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Megatrends & Families: Focus on Digital Technologies, Migration and Urbanization in
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Migration and urbanization trends and family wellbeing in Canada: A focus on disability and Indigenous issues

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Discussions of migration and urbanization in Canada and many other nations typically focus on the experiences of individuals. By doing so, the importance of their family relationships and circumstances may be overlooked. A failure to account for broader family networks has wellbeing consequences for both the people who migrate and/or move to urban locations and their family members who have stayed behind. Beyond the individual-level focus, policies related to migration are usually developed as population-level initiatives. This means that families considered vulnerable or at-risk due to certain health and/or demographic factors can remain unnoticed and their special needs unaccounted for. The experiences of these families during migration and urbanization merit greater attention so that policy makers and support services can ensure more equitable opportunities and better family wellbeing outcomes.

This paper explores migration and urbanization in Canada in relation to family wellbeing with attention to two at-risk population groups: families with a family member who has a disability, and families that identify as Indigenous. Both groups experience exclusion, that is, systematic actions resulting in being overlooked, ignored, and at-risk. Indigenous families have endured a long history of colonialism, racism, and oppression (Saul, 2014), resulting in a legacy of grievous harm to families and the chronic underfunding of support services such as health care, housing, and child welfare (Government of Canada, 2018a; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Families in which there is a member with a disability¹ require ready access to affordable health care and related services to ensure appropriate support, which is linked to the wellbeing of all family members.

The importance of a family lens

¹ Statistics Canada defines disability as anyone who reports being “sometimes”, “often” or “always” limited in their daily activities due to a long-term condition or health problem, as well as anyone who reports being “rarely” limited if they are also unable to do certain tasks or can only do them with a lot of difficulty” (Morris et al., 2018, p. 6). It applies to physical and mental health, sensory, or cognitive disabilities.

Migration and urbanization decisions are often depicted as individual activities. More likely, they are part of family decision-making processes (Trask, 2022) around such issues as the desire for better economic, educational and social opportunities. Migration can have benefits and drawbacks for families regardless of whether some family members stay behind or they migrate together (United Nations Development Programme, 2009). Many do not have a choice since policy regulations can limit who is considered family and which members are included.

The Vanier Institute of the Family has adopted a family lens to address its mission of understanding families in all of their diversities and the barriers and enablers of family wellbeing (Hilbrecht et al., 2022). We believe that thinking about *families*, rather than individuals, is essential if we wish to position *families* as the focus of policy discussions. A family lens allows greater insight into how rules, regulations, and legislation address the needs of families. In doing so, it lays the groundwork for evaluating the culture and practices of policy makers and organizations by recognizing both their strengths and where gaps exist (Bogenschneider et al., 2012). Given this year in which we mark the 30th anniversary of IYOF, families are our focus. There is much to do to improve wellbeing of families in all world regions.

The International Year of the Family 30th anniversary (IYOF+30) milestone year is a reminder of the foundational thinking that precedes us. One of the inspirations for our mission and activities at the Vanier Institute of the Family comes from the work of Doris Badir (1993). Dr Badir was President of the International Federation of Home Economics and Dean of the Faculty of Home Economics at the University of Alberta. She was one of the drivers of the UN IYOF declaration in 1994. Dr. Badir promoted the use of what we now call a family lens when viewing the impact of policies and programs on the wellbeing of families. From a policy perspective this approach is especially helpful in identifying the often-unintended influences on families of policies designed with individuals in mind. For example, in Canada, immigration policies are directed toward groups such as refugees or economic migrants. Such policies can have different consequences for families based on issues such as family structure (Berger & Carlson, 2020). A multigenerational family sharing the same household would not be able to immigrate together since grandparents need to be sponsored after the parent(s) and child(ren) arrive (Government of Canada, 2022d). This has implications for care and support of younger and older family members in both Canada and the home country.

