



**ACCORDING TO ATLANTIC
EMPLOYERS SERIES**

#3

Attitudes Towards Immigrants and International Students

JANUARY 2021



ABOUT PPF

Good Policy. Better Canada. The Public Policy Forum builds bridges among diverse participants in the policy-making process and gives them a platform to examine issues, offer new perspectives and feed fresh ideas into critical policy discussions. We believe good policy is critical to making a better Canada—a country that’s cohesive, prosperous and secure. We contribute by:

- Conducting research on critical issues
- Convening candid dialogues on research subjects
- Recognizing exceptional leaders

Our approach—called Inclusion to Conclusion—brings emerging and established voices to policy conversations, which informs conclusions that identify obstacles to success and pathways forward. PPF is an independent, non-partisan charity whose members are a diverse group of private, public and non-profit organizations.

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1400 - 130 Albert Street
Ottawa, ON, Canada, K1P 5G4
613.238.7858

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ppforum.ca

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

As Atlantic Canada faces demographic and labour market changes, retention is on everyone's minds. Keeping workers, immigrants, skills and talent in the four provinces over the medium and longer term is a complex and priority issue for economic growth and regional prosperity. [Atlantic Revitalization](#) is the Public Policy Forum's three-year project (2017-2020) addressing the challenge of retention and economic growth, with a focus on boosting long-term immigrant retention, deepening labour pools and improving employers' access to the skills they need. Through research reports, surveys, qualitative stories, provincial roundtables and regional summits, PPF is advancing regional and Canadian understanding and cross-sector networks around Atlantic Canada's most pressing immigration and economic policy priorities.

ACCORDING TO ATLANTIC EMPLOYERS SERIES

Perceptions on Hiring, Retention, Immigration and Growth

Employer projections and perceptions of issues affecting their business activities can represent a significant indicator of where these broader social and economic trends will go. Keeping the pulse of employers across industries in Atlantic Canada supports positive feedback loops with effective policymaking around economic growth priorities like retention, skills, hiring and immigrant integration. As part of the [Atlantic Revitalization](#) project, PPF partnered with Memorial University to survey over 800 Atlantic employers on their insights into the unique economic and labour market dynamics in Atlantic Canada and develop deeper understanding of how their perceptions of the economic climate impact the region's economic growth. The resulting According to Atlantic Employers series mobilizes these findings for wider discussion in five thematic reports:

- #1 Business and employment growth
- #2 Skills shortages and hiring challenges
- #3 Attitudes towards immigrants and international students
- #4 Immigration policy effectiveness
- #5 Retention of skilled workers

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Tony Fang, Stephen Jarislowsky Chair in Economics and Cultural Transformation, Memorial University

Dr. Tony Fang is the Stephen Jarislowsky Chair in Economic and Cultural Transformation at Memorial University. Currently he sits on a World Bank's Expert Advisory Committee on Migration and Development. He is dedicated to publishing cutting-edge research on the Canadian, and Newfoundland and Labrador economies. His areas of research interest encompass issues of high-performance workplace practices, retirement policy and the ageing workforce, education, immigration, innovation and firm growth.

Jane Zhu, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Department of Economics, Memorial University

Dr. Jane Zhu is Associate Professor of Economics and Management at Sichuan College of Architectural Technology. Her research interests include human capital investment efficiency, the development of the Human Resources service industry in Sichuan, China and linkages between workforce diversity and workplace productivity. With over 20 years of working experience in human resources and human capital research, Jane has developed a broad range of technical expertise in data collection, processing and analysis from existing research, survey, interview and other sources.

Paula Struk Jaia, Research Assistant, Memorial University

Paula Struk Jaia is a Master of Arts in Economics candidate at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Her research focuses on society and economics, combining economic theory and econometric analysis. Paula assists the Stephen Jarislowsky Chair in projects related to migration and labour market in Newfoundland and Labrador. Paula holds a Bachelors of Science majoring in economics from Memorial University.

Evan McCarthy, Research Assistant, Memorial University

Evan McCarthy is an undergraduate research assistant pursuing a B.A in Economics at Memorial University. He assists the Stephen Jarislowsky Chair in projects related to immigration and the labour market in Atlantic Canada. His research interests include economic growth strategies for Newfoundland and Labrador, labour market, immigration, natural resource, and environmental economics. He is hoping to pursue an MA in Economics.

