



Research Report | February 2022

# Magnetic North: Attraction, Retention, and Welcoming in Ontario's Northern Regions

Magnetic North 2021 Conference Report

**NORTHERN**  
POLICY INSTITUTE

INSTITUT DES POLITIQUES  
**DU NORD**

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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 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.
- Each community is home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples.

We recognize and appreciate the historic connection that Indigenous peoples have to these territories. We support their efforts to sustain and grow their nations. We also recognize the contributions that they have made in shaping and strengthening local communities, the province, and Canada.

This report was made possible in part through the support of our partner, Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation. Northern Policy Institute expresses great appreciation for their generous support but emphasizes the following: The views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Institute, its Board of Directors or its supporters. Quotation with appropriate credit is permissible.

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

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### Northern Policy Institute

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

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

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



### FedNor

NPI is pleased to have the support of FedNor for this important work on retaining and growing the population of every region of Northern Ontario through combating racism and building welcoming communities. Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario (FedNor) is the Government of Canada's economic development organization for Northern Ontario. Through its programs and services, and through its financial support of projects that lead to job creation and economic growth, FedNor works with businesses and community partners to build a stronger Northern Ontario.



### Northwestern Ontario Local Immigration Partnership

The Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) and Northern LIP are initiatives that are focused on improving access to, and the coordination of, effective services that facilitate immigration settlement and integration. The Northwestern Ontario Local Immigration Partnership serves Thunder Bay and 31 other communities in Northwestern Ontario.



### Réseau du Nord

Réseau du Nord creates links between organizations from all regions of Northern Ontario, such as: Sudbury, Timmins, North Bay, Sault Ste. Marie and Thunder Bay, to put in place a system to facilitate the reception and integration of newcomers. Réseau du Nord follows the objectives of the strategic plan developed by the Steering Committee:

- Increase the number of French-speaking immigrants so as to increase the demographic weight of the Francophone communities in a minority situation.
- Improve the capacity of French-speaking communities in a minority situation and strengthen welcoming and settlement structures for French-speaking newcomers.
- Ensure the economic integration of French-speaking immigrants within Canadian society and Francophone communities in minority situations in particular.
- Ensure the social and cultural integration of French-speaking immigrants within Canadian society and Francophone communities in minority situations.
- Foster regionalization of Francophone immigration outside of Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver.



### Sudbury Local Immigration Partnership

The Sudbury Local Immigration Partnership (SLIP) focuses on the development of different initiatives to ensure that Greater Sudbury continues to be a welcoming community for newcomers of all walks of life. The SLIP fosters an inclusive, engaging and collaborative environment with local stakeholders to identify issues, share solutions, build capacity and preserve collective memory for the purpose of ensuring the attraction, settlement, inclusion and retention of newcomers in the City of Greater Sudbury.

## 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.

*With contributions from Samrul Aahad and Sherry Mayer*

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# Executive Summary

After hosting two Come North conferences in February 2020, it became clear that there is an abundance of work being done to combat racism, further reconciliation, and welcome newcomers across Northern Ontario. However, connection, coordination, and communication between these efforts is needed to maximize the impacts of these efforts.

To continue with this work, over 250 people representing more than 120 organizations gathered virtually over two days in June 2021 to lay out a plan for attraction, retention, and reconciliation efforts with Indigenous peoples in Ontario's Northern Regions.

This document lays out short, medium, and long-term objectives for all of Northern Ontario's regions. This report identifies nine core themes, seven short-term actions, and four medium-to-long-term projects.

In summary, the themes and actions that should be present in population growth efforts, moving forward, can be summarized in these key points:

1. Extension of population growth discussions to include Indigenous peoples, secondary and domestic migrants, and actors in small and rural communities;
2. Regional, organizational, and individual-level buy-in and collaboration;
3. Identification and promotion of what is available in our regions;
4. Programs and initiatives BY and FOR the communities they are intending to benefit;
5. Continuous measurement of progress and lessons learned.

These points ought to be reflected in the individual actions and strategies of every organization or community looking to maintain and grow the population in any Northern Ontario region.



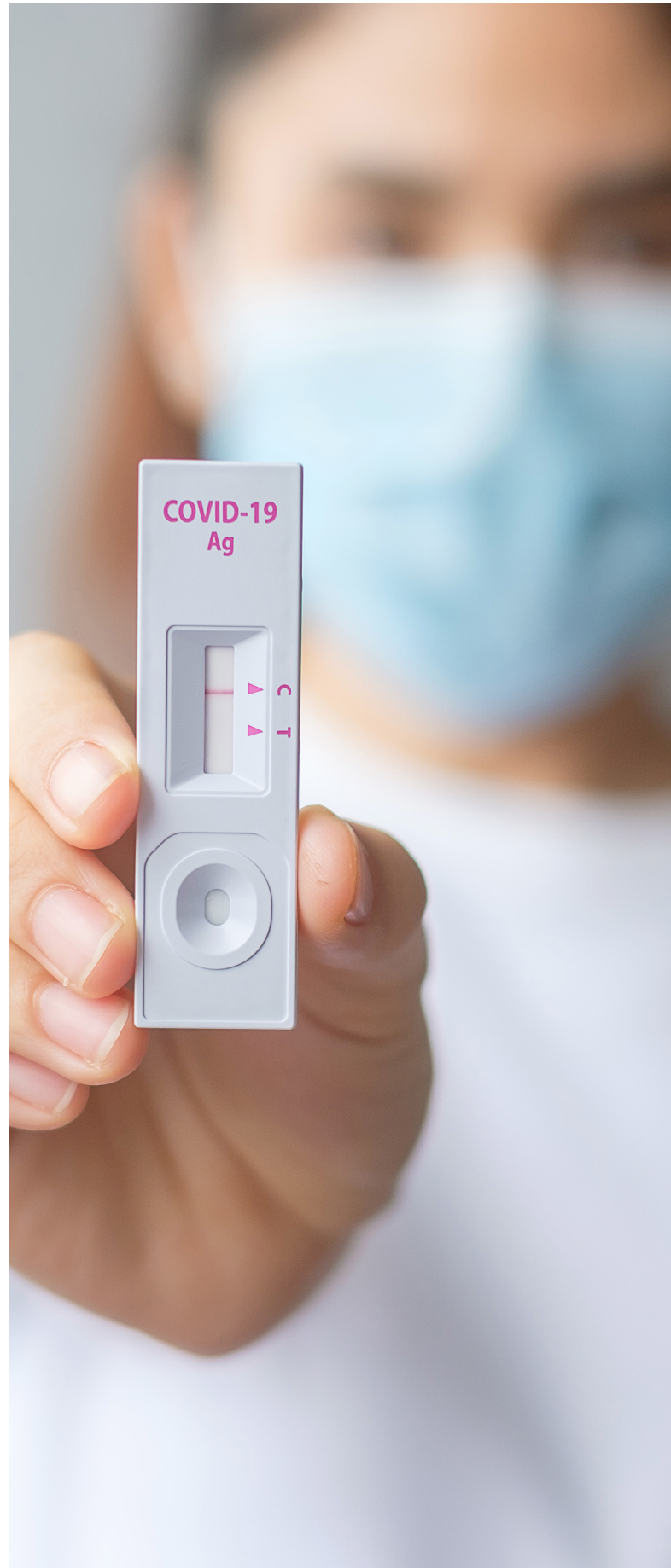
# COVID-19 Update

In June 2021, over 250 people representing more than 120 organizations participated in the Magnetic North Conference to help develop a plan for attraction and retention, as well as for reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, in Ontario's northern regions.

Hosted by Northern Policy Institute (NPI) and its partners, this annual two-day conference—previously branded as Come North—was held virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The virtual format not only addressed the ongoing impacts of the pandemic but also the challenges involved in travelling across Northern Ontario's vast geography. As a result, the event maximized the diversity of participants and ensured that the actions and directions that emerged are reflective of the broadest possible coalition of actors.

The pandemic also underscored the urgency for this conference. It has limited international migration while creating space for people in urban centres to relocate as the working world becomes increasingly hybrid and remote. These two trends have exacerbated the struggles that communities nationwide are facing in attracting and retaining people. We can see that in Northern Ontario, where the pandemic has slowed the implementation of initiatives to attract, retain, reconcile, and welcome newcomers and current residents.

It may be that the trend toward hybrid and remote work has benefits for Northern Ontario in that it will enable people to migrate here from large urban centres in Southern Ontario. But we cannot leave this to chance. We need aligned messaging and strategies to promote our welcoming communities to the world and to retain the people who live here now.



# About Magnetic North

Although this report focuses on the Magnetic North Conference, it is important to note that the event is part of the Magnetic North initiative.

The purpose of this initiative is to support community coordination in population growth and welcoming community efforts, including attraction, retention, and reconciliation efforts with Indigenous peoples. The initiative, via the Magnetic North Program Officer, will work with others to implement the action plan produced through the Magnetic North and Come North conferences.

A vital part of this initiative is assessing progress and resetting priorities, which will occur annually at the Magnetic North Conference. Progress reports and other research will be produced throughout the year that focus on impact and achievements related to retention, reconciliation, attraction, and welcoming efforts in all Northern Ontario communities.

After hosting two Come North conferences in February 2020, it became clear that there is an abundance of work being done to combat racism, advance reconciliation, and welcome newcomers across Northern Ontario. Connection, coordination, and communication between these efforts is necessary to maximize their impact. Adequate resources must be dedicated to carrying out the collective priorities established at the Come North conferences.

**The Magnetic North initiative is not intended to replace existing or future local initiatives.** Instead, the intent is to support local initiatives by helping them connect with, learn from, and work alongside each other in seeking the same or similar ends. Eliminating duplication, leveraging scarce resources, and avoiding conflicting messages will help every region in Northern Ontario grow and prosper. As each community becomes more attractive and welcoming, all communities will make progress toward that goal.

It should be noted that references to communities in Northern Ontario in this report go beyond municipalities, unless otherwise specified. This includes First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities and unincorporated areas, among others.



# Update on Come North 2020 Action Items

In February 2020, the Come North conferences produced a list of 10 immediate action items. These items were gathered from and informed by conference breakout sessions, presentations, and panels. They are listed below, in black, along with progress made on each item over the past year, in blue.

The Magnetic North Program Officer has the responsibility of communicating with the lead organization for each Come North priority action item and, where necessary and requested, assisting them in overcoming barriers to move the item toward completion. This section will highlight progress made in each of the following items over the past year. The following section will discuss the immediate action plan that came out of the Magnetic North 2021 Conference.

**1.** The Come North Planning Committee should be reconstituted as a Steering Committee to coordinate and monitor progress on these action items. The new committee should have no more than 15 members and be representative of Ontario's diverse northern regions. Northern Policy Institute should coordinate this transition.

**a.** The Magnetic North Steering Committee members for 2022 have been finalized. They include actors from across Ontario's northern regions and are representative of multiple sectors and demographics (e.g., economic development, Francophone, anti-racism, Indigenous).

**2.** Wherever possible, immigration agencies should support and assist those working directly to facilitate reconciliation, and reconciliation efforts should actively include newcomers.

**a.** Initiatives have both begun and continued to support and include those working directly to facilitate reconciliation, and to actively include newcomers in reconciliation efforts.

**b.** For example, Orientation to Ontario sessions, offered by Settlement.org, include workshops and resources on settler history, colonization, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report.

**c.** Additionally, joint youth programming is offered by some settlement agencies, First Nations, and Indigenous-serving agencies.

