

Built to Last, — Designed to Grow

A YEAR OF TRANSFORMATIVE COLLABORATION IN MIGRATION RESEARCH

2025 - 2026



Bridging Divides
Impact Report



CANADA
FIRST
RESEARCH
EXCELLENCE
FUND

APOGÉE
CANADA
FONDS
D'EXCELLENCE
EN RECHERCHE

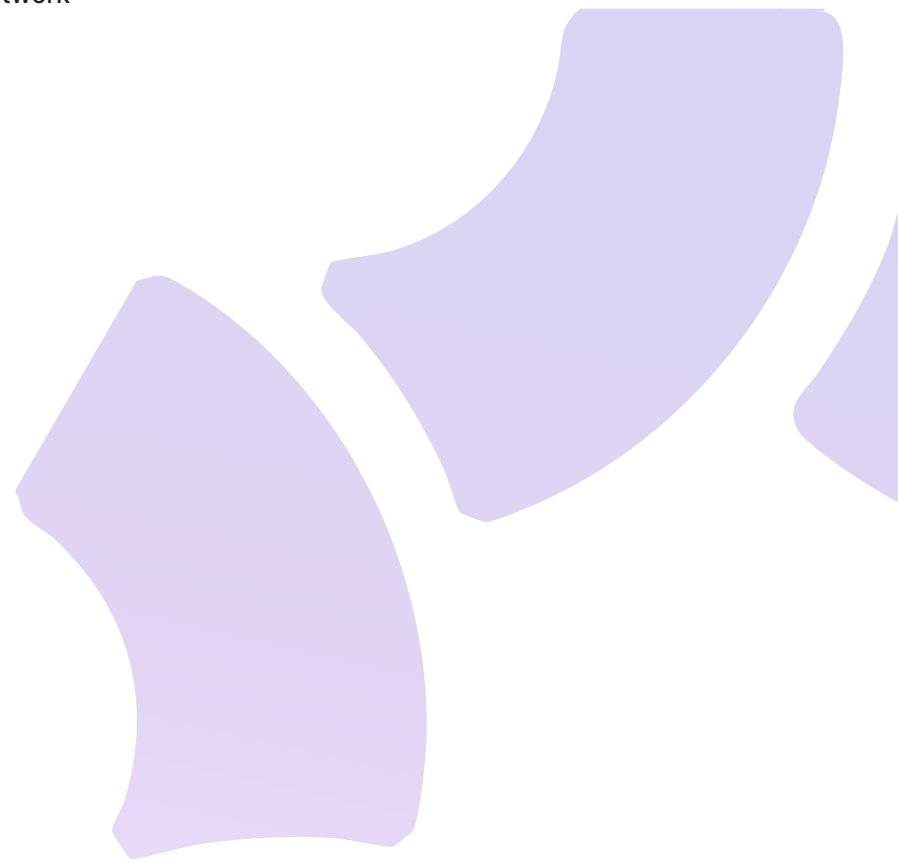


Bridging
Divides



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Message from the Scientific Director



Anna Triandafyllidou

Director, Global Migration Institute,
Toronto Metropolitan University

Scientific Director,
Migrant Integration in the Mid-21st Century:
Bridging Divides



Looking back on the past year, it is easy to be distracted by the challenges making headlines every day. We have grappled with dramatic policy shifts and budget cuts affecting immigrant-serving organizations. Labour shortages continue to characterize our economy, even as unemployment rises. Public opinion remains divided on migration and newcomers, shaped by heavily politicized rhetoric, while fast-developing technologies continue to change the rules of the game.

Yet through all of this, our goal has remained steady. **At its core, Bridging Divides was built for connection:** to weave together the invisible threads that link disciplines, draw arches across institutions, and invite the world in while sending ideas, people and research out.

The past year has been pivotal. Marking the halfway point of our seven-year program, we have reached new levels of engagement, ensuring that emerging research findings reach the communities, practitioners, and decision-makers who can use them. We have also adapted to emerging concerns and expanded our research to include new questions and more nuanced approaches to migrant integration.

Our research ecosystem has continued to evolve. The realignment of projects into thematic clusters has allowed us to consolidate what we have built while

preserving the complex interdisciplinary and inter-institutional connections that define our whole-of-society approach. This year also marked the launch of the Global Migration Institute at Toronto Metropolitan University, our new institutional home, which will carry forward the knowledge, relationships and legacy built through Bridging Divides for years to come. We are reflecting on where we have been while continuing to identify new research frontiers.

