



Motion M-39: Immigration to Atlantic Canada
Submission to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Prepared by The Conference Board of Canada
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Introduction

The Conference Board of Canada is pleased to submit this brief to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration in support of the Committee's research on immigration to Atlantic Canada. On September 25, 2017, the Conference Board released a research report entitled [*Immigration to Atlantic Canada: Toward a Prosperous Future*](#). The report draws upon Conference Board and Statistics Canada demographic and economic data to outline the need for immigration in Atlantic Canada. Moreover, it analyzes recent immigration trends in the Atlantic region and highlights Atlantic Canada's strengths and challenges with respect to attracting and retaining newcomers. The report concludes with policy recommendations that are drawn from our data and literature analysis and the interviews we conducted between April and June 2017. We spoke with 22 stakeholders including federal, provincial, and municipal civil servants, researchers, economists, officials from the business community, and immigrant settlement service officials. We refer to them as "interviewees" in the report and throughout this brief. As an independent and evidence-based organization, the Conference Board came to its own conclusions in formulating the report's recommendations.

Summary of Recommendations

To help support Atlantic Canada's immigrant attraction and retention efforts, we offer the following four immigration policy recommendations which we elaborate upon between pages 2-10 of this brief:

1. raising public and employer awareness about immigration's benefits to Atlantic Canada;
2. promoting life in Atlantic Canada to prospective immigrants to highlight why they should settle in the region rather than in other parts of the country;
3. attracting immigrants who are most likely to stay in Atlantic Canada;
4. prioritizing temporary residents by addressing the challenges that may hinder their transition to permanent residence.

The Atlantic provinces would benefit from raising public and employer intercultural awareness and understanding of immigration's value to the region. According to some of our report's interviewees, a segment of the Atlantic region's population is apprehensive about immigration, while employers lack experience in effectively integrating immigrants into the workplace.

Doing more to promote the Atlantic provinces to prospective immigrants will help to raise the region's profile; create more awareness about the benefits of living in Atlantic Canada compared with other

Canadian destinations; and dispel common myths, such as the notion that all of Atlantic Canada's economy is depressed.

By drawing on their growing immigration experiences, the Atlantic provinces can tailor their approach to immigrant selection to draw those most likely to remain in the region. This can be done by striking a balance between the selection of high- and semi-skilled immigrants, leveraging communities and families, focusing on specific source countries, and establishing retention benchmarks to measure success.

Finally, there is a broad consensus that the Atlantic provinces should provide more permanent residence pathways for international students and foreign workers. To improve such efforts, stakeholders need to help international students find permanent employment in their fields upon graduation. The federal government and provinces should also look to improve access to settlement services for international students and foreign workers.

Recommendation 1: Raise Public and Employer Awareness

The prevailing view among interviewees is that the Atlantic provinces would benefit from raising public and employer intercultural awareness and understanding of immigration's value to the region. They believe that while the Atlantic region's higher immigration levels in recent years and the Syrian refugee initiative have helped this cause, a segment of the region's population is apprehensive about immigration, while employers lack experience in effectively integrating immigrants into the workplace.

Showcasing Immigration's Benefits Even Further

Atlantic Canada already features several awareness raising initiatives. For instance, New Brunswick has launched a website called *We Are All NB* that promotes diversity and tolerance and highlights the province's efforts to support the employability of its Canadian-born residents while recruiting immigrants as complements to its workforce.¹

However, interviewees believe that more could be done to enhance public support for immigration. An economist said that it would be helpful to have a campaign that highlights the economic need for immigration, which would alleviate concerns that newcomers have a negative impact on the employment of locals and wages and show that they benefit the region's fiscal and economic standing by increasing the tax base and spending on goods and services. These efforts should be complemented by more awareness-raising of the investments that governments and businesses are making to train and hire Canadian-born workers.

Interviewees would also like to see more cross-sectoral partnerships to better demonstrate the value of immigration to the region. For instance, they said that the rise in welcoming community initiatives such as local immigration partnerships has been helpful in this area. Another pointed out that post-secondary institutions can help showcase the benefits of diversity in the classroom and community. It may also be worthwhile to highlight that the direct economic impact of international students in the region is \$525.9 million in spending, which supports some 3,969 jobs.²

¹ Government of New Brunswick, [We Are All NB](#).

