New Beginnings

Fostering a Sense of Belonging and Integrating Newcomers as Young Professionals in Calgary

April 2024

Luis Rios
Catamount Fellowship
Institute for Community Prosperity
Mount Royal University

Raj Dhaliwal, MSc.
Community Partner - Youthful Cities

Cherie Woolmer, MBA., Ph.D.
Faculty Mentor - Mokakiiks Centre for the
Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
Mount Royal University

Table of Contents

CATAMOUNT
FELLOWSHIP FOR EMERGING CHANGEMAKERS

MOUNT ROYAL
UNIVERSITY
1910 | Institute for
Community Prosperity

YOUTHFUL
CITIES

Acknowledgement

This research project could not have been made possible without the support and contributions from Barb Rallison, head of Mount Royal University's Catamount Fellowship and the Social Impact Lead for MRU'S Institute for Community Prosperity; James Stauch, the Executive Director of MRU's Institute for Community Prosperity and Cordelia Snowdon-Lawley, Changemaking and Community Research Strategist for MRU's Institute for Community Prosperity. I would like to thank all community strategists and practitioners that contributed insights into systems thinking.

I would also like to formally acknowledge my faculty mentor Cherie Woolmer, MBA., PhD., and my community partner Raj Dhaliwal, MSc., for their ongoing contributions, counsel and support in my research. I would also like to thank Katarina Covic from MobSquad, Elaine Mew from The Centre for Newcomers, and my fellow Catamount Fellows for their support. I would also like to take a moment to thank all other individuals who assisted me in furthering my research by using their wide array of networks, and a special thank you to Elle Wilde from Wilde Information Design for having designed this report. Thank you all.

Land Acknowledgement

I acknowledge that the City of Calgary, is located on the traditional ancestral lands of the Blackfoot Confederacy, including the Siksika, Kainai, Piikani, Tsuu T'ina, Stoney Nakoda (the Wesley, Chiniki and Bearspaw bands) and the Blackfeet of Montana. The City of Calgary is situated on the territory of Treaty 7 of Southern Alberta, a site traditionally known as Moh'kins'tsis to the Blackfoot, Wîchîspa to the Stoney Nakoda, and Guts'ists'i to the Tsuut'ina, and Metis Region 5 and 6 and all people who have chosen to make this place their home.

I recognize the ongoing effects of colonization, honor Indigenous resilience and elders, and commit to ongoing learning. As my research explores newcomer's *sense of belonging*, and being a settler, I acknowledge my connection to this land and its Indigenous peoples, and aim to foster understanding, relationships, and respect.

Context of Research

The purpose of my research project in the Catamount Fellowship was to address the societal issue of **How might we foster a sense of belonging for newcomers (Skilled Workers, Refugees & International Students) and facilitate their integration as young professionals in Calgary?** This was informed by the economic, legal and cultural barriers identified and the system that prevents a successful integration. Being an immigrant myself, having been born in Peru, but raised in Canada, I can relate to the idea of being both a newcomer and experiencing difficulty in finding a *sense of belonging*.

This report draws from academic (peer-reviewed articles, government publications) and non-academic sources (news articles, videos, NGO reports, official humanitarian websites). Insights were also gathered through discussions with my "trio" consisting of myself, Raj Dhaliwal from Youthful Cities and Dr. Cherie Woolmer from the Mokakiiks Centre for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, and supported by the Institute for Community Prosperity at Mount Royal University and community members. This paper will report on the barriers three groups of newcomers (international students, refugees, and skilled workers) face when settling in Canada and discuss their experiences of belonging when integrating into Canadian society as young professionals.

Introduction

Canada is a country built on immigration, ranking among the highest in the developed world, and currently leads G-8 nations in immigration levels (Moffitt et al., 2020). In 2021, over 8.3 million people, about 23% of the population, were or had been permanent residents or landed immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2022). Most settle in major cities like Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, leaving cities like Calgary lacking data on newcomer's sense of belonging. Many immigrants come seeking improved quality of life due to factors like employment opportunities, safety, or political stability (Statistics Canada, 2006). The integration of newcomers is crucial for the prosperity of Canadian society, given that immigration is more of a necessity than a choice.

23%
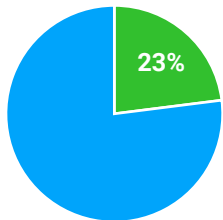
In 2021, over 8.3 million people, about 23% of the Canadian population, were or had been permanent residents or landed immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2022).

In 2022, Canada welcomed 431,645 newcomers, yet there is an increasing trend of newcomer emigration, with many leaving within 5 years of arrival (Global News, 2023). This trend, termed *onward migration*, has been rising since the 1980s, spiked in 2017 - 2019, with a 40% increase compared to previous years (Global News, 2023). Reasons for *onward migration* include: housing unaffordability, inflation, healthcare challenges, and issues with foreign credential recognition. Immigrants' inability to find work or have financial agency (i.e., buying a home) impacts their sense of belonging and fuels their decision to leave.

Canada's ability to retain immigrants has declined in the Global Talent Competitiveness Index (Global News, 2023).

9th place (2016)
15th place (2021)

What is a sense of belonging and why is it important for newcomers?

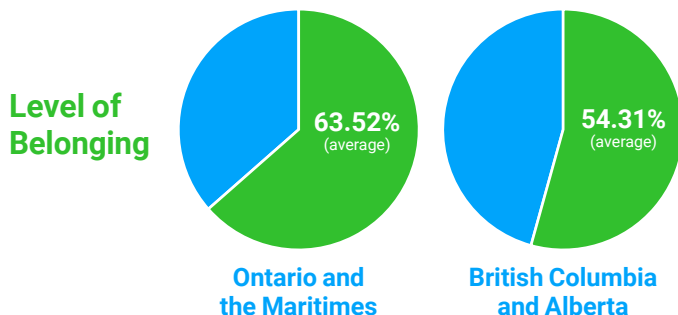**Valued Involvement + Fitting In = Sense of Belonging**

A *sense of belonging* is described as a feeling of security and support when there is a sense of acceptance, inclusion, and identity for a member of a certain group in relation to a larger group (Cornell University, 2024). According to Kitchen et al., (2015), it is "the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons [newcomers] feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment," enabling newcomers, particularly those of visible minority groups, to be authentic in their interactions with the wider community (p. 3). A *sense of belonging* enhances an individual's performance and contribution to society as they feel like they matter; it consists of two dimensions: "valued involvement" (feeling valued, accepted, and needed) and "fit" (perceiving oneself as complementing the system or environment) (Kitchen et al., 2015). For newcomers, achieving a *sense of belonging* is of crucial importance as they are elemental to the social fabric of Canadian society, in which their contributions (in terms of knowledge, cultural interactions and workforce) add to our continued diversity and ongoing prosperity (Kitchen et al., 2015).

Sense of belonging is used to measure an individual's levels of social integration, national identification and also feelings of acceptance (which can vary by regions), and in the 2020 General Social Survey by Stats Canada,x newcomers in Ontario and the Maritimes displayed higher levels of belonging (63.19% and 63.85%, respectively) compared to British Columbia and Alberta, the lowest at 52.77% and

55.85%, respectively (Vivakumar, 2023).
Factors influencing this include post-migration experiences, immigrant sociodemographics, immigrant composition, discrimination, and structural factors like employment and education opportunities (Vivakumar, 2023). Also, provinces with more long-term newcomers (like those in Ontario) tend to report greater *sense of belonging*, unlike Alberta and British Columbia, who have more recent immigrants.

This concept also serves as an indicator of broader theoretical frameworks such as citizenship theory, which encompasses "legal status, rights, civic participation, and belonging as key elements of citizenship" (Painter, 2013, p. 5). Citizenship theory explores what constitutes and sustains membership in a community (both locals and newcomers). It can also be seen as a dimension in various conceptualizations, including social inclusion/exclusion, well-being, social cohesion, social capital, mental health, and nationhood (Painter, 2013). While newcomers initially report lower levels of belonging to the local community compared to Canadian-born individuals, this difference diminishes over time as they become more acclimated to their environment (Painter, 2013).

However, there remains debate on what frameworks would appropriately enable a newcomer to achieve a *sense of belonging* since many newcomers believe they are "worthy" once they prove their merit in terms of adding to the national economy - which grants them permission to migrate, remain, and reap the benefits of Canada's social welfare state (Mofitt et al., 2020, p. 88). This focus on labour market participation in immigration policies is not new, dating back to the introduction of a point-based system in 1967, favoring immigrants with higher education, greater French or English skills, and professions beneficial to the Canadian economy (Moffitt et al., 2020).

Level of Belonging

63.52% (average)

54.31% (average)

Ontario and the Maritimes

British Columbia and Alberta

Systems of Influence on Newcomers

The barriers that influence newcomers' levels of integration and belonging are governed by the degrees of impact of policies, programs and services already present in the system.

The Multiculturalism Policy, passed in 1971, aimed to celebrate Canada's cultural diversity and ensure the fair treatment of all citizens (Hyman et al., 2011). It also served to encourage and assist the social, cultural, economic and political institutions of Canada to be respectful and inclusive of Canada's multicultural identity. The 1988 Canadian Multiculturalism Act provided a legal framework for federal responsibilities toward minorities and newcomers, promoting their integration and participation in Canadian life (Hyman et al., 2011). While this policy fosters inclusive citizenship, **it falls short in addressing racial discrimination, keeping certain groups marginalized** (Hyman et al., 2011). However there is evidence suggesting that policies focusing on economic and educational integration are more effective than multiculturalism as it allows for the preservation of ethnic, cultural or religious identity (Hyman et al., 2011). Furthermore, building social capital through networks and interactions among locals and newcomers can further facilitate a sense of belonging, integration and productivity (Hyman et al., 2011).