This year, knowledge mobilization became an even greater part of that journey. Bridging Divides hosted or co-hosted more than 90 events, bringing together over 1,500 participants from across research, policy, practice and communities. Our researchers also shared their work more than 300 times, at conferences and events around the world. Through hundreds of media engagements, colleagues across the program contributed their expertise to public conversations.

We also continued to expand the network around our research. More than 40 partner organizations are now actively engaged with the program, alongside a growing community of visitors, fellows and collaborators from Canada and abroad. We launched our first Future Leaders Fellowship, welcomed new cohorts of Civil Society and Journalism Fellows, and strengthened relationships with civil society, governments and academic institutions.

Perhaps most importantly, we are increasingly seeing new pathways emerge between research and action. Through initiatives such as Research2Results, developed with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, we are creating new opportunities for researchers and policymakers to work together around practical challenges and policy ideas. Initiatives such as the Migration Data Challenge connected students with mentors and judges from public policy and governments across Canada.

As we look ahead to the second half of our program, we are also reflecting on how knowledge is produced and whose perspectives shape it. Throughout this report, readers will find EDI not as a separate box to tick, but as an underlying current running through the research ecosystem. Community organizations and people with lived experience help ensure our work remains relevant and responsive, while we continue to learn and strengthen our approach to Indigenous engagement and reciprocal relationships.

At the halfway point, there is a sense of pride in what our research teams, staff, technicians and community partners have built together: a growing ecosystem that connects knowledge with change. I invite you to reflect with me on this pivotal year and look ahead, with renewed curiosity and determination, to consider all that remains ahead.



SECTION 02

Where We Are

In its third year, Bridging Divides entered a new phase of maturity. The foundations established in the program's early years evolved into a more connected and collaborative research ecosystem, bringing together researchers, institutions, communities and partners to address the complex realities of migration in a rapidly changing world.

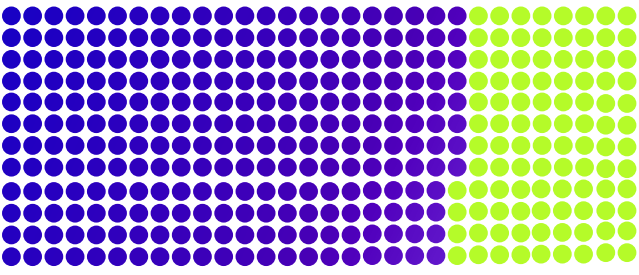
As global conversations increasingly turn inward, Bridging Divides continues to invest in connection: strengthening interdisciplinary networks, supporting new collaborations and creating pathways for research to move beyond individual projects toward shared impact. Through new thematic clusters, expanded partnerships and new phases of research, projects are becoming more integrated, generating early findings and laying the groundwork for lasting contributions to migration research, policy and practice.

*Flagship initiatives include: Annual Conference, Bridges Magazine, Build a Bridge, Civil Society and Administration Fellows, Connections Lab, Future Leaders Fellows, Journalism Fellows, Migration Data Challenge, Research Discovery Retreats, Scholar Exchange Fellows, Stipend Students, Steps to Success

Growth by the Numbers



Students and postdoctoral researchers engaged



This year marked a shift from establishing capacity to mobilizing it.

KEY MILESTONES INCLUDED:

Thematic research clusters, which brought projects together around shared challenges in migrant integration, creating new opportunities for collaboration, knowledge sharing and cross-institutional research.

Emerging research outcomes, as projects moved from development into implementation, generating early findings, publications, partnerships, digital tools, and innovative insights.

New research and engagement initiatives, which continued to strengthen the program's ability to support innovation, develop talent and connect academic research with communities and decision-makers.

SECTION 03

Reshaping Connections

Diagram 01

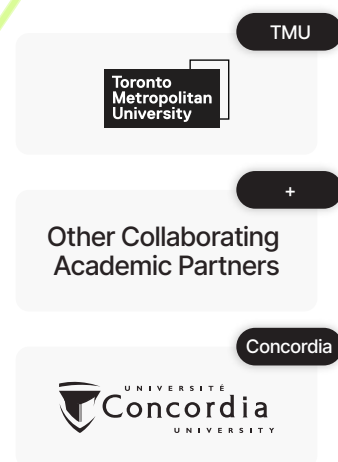
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Unique Projects

