

Policy Note #35 | December 2022

Exit Signs, Northeastern Ontario, and Out-Migration

What Makes a Welcoming Community? (Series)

By: B. Kerem Karabeyoğlu

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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.

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.

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

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Born and raised in Istanbul, Turkey, Kerem graduated in 2021 from Western University with a B.A. in Political Science. During his studies, Kerem developed a keen interest in the areas of Canadian Arctic Sovereignty and Intergovernmental Cooperation. His academic focus was also directed towards International Peace-building and Transitional Justice studies. Immediately after graduating, Kerem returned to Turkey to intern as a Junior Consultant in the Turkish Parliament. Now, back in Canada, he is pursuing his professional interests in promoting long-term sustainable development. Having experienced Northern Ontario for the first time tree-planting, he has been inspired to return to the natural beauty of the region ever since. An avid trail runner, soccer fan, and skier, Kerem is also passionate about producing music in his free time.



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

Northeastern Ontario needs, on average, 3,326 more immigrants annually (through to 2046) than the Ontario Ministry of Finance projects us to receive, to maintain our current ratio of dependents to workers. With that being said, a large part of population growth revolves around not only attracting people to these regions, but also retaining the population already here. As such, Northern Policy Institute, in collaboration with organizations across Northern Ontario, launched an exit survey to collect data on why people leave Northern Ontario communities. This survey was one of six surveys launched in February 2022 looking at the factors and experiences that contribute to the continuum of welcoming – from the individual, employer, and service provider perspective – at the community-level in Ontario's northern regions.

Although the exit survey was targeted at all out-migrants from these communities, this analysis specifically focuses on respondents that previously lived in Northeastern Ontario, and the factors contributing to their decisions to leave. More specifically, respondents were asked to consider socio-economic factors, such as their employment and housing satisfaction, opportunities present in the community, and their sense of belonging, to provide greater insight on their decision to leave. Similar reports are conducted for those that left Northwestern Ontario and Francophone respondents that previously resided anywhere in Northern Ontario.

Overall, the survey results revealed that both social and economic factors played a large role in the decision-making process when electing to leave a community. Socially, the majority of respondents in Northeastern Ontario indicated a strong sense of belonging to their previous community, though the most prevalent challenge expressed by the respondents is the lack of social interaction with other residents while living in their previous community.

Looking at economic factors, a small majority of respondents indicated they were satisfied with their employment situation, but also indicated the presence of low salaries and a lack of diversity in the labour market. In fact, the most common reasons for out-migration were the presence of better job opportunities elsewhere. Additionally, there was slight dissatisfaction with accessing services, like medical, dental, or legal services.

In consideration of the survey findings specific to those that out-migrated from Northeastern Ontario, some report recommendations include:

1. The greatest opportunity for improvement of services would be in the social and job-seeking areas. There is also room for more improvement in the access to medical, dental, and legal services offered within these communities.
2. Investment in labour market integration for immigrants, Indigenous peoples, and the domestic population is an opportunity for the regions to better retain its residents. Additionally, promoting diverse job opportunities can aid in retention.
3. Communities and organizations can work to promote socialization through virtual or in-person workshops, events, and activities to connect newcomers and those already living in the communities.

The above measures help address some of the challenges respondents mentioned facing in their previous communities. Addressing and mitigating these issues might help reduce the number of out-migrants from Northeastern Ontario communities. Moving forward, to track the progress of initiatives implemented to retain the existing population, community-level data is needed to inform decision-making and program evaluation.

Introduction

Many Northern Ontario communities are experiencing a demographic shift and a population decline. A population that is aging at a faster rate than the rest of the province, paired with a low birth rate and high levels of youth out-migration, can result in future labour market shortages.

To help mitigate these challenges, communities in Ontario's northern regions must prioritize attraction, retention, and welcoming, as well as ensure full labour market participation amongst the population.

To further explore this topic and inform local-level decision-making, Northern Policy Institute (NPI), in partnership with multiple organizations across the various regions of Northern Ontario, conducted a data collection initiative to assess former residents' level of satisfaction with the community in which they previously resided, and their reasons for leaving. The exit survey was open from February 1 to February 22, 2022.

The survey was conducted on individuals who had previously resided in a Northern Ontario community and have since left that community. Analysis of these results were conducted for three sub-groups: those who previously resided in Northwestern Ontario, those who previously resided in Northeastern Ontario, and those who are "fluent" or "advanced" in French and previously resided in a Northern Ontario community. Of those who responded to the exit survey, fewer than five respondents participated in the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP).

The purpose of this survey was to better understand the factors influencing out-migration from the regions of Northern Ontario.

Methodology

The questions in the survey were designed to gain a better understanding of several economic and social features that influenced respondents' decision to leave their communities. Factors such as employment and housing satisfaction, opportunities present in communities, and other social factors were included in the survey.

Distribution was done through a collective effort by organizations across Northern Ontario, and took the form of targeted social media ads, direct distribution through emails, social media posts, newsletters, information sessions, and direct reach out (personal emails, phone calls, and word of mouth). 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 French and English.

The sample size was made up of 147 respondents who were surveyed using a non-random participant self-selection online survey method. A total of 117 respondents indicated that their previous communities were in Northeastern Ontario. This paper specifically looks at those who previously resided in a Northeastern Ontario community.

