

# COMMUNITY REPORT

## Immigration in 5 Rural Manitoba Communities with a Focus on Refugees: Steinbach – Kleeefeld Case Study

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The Institute has diverse research affiliations, and multiple community and government linkages related to its rural development mandate. RDI disseminates information to a variety of constituents and stakeholders and makes research information and results widely available to the public either in printed form or by means of public lectures, seminars, workshops and conferences.

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## Introduction

In November 2015, a national resettlement initiative was undertaken to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees across Canada. Since November 4th, 2015 the Government of Canada has welcomed more than 29,700 Syrian refugees (August 1st, 2016) and the commitment to resettling more refugees to Canada is continuing in 2016<sup>1</sup>. More than 1000 Syrian refugees have resettled in Manitoba and, of those, 90 have settled outside of Winnipeg, in rural communities and small centres. This research project was initiated out of this experience and is funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) through Manitoba Association of Newcomer Serving Organizations (MANSO).

The purpose of the project is to learn from the current experiences in five rural communities in Manitoba and examine the settlement and community capacity of these smaller centres to resettle refugees. Selected communities are those who have received newcomers and have recently received refugees or have an active plan in place for the arrival of refugees.

This research project builds on the 2015 “Immigration Settlement Services and Gaps in CIC’s Western region”<sup>2</sup> study conducted by the Rural Development institute (RDI) and Immigration Research West (IRW). It offered a snapshot of the immigration settlement services sector in 29 selected rural communities across the western provinces (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba) and in the three territories (Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut).

1 Government of Canada, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (retrieved from <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/welcome/milestones.asp>). date accessed August 8, 2016.

2 Ashton et al. (2015, May). Immigration Settlement Services and Gaps in CIC’s Western Region. Retrieved from <https://www.brandonu.ca/rdi/publication/immigration-settlement-services-and-gaps-in-citizenship-and-immigration-canadas-western-region/>

## Research Method

This study follows the same method as the 2015 study. Five communities<sup>3</sup> were selected that are distributed geographically and represent a sample of the provinces’ smaller cities<sup>4</sup>. The five cases are: Dauphin, Portage la Prairie, Boissevain-Killarney, Steinbach-Kleefeld and Morden-Winkler-Altona-Carman.

In the five communities, data were collected through 30 telephone interviews with a senior official of the Service Provider Organizations (SPOs) or a representative of the Refugee Sponsorship Group. The sample of participating service providers included both SPOs that have a primary mandate to serve newcomers (funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada or other sources) and other community organizations supporting newcomers in some capacity. This research did not include newcomers or refugees and as such the findings are based solely on the opinions and perceptions of SPOs and refugee sponsorship groups’ representatives.

Once data were collected, a draft report was compiled for each community. Each was shared with the research participants and other local stakeholders. Their feedback was incorporated and reports finalized.

3 Similarly as in the Ashton et al.(2015) study, the term “community” is conceptualized in geographic terms as either a “local community” that consists of a single municipality, or a “regional community,” comprising two or more neighboring municipalities and/or areas that are not incorporated as municipalities.

4 Winnipeg is excluded from the study together with the communities participated in the Ashton et al. (2015) study with an exception of Dauphin, due to its recent experience with refugee resettlement (15 individuals as of August 8, 2016).

# Steinbach – Kleefeld Case Study

The Steinbach-Kleefeld case is a snapshot of perceptions from five participants. Organization representatives reported receiving funding for their operations from IRCC, and both provincial and private sources. Three participants and one additional stakeholder provided feedback to finalize the report.

## Community Context

Steinbach, a city of 13,524 (2011)<sup>5</sup>, is located 58 km southeast of Winnipeg, Manitoba. As the hub of economic activities in southeastern Manitoba, Steinbach is the regional shopping and service centre and agriculture supply centre for a large area<sup>6</sup>. Kleefeld is Manitoba's Honey Capital and it is also known for its dairy production<sup>7</sup>. The town is located about 17km west of Steinbach.



According to IRCC, 13 refugees have arrived in the Steinbach-Kleefeld area under the Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) sponsorship program. All five research participants confirmed the presence of refugees in their community and identified Syria and other African countries (e.g., Congo, Ethiopia) as the main countries of origin. Four out of five participants were aware of an existing plan for the arrival of more refugees in their community before the end of 2016. Four participants were aware of one more family coming; however two of those estimated three to five more families by the end of the year. All participants expected refugees to come through the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program.

