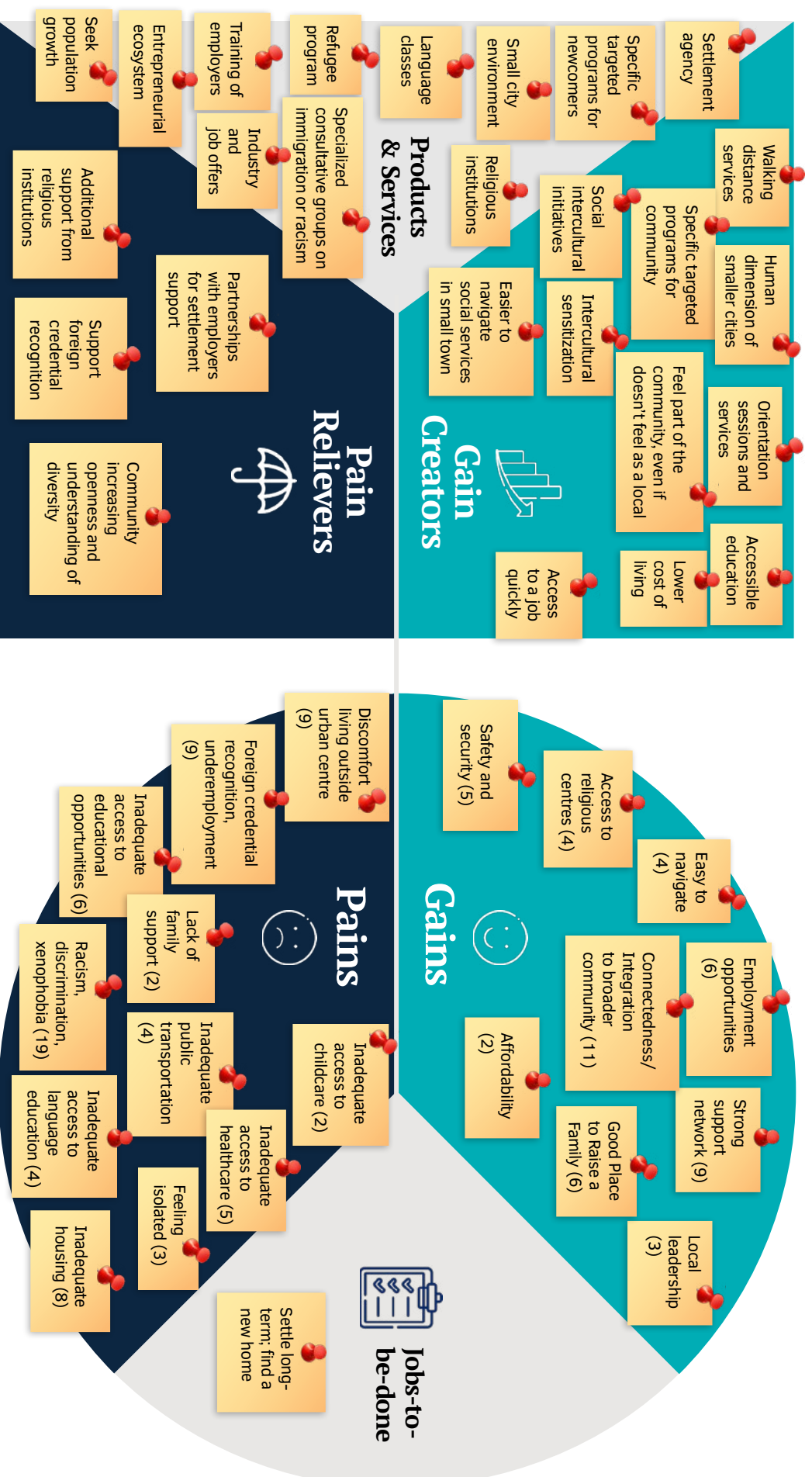
FIGURE 2 - CONSOLIDATED VALUE PROPOSITION CANVAS

Value Proposition

- Seamless settlement, inclusion, and long-term integration of newcomers as residents in Canadian non-urban communities

Targeted Group

- International newcomers



Pains and Gains

The barrier and enabler themes described previously are built upon to populate the canvas (referred to as pains and gains, respectively). The most frequently raised themes are featured in the canvas, thereby highlighting good practices and secondary research that can be shared among other communities, and discerning the main gaps unaddressed by current service offerings.

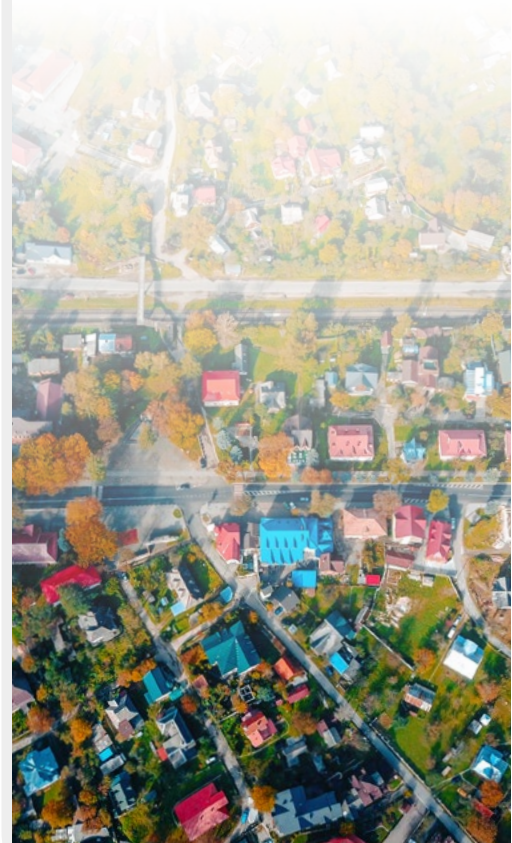
Products and Services

Each pain or gain is linked to a product or service offered to newcomers, which represent pain relievers and gain creators. Settlement services vary widely according to community. Several interviewees indicated that they had chosen to live in a small or medium population centre precisely because it was small: greater job opportunities were offered and their city was actively recruiting and seeking immigrants with targeted programs and support services such as language courses, specific skills training, and social intercultural activities.