Alex David Wells, Research Assistant, Memorial University

Alex David Wells is an undergraduate research assistant pursuing a Joint Bachelor of Commerce and Bachelor of Arts in Economics at Memorial University. He assists the Stephen Jarislowsky Chair in projects on immigration and labour research. His areas of interest include the economics of immigration and labour.

INTRODUCTION

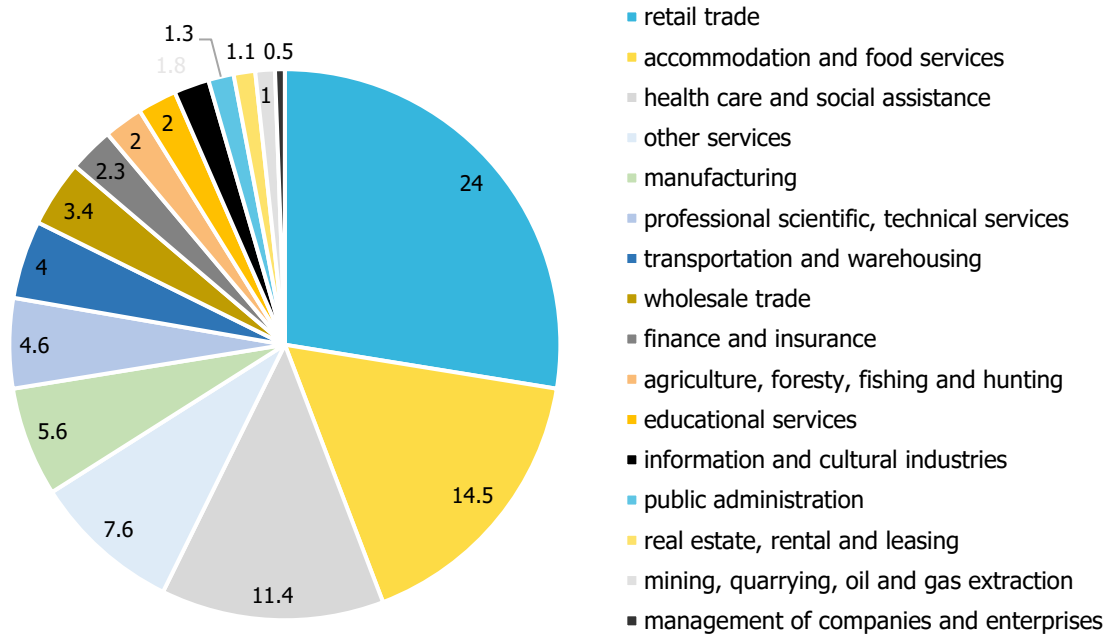
What have Atlantic employers' perceptions of hiring immigrants and international students over the recent medium term? What are their plans for the near future? This paper is the first in a series of five reports on the results of a survey of 801 employers across Atlantic Canada on hiring, retention, immigration and economic growth. This report focuses on Atlantic employers' experiences, perceptions and outlook related to hiring immigrants and international students.

METHODS

In Fall 2019, Memorial University commissioned a telephone survey with over 800 employers across Atlantic Canada to understand their perceptions on the state of the economy and labour market, their projections for the next three years and how it impacts their business growth and activity. The 15-minute qualitative semi-structured telephone survey was conducted by Narrative Research (formerly Corporate Research Associates) between September and October 2019. The survey is based on business register information of Statistics Canada (2018). The target number of responses for each province was: 301 samples in NL; 100 samples in PEI; 200 samples in NS; and 200 in NB. It applied a stratified random sampling to employers by region, industry (North American Industry Classification System) and organizational size. Target respondents were owners/senior executives or Human Resources Managers where possible. The survey data was analyzed using descriptive statistics as well as the logistic regression model and the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model.

This report outlines the results from statistical analysis of this survey data pertaining to attitudes towards immigrants and international students and the policy implications for supporting immigration and economic growth in the four Atlantic provinces.

Figure 1: Distribution of survey participants by industry



Employers who participated in the survey reflected a diversity of Atlantic Canada’s key industries (Figure 1) and were divided into three size classifications for the analysis: small (5 to 9 employees), medium (10 to 49 employees) and large (50+ employees). Of those interviewed, 84.4% represented private sector employers, 13.5% represented non-profit organizations and 2.1% represented government employers.

