

# Social Resilience and Migrants in Ontario Cities: Lessons from the Pandemic

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We acknowledge with gratitude the contributions of Manolli Ekra, formerly at OCASI, our partners, OCASI and TCRI without whom this research would not have happened, the Settlement Services Working Group at BMRC-IRMU, and the willingness of OCASI agency partners and workers to complete the survey. The views and opinions expressed here are those of the authors who are also responsible for any errors or omissions. This research was funded by SSHRC Partnership Grant # 895-2016-1004.



# What is a Resilient City?

- Use examples from pandemic responses in Ontario
- Draw on survey data and focus groups with workers and managers providing services to migrants living in Ontario
- Findings inform:
  - Debates about resilience and its conceptual value for geography
  - Empirical understanding of pandemic impacts on migrants
  - Possible directions for policy

## 100 RESILIENT CITIES

PIONEERED BY THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION



<https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/blog/100-resilient-cities/>



# Resilient Cities

## Resilience

- Ability to bounce back from adverse events

## Competing views :

- Neoliberal resilience
  - State imposition
  - Responsibilization of individuals and community-based institutions
  - Reinforces status quo
- Critical resilience
  - Focuses on lived experience
  - Acknowledges structural forces and agency
  - Considers bottom-up initiatives

## Social Resilience in the Neoliberal Era

*Edited by*

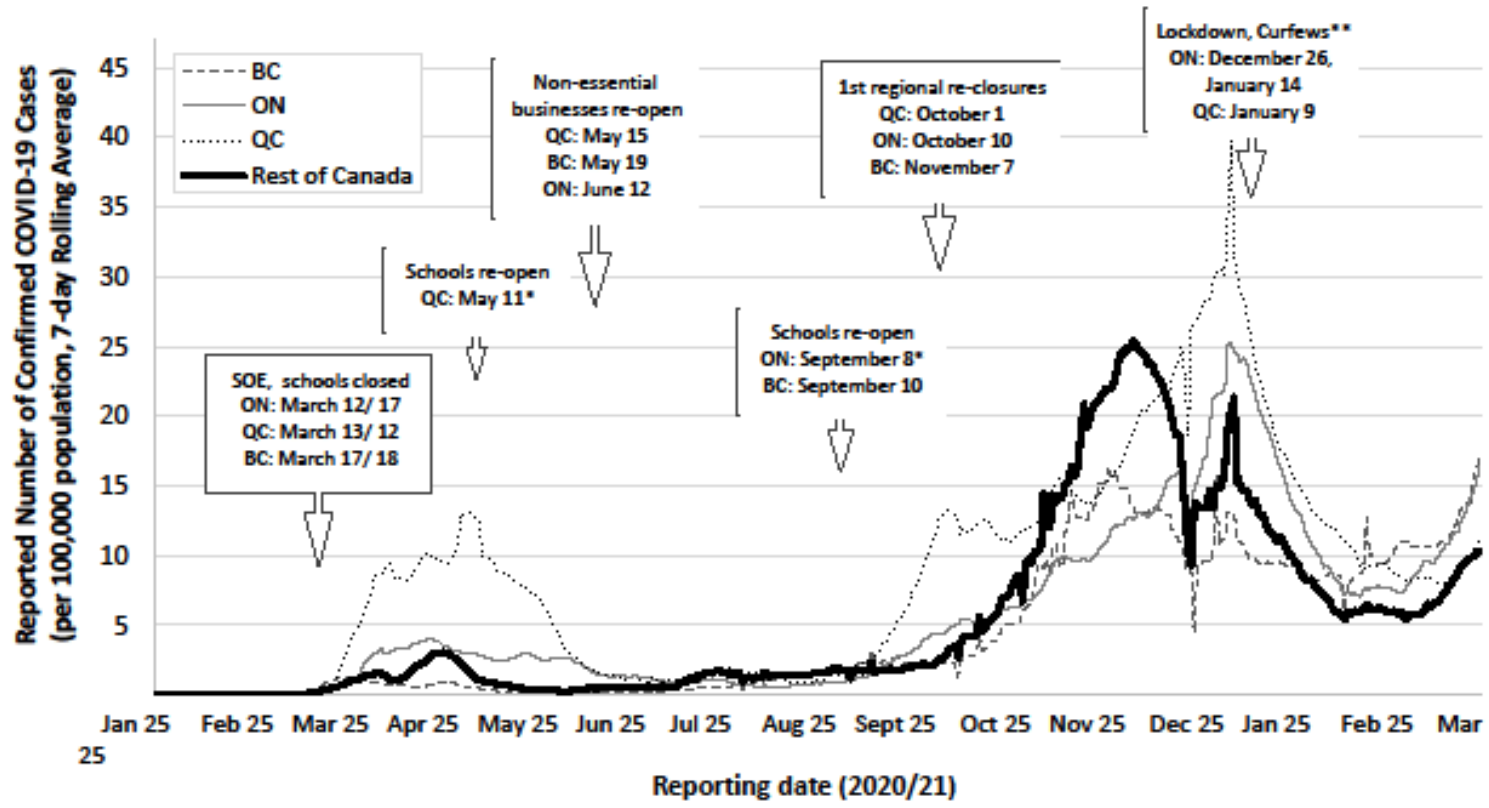
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# Pandemic Inequalities in Ontario

