

The Resilient Immigrants

*Here's to the security guards who maybe had a degree in another land.
Here's to the manicurist who had to leave her family to come here,
painting the nails, scrubbing the feet of strangers.
Here's to the janitors who don't understand English yet work hard despite it all.
Here's to the fast food workers who work hard to see their family smile.
Here's to the laundry man at the Marriott who told me
with the sparkle in his eyes how he was an engineer in Peru.
Here's to the bus driver, the Turkish Sufi who almost danced when I quoted Rumi.
Here's to the harvesters who live in fear of being deported
for coming here to open the road for their future generations.
Here's to them waking up at 4am, calling home to hear the voices of their loved ones.
Here is to their children, to the children who despite it all become
artists, writers, teachers, doctors, lawyers, activists and rebels.
Here's to international money transfer. For never forgetting home.
Here's to their children who carry the heartbeats of their motherland
and even in sleep, speak with pride about their fathers. Keep on.
— Ijeoma Umebinyuo, Questions for Ada*

An Integrated Lived Experience and Policy Research Report for
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Kate Gunn and Lucenia Ortiz

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Stories and Policy Making: People Informing Policy

The 21st century is the age of migration. Advances in communication technology, accessibility of travel, the need for global exchange of talents and skills, as well as catastrophes triggered by nature, politics and war have opened up waves of migration all over the world. Ultimately, the final physical destination of migrants is in neighbourhoods of cities and municipalities. Cities are arenas where the experience of inclusion or exclusion become real on a daily basis. It is in neighborhoods where migrants can feel joyful connections or fear for their safety. Cities are where recent immigrants meet the providers of services they need and use, make their home, where kids enjoy or dislike school, where decent and suitable employment becomes reachable or a long-forgotten dream, and where they find their identity, their voice and the space to realize their fullest potential. The city represents the closest unit of systems and institutions that migrants interact with everyday.

Cities are also where differences, divisiveness, diversity, plurality prevail; yet this offers the most astonishing possibilities in this age. The possibility of living alongside others who are different from us, learning from each other, creating new worlds with them instead of fearing them. The central question is: How can we, in all our differences, be at home, live together in multicultural and multiracial communities? This question can be tackled at two most essential levels of change: in individuals understanding and adapting to each other's differences and in systems through policies that bridge and transform diversity and differences into new possibilities to benefit everyone.

People and Policy

Policy is about strategy, direction, and about leadership on critical issues of importance to a community and its residents. Policy shapes how we work, how we live together, how we build our cities. It reflects and guides the decisions our political and municipal leaders make and it impacts daily life.

When it comes to immigration, settlement and inclusion, policy is all around us, evolving and complex. It is clear that policies, whether at a municipal, provincial or federal level, or in terms of community organizations, not only create and maintain social structures and norms, but have a direct and immediate impact on people and community well-being.

This Report began by looking at four challenging and provocative questions that reflect how intertwined people and policy are in exploring systems change:

How can we begin to shift attitudes and deepen understanding of the lived realities of those who are newly arrived to Canada?

How can we begin to reframe approaches to structural systems that may be trying to catch up to emerging demographics and changing social realities?

How can understanding both people and policy provide insight into the complexities of diverse newcomer experiences?

How might we make these realities, of newcomers' experiences and of structural policy inadequacies, visible, to shift thinking and provoke change?

From these questions, the first annual State of Immigration and Settlement Report 2021 presents a **People - Policy- Pervasive Ideas Framework**, a triangle that illustrates and

makes the connection among three critical and interconnected elements: *(A graphic triangle may be included if used in the SIS Report)*

People -The Report is grounded in the powerful narratives of recent arrivals to Canada that reflect their grassroots realities of settlement and integration as well as their remarkable resilience and aspirations. These stories help begin to make sense of personal journeys and experiences, offering some generalizable aspects that can inform policy and identify gaps as well as unintended consequences.

Policy - This Report identifies a number of relevant policies, primarily through a municipal lens, that have shaped City structures and work in three areas of focus: Housing Equity, Health Inclusion and Civic and Social Inclusion. Over 45 policies, reports and plans were reviewed mostly at the municipal level but including other orders of government and community. Potential Policy Opportunities to consider at the municipal level and Promising Approaches to watch are suggested.

Pervasive Ideas - Like the proverbial iceberg, much of what we see and how we act is influenced by powerful ideas, assumptions and mental models that are unseen and well below the surface. Identifying them and looking to reframe that thinking is a first step to change.

This **People-Policy-Pervasive Ideas Framework** helps illustrate and understand the web of interconnections, introduce fresh discourse on immigrants, immigration and social inclusion in cities, and realize the complex and intersectional nature of the issue of immigration, settlement and inclusion in an urban context.

The Policy section of this first Report begins to paint a picture of the interconnected web of policies that shape the state of immigration and settlement in Edmonton, primarily at the municipal level. It is an initial step forward in making sense of this constantly evolving and complex issue. Grounding the policy review in lived experience narratives and identifying pervasive ideas underlying these systems is a review made more robust by the People-Policy-Pervasive Ideas Framework.

Finally, this initial Report sets the stage for future reports to examine the broader complexities of scope of other orders of government, and other domains of intersecting impact. Next steps may also include a deeper dive into the effectiveness of municipal and other policies, the unintended consequences and the impact of policies on equity. Evaluating policy impact is a challenging undertaking, as it is not always easy to judge or quantify the ultimate effects of a policy, or prove a sole and direct causal relationship to an outcome especially in complex issues where many factors play a part. A few in depth case studies on the impact of particular policies may shine more light on the impact on recent immigrants and the path forward to change.

Meet the Storytellers

Storytelling is the language of persuasion because any story has to involve a sequence of events and the interpretation of their meaning. A story integrates knowledge of what happened with an understanding of why it happened and a sense of what it means to us. Stories organize knowledge around our need to act and our moral concerns.

Peter Marris. 1996

The Politics of Uncertainty

Twenty-two story tellers shared their stories of migration to Canada and Edmonton - their journey, struggles and strengths, and their hopes and dreams in their new homeland. We will meet five of them - composite stories drawn from the experience of each of the storytellers.

Merla

My hometown is famously known as 'God's Own Country' and truly lives up to the name; the scenery is breath-taking, the greenery is so refreshing, and the food is mouth wateringly delicious. Life was good. I am a specialist in my field teaching at a university and my husband worked in the hospitality industry. However, the economic situation in our country was deteriorating; there were few jobs with uncertain career options. We had a change in government a few years ago and many people are still worried about its stability with so many labour strikes. My husband and I were thinking about our two daughters, 12 and 14 years old, their education and their future. The idea of moving to another country was the most difficult decision of our lives as we were leaving everything behind, but it is a choice that we made for them.

Moving to a new country can be scary and overwhelming under the best of circumstances. The pandemic hit us hard and the whole world was going through a difficult time. There was a lot of uncertainty around everything, there were few jobs on the market and travel put us at a high risk of exposure. Despite all odds, we just had to take the leap of faith and move forward as that was the only choice we had.

We heard a lot about Canada from friends there about how peaceful it is and the free health care. I discovered that I have two former classmates in Edmonton, so I contacted them as soon as our application for permanent residence was approved. We arrived in Edmonton in early 2020. Our friend here helped us with everything we needed to set up a temporary home for a month, drove us around to help us get familiar with the city and helped us find an apartment. We all felt welcomed knowing that there was a "go to" person who told us most everything from shopping to sorting garbage which is so different from my home country. She also helped us with the basic requirements of living in Canada such as getting our social insurance and health care cards. She also connected me to a settlement agency to get us oriented to our new lives.

We got a lot of help with filling forms, information about programs and benefits we could receive as newcomers. Our settlement worker got us to apply for subsidized transit passes for newcomers, leisure access cards, library cards and a lot more! Edmonton Public Library (EPL) was the best - so many books and videos, activities for children.

Edmonton is clean, peaceful and beautiful. The parks are huge and well-kept. We went a lot of times to parks and we had our lunch there. However, my daughters have difficulty taking the bus. They were confused when and how the transit system works. They said they have to take a lot of buses and take 45 minutes for such a short distance to their school.

We went to see our employment counsellors at the agency to help newcomers find work. When I gave her my resume, which I think is impressive being a university professor and a specialist back home, she said you cannot put everything - just put two or three things. I was getting

confused now and found it hard to understand her so I told her to please speak slowly and pronounce well. I have difficulty with English. It was disheartening that all or most of your work experience back home is not taken into account when you apply for a job here. In most instances it feels like you are starting over, and 10 years of relevant work experience suddenly means nothing.

After many months, my husband found a part-time job in customer service and I found something close to my experience as an assistant in a clinic outside of Edmonton. It was a long drive from the city but it's the closest I can get to my education and background.

We understand that finding a full-time job is a big challenge for us even if the pandemic ends. My husband is taking a part-time job to accumulate Canadian working experience while looking for a full-time position at the same time. As for me, I have been preparing myself by improving English and gaining professional knowledge from my work at the vet clinic. Money is tight and barely covers our rent for a two-bedroom apartment and our daily expenses. My eldest will be in university in a few years and we have to earn more to pay for her education.

We know our neighbours, and we have good relationships with them. We always greet each other when we meet. Whoever has difficulties, we are willing to give a helping hand. Just like last winter, one day when our car got stuck in the snow, our neighbours came and helped us to get the car out. They are very nice.

But we also experienced being treated differently. It happened with my husband at work. Sometimes he would talk to a co-worker from our country, someone would come and try to separate them. He felt that they were being sized up. That is prejudice. Because they don't do that with everybody. It wasn't anything serious, but it was just some things we saw here and there where we felt, ok, this is some form of discrimination.

Being still new in the city, I'm not a member of any organization or connected to my cultural community. But I volunteered once in a church to give food to people. And this was a place where I took food from them when I was in need. And so I just offered my service, so now I have a schedule for a bread run.

I don't really know much about how the city works - who is the mayor or city council - although I was interested in local politics back home. I was an activist then and ran for governor as an independent without party affiliation.

In the future, I hope for job security and opportunity for growth in our respective careers. We look forward to setting up our own home in a good neighbourhood. We would like for our children to be educated as professionals, to blend into the new culture and make new friends and feel at home here. Down the road, we will also happily handhold aspiring immigrants and help them make a smooth transition from their home country to Canada and help them settle here, just like some wonderful people did for us.

Joseph

Life was hard back home - the war, bombs, everything, People are killed, the houses are burned. Many bad things are done to innocent people for no reason. Food is scarce and expensive. Sometimes you won't find even bread to eat. It wasn't possible anymore to do the regular daily activities such as going to work, attending classes, and working on the farm. This is the reason why we had to run away from the country and to the refugee camp.

We had to travel to another country by car, which was very dangerous, to reach the refugee camp. The roads could have been bombed anytime. We finally reached the camp after a day's travel. We stayed there for three years. Life was extremely difficult. We had no money to meet basic necessities such as food and clothing but at least we were safe.

We registered with the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) to help us find a safe place for us to settle. We were assessed based on our situation and were sent to Canada.

My wife and three children arrived in Edmonton in 2019. We know of a family from our country who live in the city and they helped us upon arrival and found a place to live in. We were connected to a settlement agency who helped us get government support for our living expenses to start our life in Canada.

We were so happy. I couldn't believe there was electricity all the time. The phone connection didn't continually break down. The water is always there. You can take a shower whenever you want. The settlement worker assessed our level in English so we can attend English classes. She also helped us to look for schools for the children that are close to our home so they can just walk to school.

We also got a healthcare paper called the Interim Federal Health Program. So we were able to use it to go to the doctor, to get our healthcare number, and all those things. And even, we were able to go to the dentist on that. There was some coverage on it.

Our settlement worker also gave us information on things to do in Edmonton, such as a card for the recreation centre for free, so we could go enjoy swimming, and the gym, so that was nice too. We went to Fort Edmonton Park, the Zoo and Muttart and the library. We enjoyed them. We know our neighbours well, but we are not connected to any organization except our church. Most of the people we know in Edmonton were people who were in our church.

We also started looking for work while we are learning English. We were sent to job fairs but it's hard to find a job. They always ask you to have Canadian experience. That's one of the struggles, always asking for Canadian experience, but when you are new you don't have one. It's so hard to find a job when you are new – for immigrants. I believe everyone has these difficulties.

About the COVID situation, we follow the usual restrictions (masks usage). Unfortunately, that makes things more challenging to find a job. Many challenges are related to the COVID situation, even the kids have to use the masks while going to school. Many services and companies are closed.

Currently, we have some concerns about our housing. We applied to get an affordable house. We are on the waiting list to get a place which will be easier for us to afford. We heard that many people got that opportunity already to pay \$400 or \$500. We dropped our files off but it has been more than one year that we are waiting for any news.

The other challenge is the language barrier, not only to find work but to participate in my children's school such as parents meetings. This has had a huge impact on helping my children in school.

The strength is that I am determined to study hard so that I can help my children in school. My English level and communication skills are improving. My wife and I will soon complete our English classes and hope to get a job, support our family and be part of society.

Our other worry is the situation back home. I worry about the wellbeing of my family. I still have family over there - my parents and sisters are not doing well economically, there is still violence in the country, and their health and risks with catching COVID.

I have friends who have been here for more than 10 years and they have learned English well and now have good jobs, able to meet their needs and live a good life. This is where I and my family want to be.

Neo (17 years old)

Life back home was pretty chill and good. I was carefree and happy. I live with my mom. My dad decided to sponsor me to get a better education and secure future. Although we were living comfortably back home, it was hard too because there's not much opportunity for good education and employment. My mom realized that too, so she let me go to Canada to live with my dad.

It was very sad, but I had to do it. I was living with my mom there for 13 and a half years. It was hard leaving her to come live with my father. My dad had a job in Alberta

I arrived in Edmonton in 2015 and my dad picked me up at the airport with my stepmom. It was good to see him after so many years. My first impression of Canada as we were driving to my dad's house was that everything is so clean in this country. My dad has his own house in a fairly white community. Everybody was pretty nice for the most part. It wasn't so bad.

My dad taught me a few things about what life is like here in Canada. But I learned many new things from my school. We had a neighbour that was part of the school board who helped me get into the school.

My dad wasn't familiar with how public buses worked so the counsellor in junior high told us that we had to buy passes and tickets. School was good. Everybody was welcoming. I also didn't speak good English at first but I got connected to an agency who works with youth, especially newcomer youth, that helped me learn English. I also got to practice English at school with classmates.

I like Edmonton and the people. Most of them are nice and helpful. I enjoy going to school and to the recreation centres. I miss hanging out with my friends at the rec centre because of COVID.

One of my best memories when I was new here was this program after school for newcomer students. They brought us into a room and talked about everything. They teach us a lot of things. It really helped me get through some challenges in school as a new student.

I volunteer a lot actually! Around the school, I rake leaves and help kids in elementary schools... At Sports Central, we put donated sport clothes such as hockey and baseball team shirts in order in color and size... I also help sort food donations in the food bank.

