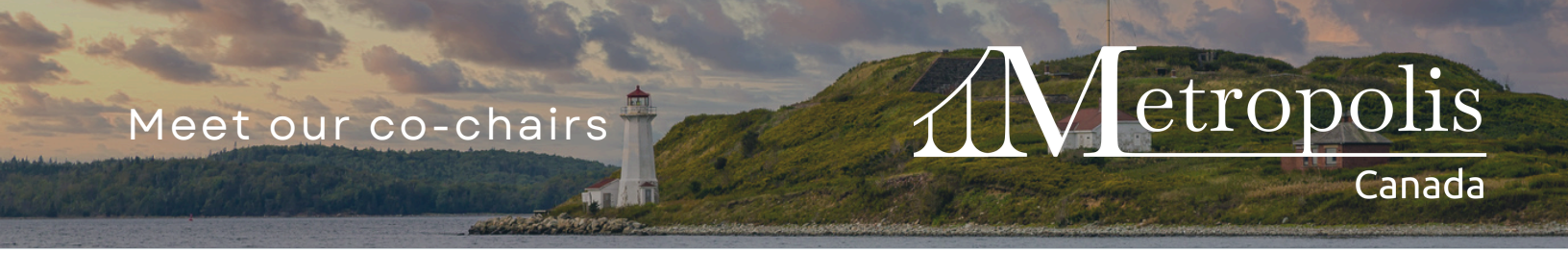

Meet our co-chairs

Paula Knight

CEO
Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS) and
Chair of the Atlantic Region Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (ARAISA)

Paula Knight is the Chief Executive Officer of the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS), Atlantic Canada's largest immigrant settlement services provider, and Chair of the Atlantic Region Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (ARAISA).

With over 25 years of executive leadership across healthcare, technology, social housing, and the nonprofit sector, Paula is known for driving inclusive, system-level change through strategic innovation, human-centered design, and a deep commitment to social impact. She has held executive roles at Microsoft, Cancer Care Ontario, and Toronto Community Housing, where she spearheaded transformative initiatives that advanced equity, expanded digital access, and strengthened community resilience across complex systems.

At ISANS, Paula is redefining the future of immigrant settlement in Nova Scotia by strategically aligning services with evolving immigration policies, shifting labour market demands, and the diverse aspirations of newcomers. She drives cross-sector collaboration and service innovation, designing inclusive programs that empower immigrants to thrive—fueling economic growth and building vibrant communities.

Paula's contributions have earned national recognition, including the Queen Elizabeth II Golden and Diamond Jubilee Medals and Microsoft's prestigious Chairman Award. Paula is passionate about mentoring women in leadership and is a founding member of the Initiative for Women in Business, Judy Project at the Rotman School of Management, and a contributing author of The Collective Wisdom of High Performing Women.

Emmanuel Nahimana

Deputy Director General
La Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse (FANE) (*The Acadian Federation of Nova Scotia*)

Originally from Burundi, Mr. Nahimana arrived in Canada in 2001. He holds a licence (Bachelor's degree) in French Language and Literature from the University of Burundi, as well as a Master's degree in Education and Diversity from Simon Fraser University.

Mr. Nahimana has served as Manager of Francophone Immigration for Nova Scotia since 2013. In this role, he developed strategic plans, identified and addressed emerging immigration trends, managed contribution agreements, and coordinated funding-related activities. Mr. Nahimana also worked for Canadian Heritage for one year as a Senior Advisor of the *Community Support, Multiculturalism and Anti-Racism Program.*

Metropolis Canada

The Honourable Lena Metlege Diab

Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

The Honourable Lena Metlege Diab was first elected as the Member of Parliament for Halifax West in 2021, and was re-elected in April 2025. She was appointed Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship in May 2025.

Minister Diab was elected to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly in 2013, and re-elected in 2017, serving on the Executive Council during both terms. In addition to serving as Minister of Immigration, she was the province's first female Attorney General and Minister of Justice. She also held the roles of Minister of Acadian Affairs and Francophonie, and Minister of Labour and Advanced Education.