The data from this region is limited. Further data collection will need to be conducted in the future to arrive at more concrete conclusions on the subject. Due to the sample size, analysis is not available at the community-level, and thus is presented at the economic region level. Additional analysis is conducted in a complementary report regarding French-Speaking respondents who formerly resided in any Northern Ontario community. Given the number of respondents for this survey, caution should be made to avoid over-generalizing these experiences to all people who previously lived in a Northeastern Ontario community.

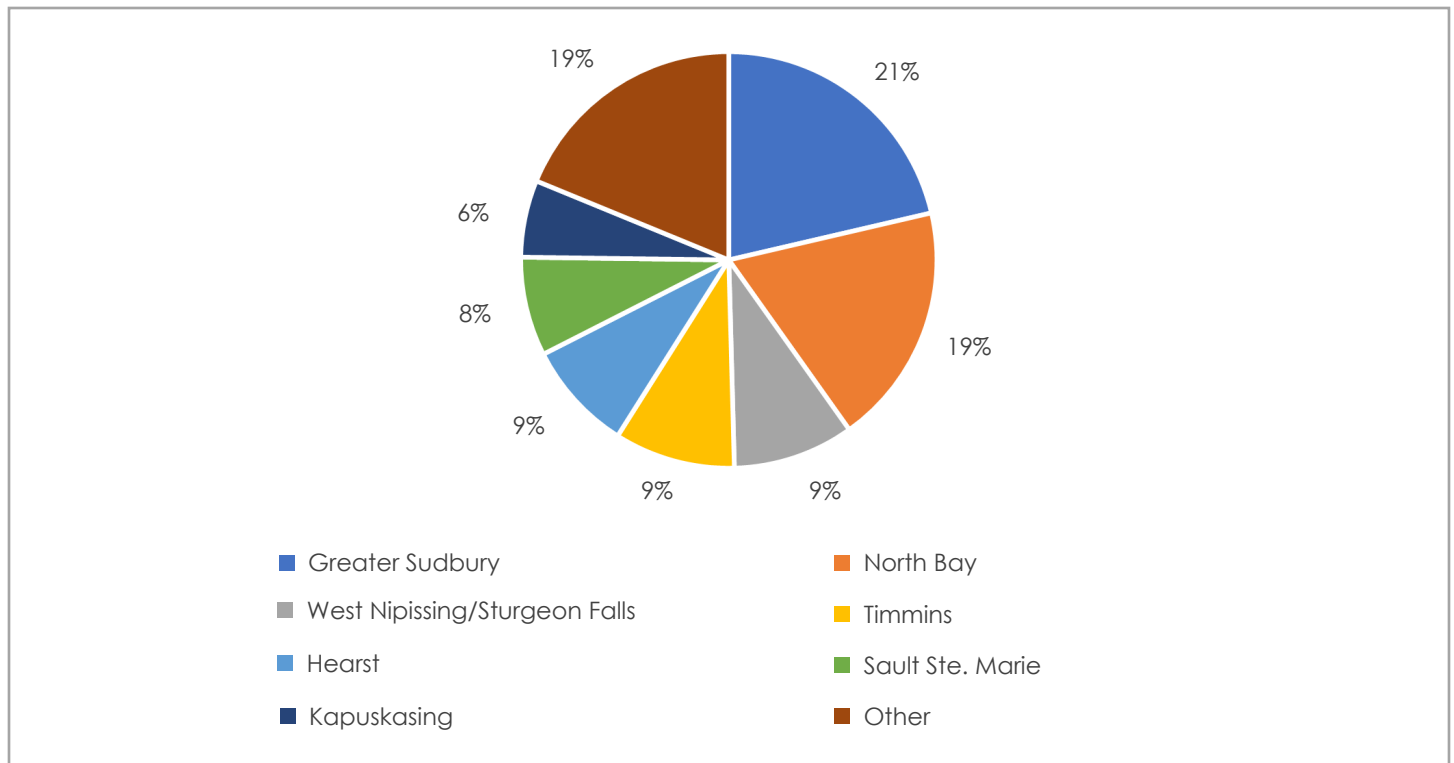


Demographics

The two highest indicated previous communities in Northeastern Ontario where respondents lived were the urban centers of Greater Sudbury (21 per cent) and North Bay (19 per cent). Comparatively, Timmins (9 per cent) and Sault Ste. Marie (8 per cent) had a lower number of out-migrant respondents. The data entry labelled 'Other' refers to communities that had less than five per cent of

the overall responses. Some of these communities include Temiskaming Shores and Kirkland Lake. Cumulatively, these communities made up 19 per cent of responses. Of the 117 respondents, some left several questions blank. Owing to this, the number of respondents (the n) of the resulting graphs fluctuates throughout the results of the survey.

Figure 1: Percentage of respondents by previous community (%)



Note: (n=117)

Of the 117 respondents, 68 per cent indicated that they identify as female and 27 per cent indicated that they identify as male.¹ Seventy-five per cent identified as

"Born Canadian Citizen" and eight per cent identified as "Permanent Resident". Furthermore, six per cent identified themselves as "Naturalized Canadian Citizens".²

¹ Five per cent of respondents identified as gender-fluid, non-binary, or did not indicate their gender.