² Roslyn Kunin & Associates Inc., *Economic Impact of International Education in Canada*.

While interviewees believe that the region will become more accepting of immigration as diversity increases—for instance, as the cohort of Syrian children grows up with Canadian-born children—they argue that creating a consistent message and stimulating more public dialogue will yield more fruitful immigration results for the Atlantic region. Several called for more visually appealing and easily understandable infographics and posters for use on social media and in public settings to help spread the message that immigration is good for Atlantic Canada.

Building the Business Case for Immigration

With employers playing such a formative role in Canada’s immigration system, whether through federal programs that fall under Express Entry, the Atlantic Immigration Pilot (AIP), or the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP), interviewees emphasized the importance of creating more employer awareness about the immigration opportunities that are available to them. Interviewees also said that employers require guidance on navigating the immigration system and that a stronger business case needs to be made to help employers understand why immigrants are so critical to Atlantic Canada’s economy—namely that the region is experiencing slow macro-economic growth and needs newcomers to create more opportunities for business. More efforts are also needed to raise intercultural awareness among employers.

While larger employers are more inclined to hire immigrants, interviewees believe that smaller employers may be hesitant to do so for various reasons, including reluctance to use the immigration system or because they believe that doing so would be more expensive or have little value. As such, it is vital to explain to these employers that immigrants offer diverse views, are hard-working, speak multiple languages, and can strengthen international business ties, which represents added value for employers.

A common suggestion was that the region showcase the initiatives of its large employers that invest in hiring immigrants. An interview from an immigrant service provider organization (SPO) said that given how influential larger employers are in the region, their example will likely encourage smaller employers to follow suit. He believes that highlighting employer “champions,” as is already done throughout the Atlantic region, will help other employers understand that hiring immigrants is a good investment and is not an expensive proposition.

Increasing Employer Intercultural Awareness

In addition to building the business case among employers for hiring immigrants, efforts are required to raise employer intercultural awareness as they may not have much experience dealing with a diverse workforce. This entails informing employers about programs that can help them strengthen their intercultural awareness capacity. For instance, SPOs in the region offer a range of diversity training programs that provide employers with insights on combating hiring biases, cultural sensitivity, and the customs of different religious and ethnic groups. Developing this capacity among employers is vital because it will increase the odds of immigrants settling in the workplace and community.

Recommendation 2: Promote Life in Atlantic Canada

Promoting Atlantic Canada more to prospective immigrants will help to raise the region’s profile, create more awareness about the benefits of living in the region compared with other Canadian destinations, and dispel common myths, such as the notion that the Atlantic region has a depressed economy.

Showcasing Atlantic Canada's Value Proposition

Despite noting the benefits of living in Atlantic Canada, several interviewees believe that the region does not brand itself well enough to prospective immigrants. They said that an advantage of better branding is that it could help to attract immigrants more likely to remain in the Atlantic region. For instance, by showcasing that Atlantic Canada is smaller and has more tight-knit communities than larger locales, the region could attract more immigrants who originate from smaller communities and are seeking to replicate in Canada the sort of lifestyle that they are used to. They also said that it is imperative for the Atlantic provinces to highlight the economic advantages of living there. Contrary to popular belief, the region has a strong immigrant employment context. For instance, showcasing that the wage gap between immigrants and Canadian-born workers is smaller in Atlantic Canada than in other parts of the country could persuade more immigrants to settle in the region. In addition, housing and the overall cost of life is more affordable in the Atlantic region than in larger Canadian cities. Sharing such information with prospective immigrants could give the Atlantic region an edge over other provinces as the region seeks to recruit more immigrants.

Interviewees also stated that Atlantic Canada could more effectively brand itself to certain population segments. One explained that the region's significant francophone population should be highlighted and leveraged further to draw even more francophone immigrants. (We discuss this below.) A post-secondary official said that although the region has high-quality universities and colleges that offer strong programs, English and French instruction, and low tuition fees, these institutions are not sufficiently recognized in an increasingly competitive global environment. He said that the region has a strong foundation of stakeholder collaboration to promote its post-secondary institutions, citing EduNova³ as an example, and that more cross-sectoral efforts among stakeholders such as institutions, government, employers, and SPOs through online marketing and participation at global recruitment fairs can help enhance the region's brand as an attractive international student destination.

