

Toronto Newcomer Strategy 2022-2026

Date: May 14, 2021

To: Economic and Community Development Committee

From: Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration

Wards: All

SUMMARY

With over half of its residents born outside of Canada, Toronto is one of the most diverse cities in the world and is recognized internationally for its approach to migrant integration. In keeping with its motto "Diversity Our Strength", the City strives to shape its programs, services, and policies to reflect the diversity and intersectional identities that have strengthened Toronto.

The first Toronto Newcomer Strategy was approved by City Council in February 2013 and has guided the City's efforts working in partnership with the settlement sector, other governments and leaders in newcomer communities. However, there is now a need to update and renew Toronto's Strategy for the next level of work. The proposed Toronto Newcomer Strategy 2022-2026 responds to:

- significant developments over the past few years, including considerable increase in newcomer arrivals, most notably resettled refugees, refugee claimants and temporary residents such as international students;
- the impact of COVID-19 on newcomers in Toronto; and
- the requirement under the City's grant agreement with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, through which the Toronto Newcomer Office is funded, to have an update of the Strategy.

The proposed Strategy was developed after extensive consultations, jurisdictional and environmental scans, and took into account achievements and learnings to date. It provides a roadmap for achieving greater impacts for newcomer success, and ultimately benefiting the city as a whole.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration recommends that:

1. City Council adopt the proposed Toronto Newcomer Strategy 2022-2026 in Appendix A to this report.

2. City Council forward the Toronto Newcomer Strategy 2022-2026 to the Boards of Directors of the City of Toronto's Agencies and Corporations and request that they adopt and apply the Strategy's Guiding Principles to their respective organizations.

3. City Council request the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration to report in 2022 on progress and the resources necessary for the full implementation of the Toronto Newcomer Strategy 2022-2026.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of the Toronto Newcomer Strategy 2022-2026 beyond the funds in the approved 2021 budget.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Newcomers to Toronto, regardless of their immigration status, face a number of barriers that challenge their ability to successfully integrate into the social, economic and civic life of the city. Their unemployment and poverty rates, as well as COVID-19 infection rates are higher than the Canadian-born population.

The pandemic has unveiled and further exacerbated barriers and challenges that newcomers already face. Precarious employment, lower pay, concentration in affected sectors of the economy, limited access to technology, language barriers, and crowded, multigenerational households are some factors that increase their risk of infection and unemployment. By adopting a new strategic approach, the City of Toronto will be better able to support newcomers and contribute to their successful settlement and integration.

DECISION HISTORY

In April 2019, City Council adopted the City of Toronto Refugee Capacity Plan: <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.EC3.5>

In January 2017, City Council re-affirmed Toronto as a Sanctuary City where all residents have full rights to access City services without fear, regardless of their immigration status (MM24.23). <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.MM24.23>

In October 2015, City Council approved the City of Toronto Refugee Resettlement Program: <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.EX8.39>

In June 2014, City Council adopted the Integrating Cities Charter and directed that Toronto become a signatory of the Charter: <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2014.CD29.10>

In February 2013, City Council approved the mission, vision and guiding principles contained in the Toronto Newcomer Strategy:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.CD18.7>

COMMENTS

Recognizing the importance of a successful newcomer settlement, and the impact of immigration on Toronto, City Council adopted the first Toronto Newcomer Strategy in early 2013. Established shortly after, the City's Toronto Newcomer Office was tasked with facilitating its implementation.

The Strategy was designed to improve newcomer settlement through shared leadership, stronger collaboration, and a more seamless and well-coordinated service system. Through its implementation, the Strategy reaffirmed the City as a leader in newcomer integration. It facilitated key city-building initiatives, such as the Toronto Newcomer Day, the Newcomer Services Kiosk Program, the award-winning Refugee Resettlement Program and the Access TO policy. It also strengthened the City's intergovernmental influence related to immigration policy, and strengthened the City's relationship with the newcomer serving sector and other community partners. To further build the City's ability to meet its commitments, the Strategy facilitated development of various other policies, plans, and agreements, such as the Integrating Cities Action Plan, Access T.O. policy, City of Toronto Refugee Capacity Plan, and the Canada-Ontario-Toronto Memorandum of Understanding on Immigration.

