

COUNTERING ASSUMPTIONS

WHY CANADA AND ONTARIO SHOULD INCREASE RURAL AND NORTHERN
IMMIGRATION EVEN WHILE LOWERING OVERALL IMMIGRATION LEVELS

PRESENTATION TO RURAL ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT OFFICER GROUP

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DRYDEN, 12 JUNE 2025



Where we are today

The Problem

- Rural and Northern Canada NEEDS Immigrants
- Focus on highest economic return – defined by potential salary – is inherently biased against rural and northern communities (size matters)
- The national consensus in support of immigration is under attack because massive increases in TEMPORARY immigration levels have contributed significantly to affordability issues and housing scarcity, particularly in urban centres
- Public policy is often driven by major population centres – where the votes are

The Solution

- Cut overall levels of immigration (especially temporary immigration – students and temporary workers)
- INCREASE immigration to rural and northern communities (especially permanent resident/citizenship track newcomers)
- Solve OUR problem by helping to solve THEIRS

Today's Topic – Convincing those not directly affected to do the right thing

- Evidence
- Alliances
- MAKE SOME NOISE

Attacking Assumptions

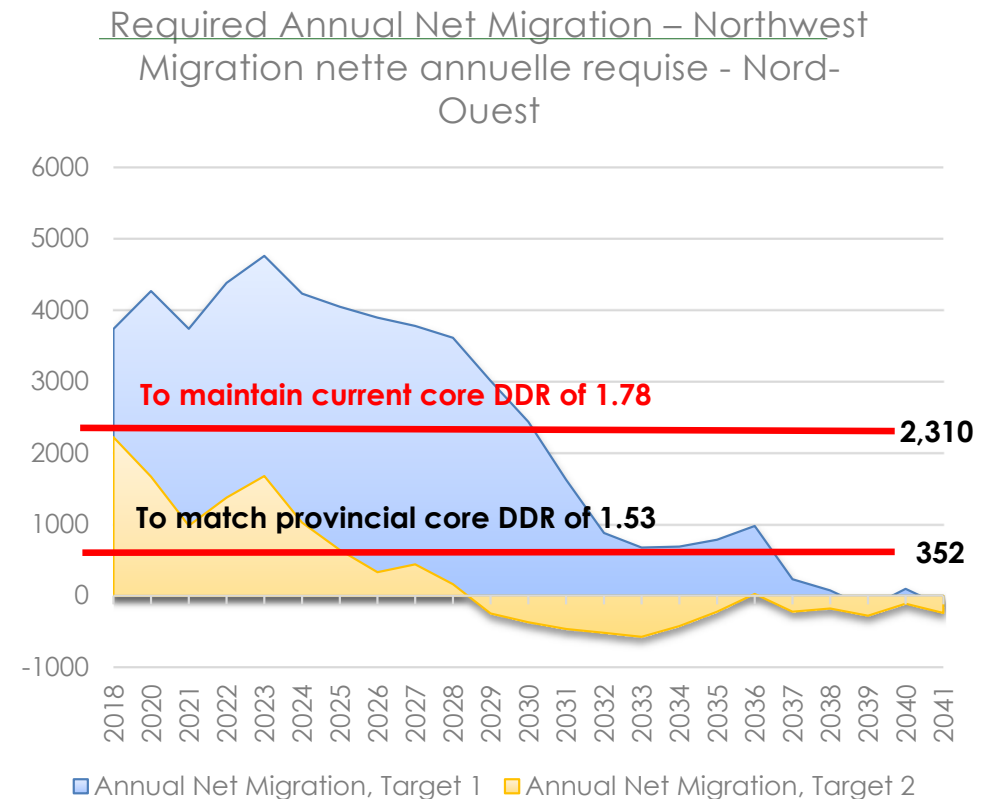
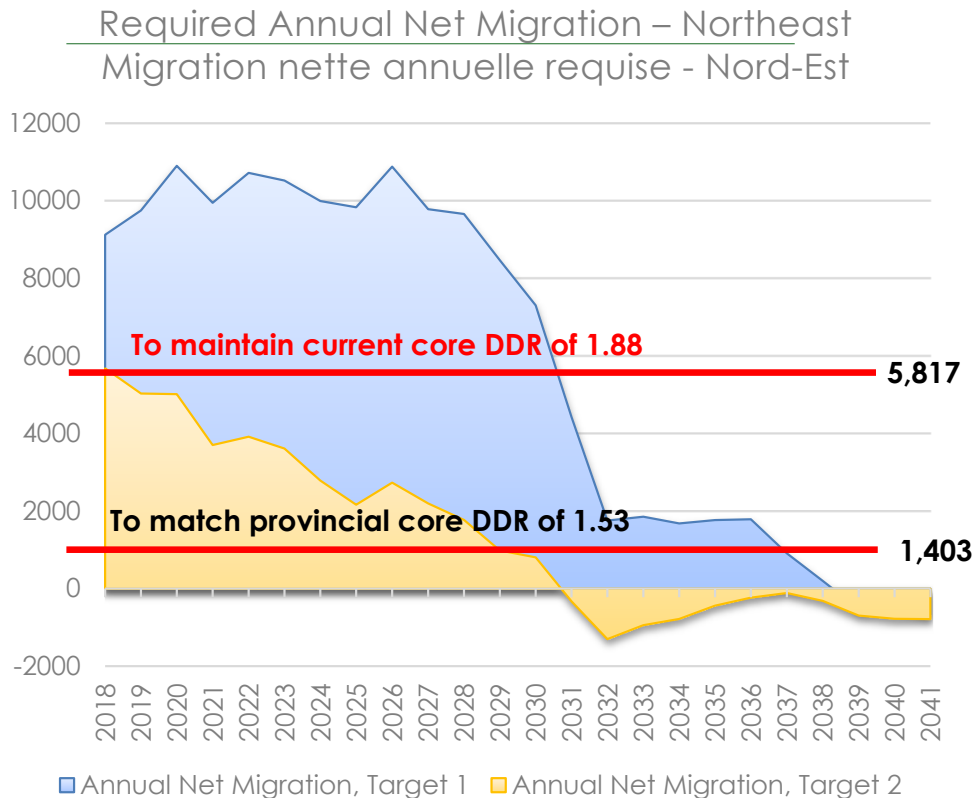
Arguments against immigration/esp. immigration to rural and northern communities

