BEYOND BORDERS: UNDERSTANDING NEWCOMER MOBILITY IN CANADA

ALBERTA ASSOCIATION OF IMMIGRANT SERVING AGENCIES
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Land acknowledgement

This report was authored in Calgary, the place at the meeting of the Bow and Elbow Rivers, also known as Moh'kin'tsis in Siksikáí'powahsin/ Blackfoot, Wîchispa Oyade in Stoney Nakoda, and Guts'its'i in Tsúùt'ínà Gūnáhà. AAISA serves diverse people across of the Treaty 4, 6, 7, 8 and 10 regions and all twenty-two districts of the Métis Nation of Alberta. We hope to continue to grow our understanding and relationship with the traditional caretakers of these lands in our roles as signatories to broken treaties.

General Acknowledgements

AAISA has been provided the opportunity to improve the settlement and integration sector in Alberta by developing this report outlining the framework for secondary migration tracking of newcomers, and recommendations to how to create a more comprehensive solution for tracking newcomer mobility.

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Glossary

UCI: Unique Client Identifier
IRCC: Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenships Canada
CUAET Visa: Canada-Ukraine Emergency Travel Visa
AAISA: Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies
CBE: Calgary Board of Education
AHS: Alberta Health Services
iCARE: Immigration Contribution Agreement Reporting Environment
SPO: Settlement Providing Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Secondary migration refers to the movement of individuals from their initial settlement area to another. In this context, we are concerned about newcomers who are migrating domestically within Canadian borders from their original landing site. Newcomers are influenced by factors such as economic opportunities, social and familial networks, or access to services. Tracking secondary migration is essential to understand shifting demographic trends to ensure resources are allocated effectively and appropriately. Currently, Statistics Canada and IRCC track secondary migration of Canadian residents annually, but only capture newcomer mobility every five years through the national census. This has created a gap in data that overlooks significant migration patterns caused by global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine. A more robust system is needed to provide timely insights for policymakers and service providers. Newcomers account for 98% of the country's population growth as of 2024 (IRCC, 2024b). As Canada continues to facilitate large-scale migration, such as the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET) Visa program, understanding where newcomers move after their initial arrival is critical for urban planning, infrastructure development, and social service distribution. Without annual tracking, policy makers risk misallocating resources, underestimating regional population shifts, and failing to address demand of economic and social services.

This report proposes a methodology and policy recommendations for tracking secondary migration on an annual basis, using Ukrainian nationals under the CUAET Visa (arrivals between March 2022 – December 2024) as a case study. The recommendations aim to:

- **Improve annual tracking of newcomer mobility to capture real-time migration trends,**
- **Leverage IRCC's Unique Client Identifier (UCI) data to better map migration patterns,**
- **Make secondary migration data accessible for government agencies, policy makers, and settlement organizations for informed and timely decision-making, and**
- **Address gaps in social service allocation and economic planning but understanding push and pull factors influencing newcomer mobility.**

Enhanced tracking of newcomer secondary migration provides critical insight into the settlement experiences of newcomers, ensuring that Canada's immigration policies and support systems remain responsible and effective in an evolving global landscape.

INTRODUCTION

Canada's population growth is largely driven by immigration, with newcomers accounting for 98% of the country's population increase in 2024 (IRCC, 2024c). As immigration policies shape demographic trends, understanding where newcomers settle is essential for urban planning, economic development, and social service delivery. While there are clear methods and policies to track initial settlement patterns, less focus has been placed on newcomer mobility, where newcomers move within Canada after their initial landing and begin settlement. This internal mobility is often influenced by factors such as job opportunities, housing affordability, and access to social networks which have significant implications for regions across the country. Despite its importance, newcomer secondary migration is not formally tracked on an annual basis, creating gaps in data that limit policymakers' ability to anticipate and respond to shifting settlement patterns.

The absence of timely secondary migration data impacts multiple sectors, particularly education, healthcare, and the labour market. School districts must plan for fluctuating student populations, healthcare systems must adapt to changing regional demands, and employers must navigate evolving workforce dynamics. Without accurate and up-to-date information on where newcomers are relocating, governments and service providers may struggle to allocate resources effectively, leading to infrastructural strain in high-growth areas and underutilization of services in other locations. This challenge has been particularly relevant to Alberta, which has been the only large province to have population growth from 2021-2024 (Statistics Canada, 2024). A more comprehensive tracking system would enable better planning for urban development and economic integration, ensuring that newcomers are supported in ways that contribute to both their success and the long-term prosperity of Canadian communities.

Tracking newcomer secondary migration is essential for understanding how settlement patterns evolve and ensuring that communities can effectively support population growth. The movement of Ukrainian nationals under the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET) visa provides a case study of how economic, social, and policy factors influence mobility within Canada. Examining these trends can offer insights into the broader dynamics of newcomer migration and the challenges associated with housing, employment, and access to essential services. By implementing a more robust system for tracking newcomer secondary migration on an annual basis, policymakers can enhance data collection, improve resource allocation, and develop strategies that foster economic stability, equitable service distribution, and more inclusive communities across the country.

CONTEXT

On March 17, 2022, Canada opened the CUAET Visa to support Ukrainian nationals and their families fleeing the on-going invasion from the Russian Federation to find safety in Canada. This visa was the first of its kind that permit Ukrainian citizens and their extended family members to live, work, and/or study in Canada for up to three years, as opposed to the standard 6-month authorization for regular visitors (IRCC, 2022). This visa also had the option to apply, free of charge, for an open work permit, exemption from COVID-19 vaccination entry requirements, and immigration medical exams. This visa differs from other settlement programs offered by IRCC such as the Resettlement Assistance Program, which provides direct financial assistance (for up to a year) and essential services supports (within four to six weeks) (IRCC, 2019). Designed as a temporary measure, this visa had limited federal financial supports including:

- A one-time payment of $3,000 CAD for individuals over 18 years old and $1,500 CAD for those under 18 years old
- Access to temporary housing (for up to 14 days)
- Language training
- Federally funded settlement support
- Orientation services

However, provinces have stepped up and provided additional financial supports including:
- Provincial health coverage
- Education registration for children aged 5-18
- Childcare subsidies
- Transportation subsidies
- Emergency income supports
- Mental health and addiction supports

The CUAET visa gained immediate attraction as soon as it was released, with over 1.1 million applications received, of which 81% (962,612) of applications were approved (IRCC, 2024a). As of April 1, 2024, nearly 300,000 Ukrainian nationals have arrived in Canada. Although this data has no longer been updated publicly as of July 26, 2024, AAISA's engagement with settlement-providing and community-serving agencies report that Ukrainians have continued to arrive until December 31, 2024 (the final day to arrive and benefit from the temporary measures) (IRCC, 2025).

POPULATION GROWTH AND DEMOGRAPHIC IMPLICATIONS

The population of Ukrainian evacuees migrating to Canada consist primarily of women, children, and the elderly, likely reflecting the impact of Ukraine's president Zelensky decree on general mobilization, banning all males over the age of 18 from leaving the country (with limited exceptions). This composition of over 300,000 individuals in a 2-year timespan does not reflect the natural population demographic changes predicted from natural-birth rate of Canadians. This directly impacts the proportion of children, working-aged peoples, and seniors in the population. A thorough understanding and analysis of demography in Canadian society is essential to providing sufficient resources to provide essential services to the community such as hospitals, roads, schools, and housing supply. Essential services are not the only social restructuring that is directly impacted from demographic changes, but economic restructuring is as well. A society's changing needs for differing professions, investments into infrastructure and services, and government spending is directly correlated with the changing Canadian demographics that newcomers influence.