39 Immigrant Health & Well-Being

25 Employment & Lifelong Learning

26 Place & Infrastructure

31 Citizenship & Participation



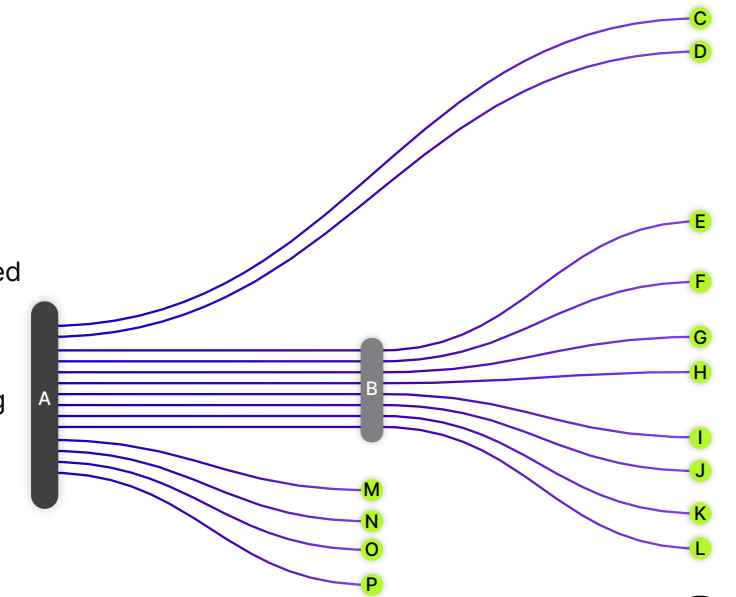
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Project Leaders

Diagram 02

Cluster Evolution

Research flows from the four core themes into thematic clusters and individual projects. As projects evolve, early findings inform new questions and projects, building a more nuanced understanding of each cluster.

For example, the Immigrant Adolescent and Youth Health cluster has evolved from studying migrant youth as a broad population to examining specific determinants of health. Diagram 02 shows this evolution, with new projects building on findings from an earlier large-scale study.



Cluster Evolution
Content Legend

- (A) Adolescence and Youth Health
- (B) Population-based Analysis
- (C) Food Insecurity and Mental Health
- (D) Immigration Status and Food Security
- (E) Migrant Youth Sexual Health
- (F) Migrant Youth Mental Health
- (G) Homestay Student Health
- (H) Digital Technology and Mental Health

- (I) Concussions and Head Injuries
- (J) Healthcare Access
- (K) Trans and Nonbinary Health
- (L) Climate Change and Health
- (M) MyPeer Sexual Health App
- (N) AI and Mental Health
- (O) Digital Tools for Parents
- (P) Rural Youth Well-being App

Reshaping Connections Content Legend

To address the challenges faced by diverse populations holistically, Bridging Divides has organized its four research themes into thematic clusters focused on specific topics at the intersection of migration and

advanced digital technologies. Researchers, disciplines and institutions overlap by design, allowing knowledge and methods to flow across the program.

- 1.1 Adolescence and Youth Health
- 1.2 Community Approaches to Wellbeing
- 1.3 Equity and Access to Care
- 2.1 Un(der)employment and Integration
- 3.1 Digital Skills and Retraining
- 2.2 Future of Work and Mobility
- 2.3 Communities and Infrastructure
- 3.2 Housing and Settlement

- 4.1 Cyber-Physical Infrastructure
- 3.3 Citizenship and Belonging
- 4.4 Mobility Decision-making
- 4.5 Governance and Policy
- 4.6 Intersectionality and Identity
- 4.3 Narratives and Polarization
- 4.2 Tools and Methods

When Evidence Leads Research

By the third year of Bridging Divides, many projects reached an important turning point. Early research is generating new questions, partnerships and tools that are expanding our knowledge in innovative directions. Across the program, researchers are building on strong foundations, expanding successful initiatives and creating practical solutions to complex challenges. These three stories are an example of how to develop **an adaptive, evidence-based research agenda** for lasting impact.

From one study to A national research agenda

A population-based study led by **Elizabeth Saewyc's** team at the University of British Columbia analyzed the health experiences of more than **30,000 Canadian adolescents**, revealing important differences in the experiences of immigrant and non-immigrant youth. The research highlighted emerging challenges around mental and sexual health, digital technology use, and access to care, while demonstrating that immigrant youth cannot be understood as a single, homogeneous group.

Those insights became the foundation for an entirely new research agenda on migrant youth health. **8 follow-on studies** are now exploring specific issues in

greater depth, from the mental health impacts of digital technologies and climate change, to health care access, concussion, sexual health and the experiences of trans and non-binary migrant youth (see Diagram 02 at page 7).

The work has also moved beyond identifying problems toward developing solutions. Projects include **piloting a mobile app** co-designed with immigrant youth to provide culturally relevant sexual and reproductive health information, and developing **AI-powered tools** to help identify urgent mental health needs and improve access to appropriate care.

