

Research Report on Newcomer Settlement in the Pembina Valley

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Pembina Valley
Local Immigration
Partnership

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PVLIP is also very thankful to Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) for funding this research.



1.0 INTRODUCTION



On December 23, 2021, the Honorable Sean Fraser, Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship (IRCC) announced that Canada had reached its target of 401,000 new permanent residents for 2021, surpassing the previous record from 1913 (IRCC, 2021a). This historic achievement is significant in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic's many challenges - from closed borders to domestic lockdowns, global migration has been upended by COVID-19¹ (IRCC, 2021b). The distribution of newcomers to Canada has always centered on a few major cities, such as Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver, which are typically the favored destinations (Carter et al., 2008). Until recently, government orders introduced policies and programs to influence the regional distribution of immigrants across the country, seemingly to share the benefits of immigration more evenly on a national basis (IRCC, 2020d).

For Manitoba, the municipalities are the foundation of the provincial economy (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2020). Municipalities play significant roles in delivering essential services and support that impact the integration and settlement outcomes of newcomers to provinces. This responsibility has increased IRCC's recognition of the importance of community engagement and collaborations at the local level since the mid-1990s. Municipalities, as well as regional and local economic development organizations, have pre-existing relationships with local employers and services within the communities they serve. However, the overall integration, socioeconomic development, and business landscape, as well as the capacity to partner in immigration programs, vary across municipalities, communities, and provinces within Canada (IRCC, 2020d).

¹ Regional Connections welcomed 1,192 newcomers in 2019 and 1,561 in 2022 to the Pembina Valley, a record high for the organization. For more information, see - <https://pembina-valleyonline.com/articles/2022-immigration-to-the-pembina-valley-surpasses-pre-pandemic-levels>



Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) provide a means to systematize the local engagement of service providers and other stakeholders to assist in successful integration processes for newcomers and immigrants, thereby providing more welcoming and inclusive communities. Pembina Valley plays an important part in guiding immigration and settlement in the area. Despite the significant contributions newcomers and immigrants make regarding diversity, the growth and quality of the local labor force, as well as the region's efforts to ensure successful integration, critical gaps have been identified as barriers to successful integration and settlement. These issues include inaccessible and unavailable public transportation, housing, long waiting times to access language classes and healthcare, non-recognition of international credentials, and skills training to assist in securing employment.

1.1 History and Demographic Context

Given the continual increase of refugee movement throughout the world for the search for safety, the number of refugees admitted to Canada each year continues to grow, especially given the recent refugee crisis (UNHCR, 2021; IRCC, 2021a). Canada is the second largest resettlement country, and it has an exceptional history of welcoming refugees. For instance, between January 2015 and May 2022, Canada admitted 195,945 refugees. Canada's immigration accounts for almost 100% of its labor force growth, and approximately 75% of Canada's population growth comes from immigration (IRCC, 2021b; Government of Canada, 2022). In 2021, Canada welcomed 401,000 newcomers, and it has been estimated that by 2036, immigrants will represent 30% of Canada's population, compared with 20.1% in 2011 (IRCC, 2021b).

The Pembina Valley is in the province of Manitoba. Manitoba has an estimated population of 1.3 million people and is the fifth populated province in Canada (Canada Population, 2023). The population of Manitoba increased 5.0% between 2016 and 2021, and this growth was in part due

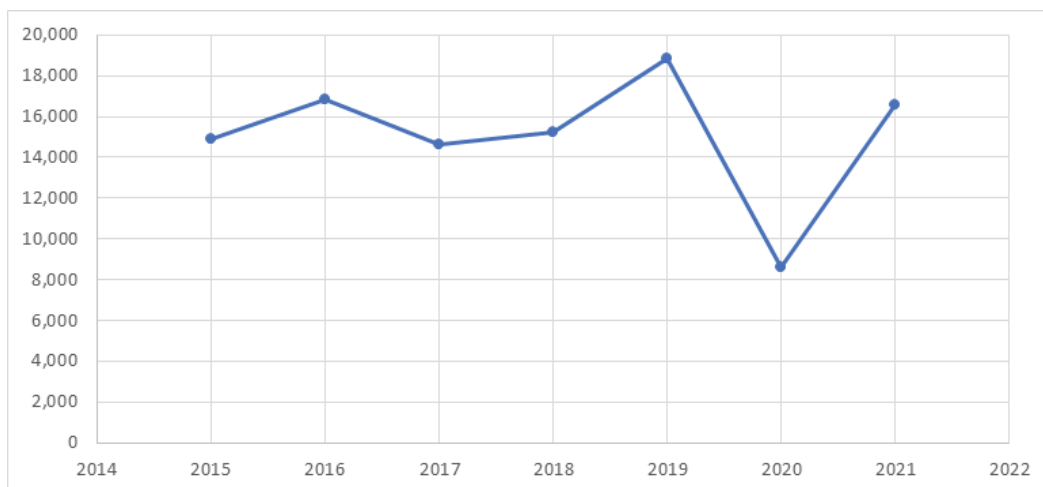


to Canada’s response to the refugee crises in Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine (Government of Canada, 2022).

1.2 Overview of Immigration in Manitoba

Since 1959, Canada has resettled over 700,000 refugees (UNHCR, 2019). Canada is known for its multicultural society, so the significant yearly increase in the number of newcomers in Manitoba is not surprising. Although newcomers contribute to the growth of Canada’s labor force, in 2020, the impact of the pandemic on Canada’s immigration because of traveling restrictions led to a decline in the number of newcomers in 2020 (Government of Canada, 2022). See figure 1.0 below regarding the immigration trends in the province over a span of several years.

Figure 1.0: Admission of newcomers to Manitoba, 2014 - 2022.



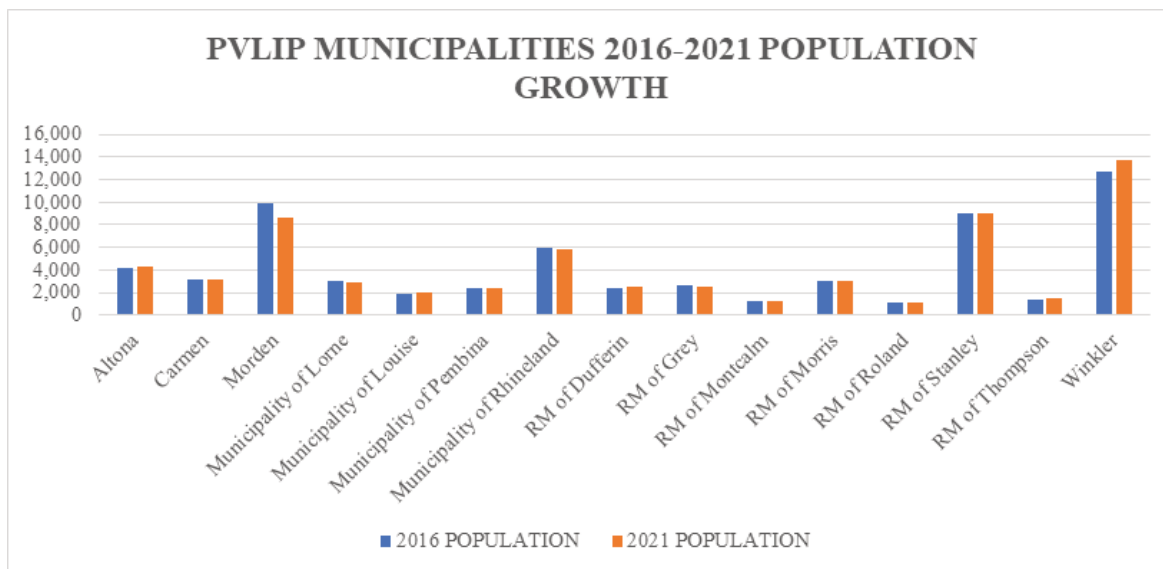
2.0 HISTORICAL TRENDS AND CURRENT DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS IN THE PEMBINA VALLEY



2.1 Region overview

The Pembina Valley is the name of the south-central region of the province of Manitoba, which is named for its major geographical features. This region comprises several communities, including² Altona, Carman, Emerson, Gretna, Manitou, Morris, Notre Dame de Lourdes, Plum Coulee, St Jean Baptiste, as well as the cities of Morden and Winkler and 15 rural municipalities: Dufferin, Grey, Lorne, Louise, Montcalm, Morris, Pembina, Rhineland, Roland, Stanley and Thompson. The region is composed of two Statistics Canada’s census divisions (Manitoba census divisions no. 3 and no. 4), which cover a combined land area of 9,790.98 square kilometers (3,780.32 square miles). In 2016, the area had a population of 64,126 decreasing to 63,979 in 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2021). See figure 2.0 below.

