



PORTAGE LA PRAIRIE  
LOCAL **IMMIGRATION** PARTNERSHIP

THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF IMMIGRATION  
TO PORTAGE LA PRAIRIE

June 2021

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## Portage la Prairie Local Immigration Partnership Mission Statement

*“The Portage la Prairie Local Immigration Partnership works to identify opportunities and designs initiatives for improving the social, civic and economic integration of newcomers and helps coordinate responses to newcomer settlement which will enable Portage la Prairie and surrounding areas to respond holistically to the challenges of housing, transportation, language, employment, education and social/civic isolation facing newcomers.”<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Portage la Prairie Local Immigration Partnership Strategic Plan 2018-2020

## Introduction and focus of the project

This study called Economic Impact of Immigration to Portage la Prairie was funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) through the Portage la Prairie Local Immigration Partnership (PLIP) and the Portage Community Revitalization Corporation (PCRC).

In Manitoba, many rural communities are exploring economic growth strategies that include immigration as a key component for their future economic growth strategy and to address labour force needs. Many communities are taking a greater role in planning for and guiding immigration and settlement, by developing an immigration strategy.

As in many communities across Canada, the population of Portage and region is aging, with 17% of people over the age of 65 who will likely exit the workforce. In Portage la Prairie, recent business investments have expanded workforce opportunities, and in the near future will bring an increased need for people to live and work in the community and surrounding municipality.

This study aims to provide an overview of immigrant (newcomer)<sup>2</sup> settlement to determine the extent immigration has benefitted the city of Portage la Prairie by exploring the economic and social impact of immigration to the community and surrounding area. In addition to the economic impact, it is important for municipalities, organizations, institutions, and businesses to recognize and understand the benefits of immigration to a community. Both attraction and retention of newcomers is necessary for communities to thrive and continue to grow. A successful strategy must address the importance of a welcoming and inclusive community.

This study was undertaken on behalf of and in collaboration with the Portage la Prairie Local Immigration Partnership. Data and feedback for this project was collected via telephone interviews, virtual meetings, and an online survey<sup>3</sup>

The findings of this study are meant to be instructive for further research and also to facilitate collaboration between communities and government, for the purpose of strengthening efforts directed towards immigration and settlement in the Portage la Prairie region.

The results compiled, summarized and presented in this report serve as the basis for recommendations and acknowledgements.

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<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this study, “newcomers” are defined to include all Permanent Residents, Refugees, Refugee Claimants, Temporary Foreign Workers (TFW), Naturalized Citizens, and International Students that have been in Canada from 1 day to 10 years.

<sup>3</sup> Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, data for the study was collected remotely, due to the province of Manitoba Code Red restrictions.

## Methodology

This study was conducted by an independent consultant with experience in newcomer settlement and integration in rural Manitoba, in partnership with the Portage la Prairie Local Immigration Partnership (PLIP) and the Portage Community Revitalization Corporation (PCRC), who held the PLIP project contract with IRCC. Following initial discussions with the PLIP Coordinator, an advisory committee was created to provide local knowledge to inform and guide the work. The advisory committee included key representatives from various organizations that work either directly or indirectly with newcomers to Portage la Prairie.

The first meeting of the advisory committee, held in March 2021, served to provide members with an overview of the project. The next meeting held in April 2021, provided members with an update on the study, a work plan and timeline, discussed the most effective and efficient method to contact key community stakeholders for the project.<sup>4</sup>

The advisory committee met monthly throughout the project, and between meetings received updates and were encouraged to provide additional contacts to the consultant, and information about existing and current initiatives that were relevant to the project. A draft of the final report was sent to members of the advisory committee for feedback and revisions.

Data for the study was gathered through multiple methods. First, the consultant conducted internet-based search to identify stakeholders and existing organizations to participate in the study.

Secondly, feedback from community stakeholders was gathered via telephone or virtual interviews. Throughout the interview phase of the study, all interviews were conducted by the consultant. An overview of these interviews are presented later in this report.

Thirdly, to gather feedback from newcomers, a survey was distributed to a group of newcomers who had been in Canada between 1 and 10 years. Initial contacts were provided through the Portage Learning and Literacy Centre. The survey was distributed through Survey Monkey to newcomers living in Portage la Prairie and the surrounding municipality, and to literacy students via in-class questionnaire. A detailed account of the survey results is presented in a later section of this report. Additionally, three newcomer stories are highlighted following the survey results.

Finally, the consultant reviewed existing and current research projects to include feedback and input for the report.

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<sup>4</sup> Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, health and safety restrictions required a revision to the work plan, therefore, in-person interviews and focus groups, were conducted via teleconference or virtual meeting platforms.

This report is the culmination of numerous discussions and data sources and is informed by all stakeholders who participated in the study. Ultimately, the report represents the interpretations and analyses of the consultant.

## Community Profile

The City of Portage la Prairie (Portage), Manitoba's fourth largest city, is located in the Central Plains region of Manitoba. The city sits on the Assiniboine River approximately 75 kilometres west of Winnipeg and 125 kilometers east of Brandon, along the trans-Canada highway. Portage and is a major service hub containing regional government offices, retail and distribution services. The surrounding rural municipality of Portage la Prairie boasts rich, productive farmland, access to major transportation routes, and natural resources. The rural municipality is also home to Long Plain First Nation, Dakota Plains First Nation, and Dakota Tipi First Nation.

The region has the capacity to support industrial growth and is well-positioned to attract employers to the region. There are indicators of future economic growth due to the development of new and existing businesses, including large corporations like Roquette, McCain, and Simplot, as well as initiatives that promote entrepreneurship in Portage la Prairie and the surrounding municipality.

