Equity and Inclusion Lens

Diversity Snapshot

IMMIGRANTS
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We are from all over the world and have chosen to make Canada our home. Our diverse cultures enrich the city. We wish to contribute our skills and experiences to strengthening our neighbourhoods, workplaces and the city. In Ottawa, we are growing at twice the rate of the general population and will be key in replacing the aging workforce.

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This document is one of 11 Diversity Snapshots that serve as background information to aid the City of Ottawa and its partners in implementing the Equity and Inclusion Lens. To access, visit Ozone or contact us at EILens@ottawa.ca.
1. Who we are

We are from all over the world and have chosen to make Canada our home. We come here to use our rich and diverse skills and experience to contribute to building and improving our neighbourhoods, communities, the city, and the country.

We are the fastest growing population of Ottawa. Cultural diversity of our city is expanding as more new immigrants come from broader regions of the world than in previous decades, and more of us (nearly 75 per cent) are considered a visible-minority. (ITWP). Some of us are indigenous peoples from different parts of the world, although our specific experience is often not recognized when we come to Canada as “immigrants.”

We all have different experiences of settlement, and the challenges change over time as the immigration policy or trends change. Racism can make integration much harder for visible-minority immigrants. Coming here as a refugee is associated with different barriers than as an economic immigrant or skilled professional (See: Canadian Council for Refugees). Legal immigration status makes a difference in our eligibility for different services, but it does not necessarily define us as a person or how we want to be treated by others in our day-to-day lives.

IN OTTAWA

Almost one in four (22.3 per cent) Ottawa residents are immigrants (not necessarily visible minority).

78 per cent of immigrants in Ottawa are Canadian citizens.

The immigrant population in Ottawa is growing twice as fast as the city’s general population (14.1 per cent vs. 7.1 per cent).

Ottawa is the second largest destination for immigrants in Ontario, and a destination for secondary migration and refugees mostly from Quebec.

Francophone immigrants make up 12.3 per cent of Ottawa’s Francophone population.

Source of immigrants to Ottawa by region:
~ Asia and Middle East (53 per cent)
~ Africa (17 per cent)
~ Europe (15 per cent)

Top ten countries of origin for recent immigrants:
~ the U.K. (12 per cent)
~ China (8 per cent)
~ Lebanon (6 per cent)
~ the U.S., India, Italy (4 per cent each)
~ Vietnam, Germany, Poland, Somalia (3 per cent each)

(SPC 2008-a; City of Ottawa 2007; HIO 2008-a)
2. Contributions we make

We are qualified, educated, experienced and a younger workforce that is driving the growth of Ottawa’s aging labour market. We are prominent in Ottawa’s business community. We bring in-depth knowledge of cultural, political and business nuances of global markets, linguistic diversity, and ability to cater to the diverse needs of the community. These are a strategic resource in acculturating Canadian businesses (City of Ottawa 2007).

We bring new opportunities to Ottawa through increased social, economic and cultural linkages to communities and markets around the world. Many of us who speak French are the key demographic that revitalizes the French language use and Francophone culture in Canada’s capital.

We are active and engaged citizens in our city, whether we can vote or not. Some of us have become elected officials at different levels of government. Many of us volunteer and donate extensively in our communities and city-wide. We build informal networks of support for each other, and use our knowledge, experience and compassion to make Ottawa a welcoming community for all.

We are great contributors to arts and culture in Ottawa and its increasing diversification, as artists and cultural workers from around the world converge in this capital city (Coalition of New Canadians for the Arts and Culture).

Barriers to language development:

➤ Lack of employment-related language supports during the initial settlement phase and attachment to the labour force.

➤ Importance of English-French bilingualism in Ottawa’s labour market.

➤ Lack of access to free/low-cost language training in English or French for unilingual immigrants and refugees.

➤ Dominance of English in Ottawa, despite the official bilingualism – a double barrier for Francophone immigrants who chose Ottawa because of its reputation as a bilingual city.

➤ Many find it difficult to access services in French, unilingual jobs in French, or bilingual jobs that require English.

