



Local Immigration  
Partnership

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# IMMIGRANTS IN RURAL LAMBTON COUNTY

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## Summary of Research

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Led by:

SOCIAL PLANNING & PROGRAM SUPPORT DEPARTMENT

150 N. Christina Street  
Sarnia, ON N7T8H3  
Telephone: 519 344-2057  
Toll Free: 1-800-387-2882  
Fax: 519 344-2025  
[www.lambtononline.ca](http://www.lambtononline.ca)

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## INTRODUCTION

### BACKGROUND

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The Sarnia-Lambton Local Immigration Partnership (LIP), established in November of 2009 and part of an Ontario-wide initiative, is a multi-sector council of local organizations that exists to provide a centralized venue for discussions about immigrant and newcomer settlement and integration. In 2010, the Sarnia-Lambton LIP Council conducted research to investigate how to better provide and coordinate services locally, resulting in a 12-strategy action plan (the LIP Settlement Strategy) to increase the community's capacity to welcome and support immigrants and newcomers<sup>1</sup>.

While the majority of this research took place within the city of Sarnia (where 70% of immigrants and newcomers reside), the consultative process reinforced the need to provide supports and services for residents in the rural areas of Lambton County<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, as a way to engage immigrants and newcomers outside of Sarnia and improve their settlement experiences, a recommendation to establish a rural outreach program for newcomers was included in the Settlement Strategy. This recommendation, or Action Step, was further divided into the following activities:

- Assess specific service needs of rural Lambton County - capacity of current settlement service providers, profile of immigrant populations including status, regions of origin, etc.
- Create connections and partnerships in rural areas
- Investigate outreach program models locally and regionally and determine ideal model of delivery
- Investigate use of CIC LSP (Library Settlement Partnerships) as part of rural outreach program

In February of 2011, a Rural Outreach Working Group (ROWG), a sub-committee of the larger LIP Council, was established to oversee the implementation of these activities. This group includes both of Sarnia-Lambton's settlement agencies, the library, an economic development organization, two employment service agencies and one newcomer.

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<sup>1</sup> For the Sarnia-Lambton LIP, 'immigrant' is defined as any individual who was not born in Canada (regardless of immigration status); 'newcomer' is an immigrant who has been in Canada for 10 years or less.

<sup>2</sup> In the context of this report, 'Lambton County' does not refer to the city of Sarnia or the three First Nations communities within its boundaries. It does refer to the remaining 10 lower-tier municipalities.

## DATA COLLECTION

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### QUANTITATIVE DATA

To gather statistical information on immigrants and newcomers in Lambton County, the following sources were used:

- Statistics Canada (2006 Census)
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) 2008-2010

These sources are limited; the 2006 Census data is outdated and the CIC data is inconsistent due to the small numbers of immigrants in these areas.

Furthermore, neither of these sources provides comprehensive information on temporary foreign workers (TFWs) in Lambton County. For this, a report by the Migrant Workers Ministry, Diocese of London was used.<sup>3</sup> Once again, there are limitations to this data. Most significantly, the numbers represent Lambton County as a whole; they are not broken down into the lower-tier municipalities.

### QUALITATIVE DATA

Focus groups and individual meetings were conducted with key community people to gather empirical information on immigrants and newcomers, as well as services that support them.

In total, three focus groups were conducted in 2011. One was held in Forest in June. Two were held (in Forest and Petrolia) in collaboration with the Ontario Immigrant Network<sup>4</sup>, the Sarnia Lambton Workforce Development Board<sup>5</sup> and Global Experience @ Work<sup>6</sup> in November. A total of 25 individuals participated in these meetings, primarily businesses and service providers.

Throughout the course of the year, a number of individual meetings also took place. These tended to be informal with the purpose of sharing, learning and establishing connections with other groups. In total, contact was made with over 20 groups relevant to the ROWG's mandate.

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<sup>3</sup> *A Snapshot in Time: 2011 Report and Recommendations on Migrant Workers in the Diocese of London.* Their statistical information came from two sources: Foreign Agriculture Resource Management Systems (F.A.R.M.S.) which helps to facilitate and coordinate applications for the Seasonal Agricultural Workers (SAW) Program and Statistics Canada 2010.

<sup>4</sup> The Ontario Immigrant Network (OIN) is a London-based organization investigating the role of immigrants in rural Southwestern Ontario.

<sup>5</sup> The SLWDB is a non-profit organization focusing on workforce planning in Sarnia-Lambton.