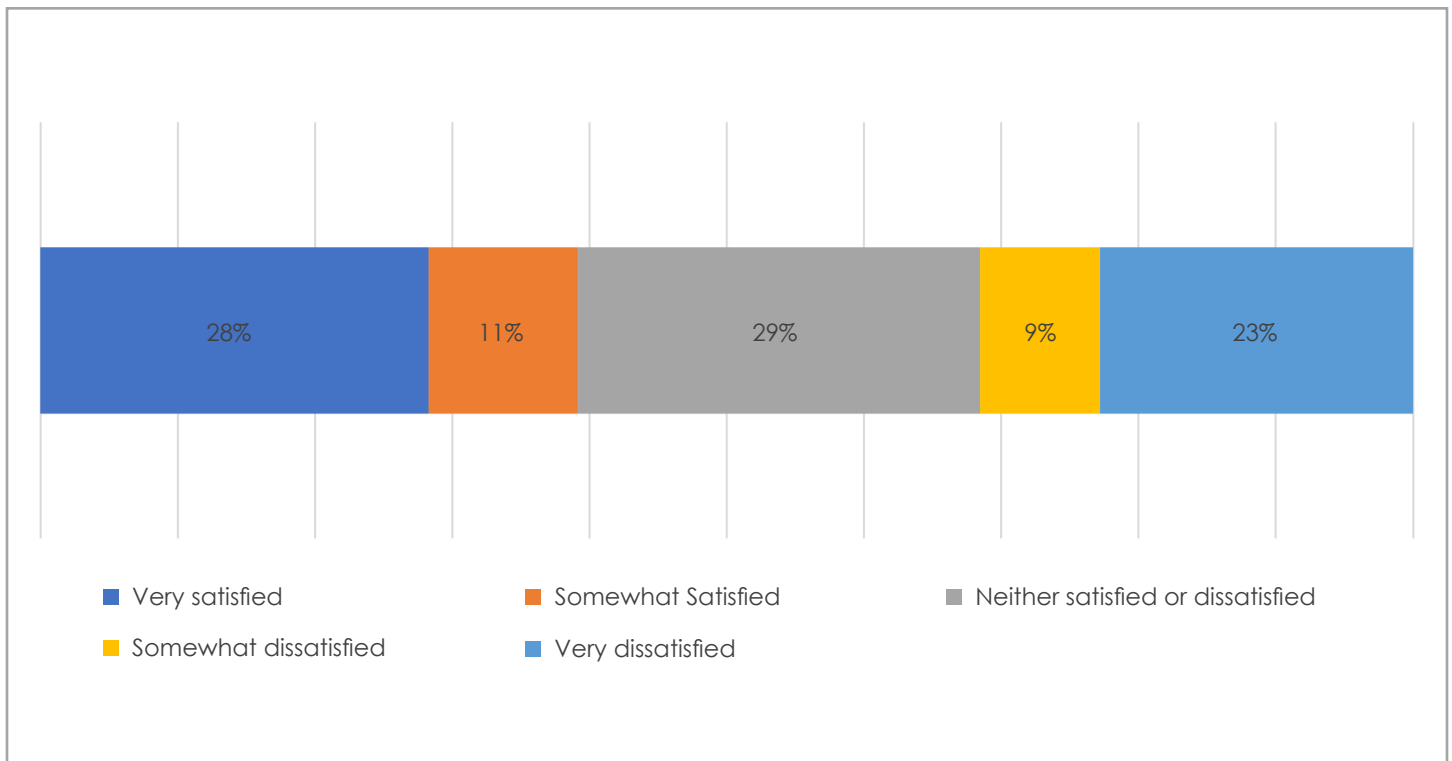
² Eleven per cent of respondents did not indicate their migration status.

Satisfaction with Employment in Previous Communities

When asked about the level of satisfaction with their employment situation in their previous communities, 29 per cent of respondents indicated that they were neutral in their opinions on the subject. Twenty-eight per cent of respondents indicated that they were very satisfied

with employment in their previous communities, while 23 per cent of respondents indicated that they were very unsatisfied. Overall, slightly more respondents tended to be satisfied with their employment in their previous community.

Figure 2: Respondents by Employment Satisfaction (%)



Note: (n=92)

Workers with former occupations in skill levels O (management jobs) and A (professional jobs that usually require a degree) were most satisfied with their employment situation in their previous community. Of those that were satisfied with their employment situation, the most common industry of employment noted was education services.

