Belonging:
Stories of the Dignity and Resilience of Immigrants

The State of Immigration and Settlement in Edmonton - Annual Report 2021

Edmonton

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Co-Chairs' Welcome

There are just too many people to thank everyone for their contributions to the production of this inaugural report. One will never be able to fully measure the blood, sweat and tears that went into it, but we are grateful for Edmonton's City Council's vision in requesting this series of reports — the opportunity it presents to help shape our collective future. We would like to share with you this poem as it kept us all centered on what was most important during the preparation of the report: the individuals and families we serve.

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

Thank you for taking the time to read this report. We hope that it sparks further conversations. We hope it gives pause to reflect upon our collective humanity. Edmonton is home to all of us, and it's truly the best place to live, work and play.

Yvonne Chiu & Mike Chow

Co-Chairs,
The State of Immigration and Settlement Report Committee

Acknowledgments

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Project Team	Affiliation	Role
Yvonne Chiu	Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op	Co-Chair
Mike Chow	City of Edmonton	Co-Chair
Charlene Ball	City of Edmonton	Project Manager
Ashima Sumaru-Jurf & Roxanne Felix-Mah	Multicultural Family Resource Society	Facilitator
Donna Mae Ford	Multicultural Family Resource Society	Facilitator
Lucenia Ortiz	Independent	Research and Engagement Lead
Kate Gunn	Independent	Policy Research and Analysis
Brynn Day	Multicultural Family Resource Society	Communications/ Technical Support
Samuel Juru	City of Edmonton	Member

Advisory Committee Members

Aftab Khan	Action for Healthy Communities
Cam McDonald	Right at Home Housing
Deborah Morrison	M.A.P.S. Alberta Capital Region
Edwin Silang	Catholic Social Services
Gemalil Biscocho	Edmonton Immigrant Services Association
Jamila Aman	Edmonton Immigrant Services Association
Judy Smith	City of Edmonton
Giri Puligandla	Homeward Trust
Kathryn Cox	City of Edmonton
Marco Luciano	Migrante Alberta
Marlene Mulder	M.A.P.S. Alberta Capital Region
Niga Jalal	Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op / Multicultural Family Resource Society
Sentsetsa Pilane	Boys & Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton & Area
Susan Morrissey	Edmonton Social Planning Council
Suzanne Gross	Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers

Lived Experience Interviewers:

who gave voice to the storytellers, revealing their journeys, struggles and strengths.

Abigail Morales	Nebiy Leul
Abida Tahir	Nilton Romero
Cynthia Palmaria	Roula Haydamous
Deanna Neri	Suzanne Gross
Grazyna Pakos	Xia Li
Gloria Salamanca	
Joelle Kacou	
Keer Chol	



We also acknowledge with sincere gratitude:

- The 22 Storytellers who trusted us with their stories of migration, injustice, resilience and hope. This report is dedicated to them.
- The early contributions of Dawn Estey and Selene Tash of Alberta Health Services.
- The many Thought Leaders across sectors who stimulated and introduced fresh and provocative ideas to energize this report and advance bold and forward thinking.

Production Team

Marliss Weber & Randy Brososky	Parodos Social Marketing	Writing
Susan May	intrinsic design	Design

Rooted in Place:
Acknowledging the Land We Share

This is the story of the land and how we all came to be here together.

Some may think of immigration and settlement on this part of Turtle Island — Canada — as being a recent trend, but people have been coming to this beautiful river valley since time immemorial. Indeed, amiskwaciy wâskahikan — Edmonton — has always been the home of many people. The Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), nêhiyawak (Cree), Anishinaabe (Saulteaux), Dene, Ĩyãħé Nakoda (Nakoda Sioux) have called this land home for as long as anyone can remember.

The First Peoples were the original caretakers of this area, followed by the Métis and the Inuit. These Indigenous Peoples were also instrumental to the survival of the first European explorers, settlers, and indeed, colonizers, by graciously sharing their vast knowledge of this land. Since then, migrants have arrived to this area from all parts of the world and have become a part of this community.

However, the story of settlement, past and present, is not one without immeasurable hardship, trauma, and resiliency on the part of Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous and non-Indigenous people have all been affected by the waves of settlement that have built this city. Too often, the struggles of discrimination, poverty, and displacement have been caused by systems and structures that perpetuate inequity, and that ignore our common humanity. Our stories are all interconnected in complex and challenging ways.

This is why we acknowledge this land as Treaty Six Territory, based upon the historic nation-to-nation treaty and bond of peaceful coexistence. Treaty Six binds us together: we have a collective obligation to care for each other and this land, no matter whether we've been living here for a day, a year, a hundred years or a thousand years. It is an honour to be here together at this time, and to share in the bounty, the safety, the community, and the relationships this land can offer us. ■

This is the Story of All of Us

This is the first chapter in an ongoing story we'll tell over the next five years, all about the ways newcomers and migrants experience Edmonton, and the roles we all have in creating a city that works well for everyone, and that gives us all a similar sense of belonging.

The story is big, but it's also personal. We are all characters in this story. Every one of us has the power to contribute to its telling.

It is our fundamental belief that people — all people — hold within them the greatest opportunity, the greatest potential. It's people who make our city an excellent place to live and grow.

And it's people who write the rules of how we engage with each other and this land. Sometimes, those rules — the policies, practices, systems and power structures — open doors and create possibilities for people. Other times, they work against people, and keep them from realizing their potential.

Our goal in this first report is to introduce you to some of the newcomers and migrants whose lives and wellbeing are affected by systems, structures, rules and other factors beyond their control. We wish to draw your eyes to the people, and the ways they are affected by policies that connect to their experiences here in Edmonton.

Migrating to a new place, and creating a new home, takes tremendous courage, strength and resilience. Newcomers to Edmonton offer wisdom, knowledge and experience from around the globe. They are a resource, and have valuable voices that need to be heard. As such, we offer our heartfelt thanks to the many people who have shared their experience and their wisdom with us, in order to create this report. They include Steering Committee members, lived experience storytellers, thought leaders, interviewers, researchers and more. Without them, this story would not be possible. ■

- There are many different policy domains that affect migrants and newcomers in Edmonton. To focus this report, we've chosen to discuss policies around housing, health and civic participation. However, other domains, such as employment, income and education are also significant to the lives and experiences of newcomers. They will be touched on in several of our stories, and explored more deeply in future reports.
- This story is being told in 2021, and is therefore reflective of the significant social impacts of the last year, including the effects of COVID-19 on people and our economy, racial tensions, and political polarities.
- We're investigating the intersectional dimensions of settlement and integration through an equity and human rights lens, as a means to shift how we think and talk about migrants and newcomers. To do so, we're using the theoretical frameworks of the **Multidimensional Immigrant** and the **Cultural Wealth Model**, as well as **lived experiences of newcomers**, to explore how we can be a more socially inclusive city. We will describe these concepts in more depth in this report.

Look for the following icons throughout this report:



Policy Connections:
Some current policies that address issues related to settlement and integration in Edmonton.



Gaps:
Some of the missing pieces and systemic blind spots that create problems for newcomers and migrants in Edmonton.



Systemic Barriers:
Current structures and policies that affect the experiences of real people.



Big Ideas:
Ideas that offer context and potential positive impacts for newcomers and migrants.



COVID-19:
The ways the pandemic has made challenges more intense for newcomers and migrants.



Promising Practices:
Positive approaches to be explored further to enhance the lives of newcomers and migrants.

Types of Migrants

Migrants have been coming to the Edmonton area for hundreds of years, but it's mainly been the waves of settlement and immigration in the last two centuries that have fundamentally changed the Edmonton landscape — literally, and figuratively. These patterns of colonization and settlement continue to the present day.

This is a common phenomenon internationally. Due to global economic, political and environmental instability, the 21st century has become known as the century of global migration. Edmonton is a part of this worldwide story.

Migration is not always an active choice. But when it is, Canada, Alberta, and Edmonton are high on people's destination lists. Since 2010, Edmonton has welcomed approximately 12,000 people each year, from more than 100 countries around the world. More than 300,000 Edmontonians are of immigrant background, and they have changed the face of our city.

Settlers, Immigrants, Refugees, Migrants. What do these terms mean?

The language of immigration and settlement is fraught with all kinds of emotionally-charged terms, and how we identify with these words will shape our reactions to them. There is no perfect and universally agreed-upon language that describes migrants and newcomers, and each related term has stigmas associated with them — a fact that underlines some of the systemic issues immigrants face.

Generally speaking, here is how we're defining the terms around immigration in this report:

- **Immigrant** - a general term, relating to a person who has come from another country, and who plans to settle here long term.
- **Newcomer** or **Recent Immigrant** - a person who is within the first several years of their arrival here.
- **Migrant** - a broad term, used to refer to all people who have left their home country to move here.
- **Settler** - a person who has migrated to an area and set up permanent residence there, in the context of broader efforts to establish a colony. The term is also used to describe people whose ancestors migrated to a new area, or who were born into an already established settler colony.

Every one of us, unless we are Indigenous, has a migrant history. And ultimately, no matter the term that describes our identity or our length of presence here, we are all Edmonton residents, and we all contribute our skills, wisdom, and experience to our city.

