

April 2021

EMPLOYER ATTITUDES TOWARDS HIRING NEWCOMERS AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE ATLANTIC PROVINCES

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Employer Attitudes towards Hiring Newcomers and International Students in the Atlantic Provinces¹

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APRIL 2021

Disclaimer: This report is funded by the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) under the Atlantic Policy Research Initiative, which provides a vehicle for the analysis of key socioeconomic policy issues in Atlantic Canada. The views expressed in this study do not reflect the views of ACOA or of the Government of Canada. The authors are responsible for the accuracy, reliability and currency of the information.

¹ The authors would like to acknowledge the generous financial support for this research project from the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) through the Atlantic Policy Research Initiative. We would also like to thank the research grants provided by the Public Policy Forum to conduct employer consultations across all four Atlantic provinces through its “Atlantic Revitalization: New Home vs. Way Station” project, the Narrative Research for conducting the employer survey for the project, and Paula Struk Jaia, Evan McCarthy, and Sumaiya Akter for their research assistance.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With declining fertility rates, an ageing population, and continued outmigration, Atlantic Canada is facing a population crisis. One of the chief solutions for this problem is to increase the number of immigrants to improve the demographic outlook of the region; the remote nature of the Atlantic provinces, combined with immigrants' tendency to seek residency in larger cities such as Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, results in fewer immigrants to these provinces than to the rest of Canada. Retention is also a challenge, as immigrants will leave if they do not find favourable conditions in their new home.

A massive driver of immigration and perhaps the most important factor in determining immigrant retention is employment. Ensuring that immigrants can find meaningful employment upon their arrival is paramount to enhancing the benefits of immigration and ensuring that skill and labour gaps in the local economy are filled.

Based on a survey of 801 employers across the Atlantic provinces prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, this study examines labour market conditions in Atlantic Canada and employer tendencies and attitudes towards hiring newcomers and international students. It also seeks to explore the effects that newcomers have on organizations, the characteristics organizations possess that result in them seeking to employ these individuals, and the challenges that arise when organizations employ these individuals. This study also aims to provide insights into how immigrant employment and skill matchmaking in the economy can be improved.

RESULTS

The results of this survey align with other research revealing the labour and skill shortages that organizations are facing, employers' general attitudes towards hiring newcomers and international students, and the challenges they face in doing so. However, our survey went further in exploring the real and complex reasons behind these factors.

There have been some encouraging changes and progress since Dr. Wade Locke and Professor Scott Lynch's pilot survey in 2005, which showed only 10% of the firms in their random sample had employed newcomers or international workers in the last five years. Neither local firms were actively recruiting, nor were potential immigrant employees actively applying for jobs with the local firms. In our current study, employers now have a

more positive attitude towards hiring immigrants and have adopted practices to help immigrants integrate into the workforce. However, Locke and Lynch (2005) study found the overwhelming majority of firms in NL (97%) who hired new Canadians and international workers reported that their experience with these workers was positive, consistent with our findings (87%), suggesting that lack of engagement between prospective hiring employers and immigrant employees was a major issue despite of severe labour and skill shortages. Though the majority of employers have expressed a willingness to hire immigrants, there are still challenges that affect employers' hiring decisions. Hardware insufficiency and software obstacles are significant challenges that smaller employers face in hiring newcomers, and language and culture differences have proved difficult for many.

According to the recent projections covering 2018-2020 in an ACOA report (ACOA, 2019a), a total of 84,725 workers would be needed in Atlantic Canada (PEI: 8,070; NS: 34,615; NB: 28,795; NL: 13, 245). The massive number of unfilled job vacancies due to the large number of retirees, new jobs created by technologic development, the willingness a majority of employers expressed to hire immigrant workers, and the positive experiences employers have had in hiring immigrants seem to indicate that newcomers should be able to find employment more easily than in the past. However, the portion of employers who have hired immigrant workers is still low compared to the portion of employers who report labour and skills shortages. Employers expect more support and collaboration from and between all levels of government and from settlement agencies, credential assessment organizations, and other stakeholders to help them utilize immigrants' human capital.

KEY FINDINGS

Revenue/sales and employment changes

Organizations' changes in sales/revenue have significantly positive correlations with changes in the organizations' employment. Sales growth leads to an increased number of employees to support production and service delivery. Approximately 50% of the selected employers reported sales/revenue growth, and 17% reported a decline in the last 3 years (before the COVID-19 pandemic). Approximately 39% of the employers reported an increase in employee numbers, and 12% reported a decline in employee numbers in the last 3 years (before the COVID-19 pandemic). Employers in Prince Edward Island (PEI) fared the best, and employers in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL)

fared the worst. Employers in urban areas and in larger organizations fared better than rural or smaller businesses.

Labour and skill shortages

- Approximately 52% of employers reported having hiring difficulties in the last 3 years, although they tried to recruit from other provinces as well. Even more employers (60%) expected to encounter labour and skill shortages in the next three years. Larger organizations and employers in rural areas were more likely to report hiring difficulty.
- While over 55% of organizations in NB, NS, and PEI experienced hiring difficulties, only 43% of employers in NL had the same experience.
- Employers were more likely to report hiring difficulties in the following occupations: technical/trade (58%), production workers with no trade/certification requirements (51%), managers (10%), professionals (10%), clerical/administrative workers (10%), and marketing/sales (7%).
- The top three reasons for hiring difficulties were “lack of applicants” (33%), “lack of applicants with the necessary experience” (28%), and “lack of applicants with the necessary skills” (21%).
- Managerial positions that require both skills and experience took the longest time to fill, followed by professionals, technical/trade, production workers with no trade/certification requirements and clerical/administrative workers.

Attitudes towards hiring immigrants and international students

- Approximately 63% of the surveyed employers reported receiving job applications from immigrants or international students, and among them 53% hired such applicants in the past three years.
- Factors such as geography and firm size seemed to correlate with a firm’s propensity to hire newcomers and international students. Employers in PEI were more likely to hire immigrants and international students than their counterparts in the other Atlantic provinces, while larger firms were more likely to hire newcomers and international students than small firms were, and urban-based firms were more likely than rural firms to hire newcomers and international students.
- Overwhelming majority of the employers surveyed (88%) had positive experiences with immigrant workers. The more experience an employer had with immigrants, the more positive their attitude towards hiring immigrants was.

- The main reasons employers had positive attitudes towards immigrants were because they thought that the immigrants they had previously hired were hard working, skilled, and reliable.
- Employers' greatest concerns when hiring immigrants were retention, language barriers, and cultural adaption to the Canadian workplace.

Employers' perception of the effectiveness of immigration policy in Atlantic Canada

- Most employers (52%) reported having little knowledge about the immigration system.
- Employers in the province of Prince Edward Island (PEI) reported the most involvement in the immigration system, followed by those in Nova Scotia (NS), New Brunswick (NB), and Newfoundland and Labrador (NL).
- The employers who are more involved in the migration process are also more opinionated about the immigration system, feeling either easier or more difficult.