<sup>6</sup> Global Experience @ Work is a Sarnia Lambton Chamber of Commerce sponsored project that provides support to newcomers in the community. The funding for this project ended in March 2012.

Their profiles range from informal, local and volunteer-based groups to provincial and regional organizations whose geographical catchment area includes Sarnia-Lambton.

### Challenges

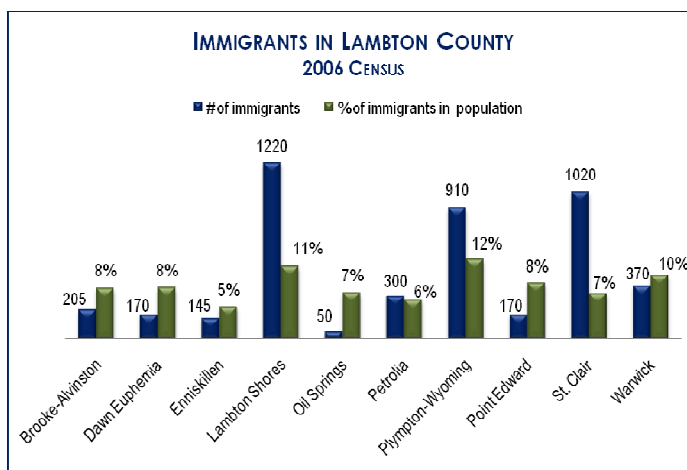
Connecting directly with immigrants and newcomers proved to be more complicated than anticipated. The rural immigrant and newcomer population is small and quite spread out making a large-scale meeting for all of Lambton County unfeasible. Furthermore, the ROWG had neither the time nor the resources (financial or personnel) to conduct meetings in all 10 municipalities that were its focus.

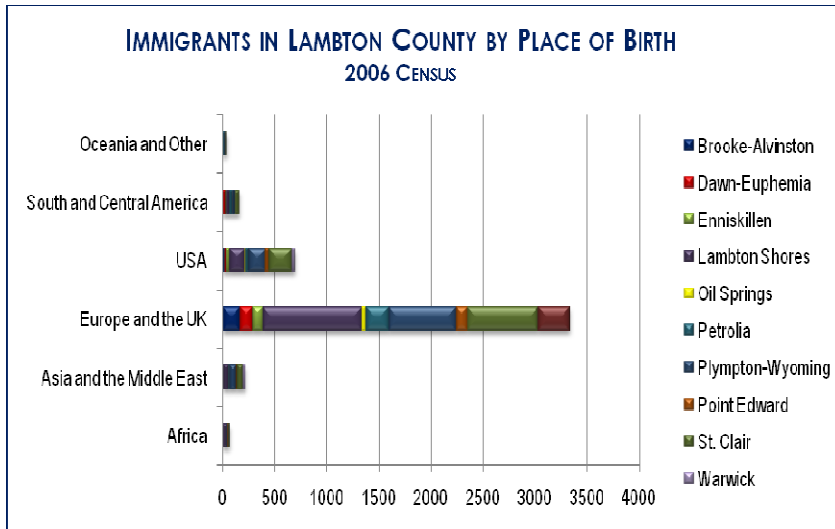
Finally, in regards to the County's migrant worker population, the ROWG did not feel it prudent to initiate direct contact with the workers and the farmers who employ them. Considering the vulnerable and sometimes precarious nature of the migrant worker reality, the ROWG felt that connecting and working with groups that have already spent time establishing trusting and meaningful relationships with the workers and their employers was a more sensitive approach which would neither create duplication nor undue anxiety for those involved.

Therefore, because of the inability of the ROWG to directly reach immigrants and newcomers in Lambton County, the rural research findings focus mainly on the service provider perspective.

## PROFILE OF IMMIGRANTS AND NEWCOMERS IN RURAL LAMBTON COUNTY

At the time of the 2006 Census, 4560 (31%) immigrants in Lambton County lived outside the city of Sarnia. The municipality of Lambton Shores had the highest number of immigrants, followed by St. Clair Township and Plympton-Wyoming. Plympton-Wyoming had the highest percentage of immigrants in its population (12%), followed by Lambton Shores at 11% and Warwick Township at 10%. The majority of these immigrants (43%) arrived in Canada before 1961 with only 5% arriving between 2001 and 2006. Finally, almost three-quarters (74%) of the immigrants in Lambton County came from Europe and the United Kingdom. A further 15% came from the United States with the





