



Employment, Mobility, and Integration

EXPERIENCES OF IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE YOUTH IN METRO VANCOUVER



FRESH VOICES

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ABOUT FRESH VOICES AND VANCOUVER FOUNDATION

ABOUT FRESH VOICES

Fresh Voices emerged from a 2011 partnership between Vancouver Foundation and the Representative for Children and Youth in B.C., and offers a way for immigrant and refugee youth from across B.C. to engage in dialogue and action to identify and remove barriers to their success. The Fresh Voices initiative works with a Youth Advisory Team comprised of immigrant and refugee youth leaders from across Metro Vancouver. To achieve its goals, the initiative engages diverse youth from racialized immigrant and refugee communities, adult allies, and service providers and collaborates with key decision-makers to affect systemic change. In spring 2018, Fresh Voices transitioned from Vancouver Foundation to be a youth-led collective hosted by PeerNetBC.

ABOUT VANCOUVER FOUNDATION

Vancouver Foundation is Canada's largest community foundation. Working throughout British Columbia to connect the generosity of donors with the energy, ideas, and time of people in the community, the Foundation has been making meaningful and lasting impact in neighbourhoods and communities since 1943.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Fresh Voices Youth Advisory Team and Vancouver Foundation would like to acknowledge the unceded and traditional territories of the Coast Salish people, in which this study took place, and express gratitude to the more than 150 immigrant and refugee youth that participated and contributed their voices and experiences to this study.

Special thanks to the Fresh Voices Youth Research Subcommittee: Yansie Ardon; Tanvi Bhatia; Fadia Jouni; Sharif Mohammad; Truepayna Moo; and Vidaluz Ortuño Nacho for their valuable facilitation, translation, peer support, leadership, and ongoing feedback to develop the survey and conduct the focus groups.

Additional thanks to the following organizations and individuals: The Centre of Integration for African Immigrants; African Descent Society BC; MOSAIC Interpretation & Translation Services; Paul Mulangu; Yasin Kiraga Misago; Saw Joe Teeshara; and Nay Bu Taw. Their trusted relationships with young people and the support programs they continue to provide made youth participation possible.

In addition to a summary of findings, this report also includes references and citations of the various academic and non-academic studies and research papers that informed and inspired this study. Where applicable, the results from this study were analyzed in comparison to data and findings from similar physical, social and economic mobility questions in the My Health, My Community's "Transportation and Health in Metro Vancouver" survey which collected data from 33,000 participants ages 18 and up, in the Metro Vancouver region.

A group of people are sitting around a campfire at night. The fire is bright and glowing, casting a warm light on the scene. The people are silhouetted against the dark background, and their faces are partially illuminated by the fire. The overall atmosphere is cozy and intimate.

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Executive Summary

Youth make up a significant portion of newcomers to Canada, with approximately 34% under the age of 25. However, very little is known about refugee and immigrant youth in Metro Vancouver. This report is a high-level summary of findings of Fresh Voice's "The Employment, Mobility, and Integration Experiences of Immigrant and Refugee Youth in the Metro Vancouver Region" research project and makes recommendations for how policy makers and community organizations can help improve the integration and settlement experience of this youth group to our country.

The Fresh Voices Youth Research Subcommittee hosted three multilingual workshops (Vancouver, Surrey and New Westminster) with 156 self-identified immigrant and refugee youth (aged 13 to 30 and living in Metro Vancouver) to help answer the question, "***How does physical mobility, economic access, and social networks affect immigrant and refugee youth employment integration over time?***"

(cont'd on next page)

There were a few key highlights from the research for each main topic area. When discussing physical mobility, we found that public transportation is a critical element for access to education, employment, and social engagement, and it needs to stay affordable now as well as in the future.

Regarding economic access and financial security, we learned that respondents feel that they are better off now compared to when they first arrived in Canada, but it takes time (more than a single year). Resources to find jobs are often centered around their social networks from school, friends and family (not a technology/internet-first approach).

