



**LEVEL**  
YOUTH POLICY PROGRAM



## **POLICY BRIEF**

# Decolonizing “Integration”:

Exploring the Role of Immigrant and Refugee Newcomer Agencies

HASRAT GREWAL GILL

***The LEVEL Youth Policy Program takes place on the traditional and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) & sə́ilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Coast Salish peoples.***

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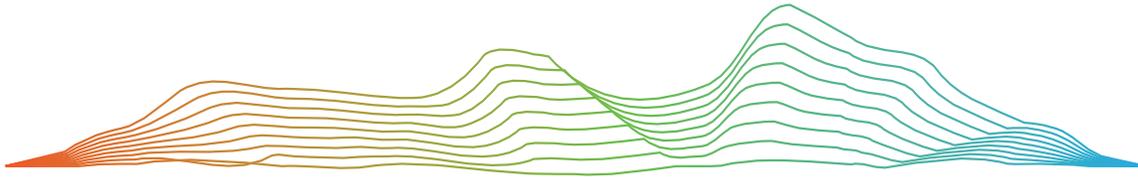
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**COVER ILLUSTRATION**

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# Contents

- 3 About the LEVEL Initiative**
- 4 Biography**
- 5 Executive Summary**
- 6 Problem Definition and Background**
- 8 Policy Options**
- 10 Conclusion**



# About the LEVEL Initiative

LEVEL is a youth engagement initiative of Vancouver Foundation that aims to address racial inequity. We do this by investing in the leadership capacity of Indigenous, racialized, immigrant, and refugee youth to create more opportunities throughout the non-profit and charitable sector.

Despite being the fastest-growing youth populations in British Columbia, Indigenous, immigrant, and refugee youth don't have the same opportunities as other young people. Race continues to be a factor that hinders their ability to have a say in decisions that impact their lives.

LEVEL empowers these youth by building their capacity to challenge and change those systems that hinder their ability to build a more just world.

## **LEVEL consists of three pillars of work to advance racial equity**

1. LEVEL Youth Policy Program
2. LEVEL Youth Organizing
3. LEVEL Youth Granting

## **About the LEVEL Youth Policy Program (LEVEL YPP)**

The LEVEL Youth Policy Program (LEVEL YPP) brings together young people between the ages of 19 and 29 from across British Columbia who identify as being Indigenous or racialized immigrants or refugees. Indigenous

and racialized Newcomer youth are disproportionately impacted by certain public policies but are rarely included in the development and implementation of public policy process. The LEVEL YPP aims to provide these youth with equitable training and leadership opportunities to better navigate the public policy landscape, and to develop new tools and skills to influence, shape, and advocate for policy changes that are relevant in their own communities. Having young people directly involved in shaping policies that impact their lives is essential to creating systemic, meaningful change. The LEVEL YPP's training is grounded from and within Indigenous peoples' worldviews, which the program acknowledges, could vary from person-to-person or nation-to-nation. Indigenous worldviews place a large emphasis on connections to the land. This perspective views the land as sacred; where everything and everyone is related and connected; where the quality of the relationships formed are key in life; where what matters is the success and well-being of the community, and where there can be many truths as they are based on individual lived experiences.<sup>1</sup> As such, an important premise of this training is to centre and place a particular focus on the fact that the work that has gone into developing this training, as well as the training itself, has taken and will take place on unceded (never given away/stolen) territories of the hən̓q̓'əmin 'əḿ-speaking Musqueam peoples, of the Halkomelem-speaking Tsleil-Waututh peoples, and of the sníchimspeaking Skwx\_wú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

1. <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/indigenous-peoples-worldviews-vs-western-worldviews>

# Biography

## Hasrat Grewal Gill



*As a settler, Hasrat lives, learns, and breathes on the unceded, ancestral, occupied, and traditional lands of the Coast Salish peoples—Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh' (Squamish, BC). She owes her gratitude to every ordinary person who overcomes not-so-ordinary challenges on a daily basis; these are the people who never cease to inspire her, and the work she is doing. She has worked in the field of migrant community work for over five years, and is passionate about advocating for migrant rights. Hasrat completed her MA degree in Immigration and Settlement Studies from Ryerson University. Her graduate research focuses on decolonization of immigrant integration in Canada, while exploring the inclusion of Indigenous and immigrant perspectives into the idea of being “Canadian.” Through her work, she aspires to hold up the resistance of Indigenous peoples, the voices of the immigrants and refugees their resilience and strength in the face of ongoing dispossession and colonial violence. She also works as an Instructor in the Department of Community Development and Outreach at Capilano University.*

# Executive Summary

*Migrant “host” countries in the global north demand that Newcomers “integrate” into their societies by demonstrating language skills, economic participation, socialization, and adjusting to the norms and values of the destination country.*

However, the question that remains unanswered is: Who is the “host” population, and who creates the norms and values that the Newcomers are required to match up to? The concept of immigrant “integration” can be seen as a form of present-day colonialism that works to reimpose the idea of European hegemony over “other” racialized groups, and distracts from the recognition and redress of Indigenous and immigrant rights.