Finally, the Atlantic region would benefit from showcasing to prospective immigrants its ability to provide personalized and comprehensive supports to them. For instance, an interviewee highlighted the great lengths that stakeholders in smaller communities in New Brunswick go to in their recruitment efforts, which he said would be invaluable in the region's larger centres. He pointed to Le Centre de ressources pour nouveaux arrivants au Nord-Ouest inc. in Edmundston, an SPO that organizes pre-arrival videoconferences with newcomers destined for the community to learn more about the composition of the family, their interests, and needs and organizes a tour commensurate with this information once they arrive. Exploratory visits of prospective immigrants to Bathurst entail meeting the mayor or members of the city council to highlight their strong desire to welcome them to the community. After they launch a business in Fredericton, the mayor writes a letter of appreciation to immigrant entrepreneurs. The Atlantic region has also enhanced its supports for newcomers, such as pre-arrival settlement services offered by the Halifax Partnership and Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia, the Association for New Canadians, and three immigrant entrepreneur programs delivered by the Fredericton Chamber of Commerce. Hence, since the region is smaller and receives fewer immigrants than other provinces, these services can be highlighted to explain to prospective newcomers that Atlantic Canada is well placed to

³ EduNova is a co-operative industry association of education and training providers that promotes Nova Scotia's education sector abroad.

provide them with a more intimate settlement experience, which is one of the region’s competitive immigration advantages within Canada.

Recommendation 3: Attract to Retain

Now that they have more immigration experience, the Atlantic provinces have a larger evidence base from which to inform their PNP selection criteria. As one interviewee explained, using this evidence better positions the region to “attract to retain”—designing its selection criteria to target immigrants most likely to remain in the Atlantic region.

Strike a Balance Between the Selection of High- and Semi-skilled Immigrants

Several interviewees argued that while the provinces are open to semi-skilled immigration candidates, and more so now thanks to the AIP, the emphasis has been on selecting high-skilled immigrants. However, the challenge with doing so is that there are some indications high-skilled immigrants are more likely to be transient upon arrival to Canada as they look for a job that is in their field and pays a competitive wage.

As such, a few interviewees believe that the Atlantic provinces would benefit from selecting a larger share of semi-skilled immigrants. These interviewees argued that while semi-skilled immigrants tend to earn lower wages on average than the high-skilled, and hence pay fewer taxes and have less spending power, selecting more of them would nonetheless advance the region’s goal of supporting economic growth through immigration. Evidence exists of labour shortages in semi-skilled occupations, which helps justify the selection of more immigrants who can fill these gaps. For example, New Brunswick forecasts that it will have 42,810 job openings in NOC C and D positions between 2017 and 2026, most of which will arise due to attrition (deaths and retirement).⁴ Continuing to use such labour market projections to guide the selection process is invaluable for several reasons. Doing so will support efforts to ensure that immigrants complement domestic workers, which will help address public concerns, and that immigrants are being brought in to fill jobs where they are needed the most (whether high- or semi-skilled), which is likely to improve retention rates.

Leverage Communities and Families

Interviewees also pointed to retention data to highlight that the region’s focus on drawing economic class immigrants to boost its population may not be the most effective given that the family class has higher retention rates, as does the refugee class in P.E.I. and Nova Scotia. Based on these data, they recommend that the provinces seek to increase their family class population. However, the provinces would not be able to use their PNPs to enforce this recommendation without coordinating with the federal government. Indeed, several provinces across the region and Canada previously used their PNPs to facilitate family reunification before they were pressured by the federal government to shut down these streams.⁵ The federal government asserted that the PNP should be used only for the economic class and was working

⁴ NBjobs.ca, *New Brunswick Labour Market Outlook 2017–2026*.

