

Policy Note # 46 | January 2023

Let's Get to Work: New Tools Needed in the Employer Recruitment Toolbox for Newcomers (Thunder Bay)

What Makes a Welcoming Community? (Series)

By: Mercedes Labelle

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Our main offices:

- Thunder Bay on Robinson-Superior Treaty territory and the land is the traditional territory of the Anishnaabeg and Fort William First Nation.
- Sudbury is on the Robinson-Huron Treaty territory and the land is the traditional territory of the Atikameksheng Anishnaabeg as well as Wahnapiatae First Nation.
- Kirkland Lake is on the Robinson-Huron Treaty territory and the land is the traditional territory of Cree, Ojibway, and Algonquin Peoples, as well as Beaverhouse First Nation.
- Each community is home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples.

We recognize and appreciate the historic connection that Indigenous peoples have to these territories. We support their efforts to sustain and grow their nations. We also recognize the contributions that they have made in shaping and strengthening local communities, the province, and Canada.

This report was made possible through the support of our partner, Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation. Northern Policy Institute expresses great appreciation for their generous support but emphasizes the following: The views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Institute, its Board of Directors or its supporters. Quotation with appropriate credit is permissible.

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Editor: Barry Norris

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Published by Northern Policy Institute

874 Tungsten St.

Thunder Bay, Ontario P7B 6T6

ISBN: 978-1-77868-084-7

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NPI is pleased to have the support of FedNor for this important work to assess the impact of the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot in Northern Ontario.



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Executive Summary

In February 2022, a survey was distributed to employers across Northern Ontario to assess employers' attitudes towards hiring newcomers and diverse groups, the challenges they face while doing so, and the support they need during the process. Additional questions were asked pertaining to welcoming employer characteristics. In total, 353 employers throughout the regions of Northern Ontario responded to this survey. This report presents the findings for the 75 survey respondents located in Thunder Bay. Additionally, reports are also available for North Bay, Greater Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie, and Timmins.

The Employer Survey is a part of the larger Measurement Month initiative led by Northern Policy Institute, in partnership with other organizations across Northern Ontario, to collect consistent and comparable community-level data on the themes of attraction, retention, reconciliation, anti-racism, and welcoming.

This paper found that, in general, employers in Thunder Bay have positive attitudes towards hiring newcomers and diverse groups and contribute positively to overall perceptions of welcoming in a community. In fact, 87 per cent of employers indicated they used at least one immigration stream to recruit foreign workers, while 61 per cent indicated that newcomers had become an increasingly important source of new hires, or will in the near future.

When it comes to hiring-related challenges, employers are struggling to fill soft skills gaps, particularly communication and analytical skills. Another challenge for employers in Thunder Bay is the process of finding and recruiting employees, with 43 per cent of respondents indicating the primary barrier they face is a lack of responses to job postings. In terms of support needed for recruiting and training of immigrant employees, employers indicated most urgently needing support in facilitating quick and electronic access to support programs.

In consideration of the above findings, the following four recommendations are made to support employers in Thunder Bay:

1. Understand the needs of employers, beyond specific occupational shortages (i.e., soft skills gaps).
2. Monitor the needs of employers, in terms of labour force gaps and information and supports needed during and after the hiring process.
3. Make full use of human capital to mitigate labour and skills shortages in Thunder Bay.
4. Work to promote and foster welcoming workplaces.

It is further recommended that efforts should continue to be made across Ontario's northern regions to share, promote, and complete these surveys.



Introduction

In February 2022, Northern Policy Institute, in partnership with organizations across Northern Ontario, launched an initiative, to collect consistent, comparable data for our regions, via surveys. The surveys focused on the themes of attraction, retention, reconciliation, anti-racism, and welcoming – specifically, individual experiences and organizations' capacity to contribute to welcoming communities.

In total, 353 unique organizations filled out the employer survey. Of these, 315 are in at least one of the five largest cities in Northern Ontario: Greater Sudbury, North Bay, Timmins, Sault Ste. Marie, and Thunder Bay. Some organizations have operations in more than one location.

The purpose of the survey was to assess employers' attitudes toward hiring newcomers and diverse groups, the challenges they face while doing so, and the support they need during the process. Additional questions were asked pertaining to knowledge of immigration programs and streams, interorganizational skill shortages, and the impacts of COVID-19 on operations.

Employers play a critical role in the attraction, retention, and welcoming of newcomers. Ensuring meaningful employment, not only for newcomers, but for the entire population, helps to fill shortages in the labour market and to use the benefits of immigration.

Methodology

The cities selected for analysis all participate in the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP) program, a community-led economic immigration stream to permanent residence. Specifically, this analysis focuses on employers in the City of Thunder Bay with at least one employee.

Distribution of the survey was a collaborative effort of Northern Policy Institute and partner organizations across Northern Ontario. Some of these partner organizations administer the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP) in their communities and sent the employer survey to employers who have either used, or inquired about, the Pilot. Additionally, many survey distributing organizations

provide services themselves, or provide information about services available. As such, when looking at distribution from partner organizations to their network, the sample of employers might overrepresent those that are familiar with services and/or the RNIP.

The survey distribution took the form of targeted social media ads, direct distribution through emails, social media posts, newsletters, and information sessions. In addition, respondents were entered into a draw to win one of two \$100 prepaid Visa gift cards.

All surveys and promotional materials were available in both French and English.

