

A stylized map of Atlantic Canada is shown in white against a blue background. A large, semi-transparent blue circle is overlaid on the map, centered over the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The circle is divided into several segments of different shades of blue. In the top right corner, there is a yellow L-shaped graphic element.

1 THE RESEARCH STORY



MARCH 2018

THE PEOPLE IMPERATIVE

Come From Away and Stay: Strategies to Grow
Population and Prosperity in Atlantic Canada



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We Choose Now. This was the commitment and rallying cry of the One Nova Scotia Commission and Coalition.¹ And now that commitment to action also suffuses Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador. Facing an existential crisis – flat or even shrinking populations, low productivity and shaken by natural resource busts – the region is taking significant actions to rebuild and renew. Population growth has become an overt priority.

The [Atlantic Growth Strategy](#) is an all-government, regional push to grow populations and spark economic expansion in Atlantic Canada. Immigration is one of the strategy's five pillars and an essential part of the growth equation. Much has already been accomplished, and the number of immigrants to the region has jumped substantially in the last five years through the provinces' efforts to attract newcomers. The lag now is retention: too many immigrants don't stay.

Analyses of tax-filer residence data show that the Atlantic provinces lag the rest of Canada in immigrant retention.² Nova Scotia has the highest regional five-year retention rate at 72 percent, Newfoundland and Labrador is at 56 percent, New Brunswick is at 52 percent, and PEI is at 18 percent overall.³ These rates are significantly lower than retention rates across the rest of country. No province outside Atlantic Canada has a retention rate below 80 percent.⁴

Provincial immigration policy in the last 20 years has been dominated by attempts to address the region's shrinking and aging population,⁵ and rates of immigration show that prioritizing immigration has driven significant growth in newcomer arrivals. Between 2012 and 2016, immigration to Atlantic Canada increased by 113 percent, while the increase in the rest of Canada was 12.4 percent.⁶

The Atlantic region is diverse, and each province is charting its own path to accommodate its unique needs through Provincial Nominee Programs (PNPs). Now the Atlantic Immigration Pilot provides, for the first time, a streamlined and consistent immigration program that is common to all provinces in the region. This renewed focus on attracting newcomers calls for a fresh focus on long-term integration and strategies for successful retention.

¹ One Nova Scotia Commission and Coalition. 2018. [Background](#).

² Background Document to Support Recommendations of the Atlantic Growth Advisory Group. 2017, November. [An Action Agenda for Atlantic Growth](#).

³ Statistics Canada. 2018. [Table 054-0003](#).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Yoshida, Y., Ramos, H. 2018. Overview of Atlantic Canadian Immigration Policy.

⁶ Background Document to Support Recommendations of the Atlantic Growth Advisory Group. 2017, November. [An Action Agenda for Atlantic Growth](#).

This report looks to the existing literature for guidance on how to improve retention. Why do people stay? Why do they leave? What are communities, employers and civil society doing that is working and not working? What gets in the way of immigrants and potential immigrants making Atlantic Canada home?

The literature is clear on why immigrants leave Atlantic Canada: they seek better job opportunities and higher compensation, better educational opportunities for themselves and their children, better social services and cultural amenities, and ties to an ethnic community and extended family. Big cities like Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver offer more diverse opportunities and community connections. In a region where out-migration of newcomers is disproportionately likely, optimizing the mix of attraction and retention strategies will make the region more attractive for the long term.

It will take well-implemented attraction efforts, clear immigration pathways, effective settlement services and good policy for more immigrants to settle and stay in Atlantic Canada. The following recommendations are drawn from recent work by the Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy,⁷ the Conference Board of Canada,⁸ the House of Commons Standing Committee on Immigration and Citizenship⁹, and the Atlantic Growth Advisory Group.¹⁰ This synthesis of leading thinkers provides a coherent view of the range of policy recommendations that align with the major retention factors.

Long-term retention should be considered from the outset, as attraction programs are designed and implemented. Such strategies focus on immigrants who are most likely to be successful in Atlantic Canada.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Actively promote Atlantic Canada's unique advantages to prospective immigrants

Promote Atlantic Canada's low cost of living, quality of life and availability of good settlement services.

Build on supports for employers

Economic opportunity is an important factor in decisions to relocate. The region needs business development as well as population growth, so employers should be engaged in ways to help them recruit and develop the types of workers they need. Business leaders know the value of immigration, but they need to be better supported to use the available system.

⁷ Ivany, R. 2014. [Report of the Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy](#).

⁸ Conference Board of Canada. 2017. [Immigration to Atlantic Canada](#).

⁹ Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. 2017. [Immigration to Atlantic Canada](#).

¹⁰ Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency. 2018. [An Action Agenda for Atlantic Growth: Recommendations of the Atlantic Growth Advisory Group](#).

Help families and community networks attract immigrants

Develop local critical masses of newcomer groups by attracting immigrants with connections to family or ethnic communities within the region.

Proactively recruit established entrepreneurs to Atlantic Canada

Improve entrepreneurial pathways by more selectively recruiting and nurturing a small number of candidates with established records of success.

Create opportunities for international students to work during and after their studies

The pathway to permanent residence for international students can be streamlined by making it easier to work when they are in school, and immediately after graduation. Much more needs to be done to increase student knowledge of what is required in order to successfully work and stay after they graduate.

Ensure necessary settlement services and immigrant supports

Settlement agencies in each province require adequate resources to meet current needs, with flexibility in the funding model to respond to sudden changes in trends. In addition, the connection between Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and regional and provincial immigration efforts would be improved by re-staffing IRCC offices in Atlantic Canada and having a regional coordinator.

Expand welcoming community initiatives

Build on the existing resources, infrastructure and success stories in the provinces to reinforce public awareness of the benefits of immigration, empower communities to be welcoming and provide opportunities for newcomers to connect with locals.

METHODS

This report is based on a selective summary of grey literature¹¹ and published research from academics, local organizations, think tanks and government. In order to provide a full picture of immigration efforts and challenges in Atlantic Canada, we draw from both quantitative and qualitative sources. We have compiled and analysed demographic, settlement and other statistical data from the Government of Canada, provincial governments, educational institutions, and other relevant bodies. We have also drawn from the experiences of other jurisdictions to contextualize the trends found in Atlantic Canada.

This report focuses on the following questions:

- What attracts immigrants to Atlantic Canada?
- What is the experience of immigrants upon arrival in Atlantic Canada?
- What causes immigrants to leave the region? What entices them to stay?
- What can Atlantic Canada learn from other jurisdictions or from successful communities within the region about attracting and retaining immigrants?

¹¹ Grey literature: materials and research produced by organizations outside of traditional commercial and academic publishing channels.

INTRODUCTION

Canada is recognized internationally as an attractive destination for immigrants. But long-term economic success and population growth have not been shared equally across the country. The fundamental problem facing Atlantic Canada today is demographics. Young people are migrating westward in search of more promising economic opportunities and as the population ages there is increased pressure on government's ability to provide essential services. And as cities grow and prosper, smaller communities and rural areas fall further behind. Without action to reverse these trends, Atlantic Canada will find itself increasingly ill-equipped to sustain growth.

Atlantic Canada's depressed level of population growth has significantly decreased its share of the Canadian population over the past several decades.¹² It has also become the oldest region in Canada. Median ages in the Atlantic provinces are the highest in the country and have consistently risen over the past five years while the national average has remained stable.¹³ As a wave of people reach retirement age, the region is poised for a steep labour force decline, threatening economic stability.¹⁴

This demographic shift has serious economic implications for the region. A shrinking workforce and tax base cannot support the rising costs of health care and other services for a growing population of seniors. To complicate the problem, as rural populations shrink, services become increasingly costly to provide in small Atlantic communities.

The nature of the labour market in the region adds an additional twist. Atlantic Canada has the highest unemployment rates in the country,¹⁵ but faces labour shortages in specialized fields,¹⁶ creating a challenging market for employers and job-seekers alike. The cities need more workers and the rural areas have too many un- or under-employed people without the right skills for the cities.

In 2016, Atlantic Canada's productivity was only 83 percent of the national average,¹⁷ and over 23,000 jobs went unfilled. While employers can't find workers, young people continue to move elsewhere in Canada to find suitable work. Without enough promising local employment prospects, Atlantic Canada is losing its

¹² Ivany, R. 2014. [Report of the Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy](#). One Nova Scotia.

¹³ Statistics Canada. 2018. [Age \(in Single Years\) and Average Age and Sex for the Population of Canada, Provinces and Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations, 2016 and 2011 Censuses - 100% Data](#).

¹⁴ Ivany, R. 2014. [Report of the Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy](#).

¹⁵ Drolet, M. 2017. [Linking labour demand and labour supply: Job vacancies and the unemployed](#). Statistics Canada.

¹⁶ Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency. 2017. [Roundtable on Skilled Workforce](#).

¹⁷ Statistics Canada. 2018. [Table 383-0033 - Labour productivity and related measures by business sector industry and by non-commercial activity consistent with the industry accounts, provinces and territories, annual \(jobs unless otherwise noted\)](#).

population to other places with more opportunity.¹⁸ Trends such as these force employers to turn to automation and outsourcing, worsening the job prospects for lower skilled and older workers in the region.

In the midst of these economic and demographic challenges, Atlantic Canada is home to pockets of growth. For instance, Moncton is the fastest growing city in the region.¹⁹ While many communities in Nova Scotia are shrinking, Halifax is experiencing a growing population and economy.²⁰ The rate of population expansion in Halifax is outpacing that of Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto and Vancouver.²¹ Halifax's boom highlights the stark differences between thriving urban centres and struggling rural areas. Even as the region overall loses young people, Halifax is attracting a young, vibrant community.²²

However, much of Halifax's growth is simply a concentration of Nova Scotians in the main centre and doesn't indicate overall growth for the province.²³ The phenomenon is reflective of the increasing concentration of population in Canada's largest centres. Halifax may be a bright spot in the region today, but it is not a broader indicator of a stabilizing population or economy for Atlantic Canada.

All of the provincial governments in the region have committed to immigration as part of the solution to the demographic crisis.²⁴ The use of temporary foreign workers (TFWs) in the region tripled from 2005 to 2012 alone, and 59 percent of small businesses reported that TFWs allowed them to stay open while still employing Canadian workers.²⁵ For the past three decades, immigration has driven Canadian population growth,²⁶ reshaping the country's demographic picture. Significantly, the median age of the immigrant population is almost 10 years younger than the average Canadian population, and almost 15 years younger than that of the Atlantic provinces.²⁷ A steady flow of young newcomers to the Atlantic provinces has the potential to stabilize or reverse the demographic shift and provide the workforce and tax base to sustain the region's economy and social services.

¹⁸ Statistics Canada. 2018. [Age \(in Single Years\) and Average Age and Sex](#).

¹⁹ Jones, R. 2017, July 18. [Moncton becomes No. 1 commercial, industrial development hub in Atlantic Canada](#). CBC News.

²⁰ Statistics Canada. 2017. [Halifax \[Census metropolitan area\], Nova Scotia and Nova Scotia \[Province\]](#).

²¹ Bundale, B. 2017, July 3. [Halifax becoming boom town as it welcomes population, economic growth](#). Toronto Star.

²² Ibid.

²³ Summers-Lubar, G. 2017, February 9. [Census shows Halifax is growing while the rest of the province is shrinking](#). University of King's College School of Journalism.

