All Roads Lead Home: Immigration Flows into Thunder Bay and What this Means for RNIP Impacts

Research Report | April 2022
By: Mercedes Labelle

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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 is 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 Wahnapitae First Nation.

- Kirkland Lake is on the Robinson-Huron Treaty territory and the land is the traditional territory of Cree, Ojibway, and Algonquin Peoples.

- All are home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

We recognize and appreciate the historic connection that Indigenous people have to these territories. We recognize the contributions that they have made in shaping and strengthening these communities, the province and the country as a whole.

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About the Author

Mercedes Labelle

Mercedes Labelle graduated from McGill University in 2020 with an Honours Bachelor of Political Science and Urban Systems. During her studies, she focused on Canadian politics and public policy processes, specifically researching the uneven distribution of benefits and services between urban and rural communities. At McGill, Mercedes provided analysis on Canadian Politics for the McGill Journal of Political Studies (MJPS). Through her involvement with MJPS, Mercedes developed a deeper understanding of the diverse interests and needs of the Canadian population. Having grown up in Canada, the United States, and Spain, Mercedes is eager to return to Northern Ontario, where her family now resides. In her free time, Mercedes enjoys listening to podcasts, cooking, and reading.

Table of Contents

Northern Policy Institute / Institut des Politiques du Nord
All Roads Lead Home: Immigration Flows into Thunder Bay and What this Means for RNIP Impacts | April 2022
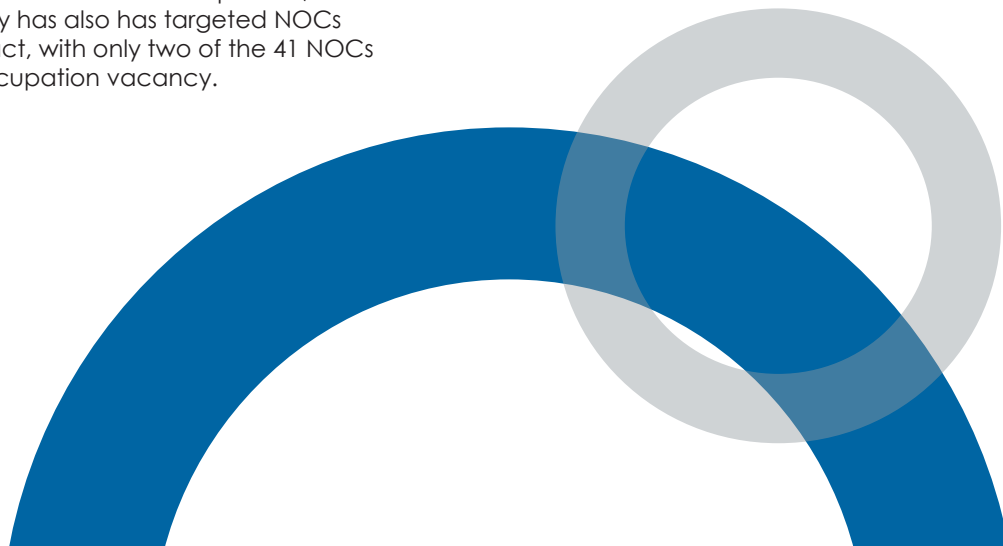
5

Executive Summary

Ontario's northern, western, and central regions are facing labour shortages, as a result of an aging population, high levels of youth out-migration, and low fertility rates. Thunder Bay, Ontario is no stranger to this issue, as it has experienced high average job vacancy rates of up to 31 per cent in some occupations. To combat the labour market impacts, the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP) program has been implemented across all five of Northern Ontario's largest cities. The RNIP aims to spread the benefits of economic immigration to small communities with demonstrated need, by creating a path to permanent residence for skilled foreign workers who want to work and live in one of the participating communities.

To assess the effectiveness of the RNIP program in Thunder Bay, baseline immigration trends are needed to accurately identify which occupations are in need of economic stimulation, and which labour market skills are most beneficial to immigrant success in the community. If admission criteria is not aligned with community-based need, then labour market shortages will only continue to be exacerbated. Which is why evidence-based decision making is crucial to adequately plan for labour supply, demand for housing, and settlement service capacity.

Thunder Bay has experienced a growth in immigration since 2001, with an approximate increase of 30 per cent. Most immigrants have been accepted under the economic class, with the most frequently intended National Occupation Codes (NOC) being university professors and lecturers, specialist physicians, home childcare providers, and financial auditors and accountants. Although these are the occupations immigrants were most frequently qualified for, the occupation vacancy rates suggest that there is the greatest need for administrative services managers, managers in customer and personal services, other installers, repairers, and services, and underground miners, oil and gas drillers and related occupations, to name a few. Thunder Bay has also has targeted NOCs which they hope to attract, with only two of the 41 NOCs being consistent with occupation vacancy.

This analysis finds that five recommendations are to be considered for the effective measurement of RNIP success.

1. Ongoing annual monitoring and assessment of community-level immigration trends;

2. Community-specific ongoing assessment of the impact of the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP) before, during, and after the program;

3. Expanded analysis to include secondary and domestic migrants;

4. Strengthening the alignment between labour market shortages, targeted occupations, postsecondary institutional fields of study, and immigrant-intended occupations to maximize economic outcomes;

5. Undertaking welcoming community initiatives to welcome, attract, and retain immigrants and the existing population.
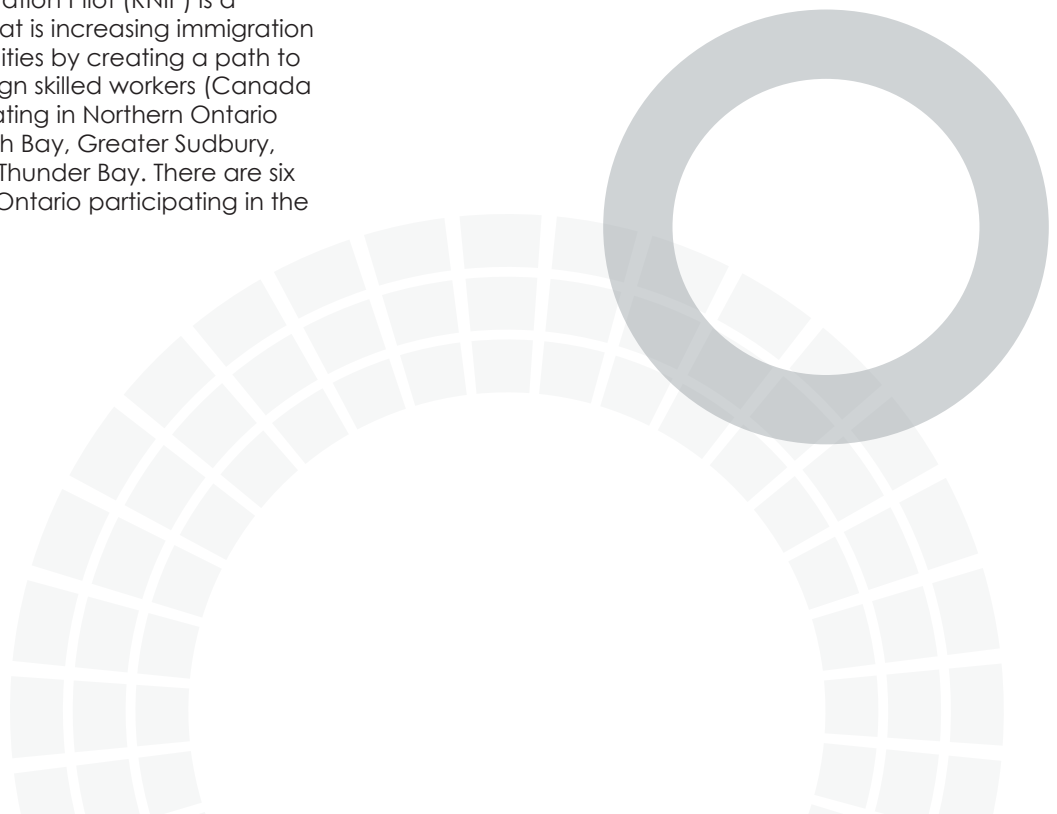
Introduction

Population trends in many of Ontario's northern, western, and central regions are characterized by high levels of youth out-migration and low fertility rates. Add to that the fact that a significant portion of the population is about to age out of the core working-age and labour shortages will emerge. There will not be an adequate supply of young workers to fill these gaps.

Without an adequate influx of immigrants, coupled with integration of the current domestic population into the labour market, shortages will continue to emerge (Ross 2020, 9). To combat this, there must be a baseline understanding of current and future immigration demographic characteristics to engage in evidence-based decision-making that will positively impact Northern Ontario communities. Using the available data, actors—such as workforce planning boards, chambers, municipalities, employers, and immigration partners—can strategically plan for, and fill, labour shortages that will emerge.

The purpose of these reports is to establish a baseline assessment of immigration trends in each of the five largest cities in Ontario's northern, western, and central regions—North Bay, Greater Sudbury, Timmins, Sault Ste. Marie, and Thunder Bay. These assessments can be used to evaluate immigration pilot programs, such as the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot, and potential future newcomer programs.

The Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP) is a community-driven program that is increasing immigration to northern and rural communities by creating a path to permanent residence for foreign skilled workers (Canada 2020c). The five cities participating in Northern Ontario are also its largest cities— North Bay, Greater Sudbury, Timmins, Sault Ste. Marie, and Thunder Bay. There are six other communities outside of Ontario participating in the pilot.

In addition to evaluating current federal initiatives, the data can be used to evaluate, more generally, how communities in Northern Ontario are doing at attracting and retaining immigrants. It is crucial to identify the immigration information that is being collected, the gaps, and who is collecting that data. Additionally, it is important for the data to be collected and reported at the community level. With a more complete picture of immigration trends in Northern Ontario, different communities can be compared against each other to assess the effectiveness of immigration, attraction, retention, and successes. Also, communities can self-assess by monitoring their progress, successes, and areas for improvement. Having this baseline immigration assessment will help communities continuously know which immigrants to target and attract to their communities.

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7

Methodology

Ideally, an immigration trend analysis would be done annually, with a quick turnaround time so communities can measure the impact of their decisions soon after they are made. Additionally, having baseline data provides a benchmark for assessing progress, or lack thereof, when compared with future reports. But there are limitations in attempting to annually update immigration trends at the community level.

The data sources used for this analysis include Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's (IRCC) admission data; the 2016 census (and subsequent target group profiles obtained from the Community Data Program); Taxfiler Migration Estimates; Emsi Economic Modeling; and the Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB). Notably, the data obtained from the census can only be updated once every five years (as per the frequency of release) and at the time of publishing, details of citizenship and immigration have not been released. The IMDB has an approximate two-year lag for data released and Taxfiler data have a one-year lag. IRCC does have monthly updates to its admission data, but the process for obtaining the data at the community level takes up to six months, and high levels of data suppression are present when requesting data at the community level. Finally, Emsi has economic modelling data updated monthly.

It is important to look at immigration trends in each community over time to see how they evolve, especially when evaluating the impact of a pilot program. But doing so with community-level data, specifically IRCC admission data, reveals that many years have few observations to report, meaning the data are suppressed for privacy reasons (see Appendix A).

Additionally, certain datasets group all immigrants that arrived before 1981 together while others group them together based on those who arrived before 1990. This creates a large group of immigrants that overshadows more recent inflows, which is specifically present when looking at census data. Thus, recent data from post-2000 can provide a more accurate picture of immigration trends and their evolution over time.

For non-permanent residents, change over time is difficult to analyze since the data are largely organized by year of immigration and, technically speaking, non-permanent residents are not 'official' (i.e., landed) immigrants, according to Statistics Canada datasets (notably the census). Non-permanent residents refers to people from another country who had a work or study permit, or who were refugee claimants at the time of the census, and had family members living in Canada with them.

Despite limitations surrounding the frequency of data updates, high levels of suppression, and obtaining this data at the community level, a thorough overview of immigration trends in Ontario's northern, western, and central regions was produced.

Finally, it is important to note the impact COVID-19 has had on Canadian immigration flows, labour market, industries, and so on. This analysis is primarily focused on data prior to the pandemic as that is what was available at the time of writing. Plus, as mentioned earlier, to assess the impact of the RNIP pilot, we need to know the picture of immigration before/at the start of the program in Northern Ontario.

8

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All Roads Lead Home: Immigration Flows into Thunder Bay and What this Means for RNIP Impacts | April 2022

Theme and indicator selection

Many indicators selected were identified based on alignment with pre-existing government immigration programs. For example, the Federal Skilled Worker (Express Entry) Program provides permanent residence to foreign skilled workers. There are minimum education, language, and work experience requirements. Then, applications are further assessed based on age, education, work experience, job offers, official language skills, and adaptability (Canada 2020a).

The Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program looks at an applicant's skills, experience, and education. Specifically, in-demand skills, language skills, and status as a recent Ontario graduate (Ontario 2019). Finally, the RNIP Program also creates a path to permanent residency for foreign skilled workers with work and educational experience in specific occupations (Canada 2020c).

As mentioned previously, limitations were present surrounding data availability. Ultimately, seven themes were identified: immigrant characteristics, economic outcomes, housing, education, immigration system, income, and retention[1].