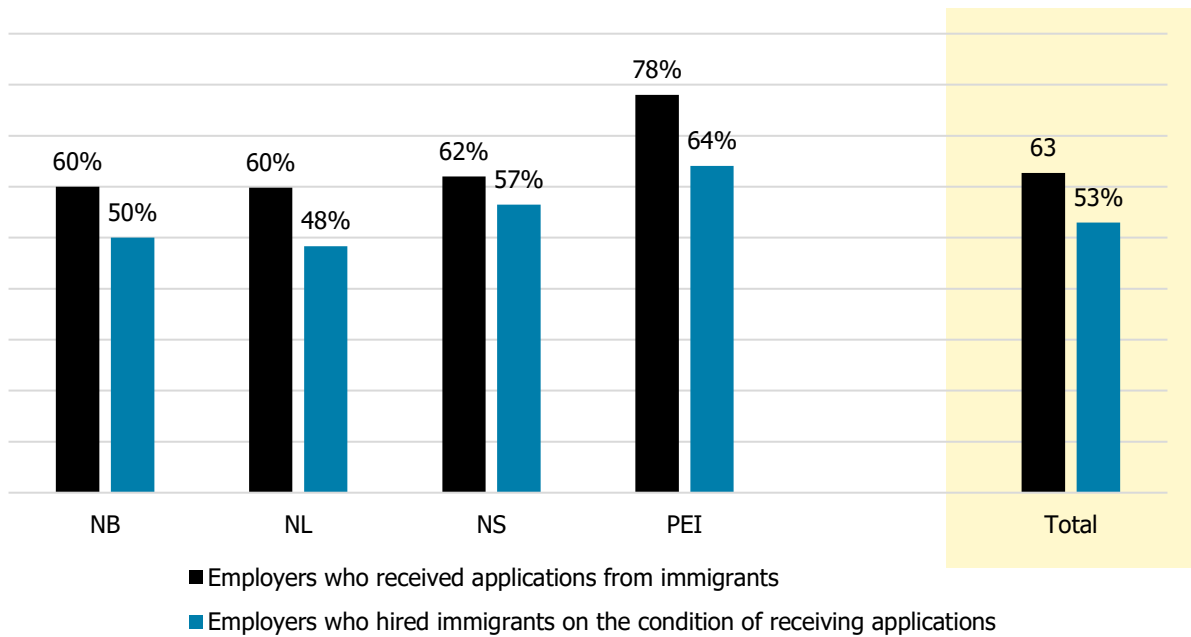
ANALYSIS AND KEY FINDINGS

IMMIGRANT HIRING IN THE LAST THREE YEARS

Hiring activity by province

63% of survey respondents received job applications from immigrants and international students (53% of the employers hired them). Among these, 38% of employers received applications from a permanent resident or landed immigrant (62% hired), followed by 12% who received applications from refugees (24% hired), 18% from temporary foreign workers (28% hired) and 33% from international students (26% hired). The survey showed that PEI received the highest percentage of applications at 78% (well above other three provinces at around 60%).

Figure 2: Employers who received applications from immigrants and employers who hired immigrants in the last 3 years, by province



Overall, 53% of employers in Atlantic Canada who received applications from immigrants hired them. Among these employers, PEI employers were also most likely to hire (64%); while employers in Newfoundland and Labrador were the least likely to hire (48%, Figure 2). PEI employers were also the most like to help immigrants integrate into organizations or local society. Approximately 24% of PEI employers interviewed have changed their operational practices to better accommodate immigrants. 29% of PEI employers have helped immigrants become a permanent resident or landed immigrant.

Hiring activity by industry

In 11 out of 19 industries, more than 52% of the employers in Atlantic Canada hired immigrants. In the other 7 industries, less than 50% of employers hired immigrants. There is a huge disparity in hiring immigrants among employers in different industries. The top industries hiring immigrants are real estate rental and leasing (100%), agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting (75%), information and culture industries (70%). Those at the bottom are finance and insurance (22%), transportation and warehousing (30%), and wholesale trade (38%).

Figure 3: Industries in which employers were more positive to hire immigrants in the last three years
(Yes – would likely hire immigrants / No – would not likely hire immigrants)

