




# IMMIGRANT CONTRIBUTIONS IN WATERLOO REGION

RESULTS IMMIGRANT SURVEY 2023



IMMIGRATION  
PARTNERSHIP  
WATERLOO REGION



Waterloo Region is set to grow to around **1,000,000** people in the coming decades. Of the over 300,000 new residents to be welcomed in that time, more than half will be immigrants from around the world. Immigrants<sup>1</sup> **bring diverse experiences and make significant contributions** to the vibrant regional tapestry. They enrich the community in many ways and shape our shared experiences.

This snapshot explores the diverse community contributions of immigrants in Waterloo Region, using responses from nearly 1,700 participants in the 2023 Immigrant Survey.<sup>2</sup> It includes ideas from immigrants themselves and the stories they were eager to share.

The Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership prepared this snapshot to help governments, funders, business leaders, non-profit organizations and others understand the many contributions immigrants make to the region as they build out strategies for future growth and development.

### Key Insights

- 📌 Immigrants are **actively engaged** in community building across in Waterloo Region with local organizations, boards, and initiatives, through volunteering, donating, and helping out neighbours and newcomers
- 📌 Immigrants contribute to educational initiatives and the local economy
- 📌 With time, most shift from focusing on developing their skills to using these skills to help their community
- 📌 Community leaders have an important role in recognizing and promoting the many contributions that immigrants bring to Waterloo Region

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<sup>1</sup> The term immigrants is used broadly in this report to include all who were born outside of Canada and now live, work or study in Waterloo Region, including immigrants, refugees, international students, permanent residents, temporary residents or foreign nationals and people who immigrated and have become Canadian citizens.

<sup>2</sup> See the last page of this snapshot for more information about the 2023 Immigrant Survey.

# Immigrants are Actively Engaged in Waterloo Region Communities

## Immigrants help their neighbours and provide informal assistance to others.

In 2023, 56% of Immigrant Survey participants shared that they help their neighbours when they need it and 30% provide unpaid assistance to family members. This includes practical support such as helping with apartment searches, moving, and childcare.

Respondents were also committed to acts of kindness, such as clearing driveways, sharing food, and engaging in cultural celebrations. Their comments show the importance of good relationships in building an inclusive and caring community.

## Immigrants volunteer and participate in local organizations that enhance community well-being

The community contributions of immigrants go well beyond benefiting immediate personal connections. In 2023, 34% of survey respondents volunteered with community organizations, groups or faith communities. This was up 12 percentage points from the previous survey in 2021.

Volunteers engage in a wide variety of activities - promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice through leadership development and anti-racist initiatives.

Immigrants in Waterloo Region also take part in political activities, such as voting in municipal, provincial, and federal elections, or being a part of various committees. While recent immigrants are

### In their Own Words:

#### Stories of community contribution by survey participants

"I am in an organization that feeds people every Saturday morning. The smile on [people's] faces and the interaction is something to be proud of."

"I am opening a nonprofit housing and stability initiative that helps people experiencing homelessness to get housed or to gain stability. I will soon be applying for grants and I am keeping in mind providing opportunities of stability for people with a criminal record in Canada by helping them establish a business. ...I discovered these problems while working as a shelter supervisor in Kitchener a city I love so much and would like to give back to."

"I am in the field of leadership development. In last three years, I continued to learn and sharpen my anti-racist lens and work towards integrating Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Social Justice lens to the non-for profits I work with."

"I have connected with other families of colour in my neighbourhood to create a safe and inclusive space for sharing, connecting, supporting each other, helping each other and navigating challenges related to settling in Canada and particularly Waterloo region. I have joined my neighbours in volunteering and donating to provide meals, clothing and other necessities to residents of the Cambridge encampment."

"I worked for the House of Friendship and I realized that people with mental and/or substance abuse are not weak minded but misunderstood."

"Since my arrival in this beautiful country I have tried to help people through Facebook or WhatsApp to find what they need by giving advice, contacts and even providing what they need if possible, I do it with all my heart and with great joy. Thank you for this space!"

### In their Own Words:

#### Stories of community contribution by survey participants

"I have been volunteering with the YMCA for several months as an English ESL instructor, and I found the process of helping others with their English learning really fulfilling. I am especially proud when students tell me that my classes helped them with their English-speaking confidence, or that my classes helped them build their confidence in using English day-to-day."

"I became a teacher in Canada, and as a teacher, I have a significant impact on your community through my work with students, colleagues, and parents. One of the ways I have contributed to my community as a teacher is through forging meaningful partnerships with local organizations, businesses, and community leaders to enrich the educational experiences of my students."

