

# Moving Forward 2026

Strengthening Settlement Systems and Community  
Connections across St. Thomas and Elgin County



## St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership

*Building Welcoming, Caring & Affirming Communities*

Prepared by Sonia Basu & Jessie Zhang · June 2026

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**St. Thomas-Elgin**  
Local Immigration Partnership

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## Our Mission

The St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership (STELIP) is a community-driven collaborative working to build welcoming, caring, and affirming environments for immigrants and newcomers across St. Thomas and Elgin County.

## Our Vision

St. Thomas and Elgin County will be a welcoming, caring, and affirming community that uplifts the dignity and contributions of culturally diverse newcomers and immigrants, including those with temporary and permanent immigration statuses. By actively addressing systemic barriers and fostering equity, the community will nurture belonging and grow together to call St. Thomas and Elgin County home.

## Our Guiding Principles

STELIP's work is guided by four core principles. These principles shape how our Community Plan 2025-2028 is implemented and how partnerships are built, grounded in a commitment to equity, justice, and belonging. They recognize and celebrate the diverse identities, strengths, and contributions of newcomers and immigrants:

- **Affirmation:** Ensure voices of newcomers and immigrants are centred in decision-making and community-building. Create spaces where newcomers do not just adapt - they feel safe and proud to share their culture, lead, teach, and shape the community.
- **Collaboration:** Work across public, private, and non-profit sectors, communities, and cultures to co-create solutions rooted in shared responsibility and collective care.
- **Empowerment:** Support and resource newcomers in exercising agency, shaping their own journeys, and contributing meaningfully to community life.
- **Sustainability:** Strengthen systems, relationships, and practices that are equitable, resilient, and adaptable to evolving community needs and realities.

## Our Community Goal

Within five years of arrival, 80% of newcomers report feeling supported, connected, and engaged in community life, recognizing that integration timelines vary and progress depends on equitable systems and collaborative community action.

# Message from STELIP

Each year, Moving Forward offers an opportunity to reflect on how newcomers and immigrants build their lives, families, and futures in St. Thomas and Elgin County, and how community systems and everyday interactions shape those experiences.

This year’s report reflects shared learning, collaboration, and action across our community. Newcomers and immigrants continue to arrive with skills, aspirations, and a strong desire to contribute. Community partners across employment, education, health, libraries, businesses, cultural groups, and public institutions continue strengthening the services and conditions that support access, belonging, and long-term stability.

In 2025-2026, the St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership (STELIP) approached Moving Forward as a systems-level reflection on what we strengthened together. Guided by the Community Plan 2025-2028, the report is organized around three connected community priorities: Build, Connect, and Transform. These priorities reflect a shared vision of St. Thomas and Elgin County as a community where newcomers and immigrants can participate, build stability over time, and feel at home. They recognize that early access conditions, opportunities for belonging, and system consistency shape how people settle, participate, and plan for their future.

Across the past year, partners advanced this work through their mandates and relationships, with STELIP supporting shared effort through convening, evidence-sharing, and cross-sector coordination.

This report is written for partners, council members, and the broader community. It highlights what we achieved together, where learning continues, and how shared responsibility across systems shapes welcoming, caring, and affirming communities in St. Thomas and Elgin County.



*Walk With Me 2025: 75+ frontline staff from 35+ organizations came together to reflect on newcomer experiences and support coordinated approaches to access, belonging, and navigation.*

## Partners and Collaboration

This work is shaped through collaboration across St. Thomas and Elgin County. Newcomer and immigrant inclusion depends on the actions, relationships, and everyday practices of systems working together.

Over the past year, this collective effort brought together partners across settlement services, employment and workforce development, education, health and social services, municipal and public institutions, libraries, businesses, and cultural and faith communities. Each brings distinct mandates, perspectives, and capacities that influence how access, belonging, and long-term stability are experienced in daily life.

Moving Forward reflects this shared responsibility. The observations and learning presented here are grounded in cross-sector dialogue, lived experience, and collaborative reflection on how community systems are functioning together over time.

