

Family, Migration, and Settlement

This issue of Migration Matters examines how family impacts migration and how immigration policy impacts families. It also explores the interdependent relationship between family and settlement. Resources for newcomer families in BC are provided.

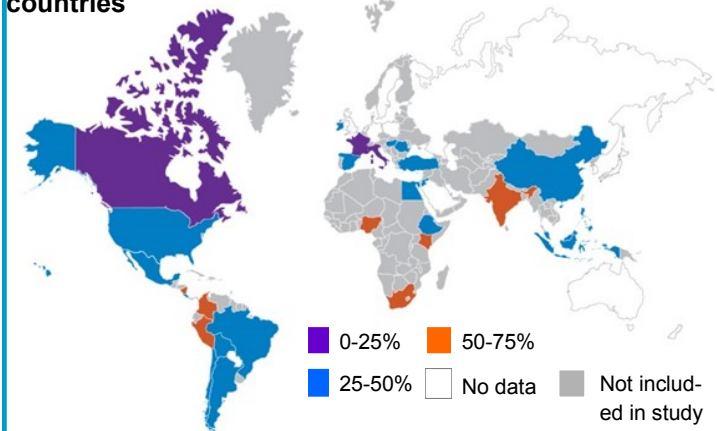
Introduction

Family relationships are an integral part of life for most people around the world. Decisions about migration are tied together with family responsibilities, and immigration policies are also set with families in mind. Settlement is also affected by family dynamics, and vice versa.

The definition of “family” is inherently cultural. Although in many cultures “family” refers to people related to each other genetically or through marriage, it can also include groups who are cohabiting, fostering, or in many other arrangements. Family dynamics and composition varies greatly across cultures. Variations include:¹

- **Individualism vs. interdependence:** The degree to which decisions are made based on the needs of the individual vs. the needs of the family unit.
- **Nuclear vs. extended family models:** The structure of an “ideal” family unit and whether it includes only parent(s) and child(ren) or a larger network including grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and others.
- **Role flexibility and kinship:** How a culture places values on different segments of an extended family, for instance if an individual is seen as having a stronger duty to their maternal family than their paternal family, or vice versa.

Proportion of children living in probable extended families (adults in addition to parents) in selected countries²



Source: Child Trends (2013)

References

- ¹ Carteret, M. (2011). [Culture and Family Dynamics](#). Dimensions of Culture.
- ² Child Trends (2013). [World Family Map 2013: Mapping family change and child well-being outcomes](#).
- ³ Province of British Columbia (2011). [Family Roots: British Columbia's Changing Families](#).
- ⁴ Statistics Canada (2014). [Facts and figures 2014 – Immigration overview: Permanent residents](#). Government of Canada.
- ⁵ Province of British Columbia (2014). [Permanent Residents 2014](#). Immigration Facts and Trends.
- ⁶ Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (2016). [2015 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration](#). Government of Canada.
- ⁷ IRCC (2016). [Syrian Family Links Initiative: Connecting Syrian family members with sponsors](#). Government of Canada
- ^{8, 11, 14} Bornstein, M. and Bohr, Y. (2011). [Immigration, Acculturation, and Parenting](#). Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development.

In BC, the size of recent newcomer families is similar to that of Canadian-born families, but newcomer households are more likely to have children of any age living at home. Three fourths of newcomer households have a child living at home, compared to just over half of Canadian-born households. Newcomer households headed by seniors are nine times more likely to have children living at home.³

Family migration patterns and policies

The vast majority of immigrants to Canada either come together with family members or come to join family members already in Canada.⁴ Permanent residents in the economic and humanitarian classes are usually entitled to bring their immediate family members (spouses and children) with them, while the Family Class consists of individuals who are sponsored to come to Canada by relatives (either in the immediate or extended family). In 2014, almost a third of permanent residents entering BC arrived as part of the Family Class.⁵

Recent changes to Family Class immigration policies

In the *2015 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration and 2016 Immigration Levels Plan*, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) announced an increased focus on family reunification, with an increase in Family Class immigration levels. The 2016 target for Family Class immigrants is 80,000 admissions.⁶

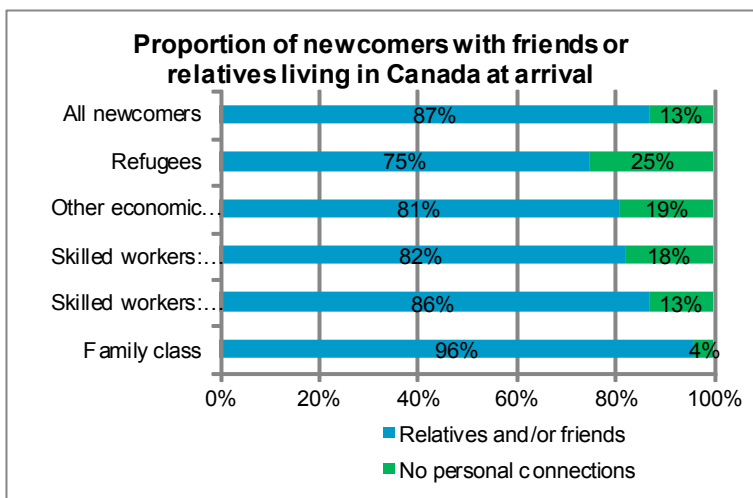
Aside from the explicit ways that immigration laws and policy interacts with family migration patterns, there are also subtler impacts, for example extended family members may choose to migrate to be closer to existing family members even if they are not being sponsored by them, or private sponsorship of refugees may be used to help reunite extended family members.⁷