²⁴ Statistics Canada. 2018. [Table 285-0001 - Job Vacancy and Wage Survey \(JVWS\), job vacancies, job vacancy rate and average offered hourly wage by economic region, unadjusted for seasonality, quarterly \(number unless otherwise noted\)](#).

²⁵ Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. 2017. [Immigration to Atlantic Canada: Moving to the Future](#). House of Commons.

²⁶ Statistics Canada. 2017. [Population growth: Migratory increase overtakes natural increase](#).

²⁷ Martel, L. & D'Aoust, C. 2016. [Report on the Demographic Situation in Canada: Permanent and temporary immigration to Canada from 2012 to 2014](#). Statistics Canada.

In 2016, the Atlantic provinces were home to 110,505 immigrants, nearly five percent of the region's total population.²⁸ Newfoundland welcomed 1,170 new permanent residents in 2017, PEI 2,350, New Brunswick 3,650, and Nova Scotia 4,515.²⁹ Yet these newcomers were only 4.6 percent of all immigrants to Canada in 2017³⁰, while Atlantic Canada makes up 6.5 percent of the total Canadian population – an immigration deficit. Atlantic Canada receives a disproportionately low number of immigrants compared to the rest of Canada, and retains a disproportionately low percentage of the immigrants it receives.

Most immigrants to Atlantic Canada in 2017 were admitted as economic immigrants under Provincial Nominee Programs (PNPs)³¹, which highlight policy priorities to stimulate local growth through immigration that is oriented to the labour market. In addition to a steady stream of immigrants through PNPs, federal and provincial governments have joined together to address Atlantic revitalization through the [Atlantic Growth Strategy](#). The strategy is a three-year whole-of-government initiative to reverse these demographic and economic trends and foster long-term, stable growth in the region. The strategy focuses on five pillars:

- Fostering the development of a skilled workforce through immigrant attraction and retention;
- Supporting business innovation;
- Leading the transition to a low-carbon economy;
- Expanding trade and investment between Atlantic Canada and international markets; and
- Investing in significant infrastructure that will enable and facilitate long-term growth.

The immigration pillar of the strategy focuses on streamlining approaches to attract and retain immigrants and integrating them quickly and effectively to address labour shortages. The Atlantic Immigration Pilot (AIP), launched in 2017 by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) in collaboration with the Atlantic provinces and the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), aims to increase immigration to the region and fill labour gaps by enabling employers to directly recruit potential immigrants for job openings, offering a fast path to permanent residency.³²

Immigration is a necessary – but on its own insufficient – part of the solution. An ongoing influx of newcomers is essential to stabilize and grow the population in Atlantic Canada. But an increase in labour supply is not a solution without an increase in labour demand.³³ Business leaders note that regulation and wages must react to market forces in order for Atlantic Canada to be able to sustain itself – and retain its

²⁸ Statistics Canada. 2017. [Immigrant status and period of immigration, 2016 counts, both sexes, age \(total\), Canada, Newfoundland and Labrador and census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations, 2016 Census – 25% Sample data](#).

²⁹ Immigration, Citizenship, and Refugees Canada. 2017. Canada - Admissions of Permanent Residents by Province/Territory of Intended Destination and Immigration Category, January 2015 - December 2017.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. 2017. [2017 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration](#).

³² Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency. 2018. [Atlantic Canada Growth Strategy](#).

³³ Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. 2017. [Immigration to Atlantic Canada](#).

immigrants.³⁴ The recommendations of ACOA's [Atlantic Growth Advisory Group](#) provide a complete framework of actions to close the circle of economic growth and population growth.

An increase in immigration won't work for Atlantic Canada unless people choose to stay. This is easier said than done. Atlantic Canada has the lowest immigrant retention rates in the country, ranging from a low of 18 percent in PEI to a high of 72 percent in Nova Scotia while, outside the region, no other province has a retention rate below 80 percent.³⁵ The marked lag in the Atlantic provinces' retention poses a large problem for the region. Immigrants won't contribute to long-term economic growth or demographic stabilization if they are only in the region for the short-term.

If Atlantic Canada wants to solve its economic and demographic problems, it must become more than a stopover for immigrants. This shift calls for coordination between governments, universities and colleges, businesses, and community organizations at all levels, while successful attraction and retention of immigrants requires an understanding of the motivators behind immigrants' settlement choices.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Statistics Canada. 2018. [Table 054-0003 - Number of immigrant tax filers, by province of landing, province of residence, sex, landing age group, immigrant admission category, landing year for tax years 1996 to 2015, annual \(persons\)](#).

WHAT DRAWS IMMIGRANTS TO ATLANTIC CANADA?

Small regions and cities in Canada are often overlooked by immigrants in favour of the dynamos of Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. Atlantic Canada is no exception. Nearly two-thirds of all immigrants to Canada in 2013-2017 arrived in one of the three largest centres, while the Atlantic region received 4.6 percent of immigrants. And yet, thanks to new initiatives underway, a growing number of immigrants arrive in Atlantic Canada every year.

What attracts these immigrants to Atlantic Canada? What role do governments, employers, educational institutions, and community organizations play in attraction?

PROVEN STRATEGIES TO ATTRACT NEWCOMERS

The advent of Provincial Nominee Programs (PNPs) opened immigration streams to individual provinces instead of generic national streams. This is important partially because most newcomers would go to the places in Canada that they had heard of – the big cities.

Promoting the Atlantic region as an ideal destination can improve awareness of the area and increase the options that potential immigrants choose from. The region's culture, lifestyle and quality of life are a major pull factors that can be taken advantage of.

Government's Role in Attracting Immigrants

Government programs, action promotion and the available immigration streams have roles in attracting immigrants. Though newcomers have traditionally entered Canada through federal immigration programs, PNPs offer the provinces more influence over who immigrates to the province, and subsequently, a more important role in attraction.

The Atlantic provinces' PNPs primarily focus on attracting skilled workers and entrepreneurs, with increasing recent emphasis on the opportunities for international students to become permanent residents.³⁶ Though the PNPs previously provided several pathways for family and community immigrants to enter the provinces, almost all of these pathways have been discontinued.

In 2017, the federal government and the four provincial governments also launched the Atlantic Immigration Pilot with a specific focus on enabling employers to hire needed workers and participate in long-term retention efforts.³⁷

³⁶ Yoshida, Y., Ramos, H. 2018. Overview of Atlantic Canadian Immigration Policy.

³⁷ Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency. 2017. [Continuing Progress with the Atlantic Immigration Pilot](#).

The federal government's strategy and the strategy for all Atlantic provinces clearly intends to draw immigrants who can contribute to the region's economy and bolster growth. The PNPs and AIP offer economic immigrants a relatively straightforward path into the country while filling labour market gaps.

Employers and Attraction

Employers have taken on an increasingly important role in immigrant attraction, settlement and retention. Attracting people for economic purposes is a clear priority, and because of labour shortages, employers are more willing to offer jobs to immigrants who don't have Canadian experience or credentials.³⁸ For newcomers immigrating to rural areas, a job offer is often the primary factor in their location decision.³⁹

Through the AIP, approved employers can hire foreign applicants to fill labour shortages. If both the candidate and employer meet the program's requirements, the candidate receives permanent residency.⁴⁰ Employers are required to work with settlement services to develop an individual settlement plan to integrate newcomers into their communities.⁴¹

Employers also use the TFW program to fill labour market shortages, which allows them to hire foreign nationals for eight-month periods when a Canadian worker is unavailable. In the Atlantic region, the program is an important source of eventual permanent residents and permanent employees, although recent changes to federal and provincial immigration programs make this two-step migration more costly and difficult for employers, with restrictions on low-skilled workers.⁴²

The Express Entry program for high-skilled immigrants offers employers another avenue. By selecting candidates from the Express Entry pool, employers can fast-track the immigration process and more quickly meet a high-skilled labour need.⁴³

Employers are bringing a large number of temporary and permanent residents into the region. In 2016, there were over 6,600 TFW positions in Atlantic Canada,⁴⁴ and nearly 1,000 immigrants entered Atlantic Canada through the Express Entry program in 2017.⁴⁵ In its first year, 2,000 spots were available through the AIP,

³⁸ Flint, D. 2008. Recent Immigrants in a Rural Nova Scotia County: A Tentative Typology. [Our Diverse Cities: Atlantic Region](#), 5, p. 40-44. Government of Canada.

³⁹ Flint, D. 2007. [Rural Immigrants Who Come to Stay: A case study of recent immigrants to Colchester County, Nova Scotia](#). Atlantic Metropolis Centre.

⁴⁰ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. 2018. [About the Atlantic Immigration Pilot](#).

⁴¹ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. 2017. [Backgrounder: Atlantic Immigration Pilot – Programs and Employer Designation](#).

⁴² Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. 2017. [Immigration to Atlantic Canada](#).

⁴³ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. 2017. [How Express Entry works](#).

⁴⁴ Immigration, Citizenship, and Refugees Canada. 2017. Canada - Admissions of Permanent Residents by Province/Territory.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

and over 900 new permanent residents were approved.⁴⁶ By 2020, an estimated 7,000 more immigrants will land in the region through the pilot program.⁴⁷

Families and Attraction

Jobs and social connections are important immigrant attraction factors,⁴⁸ but having a network of family and friends is the single most important consideration when choosing where to settle.⁴⁹ The presence of family and friends provides an invaluable support network for newcomers, providing them with general assistance as they transition to a new life in Canada, and helping create new community ties.

Beyond social supports, job opportunities are often tied to immigrants' social networks.⁵⁰ This is an important reality to recognize in Atlantic Canada, where success often depends on social connections. Family connections can bridge the gap to successful integration for new immigrants. While the Atlantic provinces lack the quantity of large ethnic communities compared to larger centres, immigrants themselves can be an important attraction factor if they stay in the region.

Communities and Attraction

Quality of life is an important and unique draw for Atlantic Canada. Immigrants note that the manageable pace of life, with safe communities and good services, makes Atlantic communities attractive for raising families, and the proximity to nature is a large lifestyle draw.⁵¹ These attractions are difficult to quantify, but they are important components of branding Atlantic Canada as a desirable destination.

⁴⁶ Luck, S. 2018, January 11. [Nova Scotia filled just a quarter of its spots under new immigration program](#). CBC News.; Guinn, A. 2017, November 28. [INFOGRAPHIC: Atlantic immigration pilot failing to meet 2017 targets](#). The Chronicle Herald.

⁴⁷ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. 2017. [Notice – Supplementary Information 2018-2020 Immigration Levels Plan](#).

⁴⁸ Hyndman, J., Schuurman, N. & Fiedler, R., 2006. Size matters: Attracting new immigrants to Canadian cities. *Journal of International Migration and Integration / Revue de l'integration et de la migration internationale*, 7(1), pp.1–25.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Bégin-Gillis, M. 2009. Immigrant settlement in rural Nova Scotia: Impacting the location decisions of newcomers. *Papers in Canadian Economic Development*, 12, pp. 1-18.;

Hanson, N. & Barber, P. 2011. Why stay: an ethnographic analysis of the settlement decisions in a small Atlantic centre. *Atlantic Metropolis Centre*.

Atlantic Canada's Natural Advantage

One anecdote offered to the House of Commons [Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration](#) highlights the strong draw of the Atlantic lifestyle: a small-town Cape Breton store owner created an advertisement on Facebook, promoting the lifestyle benefits of the island and offering a tract of land in exchange for five years of minimum-wage work at her store. The advertisement received over 300,000 responses, including from doctors, lawyers, executives, and successful entrepreneurs who were drawn by the lifestyle and interested in setting up shop on the island. As a result of the advertisement, seven families moved to the community, including three who started their own business.

