

MANSO Policy Resolutions 2019

Rationale

In partnership with all our members, MANSO can play an important role in identifying issues that positively and negatively affect the integration of newcomers, which means that we can inform and enrich many policy conversations. MANSO is often in a position to communicate with government, media, and funders about settlement & integration programs and policy. When it is possible, we try to engage front-line service providers with direct subject matter expertise.

We believe it will strengthen our work with government and general public to identify areas of consensus or common ground on policy issues among our membership, and to be able to “speak with one voice” on issues of key concern. It may also support our member organizations in their own engagement with policy makers.

The following resolutions were developed by our members and adopted during MANSO’s AGM on June 12th, 2019:

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Intersectional Principles

MANSO is committed to applying an anti-oppressive intersectional lens in its policies and activities that considers the unique needs, issues, and perspectives of a range of communities. We have asked the movers of policies to consider the following factors which may affect the impact of a policy.

- Indigeneity
- Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression
- Gender
- Age
- Racialization
- Immigration Status
- Family Makeup
- Ability/Disability

We encourage our member organizations to consider how each of these resolutions may impact different groups of immigrants and refugees.

More Information

For more information on how MANSO is advancing these policies, or to get involved in upcoming policy resolution development, please contact info@mansomanitoba.ca.

2019-1 Affordable and Appropriate Housing

Mover: Codi Guenther, New Journey Housing

Whereas: Many Manitobans continue to experience a housing crisis. Far too many households spend 50% or more of their income on rent, putting them at significant risk of losing their housing, as well as their physical and mental health. In 2016, over 50 000 Manitobans lived in core housing need.¹

Whereas: Recently arrived immigrants and refugee families are more likely to live in core housing need than non-immigrant families. Research consistently shows that immigrants' income starts out lower than comparable incomes of non-immigrants, but increases with the number of years since arriving in Canada. This initial low income, as well as challenges with language barriers and discrimination, means many newcomers struggle to navigate the housing market and find appropriate housing that meets their family's needs. Appropriate housing means that it costs less than 30% of a household's income for rent, there are enough bedrooms for the family size, and there are no major repairs or constant pest infestations. In 2011, 21.3% of newcomer families that arrived between 2006-2011 experienced core housing need, while 9.9% of non-immigrant families lived in core housing need.² As a result, immigrant and refugee families find themselves in low quality, overcrowded, and substandard housing. Homelessness within newcomer populations is also on the rise, particularly with refugee claimants staying in shelters or couch surfing upon arrival.

Whereas: It is becoming even more challenging for low-income families to afford appropriate housing. The Rent Assist program has increased rates from 25% to 30% of household income to be paid for housing. Rent-geared-to-income (RGI) housing units decreased from approximately 30 units per 100 people to 26 units per 100 people over the last ten years. Private market rents have also increased, e.g. the median cost of a three-bedroom apartment in 2018 was \$1,338, which represents a 5% increase from the previous year.

Whereas: Housing is a foundational need for the settlement process, without which other important settlement outcomes will be hindered. For newcomers who face multiple barriers, having access to safe and appropriate housing allows them to focus their energies on steps needed for their social and economic integration. Without suitable housing, families are likely to feel unsettled as they may frequently move, which can have long-term impacts on children's education outcomes, parents' mental and physical health, and social inclusion. Recently arrived immigrants are more likely to rent, but many aim to purchase homes in Canada. Home ownership can create community stability and help with children's integration into neighbourhoods and schools. As Manitoba welcomes approximately 15,000 newcomers annually, it is necessary to address the barriers to appropriate housing faced by immigrant and refugee families.

¹ CMHC, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/chn-biml/index-eng.cfm>. CMHC states a household is in 'core housing need' if its housing falls below at least one of the adequacy, affordability or suitability standards and it would have to spend 30% or more of its total before-tax income to pay the median rent of alternative local housing that is acceptable i.e. meets all three housing standards. Housing standards are defined as follows:

Adequate housing is reported by their residents as not requiring any major repairs.

Affordable housing has shelter costs equal to less than 30% of total before-tax household income.