Figure 2.0: Population growth in the Pembina Valley, 2016-2021.



Source: Statistics Canada, 2021.

The municipalities in Pembina Valley are close to each other, and the travel time between communities ranges from 15 minutes to more than an hour by car. Most residents travel between

² Listed in alphabetical order.

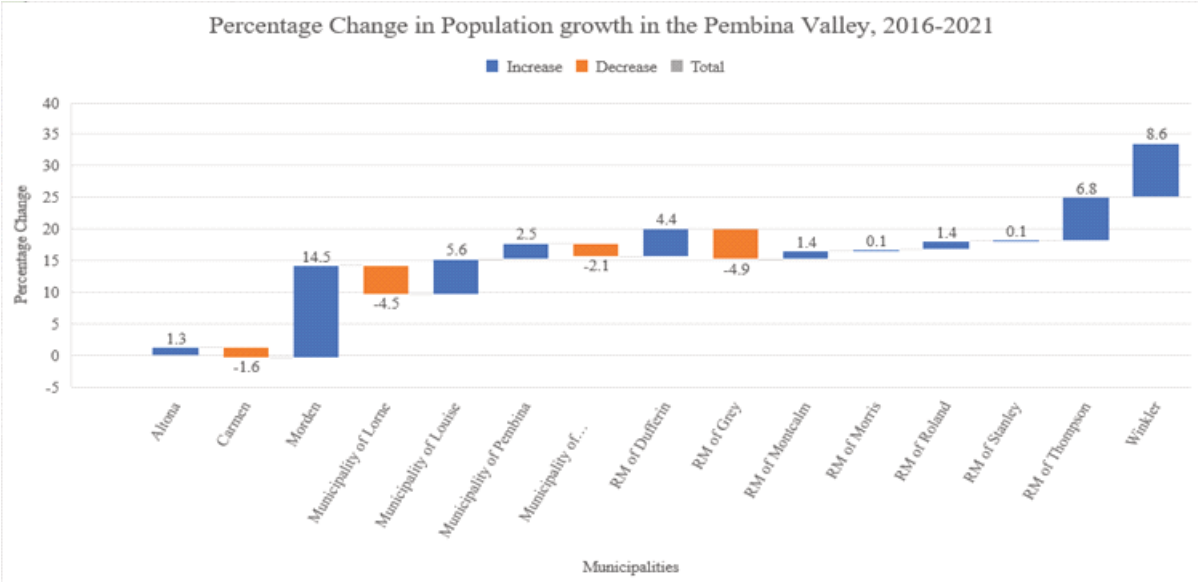


these towns to access services and support systems. Per Census and Labour Force data, the largest industry in the region is manufacturing. Depending on towns versus Rural Municipality, second and third are construction and agriculture. These are major sectors of the economy in the region.

2.2 Demographic trends of Immigration in the Pembina Valley

The Pembina Valley has been active in supporting the recent immigration trends to assist Canada’s humanitarian agenda and also satisfy the area’s human resources and other related needs. As mentioned, the region has experienced significant population increases since 2016 at varying rates across the municipalities. See figure 2.1 below.

Figure 2.1: Percentage Change in Population growth in the Pembina Valley, 2016-2021.



Source: Statistics Canada, 2021.

In addition, the region is rich in ethnic diversity and cultures - groups in the region originate from Germany, Russia, Ukraine, Philippines, India, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Hong Kong, Mexico, Pakistan, Kazakhstan (PVLIP Toolkit, 2022). According to recent research, most of the immigrants



that have settled in the community arrived from countries where English or French is a second language or is not spoken. See table 2.0 below.

Table 2.0: Mother Tongue of Immigrants Pembina Valley, 2021 census.

PVLIP Municipalities	English	French	Non-Official Language	Percentage of non-official language
Altona	2, 575	35	1, 395	35%
Carman	2, 605	65	310	10%
Morden	6, 830	85	2, 570	27%
Winkler	7, 390	60	5, 640	43%
Dufferin, RM	1, 895	65	540	21%
Grey, RM	1,760	410	235	10%
Lorne, RM	1, 545	800	380	14%
Louise, RM	1, 600	40	295	15%
Montcalm, RM	660	370	170	14%
Morris, RM	1, 905	100	995	33%
Pembina, RM	2, 010	30	320	13%
Rhineland, RM	3, 160	20	2, 475	44%
Roland, RM	835	10	280	25%
Stanley, RM	4, 355	15	4, 375	50%
Thompson, RM	980	10	495	33%

Source: Statistic Canada, 2021

2.3 Pembina Valley Local Immigration Partnership (PVLIP)

Settlement and support services contribute to newcomers’ settlement and integration, allowing them to fully participate in and contribute to various aspects of their communities. Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) pilots, such as the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP) recognize that the settlement process cannot follow a one-size-fits-all model, so they have implemented retention-based principles that prioritize strong community settlement services. Altona and Rhineland in Pembina Valley have been recognized as communities where the RNIP has been the most successful across the country.



In 2017, PVLIP was launched to organize the local engagement of service providers and other stakeholders to assist in a successful integration process for newcomers and provide more welcoming and inclusive communities. Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) were developed to focus on five key areas: **developing** and engaging a multisector council, diverse immigrant advisory table, and working groups to support the community’s settlement and integration priorities; **engaging** traditional and non-traditional partners in the inclusion of newcomers; **supporting** community-level research and strategic planning; **strengthening** local capacity to integrate newcomers; and **increasing** knowledge about newcomer needs, strengths, and local strategies for support.

Despite the population growth of newcomers in the region, the communities continue to experience major barriers, such as inaccessible or unavailable transportation, housing challenges, and inconvenient access to healthcare, and childcare. This report presents the findings of the *Pembina Valley Local Immigration Partnership (PVLIP) comprehensive immigrant survey, interviews, and focus groups* held during 2021 and 2022 and provides sources from existing literature that support the findings. The objectives of this research are to determine newcomers’ needs and the community’s assets, gaps and to raise awareness of these needs with partnership members and the wider community. To achieve these goals, the scope of this research highlights the following:

1. Available services (settlement and mainstream services) and the capacity of service providers to support newcomers’ settlement and integration needs.
2. Barriers to integration in several domains (e.g., employment, housing, healthcare, transportation).
3. Summary of consultations held with newcomers, employers, service providers, and other stakeholders in the community.

The results of this research report will help guide and improve the programs and services provided and, the lived experiences of newcomers including immigrants in the region. In addition, the findings will be shared with local organizations and decision-makers to help them understand and support settlement and integration in the Pembina Valley.



3.0 METHODOLOGY



In early Fall 2021, PVLIP worked in collaboration with various partners to develop a research strategy for the PVLIP Immigrant Study. The study was live from December 3, 2021, to January 15, 2022, followed by data collection and analysis. These research questions guided the overall process:

1. Do immigrants access settlement services?
2. What are the challenges for newcomers and immigrants who settle in the Pembina Valley?
3. What opportunities are there to improve their settlement experiences?

This process was followed by interviews with newcomers in the region and consultations with Regional Connections Immigrant Services and employers in the area. The aim was to better understand newcomers' personal experiences after arriving in Pembina Valley regarding challenges, access and service use. The consultations also included the voices of stakeholders, whose insights, discussions, and useful recommendations are essential when considering both the short- and long-term needs of newcomers in the region.

