



The Northern Attraction Series

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

By Christina Zefi

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Executive Summary

The first paper in the Northern Attraction Series explored Northern Ontario's need for newcomers (i.e. immigrants and secondary migrants). In particular, the development of a Northern Newcomer Strategy was proposed. In this second installment of the series, the author explores Northern Ontario's strengths and weaknesses in attracting and retaining newcomers through discussions with key players including local immigration partnerships, settlement agencies and post-secondary institutions.

In addition to outlining some of the actors involved in attracting and retaining newcomers, the paper highlights the challenges in this process such as a lack of collaboration between governments and the players, the greater focus on settlement efforts as opposed to settlement and recruitment, and a weak sense of community.

The paper then goes on to highlight the strengths of Northern Ontario that can be used in attraction efforts. For example, the share of recent immigrants in Northern Ontario that spend 20 per cent or more of their income on necessities such as food, shelter and clothing than does the average family was lower than that of Southern Ontario. Similarly, recent immigrants in the North have both higher labour participation rates and higher levels of education than the general population, meaning that these individuals are more likely to meet or exceed required educational qualifications for jobs.

“In this second installment of the series, the author explores Northern Ontario's strengths and weaknesses in attracting and retaining newcomers through discussions with key players.”

Based on the analysis of the weaknesses and strengths, the author provides several recommendations to improve the attraction and retention process, some of which include:

Develop a regional approach to newcomer attraction

There is a need to reduce the silos which currently operate between the various key players. By encouraging collaboration and knowledge sharing this will break down program silos, reduce duplication and enhance efficiency and effectiveness.

Target newcomers from specific countries and communities

There is a need for individual communities to develop a targeted and strategic approach under a larger regional strategy. This strategic approach would target newcomers from a source country that has favorable migration potential to Northern Ontario. For example, Northern Ontario has several designated bilingual communities and could therefore look to attract French-speaking newcomers. Similarly, the 2016 Census found that the majority of immigrants to Northern Ontario came from India, the Philippines, China and Pakistan.

Market Northern Ontario's strengths, diversity and potential

There is a need to actively and aggressively market Northern Ontario's strengths, diversity and potential, not only to Southern Ontario communities, but in other provinces and countries as well. Rather than solely highlighting the North as a place rich in natural beauty, it would be beneficial for a regional marketing plan to share positive income and labour statistics on Northern Ontario, while dispelling myths and misconceptions about the region.

Introduction

The first commentary of the Northern Attraction Series identified Northern Ontario's demographic and economic need for newcomers. The next step is to investigate and examine the North's strengths and weaknesses with regard to attracting and retaining newcomers, an analysis that is a key component of building a strong and effective Northern Newcomer Strategy. To gather this information, the author looked at key indicators on immigration, participated in meetings, attended immigration conferences throughout the region, and spoke with a multitude of actors from local immigration partnerships (LIPs), settlement agencies from both Northern and Southern Ontario, economic development offices, bridge training programs, Francophone immigration partners, post-secondary institutions (PSIs), and the business community.

Actors Involved in Attraction and Retention Strategies

To begin, the process of attracting and retaining newcomers, which includes both immigrants and secondary migrants, is not the responsibility of a single entity, but rather multiple actors found in the community and in government. Moving forward, it will be key that these public and private sector players are part of the creation and continuation of the Northern Newcomer Strategy as the attraction and retention process requires cross-sectoral dialogue and initiative. Although the list of actors below is not comprehensive, it is valuable to highlight their roles in the newcomer process.¹

Post-secondary Institutions

International students are beneficial to Ontario because of the diversity they bring to education, research, campuses, and communities. They can enhance the learning environment in PSIs through varying perspectives, experiences, and languages. As well, they serve as bridge builders between their home and host community; if they choose to stay, these students can move into the skilled workforce with recognized educational credentials and established networks (Coffey and Perry 2014, 3).

In addition to these social benefits, international students can contribute significantly to the economy, as Table 1 shows in comparisons of the 2015 and 2016 school years. Overall, the number of international students increased from one year to the next, with the territories doubling their amount. With the increase of students across the nation, annual spending for the country as a whole also increased. Although the table does not specify spending for Northern Ontario communities, it demonstrates the large effect international students can have, particularly in less populous provinces; the experiences of these provinces can then be used to compare with similarly sized northern regions. For example, New Brunswick welcomed 4,800 students in 2015 and 5,100 in 2016, while Northern Ontario's PSIs had a total of 4,127 international students (Common University Data Ontario n.d.; Ontario 2014a, 2014b).² Accordingly, New Brunswick's annual spending could be used as a rough estimate of what international students could bring to the North's communities.

¹ Unless otherwise cited, the information gathered in this section is from stakeholder consultations, meetings, and conferences that the author participated in.

² For Algoma University, data were available only for full-time international students.

Table 1: Number of International Students and Total Spending in Canada, by Province and Territory, 2015 and 2016

Province/Territory	2015		2016	
	Number of Students	Spending (\$ millions)	Number of Students	Spending (\$ millions)
Newfoundland & Labrador	2,638	58.4	3,227	72.6
Prince Edward Island	1,715	48.6	2,270	68.3
Nova Scotia	12,537	352.8	14,063	413.4
New Brunswick	4,837	124.0	5,187	136.4
Quebec	61,880	1,692.5	67,534	1,887.2
Ontario	195,710	6,161.4	233,226	7,806.8
Manitoba	11,276	287.8	14,298	374.8
Saskatchewan	6,814	181.0	8,063	222.6
Alberta	26,063	668.9	30,342	823.6
British Columbia	134,324	3,236.8	145,691	3,726.6
Yukon	25	0.6	60	1.4
Northwest Territories	9	0.2	19	0.4
Nunavut	0	0.0	0	0.0
Canada	457,828	12,812.9	523,971	15,533.9

Note: Expenditures are based on tuition and fees, additional compulsory fees, books and other study tools, transportation costs, and discretionary spending (Coffrey and Perry 2014, 5).
Source: Roslyn Kunin & Associates, Inc. 2017.

Yukon Territory is another interesting case for Northern Ontario to examine because it demonstrates how a small number of students can have a large economic impact on a community. Compare the Yukon with North Bay, for example. North Bay is a community of 51,000, while the Yukon's population is about 36,000 (Statistics Canada 2017b). North Bay is home to Nipissing University and Canadore College. 25 international students with the same level of spending (\$24,000 per student) at each institution alone could theoretically amount to an infusion of \$1.2 million into North Bay's economy, with likely spillovers into nearby communities such as Sudbury, Timmins, and Sault Ste. Marie.

According to multiple community actor discussions, in order to recruit students internationally, Northern Ontario PSIs use different methods to reach various markets, including recruitment fairs, marketing ads, social media, and the hiring of recruitment agents. Although all these methods are effective, hiring an international agent is seen as the most successful recruiting tool because these agents are present on the ground in the various source countries and can talk to students directly about living and studying in Northern Ontario.

Local Immigration Partnerships

Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) are funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to "[support] the development of community-based partnerships and planning around the needs of newcomers" (Canada 2013, 6). More specifically, the role of a LIP is to gather community players to discuss newcomers' challenges and opportunities; among these players are employers, school boards, service providers and different levels of government, professional associations, and various ethnic and faith-based organizations. Although the LIPs themselves do not work directly on attraction and retention activities, they are to coordinate community activities that enhance these efforts. Northern Ontario has five LIP representatives, located in Thunder Bay, Timmins, North Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, and Sudbury. These northern representatives work at city hall or out of their local settlement service provider, and are embedded with municipal economic development; contracts for a LIP, however, can be held by a number of third-party organizations – for example, the London-Middlesex LIP is funded by the City of London and United Way (Canada 2013, 8).