"What if" we met complexity with complexity?

Researchers led by TMU's **Bilal Farooq** are experts in bringing together complex problems. Combining expertise from transportation engineering, economics, planning, computer science and migration studies, the team is developing an integrated model of the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area that reflects the relationships between housing, labour markets, transportation, demographics, and social infrastructure. This ambitious **AI-powered modelling platform** captures how urban systems interact: from housing shortages affecting employment, transportation shaping where people live to immigration levels influencing demand for school and services.

Instead of examining each sector in isolation, the model allows researchers and decision-makers to explore how changes in one area ripple across the others. What happens if housing supply increases? How might different settlement patterns affect commuting, employment or demand for public services? By testing these "what if" scenarios before policies are implemented, governments can better anticipate trade-offs and design more coordinated responses.

The project demonstrates how interdisciplinary collaboration can produce tools that are greater than the sum of their parts.

Following technology from the job search to the workplace

What began as a single project examining the role of advanced digital technologies in immigrant employment has grown into **three interconnected streams of research**, each exploring a different stage of the employment journey. Together, researchers **Wendy Cukier, Usha George, and Rupa Banerjee** examine how AI is changing the skills newcomers need, how employers are using digital tools in recruitment and selection, and how newcomers themselves are navigating an increasingly digital job search.

As the research has evolved, so too have its partnerships. A collaboration with **Canadian start-up PeaceGeeks** emerged through Bridging Divides 2026 Connections Lab, allowing researchers to evaluate an AI-powered employment support tool with immigrant job seekers. At the same time, community organizations across Canada have helped recruit participants and ensure newcomers' experiences remain at the centre of the research.

A clear example of our research approach: identify the problem, collaborate to build understanding, and move to develop evidence-informed solutions.

SECTION 04

Deep Dive



#EDInFocus

At Bridging Divides, projects are designed in collaboration with community partners, engage participants with diverse lived experiences, and examine how factors such as migration status, gender, race, age and geography shape outcomes. The examples above are clear representations of this approach.

This research practice moves beyond treating newcomers as a single population and recognizes, instead, the distinct experiences of different communities to generate evidence that can support more equitable policies and services.

SECTION 05

Innovation Snapshots

MyPeer

MyPeer is a mobile app co-designed with immigrant adolescents through community-based participatory research, offering accessible information on sexual and reproductive health alongside a service finder that filters by language, accessibility, and 2SLGBTQIA+ friendliness. Now with Bridging Divides, the University of Alberta and University of British Columbia teams are leading an assessment of MyPeer's feasibility and acceptability among immigrant youth, working to help inform scalable sexual and reproductive health education across Canada.

BD Mobility App

How do newcomers actually move through a new city? The answer is now in the palm of their hand: the BD Mobility App, a smartphone survey tool that captures how immigrants to Canada travel. It records trip origin and destination, timing, mode of transport, and purpose, alongside a survey exploring hypothetical travel choices. Led by researchers from Concordia University and TMU, the app collects real-time data directly from immigrant commuters to help researchers map transportation needs more accurately than traditional surveys allow.

Migration Ad Observatory

Behind every targeted ad about immigration is a story about who's being persuaded, and how. The Migration Ad Observatory, developed by the Social Media Lab at TMU, tracks that story across Facebook and Instagram. Using Meta's Ads Library API, the tool identifies migration-related ads, compiles their statistics and metadata, and visualizes patterns through an accessible dashboard that helps flag misleading or false claims. Built for researchers, policymakers, NGOs, journalists, and civil society groups alike, it equips users to counter misinformation and to support a more informed public debate.

IDIO (Immigrant Discourses Observatory)

One of the most emblematic examples of interdisciplinary collaboration at Bridging Divides, IDIO is an AI-powered platform born from the joint work of TMU and University of Alberta researchers. From parliamentary debates to news media, social media, and policy documents, immigration-related text is turned into searchable, analyzable data. Non-expert users can upload documents, generate word-frequency visualizations, and ask questions grounded in their own data, with results powered by secure large language models. Engineers built it for social scientists. Social scientists shaped it for engineers.

Data and Digital Tools

Bridging Divides invests in digital and data tools that extend the reach of its research, turning findings into resources that scholars, communities, practitioners, and policymakers can use directly. This year's snapshot features **4 tools** at different stages of development — from active piloting to full launch — each built to make immigration research more accessible and responsive to real-world needs.