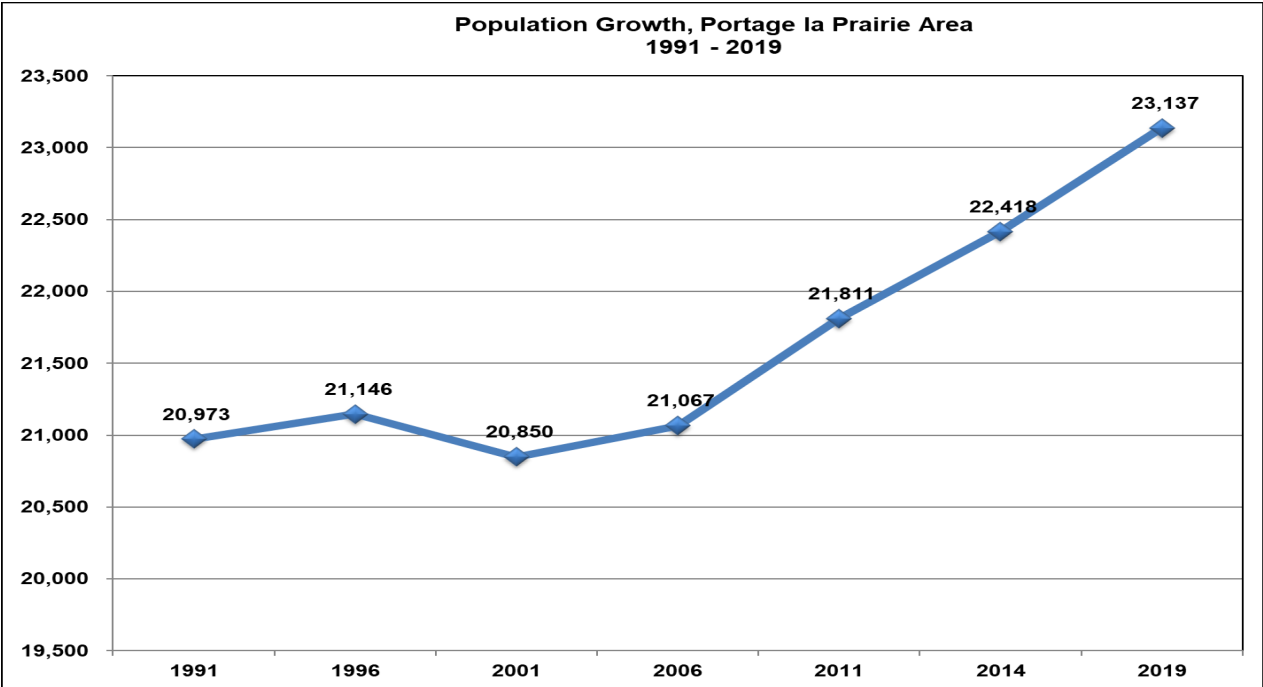
In 2019 the population of Portage la Prairie was 16,035, with 7,102 living in the surrounding municipality, for a combined population of 23,137.<sup>5</sup> Data from the Manitoba Health, Seniors and Activity Living Annual Population Report is based on records of residents registered with Manitoba Health as at June 1. From 2014 to 2019, the population of the region increased by 3.2%, lower than Manitoba's overall population increase of 6.4% for the same period. Figure 1 below shows the population growth of Portage between 1991 and 2019.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 1: Population Growth 1991 – 2019**

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<sup>5</sup> Province of Manitoba. 2019. Manitoba Health, Seniors and Active Living Annual Population Report, June 1, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Province of Manitoba. 2016. Portage la Prairie Region Economic Profile.



Source: Portage la Prairie Economic Profile

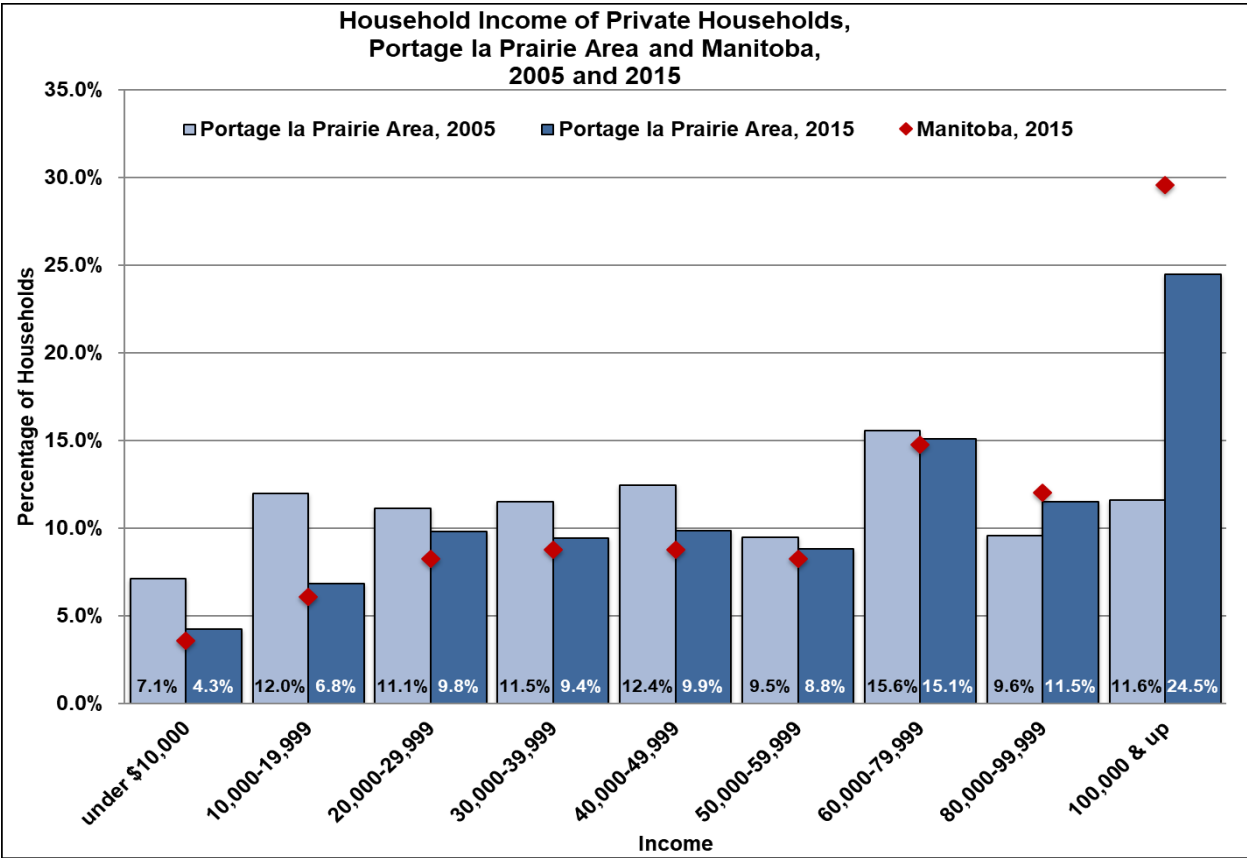
A recently published (June 1, 2020) Manitoba Health, Seniors and Active Living Annual Population Report shows that the population of the region increased from 23,137 in 2019 to 23,293 in 2020.<sup>7</sup>

Data from the latest census (2016) show that 30% of the population of Portage identifies as indigenous.<sup>8</sup> And, according to the Portage la Prairie Urban Indigenous Community Coordinator, there is an increasing number of indigenous people moving off nearby reserves into Portage for work, education opportunities, and housing.

As indicated in the Portage la Prairie and region economic profile data (2016), the household income of the region is similar to the average household income in the province. There are two exceptions, where the number of household in the lower brackets has decreased, but the greatest change is a 12.9% increase from 2005 to 2015 in the \$100,000.00 and higher category. Figure 2 provides a snapshot of household income in Portage.<sup>9</sup>

**Figure 2: Household income Portage la Prairie Area and Manitoba 2005 and 2015**

<sup>7</sup> Province of Manitoba. 2020. Manitoba Health, Seniors and Active Living Annual Population Report, June 1, 2020.  
<sup>7</sup> Province of Manitoba. 2016. Portage la Prairie Region Economic Profile.  
<sup>8</sup> Statistics Canada. 2017. Portage la Prairie [Population centre]. Aboriginal Peoples. Census Profile. 2016



Source: Portage la Prairie and region Economic Profile

In 2019, there were 11,292 jobs in the region, an increase overall of 3.1% (compared to an increase of 5.2% for the province). Many of the jobs in the region are in the agriculture, social services and health care sectors, as well as sales and services, retail, and service sectors. Between 2014 and 2019, healthcare and social assistance saw an increase in jobs of 14%, public administration at 13.7%, and agriculture and construction with 12% increases in each sector.