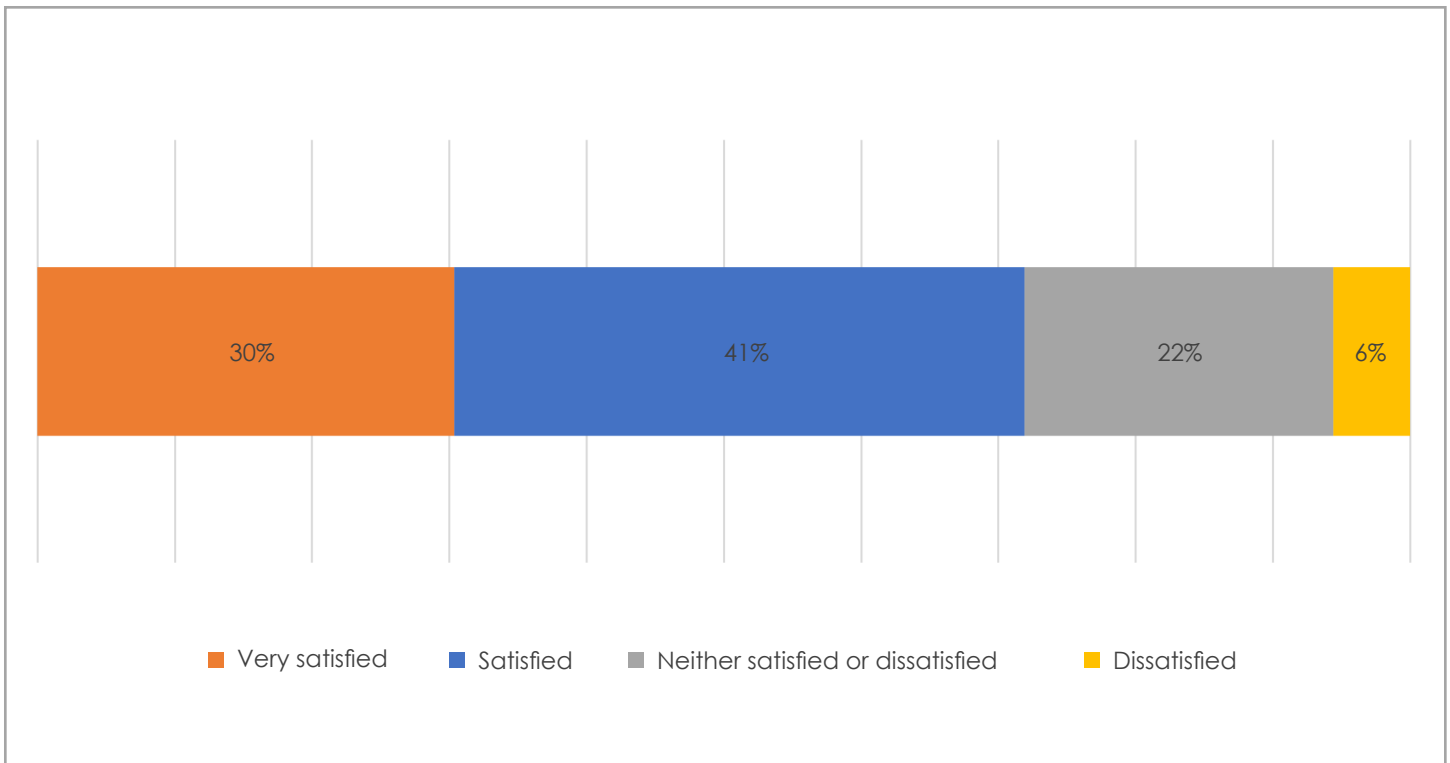
Poor pay and lack of opportunities for advancement and promotion were two of the most common reasons for employment dissatisfaction in respondents' previous communities. Not enough hours of work and the job is not in preferred profession were also common indications of employment dissatisfaction in previous communities. Twenty-seven per cent of respondents indicated that they were unemployed in their previous community.

Satisfaction with Housing in Previous Communities

A relatively high number of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the housing situation in their previous communities (41 per cent), while 30 per cent

indicated that they were very satisfied with housing. Only six per cent indicated negative opinions about housing in their previous Northeastern Ontario community.

Figure 3: Respondents by Housing Satisfaction (%)



Note: (n=90)

The most common reasons for difficulties in finding housing were related to low vacancy rates in the previous communities and respondents' financial constraints.

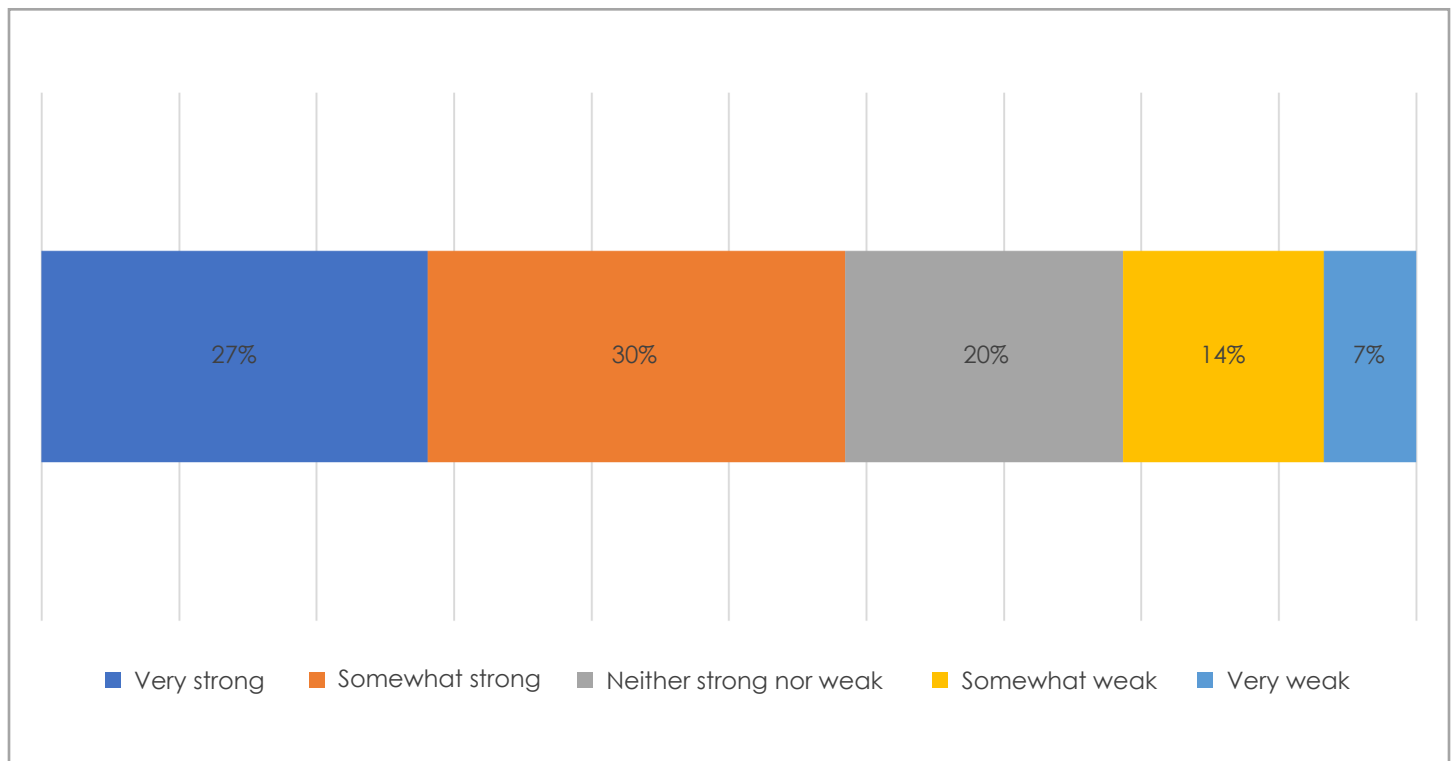
Several respondents also indicated that the available housing did not meet the needs of their families.