1. Too many people too fast
2. Housing and affordability crisis
3. Youth unemployment levels not seen since the 90's
4. First Nations unemployment
5. ECONOMIC immigrant spaces are mostly reserved for highest potential earners

Northern and rural reality

1. Too few WORKERS - demographic dependency ratio is falling, fast
2. Housing and affordability is more a “crunch” than a “crisis”
3. Youth unemployment levels are generally LOWER than urban centres
4. First Nations unemployment is generally lower, and incomes are higher in rural and northern communities (except in the far north)
5. Jobs that ARE here include (relatively) low numbers of high skill/high income and a (relatively) high numbers of medium/low skill permanent jobs that have incomes insufficient for Toronto but comfortable in Sioux Lookout

Countering Assumption 1 – NO we DON'T have enough workers

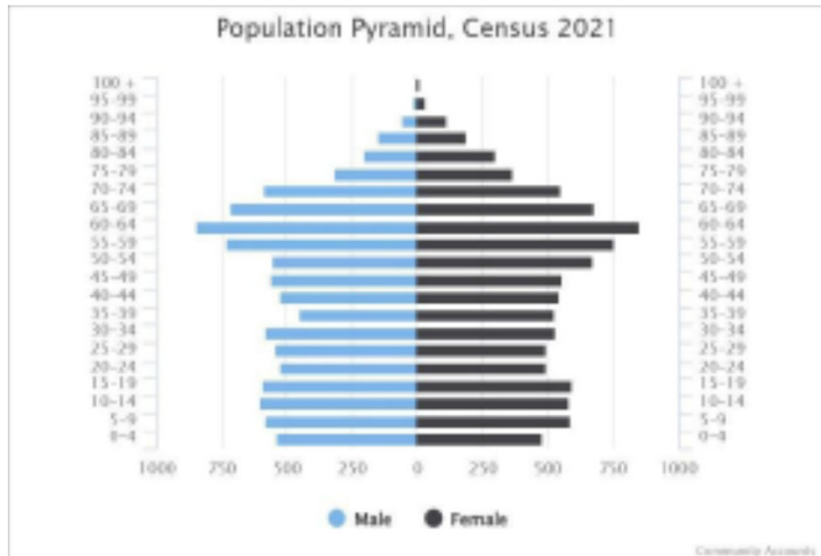


- DDR is the ratio of working people to dependents. An “ideal” ratio would be 2.0 – 2 workers (a person aged 16-64) for every 1 dependent (a person under 15 or over 65)
- **These graphs assume FULL EMPLOYMENT of the FNMI Population**
 - economic inclusion and immigration are not “either/or” ideas – we need them both.

