



**ACCORDING TO ATLANTIC
EMPLOYERS SERIES**

#4

Immigration Policy Effectiveness

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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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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INTRODUCTION

Skills and labour shortages impact how businesses can meet their clients' needs and realize growth in revenues, prompting sustainable economic growth in the region over time. Atlantic Canada's relatively small economic size and high proportion of remote and isolated communities can make the recruitment and retention of skilled workers and international students very challenging, across many types of industries and occupations. According to our survey, more than half of employers interviewed reported difficulties in fill job vacancies and anticipated even more serious labour and skill shortages in the next three years.

In order to help businesses attract and retain global talent to fill the needs of employers and communities in Atlantic Canada, the Government of Canada and the four provincial governments in the region launched the Atlantic Immigration Pilot (AIP) program, an employer-driven provincial immigration program in March 2017.¹ By February 25, 2019, there were 1,896 AIP designated employers in the Atlantic region; these AIP-designated employers made over 3,729 job offers to skilled international immigrants and international graduates.² Under the AIP program, 5191 people became permanent residents in Atlantic Canada by the end of June 2019.³

Immigrants choose where they want to go in large part based on perceived employment opportunities and culture in a region. Employers play a crucial role in achieving the objectives of immigration policies, especially those of the regional immigration programs such as PNP and AIP. How do employers perceive the immigration process? How do employers navigate Canada's immigration system? This report will discuss employer perceptions of immigration policy effectiveness and how those perceptions affect their subsequent hiring and retention of immigrants.

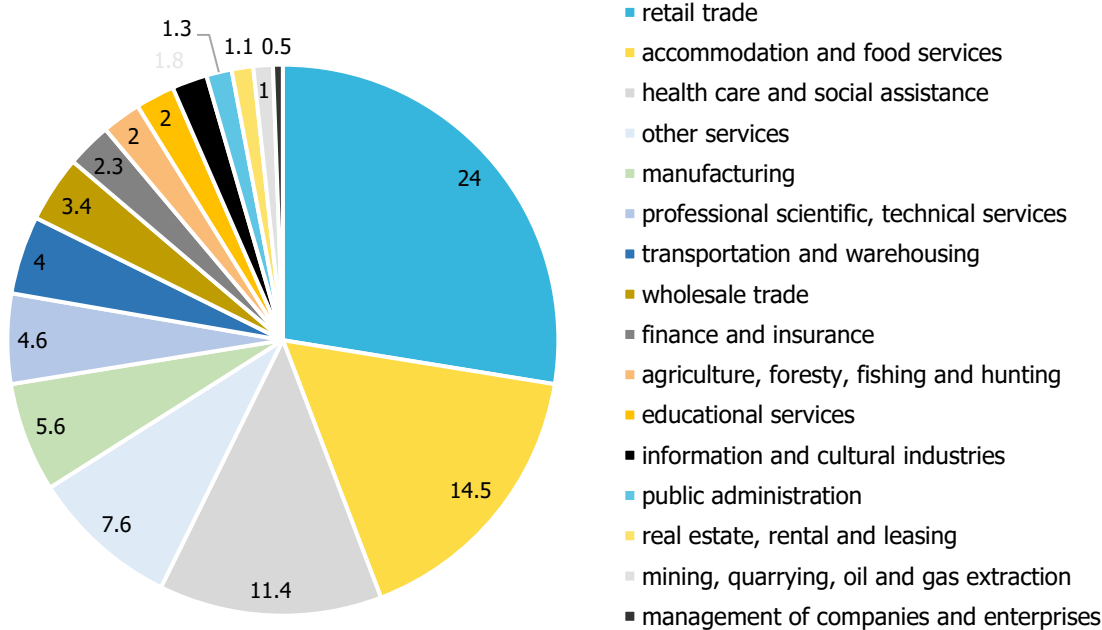
METHODS

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 immigration policy 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