The natural birth rate of Canadian-born citizens (1.33 children per woman) is lower than the replacement level of fertility (2.1 children per woman). This rate is ideal to maintain population levels, assuming no net migration and unchanged mortality rates (IRCC, 2024c). *Immigration accounted for 98% of Canada's population growth in 2023-2024* (IRCC, 2024c).

WHAT IS SECONDARY MIGRATION?

Based on IRCC's definition (IRCC, 2021), both newcomers and Canadian-born individuals alike can participate in secondary migration, whether it is an individuals' self-initiated:

- **Change in city or province while still in temporary accommodation,**
- **Change in city or province from their permanent address, or**
- **Change in city or province before the end of their first year in Canada (newcomer-specific)**

Policy makers and governments can adjust this definition to be made more specific depending on the relevant geography and demographic of interest. For example, Alberta has an interest in Rural Renewal; seeking to attract and retain individuals from urban Albertan centers, other provinces, and international talent into rural communities. By refining the definition of secondary migration in this example to be specific to individuals relocating to rural Albertan communities, the Government of Alberta can develop policies that promote the attraction and retention of individuals.

Secondary migration of newcomers in Canada is also referred to as ***newcomer mobility*** by Statistics Canada, in which mobility status referes to the "*status of a person with regard to their place of residence on Census Day in relation to their place of residence on the same date 1 or 5 years earlier.*"

WHY DO NEWCOMERS MOVE WITHIN CANADA?

Like Canadian-born individuals, newcomers relocate within Canadian borders for a multitude of reasons, such as a ***sense of community, ethno-cultural belonging, job opportunities, accessing support services that may not be available in their current jurisdiction, or housing affordability***. Secondary migration can be an essential metric for government entities to track depending on the sponsorship modality, as funding will need to follow the newcomer to their new location.

Alberta landscape

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Alberta has been receiving—and is expected to continue receiving—a disproportionately large influx of interprovincial migrants due to its perceived affordability compared to major Canadian cities such as Vancouver and Toronto (Parsons, 2024 & Roach, 2024).

August 2022 marked the beginning of the "Alberta is Calling" campaign whereby the Government of Alberta began deliberately advertising Alberta's more affordable housing, career opportunities, and family-friendly cities to Canadians and those abroad, aiming to attract migration into the province. This campaign even offered economic incentives in the form of cash bonuses for certain skilled trades. This campaign was designed with the intention of building up the provincial workforce

and supporting rural renewal, seeking to revitalize smaller communities in the province, hoping to attract and retain young, working-aged people into the province.

Based on regular stakeholder engagement with service-providers in Alberta, newcomer-serving agencies across the province have observed an influx of Ukrainian nationals' migrating from larger metropolitan areas such as Toronto and Montreal, and relocating to Alberta within their first year of arriving in Canada. In this case study, Ukrainian nationals with CUAET Visas would likely register for local settlement services, such as NAARS, orientation sessions, healthcare access, or housing supports in Toronto, and once relocated to Calgary, they would access employment supports, language classes or community integration services.

Alberta's population growth

Alberta's year over year (Y/Y) population growth is the highest it has been since the 1980s. The average (Y/Y) population growth in Alberta has hovered at 2.26% from 1952-2024 (Figure 1). Since the release of the CUAET visa, Alberta has seen an average (Y/Y) rate of 3.29% (April 1, 2022, to July 1, 2024). **This increase is equivalent to roughly 500 new Albertans per day.**
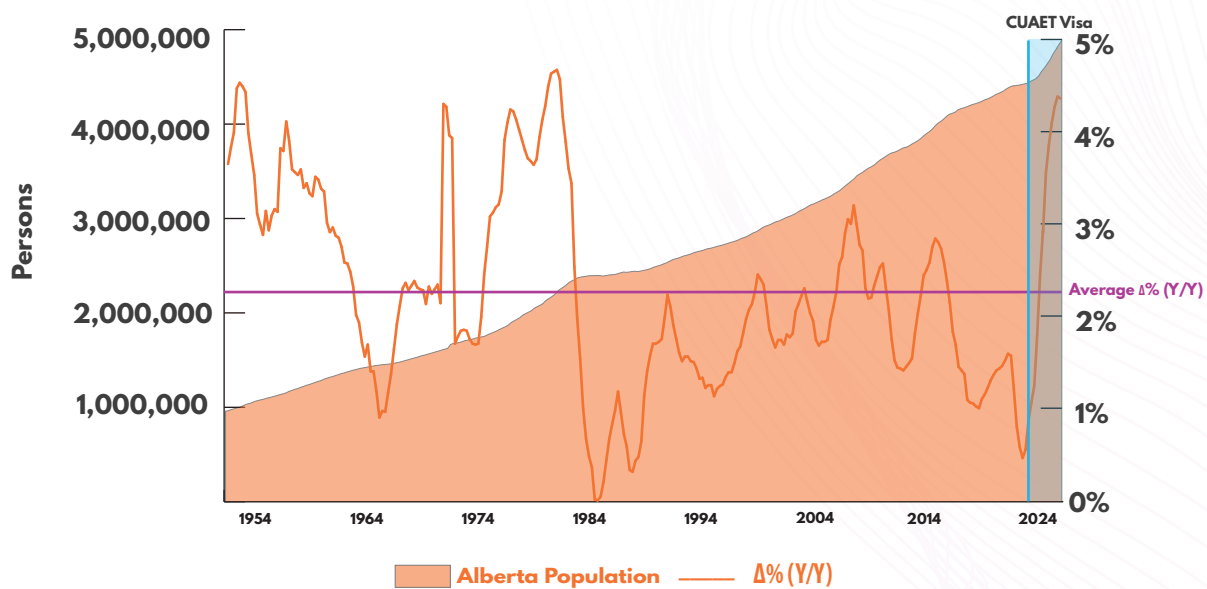

Figure 1. Alberta's population growth from 1952-2024 (Statistics Canada, 2025, Table: 17-10-0009-01).

Net interprovincial migration (2021-2024)