### Our STELIP Council

- Central Community Health Centre
- Community Member (Newcomer Representative)
- Elgin Business Resource Centre
- Elgin County Economic Development
- Elgin County Library
- Elgin County Pride
- Elgin Middlesex Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board
- Elgin/St. Thomas Small Business Enterprise Centre
- Fanshawe Career and Employment Services
- Fanshawe College – St. Thomas Campus
- Indo-Can Punjabi Cultural Association – St. Thomas
- Kerala Association of St. Thomas, Ontario
- Latinos in St. Thomas
- Mennonite Community Services
- Ontario Ministry of Rural Affairs



*STELIP Council Meeting, June 2026: Members gathering to collaborate, learn, and strengthen community impact.*

- Réseau Immigration Francophone du Centre-Sud-Ouest de l'Ontario (RIF)
- Service Canada
- St. Thomas and District Chamber of Commerce
- St. Thomas Economic Development Corporation
- St. Thomas-Elgin Social Services
- St. Thomas-Elgin Youth and Employment Services
- St. Thomas Islamic Centre
- St. Thomas Police Service
- St. Thomas Public Library
- Thames Valley District School Board
- WILL Employment Solutions
- YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin

## Committees and Collaborative Tables

In addition to our Council partnerships, STELIP participates in several local and regional committees and collaborative tables that support shared learning, coordination, and alignment across systems influencing newcomer and immigrant experiences. Participation varies by table and may include contributing insight, sharing data, supporting collaboration, or co-chairing collective efforts.

Current committees and collaborative tables include:

- Elgin-St. Thomas Workforce Development Network
- Low German Speaking Mennonites Community of Practice (co-chaired)
- Southwest Ontario Local Immigration Partnership (SWOLIP)
- Community Action Network for Children and Youth (CAN)
- Elgin Children's Network (ECN)
- Elgin County Drowning Prevention Council
- Elgin Ontario Health Team (Elgin OHT)
- Elgin County Strategic Working Session – Economic Development and Tourism Strategy Action Plan
- National LIP Secretariate Community of Practice
- YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Committee

In addition to these tables, STELIP engages in other planning, inclusion, and coordination forums as needed. Through this involvement, STELIP helps strengthen alignment across systems and ensure that newcomer and immigrant experiences inform community-level planning, learning, and decision-making.

## About STELIP & Our Role

The St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership (STELIP) is a community planning table that brings together organizations, institutions, and community partners to strengthen how systems support newcomer and immigrant participation across St. Thomas and Elgin County. Funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and hosted by YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin, STELIP works alongside partners to support shared understanding, coordination, and learning across the systems that shape daily life.

People's experiences in our community are influenced by how clearly information is communicated, how consistently services align, and how welcoming everyday interactions feel across employment, education, health, libraries, housing, public services, and community spaces. STELIP focuses on strengthening these conditions by helping partners identify patterns, align efforts, and respond collectively to lived experience and local context.

STELIP does not deliver direct services. Its role is to support coordination and shared learning by:

- Bringing partners together across sectors,
- Sharing research, data, and community insight,
- Supporting professional learning and dialogue,
- Amplifying promising practices, and
- Strengthening connections between settlement and non-settlement services.

Through this work, STELIP supports clearer access pathways, stronger navigation, and reduced fragmentation across systems, while respecting partner mandates and capacity.

STELIP's work is guided by the Community Plan 2025-2028 and its three community priorities: Build, Connect, and Transform. Throughout the past year, partners carried this work forward through their own services, relationships, and leadership, with STELIP supporting coordination, reflection, and shared responsibility. The following sections highlight how this work was reflected through community engagement and activity, and how it took shape across Build, Connect, and Transform, in support of welcoming, caring, and affirming communities across St. Thomas and Elgin County.



*City of London 2025 Newcomer Day: STELIP engaged with partners and community members to support cross-sector connection.*

## STELIP in Action

In 2025-2026, STELIP supported planning, engagement, and initiatives alongside partners across sectors, recognizing newcomers and immigrants as integral to the community.