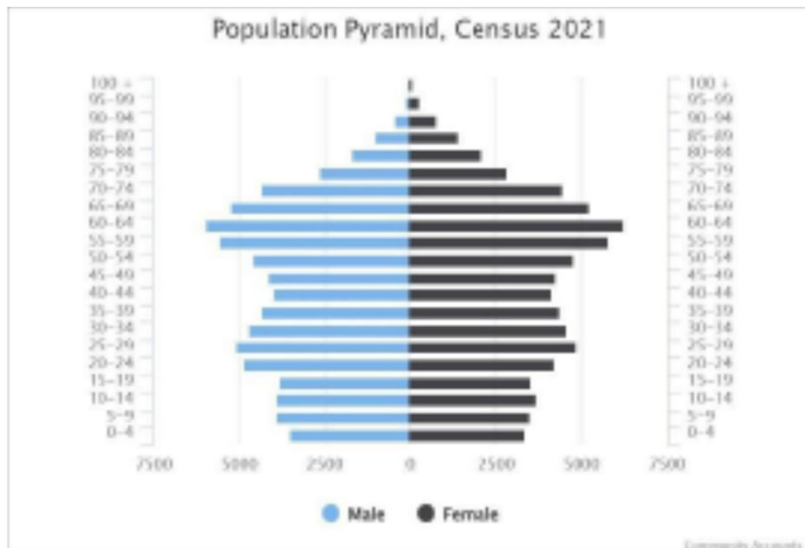
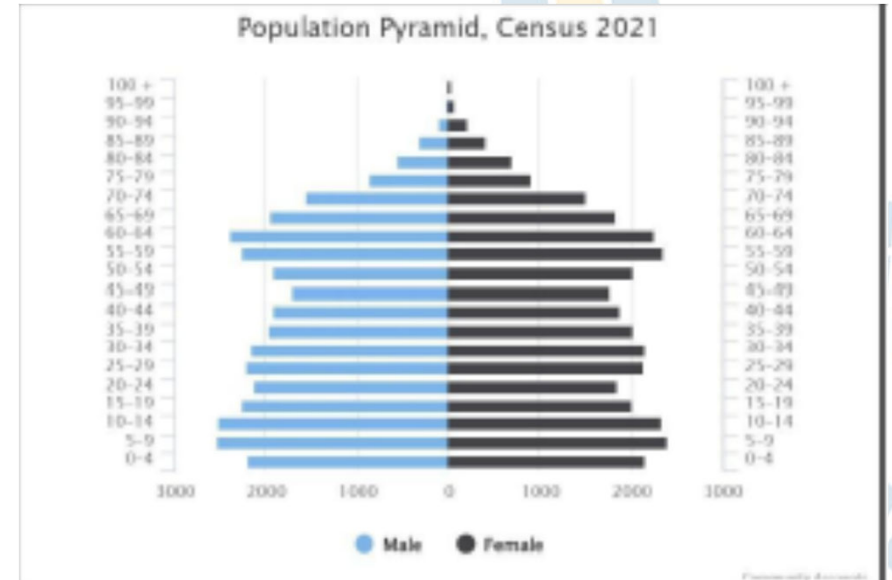
Source: Author's calculations based on Ontario Ministry of Finance population projections. Original DDR projections developed in collaboration with North Superior Workforce Planning Board, Thunder Bay Region's Local Employment Planning Council. NOTE: annual averaging understates the number of young immigrants Northern Ontario needs in the next 10 years by a significant margin.

How do you run out of workers? Well – you age.

