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## Civic Capacity and Engagement in Building Welcoming and Inclusive Communities for Newcomers: Praxis, Recommendations, and Policy Implications

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# Civic Capacity and Engagement in Building Welcoming and Inclusive Communities for Newcomers: Praxis, Recommendations, and Policy Implications

Michael Guo-Brennan and Linyuan Guo-Brennan

## Abstract

As newcomers, immigrants and refugees contribute to social and cultural diversity, and play an important role in communities' social and economic development. However, their talent, energy, and entrepreneurial spirit and skills can only be fully harnessed when the communities are welcoming and inclusive. Drawing from a two-year qualitative research study conducted in the Province of Prince Edward Island, Canada, this paper examines the degree of civic capacity, along with policies and practices related to building a welcoming and inclusive community for immigrants and refugees. Through examining civic capacity and high-impact practices and programs to support the integration of immigrants and refugees, this paper shares new insights on how community stakeholders interact with each other to support or subvert the inclusion and equity in the community and offers policy implications and practical recommendations on building welcoming communities for immigrants and refugees in small communities.

## Introduction

As immigrants settle in Canada in record-high numbers, national origin and linguistic diversity in the schools, cities, towns, and provinces continues to grow. Between 2000 and 2018, Canada admitted an average of 255,000 immigrants each year (StatCan, 2019). Many smaller provinces and local municipalities across Canada are becoming more ethnically, culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse. The changing demographics of these communities present new challenges for leaders, including meeting increasing demands of culturally responsive policy and services, reducing sociocultural friction caused by racism and discrimination, and dealing with the emerging tension and stress in governmental systems. This paper introduces immigration policy and trends in Canada, analyzes the impact of changing demographics on small urban centers, presents the challenges faced by newcomers, and shares the findings of a two-year study exploring promising practices in building inclusive and welcoming communities in a small Canadian province. Following the recommendations for building welcoming and inclusive communities, this paper concludes with policy recommendations and implications on enhancing equity and inclusion in communities with increasing newcomer populations.

## Immigration Policy and Trends in Canada

With a long immigration history, Canada is a nation of immigrants and the descendants of

immigrants. Immigration is not only a powerful demographic force for the Canadian population, but also has strong influence on the social, cultural, political, and economic development in the nation (Edmonston, 2016). Immigration policy in Canada is structured around two main categories: permanent residents and temporary visitors. Aside from voting/running for political offices and holding jobs that need a high-level security clearance, permanent residents in Canada get most benefits that citizens receive, including free public education, health care, employment eligibility, and protections under Canadian law and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Government of Canada, 2018). As of 2016, 22% of the Canadian population was foreign-born and one in five a visible racial minority (Statistics Canada, 2017a). Newcomers in this paper refer to the immigrants and refugees who have been granted permanent resident status and lived in Canada no more than five years.

While large provinces and metropolitan cities continue to see an increasing number of newcomers, smaller provinces and cities are receiving higher proportions of the newcomer population. For example, most of the established residents in Prince Edward Island (PEI)—the smallest province in Canada—are descendants of Scottish, English, Irish, and French immigrants. During the past decade, the total foreign-born population in PEI increased from 1% to 10% (PEI Statistics Bureau, 2017). The top 12 source countries for recent immigrants and refugees

in PEI include China, United Kingdom, United States, Philippines, Netherlands, Germany, Iran, India, Syria, Nepal, Bhutan, and South Korea. Most newcomers reside in Charlottetown, the capital city with a population of 67,820 residents (Statistics Canada, 2017b).

### **Civic Challenges Faced by Newcomers**

Newcomers face common challenges and barriers when they adapt to life in a new country, including language barriers, unemployment or underemployment, racism and discrimination, exclusion and inequality, poverty, unfamiliarity with the new culture and education system, securing quality housing, accessing health and legal services, and transportation. The challenges faced by refugees may be even more acute due to their prior life experiences in war and areas of conflict and the lack of preparation/orientation to move to a new country (Stewart, 2011).