The Multicultural Policy Index, as outlined by Safdar et al. (2023), evaluates the effectiveness of multiculturalism policies by assessing societal support for diversity and practice of multiculturalism policies. There are 8 criteria in assessing these policies: presence of a governmental policy that promotes multiculturalism, multicultural curriculum at schools, acceptance of dual citizenship, representation of diverse groups in the media, assistance to disadvantaged immigrants through affirmative action, exemption from engaging in cultural activities that are reflective of the cultural practices of the dominant society and the funding of both ethnic group organizations to support cultural activities and to support bilingual education or mother-tongue instruction. According to Safdar et al. (2023), Canada and Australia are among the top-ranking countries in multicultural policy implementation (from 21 countries examined). Berry and Ward (2016) suggest that multiculturalism comprises 3 features: a demographic characteristic, policy component, and belief in diversity's inherent value. A demographic characteristic reflects societal diversities in terms of religion, linguistic, ethnic, and other national characteristics, and its effective practice and implementation can lead to greater indications of belonging (Safdar et al., 2023).
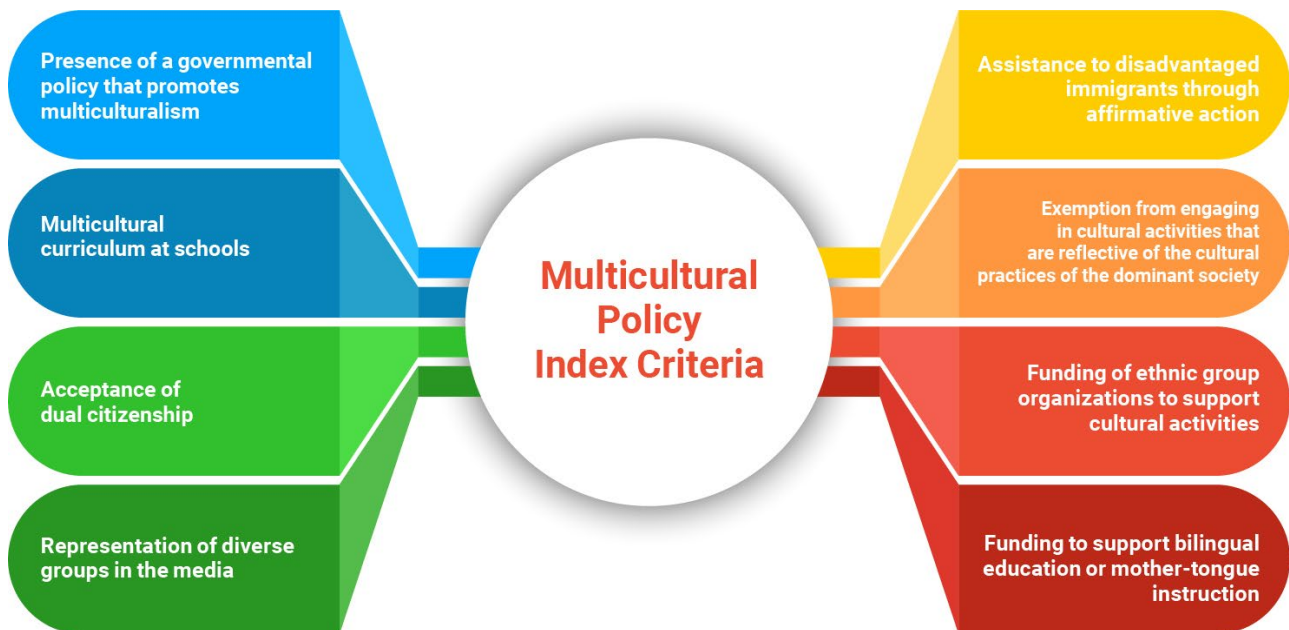

Figure 1: The 8 Criteria used to assess Multiculturalism Policies in nations under the Multicultural Policy Index as outlined by Safdar et al. (2023)

In 2011, the City of Calgary passed the Welcoming Community Policy to promote an inclusive, welcoming community where all Calgarians (including newcomers) can have an equal opportunity to participate in the economic, social, cultural, recreational and political life of the community (Guo & Guo, 2016). A welcoming community can attract and retain newcomers by removing barriers, promoting a sense of belonging, meeting diverse individual needs, and offering services that promote successful integration (Guo & Guo, 2016). However, information about the impacts of this policy could not be found with a review of publicly available information, which suggests that the policy was not effective or not evaluated. Furthermore, Calgary, classified as a second-tier city, sees fewer newcomers compared to first-tier cities like Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, which attract 77% of newcomers (Integral Human Development, 2021). To learn more about immigration & settlement programs currently in place, definition of the terms used and an understanding of how integration is measured, please refer to the *appendix*.

The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) of 2002 replaced the Immigration Act of 1976 (which was vastly different from Canada's discriminatory immigration policies of the 19th century which valued race and religion, such as the Chinese Head Tax) by modernizing Canada's immigration and refugee protection framework though the principles of fairness, transparency, and accountability in immigration decision-making while maintaining Canada's commitment to humanitarian resettlement and family reunification (Dirks, 2006).
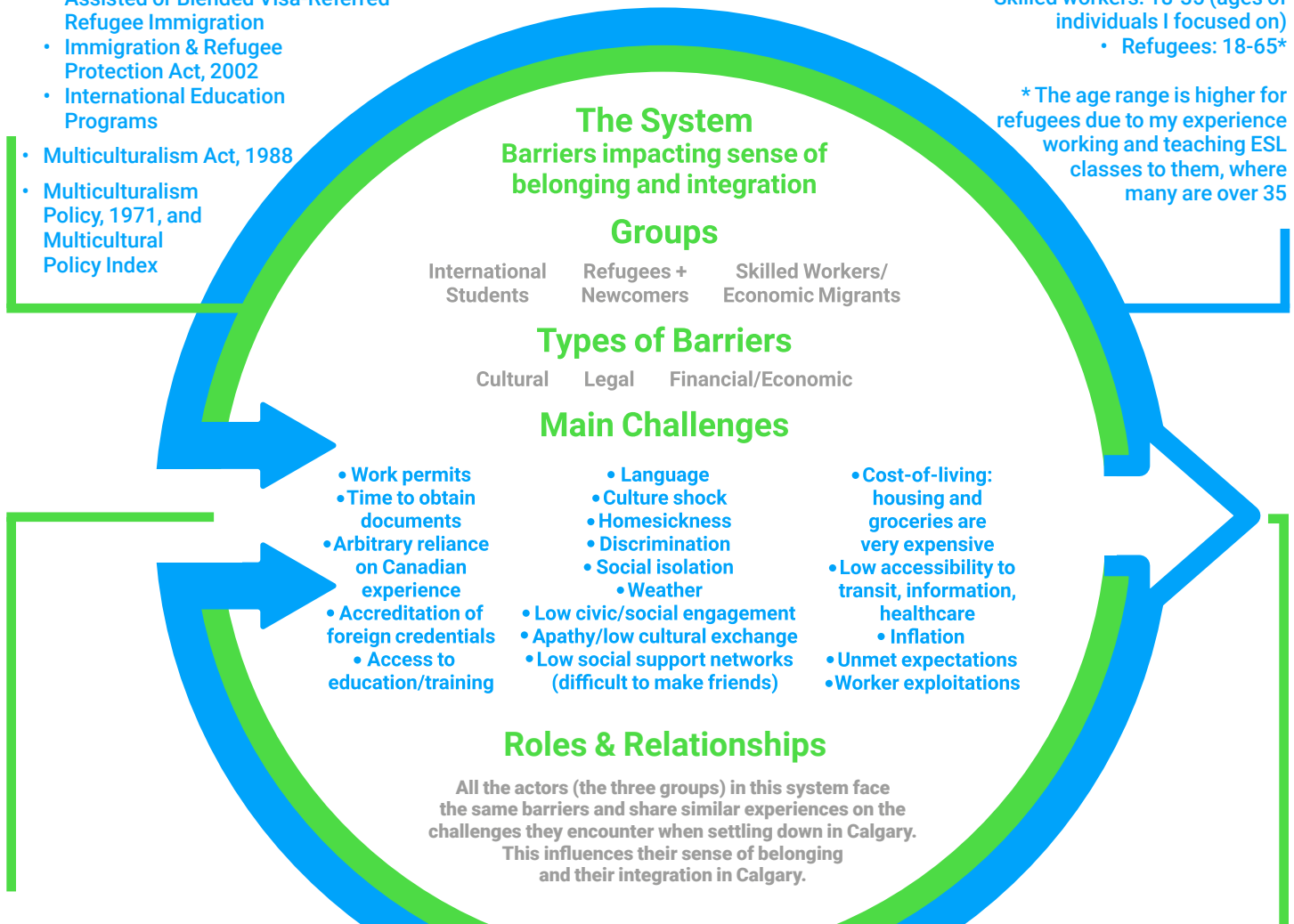
Rules

What is governing the system?

- City of Calgary: Welcoming Community Policy, 2011
- Immigration policies
  - Express Entry System
  - Privately sponsored, Government-Assisted or Blended Visa-Referred Refugee Immigration
  - Immigration & Refugee Protection Act, 2002
  - International Education Programs
- Multiculturalism Act, 1988
- Multiculturalism Policy, 1971, and Multicultural Policy Index

Local System Boundary: Age, time and experience of newcomers in Canada

- International students 18-35
- Skilled workers: 18-35 (ages of individuals I focused on)
- Refugees: 18-65*

* The age range is higher for refugees due to my experience working and teaching ESL classes to them, where many are over 35

The System
Barriers impacting sense of belonging and integration

Groups

International Students | Refugees + Newcomers | Skilled Workers/ Economic Migrants

Types of Barriers

Cultural   Legal   Financial/Economic

Main Challenges

- Work permits
- Time to obtain documents
- Arbitrary reliance on Canadian experience
- Accreditation of foreign credentials
- Access to education/training

- Language
- Culture shock
- Homesickness
- Discrimination
- Social isolation
- Weather
- Low civic/social engagement
- Apathy/low cultural exchange
- Low social support networks (difficult to make friends)

- Cost-of-living: housing and groceries are very expensive
- Low accessibility to transit, information, healthcare
- Inflation
- Unmet expectations
- Worker exploitations

Roles & Relationships

All the actors (the three groups) in this system face the same barriers and share similar experiences on the challenges they encounter when settling down in Calgary. This influences their sense of belonging and their integration in Calgary.

Resources

What is currently going into the system?
Funding, Programs and Services

- Funding for immigration and settlement services, federal and provincial
- Programs assisting settlement and education
  - LINC Program, Resettlement Assistance Program, Immigrant Settlement and Adaption Program, Host Program
- Support systems municipal, school, local, and regional
  - Community Centres, MRU International Student Support Centre (ISSC), Centre for Newcomers (CFN)

Results

What we wish to see from system?

- Transition from newcomers into young professionals
- Greater integration and higher sense of belonging across all levels for all three groups
- Analyze patterns in newcomer retention, and young professional contributions (economic, and cultural) to the prosperity of Calgary

Figure 2: *Newcomer Integration & Belonging Framework*, a 5 R's Systems Map concerning the main barriers to integration and a sense of belonging for all three newcomer groups (international students, skilled workers and refugees). The system is governed by a set of rules (policies in place) and resources (available settlement programs, funding and services), while the dynamics and relationships of the different barriers affect all newcomer groups. The results section refers to identified areas of work in order to address the barriers seen in the system, whereas the local system boundary reflects age, time and experience of newcomers (I listed my main boundary as the ages of newcomers upon arrival).