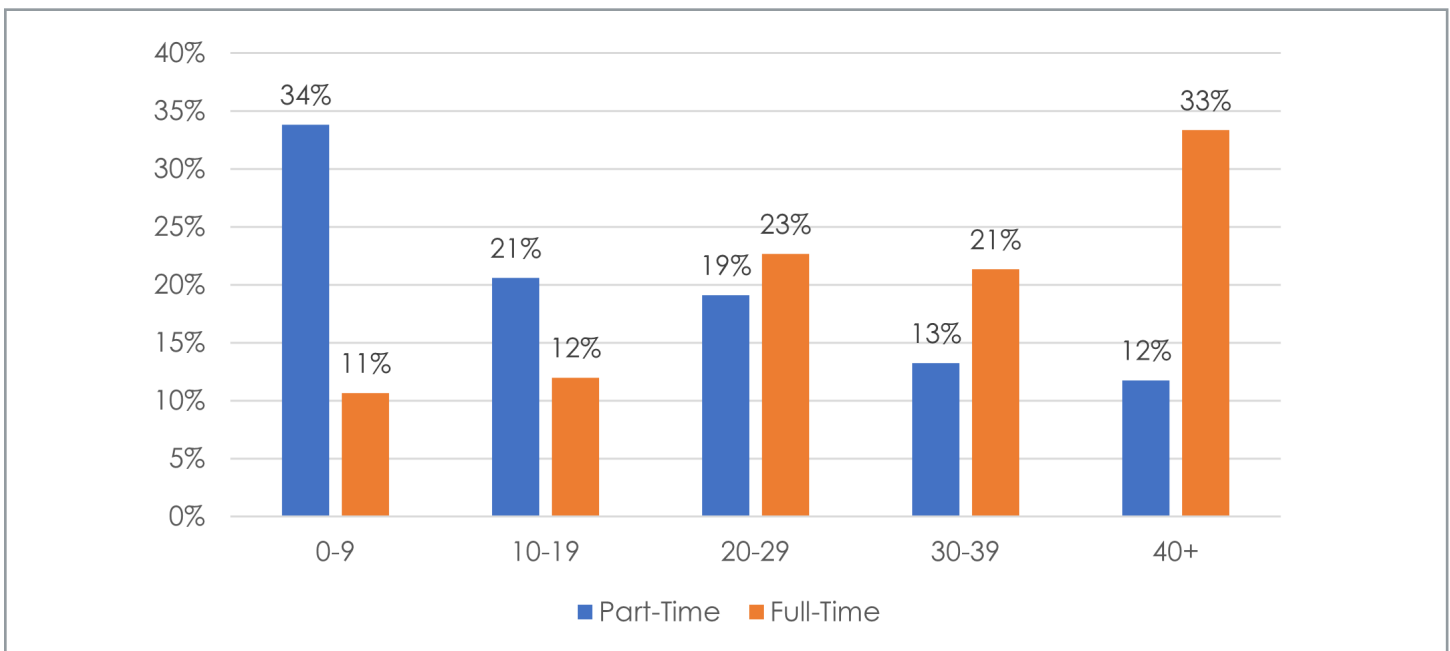


General Demographics

According to June 2022 Canadian Business Count data, the City of Thunder Bay recorded 3,765 businesses with at least one employee. Of these businesses, 45 per cent had fewer than five employees and 22 per cent had between five and nine employees. Most commonly, the businesses in Thunder Bay are in the following industries: health care and social assistance (15 per cent), construction (13 per cent), and retail trade (14 per cent) (Statistics Canada 2022).

Seventy-five employers in Thunder Bay responded to the survey. Most commonly, these organizations had over 40 full-time employees and under 10 part-time employees (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Employees of Survey Respondents, Full- and Part-Time, Thunder Bay, 2022

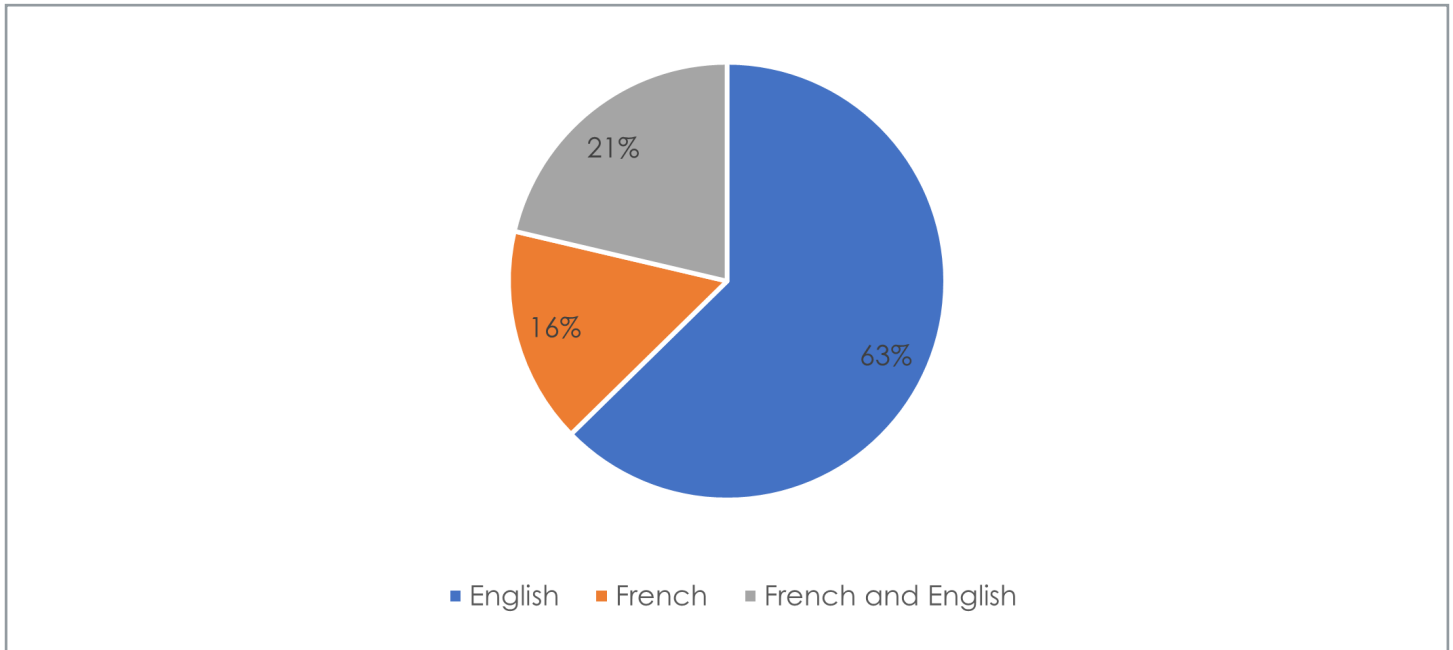


Note: (n = 75)