In 2019, there were 1909 businesses in the Portage region, with most businesses operated by self-employed individuals (or families), with over 20 businesses with 100 or more employees.<sup>10</sup> The industry that dominates Portage is 1 to 4 employees comprising of 67 businesses or 53.6% of the community's business establishments. Coming in second are companies with 5 to 9 employees that makes up 18.4% of the business community. The third largest are industries in with 10 to 19 employees, which includes 19 businesses. Meanwhile, 12% of businesses are considered to be small business, providing jobs to 1 to 99 employees, and 4.8% make up the medium-sized businesses that employs 100 to 499 people.<sup>11</sup>

Of significance for future workforce supply is an aging population of people 60 years and older at 31% of total population in the city of Portage, as compared to 22 per cent in the province of

<sup>10</sup> Province of Manitoba. 2016. Portage la Prairie Region Economic Profile.

<sup>11</sup> Town Folio. 2020. Portage la Prairie.

Manitoba as a whole.<sup>12</sup> From this information we can assume there will be a large number of people exiting the workforce and businesses in Portage and surrounding region could see a labour market supply shortage within the next five to 10 years.

The next section looks at immigration to Portage and how an immigration strategy would contribute to further economic growth for Portage and region.

## Immigration to Portage la Prairie

*“We all benefit from the economic and social impact that newcomers make to our community. While the economic benefits of immigration cannot be overstated, it is also important to mention the improvements to our community’s culture.”<sup>13</sup>*

Immigration to Manitoba has been a key strategy for economic growth in the province as a whole, and has been extremely beneficial for rural communities. In 2018, 15,230 permanent residents chose Manitoba as their immigration destination, with 21 percent choosing to live outside of Winnipeg. The Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program (MPNP) was created in 1996 to bring skilled workers to Manitoba to address labour market needs and fill gaps in labour market supply.

As in many rural communities, the City of Portage la Prairie has experienced slow population growth and concern that an aging population could lead to a shortage in labour market supply in both skilled and unskilled labour, affecting existing businesses and business development. In 2004, the City became interested in developing an immigration strategy to address economic

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<sup>12</sup> Province of Manitoba. Manitoba Health, Seniors and Active Living Annual Population Report. June 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Portage la Prairie Action Plan 2020-2025, Portage la Prairie Local Immigration Partnership



growth and development, and launched the Portage la Prairie International Agency (PIA), through the City’s Economic and Community Development department. While the PIA is no longer active, the Portage Local Immigration Partnership views an immigration strategy of vital importance to meet the needs of the community now and for the future.

The city of Portage is no stranger to immigration. Historically, immigrants settled in Portage, and newcomers arrived at a slow pace over the years. Unlike some rural communities in Manitoba, Portage has not seen a large influx of newcomers annually, but rather a slow and steady pace has occurred for the past 12 years. Many newcomers to Portage are attracted by opportunities for employment, the size of the community, education and health care. A strong sense of entrepreneurship exists among the newcomers in Portage, with over 20 new business start-ups in 2020, which is a huge investment in the community, and a strong indicator to live and work in Portage.

Immigration to Portage has been slow but steady. From 2010 to 2018, Portage la Prairie ranked 8<sup>th</sup> out of the top 10 of intended rural destinations for permanent residents to Manitoba, with 704 new arrivals.<sup>14</sup> Figure 3 below shows a compilation of the number of arrivals through the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program (MPNP). These numbers do not include temporary foreign workers (TFW), seasonal workers, refugees, or international students living and studying in Portage.

**Figure 3: Number of MPNP landings to Portage la Prairie by year (excluding TFW)**

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Arrivals	74	70	51	69	60	95	105	100	80	704

Source: Manitoba Immigration Facts 2010 to 2018

At the time of this report, Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program data for 2019 and 2020 were not available. However, Portage Learning and Literacy Centre (PLLC), a multiple-service settlement and integration organization for newcomers in Portage la Prairie reports 429 new and returning clients for 2019 and 551 new and returning clients for 2020. Returning clients data is important as it captures the retention of newcomers in Portage. In 2020, additional funding from the province contributed to an increase in the number of clients, providing more flexibility for the organization to serve clients from all immigration categories. PLLC also reports the top 5 source countries as Philippines, India, Nigeria, Syria with Ukraine and Bangladesh tied for fifth place.

Key factors that attract newcomers to a rural community are family ties, employment, housing, and supports and resources to help manage barriers to success.<sup>15</sup> Portage has many of the attributes of these key factors which not only attract newcomers, but also welcome them as an integral part of the community. Additionally, the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program is

<sup>14</sup> Province of Manitoba. Manitoba Immigration Facts. 2010 - 2018 Statistical Reports

<sup>15</sup> National Working Group on Small Centre Strategies. Attracting and retaining immigrants: A tool box of ideas for small centres (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). 2007. Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria: Victoria, BC.

provides immigration streams, based on a point system that include language proficiency, age, work experience, education, and adaptability, with extra points for regional (rural) settlement.<sup>16</sup> Upon arrival, newcomers can find a variety of services and programs integral for successful settlement at the Portage Learning and Literacy Centre. The ongoing work of the Portage la Prairie Local Immigration Partnership is important in addressing the broader scope of developing welcoming and inclusive community initiatives.

While family ties and employment might attract newcomers to Portage, one of the barriers to retention is available and affordable housing, in both rental units or home ownership. Some newcomers have found employment in Portage but due to limited housing options, are travelling to Portage from nearby communities or from Winnipeg, a 45-minute commute. As in most rural communities in Manitoba, lack of public transportation is an on-going challenge not only for newcomers but for the community as a whole.

Of importance is that newcomers in Portage are contributing to the economic growth in the community as employees, entrepreneurs, renters, home owners, consumers, and tax payers, Newcomers contribute in so many other ways to the fabric of the community and to the health and future growth of the community. This, despite the fact that currently there is no formal strategy for the city and surrounding region that includes immigration as a priority to attract newcomers with the skills needed to match the employment opportunities in the region, and to bolster economic growth in the region.

## Findings from Newcomer Survey

This section provides an overview of the results of an online survey distributed to newcomers living in Portage la Prairie and the municipality of Portage la Prairie. The survey focused on newcomer experiences related to success in gaining or retaining employment, and existing supports and resources such as settlement and employment services and local training opportunities. Respondents were asked to reflect on their experiences and observations when answering the survey questions.