The purpose of this research is to reflect on the following questions, identify the gaps, and suggest policy changes and implementation strategies.

- How do we define and appraise the “integration” of Newcomers in Canada?
- How do the colonial continuities, settler histories, geographies, and ethnicities shape the “integration” policies and practices in Canada?
- In what ways do the Immigrant and Refugee Settlement sector and migrants perpetuate and solidify the ongoing colonial and neo-colonial narratives?



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# Problem Definition and Background

*In bringing decolonizing discussions to the field of migration research, we must first understand how the field has been impacted by colonization, so that we can go about dismantling and reversing those impacts, trends, and trajectories (Coulthard, 2014).*

While migration in itself does not equate to colonialism, migration to a settler colonial space like Canada—where Indigenous land and resources are under political, ecological, and spiritual contestation—means that political agency of immigrant communities can support the colonial system.

We, as settlers, must recognize that “[o]ur homes are built on the ruins of others; we are on the lands of Indigenous peoples, lands unjustly seized, un-surrendered lands, treaty lands, and urbanized lands” (Morris, 2012 p.134 as cited in Walia, H., 2013). Khan (2015) and Dua (2005) argue that when the Newcomers take the citizenship oath, they inherit the history of this land. As Canadian citizens, they have rights and privileges that have been collectively denied to First Nations peoples, and such rights have been deployed to deny First Nations’ right to self-government. As a racialized, immigrant woman, the position of “I” is very crucial in doing this research and framing a policy ask. Strega *et al.*, 2005 argues that while working in an anti-oppressive research framework, it is essential to see one’s position as potentially both an oppressor and as the oppressed. In other words, it means recognizing our own privilege and working to dismantle the unjust systems that keep us in that privileged space. My position as an

immigrant with settler privileges makes me no less, but still an oppressor on these stolen lands. But, at the same time, the interlocking structures of race, gender, colonialism, and migrant histories put me in the position of the oppressed. Clearly our access to land, citizenship, and knowledge production is precarious, however it does make the engagement different.

Chatterjee (2018) emphasizes that the contemporary settler colonialism should be critically understood as an interlinked structure of immigration, labour exploitation, and Indigenous dispossession. However, it is important to understand that, in many ways, the racialized vulnerability and disposability of immigrants causes them to support settler colonial projects. Migration historian Laurie Bertman writes: “The very process of becoming a good, successful, moral, and respectable citizen with access to the resources of the state, transforms Newcomers into colonialists” (Stanley *et al.*, 2014, as cited in Chatterjee, 2018).

Bauder (2011) argues that despite various historical, ideological, and material connections, there is a systematic separation between the immigrants and Indigenous people in Canada. Without having meaningful

and direct interactions with one another, the opportunity for immigrants to learn first-hand about the experiences of Indigenous peoples is limited. The absence of comprehensive education, paired with a general ignorance about the history, colonization, assimilation, and displacement of Indigenous peoples in Canada, makes immigrants both complicit in, and active participants of, the colonial project (Khan *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, the immigrants might just unconsciously follow the socio-legal legitimization of dominant White structures and fail to recognize the importance of their participation in decolonization projects. Without questioning the settler colonial logics of the state, these discourses (re)imagine and (re)produce the same nation-building narratives that the state produces and maintains (Lawrence & Dua, 2005).

It is essential to understand that the discussions around decolonizing “integration” cannot happen in a vacuum. Decolonizing “integration” starts with deconstructing the word “integration” and asking questions about what it really means to “integrate” or “disintegrate”? As immigrants, what are we required “integrate” into? How and who has the power to define what “integration” is? “Integration is a “choice” and something that occurs naturally through different social and cultural interactions over time. “Integration,” when imposed as an obligation, takes a form of neo-colonial practice monitored by the “White” society. “Integration” therefore becomes a form of present-day colonialism that marginalize racialized groups as “others.”