Settlement Agencies

Six publicly funded newcomer settlement service provider organizations (SPOs) are responsible for covering all of Ontario's northern regions and, like the LIPs, they are located in the five major cities. Among the six SPOs, there is little variation in terms of what each provides, which includes needs assessment and settlement planning for newcomers, language assessment, English-as-a-second-language classes, help with finding housing, and referrals to employment agencies.

Additionally, SPOs offer some form of community mentorship/connections program – for example, the Thunder Bay Multicultural Centre offers a youth mentorship component. A unique feature of the North Bay Multicultural Centre is its Skilled Newcomer Career Loan Program, which offers eligible applicants up to \$5,000, with a three-year amortization and interest only payments for the first year (North Bay Immigration n.d). To qualify, the applicant must be a resident of the Nipissing District, have previously worked in their field outside of Canada, have a certain level of official-language proficiency, and agree to repay the loan in the given period with full interest after the first year (North Bay Immigration n.d).

Finally, many community actors point to how, in smaller communities that lack a physical office, services such as language classes or resumé assistance can be provided online or over Skype. This flexibility is valuable for newcomers, since distance is a common barrier to accessing services in Northern Ontario.

Professions North/Nord

Professions North/Nord in Sudbury aims to help "internationally trained professionals reach their career goals by bridging the gap between education, experience, culture and employment" (Professions North/Nord n.d.). In order to qualify for the cost-free program, the client must be either a Canadian citizen, permanent resident, or conventional refugee,³ and have a certain level of language proficiency. Also, the client must reside in Ontario and be willing to relocate to Northern Ontario, be in a profession that is in demand in Northern Ontario, have a post-secondary degree obtained outside Canada, and two years' experience in said profession. Once approved for the program, Professions North/Nord assists clients with their resumé and interview preparation, connects them with employers, provides resources related to their profession, networking and mentorship opportunities, and interview skills and support.

Réseau du Nord

Réseau du Nord is the organization responsible for coordinating attraction and settlement efforts for Ontario's Francophone community. Similar to the LIPs, Réseau du Nord is responsible for gathering stakeholders to discuss attraction and retention challenges and strategies in Francophone communities. As a part of their Northern Ontario Francophone Immigration Support Network, the organization works to grow the amount of French-speaking immigrants, improve the settlement structures for all Francophone newcomers, encourage Francophone immigration outside of Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver so that there is greater distribution of Francophone newcomers throughout the province, and so on (Réseau du Nord 2016).

Health Force Ontario

Health Force Ontario (HFO) is a provincial strategy to ensure that Ontarians have access to the right amount of qualified health practitioners, including equal distribution throughout the province, particularly in rural and remote areas. To meet this goal, HFO has the Rural Family Medicine, Northern Specialist Locum, and Rural Family Medicine Locum programs. The first two provide temporary or short-term coverage, while the third aims to find permanent health practitioners and encourage them to move to Northern Ontario. One of the main ways it does so is through monetary incentives, which the provincial government provides. Also, a physician can apply for the incentive after practising in a community for five years, and the more rural the community the more incentives a physician receives.

The HFO also has two programs for physicians in Northern Ontario (see Figure 1). The Northern Physician Retention Initiative provides physicians who have been practising in the north with a \$7,000 retention incentive, paid at the end of each fiscal year. The Northern and Rural Recruitment and Retention Initiative provides incentives for physicians who establish a full-time practice in an eligible community. The criteria for determining the financial incentive depends on eligibility and program budget (Ontario 2017). Both programs require physicians to have been established for at least four continuous year (Ontario 2017; Ontario 2019). By having this stipulation, the programs encourage physicians to commit to stay in a community on a medium- to long-term basis.

³ In Canada, refugees are either a "person in need of protection" or, more conventionally, persons outside their home country or the country they normally live in and are unable to return because of a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, political opinion, nationality or membership in a social group (Canada 2017).

Figure 1: Provincially Funded Incentives and Benefits for Physicians

Resource	Description
<u>The Northern Physician Retention Initiative (NPRI)</u>	Enables eligible physicians in Northern Ontario who have been practising in the North full-time for at least four continuous years to receive the equivalent of a \$7,000 retention incentive paid at the end of each fiscal year.
<u>Northern and Rural Recruitment and Retention (NRRR) Initiative</u>	Offers financial incentives to each eligible physician who establishes a full-time practice in an <u>eligible community</u> of the province. The grants range between \$80,000 and \$117,600, paid over a four-year period. To apply for the grant, visit the MOHLTC website and submit the <u>application and corresponding documentation</u> . As well, your local <u>Regional Advisor</u> is always available to answer your NRRR questions.

Source: Health Force Ontario 2015.

The International and Community Matchmakers

The International and Community Matchmakers project, first launched in Thunder Bay, offers employment and entrepreneurial services for potential international and national migrants (Northern Policy Institute n.d.) The project is funded by the North Superior Workforce Planning Board, the Société Économique de l'Ontario (SÉO), the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce, the Thunder Bay Community Economic Development Commission, and Northern Policy Institute (NPI). A unique feature of this project is that the program can assist anyone – regardless of their status. Overall, this project supports both employers through the immigration process and newcomers by helping them find meaningful work in their new communities.

Société Économique de l'Ontario

Established in 2001, the SÉO is responsible for innovative solutions to economic development, entrepreneurship, employability, and immigration in the Francophone and bilingual communities of Ontario. More specifically, the SÉO uses an inclusive approach to ensure full participation by these communities' stakeholders. As well, the SÉO aims to help strengthen these communities by attracting bilingual and Francophone newcomers; it also provides employment services to immigrants. With 16.8 per cent of Northern Ontario's population identifying as Francophone, the SÉO has a critical role to play in the federal government's official languages action plan (Canada 2018b). The plan aims to enhance Francophone minority communities through immigration and increase retention by improving the provision of French-language settlement services.

The Rural Employment Initiative

The Rural Employment Initiative (REI) is a project in partnership with the Ontario Association for Community Futures Development Corporation and the Newcomer Centre of Peel, funded by Ontario Trillium Foundation. The REI helps unemployed or underemployed newcomers from the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) find meaningful work in rural Ontario. The Newcomer Centre provides the initial settlement services through its labour market access for newcomers, including 10-week, in-class accounting and finance training; eight-week employment training; job search skills training; labour market bridging; and workplace orientation (Newcomer Centre of Peel 2017). This program is unique because it connects Northern Ontario employers with highly skilled newcomers who cannot find employment in the overburdened GTA. Also, these newcomers have already undergone their initial needs assessment and training through the Newcomer Centre, making them ideal candidates for rural communities that do not have physical settlement agencies.

Municipal Economic Development Players

Municipal economic development players have a special role when it comes to the attraction and retention of newcomers. Among these players are economic development officers, who are responsible for promoting economic growth in their communities through various initiatives. Considering that the LIPs in Northern Ontario are closely tied to economic development offices, it comes as no surprise that the latter are heavily involved in the attraction and retention of newcomers. For example, the Community Economic Development Commission in Thunder Bay works to promote the city and showcase opportunities in order to encourage immigration to the region (Wilson n.d.). The commission has produced a number of marketing materials for ethnic TV programs that promote settling in Thunder Bay and other regions in Ontario and Canada. It has also partnered with the REI and Multicultural Centre in Thunder Bay to create a promotional campaign, "Go to Thunder Bay," featuring videos by local filmmakers that showcase outdoor activities, cultural events, music, festivals, food, and shopping). The commission is a good example of how economic development players can be involved in newcomer attraction and retention.

In its 2015–20 economic development strategic plan, "From the Ground Up," the City of Greater Sudbury mentions newcomers in support of its vision to increase the workforce and fill jobs. The plan also aims to make the city become a more welcoming and open community, to improve immigrant attraction and retention (City of Greater Sudbury Community Development Corporation 2015, 23). Greater Sudbury's economic development plan demonstrates a good example of what role municipal economic development players have in attracting and retaining newcomers.

Challenges to Attracting Newcomers to Northern Ontario

Despite the work of various community actors in attracting and retaining newcomers to Northern Ontario, the process has several major roadblocks.