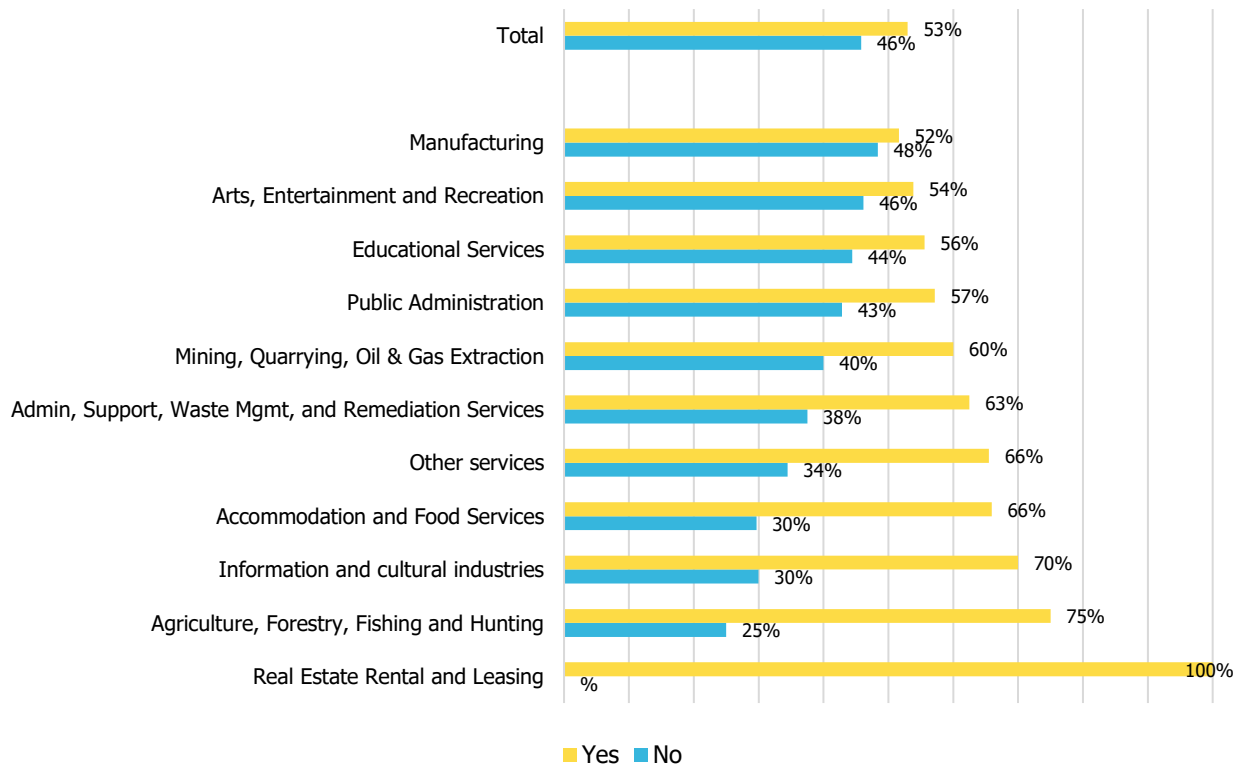
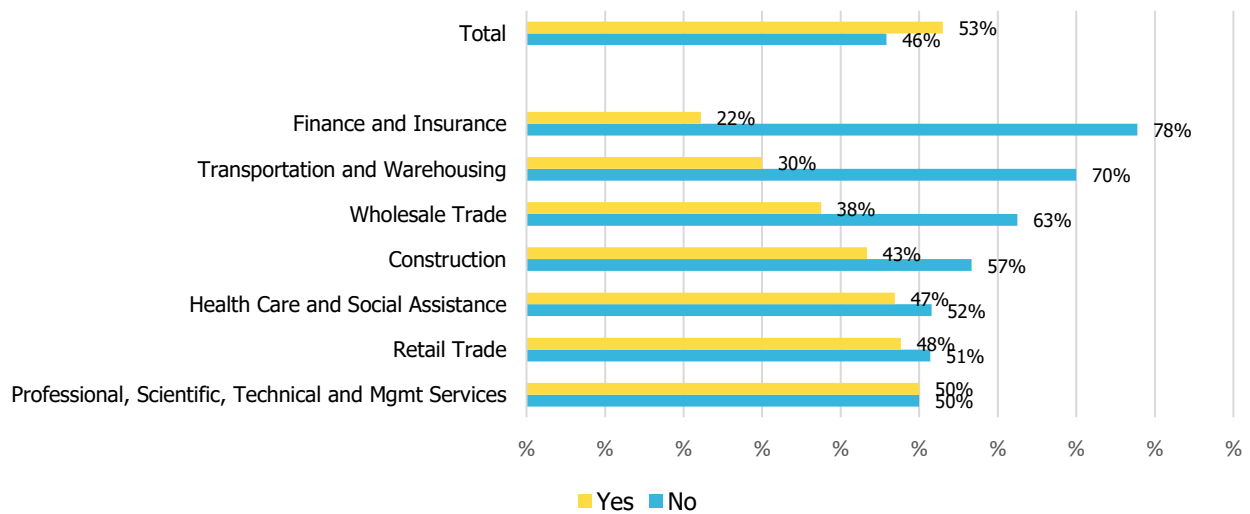