## Settlement in the Community

Newcomer settlement in the Steinbach-Kleefeld community was considered as somewhat easy by three out of five participants, while two felt it lies within the difficult range (i.e., somewhat difficult and difficult). The reasons for the ease or difficulty of newcomers or refugee settlement vary. Settlement is considered a lot easier for newcomers that have family members already in the community and for the PSRs since by the time they arrive there is already an established network of connections and supports in place for them. Overall, there seems to be enough support from the community and individual community members that assist in overcoming some of the challenges. For example, even though there is no mosque in the community, church groups drive newcomers to Winnipeg to attend the mosque. The main concerns participants identified, which made settlement more challenging for newcomers were: the lack of public transportation, low English language proficiency, not enough entry level jobs, and the reduction in support service funding. In the feedback provided by one individual the combination of lack of public transportation and large distances that create a feeling of isolation for newcomers (especially in the long winter months) was seen as an on-going concern that affects newcomer settlement in Steinbach-Kleefeld.

<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada 2011 Census

<sup>6</sup> City of Steinbach. Retrieved from <http://www.steinbach.ca/business-industry/>

<sup>7</sup> The town of Kleefeld. Retrieved from <http://kleefeld.ca/about>

Table 1 – Settlement Services offered in Steinbach-Kleefeld as reported by the five research participants

		
<h3>Information and Orientation</h3>	<h3>Literacy and Language Training</h3>	<h3>Support Services</h3>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information sessions</li> <li>• Initial reception</li> <li>• Assistance with documents and with daily life</li> <li>• Needs assessment and referral</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language training (Various levels)</li> <li>• English for work, English at worksite (employers)</li> <li>• Volunteer English tutors and EAL classes in churches</li> <li>• Language assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Childcare (for attending classes)</li> <li>• Transportation (by volunteers)</li> <li>• Interpretation/translation</li> <li>• Women, youth focused programming</li> <li>• Parenting support</li> <li>• Assisting with getting access to medical supports</li> <li>• Resource Centre (access to public computers, telephones, etc)</li> </ul>
		
<h3>Labour Market Access Supports</h3>	<h3>Community Connections</h3>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assistance finding a job (resume building, interview skills training)</li> <li>• Connections with employers</li> <li>• Referrals to professional organizations and information for foreign credential recognition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer support (especially through church groups)</li> <li>• Mentoring program</li> <li>• Welcoming communities (e.g sports programs, cooking classes- newcomers teach the community and vice versa, community event promoting cultural diversity)</li> </ul>	

The individual suggested that the community needs a cultural or drop-in centre for newcomers to access supports and have opportunities for recreation activities and social connections.

## Settlement Services

There is a variety of settlement services and supports offered to newcomers in Steinbach-Kleefeld as shown in Table 1 (page 3). In Table 1, within each service category, services are reported in the order of the frequency mentioned by the five participants, with the most commonly reported service listed first in each section and the least commonly reported services listed last. Two out of five participants mentioned that there are services offered just for refugees in the community, however the sponsorship groups offer them on a volunteer basis.

Four out of five participants reported that services need to expand to meet the needs of the current newcomer population, while one felt current services are sufficient. Language training is the main service that needs to expand, both in the number of classes offered and so that an advanced level of language training can be offered in the community. One participant mentioned that in some cases newcomers have to travel to Winnipeg to access advanced language training. In the feedback received one individual strongly disagreed with this statement and mentioned that English as Additional Language (EAL) programs are offered in the community at various locations, various levels, and schedules, and there is no need for newcomers to travel to Winnipeg. Examples are the South Eastman English and Literacy Services (offers EAL at various levels), Eastman Immigrant services (offers a small English at work program), Heartland English School, churches and online programs. In addition the local colleges offer EAL programs for a fee.

More interpretation services were also needed in the Steinbach-Kleefeld region. The expansion of transportation supports or the addition of public transportation would be extremely helpful for newcomers in the community.

Participants were asked whether services needed to change to meet the needs of the newcomer population and three out of five cited this was not necessary, since the services currently offered are the services needed. One participant believed change will be needed in the future to meet the increasing diversity in Steinbach-Kleefeld's newcomer population, while the fifth one believed change is needed now since more professional individuals are coming and there is a need for foreign credential recognition programming in the community.