Current Immigration Initiatives

When assessing the current Northern Ontario strategies to attract newcomers, one quickly finds that most of the work has focused on settlement, rather than on attraction. Settlement services assist permanent residents become Canadian citizens and established residents in their new community by offering language training, information on education, employment, health care, culture, banking, shopping, and household management (Drolet and Teixeira 2016). While focusing on settlement is a strong retention strategy, a comprehensive and effective plan requires an attraction/recruitment component.

Recruitment focuses on finding newcomers who are willing and ready to move to a community. Few programs exist, however, to recruit international newcomers to Northern Ontario. The Northwestern Immigration Portal, created in 2010, is Northwestern Ontario's primary attraction tool. The program is provincially and federally funded, and is affiliated with an ad campaign that promotes life in Thunder Bay through newspapers or posters placed in Toronto's transit system. The portal features testimonials from newcomers who have successfully integrated into the region, is available in multiple languages, and provides hundreds of pages worth of information for prospective newcomers (Wilson n.d.). The portal also has a feature called "talk too," a chat function where potential newcomers can ask questions. Northeastern Ontario also has an immigration portal that features testimonials from various newcomers and pages of information on the region, and is available in six different languages (Northeastern Ontario Immigration n.d.). Whether either of these portals has had an effect on immigration to the North is unknown, however this is a gap that could be addressed in a Newcomer strategy.

In addition to the portals, communities have focused on secondary migration⁴ as an attraction strategy.⁴ A few community representatives, such as economic development officers, LIP coordinators, and settlement or employment agencies attend job fairs in Southern Ontario to market opportunities in the North. According to discussions with community players, however, these events are quite costly and difficult to participate in regularly, resulting in slow progress and few results. Some representatives have also travelled to international events with the aim of promoting Northern Ontario, but they face such challenges as being unable to provide immigration advice to potential migrants. Furthermore, larger communities such as Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver are able to send immigration consultants, leaving small communities like those of Northern Ontario at a disadvantage. In such instances, having a provincial nominee representative or immigration specialist promoting the North or small communities in general would be beneficial.

⁴ Secondary migration is the relocation of immigrants after they reach their initial destination; see Haan and Prokopenko (2016).

Another recruitment challenge is employers' reluctance to recognize foreign training on newcomers' resumé. Such difficulties might be mitigated by implementing programs such as the National Connector Program, which takes the simple idea of networking and turns it into a way for newcomers to get a foot in the door with employers (National Connector Program n.d.).

In short, more resources are required beyond the immigration portals and greater support to small communities that lack the resources to encourage secondary migration efforts are necessary. As such, what Northern Ontario needs is a proactive, cross-sectoral attraction strategy to expand its reach and successfully recruit newcomers. Community players are aware of this need, and have advocated their shared interest in a regional approach to attracting newcomers.

Lack of Collaboration

Key players have expressed that one challenge to attracting newcomers to Northern Ontario is the lack of collaboration between the different levels of government and actors involved. Given the current situation of limited resources and increasing demand for programs and services, forming partnerships and participating in strategic collaboration is a way for communities to respond to this challenge. Strategic collaboration is defined as "an intentional, collective approach to address public problems or issues through building shared knowledge, designing innovative solutions, and forging consequential change. When used strategically, collaboration produces positive impacts, stakeholders committed to policy or program change, and strengthened capacity of individuals and organizations to effectively work together" (Norris-Tirrell and Clay 2010, 2). The following is a list of aims and benefits of strategic collaboration (O'Donnell 2012, 6–7):

The aims of strategic collaboration are to:

- Capture and share knowledge and innovation
- Connect councils in maximising service delivery opportunities to meet common community needs
- Reduce costs through elimination of duplication
- Access economies of scale
- Develop an effective local platform to work with other levels of government to achieve better whole of government outcomes for the community.

The benefits of strategic collaboration include:

- The provision of more comprehensive services at the local and regional level
- Promotion of joint cultural and economic development
- Strengthened relationships between councils and other government entities
- Improved local governance through modelling, information exchange and joint problem solving;
- Opportunities for integrated planning across local government
- Increased access to a wider range of skills, knowledge and specialist services
- Better use of access to available technology
- Better utilization of capital and other assets, including improved investment strategy options.

Returning to an example earlier, there are Northern communities that may not have enough resources to attend large international and national job fairs that can help attract newcomers to their community. Through strategic collaboration, neighbouring communities could share resources to make these events possible, as well as foster a relationship that encourages joint development and planning. Austin (2010, 62-63) further adds to the strategic collaboration idea by recommending communities and key actors develop a clear "purpose and fit statement" that breaks down the roles of each partner and what they can bring to the table. Having a defined vision helps to avoid falling back into silos or what Norris-Tirrell and Clay (2010) point to as "turf issues", which is when one community is perceived to benefit from collaboration more than another.

On the issue of silos, this practice runs the risk of program duplication. O'Donnell (2012) states that through the formation of collaborative arrangements, not only can a common platform be used to develop initiatives together, but organizations and communities can benefit from economies of scale, streamlined business processes, and improved service delivery as well (O'Donnell 2012, 14). An example of program duplication in Northern Ontario is the number of employment agencies that assist businesses and newcomers find one another, which could lead to employer fatigue. For example, Professions North/Nord, the REI, and the Matchmaker program all assist newcomers in finding employment. There are also Youth Employment Services offices throughout Thunder Bay and North Bay, as well as at the YMCA in Sudbury. While their mandates may differ slightly, the aims are similar. Given this, coordination among these services can promote efficiency and effectiveness for the region and the clients they serve. As a result, no community or newcomer slips through the cracks.

Another problem that arises from the absence of collaboration is the lack of knowledge sharing. Similar to program duplication, this can lead to redundancy and inefficiencies. By engaging with one another in a more transparent matter, communities and players can arguably better identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and room for improvements when planning the Northern Newcomer Strategy. Furthermore, it lends strength to a unified, legitimate voice for Northern Ontario.

Employment, Supports, and Community

Another challenge key players identified is a lack of supports and a sense of community. A large body of literature suggests that newcomers search for employment, supports, and community when picking a home (Kukushkin and Watt 2009). Indeed, when newcomers arrive in a new town, they need support with items such as housing, accessing health care services, applying for a driver's license, enrolling their children in daycare, learning about the Canadian culture and lifestyle, and so on. Although SPOs are the main providers of these types of supports, other actors that contribute include employers, PSIs, and members of the community. Community actors also cite other factors that might make it difficult for immigrants to establish themselves in Northern Ontario, such as the current public transportation infrastructure, which can make it difficult for newcomers to attend social events, explore the region, and build personal and professional networks. Discussions also revealed a lack of available rental and temporary housing, particularly for families.

When it comes to seeking a sense of community, newcomers tend to choose their destination by searching for members who share similar cultural backgrounds (El-Assal and Goucher 2017, 26). This practice aligns with the theory of ethnic communities and social capital, which states that personal networks such as family and friendships give immigrants additional supports to help ease their settlement in and adaptation to the host country (Gurak and Kritz 2000; Kritz and Nogle 1994; Munshi 2003; Xu 2011). For instance, ethnic communities provide employment assistance, monetary and emotional supports, and hold ethnic events according to cultural traditions, all of which assist newcomers in the settlement process in their host country (Xu 2011). These supports might be especially beneficial to newcomers in lower-skilled jobs with less education (McKenzie and Rapoport 2010). Toronto is a great example of this theory because it has a critical mass of immigrants with existing social networks, thus providing an advantage over other cities in Ontario in attracting newcomers. That is not to say, however, that all other small communities lack diversity. Take Thunder Bay, for example, where the mother tongue of 8.9 per cent of the population is other than one the two official languages or an Indigenous language (Statistics Canada 2017c).

