

This is Me:

Lived Experiences and Positive Impact of Newcomers to Canada

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The newcomer journey is not an easy one. In order to settle and integrate into their communities, newcomers acquire new skills, do research, and save money to prepare their arrival to Canada. Once here, they work hard to settle and integrate, find work, enroll themselves or their children in school, and find community. In many cases, this journey is supported by friends, family, and settlement agencies. Furthermore, whether they are temporary or permanent residents, immigrants or refugees, when newcomers make of Canada their new home, they often seek ways to give back, help others out, and give back to their new community, city, and country. In this poster, we showcase the settlement and integration of various newcomers to Canada with diverse backgrounds and life experiences. Our objective is to showcase a very small sample of what it means to be a newcomer in Canada, and the positive and profound impact that newcomers have in their communities.

Summary

Preparing for their new home: the pre-arrival and initial arrival experience

- **What motivated them:** Almost all newcomers mentioned better **professional opportunities** and a **better quality of life** for themselves and their families. Two mentioned security and safety as a factor, ranging from general instability and insecurity to targeted persecution.
- **Preparing to move to Canada:** All newcomers mentioned researching Canada on the internet, including the weather, affordability, and schools for their children. Four mentioned having family or friends in Canada already, in all cases, they received information or support from

Settlement Services:

- **Settlement Services:** Only three received settlement services—including pre-arrival.
- **Lack of awareness:** Most pointed out lack of awareness about settlement services and other supports, and how hard it was to come across this information. Some also suggested the need for a **detailed guide listing available services** and how to find them.
- **Need for connection:** Most interviewees wished they had accessed supports to help them feel connected, including youth groups, support circles, mentorship by established newcomers, or welcoming services at the airport.
- **Need for youth services:** A newcomer youth mentioned that school staff were mostly unaware about newcomer resources or programs available to newcomer youth.

Acclimatizing to their new home: Cultural Adjustments

- **Culture shock:** All interviewees experienced cultural shock when they first arrived in Canada.
- **Most common culture shock factors:** All newcomers mentioned the cold weather. Most mentioned experiencing isolation and difficulty communicating or establishing connections with others, with one mentioning experiencing depression. They also mentioned cultural differences, like not knowing common expressions, not being used to small talk, or feeling that people here are more distant. Two mentioned transportation as an additional barrier.
- **What helped:** the most helpful factor was learning English and becoming fluent. Better access to transportation was also helpful, as was building new friendships and finding a job.

Language skills and Language Learning

- **Language training:** Three newcomers accessed language training, whether formal (LINC) or informal (conversation circles). All other interviewees, including a newcomer youth, arrived with sufficient English language skills to work or study.
- **Language as a factor in settlement and integration:** All interviewees agreed that English language fluency played a key role in finding work. More than half also believe that it played a significant role in their integration process, while two mentioned that acceptance and openness by Canadians played a bigger role than language in feeling connected to their community.

The positive impact of newcomers in Canadian communities

- **Volunteering to give back to their communities:** All interviewees actively volunteer or have recently volunteered; their activities range from supporting their churches (including blood drives and donation activities) to contributing time and organizational skills to their children's school and cultural activities, to volunteering in major events in the community, including festivals and sporting events, to interpreting.
- **Motivation to volunteer, or help their communities:** Almost all mentioned wanting to contribute and give back to their communities. Most also mentioned creating connections and feeling surrounded by community. Two mentioned wanting to help newcomers have smoother transition and integration experience.
- **The impact of their work:** Those who are currently employed also believe their work has positive impact in their communities, as well as the Canadian economy. Some believe that their workplace makes a positive impact in people's lives, including pharmacists, health professionals, settlement workers, and financial support at nonprofits. Those in public-facing role spoke of how having positive interactions with clients can have a big impact in people's lives from improving their day to creating a sense of welcoming and belonging to them.

Settlement Process

What kind of settlement support or resources did you receive when you first arrived in Canada?