Atlantic Canada has deep attractions for some potential newcomers. Through active promotion of the region's unique draws, newcomers interested in the Atlantic lifestyle can become connected to communities, facilitating immigration with rich potential for long-term retention.⁵²

Community organizations, cultural groups, businesses and local governments all help market their community as a potential home for newcomers. Even small communities in rural areas have succeeded in attracting immigrants by raising international awareness about local opportunities. Colchester County in rural Nova Scotia is a case study of how access to information and social connections within a small community can influence immigrants' decisions to settle. Although Colchester County has fewer than 50,000 residents, it has actively promoted itself online and at international immigration fairs.

A now-discontinued community organization, the *Colchester Regional Development Agency* (CoRDA), provided information to potential immigrants about the region and the immigration process, and supported immigrants throughout their immigration applications and settlement. In qualitative interviews, immigrants said CoRDA's promotion and support were instrumental to their decision to settle in Colchester County. Few newcomers had family or social connections in Colchester, but were attracted by the region's lifestyle and natural environment. Promoting the community as an ideal destination and providing potential immigrants with information and options can be part of a successful population growth strategy.⁵³

⁵² Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. 2017, October 17. [Evidence, Meeting 76](#);

MacMillan, J. 2016, August 29. [Cape Breton store offers free land, job to Canadians willing to relocate](#). CBC News.

⁵³ Bégin-Gillis, M. 2009. Immigrant settlement in rural Nova Scotia;

Flint, D. 2007. [Rural Immigrants Who Come to Stay](#);

Flint, D. 2008. Recent Immigrants in a Rural Nova Scotia County.

The Colchester County case is consistent with other examples from across the region about the importance of individual communities, organizations, and even people in the successful attraction of immigrants. Communities of varying size have been successful in attracting immigrants by using active promotional tools such as regional websites and attending immigration fairs overseas to market themselves as appealing and welcoming communities.⁵⁴ Cases like Colchester demonstrate the importance of non-economic factors in attracting immigrants, even those coming through economic streams.

Lunenburg, Nova Scotia

The internet is a key source of information for immigrants, and early impressions of the community can sway immigrants' settlement decisions.⁵⁵ Though communities' access to resources vary greatly, creating an internet presence as part of marketing activities can positively impact immigrant attraction.

Lunenburg County, N.S., is one community at the forefront of innovative self-marketing. It developed its own community growth strategy and has been proactively working to attract newcomers to the area. The [NOW Lunenburg County](#) website provides clear and attractive information to immigrants, including current job postings and housing availability in the county. Community attraction efforts like these are important in creating vibrant communities outside of the largest national and regional hubs.

Education and Attraction

Education is another important draw for people who come to Canada seeking better opportunities for themselves and their children.⁵⁶ Atlantic Canada is particularly rich in educational opportunities, and the region's universities, colleges, polytechnic institutes and K-12 schools play a key role in attracting international students.

In 2017 there were an estimated 25,375⁵⁷ international student permit holders in Atlantic Canada – in universities, community colleges, language schools, elementary and high schools. More than 14,000

⁵⁴ Akbari, A. & Rankaduwa, W. 2008. [Socioeconomic Profiles of Immigrants in the Four Atlantic provinces - Phase II: Focus on Vibrant Communities](#). Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

⁵⁵ Hanson, N. & Barber, P. 2011. Why stay.

⁵⁶ Conference Board of Canada. 2017. [Immigration to Atlantic Canada: Toward a Prosperous Future](#);

Hanson, N. & Barber, P. 2011. Why stay.

⁵⁷ <https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/b813dcb6-cc08-4e06-97d4-85b7e4daa822>

international students attended university,⁵⁸ comprising nearly 20 percent of enrollment.⁵⁹ Canadian student enrollment has dropped 10 percent in the last 10 years while the proportion of university seats filled by international students has doubled.⁶⁰ Some universities, like Saint Mary's, the University of Prince Edward Island, and the University College of Cape Breton, now draw almost a third of their students from outside Canada.⁶¹ The international student population is growing as a percentage of university student bodies across the region and are becoming increasingly significant in sustaining enrollment levels in Atlantic universities.⁶² International students are a potential pool of eventual permanent residents and young, well educated workers and entrepreneurs.

In recent years, K-12 school boards in Atlantic Canada have begun accepting international students, many of whom stay after completing high school to study at post-secondary institutions in the region. In 2010, 1,640 international students were studying in the K-12 system in Atlantic Canada, nearly 12 percent of all international students in the region.⁶³ Despite a drop in Nova Scotia's youth population, its educational services industry grew by almost 22 percent in 2012, aided by increased enrollment of international students.⁶⁴

The region's high quality and relatively low-cost educational opportunities give it a distinct competitive advantage in attracting international students.⁶⁵ However, despite Atlantic Canada's strong post-secondary educational institutions, the region remains relatively unknown internationally for its educational opportunities. More marketing internationally would increase awareness and attract even more international students, which would ensure the long-term vitality of the region's universities while providing a larger pool of potential permanent residents.

Maintaining attractive channels for international students to study in Atlantic Canada is key to the survival of the region's universities, and to attracting young, skilled immigrants to Atlantic Canada for the long-term. However, to fully capitalize on this growing and attractive cohort of new residents in the region, equal emphasis must be placed on connecting international students with post-graduation employment opportunities. The ability to transition to permanent residency in Atlantic Canada after graduation makes the region more attractive to potential international students, and can only improve the retention of those already studying in the region.

⁵⁸ Corporate Research Associates. 2017. [2017 International Graduate Study: The Graduate Experience - One Year Later](#).

⁵⁹ Peter Halpin. 2017, June 7. [\[Statement\] at the Citizenship and Immigration Committee](#).

⁶⁰ Association of Atlantic Universities. [AAU Survey of Preliminary Enrolments](#).

⁶¹ Peter Halpin. 2017, June 7. [\[Statement\] at the Citizenship and Immigration Committee](#);

Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency. 2016, November 3. [UPEI Increases International Student Attraction Efforts](#).

⁶² Ivany, R. 2014. [Report of the Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy](#).

⁶³ Global Affairs Canada. 2016. [ARCHIVED - Economic Impact of International Education in Canada - An Update](#).

⁶⁴ Ivany, R. 2014. [Report of the Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy](#).

⁶⁵ Ibid.

PATHWAYS INTO ATLANTIC CANADA

Provincial immigration policy in the last 20 years has been dominated by attempts to address the demographic and economic issues facing the region⁶⁶. In addition to federal policy, the provinces turned to Provincial Nominee Programs (PNPs) as part of the immigration solution. Immigration rates show that making immigration a priority drives significant growth in newcomer arrivals: between 2012 and 2016, immigration to Atlantic Canada increased by 113 percent whereas the increase in the rest of Canada was 12.4 percent.⁶⁷

The first provinces to launch PNPs were Newfoundland and Labrador and New Brunswick in 1999. They were followed by Prince Edward Island in 2001 and then Nova Scotia in 2003. From inception, the provinces focused on attracting immigrants who could make social and economic contributions to the region. Most provinces focused on attracting skilled workers and entrepreneurs, but early programs also worked to meet specific community needs and to attract the family of immigrants.

The focus on entrepreneurial or investor immigrants was met with obstacles and challenges. Two of the provinces had to suspend programs because of irregularities and an inability to deliver on the promises offered to newcomers. Despite those obstacles, most of provinces still maintain pathways for investor and entrepreneurial immigrants.

A number of the provinces also introduced pathways that relied on community, family or economic networks. Many of the social and family pathways of early PNPs have been discontinued. This is a trend that parallels changes in federal policy between 2006 and 2015. During that time, all of the provinces increased their focus on economic pathways and also began to work to attract international students with the intention of transitioning them into the labour market or into starting new businesses.

The effect of federal immigration policy

The prioritization of economic immigrants in the Atlantic provinces aligns with federal immigration policy. A major shift in immigration policy occurred with the passing of the [Immigration and Refugee Protection Act](#) (IRPA) in 2001, which laid the groundwork for a revamped immigration system with an increased focus on the economic and human capital aspects of immigration. Policy reforms in 2008 led to an explicit favouring of skilled workers over other categories, temporary visa programs and increased reliance on two-step migration.

The IRPA was amended in 2012 to create new restrictions on family sponsorship and family migration. The next major change to the system came in 2015 when the federal government negotiated bilateral agreements with each of the Atlantic provinces to include Express Entry pathways in the PNPs. The PNP

⁶⁶ Yoshida, Y., Ramos, H. 2018. Overview of Atlantic Canadian Immigration Policy.

⁶⁷ Background Document to Support Recommendations of the Atlantic Growth Advisory Group. 2017, November. [An Action Agenda for Atlantic Growth](#).

Express Entry streams are employer driven and reward human capital and experience gained in Canada, foreshadowing the priorities of the Atlantic Immigration Pilot that would be launched two years later.

Changes in federal policy correlate with provincial prioritization of skilled workers over community and family immigration pathways. They have also coincided with an increase in the total number of potential PNP pathways. Over the last 20 years, the federal and provincial immigration pathways have become increasingly tailored and complicated – resulting in approximately 20 PNP pathways into Atlantic Canada. The precise number can be difficult to keep track of: in the first two months of 2018 alone Nova Scotia announced a new pathway for physicians while New Brunswick discontinued at least one pathway for family sponsored skilled workers.

The most recent federal change affecting Atlantic provinces is the introduction of the Atlantic Immigration Pilot (AIP) in 2017. As a policy innovation, it is not bilateral. Instead it applies the same pathway to all four provinces with a common delivery model, targets and evaluation. This contrasts with 20 years of provincial PNP experimentation and differentiation.

Newfoundland and Labrador Provincial Nominee Program

Newfoundland and Labrador launched a PNP in 1999 and for the first eight years of the program it had just one pathway – the Immigrant Partner/Entrepreneur stream. This pathway lasted until 2012 and sought to attract immigrants who wanted to invest and actively participate as a director or manager in a new or existing business in the province.

In 2007, the province launched three more pathways: Skilled Worker, Family Connections, and International Graduate. Skilled Worker pathways were part of other province's PNPs much earlier. The Skilled Worker stream is still active, and aims to attract immigrants with specialized skills that are not readily attainable in Canada. It requires that the immigrant has a job offer or is working in the province on a temporary work visa. Employers are responsible for providing evidence that the position cannot be filled by a Canadian. The Family Connections pathway was the first among Atlantic provinces to explicitly target families. Newfoundland and Labrador was a pioneer, along with Nova Scotia, in offering an International Graduate pathway for students who graduate from a post-secondary institution in the province.

The only other major change to Newfoundland and Labrador's PNP came in 2015 with the launch of the Express Entry Skilled Worker pathway. It is a pathway for immigrants accepted into the Federal Express Entry pool, who have a job offer in Newfoundland and Labrador, and who intend to reside permanently in the province. An advantage to this pathway is quicker processing of applications compared to other pathways.

Overall, the Newfoundland and Labrador PNP has moved from a focus on attracting business or investor immigrants to attracting skilled workers and international students. The province experimented with a family

pathway but moved away from it at the same time the federal immigration system closed opportunities for family.

