

## Francophone Integration Pathway: A Top Priority

The Government of Canada is committed to sustaining and enhancing the vitality of Francophone Minority Communities (FMCs) and reaching 4.4% of French-speaking immigrants outside of Quebec by 2023. However, the pathway of the French-speaking immigrant is not as seamless as it should be.

Key findings from national consultations in the context of the Action Plan for Official Languages 2018-2023 and the Evaluation of the Immigration to Official Language Minority Communities (OLMC) Initiative (July 2017)<sup>1</sup> revealed that the integration pathway for French-speaking immigrants is fragmented and more needs to be done to ensure their integration into Francophone communities outside Quebec. Five main issues emerged:

- French-speaking immigrants and refugees are unaware of FMCs and their services.
- There is an incoherent suite of services provided in French, by Francophone service providers, many of whom require support to enhance their capacity.
- Some non-francophone service providers do not provide high quality services French and/or do not provide information on francophone services in FMCs;
- There is a lack of referrals from mainstream service providers to service providers rooted in FMCs and lack of knowledge of value of referrals.
- Incoherent funding parameters and lack of flexibility. For instance, IRCC should not only consider the basis of client-volume when awarding funding, as it can disadvantage small service providers, like those in Francophone Minority Communities. Consequently the needs of French-speaking immigrants are not being met.

There is an immediate need to consolidate the Francophone integration pathway, as referenced in key strategies and policy priority-setting documents:

- 1) The consolidation of a Francophone integration pathway has been identified and announced as a key priority the *Action Plan for Official Languages – 2018-2023: Investing in Our Future*;
- 2) Increasing awareness, availability, and access to settlement services for French-speaking immigrants in FMCs to support better social integration and community connections is one of the priorities of the *Federal/Provincial/Territorial Action Plan for Increasing Francophone Immigration Outside of Quebec*;
- 3) The settlement sector is undertaking a review of its programming with the goal to achieve high quality services and improve clients' outcomes. The Francophone

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the Evaluation of the Immigration to Official Language Minority Communities (OLMC) Initiative found that only some French-speaking clients had received services from Francophone organizations: 18% had received all of their settlement services from these organizations and 50% none of their services. Moreover, only 32% received services from a Francophone or bilingual SPO on their first service date recorded in iCARE, suggesting that these organizations are not frequently the first (or at least an early) point of contact for many French-speaking clients in their integration process.

integration pathway is in the top 5 priorities in delivering the mandate commitment on settlement;

- 4) The Refugee Affairs Branch is undertaking the development of an *Action Plan for Official Languages and Refugee Resettlement and Integration* in response to a recommendation made in a Final investigation report issued by the Office of the Commissioner on Official Languages following a complaint relating to the Syrian refugee settlement initiatives.

According to the Official Languages Act and the Immigration and Refugees Protection Act, IRCC and the Settlement Program have also the responsibility to support the vitality of official language minority communities (Part VII OL Act) but also to satisfy the principle of substantive equality and adapt its services to meet the needs of the minority (Part IV of OL Act).<sup>2</sup> It is therefore critical and timely to establish a common vision of the Francophone integration pathway and set clear priorities and objectives aligned with the principles and spirit of the IRPA and the Official Languages Act.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> As stipulated by item 12.1 of the Terms and Conditions of the Settlement Program: "*The Settlement Program takes into consideration Canada's commitment to official languages duality. As stated in IRPA, the Department is also committed to supporting and assisting the development of official language minority communities in Canada. Within the context of the Settlement Program, this commitment obliges the Department to ensure that substantive equality is achieved in the delivery of settlement services to official language minority communities where CIC has jurisdiction for settlement. When necessary, the different characteristics and circumstances of official language minority communities are to be taken into account, and adapted content and/or different delivery methods employed, to ensure that the minority population receives services of equal quality to the majority.*"

## What is IRCC's Francophone Integration Pathway?

Vision for the Francophone Integration Pathway:

***Newcomers have an opportunity to settle and thrive in French and to make a positive contribution to Canadian society and the vitality of Francophone communities. This is supported by a Francophone integration pathway, which begins before they arrive in Canada and continues until they obtain citizenship.***

IRCC thus aims to ensure the successful integration of French-speaking newcomers,<sup>4</sup> to foster strong ties between newcomers and Francophone communities, and to support the vitality of Francophone communities. The Francophone integration pathway also encompasses Canada's commitment to linguistic duality and the principle of substantive equality<sup>5</sup> in service delivery.