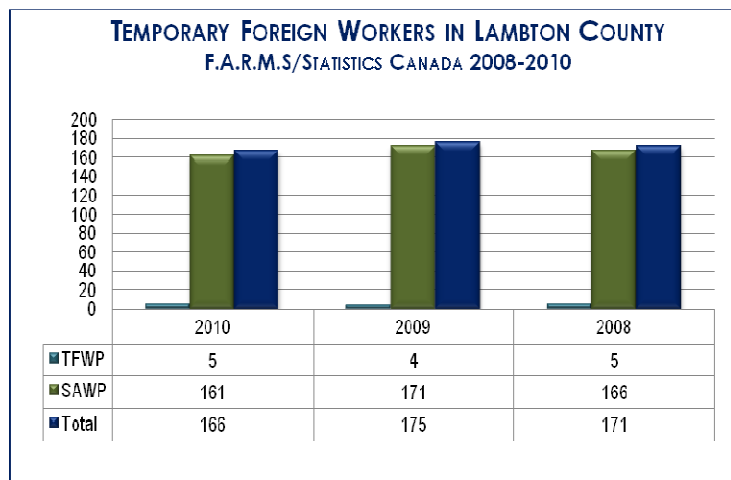
remaining 11% spread out among the remaining census regions. In relation, the city of Sarnia is only slightly more diverse.<sup>7</sup>

More current Citizenship and Immigration data suggests that these trends have, for the most part, continued.<sup>8</sup> Between 2008 and 2010, the majority of

immigrants who came to Lambton County settled in the municipality of Lambton Shores.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the majority of immigrants came from Europe and the United Kingdom, followed by the United States.

### PROFILE OF TEMPORARY FOREIGN (MIGRANT) WORKERS

Over the past three years, an average of 171 temporary workers came to Lambton County annually. 97% of these workers came through the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) and worked under the following agriculture commodities: tobacco, vegetable, greenhouse, nursery, apples, and bees. In 2010, 60% of these workers were from Mexico, the remaining 40% from Caribbean nations. Between 2008 and 2010, relatively few workers in Lambton County came through the Temporary Foreign Worker 'Low-Skills Pilot' Program (TFWP).<sup>10</sup> However, this does not reflect current developments. In 2011,



<sup>7</sup> In Sarnia the ratio is as follows: Europe and the UK - 68%, Asia and the Middle East - 14%, United States - 9%, Central and South America - 6%, Africa - 2%, Oceania and Other - 1%

<sup>8</sup> Because of the small numbers included in this data, the figures have been rounded randomly up or down to multiples of 5, thereby limiting the accuracy of the data.

<sup>9</sup> In fact, the data shows that the majority of immigrants settled in Warwick Township. However, this is incongruous with 'on-the-ground' research that was conducted.

one local greenhouse operation brought in roughly 80 workers from Thailand through the TFWP and has plans to double that number in the next year. This change has a definite impact on the community: it significantly increases the total number of migrant workers in Lambton County in general and increases the number of individuals from one cultural group in particular. Furthermore, workers in the TFWP stay longer (up to 4 years) than those in the SAWP, increasing the amount of time these workers remain in Canada.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

The information gathered by the Rural Outreach Working Group over the last year has uncovered some interesting findings. These findings can be grouped into three larger and overarching themes:

- Current service provision in rural Lambton County
- Services and supports for migrant (and temporary foreign) workers
- Attracting and retaining immigrants and newcomers in Lambton County's smaller communities

### CURRENT SERVICE PROVISION IN RURAL LAMBTON COUNTY

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The findings show that immigrant and newcomer specific services are limited outside the city of Sarnia. Even though Sarnia-Lambton's two settlement agencies have a mandate to provide their services throughout the county, only one formal settlement program, an English as a Second Language (ESL) class, is offered outside of Sarnia in the town of Petrolia. However, with the bulk of immigrants and newcomers residing in Sarnia, these agencies have logically chosen to focus their attention where the majority of their clients live. Furthermore, both settlement agencies have suffered funding cuts and staff shortages over the last couple of years, making it increasingly difficult to provide comprehensive services within Sarnia, let alone the rest of the county. Nevertheless, both agencies have identified this gap in their services and are working to address it.<sup>11</sup>

Aside from these formal and government-funded settlement programs, there are some instances where local groups and individuals have identified and subsequently addressed a need in their community relating to immigrant and newcomer settlement. These supports tend to be informal and volunteer-based. A good example of this is in the community of Florence,

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<sup>10</sup> *A Snapshot in Time: 2011 Report and Recommendations on Migrant Workers in the Diocese of London*, p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> See 'Outcomes' section below for more information.

where, on two separate occasions community members organized English language classes for two separate groups of immigrants (a church-sponsored refugee family and a family of low-German speaking Mennonites). The challenge with this model of service provision, however, is that although it addresses a need at the local level, the lack of any formal structure or funding limits its effectiveness in the long-term. Neither of these English classes, for example, is still being held.