New Brunswick Provincial Nominee Program

New Brunswick launched its PNP in 1999 but did not begin recruiting newcomers until 2000. At first it offered two pathways for immigrants: The Skilled Worker with Employer Support and Business/Entrepreneurial streams. The Skilled Worker with Employer Support program aims to attract newcomers with specialized occupational skills needed by employers in the province and requires a guaranteed offer of employment by an employer in New Brunswick. There are also requirements to have official language skills needed to complete the tasks of employment. The Business/Entrepreneurial stream offers a pathway for applicants with entrepreneurial skills and who have a business plan or business proposal deemed to be of economic benefit to the province.

The province introduced the Skilled Worker with Community Support program in 2009. The program was intended for workers supported by a community of 6,000 or less residents, with no need of a guaranteed job offer of full time employment. It launched the Skilled Worker with Family Support program in 2010, which aimed to attract applicants with specialized occupational skills, who have family members who are citizens or permanent residents of the province and commit to assisting the newcomer settle, and applicants who have been living and working in the province for a minimum of one year. It was recently discontinued.

Two additional pathways were introduced in 2015, the Post Graduate Entrepreneur and the Skilled Workers Express Entry: Labour Market streams. The Post Graduate Entrepreneur pathway aims to attract highly skilled international post-graduate entrepreneurs to live in New Brunswick and contribute to the local economy. In 2015 the province introduced the Skilled Workers Express Entry: Labour Market stream in partnership with the federal government. This pathway is employer driven like other Express Entry pathways, and mirrors the federal system.

The focus of the New Brunswick PNP is, and always has been, driven by economic interests and focuses on skilled workers and entrepreneurs. All categories focus on the economic aspects of attracting newcomers. The province has also tended to balance those interests with pathways that are tied to employer, family or community support or social and economic networks.

Prince Edward Island Provincial Nominee Program

Prince Edward Island launched its PNP in 2001. At first it had four streams: Skilled Worker, Immigrant Entrepreneur, Immigrant Partner and Immigrant Connections streams. The Skilled Worker stream focused on immigrants with specialized skills and experience that filled a critical labour market need in the province. The Immigrant Entrepreneur category worked to attract entrepreneurs to establish viable and new businesses in the province. The Immigrant Partner pathway targeted immigrants as a means of promoting investment in established businesses in Prince Edward Island, and investors needed to make a \$200,000

investment and play an active role in the company as a director or senior manager. This pathway was suspended in 2008, after concerns of conflict of interest and political favouritism toward those who received immigrant investment money, and the threat of an RCMP investigation.⁶⁸ The Immigrant Connections stream aimed to strengthen immigrant families by allowing them to "champion" relatives who met provincially set settlement and employability criteria.

Each of these pathways were maintained until 2011, when the province relaunched the PNP as a result of new federal immigration regulations that demanded the program be re-vamped and resolve issues around the Immigrant Partner stream.

After being restructured in 2011, the PEI streams fell under two broad categories: Labour Market Impact and Business Impact.⁶⁹

The Labour Market Impact category intends to attract immigrants with the skills and experience required to meet labour market needs in the province. It is an employer-driven vehicle for businesses and organizations to meet self-identified employment needs. The category bundles four pathways: Skilled Worker, Critical Worker, Family Connection and International Graduates.

The Business Impact category is intended to attract skilled entrepreneurs wanting to either establish new businesses in Prince Edward Island, or purchase existing ones. It requires active involvement in the management of the company. This category includes three streams: 100 Percent Ownership, Partial Ownership and Work Permit. The 100 Percent Ownership category requires a conditionally refundable deposit of \$200,000 to be held in escrow and that the applicant obtains 100 percent control of a business in the province. The Partial Ownership stream requires applicant to obtain a minimum of 33.3 percent of a business' equity or invest one million dollars in the equity of the business. The Work Permit pathway under the Business Impact category asks applicants to obtain a temporary work permit and become a sole or partial owner of a business by investing in and actively managing an eligible business in PEI, prior to being nominated for residency by the province. This is similar to Nova Scotia's 'Entrepreneur' pathway.

Like other Atlantic provinces, PEI also launched an Express Entry pathway that mirrors the federal Express Entry program.

Prince Edward Island's PNP has focused largely on entrepreneurial or investor immigrants. Even after struggles with some streams, the province has continued to pursue immigrants through such pathways.

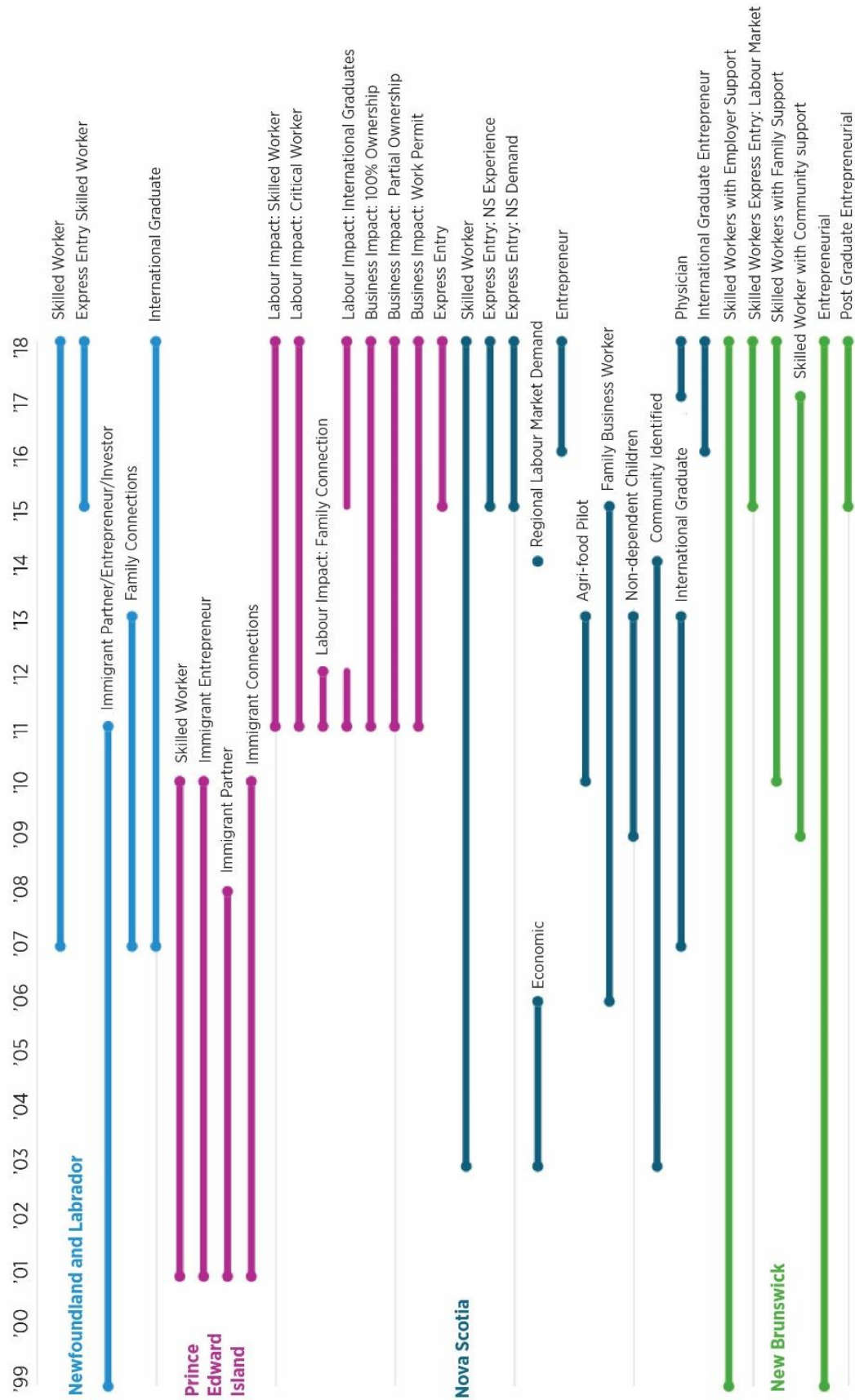
Since its inception, the province has moved away from family pathways and has increased its focus on skilled workers and other economic immigrants.

⁶⁸ CBC News. 2010, June 25. [Kenney reviews P.E.I.'s immigration program.](#)

⁶⁹ Grant Thornton. 2016. [Prince Edward Island Provincial Nominee Program. Evaluation Results.](#)

Provincial immigration pathways to Atlantic Canada

Since 1999, Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) streams have grown to more than 20.



Source: Ramos and Yoshida

Nova Scotia Provincial Nominee Program

Nova Scotia was the last Atlantic province to pursue a PNP, launching in 2003.⁷⁰ At that time, the program had three pathways: Skilled Worker, Economic and Community Identified. The Skilled Worker pathway is employment driven. Applicants need to have a guaranteed, full-time, permanent job offer in Nova Scotia before applying. The Economic category focused on attracting immigrants with experience as business managers and entrepreneurs. The program aimed to offer each nominated candidate a six-month work experience contract and mentorship at a middle management level with an approved Nova Scotian company as a means of transitioning newcomers into the business ecosystem. Like Prince Edward Island's Immigrant Partner stream, this pathway experienced complaints of irregular management, and was closed in 2006.⁷¹ The Community Identified stream was open to newcomers that had long-established connections to a Nova Scotian community and who wanted to live in the province permanently. It closed at the end of 2014.

The province introduced the Family Business Worker stream in 2006. To be eligible for the program an applicant needed a guaranteed full-time permanent job with a family run business before applying. The stream was closed in 2015. The province also introduced an International Graduate Student category to its PNP in 2007. Applicants needed to have a guaranteed, full-time, permanent job offer, preferably in their field of study from a Nova Scotian employer. The program was discontinued in 2013.

From 2009-2013 Nova Scotia had the Non-Dependent Children category as a short pilot. It was setup to accommodate the relatives of Provincial Nominees, notably those in the economic stream, who were unable to bring their dependent children because the children no longer qualified as dependent due to delays in application processing. The Agri-Food Pilot was another short-term pathway in the Nova Scotian PNP. It was launched in 2010 and ran until 2013. This stream was aimed at attracting immigrants interested in establishing or purchasing an agri-food sector business in the province. Yet another short lived pilot was the Regional Labour Market Demand pathway that opened and closed in 2014.

In 2015, Nova Scotia introduced two Express Entry pathways. Like other provinces, this program mirrors the federal Express Entry program, is employer driven, and focuses on the candidate being offered a job and filling labour market demand. Unlike other provinces, Nova Scotia launched two categories of Express Entry: Express Entry: Experience and Express Entry: Demand. The Experience stream aims to select applicants who have at least one year of experience working in Nova Scotia in a high skilled occupation. The Demand category aims to attract applicants with a good chance of quickly finding a job in Nova Scotia.

Nova Scotia reintroduced a stream focusing on international investors and entrepreneurs in 2008 with the launch of the Entrepreneur stream. It is a de facto replacement of the Economic stream that was closed by the province because of irregularities and complaints. The Entrepreneur pathway is for people who want to settle and establish their own business in the province. The new model uses a "temporary to permanent

⁷⁰ Province of Nova Scotia. 2004. [Standing Committee On Economic Development Annual Report](#).

⁷¹ Nova Scotia Office of Immigration. 2012, July 4. [Review of the Economic Stream of the Nova Scotia Nominee Program](#).

residence” model, with applicants starting a business under work permit for at least one year and then transitioning into this pathway under the PNP and then permanent residence.