➤ Non-official languages are not yet seen as assets despite the changing demographics of Ottawa with more than 70 languages spoken in the city.

(SP 2008-a, SP 2008-b; OPRN 2008; City of Ottawa 2007)
3. Barriers and inequities

Between 2006 and 2008, Ottawa had a net loss of 1,650 immigrants as they moved to other Canadian cities or returned to their home countries. This was mainly due to a lack of employment opportunities, a lack of access to public services and affordable housing, negative experiences, and systemic discrimination against visible minority groups. (SPC 2009).

1) Employment

Immigrants are more educated on average than Canadians and many bring professional experience from overseas. However, many have a harder time finding work due to lack of:

- Recognition of credentials, education and experience from overseas as assets; racial bias views them as 'inferior' to Canadian assets
- Fair, consistent criteria to enable newcomers to access their professions
- Access or support to re-education/re-training in Canada
- Access to mentorship and networking opportunities
- Cross-cultural competency and racial harassment in the workplace
- Access to professional development and advancement opportunities
- Employer competency in reaching, hiring and developing immigrant workers

For tips: Employer’s Guide to Integrating Immigrants into the Workplace (HIO).

If their international credentials are not accepted, immigrants have to pay for retraining so that they can work in their fields. About half of them work in fields that are unrelated to their skills and abilities when they first arrive in Canada (CYHNEO 2006).

Factors in settlement processes:

- Place of origin
- Circumstances of departure and arrival (age, refugee vs. planned, family networks)
- First language
- Canada’s official language (French and/or English)
- Length of time in Canada
- Cultural similarity between Canada and home country
- Availability of appropriate services
- Readiness of the host society to welcome and integrate immigrants

(SPС 2004)
2) Income
Due to barriers to meaningful employment, many immigrants experience deskilling, downward mobility, and lower incomes, which can have a major impact on children and youth, on older seniors and on visible minority groups among the immigrant population (SPC 2009).

Many work at two or more part-time jobs, with substandard protection and frequent exploitation in order to meet the needs of their families. Women and single-parent workers also experience added barriers due to lack of affordable and culturally appropriate child care or elder care, on top of juggling the stresses of migration and settlement in a new country. (Colour of Poverty #8; OPRN 2008).

This is exacerbated by the fact that immigrants in Ottawa tend to rely on employment and self-employment as their source of income, rather than government benefits (e.g. EI, childcare benefits, Canada Pension Plans) or private investment and insurance (SPC 2004). Immigrant seniors find that the fruits of their work in their home country (pensions, retirement funds, family support) are not accessible once they move to Canada, and this may delay their retirement.

3) Language barriers
More than 90 per cent of immigrants to Ottawa arrive with official language abilities. However, language barriers are still an issue as they also include: accent, rhythm of speech, job/position-specific language skills, sector jargon, Canadian idioms and slang, and cross-cultural communication (City of Ottawa 2007).

Women and senior immigrants have fewer opportunities to develop language skills and experience increased isolation, especially when they stay at home to take care of their families, while men who work outside the home tend to have more exposure to English or French language use.

4) Access to information and services
Immigrants need to access the right information and services to meet their everyday needs – like raising families, coping with limited resources, and finding housing, health care, jobs, training and recreation. However, information or services offered by City branches or community agencies may not be accessible to immigrants as they are:

Economic exclusion:

➤ The underutilization of newcomers accounts for a loss of $2-3 billion per year for Ottawa’s economy.

➤ Poverty among newcomers to Canada is increasing over time, even though their education levels are higher than ever.

➤ Foreign work experience receives only about 50 per cent of confidence from Canadian employers.

➤ Immigrant households earn only 68 per cent of the average income for Canadian-born households ($24,810 vs. $37,870).

➤ Unemployment rate for immigrant women is six times higher than Canadian-born women, and 2.5 times higher than immigrant men.

➤ Almost 50 per cent of all newcomers to Ottawa are living in poverty.