- "I remember when we were at the airport, we were given some papers with places where you could go. Some that don't exist anymore, like Employment Project (Winnipeg), and others like Immigrant Centre (known as International Centre at the time) and Entry Program. [The latter] is one of the best programs that I've been to, because that's where you learned the very basic things that you need to know as a newcomer. I was also lucky to meet people like Neneh Banas, who knew I was a social worker back in the Philippines, and encouraged me to volunteer in that field. Employment Project (Winnipeg) taught me to prepare my resume, and about my transferable skills, and things about that, because I didn't even know how to answer interview questions at a time." - Roselyn
- "The only settlement support I received was through the LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) classes, which were offered for free to newcomers. I started at CLB (Canadian Language Benchmark) level 4 and worked my way up to CLB level 7. This journey took me two years, during which I focused on learning conversational English." - Sandy
- "As a kid, I didn't use the services my mom did, but I had some support at school, like a caring teacher and regular meetings with a counselor. However, resources were limited, and an additional English class didn't help much with community integration. Joining the International Student Club helped me meet new people. I often had to seek information on my own, as the counselor wasn't always informed about my needs." - Camila

Are there any services that were available and that you didn't access?

- "I think the pre-arrival services. I know it still exists right now, but it is more employment-related. We would have benefited from pre-arrival services, but more geared towards settlement, like the education system in Canada, etc." - Roselyn
- "Now, I believe there are people who welcome newcomers at the airport, which is a significant improvement from when I arrived. During my time, there was no one there to greet us, and I think having these services readily available upon arrival would have made a world of difference. I consider myself fortunate to have a church community and family who were familiar with the resources available, but I can only imagine how challenging it must be for those who don't have any support." - Sandy
- "Looking back, I probably could have benefited from some of the settlement services offered in Saskatoon. I just wasn't aware of them at the time. I only learned about them later, when it was a bit too late to fully utilize them." - Biswa

Is there anything you wish had been available when you arrived?

- "The family host program could have been helpful, this program matches newcomers with long time immigrants or Canadians that can help them get settled in here, and provide that sense of belonging. Mental health as well - I know it is provided for Government Assisted Refugees, but maybe there could be a quick psychosocial assessment and supports for immigrants. Or perhaps even offering support circle programming." - Roselyn
- "I believe having more information on navigating Canada's job market would have been incredibly helpful. Understanding the job application process, networking, and resources for finding work would have eased my transition and boosted my confidence in job searching. I wish Canada offered easier credential assessments for professionals from other countries, as many healthcare workers struggle to find jobs in their field here." - Jayson
- "Settlement providers gave us very general information on, say, getting a SIN, opening a bank account, or schools, and didn't tell us about other available supports like language learning, employment, food banks, etc. It would have been helpful to be aware of these when we first arrived, either through a conversation with the service provider, or a guide for newcomers." - Yoheh
- "Through my mom I learned recently about NEEDS (an introduction to Canadian education for children and youth). I was surprised because I didn't find that information even when I looked for it. Also, the educational system here is very different from what I was used to, and I wasn't made aware of things I needed in order to pursue higher education. I also would have wanted a space to interact with other newcomers going through the same experience as me." - Camila
- "I think it would have been helpful to have more information about connecting with the local community and learning about Canadian culture beyond the university setting. For example, I didn't know much about Indigenous peoples in Canada until quite a while after I arrived. Having access to resources or programs that facilitated those kinds of cultural exchanges would have been fantastic." - Biswa

Cultural Adjustment

Did you experience cultural shock when you first arrived? How did it feel like?

- "Yes, the weather. I think many of us experience that. Also, the (local) culture - there are written norms, but also unspoken norms, which is why additional pre-arrival services [are needed], so that you know what to expect and how to act. For me, that cultural adaptation was a very big thing. For instance, everyone is nice, and there is no crime in general, but one of my first interactions was a young boy trying to remove my shoes at a bus stop. I didn't know if that was normal here in Canada, and made me ask myself, what is the norm here? Small talk was also stressful at first. I always felt stressed out to go to work on Monday, because I felt I needed to think of answers to the "what did you do during the weekend?" question. I had to learn how to get out of my shell and relate to people from a different culture." - Roselyn
- "Yes, it was definitely a scary experience. As I mentioned, I didn't know much about Canada, and my limited English skills made it even more challenging to navigate the transportation system, education system, and other aspects of daily life. During my first few months, I barely left the house because I lacked the confidence to interact with people. The thought of engaging in conversations or even asking for directions felt overwhelming. I often felt isolated, and it took time for me to build up the courage to venture out and explore my new surroundings. Gradually, as I improved my language skills and became more familiar with the community, I started to feel more comfortable and confident, but the initial phase was certainly difficult." - Sandy
- "I did, to a certain extent. Before arriving, I was told about Canadian culture, but when I first arrived, I noticed people were very distant, not as welcoming as they're in my country. They [other students] wouldn't really approach you and make you feel like you were part of the class or community in general. Teachers and adults in general are nicer, but students and young people - I guess they're not as informed, so they're not as open to new people." - Camila
- "The cultural shock was less than what our daughters experienced, because we had been researching and talking to other people. Canadians are polite and always open to help, but the way in which people relate to one another is different; while that was a bit of a shock, our research helped us know how to relate to people and not be too surprised by it - after all, it's part of the adaptation process. However, work was definitely a shock.