A recent addition to Nova Scotia’s PNP has been the International Graduate Entrepreneur stream. This stream provides immigration opportunities for students who graduated from a Nova Scotian university or community college and who start their own business, and follows the “temporary-to-permanent residence” model. In 2017 the province also launched the Physician stream to attract foreign doctors to the region.

Nova Scotia has experimented the most with innovative pathways for attracting immigrants and has offered the widest range of streams since its inception. Like other provinces, however, it has increasingly focused on economic pathways and skilled immigrants. The province has also moved toward a “temporary-to-permanent” set of pathways, particularly for those seeking to start businesses. This is in part a response to the struggles it had, like Prince Edward Island, with pathways promoting business investment.

Currently Available PNP Categories in the Atlantic Provinces

*This table is current as of March 12, 2018

Newfoundland and Labrador	Nova Scotia
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Skilled Worker ▪ Express Entry Skilled Worker ▪ International Graduate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Skilled worker ▪ Express Entry: NS Experience ▪ Express Entry: NS Demand ▪ Entrepreneur Stream ▪ Physician stream* ▪ International graduate Entrepreneur stream
Prince Edward Island	New Brunswick
1. Labour Impact Category <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Skilled Worker ▪ Critical Worker ▪ International Graduates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Skilled Workers with Employer Support ▪ Skilled Workers Express Entry: Labour Market ▪ Skilled Workers with Family Support** ▪ Entrepreneur ▪ Post Graduate Entrepreneur
2. Business Impact Category <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 100 percent Ownership ▪ Partial Ownership ▪ Work Permit Stream 	
3. PEI Express Entry	

*A new program first announced in 2017. For details, see <https://novascotiainmigration.com/move-here/physician/>

**NB Skilled Worker with Family Support Stream is closed as of February 2018. <http://welcomenb.ca/content/wel-bien/en/immigrating/content/HowToImmigrate/NBP>

2017 intake through Provincial Nominee Programs

Given the emphasis on economic immigration, family class immigrants represented a small percentage of newcomers to the region in 2017. Family class immigrants ranged from just 4 percent of immigrants to PEI to 18 percent of immigrants to Newfoundland.⁷² Refugees represent a similarly low proportion of immigration to the region, with the exception of Newfoundland, where refugees composed one quarter of all newcomers.⁷³ Most immigrants arrive through economic streams. In 2017, 59 percent of immigrants to Newfoundland, 73 percent of immigrants to Nova Scotia, 78 percent of those to New Brunswick, and 92 percent of those to PEI arrived via economic streams.^{74,75} The total number and proportion of economic immigrants have steadily trended upward over the past decade,⁷⁶ highlighting the provinces emphasis on attracting economic immigrants. Research by the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council (APEC) has reinforced the point that recent strong growth in immigration to the region is due to expanded use of the PNP – in particular for economic reasons.⁷⁷

Number and Percentage of Immigrants by Category and Province, 2008⁷⁸

	NL	PEI	NS	NB
Economic Immigrants	299 (48%)	1,308 (90%)	1,828 (69%)	1,355 (73%)
Family Sponsored Immigrants	141 (23%)	80 (6%)	532 (20%)	291 (16%)
Refugees	162 (26%)	46 (3%)	193 (7%)	165 (9%)

⁷² Immigration, Citizenship, and Refugees Canada. 2017. Canada - Admissions of Permanent Residents by Province/Territory.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Economic immigrants include those who arrive through PNPs, and those who arrive through skilled worker or entrepreneurial streams. Economic streams of immigration play a role of meeting a region's economic needs, either through labour for existing organizations, or capital and ideas to build new ventures to contribute to the economy.

⁷⁵ Immigration, Citizenship, and Refugees Canada. 2017. Canada - Admissions of Permanent Residents by Province/Territory.

⁷⁶ Ibid; Immigration, Citizenship, and Refugees Canada. 2017. Canada - Permanent residents by province or territory and category.

⁷⁷ Atlantic Provinces Economic Council. 2017, January 12. [Immigration on the Rise](#)

⁷⁸ Statistics Canada. 2015. [Table A3: Immigrants and percentage distribution by province of destination and class, Canada, 2008 and 2009](#).

Number and Percentage of Immigrants by Category and Province, 2017⁷⁹

	NL	PEI	NS	NB
Economic Immigrants	690 (59%)	2,170 (92%)	3,315 (73%)	2,855 (78%)
Family Sponsored Immigrants	205 (18%)	85 (4%)	710 (16%)	340 (9%)
Refugees	275 (24%)	90 (4%)	480 (11%)	440 (12%)

The immigration system can be overly cumbersome to navigate. For international students and temporary foreign workers, the transition to permanent residency largely depends on an employer who is willing to navigate the immigration system. This can be especially burdensome for small employers⁸⁰ as well as for international students who need to build Canadian work experience.⁸¹ Although the AIP makes positive steps towards simplifying the two-step migration system, these barriers continue to persist for non-permanent residents.

Systemic barriers also exist for immigrants coming to Atlantic Canada via traditional pathways. Many immigrants are forced to put their lives on hold in Canada while waiting for the immigration system, all the while unsure of the outcome of their application.⁸² A couple who moved to rural Nova Scotia under the entrepreneur pathway commented “If we didn’t want to be here so badly, we would have thrown in the towel long ago.”⁸³

Many immigrants arrive with skills and a desire to make a better life for themselves in Canada. It is one thing to attract immigrations to Atlantic Canada. Retaining them is a different story.

⁷⁹ Immigration, Citizenship, and Refugees Canada. 2017. Canada - Admissions of Permanent Residents by Province/Territory.

⁸⁰ Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. 2017. [Immigration to Atlantic Canada](#).

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Flint, D. 2008. Recent Immigrants in a Rural Nova Scotia County.

⁸³ Ibid.

WHY DO IMMIGRANTS CHOOSE TO STAY?

Immigration to the Atlantic provinces will only be a demographic and economic solution if people choose to stay. But studies based on tax-filer residence data show that the Atlantic provinces lag the rest of Canada in immigrant retention.⁸⁴ Nova Scotia has the highest regional five-year retention rate at 72 percent, Newfoundland and Labrador is at 56 percent, New Brunswick is at 52 percent, and PEI is a distant 18 percent overall.⁸⁵ No province outside Atlantic Canada has a retention rate below 80 percent.⁸⁶

Five Year Total Retention Rates by Province, 2011-2015⁸⁷

NL	PEI	NS	NB	QC	ON	MB	SK	AB	BC
56%	18%	72%	52%	82%	91%	80%	82%	91%	88%

Retention rates also vary among the immigration pathways. Family class immigrants have higher retention rates than economic principal applicants and the spouses and dependents of economic immigrants. In all cases, family class retention is higher than the overall average for each Atlantic province.⁸⁸ PEI stands out in this regard – while it still has the lowest of all family class retention, these rates are over 30 percent higher than the province’s average.⁸⁹ These patterns provide insight into the factors that are known to most affect retention and have the potential to act as a blueprint for provinces in gearing immigration and settlement policy to optimize retention efforts.

⁸⁴ Background Document to Support Recommendations of the Atlantic Growth Advisory Group. 2017, November. [An Action Agenda for Atlantic Growth](#).

⁸⁵ Statistics Canada. 2018. [Table 054-0003](#).

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ This table shows the retention rate of immigrants landed in 2011 five years after landing, in 2015. Statistics published by other sources from 2008-2013 use an average rate, which includes immigrants who landed between 2008-2013 still living in the landing province in 2013. Taking an average rate elevates retention, as retention drops steeply within the first three years of landing. The five-year retention rate provides a more accurate picture of long-term retention in Atlantic Canada. For more on calculating retention rates see the [IMDB 2015 Technical Report Appendix D.3: Calculating Retention Rates](#); Statistics Canada. 2018. [Table 054-0003](#)

⁸⁸ Statistics Canada. 2018. [Table 054-0003](#).

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Five-year Retention Rates by Atlantic Province and Immigrant Admission Category, 2011-2015⁹⁰

Immigrant Category	NL	PEI	NS	NB
Family Class	65%	50%	75%	70%
Economic class, principal applicants	58%	16%	64%	52%
Economic class, spouses and dependents	60%	14%	70%	46%
Refugee class	33%	62%	89%	38%
Overall Retention	56%	18%	72%	52%

The literature is clear on why immigrants leave Atlantic Canada: they seek better job opportunities and higher compensation, better educational opportunities for themselves and their children, better social services and cultural amenities, and ties to an ethnic community and extended family. Big cities like Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver offer more diverse opportunities and community connections. In a region where out-migration of newcomers is disproportionately likely, these retention factors are one step toward shaping policies and practices to make the region more attractive for the long term.

KEY RETENTION FACTORS

Immigrant attraction and retention in a region or community is driven by individual weighting of the likelihood of good employment, the presence of people with similar cultural characteristics, and quality of life.⁹¹ While good employment is necessary for attracting immigrants, social connectedness and a good quality of life also factor into whether people stay.

Employment Opportunities

A better life is characterized by better opportunities for immigrants and their children. Large metropolises in Canada provide a host of opportunities for employment, education and success. But in recent years Atlantic Canada has done very well with providing good employment prospects to newcomers.

The importance of opportunity is highlighted by the heightened mobility of skilled workers in Atlantic provinces. Skilled workers are more mobile than unskilled workers – immigrants with a university education

⁹⁰ Statistics Canada. 2018. [Table 054-0003](#).

⁹¹ Background Document to Support Recommendations of the Atlantic Growth Advisory Group. 2017, November. [An Action Agenda for Atlantic Growth](#).

move 10 percent more often than those without.⁹² Skilled, educated immigrants expect employment opportunities reflecting their experience. If employment has limited upward mobility, skilled and educated immigrants can eventually be drawn elsewhere.⁹³ In this scenario, the economics of business development trump simple population growth. This is the why the entirety of the Atlantic Growth Strategy is so important.

Income is a strong indicator of which immigrants will stay in Atlantic Canada. Those who stay earn roughly \$10,000 more than those who leave,⁹⁴ highlighting the correlation between economic integration and successful retention. Those who leave tend to move to larger centres in search of positions with better pay and opportunities for advancement.⁹⁵ Lower retention rates for immigrants earning relatively less than those who stay suggests that poor economic integration pushes immigrants out of the Atlantic region.

Immigrants to Atlantic Canada earn at the same level as their Canadian-educated counterparts, while immigrants who were educated in less developed countries earn 14.5 percent less in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver than their Canadian-educated counterparts.⁹⁶ However, the average incomes of economic immigrants and their families in Atlantic Canada still lag national averages for immigrants in the same cohort.⁹⁷ Despite greater income equality in Atlantic Canada, the higher overall earning opportunities in Canada's larger centres can entice immigrants to leave the region.

The difference between economic immigrants' incomes in Atlantic Canada and in Canada as a whole are fairly minimal, but there is an income gap for spouses and dependents in Atlantic Canada.⁹⁸ The regional average is pulled down by PEI, which lags the other three provinces.

⁹² Ramos, H. & Yoshida, Y. 2011. [Why do recent immigrants leave Atlantic Canada?](#) Atlantic Metropolis Centre.

⁹³ Department of Immigration and Border Protection. 2014. [Regional retention of migrants: critical success factors](#). Australian Government.

⁹⁴ Ramos, H. & Yoshida, Y. 2011. [Why do recent immigrants leave Atlantic Canada?](#)

⁹⁵ Ibid.

