



BEYOND THE BIG CITY

How Small Communities Across Canada
Can Attract and Retain Newcomers

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VICTORIA ESSES

Pathways to Prosperity Partnership
and University of Western Ontario

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Public Policy Forum





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The Pathways to Prosperity Partnership is an alliance dedicated to fostering welcoming communities that promote the economic, social and civic integration of migrants and minorities in Canada. P2P helps communities grow their economies, renew their populace, and reinvigorate their labour markets by fully welcoming immigrants, international students and temporary foreign workers. Two areas of special concern are Northern and rural communities, and Francophone minorities outside of Quebec. The Partnership includes all key federal and provincial migration ministries; municipalities; national, regional, and local organizations involved in newcomer settlement; and researchers from over fifty universities.

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Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Canada is an open, accepting, and generous country. It is built on diversity, and communities are stronger when they welcome and work with newcomers who want to build a better Canada. But with the natural trend of intensification and urbanization, most newcomers to Canada settle in just a few major cities, which offer greater economic opportunities and cultural diversity. The rest of the country has not experienced the same rewards from new people bringing new ideas, and small centres have not proportionally enjoyed the benefits of immigration. Instead, many small centres and rural areas are experiencing declining economic prospects and even shrinking populations, creating a cycle of decline and consequent low attraction of new residents, furthering decline.^{8, 58, 61}

The Public Policy Forum, in partnership with Pathways to Prosperity, conducted research to determine how newcomer attraction and retention could be enhanced to contribute to the success of smaller centres and less densely populated regions across Canada. A literature review and jurisdictional scan were conducted to bring together the best available evidence on newcomer attraction to and retention in small centres and rural areas. Data from the Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB) were also analyzed to better understand the mobility and retention rates of immigrants in small centres in Ontario. These findings were validated and expanded on through community consultations with 199 key stakeholders in five small centres across Ontario.

Summary of key findings

- **There is an overall trend of immigrants who were destined to live in smaller centres not residing in these intended destinations at landing.** While they intended to live in a small centre, they choose to reside elsewhere. These losses are not offset by an inflow from other areas in the province or from other provinces, and there is a persistent issue of either zero or negative net migration for many of these communities. In addition, with a close linear relationship between “immigration stock” and retention rates, some smaller centres in Ontario are in double-jeopardy, as these communities do not receive a lot of immigrants to begin with and do not retain immigrants.
- **Multiple factors contribute to whether immigrants choose to move to a new community,** including perceptions of the community, the presence of family, friends and/or other immigrants, employment opportunities, educational opportunities, access to cultural and religious amenities, employer support, and their desire for a small-centre lifestyle.
- **Many of the same factors that influence attraction also determine whether immigrants will stay.** The following factors have been shown to play a role in immigrants’ decision to leave a community: lack of large immigrant population, lack of cultural and religious amenities, lack of adequate settlement services, lack of fulfilling employment, inadequate employment opportunities for spouses, inadequate public transportation, inadequate housing, and racism and intolerance.

Small centres and rural areas must be involved in making themselves stand out. Some strategies that have been used to promote, attract, and retain immigrants in small centres and rural areas include providing online information portals, welcoming community campaigns and events, employer-supported initiatives, and incentives for relocation to small centres and rural areas. Yet a piecemeal approach will not be enough to reinvigorate small centres. It will take a collective effort on the part of multiple levels of government, business associations and employers, community leaders and civil society, and the settlement sector. It will require both short-term initiatives, within a three-year timeframe, as well as longer-term efforts. We suggest the following for initial consideration:

- **Provide and enhance mobile settlement supports** for small centres and rural communities, with online and telephone question-and-answer services for municipalities, service providers and newcomers;
- **Develop and implement a campaign**, in collaboration with business associations and multi-cultural councils, to engage and educate employers and communities on the value of immigrant talent and how newcomers can help vitalize the local economy and demographics;
- **Optimize employment support programs**, including intercultural competency training for employers and adjacent service providers, connector programs, and succession facilitation for businesses;
- **Implement municipal programs that support international student connections** to their local communities to encourage them to stay after graduation; and,
- **Work across government to identify new policy opportunities to invest in community development** such as rural broadband infrastructure, affordable childcare, rural and remote training and education initiatives, and public-private partnerships that try new approaches to affordable housing and transportation.

As the cost of housing in major urban centres outpaces earnings for many people, small centres can compete to attract newcomers and Canadians alike. Canada's small centres have unique attributes and many of them can make a compelling lifestyle proposition for potential new residents. Sensible policy solutions and collaboration will help Canadian small centres and rural communities benefit from the economic and social contributions of newcomers.

INTRODUCTION

Canada is an open, accepting, and generous country. It is built on diversity, and communities are stronger when they welcome and work with newcomers who want to build a better Canada. But with the natural trend of intensification and urbanization, most newcomers to Canada settle in a few major cities which offer greater economic opportunities and cultural diversity. The rest of the country has not experienced the same rewards from new people bringing new ideas, and small centres have not proportionally enjoyed the benefits of immigration. Instead, many small centres and rural areas are experiencing declining economic prospects and shrinking populations.^{8, 58, 61} This is a concern as a declining population translates into an increase in the cost of public services, which affects the overall economy.^{8, 25} As populations decline, policymakers must decide whether to continue to invest in smaller centres, which may require a disproportionate share of resources per capita, or invest available resources in the larger centres in which most people live, allowing smaller centres to decline and potentially disappear.

