

Policy Note #30 | December 2022

Perceptions of Community Welcoming: Measuring Individuals' Experiences and Satisfaction with Services in Sault Ste. Marie

What Makes a Welcoming Community? (Series)



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By: Karly Mabee

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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 Author

Karly Mabee



Karly Mabee is a former Policy Analyst at Northern Policy Institute. She graduated with her Master of Applied Politics after completing an Honours Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Leadership at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, ON. Karly's professional interests are primarily in data analysis, research, and preparing communications materials. In her free time Karly enjoys camping, hiking, and other outdoor activities.



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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. The survey was administered from February 1, 2022, to February 22, 2022. 656 unique responses were collected, of which 29 participants identified as currently residing in Sault Ste. Marie.

Below are some key findings and recommendations:

1. Overall, respondents from Sault Ste. Marie 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 would be in diversity and inclusion services, public transportation, and religious and cultural services.
2. In terms of support services for immigrants, close to one-third (30 per cent) of respondents had difficulty accessing them. Given that the most prominent support service providers are friends or family and universities or colleges, there might be an opportunity to leverage these avenues to increase support opportunities.
3. Although most respondents employed full-time indicated that they were satisfied with their employment situation, the factors that contribute most to making individuals feel welcome in Sault Ste. Marie were primarily economic. Investment in welcoming infrastructure and labour market integration for immigrants and diverse 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 efforts. 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. 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 29 identified as currently residing in Sault Ste. Marie.

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 individuals residing in Sault Ste. Marie were used to analyse satisfaction with public services, accessibility of support services for immigrants, employment satisfaction, factors that influence feeling welcomed, Indigenous welcoming, and student welcoming and retention. These reports are also available for Thunder Bay, Greater Sudbury, Timmins, and North Bay, as they are all participating in the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot project. A report also was produced for French speakers. 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

The 2021 census population for Sault Ste. Marie was 76,731, a decrease of 1.8 per cent since 2016.¹ Over the same period, the entire province experienced a population increase of 5.8 per cent. As of 2021, 2.9 per cent of the population of Sault Ste. Marie identified as Francophone, compared with 19.6 per cent nationally. The Francophone population of the Individual Survey for Sault Ste. Marie was 24 per cent. Additionally, in 2021 there were 9,860 Indigenous peoples in Sault Ste. Marie, accounting for 13.1 per cent of the population, compared with 12.5 per cent in 2016. Nationally, 5.0 per cent of the population identified as Indigenous in 2021. The Indigenous population of the Individual Survey for Sault Ste. Marie was three per cent.

¹ The "thematic" sections of the 2021 census are released throughout 2022.

Findings

Satisfaction with public services:

Overall, respondents from Sault Ste. Marie expressed satisfaction with services.² They were most satisfied with telecommunication and internet services (69 per cent), followed by the public education system (67 per cent) and emergency services (56 per cent). The greatest dissatisfaction among respondents on average was with diversity and inclusion services (53 per cent), followed by public transportation (47 per cent) and religious and cultural services (35 per cent). By comparison, a 2018 national survey found that 71 per cent of Canadians were satisfied with the public education system, while 59 per cent were satisfied with their public transportation system (Environics Institute 2019). Comparing these findings suggests that respondents from Sault Ste. Marie were less satisfied with these services than Canadians on average.

Accessibility of support services:

Of respondents who identified as immigrants currently residing in Sault Ste. Marie and had sought support services, approximately 70 per cent indicated that they had had no problems or difficulties obtaining support services.³ The remaining 30 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 friends or family, and universities or colleges. Respondents were least likely to have used not-for-profit service providers, municipalities or municipal organizations, online, government-funded service providers, or for-profit service providers.

