

A word cloud graphic with the words 'Settlement', 'Integration', 'Experiences', and 'Calgary' as the largest, most prominent terms. Other words of varying sizes and colors (orange, purple, green, yellow) are scattered around them, including 'children', 'immigration', 'arrival', 'citizenship', 'economic', 'home', 'interviews', 'migrant', 'worker', 'permanent', 'family', 'community', 'newcomer', and 'refugee'.

Settlement Integration Experiences Calgary

Looking deep with twenty-four stories

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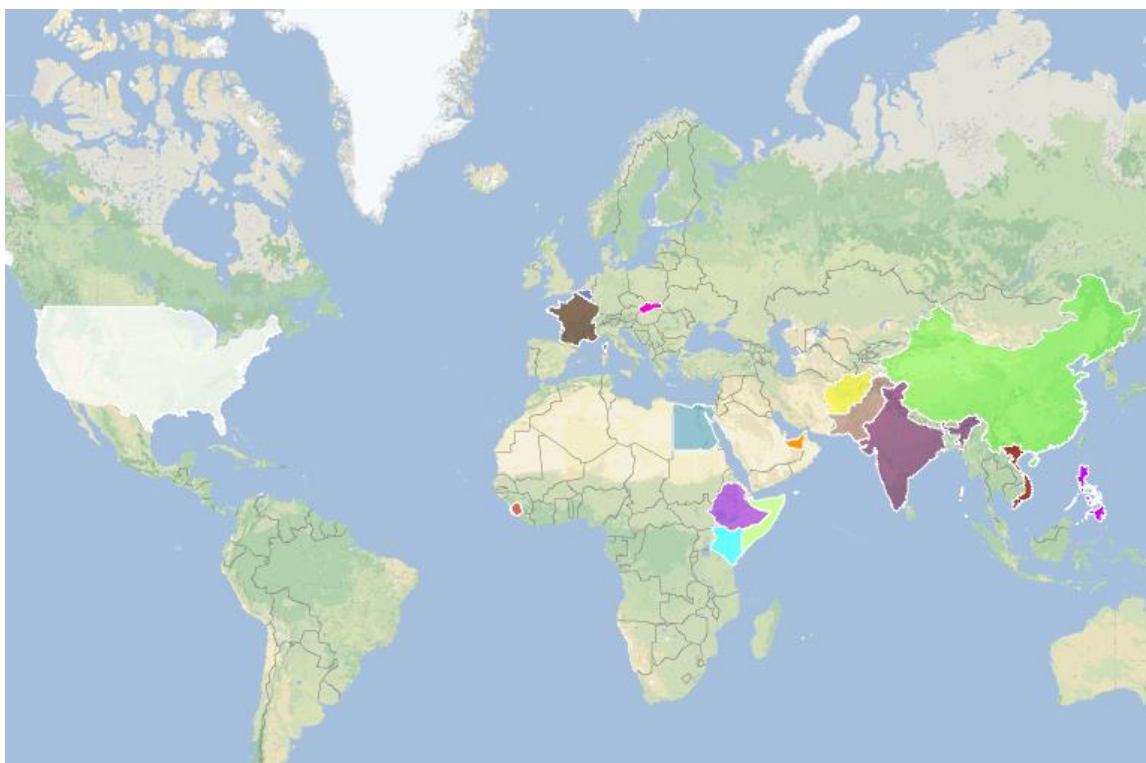


This study collected twenty-four stories from a diverse group of women and men with a range of immigration and settlement experiences. These long-form interviews were categorized in themes, and aims to keep the experience of the participants at centre.

Face to face, semi-structured, exploratory interviews were conducted in English (two interviews used translators). The names of participants used in this document have been changed.

Seven participants were 30 years old and under, eight participants were 31-40 years old, six participants were 41 and older and three participants did not state their age. Half of the participants were women.

The following image shows a country of origin profile of the participants.



Afghanistan (2)
Belgium (1)
China (4)
Egypt (1)

Ethiopia (2)
France (1)
India (2)
Kenya (1)

Pakistan (2)
Philippines (2)
Sierra Leon (1)
Slovak Republic (1)

Somalia (1)
United Arab Emirates (1)
United States (1)
Vietnam (1)

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Excerpt

Eva: It was very simple for me. We were on the way from picking up my sister from a vacation. She said “Oh a friend of mine is going to Canada, they’re moving there”. I was like “Well is it that easy just to move there like that?” She said: “Yeah they just going to this agency and they just fill the papers and here you go”. I was thinking to leave the country, I had no reason to leave my country or anything for any reason but it was like “Oh it would be interesting”. My daughter at that time was only 1 year old and I was thinking maybe she can learn English right off the bat with no accent. It would be great for her, just you know, to experience these new things, new everything.