The population in small centres and rural areas in Canada has been declining for nearly two decades.⁵⁸ Shrinking populations are the direct result of a variety of factors, such as reduced demand for farm labour, a relatively high proportion of seasonal jobs with few alternative job options, and low local birthrates.^{61, 63} Young people are particularly likely to leave small centres and rural areas, and 75% who leave never move back.^{25, 36} Young people move away to seek educational and employment opportunities, as well as the amenities offered by urban centres.^{25, 38, 41} Young people who do stay in small centres and rural areas tend to stay for local post-secondary education, jobs, because of family pressures, or they may simply lack the resources to leave.⁵⁸

Between 1996 and 2001, half of Canadian cities with fewer than 250,000 people experienced a population decline.⁵⁸ Between 2005 and 2010, 88 counties and regional municipalities shrank every year.⁵⁰ While small centres and rural areas were losing people, larger centres continued to grow.^{12, 42} For example, between 2011 and 2016, Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton and Kitchener-Waterloo-Cambridge, the four largest Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) in Ontario, grew by 5.9%.⁴⁶

Many rural areas struggle to attract and retain working professionals, including physicians and other healthcare professionals, teachers, and lawyers.³⁶ For example, in 2011 there were 591 individuals per physician in rural Alberta, compared to 212 individuals per physician in urban Alberta.³⁶ Physicians in rural areas are challenged to find professional assistants and networks of other skilled health workers, and they struggle with fewer networking and social opportunities.³⁶ Similarly, rural schools are challenged to attract and retain teachers as they must compete with larger schools in urban areas. Teachers in rural areas can feel isolated, out of touch with other teachers, lack professional development opportunities, and face high travel costs.³⁶ The same dynamics play out for lawyers.³⁶

The trend of declining populations in small centres and rural areas, and the basis for this trend, are not restricted to Canadian-born people. Many immigrants decide not to live in small centres and rural areas for similar (and other) reasons.⁵⁸ Most immigrants to Canada choose to live in Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver.¹⁰ In 2016, immigrants made up 23% of Montreal's population, 40% of Vancouver's population, and 46% of Toronto's population.⁵⁴ On a provincial level, Ontario has consistently attracted the highest number of immigrants;^{30, 61} in 2016, immigrants were 26% of Ontario's population.⁴⁷ However, further analysis of immigration to Ontario shows that the immigrant population is unevenly dispersed among small and large population centres. Of the 472,175 immigrants who arrived in Ontario between 2011 and 2016, only 0.7%, or 3,305 people, moved to Northern Ontario.⁵² In contrast, 70% chose to live in Toronto.⁴⁵ While there are exceptions, the paucity of immigration to smaller communities remains a pan-Canadian issue.

Definitions

Small centres and rural areas

For the purposes of this report, a small centre is defined as an area with a population of 50,000 people or fewer that is at least 75 km from a Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), or an area with a population of up to 200,000 people that is remote from other larger cities.³¹

While the definition of what constitutes a rural area is not conclusive, we use the Statistics Canada description ⁵¹ and a description developed by Gadsby and Samson.

²⁵ According to Statistics Canada, rural areas include the following:

- Small towns, villages and other populated places with fewer than 1,000 people, according to the current census;
- Rural areas of CMAs and Census Agglomerations (CA) that may contain estate lots, as well as agricultural, undeveloped and non-developable lands;
- Agricultural lands; and
- Remote wilderness areas.

Gadsby and Samson consider rural areas to be “places that have smaller populations, are distant from urban areas and have distinct identities and cultural ties.” ^{25, p.2}

The Public Policy Forum, in partnership with Pathways to Prosperity, sought to investigate how newcomer attraction and retention can be enhanced to contribute to the success of smaller centres and less densely populated regions. A literature review and jurisdictional scan were conducted to bring together the best

available evidence on newcomer attraction to, and retention in, small centres and rural areas. Retention rates were also analyzed to better understand the mobility at landing and retention rates of immigrants in small centres in Ontario. These findings were validated and deepened through community consultations with stakeholders in five small centres across Ontario. This report summarizes the key findings and provides recommendations to address difficulties in attracting newcomers to small centres and community-oriented solutions to improve retention in those communities.

METHODOLOGY

The study began with a literature review to collate knowledge on how immigration has contributed to economic development opportunities in small centres and rural areas. The review provides a summary of the evidence available on immigrant attraction and retention factors for small centres and rural areas.

A jurisdictional scan was conducted to bring together examples of promising practices drawn from what other places, particularly smaller communities, have done to attract and retain newcomers. It includes 11 case studies of small centres across Canada that have been relatively successful in attracting and retaining immigrants, as well as the unique context that shapes migrant settlement in small communities in Germany. The full jurisdictional scan can be found in [Appendix A](#).

Data from the Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB), a comprehensive source of data on where immigrants file taxes in Canada over time—and thus whether they go to the communities and provinces to which they were destined and are retained there²³—were analyzed to determine immigrant mobility and the retention rates of immigrants in smaller communities in Ontario over a 10-year period. The full report from the IMDB analyses can be found in [Appendix B](#).

Consultations were conducted in five communities in Ontario: Brockville, Chatham-Kent, Grey and Bruce Counties, Sault Ste. Marie, and Greater Sudbury. These communities were selected based on the criteria of urgency (negative or slow population growth), willingness (expressed interest in newcomer immigration and retention), readiness (presence of a Local Immigration Partnership or other settlement services to integrate newcomers), and geographical representation. The 199 local individuals who engaged in problem identification and solution generation during these consultations represented the private sector, municipal, provincial and federal governments, local settlement and multicultural agencies, business associations, school boards and post-secondary institutions, immigration consultants, lawyers, newcomers, and other community members. The consultations ensured that the research and recommendations were contextually relevant and informed by diverse perspectives. The full summary of community consultations can be found in [Appendix C](#).

RETENTION RATES IN ONTARIO COMMUNITIES

Differences between intended destinations and factual residences at the time of landing, and changes in locations of residence at a later time are components of migration patterns that can paint a picture of immigrant population dynamics in a region. To better understand these patterns for immigrants in Ontario, data from the Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB) were analyzed to determine immigrant destination versus residence geography (Parts II and III in Appendix B) and retention outcomes for different groups of immigrants (Part IV in Appendix B).

Definitions

Three key immigrant groups that were the focus of analysis

- Group 1: Immigrants destined to Ontario and living in Ontario at landing (year i or year i+1).
- Group 2: Immigrants destined to other provinces but choosing to live in Ontario at landing (year i or year i+1).
- Group 3: Immigrants destined to Ontario but choosing to live in another province at landing (year i or year i+1).

Census Metropolitan Area (CMA)

Area consisting of one or more neighbouring municipalities situated around a core. Must have a total population of at least 100,000, of which 50,000 or more live in the core.⁵⁵

Census Agglomeration (CA)

Area that must have a core population of at least 10,000, and up to 100,000 residents.⁵⁵

- Large CA: 50,000-100,000 people
- Medium CA: 20,000-50,000 people
- Smaller CA: <20,000 people

Residence-to-Destination Ratio

Proportion of immigrants who reside at the place of intended destination at landing.

