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Perceptions of Community Welcoming: Measuring Francophone Individuals' Experiences and Satisfaction with Services in Northern Ontario

What Makes a Welcoming Community? (Series)

By: Karly Mabee

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Land Acknowledgement

NPI would like to acknowledge the First Peoples on whose traditional territories we live and work. NPI is grateful for the opportunity to have our offices located on these lands and thank all the generations of people who have taken care of this land.

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 Wahnapiitae 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.

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Author's calculations are based on data available at the time of publication and are therefore subject to change.

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About the Partner: City of Greater Sudbury

The City of Greater Sudbury is centrally located in Northeastern Ontario at the convergence of three major highways. It is situated on the Canadian Shield in the Great Lakes Basin and is composed of a rich mix of urban, suburban, rural and wilderness environments. Greater Sudbury is 3,627 square kilometres in area, making it the geographically largest municipality in Ontario and second largest in Canada.

In 2018, Greater Sudbury was home to approximately 166,000 people. It is a multicultural and truly bilingual community. Greater Sudbury is home to the third largest French population outside of Quebec. Approximately 38 per cent of people identify as knowing both official languages. Italian, Finnish, German, Ukrainian and Polish are the top five non official languages spoken in the City. More than six per cent of people living in the City are First Nations.

This research was made possible through the City of Greater Sudbury's workforce and immigration initiatives which are funded by FedNor and focus on increasing workforce and newcomer capacity in the region.

About the Northern Analyst Collective:

The Northern Analyst Collective, a project of Northern Policy Institute, will allow members to "time share" a professional policy analyst. By merging our collective resources we can ensure that the smallest municipality or local charity can access high-end skills at an affordable price.



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

Northern Ontario's demographics have been shifting rapidly over the last decades. The aging labour force combined with the higher rates of youth out-migration, and the declining birth rates, coupled with COVID-19 pandemic-related disruptions to immigration, have created unique challenges for the sustainable development of Northern Ontario's communities. In this demographic context, it is more important than ever for Northern Ontario regions to focus on attracting and retaining more people and work on pressing issues such as racism, reconciliation, and welcoming to strengthen these efforts.

For this purpose, the "Individual Experience Survey" was created by Northern Policy Institute in partnership with various organizations to unpack and measure people's experiences and perspectives of living in Northern Ontario. The survey measures and assesses individuals' satisfaction with public and support services and related resources, as well as their perceptions of the welcoming efforts in their communities. 656 unique responses were collected, of which 183 participants identified as having either advanced or fluent proficiency in French, a 28 per cent Francophone response rate.

Below are some key findings and recommendations:

1. Overall, Francophone respondents in Northern Ontario were generally satisfied with the public services offered in their community. That being said, the findings suggest that the greatest opportunities for improvement of services in the Northeast would be in religious and cultural services, diversity and inclusion services, and public transportation. In the Northwest, improvement could be sought in the healthcare system, diversity and inclusion services, and public transportation.
2. In terms of support services for Francophone immigrants, just over a third (35 per cent) of respondents had difficulty accessing support services. Given that the most prominent support service providers are friends or family, universities or colleges, and online, there might be an opportunity to leverage these avenues to increase support opportunities.
3. Although most respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their employment situation, the factors that contributed most to making Francophone individuals feel welcome in Northern Ontario were primarily economic. Investment in welcoming infrastructure and labour market integration for immigrants and diverse (including linguistic) groups in the region should also be explored.



Introduction

In February 2022 Northern Policy Institute (NPI), in partnership with organizations across the regions of Northern Ontario, carried out a survey initiative aimed at leveraging individual resources to collect consistent, comparable data to inform decision-making at the local, regional, provincial, and national levels. Given that the demographics of many Northern Ontario regions are shifting due to an aging labour force, high out-migration among younger generations seeking education or employment, and declining birth rates, it is more important than ever that resources be focused on racism, reconciliation, and welcoming in order to strengthen attraction and retention. Immigration, reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, and multicultural initiatives are ways to address these challenges in Northern Ontario, as is ensuring that existing populations can participate fully in the community.