(City of Ottawa 2007; Colour of Poverty #6)
not coordinated among service providers and confusing to navigate

➤ not advertised or available in languages other than French or English

➤ advertised only through mainstream channels which do not reach the immigrants in their social and religious circles

➤ not designed with immigrants’ needs in mind (e.g., migration stress, language, cultural relevance)

➤ exclusive of the specific populations within immigrant communities (e.g., seniors, GLBT members, those with disabilities, indigenous immigrants)

Some service providers may not have developed the cultural competency to serve immigrant clients respectfully. This may discourage immigrants from seeking services from mainstream organizations. Immigrants themselves may lack the knowledge of their legal rights and protection, or lack the sense of entitlement.

5) Different integration processes

Immigrants in Ottawa are diverse, and so are their settlement needs and experiences. The process takes shorter or longer depending on many factors. For example, European immigrants tend to fit in suburban and rural neighbourhoods more than visible-minority immigrants. Access to foods or entertainment from one’s culture also plays a role in physical and psychological health.

**There is a misconception that all immigrants go through the same settlement process** and become integrated after a certain amount of time. Delayed integration – often due to racism – may be misinterpreted and stereotyped as failure or deficiency of the individual or the specific community, when in fact it is the societal barriers that the City and the community can address together.

6) Racism and subsequent generations

Recent immigrants are faced with different types of racism:

➤ Canadians’ negative view of diversity and immigration, fearing job competition and other economic burdens

➤ ethnic hatreds that carry-over from countries of origin

➤ non-existence or lack of coordination of services that take racism into account. In addition to racism, women face gender-specific stereotypes, psychological and economic barriers that hinder employment and integration (SPC 2002).

In addition to settlement issues, visible-minority immigrants – and even their Canadian-born children and grandchildren – face the added barrier of racial exclusion. Many Canadian-born children and grandchildren of immigrants are assumed to be immigrants or outsiders. This not only affects their sense of belonging but has implications for material inequities. For example, they experience negative stereotyping, streaming in education, under and unemployment, racial profiling in the justice system, or in recent years, Islamophobia. (See **Diversity Snapshot – Visible Minorities**)
7) Housing

After employment, finding suitable housing is the second most serious problem faced by 60 per cent of immigrants within the first six months of arrival (City of Ottawa 2007). Lack of affordable, adequate housing for families and extended family units can lead to overcrowding, unhealthy housing conditions, and stress or conflict in the household. Getting repairs is difficult when people do not have a good command of English or French or knowledge about tenancy laws, and sometimes landlords and managers take advantage of the situation. Immigrant families with someone with disabilities or seniors who require care have a hard time finding accessible housing (SPC 2008-b).

Immigrants who live on low incomes tend to live in areas with high rates of poverty, which leads to neighbourhood segregation by income and by race. The segregation often continues into the subsequent Canadian-born generations even after their economic conditions improve. Some immigrant parents and youth are concerned about safety and the influence of drug dealing near social housing neighbourhoods (Colour of Poverty #9; SPC 2008-b).

8) Transportation

Access to transportation is key for immigrants to get to and from work, to schools, childcare, clinics and recreation. People who work at multiple jobs outside of regular commuting hours, seniors who seek to volunteer or socialize, mothers who take care of children, the elderly or the sick and people who have mobility limitations, all need transportation that is affordable and easy to access to allow them to juggle multiple trips and responsibilities in a day.

9) Health

Upon arrival in Canada, most immigrants are in better health than their Canadian counterparts – but their health tends to deteriorate over time due to stress of migration, low income, poor working conditions, poor housing, change in diet, lack of healthcare or culturally appropriate service delivery.

Lack of access to affordable, culturally relevant recreation services for immigrant families also affects their health. Racial discrimination can lead to lower self-esteem and depression among visible-minority immigrants (Colour of Poverty #4). The overall health of immigrant and refugee women is often affected by the disruption in their lives, loss of familial and social networks, and living in a different socio-cultural context. Loss of social networks has a deeper impact for refugees who, unlike immigrants, are often forced out of their countries by circumstances beyond their control (PQCHC 2003).
10) Family and parenting
Some immigrant parents feel that schools challenge their traditional values and their parenting authority, instead of working together to educate the children. Immigrant seniors often feel the loss of their status and respect as elders after they move to Canada, where their children or grandchildren treat them only as caregivers or good cooks of traditional food.