Rainy River Census Division



Kenora Census Division



Thunder Bay Census Division

We are NOT Alone

David Campbell – Jupia
Consultants – New Brunswick

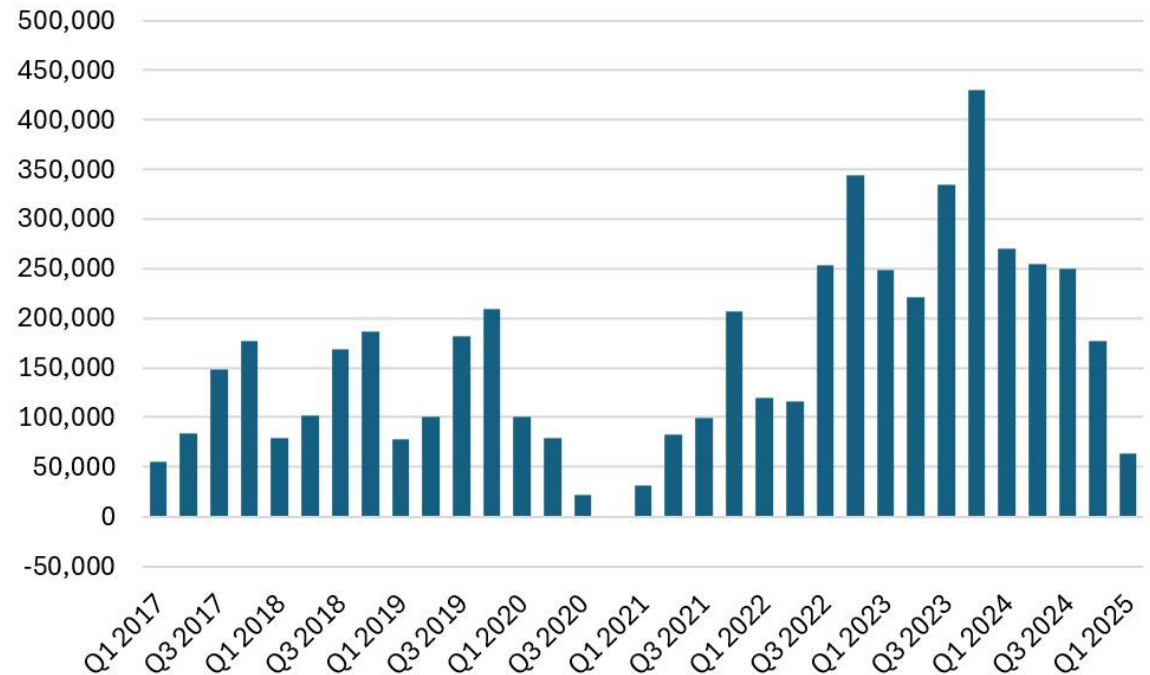
Canada's population growth in the 4th quarter was the slowest in the past 33 quarters (except the three quarters during the pandemic). **Three provinces are in outright population decline** and several others have seen population growth drop to a trickle.

The three provinces in decline are:

- Newfoundland and Labrador
- Prince Edward Island
- Nova Scotia

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/david-campbell-6323933/recent-activity/all/>

Estimated population growth by quarter, Canada



Source: Statistics Canada Table: 17-10-0009-01.

Countering Assumption 2 – CANADA has a housing “crisis” – WE don’t

(We have a “crunch” – yes, “crisis” – no)

Renting – October 2024 Source: CMHC rental market data - October 2024

- Average rent in Toronto - \$1,852
 - Average rent in Thunder Bay was 27% less - \$1,355
 - Average rent in Sault Ste Marie was 34% less - \$1,214
- Vacancy rate in Thunder Bay and Sudbury was (roughly) DOUBLE that in Toronto.
- In Northern Ontario – you can both **find and afford** a place to live

Owning – Between 2020 and 2024 Source: REMAX Market Outlook 2025

- Average sale price in Thunder Bay has gone up 27% - was \$278,381 – is now \$352,567
- Average sale price in Toronto is up 20% - \$929,699 to \$1,117,600

“As of the end of 2024, the only affordable markets are in Atlantic Canada, Northern Ontario, parts of the Prairies and smaller communities in Quebec.”