**d.** Finally, newcomers have been hired by First Nations and Indigenous-serving agencies.

**3.** The Steering Committee, via one of its member organizations, should submit a proposal to the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario (FedNor) to fund a coordinated marketing plan for

Ontario's northern regions. This plan should reflect the themes and findings of the Come North event.

**a.** Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been decided that this action item should be postponed for at least 12 months and developed as part of a separate project.

**4.** The [Northeast and Northwest] immigration portals should immediately be rebranded as "welcoming" portals to reflect the shift in focus from exclusively immigration, to retention, reconciliation, and migration.

**a.** Due to restrictions stemming from initial funding, establishing 'sister portals' that focus on reconciliation, attraction, and retention among Indigenous populations and those already in the community is being explored. Together, the portals will form a 'welcoming hub' for anyone looking to migrate to or already living in Northern Ontario communities.

**5.** The Timmins Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) should seek funding to update the Northeast Welcoming portal. This funding should include resources to create a staff position dedicated to keeping the community profiles and other resources on the portal up to date. The LIP should seek a partner organization to assist in populating and maintaining the retention/reconciliation elements of the updated portal.

**a.** The North Bay & District Multicultural Centre supports and maintains the Northeast portal. Northern Policy Institute has also committed to providing a four-month intern for each of the next three summers to update and maintain the portal, if needed.

**6.** The Northwest Local Immigration Partnership should seek similar responsibility and funding for the Northwest Welcoming portal

**a.** The Northwest portal was originally hosted by the City of Thunder Bay. Northern Policy Institute (NPI) and its Magnetic North partners have committed funding to update and maintain the Northwest portal for the next three years. A plan is currently being drafted to transfer the portal from the City of Thunder Bay to NPI. After successfully updating and maintaining the Northwest portal, funding will be sought to help update the Northeast portal, either by NPI or a partner organization.

**7.** Communities and organizations who have or who develop local plans or resources for attracting or retaining people should make every effort to align their messaging, content, and look with the regional plan and marketing effort. Local groups should contact the Timmins and Northwest LIPs for inclusion and promotion of their efforts on the web portals.

- a.** Launched at the 2021 Magnetic North Conference, Make Your Pitch provided an opportunity for Northern Ontario communities to submit a video highlighting their community's best assets within the themes of population growth—attraction, welcoming communities, and anti-racism initiatives.
- b.** Currently, funding for this initiative is made possible, in part, by the original Come North Steering Committee members (specifically Northern Ontario Local Immigration Partnerships and Réseau de soutien à l'immigration francophone) and Northern Policy Institute.
- 8.** NPI should take the lead in developing a common set of success measures for welcoming communities that cover both attraction and retention. These measures should be collected, compiled, and reported annually.
- a.** Indicators for welcoming communities have been established in collaboration with partner organizations across Northern Ontario. Data collection for these indicators took place in February 2022, using surveys as the primary collection tools. The Measurement Month initiative by NPI allowed for consistent, comparable data to be gathered across the regions of Northern Ontario and will allow for updating year-over-year.
- b.** Northern Policy Institute is not the only organization undertaking this type of work. The key is to ensure this work is not being done in silos, meaning that alignment of surveys and other information gathering, and dissemination efforts is the goal.
- i.** Example: Lakehead University – Employing New Immigrants: Community and Organizational Inclusion Challenges in Northwestern Ontario
- 1. Goal: Understand community and organizational welcoming efforts from the perspectives of new immigrants, community leaders, and employees to enhance the recruitment and retention literature.**
  - 2. Communities: Atikokan, Sioux Lookout, and Thunder Bay.**
  - 3. The Lakehead final report will be available in early July 2022.**
- 9.** Matchmaker and connector positions should be created in Northern Ontario's rural and remote regions to coordinate access to their existing services and fill their service and knowledge gaps as needed.
- a.** The International and Community Matchmaker program began in Northwestern Ontario. The pilot program ended in November 2019 while the Northeast pilot wrapped up in June 2021. This position was created to match newcomer jobseekers with employers looking to fill positions.
- b.** Currently, Association des francophones du Nord-Ouest de l'Ontario (AFNOO) is doing matchmaker work in Northwestern Ontario.
- c.** A connector position has been started by North Superior Workforce Planning Board (NSWPB) in Northwestern Ontario. The mandate of the position is to cover all the regions in Northwestern Ontario. For those who are unaware, here is an example of the concept: a newcomer is introduced to a connector. The connector then introduces the newcomer to three other people in their network. As the initiative is only in Thunder Bay, there is plenty of room for expansion.
- d.** NSWPB is working with the Sudbury Multicultural and Folk Arts Association to bring the Connector Program<sup>1</sup> to Greater Sudbury. They have recently signed on through the National Connector Program network.
- 10.** Come North should be repeated annually to assess progress and reset priorities. A member organization of the Steering Committee should take the lead in seeking funds to support this effort for the next three years.
- a.** Come North has been rebranded as Magnetic North to further expand the focus from attraction to retention, reconciliation, and welcoming.
- b.** Magnetic North took place virtually June 22 and 23, 2021. It covered topics such as attraction, retention, anti-racism, reconciliation, and welcoming. Over 250 people registered for the event.
- c.** The next Magnetic North Conference is scheduled for June 2022. Northern Policy Institute, along with the Steering Committee members and the Magnetic North Program Officer, will set the agenda.

<sup>1</sup> The program participants are connected to business and community leaders in the region to gain a better understanding of the local job market, learn about the community, and are exposed to business and career opportunities in the region.

# Priorities coming out of Magnetic North 2021

This section of recommendations is based on ideas expressed in the breakout sessions and the panels during the conference. The purpose of the recommended actions and projects is to build on those ideas and establish steps to achieve efficiencies. Both short-term and medium-to-long term action items have been proposed to achieve this goal. Progress on the short-term items can begin immediately. The medium-to-long-term projects will involve additional funding; progress on those items should be targeted over the next 12 to 18 months and should be led by the agency or agencies prepared to make the resources available to fund the change.

## Short-Term Actions

1. Capacity continues to be an issue for organizations throughout Northern Ontario. Thus, there needs to be a focus on building collaboration and communication so that efficiencies are highlighted, resources are shared, and duplication of effort is reduced. The Magnetic North Program Officer will help start this effort, but community-level organizations and individuals will play an equal role in identifying and maintaining these relationships. Specifically, it will be organizations that already act as regional connectors that take on this initiative, such as Local Immigration Partnerships/ Réseau en immigration francophone (LIPs/RIFs), system service manager(s) when applicable, tribal councils, planning boards, and provincial territorial organizations.
2. Identifying services available to potential migrants and those already in the community can help reduce duplication of effort and identify gaps that need to be filled. Instead of spreading ourselves too thin with multiple platforms that continuously need to be updated, we should pursue a collaborative resource that can be maintained and updated through the cooperation of organizations and municipalities. Northern Policy Institute, in collaboration with one organization in the Northwest and one in the Northeast, should work to coordinate, update, and maintain these tools. Again, the two partners participating in this initiative would ideally be regional connectors that already communicate and collaborate with local organizations.
3. The messaging for current marketing and attraction efforts needs to extend beyond 'the great outdoors.' Northern Ontario communities have many promising features, such as postsecondary institutes, affordable housing, restaurants, cultural activities, and events. Tourism operators, municipalities, economic development organizations, postsecondary institutions, immigration agencies and the like can expand their current messaging to encompass all that Ontario's northern regions have to offer.

4. The ongoing success of welcoming efforts requires buy-in at the individual, organizational, community, municipal, provincial, and federal levels. Everyone has a role to play in promoting and fostering welcoming communities. Those who are crucial in achieving this goal include local chambers of commerce, educational institutes (K-12 and postsecondary), media, police, and municipal services.
5. It was noted that inclusive education would be valuable for all individuals, one that details the history of different groups and how they positively contribute economically, socially, culturally, etc. to our communities. Examples of organizations that could coordinate this initiative include educational institutes (K-12 and postsecondary), local museums and heritage centres, groups dedicated to anti-racism and anti-discrimination (e.g., Equity Inclusion North Bay, Thunder Bay's Anti-Racism and Respect Advisory Committee), provincial and federal park offices, and student groups.
6. There must be space set aside for immigrants, Indigenous peoples, and groups that identify as marginalized to sit on municipal and organizational committees and boards. Seeing yourself represented in positions of power, policy, and influence contribute to a feeling of welcoming and belonging in a community. If your organization has a board or committee, review the bylaws that govern it and ask yourself if the membership is representative of Northern Ontario's communities.
7. Population growth needs to be discussed not only in terms of attraction and settlement of international migrants but also reconciliation with the Indigenous populations in Northern Ontario so that they feel welcome and want to stay. These conversations, and subsequent actions, can be continued by economic development organizations at the local and regional levels, along with tribal councils, postsecondary institutions, local immigration partnerships, and others.

## Medium-to-Long-Term Actions

- 1.** Housing remains a significant barrier to settlement and attraction. Access to affordable and suitable housing is generally problematic in many communities across Northern Ontario and needs to be addressed. Provincial and municipal governments should work collaboratively with the following organizations to identify community-level solutions: the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA), the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities (FONOM), the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association (NOMA), Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) regional officers, Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services, municipal economic development agencies, and chambers/economic development officers (EDOs) in partnership with private employers.
- 2.** There is great value in creating dedicated services for international students, not simply providing these services 'off the corner of your desk.' To do so, the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) should look at providing funding for community-level organizations or postsecondary institutions to formally offer these services. Dedicated services could help international students gain familiarity with the community so that they want to stay after graduation.
- 3.** Consistent, comparable data at the community-level would be beneficial for all actors. We cannot make informed decisions based on provincial-level data or using five-year-old data while waiting for the next census release. Primary data collection efforts would benefit from collaboration among multiple organizations, such as Northern Policy Institute, workforce planning boards, social services administration boards, chambers, EDOs, postsecondary institutions, immigration partnerships, and Francophone organizations.
- 4.** Population growth is also needed in the communities outside of the five largest centres/Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP) communities, as they face many of the same demographic and labour market challenges as the larger Northern Ontario hubs. Current Northern Ontario RNIP communities, in conjunction with IRCC, are encouraged to explore expanding RNIP boundaries outward to include other Northern Ontario communities.



# Structure, Approach, and Purpose of the 2021 Conference

Magnetic North, formerly Come North, is a joint effort with community leaders from across Ontario's northern regions that focuses on population growth via attraction, retention, and reconciliation efforts. This report will summarize the findings and recommendations identified during the Magnetic North Conference (June 2021) to build upon what was established during the Come North conferences (February 2020).

The Magnetic North Conference had three goals:

1. Celebrate new initiatives that have been launched to attract or retain people in any region of Northern Ontario.
2. Update progress against the Come North Plan.
3. Review and, if necessary, revise the priority action items for the coming year. These are actions that will ensure our communities are the most welcoming in Canada.

The conference took place during the mornings of June 22 and 23, 2021. The agenda included a review of past, current, and future immigration, reconciliation, and anti-racism efforts, with an overall focus on successful population growth efforts. The event provided several opportunities to engage in virtual networking and breakout sessions, where participants shared personal experiences, aligned resources, and learned about the priorities of each community within Northern Ontario's five largest centres. The main panel presentations offered fruitful discussions on the topics of anti-racism and the RNIP in northern communities. They also expanded on the issues and challenges regarding onboarding, diversity, labour market decline, community response to immigration and diverse groups, program successes, and best practices. The then-Minister of IRCC, Marco Mendicino, gave a keynote talk, which was followed by an audience question and answer session. Minister Mendicino discussed the federal immigration initiatives currently underway in Northern Ontario and Canada, including federal support of immigration to rural and northern communities.