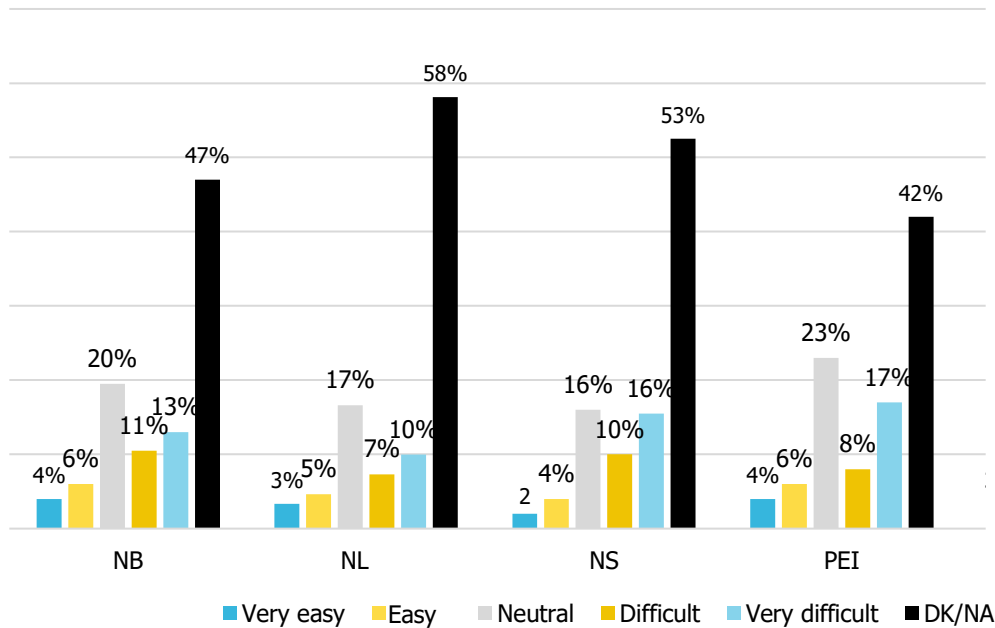
Our survey identified the following key findings about employers' perceptions of navigating the immigration system:

1. Most employers surveyed (53%) have little knowledge about the immigration system. Our findings indicate that knowledge of immigration processes is significantly and directly correlated with whether employers engage in trying to hire immigrants or helping employees become permanent residents.
2. Employers in Prince Edward Island (PEI) are most involved in the immigration system, followed by those in Nova Scotia (NS), New Brunswick (NB) and Newfoundland and Labrador (NL). PEI employers are also most familiar with the immigration system, followed by New Brunswick, then Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador.
3. Across the region, employers who were either smaller in size or rural reported having more difficulty navigating Canada's immigration system, citing lack of necessary resources.
4. In terms of improving the immigration process, employers interviewed from different provinces, sizes and location shared the perspective that Canada's immigration process could be easier and faster. Employers who have helped employees to become permanent residents held a stronger view on this issue.

NAVIGATING CANADA’S IMMIGRATION SYSTEM

Figure 2: Rating of the ease of navigating Canada’s immigration system (by province)

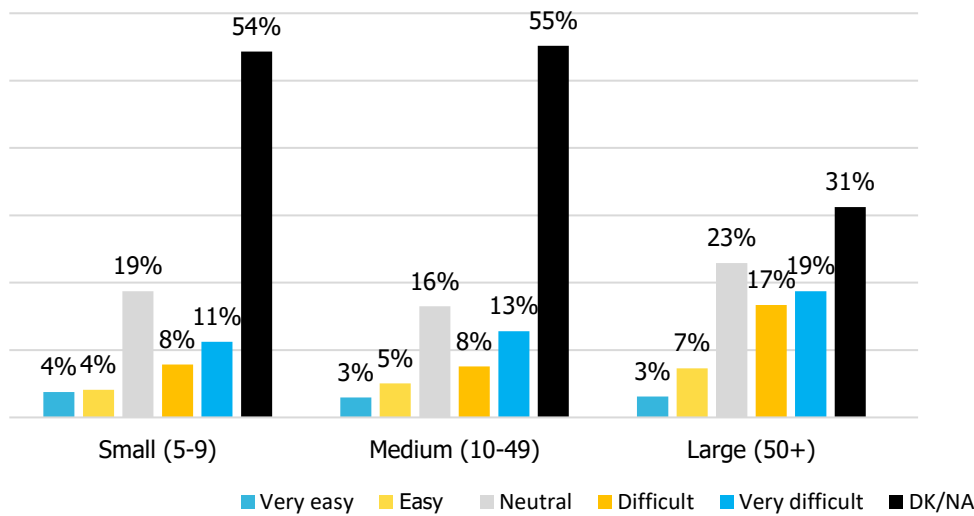
* *DK/NA - Don't know or not applicable*