For newcomers, the initial years of transitioning to new societies and countries are critical because their cross-cultural identities, described by McIntyre, Barowsky, and Tong (2011, p. 11) as “the intricate and delicate blending and mixing of the values, behaviors, and languages of the old country with those of the new one,” and their perceptions on the new society and country are important determining factors in the success of their integration (Cities of Migration, 2018a). Research on immigrants and refugees indicates that belongingness—the psychological sense that one fits in and is accepted in an environment—is a fundamental need of newcomers and is associated with many positive outcomes, such as greater social cohesion, better employment opportunities, enhanced quality and equality, and more positive health outcomes (Kanu, 2008; Mackay & Tavares, 2005; Neufeld, Matthes, Moulden, Friesen, & Gaucher, 2016; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009; Walton, Cohen, Cwir, & Spencer, 2012).

Examining and enhancing the capacity to build welcoming and inclusive communities for all is an urgent task faced by governments, policymakers, and practitioners because this is the first step to better support the personal, social, cultural, educational, and economic development of newcomers as well as an important strategy to increase community engagement in building a more just, equitable, and inclusive society for all citizens with diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Esses, Hamilton, Bennett-AbuAyyash, & Bursten, 2010; Guo-Brennan & Guo-Brennan, 2018).

### **Characteristics of a Welcoming and Inclusive Community**

Recognizing that knowledge and understanding concerning welcoming and inclusive communities for immigrants and refugees is still emerging and challenges exist in reaching a consensus on a systemic approach, we conceptualize a welcoming and inclusive community as culturally competent that welcomes people from all backgrounds, demonstrates commitment to inclusion and equity, and has the capacity to enable individual development and well-being, regardless of one’s abilities, ethnicity, cultures, languages, gender, socioeconomic status, religion, and country of origin (Cities of Migration, 2018b; Esses et al., 2010; Guo-Brennan & Guo-Brennan, 2018; Hamilton & Moore, 2004; McBrien, 2005; Pathways to Prosperity: Canada, 2018; Rutter, 2006).

The characteristics include positive attitudes toward diversity and inclusion, policy and procedures that fight racism and discrimination, programs and resources to meet newcomers’ needs, social integration and cohesion between locals and newcomers, culturally responsive public services for newcomers, and equal engagement and economic development opportunities for newcomers (Cities of Migration, 2018a; Esses et al., 2010; Guo-Brennan & Guo-Brennan, 2018; McBrien, 2005; Pathways to Prosperity: Canada, 2018). Location, history, existing population, and diversity are important factors that influence community welcoming ability and inclusiveness. To properly assess whether a community is welcoming and inclusive, both processes and outcomes need to be considered (Esses et al., 2010).

The literature related to social justice, diversity, equality, and intervention for immigrants and refugees has emphasized the significance of a systematic approach to improving the inclusion and equity for newcomers; however, there is little empirical evidence to illustrate how these systems are currently functioning to achieve this objective (Banks, 2016; Rutter, 2006; Stewart, 2014). One potential approach discussed in this paper is to improve justice and equity by strengthening civic capacity and developing community coalitions to fight racism and discrimination to reduce tension and conflict between social, ethnic, and racial groups, to support the economic, social, civic, and political integration of newcomers and to benefit the communities in which newcomers settle (Feuerverger & Richards, 2007; Li, 2005).

## Civic Capacity to Build Inclusive and Welcoming Communities

Civic capacity refers to the involvement of various actors in different sectors of the community in a problem-solving effort. Civic engagement is the application of that capacity (Brennan, 2012; Stone, Henig, & Jones, 2001; Wong, Shen, Anagnostopoulos, & Rutledge, 2007). In addressing the challenges of building welcoming and inclusive communities for newcomers, the level of civic capacity is demonstrated through a broad coalition of actors, including leaders from municipal and provincial governments, the business community, non-governmental organizations, grassroots community organizations, educators, and newcomers (Cities of Migration, 2018a; Guo-Brennan & Guo-Brennan, 2018). The work involved in creating welcoming and inclusive communities is multilayered and complex. It requires a process that creates a shared awareness and knowledge of each others' needs and realities, trusting and collaborative relationships among different stakeholders, time to act and reflect on fighting racism and discrimination, and the capacity building and engagement at both the organizational and community levels (Guo-Brennan & Guo-Brennan, 2018; Jones & Lee, 2017). Municipal governments play an important role in building welcoming and inclusive communities as they function at the most practical level and are the most closely involved in the lives of all citizens (Cities of Migration, 2018a).

