

# Ethnocultural Community Organizations in Winnipeg: A Legacy Document

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## Background

Through their work in the community, personnel at *Immigration Partnership Winnipeg* (IPW) identified a need to better understand, acknowledge, and support the work done by ethnocultural community organizations and groups in meeting the needs of immigrants and refugees in Winnipeg. Since the majority of their work is informal and occurs outside of regular office and work structures, ethnocultural community organizations' efforts go unnoticed and insufficiently compensated, despite the essential services they provide to immigrants and refugees. This report intends to enhance awareness of the work done by ethnocultural community organizations while also acting as a step toward more widely acknowledging the vital role played by such organizations and detailing some of their challenges, concerns, and needs.

IPW, which is Winnipeg's Local Immigration Partnership, acts in a facilitative manner, providing resources to bring groups together so they may establish a collective voice. In the past year, the organization hired Reuben Garang as Ethnocultural Resources Coordinator to coordinate outreach activities and establish relationships with representatives of ethnocultural community organizations. The position supports refugee claimants, Yazidi refugees, the Francophone newcomer community, and other new arrivals, while also identifying information resources for these communities. Garang coordinates research and meetings between newcomers, non-immigrants, and Indigenous communities so as to learn from one another's culture and facilitate an informed settlement and integration process.

One of the first initiatives for the Ethnocultural Resources Coordinator was to hold a community workshop to bring together representatives of Winnipeg's ethnocultural communities to discuss concerns, challenges, and opportunities regarding newcomer settlement. The workshop, entitled 'Ethnocultural Communities' Role in Supporting Newcomers to Winnipeg', was held in September 2017 at the University of Winnipeg with nearly fifty people in attendance. IPW invited representatives of ethnocultural associations to attend, along with other individuals who often struggle to find a voice within their communities (for example, women, youth, and people with disabilities). This event was an opportunity for groups to meet one another, discuss important issues, and learn about the efforts of IPW.

A second workshop was held in December 2017 to build on momentum sparked by the first event. Participants discussed ways to work together so as to address the challenges and priorities that were identified in the first workshop. One of the most common challenges discussed was related to funding and financial resources. To address this concern and provide supports, IPW included a learning opportunity on the second workshop's agenda, which focused on identifying funding sources and developing successful proposals. Since many ethnocultural community organizations struggle to seek and secure funds for their activities, providing resources that assist in navigating what can be a complex and work-intensive process is a positive step toward supporting the work of ethnocultural communities.

This report captures the proceedings from those two events and brings together the diverse discussions into a cohesive narrative of the experiences, challenges, and concerns faced by ethnocultural community organizations as they serve newcomers. It represents an attempt to illustrate and acknowledge the extensive work undertaken by ethnocultural community organizations as they respond to the settlement needs of immigrants and refugees. The document intends to provide representatives of ethnocultural community organizations with a resource that may be used to leverage funding and supports. It is meant to serve these communities, inform IPW's future initiatives, and acknowledge the work involved in welcoming newcomers. The need for this work was initially identified by IPW personnel through their interactions with ethnocultural community organization representatives.

## **Introduction**

Since research has found that only about one-third of newly arrived immigrants and refugees access settlement services from a government-funded immigrant-serving agency (Lo, et al., 2010; Wilkinson & Bucklaschuk, 2014), it is necessary to better understand where newcomers go to access information and receive supports. There are a host of formal and informal avenues utilized and accessed by immigrants and refugees when they arrive, but policymakers, researchers, and service providers do not have a full picture of the nature of those sources. However, we do know that a step in the early settlement process is to find social networks, which can be sources of information, knowledge, and community inclusion (Simich, et al., 2005). Ethnocultural community organizations and groups can often be a first point of contact for many newly arrived refugees and immigrants, as they provide linguistic and cultural familiarity while also assisting with the settlement process. Surprisingly, little is known about the role that ethnocultural community organizations play in the settlement process, yet they are acknowledged as an important actor in meeting the needs of newcomers.

## **The Role of Ethnocultural Communities**

Newcomers coming to and settling in Canada encounter many challenges and barriers to successful settlement and integration. These challenges include, but are not limited to, language barriers, difficulty finding employment, obtaining affordable housing, establishing financial security, navigating complex social services and bureaucratic systems, receiving necessary health supports, finding childcare, and adjusting to a new environment and culture (Makwarimba, 2013; Simich et al, 2005; Stewart et al, 2008). Such challenges can have negative effects on newcomers' well-being and further complicate their settlement experiences.