These are the terms used by the Government of Canada to refer to specific classes of immigrants; also known as pathways to immigration:

- **Federal Skilled Worker** - a person who is selected as a permanent resident based on their education, work experience, knowledge of English and/or French, and other factors that are deemed to help people succeed in the Canadian labour market. Spouses and children are included in this class.
- **Family Class** - a person who has been sponsored by a family member to move to Canada.
- **Temporary Foreign Worker** - a foreign worker who is hired by a local employer to fill a short-term labour and skill shortage when no Canadians are available to do the job.
- **Refugee** - a person who has fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and has crossed an international border to find safety in another country. They receive federal government benefits for up to one year after their arrival to help them settle in their new home. In Canada, there are three types of refugee, including:
  - **Government Assisted Refugee** - a person who is determined to be a Convention refugee, and who has been selected by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), or other referral organizations.
  - **Privately Sponsored Refugee (PSR)** - a person who has been determined to be a Convention refugee or member of the Country of Asylum class, sponsored by a private or community group to make their home in Edmonton.
  - **Refugee claimant** - a person who has applied for refugee protection status while in Canada and is waiting for a decision on their claim from the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. ■



Our Stories

In the pages that follow, you're going to meet five people: Yusef, Neo, Merla, Marina and Anton. These five principal storytellers are not real people, but their experiences and perspectives are reflective of the 22 immigrants who told our community-based researcher their migration stories, their challenges, and their aspirations for life in Edmonton. Our composite characters and their stories reflect real-life journeys, strengths, hopes and struggles. And while these struggles are not exclusive to newcomers, many migrants are affected disproportionately by them.

Each narrative has been semi-fictionalized, and has been presented as a learning place to identify how policies and systems affect migrants' experiences. Due to the complex, intersectional nature of personal stories, the policy connections, systemic barriers, and gaps may well be present in more than one person's experience, but will only be highlighted in one story.

You're also going to hear the real voices of people with lived experience, in their own words. These are all people who have come from countries around the globe, and who are now calling Edmonton home. Their voices shine a spotlight on the present state of immigration, settlement and inclusion in our city. ■

- There are 330,035 people of visible minority backgrounds living in Edmonton. They primarily come from South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Southeast Asian, Middle Eastern, Korean and Japanese backgrounds.
- One in four Edmontonians is an immigrant. By 2050, it is anticipated that 50% of our population will be immigrants.





- Of all the immigrants who came to Edmonton between 1980 and 2016, 54% were economic immigrants (skilled workers), while 29% were sponsored by family, and 17% were refugees.
- There are more than 125 different languages spoken by Edmontonians, not including English, French and Indigenous languages. The top ten languages are: Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin), South Asian (Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu), Tagalog, Spanish, German, Vietnamese, Polish and Somali.
- 44,620 Syrian Refugees have been resettled in Canada since 2015. More than 2,800 Syrian Refugees now call Edmonton home.
- Many immigrants come from lands that have also been colonized, and therefore bring with them a shared understanding, empathy and solidarity with Indigenous Peoples.
- An influx of 1,000 immigrant families translates to $84 million dollars in new household expenditures. 1,000 new families also generate $20 million dollars per year in municipal, provincial and federal taxes.
- Immigration is essential for our Canadian economy to thrive. As Canadians are having fewer children and retiring earlier, the flow of newcomers is necessary in order to have enough workers to fuel our economy.



- Every year, the Canadian government sets targets for the number of permanent residents they accept into the country. By the second quarter of 2020, however, the number of new immigrants fell by 64%, due to border and travel restrictions, and was far short of its 2020 targets.
- This year, the government has announced they are opening new short-term, temporary pathways for permanent residency for some migrants who are already in Canada, such as Temporary Foreign Workers and international students.

Our Stories **Yusef**



Yusef jiggles the key in the lock, and stiffly, it turns. Behind him, his daughter Sana tugs on his arm. She is pensive, but there is excitement in her eyes – an expression he's seen far too rarely in the little girl.

"Open it, Abu!" Sana slips her hand into his and looks at him with such sweetness, and his heart cracks open. This move to Canada, he tells himself for the hundredth time, it's good. He'll never forget hearing from the UN High Commission for Refugees that his family was to be sent to Edmonton. He didn't know much about Canada, but he knew it was a peaceful, beautiful place. It sounded like the fresh start they needed.

Indeed, the three long years in a refugee camp have taken their toll on his children and his wife, Amira. And himself? He can hardly remember the man he was before the war. When he used to sleep through the night. When his biggest concern was working long hours, or pleasing his boss. When his kids were happy and playful and life was... normal. Would it ever be normal again?

"Come, Yusef! Are you going to open that door?" Amira nudges Yusef's elbow and shifts the baby, Yara, onto her other hip. Her eyes are bright, and he can tell that she is excited too. Even his son, Hassan, looks eager for the first time in a long while. Though he stands apart from his parents, too serious for a twelve-year-old, Yusef sees in him a glimmer of the boy he was before the first bombs fell.

"Abu! Please!" Sana squeezes his hand.

Yusef turns the doorknob and opens the door into their new apartment. Their first real home in Edmonton.

> **"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 $1,000. I think that's a bit pricey. Subsidized rent for newcomers until they can find a job, and find their footing, that would be good."**
>
> - Skilled worker

They can see most of the apartment from the front door, and it will be a tight fit for his family of five, but it feels so safe and quiet. And he can't wait to live in a place where there's hot water day and night. Where the electricity doesn't get shut off. Where he can have a shower whenever he wants. Where his family is safe. He hasn't known such comforts for a long time.

He feels a flash of anxiety. The rent on this apartment is more than half of the government money he receives every month. The thought haunts him: how will he ever afford this home? And even though his family will still be receiving benefits for the next few months, it doesn't give him much time to learn the language, translate his engineering credentials to Canadian standards, and figure out how to make that much money on his own. All this while dealing with the trauma of the last few years. He doesn't want to disappoint his family, but their whole future, right now, feels like a question.

Sana, still holding Yusef's hand, pulls him into the living room, and they look out the window together. "Look, Abu," she says. "We can see the street from here. Hassan, look out the window!"

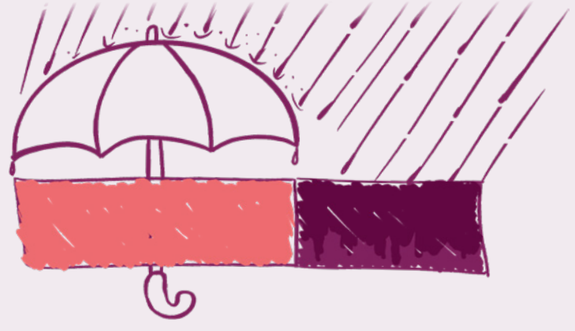
Though Yusef is used to a winter climate, this light autumn snowfall feels early to him. It clings to leaves that haven't yet fallen, and it makes him think of the dust that fell on his own city after months of shelling and air raids. Those terrible months when there wasn't enough food to eat. The booms of bombs and the tat-tat-tat of anti-aircraft fire punctuated their days and nights. He didn't sleep, always ready to throw himself over his wife and children so he could protect them in their fitful sleep. The fear was hungry, it gnawed at him constantly, but the fear wasn't the worst of it.

SYSTEMIC BARRIER: Subsidized Housing

It's very difficult for newcomers, refugees and migrants to find appropriate housing, especially homes that are large enough for families, but affordable enough to meet low-income thresholds. Low-cost housing stock is low, and it can take years to qualify for subsidized housing. Currently, 110,000 Albertans live in subsidized housing, and there are 19,000 people on waiting lists.

GAPS: Housing Costs

The City of Edmonton has established a goal that residents should pay no more than 30% of their household income on housing. A recent survey found that 72% of newcomer respondents spend more than 30% of their income on housing. Indeed, nearly half (44%) reported spending between 75% and 100% of their income on housing.



Substandard Housing

39%

of refugees in Canada live in unsuitable and substandard housing.

PROMISING PRACTICES:
Uniquely Newcomer Housing Project

In October 2019, City Council directed City staff to explore how to support a group of three community organizations, the **Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op, Right At Home Housing** and the **New Canadians Health Centre**, as they address the unique housing needs of newcomers. This project could become a model for future work in this area.

Strategic Focus For Specific Populations

A strategic focus is necessary for newcomer housing systems in order to meet recent immigrants' unique housing needs. This is especially vital to ensure that newcomers are positively integrated into broader communities, and that they have access to inclusive supports and services. The City is currently developing an **Indigenous Housing Strategy**, and the learnings from this strategy could inform the development of a strategy dedicated to newcomer housing. Specifically, a newcomer strategy could a) identify the gaps in appropriate housing stock, b) gather data about newcomer needs, and c) support pilot projects to explore new housing models, all as a means to advance this work in an intentional way.

It was his city – his beautiful city – emptying out that hurt him the most. The loss of so many people, either to death or to refugee camps or to points unknown. Family members and friends leaving, to scatter across the globe. There are so many people he's loved, and he doesn't know where they are, or if they're even alive.

Sana tugs his sleeve. "Abu! Look! There's a park across the street!"

It's the first time in a long while that Sana has seemed interested in playing outside. Yusef has been so worried about her. He pulls her into a hug, and looks to his son Hassan to see if there's a glimmer of interest in him as well.

There is.

He nods at his son. "Come, Hassan, tell your mother we're all going to the park."