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1 Retention data were only available for the Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) of Greater Sudbury and Thunder Bay.
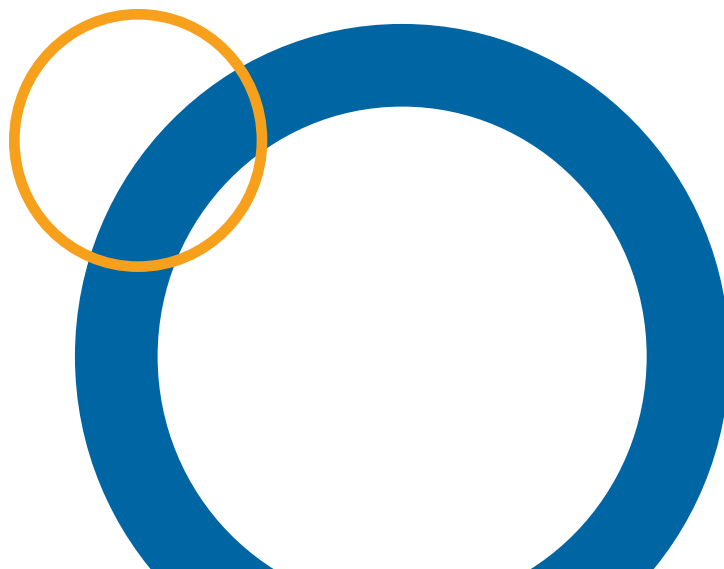
Limitations

Economic outcomes, such as income and involvement in the labour market, typically differ depending on the immigration stream the immigrant followed. Among all newcomers, principal applicants in the Economic stream fare best in the Canadian labour market in terms of labour force participation rates and employment rates. In fact, they perform better in these metrics than the Canadian-born population (de Chardon 2019, 6). Additionally, unemployment rates among principal applicants in the Economic stream are on par with Canadian-born citizens. Resettled Refugees and Protected Persons and Sponsored Family stream immigrants usually fare worse.

Although these distinctions are important to note, it was not possible to obtain community-level data separated by stream of immigration and period of admission for all indicators (see Appendix C). When possible, the immigration streams were divided; when not, total immigration numbers were assessed. Addressing these gaps is crucial in getting more specific data to ensure immigrants are not treated as a homogenous group. When evaluating a work experience-based program that will potentially directly impact Economic migrants, it would be useful to have stream-specific data to better assess program impacts.

Analysis of immigration trends must continue through the years, especially when assessing a pilot program. A detailed methodology is needed to ensure that the trend analysis can be replicated in the future. Immigration trends should continue to be tracked throughout Ontario's northern, western, and central regions before, during, and after the end of the RNIP and other immigration initiatives.

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All Roads Lead Home: Immigration Flows into Thunder Bay and What this Means for RNIP Impacts | April 2022

9

Immigrant Characteristics

The 2016 census counted 10,490 immigrants currently residing in Thunder Bay. Immigrant, as defined by Statistics Canada, refers to a person who is, or who has ever been, a landed immigrant or permanent resident (Statistics Canada, 2021a). Thus, these figures do not include temporary residents, such as study and/or work permit holders. Most immigrants in Thunder Bay arrived before 1991—the earliest time frame with available data. Thunder Bay has been experiencing an increase in immigrants settling in the city since 2001. Since 2000, the time frame with the most immigration to the city was 2011 to 2016.

Additionally, most immigrants came through the Economic stream (1,520), followed by the Sponsored Family (1,390) stream and the Resettled Refugees and Protected Persons (865) stream[2]. Most immigrants to Thunder Bay since 2001 have a university degree. Temporary residents are included in the 'non-permanent resident' category, of which there were 890 in Thunder Bay in 2016. Longitudinal data are not available from Statistics Canada on non-permanent resident cohorts. They have no official 'period of landing' as they are not landed immigrants.

Figure 1: Immigrants by period of immigration in Thunder Bay CMA, 2016
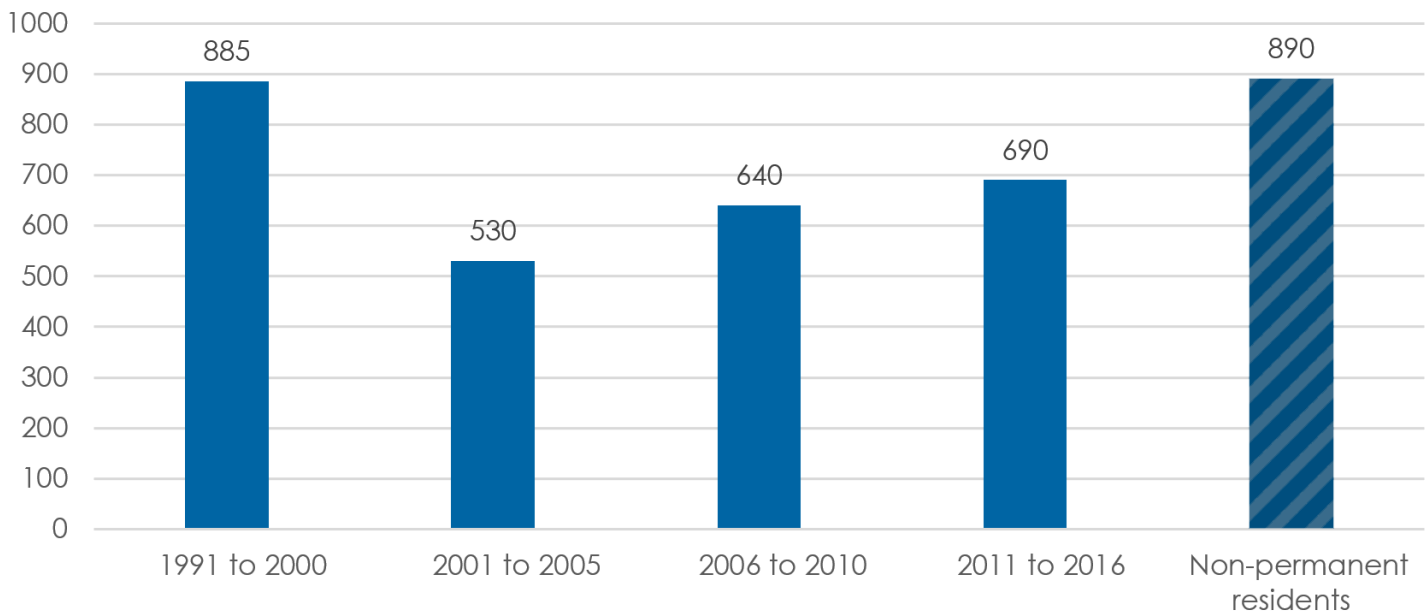
Source: Author's calculations, Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of the Population, Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001.

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2 *The total number of immigrants in the 'All Other Immigration' category is 15.*

To capture the effect of non-permanent (temporary) residents in Thunder Bay, Taxfiler Migration Estimates can be used. Taxfiler data use tax records to estimate migration patterns. Taxfiler Migration Estimates of international in-migrants include those who file taxes and had a previous address (the year before) in a location outside Canada (Canada, 2021a).

Based on the Taxfiler definition of international in-migrants, Thunder Bay has seen steady increases in the past five years[3]. In the 2014-2015 tax year, there were 187 international in-migrants. That number has steadily increased year-over-year to 812 in the 2018-2019 tax year. Additionally, since 2013, there has been a lower percentage of female immigrants than male immigrants. In the 2018-2019 tax year, 58.5 per cent of immigrants were male and 41.5 per cent were female.

Most permanent residents in Thunder Bay who landed between 1998 and 2019 have citizenship from the United States. Other common countries of citizenship for landed immigrants include China, Syria (since 2016), Myanmar (Burma), and the Philippines.

The largest age group at landing in Thunder Bay is consistently 25 to 44.[4] The second largest group is 0 to 17, perhaps indicating the presence of family immigration. The smallest age group at landing is consistently those over 65.

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3 The last five years of data are available – 2014 to 2019.
4 Age groupings done by IRCC are not uniform in age range. Age ranges are 0-17, 18-24, 25-44, 45-65, and 65+. Thus, 18-24 are underrepresented because of category groupings. The two groupings that have the largest age range are 25-44 and 45-65, which might overrepresent these categories in the data.

Northern Policy Institute / Institut des Politiques du Nord
All Roads Lead Home: Immigration Flows into Thunder Bay and What this Means for RNIP Impacts | April 2022
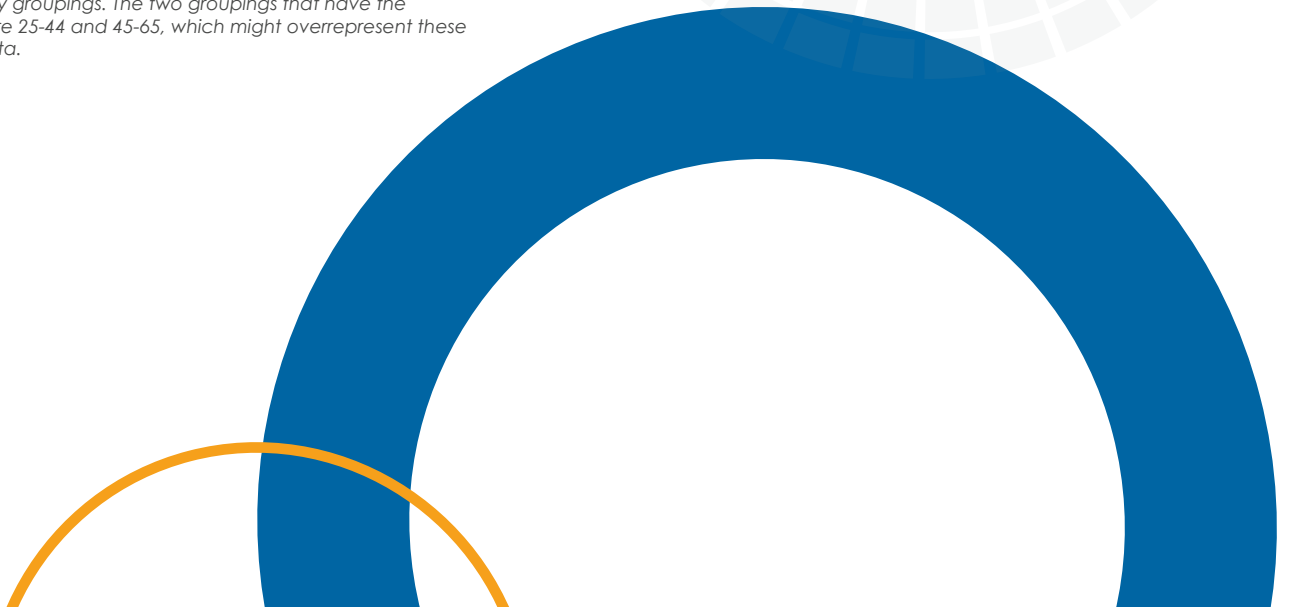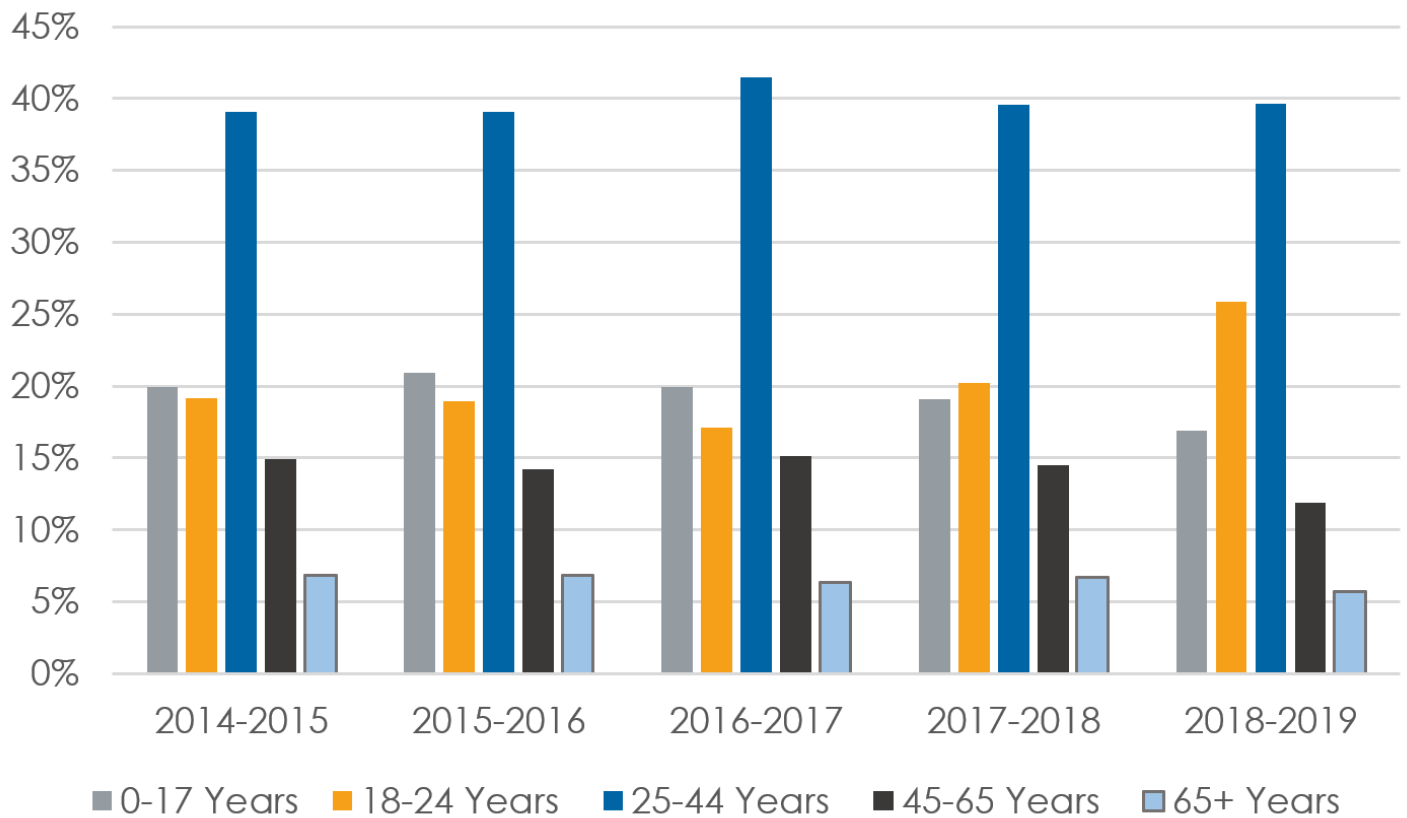
11

Figure 2: In-migrant age at landing by year in Thunder Bay CMA, 2014-2019

Source: Author's calculations, MIG: Migration Estimates from Taxfiler (T1FF), Table B: By Age Group, 2014-2019.

