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SURREY LOCAL IMMIGRATION PARTNERSHIP NEWCOMER NEEDS ASSESSMENT

April 2025



SURREY
LOCAL IMMIGRATION
PARTNERSHIP



Planning
Collaborative
Inc.

Thank you!

We are immensely grateful to the Surrey Local Immigration Partnership Council, the Immigrant Advisory Table, the Surrey Youth Newcomer Council, Surrey newcomers, service providers in the settlement sector and other community partners who took the time to share their personal perspectives with us. This report would not have been possible without your valuable input. Thank you for all that you do to make Surrey a genuinely welcoming and inclusive city.

Land Acknowledgement

The Surrey Local Immigration Partnership is located on the ancestral, traditional and unceded territories of the SEMYOME (Semiahmoo), ḱíćə́y̓ (Katzie), kʷikʷə́łəm (Kwikwetlem), ḱʷa:ńłə́h (Kwantlen), qíqéyt (Qayqayt), xʷməθkʷə́y̓əm (Musqueam) and s̓cəwəθən məsteyəxʷ (Tsawwassen) First Nations. The knowledge and traditions of these communities are significant in providing context to the work we do, and the Surrey Local Immigration Partnership recognizes the importance that reconciliation has in building truly inclusive and strong communities.



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Executive Summary

Surrey is a diverse, fast-growing community where 45% of the population consists of immigrants. Immigrants contribute to the city's vibrancy, economy, and social fabric but require supports to settle into and feel welcome in a new country and city. The Surrey Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) is a collective of community partners who collaborate to improve immigrant and refugee settlement and integration in Surrey so that all citizens can thrive. To be able to support those in the settlement sector and newcomers, it is important to understand the evolving needs of newcomers in Surrey.

Building upon the [Needs Assessment for Newcomer Services in Surrey \(2023\)](#) report, the objectives of this Surrey Newcomer Needs Assessment are to answer the following questions:

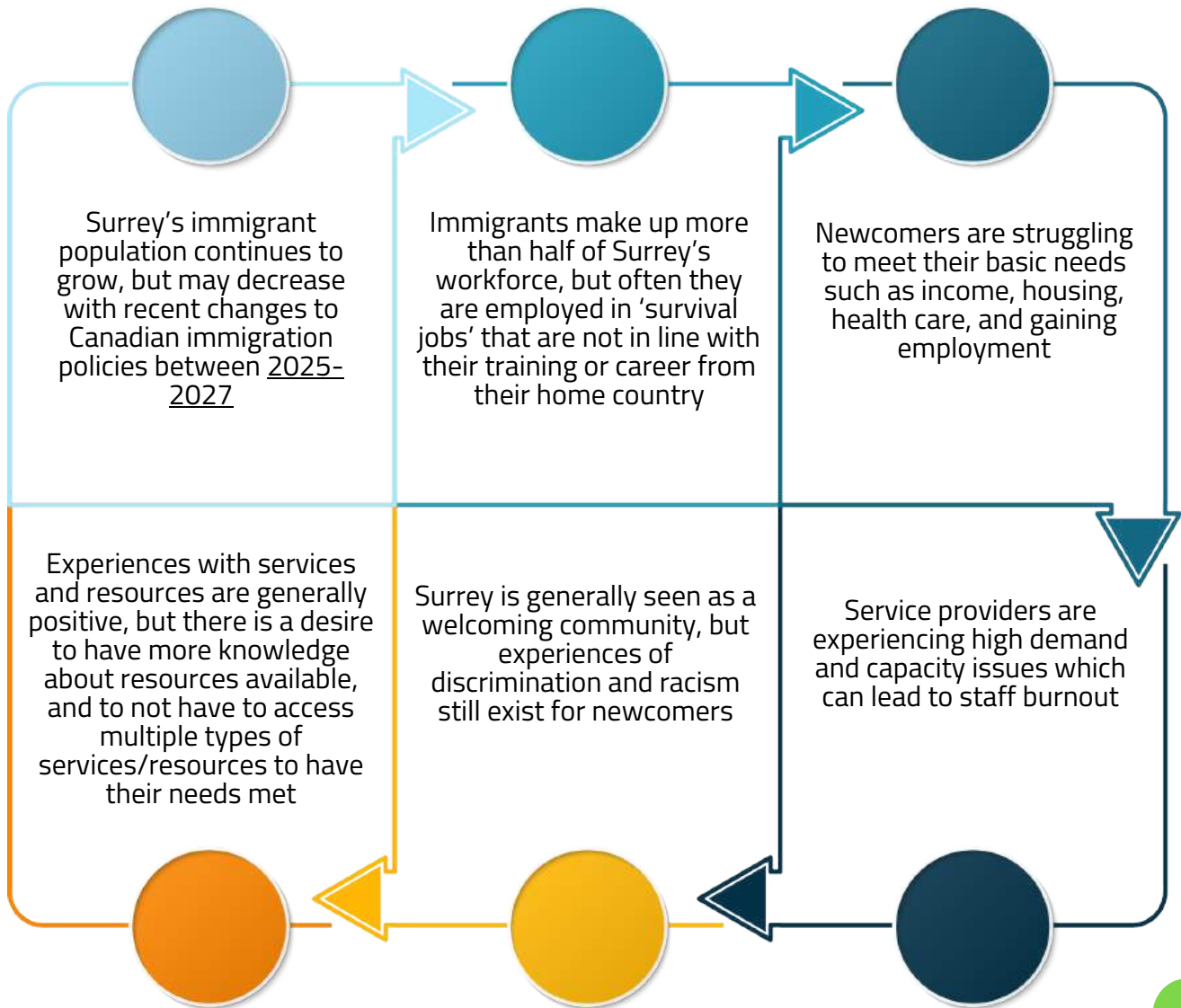
1. What are the primary needs, challenges and gaps faced by newcomers in Surrey?

2. How well are the current services and resources meeting newcomer needs?

3. What does a welcoming community look like in Surrey?

4. What role can the Surrey LIP and its partners play to support newcomers in Surrey?

Through research and community engagement, the following trends and needs of newcomers and the settlement sector in Surrey were identified:



The Surrey LIP is seen as playing a role in fostering collaboration and partnerships, research and knowledge-sharing, advocacy, and community engagement in order to improve services for newcomers in Surrey. With changes to the immigration and funding landscape in the years to come, the role of the Surrey LIP will be critical in ensuring that the evolving needs of newcomers in Surrey are met.



Introduction

Surrey is a fast-growing diverse city that welcomed 406,000 immigrants in 2021. From 2016 to 2021 the city's population increased by 51,000 people or 28 new residents each day.¹ In 2021, immigrants made up 45% of Surrey's population and of recent immigrants who arrived in the last 5 years to BC, 20% lived in Surrey.² Immigrants contribute to the city's vibrancy, economy, and social fabric but require supports to settle into and feel welcome in a new country and home. With recent federal announcements regarding changes in Canada's immigration policy, the immigration landscape in Surrey, along with the rest of the country, is evolving and it is essential to understand current and emerging settlement needs in the community.³

The Surrey Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) is a community-based initiative founded in 2014 through Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) funding and support.⁴ With over 45+ community organizations involved as the Surrey LIP Council, the goal of the Surrey LIP is to work towards an equitable and inclusive city where all residents can thrive.

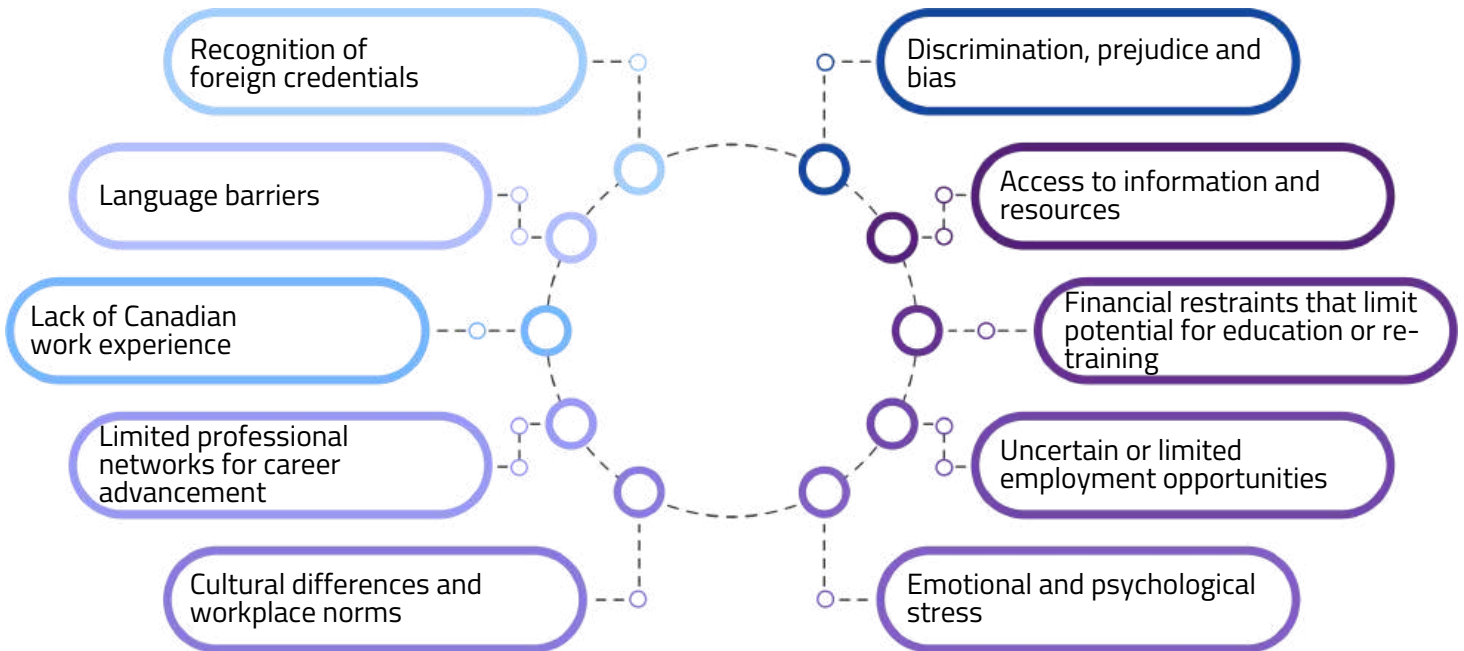
The Surrey LIP acts as a backbone agency for settlement services in Surrey, providing opportunities for research, advocacy, collaboration and partnerships to continue to meet the needs of newcomers.

The Surrey LIP is supported by advisory groups comprised of people with lived experience of the settlement journey such as the Immigrant Advisory Table, Immigrant Women Advisory Table, African and Caribbean Diaspora Table, and the Surrey Youth Newcomer Council.

LIPs are foundational sources of information and resourcing for immigrants and newcomers, and they can take the lead in supporting how well individuals and families feel welcomed within the community by encouraging their organizational partners and staff to create opportunities and activities for coming together and building relationships.



Much of the research on the well-being of newcomers in Canada emphasizes the following set of barriers faced by immigrant job seekers.^{5,6}



Other issues, like the current housing crisis, lack of digital literacy, limited access to culturally appropriate health care, and a lack of a strong professional and personal support systems can exacerbate those barriers and have a negative impact on the well-being of a newcomer's entire family.^{7,8}

It is important to note, however, that every newcomer faces a unique set of challenges and some people (e.g., women, people with disabilities, refugees) may experience more barriers than others.⁹ Settlement services play a large role in helping newcomers overcome these challenges and successfully settle in Canada.



Building on the [Needs Assessment for Newcomer Services in Surrey \(2023\)](#) report, this Surrey Newcomer Needs Assessment aims to answer the following overarching research questions that were co-developed with the Surrey LIP project team and informed by the Surrey LIP Council:

1. What are the primary needs, challenges and gaps faced by newcomers in Surrey?

2. How well are the current services and resources meeting newcomer needs?

3. What does a welcoming community look like in Surrey?

4. What role can the Surrey LIP and its partners play to support newcomers in Surrey?

Through research and community engagement with newcomers and service providers, the needs assessment provides a current snapshot of newcomer challenges, opportunities for services to provide continued support, and recommendations moving forward. The needs assessment is consistent with other research and plans undertaken by the Surrey LIP such as the current [Surrey LIP Community Plan 2024-2029](#), and should be read in conjunction with those documents.

With the landscape of immigration changing in the years to come, and on-going funding challenges to the settlement sector, the needs assessment will assist with program development and advocacy efforts to continue the important work of settlement and other community agencies to support newcomers and their families in Surrey.



Project Activities

The Surrey Newcomer Needs Assessment consisted of the following project activities which are summarized below.

Background Review

In the early stages of the project, 24 documents relating to the determinants of health and well-being among Surrey residents, particularly newcomers, were reviewed. Those documents included City of Surrey and Surrey LIP community profiles and plans, reports from local and regional non-profit organizations, and previous surveys of newcomers in Surrey.