- I came well aware that I might have to take manual labour jobs to gain experience and achieve our immigration process as quickly as possible, but resume writing was challenging, and I didn't have enough time to understand the process of writing it, and of reinventing yourself to find work." - Yoheh
- "I did experience some culture shock. It was a mix of excitement and confusion. At first, it felt isolating, especially with a very big being far away, but over time, I learned to adapt by reaching out to others, building new friendships, and embracing the differences. The support from my college and church community made the transition much easier, but the initial phase was definitely a learning curve." - Clarice
- "When I arrived in Canada, my expectations were quite different from reality. I felt out of place—my accent stood out, and I initially struggled with understanding North American English. For example, many of the office supplies had different names compared to what I was used to in Somaliland, where I had learned British English. It took time to adjust, but the experience taught me resilience and adaptability." - Hamda
- "Not really. Everything felt new and exciting. I was eager to embrace the Canadian way of life and learn about different cultures. So it didn't affect me." - Biswa

What were the most difficult aspects of adjusting to life in Canada?

- "The weather was one of my biggest challenges. Coming from a warmer climate, dealing with snow was overwhelming. While it was initially magical to see snow, braving the cold to run errands like grocery shopping or commuting to work proved difficult. I had to invest in warm clothing and learn to navigate icy sidewalks, which added to my challenges. Language barrier. Although I have my family with me, I still felt isolated during my first months. I struggled to make connections with people outside my immediate community, which further contributed to feelings of isolation." - Sandy

- "Cultural difference is the first on my list. Adapting to the social norms and customs was challenging at first. Canadians are generally polite but also more reserved compared to what I was used to in the Philippines, and it took me some time to get comfortable with that. The way people communicate and interact, such as valuing personal space and being more direct in some cases, was something I had to adjust to. The second aspect is the climate, the weather was a huge adjustment, especially the harsh winter. Coming from a tropical country, dealing with snow, freezing temperature, and getting less and shorter sunlight/daylight hours was quite a shock. It affected not just my daily routine but also my mood at times. The cost of living in Canada is significantly higher than what I was used to in the Philippines, and I've definitely had to adjust my lifestyle accordingly. Living here has taught me the true value of money and the importance of budgeting. I've learned to be more mindful of my expenses and prioritize what I truly need. Being in Canada has also instilled a sense of hard work and independence in me. I've had to fend for myself more than I ever did back home, whether it's managing my finances, finding a job, or navigating daily challenges. This experience has made me appreciate the efforts that go into building a life in a new country, and I've come to value the opportunities that come with that hard work." - Clarice
- "The weather was another significant adjustment. Coming from a warmer climate, dealing with snow and cold temperatures was overwhelming. I had to learn how to dress appropriately for the winter and cope with the long, dark days. Additionally, I found navigating the transportation system, housing, and daily errands to be quite challenging. Without a strong support network, it was sometimes difficult to figure out how to get around or access necessary services. Overall, these challenges made the transition to life in Canada quite tough, but I gradually learned to adapt and overcome them." - Jayson

Pre-Arrival Experience

What motivated you to move to Canada?

