



photo: Marta Guerrero

BRIGITTE LÉGER

*Economic
immigration counsellor,
CDEM.*

ATTRACTING *francophones* TO MANITOBA

Created by the Province of Manitoba in 1998, the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program has enabled the Francophone community to bring in more Francophone newcomers.

BY CAMILLE HARPER

Francophone immigration is an asset for all of Canada and Manitoba, to ensure the survival of the official language minority community.

Brigitte Léger is the Economic Immigration Counsellor at CDEM: “Canada has set a goal of welcoming 4% Francophones each year among all its immigrants. But Manitoba’s Francophone community would like to attract up to 7% per year.”

Among the programs to immigrate to Canada, the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program, created in 1998, has brought Francophone immigrants directly to Manitoba. It was the first agreement of its kind where a province outside of Quebec took the lead in immigration.

Assistant Deputy Minister of Immigration for the Province of Manitoba from 1997 to 2007, Gérald Clément was instrumental in creating

the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program: “Immigration to Manitoba had dropped due to competition from Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal, and the economy was suffering. So, we created a program whose selection criteria would favour people who wanted to come to Manitoba.”

In the first year, 200 applications were filed, and this number increased year after year. “We had a five-year agreement with the federal government that reviewed our quota of applications to be accepted each year. In the end, we decided that we wouldn’t have any more quotas. The Province would decide the number according to needs. Manitoba really distinguished itself as the little engine that could.”

Since April 1, 2019, more than 260 Francophones have settled in Manitoba through this program.

Brigitte Léger says: “To qualify for the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program, one must normally have a connection to Manitoba. It can be having studied here, having family or close friends, work experience or a job offer.”

The Importance of an Exploratory Visit

“Thanks to the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program, we can identify Francophone candidates who meet Manitoba’s economic needs and invite them on exploratory visits so that they can create links with the province and be accepted as immigrants,” says Brigitte Léger.

Launched by the CDEM, under the direction of Mariette Mulaire in the 2000s on an informal basis for business immigrants, the exploratory visit has become an essential tool for being accepted as an immigrant by the Province of Manitoba.

Brigitte Léger: “There were more and more requests for exploratory visits, so in 2007 the Province set up a more formal system to welcome them. I would evaluate the applications, send those that I thought were promising to the Province for official approval, and then the candidates would come on an exploratory visit.”

In 2007, seven visits were organized. Then the requests multiplied. Brigitte Léger remembers: “In March 2017, there were more than 300 requests for exploratory visits pending! There were so many that we had to close the program to give us time to evaluate them all. It wasn’t until the end of November 2019 that we were finally able to reopen the program.”

Today, it is the Province that receives requests for exploratory visits directly via an online request.

The Province selects candidates according to need. The CDEM then supports the selected candidates to help them establish links with the Manitoba community. In 2019, it supported more than 100 exploratory visits to Manitoba.

She says that this new selection system was necessary: “Imagine! Between the end of November 2019 and the beginning of February 2020, the Province received more than 4,000 requests for exploratory visits!”

Arriving With a Work Permit

In addition, the federal government has also created the Mobilité Francophone program, another tool to expand Francophone space in Manitoba. Brigitte Léger explains: “This program gives employers in Francophone communities outside Quebec the right to hire Francophones abroad without having to prove that there was no one else for the position they are looking to fill. It makes it easier to bring Francophones to our cities, our communities.

“They arrive with a work permit, but after six months, because they have created a professional and personal connection with the province, they can apply for permanent residence through the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program.”

Brigitte Léger pointed out that both the Province and the Federal government have always encouraged Francophone immigration. “This has been a constant since I started in this position in 2007, despite the changes in power. What has changed is the interest: the number of applications has exploded. This is very positive for Manitoba’s Francophone community.”

According to provincial figures, in 2019 Manitoba received 18,905 immigrants, 615 of whom were Francophones. Of these, 12,545 arrived in Manitoba through the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program. ▶



“My husband and I came on an exploratory visit in March 2016 for ten days. The objective was to address our concerns and reassure ourselves. And this proved to be useful, even essential! It allowed us to assess the environment and the cost of living. I wouldn’t have come to live here without being able to visit. We stayed in Winnipeg, trying to imagine our future. We were also able to visit several schools for our children, including École Taché.”

- RYM SRARFI TABBANE,
arrived from Algeria in the fall of 2016
with her husband and children.