- Settlement agencies generally act as orientation mainstays, though some are quite proactive and act as a central resource for a large number of immigrants, while others are more limited and less frequently consulted, or even nonexistent.
- Employers are important service providers, particularly in smaller communities where settlement agencies have more limited capacity, and for economic immigrants.
- Charitable social service providers, community groups and religious institutions can play an integral role for many newcomers.
- Local universities or other educational institutions are major attractors for immigrants, such as in Whitehorse, YT, and Fredericton, NB, primarily in the form of international students, and provide their own specialized settlement support.

"We need to give them a reason to pick us, before they give us an opportunity to pick them."

*Patrick MacKenzie,
Executive Director,
Immigrant Employment
Council of BC*



Gain Creators and Pain Relievers

An analysis of the gain creators and pain relievers determines how the existing products and services satisfy the needs of the target group. Tables 3 and 4 provide sample gain creators or pain relievers for each gain or pain experienced by newcomers and underline examples of gaps that remain to address each gain or pain.

TABLE 3 - GAINS, GAIN CREATORS, AND GAPS

GAINS (ENABLERS)	GAIN CREATOR	GAPS
Connectedness / Integration to Broader Community	Cultural programs such as festivals and holiday markets (Rimouski)	Need for ongoing efforts, as a sense of connection relies highly on interpersonal relationships and being welcomed in both professional and personal contexts
Strong Support Network	Large community of international students (Fredericton)	Lack of recreational and entertainment opportunities for international students
Employment Opportunities	Diversity and equity training opportunities for managers (Smiths Falls)	Limited ability of settlement agencies to only connect immigrants to low-skilled, often precarious jobs that do not match the qualifications and needs of immigrants
Good Place to Raise a Family	Tuition for children offered by major employer (Brooks) Activities for children (Swift Current)	Lack of introductions or connections made to family-friendly recreation opportunities (such as camping) despite ample opportunities (Whitehorse)
Safety / Security	Feeling of safety by residents walking anywhere in the city (Fredericton)	Racism and discrimination leading to feelings of insecurity that are not easily addressed
Ease of Navigation	Ease of wayfinding and accessibility to different parts of the city with minimal time or effort (Swift Current)	Lack of driver's licences among newcomers or inability to afford a vehicle
Access to Religious Centres	Ease of quickly finding people with shared beliefs and ability to join a community	Proliferation of xenophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and other hatred against religious minorities
Local Leadership	Proactiveness of energetic community leaders to act as mentors, guides, and connectors, to welcome newcomers to a community	Limitations of reliance on individuals, and underappreciation and lack of acknowledgement of the most important connectors (a community spirit with a culture of support is more sustainable)
Affordability	Abundance of jobs and low cost of living (Swift Current)	Inadequate public transportation and accessibility challenges to employment or housing opportunities.

"What I've learnt over my research is that inclusion is about equal access to the same opportunities."

Paul Holley, Research Director, Canadian Index for Measuring Integration

The consolidated Value Proposition Canvas demonstrates that settlement agencies are generally able to provide basic information about the host community to newcomers, such as regarding maps, public transportation, available social services, and essential tasks (e.g. obtaining a driver's license). These agencies also serve a critical function in helping newcomers to build a community, especially by connecting them with other newcomers—a powerful shared experience in its own right. Connections are forged informally through orientation sessions and shared activities such as employment training programs and language classes. They can also be developed more intentionally through cultural events and celebrations, such as Halloween pumpkin carving contests and holiday markets, which present additional opportunities for newcomers to connect with long-time residents. In Rimouski, as one of the 14 official refugee host cities of Québec, the local settlement agency manages a program aimed at improving the community's knowledge and understanding around cultural diversity. The agency also leads in organizing social intercultural activities to bring local community members and newcomers together to share each other's cultures.

Jobs are obviously a significant issue for immigrants. Settlement agencies can offer services to help them build employment skills, tailor their resumes, and find and apply for jobs in the community. Employers, in turn, prove to be pivotal enablers as well, often having direct influence not only on the economic fortunes and income stability of immigrants, but also on the quality of their social life. In Brooks, Alta., as an example, a local company pays for the tuition for their employees' children, incentivizing workers to stay. In other local communities, such as Smiths Falls, Ont., a local employer offers training to managers to help them support the settlement process for their employees, and to teach them how to adapt to cultural differences.



EMPLOYER-DRIVEN INCLUSION: SMITHS FALLS, ONT.

Smiths Falls is a small town just 80 km southwest of Ottawa with a population of 8,780 according to the 2016 census. According to Mayor Shawn Pankow, the town was founded in 1854 as result of the Rideau Canal and rail passages and became known as a throughway between Toronto, Kingston and Ottawa. The town boomed with the opening of The Hershey Company Factory in 1963 and became a manufacturing and distribution hub as a result of its strategic location and ability to offer shipment via water, road or rail. In 2008, the closure of The Hershey Factory coincided with a number of closures which led to 40% of the workforce losing their jobs, and an even greater reliance on social assistance in an already-stressed local economy.

Fast forward to 2014, when Canopy Growth, a cannabis company, announced that it had purchased the old Hershey Company's factory and was looking to expand operations. Mr. Pankow was hopeful that Smiths Falls would be known as the "Pot Capital of Canada" and have a similar tourist approach as wine country in Prince Edward County, noting that

world-famous rapper Snoop Dogg had visited the factory in 2018 to promote the company and the town. Canopy Growth estimates that it currently employs between 900-1000 people from Smiths Falls and the surrounding area.