In addition, a literature review of 'promising practices' in services for newcomers in Canada was completed, including what constitutes a welcoming community. Mostly grey literature was gathered for the review, but academic articles were reviewed when extra clarity was needed. Finally, a brief review of needs assessments done by other LIPs in Canada was completed, to learn from their approach and integrate it into community engagement planning.

Community Engagement

To learn from the lived experiences of newcomers, a variety of community engagement activities were completed from October 2024 to February 2025 including attending a Surrey LIP Council meeting, launching two surveys for Surrey newcomers and service providers, interviews with key informants, and focus groups with service providers and Surrey LIP Advisory Table members.

Engagement Activity	Date(s)	Number of Participants
Surrey LIP Council Meeting	October 2024	22
Survey for Newcomers	January – February 2025	138 ^a
Survey for Service Providers	January – February 2025	17
Key Informant Interviews	December 2024 – February 2025	4
Focus Groups (4)	December 2024 – January 2025	18

Table 1: Summary of Community Engagement Activities

^aThis number includes surveys that were completed and in progress, as any completed question was analyzed



Surrey LIP Council Meetings

Early in the project, the Surrey LIP Council was provided with an introduction to the project during the October 15, 2024, meeting. The meeting offered an opportunity to inform members about the needs assessment and to brainstorm key objectives and methods for community engagement activities. Members were provided with information about their role in the project such as providing feedback regarding survey questions, raising awareness about engagement opportunities, recruiting participants, and participating in engagement activities such as taking the Service Provider survey, helping people take the Newcomer survey, or attending interviews or focus groups.

Surveys

Two surveys were developed in partnership with the Surrey LIP project team: the Surrey Newcomer survey and the Service Provider survey. The Newcomer survey was translated into five languages: Punjabi, Spanish, Mandarin, Tagalog, and Arabic. However, due to technical challenges, the Arabic survey was only available as a paper copy. The surveys were available for six weeks from January to February 2025 and were hosted on Simple Survey, a platform that stores data in Canada.

Both surveys were promoted on social media by the Surrey LIP team, and a draw prize of \$100 for 25 random participants was advertised. Due to this, there were many bots that attempted to take the survey. The survey analysis team went through the surveys to identify and remove bot responses, but there may still have been some bot responses analyzed. Therefore, it is recommended that draw prizes not be advertised through social media in the future, and to interpret the survey results with caution.

Interviews and Focus Groups

Targeted interviews and focus groups were conducted with service providers and members of the Surrey LIP Advisory Tables. A total of four interviews and four focus groups were conducted, with two focus groups for service providers, one focus group for the Immigrant Advisory Table, and one for the Surrey Youth Newcomer Council.

Data Analysis

Quantitative survey data were analyzed using the Simple Survey analysis software, and qualitative responses from the survey, interviews, and focus groups were analyzed using MAXQDA data software by the LevelUp Planning team. Responses were anonymized to share with the Surrey LIP team.



Summary of Findings

Results from the background review and community engagement are summarized in the sections below.

Snapshot of Immigrants in Surrey

Results from the background review and community engagement are summarized in the sections below. The following section provides demographic information about newcomers in Surrey including population trends over time, languages spoken, education levels, employment information, and cost of living information. Where data are available, comparisons to Canadian-born Surrey residents or Metro Vancouver are provided. For more detailed information about immigrant demographics in Surrey, please see the [NewToBC: The Library Link for Newcomers, Immigrant Demographics Surrey, BC \(2023\)](#).

Population Trends

Surrey is a diverse city where 67% of the population identifies as racialized,^b with 38% of the total population in Surrey identifying as South Asian and 9% of the total population identifying as Chinese.¹⁰ Figure 1, below, shows a further breakdown of the racialized population in Surrey, as compared to Metro Vancouver.¹¹

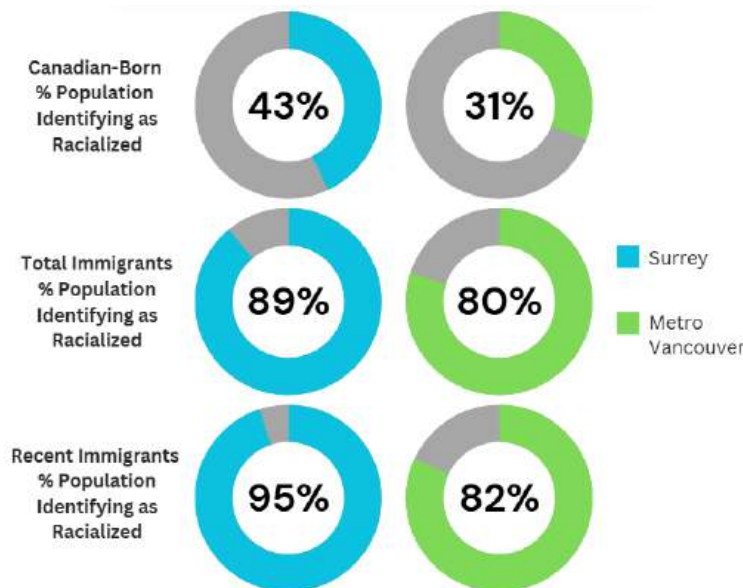


Figure 1: Racialized Population in Surrey. Source: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. New to BC: The Library Link for Newcomers. 2023. Immigrant Demographics Surrey, BC. www.NewToBC.ca

^b To identify racialized populations, Statistics Canada uses the term 'visible minority'. The Government of Canada defines visible minorities as persons, other than Indigenous peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour. The term has been rightly criticized as outdated and harmful, as it downplays the diversity of racialized communities and assumes whiteness as the norm.

Immigrants make up 45% of Surrey's total population (250,870 of 562,565 residents), meaning that nearly half of people in Surrey were born in another country.¹² From 2016 to 2021, the total population of Surrey grew by 10%, with the immigrant population growing by 14%.¹³ In 2021, 20% of recent immigrants to BC are in Surrey.¹⁴ The number of recent immigrants, those arriving within the last 5 years, settling in Surrey has remained relatively stable since 2016, as shown in Figure 2.

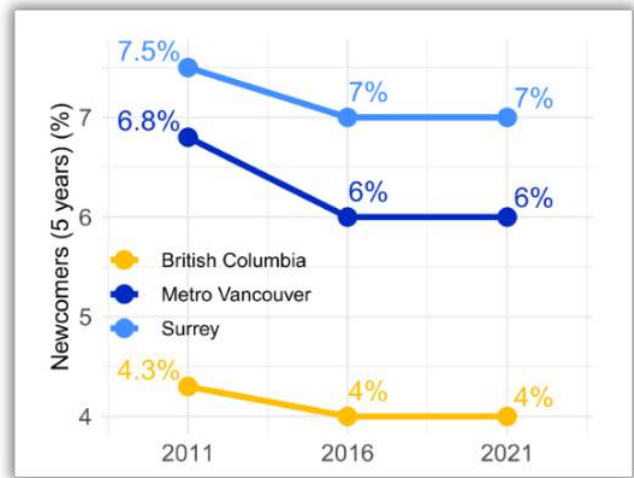


Figure 2: Population of immigrants 2011 to 2021. Source: Statistics Canada of Population (2011, 2016 and 2021).

The **top places of birth** among Surrey Immigrants in 2021 were:¹⁵



The **generation status of Surrey** immigrants in 2021 was:¹⁶

- First-generation (born abroad) 52%. Approximately a 6% increase since 2016.
- Second-generation (born in Canada with at least one parent born abroad) 26%. Slight decrease since 2016.
- Third generation or more (born in Canada with both parents born in Canada) 23%. Approximately 4% decrease since 2016.

Government-Assisted Refugees

Surrey received 70% of all Government-Assisted Refugees (GAR) arriving in BC, making it one of the top 5 municipalities in BC for GAR arrivals.¹⁷

International Students

There are 14,740 study permits for international students in Surrey, and they account for almost 3% of the total population in Surrey. Students from India represent 79% of these study permits. 61% of these study permits have been observed to be living in unsuitable housing,^c ranking as one of the top two municipalities in Canada to have the highest share of international students living in unsuitable housing. By comparison, less than 17% of Canadian-born students (ranging from ages 18-24) experience unsuitable housing.¹⁸



^cStatistics Canada defines housing suitability as whether there are enough bedrooms for the number of people living in the home.



Top languages spoken

Non-official languages are the most common for languages spoken at home for both recent and total immigrants in Surrey. Punjabi represents the most common language spoken at home amongst Surrey immigrants; 26% of total immigrants report Punjabi as the language spoken most often at home.¹⁹

Education

Immigrants between the ages of 25 to 64, and particularly recent immigrants to Surrey are highly educated, as noted in Table 2 below.

Level of Education	Immigrants in Surrey	Recent Immigrants (5 years) in Surrey	Canadian-Born Surrey Residents
Bachelor's Degree or higher	39%	53%	24%
College or University Diploma below bachelor's level	19%	17%	27%
Apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma	4%	3%	9%
High (secondary) school diploma or equivalency certificate	25%	19%	32%

Table 2: Level of Education among Immigrants in Surrey. Source: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. *New to BC: The Library Link for Newcomers*. (2023). *Immigrant Demographics Surrey, BC* www.NewToBC.ca

Employment

According to the 2021 Census, immigrants accounted for more than half of Surrey's work force.²⁰ The employment rate for total immigrants in Surrey was 59.2% and 66.7% for recent immigrants, which was greater than the employment rate for Canadian-born Surrey residents at 58.8%. However, full-time recent immigrant workers earned 11% less than immigrants and 26% less than Canadian-born Surrey residents.²¹ This could be attributed to the fact that immigrants often take lower paying 'survival jobs' as was described during community engagement. This is due to immigrants facing multiple barriers to restarting careers they had in their home countries such as a lack of recognition of foreign qualifications, language barriers, lack of Canadian work experience, limited professional networks, discrimination and bias.²²

Low Income

There has been a reduction in the rates of immigrants experiencing low income or poverty since 2015, but it still exists at a higher prevalence for immigrants than Canadian-born residents. According to the 2021 Census, 14% of recent immigrants, those who have been in Surrey for 5 years or less, experience low-income compared to 9% of all immigrants and 7% of Canadian-born residents in Surrey.²³ This is a reduction from previous Census 2016 levels, where 31% of recent immigrants and 17% of all Surrey immigrants experienced low income.²⁴

The map in Figure 3 below shows where recent immigrants are living in Surrey overlaid with poverty rates. Areas in dark brown show where high rates of poverty exist in Surrey and where many newcomer residents live.²⁵

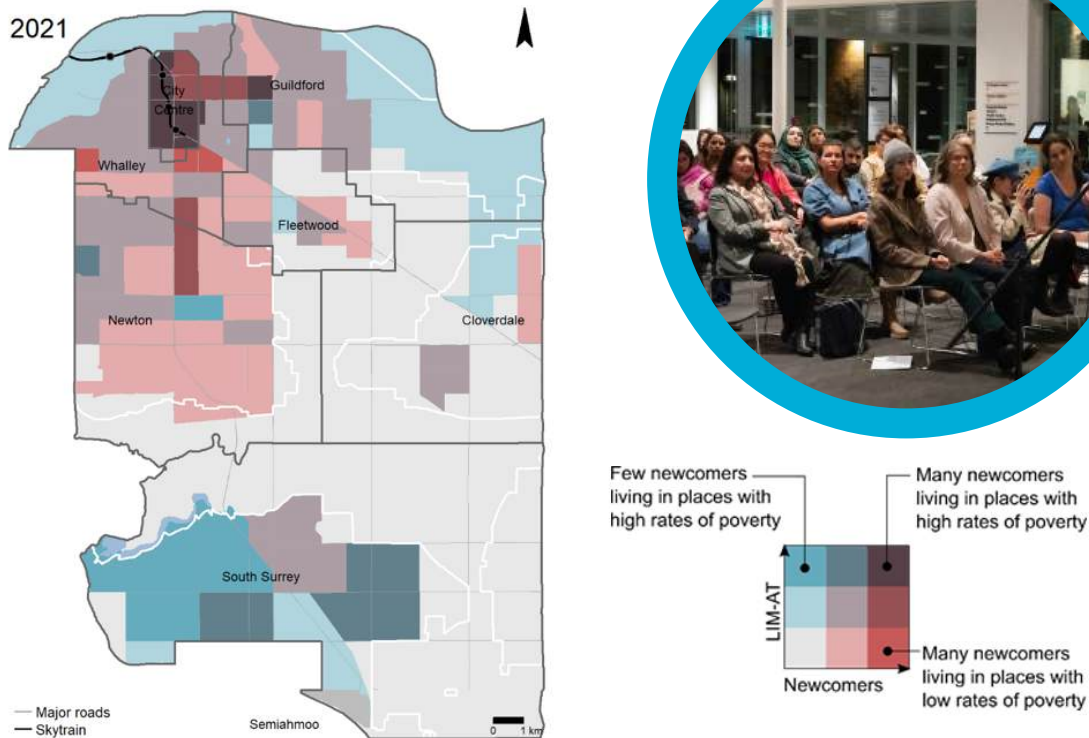
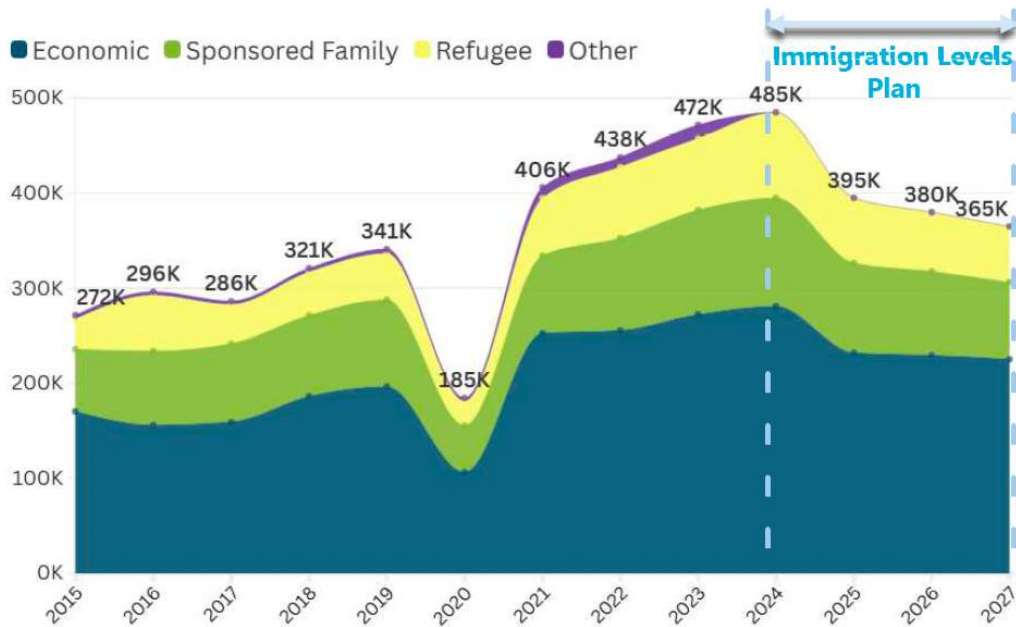