Although most people I meet are nice people, I've also experienced being treated unfairly too. It's a hard thing to talk about it.

I have two hopes for the future: to finish an engineering degree, earn well and have a stable future, and to bring my mom to Canada.

Marina

My life back home was simple but I wasn't making enough to support my family. I finished a four-year university degree but the salary just wasn't enough to cover our daily expenses. I was the only breadwinner being the eldest in the family. When my mother had a stroke and had to stay in the Intensive Care Unit, I knew that we would have to use whatever savings we had to cover expensive hospital costs. That's when I thought about going abroad to earn more for my family.

I knew friends who have obtained work visas in Canada and were sending money back to their family. They said Canada is a peaceful place and I could have a chance to become a permanent resident. When I thought of how much our Canadian dollar would be when converted to our local currency, I got excited! Finally I could support my family or send my siblings to school even on a minimum wage salary as I did the math in my head.

So I contacted an employment agency to help me find work in Canada. I put up the money to pay for the agency from what's left of my savings and borrowed from relatives. It took two years before I got my work permit to Canada as a temporary foreign worker headed for Edmonton.

I arrived in Edmonton in 2009 during winter. I was thrilled to see snow for the first time, but I wasn't dressed properly so I was shivering in the cold at the airport. My friend's brother picked me up at the airport and I stayed in their house for the night and brought me to the house arranged by my employer the next day.

I started working after I got all my papers such as my Social Insurance Number and Alberta Health Care Card which just took a day to process. I lived just five blocks from the restaurant where I worked. I rented a room for \$600 a month. It's only a small room and learned later that this was too expensive. It was a choice between a cheaper room far from the restaurant, which means I will have to take the bus, and that's over an additional \$100 a month.

There was no real orientation from my employer about Edmonton, how to get around the city, what services are there. There was confusion about my health card that I can only use after three months of residence, which was not accurate. I didn't learn about free library cards until someone told me months later that anyone can get as long as they have an Edmonton address. I only got to know about the parks when I got invited to a picnic in the summer of 2010. I was surprised to see how nice the park is here, plus you don't have to pay for anything, so that's a good thing

For many years, I worked hard because I wanted to have a good record of employment so that my employment contract will be always renewed and hopefully pave the way for permanent residency. However, I am only earning minimum wage so it's really hard to make ends meet. Between paying my room rent, sending money to my family and paying my debts back home that I owed to the employment agency, there's very little left for my daily expenses. I thought it would be an easy life working abroad but it didn't turn out what I expected.

Then I filed a harassment complaint against a co-worker to my employer. At first, I didn't seek help because I am under contract. I am scared that they were going to terminate me or to end my contract but the harassment didn't stop so I reported it. While the people who were involved were terminated, the case screwed up my papers resulting in the expiration of my work permit. By that time, it was very difficult to apply for work permits because of changes in the Temporary Foreign Workers Program. This is how I got to be an undocumented worker.

I don't have the courage to go home and face my family. Besides, there is nothing for me in my country - it is worse now than when I left. I would rather take the risk here in Canada hoping that things will get better and perhaps find legal employment.

Now I don't have access to anything - from health care to housing. With COVID, I'm not sure if I will get treatment if I get infected or be reported when I go for testing or vaccination without a valid Alberta Health card. I couldn't even rent a place because they will ask for an ID, proof of ability to pay and bank statement. I am staying in a friend's house now.

My friends were able to connect me to agencies who provided support without asking questions about my status. I was able to access food hampers, visit city attractions and buy bus tickets. I am also connected to a local migrant organization who ensures that we are looked after. It's a safe place to discuss problems and help each other. Before COVID, we have gatherings with home cooked meals.

Prayers helped me a lot. As long as I am able to go to church, I'll be good, I'll feel better and ready for the next week. Finally, my family, they're my greatest support system, I constantly communicate with them.

My greatest hope for my future to be settled here in Edmonton; to have my status restored so that I can work legally. I think I have proven myself in the many years I've worked hard and showed that I can contribute positively and not be a burden to Canada. I had dreams of going back to school in a healthcare field and earn good income to give my family a better life and someday bring them here.

Anton

In my country, being gay is against the law and a crime. When my identity was revealed, I was attacked by cultural leaders in 2019. It was then that I decided to leave the country. I was hiding in my aunt's place and she helped me to escape by paying for my travel expenses through an immigration agency. They were able to get me a visitor visa from Canada to attend a conference in Toronto in 2019. I didn't go to the conference and went to Edmonton.

Although I didn't know anyone in Edmonton, I was told that it was not as big as Toronto and I might be able to find support easier. I landed at the airport at 1:00 AM and stayed there until it opened. I asked a few people where I can stay. I was still scared to tell them about my personal situation and couldn't tell people why I travelled to Canada. They pointed me to the bus stop to take me to the city. I met someone on the bus who told me that I could stay in a shelter and gave me directions.

The situation at the shelter was much harder than what was in my home. At least over there, I had food and a safe place to sleep. I cried at night and couldn't sleep for those 5 days. I told a worker that I am new to Canada and she immediately gave me the name of an agency for newcomers and provided directions on how to get there. I just asked people to help me find the right bus as I was terrified of getting lost. I was in tears inside the bus when a black lady approached me to ask why I was crying. I told her my story and immediately she asked me where I came from and found out we were from the same country and switched to talking in our own language. I was so happy!

I told her I was living at a shelter, and she was like, "Oh, come with me. I have a room for rent, and you can stay as long as you can behave." I said, "I'll behave." When we reached her house, I met people who are also renters like me and assured me that all of them went through the same experience. They told me that I could get support from the government for my situation, but you have to get connected to a settlement agency. They gave me food and my own room with a bed and mattress.

I will never forget this day - July 8, 2019 - when my whole life turned around. That day, following directions from my new friend, I went to the settlement agency. Since I don't have an appointment, I can either wait for 10 days or try my luck for an opening and wait there the whole day. A couple of hours later, a staff member came out and looked at the waiting room and told the receptionist that he could see me at that time. I immediately sense a kindred spirit. It was like a miracle! When I came in his office, I was scared when he closed the door because it brought back traumatic memories and started crying. He reassured me that there is nothing to fear; that he is gay too and will help me the best he could. He told me to write my story and bring all my papers and we set an appointment for the next day.

My friend brought me to the nearest library so I can use the computer to draft my story. The library was another wonderful experience. I got a free library card with just my name and address!

At the settlement agency, I got help filling out forms to get a refugee claimant status, a \$50 gift card for food, 10 bus tickets and they introduced me to LGBTQ+ Newcomer Group that meets every Friday. We filed my papers at Canada Place and were given instructions about my interview and medical examination. This whole process was so overwhelming for me because I don't fully understand why I need to sign certain papers, reveal my identity or show my passport. I had this fear that I might be sent back to my home country which would mean imprisonment or death. I just had to trust the people who are helping me that they are doing this for my best interest.

Having filled all my papers, I only have \$US200 in my pocket and needed money to pay for rent and food. I got connected to a local church to get food and learned that they could give me money to start my first month in my life in Edmonton. My settlement worker wrote a letter of support that helped pay my first month's rent, a new cell phone and a fee to attend a security guard course so I can get a license.

I was given a work permit while waiting for my application for my refugee status to get approved. My first job was a part-time security guard for K-Days - I was so excited to get my first Canadian pay cheque of \$500 - enough to pay for my room and an extra money for food. At least it's my own money that I earn and not just the cheque I get from Alberta Supports.

Once I got my security license, I found a full-time job as a security guard. I was also very active in the LGBTQ+ Newcomer Group which was the safest place I could ever be - just like my own family.

My hearing was set for September, 2020 and I was so nervous and afraid, but I was pleasantly surprised at how quick it took them to make a decision to let me stay in Canada. They were interested about what my life has been since I arrived in Canada and didn't dwell so much about my hard life in my home country. All the people who supported me - my friends at church, my roommates and settlement counsellor - treated me to lunch. It was the happiest day of my life! I now work for a settlement agency serving refugees and volunteer as much as I can to give back to the community.

This is what I can say about how amazing Canada is: despite many things that could still make our lives better, the most important thing is that there was always someone to help me whether it's someone you meet on the street giving you directions, the kind bus driver who told me how to get to my destination, meeting a friend on the bus, the friendly receptionist in the offices I went to or the thoughtful settlement worker who never failed to give me the best gift for someone in need - the gift of hope.

A Profile of the Storytellers

The storytellers came from 13 countries¹, half of them arrived with their spouses and children, six were single moms and their children, and the rest were single. Nearly two-thirds are female, a third are males, and one preferred to be identified as LGBTQ2S+.

Nearly half of them (45%) were between 30-40 years old, almost a third (27%) are between 41-50 years and the rest are either above 50 years old or below 18 years old.

The storytellers represented all immigration categories and the majority were relatively recent immigrants that had lived in Canada between 1-5 years. The table below shows the immigration categories distributed by length of residence among the storytellers.

¹ Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, India, Jamaica, Mexico, Nigeria, People's Republic of China, Philippines, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and Uganda.

Immigration Category	Length of Residence (in years)				Total
	Less than 1 year	1- 5	6-10	More than 10	
Economic Migrants (Skilled Worker)	2	3			5
Family Class	1	4	1		6
Refugees (Government Assisted, Privately Sponsored and Refugee Claimants)	2	3	1		6
Temporary Foreign Workers (documented & undocumented)		1	1	3	5
Total	5	11	3	3	22

Where storytellers live in Edmonton

Spatial distribution of immigrants in neighborhoods across the city has been an area of interests for researchers. Settlement patterns between new arrivals differ from those who are established migrants. Ethnic neighbourhoods in Edmonton and Calgary are overwhelmingly emerging in the suburbs, with new immigrants choosing to live in areas where they can find the support and social networks of their home communities, according to a 2019 study.²

It is interesting to note that nearly all (90%) of the storytellers live in suburban neighborhoods. Two-thirds of them - in Edmonton for less than five years - are considered as recent immigrants by Statistics Canada.



² Sandeep Agrawal & Nicole Kurtz, 2019. "[Ethnic Spatial Segmentation in Immigrant Destinations—Edmonton and Calgary](#)," Journal of International Migration and Integration, Springer, vol. 20(1), pages 199-222, February.

Models to Ground our Analysis

In describing the resilient immigrant, we present two models to guide us in framing the analysis of stories and policy in this report. We chose these models to highlight a fresh perspective in the immigration and settlement discourse and to shift the narrative about immigrants to a fuller, thicker and richer story of who they are, why they left their home countries and how their lives have changed in the new homeland.

Multidimensional Immigrant Model

Canada's immigration policies have been recognized for their clarity and focus. Canada views immigrants as assets to the country's economic and social vitality. Its well-established points system for assessing the suitability of immigrants to the Canadian labour market has attracted the best of the best from source countries. This rigorous selection process has been overemphasized and has influenced the focus of the settlement process towards ensuring that newcomers find themselves useful in the labour market upon arrival, settlement and integration.

The current settlement approach based in the skills-centred immigration policy has created the "*one dimensional immigrant*"³ where skills that will be invested in advancing Canada's economic growth is the primary consideration. The view of the "*one-dimensional immigrant*" has also focused research on what immigrants lacked and/or struggled with (language for employment, Canadian work experience, etc.) and hence explained their failure to succeed and fully integrate in Canadian society. Studies on social and cultural assets of immigrants are sparse.

Migrants come to Canada as whole persons with multidimensional assets beyond their ability to work. They bring with them more than just individual human capital (education and employment skills). What is not revealed is that they come with tremendous resilience that enabled them to overcome adverse circumstances and barriers most often caused and imposed by systems limited in their understanding of immigrants and their connection to a collective whole known as culture. This resilience comes from their cultural strengths, buoyed by bountiful hopes that their lives will get better in their new homeland.

Supporting the multidimensional immigrant is much more than just facilitating economic integration. It also means fostering a sense of belonging and supporting social inclusion. In essence, integration becomes a pathway to citizenship by which immigrants exercise their rights to fully participate in the political, economic, social and civic life of their new homeland.

This report offers an opportunity to shift this perspective by articulating the *multi-dimensional immigrant* capable of building a just and inclusive Canadian society. This model also directs settlement and integration to the jurisdiction where more abstract levels of welcome such as freedom from discrimination are experienced on a daily basis. Municipalities are in the best position to enable and nurture multidimensional immigrants to demonstrate their contributions beyond the labour market (even if their jobs do not fully match their skill assets), becoming positive tax contributors and more importantly, actively enriching the social and cultural fabric of their new societies.

³ Shields, J., Drotel, J. & Valenzuela, K. 2016. Immigrant Settlement and Integration Services and the Role of the NotforProfit Service Providers: Issues and Trends. RCIS Working Paper 2016/1. Ryerson Centre for Immigration. Ryerson University.

Cultural Wealth Model

The 2016 Census documented Edmonton's diverse population comprising over 200 ethnic groups. They represent a rich mosaic of community cultural wealth - a collective set of social assets that immigrants bring to their new homeland. This way of thinking broadens our perception of immigrants as multi-barriered individuals struggling to adapt in a new country.

Dr. Yosso's⁴ concept of community cultural wealth brings to light a potent cultural resource that has 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, when appropriately used, can be fonts of social innovation in public service and social enterprise.
- **Social capital**
The majority of newcomers come to Edmonton with their families, 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 through formal ethnocultural organizations can teach us about collective relationships that enable them to survive and thrive in an unfamiliar environment. These organizations reflect a robust pattern of reciprocity and trust that help build and enrich civil society in the new homeland.
- **Resistance capital**
Many immigrants from colonized countries bring with them a historical legacy of engaging in social justice. We can learn from their experience of securing equal rights and freedom; tackling challenging problems in the midst of scarcity and believing in the collective power of people. There is an exciting opportunity to transform current ways of designing and conducting public engagement and citizen participation that is genuine and committed to people's interest.

The cultural wealth model links well with the *multidimensional immigrant* as it articulates a fuller set of attributes aptly named as capital or assets that immigrants bring to local communities. These two models illuminate the less visible yet essential elements of what makes neighborhoods and communities vibrant and robust.

⁴ Yosso, Tara J. (2005). "Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth". *Race Ethnicity and Education*. 8 (1): 69-91.
<https://scalar.usc.edu/works/first-generation-college-student/community-cultural-wealth.10>
https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.afa1976.org/resource/collection/1463450F-85AA-4A92-BE23-B583CBE8919A/Hudson_Dec18.pdf

Immigration and Settlement Experience

*Immigrants are like classical explorers who sailed in a ship,
had no idea of what they were going to find,
and have to deal with whatever they find.
(Thought Leader)*

Why people leave their home country and how they thrive in their new homeland has been documented and explained in many studies that produced numerous concepts and theories about migration and the migrant experience.

We believe that the migration journey of immigrants is a lifelong process of striving to be included and to feel a sense of belonging in their new homeland. As well, the path to inclusion is shaped and influenced by the readiness of the host country to create conditions for inclusion - systems, institutions and attitudes of people towards recent immigrants that are welcoming and responsive to them.