VP of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, Sumayyah Emeh-Edu, Vice President of Talent Management, Cathy Jung and Head of Government and Stakeholder Relations Sean Webster shared their plan to help develop Smiths Falls and Canopy Growth into a diverse and inclusive partnership for all. All three panelists agreed that housing and public transportation is still a major challenge in their talent acquisition process, which includes recruitment from universities and colleges across Canada. This recruitment also includes additional considerations for a diverse population to maintain an equitable hiring process and mandatory training for managers through the lens of the company's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion policy. As Sumayyah Emeh-Edu says: "We believe if we inspire change within the workforce, it will trickle down into the community and make it a better place."

Religious institutions play a key role as well, as they provide a sense of familiarity and constitute a place where a pre-existing community gathers frequently, allowing newcomers to exchange experiences and information. Through regular religious services and holiday celebrations such as biannual Eid festivals in masjids, newcomers

can meet other members of the same faith tradition and escape feelings of isolation.

The services provided by these various institutions not only serve as gain creators, or positive enablers, but also as pain relievers, removing various barriers that newcomers face.

TABLE 4 - PAINS, PAIN RELIEVERS, AND GAPS

PAINS (BARRIERS)	PAIN RELIEVERS	GAPS
Racism / Xenophobia and Intolerance	Multicultural training for employers, engagement with European intercultural cities program (Rimouski)	Long-term cultural sensitization (this process is long, and it takes significant effort to introduce newcomers to a community that is not used to them)
Discomfort Living Outside an Urban Centre	Social connections helping people to feel more comfortable in an unfamiliar environment	Difficulties in understanding and preparing for living in rural communities, given the diversity of community types
Underemployment / Barriers to Foreign Credential Recognition	Settlement agency-facilitated foreign credential recognition with official agencies (Whitehorse)	Need for an in-depth review (agencies are limited in their ability to facilitate this process)
Inadequate Housing	List of housing providers maintained by agencies (Whitehorse)	Inconsistent and insufficient accessible information (newcomers may need more dedicated support); limited housing options and availability
Inadequate Access to Educational Opportunities	Information provided regarding educational institutions and opportunities	Insufficient information (newcomers need guidance and often financial support to plan for and consider educational opportunities)
Inadequate Access to Health Care	Information provided by settlement agencies about nearby healthcare	Limited healthcare facilities and services in smaller communities (newcomers are not eligible for public healthcare until they spend three months in one place)
Inadequate Public Transportation	Transit passes offered by settlement agencies (Fredericton)	Limited public transportation options in outlying areas; need for a driver's license, which can be difficult to get
Inadequate Access to Language Education	English as a Second Language (ESL) and (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) classes provided by settlement agencies	Limitations of language classes, which focus on rudimentary skills and daily use (newcomers need advanced and job-specific language skills to access economic opportunities)
Feeling of Isolation	Attempts to link existing communities of visible minorities with newcomers (Smiths Falls)	Lack of dedicated support (settlement services cannot rely solely on volunteers)
Inadequate Access to Childcare	Childcare services provided to newcomers as they are seeking to settle into a new community	Limitation of childcare services to only a few hours a day; culturally inappropriate services
Lack of Family Supports	Opportunities provided for newcomers to communicate regularly with family members, wherever they may be	Difficulties for family members from outside Canada to obtain tourist or visit visas and to visit and live with their loved ones, which can deepen isolation



One of the foremost barriers that newcomers face is the difficulty in finding gainful employment, especially one that matches their skills and experience. While the story of doctors driving taxis may seem like an overused trope, a 2012 study found that immigrants were indeed significantly overrepresented among taxi drivers, and more than half of them had postsecondary degrees and were likely overqualified for the job.³⁵ Underemployment was named as one of the chief priorities for many of the settlement agencies in the case study communities, which speaks to the prevalence of employment training programs. However, such training programs can only provide limited support and lack the specialized support that high-skilled occupations require.

A related issue is the challenge of foreign credential recognition (FCR). While settlement agencies facilitate the process, they cannot ensure a full-depth review, partly due to the fact that the FCR process is decentralized and uncoordinated.³⁶ Depending on the occupation and need for evaluation, immigrants may go to one or more of the following types of organizations: (1) provincial and territorial credential assessment services, (2) regulatory or professional bodies, (3) educational institutions, and (4) employers.³⁶ These organizations often systematically devalue foreign credentials,³⁷ demonstrating what has been called a new “head tax”, echoing the exclusionary, racist Canadian policy against Chinese immigrants that was in effect less than a century ago.³⁸

NEWCOMER SETTLEMENT IS TWO-PRONG: BROOKS, ALTA.

Settlement agencies play a dual role in both community readiness and newcomer settlement. According to Mohammed at the Brooks & County Immigration Services, only 40% of newcomers access settlement agencies. If all settlers accessed their services, they would not be able to meet the demand based on funding levels and resourcing. Many newcomers find connection with people from their home communities. For example, Somali newcomers connect with other Somalis in established neighbourhoods. Focus needs to shift to real integration and connecting newcomers with the larger community to create a true sense of belonging.



Newcomers reported discomfort living outside urban environments, with noted challenges of isolation and a lack of family support. Social activities and opportunities for cultural interaction provided by settlement agencies, universities, diaspora groups and religious institutions are crucial in addressing and responding to these, yet insufficient in and of themselves. Social relationships are not easily built, particularly in small and medium population centres where newcomers do not blend in easily and are often unprepared for the rhythms of daily life outside urban environments.

Lack of access to amenities and social services is a recurring pain for many immigrants, and therefore a major consideration for settlement agencies and actors. They excel at providing

information, often highly up-to-date, on where newcomers can find housing, enroll their kids for school, access health care, or build language skills. However, they only offer the first step, and actually accessing these services takes time and could benefit from dedicated support to navigate the bureaucracy.

