

Chapter **3**

Working with York Region's Diverse Communities

3.1 York Region's Diversity

York Region's population is increasing along with its diversity. Between 1986 and 2001, the Region's population has more than doubled. This population is increasingly becoming more diverse due in large part to the increased settlement of recent immigrants (those who arrived between 1996 and 2001) in the region and the aging of the baby boom generation.

This very rapid growth and changing demographics is expected to continue well into the future.

While some organizations have been proactive about becoming more inclusive and in addressing the changing needs of the Region's population, others have been reactive and made changes when needed.

Organizations are encouraged to understanding the changing demographics and the implications this has on providing services to abused women that are responsive to their needs.

Population Change

- At the time of the last Census in 2001, York Region's population was 725,665. As of February 28, 2006, York Region's population is estimated to have reached over 923,000.
- In 2000 and 2001, the Region was growing at an average rate of 5.7%, or 40,000 people per year. Between 1996 and 2001, York Region had the highest growth rate within the GTA, growing by 160,000 people.
- While all areas within the Region experienced growth, most of the population growth was concentrated in the southern half of the Region.

Immigration

Census data shows that the immigrant population in York Region is growing at a much faster rate than the non-immigrant population. Immigration then affects the diversity of the Region's population with respect to race, ethnicity, language and religion.

- Between 1991 and 2001, the number of recent immigrants in York Region increased by 132%, while the number of non-immigrants increased by 31%.
- In 2001, 39% of residents in York Region were born outside Canada. This is up from 28% of the population in 1986.
- 43,405 or 6% of York Region's population has immigrated to Canada in the 1996-2001 period.
- Since 1981, there has been a shift in the source of York Region's immigrant population – from Southern Europe to Asia and Eastern Europe.
- The top five countries of birth for recent immigrants in York Region are Hong Kong (19%), China (13%), Russian Federation (7%), Iran (7%) and India (6%).

Ethnicity and Race

Ethnic Origin refers to the ethnic or cultural group to which an individual's ancestors belong. This category stresses cultural ties and includes individuals that associate with a specific ethnic group but do not necessarily speak the language.

Statistics Canada collects information on the population's race and defines visible minorities to be individuals, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour, regardless of their place of birth.

- York Region is becoming increasingly diverse as the area attracts more new immigrants to the country along with migrants from other parts of the GTA. In 2001, the ethnic composition of the Region was:
 - Italian 14%
 - Chinese 13%
 - British 8%
 - Canadian 8%
 - Jewish 5%
 - East Indian 4%
 - Greek 1.4%
 - German 1.2%
 - Filipino 1.2%
 - Iranian 1.1%
 - Other single responses 14%
 - Multiple responses 31%

- Ethnic origins varied considerably over York Region. For example:
 - Vaughan and King showed the highest proportion of those reporting to be Italian (39% and 16% respectively);
 - Markham and Richmond Hill, those of Chinese ethnic origin were the largest group (28% and 20% respectively);
 - The second largest ethnic group in Vaughan was Jewish (11%);
 - The second highest ethnic origin in Markham was East Indian, and in Richmond Hill it was Italian.

- 30% of residents consider themselves to be a visible minority.

- As of 2001, visible minorities represented 71% of the recent immigrant population living in York Region.

Language

- 89% of recent immigrants speak English and/or French.
- Over 10,000 recent immigrants, or 11% have no knowledge of English or French. This is the highest percentage of recent immigrants that have no knowledge of either official language in the GTA.
- In 2001, 24,000 or 3.2% of the population reported that they had no knowledge of English or French.
- Cantonese is the single most common non-official language spoken at home by recent immigrants in York Region (28%), followed by other Chinese (14%), Russian (6%), and Farsi (4%).

Religion

- The most common religious affiliation for York Region's total population is Roman Catholic (35%), followed by "No Religion" (17%), Jewish and United Church (8% each).
- For new immigrants, the most common affiliations are "No Religion" (33%), followed by Roman Catholic (19%) and Muslim (11%). The high reporting of "No Religion" could be due to other factors such as fear of reprisals rather than lack of specific denomination.

Age

- The baby boom generation makes up 35% of the Region's population. In Canada, the baby boom generation is usually defined as the generation born from 1947 to 1966.
- By 2026, the aging of the baby boom generation will increase the population of seniors. It is estimated that in 2026, 21% of the Region's population will be over the age of 50.

Disability

- It is estimated that approximately 9% of the population between the ages of 15-64 in York Region have a physical or developmental disability.

Implications for service delivery

The growth trends for the Region indicate that there will be an increased demand for all types of social services. In addition, the increasing diversity of the population will challenge social service providers in responding to the increased demand for services that accommodate the differences within the population. This also suggests the need for increased links with community organizations with knowledge and expertise in working with the diverse populations.

The data also indicates that there is also an increase in vulnerable populations, including low-income households, seniors, single parent families and persons with disabilities. This increases

the demand for additional services to assist these populations in dealing with abuse, including income support, affordable housing, support for the elderly, etc.

Service providers should reflect the community they serve and be responsive to the diverse needs within the community. Responses to the changing demographics include:

- Providing printed information in other languages and alternate formats (e.g. audio cassettes, large print, Braille);
- Using interpreters when providing services to clients with limited English language ability;
- Providing American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters;
- Reviewing policies and programs to ensure they are inclusive and accommodate cultural and religious differences and needs;
- Increasing diversity awareness and cultural competency among staff;
- Promoting services to ethnocultural communities;
- Addressing the issues for transgendered women in policies and programs
- Establishing relationships or improving communications with community organizations serving the diverse populations.

Data Sources:

York Region census data implications. The Regional Municipality of York. October 16, 2003.

The Changing Face of York Region: A Demographic Profile. The Regional Municipality of York. (n.d.)

Highlights from Community Snapshots: Recent Immigrants Living in York Region. The Regional Municipality of York (n.d.)