The immigration and settlement experience of migrants is punctuated by significant milestones that shape the trajectories of their lives in their new homeland. These milestones start from their lives back home, their decision to move to Canada, arrival and settling in Edmonton, their struggles and impact on their lives, their strengths and their hopes for the future. This is their journey.

Life Back Home: Migration is not always an active choice

The storytellers came from countries in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. From their recollection of why they decided to migrate, it was apparent that migration is not always an active choice. While many felt that they have a simple, good life back home, the overall economic, social and political conditions in their home countries have not provided them with the secure and stable life that they long for. Whether they were migrating as skilled workers, refugees, family sponsored or temporary foreign workers, the decision to migrate was dictated by circumstances beyond their control, such as limited or poor economic opportunities, political instability, war and insecure futures.

We had stable and rapidly progressing careers and a strong support system of friends and family. The work culture however demanded long hours, constant high-pressure situations and we were struggling to strike work-life balance. Having done this for 10 years, we were not sure if we could run the rat race for another 20-25 years without completely burning out. That is when we started looking for options.

My life back home I would say it's not really hard but having a kid and working just to make ends meet, the money that I make a day is not enough to sustain or to give a family a better life because the minimum wage back home is not really good enough to cover the daily expenses of a family.

It is hard for a woman to raise children back home when the economic situation is not that good. We have unemployment issues just because we have so many graduates and very few jobs. And even if you worked so hard, you were not guaranteed results. That was the major issue for me.

Well, life back home was a bit more stressful and there was the huge problem of insecurity. And then accessing physical amenities was also an issue: lights, good roads, good schools.

Civil unrest and war made it difficult to live. The security situations were very risky; raising children in such situations was very scary and unsafe. I left my home country due to the political unrest that was happening many years back.

Safety was a concern and not enough opportunity for me to grow as a person, as a professional. What encouraged me to move to another country was that I was always concerned about my safety and that what was going to happen with me in the future. That is why I decided to find a way to come to Canada.

I was there while everything was, like all the war, bombs, everything, You can't travel by yourself.

I have a very beautiful life there. We have had a revolution since 2011, and after the revolution, there was a change in the government, and all people there are a little bit worried about, and they don't really like the new path. But I was thinking about my daughters, which – they were 16 and 14 years old -- and I was thinking about their future and their universities later on, and seeing the situation, looking at education, it is coming down because of the instability in the government.

It is also important to understand the broader historical and social contexts that frame decisions to migrate. One such context is the legacy of colonization which is not often part of the discourse in the pre-migration narrative. The reasons shared by the storytellers of economic hardships and political instability are vestiges of colonization that have persisted over time in many countries which are now source countries of increasing waves of migrants.

The direct impacts of colonialism were similar across colonized countries, regardless of the specific colonizer: displacement of Indigenous peoples and loss of their culture, disease, exploitation and land degradation. As colonies became independent nations, the colonizers left behind nations with limited capacity to manage what is left of their natural resources and to function in the modern global system. Many of these countries were impoverished and had limited opportunities for advancement of their people in terms of better employment, access to education and health and the right to participate in a democracy. These are push factors for many migrants to leave their countries and seek a stable future for themselves and their families.

The colonial history of migrants unravels a shared journey with Indigenous peoples of Canada, opens the way to build bridges of solidarity and change, and offers a fresh understanding of migrants and immigration.

Why Canada: pull factors (it was the only option!)

A 2009 UN report called “Overcoming Barriers: Human Mobility and Development”⁵ reported that Canada is second to the US with the largest share of migrants among eight immigrant-receiving countries. Canada is perceived to be generally welcoming, has fair immigration policies and opens pathways for permanent residence. The storytellers seem to agree with this and it leaves them with very few choices. They went to apply to Canada even at huge financial cost to them.

My sister said, “Canada needs skilled immigrants,” and more or less encouraged me to come. It took awhile to convince me, but once I saw the wisdom in what she was saying, I saw her perspective. Then I made a decision to apply.

⁵ UNDP. 2009. *Human Development Report 2009: Overcoming barriers: Human mobility and development*. New York. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-report-2009>

My husband and I thought that we should have more experiences in our lives. So, we decided to go to Canada to experience a different life.

My Aunt went to that church and she met the priest, and he was like, "We're helping Syrian people to come. You are Syrian. Do you have any family back home?" And she was like "Yes, I do." And then they filled the papers and everything and they helped us to come over here.

At our arrival in Nairobi, we explained our situation. We have been registered in the United Nations organizations. In UNHCR, people are there to help to create files after explaining the entire situation or case. Then, the United Nations organizations make the decision to send us to Canada.

It was 2018 when I started applying through an agency because applications were open for temporary foreign workers in Canada. It was really hard. I asked my brothers who are working [abroad] to support me financially. Even with their help, I still need to borrow money from a relative with an interest, just imagine a 7% interest rate. Because I paid like \$CDN 5,000 the agency.

Why Edmonton: opportunities, connections and safety

For the last 10 years, Edmonton has remained the fifth city of destination in Canada welcoming 15,556 newcomers in 2019 or 4.5% of all total immigrants. The storytellers gave a glimpse of reasons why they chose Edmonton to be their home in Canada. There were those who did their research about Edmonton and shared their appreciation for a calmer, slower pace of life with access to urban amenities. For many, there were the job opportunities offered by a booming local economy. For some, the connections were important, particularly family members -- from spouse and parent -- and local organizations who sponsored refugees to settle in Edmonton.

Edmonton is a very beautiful, clean city. I enjoy living here. I am happy I chose Edmonton. It's not as fast paced as other places. I guess I enjoy the cleanliness, the services, the health centres. So, so far so good.

We have three reasons to choose Edmonton. Firstly, the weather and climate here are very similar to our hometown's. It is easier for us to adapt to this new environment. Secondly, Edmonton is a provincial capital city with large acreage and population, which means more opportunities available and to increase. Thirdly, Edmonton has better bilingual schools, e.g., English-Chinese bilingual schools. It is for my daughter. These are the three reasons why we chose Edmonton.

We were also looking for a change of pace in life and wanted a slower, affordable, and less crowded city to settle down. That is how we narrowed down at Edmonton.

Well - I like to say that Edmonton chose me. Maybe it was by coincidence, but many years ago I was searching. I was randomly searching for a school, and I came across Edmonton and it stuck ever since. So when the opportunity to relocate to Canada came, I just said, "Oh - we're going to Edmonton." I didn't know anyone who lived in Edmonton, so I started digging up and discovered I had two classmates, former schoolmates, that lived in Edmonton, so we decided to come."

We first arrived in Montreal. My kids were in a Francophone school but they were not able to succeed since they were attending an Anglophone school system in Nairobi. My kids failed unfortunately. This is the reason why we made the decision to move to Edmonton, to allow my kids to attend school in English. We made the decision to move to the city of Edmonton in 2014 because it offered better job opportunities.

My immigration agency told me “Look, you have an offer from Alberta.” I thought maybe it’s better to go to Edmonton because at least I know two people there.

The company I have to work for is based in Edmonton. That’s why I came here in Feb. 5, 2009. It’s winter time and I was excited to see the snow. I was excited.

My sponsors were in Edmonton, so I came directly to Edmonton.

I was sponsored by my husband who lives in Edmonton. I started reading about Edmonton. I found out many good things about this city, that there are many opportunities for immigrant families.

Edmonton: the city of arrival

The first few days of arrival in a new place bring a mix of emotions - joys and fears, excitement and anxiety. The storytellers' first experience of Edmonton brings emotional and profound reactions that often stay with them in their lives in the city. These include encounters through small acts of kindness or negative ones that one wishes to forget. The storytellers shared their first experience of being treated warmly upon their arrival. There were relatives and friends who picked them up at the airport, found housing for them, showed them around the city and were there for them.

We arrived at Edmonton exhausted and headed straight to the quarantine facility that we had booked for ourselves. Lucky for us, the Uber driver was a kind man and he helped us with our luggage as we did not have anyone to receive us at the airport.

We had visited various places when we first arrived in Edmonton. Wherever we went, people were very warm and said, “Welcome to Canada” when they knew we were newcomers. When we went to government agencies to access some services, the staff were enthusiastic and greeted us with “Welcome to Canada” as well.

A friend took me grocery shopping, sometimes to the mall, and with time as we were getting used to each other we shared a coffee from time to time at a local coffee shop. She was always calling to make sure we were okay.

My sponsors and my sister-in-law helped me to find housing, public transit services, finding schools for my children.

Any part of the world you go, it is the people that make all the difference. We started out thinking we will take a day at a time and we had people supporting us every step of the way. Our friend here helped us with everything we needed to set up a temporary home for a month, drove us around to help us get familiar with the city and helped us finalise an apartment.

Some were not so fortunate to experience a warm welcome, especially those who came here as temporary foreign workers.

When I came here, there was no real orientation from the company. It seems like you come in here as a guest worker, this is what you do, this is the place where you work, this is the time/your schedule and that’s all, it’s just all about work

I really don’t know about all the services that Edmonton is giving. We just focus on the work. My employers didn’t inform me about what Edmonton can give to us as a newcomer, as a temporary permit holder. I really don’t know exactly what are the benefits or the kind of services that they offered until I became undocumented.

I worked right away. I could not even enjoy the day because I work the night shift. I sleep during the day. I feel I am being watched at work everyday.

Life in Edmonton: access to supports and connections

Getting their bearings, settling in to navigate the intricacies of a new city can be overwhelming and exhausting for recent migrants. These are critical times that can inform or reveal expectations, learn from moments of culture shock and affect views of their future in their new home. Thus a suite of settlement supports needed by newcomers is an integral part of federal settlement programs. In a 2012 Alberta study⁶ close to only half of recent immigrants have used one or more settlement services, with employment services and English language assessment and instruction most likely to be used. Most of the storytellers (86%) were connected to settlement agencies and generally had positive experiences.

I went with my wife to assess our level in English at the settlement agency. Then they asked us to look for schools close to our address where we can attend English classes and where our kids can attend school as well. We chose schools close enough for my children to walk.

We were provided a lot of assistance, such as introducing the City of Edmonton, orientations regarding how to find a job, how to find a school, how to register our daughter for schooling, etc. They provided a lot of relevant information to us. When we visited the immigrant services organizations, staff would give us a lot of printed booklets/materials. Those materials include detailed information regarding public transit, schools, important government departments' contact phone numbers, etc.

Finding services, I remember someone gave me your number (settlement worker) and told me that you would be able to assist me. At that time I was looking to get into LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) and find a daycare for my daughter.

The settlement agency has supported me a lot in accessing services and supports as a newcomer. When I first called, I felt comfortable because the settlement worker spoke the same language. She is the one who has helped me a lot to access many things here in the city, and she still is.

Yes, my family and I were able to access rec centers, and I found it helpful to improve our health and wellbeing. I got the information about the parks and attraction areas from friends and communities; but I wasn't able to visit due to the pandemic.

Edmonton cares - transit, recreation subsidies, parks and libraries are the best of all!

Knowledge about municipal services is an essential aspect of settlement information that makes a big difference in introducing recent immigrants to their new community. Programs and services available at the City of Edmonton that can be accessed by recent immigrants such as subsidized programs (RIDE Transit and Leisure Access Pass) and free library cards were much appreciated and make a big difference for newcomers to enjoy their first days of living in the city.

We got help with subsidized transit passes for newcomers, Leisure Access cards, library cards. We found these services really good, especially the transit pass which I am still enjoying today.

On our first year, we got a card for the recreation centre for free so we could enjoy swimming and the gym, so that was nice.

⁶ Essesc, VM, Burstein, M, Ravanera, Z, Hallman, S, Medianu, S. March 2013. Alberta Settlement Outcomes Survey Pathways to Prosperity Partnership.

One thing I have been regularly doing since I came is taking trips to the library. It is a gold mine! The catalogue has every single book I have ever had on my To Read list. Though the library is closed now, they still offer take out services and that is just so impressive. The parks where we take our son to play are so well maintained, safe and child proofed. No sharp edges, proper functioning harness, no rust on the metal surfaces of slides etc. are testimony to impeccable maintenance services. Such attention to detail draws my attention as it is not that common in places I have been.

Public transport is extremely reliable here if you can plan. Buses are always on time and whenever in doubt I used to check with the drivers and most of them seemed helpful. There is no hurry or chaos, and they wait till the passengers alight and board the bus and are seated comfortably. Ramp for the stroller and infrastructure facilities for kids, elders and handicapped are new experiences for me - are very impressive. Small, yet thoughtful facilities like these make a huge difference.

Our family has visited many of these places, such as Valley Zoo, Fort Edmonton Park, gym, recreation centers, and many other parks. We felt great when we visited those places. Like the recreation center, my daughter registered for swimming and dance lessons before the pandemic. She went there every week.

During the weekend, my husband and I took our daughter to the recreation center. When she was in her classes, my husband and I would go to the gym to do workouts. When talking about parks, Fort Edmonton Park impressed me a lot. This park is unique and very characteristic. It has diverse architecture. People there are dressed up in old-time costumes, and we can take photos with them. It can help us to better understand Canadian history. I remember that we also took a train there.

My daughter enjoyed Valley Zoo best. There are various animals, including some that can only be seen here in Canada. She likes them a lot. We often went to some other parks as well. We had picnics with our friends while children were having a great time in the water park. The parks are great. They are the places that allow families and friends to get together, and to get relaxed completely.

Strengths Revealed

It's often said that one cannot know one's capacity of strength unless one goes through moments of struggle and adversity. Moving from one's home country to another takes a lot of courage, and trying to build a new life amidst the unknown and the uncertain reveals strength and resilience. The storytellers shared their primary concerns of navigating the employment landscape in the city and overcoming experiences of being treated unfairly. In the midst of these struggles, we also learned of the strengths and resilience of migrants using the best of their personal resources and the deep cultural wealth that they can muster to surmount the barriers so that they can fulfill their hopes for the future.

Struggles in the city

A devastating shock for many migrants when they arrive in Canada is finding out that they may not necessarily find employment based on their education and work experience. Studies after studies have documented that the lack of recognition of foreign credentials, particularly those occupations requiring licensure such as doctors, nurses, engineers, and teachers to name a few, has been a chronic and persistent barrier to immigrant advancement. Whether they came as economic migrants, refugees, family-sponsored or on work permit, most immigrants end up in low-paying precarious jobs that do not match their pre-migration skills and qualifications. This

situation ultimately expresses itself in their income. Low-paying jobs impact nearly all facets of their lives - access to affordable decent housing, food security, extended health expenditures as well as smaller remittances to family back home

Nearly all the storytellers indicated that unemployment and underemployment are their primary concerns that have resulted in limited income for the household and its impact on their personal and family health. They struggled with it from the time they arrived to their current status and it has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic that has disrupted job seeking.

