



Immigration Settlement Services and Gaps in Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta

This community report is part of the "Immigration Settlement Services and Gaps in CIC's Western Region" study.

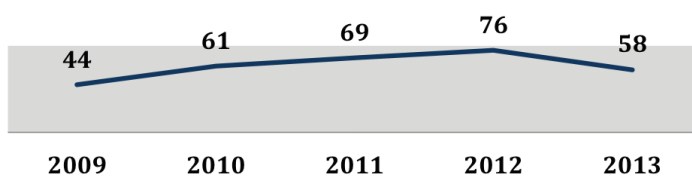


Population (2014): 22,808 residents.

Source: City of Fort Saskatchewan Municipal Census, 2014

Permanent Resident Landings Fort Saskatchewan 2009-2013

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada



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Data sources: 6 Service Providing Organizations (SPOs) receiving funding from Provincial, NGO, other federal, and various other sources.

- Findings validated locally

SETTLEMENT SERVICES



Top services offered

- ESL language training
- Needs assessment and referrals
- Multicultural programming



Key gaps identified

- Affordable childcare
- Welcoming and information services
- Legal services and general advice
- Services for youths
- General lack of capacity among existing SPOs
- Women's shelter



Barriers to access services

- English language proficiency
- No local/centralized settlement agency
- Access to transportation
- Lack of knowledge among newcomers of existing services
- Foreign credential recognition



Top services needed

- Academic and after school tutoring
- Information and welcoming services
- Help finding skilled jobs and job training / upgrading
- Transportation



Services needed by newcomers ineligible for CIC funded services

Language training, low cost housing and furnishing, information and orientation and transportation.

PARTNERSHIPS



Fort Saskatchewan has a well-developed and diverse service provider partnership network. The most commonly identified partnerships exist with child and family services, civil service groups, religious associations, multicultural associations, police, the municipality, welcoming services, schools and school boards, and the public library.

INTEGRATION IN COMMUNITY



The general perception is that it is somewhat difficult for newcomers to settle and find a job in Fort Saskatchewan, although some say it is somewhat easy. Language, transportation, childcare and a lack of centralized services were identified as the main barriers to settlement and integration in the community. Foreign credential recognition was also identified as a barrier to finding work.

IMMIGRATION SETTLEMENT SERVICES AND GAPS IN CIC'S WESTERN REGION: Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta

Introduction

The purpose of this project is to better understand the settlement and integration services available to newcomers and to explore the service gaps and opportunities in Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta and 28 other rural communities across Western Canada. This research offers a current snapshot of Fort Saskatchewan by providing information gathered from a sample of local service providers. It is not a comprehensive review of all settlement services in Fort Saskatchewan. Data was collected in October and November 2014 from six organizations that serve newcomers in Fort Saskatchewan through a telephone survey completed by a representative from each organization. All six organizations receive provincial funding, one receives other federal funding, one receives private funding, and one receives funding from NGOs. In addition, three participants receive funding from other sources. Three survey respondents participated in a feedback session on the primary survey findings via teleconference held in December 2014, and one provided feedback via email.

Background

Fort Saskatchewan is located in close proximity to a major urban centre, Edmonton. In recent years it has experienced steady growth in its population. Growth is attributed to labour needs in local heavy industries primarily related to petrochemical and resource extraction sectors. As a growing satellite community, Fort Saskatchewan has also recently attracted many large commercial businesses, adding another layer to the local economy.

1. Although none of the participating SPOs received direct funding from CIC, the community was included in the provincial sample based on the recommendation of the Provincial Advisory panel and after there was no response from the Cold Lake community to participate in the study, and the fact the Okotoks and High River communities were excluded from the study since they already had LIP funding.

Community Settlement Concerns

All SPO representatives feel that the number of newcomers settling in Fort Saskatchewan has increased in the last five years. The main driver of this trend is economic growth and associated labour needs. Inter- and intra-provincial mobility and the Temporary Foreign Worker Program have contributed to a growing newcomer population.

Half of the participants felt that it is very difficult for participants to settle in Fort Saskatchewan, due in part to a lack of cultural and religious awareness in the community, as well as public misconceptions about the Temporary Foreign Worker program. Some, however, felt that it is somewhat easy to settle. Participants were divided on how easy it is for newcomers to get jobs; half felt it is somewhat to very difficult, while half felt it was somewhat easy to easy. Some participants noted that jobs were available to newcomers; however, those jobs often did not fit with the experience, education or set of job skills possessed by newcomers. Furthermore, it was noted that due to a lack of access to affordable childcare and transportation, newcomers found it difficult to access job training and upgrading of existing skills. Therefore, language and transportation barriers were identified as negatively affecting outcomes in the labour market.

