



# Local food system safety net: A review of the food access environment for marginalized newcomers to Canada in Metro Vancouver

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The Institute for Sustainable Food Systems and Pacific Immigrant Resources Society respectfully acknowledges that we work on unceded Coast Salish Territory; the traditional territories of the ḡíçəy̓ (Katzie), q̓w̓a:n̓l̓əṇ̓ (Kwantlen), k̓w̓ik̓w̓əḷ̓əm (Kwikwetlem), máthxwi (Matsqui), x̓w̓məθk̓w̓əy̓əm (Musqueam), q̓iq̓éyt (Qayqayt), se'mya'me (Semiahmoo), S̓k̓wxwú7mesh (Squamish), Sc̓əwəθəṇ M̓əsteyəx̓w̓ (Tsawwassen), and Sə' l̓ilw̓ətaʔ̓' (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

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# Introduction

As one of many developed nations facing a downturn in population growth (and therefore its labour force growth), Canada is aiming to accept 1.5 million new immigrants by 2025 to fill the gap. Canada has for many years been known to welcome and embrace newcomers of various immigration statuses with the aim to stimulate the economy, reunite families, and provide humanitarian assistance to people from war-torn countries (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2022). Ultimately, however, Canada's immigration system was designed to be based on economic immigration to boost the labour market, and therefore prioritizes skilled workers (Statistics Canada, 2022a). A richness and diversity of newcomers' contributions are woven into society, and economic benefits are seen for Canada in general as well as for the newcomer populations. For example, newcomers make up a considerable number of entrepreneurs. Some excitedly launch into entrepreneurship because of family history and background while others seemingly are driven onto this path by barriers faced in obtaining traditional employment (Cukier et. al., 2017).

In recent years, challenges with high costs of living are increasing among Canadians but is especially felt by newcomers. According to the 2021 Census, one in four immigrant household spent more than 30% of their income on housing (Statistics Canada, 2022b). Additionally, more immigrants are living in poverty compared to Canadian-born individuals. In British Columbia (BC), in 2020, the poverty rate among immigrants was 10.4% while the poverty rate for Canadian-born was 7.9%. The poverty rate was highest for recent immigrants who were admitted to Canada within the last five years at 15.7%. As a result, those experiencing a prevalence of low income are often food insecure even long after settling into their new country (Greenwald & Zajfen, 2017). In 2021, in Canada, 73.8% of recent immigrants (10 years or less) aged 16 years and over were food secure. This number was about 10% lower than that of the Canadian born population (Statistics Canada, 2023a). The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and rising food prices have led to additional constraints within newcomer households resulting in increased food insecurity. The proportion of recent immigrants age 16 and over who were food insecure in 2021 was 3% higher than in 2020 (Statistics Canada, 2023a).

Not having access to nutritional foods, as well as the stress of adjusting to a new culture and lifestyle, while navigating a new food system can all lead to pre- and post-migration physical and mental health issues. There are numerous studies conducted in other regions across Canada on the topic of newcomers and food access/security (Vahabi & Damba, 2013; Rodriguez et al., 2016; Henderson et al., 2017; Moffat et al., 2017; Lane et al., 2019). However, there is no previous research on this topic within Metro Vancouver. Under its current food policy environment, immigrants and refugees are often addressed in the context of other equity seeking groups. Partly it is due to the lack of data specifically on vulnerable newcomers and their barriers to food. The lack of information regarding newcomers and food security in Metro Vancouver presents challenges as policymakers have insufficient knowledge to take appropriate action.

To fill this data gap, this study investigates food access challenges among marginalized newcomers and existing services and programs serving this population. The study highlights current strategies which aim to reduce systematic barriers in our local food systems and identifies key challenges in program and service implementation. Key questions guiding our analysis are: What are the root causes of food insecurity among marginalized newcomers in Metro Vancouver? What programs or services are available to support newcomers to achieve food security. What are the characteristics of programing success and how can they be replicated? What policy environment is needed to strengthen existing programs and services? And what are the key challenges or gaps that prevent a successful delivery of programs and services? The results can provide much needed information to support decision makers and key food system actors in amending their local food policy, modernizing existing programs and supporting alternative food networks to include newcomer populations.

## **Metro Vancouver and Immigration**

The Metro Vancouver metropolitan area currently has a higher percentage of immigrants (nearly 42%), in comparison to BC (29%) and Canada as a whole (23%) (Statistics Canada, 2022c). Currently, more than half of residents now identify as visible minorities (Statistics Canada, 2023b). Many immigrants are drawn to Metro Vancouver for the high quality of life experienced in the region in addition to being reunited with family members or joining similar ethnic communities. According to the 2021 Census of Population (Statistics Canada, 2022d):

- Prior to 1980, most immigrants were from Europe. Since then, the majority of immigrants were from Asia, predominantly East Asia.
- Between 2016 – 2021, over 150,000 new immigrants moved to Metro Vancouver.
- The top three places of birth of recent immigrants were India, China and the Philippines.