I got a part-time job as a sales check-out clerk. I mean it wasn't my profession. I did that for about a month. And then I got another job with a company with a customer service position as well. (Pre-migration career - MA in Public Health)

The problem is, since I have been a specialist for the past 13 years, (to get licensure) I have to take a basic exam – it's questions from when I was maybe 20 years old, from the time I was in the university. I was struggling with that. I asked around about the basic exam and nobody seems to know including the Canadian Veterinary Association. So I was in the unknown. (Pre-migration career - Veterinary surgeon and university professor)

We found work at a wholesale store. Two days a week, it's hard to pay your bills. But we were trying hard. My husband had this job, the same as me, for four days a week, for both together, But we were trying to pay rent. Oh, by the way, we tried the Food Bank. So the food bank, they helped us a lot too in the beginning. Because with this salary that we were making, it was just for paying the rent, internet, and that's it. (Pre-migration careers - civil engineers)

We understand that finding a full-time job is a big challenge for us even if the pandemic ends. My husband is taking a part-time job to accumulate Canadian working experience while looking for a full-time position at the same time. (Pre-migration careers - business management professionals)

Temporary Foreign Workers are even in a more precarious situation with debts on their backs to their employment agencies upon arrival and shocked to learn that the job to which they came was drastically different than promised, or had disappeared entirely or they experienced repeated employment standards violations and other forms of abuse and mistreatment such as unpaid overtime, verbal harassment and denial of break periods.⁷

My experience here is not really good. My first employer did not treat me well. We ended up going out in public and exposed the managers and supervisors abuse on the worksite.

The contract stipulated that it's a light cleaning duty job, but we ended up doing heavy duty jobs like carpet steam cleaning. I do carpet steam cleaning by myself. Most of the people on the worksite said that it's a 3-man job but I was doing that by myself. And aside from steam cleaning, I was also doing waxing and stripping in some buildings and offices.

Being able to treat people unfairly and discriminate against them tells us that some people are not acceptable or do not belong in society because of their identity. The experience of discrimination leads to a cascade of stress-related emotions and behaviors that can have long-term effects on mental health. It also speaks about how a city fosters inclusion and belongingness among its diverse citizens. In a 2020 Leger Survey⁸ Edmontonians said:

⁷ Foster, J. & Luciano, M. 2020. In the Shadows: Living and Working without Status in Alberta. Parkland Institute. Edmonton.

[https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/parklandinstitute/pages/1792/attachments/original/1588012847/int_heshadows.pdf?1588012847]

⁸ Vital Signs, 2020. <https://www.ecfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/Final-2020-Vital-Signs.pdf>

- 69% of Edmontonians agree Indigenous people often face discrimination
- 60% agree visible minorities face discrimination
- 57% agree refugees often face discrimination in Edmonton

Some of the storytellers shared their stories of being treated unfairly and their experience of discrimination.

I was with four other girls from my community at a shopping centre. We were there to do a cleaning job. At the break for lunch, we went to the food court and some people at the table next to us started saying discriminatory things. We just ignored them and left. We did not seek for help nor complain to anyone. I guess the language barrier was one reason we did not complain. We just avoided the escalation of the situation. There are always stories that people tell you where others are mean sometimes because you don't speak the language or sound funny when you do.

Sometimes when we are at work, some people stand and they talk, and nobody says anything. But when they see me and this lady standing and talking in our own language, they come and try to separate us. I feel we are sized up. That is prejudice. Because they don't do that with everybody. You only do it when you see certain people talking together. So that is a form of discrimination.

I also experienced discrimination when I was processed in Edmonton Remand. One of the jail guards told me, even though I was not guilty yet of the charge, the jail guard told me you came here to Canada, to do this kind of shit, you guys don't belong here. Yes, for me it's a discrimination. It's something that Canadians or Albertans don't do but those kinds of discrimination is still happening and still ongoing and I would like to bring it to the city council.

If economic integration or success through suitable employment are not addressed in the immediate and long-term, Canada may well experience the social tensions that have troubled other societies. Experiences of being excluded could cause interethnic tensions straining the shared societal values of diversity and plurality. Ultimately, it is neighborhoods in cities that will bear the burden of mediating these tensions, even if the resolution belongs to higher levels of government. Nevertheless, the individual immigrant will harness all that they have under their power and control to build better lives for themselves and their families. The role of municipalities is to ensure that neighborhoods have the necessary support and tools to engage residents in acknowledging diversity and plurality and mediating differences.

Motivation to learn new skills

Storytellers shared various strategies to adapt to their changing environment such as maintaining a positive attitude and learning new skills. They are determined and resolute to succeed in their new homeland.

Since my arrival, I am striving to make my life better; and the reason why I was taking different courses -- English classes, entrepreneurship and many other training -- is to increase the scope of my opportunity and to improve my livelihood. I am still working on that.

Continuing to attend English classes to be able to overcome the language barrier and being able to have good communication skills. That will help me to look for a job to support my family. Once my wife and I will complete our studies (English classes) we will be able to look for jobs to support our kids, to cover our needs such as purchase a vehicle.

We understand that finding a full-time job is a big challenge for us even if the pandemic ends. My husband is taking a part-time job to accumulate Canadian working experience while looking for a full-time position at the same time. As for me, I have been preparing myself by improving English and gaining professional knowledge, while staying home to look after my daughter who is taking online classes.

So I'm currently considering my options, doing some research, and getting to the point where I'm making a decision based on changes in my career, and going back to school to get some more formal education to settle on a new path. I haven't decided yet what I want to do going forward, but I'm researching and talking to people. Hopefully before the end of this year, I should conclude on that.

Valued Cultural Capital

Most often recent immigrants may seek support by connecting with individuals who share a familiar culture, religion, or language. These cultural connections are known as social bonds which enable them to navigate an unfamiliar environment by having someone who shares a natural cultural affinity. They could be friends and neighbors who are of the same culture or formal ethnocultural organizations that provide a robust social network that can ease the settlement process and foster a sense of community. This cultural capital offers a powerful buffer in helping newly arrived migrants as they confront the complexities of settling and adjusting to a new environment.

The storytellers harnessed their cultural capital by connecting with ethnocultural organizations in the community and local churches.

I have no concerns about living in the city; one of the reasons is because the circle of friends in my community.

We know our neighbours, and we have good relationships with them. We always greet each other when we meet. Whoever has difficulties, we are willing to give a helping hand. Just like last winter, one day when our car got stuck in the snow, our neighbours came and helped us to get the car out.

The organization made me feel welcome. It made me feel like I am a member of society and a member of the community that actually cared about me. So it felt good."

I consider them like a family, they helped me. . . During the time that I was really, really down, I was thinking of ending up my life because of a lot of worries. I have them on my back. They never let me down.

Yes, I get help and support from the organization. We have gatherings and events where we can discuss these problems and help each other. We can express ourselves and meet friends there while eating home cooked meals, it really helps a lot.

As long as I am able to go to church, I'll be good, I'll feel better and ready for the next week. Finally, my family, they're my greatest support system.

They are the one who help us a lot, that's why I chose to stay here still in Edmonton. I became active also to the community, like helping the undocumented also, and volunteer during Filipino fiesta or any event that Migrante participate in.

Many storytellers also spoke of the family support, whether they are in Edmonton or back home, that has given them strength and courage in their new journey. The strong family ties in many

cultures have been powerful in maintaining their resilience to the ebb and flow of settlement and adaptation.

The only reason that gives you strength is when you think about your kids; the reason why I'm working here is for them. The things that give me strength to survive or to stay strong.

My family is everything to me and they still talk to me over the phone, FaceTime, but no more in-person meetings, so they don't get sick. The way I overcome or cope with this problem. . .

I try to talk to them as often as I can; I try to call them. They keep reassuring me that they are fine. I am also a very spiritual person; I pray for them. So that's what I do.

Commitment to Edmonton

Social integration can be expressed as one's pride of their community and a belief that most people can be trusted most of the time (generalized trust). The storytellers are able to see the good and beautiful in Edmonton, despite struggling with the challenges that come with moving to another country and the negative experiences of being different. The storytellers spoke of Edmonton in a heartwarming way.

In my first few years, before 2016, I really enjoyed living in Edmonton because I got a chance to meet different people and make friends. The struggle is first, the separation from the family, from relatives, from friends. That's the hardest part of being away and being here by myself. I don't have any relatives here, I'm all by myself.

People complain about Edmonton -- it is a crowded, busy city -- but for me the city is nice, with nice people, and multicultural. The respect of any other countries and religions. There are many organizations that help people in many ways. People are very generous.

I like Edmonton! I like the place, I like the parks, I like downtown. I really want to learn to know how Edmonton was before COVID, because I'm sure that there is a difference.

I believe it is a place of opportunities for families if that is what we want. Even though everything that has happen in the family here, I still want to stay here and give my children an opportunity to grow in Edmonton.

Having peace and tranquility. Because Edmonton is more quiet and less noisy than Toronto. What I like the most: The warm welcome from people in general, the education opportunities for our kids, the financial support from the government, all the other support from the government, the support for the English learning and improvement which will allow us to seek for job and to improve our language skills.

My husband forgot to put his wallet inside the backpack while on the bus. It must have fell off his lap when he got off the bus. . . So we went to the station and they pointed us to the Lost and Found. We went there and found his wallet. I opened it. So nothing had been taken out! I am so happy there is a Lost and Found!

Resilience and Relentless Hope

As immigrants struggle to imagine a future in their new homeland, they have remained fervently hopeful that their dreams and aspirations will be achieved. This is referred to as Aspirational Capital that migrants have an abundance of. The storytellers' visions of their future are inspirational and taken collectively are a potent wellspring to spur creativity and innovation.

I know this is all a process, it takes a lot of patience and dedication to overcome and achieve certain goals. So many things that I have been through since my arrival to Canada I have become a different person. I know there are struggles but we can overcome them.

My dreams and my hopes are to give a better life to my family. My motivation to grow is mostly for my children. Like I mentioned before, Canada is a place where you can grow if you fight for it. I know here my children have access to better education, they will be safe here. I also want to get my education accredited. I am a nurse back in my country, eventually I would like to be able to practice here.

In the future, I hope for job security and opportunity for growth in our respective careers. We look forward to setting up our own home in a good neighbourhood. We would like for our child to blend into the new culture and make new friends and feel at home here. Down the road, we will also happily handhold aspiring immigrants and help them make a smooth transition from their home country to Canada and help them settle here, just like some wonderful people did for us.

I was hoping I can bring my kids here. I'm hoping that here, there's a future for the kids here.

I think I'm hoping for my future to be settled here in Edmonton is to have my status restored so that I can work legally. To my family to bring here for my children to get access. Like my daughter, my daughter is a Canadian, but she cannot get access (to services) because she was tied with my status.

To be able to continue having a good quality of life which has been really good for now, especially with good health.

I want to have my own business, I want to be my own boss; I want my kids to go to university and have the freedom to choose what they want to do, and I have my own house.

Finding a job, having the class 5 driver license, attending training and having some certificates will help us to have a better life. So I am looking for ways to solve those issues.

Firstly, we should work harder to find a job, and then to purchase our own house. Owning a house can make us have a sense of belonging to this city, not a passer-by anymore. Life will be getting better and better. After that, we will spend time traveling across Canada. Traveling can help us to learn Canada well. I believe we will love Canada more when we have a better understanding of it. Last but not the least, we would like to sponsor our parents to come to Canada to live with us together. If so, life will be perfect.

I want my children to grow up to be educated professionals in their field. I want them to contribute to their community. I just want them to be grounded men and women. I want them to also contribute to the development of the community they are part of.

Opportunities: People and Policy

Immigration has been central to the growth of Edmonton. This city has one of the highest immigration rates in Canada, and its workforce includes over 25% immigrants.

Ager and Strang (2008)⁹ presented a conceptual model on understanding integration of migrants and refugees in the host country, and identified ten domains of integration based on their studies of migrants and refugees in Europe. These domains can also be conditions for inclusion that reside both in the individual migrant and the host country. These domains, while discrete and grouped separately, are interdependent. In their model, means and markers such as housing and health enable integration; citizenship and human rights are foundations about being treated fairly and to participate in society as citizens and social and community connections as the “connective tissue” that bridges the exercise of foundational rights and successful outcomes for migrants. The importance of the Ager and Strang framework is that it lends itself to understanding integration processes at the local level. This report will cover three domains in this model: health, housing and social connections.

The City’s most recent formal policy on Settlement and Immigration (C529, 2007) guides the City’s work in this area. This foundational policy commits the City to seek partnerships with other orders of government in order to access funding for projects that address mutual objectives in the area of immigration and settlement. Importantly, it enables the municipality, as a local government and provider of services, to work with other orders of government, other partners and with citizens to promote a “sense of identity, belonging and full participation.”

The policy outlines seven key intersecting areas where the municipality can activate levers to impact the experience of newcomers in Edmonton: Economic Integration, Service Access/Equity, Intergovernmental Relations, Community Building and Inclusion, Immigrant Women and Planning and Coordination.

So although municipalities do not fund or provide settlement services, Edmonton, like all cities, provides this web of critical and complex services and investment to community agencies for all who live in the city, including newcomers. It has become ever clearer that the City needs to continue to attract newcomers and acquire the federal and provincial resources it requires to enable it to address newcomer settlement and integration needs, such as: income support, health and wellness services, housing and transit.

The Cities of Migration platform (<https://citiesofmigration.ca/>) identifies that for things to stay strong, cities need to change. Cities need to show leadership by creating an environment where all sectors and inclusion partners come together to advance new policies and approaches:

When it comes to economic growth, quality of life, and healthy communities in small, medium and regional cities and towns across Canada, what needs to change is not a recognition that immigration brings economic growth, but that it brings social capital as well.

This People and Policy Review Section provides a review of both people and policies in three domains identified as a focus for this Report:

⁹Ager, A. and Strang, A. 2008. Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework. *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 21, No. 2

1. Housing Equity
2. Health Inclusion
3. Civic and Social Inclusion

Of key importance, we begin each section grounding the Policy Review in the insights of newcomers. Each section therefore begins with a summary of the key themes that emerged from Lived Experience narratives shared by the storytellers in the related domain. An overview of what we heard and quotes from these interviews are provided, to offer grassroots, real life commentary and insights.

In each of the three domains, the Policy Review Section follows and includes these elements in relation to the domain or area of focus in question:

- The Role of the City
- Review of policies related to that domain, with a focus on municipal policies
- COVID-19's impact - on newcomers and the City in that domain
- Observation of Gaps and Possibility: Big Ideas -- opportunities for policy change or action
- Pervasive Ideas/Mental Models - established mindsets; concepts to shift them
- Promising Approaches - current or emerging initiatives that offer hope of change

Housing Equity

Housing concerns are the second most pressing issue after income and employment experienced by most of our storytellers. For many of them, as all recent immigrants, housing that offers basic amenities of living comfortably in a safe environment and one that they can afford as they start their life in Edmonton seems to be far from their reach at the moment.

High cost of rental housing

Foremost of these housing concerns is the high cost of rental housing which takes up most of their income for most of those (72.7%) who have been in Edmonton for less than five years. Most newcomers who have been in Canada five years or less are tenants rather than homeowners and half as likely as non-immigrants to own their homes¹⁰. This is the experience most common in the storytellers' experience.