## Short and Long-Term Needs of Refugees

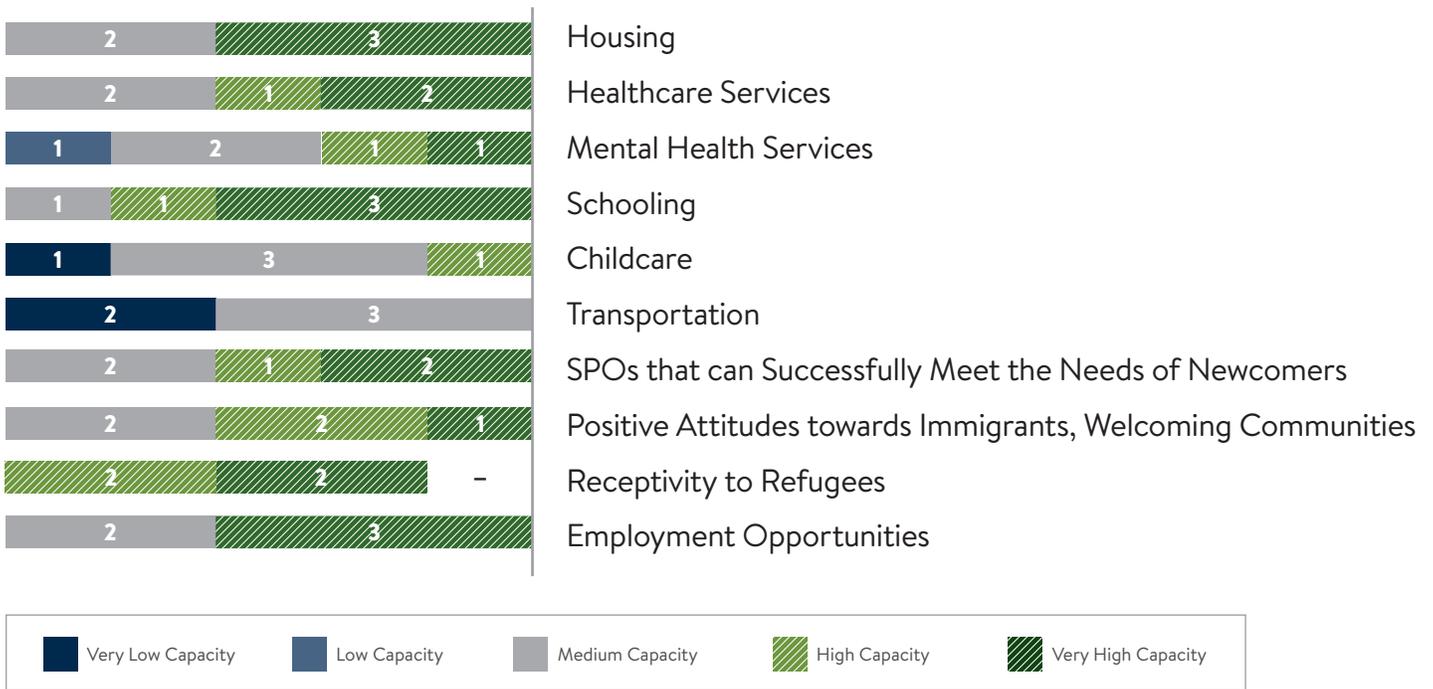
Participants were asked to identify the top short and long-term needs of refugees. In the short-term improving language skills (mentioned by 4 participants); cultural adjustment and making connections to the new community (4); and finding employment (2) were seen as the top needs. In the long run though, finding employment (4) and moving towards independence both financially and by relying on themselves rather than on the sponsorship group (3) become the most important needs. Continually improving language skills (3) remains a top priority, since many other factors like employment depends on language skills. One participant mentioned that even though English comprehension is getting better, pronunciation should not be ignored since employers are more likely to hire a newcomer with strong English pronunciation. In the feedback received one individual highlighted the fact that low English language skills result in safety and behavior challenges (especially in sensitive cases with women and children). The individual noted that in some cases newcomers tend to agree with something without having fully comprehended everything that was communicated to them in English. Also, newcomers may be hesitant to indicate their lack of understanding and to raise their concerns. This poses additional challenges and reiterates the importance of language skills in refugee and newcomer settlement.

