



# CREATING A WELCOMING WORKPLACE:

*A Guide for Employers with  
Newcomer Employees*



The Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (AAISA) is a non-profit umbrella organization representing agencies that provide resettlement, settlement, and integration services to newcomers in the province of Alberta. Since 1980, we have been working to build the sector's capacity to better serve newcomers by fostering collaboration, professionalization, and member-driven research and policy work.

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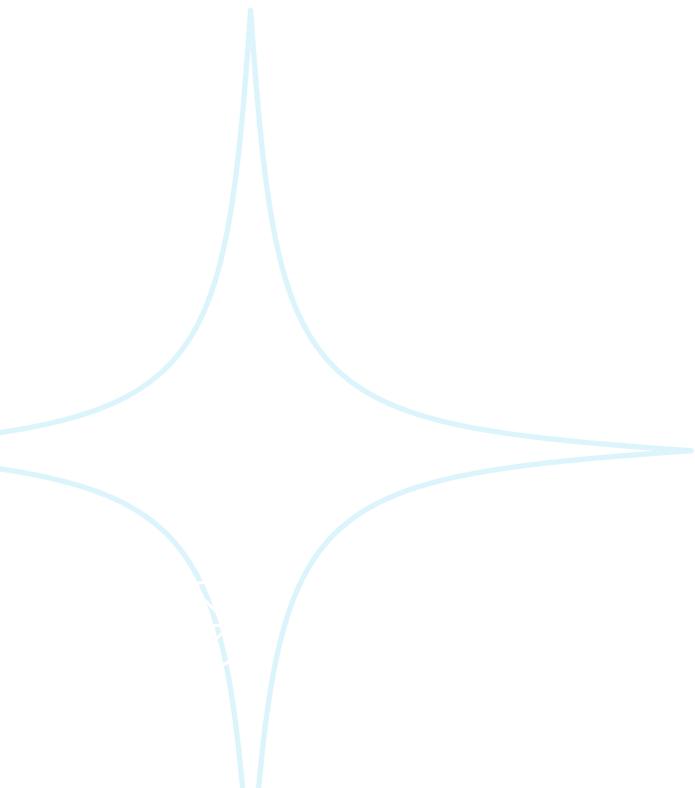
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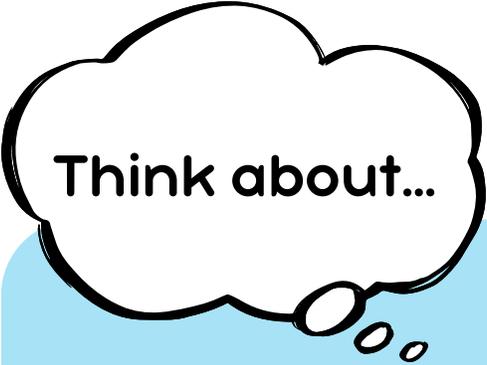


# UNDERSTANDING NEWCOMER PERSPECTIVES

Recognizing the undeniable social and economic advantages that immigration bestows upon both newcomers to Canada and the local population, the Government of Alberta actively promotes immigration to rural areas. This strategic initiative not only aims to address **labour gaps** and foster rural settlement but also underscores the vital need for newcomer **retention** in these regions. Without a concerted effort to retain newcomers, rural towns may miss out on the transformative benefits of integrating newcomers into their economies and communities.

As **employers** in rural Alberta, your active involvement in cultivating a welcoming workplace is paramount. Beyond bridging labour gaps, your commitment plays a crucial role in ensuring the success of newcomers within your community. This guide is designed to deepen your understanding of the distinctive **challenges** faced by **newcomers**, empowering you to actively contribute to their seamless integration. By doing so, you not only enhance the vitality of your workforce but also become an integral part of driving local economic prosperity.

By understanding the challenges newcomers face when they immigrate into your towns, begin looking for employment outside their specialization, and ultimately settle in your town, hopefully it will better prepare you to support newcomers' integration into the **labour market** and your community.



## Think about...

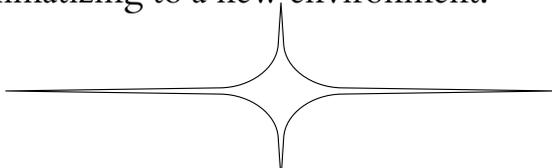
A newcomer's journey involves a life-changing series of events:  
leaving family & friends behind

- Adapting to a new climate, culture, and language
- Having to rebuild a social network
- Sometimes facing racism and discrimination