Figure 3: Newcomers in 2021 in Surrey as a proportion of the population and LIM-AT. Source Statistics Canada (2021).

Immigration Projections

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) recently released the 2025-2027 Immigration Levels Plan (Levels Plan), which sets targets for different types of immigration such as permanent residents, or those under economic, family, refugees and protected persons, and humanitarian and compassionate classes.²⁶ Overall, there is an anticipated decrease of 105,000 immigrants coming to Canada in 2025 compared to previous 2025 projections.

In addition, the Federal Government is aiming to reduce the number of temporary residents to 5% of the total population by the end of 2027, which includes temporary foreign workers and international students.²⁷ International students are being capped with an estimated 10% reduction in 2025 relative to 2024 targets. It is estimated that Canada’s temporary population will decline by 445,901 in 2025, and 445,662 in 2026.²⁸ While the specific projections for immigrants to Surrey are not known at this time, these decreased immigration targets will likely result in fewer newcomers settling in Surrey, and increased barriers for those seeking permanent residency status.



Canada - Admissions of Permanent Residents (#) by Immigration Category

Figure 4: Trends in Permanent Resident Admissions Over Time. Source: Surrey Local Immigration Partnership. (2025). *Evolving Immigration Landscape*. <https://www.surreylip.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Surrey-LIP-Factsheet-Final-for-CSE-Forum.pdf>



Newcomer Needs

The following section summarizes the needs of newcomers as identified by engagement participants through the surveys, interviews and focus groups.

**Question 2: Over the past year, what are some of the biggest challenges you or your family have experienced in Surrey?
Please choose all that apply.**

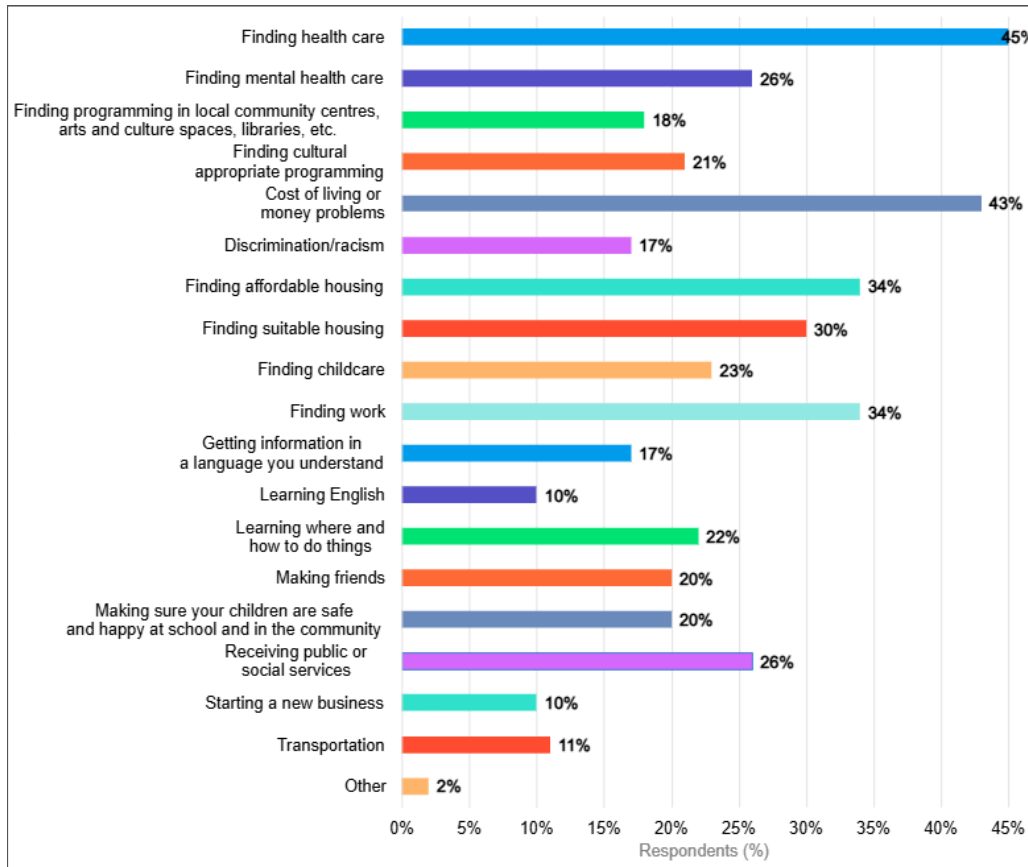


Figure 5: Newcomer Survey Question 2 Responses - Key Challenges

Basic Needs

"Help me access healthcare, mental healthcare and more housing options."
- Newcomer Survey participant

Meeting basic needs such as having an adequate income, housing, and health care were the biggest challenges noted by all engagement participants. People who responded to the Newcomer Survey ranked finding health care (45%, n= 57) and the cost of living or money problems (43%, n=55) as the biggest challenges they have experienced in Surrey over the past year. Finding affordable housing (34%, n= 44) and suitable housing (30%, n=38), defined as having enough bedrooms for the number of people living in the home, were also common challenges, as was finding work (34%, n=43). 67% of Newcomer Survey participants are spending more than 30% of their total household income on housing.

Question 3: Please select the statement that best describes your housing costs.

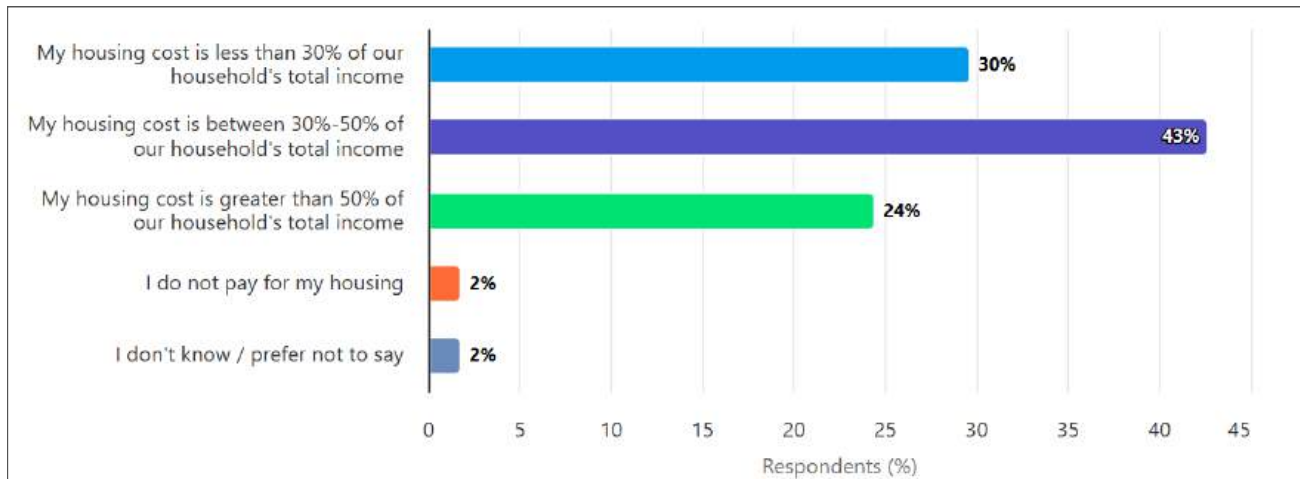


Figure 6: Newcomer Survey Question 3 Responses - Housing Costs

Health Care

“Our workers have to find and screen where can connect clients to health support. Challenges with language as if they don't speak enough English some clinics won't take our clients. Long waitlist for refugee clinics.”
-Interview participant

The shortage of family physicians was identified by participants as a barrier to getting connected to health care services in a timely manner. Other barriers to health care included long waitlists for refugee clinics and increased paperwork involved for physicians billing through the Interim Federal Health (IFH) plan for those who are not yet covered by the Medical Services Plan (MSP).



Mental health care was another common need identified by engagement participants with 26% (n= 33) of survey participants noting it as one of the biggest challenges experienced over the last year. Interview and focus group participants noted that the context with which newcomers arrive to Canada includes trauma and results in poor mental health. For example, refugees are often fleeing war and then facing cultural shocks and less support in their new home. These compounding factors lead to an increased need for mental health support which is often difficult to find due to long waitlists or not being available in their preferred language.

Employment

"Getting visa from government because skilled immigrants, but when arriving here credentials aren't recognized and need to go through many other processes to get to work."

- Interview participant

66% (n=74) of Newcomer Survey participants reported being employed full-time (35 hours or more per week), 15% (n=17) were employed part-time (up to 34 hours per week), while 20% were unemployed with 16% (n=18) of those unemployed looking for work. Additionally, 49% (n=55) of respondents noted that their current job is a good match for their education and experience while 28% (n=31) reported they are not.

Question 5: What is your employment status? (Check all that apply)

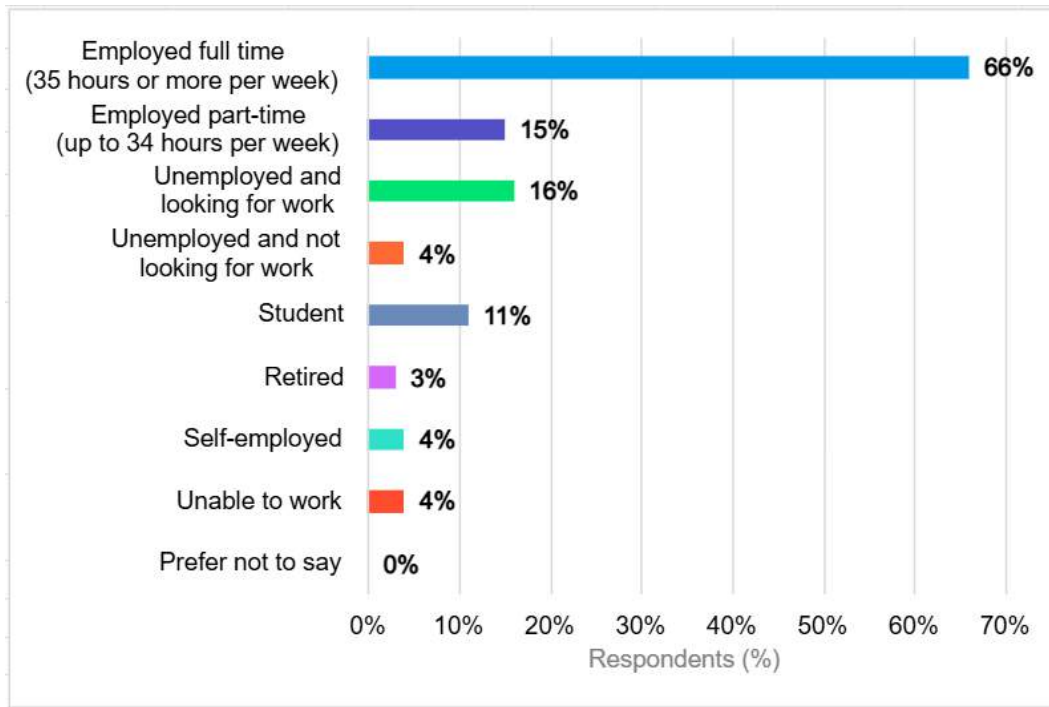


Figure 7: Newcomer Survey Question 5 Responses - Employment Status

As shown in Figure 8, respondents provided the following top reasons for thinking why their current job is not a good match for their education and experience:

- they need Canadian experience (49%, n=40);
- they need additional certification or education (38%, n=31);
- they have made a career change and need to have international credentials assessed (28%, n=23); and,
- their profession does not pay enough or is not hiring (23%, n=19).