Implementation of the Francophone Integration Pathway is based on the following policy directions:

- Ensure that **ALL newcomers** can make **informed decisions** by obtaining accurate and complete information on settlement services offered in French by Francophone organizations and the presence of Francophone communities throughout the integration continuum and in all key points of settlement services offered by IRCC;<sup>6</sup>
- Ensure that **French-speaking newcomers can be referred** to Francophone service providers, depending on their preference;
- Adopt a **targeted approach by designating communities and regions** where efforts will be directed<sup>7</sup> by providing a complete suite of basic settlement services in French in all designated communities. The designation will take into account the following criteria: the current availability of settlement services in French, the presence of Francophone institutions and French-speaking/bilingual immigrants, the accessibility of services in French in at least one region in each of province and territory, and the will of the community.
- Emphasize a “by and for Francophones” approach based on strong community partnerships by:
  - Ensuring a cohesive suite of services that takes into account the priorities identified by **Réseaux en immigration francophone** and their partners, and through consultations with Francophone community players adapted to their context.

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<sup>4</sup> Definition: A French-speaking immigrant is an immigrant for whom French is the first Canadian official language of usage.

<sup>5</sup> (<https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/values-ethics/official-languages/public-services/analytical-grid-substantive-equality.html>)

<sup>6</sup> Key points of settlement services include pre-departure services, airport services, receiving centres offering the Resettlement Assistance Program, language testing service providers, and non-Francophone mainstream service providers in each province and territory.

<sup>7</sup> The targeted approach recommended for the Francophone Integration Pathway does not exclude organizations located outside the designated regions from submitting funding proposals to IRCC.

- Favouring services offered primarily by **Francophone service providers or through partnerships with non-Francophone organizations** and defined according to the needs identified by Francophone community stakeholders.
- Exploring **delivery modes adapted** to the Francophone minority context and the reality and needs of French-speaking immigrants, including service delivery adapted to small and remote Francophone communities.
- Ensure **active promotion** of the Francophone Integration Pathway to French-speaking newcomers in each region.

The Francophone Integration Pathway will be a major component of **IRCC's upcoming Francophone Immigration Strategy**. The success of this Strategy will require the engagement and collaboration of the entire settlement sector, including IRCC and its regional offices, and non-Francophone and Francophone organizations.

Implementing the Francophone Integration Pathway will be possible through the funding of the IRCC Settlement Program (e.g. EOI for pre-arrival services, CFP 2019, and other intake processes) as well as the Action Plan on Official Languages 2018-2023: Investing in Our Future. The Action Plan's funding will enable IRCC to implement three new measures to support the consolidation of the Francophone Integration Pathway, namely:

1. **Welcoming Francophone Communities Initiative:** IRCC will implement this initiative by introducing a new community-based funding model. Through community partnerships, communities will be able to implement projects that have been determined and developed by and for Francophones in order to fill current gaps and to find innovative solutions tailored to their needs and to the needs of the Francophone newcomers settling there (see p. 5).
2. **Building the capacity of the Francophone settlement sector:** With the objective of setting up high quality services respecting the principle of substantive equality, this measure is intended to help Francophone communities develop solid expertise in settlement and integration, such as by having access to professional development in French.
3. **Language training tailored to the needs of French-speaking newcomers:** This measure is intended to increase the supply of and access to official language training and will enable newcomers to learn the French and English necessary for their effective economic and social integration. The program will be adapted to the realities of Francophone communities.

## What is the Welcoming Francophone Communities Initiative?

In order to foster the integration and retention of newcomers in the longer term, attention must be given to objectives that complement quality service delivery by fostering, for example, the social involvement and sense of belonging of immigrants, and that encourage communities to be more receptive to newcomers.

In supporting the objectives of the Francophone Integration Pathway, the IRCC Welcoming Francophone Communities Initiative will focus mainly on supporting **partnership and community approaches** that will help **bring together all the winning conditions** to create an environment in which French-speaking newcomers will feel welcome, and to **support innovative solutions and strategies** to draw these immigrants to the designated Francophone communities and to encourage them to integrate those communities and settle there.

Communities will be able to implement projects that have been specified and developed “**by and for Francophones**” that will aim to 1) meet the needs of French-speaking newcomers who settle there, 2) build ties between newcomers and host communities, and 3) support community initiatives to fill the gaps in the Francophone Integration Pathway.

## How will the Welcoming Francophone Communities Initiative be implemented?

Because access to settlement services in French and the presence of Francophone organizations are key characteristics of the success of welcoming communities, IRCC will prioritize the implementation of this initiative in **communities and regions designated** to offer the Francophone Integration Pathway,<sup>8</sup> where IRCC will focus its efforts on facilitating access to a complete range of basic settlement services in French that are tailored to the needs of French-speaking newcomers.

The objectives of the Welcoming Francophone Communities Initiative are closely linked to the mandate of **Francophone Immigration Networks**.<sup>9</sup> IRCC will therefore work with those networks to equip them with the tools needed to facilitate the implementation of the preliminary stages of this initiative within the designated regions, for instance to set up community advisory boards that would be mandated to develop an action plan and identify community priorities in support of the establishment of a welcoming Francophone community.