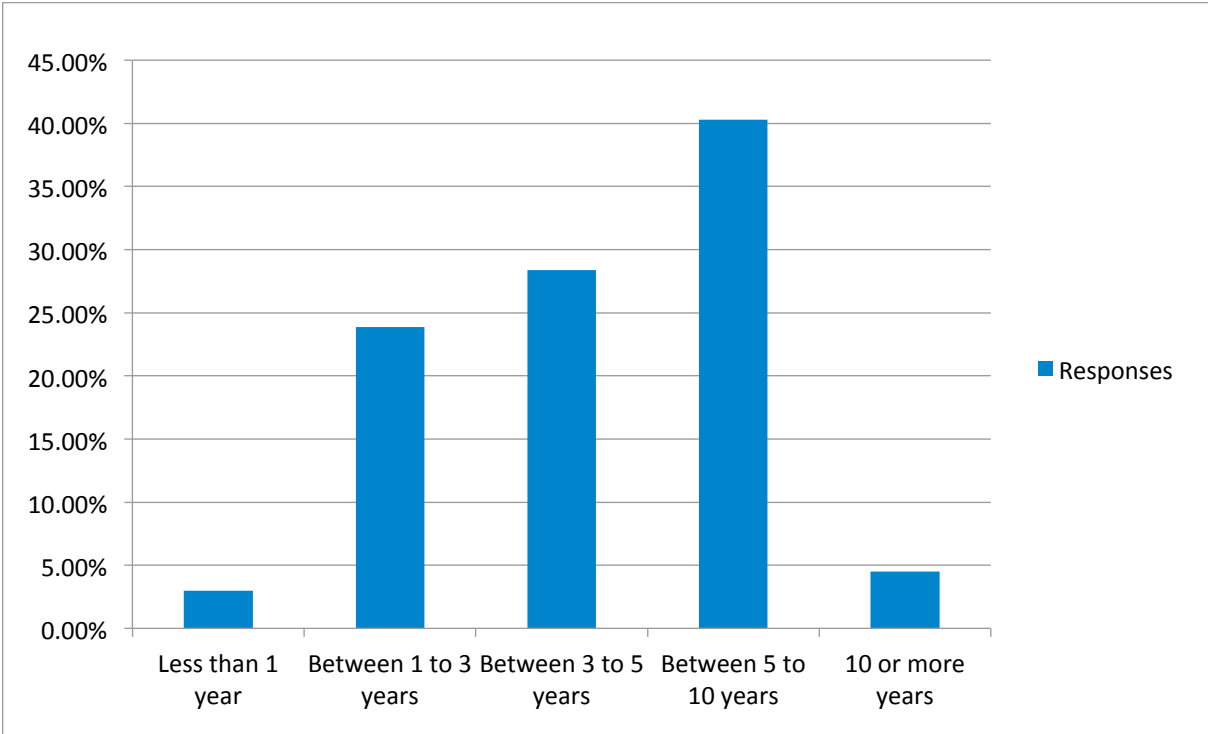
The survey was constructed and distributed through Survey Monkey, the link sent to newcomers through the Portage Learning and Literacy Centre network. Respondents were also encouraged to share the link with their connections. In all, 67 responses were gathered over the period of one week. Although the survey results provide useful insight into some of the gaps, challenges, and successes that exist, it is important to note that the survey responses represent the perspectives of a small group of newcomers and are by no means comprehensive in scope.

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<sup>16</sup> Province of Manitoba. Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program. [www.immigratemanitoba.com](http://www.immigratemanitoba.com)

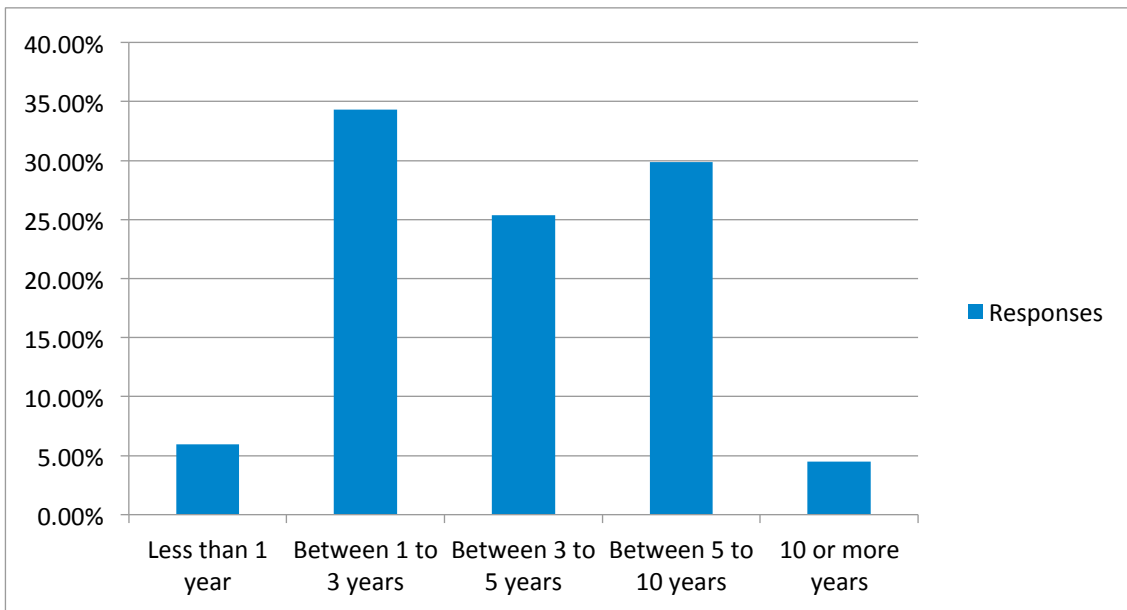
The survey respondents represented a diverse group of newcomers currently residing in Portage la Prairie. The majority (58%) were permanent residents, while the remaining respondents identified as temporary foreign workers or international students. The survey respondents also represented a range of the length of time living in Canada. 40% of respondents had lived in Canada between 5 and 10 years, while 62% represented 1 to 5 years in Canada. (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Please Indicate the length of time you have lived in Canada**