What then is a family lens? In our recent work at VIF, we have created a Family Diversity Framework (Hilbrecht et al., 2022). It has two main components. The first is based on the principle that families are diverse. In order to map these diversities, we have developed three ways of viewing diversities in families. These are family structure, family work and family identity. When we focus on *family structure*, we gain insights into the ways in which family members are related to one another; to which of those relationships are recognized in our laws; which are seen as ideal; and which are discouraged, ignored, or even banned. This leads us to consider how policies and laws about family formation and dissolution, about inheritance and parental rights, shape family life. The *family work* lens addresses the paid and unpaid work of families and how these roles are distributed. This leads us to consider how precarious paid work experiences might influence who assumes the work of family care; or how public policies around child benefits (Government of Canada, 2022a) might reduce the gendered assignment of care for dependent children in families. The *family identity* lens focuses on how common features and experiences of families including race, ethnicity, religion, and immigrant status might frame how families are perceived and represented by themselves and others. This leads

us to consider how families might be marginalized by identities that act to exclude. Canada's history of exclusion of families because of their Indigenous background is a stark example.

The second assumption of the framework is that family wellbeing is the desired outcome. To achieve this goal, we must be explicit about what is meant by family wellbeing and to be able to assess our progress. We view family wellbeing as having three dimensions. Material wellbeing is resources that families have; relational wellbeing is based in their social relationships; and subjective wellbeing their sense of fit between their experiences and their aspirations—a kind of “how are we doing” barometer (Keating et al., 2021). When policy decisions account for the way in which families differ, there is potential for more families to be positively affected in at least one of these spheres, resulting in better family wellbeing outcomes.

Megatrends and the influence of family diversity

Migration and urbanization will have differential effects on families. The two family identity subgroups on which we focus, families with disability and families that are Indigenous, represent priority employment equity groups identified by the Canadian government as disadvantaged in the workplace (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2021). These groups have experienced barriers and constraints that require special consideration not only for employment but in other life domains. It should also be noted that the groups are not always mutually exclusive.

Our remarks focus on Canada, though there are some similar issues in the United States. Both countries admit immigrants for family reunification and to meet broader economic needs. Nevertheless, although Canada and the U.S. share characteristics of being high income, educated, North American nations, their patterns of family experiences of migration and urbanization differ due to unique political, economic, socio-cultural, and historical circumstances. For example,

- Family reunification has been called the “bedrock” of immigration in the U.S (Wolgin, 2018). It allows admission to a wide range of family members but is capped according to category of relationship and country of origin (United States Government, 2022). Canada has more economic-based immigrants than the U.S. but admits a narrower range of family members that is not capped. Even so, in 2020 family immigration in Canada accounted for 59% of permanent admissions, including those admitted through the family reunification program and through the refugee and economic immigrant streams as accompanying family members (Government of Canada, 2021).
- The U.S. has a higher level of unauthorized immigration than Canada due to its geographic proximity to Mexico, which also serves as a transit corridor for Central and South America. Undocumented immigrants and their families are more vulnerable since they have limited access to employment protections, social services, and health care (Government of Canada, 2022b).
- Both countries allow entry to refugee claimants, but the approach to implementation of the refugee and asylum seeker system varies. Detention criteria for asylum seekers are more restrictive in Canada, whereas in recent years detention became an increasingly preferred solution in the U.S. (Sanders, 2020). This was especially notable at the US-Mexico border, where family separation and the detention of children and youth led to major political, ethical, and legal concerns.

- Canada and the US are highly urbanized countries; however Canadian cities are not as complex governmentally than cities in the U.S. Further, Canadian urban centres are more dominated by central cities than the fragmented metropolitan areas in the U.S. (Taylor, 2019). For families, this means potential differences in access to programs and services due to governance models.

Migration

In Canada, migration is commonly understood as either interprovincial (from one province or territory to another) or intraprovincial (from one region to another within a province or territory) (Chastko, 2021). Our interest here is primarily in transnational migration, so we refer to Canada's *immigration* policies and statistics. These policies may support or prevent family members from entering the country and/or becoming permanent residents. As such, they have the power to fragment or unite families, to highlight inequalities among diverse family groups, and ultimately to undermine or enhance family wellbeing. An issue is which family diversities are prioritized within immigration policies. For example, priorities may be parents, either married or common-law, with children (family structure); families who fill employment needs (family work); and families who are not part of identity groups that are not valued (family identity). Family definitions are often implicit in immigration policies, (i.e., they are developed with a type of family in mind) making it difficult to see which diversities are included or overlooked.