Figure 4: Industries in which employers were less likely to hire immigrants in the last three years
(Yes – would likely hire immigrants / No – would not likely hire immigrants)

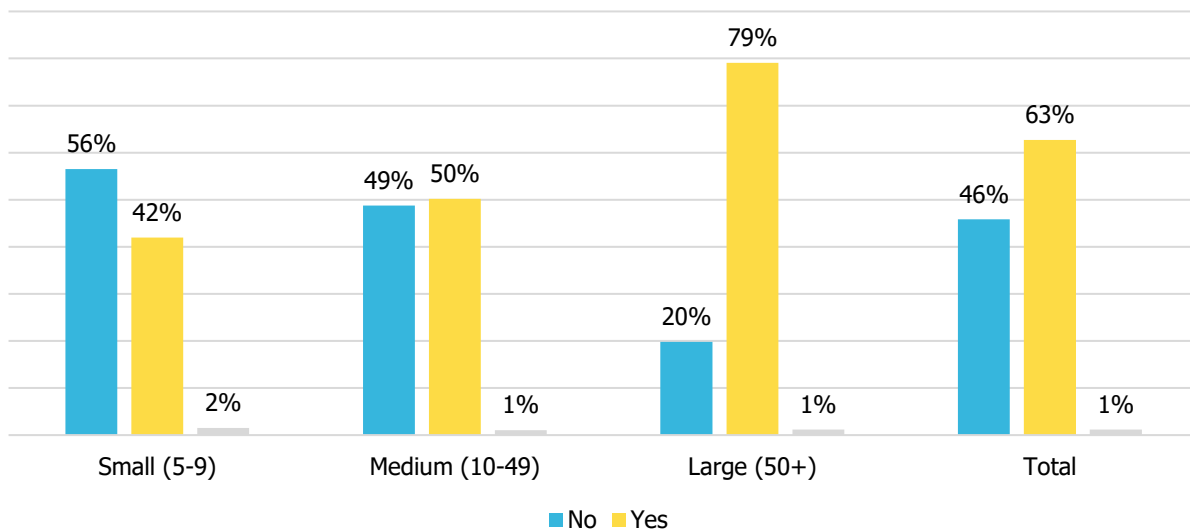


Hiring activity by employer size

Of the employers surveyed, 33% of employers were categorized as small (with 5-9 employees), 55% were medium-sized (with 10-49 employees) and 11% were categorized as large employers (50+ employees).

Figure 5 (below) shows that the larger the organization, the greater the likelihood that the organization hired immigrants (from small to large firms, 42%, 50%, 79% respectively). This can be attributed to the fact that larger organizations typically have more vacancies, experience and expertise in human resource management. Additionally, larger organizations have access to more information and support from settlement agencies, which helps the organization integrate immigrants more easily.

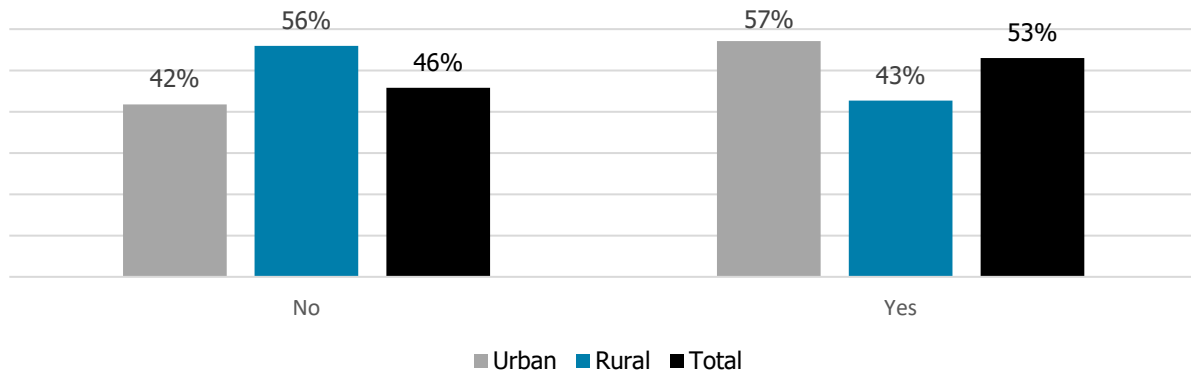
Figure 5: Employers that hired newcomers and international students in the last three years, by firm size (*Yes – would likely hire immigrants / No – would not likely hire immigrants*)