Canada has also openly accepted people fleeing from recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Ukraine, leading to budding communities from both countries in Metro Vancouver. Since 2021, Canada has welcomed 33,100 Afghans refugees to Canada (over 2,500 landed in Metro Vancouver), including over 10,000 who are using a special immigration pathway for those who have assisted the Canadian government (Government of Canada, 2023a). Since the beginning of 2022, Canada has welcomed over 234,000 Ukrainians with over 11,000 settling in BC (Ministry of Municipal Affaire, 2023). However, Ukrainians are not considered refugees but instead are coming under the Canada-Ukraine authorization for emergency travel (CUAET) program, of which over 158,000 have used this program. CUAET provides newcomer services, support for flights, and priority processing of their applications (Government of Canada, 2023b). Because they are considered temporary residents and not refugees, they can experience falling through the cracks with some services as they do not qualify due to their status (Personal communications with interview participants, 2023). The high numbers of Ukrainians being welcomed are likely due to the historical immigration and ancestry of Ukrainians in Canada, with 1.36 million people reporting Ukrainian ethnic origins in the 2016 Census, including 6.9% of the Metro Vancouver population (Stick and Hou, 2022).



## Who are newcomers?

Among SPOs, the term “newcomer” often refers to any person who has recently arrived in Canada within the last 5 years, regardless of immigration status. However, in speaking with people with lived experience, we learned that one can still feel like a “newcomer” in the many challenges they face after the 5-year mark. Language barriers, adequate employment, cost of living, and more still hold back many newcomers, whether they have recently arrived or have been here longer. As a result, many still rely on food banks even 10 years after arriving in Canada. Review of literature also confirmed that it may take longer than 5 years for newcomers to acculturate and improve their economic outcomes (Kohnen, 2013).

To capture different experiences, we decided to not define the term with a time limit. Instead, in this research context, a newcomer is a person born outside of Canada but is now a resident yet still experiences the hardships associated with settling in a new country, regardless of immigration status and the length of stay in the country.



### **Dictionary, 2021 Census of Population** (Statistics Canada, 2021)

For the purpose of data collection, Statistics Canada defines immigrants and non-permanent residents as:

“**Immigrant** refers to a person who is, or who has ever been, a landed immigrant or permanent resident. Such a person has been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities. Immigrants who have obtained Canadian citizenship by naturalization are included in this group. In the 2021 Census of Population, 'Immigrant' includes immigrants who were admitted to Canada on or prior to May 11, 2021.

**Non-permanent resident** refers to a person from another country with a usual place of residence in Canada and who has a work or study permit or who has claimed refugee status (asylum claimant). Family members living with work or study permit holders are also included, unless these family members are already Canadian citizens or landed immigrants or permanent residents.”

# Methodology

This study has been informed in three ways:

First, we conducted in-depth interviews with key actors to better understand the current state of Metro Vancouver's support for newcomers' access to food and the role of food policy and planning. Written responses were also requested from those who could not participate in the interviews. Fifty-three organizations were invited for interviews. Nineteen did not respond while four declined the invitations due to the lack of staff capacity or because there is no designated staff person responsible for food-related issues. In total, thirty-one individuals participated in this process. Appendix 1 shows the list of these organizations.

Second, we held regular meetings (from November 2022 to March 2023) with a group of 12 immigrant and refugee women living in Metro Vancouver and formed the Immigrant Women Food Policy Group (IWFPG). They contributed their lived experience and helped advise our findings and mobilize this knowledge. We focus on women because traditionally immigrant and refugee women are responsible for food and health of their families, often providing more support than they receive. Appendix 2 shows the women's countries of origin and length of stay in Canada.

Third, we facilitated two in-person meetings with key food system actors in the City of Surrey and City of Vancouver. The main purposes of these meetings were to create connections among SPOs and local governments and continue the conversations in support of newcomers. The first meeting at the City of Surrey was hosted at KPU Civic Plaza campus on April 26, 2023. There were a total of 35 people attending the meeting. The second meeting was hosted at the South Vancouver Neighbourhood House on May 16, 2023. There were a total of 45 people attending the meeting



## Food Security vs Food Insecurity

The complexity of food security and food insecurity, and their inconsistent usage throughout Canada has led to confusion in policy and program interventions. The Health Authority Food Security Committee (HAFSC) of BC convened to create BC-specific definitions (BCCDC, 2022a) by adopted the framework of adequacy, acceptability, availability, accessibility, affordability, agency, social justice, and sustainability.

The definition of food security within BC is “that everyone has equitable access to food that is affordable, culturally preferable, nutritious and safe; everyone has the agency to participate in, and influence food systems; and that food systems are resilient, ecologically sustainable, socially just, and honour Indigenous food sovereignty” (BCCDC, 2022b).

On the other hand, food insecurity exists “when factors outside an individual’s control negatively impact their access to enough foods that promote wellbeing. Economic, social, environmental, and geographical factors influence this access. Food insecurity is most acutely felt by those who experience the negative impacts of structural inequities, such as discrimination and on-going colonial practices” (BCCDC, 2022b).

McIntyre (2011) suggested that policies to address food insecurity should focus on poverty reduction and food pricing and they should not be confused with food security policies such as community gardens or food skills.