Currently in Canada, there are four immigration classes that prioritize specific relationships. They illustrate a structural definition of family rooted in traditional values, norms, and experiences of the dominant culture:

1. Immigrant sponsored by family - also referred to as "family reunification" can only be applied for post-immigration. It is for permanent residents who have promised to provide financial assistance to those who are deemed close family relatives including: parents, grandparents, sibling, uncle or aunt, nephew or niece, and "other relatives" (Government of Canada, 2022d). The latter includes orphaned family members: sibling, nephew, niece, and grandchild (Minister of Immigration Refugees and Citizenship, 2022).

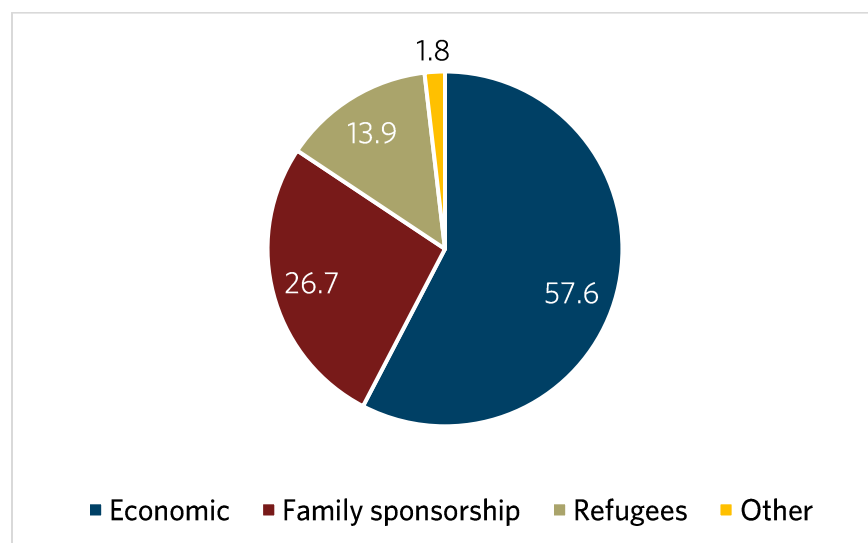
The following immigrant classes can bring a more restricted set of family members with them, including spouse or common-law partner, dependent child, spouse or common-law partner's dependent child, and dependent child of a dependent child (Government of Canada, 2022d):

2. Economic immigrant - for skilled workers, people with Canadian work experience, or those who qualify under certain business categories (e.g., entrepreneurs) and have the requisite skills and experience to participate in business in Canada.
3. Refugee - people in need of protection or who cannot or are afraid to return to their home country; and,
4. Other immigrants - people who are not normally eligible for other classes but can be considered based on family ties, best interests of children, settlement in Canada, consequences of not being allowed to immigrate, and humanitarian or compassionate reasons (Statistics Canada, 2019).

In 2020, 184,606 permanent residents were admitted to Canada. Just over half were admitted as economic immigrants and about one-quarter through the family sponsorship program. Refugees and

'other immigrant' classes represented just over 15% (see Fig. 1). In total, more than one-third were from India (42,876), the People's Republic of China (16,535), and the Philippines (10,969) (Minister of Immigration Refugees and Citizenship, 2022). Although much information is gathered about the applicant, far less is known about family members. Knowing how many families are included in these numbers along with the education and employment circumstances of all family members, income adequacy, and potential language barriers would be helpful for understanding what might be needed to support their material or relational wellbeing.

Figure 1. Percentage of permanent residents admitted to Canada by immigration class, 2021



Source: Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. (2022). 2021 Annual report to parliament on immigration. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/annual-report-parliament-immigration-2021.html>

Families and persons with disability

Canada has not had a history of welcoming immigrants with disabilities and has been known to deny permission to their families as well (Hanes, 2009). This is important to keep in mind when considering in what ways immigration policy reflects societal norms and values regarding inclusion and exclusion, and the extent to which it may be in need of change. Contemporary immigration law does not preclude people with disabilities and their families from applying.