A contributor to the challenges experienced during the settlement process is newcomers' lack of access to and knowledge of both formal and informal support systems in their new community. There are many formal (such as mainstream agencies, settlement service provider organizations, and language schools) and informal (such as friends, relatives, neighbours, co-ethnic groups, independent sponsors, and religious organizations) supports available to assist immigrants and refugees, but accessing such supports can be complex, unfamiliar, and overwhelming. When attempting to access available supports and services, newcomers may encounter language barriers, cultural differences, transportation difficulties, and eligibility issues that can hinder their engagement with existing institutions and organizations.

One avenue through which newcomers may seek supports is to connect with individuals who share a familiar culture, religion, or language. Sources of this familiarity can often be found within ethnocultural community organizations and groups. As such, ethnocultural community organizations fill important roles in the settlement services landscape, addressing gaps and extending available supports (Chekki, 2006; Couton, 2014; Lacroix, Baffoe, & Liguori, 2014). There are a wide range of services and supports offered by ethnocultural organizations and communities, which depend upon their capacities and resources. In general, though, most organizations can be relied upon to offer informal social and cultural supports, while others offer more extensive formal services such as language learning classes and other skills-building programming.

Given that immigrants and refugees often lack robust social networks when they first arrive in their new home, ethnocultural communities and related organizations can foster a sense of community as they provide culturally familiar and appropriate social supports (Couton, 2014; Simich et al, 2005). They offer an already established network of actors that has the capacity to support and advocate for the well-being of individuals and families (Acheson, 2013; Lacroix, Baffoe, & Liguori, 2014). Also, since those within these

organizations are often immigrants or refugees themselves, they become an important source of local knowledge and advice on how to find housing, obtain employment, and navigate other aspects of the settlement process (Bucklaschuk & Sormova, 2011). Through peer support groups and social network formation, these organizations contribute to community building and offer supports to individuals and families who often share common experiences, cultures, and languages (Stewart et al., 2008).

Ethnocultural community organizations provide significant benefits to the individuals, families, and communities they serve. The process of settling and learning to navigate a new society is complex, and such organizations can mitigate some of the associated challenges. In sum, ethnocultural community organizations function to both foster and create positive settlement experiences, working to ensure that newcomers can fully participate in their new community (Guo, 2013). They do so by contributing to social inclusion and integration through the provision of social supports and community building.

Despite the significant role played by ethnocultural community organizations, they face a number of challenges. Since they are not often recognized as formal settlement service provider organizations with core government funding, these groups and organizations struggle to obtain sufficient stable financial resources and are often expected to 'do more with less' (Acheson, 2013; Simpson, 2015). In cases where they do have opportunities to pursue federal or provincial government funding, the process is often competitive with multiple community-based organizations trying to successfully secure limited amounts of funding (Evans & Shields, 2017; Simich et al, 2005).

Moreover, when seeking funding to provide services and supports for immigrants and refugees, ethnocultural community organizations face challenges when defining the nature of their supports. Governments tend to focus on enhancing newcomers' economic integration, while ethnocultural community organizations focus on providing holistic and long-term approaches to social integration and inclusion that will positively contribute to the well-being of immigrants and refugees (Meinhard et al, 2016). Such differences can make it difficult for ethnocultural community organizations to obtain government funding that is targeted at improving settlement and integration outcomes.