Cumulative five-year retention rates for two cohorts—those who landed within the 2002-2006 and 2007-2011 time periods—were estimated by comparing the residency of immigrants at landing with where they were five years later. Residence-to-destination ratios were examined, defined as the proportion of immigrants who reside at the place of intended destination at landing. Retention rates were also examined for immigrants who reside in CMAs and CAs in Ontario. An adjustment was applied for non-mobility related factors (death, becoming a non-resident in Canada in a tax year, stopping tax filing) to the retention rate formula to estimate the proportion of stayers. This adjustment allowed for an estimation of retention outcomes related only to mobility that can be influenced by policy interventions.

This section presents a summary of the key findings.

Resident rates depend on urban area “magnetism”

CMAs receiving high immigration volumes also enjoy high residence-to-destination ratios. For immigrants destined to a CMA, if they choose to reside elsewhere in Ontario at landing, it is likely to be another CMA.

Immigrants destined to small centres are less likely to reside in their intended destination

There is an overall trend of immigrants destined to smaller communities not residing in these intended destinations at landing. Compared to CMAs, all groups of CAs are more involved in geographic destination-to-residence exchanges with other CAs in Ontario, not just with CMAs. Large census agglomerations are mostly likely to lose their destined immigrants to census metropolitan areas.

Intra-provincial migration at landing can make up for a loss of destined immigrants, but smaller centres are not likely to benefit

Redistribution of immigrants between destinations in Ontario at landing can compensate for a loss of destined immigrants in a community by an inflow from another destination. However, medium and small census agglomerations are not compensated for losses at landing by an inflow from other areas within the province, and there is a persistent issue of either zero or negative net results for many communities.

Smaller centres are not likely to benefit from inter-provincial migration at landing

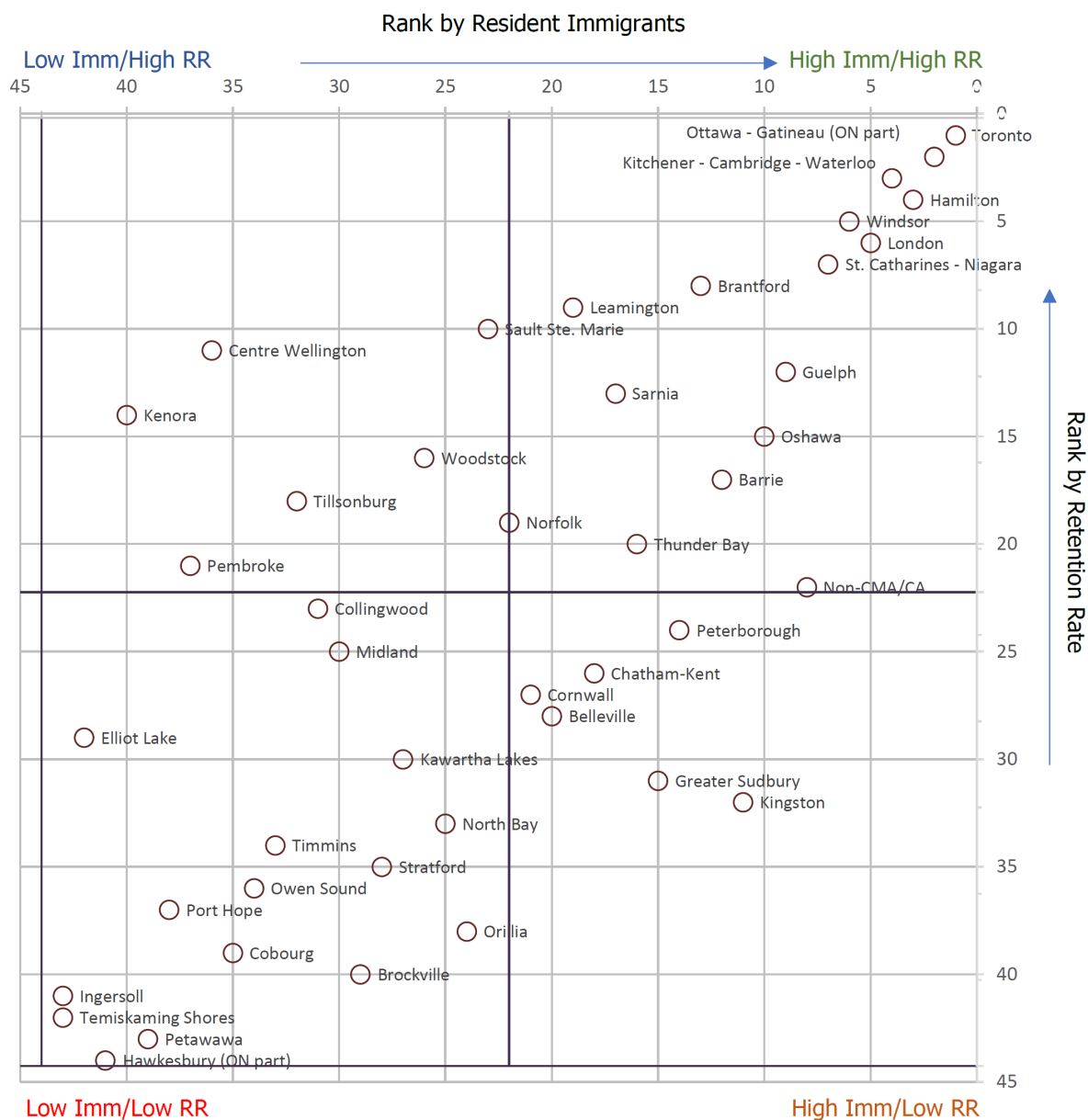
Almost 75% of non-Ontario destined immigrants who came to Ontario chose to reside in Toronto, and another 22.7% chose to reside in other CMAs. Only 2.3% chose to reside in CAs. However, some smaller communities have benefitted from immigrants coming in from other provinces, such as Brockville, Sault Ste. Marie and Owen Sound.

Capacity to retain is related to capacity to attract

With a close to linear relationship between “immigration stock” and retention rates, several Medium and Small CAs are in double-jeopardy, as these communities do not receive a lot of immigrants and also do not retain immigrants well. However, there are some Medium and Small CAs that are low in resident immigrant counts but do better in retention rates.