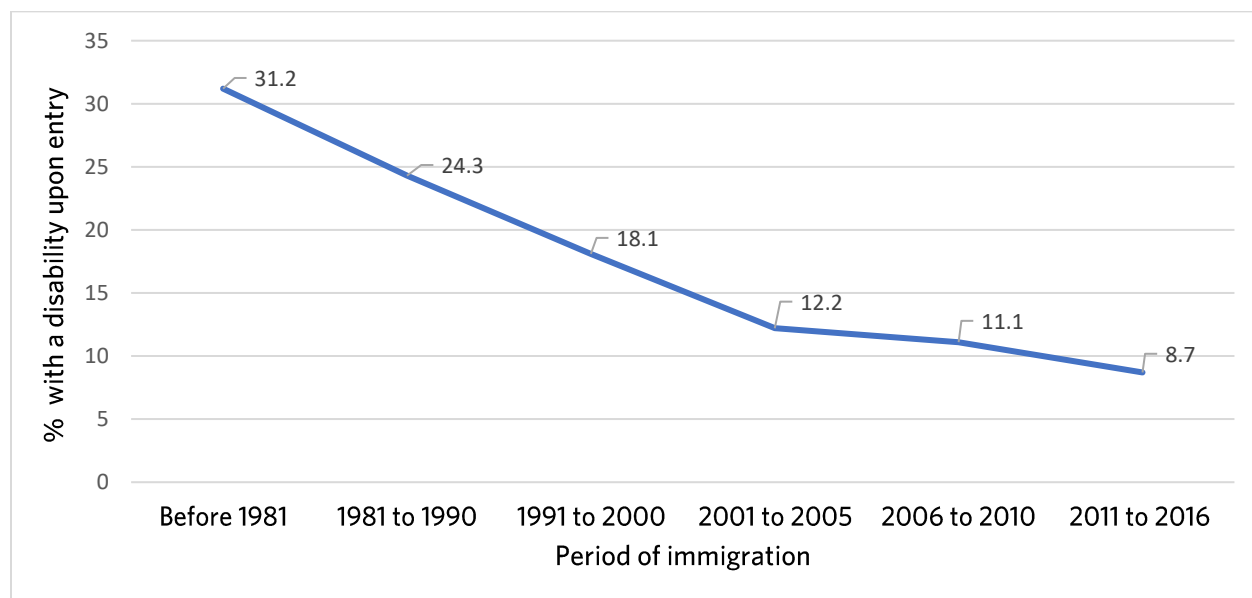
However, it is still the case that the family member with a disability may be deemed inadmissible on health grounds if anticipated health or social service costs are deemed likely exceed those of the average Canadian over a period of five years; or, if the demand on health or social services would increase waiting times that could negatively affect the health of Canadian citizens or permanent residents (Government of Canada, 2022c). This is known as the *excessive demands* clause, and it raises a question about whether this exclusion is unjust. Although the aim is to protect overuse of Canada's publicly funded social and health care systems, it treats the costs as a burden, rather than an investment in full participation, inclusion, and positive contributions to Canadian society (Keung, 2021). The only exception to the excessive demands clause for immigrant families is for refugees, where there is a higher risk of disability due to war, disasters, and the migration journey. Such

migrants are excluded from medical screening (Lu & Ng, 2019) and therefore cannot be barred from entry to Canada.

Potential immigrants defined as family members (i.e., spouse, child, or common-law partner) of a person with a disability deemed to have excessive demands are allowed entry (Government of Canada, 2018b, (Annex A, Section 38 (2), Paragraph (1)(c)). Non-excluded family members may be reluctant to proceed with immigration if the family member with a disability is excluded, or they may still choose to immigrate even if the family member is unable to make the journey, which has implications for family wellbeing. A systematic review of mental and physical health outcomes for parents (U age 50) who were left behind, revealed that they can experience higher levels of mental health problems, lower life satisfaction, and more loneliness, among other outcomes. These outcomes are exacerbated by risk factors such as gender, income, physical activity, rural residence and, perhaps not surprisingly, how often their adult children visit (Thapa et al., 2018). For some families, such visits may be almost impossible. One has only to consider the recent wave of Ukrainian refugees where adult men are not permitted to leave with their families, and the emotional trauma experienced by family members who immigrated without them (Waldie, 2022).

Statistics are not kept for numbers of families with disability that immigrate to Canada, but they are kept for individuals with a disability. The percentage of immigrants with a disability has decreased markedly over time. Prior to 1981, 31.2% of immigrants had a disability, compared to only 8.7% in 2011 to 2016 (see Fig. 2). From these figures, we can assume that the percentage of immigrant families with disability would also show a downward trend. This could reflect a burden-of-disability

Figure 2: Immigrants to Canada by Period of Immigration and Presence of Disability Upon Entry



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD) 2017, linked to the 2016 Census of Population²

Note: 'Immigrant' includes persons who are, or who have ever been, landed immigrants or permanent residents. Such persons have been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities. Immigrants who have obtained Canadian citizenship by naturalization are included in this category.