To measure the experiences and perspectives of individuals living in Northern Ontario communities, NPI in partnership with various organizations created the "Individual Experience Survey." The goal of this survey was to measure and assess individuals' satisfaction with support services and related resources in their communities, as well as the welcoming efforts of each community. This analysis will look specifically at Francophones currently residing in Northern Ontario. The survey was open from February 1, 2022, to February 22, 2022, and anyone residing in Northern Ontario was eligible to complete it. The survey was made available in both English and French. Overall, 656 unique responses were collected, of which 183 identified as having either advanced or fluent proficiency in French, making up the Francophone response rate for the purpose of this analysis.

Methodology

The Individual Experience Survey was distributed online via a survey link. The link to the survey was made available on NPI's website and on that of many of the partner organizations, as well as through newsletters and targeted advertisements on social media and Google, followed up by direct outreach through personal emails, phone calls, and word of mouth. The survey was divided into the following sections: general information, immigration information, Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot usage, service use, student experience, employment situation, welcoming community, and spousal questions. Through the use of logic paths, respondents were directed to questions based on their responses to demographic indicators throughout the survey.

For the purpose of this summary, the responses of Francophone individuals residing in Northern Ontario were used to analyse satisfaction with public services, accessibility of support services for immigrants, employment satisfaction, factors that influence feeling welcomed, and student welcoming and retention.¹ These reports also are available for the general population in Greater Sudbury, Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Timmins, and North Bay, as they are all participating in the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot project. It should be noted that limitations of this research include a small sample size and a non-random sample based on participant self-selection, leaving results unable to be generalized for the population at large.

Demographics

Northern Ontario has two economic regions: Northeast and Northwest Ontario. The 2021 census population for Northeast Ontario was 557,220 and for Northwest Ontario, 232,299.² Both regions have experienced growth since 2016, with a 1.6 per cent increase in the Northeast and a 0.3 per cent increase in the Northwest. Over the same period, the entire province experienced a population increase of 5.8 per cent. As of 2021, 18.6 per cent of the population of the Northeast identified as Francophone and 2.3 per cent in the Northwest, compared with 19.6 per cent nationally. The Francophone population of the Individual Survey for Northern Ontario overall was 31 per cent. Since approximately 80 per cent of Francophone respondents resided in Northeast Ontario, almost all findings are presented for Northern Ontario generally.

¹ Limited data prevented in the inclusion of Indigenous respondents.

² The "thematic" sections of the 2021 census are released throughout 2022.

Findings

Northeastern Ontario

Satisfaction with public services:

Overall, Francophone respondents from communities in Northeastern Ontario expressed mixed satisfaction with services.³ They were most satisfied with the public education system (71 per cent), followed by telecommunication and internet services (67 per cent), and emergency services (60 per cent). The greatest dissatisfaction among Francophone respondents on average was with religious and cultural services (45 per cent), diversity and inclusion services (43 per cent), and public transportation (29 per cent). By comparison, a 2018 national survey found that 71 per cent of Canadians were satisfied with the public education system and 59 per cent with public transportation (EnviroNics Institute 2019). Comparing these findings suggests that Francophone respondents from Northeast Ontario are equally satisfied with the public education system as Canadians on average, but less satisfied with public transportation.

Northwestern Ontario

Satisfaction with public services:

Overall, Francophone respondents from communities in Northwestern Ontario expressed dissatisfaction with services.⁴ They were most satisfied with the public education system (79 per cent), emergency services (74 per cent), and telecommunication and internet services (65 per cent). Dissatisfaction, on average, was expressed with the health care system (53 per cent), diversity and inclusion services (48 per cent), and public transportation (25 per cent). Francophone respondents from the Northwest are more satisfied with the public education system than Canadians on average, but less satisfied with public transportation. Findings suggests that respondents from Sault Ste. Marie were less satisfied with these services than Canadians on average.

Northern Ontario

Accessibility of support services:

Of respondents who identified as Francophone immigrants currently residing in Northern Ontario and had sought support services, approximately 65 per cent indicated that they had had no problems or difficulties obtaining support services.⁵ The remaining 35 per cent indicated that they have had problems or difficulties in obtaining support services. The main sources of support, in order of most unanimous use by respondents, were universities or colleges, friends or family, and online. Respondents were least likely to have used not-for-profit service providers, municipalities or municipal organizations, or for-profit service providers.