In the hallway, as Yusef locks the door and Amira fusses over the baby's coat, another door opens down the hall. A family with a little girl around Sana's age leaves their own apartment. The woman wears a beautiful hijab, and Yusef notices Amira smooth hers in its place.

The two fathers' eyes meet and they greet one another. "Asalaam alaikum," the man says.

Yusef is relieved to hear the familiar words. "Alaikum salaam," he responds.

The man asks Yusef in lightly-accented English, "Are you moving in?"

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

- Single mom with one child

"Yes, we are, " Yusef says slowly, enunciating carefully. " I am Yusef, my wife Amira." Beside him, Amira smiles shyly.

"I am Jabir. Where are you from?" His face is so open and friendly, and Yusef is reminded of his friends back home. He tells Jabir his home city, and Jabir nods with excitement. Switching into his own language, the language Jabir and Yusef share, Jabir says, "I know it well! I used to go there with my family."

The woman reaches out to take Amira's hand in hers. "I'm Fatima. And this is Rabia, my daughter." She pulls the little girl in front of her.

"You are the same age as Rabia?" Fatima squeezes her daughter's shoulders as she looks at Sana. "What is your name, dear, and how old are you?" she asks, switching to English.

Sana looks up at Amira, and back to the little girl, grinning. "Sana," she says quietly. Then "Six!" She shows her age on her fingers.

Yusef glances at Amira. It's the first time Sana has ever answered a question in English. Amira smiles back at him, amazed.

"Wonderful. Do you and Rabia want to play together sometime?" Both little girls nod excitedly, while the women exchange smiles.

"You need anything, you just ask us," Jabir says. Yusef puts his hand on his heart. "Shukran. Thank you." Yusef and Amira smile as Jabir, Fatima and Rabia depart, saying, "Salaam," as they pass.

Yusef feels his optimism return. Friendly neighbours. A friend for Sana. Is it too much to hope for?

And then, the cloud of anxiety comes back. How can he find a way to support his family? How can he pay for this home they need so desperately? How will each of them settle into this Canadian life and find their way?

With these questions in his heart, he's quiet as he takes Sana's hand, and the family walks out to the park. ■

POLICY CONNECTION: Affordable Housing Plans

The City's **Affordable Housing Strategy 2016-2025** guides the City's approach to subsidized housing. The City works with non-profit housing providers to manage and increase the supply of affordable housing in Edmonton. Its recent **Affordable Housing Investment Plan** calls for 2,500 units of affordable housing and 600 units of supportive housing to be built by 2022. Investment from all levels of governments is critical in order to reach these goals, and a coordinated response is essential. There are currently some significant gaps in this response, and there is a need to work together more effectively.

BIG IDEA: Applying an Equity Lens

An intersectional equity lens is a necessary approach for all City policies and practices , as reflected in the Art of Inclusion: Diversity and Inclusion Framework (2019). Notably, Dr. Sandeep Agrawal, of the University of Alberta, is working with the City to examine how an equity lens can be applied to the City's **Zoning Bylaws**, which over time have had negative unintended impacts on low-income communities across our city. Applying GBA+ to this revision of municipal bylaws is one example of building equity into the heart of municipal policies and plans.

COVID-19 IMPACT: Funding for Social Services

The pandemic has had a devastating impact on newcomers and refugees, particularly when it comes to job and income loss, food security, child care, health, and housing challenges. Early in the pandemic, the City of Edmonton received $7.29 million dollars from the provincial government for Social Services support, as a means to respond to the basic needs of people hit the hardest by the pandemic, including recent immigrants and other racialized people. During the second wave, an additional $2.1 million has led to the creation of the **Edmonton Rapid Response Collaborative**. This network of Edmonton community agencies has been responding collectively to the crisis, and providing culturally-sensitive support in more than 30 languages, in neighbourhoods across the city.

"I've been here for a long time, 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, and you have to send money back home. Especially during this pandemic, everything is affected. Not to mention the expenses for my Permanent Residency application"

- Temporary Foreign Worker

The City of Edmonton's Role

For a city to thrive, it must meet the needs of every resident.

While settlement and immigration policies are formally the domain of federal and provincial governments, municipalities have significant roles to play in ensuring newcomers have the opportunity to positively integrate, connect and contribute — economically and in other ways — to their new communities.

The tenets of social inclusion and social determinants of health are key to integration, and are pivotal in determining whether or not migrants and newcomers can truly call a city home. A municipality can exert life-changing influences in these areas through policy and action.

For example, a municipality can play a proactive role in building a strong economy, and can incorporate equity measures to address systemic barriers that newcomers often experience. It can leverage development permits and land acquisition by tying it to expectations of affordable or subsidized housing standards. Support for community organizations can be tied to expanding inclusive and equitable services and intercultural practices. The design of public spaces can be done with a focus on accessibility, affordability, safety and cultural inclusion. Targeted grants can be made available to newcomers and migrants, in terms of supporting entrepreneurship, as well as community activities. Basic supports and services for Edmontonians can be made available in multiple languages. Municipalities can create means to effectively reach and engage with ethnocultural communities, and community animators can be recruited to provide a liaison between City services and communities with language and cultural barriers.

And of course, a city should always be the best champion for its residents, and can advocate for funding and other supports from different levels of government. It can take action to reduce the stigmas of mental health and addictions issues, advocate for affordable childcare and other policies that support gender equity, and can proactively work towards Reconciliation and anti-racism.

There are many City of Edmonton policies and actions that address these tactics, but they are not yet reaching all Edmontonians that could benefit from them. Some of these policies are mentioned throughout this report as promising practices. There is, however, still room for improvement of these policies, as well as development of other policies to provide the municipal level of services and support that newcomers deserve. ■

- It's a reality of our economy — we need immigration to grow our cities, provinces and country, and to keep them stable. But newcomers can't contribute to that stability if they are struggling, and if they can't fully participate in ways that long-time residents often take for granted. Employment, housing, civic participation, access to health services, education, and the simple reality of connecting with the broader community are all fundamental to belonging in a city.
- Social inclusion has been addressed in Edmonton's new **Economic Action Plan** (April 2021), by paying "careful attention to who is included and who is left behind," with the intention of creating policies that work for all Edmonton residents. It is essential to ensure newcomers and migrants are intentionally included in Edmonton's post-COVID-19 economic recovery.
- Action 17 of the **Edmonton Economic Action Plan** (April 2021) addresses the need to improve access to affordable childcare, which supports parents in their ability to work. This is especially vital for racialized women and single parents, so that Edmonton's economic recovery is inclusive of newcomers and migrants.

Our Stories **Neo**



Neo leans back in his chair and glances at the clock. One more hour of class, and then an hour to eat and catch the bus to his job at the convenience store. He's proud to be working, especially during the pandemic, but it doesn't leave him a lot of free time.

That is how it is. He can almost hear his mother's voice saying these words.

He knows it's not cool to admit it – not for a seventeen year-old – but he misses his mom desperately. He hasn't seen her since he was thirteen, and he'll never forget the day she told him he was to go to Canada to live with his dad.

He remembers his mom had her back to him, stirring beans at the stove in their small kitchen. She didn't turn around, but her voice was thick. "Your father wrote to me. He wants to sponsor you to live in Canada. He owns a house. He has a good job. You could have a good life there."

> **"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."**
>
> - Youth, Family Class, sponsored by his father

She kept stirring the beans.

"But I have a good life here. I'm not going." Neo could feel panic rising in the back of his throat.

Neo's mom finally turned around, and her face was stern. "Neo, you know your stepdad doesn't make a lot of money at the mine. That is how it is."

"Why didn't you marry some rich man, like a lawyer or something? Why didn't you think of that before you married Robert?"

"I did marry a rich man, Neo. He's your father and he lives in Canada. It's settled. You're going."

And with that, she turned back to her beans. He hated those beans in that moment.

Later that night, Neo woke to hear a strange sound coming from his mother's bed. He sat on the floor next to her bed and held her hand as her whole body shook with sobs. They cried together until morning. Both swollen-eyed, he looked at her solemnly.

"Ok," he said. "I'll go."

He was on a plane to Edmonton later that month.

It was his dad who picked him up at the airport. Neo didn't speak a lot of English when he first arrived, so the drive was long and quiet. And even though Edmonton was clean and pretty, it took a long time for it to feel like home. Just riding the bus was hard. He couldn't read the English signs and he never knew where to get off the bus. The first time he rode the bus by himself, he rode around the entire route before the bus driver helped him figure out where he needed to go.

But Neo is proud of how far he's come. His dad isn't as rich as his mom made him sound, but he's a good dad. He sent Neo to a youth group for newcomer kids, where he made lots of friends. And now he volunteers at the Food Bank and his English is much better. He's on track for university in the fall, as long as they can afford it.

SYSTEMIC BARRIER: Experiences of Racism

Several of our storytellers experienced racism and discrimination in Edmonton. We're well aware of racist attitudes and behaviours on our city streets, not to mention in homes and online spaces. With the rise of hate crimes and white supremacist groups operating in Edmonton, the safety, equity and wellbeing of racialized residents are tangible and serious concerns.

GAP: Disconnected from Civic Life

Amongst the migrants we interviewed, only a handful formally volunteered with an organization, though research indicates that newcomers frequently help out their extended families, faith groups and communities in informal ways. Only two had voted in an election before. The rest had no knowledge of City Councillors, or any sense of the role the City could play in their lives. Broader research tells us that civic engagement is the least documented area of immigrant life. There is a clear gap, and therefore an opportunity, for the City to engage more deeply with ethnocultural communities, since these groups make up 25% of our city's population and are growing.