Employment status and satisfaction:

Approximately 42 per cent of Sault Ste. Marie respondents were employed full time, while eight per cent worked part time⁴, 15 per cent were unemployed and looking for work, and another 35 per cent were not participating in the labour force. Overall, 46 per cent of respondents from Sault Ste. Marie were satisfied with their employment situation. Of those who were employed full time, 64 per cent were also either satisfied or extremely satisfied. Individuals who were employed part time had a satisfaction rate of 50 per cent. The least satisfied respondents were those who were unemployed and looking for work. 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 immigrant employment satisfaction in Sault Ste. Marie demonstrates that 17 per cent immigrant respondents were satisfied with their employment situation, compared with 69 per cent of respondents who were Canadian citizens (see Figure 1).⁵

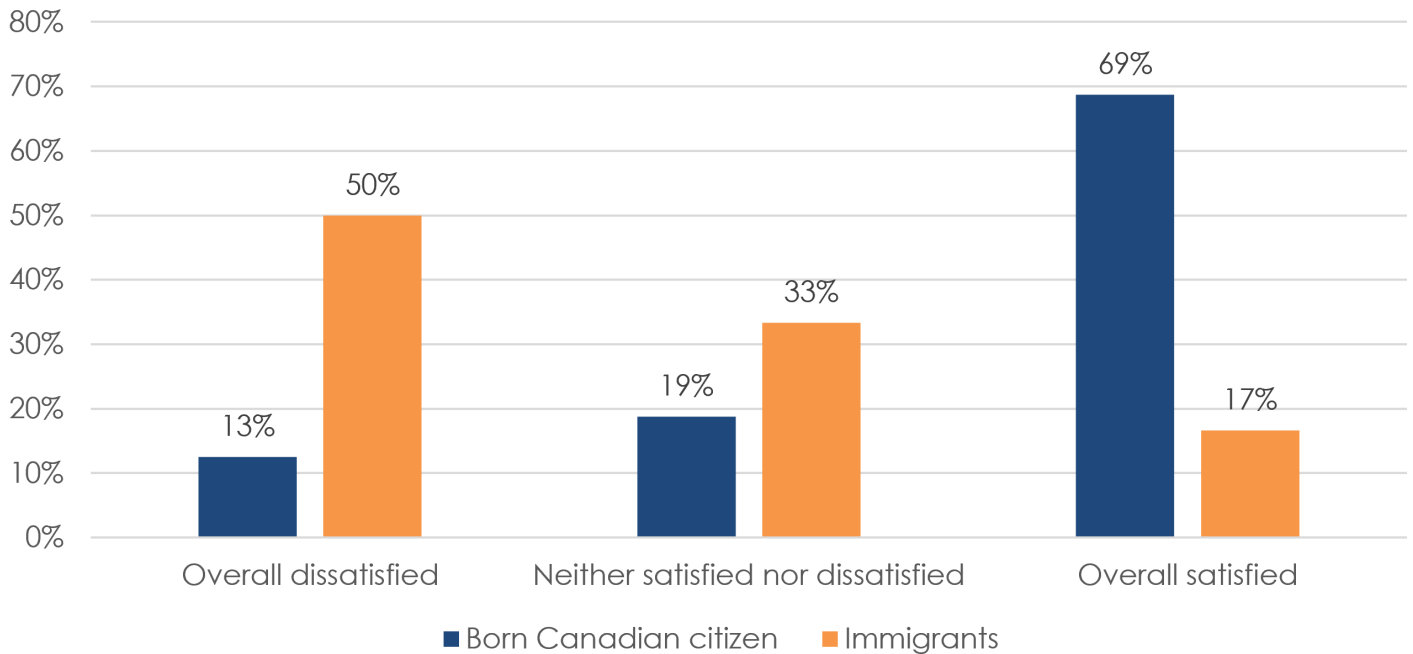
2 Since the sample size for this question varies between indicators, the percentage was calculated based on those who indicated satisfaction with the service, divided by the number of respondents who had used the given indicator. The sample size for the indicators ranges from 17 to 26 individuals.

3 The sample size for this question is based on those who identified as an immigrant and reside in Sault Ste. Marie (n=10).

4 The sample size for the employment indicator is n=26.

5 The sample size for this indicator was based on those who identified as an immigrant and those who were born in Canada and reside in Sault Ste. Marie (n=268).



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=28.