FIGURE 1

CMA and CA position in rankings by number of residing immigrants (X) and by NMF adjusted retention rate (Y), 2002-2011 cumulative cohort (Group 1).



Note: For Ingersoll, only the 2007-2011 cohort retention rate is available.

Inter-provincial migrants tend to have lower retention rates

Immigrants destined elsewhere in Canada who reside in Ontario at landing tend to have lower retention rates compared to immigrants destined and residing in Ontario. This group tends to stay in the chosen community at a lesser rate and is more likely to move to another province again five years after landing.

The majority of immigrants destined to Ontario who live outside of the province at landing do not return to their original destinations

Return rates for immigrants destined to Ontario who reside in other provinces at landing are very low. Except for Toronto and Ottawa, communities in Ontario saw only a 4% return rate. A large majority go to Toronto if they return to Ontario.

WHAT ATTRACTS PEOPLE TO A COMMUNITY?

Small centres and rural areas have a fundamental problem at the outset: for some people the terms “small centre” and “rural” have negative implications.³⁶ This is reinforced by the association between community size, economic growth and social vibrancy.⁵⁸ The decision of where to live is influenced by the size of a community and by the proximity to a major city.^{1, 14, 17, 29, 58, 61}

When it comes to attracting newcomers to small centres and rural areas, it is important to know the drivers of population inflow. The following factors have been shown to play a role in attracting people to a community.

Perception of the community

The perception of place and lifestyle is important for all immigrants, whether originally from a large city or a smaller region.²⁰ Immigrants’ perception of a place can be influenced by the internet, family or friends as they search for what each potential destination has to offer.⁷ Well-known places get the highest number of immigrants because immigrants go to places with which they are familiar.⁷ Small centres and rural areas need to make themselves stand out, using platforms and methods that reach immigrant populations.²⁹

Presence of family, friends and/or other immigrants

The presence of family members is a leading factor that influences location decisions,³⁶ particularly for lower-skilled immigrants who are more likely to move for social ties.²⁷ Immigrants are drawn to communities where they have family members, or where there is an established immigrant community, as they facilitate the integration process.^{3, 16, 29} Having a high concentration of immigrants in an area helps to attract other immigrants. They do not need to be of the same nationality,⁵⁸ but the pull is greater when they are.⁶¹ However, many small centres do not have a large and diverse immigrant population, which can pose a challenge for communities working to attract newcomers.

Employment opportunities

Some studies have shown that the perception of employment prospects is the most crucial factor in attracting immigrants to a community,^{2, 44} particularly for high-skilled immigrants who are more likely to move for economic reasons.²⁷ However, newcomers are not drawn by any job, but by work that is fulfilling and aligns with immigrants’ prior skills, education, and experience.^{8, 21, 44, 58, 61} Indeed, there is wide agreement that the presence of suitable employment opportunities is one of the most important characteristics of a welcoming community.²¹

Educational opportunities

Universities and colleges play a role in attracting immigrants to a community,⁹ as they have been found to influence an immigrant's decision to settle in a small centre.⁶⁰ They also play a role in attracting international students—potential immigrants who may benefit the community and eventually set down roots as permanent residents.⁶³ Universities and colleges are also recognized as open and tolerant spaces⁶⁰ and contribute to the perception of a welcoming community.⁶⁰

Access to cultural and religious amenities

Immigrants tend to be drawn to larger centres because of their access to religious amenities and cultural foods.^{37, 61} Having a large and active cultural community therefore can contribute to attracting and retaining immigrants² as the religious, cultural and dietary needs of immigrants are most often provided by other immigrants in the community.⁶¹ As Chekki (2006) states, a vibrant and active social and cultural life is necessary not only to “meet their socio-religious and cultural needs, but also to escape or alleviate the isolation, loneliness, insecurity and bewilderment that they would otherwise experience.”^{13, p.7}

Rural and small centre lifestyle

Small centres and rural areas can be attractive to immigrants because of the friendliness of the community, low crime rates, low cost of living, short travel distances, the beauty of the natural landscape, slower pace of life, and overall high quality of life.^{19, 29, 33, 36, 61} In a study by Teixeira and Drolet (2016), immigrants listed the quality of life as one of the reasons they were drawn to Kelowna and Kamloops in British Columbia. The Morden Community Driven Immigration Initiative also found that immigrants have been drawn to Morden, Manitoba by the quality of life.¹⁵

WHAT MAKES PEOPLE LEAVE A COMMUNITY?

TABLE 1

Factors affecting retention in small centres and rural areas

	Immigrants	Youth	Professionals
Employment	▪ Lack of fulfilling employment opportunities ▪ Inadequate employment opportunities for spouses	▪ Lack of economic / employment opportunities	▪ Inadequate employment opportunities for spouses
Transportation	▪ Lack of public transportation	▪ Lack of public transportation	▪ Lack of public transportation
Amenities	▪ Lack of cultural and religious amenities	▪ Lack of recreational / social activities and infrastructure	▪ Lack of cultural or religious amenities ▪ Lack of recreational / social activities and infrastructure
Isolation	▪ Lack of large immigrant population		▪ Professional and physical isolation
Housing	▪ Inadequate housing		
Services and Resources	▪ Lack of adequate settlement services		▪ Inadequate health facilities and resources
Discrimination	▪ Racism and intolerance		
Other	▪ Shortage of childcare	▪ Lack of post-secondary education and training ▪ Lack of youth engagement	▪ Lack of professional development ▪ Inadequate rural training ▪ Shortage of childcare

Many of the factors that influence attraction to a community also determine retention. Here are some common factors that cause people, including immigrants, Canadian-born professionals, and youth, to leave smaller centres and rural areas.