Sense of Belonging in Previous Communities

Fourteen per cent of respondents indicated that their sense of belonging in their previous communities was somewhat weak. On the other hand, 30 per cent indicated that they had a somewhat strong sense of belonging in their previous communities. Twenty-seven

per cent indicated that their sense of belonging was very strong, and seven per cent indicated a very weak sense of belonging. Twenty per cent of respondents indicated that their sense of belonging was neither strong nor weak.

Figure 4: Respondents by Sense of Belonging in Previous Community (%)



Note: (n=91)

Thirty-five per cent of respondents indicated that they agree that their previous community was welcoming towards newcomers. Twenty-one per cent disagreed, and 30 per cent indicated neither agree nor disagree. Forty-four per cent of respondents indicated that their families lived in their previous communities prior to arrival,

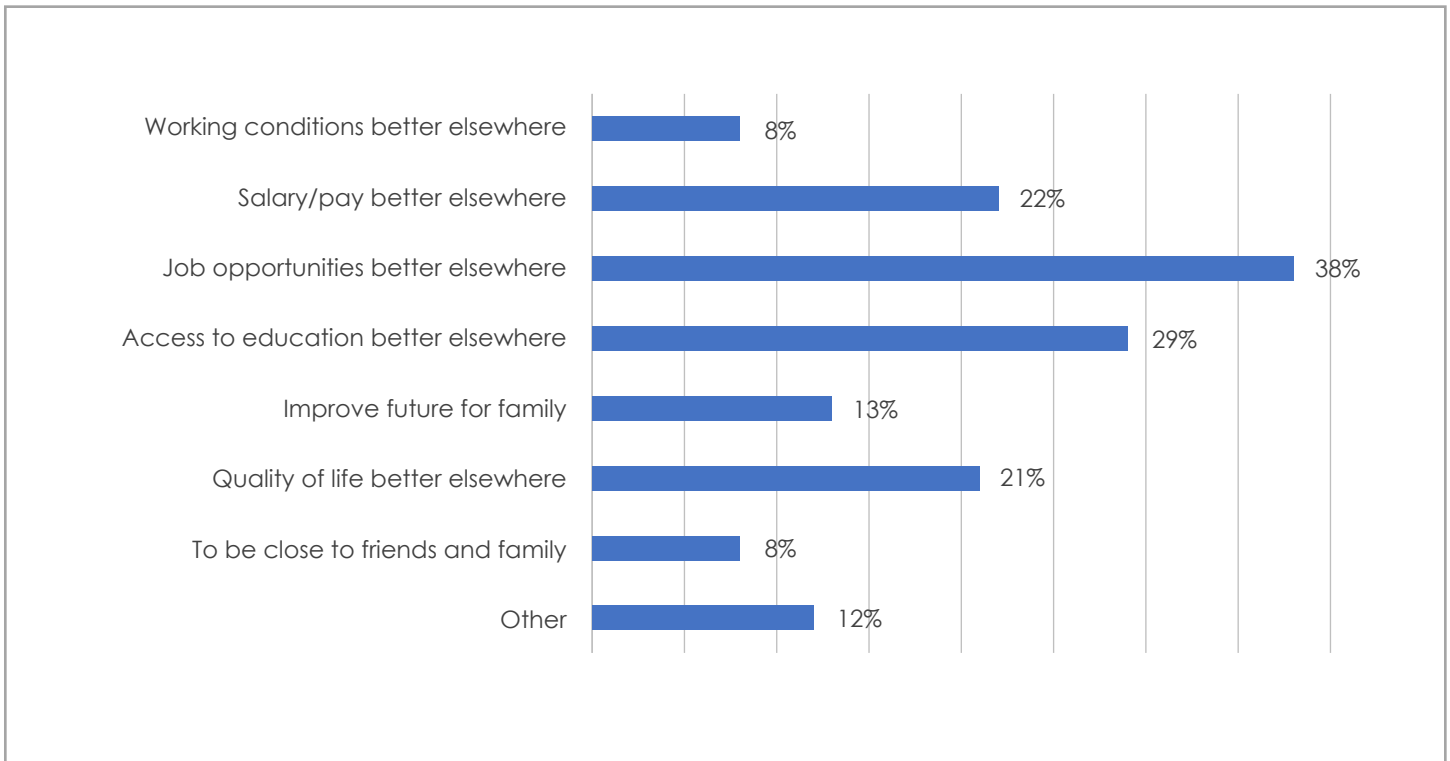
while 37 per cent of respondents indicated that they had no family members living in their previous communities prior to arrival. A lack of family was also what respondents indicated was a major reason for moving away from their previous communities.