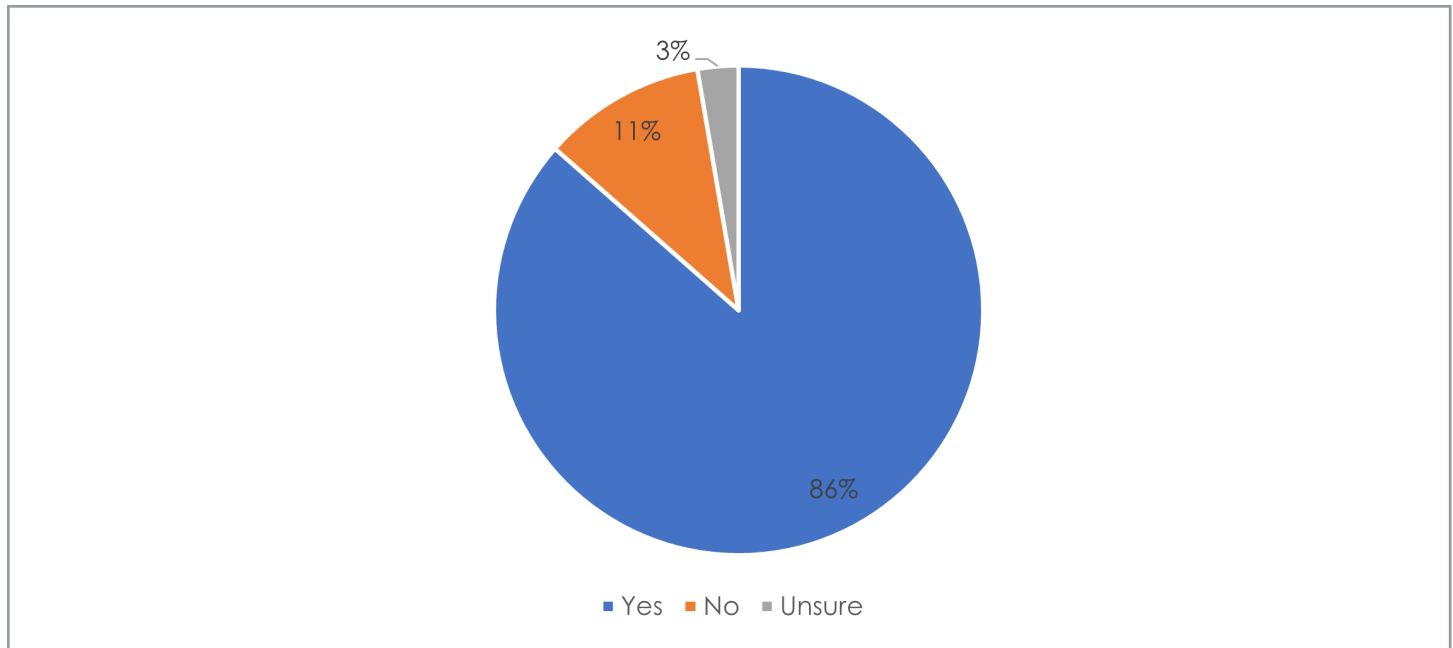
Language

In the respondent organizations in Thunder Bay, the primary language used in the workplace is English, with 84 per cent of organizations indicating its use, while 37 per cent indicated using French in the workplace (Figure 2). Included in these totals are the 21 per cent of organizations that indicated using both French

and English. In addition, 86 per cent of respondent organizations in Thunder Bay indicated that French-language skills are a benefit to their organization (Figure 3). As for RNIP employer respondents in Thunder Bay, the primary language used is also English.

Figure 2: Primary Language Used in the Workplace, Survey Respondents, Thunder Bay, 2022

Note: (n = 75)

Figure 3: French-Language Skills as Benefit to the Organization, Survey Respondents, Thunder Bay, 2022

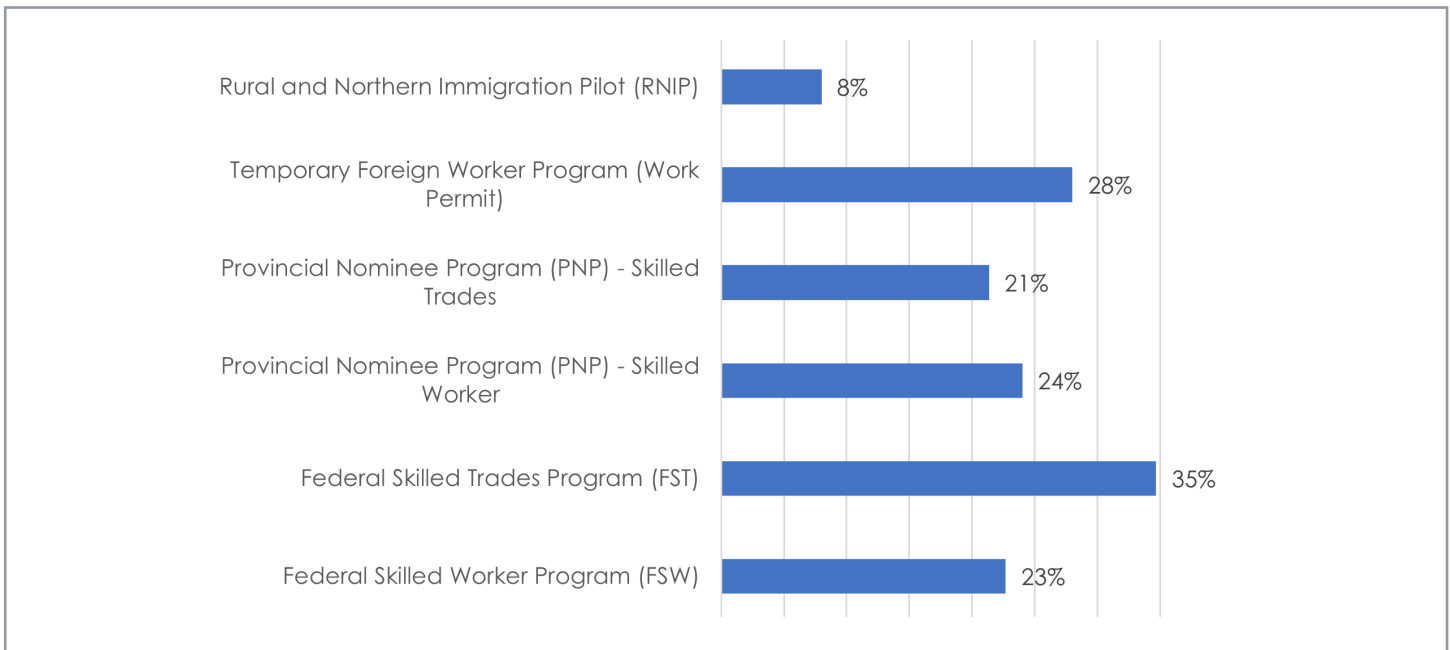
Note: (n = 74)

Service and Program Usage and Satisfaction

In the coming years, labour shortages will emerge in Thunder Bay – many employers are already experiencing them. Using immigration pathways to hire skilled workers is a way to mitigate these labour shortages, alongside ensuring the domestic population is participating fully in the labour market. Of employers in Thunder Bay that responded to this survey, 87 per cent had used at least one immigration stream to recruit foreign

workers. As Figure 4 shows, most commonly used is the Federal Skilled Worker program¹ (35 per cent) and the Temporary Foreign Worker Program² (28 per cent). Eight per cent of respondents indicated using the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot³ – a community-led economic immigration pilot meant to fill specific labour shortages identified by communities. Thirteen per cent of respondents had not used any immigration streams.