² Figures supplied by Diversity and Sociocultural Statistics Division, Statistics Canada, 2022

attitude becoming more entrenched in immigration policy, especially in the past 20 years. This attitude also suggests reasons why people with disability in Canada are a priority group for employment equity. The most recent population prevalence rate of disabilities among immigrants is 19.2%, which is lower than the non-immigrant population rate of 23.7% (Statistics Canada, 2018). It is likely due to the 'healthy immigrant effect' even among those in the refugee class with less severe chronic health issues (Lu & Ng, 2019). Immigrant families with disability do face additional challenges. Finding appropriate healthcare, accessible housing, transportation, employment, and respite care are pressing concerns. The ability to meet these needs quickly and efficiently will influence family wellbeing.

Indigenous families

Three groups of Indigenous Peoples are recognized in Canada: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. These groups are distinct from one another with unique languages, histories, spiritual beliefs, and cultural practices. They represent more than 50 Nations and 50 Indigenous languages.

Indigenous Peoples may define "family" differently. Drawing upon in-depth interviews with Indigenous and non-Indigenous people with content expertise and working in government, universities, or as policy leaders, the concept of family was described in two ways by both groups. At the *personal level*, Indigenous family was seen as multi-faceted, socially and culturally based, and with strong ties to community, language, and mobility. At the *institutional level*, family was based on biological ties, household membership, or legal status (Tam et al., 2017). The lack of coherence between personal and institutional definitions of family has policy implications since the institutional definition is the dominant model for policy development and administration. As one participant related, "...certain non-Indigenous family norms, such as a nuclear family structure, have taken precedence in what is considered a 'normal' family, not necessarily reflecting the diversity of family types" (p. 250). This is concerning because it may limit access to resources and supports for Indigenous people who do not identify with a nuclear family model.

For centuries, Indigenous families have been forcefully removed from the land central to their identities and wellbeing and relocated elsewhere. During the post second world war era, Indigenous families were encouraged to leave reserves and assimilate into the dominant settler culture and society in the same way that immigrants from Europe were encouraged to assimilate. As noted by Bohaker and Iacovetta, "Despite the geography of their birth, in order to be considered citizens, Aboriginal [sic.] Canadians had to 'immigrate' from peripheral reserves to mainstream Canadian communities in a manner metaphorically similar to the journey taken by the refugees who left Europe's DP camps and immigrants who fled its impoverished regions" (2009, p. 66). It was not until 1960 that Indigenous people were given the right to vote with no impact on their treaty rights and obligations, and no loss of Indian status. As part of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action, in 2021 they were finally allowed to use their traditional names on their passport and other government identification (Reynolds, 2021).

More than any other population in Canada, Indigenous families have been subject to forced migration and relocation—sometimes to urban areas, but also to other remote regions. Government relocation initiatives have been couched in terms of their administrative usefulness, i.e., for the convenience of the government to administer services; to address perceived needs of Indigenous Peoples by relocating them to the land to get away from negative influences of non-Indigenous settlements and

encouraging self-sufficiency; or, for development, i.e., where land needed is needed for agriculture, urban growth, or hydro dams (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). The effects on families have been considerable. A study of relocated Indigenous families identified effects extending across generations such as high levels of substance abuse in the first generation, women's depressive symptoms and less effective parenting in the second generation, and a greater risk of depressive symptoms and delinquent behaviours in the third generation. Separation from grandparents led to the erosion of intergenerational cultural influences and has resulted in limited parental abilities (Walls & Whitbeck, 2012). Due to the continued lack of essential services in remote parts of Canada, Indigenous Peoples are still evacuated to urban areas for various reasons such as the birth of children (Smylie et al., 2021) or assisted living for elders (Grant, 2021), which can lead to disconnection with families, the land, and their communities.

