

Intersectionality and Settlement

This edition of Migration Matters introduces the concept of intersectionality and its relevance to understanding newcomers' experiences, and how an intersectional approach can be applied in working with newcomers.

Introduction

The concept of intersectionality refers to “the ways race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, status and other markers of differences intersect to inform individual realities and lived experiences.”¹ Newcomers to Canada represent many different social groups and identities; intersectionality is an approach to understanding society that acknowledges these differences and the way that different parts of an individual or group’s identity can shape their experiences.²

Intersectional approaches

Intersectionality is often referred to in the context of an “approach” because it represents an attitude or set of principles that underpin the work of an organization or initiative.³ Using an intersectional approach to understanding and addressing social issues is becoming increasingly common. The starting assumptions of an intersectional model include:⁴

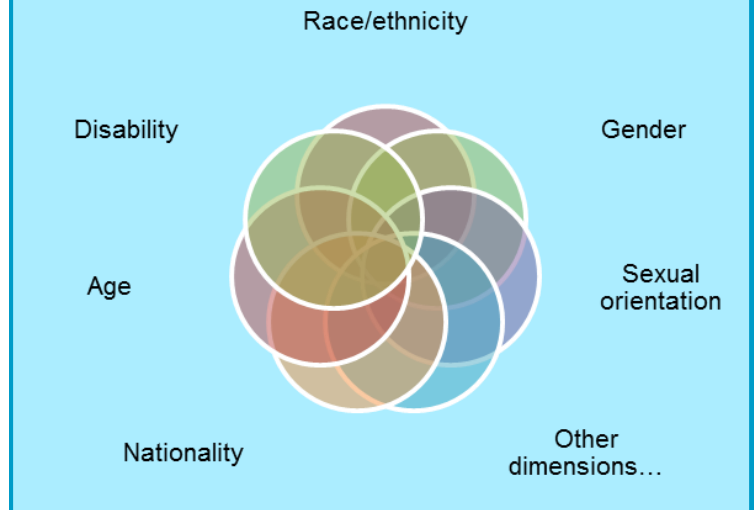
- **We all have points of privilege and points of oppression:** A newcomer may experience oppression based on one social category or group to which they belong, for example their ethnicity, but may experience privilege based on another, for example their sexual orientation.
- **There is diversity within diversity:** Although it is important to consider the social categories or groups that an individual might identify with, it is just as important not to assume that all members of a group will share similar experiences or perspectives.
- **Systems and structures of discrimination and oppression are linked:** In order to work to combat the barriers that newcomers face, it is important to see how their experiences may be impacted by multiple parts of their identity.

Intersectional approaches can be used to explore the identities of people or social groups; to understand various categories of difference; and to analyze systems of power and oppression.⁵

References

- ^{1, 3, 4, 17} Mason, C. N. (n.d.). [Leading at the Intersections: An introduction to the intersectional approach model for policy and social change](#). NYU Wagner: Women of Color Policy Network.
- ^{2, 7, 14} Simpson, J. (2009). [Everyone Belongs: A toolkit for applying intersectionality](#). Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIA/W/ICREF).
- ⁵ Hankivsky, O. et al (2009). [Intersectionality: Moving women's health research and policy forward](#). Women's Health Research Network.
- ⁶ African American Policy Forum (n.d.). [A primer on intersectionality](#). Columbia Law School.
- ^{8, 9} The Opportunity Agenda (n.d.). [Ten Tips for Putting Intersectionality into Practice](#).

Diagram: Model of intersectional identities⁶



Adapted from African American Policy Forum (n.d.)

Applying intersectionality

In the context of settlement services, an intersectional approach might be used to gain deeper insight about clients, to better serve clients who have experienced discrimination, or to make services more inclusive.

Researchers and practitioners have identified several strategies that can help organizations incorporate an intersectional approach in programs and services:

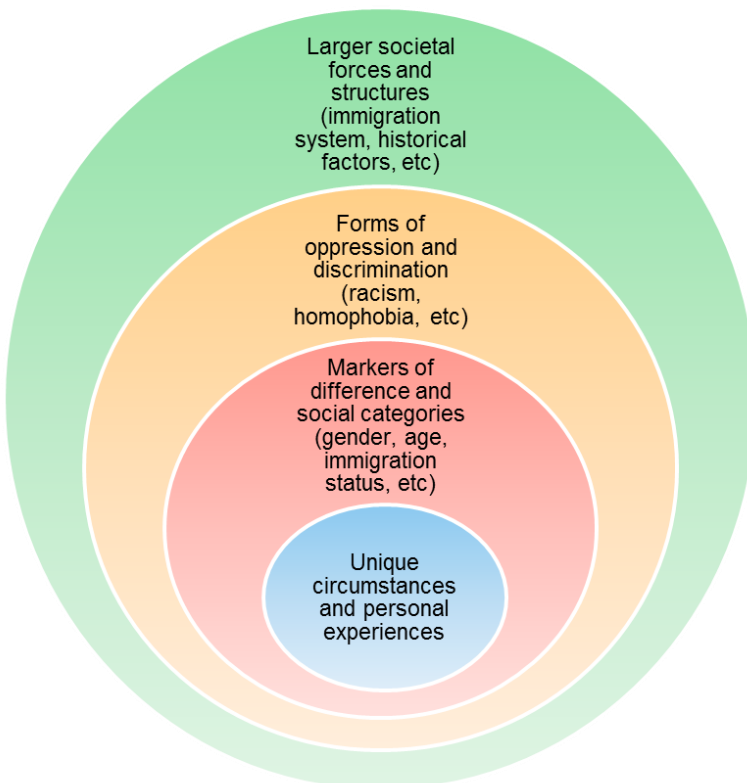
- **Build intersectional policies into organizational structures.** For example, expanding the organization’s accessibility policy to address not only barriers for clients with disabilities, but also barriers for transgender clients, parents, or other client groups, can make it easier for staff to incorporate intersectionality at the program level.⁷
- **Form partnerships or coalitions with organizations** that serve distinct communities to identify areas where their community may intersect with the community your organization serves.⁸
- **Collect data** about client diversity that can be broken down in multiple ways. For example, instead of examining outcomes of women vs. men or younger clients vs. older clients, make sure the data allows for looking at older women vs. older men as well.⁹

Newcomer diversity

The demographic characteristics of newcomers to Canada are continually changing and newcomers are becoming more diverse. For example, prior to 1971, 77% of immigrants came from Europe, while from 2006-2011, Europeans represented 14% of immigrants.¹⁰ The most recent data available indicates that 78% of newcomers who arrived between 2006 and 2011

were identified as “visible minorities.”¹¹ A third of newcomers in that period were under the age of 25. 48% of newcomers in that period identified as Christian, while 33% of newcomers arriving from 2001-2011 identified as Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, or Buddhist.¹² 48% of permanent residents who came to Canada in 2015 were women.¹³ Of course, newcomer diversity extends beyond these categories and many aspects of newcomer diversity are not recorded in official statistics.

Diagram: Layers of intersectionality¹⁴



Adapted from Simpson (2009).

Glossary

- **Discrimination:** Treating an individual or group of people differently because of an element of their social characteristics or membership of a social group.¹⁵
- **Intersectionality:** A term developed by feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to highlight the importance of understanding the intersection of racism and sexism in black women’s lives. Now used more broadly to refer to multiple identities and the “interconnectedness of various systems of oppression.”¹⁶
- **Marker/category of difference:** “A defining, sometimes evident, characteristic or attribute that distinguishes groups or individuals from one another in society. The meaning and value of these markers are shaped and informed by society.”¹⁷
- **Oppression:** Systems, structures, and power relationships “woven throughout social institutions as well as embedded within individual consciousness” that result in social inequalities.¹⁸ Racism, sexism, and other “-isms” are forms of oppression.
- **Privilege:** Unearned social power accorded by the formal and informal institutions of society to members of a dominant group.¹⁹

Further resources

- The Opportunity Agenda: [Ten Tips for Putting Intersectionality into Practice](#)
- AAISA: [Building Champions of Anti-Racism and Anti-Islamophobia: A Practice Guide for Alberta’s Settlement Community](#)
- Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women: [Everyone Belongs: A toolkit for applying intersectionality](#)
- Ontario Health Communities Coalition: [Inclusive Community Organizations: A Tool Kit](#)
- NewtoBC: [Community Immigrant Demographic Profiles](#)
- City for All Women Initiative: [Advancing Equity and Inclusion: A Guide for Municipalities](#)

References

- ¹⁵ Elswick, J.L. (2016). [Diversity and inclusion dictionary](#). Virginia Commonwealth University Division for Inclusive Excellence.
- ¹⁶ Crenshaw, K. (2015). “[Why intersectionality can’t wait](#).” *Washington Post* September 24, 2015.
- ¹⁸ Racial Equity Resource Guide (2017). [Glossary](#). W.K. Kellogg Foundation.
- ¹⁹ Racial Equity Tools (2017). [Glossary](#). Racial Equity Tools.
- ^{10, 11, 12} Statistics Canada (2011). [Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity in Canada](#). Analytical Document. National Household Survey, 2011.
- ¹³ IRCC (2015). “Canada - Permanent residents less than 15 years of age by gender, age and category.” [Facts & Figures 2015: Immigration Overview - Permanent Residents](#). Open Government Portal, Record ID: 2fbb56bd-ee7-4582-af7d-a197d185fc93.

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