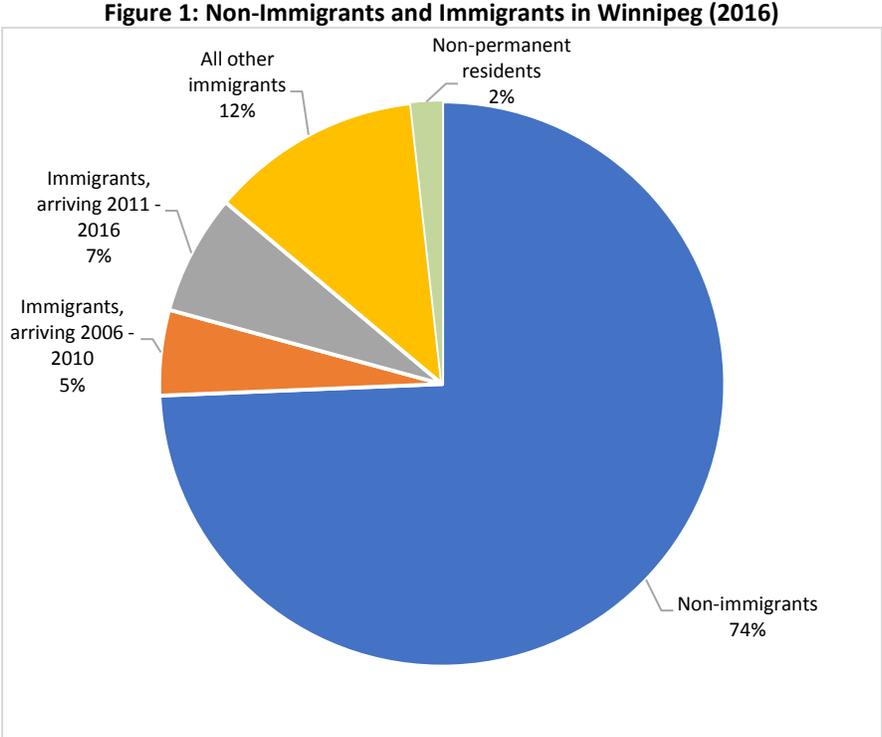
Studies have found a number of other challenges experienced by ethnocultural community organizations, including a lack of centralization of services, difficulties developing mandates, policies, and programming, and limited human resources (Lacroix, Baffoe, & Liguori, 2014; Simich et al, 2005). For those organizations operating outside of major urban centres, there remains a need for their supports, but since there are only relatively small populations of newcomers it is a challenge to form stable and active ethnocultural community groups (Brown, 2017; Bucklaschuk & Sormova, 2011).

In order to address these challenges and continue to provide localized support for immigrants and refugees, collaborative partnerships are required between all levels of government and ethnocultural community organizations. These relationships can be highly effective if all actors participate in a collaborative and respectful manner (Meinhard et al, 2016; Simpson, 2015). Ethnocultural community organizations also require strong partnerships with the broader community, including with immigrant-serving organizations and other service providers (Couton, 2014).

### **Immigration & Ethnocultural Community Organizations in Winnipeg**

Winnipeg is a diverse city with a long and evolving history of immigration. Each year, the city receives the majority of all permanent residents arriving to Manitoba, with 83.7 percent arriving to Winnipeg in 2016 (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2016). In the most recent Census, almost one-quarter

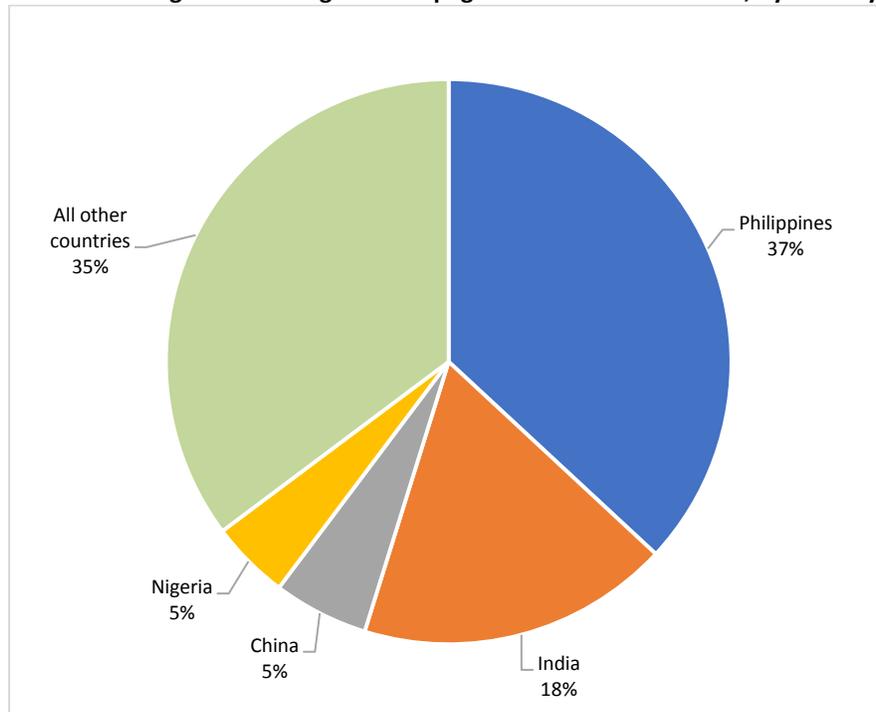
(23.9 percent) of Winnipeg's residents identified as being an immigrant (see Figure 1). Interestingly, this is a population that is quite new to Winnipeg since almost half (49.3 percent) have arrived since 2006. It is also a population that is young in age. Almost half (49.1 percent) of immigrants are under 25 years of age, while the vast majority (91.8 percent) are under the age of 44 (Statistics Canada, 2016).