Ways to improve the retention of skilled workers, including immigrants and international students

- The main reasons immigrant employees leave their jobs according to the self-reported responses from employers were as follows: moving away (33%), taking another job (25%), and going back school (10%). Approximately 60% of employers in PEI reported that the main reason immigrants left their organization was moving away, while 31% reported this in NL and NB, and only 21% reported this in NS.
- Along with an immigrant's language proficiency and understanding of Canadian business culture/practices, one of the main concerns for employers when hiring immigrants was retention: how long an immigrant will stay in the area before he or she leaves.
- Employers facing hiring difficulties are more likely to demonstrate helping behaviours, such as helping employees become permanent residents of Canada and changing workplace practices to better accommodate immigrants. The first, changing workplace practices to better accommodate immigrants is associated with a lower probability of reporting immigrant employees leaving and taking another job. However, helping employees become permanent residents is associated with a higher probability of those employees moving away. This explains why some employers in the regions are reluctant to support their employees' applications for immigration.

IMPLICATIONS

Job opportunities, mutual cultural understandings, and support in daily life for newcomers require all stakeholders to work together and make a concerted effort to provide holistic services and support to facilitate the long-term integration and retention of international immigrants and their families. This can be done by helping immigrants find gainful employment, make valuable contributions to the economy, and develop a high sense of belonging to their community and region. A transparent and effective immigration system along with supportive employers, welcoming communities, affordable housing, accessible health care and public transportation systems, and strong service delivery programs from immigrant service organizations will facilitate immigrant social/economic integration and improve the retention of newcomers and international students to Atlantic Canada and support the long-term economic prosperity of the region.

- Greater effort needs to be made to promote Atlantic Canada's low cost of living, welcoming communities, and agreeable lifestyle to potential job candidates, much like what tourism marketing has achieved for the Atlantic provinces.
- Immigration policies that meet the needs of local employers should be developed and improved. These include the PNP, AIPP, MNP (Municipal Nomination Program), RNIPP (Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot Program), and AFIPP (Agri-Food Immigration Pilot program).
- The government should provide clearer and more transparent immigration information to make the immigration process easier to understand and navigate. Government and settlement agencies should also build infrastructure and advanced information technology to disseminate and communicate policy information to employers, especially those in rural and remote regions.
- Settlement agencies need to work with employers and training institutions to develop and improve job-specific language training and bridge programs to newcomers to align with the skill needs of the local labour market. Employers and government should provide immigrants occupational training, labour market information, and networking opportunities that can help immigrants find meaningful employment and better integrate them into their workplaces and communities.
- Stakeholders should increase community-based support for newcomers, including spousal and family support. They should also provide a focused pilot program for improving spousal support for employment opportunities and family support such as affordable childcare, health care, and child education to encourage immigrants to settle down.

- It is clear from the survey that small- to medium-sized businesses and businesses located in rural areas are less likely to hire immigrants. Supporting these employers with immigration information, funding, and personnel should be prioritized to encourage them to hire immigrants.
- Intercultural training for both immigrants and employers may facilitate workplace communication and enhance immigrant productivity and organizational performance.
- Employers should consider changing workforce practices to better accommodate the needs of immigrants, which could be a useful tool to improve retention (both in the firm and the region).

Attitudes des employeurs à l'égard de l'embauche de nouveaux arrivants et d'étudiants internationaux dans les provinces atlantiques

RÉSUMÉ

Avec des taux de fécondité en baisse, une population vieillissante et une émigration continue, le Canada atlantique fait face à une crise démographique. L'une des principales solutions à ce problème est d'augmenter le nombre d'immigrants pour améliorer les perspectives démographiques de la région. La nature éloignée des provinces atlantiques, combinée à la tendance des immigrants à chercher la résidence dans les grandes villes comme Toronto, Montréal et Vancouver, se traduit par une diminution du nombre d'immigrants dans ces provinces que dans le reste du Canada. La rétention est également un défi, car les immigrants partiront s'ils ne trouvent pas de conditions favorables dans leur nouveau foyer.

L'emploi est un moteur massif de l'immigration et peut-être le facteur le plus important pour déterminer la rétention des immigrants. Veiller à ce que les immigrants puissent trouver un emploi valable à leur arrivée est primordial pour accroître les avantages de l'immigration et garantir que les lacunes en matière de compétences et de main-d'œuvre dans l'économie locale sont comblées.

Basée sur une enquête menée auprès de 801 employeurs des provinces atlantiques avant l'écllosion de la pandémie du COVID-19, cette étude examine les conditions du marché du travail au Canada atlantique et leurs tendances et attitudes à l'égard de l'embauche de nouveaux arrivants et d'étudiants internationaux. L'étude cherche également à explorer les effets que les nouveaux arrivants ont sur les organisations, les caractéristiques que possèdent les organisations qui les poussent à chercher à employer ces personnes et les défis qui se posent lorsque les organisations emploient ces personnes. Cette étude vise également à fournir un aperçu de la manière dont l'emploi des immigrants et l'adéquation des compétences dans l'économie peuvent être améliorés.

RÉSULTATS

Les résultats de cette enquête concordent avec d'autres recherches révélant les pénuries de main-d'œuvre et de compétences auxquelles les organisations sont confrontées, l'attitude générale des employeurs à l'égard de l'embauche de nouveaux arrivants et d'étudiants internationaux et les défis auxquels ils sont confrontés. Cependant, notre enquête est allée plus loin en explorant les raisons réelles et complexes derrière ces facteurs.

Il y a eu des changements et des progrès encourageants depuis l'enquête pilote de Wade Locke en 2004. Les employeurs ont maintenant une attitude plus positive à l'égard de l'embauche d'immigrants et ont adopté des pratiques pour aider les immigrants à s'intégrer dans la population active. Bien que la majorité des employeurs aient exprimé leur volonté d'embaucher des immigrants, il reste des défis qui affectent les décisions d'embauche des employeurs. L'insuffisance matérielle et les obstacles logiciels sont des défis importants auxquels font face les petits employeurs pour embaucher de nouveaux arrivants, et les différences de langue et de culture se sont avérées difficiles pour beaucoup employeurs.

Le nombre massif de postes vacants non pourvus en raison du grand nombre de retraités, des nouveaux emplois créés par le développement technologique, de la volonté exprimée par une majorité d'employeurs d'embaucher des travailleurs immigrés et des expériences positives des employeurs en matière d'embauche d'immigrants semblent indiquer que les nouveaux arrivants devraient être en mesure de trouver un emploi plus facilement que par le passé. Cependant, la proportion d'employeurs qui ont embauché des travailleurs immigrants est encore faible comparativement à la proportion d'employeurs qui signalent des pénuries de main-d'œuvre et de compétences. Les employeurs attendent plus de soutien et de collaboration de la part et entre tous les paliers de gouvernement et des agences d'établissement, des organismes d'évaluation des titres de compétences et d'autres intervenants pour les aider à utiliser le capital humain des immigrants.

PRINCIPALES CONCLUSIONS

Changements des revenus / ventes et de l'emploi

Les changements des ventes / revenus des organisations ont des corrélations significativement positives avec les changements de taille des organisations. La croissance des ventes conduit à un nombre accru d'employés pour soutenir la production et la prestation de services. Environ 50% des employeurs sélectionnés ont signalé une croissance des ventes / revenus, et 17% ont signalé une baisse au cours des 3 dernières années (avant la pandémie du COVID-19). Environ 39% des employeurs ont signalé une augmentation du nombre d'employés et 12% ont signalé une baisse du nombre d'employés au cours des 3 dernières années (avant la pandémie du COVID-19). Les employeurs de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard (Î.-P.-É.) ont fait le meilleur, et les employeurs à Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador (NL) ont fait le pire. Les employeurs des zones urbaines et des grandes organisations ont obtenu de meilleurs résultats que les entreprises rurales ou plus petites.