From the full sample of employers interviewed, as shown in Figure 2, 52% of employers interviewed did not know how to evaluate the ease of navigating Canada’s immigration system, largely due to their limited experience. Among these employers, the greatest lack of awareness was in Newfoundland and Labrador at 58.1%, followed by Nova Scotia at 52.5%, New Brunswick at 47% and Prince Edward Island at the lowest at 42%. Of the employers that did have some familiarity with Canada’s immigration system, the percentage of employers that rated the ease of navigating the system as “easy” and “very easy” are much lower than those who rated it as “difficult” and “very difficult”.

Figure 3: Rating of the ease of navigating Canada’s immigration system (by size of employer)

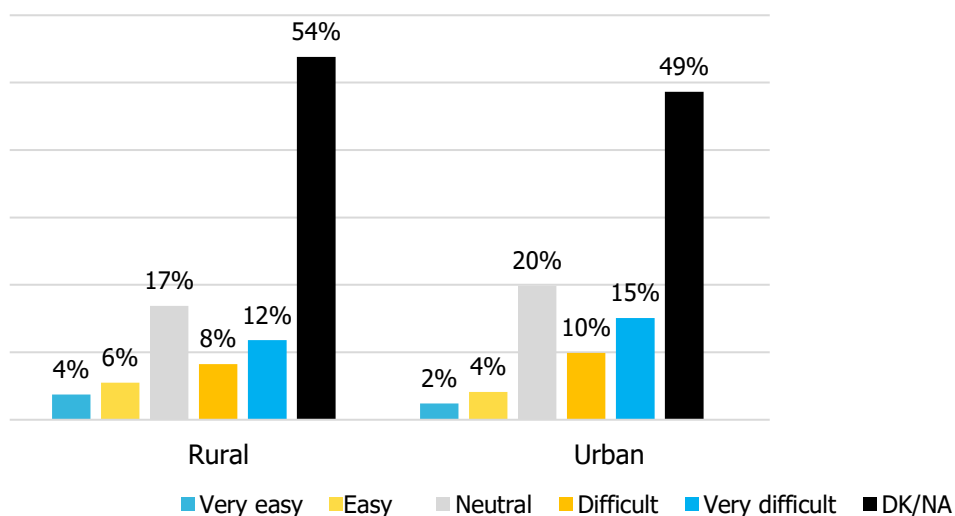
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With respect to the ease of navigating Canada’s immigration system by size of employer, larger employers demonstrated deeper understandings of Canada’s immigration system compared to other employers (31% did not know, relative to 55% and 54% for medium and small sized employers). This is likely since large organizations tend to have more human resources capacity and specialized expertise to hire more immigrants and assist employees with immigration issues. As they have more experience dealing with immigration issues, larger employers also reported greater difficulty in navigating the immigration system than medium and small sized employers (36% of larger employers compared to 21% and 19% of medium and small employers, respectively).

Figure 4: Rating of the ease of navigating Canada’s immigration system (by location)

* DK/NA - Don't know or not applicable



Similarly, employers in urban areas may have more exposure to international migrants and international graduates resulting in greater knowledge and awareness about the Canadian immigration system compared to those in the rural areas (49% of employers in urban areas compared to 54% in rural areas).