Chinese Canadian Children Celebrating Canada Day in 1999, Vancouver, 1 July 1999. Photo by Kalleung, Wikimedia Commons

Decolonizing “integration” is a multi-step process, which involves challenging the Eurocentric systems of knowing, critically analyzing the present system of migration research; challenging the neo-colonial continuities that shape the present day norms, challenging the exclusionary nature of immigration and integration policies, and therefore redefining what it means to “integrate.” It is evident that the Immigrant and Refugee Settlement sector has made little attempt to create meaningful linkages between First Nations communities and Newcomers. Non-Aboriginal Canadians (including immigrants and refugees) have been beneficiaries of Canada’s policies that have discriminated against Indigenous communities. A critical step toward realizing this vision is the rebuilding and renewing of the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples of Canada through a process of Reconciliation that fully honours our respective roles as Treaty peoples. Settlement agencies are the entry point for many Newcomers in Canada. Therefore, it is extremely important that the settlement agencies share the burden and rethink their ways moving forward.



# Policy Options

## 1 Allocate Considerable Amount of Funds for Implementation of Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) Calls to Action #93 and #94.

More specifically I ask for allocation of Federal and Provincial funding to Newcomer settlement agencies to design and run programs/projects directed toward learning, sharing, and relationship-building between Indigenous peoples and Newcomers. It is important to recognize that without allocating finances and resources toward an action, the Canadian government's commitment to Reconciliation cannot be seen as more than just lip service.

## 2 Newcomers to Canada.

*"93. We call upon the federal government, in collaboration with the national Aboriginal organizations, to revise the information kit for newcomers to Canada and its citizenship test to reflect a more inclusive history of the diverse Aboriginal peoples of Canada, including information about the Treaties and the history of residential schools.*

*"94. We call upon the Government of Canada to replace the Oath of Citizenship with the following: I swear (or affirm) that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Queen of Canada, Her Heirs and Successors, and that I will faithfully observe the laws of Canada including Treaties with Indigenous Peoples, and fulfill my duties as a Canadian citizen."*



**Indigenous community members and activists should be a part of welcoming process for Newcomers.**

## 3 Recommendations and Next Steps for Implementation for Settlement Sector.

It is essential to center Indigenous worldviews and teachings while developing the "integration" programs for the Newcomers. Collaborative research, rethinking, and redesigning the existing "integration" programs delivered by settlement agencies. Both the Content and the Contact with Indigenous communities are vital first steps forward toward Reconciliation and decolonization. Here are few recommendations:

### CONTENT

- a) **Must incorporate awareness of the history and present realities of Indigenous peoples in activities and programs delivered at settlement agencies.** Referring to already existing toolkits and designing community specific programs. For example:

Immigration Partnership Winnipeg Resource: Fostering Safe Spaces for Dialogue and Relationship-building Between Newcomers and Indigenous Peoples-Wise Practices for the relationship-building process and recommendations for the development of an orientation toolkit. Based on this study, a variety of methods have been proposed for the processes of relationship-building, including territorientation, land-based learning, storytelling, organic relationship-building, meeting role-models, institutionalizing relationship-building, sports, life skills, and spirituality.

- b) **A mandatory component of the Language Instruction for Newcomers.** / Cours de langue pour les immigrants au Canada (LINC/CLIC) curriculum.
- c) **Create asset-based programming for Newcomers.** Identify their strengths and potential contributions and provide them a safe space to share their skills.
- d) **Rethink and Redesign Newcomer programs beyond “One fit for all.”** The settlement practitioners and program developers must take into account different migration histories, and develop programming and services accordingly, as migration experience and expectations of an economic immigrant might be very different from a Newcomer refugee.
- e) **Create Newcomer resources centred in Indigenous worldviews.** Develop strategies in consultation with Aboriginal governments to ensure their implementation, and provide resources.  
For example:
  - Immigration Services Society of British Columbia (ISSofBC): Welcome to Our Homelands—A greeting from Canada’s First Peoples to Newcomers
  - First People: A Guide for Newcomers, City of Vancouver



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## CONTACT

- a) **“Terrorientation.”** Indigenous community members and activists should be a part of welcoming process for Newcomers.
- b) **Build a capacity of settlement workers through culturally sensitive training and learning.** Hire Indigenous subject-matter experts and consultants by paying them a consultancy fee, and not just an honorarium or a gift card.
- c) **Mandatory hiring of Indigenous settlement/outreach workers in Newcomer-serving agencies.**
- d) **Organic relationship-building through storytelling initiatives, land-based learning, ally-ship and solidarity.**