# Key Findings

## Barriers to Food Security

We acknowledge that newcomers and Canadian-born do share some of the same systemic barriers. However, newcomers face additional challenges in achieving food security due to acculturation. Table 1 summarizes newcomers' barriers in four dimensions: economic, socio-cultural, physical environment, and political.

Newcomers, especially those from developing or less-developed countries, often encounter a price shock as Canadian food prices may differ significantly from their respective home countries. Not having the economic means to support a family with adequate food and nutrition can be due to the inability to find suitable employment because of language barriers, the lack of Canadian work experience or racism. Many highly educated newcomers become “underemployed” because their degrees and experiences are not recognized by Canadian employers. Additionally, monetary cost and mental energy spent on resettlement can weigh down on newcomers causing them to depend on highly processed, easy to prepare, unhealthy food.



**“I don't want to generalize, but whether you're an immigrant, refugee or a food insecure person, an inadequate income is probably the most important variable. It's not the lack of food. It's not food waste. It's you don't have money to buy adequate food, culturally appropriate and nutritional food.”**

**- Participant #13**

Newcomers rely on support from families, friends, or people from the same ethnic and cultural backgrounds. However, many do not have adequate social networks upon arrival and have to build their networks from nothing. As such, settling into a new country and food environments can be very difficult as they may not have the knowledge of where to access food and how to utilize unfamiliar food. One IWFPG member mentioned that she lost nearly 20 lbs in her first few months in Canada due to combined factors of arriving alone, having no social network, not having sufficient income, not understanding the local food system, and recovering from trauma. Another IWFPG member said that she had to educate herself about local foods and used resources such as YouTube videos and the Canadian food guide to help her learn. However, she became very frustrated in learning that, for example, a required amount of fruit and vegetables to maintain a healthy diet for all her family members would wipe out most of her grocery budget. As a result, she was at a loss to know how to meet healthy nutritional requirements for her family. As noted, the legacy of trauma can also play an important role in the mental health of newcomers impacting their ability to connect with people in their Canadian communities.



**“So-called ‘Canadian experience’ is really just a form of racism.”**

**- In-person meeting Participant (April 26, 2023)**



*Table 1: Economic, socio-cultural, physical environment and political barriers to food security and unique challenges experienced by the newcomer population*

	<b>Economic Reasons</b>	<b>Socio-cultural Reasons</b>	<b>Physical Environment Reasons</b>	<b>Political Reasons</b>
Barriers to food security experienced by the general population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Living in poverty</li> <li>• Lack of disposable income</li> <li>• High cost of living</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inability or hesitation to access emergency food services</li> <li>• Lack of food literacy</li> <li>• Stigma associated with accessing charity/emergency food programs</li> <li>• Not having choices within free food provided</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of storage space</li> <li>• Limited transportation</li> <li>• Living in a food desert environment</li> <li>• Unhealthy food received from food banks/charities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disinterest in civic participation (e.g., no participation in food policy councils or advocacy groups)</li> <li>• Lack of food system planning in municipalities</li> </ul>
Additional barriers to food security faced by newcomers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Price shock</li> <li>• Unable to find adequate employment due to racism, language barrier or the lack of Canadian work experience</li> <li>• Responsibility of sending money “home”</li> <li>• Preference for quick-to-prepare, convenience, or unhealthy foods due to price, long work hours and other stressors of immigration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unfamiliarity with food commonly available in Canada</li> <li>• Clash with children’s preference for new processed Canadian foods</li> <li>• Lack of knowledge of new food environments, affected by language barriers, lack of social network and religious reasons.</li> <li>• Inability to access social services and lack of cultural/religious support</li> <li>• Culturally unresponsive social services</li> <li>• Pre-migration trauma and post-migration stress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absence of ethnic food stores in neighborhoods</li> <li>• Small selection of ethnic/culturally-appropriate food in conventional supermarkets</li> <li>• Accessibility of farmland and other alternative sources of foods (e.g., community gardens, farmers’ markets)</li> <li>• Difficulty navigating through food environments due to language barriers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of understanding of Canadian political culture, and fear of participation in civic duties</li> <li>• Challenges building agency to advocate for food need and preferences</li> <li>• Funding, zoning and regulating of land use that affect non-traditional retail food outlets (e.g., ethnic groceries)</li> <li>• Sufficient government support for enhancing newcomers’ livelihood</li> </ul>

Sources: Information in this table was gathered from discussions with SPOs, newcomers, and Berggreen-Clausen et. al. (2021), Hodgins and Fraser (2017), Kohnen (2013), Rodriguez et. al. (2016), and Trinidad et. al. (2015)

Accessing culturally appropriate food is another key challenge because of the lack of availability. Among newcomer population, good healthy food is considered food from their home country that is made with food ingredients which can be hard to find or expensive in Canadian supermarkets. Having access to one's own food helps avoid social isolation, preserves family traditions and culture, and supports well-being. Some of our IWFPG members mentioned that if these familiar traditional foods were available, sadly they were often found to be expired or in poor condition. Lastly, some of the coping strategies newcomers may have used in their countries to access food, such as foraging, bartering or skill exchange, may no longer be applicable or permitted in Canada.