Prior to entering politics, Minister Diab was a small business owner, lawyer and active volunteer. She practised law in Halifax for more than 20 years, served on a number of adjudicative boards and was awarded the Queen's Counsel designation for service to the legal profession.

Her extensive community involvement and volunteerism earned her numerous honours, including Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee Medal, the Progress Women of Excellence Award, the Outstanding Professional of the Year Award from the Canadian Lebanese Chamber of Commerce, and the Lorita Star Award from the Council of Arab League Ambassadors.

Minister Diab holds a Bachelor of Arts from Saint Mary's University, and a Master of Public Administration and a Law Degree from Dalhousie University. She is also trained in mediation, collaborative family law and interest-based negotiation.

Metropolis Canada

The Honourable Nolan Young

Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration
Government of Nova Scotia

The Honourable Nolan Young was first elected to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly as MLA for Shelburne in 2021 and was re-elected in 2024.

He was appointed to the Executive Council of Nova Scotia in December of 2024 as the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration; the Minister responsible for the Apprenticeship and Trades Qualifications Act; and Minister responsible for the Workers' Compensation Act (except Part II).

He is a former Councillor and Deputy Mayor for Shelburne, as well as a former instructor at NSCC Shelburne Campus.

Prior to government, he worked many years at various levels in construction.

Metropolis Canada

Dr. Shannon Dea

Provost and Vice-President
Academic and Research
Saint Mary's University

Dr. Shannon Dea is the inaugural Provost and Vice-President, Academic and Research (PVPAR) at Saint Mary's University, where she leads the university's academic and research portfolios. In this role, she is responsible for advancing academic excellence, fostering research impact, and ensuring the strategic allocation of resources to support institutional priorities.

Prior to joining Saint Mary's, Dr. Dea served as Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Regina from 2020 to 2025.

Dr. Dea holds a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Western University, an M.A. in Philosophy from Queen's University, and a B.A. in Philosophy and Russian from the University of Waterloo. Her research spans academic freedom, harm reduction, and feminist philosophy. She is the author of numerous scholarly articles and book chapters, and her book Beyond the Binary: Thinking about Sex and Gender—now in its second edition—is widely recognized for its accessible and rigorous engagement with gender theory.

In addition to her academic and administrative roles, Dr. Dea has held leadership positions such as Vice-President of the Board of Trustees at the MacKenzie Art Gallery and Chair of the Western Canadian Deans of Arts, Science, and Indigenous Studies. Her work reflects a deep commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, and Indigenization in higher education.

Meet our plenary session chairs

Metropolis Canada

Corinne Prince
Special Advisor
ACS-Metropolis

Corinne retired in July of 2023 after almost 33 years with the federal government including time with the CRTC, the Secretary of State, Human Resources Development Canada and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

Over her career, Corinne lead the growth and transformation of a number of federal programs including the Canada Student Loans Program, the Foreign Credential Recognition Program, Labour Mobility programming, the Going to Canada Immigration Portal, the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, the National Occupational Classification system, Labour Market Information, Career Information, Essential Skills programming, the Settlement Program and the Resettlement Program. She also lead legislative changes to the Canada Student Loans Act, the Canada Student Financial Assistance Act, the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, and the Official Languages Act.

Meet our plenary session chairs

Metropolis Canada

Patrick MacKenzie,

CEO

Immigrant Employment Council of BC

Patrick MacKenzie has devoted his career to the intersection of people and the economy. For him, immigration is more than a policy area—it's a pathway to creating a more vibrant, prosperous economy where people and communities flourish. Patrick believes that when individuals succeed, so does society, and he has championed this vision across his work in public service from coast to coast.

With almost 20 years in public service, including a decade at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, Patrick held pivotal roles in both Ottawa and Vancouver, driving progress with private and public sector partners on key issues affecting Indigenous and immigrant populations. His expertise extends into immigrant economic integration, credential and skills recognition, and labour mobility—areas he sees as essential for unlocking Canada's full potential. As an advocate for thoughtful dialogue, Patrick's connections give him a unique view of the realities and aspirations of both communities and the broader economy. His people-first approach is evident in his leadership and in the lasting partnerships he builds with employers and immigrants.