Hiring activity by urban-rural location

64% of employers surveyed are located in urban areas, and 36% in rural areas. Organizations in urban areas are more likely to hire immigrants and international students than those in rural areas (57% vs. 43%) over the last three years, as shown in in Figure 5. In urban areas, there is more institutional support from government, settlement agencies and non-profit organizations for employers. Additionally, there are more employment opportunities at high skill levels for immigrants in urban areas, which are better suited for their needs because recent immigrants are typically high skilled.¹

Figure 6: Employers' hiring activity to immigrants in the last three years, by location

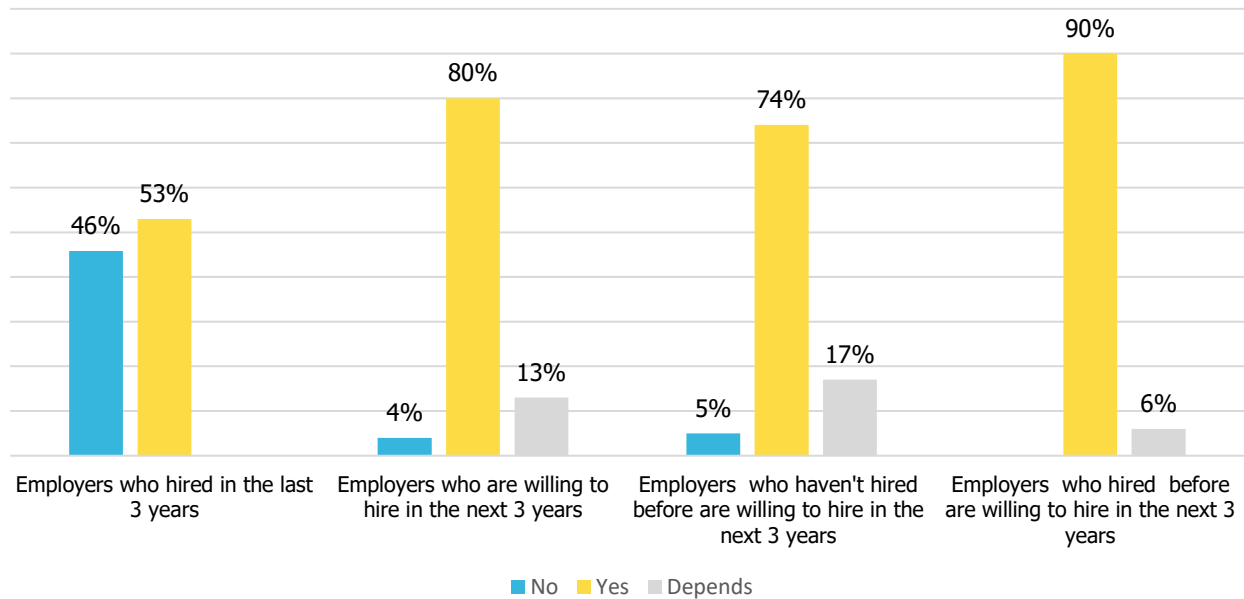


WILLINGNESS TO HIRE IMMIGRANTS IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS

As shown in Figure 7 below, 80% of employers are willing to hire immigrants in the next three years, which is significantly higher than the proportion of employers who hired in the last three years (53%). 13% of employers responded that they would be willing to hire immigrants depending on their qualifications and whether their qualifications are relevant for the company.

To find out how hiring experience influences employers' future hiring willingness, we divided employers into 2 different groups: employers who have hired immigrants before and employers who have not. For employers who have hired immigrants before, 92% reported they would like to hire immigrants in the next three years; 74% of those who have not hired immigrants before reported that they would hire immigrants. The number of employers who were uncertain about their attitudes towards hiring immigrants in the next three years declined from 17% to 6%. Employers who have had prior experiences hiring immigrants indicated greater willingness to hire immigrants in the next three years.

Figure 7: Employers' willingness in hiring immigrants in the next three years
(Yes – Would hire / No – would not hire)



EMPLOYER PERCEPTIONS OF IMMIGRANT WORKERS

Perceptions of hiring immigrants vary between employers who have previously hired immigrants and employers who have not. In general, as shown in Table 1 below, employers who have previously hired immigrants held more positive perceptions towards immigrants compared to those who had never hired an immigrant employee.