"If you can see it, you can be it."



Diversity is important in its own right, but when youth can see themselves reflected in our leaders, it can inspire them to leadership themselves. This is relevant for all kinds of diversity — race, gender, ability, age, etc., and it's vital to take steps to encourage formal and informal role modeling and mentorship in diverse communities.

PROMISING PRACTICES:
Edmonton Local Immigration Partnership (ELIP)

ELIP 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. In its second year of a 5-year federally funded project, and with the guidance of a shared Secretariat, **ELIP**'s goal is to provide the means for innovative partnerships to address specific needs in the community related to settlement, immigration and inclusion. As **ELIP** aims to be participatory, people-centred, and to consider power dynamics, it strives for dynamic multi-sectoral representation beyond the immigration and settlement sector such as people with lived experience, business, academe, ethnocultural community leaders and faith communities.

Anti-Racism Work at City of Edmonton

The City of Edmonton is advancing anti-racism through various endeavours: such as the **Task Force on Community Safety and Wellbeing**, and the **Anti-Racism Advisory Committee** (**ARAC**). The Task Force recently released a community-driven report that offered recommendations to address racism, discrimination, excessive use of force by the police, poverty and homelessness in Edmonton. City Council accepted 13 of the 14 recommendations, and Administration is now working with the Police Commission to explore implementation. **ARAC** is made up of community members who bring insight and lived experience to inform City Council on City policies, and to raise awareness and mobilize action around anti-racism efforts in Edmonton.

Engaging Newcomers in Civic Life

The City of Edmonton is already taking positive steps to engage newcomer women, children, and youth — of particular note are the **Women's Advocacy Voice of Edmonton** (**WAVE**), **City of Edmonton Youth Council**, and **City Hall School**. Other steps the City could take to engage newcomers of all ages include: offer a City Hall 101 multilingual introduction to how the City operates; incentivize community groups to actively include newcomers as volunteers and leaders; and engage community animators to mobilize ethnocultural communities for public engagement and to co-create solutions with the City.

> **"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."**
>
> **- Temporary Foreign Worker**

A knock on the classroom door pulls him back into the moment. His teacher pauses her lecture, and steps into the hallway. A loud engine revs outside, and it attracts his attention. He imagines it's a silver Porsche 911 Turbo S Coupe, the car he'll own when he's a rich lawyer someday. He'll wear the best suits, just like the lawyers on TV. And he'll own a great big house, and he'll sponsor his mom and bring her to Canada, and she'll never have to eat beans again, unless she wants to.

The door opens, and his teacher leads a tall Black man into the room. Neo sits up straighter. The stranger is casual in jeans and a bright white dress shirt, and he looks like an Instagram model. #BusinessCasual, Neo thinks. He wonders if this guy drives a Porsche.

"Everyone!" His teacher says. "I want to introduce you to my friend Richard. He's here to talk to you about what it's like to be an elected official, and why you should vote."

A politician. That makes sense, Neo thinks. He isn't sure if he should be impressed, but this guy must be popular. He notices a lot of his classmates are paying more attention. Especially the girls. He takes note of that, too.

Richard's voice is warm, and Neo can hear the smile coming from behind his mask. He's talking about what it's like to be a candidate during an election, knocking on doors and shaking hands. Neo imagines himself wearing a shirt just like Richard's, and people listening to him as he makes a speech.

"...Something that's really important to me, though, is addressing racism here in our city," Richard says.

The word 'racism' pulls Neo out of his daydream. His heart beats a little faster as he listens.

> **"Discrimination and being treated unfairly — I really hate stuff like that, you know? It's so gross feeling like that."**
>
> **- Youth, Family Class, sponsored by his father**

Richard continues. "I've experienced it myself – in big ways and small. We have to change attitudes, and it starts with people your age, and younger. You are the ones who can make a real difference."

Neo feels a familiar weight in his gut. He knew racism back home, where his mom struggled to get an education because of her dark skin. He experienced it himself, being told he wasn't

POLICY CONNECTION: The Art of Inclusion Framework

The Art of Inclusion: Our Diversity and Inclusion Framework is all about shifting the mindset, heartset, and skillset of City staff so they more effectively serve a diverse population. It directs all City departments to implement a GBA+ lens to all of their work, including employment, policies, programs and services for the public. It will undertake a review to determine systemic barriers specific to racialized and underrepresented groups of City employees. It also calls for an update to the City's Diversity and Inclusion Policy, and to establish a community of local employers to share information and best practices. The plan also identifies the intention for an annual report on the City's inclusion progress, as an accountability measure.

> **"I don't volunteer, but it is something I would really like to do… I haven't got any information about volunteering, but I would really like to do it."**
> - Skilled worker, married with three children

welcome at this church or that store. In Edmonton, the racism he experiences is different. It's jokes on the playground. It's the way ladies clutch their purses when you pass them on the street. It's the way security looks at you when you're minding your own business, or the way people doubt you when you apply for a job. The older he gets, the worse it is for him. And it hurts every bit as much as it did back home. He doesn't like to think about it.

But Richard is talking about it. And now people are paying attention. Without thinking, Neo raises his hand. He's usually shy about speaking up in class, worried about his accent.

"Neo?" His teacher calls on him, surprised.

"Sir, how do I get your job?"

Richard laughs, and says, "Well, to start, it's a great idea to follow local politics and learn about the issues. Get involved in your community. And then run for election. Even if you don't get elected the first time, you'll learn a lot for your next campaign."

Neo is quiet for a moment. Maybe working to change the world is better than being rich, or having a Porsche. Maybe it doesn't matter, so long as he can bring his mom to Edmonton. If he were a politician, or a leader of some kind, maybe he could make Edmonton a better city, for himself and for other people…

Neo's hand shoots up one more time. "Sir, what kind of car do you drive?" ■

BIG IDEA: Grounding in Local Data

Too often, data is lacking when it comes to all aspects of helping migrants integrate in our city. We're often operating blindly, which perpetuates systems that create barriers. Therefore, there is significant need for local research and disaggregated race-based data in order to create an evolving knowledge-base. Both ongoing qualitative and quantitative research are necessary to ground policies in the changing realities of immigrants in Edmonton.

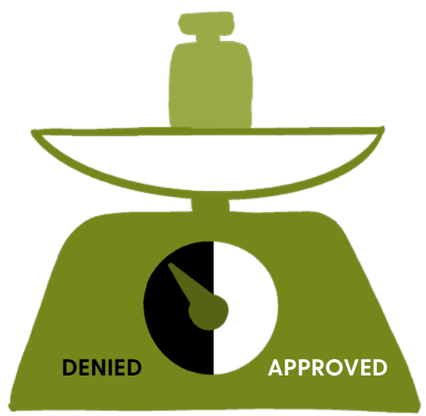
COVID-19 IMPACT: Youth

Young people have faced a lot of changes to their lives due to the pandemic. Disruptions to their education and vital social connections have exacerbated mental health issues and feelings of isolation. As of spring 2021, the Alberta youth unemployment rate is 19%, largely due to closures in retail and service industries. It's harder than ever for youth to find work, and when they do, they're often risking their health in these minimum-wage, front-line service roles.

The Multidimensional Immigrant

Historically, our federal government has considered immigrants from two very specific, limited viewpoints: how will this person contribute to or take from the economy, and are they desirable for permanent migration based on race.

Both of these perspectives offer very one-dimensional views of a person — as simply a financial cog, or either an asset or a liability to our economy or culture, based on racial bias. This dehumanizes and diminishes people, as it does not acknowledge any of their intrinsic human value, and instead draws

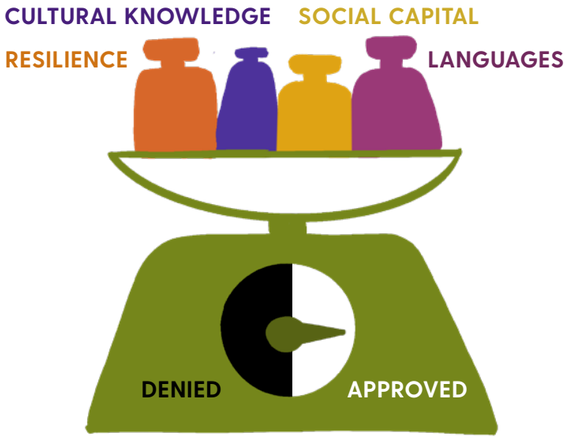


the focus to what migrants may lack, such as strong English skills, Canadian work experience, or transferable education. It reduces them to numbers, and does not look at the entire scope of impact a person can have in their community.

The diverse value and wealth of experiences that people can offer should be taken into consideration, and policy should reflect a more multidimensional assessment and approach.

Migrants enrich and strengthen our communities, and society, in many important ways. For example, many newcomers bring cultural knowledge and traditions that enrich our social fabric. They bring experiences of resilience, as they strive to overcome adverse conditions and systemic barriers present in their countries of origin, and in their new communities. Many immigrants are highly skilled, even if their credentials aren't formally recognized by local licensing bodies, and these skills add to our local knowledge base and can spur innovation.