That is one thing I think I find expensive in Edmonton here, especially for a single person. Trying to rent a one-bedroom apartment and you are looking at about \$1000. I think that's a bit pricey. Subsidized rent for newcomers until they can find a job, and find their footing. That would be also good. (Skilled worker, single)

I am renting an apartment, but renting is too expensive and on top of that the landlord raised the rent and I am not working. I was laid off as well so it was so difficult and too much stress. I was also thinking of moving, but moving is hard as well as packing, the responsibility to arrange for the moving. (TFW, single mom with one child)

Regarding housing, I found it very difficult. Until this moment, I am living in the building and the rent is so expensive. I applied at Capital Region Housing. Until today there's no help regarding CRH. This became a burden on my family to have a suitable house, and

¹⁰ AMSSA. Migration Matters. May 2016. Issue 31.

<https://www.amssa.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/InfoSheet31-Housing.pdf>

if I can make any recommendation, it would be that housing is the number one issue for many immigrants. (Government Assisted Refugee with spouse and 3 children)

A household is considered to be in core housing need if they are spending more than 30% or more of its before-tax income on it. In a 2017 National Housing Affordability Survey¹¹, housing affordability problems were more prevalent among recent immigrants living in cities such as Edmonton, where they spent 30-50% of their income for housing. Our storytellers confirm this:

We are renting. Rent is high, the money that is supposed to be used for the children, the Child Tax Benefit, is used for rent most of the time. (Family class, single mom with 3 children)

I've been here for a long time, but as I said earlier, I'm still not settled. Why? Because first and foremost, my income is not enough. Housing here is very expensive, even if you pay for a \$450 bedspace, plus you have to pay your bills, you have to send money back home, especially during this pandemic everything is affected. Not to mention the expenses for my PR (Permanent Residency) application. (TFW, Single)

Lack of affordable rental properties

The limited supply of affordable rental properties is expressed in the long waiting list of applicants for subsidized housing. One of the first lines of support provided by settlement workers to newcomers is finding affordable housing units that they can apply for. The reality is that it takes years to find one, as experienced by many storytellers.

We applied to get affordable housing. We are on the waiting list to get a place which will be easier for us to afford. We heard that many people got that opportunity already to pay \$400 or \$500. We dropped our files off, but it has been more than one year that we are waiting for any news. (Refugee with spouse and 3 children)

Challenges of applying for affordable housing

Applying for rental housing entails a dozen documents to provide and more so if one is intending to apply for subsidized housing. This is often a challenge for many newcomers, who are not familiar with navigating the local housing market, unless they are connected with settlement supports.

Finding a permanent accommodation was not a problem, but the screening process was overwhelming. Lack of a credit history meant that we had to furnish multiple references including one from a previous landlord. (Skilled Worker, with spouse and one child)

I have come to understand that even though this is a place with many opportunities and we can access many services, there is a process for everything, and sometimes it is not easy to access certain things right away. Let's say housing. I have already applied for an affordable low-rent house at Capital Region Housing. There is such a long waitlist even for a single mom like me. I do not know when my application would be approved. (Family class, single mom with 3 children)

¹¹ The Housing Conditions of Recent Immigrant Households Issue 13 – 2011 Census/National Household Survey Housing Series (2017)
<https://assets.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/sf/project/cmhc/pubsandreports/pdf/69093.pdf?rev=4040c0ed-4b90-44c7-8889-73ccb74ca443>

Housing insecurity for those in precarious situations

The idea of Canada as a land of promise: those who seek better employment opportunities and a comfortable life were stunned once they settled in their first home. Those who came to Edmonton as temporary foreign workers (TFWs) find housing as an oppressive reality for them upon arrival. In a study of housing struggles of temporary foreign workers, employers not only put them in crowded housing conditions and restricted privacy, but charged them with high rents notwithstanding that they are working on minimum wage.¹²

Our storytellers confirm this study finding. Some are able to find alternative housing from their social connections in the community.

Plus, the house that we're staying in, it's a staff house with 9 people and 3 bedrooms so we have to pay \$450 per person. (TFW, Single)

Housing is really hard for us, for me, because I'm undocumented. Good thing that we have a lot of friends that support me and my daughter. (TFW, single mom with one child)

Diverse and evolving housing needs of immigrants

Out of the 22 storytellers in our lived experience research, almost 30% are married with 3 or more children, thus requiring a larger housing unit. The 2016 Census in Canada documented refugee housing in Canada and concluded that 39% of refugees lived in unsuitable and substandard housing. This was primarily because they have different housing needs from the rest of the population, from larger family sizes to multigenerational households.¹³

Housing that is affordable, of suitable size, and without need of major repairs would provide refugees with the foundation necessary for successful integration into Canadian society (Recent Refugee Housing Conditions in Canada, 2016).

Policy Review

The Role of the City

Cities are key partners on the settlement journey for recent immigrants in Edmonton, and housing is an essential element. For well over a decade now, Edmonton has been on the forefront of the work on housing and ending homelessness. Progress in this arena depends on all orders of government working together, so cities have adequate resources and can play a resilient, bold role in advancing new approaches to meet evolving newcomer housing needs.

Edmonton's City Plan

- Edmonton City Plan (2021) frames Housing as a cornerstone of building a healthy community and articulates the City's housing and homelessness role as helping Edmontonians build better lives. This framing aligns with the Council-supported EndPovertyEdmonton Strategy, which designated Affordable Housing as one of six Game Changers to end poverty in a generation.

¹² Haynes, W. & Luciano, M. 2020. A Final Research Report: Alberta Workers Association for Research and Education (AWARE). Migrant-Alberta and York University.

¹³Recent Refugee Housing Conditions in Canada (2016 Census Data).

<https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/data-and-research/publications-and-reports/socio-economic-analysis-rec-ent-refugee-housing-conditions-canada>

- City Plan 2021 aims to ground City decisions in equity, dignity and inclusion. The City has also introduced and supports the use of a GBA+ lens to city decision making to ensure input is gathered and different perspectives considered to advance equity.
- City Plan 2021 highlights HOUSING as a key element of urban vitality and wellness and is featured in Goal 2.0 LIVE: I want to LIVE in a place that feels like home. It outlines a Policy Direction (2.2.2.), among others, that clearly states: Ensure affordable housing and local food options to support social equity and meet the needs of all Edmontonians.
- The affordability touchstone is that no one spends over 35% of their income on housing, a goal that local recent research tells us is much lower than the reality of housing insecurity experienced by newcomers in Edmonton. Implementation planning for Edmonton's City Plan is currently under development.

Policies

The Municipal Perspective: The City's **Affordable Housing Strategy 2016-2025** guides the City's provision of safe, adequate and affordable housing across the city. The strategy states clearly that "affordable housing is a municipal purpose and an important component of municipal infrastructure." Grounded in the belief that access to housing is a human right, the strategy's four goals include: increasing the supply of affordable housing across all areas of the city; maintaining supply of affordable and rental housing, supporting tenants, transitioning out of homelessness and coordinating action on housing and homelessness.

The City of Edmonton has a long history of supporting affordable housing. The City does not directly build, operate or maintain affordable housing, but works closely with non-profit housing providers. Through its current programs, the City offers land or grants for the construction of affordable and supportive housing, in partnership with the federal and provincial governments, the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, and non-profit housing providers; advocates for funding; raises public awareness of the need for more affordable and supportive housing and has provided tenant advice on issues.

The City's current housing work is guided by its **Affordable Housing Investment Plan**, which aims to help build 2,500 units of affordable housing and 600 units of supportive housing by 2022. The **Affordable Housing Investment Guidelines** offer direction for the City's Affordable Housing investment decisions to provide limited grant funding to eligible non-profit and private sector entities to encourage affordable housing development in Edmonton. Importantly, they encourage prioritizing projects that respond to community housing needs and involve community engagement, and those with high quality, inclusive and innovative design standards. They also support the City's goal of building 16% affordable housing in every neighbourhood across Edmonton, but notes that achieving that goal depends on federal and provincial support and resources.

When it comes to supporting the development of affordable housing, the City has a key asset in the land it owns. In Spring 2021, an update to the policy on **City Land Assets for NFP Affordable Housing** will be going to City Council for approval. Over the past decade or more, Edmonton City Council has approved the sale of land to not-for-profit housing providers at less than market value for the purpose of affordable housing development. In late 2020, City Council asked City Administration to review this policy on the status of NFP providers and update the land policy to advance affordable housing goals.

The Provincial Perspective: **Alberta's Provincial Affordable Housing Strategy** guides investments in affordable housing across Alberta. In December 2020, the **Affordable Housing**

Review Panel, appointed to review the affordable housing system, delivered its report to explore ways to improve affordable housing in Alberta. It flagged that 110,000 Albertans live in affordable housing with 19,000 on waiting lists. Panel recommendations aim to make affordable housing more efficient and effective, including examining legislation and how housing assets are funded and operated in a sustainable way. Implementation of these recommendations is yet to come.

The Federal Perspective: At the federal level, as of 2017, Canada has grounded its national housing strategy in a human rights based approach and is focused on improving housing outcomes for those in greatest need and the belief that Canadians deserve safe and affordable housing. This **Federal National Housing Strategy (NHS)** is supported by the **Federal National Housing Strategy's Co-Investment Fund** that guides investment in affordable housing, supporting new construction and repair and upgrading of existing stock across Canada. The collaboration and commitment of all three orders of government is more critical now than ever in order to create a new generation of housing in Canada.

COVID's Impact on Housing of Recent Immigrants and the City

Recent immigrants in Edmonton are more likely to spend well over the standard 35% of their income on shelter, with recent studies indicating many spend over 75% of income on housing, leaving little if anything for other basic expenses. While these income inequities impacting newcomers existed pre-COVID, the pandemic has exacerbated issues of housing for migrant, temporary foreign workers, women and newcomers whose income has been disproportionately impacted by job losses and increased precarity of 2020/1.

The Federal Government's **Rapid Housing Initiative 2020/21** is part of its plan to create jobs and support economic recovery, while ending chronic homelessness. In October 2020, the Federal Government launched the new Rapid Housing Initiative (RHI) that invests \$1 billion to create up to 3,000 new permanent, affordable housing units across the country. Edmonton received \$7.3 M direct to City rapid funding, plus \$17 M in project-based funds to increase affordable housing. Support from the Province is still outstanding.

Observations on gaps and possibilities: Big Ideas about Housing Equity

Housing challenges facing newcomers can be seen through a systems lens. What are some opportunities for the City to address gaps and build housing equity for newcomers?

How might the City address the diversity of housing stock for newcomers?

The City can address the housing gap identified so strongly as a barrier in the Lived Experience narratives, by encouraging and investing in diverse and inclusive housing prototypes, models and community-driven new approaches.

Explore New Models - Two examples of how the City might, within its jurisdiction and capacity, explore new models and diversity of housing to meet the existing gap include:

- **Affordable Housing Solutions Lab** In 2016 the EndPoverty Edmonton Road Map called for a community-based learning project to look at housing and zoning innovation in Edmonton. In view of this, Edmonton City Council dedicated funding to the University of Alberta Affordable Housing Solutions Lab. Its work, called *The Pivot*, is about identifying innovations in affordable housing, listening to the voices of lived experience to expand the supply, diversity and accessibility of safe, adequate and affordable housing choices in Edmonton.

- **Safe and Stable Housing for Edmonton’s Vulnerable Newcomers 2020** Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op, Right at Home Housing Society and New Canadians Health Centre, a new not-for-profit focused specifically on improving newcomers’ health outcomes and wellbeing in Edmonton, are exploring a new and innovative project to address the housing needs of Edmonton newcomers. On October 16, 2019, a City Council motion directed Administration to work with the MCHB and other stakeholders to explore this further as a model for future projects.

How might the City address evolving recent immigrants’ housing needs more strategically?

A Strategic Focus - In March 2021, City Council supported work on an Indigenous Housing Strategy, recognizing the unique needs around housing of Indigenous Edmontonians. How might the City also move forward and ground a deeper understanding of the unique and evolving needs of newcomer communities in a more strategic approach? Some initial steps to articulate a strategic approach to newcomer housing needs might provide some direction and lead to a focused municipal Newcomer Housing Approach, grounded in current local data and lived experience. The upside of a strategy may be to avoid one-offs with a more comprehensive plan in place.

Rigorously Apply a GBA+ Lens - An intentional application of the GBA+ lens, approved by City Council, will spotlight the intersecting challenges around recent immigrants housing, health, income and gender, which has emerged as critical COVID outcomes. GBA+ also puts people at the centre, and a continued effort to engage Edmonton newcomers in a meaningful way, as co-creators in change and planning, is vital. It will ensure intersectional housing policies are baked into the City structures that support newcomers and inclusion.

How might the City advocate for systems change?

Advocacy for a New Deal - Cities struggle to address more than their traditional responsibilities of basic services to property without the resources and fiscal tools they need to meet complex, new responsibilities. An outdated property tax system, in fact, means that cities collect only eight cents of every tax dollar. Reform of cities’ funding tools and of their roles is needed to address this gap. Edmonton and the FCM Big City Mayors Caucus have been strong advocates in recent years for Federal and Provincial investment in housing and support of municipalities who are doing the work on the front lines.

How might the City help mobilize local data needed to inform policy and program change?

Grounding in Local Data - Possibly the greatest challenge the City has when it comes to newcomers and housing is not knowing enough about the need, the gaps and how the City can help to address these diverse housing needs. A recent housing survey released in Spring 2021 by the Refugee Settlement Agencies Coalition, is a good example of a current source of data and insight that will help inform decision makers about the housing struggles of immigrants, refugees and other newcomers.

The invisibility of newcomer housing realities may be perpetuated by systems that lack the flexibility and data so badly needed to shift systems and respond to evolving needs. In addition, research indicates that to effectively address barriers to inclusion for newcomers, solid consistent local data and disaggregated race-based data is vital to advance change for immigrant and newcomer populations. The City of Edmonton could leverage its influence to convene key research partners like Edmonton Social Planning Council, Edmonton Local Immigration Partnership, EndPovertyEdmonton and the University of Alberta. The aim would be

to build a robust body of current, evolving knowledge around newcomer resilience, housing barriers and other equity opportunities, including race-based data. In this way, it will make visible newcomer strengths and experiences essential to help shape City policy directions to build social inclusion.

How might the City support more availability and affordability of rental housing?

The Rental Gap - The cost of housing and rental is out of reach, and the waitlist for affordable housing is challenging for newcomer families, especially with job and income loss or precarious work recently magnified by COVID. In this context, we can consider the scarcity of rental housing in Canada as a vulnerability in the system: persistent threats to the system include condominium conversion, lack of funding for affordable housing, and lack of policy support for a broad range of housing types. It is a gap that municipalities, together with other orders of government, need to address with data, flexibility and resilience.

Pervasive Idea/Mental Models

Resilience is defined as the ability of people to bounce back and learn from adversity - and to grow stronger from these experiences. Often it is perceived as a one way street, valuing the extraordinary resilience of newcomers. But can we reframe resilience as a core strength vital both to newcomers and to the communities and systems who welcome them?