Racial prejudice that youth and parents experience in mainstream institutions can also contribute to distrust of the system. However, many immigrants and immigrant youth develop strong adaptation skills and negotiate the different values on a day-to-day basis – between their cultural background and Canadian society, and the generational differences in their communities. Learning about their rights in Canadian society and multiple cultural competencies can build people’s confidence and human capital (SPC 2008-b; PQCHC 2008).
4. We envision – an immigrant-friendly city

- The City gives realistic and accurate information to prospective immigrants to Ottawa so as not to create false expectations when we arrive.

- The City works closely with community agencies and immigrant groups to reduce the gap in information and services.

- The City takes leadership in informing higher levels of government on policies and services for immigrants – using its on-the-ground knowledge and closeness to the community.

- Immigrants can easily access information and services to meet their settlement-related and everyday needs.

- City policies and services are designed and delivered with immigrants in minds.

- Fair and equitable career development opportunities are available to immigrants.

- Our international credentials and experience are fully utilized in the labour market and community building.

- Our cultures, languages and religions are respected as equals, and celebrated and embraced as part of Ottawa’s diverse identity.

- Leadership and positions of power in the workplace and decision-making are reflective of the community make-up.

WHAT CAN I DO?

- Articulate my own culture’s attitudes, beliefs and behaviours.

- Don’t assume another culture is similar to mine.

- Listen, observe, and describe rather than evaluate.

- Identify my own learned generalizations, stereotypes and filters.

- Make it my business to learn about the deeper-than-visible elements of the cultures of my coworkers and clients.

- Recognize that initial perceptions are often inaccurate.

- Develop empathy. See a situation from my own and others’ cultural perspective.

- Perceive “difference” as value added, not “less than”.

- Find out how people want to be treated and respond accordingly.

- Provide on-going education to all staff in my team about cultural norms, values, communication style, approach to conflict, etc.

- And, if I am an immigrant, I know that my knowledge and experience can enrich the city.

(HIO 2008-b)
5. Council mandates and legislation

- City of Ottawa Duty to Accommodate Policy
- Ontario Human Rights Code (Provincial)
- Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Federal)
- Employment Equity Act (Federal)
- Citizenship Act (Federal)
- Immigrant and Refugee Protection Act (Federal)

6. What’s happening in Ottawa

- City of Ottawa – Immigration Portal (Immigration Ottawa Initiative (IOI)).
- City of Ottawa – Cultural interpretation services in 70 languages and services provided in Chinese, Vietnamese, Farsi, Arabic, Somali and Spanish.
- City of Ottawa Immigrant Status Reporting – to support recent immigrants’ labour market integration, the City tracks and reports the number of recent immigrants who gain Canadian work experience at the City.
- City of Ottawa – Multicultural Programs offer effective social, health and recreational services for residents from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
- City of Ottawa Visible Minority Youth Initiative (VMYI) is a project offered through the Youth Zone Jeunesse (YZJ) employment resource centre, geared towards maximizing the participation and placement of visible-minority and newcomer youth in employment activities. The goal is to increase access to employment supports, services and job opportunities for visible-minority and newcomer youth, including Francophones who receive Ontario Works, and community participants.
- Hire Immigrants Ottawa (HIO) – encourages local employers to hire newcomers and helps to facilitate the process. HIO organizes the Employer Council of Champions Summit. The City of Ottawa is proud to have received the 2010 Employer Excellence Award from Hire Immigrants Ottawa for outstanding achievement in the recruitment of skilled immigrants.
- Internationally-Trained Workers Partnership (ITWP) – brings together employers, business associations, labour, governments, educational institutions and immigrant serving organizations from across Ottawa, including the City of Ottawa, to facilitate labour market integration of immigrants.
- LASI World Skills (Local Agencies Serving Immigrants) – helps both newcomers and local employers by connecting internationally trained professionals with employers who are looking to fill labour gaps.
- Ottawa Local Immigrant Partnership (OLIP) – an inter-agency project that aims to enhance the integration of newcomers, immigrants and refugees to the City of Ottawa through the establishment of an integrated and comprehensive system of services and organizations.
• Ottawa-Carleton District School Board has the Community Council for Ethnocultural Equity and Diversity & Inclusion Task Force to develop an enriched, equitable, anti-racist education for all students.