Pénuries de main-d'œuvre et de compétences.

- Environ 52% des employeurs ont déclaré avoir eu des difficultés à embaucher au cours des 3 dernières années, bien qu'ils aient également tenté de recruter dans d'autres provinces. Encore plus d'employeurs (60%) s'attendaient à faire face à des pénuries de main-d'œuvre et de compétences au cours des trois prochaines années. Les grandes organisations et les employeurs des régions rurales étaient plus susceptibles de signaler des difficultés d'embauche.
- Alors que plus de 55% des organisations du Nouveau-Brunswick, de la Nouvelle-Écosse et de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard ont éprouvé des difficultés d'embauche, seulement 43% des employeurs de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador avaient la même expérience.
- Les employeurs étaient plus susceptibles de signaler des difficultés d'embauche dans les professions suivantes: technique / métier (58%), ouvriers de production sans exigences de métier / certification (51%), gestionnaires (10%), professionnels (10%), commis / travailleurs administratifs (10%) et marketing / ventes (7%).
- Les trois principales raisons des difficultés d'embauche étaient « le manque de candidats » (33%), « le manque de candidats possédant l'expérience nécessaire » (28%) et « le manque de candidats possédant les compétences nécessaires » (21%).
- Les postes de direction qui exigent à la fois des compétences et de l'expérience ont pris le plus de temps à pourvoir, suivis des professionnels, des techniciens / du commerce, des travailleurs de la production sans exigences de métier / de certification et des employés de bureau / administratifs.

Attitudes à l'égard de l'embauche d'immigrants et d'étudiants internationaux

- Environ 63% des employeurs interrogés ont déclaré avoir reçu des demandes d'emploi d'immigrants ou d'étudiants internationaux, et parmi eux 53% ont embauché de tels candidats au cours des trois dernières années.
- Des facteurs tels que la géographie et la taille de l'entreprise semblent être en corrélation avec la propension d'une entreprise à embaucher des employés non locaux. Les employeurs de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard étaient plus susceptibles d'embaucher des immigrants et des étudiants internationaux que leurs homologues des autres provinces de l'Atlantique, tandis que les grandes entreprises embauchaient plus de non-locaux que les petites entreprises, et les entreprises urbaines étaient plus susceptibles que les entreprises rurales d'embaucher des non-locaux.

- Plus un employeur avait d'expérience avec les immigrants, plus son attitude envers l'embauche d'immigrants était positive.
- Les principales raisons pour lesquelles les employeurs avaient une attitude positive envers les immigrants étaient parce qu'ils pensaient que les immigrants qu'ils avaient précédemment embauchés étaient qualifiés, fiables et travailleurs.
- Les plus grandes préoccupations des employeurs lors de l'embauche d'immigrants étaient la rétention, les barrières linguistiques et l'adaptation culturelle au milieu de travail canadien.

Perception des employeurs de l'efficacité de la politique d'immigration au Canada atlantique

- La plupart des employeurs (52%) ont déclaré avoir peu de connaissances sur le système d'immigration.
- Les employeurs de la province de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard (Î.-P.-É.) ont déclaré participer le plus au système d'immigration, suivis de ceux de la Nouvelle-Écosse (N.-É.), du Nouveau-Brunswick (NB) et de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador (NL).
- Les employeurs les plus impliqués dans le processus de migration sont également plus avisés sur le système d'immigration, se sentant plus faciles ou plus difficiles.

Moyens d'améliorer la rétention des travailleurs qualifiés, y compris les immigrants et les étudiants internationaux

- Les principales raisons pour lesquelles les employés immigrants quittent leur emploi selon les réponses autodéclarées des employeurs étaient les suivantes: déménagement (33%), prendre un autre emploi (25%) et retourner à l'école (10%). Environ 60% des employeurs de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard ont déclaré que la principale raison pour laquelle les immigrants ont quitté leur organisation était de déménager, tandis que 31% l'ont déclaré à Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador et au Nouveau-Brunswick, et seulement 21% en Nouvelle-Écosse.
- Outre la maîtrise de la langue d'un immigrant et sa compréhension de la culture et des pratiques commerciales canadiennes, l'une des principales préoccupations des employeurs lors de l'embauche d'immigrants était la rétention: combien de temps un immigrant restera-t-il dans la région avant de partir.
- Les employeurs confrontés à des difficultés d'embauche sont plus susceptibles de démontrer des comportements d'aide, comme aider les employés à devenir des résidents permanents du Canada et changer les pratiques de travail pour mieux accueillir les immigrants. Le premier, changer les pratiques en milieu de travail pour mieux accueillir les immigrants, est associé à une probabilité plus faible de

déclarer que les employés immigrants quittent et prennent un autre emploi. Cependant, aider les employés à devenir résidents permanents est associé à une probabilité plus élevée que ces employés déménagent. Cela explique pourquoi certains employeurs des régions sont réticents à soutenir les demandes d'immigration de leurs employés.

IMPLICATIONS

Les possibilités d'emploi, la compréhension culturelle mutuelle et le soutien dans la vie quotidienne des nouveaux arrivants exigent que toutes les parties prenantes travaillent ensemble et fassent un effort concerté pour fournir des services et un soutien holistique afin de faciliter l'intégration et la rétention à long terme des immigrants internationaux et de leurs familles. Cela peut être fait en aidant les immigrants à trouver un emploi rémunéré, à apporter une contribution précieuse à l'économie et à développer un fort sentiment d'appartenance à leur communauté et à leur région. Un système d'immigration transparent et efficace, associé à des employeurs favorables, des collectivités accueillantes, des logements abordables, des systèmes de soins de santé et de transport en commun accessibles, et des programmes de prestation de services solides d'organisations de services aux immigrants faciliteront l'intégration sociale et économique des immigrants et amélioreront la rétention des nouveaux arrivants et des étudiants internationaux au Canada atlantique et soutiendront la prospérité économique à long terme de la région.

- Il faut redoubler d'efforts pour promouvoir le faible coût de la vie, les collectivités accueillantes et le style de vie agréable du Canada atlantique auprès des candidats potentiels, tout comme ce que le marketing touristique a réalisé pour les provinces atlantiques.
- Des politiques d'immigration qui répondent aux besoins des employeurs locaux devraient être élaborées et améliorées. Il s'agit du Programme des Candidats des Provinces (PCP), du Programme pilote d'immigration au Canada atlantique (PPICA), du Programme des candidats des Municipalités, du Programme pilote d'immigration dans les communautés rurales et du Nord, et de l'PPIA (Programme pilote sur l'immigration agroalimentaire).
- Le gouvernement devrait fournir des informations plus claires et plus transparentes sur l'immigration pour rendre le processus d'immigration plus facile à comprendre et à naviguer. Le gouvernement et les organismes d'établissement devraient également mettre en place une infrastructure et une technologie de l'information de pointe pour diffuser et communiquer de l'information sur les politiques aux employeurs, en particulier ceux des régions rurales et éloignées.