Lack of fulfilling employment

Jobs attract and keep people in a community, and a lack of fulfilling jobs drives them away. For immigrants, employment is the most important factor in determining whether they will stay or leave.^{2, 44} In a study conducted in Brandon, Manitoba, a small centre known for its efforts to attract immigrants, recent Chinese and Latin American immigrants ranked employment opportunities as the top factor in keeping them there.²

However, research has shown that employment cannot just be about any job. It must be work that is fulfilling and aligned with skills and experience.^{8, 21, 44, 58, 61} Some employers in small centres and rural areas are struggling to find and keep workers, but the quality of jobs can contribute to immigrants choosing to move to another community. Jobs that many newcomers are able to secure are low-paying seasonal positions in regional tourism and services industries.¹⁸ There is a negative correlation between an immigrant's educational level and their satisfaction in an unskilled or low-skilled position; highly skilled and well-educated immigrants prefer jobs that match their skills and recognize their credentials.^{20, 49} As Depner and Teixeira (2012) explain, getting such "survival jobs" defeats the purpose of being recruited as a skilled employee. Furthermore, when jobs are available, immigrants may find that their credentials are not recognized, that language is a barrier, that there is discrimination in hiring, or that networks are not accessible.^{47, 56} These challenges create an unwelcoming employment environment.

Inadequate employment opportunities for spouses

Similar to Canadian-born professionals, economic immigrants often have secured a job prior to arriving at their new community. However, their spouses often do not and may face challenges in securing employment, especially if they speak little English or French.^{20, 61} Finding adequate employment is therefore a particular challenge for these immigrants.⁶¹ Couples are likely to leave a location if only one of them has a fulfilling job.²⁰

Transportation

Small centres and rural areas often lack adequate public transportation,^{9, 36, 58, 61} with infrequent buses, long distances between stops and home, and inconvenient bus routes.⁵⁶ Inadequate transportation interferes with finding work, going to school, and participating in leisure activities.^{18, 61} For immigrants, it can also hinder access to settlement and other services.⁹ Some small centres or rural areas have no public transportation system at all and individuals in those communities rely on cars.^{48, 61} Not only are cars expensive to own and maintain, but many immigrants may not have a banking history in Canada so they

cannot obtain a loan to purchase a vehicle.³⁴ In some cases, employers have set up shuttle services for their employees, or settlement staff have personally driven clients to appointments.⁶¹

Amenities

The lack of amenities in small centres and rural areas is known to contribute to out-migration to larger centres.³⁸ Due to the presence of large immigrant populations in larger centres, immigrants residing in these areas are readily able to find cultural foods and religious services unlike their counterparts in small centres or rural areas. For example, in a study on the settlement experiences of new immigrants in Brandon, Manitoba, Annis and Ashton (2010) reported that 25% of Chinese immigrants and 14.3% of Latin American immigrants had difficulties finding foods that they enjoyed, compared to 4.3% of Canadian-born individuals. It was also found that 15.7% of recent Chinese immigrants experienced challenges related to worshipping.²

Isolation

Isolation is an issue for many Canadian-born professionals and immigrants who move to smaller communities and rural areas and it can impact their decision to stay or leave. An international study reported that immigrants do not want to be in remote areas that are far from other immigrants, especially if the remote area does not have adequate settlement services.²² Having a large cultural community that they can relate to and interact with helps newcomers feel less isolated.^{11,49} In Canada, many stories of successful immigrant retention involve places where there was a large number of established immigrants and family members.^{3,4} Maple Leaf Foods has successfully used this strategy to their advantage by recruiting individuals to a location and industry from one country at a time.¹¹

The following factors apply uniquely to immigrants and may drive them to leave a small centre or rural area.

Inadequate housing

Finding affordable housing is a crucial step in the integration process.⁶¹ In smaller centres and rural areas, this is compounded by the fact that many of the available housing units are single family units for purchase.^{9,61} For example, in 2016, 45.4% of private dwellings in CMAs were single detached houses and 34.5% were apartments.⁵³ By contrast, 72.7% of private dwellings outside of CMAs were single detached houses and only 16.2% were apartments.⁵³ While owning a home can be an important contributor to immigrant retention, it may not be an option for immigrant families in lower income brackets.⁹ Other housing challenges faced by immigrants include “a lack of reliable housing information, initial hesitance of landlords, limited knowledge of rights and responsibilities, the age and condition of rental and housing stock” as well as “prejudice from landlords based on their ethnic and racial background.”^{9, p. 721}

Lack of adequate settlement services

Immigrants need help when they first move to a location,^{25, 61} such as finding housing, enrolling children in school, opening a bank account, finding a family doctor, getting language training, finding a job, and learning about life in Canada.²⁰ Yet the lack of settlement services in some small centres and rural areas creates challenges throughout the settlement process, especially early on. In addition, adjacent services such as childcare and affordable housing can be equally important but also unavailable.

Settlement services are an important factor in integrating and subsequently retaining immigrants, as they can help to lessen feelings of isolation, especially for those who do not have family members or other immigrant communities to rely on.^{3, 16, 26, 29} The low density of immigrants in smaller communities makes it difficult to justify funding services, yet this feeds into fewer immigrants being attracted to these communities. The success of settlement services is also tied to the funding they get; when participation is low, so is funding, and this creates a negative feedback mechanism.⁴¹ The needs of immigrants in these communities are often only recognized and addressed after the fact, when it may be too late.^{3, 61}

In some locations employers work to fill this gap by providing settlement services to their workers.^{6, 39} In Morris, Manitoba, a manufacturing firm provides English classes, a bus service to take workers to and from Winnipeg, and a welding school for job training.⁶¹ While the workers pay for some of this, most of the funding comes from the company. With a major focus on immigration through the [Atlantic Immigration Pilot](#) program, employers in the Atlantic provinces are taking a more active role in settlement services including helping to provide housing and transportation. For instance, the J.D. Irving company has created a Director of Immigration position to oversee a range of settlement supports for new immigrant workers at the company.

Racism and intolerance

While discrimination and intolerance are not only present in small centres and rural communities,⁶¹ such experiences can impede immigrants' settlement and integration and drive them to leave the community.^{5, 26, 61} These acts of discrimination and intolerance may include talking about a person's non-Canadian accent and being impatient when helping them.⁵⁸ Many community members in small centres believe that immigrants only contribute to the community economically, and not socially.⁴⁰ When this is combined with the fact that long-term residents may not expect their community's demographics to change so drastically, incorporating such diversity seems forced ^{26, 40, 59} and may contribute to more negative attitudes towards immigrants. These negative perceptions and attitudes can leave social integration up to immigrants, especially for racialized immigrants.^{40, 59} As Walton-Roberts (2007) states, "sustainable immigrant settlement is also more likely to succeed if it is community driven and entails a long-term and broad-based model of incorporating immigrants into communities as community builders and stakeholders".^{60, p.14}

WHAT ATTRACTION AND RETENTION STRATEGIES ARE BEING USED BY SMALLER COMMUNITIES?