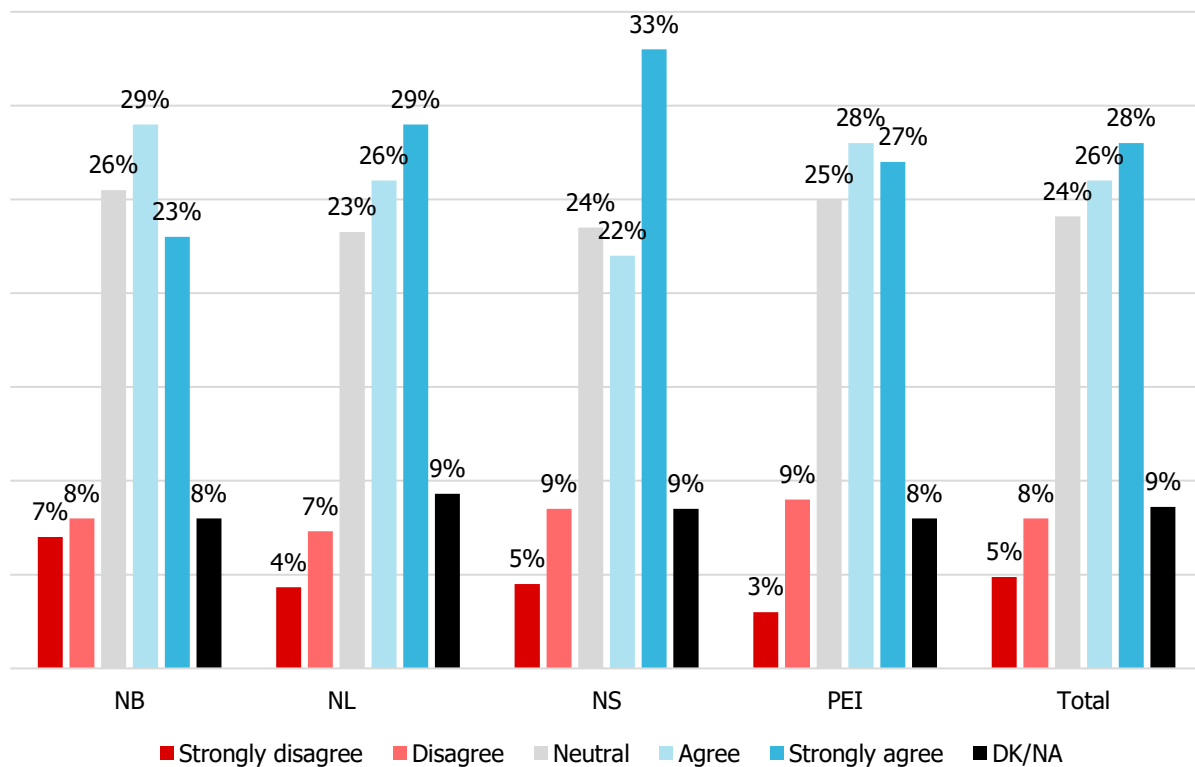
However, as urban employers have more experience in hiring immigrants (going through a variety of immigration processes and more often) they are also somewhat more likely to report difficulty in navigating the system (25% for urban employers compared to 20% of rural employers).

Interestingly, there are also slightly higher proportion of employers in the urban areas reported ease of navigating the system (6% vs. 10%), again likely because those firms who developed some expertise in this area.

EMPLOYERS ON IMMIGRATION PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS

Figure 5: Does the immigration system need to be made easier and faster? (by province)