## Research Purpose and Questions

This paper is developed based on an interdisciplinary study that explored promising practices in building welcoming and inclusive communities for newcomers through examining the direct and indirect interactions that newcomers encountered with community stakeholders in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada. Specifically, this study addressed three research questions:

1. What are newcomers' perceptions and expectations for a welcoming and inclusive community?
2. What policy and practices are adopted to build welcoming and inclusive communities for newcomers?
3. What needs to be done to foster greater civic capacity and engagement in building welcoming communities for newcomers?

## Methodology and Methods

The study adopted a qualitative design with a continual and dynamic data collection and analysis process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Conducted in a series of phases that spanned two years, the study was purposefully developed to allow for a reciprocal process of learning, investigating, problem-solving, and continual collaboration with stakeholders, community members, and research participants. To understand the broader context as well as newcomers' needs and expectations, research data was collected through multiple methods as identified in the literature, including document analysis, focus groups, program observations, and semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

Immigration policies and programs at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels were collected and analyzed to identify support systems and resources contributing to welcoming and inclusive communities for newcomers. Researchers conducted 50 semi-structured interviews and five focus groups. In total, 71 participants volunteered and were invited to participate in this study. Representing the community of stakeholders with diverse backgrounds, the participants included representatives for non-governmental organizations (20), newcomer parents (16), newcomer youth (14), educators (10), public officials and administrators from the federal, provincial, and municipal government (8), and refugees (3). Refugees were the most difficult to reach for this study. Proper protections in place by the federal government and the service-providing agencies to protect this vulnerable population, and fear of refugees themselves to discuss their status limited our ability to collect some data for this research. Newcomers who did participate in this study came from China, Iran, the Netherlands, India, United States, England, Central Africa Republic, Syria, South Africa, Korea, and Bhutan.

Individual interview protocols were designed for each cohort of participants. Interviews were structured with a series of predetermined questions as well as optional follow-up questions based on given responses. Questions for immigrants and newcomers focused on their experience coming to Canada including if they felt Canada, and PEI were welcoming. These same participants were asked about the availability of services, including job training/career counseling, if these services

met newcomer needs, and what more needed to be done to better meet the needs of newcomers to build a more welcoming community.

Parents and students were asked specific questions about the schools and efforts to create welcoming schools and the services available for immigrants, including refugees. Those directly involved with providing services for newcomers and refugees, including government policymakers and service providers, as well as staff at nonprofit organizations, were asked about immigration policy, responsibilities and roles of various actors, as well as funding for immigrant services. All participants were asked what needed to be done to better support refugees.

All interviews were fully transcribed verbatim by trained research assistants to capture every utterance and nuance of the interviewee. In addition, 10 program observations were conducted to learn about high-impact programs, practices and models for building welcoming and inclusive communities. All program observations were documented based on a prepared protocol by the primary researchers or trained research assistants. A continuous process of sorting, theorizing, analyzing and interpreting data was adopted throughout this study. Data codes, themes, and interpretation were developed, organized, and digitally coded by using software NVivo 11. Triangulation and cross-member checking were used to ensure accuracy and validity. Pseudonyms were used in this paper to protect participants' confidentiality.

## **Findings and Discussion**

Through an analysis of the collected data, findings are identified based on three main categories: (1) newcomer perceptions, (2) challenges and barriers, and (3) promising practices. Within these broad categories, themes were chosen and presented to discuss civic capacity and engagement in building welcoming and inclusive communities.

### *Newcomer Perceptions Toward PEI: Friendly but not Welcoming*

Most immigrant participants in this study perceived the PEI community as friendly but not welcoming. They reported that PEI is a friendly island because most community members would greet them on the street, at the church, and in the schools. However, the interaction between newcomers and local community members rarely went to deeper levels. Most participants in this

study did not feel they were welcomed by local community members because very few people had taken an intentional interest in the life stories of the immigrants and refugees. Mary, an immigrant from South Africa, shared her experiences:

I felt the people on the streets, in the churches, in the shops were very friendly... but they do not make friends easily. I feel like there are two groups, immigrant and refugees and then islanders. We live on a farm, when we first started living on the farm, our neighbors never came to meet us. Where as in South Africa if you move into a new neighborhood, your neighbors would come over with soup in the winter, or like sandwiches and say hello. Nothing like that here.... The store we went to, after about five years, one of the employees called me by my name.