7. Relevant practices in other cities

• Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) – Cross-sector collaboration to address the underutilization of skilled immigrants’ education, talent and experience. Hire Immigrants Ottawa was modeled after TRIEC.

• City of Toronto Plan of Action for the Elimination of Racism and Discrimination, City of Toronto diversity management and community engagement.

• Canadian Coalition of Municipalities against Racism and Discrimination – a part of the international coalition promoted by UNESCO. Canadian members include: Calgary, Edmonton, Gatineau, Montreal, Oakville, Saskatoon, Toronto, Vaughan, Windsor, Winnipeg.

• Ontario Ministry of Education – Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy. Recognizing Ontario’s growing diversity as a strength, the Strategy addresses barriers related to sexism, racism, homophobia and other forms of discrimination in Ontario schools, which may prevent students from reaching their full potential. Students from immigrant families are part of the target. See also: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation.

• Metropolis Canada – International network for comparative research and public policy development on migration, diversity, and immigrant integration in cities in Canada and around the world.

• Welcoming Communities Initiative – A federal initiative to bring the multi-stakeholders together to address the needs of access, equity, and inclusion. Part of Canada’s Action Plan Against Racism (CAPAR).

8. Sources

• Canadian Council for Refugees. “Facing Facts - Myths and misconceptions about refugees and immigrants in Canada.”


• Coalition of New Canadians for the Arts and Culture.

• Colour of Poverty. Fact Sheets – #4 Health; #6 Income; #8 Immigration; #9 Housing and Homelessness.
• Hire Immigrants Ottawa (HIO).
• Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre (PQCHC).
• Social Planning Council of Ottawa.
  – 2008-a. “This is Who We Are - A Social Profile of Ottawa Based on the 2006 Census.”

9. Definitions

**Immigrant** – The term does not preclude Canadian citizenship status for individuals denoted with this term. Regardless of their class of immigration and date of arrival, a large majority of immigrants in Ottawa are Canadian citizens. Of the 168,125 immigrants living in the Ottawa region, 75 per cent have over the years acquired Canadian citizenship. The remaining 41,695 of Ottawa’s immigrants are permanent residents of Canada (SPC 2004).

For the purposes of tracking the number of skilled immigrant workers at the City of Ottawa, the City defines “immigrant” more narrowly as “internationally trained worker, born outside Canada who has lived in Canada for less than 10 years.” (City of Ottawa – Immigrant Status Reporting (See Recent Immigrants)

**Landed immigrant** – a person who has been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities.” (SPC 2004)

- Economic immigrants are workers and their families who are accepted into Canada because of their skills or education.
- Family Class immigrants are people who are sponsored by a family member who already lives in Canada.
- Convention refugees are granted protection in Canada because they face persecution in another country.
- Refugee claimants are people who are in Canada and have made a claim for protection. Over half of such claims are denied.
Non-status refers to anyone who’s living in Canada who, for different reasons, cannot obtain legal status or has status that expired.

Regularization means that non-status or undocumented people are given legal status in Canada. (Colour of Poverty #8)

Non-permanent residents – include foreign workers, foreign students, refugees and refugee claimants (SPC 2004).

Recent immigrants – refers to immigrants who came to Canada within the last 10 years, who are now, or have once been, landed immigrants. This includes individuals who came to Canada as refugees or refugee claimants, but have since their arrival acquired permanent residency status in Canada (SPC 2004; City of Ottawa 2007).

10. Acknowledgements

The Equity and Inclusion Lens is the product of a collaborative partnership between the community and the City of Ottawa. This partnership was coordinated by the Diversity and Employment Equity Unit of the City of Ottawa and the City for All Women Initiative (CAWI).

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