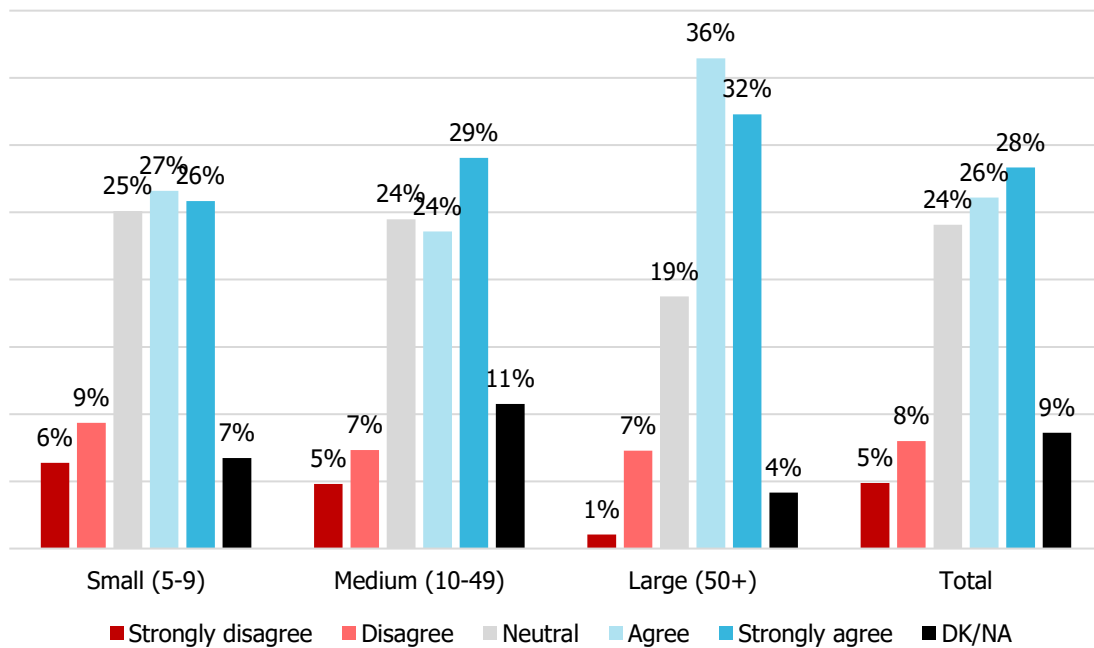
* *DK/NA - Don't know or not applicable*



More than half of employers surveyed (54%) agreed or strongly agreed that the immigration process should be easier and faster (Figure 5). The sentiments towards improving the immigration process are similar across all four Atlantic provinces.

Figure 6: Does the immigration system need to be made easier and faster? (by employer size)

* DK/NA - Don't know or not applicable

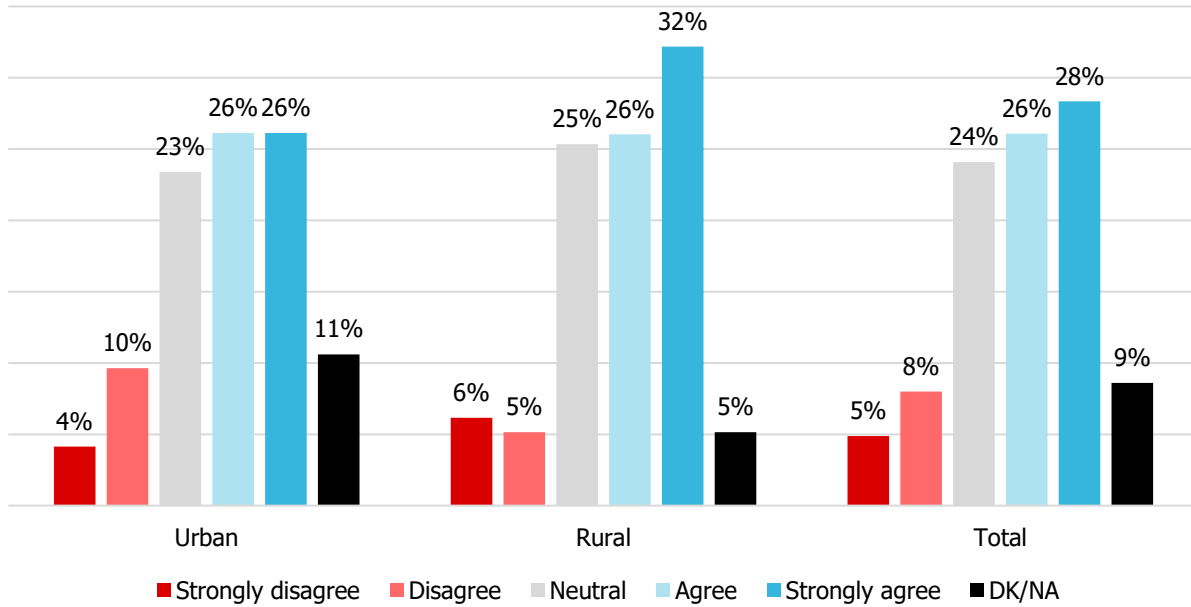


Not surprisingly, large employers are most supportive of improving the immigration process (68%) when compared to small and medium sized employers, which hold quite similar views (53%). This is consistent with the fact that large employers are also more likely to hire immigrants or help employees become a permanent resident, according to our survey.