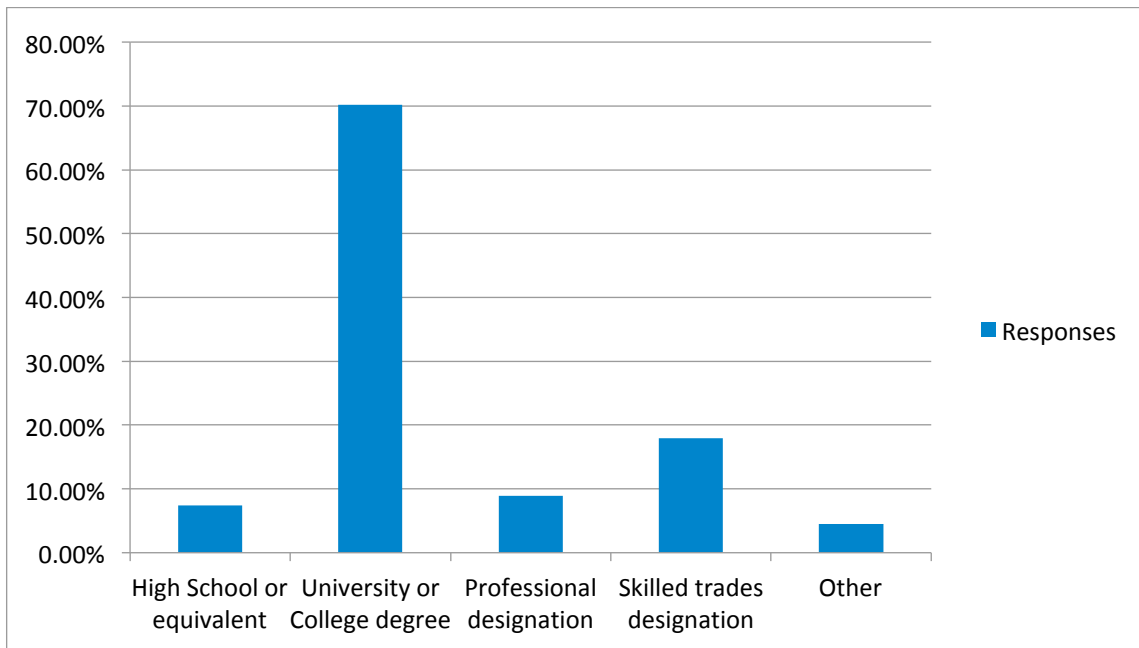
In comparison, the data in Figure 5 indicates nearly 30% of respondents had lived in Portage la Prairie between the 5 to 10-year range. Additional comments provided by the respondents indicated they had migrated to Portage la Prairie from another community.

**Figure 5: Please indicate the length of time you have lived in Portage la Prairie (select one)**



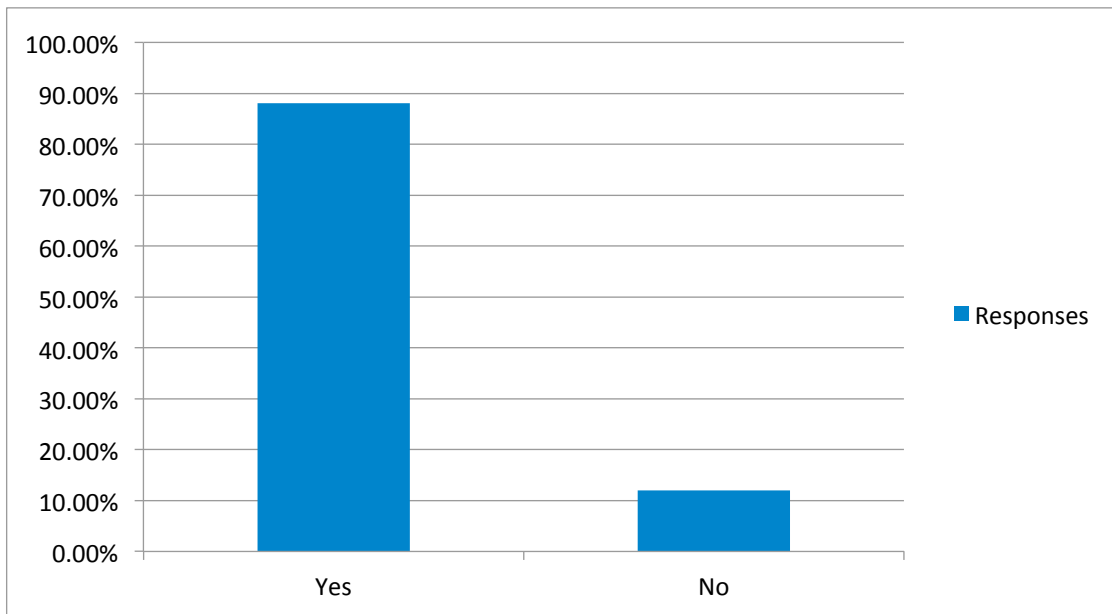
58% of respondents identified as permanent residents, while 16% as temporary foreign workers, and 10% international students. Just over 70% of respondents indicated their level of education as university or college degree, with 9% a professional designation and 18% a skilled trades designation. See Figure 6 below.

**Figure 6: What is your level of education or training in your first country?**



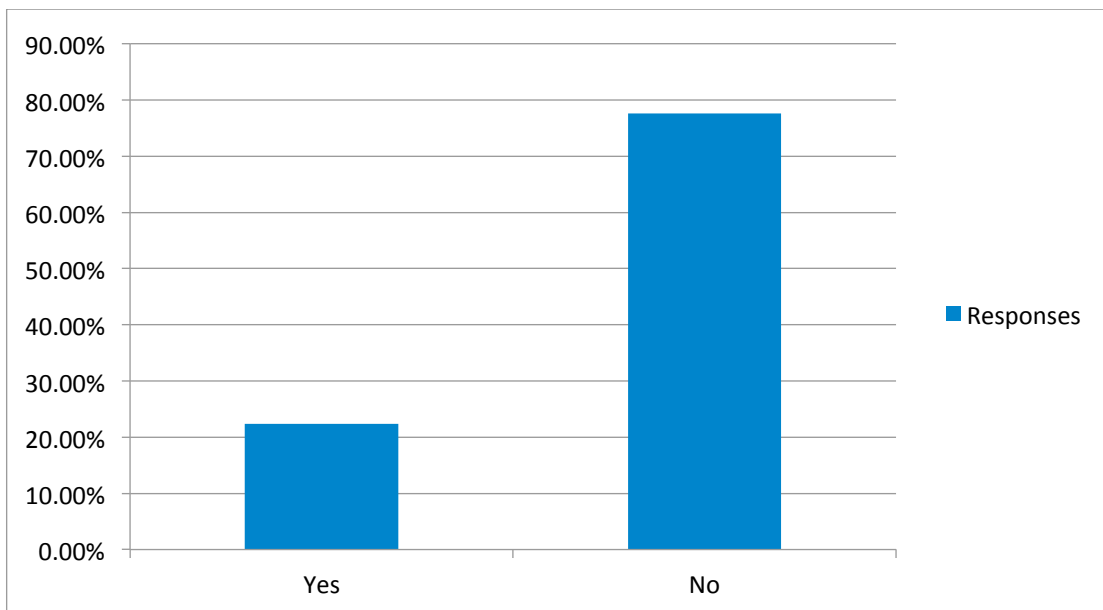
In all, 88% of respondents identified as employed, with the majority (77%) indicating it was not difficult to find employment. (Figure 7 and 8).