Language

The most prevalent language spoken[5] among permanent residents in Thunder Bay is English, perhaps due to the points allotted to English-speakers in the federal Express Entry program. Additionally, English is the primary language spoken in the United States—the most common country of citizenship for permanent residents. The number of English-speaking immigrants who gained permanent residence in Thunder Bay peaked in 2006 with 70 admittances and reached 70 again in 2010. Thunder Bay is located less than an hour's drive from the Canada-United States border, perhaps aiding in the large inflow of English-speaking immigrants.

Additionally, English is the most common language spoken by permanent residents in all 11 Northern Ontario districts and its five largest cities. Other common languages include Arabic, Chinese, Spanish, and Burmese.[6]

Arabic-speaking immigrants peaked in 2016 with 125 gaining permanent residence in Thunder Bay that year. The years following also saw higher rates than pre-2016 numbers, ranging between 60 and 90 Arabic-speaking immigrants per year.

Service Usage

Immigrants in Thunder Bay most commonly use information and orientation services provided by settlement service-providing organizations. Other commonly used services include language assessments and needs assessment and referrals. There is low usage of

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5 Language spoken indicates the mother tongue of individuals. The mother tongue is the native language of an individual upon entering Canada.
6 Burmese is native to Myanmar.

Stream

employment-related services.

Between 2014 and 2019[7], the number of permanent residents coming to Thunder Bay has increased rapidly, starting at 150 in 2015 and peaking at 385 in 2019. Between 2015 and 2019, the most common immigration stream among permanent residents in Thunder Bay was Resettled Refugees and Protected Persons, with 490 people gaining permanent residence through that stream. This coincides with the large number of Arabic-speaking immigrants landing in Thunder Bay during the same time frame. Economic immigrants was the second most common stream between 2015 and 2019, with 470 gaining permanent residence in the city.

Between 1998 and 2019, the most common immigration stream for permanent residents in Thunder Bay was Sponsored Family, closely followed by the Economic stream and the Resettled Refugees and Protected Persons stream. The number of Resettled Refugees and Protected Persons jumped from 10 in 2015 to 150 in 2016, with high numbers continuing through 2019.[8]

Economic immigrants predominantly know English; very few know only French. There are more immigrants who know neither official language than those who know both official languages. Sponsored Family immigrants are predominantly English speakers, with a portion not

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7 The most recent years with full data available at time of writing.
8 Based on IRCC Admission Data, permanent residents by intended destination.

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All Roads Lead Home: Immigration Flows into Thunder Bay and What this Means for RNIP Impacts | April 2022

13

Analysis

knowing either official language.

Characteristics such as age, education, and language spoken all are weighted heavily in the Express Entry program streams. For example, higher levels of education, such as university degrees, are given more points in the program. Additionally, certain age groups, such as 18-24, are allotted more points, while other age groups (0-17) receive no points.

Despite French being an official language, and the existence of additional incentives for French-speaking skilled workers[9], French is not one of the common languages spoken by permanent residents in any of Northern Ontario's 11 districts or five largest cities. Perhaps French-speaking immigrants are not common in most Northern Ontario districts due to the benefits they receive if they locate in Quebec, such as prioritized credential recognition between France and Quebec (Quebec 2019). But the immigration target set by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada for French-speaking migrants to Canada (i.e., outside Quebec) is 4.4 per cent.

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9 *Additional points provided to French-speakers in the Express Entry program, as well as Ontario's Express Entry French-Speaking Skilled Worker stream (under OINP).*

Economic Outcomes

Intended NOCs

Measuring immigrants' intended occupations can help align labour supply with labour demand. To put it another way, strategically targeting immigrants with skills needed in the community, such as a specific labour shortage, can enhance the vitality of the local labour force.

National Occupation Classifications (NOCs) provide an organizational framework of occupations in the Canadian labour market. Occupations are identified and grouped primarily based on the work typically performed, in other words by the tasks, duties, and responsibilities of the occupation (Statistics Canada 2016).

In no particular order, the most frequent immigrant-intended NOCs in Thunder Bay between 1998 and 2019 were:

- University professors and lecturers

- Specialist physicians

- Home childcare providers

- Financial auditors and accountants

It is worth noting that 'Other intended occupation' was the most selected NOC answer for every district in Ontario's northern, western, and central regions. Thus, it is excluded from this analysis to focus on specific

Occupation vacancy rates

occupations.

Occupation-specific vacancy rates represent vacancies as a proportion of the total labour force for that occupation. Thus, vacancy rates can identify potential current labour market gaps.

The methodology for calculating vacancy rate mirrors that of Northern Policy Institute's "Assessing Labour Market Shortages" series of reports on North Bay, Greater Sudbury, Timmins, Sault Ste. Marie, and Thunder Bay (Ross, 2020). That series reflects trends from 2018, but this paper has updated the calculations to reflect 2020 trends—the most recent full year with data available. A high job vacancy rate typically indicates a stronger labour market for job seekers, as it demonstrates that a higher proportion of the total labour market consists of vacant jobs needing to be filled (Lindzon, 2019).

The data used to calculate job vacancy rates[10] were obtained from Emsi Economic Modeling, which were provided through a partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

According to Table 1, multiple management-related occupations appear to have the highest job vacancy rates (NOC Skill Level 0). Additionally, there are three Skill Level C occupations, including:

- Other installers, repairers and servicers

- Home care providers and educational support occupations

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10 The methodology Northern Policy Institute uses to calculate vacancy rate is explained in the "Assessing Labour Market Shortages" series by Alex Ross (2020).

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All Roads Lead Home: Immigration Flows into Thunder Bay and What this Means for RNIP Impacts | April 2022

15

Table 1: Occupations with the highest average job vacancy rates, Thunder Bay CMA, 2020

• Customer and information services representatives

NOC	Description	Total Labour Market 2020	Job Vacancy Rate
011	Administrative services managers	279	31.8%
065	Managers in customer and personal services, n.e.c[11].	105	23.4%
744	Other installers, repairers and servicers	384	12.4%
823	Underground miners, oil and gas drillers and related occupations	39	11.8%
441	Home care providers and educational support occupations	954	11.6%
060	Corporate sales managers	138	11.6%
655	Customer and information services representatives	682	11.3%
051	Managers in art, culture, recreation and sport	70	11.0%
312	Optometrists, chiropractors and other health diagnosing and treating professionals	237	9.7%
313	Pharmacists, dietitians and nutritionists	282	9.7%
031	Managers in health care	164	9.5%

Source: Author's calculations based on Emsi – economicmodeling.com.

It is worth noting that current immigration trends largely do not align with the labour market vacancy rates above. The only common immigrant-intended NOC that aligns with high vacancy rate occupations in Thunder Bay is 4411 – Home child care providers.

Additionally, the RNIP Program requires communities to target specific occupations that could be seen as in demand that immigrants could fill. These occupations are identified at the community level, largely through consultations with community employers. In the first year of the RNIP Program, Thunder Bay is targeting multiple three- and four-digit NOCs (see Appendix D). The two Thunder Bay-targeted NOCs that align with identified occupations currently experiencing high vacancy rates (Table 1) are as follows:

• 8231: Underground production and development miners

• 7441: Residential and commercial installers and services

Vacancy rate, at first glance, might not seem to be indicative of immigrants' economic outcomes. But when looked at in conjunction with intended and targeted occupations, vacancy rate can indicate whether there is alignment between occupations experiencing high vacancy rates and employment, unemployment, and participation rates among immigrants.

11 N.e.c. refers to 'not elsewhere classified.

Labour Market Impact Assessments (LMIAs)

When looking at the presence of work permit holders in a specific region, it is important to analyze the jobs they are filling. Labour Market Impact Assessments (LMIAs) are submitted by employers to gain approval, in most cases, to hire foreign workers. A positive LMIA will show that there is a labour shortage that cannot be filled by a Canadian worker or permanent resident, indicating a need for a foreign worker to fill the job (Canada, 2021d). It should be noted that some foreign workers are exempt from needing an LMIA or work permit, such as those in the International Mobility Program.

LMIAs are only approved in regions without high unemployment rates, specifically for lowest skill and lowest wage occupations in accommodation, food services, and retail trade sectors.

The reason for reviewing positive and negative LMIAs is to measure, quantitatively, which occupations are experiencing labour shortages. Specifically, for the RNIP Program, communities select the occupations they will be 'targeting' each year. LMIA information should be considered when identifying labour shortages in each community.

Negative LMIAs are not inherently indicative of the position's ability to be filled by Canadians or permanent residents. It can also indicate that the employer requesting the work permit has provided false, misleading, or inaccurate information in the past two years (Canada, 2021b).

In 2020, there were 11 occupations **approved** for LMIAs in Thunder Bay, with a total of 30 unique positive LMIAs issued:

- 7511 – Transport truck drivers (15)

- 6311 – Food service supervisors (4)

- 3111 – Specialist physicians (3)

- 0511 – Library, archive, museum and art gallery managers (1)

- 0711 – Construction managers (1)

- 1241 – Administrative assistants (1)

- 3216 – Medical sonographers (1)

- 6211 – Retail sales supervisors (1)

- 6315 – Cleaning supervisors (1)

- 6332 – Bakers (1)

- 7611 – Construction trades helpers and labourers (1)

As mentioned, an approved LMIA indicates that there is no Canadian talent available to fill the above positions in Thunder Bay. As such, approved LMIA positions are a good indicator for decision-makers of labour market gaps and occupations that could be targeted through the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot, postsecondary institutions, or through additional training and upskilling.

Thunder Bay had three LMIA applications **denied** in 2020 for the following occupations:

- 6311 – Food service supervisors

- 0213 – Computer and information systems managers

- 2171 – Information systems analysts and consultants

Denied LMIA applications do not necessarily indicate the availability of Canadians to carry out the duties of the occupation. Instead, there are multiple reasons, including a company's past experiences with the LMIA process, that contribute to whether an application is denied (Canada, 2021b).
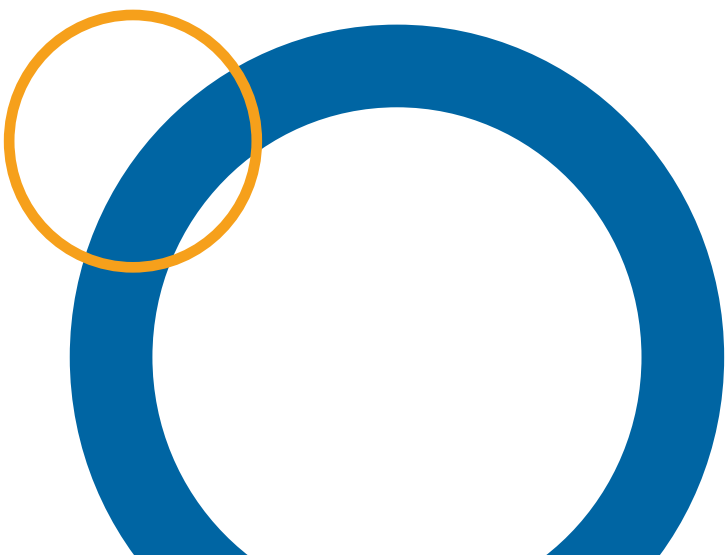
Between 2017 and 2020, there were a total of 54[12] LMIAs approved in Thunder Bay. The occupations with the most approved positions are as follows:

Table 2: Occupations with the most approved LMIAs in Thunder Bay, 2017-2020

NOC	Occupation	Skill Level	Approved Positions	Included in RNIP Y1 NOCs?
7511	Transport truck drivers	C	15	**Yes**
3111	Specialist physicians	A	10	No
6322	Cooks	B	8	No
6211	Retail sales supervisors	B	3	No
4021	College and other vocational instructors	A	2	No
6311	Food service supervisors	B	2	No

Source: Open Data - Government of Canada, Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP): Positive Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) Employers List, multiple issues.

It is worth noting that the only positive LMIA issued in 2020 that aligns with the occupations with high vacancy rates (Table 1) is for 0511 – Library, archive, museum and art gallery managers. The occupations in Thunder Bay with the most approved LMIAs between 2017 and 2020 do not align with any of the occupations with the highest vacancy rates. There was more alignment between RNIP Year 1 targeted occupations (Appendix D) and 2020 approved LMIAs. For example, overlaps include transport truck drivers, medical sonographers, and construction trades helpers and labourers. With further alignment of in-demand occupations and the RNIP Program, employers can better attract and retain (as permanent residents) immigrant employees to fill these gaps.

12 Not all occupations are included in this table.

Employment/ unemployment/participation

Immigrants in Thunder Bay, whether recent or more established, achieve higher employment rates than non-immigrants and non-permanent residents, with the exception being those who arrived before 1990, who may be aging out of the labour force. For other cities in Ontario's northern, western, and central regions— notably North Bay, Timmins, and Kenora—recent immigrants tend to have lower employment rates than more established immigrants.