- <https://www.missingmiddleinitiative.ca/p/when-did-middle-class-housing-become>

Countering Assumption 3

We have jobs for youth – Canada “doesn’t”

“**Gen Z is facing the worst youth unemployment rate in decades.**” – CBC 11 June 2025

From CBC Table (data NOT seasonally adjusted):

1994 – 14.2%

1998 – 11%

2021 – 14.2%

2025 – 11.2%

- Youth Unemployment Rate (seasonally adjusted) in Canada increased to **14.20 percent in May** from 14.10 percent in April of 2025. Youth Unemployment Rate in Canada **averaged 13.79 percent from 1976 until 2025**, reaching an all time high of 30.30 percent in May of 2020 and a record low of 9.00 percent in July of 2022. source: Statistics Canada
- Youth unemployment rate in Northwestern Ontario: **9.6% in 2024** (LFS)
- Youth unemployment rate in Northeastern Ontario: **14.1% in 2024** (LFS)
- **Since 2009** the Employment Rate for youth 15-24 has been almost continuously above the provincial average (so, if you are looking, chances are better here)

Countering Assumption 4 – We CAN make progress on immigration AND improve FNMI unemployment and incomes

- Key Findings of NPI's Human Capital Series
 - <https://www.northernpolicy.ca/article/publications-search-245.asp?Category=38765>
- While still lagging behind the general population in Northern Ontario, the **FNMI population in northern Ontario have better unemployment, education, and income results than FNMI individuals in the rest the province**
- In some cases, **female FNMI community members are at or close to par** on income and unemployment metrics with their NO counterparts in the general population
- The gap between FNMI males and their counterparts in the general population is larger than for women – but the **gap is still smaller than that seen elsewhere in Ontario.**
- All of this was achieved even as immigration in Northern Ontario grew, significantly, over the last decade.

Countering Assumption 5 – ECONOMIC should not just mean income, it should include employability, participation, affordability

Reminder:

“As of the end of 2024, the only affordable markets are in Atlantic Canada, Northern Ontario, parts of the Prairies and smaller communities in Quebec.”

- <https://www.missingmiddleinitiative.ca/p/when-did-middle-class-housing-become>

- Analysis by Northern Policy Institute and the Conference Board of Canada has shown that, among other things, the “points system” (driven largely by income earning potential) results in:
 - Bias towards urban immigration
 - Urban centric unintended consequences (decline in housing affordability, cost of living increases due to rapid demand growth, etc.)
 - Underemployment or unemployment of new immigrants
 - High levels of dissatisfaction by new arrivals, and
 - Higher than desired levels of departures from Canada

- <https://www.conferenceboard.ca/product/immigration-beyond-the-gta-toward-an-ontario-immigration-strategy/>
- <https://www.northernpolicy.ca/northernattraction1>

We were (finally) heading in the right direction

- Growth in Provincial Nominee Streams
 - Growing alignment to employment
 - Local markets with demonstrable labour shortages
 - Tied to job offers – not income potential
- Atlantic Immigration Pilot
- Rural & Northern Immigration Pilot
- Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot
- BUT – we went astray
 - Accelerated growth in Temporary Foreign Workers
 - Exponential growth in International students (to offset stagnant investment in PSE)
- Then we OVERCORRECTED
 - 2024 across the board cuts have applied a solution everywhere when, in rural and northern communities, there was no problem to begin with

OINP Since 2009

OINP Nominees by Census Division	2009	2014	2019	2023	Jan-Jul 2024	2025 Estimated	2021 Population	2025 Proposed
Algoma	5	10	5	15	15	8	113,777	399
Cochrane	--	5	10	20	10	5	77,963	273
Greater Sudbury	10	90	35	85	55	28	166,004	581
Kenora	5	--	10	5	15	8	66,000	231
Manitoulin	0	0	0	0	0	0	14,318	50
Muskoka	0	0	5	40	20	10	66,674	234
Nipissing	--	5	5	10	10	5	84,716	297
Parry Sound	0	0	--	10	--	0	46,909	164
Rainy River	0	0	--	10	0	0	19,437	68
Sudbury	0	0	--	0	0	0	22,368	78
Thunder Bay	5	--	60	55	85	43	146,862	514
Timiskaming	0	0	--	5	10	5	31,424	110
Northern Ontario	25	110	130	255	220	110	856,452	3,000
Ontario	1,000	2,500	6,650	16,500	21,500	10,000	14,223,942	10,000
NO as % Ontario	3%	4%	2%	2%	1%	1%	6%	30%