Employment status and satisfaction:

Approximately 51 per cent of Francophone respondents from across Northern Ontario were employed full time, while 26 per cent worked part time,⁶ 10 per cent of respondents were unemployed and looking for work, and 13 per cent were not participating in the labour force. Overall, 60 per cent of Francophone respondents were satisfied with their employment situation. Of those who were employed full time, 83 per cent were also either satisfied or extremely satisfied. Individuals who were employed part time had a satisfaction rate of 44 per cent. The least satisfied respondents were those who were unemployed and looking for work (57 per cent). The literature suggests that employment satisfaction is an indicator of retention in the workplace (Cowin et al. 2008; Tarim, Zizys, and Yang 2019; Yap et al. 2013). Additional analysis of Francophone immigrant employment satisfaction in Northern Ontario demonstrates that immigrant respondents were less satisfied with their employment situation than Canadian citizens (see Figure 1).⁷

3 Since the sample size for this question varies between indicators, the percentage was calculated based on those who indicated satisfaction with the service, divided by the number of respondents who had used the given indicator. The sample size for the indicators ranges from 94 to 125 individuals.

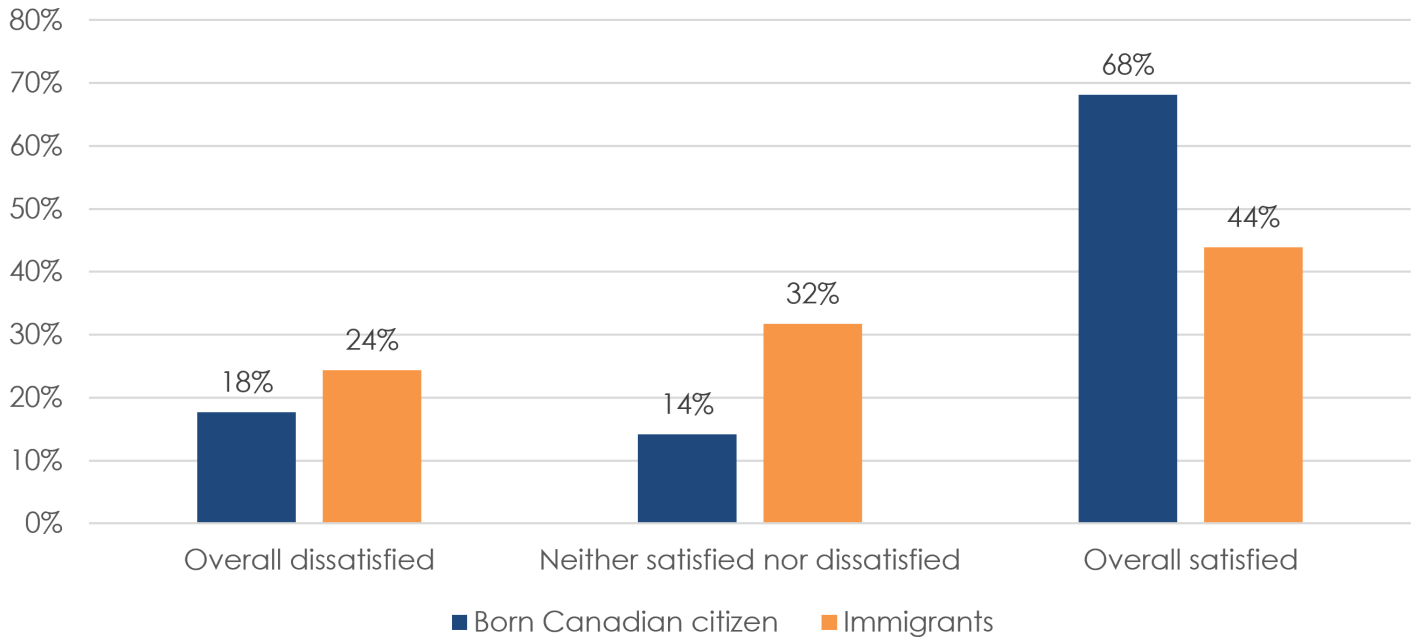
4 Since the sample size for this question varies between indicators, the percentage was calculated based on those who indicated satisfaction with the service, divided by the number of respondents who had used the given indicator. The sample size for the indicators ranges from 24 to 34 individuals.

5 The sample size for this question is based on those who identified as a Francophone immigrant and reside in Northern Ontario (n=34).