**Figure 7: Are you employed?**



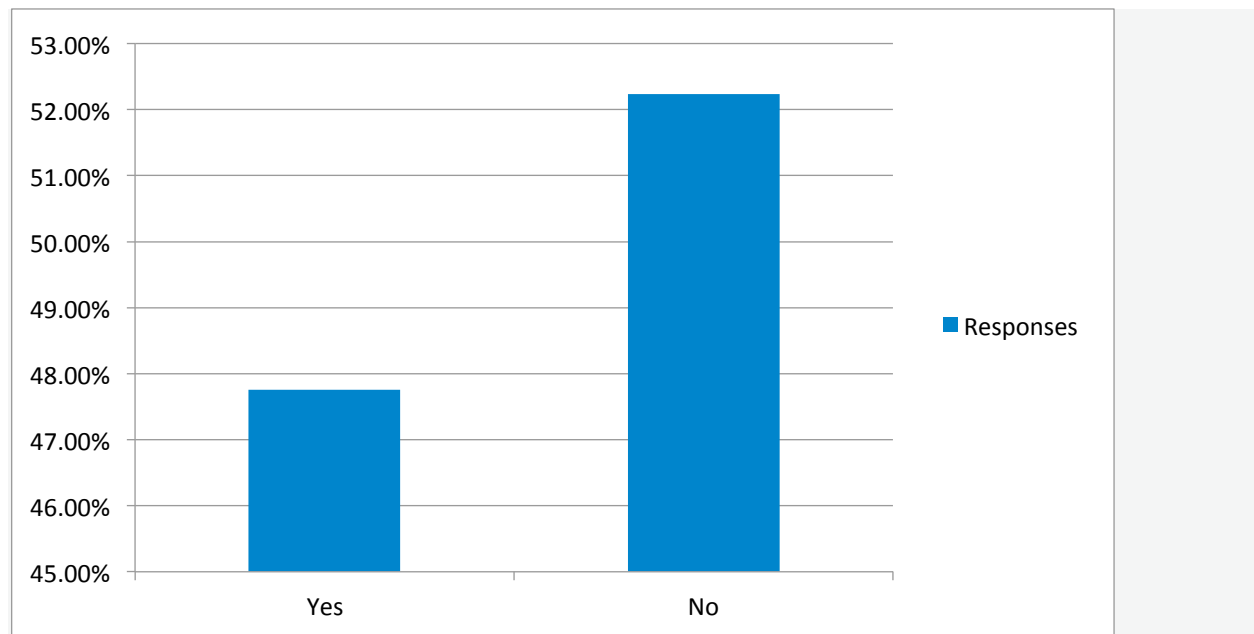
Several respondents commented that it wasn't that hard to find a job if you're not choosy. One respondent couldn't find an opportunity to work in his skilled trade as a welder, but he owns a home in Portage so his family will stay in Portage, instead of moving to Winnipeg where he can work as a welder.

**Figure 8: Was it hard to find employment?**



Just under half (48%) of respondents found employment related to their profession, while the remaining 52% did not. A majority of respondents (70%) indicated they found employment related to their skills, while 30% did not. See Figure 8.

**Figure 8: Were you able to find employment related to your profession?**



One respondent commented that employment opportunities are high in Portage but sometimes the degree that you have in your country cannot be applied in Canada due to different system of education. Another respondent indicated they were happy in their current job but want employment in their skill and qualifications. Another respondent expressed the hope that our education in our home country will be credited in Canada too, but if not, would like to take a bridging program for all courses or related work experience rather than start back to zero.

Just over half of the respondents (52%) own their home, while the remainder rent accommodations.

An overwhelming majority (94%) of respondents felt the community provided good educational opportunities for newcomers.

The objective of presenting these findings is to provide an overview of the responses to key questions in the survey.

## Overview of Newcomer Interviews

The purpose of the newcomer consultation was to engage a small number of newcomers to learn about their individual and family settlement experience and to hear their perspective on their contribution to the community of Portage la Prairie.

The project advisory team recommended individuals to participate in the consultation process. The selection process was based on the length of time the newcomer had lived in Portage (1 to 5 years, 5 – 10 years, and 10+ years), to capture newcomer experiences in different phases of the settlement journey as well as their immigration pathway.

In all, 3 newcomers participated in an individual interview between the newcomer and the consultant. Each of the participants had very different immigration and settlement experiences. Their stories give us a sample of the perspective of newcomers on the economic and social impact of newcomers to Portage. Names have been altered to provide privacy for the participants

This section provides a brief outline of each of the stories.

### **Story One**

*A newcomer arrived in Canada as an international student in 2016 and has lived in Portage since 2018. After his education was complete, the newcomer came to Portage for a job interview. While waiting for the job interview, the newcomer drove around Portage to see the community. While driving, he saw a person who looked just like him, and immediately felt he could live in Portage. He stopped to talk to the person who referred him to another company in case the first job interview didn't work out. The stranger took him to see the other company and the newcomer interviewed for two jobs that day. The newcomer was hired for both jobs to start immediately, and still works for them today. His journey as a community member of Portage began with both his initiative and the kindness of a stranger.*

*One challenge was finding a place to live in a hurry. The person he met gave him a place to stay in his home until he could find his own apartment. The community member stayed a week and with help from this stranger, was happy to find a place of his own. During this time, they developed a strong friendship that continues today.*

*The community member worked hard at both jobs to earn enough money to sponsor his wife and children. With assistance from the Portage Literacy and Learning Centre (PLLC), he was able to navigate the application process, and was so happy and relieved when his family finally joined him. His landlord helped him find a larger apartment more suitable for his family. The community member was overwhelmed and grateful for the kindness of strangers and PLLC. The community member contributes to his new community by donating money and time as a volunteer, and by continuing to work two jobs to build a better life for his family.*

### **Story Two**

*A newcomer arrived in Canada as the spouse of a principal applicant through the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program (MPNP). They arrived in 2010 and while her husband had a job, the community member was not able to find employment in her field as a nurse. In her first country, the community member was skilled as an Operating Room Nurse, but in Canada was not able to navigate the credentialing process as an Internationally Educated Nurse (IEN) due to language ability. This was very frustrating and the community member felt there was no hope, and there were many tears, and an abundance of worry.*

*The community member worked at a “new beginnings” job at a grocery store where, combined with language classes, the community member learned basic English skills. Her increased language ability helped her find a job in the health care system. At this time, the community member is working as a health care aide working various shifts, while supplementing the family income with home care attendant work where possible.*

*The community member has come to terms with not being able to work as a nurse, seeing that her work as a health care aide is helping others. Although the community member would like to have more daytime shifts so she can have more time with her family, she is grateful for her job and the health of her family.*

*The community member expressed that her contribution in the health care field benefits people in her community and she feels a responsibility to do her best for the next generation.*

### **Story Three**

*A newcomer arrived in Portage in 1985 to get married and join her husband who had arrived earlier and was a business owner in Portage. The community member found everything so new, the culture, the language, working and the job. The community member had been a teacher in first country, so working at a business was very new. When the community member arrived in Portage, there were no language classes, so she struggled to learn English without any help from others. There were a few people other people from the same country living in Portage, but everyone was working hard to make a living.*

*The biggest challenges were getting used to the culture, language, customs and being homesick. Working in the business helped her to get used to things, as customers were helpful and friendly, and slowly life got easier. The community member learned to speak English through talking with customers and asking a lot of questions.*

*Customers became friends. The community member and her husband cared a lot about the customers, and as time went on, the business became a gathering place for community, and customers became friends.*

*The community member and her husband are retired now, but have continued to volunteer and be part of the community and at Folklorama in Winnipeg.*



The stories above are just a small sample of newcomer experiences in Portage. Each story is an example of how difficult it is not only to move to a new country but how settling into life in a new country can have many unexpected challenges. The individuals were selected because each of their stories are unique and represent a small snapshot a different settlement challenges newcomers face. The settlement process is an individual journey as newcomer navigate each of the phases of the settlement process.