The pain of racism, xenophobia, and intolerance in various communities is also one that a wide variety of settlement actors can help relieve. Social activities, cultural sensitization efforts and intercultural exchanges organized by settlement agencies and community groups can go a long way in reducing the likelihood of discrimination. These agencies can also help connect victims of discrimination with human rights institutions and law enforcement agencies.



DISCUSSION

Settlement Services Gaps

Service providers may view the gains created and the pains relieved by a specific service as a success. However, the canvas pushes us to go further and assess not only whether the services do create gains or relieve pains, but also if these gains and pains are the ones that matter most for newcomers.

Gaps refer to deficiencies in the quality or efficiency of a service or product to create the gains and relieve the pains listed in the newcomers' profile. Gaps can generally be grouped under two categories: the absence of a service or the inadequacy of the current offer to address the real need. These gaps are presented in order of importance for newcomers based on their frequency of appearance during interviews, identified for each gain and pain or by grouping corresponding gains and pains together.

Most actors in immigrant settlement and retention are aware of several key barriers and enablers, and generally seek to provide matching services that take them into account. However, many of these services are simply not sufficient, particularly for complex issues such as the development of a sense of community and belonging, employment, racism and discrimination, and housing affordability.

Following Tables 3 and 4 above, we discuss the most prominent challenges uncovered through our analysis of the community interviews. Many of these gaps align with ones identified by the Report on Improving Settlement Services Across Canada, including lack of transportation and housing, lack of language services, and the importance and limitations of current volunteers to fill in other gaps.¹⁸

ENABLING INTEGRATION THROUGH EDUCATION: RIMOUSKI, QUE.



Rimouski's settlement agency, *Accueil et intégration Bas-Saint-Laurent (AIBSL)* launched the "Programme d'appui aux collectivités" (PAC) program consisting of a three-year grant to develop community acceptance/openness. Sponsored by the Immigration, Francisation and Integration Ministry of Quebec, this program focuses on community education. Many employers, settlement agency workers, and municipal officers realize that racist and discrimination behaviors often stem from ignorance or a lack of experience with multicultural diversity. As an example, *Moisson Québec*, a community food organisation that provides food to newly arrived immigrants, learned about ham being pork and needing to respect newcomers with dietary restrictions. This pilot project shifted the focus: instead of only asking for more effort from immigrants to integrate into the community, it empowered the community itself through knowledge to create a welcoming and seamless settlement experience.

Connectedness and Support Network **GAIN** / Feeling of Isolation **PAIN**

Two principal gains identified by newcomers that impact their choice to settle in the long term are connectedness to a broader community and a strong support network. We observed from interviews that this sense of connectedness and this support network rely heavily on the personalities of settlement services employees and the local culture, openness, and experience of the host community.

A key enabler in certain cities that create these gains is a pre-existing cultural

community. As an example, there is a strong Filipino community in Whitehorse, where newcomers from the Philippines can more easily integrate and feel that they belong. However, most small cities cannot bank on the presence of strong diverse groups. While many localities design social intercultural activities, mentorship programs or even community training programs, interviewees have noted that there is still much left undone. Interviewees have specified that more programs, funds, and training opportunities are necessary to improve the inclusion of diversity in a city's culture.

Racism, Xenophobia and Intolerance **PAIN**

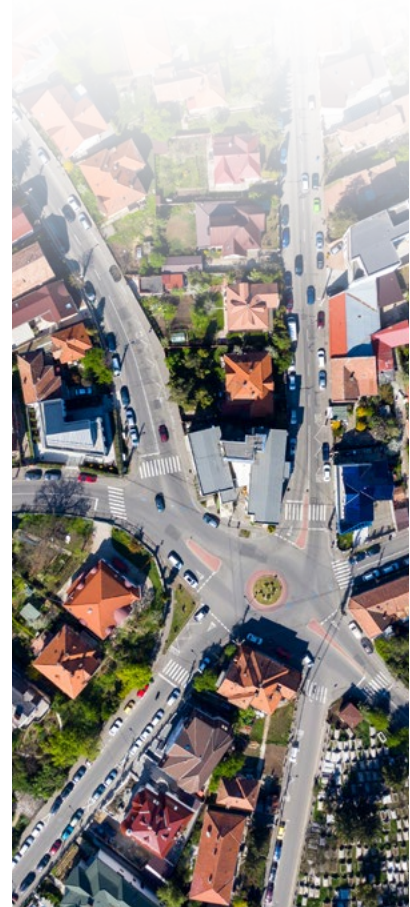
Interviewees described contrasting experiences with racism, xenophobia and intolerance (grouped henceforth under “racism”). In the same city, some people did not witness any racism while for others, it was omnipresent. Gaps identified were partly due to the fact that racism is often more subtle compared to the open aggression that is sometimes witnessed in larger urban centres. In some instances, the help of a Caucasian local was enlisted to call landlords for housing research to prevent a refusal rooted in racism. Another example is racial discrimination in hiring or during employment. Racism also manifested itself through underpaid salaries or a lack of respect for seniority due to race in determining a work schedule.

Communication barriers were brought up in discussions of these more sensitive topics, especially when determining what is considered racism. Newcomers were also noted to have a lack of knowledge around their rights. While some settlement service actors encourage newcomers to report instances of racism, no official channels are at their disposal and a fear of retaliation often serves as a deterrent. Settlement agencies also have a limited mandate and few services available to help immigrants identify and address any issues they may face. Two agencies interviewed admitted that they were not equipped to respond to human rights complaints or hate crimes, which points to the importance of collaboration with law enforcement agencies and human rights councils.

While community leaders may denounce racism and seek to sensitize a community unfamiliar with culturally different outsiders, they may have limited impact in the short term and can certainly be overshadowed by broader cultural trends and political sentiments. This issue is therefore a key gap that has an impact on many of the gains or pains experienced by newcomers, including their sense of belonging, safety and fulfilling employment.

