

**WHO  
DOES  
WHAT**  
SERIES



# The Municipal Role In **IMMIGRATION**

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The Institute on Municipal Finance and Governance (IMFG) is an academic research hub and non-partisan think tank based in the School of Cities at the University of Toronto.

IMFG focuses on the fiscal health and governance challenges facing large cities and city-regions. Its objective is to spark and inform public debate, and to engage the academic and policy communities around important issues of municipal finance and governance. The Institute conducts original research on issues facing cities in Canada and around the world; promotes high-level discussion among Canada's government, academic, corporate, and community leaders through conferences and roundtables; and supports graduate and post-graduate students to build Canada's cadre of municipal finance and governance experts. It is the only institute in Canada that focuses solely on municipal finance issues in large cities and city-regions.

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## Authors

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**Dr. John Shields** is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Politics & Public Administration at Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU), where he taught for 35 years. He is an active researcher publishing widely in the areas of immigration and settlement, non-profit studies, and public policy. John has numerous academic distinctions, including the Sarwan Sahota Distinguished Scholar Award for 2001 from TMU (the highest research award from the university). In 2013 he received the Yeates School of Graduate Studies Outstanding Contribution to Graduate Education Award. He was also named TMU Fellow at Massey College at the University of Toronto for 2013–14. In 2016 he received the National Metropolis Researcher Award and the Dean's Excellence Award for Research Impact. In 2022 he was given the TMU Faculty Association's Career Achievement Award. His focus is on community-centred research, often closely collaborating with researchers based in the community. His most recent book (forthcoming with Fernwood publishing) is *The Canadian Non-profit Sector: Neoliberalism and the Assault on Community*.

The Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion named **Dr. Valerie Pruegger** the 2019 Western Diversity and Inclusion Practitioner of the Year. She spearheaded signing on to the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities Against Racism and Discrimination (CCMARD) for The City of Calgary and led its development of a Welcoming Community Policy and Framework. She was the inaugural Director of the Office of Diversity, Equity and Protected Disclosure at the University of Calgary (2014–2019) and a member of the ii'taa'poh'to'p Indigenous strategy working team for the University of Calgary. Valerie has served as Past President of the Alberta Association for Multicultural Education; a member of the Alberta Hate Crimes Committee; a member of the Calgary Diversity and Inclusion Network; and Vice Chair of the Inclusion Network for Canadian Research Universities. In 2017 the Black community in Calgary recognized her work on anti-racism with an Obsidian Award, and in 2018 the Faculty of Arts at the University of Calgary awarded her with the Celebrated Alumni award in honour of her career achievements. As a consultant, Valerie works with government, academic, voluntary, and private-sector organizations on developing diversity, equity, and inclusion strategic plans and facilitating DEI and anti-racism/anti-oppression training.

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## Acknowledgements

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# Executive Summary

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In November 2022, the federal government announced that Canada would aim to welcome 500,000 permanent residents per year by 2025. The vast majority of these new permanent residents will reside in cities.

Such a policy has complex ramifications across all orders of government. Supporting and integrating newcomers implies not only an increase in service provision but also the construction of physical infrastructure, notably housing. Many of the services required and much of the infrastructure needed fall within the purview of local government.

Moreover, human migration is a complex topic that goes beyond the precise targets set by government in any one year. First, those who come with the immediate intention of settling permanently make up only a portion of the migrants who enter Canada each year; many others will enter the country as temporary residents, some of whom will likely end up staying for the long term. Second, in any year, many people will enter the country in irregular ways. These people, who may be without status, will also end up in cities and find themselves in need of services provided by local government.

The three papers in this report examine the role that Canadian municipalities play in immigration, and how other orders of government can support that role. They explore collaboration with non-governmental service providers, lessons learned from the municipal policy development process, and the role of sanctuary cities as providers of critical access to government services for non-status populations.

## Municipalities

Valerie Preston and John Shields describe the multi-faceted role of municipalities in immigration policy, including participating in Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) with other orders of government and supporting the work of immigrant-serving agencies.

Valerie Pruegger traces the development of Calgary's municipal immigration strategy from the initial direction provided by City Council through the policy's implementation. She identifies key lessons for practitioners looking to develop similar policies in their own communities.

Mireille Paquet and Sivakamy Thayaalan examine the genesis of sanctuary city and access-without-fear policies, situating municipalities as the order of government uniquely positioned to devise them.

## Provincial governments

Preston and Shields set out the way in which jurisdiction over immigration is shared between provincial and federal governments, with marked variation among provinces in terms of supports and services.

Pruegger notes that the provincial government had a role to play throughout the development of Calgary's immigration policy, including participation in an external advisory committee set up to assist in creating the policy.

Paquet and Thayaalan note that sanctuary city policies may mean that municipal resources are utilized to provide services for non-status immigrants who are not covered by funding agreements with provinces. They propose that provinces should consider providing funding for the cost of sanctuary city policies.

## Federal government

Preston and Shields note the tension that arises between the overarching federal role in immigration and the need for municipal action when it comes to delivering services on the ground. They focus in particular on LIPs, which coordinate action across different orders of government and are administered by municipalities but funded by the federal government.

Pruegger notes that when Calgary City Council first directed staff to develop an immigration policy, it clearly declared that immigration was primarily a federal and provincial responsibility. However, the Council also identified several reasons why municipal government had an interest in developing an immigration policy, including its responsibility to build a welcoming community.

Paquet and Thayaalan argue that the federal government must recognize the role cities have played in the immigration system by providing critical supports for non-status immigrants – and, moreover, that this reality should be the impetus for long-term federal-municipal immigration agreements.

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## **Intergovernmental cooperation**

The call for a municipal “seat at the table” in intergovernmental discussions echoes throughout all three papers. Preston and Shields recommend that municipalities be fully integrated into immigration and settlement governance structures, and describe various ways in which this involvement could be achieved. Paquet and Thayaalan make a similar proposal, calling specifically for long-term federal–municipal immigration agreements. Finally, Pruegger recognizes the need for a trilateral approach to immigration, but also encourages horizontal cooperation during the policy development process through jurisdictional scans in which municipalities examine approaches taken in other locales.

## **About the Who Does What Series**

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Canadian municipalities play increasingly important roles in addressing policy challenges such as tackling climate change, increasing housing affordability, reforming policing, and confronting public health crises. The growing prominence of municipalities, however, has led to tensions over overlapping responsibilities with provincial and federal governments. Such “entanglement” between orders of government can result in poor coordination and opaque accountability. At the same time, combining the strengths and capabilities of different orders of government – whether in setting policy or in convening, funding, or delivering services – can lead to more effective action.

The Who Does What series gathers academics and practitioners to examine the role municipalities should play in key policy areas, the reforms required to ensure municipalities can deliver on their responsibilities, and the collaboration required among governments to meet the country’s challenges. It is produced by the Institute on Municipal Finance and Governance and the Urban Policy Lab.