Alberta's net interprovincial migration has been growing since 2021-2022 (Figure 3, 4, and 5), increasing sixfold in 2022-2023 (Figure 4), and 6.8 times in 2023-2024 (Figure 5). ***Alberta's net interprovincial migration surpasses the combined number of individuals who left Ontario, British Columbia, Quebec, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba in 2023/2024*** (Figure 2). This trend reveals Alberta's growing appeal as a destination for internal migration, driven by factors such as affordable housing, economic opportunities, and a lower cost of living compared to other major provinces. The substantial net gain highlights shifting regional migration patterns, emphasizing Alberta's increasing role as a key economic and demographic hub in Canada.
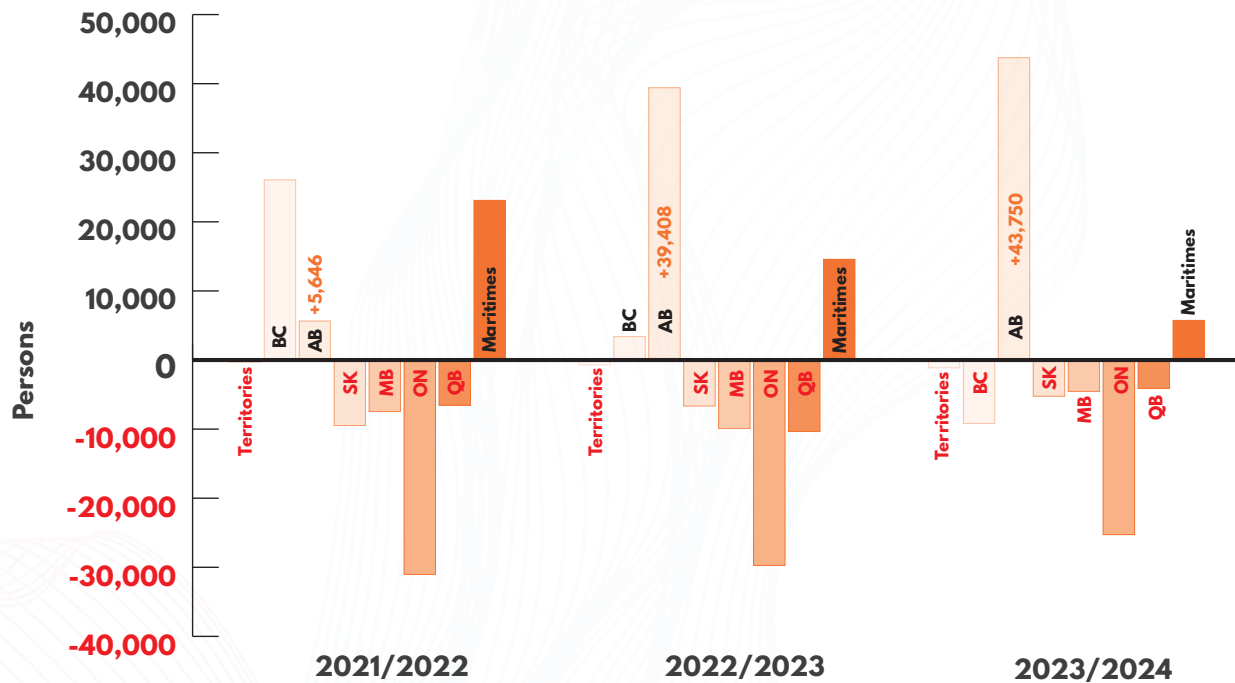
Figure 2. Total interprovincial migration from 2021-2024 (Statistics Canada, 2024a, Table: 17-10-0022-01)

Figure 3. 2021-2022 provincial and territorial population change with maritime provinces and territories aggregated as one region (Statistics Canada, 2024a, Table: 17-10-0022-01).

Figure 4. 2022-2023 provincial and territorial population change with maritime provinces and territories aggregated as one region (Statistics Canada, 2024a, Table: 17-10-0022-01).
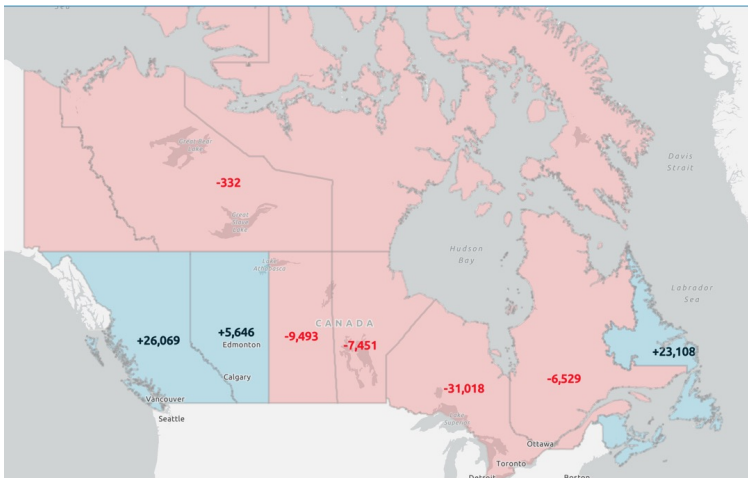

Figure 5. 2023-2024 provincial and territorial population change with maritime provinces and territories aggregated as one region (Statistics Canada, 2024a, Table: 17-10-0022-01).
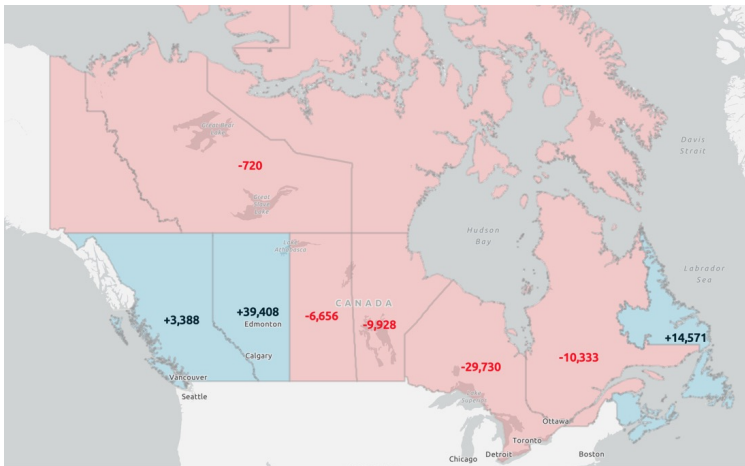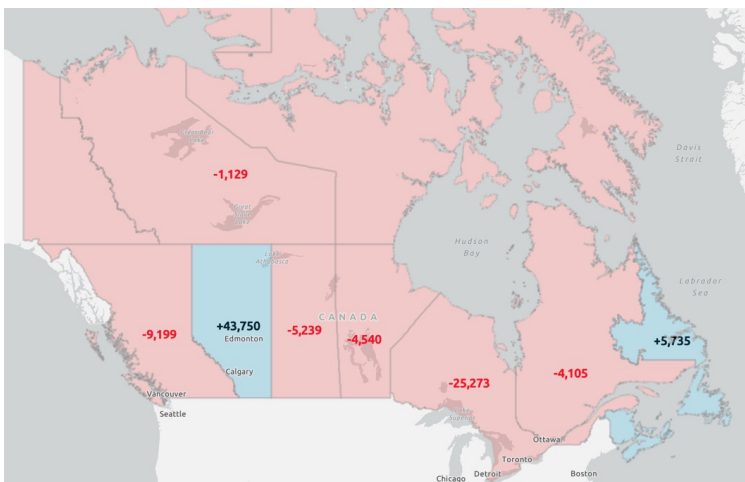
IMPORTANCE OF SECONDARY MIGRATION

In this case study, the definition of secondary migration will be centered around permanent residents who relocate from their initial settlement location to another region within their first year of being Canadian residents. This data is crucial for Canadians as immigration is the single primary driver of population growth, and understanding newcomer mobility is pertinent to appropriately allocate settlement supports to ensure newcomers can settle within their communities and contribute meaningfully to the regional economy. Pull factors for newcomers are often centered around increased social integration, relocating proactively based on ethnocultural community supports, economic opportunities, or housing affordability. This data plays a critical role in economic restructuring, as labour shortages, business growth, and economic diversification can be directly influenced by population and demographic movements, with a magnified impact in rural areas that rely on newcomers for workforce sustainability and to counteract their dwindling populations.