Suitable housing has enough bedrooms for the size and composition of resident households according to National Occupancy Standard (NOS) requirements.

² CMHC, Core Housing Need Status for the Population, by Selected Characteristics and Gender, Winnipeg, 2011.

Whereas: Newcomers require access to accurate information, supports, and advocacy around housing soon after arrival and at all stages of the settlement process. Supports are also required to help newcomers learn about mortgages and buying a home. Housing-related supports must be enhanced to help newcomers find housing that is suitable for their family size, affordable, safe, and stable, which will positively contribute to social inclusion, settlement, and integration.

Whereas: Investing in supports for RGI housing and subsidy programs is critical for newcomers during the transition stages of settlement as it will lead to better settlement and integration outcomes in the long term. All three levels of government have to play a role in the development and management of RGI housing. The Province of Manitoba and municipalities can be proactive in working with the federal government as it implements and funds the National Housing Strategy.

Be it Resolved That: MANSO, in continued collaboration with the Right to Housing Coalition, urges the Province of Manitoba to develop a Provincial Housing Strategy to demonstrate how supports of the National Housing Strategy will be implemented in Manitoba. This should address:

- How the Canada Housing Benefit will be used to enhance the Rent Assist program.
- How Rent Assist will be expanded to include refugee claimants in the non-EIA Rent Assist program.
- How EIA rental rates will be indexed to address ever-increasing market rates.
- How supports will be increased for home ownership or co-op programs, e.g. matched savings, particularly for Manitoba Housing tenants.

Be it Further Resolved That: MANSO urges the Province of Manitoba to continue to build RGI housing, including accessible units that can accommodate larger and multi-generational families. This should include:

- Mixed-income developments and supportive housing models, which include funded staff positions and community supports.
- A pest strategy, investing in tools that are accessible for the community to prevent and address pests, particularly in RGI housing.

Be it Further Resolved That: MANSO, in continued collaboration with the Right to Housing Coalition, urges the City of Winnipeg and other Manitoba municipalities to adopt policies that require that any new development receiving any financial incentive must include RGI housing.

Be it Further Resolved That: MANSO urges the City of Winnipeg and other Manitoba municipalities to adopt policies that promote infill housing and make surplus land available to community groups for non-profit housing. Policies must ensure that any properties transferred to non-profit housing providers come with stable funding and supports in order to keep these properties as well-maintained RGI housing units.

2019-2 Availability of Stage 2 (Canadian Language Benchmark 5-8) Language Classes

Mover: Ben Starkey, Red River College

Whereas: Approximately 15,000³ newcomers arrive in Manitoba each year. Thousands of these individuals require access to higher level language classes (Stage 2 CLB 5-8) in order to re-enter their profession, improve their opportunities for employment, access academic upgrading, and fully integrate into Canadian society. Due to a lack of federal and provincial funding, very few Stage 2 language programs are being offered and access to CLB 7/8 is especially restricted.

Whereas: Stage 2 language seats are very limited in comparison to Stage 1 (CLB 1-4) classes, so newcomers with higher language levels are often on waitlists for two to eight months. As of Spring 2019, in Winnipeg there are 1420 funded Stage 2 language seats. The majority of those seats are full with another 750 clients on waitlists. Outside of Winnipeg significant waitlists also exist. In the Brandon area 137 people are on waitlists while there are only 80 seats for Stage 2. Fewer classes mean less flexibility in scheduling so many newcomers are unable to fill spots that do become available. This shortage is further exacerbated by a lack of summer programming which leads to learning loss.

Whereas: Access to higher level language classes is critical in ensuring that newcomers to Manitoba are able to reach their full professional, employment, academic, and social potential. Being able to communicate comfortably, not just for survival, is key to integration within community.

Whereas: The lack of options for newcomers who need upgraded language skills to re-enter their professions or move on to post-secondary study detracts from the economic opportunities of these individuals and the province as a whole. Newcomers' unemployment and underemployment leads to a loss of income tax revenue as well as additional Federal and Provincial government spending on supports such as the National Child Benefit, Employment and Income Assistance, and mental health supports. The 2017-2023 Manitoba Labour Market Report identifies that approximately 62% of the 166,500 forecasted job openings in this time period will require some post-secondary education and training (e.g. college, university, trade certification). Given these figures, higher level language programming will be critical to meet employment demand in Manitoba.

