

ST. THOMAS • ELGIN
Local Immigration Partnership

Moving Forward Report

2025

Building Welcoming, Caring, and Inclusive Communities



Building Welcoming, Caring, & Inclusive Communities.

Our Vision

St. Thomas and Elgin County communities will be a culturally diverse, welcoming, caring, and inclusive community that will retain current residents, welcome newcomers, and provide them the opportunity to successfully integrate, contribute to, and benefit from social, cultural, and economic inclusion.

Our Mission

We are a collaborative community initiative that aims to build welcoming, caring, and inclusive communities by supporting the integration of immigrants and promoting the value of diversity.



Our Principles

Inclusivity – Our work will be inclusive of all immigrants in the St. Thomas-Elgin community regardless of their immigration status, citizenship, age, gender, health status, sexual orientation, and number of years in the community. We will work towards equal participation while promoting social justice.

Collaboration – Our work will emphasize developing a strong and respectful relationship with immigrant communities to ensure a welcoming, caring, and inclusive environment.

Empowerment – Our work will strive to support new immigrants' capacity to provide for themselves and their families through their own means and their own decisions.

Sustainability – Our work will be planned and evaluated to ensure continued effectiveness and long-term feasibility.



#CultureLivesHere



2024-2025 STELIP Council

"We want St. Thomas and Elgin County to be the most accepting and welcoming place to live, work, and play. Our goal is to create space for everyone to be involved in building community together." -

Paul Jenkins, STELIP Council Member

Reflections from 2024-2025

This year marks the final year of our 5-year strategic plan. It has also been a year marked with a great deal of uncertainty. Globally, we have seen ongoing international conflicts, as well as the recent trade war escalation with the United States. Nationally, we saw cuts to the federal immigration levels plan, which also translated into funding cuts across the immigration sector. Locally, we continue to see commitment to growth and development with the incoming PowerCo electric battery plant, with some estimates putting St. Thomas' growth at a population of nearly 80,000 by 2051. This would see the population nearly double in the next 25 years.

Regardless of the uncertainty and change on the horizon, we know that immigrants are still critical for our community. Not only do they account for around 90% of Canada's population growth and 80% of all labour force growth, but they also bring new and valuable ideas, perspectives, and ways of doing things. Immigrants are also our neighbours, friends, family, and colleagues; about one in every 10 St. Thomas-Elgin residents was born outside Canada.

Over the past five years, we have seen St. Thomas-Elgin become more diverse, and we anticipate that trend to continue in the future. The racialized population across the region grew by 53% between 2016 and 2021. Accordingly, we have seen the growth of local ethnocultural and faith groups and have worked to strengthen our relationships with them in recent years. We have seen many community leaders emerge to champion diversity and inclusion in St. Thomas-Elgin.

As we look towards creating a new strategic community plan for 2025-2028, we will continue to affirm that immigrants are a valued part of our community and that it is worthwhile to work together to support immigrants in St. Thomas-Elgin. As a community collective, together we will rise to meet both the challenges and opportunities that the future holds.

Strategic Outlook

Back in 2019, looking ahead to a new 5-year strategic plan, we set the aspirational target that, by 2025, 80% of newcomers to St. Thomas-Elgin would progress from settlement to integration within five years of arriving in St. Thomas and Elgin County. While it is hard to exactly measure this outcome, our community collectively worked towards this goal for the past five years. We strengthened workforce development and employer supports, community readiness, equitable supports, education, and civic and social inclusion to improve newcomers' settlement outcomes in our community. Our 2023 Immigrant Survey showed some encouraging results: 75% of respondents shared they had a positive settlement experience and expressed a strong sense of belonging, while 77% considered staying permanently

Impact Statement

By 2025, 80% of newcomers to St. Thomas-Elgin will progress from settlement to integration within five years of arriving in St. Thomas and Elgin County.