- Les agences d'établissement doivent travailler avec les employeurs et les établissements de formation pour élaborer et améliorer des programmes de formation linguistique et des programmes de transition pour les nouveaux arrivants afin de répondre aux besoins en compétences du marché du travail local. Les employeurs et le gouvernement devraient offrir aux immigrants une formation professionnelle, des informations sur le marché du travail et des possibilités de réseautage qui peuvent aider les immigrants à trouver un emploi intéressant et à mieux les intégrer dans leurs lieux de travail et leurs communautés.
- Les intervenants devraient accroître le soutien communautaire aux nouveaux arrivants, y compris le soutien du conjoint et de la famille. Ils devraient également offrir un programme pilote ciblé pour améliorer le soutien du conjoint pour les possibilités d'emploi et le soutien à la famille, comme des services de garde d'enfants abordables, des soins de santé et une éducation des enfants pour encourager les immigrants à s'installer.
- Il ressort clairement de l'enquête que les petites et moyennes entreprises et les entreprises situées dans les régions rurales sont moins susceptibles d'embaucher des immigrants. Le soutien à ces employeurs avec des informations sur l'immigration, du financement et du personnel devrait être une priorité pour les encourager à embaucher des immigrants.
- La formation interculturelle à la fois pour les immigrants et les employeurs peut faciliter la communication sur le lieu de travail et améliorer la productivité et la performance organisationnelle des immigrants.
- Les employeurs devraient envisager de modifier leurs pratiques de main-d'œuvre pour mieux répondre aux besoins des immigrants, ce qui pourrait être un outil utile pour améliorer la rétention (à la fois dans l'entreprise et dans la région).

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1.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Project background

Demographic challenges, robust economic growth, and rapid technological change contribute to the increasing gap between the supply of and demand for labour and skills. Finding qualified or skilled workers and retaining them have been primary challenges for Canadian employers in recent years (LMIC, 2019). Atlantic Canada is facing a higher gap in labour and skills as a result of numerous factors: the ageing population, low birth rates, young people moving away, and the stereotype of having a stagnant and fluctuating economy dependent on natural resources. The diversity of the economy due to industrial restructuring and rapid technological progress also leads to skills mismatch, which exacerbates labour and skill shortages. Remote and isolated communities' relatively small economies make the recruitment and retention of younger generations, migrant workers, and international students a more serious challenge in Atlantic Canada (Walsh et al, 2015; Hann, 2018; ACOA, 2019a). During the last 10 years, the regional labour force declined by 64,000 people, or 3.9%, while the labour force in the rest of Canada increased by 7.4% (Statistics Canada, 2020b). Before the outbreak of the pandemic, the region experienced healthy economic growth, and the unemployment rate in Atlantic Canada declined to its lowest level in 20 years in 2019, meaning that the labour supply was too constrained to support further economic expansion in the region. At the same time, total job vacancies for the region increased from 12,000 in June 2016 to 20,000 in June 2019. As a result, many jobs, from high-tech occupations to low-skilled machine operators, lack qualified workers to fill them, and businesses from all industries are experiencing labour and skills shortages across Atlantic Canada, which hinders business growth and economic development (Akbari, 2013; APEC, 2020a).

In addition to increasing the labour force participation rate of underrepresented groups, by re-skilling or upskilling the existing labour force, immigrants can be considered as a new labour pool to fill skill and labour shortages. In 2016, immigrants made up 26% of Canada's prime-aged workforce and accounted for more than half of the employment increase in recent years (Yssaad & Fields, 2018; Patterson et al. 2019). To help businesses attract and retain global talents to fill the needs of employers and communities in the Atlantic region, the federal government, together with the region's four provincial governments, launched the Atlantic Immigration Pilot (AIP) program, an employer-driven provincial immigration program, in March 2017. By February 25, 2019, there were 1,896 AIP designated employers in the Atlantic region; these employers made over 3,729 job

offers to skilled international immigrants and international graduates. Under the program, 4,145 people became permanent residents by the end of 2019.

International students with Canadian educational credentials, strong language skills, and local work experience in Canada are ideal candidates as potential labour market participants. Most post-secondary international students have the option to apply for an open work permit after graduation, and this system aims to encourage them to work and stay in Canada while providing them a chance to acquire Canadian work experience (Lu & Hou, 2019). The number of international graduates in Atlantic Canada has increased dramatically over the past 10 years. In addition to programs in Canadian Experience Class and Express Entry, international graduates in Atlantic Canada have another path to become permanent residents: The International Graduate Stream within the AIP program. Some collaborative efforts have been made to ensure that international students stay after graduation. By mainly developing international students' employability capacity and connecting them with business, Atlantic Canada Study and Stay set up a successful pilot program with a much higher retention rate for international students. However, international student retention in the Atlantic provinces still has a long way to go, as most of these students end up leaving the region due to lack of job opportunities that match their professional qualifications and career aspirations (Arthur & Flynn, 2011). The retention rate has improved in recent years; however, compared to the retention rate in other provinces for the 2004-2015 period, it is still very low in the Atlantic provinces (NL, 17%; NB, 18%; PEI, 15%; NS, 15%; AB, 34%, BC, 21%; ON, 27%; PQ, 38%; MB, 29%; SK, 26%. Hann, 2018).

Though immigrants and international students have had a significant impact on the Canadian labour market and the local social-economic environment, they face various employment obstacles and on average, experience longer time in unemployment and higher unemployment rates than their native peers. This is the case even though employers have reported difficulties in filling job vacancies and anticipated more serious labour and skill shortages in the coming years (BDC, 2018; Hiebert, 2019). There is a significant amount of research that has explored the challenges and implications of the economic integration of immigrants and international students from the job supply point of view (Boswell et al, 2004; Samuel & Basavarajappa, 2006; Kelly-Freake, 2007; Fang, 2009; Miner, 2012; Garnett et al, 2012; BDC, 2018). There have been few studies from the demand side and employer perspectives attempting to discover how to effectively integrate immigrants and international students into the labour market (Cao et al., 2012; Harrison & Lloyd, 2013; Fernando et al., 2016; Enchautegui 2015; BDC, 2018).

By understanding employers' experiences and analysing their concerns, this project's research questions will help identify the obstacles when hiring immigrants and international students and explore possible solutions to fully utilize the human capital of immigrants and international students to fill labour and skill shortages and keep them in Atlantic provinces for the long term.

1.2 Research Objectives

In an effort to cope with population ageing and reduced fertility and to sustainably maintain the prosperity of the Atlantic provinces, the governments in those provinces are doing their best to attract and retain immigrants from all sources. Of all the factors that affect immigrants' decision regarding where to live, job opportunities are the primary factor in which employers play a key role. Even though recent immigrants have been younger, more educated, and more skilled, they still face unfavourable labour market conditions, especially in terms of employment rate and the degree of job-education matching, which discourages them from choosing or staying in the Atlantic provinces. In an effort to better understand the challenges and opportunities in the labour market integration of newcomers, this study investigates the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of employers in Atlantic Canada (Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick) regarding hiring newcomers and international students.