⁵ Seidle, *Canada’s Provincial Nominee Immigration Programs*.

with the provinces and territories at that time to increase the economic class's share of total immigration to Canada to 70 per cent.⁶

Interviewees cited Nova Scotia's previous use of its PNP to facilitate family reunification as a good practice. Notably, they pointed to the province's Community Identified Stream, which operated between 2003 and 2014 before being closed at the federal government's direction. Under the stream, Nova Scotia nominated immigration candidates who had strong connections to a community in the province and good employment prospects and who received a letter of support from a community organization designated by the province.

While the AIP and PNP allow principal applicants to bring close family with them to the region, and a recent Express Entry change provides 15 extra points to candidates with siblings in Canada, interviewees said the advantage of the Community Identified Stream was that immigrants would attach to faith-based and diaspora groups in the province who provided supports and the sense of community that is vital to facilitating retention. Thus, given the high retention rates of family class immigrants in the region, it would be worthwhile for the federal and provincial governments to revisit the possibility of allowing the Atlantic provinces to use their PNP streams to draw newcomers with family and community connections to the region. Currently, the PNP focuses on selecting those likely to economically establish in a locale by evaluating their human capital characteristics (including whether there is a labour market demand for their skills). However, allowing the provinces to also assess PNP candidates based on their social capital would likely be economically beneficial, as newcomers would have support networks in place to help find employment and would also contribute to a larger population and workforce. Doing so could also create social benefits as it would likely support stronger communities in the region.

Target Specific Source Countries

Government and non-government interviewees alike suggested that the provinces target specific immigrant and international student source countries to develop clusters of diaspora communities. Establishing such clusters would help boost retention rates and facilitate chain migration from those source countries.

At the time of the 2011 census, the top source countries of immigrants in the Atlantic region were the U.K., the U.S., China, and Germany. Other notable diasporas originated from India, the Netherlands, Lebanon, and South Korea. Such data provide a useful snapshot of source countries that the Atlantic provinces could target even further. For example, the Philippines has been a significant immigrant source country in every Atlantic province over the past decade. Evaluating retention rates across immigrant source countries would also be a useful exercise.

The region could also be more creative in identifying how to boost francophone immigration, given how critical it is to Atlantic Canada. For instance, as the country's only bilingual province, New Brunswick has set a target of francophone immigrants comprising 33 per cent of its PNP arrivals by 2020,⁷ and it signed a new bilateral immigration agreement with the federal government in March 2017 that contains

⁶ Government of Canada, *Attracting Skilled Newcomers to Canada*.

⁷ Government of New Brunswick, *New Brunswick Francophone Immigration Action Plan*.

the country's first ever francophone immigration annex.⁸ Atlantic Canada faces challenges in attracting francophones to the region: it must compete with Quebec and the global francophone population is small. The francophone recruitment pool becomes even smaller because the provinces tend to focus on potential immigrants in Europe and North Africa, viewing sub-Saharan Africa as politically volatile. However, a researcher argued that the region would benefit from widening its net to countries where immigrants have the human capital characteristics to adapt in the Atlantic region, such as anglophone and francophone countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Doing so could prove wise, as the global francophone population is forecast to rise to 700 million (currently it is some 220 million people) by 2050, of whom 80 per cent will be African.⁹

The recent influx of Syrians to the region represents another significant immigrant source country that can be targeted. An SPO official said that the federal government could fast-track private sponsorship applications made by Atlantic residents to increase the region's Syrian population. Moreover, she said that Syrians in the Atlantic region should be encouraged to sponsor their family members. While conceding that it will take Syrians a bit longer than other immigrants to economically integrate, since they arrived in Canada based on a humanitarian need rather than skills, she said that governments need to take a long-term view of how Syrians can help benefit the region's economic situation—for instance, Syrian children are likely to successfully integrate economically and socially.

Define Retention Success

Setting more nuanced retention targets is an approach the Atlantic provinces could employ to evaluate the performance of their immigration efforts. Currently, the provinces set retention targets for all immigrants (irrespective of admissions class). However, as we have seen, retention rates vary widely between classes. One interviewee recommended that retention targets instead be delineated across the classes to help stakeholders better understand the profiles of “leavers” and “stayers.”