Indirectly, political dimension can impact economic and physical food environments adding more barriers to newcomers. Land use zoning and regulations may limit locations of ethnic grocery stores. Gentrification of neighbourhoods may push newcomers to live in locations that are not convenient to access food. Those who come from an oppressed society may not feel comfortable participating in civic activities and advocating for their rights and access to food. For example, one IWFPG member noticed a lack of halal meats in a local grocery store that she frequented. She had to travel far away to buy halal meat. Later, she learned from her English teacher that she and her friends could contact a local grocery store and ask them to offer halal meat. After several requests, she noticed that the store began carrying halal meat, making it more accessible for them to purchase and likely more cost effective than trying to access it from further away stores.

### **Types of Food Related Services Offered by Service Provider Organizations (SPOs)**

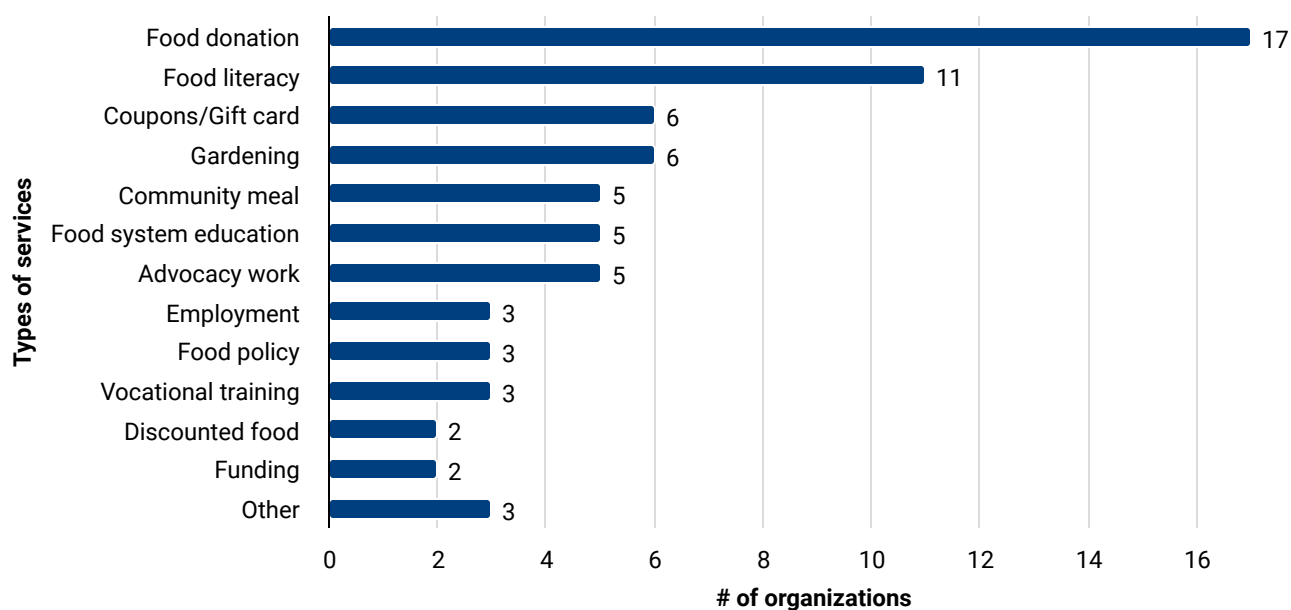
Among all the SPOs interviewed, 6 of them exclusively offer programming or services to newcomers. Most organizations often do not specifically target newcomers in their programming and services. Often their clients include a variety of vulnerable, low-income populations. Services related to food provided by 20 SPOs participated in this study can be categorized into the followings:

- *Food donation*: refers to food given at no costs to clients. This includes traditional form of food donation such as food bank and other forms such as food hamper which include culturally appropriate food, rescued food as well as food delivery services for clients with mobility issues.
- *Coupon/gift card*: refers to grocery store gift cards and farmers' market nutrition coupons given at no costs to clients. They are an alternative way for newcomers to access food in a dignified way.
- *Discounted food*: refers to food that can be purchased at a discounted rate at specific stores. Clients shop for the food they prefer and pay as much or as little as they can. This is another dignified way to access food especially for those who may feel reluctant to receive food through charities.
- *Community meal*: refers to meals that are prepared by service provider organizations and shared with clients in form of community lunches or dinners. Some organizations will let clients volunteer to prepare these meals.
- *Food literacy*: refers to programs that aim to provide knowledge such as nutrition, cooking and food shopping. These programs introduce newcomers to new foods and how to prepare them. This increases the usage and uptake of more commonly used Canadian produce found in food banks or grocery stores.