Barriers: Refugees

Krahn et al. (2003) examined factors affecting Calgary's ability to retain refugees, finding that employment, education, housing quality, climate, discrimination, and strong ethnic community ties (or a desire to be close to friends and family) influenced relocation decisions in which 20% of refugees new to Alberta, were likely to leave the province within the first two years of landing (from 956 studied). Inadequate settlement services and dissatisfaction with community services, also contributed to relocation.

Given the intertwined nature of immigration and integration, collaboration among government levels and community partners is crucial. Despite Calgary's growing immigrant population, research on settlement and integration in medium-sized cities remains minimal as effective municipal policies reflecting belonging and integration are insufficient, and much of the responsibility of immigration policies and services rests on federal and provincial governments (Guo & Guo, 2016). A study by Guo & Guo, 2016, focused on two community centers in Calgary: Genesis Centre and Edgemont Community Centre. The authors found that refugees can need up to ten years to settle, and face the largest challenges in the first three years. **Barriers such as unemployment and underemployment, devaluation of their prior learning and work experiences, language barriers, lack of support networks, lack of access to short- and long-term services, feelings of isolation and exclusion, housing, daycare, education, healthcare, counseling, legal and social services all affect their sense of belonging.** Furthermore, current immigration policies prioritize economic and political integration, while ignoring the social and cultural integration needed for transitioning to life in Canada. (Guo & Guo, 2016). Engaging municipalities and community partners is crucial to overcome the disconnect between government policies and local community needs in regards to immigration integration.

Other barriers that hinder refugees' sense of belonging, include: homesickness, weather, cultural shock, and miscommunication (Hashbun, 2023). These challenges can lead to feelings of disorientation, anxiety (relearning to socialize through new customs), and isolation, where integration becomes a burden and possibly a deterrent in achieving a sense of belonging (Hashbun, 2023). Refugees face significant employment challenges compared to other newcomers, and are more likely to be overqualified for their jobs than skilled workers (Hyndman & Hynie, 2016). Studies indicate lower employment rates for refugees, with only 56% of men and 39% of women employed five years after arrival (Hyndman & Hynie, 2016). These challenges are not exclusive to refugees, yet are exacerbated given that they face a greater risk of discrimination and language difficulties, with many arriving with limited English or French proficiency, unrecognized foreign credentials or training, and a lack of Canadian work experience - which can make job searching more difficult (Hyndman & Hynie, 2016). Contrary to the literature, and in my experience engaging with community members, accessing essential services (housing, transportation, healthcare) is a major barrier, as refugees often lack information and rely on word-of-mouth or self-navigation due to limited resources upon arrival, unlike international students or skilled workers who usually arrive with a predetermined plan.

20% — Refugees new to Alberta were likely to leave the province within two years of landing
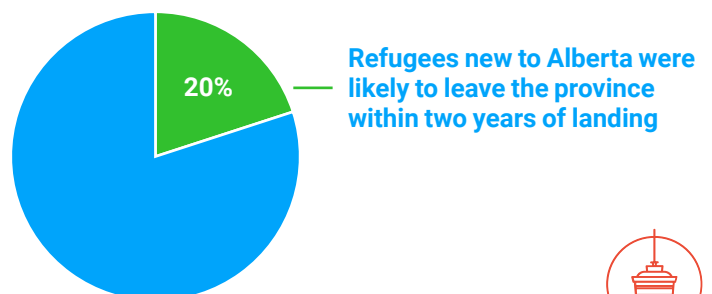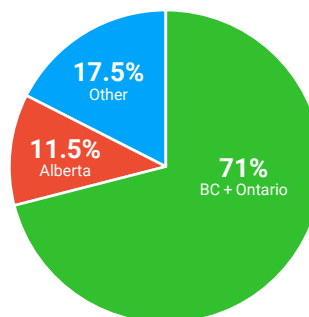
Barriers:
International Students

For international students, studying in Canada is not just about education (or obtaining skills) but also a chance for social mobility and family support, often viewed as a step towards permanent residency (Kahlon, 2021). British Columbia and Ontario account for the majority of international students (71%), with Alberta at 11.5% (Kahlon, 2021).

In 2019, Canada enrolled 1,142,091 international students in its public universities and colleges. These students are often seen as valuable "commodities," with educational institutions treating them as lucrative business opportunities and convenient sources of revenue (Kahlon, 2021; Arumuhathas, 2023, p. 43); yet, they play a crucial role in strengthening Canada's economy and shaping the image of "ideal immigrants" (Arumuhathas, 2023, p. 43). Yet, there remains limited research on their post-secondary experiences (chiefly their sense of belonging) and the barriers they face in integrating into Canadian society. **Many international students express feeling alienated - leading to low confidence and self-esteem, compounded by linguistic differences, social isolation, discrimination, lack of essential resources and inadequate resources to social security** (such as lack of affordable housing, transportation, employment - too many working hours for little pay) (Arumuhathas, 2023). These challenges are even more pronounced for racialized international students. Additionally, international students lack full human rights protection (as they are not fully protected by their host country, nor home country), face security challenges due to communication barriers, face difficulty entering the labour market, housing market ignorance, and increased isolation (Marginson, 2011).

The increase in international student migration has affected Canada's rental housing market, and places international students with inadequate accommodation options (Kahlon, 2021). This forces them into off-campus housing, often of inferior quality or overcrowded places (Kahlon, 2021). While some institutions like Mount Royal University offer equal housing access, this is not universal. Language barriers further isolate international students, hindering communication with peers, employers, and professors (Kahlon, 2021). Difficulty making friends and integrating into local communities can lead to social isolation and feeling ignored, pushing students to form bonds mainly with peers from their home country - hindering their sense of belonging (Kahlon, 2021).

High tuition fees and high cost of living pose the primary

barrier for international students, often leading them to work illegally (more than the 20 hours/ week they are allowed under their study permit) putting them in vulnerable positions such as labour exploitation, in order to manage financial strains (Kahlon, 2021). Female students, in particular, face increased risks of sexual assault and harassment due to economic dependency (Kahlon, 2021). This isolation contributes to deteriorating mental well-being, with international student suicides on the rise (Kahlon, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic worsened these challenges, leaving many students homeless as campuses closed, while those working illegally were ineligible for federal benefits like the Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB) (Kahlon, 2021).

In early 2024, the federal government (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada - IRCC) introduced a temporary cap on international student permit applications to address housing crises and restructure university recruitment practices for 2 years (Government of Canada, 2024b). This cap aims to stabilize and reduce pressure on rental and owner markets (chiefly first-time home owners), with an expected 35% decrease in approved study permits compared to 2023 (Government of Canada, 2024b). Furthermore, the new $20,635 cost-of-living requirement (in order to be issued a study permit) can demonstrate a financial burden for students and may deter future applicants, impacting their prolonged sense of belonging in Canada (Government of Canada, 2024b).

British Columbia and Ontario account for the majority of international students

Barriers: Skilled Workers

Skilled workers are needed to address labour shortages, demographic challenges, such as an increasingly aging population and decreasing birth rates in Canada, and ensure economic sustainability (Sakamoto et al., 2010). Unlike the Canadian-born population, a sense of belonging is linked to full-time employment and home ownership among skilled workers (Kitchen et al., 2015).

Skilled workers in Canada face challenges like underemployment and unemployment due a lack of foreign credential and experience recognition, language & communication barriers, and the demand for "Canadian experience" (Sakamoto et al., 2010). Canadian experience is often seen as a blend of technical expertise (hard skills) and culturally embedded soft skills like communication and teamwork (Sakamoto et al., 2010). Many employers prioritize soft skills to assess how well newcomers "fit" into workplace culture, at the expense of personal expression and without disclosing faults until after having lost a potential employment opportunity (Sakamoto et al., 2010). **The inability to be genuine at the workplace leads to a lower sense of belonging.**

Mulholland & Biles (2004) identified four main barriers affecting skilled workers realizing a sense of belonging: affordable housing, discrimination, lack of Canadian references, and employment hiring practices. The absence of established social, personal and professional support networks can be a challenge to navigate a new city and also secure employment in a particular field given many jobs are never publicly advertised (Business Council of Alberta, 2024).

Arrive, an RBC initiative for newcomers, reports that 65% to 85% of job openings are not publicly advertised, relying on existing connections or referrals (Business Council of Alberta, 2024). This disadvantages skilled workers with already limited support networks and further limits their job opportunities (Business Council of Alberta, 2024). Nearly 60% of skilled workers with foreign work experience or credentials are unable to find suitable employment (they are also nearly three times more likely to be overqualified - compared to their Canadian counterparts) where employers tend to prefer candidates with Canadian education and work experience, viewing it as stronger competency and cultural understanding (Business Council of Alberta, 2024).

Four main barriers affecting skilled workers, Mulholland & Biles (2004)

- Affordable Housing
- Discrimination
- Lack of Canadian References
- Employment Hiring Practices

Many skilled workers in regulated professions (i.e., nurses, teachers, plumbers, and engineers) face challenges practicing their professions in Canada due to differences in education and training standards (which vary by country). Although regulatory bodies (chiefly provincial governments) have made efforts to recognize foreign credentials, comprehensive evaluation processes are time-consuming, resource-intensive and legally risky (Business Council of Alberta, 2024). Additionally, restrictions on the number of professionals in certain fields limits job opportunities and earning potential, making them more difficult and competitive for newcomers as opposed to residents (Business Council of Alberta, 2024). This leads to underemployment, and missed career opportunities with skilled workers working in unrelated jobs that do not capitalize on their skills or are below their qualifications for extended periods - a situation sadly familiar to many newcomers (Business Council of Alberta, 2024). **We all know the story of a foreign-trained professional working as a taxi driver.**