Figure 4: Use of Immigration Streams by Survey Respondents to Recruit Foreign Workers, Thunder Bay, 2022



Note: (n = 75)

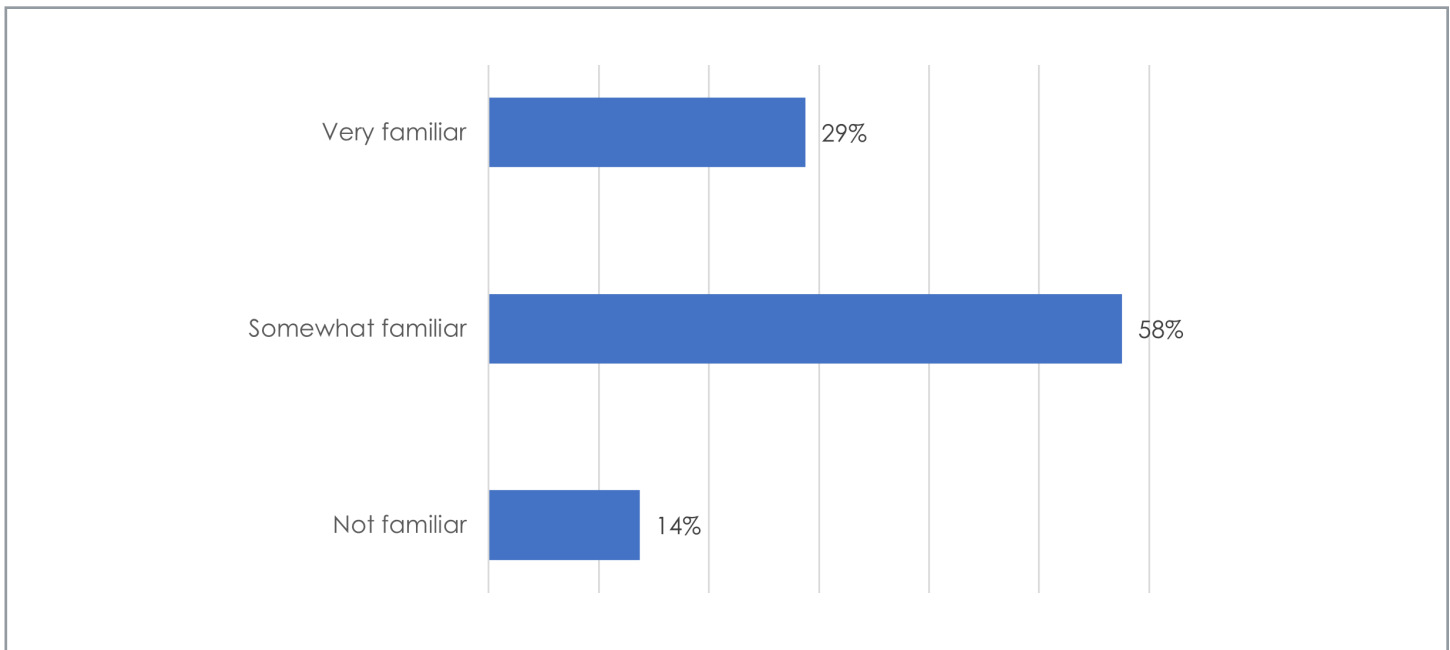
The majority of respondents (87 per cent) indicated being familiar with the RNIP program (Figure 5), with 79 per cent indicating they were interested in participating in the program, while 26 per cent of respondents

indicated they were interested in the RNIP but were unable to participate for reasons that included difficulty accessing language testing or requiring a specific trade certification.

¹ To learn more about the Federal Skilled Trades Program, please visit <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/immigrate-canada/express-entry/eligibility/skilled-trades.html>

² For more information about the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, see <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/foreign-workers.html>

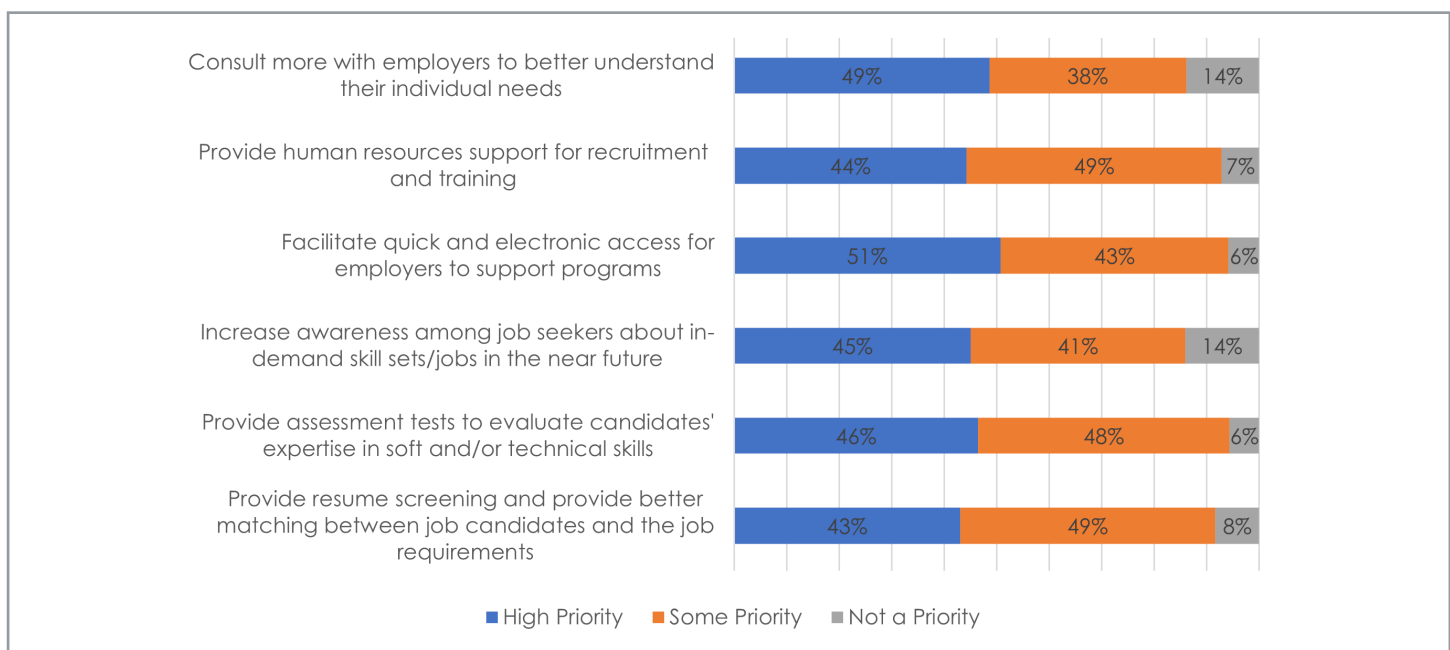
³ For more information about the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot, see <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/immigrate-canada/rural-northern-immigration-pilot.html>

Figure 5: Familiarity with the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot, Survey Respondents, Thunder Bay, 2022

Note: (n = 73)

Navigating the immigration process as an employer, with multiple streams, applicants, and requirements, can be difficult. Fortunately, there are organizations that can provide some supports for employers throughout this process. When asked, respondent employers in Thunder Bay indicated the highest priority was facilitating quick

and electronic access to support programs (51 per cent) and consulting more with employers to better understand their individual needs (49 per cent). A lower priority support item was increasing awareness among job seekers about in-demand skills sets/jobs in the near future. See Figure 6.