Small centres and rural areas must work to make themselves stand out. Canada is experimenting with new policy and programs such as the Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program and the newly launched Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot.

Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot

The Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot was developed to help spread the benefits of economic immigration to smaller communities throughout Canada. The Government of Canada is working with local communities to use immigration to help meet local labour market needs and support regional economic development; test a new pathway to permanent residence in rural Canada for skilled foreign nationals at various levels; and create welcoming environments that encourage and help new immigrants to stay in their new communities.³⁵

The following strategies have been used to promote, attract, and retain immigrants in small centres and rural areas.

Web portals

- Ontario's Municipal Immigration Information Online (MIIO) program supported municipalities to develop municipal immigration websites to market communities to prospective immigrants.³²
- For example, the Northwestern Immigration Portal was created to attract immigrants to Thunder Bay by providing information about living there, including immigrants' firsthand experiences, in various languages.⁶² The "Talk Too" chat feature allows prospective immigrants to ask questions about living in Northwestern Ontario.⁶³ The portal is marketed through newspaper advertisements and posters displayed in Toronto's transit system.⁶³
- Newfoundland and Labrador's Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism (OIM) provided 18 municipalities and regional groups with \$10,000 each to develop websites to promote immigration to their communities.⁷

- The Wegweiser-Kommune is a municipal information portal in Germany that centralizes data on all German municipalities with populations of 5,000 or more people.

Welcoming communities

- Ontario's Municipal Immigration Program supported the adoption of best practices and implementation of innovative new municipal initiatives including Welcoming Communities. Welcoming communities are places where newcomers feel valued, their needs are served, and residents support the integration of newcomers.
- Some communities are working to become more welcoming and inclusive for newcomers. For example, the community and non-profit sector in Grey County, Ontario developed the "Make Grey Bruce Home" project to support the integration of refugees and other vulnerable newcomers in the region.
- In Banff, Alberta, Family and Community Support Services holds meetings three times a year with key stakeholders to identify service needs and gaps of immigrants in the community, and services and supports are developed as needed.⁶¹ Immigrants receive the supports they need, thereby encouraging retention in the community.
- The community of Steinbach, Manitoba, hosts an annual "Culturama" celebration to bring together immigrants with the local community.²¹

Employer-supported initiatives

- The City of Brooks, Alberta, has been successful in attracting newcomers to its community since the early 2000s. One of its major employers, JBS Foods, has been actively recruiting newcomers and providing resources to support their settlement. This includes sponsoring a booklet of information on services available in the community for children and families and offering English as a Second Language in the Workplace classes for employees.

Incentives for relocation to small centres and rural areas

- The Rural Employment Initiative (REI) helps unemployed and underemployed immigrants in the Greater Toronto Area to find jobs in rural Ontario. Through the Newcomer Centre of Peel, immigrants participate in various employment and job search skills training programs⁴³ before being connected with employers in rural areas that may not have specialized employment services for immigrants.⁶³
- Prince Edward County has developed the Rural Immigration Attraction Initiative under Ontario's Municipal Immigration Program to deliver educational and diversity training to employers as well as outreach aimed at attracting immigrants.

- Immigrants in Montreal who are willing to relocate to surrounding communities, such as Ste-Hyacinthe, Rimouski, Drummondville or Sherbrooke, are provided with services to assist with the move, including housing and employment supports.
- The Morden Community Driven Immigration Initiative (MCDII) is a support program for skilled workers interested in applying for permanent residence in Morden through the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program. Approximately 50 families per year, who otherwise would not qualify as Manitoba Provincial Nominees, receive a support letter for their immigration application.
- In Alberta, a commitment has been made to create a new Alberta Advantage Immigration Strategy that aims at attracting immigrants through the Rural Entrepreneur Immigration Program for those who “are prepared to live and actively own and manage a business in any of Alberta’s eligible small towns” and through the Rural Renewal Program for newcomers “who are committed to living and working in smaller communities throughout Alberta.”⁵⁷ Further, the provincial government is seeking collaboration with the federal Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot.⁵⁷

PRESSURES AND POSSIBILITIES: PERSPECTIVES FROM SMALL CENTRES

Each community has its nuances, unique assets, and understanding of the role that immigration can play in its future prosperity and vitality. To better understand the local dynamics and develop policy recommendations informed by real-world issues, consultations were organized in February and March 2019 in five communities across Ontario—Brockville, Chatham-Kent, Grey-Bruce Counties, Sault Ste. Marie, and Greater Sudbury. The communities were selected based on criteria of urgency (negative / slow population growth), willingness (expressed interest in newcomer attraction and retention), readiness (presence of a Local Immigration Partnership and/or settlement service provider), and geographical representation. Greater Sudbury also represented a Francophone minority community. The consultations engaged a total of 199 key stakeholders from the private sector, municipal, provincial and federal governments, local settlement and multicultural agencies, business associations, school boards and post-secondary institutions, immigration consultants, lawyers, newcomers, and other community members.

Table 2 provides background information on the selected communities based on publicly available socio-economic data and the findings of the IMDB analysis (Appendix B), such as Migration Effectiveness Rates and retention rates for Group 1 immigrants, those who were destined and resided in Ontario at the time of landing. Immigrants arriving in two different time periods—2002 to 2006 and 2007 to 2011—are presented in order to provide a comparison between earlier and more recent immigrant cohorts.

The Migration Effectiveness Rate (MER) can represent compensation or losses at landing by an inflow from other areas within the province. MER is defined as the difference between in-migration and out-migration between a pair of locations of origin and destination. Within the context of this research, the streams represent intended destination versus actual landing residence. MER essentially indicates a gain or a loss experienced by an area in a migration exchange relative to the size of the exchange. Multiplied by 100, MER is expressed as a percentage, varying between -100 and +100 depending on the direction in the net migration balance.

With a positive net exchange between locations of destination and residence, MER will be a positive number. With this, any MER of 0 or above is a sign that a community either does not lose anything in the immigrant exchange with other locations, or gains immigrants that were not originally destined there if MER is above zero. Positive MER can be interpreted as an attractivity measure.