Of course, it should be acknowledged that one challenge for Thunder Bay and other communities in Northern Ontario could be the alignment between ethnic communities and immigration trends today. To explain, as a presentation by Statistics Canada on immigration patterns in Canada between 1871 and 2011 reveals, migration trends have shifted from European to non-European immigrants (2017a, 6). This could pose a challenge for Northern Ontario because according to various key players, northern communities are perceived as lacking the diversity that will attract non-European immigrants.

In the same vein, although small communities have a reputation of being friendly, it can be hard for newcomers to come to be included in close-knit social circles. Indeed, many interviewees expressed that Northern Ontario residents continue to believe that immigrants displace domestic workers and do not understand why the region is seeking to attract newcomers – an attitude that is reflective of certain segments of the Canadian population. According to the Environics Institute, while the majority of Canadians still hold positive attitudes on immigration levels, there has been a small increase in negative attitudes, particularly in the Prairies (Environics Institute 2018, 1).

This perceived northern attitude could surface in workplaces due to a lack of cultural awareness among staff and employers, leading to uncomfortable working conditions for newcomers and, in some instances, discrimination. For these reasons, immigrants find it difficult to develop friendships or professional networks in the region, a finding consistent with some of the push-and-pull factors noted in a Conference Board of Canada's report (El-Assal and Goucher 2017).

In various discussions, several interviewees said that lack of support and a sense of community have caused immigrants to leave the region in the past or to avoid Northern Ontario altogether. Indeed, El-Assal and Goucher (2017) cite such experiences in their analysis of Atlantic Canada. The authors go on to say that retention rates increased once the federal and provincial governments invested more money in settlement services (32). As mentioned previously, only six SPOs cover the entire Northern Ontario region, with the Thunder Bay Multicultural Association and North Bay Multicultural Association delivering online services to smaller communities. Although the provision of online services is a practical option, newcomers must have a basic understanding of English or French and how to use a computer in order to participate successfully in the delivery of these services. Attendees of the National Small Centres Settlement and Integration Conference also acknowledged that, while technology can simplify and facilitate some components of settlement, the actual integration process still remains face-to-face (Central Alberta Refugee Effort 2018).

Additionally, interviewees stated that the lack of in-person language classes makes it difficult to integrate newcomers because online classes are not as effective. It was also cited that large municipalities in Northern Ontario have applied for language service funding in the past for the entire region but without any coordination among them, this poses a number of challenges, among which are that it blocks other municipalities from applying for similar funding and makes the coordination of services difficult in such a large region. If fewer people use programs such as Language Instructions for Newcomers to Canada, which provides language services to permanent residents in a number of communities, it will be harder to make a case for the ongoing need for such programs, once again underscoring the need for strategic collaboration in Northern Ontario communities to retain newcomers.

When it came to employment challenges to attracting newcomers to Northern Ontario, discussions with community actors revealed that small and medium-sized businesses are generally hesitant to hire immigrants because they are unsure about what the benefits of doing so might be and do not have the human resources capacity to train and integrate them appropriately. As well, a study by the Canadian Chamber of Commerce (2016, 25) found that employers have difficulty navigating the immigration system – like the Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) process, for example. With these barriers, employers and communities more generally are unable to fill important skills gaps. A natural solution to help fill these skills gaps is to encourage businesses to work with multicultural centres, the REI, the International and Community Matchmakers project, and local service planning boards to integrate newcomers.

International students also face unique road blocks when seeking employment in Northern Ontario, as limitations on their student visas prevent them from gaining valuable work experience. Interviewees stated that international students also have limited access to government-funded settlement services, which this hinders their integration into the region. As Flynn and Bauder point out, this obstacle is primarily one erected by the federal government (the provincial government has more maneuverability) and applies to students (and other migrants) who possess only temporary status as they wait for their nomination under the Provincial Nominee Program (2013, 9).

The challenges international students face include insufficient English- and/or French-language proficiency, lack of recognized work experience, and limited social or professional networks. Due to these challenges, international students pursue economic opportunities elsewhere, thus leaving Northern Ontario at a disadvantage. This process, however, might change given that PSIs such as Lakehead, Confederation College, and Collège Boréal offer immigration services, whether through immigration advisors or training programs.

The Lack of a Strategic and Effective Attraction Plan

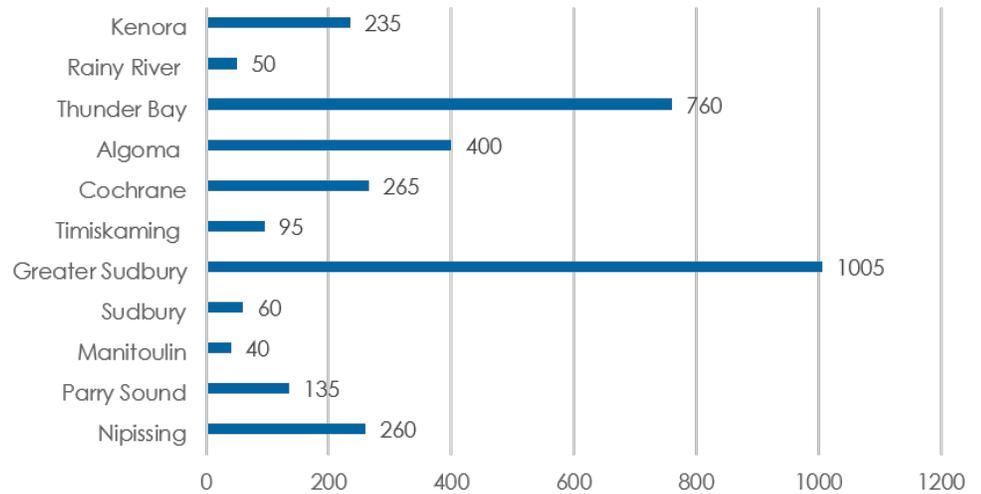
Many key players argue that the North lacks a strategic approach to attracting newcomers. Instead of developing a community of immigrants from a source country, Northern Ontario has focused on attracting immigrants from varying countries. This particular finding was also apparent in Atlantic Canada (El-Assal and Goucher 2017). Although diversity is valuable, strong cultural networks for a given group are not being constructed. Additionally, there has been criticism over the lack of a regional marketing plan that highlights the various benefits of Northern Ontario and dispels myths about the region, including such commonly held misconceptions as a lack of employment opportunities, quality educational facilities, and amenities similar to those found in Southern Ontario. Instead of addressing these myths and highlighting the economic and social benefits of living in Northern Ontario, marketing schemes for the region have focused on outdoor living.

Overall, stronger collaboration among communities and levels of government in the North could lead to more coordination on newcomer initiatives, employment and community supports, and a stronger attraction plan. Furthermore, strategic collaboration can assist in greater newcomer retention through the fostering of support and a sense of belonging.

The Current Situation: How Many Immigrants Are Coming to Northern Ontario?

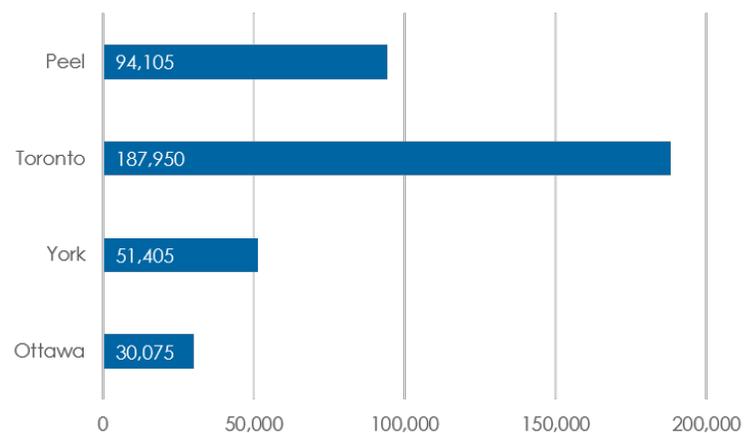
From 2011 to 2016, Ontario welcomed 472,175 immigrants; of that number, only 3,305 people, or just 0.7 per cent of the total, came to Northern Ontario.⁵ Some northern districts fared better than others (Figure 2); for example, Thunder Bay and Greater Sudbury had the largest number of immigrants – 760 and 1,005, respectively – over the five-year period. Annually, this amounts to 152 immigrants for Thunder Bay and 201 for Sudbury; in contrast, Nipissing District had 260 immigrants over the period, or 52 annually. When comparing several major Southern Ontario districts to those in Northern Ontario, the contrast is striking. As Figure 3 shows, these areas alone accounted for nearly 77 per cent of the total number of immigrants who arrived in Ontario during the five-year period.