One term frequently mentioned by newcomers when sharing their perceptions about the unwelcoming characteristics is their identity as people who “come from away” (CFA). These are people who were not born on the island but now take up residence on PEI. This status is not limited to newcomers; anyone, even fellow Canadians from other provinces can be labeled with the CFA brand. A shared concern by newcomers was that they were in disadvantaged situations in job hunting, business opportunities, and meaningful social connections once they were defined as CFAs.

Refugees, on the other hand, felt more welcomed and grateful for the country and local community. Talking about her impression of Canada and PEI, Rene expressed her appreciation by saying:

I left my home country because of war and lived in a refugee camp in Ghana for nine years. I am a widow with two daughters. God helped me settle down in Canada last year. I am so grateful and pray that God bless this country because many people come together to help poor people like me. People came to meet me at the airport on the day we arrived, brought me to a home, gave me some presents and seven hundred Canadian dollars for food. They provided us an apartment, the clothes for my kids, and helped connect my kids with schools. They also found the

way to drive us to the hospital. They are very good to us and I greatly appreciate all the help they gave to us.

### *Challenges of Building Inclusive Communities*

**Limited support services.** Unlike a large metropolitan area, where there may be dozens of community organizations that offer support services for newcomers, PEI has only one settlement organization—PEI Association of Newcomers to Canada (PEIANC). Newcomers rely heavily on this organization for most support services. Some participants indicated that in a small city it was better to have a centralized agency to obtain settlement and integration services. All participants identified PEIANC as a service hub for newcomers to get settlement information and assistance needed in education, health care, employment, and public services. In addition to PEIANC, faith-based organizations and English language training institutions were also identified by newcomers as their primary sources of support. These community organizations provided the opportunity for newcomers to learn local cultures and make connections with local community members. Due to the many challenges faced by newcomers related to language barriers, language training institutions played a significant role in connecting newcomers to each other and to help them develop the intercultural awareness, understanding, and communication skills needed for living and working in a new country.

**Unrecognized foreign credentials.** Employment or business discrimination was mentioned by nearly all newcomer participants. Most newcomers who immigrated to PEI were professionals in their home countries and earned a living as engineers, accountants, teachers, health-care providers, or successful business managers/owners. Most of them were not able to continue their former professions because of the lack of employment opportunities or tremendous barriers of getting their professional accreditation or license recognized in Canada. Aanya worked as a registered nurse in India for 10 years and could speak five languages, including English. Talking about her impression about Canada and PEI, Aanya said:

I consider Canada overall is a welcoming country, except for the area related to our profession. I was a Registered Nurse in India. I did everything I could to get my

nursing credential and license recognized, but was always told that “I don’t have this or that experience.” After trying for two years, I gave up and quitted the process. It was a heartbreaking experience. There should be some help to the professionals. I knew some doctors are working as taxi drivers.

**Barriers in public services.** Stakeholders in the public sector encountered greater challenges in creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for newcomers. Most participants in public services such as policing, health services, legal services, and parental involvement in education reported difficulties in interactions with newcomers due to linguistic and cultural differences. Talking about the challenges in providing culturally responsive policing services, a police official said:

Any contact with the police, be it a traffic accident, or other reason, is a time of high anxiety and stress. It could cause or involve injury. Let’s suppose the police encounter is a nice clean accident with no injuries. The police show up and they find the two parties involved. Imagine the situation if one party does not fully grasp English and may not fully understand what is happening.... Situations like this have demanded the police department to make a conscious effort to learn the difference between violent behavior caused by mental challenges and behavior caused by other issues, such as language, culture, etc.