The ability to respond, to adapt, to recover and to find new ways to go forward, are strengths of resiliency that are needed by both newcomers and the communities and systems that welcome them. This concept of *bilateral resilience* aligns with the goal of a socially inclusive community, one that cultivates the participation of all, recognizes and develops the capacities of all and works towards a goal of equal opportunity and freedom from discrimination. The concept of resilience, for example, can highlight the need for the housing system to shift to more affordable rental units, not just home ownership. The City can play a key role in shifting this discourse in the community, with an intentional focus on both newcomer resilience and how the municipality and the mainstream can also respond with resilience to advance social inclusion.

A Promising Approach

A Case Study: Applying an Equity Lens to Policy Change - The City can build intersectional policies into City structures, using its GBA+ policy to see the intersecting nature of structural challenges impacting newcomer housing. The City is currently reviewing its Zoning Bylaw that includes analyzing current land use zones in Edmonton, which over time have evolved to segregate people and have unintended and disproportionate impacts.

The review and case study research being done with the City by Dr. Sandeep Agrawal of the University of Alberta will look at questions that municipalities like Edmonton and others are beginning to ask about policy. “What human rights and equity issues should be considered when drafting land use regulations? How can we apply and promote equity in a zoning bylaw?” As part of this leading-edge work, the City will be producing a GBA+ and Equity Toolkit to help consider the unintended outcomes of regulations, and to help City planners check their biases, identify social inequities and explore more equitable measures. By exploring how to make the municipal zoning bylaw more inclusive through a human rights and equity lens, the GBA+ and Equity Toolkit will pave a path forward for all cities looking at unintended outcomes of policies and how to build equity into city policies and plans.

Health Inclusion

The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion defines health as a positive concept that emphasizes social assets, personal resources and physical capacities that help people to lead their lives everyday. This definition essentially captures the importance of health among immigrants; they need to be healthy so that they are able to realize aspirations, satisfy needs, and adjust or cope with their new environment.

Struggling to be healthy

Studies in the last 20 years of immigrant health confirms that newly arrived economic immigrants are typically healthier than the general population, but this so-called healthy immigrant effect declines over time, partly because of the stresses of integration, and it is not found across other classes of migrants¹⁴.

My health is worse than when I just arrived in Canada. I have some digestive system problems. It makes me worry about my health. I think it is because I cannot integrate well into a new life here. When I just arrived in Canada, I felt strange about the food, and the people around me. I am a sensitive person. I feel very nervous when I stay in an unfamiliar environment. You know, tension and stress can affect the digestive system. Moreover, homesickness could be another reason. I have been working hard to improve my health. I contacted my family doctor immediately when I found I had health issues. My family doctor is very dedicated. She referred me to various medical checkups and prescribed [medications] for me based on diagnosis. Now, the disease has been controlled. At the same time, I am looking for alternative treatments, such as traditional Chinese medicine and moxibustion therapy. It affects me a lot. I feel uncomfortable from time to time. I always worry about my health because digestive system disease is hard to be cured. It makes me feel stressed. My husband and my daughter also worry about me too. (Skilled worker, married with one child)

Thanks to the Canadian health care system but...

Access to health care based on need rather than the ability to pay was the founding principle of the Canadian health care system. Our healthcare system is well-appreciated by most of the 22 storytellers but some lament that certain services are not covered by provincial health insurance..

The health care here is very wonderful. (Skilled Worker, married with 3 children)

Health is better now, thanks to the medical coverage and service that Alberta Health offers through its continuous monitoring and easy follow-ups with the family doctor, which provides preventative attention to people. I am healthy. (Refugee, married with child)

I have had interaction with the healthcare system with my daughter, the ballet dancer. She had hip issues because she's a dancer. We went maybe twice. The problem is, chiropractor or physiotherapy, it's not refunded. It's really hard for me to pay that. I was struggling with that. (Skilled worker, single mom, 2 teens)

Before I became a protected person, I was getting full health coverage [through the Interim Federal Health Benefit Plan]. But later on, when I got a skin disease, I went to the clinic near me. I showed them the Alberta Health Card. "Oh, this one just enables you to see the doctor. It doesn't cover anything". I'm like, "What? You guys are joking!" They are like, "No. It doesn't pay for your medication." (Refugee, single)

¹⁴ Lu, C. & Ng, E. Healthy immigrant effect by immigrant category in Canada. Statistics Canada. Release date: April 17, 2019. DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.25318/82-003-x201900400001-eng>

COVID worries - from fear of getting sick to fear of discrimination

In a 2020 study of the impact of COVID on Canadians, recent immigrant participants were more likely to report symptoms of anxiety than other Canadians.¹⁵ Some of the symptoms reported were, "Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge" followed by "trouble relaxing" (79%) and "becoming easily annoyed or irritable" (78%). These same symptoms were also the most prevalent among established immigrants and Canadian-born participants. The storytellers shared this same experience.

We are very worried about the COVID. Even though the number of new cases is decreasing, the coronavirus mutation is increasing. We always wear masks when we go out even just for a walk. But we found people around us did not wear masks. It affects us physically and mentally. Every time I hear COVID-19 news from the media, it makes me feel anxious, and the anxiety can lead to discomfort. I have stopped my daughter from going to play in the playground due to this concern. And this makes her feel lonely and isolated. Now, she becomes afraid of meeting with new people. (Skilled worker, 1 child)

Just because I am a Chinese, people are easily led astray by some lying rumors from social media. As a Chinese featuring obvious oriental character, I am worried about that someone might use COVID as an excuse to treat me unfairly or discriminate against me. (Family class, separated with 3 children)

Health for all?

The COVID pandemic has further amplified the pre-existing health inequalities in Canadian society. Those who came here as temporary foreign workers and lost their status makes them ineligible for health care services that include access to COVID treatment and vaccinations. This is acutely illustrated by storytellers in the report who are anxious and afraid that they might be left behind in the COVID vaccination roll-out.

We had a lot of cases on the 2nd wave of COVID and it makes me scared because of my status, no status. When no status, you don't have access to healthcare when exposed to COVID. So I can't get any medical treatment from the government. (TFW, married with 2 children)

But what most I'm worried about right now, during this pandemic, is the COVID. Like, because if you're undocumented, you don't have healthcare. So I'm worried if I get sick, Where will I go? Do I get a swab test? Or can I get access to a vaccine? Because I am undocumented. That's what I fear most. (TFW, single mom with one child)

Policy Review

The Role of the City

Formal jurisdiction and resource levers for healthcare reside with the Provincial and Federal orders of government when it comes to newcomers; however, it is abundantly clear that cities and local governments play an influential role in the wellness of Edmontonians and of the city in which they live. Despite the lack of explicit responsibility, formal jurisdiction and resource levers, the municipality has an array of opportunities, tools and levers within its purview to catalyze and

¹⁵ [Rose Evra](#) and [Eric Mongrain](#). Mental Health Status of Canadians during COVID 19 Pandemic. Statistics Canada. Release date: July 14, 2020.

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00050-eng.htm>

proactively enhance an urban environment for newcomers. The City has the capacity to promote healthy active living, facilitate connected urban design and safe public spaces, and advance services grounded in dignity and inclusion - all issues made more acute in the pandemic. Listed below are some key City policies that reflect evolving language, understanding and grounding in equity, inclusion and the social determinants of health. These provide a framework to support deeper understanding of the unique needs of newcomers and refugees for relevant, meaningful and culturally safe health care and the need for new models.

Policies

1. Building a Healthy City

ConnectEdmonton 10 year Strategic Plan

The City's 10 year plan has Healthy City as one of its four strategic goals and Connection as a unifying principle: *"Edmonton is a neighbourly city, with community and personal wellness that embodies and promotes equity for all Edmontonians."*

City Plan

This visionary plan, endorsed in early 2021 by Council, puts *planning for people* and wellbeing at its centre: *"Our healthy city encompasses both Edmontonians' wellbeing and the wellness of our communities. It requires that all people have the means to access and maintain a good standard of living."* Some core policy directions, in BELONG and ACCESS include:

- *Edmonton fosters **wellness and mental health** by providing opportunities for all people to engage in community life and supporting those who are isolated, marginalized or at risk. (1.1)*
- *Ensure that **newcomers** to Edmonton feel welcome and supported. (1.1.2)*
- *Improve access to equitable, appropriate and **culturally relevant** amenities and facilities for seniors at the district level. (1.1.1.4)*
- *Ensure the **equitable access of affordable services and amenities** to all Edmontonians. (4.1.3)*

2. Equity, Mental Health and Addictions

Urban Isolation and Mental Health Initiative

The challenges of mental health, connection and isolation have become even more severe than ever, as noted in the Lived Experience narratives shared. The unique challenges facing newcomers are more acute due to COVID-19, with disproportionate job and income loss, stress and lack of affordable housing. City leadership in this wellness area continues to be strong and more critical than ever. This work is closely intertwined with the EndPovertyEdmonton Road Map and its game changer of Mental Health, which saw the City support the development of a Community Mental Health Action Plan and a Suicide Prevention Strategy as part of this commitment.

Over the past seven years, the City Council Initiative on Mental Health and Social Isolation has raised awareness through its social media and outreach around these issues. As Initiative Sponsor Councilor Scott McKeen wrote at the initiative launch: *"Although health care is, strictly speaking, a provincial responsibility, City Council understands that the municipality is in the business of creating a healthy, prosperous and sustainable city, for this and future generations."* As a new City Council convenes in fall 2021 to determine new priorities around initiatives, this Council Initiative merits the continued support and profile of strong Council champions.

3. Reducing Expenses: Access to Leisure and Transit

Leisure access and affordability is critical for all Edmontonians, including newcomers, and is vital to health, wellness and belonging. The City's Leisure Access Program (LAP) makes it possible for eligible low-income Edmontonian families to access participating municipal recreation facilities through an annual or subsidized monthly pass. Lived Experience storytellers reinforced the importance of this and how it has been missed in the COVID shutdown. Similarly, the related Ride Transit Program, another Game Changer in the EndPovertyEdmonton Strategy, launched with support from the Government of Alberta, increases access to transit and thereby to jobs, school and recreation for eligible families living with low-incomes. Like free Edmonton Public Library cards, mentioned frequently in the Lived Experiences shared, this approach puts money in people's pockets directly by freeing them from these expenses so they have money for other critical costs.

4. Investing in Prevention

The City of Edmonton participates in the Family and Community Support Services Program as funded by the Province of Alberta, and is committed to providing leadership and investment to address preventive social service solutions. A recent City FCSS Strategic Alignment offers a Funding Model to strengthen a framework for prevention that supports individual and community wellbeing and safety:

"Our societal tendency is to invest in organizations, programs and services that are designed to tackle the red arrows and mitigate, repair or restore wellbeing after the fact. Investing in early prevention provides the opportunity for individuals, families, and communities to maintain social well-being, sustain themselves, and help to avoid costly and painful recovery and rehabilitation efforts."~ Strategic Alignment, Executive Summary

COVID's Impact - City Response and Health Inclusion

With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, cities have been buffeted by emergency health challenges, swift responses, fiscal restraints and the need to pivot and adapt like never before. Public health has become a focus of public discourse in its grave impact on lives, livelihoods, community life and physical and mental wellness. Edmonton's **Reimagine Report** anticipates recovery post-COVID, noting timelines may be impacted, but reaffirms commitment to the bold City Plan vision for Edmonton's future.

Newcomers and racialized Edmontonians have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and the emergency measures - including mental and physical health impacts, employment and income loss, increasing food insecurity and the stress of these and other interrelated factors combined. **Edmonton's Emergency COVID-19 Response Plan 2021**, funded by the Province, is a response to these long-standing inequities, in which the City has mobilized a Community Coalition of twelve agencies to deliver targeted outreach to diverse Edmontonians disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. It aims to address public health issues in an effective, coordinated and culturally relevant way, grounded in inclusion, trust and dignity. The pandemic has starkly revealed the need for all orders of government to work together, collaborating with diverse community partners - schools, health regions, business, faith communities and citizens - in order to advance community wellness and safety.

Observations on Gaps and Possibilities: Big Ideas about Health Inclusion

The Lived Experience storytellers highlighted systemic challenges for newcomers around health and wellness, pre-existing barriers made more acute by COVID-19. From a City perspective, it is useful to examine health challenges facing newcomers through a systems lens that shapes policies, decisions and investments. How does the system in place discourage health inclusion

and where are the gaps? How might the City address these systemic barriers, within its jurisdiction, and enhance a more equitable and inclusive approach for newcomer health and wellness in Edmonton? Below are two ways the City and partners can begin to shift some of the basic building blocks of the systems that support inequities in health.

How might the City advance the idea of income as a core Determinant of Health?

Leading by Example - The City might play a lead role in influencing other agencies and Edmontonians to recognize that income is the most influential determinant of health and wellness. The City can continue to play a leadership role as it has with its Living Wage policy, impacting thousands of City workers, through advanced Social Procurement policies to support underrepresented contracted workers hired on City projects, and by community benefit agreements by looking at development through an equity lens to support standards on living wages and equitable access to job opportunities for newcomers.

Supporting EndPovertyEdmonton Advocacy for Change - Many of the policies that can address health inclusion lie outside the City's jurisdiction and require advocacy to other orders of government for change. Just five years ago, EndPovertyEdmonton was launched as a community- grounded coalition to steward the work to end poverty in a generation in Edmonton. It can play a powerful leadership role to address a number of existing and emerging systemic issues that impact health inclusion and advocate for income equity as a solution. With continued City investment, commitment and participation for the second 5-year Road Map, EndPovertyEdmonton can forge ahead on its work on income as it relates to poverty - and wellness - and to champion movements for systems change that focus on income inequity that will impact health of newcomers. This might include the Basic Income Alberta campaign, which advocates for the value of a basic income, that would address health as it relates to income, guaranteeing that everyone, regardless of their work status, can meet their basic needs and live in dignity.

How might the City advance food security and justice to support health inclusion?

A Vision for Food Justice - Food insecurity has grown in severity in Edmonton during the pandemic, particularly among newcomers and it is clearly tied to lack/loss of adequate income and housing costs and has acute health and wellness impacts. Early in the pandemic in 2020, funders and governments stepped up to support food banks and community food distribution to address the growing food insecurity. Increasingly, the importance of providing culturally relevant food and supporting food justice approaches have emerged as central to this issue. This includes the need to look for innovative models of food support that involve dignity and choice, and that move beyond established food charity models.

In May 2020, the City convened a table of food security players to provide a platform for information sharing and coordination. A subcommittee, Edmonton's Newcomer Food Security Table, emerged as well to focus on exploring food justice, new models of food distribution grounded in choice and dignity, and the need for culturally relevant foods. Continued, robust City support to these community leadership tables could catalyze the emergence of a culture of food dignity and a common vision among mainstream food organizations and newcomer community efforts, perhaps engaging the City's Edmonton Food Council to find synergy with their focus on urban and local agriculture and food. This will go a long way to advancing equity in food security and better health and wellness for newcomers and all Edmontonians.