Figure 2: Number of Immigrant Arrivals by District, Northern Ontario, 2011–16



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Population Census

Figure 3: Number of Immigrant Arrivals, Selected Southern Ontario Districts, 2011–16

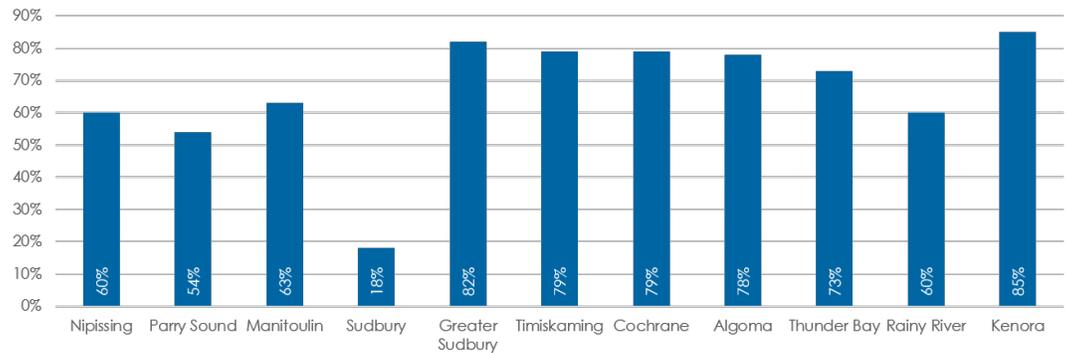


Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Population Census.

⁵ The focus of much of the data on newcomers is on immigrants, rather than on newcomers more generally, which includes secondary migrants as well as immigrants.

This disparity in the intra-provincial distribution of immigrants is a perfect example of how more collaboration among the federal, provincial, and municipal governments could improve this distribution through strong incentive programs or campaigns with specific targets, such as the French Language Immigration Initiative carried out by the Assemblée communautaire francosaskoise (2017) in Saskatchewan. Such initiatives, however, would not be starting from the drawing board, but could work in conjunction with current processes that are helping to increase retention rates, which surprisingly show that newcomers do tend to stay in Northern Ontario once they arrive (Figure 4). All of the 11 northern districts had a retention rate of 70 per cent or more, which means that 7 out of 10 immigrants stay in Northern Ontario. Kenora has the highest retention rate, Greater Sudbury comes in second, with Timiskaming and Cochrane tied for third. Sudbury and Parry Sound reported the lowest retention rates at 18 and 54 per cent respectively. Across all districts, especially ones like Sudbury, addressing these gaps require not just a regional approach, but a defined and comprehensive newcomer strategy.

Figure 4: Percentage of Recent Immigrants Who Have Been Living in Their Community for 5 Years or More, by District, Northern Ontario, 2016



Source: Author's calculations based on Statistics Canada, 2016 Population Census.

“... newcomers do tend to **stay in Northern Ontario** once they arrive.”

How Are Newcomers Faring in Northern Ontario?

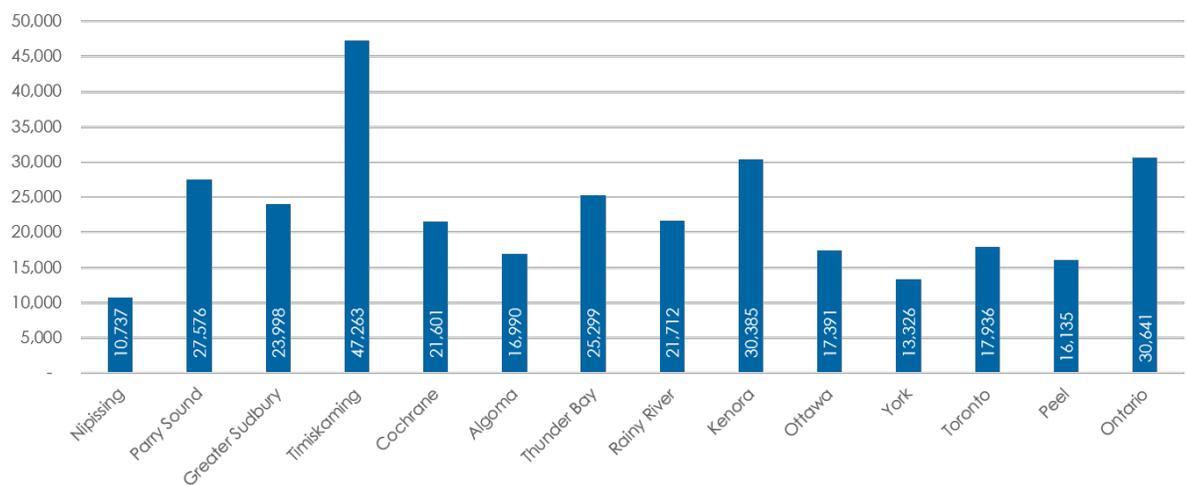
In the development of such a strategy, it is key to look at the underlying factors that influence retention rates, which can then be used as attraction tools. As well, it helps identify where communities and key players can improve the quality of life for newcomers.

Income

Median Income

Income is an important indicator because it represents the primary source through which individuals meet their basic needs for shelter and food (Esses et al 2010, 14). Median income is the amount that divides the income of a specified group into two halves, with one half below the median and the other half above (Statistics Canada 2016b). This measure thus indicates how well off a group in a community is compared with others. As Figure 5 shows, in 2015 recent immigrants⁶ to Northern Ontario generally had a higher median income than those in districts – Ottawa, York Region, Toronto, and Peel Region – with a high density of immigrants.

Figure 5: Total Median Income of Recent Immigrants Ages 15 and Over, Northern Ontario Districts and Selected Southern Ontario Districts, 2015



Note: Manitoulin is excluded due to data suppression.
Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population.

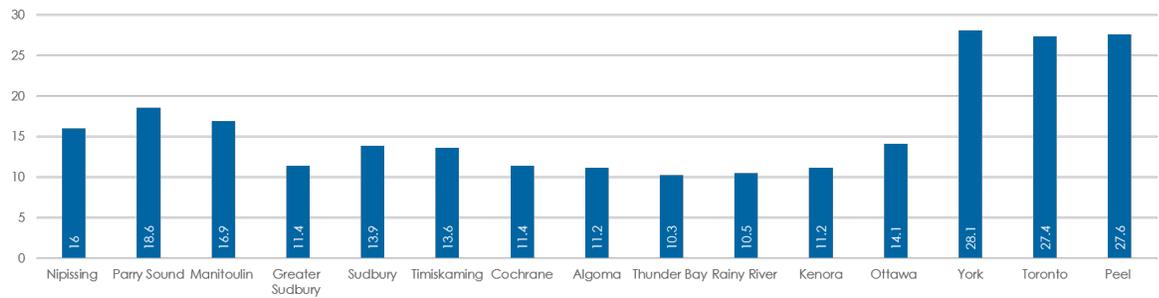
Shelter Costs for Homeowners and Tenants

Homeowners

Shelter costs include monthly mortgage payments, property taxes and condominium fees, electricity and heat, water, and other municipal service fees (Statistics Canada 2016a). The share of owner households in York Region, Toronto, and Peel Region that spent 30 per cent or more of their income on shelter costs in 2016 was almost double the share of those living in Northern Ontario (Figure 6). One reason shelter costs in Southern Ontario are so high might be that the cost of owning a home is much higher there. As Table 2 shows, the median price of a house is much lower in the 11 northern districts than in the southern ones – indeed, only in Ottawa does the median price of a house approach that found in Northern Ontario. Figure 7 shows median monthly shelter costs for dwellings. Of the 11 northern districts, Greater Sudbury had the highest median monthly shelter costs in 2016, at \$1,138, but this was still \$296 less than those for Ottawa, which was the cheapest Southern Ontario location. In contrast, costs in Peel District were twice as high as those in Thunder Bay, Sudbury, and Rainy River.