#EDInFocus

From initial conceptualization to testing, EDI principles are embedded in the development of Bridging Divides' digital tools. MYPEER was co-designed directly with immigrant youth through community-based participatory research. Similarly, BDMobility, IDIO, and the Migration Ad Observatory were each developed through research grounded in the needs of their end users. All three continue to be refined through ongoing testing and real-world application.

By prioritizing accessibility, community engagement and user-centred design, these tools demonstrate how digital innovation can make research more responsive and inclusive, while supporting more equitable access to information for researchers, practitioners, policymakers and communities.

Some of the **most impactful** leaps of the past year were part of one of these efforts:

Research Talent Pipeline

The best way to ensure migration research truly matters is to train the people who will carry it forward. Bridging Divides invests in scholars at every level of study, from undergraduates to early-career researchers, across all partner universities, because building capacity is how the program's impact outlasts any single project.

In our third year, several flagship initiatives were re-launched, using what we learned in past editions to increase their value for all participants. We also deepened collaborations with partners and organizations to open new training opportunities for all scholars.

SECTION 06

The Future Guard

Increase Employment Opportunities



30 new graduate stipends

Master's and PhD students supported across immigration studies, spatial analysis, engineering, nursing and computer science.

245+ research assistants

Students advanced research across Bridging Divides' four core themes.

49 postdoctoral fellows

Researchers contributed expertise across the program.

17 Steps to Success interns

Equity-deserving TMU undergraduates matched with paid, mentored research placements for the third year.

Student Challenges



3 winning ideas | Build a Bridge 2026

Part program, part competition, student teams were mentored to come up with their own AI solutions to migrants' challenges.

3 winning insights | Migration Data Challenge 2026

A pressure cooker for data visualization: students had one week to turn Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's local-level data to find patterns of urban belonging.

22 innovations | Demo Day 2026

TMU Tech Law students pitched tools, rules and spaces to reimagine virtual hearings at the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada.

Training and Workshops



50+ training and workshops offered to staff and researchers

Including **regular EDI training**, workshops on digital research tools like **ORCID** and **Spiral**, and **thematic sessions** on *Storytelling for Migration Researchers*, *Grant Writing and Designing Poster Presentations*. **Full-day events** on *Trustworthy AI*, *Narrative and Text Analysis and Design Fiction* brought together training and knowledge mobilization.

More migrant-focused trainings

More projects than ever incorporated free training for migrants into their research, including **Game Jams** for video game design and **workshops on AI** and digital technology. For the first time, **Enterprise Bridge** supported **28 immigrant entrepreneurs** with training and mentorship to overcome barriers and turn ideas into businesses.

From Postdoc to Professor

Behind every career milestone is a community that helps make it possible.

This year, two Bridging Divides postdoctoral researchers took the next step in their academic journeys, securing tenure-track faculty positions after contributing to the program's interdisciplinary research community as Postdoctoral Fellows. For **Émile Baril**, now an Assistant Professor at Concordia University's Department of Geography, the opportunity to pursue independent research while learning from scholars across disciplines left a lasting impact.

"Seeing migration scholars doing similar work but from all the different fields gave me a broader perspective on studying migration, integration and technologies. Getting insights from all the top scholars in the field in Canada was very helpful."



As he begins teaching, Baril is looking forward to bringing those perspectives into the classroom while continuing his research on migration, labour and technology.