## Make Your Pitch

A new component was added to the 2021 conference—the Make Your Pitch video contest. This was an opportunity for Northern Ontario communities to submit a video highlighting their best assets within the themes of population growth—attraction, welcoming, and anti-racism initiatives. Submissions were judged by international, Francophone, and First Nations students from Northern Ontario's postsecondary institutions. The winners were as follows:

In the **Northern Attraction** category:

1. La route du succès - Réseau Timmins, ON
2. West Nipissing-Quelle Surprise - West Nipissing Chamber of Commerce
3. La route du succès - Réseau Hearst, ON

In the **Welcoming Communities/Anti-Racism** category:

1. Untitled - Wake the Giant
2. L'occasion de réaliser certains rêves - Association des francophones du Nord-Ouest de l'Ontario (AFNOO)
3. Route Du Succès - Réseau Timiskaming

Tying into Come North Action Item #6 ("...submit a proposal...to fund a coordinated marketing plan for Ontario's Northern Regions..."), communities must first have the capacity to create a marketing plan, which might identify the need for videos. But both the Come North and Magnetic North conferences, and the Make Your Pitch initiative, have found that not every community can afford to create, or update, marketing content.

## Targeted Attendees

Similar to the previous year, invitations to attend the 2021 conference were sent to a broad range of community organizations. The themes of the conference—attraction, retention, reconciliation, anti-racism, and welcoming—apply to everyone living, or wishing to live, in any region in Northern Ontario.

In targeting attendees, there was a special focus placed on economic development agencies, municipalities, First Nations, Indigenous service organizations, and immigrant attraction and settlement agencies. Broad private sector representation was pursued through tourism industry organizations, chambers of commerce, and direct appeals to small, medium, and large employers known to have an unmet need for workers. Police, fire, secondary and postsecondary institutions, health institutions, and other local service delivery agencies were also invited. Local unions, seniors organizations, youth support groups, and local sports agencies were sought out to provide a well-rounded perspective at these events. Federal and provincial agencies in the areas of education, health, economic development, transportation, rural and municipal administration, Indigenous relations and services, and immigration were invited. The public was welcome to attend and multiple efforts were undertaken to engage students—domestic and international—at northern colleges and universities. A full list of organizations represented at the event is available in Appendix 2.

With the virtual delivery platform, two large barriers to attendance were removed: travel and cost, as the conference was free to attend. The financial barrier was also addressed through support from our partners and sponsors.

In the years to come, more focus should be placed on welcoming Indigenous peoples and organizations to the conferences, and on building lasting, mutually beneficial relationships that encourage knowledge sharing and capacity building. Additionally, a hybrid delivery model is being explored to continue offering the same benefits of accessibility (via eliminating travel and reducing costs) while providing in-person experiences for those who wish to attend<sup>2</sup>.

## Booths

Organizations wishing to promote their services and connect with attendees were invited to do so in exchange for a small fee to partially offset any external hard costs related to that activity. Funds were set aside to provide free or subsidized networking, promotion, and engagement opportunities for those experiencing financial barriers.

Throughout the conference, attendees had access to a virtual exhibition hall, where 12 organizations set up virtual 'booths' to showcase both their activities over the past year and their plans for the upcoming year. 86 unique individuals visited the exhibit hall. Each booth had an average of 28 unique visitors during the conference.

The organizations that participated in the virtual exhibits include:

- Northern Policy Institute
- Northwestern Ontario Local Immigration Partnership
- Newcomer Legal Clinic
- Lakehead University Faculty of Business Administration
- 101 Experiences
- North Bay and Area Local Immigration Partnership
- North Superior Workforce Planning Board – Northwest Connector Program
- Sault Ste. Marie Local Immigration Partnership
- Sudbury Local Immigration Partnership
- Timmins Economic Development Corporation
- Timmins Local Immigration Partnership
- Réseau de soutien à l'immigration francophone du Nord de l'Ontario.

The booths were active over the course of the two-day event. They displayed both automated and live content and allowed attendees to chat face-to-face (virtually) with a representative from the organization.

Additionally, there was capacity to open 25 separate rooms to allow for virtual networking among attendees. Some themes and topics addressed in the rooms trickled down from the main panel and breakout discussions. Rooms were opened for attendees after the main event content concluded each day.

## Why Population Growth?<sup>3</sup>

Northern Ontario communities are experiencing and will continue to experience demographic challenges related to the ratio of the working-age population (those ages 15 to 64) to the dependent population (those under 15 and over 64). A healthy, economically sustainable ratio is approximately one dependent to every two workers.<sup>4</sup> Based on current population projections, no district in Northern Ontario will be at, or below, the target by 2046.

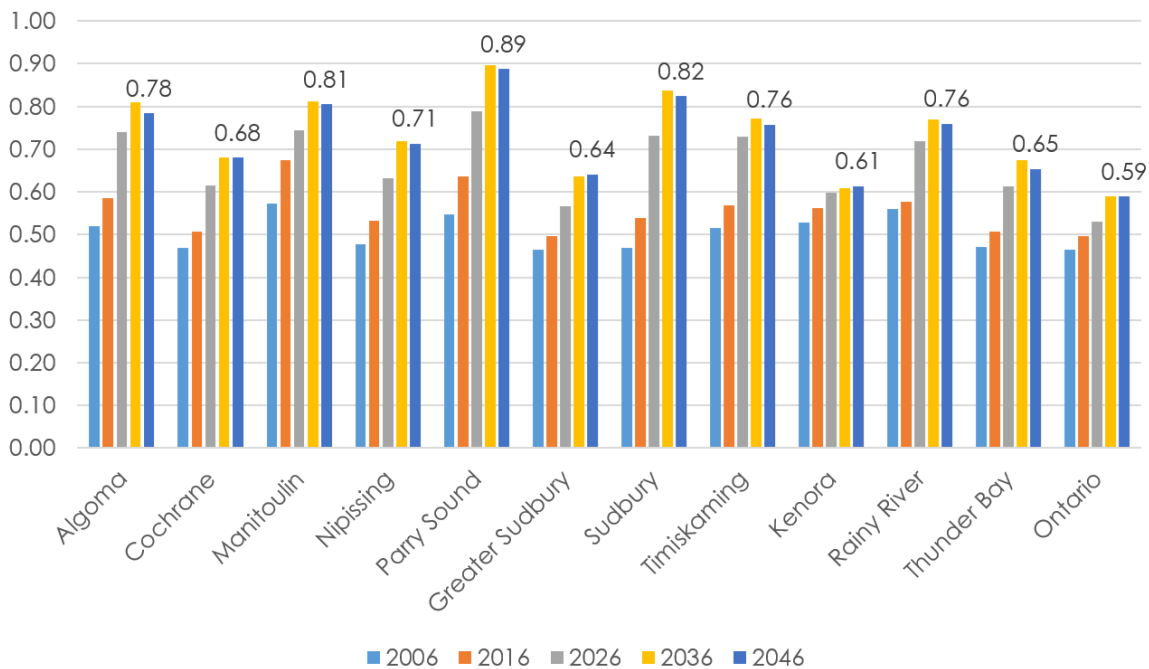
Previous projections using spring 2018 data<sup>5</sup> estimated three districts in Northern Ontario would have two dependents for every worker by 2036, which is the exact opposite of the ideal economic circumstance of two workers for every dependent (Cirtwill, Hagar, and Rizzuto 2021, 9). But the most current (spring 2021) Ministry of Finance population projections suggest no district will have two workers for every dependent either in 2036 or 2046.

These projections indicate that the Ministry of Finance anticipates an influx of migrants to Northern Ontario regions in the next 24 years to offset an aging population and low birth rates in our regions.

In fact, the Ministry states “net migration is projected to account for 86 per cent of all population growth [in Ontario] over the 2020-2046 period, with natural increase accounting for the remaining 14 per cent” (Ministry of Finance 2021).

That said, all Northern Ontario districts do, and will continue to, have demographic dependency ratios (DDR) higher than the Ontario average.

**Figure 1: Demographic Dependency Ratio, by Northern Ontario District, 2006 to 2046**



Note: Calculations of dependency ratios assume 100 per cent labour force participation among the working-age cohort—those ages 15-64—and thus overestimate participation rates, meaning the dependency ratios could be higher.

Source: Statistics Canada, census, various years. Population projections for 2026, 2036, and 2046 were derived from the Ontario Ministry of Finance's population projection tool produced during spring 2021.

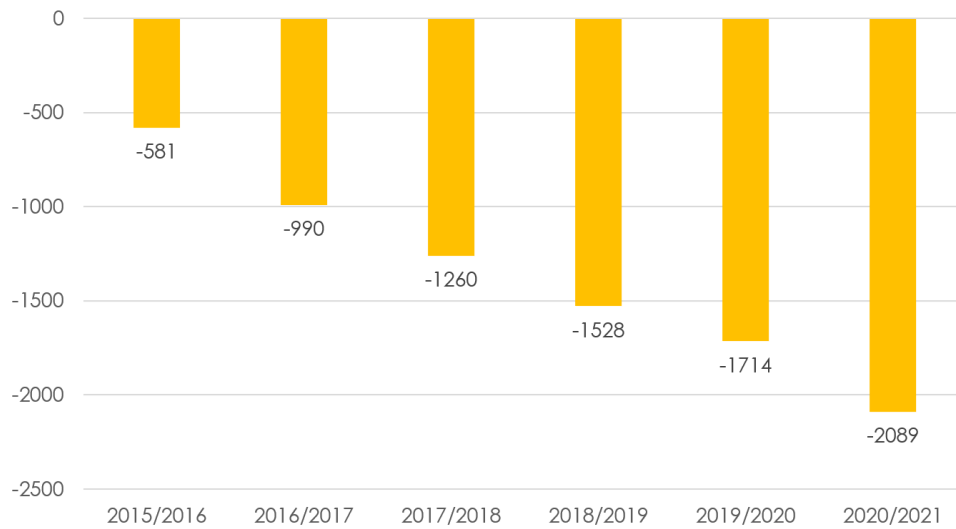
<sup>3</sup> At the time of writing this report, available data were 2016 census data, Ministry of Finance population projections from spring 2021, and components of population change 2021. The 2021 census data have only been released for total population and dwelling count. Further dissemination of census data is expected to continue between April 2021 (with release of age breakdowns) and 2023.

<sup>4</sup> For more information on the demographic dependency ratio for Northern Ontario districts and how migration targets were calculated, see Cirtwill, Hagar, and Rizzuto 2021, 8-9.

<sup>5</sup> Previous DDR graph available in Appendix 1.

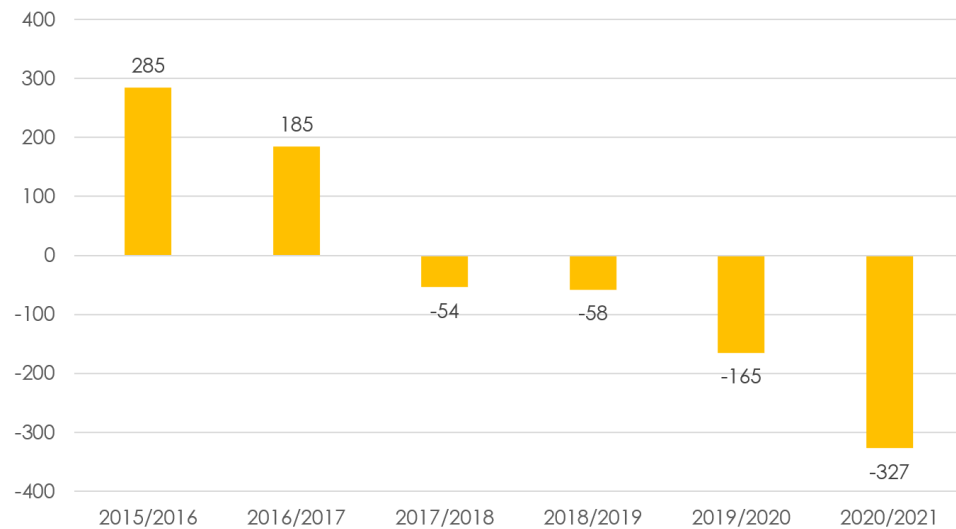
Aside from migration, another component of population change is natural change—births and deaths. To further emphasize the need for both attraction and retention, we can look at natural change numbers for Northern Ontario's economic regions. Both Northeastern and Northwestern Ontario are experiencing negative natural change. This indicates a higher mortality rate than birth rate, meaning more people are dying than are being born. Without attraction and retention of newcomers and existing residents, the Northeast and Northwest populations will decline rapidly. Northern Ontario communities will become economically unsustainable.