# BARRIERS NEWCOMERS FACE

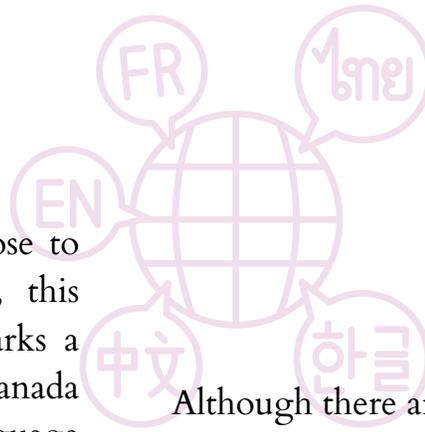
While, for the most part, immigrants choose to move to Canada of their own volition, this decision carries significant weight and marks a life-changing process. Relocating to Canada involves evident challenges, including language barriers, cultural shock, acclimatization to new weather conditions, and feelings of loneliness. Additionally, there are less overt obstacles such as discrimination, poverty, and unique challenges faced by specific groups like children, women, and individuals with disabilities. Specific barriers also hinder successful integration into the labor market.

This section will provide insights into the challenges newcomers encounter, encompassing cultural differences, communication/language barriers, and the process of adjusting and acclimatizing to a new environment.

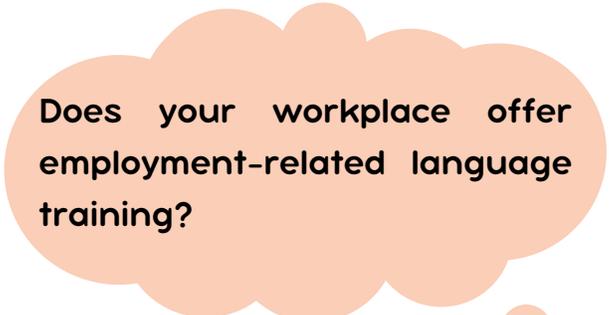


## Language Barriers

The most apparent challenge for many newcomers is the language barrier. This challenge becomes most apparent when newcomers try to obtain employment. Furthermore, when newcomers bring their families to Canada, often only one family member, typically the primary applicant, is the only person proficient in English. Consequently, this places the responsibility for all communication on a single individual within the family. Proficiency in English is crucial for successful integration in Alberta, impacting various aspects such as securing employment, establishing relationships, finding housing, and accessing essential services.



Although there are many language classes available for newcomers, they are challenging to access in rural Alberta and often have long waitlists. Alternatively, many public libraries host “conversation circles” to promote language learning and networking. While it will take time for newcomers to learn, improve, or integrate into their new communities, there are certain caveats to be aware of so that both newcomers and the communities they settle in can gain positive outcomes.



**Does your workplace offer employment-related language training?**



**Are the language classes in your community accessible?**

# How can you support newcomers with a language barrier?

Although newcomers are responsible for learning and adjusting to language barriers, there may be ways for employers to support their newcomer employees in accessing services, feeling welcomed and supported, ultimately leading to the retention of new staff members. It's important to recognize that a newcomer's journey in rural Alberta is very different from settling in big cities such as Edmonton or Calgary, where language services, settlement support services, healthcare, and larger ethnocultural communities are all present as supports. There are very limited services for newcomers, leading them to rely on informal services through libraries, churches, and even their employers and landlords.

Some ways employers can actively provide support to their newcomer employees include:

- **Language Training Programs**

- Language training programs tailored to the specific needs of the industry or trade employees work in. This could include technical terms, safety precautions, and communication skills that are relevant to their jobs.

- **Mentorship Programs**

- Experienced employees can guide and support newcomers in their new role. Thus, helping upskill the current employees, and training and retaining newcomer employees.

- **Written Resources**

- Manuals, safety guidelines, and standard operation procedures that are offered in multiple languages, if possible.

- **Visual Aids**

- Where possible, visual aids that are standard and can be understood in any language can be especially helpful in trades careers, where hands-on tasks are common, and can act as physical reminders for safety protocols

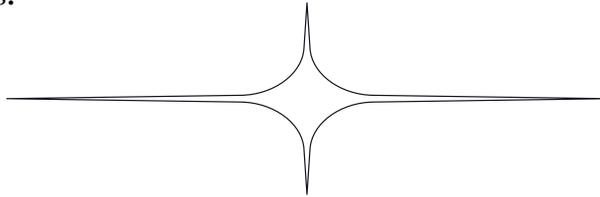
- **Encourage Peer Support**

- Foster a positive and supportive workplace where colleagues are encouraged to help each other, creating a collaborative environment that assists newcomers connect with their colleagues, build rapport, and aid in language learning.



# CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Employers play a pivotal role in fostering the success of newcomers within both the workplace and the broader community. The settlement process for newcomers often involves navigating cultural shock as they establish themselves in a foreign environment. Amid language acquisition efforts and the pursuit of positive first impressions, newcomers harbor hopes for a better life for themselves and their families.