In follow-up consultations with service providers a lack of English language proficiency, a lack of a centralized settlement agency, access to affordable child care and access to transportation were cited as common barriers to settlement. In particular, participants highlighted the acute need for a dedicated, formal and professional information and welcoming service that could inform newcomers about available services. Service providers noted that most newcomers who seek out their services are informed through word of mouth, rather than receiving direction from officials. Service providers also noted in the follow-up that while counselling and intervention services are available for women who suffer domestic abuse, there is no local women's shelter. Based on this shortcoming local newcomer women must travel to the community of Sherwood Park where there is an existing shortage of shelter space.

Available Settlement Services

Fort Saskatchewan has a developed settlement and integration service sector with at least 12 services (out of 27 key services listed in appendix A) offered by the participant organizations or someone in the community. During follow-up consultations one organization explained that they offer a holistic range of support and services through a co-operative referral system. Yet, participants noted a need for improvement or expansion of services related to language training, transportation, affordable and safe housing, affordable childcare, academic tutoring and school service supports, general services for youth, and mentoring.

Nearly all participants say they provide services to at least one group of newcomers who are ineligible for CIC-funded services. Ineligible groups include temporary foreign workers (TFWs), new and returning naturalized Canadian citizens, refugee claimants, and international students. It should be noted that none of the participating service providers received CIC funding. Participants indicated that all ineligible groups are in need of settlement services. Language training and resources, information and welcoming, affordable housing and furnishings, and transportation are listed as the services most needed by ineligible newcomers. In the follow-up consultations participants suggested that their current funding levels do not meet the level required to provide necessary services to newcomers.

Tracking and Planning

Nearly all participants engage in regular assessment of newcomers' needs; half conduct assessments with other service providers, two do so within their organization - one does not conduct regular assessments. Needs assessments take a variety of forms such as: one-on-one conversations, community meetings, and talks with other community organizations. One organization conducts such activities through a yearly community survey and quarterly meetings with service providers. One participant identified a need to better develop assessment tools.

Specific Capacities

As previously indicated service provider organizations that participated in the survey and follow-up consultation feel they do not have the necessary capacity to serve newcomers. Staffing, financial support, offering services in both official languages, and staff training were identified as areas where capacity needs to be improved. Organizations noted that existing coordination among services is satisfactory. In some areas, such as developing support groups for newcomer women and developing multicultural programs, services are growing. However, as the newcomer population expands, more capacity will be needed to meet future needs.

Partnerships

All service provider participants report being engaged in partnership with other community organizations. Participants indicate that they are in partnership with 14 of the 21 possible community partners listed in the survey (see appendix B). The most commonly reported partners include child and family services, ethno-cultural associations, municipal government, religious organizations, civil society groups, schools and school boards, and police. As outlined in the follow-up consultation, service provider organizations are actively seeking greater co-ordination of services through an existing program (Building Bridges). It was suggested that the Fort Saskatchewan Public Library could host a settlement practitioner, similar to the partnered services provided at area libraries. It could also act as a resource centre for print and online information. The main partnerships to promote and ensure high use of these services are the Families First Society, Multicultural Association and Kabisig Society. In addition, it was suggested that one way of reaching each partner's full potential is to create a "landmark site" that would highlight the services offered by each provider and that would guide both the clients and other service providers in making connections.

The activities conducted in partnership were categorized into three groups; settlement (e.g., getting jobs and housing, daily functioning), integration (e.g., teaching labour rules and human rights), and welcoming (e.g., orientation to community, civic events). In Fort Saskatchewan, activities conducted in partnership are mainly welcoming (mentioned by all participants) and integration activities (mentioned by half of the participants). The city of Fort Saskatchewan was identified as a key agent in establishing and supporting partnerships in the community. Given this preexisting level of partnering, and number of partnerships that currently exist in Fort Saskatchewan, the community would be a candidate for a LIP.

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Appendix A – List of Possible Services

SETTLEMENT

- Greeting upon arrival/initial reception
- Information and orientation
- Needs assessment and referral
- Interpretation services
- Language assessment
- Language training
- Help finding housing
- Help with daily life (e.g., registering for school, getting a bank account)
- Transportation support

ECONOMIC

- Help finding a job
- Educational upgrading
- Recognition of foreign credentials
- Investment opportunities
- Job-specific language training
- Help setting up a business
- Occupational/business mentorship and networking
- Financial supports

SOCIAL

- Childcare
- Cultural Events
- Recreational services
- Legal support/referral
- Health Services
- Mental Health Services
- Social inclusion/ integration support
- Services for seniors
- Services for women
- Services for youth

Appendix B – Possible Organizational Partnerships

1. School/School Boards
2. Settlement service providers
3. Health services
4. Municipal offices/EDO
5. Civil society groups
6. Francophone organizations
7. Language training providers
8. Children/Family services
9. Businesses
10. Police Force
11. Ethno-cultural groups
12. Religious organizations
13. Public library
14. Other: Building Bridges, Family First group, Boys and Girls club, Careers Under Construction, Parent Link Centres.