- Food system education: refers to programs that provide general knowledge about the food systems and food environment in Canada or Metro Vancouver such as facilitating community dialogues, kids' camp and offering information about grocery stores or farmers' markets.
- Gardening space: refers to access to space for newcomers to grow their own food. Gardening is also another form of food literacy. Additionally, gardening boosts mental health due to the impact of connecting to nature and socializing with other gardeners.
- Employment in food sector: refers to programs that offer employment opportunity for newcomers to earn money.
- Vocational training in food sector: refers to programs that train clients to be able to find employment in the food sector.
- Food policy: refers to activities that support the making of local food policies or charters
- Advocacy work: refers to activities that bring concerned citizens together to form groups or coalitions to discuss and navigate through issues such as food justice and food insecurity in order to create changes or influence policies.
- Funding: refers to monetary support offered to other organizations through grants or other types of funding arrangements.
- Other: refers to all other activities not already mentioned above such as incorporating equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) principles in their work

Figure 1 shows the number of SPOs and types of services they currently offer. Several organizations mentioned that food donation was not originally the focus of their services. However, due to hardship caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation, and other social issues, food donation has become the priority for their clients. More and more people need donated food to survive. This creates service shortfall in other areas as more and more resources (staff, funding, space, etc.) go to food donation programs.

Figure 1: Types of services offered by 20 SPOs participating in this study



As the food system is interconnected to other aspects of life, organizations often provide overlapping services. For example, organizations which provide food hampers may also provide community meals or food literacy programs. Community meals allow newcomers to socialize and meet other newcomers and build their social network. Food literacy programs help newcomers learn about unfamiliar ingredients, nutrition, affordability, building cooking confidence. Newcomers can learn about other Canadian food contexts, such as providing lunch for kids at school or how an unrecognizable vegetable is similar to a vegetable in their culture. Developing food literacy can help newcomers adapt to their food environment. For example, some newcomers only have access to canned foods from food banks, so SPOs may teach how to cook various meals using canned goods. Participant #26 explained how their organization's food literacy program involves a nutritionist walking through the aisles of a grocery store with a newcomer family to help them understand where the affordable and healthier options are.

In addition to services related food, many organizations also provide other types of services related to every aspect of newcomer life such as referrals to other organizations, socializing opportunities, or resettlement support. Some SPOs also provided mental health services, youth programming, employment services, language lessons, and more to ensure that newcomer families can successfully acclimatize to Canada.



**“We use food as a way to create space for people to talk about who they are, where they're from and to use that as a vehicle for empowerment.”**

**- Participant #1**

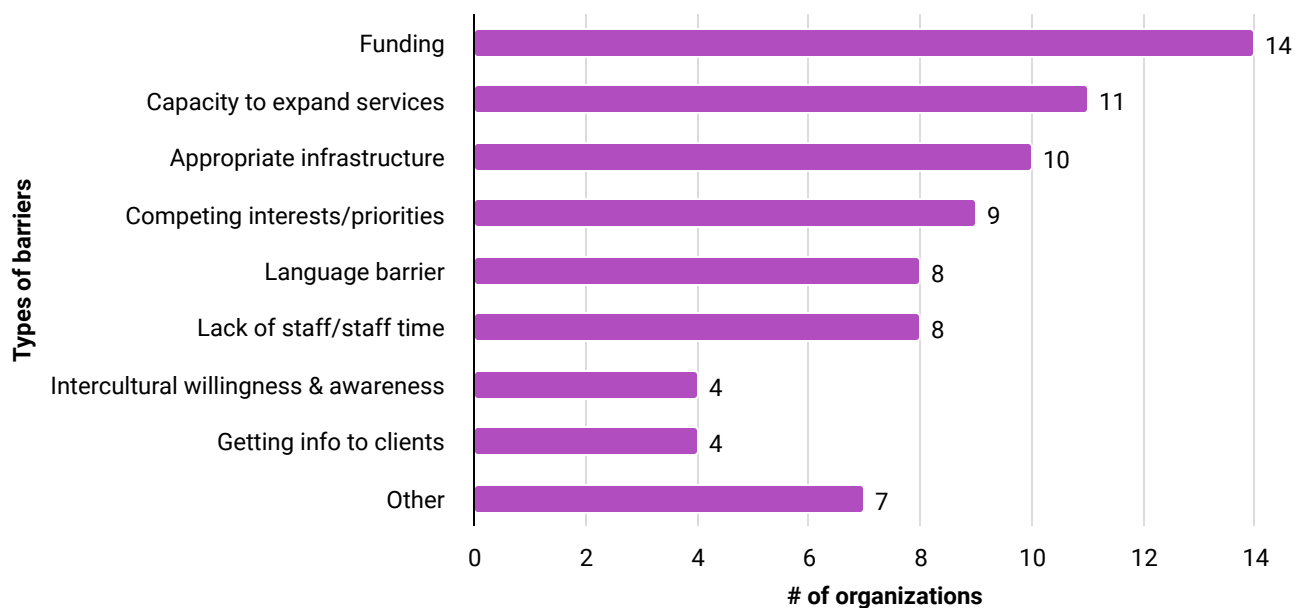


## Barriers to SPOs in Providing Services to their Clients

SPOs experience several barriers in their work in supporting newcomers and alleviating their food insecurity. Funding issue is the key barrier for 14 out of 20 organizations. SPOs indicate that often times funding is either not enough, comes with many restrictions or does not provide long term opportunity. As a result, many SPOs can only offer short term programs or project-based programs which can end as soon as the funds are spent. Staff time is often spent on grant writing and reporting to ensure that their organizations have enough fund to support clients. Due to funding limitation, SPOs also face another key barrier in service expansion either in offering more variety of programs or offering the current services to additional clients. When clients are turned away or when they move, SPOs will refer them to other organizations but currently there is no mechanism to follow up to ensure that these people will be able to find services that they need, and do not “fall through the crack”.