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

CANADA WORLD BUSINESS INVESTING OPINION POLITICS SPORTS LIFE ARTS DRIVE REAL ESTATE PODCASTS

## Immigrant COVID-19 deaths early in pandemic about twice that of other Canadians: Statscan

HINA ALAM

VANCOUVER

THE CANADIAN PRESS

PUBLISHED JUNE 10, 2021

Global NEWS

World Canada Local Politics Money Health Entertainment Lifestyle

HEALTH

### Low COVID-19 vaccine uptake in vulnerable Ottawa neighbourhoods blamed on barriers



By Craig Lord · Global News

Posted August 11, 2021 1:01 pm · Updated August 11, 2021 3:58 pm

Table 1. Summary of confirmed cases of COVID-19 for each neighbourhood diversity quintile: Ontario, February 26, 2020 to December 31, 2022 (n=1,401,843)

Quintiles of neighbourhood diversity	Cumulative case count	Percent of all COVID-19 cases (%)	Age-standardized cumulative rate per 100,000 population	Rate relative to least diverse
Quintile 1 (least diverse)	154,131	11.0	7,418	Reference
Quintile 2	186,401	13.3	8,175	1.1
Quintile 3	229,939	16.4	9,056	1.2
Quintile 4	314,497	22.4	10,170	1.4
Quintile 5 (most diverse)	516,875	36.9	12,051	1.6

Note: Rates per 100,000 population are standardized to the 2011 census population to account for any age differences between quintiles of marginalization.

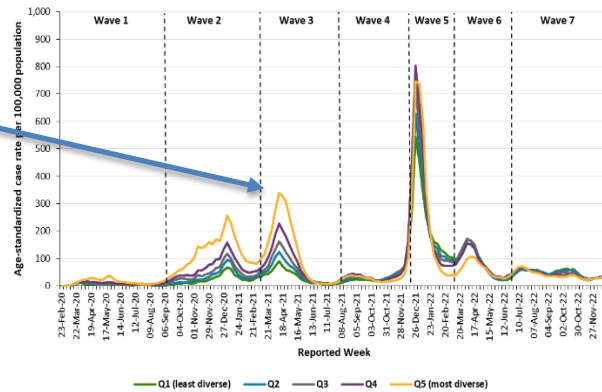
Data Source: CCM, ON-Marg 2016



# Reversing Inequalities

High rates in minority areas peak in wave 3

Figure 1. Confirmed cases of COVID-19 for each neighbourhood diversity quintile by reported week: Ontario, February 26, 2020 to December 31, 2022



Note: Wave 7 includes data on cases reported up to December 31, 2022.  
Data Source: CCM, ON-Marg 2016

<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/epi/2020/06/covid-19-epi-diversity.pdf>

## How local volunteers are helping Toronto's least vaccinated community get shots in arms



Only 57% of residents over 18 are immunized against COVID-19 in Taylor-Massey

Michelle McCann · Posted: Jul 10, 2021 4:00 AM ET | Last Updated: July 10, 2021



Community ambassadors stand outside an apartment building in the east end neighbourhood of Massey-Taylor. Volunteers have been knocking on doors in the area to encourage residents to get vaccinated. (Submitted by WoodGreen Community Services)

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/taylor-massey-low-vaccination-rates-1.6096481>



# Canadian Settlement Model



- Funded mainly by federal government (\$1.7 billion in 2021-22)
- Immigrant-serving agencies (ISAs)
  - Non-profit, community-based
  - Services include:
    - Support (translation, transportation etc.)
    - Language training, employment and community programs
  - For permanent residents
  - Mainly in-person
  - Largely local mandate
  - Uneven distribution across cities
- Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs)
  - Convene public and private sector representatives to identify and plan for municipal migration issues
  - Most are housed in municipalities with small dedicated staff
  - Consultation, research and advocacy

<https://newcomersinCanada.ca/services-for-newcomers/settlement-services-at-toronto-public-library/>