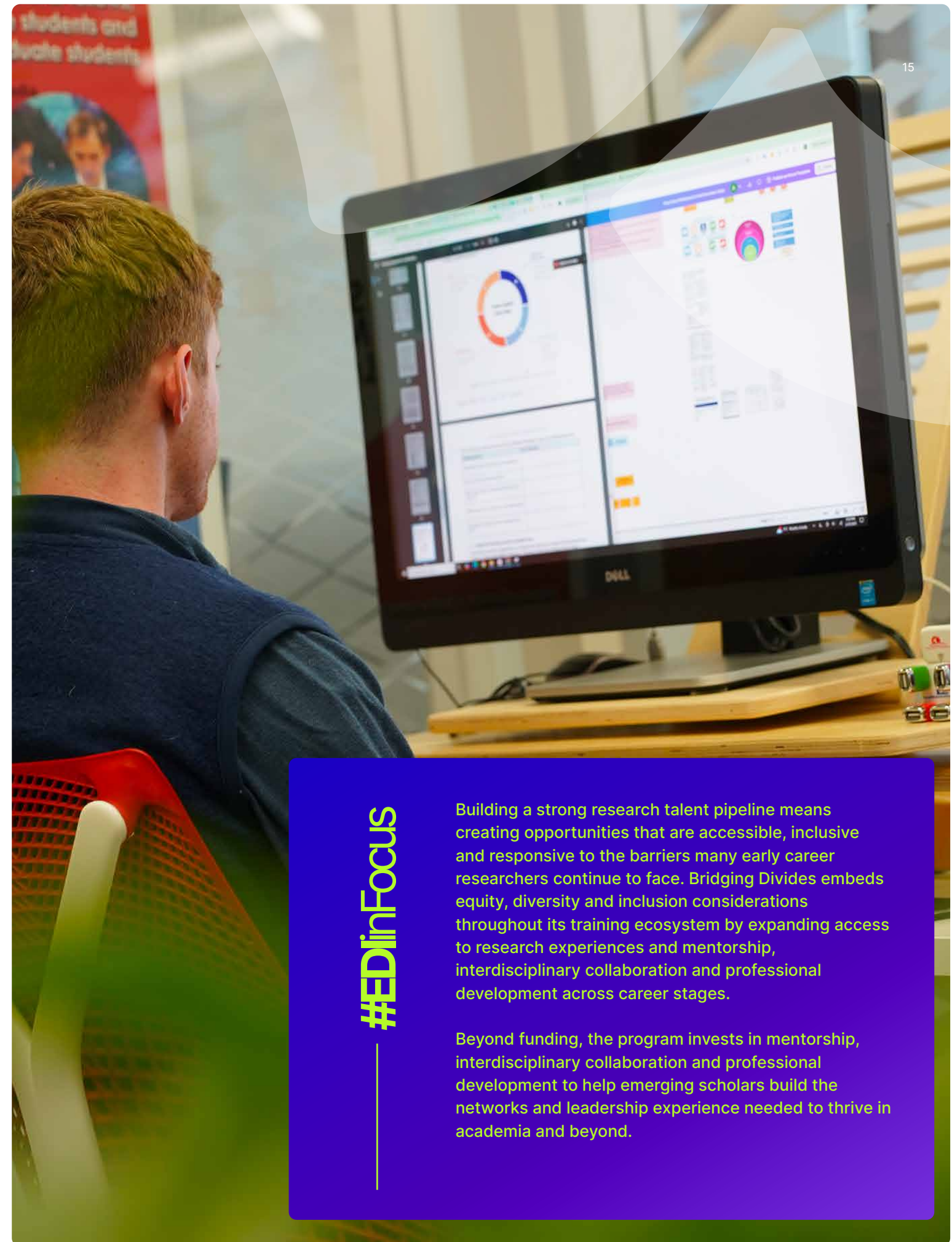
At TMU, **Muhammad Rehman Zafar** has joined the Ted Rogers School of Information Technology Management as an Assistant Professor. Looking back, he says Bridging Divides helped him grow not only as a researcher but as a leader.

"Through this vibrant community, I have built lasting relationships with exceptional scholars, broadened my research perspective, and had the unique opportunity to lead the Methods and Infrastructure Collaboration research cluster early in my career."

Their journeys reflect how investing in emerging researchers helps build the next generation of scholars to tackle society's most pressing challenges.

"This experience was instrumental in shaping my growth as a researcher and academic leader."

Muhammad Rehman Zafar



#EDinFocus

Building a strong research talent pipeline means creating opportunities that are accessible, inclusive and responsive to the barriers many early career researchers continue to face. Bridging Divides embeds equity, diversity and inclusion considerations throughout its training ecosystem by expanding access to research experiences and mentorship, interdisciplinary collaboration and professional development across career stages.

Beyond funding, the program invests in mentorship, interdisciplinary collaboration and professional development to help emerging scholars build the networks and leadership experience needed to thrive in academia and beyond.

Policy, Media, and Public Reach

Bridging Divides was created to generate knowledge that informs decisions beyond the university. Throughout the year, researchers strengthened connections with governments, contributed to public conversations through national and international media and shared evidence with practitioners and community leaders.

Research informing policy

Bridging Divides has a long-standing, growing partnership with **Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)**, built over the years through a series of complementary initiatives that connect researchers directly with policymakers.

Research met policy at the second **Migration Research and Policy Forum**, a closed-door consultation that brought researchers and senior IRCC leaders together to identify emerging challenges and evidence needs.

Research reached decision-makers through dedicated webinars, project-related consultations, and knowledge mobilization events that connected Bridging Divides research with **300+ IRCC policy analysts and directors**.

Evidence became actionable through joint policy briefs and the **Research 2 Results** initiative, translating research into targeted tools for policy design and implementation.

