



Immigration Settlement Services and Gaps in Virden, Manitoba

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

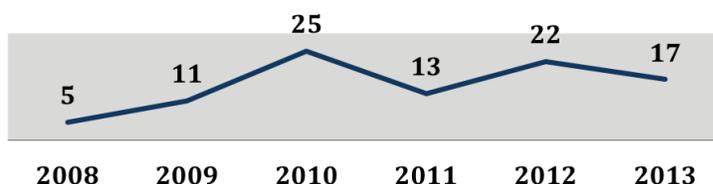


Population (2011): 3,114 residents

Source: Statistics Canada, 2011 Census

Permanent Resident Landings Virden 2008-2013

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada



UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA



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Data sources: 4 Service Providing Organizations (SPOs) receiving funding from CIC and other sources.

• Findings validated locally

SETTLEMENT SERVICES



Top services offered

- Greeting upon arrival
- Language training
- Information and orientation
- Assistance with finding a job, housing and daily life
- Occupational mentoring
- Legal supports
- Cultural events



Key gaps identified

- Life skill mentors and social support
- Interpretation
- Health and mental health services
- Lack of adequate organizational capacities for SPOs
- All services need to expand
- Communication among SPOs needs to improve



Barriers to access services

- Language difficulties of newcomers
- Ineligibility for services
- Transportation difficulties
- Lack of childcare
- Cost of services for the ineligible newcomers
- Hours of the day that the services are offered



Top services needed

- Language training and interpretation
- Assistance with daily life, finding housing and job
- Social support and mentorship
- Cultural events
- Information and orientation
- Legal support and referral



Services needed by newcomers ineligible for CIC funded services

- Language training and support
- Introduction and orientation
- Assistance with daily life, finding housing and job
- Recreational programs
- Social support and mentorship

PARTNERSHIPS



Virden service providers are partnering with others to deliver services to newcomers. 3 out of the 4 participants were engaged in a variety of partnerships.

- Settlement, Integration and welcoming activities were all reported in partnership, but welcoming was the least common activity.
- Strong partnership foundation; however there is a need for stronger communication among SPOs and stakeholders.

INTEGRATION IN COMMUNITY



Perceptions vary regarding how easy or hard it is for newcomers to settle and get jobs in Virden.

- Social supports and peer group support offered through Virden Immigrant Service helped settlement, but cost and scarcity of housing and language difficulties made settlement more challenging.
- Language, foreign credential recognition and need for educational upgrading were the key challenges to employment.

IMMIGRATION SETTLEMENT SERVICES AND GAPS IN CIC'S WESTERN REGION: Virден, Manitoba

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 Virден, Manitoba and 28 other rural communities across Western Canada. This research offers a current snapshot of Virден by providing information gathered from a sample of local service providers. It is not a comprehensive review of all settlement services in Virден. Data were collected in October and November 2014 from 4 organizations serving newcomers in Virден through a telephone survey conducted with a representative from each organization. Only one of the 4 participants received funding from the CIC and 2 participants identified "other" as their funding sources, but did not specify. One participant worked independently and did not receive any funding. Upon the completion of data collection, a draft of the Virден community report was provided to all 4 survey participants and 3 additional immigration stakeholders in Virден in order to offer them the opportunity to review the report and provide feedback. Three of the 4 survey participants and 2 additional stakeholders provided feedback, which was then integrated in the report to ensure the report portrays the community as accurately as possible.

Background

The town of Virден is in the southwest corner of Manitoba, west of Brandon and close to the provincial boarder with Saskatchewan. Virден is quite rural and is roughly 80 kilometres from Brandon, which is the closest city. The Canadian Pacific Railway established Virден in 1883. The city of Virден had 3,114 residents in 2011 and has grown 3.5% between 2006 (3010) and 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2014). Virден has been know since the 1950s as the "Oil Capital of Manitoba" and has a large oil and gas industry, with over 500 new wells being drilled in 2006. Virден is also highly engaged in the agricultural industry.

Community Settlement Concerns

Three out of the 4 service provider representatives felt the population of newcomers had increased in the last five years and the fourth felt it had actually decreased. Though this was counter to the stakeholder feedback, the participant who felt the number newcomers had decreased cited the loss of newcomers to other areas with more employment opportunities. Though most participants felt the numbers of newcomers had increased it was observed that fewer families and more individual workers were coming. Reasons for the growth in newcomers was attributed to employment opportunities (often in Virден's restaurants), family and friends joining previously arrived newcomers, and the presence of more transient workers.

Three participants felt it was somewhat difficult and one participant felt it was somewhat easy for newcomers to settle into the community. The main reasons for citing it was somewhat difficult were lack of affordable housing, language difficulties of newcomers, lack of social support network, and overcoming some residents' preconceived notions about newcomers. Reasons for ease of settlement that were identified were employment opportunities and the work Virден Settlement Services has been doing with social inclusion and social support groups.

In terms of employment, participants varied in their perception of the ease for newcomers to get jobs in Virден. One participant felt it was very difficult and another felt it was easy, but 2 were right in the middle claiming it was somewhat easy for newcomers to find jobs. Some participants stated there were no concerns getting jobs and that language was not always an issue, because many jobs (low paid and low skilled jobs mainly) do not require English language skills. However, other participants disagreed with this and identified language as the primary barrier to employment in Virден, especially in the oil fields where safety is critical. Foreign credential recognition is reported as a major issue, especially for those newcomers who arrive as permanent residents with foreign education and training, whom are subsequently under-employed. In addition, some educational or skill upgrading is needed by newcomers; for example, a truck driver needs to learn how to drive in the snow.