As the need for donated food has increased, many organizations also encounter issues in finding appropriate food storage, freezer and distribution space. Figure 2 shows the numbers of organizations and various barriers they currently encounter. In addition to barriers presented in Figure 2, other noteworthy barriers are: diversity of ethnic subgroups, difficulty in establishing network for smaller SPOs serving specific client groups, lack of data on specific issue, and the slow pace of collaboration with governmental agencies.

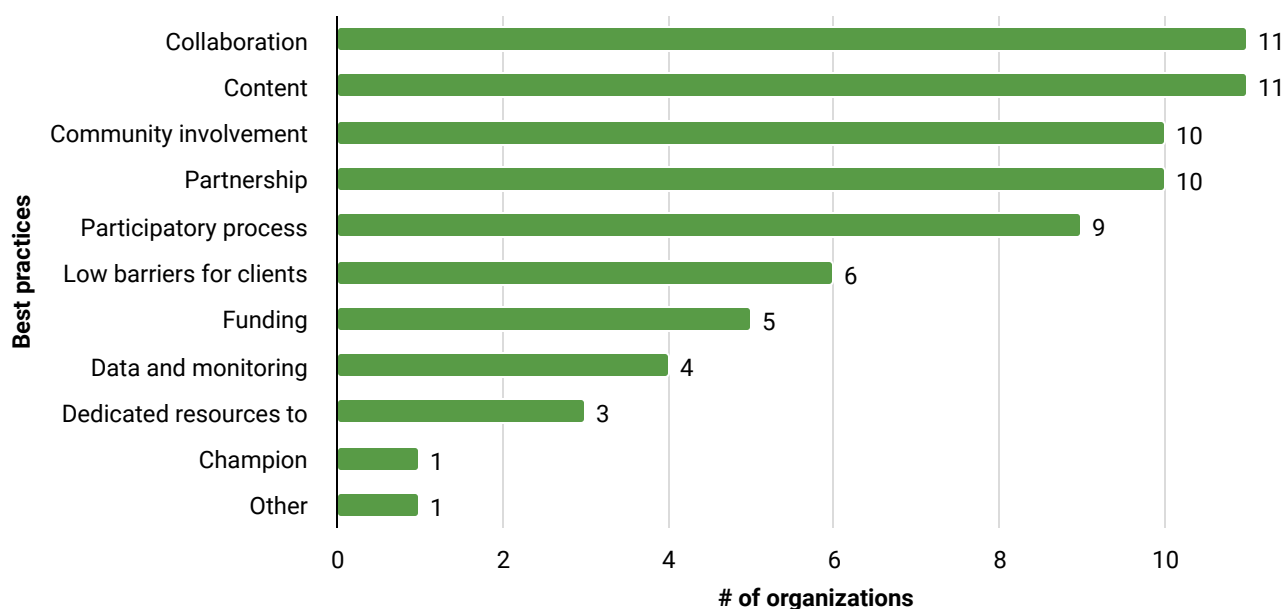
Figure 2: Types of barriers experienced by 20 SPOs participating in this study



## Best practices for SPOs' services/programming

Despite funding being a major challenge, the key to success lies in collaboration and contents. SPOs often collaborate with each other to exchange information, refer clients and share resources to ensure that their clients will receive a holistic system of support. Collaboration is very important when funding is limited or come from the same few sources. Additionally, when SPOs work together they can share their successes to create better contents and avoid siloing. Understanding what their clients need, what services to offer and how services are delivered (contents) are another key success. This understanding is often based on dignity, cultural sensitivity, flexibility to change and translation ability. What we heard from newcomers corroborated with what we heard from SPOs especially when it comes to the charitable food model. Receiving food from someone represents an imbalance power dynamic between the giver and the receiver particularly when there are no options in what and how one receives. Depending on organizational capacity and other resources, several SPOs have deviated from traditional food bank model. SPOs who serve newcomers exclusively do focus on providing culturally appropriate food. This not only reduces stress for clients but also reduces guilt of having to throw away food they do not eat. Some SPOs offer shopping style food hamper where clients can pick and choose food according to their needs. Other SPOs provide volunteer opportunity to clients (to give back to the communities) on food distribution day to put together food hampers for others. Figure 3 shows the number of organizations and key best practices leading to their success. Community involvement and creation of partnership are other key best practices. Community involvement directly support contents creation as people who are affected can have a voice in the type of services they need. Partnership can lead to long term programming success as SPOs can collaborate more officially and share risks and create mutual benefits.

Figure 3: Best practices leading to success of 20 SPOs participating in this study



## Food System Planning in the Context of Newcomers

Food system planning is an emerging field that is critical for the success of all members of a community. Due to historical exclusion, it remained a less visible form of planning usually found under housing, transportation, or environmental planning and can still be considered a rural planning jurisdiction (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999). However, with the presence of our industrialized, global food system and climate change threats, food system planning has become both an urban and rural issues. It is embedded in the everyday lives of community members through our health care system, supermarkets, employment, household spending, built environment, and more (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 2000) while becoming more of a relevant specialization in planning. However, suitable training for food systems planners is extremely limited currently and therefore the understanding and practice of food systems planning is lacking within planning agencies (Hansen et al., 2020), forcing planners to “learn as you go” (Soma and Wakefield, 2011). According to a survey of Canadian planners and practitioners conducted by Hansen et al. (2023), 10% of planners indicated that food systems planning was the primary focus of their work. The top key barriers to advancing food system planning were: limited food systems knowledge, competing priorities and lack of political support or guidance (Hansen et al., 2023).