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016.

While the majority of Winnipeg's residents identify as being of European origin (66.1 percent), this does not apply to the immigrant population. Of Winnipeg's most recently arrived immigrants (arriving between 2011 and 2016), 37.4 percent are from the Philippines, 18.1 percent are from India, 5.5 percent are from China, and 4.6 percent are from Nigeria. These four countries account for nearly two-thirds of all recent immigrants to Winnipeg (see Figure 2) (Statistics Canada, 2016).

**Figure 2: Recent Immigrants Arriving to Winnipeg Between 2011 and 2016, By Country of Birth**



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016.

The nature and functions of ethnocultural community organizations are often related to the particular characteristics of the communities they serve. Some organizations are more developed and formal than others, which usually is related to both the size of the community and how long individuals have been in Canada. According to a report produced by the Canadian Community Economic Development Network (CCEDNet) (2006), organizations with a long history in Winnipeg are composed of people from older generations of immigrants who have arrived to Canada from European countries decades ago. These older organizations generally focus on cultural and recreational activities. Newer organizations are composed of people from recently arrived groups of immigrants and refugees, with a wide range of source countries from outside of Europe. Such organizations typically respond to immediate needs of settlement and integration. The characteristics of migration flows do influence the nature of ethnocultural community organizations.

It is estimated that there are approximately 100 different ethnocultural groups in Winnipeg. An exact number is difficult to obtain since the formality and public presence of these groups varies. Currently, there are many groups that are well-established while many others are quite new and do not yet have formal organizational structures. Also, some ethnocultural community organizations can be temporary in nature, responding to the immediate needs of new groups of immigrants or refugees and then dissolving once needs have been met. In addition, since these organizations often operate with a small group of committed volunteers, they may cease to exist when those individuals are no longer able to be involved.

Many ethnocultural community organizations in Winnipeg offer some type of service or supports to newcomers. Common programming and services offered include language classes, cultural activities, youth drop-in services, workshops, employment referrals, counselling services, and other immigration-related services. These organizations also offer culturally and linguistically familiar resources for immigrants and refugees who are learning about their new home and navigating what is a complex and multifaceted

settlement process. Social support is often a central part of the assistance provided by ethnocultural community organizations and, as such, much of the work done by these groups is informal, unpaid labour involving long hours. Such organizations can only function with a large group of volunteers who are willing to spend their time assisting with a vast array of tasks including answering telephone calls at irregular hours, helping with immigration paperwork, arranging transportation, and seeking interpretation or translation.

For details of services offered by these groups, please see the following resources on IPW's website:

- *Newcomer Services Guide* at <https://www.ipwinnipeg.org/hidden-nc>
- *Ethnocultural Community Resource* at <https://www.ipwinnipeg.org/ecc-database>

## **Findings from Ethnocultural Community Workshops**

The first workshop was designed to initiate active and engaged discussion from all participants. Dialogue groups were organized around five key discussion questions (see Appendix 1) that were posed by IPW personnel. Each group had time to discuss each question and in-depth notes were taken by University of Winnipeg students. There were five different discussion groups, each with between seven and nine individuals.