Skilled workers often face labour market discrimination, evidenced by a 20 - 40% lower callback rate for applicants with "foreign-sounding names" (Business Council of Alberta, 2024). This bias persists, especially for those with second-language accents, leading to relegation into lower-skilled roles (despite qualifications), as they are perceived as less competent and trustworthy. Cultural differences and social norms also pose integration challenges in the workplace which can hinder promotion opportunities (Business Council of Alberta, 2024). Yet, Alberta can streamline the recognition process for skilled workers by standardizing requirements across regulatory bodies, as demonstrated by the Labour Mobility Act for out-of-province workers (excluding foreign skilled workers). The inability to find full time work, nor be able to find a place to stay while facing discrimination hinders skilled workers ability to integrate as young professionals and achieve a sense of belonging.
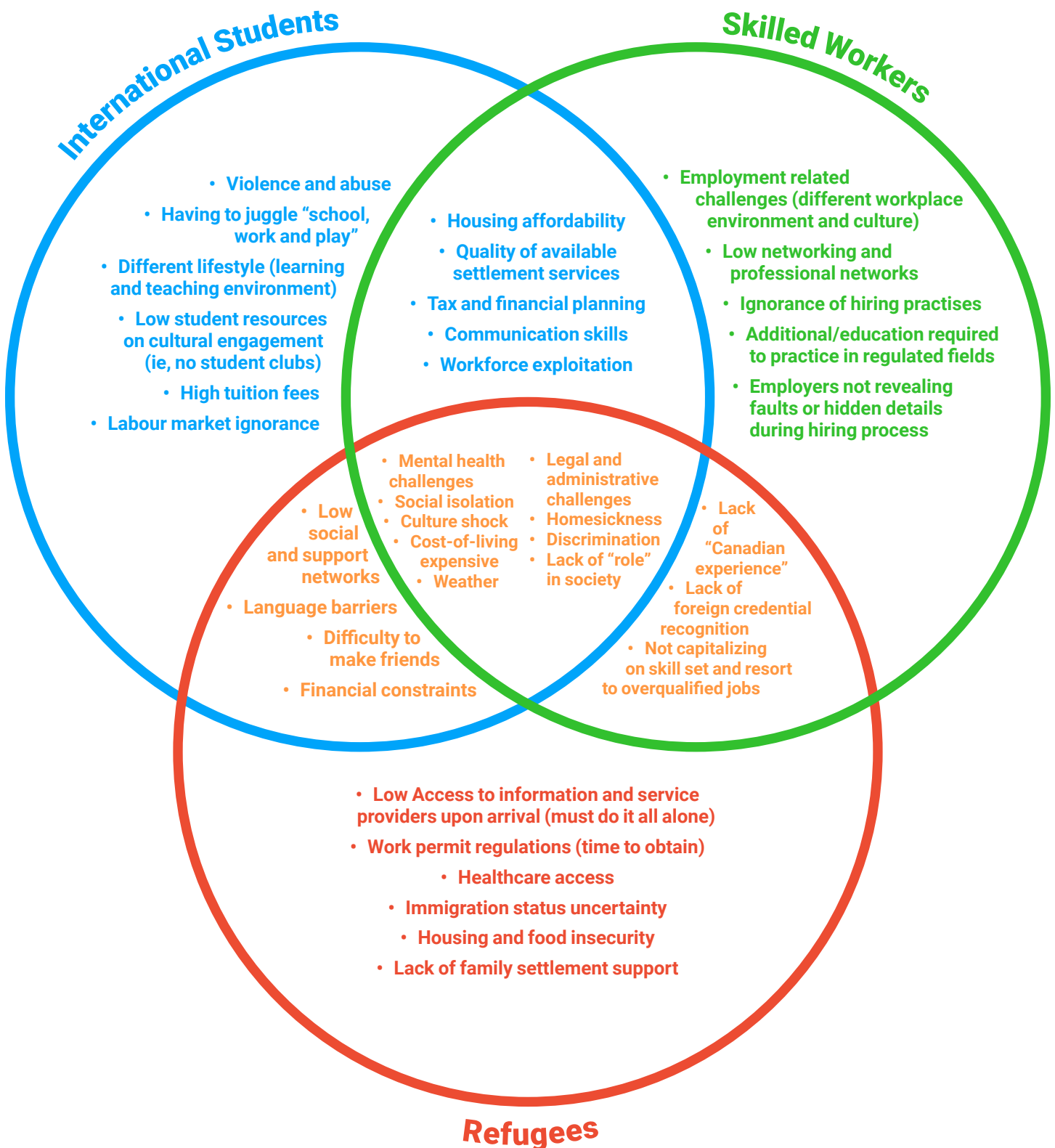
International Students

- Violence and abuse
- Having to juggle "school, work and play"
- Different lifestyle (learning and teaching environment)
- Low student resources on cultural engagement (ie, no student clubs)
- High tuition fees
- Labour market ignorance

Skilled Workers

- Employment related challenges (different workplace environment and culture)
- Low networking and professional networks
- Ignorance of hiring practises
- Additional/education required to practice in regulated fields
- Employers not revealing faults or hidden details during hiring process

International Students ∩ Skilled Workers

- Housing affordability
- Quality of available settlement services
- Tax and financial planning
- Communication skills
- Workforce exploitation

International Students ∩ Refugees

- Low social and support networks
- Language barriers
- Difficulty to make friends
- Financial constraints

Centre (all three)

- Mental health challenges
- Social isolation
- Culture shock
- Cost-of-living expensive
- Weather
- Legal and administrative challenges
- Homesickness
- Discrimination
- Lack of "role" in society

Skilled Workers ∩ Refugees

- Lack of "Canadian experience"
- Lack of foreign credential recognition
- Not capitalizing on skill set and resort to overqualified jobs

Refugees

- Low Access to information and service providers upon arrival (must do it all alone)
- Work permit regulations (time to obtain)
- Healthcare access
- Immigration status uncertainty
- Housing and food insecurity
- Lack of family settlement support

Figure 3: From my own experience in engaging with community members, the barriers to belonging and integration discussed in this paper can be subdivided into which newcomer group it impacts the most, and which groups share common barriers within the system.

Recommendations to Foster a Stronger Sense of Belonging for Newcomers in Calgary

Gordon Allport's (1954) c*ontact hypothesis,* an element of social cohesion suggests that increased interaction among diverse groups can reduce prejudice, provided certain conditions are met. These conditions include equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and legal support for diversity (Safdar et al., 2023). Strategies to implement this include investing in cultural activities and recreational facilities by using ethnic media outlets to promote awareness of programs (Safdar et al., 2023). Research indicates that cultural activities, such as cinema, theater, music, and literature from diverse backgrounds, enhance residents' quality of life and fosters a welcoming environment for newcomers (Safdar et al., 2023; Berry, 2016).

Local organizations can facilitate *contact hypothesis* by encouraging established residents to include immigrant neighbours in social activities, such as neighbourhood yard sales or barbecues. These activities provide opportunities for immigrants to build social capital (social networks based on reciprocity and trust) and integrate into their communities by familiarizing with neighbours (Painter, 2023). Long-term immigrants can also play a crucial role in fostering a sense of belonging by offering assistance with basic needs and sharing knowledge of settlement services and recreation programs with newcomers (Safdar et al., 2023).

Policymakers should empower provinces and cities to identify local labour market needs through initiatives like the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) to select skilled workers tailored to specific professions (Kitchen et al., 2017). Tailoring policies to reflect community needs while considering economic development is crucial, especially for Calgary (Calgary Financial Hub, 2021). Standardized competency tests for regulated professions can expedite entry into the workforce by assessing skills regardless of where training was completed (Business Council of Alberta, 2024). These tests identify areas needing additional training and recognize skills acquired beyond formal education, reducing time and cost spent on redundant training (Business Council of Alberta, 2024).

Developing pre-arrival services, whether at embassies, consulates, or online platforms, can enhance newcomers' sense of belonging prior to landing and ease the settlement process upon arrival (Kitchen et al., 2015). This approach can involve breaking orientation sessions into multiple visits to reduce overwhelm and promote social inclusion by addressing newcomers' interests and hobbies (Kitchen et al., 2015). Online programs like the *Canoe Access Pass* aim to guide newcomers through their city's entertainment and cultural services in order to foster a sense of belonging and integration (Dennler, 2023).

To improve the international student program and enhance their sense of belonging, three steps can be taken: conduct a comprehensive study of the international student program from 2014 to 2020 to address fraudulent acceptance offers and improve program integrity (Kahlon, 2021); Regulate and reduce tuition fees for international students to alleviate financial strain and uncertainty, which can hinder academic performance (Kahlon, 2021); and also increase funding and training for specialized services within post-secondary international student offices to better meet the unique needs of international students, including off-campus housing support and pathways to permanent residency (Kahlon, 2021).

In order to facilitate a smoother transition to life in Canada, other pathways to enhance the sense of belonging for international students are to encourage participation and implementation of course-based experiential learning or work-integrated learning programs (Thies & Falk, 2023); Promote involvement in student groups, both organized by fellow students, such as social engagement (tutoring or coaching students) or cultural engagement (drama groups, debate groups, musical groups, clubs) and university facilities, by organizing and offering extracurricular activities such as intramural sports, excursions, get-togethers, or buddy programs (Thies & Falk, 2023).
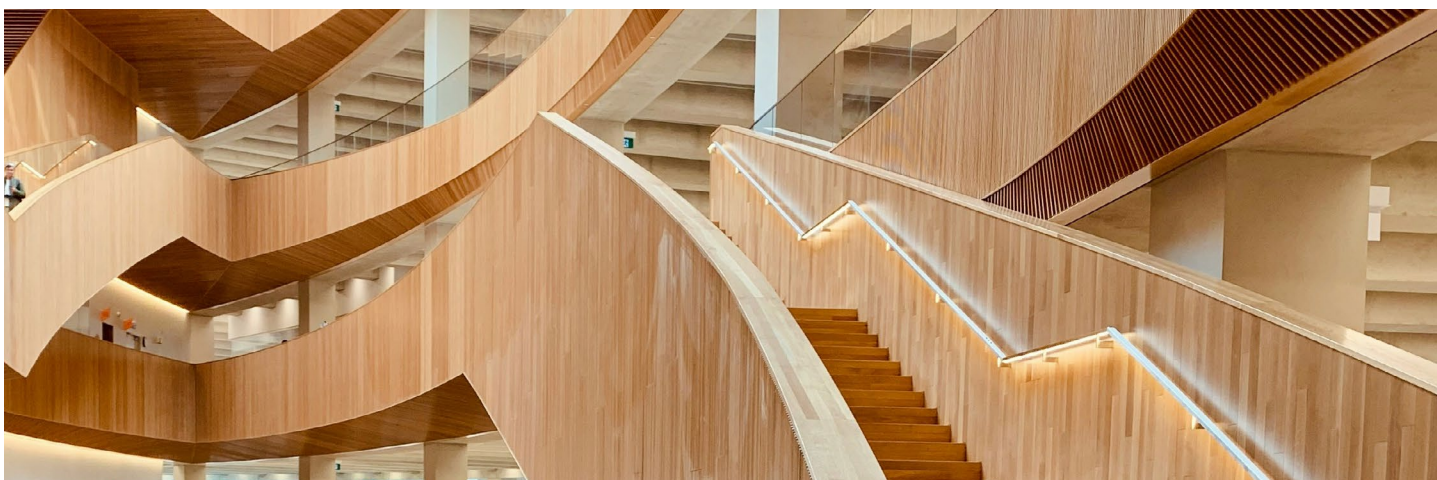
Identified Areas of Further Research

Due to the scope of the research project and the particular complexities arising from systems thinking, **several areas warrant further investigation, including newcomer well-being** (mental and physical health - as much focus is given primarily to their economic contributions), **the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on settlement services for skilled workers and refugees** (a gap in the literature existed, yet it did not for international students), **the disparity in funding streams, and how the quality of available services affects newcomer's sense of belonging and their ability to function as young professionals.**

Due to the complexity of the system, there remains areas this study did not explore, such as differences within groups based on factors like socioeconomic status, race, religion, country of origin, gender, or age, which can significantly affect individuals' sense of belonging and integration as young professionals (Hyndman & Hynie, 2016). **Also, a one-size-fits-all approach may not be effective as newcomers vary in age, education, language skills, and cultural backgrounds.** Integration is a long process (which requires longitudinal studies) and the effectiveness of its programs may not be evident until 10 to 15 years after arrival (Hyndman & Hynie, 2016). Additionally, gathering data on newcomers' sense of belonging is time-dependent, overlooking the lived experiences of long-term newcomers and how they achieved a sense of belonging (i.e., developing social connections) and integration in the workplace, community or school (Hyndman & Hynie, 2016).