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<sup>8</sup> As explained on page 3, implementation of the Francophone Integration Pathway will be based on the adoption of a targeted approach by designating communities and regions where efforts will be directed. The designation will take into account certain criteria, such as the current availability of settlement services in French and the presence of French-speaking and bilingual immigrants. Some of these communities will be identified to implement and test the Welcoming Francophone Communities Initiative.

<sup>9</sup> The objectives of the Francophone Immigration Networks are to: 1) ensure co-operation and promote partnerships with stakeholders from the various sectors; 2) identify the needs, deficiencies and assets of the community and French-speaking newcomers according to the different stages of the immigration continuum; 3) develop a Francophone Immigration Action Plan that addresses the needs, deficiencies, and assets identified and guided by national Francophone immigration priorities; 4) raise awareness, mobilize and support communities and partners in the implementation of the Francophone Immigration Action Plan.

With the goal of exploring more flexible funding that is better aligned with the priorities identified by the communities, IRCC will use a **community-based funding model** empowering communities to identify and select where IRCC should invest these dedicated funds.

Through a contribution agreement with a host organization, IRCC will provide funding to the designated regions, asking them to bring together a wide range of stakeholders in each area (setting up of community advisory committees) with the purpose of developing a strategy and recommending community projects supporting the goals of the welcoming communities.

Projects to be funded could include:

- All community-based activities and approaches related to establishing a welcoming community, such as:
  - Assessing the current state of the community
  - Setting short- and long-term goals
  - Implementing (or adjusting) strategies or initiatives designed to address gaps and weaknesses in order to achieve those goals
  - Conducting research to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies or initiatives
  - Assessing outcomes and feedback on an ongoing basis
- Engaging stakeholders, organizing community forums for sharing information, raising awareness, engaging and building capacity
- Supporting coordinated approaches to promoting services and community resources to immigrants
- All partnership initiatives aimed at enhancing the achievement of community objectives and of welcoming community characteristics in accordance with the Settlement program's Terms and Conditions (see Annex).
- Developing and implementing initiatives that would address service gaps (e.g. *Arrimages francophones* services, newcomer appreciation days, initiatives meeting the needs of a target immigrant population, etc.)

## ANNEX

### UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF A WELCOMING COMMUNITY

To understand what a welcoming community is, IRCC funded a study by Victoria Esses and her collaborators.<sup>10</sup> Her work suggests that the term “welcoming communities” refers to “a location seeking to attract and retain immigrants” and has often “become synonymous with a policy approach.”

According to Esses, a welcoming community attracts and retains newcomers by:

- identifying and removing barriers
- promoting a sense of belonging
- meeting diverse individual needs
- offering services that promote successful integration, defined as the "ability to contribute, free of barriers, to every dimension of Canadian life—economic, social, cultural and political”

A welcoming community incorporates the following concepts:

- **Spatial dimension:** physical location in Canada—a town, a city, or region—in which newcomers feel valued and their needs are served
- **Discourse dimension:** a community having agency and engaging in actions that facilitate the integration of newcomers
- **Collective effort:** to create a place where individuals feel valued and included
- **A location that has the capacity** to meet the needs and promote inclusion of newcomers, and the machinery in place to produce and support these capacities

*Les Sentiers du Leadership* defines a welcoming Francophone community as follows:

- a place where there is a strong desire to receive and welcome newcomers and to foster an environment where they will feel at home
- access to Francophone reception and settlement services

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<sup>10</sup> Characteristics of a Welcoming Community. Victoria M. Esses, Leah K. Hamilton, Caroline Bennett-AbuAyyash, and Meyer Burstein. March 2010.

## **Characteristics of welcoming communities adapted to FMCs**

*Many factors contribute to creating a welcoming and inclusive environment:*

1. Francophone organizations serving newcomers that are able to meet the needs of these newcomers
2. Social engagement opportunities within the Francophone community
3. Accessible French-speaking public spaces and recreation infrastructure
4. Municipal programs and services reflecting an awareness of newcomers and their needs
5. Employment opportunities, including in the community sector
6. Positive attitudes toward immigrants, cultural diversity and the presence of newcomers in the community
7. Networks within and among groups – opportunities to create ties
8. Affordable and suitable housing
9. Links between key players striving to build welcoming communities
10. Educational opportunities (daycare, elementary, secondary and post-secondary schools, and adult education)
11. Safety—an environment that provides a sense of safety
12. Accessible and suitable health care in French
13. Accessible public transportation
14. Various faith organizations (places of worship, churches)
15. Political participation opportunities
16. Good relations with the police and the legal system
17. Favourable Francophone media coverage and positive media representation of newcomers