

## Newcomer Youth: Challenges and Strengths

*This issue of Migration Matters explores newcomer youth in British Columbia. It identifies the unique needs, challenges, and strengths of newcomer youth. Strategies for effective programming and links to further resources are also provided.*

### Introduction

Approximately 34% of all newcomers to Canada are under age 25.<sup>1</sup> Newcomer youth experience a big life change when moving to a new country, at a very formative period of their lives. Although social services and programs have traditionally been divided into children and adult services, there is growing recognition that young people's needs are distinct from both children and adults, and youth-specific programs are increasingly common.<sup>2</sup>

### Newcomer youth in BC

Approximately 12% of all people under age 25 in BC were born outside of Canada, the highest proportion among all Canadian provinces and territories.<sup>3</sup> In the most recent National Household Survey (2011), the proportion of immigrants (permanent residents) who were aged 15-24 when they arrived in Canada varied across different communities within BC. Powell River and Port Alberni had the highest proportion, with 33% of immigrants in each community having arrived when they were aged 15-24. Fort St. John had the lowest proportion, with 17%.

#### Defining newcomer youth

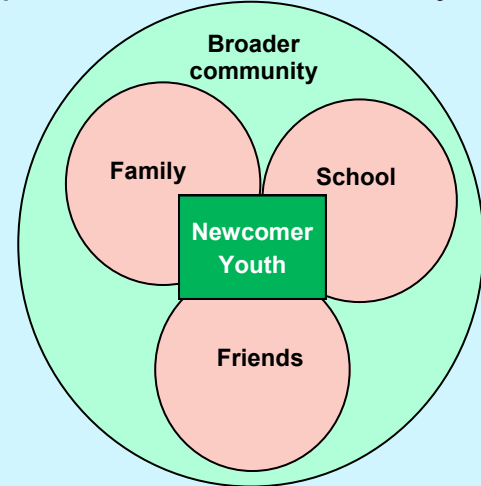
Definitions of the term "youth" vary substantially across different publications and programs. Broadly, "youth" refers to people in the gray area between childhood and adulthood. Age ranges often extend as low as 12 and as high as 25, depending on the context.

Defining "newcomer youth" creates an added challenge because much of the research does not distinguish between young people who have migrated to Canada themselves and children of immigrant parents.<sup>5</sup> This Info Sheet defines "newcomer youth" as persons who have come to Canada during adolescence and early adulthood.

### The many contexts of youth settlement

Young people's lives are shaped by at least four "spheres of influence"—home, school, friends, and the broader community.<sup>6</sup> Newcomer youth's settlement journeys are shaped by each of these spheres of influence; for example,

#### Spheres of influence for newcomer youth



Source: Centre for Research and Education in Human Services (2000).

research has shown that the educational and earnings outcomes of newcomers who arrive in Canada before age 18 are impacted by the education levels and language skills of their parents.<sup>7</sup>

Each sphere of influence can contain sources of support such as family members, friends, and teachers, but can also contain unique challenges.<sup>8</sup> Newcomer youth themselves have identified the following challenges through research and consultations:<sup>9</sup>

- **Family:** Intergenerational conflicts can arise due to differences between the value systems across different spheres of influence.
- **School:** It can be difficult to learn new grading systems, school structures, and school cultures.
- **Friends:** Newcomer youth can encounter peer pressure to engage in "negative behaviours" or feel socially isolated due to language barriers.
- **Broader community:** Adjusting to Canadian culture and weather can be a challenge, and many newcomer youth experience racism and discrimination.

### References

- <sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada (2011). [Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity in Canada](#).
- <sup>2,20</sup> Bernhard, J.K. et al (2010). [Meeting the Needs of Immigrants Throughout the Lifecycle](#). Region of Peel Immigration Discussion Paper.
- <sup>3</sup> Pottie, K. et al (2015). [Health Profile on Immigrant and Refugee Children and Youth in Canada](#). In *The Health of Canada's Children and Youth: A CICH Profile*.
- <sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada (2011). [NHS Profiles: Census metropolitan areas / Census agglomerations](#).
- <sup>5,16,17</sup> Dinovitzer, R. et al (2003). [Choice and Circumstance: Social capital and playful competence in the attainments of immigrant youth](#). *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 28(4).
- <sup>6,8</sup> Centre for Research and Education in Human Services (2000). [Enhancing Services and Supports for immigrant youth in the Waterloo region](#).
- <sup>7</sup> Bonikowska, A. and Hou, F. (2016). [Educational and Labour Market Outcomes of Childhood Immigrants by Admission Class](#). Statistics Canada.