Common barriers like housing affordability, discrimination, cost of living, social isolation and language barriers were identified for all groups, yet little academic focus was found on accessibility to information, which I came to understand anecdotally that particularly concerns refugees, unlike international students and skilled workers. This gap is concerning, since in my experience of teaching ESL classes, refugees are the group that struggle the most when adapting to life in Canada as they are either unaware of available services nor have the capacity to access them (i.e., not tech-savvy or a mistrust of governmental bodies due to experience back home).

Studying a sense of belonging is complex, involving various indicators like social connections (personal, professional, community, etc.) and different types of diversity (e.g. ethno-racial, or based on socio-economic status, etc). Factors such as local geography and the respondent's position also play a role, such as ethno-racial diversity in residential areas and minority or majority status (Painter, 2023). To learn more about how Calgary & Canada benefit from Newcomer Integration, and the public perception of newcomers in Canada, please refer to the *appendix*.

Concluding Remarks

Throughout my learning journey, I have come to learn that a *sense of belonging* can mean different things for the three groups I focused on. For international students, a sense of belonging means feeling welcomed and supported in their academic pursuits and social interactions. It involves finding a community where they can connect with peers, engage in cultural exchange, and navigate the challenges of studying abroad with confidence. For refugees, a *sense of belonging* goes beyond physical interactions; it encompasses finding safety, security, and acceptance in their new environment. It involves rebuilding their lives in a place where they can access essential services, establish meaningful connections with local communities, and ultimately regain a sense of autonomy - which allows them to rebuild their lives and contribute positively to their host society. For skilled workers, a sense of belonging means finding professional fulfillment and personal satisfaction in their career endeavors. It involves accessing employment opportunities that align with their skills and expertise, receiving recognition for their contributions, and integrating into the workplace culture. This sense of belonging empowers skilled workers to excel in their professions, contribute to the economy, and establish a sense of identity and purpose in their adopted country. Given that immigrants represent a large and growing share of the workforce, their outcomes will increasingly determine the strength of the Canadian workforce and economy. In other words, the success or failure of the integration of newcomers is not just their own—but all of Canada's, and fostering a sense of belonging is imperative for this transition.

References

Arumuhathas, S. (2022). *T*he Dislocated 'Outsiders' within International Canadian Higher Education. *The Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education, 13*(1), 43-49. https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/cjnse/article/view/74405

Basiri, M. (2023). The impact of international students on Destination Economies in 2023. *ApplyBoard*. https://www.applyboard.com/applyinsights-article/the-impact-of-international-students-on-destination-economies-in-2023#

Berry, J. W. (2016). Comparative analysis of Canadian multiculturalism policy and the multiculturalism policies of other countries. *Psychology in Russia, 9*(1), 4-23. https://psychologyinrussia.com/volumes/index.php?article=4621

Business Council of Alberta. (2024). The Struggle for Success: A Look at the barriers faced by immigrants & skilled workers in Canada. https://businesscouncilab.com/reports-category/the-struggle-for-success-a-look-at-the-barriers-faced-by-immigrants-to-canada/

Cohen, B. (2023). Canada's immigration levels plan 2024-2026. *Canada Visa*. https://www.canadavisa.com/canada-immigration-levels-plans.html

Cornell University Diversity and Inclusion. (2024). Sense of Belonging. https://diversity.cornell.edu/belonging/sense-belonging

DeLaire, M. (2023). Growing number of Canadians believe immigration levels too high: Survey. *CTV News*. https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/growing-number-of-canadians-believe-immigration-levels-too-high-survey-1.6623463

Dennler, K. (2023). The Leaky Bucket: A Study of immigrant retention trends in Canada. *The Conference Board of Canada*, 1-16. https://www.conferenceboard.ca/product/the-leaky-bucket/

Dirks, G. E. (2006). Immigration policy in Canada. *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/immigration-policy

Global News. (2023). Growing number of immigrants are deciding to leave Canada. Why? [Video]. *Youtube*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09qU8UyRJjQ&ab_channel=GlobalNews

Government of Canada. (2024a). Benefits, credits, and taxes for newcomers. https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/tax/international-non-residents/individuals-leaving-entering-canada-non-residents/newcomers-canada-immigrants.html

Government of Canada (2024b). Canada to stabilize growth and decrease the number of new international student permits issued to approximately 360,000 for 2024. https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2024/01/canada-to-stabilize-growth-and-decrease-number-of-new-international-student-permits-issued-to-appr

Government of Canada. (2024c). Eligibility to apply as a Federal Skilled Worker (Express Entry). https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/immigrate-canada/express-entry/eligibility/federal-skilled-workers.html

Government of Canada. (2024d). What Does "Refugee" Mean? https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/history.html

Guo, S., & Guo, Y. (2016). Immigration, Integration and Welcoming Communities: Neighbourhood-based Initiative to Facilitate the Integration of Newcomers in Calgary. *Canadian Ethnic Studies, 48*(3), 45-67. https://doi.org/10.1353/ces.2016.0025

Hashbun, A. (2023). Mental health struggles as a newcomer to Canada: Finding a sense of belonging. *Edmonton Social Planning Council.* https://edmontonsocialplanning.ca/2023/02/10/blog-mental-health-struggles-as-a-newcomer-to-canada-finding-a-sense-of-belonging/

Hyman, I., Meinhard, A., Shields, J. (2011). The role of multiculturalism policy in addressing social inclusion processes in Canada. *Toronto Metropolitan University. Journal Contribution, 3*, 1-33. https://doi.org/10.32920/ryerson.14639595.v1

Hyndman, J., & Hynie, M. (2016). From newcomer to Canadian: Making refugee integration work. *Policy Options.* https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/may-2016/from-newcomer-to-canadian-making-refugee-integration-work/

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. (2022). 2023 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration. *Government of Canada.* https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/annual-report-parliament-immigration-2023.html

Integral Human Development. (2021). Country Profiles: Canada. https://migrants-refugees.va/country-profile/canada/

Kahlon, B. S. (2021). Report on the realities for international students. *One Voice Canada.* https://onevoicecanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/The-Realities-of-International-Students-Evidenced-Challenges_Full-Report-1.pdf

Khatoon, H. (2020). CALGARY'S NEWCOMERS AS ECONOMIC DRIVERS. *Calgary Economic Development.* https://www.calgaryeconomicdevelopment.com/assets/Reports/Research/Newcomers-as-Economic-Drivers.pdf

Kitchen, P., Williams, A.M. & Gallina, M. (2015) Sense of belonging to the local community in small-to-medium sized Canadian urban areas: a comparison of immigrant and Canadian-born residents. *BMC Psychology, 3*(28), 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-015-0085-0

Krahn, H., Derwing, T. M., & Abu-Laban, B. (2003). The Retention of Newcomers in Second and Third Tier Cities in Canada. *University of Alberta Humanities Centre*, 1-23. https://sites.ualberta.ca/~pcerii/WorkingPapers/WP01-03.pdf

Mackay-Brown, A., & Ashton, A. (2021). Integration Experiences of Newcomers Across the Prairies: Untangling Perceived Dichotomy Between Immigrants and New-to-Towns. *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, *53*(1), 89-110. https://doi.org/10.1353/ces.2021.0004.

Marginson, S. (2012). Including the other: regulation of the human rights of mobile students in a nation-bound world. *Higher Education*, *63*(4), 497–512. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41429095

Moffitt, U. E., Nardon, L., & Zhang, H. (2020). Becoming Canadian: Immigrant narratives of professional attainment. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 78*, 84-95. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2019.06.004

Mulholland, M.-L., & Biles, J. (2004). Newcomer integration policies in Canada. *Citizenship & Immigration Canada (IRCC)*, 1-70. http://p2pcanada.ca/wp-content/blogs.dir/1/files/2015/09/Newcomer-Integration-Policies-in-Canada.pdf

Neuman, K. (2022). Canadian public opinion about immigration and refugees - Fall 2022. *Environics Institute,* 1-8. https://www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/project-details/canadian-public-opinion-about-immigration-and-refugees---fall-2022

Painter, C. V. (2023). Sense of Belonging: Literature Review. *Citizenship & Immigration Canada (IRCC)*, 1-56. https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2022/ircc/Ci4-114-2013-eng.pdf

Safdar, S., Chahar Mahali, S., & Scott, C. (2023). A critical review of multiculturalism and interculturalism as integration frameworks: The case of Canada. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *98*, 1-12 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2023.101756

Sakamoto, I., Chin, M., & Young, M. (2010). "Canadian Experience," Employment Challenges, and Skilled Immigrants: A Close Look Through "Tacit Knowledge." *University of Toronto Library, 12*(1), 145-151. https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/94782/1/Canadian%20Experience%20employement%20challenges_Sakamoto.pdf

Statistics Canada. (2006). Table 4 reasons for staying in Canada cited by immigrants who plan to settle here permanently, by immigration category (cited 4 years after arrival). *Government of Canada.* https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-008-x/2007000/t/4097873-eng.htm

Statistics Canada. (2010). Definition of "International students." https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/81-004-x/2010005/def/intlstudent-etudiantetranger-eng.htm

Statistics Canada. (2022). Immigrants make up the largest share of the population in over 150 years and continue to shape who we are as Canadians. *The Daily*. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221026/dq221026a-eng.htm

Thies, T., & Falk, S. (2023). International students in Higher Education: Extracurricular Activities and Social Interactions as Predictors of University Belonging. *Research in Higher Education, 64*, 1143-1164. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11162-023-09734-x

United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) Canada. (2024). Refugees in Canada. https://www.unhcr.ca/in-canada/refugees-in-canada/

Vivakumar, V. (2023). Canadian immigrants more likely to report a strong sense of belonging in Ontario and Atlantic Canada: Report. *CIC News - The Voice of Canadian Immigration*. https://www.cicnews.com/2023/10/canadian-immigrants-more-likely-to-report-a-strong-sense-of-belonging-in-ontario-and-atlantic-canada-report-1036902.html#gs.24c75k