**Figure 2: Natural Population Change (births – deaths), 2015 to 2021, Northeastern Ontario**



Source: Author's calculations, Statistics Canada, Table 17-10-0008-01, estimates of the components of demographic growth, 2016 boundaries.

**Figure 3: Natural Population Change (births - deaths), 2015 to 2021, Northwestern Ontario**



Source: Author's calculations, Statistics Canada, Table 17-10-0008-01, estimates of the components of demographic growth, 2016 boundaries.



One way to offset negative natural change numbers is to focus on attraction of migrants and retention of residents in our regions. This approach can help maintain economically healthy and prosperous Northern Ontario communities.

As noted in last year's Come North Conference Report,

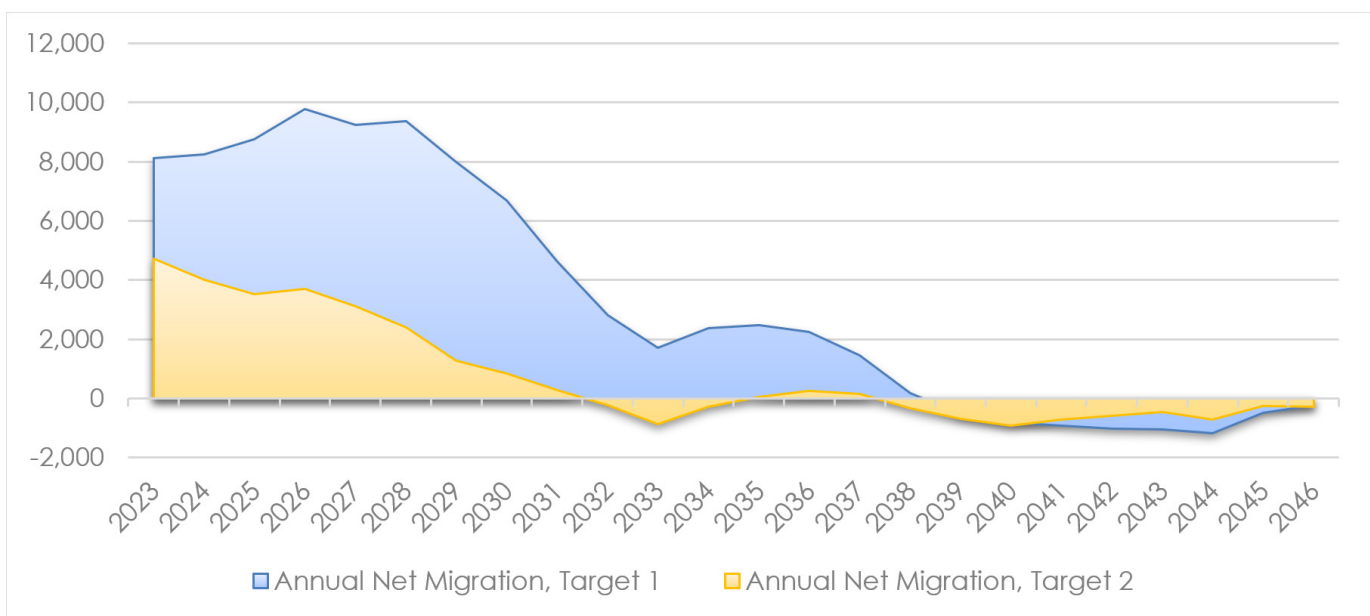
"If we wished to **maintain** our historical, healthy, ratio of dependents to workers, Ontario's northern regions would need to retain everyone who is currently here and attract some **8,100 additional people every year** for the next twenty years. In order to just limit the fall in our ratio of dependents to working age people to match the expected Ontario level by 2041, Northern Ontario needs some **1,700 new people a year** for the next twenty years. That's **34,000 new northerners to slow our decline, 162,000 to halt it.** Assuming, of course, that everyone who is already here and who is born here over the next twenty years, stays here" (Cirtwill, Hagar, and Rizzuto 2021, 9).

The above targets are based on maintaining the 2018 demographic dependency ratio, both for Ontario's northern regions, and the province. Between 2018 and 2022, the DDR increased by 0.04 points due to the original targets not being met.<sup>6</sup>

With the release of the 2021 census total population numbers, we can observe the population change between 2016 and 2021 in Ontario's northern regions and compare it to updated DDR targets based on more recent data. The 2022 DDRs for the Northeast and Northwest are 0.59 and 0.58, respectively. Meaning, that to **maintain the 2022 DDR** in the **Northeast** (target 1), through to 2046, we need on average **3,326 more immigrants annually** than the Ministry of Finance population projections expects us to receive. Similarly, for the Northwest, we need **792 more immigrants annually** than the Ministry expects us to receive.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, Ontario's DDR is projected to increase by 0.08 points between 2022 and 2046. However, Northeastern Ontario's DDR is expected to increase at a much **faster** rate in the same period of time (0.11). Meaning, that to **match the expected Ontario rate** by 2046 (target 2), **Northeast** Ontario needs an average of **750 immigrants annually**, on top of what the Ministry of Finance already projects the region to receive. Meanwhile, **Northwest** Ontario's DDR is expected to increase at a **slower** rate than Ontario (0.07). Meaning, that Northwest Ontario needs on average, **109 fewer immigrants annually** than what the region is expected to receive.

**Figure 4: Required Annual Net Migration – Northeast Ontario**

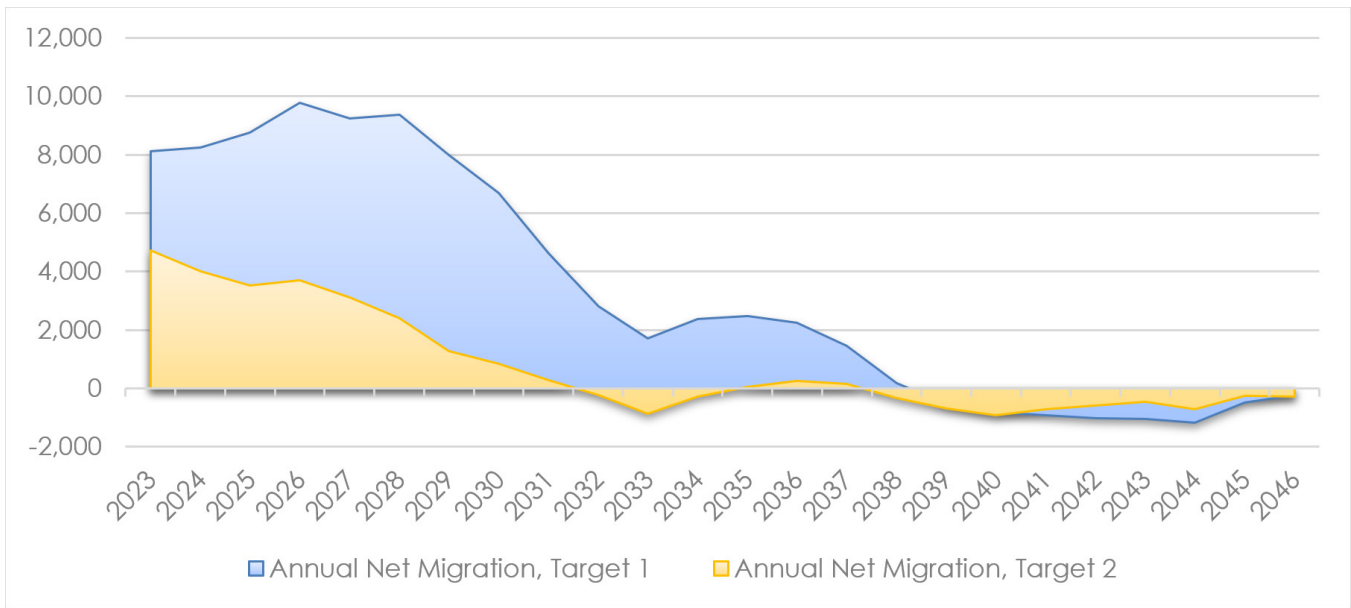


Source: Contributor's calculations based on Ontario Ministry of Finance population projections – 2022. Note: Target 1 – maintain current DDR, Target 2 – fall to provincial average DDR.

<sup>6</sup> Previous DDR graph available in Appendix 1.

<sup>7</sup> The Ministry of Finance population projects account for births, deaths, and migration. The Ministry of Finance projections project that Northeast and Northwest Ontario's DDR will rise above its current 2022 level, even with migration taken into account. Thus, to maintain the current DDR in these regions, migration above and beyond what the Ministry is projecting is needed.

**Figure 5: Required Annual Net Migration – Northwest Ontario**



Source: Contributor's calculations based on Ontario Ministry of Finance population projections – 2022. Note: Target 1 – maintain current DRR, Target 2 – fall to provincial average DRR.

To check progress against targets established at Come North in February 2020, we can look at the components of population change for our regions. As indicated in the table below, Ontario's northern regions attracted a minimum of 9,379 people since 2016—an average of 1,876 people per year.

This number does not mean that only 9,000+ people moved to our regions in the past five years; the rate is likely higher. But out-migration also occurred. This further emphasizes the importance of not only attraction

but also retention. Nevertheless, these trends leave us approximately 6,224 people short of our target for maintaining our historically healthy demographic dependency ratio established in 2018.

Partially as a result of not meeting prior net-migration targets, the demographic dependency ratio in our regions did rise, as mentioned previously, meaning there are now less people needed per year to maintain our new (higher) DDR.