6 The sample size for the employment indicator is n=148.

7 The sample size for this indicator was based on those who reside in Northern Ontario and identified as an immigrant and those who were born in Canada and identified as Francophone (n=155).

Figure 1: Employment Satisfaction by Immigration Status



Note: The term "Immigrants" is defined as individuals who indicated their migration status as a temporary resident, study permit holder, temporary resident, work permit holder, permanent resident, refugee claimant, or naturalized Canadian citizen.

Source: Author's calculations, Northern Policy Institute, Measurement Month: Individual Experience Survey, February 2022, n=155.

Factors of welcoming:

Overall, Francophone respondents from Northern Ontario expressed that all welcoming factors would contribute to making them feel settled.⁸ The factors that respondents from Northern Ontario Francophones indicated would contribute most to making them feel welcome (see Figure 2) were having a good place to live (93 per cent), having a good job (87 per cent), and having enough money to live well (84 per cent). Factors that were less, but still, important were knowledge of the community (78 per cent), connection with members in the community (68 per cent) and participation in local organizations (68 per cent). These results reflect the work done by the Regina Regional Local Immigration Partnership, which looked at the characteristics of a welcoming community in relation to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. This model

suggests that physiological needs must be met before more social needs of belonging (Multicultural Council of Saskatchewan 2017). The Individual Experience Survey results demonstrate similar findings, with housing, employment, and financial security taking priority for respondents over community connection and participation.

⁸ The sample size for this question varied between welcoming factors, therefore the percentage was calculated based on those who indicated the given factor was important, divided by the number of respondents of the given factor. The sample size for the various factors ranged from 157 to 159 individuals.

Figure 2: Importance of Welcoming Factors



Source: Author's calculations, Northern Policy Institute, Measurement Month: Individual Experience Survey, February 2022, n=157-159.

Student welcoming and retention:

Analysis of Francophone respondents from across all the regions of Northern Ontario suggests that approximately 69 per cent of student respondents found their community welcoming.⁹ Additionally, 38 per cent of respondents were planning to stay in their community after graduation. Approximately 53 per cent of Francophone student respondents who felt welcome in their community were planning to stay in their community after graduation, while 20 per cent of student respondents who did not find their community welcoming were still planning on staying in their community. This relationship between student welcoming and retention is interesting, and could use further exploration.



⁹ The sample size for Francophone students living in Northern Ontario is n=58.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings from the Individual Experience Survey suggest that Francophone respondents in Northern Ontario were generally satisfied with the public services offered in their community. The survey findings suggest that the greatest opportunities for improvement of services in the Northeast would be in religious and cultural services, diversity and inclusion services, and public transportation. In the Northwest, improvement could be sought in the healthcare system, diversity and inclusion services, and public transportation. In terms of support services for Francophone immigrants, just over a third (35 per cent) of respondents had difficulty accessing support services. Given that the most prominent support service providers are friends or family, universities or colleges, and online, there might be an opportunity to leverage these avenues to increase support opportunities. Although most respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their employment situation, the factors that contributed most to making Francophone individuals feel welcome in Northern Ontario were primarily economic. Investment in welcoming infrastructure and labour market integration for immigrants and diverse groups in the region should also be explored.



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About Northern Policy Institute

Northern Policy Institute is Northern Ontario's independent, evidence-driven think tank. We perform research, analyze data, and disseminate ideas. Our mission is to enhance Northern Ontario's capacity to take the lead position on socio-economic policy that impacts our communities, our province, our country, and our world.

We believe in partnership, collaboration, communication, and cooperation. Our team seeks to do inclusive research that involves broad engagement and delivers recommendations for specific, measurable action. Our success depends on our partnerships with other entities based in or passionate about Northern Ontario.

Our permanent offices are in Thunder Bay, Sudbury, and Kirkland Lake. During the summer months we have satellite offices in other regions of Northern Ontario staffed by teams of Experience North placements. These placements are university and college students working in your community on issues important to you and your neighbours.

Related Research

Magnetic North 2021 Conference Report, February 2022
Mercedes Labelle

A Reason to Stay: Retaining Youth in Northern Ontario, March 2022
Andre Ouellet & Dr. Martin Lefebvre

Addressing the Cuts Left Behind: Anti-Racism and Discrimination Initiatives for an Inclusive Northern Ontario, February 2022
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