In the area of social belonging and community networks, we discovered that making physical and institutional space for youth matters, and the process is just as important as the outcome, as the process is an opportunity for youth to further develop networks outside school or work.

Based on the research and findings, we developed several recommendations.

When planning for physical mobility, invest in more frequent bus services during peak times, especially in areas outside of the City of Vancouver where the majority of new immigrants are settling. Consider community settlement services to develop a transit system and pass benefits orientation process, and a subsidized transit pass for new immigrant and refugee youth to support lessening economic pressures and reducing social isolation.

To assist newcomer immigrant and refugee youth in achieving economic access and financial security, create targeted opportunities for financially compensated internships that provide mentoring opportunities and support quicker economic security and successful integration. Time is not “free” as these youth try to balance education, work, and family.

To improve feelings of social belonging and community networks, create opportunities to meaningfully engage face-to-face to build social connections. Additionally, government agencies and community services are encouraged to include immigrant and refugee youth when developing outreach processes, public policies, and community programs. Lastly, support youth-centered spaces and programs within an intersectional framework to reflect these youths’ multidimensional, layered, and complex lives.

The study has found that physical mobility, economic access, and social networks are key elements for facilitating successful settlement process and employment integration of new immigrant and refugee youth. It has also shown that institutions, physical infrastructure, and public policies have tremendous influence in shaping the lives of young people. The findings have also shown that meaningful process and engagement are important, as youth want to be part of the decision-making processes related to the policies and systems that directly affect their lives. It is an area that can always benefit from additional consideration and learnings by government, policy-makers and organizations when designing programs and services for young newcomers.

Purpose, Context and Background

PURPOSE

As there is limited data and few research studies on local immigrant and refugee youth communities in the Metro Vancouver area, Fresh Voices wanted to further understand the challenges facing these newcomer youth to inform the policies, programs, services, and community networks that they navigate.

This research study listened and gathered information about the experiences of immigrant and refugee youth on how physical mobility, economic access, and social networks affect immigrant and refugee youth employment integration over time.

The study's research process strengthened youth grassroots leadership development and encouraged youth engagement in active civic participation, as well as raised awareness of refugee and immigrant youth experiences within the wider community.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Providing protection to refugees is part of Canada's international humanitarian commitment, and over the years, Canada has welcomed thousands of immigrants and refugees. Every year, Canada takes in one out of every 10 refugees who are resettled globally, and it is anticipated that British Columbia will receive between 39,000 and 42,000 sponsored immigrants and refugees annually. The number of undocumented refugees is unknown, and the number of displaced people impacted by conflict and persecution will continue to grow as there is much political turmoil all over the world.

Integrating new people into an existing community is a long-term process and has always been challenging. As previously mentioned, youth make up a significant portion of newcomers to Canada with approximately 34% of all newcomers to Canada under the age 25. The youth cohort is in a critical period of social and economic integration into society through the completion of formal education and the transition into adulthood and work life.

Since 2011, Vancouver Foundation's Fresh Voices initiative has hosted summits, regional dialogues, and multi-day community forums that have convened over 1,000 immigrant and refugee youth from across B.C, but primarily the Metro Vancouver region, to explore issues facing immigrant and refugee youth. One of the main priorities identified through these gatherings has been access to employment.

To build upon the work of the Fresh Voices initiative, Vancouver Foundation contracted Celene Fung and Andy Yan as researchers to conduct a study to provide a broad snapshot of employment integration experiences of these youth living in Metro Vancouver by examining three dimensions of mobility.



Research

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

The theoretical framework for this research project was underpinned by the conviction that consulting with the community is the most effective method of understanding the challenges and needs of refugee and immigrant youth. The primary data was obtained through a survey in three community settings, facilitated and led by the Youth Research Subcommittee from Fresh Voices.

The survey was completed by individual participants and facilitated in a structured manner, thus ensuring that each respondent was asked the same questions in the same order. This is important because it ensured data consistency.