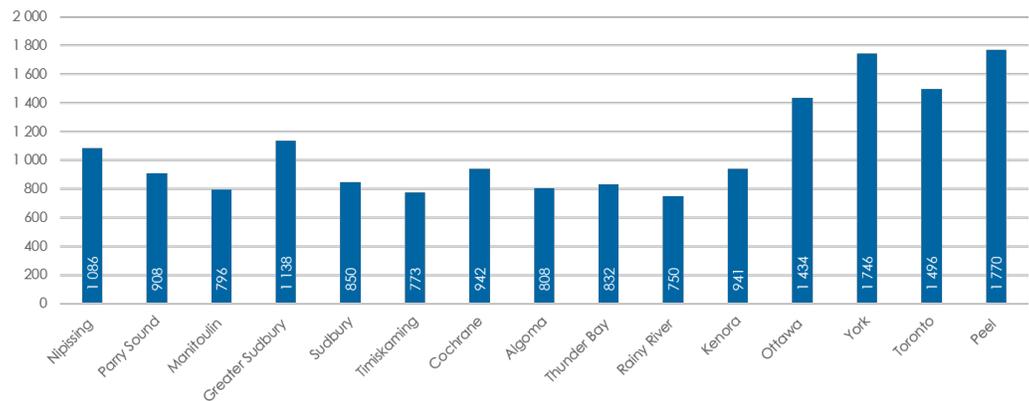
⁶ This refers to landed immigrants and those with permanent resident status for up to five years prior to the census year (Statistics Canada 2016b).

Figure 6: Share of Owner Households Spending 30 per cent or More of Their Income on Shelter Costs, Northern Ontario Districts and Selected Southern Ontario Districts, 2016



Note: The majority of listings are based on three-bedroom homes for all locations except Cochrane, Rainy River, Kenora, York, and Mississauga. Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population.

Figure 7: Median Monthly Shelter Costs for Owned Dwellings, Northern Ontario Districts and Selected Southern Ontario Districts, 2016



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population.

Table 2: Median House Price, Northern Ontario Districts and Selected Southern Ontario Census Divisions / Sub-divisions, August 2016

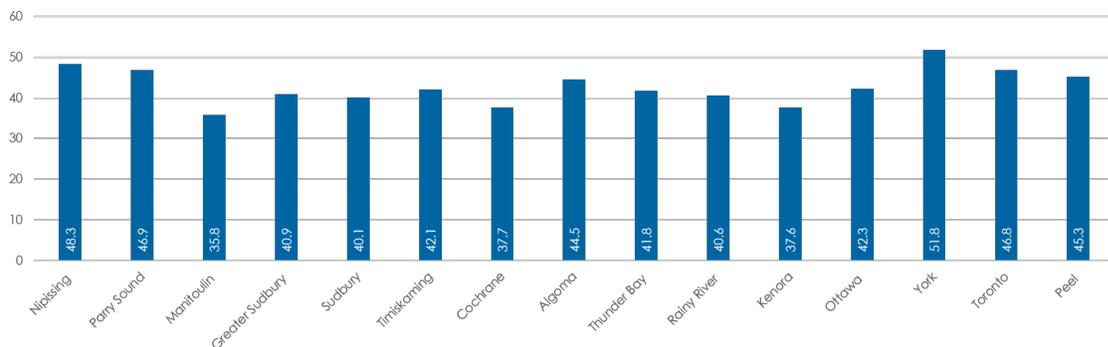
District	Median House Price (\$)
Nipissing	289,000
Parry Sound	255,000
Manitoulin	245,000
Greater Sudbury	324,700
Sudbury	315,900
Timiskaming	300,000
Cochrane	179,900
Algoma	289,900
Thunder Bay	264,900
Rainy River	119,900
Kenora	273,750
Ottawa	379,900
York	865,000
Toronto	699,000
Peel	—
Mississauga	620,000
Brampton	588,900
Caledon	957,394
Ontario	349,900

Note: Peel was broken down into municipalities because a median house price for Peel did not exist. Source: Canadian Real Estate Wealth Magazine 2016, various issues.

Tenants

For households that rent their dwellings, shelter costs include rent, electricity, heat, water, and other municipal services (Statistics Canada 2016a). Bar some exceptions, the northern districts had a lower share of tenants spending 30 per cent or more of their income on shelter costs in 2016 than in selected Southern Ontario districts (Figure 8). Not only do tenants spend more of their income on shelter costs than do owner households, but, with the exception of a few districts, newcomer tenants in Northern Ontario spend only a little less than they would in selected southern districts. Strong pull factors, however, such as higher median incomes in northern districts, can offset these costs.

Figure 8: Share of Tenant Households Spending 30 per cent or More of Their Income on Shelter Costs, Northern Ontario Districts and Selected Southern Ontario Districts, 2016



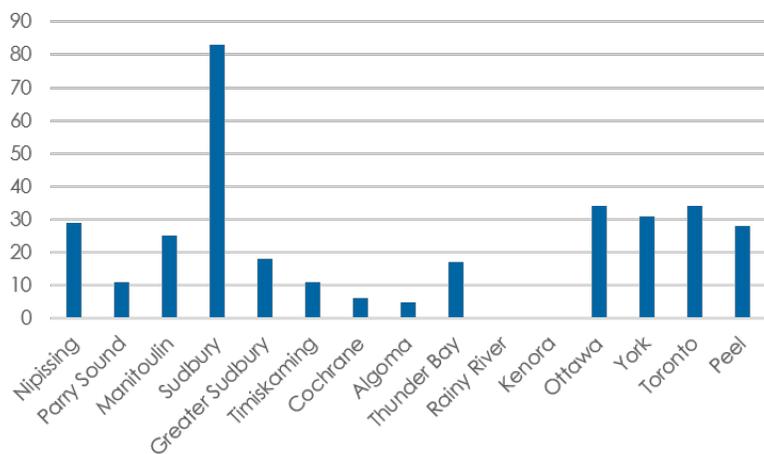
Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population.

Low Income among Recent Immigrants

Statistics Canada's low-income after tax (LICO-AT) measure is the income threshold below which a family likely devotes a larger share of its income (20 per cent or more) on necessities such as food, shelter, and clothing than does the average family (Statistics Canada 2015b). As Figure 9 show, the share of recent immigrants below the LICO-AT threshold was significantly lower in Northern Ontario than in Ottawa, York Region, Toronto, or Peel Region, with the exception of Sudbury and Nipissing.

Overall, income indicators illustrate that Northern Ontario offers a more accessible alternative to Southern Ontario when it comes to shelter costs and home or tenancy costs. This affordability is a strong attraction that could be advertised to newcomers – those recently arrived in Canada, secondary migrants from Southern Ontario or out of province, and recent graduates.