Table 1 shows more than half of all employers believe immigrants enhance creativity in the workplace. The majority of employers surveyed did not think that immigrants took jobs away from local workers. This figure supports the finding that immigrants do not compete with local workers. In fact, they are complementary to local workers in the labour market. Typically, immigrants are occupying employment positions that local workers are either unwilling or unable to occupy.²

Most employers surveyed believed that immigrants were hard working and more productive than Canadian-born workers. They did not believe immigrants worked for less pay than local workers.

Table 1: Employer attitudes towards immigrants between employers who have not hired and who hired

Attitude	Organizations that have not hire immigrants		Organizations that have hired immigrants	
	Disagree & Strongly Disagree	Agree & Strongly Agree	Disagree & Strongly Disagree	Agree & Strongly Agree
A multicultural workforce enhances creativity in the workplace	7%	58%	5%	81%
Immigrants are harder working than local workers	20%	24%	21%	40%
Immigrants are more productive than local workers	22%	22%	22%	31%
Immigrants take jobs away from locals	71%	9%	84%	7%
Immigrants will work for less pay than local workers	31%	19%	34%	26%
Having employees from other countries can improve export opportunities	21%	33%	18%	30%

Furthermore, employers who hired immigrants generally reported more positive attitudes towards immigrants. Employers who hired immigrants before were more likely to believe that immigrants had a strong work ethic, were more productive and enhanced creativity in the workplace. These employers were less likely to believe that immigrants would take jobs from local workers and work for less pay than local workers.