Newcomers are entire complex people who can contribute in a multitude of ways to our neighbourhoods, cities, and society as a whole, and policy needs to reflect these multidimensional strengths. ■



Our Stories **Merla**



"Sorry, ma'am, that position has been filled. We're not hiring anyone else right now."

Merla hangs up the phone with a sigh. It had been her most promising lead yet – a job she was over-qualified for – and still she didn't even get an interview for it. She feels the gnaw of worry tug at her insides. How is she ever going to find a job?

This worry about work is new to her. She worked as a research assistant while she did her graduate studies, and became an associate professor soon after she finished her PhD. She thought she'd never have trouble finding a job.

But then, the government changed, there were riots in the streets, and Merla's husband, Aadi, lost his job. They knew they had to make a change – for their own sake, and for the safety of their young daughters. One of Merla's closest friends from university had done her graduate studies at the University of Alberta, and she had heard so many good things about living in Edmonton.

So Merla and Aadi applied for permanent residency in Canada through the Skilled Worker program, and a little more than a year later, they were accepted. It was overwhelming to pick up their lives and move to Edmonton during a global pandemic – she's not sure Aadi's mother will ever forgive her – but she had few doubts at the time that it was the right thing to do.

Now, doubts are flooding in. It's been nine months since they arrived, and Aadi has just found a part-time job as a night receptionist at a hotel – a position that doesn't make use of his hard-earned MBA, but at least it brings in a small amount of money to the house. Until then, they were living off their savings, and those savings are almost gone. Merla has applied for every position she was remotely qualified for, but hasn't even gotten an interview. If she gets any response at all, it's a variation of the same:

"There's a lot of competition for this role, and we hired someone else with more direct experience."

"It was a difficult decision to make, but, we hired a more suitable candidate."

"You have an impressive resume but we have hired someone else this time."

> "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 in a customer service position as well."
> - Skilled Worker with an MA in Public Health

Her friend, Deborah, at the settlement agency, told her it's probably because her resume is too long, and because she doesn't have any Canadian work experience. But how can she get Canadian work experience if no one will hire her? And how can she summarize her ten-year career in a page or two? She knows Deborah didn't mean any offence, but honestly, she left their most recent meeting feeling diminished and hopeless. If employers aren't interested in what she can offer, and all her experience, how will she ever get a fulfilling job here?

The clatter of a toy falling on the floor in the next room, a rising argument and a wail from

SYSTEMIC BARRIERS: Childcare

Childcare in Edmonton is expensive. For low-wage workers, childcare can sometimes cost as much or more than their income, which defeats the purpose of going to work, and prevents parents, often women, from entering or staying in the workforce. The cancelation of the provincial government's $25/day childcare program left many parents with low incomes in a bind. There is hope that the federal government's $10/day childcare program may provide some relief, but there are still many questions about how that program will be implemented in Alberta.

Bias in Hiring and Workplace Practices

Many studies show that we all hold implicit (and sometimes explicit) biases which influence our opinions, especially about people from racialized communities. These biases can create barriers for employment, particularly when applicants don't already have relevant Canadian work experience, and unfair biases and stereotypes can also follow immigrants into the workplace. This leaves many immigrants and people from racialized communities unemployed and underemployed.

GAP: Education vs. Employment

Every year, Canada welcomes thousands of newcomers with advanced degrees and specialized training. 17% of recent immigrants hold graduate degrees, and 87% of skilled workers arrive in Canada with a university degree. 40% of immigrants (aged 25-64) hold a Bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 25% of the Canadian-born population. And yet, finding employment in their fields is a consistent problem for many immigrants.



40% of immigrants (aged 25-64) hold a Bachelor's degree or higher, compared to



25% of the Canadian-born population

PROMISING PRACTICES:

Edmonton Economic Action Plan

The new **Edmonton Economic Action Plan** is grounded in the pursuit of equity, and provides actions around building capacity and access to resources for entrepreneurs from marginalized communities (including newcomers). It also addresses local procurement, giving priority to businesses owned by people who have experienced systemic barriers. While this plan is very recent (April 2021), it offers promise for racialized entrepreneurs and immigrants.

Micro-Credentialing and Gaining Canadian Work Experience

Micro-credentialing refers to short, inexpensive online courses for newcomers to take at any point in their migration journey — even before they arrive. The certificates they receive could provide proof of marketable skills, relevant to Canadian workplaces. The City could work with post-secondary institutions and the business community to increase paid internships and practicum opportunities to help immigrants gain Canadian work experience.

her youngest daughter, pulls her back into the moment. She takes a deep breath, and pushes away her frustration. With her husband working nights, sometimes it's hard to manage both the job hunt and being a full time mom.

"What's going on in here?" Merla scoops her littlest girl, Maaran, into her arms, and gives her a hug to quell the tears.

"Maaran was bothering me," her older daughter, Nilan, says as she picks up the toy from the floor.

> **"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"**
>
> - Skilled Worker

"Nilan, aren't you supposed to be doing your schoolwork?" Merla settles Maaran on the floor and hands her a teddy bear. The little girl, distracted, nestles her fingers in the bear's plush fur, and looks up at her mother, her brown eyes still swimming in tears.

"It's hard, mama. I need help with the English." Nilan's voice is edged with tears herself, and Merla doesn't blame her. Once again, she wonders if this move is worth it. Her girls haven't had the chance to make friends yet, because of COVID, and every day one or both of them have an outburst about something.

Maybe it's a good thing I don't have a job, Merla thinks. Could we afford childcare? Could I add more stress to my children's lives by putting them in a day home or after-school care with strangers? Back home, her mother-in-law lived with them, and provided all the childcare the family needed. And her girls had a dozen cousins and neighbourhood kids to play with. Here, they're all alone.

Merla reaches out her hand to Nilan and gives her a hug, too. Nilan clings to Merla's side, and buries her head in her mother's sweater, sobbing softly. Where is the bright, adventurous seven-year-old she was this time last year? Merla feels her own eyes fill with tears, and she wipes them away quickly, before her girls can see them.

But Maaran – her sweet, sensitive four year-old – has already noticed. She pushes her teddy bear into Merla's hand, and whispers, "Feel happier, mama."

And in that moment, her daughter's gift touches Merla in a powerful way. She feels her resolve coming back. She must be strong for her

> **"The problem is, since I am a specialist for the last 13 years, and this is a basic exam. It's questions from when I was maybe 20 years old...I was struggling with that. I asked [veterinarians] about the basic exam, like, if you have samples...what this exam looks like. Nobody knows. Nobody can help."**
>
> - Skilled Worker, Veterinary Surgeon and University Professor

daughters. She must be an example for them, to show them that they can all make their way in this new, strange country. She must show them that they can succeed at school, just like she and Aadi will somehow build successful careers for themselves. Who knows? If she can't get a job, maybe she could start a business? After all, her own mother always told her that she had a will like no one else, and once she put her mind to something, she'd get it done.

"Come on," she says to her girls, pushing her fears temporarily to the side. "Get your coats. Let's go out and explore our neighbourhood." ■

POLICY CONNECTION: Living Wage

In Edmonton, the most recent living wage is calculated to be $16.51/hour (2019), based on what a family of four, with two full-time income earners, would need in order to provide the basic necessities, and to fully participate in their communities. The City of Edmonton has adopted an internal living wage policy, ensuring it pays all employees and contractors a living wage at minimum, and serves as an example in the community for other employers. This is especially relevant for newcomers, who frequently find low-wage or entry-level positions their only options for employment.

COVID-19 IMPACT: Shecession

The pandemic has dramatically affected women's lives, driving many out of the workforce, with often racialized women with low incomes bearing a significant burden. According to the **Royal Bank of Canada,** half a million women who lost their jobs in the pandemic still hadn't returned to work by January 2021. Increased childcare responsibilities, and decreased job opportunities, have made it especially difficult for migrant women to find and keep their employment.

BIG IDEA: An Opportunity Not a Problem

When we think about diversity, there is a need to shift away from thinking about immigrants and racialized communities as "vulnerable populations," or "a drain on resources" and instead, recognize their skills and strengths as a resource, and as a source of innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship. Therefore, we need to look at ways we can co-create solutions with diverse newcomers, from an intercultural mindset (see page 33), rather than "trying to solve problems for a population in need." Diversity in organizations also provides a changing vision of what leaders look like, which can be inspirational to newcomers in the workplace.

An Inclusive Recovery

The City of Edmonton is looking for ways to spur economic growth, and to create 120,000 jobs in the next ten years. Any focus on economic recovery needs to be driven by the value of equity, and incorporate a GBA+ lens to address racial, gender and other systemic social inequities. This recovery plan must ensure that no Edmontonian, due to their income, age, gender, immigration status, disability, race, sexual orientation or other identity factors is left behind.

Cultural Wealth Model

When we consider how newcomers contribute to our communities, it is important to look beyond simple economic measures, and to explore the many kinds of 'wealth' that people bring with them when they immigrate. Dr. Tara J. Yosso proposed a more robust way of looking at the true 'wealth,' or cultural capital, that newcomers offer our communities.

Social Capital: The strength of networks, and associations with peers and community members, which can be leveraged for success.

Aspirational Capital: The strength and persistence of hope, and the inspirational pursuit of dreams in the face of barriers and adversity.