Factors of welcoming:

Overall, respondents from Sault Ste. Marie expressed that all welcoming factors would contribute to making them feel settled.⁶ The factors that respondents from Sault Ste. Marie indicated would contribute most to making them feel welcome (see Figure 2) were having enough money to live well (96 per cent), having a good place to live (88 per cent), and feeling that their family would do well in the community (88 per cent). Factors that were less, but still, important were connection with members in the community (79 per cent) and participation in local organizations (76 per cent); see

Figure 2. 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.

⁶ 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 24 to 25 individuals.

Figure 2: Importance of Welcoming Factors



Source: Author's calculations, Northern Policy Institute, Measurement Month: Individual Experience Survey, February 2022, n=24-25.

Indigenous peoples welcoming:

Although evaluation of Indigenous respondents at the community level was not possible given limited data availability, an analysis can be undertaken of Indigenous responses from across Northern Ontario.⁷ Based on the analysis of several welcoming indicators, the survey data suggest that Indigenous respondents felt that economic factors were more influential than social factors on feeling settled in the community: 75 per cent felt economic factors would contribute greatly to making them feel welcome, whereas 44 per cent said social factors would do so. In terms of prioritizing services, Indigenous respondents indicated they would benefit more from positive economic changes, such as more affordable housing and employment opportunities, than from social welcoming.

Student welcoming and retention:

Community-level data for students was unavailable given the limited available sample size. Analysis of responses from across all of Northern Ontario suggests that approximately 66 per cent of student respondents found their community welcoming.⁸ Additionally, 46 per cent of respondents were planning to stay in their community after graduation. Approximately 59 per cent who felt welcome in their community were planning to stay in their community after graduation, while 27 per cent of 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.

⁷ The sample size for Indigenous peoples living in Northern Ontario is n=57.

⁸ The sample size for students living in Northern Ontario is n=105.

Program Spotlight: Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot Participants

Although evaluation of Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP) respondents at the community level was not possible given limited data availability, analysis can be undertaken of responses from across Northern Ontario.⁹ RNIP respondents most frequently had one year of continuous paid work experience in the previous three years in one occupation outside Canada when applying to the RNIP, and most commonly found out about the RNIP from friends and/or family in Canada, or through independent research of official information sources (Government of Canada, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada [IRCC]). The stage of the application process that respondents found easiest was submitting an application for community recommendation, followed closely by meeting the minimum RNIP requirements (education, language, work experience, etc.). Respondents identified applying to IRCC for permanent residence as third easiest; receiving an acceptable job offer in the community came last, but was still easy. Overall, respondents who used the RNIP program were satisfied or very satisfied with all aspects of program delivery: the time it took to receive a community recommendation or permanent residence approval, communication with local RNIP administrators, support from local RNIP administrators, the cost of qualifying for the RNIP, and the overall process of applying to the RNIP program.

When assessing employment, the most common industries in which RNIP respondents were employed were accommodation and food services, healthcare and social assistance, and manufacturing. Additionally, 58 per cent of RNIP respondents were either satisfied or extremely satisfied with their employment situation.

Regarding settlement services, almost all RNIP respondents indicated that they had not had any problems or difficulties obtaining support services. Approximately 67 per cent of respondents indicated that economic factors would contribute greatly to making them feel welcome, whereas 50 per cent said social factors would do so. The most influential welcoming factors were having a good place to live, a good job, knowledge of the local community, and feeling that their family would do well in the region. Participation in local organizations and connection with members of the community were less important.

When asked about satisfaction with public services, RNIP respondents who engaged with public services were most satisfied with religious and cultural services, telecommunications and internet access, and the public education system. RNIP respondents were least, yet still, satisfied with public transportation and the healthcare system.



⁹ The sample size for individuals who have used the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot living in Northern Ontario is n=14.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings from the Individual Experience Survey suggest that respondents from Sault Ste. Marie were generally satisfied with the public services offered in their community. The survey findings suggest that the greatest opportunities for improvement of services would be in diversity and inclusion services, public transportation, and religious and cultural services. In terms of support services for immigrants, close to one-third (30 per cent) of respondents had difficulty accessing them. Given that the most prominent support service providers are friends or family and universities or colleges, there might be an opportunity to leverage these avenues to increase support opportunities. Although most full time respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their employment situation, the factors that contribute most to making individuals feel welcome in Sault Ste. Marie 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.

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