The main objectives of this study are to:

- Understand employers' perceptions of the regional economy and labour market.
- Delve into employers' attitudes towards hiring immigrants and international students.
- Explore employers' experiences in hiring immigrant and international students.
- Explore the concerns employers have when hiring immigrants and international students.
- Provide explanations for the low retention rate of immigrants and international students in Atlantic Canada.

1.3 Methodology

A 15-minute qualitative semi-structured telephone survey of employers across the Atlantic provinces was conducted by Narrative Research (formerly Corporate Research Associates) on behalf of our team between September and October 2019.

The project applied stratified random sampling of employers by region, organizational size, and industry to ensure that the sample was representative of the employer population in the Atlantic region.

- Employers were divided into two regional classifications: urban or rural.
- There were three size classifications: small (5 to 9 employees), medium (10 to 49 employees), and large (50 or more employees);
- The industry category is based on the North American Industry Classification System (2018) as follows:
 - Retail trade;
 - Wholesale trade;
 - Accommodation and food services;
 - Professional, scientific, technical, and management services;
 - Information and cultural industries;
 - Arts, entertainment, and recreation;
 - Finance and insurance and real estate rental and leasing;
 - Health care and social assistance;
 - Educational services;
 - Public administration;
 - Construction;
 - Manufacturing;
 - Transportation and warehousing;
 - Administrative support, waste management, remediation services;
 - Mining, quarrying, and oil & gas extraction;
 - Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting; and
 - Other services.

The survey was conducted in 2019 before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey data were analysed using descriptive statistics as well as estimates from the logistic regression model and the ordinary least squares regression model (upon request).

1.3.1 Sample description (Table 1)

- Target number: 301 in NL, 100 in PEI, 200 in NS, and 200 in NB
- Type of respondents: owners (36.7%), senior executives (14.4%), human resources managers (11.7%), and managers who are in charge of hiring (37.2%)

- Status of owner or CEO: permanent resident (8.6%), refugee (1.0%), international student (1.6%), temporary foreign worker (1.5%), and Canadian-born (87.8%)
- Sector representation: private sector company (84.4%), government (2.1%), and not-for-profit organizations (13.5%)
- Region: urban centres (63.6%) and rural areas (36.5%)
- Sample size: small (33.3%), medium (54.6%), and large organizations (12%). Top five industries: Retail trade (24.0%), accommodation and food services (14.5%), health care and social assistance (11.4%), construction (8.1%), and manufacturing (5.6%)

Table 1: The industry distribution of employers interviewed

Industry	Survey respondents, N (%)
Retail Trade	192 (24.0)
Accommodation and Food Services	116 (14.5)
Health Care and Social Assistance	91 (11.4)
Construction	35 (8.1)
Other Services	61 (7.6)
Manufacturing	45 (5.6)
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	37 (4.6)
Transportation and Warehousing	32 (4.0)
Wholesale Trade	27 (3.4)
Administrative Support, Waste Management, Remediation Services	20 (2.5)
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	20 (2.5)
Finance and Insurance	18 (2.3)
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	16 (2.0)
Educational Services	16 (2.0)
Information and Cultural Industries	14 (1.8)
Public Administration	10 (1.3)
Real Estate Rental and Leasing	9 (1.1)
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil & Gas Extraction	8 (1.0)
Management of Companies and Enterprises	4 (0.5)
Total	801 (100.0)

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

In addition to humanitarian goals, the central objectives of immigration policy in Canada are to alleviate the ageing of the population and help meet the labour market needs that cannot be satisfied by the domestic labour force within a reasonable timeframe. Canada has the most elaborate and longest-standing skilled labour migration system in the OECD countries (OECD, 2019). It achieves a proper balance of qualified labour immigrants that fit the demands of the labour market and have been largely beneficial to Canada economically, socially, and culturally (Grogger & Hansonk, 2011; Akbari, 2015; IRCC, 2020) due to immigrants' high level of human capital (Docquier & Marfouk, 2004; Grogger & Hanson, 2011; Statistics Canada, 2020b). Policies to improve the recruitment and retention of those groups of potential workers have contributed to the success of Canada's labour market, economy, and social outcomes (IRCC, 2018).

Low fertility rates, the looming retirement of Baby Boomers, the outmigration of younger workers, and lower immigrant in-take have resulted in a seriously ageing population and labour and skill shortages in Atlantic Canada. Skill shortages are superimposed with new technologies that require workers to acquire new skill sets and results in structural worker shortages across the region. Such demographic deficits are limiting and holding back the economic growth of Atlantic Canada (ACOA, 2019; APEC, 2020). To address the declining labour force and alleviate skills shortages and skills mismatch, all four Atlantic provincial governments have introduced population and/or immigration strategies to increase the quantity and improve the quality of the labour force, including enhancing the participation rate of untapped sources of labour, re-skilling/upskilling the existing labour force, and attracting a new pool of workers, including immigrants, refugees, and international students to the region (APEC, 2012).

Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the regional economy had been experiencing steady growth in recent years. The unprecedented outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused severe disruptions to labour demand, ways of doing businesses and people's lifestyles. Many businesses have been forced to shut down, which has led to the unemployment rate soaring to historic highs. The COVID-19 pandemic also has had an unequal impact on industrial sectors, and there are different trajectories and recovery periods expected for different sectors (APEC, 2020; Adams-Prassel et al., 2020). Worker shortages may be eased or eliminated in the short term during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Even so, existing structural labour and skill shortages caused by low birth rates, continuous ageing, and skill gaps due to new technologies that require workers with new skill sets across Atlantic Canada will resume when the pandemic fades and the economy fully re-opens.

2.1 Labour market integration

As a traditional destination country, Canada continues to attract immigrants. Since 1986, the primary objectives of the Canadian immigration policy have shifted from family unification and humanitarian concerns to addressing ongoing demographic challenges and skill shortages and integrating newcomers into Canada socially, culturally, and economically (IRCC, 2018, 2020).

However, even though immigrants and international students supplement the working-age population by providing specific skills, promoting innovation, and contributing to entrepreneurship (Hanson 2012; Ozgen et al., 2013; Vu et al., 2019; Picot et al. 2019; Statistics Canada, 2019b), they still face major challenges, such as language/communication barriers and cultural differences, a lack of recognition of foreign credentials, a lack of social and professional networks, a lack of local experience, and difficulty in effectively integrating into the labour market in terms of employment rate, wages, and skills/education matching (Chiswick & Miller, 2003; Derwing & Waugh, 2013; Lu & Hou, 2020; Banerjee et al, 2019).

The effective integration of immigrants into the labour market, as seen through employment rate and wage differentials between immigrants and their native counterparts, has been one of the pivotal focuses of immigration research in Canada (Li & Halli, 2003; Godin, 2008). Employment opportunities are one of the most important factors affecting the decision of immigrants and international students regarding where to live and stay (Harvey, 2011; Arthur & Flynn 2011; Wu & Wilkes 2017). Stable and suitable employment and promising work prospects have a significant impact on reducing out-migration (Houle, 2007; Esses et al, 2010; Griffiths et al., 2012). Employment is especially critical in attracting and retaining immigrants and international students in small- and medium-sized communities, as it provides economic security and wider community acceptance (Carter et al, 2008; Gien & Law, 2009; Walton-Roberts, 2012). Employment is also considered the first line of defence against poverty. This is especially the case for newcomers because they have had a greater possibility of falling into poverty in recent years (Dungan et al., 2013). Job-education and job-skills matches for immigrants and international students are even more important for retention (Hugo, 2008; Lewis, 2010). A high level of mismatch (more often the overqualification of newcomers) is more common among newcomers and international students (Green et al., 2010; Uppal & LaRochelle-Côté, 2014). However, the mismatch rate for employer-selected immigrants is significantly lower than that for those admitted directly from abroad, highlighting the importance of employer involvement in the immigrant selection process (Lu & Hou, 2020).