A review of local policies within Metro Vancouver indicated that for some municipalities, food system planning is often included in their Official Community Plans (OCPs) or other Charters. Several municipalities have developed or are developing food policies, food charters or action plans such as the City of Vancouver, the City of Richmond and the City of New Westminster. These are policy or planning documents that attempt to coordinate municipal food security goals. They are often linked to greater poverty reduction or environmental sustainability planning strategies.



“Food system planning is only becoming an emergent subject that’s only kind of come out in the last decade or so. It is slowly moving into the center of urban planners’ visions.”

- Participant #11

Within the official community plans or food strategies across Metro Vancouver we found little mention of newcomers. Some documents recognized food as a social need (City of Port Coquitlam, 2013), or the need to support intercultural dialogue (City of Richmond, 2009). Newcomers are sometimes mentioned in poverty reduction plans as they are identified as having a higher risk of poverty (City of Surrey, 2012). While newcomers are not always directly referred to in poverty reduction plans, they have at the least been consulted in the creation of those plans (City of Burnaby referencing the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition’s ABC Plan, 2019). The City of Vancouver, on the other hand, does address both immigrants and refugees and provides specific examples of how alleviating poverty in these populations can be addressed (City of Vancouver, 2017).



“If it’s not embedded in policy, it’s not going to happen when it comes to food. You will spin your wheels forever if it’s not embedded in policy.”

- Participant #14

However, there was often a missing connection between food security and newcomers that needs to be addressed in these plans. The Vancouver Food Strategy of 2013 provided an example of how to include newcomers in these plans. They identified goals of including ethno-culturally diverse communities in consultations, addressing the most vulnerable including recent immigrants, and statistically identified where in Vancouver recent immigrants (within the last 5 years) have settled (City of Vancouver, 2013).

Specifically, on the issue of newcomers and food security, a key barrier to planners is the intercultural awareness and knowledge of diverse newcomer communities. As planners lack the lived experience of some of the populations they serve, they may recognize some challenges but may not have explored the particular challenges of a particular demographic nor looked at the issue with an intersectionality lens. Some cities have recognized this issue and as a result have founded intercultural planning groups (e.g., committee, table) that work with community partners and their members include folks representing different immigration statuses. This has been helpful to glean information on newcomer issues and respond accordingly to what arises. However, sometimes the issue of food security is discussed more within poverty reduction groups (e.g., committee, table) rather than in the intercultural focused groups. City planners have also acknowledged their own disconnect with the diverse newcomer communities due to lack of specific cultural knowledge, and as an innovative solution have hired cultural liaisons to engage with the communities more directly and fruitfully.



**“Newcomers are often overlooked when it comes to creating a food plan, creating food policies and creating specific food programming within organizations too.”**

**- Participant #2**

Municipal governments do not often directly engage with newcomer communities but indirectly through interactions with SPOs. Cities recognize the valuable work of SPOs and have encouraged them to apply for grants to help sustain their programming, as funding is a widely recognized issue for SPOs. As indicated, some cities have chosen to collaborate with cultural liaisons to better engage with newcomers that utilize the services and programs at SPOs. Municipal governments often work together with SPOs to identify the needs of different populations since SPOs work more directly with newcomers and thus understand and can voice those concerns to the city. However, it was also noted that sometimes councillors and others within the municipal government were very unaware of what people were experiencing in the community and they need advocacy from SPOs and community members to better learn and understand the issues.





# Conclusion

## Fostering a stronger food system safety net to support newcomers

In the current economic environment, dependence on charity food program is on the rise. However, this type of social assistance is effective only in the short-term. Long-term solutions should also be carried out to address food insecurity and support food security of our newcomer population. Research studies around the world agree that the key root cause of food insecurity is the lack of income and/or poverty (Smith et. al, 2000; Tarasuk et. al, 2014; Pollard and Booth, 2019). To address food insecurity, empirical studies in Canada demonstrated clearly that income-based policies can effectively alleviate household food insecurity. For example, Men, Urquia & Tarasuk (2021) used household food insecurity and income data from 10 provinces to illustrate that higher minimum wage, lower tax rate for the lowest income tax brackets and higher welfare assistance all contribute to the reduction in household food insecurity. When the Canada Child Benefit was introduced, Brown and Tarasuk (2019) found that the likelihood of families experiencing severe food insecurity significantly reduced, emphasizing the importance of such income transfer programs to help people in need. Such income-based policies and poverty reduction policies can target those who lack adequate income to afford food, including newcomer populations.