**Other barriers.** Other barriers to inclusion identified by participants include youth employment discrimination, difficulties accessing health care due to language barriers, concerns about the quality of public education, insufficient public transit and municipal services suitable to newcomers, lack of social engagement opportunities with local community members, and the absence of newcomers’ voices and opinions in the public decision-making and political systems.

### *Promising Practices in Building This Kind of Community*

**Municipal government’s leadership.** Municipalities’ efforts to mobilize resources and build support for newcomers included subsidized

public transportation, collaborating with settlement agencies and organizations to offer free sporting programs and facilities for newcomers, creating city-wide events that celebrate diversity and inclusion, and collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce to support newcomers' needs for business opportunities and networking. Further actions can be taken by local government leadership to build a more inclusive community, including reducing language and cultural barriers for newcomers in accessing public services, reducing social and employment discrimination, creating a more open and supportive business environment for newcomers, promoting better understanding among citizens of the struggles of minority communities, and taking broad-based sustained action to build inclusion and a welcoming community for newcomers.

Municipal government's leadership role in building inclusive and welcoming communities is critical to achieve successful outcomes. This was emphasized by one senior government official who participated in this study:

No one can build inclusion and diversity alone. Do we have a role to play in building welcoming community, absolutely! We should be at the table with school boards, with sport PEI, with newcomer's association, with the university, colleges, and major employers. I think we should all have a role.

**Alignment with existing priorities, initiatives, and networks.** Responding to the rapid demographic changes caused by immigration, the Charlottetown municipal government has made efforts to deliver linguistically and culturally responsive city services. Municipal leaders have promoted inclusion and diversity through programs and policies such as expanded public transportation service routes to meet the needs of newcomers, municipal recreational programs and facilities that cater to non-Canadian cultures, tourist information in different languages, and municipal government sponsored holiday celebrations and activities that reflect diverse population and traditions. One participant shared how public transportation planning was transformed by and for newcomers:

Some non-Canadian cultures are more inclined to walk or to participate in unorganized activities, so we invest in

active transportation, such as walking trails and bicycle routes. We have a wonderful trail system that runs behind the university. The city made a three-year plan to make active transportation as a key component in city planning and development. We just voted to invest \$100,000 in the first phase of lighting the trail system so it can be used at night.

Public transportation systems were important for many immigrants and refugees, particularly when they first arrived in a community/country without a vehicle and/or local driver's license. This initiative's planning and implementation was successful and widely supported because it was connected to the city's Community Sustainability Plan, an existing element of the municipality's long-term strategic plan.

#### **Integrated immigration settlement services.**

Settlement services refer to the programs and supports designed to assist immigrants to settle and make the necessary adjustments for a life in their host country and community. While some newcomers saw the limited sources for information and assistance as a barrier, others appreciated the ability to access all services through one primary agency. As the primary nonprofit organization that serves newcomers, PEIANC provides integrated settlement and integration programs/services, administers language training placement, offers interpretation and translation services, assists newcomers with employment and business development, connects newcomers with the local community through outreach programs, and provides services to immigrant students and their families. The centralized and integrated service system was emphasized by most participants as a strength and solid foundation for building a welcoming community. A governmental official with many years of working experience in the immigration sector commented that:

We have one of the few EAL (English as Additional Language) and FAL (French as Additional Language) intake systems in the country that allows immigrants and refugees to be assessed and placed properly. From a case management standpoint, they are given the proper resources that meet their needs. In many other jurisdictions, a refugee or a

newcomer shows up in a school system without being assessed. Schools do not have advanced warning or have no understanding of their needs. From a functional standpoint, we know about the individuals, we know about their needs and can properly plan to put a program together to help those individuals get through the school system.

**Enhancing Newcomers' Social Capital and Connections.** Social capital contributes to a sense of belongingness and refers to the resources that newcomers may draw upon as needed to enhance productivity, facilitate upward mobility, and realize economic returns (Portes, 1998). It consists of networks and relationships based on reciprocity, trust, and shared values. Social capital enables immigrants and refugees to develop the sense of belonging through trusting relationships and gain access to and information on various resources helpful to their new lives in the host country (Coleman, 1991). Most newcomer participants in this study expressed their strong desire to form meaningful social connection and interactions with both newcomers and local community members.