Recall – to MAINTAIN our current workforce – we need 8,000 people a year

Number of Allocated Pilot Spots Per Year

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2025	2025
Pilot Site	RNIP 1	RNIP 2	RNIP 3	RNIP 4	RNIP 5	RCIP 1	FCIP 1	REDI
Thunder Bay	46	104	254	499	101	475	0	200
Timmins	23	98	131	206	138	200	25	0
North Bay	1	45	115	228	172	250 (?)	0	0
Sudbury	6	49	189	467	460	525	45	0
Sault Ste Marie	39	65	149	356	238	300	0	0
Superior East	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	0
TOTAL	115	361	838	1756	1109	1500	95	200

Recall – to MAINTAIN our current workforce – we need 8,000 people a year

1. RNIP = Number of Applications Received (excluding Prospective and Cancelled Applications) by CASE not PERSONS
2. 2024 is applications in calendar 2024 – final RNIP numbers will likely be higher once reported for first part of 2025
3. 2025 – RCIP is “First Year” of allocations – so will roll into 2026

Northwest Communities & Immigration Pilots

Community	RNIP (Y1-2) (CAN)	RNIP (Y3-5) (CAN)	RCIP (CAN)	FCIP (CAN)	REDI (ON)
Thunder Bay	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nipigon, Marathon, Manitouwadge, Greenstone	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Sioux Lookout, Rainy River, Dryden, Ignace, Atikokan	No	Yes	No	No	No
Kenora, Sioux Narrows, Ear Falls, Red Lake	No	No	No	No	No

The Far Northwest is the **ONLY** region of Northern Ontario **NOT** currently included in either a provincial or federal rural/northern immigration pilot.

Northeast Communities & Immigration Pilots

Community	RNIP (Y1-2)	RNIP (Y3-5)	RCIP	FCIP	REDI
Timmins	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Hearst, Kapuskasing, Moonbeam, Kirkland Lake, Temiskaming Shores etc.	No (?)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Sudbury	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Espanola, Sturgeon Falls, Elliot Lake, etc.	No (?)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
North Bay	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Parry Sound, Mattawa, etc.	No (?)	Yes (?)	Yes	No	No
Sault Ste. Marie	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Wawa, Chapleau, Dubreuville, etc.	No	No	No	Yes	No

Service boundaries and specific dates of changes to boundaries are still being confirmed, this chart will be adjusted as new information becomes available.

Other Streams/Programs - 2025

RECRUTE NORD (pending or submitted)

- Kenora - 4
- Fort Frances - 6
- Sioux Lookout - 8
- Long Lac - 1

Communities Soon to Join

- Hearst, Kapuskasing, Timmins, Chapleau, Cochrane, Wawa, White River, Dubreuilville, Horne Payne, Manitouwadge, Temiskaming Shores, Sturgeon Falls

ECONOMIC MOBILITY PATHWAY PILOT (pending or submitted)

Thunder Bay – 60
Fort Frances - 25

Recall – to MAINTAIN our current workforce – we need 8,000 people a year

Economic Impact of NOT Solving our “People Problem”

Example – Dryden

- Dryden had **124 individual responses to recent survey**. Those **124 people currently account for 180+ jobs in Dryden** (40% of responses report they are currently holding down 2 or more jobs), primarily in the restaurant and food services industry, retail, tourism & hospitality, and healthcare sectors.
 - Conservatively speaking, the wages of these workers **represent \$8.1M in the Dryden economy**
- **83% of these folks are reporting that they have adequate access to housing**, the remaining 17% have access to housing, however it does not meet their needs (not adequate for the size of their family / budget / etc.)
 - Dryden is actively building additional housing stock with an additional 40+ multi-residential units and 15+ single family / duplex units slated for the 2025 building season.
- **68% of the respondents to this survey have 12 months or less on their work permit, and 69% are reporting that they have spent a minimum of 1 year in Dryden (27% say they have been here more than 2 years).**
- The vast majority of these TFWs have no pathway to permanent residency in Canada if they chose to stay in Dryden.
 - **92% of the respondents claim they would apply to RCIP** if it was made available to them in Dryden.
- As of today, the Canadian Job Bank is reporting that there are 109 vacant positions in Dryden.
 - If the majority of our TFWs are forced to leave our community in the next 6 – 18 months, this puts our businesses and our community in crisis mode, projecting near 300 job vacancies – not to mention the job vacancies in surrounding communities like Sioux Lookout & Kenora as well.