- "My aunt encouraged us to come to Canada. When I was younger, I didn't even think about moving to another country; however, by the time I got married and I had a child, I realized that life isn't that easy. Philippines, and my husband was also pushing for us to come to Canada. So, I said yes to my aunt. It was a mix of looking for better opportunities, and knowing that I would be supported by family." - Roselyn
- "The reason we moved here was due to religious persecution. Back in Iraq, my family was one of the few that practiced Catholicism, and it was not well accepted in a predominantly Muslim community. We faced threats that forced us to consider our safety and well-being. Ultimately, we decided to leave our home in search of a place where we could live freely and peacefully, without fear of persecution. Moving to Canada has provided us with the safety and peace of mind we desperately sought, allowing us to practice our faith openly and contribute to a diverse society that values religious freedom." - Sandy
- "Our motivation was mostly safety and security - physical safety, and emotional and economic security. In addition, we wanted our daughters to have the opportunity to grow up in a more egalitarian country, with better quality of life and more culturally diverse." - Yoheh
- "I am motivated to move to Canada because healthcare professionals in the Philippines are often undercompensated, which limits opportunities for growth. I am seeking new opportunities for personal and professional advancement, as well as a fresh start in a country where my skills and contributions will be valued. Canada offers a better work-life balance and a chance to further develop my career while improving my quality of life." - Clarice
- "Canada appealed to me as a place with opportunities for growth and a better quality of life. I was drawn to its reputation for diversity, inclusivity, and strong support for newcomers. The decision to move was guided by the chance to experience a new culture, expand my horizons, and build a better future." - Hamda
- "I've always been passionate about research, and Canada has a fantastic reputation in that area. The research infrastructure here is world-class, and I knew I'd have amazing opportunities to learn and grow. Plus, I was drawn to Canada's multiculturalism and its welcoming environment for international students. It seemed like the ideal place to pursue my postgraduate studies." - Biswa

Language

What were your language skills like when you first arrived in Canada? Did you take any English or French classes?

- "We arrived with high CLB's—mine was 8, my husband's was 6. He started working right away, but I took EESSE classes that boosted my confidence in English, especially for presentations and writing. The support from my teachers helped ease my worries about grammar." - Roselyn
- "Yes, I took English classes through the LINC/ESL program. I started at CLB 4 and finished at CLB 7. It helped me to be more confident talking to other people and to get a job." - Sandy
- "I had taken English courses in Colombia, in school and as an adult, but not as thorough as what my daughters took, which enabled them to arrive already fully bilingual. That helped with the first steps, like going to the bank. I started working and went to conversation circles at Immigrant Centre." - Yoheh
- "I already spoke English fluently when we arrived, which helped me have a smoother transition, and I did take a course for immigrants in school. However, it did take a while to get used to the speed at which people speak here, as well as their expressions - it was like learning a new language altogether." - Camila
- "My English was at CLB 5/5/6/6 when I arrived. After arriving, I completed high school here, graduating from Grade 12, and then attended ESL classes at RRC. Although I was already working full-time, these classes were instrumental in refining my language skills. They had a profound impact on both my personal and professional life, shaping my communication abilities and building my confidence in social and professional settings." - Hamda
- "I had good English skills when I arrived and knew other regional languages from India. I didn't take any English or French classes in Canada. My English proficiency was crucial in securing my first job at the University's alumni office call center. Being able to communicate effectively in English was essential for that role. My writing skills also helped me get some research writing jobs early on." - Biswa

Positive Impact of Newcomers in Canada

Do you volunteer in your community?

- "I volunteer with the Philippine Heritage Council of Manitoba, organizing events to preserve our heritage and welcome newcomers. During the pandemic, I helped create community programs, filling gaps in services for underrepresented groups, and these initiatives continue today." - Roselyn
- "Yes, in our church we have this events where we give back to community. I also volunteer my time as an interpreter for newcomers." - Sandy
- "I volunteered at the Winnipeg Jazz Festival as a cashier and worked with children at the Zoo over the summer. While it wasn't focused on my community, I enjoyed meeting different people and making a positive impact, especially with the kids." - Camila
- "I volunteered at the Winnipeg Jazz Festival and World Police and Fire Games, gaining work skills and connecting with the community. I also help with my daughter's dance group, promoting cultural exchange and preserving our heritage." - Yoheh
- "Through my church, I have opportunities to give back to the community. Despite my busy job schedule, I participate in socio-civic activities like clothing, food, and blood donations, as well as local community services." - Clarice
- "Yes, our church is very active in these kinds of socio-civic events, which has inspired me to volunteer my time to give back to the community. Being part of these initiatives allows me to contribute positively and connect with others who share similar values." - Jayson
- "Yes, I am actively involved in community volunteer work. I represent the Bitala Community and Family Centre, serving as a community connector and participating in various discussions on their behalf. This role allows me to bridge gaps and ensure that the needs of our community are understood and addressed." - Hamda
- "Yes, volunteering has been an important part of my life, starting with student positions and joining organizations like the Indian Students Association and Engineers Without Borders. I was also an ambassador for Let's Talk Science, encouraging students to pursue STEM fields. Since graduation, I've taken on leadership roles, including Vice President of the India-Canada Cultural Association, President of the Rotary Riverside club, and board member of the Saskatoon Open Door Society. Additionally, I volunteer with Asha for Education Canada, supporting underprivileged students in rural India." - Biswa