Appendix A
Iceberg Model for Inaccessibility to Settlement Services

1 Events

- An immigrant (chiefly refugee) cannot access settlement services or programs upon arrival as they lack the tools to have access to information

2 Patterns

- Inadequate dissemination of information about available settlement services and support programs
- Lack of language-specific information and outreach efforts by organizations to reach immigrant communities
- Limited accessibility of information due to digital literacy barriers (not tech-savvy) or insufficient outreach channels in certain communities

3 Practices

- Insufficient coordination between service provider organizations (SPO's) diseminating information effectively to newcomers
- Lack of standardized information dissemination across provinces and territories
- Inconsistent efforts in engaging community leaders and stakeholders to facilitate information sharing and outreach efforts

4 Policies

- Absence of comprehensive and effective municipal, provincial and national policies supporting settlement and integration to newcomers upon arrival
- Limited funding and resources to support information dissemination efforts as part of immigration and settlement policies
- Policy gaps in addressing specific information needs of newcomers, such as refugees with limited education or digital literacy skills

5 Structures

- Fragmented organizational communication among government agencies, nonprofit organizations, SPO's, and community groups involved in immigrant settlement services
- Limited integration of information dissemination responsibilities within existing settlement service delivery structures
- Lack of centralized platforms or databases for consolidating and sharing information about available settlement services and resources

6 Mental Models

- Assumptions within broader society that newcomers have access to necessary information about settlement services through informal networks or personal connections, and that labour market participation is key to functioning and being welcomed.
- Perceptions among policymakers and SPO's that information dissemination is a secondary concern compared to direct service delivery
- Implicit biases or stereotypes that may affect the prioritization of certain immigrant groups over others in information dissemination efforts

Figure 4: Among the many potential directions to guide future research, one area worth looking into (also from my own personal experience) is why certain newcomers (chiefly refugees) are unable to access information concerning settlement services and integration programs upon arrival. Not being able to learn what your community has to offer can hinder achieving a sense of belonging and functioning as a young professional.

Appendix B
Definition of Terms

Newcomers refer to landed immigrants who arrived in Canada up to five years before a given census. They include permanent residents, refugees, and temporary residents such as students or workers (Government of Canada, 2024a). The term "newcomer" is used interchangeably with "immigrant" throughout this paper.

Refugees, as defined by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, are individuals who have been forced to leave their country due to war, violence or persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion or adherence to a particular social group (Government of Canada, 2024d). In this project, I classified refugees as foreign nationals seeking refuge in Canada due to serious risks of harm from conflict, persecution, and without protection in their home countries.

Skilled Workers are foreign nationals selected through the Federal Skilled Worker Program under the Express Entry System, to fulfill specific criteria outlined by the Government of Canada (2024c). These individuals must have at least one year (1,560 hours) of work experience in one of 370 designated occupations, classified within TEER categories 0, 1, 2, or 3 of the National Occupational Classification (NOC). Additionally, they must demonstrate proficiency in English or French and meet a minimum threshold of 67 points (out of 100) to be granted a work permit (Government of Canada, 2024c).

International students are defined as non-Canadian students who do not have *permanent resident* status and were granted authorization by the Canadian government to enter Canada with the intention of pursuing an education (under a student visa) (Statistics Canada, 2010).

For the purpose of this project, I listed young professionals as individuals between the ages of 18 - 35 (for both international students and skilled workers), and between 18 - 65 for refugees due to my personal experience working with them at the Centre for Newcomers in the Marlborough community. My trio went along with the definition of classifying a newcomer as a young professional once they contribute skills, resources or knowledge to the larger Calgary community (either economically through employment; culturally through interactions with the community, or socially by partaking a role in their local community).

Appendix C

Immigration & Settlement Programs Already in Place

The federal department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) is the board responsible for immigration in Canada; they annually release immigration targets to guide its operations (Cohen, 2023). In 2023, IRCC welcomed over 465,000 immigrants, with a target of 485,000 new permanent residents in 2024 and an additional 500,000 immigrants each year for 2025 and 2026 respectively.

The Express Entry System offers various pathways for skilled foreign workers to obtain a work permit before entering Canada (Cohen, 2023):

Federal Skilled Worker (FSW) Program	• Requires education, work experience, language proficiency, and skills assessed through a point-based system
Federal Skilled Trades Class (FSTC)	• For skilled trade workers
Canadian Experience Class (CEC)	• Targets those with Canadian work experience or recent graduates of Canadian institutions
Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program (AIPP)	• Allows designated Maritime employers to hire skilled foreign workers or international graduates
Caregivers Program	• Provides permanent residence to eligible caregivers
Federal Business (Start-Up Visa Program and Self-Employed Person)	• Facilitates foreign entrepreneurs in establishing businesses
Provincial Nominee Program (PNP)	• Allows provinces and territories (excluding Quebec and Nunavut) to nominate economic immigration candidates
Quebec Skilled Worker Program and Quebec Business	• Quebec's immigration system, independent of the federal system

Canada offers different refugee sponsorship options through three programs (Hyndman & Hynie, 2016):

Government Assisted Refugees (GARs)	• Receives federal income assistance and settlement support from government-funded agencies
Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs)	• Receives support from citizens, charities, or nonprofits
Blended Visa Office-Referred Refugees (BVOR)	• Receive shared financial support from private sponsors and government, with resettlement assistance from government-funded agencies.

Canada is the only country in the world offering both private and government sponsorship of resettled refugees.

Funding for settlement services, managed by service provider organizations (SPOs), encompasses four key areas (Mulholland & Biles, 2004):

Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC Program)
- Offers basic language instruction for up to three years (yet, most of the training does not reflect advanced or employment specific language training in order to access employment)

Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP)
- Supports settlement programs aiding immigrants in accessing services and integrating into communities

The Host Program
- Pairs immigrants with established Canadians to aid integration

The Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP)
- Provides immediate financial assistance to refugees for up to two years, including public housing and welfare services, supplemented by the Immigration Loan Program
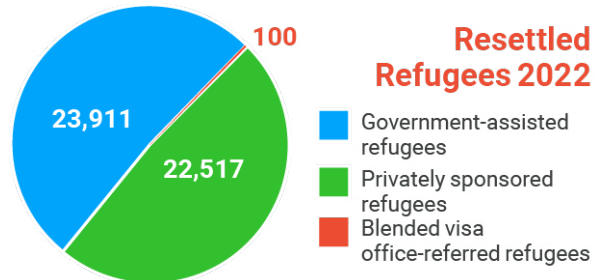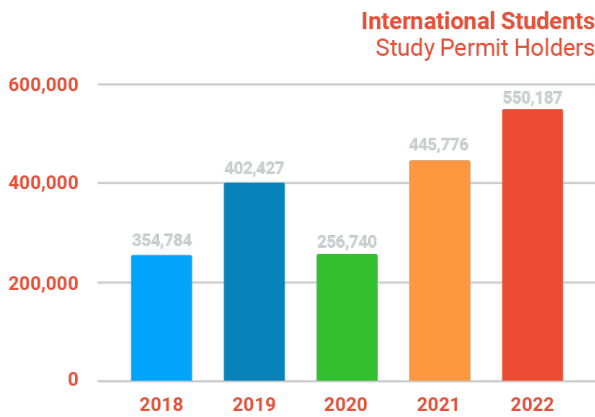
International Students
Study Permit Holders

Year	Study Permit Holders
2018	354,784
2019	402,427
2020	256,740
2021	445,776
2022	550,187

Resettled Refugees 2022
- 23,911 — Government-assisted refugees
- 22,517 — Privately sponsored refugees
- 100 — Blended visa office-referred refugees

Figure 5. Canada granted 550,187 student permits in 2022. This number is expected to decrease by 35% under the new student cap introduced in early 2024. 2020 saw the lowest number of student permits issued due to the Covid 19 pandemic. Image adapted from Immigration, Refugees & Citizenship Canada (2022).

Figure 7. In 2022, a total of 74,342 refugees (23,911 as Government-Assisted Refugees, 22,517 as Privately Sponsored Refugees and 100 Blended Visa Office-Referred Refugees), were admitted as permanent residents. Image adapted from Immigration, Refugees & Citizenship Canada (2022).
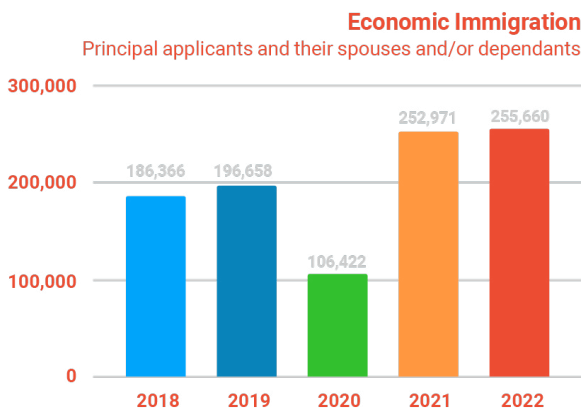
Economic Immigration
Principal applicants and their spouses and/or dependants

Year	Number
2018	186,366
2019	196,658
2020	106,422
2021	252,971
2022	255,660

Figure 6. Canada is seeing an increase in the number of Skilled workers (and their families) that have been granted work permits. Similar to Figure 5, 2020 saw a decrease due to the Covid 19-pandemic. Image adapted from Immigration, Refugees & Citizenship Canada (2022).

Appendix D

How is Integration Measured?

Integration involves equal access to community outcomes such as the availability and accessibility to healthcare, housing, and employment, as well as participation in one's community and society (Hyndman & Hynie, 2016). It measures new-comers' acquisition of language, knowledge, and skills to navigate their new environment. Since the Second World War, the concept of integration into the political, social, economic and cultural sectors of Canadian life has evolved under "The Canadian Diversity Model" (Mulholland & Biles, 2004).

The Canadian Diversity Model
(Mulholland & Biles, 2004).