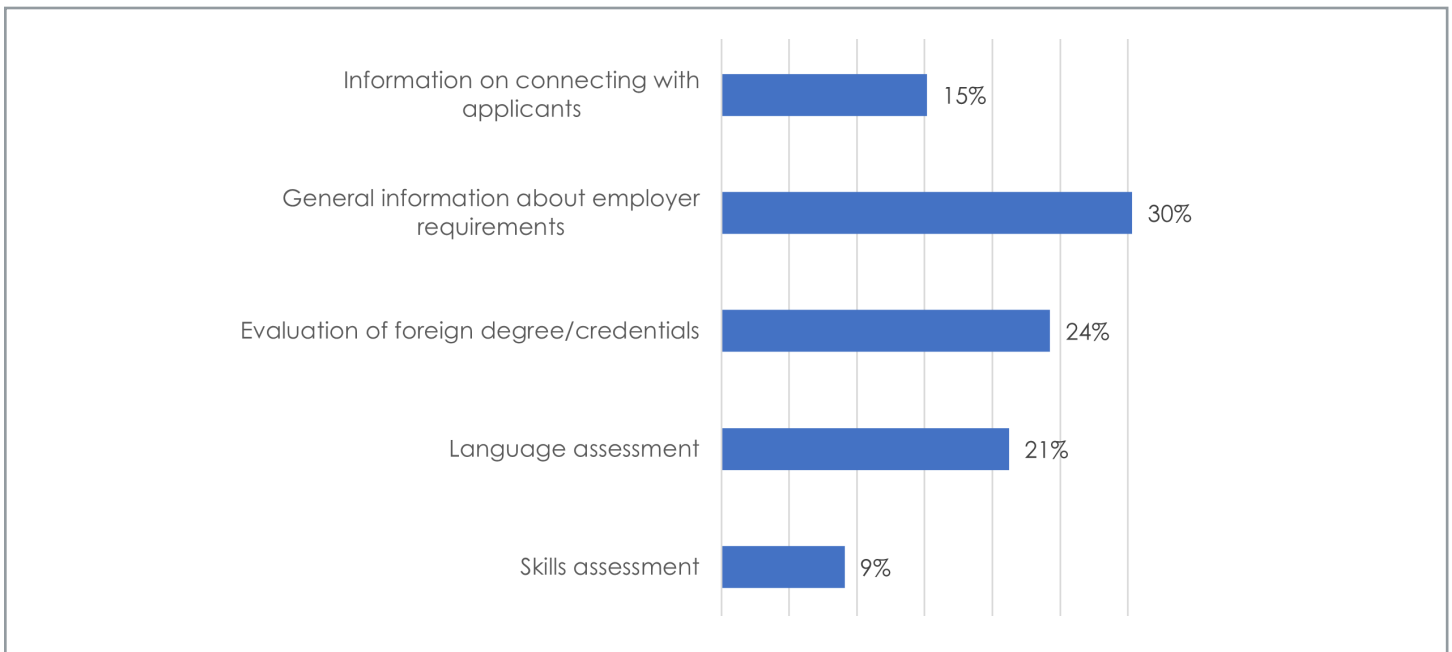
Figure 6: Support Needed for Immigrant Recruitment and Training, Survey Respondents, Thunder Bay, 2022

Note: (n = 72)

Employers that responded to this survey most commonly indicated that the help they needed but did not receive was general information about employer requirements for hiring newcomers (30 per cent) and evaluating an applicant's foreign credentials (24 per cent); see Figure 7. Although employers most commonly indicated that evaluation of foreign degrees/credentials and language assessment services were in need, provision of these services is usually not mandated or offered by community organizations. In fact, educational credential assessments must be conducted by an organization or professional body designated by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (Canada 2020).

Lack of accreditation of foreign credentials, education, and training is one of the largest obstacles preventing immigrants from meaningful participation in the labour market (Esses et al. 2010, 19). Thus, if the employer had the ability to recognize foreign credentials, everyone – the individual, the employer, and the community – would benefit.

Figure 7: Help Needed but Not Received when Hiring Newcomers through Immigration Programs, Survey Respondents, Thunder Bay, 2022



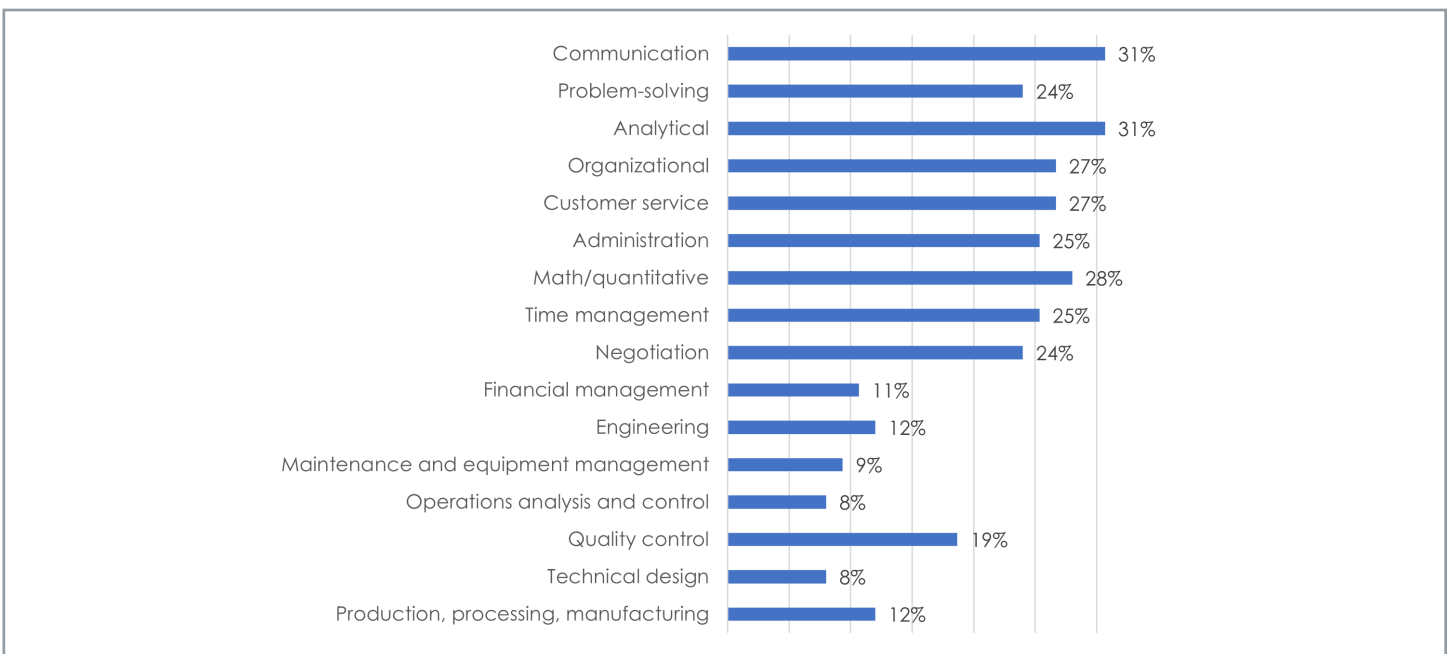
Note: (n = 33)