## Community Capacity

All five participants were in agreement that their community has the capacity to attract and retain refugees. The five participants ranked ten areas of community capacity for assessing the community's ability to respond to the needs of refugees. The results are listed in Figure 1.

Transportation was the main area that was scored very low with 2 participants stating the capacity is very low and 3 characterized it as medium. The community has no public transportation in place, which leaves newcomers and refugees either to depend on volunteers or to spend significant money on taxis. Both of these options were not seen as a permanent solution in the long term. In the feedback received one individual reiterated the importance of public transportation however emphasized that this alone would not meet all needs. There needs to be supports in place for families to obtain a vehicle given the location of the community and that the distances to someone's employment and to acquire necessities can be quite large (in the winter months the challenge increases). Childcare also scored low since childcare spots are

Figure 1 - Areas of community capacity ranked from very low to very high capacity by the five research participants



limited in the community.

Participants had mixed perceptions around mental health services; this capacity area scored from low up to very high. There is some availability of services in the community, however for more specialized services refugees will need to go to Winnipeg.

In all other areas more than half of participants felt that their community had high or very high capacity. Experienced SPOs are in place and provided a wide range of services and supports to facilitate settlement of refugees. Housing for refugees is available and is normally arranged before refugees arrive; however in some cases can be expensive. Schools in the community have the capacity to accept more students (even though in some areas numbers might be high) and teachers are experienced with multi-cultural classes. Overall, participants feel that their community is a welcoming community and open to other cultures, however people are more familiar with immigrants than refugees, and levels of receptivity might vary depending on the refugees' country of origin.

Regarding employment opportunities, there is availability in the community, however mainly for low skilled positions. For any type of employment, even low skilled, a certain level of language skills is needed for individuals to find and keep their jobs. For example, in some industries like hog and agriculture,

even the entry-level positions require a certain level of English in order to follow safety protocols.

## Partnerships and Agency Capacity

Four of the five participants reported their organizations were engaged in partnerships with other community organizations. Partnerships were identified with a variety of stakeholders such as, schools, SPOs, churches, local businesses, Mennonite Central Committee, EAL and Literacy provider, Child and Family services, health authorities and other resource centres in the community.

Participants also shared their opinion regarding what types of local partnerships are needed in the community in order to better respond to the needs of refugees (regardless of whether the partnerships are already in place or not). One participant mentioned the lack of public transportation and the need for rural municipalities to come to the table and better understand and support refugee concerns and issues. Other important partnerships needed are with employers, the sponsorship groups, language providers and for government to address the red-tape issues with foreign credential recognition. Most of the needed partnerships appear to be in place in Steinbach-Kleefeld; however, it was reported that more coordination is needed so that all partners are working together to meet