As the existence of the Family Class indicates, many families experience temporary separation during the migration process and later reunite in Canada. Family separation impacts settlement, as newcomers maintain close emotional and economic ties to another country during the separation. It can also lead to more challenging family dynamics once the family is reunited.⁸

How family impacts settlement

Research shows that the vast majority of people in Canada—both newcomers and Canadian-born—feel a strong sense of belonging to their family.⁹ For newcomers, this means that family plays a strong role in shaping their integration into Canadian society.

Connections to family members are an important component of social capital—an individual's networks and connections that provides information and social support—which newcomers rely on to find jobs, housing, and meet other settlement needs. Family and friends constitute the top two sources of support for settlement-related issues for newcomers. Perhaps unsurprisingly, family class immigrants are the most likely to have connections in Canada before they arrive. Refugees are the least likely to have connections in Canada prior to arrival.¹⁰



Adapted from Bergeron (2006).

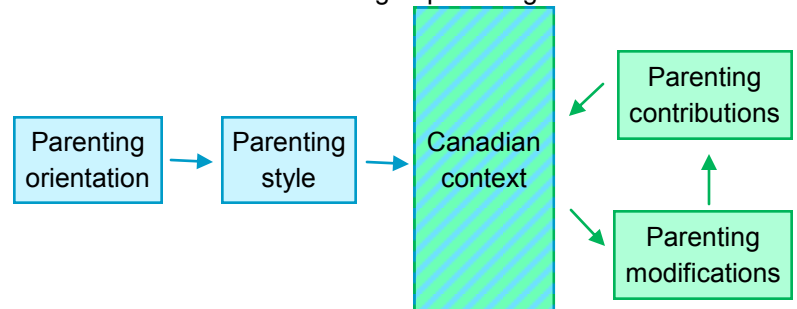
How settlement impacts family

As newcomers integrate into Canadian society, becoming familiar with differing cultures and values, this in turn impacts their family dynamics. For instance, family dynamics may be affected by a decision for a woman in the household to begin paid work if this is not typical in the family's home culture. Family roles may also change due to settlement processes. For example, as children improve their official language skills, they may take on the role of interpreter or translator in the family. These additional responsibilities for children can alter family dynamics.¹¹

Newcomer parenting framework

Parenting styles and practices are rooted in an individual's culture. As newcomer parents encounter new cultural

norms, their parenting *orientation* (beliefs and values about parenting) and parenting *style* (the implementation of their beliefs and values about parenting), are impacted by the *Canadian context* of parenting expectations and norms. This can lead to *modifications* in newcomer parenting orientation and style. At the same time, the Canadian context is impacted by *contributions* that newcomer parents make to the understanding of parenting in Canada.¹²



Adapted from Janzen (2001).

Each part of the framework is impacted by a number of factors including age and gender of the parents and children, family size, length of time in Canada and level of contact with other Canadians, and home culture.¹³

Research has shown that tension between parenting practices in the two cultures can lead to increased stress on the family. Newcomer parents may find it emotionally difficult to discard culturally important parenting practices, or they may experience judgement if they maintain those practices. Meanwhile, newcomer children often integrate faster due to the strong influence of school and peer groups, which can lead to intergenerational tension.¹⁴ For this reason, parent and family supports are often vital to settlement success.¹⁵

Resources for newcomer families in BC

- Vancouver School Board: [Resources for Newcomers](#)
- Legal Services Society: [Family Law in British Columbia—for Immigrants](#)
- Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs: [Multilingual Parenting Information](#) (14 languages)
- CMAS: [New in Canada Parenting Support Brochures](#) (13 languages)
- [BC Association of Family Resource Programs](#)
- [BC Representative for Children and Youth](#)
- [BC Council for Families](#)

References

- ⁹ Jedwab, J. (2006) "Capital Paradoxes: Has Robert Putnam erred on ethnicity, engagement, and trust?" *Canadian Issues*. Spring 2006: 65-67.
¹⁰ Bergeron, J. (2006) "Family members and relatives: An important resource for newcomers' settlement?" *Canadian Issues*. Spring 2006: 76-80.
^{12, 13, 15} Janzen, R. (2001). [Study on Parenting Issues of Newcomer Families in Ontario: Waterloo Region findings.](#)

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