Figure 8: Employers' experience with immigrants

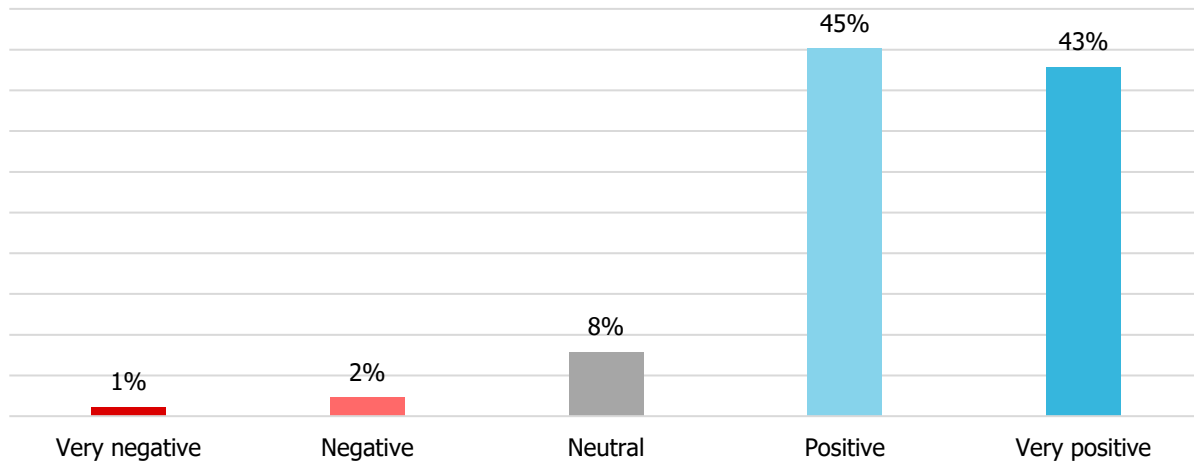


Figure 9: Main reasons for negative experience

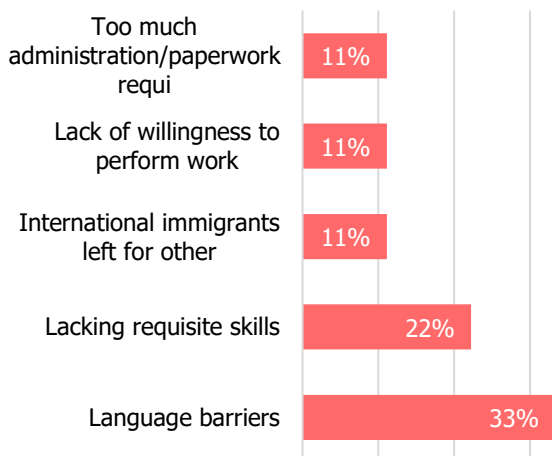


Figure 10: Main reasons for positive experience

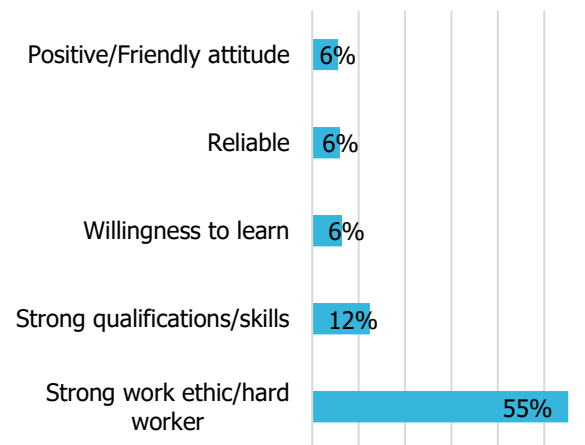


Figure 8 shows only 3% of employers had a negative or very negative experience with immigrant employees. The main reasons for these negative experiences included language barriers, complexities in the administrative paperwork for hiring, workplace disputes caused by cultural conflicts and difficulties with employee retention. Most employers (88%) had a positive experience with immigrant employees and 8% had neutral experiences. The main reasons for employers' positive experiences included immigrants' strong work ethic (55%), strong qualifications/skills (12%), reliability (6%), willingness to learn (6%), positive/ friendly attitude (6%) and increasing diversity. Our survey also shows that about

15% of employers changed their management practices to better accommodate immigrants in the workplace.

EMPLOYER CONCERNS WHEN HIRING IMMIGRANTS

When hiring immigrants, employers were mainly concerned about an immigrant’s lack of language proficiency, high labour mobility and lack of Canadian experiences (Table 2). However, they did not believe that immigrants had unreliable credentials, would incur additional training costs or would create confusion in the workplace due to cultural differences.

Table 2: Employers’ potential concerns when hiring immigrants

Employer attitude/concern	Organizations without immigrant employees		Organizations with immigrant employees	
	Disagree & Strongly disagree	Agree & Strongly agree	Disagree & Strongly disagree	Agree & Strongly agree
“Language differences make it difficult to communicate”	17%	47%	31%	31%
“Cultural differences create confusion in the workplace”	49%	17%	67%	11%
“Hiring newcomers will require incurring additional training costs”	36%	28%	61%	15%
“Immigrants are unfamiliar with Canadian business and workplace practices”	22%	23%	35%	23%
“Immigrants have unreliable credentials”	47%	8%	71%	6%
“Immigrants will leave for another part of the country within a short period of time”	19%	21%	33%	26%

CONCLUSION

This employer survey demonstrated that most of employers in Atlantic Canada held positive perceptions toward hiring immigrants. Moreover, employers who hired immigrants and international students in the last three years had more even positive perceptions. Among the four provinces, employers in PEI reported the most positive perceptions toward hiring immigrants. This trend is consistent with the fact that employers in PEI are the most active in recruiting immigrants.

Most employers reported that immigrants are hard working, more productive and bring creativity to the workforce. Despite commonly held perceptions that immigrants take jobs from local workers, most employers surveyed did not express this perception. This is consistent with the evidence that immigrants tend to complement local workers in the labour market.³ Our survey results also indicated that employers that hired immigrants before held more positive attitudes towards them.

Employers who were concerned about hiring immigrants expressed this view mostly due to perceptions of language non-proficiency, high labour mobility and lack of Canadian work experiences. However, few employers perceived immigrants as having unreliable credentials, requiring additional training costs or creating uncertainty in the workplace due to cultural differences.

Language training is particularly useful for the economic, social and cultural integration of immigrants, improving their retention in the workplace. Intercultural training for both immigrants and employers may facilitate workplace communication and enhance immigrant productivity and organizational performance.

This survey also found that small to medium-sized businesses and businesses located in rural areas are less likely to hire immigrants. Supporting these employers with immigration information, funding and personnel should be increased and prioritized to facilitate increased immigration hiring.

ENDNOTES

¹ Grogger, J., & Hanson, G. H. (2011). Income maximization and the selection and sorting of international migrants. *Journal of Development Economics*, 95(1), 42-57.

² Constant, A.F. (2014). [Do migrants take the jobs of native workers? IZA World of Labor.](#)

³ Hou, F., Gu, W. and Picot, G. (2018). [Immigration and firm productivity: Evidence from the Canadian Employer-Employee Dynamics database.](#) Statistics Canada.