For the purposes of this report, the content of the discussions has been aggregated and organized around the key issues raised during conversations. Many similar themes, concerns, and challenges were presented across the discussion groups, indicating that ethnocultural community organizations in Winnipeg are experiencing common challenges as they seek to provide services and supports to immigrants and refugees. Every attempt has been made to capture the general points raised in the discussion groups, but, inevitably, this report cannot represent a comprehensive account of all matters presented at the workshops. The focus in reporting is on aggregating the discussions so that users of the document can understand the general challenges, concerns, and issues faced by those representatives of Winnipeg's ethnocultural community organizations in attendance at the two IPW workshops.

During the workshops, representatives discussed a diverse range of challenges facing both their organizations and the communities they serve. Since these groups serve immigrant and refugee populations, they encounter and are concerned by many of the same difficulties that are experienced by newcomers across Canada. For example, a common topic of discussion concerned immigrants' and refugees' difficulties accessing the labour market and what could be done to mitigate the barriers faced by newcomers as they try to find employment. Other areas of concern include newcomers' difficulties navigating the housing market and finding affordable places to live, and their challenges accessing skills, training, and language learning opportunities. Representatives from ethnocultural community organizations work to address these issues and alleviate the multiple barriers encountered by immigrants and refugees. This report acknowledges the immense difficulties faced by immigrants and refugees in the settlement process and the myriad barriers that negatively impact their lives, but it does not delve further into these challenges. Rather, it focuses on illustrating the role of ethnocultural community organizations and highlighting their concerns as they deliver services and supports to newcomers.

## **Funding**

The most common challenge faced by ethnocultural community organizations is related to funding. All representatives identified funding as their most pressing need since it has implications for all aspects of their operations. There is a lack of sustained and consistent funding available for these groups to offer

programs, services, and activities, and expand their capacities. Furthermore, limited funding impacts groups' ability to obtain and use physical spaces. When organizing cultural activities, ethnocultural community organizations require space in which to hold such events, but renting such places (often community centres that are rented from the City of Winnipeg) is often quite expensive and puts considerable financial burdens on such groups.

#### *Desired Action*

- Ethnocultural community organizations require consistent, predictable, and stable funding to ensure their ability to offer immigrants and refugees a continuum of services and supports. They also require the capacity and skills to obtain funding through competitive funding processes.

### **Personnel and skills building**

Ethnocultural community organizations often lack the human resources and capacity necessary to meet the needs of newcomers. Since funding is limited, many groups are unable to employ personnel in secure full-time work, so they rely on volunteers. As such, they struggle to find enough dedicated volunteers. Volunteer burnout commonly occurs because of long irregular hours and strains on personal financial resources. Also, volunteers require a wide range of knowledge and skills to effectively provide services and supports, which may be lacking among a fluctuating group of volunteers. Relying on under-trained volunteers to ensure a robust array of helpful programming and services can be quite taxing for organizations and it makes providing formal and consistent settlement supports difficult.

#### *Desired Action*

- Ethnocultural community organizations need more training opportunities for volunteers, which would establish a resource of essential skills and capacity. Being able to access consistent training opportunities would ensure that volunteers have the knowledge and skills necessary to assist newcomers.

### **Information and knowledge sharing**

There is an identified lack of centralized and reliable information and resources for ethnocultural community organizations to access. Many ethnocultural community representatives desire enhanced access to and knowledge of supports and services that are currently available for newcomers in the community. Since many groups wish to and do use referrals to augment services, they often struggle to identify the appropriate places and organizations to direct immigrants and refugees to. Moreover, as immigration policies often evolve and shift, ethnocultural community organizations have difficulties keeping up to date with matters related to eligibility and the nature of immigrant and refugee arrivals. There is a fear among such organizations that the supports they extend to newcomers may be out-of-date or incomplete since they lack the resources necessary to sort through the evolving and complex landscape of immigration policy and settlement services.

#### *Desired Action*

- Ethnocultural community organizations require better communication and connections among their organizations and with other relevant community-based organizations.
- IPW can be a potential source of information and there is value in continuing to hold information sharing workshops with representatives from ethnocultural community organizations.

