



# A project of OCASI

## Countering misinformation about immigrants and refugees in Canada

Federal elections are about the battle of ideas over what kind of Canada we want to be—and sometimes things get heated.

Then there are the tough conversations. A recent [Samara survey](#) of Canadian social media users, for instance, says Canadians find it more difficult to have conversations about issues like immigration and multiculturalism.

As we enter Thanksgiving weekend, with election day just over a week away, how can we talk with that grumpy uncle who's been sharing racist memes on Facebook? Or that aunt who says she supports immigration but things have gone too far?

## 9 points to talk over turkey this weekend

In the spirit of reaching across differences to calmly counter misinformation about jobs and the economy, safety and security, and Canadian values, here are 9 things to put on the conversation menu.

**Try to understand what's behind the concern:** This might be a good time to talk about our own family's history. If we're not Indigenous peoples, it means at some point our ancestors came to Canada seeking a better life. I'd truly like to understand what makes this moment in history cause you to have these concerns about new Canadians?

**There are checks and balances; it's highly regulated:** There are a lot of checks and balances to ensure due process, even for newcomers who arrive in less traditional ways. New Canadians who come here are subjected to stringent background checks, medical reviews—it's a highly regulated process. According to the OECD, Canada has the most comprehensive and elaborate immigration system of all developed countries. Once they pass those tests, New Canadians often come here with a lot more education and credentials than a lot of us; and they contribute to our economy and our communities.

**Refugees are here legally, awaiting claim review:** There are three streams for refugees to come to Canada: government sponsorship, private sponsorship, and of their own volition by air, by sea or via the land border with the U.S. and making a refugee claim at a port of entry. To appreciate the diversity of people who come to Canada, there are also immigrants, migrant workers and international students. All of these are legitimate, legal ways to get here – including if a person walks into Canada at any point on the border and makes a claim at a port of entry. That's why you see RCMP helping refugees with their luggage after crossing the border into Canada. But I can't stress this enough: every newcomer to Canada is subjected to rigorous checks and balances, including refugee claimants. There's a control system in place. That's why Canada's system is respected worldwide.

**New Canadians work:** If it's jobs and the economy that concern you, there's a lot of misinformation out there. Did you know that 81.3% of immigrants hold down a full-time job? That's slightly higher than non-immigrants (79.7%). Facts [here](#). The percentage of unemployed immigrants (5.9%) is pretty much tied with the percentage of unemployed non-immigrants (5.5%). Facts [here](#). It's a similar story for participating in the workforce: immigrant labour market participation (73.8%). Facts [here](#).

**Housing affordability constrains us all:** In many Canadian cities, we are in an affordable housing crisis. An overheated market has contributed to sky-high prices for homes and rental units. There hasn't been as significant investment in affordable housing in a generation and income inequality is getting worse, forcing low-income people from all backgrounds into shelters. Let's focus on the real problem: affordable housing, because everyone deserves a safe place to call home.

**Misinformation campaigns try to divide us:** There is a concerted misinformation campaign aimed at dividing us as a country—new Canadians versus everyone else. And if we let those extremist forces polarize us further, we risk descending into a divided society. Let's not scapegoat some newcomers. That's not the Canada we want. Canada has a proud history of welcoming people from around the world. Unity is our strength. We need to challenge misinformation on this issue. That's key to Canadian democracy.

**Canada's growth strategy needs more new Canadians:** Right now immigrants represent only 1% of the population and it's been this way for some time. The Conference Board of Canada says we should be doing much more to attract new Canadians. Why? "Immigration is more important to Canada's prosperity than ever before due to the country's rapidly aging population and low birth rate." The Board says it's key to Canada's growth strategy.

**New Canadians are contributing to our communities:** In many respects, New Canadians are bringing their skills and talents to solve some of our problems. Like doctor shortages in smaller and remote communities. Like providing home care for seniors or child care for young families. They're entrepreneurial: They could be that family-run corner store where you buy your milk and lottery tickets. They don't just pass a test to get here; they establish deep roots in our communities and contribute to our economic strength.

**Hate has no place in Canada:** Canada's diversity, and our ability to make this country home to people from around the world, is being tested by those who seek to divide us; forces advancing extremist views in ways that we haven't seen since the 1940s, where Canada fought to free the world from that kind of racism, hate and prejudice. One of the hallmarks of Canada's success has been the freedom to wear what we want, to be who we want, and to co-exist in relative harmony. Because of that, Canada is seen as an example for the rest of the world—a model for others to build on. This is a point of pride. But when we descend into restrictions on people whose culture is different than our own, we risk descending into a divided society. Let's not devolve into that. Unity is our strength.