With this commitment to growth through inclusivity, Patrick continues to meaningfully contribute to economic and social progress centred on human potential.

Rob Roberts
Editor in Chief at National Post

Rob Roberts, who has held senior editorial positions at The Canadian Press since late 2015, is leaving the news service to become editor-in-chief at the National Post.

Mr. Roberts began his career in radio before he moved to editorial positions at newspapers in Halifax, Ottawa, Montreal and Toronto. He was one of the Toronto-based National Post's original staffers and was its national editor prior to his move to The Canadian Press in December, 2015.

Mr. Roberts was chief of The Canadian Press's Atlantic bureau until he moved to the agency's head office in Toronto in May on an interim basis to assist Andrea Baillie, the agency's managing editor and acting editor-in-chief. In that capacity, Mr. Roberts co-ordinated coverage of stories by various bureaus and departments in consultation with other Canadian Press senior managers.

Tony Keller
Columnist
The Globe & Mail

Tony joined The Globe in 1991 as an editorial writer; over a career of more than 30 years he has also served as editor of The Financial Post Magazine, managing editor of Maclean's and a TV news anchor on BNN (now BNN-Bloomberg). He returned to The Globe in 2013 to become the paper's editorials editor and remained in that position until 2022.

Originally from Montreal, he's a graduate of Duke University and Yale Law School and has also been a visiting fellow at the University of Toronto Faculty of Law and the Wilson Center in Washington D.C. He's been nominated three times for the National Newspaper Award for editorial writing, winning in 2016.

Anil Arora,
Adjunct Lecturer in Public Policy, John F Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Chief Statistician of Canada, Statistics Canada 2016 to 2024

Anil Arora has dedicated his professional career to partnering with the business sector, academia, internationally and with all three levels of government, building a culture of innovation, successfully delivering complex and transformational digital solutions, strengthened consumer and citizen trust, and increased organizational relevance and impact. Anil was appointed as the Chief Statistician of Canada in September 2016, overseeing the country's preeminent data agency, where he led modernizing its digital governance, technical and data infrastructure. He co-authored and helped steer the Government of Canada's data strategy.

With significant experience in the private and public sectors, as well as leading influential international forums in the OECD and the United Nations, Anil has helped shape the data and digital landscape domestically and globally. He currently provides consultative services globally with the World Bank, helping countries build robust data and digital strategies. Anil has advised CEO's, Prime Ministers, Cabinet Ministers, Premiers, Deputy Ministers, and led Business Missions internationally. Anil has authored several papers, is a regular keynote speaker and lecturer, and a sought-after thought leader.. Anil has led large and complex organizations with multi-billion dollar budgets and tens of thousands of employees. Anil's leadership spans senior strategic, science, policy, program delivery and regulatory roles in the oil and gas sector, mining and critical minerals, forestry, nuclear, public health, drug safety, food, medical devices, and natural health products. Anil has earned numerous accolades, including being named Outstanding Innovator (2023), One of the Top 25 Immigrants in Canada (2022), Policy Maker (2022), as well as receiving several Leadership Awards by the Business Community and the Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada (2009-2024).

Anil is passionate about evidence-informed decision making, responsibly using data and technology to create value, assisting organizations in leveraging diversity and inclusion as a competitive advantage, and building healthy and sustainable communities for the benefit of all citizens.

Anil holds a BSC (Petroleum Geology) from the University of Alberta (1985), a Graduate Certificate in Public Sector Leadership and Governance from the University of Ottawa (2009), is a Graduate of the Advanced Leadership Program at the Canada School of Public Service, with further studies in Computing Science and Management.