Priorities

Workforce
Development
& Employer
Supports

Community
Readiness

Equitable
Supports

Education

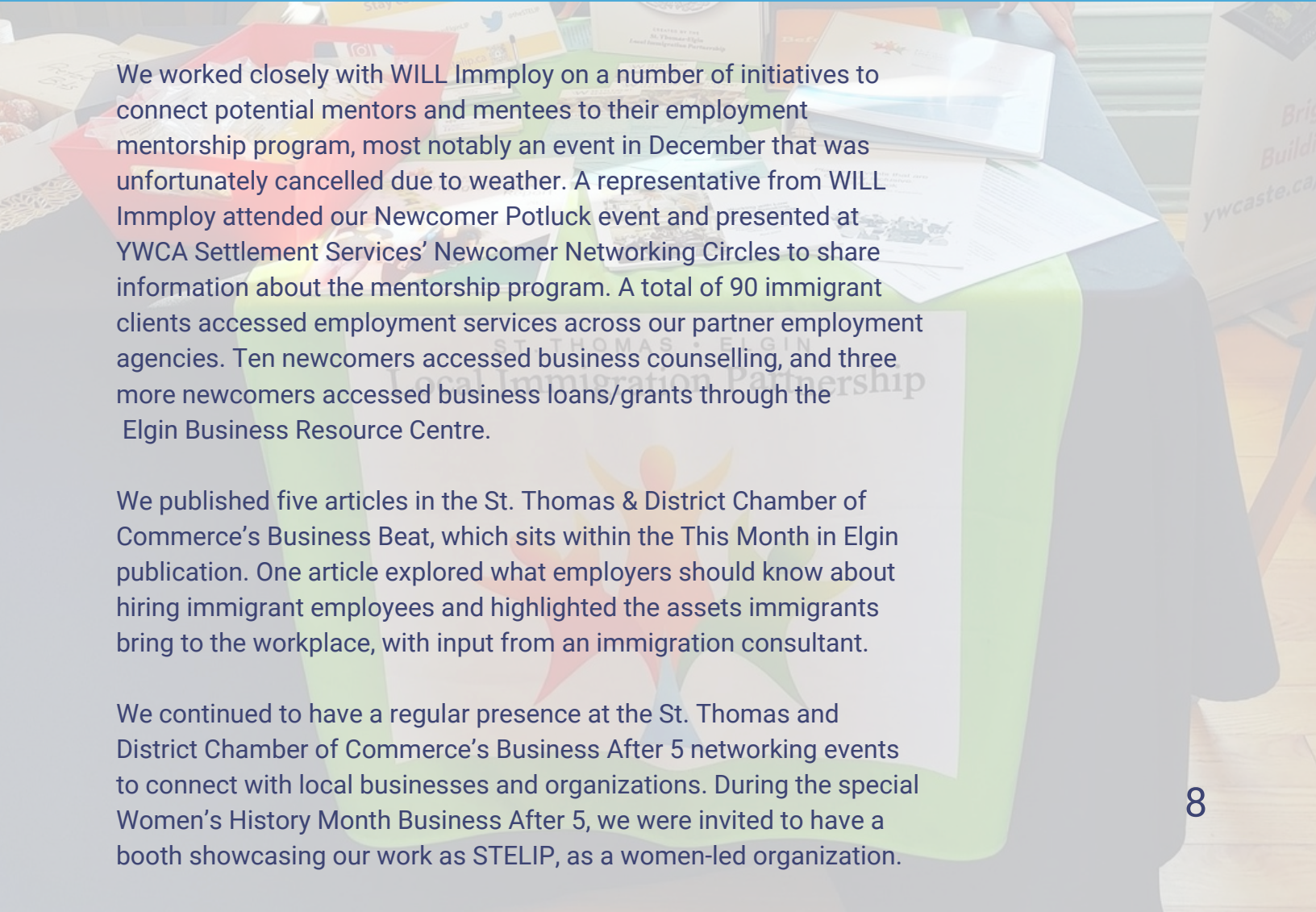
Civic and
Social
Inclusion





Workforce Development & Employer Supports

As St. Thomas-Elgin continues to grow, workforce development and employer supports are increasingly important. We work to ensure both employers and the broader workforce have the tools and supports they need to succeed, including immigrant jobseekers, employees, and employers. A strong, inclusive workforce supports the whole community.



We worked closely with WILL Immploy on a number of initiatives to connect potential mentors and mentees to their employment mentorship program, most notably an event in December that was unfortunately cancelled due to weather. A representative from WILL Immploy attended our Newcomer Potluck event and presented at YWCA Settlement Services' Newcomer Networking Circles to share information about the mentorship program. A total of 90 immigrant clients accessed employment services across our partner employment agencies. Ten newcomers accessed business counselling, and three more newcomers accessed business loans/grants through the Elgin Business Resource Centre.

We published five articles in the St. Thomas & District Chamber of Commerce's Business Beat, which sits within the This Month in Elgin publication. One article explored what employers should know about hiring immigrant employees and highlighted the assets immigrants bring to the workplace, with input from an immigration consultant.

We continued to have a regular presence at the St. Thomas and District Chamber of Commerce's Business After 5 networking events to connect with local businesses and organizations. During the special Women's History Month Business After 5, we were invited to have a booth showcasing our work as STELIP, as a women-led organization.