# Methods

## Surveys

- Managers and workers at immigrant-serving agencies
- On-line surveys
- Manager survey
  - About 20 minutes
  - Demographics, impacts of pandemic on agency operations & concerns for future
  - 50 agencies
- Worker survey
  - About 15 minutes
  - Demographics, impacts of pandemic on working conditions & views about return to the office
  - 173 workers

## Focus groups

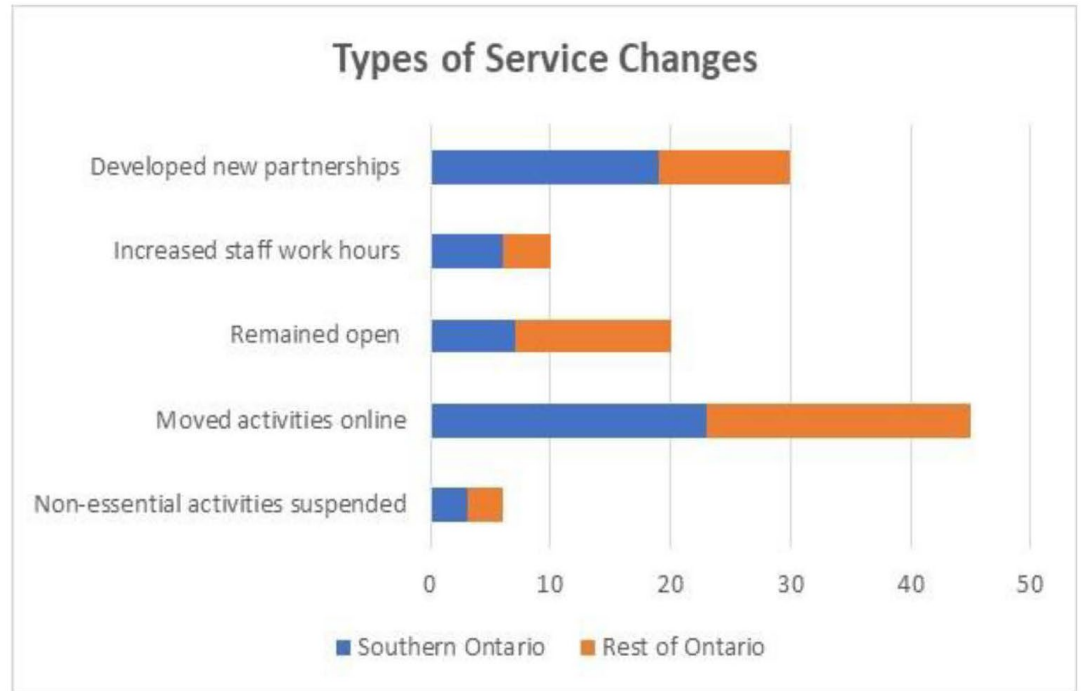
- Managers at:
  - immigrant-serving agencies
  - Local Immigration Partnerships (local planning tables that bring together agencies, other public institutions, and private sector representatives interested in immigration)
  - Views of resilience, resilience during the pandemic, and strategies for enhancing resilience of organizations and migrants





# Service Provision

- ISAs adapted:
  - Moved services online
  - Maintained critical in-person services
- LIPS facilitated:
  - Brainstorming and problem-solving
  - Learning within and across sectors
- Regional variations



# Information Exchange

- LIPs
  - Convened and chaired intersectoral consultation tables
    - Health
    - Employment, food security, and other essential services
  - Initiated and supported collection and analysis of information about migrant COVID experiences
- ISAs
  - facilitated volunteer recruitment and activities
  - Participated in data collection
- ISAs and LIPs acknowledged as migration experts

## How local volunteers are helping Toronto's least vaccinated community get shots in arms



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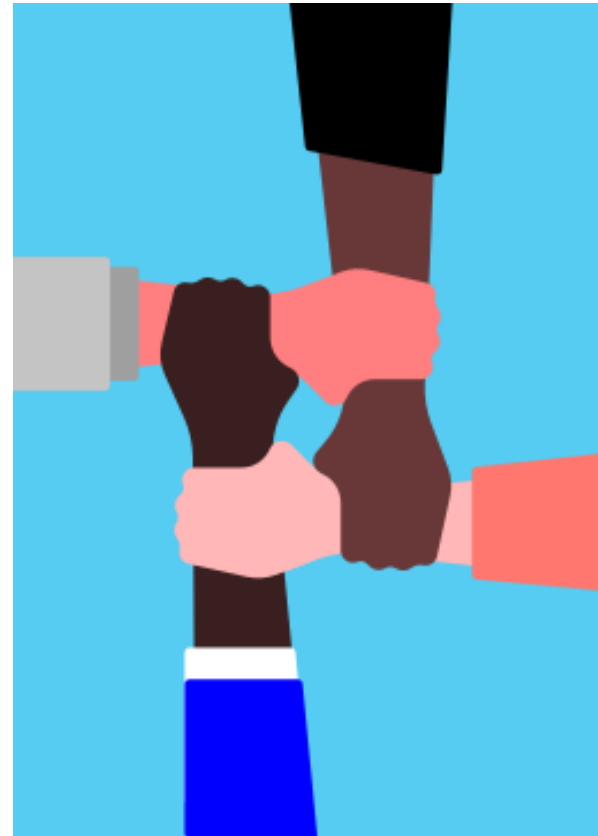
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/taylor-massey-low-vaccination-rates-1.6096481>