Economic Impact of NOT Solving our “People Problem”

Northern Economist 2.0

<https://northerneconomist.blogspot.com/2025/06/measuring-cost-of-labour-shortages-in.html?m=1>

*Notwithstanding the effects of the current trade war and the creeping up of the unemployment rate, labour shortages have been a persistent economic theme since the pandemic in Canada as well as northern Ontario. A recent Conference Board report has argued that **the main challenge for the labour market in Northern Ontario is a shortage of labour** with the region experiencing some of the highest job vacancy rates in the country.*

- In 2024, the average quarterly number of job vacancies comes out to 8,713 for Northeastern Ontario and 5,148 for the Northwest.
- Multiplying the number of vacancies by the GDP produced per employee results in a **foregone GDP** output of approximately \$1.1 billion in Northeastern Ontario and about 0.7 billion in the Northwest for a total **of \$1.8 billion dollars.**
- (A rough) estimate of (regional GDP is) about \$50 billion for current nominal GDP.
- In other words, the **output foregone represents nearly 4 percent of the current GDP** in Ontario's north.

NB – Author highlights these are very rough estimates using readily available figures.

Economic Impact of RNIP



Sudbury – 2020-2022 impact

- 204 jobs for applicants
- 89 other jobs in the local economy, totalling 293 jobs
- An estimated total of \$15.7 million in annual wages in the local economy

Thunder Bay – 2020-2022 impact

- 229 jobs for applicants
- 93 other jobs in the local economy
- Estimated total of \$11.7 million in annual wages in the local economy

Timmins – as of February 2024

- 548 new immigrants employed
- Estimated 198 additional indirect jobs
- Estimated total of \$34.9 million in annual wages

NB – Salaries are higher on average in Sudbury than in Thunder Bay, so impact higher even though fewer jobs created during period analyzed.

Go Forward Options

FEDERAL

- Short Term:
 - Continue Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot to match timing of windup of RCIP/FCIP – **this pilot was shuttered on 12 June (could be “easily” reinstated)**
 - One-time extension all Work Permits expiring in 2025 in rural and northern regions for 3 years – **concept was suggested by a local MP**
 - Work with Thunder Bay to expand RCIP service boundary to old RNIP boundary (or to all of NW?) – **mixed blessing – limited number of spots - if we share do we take heat off Ontario/Canada to grow the overall number?**
- Medium/Long Term
 - Reverse cuts to Provincial Nominee Programs on condition reinstituted allocations are assigned to rural and northern regions – **to date there has been limited departmental interest in making this change**
 - Expand Atlantic Immigration Program to be a PERMANENT Community Immigration Program nationwide – **this remains official federal policy – a permanent community led program**