In addition to employment opportunities, providing a strong social support from the community and building a high sense of belonging also favourably influence the attraction and retention of immigrants and international students (Goss Gilroy Inc., 2005; Carter et al., 2009; Jurkova 2014; Bonikowska et al, 2017; Kaida et al, 2019). However, the proportion of immigrants and international students in Atlantic Canada is relatively small, as it is difficult for them to set up sufficient ethnic social networks and become involved with communities. Employment provides an important channel for immigrants and international students to build their social networks and establish a sense of belonging (Friesen, 2011) while simultaneously upgrading their professional skills and improving their language proficiency (Remennick, 2013).

2.2 The role of the employer: motivations, concerns, tools, practices, and resources

Even though both macro-institutional factors (the economic environment, societal context, immigration policies, and settlement services) and micro-individual factors (age, gender, education, ethnicity, and other attributes) can influence the economic integration of immigrants and international students, meso-organizational factors, such as organizational practices and resources, have a direct and fundamental role in determining and influencing the employment opportunities, economic integration, and career trajectories of immigrants and international students (Syed, 2008). Employers' input is key in both the selection and development of immigrants and international students for at least their first several years in Canada (Picot et al, 2016).

2.2.1 Employer motivations

Organizations in Canada are facing labour and skills shortages resulting from mass retirement, low fertility, and technological advancement (BDC, 2018). Atlantic Canada is experiencing an even more serious situation than the rest of the country due to its more severe population ageing and lower fertility rates (ACOA, 2019; APEC, 2019). Employers are trying to fill job vacancies by any means. By improving the labour force participation rate of under-represented groups and re-skilling or up-skilling the existing labour force, employers are finding immigrants and international students to be a significant new source of labour.

According to human capital theory, immigrants and international students possess high levels of human capital in terms of educational attainment and professional skills, which, when compared with the capital of Canadian-born workers, may have differential effects

on firm productivity (Hou et al., 2018). Education is viewed as a major determinant of long-term economic growth, as it increases the quality of human capital (Lucas, 1988). Younger immigrants and international student workers with a better understanding of new technology can complement older workers who have a better understanding of workforce norms and practices (Lazear, 1998), which can improve organizational performance.

Compared to their Canadian-born counterparts, immigrants and international students are also fundamentally heterogeneous in terms of their skills, abilities, and diverse work experiences and are considered important sources of innovation and creativity that can generate some synergistic effects while working side-by-side with their domestic-born peers (Hanson 2012; Ozgen et al., 2013). Additionally, organizations may also benefit from the diverse informational networks of their immigrant employees, which can be a key driver of creativity (Chua, 2018).

With increasing globalization and the diversification of the population, organizations are serving an increasingly diverse customer base and facing more intensive challenges from international markets. Therefore, a diverse workforce may help organizations better understand customer needs in Canada or abroad so as to better meet their needs. Additionally, due to immigrants' and international students' knowledge, information, and social networks linked to their origin countries, they can help decrease cultural and linguistic barriers and promote trust, potentially reducing trade costs and improving international trade (Genc et al., 2011; Aleskynska & Peri, 2014).

2.2.2 Employer concerns

Limited Official Language proficiency. Having proficient skill in the official language(s) is an important element of an individual's human capital. It reflects the effectiveness of individuals' oral and written communication and can directly affect the efficient transfer of personal knowledge and skills in their host countries (Chiswick & Miller, 2007, 2009; Zubin, 2007). As such, proficiency in the official language is a necessary condition for immigrants to effectively integrate into the Canadian labour market. The greater their proficiency in official languages is, the stronger the impact it has on their return to schooling and pre-immigration labour market experience as measured by earnings in the host country labour market (Chiswick & Miller, 2003). In 2016, over 72% of the immigrants' mother tongues were not English or French (Statistics Canada, 2017^{5b}).

Cultural differences. Culture can reflect and help interpret and predict individuals' attitudes towards work, family and behavioural patterns (Taras et al., 2013). While cultural

differences can improve creativity and innovation in a workforce, differences in both physical and verbal communication styles and cultural norms can also bring interpersonal conflict and misunderstanding to the workplace, which can reduce and even overshadow the benefits of cultural diversity (Chua, 2014; Frijns et al., 2014). Even immigrants from English- or French-speaking countries still face communication obstacles stemming from multicultural differentiation relevant to the work environment and individual differentiation from their own social-cultural background (Madziva et al., 2016).

Language proficiency and cultural differences can directly affect the way immigrants and international students utilize their soft skills, such as communication skills (written and oral), teamwork, conflict resolution, and adaptability, all of which are important to immigrants' long-term career development and success, as they reduce transaction costs (Deming 2017) and are extremely important in this era of declining routine employment due to globalization and technological advancement (Autor et al., 2003).

Immigrants and international students' unfamiliarity with workplace norms and practices. Workplace norms and practices are a kind of unwritten, "tacit knowledge" of an organization that reflects the organizational culture and is embedded into the greater national culture (Lai et al., 2017). Workplace norms and practices shape workers' behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs (Hammer et al., 2004). These workplace norms and practices include implicit rules about commitment, social relations, interaction patterns and work performance in majority organizations (Hammer et al., 2004). It is difficult for newcomers and international students who have no Canadian work experience to understand and align with Canadian workplace norms and practices, which are mainly learned through personal interactions. Without understanding these workplace norms and practices, immigrants and international students may find it difficult to fit into Canadian workplaces (Sakamoto et al., 2010).

Difficulty in evaluating immigrants' foreign credentials and work experience. Each country has its own educational and professional credential assessment system based on its unique economic, social, and business environment, and this can cause issues, especially with immigrants from cultures that differ considerably from mainstream Canadian culture. Furthermore, immigrants' working experiences are embedded into the specific business environment and social contexts of their origin countries. Both are fundamental bases for employers to evaluate the skill sets of immigrants, which, however, are likely to be unfamiliar to and unrecognized by employers, especially smaller

organizations, due to a lack of information and evaluation capacity (Buzdugan & Halli, 2009).

2.2.3 HR practices adapting to workforce diversity

Immigrant employment in the Canadian labour market has continuously increased in recent decades. To maximize organizational performance, managerial practices should respond to changes in workforce diversity (Tayeb, 1998). Immigrant employees come from different cultural backgrounds, causing them to interpret and respond to their work environment differently. This has a great influence on employers' adoption and implementation of recruitment- and retention-related HRM practices.