The retention rate represents five-year retention rate for immigrants, adjusted for non-mobility factors (see key definitions in Retention Rates in Ontario Communities section). The provided rates are for Group 1 immigrant cohorts.

TABLE 2**Characteristics of the communities in which consultations took place**

	Ontario	Medium CAs		Large CAs		CMA
		Brockville	Owen Sound	Chatham-Kent	Sault Ste. Marie	Greater Sudbury
Total population, 2016	13,448,494	38,553	31,820	102,042	78,159	164,689
Change in total population, 2011–2016	+4.6%	–1.2%	–0.8%	–2.0%	–2.1%	+1.0%
Immigrant population, 2016	29.1%	7.8%	7.1%	8.6%	8.5%	5.8%
Size of labour force, 2016	7,141,675	18,765	15,605	49,960	37,605	85,235
Unemployment rate, 2016	7.4%	8.5%	6.6%	7.6%	10.3%	8.4%
Migration Effectiveness Rate: Immigrants (2002–2006)	CMAs: –0.1% Large CAs: 18.3% Medium CAs: 1.4%	42.9%	25.0%	12.2%	38.5%	33.3%
Migration Effectiveness Rate: Immigrants (2007–2011)	CMAs: –0.4% Large CAs: 3.37% Medium CAs: 1.9%	7.7%	0.0%	5.9%	0.0%	34.9%
Retention Rate: Immigrants (2002–2006)		47.8%	---	60.0%	69.0%	60.3%
Retention Rate: Immigrants (2007–2011)		50.0%	60.0%	67.7%	73.2%	59.8%

Table 3 below presents findings from the community consultations that are analogous to a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis adjusted to the context of the community consultations. Priorities are simultaneously reflective of ‘weaknesses’ and ‘opportunities’, barriers

correspond to ‘threats’, and recommendations provide solutions based on the scope of revealed issues and possibilities. See Appendix C for greater detail from each community consultation.

TABLE 3

Common priorities, perceived strengths, barriers and recommendations of the communities in which consultations took place

Common Priorities	Common Perceived Strengths
▪ Workforce attraction and retention ▪ Skills attraction and retention ▪ People attraction and retention (in particular international students and immigrants) ▪ Increase service availability and coordination ▪ Increase diversity and inclusion	▪ Small centre / rural lifestyle ▪ Many job opportunities and significant demand for workers (although many jobs are low-skilled positions) ▪ Warm and friendly community ▪ Connections / collaboration between service providers
Common Barriers to Attraction and Retention	Common Recommendations
▪ Limited number of settlement services ▪ Inadequate public transportation system ▪ Limited access to meaningful employment ▪ Limited access to employment for spouses of economic immigrants ▪ Inadequate foreign credential recognition ▪ Some incidences of racism and discrimination	▪ Develop a one-stop shop for information about newcomer programs and services ▪ Expand language training options (e.g., online classes, evening classes, language in the workplace) as well as training on workplace culture and communication skills ▪ Improve access to affordable housing and public transportation in the community ▪ Educate and support employers to hire more newcomers (e.g., cultural competency training, resources for hiring and onboarding newcomers) ▪ Create opportunities for intercultural dialogue and connections between newcomers and longer-term residents

RECOMMENDATIONS

Multiple groups are needed to build and sustain welcoming communities that successfully attract and retain immigrants.^{21, 24} These include, but are not limited to, the receiving community, the municipal, federal and provincial governments, organizations that provide community services, and the companies that hire immigrants.^{3, 7, 20, 21, 28}

The following recommendations for the attraction and retention of immigrants are divided into those that can be implemented in the short-term—within a three-year time frame—and longer-term recommendations requiring sustained efforts over time and requiring more substantial policy changes. These recommendations are designed to address many of the barriers to attraction and retention noted in the literature review and community consultations, and evidence from the IMDB analyses that a number of medium and small CAs in Ontario are in double jeopardy, as these communities do not receive a lot of immigrants and also do not retain immigrants well so that both must be a focus of attention.

SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations	Federal Government	Provincial Government	Municipal Government	Employers / Businesses	Service Providers	Community Members
Immigration Policies						
Prioritize and expedite refugee sponsorship applications to small centres and rural areas.	X					
Community Planning / Strategy						
Develop a community strategy and action plan for attraction, integration and retention of newcomers.			X	X	X	
Promotion / Marketing						
Promote the benefits of working and living in small centres and rural areas through websites, social media, advertisements and other tools.	X	X	X			
Highlight success stories from the perspective of newcomers, employers and the community.	X	X	X	X	X	X

Recommendations	Federal Government	Provincial Government	Municipal Government	Employers / Businesses	Service Providers	Community Members
Provide incentives to newcomers to settle in small centres and rural areas (e.g., financial).	X	X	X	X		
Be more targeted and proactive in international recruitment efforts for small centres and rural areas.	X	X		X		
Programs and Services						
Create a one-stop shop for settlement and employment information and services.	X	X	X		X	
Create itinerant settlement services that can support immigrants in smaller communities, and online/phone Q-and-A services	X	X			X	
Provide more online services and learning options, incorporating technology such as webinars and online delivery of language training	X	X			X	
Promote services that are available in the community (e.g., information package, welcome basket).			X	X	X	
Support collaborations between service providers to avoid duplication and create complementary programs and services.	X	X	X		X	
Provide specialized employment services and supports (e.g., immigrant entrepreneurship, English / French in the workplace, workplace culture).	X	X		X	X	
Augment existing English / French language training programs and supports with more flexible approaches, such as online adaptive models of language training, so that newcomers can learn at a pace and at time that is convenient for them.	X	X			X	
Provide specialized services and supports for Francophones, including services offered by and for Francophones (rather than relying on services offered by “bilingual” agencies).	X	X			X	
Create a mentorship program and local internships for international students, and build on models such as the EduNova approach.		X	X	X		
Establish Local Immigration Partnerships in smaller centres that are ready to benefit from them, building on models developed in other smaller communities and rural regions	X					