Skills Gaps and Hiring

As mentioned, an aging population, low birth rates, and out-migration are contributing to labour market shortages, and will continue to do so. With these trends, employers face hiring-related challenges now more than ever. Along with occupation-specific skills, employers also need to take soft skills into account, which respondents commonly indicated were difficult to find. As Figure 8

shows, the skills gaps respondent employers in Thunder Bay were most looking to fill included communications (31 per cent), analytical (31 per cent), and math/quantitative skills (28 per cent). The respondents' least-sought-after skills were in operations analysis and control (8 per cent) and technical design (8 per cent).

Figure 8: Skills Gaps Needing Filling, Survey Respondents, Thunder Bay, 2022



Note: (n = 75)

Another challenge employers face is the process of finding and recruiting employees (Figure 9). When asked, respondent employers in Thunder Bay indicated the primary barriers they faced included lack of responses to job postings (43 per cent) and difficulty engaging

qualified candidates (39 per cent). Respondents were least likely to have difficulty reaching non-traditional labour sources or new candidate pools (9 per cent) or to feel that job boards were too time consuming (14 per cent).

Figure 9: Primary Barriers to Finding and Recruiting Employees, Survey Respondents, Thunder Bay, 2022

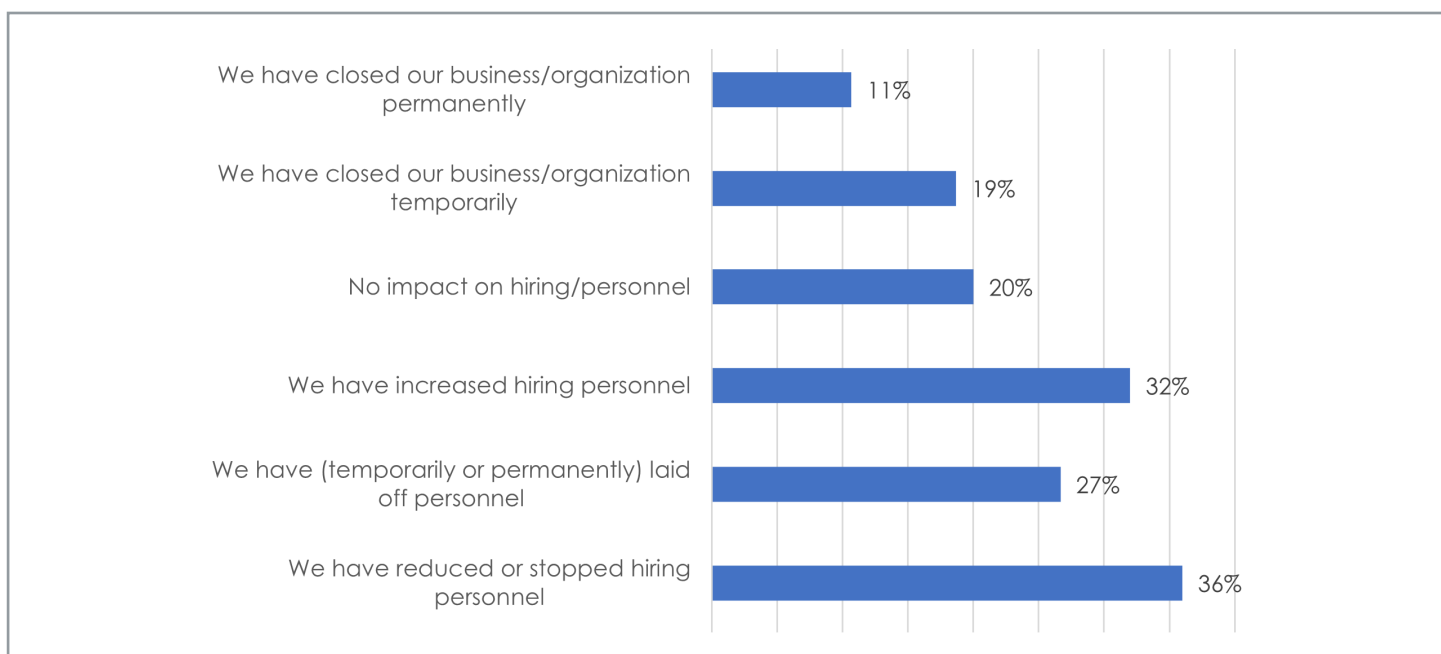


Note: (n = 75)

When looking at the impact of COVID-19 on hiring and personnel needs (Figure 10), respondent employers most commonly cited having to reduce or stop hiring personnel (36 per cent), while 27 per cent had to lay off personnel either temporarily or permanently. Nineteen

per cent of respondents had to close either temporarily (19 per cent) or permanently (11 per cent). On the other hand, 32 per cent had to increase personnel hiring, while 20 per cent did not experience an impact on hiring or personnel.