3.1 Data Collection

Data were collected using several channels so that a holistic view could be gained of the integration of newcomers and immigrants in Pembina Valley. Given that the COVID-19 restrictions had relaxed in many of the communities, some interviews were conducted in person. Focus groups were conducted via Zoom and online surveys were accessible to participants through SurveyMonkey. Existing literature was also gathered with a focus on topics related to immigration, integration, settlement, and census populations for Canada and Pembina Valley.

3.1.1 Newcomers and Immigrants (Survey and One-on-one interviews)



3.1.1.1 Survey

A survey was designed for newcomers and immigrants in the Pembina Valley in 2021 and 2022. The survey was reviewed by the PVLIP Council and Immigrant Advisory Table (IAT), who provided feedback and assisted in pilot testing before the survey was administered. The survey was written in English, and participants accessed it via the SurveyMonkey platform. Participants were offered the opportunity to complete the survey in a different language, including the top languages represented in the region: Arabic, German, Tagalog, Hindi, Italian, Portuguese, Punjabi, Russian, Spanish, Ukrainian, and French. However, no requests were made for this service. A total of 271³ immigrants including newcomers, between the ages of 16 and 65 years participated in this survey.⁴

The survey was promoted through multiple channels to reach as many immigrants and newcomers as possible. The strategy included social media advertisements and 500 promotional survey cards that were disbursed among various partners, businesses, and local cultural food stores and restaurants in the region.

3.1.1.2 One-on-one interviews

One-on-one interviews were conducted with newcomers who responded to the call for participants, which was promoted primarily during the region's local 2022 summer festivals. When these interviews occurred, pandemic restrictions had been lifted. These interviews were designed to provide a platform for newcomers and immigrants to share their experiences in greater depth than was possible with the survey. The interview included open-ended questions, and each session was an hour in length and scheduled at a convenient time for the participant. Throughout the interviews, participants were provided with operational definitions of key terms to foster clarity in understanding the questions. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permis-

³ Over 500 participants started the survey but did not complete it. Only those who completed the full survey were included in the survey report.

⁴ See PVLIP website for full details PVLIP Immigrant Survey report, 2022.



sion and subsequently transcribed. The interviews were either in-person or conducted over Zoom.

3.1.1.3 Consultations (Focused group interviews)

In early Fall 2022, consultations were held with Regional Connections Immigrant Services, employers in the Pembina Valley, and other stakeholders. The call for participants was sent through email to partners, stakeholders, and businesses in the region. All consultations were an hour long and completed over Zoom, and they were scheduled at a convenient time for the participants.

The consultations included two parts: a survey and focus groups. An employee survey was created, which was completed by 5⁵ employers, and a Zoom focus group was held for employers. In addition, one focus group session was held with Regional Connections Immigrant Services and stakeholders via Zoom.

The questions were open-ended. The topics of discussion centered on participants' experiences with and knowledge of the integration of newcomers and immigrants in the region and the roles they have played in the integration process, specifically regarding employment, employment support systems, availability of interpretation and translation services, and access to services, such as education and language training. All discussions were audio-recorded with the participants' permission and subsequently transcribed.

⁵ The call for participants was sent out to employers in the Pembina Valley and the survey was made available to over 50 employers to complete online or email their responses.



4.0 FINDINGS

4.1 Immigrant Survey and On-one-one interviews (Newcomers)

The PVLIP survey was conducted to understand immigrant experiences, awareness of existing settlement services, access to information, and use of these services in the Pembina Valley. The one-on-one interviews gave participants the opportunity to share their experiences in depth regarding the themes raised in the initial main survey in 2021 and 2022. The participant survey and interviews focused on several broad areas of service use, including employment, healthcare, language classes, housing, and foreign credential recognition. The following text explains what we have learned from recent newcomers living in the region:.

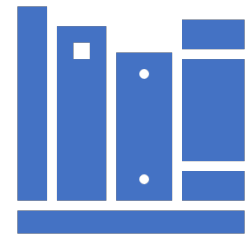
4.1.1 Existing Services and Support systems in the region

Over the past several years, Pembina Valley has experienced a significant rise in immigrant population - in fact, the 2011 census had predicted this population growth. In 2019, Pembina Valley received the second highest number of new immigrants in Manitoba next to Winnipeg (PVLIP, 2021). The region has consistently been putting measures in place to ensure welcoming and inclusive communities, and various stakeholders have participated in creating opportunities to determine which resources are available, what is needed, and which collaborative efforts foster successful integration. PVLIP has helped build the foundation for mobilizing a coordinated newcomer and immigrant integration effort in the various communities, fostering collaboration across sectors and municipalities for resource alignment, and developing new strategies to meet new and growing needs of both newcomers and the regional communities⁶.

Existing services and support systems in the region are essential for achieving beneficial and successful integration of newcomers and immigrants. To retain and attract newcomers, certain services and programs have been put in place to meet their needs. In some communities, Regional Connections Immigrant Services⁷ exist to attend to newcomers' needs, and the goal is to assist or

⁶ For more details, see <https://pvlip.ca/about-us/>

⁷ Offices are located in Winkler, Morden, and Altona with itinerant services available in Carman and Morris.



support them in resettling and integrating in their communities successfully. Regional Connections Immigrant Services provide immigrants and refugees with services related to language classes, language interpretation, legal and documentation needs, medical and mental health referrals, employment, education, housing and childcare (family services) (Gibson et al., 2017; Wilkinson et al., 2018).

Information gathered through the 2022 PVLIP Immigrant Survey, interviews with newcomers, consultations, and focused research confirms that prioritizing resources and making them consistently available to this population is key to their settlement in the region. This process fosters not only a sense of inclusiveness but also the existence of the support networks needed to develop and improve service and program delivery. A close look at the major findings (from our immigrant survey and one-on-one interviews) indicates that the existing services and support systems in the region are important.

4.1.1.1 Information workshops and Orientation Sessions

Newcomers arrive in Pembina Valley with many expectations of their new community and home, which makes learning about living in the region beneficial for their integration and growth. From the onset, newcomers have access to information and orientation sessions through Regional Connections Immigrant Services in their communities. Popular topics for these sessions include an introduction to and understanding life in Canada and their community, places to go (getting around), climate, registering for language classes, health, rights and responsibilities, cost of living, and employment. These sessions⁸ are crucial because newcomers often experience culture shock and have to adapt to new roles. The information is presented in a simple manner to ensure that newcomers can grasp their new reality and also adjust their expectations in some cases.

Referral and assessment services are also provided, especially in communities where some services are not available, such as immigration assistance and translation and interpretation services,

⁸ For more information, please see the Regional Connections website <https://regionalconnections.ca/>



especially for French-speaking newcomers⁹. To an extent, this situation highlights the challenges that exist in some of the communities in Pembina Valley. Overall, these workshop and sessions provide newcomers with not only vital information but also a chance to address pertinent issues that are key to their successful integration and community involvement.

4.1.1.2 Literacy and Language Training

Canada has two official languages - English and French - so it is beneficial for newcomers settling in the country to be fluent in at least one of these languages (Boyd and Cao, 2009; Huot et al, 2020). Recognizing the importance of Canadian languages in the integration of the diverse immigrant population settling in different parts of the country, the federal and provincial governments fund several language programs delivered through Settlement Provider Organizations (SPOs.) Literacy and language training helps newcomers by teaching English or French and building skills and the confidence to communicate in social and community situations. These benefits increase the chances of finding suitable employment, accessing community resources, and feeling less isolated. To this end, Regional Connections also incorporate extracurricular activities for practicing English or French in a variety of social settings - for instance.

The language classes provided in the region offer a supportive environment for learning a new language¹⁰. Classes are offered at different levels to accommodate for newcomer's different language and literacy levels. Also, classes are given at different times, either in person or online, to provide more options to accommodate schedules and childcare needs. The main goal of the language classes is to develop listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills based on Canadian Language Benchmarks. Regional Connections in Altona, Morden, and Winkler have been meeting language and literacy needs since 1988. Classes run year-round on a variety of schedules and free on-site childcare is available for preschool aged children of learners for many classes. Eng-

9 There is a Bi-lingual service center in Notre Dame which covers the Pembina Valley for any French related needs and services.