Inclusion 01

Reciprocity 02

Equality 03

Accommodation 04

Acceptance 05
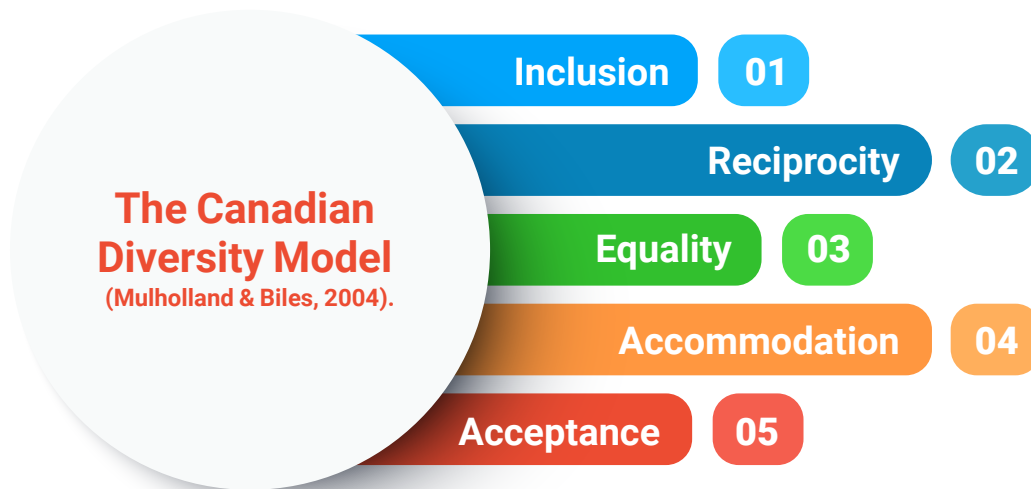
Mackay-Brown and Ashton (2021) identified 11 factors of newcomers' integration in a community:

Language proficiency • A key factor affecting employment and educational opportunities

Employment • Ensures sufficient income

Housing • Access to affordable, safe, and inclusive neighborhoods

Place Attachment • An emotional or physical connection to the community

Cultural Participation • Adopting community values while preserving cultural identity

Social Participation • Building and maintaining social networks

Political Participation • Engaging in public life and political activities

Civic Participation • Involvement in community organizations and events

Inclusivity • Ensuring all residents can participate without barriers

Economic Participation • Contribution to the local economy

Time • The duration of integration, including setbacks and adjustments

Berry (1980) proposes a two-dimensional model of acculturation, assessing newcomer's relationships with their heritage culture and their new society. This model yields four strategies: *integration* (strong links to both), *marginalization* (links to neither), *assimilation* (exclusive link to dominant culture), and *separation* (exclusive link to heritage culture) (Safdar et al., 2023).
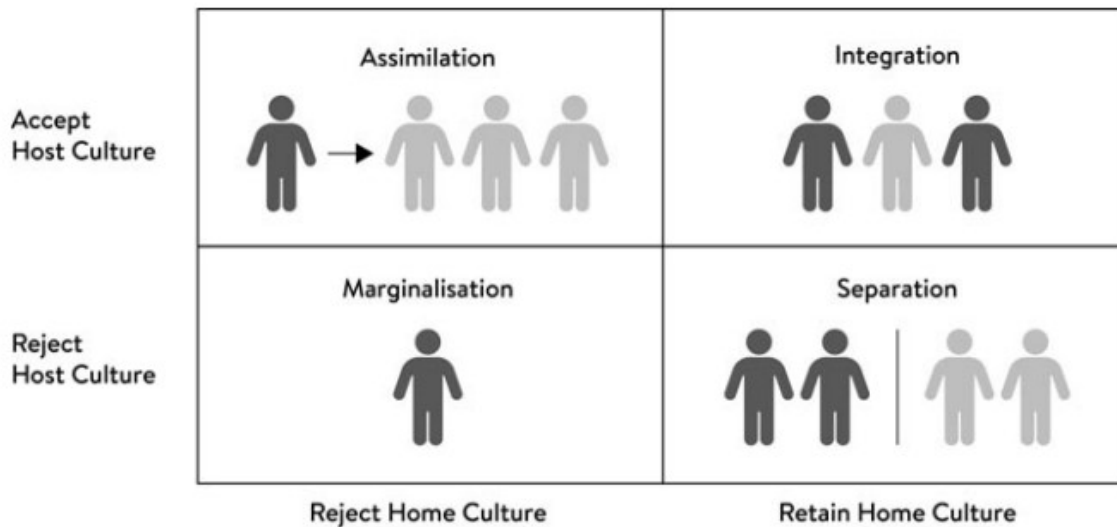

Figure 8. Berry (1980)'s acculturation model to measure integration of newcomers. He posits that in order to reach integration, a newcomer must reach a balance between accepting host (Canadian) culture and retaining home culture. Any other combination will lead to a disconnect. Image courtesy of Mackay-Brown, A., & Ashton, A. (2021).

Appendix E
Public Perception of Newcomers in Canada

In addition to the barriers newcomers face, an equally important factor is their reception in their host community, how they are treated/ viewed upon, and also Canada's capacity to welcome the expanding flow of newcomers. The Environics Institute, Fall 2022 report, highlights that 7 in 10 Canadians support current immigration levels, reflecting widespread recognition of immigration's economic importance and the need for population growth (Neuman, 2022). There is also support for welcoming people from conflict zones like Ukraine and Afghanistan and growing rejection of prejudice against immigrants from racialized cultures. Another indicator of growing acceptance of newcomers is the value placed on multiculturalism, which is an integral element of Canada's identity (Neuman, 2022).

However public perception is always prone to fluctuations. In Fall 2023, public support for immigration saw a sharp decline from its peak in the Fall of 2022. Another study by the Environics Institute found that the proportion of Canadians believing immigration levels are too high rose from 40% in 2020 to 53% in September 2023 (DeLaire, 2023). Concerns include impacts on housing availability, inflation, cost of living, and interest rates (DeLaire, 2023). While most Canadians still disagree that immigration levels are too high, the gap between opposing views has narrowed significantly. This sentiment is strongest in Ontario and British Columbia, and among high-income earners and first-generation Canadians (DeLaire, 2023). Despite these concerns, many Canadians recognize the economic and social benefits of immigration, viewing housing concerns as influenced more by media narratives than local realities.
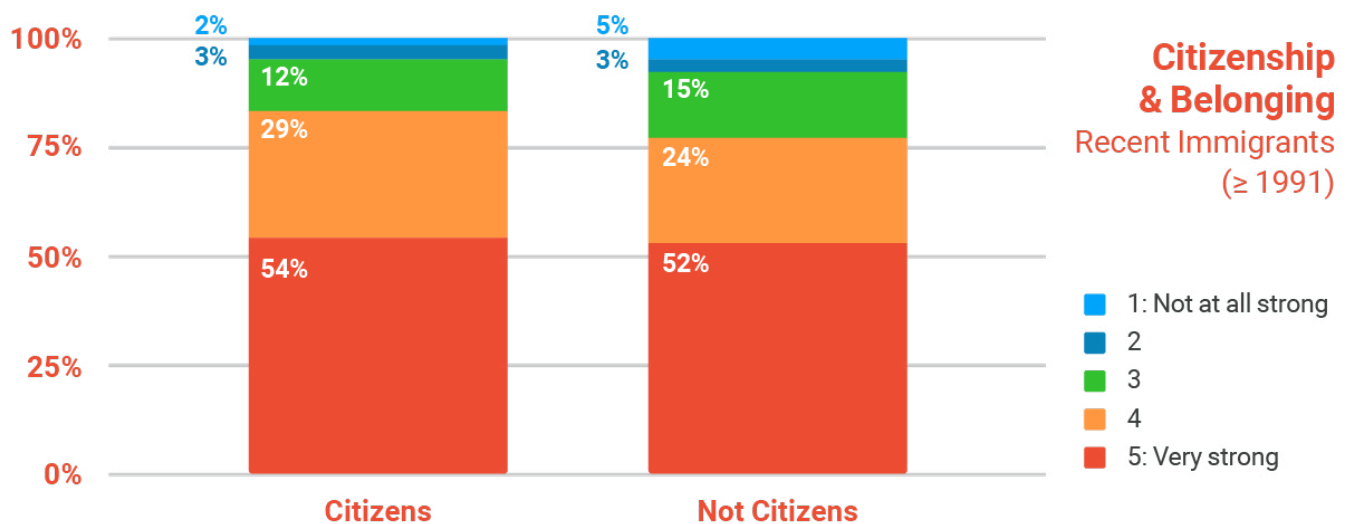

Figure 9. A correlation exists between a sense of belonging and citizenship. A study conducted between 1991 - 2013 stated that the sense of belonging for recent immigrants (non-citizens) is very similar to that of established residents (citizens), and evidence shows that following a 5 year period, newcomer's sense of belonging can surpass those of established residents. Figure adapted from iFigure 8-2: Citizenship and belonging - recent immigrants (≥1991)i by Painter, 2013.
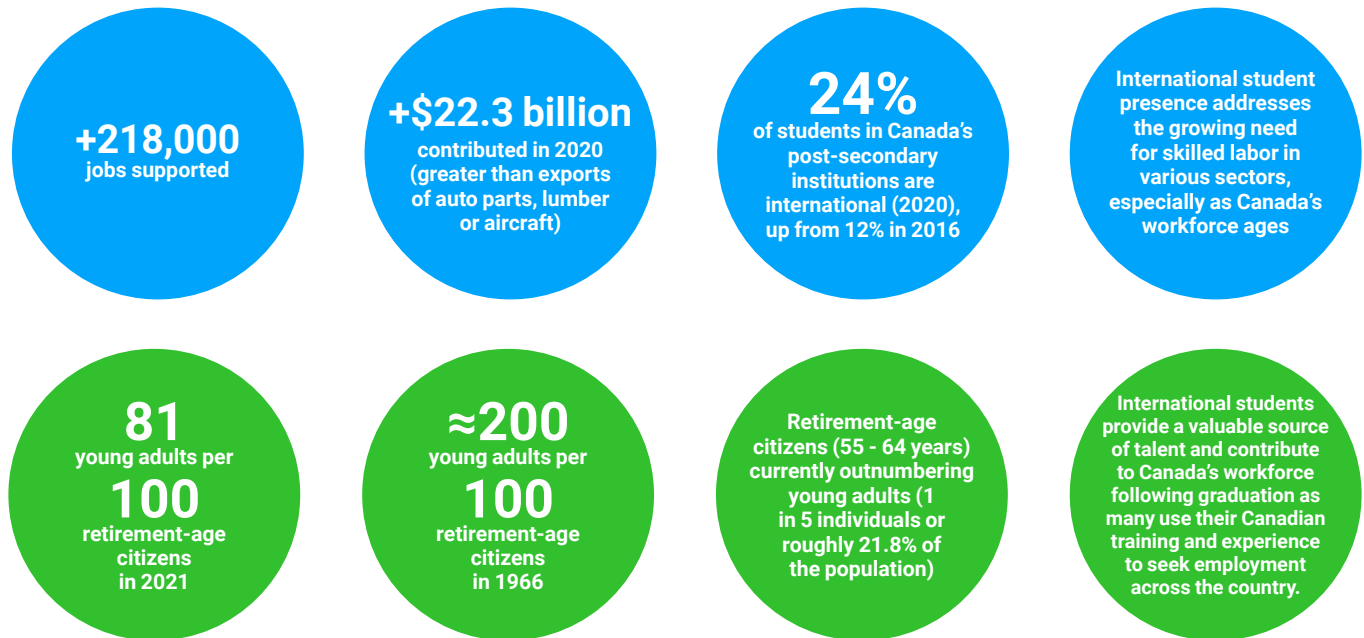
Appendix F

How Does Calgary and Canada Benefit from Newcomers?