I believe immigrants bring so much to Canada. We come with skills and a strong work ethic, contributing to the economy and making Canadian society more vibrant and diverse. - Biswa Patra (India)

Does language play a role in making friends, and becoming a part of your community?

- "It played a role, but not as big. What played the biggest role was how the community was so open and accepting of me at that time. Seeing how the community accepted me and allowed me to be who I am was much bigger than communication." - Roselyn
- "Yes, I believe language is very important for making friends and fitting into your community. For me, being able to speak and understand English has helped me connect with people in ways I couldn't before. When I can talk to others, it makes it so much easier to build friendships and share experiences. Speaking the language has also allowed me to join community events and understand how things work around here. It really helps me feel more comfortable and like I belong in my new home." - Sandy
- "Yes, I didn't come with the expectation to find Spanish speaking friends right away, so I started volunteering right away after arriving in Winnipeg. The level of English I had allowed me to interact a bit, make friends, and be assigned various tasks as a volunteer." - Yoheh
- "Yes. Recently I started working as a hostess at a restaurant, and the fact that I could speak English fluently helped me a lot when applying for work. I did see that people who weren't as fluent in English had to work in other positions that didn't involve talking to the public as much. So it did help a lot, because it's not that easy to get a job when you don't have any experience here." - Camila
- "Language played a critical role in my journey. My proficiency helped me make friends, integrate into the community, and secure a job within a few months. It made the process of settling in much smoother." - Hamda
- "Definitely. Language is key to building relationships and understanding different perspectives. It allows you to connect with people on a deeper level and participate fully in community life. While English is widely spoken, being able to communicate in other languages, like French or even some other languages, can open up even more opportunities for connection and cultural exchange." - Biswa

What do you do for a living, and how does your job help others in your community?

- "As the Director of Settlement at Immigrant Centre Manitoba and a Group Facilitator at Aurora Family Therapy Centre, I'm deeply motivated by the support I received as a newcomer. People saw potential in me that I didn't see in myself, inviting me to volunteer and advocating for my opportunities. Now, I strive to offer that same encouragement to others. Helping newcomers feel a sense of belonging, providing them with information, and believing in their abilities can have a profound impact on their lives. It's about giving them the confidence to navigate life and inspiring them to pay it forward." - Roselyn
- "I am a housewife, but I also volunteer as an interpreter for newcomers in Canada. I believe this work is important because it helps ease the burden of speaking a foreign language for those who are trying to access essential services. By helping them communicate, I can make their transition a little smoother and ensure they receive the support they need. It's a rewarding experience that allows me to give back to the community while also connecting with others." - Sandy
- "In my professional role, I focus on supporting and empowering members of the community, helping them navigate the challenges of settling in a new country. My work involves offering guidance, resources, and a sense of connection, which not only helps individuals adjust to their new environment but also strengthens the community as a whole." - Hamda
- "I am a project manager at EnviroWay, where we produce eco-friendly cleaning products and prioritize green chemistry while creating local jobs. My role includes managing charitable projects, donating supplies to community organizations and First Nations reserves, and overseeing a sewage treatment initiative to address wastewater issues. Additionally, I founded two startups focused on mine tailing remediation and sustainable agriculture through biomaterials processing and biofertilizers, emphasizing environmental sustainability for a healthier future in Saskatchewan and beyond." - Biswa

I want people in Canada to know that immigrants are always willing to help. We come here to contribute to the economy, help our cities grow, follow the rules, and generate positive changes. - Yoheh Valverde (Colombia)

Initial Arrival Experience

Did you already know anyone before you moved to Canada?