Figure 10: Impact of COVID-19 on Hiring/Personnel Needs, Survey Respondents, Thunder Bay, 2022



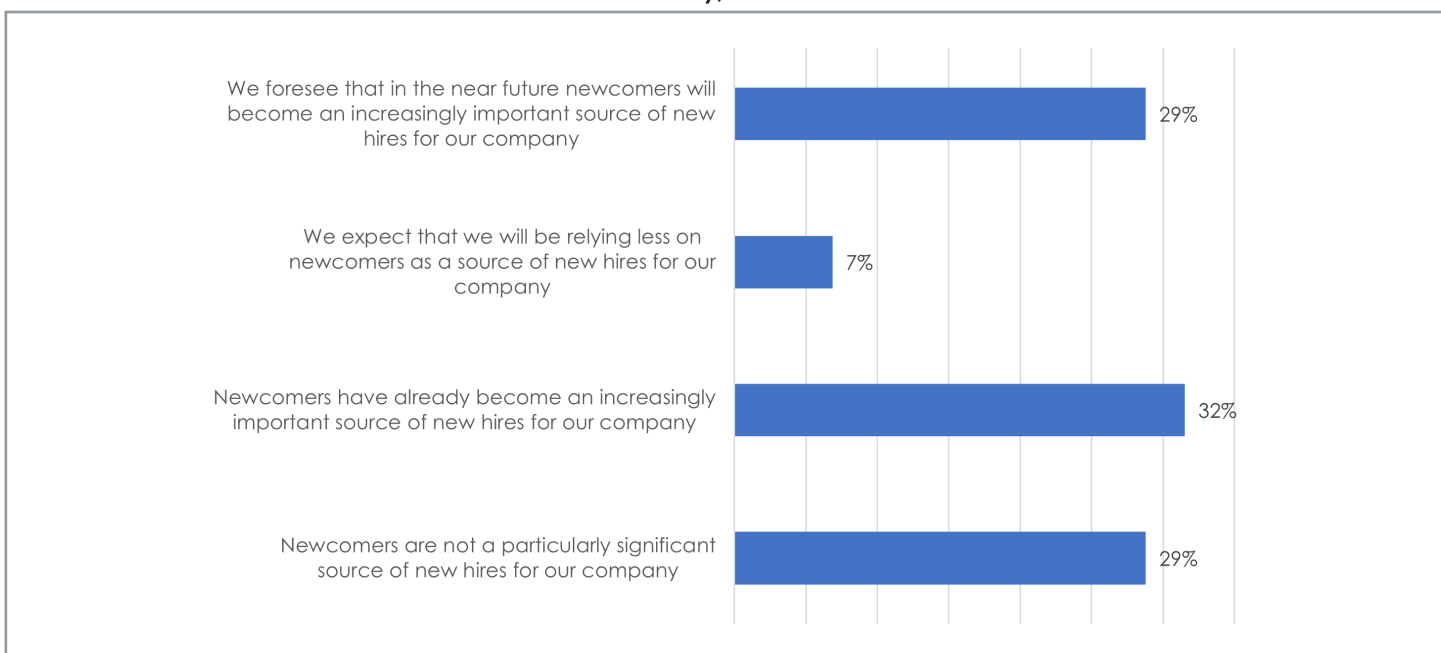
Note: (n = 75)

Welcoming Employer Characteristics

Again, having a welcoming employer contributes to overall perceptions of welcome in a community (Esses et al. 2010, 17). As such, employers in Thunder Bay were asked to choose a statement that best reflected the role that newcomers play in their hiring decisions (Figure 11). Notably, many respondent employers indicated that newcomers had already become an increasingly

important source of new hires for their company (32 per cent), while an additional 29 per cent of respondents indicated that they foresaw newcomers as an important source of new hires in the future. The responses indicate employers are open to welcoming newcomer talent into its organization, contributing to a positive employment situation and helping to mitigate labour shortages.

Figure 11: Statement that Best Reflects the Role Newcomers to Canada Play in Hiring Decisions, Survey Respondents, Thunder Bay, 2022



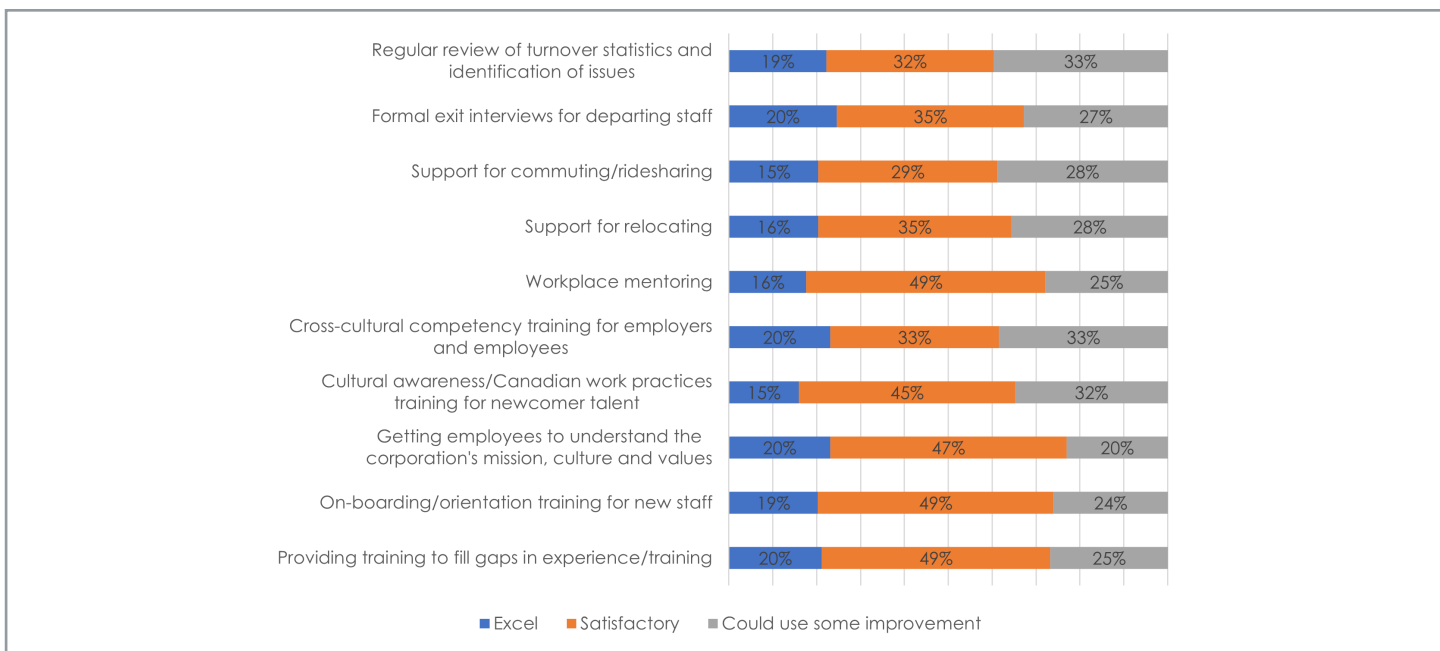
Note: "Newcomers" defined as those who arrived within the past five years.
Note: (n = 73)

Employers themselves also provide supports and policies to welcome new employees into the labour force. Asked what supports they felt they excelled at (Figure 12), respondents noted cross-cultural competency training for both employers and employees (20 per cent) and providing training to fill gaps in experience (20 per cent). Other supports included getting employees to

understand the corporation's mission, culture, and values (67 per cent) and on-boarding/training for new staff (69 per cent). The internal policies that organizations felt could use the most improvement were those related to regular review of turnover statistics and identification of issues (33 per cent) and cultural awareness/Canadian work practices training for newcomer talent (32 per cent).



