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MONEY

French-speaking immigrants could fill North's gap

By [Emma Meldrum](#)

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Chartwell, Thunder Bay



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Christian Howard, project co-ordinator with Réseau du Nord: Francophone

immigration support network. Emma Meldrum / Postmedia

Recruiting French-speaking immigrants could be the solution to the North's labour shortage, says Christian Howard.

Howard, of Sudbury and project co-ordinator with Réseau du Nord: Francophone immigration support network, says 47 per cent of Northern Ontario's workforce is eligible to retire by 2031.

"We are short 50,000 people because we didn't have enough kids – and that's if we have no economic growth," he says.

Howard cites the Northern Ontario Policy Institute, which stated that the North would need 7,000 immigrants a year for 22 years to keep the economy going.

"What we're suggesting is to recruit French-speaking immigrants to maintain a demographic weight," he says. "It's good for the culture, it's good for the community."

"There's no risk and there's no fear to hire qualified (French-)speaking immigrants," he says.

"The Federation of Acadian and Francophone Communities in Canada, in line with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, every year they organize recruitment fairs in Paris and Brussels where, for free, they'll go recruiting qualified workers for Canadian employers that are interested."

Howard says an influx of French-speaking immigrants has already started, with 60 francophone international students currently studying at Collège Boréal in Timmins and Université de Hearst.

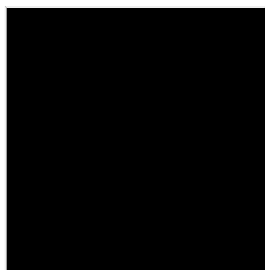
"In Northern Ontario, we get about 500 immigrants per year, but we've managed to attract 2,000 international students a year. The idea is now, let's develop the community process for them to be able to stay."

Jean-Pierre Nadon, director of Collège Boréal's Timmins campus, says that while the strategy is to attract French-speaking immigrants, the reality is Ontario is a bilingual province.

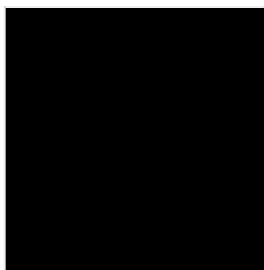
"We want to create a workforce that will be able to work in those businesses, so the community will be bilingual," Nadon says.

"We don't want to create a dead-end where those people will come, but they are not employable because they're unilingual – either francophone or anglophone. We want to make sure that the people we are bringing will meet the demand or the needs of the employer today in Ontario."

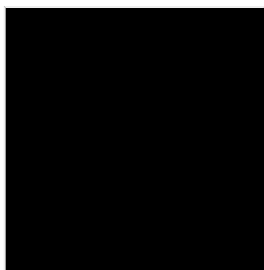
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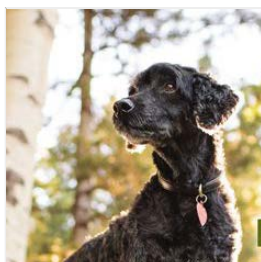
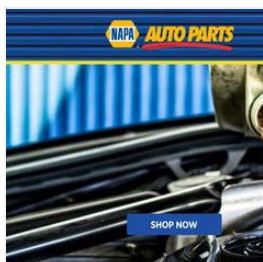
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