Non-permanent residents, also known as temporary residents, may be in Canada with permits that have more work restrictions. For example, study permit holders who are enrolled full-time are able to work on- and off-campus without a work permit for up to 20 hours a week during school terms, which could make finding a job more difficult. Additionally, work permit holders can have either an open or closed work permit. Closed work permit holders are only able to work with the employer specified on their work permit, while open workers can work for any eligible Canadian employer. These factors could contribute to the higher rate of unemployment among non-permanent residents (Canada 2020d).
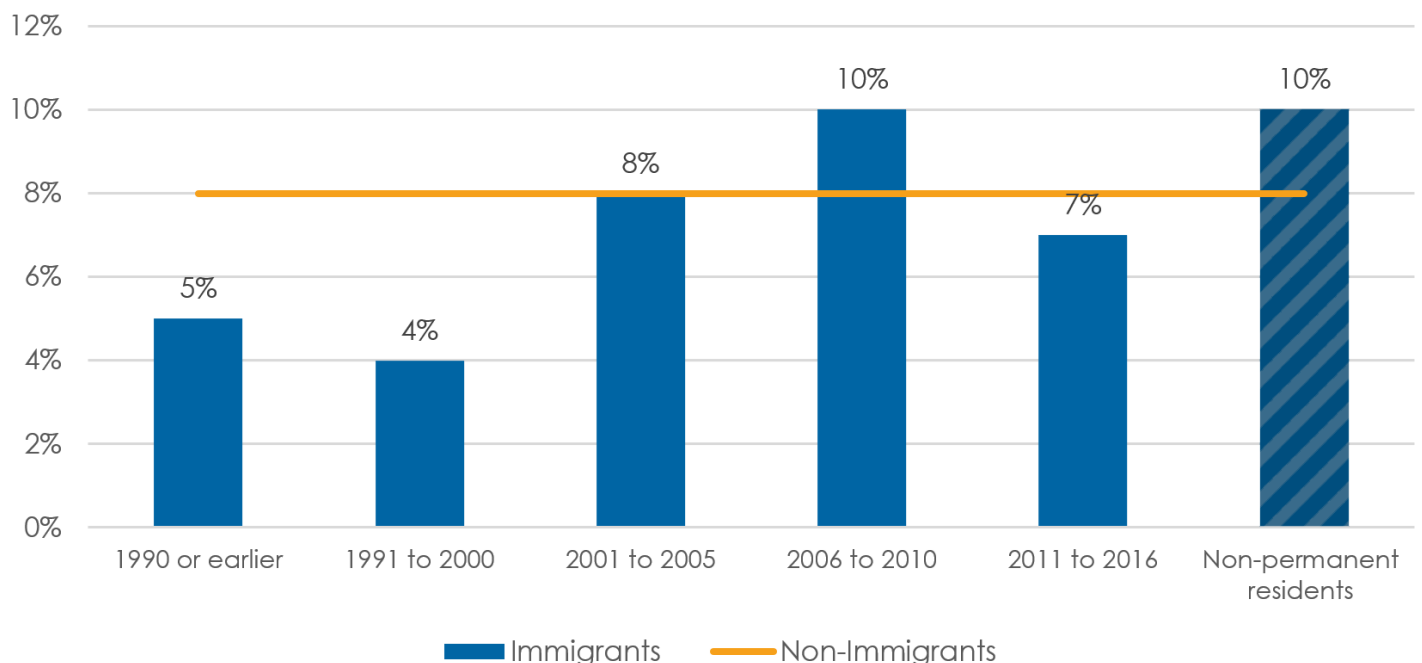
Figure 3: Employment rates (%) in Thunder Bay by period of immigration, 2016
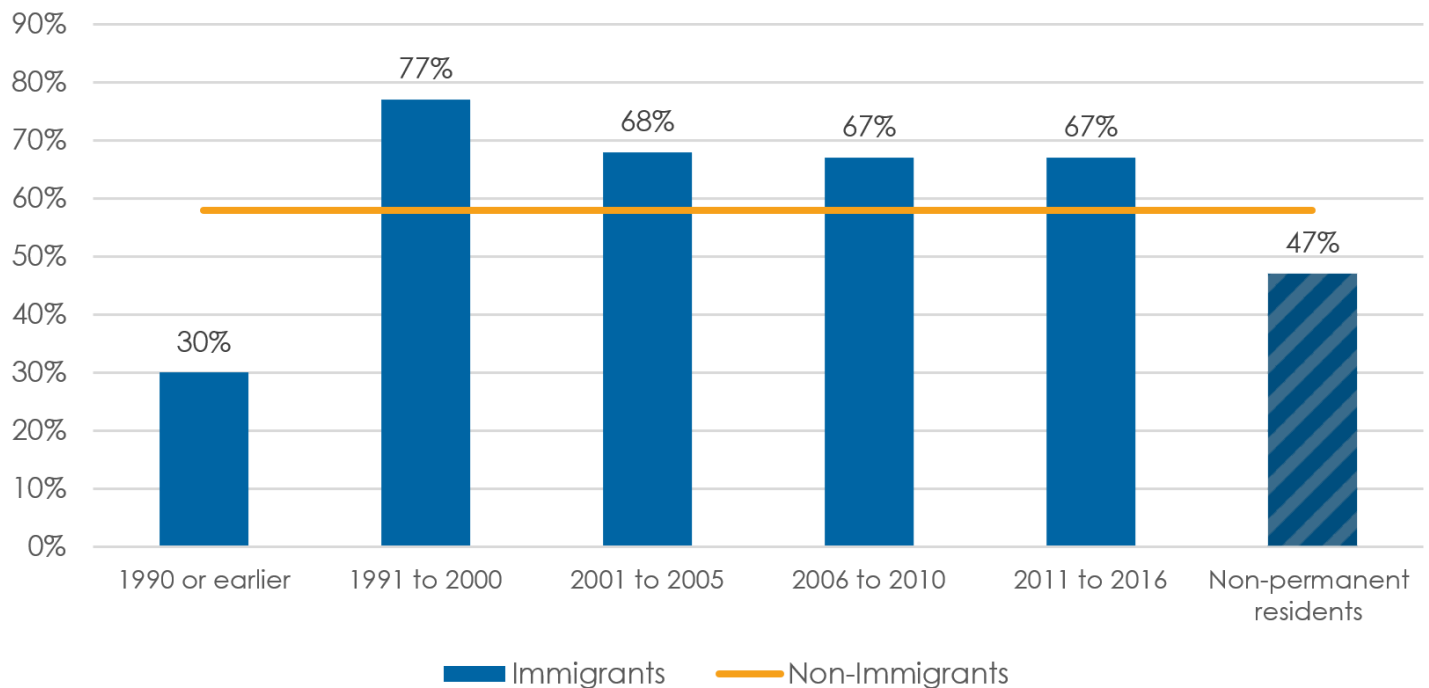
Source: Author's calculations; Community Data Program (CDP); Selected Language, Labour Force, Education, Income and Mobility Status Characteristics; Table EO2767-TBL7R.

Figure 4: Unemployment rates (%) in Thunder Bay by period of immigration, 2016

Source: Author's calculations; Community Data Program (CDP); Selected Language, Labour Force, Education, Income and Mobility Status Characteristics; Table EO2767-TBL7R.

Measuring participation rates between immigrant cohorts indicates the number of immigrants in each cohort actively participating in the labour force, either by being employed or searching for employment. As regions in Northern Ontario are facing an aging population, low birth rates, and youth out-migration, immigrant participation in the labour force is one way to maintain the current standard of living as demographics shift.

The participation rate measures the total labour force, comprised of those who are employed and unemployed, combined, relative to the size of the working-age population. The participation rate is the share of the working-age population that is working or looking for work.

As mentioned, when discussing employment and unemployment, time since landing is a large determinant of immigrants' labour market outcomes. For example, recent immigrants face labour market hurdles that affect their integration into the labour market, such as lack of language proficiency, lack of recognition of foreign credentials, and inadequate familiarity with the Canadian labour market (Statistics Canada, 2003, 10). A high participation rate combined with a low unemployment rate indicates robust opportunities in the labour market.

Recent immigrants in Thunder Bay participate in the labour market at a comparable rate to more established immigrant cohorts. Non-permanent residents (i.e., temporary residents) are participating in the labour market at a lower rate than the general population and permanent residents. The explanation for the lower participation rate coincides with the rationale mentioned previously regarding employment and unemployment rates: many of these temporary residents are study permit holders with employment limitations. Also, immigrant cohorts, except for those who migrated in 1990 or earlier, have higher participation rates than non-immigrants.

Northern Policy Institute / Institut des Politiques du Nord
All Roads Lead Home: Immigration Flows into Thunder Bay and What this Means for RNIP Impacts | April 2022
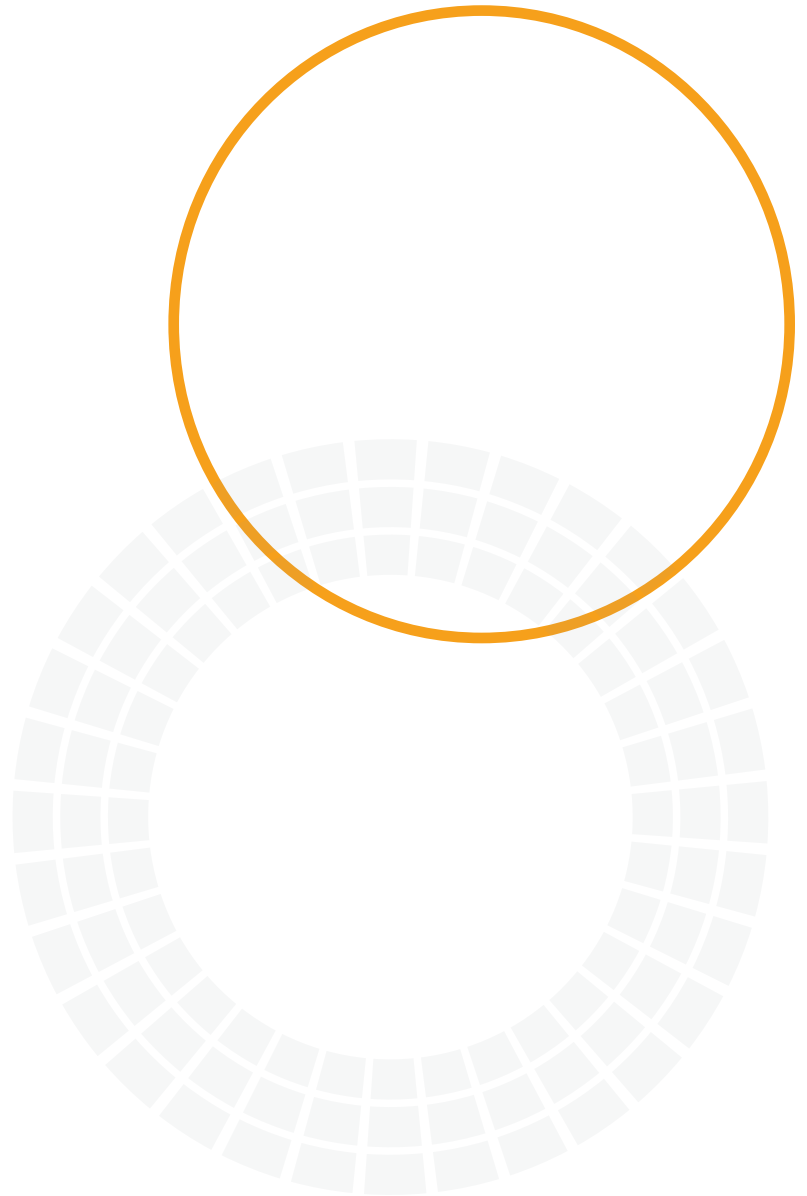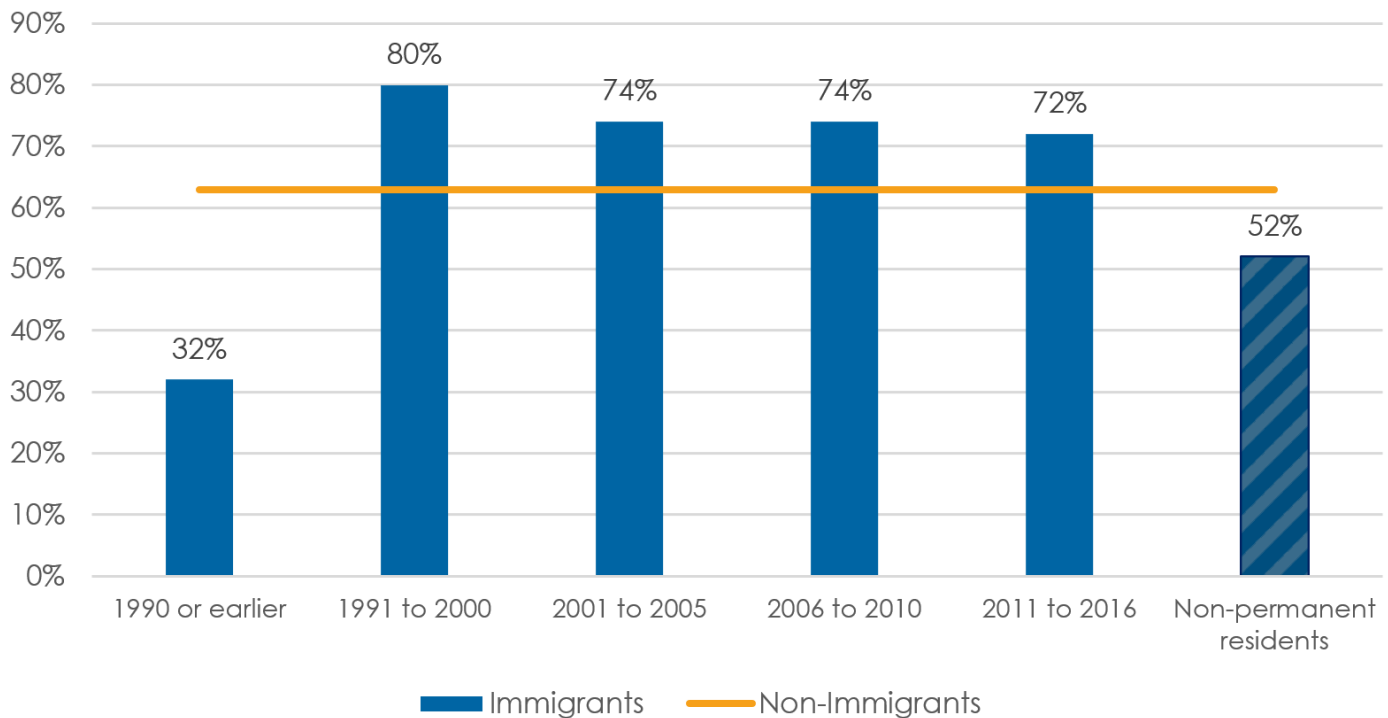
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Figure 5: Participation rate (%) in Thunder Bay by period of immigration, 2016


Source: Author's calculations; Community Data Program (CDP); Selected Language, Labour Force, Education, Income and Mobility Status Characteristics; Table EO2767-TBL7R.

Discussion

The federal Express Entry program prioritizes immigrants with certain jobs or NOCs. In fact, all federal Express Entry streams require work experience in NOCs 0, A, or B, which are jobs in management and/or requiring university or college credentials. Thus, the Express Entry program caters to high-skilled workers.