Interviewees asked a broader question: What constitutes successful retention? Some argued that it is unrealistic to expect immigrants to reside in the region “permanently,” given how common interprovincial mobility is among the Canadian-born and immigrants alike. The common response to this question was that retention targets should be based on each jurisdiction, their previous retention rates, and the composition of their newcomers. For instance, one researcher said that even if retention rates are lower in P.E.I. than in other Canadian provinces, the multiplier effects of immigration still have a significant economic impact since the province has such a small population and economy. Interviewees in the other Atlantic provinces shared this same view about their own jurisdictions, though one noted that since immigration is also a community-building exercise, it is important to aspire to higher retention rates. Thus, defining successful retention requires stakeholders to keep both economic and social goals in mind.

Recommendation 4: Prioritize Temporary Residents

There is a broad consensus that the Atlantic region should provide more temporary-to-permanent residence pathways (“two-step migration”) for its international student and foreign worker populations. This view is underscored not only by interviewees, but also by the selection criteria of the AIP and PNP.

⁸ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, *Canada-New Brunswick Immigration Agreement—Annex B*.

⁹ France Diplomatie, *The Status of French in the World*.

The rationale is that by virtue of establishing roots in the region, temporary residents are more likely to remain and integrate as permanent residents compared with newcomers with few ties to Atlantic Canada. The view is also backed by evidence: research shows that those with Canadian work and study experience have positive labour market outcomes upon gaining permanent residence.¹⁰

However, two major challenges impede two-step migration in the Atlantic region. First, like their Canadian-born counterparts, international students often have trouble securing full-time employment in their field upon graduation, causing them to leave Atlantic Canada to find work. Second, federally and provincially funded settlement services for international students and foreign workers remain limited, although both levels of government view them as prime immigration candidates and research shows that the sooner settlement supports are offered to newcomers, the sooner they will integrate in Canada.¹¹ Thus, identifying solutions to these issues will help increase two-step migration in the region.

Tackling International Student Employment Barriers

Several initiatives by post-secondary institutions, SPOs, community groups, and the three levels of government are aiming to tackle international student employment barriers. The University of Prince Edward Island, as one of many post-secondary examples in the region, has staff dedicated to providing international students with supports in key areas such as language training, understanding permanent residence pathways, and gaining employment during and after their studies. In addition, the university recently received a funding commitment of \$546,421 from the federal government and the province to advance such efforts.¹² First launched in Halifax in 2009, the Connector Program has since expanded nationally, including in Charlottetown and St. John's.¹³ It facilitates networking opportunities between local volunteers ("connectors") who provide advice and referrals of at least three people in their professional field to immigrants and international students ("connectees") to help them integrate into the community and find a job. In Halifax, the program has led to some 900 jobs found since its launch.¹⁴ The City of Moncton partners with post-secondary institutions and employers to facilitate job opportunities, such as through employment fairs dedicated to international students.

Getting employers to buy in to the notion of hiring international students is a critical aspect of this exercise. The Halifax Partnership (which first launched the Connector Program) has also spearheaded the Game Changer Action Plan to encourage employers to hire youth, including international students, and has created an employer awareness guide that among other things, dispels myths and showcases good employer practices.¹⁵ Furthermore, governments across the region are looking to wage subsidy programs that encourage employers to test out international students before determining whether to hire them permanently and support them through the immigration process.

¹⁰ Sweetman and Warman, "Former Temporary Foreign Workers" and "Canada's Temporary Foreign Workers Programs"; Bonikowska, Hou, and Picot, *Which Human Capital Characteristics*; Hou and Bonikowska, *The Earnings Advantage*.

¹¹ See, for example, Shields and Türegün, *Settlement and Integration Research Synthesis*.

¹² Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, *UPEI Increases International Student Attraction Efforts*.

¹³ National Connector Program, *Connector Communities*.

¹⁴ Halifax Partnership, *The Connector Program Works*.

¹⁵ Halifax Partnership, *Game Changers Guide to Hiring Youth*.