The study means to illustrate the collective experience of self-identified immigrant and refugee youth living in Metro Vancouver. The survey sample is not statistically derived and the interpretation of research findings are limited by the nature of the research parameters and design. Participants' self-assessments may limit the response veracity. The research study was developed as an "Open Tool Set," where the methodology and community engagement processes can be adopted and scaled to examine different geographic regions and selected demographic target groups.

This research is intended to be a pilot project, and further research is needed to fully understand this unique demographic cohort of Canadian society.

QUESTION AND TERMINOLOGY

The research question, developed through discussions with Vancouver Foundation staff and members of the Fresh Voices Youth Advisory Team, was ***"How does physical mobility, economic access, and social networks affect immigrant and refugee youth employment integration over time?"***

The three main dimensions of mobility in this research study included physical mobility, economic access, and social networks. In reviewing current literature, there were many different terms, definitions, and technical nuances. For this research, the following definitions and context statements were used:

- **PHYSICAL MOBILITY** is defined as the way people move around the community and allows them to reach desired goods, services, activities and destinations¹. To be able to move efficiently around one's community and within the region is important as it takes time, effort, and financial resources. It is assumed that access to reasonable, efficient, and safe transportation can help newcomers integrate within a community. The ability to easily reach a destination is important as it lessens social isolation and provides access to employment and services outside the home. Physical mobility includes moving around by public transit (bus, Canada Line, Skytrain, West Coast Express), car, bike, and walking.

- **ECONOMIC ACCESS** is defined as the ability to gain financial security, most often obtained through employment. Financial security is important for personal independence and long-term successful integration. Economic access is challenging for many young people, and for refugee and immigrant youth in particular, as they may face other challenges such as language and cultural barriers, difficult household socio-economic circumstances, and access to employment opportunities². Refugee and immigrant youth may become at-risk if they cannot access sustainable and well-paying employment.
- **SOCIAL NETWORKS** are defined as the people and places that make one feel supported and connected in the community. The network helps bring people together for social interactions and facilitates the development of relationships. Social inclusion can be perceived as an individual's access to social support and sense of community belonging. It also means being engaged and having input into decision making in your community³. When individuals feel part of a community or social network there is the belief that help is available when needed, and it can be a key avenue for seeking and securing employment. Social networks are often built by engaging with members of existing community groups such as attending a place of worship, interacting with neighbours, making new friends with classmates and workmates, volunteering, and participating in community-based programs.

PROCESS AND REFLECTIONS

Since 2011, Fresh Voices has always sought to work in partnership with immigrant and refugee youth to create spaces that value their lived experiences and allow youth to articulate their own realities with the support of peers and adults. As meaningful youth engagement is the pillar of the Fresh Voices work, the process was youth-led.

Members of the Fresh Voices Youth Advisory Team (YAT) were actively involved in the research development and engagement process. A research subcommittee was formed with five YAT members who led the recruitment and outreach process via their peer networks, schools, and social media. Tanvi Bhatia was hired as a youth research assistant to help coordinate the research subcommittee, assist with outreach and recruitment, and manage and provide advice to the overall study.

The outreach and promotional materials were translated into eight different languages: Arabic; Cantonese; Mandarin; Farsi; Karen; Punjabi; Spanish; and Tagalog. These were also the languages in which the YAT members were able to facilitate the surveys and provide translation support for their peers if needed. Fresh Voices hosted three multilingual workshops (Vancouver, Surrey and New Westminster) with a total of 156 youth participants.



Youth involvement and leadership throughout the research process ensured the study was relevant and meaningful, strengthened study outcomes, and enabled overall project success. The research project was successful as it gave underrepresented youth an opportunity to engage within their community, share their experiences, and have a sense of ownership over the study's results.

The research process was just as important as the research findings. Youth leadership, teamwork, and facilitation skills are transferable to other areas of young people's lives. Many of the participants expressed gratitude to be members of Canadian society and for the opportunity to share their experiences with the larger community as it was their first time participating in civic life.