As seen in the labour market analysis for Thunder Bay, high-skilled workers are not the only NOC categories facing labour market shortages. There is a demand for NOC skill levels C and D. Skill Level C includes intermediate jobs that usually call for high school and/or job-specific training, such as residential and commercial installers and servicers and transport truck drivers. It is notable that Thunder Bay does not target any Skill Level D NOC targets. Skill Level D includes labour jobs that usually give on-the-job training, such as food counter attendants and kitchen helpers (Canada 2020b).

In theory, communities targeting immigrants who have specific occupational experience that aligns with current labour market shortages should result in an increase in employment rates for recent immigrants. The RNIP requirement that the potential immigrant have a permanent job offer further contributes to positive labour market outcomes and employment upon arrival.
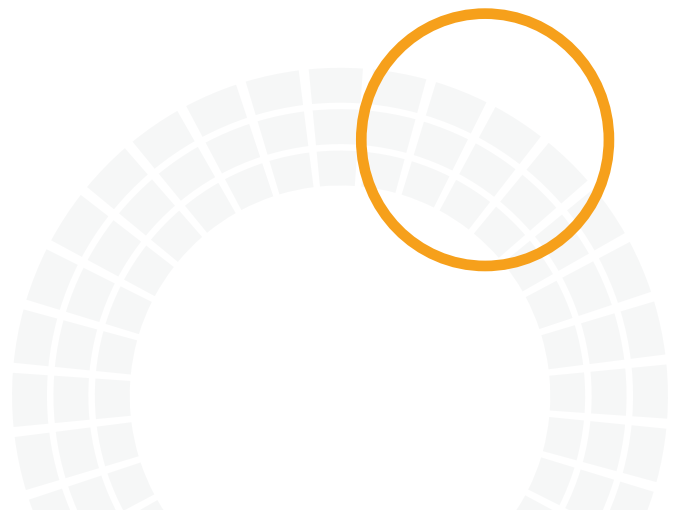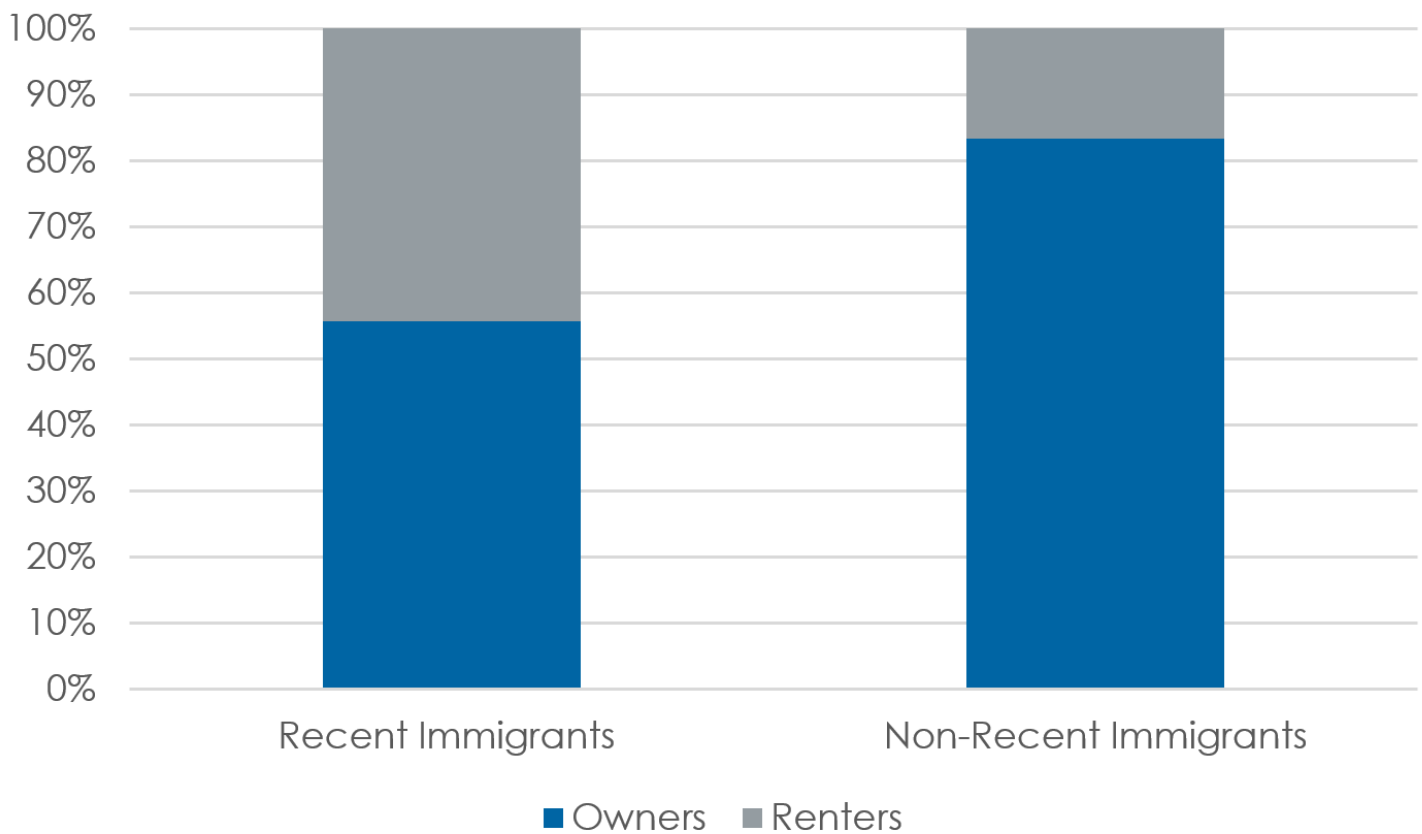
Housing

Looking at immigrants' housing tenure can help indicate financial security, especially if the dwelling is owned (Haan 2012, 3). Owned housing can also signify an immigrant household's commitment to their new community and society (ibid), which can indicate retention.

In Thunder Bay, recent immigrants are more likely to own than rent their dwellings. This trend goes against what is seen in the other cities in Northern Ontario, except for Sault Ste. Marie. Non-recent immigrants—those who obtained permanent residence more than five years ago—are more likely to be homeowners.

Figure 6: Immigrant households in Thunder Bay by housing tenure (owners vs. renters), 2016


Source: Community Data Program (CDP), Target Group Profile of Recent Immigrant + Immigrant Population, Census 2016.

Northern Policy Institute / Institut des Politiques du Nord
All Roads Lead Home: Immigration Flows into Thunder Bay and What this Means for RNIP Impacts | April 2022

23

There are many factors that can influence housing tenure, such as housing prices, discrimination, admission category, navigating the system, stable employment, access to credit, affordability/income, availability, and adequacy.

Also, the distinction needed when looking at housing tenure is that between recent and non-recent immigrants. A recent immigrant refers to a person who obtained a landed immigrant or permanent resident status up to five years prior to a given census year. For the data used in this paper, a recent immigrant would be defined as someone who landed between 2011 and 2016. Non-recent immigrants landed before 2011.

Non-recent immigrants have had more time to settle into the community, find careers, and make connections. Recent immigrants, on the other hand, might not yet have stable careers—making it more difficult to qualify for a mortgage and/or build credit—community connections, or knowledge of the Canadian housing market.
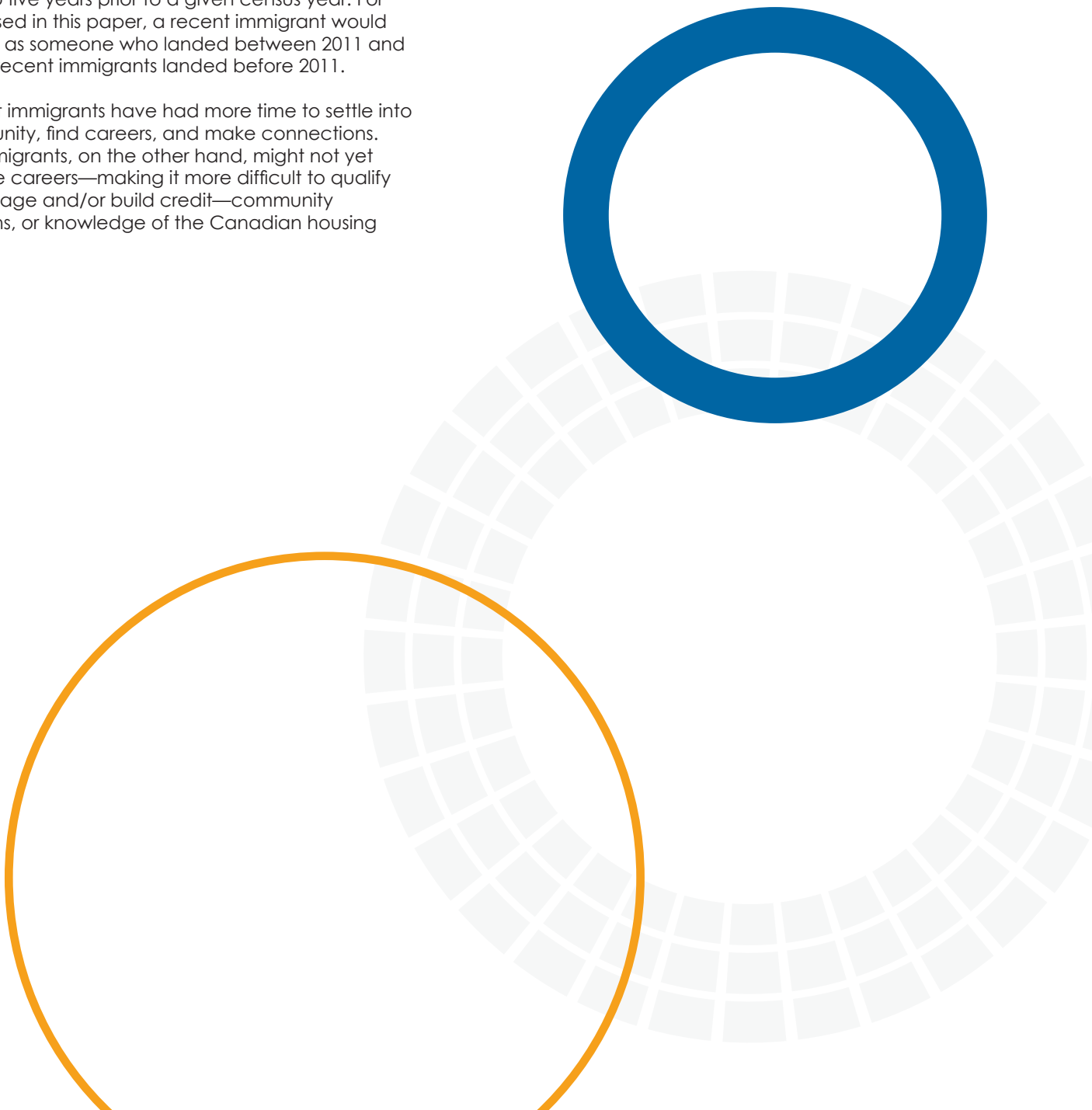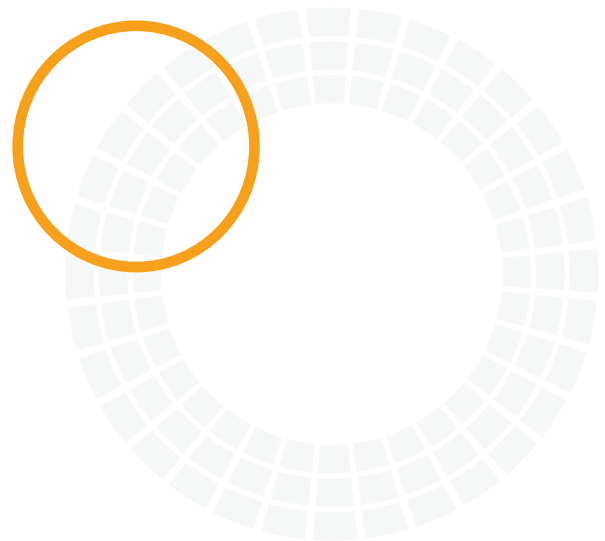
Education

The most common field of study for immigrants in Thunder Bay is architecture, engineering, and related technologies. The second most common field of study among immigrants is health and related fields. The third is business, management, and public administration.

Immigrants who studied in a high-skill field, such as health care, engineering, or architecture, are most prominent in Thunder Bay. The health care field of study aligns with one of the most intended occupations for immigrants to Thunder Bay between 1998 and 2019: specialist physicians.

The City of Thunder Bay has two postsecondary institutions: Confederation College and Lakehead University. The number of international students at both institutions has been increasing since 2012, with 907 enrolled at Lakehead and 428 at Confederation in the 2017-2018[13] academic year. Seven per cent of students at Lakehead are international students.

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13 Most recent data available at time of writing.