## Challenges and strengths

It is common to think of newcomer youth's settlement journeys through the lens of a "deficit model", which focuses on the challenges and problems facing them on their settlement journey. However, research has shown that an "asset model," which focuses on strengths, can be more effective in supporting youth.<sup>10</sup> Most of the key issues for newcomer youth include both challenges and strengths, as seen in the chart below:

Issue	Challenges	Strengths
<b>Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of recognition of prior educational credentials can create barriers.<sup>11</sup></li> <li>There are large variations in educational outcomes by ethnicity/country of origin.<sup>12</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newcomer youth are more likely to complete secondary education and more likely to attend university than Canadian-born youth.<sup>13</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Employment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newcomer youth have higher rates of unemployment compared to Canadian-born youth.<sup>14</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newcomer youth may possess attributes that can be useful in professional settings, such as bilingualism, flexibility, and resourcefulness.<sup>15</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Language</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of language proficiency can form a barrier in education, employment, and social settings.<sup>16</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bilingualism has been shown to have a positive effect on educational outcomes.<sup>17</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Identity development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identity development can be more challenging when home and peer groups are from different cultures.<sup>18</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newcomer youth are at a life stage when they are more adaptable to change.<sup>19</sup></li> <li>Maintaining a connection to culture of origin can be positive for identity development.<sup>20</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Mental and physical health</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pre-migration trauma can impact newcomer youth's mental and physical health.<sup>21</sup></li> <li>There is a lack of youth mental health supports in general, even fewer supports for newcomers.<sup>22</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reinforcing home culture behaviour norms can slow or prevent the adoption of new behaviour norms which increase health risks, such as eating an unhealthy diet.<sup>23</sup></li> </ul>

## Program strategies

In 2015, 26% of clients receiving IRCC-funded settlement services in BC were between the ages of 15 and 25.<sup>24</sup>

Research has identified that effective programs "build on the assets" of newcomer youth. Program strategies include:<sup>25</sup>

- Programs for youth from a particular country or region**, to increase connection to and pride in a specific cultural identity.
- Programs for youth from multiple cultures**, to provide learning and connections across cultures and emphasize shared experiences of newcomer youth
- Programs enabling youth to share their language or culture with the wider community**, to enhance leadership skills and contribute to greater understanding from the broader community, and
- Programs supporting youth community advocacy**, to increase young people's community engagement and develop positive relationships between youth and adults.

## References

<sup>9, 15</sup> Chuang, S. & CISSA-ACSEI (2010). [New Start for Youth Study: An Examination of the Settlement Pathways of Newcomer Youth](#). Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector Alliance.

<sup>10</sup> Rose, H.A. (2006). [Asset-based development for child and youth care](#). *Reclaiming Children and Youth* 14:4.

<sup>11, 18, 19, 22</sup> Joint Centre of Research on Immigration and Settlement (2008). [The needs of newcomer youth and emerging "best practices" to meet those needs: final report](#).

<sup>12</sup> Abada, T. et al (2008). [Group Differences in Educational Attainment Among the Children of Immigrants](#). Statistics Canada.

<sup>13</sup> Picot, G. and Hou, F. (2012). [Immigrant Postsecondary Education: A Comparison of Canada and Switzerland](#). Statistics Canada.

<sup>14</sup> Statistics Canada (2016). [Labour force characteristics by immigrant status, by detailed age group](#).

<sup>15, 20, 23, 25</sup> Easter, M. and Refki, D. (2004). [Creating Successful Programs for Immigrant Youth](#). ACT for Youth Upstate Centre for Excellence.

<sup>24</sup> Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (2016). [Settlement Service Clients by P/T of SPOs and Age Group at Service](#). Government of Canada Open Data.

## Further resources and links

- [BC Representative for Children and Youth](#)
- WorkBC: [Resources for Youth](#)
- Settlement at Work: [Newcomer Youth](#)
- Society for Children and Youth of BC: [Multilingual Resources](#)
- AMSSA: [Settlement Workers in Schools](#)
- AMSSA: [Immigrant Youth and Children](#)
- NewToBC: [Immigrant and Refugee Programs and Services](#) (select the filter for "youth services" to find services for newcomer youth in your community)

### Links for newcomer youth

- [NewYouth.ca](#)
- [Canadian Council for Refugees Youth Network](#)
- [YouthinBC.com](#)
- [Youth.gc.ca](#)
- [Fresh Voices Initiative](#)