**"We need people on the ground providing these food services and making sure those emergency needs are met. And at the same time, we do need a greater push for governments to take responsibility for this as well and not heavily rely on nonprofits and charities to be doing all this work."**

**- Participant #2**

In addition to income-based programs and poverty reduction strategies, other social policies and measures specifically for newcomers are needed to holistically support them navigating through a new food environment and achieve food security.

First, it is important to have a language specifically dedicated to newcomer populations in official community plans, food policies/strategies/charters and poverty reduction plans. This study has shown that newcomers do have unique needs and appropriate supports are needed. Explicit language to recognize these needs of newcomers can provide guidelines to planners and other government officials. For example, this recognition can guide local governments to collect better data and conduct more research on the topics related to the newcomers' lives and wellbeing in order to create a welcoming food system environment.



Second, fostering of inclusive food system environments should be prioritized. Inclusivity can lead to meaningful, sensitive engagement with diverse communities. Recognition of newcomers' lived experience and incorporation of this information into the planning process can be done through better collaboration with SPOs. Marginalized newcomers often lack the agency or capacity to advocate for themselves. SPOs can act as a bridge between governments and newcomers to ensure that newcomers are provided appropriate space to be part of the decision-making process. Establishing a communication strategy or system that allows SPOs be connected easily with all level of governments can ensure that funding support are appropriately distributed according to newcomers' needs.

Third, enhancing cultural food space can support newcomers' health and wellbeing. There are many difficulties and stressors that newcomers face in adapting to a new country, affecting their mental health and feelings of isolation and grief. Consumption and preparation of cultural food can reduce the feeling of homesickness and help newcomers maintain their ethnic identities. Locations of ethnic food stores can be strategically zoned through municipal bylaws based on known population groups living in particular areas. Charity food programs can consider adding selections of culturally appropriate food to their offering. Creating connections between local farmers and newcomer communities can not only help farmers develop niche markets but also help newcomers to access fresh vegetables that are hard to find in conventionally grocery stores. These are a few example strategies.

Fourth, creating appropriate opportunities for newcomers to participate in our local food systems can indirectly aid newcomers in achieving food security. Families, friends, co-workers and community members make up newcomers' support system through activities such as sharing information, assisting with job search or lending a hand during difficult times. Low-barrier programs can be carefully designed to offer various opportunities to newcomers to be connected with other community members and expand their social circle such as accessing land to grow food, preparing and sharing community meals. Financial incentives such as a wage subsidy program can encourage employers to hire newcomers into the agri-food sector. Food entrepreneur training and easy-to-access loans for newcomers are also necessary to increase food system participation.



Finally, learning and understanding newcomers' stories and situations can help combat racism and misconceptions about newcomers. Shifting the narrative from newcomers being a burden to newcomers making significant contributions in our society can help foster equitable food system environments. Intercultural willingness and awareness from all food system actors are needed to provide various opportunities to newcomers such as training, employment, and social engagements. This often means having the patience to work and collaborate with newcomers, and being conscious and respectful of different cultural practices.

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# Appendix 1

## List of organizations and individuals participating in in-depths interviews

### *Service Provider Organizations*

BC Association of Farmers' Market	Burnaby Neighbourhood House
CityReach Care Society	DiverseCity Community Resources Society
Flavours of Hope	Food Stash
Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House	Immigrant Link Centre Society
Kingdom Acts Foundation	MOSAIC
Muslim Food Bank	New West Community Food Security Plan
Pacific Immigrant Resources Society	Seed of Change
Sharing Farm	South Vancouver Neighborhood House
Tayybeh	United Way
Urban Bounty	YWCA (Employment Program)
Zimbabwe Cultural Society of BC	

### *Governmental officials (whose opinion may not necessarily reflect the opinion of their organizations)*

Six planners in Metro Vancouver  
Three dieticians in the Fraser Health region

## Appendix 2

### Immigrant Women Food Policy Group (IWFPG) Members:

First Name	Country of Origin	Length of stay in Canada
Ana Maria	Peru	12 years
Amandeep	India	4 years
Hamida	Bangladesh	4 years
Khadijeh	Iran	4 years
Nargis	Afghanistan	6 years
Nazifa	Afghanistan	20 years
Neema	Tanzania	10 years
Noora	Qatar	2 years
Regine	Singapore	2 years
Sawsan	Lebanon	10 years
Siu Yin	Hong Kong	1 year
Touran	Iran	3.5 years

## Appendix 3

### List of organizations participating in in-person meetings

#### *April 26, 2023*

A Rocha	City of Burnaby
City of New Westminster	District of North Vancouver
DiverseCity	Family Education & Support Centre
Farm to School BC	Fraser Health
Kingdom Acts Foundation	KPU
Metro Vancouver Regional District	Muslim Food Bank
PIRS	Public Health Association of BC
SFU	Surrey Food Bank
Umoja Operation Compassion Society	ZICUSO BC

#### *May 16, 2023*

BCCDC	BC Poverty Reduction
City of Delta	City of Vancouver
City Reach	Farmers on 57th
Food Stash	Kitsilano Neighbourhood House
KPU	New Westminster Poverty Reduction
PIRS	Sharing Farm
South Vancouver Neighbourhood House	Tayybeh
UBC	United Way
Vancouver Food Networks	Vancouver Food Runners