The youth research participants all received a small honorarium of \$50 as Vancouver Foundation valued their time and commitment, and recognized that for many young immigrants and refugees, committing up to 3.5 hours to participate in a research study meant time away from family obligations, work, finding work, or school-related commitments.

For more in-depth information about the respondent's profiles, full results of each question, research findings, conclusions, and recommendations, please view or download the full report at www.freshvoices.ca or www.vancouverfoundation.ca.



Reflections on the Youth-Led Process


by **Tanvi Bhatia**, Youth Research Assistant

One of the unique successes of this project was finding access to a population on whom very little research has been done. This is due in a large part to the research process, which was designed to ensure that the population being researched, immigrant and refugee youth in Metro Vancouver, was involved every step of the way, from designing the research question and survey, to giving final feedback on the presentation of the results.

I was hired from among the Fresh Voices Youth Advisory Team as a Youth Research Assistant alongside five others who volunteered to take charge of recruitment and facilitate the focus groups. Together with the researchers, we went through the first draft of the survey and gave our feedback, indicating areas which may have been unclear or inaccessible to young people, especially those with limited English language skills. Our feedback was incorporated into the design of the survey, and we reviewed the final draft before our first focus group.

For each of the three focus groups, the facilitators were responsible for recruitment. They reached out through their pre-established connections with their communities and with other immigrant and refugee youth to find survey participants, using their trusted relationships to create the level of safety many young people needed to feel comfortable participating in the research. This allowed us to exceed our goal of 100 respondents as youth piled into our focus groups, not only to share their experiences, but to be in a space with others with similar backgrounds. This was also a way to make social connections and learn more about how to get involved in their communities.

The focus groups were led by myself and the facilitators, who were dispersed at different tables around the room. At the beginning of each session, youth were encouraged to pick up an information sheet (translated into various languages), familiarize themselves with the research, and ask questions if they had any. The facilitators then introduced themselves including what languages they spoke, and encouraged youth with language barriers






to sit at a table near someone who spoke the same language. The facilitators offered translation support and guided them through complicated questions, sometimes working one-on-one with participants to walk them through the survey. After each focus group, the facilitators gathered with myself and the researchers to debrief and discuss challenges and improvements that could be made for the next focus group to make youth more comfortable answering the survey questions.

Youth involvement continued for long after the focus groups. I shared the duty of inputting data from the many surveys, watching as trends began to emerge. Once the findings were compiled into an initial presentation by the researchers, I met with the facilitators to discuss the results, identify key components of the findings, and make recommendations on how to best present this information to the greater population of immigrant and refugee youth.

A key element of this process was the recognition of the time and energy young people put into making this research project successful. Participants were provided with transit tickets and food on the days of the focus groups, and both participants and facilitators were given an honoraria. Providing compensation was important in showing young people that their time is valued and recognizing that they are not simply research subjects, but real people who are directly affected by the issues being researched. In other words, what better way to conduct research about employment opportunities for immigrant and refugee youth than by employing immigrant and refugee youth?

I believe that the success of this project can be credited to the continual and appropriately compensated involvement of immigrant and refugee youth, a population underrepresented in research, but greatly affected by a variety of different social issues. The model used by Fresh Voices and Vancouver Foundation to conduct the research can and should be used to conduct further research on this population.