10 Regional Connections is a Language Assessment and Referral Centre (LARC) and as such, able to provide CLB placement tests. For more information, see - <https://regionalconnections.ca/programs/language/class-schedule/online-english-classes/>



lish as a Second Language (ESL) classes use the Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) system in Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) classes (IRCC, 2004; Mudzingwa, 2020). Further to this, Regional Connections run and advise clients to sign up for Language Buddies and Conversation Circles (Clients can begin attending a Conversation Circle immediately) - these are in part, a way to both supplement formal language learning (classroom) but also to fill the gap while clients are waiting for a spot in class.

4.1.1.3 Settlement Support Services

Settlement support services are an integral part of welcoming newcomers to communities. The federal and provincial governments have supported this process by funding programs, services, and operations delivered by Settlement Provider Organizations (SPOs) (Government of Canada, 2022). In Pembina Valley, Regional Connections Immigrant Services deliver a broad range of client-focused and organized systems of resources, assistance, and support for newcomers and immigrants in the various communities. For instance, Regional Connections has offices in Winkler, Morden, Altona, which serve as one-stop service hubs to serve the growing needs of the diverse populations in their communities. During the past several years, settlement support services in the region have evolved and grown, creating a more accessible service model for newcomers and immigrants. In examining closely those who use these services - that is, newcomers and immigrants living in the region, we found that our survey highlighted particular elements:

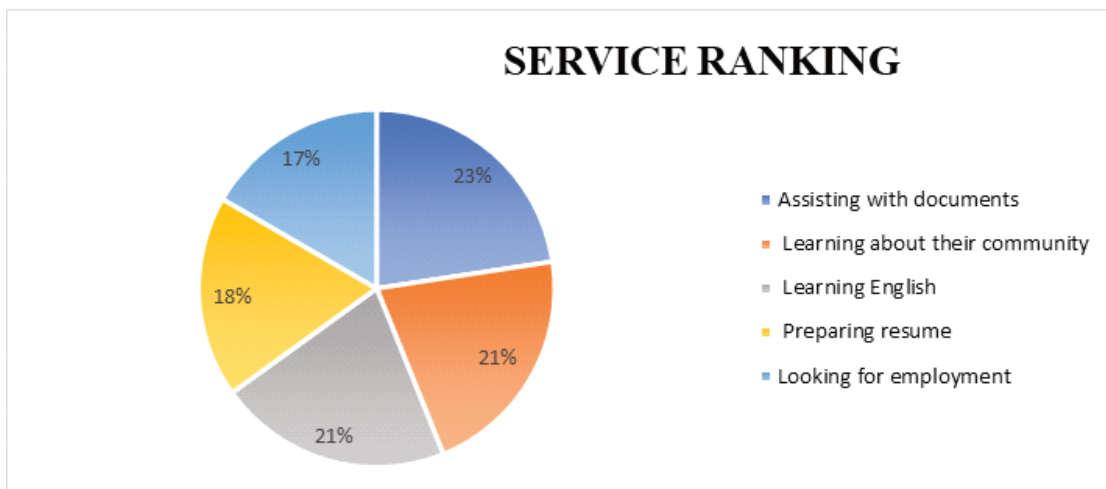
When newcomers and immigrants were asked about their awareness of available settlement services in the Pembina Valley, 86.3%¹¹ indicated that they were aware of the settlement services available in their community, whereas 13.7% did not have knowledge about such services. This finding is beneficial, as it showcases the extent to which settlement agencies are reaching newcomers and providing the needed support. It also draws attention to the need to create more awareness of such services in the various communities and nearby areas. When asked how they

¹¹ This percentage is based on our survey participants and does not include the recently arrived Ukrainian refugees.



learned about the settlement services for immigrants in their communities, respondents reported that they did so through friends (38.0%), a settlement worker - someone who works at Regional Connections (28.8%), family members or social media (24.4%), and “other” (6.3%). When asked how helpful Regional Connections was with services, respondents indicated that they used the services for the following: assisting with documents (51.8%), learning about their community (48.8%), learning English (48.6%), preparing resumes (41.8%), and looking for employment (38.2%). See figure 4.0 below.

Figure 4.0: Service use in Pembina Valley ranked by newcomers and immigrants.



Source: PVLIP Immigrant Survey, 2022.

Participants reported they have used settlement services, such as employment and language services, in the region. In one interview, a participant commented the following: *“Very surprised about all the info received from settlement worker. Was told how to do everything...including documents and answered all my questions. Regional Connections is a free gift for newcomers!”*

This sentiment was expressed by other interviewed participants. Regarding employment services, when asked about their experiences in accessing employment services from Regional Connections, one respondent shared the following: *“Yes Regional Connections helped with resume, sent*

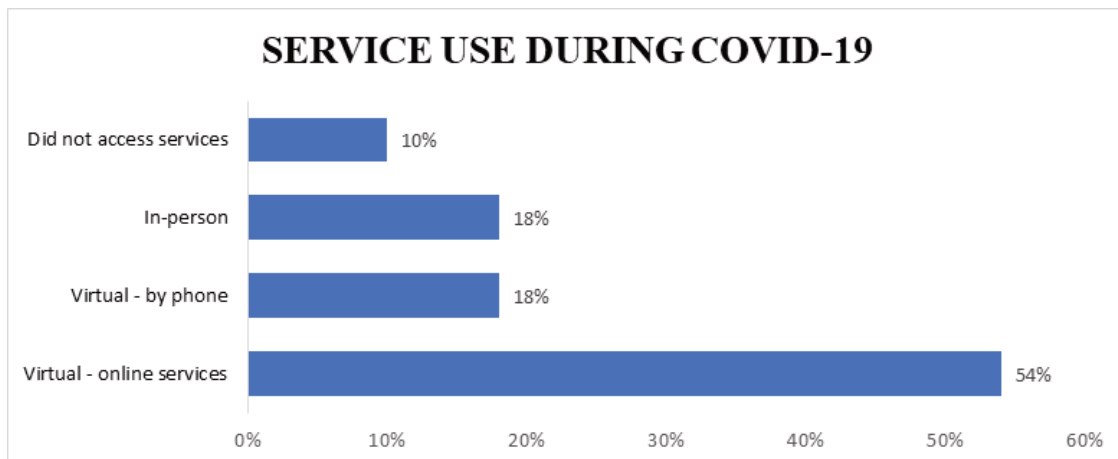


me to where to apply for work, also volunteering with Regional Connections if you want to work, they help you. People are very nice always helping with kids, paperwork... ”.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted how services and programs were delivered across the country (Esses, 2021; Abbas, 2022). Most newcomers arriving during that period felt an overwhelming sense of isolation and abandonment, as most SPOs had shut down and programs in some places closed temporarily or offered services online - in the case of Pembina Valley, Regional Connections adjusted its daily operations during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown protocols. They shifted to remote services only for 2-6 weeks (varied by office) in April to May 2020. In addition, locations opened for one-on-one in-person services that complied with health and safety policies, regulations and continued with many online and remote services. Regional Connections invested a lot in VOIP, Teams and Zoom to be able to provide continuous service delivery throughout the pandemic.

Nonetheless some of these new changes affected newcomers in the region who had to adapt to new processes and integration measures. In our survey, respondents were asked how they accessed services during the COVID-19 pandemic: 54% said virtual-online, 18.0% virtual-by phone or ways other than online, 18% in person, and 10% did not access services. See figure 4.1 below.

Figure 4.1: Service use in Pembina Valley during COVID-19 by newcomers and immigrants.



Source: PVLIP Immigrant Survey, 2022.

In addition, survey responses reflected the importance of settlement services and programs. Ranging from 1 to 12 months after arrival, 89.6% of the respondents indicated they had used the settlement services in their community. However, 10.4% indicated that they did not access services. Overall, satisfaction of newcomers and immigrants on services in the Pembina Valley was fairly high.