2. Seeking new experiences

Three participants spoke about their desires to come to Canada to “try something new.” These individuals were employed and experienced relatively stable lives in their country of origin. Their decisions to come to Canada were based what they had heard from those that came before them – about positive work and life opportunities. These individuals had more time to plan for their immigration, and usually spend significant time saving money before departing.

3. Family, economic and other considerations

Thirteen (13) out of the twenty-four participants spoke at length about being motivated to move to ameliorate the family’s quality of life, or to be near their family. Participants came to Calgary to be near their children and grandchildren (3), to be with extended family (6), and to be with their spouses (4). This was the major motivating factor for those over the age of 65.

Another strong impetus for immigration to Calgary was a belief that Calgary had a strong economy, and in particular, opportunities for credential recognition. One participant in particular spoke about how he learned about Calgary’s labour opportunities through online discussion forums. Labour opportunities were the driving force for the three participants who were in Canada as Temporary Foreign Workers (or were the spouses of Temporary Foreign Workers and who had open work permits).

Excerpt

Eva: We checked the unemployment rates throughout Canada to see where would be the best place to go. At that time the lowest unemployment rate was in Calgary particularly, so that was a very fast decision and quick one, and how we had decided to come to Calgary directly.

Excerpt

Wilhelm: I had a job offer with a [required] Labor Market Opinion (LMO). So when the recruitment was done, they guarantee work permit with, based on LMO. Last year in August we came in both of us with the right documents. With the LMO from the employer and we walked through immigration without any issue.

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Milestone: Educational achievement

The pursuit of education is a central aspect of the newcomer experience in Calgary. Education begins almost immediately for many, whether it is English classes, continuing education or recertification.

- Parents of small children believe a key milestone is when their young children pick up English “with ease” and are managing well in the mainstream school system
- Young adults spoke about their parents viewing admission into post-secondary as a key milestone
- Adults who are in post-secondary or trades education stated that it is not simply gaining entry into any educational institution that is success, but becoming enrolled in a program that reflects the goals and aspirations of newcomers. This will also contribute to diminishing isolation and encouraging belonging.



Recommendations from participants:

- Educational institutions need “easy-to-navigate” websites with specific information about prior foreign education and admission processes for individuals with foreign transcripts.
- Speaking to academic advisors as early as possible once landing is the most important part of the process. These advisors should specialize in cross-cultural evaluation of the credentials and education.
- Calgary’s post-secondary institutions have a unique opportunity to consult with newcomers to better harness the energy of these newcomer students. Partnering with international student organizations such as AISEC would be beneficial.
- Ensuring that recruitment and admission information is readily accessible and delivered to newcomers via settlement agencies.

Excerpt

Rita: [on barriers to educational achievement] I couldn’t take those courses, I couldn’t afford it, I had to work. I just couldn’t just go to classes and just live off nothing....[when you consider] rent, damage deposit, phone lines, whatever, you just can’t afford not to be working. I had no choice, I had no time to go to school as much as I want to.

Milestone: Independence and Confidence

Feeling independent and having a sense of confidence in their choice to migrate is important.

- Feeling independent was a true sign of settlement
- Being able to access the right benefits and entitlements bolstered a sense of confidence
- Being connected to a network of peers and volunteering in their ethno-cultural communities contributed to both independence and confidence

Milestone: Accessing services

Depending on the motivations of individuals in moving to Canada, participants spoke about different needs and action in accessing settlement services in Calgary.

Social, economic and political volatility: There was minimal orientation to Calgary upon arrival; however the majority of these participants spoke about the high quality of support through services accessed upon arrival, and the importance of these services for their settlement.

Seeking new experiences: Once they arrived, although they were directed to immigrant-serving agencies, they did not access services either because they didn’t need to, or because they was a perception that the services offered would not suit their needs.

Family, economic, other considerations: These participants spoke about a pull to Calgary to be closer to their ethno-cultural communities, and about how these communities were important sources of strength during the settlement process.