**Table 1: Northern Ontario Population Change, 2016 to 2021**

	2021 Population	2016 Population	Population Change	Population Change (%)
<b>Nipissing</b>	84,716	83,150	1,566	1.9%
<b>Parry Sound</b>	46,909	42,824	4,085	9.5%
<b>Manitoulin</b>	13,935	13,255	680	5.1%
<b>Sudbury</b>	22,368	21,546	822	3.8%
<b>Greater Sudbury</b>	166,128	161,647	4,481	2.8%
<b>Timiskaming</b>	31,424	32,251	-827	-2.6%
<b>Cochrane</b>	77,963	79,682	-1,719	-2.2%
<b>Algoma</b>	113,777	114,094	-317	-0.3%
<b>Thunder Bay</b>	146,862	146,048	814	0.6%
<b>Rainy River</b>	19,437	20,110	-673	-3.3%
<b>Kenora</b>	66,000	65,533	467	0.7%
<b>Northeast Ontario</b>	557,220	548,449	8,771	1.6%
<b>Northwest Ontario</b>	232,299	231,691	608	0.3%
<b>Northern Ontario</b>	789,519	780,140	9,379	1.2%
<b>Ontario</b>	14,223,942	13,448,494	775,448	5.8%

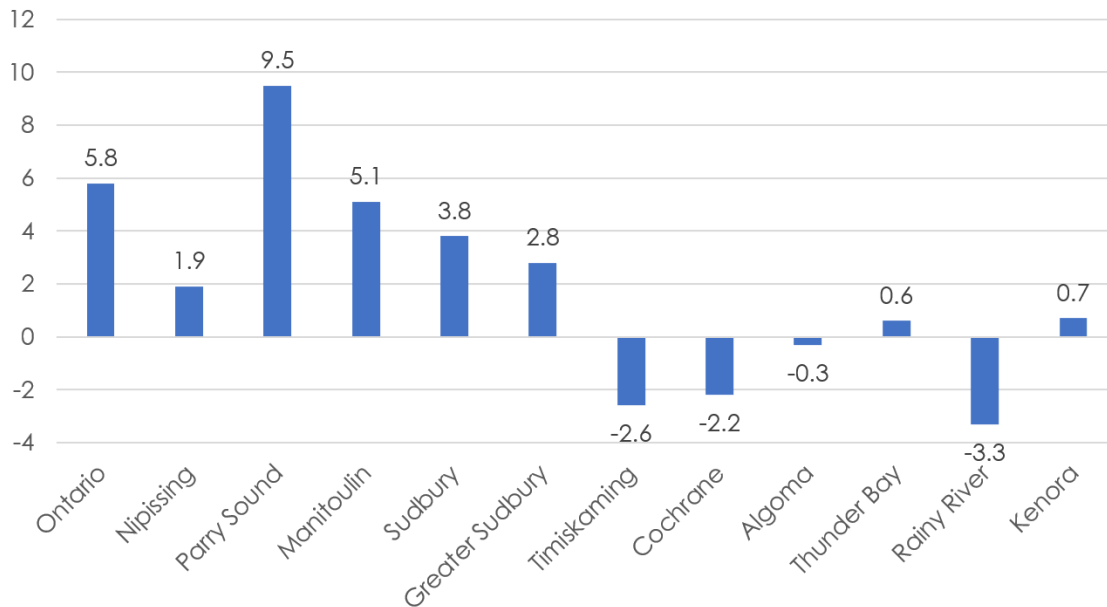
Source: Author's calculations, census of the population, 2021.

Although net-migration numbers over the past five years fell short of the needed in-migration targets to maintain the DDR, there are still some positive population changes that emerged from the 2021 census numbers.

As indicated in the figure below, most Northern Ontario districts experienced positive population change (i.e., growth). Notably, Parry Sound saw an increase of 9.5 per cent, with 4,085 new residents in the district. But no other district is growing at an equal or greater rate than that of the Province of Ontario. Furthermore, the districts of Timiskaming, Cochrane, and Rainy River experienced population loss. Population growth is caused by births and in-migration; population loss is caused by deaths and out-migration.

The rate of population growth is highest among districts in Northeastern Ontario, specifically those in the southern parts of the region, such as Nipissing, Parry Sound, Manitoulin, Greater Sudbury, and Sudbury. Although Timiskaming, Cochrane, and Algoma are in Northeastern Ontario, they are located further away from Southern Ontario's densely populated cities, such as Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area. As the figure below confirms, most migration to Northeastern Ontario is from intraprovincial migrants—people from elsewhere in Ontario. With rising housing prices and the increasing availability of remote work, out-migration from Southern Ontario cities to the north is increasing. Efforts should be focused on attracting and retaining this intraprovincial migrant population.

**Figure 6: Population Change (%), 2016 to 2021, Northern Ontario Districts**



Source: Author's calculations, census of the population, 2021.

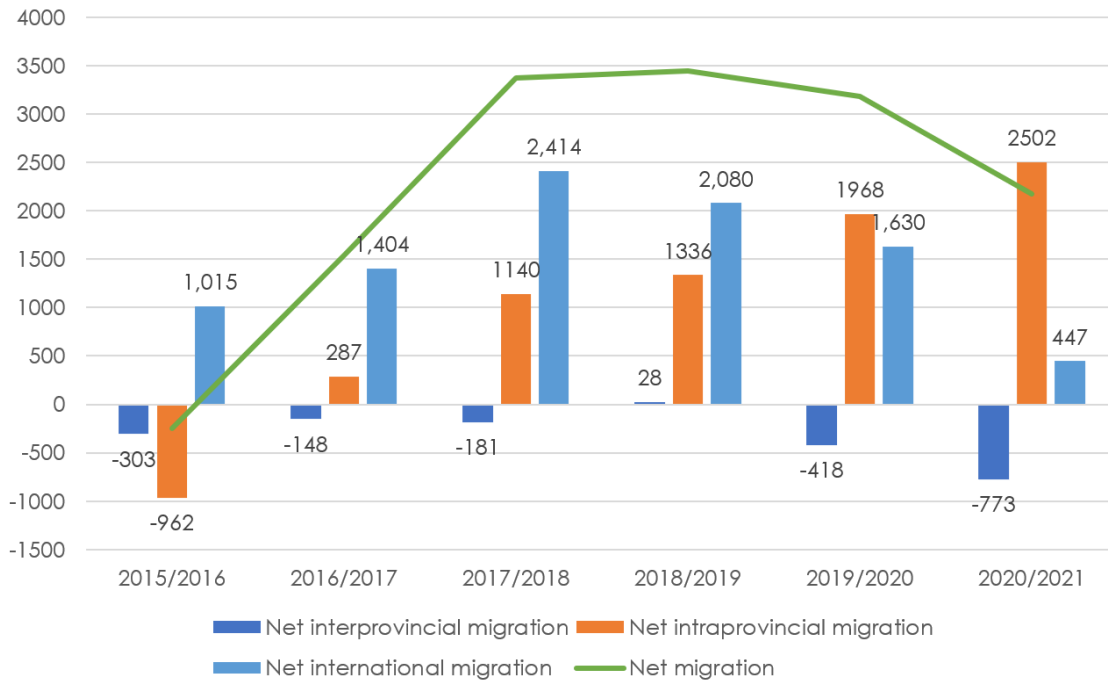
## Adapting, Pivoting, and Prospering

Throughout the conference, discussions involved efforts to adapt to the ever-changing nature of the pandemic. The figures below show that both Northeastern and Northwestern Ontario experienced a sharp decrease in net-migration numbers starting in 2019/2020—a decline that continues today. Both regions previously had positive net migration numbers but the onset of the pandemic pushed Northwest Ontario into the negatives. The COVID-19 pandemic not only affected migrants to Northern Ontario but also people already living in our regions and efforts to attract, retain, reconcile, and welcome. That said, there still were, and are, efforts to foster welcoming, sustainable, healthy Northern Ontario communities.

In the Northeast, intraprovincial migration overtook international migration during the pandemic as the biggest driver of population growth. But even prior to the pandemic, intraprovincial migration numbers were trending upward. In Northwestern Ontario, international migration is still the largest contributor to population growth. Additionally, the Northwest may not have benefited from the same level of intraprovincial migration as the Northeast, which is close to densely populated southern cities. That said, Northwestern Ontario saw stable, positive numbers of international migrants prior to the pandemic.

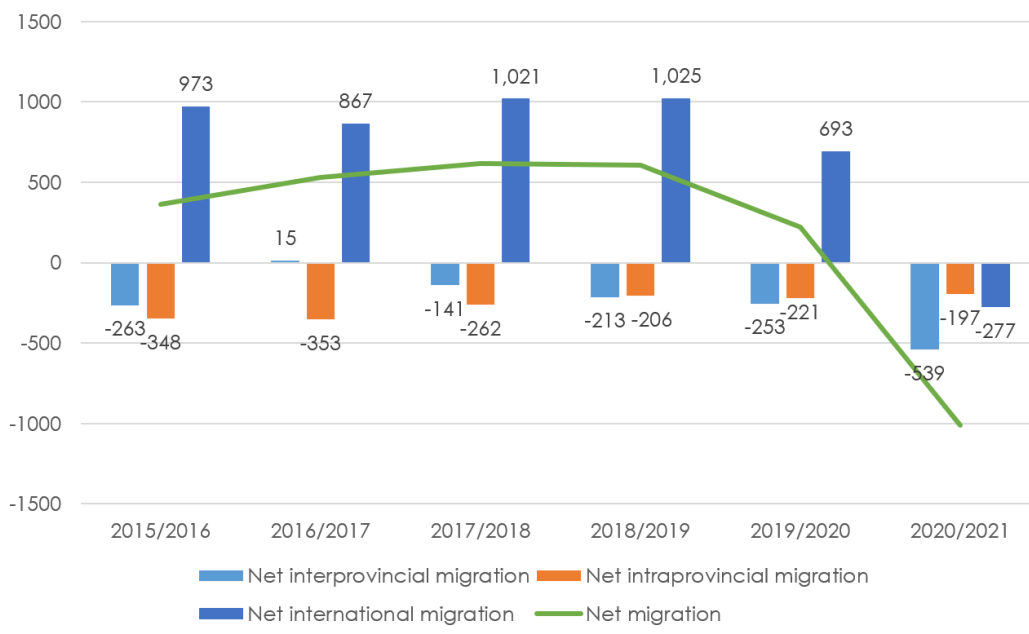
For communities to prosper, they must not only increase in-migration but also decrease out-migration. Creating welcoming communities is a pivotal step not just in attracting people but also in retaining them and current residents.

**Figure 7: Migration in Northeastern Ontario, 2015 to 2021**



Source: Author's calculations, Statistics Canada, Table 17-10-0008-01, components of population change by economic region, 2016 boundaries, release date 2022-01-13.

**Figure 8: Migration in Northwestern Ontario, 2015 to 2021**



Source: Author's calculations, Statistics Canada, Table 17-10-0008-01, components of population change by economic region, 2016 boundaries, release date 2022-01-13.