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# Who Does What: The Municipal Role in Immigration

## Backgrounder: Municipalities and Immigration

By Gabriel Eidelman, Spencer Neufeld, and Kass Forman

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Canada is fundamentally a country of immigrants. Almost one in four Canadians (23 percent) were born overseas, the highest proportion among G7 countries.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, more than 1.3 million people have been granted permanent entry to Canada, and the latest federal immigration targets aim to bring in up to 500,000 new immigrants annually by 2025.<sup>2</sup>

The vast majority of newcomers to Canada – past, present, and future – settle in cities. More than 92 percent of Canadian immigrants live in a census metropolitan area (CMA).<sup>3</sup> The Toronto, Montréal, and Vancouver CMAs alone welcome more than half of all new immigrants. And newcomers make up a majority of the local population in dozens of municipalities across the country, from Burnaby to Brampton, Richmond to Richmond Hill.<sup>4</sup>

This backgrounder provides an overview of the different roles that Canadian municipalities play in the country's immigration system, with particular attention paid to the attraction and retention of new immigrants and to the provision of settlement and integration services to newcomers. We draw from a growing body of research which demonstrates that municipalities play a variety of roles in immigration policy, but that municipal engagement is uneven, with variation evident both across provinces and within urban regions.<sup>5</sup> We begin by reviewing independent immigration initiatives taken by municipalities within a limited set of prescribed powers, then discuss examples of collaboration between municipalities and other orders of government.

### Independent municipal action within legal and fiscal constraints

As constitutional “creatures of the provinces,” municipalities do not enjoy any formal powers related to immigration.

The *Constitution Act, 1867* (s. 91.25) grants the federal government exclusive authority over “naturalization and aliens.” Over time, the government has used this power to assume primary responsibility for setting overall immigration targets (known as the Immigration Levels Plan); defining different categories of immigrants (economic, family, and refugee) and relevant eligibility criteria; processing refugee claims; and operating administrative tribunals (e.g., Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada).

Federal jurisdiction, however, is not unlimited. Section 95 of the same Act designates immigration as one of three “concurrent powers” that must be formally shared between federal and provincial governments. The precise division of responsibilities between federal and provincial governments is thus subject to regular consultation and negotiation between governments, formalized in separate, bilateral immigration agreements.<sup>6</sup> Some

of these agreements establish an extensive role for provincial government. For example, the 1991 *Canada–Québec Accord* delegates complete authority to the province for selecting economic-

class immigrants who wish to settle in Québec, as well as for immigrant settlement services.<sup>7</sup> Others outline a more balanced administrative arrangement, whereby provinces nominate immigration applicants for federal approval through provincially designated admission streams.<sup>8</sup>

Despite their weak constitutional standing, many municipalities are nevertheless described as immigration “policy entrepreneurs,” by virtue of the broad and growing range of public services local governments provide to their (increasingly multicultural) residents.<sup>9</sup> In some cases, this role has been forced on municipalities, with responsibilities downloaded from provincial to local governments. In other cases, municipalities have voluntarily chosen to support newcomers in the absence of provincial and federal support.<sup>10</sup>

The scope of involvement in immigration varies widely. All municipalities are involved in settlement and integration services, but only some are active in immigrant attraction or retention.<sup>11</sup> Settlement and integration services refer to assistance programs that help newcomers access health, housing, education, employment, and social services. For example, many cities, including Edmonton, Richmond, Moncton, and York Region, publish guides for newcomers in multiple languages, with information about how to access essential services like housing, public transportation, child care, and health care, as well as local employment services,

language lessons, and job training. The heavy lifting of delivering these services, however, usually falls on local non-profit and community organizations – funded through a combination of federal, provincial, and municipal grants – rather than on the municipal public service.<sup>12</sup>

Municipalities are also seen as policy innovators in cases requiring unique settlement services for refugees and undocumented residents.<sup>13</sup> For example, the mayors of Toronto, Mississauga, Hamilton, Brampton, and seven other municipalities in the Greater Toronto region recently mobilized to coordinate settlement services for 2,000 refugees escaping the war in Ukraine.<sup>14</sup> Seven large municipalities across Canada, including Vancouver, Montréal, Edmonton, and London, have declared themselves “sanctuary cities,” part of a global movement of cities committing to guarantee undocumented residents access to health care, employment, and other public services without fear of arrest, detention, or deportation.<sup>15</sup>

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With regard to immigrant attraction and recruitment, dozens of cities, including Winnipeg, Calgary, and Halifax, have developed formal recruitment

strategies in consultation with industry and community partners, as part of broader, council-adopted immigration plans.<sup>16</sup> These strategies, which aim to encourage new immigrants to settle in particular municipalities after they have passed through a federal or provincial selection process, often include marketing campaigns; diversity, inclusion, and cultural competency training for city staff; anti-racism and employment equity initiatives; reviews of internal policies to improve newcomer access to city services; research, analysis, and reporting on immigrant quality of life; the convening of local immigration partnership tables and advisory committees; and the establishment of dedicated newcomer offices and welcome centres.

The scope of municipal intervention is more limited in many municipalities, however. Small cities, for instance, which lack the financial and administrative resources of larger urban centres, tend to be far less active in immigration policy and service delivery.<sup>17</sup> In Québec, municipalities face unique constraints to independent action on immigration due to provincial “*interculturalisme*” and “*francisation*” policies intended to protect the French language and Québécois culture.<sup>18</sup>

Whatever their size, municipalities rely heavily on businesses, non-profits, charities, and community partners to plan and deliver services to newcomers, and on other orders of government to fund a large portion of these services.

## Municipal collaboration with other orders of government

Despite the growing list of municipal immigration responsibilities, local governments have historically “been left on the sidelines of immigration policy and funding decisions.”<sup>19</sup> This changed in the early 2000s, however, after a series of precedent-setting intergovernmental agreements led to the proliferation of Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) and nominee programs, as well as federal cost-sharing programs for refugee settlement.