Canada faces labour challenges due to its aging population and low birth rates (with a total fertility rate measured at 1.33 per woman), resulting in economic strains and difficulty maintaining social services such as education, health care and other services that provide high living standards (Cohen, 2023). This creates substantial economic and fiscal pressures, in which, immigration is essential for sustainable population growth and economic vitality. With an immigration rate of nearly 1.2%, three times more immigrants on a per capita basis than then the United States, Canada heavily relies on newcomers to stimulate growth and cultural diversity (Cohen, 2023). Therefore, facilitating a strong sense of belonging among newcomers is crucial for their successful integration into Canadian society and their contributions as young professionals.

Calgary is emerging as a hub for skilled workers, particularly in STEM fields, making it the third most diverse city in Canada (Khatoon, 2020). Between 2018 and 2019, Calgary experienced a significant increase in residents, with over 20,000 permanent residents mainly from the Philippines, India, and China (Khatoon, 2020). From 2018 to 2023, approximately 128,000 newcomers (aged 25 - 64), mostly economic migrants, moved to Calgary, with nearly half (45.2%) holding bachelor's degrees (Khatoon, 2020). **Newcomers contribute significantly to Calgary's economy, bringing diverse perspectives, experience (creativity & resilience), and cultural richness both at the corporate and community level.** Therefore, understanding and meeting their needs and experiences are essential for their successful integration (as they form a significant size of the economic workforce) and enable them to function as young professionals in their field.

International students play a crucial role in Canada's post-secondary education system and economy:

+218,000
jobs supported

+$22.3 billion
contributed in 2020 (greater than exports of auto parts, lumber or aircraft)

24%
of students in Canada's post-secondary institutions are international (2020), up from 12% in 2016

International student presence addresses the growing need for skilled labor in various sectors, especially as Canada's workforce ages

81
young adults per
100
retirement-age citizens in 2021

≈200
young adults per
100
retirement-age citizens in 1966

Retirement-age citizens (55 - 64 years) currently outnumbering young adults (1 in 5 individuals or roughly 21.8% of the population)

International students provide a valuable source of talent and contribute to Canada's workforce following graduation as many use their Canadian training and experience to seek employment across the country.

(Basiri, 2023)

Refugees contribute significantly to Canada's economy, with a low unemployment rate of 9% compared to the national average of 6% (UNHCR CANADA, 2024). They form a large part of the workforce where according to the 2016 Census, 33% of refugees aged 25 to 54 worked in jobs requiring a high school education or specific training, while one-fifth were employed in roles requiring a university degree or higher (UNHCR CANADA, 2024). The entrepreneurial spirit is evident as up to 51% rise to hold high-skilled positions, including dentists, architects, doctors, software engineers, and service managers, making valuable contributions across various industries, despite arriving with limited financial resources (UNHCR Canada, 2024). Additionally, refugees contribute more income tax than they receive in public services and benefits within five years of arrival; they also exhibit a higher entrepreneurship rate compared to Canadians, with 14% starting businesses (UNHCR Canada, 2024). By seizing the opportunities presented in Canada, refugees leverage their unique skill sets to develop enterprises that enhance the diversity and vitality of our economy.
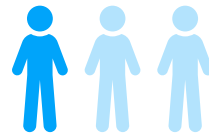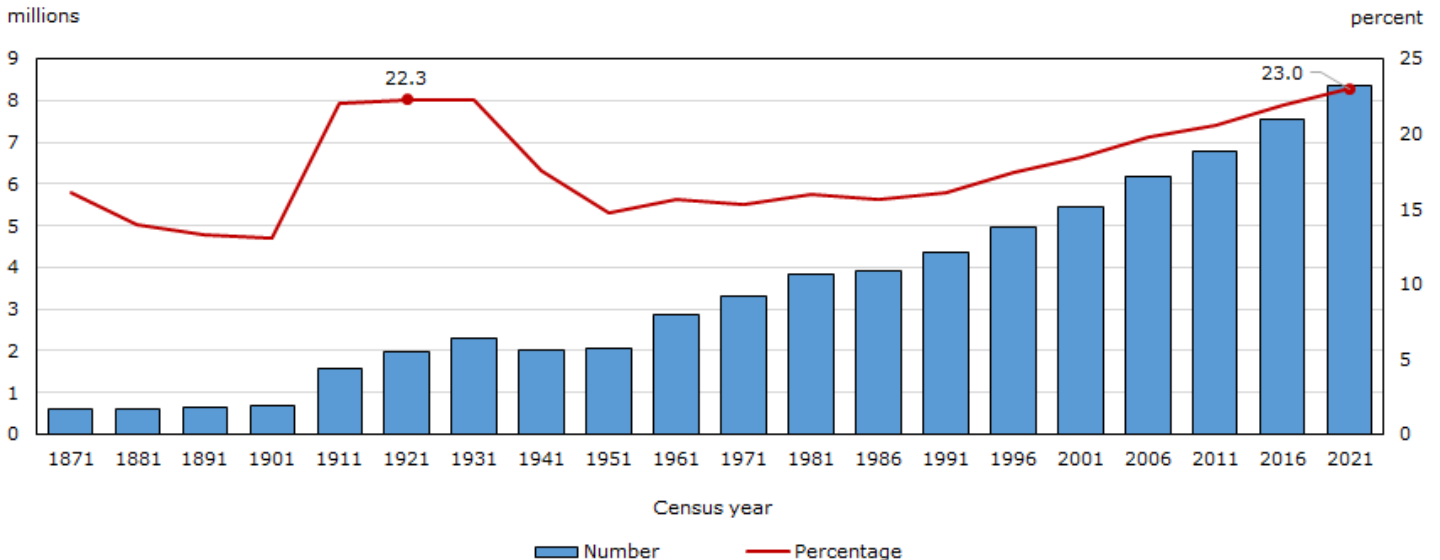
33% of refugees aged 25 to 54 worked in jobs requiring a high school education or specific training,

One-fifth of refugees were employed in roles requiring a university degree or higher (UNHCR CANADA, 2024).

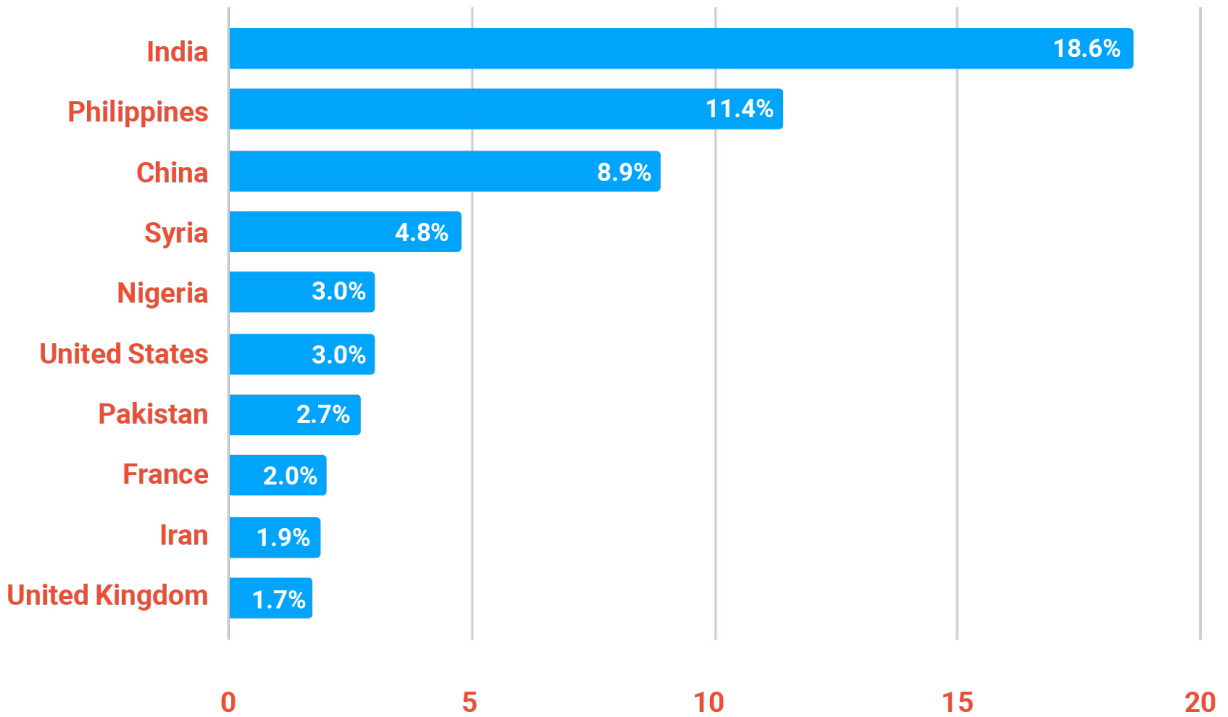## Immigrant population and its percentage of the population, Canada, 1871 to 2021

Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1871 to 2006, 2016, 2021 and National Household Survey, 2011.

Figure 10. The Immigrant population of Canada has been at a healthy increase since 1871, and in 2021, 23% of Canada's population is or has been an immigrant at some point of their life. Due to the increase of immigration, which is needed to stimulate economic growth in an aging nation, it is vital to consider newcomer's sense of belonging and integration into the workplace as young professionals. Figure adapted from Infographic 5 of Statistics Canada (2022).

Top 10 Places of Birth for Recent Immigrants
2021

Place	Percentage
India	18.6%
Philippines	11.4%
China	8.9%
Syria	4.8%
Nigeria	3.0%
United States	3.0%
Pakistan	2.7%
France	2.0%
Iran	1.9%
United Kingdom	1.7%

"Note: 'Recent immigrants' refers to immigrants who first obtained their landed immigrant or permanent resident status in Canada in the five years prior to a given census. In the 2021 Census, the period is January 1, 2016 to May 11, 2021. **Source:** Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021."

Figure 11. In recent years, many of Canada's landed immigrants have come from Asia. Image courtesy of Statistics Canada, 2022.

CATAMOUNT
FELLOWSHIP FOR EMERGING CHANGEMAKERS

YOUTHFUL CITIES

MOUNT ROYAL
UNIVERSITY
1910

Institute for
Community Prosperity

New Beginnings Fostering a Sense of Belonging and Integrating Newcomers as Young Professionals in Calgary