Question 7: If your current job is not a good match for your education and experience, please select the reason(s) why you think that is. Please choose all that apply.

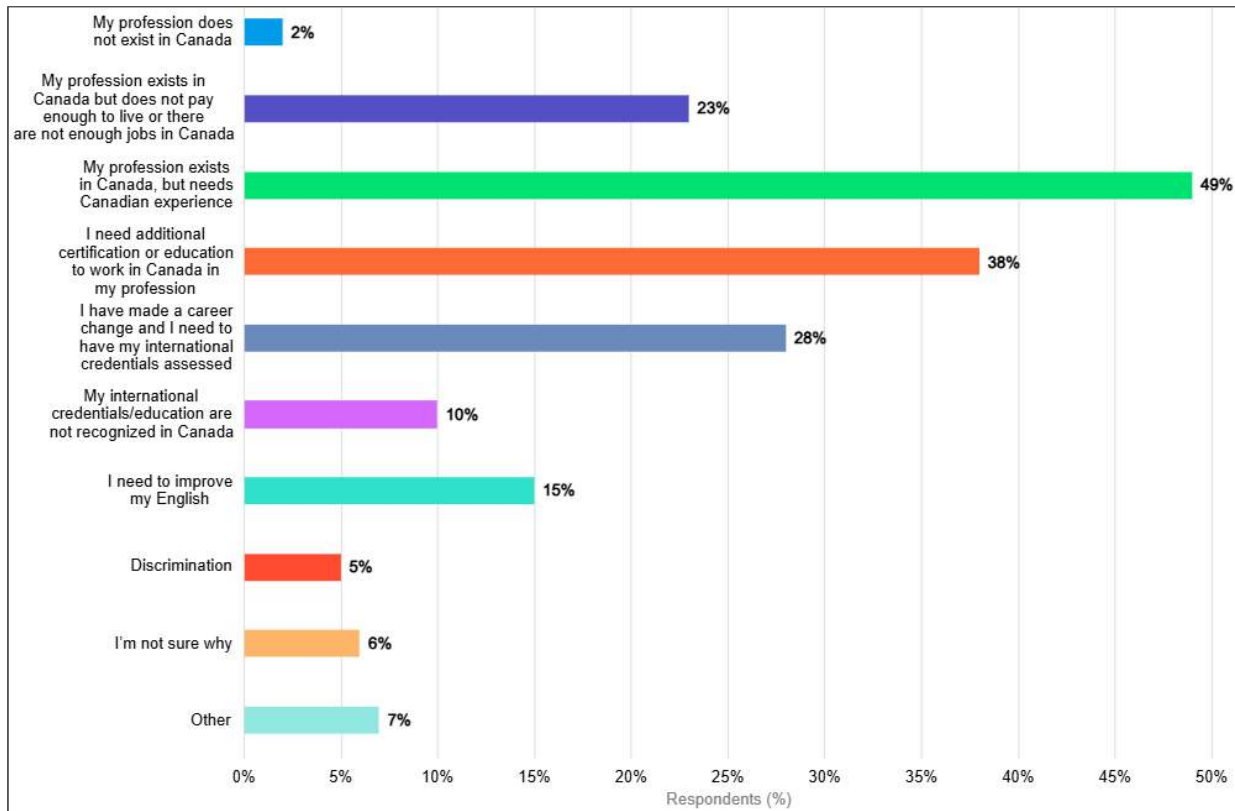


Figure 8: Newcomer Survey Question 7 Responses - Current Employment

Job qualifications were a common theme during interviews and focus groups with systemic barriers identified such as employment experience and foreign education not being recognized in the province. Changes in paths to working were also recognized by participants due to not everyone having the ability to go back to school for training and taking lower paying “survival jobs” instead. Discrimination, language, and inflexible hours were also seen as barriers to newcomers being unable to find adequate work.



Experiences with Services

“Some of the services I am not have any interaction or access according to my needs.”
 - Newcomer Survey participant

Settlement and government services not meeting needs was a common challenge faced by newcomers with 26% (n=33) of survey respondents noting receiving public or social services as one of the biggest challenges faced over the last year. Surrey has a variety of settlement, government, and non-government non-profit services available to newcomers and their families, as listed in the [NewToBC Library Link for Newcomers](#). However, engagement participants noted barriers to accessing services such as low awareness, needing to access multiple services at different locations, and long waitlists.

Interview and focus group participants also noted that newcomers are falling through the cracks due to not getting connected to services in a timely manner. Participants from the settlement service sector noted that newcomers are having to search for different services as services are not “all encompassing”, and many are online. The lack of digital literacy of some newcomers was then seen as an additional barrier to accessing services.

Newcomer survey participants noted that they are most likely to find information about immigrant services through social media (70%, n=71) or an online search (67%, n=68), with family/friends (46%, n=47), community centres (43%, n=44), and libraries (37%, n=38) also being common sources of information.

Question 9: How well have these services met your needs?

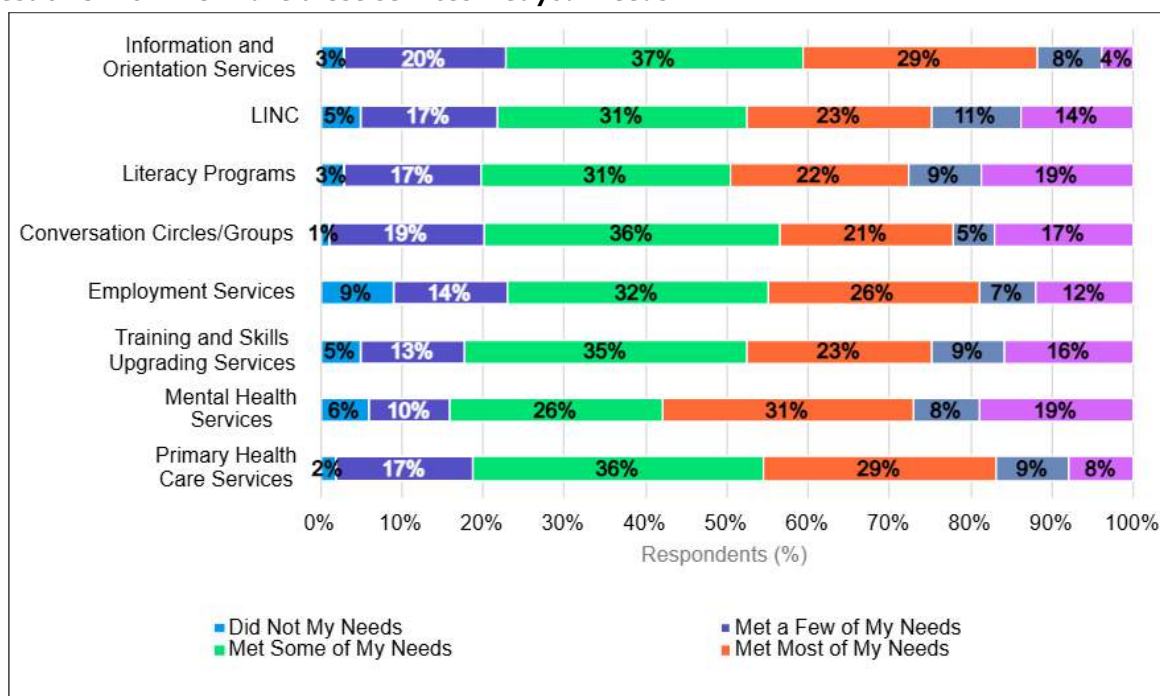


Figure 9: Newcomer Survey Question 9 responses – Services Meeting Needs

When asked to rank how well services such as information and orientation, language instruction for newcomers to Canada (LINC), literacy programs, conversation circles, employment services, training and skills upgrading, mental health services, and primary health care services have met their needs, most participants ranked all services as meeting some of their needs most often (26% to 37%). Approximately 30% of newcomer survey respondents ranked information and orientation services (29%), mental health services (31%), and primary health care services (29%) as meeting most of their needs. Alternatively, 22% to 23% of survey respondents noted that LINC, information and orientation services, and employment services did not meet or met a few of their needs.

Question 11: Thinking about your experience with agency staff, please tell us how much you agree with the following statements:

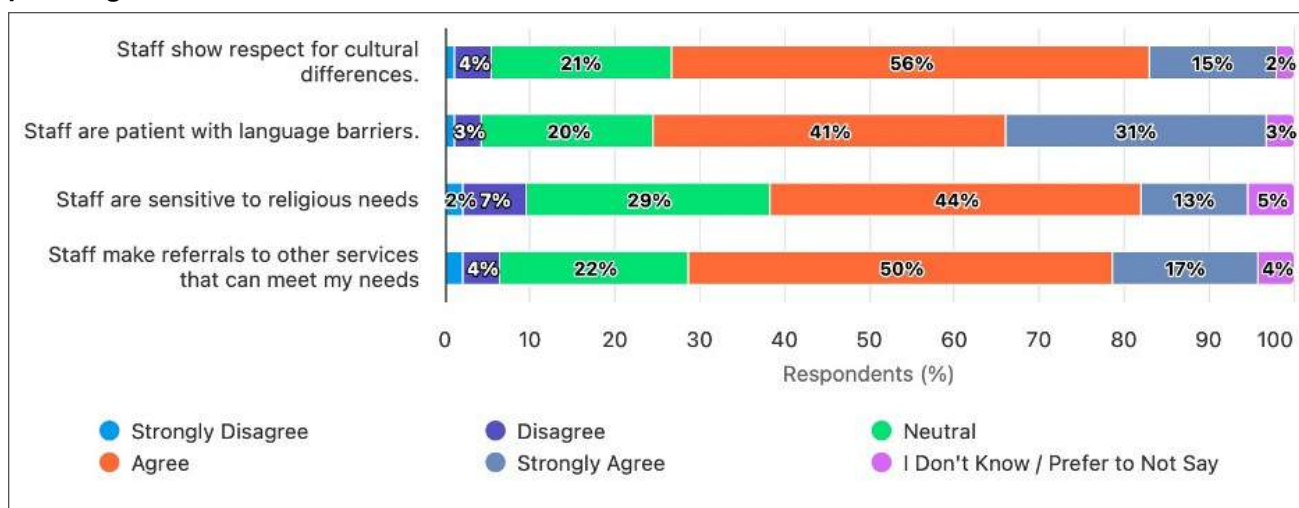


Figure 10: Newcomer Survey Question 11 responses – Experiences with Staff

The majority of Newcomer Survey participants agreed or strongly agreed that settlement service staff treated them with respect, were patient with language barriers, sensitive to religious needs, and made referrals to other agencies as indicated. Survey participants went on to explain that staff were friendly, offered personalized assistance, took time to understand their specific needs which made them feel valued, and encouraged them during challenging times.



“Many staff exhibited empathy and understanding, which made a significant difference during challenging times, helping me feel less isolated.”
 – Newcomer Survey participant

Question 14: How well have these Community Connection Services met your needs?

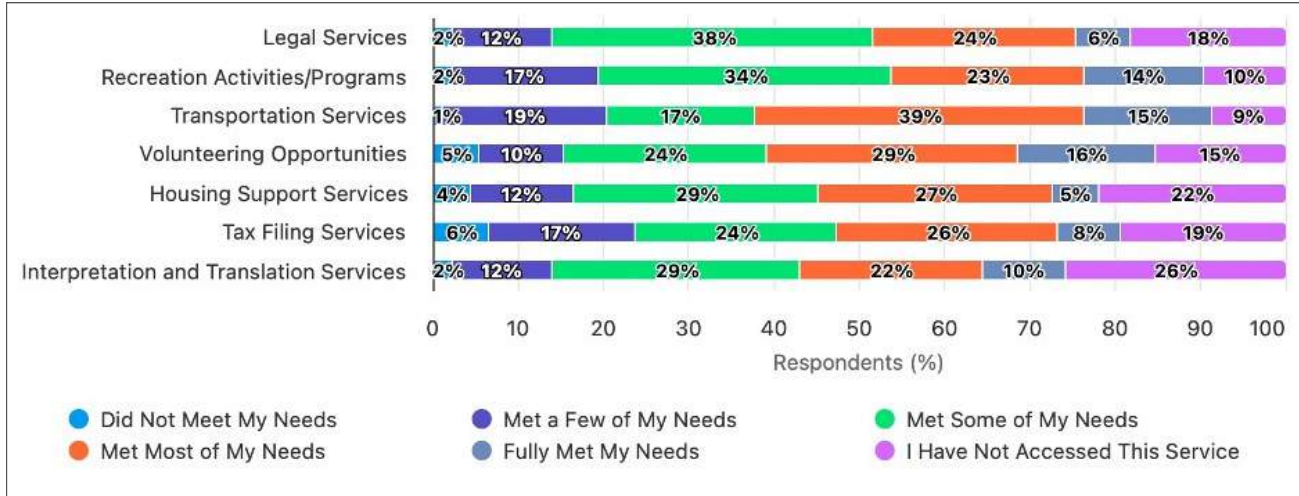


Figure 11: Newcomer Survey Question 14 responses – Community Connection Services Meeting Needs

Similar to settlement services, Newcomer Survey respondents noted that community connection services such as legal services, recreation activities, transportation services, volunteering opportunities, housing support services, tax filing services, and interpretation services met some or most of their needs, as shown in Figure 11 above. In addition, Figure 12 below shows the breakdown of how often supports are available when newcomers have used services. Ideas for improving services are provided in a later section.