### *Intergovernmental agreements*

The 2005 Canada–Ontario Immigration Agreement (COIA) marked the first formal acknowledgement by a federal or provincial government that municipalities “provide a broad range of services that support the successful settlement and integration of immigrants,” and should therefore play a meaningful role in immigration policy.<sup>20</sup>

The agreement, last updated in 2018, includes a protocol for municipal consultation with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), as well as continued support for the Municipal Immigration Committee, a trilateral forum made up of senior officials from AMO and federal and provincial immigration departments.<sup>21</sup> (Because Toronto is not a member of AMO, a separate Canada–Ontario–Toronto Memorandum of Understanding on Immigration was signed in 2005, and updated in 2018.<sup>22</sup>)

Subsequent federal agreements with other provinces include gradually more expansive language. For example, the Alberta agreement, signed in 2007, states that the federal and provincial governments will “advance a dialogue on the appropriate role of municipalities.”<sup>23</sup> The B.C. agreement, signed in 2021, includes a joint commitment to “work with local governments” to “explore” issues and opportunities for greater collaboration.<sup>24</sup> The Newfoundland and Labrador agreement, signed in 2022, commits to “partnering” and to “work[ing] cooperatively” with local governments.<sup>25</sup>

### *Local Immigration Partnerships*

The 2005 COIA spawned the creation of LIPs. These localized, cross-sectoral planning bodies have a mandate to improve settlement outcomes for newcomers. LIPs do not directly provide settlement services or programs. Instead, they bring together a broad coalition of local organizations, including municipalities, to conduct research (such as

needs assessments and community surveys), map existing services and opportunities for greater coordination between governments and community agencies, develop community action plans, and track policy outcomes.<sup>26</sup>

The first LIP was established in 2008; today, LIPs operate in 87 cities, regions, and remote communities across Canada.<sup>27</sup> LIPs vary in size and composition, and membership is wide-ranging, including not only local governments but also community agencies, health centres, school boards, colleges and universities, faith groups, employers and employer associations, libraries, and grassroots organizations. The Ottawa LIP, for example, includes representation from 60 organizations.<sup>28</sup>

Many, but not all, LIPs are hosted or chaired by representatives from a local municipality (or municipalities) and supported by municipal staff. For example, the City of

Toronto manages four LIP councils through a dedicated Newcomer Office.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, the Halifax Immigration Partnership, the first LIP established in Atlantic Canada, is managed by Halifax Regional Municipality’s Diversity & Inclusion Office. In Edmonton, the LIP is supported by a shared secretariat, comprised

of staff from the City of Edmonton and from various community organizations.

### *Nominee programs*

Another product of federal–provincial agreements relevant to municipalities is the establishment of provincial nominee programs (PNPs), now an important element of the immigration selection process. PNPs enable provinces outside Québec to identify, recruit, and nominate certain applicants – e.g., skilled workers, entrepreneurs – who intend to settle in their province for expedited entry. The goal is to distribute immigrant flows and economic benefits more evenly across provinces, and tailor the immigration system to local labour market needs. Roughly 35 percent of economic-class immigrants to Canada are now admitted through the PNP selection process.<sup>30</sup>

Some PNPs involve input from municipalities during the nomination process. For example, municipalities in Manitoba and Ontario help assess local labour-market needs and employment opportunities for new immigrants and develop specialized recruitment strategies.<sup>31</sup> But this arrangement is the exception, rather than the norm. The British Columbia PNP, for instance, added a specific entry stream for

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technology workers, but without any direct input from local governments – despite the fact that B.C.’s tech industry is heavily concentrated in the Vancouver and Victoria regions.<sup>32</sup>

To address this shortcoming, the federal government recently announced a dedicated Municipal Nominee Program to enable local governments, chambers of commerce, and labour organizations to directly sponsor permanent resident applications. Although it was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the pilot program is expected to launch soon.<sup>33</sup> The government also introduced a Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot, which solicits input from northern and rural municipalities, such as Thunder Bay, Brandon, Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie, and Moose Jaw, to communicate their immigration needs and identify immigrants who want to work and live in these communities.<sup>34</sup>

A final source of intergovernmental cooperation – and controversy – among federal, provincial, and municipal governments involves refugee resettlement. Municipalities report increasing difficulty managing the thousands of asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine, and many other conflict zones who end up in local shelter systems. In 2019, the federal government created the Interim Housing Assistance Program, a cost-sharing arrangement to reimburse provinces and municipalities for temporarily housing asylum claimants. To date, the program has paid out approximately \$700 million to provinces and municipalities, including multi-million-dollar payments to Toronto, Ottawa, Peel Region, and Hamilton.<sup>35</sup> The government added another \$212 million in one-time funding to the program in July 2023.<sup>36</sup> Despite these efforts, many municipal leaders, such as the Ontario Big City Mayors caucus, insist that federal and provincial support remains insufficient.<sup>37</sup>

## Conclusion

Despite legal and fiscal constraints, many municipalities have adopted their own local immigration strategies, convened advisory tables and committees, established newcomer offices and welcome centres, and worked with community agencies and civil society partners to welcome refugees and immigrants into their communities. Over time, local governments have also gained greater standing within federal-provincial-municipal relations, including formal recognition in several federal-provincial legal agreements, inclusion in many LIPs, growing participation in federal and provincial nominee programs, and increased (though still inadequate) federal funding for refugee resettlement. All told, however, the role of municipalities in Canadian immigration policy remains highly variable from city to city and province to province.

## The Municipal Role in Immigration and Settlement: Contradictions and Challenges

By Valerie Preston and John Shields

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In Canada, municipalities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play an outsized role in helping international migrants participate fully in Canadian society.<sup>38</sup> While federal and provincial governments largely set policies about immigration and settlement, where migrants live matters – not least because municipal policies and resources to support migrants vary.<sup>39</sup> This paper outlines how NGOs and municipalities support international migrants, the complex links between them and the other orders of government, and the tensions and challenges in these relationships. Using examples from an Ontario study of NGO and municipal efforts to assist migrants during the recent global pandemic, it describes lessons learned about intergovernmental relations that would benefit municipalities and the NGOs with which they work on migrant issues.<sup>40</sup>

### International migration to Canada

The centrality of immigration to Canadian economic, social, and demographic development is hard to overstate. With a population of 40 million people, Canada plans to recruit 500,000 new permanent residents annually by 2025.<sup>41</sup> Current admission policies for immigrants – people with status as permanent residents<sup>42</sup> – continue to favour skilled workers, who are portrayed as key to Canada’s economic prosperity and the future of the nation.<sup>43</sup> While the federal government consults provinces and territories regularly about annual immigration targets, municipal involvement in these policies has been limited. Recognizing the key role of municipalities in successful migrant integration and the interest of many municipalities in attracting more migrants, the federal government is developing a municipal nominee program that may enable more municipal influence on admissions.<sup>44</sup>

The number of people admitted to Canada with temporary status has exploded since the 2010s, with more than 1 million residents now admitted each year on a temporary basis as international students, temporary foreign workers, and refugee claimants.<sup>45</sup> The total combined number of immigrants and these temporary visa holders arriving each year is projected to exceed 1.5 million in the near future, rapidly increasing the percentage of the Canadian population that is foreign-born.

Contemporary international migration is an urban phenomenon.<sup>46</sup> One important aspect of this reality is that more Canadian cities will soon emulate Richmond, B.C., and Markham, Ontario, where more than half the population is foreign-born and identifies as a visible minority.