Dr. Rupa Banerjee

Canada Chair in Economic Inclusion, Employment & Entrepreneurship of Canada`s Immigrants, Toronto Metropolitan University

Dr. Rupa Banerjee is the Canada Research Chair in Economic inclusion, Employment and Entrepreneurship of Canada's Immigrants and Professor of Human Resource Management and Organizational Behaviour. Her primary research interest lies in the employment integration of new immigrants to Canada. She is particularly interested in the institutional barriers facing new immigrants in the Canadian labour market.

In addition, she is interested in workplace diversity and ethno-racial discrimination, particularly as it applies to second-generation immigrants. Dr. Banerjee's research has appeared in such journals as *International Migration Review*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, *Journal of Labor Research and Relations Industrielles/Industrial Relations.*

Dr. Ather Akbari

Professor
Chair Atlantic Research Group on Economics of Immigration, Aging and Diversity, Saint Mary's University

Dr. Ather Akbari is professor of economics at Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Canada. He is a labour economist with research interest in issues related to economics of immigration and education. He has published in several peer-reviewed academic journals on public finance and labour market impacts of immigration in Canada and has also conducted immigration research projects for federal and provincial governments in Canada. He has testified thrice in front of the Parliamentary Standing Committees on immigration.

His recent major projects include: 1) Immigration in Nova Scotia: Who comes, Who Stays, Who Leaves and Why? 2) Impacts of Provincial and Territorial Immigration programs in Canada; 3) Satisfaction and Well-being of International Students in Atlantic Canada. His on-going project is entitled Twenty-Five years of Immigration in Atlantic Canada in Statistics. National and international newspapers such as The Globe and Mail, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, New York Times and The Economist magazine have cited his immigration research. He chairs the Atlantic Research Group on Economics of Immigration, Aging and Diversity (ARGEIAD) and has been the Academic Coordinator of the Master of Applied Economics (MAE) program and Post-Baccalaureate Certificate in Applied Economics program (PBCAE) at the Sobey School of Business.

Dan Gignac
Chief People Officer
Murphy Hospitality group

Dan Gignac is an authentic, results-driven human resources leader with twenty years of experience aligning people strategies with business goals and building strong, inclusive workplace cultures. He is known for leading organizational change, developing high-performing teams, and fostering positive employee experiences.

Dan spent over a decade with one of Canada's largest construction and infrastructure firms before joining Murphy Hospitality Group in January 2022, relocating to Prince Edward Island from Brantford, Ontario, with his wife Emily and their three daughters, Callie, Stella, and Violet.

Outside of work, Dan is a passionate sports fan and spends much of his free time coaching girls' hockey.

Stephen Harrington

Partner, Global Workforce Strategies & Intelligence leader
Deloitte Canada

Stephen leads Deloitte's Workforce Strategies & Intelligence business globally, bringing over 25 years of experience helping organizations transform how they attract, develop, and engage talent.

He partners with clients to design and implement workforce strategies that create business value and help employees find purpose and impact, especially as organizations navigate the future of work and the age of AI. Stephen's expertise spans attracting and retaining talent, employee value proposition, compensation, succession planning, competency modeling, workforce planning, and leadership development.

He is also a frequent writer and speaker on the future of work, innovation, and workforce trends, and has published several papers on these topics.

Vanessa Chouinard

Associate Deputy Minister for the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration
Government of Nova Scotia

Vanessa is the Associate Deputy Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration, where she supports the Deputy Minister and Minister and provides leadership across the Safety, Immigration and Population Growth branches, as well as the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency.

She brings experience across oil and gas, professional services, and public service, with a focus on strategy, change management, and service improvement. Since joining Service Nova Scotia in 2008, Vanessa has held senior leadership roles across Community Services and Health and Wellness, including leading public health during the COVID-19 response and supporting province-wide health system transformation as Associate Deputy Minister of Health and Wellness.

Vanessa is passionate about developing leaders and advancing outcomes for Nova Scotians. She holds a Bachelor of Information Systems from St. Francis Xavier University and an MBA from Dalhousie University.

Catherine Scott

Assistant Deputy Minister, Settlement and Citizens, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)

Catherine Scott has been the Assistant Deputy Minister, Settlement and Citizens at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) since March 2022.