Main Reasons for Moving Away from Previous Communities

A common notion among the respondents is that both social and economic factors play a large role in the decision-making process when leaving a community.

The highest response, at 38 per cent, was job opportunities better elsewhere, followed by access to education better elsewhere at 29 per cent. Of the 117 respondents, 12 per cent indicated 'Other' as the reason for moving away from a previous community. Some of the key reasons under this option were: wanted a more urban lifestyle, to go to university, was on contract and returned home, retirement, and closer to medical specialists and family.

Figure 5: Respondents by Reasons for Moving Away from Previous Community (%)

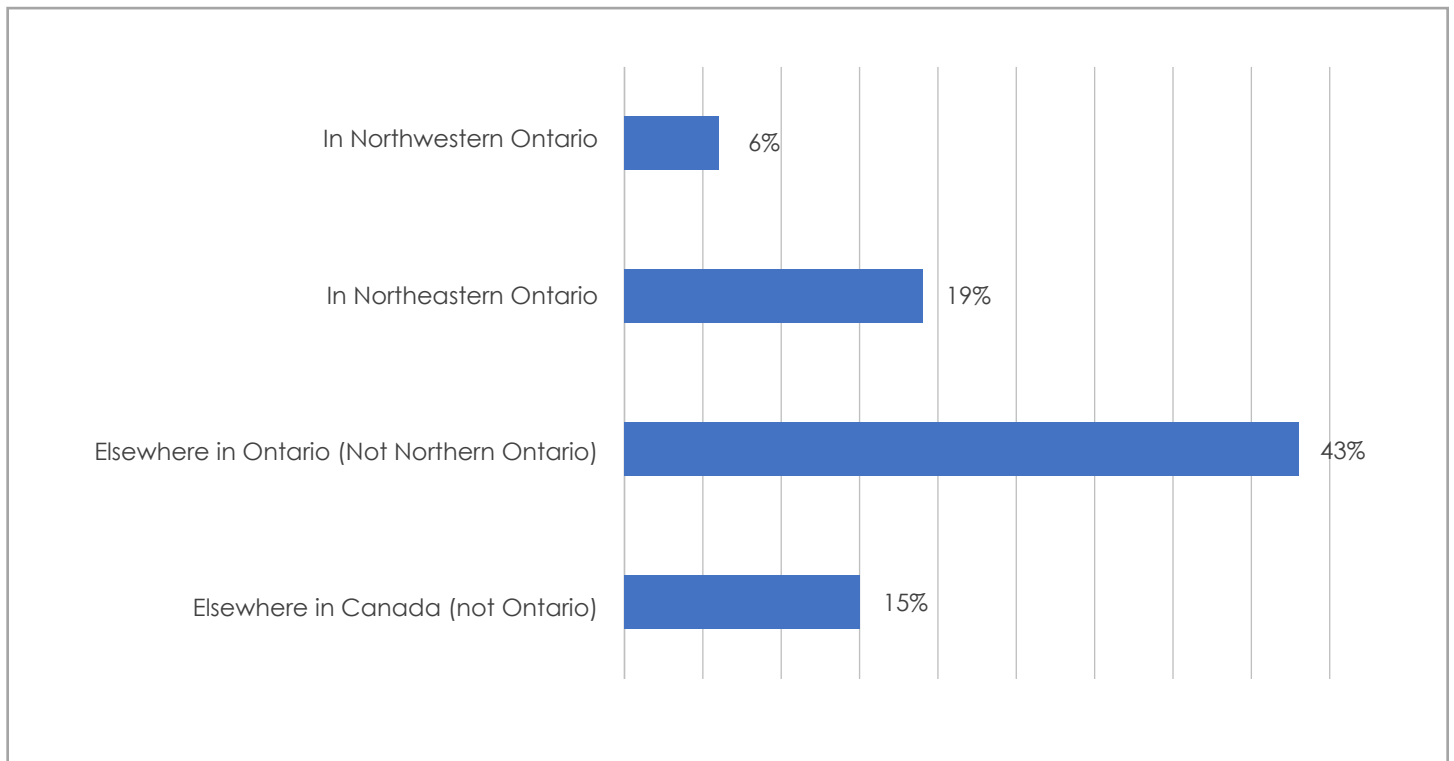


Note: (n=117)

Of the 117 total respondents, 15 per cent indicated that their current residency is elsewhere in Canada, outside of Ontario. Forty-three per cent indicated that their current residency is elsewhere in Ontario, outside of the regions of

Northern Ontario. Nineteen per cent indicated that their current residency is in Northeastern Ontario. Six per cent indicated Northwestern Ontario as their current place of residence.