Figure 12: Opinion of Organization's Human Resources Policies and Implementation, Survey Respondents, Thunder Bay, 2022

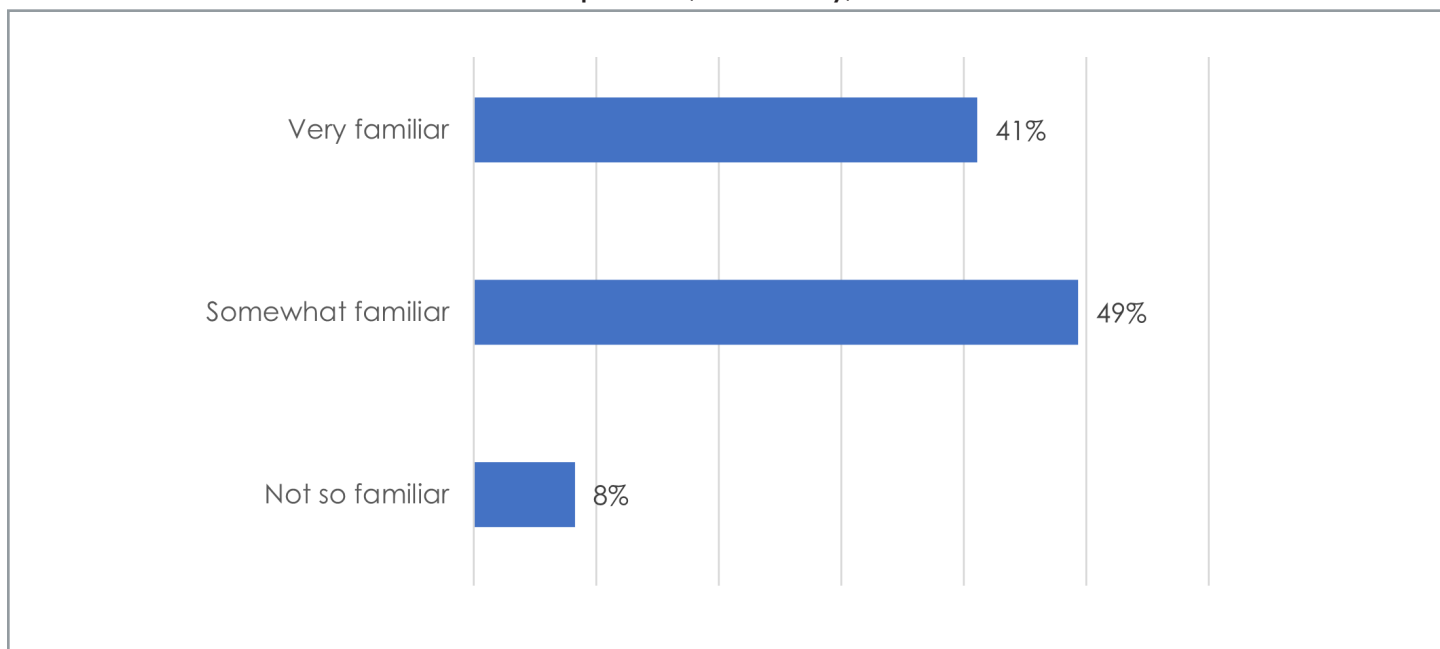


Note: (n = 73)

Although meaningful employment opportunities do play a significant role in making an individual feel welcomed, other factors are also at play, such as settlement services and other supports available to them. Employers can play a role in referring newcomer employees to these services. The majority of respondent employees in Thunder Bay indicated they were very (41 per cent) or somewhat (49 per cent) familiar with local settlement

and support services for newcomers (Figure 13). Similarly, the majority of RNIP employer respondents indicated they were very or somewhat familiar with these services. Acting as a point of contact to direct newcomers to services promotes a "no wrong door" approach, where newcomers are more likely to gain access to the help they seek.

Figure 13: Familiarity of Organization with Local Settlement Services and other Support Services for Newcomers, Survey Respondents, Thunder Bay, 2022



Note: (n = 74)

Conclusion and Recommendations

Comparable and available community-level data are crucial to making informed decisions. As such, an effort should continue to be made in Thunder Bay, and across Northern Ontario, to share, promote, and complete these surveys. The information gathered from respondents helps create a sample of sentiments that employers in Thunder Bay are expressing. It is important to take the sentiments expressed in these surveys and address them meaningfully. Accordingly, the following recommendations and next steps are offered.

1. **Understand the needs of employers**, beyond specific occupational shortages. Respondent employers in Thunder Bay indicated difficulty finding candidates with specific soft skills, such as communication, analytical, and organizational skills. Although occupations can be targeted through the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot, soft skills are more difficult to pinpoint. Additional training and/or mentoring of qualified candidates could increase these skills. As well, ensuring that employers are made aware of services and programs that are already in place could alleviate some hiring difficulties.
2. **Monitor the needs of employers**, in terms of labour force gaps and information and supports needed during and after the hiring process. This work could help inform the communication and promotion of available services, service offerings, and targeted occupations under the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot and more generally as well.
3. **Make full use of human capital to mitigate labour and skills shortages in Greater Sudbury.** Employers indicated needing help regarding general information for employer requirements when hiring newcomers and evaluating foreign credentials, training, and degrees. Having a skilled potential employee in a community, unable to practice due to assessment barriers, hurts both the individual and employer. Services that are available to help employers assess foreign degrees should be communicated. If these services do not currently exist, or are difficult to access, steps should be taken to ensure their availability. Another barrier employers face were difficulties engaging qualified candidates. In terms of engaging qualified candidates, building capacity, and increasing labour market experience, employers should be encouraged to apply for internship funding from the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation, FedNor, Canada Summer Jobs, and other federal and provincial support programs. Building capacity in Northern Ontario, specifically among youth, would help to mitigate out-migration, while also contributing positively to the labour market for years to come.
4. **Work to promote and foster welcoming workplaces.** Workplaces that welcome newcomers have a higher rate of retention of new hires, leading to a number of direct benefits to the employer (Ontario 2011, 44). This work could start by evaluating internal human resources policies, such as cultural awareness and Canadian work practices training – of which respondent employers commonly suggested could be improved upon internally.



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