“When you are noticed, you *feel* noticed, both positively and negatively.”

*Mohammed Hashim,
Executive Director, Canadian
Race Relations Foundation*



Employment Opportunities **GAIN** / **Underemployment and Barriers to Foreign Credential Recognition** **PAIN**

Newcomers hope to find a job that corresponds to their credentials and experience, both for themselves and their families. Labour shortages in small and medium population centres have created multiple job openings. However, this gain creator is often unable to meet the need for finding a fulfilling position, which relates closely to the pain of underemployment and barriers to foreign credential recognition (FCR). While some settlement services providers (agencies, federal employees, etc.) provide support for the FCR process, the undertaking itself is very prohibitive both in its results and the administrative steps involved.

Many newcomers are underemployed and are forced to work in lower-paid jobs despite being experienced professionals. The criteria for providing FCR would benefit from constant review to ensure communities can benefit from the untapped potential of immigrants. Barriers include the high lead time, extensive documentation required, significant repetition or redundancy, and the lack of communication among relevant administrative entities.

Discomfort Living Outside an Urban Centre **PAIN**

International newcomers may come from varied settings, often including large metropolises, where a dynamic and stimulating environment characterised their lifestyle. Newcomers have expressed feelings of discomfort experienced either by themselves or members of their family, especially younger members, as a result of

living outside an urban centre. Larger cities offer the benefits of anonymity and ease of integration, which is not possible to the same extent in smaller communities. Immigrants, particularly if they are racialized, are more easily recognized as outsiders. Moreover, small and medium population centres often have fewer and more limited recreational opportunities, which can contribute to culture shock in a new environment. This gap points to the importance of considering the role of recreational activities and amenities in the creation of a stimulating environment that can contribute to a sense of connectedness and belonging.

"I think that when you're such a visible outsider, there's a lot of pressure to conform, fit in, be nice, but that pressure can be oppressive ... being able to be seen or unseen is a luxury that people look for."

*Mohammed Hashim,
Executive Director, Canadian
Race Relations Foundation*

FINDING SOLUTIONS THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS: RIMOUSKI, QUE.



The settlement agency in Rimouski created an immigration roundtable to share and develop solutions for the most pressing issues in the city. It includes 12 organizations representing the education, health, ministerial and municipal sectors. As one step, this initiative addressed affordable housing needs of international students during a time when the Université du Québec à Rimouski (UQAR) was facing a shortage. UQAR shared this urgent issue at the table, which led to the local Cégep to offer their housing capacity for university students. This dynamic cross-sector organization helped find an efficient and timely solution.

Inadequate Housing **PAIN**

For at least four of the communities surveyed, inadequate and inaccessible housing features prominently. While a settlement agency can provide housing provider lists and even help someone decide between options, it cannot provide the funds needed to secure accommodation or facilitate mortgage eligibility and procurement. Much of current housing is simply not affordable for the tight budgets of most newcomers. Service providers can unfortunately only help orient newcomers and do not have much power to

engage with construction projects, while incentives for promoters to build less luxurious housing are insufficient.

The prevalence of gaps with regards to accessing basic amenities and social services such as housing, education, health care and transportation points to the importance of coordinated planning between different jurisdictions and government entities, especially in the areas of land use planning, community economic development, health care, and educational investments.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Successful immigration settlement and retention is a whole-of-community affair, involving service providers, governments, employers and community members. In the Dec. 16, 2021, mandate letter to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, the Prime Minister asked Minister Sean Fraser to deliver on 13 specific commitments.²⁷ We strongly support these commitments “to strengthen Canada’s immigration and refugee system, including bringing in more newcomers to all regions of Canada who will support Canada’s economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.”³⁹

While the extended list is detailed in Appendix II, we highlight below our top 10 recommendations representing key priority areas and particular opportunities for small communities to shine.

Employ Evaluation Tools to Assess Current Gaps and Identify Targeted Solutions

1



Our primary recommendation builds on the theme of connectedness and integration to the broader community. Small

and medium population centres have the unique ability to develop highly specialized programs tailor-made to their specific communities. Effective solutions can be designed and implemented by municipal governments through the use of tools, such as the Value Proposition Canvas, which can assess gaps between the needs of newcomers and services offered by existing settlement actors. Addressing immigration needs through a broad lens encompassing all stakeholders will allow for a whole-of-community approach that can ensure that both newcomers and local communities alike will benefit.

Create a Municipal Roundtable on Immigration

2



Continuing the theme of connectedness, all immigration stakeholders should be involved in developing solutions. The implementation by municipal governments of a roundtable on immigration involves gathering all key service providers, community members and newcomers to develop local plans of action that can address the needs of all parties.

Engage Service Providers and Employers in All Aspects of Immigration

3



Immigration involves the attraction, selection, settlement, and retention of newcomers and is a significant investment. In turn, immigrants help drive business creation, fuel innovation, fill essential workforce needs and strengthen communities. Municipal governments should fully engage local service providers and employers and involve them with strong roles in the immigration process, particularly regional economic immigration, to ensure that the right fit is found, as indicated in consultations for the Municipal Nominee Program.

Develop an Anti-Racism Strategy

4



A strong community is an inclusive one and many newcomers described incidents of racism and xenophobia. Municipal governments should develop a multi-faceted anti-racism and racism awareness strategy that builds on Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy, encompassing education for newcomers on their rights and laws that protect them in Canada, the role of law enforcement agencies in welcoming newcomers, safe spaces for accessible reporting, fora for newcomers to share their stories, and accountability for agencies in pursuing and prosecuting offenders.

"We really strongly believe in giving people opportunities."