Northern Policy Institute / Institut des Politiques du Nord
All Roads Lead Home: Immigration Flows into Thunder Bay and What this Means for RNIP Impacts | April 2022

25

Figure 7: International students enrolled in Thunder Bay by postsecondary institution, 2012-2018

Year	Lakehead	Confederation
2012-2013	197	93
2013-2014	288	177
2014-2015	363	276
2015-2016	453	362
2016-2017	683	387
2017-2018	907	428
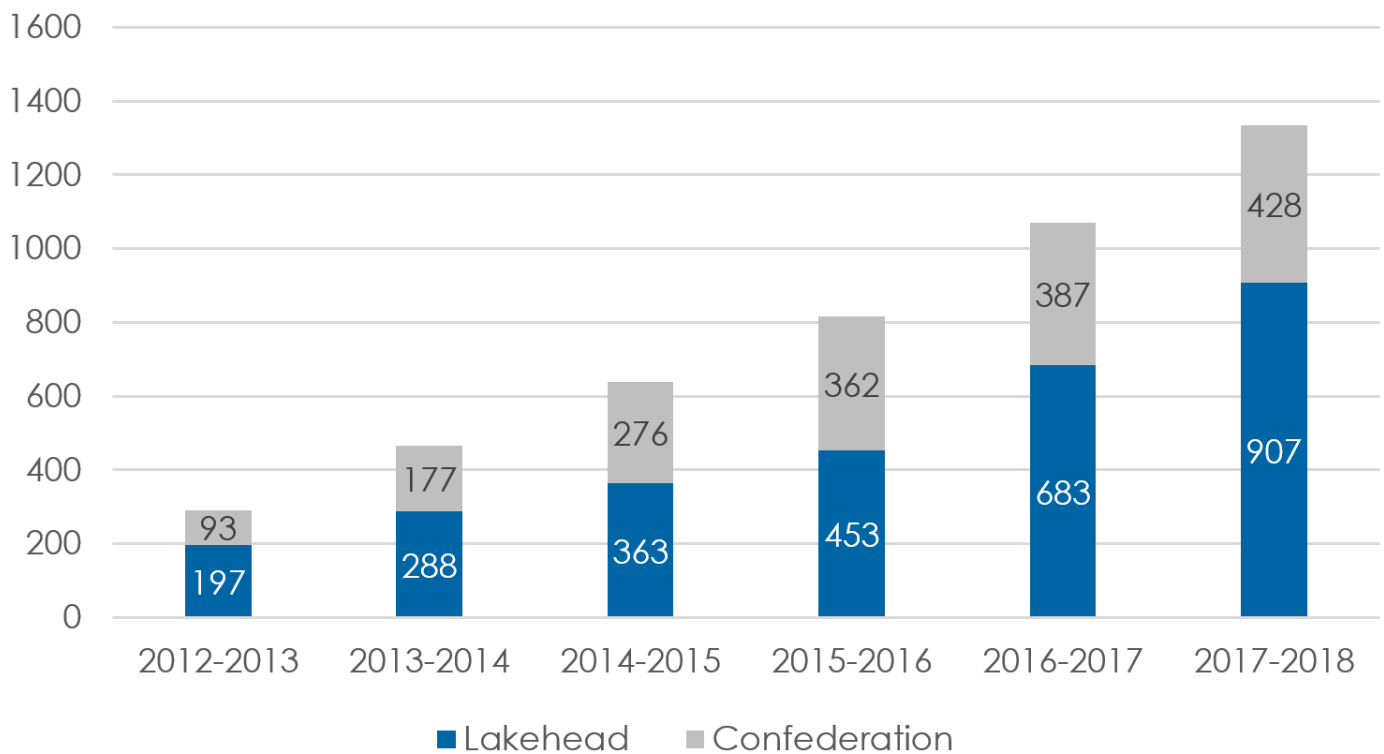
Source: Author's calculations, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU), Enrolment Data - International and Domestic Full-time Headcounts.

International students comprise an important pool of potential immigrants. They have recognized Canadian education credentials, knowledge of French or English, potentially Canadian work experience, familiarity with Canadian culture, and a connection to the community. For these reasons, international students are expected to integrate quicker into the labour market and society than other types of immigrants (Hagar 2019).

Immigration System

Study permit holders

In Thunder Bay, which has Lakehead University and Confederation College, most study permit holders between 1998 and 2019 were citizens of India. In fact, in all the Big Five cities in Northern Ontario, the most common country of citizenship for study permit holders was India. China was the second most common country of citizenship for study permit holders in Thunder Bay and three other major cities in Northern Ontario.

Study permit holders with citizenship from China and India saw an uptick in 2012. Study permit holders with Indian citizenship increased from 35 to 110 from 2011 to 2012, and this trend continued, reaching 1,245 in 2019. A similar trend occurred with Chinese citizens; the number grew from 60 to 125 between 2012 and 2013 and reached 390 in 2019.

Study permit holders who gained permanent residence in Thunder Bay between 1998 and 2019 primarily went through the Economic stream. In that category, the primary pathway was through the Federal Skilled Worker Program, with some also coming through the Canadian Experience Class stream. The least used Economic substream by study permit holders was the Provincial Nominee Program. Few prior study permit holders gained permanent residence through the Sponsored Family stream. Those who did were sponsored spouses or partners.

Work permit holders

Work permit holders in Thunder Bay most commonly have citizenship in the United States. The United States is, significantly, the most common country of citizenship for work permit holders in Northern Ontario's 11 districts and five largest cities. Other common countries of citizenship in Thunder Bay include India, China, the United Kingdom, and the Philippines.

Work permit holders who gained permanent residence in Thunder Bay between 1998 and 2019 primarily did so through the Economic category. Within this stream, work permit holders mainly came through the Canadian Experience and Federal Skilled Worker streams. Many also gained permanent residence through the Provincial Nominee Program.

Discussion

Temporary residents—work permit and study permit holders—make up a large share of Thunder Bay's immigrant population. They also contribute to the local economy and labour force.[14] International students pay tuition to local institutions and spend their money in the city (e.g., rent, groceries, transportation, textbooks, clothing), with additional indirect and induced economic impacts. Similarly, work permit holders fill in-demand jobs in the community and pay for rent/mortgage, groceries, transportation, and other necessities. As such, it is important to measure their presence, and assess their characteristics, as is done with permanent residents.

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14 See "Where are the international students? How COVID-19 could affect Northern Ontario's economy," Hilary Hagar, 2020.
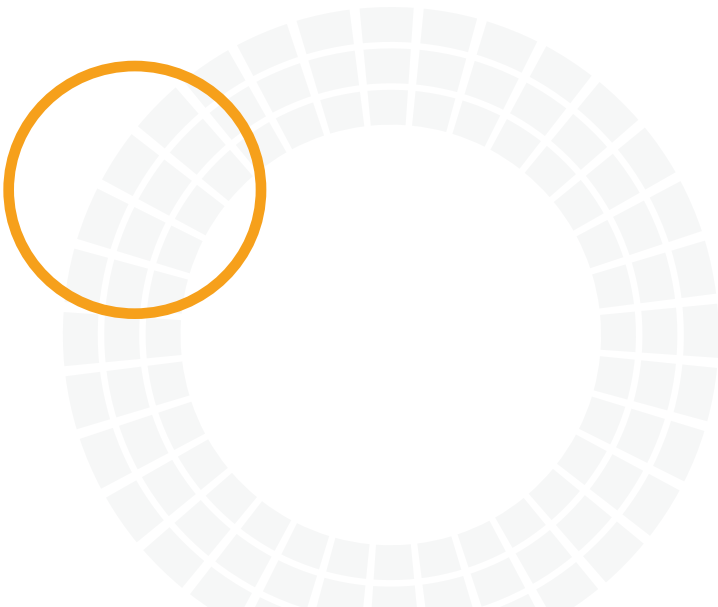
Income

Employment income

Employment income is calculated among immigrants who receive employment income, whereas total income includes both those with and without income. This can result in higher employment income numbers, despite total income also including income from government transfers and investments.

In terms of median employment income, immigrants who settled in Thunder Bay between 1991 and 2000 are the only cohort who have comparable median employment incomes to non-immigrants. Immigrants who settled in Thunder Bay before 1991 and after 2000 have median employment income levels lower than those of the domestic population. Average employment income levels are comparable among immigrants who settled in 2010 and earlier.

It appears that as immigrants become more established, they begin earning higher employment incomes. Income levels among immigrants in Thunder Bay are consistent with trends identified in the literature. De Chardon emphasizes this point, stating, "annual earnings for high-skilled principal applicants surpass the Canadian average soon after landing and increase over time." (2019, 9) Immigrants and refugees often need time to settle in their new country, and as a result, the number of years since migration generally corresponds with improved economic and social outcomes (Crossman 2013).

Household income

Factors that contribute to household income for immigrants include the number of people in the household, pre-admission experience, knowledge of official languages, and category of admission (Statistics Canada, 2021b). Similar to other variables, it is important to look at immigrants based on their period of immigration, if possible. For average and median household income metrics, data were only available for all immigrants and recent immigrants.

Household average income levels for recent immigrants in Thunder Bay are lower than those of all immigrants, but median income levels are higher for recent immigrant households than all immigrant households. The reasons for lower average income levels (both total and after-tax) are comparable to those listed previously: recent immigrants need time to settle into their new communities, gain stable employment, have recognized credentials, complete training, and so on.

Table 3: Immigrant household income statistics in Thunder Bay, 2016

	Average total income	Median total income	Average after-tax income	Median after-tax income
Recent Immigrants	$80,765	$70,936	$68,965	$62,092
All Immigrants	$87,208	$67,890	$73,952	$60,325

Source: Author's calculations, Community Data Program (CDP), Household & Family TGP of the recent immigrant population, Census 2016, custom tabulation.

28

Northern Policy Institute / Institut des Politiques du Nord
All Roads Lead Home: Immigration Flows into Thunder Bay and What this Means for RNIP Impacts | April 2022

Low income cut-offs (LICOs)

Low income cut-offs (LICOs) are income thresholds below which a family will likely devote a larger share of its income to necessities such as food, shelter, and clothing than the average family. Statistics Canada calculates LICOs by looking at the income threshold for which families are expected to spend 20 percentage points more than the average family on food, shelter, and clothing (Statistics Canada 2015). As the purchase of necessities is done with after-tax dollars, after-tax income is used to determine LICOs.

Immigrants who came to Thunder Bay after 1991 have LICO levels above those of non-immigrants. Incidence of LICO immigrants decreases as time in the community increases. More than 50 per cent of non-permanent residents are LICOs, indicating either difficulty integrating into the labour market or finding meaningful employment. Additionally, non-permanent residents also include study permit holders. Study permits often restrict the number of hours a permit holder can work per week to 20, which would partially explain the high prevalence of non-permanent residents in the LICO category.

Northern Policy Institute / Institut des Politiques du Nord
All Roads Lead Home: Immigration Flows into Thunder Bay and What this Means for RNIP Impacts | April 2022

29

Figure 8: Percentage of low income cut-offs after tax (LICO-AT) in Thunder Bay, by period of immigration, 2016
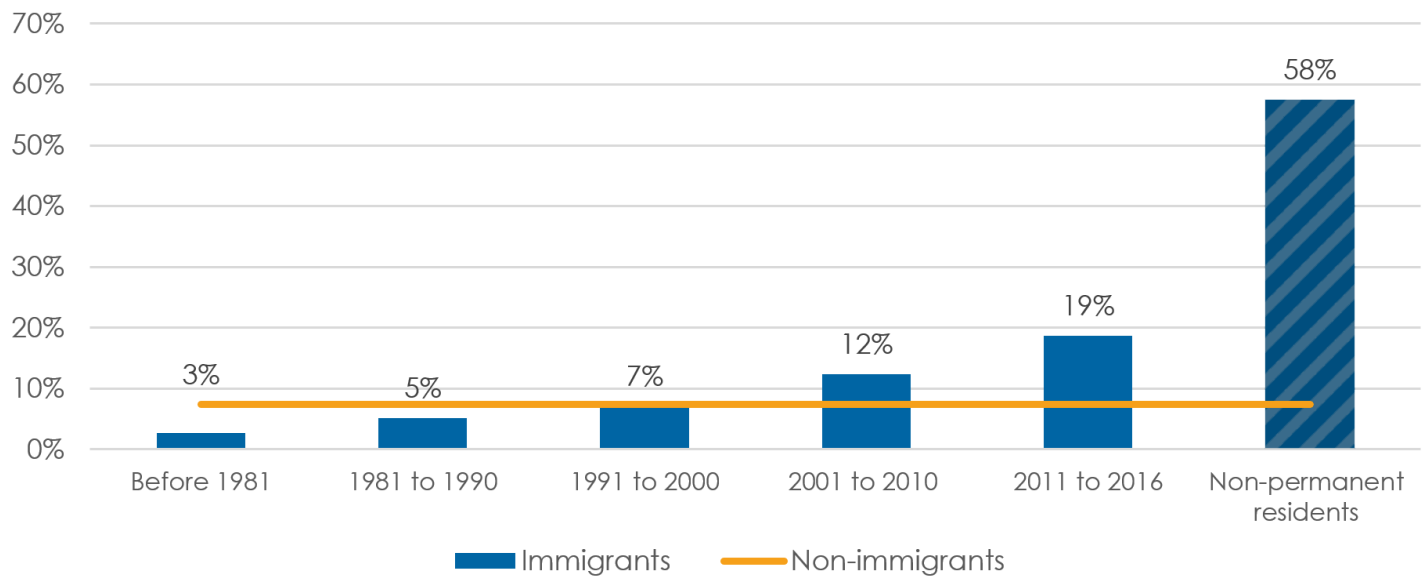
Source: Author's calculations; Community Data Program (CDP); Selected Language, Labour Force, Education, Income and Mobility Status Characteristics; Table EO2767 - TBL7R.