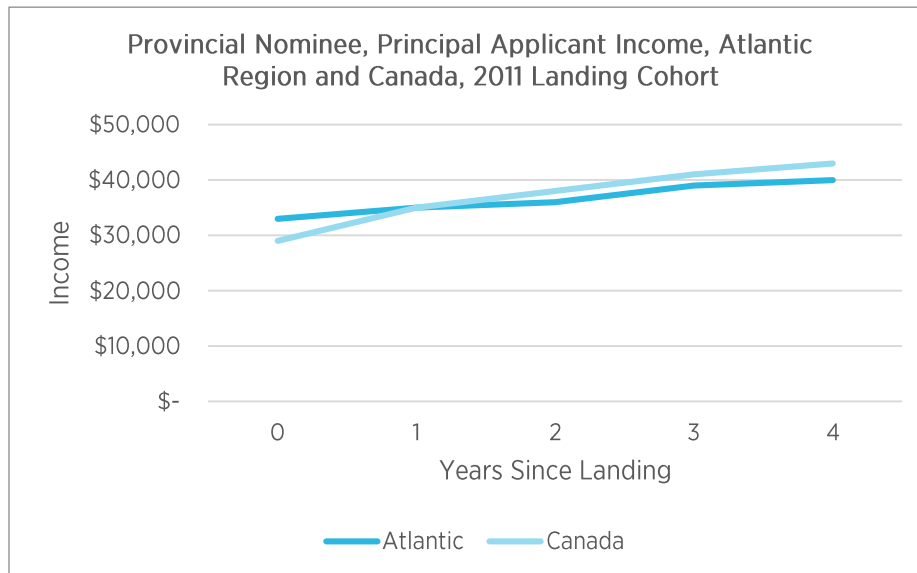
⁹⁶ Sano, Y., Kaida, L. & Swiss, L. 2017. Earnings of Immigrants in Traditional and Non-Traditional Destinations: A Case Study from Atlantic Canada. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 18(3), pp.961-980.

⁹⁷ Statistics Canada. 2018. [Table 054-0001 - Income of immigrants, by sex, landing age group, immigrant admission category, years since landing and landing year, 2015 constant dollars, annual](#).

⁹⁸ Ibid.

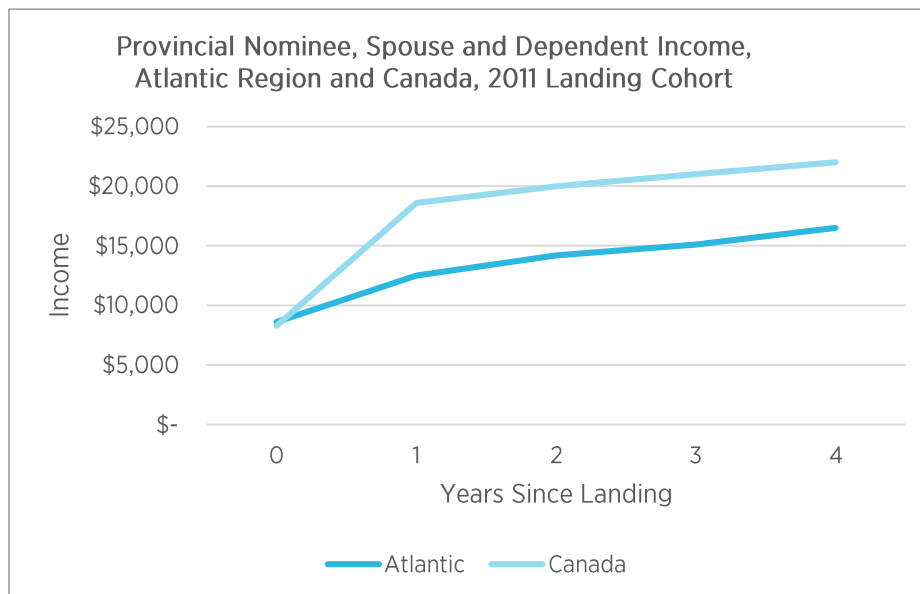
IMMIGRANT INCOMES

After four years in Canada, principal economic immigrants' incomes are roughly on par with the Canadian average, but growing slower.⁹⁹



IMMIGRANT SPOUSAL INCOMES

After four years in Canada, economic immigrants' spouses' incomes in Atlantic Canada are nearly \$5,000 less than the Canadian average.¹⁰⁰



⁹⁹ Statistics Canada. 2018. [Table 054-0001](#); Statistics Canada. 2018. [Table 054-0016](#).

¹⁰⁰ Statistics Canada. 2018. [Table 054-0001](#); Statistics Canada. 2018. [Table 054-0016](#).

The gendered wage gap for immigrants is 33 percent in Atlantic Canada, which is twice the rate of that in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver.¹⁰¹ Most economic applicants are men, and most women who enter Canada via economic streams come as spouses.¹⁰² Women who enter Canada as spouses of economic principal applicants earn approximately \$20,000 less than male principal applicants,¹⁰³ a gap that is even wider in the Atlantic region. Much of this gap, however, is the result of PEI pulling down the regional average.

Credential recognition, while not unique to the Atlantic region, is an ongoing barrier to immigrant success. The Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy report notes that immigrants often encounter difficulty having their credentials and experience recognized,¹⁰⁴ which may partially explain immigrant underemployment. Many skilled immigrants report giving up hope of finding jobs in their field because of the barriers to credential recognition,¹⁰⁵ both preventing immigrants from filling labour shortages, and from integrating economically into the region. This is especially significant for well-educated and skilled¹⁰⁶ spouses of economic principal applicants who end up underemployed and undercompensated.¹⁰⁷

Though the majority of Atlantic Canada's immigrants come through economic streams, economic immigrants and their spouses and dependents have consistently lower retention rates than family class immigrants across the region.¹⁰⁸ These rates are consistent with the evidence that better employment and economic opportunities exist for economic immigrants and their families in other parts of Canada, demonstrating the importance of employment opportunities for retaining immigrants in Atlantic Canada. Conversely, family class immigrants' income levels are consistently higher in the Atlantic region (with the exception of PEI) than in Canada as a whole,¹⁰⁹ potentially explaining higher retention rates for family class immigrants within the region.¹¹⁰

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. 2017. [2017 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration](#).

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ivany, R. 2014. [Report of the Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy](#).

¹⁰⁵ Flint, D. 2007. [Rural Immigrants Who Come to Stay](#).

¹⁰⁶ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. 2017. [2017 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration](#).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Statistics Canada. 2018. [Table 054-0003](#).

¹⁰⁹ Statistics Canada. 2018. [Table 054-0001](#); Statistics Canada. 2018. [Table 054-0016](#).

¹¹⁰ Statistics Canada. 2018. [Table 054-0003](#).

Five-year Retention Rates by Atlantic Province and Economic Immigrant Categories, 2011-2015¹¹¹

Immigrant Category	NL	PEI	NS	NB
Family Class	65%	50%	75%	70%
Economic class, principal applicants	58%	16%	64%	52%
Economic class, spouses and dependents	60%	14%	70%	46%
Overall Retention	56%	18%	72%	52%

Immigrant employment rates in Atlantic Canada over the past five years are consistently lower than employment rates for the Canadian-born population in the same region.¹¹² Immigrant employment rates in Atlantic Canada are also lower than immigrant employment rates in Canada as a whole,¹¹³ highlighting the lower levels of economic integration for newcomers to the Atlantic region.

Many organizations and networks are working to close the employment gap through programs to connect immigrants to employers. The [Halifax Connector Program](#) matches newcomers and new graduates with established business leaders and community leaders. [PEI Connectors](#) helps newcomers develop and implement a business plan. The New Brunswick Multicultural Council has supported or implemented multiple programs, including [Succession Connect](#) to match existing business owners looking to retire with newcomers looking to purchase a turnkey business. In Newfoundland, the [Connector Program](#) helps local businesses connect with immigrants, international students and graduates who are interested in starting and growing their career in St. John's.

Programs that improve the economic integration and labour market outcomes for immigrants in the Atlantic will make the region more attractive. If these programs are also able to narrow the earnings gap for economic immigrants' family members, they may make a significant difference to retention.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Statistics Canada. 2018. [Table 282-0102](#).

¹¹³ Ibid.

Keeping Doctors in Newfoundland

Newfoundland and Labrador provides an important case study of the role of opportunities for growth as a retention factor for immigrants, particularly for skilled immigrants. Newfoundland relies heavily on doctors who have trained outside of Canada to service its medical needs, allowing these doctors to pursue their Canadian licences while serving Newfoundland communities. Yet, 74 percent of these physicians leave the province after receiving their Canadian certification to practise medicine, creating a revolving door in Newfoundland health care that poorly serves locals' needs.¹¹⁴ The chronic out-migration of skilled workers is expensive for businesses and governments in Atlantic Canada, who constantly have to recruit new workers, and results in poor outcomes because of high turnover.¹¹⁵

Doctors most commonly cited opportunity as a push factor away from Newfoundland. After obtaining their provisional licence, they are attracted by the opportunities for higher earnings and the better employment prospects for their spouses in other provinces.¹¹⁶ Opportunity must be understood in broader terms to reflect the reality that immigrants often move as family units. While Newfoundland may provide attractive opportunities to international doctors, it cannot hope to keep these doctors around without attractive opportunities for spouses.

Educational Opportunities

Educational opportunities for immigrants' children are also an important factor for retention. Quality schools at the K-12 level are part of marketing the region as a good place to raise a family, and are often cited by immigrants as reasons for staying in a community.¹¹⁷ Anecdotal evidence suggests education quality becomes increasingly important as immigrants' children get older. Immigrants in rural Atlantic areas have said they will move to provide their children with better access to high school academic and extracurricular opportunities, and more universities.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Vardy, D., Ryan, A., & Audas, R. 2008. Provisionally Licensed International Medical Graduates. [Our Diverse Cities: Atlantic Region](#), 5, p. 109-114. Government of Canada.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Hanson, N. & Barber, P. 2011. Why stay.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

As the region's schools have increased their international student enrollment, provinces and universities have done more to help transition international students to jobs after graduation. As young immigrants who have already spent several years immersed in Atlantic Canada's culture and language, and who have Canadian credentials, international students are ideally placed to become permanent residents. International graduates also likely have developed community connections over the course of their studies, creating ties to the region that can entice them to stay. Retaining more international graduates would be a huge win for the region and boost retention for all of the provinces while keeping young talent in the area.

While international students represent an ideal cohort of potential immigrants, two-step migration – becoming a permanent resident after being a non-permanent resident – has been difficult to navigate in Canada. International students often do not have enough experience to be competitive in the traditional immigration streams¹¹⁹ and must jump through administrative hoops to gain work experience during their studies in Canada.¹²⁰

Each of the provinces has streams within their PNPs to transition international graduates into full-time residents, and the AIP includes an Atlantic International Graduate Program to facilitate the transition to permanent residency for international graduates with a job offer.¹²¹ These programs represent a positive change for international students, but barriers to gaining experience still exist.¹²² New graduates are among the most likely of potential permanent residents who are most able to leave, drawn away by pull factors in other places.

One challenge is basic awareness. In spite of the various immigration streams being open to them, only 36 percent of international graduates in 2017 were aware of the available pathways to permanent residency. Forty three percent of those graduates were aware of PNP paths but just 16 percent were aware of the Atlantic International Graduate Program¹²³, which had only recently begun at the time of the survey. Only 1 percent of international students had applied for permanent residency through the AIP, but 59 percent expressed interest.¹²⁴ With higher awareness of pathways to permanent residency for international graduates, the region may have more success in retaining these students after their studies.