Her responsibilities span the integration of newcomers into Canada and their transition to citizenship and obtaining passports. Catherine joined IRCC in 2019 as Director General, Refugee Affairs, and was then Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Program Policy before taking on her current role.

Prior to this, she spent a decade working at Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) on both labour market and social policy issues. During this time, she led a significant renewal of the federal homelessness program. Catherine led extensive consultations to develop the first Government of Canada social innovation and social finance strategy. She has also managed the Foreign Credential Recognition Program and launched the first federal initiative to support capacity-building in Black Canadian communities. Catherine has also worked for the Commissioner of Official Languages, the Privy Council Office and the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Catherine holds an honours Bachelor of Arts in International Studies and French from Glendon College, York University and an M.A. in International Relations from Université Laval.

Metropolis Canada

Shamira Madhany

Managing Director Canada and Deputy Executive Director, World Education Services (WES)

Shamira Madhany joined WES in 2018 after more than two decades of government service in Ontario. Her last position was Assistant Deputy Minister for Health, Education, and Social Policy, in the Cabinet Office. She also served as Chief Diversity and Accessibility Officer, ensuring that 62,000 employees met accessibility and inclusion goals.

Shamira has extensive experience working with employer associations, licensing bodies, non-profit organizations, and the post-secondary sector. She served as the chief architect of several government programs that enable internationally educated professionals to obtain employment in their fields.

Shamira is a guest lecturer at Queen's University and the University of Toronto Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy. She also serves on the boards of Windmill Microlending, Touchstone Institute, Herzing College Toronto, and the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC).

Myriam Mekni

CEO
Catholic Centre for Immigrants
Ottawa

Myriam Mekni is the Chief Executive Officer for CCI Ottawa. Previously, she served as Managing Director of Rising Tide Community Initiatives and as the Executive Director of MAGMA, the Multicultural Association of the Greater Moncton Area.

In addition to her role at CCI Ottawa, Myriam is a member of the National Settlement and Integration Council. She serves on the OCASI Board of Directors as the Eastern Regional Director; the Executive Committee of the Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership; as a director on the board of World Skills Employment Centre, the Caldwell Family Centre Board of Directors and is a partner of the Local Agencies Serving Immigrants.

Passionate about human rights and justice for all, Myriam is a member of the Executive Committee of the Canadian Council for Refugees and has served on the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission and the New Brunswick Women's Council.

Fluent in English, French, and Arabic, Myriam is dedicated to empowering both new and established Canadians. Her leadership and community impact have been recognized through several honours, including being named one of the Most Inspiring Immigrants in the Maritimes (2020) by My East Coast Experience and being selected as one of the Top 20 Under 40 (2020) by the Greater Moncton Chamber of Commerce.

Anita Stellinga

Chief Executive Officer
COSTI Immigrant Services

Anita Stellinga is the Chief Executive Officer of COSTI Immigrant Services, bringing over 25 years of leadership experience in the not-for-profit sector. Her career is deeply rooted in settlement and community services, and as a former newcomer to Canada, Anita understands firsthand the critical role organizations like COSTI play in helping people build new lives.

Anita began her career on the frontlines of the settlement sector, supporting language training, refugee services, and mental health programs. She later joined United Way Peel Region, advancing to senior leadership and serving as Interim CEO. During her tenure, she played a pivotal role in the historic merger that created United Way Greater Toronto, the largest United Way in the world, strengthening operations, strategy, and community impact.

A champion of collaboration and systems-level change, Anita co-founded the Peel Newcomer Strategy Group and co-chaired the Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy Committee, shaping regional responses to poverty, equity, and inclusion. Prior to joining COSTI, she served as Vice President of Corporate Communications and Public Policy at United Way Greater Toronto, where she led initiatives in governance, advocacy, and equity, including the organization's Reconciliation and Equity Action Plan.

Anita holds a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from the University of Toronto at Mississauga. She currently chairs the Governance Committee at Partners Community Health and is a past Chair of STRIDE, a mental health agency serving Peel and Halton.