Pervasive Ideas/Mental Models:

Towards an Intersectional Concept of Health and Wellness - A recent participatory research project led by the Refugee Health Coalition of Edmonton looked at refugee health needs from eight refugee communities and found that health and wellbeing emerged as a holistic concept encompassing physical, mental and emotional health. Being healthy is seen as having family close by, being safe and secure, having access to good food and healthcare including community support systems and, importantly, other-care or the capacity to care for family and friends, a cultural concept vital to many newcomers. Key recommendations about the need for a meaningful, culturally relevant approach to wellness were highlighted in this Refugee Health Community Engagement Project Report¹⁶.

This holistic perspective has been echoed in the City's recent leading edge work on *Recover: The Soulful City and Urban Wellness* <https://www.urbanwellnessedmonton.com/soulful-city>. Its bold approach looks at wellness not as a linear pursuit but as a circuitous journey with many elements that can be enabled or hindered by the rules society sets and the narratives we hear. Its Framework for a Culture of Wellbeing, shared with City Council in 2020, echoes powerful Indigenous concepts of living well that are about the search for something greater, connection to community and spirituality. The City can advance this holistic concept through its work that resonates with the resilience, strengths and intersectional needs of newcomers so clearly identified by the storytellers in the Lived Experience narratives. The outcome may be new approaches and solutions to complex, dynamic issues like health inclusion.

Promising Approaches

1. New Canadians Health Centre

A local community board has been formed in Edmonton to steward the establishment of a New Canadians Health Centre (NCHC). Edmonton is currently the only major city in Canada without a dedicated health centre for refugees. The circumstances that drive refugees from their home countries, combined often with extended time in refugee camps, exacerbates health concerns. In transition to Canada, income inequalities, language barriers and loss of status and social networks, profoundly impact refugees' quality of life and integration experience. The Refugee Health Community Engagement Report flagged the need for a new community driven model of health care to address the existing gaps facing refugees in Edmonton and provided a number of concrete recommendations for change.

The NCHC will improve the health and wellbeing of refugees in Edmonton through the provision of culturally and linguistically competent healthcare to facilitate successful integration into the community. This vision for a welcoming, community-operated, multidisciplinary and multi-ethnic centre will be located in a space that can integrate healthcare professionals, social and settlement supports with multidisciplinary care. As it grows it plans to expand to reflect a hub and spoke model with dispersed services across the city. Business planning and partnership development is underway.

2. Immigration as a Social Determinant of Health

Municipalities have long recognized the social determinants of health and many policies and programs -- from ending poverty to building community and addressing racism -- that speak to this framework to guide their policy decisions. An emerging perspective that challenges the

¹⁶ Refugee Health Coalition. 2020. Refugee Health Community Engagement Project. Unpublished Report. Edmonton. Alberta.

status quo is that immigration itself must be seen and understood as a social determinant of health in its own right.

Immigration influences social relationships and is a lived experience that directly affects newcomer health. Treating it this way will advance public health and challenge conventional practices by going beyond individual solutionizing. It calls for communities to tackle upstream structural and systemic factors that impact health, such as more inclusive health care practices; proactive, deep engagement with immigrant communities; and advocacy for fair immigration, economic and health policies.

Social and Civic Inclusion

Social inclusion fosters a sense of belonging, acceptance and recognition in a community or society. For immigrants and refugees, social inclusion means that they have achieved full and equal participation in the economic, social, cultural and political dimensions of life in their new country¹⁷.

Civic inclusion engages immigrants to feel and be connected to the larger community. Civic engagement opportunities that strengthen civil society, such as volunteering or participating in a community forum, must be present for all, including new and underrepresented communities¹⁸. Within the context of the immigrant experience, it is also referred to as **civic integration**.

The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) identified four indicators of civic engagement and inclusion:

- Volunteering
- Membership in community associations, sporting or leisure activities, neighbourhood committees, trade unions, political parties
- Acquisition of citizenship
- Participation rates in election and public consultations

The 22 storytellers overall are not well connected to formal organizations in their cultural, social and neighborhood communities, either as members or volunteers. Only two have acquired Canadian citizenship and have voted in the last provincial and federal elections.

Disengagement from civic life

Out of the 22 storytellers, only 6 or 30% indicated that they have volunteered, in their church, food bank or school. The rest were unable to volunteer because they had just arrived, were busy with classes, or because COVID had restricted volunteer work.

I don't volunteer but it is something I would really like to do. But, because of COVID, I believe there are restrictions. I don't know, I haven't got any information about volunteering but I would really like to do it." (Skilled worker, married with 3 children)

I have been working for my teacher as a volunteer since I graduated last year. My teacher posts a video online weekly. The purpose of those videos is to introduce City of Edmonton, to guide

¹⁷ Omidvar, R and Richmond, T. January, 2003. Immigrants and Social Inclusion in Canada. Working Paper Series Perspectives on Social Inclusion. Laidlaw Foundation.

<https://maytree.com/wp-content/uploads/SummaryImmigrantSettlementAndSocialInclusion2003.pdf>

¹⁸ Building Inclusive Cities. Cities of Migration.

<https://citiesofmigration.ca/building-inclusive-cities/overview/>

newcomers to integrate into Edmonton life. As a volunteer, my duty is to collect relevant resources/information, as well as forward, advertise, and comment on the posted videos. (Skilled Worker, married with one child)

Yeah, I volunteer a lot actually! Like for example, Sports Central. People donate for kids and we go there and like, people donate sports team shirts. For example, like for hockey, basketball and stuff like that. We put them in order in color and size. (Family class, youth 17 years old)

We volunteer every Dec. 31st at Mustard Seed. We do food preparation.

Few community connections

Only five storytellers have indicated that they are members of a church or cultural organization.

I am a member of TianJin Overseas Association of Canada. When I just arrived in Canada, I did not have any friends in this city. In this association, most of the members are from my home town TianJin, China. (Family class, single mom with 3 children)

We are part of our religious community. (Refugee, married with 3 children)

I joined Migrante because after a bad experience with my employer, I decided to advocate for temporary foreign workers. (TFW, married with 3 children)

Disconnect with Local Government

Out of the 22 storytellers, only two youth storytellers knew who the mayor of Edmonton was. While there are two storytellers who have voted in the federal and provincial elections, they have not voted in the municipal elections. The rest barely know City Council, Councilors, City, and have no sense of the City's role in their lives or engagement opportunities to provide their expertise. None had participated in public engagement activities organized by the City of Edmonton regardless of length of residency.

In a study of belonging to the new homeland among immigrants, it said that they must experience three equalities to make the full transition from immigrant to citizens. These three equalities are: human rights and justice, socio-economic equality and civic and political participation¹⁹. First, human rights for all is guaranteed under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and access to justice when these rights are violated should be available to migrants. Second, knowledge and skills must be recognized and utilized to achieve rewarding livelihoods that create conditions for reducing socio-economic inequalities. Third, full representation and participation in the civic and political process is the final frontier of integration where migrants feel that they truly belong as they become participants in civic life and public-decision making. It is the third equality where the city's role is crucial in the migrant's path to belonging. As a final destination, the city is the active arena where it has the most influence in mediating, fostering and nurturing engagement, mutual support and civic participation .

¹⁹ Banting, K, Chourchene, TJ and Seidle, FL. 2007. Conclusion: Diversity, Belonging and Shared Citizenship in Banting, K, Chourchene, TJ and Seidle, FL Eds. *The Art of the State: Volume III Belonging?* Institute of Research in Public Policy, Montreal: Canada.

Policy Review

“ Their first and sometimes lasting experience of inclusion will be in your city schools, city buses and city libraries... Inclusion does not happen accidentally; it takes intention, it takes resolution and it takes leadership. Leadership to realize that a city that works for everyone must include everyone.”- Senator Ratna Omidvar Building Inclusive Cities

The Role of the City

Catalyzing and creating inclusive cities is the role of municipalities. The City has a significant and immediate impact on the daily life and integration of newcomers into the community. It can play a catalytic role as leader, funder, convenor and accessible service provider, in areas that span the entire municipal spectrum and impact the successful integration of newcomers.

Policies that are intentionally inclusive - and grounded in community and newcomer perspectives and experience - can have a substantive and upstream impact on inclusion. In recent years, the language of the City has evolved, shifting from multiculturalism and diversity to a focus on interculturalism, anti-racism, equity and social inclusion.

Cities can advance diversity, equity and inclusion in planning and engagement processes, in neighbourhood and transit design, in reducing barriers and sparking economic initiatives among newcomer businesses and entrepreneurs, social procurement and community investment. As Edmonton's City Plan 1.3.3.2 clearly states, the City can “*Address equity in the delivery of policies, programs, public services, investment and infrastructure delivery. (1.3.3.2.)*” A socially inclusive society is therefore one which cultivates the skills and abilities of its citizens and communities, works towards a goal of equal opportunity and freedom from discrimination, and engages newcomers to help shape decisions and policies.

Policies

ConnectEdmonton Strategy 2019

ConnectEdmonton lays the foundation for the City Plan, identifying Connections as a unifying principle with key indicators for settlement, anti-racism and equity.

Edmonton's City Plan has one relevant Big City Move, Inclusive and Compassionate, that is rooted in concepts and efforts to improve equity, end poverty, eliminate racism and make clear progress towards Truth and Reconciliation. It contains many cross cutting policy intentions that support newcomers' settlement and success in Edmonton. Inclusion and diversity are woven throughout City Plan policy directions. They are related to a whole spectrum of work the City advances: belonging, engagement, input to city planning and decision making, urban neighbourhood diversity, poverty, safety, data gathering and economic opportunities.

City Inclusion Policies

The Art of Inclusion Framework (2019) - The City's 2019 framework document for inclusion focuses on how the City works, its workforce and staff, but extends also to how the City delivers its programs to diverse Edmontonians. Several specific Equity Pillar actions to watch for are plans to: identify the needs of equity-seeking groups and implement equity measures; a commitment to Intercultural training of City Staff, and updating the older, foundational **Diversity and Inclusion Policy** by 2022.

Gender Based Analysis (GBA+) - The Inclusion Framework outlines how the GBA+ lens will reduce inequality for both the City workplace and the community. It notes the implementation of

GBA+ is a mandatory process that cuts across all City departments over a 3-5 year timeframe, and commits to do an Annual Report on City Inclusion Progress every 1-2 years

Public Engagement and Community Investment Policies

Public Engagement In the Public Engagement Policy C593, the Guiding Principles and spirit address “Inclusive and Accessible” as a key way to reach diverse communities to “ensure people feel heard and know their input is valued....inviting citizens to play a larger role in shaping their community and enabling social and economic growth.” The Policy is supplemented by a Procedure and a Framework that lay out rigorous expectations for high quality public engagement in decision making processes.

Emerging Immigrant and Refugee Community Grant, launched in 2007, underwent a participatory review in August 2020 seeking input from ethnocultural communities about the impact and value of community grants. Support for youth and parent language and culture programs, operational support for events and staff, growing the ethnocultural community and strengthening links to the City and other organizations were identified as of key importance. These grants help build community capacity around social inclusion and connection.

COVID’s Impact on Civic and Social Inclusion and the City

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted newcomer communities and all Edmontonians with its protocols around social and physical isolation, unequal effects on Edmontonians of different racial backgrounds, a gender impact on employment that is steadily growing clearer, the challenges of multiple waves of the pandemic, the vaccine roll out and increasing incidents of hate crimes and discrimination.

- **Edmonton’s Emergency COVID Response Plan** was launched in January 2021, focusing on a targeted approach and outreach to diverse Edmontonians disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and existing systemic barriers that exacerbate these inequities. Provincial funding for this one-year initiative supports a Community Coalition leading this city-wide collaborative response - one that is culturally and linguistically relevant to those impacted by COVID-19.
- **Edmonton’s Reimagine Plan**, approved in Summer 2020, is an Edmonton built response to recovery from the pandemic. It aims to help guide the city to achieve an inclusive recovery from the pandemic, economic recession and challenging fiscal realities. While COVID doesn’t alter the City Plan commitment and vision, it may impact timelines on priorities like homelessness and affordable housing and it reimagines services like public engagement, impacted by public health protocols and budgetary concerns.

Observations on Gaps and Possibilities: Big Ideas about Social and Civic Inclusion

How might the City strengthen social and civic connections with newcomers?

Participatory Citizenship is about Edmontonians, including newcomers, having the right means, space, opportunity and support to participate in and influence decisions and to engage in activities that contribute to the community’s well being. As our foundational model by Agar and Strang states, the foundation for integration lies in citizenship and the rights and responsibilities associated with it.

Yet research tells us that civic engagement is the least well known or documented area of immigrant life and inclusion. Compared to economic outcomes, this dynamic of integration is

relatively unknown. The Lived Experience stories gathered for this report highlight disengagement from civic life, few community connections and a clear disconnect with local government. This is clearly a gap where the City, as always with community partners, can do more - and an opportunity for the municipality to catalyze, encourage and lead work to change the frame. It also indicates that city policies and plans are developed without or with limited input from a significant (or 25%) of the city population.

In the COVID and PostCOVID urban landscape, marked by isolation, how might we address this gap and foster belonging and connection of newcomers in Edmonton? The City has in place a number of strong initiatives and partners with platforms and commitments to deepening community that can be encouraged to ramp up efforts to creatively and meaningfully engage newcomers in leadership, learning and collective action for change.

The City can lead the way by :

- Advancing meaningful intercultural competency training across its departments and using its tools and levers to shift the discourse on inclusion through leadership, programs and services.
- Modeling inclusion in its workplace, hiring practices and board recruitment efforts, as well as deep engagement with community, particularly voices of lived experience.
- Considering a City Hall 101 online multilingual introduction for newcomers to how the City operates, how to vote and get involved, modelled after City Hall School for K-12 students.
- Encouraging and incentivizing powerful City supported platforms like Abundant Communities, Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues, Recover and City Advisory Councils to prioritize and strengthen their existing membership and outreach to newcomers.
- Explore engaging bicultural community animators and facilitators in mobilizing ethnocultural community members in public engagement activities.

How might the City work to advance anti racism and equity?

In response to long standing inequities and experiences of racism, made more acute in 2020 during the pandemic, the City (and Province) has two key opportunities to mobilize strong community leadership and input for change on these important systemic issues that speak to civic and social inclusion:

1) Task Force on Community Safety and Well Being: Time limited Task Forces convened by the City with strong community leadership are unique and powerful tools that can mobilize community leadership around the issues of the day. Recommendations of task forces - like the REACH and the EndPovertyEdmonton task forces - can generate shared vision and starting point strategies with strong political buy-in to activate system change.

In April 2021, a Final Report with Recommendations was presented to Edmonton City Council by the 2020 Task Force on Community Safety and Well Being, chaired by Dr. Annette Trimbey. Focusing on important issues of racism, inequality and systemic barriers, its findings and ideas for next steps will be relevant to newcomers in Edmonton, many of whom are experiencing aggravated racism and discrimination during the pandemic. Released in April 2021, this community-driven report offered directions and recommendations to address racism, discrimination, excessive use of force, poverty and homelessness in Edmonton.