Recommendations	Federal Government	Provincial Government	Municipal Government	Employers / Businesses	Service Providers	Community Members
Create a pool of volunteers to support newcomers (e.g., translators / interpreters, mentors).			X		X	X
Cultural and Religious Amenities						
Support opportunities for cultural events and celebrations in the community.	X	X	X			X
Encourage more diverse amenities and options in the community (e.g., ethnic food options, places of worship).			X	X		X
Employment						
Develop a campaign to educate employers, businesses and communities on the value of immigrant talent and how foreign credentials can translate in the Canadian economy (e.g. similar to New Brunswick's New Conversations tour)	X	X	X		X	
Develop resources and tools to support employers who want to hire immigrants (e.g. best and promising practices).	X	X	X		X	
Offer language training and/or other supports to newcomers in the workplace or enable them to take training during working hours.	X	X		X	X	
Provide intercultural competency training for employers and employees in local businesses					X	
Diversity and Inclusion						
Develop anti-racism education and campaigns for community members.	X	X	X		X	X
Organize events to bring together newcomers and longer-term residents (e.g., potlucks, intercultural dialogue, cultural competency).			X			X
Offer intercultural competency training to staff of mainstream organizations that serve the public in small communities (e.g., libraries, hospitals)					X	
Establish a community welcome ambassador program.					X	X
Francophone Immigration						
Develop a community strategic plan for successful Francophone immigration in smaller Francophone minority communities and include the Réseaux en immigration francophone. The strategic plan should set clear, ambitious, and realistic objectives.			X		X	X

Recommendations	Federal Government	Provincial Government	Municipal Government	Employers / Businesses	Service Providers	Community Members
Conduct an audit of all newcomer services in smaller Francophone minority communities. Develop a resource database for newcomers, schools, post-secondary institutions, and Francophone service providers.			X		X	
Develop a process for coordination of settlement services for Francophone immigrants in smaller Francophone minority communities.	X	X	X		X	
Provide language training opportunities (e.g. French Canadian, English) in French for Francophone immigrants.	X	X		X		
Organize cultural events to engage all members of smaller Francophone minority communities, including children, youth and families.			X		X	X
Develop a recruitment plan for attracting more newcomer workers to Francophone minority communities. Include enhanced international recruitment as part of the strategy.	X	X	X	X		X

LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations	Federal Government	Provincial Government	Municipal Government	Employers / Businesses	Service Providers	Community Members
Immigration Policies / Programs						
Develop new pathways to permanent residence in small centres and rural areas. Potential streams could include economic class and their family members (e.g., Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot for high and low skilled workers)	X					
Develop a new category under the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program (OINP) for immigration to small centres and rural areas. Potential streams could include both high- and low-skilled worker streams, with support for family members such as dedicated employment connector support.	X	X				
Housing, Transportation, and Child Care						
Develop rental housing incentive programs (e.g., adjust tax code to make it more attractive for developers to build affordable rental units).	X	X	X			
Develop a rent-to-own home ownership program to encourage newcomers and other residents to remain in small centres and rural areas.	X	X	X			
Develop rural ride-share programs (e.g., could be modeled after SmartRide).		X	X	X		
Increase the availability of on-site, no-cost childcare at locations providing language training for newcomers	X	X			X	
Provide childcare subsidy top-ups for newcomers attending language classes	X	X				
Employment						
Develop supports for newcomer entrepreneurs who would like to start businesses in small centres and rural areas or purchase established businesses.	X	X			X	
Establish a career mentorship program to assist newcomers' integration in the workplace.	X	X	X	X	X	
Develop resources to facilitate immigrants in identifying, negotiating, purchasing and running an existing business.		X	X	X		

Diversity and Inclusion						
Create immigrant / multicultural / diversity advisory councils so newcomers have a voice in the community.	X	X	X		X	X
Support the establishment of ethno-cultural associations in the community.		X	X			X
Francophone Immigration						
Explore options for prioritizing or fast-tracking applications from Francophone immigrants who would like to live in small centres, rural areas or smaller Francophone Minority Communities (FMCs) (e.g., Express Entry, Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program).	X	X				
Explore the possibility of making smaller Francophone minority communities priority destinations for Government Assisted Refugees, particularly those with some French language skills.	X				X	
Develop / implement an action plan in partnership with local stakeholders to ensure the target of 5% of Francophone immigrants to Ontario is met.	X	X	X		X	
Implement the promotion and recruitment strategies in the General Provisions (5.0 French-Speaking Immigration) of the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement in partnership with stakeholders of <i>Réseaux en immigration francophone</i> .	X	X	X			
Develop a public campaign targeting Francophone immigrants in Toronto, Ottawa, Quebec, and overseas with information about the quality of life and assets of smaller Francophone minority communities.	X	X	X	X		
Create better supports for Francophone international students in FMCs, such as: - Mentorship programs (e.g., new / established student, student / employer) - Volunteer fair(s) - Internships in local organizations to encourage them to stay - English as an Additional Language (EAL) courses	X	X			X	

CONCLUSION

The decline of traditional employment sectors and an expanding knowledge economy in the last two decades have had an outsized effect on rural and small population centres, while larger urban centres have prospered and grown.¹ Under the pressure of continuing youth and working professionals' outmigration and low domestic birthrates,²⁵ small centres have to focus more resources on keeping those that remain and attracting new residents.

Many of the same factors that drive Canadians out of rural and small areas to larger cities are also what influence immigrants' decisions of where to live. Canadians and immigrants alike want to reside where there are employment opportunities, and some prefer the social vibrancy that larger cities offer. For immigrants, social vibrancy includes being with members of their own and other ethnocultural groups. For attraction and recruitment strategies to work, rural and small areas must market the benefits of living in their region to immigrants, young people and working professionals.

Immigrant attraction to small population centres and rural regions, whether from outside of Canada or from larger Canadian cities, is one way to counter the declining population and economy of these centres.^{2, 7, 29} In order to attract foreign talent, small population centres must present themselves as welcoming communities by maximizing the factors that draw immigrants in and minimizing those that push and/or keep immigrants out. Since pull-factors are very similar for Canadian-born individuals and newcomers alike, improving a location's welcoming capacity can attract more than just immigrants. Although rural areas lack some of the assets found in larger cities, they have their own desirable characteristics and can be nimbler and bring greater collective effort together more quickly.

Getting it right will demand a mix of economic, social and cultural factors enabled through good public policy. Small centre revitalization is a matter of federal, provincial and municipal cooperation with employers, the settlement community, newcomers and other community stakeholders. As Canada's demographic landscape continues to change, immigration will remain a cornerstone to its future prosperity and competitiveness.

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