Strengthening research and shaping conversations

Bridging Divides researchers continue to advance knowledge across disciplines while bringing migration and integration research into broader public and academic conversations. Their work has been published across **more than 10 fields of study**, featured in leading journals, books, policy reports and working papers, and shared through keynote lectures, international conferences, media commentary, podcasts, and public events. Researchers have also received institutional and creative achievement awards recognizing excellence in research, mentorship and knowledge mobilization.

Where excellence takes the stage

The **2026 Annual Bridging Divides Conference**, hosted in Montreal by the Institute for Research on Migration and Society (IRMS), brought together **260+ researchers, policymakers, practitioners and community leaders** to explore how advanced digital technologies are reshaping migration. Through panels,

“For IRCC, Bridging Divides has become a trusted partner that helps connect research excellence with evidence-informed policy development and long-term strategic thinking.”

Chantal Goyette
SENIOR DIRECTOR, RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION, IRCC

a keynote, poster competition and workshop, participants examined the opportunities and risks of digital transformation across migration governance, employment, healthcare, services and belonging, advancing conversations about more equitable, accountable and human-centred migration systems.

SECTION 07

Shifting the Narrative

Research excellence by the numbers

133 Academic publications on Bridging Divides projects

355 Conference presentations and engagements

256 Media mentions and authored contributions

40+ Awards and recognitions

\$19M+ in additional federal and provincial funding for initiatives spanning public health, quantum engineering, migration research, urban planning and other fields.

International Connections and Partnerships

Great research should never be kept behind institutional or national boundaries. This is why, as Bridging Divides enters its third year, the program is increasingly serving as a global meeting place where researchers, practitioners, journalists and community leaders exchange knowledge, challenge assumptions and build collaborations that extend well beyond Canada.



A Canadian home for a global community

This year, Bridging Divides expanded its international fellowship programs, bringing together professionals at different stages of their careers who share a common interest in migration, inclusion and the role of advanced digital technologies.

Launching the Future Leaders Fellowship

Senior doctoral candidates and early career postdoctoral researchers gathered in Toronto to begin a year-long program of mentorship, interdisciplinary collaboration and independent research. While their residency marked the beginning of the fellowship, their work now continues across the world, from Thailand to Germany, from Spain to Nigeria, from South Africa to Malaysia, strengthening an international network of emerging migration scholars.

Welcoming the second Journalism Fellows cohort

Journalists from Ukraine, Colombia, Pakistan, India, Morocco and the United Kingdom came to Toronto for a month-long residency. Working alongside Bridging Divides scholars, fellows combined field reporting with evidence-based research on issues including LGBTQ+ refugee communities, environmental migration, online extremism and women's experiences of conflict.

Supporting Civil Society and Public Administration Fellows

Fellows from the International Organization for Migration in Tunisia and Manchester City Council in the United Kingdom brought international and municipal perspectives into Bridging Divides research, while taking new ideas, partnerships and evidence back into their own practice.

SECTION 08

Cultivating a Global Network



“Bridging Divides is the ideal place to study and think through questions of international migration. The fellowship brings together an incredibly **diverse group of researchers in a way I've never seen anywhere else.**”

Barbara Orth

POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW,
UNIVERSITY OF BERN
FUTURE LEADERS FELLOW



Strengthening an international research network

Bridging Divides also broadened its international reach through the **Global Exchange Fellowship** at the Global Migration Institute. Building on an established exchange model, the program now connects even more researchers at TMU with leading migration centres across Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia and Latin America, creating new opportunities for early career scholars to spend a month embedded in partner institutions while welcoming international researchers to Toronto.

Connecting beyond academia

Throughout the year, Bridging Divides continued to expand its partnerships with governments, community organizations, industry and civil society, creating new opportunities for collaboration and co-creation of knowledge. The program now works with **over 40** partner organizations across Canada, with a number of projects involving at least one community organization or other non-academic partner at their inception.

Following the success of the first **Connections Lab**, this year's event once again brought together researchers and partners from across sectors to explore shared challenges, spark new collaborations and help shape future research directions.