This work was reflected across several interconnected areas:

### Partnership & Shared Direction

- Engaged 30+ Council members representing diverse sectors
- Co-developed a new multi-year Community Plan and Action Plan grounded in the priorities Build, Connect, and Transform
- Expanded representation to include Francophone (RIF) and 2SLGBTQIA+ perspectives

### Community Voice & Learning

- Led the 2025 Immigrant Survey, engaging 100+ newcomers and immigrants to better understand settlement experiences, community connection, and system conditions shaping long-term belonging
- Shared findings with partners to support reflection on housing, employment, transportation, and access to services
- Contributed to community-wide understanding of strengths, ongoing challenges, and emerging priorities through data, dialogue, and evidence-sharing

### Welcoming Week & Civic Engagement

- Coordinated Welcoming Week activities in collaboration with the City of St. Thomas, County of Elgin, and community partners, including proclamations and flag raisings recognizing the contributions of newcomers and immigrants
- Presented to Elgin County Council to support awareness of immigration trends, newcomer experiences, and opportunities for community growth and inclusion
- Supported a range of community-based events and activities designed to strengthen access, connection, and participation, including newcomer open houses, meet-and-greet opportunities with local leaders, guided tours of community institutions, and community information sharing sessions in partnership with settlement services, employment services, and the public library
- Partnered with community organizations to deliver inclusive programming such as bilingual story time, library tours, and cultural exhibits that increased access to community spaces and supported welcoming, participatory experiences

## **Sector & Community Engagement**

- Hosted the 14th annual Walk With Me, engaging 75+ frontline staff and leaders from over 35 organizations in cross-sector dialogue, professional learning, and reflection
- The event focused on exploring equity and the broader conditions that shape social outcomes, supporting participants to consider how system design, access, and coordination influence newcomer experiences across sectors
- Created opportunities for service provider learning, networking, and knowledge sharing, strengthening relationships and shared understanding across employment, education, health, social services, and community organizations
- Supported information sharing and coordination across sectors through a monthly newsletter, sharing timely updates, events, and resources with partners
- Contributed to cross-sector committees, planning tables, and collaborative initiatives, supporting shared learning, alignment, and coordinated community responses across the region

## **Economic & Cultural Initiatives**

- Supported community engagement through participation in local events, cultural festivals, and outreach activities across the region, helping strengthen visibility, access to information, and community connection for newcomers and immigrants
- Delivered Global Flavours: International Taste Experience of St. Thomas-Elgin in partnership with Railway City Tourism and Elgin County Tourism
- Engaged 20+ restaurants and over 100 participants through the initiative, highlighting local businesses, supporting economic participation, and celebrating cultural diversity across the community
- Recognized and supported key cultural events and moments of significance that celebrate diversity and community identity across the region

## Community Snapshot: What We Are Seeing

This Community Snapshot brings together insight from local data, partner observation, and lived experience shared over the past year, including through the 2025 Immigrant Survey. It reflects how newcomers and immigrants interact with everyday services and systems in St. Thomas and Elgin County, and how community conditions shape access, participation, and belonging over time.

Across sectors, a consistent set of patterns emerges. Newcomers and immigrants arrive with skills, knowledge, and lived experience that contribute to community life. Their experiences are shaped less by individual effort and more by how clearly information is communicated, how consistently services align, and how accessible everyday entry points feel across employment, housing, education, health, libraries, public services, and community spaces.

## Newcomer and Immigrant Experiences Across Systems

### **Employment plays a central role in stability and planning.**

Many newcomers actively pursue work aligned with their skills and experience. Their outcomes are influenced by labour-market conditions, employer practices, credential processes, and access to professional networks. Entrepreneurial pathways and small business activity also emerge as important forms of economic participation, contributing to local community life even when not reflected through traditional employment measures.



*Employment Services Elgin Find Your Job Match Open House*

### **Housing conditions shape daily decision-making for individuals and families.**

Affordability, availability, and suitability influence where people live, how they commute, and how easily they participate in work, schooling, and community activities. Housing pressures affect newcomers, immigrants, and long-time residents alike, highlighting housing as a shared community concern with system-level implications.

### **Language access and service navigation remain foundational conditions.**

Even when services exist, clarity of information, interpretation access, and consistent entry points shape whether people feel confident, safe, and respected when engaging with systems. Libraries, health services, income and children's services, schools, and community organizations often function as trusted access points within the scope of their mandates.

### **Belonging forms through everyday interactions.**

Partners observe many examples of welcome, connection, and participation through workplaces, schools, faith and cultural communities, neighbourhoods, and shared community spaces. Where interactions are welcoming and affirming, people are more likely to participate, contribute, and build long-term relationships. Experiences of discrimination or exclusion, when they occur, affect trust, confidence, and a sense of safety.