4.1.1.4 Sense of Belonging and Community Connectedness

According to Kitchen et al. (2015), even though variations exist among different populations, the sense of belonging among Canadian residents has increased in recent years. This finding means that more people have feelings of connectedness to their communities and feelings of being attached to and accepted by the members of their communities and being part of something. In addition, some scholars note that a sense of belonging is an important determinant of psychological and physical well-being (Michalski et. al, 2020; Chireh et. al, 2022). A sense of belonging and community connectedness for most newcomers and immigrants is more than just being part of a community - it is a way of forging new identities and relationships and sharing and developing beliefs and ideals. As such, much effort has been made in the region to be inclusive by developing relationships with immigrants and creating conditions and opportunities for experiences that foster community connectedness. The findings from our survey with newcomers and immigrants in Pembina Valley indicate the following:

Almost 84% of the respondents agreed that they are welcome in their community; 3.9% disagreed and approximately 12.5% were indifferent. In addition, 75.7% had a strong sense of belonging to their community, 7.1% had weak sense of belonging to their community, and 17.2% were indifferent regarding their sense of belonging to their community. This finding, to an extent, confirms the benefits of the intercultural programs and festivals that take place in the various



communities, as well as the various social gatherings that provide newcomers with opportunities to participate at different levels. Most indicated they connect with their community by using recreational facilities (59.6%), participating in cultural events (57.8%), spending time at and using services provided by public libraries (54.5%), attending church or other religious services (53.7%), and group activities organized by Regional Connections (51.3%).

Most of the respondents (73%) indicated that they feel safe in their community, 16.8% reported that they do not feel safe in their community, and 10.2% were not sure. Although most indicated they feel safe, some respondents suggested that there should be more services for newcomer women regarding domestic violence, such as legal support, webinars to explain rights, and opportunities for those with children.

4.1.2 Challenges

Despite the continuous contribution of newcomers and immigrants to the social, political, and economic growth of the region, they continue to face major challenges that have implications for successful integration and settlement. According to the respondents, the most significant challenges they or their family have experienced since settling in Pembina Valley include the following:

4.1.2.1 Housing

Housing plays a central role regarding the settlement of newcomers in Canada, and our survey and one-on-one responses provided a clear indication that housing is the main challenge newcomers in the region face. Although Canada is considered a high-income country, housing security and homelessness remains a major social problem, particularly for immigrants and refugees (Teixeira and Halliday, 2010; Walsh et al., 2016). A 2014 study indicated that approximately 500,000 immigrant households in Canada were in core housing need (Bell, 2019), providing evidence of system failure in addressing the pressing housing needs of newcomers. To retain new-



comers in the region, it is necessary to create not only affordable housing but also sustainable housing for newcomers so that the predicted growth of immigrants to the region can be met.

4.1.2.2 Finding work and Foreign Credentials

The existing literature and research on immigrants in Canada indicate that most struggle to find work and often work in fields unrelated to their education or training (Creese and Wiebe, 2012; Banerjee et al., 2019). Our survey identified a similar pattern for newcomers in the region regarding finding work - many newcomers are not able to find or secure jobs in their field, sometimes because of their accents or lack of foreign credentials or Canadian work experience. When participants were asked to share their experiences of finding employment in the region, one respondent indicated in the interview that although it had not been difficult to find work in the region, the jobs did not pay well: *“We are not earning enough money for the family. I need second job to support family even though both are working, expenses are higher than earnings. We can’t buy a house on our current income.”* Many newcomers are accepting low-paid jobs below their previous level of work, and in other cases, they have multiple part-time jobs to meet their living expenses. When asked whether their current jobs were at the same level of their education, skills, and experience, the interviewees indicated that their jobs in the region are downgrades from their careers in their home countries¹². Below are some of their responses:

“I had to downgrade. I worked as service engineer (computer science), trained in Europe. Working now as a machine operator.”

“I want to start a new career; working as secretary...diploma in computer science...will work now in day care and getting less pay here than in former country.”

“I have a master’s degree in banking, worked as logistics—coca cola, beverage plant, now working at an entry level job in production.”

¹² Employers in Pembina Valley know they are under-employing newcomer applicants but indicate these are the only applicants they are getting. The current economic immigration streams often brings Internationally Educated Professionals who are overqualified for the entry level jobs in manufacturing, construction, food services, hospitality, and retail available in the region.



4.1.2.3 Insufficient Language Classes¹³

Language fluency is vital for the economic and social integration of newcomers in Canadian society. Several research have highlighted that knowledge of an official language has a positive effect on earnings and is associated with a higher probability of finding employment and accessing healthcare (Creticos et al. 2006; Martinez et al., 2005). The major challenges for newcomers in Pembina Valley are the long waiting list to access English classes¹⁴, the lack of available day care options, and the cost associated with day care. These problems are major concerns for most newcomers for whom English is not their first language and who find themselves in communities where it is needed for day-to-day interactions.

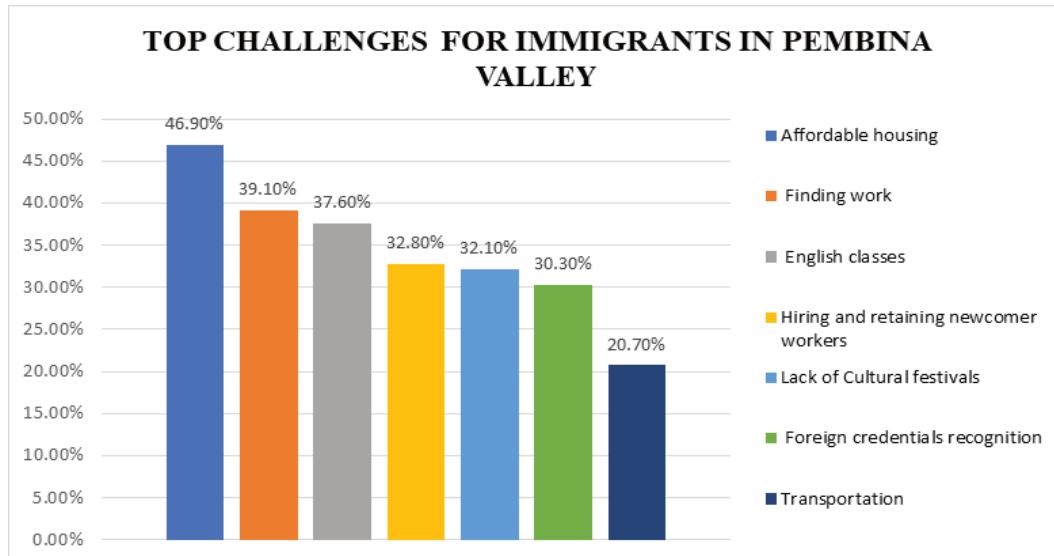
Furthermore, when participants were asked whether they used language services upon arriving, some indicated that they had access to language services. A respondent shared the following: *“Had an assessment...can join a group online for 3 hours 3x/week. But due to shift work, I cannot participate on a regular basis...”* However, other interviewees also indicated that their immigration status prevented them from accessing this service because they were not permanent residents. As one of the respondents stated, *“Cannot join classes until Permanent Resident. Needed Ukrainian, Korean, Russian - but other newcomers help with interpretation for those with low English.”* Regional Connections Immigrant Services in the area are faced with capacity challenges, as most newcomers arrive eager to learn at least one of Canada’s official languages to facilitate integration into their new home. As participants from our survey indicated, even when evening language classes were available, few could take advantage of this option because of the lack of public transportation. See Figure 4.2 for summary of top challenges of newcomers in Pembina Valley.

¹³ On average, it takes a new client about 6 weeks to get through full Language process that includes: initial needs assessment and planning, CLB placement test, class registration, and then actually attending class. This can vary by class as some have spaces open and can take students immediately, some are full with low turnover and people wait longer.

¹⁴ In 2022, there were about 100 clients on average in this 6-week processing time. This was due to the very high number of immigrant arrivals in 2022 hence, in many locations in the region, wait times were much longer.



Figure 4.2: Top Challenges of newcomers in Pembina Valley.



Source: PVLIP Immigrant Survey, 2022.