Overall, employers in urban areas hold slightly stronger views that the immigration process should be easier and faster compared to employers in rural areas. This difference is likely because urban employers have a deeper understanding of navigating the immigration system.

Figure 7: Does the immigration system need to be made easier and faster? (by location)

* DK/NA - Don't know or not applicable



COMPARING PERCEPTIONS BY EMPLOYER TYPE

The extent to which employers are involved in the immigration system has an important effect on their perception of the system's effectiveness. We divided employers into three different categories: employers who have not hired immigrants (C1), employers who have hired immigrants (C2) and employers who have helped employees become permanent residents (C3).

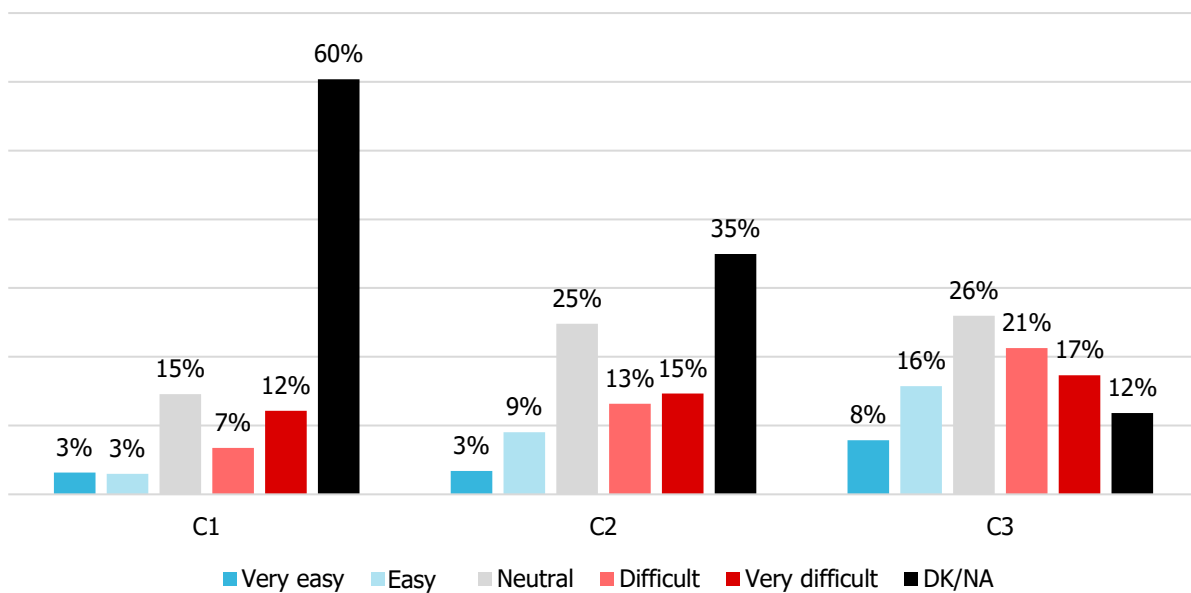
Figure 8: Rating of the ease of navigating Canada’s immigration system (by different categories of employers)

C1 - Have not hired immigrants

C2 - Have hired immigrants

C3 - Have helped become permanent residents

* DK/NA - Don’t know or not applicable



Employers who have hired immigrants are more likely to report a Don’t Know or Not Applicable answer to rating the ease of navigating Canada’s immigration system (60%) compared to employers who have not hired any immigrants (35%) and employers who have helped employees become permanent residents (12%). Among those same employers that have the most direct experience with the immigration system best (employers who have either helped employees to become permanent residents and hired immigrants), more reported that finding the immigration system difficult or very difficult to navigate (29% and 28% respectively) compared to employers who have not hired immigrants (19%).