Figure 6: Respondents by Current Residency (%)



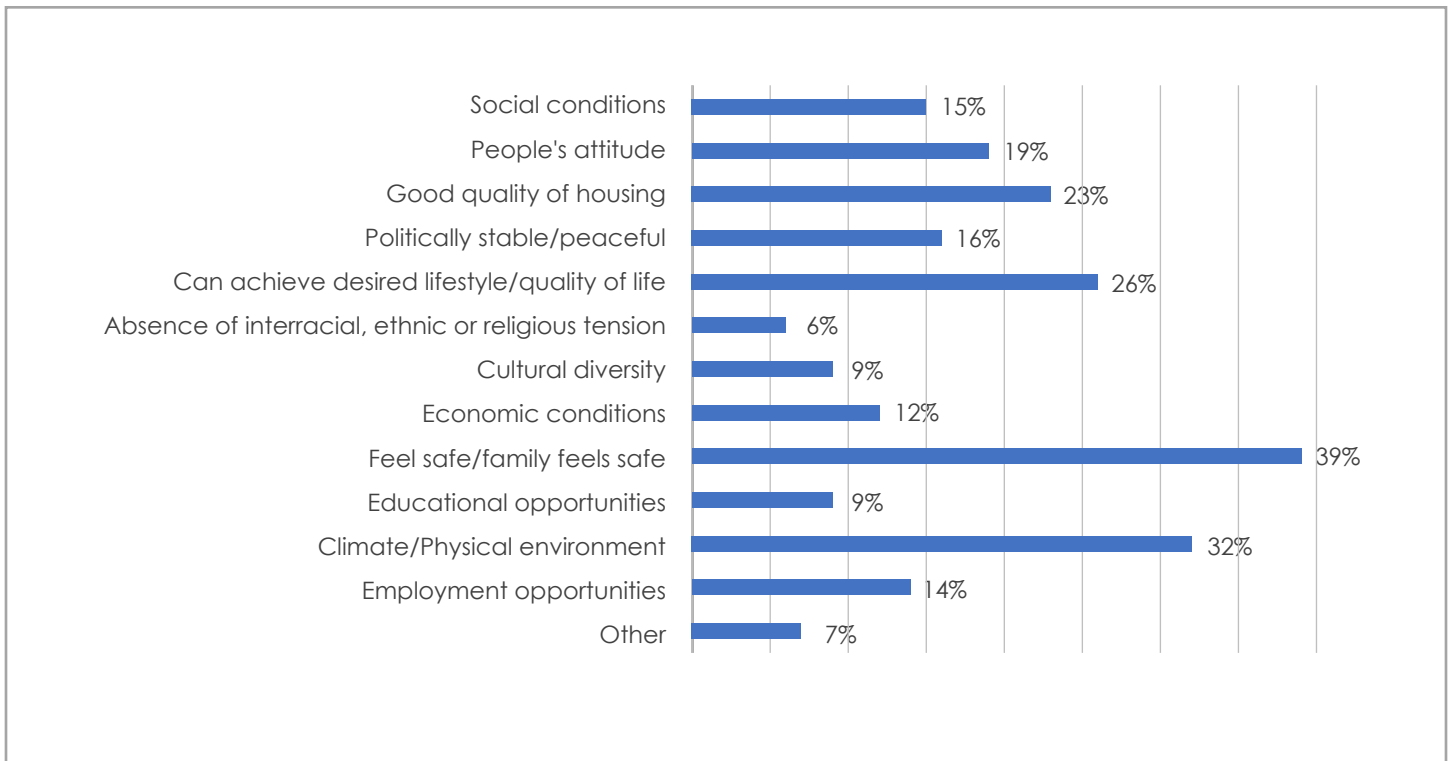
Note: (n=117)

Aspects Liked About Previous Communities

Thirty-nine per cent of respondents indicated that the safety of their family was a likable aspect of their previous communities. For 32 per cent, the climate and physical environment were the most appealing factors, and 26 per cent of respondents indicated that one

could achieve their desired lifestyle/quality of life within those previous communities. Twenty-three per cent of respondents were happy with the quality of housing within the communities of Northeastern Ontario.

Figure 7: Respondents by What They Liked About Previous Community (%)