Figure 9: Share of Recent Immigrants Who Are Low Income, Northern Ontario Districts and Selected Southern Ontario Districts, 2016



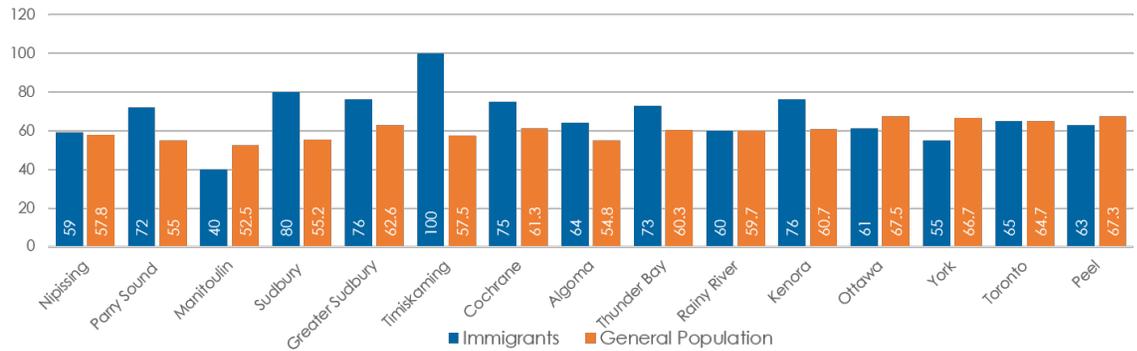
Note: Low income is defined as being below Statistics Canada's low-income after tax measure.
Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population.

Employment and Education

The Labour Force Participation Rate

The labour force participation rate reflects the working-age population that is either actively working or looking for work (Statistics Canada 2015). As Figure 10 shows, participation rates were higher for recent immigrants in Northern Ontario in 2016 than for the non-immigrant population, except in Manitoulin District. In comparison, the participation rate of recent immigrants in Ottawa, York Region, and Peel Region was lower than for the non-immigrant population there, except for Toronto (marginally).

Figure 10: Labour Force Participation Rate, Recent Immigrants, Northern Ontario Districts and Selected Southern Ontario Districts, 2016

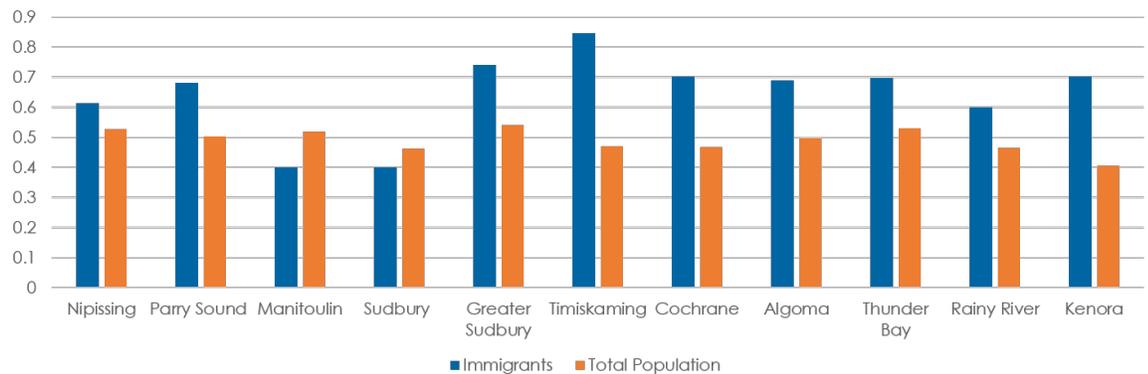


Source: Statistics Canada, 2016c, census of population, Custom Tabulation (Community Data Program).

Education

With respect to education levels, immigrants in Northern Ontario generally tend to surpass the total population for the share with a post-secondary certificate, diploma, or degree (Figure 11). Holding all other employment requirements constant⁷, this suggests that immigrants in Northern Ontario are more likely to meet or exceed required educational qualifications for jobs. More than that, the capital they contribute to economic productivity is a significant benefit to Northern Ontario. According to Cuddy and Moazzami (2017a, 2017b), immigrants in both Northeastern and Northwestern Ontario have higher human capital levels than the total population. At the same time, as Figure 11 illustrates, not all newcomers have these credentials, but for Northern Ontario, the in-demand jobs do not necessarily require post-secondary credentials such as housekeepers, retail workers, hospitality workers, and so on (Vicinity Jobs n.d.; Canada Job Bank n.d.).

Figure 11: Share of Individuals with Post-secondary Credentials, Northern Ontario Districts and Selected Southern Ontario Districts, 2016

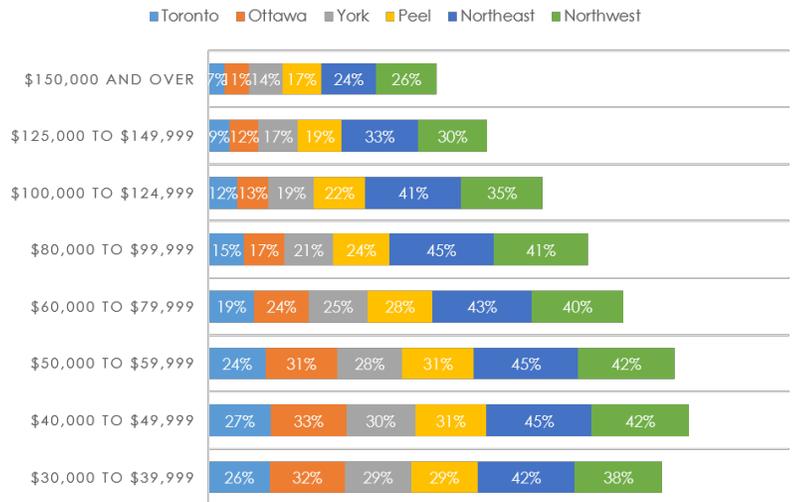


Source: Statistics Canada, 2016c, census of population, Custom Tabulation (Community Data Program).

Continuing in the same vein, Figure 12 shows the percentage of the total population with non-university education in a specified income bracket after taxes. Of those earning \$150,000 and over in Northwestern Ontario in 2016, 26 per cent lacked a university education; the share was 24 per cent in Northeastern Ontario. By comparison, in Toronto only seven per cent of those in the same income group lacked a university education, which is interesting as it reveals that, in Northern Ontario, individuals with an apprenticeship, trades certificate or diploma, College, CEGEP, or other non-university certificate are in higher-income brackets than in Southern Ontario.

⁷ Employment requirements such as language, work experience, etc.

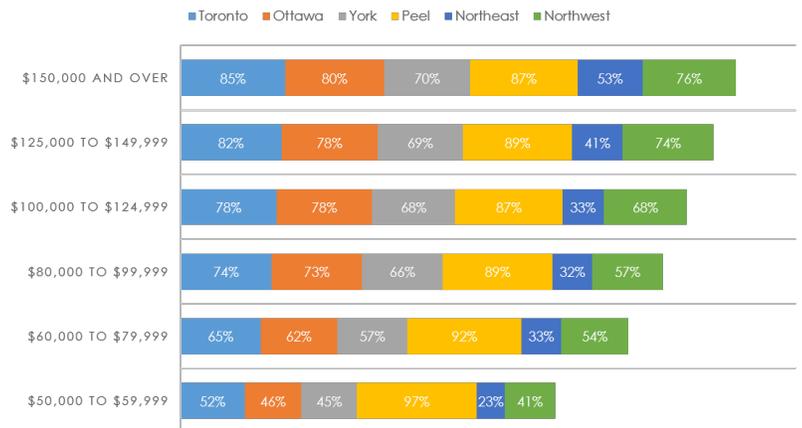
Figure 12: Share of Individuals with College/CEGEP/ Other Non-university Certificate or Diploma, or Lower, by After-tax Income Group, Northern Ontario Districts and Selected Southern Ontario Districts, 2016



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population Target Group Profile.