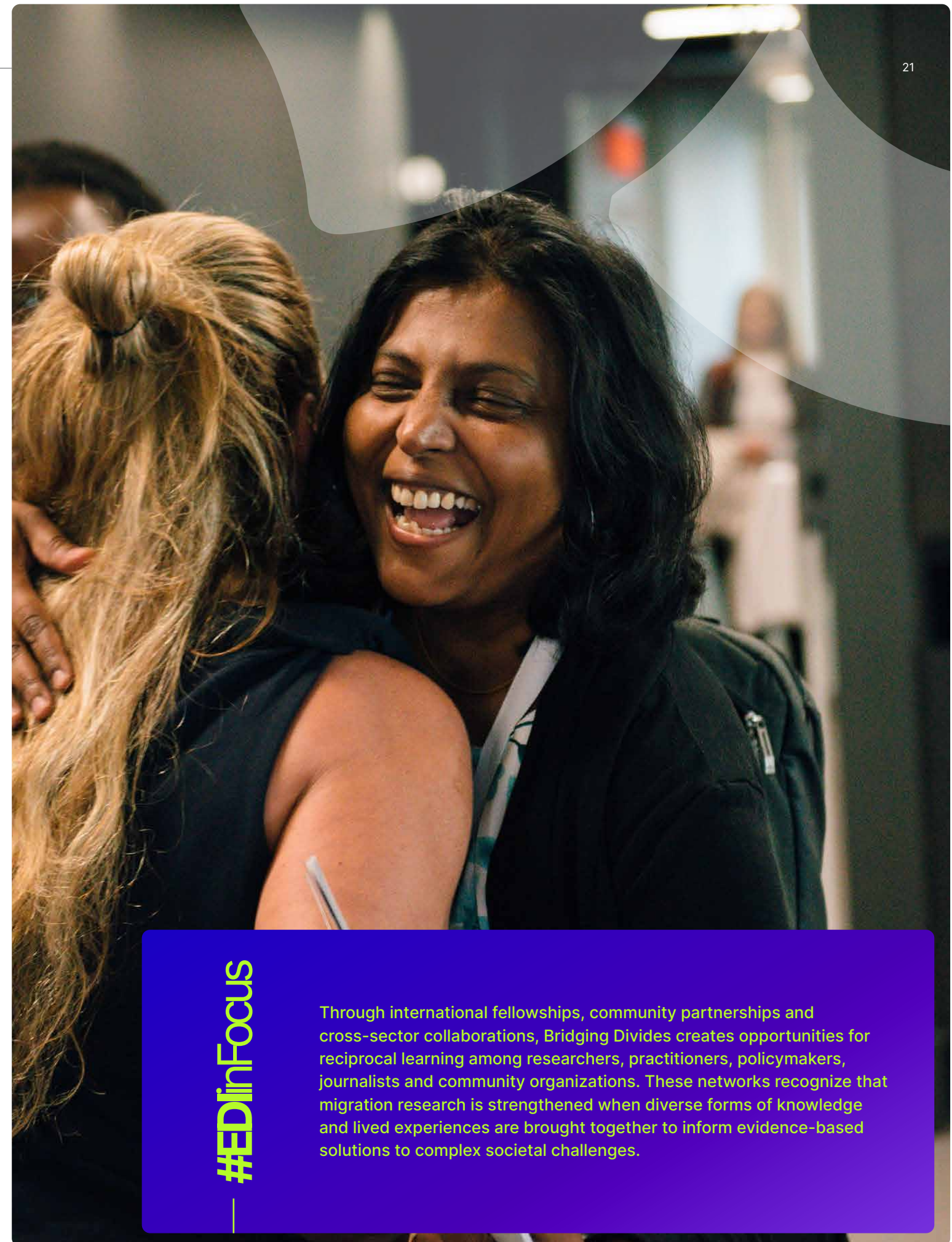
The program also continued publishing **Bridges**, our in-house community magazine, now approaching its fourth issue, showcasing more than 15 stories of collaboration between researchers and partner organizations and highlighting how research translates into meaningful action.

This year, Bridging Divides also launched a series of structured partner consultations to gather insights on future research and enhanced community collaboration. These regular discussions ensure our work remains aligned with real-world impact and our partners' evolving needs.

"The conversations I've had during my fellowship have contributed to my knowledge and understanding of the research. **They've challenged my thinking** and I'll take back ideas that will add real value to my work."

Shefali Kapoor

DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITIES,
MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL
CIVIL SOCIETY AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION FELLOW



#EDinFocus

Through international fellowships, community partnerships and cross-sector collaborations, Bridging Divides creates opportunities for reciprocal learning among researchers, practitioners, policymakers, journalists and community organizations. These networks recognize that migration research is strengthened when diverse forms of knowledge and lived experiences are brought together to inform evidence-based solutions to complex societal challenges.



This Impact Report highlights select activities from the Migrant Integration in the 21st Century: Bridging Divides research program between April 2025 and May 2026. We extend our thanks to the researchers, collaborators, students, partners, and administrative, technical and research staff whose time and expertise informed this report.

For more information on the Bridging Divides research program, visit torontomu.ca/bridging-divides/