The intention of sharing these stories is to relate how each of these newcomers and their families faced their settlement challenges and how they are now contributing in many ways to bring richness and value to the life of their new community. All of these newcomers met and overcame many settlement challenges not only by themselves but with the help of strangers, who became new friends and community.

These newcomer stories are an example of how newcomers make a difference in their new communities, both economically and socially, bringing their skills, expertise, experience, and cultural gifts that enrich their new community.

## Summary of Community Stakeholder Interviews

Community stakeholder interviews were conducted over a six-week period extending from April to May 2021. Participants represented a cross-section of community stakeholders. All of the interviews were conducted either via telephone or virtually.

Overall the city of Portage and surrounding area has not experienced an influx of newcomers similar to other Manitoba communities such as Neepawa, Steinbach, or Winkler. However, the steady arrival of newcomers over the past decade or more has made an economic and social impact in the community. In the previous section, we heard the story of a newcomer who arrived in Portage more than 30 years ago, and built a successful, thriving business that became a gathering place for community members.

The objective of this section is to provide a summary of community stakeholder perspectives. It is important to note that the responses and summary of those responses, constitute the views of a small group of stakeholders and do not represent all community stakeholders in the region.

Over the past five years, the City of Portage la Prairie and the Rural Municipality (RM) of Portage la Prairie has attracted over 1 billion dollars in business investment into the area. There is a sense that other businesses will grow or get established to support several of the larger companies like Roquette, Simplot and McCain, such as trucking and warehousing. The Mayor of Portage indicated there is potential for more than 200 added jobs coming to the region, therefore access to a large workforce will become increasingly important. Along with attracting more workers, the city plans to take steps to ensure they are being more proactive to make sure enough housing is available for future growth.

As indicated in a previous section, Portage la Prairie hasn't seen large population increase in the past. One of the reasons for the slow growth is believed to be related in part to a lack of housing, therefore, the city plans to take steps to ensure the community is more proactive.

Currently, finding available and affordable housing in Portage is a challenge. PLIP conducted a housing consultation<sup>17</sup> in March 2021 to address newcomers housing needs and identify gaps and challenges that currently exist. The majority of participating newcomers indicated a long-term housing goal was home-ownership. Currently, the shortage of available and suitable housing has increased the average home cost to \$235,000.00, up from \$176,000.00 the previous year. Thus huge increase makes it more challenging for newcomers to become home owners. In Portage, property taxes on a \$250,000.00 home are over \$3,600.00. And, according to a local realtor, the rental market is tight, with rents averaging between \$1,000 - \$3,375 per month, Newcomers cannot afford the average home, even if they would qualify for a mortgage. One stakeholder indicated some newcomers live in Winnipeg and commute to Portage for work due to the housing challenges.

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<sup>17</sup>Portage Local Immigration Partnership. Housing Consultation

Many newcomers arriving in Portage come through the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program, selected for their skills that meet the needs of the province. New arrivals to Portage have indicated that the reason they moved to Portage is because it is easy to find employment. One stakeholder indicated that currently everyone in Portage who wants to or can work, is employed. Based on the potential for 200 jobs in the near future, immigration or an immigration strategy will be important for the labour market in the region.

There is also a keen interest in entrepreneurship with many newcomers to Portage. The Portage & Region Economic Development office indicated that just over 20 new business starts by newcomers occurred in the past year (2020), adding to the existing businesses owned by newcomers. Some of the new businesses are in the retail and hospitality sectors, and the boom in hospitality and retail seem to be on trend for 2021. The economic impact of this growth is local benefits, but also globally as newcomers retain contacts from their home country to source goods.

Community Futures Heartland provides business start up supports and training sessions, and high-risk lending to clients, and reports an increasing percentage of newcomer clients over the past 5 years.

Both Red River College Portage Campus and Assiniboine Community College have sites in Portage, providing post-secondary opportunities in the community. Red River College has an International Student program, with well over 90 % of the students leveraging their experience to apply to stay in Portage la Prairie. The economic impact of these students is felt with lodging, school tuition and household purchases, and may be long-term as they build connections to the community. Red River College also offers a nursing program, business and management courses, and will offer an agri-food manufacturing course in 2022. In September 2020, Assiniboine Community College was selected to host the rural rotating Practical Nursing Diploma program to address nursing shortages in the province and the region.

Portage Literacy and Learning Centre (PLLC) is a multiple services organization for newcomers to Portage. PLLC, founded in 1991 as an adult education centre, including adult literacy, family literacy and a job finding component, has become a gateway for newcomers to begin their settlement process in Portage. In 2008, PLLC has incorporated many other programs in addition to the original programs that continue today. PLLC has become a one-stop shop with settlement services, language assessments, language training in English as a Second Language, literacy classes, employment services, work experience programs, and other programs as identified by newcomers, are offered at the centre, with a focus on improving skills and abilities for newcomers that contribute to successful settlement, employment, and integration. In 2020/2021, more than 630 clients accessed programming and services, and PLLC collaborated with over 40 employers in the work experience program.

And finally, PLIP (established November 2017), under the umbrella of PCRC, brought high-level community stakeholders together as a council to be a mechanism to support the economic, social, cultural and civic integration of newcomers moving to the area.

## Economic and social impact of immigration to Portage la Prairie

While the City of Portage la Prairie is in early stages of immigration in comparison to other rural communities in Manitoba, such as Steinbach, Neepawa, and Winkler, already the economic impact of the arrival of newcomers is noticed. Newcomers are filling job vacancies, not necessarily in their skill or area of education, but they feel they are finding employment more easily than in Winnipeg. Some newcomers are working more than one job to make a living or to save to purchase a home. According to the Mayor of Portage, future job prospects look good and there will be more opportunities for newcomers to gain employment.

According to the Portage Economic Development office, the cultural diversity of businesses such as restaurants and retail, owned by newcomers is creating a visible presence in Portage. This local economic development has a positive impact and shows investment in the community, where profit stays in Portage, benefitting the entire community. As the newcomer population in Portage increases, the economic and social impact will be felt even greater the trend for newcomers to open new businesses continues.

One stakeholder observed that the trend for an increase in ethnic food stores and restaurants have contributed to cultural awareness for the community, and are very well-supported in the community. Several newcomer restaurants participated in community food competitions during COVID and placed in the top three.

Within the last 5 years the medical clinic tripled in size to address increasing health care needs, and to provide more space for services, expand existing services, and attract medical specialists.