Question 16: How often have the following supports been available when you have used services.

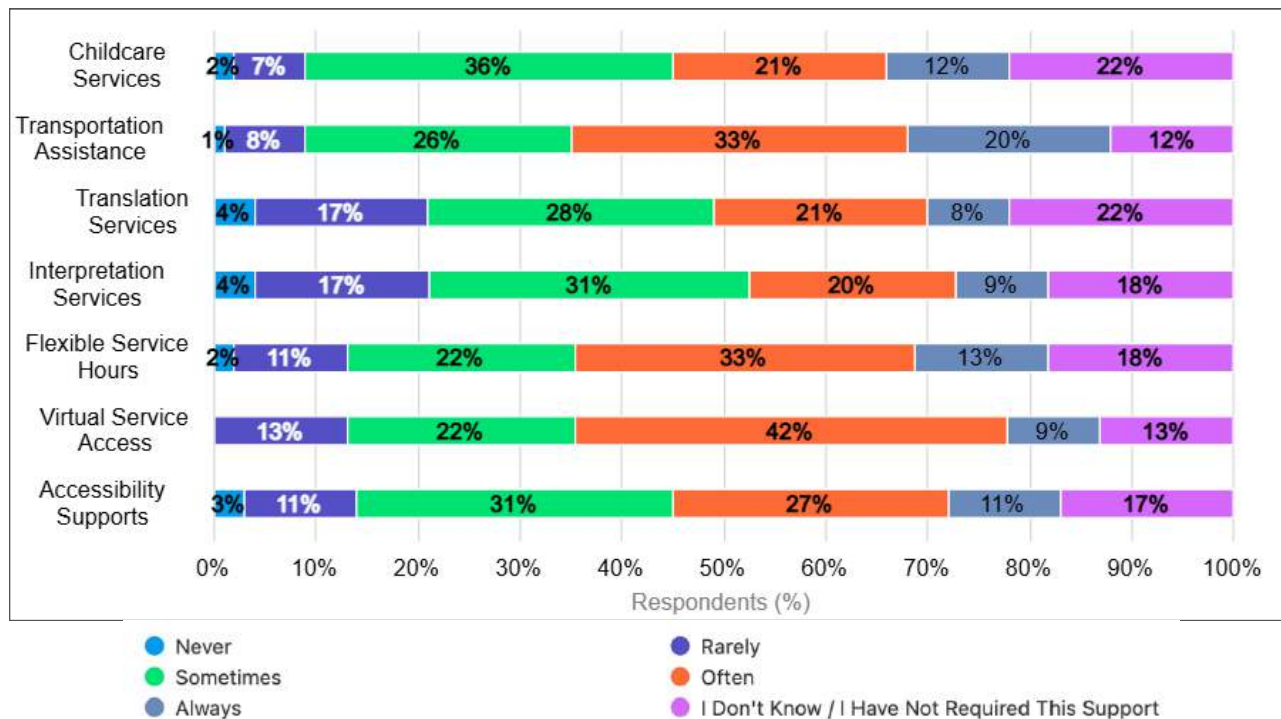


Figure 12: Newcomer Survey Question 16 responses – Availability of Supports

Welcoming Communities

Transitioning to a new country is a difficult task, especially if individuals are entering these new communities with fresh eyes and a minimal social network to depend on. It is imperative that immigrants and newcomers find accessible ways to become a part of the community to make sure that their well-being is supported and maintained by a good network, and that they feel welcome in their new communities.

Measuring Welcoming Communities

In March 2023, Measuring Welcoming Communities: A Toolkit for Communities and Those Who Support Them was published by Pathways to Prosperity.²⁹ The toolkit outlines categorized indicators for measuring a welcoming community and supporting efforts to enhance inclusion. As Surrey continues to welcome more newcomers on a yearly basis, ways to integrate and embed individuals and their families will be important.

"A welcoming community [is] a collective effort to design and sustain a place where immigrants feel that they belong and that supports immigrants' economic, socio-cultural, and civic-political integration. A welcoming community has structures, processes, and practices in place to meet the needs and promote the inclusion of immigrants in all aspects of life and actively works to ensure these are effective."

- Measuring Welcoming Communities Toolkit, p. 5

Using a 5-step approach, the Measuring Welcoming Communities toolkit starts with a current state assessment, moves into outlining goals, and then encourages implementation of activities followed by immediate and on-going evaluation (starting the cycle over again). Nineteen characteristics of welcoming communities are outlined each with dozens of indicators to be assessed against, and they include:

- Access to Affordable, Adequate and Suitable Housing;
- Access to Suitable Health Care, Including Mental Health Care;
- Immigrant-Responsive Municipal Features and Services;
- Educational Opportunities; and,
- Civic and Political Participation.

Tools to support a community organization's journey to assess its current state of welcoming are provided, including environmental scan questions (Tool 1), a ranking exercise to identify which characteristics are most important to the community (Tool 2), and indicator measurements to be utilized once priority characteristics have been identified (Tool 3). This toolkit can continue to support the evaluation of Surrey's newcomer services' welcoming efforts, which will only enhance the settlement experience of individuals and families in their new community.

Sense of Belonging

"It's been an amazing experience. I've met so many friendly people and felt a real sense of belonging."
- Newcomer Survey participant

56% (n=50) of Newcomer Survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "In Surrey, I feel a strong sense of belonging", which is highlighted in Figure 13 below:

Question 18: Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement "In Surrey, I feel a sense of belonging"

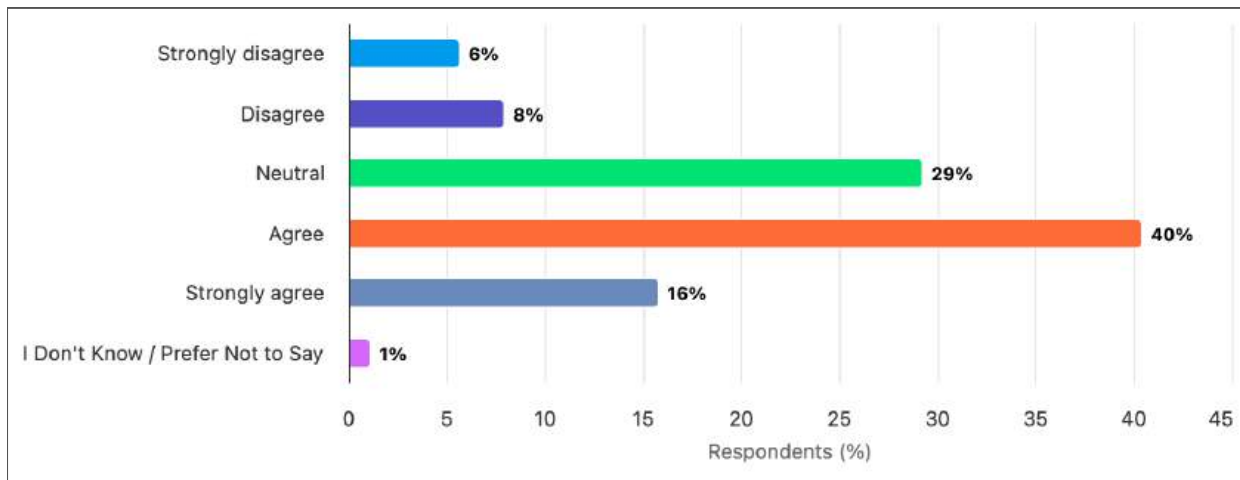


Figure 13: Newcomer Survey Question 18 Responses - Sense of Belonging



A strong sense of belonging can be attributed to neighbourhood and community connectedness through local events and activities, which can help to anchor newcomers during their settlement period. Surrey's multicultural nature was also noted by survey participants as a factor influencing their sentiment of belonging. As well, focus group attendees and survey participants stated that newcomer volunteer involvement was a way to create networking opportunities and to better learn about their new communities.

"I enjoy local events, but I think there could be more programs that allow newcomers to share their experiences with the wider community."
-Newcomer Survey participant

Overall, Newcomer Survey participants also agreed that Surrey is welcoming to newcomers. As noted in Figure 14 below, 76% (n=66) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Surrey is welcoming to newcomers while only 9% (n=8) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Question 19: Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement "Surrey Is Welcoming to Newcomers"

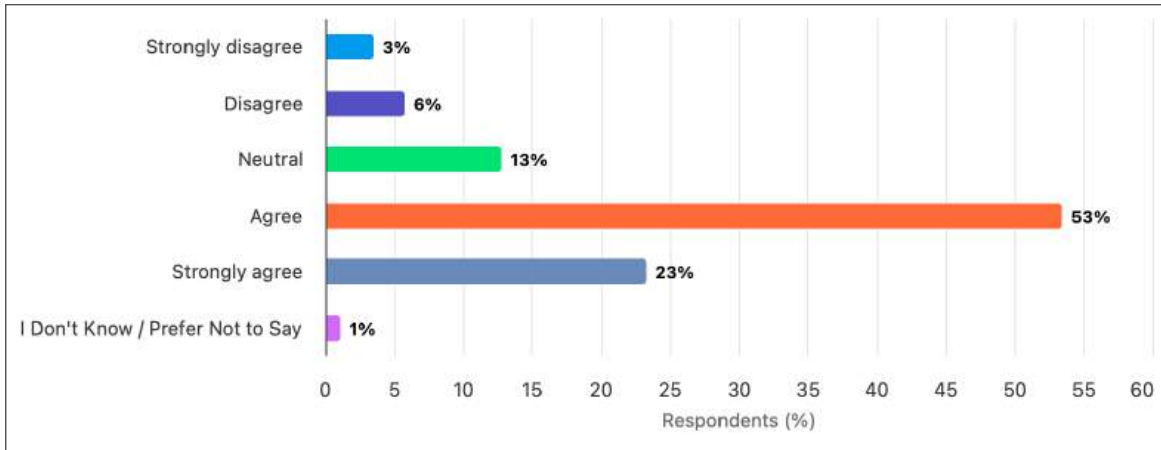


Figure 14: Newcomer Survey Question 19 Responses - Welcoming

45% (n=40) of Newcomer Survey participants agreed or strongly agreed that newcomer services were vital in enhancing feelings of welcoming. Available programming, resources, supports and activities were all highlighted as key for families to navigate both their first months to one year in Surrey and that the system can be confusing at times. Online groups were also discussed frequently by survey participants, connecting those who may be experiencing similar challenges to each other. However, some participants noted that they did not know about all of the neighbourhood activities or local events happening, despite living in Surrey for some time.

"Not knowing about these showcases how much disconnect is there between the residents and the city. I've been living here for 2 years with my family, but all this is sounds new to me."

- Newcomer Survey participant

While many have found Surrey to be welcoming, some have found it difficult to connect and engage with the broader community. Within the survey, some participants did note that making local connections can be difficult, especially with language barriers or differences in culture. There also may be friction between more established immigrants and newer immigrants, as noted by a couple of survey participants. Finally, the broader receiving community of Surrey has, at times, been found to be somewhat resistant to newcomers; this can prevent individuals and families from optimally settling into the city and making those key connections.



"Sometimes people from the same ethnic group who are born here discriminate against the newcomers. Combat misinformation about newcomers. Form groups, roundtables, events, where newcomers can connect with current residents of Surrey."

– Newcomer Survey participant

Discrimination and Racism Experiences

"Some residents may lack awareness of the challenges faced by immigrants, leading to misunderstandings and feelings of exclusion among newcomers."

– Newcomer Survey participant

While many respondents from across the survey, focus groups and interviews voiced that Surrey is a welcoming city where newcomers feel like they could belong, there were a number who noted that the community is not exempt from incidents of discrimination and racism. When asked about racist or discriminatory encounters that took place within the last year, two-thirds of survey respondents affirmed that this had been their experience (66%; n=57) as seen in Figure 15 below:

Question 22: In the last 12 months, have you experienced discrimination or prejudice in Surrey?