## General Findings

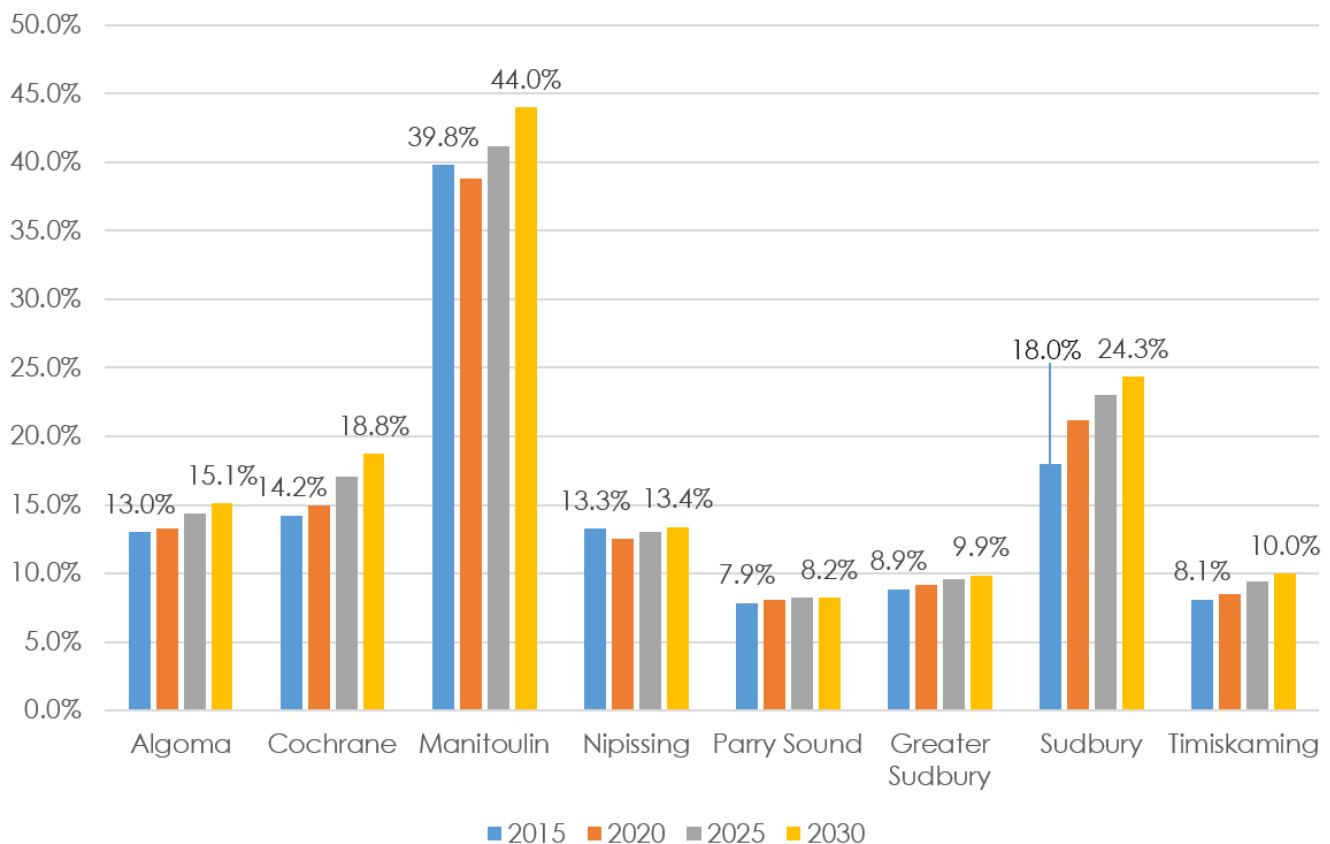
There are multiple components to population growth. As seen above, the components of population change include in-migration and out-migration, as well as births and deaths. Thus, to grow the population in Ontario's northern regions, our work must include both **attraction** and **retention**.

Attraction efforts should not focus only on international migrants. Both intra- and interprovincial migration to Northern Ontario regions have the potential to significantly contribute to population growth, as is already happening in Northeast Ontario. Postsecondary students, workers relocating for a new job, a First Nations person moving off-reserve, entrepreneurs opening a business in a new community—all contribute to net migration numbers and population growth.

But all the hard work being done to attract migrants must be matched with retention efforts that extend to people already in our communities. Specifically, we should focus on Indigenous peoples in Northern Ontario, given their current and projected population size, and groups that identify as marginalized.

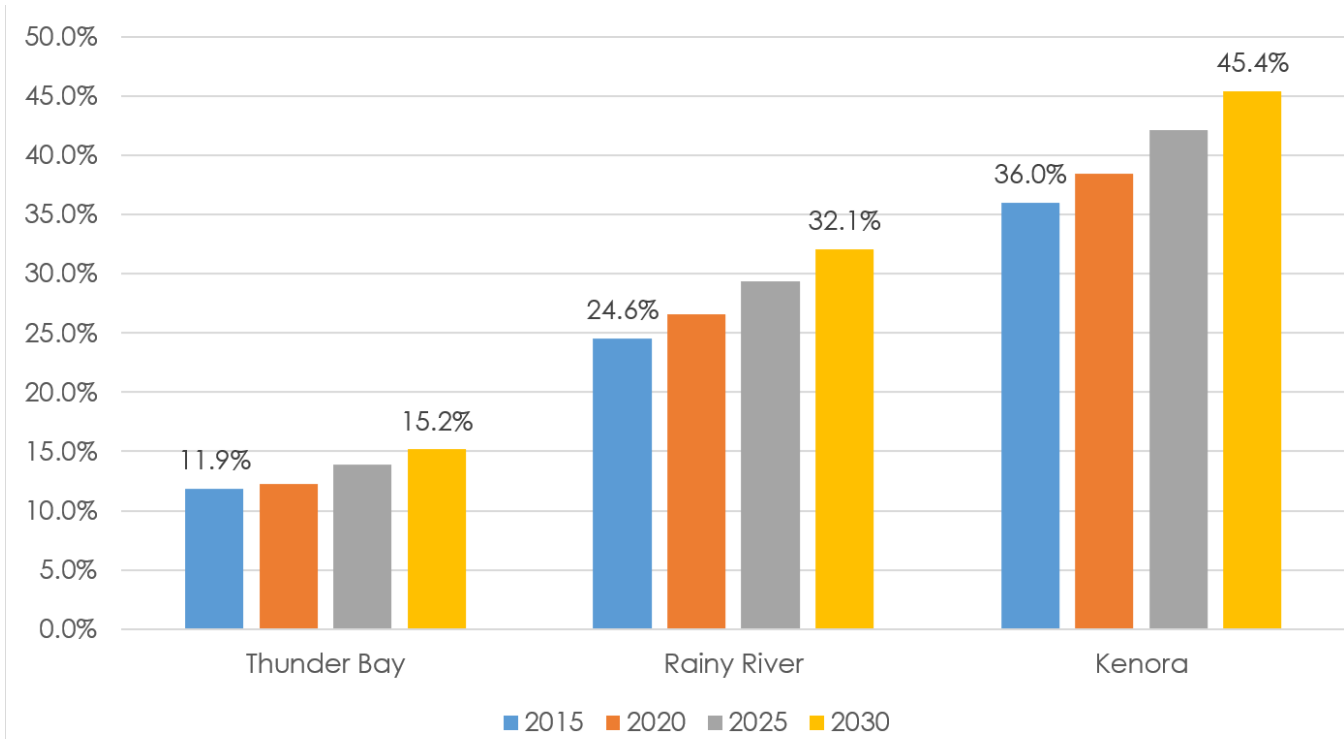
The figures below highlight how quickly the Indigenous population is growing, and is expected to grow, in both the Northeast and Northwest. There was a clear consensus among participants that a healthy, mutually respectful relationship between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous people is critical to the growth and sustainability of all Northern Ontario communities.

**Figure 9: Population Growth Projections: Indigenous Share of Total Labour Force (15+), Northeastern Ontario Districts, 2015 to 2030**



Source: Northern Policy Institute, Human Capital Series, 2019.

**Figure 10: Population Growth Projections: Indigenous Share of Total Labour Force (15+), Northwestern Ontario Districts, 2015 to 2030**



Source: Northern Policy Institute, Human Capital Series, 2019.



Attraction and retention mainly happen at the community-level. Specifically, they determine how welcoming a community is for potential migrants and the current population, including Indigenous peoples and other groups that identify as marginalized. The onus of being welcoming rests with every community member, organization, business, and employer. Welcoming community indicators, developed for Northern Ontario based on feedback from organizations across the region, are as follows<sup>8</sup>:

- a. Meaningful employment opportunities;
- b. Fostering social capital and community engagement;
- c. Affordable and suitable housing;
- d. Positive attitudes toward immigration and community diversity, and the presence of diverse groups in the community;
- e. Suitable and welcoming infrastructure; and
- f. Positive relationships with the police and the justice system, and safety.

Individual and organizational action is required to foster welcoming communities, which was thoroughly discussed during the Magnetic North Conference.

## Core Themes

The main themes of the conference included attraction, retention, reconciliation, and welcoming efforts. The following subthemes were also identified in the panels and breakout rooms.

1. Migration extends beyond international in-migrants to include domestic and secondary migrants (e.g., people migrating to Northern Ontario from Southern Ontario hubs; postsecondary students coming from elsewhere in the province/country; Indigenous peoples moving off-reserve). These migrants contribute to Northern Ontario population growth efforts and require diverse services.
2. Exacerbated by COVID-19, capacity continues to be an issue within the immigration and anti-racism/welcoming sectors. We must work to highlight efficiencies and reduce the duplication of efforts. For this to be successful, actors in Northern Ontario's regions need to prioritize collaboration and communication and avoid working in regional or sectoral silos.
3. There is a wide array of services being offered in Northern Ontario. But the identification of these services, who they are available to, and where they are offered is lacking. Adequate identification not only helps people who are moving to/living in our communities but also decision-makers in identifying gaps in services for specific demographic/cultural groups.
4. The long-term success of welcoming efforts requires buy-in at the individual, community, organizational, and municipal, provincial, and federal levels.
5. Community-level organizations and employers can play a significant role in educating individuals not only about the benefits newcomers and diverse groups bring to our communities but also the part they can play in making our communities more welcoming. Specifically, there is an onus on municipalities to show how and why immigration and retention of the existing population is good for the communities. Municipalities can teach employers and that can have a trickle-down effect.
6. Northern Ontario communities cannot afford to under employ the population living in these communities. Avenues must be in place for newcomers to get their foreign credentials recognized, and to ensure there are pathways for Indigenous peoples to complete/continue their education in whatever community they currently reside. Full participation of the existing population is necessary in mitigating labour market shortages.
7. Attraction and retention messaging are largely focused on 'the great outdoors.' Northern Ontario communities have much more to offer. There are great colleges and universities, French immersion programs, housing security, cultural diversity and multicultural activities, employment opportunities, and so on.
8. Welcoming infrastructure, specifically affordable, accessible, and timely transportation, is lacking in many communities. If people cannot get to and from work in a timely manner, access services, visit friends, etc., life satisfaction and satisfaction with the community decrease significantly.
9. Housing is a major barrier for people looking to move to, and remain in, Northern Ontario communities. although jobs may be available, housing, especially in smaller communities, is often difficult to find. In larger communities, housing is increasing in price, making it difficult to find affordable and suitable accommodations.

<sup>8</sup> See Mabee 2022, forthcoming.

## Breakout Sessions

One of the main components of the Magnetic North Conference is the breakout session discussions among participants, who represent a wide range of organizations and regions in Northern Ontario. At 2021's conference, the Come North Planning Committee weighed in on important topics identified through their work.

Breakout sessions were offered each day and included English and French translation options. Similar to the previous year, the sessions were intended to further knowledge, increase capacity, share resources, and identify priority themes to carry forward in each discussion area for the year ahead. The priorities set for each session were to enhance local capacity, mutual support, and leveraging.

- Breakout 1 – Building Capacities for Francophone Inclusion
- Breakout 2 – Economic Development and Job Creation through the Population Growth Lens
- Breakout 3 – The Effects of Racism and Discrimination on Attraction and Retention
- Breakout 4 – Gaps in Servicing Temporary Residents: A Look at what's Available
- Breakout 5 – Attraction, Retention, and Reconciliation in the COVID-Era
- Breakout 6 – 101 Experiences to Reduce Racism and Promote Welcoming Communities

At each session, participants were invited to explore the assigned theme by answering a series of three questions. The questions were consistent across each theme:

1. Establish a baseline: What are we currently doing?
2. Identify challenges: Where are the gaps? (e.g., services, resources, availability, accessibility)
3. Identify priorities and next steps: What needs to be done NOW (who, what, when)?

The following section presents the advice gleaned from the sessions.