## **Connections with settlement service provider organizations**

Despite their important role in providing supports to newcomers, ethnocultural community organizations report an underdeveloped relationship with settlement service provider organizations. It was noted by participants at the workshops that there have been few attempts to establish consistent and enduring links between these two actors. Since they are both part of the continuum of supports and services for immigrants and refugees, it would be beneficial if these organizations established connections and collaboratively exchanged information to ensure that newcomers receive a full array of supports. Moreover, ethnocultural community groups have potential to be a vast source of knowledge and skills that may be beneficial to settlement service provider organizations. If a collaborative relationship were developed, both actors could leverage each other's expertise and capacities to fill service gaps and ensure robust supports for newcomers.

### *Desired Action*

- Ethnocultural community organizations require more engagement with settlement service provider organizations so they may develop trusting, communicative, and collaborative relationships. Such engagement will lead to enhanced knowledge of settlement services and positively contribute to newcomers' access of such supports.

## **Recognition and support from municipal government**

Many representatives of ethnocultural community organizations in Winnipeg have noted that the municipal government does not engage in or provide supports for immigration related matters. They have observed a lack of outreach and interest from the municipal government.

### *Desired Action*

- Ethnocultural community organizations would like support and involvement from the City. Suggestions include subsidies or funding to obtain physical space for community activities and more engagement of city representatives within such community groups. In addition, there is a need for an inclusive welcoming community policy for immigrants and refugees that captures their needs in municipal planning processes.

## **Other issues**

There were a number of other challenges and issues discussed by participants at the workshop, which mostly concern observed gaps in services. There is a need in Winnipeg for better access to mental health and counselling supports, prevention programs, and workshops on cultural differences in life skills for immigrants and refugees. Many representatives of ethnocultural community organizations observe the negative implications of this gap in services and fear that newcomers are needlessly suffering because of shortages in such supports. Many also noted that employment services, supports for individuals who are ineligible for federally-funded services, and programs for women are also severely lacking, and hinder newcomers' ability to settle in Winnipeg.

Newcomers seek ethnocultural communities for assistance throughout the settlement process for a variety of reasons. One such reason is to establish a sense of familiarity. Another, which was raised by a number of people at the workshop, is that there is a sense of trust between newcomers and their co-ethnic community. Building trust is an important part of the work done by ethnocultural community organizations,

and it cannot always be assumed that immigrant and refugees necessarily trust the institutions that are designed to assist them (ie. government funded settlement service provider organizations).

### **Moving Forward**

The workshops held by IPW represent the first times that such groups were in the same room together and, as a result, fruitful discussion and collaborations were initiated. The following summarizes the main actions desired to move forward:

- Representatives of ethnocultural community organizations recognize the need to work together, meet regularly, and build capacity through collective efforts.
- Many representatives desire an umbrella organization for ethnocultural groups, identifying this as a step toward broader recognition, establishing a centralized structure, and leveraging funding.
- Having a consistent central actor for ethnocultural community organizations could provide necessary outreach, be a reliable resource for information, and address many of the challenges they encounter on a daily basis.

One way to establish a collective voice is for more ethnocultural community organizations to join the Manitoba Stronger Together initiative, which is an emerging umbrella organization. Currently, only 18 groups have joined, but all are encouraged to do so. The Stronger Together initiative represents an opportunity to both celebrate cultural diversity and become a platform for sharing experiences and devising solutions to common challenges faced by ethnocultural communities.

In addition, to further advance knowledge about the work performed by ethnocultural community organizations, a research report on ethnocultural organizations' roles in addressing the needs of resettled refugees in Winnipeg, with a particular emphasis on engagement of youth and families, will be produced and distributed by Fall 2018. This report will include more extensive research findings derived from surveys and focus groups with ethnocultural community representatives and youth community members.

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## **Appendix 1**

### 'Ethnocultural Communities' Role in Supporting Newcomers to Winnipeg' Workshop

(September 9th, 2017)

#### Break-Out Group Discussion Questions

- 1) Identify five pressing needs which you think will enhance your role in assisting newcomers in your community and rank these needs in the order of priority.
- 2) How would you describe the relationship between ethnocultural communities (ECCs) and federally-funded settlement service providers, and what steps can we take to make this relationship more effective and collaborative?
- 3) How would you like the municipal government (city) to assist in your role of supporting newcomers?
- 4) If ECCs were to offer ongoing settlement assistance, what obstacles would ECCs face? Moreover, what would help ECCs to overcome these obstacles?
- 5) In what ways can Immigration Partnership Winnipeg empower and assist ECCs?