It has been eight years since the Strategy was adopted. During that time, several major unplanned developments took place that required the City's urgent attention, including the arrivals of several thousand Syrian resettled refugees and refugee claimants in Toronto between 2016 and 2019, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Toronto newcomers in 2020 and 2021. In 2020, due to the pandemic, Canada has seen a dramatic drop in new permanent resident arrivals at a time when Toronto depends on immigration for population growth. In the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area in 2019, for example, number of permanent resident arrivals was 117,700. In 2020, it was 61,045, almost a 50% decrease.

These developments necessitate a refreshed plan. Led by the Toronto Newcomer Office and with engagement of two expert immigration consultants, the City engaged in a strategic renewal process to develop a Toronto Newcomer Strategy 2022-2026. The process included a review of achievements and learnings to date, a jurisdictional and environmental scan, as well as extensive consultations that involved City divisions, the Newcomer Leadership Table, other Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs), community agencies, newcomers, and intergovernmental partners. The full text of the strategy is provided as Appendix A, and further below is a summary.

Consultation Highlights

To inform the development of the renewed Toronto Newcomer Strategy, a series of consultations were conducted over a period of two months. City employees, councillors, external stakeholders, and newcomers provided input through individual and group

virtual sessions supplemented in some cases by written submissions. The consultation was conducted by external consultants with support from the Toronto Newcomer Office.

The input received served as a valuable and critical resource in developing the new strategy. A consultation synthesis with brief case studies is provided as an Appendix B, and the following are some highlights:

The City has progressive policies, but implementation is mixed: By adopting progressive policies, the City demonstrates a genuine commitment to benefit newcomer residents which in turn benefits the city as a whole. But implementation has been mixed, often suffering from a lack of training, capacity and resources. For example, Access T.O. is viewed as an excellent policy that has not been given the resources and attention it needs for full implementation to enable undocumented residents to access City services without fear. At the same time, many of these residents are essential workers that continued working during the COVID-19 emergency regardless of the risks. From warehouse and factory workers, delivery personnel, and long-term care workers, many continued working throughout the pandemic.

The City responds well to crisis, but long-term planning is lacking: response to the Syrian refugee resettlement has been highlighted as a significant success, while preparing for arrivals of refugee claimants when borders reopen was mentioned as an example of long-term planning that is lacking. Staff are currently planning for border reopening.

The City made advancements, but there are still many barriers: Examples provided include access to recreation, social services, interpretation and translation. Positive comments were provided about the City's emergency shelters, 311, public health services, library services, Newcomer Day, Newcomer Kiosks, and many more.

As an employer, the City increased diversity of its employees, but not in senior positions. The City has an opportunity to better reflect the community it serves and provide work opportunities for newcomers that will provide the Canadian experience they need to move forward in their careers.

Toronto Newcomer Strategy 2022-2026

The Toronto Newcomer Strategy 2022-2026 is a framework and roadmap for achieving a greater impact for newcomer success. It focuses on services, functions and powers within the municipal government's purview, as well as on collaboration and influence necessary to achieve systemic change on issues affecting newcomers.

The strategy outlines a new vision, five guiding principles, five strategic priorities, and role of the Toronto Newcomer Office. It also provides consultation highlights.

The **vision** of the Toronto Newcomer Strategy 2022-2026 is that:

- Newcomers living in Toronto have a sense of belonging, well-being, and connectedness. They feel safe, supported, welcome and engaged.

- The City is a leader in providing newcomers equitable access to municipal programs and services.

The five **guiding principles** are:

- *A City-wide Approach*: The renewed strategy to be embraced and implemented by all parts of the City's government including elected officials, members of the public service employees and volunteers.
- *City Roles*: The City's commitment to improving newcomer outcomes is related to its five roles - as a policy maker, service provider, employer, buyer of goods and services, as well as a convenor, collaborator and advocate.
- *Diversity*: City services must be sensitive to differing circumstances and lived experiences related to a newcomer's immigration status, official language ability, and intersecting identities related to race, gender, age, LGBTQ2, disability, and mental health.
- *Equitable Access*: City programs and facilities, which are instrumental in newcomer integration, should be equitably available across Toronto in response to need.
- *Flexibility*: The City will be flexible in order to be able to address both anticipated and unforeseen changes affecting newcomers.