Community Readiness

A welcoming community is a place that accepts and celebrates all of its members—where people feel like they can integrate and belong. ‘Welcoming’ is a two-way street. We support both newcomers and established community members in St. Thomas-Elgin with practical knowledge and community-building opportunities to create a truly welcoming place for all to call home.

Along with our council and other community partners, we held a successful Welcoming Week in September. We kicked off the week with a flag raising at St. Thomas City Hall, where the mayor read a proclamation in support of the spirit of Welcoming Week. The St. Thomas Public Library hosted two bilingual storytimes again this year, with community volunteers sharing a story in a language they speak. These events introduced children to new languages and cultures and highlighted the library’s multilingual collection.

Employment Services Elgin offered two job search workshops during Welcoming Week, while the St. Thomas Police Services and St. Thomas & District Chamber of Commerce aligned pre-existing events with the week—an Open House and Business After 5, respectively. Additionally, Welcoming Week coincided with Mennonite Heritage Week, which included Mennonite Community Services’ Soup Cook-Off event. We concluded the week with another flag raising and proclamation with Elgin County.

We participated again this year in St. Thomas-Elgin EarlyON's Children's Festivals in St. Thomas, Aylmer, and West Lorne. We connected with around 300 caregivers and their families. Children could stop at our booth and make buttons with messages of inclusion. We also connected with the community and shared information about STELIP at various other events, including the St. Thomas & District Chamber of Commerce's Picnic and a local youth-led event called Breaking the Ice, which encouraged inclusion in sport.

We continued to support the St. Joseph's Catholic High School Multicultural Club. We facilitated making buttons at their club meeting for Asian Heritage Month. We also connected with a local community member and owner of Taste of the Caribbean, Maribel Corcho, who wanted to hold some events in celebration of Black History Month in Aylmer. She took part in the Elgin County Library's Stories We Tell Q&A session, sharing about the rich and diverse stories behind Caribbean cuisine and how her dishes bring the stories and traditions of her ancestors to life.

We were active in planning the YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin's annual Women's Day event, connecting the planning committee with diverse workshop volunteers. This year, a number of immigrant community members volunteered their time to teach attendees everything from salsa dancing to leadership skills. We also had a STELIP table at the event during lunchtime to share information with attendees, in addition to donating a copy of our cookbook—featuring recipes from local immigrants—for every attendee.



Global Flavours

Global Flavours celebrates the diversity of food—and people—in the St. Thomas Elgin region. Together with Railway City Tourism and Elgin County Tourism, we partner with immigrant-owned/cultural restaurants for the month of February. When patrons visit the participating restaurants, they can check in using an app or a “passport” stamp card. At the end of the month, a minimum of two check-ins or stamps makes them eligible for a prize draw. As a community, we embrace trying new “global flavours” and learning about the people who make them.

26 participating restaurants

100+ participants

10 prizes

166,000+ points claimed

50+ stamps submitted

5th annual event






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Equitable Supports

Everyone deserves to have their needs met. This means we need to have services and supports in our community that are equitable—that are accessible and ensure similar outcomes for everyone, accounting for our differences or unique barriers. Together, we work to identify and dismantle barriers and build equitable supports for all.



We supported the Central Community Health Centre with their “Community Connections” Newcomer Fair for Wellness Month. Representatives of various community agencies attended to share information about local services with newcomers. There were also cultural performances, speakers, and food.

This year, we had introductory meetings with many community agencies and organizations, including the West Elgin Community Health Centre, Elgin Community Health Hub and the Filipino-Canadian Association of St. Thomas to establish partnerships and communication going forward. Our new STELIP Community Development Manager also met with many council member organizations, in addition to bringing on new partners to the STELIP Council: Latinos in St. Thomas ethnocultural group and St. Thomas-Elgin Social Services - Ontario Works.

We took part in community mental health planning workshops organized by the Elgin-Ontario Health Team. Over the course of these two workshops, we ensured newcomers’ mental health needs and experiences were considered. We also had the opportunity to share some information about existing supports for newcomers offered through settlement services (Newcomer Networking Circles, Newcomer Youth Club, Canada Connects).

Walk With Me

Walk With Me is an annual event that enhances local service providers' ability to effectively serve newcomer and immigrant clients. It's a service provider networking event that provides opportunities for attendees to connect with other service providers and participate in professional development. This year, WILL Immploy led a session about intercultural communication. Ultimately, this event increases referrals between agencies by increasing front line service providers' knowledge of community programs, resources, and services. This especially benefits newcomers, who often require more community supports and have less familiarity with their new community.