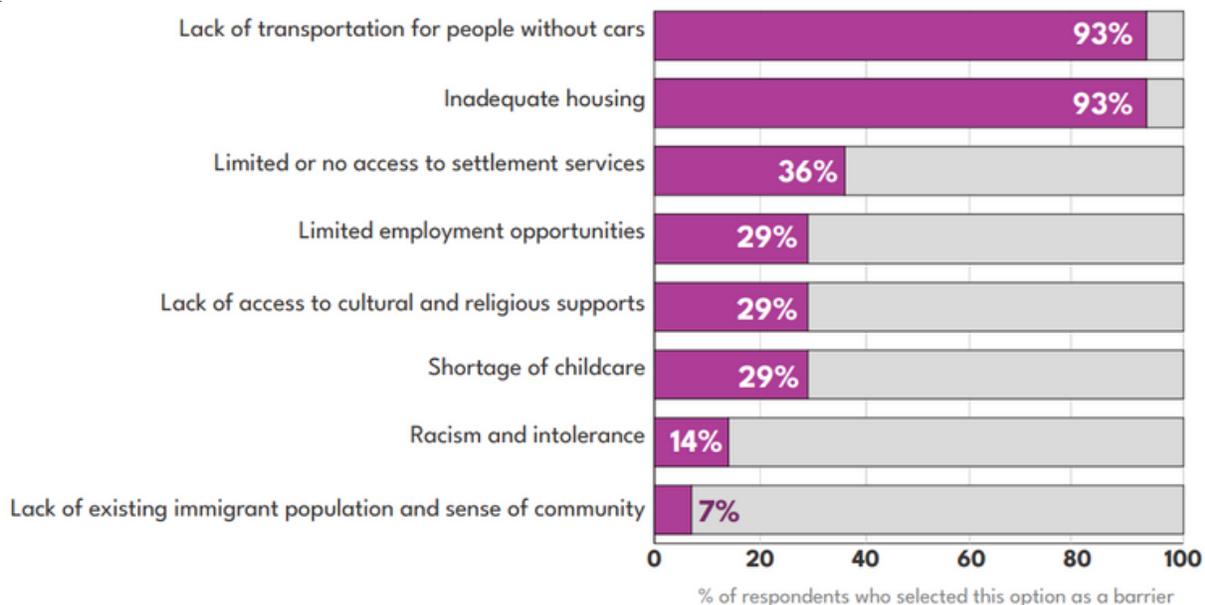


## CHALLENGES FACED BY NEWCOMERS:

**Isolation Factors:** Newcomers may experience a heightened sense of isolation, particularly if they are racialized, face precarious housing, have a disability, or are trauma survivors. These layers of identity can significantly impact their settlement experience.

**Community integration:** Newcomers are challenged with finding a sense of community when arriving in a new region. Factors that may create difficulty in building a sense of community can include language barriers, lack of awareness of community events, availability of cultural events and Welcoming Newcomers programming.

In addition to the above factors, the gaps below highlight barriers in the settlement process; preventing newcomers feel “at home” in their new towns. The figure below was a result of a research survey, where rural settlement was studied. The question posted was “*In your opinion, what are the greatest gaps preventing immigrants and refugees from settling in your municipality?*” The full report can be accessed [here](#).



# Employer Responsiveness

In creating a workplace environment that thrives on diversity and inclusivity, employers play a pivotal role in understanding and addressing the unique needs of their newcomer employees. By developing intercultural competencies and considering sensitivity training, employers not only foster an inclusive atmosphere but also actively contribute to the retention of both employees and newcomers in the community.

- **Cultural and Religious Celebrations**

- Employers can enhance cultural sensitivity by familiarizing themselves with the diverse cultural and religious celebrations that may differ from typical Canadian practices. This can include recognizing and celebrating holidays of different cultures in the workplace.

- **Provide a list of community resources**

- Language, healthcare, transportation (if applicable), religious places of worships (such as churches, mosques, temples, etc.), ethnocultural groups/centres.

- Local employers have access to countless **networks**, thus the capacity to connect newcomers to support services such as Family and Community Support Services, local libraries, networking events, and helping them build their professional network.

- **Develop intercultural competencies in the workplace**

- Consider a **sensitivity training** such as the ones provided by:

- Sensitivity Training Canada
- Alberta Council of Disability Services (ACDS)
- The Canadian Diversity Initiative
- Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion

- This is important to encourage a workplace where everyone feels welcome, thus encouraging employee and newcomer retention in your communities.

- **Upskill current employees**

- Help employees further develop existing skills or gain new skills to better retain employees and entice new employees.

## MORE RESOURCES?

- The Conference Board of Canada created a tip sheet “By Employers for Employers” to better retain immigrant employees. This document includes common barriers to recruiting immigrants, employer-led solutions, a list of employment councils, and more. The document can be found [here](#).
- Calgary Region Immigrant Employment Council (CRIEC) has an [Employer Playbook](#) that presents actionable strategies and tips for each stage of the employment cycle