Whereas: Francophone newcomers with stronger English language skills still need extra language supports in order to thrive in the labour market where fluent French is simply not enough on its own to guarantee success.

Whereas: Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) has stated that its current funding priority is Stage 1 (CLB 1-4), and only limited Stage 2 programming with an employment outcome, i.e. work placements or job acquisition, may be supported.

Whereas: According to IRCC's *CORE Principles*, programs must be responsive to the needs of individuals and society to promote integration. Programs must also be client centred, and there is a particular

³ Average number of immigrants from 2011-2017, Open Government Data Portal.

emphasis on francophone newcomers. However, IRCC's singular focus on Stage 1 language funding or Stage 2 funding with an employment focus severely limits the holistic social and economic growth of newcomers and works counter to the IRCC's vision of integration.

Whereas: IRCC offers language services to permanent residents only. Many Stage 2 learners have reached Canadian citizenship, have only work permits, are international students, or are refugee claimants, and are thus ineligible for funded language training.

Whereas: Across Canada, the majority of provincial governments fund a portion of Stage 2 language costs for IRCC-ineligible clients. The Province of Manitoba initiated a Request for Proposals for provincially funded language programming, but it does not currently provide funding for language programs. In Manitoba, limited federal eligibility and funding without provincial involvement leaves a significant gap in services for higher level language learners.

Whereas: The Province of Manitoba cites immigration as a major driver of economic growth and acknowledges that an increasing percentage of professionals are arriving through the Provincial Nominee Program.⁴ The planned program renewal emphasizes improving outcomes for Provincial Nominees and increasing Francophone immigration to Manitoba. However, the ability of these newcomers to thrive socially or economically can be severely limited by the lack of higher level language programs.

Be It Resolved That: MANSO urges IRCC to expand their funding of language programming for Stage 2 newcomers, including year-round classes for a range of client needs.

Be It Further Resolved That: MANSO urges the Province of Manitoba to provide comprehensive and sustainable funding for Stage 2 language training for IRCC-ineligible clients that meets a range of student needs.

Be It Further Resolved That: MANSO urges the Province of Manitoba and IRCC to continue the efforts toward productive collaboration to effectively meet the needs of clients.

⁴ The MPNP at 20: Growth and Renewal of the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program, Province of Manitoba, MANSO Integration Summit, 2018.

2019-3 Policy Changes to Transportation Loans for Refugees

Mover: Ermias Yoseph, MIIC

Whereas: Government Assisted (GAR) and Privately Sponsored (PSR) Refugees, as well as Humanitarian-Protected Persons Abroad, are required to repay the federal government for the cost of transportation and other related expenses, e.g. airfare and screening, for themselves and their family dependents to arrive at their resettlement destination.

Whereas: The transportation loan is a huge barrier for most refugees in reaching their full potential. It is an additional stressor for refugees trying to settle and integrate in a new country, navigate the system, learn the language, find a job, and rebuild their lives. The 2016 Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) Immigration Loan Program evaluation shows that 76.3% of GAR loan recipients and 31.9% of PSR loan recipients surveyed indicated that they had to use their income support or social assistance to pay their loan. A number of recipients were unable to repay within the 12-month loan term even though the loan size is relatively small.

Whereas: The loan places a disproportionate burden on vulnerable newcomers, particularly single parents and families with dependent children. Refugee families often enter resettlement having suffered major family traumas, losses, or separations due to political violence and forced displacement. They are often also trying to sponsor a family member or a friend who is still residing in a refugee camp. In many cases refugee youth are forced to work long hours while going to school, or to postpone further education, in order to pay back the transportation loan. Research indicates that paying back transportation loans also exacerbates mental health stressors. The travel loan exacerbates challenges faced by members of the community who are marginalized based on race, class, ability, religion, sexual orientation, incarceration, gender, etc.