## Targeted Advice

### *Building Capacities for Francophone Inclusion*

#### Key Assets

French services and assets in Northern Ontario include:

- Settlement services offered by Collège Boréal, Groupe Innovanor, Centre de santé communautaire du Grand Sudbury, and Association des francophones du Nord-Ouest de l'Ontario (AFNOO)
- Predeparture services for permanent residents
- Early childhood services
- Arts, culture, and entertainment offered at the community level
- Francophone education/school boards that offer services to families
- Postsecondary French-language institutions, like Collège Boréal and Université de Hearst
- Organizations for business improvement, like Conseil de la coopération de l'Ontario (CCO)

#### Gaps

- **There are many services offered to Francophones, but there are still gaps that need to be filled. The quality of the services also needs to be improved.** It is not enough to offer some translations and/or someone who speaks a little French.
- Many services that exist were created by anglophones for the anglophone/English speaking community and then translated into French for the Francophone community. But that does not work. **Services in French need to be tailored for the Francophone community because they have their own specific needs—services for and by Francophones.**





#### Efficiencies to Pursue

- A prerequisite for Francophone inclusion is ensuring services are available to both the existing and newcomer Francophone populations, as well as employers looking to provide bilingual services. This collaborative effort must be undertaken by both French-speakers and Anglophones within the communities.
- To maintain and grow the Francophone population in Ontario's northern regions, inclusion of this demographic group must be prioritized. Thus, adequate employment opportunities, services, and welcoming efforts must be present in communities.
- Francophones and non-Francophones alike need to participate in service provision and welcoming efforts for Francophones.

#### **Economic Development and Job Creation, Through the Population Growth Lens**

##### Key Assets

- Each community is unique, both in its successes and challenges. **Communities are working to adapt and accommodate their unique circumstances** to increase welcoming and economic development efforts.
- In Sioux Lookout, the Value Foods Mart is taking on several initiatives to welcome newcomers, helping them find housing and offering weekend programming (e.g., hiking, fishing, exploring the environment) for acclimation. **Employers that are welcoming foster community prosperity and retention.**

##### Gaps

- **Disconnect between governments-employer-community goals and an individual's aspirations**, which leads to harmful prejudice, stereotypes, and difficulty in obtaining meaningful employment as a newcomer.
- Lack of data. There are too many cases where **Ontario's northern regions are being lumped together with the rest of the province, which makes isolating the unique needs of the northern communities difficult.**
- Retaining skilled workers in communities outside of the five largest centres is difficult.

#### Efficiencies to Pursue

- **Possible solutions discussed:** Increased social services (focus beyond solely economic development), increased employer-level welcoming strategies, improving data availability, awareness of evolving responsibilities associated with occupations and their national occupational classification codes, adaptability in services provided to include temporary residents (that said, it was noted that there are some limitations that are tied to funding).
- Most importantly, **gaps need to be identified and red tape removed.** We cannot improve on what we do not know, and if there are too many barriers, economic development is hindered

#### **The Effects of Racism and Discrimination on Attraction and Retention**

##### Key Assets

- **Welcoming initiatives will not look the same in urban centres and townships.** Urban centres will see more organization-led initiatives to connect newcomers to people. In small communities, the responsibility is mainly on individuals to engage with newcomers and share their cultures. Northern Ontario has tools such as **Magnetic North, RNIP, 101 Experiences, and quality colleges and universities.**
- **Municipalities and educational institutes (at all levels) are critical in educating the public on the importance of welcoming newcomers** and how they enrich our communities. These efforts will help promote conversations on embracing and encouraging diversity. Moreover, communities and educational institutions can start implementing welcoming practices today by incorporating supporting principles into their messaging, media, meetings, and other communications.
- Lakehead University (Thunder Bay) is working to target international students by creating a welcoming campus. It has invested in an international student lounge and has groups and clubs that cultivate community on campus.

##### Gaps

- **Racism in the housing market can be a major barrier.**
- Smaller communities may not have dedicated organizations to welcome and retain newcomers and Indigenous populations, which is why steps must be taken at an individual level to learn about these populations and how to be more welcoming.

### Efficiencies to Pursue

- Having folks in the housing market on board would be helpful to ensure that **landlords are culturally educated** and that **newcomers have a firm grasp of where to find housing, what to expect, and what their best options are.**
- Opportunities for cross-cultural exchange. For example, newcomers and Indigenous populations learning about each other's cultures and beliefs and attending each other's events can contribute to a better sense of understanding and acceptance.

### Gaps in Servicing Temporary Residents: A Look at what's Available

#### Key Assets

- **There are some services in Northern Ontario that focus on immigration retention.** They include Matchmaker, majority volunteer-run organizations like the Kirkland Lake Multicultural Centre, and consultations with immigration lawyers at Thunder Bay Multicultural Centre. **However, these services are few and far between.**
- Additionally, Thunder Bay has a migrant and refugee legal clinic for temporary residents.

#### Gaps

- Most temporary residents have a goal of becoming permanent residents in Canada. There are many services that benefit them throughout the process, but gaps do exist.
- There must be **better availability of services that facilitate successful permanent residence applications** throughout Northern Ontario, such as language testing, biometrics, health testing, and facilitators who can perform French language testing. For example, Toronto is the closest place where temporary Timmins residents can access a language testing centre. This requires time and money, such as transportation, time off work, and childcare.<sup>9</sup>
- **Limited human and fiscal resources in Northern Ontario create many gaps in the services** that are required to retain temporary residents in Canada. Many service-providing agencies are not funded to fully support temporary residents.

### Efficiencies to Pursue

- **Pooling of resources and collaboration between organizations and regions** is needed to bridge these gaps.
- Employers can also play a large role in this process if they have the right tools and training.
- **Better identification of the services that are available**, where they are available, and who they are available to is needed so potential migrants and current community members know what they can access and how.
- **Resources for international students**, such as help finding housing, navigating the transportation system, and accessing language tests. Making international students feel welcome will increase their desire to stay after graduation.

### Attraction, Retention, and Reconciliation in the COVID-19 Era

#### Key Assets

- The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way that Canadians live and how they approach migration and reconciliation. Festivals, pow wows, events, open houses, ceremonies, training sessions, tours, living history and so much more were underway prior to COVID-19. Since the pandemic, we have seen a shift toward an online world.
- In Thunder Bay, there is a community medicine garden (Four Sacred Medicine Garden), and knowledge is being fostered in broader ways outside of classrooms to educate people on the importance of traditional practices and what healing properties are.
- There are also resources to help implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and to teach them in schools. Specifically, a resource was created by the Assembly of First Nations to support this effort during COVID.

#### Gaps

- We need more people for population growth and to retain those already here. But this process needs to have reconciliation at the forefront. Newcomers have a role in reconciliation. **If we do not include them in this effort, we are failing.**

<sup>9</sup> Since June 2021, Test d'évaluation de français (TEF) has been available in more locations—Thunder Bay (Novacentre), Hearst (Groupe Inovonor), Kapuskasing (Groupe Inovonor), and Timmins (Groupe Inovonor). It will soon be available in Sudbury (Collège Boréal).

- **It's important to be an ally and have difficult conversations even if you do not have all the answers.** Sometimes Indigenous peoples and other groups that identify as marginalized do not have access to a 'seat at the table.' Being an ally and engaging in these conversations in areas of life where there is a lack of representation and Indigenous voices is still important. You can and should have these conversations while recognizing and being open about your limitations and knowledge gaps.

#### Efficiencies to Pursue

- **If racism, systemic racism, and unwelcoming behaviours/communities are an illness, then education is a remedy.** How do we integrate newcomers into this process when non-newcomer Canadians are still learning this history as well? We need to educate non-newcomers and newcomers alike, young and old, to work toward reconciliation.
- We cannot teach what we do not know. **We must create a paradigm shift from teaching newcomers to all of us learning together.** Rather than asking "What can we do? How do we fix this?" we need to stop, listen, and learn from Indigenous peoples, groups that identify as marginalized, and each other so that we can move forward together.
- We need to ensure that the **Indigenous workforce can gain meaningful employment and full participation** in the labour force. Education and upskilling programs need to be available that either build on services already in place or are provided in areas where they do not exist and delivered in ways that are mindful of potential barriers such as connectivity and location. Additionally, welcoming employers play a large role in meaningful employment.

#### 101 Experiences to Reduce Racism and Promote Welcoming Communities

##### Key Assets

- 101 Experiences in Northeastern Ontario is an initiative that has been created to reduce racism and promote welcoming communities. Participating in multiple activities while engaging with different actors contributes to awareness of diverse groups and cultures. These activities can help foster mutual respect and understanding.
- **To reduce racism, people need to have genuine experiences with people of other races** where everyone is an equal.

##### Gaps

- **There must be greater information sharing between communities and organizations across Northern Ontario.** Folks in Thunder Bay do not hear about successful techniques for promoting cultural exchanges/anti-racism developed in the Northeast.

#### Efficiencies to Pursue

- Two types of 'promotion' are needed for these types of experiences. **First, promote these opportunities to prospective entrepreneurs.** People need to be encouraged to make a business out of their talents. **Second, promote these experiences to consumers.** This can be achieved by leveraging multicultural centres and municipalities for help. Participation extends beyond the individual-level; organizations as a whole can benefit from participating in welcoming experiences.

## Panel discussions

In addition to the breakout sessions, one panel was held each day to facilitate knowledge and information exchange between panelists. Each panel had a set of predetermined questions, followed by a live, audience-driven question and answer session.

#### Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP) Panel

On day one, there was a panel of the Northern Ontario RNIP coordinators. The panelists were as follows: Madison Mizzau (Timmins), Paul Sayers (Sault Ste. Marie), Alex Ross (Greater Sudbury), Patti Carr (North Bay – Former), and Emily Lauzon (Thunder Bay). The prepared questions were:

1. Paul, how do you respond when someone says the immigrants that come through the RNIP program are taking jobs from local people?
2. Emily, Thunder Bay had the largest number of RNIP recommendations in year one. What was the secret to your success?
3. Alex, why does Sudbury need a specific allocation of immigrants through the RNIP program?
4. Madison, how could a program like the RNIP benefit other rural and northern communities in Northern Ontario?
5. Patti, North Bay has the local Chamber of Commerce playing a much bigger role in the RNIP program. How do you think that has made its design and delivery different than that in other RNIP communities?

#### Key Themes

- **Immigration is not just about the 'here today' job;** it's about the future of our communities. If we assume 100 per cent labour force participation by everyone, we still need at least 2,000+ people to migrate to Northern Ontario to address the projected dependency ratio.
- **Discussion, community buy-in, partnerships, and**

**social supports were important themes and tools used in successful pilot programs that will continue this year.** Recruiting and educating talent locally helps secure community buy-in, as do partnerships with higher education, local Friendship Centres, etc., to support welcoming environments.

- **RNIP and economic development programming are not just about immigration. There are other programs for residents and the Indigenous populations that can promote labour force development and support pathways for developing skillsets locally as well.** Low productivity due to labour shortages is not a good thing. If employers cannot secure new contracts because of labour shortages, that is not good for the economy.

#### Gaps

- Geographic boundaries – **communities outside of the five largest centres in Northern Ontario (RNIP communities) also have labour shortages that must be filled.** The economic and social ties small communities have with hubs like Thunder Bay, Sudbury, and Timmins need to be considered in assessing pilot participants. The Northwestern Local Immigration Partnership (NWLIP) covers all of Northwestern Ontario, and there are economic development agencies in many smaller communities. There are resources in place in these surrounding communities to welcome and retain new migrants. But, the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot is not available to these smaller centres.
- Another gap identified is the **limited number of Francophone candidates** coming through the program in specific communities. It should be noted that some communities do allot additional points to candidates who speak French.

#### Successes

- **International students from local postsecondary institutions have been critical to the success of the RNIP.** They have knowledge of the community and connections in it. This helps with retention.
- **The community-driven nature** of the pilot has enabled communities to select candidates who will thrive based on the criteria that have been set and targeted occupations.