Priorities for 2022-2026 include:

- *Priority 1: Improve newcomer access to the City through employee training, outreach and communications*. Training is essential, especially for frontline staff, about newcomers, and about special considerations when serving undocumented residents. Outreach will provide newcomers a stronger voice for the City to better understand the barriers they face and how they can be removed. Communication will improve newcomer access to information about City services, which will improve their settlement and integration, and reinforce Toronto as a welcoming place to live.
- *Priority 2: Rigorously implement Access TO Policy*: Many undocumented people feel intimidated, fearful and are not accessing City services despite City Council commitment to supporting access without fear. Full implementation will include staff training, review of intake and registration forms, review of documentation and information management policies, creating an approach to service access for people without IDs, and enhanced collaboration with agencies working with undocumented.
- *Priority 3: Prepare and implement Newcomer Access Plans*: Newcomer Access Plans will be important tools for achieving the vision, principles and priorities of the strategy. They will identify and assess significant barriers for newcomers as they relate to programs and services, outline specific actions that will be taken to address them, and also how results will be measured. The creation of divisional plans will be prioritised to focus on functions, programs and services with a high impact on newcomer well-being.
- *Priority 4: Convene, collaborate and advocate on system-wide issues affecting newcomers*. Many of the barriers that newcomers face are systemic and beyond the City's jurisdiction and ability to resolve. To address these system-wide issues,

engagement and collaboration across governments, agencies and sectors is necessary. This fourth priority addresses how the City engages with its many stakeholders and partners on newcomer issues: locally, regionally, provincially, federally, and internationally.

- *Priority 5: Report on results:* Reporting is essential for transparency and accountability and to signal progress that has been made. The strategy includes a set of performance indicators that will be used to measure success, in addition to any indicators identified through Newcomer Access Plans.

The **implementation** of the Strategy will be gradual. The first year of implementation, 2022, will be focused on establishing the foundations. This will include development of supporting documents, training modules, a performance management plan, and pilot-testing of Newcomer Access Plans. The Newcomer Access Plans will be developed and implemented in three phases, as identified in the Strategy. The focus of the final year will be on identifying learnings and engaging in a strategic renewal.

Role of the Toronto Newcomer Office

As an internal centre of expertise on newcomer issues, the Toronto Newcomer Office will continue to carry primary responsibility for coordinating the Toronto Newcomer Strategy, and other directly related policies and strategic documents (Access TO Policy, Refugee Resettlement Program, Refugee Capacity Plan and Integrating Cities Charter). The Office will have a leading role in employee training related to the Strategy, implementation of Access TO, advising on the City's position related to immigration issues, providing guidance and support on the development and implementation of newcomer access plans, and reporting to City Council and the public on progress. The Toronto Newcomer Office will also continue to implement its federally-funded mandate as a city-wide Local Immigration Partnership in Toronto, which includes working with Newcomer Leadership Table, Local Immigration Partnerships and settlement partners, implementation of Newcomer Kiosks and the Toronto Newcomer Day.

Conclusion

The scope and complexity of immigration-related issues have increased since City Council adopted the Toronto Newcomer Strategy in 2013. In the years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, global developments, shifting immigration policies and the political landscape have led to an increased number of newcomers arriving in Toronto, most notably in immigration classes that have more complex needs, such as resettled refugees and refugee claimants. This trend took a sharp downturn after the first quarter of 2020, while newcomers already here suffered disproportionate impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Toronto Newcomer Strategy 2022-2026 introduces a new strategic approach that will help address the post-pandemic challenges that lie ahead.

CONTACT

Vera Dodic, Manager, Toronto Newcomer Office, Social Development, Finance and Administration, 416-392-5679, Vera.Dodic@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Denise Andrea Campbell
Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration

ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A - Proposed Toronto Newcomer Strategy 2022-2026
Appendix B - Toronto Newcomer Strategy Renewal Consultation Synthesis (March 2021)