4.1.2.4 Lack of Public Transportation

Access to safe and reliable transportation contributes to quality of life, especially for newcomers and immigrants settling into their new communities. Public transportation makes life easier for residents by providing a means to commute to work, access healthcare and settlement services and programs, and perform errands outside the home (Majkut, 2011; NORC, 2019). Note that Pembina Valley is in Manitoba, which has harsh cold seasons which can last from October to May so at certain times of the year, walking or cycling are not feasible alternatives to reach a destination - in winter, the use of bicycles is not ideal due to snow, extreme cold and infrastructure that is not balanced to accommodate cyclists. This situation is a major challenge for newcomers who arrive with no personal vehicles, or they have one car but it is with the spouse at work and the remaining spouse has no vehicle resulting in having to rely on volunteers¹⁵ to meet needs and extending commute times for accessing resources and support. Even for those with personal vehicles, driving long distances can be especially burdensome - driving in winter conditions for the first several years is very stressful and for newcomers, it takes time to adjust to driv-

¹⁵ The cost of gas often hinders volunteers from being willing to help out with rides for newcomers.



ing in the snow. In our survey and interviews with newcomers, our participants indicated that the lack of public transportation has prevented them from participating in community activities and programs at the settlement offices¹⁶, which are needed to promote integration and a sense of belonging, especially during the winter.

4.1.2.5 Healthcare

Even though healthcare access and experiences did not emerge as one of the top challenges that newcomers and immigrants experience in Pembina Valley, a close examination of our one-on-one interviews with recent newcomers indicated that some level of system breakdown exists that creates barriers for newcomers accessing the healthcare system after their arrival. When asked about their experience accessing healthcare in the region, one participant said, *“Very different experience here than before in home country. Don’t have a family doctor...need to get a specialist. I waited one month for ultrasound...then sent doctor’s appointment via mail...took another month to get appointment.”* Others also mentioned discriminatory experiences with healthcare professionals and a lack of culturally sensitive care.

4.2 Consultations¹⁷ (Survey and focus groups for employers and Regional Connections Immigrant Services)

To gain a holistic view of the integration and experiences of newcomers and immigrants in Pembina Valley, we held consultations with employers, Regional Connections Immigrant Services, and other stakeholders. The goal was for employers in the region to share their perspectives on their experiences with hiring, attempting to hire, or wanting to hire newcomers. For Regional Connections Immigrant Services and stakeholders, the goal was for them to share their perspectives on service use and programs most needed by their clients (newcom-



¹⁶ The Fall-Winter periods are the same seasons when language classes are available.

¹⁷ Due to low sample size, response from employers, Regional Connections Immigrant Services and partners have been combined for the discussions in this section.

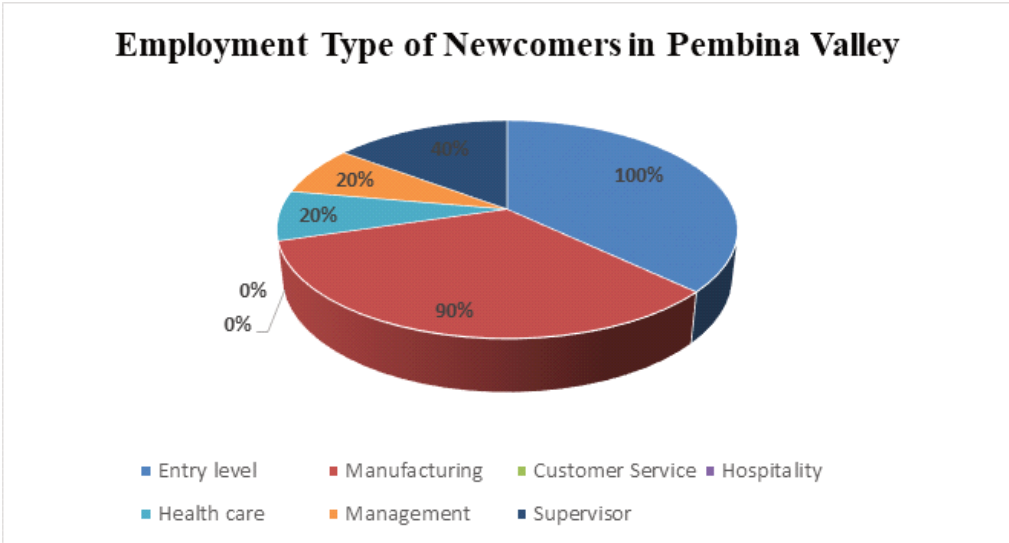


ers). The consultations also provided the space to discuss support systems, barriers, and challenges in the region and to share thoughts on welcoming newcomers.

4.2.1 Employment

Immigrants arrive in Canada with varying skills and work experiences, making them valuable in the Canadian labor market (Buzdugan and Halli, 2009; Ogoe, 2022). Creating a diverse workforce has been beneficial to businesses in Pembina Valley, and employers are constantly exploring ways to absorb the skill sets that newcomers arrive with. In our survey and focus group with employers, all the employers who participated indicated that their workforce has a significant newcomer population from diverse countries of origin. However, because of language skills upon arrival and low to intermediate familiarity with the Canadian labor market, the newcomer and immigrant employees are typically placed in entry-level jobs; some also raised the point that these are the positions that newcomers usually apply for, then move up the job ladder by applying for higher positions as they gain experience. See figure 4.3 below for an overview of employers' survey responses.

Figure 4.3: Employment Type of Newcomers in Pembina Valley.



Source: PVLIP Employer Survey, 2022.



Newcomers are major contributors to the economic growth of the region. Depending on the size of their business, some employers indicated that they have at least 8 newcomer employees, whereas others have as many as 300. Over a span of 10 years, some companies in the region have hired about 170 newcomers, and these numbers, according to those who participated in the focus group, are expected to increase.

Similarly, Regional Connections Immigrant Services in the focus group interviews noted that newcomers arrive in the region with no Canadian work experience but with transferable skills and knowledge from their home countries. They work with them on resume development, preparation for interviews, job listings, and computer and internet access for job searches. To build Canadian work experience, they have engaged their newcomer clients in volunteer programs and opportunities.

Furthermore, discussions from the focus groups confirmed that employers in the region value newcomer talent for helping fill a much-needed workforce gap - this sentiment was shared by employers and the Regional Connections Immigrant Services. When asked about their success as a result of hiring newcomers, the participants (employers) indicated that they were able to meet labor force needs and they also gained diverse experiences and skills, new ideas, and positive work ethic. In addition, a recurring theme that almost all the participants emphasized was the appreciation for the increased diversity and different perspectives that newcomers bring to the region's labor market.

4.2.2 Workplace Integration

Workplaces have a commitment to embrace and implement best practices of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. Our consultation with employers included questions and discussions specifically regarding what employers are doing in their workplaces to help their newcomer employees. For Regional Connections Immigrant Services and stakeholders, the focus was more on



creating awareness to ensure that newcomers are not exposed to discrimination and alienation and educating newcomers on knowing their rights in the workplace.

This topic brought to light the preparedness of different employment places regarding the region's support for newcomer workforces as they adjust, learn, and become accustomed to their communities and life in Canada overall. Some of the employers shared that they have the following in place:

- Translation services, in addition to translating general orientation materials
- One-on-one training with lead hand assistance
- Buddy systems
- Assistance with living arrangements
- Provision of English and essential skills classes
- Accommodations for dietary restrictions
- Transportation to appointments
- Purchase of temporary health insurance while waiting for health cards

Regional Connections Immigrant Services also have workshops and training sessions in place that focus on labor market integration to help employers adopt best practices and newcomers navigate their work life.