Urbanization

Urbanization refers to population centres becoming larger, more interdependent, and more specialized over time. It emerges through interaction among social, economic, environmental and political changes (Stelter & Artibise, 2015). According to the 2021 Census, 83.4% of households in Canada were in urban areas.³ Smaller urban locations, known as census agglomerations (CAs) have a population of 1,000 – 99,999 and larger urban locations, census metropolitan areas (CMAs) have a population of 100,000 or more. Rural is the area that remains. It is defined as “an area with less than 1,000 inhabitants and a population density less than 400 people per square kilometre” (2022b, p. 4). It should be noted that other countries include higher populations and population densities in their criteria for rural. Population movement between rural and urban locations (CAs and CMAs) is limited. According to the most recent yearly data available (2019-2020), the number of individuals moving from rural to urban areas was 207,111, while the number moving from urban areas to rural areas was slightly higher at 214,573.⁴ Movement within urban centres is more rapid, specifically the growth of downtown populations. There were six more CMAs in 2021 than in 2016, the previous census year. Further, immigration and urbanization are closely intertwined. Between 2016 and 2019, 9 in 10 new immigrants settled in CMAs (Statistics Canada, 2022a).

Families in urban areas have easier access to employment, education, healthcare, childcare, and other social supports that enhance family wellbeing, but the rapid growth of urban areas can have negative effects. It increases the need for housing, transportation, and infrastructure, and raises concerns about the health of the local environment due to impacts on wildlife, wetlands, and farmlands related to Canada's increasingly car-dependent culture (Statistics Canada, 2022a).

Living in urban centres may support or undermine the wellbeing of families in relation to specific diversities. For example, cities have more employment opportunities (Milaney et al., 2022), although long commute times in large cities may have an impact on family wellbeing (family work). Other families may be drawn to cities for different reasons. Same-gender, non-binary or transgender couples are more likely to live in large urban centres, especially in the downtown core (Statistics Canada, 2022c) where they may feel more welcome than in other locations (family identity). Changes to bylaws in large cities such as Toronto to allow garden suites on residential locations (City of Toronto, 2022) make it easier for multigenerational families who wish to reside in the same

³ Figures supplied by the Centre for Demography, Statistics Canada, Government of Canada, 2022

⁴ Figures supplied by the Centre for Demography, Statistics Canada, Government of Canada, 2022

location to do so and it is often more affordable too. Affordable housing for families in Canada is linked to quality of life, including better physical and mental health, feelings of belonging, reduced stress, and improved educational and employment opportunities (Milaney et al., 2022).

Families, disability, and urbanization

Families with disability may move from rural to urban areas of Canada for improved access to health care and other related supports. In urban areas, there is greater accessibility to a family physician, specialists, and emergency departments (Clark et al., 2021; Sibley & Weiner, 2011). There are also more community support services available for families such as respite care, supportive housing, transportation for the family member with a disability, and service coordination and arrangement—all of which can improve the wellbeing of families. Even so, it is worth considering some of the challenges of living in cities, such as affordability, and its impact on a family's material wellbeing.

Official statistics are not kept for families with disability having to relocate or do without needed services. This represents a substantial information gap when considering policies that would help families to ease the transition from and one location to another ensure continuous, high quality, and accessible supports and services. Providing more health care and related services to smaller communities is another option so that families do not have to relocate to access the services needed. Admittedly, this would be a complex undertaking for an already stretched public health care system.

Indigenous Peoples and urbanization

More than half of Indigenous people live in urban areas. Many Indigenous people move to cities for the opportunities they can provide and for other reasons such as being closer to children that may have been removed by the child welfare system, provision of culturally relevant education for their children, and mobility (National Association of Friendship Centres, 2021). Others reside in cities that have occupied their traditional territories and reserves. Many urban-dwelling Indigenous peoples retain a connection to their family's community of origin, which helps to maintain their culture in both traditional and contemporary ways (Wilson & Hodgson, 2018). Indigenous families also have high mobility, moving into and out of urban spaces according to family circumstances and the presence of other community and family members (Tam et al., 2017).

Although the Indigenous middle class is growing, poverty levels remain high for urban Indigenous people. They also experience persistent racism and racial discrimination. As noted in a report to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights,

Urban Indigenous children, youth and families, including Indigenous Elders, are at a significantly greater risk of human rights violations in Canada such as racial and systemic discrimination in healthcare, education, child welfare and social settings by virtue of belonging to an Indigenous grouping in Canada such as being First Nations, Inuit and/or Métis (National Association of Friendship Centres, 2021, pp. 9-10).