Another is that more migrants are also locating outside the historic gateways of metropolitan Toronto, Montréal, and Vancouver, settling instead in mid-sized and small metropolitan areas<sup>47</sup> – where municipal readiness to help migrants build new lives in new places is being tested. Many mid-sized and small cities that have not welcomed large numbers of migrants since the 1970s are currently confronting the challenges of incorporating international migrants and their concerns in municipal decision-making. For many, making changes that go beyond translating key municipal information into multiple languages is proving costly and difficult.<sup>48</sup> And as the ethno-racial diversity of cities increases, municipalities must take on difficult and sometimes divisive issues such as multiculturalism programs and anti-racism policies.<sup>49</sup>

### **Situating the municipal role**

Given the shifting nature of federal-provincial arrangements, pinning down the municipal role in migrant issues in Canada is difficult.<sup>50</sup> Although federal and provincial governments gesture toward municipal involvement, Canadian municipalities still have limited powers in this area, especially by international standards.<sup>51</sup> Municipalities sometimes fund settlement services, but the funding levels are low compared with provincial and federal commitments.<sup>52</sup> In fiscal year 2021–22, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) alone spent some \$1.7 billion on a broad range of settlement and integration services<sup>53</sup> – a commitment per immigrant exceeding those of most other immigrant-receiving countries.<sup>54</sup>

Nonetheless, many of the immigration agreements between Canada and the provinces and territories acknowledge that municipalities have an important role in supporting immigrant settlement and integration, even committing provincial and federal governments to cooperate with municipalities. However, the municipal role remains primarily advisory.<sup>55</sup> In the case of Ontario, the location of the case study on which this report is based,<sup>56</sup> provincial, federal, and municipal governments participate in municipal immigration committees that discuss immigration and settlement matters of mutual interest and share information.

### **The consultative role of municipalities: Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs)**

The value of the opportunity to be consulted should not be minimized. The original Canada–Ontario Immigration Agreement signed in 2005 led to an important and lasting innovation: the Local Immigration Partnership (LIP). Designed to coordinate stakeholders interested in migration matters so they can identify and plan for successful settlement of temporary visa holders and immigrants, LIPs include representatives from the private sector, all three orders of government, and civil society organizations.<sup>57</sup> They are coordinating and advisory bodies that do not provide any direct services to migrants.

Funded through contribution agreements with the federal government, the secretariats for many LIPs are housed in

municipal governments that provide logistical, administrative, and even financial support.<sup>58</sup> For example, the City of Toronto Newcomer Office serves as the central LIP for the municipality. In addition to the LIPs, the federal government also funds *réseaux en immigration*

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*francophone* (RIFs) – networks of stakeholders that are charged with coordinating and advising about francophone immigrants in provinces where francophones are the minority. (There are neither LIPs nor RIFs in Québec, since the province has direct control over settlement policies and programs.)

Ranging in size from large municipalities to small grassroots organizations, LIP participants have diverse funding sources. For example, municipalities and school boards draw on tax revenues, while immigrant-serving agencies rely on federal contracts, along with funding from other orders of government and charitable donations. The mandates of LIP participants also vary, ranging from municipal governments that provide services for all residents, to organizations serving people from a single ethnocultural group, national origin, or religious institution, to private businesses. The very diversity of the organizations participating in LIPs is a key to their success in facilitating settlement and integration.<sup>59</sup>

### **The role of municipalities in service provision: Working with immigrant-serving agencies (ISAs)**

Consistent with Canada's settler colonial history, permanent residence still confers many of the rights and responsibilities accorded to people born in the country.<sup>60</sup> To facilitate immigrants' integration, the Canadian state has made significant investments in supports and services, which are

mainly provided through non-profit immigrant-serving agencies (ISAs) with government funding.<sup>61</sup> Often built by migrants themselves, ISAs are dedicated to enhancing the well-being of migrants and their communities. This government-funded programming is extensive enough to constitute an unacknowledged part of the larger Canadian welfare state.<sup>62</sup> To a lesser extent, provinces (other than Québec) also fund supports, especially related to employment. And some municipalities, such as Vancouver, Montréal, and Toronto, play a prominent role in providing services and supports for temporary residents and immigrants, such as funding ISAs, implementing policies to ensure access to city services regardless of legal status in Canada, supporting LIPs, and proclaiming commitments to being diverse, multicultural, even multiracial cities. Other municipalities place more importance on policies to recruit migrants to fill local job vacancies. Still others, meanwhile, are antagonistic towards migrants.<sup>63</sup>

Despite their involvement through LIPs, RIFs, and ISAs, the gap between municipalities' authority and responsibility in migration matters is

a continual source of tension. For example, in the City of Toronto, where the federal government provides funds to house asylum seekers in municipal shelters,<sup>64</sup> City Council

refused to accept additional asylum seekers in municipal shelters as of June 1, 2023.<sup>65</sup> Pictures of asylum seekers living on Toronto sidewalks generated public outrage and underscored the failure of the three orders of government to address the municipality's demands for additional funding to serve this population. Other Ontario and Québec municipalities quickly echoed Toronto's request,<sup>66</sup> underscoring the need for policies that respond to the variegated landscape of municipal involvement in migration issues.<sup>67</sup>

### **Intergovernmental cooperation during the pandemic**

The pandemic provides a useful and timely illustration of the key role municipalities have to play in migration issues: their involvement was key to successful initiatives to reduce COVID transmission, infections, hospitalizations, and deaths among migrants and alleviate the unequal impact that the pandemic had on the international migrant population.<sup>68</sup> The implementation of many pandemic policies fell largely to municipalities, which operate services that urban residents use in their daily lives such as public transit. For example, the Toronto Transit Commission introduced new cleaning schedules for streetcars, buses, and subway cars; improved ventilation; and monitored social distancing to assure the

safety of riders. Public health agencies implemented local COVID prevention strategies and vaccination programs, sometimes operating across several municipalities. Even the enforcement of provincial COVID regulations was adapted by the public health agencies to local circumstances. In a particularly notable demonstration of the value of a municipal focus, transmission was reduced successfully by municipal vaccination campaigns targeting neighbourhoods with high rates of COVID that were also home to large numbers of international migrants. Downloading responsibility for policy implementation to public health agencies allowed several municipalities to introduce local systems for vaccination appointments before the provincial appointment system was available. While municipal ingenuity accelerated vaccination programs, the policy had unintended consequences: municipally operated appointment systems were often only accessible to residents with an address in the municipality.

Another example of successful cooperation that included municipalities is the way that the financial stability provided

by the municipal, provincial, and federal governments helped the ISAs move services online.<sup>69</sup> The federal government assured financial stability for most ISAs by renewing their contracts for five years in April

2020, while reducing reporting and other accountability requirements. For the duration of the pandemic, IRCC placed in abeyance targets for the number of people receiving services, hours of service delivered, and number of different services being provided. Provincial, territorial, and municipal governments followed suit.<sup>70</sup> With secure and more flexible funding, ISAs were not only able to continue their operations, they could shift to virtual forms of service delivery.