Recruitment channels. Given its positive influences on organizational pre-hire and post-hire recruitment outcomes, word-of-mouth communication used to be one of the most common sources of recruitment (Shinnar et al., 2004; Van Hove et al., 2014). However, it and other personal social networking sources heavily rely on the quality and size of individuals' social networks and largely exclude newcomers and international students due to their lack of access to these networks (Liu, 2007). A survey conducted by the Labour Market Information Council (LMIC) with recent immigrants found that newcomers' lack of professional contacts (21%) was one of their top three employment barriers, along with lack of Canadian work experience (39%) and lack of Canadian education (21%) (LMIC, 2019). However, social and professional networks are the primary source of quality hires (LinkedIn, 2015). Thanks to rapid technological advancement and wider use of the internet, online job advertising and search engines (job banks) have become a pervasive and effective tool for finding jobs and hiring new employees (Faberman & Kudlyak, 2016). An increasing number of employers in Atlantic Canada now use online recruiting technology to reach wider networks of immigrants and international students.

Training. Employee training means an organization's investment in employees' skill sets, which can increase productivity, employee job satisfaction, and employee loyalty. According to job embeddedness theory, the more embedded an employee is in the organization, the more likely he or she is to stay with the organization (Zhang et al., 2012). Both on-the-job and off-the-job embeddedness have direct impacts on migrant employees' turnover intentions. Formal and informal mentoring programs and work teams can engage immigrant employees and provide information and social support (Noe et al., 2002; Halvorsen et al., 2014). Ongoing on-the-job training provides immigrants with organization-specific skills that help them fit in the organization better and create an opportunity cost of leaving the organization (Halvorsen et al., 2014). However, if

employers believe that immigrant employees and international students have a higher turnover rate than native workers, employers will not be willing to invest in employer-sponsored on-the-job training (Shah, 2009), or they may be less likely to hire immigrants or international students in the first place, which is consistent with our employer survey findings. In addition to improving organization-specific skills, training can also work as a socialization process to enhance employees' organizational commitment so as to increase the retention of immigrants and international students (Ahmad & Baker, 2003).

Diversity management and training. With the increasing diversity of the Canadian workforce, the understanding and implementation of diversity management and training and the construction of an inclusive organizational culture are crucial for fully utilizing the human capital of immigrants and international students, enhancing their creativity, and fostering a deeper understanding of the global marketplace (Robinson & Dechant, 1997). To decrease the possibility of cultural conflict, organizations need to provide cross-cultural training to both managers and employees and provide mentoring to their diverse workforce (Koonce, 2002; Jones & George, 2014; Mujtaba, 2015). Organizations also need to allocate human resources, financial resources, and diversity training programs to equip members with the skills and knowledge to interact with a diverse workforce, foster a culture of mutual respect, reduce workplace discrimination and prejudice, and provide equal opportunities for career development to immigrants and international students, which helps to cultivate an inclusive, welcoming, and supportive organizational culture (Pendry et al., 2007; Belcourt et al., 2017) and, in turn, effectively promotes teamwork, organizational creativity, and customer satisfaction (Ely, 2004; Homan et al. 2015).

2.2.4 Employers' use of immigration policies

Since the economy is transitioning due to a massive shift in technology, labour force requirements are changing. Immigration policy should address labour market needs, as this will boost economic development. The TFW program, Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) and Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program (AIPP) are all employer-driven programs in which employers have been granted vital influence in the selection and/or integration of newcomers and international students. Because of the pre-arranged, employer sponsored nature of these programs, immigrants inducted through them are more rapidly integrated into the labour market than those who go through other programs (Picot et al., 2016; Neiterman et al., 2017).

However, sluggish processing times deter employers from reaching out overseas to fill shortages; the selection of economic immigrants can be non-transparent and very

complex, with numerous selection criteria. Many employers are unfamiliar with these complicated immigration policies and processes due to the often scattered and inadequate information supply (Ferrer et al, 2014; Fang et al, 2019).

2.3 The role of the settlement agencies

Settlement agencies play a major role in assisting immigrants and refugees in overcoming barriers specific to the newcomer experience so that they can successfully integrate into the Canadian society. Pre- and post-arrival programs have been the most successful part of the Canadian immigration system (OECD, 2019). Programs including early settlement support, orientation, language training, community connections, and employment-related services provide immigrants with the social services and employment counselling they need to ease their settlement and integration (Bloemraad, 2006). Through the Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program (AIPP), employers have been granted more influence and responsibility in working with settlement agencies to support the settlement and integration needs of their newcomer employees and their families in Atlantic provinces (AIPP Employer Guide).

Employers are also important partners in various areas of the settlement programmes, not only in employment-related services but also in language training and community connections (CIC, 2019). By providing occupation-specific language training (OSLT), job search training, interview skills training, bridge training, and mentoring programmes, governments, settlement agencies and other non-profit organizations, educational institutions and employers can work together to help immigrants meet their career goals. This multi-sector model of immigrant settlement and integration has proven to be the real strength of the Canadian immigration system (Sakamoto et al. 2010; Reitz et al., 2014; Kaushik & Drolet, 2018).

2.4 The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the labour market

While the major parties mentioned above have been concerned about the increasing workforce shortages at all skill levels, the coronavirus pandemic swept across the world, causing severe economic and social disruptions and dramatic changes in the supply and demand of the workforce, many of which are the result of new social distancing policies, widespread business closures, and travel restrictions. Due to the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, more than three million Canadians lost their jobs, and the unemployment rate soared to a record high of 13.7% in May. As the economy has re-

opened, jobs have begun returning. In September, the unemployment rate fell to 7.9%, which was close to the pre-pandemic level of 7.2% (Statistics Canada, 2020c).