Observing newcomer mobility ***enables governments, policy makers, businesses, and community-serving organizations to make data-informed decisions and rapid responsiveness to changing workforce needs, demographic composition, and infrastructure demands***. The need for timely and accurate data of secondary migration is ***essential to develop targeted supports systems that promote balanced regional development and foster social integration through community supports and economic opportunities***. This framework is necessary to mitigate inefficiencies in resource allocations and missed opportunities for economic growth. As Canada continues to welcome significant numbers of newcomers, investment into a robust secondary migration mechanism is critical to ensure sustainable development and support newcomers in the communities they choose to settle in.

HIGHLIGHT AREAS

While newcomers initially land in one location, many resettle across Canada seeking better opportunities and resources, directly impacting various sectors in the process. This report focuses on a broad overview of selected impacted areas in Alberta but is not inclusive of all secondary migration impacts.

These focus areas include: education, healthcare, the economy and the labour market.

EDUCATION

As newcomers relocate within Canada, their movement has a direct impact on school systems, particularly in urban centres like Calgary, where the student populations are rapidly growing. The Calgary Board of Education (CBE), the largest school board in Alberta, has seen a surge in newcomer student enrollments, reflecting broader shifts in population distribution due to secondary migration. With an increasing number of students arriving from diverse backgrounds, *schools must adapt to evolving educational needs, including language support, cultural integration, and specialized programming*. Beyond urban centers, rural school districts are also experiencing unique challenges, often lacking the infrastructure and resources to accommodate a sudden influx of students. Addressing these shifts requires targeted policy interventions to ensure both urban and rural school systems can effectively support all students and maintain high-quality education across the province.

CALGARY STUDENT POPULATION

The *Calgary Board of Education (CBE)* is responsible for over 142,000 students (CBE, 2024b), making it *equivalent in size to the third-largest city in Alberta*. The CBE is used in this case study as a benchmark to understand shifting student populations in urban Alberta. It is especially significant to understand the changing urban populations in Alberta as cities have the highest proportion of landing and resettlement areas for newcomers. This is largely due to their established infrastructure, which supports newcomer needs such as transportation, housing availability, translation and interpretation services, among other settlement-related services.
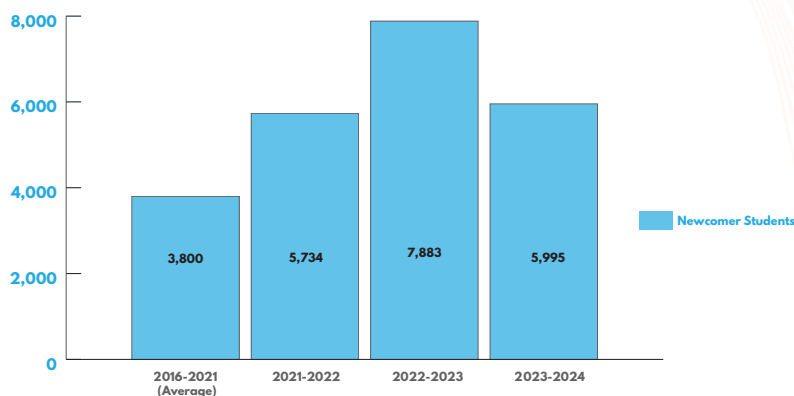
Figure 6. Count of newcomer CBE students between 2016-2024 (Source: CBE, 2024b).

CALGARY NEWCOMER STUDENTS

TThe average number of non-Canadian total registrations in the CBE between 2016 and 2021 was 3800. For the school years of 2021-2022, 2022-2023, and 2023-2024 respectively, 5,734, 7,883, and 5,995 non-Canadian students were registered (Figure 6). ***This represents an increase of 51%, 107%, and 57% for the 2021-2022, 2022-2023, and 2023-2024 school years,*** respectively (CBE, 2024b).

CALGARY NEW STUDENT POPULATION GROWTH

The CBE has seen the highest student enrollment growth (Y/Y) in all of western Canada since 2021-2022 (CBE, 2024a). Figure 7 displays the change in student enrollment (Y/Y). The average student enrollment (Y/Y) growth hovers at 2% (2,300 new students per year) from 2010-2020. ***However, the 2023-2024 school year saw more than double this average increase, with 7,029 new students***. This growth has slowed, with the 2024-2025 school year seeing 4,158 new students, but not to average student enrollment levels seen from 2010-2020.
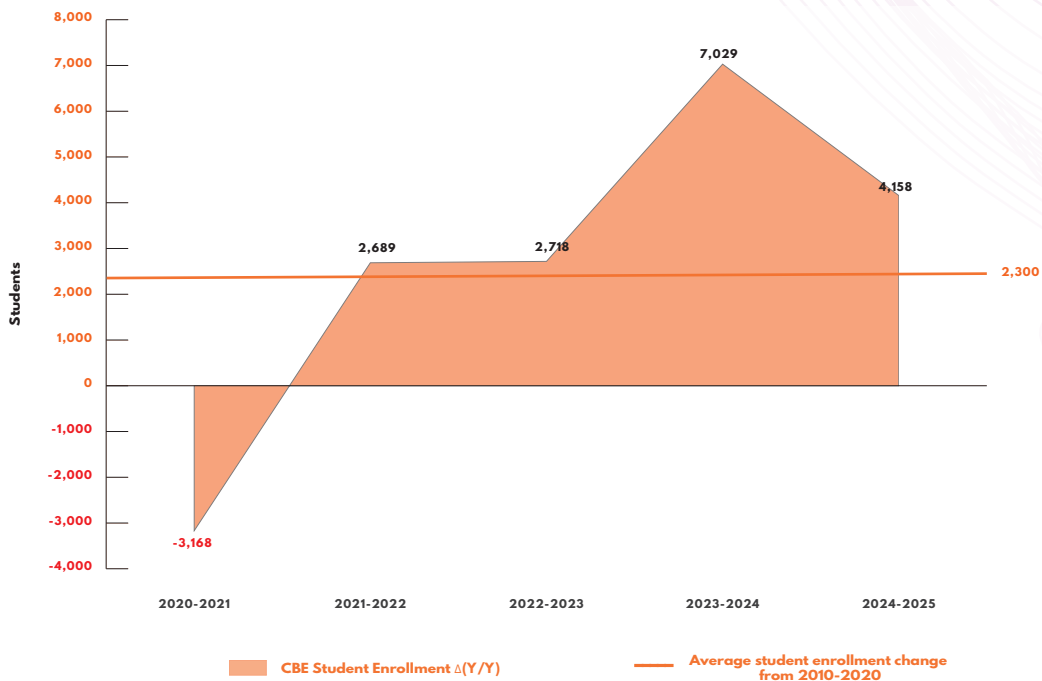

Figure 7. Annual count of CBE student enrolment from 2020-2025 compared to the average count of students enrolled between 2010-2020 (CBE, 2024b).