"I'm a coordinator of the project 'Family Support Club' for Ukrainian newcomers. I was a part of the team who designed the project... I've been working with social projects and definitely know how to embrace support and bring changes. It was a great surprise to receive double a number of applicants willing to participate in the project!"

"Welcome to the enchanting town of Cambridge, where I discovered a heartfelt need within our crafting community, particularly among talented women entrepreneurs... Recognizing the importance of empowerment, I started providing free classes to underprivileged women, guiding them on how to kickstart their own thriving businesses from the comfort of their homes. We delved into the realms of platforms like Etsy, Amazon, Shopify, and eBay, empowering countless women with the knowledge and skills to navigate these digital marketplaces successfully. In addition to these efforts, I made it my mission to support the community during the trying times of the Covid era. I distributed free groceries throughout the Galt area, aiming to bring some much-needed relief and nourishment to those in need."

not able to vote until they have been living in Canada for several years and become citizens, voting rates increase quickly afterwards. Approximately half (47%) of immigrant survey respondents that had lived in Canada for more than 5 years shared that they vote in elections – rising to 59% of those that have lived in Canada for more than 10 years.

Among those who expressed gratitude for acts of kindness they experienced, many shared a commitment to continuing this kindness by giving back in a wide variety of ways. In 2023, 31% of respondents reported that they donated to local charities.

When asked to share stories about community contributions that they were particularly proud of, many respondents highlighted the fulfillment and joy they experienced when they gave back to their community. They often referenced how they create inclusive spaces that help newcomers.

### Immigrants Help Other Newcomers and Youth

No matter how long they have lived in Canada, immigrants in Waterloo Region take pride in taking care of the next generation and helping other newcomers to Canada.

In 2023, 30% of survey participants cited helping newcomers settle in Waterloo Region as a significant way they contribute to the community. Many also emphasized how they aid and empower youth, with 12% volunteering with youth sports and 9% providing tutoring and helping youth learn.

Respondents commonly expressed being thankful for the help they received when they arrived and a strong desire to offer similar assistance to others going through the same transition.

After living in Canada for at least five years, immigrants were more likely to contribute and help in various ways compared to when they first arrived and were newcomers themselves. After five years, immigrants were more likely to:

- Vote in local/municipal, provincial or national elections (45 percentage points higher than those who had arrived in the past year)
- Donate to local charities (32 percentage points higher)
- Provide unpaid help for family members (25 percentage points more)
- And contributing through their job (20 percentage points more)

Some of the key supports survey participants offered to newcomers included transportation assistance, translation, providing information about local facilities and infrastructure, and facilitating access to resources such as food banks and healthcare.

## Immigrants Foster Learning and the Economy

Over time, immigrants in Waterloo Region continue to intentionally build their skills, strengthen the ways they can contribute to the community, and increase their economic and political participation.

### In their Own Words: Stories of community contribution by survey participants

“I am very grateful to all the volunteers who helped me and my son. I was pleasantly surprised by the number of programs and organizations that help in the adaptation. In just a few months after my arrival I have made a lot of friends. I am actively involved in local events and thanks to the churches, the Ukrainian Congress of Canada and other volunteers I am able to implement all my ideas and make life in the region better.”

“I am a couponer and saves money when shop, always look and find great deals, and in the end I donate it to local food bank and to the shelter for homeless people. I am proud of it.”


“I'm proud that the community comes together for special events especially when it concerns children or celebration of an event. We really go all out, let each other know that we have had a great year, and get to know one another.”

“I ride my bike almost everyday to get to work, do groceries, errands or just to see around and get to know my community better.”

“I helped to establish a community garden at my workplace so local volunteers can help cultivate it and benefit from the produce.”

“The day I received my first salary I donated a small chunk of it for the hungry childrens. Because my mom always told me to donate some amount of your salary to the people in need.”

“I started a number of grassroots community associations to help immigrants build social connections to create a sense of belonging. One of these groups is called Tumaniyi Association, we plan welcome parties for newcomer families to meet other immigrants. We engage music, dance, culturally relevant foods and an atmosphere of joy which many newcomers say they have not experienced since arrival.”



In 2023, 39% of Immigrant Survey participants were engaged in skills development, up 17 percentage points from 2021. This included learning English, pursuing further education, building professional skills through their job, and more.

Among respondents, 38% were proud to contribute with their skills and experience to the local economy through their job. Some were themselves business owners.