¹¹⁹ Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. 2017. [Immigration to Atlantic Canada](#).

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Immigration, Citizenship, and Refugees Canada. 2018. [Eligibility criteria for international graduates – Atlantic Immigration Pilot](#).

¹²² Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. 2017. [Immigration to Atlantic Canada](#).

¹²³ Corporate Research Associates. 2017. [2017 International Graduate Study](#).

¹²⁴ Ibid.

Study and Stay

A lack of employment opportunities is the main factor deterring international students from staying in the region.¹²⁵ In fact, one recent analysis found that only 11 percent of international students remained in their province of study after graduation.¹²⁶ Better pathways to employment after graduation would increase the likelihood that students stay after graduation.

EduNova is one-of-a-kind: the only provincial education and training co-operative in Canada. Its members include the leading universities and colleges in Nova Scotia, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and the Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Advanced Education. And it is at the epicentre of the push to ensure international students are part of Atlantic revitalization efforts.

EduNova has implemented a signature program with the express intent to boost retention: [Study and Stay](#) is a comprehensive international student support and career transition program. It includes employment-related events and activities, workshops, career mentorship, and experiential workplace learning. Participants are supported as they transition from student to professional over the course of their studies.

With support from ACOA and IRCC, ***Study and Stay*** is expanding its scope to all of Atlantic Canada.

Family Ties and Social Connections

Though economic factors are a primary draw for immigrants, they aren't necessarily enough to keep them around. Family and social networks are an important ingredient in decisions to settle down for the long-term. Most literature and anecdotal evidence finds that a critical mass of immigrants is necessary for retention.¹²⁷ In particular, a community of immigrants from the same source country or region is a large pull factor. Diaspora communities can communicate with new immigrants in their own language, offer settlement support and social networks, and have cultural amenities that immigrants desire. Even more importantly, larger immigrant communities are often home to immigrants' family and friends, and reunification makes moving a top priority.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Department of Immigration and Border Protection. 2014. [Regional retention of migrants](#); Hyndman, J., Schuurman, N. & Fiedler, R., 2006. Size matters: Attracting new immigrants to Canadian cities.

The importance of a critical mass of immigrants explains why Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver are such popular destinations, and why Atlantic Canada struggles to keep newcomers. Immigrants leaving the region for other parts of Canada often cite a desire to reunite with family and friends as their main motivation to move.¹²⁸

Case studies suggest that settling larger groups of immigrants from a single source country in one place can improve retention – there’s no longer a need to move elsewhere to find the familiar comforts of home. But even without planting diaspora communities, the presence of family alone can dramatically boost retention. Singles are more likely to out-migrate than families¹²⁹ and family class immigrants have significantly higher-than-average retention rates across all provinces in the Atlantic region.

Nova Scotia, which has the region’s highest overall retention rate, keeps 75 percent of its family class immigrants.¹³⁰ Newfoundland, with an overall retention rate of 56 percent, has a family class retention rate of 65 percent, and New Brunswick, with an overall rate of 52 percent, retains 70 percent of family class immigrants.¹³¹ The most stark difference in retention rates is in PEI, where the family class retention rate is 50 percent, more than 30 percentage points higher than the overall rate of only 18 percent.¹³²

Five-year Retention Rates by Atlantic Province and Family Admission Category, 2011-2015¹³³

	NL	PEI	NS	NB
Family Class Retention	65%	50%	75%	70%
Overall Retention	56%	18%	72%	52%

Family class immigrants in the Atlantic region also experience more success than those in other parts of the country, a little-known fact that could improve attraction and retention in the region. Average incomes for family class immigrants in the region are consistently higher than the national average,¹³⁴ and some evidence suggests family class immigrants are more successful in finding employment than other immigrant classes.¹³⁵

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Baldacchino, G., Chilton, L., Chung, S.Y., & Mathiang, B.M. 2009. [The Host Program and Immigrant Retention on Prince Edward Island](#).

¹³⁰ Statistics Canada. 2018. [Table 054-0003](#).

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

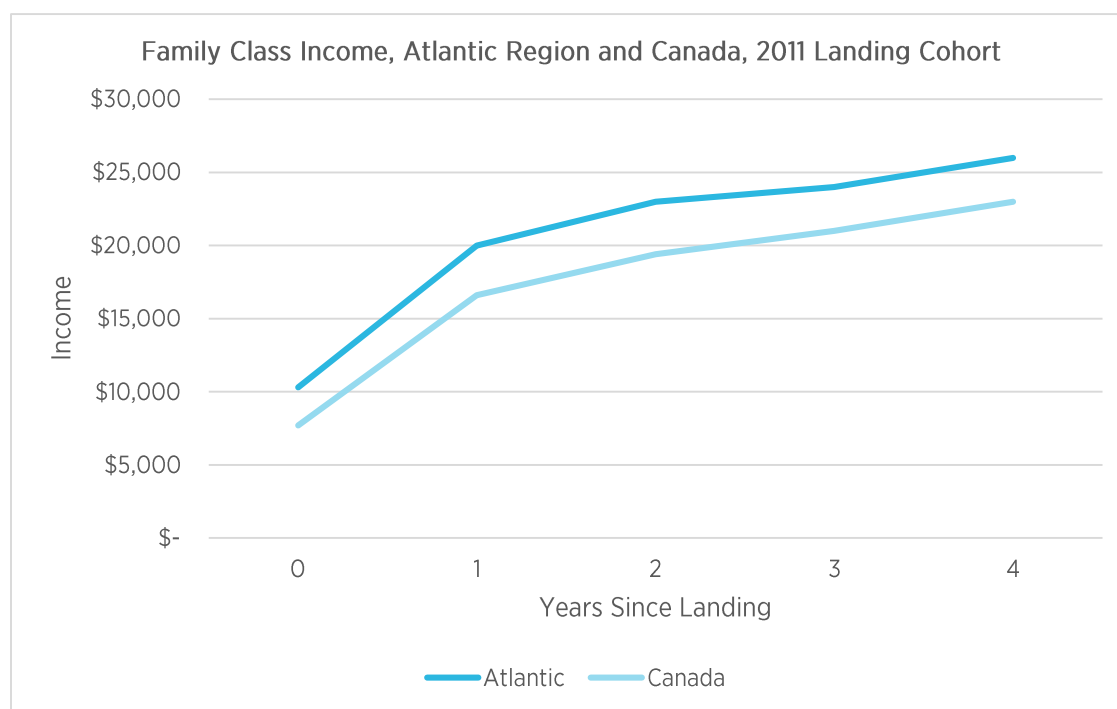
¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Statistics Canada. 2018. [Table 054-0001](#).

¹³⁵ Yoshida, Y., Ramos, H., VanderPlaat, M., Mills, P., Atallah, N. 2015. [Who are Recent Immigrants and What are their Economic Activities: An Analysis of Socio-Demographic Profiles and Economic Activities Across Immigration Categories](#). Pathways to Prosperity.

FAMILY CLASS INCOMES

After four years in Canada, family class immigrants' incomes are \$3,000 higher in Atlantic Canada than the Canadian average.¹³⁶



While the Atlantic provinces can't control whether an immigrant has family connections elsewhere in Canada, they can do their best to keep immigrants around by making sure they have family in the Atlantic region. In the longer term, immigrant families may even become a magnet for their own friends and family looking to settle in Canada.

Despite the importance of family in attracting and keeping immigrants in the region, many pathways for families and social connections to immigrate to Atlantic Canada have been discontinued, a policy change that mirrors the federal government reduction in pathways for families.¹³⁷ Instead, the Atlantic provinces and the federal government have focused on increasing pathways for economic immigrants and international students.¹³⁸ While this shift reflects the priority of economic revitalization and necessity of entrepreneurs for the region, it limits options to immigrate for those who are most likely to stay.

4. Settlement Services

While settlement services play little role in immigrants' initial location choice, they quickly become important in influencing whether a newcomer stays. Language services, child care, transportation, housing,

¹³⁶ Statistics Canada. 2018. [Table 054-0001](#); Statistics Canada. 2018. [Table 054-0016](#).

¹³⁷ Yoshida, Y., Ramos, H. 2018. Overview of Atlantic Canadian Immigration Policy.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

employment supports and other vital services for immigrants are important components of the settlement experience.

Special attention must be paid to those living in rural communities, where a full suite of settlement services often isn't readily available.¹³⁹ In many parts of rural Atlantic Canada, newcomers need to travel to larger centres to access settlement services, which inhibits integration into their new communities.¹⁴⁰ Small communities often receive immigrants in waves. Without a steady flow of immigrants, small settlement service providers lack a steady flow of funding under IRCC's current funding model.¹⁴¹ This can lead to providers being under-equipped when newcomers arrive in large numbers.¹⁴² Inadequate settlement services effectively isolate immigrants, preventing economic or social integration vital to retention.

Settlement services also provide important social connections at a time when newcomers know few people within a community. Without proper supports in the host community, newcomers can become isolated, preventing them from making connections in the community.¹⁴³ In one study of immigrants to a small town in New Brunswick, socialization was one of the most sought-after elements provided by settlement services.¹⁴⁴ Since social networks are an important retention factor,¹⁴⁵ the network settlement services provide directly contributes to retention.

Integration into a community requires immigrants to sustain themselves, which means vital supports for employment, housing, and child care cannot be ignored. Programs that focus on language and social support, for instance the PEI host program, are not sufficient to facilitate retention. While those who participated in PEI's Host Program were grateful for the services provided, the service had no noticeable effect on retention. Without job prospects, newcomers could not stay.¹⁴⁶

There is also need for specialized French-language settlement services to integrate newcomers into francophone communities.¹⁴⁷ While francophone immigrants represent a small percentage of all immigrants to the region, they are equally vital to revitalizing Atlantic Canada.

¹³⁹ ARASIA. 2014. [Summary Report: Settlement Program Priorities for the Atlantic Region](#).

¹⁴⁰ Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. 2017. [Immigration to Atlantic Canada](#).

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ ARASIA. 2014. [Summary Report: Settlement Program Priorities for the Atlantic Region](#).

¹⁴⁴ Hanson, N. & Barber, P. 2011. Why stay.

¹⁴⁵ George, U. & Fuller-Thomson, E. 1997. To stay or not to stay: characteristics associated with newcomers planning to remain in Canada. *The Canadian Journal of Regional Science*, 20(1/2), pp.181-193.

¹⁴⁶ Baldacchino, G., Chilton, L., Chung, S.Y., & Mathiang, B.M. 2009. [The Host Program and Immigrant Retention on Prince Edward Island](#).

¹⁴⁷ ARASIA. 2014. [Summary Report: Settlement Program Priorities for the Atlantic Region](#).