#### Anti-Racism and Discrimination Panel

The Anti-Racism and Discrimination Panel took place on day two and was comprised of a group of experts with both lived experience and a passion to fight racism. The panelists were: Rimaz Abakar (Founder, Black Northern Consulting), Wayne Neegan (Communications Liaison, Constance Lake), Moïse Zahoui (Coordinator

of Immigration Services at le Centre de santé communautaire du Grand Sudbury), and Hediye Karimian (Co-founder, ULU).

The questions asked were:

1. What are some advantages about living in your community that have been identified by Indigenous peoples and groups that identify as marginalized? Any particular success stories to highlight?
2. Are there any barriers that Indigenous peoples and marginalized groups face when it comes to settling or living in your local community? (e.g., work, education, access to services or housing, discrimination)
3. Is systemic racism and discrimination an issue in your community and, if so, what are ways your local community can address that?
4. How would you describe the relationships that Indigenous peoples and groups that identify as marginalized have with employers? Schools? The municipality? Other community groups?
5. Have efforts been made in the past to address racism and discrimination in your community? Were they successful? If not, why?
6. Based on the discussion, what do you see as the main priorities moving forward?

#### Key Themes

- We hear it all the time: “I am not racist.” But at the end of the day, **what are you doing to be an ally to Indigenous peoples and other groups that identify as marginalized?** It's all about learning, listening, and standing up when it is your turn to do something.
- **You need to see yourself represented in the local community and the neighbourhood needs accessible opportunities and services.** Everyone has fight in them, but why fight if you can go to different cities and be in a much more vibrant community where you see yourself reflected in all facets of life?
- **Immigrants are so much more than 'economic value.'** They contribute culturally, socially, and ethnically to the communities where they reside. The onus is not on immigrants and diverse groups to prove they are economically viable; they have a right to live, work, and play in these communities, too.
- **Microaggressions** are prevalent in everyday life and often are far worse than explicit forms of

racism and discrimination faced daily. They are like a million tiny cuts that chip away at your happiness and you are constantly reminded that you are an 'other.'

opportunities surface and so that privilege does not filter out the right people? A lot of trauma comes with our communities. If you do not have the fight within you, you cannot necessarily vie for those opportunities.

#### Gaps

- **Accessibility, like getting to and from work, is an issue.** In Sudbury, there are employees who must catch a bus an hour before their shift or wait an hour after their shift to get home.
- Also, **accessing essential services like health care without facing discrimination** is the absolute minimum expectation for living in a community. Additionally, having access to **services in other languages** and having **culturally appropriate resources in all sectors**—housing, health care, transportation, counselling, therapy, etc.—are vital. In every system, there are barriers for Indigenous peoples and groups that identify as marginalized.
- **Finding and securing suitable** housing is difficult, especially for larger families. Often, when housing is finally found, it is substandard. Discrimination also plays a large part in this.
- **Systemic racism** is prevalent and makes it extremely difficult for people to grow and prosper in their communities.

#### Successes

- Local Immigration Partnerships are working to address racism in collaboration with local organizations.
- For anti-racism initiatives, specifically for the French population, there has been collaboration between the Sudbury Local Immigration Partnership (SLIP), Réseau du Nord, and L'Association canadienne-française de l'Ontario (ACFO) in Sudbury.
- Black Northern Consulting, a group based in Sault Ste. Marie, was born out of a need for dialogue and action pertaining to anti-racism and anti-discrimination.

#### Efficiencies to Pursue

- **Services available must be made more apparent.** New community members, even those who are already residents, should not have to search for hours to find services that meet their needs. We need to see Indigenous peoples and marginalized groups in places of influence, policy, and power.
- **Opportunities must exist for Indigenous peoples and groups that identify as marginalized.** How can we make it friendly enough so that these



## Conclusion

When it comes to building long-lasting welcoming communities, there is no easy path. As well, as this report has identified, there is no one way either. There are multiple short- and long-term actions actions that can be taken in partnership with others across Northern Ontario. And that's just the thing – there are natural synergies that exist and by pooling resources, whether it be personnel, funding, or other assets, opportunities can be leveraged to strengthen attraction, retention, and reconciliation. The Magnetic North conference will continue to bring people together in order to identify these opportunities and highlight actions we can all take.



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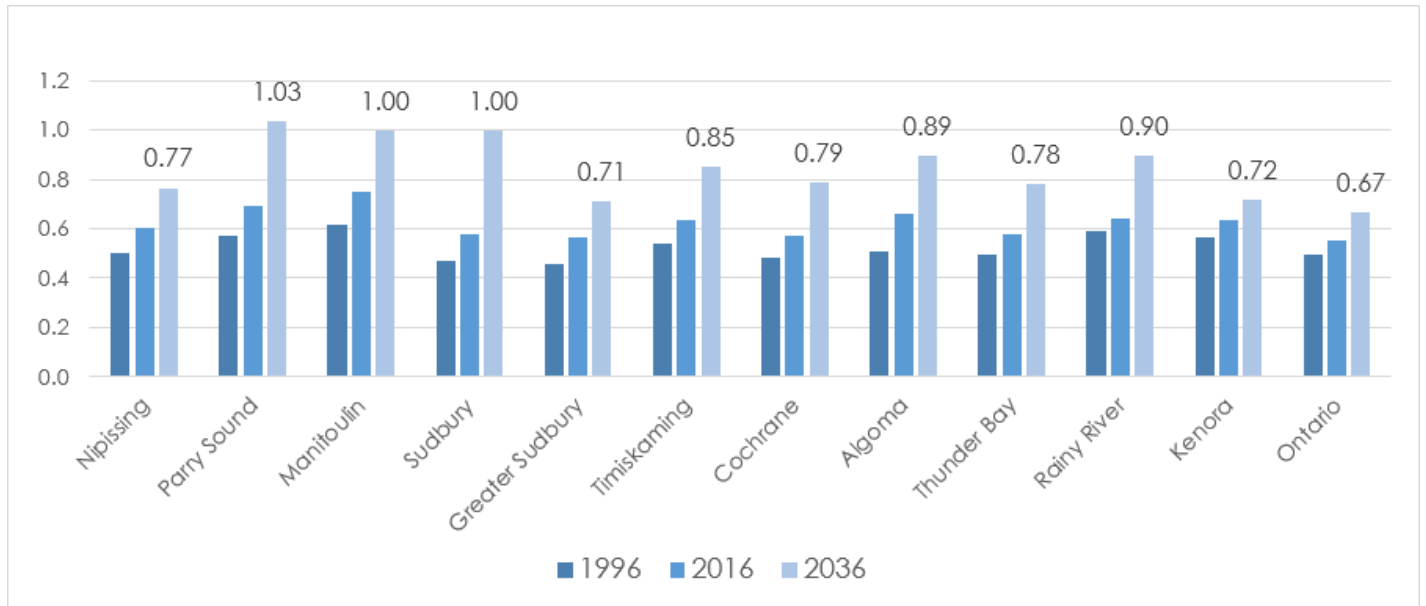
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# Appendix 1: Demographic Dependency Ratio by District, Northern Ontario, 1996-2036

(Cirtwill, Hagar, Rizzuto, 2021 9).

Figure 1: Dependency Ratio by District, Northern Ontario, 1996-2036



Note: Calculations of dependency ratios assume 100 percent labour force participation among the working-age cohort, those ages 15-64, and thus overestimate labour force participation rates, meaning the dependency ratios could be higher.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Census, various years: population projection for 2036 were derived from the Ontario Ministry of Finance's population projection tool.



## Appendix 2: Magnetic North 2021 Attending Organizations

211 Northern Region	Conseil scolaire public du Nord-Est de l'Ontario
ACCES Employment	Constance Lake First Nation
Actions interculturelles	Coopérative Centre francophone de Thunder Bay
Algoma University	Corporation of the Township of White River
Ambassade du Canada en France	Cultural Crossroads: 101 Experiences
Anthony Rota Constituency Office	Dubreuil Broas Ltd
Anushika Anthony Professional Corporation	Employment Options - Northern College
Association des francophones du Nord-Ouest de l'Ontario (AFNOO)	Explorer Solutions
Centre de santé communautaire du Grand Sudbury	Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada
Centre d'éducation et de formation pour adultes	FedNor
Centre régional de recherche et d'intervention en développement économique et communautaire (CRRIDEC)	Fringe North Theatre Festival
City of Greater Sudbury	HomeGrownCommunities.net
City of Kenora	iC Advantage
City of North Bay	Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
City of Sault Ste. Marie	Indigenous Tourism Ontario
City of Temiskaming Shores	Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada
City of Thunder Bay	Kirkland Lake Multicultural Group
Collège Boréal	Lake of the Woods Employment Action Project
Collège Boréal (Employment Options Emploi)	Lakehead Public Schools
Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada	Lakehead Social Planning Council
Confederation College	Lakehead University
Conference Board of Canada	Laurentian University
Conseil de la coopération de l'Ontario	Limestone Partners
Conseil scolaire catholique de district des Grandes Rivières	Ministry of Energy, Northern Development & Mines
Conseil scolaire catholique Franco-Nord	Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development
Conseil scolaire de district catholique des Aurores boréales	Municipality of Black River-Matheson
Conseil scolaire public du Grand Nord de l'Ontario (CSPGNO)	Municipality of Neebing
Conseil scolaire public du Nord-Est de l'Ontario	Municipality of Red Lake
	Municipality of Sioux Lookout
	NECO Community Futures Development Corp.
	NEOnet Inc.

New Horizons Media Inc.

Newcomer Legal Clinic

North Bay & District Multicultural Centre

North Bay Metis Nation Council

North Superior Workforce Planning Board

Northern College

Northern Policy Institute

Northwest Business Centre

Northwest Employment Works/Confederation College

Northwestern Ontario Local Immigration Partnership

Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association

Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages

Ontario Lottery and Gaming Commission

Ontario Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines

Ontario Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development

Ontario Trillium Foundation

Oshki Pimache O Win

PACE Global

Parents partenaires en éducation

PHI&CO

Professions North/Nord (Laurentian University)

Réseau ACCESS Network

Réseau de soutien à l'immigration francophone du nord de l'Ontario

Sault Community Career Centre

Sault Ste. Marie and Area Local Immigration Partnership

Sault Ste. Marie Local Immigration Partnership

Services d'établissement du Nord-Est de l'Ontario

Skills for Change

Société Économique de l'Ontario

Sudbury Local Immigration Partnership

Sudbury Multicultural & Folks Art Association

Superior East Community Futures Development Corporation

TD Canada Trust

Temiskaming Shores and Area Chamber of Commerce

The Business + Higher Education Roundtable

The Corporation of the City of Dryden

The Temiskaming Foundation

The Venture Centre

The Woke Age Project

Thunder Bay Community Economic Development Commission

Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre

Thunder Bay Multicultural Association

Thunder Bay Ventures

Timmins & District Multicultural Centre

Timmins Chamber of Commerce

Timmins Economic Development Corporation

Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University)

Town of Blind River

Town of Fort Frances

Town of Hearst

Town of Rainy River

Township of Ear Falls

Township of Gillies

Township of Hornepayne

Township of Manitouwadge

Township of Sioux Narrows Nestor Falls

Township of Terrace Bay

Université de Hearst

University of Guelph

Wakenagun CFDC

Westrock Enterprises

YMCA of Northeastern Ontario

# About Northern Policy Institute

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

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

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

## Related Research

**Come North 2020 Conference Report**  
Charles Cirtwill, Hilary Hagar, and Rachel Rizzuto

**All Roads Lead Home: Immigration flows into Ontario's north and what this means for RNIP impacts**  
Mercedes Labelle

**Addressing the Cuts Left Behind: Anti-Racism and Discrimination Initiatives for an Inclusive Northern Ontario**  
Larissa Yantha

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