*Jim Middleton,
General Manager,
Northside Creators Market*

Implement an Immigrant Mentorship Program



5 To further counter feelings of isolation and promote a sense of connectedness, service providers should develop mentorship programs that link newcomers to established immigrants from their cultural community who can provide much-needed support and communal aid.

Leverage Technology



6 Strong support networks contribute to feelings of connectedness to the community and there are a multitude of ways to build them. Technology is a great facilitator to bring together multiple parties. Municipal governments, service

providers, and community members should expand the use of technology platforms to connect newcomers with resources for housing, employment, and other essential services. An example is the Welkom-U⁴⁰ app, co-founded by Oluwatosin Ajibola, an international student from the University of New Brunswick.

Subsidize Housing Solutions



7 As one of the major contributing factors to settlement location choice, housing is a growing issue for many immigrants. Municipal governments and service providers should work together to develop social housing solutions, such as rent-to-own options, and provide temporary subsidies to newcomers to access transitional housing options to provide some initial stability as they search for permanent housing.

"When are we really at home?
When the glances of others
make us feel that we are."

*Julien Munganga,
Intake worker,
Accueil et integration Bas-Saint-Laurent (AIBSL)*

—TRANSLATED FROM FRENCH



Provide Accessible Transportation Options



While many small and medium population centres do not have the resources or need for well-developed public transportation infrastructure, newcomers often rely on public transit as their only means of travel. Municipal governments should ensure that newcomers and even large employers are consulted in the design and implementation of public transportation strategies that include community engagement, in order to identify unmet priority needs. Uptake of public transit can be encouraged via the provision of temporary free or discounted passes to newcomers.

Encourage Long-Term Incentives Through Employers



Small communities are often cited as good places to raise a family and thus long-term strategies must include family-centered solutions. As a common driving force for immigration, employers are uniquely positioned to contribute to the retention of immigrants by offering incentives such as tuition programs for employee dependents. Partnerships between municipal government, social service agencies, and employers can yield outcomes that are greater than the sum of their parts.

Promote Local Attractions and Amenities



Finally, small communities do not have at their disposal the resources that large population centres do. However, they have their own unique charms, opportunities, and lifestyle. These cities can ease feelings of discomfort in living outside of urban centres by showcasing their own attributes and advantages, highlighting local attractions and amenities, and promoting their uptake by offering welcome packages and discounted options to newcomers.



The settlement of immigrants outside Canada's large urban population centres is a challenge of national significance and the factors contributing to the settlement of newcomers outside large urban population centres are complex. However, common themes that both enable and present barriers to successful settlement in small and medium population centres have been identified through the examination of existing literature and case studies conducted through direct stakeholder interviews in six communities across Canada.

Enablers to settlement include feelings of connection to the community, the existence of a strong social support network, and employment opportunities. Barriers include racism/xenophobia and intolerance, underemployment and a lack of foreign credential recognition, inadequate housing, inadequate access to health care, inadequate public transportation, and discomfort living outside a major urban centre.

It is mutually beneficial for newcomers to settle in small and medium population centres. The communities, which often face labour shortages, benefit economically from

the settlers who can complement the work force and fill critical job vacancies. The diversity they bring to the social fabric of the community is a spinoff once settlement occurs. For newcomers, these small and medium population centres provide a unique value proposition in that they are smaller and easier to navigate, and settlement experiences are more integrated. The safety, security and connectedness that newcomers note are beneficial at a time of personal upheaval. These smaller cities are also able to more easily take on a whole-of-community approach to provide a more holistic vision to settlement and integration.

Despite a wealth of comprehensive recommendations from a multitude of stakeholders, one of the most underexplored is the prevalence of racism and xenophobia experienced by newcomers in small and medium population centres. While these incidents do take place within large urban population centres, they manifest and are experienced very differently in smaller centres, where there may be a lack of community support. Current policy and long-term settlement strategies are unable to successfully settle newcomers, as they are failing to adequately address racism and xenophobia and establish a sense of community and belonging. This issue must be addressed through local education, training and activities that bring the community and newcomers together while also considering other themes identified as enablers and barriers to settlement.

The Settlement Value Proposition Canvas outlines approaches that could be taken to leverage the enablers to settlement while

addressing and mitigating the barriers.

This tool facilitates a bottom-up process to integrate intermediaries in a decentralized but coordinated manner, such that local service providers on the ground are empowered to fill gaps effectively.

Additionally, through tangible and practical recommendations, municipalities can take note of best practices from other regions. Armed additionally with a framework tool, they are encouraged to develop their own tailored action plans specific to their cities while working together with other intermediaries throughout the immigration network.

We hope that our research findings will help inform organizations about the expectations and needs of newcomers, and contribute to the long-term settlement and retention of immigrants outside large urban population centres, leading ultimately to sustainable population growth, thriving economies, and diverse, inclusive and welcoming communities.

Current policy and long-term settlement strategies are unable to successfully settle newcomers, as they are failing to adequately address racism and xenophobia and establish a sense of community and belonging. This issue must be addressed through local education, training and activities that bring the community and newcomers together while also considering other themes identified as enablers and barriers to settlement.



APPENDIX I: ENABLERS & BARRIERS

Enablers

Connectedness / Integration to Broader Community: A noted sense of belonging and a feeling of being integrated and connected with members of the community at large.

Strong Support Network: A noted feeling of support from family or close friends, particularly from a common cultural community.

Employment Opportunities: Ample and available employment opportunities for newcomers in the community that provide for a good quality of life.

Good Place to Raise a Family: Attributes within the community noted to be a place where it is advantageous to raise children because of safety, opportunity, or ease of accessing services, among other reasons.

Safety / Security: A noted perception that the community is safe and that the individual feels secure and safe living there.

Ease of Navigation: A description of the community that includes ease of navigation in terms of travel throughout the community, wayfinding, and ability to physically access services.

Access to Religious Centres: A noted ability to access religious services and centres to support one's religious needs.