In addition, we asked employers to share how their business or organization can improve on welcoming their newcomer employees, and they provided the following responses:

- Recognition of holidays and significant dates from the immigrants' countries of origin
- More streamlined processes
- Additional translation and interpreter service options
- Continual revision and updates for orientation and onboarding processes

4.2.3 Skill Enhancement and Development

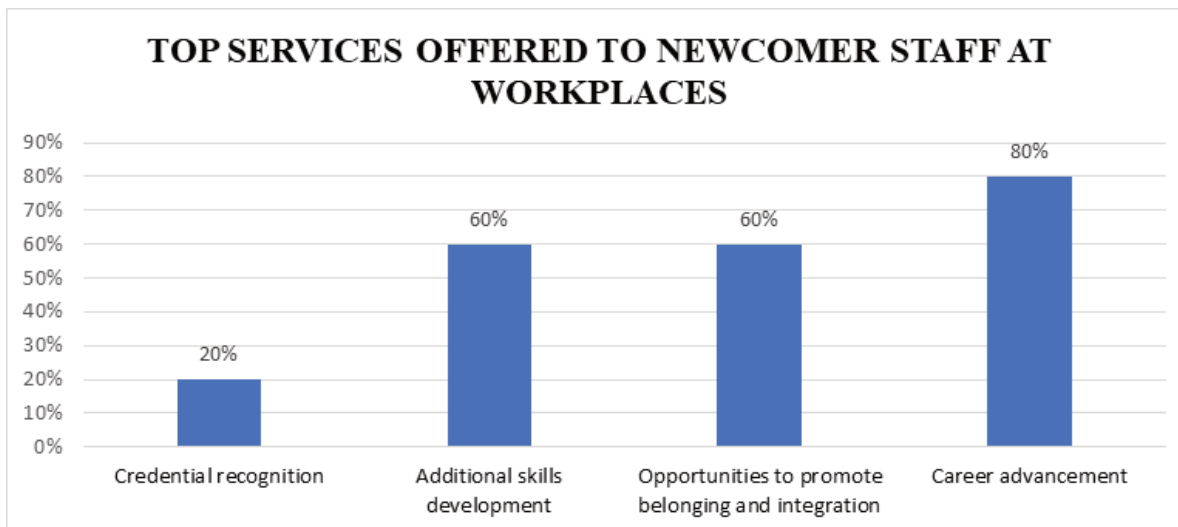
Skill enhancement and development assist newcomers in optimizing their existing skills and experiences, thereby achieving better success rates at work. Employers in Pembina Valley recognize the contributions of newcomers and immigrants to the economy, but there are increases in



high- and low-skilled workers, mismatches between skills and job positions, and aging populations, among others. Therefore, employers invest heavily in their staff to help them perform various tasks as well as advance in their jobs. Development programs have become part of the model in the region to improve newcomers' responsiveness to Pembina Valley's labor market needs - Regional Connections Immigrant Services in the study noted a number of employment programs they have in place. As mentioned, newcomers often arrive with different foreign work experience, training, and levels of education, and as a result, their needs may be complex, often requiring multifaceted approaches depending on the type of business or company.

The top services employers indicated they have invested in regarding newcomer employees include career advancement (80%), opportunities to promote belonging and integration (60%), skills development (60%), and assistance for foreign credential recognition. See figure 4.4 below.

Figure 4.4: Top services offered to newcomer staff at workplaces.



Source: PVLIP Employer Survey, 2022.

4.2.4 Connecting with Regional Connections

Employers and Regional Connections Immigrant Services often work together to facilitate the economic integration of newcomers and immigrants and to identify and provide the needed labor



market trainings. It is important that employers have in place the necessary support and measures to achieve a sustained labor market integration for newcomers. Therefore, building good relationships between employers and Regional Connections Immigrant Services in their communities is necessary. In some cases, employers have received job referrals for newcomers in the region: 40% are extremely familiar with settlement services (Regional Connections) for newcomers or immigrants, 20% are very familiar, and 40% somewhat familiar.

Over the years, the diversity of newcomers in the various communities has presented opportunities for employers and Regional Connections Immigrant Services to examine strategies and explore employment programs and trainings that make newcomers' economic integration better and, to an extent, easier. Our participants indicated that some of their newcomer staff are receiving English language classes from Regional Connections and help from employment programs but they continue to require support. The employers also addressed the fact that more needs to be done to close the gap and remove barriers newcomers and immigrants face. They would like Regional Connections to help in hiring and retaining their newcomer and immigrant staff as well as:

- Assist newcomers with transportation services (to Service Canada, MPI, etc.).
- Provide translation services for employers until the newcomer reaches a certain language level.
- Continue upgrading the amount of pre-training they are offering to newcomers to explain the Canadian work culture, expectations, and rights and ensure they have a place to go (outside of work) if they are unsure of their rights or the expectations of their employer.
- Offer more resources to our local Regional Connections: *“Our staff are having to do a lot of community support, where Regional Connections does offer these services, but does not have the resources to fulfill.”*
- Connect employers and those looking for work: *“I think somehow bridging that gap in a more forward way could help both newcomers and employers fill positions”..*
- Promote continued language learning: *“Support continuing language learning. Somehow when they reach a certain level, they stop attending. How can we ensure this?”.*

4.3 Challenges

Despite the positive experience these employers have had in employing newcomers, they have also experienced difficulties in hiring newcomers. Employers and Regional Connections Immigrant Services outlined the major challenges they face, and they discussed IRCC processing



times, language barriers, a lack of understanding of cultural norms, insufficient community support to successfully settle newcomers in the region, and cultural differences.

4.3.1 IRCC processing times

Processing delays by IRCC is one of the top barriers that the employers experienced, according to the survey for employers in Pembina Valley. Seventy percent of Canada's largest employers use the immigration system to recruit skilled newcomers. They do so to expand their operations, tap newcomers' global networks, and improve their service delivery (Hyder, 2022). In a letter addressed to the Honorable Sean Fraser (Minister of IRCC) regarding the Government of Canada's Immigration Levels Plan for 2023–2025, it was highlighted that increased economic immigration is needed to tackle acute labor and skill shortages. In a survey of Business Council members in the first quarter of 2022, 80% of respondents reported having difficulty finding the skilled workers they needed to grow and compete globally. As a result of these shortages, 67% of respondents had canceled or delayed major projects, 60% reported lost revenues, and 30% were forced to relocate work outside of Canada (Hyder, 2022). According to our employer survey, most of the companies in Pembina Valley have been working with other organizations to help navigate some of these barriers in employing newcomers - only 40% of the employers reported Yes to having worked with other organizations to assist with hiring immigrants or newcomers.

4.3.2. Language barrier

English language use and communication challenges among newcomers in workplaces is not new. This issue has played a role in their exclusion from well-paying jobs, higher work positions, and in some cases, promotion (Adamuti-Trache, 2013; Huot, 2020). With English being the dominant spoken language by businesses and companies in Pembina Valley, newcomer and immigrant staff who have low English skills can be excluded from conversations, discussions, and decisions that occur at their workplaces, and it can also lead to a lack of proper understanding of trainings provided in English or French, among other problems.



Language use is vital to the success of newcomers and immigrants in their employment (Cheng et. al, 2021). According to Novielli (2022), immigrants recognize the limitation that language fluency presents, and as a result, they tend to adopt several communication strategies, such as repeating themselves, spelling things out, adjusting the volume of their voices, or even avoiding situations altogether - these techniques can have an impact on their confidence and performance at the workplace. Employers in the region who participated in our consultation indicated that the main challenges in hiring newcomers are the following:

- Language barriers and understanding cultural norms.
- Cultural and communication differences.
- Low English level that makes it difficult to train and ensure understanding of processes.
- Strong accents, as residents sometimes have difficulty understanding them, especially those with hearing impairment.
- Difficulty understanding the culture and articulating concerns.

4.3.3 Transportation

Participants indicated that transportation is a major challenge for most newcomers in the region, especially during the winter. Even though solving this problem is beyond the means of Regional Connections Immigrant Services, the unanimous suggestion was for public transportation to solve this problem, as this issue has existed in the region for years without a permanent solution. Existing research notes that newcomers overwhelmingly feel that their transportation situation has a strong negative impact on several dimensions of their well-being, including loneliness and sadness and, as a result, their work productivity. It is therefore not surprising that employers in the region consider the lack of reliable public transportation to be a major hindrance for their newcomer employees:

- *“Yes, currently our newcomers need rides to appointments we cannot always fulfill. They need help going to the city to buy clothes for their children...”*
- *“We often hire people - teachers and support staff - that are new to Canada and the ONE biggest concern is lodging. Many do not have Canadian Driver’s licenses and cars to live and commute from the neighbouring communities. They must live in the town in which*



they work. Here in Notre-Dame, the housing market is such that there are few, if any, rentals.”