Through their involvement in LIPs, Canada's municipalities honed their pandemic responses to the needs of international migrants. At the same time, both LIPs and ISAs became sources of valuable information for municipalities, other orders of government, and other institutions. One LIP collected and publicized migrant stories to illustrate the specific needs of this population. Others advocated for disaggregated information about COVID-19 that took account of immigration status, ethno-racial identity, and neighbourhood. An ISA that works closely with employers engaged in a twitter campaign to remind employers about the crucial importance of international migrants for the Canadian economy and local businesses.

Local collaboration was also key for successful adaptation as ISAs expanded their collaborations with municipal

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**The gap between municipalities' authority and responsibility in migration matters is a continual source of tension.**

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departments and other non-profit and public organizations during the pandemic. At consultation tables with representatives from municipal departments such as housing and public health, they advocated for migrant needs; this regular interaction with municipal departments laid the groundwork for a sustained partnership. Several ISAs also established new partnerships with school boards that were trying to ensure the families of immigrants and temporary residents had the technology needed for online education.

The LIPs helped coalesce organizational partners around mutual goals with weekly meetings and multisectoral consultation tables on specific issues, such as health and education. The benefits of these connections, and the expanded opportunities for information sharing and collaboration, became immediately apparent as stories spread about municipal bureaucrats advocating for small grassroots organizations that they had just learned about. By supporting initiatives that sprang up, such as food banks that provided culturally appropriate food for specific ethnocultural populations, municipalities were able to meet the needs of international migrants without assuming the risk of developing new municipal programs.

Municipal participation in a working group organized by IRCC that met regularly with representatives from ISAs and LIPs<sup>71</sup> facilitated quick and

effective responses to pandemic needs with little risk of financial or reputational damage. Acknowledging the value of ISAs' expertise and detailed knowledge of local immigrant and temporary resident populations allowed the three orders of government to foster innovation in supporting services. For example, the federal government distributed emergency funds to local umbrella agencies such as the United Way, which allocated them to local initiatives undertaken by small organizations that lacked the capacity to apply independently for federal funding.

Regular communications with ISAs allowed the concerns of immigrants and temporary residents to be heard in the municipal, provincial, and federal policy arena. For example, both ISAs and municipal representatives lobbied for funding initiatives such as recruiting the community ambassadors who went door to door in many neighbourhoods delivering information about COVID-19 and vaccination, helping to arrange vaccination appointments, and even interpreting for vaccination teams. ISAs sometimes helped identify potential ambassadors for the program, which was funded through municipal offices of public health. Driven by their commitment to empowering migrants themselves, the ISAs

engaged in a variety of advocacy practices that ranged from direct, "harder" forms of advocacy with funders to "softer" forms that included information exchange with federal, provincial, and municipal government program officers regarding their immigrant clients.

### **Disrupting the status quo**

The policy and program innovation that occurred during the pandemic holds important lessons for municipal involvement in immigration and settlement. Municipal-level governments can be regressive, as both Fourot and Good<sup>72</sup> point out; local business interests can have a disproportionately large influence on municipal decisions about migrant issues that may not always benefit migrants themselves. The pandemic experience in Ontario revealed some of the conditions for municipal involvement and actions that benefit immigrants and temporary residents themselves.

The pandemic drew attention to the local ecosystem of organizations involved in migrant issues in each municipality. LIPs, mostly housed in municipal governments, brought together private- and public-sector organizations with

interests in every facet of daily life, from jobs to education, health care, recreation, leisure, and transportation.

While constitutional responsibility for immigration lies with the federal and provincial governments,

the pandemic underlined the truism that settlement and integration take place locally. Successful integration required local expertise about migrant needs, services, and the structure of the local labour market. Multisectoral collaborations that reduced inequalities at different geographical scales – the neighbourhood, the ward, and the municipality, as well as the province – were crucial for addressing the pandemic's unequal impacts. The success of many such collaborations demonstrated how policy and policy-making can respond effectively to local circumstances and concerns.

The pandemic experience also confirmed that collaboration and innovation require resources to succeed. Core funding separate from program delivery is essential for ISAs to continuously adapt their services and advocate successfully on behalf of international migrants. Other reforms in financial practices are needed. For example, when during the pandemic the federal and Québec governments gave ISAs more flexibility to move money between budget lines, it facilitated the shift to hybrid delivery of services. This kind of flexibility enhances the capacities of ISAs to achieve their missions.<sup>73</sup>

The authority and expertise of municipalities also need to be acknowledged and supported. The current formal role of

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## **The policy and program innovation that occurred during the pandemic holds important lessons for municipal involvement in immigration and settlement.**

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municipalities as participants at consultation tables about migration issues is inadequate. The pandemic demonstrated the urgency and efficacy of greater municipal involvement in this policy arena: while federally funded LIPs provided much of the organizational infrastructure for responding to migrant needs, it was the municipalities that provided the local resources and expertise that facilitated successful partnerships. To maintain and expand municipal involvement will require augmenting local fiscal capacity to ensure municipalities can respond quickly to rapidly emerging migrant issues, such as the increase in asylum seekers needing shelter in Ontario and Québec cities. Given the centrality of immigration to Canada's economic and social development and the place-based nature of settlement, there is an urgent need to bring municipalities fully into immigration and settlement governance structures.

## Creating a Municipal Immigration Strategy: Challenges & Opportunities

By Valerie Pruegger, Ph.D.

*Valerie Pruegger is a diversity, equity, and inclusion consultant.*

### Introduction

In 1996, after three years as Executive Director of the Calgary Multicultural Centre, I joined The City of Calgary as a Research Social Planner. My time working in immigrant communities in Calgary and serving on an immigration roundtable provided a strong knowledge base and understanding of the barriers faced by both newcomers to Calgary and established racialized communities. Over the next 15 years I spent countless hours on committees, talking with people in the community about their issues and concerns, and conducting research on municipal immigration policies.

One of the first research projects I tackled at The City was a report on diversity in Calgary and the challenges faced by underserved communities. In an experience that foreshadowed much of what was to come, this report, over a year in the making, was never published, as senior management felt it was too incendiary.

Despite this early setback, I was determined that The City needed a municipal strategy on immigration. I found that The City of Toronto had created the first (and only) municipal immigration policy, and I used this as a template for my initial work. Over the next several years, I endeavoured to get this issue to City Council, only to be barred repeatedly by senior management, who did not see immigration as a municipal concern. However, I argued that as the order of government that is closest to citizens, and the one newcomers turn to first, city government needed to address this issue along with other orders of government. As well, it is the municipality that is responsible for infrastructure, for many public services, and for creating a social and economic environment that allows its citizens to thrive – all critical factors for the success of immigrants.

This paper explores the journey of getting a municipal immigration policy approved by Council, how it was subsequently implemented, and the various barriers encountered along the way. In addition, I explore some of the strategies that were successful in overcoming these challenges (see Box 1).