Familial Capital: Cultural knowledge that is developed and maintained within generational and 'chosen' family structures.

Navigational Capital: The skills of navigating systemic challenges, which are frequently faced and overcome by newcomers and migrants.

Resistant Capital: The strength, knowledge and skills that come from consistently challenging inequities, both in their countries of origin and here.

Linguistic Capital: The social, intellectual and communication strengths present in anyone who is capable of interacting through multiple languages.

All of these forms of 'cultural capital' or 'cultural wealth' provide significant value to our communities, and offer a shift in the way we think about migrants and newcomers — from consumers of services to contributors of value. Though these kinds of capital are harder to quantify than 'economic capital,' migrants' contributions of this sort can not be ignored or undervalued. Our communities are enriched by these many forms of wealth. ■



Our Stories **Marina**



Marina sits on a bench outside the tall office tower, working up her courage to go inside. The downtown streets are unfamiliar, full of busy people rushing past, no one smiling or stopping to say hello. It's so far from her sunny island home, and she feels another wave of homesickness wash over her. She'd give anything to be playing with her nephews in their sand-washed yard right now, or to be cooking with her sister, or caring for her aging mom.

Instead, she's on a hard bench, in a hard city, dreading the conversation she knows she needs to have.

It seemed like a good idea to come to Canada to work. When she calculated how much money she'd make in her local currency, even at Alberta's minimum wage, well, the decision to come to Edmonton was an easy one. She took what was left of her savings after paying her mother's hospital bills, and invested it in an employment agency, which got her temporary papers and a job in Edmonton. The process took two years, and the closer her departure date came, the more excited she got. Finally, she'd be able to provide a good life for her mom, and her younger sister could go to university. It seemed like the best way for her to help her family. And she'd get to have an adventure at the same time.

Marina will never forget stepping off the airplane in Edmonton. A 70-degree temperature shift in just 20 hours, she shivered outside, waiting for her brother's friend Damian, who lived in Edmonton, to pick her up. She remembers how the car windows fogged as she spoke, and she was grateful for the warm coat Damian's wife sent along. She huddled in the passenger seat, her fear fighting with her enthusiasm as she saw her new city for the first time. And when she glimpsed snow-tipped trees, decorated with fairy lights, she felt like she had entered a storybook world, full of possibility.

And yet, now that she's been in Edmonton for two years, Marina is still waiting for a storybook ending.

She might have known things were going to be a problem on the job from the very first day. The bus system confused her, and there was no one to explain it to her, so she was late getting to the work site. When she finally arrived at the office building she was supposed to clean, there was no one to meet her, no one to let her in, or show her what to do. She felt completely lost.

On the very first shift she worked with her boss, he yelled at her in front of the other cleaners, because she used the wrong solution on the mirrors, and it left streaks. It only got worse from there. Between the verbal abuse, threats to fire her if she didn't work extra hours without pay, and the heavy physical labour unsuitable for her tiny five foot frame, her storybook adventure in Edmonton now feels more like a nightmare.

She cries herself to sleep every night.

Which is exactly why she's found herself sitting outside a skyscraper on a Monday afternoon. She rehearses in her head the words that Emilio taught her: "Hello, I have an appointment to speak to the head of Human Resources." And then, "I'd like to make a formal complaint against my employer."

> "My experience here is really not 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."
> - Temporary Foreign Worker

Just thinking these words brings on a wave of nausea – from nerves or something else, she's not sure – and she tries to breathe deeply to quell it.

She knows too well what will happen to her if this meeting with HR doesn't go well. If she loses her job... well, she's seen it before. It happened to her friend Louisa. She'd lose her housing. $450 per month for a shared room is a lot, but at least it's a roof over her head. No job means no work permit. Which means no status – she wouldn't be able to work legally in Alberta. And no status means no healthcare, and if she got sick, if she got COVID,

SYSTEMIC BARRIER: Eggs All In One Basket

Though Temporary Foreign Workers are Edmonton residents, they face pressures that permanent residents don't face. At the mercy of sometimes exploitative employers, they have little recourse. Housing, healthcare and legal status to work are tied to their employment contracts. If they lose their job, they lose everything. The Temporary Foreign Workers Advisory Office is a resource for Temporary Foreign Workers, but it may still feel like a significant risk to make a complaint against an employer.

GAP: Lack of Healthcare Support

While Temporary Foreign Workers are eligible for Alberta Health services, many have difficulty accessing our healthcare system, and are left with little or no ability to pay for expenses like dental care, mental health support, prescriptions, vision care, etc.

POLICY CONNECTION: Access Without Fear

People with precarious immigration status may be fearful of any interactions with government officials out of concern about deportation, and so may be hesitant to obtain services like low-income transit or recreation passes. The **City Plan** includes the core policy directions of 'BELONG,' and 'ACCESS,' which speak to fostering wellness in all Edmonton communities, including temporary residents. The **Access Without Fear** policy is meant to ensure all residents can access City of Edmonton supports and services without being questioned about their immigration status.

PROMISING PRACTICE: New Canadians Health Centre

The circumstances that drive refugees and other migrants from their homes can dramatically affect their health. And other complex factors, such as language and cultural barriers, income inequalities, and loss of status and social networks highlight the need for focused support. A local community board has been formed to establish a **New Canadians Health Centre**, which will offer welcoming, community-operated, multidisciplinary, multicultural and multilingual services, including a range of healthcare, social and settlement supports. Edmonton is the last large Canadian city to offer this dedicated service to newcomers, and business planning and partnership development is underway.

COVID-19 IMPACT: Health For All?

The pandemic has shone a light on the healthcare inequities in our country. Undocumented migrants residing in Edmonton have particularly precarious healthcare status, as it is often tied to their work, and as many workplaces have been disrupted by pandemic closures, many undocumented migrants are left without healthcare, or access to vaccinations, during the worst health crisis in a century. As mental health challenges escalate as a result of the prolonged pandemic, City work with partners on the **Mental Health and Social Isolation Initiative** and the **Community Mental Health Action Plan** aimed at improving systems coordination, will be more vital than ever.

she wouldn't be able to go to the hospital.

And the alternative, going home after two years, without any money, feels even worse. She feels shame burn in her cheeks, and it hasn't even happened.

She looks up at the front door of the office building. She can't go in. The risk is too high. She stands to go, turning her back on the building.

But then, she thinks of Emilio and his kindness. She'd have to tell him she lost her nerve.

"Use your voice, Marina," he had said to her. "You're smart and capable, and you're being treated badly. That's not right."

Emilio invited her to a meeting with other temporary foreign workers, other people who had similar stories to tell. She was horrified by the abuses they had faced, but also relieved to know she wasn't completely alone. Other people had stood up to their employers, and they hadn't lost their jobs. She felt so inspired by the chance to make a difference. She couldn't lose her courage now.

And yet, her nausea feels worse than ever. Is it really just nerves? Is she sick? Does she actually have COVID?

> **"Access to health services is only a portion of what contributes to health status. As refugees do not experience settlement in silos, those elements such as housing, transportation, education or poverty must be considered in the whole person. As such, programs and services for refugees need to be able to address and consider all social determinants of health."**
>
> - Refugee Health Community Engagement Project Report, March 2021

> **"We had a lot of cases on the second wave of COVID, and it makes me scared because of my status — no status. When no status, you don't have access to healthcare even when exposed to COVID. So I can't get any medical treatment from the government."**
>
> - Temporary Foreign Worker, married with two children

She sits back down on the bench, sweating. She thinks of her sister, Donna, back home. Her sweet baby sister, who was arrested at a protest against the government. She was detained illegally for a week, and yet she's still willing to push for change. If Donna can use her voice, if she can speak up in a far more repressive environment, surely she, Marina, can stand up for herself too? Surely she's made of the same stuff?

Surely if she can keep her job, and make her situation better, she can apply for permanent residency. Maybe, in time, she could even sponsor her sister and her mom and her nephews to come to Canada, and they could all be together. That would be the best storybook ending of all.

So, Marina knows what she needs to do. Before she can think about it any longer, she stands up and marches to the tall building's door, and up the elevator to the company's head office.

"Hello," she says to the receptionist. "I have an appointment with the head of Human Resources."

As the receptionist makes the call, Marina squares her shoulders. She's ready. ■

BIG IDEAS: Immigration as a Social Determinant of Health

Municipalities have known that income is a social determinant of health for a long time. An emerging perspective is that immigration is also a social determinant of health in its own right. Many of our storytellers indicated that their health had declined during their immigration journey, and the stress, upheaval and uncertainty that many migrants (especially those with undocumented status) experience have deep physical and mental health impacts. This recognition must go beyond looking for solutions for individuals, and identify the systemic factors involved. Municipalities can help by advocating for a better deal for their citizens, and City administration can collaborate with stakeholders to advance work around physical and mental health, housing, wellbeing, and safety, even if those domains fall outside of the municipality's jurisdiction.

The Wellness Framework

Wellness is all about connection, and in order for a community to foster wellbeing, it must promote connections on six different levels: to one's body and self; to family, friends and community; to the sacred; to culture; to the land; and to society as a whole (the human project). The City of Edmonton's **RECOVER** project is looking at how to implement this intersectional and holistic concept of wellbeing in order to promote wellness and social inclusion across the city, but especially in communities that would benefit the most.