Go Forward Options

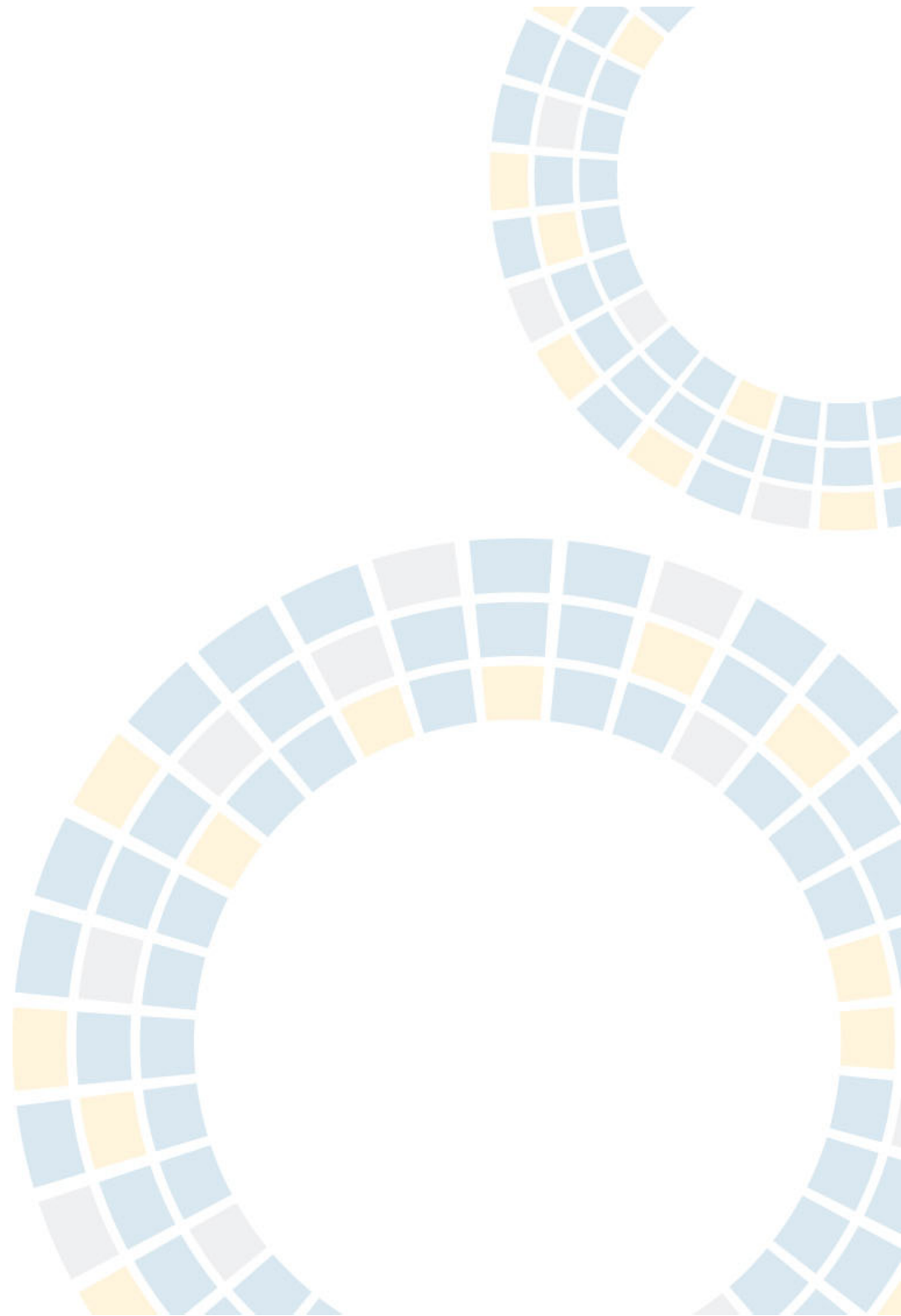
PROVINCIAL

- Short Term
 - Expand NOCs under OINP to include some TEER 4 NOCs but ONLY in rural and northern communities – **OINP has indicated willingness to consider expanding list as labour market data supports the change**
 - Add a REDI site in Far NWO – **to date there has been limited departmental interest in making this change**
- Medium Term
 - Allocate 3,000 spots within the OINP to rural and northern communities (50% of OCC request) – **to date there has been limited departmental interest in making this change**
 - Reallocate International students cuts to return northern and rural numbers to 2023 status quo – **to date there has been limited departmental interest in making this change**

Actions (taken or to be considered)

- Media Attention
 - Thunder Bay Chamber video
 - Northern Economist 2.0
 - Series of stories on Kenora/Sioux Lookout
 - Cost/benefit value of doing more media/media outreach/press conference?
- Meeting with MPs/MPPs
 - Targeted Meetings
 - Meetings of opportunity
- Delegations
 - Federal Liberal Rural Caucus (NDP/Conservative?)
 - Provincial caucuses?
 - AMO
 - Other?
- Actors
 - 84 organizations signed on to letter to Premier re OINP
 - NOMA
 - FONOM
 - Other?

Questions and Discussion



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Thank you. Marsee. Ραυλ᾽dΓN᾽
Merci. Miigwech.

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