The Role of Settlement Services in Retention: Manitoba PNP

Manitoba's PNP is well known for successfully attracting and keeping immigrants. Settlement services, provided directly by the province, have been key in this process. Manitoba has developed innovative settlement services that target niche populations and provide occupation-specific training, helping immigrants integrate quickly, even outside major cities. The services have been important to the high labour market integration and high retention rates of provincial nominees in Manitoba.¹⁴⁸

Quality of life and welcoming communities

The end goal of settlement services is to fully integrate immigrants into communities. Feeling a sense of belonging within the community – as intangible as it may be – can be the determining factor in whether an immigrant stays. The settlement sector emphasizes welcoming communities as key to successful immigrant retention. Though there is no common criteria for welcoming communities, the outcome of a truly welcoming community is the full integration and participation of newcomers in community life.¹⁴⁹

A welcoming community differs from a kind community, as has been made clear by the experiences of newcomers to Atlantic Canada. In a 2015 survey of Nova Scotians, over 80 percent reported they would welcome immigrants to their community.¹⁵⁰ But many immigrants feel unwelcome and have difficulty integrating. Anecdotally, newcomers share that while community members have been kind towards them, that kindness has not extended beyond the surface, and many do not feel truly at home in their new communities.¹⁵¹ In a study of immigrants in a rural Nova Scotia community, community integration was divided along stark lines: white, European immigrants and those with family ties to the community felt welcomed, while those with greater cultural differences reported that locals were kind but not necessarily welcoming.¹⁵² These experiences reflect similar stories in PEI where the homogenous white, anglophone, Christian, and straight culture prevents many immigrants from integrating or finding work.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ Carter, T., Pandey, M. & Townsend, J. 2010. The Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program: Attraction, Integration and Retention of Immigrants. IRPP Study, (10), pp. 1-44.

¹⁴⁹ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. 2011. [Evaluation of the Welcoming Communities Initiative](#).

¹⁵⁰ Engage Nova Scotia. 2015. [Cultural Levers for Change Research Survey: Summary of Report Results](#).

¹⁵¹ Flint, D. 2007. [Rural Immigrants Who Come to Stay](#).

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Baldacchino, G. 2006. Settling in Charlottetown and P.E.I.: Recent Settlers Speak. [Our Diverse Cities](#), 2, p. 106-113. Government of Canada.

In Newfoundland, 36 percent of newcomers perceive racism and discrimination as a barrier to integration¹⁵⁴, and in PEI, newcomers' most commonly cited reason for leaving is the close-mindedness of islanders and the patronage society.¹⁵⁵ Across the region, nearly 30 percent of immigrants experience discrimination, and those who experience discrimination are five percent more likely to leave Atlantic Canada than those who do not.¹⁵⁶

While Atlantic Canada prides itself on its tight-knit communities and friendliness, the welcome does not always extend to immigrants. Overcoming this challenge to create welcoming communities requires a culture change, resources to actively address this barrier, and a recognition of the importance of immigration and diversity to the vitality of the region.

Engage Nova Scotia's Share Thanksgiving

Engage Nova Scotia is spearheading an innovative approach to welcome new immigrants into local communities and family traditions. The **Share Thanksgiving** initiative pairs new immigrants and Nova Scotians to share a traditional Thanksgiving meal. The initiative's intent is to break down barriers and create relationships between newcomers and Nova Scotians, hopefully contributing to community integration and better retention of new immigrants.

The Atlantic region's unique quality of life is an intangible retention factor. The immigrants who make their home often cite a sense of personal security, a good environment for raising children, a slower pace of life, and the local culture.¹⁵⁷ Community integration is a key element of quality of life, and should not be underestimated as a retention factor.

¹⁵⁴ Gien, L. & Law, R. 2009. [Attracting and Retaining Immigrants to Newfoundland and Labrador: Voices from the Newcomers and International Students](#). The Harris Centre, Memorial University.

¹⁵⁵ Baldacchino, G., Chilton, L., Chung, S.Y., & Mathiang, B.M. 2009. [The Host Program and Immigrant Retention on Prince Edward Island](#).

¹⁵⁶ Ramos, H. & Yoshida, Y. 2011. [Why do recent immigrants leave Atlantic Canada?](#)

¹⁵⁷ Flint, D. 2007. [Rural Immigrants Who Come to Stay](#); Hanson, N. & Barber, P. 2011. Why stay.

CONCLUSIONS: ADVANCING IMMIGRANT RETENTION

Economic integration for immigrants and their families – allowing them to fully contribute to and benefit from the region’s economic success – is essential for retaining newcomers in Atlantic Canada. But economic integration is only one part of the retention puzzle, and must be understood in the context of broader integration into society. Long-term integration requires creating the conditions for people to thrive in their careers, feel welcome and at home, find opportunities for themselves and their children, and participate fully in life in Atlantic Canada.

No single retention factor is likely to determine whether people stay. Integration comes down to people, place and opportunity – an interaction among retention factors. Government, employers, educational institutions, community and civil society each have a role.

The following recommendations draw on the findings of recent reports by the Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy¹⁵⁸, the Conference Board of Canada¹⁵⁹, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Immigration and Citizenship¹⁶⁰, and the Atlantic Growth Advisory Group¹⁶¹.

ATTRACTION IS THE FIRST STEP TO RETENTION

Long-term retention should be considered from the outset when attraction programs are designed and implemented. Such strategies focus on immigrants who are most likely to be successful in the region and make a home – or build a business – in Atlantic Canada. It begins with “selling” Atlantic Canada to the types of immigrants who are most likely to want to stay in the region and build a better life.

Actively promote Atlantic Canada’s unique advantages to prospective immigrants

Promote Atlantic Canada’s:

- Value for immigrants compared to the rest of Canada, including:
 1. Lower cost of living;
 2. Lower wage gap; and
 3. Excellent opportunities for higher education.
- Culture and quality of life; and

¹⁵⁸ Ivany, R. 2014. [Report of the Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy](#).

¹⁵⁹ Conference Board of Canada. 2017. [Immigration to Atlantic Canada](#).

¹⁶⁰ Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. 2017. [Immigration to Atlantic Canada](#).

¹⁶¹ Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency. 2018. [An Action Agenda for Atlantic Growth: Recommendations of the Atlantic Growth Advisory Group](#).

- Ability to support newcomers with strong settlement services.

Successful attraction is about fit with jobs, community and place. Some of the provinces are already investing new resources in carefully recruiting immigrants from similar places.

Improve the employer experience with immigration pathways

Employers are increasingly acting as a key link between immigrants and Atlantic Canada. Business leaders know the value of immigration, but face obstacles in using the system as it currently exists. Small- and medium-sized employers need to be supported to make better use of Express Entry pathways. Employers need to be engaged to inform how the system can be effectively streamlined.

Leverage families and community networks to attract immigrants

Attracting immigrants with connections to family or ethnic communities within the region has the potential to grow communities and create small diasporas, developing the ‘critical mass’ to attract more newcomers. Given higher retention rates of family class immigrants in the region, greater opportunities for people with existing connections to come to Atlantic Canada may contribute to higher retention.

IMMIGRATION SYSTEM

The Atlantic provinces and the federal government have focused on attracting economic immigrants to the region, but the retention of skilled workers and entrepreneurs is lower than it is for other newcomers. Policy can positively affect retention through more selective recruitment and by streamlining and improving processes.

Open immigration streams for semi-skilled labourers

Provide pathways to permanent residence for semi-skilled workers, who are not only in demand in regional industries, but also have higher rates of retention.

Proactively recruit established entrepreneurs to Atlantic Canada

There are proven examples of communities that have revitalized themselves through deliberate, targeted recruitment overseas. A similar approach could be taken to improve entrepreneurial immigration pathways. Such a program would actively and selectively recruit entrepreneurs by targeting a small number of candidates with established records of success. Rather than filling labour shortages, these immigrants would be job creators, who would help revitalize the Atlantic economy and attract more talent.

Create opportunities for international students to work during and after their studies

Issue work permits to international students for the duration of their studies in Atlantic Canada, and issue graduates five-year work permits. This would enable students to gain work experience and make the connections necessary to begin a career in the region. Current barriers in the Express Entry program for

graduates could be removed by allocating more weight to age, skills and experience than to possessing an immediate job offer.

Reach students early and often to increase knowledge of immigration opportunities

Student knowledge of potential immigration avenues badly lags their desire to stay in the region. Communication needs to improve to inform international students of possible pathways to permanent residency. Targeted support to navigate the immigration system would further improve transitions directly from graduation to local employment.

SETTLEMENT AND RETENTION

Settlement services are vital for newcomer integration and need to be understood as a priority for retention. Without adequate settlement services, even basic economic integration is out of reach for many immigrants, not to mention the social and cultural integration immigrants need to feel at home in a community. Settlement services need to reflect the full spectrum of retention factors, going beyond economic integration to allow immigrants and their families to gain social connections and skills they will need to navigate community life.

Ensure necessary settlement services and immigrant supports

The Atlantic provinces differ in geography, location of large employers, and distance to centres with settlement services. Unique models of service delivery are already being designed, recognizing that a one-size-fits-all approach to service delivery is not realistic. Settlement agencies in each province require adequate resources to meet current needs, but which are also responsive to sudden changes such as rapid increases in demands. Resources also need to account for unique service delivery demands in francophone and rural areas.

Coordinate regional IRCC presence

The connection between IRCC and regional and provincial immigration efforts would be improved by re-staffing IRCC offices in Atlantic Canada and appointing a regional coordinator.

COMMUNITIES AND RETENTION

Community and employer engagement are integral to long-term integration. Initiatives that connect immigrants to their communities should not be underestimated as part of the retention equation. The region has done a good job of implementing welcoming community principles, and these successes can be expanded.

Showcase the value of immigrants to employers

Using success stories of immigrants hired by local businesses, showcase their value to employers in the region. Encourage business associations and employers to create employee engagement programs and to support immigrants in settlement and credential recognition.

MAKING IMMIGRATION WORK FOR ATLANTIC CANADA

Atlantic Canada has much to offer newcomers: kind and safe communities, natural beauty, a uniquely welcoming culture, and renewed commitment to growth and revitalization. The region has seized on the core message of the One Nova Scotia Commission: *We Choose Now*.¹⁶² The all-government approach of the Atlantic Immigration Pilot and depth of commitment on the part of all sectors shows how committed people are to turn the curve to a prosperous Atlantic Canada.

This report serves as a roadmap for policy makers who are thinking beyond immediate immigrant attraction to where Atlantic Canada needs to be in 5-20 years. It's not enough to receive a fair share of immigrants relative to the rest of Canada; the Atlantic provinces need to shape policy and practice so that more newcomers choose to stay. The devil is in the details – and in the messy matrix of real world policy implementation and personal decisions.

¹⁶² One Nova Scotia Commission. (2015). *We Choose Now: A Playbook for Nova Scotians*.

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MARCH 2018

THE PEOPLE IMPERATIVE

Come From Away and Stay: Strategies to Grow Population and Prosperity in Atlantic Canada

WHEN ADISH MET SUZANNE: Like many small business owners, Suzanne was looking for a successor. And, like many newcomers, Adish was looking for a business opportunity. Read about their happy ending and other stories of Atlantic Canadians who are finding out what's at stake in the region's big demographic shift.

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Atlantic Canada is a bellwether for the demographic issues that the rest of Canada will soon encounter. An aging and, in some cases, shrinking population is not conducive to the social and economic base required for a region to thrive. A crisis should never be wasted, and today we see Atlantic Canada taking action to promote population growth and business development. There is a lot of good work happening and signs of a turnaround are promising but not yet secured. PPF will contribute to grassroots, business and government efforts through research, conferences and storytelling.

PPF is building a 10-year fund dedicated to addressing Atlantic Canadian issues, starting with population retention and attraction. People will spell the difference between growth and decline. We are building new partnerships with government, the business community, academia and non-profits. We need your participation.

Our Atlantic Advisory Council, made up of accomplished leaders from all sectors, will help guide us to the policy research and convening that makes sense for the region.