A BROADER LOOK AT ALBERTAN STUDENTS

Over 400,000 K-12 students in Alberta are located outside of Edmonton and Calgary. Remote student populations range drastically from as small as two students to as many as 5,640 students in a single school, with the median rural student population hovering at 271 students (Figure 8) (Government of Alberta, 2025). *Some of these remote communities are over-represented in their newcomer populations, with as high as 33% of residents being newcomers, compared to the national average of 25% as of 2021* (IRCC, 2024a).
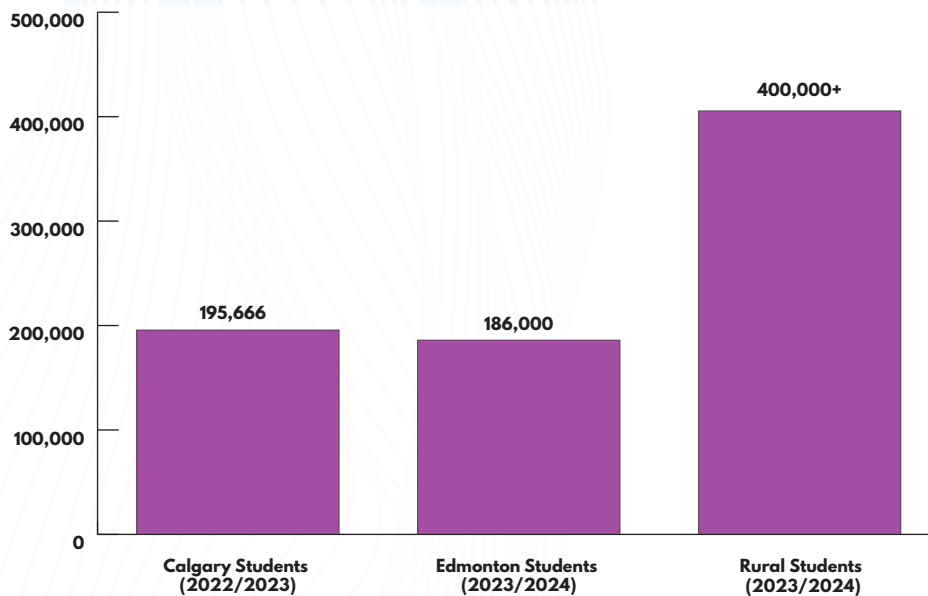
Figure 8. Proportion of K-12 students in Alberta outside of the Calgary and Edmonton major cities (Government of Alberta, 2025).

IMPLICATIONS - EDUCATION

Although there is no publicly available data on the nationality or country of most recent studies for students in Alberta, the significant increase of students aligns with the timeline of the implementation of the CUAET visa (Spring 2022 onward).

Students outside of the major cities of Calgary and Edmonton have vastly different resources from transportation, language access, and diverse programming for developmental needs. The impact of mass migration into Alberta can easily overwhelm smaller school boards already struggling with:

- Staff retention
- Staff recruitment
- Overflowing classrooms
- Limited language supports
- Transportation barriers
- Mental health and trauma supports
- Technological access
- Cultural competency

The rapid increase in student enrolment across the province highlights a significant impact of newcomer secondary migration on the education system. *With shifting student demographics and growing enrolment numbers, school boards are facing mounting pressures related to staffing, classroom capacity, language support services, and transportation accessibility.* While larger cities like Calgary have more established resources to assist newcomer students, rural and smaller communities often struggle with limited infrastructure and fewer specialized services.

HEALTHCARE

Primary care shortages, long wait times, and medical staff workforce retention issues have made it *increasingly difficult for Albertas to access essential healthcare services amidst the rapid population growth in the province*. Despite efforts to recruit more healthcare professionals, the supply has not kept up with the population increase, leaving many residents without consistent access to family doctors or specialized care. These challenges are particularly pronounced in rural areas where physician shortages are more severe and have magnified impacts on the systems. *Access to healthcare is particularly vital to successful newcomer settlement, yet systemic barriers including language, transportation, and long wait times can hinder their ability to receive timely and responsive medical care*.

HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS LEAVING THE PROVINCE

With over 1 million visitors to the Alberta Find a Doctor website between April 2023 and March 2024, a significant increase of 28% compared to the previous year, coupled with a 20% decrease in doctors taking new patients, it is clear that Albertans are struggling to find access to primary health care.

Despite an increase of doctors (Figure 9) entering the province, supply does not meet demand, as "*Alberta in particular, has struggled to recruit and retain medical learners* with an unprecedented 22 family medicine training spots in Alberta empty in 2023, following the medical training "match", *accounting for 81% of all vacant family medicine spots Canada-wide, excluding Quebec*" (Cantlon et al., 2023).
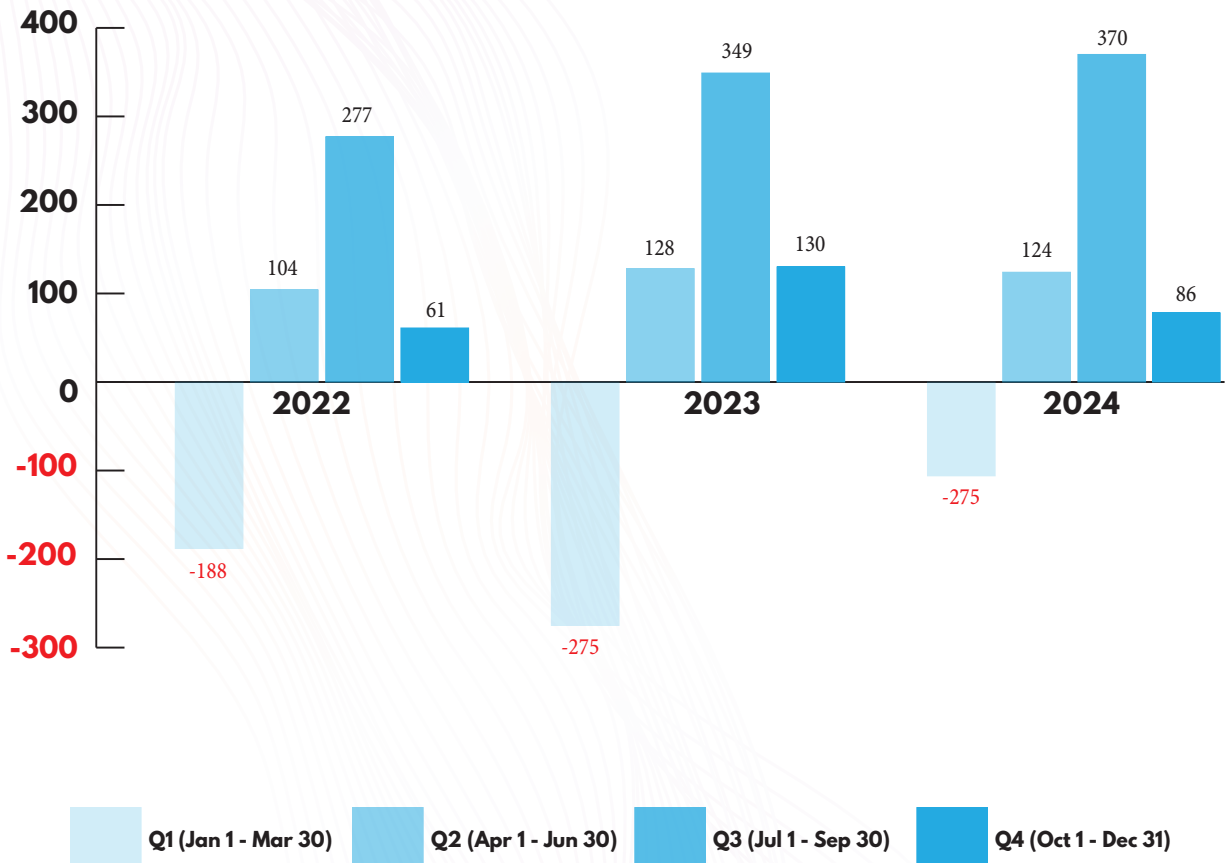
Figure 9. In and out flow of physicians in Alberta (2022-2024) (Source: College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta, 2023, 2024, 2025).