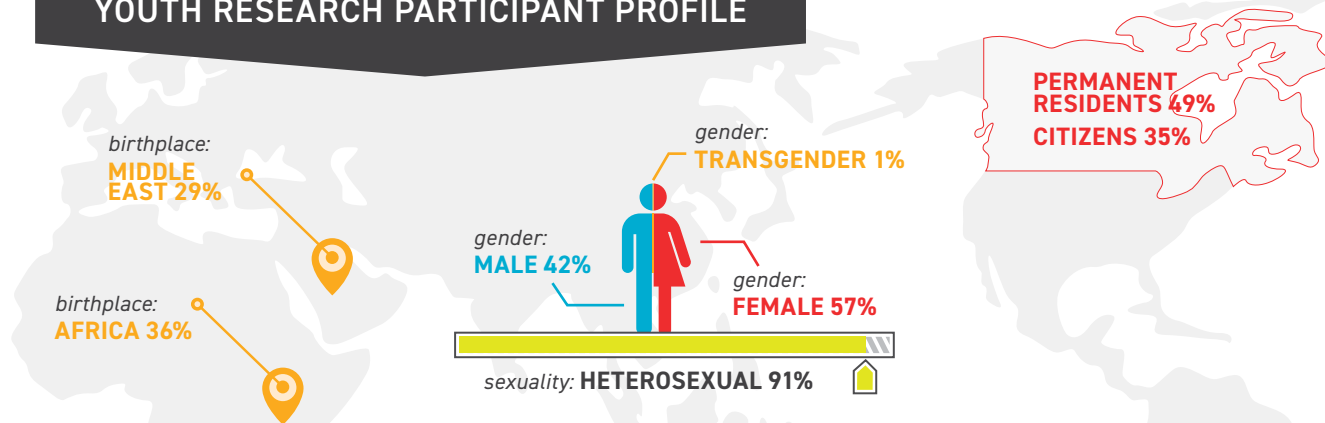
Findings



A word cloud graphic on a dark t-shirt, featuring various terms related to migration and social justice. The words are arranged in a circular pattern around the central word 'education'. The words include: policy, equity, equality, opportunity, safety, citizenship, fairness, journey, family, immigration, anti-racism, allyship, anti-sexism, systems change, refugee, and migration.

policy
equity
equality
opportunity
safety
citizenship
fairness
journey
family
immigration
anti-racism
allyship
anti-sexism
systems change
refugee
migration
education

YOUTH RESEARCH PARTICIPANT PROFILE



The immigrant and refugee youth research participant profile:

- Age range: 13–30 years old, with an average and median age of 19.
- Education: 86% of respondents were in school, with 49% in secondary school.
- Gender: 57% of respondents were female, 42% were male, and 1% were transgender.
- Sexuality: 91% of respondents identified as heterosexual.
- Citizenship: 49% of respondents were permanent residents and 35% were Canadian citizens. The average number of years in Canada was 6.5 and median was 5.75.
- Birth place: Respondents' birth places were diverse, but the top two geographic regions were Africa (36%) and the Middle East (29%).
- Language: The majority of respondents were fluent in English and spoke a variety of languages. The top three languages were Swahili, French, and Arabic.
- Location: Respondents primarily settled in Surrey, Burnaby, and Vancouver (similar to the geographic distribution of 2016 Census immigrant population).
- Living situation: The majority of respondents lived at home with parents and siblings. Family sizes were larger, with an average household size of four (compared to Metro Vancouver's average household size of 2.5). Respondents lived in a variety of homes and were equally distributed amongst apartment, townhome and single-family home types. The majority (70%) rent.

PHYSICAL MOBILITY

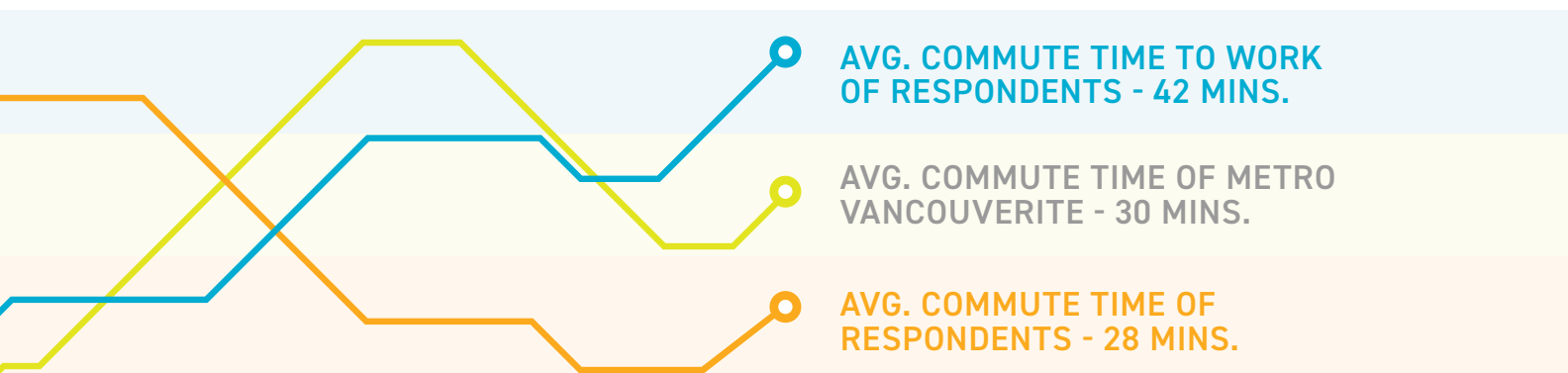
Access to reasonable, efficient, and safe transportation can help newcomers successfully integrate within a community. The ability to easily reach destinations is important as it lessens social isolation and provides access to employment and services outside one's home.