## **Labour Market Context**

Local and regional labour market research reflects many of the patterns described by survey respondents. Workforce planning studies across Elgin, Middlesex, and Oxford continue to identify barriers related to credential recognition, skills alignment, access to networks, and recruitment conditions. Recent labour market data for the London Economic Region also indicate softer employment conditions over the past year, contributing to increased competition for available jobs.

This context reinforces that employment barriers experienced by newcomers and immigrants are shaped by broader labour market structures and conditions rather than individual readiness or effort alone. Across contexts, this is reflected in persistent challenges such as overqualification and involuntary under-employment for immigrants across municipalities, particularly in mid-sized and smaller communities.

## **Housing Context in St. Thomas-Elgin**

Housing conditions form an important backdrop to settlement and inclusion experiences. Rental availability remains constrained, particularly for larger units, and average rental costs continue to represent a substantial financial pressure for many households. Housing pressures influence access to employment, transportation, schooling, and participation in community life.

As a result, housing stability functions as a foundational condition for longer-term inclusion and retention in the region.

## What We Are Seeing Across the Community

These patterns point to the importance of community conditions. Clear information supports confident access. Coordinated services reduce fragmentation. Language access strengthens dignity and safety. Opportunities to connect support belonging. Consistent system responses over time foster stability and participation.

As a smaller, more rural urban community, St. Thomas and Elgin County experience both distinct pressures and unique strengths. Fewer specialized services can intensify navigation challenges, while closer relationships across sectors support faster collaboration, shared problem-solving, and more personalized responses. These conditions shape how barriers, opportunities, and system responses are experienced locally.

As St. Thomas and Elgin County continue to grow and change, partners across sectors adapt services, practices, and relationships in response to evolving realities while strengthening what already works. Collaboration, shared learning, and alignment across systems play an essential role in shaping how newcomers and immigrants experience welcome, participation, and belonging.

These patterns provide the context for the sections that follow, which explore how community systems responded, aligned, and strengthened across the priorities of Build, Connect, and Transform.

## Progress Across Community Priorities

This section highlights how shared effort across St. Thomas and Elgin County strengthened the conditions that shape settlement, participation, and long-term stability over the past year. Rather than cataloguing individual programs or activities, it focuses on what changed, improved, or aligned as systems worked together.

The community priorities of Build, Connect, and Transform offer a way to understand how these changes show up across different layers of community life. They reflect how early access conditions, opportunities for connection, and system consistency over time influence whether newcomers and immigrants can navigate the community with confidence, participate fully, and put down roots.

Insights in this section draw on lived experience, local context, partner observation, and shared reflection informed by the 2025 Immigrant Survey. Given differences in mandates, geography, and data-tracking capacity across organizations, this analysis does not represent a comprehensive record of system activity. Instead, it surfaces patterns that point to how systems are functioning collectively, where alignment has strengthened, and where continued attention is needed.

Progress across these priorities supports the Community Plan's longer-term vision of equity, belonging, and stability for newcomers and immigrants across St. Thomas and Elgin County. The sections that follow explore how this progress took shape within each priority area.



*Welcoming Week 2025 Community Connections Information Session: STELIP and Settlement Services engaged community members at an information booth, in partnership with Employment Services Elgin and St. Thomas Public Library, supporting access across settlement and community settings.*

### Build: Early Conditions that Shape Settlement

Early settlement experiences reflect the conditions people encounter as they arrive and begin establishing themselves in the community. Employment access, housing availability, language supports, and clear navigation pathways influence how confidently newcomers and immigrants can stabilize, participate, and plan for their future.

## **Key Conditions Observed**

### ***Employment and Economic Access***

Building on the patterns identified in the Community Snapshot, early employment outcomes are influenced by labour market structures such as credential recognition processes, recruitment practices, and access to professional networks, rather than individual readiness alone. Early employment difficulties shape not only income stability, but also housing options, transportation choices, and confidence in long-term planning.

### ***Housing as an Early Settlement Pressure***

Limited rental availability and rising costs affect stability at a critical stage, when newcomers and immigrants are also navigating employment transitions, schooling, and access to services. Housing pressures interact closely with employment conditions, influencing commuting options, family wellbeing, and opportunities to participate in community life.