Whereas: Bringing refugees to Canada is a humanitarian obligation and part of that should include paying for refugees who arrive via the refugee sponsorship program. The federal government should not be profiting from the vulnerable by continuing to collect interest from pre-2017 loan recipients.

Whereas: The repayment policies and practices of the transportation loan program work counter to the Resettlement Assistance Program's role of providing income assistance to meet basic needs and facilitate self-sufficiency. They also contradict IRCC's *CORE Principles* which prioritize programs that are responsive to need and facilitate integration. IRCC's evaluation of the program stated that having to repay the loan is having a negative impact on the settlement of some refugees. 63.6% of GAR loan recipients and 38% of PSR loan recipients surveyed indicated that paying back the loan made it difficult to pay for basic necessities like food, clothing and housing. Similarly, the loan made it difficult for many families to afford to participate in community-related activities. Changes made to the Immigration Loan Program in 2017, notably extending the loan repayment period and no longer charging interest, are a starting point in adjusting the program to improve settlement outcomes. IRCC has demonstrated a precedent for waiving transportation loans for some Syrian and Yazidi refugees, which indicates an acknowledgment of the burden they cause.

Be It Resolved That: MANSO calls upon the Canadian government to absorb the costs of the transportation expenses for refugees.

Be It Further Resolved That: MANSO calls upon the Canadian government to waive outstanding balances from interest accumulated before interest payments on travel loans were eliminated.

Be It Further Resolved That: In the interim, MANSO calls upon the Canadian government to make the refugee transportation loan and immigration loan programs more transparent and accessible to people seeking refuge in Canada. This must include:

- Aligning the loan repayment schedule with the time needed to repay and assuring that refugees who are struggling financially can request an extension for up to 24 months or a review of their repayment arrangement.
- Providing refugees easy access to information on loan repayment processes, types of assistance available, and how to contact IRCC Collection Services.
- Developing a committee for a more transparent debt waiving process.
- Not revoking permanent resident status or refusing to grant travel documents if refugees are unable to repay the loan within the time period.
- Providing options for alternative repayment plans such as volunteer work programs.

2019-4 Access Without Fear Policy

Mover: Carol Reimer, IRCOM

Whereas: As Canada continues the practice of granting temporary status to newcomers, the number of people without legal status or with precarious status is growing. It is estimated that there are up to 500,000 undocumented migrants living in Canada.⁵ Temporary status makes newcomers more vulnerable and increases the likelihood of loss of status. In Manitoba, in addition to a recent increase in refugee claims, the province has also been relying on greater numbers of Temporary Foreign Workers. Given the many ways people enter the province, loss of status happens in a variety of ways. Temporary Foreign Workers may have their term end or experience a breakdown in their employment relationship; a refugee claimant may miss a deadline or have their claim denied; there might be delays in paperwork for students or visitors applying for permanent residency. Regardless of the cause, the impacts are similar. Without status, people can be stigmatized and are less likely to utilize community and government services for fear of discovery, detention, and deportation.

Whereas: Municipal governments provide critical services to residents, such as police, fire, paramedics, libraries, and public transit. Immigration status is not a condition of eligibility for most municipal services which are normally available to all residents of a city. However, the potential risk of city employees asking for immigration documents and reporting immigration status to other levels of government, for example police reporting lack of documentation to Canadian Border Services Agency, means access to these services is severely constrained for people without status.

Whereas: Not having clear policies to ensure all residents access to city services puts people without status and their families at risk. People without status or with precarious status are more vulnerable to violence, unsafe work environments, and waiting until they are in crisis before getting medical attention. Women may not seek prenatal health care if they are pregnant and have fewer supports if they are in an abusive domestic relationship. Children feel the repercussions of these limitations and of their own limited access to services.

Whereas: Not having clear policies to ensure all residents access to city services puts the broader public at risk and neglects the duty of society to ensure that all people can live in dignity. Broader public safety is impacted if people with precarious status fear reporting safety concerns to the police or fire paramedic services. Limiting access to basic services for community members detracts from overall community well-being.