80+ participants

30 agencies represented

93% know how to make referrals to local services after WWM 2025

98% are more familiar with local services after WWM 2025



Education

Access to education is essential for newcomers and immigrants in our community. Whether it's English language classes, adult literacy supports, or formal postsecondary training, education builds the skills needed to communicate, find employment, make connections, and overall integrate into the community. We work to strengthen access to relevant education opportunities for all immigrants in St. Thomas-Elgin.

We attended Fanshawe College's St. Thomas/Elgin Campus International Student Orientation and their Ask Us Information Fair. We shared information about STELIP and about resources and supports available in our community with incoming international students. Overall, Fanshawe College has 157 international students enrolled at their St. Thomas/Elgin Campus.

We continued to support local partners who provide education for newcomers and immigrants in our community. The YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin offered English language classes (LINC) at two different locations, St. Thomas and Aylmer. Across four classes, they supported 48 learners. They also offered English Conversation Circles to further help learners build skills and confidence. Additionally, 51 immigrants were supported by Fanshawe College's adult upgrading programs.

Mennonite Community Services, in partnership with YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin and Fanshawe College, continued to offer the Family Education and Support Program Aylmer (FESPA). This program helps build skills and offers social opportunities for newcomer women and their preschool-aged children, particularly Low German Speaking Mennonite women.





Civic & Social Inclusion

Including newcomers and immigrants in the civic and social life of a community is imperative. Not only does civic and social inclusion ensure the community reflects the needs and perspectives of all members, including immigrants, it also contributes to each individual's sense of belonging and purpose. Together, we create opportunities for inclusion in community life and strengthen immigrants' civic and social participation.

The YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin continued to offer Newcomer Networking Circles to strengthen connections to local agencies, provide information about important settlement topics like banking, fraud, fire safety, and job searching, and offer social opportunities. They ran 13 sessions, with 220 participants. Additionally, they ran a Newcomer Youth Club to likewise strengthen youth's social connections and build skills. This year, the club met three times with a total of 16 youth, enjoying activities like board games, sports, and pumpkin carving.

Welcoming Week this year also offered opportunities for civic and social inclusion, particularly with the public flag raising and welcoming proclamation held by both the City of St. Thomas and Elgin County. Additionally, newcomer and immigrant community members had the opportunity to volunteer as story readers for the bilingual storytimes at the St. Thomas Public Library, as well as participate in the Mennonite Soup Cook-Off (also for Mennonite Heritage Week).

Two newcomers were nominated for the St. Thomas and District Chamber of Commerce's Impact Awards.

Local immigrant-led groups also continued to grow and facilitate social events in our community. The Indo-Can Punjabi Cultural Association of Ontario was very active, with activities this past year including Summerfest, free pizza for all to mark the occasion of Guru Nanak Dev Ji Gurupurab, walking in the St. Thomas Santa Claus Parade, and more.

Latinos in St. Thomas hosted various Spanish social events, including a Christmas event at a local restaurant. They were also a strong supporter of the Salsa in the City event series, organized in part by a local immigrant business owner. Both organizations have joined our STELIP council in the past few years, with Latinos in St. Thomas joining this past year.

The St. Thomas Malayali Association held a very well-attended Christmas and New Year celebration, in addition to holding community outreach events like a free tax clinic. We also have an active Kerala Association of St. Thomas Ontario (KASTO) and a small Filipino-Canadian Association of St. Thomas.



Newcomer Gatherings

Together with YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin Settlement Services, we held events to connect newcomers and immigrants to each other and to their community, including two Newcomer Potlucks and one BBQ. The Newcomer Potlucks in May and February saw a combined turnout of 120, with participants sharing food from their cultures and enjoying fun activities. EarlyON St. Thomas-Elgin attended the February potluck to provide children's activities and information about their programs.

In June, we held our annual Newcomer BBQ with a participation of 180 people. We shared a barbeque meal, cooked by volunteers from the Kinsmen of St. Thomas, and enjoyed fun activities like face paint and temporary tattoos, tours of the St. Thomas Fire Department trucks, and outdoor children's activities facilitated by EarlyON St. Thomas-Elgin.

300 attendees

4 community partners

9 languages shared at the potluck:
English, Spanish, Nepali, Chinese,
Portuguese, Ukrainian, German & Kurdish





Southwestern Ontario LIPs

We are part of the Southwestern Ontario LIPs (SWOLIP) collective, which meets regularly to share information and promising practices and collaborate on joint initiatives. We met twice this year. Together with the Hamilton Immigration Partnership and Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership, we developed a toolkit for LIPs about incorporating a Gender-Based Analysis (GBA) Plus approach into their work, with a focus on reporting using a GBA Plus lens. After sharing this toolkit through our regional and national LIP channels, we also presented it at Metropolis conference as part of a presentation on demystifying evaluation processes and GBA Plus with Toronto North LIP and Hamilton Immigration Partnership.