### ***Language Access and System Navigation***

Access to interpretation, plain-language communication, and clear eligibility information continues to shape safety, dignity, and confidence during early settlement. Fragmented information or unclear processes can slow access to support and increase stress during the early years after arrival.

## **What This Tells Us About Early Settlement**

Employment access influences housing options; housing affects mobility and participation; language access supports safety and confidence; and clear navigation enables timely support. When they are fragmented or difficult to navigate, challenges tend to compound over time.

## **Community Responses**

Early access is strengthened by making pathways more navigable across systems. Access points worked more effectively when information was presented in plain language, service entry points were easier to identify, and people could move between services with fewer gaps in understanding.

Stronger early employment access and coordination were supported across the system. Employment remained central to early stability, with community efforts towards earlier entry into employment pathways and clearer connections between jobseekers, services, and employers. One employment service reported 35 newcomers completing intake during

the reporting period, with 13 engaged in employment or education at outcome or follow-up, illustrating active entry points within the local system.

Entrepreneurship was recognized as a meaningful form of economic participation and community contribution. Small business activity and newcomer entrepreneurship contributed to local economic life and expanded how participation was understood across the region. One business support organization reported working with 19 visible-minority-owned businesses, including 5 identified as newcomer-owned.

Language access functioned as a shared condition across public-facing services. Interpretation and multilingual communication supported safer and more dignified access, particularly in settings where information is technical, time-sensitive, or high-stakes. One access point reported 76 clients requesting and accessing interpretation services, underscoring interpretation as a practical early access condition rather than a specialized add-on.

Everyday community spaces increasingly functioned as key access points. Many individuals navigated early settlement through mainstream services and trusted community settings, alongside formal settlement service providers. Libraries, schools, health settings, and social services function as places where people could ask questions, understand their options, and identify next steps through relationship-based navigation.

Foundational pressures remained visible and interconnected across systems. Findings from the 2025 Immigrant Survey highlight how early access conditions intersect across cost of living, employment, healthcare, transportation, and housing. Respondents most often identified cost of living (51%), finding work (40%), accessing health care (33%), transportation (31%), and finding affordable housing (31%) as key challenges. These patterns reinforce the importance of addressing early stability conditions that shape participation across work, learning, services, and community life.

### **STELIP's Role in Supporting This Work**

STELIP supported progress under Build by facilitating shared understanding of early settlement conditions across sectors. This included employment-focused learning and dialogue with workforce and service partners, supporting clearer understanding of local labour-market pathways, referral points, and common navigation challenges newcomers face early in their settlement journey.

STELIP also supported early access readiness by sharing evidence from the 2025 Immigrant Survey and other community insight, helping partners identify patterns related to employment, housing, language access, and service navigation. By translating lived

experience and local data into shared context, STELIP helped partners align approaches to clarity, coordination, and access across early points of contact.

## What This Strengthens for Early Access

Progress under Build shows that early access improves when systems work together with intention. Clearer information, more consistent language access, coordinated employment entry points, and trusted access spaces reduced fragmentation and supported stronger early settlement experiences. These strengthened conditions created a foundation for participation, connection, and longer-term stability across the community.

## Connect: Strengthening Participation, Relationships, and Belonging

While early settlement conditions shape access and stability, opportunities for connection, participation, and contribution play a central role in whether newcomers and immigrants develop a sustained sense of belonging. Connect reflects how opportunities for participation, relationship-building, and contribution strengthened across St. Thomas and Elgin County, with belonging growing through everyday interactions that allow people to connect, contribute, and be recognized as part of community life.

### Community Responses

#### **Welcoming is reinforced through everyday interactions.**

Experiences of welcome were shaped by how people were received in workplaces, neighbourhoods, schools, community spaces, and public facing services. The 2025 Immigrant Survey shows that many newcomers and immigrants continue to experience St. Thomas-Elgin as a welcoming place, with positive interactions with neighbours, coworkers, and community members playing an important role in settlement. These everyday encounters strengthened trust and eased isolation.