A number of strategies have been adopted on the island to strengthen immigrants and refugees' social capital and connections. For instance, PEIANC offers a number of programs and services specifically designed for enhancing newcomers' social capital and connections. These programs include: Community Connections Program, Multicultural Education Program, Community affiliations, Holiday Host Volunteer Program, Immigrant Women's Support Group, Ethno-cultural Organizations in PEI, and the DiverseCity Multicultural Festival. These programs provide opportunities for both newcomers and local community members to connect socially, culturally, and professionally and contribute to a sense of unity and belongingness.

**Reducing racism and discrimination.** Newcomer youth participating in this study reported social segregation in schools and how social segregation affects their confidence, identity, and psychological well-being. Similarly, adult immigrants and refugees experienced economic and employment discrimination caused by business and cultural racism.

Recognizing that racism plays an important role in causing social and economic inequality and discrimination of newcomers, community

stakeholders have taken several initiatives to bring community stakeholders together to fight against racism and discrimination. One such initiative is PEIANC's annual Youth Anti-Racism Challenge, a creative competition to encourage youth to explore the meaning of anti-racism. Scheduled to coincide with the International Day for the Elimination of Radical Discrimination (March 21), this event attracts many students and parents and plays a critical role in increasing school and local community awareness and understanding of racism and discrimination. The event also provides opportunities for both newcomer and Canadian-born youth to work together to fight against racism and discrimination.

### **Recommendations for Civic Capacity Building**

Participants in this study made numerous suggestions on how to strengthen civic capacity and engagement to develop a more welcoming and inclusive community for all. Integrated with our critical literature review in this field, we recommend the following strategies to enhance civic capacity in the process of building welcoming and inclusive communities. Governments' willingness to be responsible for following through with the vision and commitments to promote inclusion and equity is critical in building an inclusive community for all.

We recommend the provincial and municipal governments in PEI take the following actions to demonstrate greater accountability toward building welcoming and inclusive communities:

- **Develop a strategic plan or action framework to build a coalition to enhance inclusion and equity in the community.** This includes articulating this vision in all council documentation and planning. Clearly state building such a community as a political imperative and desired management competency in all government activity. Evaluate and report strengths and achievements at both the organizational and community levels. Inspire and demand that all governmental organizations serve as a role model to other institutions by demonstrating a genuine commitment to minority communities.
- **Create a shared vision and action plan.** Developing a shared vision of an inclusive and equitable community is an important

first step to engage stakeholders and community members to form a sense of ownership in inclusive community building. This is particularly important and effective for small communities like PEI due to limited opportunities and resources for newcomers. We recommend that municipal governments identify and engage all community stakeholders in developing a shared vision for building inclusive communities free from all forms of racism and discrimination. This vision should be reflected in all key public policy areas to inspire community stakeholders and members to take actions toward this shared goal.

- **Strengthen local ownership and community partnerships.** Partnerships, either informal alliances or formally constituted bodies, are key to making progress. These partnerships are most effective when there is a commonly defined vision, which brings together potential institutional and community stakeholders. Data collected in this study indicate that building an inclusive community involves cross-sector stakeholders, including governmental organizations, public institutions (e.g., schools, universities, colleges, health institutions, law enforcement), nonprofit organizations (e.g., settlement agencies, faith-based organizations, legal aid), business organizations, and community members/volunteers. Stakeholders in the private sector, such as restaurants, car dealers, pharmacies, grocery stores, banks, and real estate agencies have shown motivation and extended outreach to newcomers and have played a more active role in welcoming and including newcomers. Many larger business organizations have employed newcomers or increased the diversity of their employees in response to the needs of newcomers as well as an increasingly diverse clientele.
- **Work to promote inclusion and equity in the society, requiring the broad involvement of committed groups of people.** For this to happen,

the issue needs to be carefully framed in a way that builds inclusion for all stakeholders. It is important to build a supportive, relationship-based network for practitioners based on a sense of “common cause.” We recommend that provincial and municipal governments incorporate the mandate of building this kind of community through public policies and governance structures based on the insights gained from stakeholder groups and leaders/advocates who are knowledgeable about inclusion, access, and equity barriers faced by minority communities. This approach will lay a foundation for developing and communicating a vision for the future that speaks to a “just society for all,” ensuring a process that bridges difference and builds bonds, and reaches agreement on a common understanding of language.