RURAL HEALTHCARE

Rural communities across Alberta face unique healthcare challenges compared to urban centres, with physician shortages and service accessibility issues impacting the quality of life for residents. *As of 2023, 75% of physician job postings in the province were for positions outside of Calgary and Edmonton (Johnstone et al., 2023), despite the rural population representing only 17% of the province's population.* This persistent shortage of healthcare professionals in rural areas not only limits access to primary and specialized medical care, but creates broader socio-economic consequences.

An effective healthcare system is essential for the sustainability of rural communities. The availability of medical services influences young people's willingness to

remain in or relocate to rural areas, as *access to healthcare is a key consideration for those starting families or seeking to establish long-term roots*. Likewise, aging populations in these regions often depend on the local healthcare infrastructure for chronic disease management, emergency care, and long-term health services. *Without adequate healthcare support, many seniors may be forced to relocate to urban centers, further accelerating population decline in rural areas.*

Beyond individual health outcomes, *healthcare accessibility plays a critical role in business attraction and workforce retention*. Companies looking to expand or invest in rural communities consider the availability of healthcare services as a key factor in employee well-being and recruitment efforts. Without a stable healthcare workforce, rural hospitals and clinics risk closure, leading to a cascade effect where remaining healthcare teams become overburdened, further exacerbating retention issues (Johnstone et al., 2023). Addressing these shortages requires targeted investment in physician recruitment and retention programs and innovative solutions such as telemedicine to bridge accessibility gaps. Ensuring sustainable healthcare services in rural Alberta is crucial to maintaining the long-term viability and resilience of these communities.

IMPLICATIONS – HEALTHCARE

The Alberta healthcare system has faced longstanding challenges, including staffing shortages and service accessibility. Population growth, including interprovincial migration, is increasing demand for healthcare services, highlighting the need for strategic investments in infrastructure and workforce capacity. Retention challenges for healthcare professionals, including physicians, nurses, and other essential healthcare workers, have led to staffing shortages, requiring stronger efforts to attract and retain talent to meet the needs of Alberta's growing population. The existing infrastructure cannot meet the growing demands of Albertans. *Simply put – the waiting period for essential care is too long.* From surgeries, ICU beds, and emergency room visits, to preventative care such as screening, access to a family general practitioner and referrals to specialists for diagnoses and treatment, *Albertans experience the longest wait times outside of Atlantic Canada to receive healthcare services. This is despite Alberta ranking second highest in healthcare spending as of 2021* (Moir et al., 2023, and Moir & Hill., 2024).

ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING & CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Alberta's rapid population growth has reshaped the province's economy and critical infrastructure needs, creating both opportunities and challenges. Although the private sector has driven significant job creation, particularly in the resource and hospitality industries, the labour market has struggled to keep up with the population increase, leading to rising unemployment in major urban centers like Calgary. Similarly, the housing demand has surged, with rising home prices, record-low rental vacancy rates, and growing affordability challenges disproportionately affecting newcomers, international students, and temporary foreign workers. Additionally, food insecurity has been on the rise, with newcomers increasingly relying on food banks for essential support.

ECONOMIC AND LABOUR MARKET CHALLENGES

Alberta's economy has seen significant growth, adding 70,000 new jobs from Q3 of 2023 to Q3 of 2024 – outpacing all other large provinces. The private sector has been a key driver, with the resource industry (+25k) and the hospitality industry (+21k) comprising the two largest sectors. Despite this growth, the province is struggling to create enough jobs to keep up with the population growth. This is reflected in the job vacancy rate decreasing and unemployment rates increasing (Business Council of Alberta, 2024). Most significantly, Calgary has the second-highest unemployment rate among urban centres in Canada (8.1%), while also experiencing the highest population growth in the country (Business Council of Alberta, 2024).

As Alberta continues to grow, ensuring strong job opportunities and workforce integration will be essential in supporting long-term economic prosperity for all Albertans. Newcomers play a vital role in Alberta's economic and social fabric, contributing to innovation, entrepreneurship, and workforce diversity. Notably, immigrants account for 32% of all business owners, creating local jobs in all sectors of the economy, and are disproportionately overrepresented in essential sectors such as grocery stores and truck transportation (IRCC, 2024c).

HOUSING SHORTAGES AND AFFORDABILITY CRISIS IN ALBERTA

As of February 2024, over 110,000 Albertans live in affordable housing, with 18,500 households on the waitlist (Government of Alberta, 2024b). **The median price of all homes in Alberta has increased to $605,074 in 2024, a 12% year-over-year price increase (Clark, 2025), compared to a 2.5% increase for the national average (CREA, 2025).**

RENTALS IN ALBERTA

The rental market is important for newcomers because it provides many benefits, such as:

- Flexibility in choosing where to live and ease of relocation
- Lower upfront cost compared to homeownership
- Less responsibility for property maintenance
- Partial inclusion of utilities in some cases
- Predictable and consistent monthly costs

The rental market vacancy rate has been decreasing since 2022 and is forecasted to hit record lows in 2024 (Figure 10).
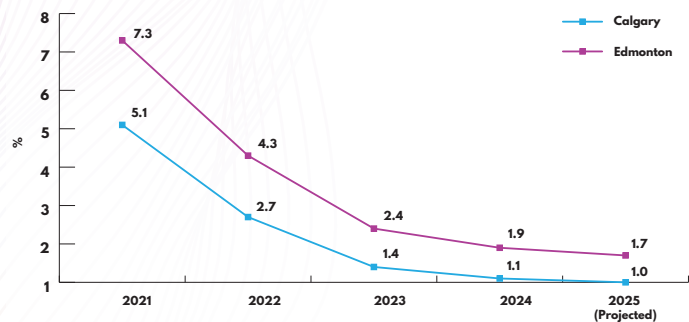
Figure 10. Rental vacancy rates in Alberta (Calgary and Edmonton) from 2021-2025 (projected) (CMHA, 2024).

RENTAL AFFORADABILITY CHALLENGES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND TFW'S

A 2021 study by Statistics Canada found that international students and temporary foreign workers face higher rental costs, 10% and 21% respectively, than their Canadian-born counterparts or immigrants who have been admitted more than five years prior, living in the same urban areas (Kei et al., 2024).

RISING FOOD INSECURITY

Annual reports from Food Banks Canada indicate that newcomers are increasingly becoming a larger proportion of Food Bank clients. From 2022 to 2024, newcomers have nearly doubled as emergency food supply clients (Figure 11). In 2024, most newcomer clients have arrived to Canada in the last two years (Food Banks Canada, 2024).
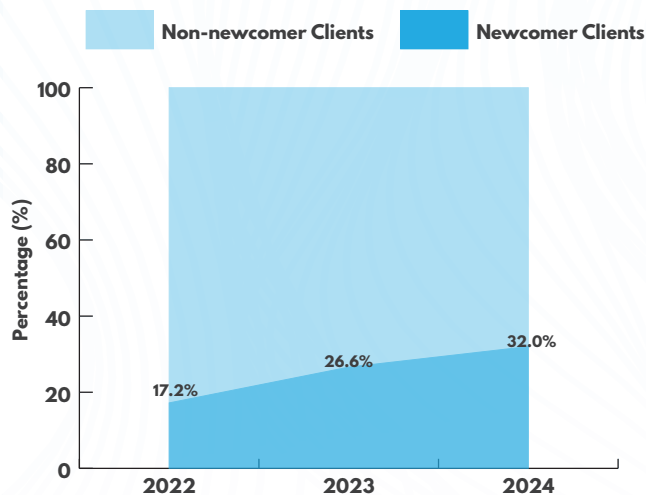
Figure 11. Proportion of newcomers as food-bank clients in Canada from 2022-2024 (Food Banks Canada, 2024).