The impact of the arrival of newcomers is felt particularly in the area of housing. Available and affordable accommodations are a challenge to find, especially suitable housing for larger families. As a result, new housing developments, single homes or multiple dwellings are increasing, benefitting the community by addressing housing needs for newcomers and the community at large, but also by increasing employment in construction and skilled trades.

Both the economic and social impacts of newcomers are seen as positive and as an indication of prosperity in the community. The Portage la Prairie School Division notes an increase in newcomer student enrollment, which has benefitted the schools and provided an opportunity to children and youth to learn more about other cultures and languages. As well, international students attending post-secondary education at Red River College Portage Campus contribute to the overall impact of household spending in the community.

Another observed that the Heritage Festival provides reciprocal educational opportunity for newcomers and the whole community to learn about each others cultures through information sharing, including dance, art, and music.

The observation by a long-standing Portage resident notes that the population of Portage has changed in the last 10 years, becoming more diverse. Although it is evident with the number of

businesses and ethnic food restaurants, we also need to look at what is happening within the community. The social impact is seen and heard in the community through the visibility of newcomers walking down the street, or the many different languages spoken while families are relaxing and playing at Island Park or Delta Beach. The number of newcomer children attending school and participating in programs and organized sports or dance has increased, as has the parents and grandparents attending related events or concerts. The men's soccer team has international representation with players from different cultures, speaking different languages.

The social impact is more challenging to measure. The annual festival is a great opportunity for future conversations to explore and develop the potential for the community to create an accepting, welcoming and enriched community. The number of indigenous community members in Portage, and the indigenous communities living in close proximity to Portage, gives Portage the potential to become a leading community in anti-racism movements, with inclusion and equitable representation at a municipal level, creating pathways of integration that can be an example for other communities.

The next section provides an overview on the economic impact of immigration to Winkler, a rural community that has seen tremendous growth, due in large part to immigration.

## Overview of the economic impact of immigration to Winkler

In 1996, as in many rural communities, Winkler employers were finding it difficult to find workers to meet their economic and human resource needs. The Winkler Chamber approached the Manitoba government about utilizing immigration to fill this need, and at the same time, the province was in the process of introducing Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program (MPNP). In 1998, Winkler participated in a pilot project bringing 50 families to the community, to fill 50 jobs. The pilot was successful, the newcomers were happy with their jobs, liked the space of living in a rural community, and encouraged their family and friends to apply to Winkler.

What started as a humble beginning, became a gradual flow of new arrivals which has increased steadily over the years. Regional Connections, a settlement service organization located in Winkler reports approximately 1,000 new clients each year for the past 10 years, with the majority of the families settling in and around Winkler.

The City of Winkler has seen tremendous population growth, from 7,000 people in 2002 to 18,000 in 2020 due in large part to immigration.<sup>18</sup> The population growth has had an impact in many areas in the communities. Since 2006, four new schools have been built (from 5 schools to 9), and according to the Mayor of Winkler, 50% of the students in classrooms were not born in Canada. Health care has been impacted as well with the medical clinic growing from 3 to 20 doctors, and a new hospital built between Winkler and Morden. The snowball effect of newcomers filling jobs is that over time there is an increase in health care needs, more kids in schools, housing rentals lead to purchasing a home, and an increase in construction leads to more jobs for trades people.

The economic growth in the community is seen with expansions of existing businesses, a strong entrepreneurial spirit as evidenced in new businesses (versus 1 or 2 large corporations), growth in other sectors such as retail and hospitality, and housing starts. In 2020, a housing development of 80 homes were sold, leading to a second phase with an additional 220 homes.

A key part of the economic impact of immigration in Winkler is the intentional strategy that has been employed throughout the years. The original pilot project has led to another recent agreement with MPNP that meets the evolving economic and labour force needs of the community. This partnership means that there is more alignment with the language level and jobs available, so newcomers will be satisfied with their job long term.

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<sup>18</sup> Manitoba Health, Seniors and Active Living Annual Population Report. June 2020.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Immigration to Portage has been slow but steady with the majority of newcomers arriving as economic immigrants, driven by employment opportunities. Other new arrivals come as international students, or family connections, seasonal workers (circular migration), and a small number through refugee sponsorship.

The City of Portage la Prairie and the surrounding region has many attributes including employment opportunities, and is well-positioned to be a destination of choice for newcomers. The region has experienced recent business investments of large corporations and spin-off from those companies is becoming evident. Employment is easier to find than elsewhere in the province, and the community is welcoming to newcomers.

The city and region would greatly benefit from an intentional immigration strategy that addresses the impact in all aspects of the community: employer needs, labour market needs, community needs, newcomer needs, housing, infrastructure, education, health services, and transportation. An immigration strategy should include these and all other relevant aspects for future economic and population growth.

An immigration strategy that identifies gaps and challenges, assesses the readiness of the community, and produces a framework using immigration as a key element for future economic and population growth would be an advantage for the community. This strategy could address challenges and provide a road map for successful immigration, settlement and integration into the community.

The advantage of slow and steady immigration is that currently the City of Portage has the time and opportunity to create an immigration strategy for future economic development and population growth. While attraction of newcomers is important, of equal importance is retention, and a focus on what it means to be a welcoming and inclusive community for all community members.

The following recommendations focus on the development of a strategic direction for Portage la Prairie and region, to address gaps and improve services and are based on a compilation of the findings of the consultation process and the key issues profiled in the research.

## Recommendations:

- An immigration strategy should be developed for the region that:
  - Would assist the City of Portage la Prairie in taking a greater role in planning for and guiding immigration and settlement, and would engage local partners, including the Portage la Prairie Local Immigration Partnership in the development of the immigration strategy.
  - Includes a readiness assessment of the community to measure both attraction and retention of newcomers, and focus on both short-term and long-term needs.
  - Includes an intentional community immigration program that benefits both the newcomer and the host community, and encourages newcomers to live and work in Portage.
  
- The City of Portage la Prairie should facilitate collaboration between the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program and federal programs and initiatives to strengthen efforts toward immigration and settlement in Portage la Prairie.

During this study, information provided through the survey, interviews and feedback from the advisory group, uncovered questions that were connected to the study, but outside of the scope of this project.

This led to a short list of recommendations for future research projects for the Portage la Prairie Local Immigration Partnership.

- Organize and develop a working group with a focus on newcomer/indigenous relationships
- Continue work on anti-racism initiatives
- Conduct a review on the retention of newcomers to Portage la Prairie
- Conduct a review on newcomer access and attendance at Post-Secondary education in Portage la Prairie



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Mitch Tilk - Portage la Prairie Local Immigration Partnership

Megan Romphf – Portage la Prairie Local Immigration Partnership

Cornell Pashe – Urban Indigenous Community Coordinator, Portage la Prairie

Eve O’Leary –Portage of Portage la Prairie and Region Economic Development Office

Cathy Dowd – Portage Learning and Literacy Centre

Don Boddy – Manitoba Association of Newcomer Serving Organizations



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