- **Create more opportunities for education and awareness.** The literature identifies the importance of education and public awareness to create a welcoming environment for immigrants and refugees (Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, 2010; Cities of Migration, 2018a; Esses et al., 2010; Lund & Hira-Friesen, 2013). Asked about what needed to be done to make the country and city a more welcoming community for newcomers, most participants suggested more education and awareness. However, participants interpreted education and awareness differently, based on the mission and activities of their organizations. Governmental actors see education as strategies to increase public awareness of immigration policy, goals, and trends in provincial and national contexts. For actors in settlement service agencies, education and awareness means greater outreach to inform the local community about the types of newcomers arriving on PEI, their unique needs, issues and concerns, to clarify the concerns and misunderstandings associated with immigration policy and practices, and to communicate how a community can work together to address the unique issues and concerns related to newcomers

and their impact on the local community. Newcomer participants in this study identified local residents' understanding and awareness of the new cultures in PEI and Canada, the opportunities to interact with local residents, and the ability to identify strategies they could adopt to deal with the racism and discrimination as critical components to feel more welcome. Local community members expressed their desire for more opportunities to learn about newcomers' cultures, backgrounds, and the ways they could socialize or communicate with newcomers without offending them due to culturally inappropriate topics or behaviors. Data collected in this study clearly indicate that creating more opportunities for education and awareness based on individuals' and organizations' needs and priorities can be a desired and effective approach for everyone in building up civic capacity and engagement in creating welcoming and inclusive communities.

- **Strive for a better coordinated refugee settlement.** All provinces in Canada receive a proportionate share of refugees as the result of Canada's policies toward humanitarian compassion and relief efforts. Refugees are usually placed in each province based on their basic needs for safety and protection by the federal government. However, refugees coming from certain regions or situations, particularly those who have lived in refugee camps for a long period of time, may have unique needs that may challenge community capacities. Smaller communities, where the educational, cultural, psychological, and health services and facilities may be limited, may not be prepared to meet their unique needs. We recommend that refugees with high needs be placed in larger municipalities or communities with demonstrated capacity to provide needed services and facilities. Small communities struggling with funding and sufficient culturally responsive services may lack the capacity to provide the quality services necessary to meet the needs of all newcomers.

- **Challenge language inequality in policy, planning, and services.** Language plays an important role in building welcoming and inclusive communities because it is not only an inalienable component of one's cultural identity, but also the most important tool for economic, social, and political engagement and empowerment (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). Exclusion caused by language was reported by the majority of newcomer participants in this study. Many encountered difficulties communicating with teachers, doctors, and police during critical events. To build inclusive communities for immigrants and refugees, language inequality and barriers in all sectors in the society need to be examined, recognized, and challenged. We recommend both the public and private sectors increase linguistic awareness and expertise, encourage teaching/learning of languages other than English and French, and celebrate linguistic diversity as a strength for intercultural skills needed for living and working in an increasingly interconnected world. Local universities and community colleges may serve as important partners in this effort by connecting international students with communities and service agencies as language experts or by working with local service agencies to support language services and other needs. This could reduce exclusion and build stronger connections within the community.

### Policy Implications

Findings from this study have significant implications for public policies to build welcoming and inclusive communities for newcomers, particularly in smaller municipalities and communities where the culture and population have undergone considerable change in a short period of time. Building welcoming communities requires a shared vision with goals and objectives to reduce racism, discrimination, and exclusion. The articulation of this shared vision should be reflected in public policy, as well as municipal council and school board documentation and planning. There should be open and public acknowledgment of a commitment to this vision, and support mechanism for those who are working toward it. A framework for the development of strategies to build inclusion and equity and reduce

racism and discrimination should be developed collaboratively and shared as a tool to inspire all community stakeholders and members to act. Partnerships and collaborations are essential for the success of shared governance structures and for maximizing resources and communicating best practices. These partnerships would increase civic engagement and should include local and regional government, local service providers, and public schools and universities.