IMPLICATIONS – ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING & CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The combination of rapid population growth, economic expansion, and the inherently slow pace of infrastructure development places considerable strain on Alberta's critical infrastructure. While newcomers contribute significantly to workforce diversity, entrepreneurship, and business growth, the challenges in the the rising costs of living, record-low rental vacancies, and increasing food insecurity further highlights the need for strategic planning and investment in critical infrastructure. *As Alberta continues to expand, ensuring that economic development is accompanied by sustainable infrastructure investments, affordable housing, and accessible social services will be crucial to supporting both newcomers and long-term residents alike*. This will promote economic resilience while addressing infrastructure gaps to ensure Alberta remains an attractive and sustainable destination for both newcomers and long-term residents.

CURRENT SECONDARY MIGRATION FRAMEWORK

There are multiple avenues for tracking secondary migration in Canada, conducted by multiple levels of government, with varying degrees of accuracy.

The current framework for tracking secondary migration in Canada entails:

THE LONGITUDINAL IMMIGRATION DATABASE (IMDB)

The IMDB provides information on immigration data for all immigrants since 1952, and non-Permanent Residents since 1980. This dataset is managed by Statistics Canada on behalf of a federal-provincial consortium led by IRCC. The data sources include information from IRCC, taxation records from CRA (T1 Family Files and T4 Files), and death records from the Canadian Mortality Database. The IMDB is updated annually with information about:

- The newest immigrant and non-permanent cohorts (Temporary Residents)
- Citizenship and settlement services data
- Taxation, and linking previous years individuals' datasets

STATISTICS CANADA INTERPROVINCIAL MIGRATION DATA

This dataset tracks address changes through the Canada Child Benefit program via the Canada Revenue Agency. Preliminary data is available on a monthly basis, while final interprovincial migration estimates—based on addresses from personal income tax returns—are released a year after the reference year.

NON-PUBLICIZED SECONDARY MIGRATION DATA (IRCC & STATISTICS CANADA)

There is also a third, lesser known alternative for tracking newcomer secondary migration in Canada. When AAISA contacted IRCC and Statistics Canada directly, both agencies confirmed that no additional public data is available on how both entities are tracking newcomer mobility in Canada. However, they noted that this does not mean that frameworks are not currently being explored—it may simply mean they are still in development. Further precedence that there may be a framework being developed to study newcomer mobility in Canada is through the 2016 Syrian Crisis where the IMDB included information on Syrian refugees. Based on this metric, it is plausible that the 2025 IMDB data products may include datasets with Afghan and Ukrainian newcomer mobility.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The current framework for tracking the secondary migration of newcomers in Canada remains limited. To strengthen the system to track newcomer mobility, IRCC and Statistics Canada can work together to map Unique Client Identifier (UCI) data against regional iCARE (Immigration Contribution Agreement Reporting Environment) reporting.

iCARE is a system that IRCC uses to track the services that Service Providing Organizations (SPO) are providing to newcomers monthly. This reporting requires SPOs to track UCI data with each service they provide. *By mapping the UCI data against the regional reporting, we can visualize and more accurately identify where newcomers are migrating within Canada.*

UCI: Unique Client Identifier is assigned to an individual applying for services related to IRCC, including (Parsi, 2024):

- People applying for immigration to Canada
- People applying for work permits
- People applying for study permits
- People applying for refugee claims
- People who are sponsoring family members for immigration
- People who are facing a removal order
- People who have contacted a law firm to help with their immigration papers

IMPLEMENTATION

DATA COLLECTION

iCARE data is reported monthly to IRCC by newcomer-serving providers. Each provider reports the postal code where services are received by newcomers, along with the service date. IRCC and Statistics Canada will need to work together to cross-reference the postal code data with the UCI records to create data products that display geographically where newcomers are receiving settlement services, and whether individuals are receiving services in more than one area (e.g. multiple provinces, urban areas, and/or rural communities).

Scope

In terms of tracking UCI data over time and space to determine secondary migration, it is recommended that the client's first access to settlement services is identified as their landing or initial settlement area. Within one year, if the same client (identified through UCI reported in iCARE), accesses settlement services elsewhere, it can be inferred that the newcomer migrated secondarily. The scope of this is limited to newcomers with permanent resident status and those who have access to settlement services during their permanent residency.

DATA SHARING AGREEMENTS

A data sharing agreement between IRCC and Statistics Canada must be created for Statistics Canada to access iCARE data to be mapped. There is already precedence for this as IRCC and Statistics Canada have a data sharing agreement to facilitate the IMDB database and produce up-to-date data products related to newcomers in Canada. This agreement would simply need to be updated to include UCI and postal code data that is reported from iCARE monthly. The existing agreements in place presumably have preestablished jurisdictional rights and responsibilities for each federal entity to maintain data privacy, collection, and storage.

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

To broadly visualize the secondary migration of newcomers, the UCI data must be mapped with the corresponding postal data, both of which are submitted through the same iCARE reports. The data products can include comprehensive reports, briefs, and interactive dashboards to inform the public, policy makers, and service providers on the changing demographics, concentrations, and mobility patterns of newcomers in each jurisdiction.

DATA PRIVACY

Privacy regulations also pose significant challenges, as data sharing between government entities is subject to strict legal constraints. While anonymization and data aggregation help protect individual identities, they can also lead to the loss of critical migration details, making it harder to track movement patterns at a granular level. Ethical concerns further complicate data collection, as any attempt to monitor individual mobility must ensure it is used solely for policy and service improvement rather than for enforcement or movement restrictions.

To protect the identity and mobility patterns of individual newcomers, all data collected must be aggregated and anonymized before analysis or public dissemination. Additionally, data should be categorized by relevant demographic factors, such as immigration pathway, language needs, and employment sector, ensuring that no single individual can be identified through cross-referencing variables.

A key privacy concern in tracking secondary migration is the potential risk of re-identification, particularly in small communities or niche service areas. To mitigate this risk, suppression techniques should be implemented for data points with low counts, and data should be rounded or grouped where necessary to prevent indirect identification. Furthermore, strict access controls should be enforced, ensuring that only

LIMITATIONS

As with all methods of attempting to track large populations of peoples across time and space, our recommendation has limitations. Begining with broader systemic challenges that can complicate the tracking of secondary migration includes the ***lack of a centralized data integration system*** that connects federal, provincial, and municipal sources. Differing regions maintain seperate databases, often without real-time mechanisms for data sharing. Without a unified system, migration data remains fragmented, making it difficult to obtain and accurate and timely understanding of newcomer movement across jurisdictions. The next limitation notes that ***service-specific data collection is often gathered for operational purposes rather than for migration analysis,*** leading to incomplete datasets that do no capture the full scope of newcomer mobility.