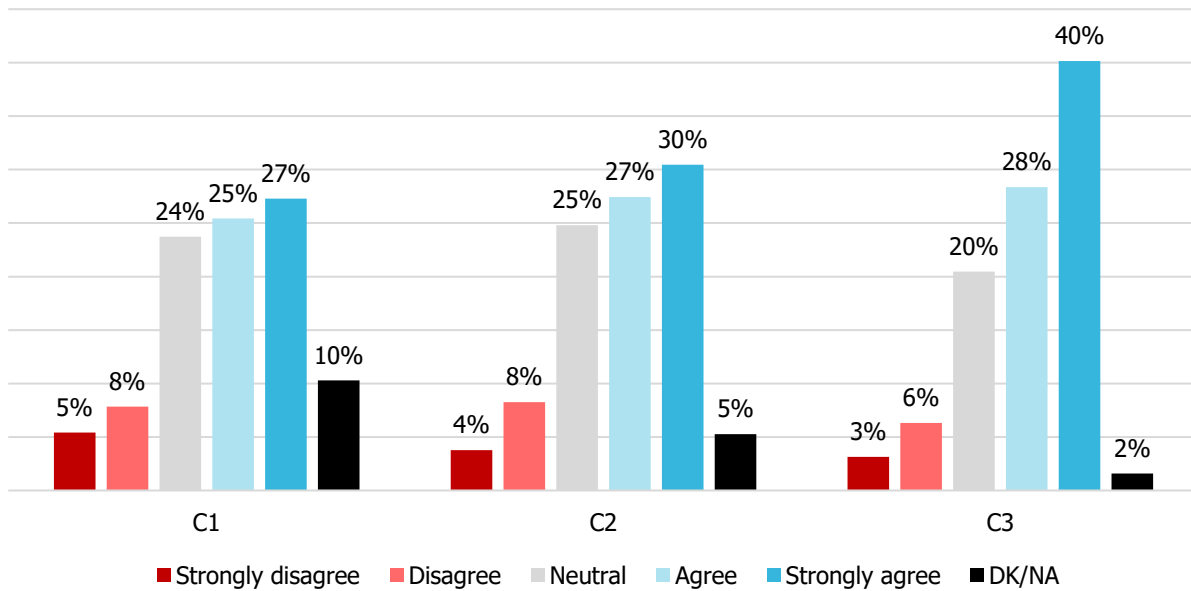
Figure 9: Does the immigration process need to be made easier and faster? (by different categories of employers)

C1 - Have not hired immigrants

C2 - Have hired immigrants

C3 - Have helped become permanent residents

* DK/NA - Don't know or not applicable



As expected, employers who are more involved in the immigration system are also more supportive of improving the system's effective. The percentage of employers holding this view is highest for those who have helped employees to become permanent residents (68%), followed by those who have hired immigrants (57%) and those who have never hired immigrants (52%).

CONCLUSION

Atlantic Canada is eager to attract and retain more immigrants to address the region's aging population and skill shortages and ensure long-term economic prosperity in the region. In doing so, employers play a crucial role in providing employment opportunities and connections to help immigrants successfully integrate into Atlantic Canada, especially under the Atlantic Immigration Pilot program (AIPP). This survey suggests that increasing employers' awareness and ability to access Canada's immigration system will help them better utilize current immigration streams and processes. Most employers expressed a desire to see policy changes that would make Canada's immigration system faster and easier to navigate.

NEXT STEPS

The survey results suggest the following next steps:

1. Government and settlement agencies should provide more accurate information about the immigration policies and programs, especially to employers in small and medium-sized employers and employers in rural areas. The need for more accurate information was particularly pronounced in Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia.
2. Government and settlement agencies should also provide more staff support to help train smaller employers in rural areas to navigate the immigration system.
3. Government should provide clearer and more transparent immigration information to individual employees.
4. The government should improve innovative employer-driven immigration programs, including the PNP, MNP, AIPP, RNIPP and AFIPP, by better integrating information technology to make the immigration process easier and faster.

There are many factors that can support employers in attracting and retaining immigrants and international students, including a transparent and effective immigration system, welcoming communities, affordable housing, accessible health care and programs and services provided by immigrant service organizations. Together, these factors will facilitate social and economic integration and retention of immigrants and international students to Atlantic Canada, supporting long-term economic prosperity of the region.

ENDNOTE

¹ Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (2019). [Changes to the Atlantic Immigration pilot.](#)

² Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (2019a). Atlantic Growth Strategy - Changes to the Atlantic Immigration Pilot.

³ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (2019b). [Permanent Residents – Monthly IRCC Updates.](#)