Clearly, the impact on family wellbeing is negative and destructive. A useful step to address systematic racism and discrimination in urban areas and elsewhere is to heed the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015). This could help to address the legacy of residential schools, advance reconciliation, and improve settlers' understanding of Indigenous Peoples. Another would be to adopt the perspective of Chris Anderson, a Métis, who stated, "To me, a decolonized city is a city that sees Métis in particular, but Indigenous people more generally, as partners to be

engaged with rather than problems to be solved” (McCreary, 2019, p. 170). Media representations could also move away from deeply entrenched “victim” and “survivor” narratives (Pfliger, 2020) to feature Indigenous families that are thriving and experiencing high levels of family wellbeing, including under which conditions.

Migration, urbanization, families, and policy

The megatrends of migration and urbanization affect families in different ways. By applying a family lens and recognizing different experiences of two excluded groups—Indigenous families and families with a member who has a disability—gaps in Canada’s immigration policies and families’ experiences of urbanization are more readily apparent. Family structure is apparent in assumptions about who’s family in immigration policy and in assumptions about the impact of forced migration on Indigenous families.

Still, on a more fundamental level, how do we really know the impact of these activities if we do not know who is seen as family? We need to recognize that type of family structure embedded in our policies and programs does not necessarily reflect who is family for different types of family diversities. Common themes emerge across families. Both Indigenous families and families with disability have a long history of exclusion. For Indigenous families, the damage resulting from forced migration and dislocation has resulted in family fragmentation and other negative family wellbeing outcomes. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) provides a map to improve the wellbeing of Indigenous families and communities in both urban and rural areas. It calls upon ordinary Canadian citizens, government, and other prominent leaders to recognize their complicity in undermining Indigenous families and culture, and outlines ways to address these wrongs.

For families with disability, government policy still adopts a burden of disability perspective in immigration policies. This has the potential to disrupt family relationships by separating family members during the immigration process by applying the excessive demands clause. An immigration policy framework could remove this policy and instead focus on the potential contributions of each family member to Canadian society rather than framing disability as a burden on the healthcare system. To better support family wellbeing, a concerted effort is also needed to determine required healthcare and support services, then connect newly arriving families to them immediately.

At present, most countries, including Canada, gather information at the individual or household level, but data with the family as the unit of analysis is needed too. The lack of data for Indigenous families and families with disability is evident for immigration policies, and for monitoring how they are affected by urbanization. More information is needed regarding push and pull factors for immigration and urbanization, including how family wellbeing is enhanced or diminished by these experiences, both in the short term and over time. Focusing on families will allow a clearer picture of family wellbeing to develop and will contribute to the evidence base for policy development, refinement, and application.

Good policy from a family diversity perspective

The experiences of excluded families during migration and urbanization deserve greater attention so that policy makers and support services can ensure more equitable opportunities and better family wellbeing outcomes. For this, we return to the family diversity framework (Hilbrecht et al., 2022).

Beginning with family structure, only certain family members (as designated in official policy) are included in applications for permanent residency in all immigration classes. This categorization of relationships could be challenged to allow greater latitude. For good policy, an assessment of family structure and the impact of imposing the dominant family model should be evaluated. This is especially important for those who have different understandings of what family means.

Regarding family work, families often choose to relocate to Canada or to an urban centre for better employment opportunities. To enhance labour market participation, good policy would assist with earlier recognition of international qualifications for immigrants and ensure equal educational opportunities for Indigenous people. This, in turn, would allow access to employment insurance special benefits such as maternity, parental, and caregiving leave to support families during major life transitions.

Using the family identity lens, Indigenous families and families with disability have been clearly overlooked. Canada's employment equity legislation is now prioritizing individuals belonging to these groups, so their experiences are now receiving more attention. National data are disaggregated whenever possible to monitor change and stability in outcomes that will have an impact on the material and subjective wellbeing of families belonging to these groups. Equipped with this information, policy makers can advance programs and services that could begin to address systemic barriers and inequality when compared to other families in Canada.

Good policy situates family wellbeing as the outcome. By considering family structure, family work, and family identity, policies can be developed and adapted to the needs and circumstances of families in Canada, in all their diversities. Further, knowledge gaps could be more easily identified so that a more critical approach to the development of policies affecting families will be possible. In this way, policy has stronger potential to support and enhance the material, relational and subjective wellbeing of families as they adapt to migration and urbanization, two global trends that can have deep effects on the experience of family life.

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