A third finding related to service provision is that 'mainstream' service providers in rural Lambton County have either very few or no immigrant and newcomer clients (less than 5%). When asked, service providers suggest the following reasons for this:

- Immigrants and newcomers are not aware of the services available to them
- There is a low population of immigrants in the area
- Immigrants in the area are more established and do not require their services

These service providers also expressed challenges they have faced when providing services to immigrants, most notably in relation to language barriers (including lack of access to interpretation/translation services) and lack of awareness of settlement services available. Some suggestions to address these challenges included the creation of a service directory for immigrant and newcomer services (including interpretation/translation services) and promoting the use of local office space for Sarnia-based organizations' outreach activities. These challenges and recommendations are in keeping with the findings of the Sarnia-Lambton LIP's initial research.

## **SERVICES AND SUPPORTS FOR MIGRANT WORKERS**

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The majority of supports and services for immigrants and newcomers in the county are directed toward migrant or temporary foreign workers. While these supports are generally informal and rely heavily on volunteers, as with the Florence example, services for migrant workers differ in that they are predominantly spearheaded by faith-based groups and have some (usually private and minimal) funding attached to them.<sup>12</sup> There are a number of possible reasons for this:

- Migrant or temporary foreign workers are not eligible for settlement services leaving a gap in service provision that has been filled by other, non-governmental groups

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<sup>12</sup> The exception to this is the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (OHCOW) which is funded under the prevention arm of the Ministry of Labour. In 2011, they piloted a health and safety program for migrant workers in Lambton County.

- For some workers, religion provides a sense of familiarity for them because practices here in Canada are consistent with those in their home country (e.g. Catholic mass has the same form here as in Mexico, as in India, etc.)
- The reality of the migrant worker experience (hard labour, low wages, isolation due to long work hours and language barriers, etc.) is often seen as a human rights/social justice issue and is often of great interest to churches and faith-based groups with an inherent orientation to service

These programs have also managed to sustain themselves in the longer-term. Nevertheless, as churches become less and less supported by the general population (due to low membership and a decrease in donations), they have few resources (financial and volunteer) to put into outreach activities. At the same time, religious institutions are often not eligible for program funding from secular organizations or government sources, even if these programs aren't 'religious' in nature, further limiting the capacity of these groups to continue providing assistance to migrant workers. Finally, these groups tend to work in isolation from each other, particularly if conflicting religious beliefs are perceived. This has created a number of very localized, informal programs that lack larger-scale coordination that could benefit both migrant workers and those providing support.<sup>13</sup>

The services and supports that are provided by these groups cover a wide variety of activities including:

- Securing basic needs (e.g. adequate clothing and food)
- Transportation and accompaniment (e.g. to doctor's appointments, shopping)
- Assisting with opening bank accounts, filling out papers, filing income taxes
- Interpretation services (sometimes to overcome miscommunications between worker and employer)
- Social and recreational activities (e.g. organizing soccer games, barbeques)
- Religious and spiritual services
- Health and safety training

A gap in service that remains, however, is English language training. This is not only because of the workers' ineligibility for government-funded programming. A 12 to 15 hour workday with one day off a week is not an uncommon schedule for migrant workers during the peak growing season. This leaves little time to pursue language classes.

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<sup>13</sup> This is changing. See 'Outcomes' for information on a strong partnership established between two of these groups.