#### **Opportunities to participate and contribute grow community.**

Participation took many forms across the community, including employment, volunteering, cultural expression, entrepreneurship, caregiving, and informal neighbour to neighbour support. Survey findings highlight a strong relationship between belonging and contribution. Respondents who reported stronger feelings of belonging were also more likely to describe contributing skills through work, owning or supporting local businesses, volunteering, supporting family and community members, and participating in cultural associations. These patterns reinforce that contribution is happening in diverse ways, and that belonging grows through participation and participation deepens belonging.

### **Community spaces support connection.**

Libraries, schools, cultural and faith spaces, workplaces, and community events functioned as key sites of connection. These spaces created opportunities for conversation, recognition, and shared experience, allowing people to form relationships beyond service access. For individuals navigating new systems or social networks, these informal connection points reduced isolation and supported confidence.

### **Belonging and discrimination are held together in community understanding.**

While many people described positive and welcoming experiences, the Immigrant Survey also shows that experiences of discrimination remain present and have a direct impact on belonging. Respondents identified discrimination most often in workplaces and public spaces, highlighting the importance of addressing welcoming not only through social connection, but also through equitable treatment and accountability across systems. Recognizing both realities allowed the community to hold belonging and safety together as connected conditions.

### **Youth, families, and intergenerational connections matter.**

Connection often occurs through family life, schools, childcare, and youth activities, supporting both children and caregivers in building community ties. These intergenerational connections contributed to longer term attachment to place and strengthened informal support networks across neighbourhoods.

### **STELIP's Role in Supporting This Work**

STELIP supported progress under Connect by convening spaces for shared reflection on belonging, participation, and everyday welcome. Over the past year, this included community-wide moments of connection and learning such as Welcoming Week, which brought together municipalities, libraries, schools, employers, service providers, and community organizations across St. Thomas and Elgin County to align activities, amplify welcoming messages, and create inclusive opportunities for participation through everyday community settings.

Welcoming Week activities functioned as system-level signals of shared commitment, reinforcing that welcoming is shaped not by a single program, but through coordinated action across public institutions, community services, and local organizations. STELIP also convened Walk With Me, which brought together more than 75 frontline staff and leaders from over 35 organizations to reflect on inclusion, system navigation, and shared responsibility. Through council dialogue and cross-sector learning, STELIP helped surface

how connection is experienced across settings and supported alignment between welcoming values and practice.

### **What This Strengthens for Belonging and Participation**

Progress under Connect demonstrates that belonging is actively built through relationships, participation, and recognition. When people have opportunities to contribute, feel welcomed in everyday spaces, and experience fairness and respect, connections deepen and attachment to community grows. These strengthened relationships support individual wellbeing and collective resilience over time.



*Newcomer Winter Gathering Family Game Night:  
STELIP supported Settlement Services in engaging newcomer and immigrant families,  
strengthening connection and welcoming community spaces.*

### **Transform: Shaping Conditions for Long-Term Stability**

Transform reflects how system-level conditions influence whether newcomers and immigrants can build stable, sustainable, and fulfilling lives in St. Thomas and Elgin County over time. While early access and connection shape immediate experiences, long-term stability depends on how consistently systems operate, how clearly pathways are communicated, and how equitably people are treated through everyday interactions with institutions.

## Community Responses

### **Identifying system strengths and pressures.**

Experiences shared through the 2025 Immigrant Survey point to positive experiences in areas such as settlement services, education, and local government. At the same time, respondents identified persistent pressures in systems that shape long-term stability, particularly housing, employment and skills pathways, transportation, childcare, and overall wellbeing and safety. Bringing these strengths and pressures into shared focus supports conversations about system resources and performance rather than individual circumstance.

### **Making connections between system performance and stability.**

Survey findings highlight that even when people feel socially connected and welcomed, inconsistent access, unclear processes, or fragmented pathways can undermine long-term stability. Respondents who experienced barriers in housing, employment, or transportation were also more likely to report lower satisfaction with services and reduced feelings of safety. These patterns reinforce that belonging alone cannot offset system-level gaps.

### **Housing and employment as decisive system conditions.**

Housing affordability, suitability, and availability, alongside access to meaningful employment, strongly shaped decisions about whether people felt able to remain and plan a future in the region. Rising cost-of-living pressures and difficulty securing employment aligned with skills placed strain on households, even among those with strong social ties and community connections. Delays in accessing well-matched work, limited opportunities for advancement, or reliance on precarious employment affected not only financial outcomes but perceptions of longer-term stability. These patterns reflect structural labour market conditions rather than individual capacity alone.