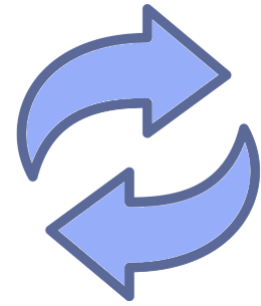
4.4 Recommendations

According to the participants in our consultations (survey and focus group interviews), the following factors should be considered in helping improve labor market access and integration of newcomers in the community:

- Faster IRCC processing times.
- A direct phone line to IRCC from direct service settlement workers to get assistance in a timely manner.
- Available and suitable housing for newcomers - employers in the region indicated they are very limited in hiring newcomers because of lack of housing.
- Public transit.
- More childcare facilities.
- Clearer information about the available employment services Regional Connections offers.
- Job fairs with employers in the region.



5.0 AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT OR CHANGE



Immigration has made significant contributions to Manitoba's economic and population growth and development, as well as cultural diversity. The southern part of Manitoba is well known for its hospitality toward newcomers in the region, and as such, the number of immigrants settling in the communities has been rising over the past several years. Although the region has proven to have strong support systems and services for newcomers, barriers still exist that hinder the successful integration of newcomers. According to past research reports on the region, some of these barriers have been tackled and improvement is evident, but some challenges still remain.

As discussed by all the participants in the surveys and the focus group interviews, barriers exist that hinder the integration of newcomers and immigrants in Pembina Valley. Below are the suggestions most often made by the participants regarding interventions or areas that need change.

5.1 Housing

Research on the region has found housing to be one of the pressing needs of most newcomers (46.9%). Housing plays a central role in the settlement and integration of newcomers in the community. Many of the participants suggested provisions of affordable¹⁸ and appropriate housing for newcomers in the region, especially for those with large families and younger children. From the participants' perspective, housing is expensive for new arrivals with limited finances. In other cases, due to high demand, some landlords are known to conduct interviews with rental submissions and are picking who they want to have as tenants which has led to multiple discrimination-based decisions. Also, landlords create living environments inconducive for those with large families. Hence, provisions of suitable housing are key to retaining newcomers in the region and supporting their integration.

¹⁸ Per CMHC data, the Pembina Valley has relatively affordable housing. The issue is more of cost of housing versus local wages for newcomers in the region. Most newcomers arrive without a credit rating and work in entry level positions which has low wages. An entry level job and no credit rating therefore makes home ownership very difficult/impossible in the initial years of resettlement.



5.2 Employment and Foreign credentials recognition

Another major factor participants discussed is finding work that pays well enough to meet basic needs without continuing to search for supplementary jobs. The newcomer participants indicated that they are underemployed (compared to their education levels and the positions they held in their countries of origin) and receive low wages¹⁹. Newcomers with higher educational qualifications or trained in regulated professions, such as nursing and engineering, are not able to access their chosen profession because of unsuccessful foreign credential recognition, causing them to find employment in low-entry and low-skilled jobs. This problem is substantial because it constitutes underutilization of skills and challenges the long-term retention of newcomers and immigrants in Pembina Valley. Most of the participants expressed that they are not able to survive on one income because of their salaries, so recognizing foreign credentials is a great step toward tapping into the skills and talents of newcomers.

5.3 Language Classes²⁰

Another area suggested is more English classes for newcomers. Although Regional Connections Immigrant Services in the region provide this service, they often have long waiting lists, which delays their settling process and becoming familiar with the communities. An additional challenge is that few locations have childcare²¹ in the language class locations to support newcomers who are unfamiliar with their communities and feel safer with their children nearby. Although employment opportunities may exist in the region, newcomers and immigrants often need to have at least working knowledge of English or French to take advantage of the available opportunities.

5.4 Transportation

Participants also suggested a need for change in the transportation system - having a reliable means of affordable public transportation would serve the many needs of residents, including

¹⁹ As noted earlier, this is an issue with federal/provincial economic streams that favor Internationally Educated Professionals when many local jobs available (in this context, Pembina Valley) are lower skilled.

²⁰ To help improve capacity, Regional Connections has successfully advocated for additional funding for additional classes in 2022 and 2023.

²¹ This is available in Winkler, Morden and Altona - the major communities receiving newcomers.



running everyday errands and getting to and from work and hospital appointments. The lack of public transportation prevents many newcomers from participating in activities and programs that promote integration and sense of belonging. What currently is in place for newcomers and immigrants who cannot afford their own personal vehicle is to continually rely on volunteers, friends, Regional Connections Staff, and, in some cases, taxis, which tend to be expensive. From the perspectives of the participants, if the provincial and federal governments make an effort to invest in public transportation that connects the communities in the region and to Winnipeg, it will solve a barrier that has persisted for years; the travel time between the communities ranges from 15 minutes to more than an hour's drive, and residents must travel between these communities to access available services and support systems.

5.5 Healthcare and Childcare Services

The other areas that participants indicated as needing improvement are the healthcare systems and childcare services in the region. Newcomers reported long waiting times to see a family doctor in the region, with many having to wait for many months or even over two years, which is even worse when one needs to see a specialist. From the consultations, participants discussed poor reception while accessing hospitals, cultural shock regarding how they were treated by health professionals, and extended wait times to receive a Manitoba health card. Participants suggested cultural training²² for health professionals in the region and more informed orientations for newcomers regarding the local and national health systems. They also indicated that a lack of accessible childcare exists in Pembina Valley. Although childcare facilities are present in several communities, they offer few spots and long waiting lists - this finding is no different from what has been reported in previous years' reports. This problem continues to prevent many newcomer parents from working, engaging in the community, and participating in programs.

²² Cultural Training is now available via PVLIP's Connecting Cultures & Communities Guide/Toolkit/Video Series with optional workshops that are scheduled throughout 2023. Visit www.pvlip.ca to register



6.0 NEXT STEPS FOR PVLIP



According to IRCC, successful integration is “the ability to contribute, free of barriers, to every dimension of Canadian life - economic, social, cultural and political” (IRCC cited from PVLIP Action Plan, 2019). Successful integration, therefore, has been one of the main goals of Pembina Valley. This research report addresses newcomer needs and the region’s efforts and existing gaps, and this information was obtained through surveys, interviews, and consultations with newcomers (and immigrants), employers, Regional Connections Immigrant Services and other stakeholders. What now remains are determining the next steps on the basis of the information compiled and situating it within the larger context of the PVLIP Action Plan (2020–2025).

The PVLIP Action Plan 2020 - 2025 identified and aligned the goals and objectives of the region regarding three priority areas: **Priority 1**, Welcoming & Inclusive Communities; **Priority 2**, Communication; and **Priority 3**, Mental Health. Over the last three years, much work has been done and progress made based on the findings of this report. To achieve these priorities, Years 1, 2 and 3 focused on development, promotion, research, education, community outreach, and implementing their proposed actions in alignment with the funders requests and/or expectations. The next steps for PVLIP is to continue to expand on these priorities and meet the growing and diverse needs of the newcomer populations arriving in the region - this endeavor requires a commitment to achieve the initial priorities while examining how best to overcome the current gaps and barriers presented in this report.



The recommended next steps based on this research report include the following:

- **Expanding on the coordinated arrival strategy:** This step is for meeting the growing and diverse arrivals of newcomers, especially refugees settling in the region.
- **Promoting mental well-being:** Resettling in a new country and region can be overwhelming and isolating, so strengthening the healthcare services for newcomers is essential.
- **Building on targeted research topics, such as transportation:** What else can be done?
- **Increasing awareness of settlement services:** This step includes barrier-free services, immigrants resettled in the country and region arrive under different programs and categories, which currently poses limitations on accessing certain services.
- **Determining funding and research partnerships to support further research (specifically addressing the needs of immigrants who need services in French in the region):** This step includes examining which measures need to be put in place for strategic planning towards the successful settlement of newcomers to the region.

Additional information about PVLIP and access to the Action Plan (2020-2025) is available at www.pvlip.ca

If interested in the surveys and focused group questionnaires or any questions relating to this report, please contact the PVLIP Coordinator: info@pvlip.ca



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