

Edna Nortey
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Status of Newcomer Youth Deputation

Bridging the Newcomer Gap (Housing and Employment)

Good afternoon Councillors and fellow Torontonians, I am Edna Nortey, Newcomer Co-Lead of the Toronto Youth Cabinet, the City of Toronto's official youth advocacy body and a current senior at William Lyon Mackenzie CI.

I want to share the following headlines from articles published within the last week:

"Toronto metropolitan population hits seven million thanks to immigration" (Toronto Star, 2025)
"Ottawa slashes funding and programs for newcomer agencies amid cuts to Canada's immigration targets" (Toronto Star, 2025), "One-third of Ontario newcomers say they felt safer in home countries" (CBC, 2025).

These articles all showcase the reality of being a newcomer in Canada, and more importantly, right here in Toronto. It's getting no easier to be a newcomer, let alone a young newcomer, in our city.

Federal policies and overarching budget constraints complicate matters by prioritizing numbers over the quality of settlement experiences—quantity over quality. In my work at the TYC, my Co-Lead and I have seen firsthand the impact these budget cuts can have, ending phenomenal programming and leaving Newcomer youth without support and likeminded networks.

It then falls to us, the City of Toronto, to make sure we are actively doing our part to ease this accumulated burden.

This year's budget discussions offer an opportunity to change this once and for all. We must address the issues of youth, the keepers of tomorrow, and prioritize investments in youth-specific programming that not only address immediate needs but also pave pathways for long-term success. Rising youth homelessness, all-time high youth unemployment and more, are all barriers affecting youth.

Firstly, youth unemployment is a critical issue. We can no longer have youth feeling helpless in their own city, facing anxiety at whether or not they will acquire meaningful and gainful employment to live comfortably in Toronto. Youth unemployment in the GTA jumped from

13.2% in January 2024 to 19.8% in July. Racialized youth faced 20.5% unemployment in 2022, far above the 15.7% for non-racialized youth, with Black youth disproportionately impacted in 2024.

Initiatives such as the Toronto Youth Cabinet's goal of creating 10,000 jobs for young people really highlight the importance of prioritizing youth employment in this year's budget. Programs will provide meaningful work opportunities, equip youth with essential skills, and reduce the alarming rates of youth unemployment.

As a senior, it seems like life is right at the front door, and I am working hard to try to secure a future for myself. My parents and I were newcomers, and I will not let their hardwork and sacrifices providing a good life in Toronto go to waste. As a young person in this city, I want a good career and my own home one day—much like everyone else.

In addition, Toronto's shelter system is operating over capacity, turning many young people away. The city has made efforts to address this crisis—such as temporary and repurposed shelter spaces, but more needs to be done to address the growing demand. In 2024, over 11,000 individuals, including a disproportionate amount of youth, refugees and more, relied on the city's shelter system every night. Meanwhile, affordable housing developments have lagged behind targets, with only 25 percent of the planned units completed since 2020.

The facts are all right here, and I urge this committee to act now with youth in mind. Increased funding for housing, youth employment programs, and education initiatives are not just an investment in newcomer youth, it is an investment in Toronto's future. By addressing these challenges head-on, we can build a city where every resident and every youth, regardless of where they come from, feels empowered to contribute to our collective success, but most of all—call Toronto home again.

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