Addressing these challenges requires stronger intergovernmental collaboration, standardized reporting mechanisms, and a balanced approach that respects privacy while improving migration tracking. By developing more comprehensive and transparent data-sharing agreements, policymakers and service providers can gain a clearer understanding of secondary migration trends, leading to better planning and resource allocation to support newcomers effectively.

Another limitation lies in service access, as this proposed methodology relies on newcomers who are actively seeking and successfully accessing settlement services. ***Only 38% of adult immigrants*** (based on pre-COVID-19 data) ***accessed settlement services within their first year of receiving permanent residency, dropping to 13.7% between 2020-2022*** ((Business Council of Alberta, 2024; IRCC, 2024a). As well, 85% of newcomers seeking settlement services were able to access them with ease (IRCC, 2024c). It is also of note that IRCC-funded settlement services are only available to permanent residents and refugee claimants, leaving a considerable gap for the overall newcomer population, and how to track newcomer mobility.

Inferring Newcomer Population From The Limited UCI Sample Size
We can infer a range of newcomers migrating to each province in two ways:

1) The lower end of the range:
Utilizing the percentage of newcomers who access settlement services within their first year of receiving permanent residency to calculate roughly how many newcomers are moving to a province within that time frame.
Based on the most recent metric by the Business Council of Alberta, 38% of new-

comers access settlement services within their first year of receiving permanent residency based on pre-pandemic values (Business Council of Alberta, 2024a). We can employ the method recommended above of tracking UCI numbers and mapping any changes of geographic locations within one year of the first settlement service iCARE reporting.

For example, the data may show that 3,400 newcomers accessed settlement services in another province within one year of their first Needs and Assets Assessment and Referral Services in their landing location of Ontario. We can then infer that the sample population of 3,400 represents only 38% of newcomers who left Ontario in that year. 3,400 newcomers accessing services / 0.38 newcomers collectively = 8947 newcomers left Ontario that year.

2) The higher end of the range:
In the 2023-2024 year, Statistics Canada reported Alberta had a net interprovincial migration of + 43,750. According to IRCC's 2024 Levels plan, 98% of the country's population growth is because of newcomers. We can then infer that 43750 x 0.98 = 42,875 newcomers migrated to Alberta in 2023/2024 from another province.

This upper range of the metric is based on the IRCC definition of newcomer, whereby newcomers are defined as "a Foreign National (who is not a Canadian Citizen) who has been in Canada for a brief time (usually less than five years)." (IRCC, 2024c). By leveraging these two estimates, we can develop a more comprehensive understanding of newcomer mobility, even in the absence of a fully integrated tracking system.

How Can This Sample Size Represent The Entire Newcomer Population?

Newcomers accessing settlement services are likely to have similar needs and desires as newcomers who do not access settlement services. Seeking affordable housing, closer proximity to ethno-cultural groups or social circles, and access to specialized services are common needs for newcomers of any background, regardless of time since initial settlement. This subset of the newcomer population can be statistically analyzed with further precision by weighing and adjusting for underrepresentation, comparing demographic characteristics such as age, employment status, region of initial landing, etc. This calculation of newcomer secondary migration can be strengthened through a number of supplementary measures including provincial registries, the provincial healthcare system, and school registration data. The resulting data can be further validated through newcomer-specific surveys administered by either Statistics Canada or IRCC to build a more complete understanding of newcomer mobility trends.

ALTERNATIVE MEASURES OF TRACKING SECONDARY MIGRATION

While federal data sources like iCARE offer some insights, alternative tracking methods at the provincial and municipal levels can provide valuable regional data. There are unique opportunities to monitor secondary migration patterns, capturing important demographic details and contributing to the larger understanding of settlement trends which can been seen through:

- Provincial registries
- Healthcare enrolment, and
- School registration systems

By leveraging multiple data sources, policymakers can develop a more comprehensive understanding of secondary migration and ensure that services are better tailored to meet the evolving needs of newcomers in Alberta.

PROVINCIAL REGISTRIES

Provincial registries have the capacity to track who is a newcomer to the province by tracking who is trading in their driver's license/identification card from another province. This data could also be extended from a province-to-province basis, or refined to urban-to-urban, urban-to-rural, and rural-to-urban basis.

This method can track:
- Specific settlement zones (e.g. urban to rural, urban to urban, rural to rural)
- Age and sex of newcomers who are moving to Alberta

Gaps
This methodology is very limited, as it can only account for the subset of individuals who apply for driver's licenses (aged 14+) or identification cards (aged 12+). This methodology cannot track:
- Immigration status (citizenship, permanent or temporary residency status, etc.)
- How long the individual lived in their previous province before moving to Alberta

PROVINCIAL HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

Case study: CUAET Visa Holders

This method was utilized from 2022-2023 through Operation Ukrainian Safe Haven (OUSH) whereby data on health registration applications had specific AHS numbers through the UETHBP (Ukrainian Evacuee Temporary Health Benefits Program) that made them easily identifiable as newcomers to the province. The cities that Ukrainian evacuees relocated to within Alberta were tracked as of April 7, 2022. As of September 8, 2022, OUSH has been able to access AHS data that identifies which province new Alberta CUAET Visa holders have relocated from. This data was not previously tracked.

This method can track:
- CUAET Visa holders in the province at a given time
- Age of CUAET Visa holders in the province at a given time

Gaps

This method has been successful for the tracking of CUAET visa holders in particular coming to Alberta. It does not however track whether a CUAET Visa holder arrived directly to Alberta first, or a secondary resettlement.

SCHOOL REGISTRATION

Public school systems track new registrations of students into each school year, not all public-school systems have the infrastructure to track newcomer students into their schoolboard. This system could be as specific as province to province, or urban to rural, or rural to urban.

Gaps
- Tracking is only eligible for students who do enroll in the current year, there may be gaps in study for newcomer students whose families are secondarily migrating, resettling into life in Canada. There may be many reasons associated with a gap in study for newcomer students such as delays in enrollment, schools being over-capacity, challenges finding housing, unfamiliarity with the new area, time needed to unpack and settle, or finding social and community connections.
- Tracking is only eligible for children within school age (ages 5-18)
- Inability/ethics associated with requesting data for students place of last study, country of origin, etc.

CONCLUSIONS

Secondary migration of newcomers is an essential metric to track as newcomers are responsible for 98% of the Canadian population growth (IRCC, 2024c). The method proposed in this report outlines the utilization of iCARE data, mapping where UCI individuals are moving within Canada, within one year of accessing their first settlement service, providing real-time insights into mobility patterns.

By tracking secondary migration, policymakers and service providers can identify factors influencing relocation decisions such as economic opportunities, housing affordability, access to healthcare, or ethnocultural community supports. This data helps to inform targeted policy interventions including labour market strategies, infrastructure developments, and social service distribution, ensuring both newcomers and their communities have the necessary resources to thrive. Additionally, analyzing migration trends allows for proactive planning in response to broader global events such as economic downturns, humanitarian crises, or geopolitical conflicts that drive mass displacement into Canada.

Ultimately, secondary migration tracking is not just about measuring movement of peoples, but about understanding the evolving needs of Canada's growing population and ensuring resources and opportunities are distributed equitably. A comprehensive and timely approach to tracking newcomer mobility strengthens Canada's ability to respond to demographic changes, support regional economies, and create inclusive communities where newcomers can successfully integrate.

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