Members of SWOLIP have also continued to be active in collaborating on research activities, particularly the bi-annual Immigrant Survey, which aims to hear from local immigrants to understand their perspectives and needs.

The Communications Roundtable subcommittee of SWOLIP also met four times to share learnings and promising practices, including topics like Welcoming Week, producing a podcast, and graphic design. We hosted one of the meetings, facilitating roundtable updates and open discussion about Welcoming Week plans.

Committees

Workplace - YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin

EDI (Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) Committee

Women's Day Event Committee

St. Thomas-Elgin

Community Action Network for Children and Youth Elgin

Elgin Children's Network

Elgin County Drowning Prevention

Elgin - Ontario Health Team Coordinating Committee

Elgin-St. Thomas Workforce Development Network

Regional

Low German Speaking Mennonite Community of Practice of Elgin, St. Thomas, Oxford, and Norfolk

Low German Speaking Mennonite Community of Practice of Elgin, St. Thomas, Oxford, and Norfolk - Steering Committee

Southwestern Ontario Local Immigration Partnerships (SWOLIP)

Southwestern Ontario Local Immigration Partnership - Communications Roundtable

Ontario 211 Discrimination Reporting Committee

National LIP Secretariate Community of Practice

Communications

This year we had 4100 unique visitors to our stelip.ca website between March 2024 and March 2025. We saw 16 new subscribers to our newsletter, as we transitioned to putting out a monthly newsletter from a quarterly publication. We put out 9 newsletters in 2024-2025 to a total of 306 subscribers.

We saw growth across all three of our active social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. We decided to wind down our usage of X (Twitter) and won't be posting new content to that platform in the coming year. Facebook continues to be our most popular platform, with 1022 followers (increase of 22 this year), while the greatest increase in both followers and cumulative reach was on LinkedIn (118 total followers with an increase of 32).



Council & Project Team

We are a collaborative community initiative. Our work is guided by our council, which comprises community members and representatives from local agencies and organizations. The council met five times over the course of the fiscal year, providing direction on projects, giving perspectives on community trends, and collaborating on relevant community initiatives.

STELIP Council

Central Community Health Centre	Catalina Friesen
Elgin Business Resource Centre	Jennifer Grigg
Elgin County Economic Development	Carolyn Krahm
Elgin County Library	Séanin Steele (Chair)
Elgin Middlesex Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board	Petrusia Hontar

Elgin/St. Thomas Small Business
Enterprise Centre

Emily Mason

Employment Services Elgin

Jodi Annett-Kish

Fanshawe College Community Career
and Employment Services

John Griffiths

Fanshawe College St. Thomas/Elgin
Campus

Joel Van Bynen

Indo-Can Punjabi Cultural Association –
St. Thomas

Lakhwinder Kathuria

Latinos in St. Thomas

Michelle Carmona

Mennonite Community Services

Anna Bergen

Newcomer Representative

Chiyemenma (Chichi)
Kejeh

Service Canada

Élisabeth Brito

St. Thomas & District Chamber of
Commerce

Paul Jenkins

St. Thomas Economic Development

Mike Kerkvliet

St. Thomas-Elgin Social Services – Child
Care

Teresa Sulowski

St. Thomas-Elgin Social Services –
Ontario Works

Carrie Escaf

St. Thomas Police Service

Samantha Wakefield

St. Thomas Public Library

Dakota Smith

St. Thomas Islamic Centre

Zena Chaudhry

Thames Valley District School Board

Michael Tamasi

WILL Immploy

Devin Munro

YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin

Shelley Harris

YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin Settlement
Services

Umair Ahmad

STELIP Project Team

Communication Coordinator

Fiona Murray

Community Development Manager

Nadia Li

Director of Education and Settlement

Shelley Harris

Acknowledgements

As our five-year strategic planning period comes to an end, we're reflecting on all the work that has been done to make St. Thomas and Elgin a welcoming, caring, and inclusive community in that time. Despite ongoing challenges and barriers, we have seen many community members and organizations work to make our community better: celebrating diversity, welcoming newcomers, and building inclusive community supports.

We're especially grateful for our council members, who share their expertise, knowledge, skills, and resources as part of the STELIP collective. Together, we have collaborated on projects, built bridges, and strengthened partnerships in the community.

We are also thankful for the continued commitment and funding from Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada to support immigrant integration in communities across Canada.

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Immigration, Réfugiés
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