Meeting the needs of newcomers to a community requires policy and practices targeting a broad range of areas and services, including the provision of services targeting their basic needs (e.g., shelter and medical services), employment needs (e.g., language and employment skills development programs, business development training), and social connectedness (e.g., diversity awareness campaigns and culturally sensitive programming). In smaller communities, there are often discrepancies between newcomer needs and current available services, such as public transportation, housing, language learning, social inclusion, etc. In addition, English/French bilingualism generates inequality and exclusion within a multicultural/multilingual society and community. We recommend cultural marginalization and linguistic issues be considered as significant aspects in policymaking and in providing services, programs, and opportunities responsive to newcomers' needs.

In addition to policy gaps and funding issues, systemic racism and absence of public awareness are also important factors that can hinder the development of inclusive communities, particularly for refugees and immigrants. We recommend that governmental and nonprofit organizations, as well as universities, work together to share with the public the political, social, and financial challenges to build inclusive and welcoming communities as they strive to overcome systematic racism and to help newcomers integrate. Individuals and organizations who have demonstrated commitment and passion for achieving a more just and equitable society for all need to be recognized and celebrated. Media and public education and training for creating an inclusive environment and opportunities to build understanding relationships and trust among stakeholders are fundamental to sustain success, and should be available to citizens in a continuous effort.

### **Implications for Municipal Governments**

Municipal governments play a critical leadership role in building welcoming and inclusive communities. Developing a shared vision and strategy for reducing racism, discrimination, and exclusion in local communities is the most important role municipal government leaders can play in this process. Such communities require a broad consensus among local actors, including government and education, business and nonprofits, and representatives from the newcomer and local communities. Local government actors should play a leading role in ongoing and open conversations and communications among these actors about community strengths, weaknesses, and challenges. Devoting appropriate time and resources to build lasting cross-cultural understanding and relationships and to provide culturally and linguistically responsive public services for newcomers should be a priority as it not only serves the public interests, but also demonstrates governments' commitment to the equity and inclusion of all community members.

Raising public awareness on racism and building capacity to fight against discrimination remains a challenge for local leadership. Through collaborative partnerships, effort should be made to increase public awareness and reduce racism and discrimination. Municipal governments, the education sector, the business community, and nonprofit organizations may organize and partner to increase public awareness on immigration through marketing campaigns that highlight the financial, social, and cultural opportunities and challenges associated with newcomers and immigration. Sharing newcomer portfolios on governments' websites, successful immigrant businesses, life stories of immigrants and refugees, newcomers' positive contributions to local communities, and demographic data of newcomer students in the public schools and universities can be excellent strategies to increase public awareness on the significance of diversity and inclusion for community engagement.

Access to local services is often a challenge for newcomers in small cities and communities. Local government can play an important role in reducing these challenges by providing culturally and linguistically responsive public services. For instance, a municipal government's website integrated with Google Translate is a clear indication that a local government is attuned to the needs of newcomers as the technological integration

allows newcomers to access a wide range of public services and information. Expanding public transportation services and adjusting the schedules of these services based on newcomers' needs are indicators of a city's efforts in building inclusive infrastructure capacity. In addition, inviting newcomers to share their voices and views in the economic and political decision-making process can ensure programs and activities offered by municipal governments are inclusive and welcoming.

## Conclusion

Building welcoming and inclusive communities for newcomers is a multilayered and complex task demanding cross-sector resources, innovation, and commitment. Small urban centers and communities often encounter greater challenges and barriers in this work because of the history, location, and limited resources. A systematic approach, including leadership engagement, a shared vision, trusting community relationships, broader community awareness on immigration, and commitment to fighting against discrimination, is critical to build capacity at both the organizational and individual levels.

Effective public policy and action plans to build welcoming and inclusive communities require knowledge and awareness of successful experiences and best practices. By sharing a deeper understanding of the existing issues related to inclusion, access, equity, racism, and discrimination in a small Canadian province, we hope to sustain the positive efforts/outcomes catalogued here while inspiring innovative strategies to better support the personal, social, cultural, educational, and economic development of newcomers, as well as increasing community engagement in building a more just, equitable, and inclusive society for all citizens.

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