Social Inclusion

A place doesn't truly feel like home until we're able to fully participate in all of the social, political, economic and cultural activities of the community.

This is what we mean by social inclusion for this report. And the social inclusion of every Edmonton resident needs to be a primary goal for all municipal policies, programs and activities.

For newcomers and migrants, the barriers to full inclusion are often significant, tend to be complex and intersectional, and are almost always systemic in nature. Therefore, we need to change the systems in order for all Edmontonians to engage more fully in our city.

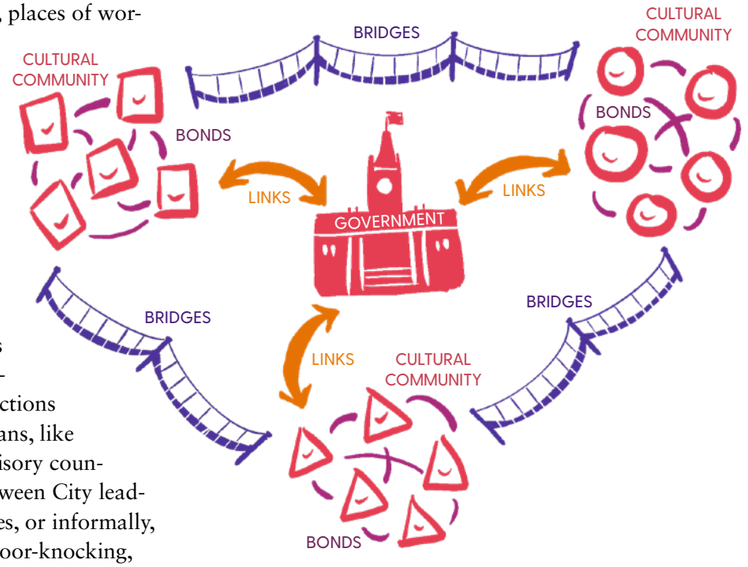
The following two frameworks are helpful approaches, and offer a new way to think about how we can include all Edmonton residents in building a safe, warm and welcoming city.

Ager and Strang's Bonding/Bridging/Linking Model of Social Inclusion

According to researchers Alastair Ager and Alison Strang, one of the ways we can strive for social inclusion is by identifying and understanding the different ways that cultural groups connect, both within and beyond their communities.

- **Bonds** - Connections between members of the same cultural community. These connections may be made through family members, neighbours, ethnocultural community groups, places of worship and more.
- **Bridges** - Connections between members of different cultural communities. These connections may be made through schools and post-secondary institutions, community leagues, sports, hobbies, activities and more.
- **Links** - Connections between members of cultural communities to systems of power, policies, programs and supports. These connections may be made through formal means, like public engagement activities, advisory councils, and planned interactions between City leaders and ethnocultural communities, or informally, through community animators, door-knocking, and other forms of connection.

In order for people to feel fully included, they must have connections at all three of these levels. Effective policy must facilitate these kinds of connections, and actively create engagement and co-creation opportunities to ensure the development of effective and meaningful inclusion of newcomers and migrants.



From Multiculturalism to Interculturalism

As Canadians, we're often proud of our multicultural 'mosaic.'

But there has been an important evolution in thought regarding how we embrace the diversity of different cultures within a community, neighbourhood or city. Multiculturalism has limitations, and has prompted a re-imagining of the philosophy: moving from multiculturalism, through cross-culturalism, and finally to interculturalism. This approach has been adapted from the model developed by the United Church of Canada.

Multiculturalism



With multiculturalism, we acknowledge different cultures but live 'adjacent' to them. This can manifest as 'enjoying ethnic foods' and cultural music and fashion, but there is still a separation, and there is little cross-learning, or acknowledgement of power differentials.

Cross-Culturalism



With cross-culturalism, there are attempts to reach across cultural divides, but they are deliberate and limited. And while these tentative attempts acknowledge that barriers to inclusion exist, those barriers are rarely removed. This still leaves room to believe that one culture is better than another, and also does not address power differentials.

Interculturalism



Interculturalism is based on a mutual understanding and appreciation for all cultures, with no hierarchy between them. It is an ongoing process of mutual exchange, understanding, empathy and acceptance, with an expectation of learning, shifting perspectives, and mutual adaptation. Differences are acknowledged and celebrated, and barriers are removed.

Policies, programs and services need to be developed from an intercultural perspective, in order to enhance the inclusion and wellbeing of all Edmonton residents. This calls for deep and ongoing community engagement and co-creation with those who have been underrepresented and underserved, such as Indigenous peoples and newcomers. ■

Our Stories **Anton**



Anton sits outside the courtroom, studying the loonie in his hand. This coin, with the funny name, and the bird, and the picture of the queen – it represents for him the hope, the promise of his life in Canada. If only he can stay.

Heads, I win, he thinks. I get to stay in Canada.

Tails... He doesn't want to think of that possibility. He knows if he's denied his refugee claim, he'll have to go back home and face prison. Violence. Maybe death.

He flips the coin in his hand, but he's too afraid to look at the result. Instead, he shakes it, like dice, and lays it out flat in his palm.

He remembers the first time he saw a loonie, in the handful of coins a nice woman gave him at the Edmonton airport. She had bought him a coffee and handed him the change, and told him how to get to a shelter in the city. People would help him there. She was so kind. She reminded him of his Auntie, and it helped to remember there are good people in this world.

His Auntie is the best person he knows. She hid him in her house. She lied to the police about knowing where he was. She collected money from her cousins, and made all the arrangements to help him leave. Going to Canada was her idea.

"You'll be safe there, love," she said, touching his face. "You'll be free."

He remembers the tears that flooded his cheeks. The very idea of being safe anywhere was so foreign to him. And freedom, freedom to be who he really is? For the first 25 years of his life, that was something he'd never thought possible.

But the last six months, since he's been in Canada? It's been the hardest, but most beautiful six months of his life. His Auntie was right. It's not a crime to be gay in Canada, not like it is back home. He's never felt so accepted by his friends at the LGBTQ+ support group. Just thinking about it now brings tears to the corners of his eyes. He can't express how grateful he is to be here.

A gentle pat on his back brings him back to the courthouse in Edmonton. His friend Winnifred sits down beside him, tucking a lock of pink hair behind her ear. She doesn't speak, she just takes his arm and gives it a gentle squeeze. He's so grateful to have made all the friends he has – he knows other newcomers haven't been so lucky.

He flips the coin and this time he looks at it. Heads. He hopes that's a good omen. Winnifred winks at him, just like she did the first day he met her at the LGBTQ+ newcomers group, and he no longer feels as nervous.

And then he sees the woman he calls Mama Aggie strutting down the hall towards him. Her high heels clip clop on the hard surface floor, and as usual, she turns heads as she walks. He's never known anyone with as much force of will as Mama Aggie – with her by his side, nothing can go wrong.

> "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 families with the city and helped us finalize and apartment."
>
> - Skilled Worker, mother of two

"Have you gone in for your hearing yet?" Mama Aggie hugs Anton hello. He feels safe with her, just as he did when he first met her.

He thinks back to that day. He had been sitting on the bus on his second day in Edmonton. He was hungry, he hadn't slept well at the shelter the night before. The unfamiliar streets whizzed past. Everything felt unreal, and loneliness clawed at his gut. He couldn't keep tears from falling.

A Black woman in a bold print dress sat down beside him, and without even asking, she dried

SYSTEMIC BARRIER: System Navigation

It's very difficult for newcomers, refugees and migrants to find appropriate housing, especially homes that are large enough for families, but affordable enough to meet low-income thresholds. Low-cost housing stock is low, and it can take years to qualify for subsidized housing. Currently, 110,000 Albertans live in subsidized housing, and there are 19,000 people on waiting lists.

GAP: Making Connections

Language and cultural barriers, lack of income, as well as time pressures due to employment and childcare frequently create a sense of isolation in newcomers, and it can be difficult to make the vital social connections that help them feel at home. While Edmonton is generally perceived to be a welcoming city, there is a genuine need for the intentional co-creation of welcoming intercultural social opportunities to help newcomers positively integrate in our city.

POLICY CONNECTION: Subsidized Costs of Living

While Edmonton isn't one of Canada's most expensive cities, the cost of living and being active here can be prohibitive to low-income earners. Therefore, programs like the **Leisure Access Program** (which provides free or reduced entry for low-income families into City of Edmonton attractions and recreation centres), **Ride Transit Program** (and free transit for kids under 13 accompanied by an adult), and free **Edmonton Public Library** cards are so important, and were mentioned positively by many of our storytellers.

COVID-19 IMPACT: Isolation

If the pandemic has taught us anything, it's just how important our social lives are, as we've all experienced some level of isolation this year. In some ways, this experience can be compared to the isolation that migrants experience when they move here: feeling the distance from friends and family members, and being isolated from their formal and informal social supports. This experience we've all had this year should inspire empathy, and therefore drive change, to create more opportunities for all migrants in Edmonton to feel a true sense of belonging and engagement.