The preceding data show that having lower income levels as a recent immigrant is not a long-term phenomenon. Income levels appear to increase, and LICO levels decrease, in correspondence with time spent in the community. As noted, factors such as immigration stream, knowledge of an official language, and employment situation all greatly affect income levels. Additionally, when more recent data are available, income levels will reflect what is happening in the economy at the time of landing for the most recent immigrant cohort. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic will likely impact employment, income, and LICO levels among recent and non-recent immigrants alike.
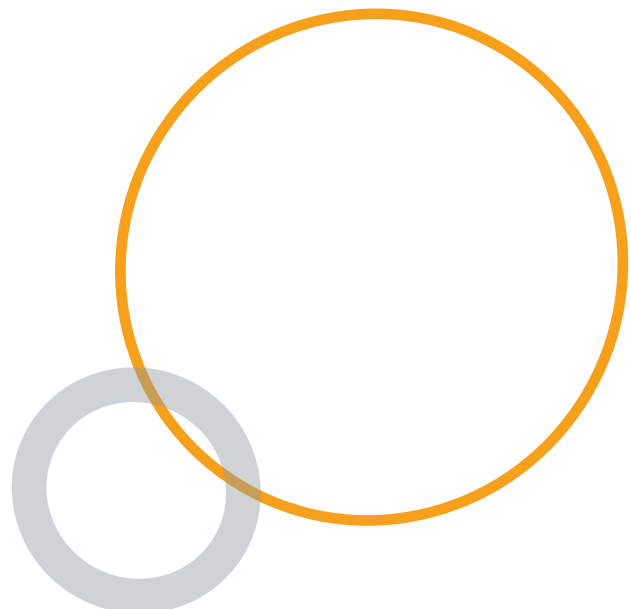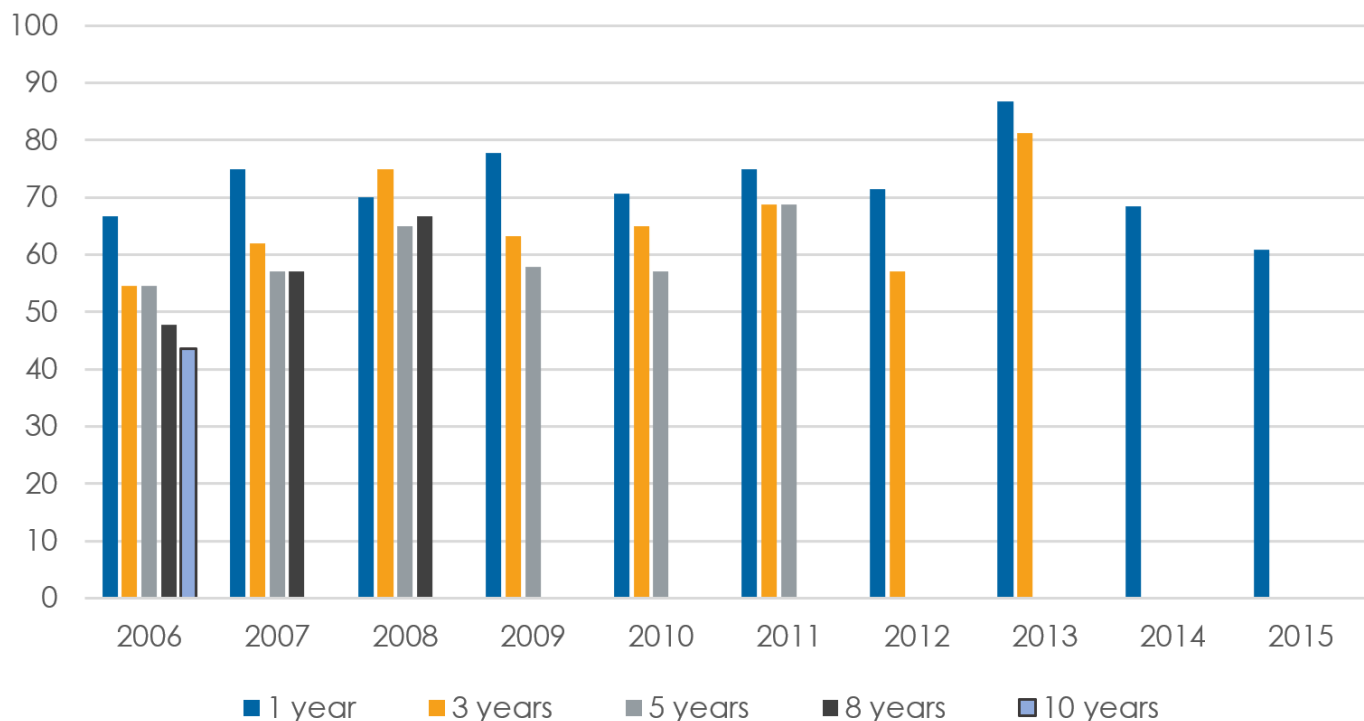
Retention

Retention of immigrants in the first year of admission averaged between 70 and 80 per cent from 2007 to 2012, meaning approximately 20 to 30 per cent of immigrants left Thunder Bay within the first year of gaining permanent residence. In 2013, one-year retention rates were at 86.7 per cent, the highest number for the years in which there are data. Following 2013, one-year retention rates fell below 70 per cent, with just 60.9 per cent of immigrants remaining in Thunder Bay one year after admission.[15] As the number of years since admission increase—otherwise known as time spent in a community—retention rates decrease, indicating immigrants are gradually moving out of a community, which is to be expected. The largest out-migration appears to happen between one and three years after admission.

As new initiatives are rolled out, it is important to track their impacts on retention. For example, will RNIP community-specified candidate criteria aid in finding immigrants more willing to stay in Thunder Bay? Will the conditional permanent residence offer lead to higher employment satisfaction (and thus higher retention) if applicants can obtain a job in their field? The factors that aid in retention beyond the RNIP must be continuously assessed not just among the migrant population but also those already in the community.

Figure 9: Retention rate (%) by years since admission in Thunder Bay CMA, 2016


Source: Author's calculations, Statistics Canada, Mobility and Income of Immigrant Taxfilers, Table 43-10-0014-01.

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15 2015 retention rates

Conclusion

When assessing the economic Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP) Program, the governing principles are grounded in labour market success for principal applicants. For example, trends related to the labour market participation and employment of recent immigrants would be influenced by the fact that RNIP applicants must have a valid job offer in the community. Also, applicants must have either a Canadian postsecondary degree or experience in the field in which they are applying, which would influence income levels. When looking at housing, the previously discussed effects of having stable employment, coupled with more points being given to those who have lived in the community, aid in the search and ownership of housing.

But the impacts of the RNIP are not limited to those directly participating in the pilot. Welcoming initiatives and sustainable economic growth (via immigrants filling labour market shortages) help the entire community. Thus, although the purpose of this paper is to establish a baseline assessment of immigration trends in the region for the purpose of monitoring and assessing the impact of RNIP and other programs, many other aspects need to be looked at in tandem.
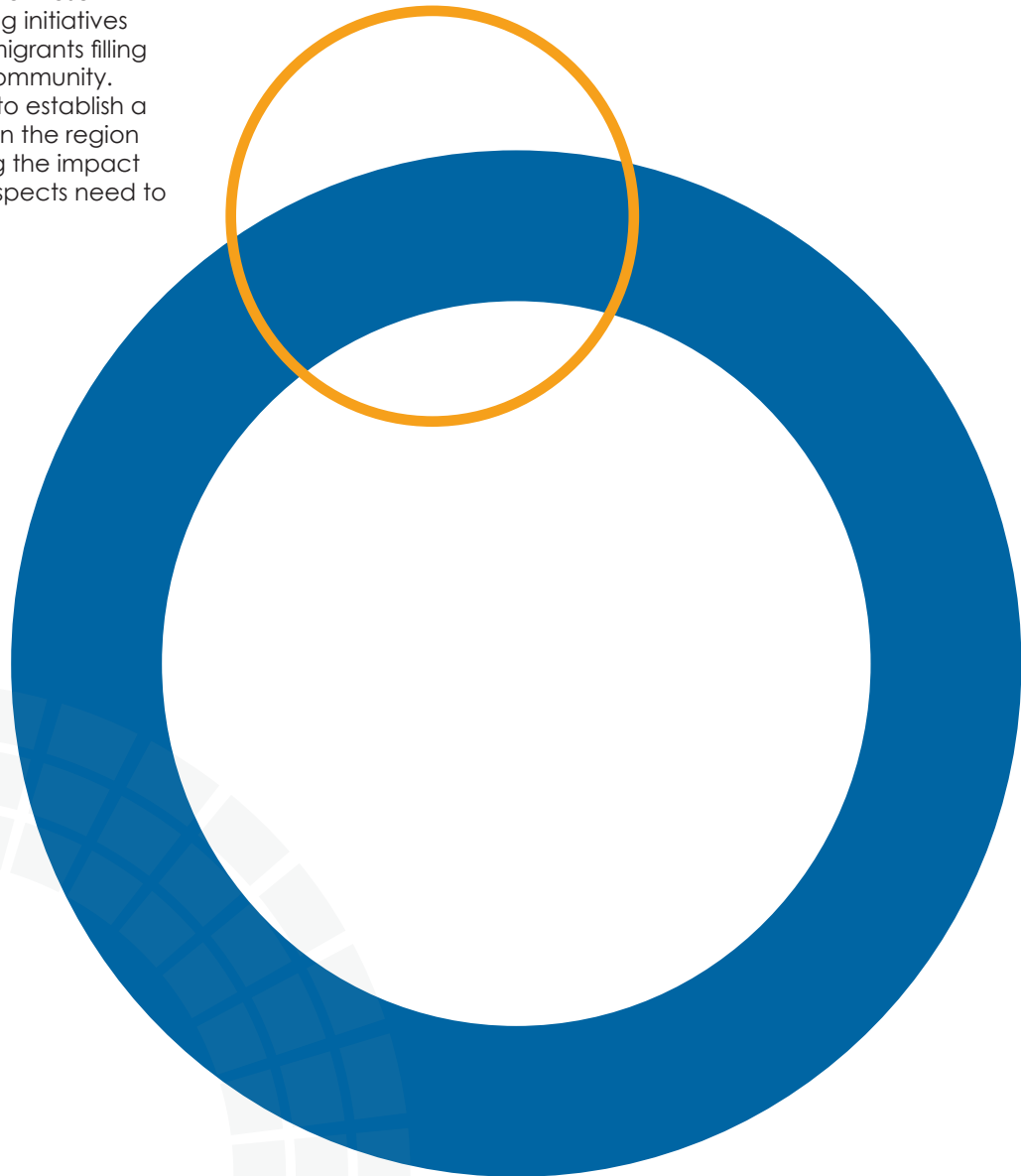
Recommendations

Economic immigration is a valuable tool for communities to fill labour market shortages and counteract the effects of an aging population, low birth rates, and high levels of youth out-migration. For this process to be not only successful but also meaningful for all parties involved, the following recommendations must be considered:

1. (1a) Ongoing annual monitoring and assessment of community-level immigration trends in Ontario's northern, western, and central regions

Now that a baseline is established for immigration trends in Ontario's northern, western, and central regions, this analysis should be used and built on, year-over-year, to monitor and assess trends in the regions.

Not only should immigration trends be monitored and updated but also labour market indicators, such as vacancy rates in specific occupations. This analysis will aid in monitoring the impacts of the RNIP Program, as well as other welcoming, attraction, and retention efforts undertaken by communities.

It should be noted that data availability and accessibility were a challenge, with long wait times for IRCC admission data. Additionally, there were high levels of data suppression when working at the community level. With the upcoming release of 2021 census data, as well as the continued updating of the IMDB and Taxfiler data, a more comprehensive picture of immigration trends can be provided moving forward.

2. (1b) Community-specific ongoing assessment of the impact of the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP) before, during, and after the program

Although 100 recommendations were available to communities in the first year of the pilot, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly hindered the arrival of immigrants to Canada, as well as the initial rollout of the pilot in some communities. Thus, the number of community recommendations issued in the first year of the pilot was low. This is cited to highlight the difficulties in obtaining RNIP candidate-specific data for Year 1.

Northern Policy Institute has partnered with three RNIP communities in Northern Ontario—Thunder Bay, Timmins, and Greater Sudbury—to monitor and assess RNIP-specific immigration trends and outcomes. The goals of the RNIP are to fill community-specific labour market needs while promoting a welcoming community for all participants, ultimately resulting in high retention levels. Thus, the social and economic benefits of the pilot in each community should be analyzed.

This partnership was offered to all RNIP communities in Northern Ontario, and the data-sharing and analysis partnership remains open. Communities that are interested in community-level RNIP assessments, but do not have formal partnerships, are welcome to partner with Northern Policy Institute for this analysis.

3. Expanding the above analysis to also include secondary and domestic migrants to (and in) Northern Ontario communities

Domestic and secondary migrants, and those already in the communities, also shape the economic landscape in terms of participation in the housing and labour market. Additionally, they need access to welcoming infrastructure, employers, and the community as a whole to retain them once they are in the communities.

A limitation to this extra layer of analysis is data availability. IRCC keeps admission records on international in-migrants and temporary residents based on intended destination. Secondary and domestic migration are not captured in these records. Thus, data sources are limited to the census and Taxfiler information.

4. Strengthening the alignment between labour market shortages, targeted occupations, postsecondary institutional fields of study, and immigrant-intended occupations to maximize economic outcomes

Available data should be used to align labour supply with labour demand, thus promoting a robust local labour market and contributing to sustainable economic growth. All actors involved—chambers, planning boards, postsecondary institutions, employers, immigration actors—can strategically target labour supply, via targeted immigration, to fill current vacancies.

Most communities analyzed do not have overlap between occupations with high vacancy rates and those under the Year 1 RNIP targeted occupations. To aid in attraction and retention of immigrants, as well as promote positive labour market outcomes for the community, more strategic alignment is recommended. Available data can, and should, be used to guide decision-making, alongside consultations with community partners and employers.

Additionally, those already in the community comprise a large source of labour. Similar to the preceding point, this population also needs to be assessed. Are people already in the communities participating in the labour force? Are they unemployed or underemployed? Are their (foreign) credentials and life experiences adequately acknowledged and compensated?

Northern Policy Institute / Institut des Politiques du Nord
All Roads Lead Home: Immigration Flows into Thunder Bay and What this Means for RNIP Impacts | April 2022

33

5. Undertaking welcoming community initiatives to welcome, attract, and retain immigrants and the existing population to/in Ontario's northern, western, and central regions

Beyond the trends that can be measured quantitatively, using data gathered from IRCC, the census, Taxfiler estimates, and IMDB, there is a need to also measure attitudes and perceptions of those in the community. A requirement for participating RNIP communities is to undertake welcoming community efforts. Undoubtedly, the effects of implementing welcoming community initiatives will positively benefit people beyond those participating directly in the pilot.

The effects of these initiatives should, similar to immigration trends more generally, be tracked on an ongoing basis. To do this, primary data collection, likely in the form of focus groups and surveys, must be deployed. Important indicators to track include sense of belonging, meaningful employment, positive community interactions, and welcoming infrastructure (such as services available).