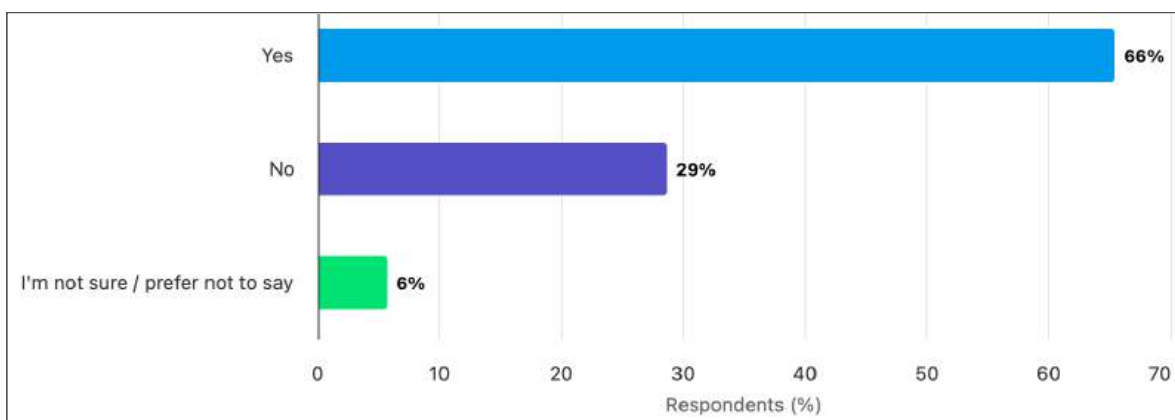


Figure 15: Newcomer Survey Question 22 Responses - Discrimination

When asked about the types of situations these negative experiences took place in, the top three places newcomers identified included (Figure 16 below):

- At a community or public event (43%; n=30);
- When applying for a job or a promotion (34%; n=24); and,
- At my job (e.g., from supervisors, coworkers, or clients) (29% n=20).

Question 23: If you did experience discrimination in the last 12 months, in what types of situations has this happened? Please choose all that apply.

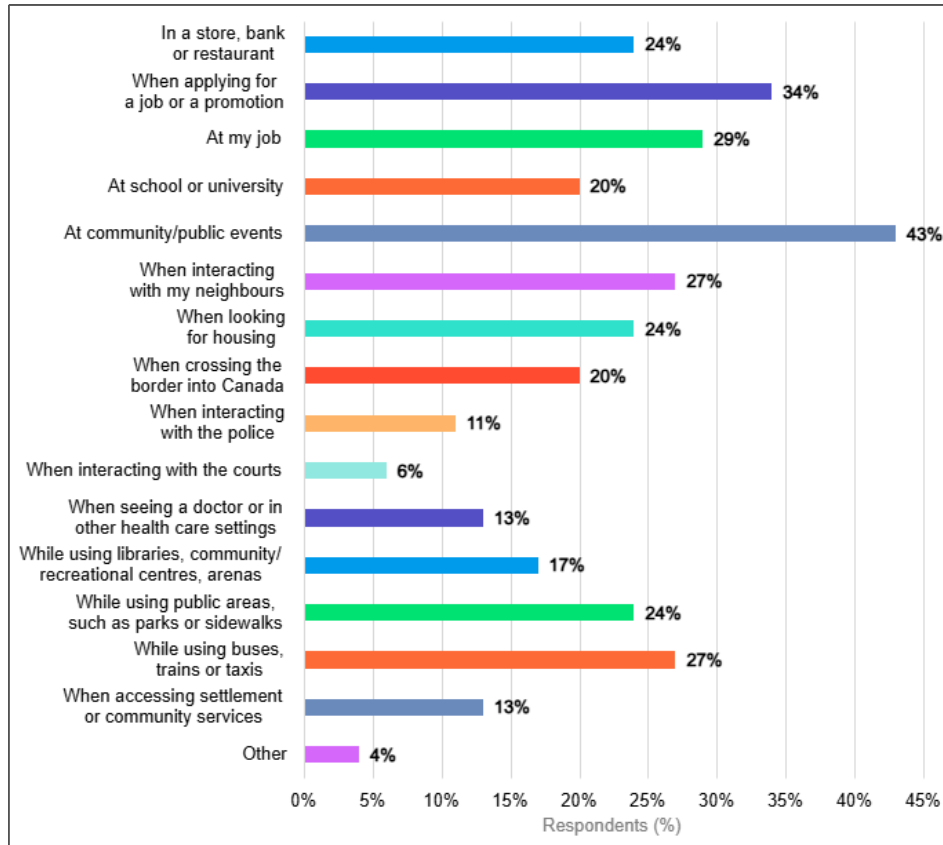


Figure 16: Newcomer Survey Question 23 Responses - Experiences of Discrimination

As for the potential reason why newcomers experienced racism and discrimination, a common theme noted in the Newcomer Survey was related to their accent or perceived lack of English-language proficiency. Language barriers make newcomers hesitant to engage in many types of services and with people in their communities; having negative experiences because of those barriers further exacerbates their feelings of not being welcome.

Service Provider Perspectives

“When we look at current need and supply of resources, it’s working but it’s not great. Need proper infrastructure, resources, and funding from government.”

- Service Provider Survey participant

The newcomer services that individuals and families rely on during their settlement period in Surrey would be nothing without the staff who provide foundational support. There are dozens of newcomer services within the city, which means that there are many doors for new residents to utilize when it comes to finding the resources that they need. This was noted as a strength in regard to the newcomer service landscape in Surrey; meeting the needs of as many recently settled individuals and families is the collective goal, no matter which service is utilized.

When asked about other strengths about the newcomer service landscape, service providers in both focus groups, interviews, and the survey stated that there is strong collaboration amongst organizations. Partnerships with other agencies, such as the partnership between Options Community Services and the Surrey Public Library, can socialize newcomers to different types of resources while being in a space that they are comfortable in or known to use.

If necessary, some services make referrals to other organizations or services to provide wrap around support for newcomers. As noted by service providers in the separate survey that they completed, services that they often or very often referred to included primary care services (61%, n=8), training and upgrading (54%, n=7), and mental health services (53%, n=7), as shown in Figure 17 below.



Question 2: Please think about the types of services for immigrants in Surrey, like settlement services, English language services, employment services and health services. How often does your organization make referrals to other organizations for the following services?

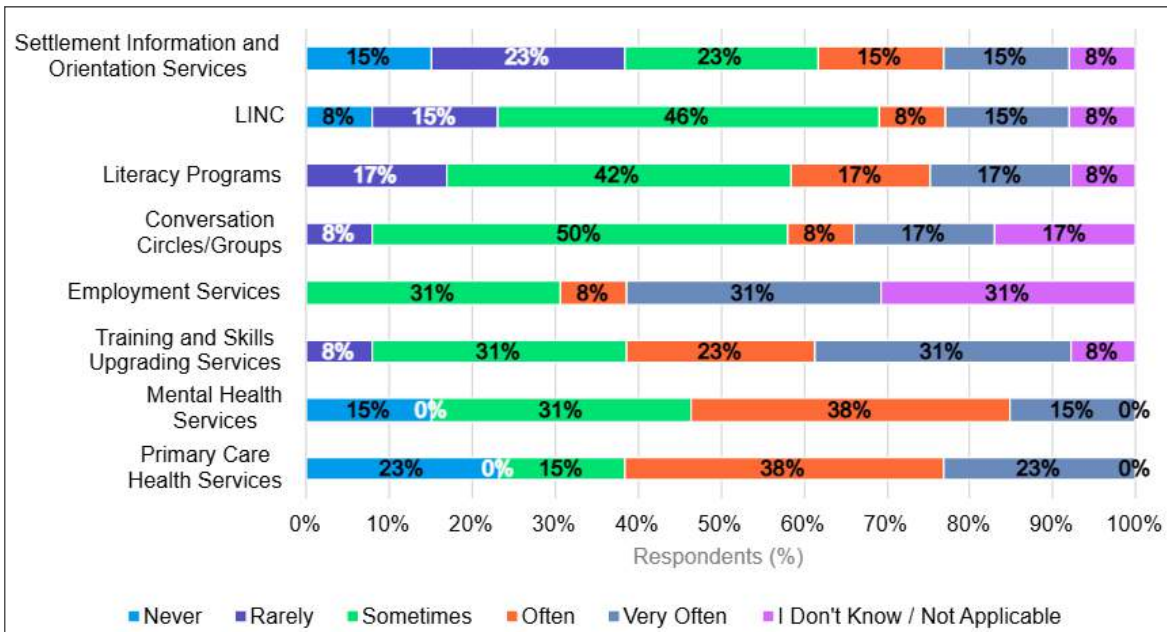


Figure 17: Service Provider Survey Question 2 Responses – Referrals to Other Organizations

“Community members and newcomers increasing...need increased funding to support the long-wait list.”
 – Focus Group participant

While collaboration occurs, an area for improvement is more formalized coordination of newcomer services. This has led to missed opportunities for collaborative efforts supporting newcomers in Surrey because staff at one organization may not know what activities or initiatives are taking place at another organization; 31% (n=4) of service provider respondents in the survey noted that they are dissatisfied with the overall coordination and collaboration initiatives among service supporting immigrants in Surrey. Subsequently, duplication or overlap occurs which can create inefficiencies and ineffectiveness of resources, as demonstrated in Figure 18.

Question 3: How often have you observed overlapping or duplicate services among organizations serving immigrants in Surrey?

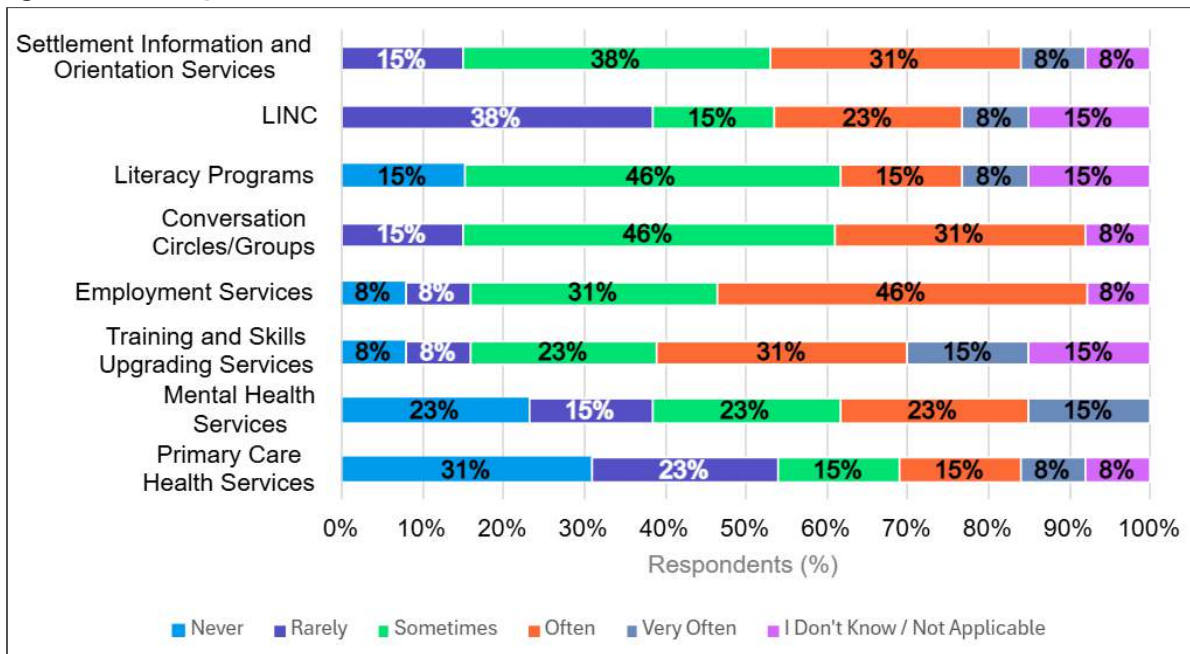


Figure 18: Service Provider Survey Question 3 Responses – Overlap and Duplication of Services



A consequence of duplication or overlap of services is a perceived competition for funding between newcomer services, as there is limited financial resourcing from different levels of government and other organizations. This sentiment was noted by both interviewees and focus group attendees; 69% (n=9) of survey respondents noted that they have observed competition over resources and funding in the newcomer service landscape often or very often.

Question 5: How often do you observe competition over funding and resources among organizations serving immigrants?