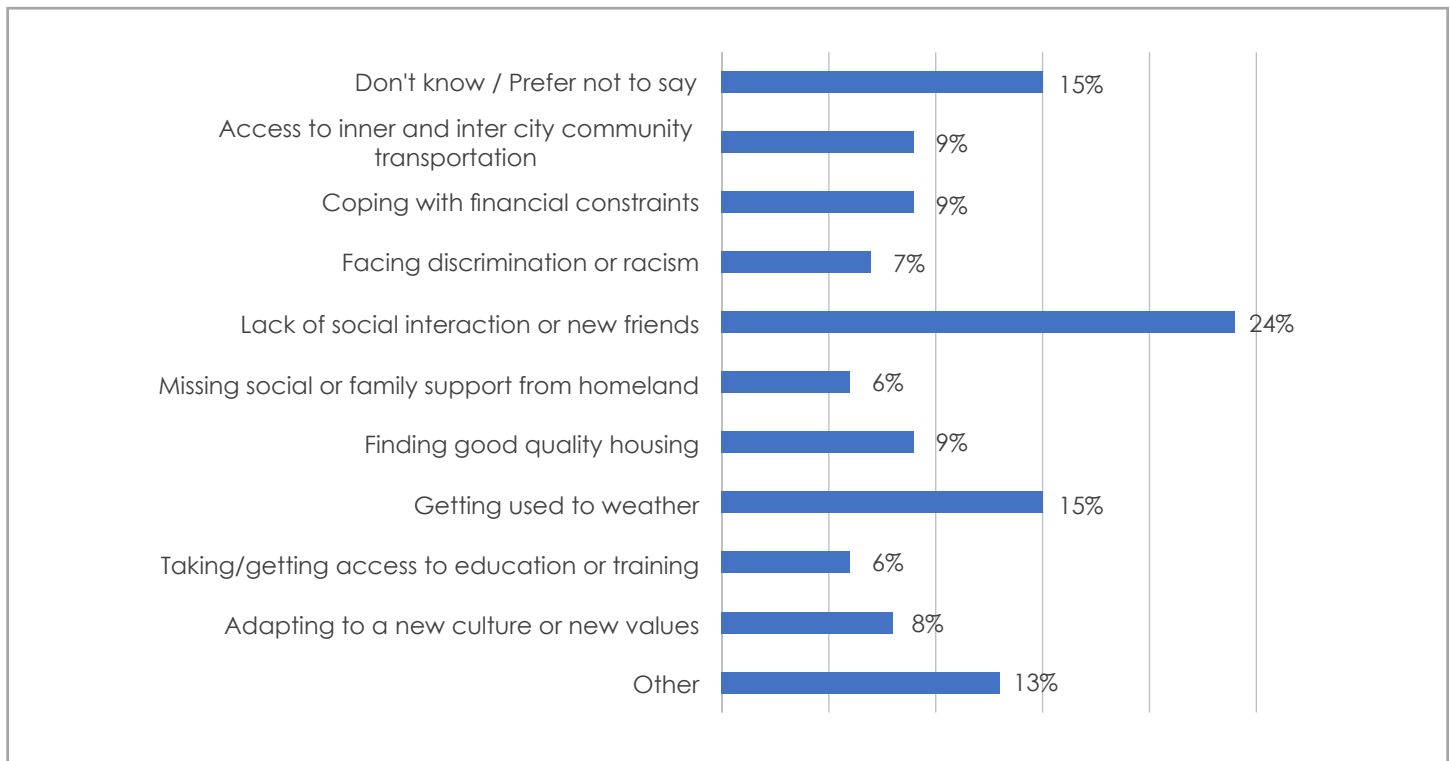
Note: (n=117)

Greatest Difficulties Following Arrival in Previous Communities

According to respondents, the greatest difficulty they faced upon arrival in their new community in Northeastern Ontario was the lack of social interaction or making new friends (24 per cent). Fifteen per cent

indicated that they had difficulties adapting to the new weather conditions in their communities. Gaining access to professional help such as medical, dental, or legal services was also an issue for respondents (15 per cent).

Figure 8: Respondents by Greatest Difficulties Following Arrival in Community (%)



Note: (n=117)

Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall, the findings from the Northeastern Ontario Exit Survey suggest that respondents from Northeastern Ontario were slightly dissatisfied with the services offered in their previous community. The survey findings suggest that **the greatest opportunity for improvement of services would be in the social and job-seeking areas. There is also room for more improvement in the access to medical, dental, and legal services offered within these communities.**

Although most respondents indicated that they are satisfied with their employment situation, the survey responses largely indicated that employment-related factors were a reason for out-migration. In addition to low salaries being an issue, a lack of diversity in the labour market opportunities is also noted. **Investment in labour market integration for immigrants, Indigenous peoples, and the domestic population is an opportunity for the region to better retain its residents. Additionally, encouraging diversity in job opportunities can be helpful with retention.** This diversity can be encouraged in a multitude of ways, such as investment into industries and occupations of growth, alignment between what is taught in schools and the skills needed in the labour market, and funding such as the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation (NOHFC) internship program and FedNor internship programs that helps businesses provide job opportunities.

The biggest challenge respondents faced in their previous communities seems to be the lack of social interaction. It is important to note, however, that the pandemic might have influenced the responses concerning their difficulties socializing. Physical distancing has led to the temporary closure of many recreational and social establishments that promoted these activities within the communities. Regardless, **communities and organizations can work to promote socialization through virtual (or in-person) workshops, events, and activities to connect newcomers and those already living in the communities.**

Moving forward, community-level data can promote informed decision-making related to out-migration in the communities of Northeastern Ontario. As such, an effort should be made across, and, in this case, beyond Northern Ontario to share, promote, and take these surveys. With granular data, there is the opportunity for comparability across regions, allowing for the identification of best practices and areas for improvement.



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

Identifying Northern Ontario's Strengths and Weaknesses in the Attraction and Retention of Newcomers
Christina Zefi

Magnetic North 2021 Conference Report: Attraction, Retention, and Welcoming in Ontario's Northern Regions
Mercedes Labelle

A Reason to Stay: Retaining Youth in Northern Ontario
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