Milestone: Employment and a 'Real Job'

It was clear during the interviews that participants' experiences in the labour market are reflective of wider trends in immigrant employment, where lack of credential recognition, language skills and other barriers make it difficult to find employment.

- Lengthy recertification processes are contributing to the repatriation of educated and skilled immigrants.
- The disappointment that prior education, professional training and work experience are not recognized contributes to a sense of being devalued.
- Women experience labour market integration in particular ways that differ from men. For example, because of the fiscal restraints related to recertification and accreditation, or the further pursuit of education, it is usual practice that women forego their own job mobility processes in order to take (usually low-wage) employment to support the family while their spouses pursue them. On the other hand, it may also mean that women are required to enter the workforce to secure double-incomes for their families, and this may be a departure from their cultural norms, responsibilities and personal desires.
- Refugee participants face particular barriers to a real job. Most likely, refugees are arriving in Canada with an incomplete set of educational and/or professional documentation. This translates to expensive retraining programs, lack of multiple entry points into training programs which means that they are required to begin at the most basic level, regardless of previous training and experience.



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How do you describe your **SENSE OF BELONGING** in Calgary?



The majority of participants view Calgary as their permanent home. Some important aspects related to a sense of belonging and ideas about the future:

- Overwhelmingly, participants spoke about how it was important for them and their families to retain strong connections with their country of origin, and this was reinforced with regular visits. Circular migration patterns seemed to emerge in this research.
- Participants spoke about a dynamic sense of belonging – it is certainly not a linear process and it fluctuates, is ongoing, and never complete.
- When asked about what has helped in this ongoing sense of belonging, many participants spoke about it was the achievement of personal and family goals that were met through their immigration to Calgary. If the settlement process builds their confidence and really supports their achievements, then they are more likely to feel like they belong.
- Several participants describe in some way that although life in Calgary is good, they would consider going back to their countries of origin because there are more social and familial connections.

Excerpt:

Soni: Yeah, school, life, friends, it's great. I am more connected to people than I was 6 years ago. Yeah, we have everything we need I think. So everyone is happy and ah, we're enjoying it...it's just a matter of adapting to it, like if you get through the first few years, after that people will be fine. They will start liking it...I do want to live in Canada but I may travel during winter times.

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PARTICIPANT RECOMMENDATIONS for improving settlement in Calgary

- Support the involvement of newcomers in healthy social networks early, such as in sports and recreation or volunteering. Provide more resources to programs where they exist.
- Encourage communities to get to know each other, work together across language and cultural differences in order to address how communities within Calgary can be isolated. Build more welcoming communities.
- Build awareness in Calgary that being a newcomer and moving to a new country is a very hard thing to do. This will build more understanding and respect for diversity and English language learning students.
- Reinforce to newcomers and the receiving community that newcomers have a great deal of talent and knowledge to contribute. This will encourage civic engagement.
- Streamline and simplify post-secondary education access for newcomers by improving education and credential recognition. Consider having a specialized organization or department within educational institutions to focus on supporting immigrants with higher education to access.
- Increase social and entertainment opportunities for newcomer seniors to reduce isolation and improve community engagement.
- Continue to promote improvements in service access by way of translation and interpretation services.
- Provide educational programs around the benefits systems to newcomers so that they are aware of what they are entitled to, how they can receive it, and which governmental departments are responsible for them.
- Invest in immigration sector online resources. Many participants used online forums, web searches, government websites, and immigrant sector agency information and resources to make initial immigration-related decisions and prepare for arrival in Calgary. It is critical that information available is up to date, and easy to navigate.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Twenty-four individuals have shared with us their experiences of moving to Calgary, what were their milestones in settlement, and what has contributed to their dynamic sense of belonging in Canada. Through these stories, we begin to see themes emerge that will help human service organizations in supporting and fostering settlement and integration in Calgary. The motivations that drive individuals to Calgary are interrelated with the milestones of their settlement, and in what ways they feel as though they belong here.

Newcomers from a diverse demographical background have told us that they are ready, willing and able to contribute to building Calgary's success, how can we foster this enthusiasm?

Continual efforts to improve how Calgary receives newcomers recognizes that integration and settlement is a two-way process and contributes to a society-wide effort to build more welcoming communities. It also recognizes that settlement occurs everywhere - through ordinary daily interactions on Calgary's roads, in classrooms, supermarkets, hospitals, on sports fields, and on sidewalks - and that all Calgarians have a role in fostering welcoming communities.

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