FINDINGS:

- 81% of respondents are considered 'Active Transportation' users (compared to 43% of the Metro Vancouver's general population).
- 49% of respondents use transit as their main form of transportation (compared to 29% of the Metro Vancouver's general population).
- 61% of respondents use transit daily and 60% are very comfortable using transit.
- 60% of respondents live less than 400 metres (less than a five minute walk) from the closest transit stop.
- 77% of respondents that need to travel outside their community are going to post-secondary school.

ADDITIONALLY:

- Respondents' average commute time is 28 minutes (similar to the 30 minute commute time of Metro Vancouver's general population).
- Respondents' average commute time to get to work is 42 minutes.
- Most respondents use the Compass Card as their main way to pay for transit.
- Respondents feel that they have a hard time reaching recreational places (e.g., outdoor regional parks within Metro Vancouver).
- Respondents' main concern with using transit is that they find it expensive, followed by inconvenient schedules and routes. (Note that the use of public transportation is not necessarily whether a connection is available, but frequency of service).
- If respondents are not using transit, it is primarily because they have access to other forms of transportation.



ECONOMIC ACCESS AND FINANCIAL SECURITY

Economic access is challenging for young people and especially for refugee and immigrant youth as they face additional challenges such as language and cultural barriers, insecure socio-economic home environments, and access to employment opportunities. However, financial security is key to personal independence and long-term successful integration. Refugee and immigrant youth may become at-risk if they cannot successfully complete school and access sustainable employment.

FINDINGS:

- 56% of respondents feel that they are better off now compared to when they first arrived (but it takes time, more than a single year).
- 43% of respondents are financially independent.
- 45% of respondents are employed in full-time/part-time/informal work.

ADDITIONALLY:

- The most popular networks recommended by respondents to help find employment are school, friends, and family.
- Resources to find jobs are often centered around social networks from family, friends, and school first, and not necessarily a technology/internet-first approach.
- Respondents feel that the best way to secure employment is to gain marketable skills through school.

SOCIAL BELONGING AND COMMUNITY NETWORKS

Social inclusion can be perceived as an individual's access to social support and sense of community belonging. It also means being engaged and having input into decision making in one's community. Community is important; when individuals feel part of a community there is the belief that help is potentially available when needed, and community members are often key avenues for seeking and securing employment. The building and supporting of strong, safe, socially cohesive communities that embrace social connections and commitment has become an important goal of local social policies and community initiatives³.

FINDINGS:

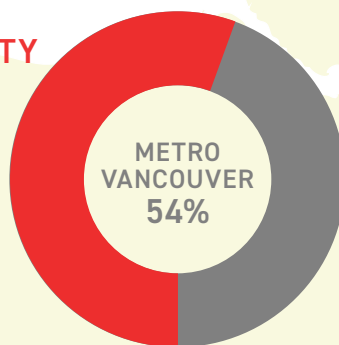
- 55% of respondents feel strongly connected to their community (compared to 54% of Metro Vancouver's general population).
- 60% of respondents have one to three people whom they can confide in, and 19% have more than four people whom they can confide in (compared to 50% of Metro Vancouver's general population).
- 63% of respondents feel that Metro Vancouver needs more youth programs and spaces, and more youth integration initiatives.