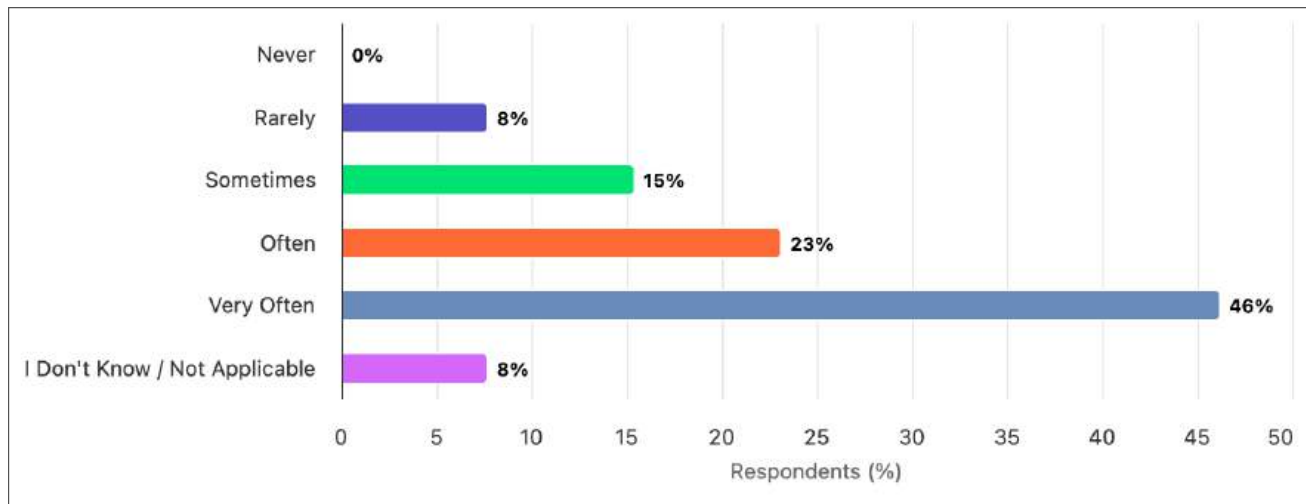


Figure 19: Service Provider Survey Question 5 Responses – Referrals to Other Organizations

Another significant issue impacting organizations serving immigrants in Surrey is limited capacity. As the number of newcomers engaging with the services is increasing, so are their complexities. Long wait times, under resourced staff (related to funding issues), and sub-optimal infrastructure (both physical and process) were noted across all levels of engagement. A service provider noted that it takes anywhere from 8 months or longer for individuals to wait for LINC English classes; another service provider highlighted that to serve the growing immigrant population, 40-50% more space is needed immediately. Immigrants may not be able to get the responsive support required to optimally adjust to their new environment, which can further impact their mental health.

“We don’t know what the new funding will look like, especially for small organizations. But the needs are still walking through our doors.”
– Focus Group participant

Staff who are facing these issues have the desire to provide timely support but come up against the barriers of time, overload, and burnout. In addition, focus group and interview participants noted the changing funding landscape of the settlement service sector with many organizations experiencing uncertainty about their funding in the coming years leading to more anxiety about how best to continue to support newcomer needs.

Ideas for Improving Services

"Enhance settlement services to provide personalized support for newcomers to help them adjust to life in Canada, such as finding housing, healthcare, and transportation."

- Newcomer Survey participant



Ways for services to better meet newcomer needs were identified by survey participants such as:

- Language or interpretation services;
- Offering more tailored settlement services;
- Raising awareness of services and resources available;
- Providing more opportunities for social connections with other newcomers and the local community; and,
- Navigating challenges such as housing, health care, child care, transportation, and the education system for their children.

Newcomer Survey participants went on to describe the need for more personalized information about:

- Immigration policies, procedures and requirements;
- Navigating the Canadian system as a newcomer;
- Finding housing that meets their needs (e.g., close to schools or near public transit); and,
- Navigating the public transportation system such as including maps and schedules in multiple languages.

More Resources

"Developing comprehensive online resource portals that provide easy access to information about all available services in multiple languages would be extremely helpful."

- Newcomer Survey participant

Interview and focus group participants noted the need for increased resources for newcomers, such as information about education/training programs, job readiness programs, newcomer rights, financial literacy, where to buy inexpensive goods, and mental health workshops offered in a trauma-informed approach.

Ideas for improved resource awareness included providing accessible materials in multiple languages on different platforms. For example, participants expressed wanting to have a centralized information hub where newcomers can access resources related to housing, employment, health care, legal services, and community programs. The use of social media to raise awareness was also suggested. Lastly, participants noted the need for service providers to conduct outreach programs to inform newcomers about available services, especially in underserved areas.

Language Support Services

"More accessible language support services would help me understand everything better."
- Newcomer Survey participant

Expanded interpretation services were another common theme for improving services. Newcomer survey participants noted the need for interpretation services in multiple languages to be readily available during appointments to help them fully understand information without language barriers. A suggestion to have language services be expanded to cover more dialects including less common languages was also provided. Streamlining processes for accessing translated documents and increasing the availability of free or low-cost document translation services were ideas to help newcomers complete necessary paperwork on time.

Opportunities for Social Connection

"Create a mentorship program where newcomers can receive guidance and support from experienced community members."
- Newcomer Survey participant

Opportunities for increased social connection and integration with longer-term Surrey residents was another idea provided by Newcomer Survey participants for improving settlement services. Suggestions included:

- Hosting regular cultural exchange events;
- The creation of volunteer programs for new immigrants to contribute and build connections to the community;
- Cultural integration programs to better understand Canadian norms and values;
- Offering more programs and community events for families to interact with other families and build a support network;
- Hosting regular networking events for newcomers to connect with local businesses and community leaders, and neighbourhood meet-ups or other social events to introduce newcomers to long-time residents; and,
- Mentorship programs that connect experienced parents with newcomers to provide practical advice and emotional support in navigating child care challenges.



Improved Transportation

"Improve public transportation services to make them more accessible and affordable for newcomers who may not have access to private vehicles."

- Newcomer Survey participant

Improving transportation in Surrey was another common theme identified by survey participants to help with their settlement needs in Surrey. Participants noted that there are issues with long wait times and overcrowding in buses resulting in late buses and being late for school, work, or appointments. The need for improved public transportation routes and schedules, including more frequency, was noted to help connect newcomers to key locations such as job centres, schools and community services more effectively. Information about accessible transportation options for people with disabilities and young families was also identified as improving access to services. Clear maps and schedules in multiple languages were another idea to improve transportation access in Surrey.

Accessibility and Inclusivity

"I think that combining childcare, transportation assistance, and flexible service hours into one service package would simplify the experience for families."

- Newcomer Survey participant

Increased accessibility considerations for people with disabilities were also suggested by survey participants. For example, participants noted the need for more physical accessibility in community centres and public buildings such as wider doorways, ramps and elevators to make services available for everyone. Another participant noted the need for more support for families with disabilities in general, including access to specialized services.

Offering additional language courses was identified to help immigrants of different proficiency levels. Having courses offered to older immigrants and during evening times was also suggested, especially for individuals who are working or attending other courses during the day. The creation of inclusive and diverse conversation circles to allow newcomers to practice English in a supportive environment was another idea that survey participants had to improve language skills.

Additional cultural training and awareness for service providers was offered as a way for staff to better understand newcomer needs and their personal circumstances. Participants noted that a lack of cultural sensitivity can affect communication and lead to increased misunderstandings. Survey participants also suggested to increase staff diversity to reflect the immigrant communities they serve, and in turn increase cultural safety.

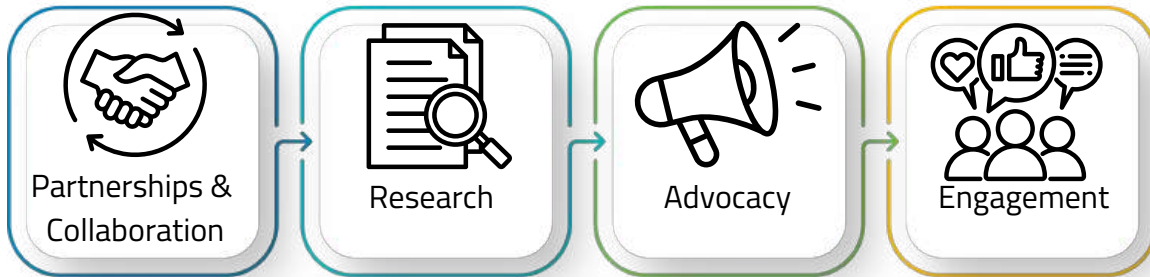
Surrey LIP's Role

"For all of our organizations, the base intent is to meet the needs of community in different ways. I would suggest sharing resources, expertise, and strategies for addressing the different challenges our communities need."

- Focus Group participant

Interview and focus group participants presented ideas for how the Surrey LIP could help improve the settlement services for newcomers. These included:

- Fostering partnerships and collaboration;
- Creating more resources for service providers and newcomers;
- Advocacy; and,
- Engaging newcomers.



Fostering **partnerships and collaboration** amongst community organizations was a main theme. Participants found LIP Council meetings to be helpful to provide feedback, learn about the work of other organizations, and participate in action-oriented working groups. There was a suggestion to explore how to better engage the private sector, something that the Surrey LIP is attempting through increased Council membership. In particular, there were ideas to better fill the gap between service providers and employers to help build relationships, facilitate collaboration, and provide education.

The Surrey LIP's partnership was valued as an opportunity to think about the overarching settlement service landscape, as often service providers are too busy in their day-to-day work to do strategic planning. A suggestion by interview and focus group participants was for the Surrey LIP to assist with creating better coordination between organizations, for example between the LIP, Surrey Board of Trade, library, City of Surrey, housing, partners, and grocery chain owners to help meet the basic needs of newcomers right away. Participants noted that services are fragmented but more streamlined services would better support service providers and in turn newcomers.

"Funding that the Surrey LIP gets is not enough to create more resources."

-Interview participant

The **research and resources** that the Surrey LIP develops for service providers were appreciated by interview and focus group staff, such as asset mapping, and data about newcomer demographics and needs. However, there was recognition that the funding that the Surrey LIP receives is not adequate to create additional resources for newcomers or service providers.

"Surrey LIP can advocate on behalf of us as we're not able to technically advocate."

-Interview participant

Advocacy was another main role identified by interview and focus group participants. The Surrey LIP was seen as having a closer connection with the different levels of government, and it was suggested that the LIP use a coordinated, team approach to advocate for the settlement sector and newcomers in general. The Surrey LIP was seen as being able to advocate on policies affecting newcomers such as immigration policies, housing, employment, mental health, and general funding for the settlement sector.

Engagement with newcomers was another suggestion for the Surrey LIP's role in improving settlement services and Advisory Tables were seen as one way of better engaging newcomers. Service providers shared their experiences of engaging newcomers and suggested that the engagement process needs to start early to help build relationships. Reciprocal feedback was also indicated as a way to build trust with engagement participants, for example, sharing the results of engagement with them.

Presentations and workshops were offered by focus group participants as activities that help with engaging newcomers, especially youth. Satisfaction surveys were a common way of learning from newcomers about how well settlement programs were meeting their needs.

Lastly, participants noted that newcomers need to be given opportunities to participate with service providers with some offering success stories about participants later becoming mentors in certain programs.

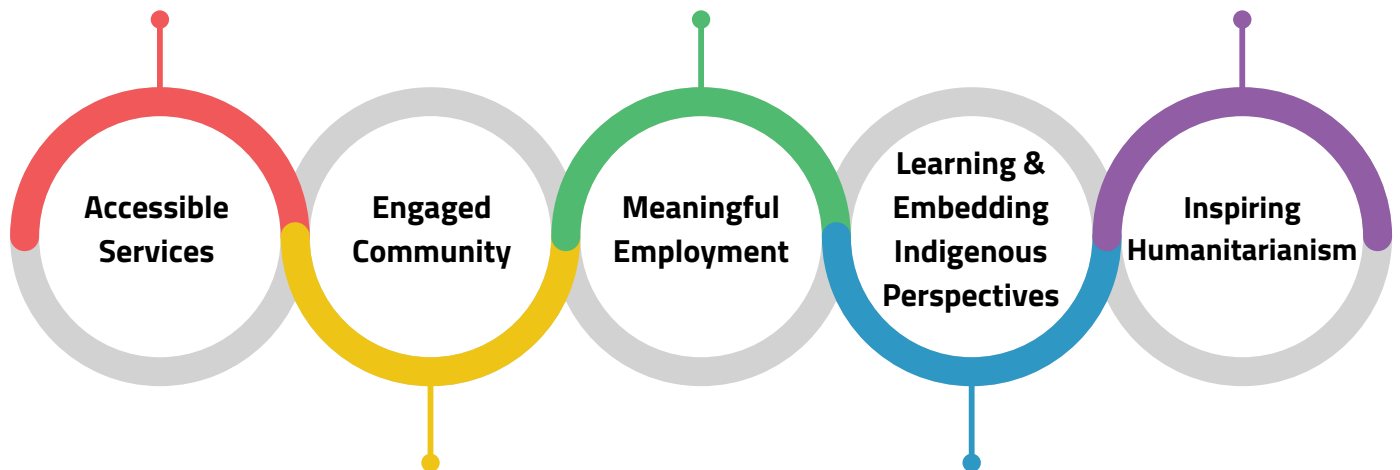


Recommendations & Next Steps

The landscape of immigrants in Surrey is evolving, but many of the needs remain the same since the previous needs assessment in 2023. With a mission to increase the capacity of Surrey to integrate and support immigrants and refugees, the Surrey LIP continually assesses evolving community needs. Top needs identified during the needs assessment included:

- Meeting basic needs such as income, housing, health care, and employment;
- Ensuring settlement services are expanded or streamlined to meet evolving needs;
- Feeling a sense of belonging in the community; and,
- Advocating for better policies that support newcomers and the settlement service sector.

The Surrey LIP is on the right track to meet these overarching needs through its current 2024-2029 Surrey Local Immigration Partnership Community Strategic Plan which focuses on the following five priority areas:



It will be important to continue to implement and evaluate this plan over the coming years to ensure needs of newcomers in Surrey are and continue to be met. It will also be important to partner with other levels of government to raise awareness about issues affecting newcomers, and to advocate for policies that are responsive to the emerging needs of this population.