For instance, in October 2016, the federal and Nova Scotia governments announced the launch of the Stay in Nova Scotia pilot program, in which they will contribute \$288,813 each to subsidize the salaries of 50 international students for a four-month period.¹⁶ P.E.I.'s Graduate Mentorship Program serves a similar function, while Newfoundland and Labrador is launching two similar programs—both are two-year pilot programs that will provide job placements to international students and graduates.¹⁷ The new Study & Stay in Nova Scotia Program will be another one to watch—beginning in September 2017, up to 50 international students from India, China, and the Philippines will be provided with enhanced settlement supports to help them eventually launch a career and establish in the province.¹⁸

Stakeholders will need to continue and scale up such efforts to ensure that international students find permanent, full-time employment upon graduation so that the Atlantic provinces retain more of them. This entails post-secondary institutions working with local employers and business groups to facilitate job experience opportunities and heightening employer awareness about the value of hiring international students and permanent residence pathways. If successful, wage subsidy programs could be expanded to help cover more international students. Since governments are large employers in the region, an interviewee suggests that they introduce short-term employment schemes from which international students can benefit. Moreover, while a 2016 survey found that only 2 per cent of international students in the region intend to launch a business upon graduation,¹⁹ it is also important to have entrepreneur supports in place for those who wish to do so. For instance, Memorial University of Newfoundland offers the Entrepreneurship Training Program, a 16-week program on how to launch a business.²⁰

Providing More Settlement Supports to Temporary Residents

Unlike international students, foreign workers tend to arrive to Canada with an attachment to the labour market (though this depends on whether they arrive through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program or the International Mobility Program). However, like international students, they have limited access to government-funded settlement services. Such services are designed to provide newcomers with the supports they need to integrate into society and can make it easier for temporary residents to qualify for immigration. For example, federal and provincial programs have minimum language requirements that candidates must meet to qualify for permanent residence; however, in the absence of language supports during their time in Canada, some temporary residents may be ineligible to apply to these programs. Foreign workers, for instance, may not qualify because they do not meet minimum language requirements. And even if they qualify for an immigration program, temporary residents might still struggle to find work. For example, an interviewee in New Brunswick said that while the province has a large population of francophone international students, they often need to learn English to enhance their employability.

Temporary residents are ineligible for federally funded settlement services, while like their counterparts across Canada, the Atlantic provinces offer limited services to temporary residents.²¹ Access to services

¹⁶ Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, *Helping International Students Avoid a Farewell to Nova Scotia*.

¹⁷ Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, *The Way Forward on Immigration*.

¹⁸ EduNova, *Study & Stay in Nova Scotia*.

¹⁹ Brigley, *2016 Graduate Retention Study*.

²⁰ Memorial University of Newfoundland, *Entrepreneurship Training Program (ETP)*.

²¹ Canadian Council for Refugees and others, *Migrant Workers*.

for temporary residents in Atlantic Canada depends on the province and type of locale they are in. Commonly, services are available, but access to language training is restricted and fewer services overall are available in rural communities.²² Limited government supports are due to the fact that most temporary residents leave Canada and it is already very expensive to fund services for immigrants. For example, the federal government's national settlement spending has quadrupled since the 2000–01 fiscal year to some \$1.174 billion in its 2016–17 fiscal year.²³

Given how important settlement services are to the success of newcomers, addressing services gaps for temporary residents will buttress efforts to retain more of them in the Atlantic region. One SPO official said that the federal government could list temporary residents as eligible clients. This would not require the federal government to spend more money, but it would allow SPOs to offer federally funded services to temporary residents looking to access them. The federal government could also look to roll out a Caregiver Program model across Canada targeted at specific types of temporary residents who align with its policy priorities. Caregivers can access federally funded services as temporary residents, since most of them go on to gain permanent residence. While it would be unaffordable to make the services accessible to all of Canada's temporary residents, the federal government could look to offer it to foreign workers and international students in high-demand occupations and sectors who declare the intention of wanting to apply for immigration. Also, provincial governments could look to increase investments in settlement services for temporary residents. Given their budgetary constraints, the provinces could focus the increased spending on key areas such as language training.

Access to the Report

The report is available for free download on the Conference Board's website:

- English executive summary and report: <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/e-library/abstract.aspx?did=9138>
- French executive summary: <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/e-library/abstract.aspx?did=9139>

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²² Ibid.

²³ El-Assal, *A New Era*.