

Staff Report

Community Services Department



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REPORT TO: Community and Infrastructure Services Committee

DATE OF MEETING: March 17, 2025

SUBMITTED BY: Elin Moorlag Silk, Manager, Service Coordination & Improvement

PREPARED BY: Elin Moorlag Silk, Manager, Service Coordination & Improvement
Olabukonla Mise, Project Manager, Municipal Newcomer Strategy

WARD(S) INVOLVED: All Wards

DATE OF REPORT: March 6, 2025

REPORT NO.: CSD-2025-054

SUBJECT: Municipal Newcomer Strategy – Scope & Development Approach

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council endorse the scope and approach outlined in CSD-2025-054 for the development of the Municipal Newcomer Strategy.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an overview of the purpose, approach, scope, intended deliverables, and timeline for the development of the City's first-ever Municipal Newcomer Strategy.
- Development of the Municipal Newcomer Strategy will involve significant community engagement with newcomers, collaboration with newcomer-serving organizations, and the utilization of research, data and best practices. This approach will ensure the strategy is experience-based and data-driven.
- The scope for the strategy development will be focused on the experiences and needs of newcomers who have arrived in Canada within the last 10 years, AND on areas of service and opportunities within the City of Kitchener's jurisdiction.
- While the development of the Municipal Newcomer Strategy aligns with our strategic priority to *Foster a Caring City Together*, it also plays a crucial role in enhancing Kitchener's economic resilience by leveraging the potential of newcomers in business creation, workforce sustainability, and long-term economic growth.
- The end goal throughout this development phase is to create a strategy that enhances the quality of life for newcomers by improving access to City services, facilities, events, and supports, while fostering opportunities for economic prosperity, cultural inclusion, and active community participation.

*** This information is available in accessible formats upon request. ***
Please call 519-741-2345 or TTY 1-866-969-9994 for assistance.

BACKGROUND:

The idea to develop a Municipal Newcomer Strategy came out of the City's 2022 strategic plan process through consultations with community-led advisory groups who identified newcomers (immigrants from various streams, including skilled workers, and refugees) as a priority population for the City of Kitchener to focus on. As a starting point, the development of a strategy to guide this municipal work was identified as the first step and was included in the City's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan under the *Fostering a Caring City Together* list of priorities.

Given the immigration trends across Canada and within our region over the past 10 years, it is timely for the City of Kitchener to turn our attention to how best to support newcomers in our community. As of the 2021 census, 23% of the Canadian population is made up of immigrants, and 30% of Kitchener's population is reported to be born outside of Canada (which is a 4% jump after remaining stable at 26% for the 2016 and 2011 census). Among immigrants living in Kitchener, approximately 22% are considered recent immigrants, which means they have arrived over the last five years.

The tables below provide an overview of recent immigration trends in Kitchener. Table 1 highlights the top 10 countries of origin for recent immigrants in 2021, showing a doubling of the number of recent immigrants compared to 2016. It also reflects shifts in their countries of origin, which indicate evolving global migration patterns and present new opportunities for community and economy building in Kitchener.

TABLE 1: COUNTRY OF ORIGIN FOR RECENT IMMIGRANTS LIVING IN KITCHENER

Top 10 Countries	2021 Census			2016 Census		
	N	%	rank	N	%	rank
India	3,565	22%	1	925	12%	1
Eritrea	2,055	13%	2	340	4%	5
Syria	1,695	10%	3	725	9%	2
Nigeria	605	4%	4	60	1%	27
Philippines	500	3%	5	320	4%	6
China	495	3%	6	420	5%	4
Turkey	460	3%	7	70	1%	24
Brazil	425	3%	8	35	0.5%	39
Pakistan	365	2%	9	230	3%	8
Ethiopia	360	2%	10	195	3%	12
Total	16,345			7,910		

Table 2 categorizes recent immigrants living in Kitchener by the primary immigration pathways contributing to these larger immigration trends. As demonstrated, Economic Immigrants and Refugees are the two largest categories of newcomers settling in Kitchener, accounting for 79% in 2021 and 75% in 2016.