The recent release of the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) 2025-2027 Immigration Levels Plan (Levels Plan), anticipates an overall decrease of immigrants coming to Canada over the next two years compared to previous projections. While the specific projections for immigrants to Surrey are not known at this time, on-going changes to immigration policies in Canada and these decreased immigration targets will potentially result in subsequent funding changes to the settlement sector.

In an already overburdened settlement sector facing increased uncertainty regarding future funding, it is timely for the Surrey LIP to take on a lead advocacy role in partnership and collaboration with the Surrey LIP Council members. Key functions of the Surrey LIP such as research, knowledge-sharing, fostering collaboration, and engagement are even more important during these challenging times in the settlement and immigration sector.

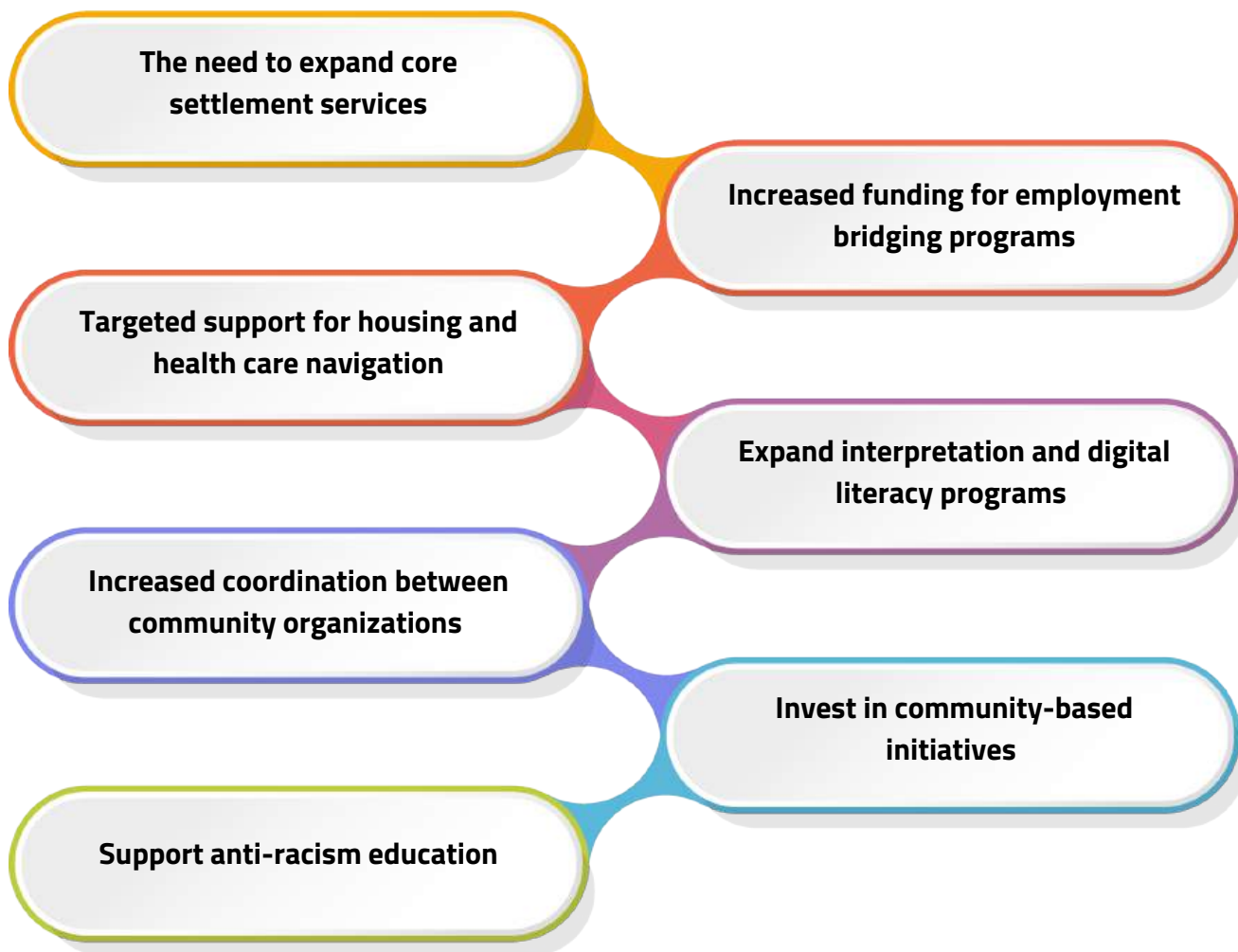


To address these pressing challenges, securing targeted funding will be essential for expanding core settlement services, improving service coordination, and investing in programs that directly respond to the specific needs identified in the assessment, such as employment support, housing navigation, and anti-racism initiatives.



Initial next steps could be for the Surrey LIP to come up with a Social Action Plan based on the current needs assessment and find opportunities to partner with the City of Surrey on this plan. The needs assessment provides the foundation for the Surrey LIP and Council to think about ways to address current and on-going newcomer needs.

For example, a Social Action Plan may include actions such as:



It would then be important to delineate roles amongst the Surrey LIP, Council, the different levels of government, and community partners in the Social Action Plan.

Sharing the results of the needs assessment with the Surrey LIP Council and the broader community will also be important to continue to build trust and relationships with newcomers and engagement participants. The settlement sector is full of a diverse group of individuals and organizations who are dedicated to supporting newcomers to Surrey, and the Surrey LIP will continue to play a supportive role in the important work that they do.



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Newcomer Survey

Introduction

1. Are you a newcomer to Surrey?

- Yes
- No

2. Over the past year, what are some of the biggest challenges you or your family have experienced in Surrey? Please choose all that apply.

- Finding health care
- Finding mental health care
- Finding programming in local community centres, arts and culture spaces, libraries, etc.
- Finding cultural appropriate programming
- Cost of living or money problems
- Discrimination/racism
- Finding affordable housing
- Finding suitable housing
- Finding childcare
- Finding work
- Getting information in a language you understand
- Learning English
- Learning where and how to do things
- Making friends
- Making sure your children are safe and happy at school and in the community
- Receiving public or social services (e.g., settlement services, government services, etc.)
- Starting a new business
- Transportation
- Other: _____

Housing

3. Please select the statement that best describes your housing costs (mortgage/rent, utilities, insurance, and property taxes):

- My housing cost is less than 30% of our household's total income
- My housing cost is between 30%-50% of our household's total income
- My housing cost is greater than 50% of our household's total income
- I do not pay for my housing
- I don't know / prefer not to say

4. Thinking about your current housing needs, please tell us how much you agree with the following statements (*Options: Strongly Agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; Strongly Disagree; I Don't Know/Not Applicable*)

- My current housing meets my needs today
- My current housing will meet my needs for the next 10 years
- My current housing needs improvements or repairs to remain livable
- My ability to stay in Surrey depends on finding decent affordable housing
- I do not currently have permanent housing

Employment

5. What is your employment status? (Check all that apply)

- Employed full time (35 hours or more per week)
- Employed part-time (up to 34 hours per week)
- Unemployed and looking for work
- Unemployed and not looking for work
- Student
- Retired
- Self-employed
- Unable to work
- Prefer not to say

6. Is/are your current job(s) a good match for your education and experience?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure
- Not applicable
- Prefer not to answer

7. If no or not sure, please select the reason/reasons why you think that is. Please choose all that apply.

- My profession does not exist in Canada
- My profession exists in Canada but does not pay enough to live or there are not enough jobs in Canada
- My profession exists in Canada, but needs Canadian experience
- I need additional certification or education to work in Canada in my profession
- I have made a career change and I need to have my international credentials assessed
- My international credentials/education are not recognized in Canada
- I need to improve my English
- Discrimination
- I'm not sure why
- Other: _____

Access to Immigrant-Serving Agencies that Meet Immigrants' Needs

8. What resources do you use most often to find information about immigrant services in your language?

- Community centres
- Library
- Online search
- Social media
- Family/friends
- Brochure
- Community event/resource fair
- Other: _____

9. How well have these Settlement Services met your needs? (*Options: Did not meet my needs; Met a few of my needs; Met some of my needs; Met most of my needs; Fully met my needs; I have not accessed this service*)

- Information and Orientation Services
- Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC)
- Literacy Programs
- Conversation Circles/Groups
- Employment Services
- Training and Skills Upgrading Services

9a. How could services better support your needs? (open-ended question)

10. Thinking about your experience with agency staff, please tell us how much you agree with the following statements (*Options: Strongly Agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; Strongly Disagree; I Don't Know/Not Applicable*)

- Staff show respect for cultural differences
- Staff are patient with language barriers
- Staff are sensitive to religious needs
- Staff make referrals to other services that can meet my needs

10a. What else would you like to share about your experience with staff?

11a. How well have these Individual and Family Services met your needs? (*Options: Did not meet my needs; Met a few of my needs; Met some of my needs; Met most of my needs; Fully met my needs; I have not accessed this service*)

- Child Services (0-12 years)
- Youth Services (13-18 years)
- Parenting Programs
- Family Counselling
- Women's Services
- Senior's Services
- 2SLGBTQ+ Services
- Disability Services
- Refugee Services

11b. How well have these Community Connection Services met your needs? (*Options: Did not meet my needs; Met a few of my needs; Met some of my needs; Met most of my needs; Fully met my needs; I have not accessed this service*)

- Legal Services
- Recreation Activities/Programs
- Transportation Services
- Volunteering Opportunities
- Housing Support Services
- Tax Filing Services
- Interpretation and Translation Services

11c. If you have any suggestions for improving these services, please share them.

12. How often have the following supports been available when you have used services (*Options: Never; Rarely; Sometimes; Often; Always; I Don't Know/I have Not Required This Support*)

- Childcare Services (e.g. on-site childcare)
- Transportation Assistance (e.g. public transit tickets)
- Translation Services (e.g. translated documents)
- Interpretation Services (e.g. availability of interpreters)
- Flexible Services Hours (e.g. support in the evening and/or weekends)
- Virtual Service Access (e.g. video calls)
- Accessibility Supports (e.g. physical access such as ramps/elevators in buildings)

12a. How could support be improved? (optional)

Welcoming and Sense of Belonging

Sense of belonging is when you feel accepted and valued by others around you. It is when you feel like Surrey is truly your home.

13. Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement:

In Surrey, I feel a strong sense of belonging.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
- I don't know / prefer not to say

Please tell us more. (optional)

14. Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement:

Surrey is welcoming to newcomers.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
- I don't know / prefer not to say

Please tell us more. (optional)

15. Please rate your level of satisfaction with the following statements related to sense of belonging (*Options: Very Satisfied; Satisfied; Neutral; Dissatisfied; Very Dissatisfied; I Don't Know/Doesn't Apply*)

- The availability and quality of local events and activities in Surrey
- The availability, quality, and openness of social and community networks in Surrey, including immigrant networks
- The intercultural understanding in Surrey
- Connections between immigrants and longtime residents of Surrey
- The respect and value that community members have given to immigrants in Surrey

15a. Please tell us more. What has it been like to participate in neighbourhood activities, local events, or online community groups in Surrey?

16. In the last 12 months, have you experienced discrimination or prejudice in Surrey?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure / prefer to not say

17. If you did experience discrimination in the last 12 months, in what types of situations has this happened? Please choose all that apply.

- In a store, bank or restaurant
- When applying for a job or a promotion
- At my job (e.g., from supervisors, coworkers or clients)
- At school or university
- At community/public events
- When interacting with my neighbours
- When looking for housing
- When crossing the border into Canada
- When interacting with the police
- When interacting with the courts
- When seeing a doctor or in other health care settings
- While using libraries, community/recreational centres, arenas
- While using public areas, such as parks or sidewalks
- While using buses, trains or taxis
- When accessing settlement or community services
- Other: _____

Demographics

18. What is your current status in Canada?

- Permanent resident
- Refugee claimant
- Canadian citizen
- Temporary resident (e.g. work or study permit)
- Other: _____

19. How long have you lived in Surrey?

- Less than 6 months
- 6 months to 1 year
- 1 -3 years
- More than 3 years
- Other: _____

20. What is your age group?

- 16-24 years
- 25-54 years
- 55-64 years
- 65+ years

21. What is your gender identity?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say
- Other: _____

22. Do you speak any of the following languages? (select all that apply)

- English
- French
- Punjabi
- Mandarin
- Tagalog
- Hindi
- Korean
- Cantonese
- Vietnamese
- Arabic
- Spanish
- Urdu
- Other: _____

23. What is your country/region of origin?

Prompt for Prize Draw

If you would like to participate in the draw, please provide your full name and email address below. Your contact information will only be used for the purpose of the prize draw and will remain confidential.

Full Name:

Email Address:

Thank you for participating in our survey. Your responses will help us to work with agencies to better support newcomers in Surrey!

To learn more about our work at the Surrey Local Immigration Partnership or to get in touch with our team, please visit: www.surreylip.ca