Whereas: Manitoba municipalities have a responsibility to develop Access Without Fear policies so that newcomers without legal status, or with precarious status, can confidently access basic city services. Policies should ensure that:

- City employees do not require immigration documents as proof of identity or of residency in order to access city services.
- City employees do not report immigration status to other levels of government unless required to do so by law.
- Training is provided for city employees to ensure compliance with the policy.
- Mechanisms are included so the policy is enforceable.

⁵ RCMP, 2007.

- Public education campaigns in multiple languages are supported to inform newcomers and the broader public of their rights to inclusion and safety.

Whereas: Communities across Manitoba have long been leaders in supporting refugees and newcomers through sponsorships, settlement services, and promoting the inclusion of diverse cultures. The City of Winnipeg states that it is working to promote, build, and align Winnipeg as an international leader for human rights, for example with the Canadian Museum for Human Rights and the recent creation of the Human Rights Committee of City Council. Similarly, the Association of Manitoba Municipalities has supported the development of community inclusion and awareness approaches and resources. Ensuring access to city services for all residents, without fear related to their immigration status, is part of respecting the basic rights and needs of all members of the community. Other cities in Canada, such as Vancouver, Toronto, Hamilton, Edmonton and Montreal, have implemented similar policies and can serve as precedents.

Be It Resolved That: MANSO, along with its community partners, advocates for municipal governments to implement and promote Access Without Fear policies that would allow all people to access city services without fear of jeopardizing their ability to remain in Canada. Policies must include mechanisms for training, enforceability, and public awareness.

Be It Further Resolved: MANSO, along with its community partners, open dialogue with the provincial government to implement and promote Access Without Fear policies that would allow all people to access Provincial services without fear of jeopardizing their ability to remain in Canada. Policies must include mechanisms for training, enforceability, and public awareness.

2019-5 Changes to Personal Information Requirements for Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE) Newcomers

Mover: Edmund Machona, Rainbow Resource Centre

Whereas: Many newcomers with specific needs related to their sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression (SOGIE) come from places where the disclosure of this part of their identity puts them at risk of persecution. More than 80 countries worldwide criminalize the expression, and even the existence, of people with these identities. Many SOGIE newcomers are drawn to Canada for its reputation as an affirming and safe place of human rights and social integration; however, these newcomers can experience unforeseen barriers in accessing services.

Whereas: In order to access Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) funded settlement services, newcomers must be permanent residents and provide their permanent resident (PR) number, linking their access to services to their record. Given the state-sanctioned persecution of SOGIE people in countries around the world, many SOGIE newcomers with PR status are understandably fearful of having their identities tracked by the government and associated with SOGIE-specific supports. This acts as a deterrent to accessing SOGIE-specific settlement services.

Whereas: In April 2019, the Province of Manitoba announced funding to support non-IRCC eligible newcomers, such as refugee claimants and temporary foreign workers; however, these services are not yet established or consistent. The delivery of SOGIE-specific settlement services remains fractured as not all individuals can participate freely or at all.

Whereas: The IRCC's *CORE Principles* highlight supporting SOGIE newcomers as part of its prioritization of client-centred programming that supports vulnerable newcomers. The IRCC's cluster strategy and the Immigration and Refugee Board's new SOGIE guidelines demonstrate steps forward in supporting SOGIE newcomers. However, IRCC's information tracking requirements create a barrier to service access that is incompatible with these priorities and puts SOGIE newcomers at risk.

Whereas: The Province's recent funding for newcomer support services states its goal is to help immigrants and refugees integrate and settle. Two of its key service areas are accessibility and supports for clients who are "high risk" or face multiple barriers. This is an opportunity to establish funding and data collection practices that do not contradict these goals.

Whereas: Developing alternative funding and data collection methods would mean that potentially vulnerable newcomers would not face additional barriers in accessing services related to sexuality, gender, sexual health, gender-based violence, etc.

Be It Resolved That: MANSO urges the IRCC to develop alternative funding and data collection methods, e.g. grant-based funding, for services involving sensitive information, e.g. sexuality and gender, sexual health, gender-based violence, so that the use of these services is not linked to newcomers' identifiable information. This should be done in consultation with MANSO and community-based organizations.