### **Navigation and coordination matter as much as availability.**

Across systems, respondents emphasized the importance of clear information, coordinated pathways, and predictable processes. As immigration status, eligibility, and family circumstances evolve over time, navigating multiple systems simultaneously becomes more complex. Requests for more integrated or “one-stop” approaches, clearer employment pathways, expanded English-language learning options, and stronger employer education reflect a desire for systems that work cohesively rather than in isolation. These themes appeared across immigration pathways and among both newer and longer-term residents, underscoring their shared relevance.

These conversations supported greater alignment across sectors around how housing pressures, employment pathways, and transportation barriers intersect, shifting focus from isolated service challenges toward shared system accountability.

### **STELIP's Role in Supporting This Work**

STELIP supported progress under Transform by facilitating shared learning about how systems function and respond over time, and how different policies, practices, and access points intersect in people's lives. By centring lived experience alongside partner insight, STELIP helps-sustain a community-wide view of systems consistency, equity, and alignment, and supports-more informed dialogue about long-term conditions rather than short-term fixes.

This work included convening cross-sector partners, sharing research and evidence, supporting professional learning opportunities, and facilitating reflection on system design and practice. It also included monitoring changes in federal and provincial policies, programs, and eligibility requirements, and sharing updates with partners to support consistent understanding across systems. Through ongoing dialogue with newcomers, immigrants, and frontline partners, STELIP helped surface emerging needs and implementation challenges, to support-informed and coordinated system responses over time.

### **What This Strengthens for Long-Term Stability**

Progress under Transform demonstrates that long term inclusion depends less on individual motivation and more on how systems consistently and reliably function over time. When housing, employment, language learning, transportation, and public services operate in alignment, people can establish routines, plan ahead, and put down roots. When systems function unevenly, instability compounds.

The patterns reflected across Build, Connect, and Transform show that access, belonging, and stability are interconnected. Sustained progress relies on continued attention to how systems interact, learn, and adapt to support both newcomers and the broader community over the long term.

# Strengthening Systems: Learning and Collaboration

Beyond the progress described across Build, Connect, and Transform, this section highlights the shared learning and collaboration that helped make that progress possible by strengthening how systems interact in practice. Rather than delivering programs or services directly, STELIP supported this work by convening partners, facilitating dialogue, and sharing insight that translated evidence and lived experience into shared system understanding.

## Community-Level Convening and Shared Learning

Community-level convening created opportunities for partners across settlement, employment, education, health, municipal services, business, and community organizations to reflect on patterns emerging from newcomer and immigrant experiences and consider how systems intersect in everyday practice.

Welcoming Week functioned as a community-wide system signal, bringing together municipalities, libraries, schools, employers, service providers, and community organizations across St. Thomas and Elgin County to align activities, amplify welcoming messages, and reinforce welcoming as a shared community condition shaped through everyday institutions and public spaces.



*Welcoming Week 2025 Flag Raising and Proclamation: STELIP presented to County Council and engaged with Elgin County through a newcomer open house and community tours with Settlement Services.*



*Welcoming Week 2025 Flag Raising and Proclamation: STELIP joined the City of St. Thomas alongside community partners to recognize newcomers and immigrants through civic leadership.*



*Walk With Me 2025: Participants engaged in small-group dialogue and collaborative learning, reflecting on newcomer experiences and system conditions across sectors.*

Walk With Me, an annual professional learning and networking event, brought together more than 75 frontline staff and leaders from over 35 organizations. The session supported cross-sector reflection on how system design, eligibility, and coordination shape frontline experiences, and how more aligned approaches can reduce unintended barriers over time.

STELIP also supported Global Flavours, a community initiative engaging more than 20 immigrant-owned and culturally diverse restaurants and over 100 participants. Through collaboration with economic development, tourism, and community organizations, Global Flavours highlighted the cultural, social, and economic contributions of immigrant-led enterprises and reinforced an asset-based understanding of newcomer participation within local economic systems.

These efforts strengthened cross-sector relationships and supported shared understanding of how collective action contributes to system alignment and responsiveness.