Local Leadership: A noted appreciation for local leadership and the impact it has on one's ability to feel settled within the community.

Affordability: A positively characterized ability to meet one's needs due to cost of living in the community.

Barriers

Racism / Xenophobia and Intolerance: A noted feeling of having experienced either subtle or blunt racism or xenophobia or witnessed demonstrated intolerance towards one's self or others.

Discomfort Living Outside an Urban Centre: A noted discomfort living outside large urban population centres due to the respondent's familiarity with living in a large urban city.

Underemployment / Barriers to Foreign Credential Recognition: A noted struggle to find employment within one's career of choice or within the profession in which one had trained.

Inadequate Housing: Annotated lack of quality, affordable, and/or accessible housing within the community.

Inadequate Access to Educational Opportunities: Noted barriers to educational opportunities for one's self or family members for secondary or post-secondary education within the community.

Inadequate Access to Health Care: Noted barriers to access necessary health care within the community across the care continuum.

Inadequate Public Transportation: A noted lack of public transportation services within the community to meet the desired needs.

Inadequate Access to Language Education: A noted lack of access to second language education opportunities.

Feeling of Isolation: A noted feeling of isolation and loneliness.

Inadequate Access to Childcare: A noted lack of access to quality and affordable childcare services.

Lack of Family Supports: A noted lack of support from family members within the community.

APPENDIX II: RECOMMENDATIONS (EXTENDED)

Appendix Table 5 - Recommendations to Enable Gains

RECOMMENDATIONS	MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT	SERVICE PROVIDERS	EMPLOYERS	COMMUNITY
Connectedness / Integration to Broader Community				
A community must be ready to both receive newcomers and to welcome them, ensuring that programs, services, facilities and employment opportunities are in place to help them become a part of a community. The goal is not merely to attract newcomers, but to retain them.				
1 Employ tools such as the Value Proposition Canvas to assess gaps between the needs of newcomers and services offered by existing settlement actors and identify and validate potential targeted solutions before moving forward with development and implementation.	X	X		
2 Create a municipal roundtable on immigration, gathering all key service providers, community stakeholders, and newcomers to develop a rapid action plan for implementation.	X	X	X	
3 Customize public programs to ease local adaptation by different categories of newcomers and the different needs of each community.	X	X		
Strong Support Network				
A welcoming community requires all stakeholders to examine the fabric of a community, studying the way it functions; and committing to making it inclusive and welcoming.				
4 Expand the use of technology platforms, to connect newcomers with resources for housing, employment, and other essential services in communities across Canada (e.g. “Welkom-U”40 app, developed by an international student).	X	X		X
5 Implement a Cultural Access Pass Program for newcomers to small and medium population centres to create recreational and entertainment opportunities and foster a sense of community connection.	X	X		X
6 Create a dedicated welcome centre where newcomers and locals can come together, share information and build relationships (through art, cooking, etc.).	X	X	X	X
7 Prioritize accessibility and encourage the use of local services by facilitating access to additional language services and providing translation services.	X	X		

APPENDIX II: RECOMMENDATIONS (EXTENDED)

Appendix Table 5 - Recommendations to Enable Gains

RECOMMENDATIONS	MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT	SERVICE PROVIDERS	EMPLOYERS	COMMUNITY
Employment Opportunities Immigrants help drive business creation, fuel innovation, fill essential workforce needs, and strengthen our communities.				
8 Expand the role of local, community-based service providers and employers in the selection, attraction, settlement, and retention of newcomers in regional economic immigration, as indicated in consultations for the Municipal Nominee Program.	X		X	
9 Standardize equitable access—the same opportunity for everyone (not affirmative action) to employment and implement it as the norm in recruitment, hiring, retention, and mobility within organizations and businesses.	X	X	X	
Good Place to Raise a Family A community has a range of public services and facilities appropriate to its needs, including daycare programs, recreation centres, housing programs, libraries, and senior citizen centres.				
10 Offer incentives, such as tuition programs, through employers for employee dependants, which has proven to work as a retention strategy.			X	
Safety / Security Reassurance of safety fosters a more hospitable environment for newcomers.				
11 Invite members of the local police service and/or emergency response to attend newcomer meetings and events.		X		X
Access to Religious Centres A hospitable community will be sensitive to this need, and be prepared to allow newcomers space to practise their beliefs.				
12 Facilitate and provide opportunities for immigrants to practise different religions and celebrate cultural holidays openly and without judgment.	X	X	X	X
13 Encourage cultural events and celebrations within the community to promote more diverse amenities and options within the community (e.g., ethnic food options, places of worship).	X	X	X	X

APPENDIX II: RECOMMENDATIONS (EXTENDED)

Appendix Table 6 - Recommendations to Relieve Pains

RECOMMENDATIONS	MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT	SERVICE PROVIDERS	EMPLOYERS	COMMUNITY
Racism / Xenophobia and Intolerance <p>Many newcomers stated that racism and xenophobia were still prevalent in their day-to-day lives and reported on what they considered micro aggressions or passive aggressive incidents.</p>				
14 Develop an anti-racism strategy encompassing newcomer education on their rights and laws that protect them, local law enforcement engagement, safe reporting, agency accountability.	X	X	X	X
Discomfort Living Outside an Urban Centre <p>Large urban population centres can offer a degree of anonymity and ease of integration; they also have more recreational opportunities and amenities that help foster a sense of belonging. Some newcomers may better identify with larger urban centres with a dynamic and stimulating environment.</p>				
15 Offer welcome packages and discounted options to newcomers to promote local recreational opportunities and urban amenities.	X	X		X
Underemployment / Barriers to Foreign Credential Recognition <p>Acceptance and adoption of foreign credentials continues to lag. Many professionals (e.g. doctors, engineers,) are therefore now working lower paid and lower skilled jobs.</p>				
16 Subsidize professional conversion courses by expanding the provision of low-interest loans for recent immigrants to help them obtain necessary credentials.	X		X	
17 Build on existing pilot programs to further explore ways of regularizing status for undocumented workers who are contributing to Canadian communities.	X			
18 Upskill newcomers through previously gained qualifications, education, and the workplace to be more effective and use previously gained skills.	X		X	