In Toronto, Ottawa and Peel, those with a university education were more highly represented in the highest-income bracket in 2016 than in Northwestern Ontario (Figure 13), and the shares for those southern jurisdictions plus York were higher than Northeastern Ontario. The data also show that the wage gap based on education level is smaller in Northern Ontario than in Southern Ontario. For example, in Northeastern Ontario in 2016, of those earning between \$125,000 and \$149,000, 41 per cent had a university-level education and 33 per cent had a non-university education. In Peel Region, by comparison, 89 per cent of those in the same income group had a university-level education, but only 19 per cent had a non-university education. Even in the lowest income bracket shown, those earning between \$50,000 and \$59,000, the difference in the representation of university- versus non-university-educated individuals is quite striking between Southern and Northern Ontario, suggesting that there are opportunities for newcomers who do not have a university education to earn a higher income in the North.

Figure 13: Share of Individuals with University Certificate or Diploma below Bachelor Level/ University Certificate, Diploma or Degree at Bachelor Level or Above, by After-tax Income Group, Northern Ontario Districts and Selected Southern Ontario Districts, 2016



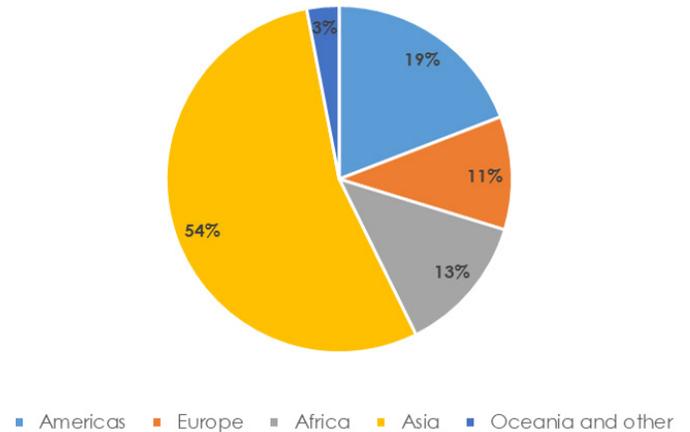
Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population Target Group Profile.

Overall, immigrants have a higher labour force participation rate in Northern Ontario than in Southern Ontario, demonstrating their willingness and ability to partake in the workforce. In addition, immigrants are generally more educated than the general population, demonstrating the knowledge and skills they can contribute to Northern Ontario's communities and employment landscape. Finally, for the general population, those with a non-university education have as equal a chance as university-educated individuals to be high-income earners in Northern Ontario. In contrast, the disparity between those with a non-university and university education in the \$60,000 and higher income brackets in Southern Ontario is alarming. This is an opportunity for newcomers who do not have post-secondary credentials not only to earn higher incomes, but also to help fill in-demand job gaps.

Country of Origin

Of all the immigrants in Northern Ontario at the time of the 2016 census, the majority were from Asia (Figure 14), with the top five sources (in descending order) being India, the Philippines, Other Places in Asia (that is, country of origin not specified), China, Pakistan (Statistics Canada 2017d). Many newcomers also arrived from the Americas, particularly the United States (Statistics Canada 2017d). With this knowledge in hand, Northern Ontario could create targeted strategies to attract newcomers from these countries.

Figure 14: Continent of Origin, Recent Immigrants in Northern Ontario, 2016



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population.

Indeed, this is exactly what the Assemblée communautaire francosaskoise has done. After taking inventory of problem areas such as skills shortages and lacklustre immigration results from previous years, the ACF developed a strategy to attract newcomers with a French-language background and to “[i]dentify [s]ource countries favouring immigration to Canada” (Assemblée communautaire francosaskoise 2017). It also put in place a strong retention plan. At the top of the list of countries the ACF identified Mauritius, a French-speaking island in the Indian Ocean north of Madagascar (Assemblée communautaire francosaskoise 2017). Between 2010 and 2017, the retention rate was nearly 90 per cent, more than 200 jobs were filled, and a process of community revitalization was kickstarted (Assemblée communautaire francosaskoise 2017).

Such an initiative could be replicated in Northern Ontario, given its large Francophone population. Northwestern Ontario has five officially designated bilingual communities – Ignace, Terrace Bay, Greenstone, Marathon, and Manitouwadge⁸ – while in Northeastern Ontario the districts of Timiskaming, Cochrane, Nipissing, Algoma, and Sudbury are also considered bilingual (Government of Ontario n.d.). Following the ACF's strategy, these designated communities, as well as others, could look to the Americas and Africa, which were the second- and third-highest source continents for immigrants in Northern Ontario, and the locations of numerous French-speaking countries.

Implications for Northern Ontario

Based on the above analysis, Northern Ontario communities ought to take advantage of their strengths and continue to capitalize on marketing and advertising opportunities to attract newcomers. For instance, a regional approach to marketing could promote that recent immigrants have a higher median income in Northern Ontario than in highly concentrated immigrant areas. The Institute for Competitiveness & Prosperity has identified a 12.7 per cent employment rate gap and an inexplicable 7.1 per cent wage gap between immigrants who arrived in Canada within the past five years and Canadian-born residents (2017, 7). In Northern Ontario, however, the data clearly show that immigrants have a higher labour force participation rate than either their Southern Ontario counterparts or the non-immigrant population in their respective districts. What is more, immigrants are much less represented among low-income persons in Northern Ontario than in the South. All such information about opportunities in the North could be used as a marketing tool to target immigrants internationally before they choose a destination in Canada.

In addition to marketing this information to immigrants, Northern Ontario could also target young people in Southern Ontario or other expensive metropolitan areas. The region's attractive housing prices and lower shelter costs would be of particular interest to this group, especially young families. Regional marketing could also target college students and showcase the representation of this group in high-income brackets in Northern Ontario. More research is needed, however, to understand which college programs could lead to these jobs, which could also be used as a marketing tool. All of these marketing strategies should include comparisons with Southern Ontario, so as to highlight that Northern Ontario, as a region, has more to offer than just the beautiful outdoors.

⁸ Greenstone and Ignace have self-identified as bilingual in order to provide municipal services in French; Ignace, however, has just started on this path.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the various strengths and weaknesses of Northern Ontario's ability to attract and retain newcomers, especially immigrants. For strengths, there are the many types of community players involved in the attraction and retention process and that provide on-the-ground support. Analysis of how immigrants are faring in Northern Ontario reveals a strong case that newcomers can thrive in the region, despite issues with educational qualifications and high tenancy costs. Key players have also identified weaknesses in the North's newcomer attraction and retention process – in particular, the lack of collaboration among the many actors.

One clear conclusion from the analysis is that there is opportunity in Northern Ontario – not just for newcomers, but for communities, organizations, and individuals involved in the process. To capture these opportunities, several recommendations could be considered to improve the attraction and retention process:

1. Encourage a regional approach in order to build collaboration among key actors in the newcomer attraction process. Doing so could break down information and program silos, thereby enhancing efficiency and potential resource and knowledge sharing.
 2. Gather greater social support from communities.
 3. Provide opportunities and actively support employers and newcomers in the process of recognizing foreign credentials and work experience.
 4. When participating in international recruitment fairs, have an immigration advisor present who can promote small communities and help guide interested parties.
 5. Develop a more targeted strategic approach for individual communities under the larger regional strategy that targets newcomers from a source country that has favourable migration to Northern Ontario.
 6. Highlight the region's bilingual communities and target Francophone newcomers to build on the previous recommendation. Considering the federal government's focus on Francophone immigration, there is a real opportunity for Northern Ontario Francophone communities to get ahead of this and focus on strengthening Francophone welcoming, settling, and integration efforts. Additionally, Northern Ontario communities ought to ensure they are ready for an intake of Francophone immigrants by expanding services in French.
 7. Build on the region's strengths and actively market them not only to Southern Ontario communities, but in other provinces and countries as well.
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Northern Policy Institute is Northern Ontario's independent think tank. We perform research, collect and disseminate evidence, and identify policy opportunities to support the growth of sustainable Northern Communities. Our operations are located in Thunder Bay, Sudbury and Sault Ste. Marie. We seek to enhance Northern Ontario's capacity to take the lead position on socio-economic policy that impacts Northern Ontario, Ontario, and Canada as a whole.

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