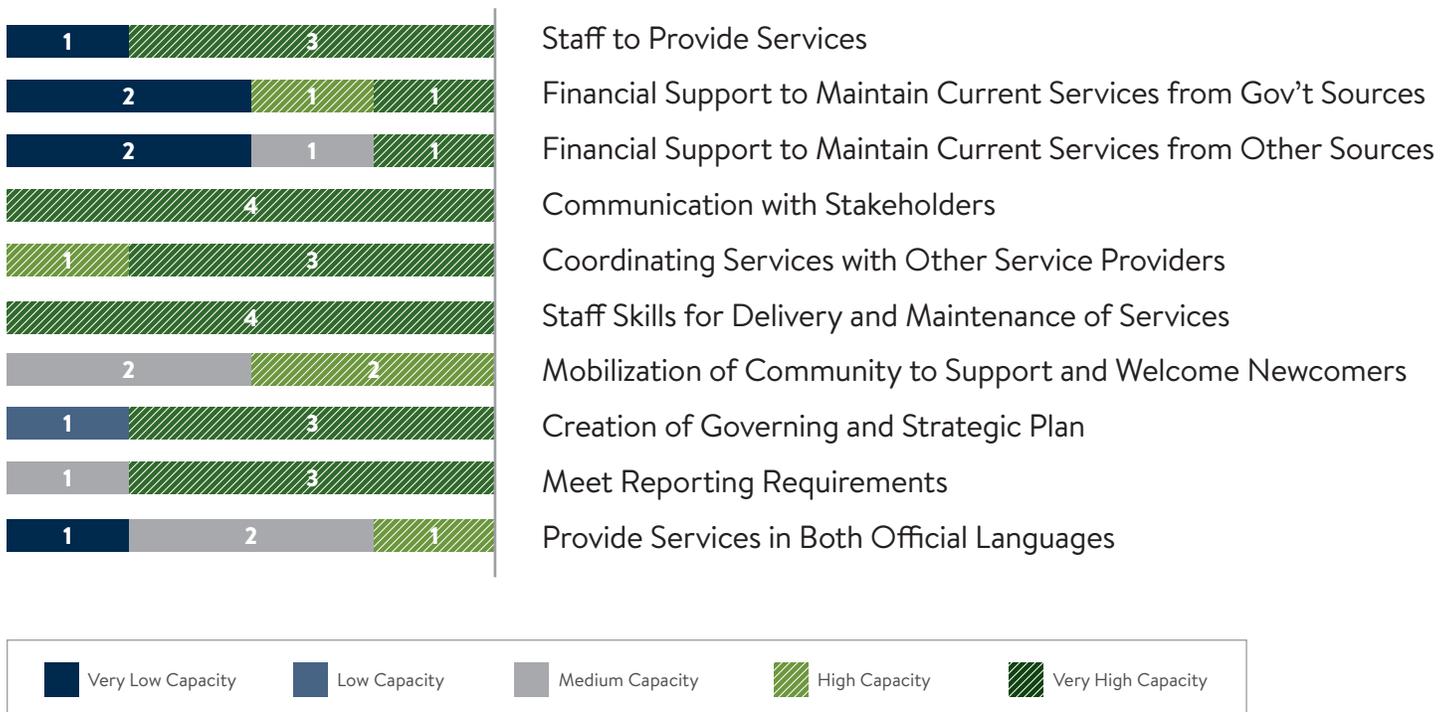
refugees’ needs instead of each partner doing their own piece.

The participants were also asked about their own agency’s or organization’s capacity to meet the needs of newcomers, including refugees in the community. Four participants ranked their organizational capacity on a set of activities (Figure 2). Fewer participants answered these questions, as they were most intended for SPOs and did not always apply well to sponsorship groups or other community stakeholders who were not formally funded for their support of newcomers.

Four of the five organizations rated their organizational capacity to serve newcomers in their community as somewhat high to very high on many items (Figure 2).

More financial support is needed from both government and other sources and participants mentioned that multi-year funding needed to be in place in order to stabilize service delivery; something also highlighted in the feedback received by one individual. Capacity for staff skills for delivery and maintenance of services is adequate; however in some cases more staff is needed. Capacity to deliver services in both official languages is relatively low, but the main need was for interpreters in newcomers’ first language.

Figure 2. Areas of agency capacity as ranked by the four participants responded in this question.



The following two sections of the Steinbach-Kleefeld community report explores the participants' experiences with the refugee resettlement that has occurred since November 2015.

## Recent Experiences with Refugees

According to the research participants, many organizations, other than the sponsorship groups, were involved in the process of refugees' resettlement such as, churches, the School Division, SPOs, Steinbach Family Resource Centre, Southern Health Authority, and Mennonite Central Committee. Overall, the sponsorship groups and SPOs worked well together during the resettlement process of refugees, with four out of five participants feeling this way, while one participant strongly disagreed with this statement (SPOs are based in Steinbach and sponsorship groups in Kleefeld are not well connected to them). SPOs provided services as listed in Table 1 while the sponsorship groups mainly assisted refugees with transportation, housing, daily life (shopping, banking, taking them to the doctors), finding employment, orientation to Canadian culture and to the community and provide financial and social supports. Four out of five participants agree with the statement that there are no refugees in Steinbach-Kleefeld who need support but don't seek help or access support.

There were many key initiatives the participants' organizations undertook to prepare for the arrival of refugees in the community. One organization conducted needs assessment for both the agency and the community. Lack of public transportation and lack of interpreters were both identified and volunteers were found to help address those issues. The sponsorship groups conducted meetings and delegated tasks to members to find housing for refugees and help them with day to day activities. SPOs, churches, schools and refugee sponsorship groups communicated to identify and match services offered with refugee needs. For example, teachers were already aware of the materials needed for them to learn English and also had materials in Arabic and French ready for refugees to use.