### Initial direction from Council

In 2006 The City of Calgary signed on to the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities Against Racism and Discrimination, providing the impetus for City Council to direct that a policy be created on immigration, settlement, and a welcoming community. Council noted,

*While immigration is primarily a federal and provincial mandate, The City of Calgary has a significant role:*

- *As municipal government to uphold matters of public interest. This means creating a welcoming community where all Calgarians can live in a safe community and have equal opportunity to participate in the economic, social, cultural, recreational and political life of the community;*
- *In conjunction with other orders of government to provide social and physical infrastructure in Calgary that meet the diverse needs of all Calgarians;*
- *As one of the largest employers in Calgary; and*
- *As local government that respects and promotes human rights and diversity.*<sup>74</sup>

In acknowledging its role in immigration, as an order of government and as an employer, The City had opened the door to developing a policy that would address issues faced by immigrants and racialized communities.

Despite this direction to move forward in 2006, further barriers were presented by senior management within the public service. Action stalled. In the meantime, my counterpart at The City of Edmonton had requested permission to adapt the policy I had created for use in Edmonton – and was able to get it approved by a favourable Council within a year!

### **Research motivates further work**

In 2007,<sup>75</sup> my colleague Derek Cook and I worked with counterparts in five other Western Canadian cities (Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon, Edmonton, and Vancouver) to explore municipal governments’ responses to the challenges faced by recent immigrants and established racialized populations in their communities. Given that immigration was a driving force for population growth in cities, it was evident that immigrant attraction and retention strategies were important to municipalities for future development and success. We found that the challenges included a lack of leadership and coordination of services, poor funding formulae, systemic barriers and racism, and a lack of affordable housing. We also found that one of the largest challenges was the uncertainty over the roles and responsibilities of various orders of government involved in immigration and settlement, along with the growing demands for services by municipalities facing a lack of resources to provide them. While settlement responsibilities are downloaded from the federal and provincial governments to immigrant-serving agencies in local communities, these services continually face funding shortages.<sup>76</sup>

### **Developing the policy**

We were finally able to move forward again in 2010, and I was given three months to produce a policy, framework, and implementation plan that could be supported by Council and senior management. To this end, I knew it would be important to involve everyone in the planning of the policy. This entailed reaching out to the Director of each business unit and asking for a member of their team to sit on the Project and Information Team. These individuals would become champions of the policy, aid in its implementation in their own areas, and keep their senior management apprised of how the policy was being developed as we moved forward. This was essential to getting the endorsement of senior management from the start to prevent any dissent once we reached City Council. In addition, I pulled together an external advisory team of community members, representatives from immigrant-serving agencies, education organizations, the provincial government, and Calgary Economic Development. This team was responsible for ensuring that the voices and concerns of immigrant and racialized people in Calgary were heard and represented in

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**It was important to link the immigration policy to related policies and initiatives at The City and to explore best practices in other jurisdictions.**

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the development of the policy. Another strategy that was key in getting Council approval was the development of an FAQ sheet. I gathered all the concerns, questions, objections, and barriers that had been presented to me over the years and

developed an information sheet that answered all of these with concise, evidence-based responses.

This process required a lot of meetings, hard work, and revisions over the course of the three-month timeline. With so many voices having input, the writing process was difficult, but the result was a framework which included six areas of focus (education, employment, health and well-being, inclusion and civic engagement, justice and protection services, and settlement).<sup>77</sup> The framework outlined a partnership that included all three orders of government, immigrant service agencies, other service providers, and community members. It was important to link the immigration policy to related policies and initiatives at The City and to explore best practices in other jurisdictions. The policy also outlined current demographics, barriers and challenges, and key areas in which The City could work to minimize these challenges. A companion document was developed that provided suggestions for each business unit of how that area could embed actions that would meet the goals and values of the policy. This was seen as a way in which each area of responsibility at The City could envision its own implementation plan, as no one person was assigned to oversee the implementation of the policy or given the responsibility and authority to do so.

I believe it is because of this extensive and inclusive internal and external consultation process that when we took the policy to Council in 2011 it was approved unanimously with no dissent. One Council member even remarked, “Why didn’t we do this a long time ago?” and even “Are these things [barriers and challenges] really still happening today?”

### Implementing the policy

I retired shortly after this policy was passed by City Council, and an Issue Strategist was subsequently tasked<sup>78</sup> with developing an implementation plan for the organization, called the Welcoming Community Policy (WCP) Corporate Plan. The Plan’s vision was that “Calgary is an inclusive city where immigrants can fully participate in all aspects of the economic, social, political, and cultural dimensions of civic life.” It would include key result areas and system actions for the local government to ensure that the priorities found in the Council policy were delivered on, and that business units across the organization and immigrant communities were involved in a meaningful way. In order to ensure that the WCP Corporate Plan truly met the needs of those who were impacted by this policy, the Committee on Immigrant Inclusion was established. It comprised 30 immigrant members (Calgarians born outside of Canada) who were diverse in terms of country of origin, sex, language, years in Canada, race, and immigrant class. Members were responsible for investigating barriers and making recommendations on areas of mutual concern between immigrants and The City of Calgary as it related to the WCP. The committee also committed to reach out monthly to immigrant community networks and report back findings to inform the corporate plan.

After consultations with the Committee on Immigrant Inclusion, civic partners, and subject-matter experts in evaluation, five key results areas were identified:

1. Immigrants have meaningful and sustainable employment and have the ability to achieve economic well-being.
2. Immigrants have broad community and cultural networks.
3. Immigrants have equitable access to and benefit from City programs, services, facilities, and spaces.
4. Immigrants participate in civic priority setting and decision making.
5. Immigrants are safe and accepted in Calgary.

Informal and formal conversations were held in order to document barriers that immigrants experience for each of these key result areas. Five reports, one for each area, were written providing actions that The City of Calgary could implement to reduce the barriers identified by the Committee. These reports informed the work of five working groups to finalize the system actions for the corporate plan.

In August 2017, the Issue Strategist responsible for finalizing the WCP Corporate Plan left to begin a new position at The

City of Calgary. The work did not continue, and, as a result, the Welcoming Community Policy is now at serious risk of being rescinded.

### Conclusion

Discontinuity, setbacks, and non-linear progress are the reality of policy work at any order of government and in many organizations. However, I continue to believe in the importance of immigration and welcoming community policies at the municipal level. Our cities and towns continue to diversify as we welcome the talent that newcomers bring to Canada and become more aware of the need to include the skills and knowledge that existing racialized and other under-served populations (e.g., Indigenous, LGBTQ2S+, people with disabilities) bring to our communities. It is incumbent on municipal leaders to work in partnership with other orders of government to create better funding opportunities, information sharing, and strategies for inclusion at all levels of civic life, as well as better education and employment opportunities. This includes support for smaller centres and towns that are receiving newcomers across the country, and more regional planning, communication strategies, and collaborative partnerships with other municipalities.