Be It Further Resolved That: MANSO urges the IRCC to develop strategies to ensure settlement services are available and fully accessible to SOGIE newcomers, meeting biannually with MANSO and community partners for updates and discussion.

Be It Further Resolved That: MANSO urges Manitoba Education and Training to develop funding, data collection, and service provision approaches that do not link newcomers' identities with sensitive information and that ensure settlement services are fully accessible to SOGIE newcomers. This should be done in consultation with MANSO and community-based organizations.

2019-6 Addressing Educational Barriers for Newcomer Youth Linked to the 'E' Credit System

Mover: Susan Emerson, YMCA

Whereas: Many high schools in Manitoba offer modified EAL 'E' credit courses for their EAL students in order to increase the likelihood that these students can successfully advance in their classes. However, youth are often encouraged by their school or family to graduate prematurely without upgrading their 'E' credit courses to the general 'G' or specialized 'S' credits that are accepted for post-secondary pursuits. There is a lack of communication to inform these newcomer students and their families that graduating with 'E' credit courses will not allow them to pursue post-secondary education.

Whereas: Allowing youth to graduate without the adequate type or number of recognized credits does not address the underlying educational and economic needs of newcomer students and their families. Older refugee youth with significantly interrupted schooling face particular challenges as they often lack basic literacy, numeracy, and academic skills. These youth need intensive supports and time to make up for years of lost schooling; however, schools are often under pressure to have youth graduate on time and can use modified courses to increase graduation rates for newcomer youth. Many newcomer youth are also under pressure from their families to graduate as quickly as possible to find work and contribute financially to the family.

Whereas: Many newcomer youth would like to attend additional schooling to upgrade their classes but cannot afford to do so, as it costs approximately \$200-1000 per course. Several Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) funded newcomer youth serving organizations currently offer some funding and opportunities for youth to attend summer school and upgrade their courses; however, funding for these activities is limited, inconsistent, and is not organized systematically across service providers.

Whereas: The lack of consistent financial and educational supports to upgrade 'E' credits means that many youth are unable to pursue their educational goals and instead start working. Youth that begin full-time work prior to completing high school are less likely to finish high school and will earn less over their careers than those that are able to complete high school or a General Education Development test.

Whereas: IRCC relies on newcomer youth serving organizations to provide youth with ongoing support towards settlement and integration. Providing funding for youth to upgrade their 'E' credits is a clear step towards improved settlement outcomes.

Whereas: Graduation rates are a key indicator used by both levels of government to measure the success of schools and service providers. However, if students are graduating with credits that severely limit their opportunities, this is a false measure of success. Adjusting the 'E' credit system will allow the IRCC and the provincial government to better measure and respond to the limitations faced by these youth.

Whereas: The 2017-2023 Manitoba Labour Market Report identifies that approximately 62% of the 166,500 forecasted job openings in this time period will require some post-secondary education and training (e.g. college, university, trade certification). Given these figures, providing accessible ways for youth to upgrade their existing 'E' credits and reforming the 'E' credit system will contribute to meeting employment demand in Manitoba.

Be It Resolved That: MANSO urges Manitoba Education and Training to audit and reform the 'E' credit system, assessing its implications for enhancing student opportunities, maintaining academic rigour, and ensuring clear pathways to diverse post-secondary options.

Be It Further Resolved That: In the interim, MANSO urges IRCC to collaborate with the provincial government in developing a systematic approach to help newcomer youth upgrade 'E' credits. This should include:

- Strategies for collaboration between schools and agencies to provide bursaries for summer school or other upgrading programs.
- Funding to service providers so that they can consistently offer financial support, and ongoing homework support, to newcomer youth who would like to attend summer school to upgrade their 'E' credits.
- Funding to service providers to deliver programs for transition from E to S credits, in collaboration with schools.

Be It Further Resolved That: MANSO urges Manitoba Education and Training to develop and fund a comprehensive strategy, in collaboration with IRCC, for the effective support of older newcomer youth with interrupted schooling, including access to EAL and adult education. This should include specialized and wrap-around supports as well as alternative and flexible approaches to student learning.