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# Collaboration

- Deepened relationships with:
  - Existing and new partners, e.g., food banks, public health, hospitals, school boards
- Involved diverse institutions:
  - Small and emerging settlement agencies, multiple public sector institutions, ethnocultural groups, faith organizations, etc.
- Drew on past experience:
  - Syrian refugee initiative



Wikimedia commons



# Advocacy



[https://www.yorkregion.com/news/york-region-food-bank-appeals-for-cash-donations-to-help-support-current-future-programs/article\\_3d50d9ca-082c-56a4-9ad4-68a329f7b843.html](https://www.yorkregion.com/news/york-region-food-bank-appeals-for-cash-donations-to-help-support-current-future-programs/article_3d50d9ca-082c-56a4-9ad4-68a329f7b843.html)

## BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDES TECHNOLOGY, ACCESS AND SUPPORT FOR SENIORS (TASS)

### BACKGROUND

COVID-19 pandemic started in March 2020. Public spaces were closed. Human Endeavour recognized the need to pivot to online services and offered TASS senior-friendly technology in May 2020.

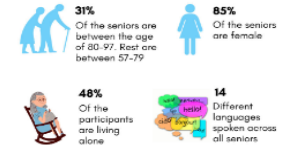
May 2020 to November 2021, 400+ free tablets with data and technical support helpline have been provided to seniors through partners across Ontario. TASS helpline engaged in 15000+ calls and remote technical interactions. 25+ organizations are partnering through collective impact TASS project.



### OBJECTIVE

Gather feedback from seniors who used TASS tablets for at least 3 months.

### DEMOGRAPHICS



## TASS IMPACT ON SOCIAL CONNECTIONS AND PHYSICAL & EMOTIONAL HEALTH



85%

Seniors agreed that TASS tablets have helped maintain their social circle during the pandemic.



86%

Seniors agreed that TASS tablets have helped maintain their physical and emotional health.



79%

Seniors agreed that having their own tablets increased their independence.



Seniors were able to maintain connections with family and friends and make new friends through virtual online programs.



70% of the seniors attended more community programs than pre-COVID.

Funded by The United Way Greater Toronto / Allin Straight Fund, York Region, Government of Ontario, and Government of Canada. Project and Research Partners: Research by York University. Contact: info@humanendeavour.org



<https://bmrc-irmu.info.yorku.ca/research-reports-2/>



# Fostering Local Resilience

- Sustained, adequate, and flexible funding for NGOs and municipal governments
- Collaboration
  - Across diverse institutions from multiple sectors, of various sizes, and with different funding regimes
  - Local knowledge that encourages collaboration
  - Social relations that promote collaboration
- Equitable power relations
  - Responsive, regular, and cooperative dialogue
- Mission-driven advocacy



Credit: Andy Dean

# Conclusions

A critical resilience approach that highlights bottom up as well as top down crisis responses is useful for urban social problems.

Social resilience is relevant for studying migration issues in cities:

- Foregrounds social and economic context where migrants settle
- Acknowledges integration poses challenges for all migrants and those challenges differ from one migrant to another
- Takes account of the dynamic nature of integration

What makes a city resilient?

- Sustained, sufficient and flexible funding for municipalities and civil society organizations.
- Collaboration with diverse NGOs, more equitable power relations, and engaging with NGOs' mission-driven advocacy also reduced inequalities.
- Adequate resources to maintain collaboration, cooperation and advocacy are crucial.



## Questions/Comments

Thanks to all participants in the survey and focus groups and Tara Bedard, Waterloo Region

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This presentation draws on **Resilience, Advocacy and the Settlement Sector: Learning from the Pandemic** by Valerie Preston, John Shields, Lisa Alfieri-Sladen, Henry Akanko, Tara Bedard, Mary Ellen Bernard, Noor Din, Vera Dodic, Lucia Harrison, Hindia Mohamed, Prince Sibanda, Stephan Reichhold available from V. Preston upon request.



# Building Migrant Resilience in Cities/Immigration et résilience en milieu urbain



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