## Challenges & Successes

Despite the preparation for refugee arrival, participant organizations faced challenges during the resettlement of refugees in their community. Participants mentioned different types of challenges based mainly on their organizations' involvement.

Knowing in advance the exact date new refugees are arriving in the community helps with planning. There were incidents where sponsorship groups were unaware of the refugee arrival until the same day, so this caught them by surprise and they were not as prepared as they could have been if they had had a few weeks' notice. In another case, half the members of one refugee family have already arrived, but there is no indication as to when the rest of the family is expected to arrive. Better coordination and communication is needed from the federal government to avoid frustration for both the refugees and those involved in their resettlement process.

Public transportation is a big concern and it is suggested for municipalities to be more involved and find ways to address this issue. Currently volunteers are assisting and biking is an option during the summer; however, these solutions are not permanent. Lack of interpreters is another challenge and despite the fact volunteers are assisting in this area too, an expansion of the interpreter program is needed.

One participant mentioned that refugee sponsorship groups need to financially support new refugees until they at least obtain basic language skills and then to arrange employment for them. Rushing to employment without prior English language comprehension has resulted, in one incident, in refugees losing their jobs due to low or very limited language skills.

Additional frustration is caused by the fact that refugees are missing proper documentation, such as birth certificates, immunization records, education level records and everything needs to be recreated from scratch. This is an ongoing challenge and no recommendation was offered regarding how to overcome it.

Participants also reported on the key successes during the resettlement process of refugees in their community. The positive things that came out of this process is the strong community partnerships that were developed, strong volunteer networks that assisted refugees with daily life needs and a volunteer group of language tutors assisting refugees learning the language. Overall, and despite the challenges, refugee families managed to settle and start their first steps towards doing things on their own and being part of the community.

## Conclusion

The community of Steinbach-Kleefeld has recently welcomed and resettled refugees, with more anticipated to arrive in the near future. With already strong settlement services, they still required additional support to facilitate resettlement and integrate refugees. They relied on their volunteer network to meet the current and growing needs. Expansion of language training is a priority since other aspects of newcomers' lives depend on language skills (for example employment, social integration, safety).

Generally speaking, participants saw Steinbach-Kleefeld as a welcoming community with the capability to develop more of its current capacity to attract and retain refugees. Lack of public transportation remains a major concern and there is a call for neighbouring municipalities to come to the table and address this issue as well. An alternative would be for additional supports to be put in place that will allow refugee families to acquire their own vehicle.

Several organizations were involved in the resettlement of refugees in the community and worked hard to prepare for refugee arrival. Additional financial support (multiyear funding) and better coordination and communication (e.g. knowing in advance the timeline for refugee arrival) with the Federal Government is needed to allow for a more positive resettlement experience. Despite the challenges faced, and thanks to a strong volunteer and partnership network, refugees have settled and started their life in the community. What remains to be seen is how refugees move forward towards independence and integration.

## RURAL DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE RESEARCH TEAM

**William Ashton, MCIP, PhD**  
*Director*

**Eleni Galatsanou, MSc**  
*Project Lead*

**Rachael Pettigrew, PhD**  
*Research Associate*

**Meghan Miller Cronkrite**  
*Research Assistant*

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### Terms:

**Newcomers:** Includes all immigrants, permanent residents, refugees, refugee claimants, temporary foreign workers, and international students that have been in Canada for 1 day to 5 years.

**Refugees:** Includes all Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs), Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs), Refugees under the Blended Visa Office-Referred Program (BVORs) and refugee claimants. A refugee is different from an immigrant, in that an immigrant is a person who chooses to settle permanently in another country. Refugees are forced to flee (IRCC, 2016)

**Community:** A municipality, district, region or other geographic area consisting of population clusters.

**Stakeholder:** Any group, organization, or enterprise that has newcomers and/or refugees as the primary or secondary clientele.



#### Contact Us

Rural Development Institute, Brandon University

270-18th Street, McMaster Hall, Lower Level

Brandon, Manitoba R7A 6A9

Phone: 204-571-8515

Email: [rdi@brandonu.ca](mailto:rdi@brandonu.ca)

[www.BrandonU.ca/RDI](http://www.BrandonU.ca/RDI)