PROMISING PRACTICES: Grants for Immigrant Communities

Launched in 2007, the City of Edmonton's **Emerging Immigrant and Refugee Community Grant** program has offered funding to immigrant communities to offset the cost of language and culture programs and events, to build capacity of organizations, and partnership opportunities for mutual learning through shared program delivery. The City has accepted the recommendations of a 2020 program review to take a more holistic community development approach, driven by the aspirations of newcomer communities to thrive in all aspects of civic life. The program is currently in transition to respond — through anti-racism and GBA+ lenses — to the complex realities and community-driven aspirations of diverse newcomer, immigrant and refugee communities. The **Edmonton Community Foundation** also offers funding for youth through the **Young Edmonton Grants** program. This innovative program engages a diverse youth board to facilitate the awarding of grants for youth-led community projects, so youth can gain experience both as young philanthropists and as grantees.

Intercultural Dialogues

The Mill Woods Cultural Diversity Committee, has been hosting community and multi-sectoral Intercultural Dialogues since 2017. These have been widely attended by community leaders, and members of community agencies, community leagues, library, law enforcement, and municipal and provincial governments. The **Edmonton Intercultural Centre** also developed a series of Intercultural Multilogues, which connects Indigenous and newcomer communities, in order to foster intercultural relationships through a focus on art.

his tears and took his hand.

"Whatever could be the matter with you?" Her face was open and kind, and her voice danced with a familiar inflection. She made him think of his Auntie, and home.

"I have nowhere to live and I'm so, so hungry," Anton felt deep shame sit heavily in his stomach.

"Where are you from?"

The woman dug in her large purse and fished out a granola bar. Anton gratefully took it, and told her his home town. She nodded. "I know it," she said. "I'm from not that far away. Who are your people?"

Anton told her about his Auntie, and his mom, who was dead.

"I don't know them," she said in his own language, the rhythm making his need for tears evaporate.

> **"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 in the city"**
> **- Refugee**

"But I do know this. You need a home, I have a home. You will come and stay with me. If you can behave, that is."

Anton couldn't believe his luck. "I can behave," he said.

That had been six months ago. Now Mama Aggie is the closest thing he has to family, and he loves her with the same fierceness as his Auntie back home. She doesn't care that he is gay, and she even let him host a barbecue in her back yard for the LGBTQ+ newcomers group.

In fact, Mama Aggie helped him get to the settlement agency where he now works. She helped him fill out his paperwork so he could file as a refugee, and she helped him find food and other supports through her church.

Without Mama Aggie, he doesn't know what he would have done. He smiles at her as he flips his coin one last time.

Mama Aggie catches it and holds it against her heart, just as the door to the courtroom opens, and Anton's name is called. "I have prayed," she tells Anton. "I have prayed for a good outcome. You are the strongest young man I know, and God is with you."

A flood of adrenaline takes over Anton's body, and all he can hear is the rush of blood, his heart beating so wildly he's sure the judge will be able to hear it. Winnifred squeezes his arm one more time, and Mama Aggie wraps him in a big hug.

He walks to the door, his fate to be decided on the other side of it. He calls over his shoulder to Mama Aggie. "What does the coin say? Mama! Tell me what the coin says."

"It's heads," she calls back, not even looking at it. "You're going to be fine."

And because Mama Aggie says it, Anton knows it's the truth. He walks into the courtroom with his head held high. ■

Note: The other stories are composites of several stories; Anton's story closely follows the unique, real-life experiences of one refugee claimant.

BIG IDEA: Social Capital

People can't succeed without building and tapping into their social capital — their strong and weak ties (close friends and family, as well as acquaintances) help make the connections each person needs in order to move forward in their lives. Cities can promote the growth of social capital in formal ways: mentorship, internships, networking opportunities, public engagement and co-creation activities. Informally, connections can grow through community groups, volunteering, neighbours and friends. The City can provide opportunities for newcomers to develop their social capital to pave the way to open doors — for employment, social inclusion, and beyond.

We Continue to Write Our Story as We Live It

As the state of immigration and settlement in Edmonton constantly shifts, the most important shift continues to be in our hearts and minds. Edmonton is not two stories — "them" and "us" — it is a collective story. A story where together we shape what kind of future we all want. What is OUR Edmonton? And as we write this new story, we are also reconciling and relearning the complicated past histories of this place and country — as told by it's First Peoples.

The annual State of Immigration and Settlement report aspires to provide a foundational road map. It aims to architect a shared consciousness which begins to reframe and rebuild our community — together. Through the stories, we have illuminated the immense and varied strengths that newcomers and migrants bring to our city. We highlighted the social and cultural capital they collectively offer, as well as some of the policy and systems issues that blight their potential.

We saw Yusef and his family welcomed by members of their own cultural community — an opportunity to build cultural capital and strong bonds, as they become rooted in their new community. Neo has embraced his new home, and his future is full of potential, provided experiences of racism and financial stress don't close doors for him. Merla has the skills and expertise to provide a stable life for her family and contribute to her community, so long as the job market is open to her. Marina has the resistance capital to better her own life, and the lives of other Temporary Foreign Workers, provided people are willing to listen to her. And Anton, rich in social capital, has the social connections he needs to be fully included in Edmonton society, as long as immigration pathways continue to work in his favour. These people all bring their own strengths, and have opportunities here, but their futures are unwritten.

It's up to all of us to make sure that they, and the many migrants and newcomers like them, can be fully included and integrated into Edmonton life. Every one of us has a part to play in these stories.

This report comes at a time when we, as a whole community, are rocked by economic restraints, job losses, turbulent political discourses and an uncertain post-pandemic world. These things disproportionately impact newcomers and migrants in Edmonton, but this same population is also part of the solution, if its potential can be recognized and unleashed.

William Lacy Swing, Director of the 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 his 2015 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 which 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 aging 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 services. They bring with them new ideas, ways of thinking and creative approaches.

We know that when local governments look to co-create new pathways forward with its residents, positive change happens. Cities do this best working alongside diverse residents who bring insight, energy and experiences to the table. This is OUR future.

The next chapter of the State of Immigration and Settlement in Edmonton will build upon this year's work, and continue to be a platform of concepts and ideas for an inclusive and vibrant city. ■

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This report and supporting documents can be found at edmonton.ca/newcomers

Belonging:

Stories of the Dignity and Resilience of Immigrants

The State of Immigration and Settlement in Edmonton - Annual Report 2021

Executive Summary

Edmonton is a city that is rich in history and diversity, encompassing Indigenous Peoples, settlers and more recent migrants. Every year, more than 12,000 people move here from other countries. Indeed, immigrants make up a quarter of our city's population, and speak more than 125 languages.

The first of five annual reports, *Belonging: Stories of the Dignity and Resilience of Immigrants* explores the many strengths migrants bring, and the challenges they experience in our city. It connects the wisdom, lived experience, commitment and collaboration of many diverse individuals from settlement and immigrant-serving agencies, thought leaders from multiple sectors, people with lived migration experience, and City of Edmonton employees. Community-based researchers conducted a focused literature review, and examined more than 40 policies that affect migrants and newcomers, in order to provide context for how to build a city that works well for everyone, and in which everyone has a strong sense of belonging.

In this report, you will meet five composite characters: Yusef, Neo, Merla, Marina and Anton. While their stories are semi-fictionalized, their experiences and perspectives are drawn from the journeys, strengths, struggles and aspirations of 22 Edmontonians with lived migration experience. The characters' immigration pathways reflect the variety of circumstances by which people leave their homelands. Yusef and his family are Government-Assisted Refugees, who are exploring their Edmonton home for the first time. Neo, sponsored to come here by his father, is a 17-year-old youth with a bright future ahead of him, so long as racism and financial pressures don't close doors on him. Merla and her husband are economic migrants, skilled workers with much to offer, and yet they both struggle to find employment here. Marina is a Temporary Foreign Worker who has the courage to stand up to abuse in the workplace, and Anton is a Refugee Claimant who is fighting to save his life and to build a new life in Canada.



All of these characters show resilience, courage and determination in the face of significant hardship. Their stories demonstrate how policies, systemic barriers and structures of power affect people in their day-to-day lives. The corresponding research that accompanies their stories presents some big ideas and promising practices that could help remove the barriers they face.

The report is grounded in two models to highlight a fresh perspective in the narrative of immigration and settlement. While immigration is formally the domain of provincial and federal governments, municipalities are able to create opportunities for immigrants to fully participate in all aspects of civic life. The Multidimensional Immigrant Model views immigrants beyond the economic benefits they bring and more in terms of the multiple assets and strengths that migrants harness to overcome systemic barriers in adapting to their new homeland. The Cultural Wealth Model builds on this holistic approach, and reveals the rich mosaic of cultural assets that migrants bring to their new communities.

We also draw on social inclusion research to look at ways to foster cultural bonds, intercultural bridges and links to systems of power in order for newcomers to build their social capital. And finally, we explore how to move beyond a multicultural society to an intercultural one, which focuses on the mutual benefit of our interconnectedness, and the value of building reciprocal relationships across many cultures, rather than simply celebrating our diversity.

The intent of this first report is to begin shifting our ways of thinking and feeling, as a city and a community, when it comes to immigration, settlement and integration of newcomers. Through the stories of lived experience, we can, as a collective, gain a deeper understanding of some of the systemic and structural barriers migrants face, and the need to shift the paradigm from 'serving vulnerable communities' to co-creating solutions together. Migrants of the present (and the past) are city-makers with tremendous resilience, assets and potential; they are agents of local development, bringing value to our economy and the cultural fabric of our community. We have so much to gain by honoring our collective strengths as Edmontonians, and so much we can do to ensure that migrants can fully contribute to building our city.