#### *Box 1: Lessons learned from the development of Calgary’s immigration policy*

- **Start with a jurisdictional scan to understand the issues.** From our research we found that one of the largest challenges was the uncertainty over the roles and responsibilities of various orders of government involved in immigration and settlement, along with the growing demands for services by municipalities facing a lack of resources to provide them.
- **Collaborate with allied initiatives to build consensus at Council.** Working with and highlighting other initiatives focussed on diversity, equity, and anti-oppression helped to get Council to pass the immigration policy in 2010.
- **Involve the whole of government in the planning of the policy.** By reaching out to Directors and asking them to each send a team member to sit on the project and information committee, we established a network of champions throughout all divisions of city government.
- **Use an external advisory team to ensure the community is heard.** This team consisted of community members, representatives from immigrant-serving agencies, education organizations, the provincial government, and Calgary Economic Development.
- **Prepare an FAQ sheet to address common concerns.** The FAQ sheet gathered all the concerns, questions, objections, and barriers that had been presented over the years and answered them with concise, evidence-based responses.

Canada needs trilateral immigration agreements that can offer holistic and integrated approaches to immigration, settlement, and inclusion. Immigration and inclusion of under-served citizens will continue to be a challenge and opportunity for municipal governments into the foreseeable future. The extent to which integration (not assimilation) is successful will depend on the ability of governments and community agencies to work together to address the unique needs of each community, providing targeted solutions and collective action.

## **A Seat at the Table: Making Municipal Action toward Non-status and Precarious Immigrants Sustainable**

By Mireille Paquet and Sivakamy Thayaalan

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In many Canadian cities, a portion of the residents live with precarious immigration status, and some live without any immigration status. Precarious status refers to any immigration status that offers little protection of permanence, that can be easily lost, and that offers limited access to government services, such as temporary residence permits for work and study.<sup>79</sup> In contrast to precarious status, the absence of status implies that an immigrant lacks authorization to reside or work in Canada, has limited access to rights, and has no public services. There are no official statistics about the number of non-status immigrants in Canada; estimates vary from 20,000 to 500,000 persons.<sup>80</sup> In 2023, Statistics Canada estimated the non-permanent resident population of Canada to be about 2.2 million.<sup>81</sup> While not all of this population experiences equally precarious status, these recent estimates demonstrate how Canada's immigration system is changing, bringing in more temporary permit holders who experience higher risk of status loss.<sup>82</sup> Despite efforts by all orders of government to support the settlement of newcomers outside of large cities, immigration will remain a highly urban phenomenon in Canada because of employment and educational opportunities and individual preferences, amongst other things. Moreover, because of the availability of services and social networks in urban areas, and because of the potential for anonymity granted by large cities, a considerable proportion of non-status and precarious status immigrants, in addition to asylum seekers, will continue to prefer settling in cities.

Canadian cities have limited formal authority over immigration, which is a shared jurisdiction between the Government of Canada and the provinces. Nonetheless, several Canadian cities have a history of involvement in immigrant attraction and retention, in the delivery of culturally sensitive services, and in the promotion of diversity.<sup>83</sup> Changes to national immigration policies have led to an expanding municipal role in funding settlement and integration services.<sup>84</sup>

Starting with Toronto in 2013, several Canadian cities have experimented with new forms of interventions to



support non-status and precarious-status residents within their boundaries. To date, seven cities – Toronto, Montréal, Vancouver, Edmonton, London, Hamilton, and Ajax – have officially adopted policies of this nature.<sup>85</sup> Often labelled “sanctuary policies” or “access without fear policies,” these aim at ensuring that services are provided to all residents without considering or collecting data on immigration status. They also include funding to provide services for immigrants who are ineligible for federal or provincial support due to their lack of status. In some cases, such as in Montréal, these policies also include the provision of municipal ID cards to support access to local services.<sup>86</sup> In contrast to local immigration policies in the United States, Canadian sanctuary policies do not extend to police services and do not restrict federal immigration enforcement within municipal boundaries, because municipalities lack the jurisdiction to do so.<sup>87</sup> Some Canadian cities that do not have official sanctuary policies are also working to support non-status and precarious-

status residents by coordinating with stakeholders, building administrative capacity, and informally adjusting policies (for example, by not collecting unnecessary information about immigration status).

In Canada, the rise of sanctuary policies results from a confluence of factors, including changes to national immigration policies, reaction to the anti-immigration climate in the United States, and the relative influence of social movements supporting the rights of immigrants. Some mayors and local public servants have also piloted the creation of sanctuary policies, acting as policy entrepreneurs.<sup>88</sup> Since 2018, however, no more cities have enacted policies of this kind. The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to this pause, but it also likely reflects the dilemma facing Canadian cities when it comes to non-status and precarious-status immigrants:<sup>89</sup> Canadian municipalities are front-line governments for these populations but must support them with very limited resources and despite having almost no influence on the national and provincial policies that give rise to precarious status or loss of status. Yet as Canada is welcoming record numbers of permanent and temporary immigrants amidst policy changes, the role of cities in providing services to all immigrants regardless of their status is becoming even more essential in order to ensure the best integration outcomes possible, to maintain social cohesion, and to limit social inequalities in the country. This role, however, can only be realized at its fullest if municipalities

are granted a better intergovernmental deal when it comes to immigration, including more predictable funding and a larger role in federal–provincial/territorial institutions dedicated to immigration, notably the Forum of Ministers Responsible for Immigration.

### **Increased and predictable funding**

Responding to the needs of precarious-status and non-status immigrants can become hard to justify for municipalities when they are faced with multiple other demands and have limited resources. Immigration intersects with most of the areas where Canadian cities could benefit from increased federal and provincial funding: housing, social services, infrastructure, transportation, and more.<sup>90</sup> Precarious-status and non-status immigrants are often provided with support even if they are not covered by existing program rules and funding arrangements,<sup>91</sup> sometimes at the expense of city budgets and often increasing the pressure on already-limited municipal services. Providing municipalities with more

generous funding to cover the costs of services they already deliver for these residents – and making sure that this funding is predictable – is crucial to ensuring service continuity. Canadian municipalities have demonstrated their commitment to this issue and their unique

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capacity to deliver quality services and outcomes for both immigrants and non-status residents.

Funding must not only be increased, but must also move away from the ad hoc transfers, program-based financing, and special agreements that have been the norm in this sector of fiscal federalism. Examples of this approach abound: the Québec department of immigration has concluded limited agreements with several large cities to fund integration services;<sup>92</sup> the federal department of immigration funds Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) to support the coordination of service-providing organizations and local administrators;<sup>93</sup> and, since 2017, the Government of Canada has invested to support the temporary housing of irregular arrivals in large cities.<sup>94</sup> These instances of dedicated funding are time-limited and include considerable limits on how cities can use the resources.