System-level learning also included continued reflection on Indigenous histories, responsibilities, and the role of institutions within ongoing colonial structures. This learning informed how STELIP approaches convening, equity-focused dialogue, and accountability, guided by respect for Indigenous self-determination and an understanding of appropriate roles as a community planning table.



*Global Flavours 2026: STELIP supported a community-wide initiative celebrating culturally diverse and immigrant-owned businesses, engaging local restaurants and residents.*

## Supporting System Coordination and Information Sharing

Beyond formal convening, STELIP supported system coordination by intentionally sharing timely, relevant, and consistent information across sectors to improve system readiness. Partner perspectives highlighted how employer practices, recruitment pathways, eligibility criteria, and navigation expectations shape access across employment, health, and public services, reinforcing the importance of coordinated approaches where mandates intersect.

This coordination also extended beyond service providers to include municipalities, educational institutions, cultural and faith groups, 2SLGBTQIA+ organizations, employers, and other community partners. By sharing information about events, resources, toolkits, and learning opportunities across sectors and audiences, STELIP supported broader awareness, connection-building, and access for partners, newcomers, and immigrants alike.

By sharing research, updates, and emerging patterns related to settlement, labour-market conditions, housing, and equity, STELIP supported partners in maintaining situational awareness, reducing duplication, strengthening consistency, and contributing to clearer navigation and more cohesive system responses.

## Looking Ahead

The patterns highlighted in this report underscore that newcomer and immigrant experiences are shaped by how systems interact over time, and by the consistency, clarity, and equity with which community conditions are experienced. Access, connection, and long-term stability are interconnected. Progress in one area depends on alignment and learning across the others.

This work remains oriented toward the shared vision set out in the Community Plan, a community where newcomers and immigrants experience dignity, belonging, and equitable access over time. Strengthening early access conditions, supporting opportunities for connection and contribution, and improving system consistency are ongoing responsibilities shared across sectors.

As local conditions continue to evolve, attention to system performance and responsiveness will remain essential. Housing affordability, employment and language pathways, transportation, childcare, and public facing services all play a central role in shaping whether people can plan, participate, and put down roots. Continued progress depends on how well these systems remain coordinated, predictable, and accessible in practice.

STELIP will continue to approach its role as a convener and learning partner, supporting dialogue, reflection, and shared understanding across St. Thomas and Elgin County. This includes centring newcomer and immigrant experiences, amplifying relevant local insight, and creating space for cross sector learning about what is working, where pressures remain, and how systems can adapt together.

Looking ahead, the focus remains on strengthening alignment and on-supporting systems through continued collaboration, reflection, shared responsibility and contributions. Moving forward together in ways that are responsive, coordinated, and grounded in collective learning, these efforts support a collective commitment to building welcoming, caring, and affirming communities.

# Acknowledgments

STELIP extends its appreciation to the many individuals, organizations, and community members who contributed time, insight, and care over the past year to support welcoming and inclusive communities across St. Thomas and Elgin County.

We extend our sincere thanks to the newcomers and immigrants who shared their experiences through the 2025 Immigrant Survey and other engagement opportunities. Their perspectives are essential to understanding local conditions and informing community-level learning, reflection, and planning.

STELIP also thanks the members of the STELIP Council for their leadership, collaboration, and ongoing commitment to shared responsibility across sectors. The knowledge, experience, and perspectives contributed through council continue to strengthen this work and support coordinated approaches to settlement, belonging, and long-term stability.



*Welcoming Week 2025 Flag Raising and Proclamation:  
Community members, partners, and Elgin County municipal leaders gathered to recognize newcomers and immigrants through a shared moment of civic leadership.*

We recognize the many community partners, service providers, employers, educators, municipal representatives, and community organizations who contributed to shared learning, dialogue, and coordination over the past year. Their collective efforts support more responsive, inclusive, and connected systems across the region.

STELIP gratefully acknowledges Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) for its continued support of Local Immigration Partnerships, and YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin for providing the organizational home and infrastructure that make this community-level planning and learning work possible.

Moving Forward reflects a collective effort. Its insights and observations are grounded in shared responsibility and a continued commitment to building a community where newcomers and immigrants can settle, connect, and thrive over time.