How did you prepare to move to Canada?

- "My aunt immigrated to Canada in the 1960s, but her knowledge of settlement services was limited. She assured me that things would improve when I arrived, mentioning that I would work at McDonald's, which excited me since I had always wanted a fast food job. At that time, there were no free arrival services, so my husband researched everything online, including the nearest school and park to my aunt's home. We did our best to prepare and familiarize ourselves with our new environment in Canada." - Roselyn
- "My family's move to Canada took nearly a year through family sponsorship, with at least five relatives helping us. At the time, the internet lacked useful information, so we only knew Canada was cold and that we needed thick jackets. I was largely unaware of cultural differences, lifestyle changes, or resources for newcomers, which made the transition daunting but also added an element of discovery once we arrived." - Sandy
- "We had been planning for it for around 15 to 20 years. More recently, we started researching various provinces and cities, the weather, affordability, universities that matched our professional profiles, the immigration process in different provinces, and began budgeting to move as international students." - Yoheh
- "To prepare for my move to Canada on a student visa, I researched colleges, gathered necessary documents, and attended orientation sessions in the Philippines to learn about my rights and support. I explored housing options and connected with other students online. Understanding COVID-19 protocols was also crucial. This preparation boosted my confidence about the opportunities for personal and academic growth in Canada." - Jayson
- "This was my first time traveling abroad, so I wanted to be as prepared as possible. I did a ton of research on Canadian culture and lifestyle, especially about life in Saskatoon. I even connected with some students in my lab at the University of Saskatchewan before I arrived. They gave me some great tips on everything from finding accommodation to navigating the city. I also spent a lot of time searching for housing online and finally found a great place to live." - Biswa

- "Yes, I have some relatives here that helped us when we arrived in Canada. I am really grateful for them." - Sandy
- "We had a friend of a friend here in Winnipeg, who shared her impression of Winnipeg, as well as suggestions, which allowed us to get a better idea about Winnipeg - particularly since all our friends are in other provinces. Unfortunately, by the time we moved, she had already moved to Kelowna, but she helped us with information about Winnipeg, the neighbourhoods, and life in general." - Yoheh
- "No, I don't have any relatives here. Most of my family lives in the U.S., which makes it challenging at times. However, I've been incredibly fortunate to connect with members of my church community here. They have really stepped in when I needed support the most—offering not only emotional guidance but also practical help. It's been a blessing to have that sense of community and belonging." - Clarice
- "Before coming to Canada, I didn't have any close connections. The only person I knew was a distant acquaintance—a friend's friend. This made the initial transition a bit challenging, but it also pushed me to explore and build my own network." - Hamda
- "Yes, I did. I was in contact with a researcher at the University of Saskatchewan. He was incredibly helpful throughout the whole process, from my initial application to settling in after I arrived. He really went above and beyond to make me feel welcome and answer all my questions about Saskatoon." - Biswa

Interviewees

Roselyn Advincula, Winnipeg, MB
Country of origin: Philippines



Sandy Yousif Saskatoon, SK
Country of Origin: Iraq



Camila Aguirre & Yoheh Valverde Winnipeg, MB
Country of origin: Colombia



Clarice De Guzman & Jayson Santos Saskatoon & Shaunavon, SK
Country of origin: Philippines



Hamda Ahmed Winnipeg, MB
Country of origin: Somalia



Biswa Patra Saskatoon, SK
Country of origin: India



The values of inclusivity and diversity in Canada also appealed to me, as I believe they create a welcoming atmosphere for newcomers. - Jayson Santos (Philippines)

[In my job] I am proud to guide newcomers through their initial months and witness their progress. It feels rewarding to be that source of support that I once needed. - Hamda Ahmed (Somalia)

As newcomers, we come here and have dreams, but sometimes it is hard to get started because we don't know where to go. We just need that one person to believe in us and help us find the right way or direction. For me, that is my driving force to work in this field. - Roselyn Advincula (Philippines)