2) Edmonton's new Anti-Racism Advisory Committee holds the promise of bringing strong community insight and expertise to inform Council, raise awareness and catalyze action on racism and anti-racism in Edmonton on an ongoing basis. A Community Safety and Well Being subcommittee is a touch point for the Task Force noted above and this Committee may play a role in the stewardship of its recommendations. An opportunity for intergovernmental collaboration on anti racism is possible as the **Province's Anti Racism Advisory Council**, with new membership in January 2021, is also looking to address similar challenges, as systemic racism spans city boundaries and levels.

How might the City deepen and promote newcomer perspectives on decision making and policy?

It's not just what the City does, it's how it does it that matters most. The active involvement of Edmontonians in decision making and new directions, of often co-creating new strategies, is not a one time event. Edmonton has demonstrated great strides in public engagement but, like all municipalities, is continually striving to do better.

City Plan, a plan that puts people at the centre, involved significant engagement of Edmontonians to shape its initial vision and policy direction. There is now an opportunity as implementation begins in 2021 to find creative ways to engage newcomers in a digital age, as the plan becomes real.

A new City Council will be determining the status of Council initiatives later in 2021. The municipal commitment to engage Edmontonians, to co-create a safe and healthy city, is central to addressing complex issues like health inclusion, poverty and anti-racism. In fact, the City Council Initiative on Public Engagement may be considered one of the most important tools in the municipal toolbox and one worth continuing, with its Guiding Coalition of citizens and strong Council championship to ensure community contributions. When a new City Council is elected in fall 2021, the importance of continuing this high-profile, community grounded initiative is vital.

Pervasive Ideas/Mental Models:

Diversity: An Opportunity not a Problem: The global Intercultural Cities Network and its Diversity Advantage policy paradigm encourages local governments to see diversity as a challenge and opportunity, not a problem. The City can play a strong role by modeling and embedding this new paradigm in all it does, encouraging intercultural connections that lead to transformation of people's thinking. This Network focuses on how **cultural diversity strengths of migrants are a resource, a source of innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship - a positive force and resource, not a vulnerable population.** Cities can live this approach by innovating in policy grounded in lived experience of newcomers, ensuring staff have deep training in interculturalism and by the co-creation of strategies with citizens. A recent report from this group included an assessment of the threats to diversity and equity posed by COVID-19 that include: increasing social inequalities, privileging individual rather than systemic solutions, racism and restrictions of human rights and freedoms. This work is more urgent than ever.

A Promising Approach:

The City has the potential to convene community stakeholders to catalyze a collective voice and vision for newcomers in Edmonton - one that supports a more integrated approach to settlement and inclusion. The **Edmonton Local Immigration Partnership (ELIP)**, a project funded for five years by the Federal Government (Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada), is underway in year two with the City contributing time and staff. Africa Centre, ECVO (Edmonton Chamber

of Voluntary Organizations), FRAP (Francophonie Albertaine Plurielle) and MFRS (Multicultural Family Resource Society) along with the City form the guiding shared Secretariat.

Edmonton's LIP aims to be participatory, people-centred, and to consider power dynamics. Its goal is to provide the means by which innovative partnerships can address specific needs in the community related to settlement, immigration and inclusion. Cities like Moncton and Toronto have successfully produced local Settlement and Immigrations plans to provide a coordinated, community-wide approach to newcomer needs and opportunities. As a representative council is confirmed, work on advancing a shared vision towards a Settlement and Immigration plan will get underway. This Council should have a dynamic multi-sectoral representation beyond the immigration and settlement sector such as people with lived experience, business, academe, ethnocultural community leaders and faith communities.

Migrants as City Builders

Edmonton in the 21st Century: an inclusive intercultural hub of city makers

Migration is a local reality. In 2015 William Lacy Swing, Director of International Organization for Migration, spoke in Geneva about integration and inclusion of migrants and the reciprocal relationship they have with the cities they live in. In that speech he spoke of migrants as powerful city builders and how cities must include migrants in shaping urban planning and growth. In this way, he introduced the concept of a reciprocal, two-way relationship when it comes to integration that incorporates the perspectives of both migrants and of the local community and local government.

This powerful new frame for migration describes the urban setting - its municipal offices, community centres, sports fields, public spaces, work places and places of worship - as the social crucibles where the "alchemy of integration" can emerge. And he positions migrants as integral contributors to the social and economic well-being of cities. This frame identifies at least three ways this happens:

- **Migrants as builders of resilience:** Migrants provide diversified skills that can support disaster preparedness, adaptation and recovery efforts, particularly in ageing societies.
- **Migrants as agents of local development:** Migrants play a central role in ... mainstreaming migration into local development planning.
- **Migrants as city makers:** Migrants are not just consumers of service. They bring with them new ideas, ways of thinking and creative approaches.

Thought Leaders

This concept of Migrants as City Builders resonated with the Thought Leaders Conversation held as part of the Report insight gathering, hosted by the Report Steering Committee Co-Chairs, Yvonne Chiu and Mike Chow in March 2021. This meeting convened an impressive brain trust of community leaders from a wide array of backgrounds and sectors - all deeply connected to immigration and settlement.

This thoughtful conversation provided insights into the current state of immigration and settlement in Edmonton, as the pandemic persists and post-COVID. They shared concerns about the grave challenges and potential opportunities facing Edmonton as it prepares to robustly support the anticipated growth in newcomers arriving here in the next three years. They reflected on the changes impacting settlement, immigration and inclusion as a result of the

pandemic that span all aspects of community wellbeing. And they shared ideas for long overdue change and issued a call to action.

The Impact of COVID-19

First, they reflected on how COVID-19 has reshaped our world and impacted immigration and settlement from the pre-migration journey to the challenges of settlement in a new country and in a city still in the throes of a global pandemic and its aftermath. They noted the political, social and economic contexts of this COVID/post-COVID era and the complexities it poses.

- *We can't erase that COVID has disproportionately affected our communities. It's the community sector AND the health sector that have been exhausted. Part of our work has to be about rebuilding people and rebuilding a sense of hope. I think it will be challenging work.*
- *These realities that we are facing because of the economic situation - I'm really worried about the high level of unemployment in Alberta. This is going to not create a welcoming atmosphere for a lot of newcomers.*
- *The other thing that is different is that many of the people who migrate have a much stronger sense of abandonment. We have closed our borders in no time, we have forced people to stay away unintentionally through messages to stay away. There is a deep feeling of abandonment in the people who seek to come here.*
- *In the past, when we've worked with refugees, you at least have a robust group of practitioners and supporters that have some energy, but the next wave of immigrants is coming into a challenged context burdened with the high demand of work.*
- *What has been exciting over the last few years is the sudden attention mental health and wellness is receiving. There is satisfaction in finally seeing that happen. But also a lot of frustration is seeing the same concerns and dealing with the same issues such as lack of funding.*
- *The political context is critical. We're seeing tremendously less support - for school systems and people living with disabilities for example. We're working in a political context that amplifies inequities. One challenge for us is to ask who are our allies? What would community development look like? How can communities contribute to a sense of wellbeing?*

Migrants as City Builders

Out of the pandemic pressures and long-standing challenges, the Thought Leaders framed a fresh understanding and language of migrants as agents of change and as multidimensional city makers, who are key to building the city we want to live in.

- *We need to see immigrants as city makers and community builders and not as a drain on the community or its economy. Anyone who immigrates has a nugget of courage and strength to undertake that journey. Let's not look at the deficits and vulnerabilities or talk about "clients" but as people with strengths and resilience.*
- *Immigrants, newcomers are often seen as ... recipients of services. Being seen from a one way perspective. We need to see immigrants as coming here with huge potential and contributions. And that we can become contributors to society even in our first day or first year.*
- *People need to be around the table because usually they have the best solutions. We need to create opportunities for newcomers to participate in the design and redesign in the way services are delivered.*
- *Services that create more opportunities for generating new ideas from newcomers, providing newcomers with resources to realize their ideas.*

- *It's not about arriving somewhere, but about a journey to somewhere that might feel like home for a while. Honouring pre-migration stories as important. We see in these families a struggle to imagine a future.*

It's Time for Change

It's time for a paradigm shift. As the City and community of Edmonton reimagine an inclusive recovery, and the economy shifts, we need new attitudes, skills and approaches. This call for a shift of perspective, structures and approach envisions the need for whole community involvement - from all orders of government, civil society and education, to business and community sectors and all Edmontonians.

- *We all need a paradigm shift. The economy is not going to be what it was in the past. Oil and fossil fuels are history. We need to retool ourselves. There aren't that many community-based resources and those that are there are flat out. It's important to add additional resources to current ones so people aren't burnt out.*
- *We need to be looking at it from a resiliency lens. Even post-pandemic. Move towards a vision of recovery that is resilience focused, rather than snapping back into old frameworks.*
- *We are getting an increasing number of young families with young children, where women play a big role in the settlement and integration of families and communities. It is probably time to re-think and re-design the way services are delivered and resources are distributed.*
- *We need to reach our institutions and businesses to provide on-line micro-credentialing courses for people before they arrive here. These 3-6 hours practical, affordable courses would give people not only a locally recognized credential, but some starting point for Edmonton networks and connections before they arrive here.*
- *I think we need to start thinking differently in engagement with faith organizations, community organizations, community leagues... How do we encourage more newcomers to move into mature neighbourhoods which are not diverse?*
- *I think about the school system and the importance of children seeing themselves in the curriculum. I'm also passionate about employment. I wonder if we could take a different approach to immigration to prepare people before they come to Edmonton. So that before people get here they are more prepared.*
- *The idea of being proactive has remained with me. I know in my agency we have what we call Settlement workers in public institutions, schools, libraries, and if I had my way they would be at the airport, malls and health centres too.*
- *I am really interested in having the conversation with how Edmonton's Community Leagues can support newcomers. How can we connect Leagues with new people in the community? Leagues are natural supports - they can't provide the same level of 'service' but they are a neighbourhood space. And full of neighbours who care and want to bring all voices to build the community.*

The Role of the Municipality

The Thought Leaders discussion surfaced some key ideas about the central role played by the City of Edmonton in supporting the transition from “immigrant” to “community member” which is the essence of integration and social inclusion. The City’s role is grounded in fostering and nurturing social inclusion and enhancing the social and economic well-being of the city and of all Edmontonians. The design and connectedness of its neighbourhoods and public spaces and places are core to social inclusion.

As Edmonton, like other cities worldwide, rebuilds with hope post-COVID, it is critical to prioritize the entrepreneurial and cultural wealth of newcomers to ensure integration in this new post-pandemic world. The City can provide leadership to other players by committing to continued intercultural competency and anti-racism training of staff and by reframing the concepts and language used around immigration and settlement. By taking a leadership role in offering short term, starting point internships for new immigrants and mentorship programs, the City can model practical job experience to prepare newcomers for workplace success.

Often programmatic approaches unwittingly create glass ceilings for building capacities of immigrants. Perhaps we should remove the notion of clients. ~ Thought Leader Discussion

In this way, the City can prepare its staff to bring an inclusive lens to its work with diverse Edmontonians as city builders.

The City of Edmonton can use its convening power and networked relationships to raise issues and bring forward solutions beyond their traditional and limited jurisdiction. Complex challenges like settlement and integration of immigrants will not be solved by one order of government, but require coordinated strategies and even structural change to ensure cities have the resources they need to do the work they do so well. The City's ability to convene and bring diverse players and perspectives together is also needed within Edmonton, looking for opportunities to spark cross sector collaboration that involves business, civil society, faith communities that often play a significant role in newcomer connections, community leagues, public health, education and immigrants themselves.

A Call to Action

This powerful discussion acknowledged the challenges of this work in a community rocked by economic restraints, job losses, a challenging political climate and a turbulent post-pandemic world. It also reflects our aspiration that this Report will provide a collective starting point, grounded first in the grassroots realities of newcomers in Edmonton. The [People - Policy - Pervasive Ideas Framework](#), a triangle that bridges these three linked elements, offers a new way of exploring this important issue of social inclusion and finding different solutions.

The municipality can play a pivotal role in reimagining the structures and policies for a new era, and in facilitating and advancing equity. We know that when local governments look to co-create new pathways forward *with* newcomers, change can happen. Cities do this best working alongside diverse residents who bring insight, energy and experiences to the table.

It's time for a serious shift. It's time to reframe, retool and rebuild. It's time to reflect on stories, local data and policy opportunities and how they interact and connect. Together we can build a truly inclusive city that welcomes and engages newcomers to thrive and to help shape the future of Edmonton and all those who live here.

Appendix - Terminology

Statistics Canada, 2006

Recent immigrants (also known as newcomers)

Refers to landed immigrants who came to Canada up to **five years** prior to a given census year. For the 2006 Census, recent immigrants are landed immigrants who arrived in Canada between January 1, 2001 and Census Day, May 16, 2006. Similarly, recent immigrants in the 2001 Census were newcomers at the time of the 2001 Census, i.e., they came to Canada between January 1, 1996 and Census Day, May 15, 2001.

Established immigrants

Those who have landed **five years or more** prior to a given census year.

Immigrants based on Admission Categories by Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) categories of admission to Canada

Newly arrived immigrants who become legal residents in Canada (landed immigrants) would have to be admitted in categories set by Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). This includes undocumented workers who have legally entered the country in the Temporary Foreign Workers Program. Immigrants who come to Canada can be described according to the categories of admission defined by the IRCC (Glossary - IRCC).

Federal Skilled Worker

An immigrant selected as a permanent resident based on their education, work experience, knowledge of English and/or French, and other criteria that have been shown to help people succeed in the Canadian labour market. Spouses and children are included on the application. They constitute the largest percentage of newcomers annually.

Refugees

A permanent resident who applied for and received permanent resident status in Canada after their refugee claim was accepted under the Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program. Refugees come to Canada as:

- Government-assisted refugee (GAR) - a person who is outside Canada and has been determined to be a Convention refugee and who receives financial and other support from the Government of Canada or Province of Quebec for up to one year after their arrival in Canada. GARs are selected from applicants referred by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and other referral organizations.
- Privately sponsored refugee (PSR) - a person outside Canada who has been determined to be a Convention refugee or member of the Country of Asylum class and who receives financial and other support from a private sponsor for one year after their arrival in Canada. Private sponsors are Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs), Groups of Five or Community Sponsors.
- Refugee claimants - A person who has applied for refugee protection status while in Canada and is waiting for a decision on his/her claim from the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada.

Family class

Any family members sponsored to come to Canada by a Canadian citizen or permanent resident.

Temporary Foreign Workers

This program allows employers to hire foreign workers to fill short-term labour and skill shortages when no Canadians are available to do the job. A Labour Market Impact Assessment is needed to hire through this program. Foreign workers hired as part of this program are referred to as Temporary Foreign Workers. They may get a work permit only after a Labour Market Impact Assessment.