APPENDIX II: RECOMMENDATIONS (EXTENDED)

Appendix Table 6 - Recommendations to Relieve Pains

RECOMMENDATIONS	MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT	SERVICE PROVIDERS	EMPLOYERS	COMMUNITY
Inadequate Housing <p>Inadequate housing is a major contributing factor to settlement location choice. There is currently no credit conversion program from home countries and many people do not have co-signers or sureties, resulting in declined mortgage applications and loans.</p> <p>19 Develop new social housing options, such as rent-to-own and subsidize transitional housing for newcomers to provide initial stability as they search for permanent housing solutions.</p>	X	X		
Inadequate Access to Educational Opportunities <p>There are minimal educational and language skills enhancement opportunities for newcomers who have already aged out of the public school system. There is very little information and a lack of support to help them plan for and consider education opportunities.</p> <p>20 Provide, fund, and facilitate secondary language training and practice opportunities through community centres and networks of volunteers to provide comfortable environments that encourage dialogue through relationship-building and shared experiences.</p> <p>Train school administrators and staff to better integrate and facilitate learning to the children of newcomers.</p>	X	X		
Inadequate Public Transportation <p>Many small and medium population centres do not have the budget or need for public transportation but for newcomers, public transportation is often their only means of travel. Obtaining a driver's license can take years and the affordability of a personal motor vehicle is often not a feasible priority.</p> <p>21 Consult with both newcomers and large employers when developing public transportation strategies and provide access to free or discounted public transportation passes to newcomers for a period of two years.</p> <p>22 Offer taxi or bus systems similar to public or school bus transportation for new employees who do not otherwise have access to transportation.</p>	X			

APPENDIX II: RECOMMENDATIONS (EXTENDED)

Appendix Table 6 - Recommendations to Relieve Pains

RECOMMENDATIONS	MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT	SERVICE PROVIDERS	EMPLOYERS	COMMUNITY
Feeling of Isolation A sense of connectedness often relies on underfunded settlement services employees and the host community culture, openness, and experience. There is a lack of permanent dedicated support, and many services rely solely on volunteers.				
23 Design mentorship programs that link newcomers to established immigrants from their cultural community.		X		X
24 Offer community based programs and interactive seminars aimed at newcomers and volunteers from the community to help with the settlement process, and familiarity within the community.		X		X
Inadequate Access to Childcare Newcomers noted challenges in obtaining childcare services in both work and educational settings.				
25 Provide childcare funding within the education system (e.g. post-secondary or equivalency training programs) and the workplace (e.g. bursary programs or workplace centres).	X	X	X	
26 Provide accommodation for parents, such as remote work or flexible hours in order to offset childcare needs with their spouse or families.			X	



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APPENDIX IV: INTERVIEWEES

Tatheer Ali, Senior Policy Analyst, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

Nicole Andrade, Local Immigration Partnership Coordinator, Ignite Fredericton

Edith Bélanger, Director of economic development, Association Franco-Yukonnaise

Daniel Bernhard, CEO, Institute for Canadian Citizenship

Dan Curtis, Mayor, Whitehorse

Jocelyn Curteanu, Councillor, Whitehorse

Asad Chishti, Community Member, Chairs and Tables, Whitehorse, Yukon

Marius Curteanu, Director, Immigration Unit, Economic Development, Yukon Government

Icasiana de Gala, Executive Director, Southwest Newcomer Welcome Centre

Sumayyah Emeh-Edu, Vice President of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Canopy Growth

Ben Griffin, Community Inclusion Program Manager, City of Fredericton

Amanda Hachey, Director, Economic Immigration Lab

Mohammed Hashim, Executive Director, Canadian Race Relations Foundation

Anika Henderson, Immigration Consultant, Imagine Immigration

Paul Holley, Research Director, Canadian Index for Measuring Integration

Cathy Jung, Vice President Talent Management, Canopy Growth

Andrew Langille, Community Member, Fredericton

Patrick MacKenzie, Executive Director, Immigrant Employment Council of BC

Jim Middleton, General Manager, Northside Creators Market

Barry Morishita, Mayor, Brooks

Julien Munganga, Intercultural community worker, Accueil et intégration Bas-Saint-Laurent

Claudia Munoz, Settlement Advisor, Southwest Newcomer Welcome Centre

Shawn Pankow, Mayor, Smiths Falls

Marc Parent, Mayor, Rimouski

Jocelyn Pelletier, City Counsellor, Rimouski

Sebastián Salazar, Former Community Planner, City of Fredericton

Colette Schoonbroodt, Coordinator of volunteering activities, Accueil et intégration Bas-Saint-Laurent

Doyin Somorin, Population Growth Specialist - Immigration, Ignite Fredericton

Mona Syed, Immigration Officer, Economic Development, Yukon Government

Émilie Thériault-Deroy, Francisation Services Coordinator, Centre de service scolaire des Phares

Sean Webster, Director, Government & Stakeholder Relations, Canopy Growth

Madeleine Whalen, Senior Manager, Member Engagement, New Brunswick Multicultural Council

Mohammed Y. Idriss, Services Manager, Brooks & County Immigration Services

Tiziana Zevallos, Design Researcher, All In Agency

Community Cultural Organization Leader, Whitehorse

Community Organization Leader, Fredericton

Community Policy Officer, Smiths Falls

Community Support Worker, Fredericton

Immigrant and Local Business Owner, Whitehorse

Provincial Organization Manager, New Brunswick

Senior Police Officer, Whitehorse



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Ottawa, ON, Canada, K1P 5G4
613.238.7858



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