TABLE 2: CATEGORIES OF RECENT IMMIGRANTS LIVING IN KITCHENER

Immigration Category	Arrivals in Kitchener 2021	Top Source Countries 2021	Arrivals in Kitchener 2016	Top Source Countries 2016
Economic immigrants	6,295 (39%)	India, Nigeria, Philippines	3,690 (41%)	India, Philippines, Pakistan
Refugees	6,590 (40%)	Eritrea, Syria, Turkey	3,090 (34%)	Iraq, Eritrea, Syria
Family sponsorships	3,260 (20%)	India, Eritrea, China	2,205 (24%)	India, United States of America, Pakistan
Other immigrants	200 (1%)	Nigeria, Poland, Brazil, El Salvador	90 (1%)	Colombia, United States of America
TOTAL	16,345		9,075	

While the tables above draw on the most recent available data from the 2021 census, it is essential to recognize significant global and national events that have occurred post-2021, which may have contributed to a notable increase in newcomers in Kitchener. These events, though not captured in the 2021 Statistics Canada data, have likely impacted service demands and community dynamics. Such key events include:

- Russian Invasion of Ukraine (2022)
- Afghan Refugee Resettlement (2021 – ongoing)
- Global Humanitarian Crises in regions such as Syria and Rohingya-majority areas (2021+)
- Significant Increases in International Students entering Waterloo Region (2022+)

These additional resettlement trends show the need for flexibility in the Municipal Newcomer Strategy's design to accommodate emerging population shifts and service needs driven by global events.

REPORT:

In building a project charter for the development of the Municipal Newcomer Strategy, substantial engagement with staff across all departments within the City of Kitchener, along with representatives from newcomer-serving organizations (such as Immigration Partnership, KW Multicultural Centre, and Compass Refugee Centre) has been conducted. The purpose of these consultations was to better understand newcomer services available within the community and to better understand some of the experiences or challenges City of Kitchener staff have encountered when serving newcomers within their various roles. Within these conversations, ideas, insights, and opportunities were shared related to the scope and approach to the development of the newcomer strategy, which was incredibly helpful in developing a clear purpose, goals, approach, deliverables, and timeline for development of the strategy.

It is also important to note that while the development of the Municipal Newcomer Strategy aligns with our strategic priority to *Foster a Caring City Together*, it can also play a crucial role in enhancing Kitchener's economic resilience by leveraging the potential of newcomers in business creation, workforce sustainability, and long-term economic growth. Thus, the

development of the Municipal Newcomer Strategy can also be seen as an important component of the strategic investment in Kitchener's economic and social future, supporting the city's long-term prosperity by building a stronger economy, building stronger communities, and engaging in better workforce planning. In fact, research shows that newcomers drive economic growth in a number of ways, as illustrated below.

How Newcomers can Drive Economic Growth in Kitchener

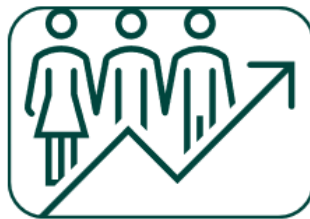


Entrepreneurial Potential

- 38% of immigrants surveyed by the Immigration Partnership in Waterloo Region accessed small business supports

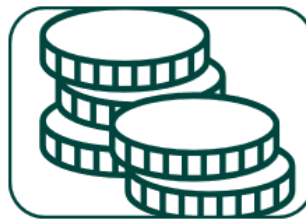
• More than 1 in 4 enterprises in Canada are owned by immigrants

• Newcomers drive local business growth and job creation



Workforce Contribution

- 71% of recent immigrants (15+) in Kitchener have employment income
- Newcomers fill talent shortages & workforce gaps



Economic Independence Potential

- 29% of recent immigrants earned over \$50K annually in 2020



Young & Growing Workforce

- Average newcomer age is 29.9 years (compared with the overall Kitchener population of 39.0)
- Supports workforce & business sustainability

Municipal Newcomer Strategy Development

The following section provides an outline of the purpose, scope, approach, and deliverables for the development of the Municipal Newcomer Strategy.

Purpose

To develop a Municipal Newcomer Strategy for the City of Kitchener that enhances the quality of life for newcomers by improving access to City services, facilities, events, and supports, while fostering opportunities for:

- economic prosperity,
- cultural inclusion, and
- active community participation.

Throughout development of the strategy, the focus will be on actionable and achievable recommendations within the City's jurisdiction to help create a welcoming and supportive environment where newcomers can thrive and contribute meaningful to the life of our community and our City's economy.

Project Scope

In developing the Municipal Newcomer Strategy, priority will be placed on the experiences and needs of newcomers who have arrived in Kitchener within the last 10 years. Typically the categorization of 'Newcomer' or 'recent immigrant' by the federal government, as reported by Statistics Canada, would be those who have arrived within the past five years. However, for this project, the decision to define 'newcomers' as individuals who have arrived in Canada within the last 10 years acknowledges the varied timelines for settlement and integration into the community, which differ based on individual circumstances. This approach aligns with the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) perspective, which emphasizes that not all newcomers integrate within a specific timeframe. Expanding the time band to 10 years also ensures inclusion of those who arrived shortly before or during the COVID-19 pandemic, recognizing that the pandemic's disruptions likely delayed integration and access to supports for many individuals.