Available Settlement Services

Virден has a developed settlement and integration service sector with most of the services listed (26 key services – see appendix A) being offered by the participant organizations or someone in the community. However, all 4 participants agreed the services offered need to expand, with one participant mentioning the expansion of services was currently underway to meet the growing demand for services. The 4 services providers in this sample offered the following services (See appendix A): greeting upon arrival, information and orientation, assistance finding employment, housing and with daily living, needs assessment and referral, legal supports and referral, language training, job skills upgrading, occupational mentorship and networking, cultural events, social inclusion and integration. One service was provided but was not listed on the inventory (See appendix A) and was will creation. The services not offered by participants or another SPO in the community were transportation, childcare, interpretation, health services, mental health services, recreational services, and specific services for women, youth and seniors. Several services were identified as needing to be offered or expanded to meet demand; 24 hour support, interpretation, language assessment and training, assistance finding a job, and recreational services.

The top services identified as needed by newcomers were language training and supports, orientation to the community and Canadian culture, assistance finding housing, employment and with daily life, mentorship program, legal support/training, social support, and cultural events.

In regards to newcomers who are ineligible for CIC-funded services, participants almost unanimously indicated temporary foreign workers (TFW), new and returning naturalized citizens, refugee claimants and international students were all in need of all settlement services. There was particular emphasis on the settlement needs of TFWs in Virден. It was felt CIC funding should be extended to meet the settlement needs of those who are currently ineligible, but TFWs in particular. In lieu of CIC funding, employers were identified as a crucial partner is supporting the settlement of TFWs and employers should be more diligent in making sure their TFWs have the basic requirements, such as housing and appropriate winter clothing. It was even suggested, if employers bring TFWs to the community they should be required to ensure adequate housing, which is currently not the case. Participants also indicated the most needed services for those who are currently ineligible for CIC-funded services were mainly language training and supports, but also orientation to the community and Canadian culture, social support, mentorship, recreational programs, and assistance with daily life.

Several barriers to accessing services were identified by participants, such as language difficulties of newcomers, ineligibility for services, lack of childcare, transportation difficulties, cost of services for the ineligible newcomers, hours of the day services are offered. One participant felt some employers are resistant to their employees accessing services, mainly out of fear that the more newcomers learn they would want to improve jobwise, which might lead to turnover.

Tracking and Planning

Only one of the four participant service providers reported their organization regularly, independently assessed the service needs of the newcomers in their community. These needs assessments, which were conducted on an ongoing basis, were casual in nature, and included stakeholder feedback.

Specific Capacities

Participants were asked about organizational capacity on 10 items listed in Appendix C and indicated if they currently had adequate capacity or inadequate capacity regarding each item. More participants reported not having enough capacity than they reported having adequate capacities. All four organizations identified they did not have adequate capacity to create governing documents or a strategic plan. Three out of the four participants indicated they were unable to provided services in both official languages. However, all organizational capacities (see appendix C) were identified as being adequate by at least one participant, except the capacity to create governing and strategic documents. Three out of the 4 participants indicated they had the capacity to mobilize the community to support and welcome newcomers. Half the sample indicated they currently had enough government funding and had the capacity to coordinate services with other SPOs. Each of the following capacities were identified by at least 1 participant as currently being adequate: staff, funding from other sources, and staff skills for delivery and maintenance of services.

Partnerships

Three out of the four service provider participants reported being engaged in partnership with other community organizations in Virden (for a list of possible partnerships see appendix B). Partnerships were cited with schools/school districts, employers, SPOs, Chamber of commerce, umbrella organization, housing services, municipalities, police force, religious organizations, public libraries, language training provides and newcomers.

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). Though integration, settlement and welcoming were all reported as being conducted in partnership, welcoming was the least commonly reported partnership activity. It would appear Virden has a strong foundation in partnership. Though given the divergent opinions about the state of settlement services in Virden, the first step in improving the services and meeting the needs of newcomers may be in improving communication between community service providers and stakeholders.

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Appendix A – List of Possible Services

SETTLEMENT

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

ECONOMIC

- j. Help finding a job
- k. Educational upgrading
- l. Recognition of foreign credentials
- m. Investment opportunities
- n. Job-specific language training
- o. Help setting up a business
- p. Occupational/business mentorship and networking
- q. Financial supports

SOCIAL

- r. Childcare
- s. Cultural Events
- t. Recreational services
- u. Legal support/referral
- v. Health Services
- w. Mental Health Services
- x. Social inclusion/ integration support
- y. Services for seniors
- z. Services for women
- aa. Services for youth

Appendix B – Possible Organizational Partnerships

- School/School Boards
- Umbrella organizations
- Newcomers (individuals)
- Housing services
- Settlement service providers
- Health services
- Municipal offices/ EDO
- Civil society groups
- Francophone organizations
- Language training providers
- Children/Family services
- Businesses
- Chambers of Commerce
- Police Force
- Universities/Research Networks
- Ethno-cultural groups
- Religious organizations
- Public libraries
- Foundations

Appendix C – Possible Organizational Capacities

- Staff to provide services
- Financial support from government sources to maintain current services
- Financial support from non-government sources to maintain current services
- Communication with stakeholders
- Coordinating services with other service providers
- Staff skills for delivery and maintenance of services
- Mobilization of community to support and welcome newcomers
- Creation of governing and strategic plan
- Meet reporting requirements
- Provide services in both official languages
- Creation of governing and strategic plan
- Meet reporting requirements
- Provide services in both official languages