# Conclusion

The imperialist and neo-colonial ideologies shape the formation and continuation of present-day immigrant and integration policies in Canada. Indigenous voices are completely missing from the discourse of “integration,” whereas they are themselves “required” to integrate into the so-called “Canadian” nation. In order to have meaningful complex discussions around immigrant integration, we must rethink how the colonial past has impacted our policy making. In the spirit of the TRC’s Commission’s calls to action #93 and #94, the Canadian government, Newcomers, and service providers have a shared responsibility and commitment toward implementing systemic change, and decolonizing the policy and practices in Canada.



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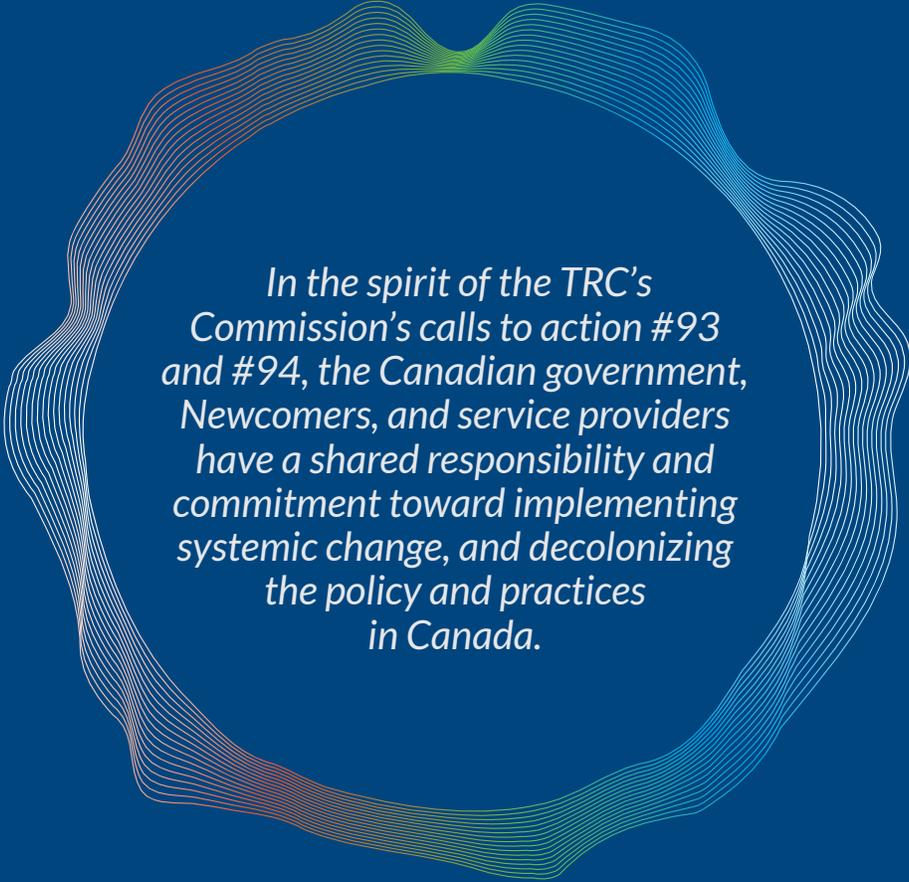
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Vancouver Foundation is Community Inspired. We are a community foundation that connects the generosity of donors with the energy, ideas, and time of people in the community. Together, we've been making meaningful and lasting impacts in neighborhoods and communities since 1943. We work with individuals, corporations, and charitable agencies to create permanent endowment funds and then use the income to support thousands of charities. We recognize that communities are complex and that collaboration between multiple stakeholders is needed to help everyone thrive and evolve. Vancouver Foundation brings together donors, non-profits and charities, government, media and academic institutions, local leaders, and passionate individuals to build meaningful and lasting change in the province of British Columbia. We see young people, their voices and experiences as part of that vision to building meaningful change.

200-475 W. Georgia Street  
Vancouver, BC, V6B 4M9

info@levelvf.ca   www.levelvf.ca   604.688.2204

f @LEVELVF   t @LEVEL\_VF   @LEVEL\_VF   ✉ level@vancouverfoundation.ca



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vancouver  
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