ALSO:

- Respondents strongly indicated that they would like to be involved in their community, but are constrained by time. The best way for them to be involved with decision makers in Metro Vancouver is to participate in a general youth committee.
- Main stresses for the respondents are related to work and school, followed by financial concerns and caring for family members.
- Best way to outreach to youth is through social media, in particular Facebook.
- Best time to reach youth during the weekday is evenings between 5-9pm.
- Best time to reach youth during the weekend is afternoons between 12-5 pm.

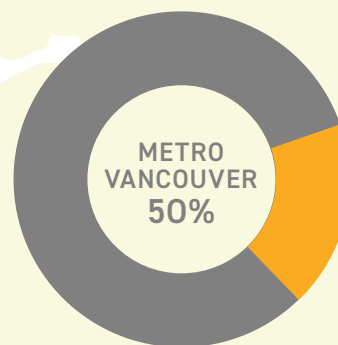
**FEEL STRONGLY
CONNECTED
TO COMMUNITY**

**OUR
RESPONDENTS
55%**



**HAVE MORE THAN
FOUR PEOPLE
TO CONFIDE IN**

**OUR
RESPONDENTS
19%**



**HOW
TO BEST
REACH
YOUTH**



**SOCIAL
MEDIA**



**DURING
WEEKDAY
5-9PM**



**DURING
WEEKEND
12-5PM**



YOUTH CONNECTEDNESS



Recommendations

Arriving and settling into Canadian life is a new experience and there are significant challenges. Immigrant and refugee youth want to succeed, engage, and integrate in Canadian society. Physical mobility, economic access, and social networks are key elements that help facilitate successful settlement process and employment integration of this youth group. This study has examined the employment, mobility, and integration characteristics of a set of immigrant and refugee youths, and this framework seems promising as a means of viewing the successes and challenges facing these young people today.

The study has shown us that institutions, physical infrastructure, and public policies have tremendous influence in shaping the lives of young people. The findings also show that meaningful process and engagement are key as youth want to be part of the decision-making processes related to the policies and systems that directly affect their lives. It is an area that can always benefit from additional consideration and learnings by government, policy-makers and organizations when designing programs and services for young newcomers.

Below is a list of recommendations.

FOR YOUTH PHYSICAL MOBILITY:

- Invest in more frequent bus services during peak times, especially in areas outside of the City of Vancouver where the majority of new immigrants are settling.
- Consider community settlement services to develop a transit system and pass benefits orientation process.
- Consider a subsidized transit pass for new immigrant and refugee youth in support of lessening economic pressures and reducing social isolation.

FOR YOUTH ECONOMIC ACCESS AND FINANCIAL SECURITY:

- Create opportunities for financially compensated internships targeting immigrant and refugee youth that provide mentoring opportunities and support quicker economic security and successful integration. Time is not “free” as youth try to balance education, work, and family.

FOR YOUTH SOCIAL BELONGING AND COMMUNITY NETWORKS:

- Engage meaningfully and face-to-face to provide opportunities to build social connections between youth and adults, newcomers and community, as well as youth peer-to-peer relations.
- Encourage government agencies and community services to include immigrant and refugee youth when developing outreach processes, public policies and community programs.
- Create inclusive and multilingual public policy development and community consultation processes.
- Continue to build adult allies and co-create opportunities for youth peers to engage with each other to foster inclusion and develop leadership.
- Support youth-centered spaces and programs within an intersectional framework to reflect the multidimensional, layered and complex lives of immigrant and refugee youth. Intersectionality includes consideration of aspects such as gender, race, culture, age, paid and unpaid work experience, ability, language, faith, geography and sexual orientation.

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