Development of the strategy will also draw on established frameworks, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Canada's Social Determinants of Health (SDH), and regional initiatives such as the Community Safety and Wellbeing Framework and Immigration Partnership's model, to guide its development and ensure alignment with global, national, and local priorities for fostering inclusive and thriving communities; please see Appendix A.

Some examples of areas of jurisdiction that affect newcomers but **are out of scope** in development of the strategy include: Regional responsibilities (public transit, subsidized housing, social services), Federal and Provincial immigration policies and programs, employment and credential recognition process, and education systems (K-12 and post-secondary).

The strategy **will focus** on areas of service and opportunities within the City's jurisdiction, ensuring actionable recommendations while integrating equity considerations throughout its development. Some examples areas of focus within the City's jurisdiction include the following: direct programming offered out of City pools and community centres, informational materials about the City's services, engagement practices for City-led projects, access to and use of City of Kitchener facilities, and recruitment/retention policies and practices for City of Kitchener staff.

Project Approach

To develop a strategy that is beneficial for newcomers and for the community as a whole, while also being feasible to implement, the following approach will be taken:

1. **Conduct widespread engagement** with newcomers and with newcomer-serving organizations to understand needs, barriers and challenges, to leverage/coordinate resources, address gaps in services/supports and awareness, and avoid duplication of services.
2. **Utilize research, demographics, best practices, and existing frameworks** to create a strategy informed by evidence and lived experience.

3. **Collaborate with City Staff to integrate existing initiatives** that are in alignment with the purpose of the Municipal Newcomer Strategy. In our consultations with staff and within the community, many areas of collaboration have surfaced where staff are already doing newcomer-focused work, which we will continue to prioritize to ensure a focused, coordinated approach within the City's jurisdiction, maximizing impact without duplicating efforts.
4. **Ensure collaborative governance throughout strategy development** with the creation of a Municipal Newcomer Strategy Working Group made up of those with lived experience as newcomers, representatives from newcomer-serving organizations, and City of Kitchener staff. This group will play a critical role in reviewing the engagement strategy and results, refining priorities, and formulating the recommendations that will make up the strategy presented to Council for its consideration.

Project Deliverables

The final set of deliverables expected out of the work outlined above are the following:

1. **A comprehensive summary of themes and priorities identified through engagement** with diverse newcomer groups and newcomer-serving organizations, including the identification of challenges and barriers related to accessing City of Kitchener services, and opportunities where improvements could be made.
2. **A summary of research conducted**, including current City of Kitchener demographics, population projections, and analysis of best practices and newcomer strategies/frameworks from other cities to support data-driven decision-making.
3. **A comprehensive Municipal Newcomer Strategy**, made up of a series of resource-aligned recommendations for Council's consideration (staff report and presentation).
4. **An actionable implementation framework** and a monitoring/evaluation plan to ensure long-term impact and sustainability.

Project Timeline

Over the course of 2025, the following activities will be taking place as the Municipal Newcomer Strategy is under development.

Project Timeline: Municipal Newcomer Strategy Development



* Opportunities for Council feedback & input

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report supports Fostering a Caring City Together

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Through the 2023 budget process City Council added \$200,000 in capital funding for this Strategic Plan Priority, which covers the dedicated full-time project manager in place for strategy development as well as all expenses incurred as part of community engagement.

Once the Municipal Newcomer Strategy has been developed, considerations for both operational and capital funding will be presented to Council as part of the recommendations.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

Engagement efforts to date have included targeted consultations with newcomer-serving organizations such as the Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre, Immigration Partnership Waterloo Region, and Compass Refugee Centre. Moving forward, staff will consult a diverse range of stakeholders, including additional newcomer-serving and ethno-cultural organizations.

As part of planned engagement for the strategy development, staff will seek input from individual newcomers across various immigration categories within the Kitchener community, including permanent residents (economic immigrants, family-sponsored immigrants, and refugees), temporary residents (international students, temporary foreign workers), asylum claimants, and undocumented persons in order to ensure a comprehensive and inclusive approach.

In order to ensure diversity of experience and representation in the governance of the strategy development, a working group will be created to support the co-creation and development of the strategy. The working group will consist of representatives from newcomer-serving organizations, individuals with lived experience as newcomers, and City staff. This group will play a critical role in developing the engagement strategy, reviewing engagement data, refining priorities, and formulating the recommendations that will comprise the Municipal Newcomer Strategy. The working group is expected to consist of 12 to 15 members in total, including 5 staff members, 5 newcomer community members, and 4 representatives from newcomer-serving community organizations, who will, in line with previous City practices when engaging equity-seeking groups, be paid an honorarium for their time.

PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:

There are no previous reports/authorities related to this matter.

APPROVED BY: Michael May, DCAO & GM, Community Services

ATTACHMENTS:

Appendix A – Framework Alignment & Context for the Municipal Newcomer Strategy