

## Why The City of Brockville Needs Immigrant Entrepreneurs

The rural populations of communities across Canada often wonder why immigrant attraction is at the top of the list of so many municipalities in this country. Queries such as, “Why would we want to attract more people to areas where people are struggling to find employment and having difficulty offering services to those who already live here?” The question is a good one and, fortunately, the answer is also quite simple: The fact is, as rural populations decline, as the majority are (save for some communities that lay at the outskirts of expanding high-density rural areas) these communities need support from outside, just as Canada as a whole does in order to grow and thrive. What rural communities are experiencing in terms of population decline represents a microcosm of what is happening in Ontario, at a provincial level, and in Canada on a national level. Canada as a country faces a situation where the residents of the nation no longer meet the replacement fertility rate needed to sustain the population. This reality means that, without immigration, Canada’s population would be headed toward decline. The Government of Canada reports that, in recent times,

the contribution of natural increase to population growth has waned as the Canadian population aged and fertility rates declined. Today, natural increase accounts for less than one-third of Canada's population growth and has ceased to be the major player in the equation. Meanwhile, migratory increase [immigration] plays an increasing role in Canada's population growth. Migratory increase currently accounts for about two-thirds of Canada's population growth (Population growth: Migratory increase overtakes natural increase, Statistics Canada, 2016).<sup>1</sup>

Statistics Canada projects that immigration will not only continue to be a key driver of population growth in the coming year – without it, Canada's population growth could be close to zero in 20 years (ibid.). This reality has significant implications for the Canadian labour force and the availability of service providers and others who will undoubtedly be needed to support Canada’s aging population.

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<sup>1</sup> Found at <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2014001-eng.htm>

Rural communities reflect this shifting population reality because of the significant outmigration of youth from rural communities where jobs tend to be scarcer as industry has changed. In order to thrive as communities and as a nation, Canada must welcome newcomers. Immigration is also understood as necessary to the well-being of the province. As the Chair of Ontario's Expert Roundtable on Immigration, Julia Deans, asserts, "It is clear to us that immigration is crucial to the well-being of every person in Ontario" (The Final Report By Ontario's Expert Roundtable on Immigration (FROERI), 2012). The Roundtable goes on to explain that Canada was built on natural resources; its future will be built on human resources" (ibid.). In short, immigration is necessary at federal, provincial, and municipal levels in order to maintain Canadian economic, social, cultural, and population needs.

The City of Brockville has been aware of this reality for some time and has been participating actively in the global "race for talent" (ibid. 13) by recognizing that immigration is key to the economic development of the City and acting as a key player in the establishment of the Leeds and Grenville Immigration Partnership (LIP) in 2010. Concomitantly, the City of Brockville has been recognized as a benchmark "creative economy" in rural Ontario meaning that, as a community, is an exemplar of what the Martin Prosperity Institute deems economically ideal in terms of attracting newcomers who will help build the economy. Economic immigrants, in the municipal interpretation of Dr. Richard Florida's (Director of the Martin Prosperity Institute) groundbreaking work on the creative economy, are members of the "creative class," the group that helps to build the communities that house them by engaging in high-tech, professional and entrepreneurial endeavours that are job-creating for communities. This means that the higher rate of creative class members a community has, the higher the potential for economic prosperity. This reflects the Roundtable's suggestion above, that human resources – more specifically, human capital – will build the future of Canada. Human capital is another way of saying all of the skills and knowledge necessary to produce economic growth and is seen as something the individual possesses by virtue of the education, training, and experience they have acquired. This "race for talent" is therefore a global race for human capital – that is, talented people willing to immigrant – that has uniquely local implications.

The shift to the attraction of individuals from the attraction of large industry comes from the global economic realities of off-shoring and the inability of the Canadian market to compete in some key sectors. The days of large industry as main local employer and economy driver are over. The City of Brockville has recognized this for some time and has engaged strategic initiatives to compete for creative class talent by way of immigrant attraction strategies. In its publication *Benchmarking the Creative Economy in Rural Ontario* published in 2012, the Martin Prosperity Institute recommended that Brockville focus on the “opportunity presented by much higher scores on diversity indicators, relative to other rural areas. Moreover, Brockville should focus on building immigrant attraction strategies aimed at immigrants in nearby regions” (Martin Prosperity Institute, 2012: 10). The City implemented this recommendation and set about capitalizing on its diversity indicators and status as a creative economy by integrating key attraction strategies into the overall economic strategic direction for the City. Immigration attraction was outlined as a key strategic action for municipal services and government relationships in the 2015 Brockville Economic Development Strategic Directions Update.

The Immigrant Entrepreneur Attraction Initiative (started March, 2016 and funded by the provincial Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration) is just one piece of this overall municipal strategy that seeks to bring in talent in two ways: By attracting people from their home countries (primary migrants) to come to Canada to start a life and build a business or invest in existing or new businesses in Canada and, by attracting people from more densely populated urban centres (secondary migrants) who want to experience the quality of life that smaller centres like Brockville offer. By investigating the experiences of the many local immigrant entrepreneurs, building bridges with Ottawa-area embassies and ethnic chambers of commerce, and consulting with other economic development departments in the region, this project seeks to understand the best way forward for the City of Brockville’s immigrant attraction strategic action. Brockville is on the cutting-edge of what is happening in terms of demographic and economic trends in Canada that will ensure the best possible future for all Canadians, no matter where they come from or how long they have made Canada home.

The necessary answer to ‘Why immigration?’ is because of “an aging population, an anticipated shrinking workforce, and skills shortages in sectors

critical to Ontario's prosperity" (FROERI, 2012: 1) that make immigrant attraction initiatives necessary. As *A New Direction: Ontario's immigration Strategy* rightfully points out, "building stronger, inclusive communities that promote and value diversity will help all Ontario municipalities grow and succeed" (Government of Ontario, 2012). Brockville is one community that is unique in its foresight and is ensuring its community's success by preparing and providing for its current and future residents through immigrant attraction strategies.

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