## **ATTRACTING AND RETAINING IMMIGRANTS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES**

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The rural communities of Lambton County, like Sarnia, are seeing a stagnation or decrease in their populations.<sup>14</sup> Attracting new residents in general and immigrants in particular is on the minds of these smaller communities. However, they feel at a disadvantage when compared to the city of Sarnia and other urban centres in Ontario. Some of the attraction challenges Lambton County's smaller communities identified are:

- Inability to offer competitive wages
- Lack of adequate (or any) public transportation
- Lack of quality housing
- Perception that smaller communities can't offer enough cultural necessities (e.g. restaurants, shops, ethnic food stores)
- Unsure how to 'sell the rural areas' to immigrants
- Lack of local settlement services and supports (e.g. ESL classes)
- Reputation for being 'closed' communities (although that does not mean unwelcoming)

In order to lessen the impact of these perceived disadvantages, the following suggestions were made:

- Provide resources and supports to immigrants wanting to start or take over a business in a smaller community (in person or via internet)
- Provide more direct settlement services outside of Sarnia
- Offer cultural awareness sessions that go 'both ways' so immigrants know what they are getting into and so the community can know how to help/support/mentor immigrants once they come

## **OUTCOMES**

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This research was conducted in order to provide the community with a more comprehensive snapshot of immigrants and newcomers in rural Lambton County and the services available to them. These findings, however, were just one portion of the Rural Outreach Working Group's purpose. Another equally, if not more, significant reason for this research was to provide a foundation (and justification) for rural outreach programming recommended in the LIP Settlement Strategy. In theory, the ROWG meant to carry out these activities consecutively but in reality, program enhancements began happening simultaneously

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<sup>14</sup> *Population: Summary of Trends & Projections Census years 2006 to 2031*. County of Lambton Planning & Development Services Department (2010), pp10-12.

with the data collection. Some exciting initiatives and partnerships that are underway are highlighted below.

### **LIBRARY SERVICES FOR NEWCOMERS**

In 11 cities across Ontario, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) has funded a program called Library Settlement Partnership (LSP) where settlement services are provided onsite at libraries.<sup>15</sup> Funding for this program is no longer available; however, the model of a partnership between libraries and settlement agencies caught this community's attention, especially since Lambton County Library operates 26 branches throughout the municipality. To capitalize on this strong presence in the county, both settlement agencies are working with the library to organize outreach services at various branches.

Another initiative the library has undertaken is the development of a brochure to promote services for immigrants and newcomers, including multilingual and ESL resources. Once completed this brochure will be translated into French and Spanish (to start) and distributed throughout the county.

### **WELCOME BOOKLET FOR MIGRANT WORKERS**

Collaboration between the Sarnia-Lambton LIP, the Migrant Workers Ministry (Diocese of London) and the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (OHCOW), has led to the development of a welcome booklet for migrant workers in Lambton County. This booklet includes a variety of important information for workers such as health and safety, employment benefits and access to local services. Once completed, the booklet will be translated into Spanish and Thai and can be used as a resource for migrant workers, their employers, and the groups and agencies that support them.

There is also the possibility that this booklet will provide the template for a more general directory of immigrant and newcomer services that can then be distributed to all relevant stakeholders throughout the county.

### **IMMIGRANT RURAL BUSINESS SUCCESSION PROGRAM**

The Ontario Immigrant Network (OIN) has spent the last year researching the role of immigrants in rural Southwestern Ontario.<sup>16</sup> From the beginning, representatives from the

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<sup>15</sup> For more information on LSPs, visit [www.lsp-peb.ca](http://www.lsp-peb.ca)

<sup>16</sup> OIN's area of focus includes the following municipalities: Middlesex, Lambton, Chatham-Kent, Essex, Huron, Oxford, and Elgin

Sarnia-Lambton LIP have sat on OIN's Steering Committee for this project. The results of OIN's research have led to the development of a program to attract immigrant entrepreneurs to smaller communities through business succession planning. This program is being piloted in Sarnia-Lambton through an Ontario Trillium Foundation grant.

## CONCLUSION

The research that was conducted over the past year by the ROWG is by no means exhaustive or complete. In particular, it lacks the first-hand experiences of immigrants and newcomers who have settled in Lambton County. Despite this significant omission it has provided a clearer demographic profile of immigrants and newcomers outside of the city of Sarnia as well as a greater understanding of the services and supports available to them. The research has also drawn attention to some of the challenges rural-based service providers face when serving immigrants and newcomers. Finally, the research highlights a number of suggestions to address these challenges, some of which have already been undertaken by various stakeholders.

The ROWG will continue to meet quarterly and act as a centralized meeting point for information and resources on rural-related programming, services and supports for immigrants and newcomers. By doing so, the ROWG will strive to strengthen existing and create new partnerships that will lead to improved settlement experiences for immigrants outside of Sarnia through enhanced and more comprehensive service provision. Ultimately, these actions will help achieve the larger goal of creating welcoming and diverse communities in every corner of Lambton County.