When looking at each community's labour market, the individual and community-wide benefits of immigration will be felt when there is an alignment between the labour shortages in the community and the immigrants who are applying their skills to fill these gaps.
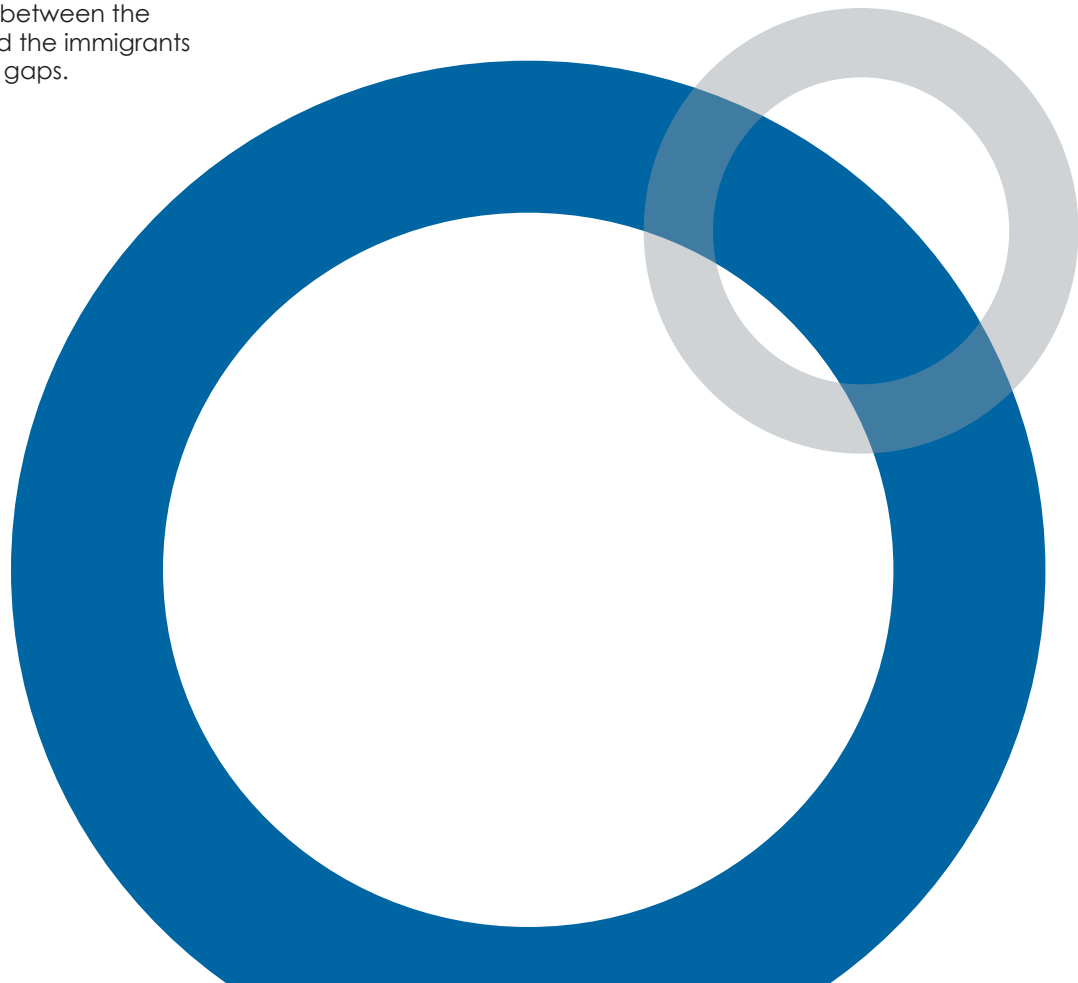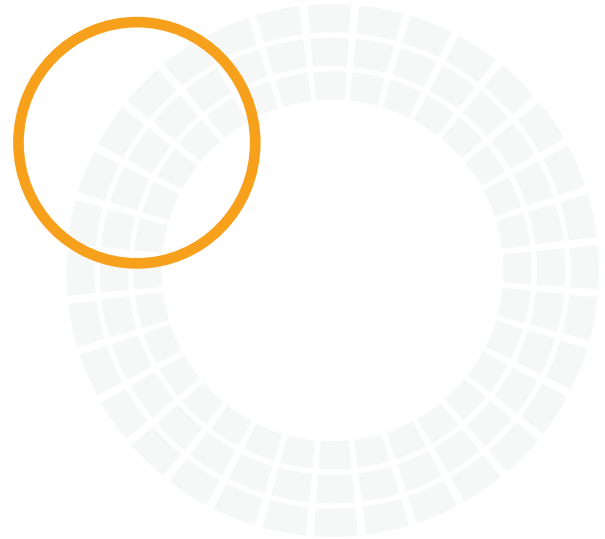
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Northern Policy Institute / Institut des Politiques du Nord
All Roads Lead Home: Immigration Flows into Thunder Bay and What this Means for RNIP Impacts | April 2022

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Appendix

Appendix A:
Data Suppression

All values between zero and five are shown as '--' in requested datasets from IRCC. This is done to prevent individuals from being identified when IRCC data are compiled and compared to other publicly available statistics. All other values are rounded to the closest multiple of five for the same reason. Years with suppressed or rounded data are still significant because they represent a non-zero value. But there are challenges when working with small and suppressed data.
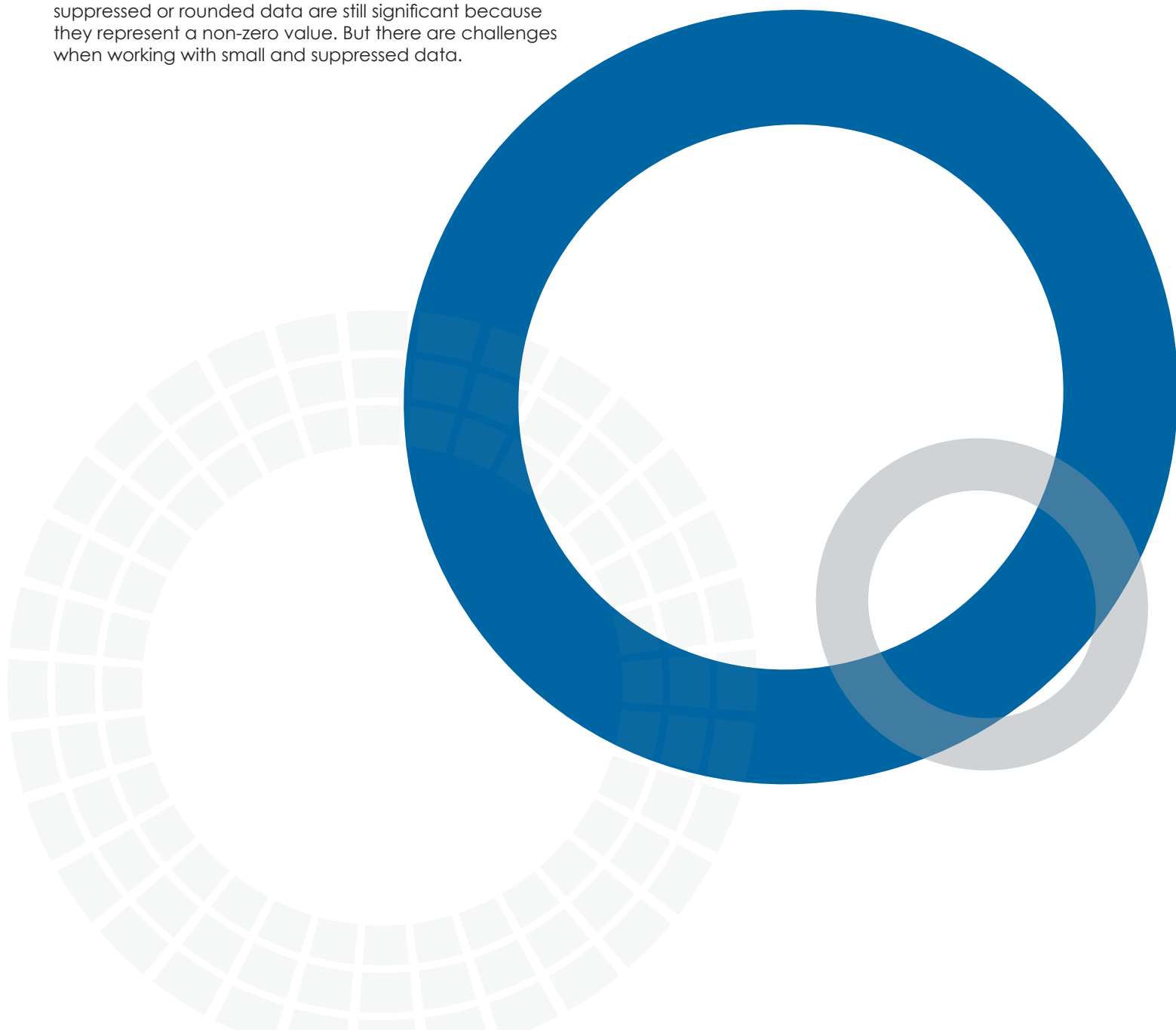
Appendix B: Definitions

Economic immigrants: Immigrants who have been selected for their ability to contribute to Canada's economy through their ability to meet labour market needs, to own and manage or build a business, to make substantial investment, to create their own employment, or to meet specific provincial or territorial labour market needs.

Sponsored Family immigrants: Immigrants who were sponsored by a Canadian citizen or permanent resident and were granted permanent resident status based on their relationship either as the spouse, partner, parent, grandparent, child, or other relative of this sponsor.

Resettled Refugees and Protected Persons immigrants: Immigrants who were granted permanent resident status based on a well-founded fear of returning to their home country.

Other immigrants: Immigrants who were granted permanent resident status under a program that does not fall under the Economic, Sponsored Family, or Resettled Refugees and Protected Persons categories.

Immigrant status: Refers to whether the person is a non-immigrant, an immigrant, or a non-permanent resident:

- Non-immigrants: Persons who are Canadian citizens by birth.

- Immigrants: Persons who are, or who have ever been, landed immigrants or permanent residents. Such persons have been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities. Also includes persons who are Canadian citizens by naturalization.

- Non-permanent residents: Persons who do not have Canadian citizenship and who are not landed immigrants or permanent residents. Includes those who have work, study, or temporary resident permits, or who are refugee claimants, and their family members sharing the same permit and living in Canada with them.

Recent immigrants: Individuals who obtained a landed immigrant or permanent resident status up to five years prior to a given census year. For the data used in this paper, a recent immigrant would be defined as those who landed between 2011 and 2016. Non-recent immigrants landed before 2011.

All immigrants: Individuals who are, or who have ever been, a landed immigrant or permanent resident.

Unemployed: Refers to persons who, during the week of May 1 to May 7, 2016, were without paid work or without self-employment work and were available for work and either:

a. Had actively looked for paid work in the past four weeks; or

b. Were on temporary layoff and expected to return to their job; or

c. Had definite arrangements to start a new job in four weeks or less.

Unemployment rate: Refers to the unemployed expressed as a percentage of the labour force during the week of May 1 to May 7, 2016. The unemployment rate for a particular group (e.g., age, sex, marital status, geographic area) is the unemployed in that group, expressed as a percentage of the labour force in that group.

Appendix C: Indicator List

In total, 24 indicators were identified for trend tracking and analysis.

Category	Indicator
Economic outcomes	Admission of permanent resident (PR) by intended occupation (NOC)
Economic outcomes	Unemployment/employment/ participation rates
Housing	Housing tenure (renters vs. owners)
Education	Highest level of education
Education	Field of study for international students
Education	Field of study for the immigrant population
Education	Number of international students by postsecondary institute
Immigrant characteristics	Admission of PR by country of citizenship
Immigrant characteristics	Gender of international in-migrants
Immigrant characteristics	Age at landing
Immigrant characteristics	Admission of PR by language spoken (mother tongue)
Immigrant characteristics	Study permit holder by language spoken (mother tongue)
Immigrant characteristics	Work permit holder by language spoken (mother tongue)
Immigrant characteristics	PR by immigration stream and language
Immigrant characteristics	PR by immigration stream and family status
Immigrant characteristics	PR by country of citizenship
Immigration system	Study permit holders by country of citizenship
Immigration system	Work permit holders by country of citizenship
Income	Percentage of low income cut-offs after tax (LICO-AT)
Income	Median and average total income by immigration status and time frame
Income	Median and average employment income by immigration status and time frame
Income	Median and average household income
Retention	Immigrant mobility – retention rates by years since admission
SPOs	Settlement service clients by service type

Appendix D: Thunder Bay RNIP Targeted NOCs - Year 1

- 3012 Registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses

- 3142 Physiotherapists

- 2131 Civil engineers

- 2132 Mechanical engineers

- 2133 Electrical and electronics engineers

- 2223 Forestry technicians and technologists

- 2271 Air pilots, flight engineers and flying instructors

- 2272 Air traffic controllers and related occupations

- 321 Medical technologists and technicians

- 3219 Pharmacy technician

- 2231 Civil engineering technologists and technicians

- 2232 Mechanical engineering technologists and technicians

- 3233 Licensed practical nurses

- 4214 Early childhood educators and assistants

- 6321 Chefs

- 6331 Butchers and bakers

- 7283 Tile setters

- 731 Machinery and transportation equipment mechanics (except motor vehicles)

- 732 Automotive service technicians

- 733 Other mechanics and related repairers

- 8231 Underground production and development miners

- 8241 Logging machine operators

- 7511 Transport truck drivers

- 7521 Heavy equipment operators (except crane)

- 8411 Underground mine service and support workers

- 9411 Machine operators, mineral and metal processing

- 9414 Concrete, clay and stone forming operators

- 9415 Inspectors and testers, mineral and metal processing

- 9416 Metalworking and forging machine operators

- 9417 Machining tool operators

- 9418 Other metal products machine operators

- 9431 Sawmill machine operators

- 9432 Pulp mill machine operators

- 9433 Papermaking and finishing machine operators

- 9434 Other wood processing machine operators

- 9435 Paper converting machine operators

- 9436 Lumber graders and other wood processing inspectors and graders

- 7611 Construction trade helpers and labourers.

- 3413 Nurse aides, orderlies, and patient service associates

- 7441 Residential and commercial installers and servicers

- 3411 Dental assistants

About Northern Policy Institute

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 Kirkland Lake. 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.

Related Research

All Roads Lead Home: Immigration Flows into North Bay and What this Means for RNIP Impacts
Mercedes Labelle

All Roads Lead Home: Immigration Flows into Greater Sudbury and What this Means for RNIP Impacts
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