With time, most shift from focusing on developing their skills to using these skills to help their community. For example, respondents who lived in Canada for 5 years or less were more likely to report that they continue to develop their skills (71%). Conversely, those who have lived in Canada for over 10 years were more likely to vote and be on a board of directors or another committee.

## **Immigrants Promote Inclusivity, Kindness, and Environmental Sustainability**

**Immigrants are vocal advocates for fairness, kindness, and resilience in Waterloo Region.**

One third (33%) of respondents to the 2023 Immigrant Survey said they contribute to the community by speaking up for fairness and treating people with kindness. These values often led to other community contributions, like helping newcomers and volunteering.

In the survey, 40% of respondents shared that they contribute to the community by taking care of the environment. Many noted their efforts to reduce their personal impact on the environment while also ensuring the resilience of their community. Many respondents mentioned that they promote environmental well-being by riding their bikes, recycling, picking up waste, planting trees, and participating in community initiatives like bottle drives.

## Conclusion

The stories of community contribution shared by Immigrants in Waterloo Region paint a picture of resilience, collaboration, shared prosperity and belonging. They highlight a large groups of residents and community that values togetherness and unity, understanding that collective efforts lead to greater well-being for everyone.

Immigrants bring different cultures together, and play important roles in shaping the local economy. Their dedication to entrepreneurship, job creation, and economic growth benefits both individual immigrants and the broader community. Their active engagement in volunteerism and community initiatives shows their commitment to giving back and prosperity for all. From tutoring programs and language assistance to involvement in local organizations, immigrants play a crucial role in creating a sense of belonging and support.

Survey participants encouraged community leaders to have a greater openness to the valuable contributions of immigrants in our community:

- 🌈 “Recognize their contributions to the community particularly economically. Help decrease the perception that we are freeloading.”
- 🌈 “[...] As immigrants, we can provide lots of support to our communities, and currently more than ever that help will be more than welcome, since our province is facing lack of people, services etc.”
- 🌈 “Look for the future community leader and shape them into the position because we have to invest in each other [...]”
- 🌈 “Community leaders [...] can create opportunities for immigrants to share their culture and talents with the broader community, and promote intercultural dialogue and exchange. By fostering a culture of inclusivity, community leaders can help to create a welcoming and supportive environment for immigrants in Waterloo Region. This can help to improve their overall wellbeing, enhance their sense of belonging, and promote a more vibrant and diverse community for all residents.”

The stories and experiences shared by immigrants in Waterloo Region paint a picture of a vibrant community that thrives on diversity, empathy, and a collective spirit. As Waterloo Region continues to grow and evolve, ongoing dialogue and collaboration between immigrants and others will help shape a more inclusive and dynamic future for all.

## Data Sources and Limitations

The data for this snapshot comes from the Immigration Partnership's **2023 Immigrant Survey**. This biannual, multilingual survey is for immigrants who live, work and/or study in Waterloo Region. It covers immigrant experiences on a range of topics impacting their ability to reach their full potential and contribute to a thriving, prosperous community for everyone. The survey was most recently conducted in June 2023 with 1,676 participants. Some comparisons are included to the 2021 Immigrant Survey of 1,507 participants.

In the 2023 survey, the majority of participants filled out the survey online. Participants reflected the whole range of immigrants living in Waterloo Region. Two thirds (67%) had been in Canada for 5 years or less, while the rest had been here for longer. More than half were permanently in Canada (57%) and 39% were here on a temporary permit. Almost all (93%) were living in Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo, with 3% in the rural townships. Participants answered the survey in 11 languages and had 75 first languages. English was the first language of 14% of participants, 77% spoke English well or very well and 9% spoke English poorly or not at all. A full 76% of respondents identified as racialized; 59% were female and 40% male; 3% identified as LGBTQ+; 6% were living with a disability or chronic illness. Respondents, like immigrants overall, were highly educated: 75% had a Bachelor's degree or above. Almost two thirds (63%) were working (full/part time/casual/self-employed) and 26% were unemployed and looking for work.

Survey responses were disaggregated along many demographic lines and analysed to uncover the varying experiences of different groups of immigrants. This profile highlights larger differences among immigrant subgroups. Because of small numbers for some subgroups, the findings should be interpreted with caution. Additional information can be found at [www.immigrationwaterlooregion.ca/immigrantsurvey](http://www.immigrationwaterlooregion.ca/immigrantsurvey).

The Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership is collaboration of over 100 community service, business, municipal, post-secondary and ethno-cultural organizations and residents working together to create the conditions for immigrants to succeed and help build a welcoming, dynamic community.



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