What is needed instead is a clear and predictable fiscal architecture that municipalities can use to plan and design services for all immigrants, irrespective of their immigration status. Such a funding basis would ensure that local governments start or continue to allocate resources in a way that supports the specific needs of their own

precarious-status residents following a place-based approach. It would also enable municipal governments to invest in their administrative capacities, which could benefit all orders of government by supporting better data collection, more meaningful collaboration, and more effective policy implementation. Such a funding arrangement would also, to some extent, safeguard these services from the impact of changes in local government, notably the election of a new mayor or city council.

More importantly, in an era of rising anti-immigration sentiments and economic hard times, providing municipalities with a stable funding foundation for services to all immigrants would have the added advantage of guarding against potential public backlash toward municipal spending on immigrants and non-status populations. As seen in other parts of the world, city residents can come to resent sharing spaces and resources with newcomers, especially if they perceive them as non-deserving or as free riders. Canada has been, so far, exempt from such discourses in mainstream politics, but we should not be complacent.

The municipal revenue base relies largely on property taxes, and the public does not always realize how prevalent home ownership is for immigrants today, thereby underappreciating how much newcomers contribute to city

budgets.<sup>95</sup> At the same time, immigration is increasingly being linked by political commentators to Canada's housing supply crisis, which is felt most acutely in large urban centres.<sup>96</sup> These developments show that a backlash against immigration, and especially against municipal investments in this sector, is possible in Canada and that political actors could mobilize on this theme to make electoral gains. Providing additional stable resources to cities could diminish the appeal of such a strategy.

### **A real seat at the table**

To ensure the sustainability and expansion of municipal intervention for precarious-status and non-status residents, it is also crucial to give Canadian municipalities a role in the governance of immigration in Canada. Municipalities operate in a liminal zone, as they must manage the consequences of federal and provincial immigration policies without receiving direct funding tied to these consequences, which include national immigration targets, the process of determining immigration status, the issuance of temporary residence permits, and the funding of immigrant integration services. In the last 20 years, in addition to record levels of

permanent immigration, these policies have heightened the precariousness of many immigrants' status and contributed to the growth of larger non-status populations. As an outcome of these policies, urban populations have become more heterogeneous in terms of their residents' statuses and needs. Indeed, the rise of municipal sanctuary policies has been partially explained as a direct result of cities' on-the-ground experiences with the consequences and outcomes of Canada's evolving immigration policies.

While it is politically unfeasible to grant constitutional jurisdiction over immigration to municipalities, some changes to sectoral intergovernmental institutions could go a long way toward ensuring that the planning and management of immigration policies include input from the Canadian cities that must manage the consequences of these policies. These changes would complement existing communication mechanisms and the executive relationships that sometimes emerge between mayors and immigration ministers. As in other policy sectors, giving municipalities a seat at the table

of Canada's major intergovernmental institutions would help strengthen relations, improve policy coordination, and avoid unfunded mandates.<sup>97</sup> And, as in other policy sectors, this change has to be accompanied by an evolving provincial approach to sharing

power with municipalities – something that most Canadian provincial governments continue to be lukewarm about.

One key reform would be to formally incorporate municipalities into the Forum of Ministers Responsible for Immigration (FMRI), the central venue for intergovernmental coordination in immigration.<sup>98</sup> The FMRI includes federal, provincial, and territorial ministers, executives, and policy officials collaborating through formal working groups and decision-making tables to set shared objectives for immigration programs. Multiple options exist for including cities in the FMRI, including nominating municipal representatives for each province or creating a municipal–federal–provincial/territorial working group. Municipal participation in this important forum would ensure that cities have a say in the direction of national immigration policies in recognition of their fundamental role in the delivery of Canada's immigration program.

Furthermore, Ottawa should experiment with new forms of long-term federal–municipal immigration agreements. The Canada–Ontario Immigration Agreement, which includes a Memorandum of Understanding with Toronto, states areas of shared policy interests and governance mechanisms for

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collaboration between orders of government. Building on its lessons, a new generation of agreements should be offered to other Canadian cities. These agreements should expand beyond the themes of immigrant integration and immigrant attraction to include funding and to provide avenues for meaningful consultations with municipal administrations on national immigration priorities. A one-size-fits-all approach might not be realistic for such agreements; a tiered approach based on municipalities' size and immigration experience could provide a solid basis for more collaboration and allow cities to feel more confident about getting substantially involved in new immigration-related sub-issues. Ultimately, the realization of such agreements could usher in a new phase of municipal–federal relations over immigration: from sectoral capacity building and local coordination to official government-to-government relations.

### Conclusion

Canada is currently implementing its most ambitious immigration program since the post-war population boom. The majority of the record number of immigrants that the country plans to welcome in the coming years will settle in urban centres. City governments and administrations must be full participants in realizing this program, and their comparative advantages in supporting those that fall through the cracks of our immigration system must be recognized both financially and institutionally. Failing to do so could mean serious breaks in service delivery and lead to a popular backlash against immigration. Make no mistake: in the current context, these risks should be seen as urgent enough for Ottawa to risk facing potential resistance from provincial governments in order to give municipalities a more substantial local role in immigration governance.

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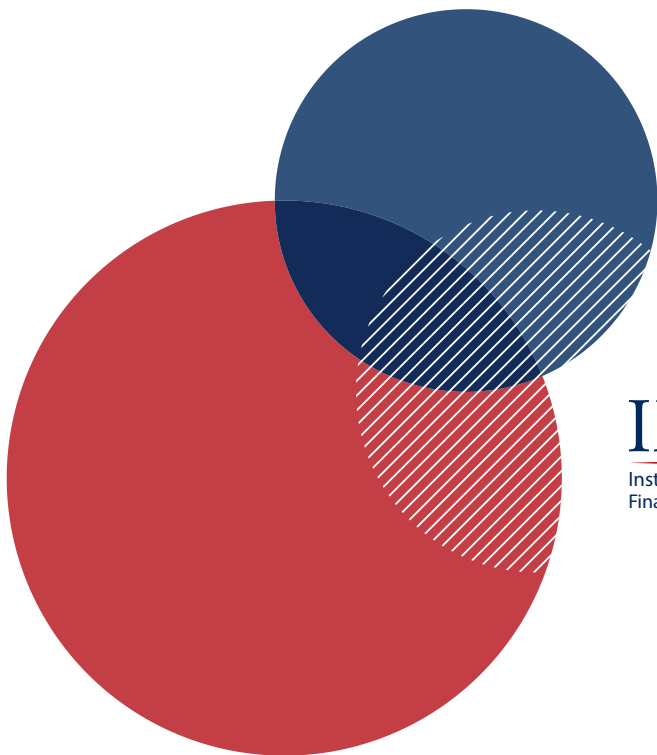
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