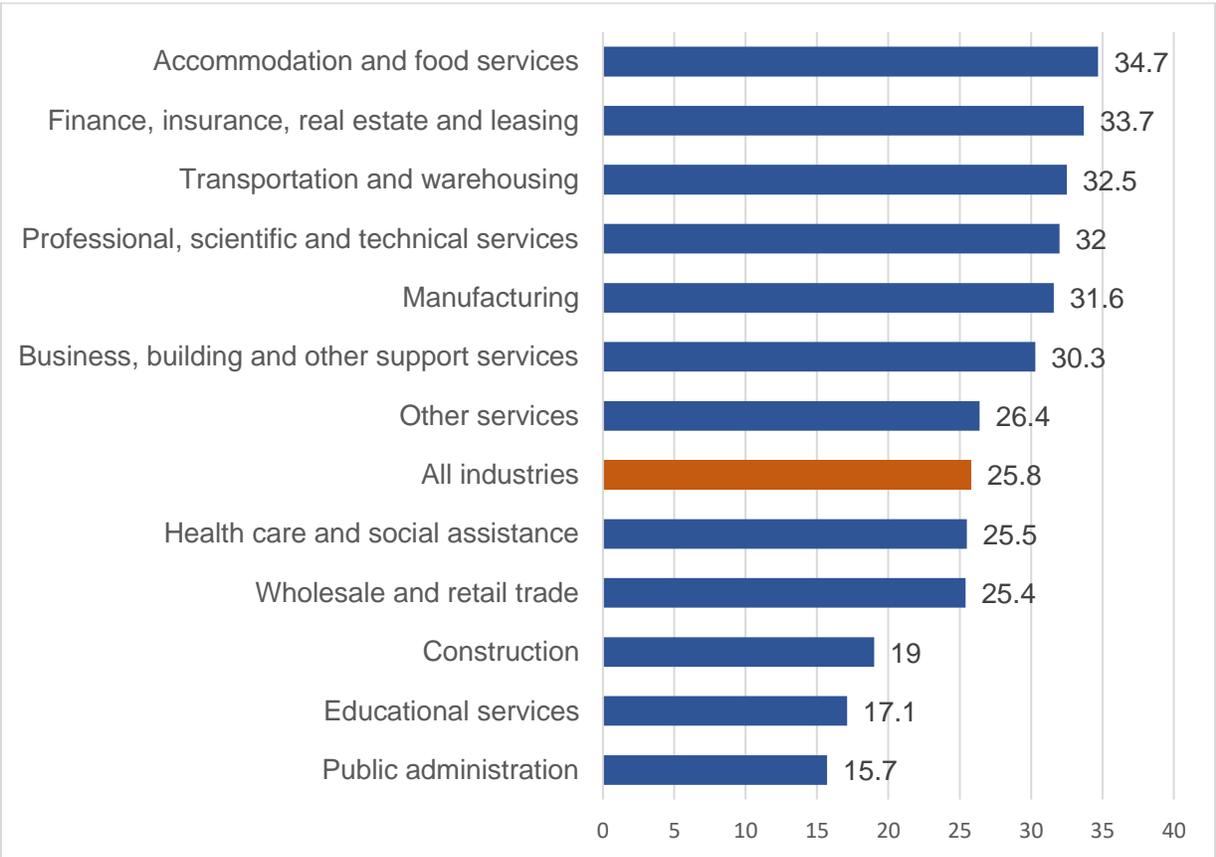
The Atlantic region is facing unprecedented high unemployment rates due to the short-term social distancing policies and business closures. The latest research suggests that the extent of the impact of the novel coronavirus pandemic on the economy will be determined by the underlying properties of the virus, policy responses, and the corresponding behaviour of consumers and corporations in response to the crisis (Carlsson-Szlezak et al., 2020). Since the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, the government has used various fiscal and monetary policies to limit the damage from the pandemic. Up to \$193 billion CAD in various subsidies and tax deductions for both business and individuals and an interest rate reduction to 0.25% and other measures have increased market liquidity (Government of Canada, 2020b; IMF, 2020). All of these measures can improve the situations on both the supply and demand sides of the market. As consumers are cautious about the economic outlook and their personal income security, they are expected to reduce their consumption of unnecessary goods and products due to a continuous decrease in household income and savings (McKinsey, May 2020). It is a good sign that consumers with pessimistic opinions are numbering fewer and fewer, and the remaining pessimism may decline further as more supporting policies are launched and the pandemic becomes better controlled, especially in Atlantic Canada (McKinsey, May 2020). Businesses have also responded promptly to accommodate shifting public behaviour and health interests, such as changing their methods of product delivery, changing types of products, increasing online marketing, increasing automation, and allowing more employees to work from home or remotely (Statistics Canada, 2020d). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Atlantic Canada was experiencing healthy economic growth and its lowest unemployment rate in 40 years. The novel coronavirus pandemic is likely to have a temporary or short-term impact on the economy, and the Canadian economy may experience a “V-shaped shock” and expect full economic recovery, although the optimism on this front may dim if a second or even a third wave hits the region (CIC, 2020a).

Population ageing and technological progress are common phenomenon around the world today. The ageing of the population is more serious in Atlantic provinces, which have a median age of over 43 years old. In Newfoundland and Labrador for example, over the last 20 years, the median age rose by 10 years to 47.1 years old in 2019, making the province the oldest in average population in the country (Statistics Canada, 2019a). Structural labour shortages caused by demographic shifts and technical changes may be eased or eliminated by the coronavirus crisis in the short term but will reappear after the

economy is fully re-opened. According to ManpowerGroup’s employment survey for Q2 2020, before the pandemic, employers in Atlantic Canada reported a net employment outlook of +9% (ManpowerGroup, 2020). A recent study found that a large number of early retirements occurred during the pandemic, diminishing the size of the labour force (Coibion et al., 2020), so labour and skill shortages may in fact be worse after the crisis. Immigration is thus more important than ever for the economic growth of Canada as a whole and Atlantic Canada in particular in order to ensure both economic recovery and long-term prosperity (CIC 2020a).

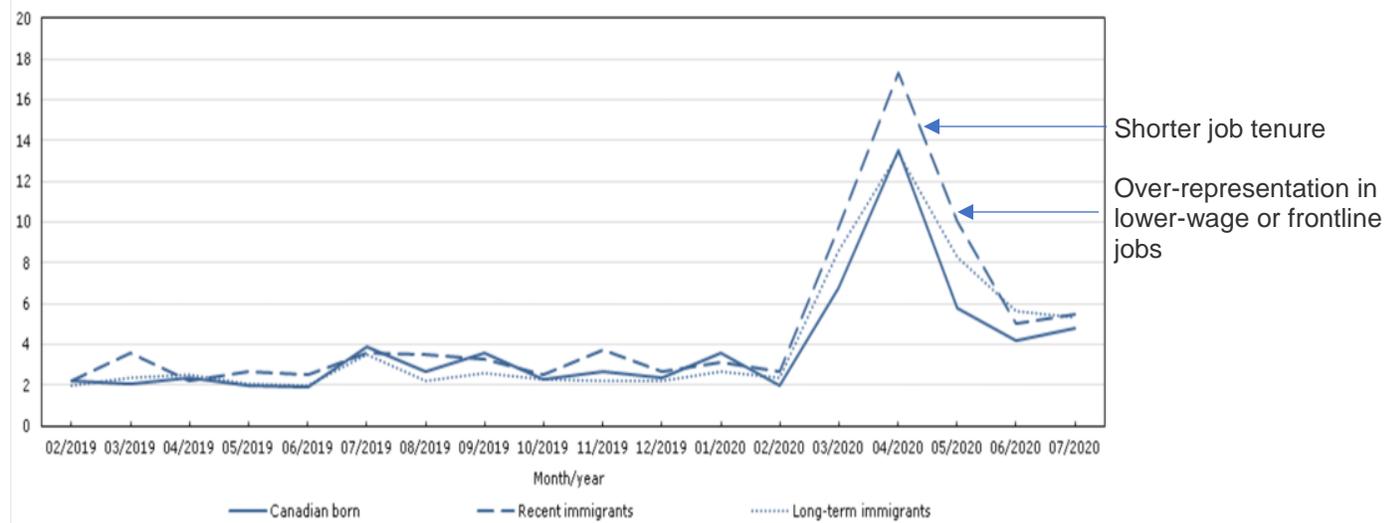
Unsurprisingly, short-term disruptions caused by the pandemic have impacted sectors unequally. Some industries and groups of workers have been impacted more than others. The food and accommodation services, transportation, leisure, and retail trade sectors have been hit the hardest (CNBC, 2020). The first two sectors are also industries in which immigrants are traditionally more likely to be employed (Yssaad & Fields, 2018; Statistics Canada, 2018a. Figure 1).

Figure 1: Immigrants’ industrial employment profile (%) (Statistics Canada, 2018a)



Additionally, immigrants, especially newcomers, have been one of the most vulnerable groups during the pandemic due to their shorter job tenure and over-representation in low-wage or frontline jobs (Baert et al., 2020; Statistics Canada, 2020a. Figure 2).

Figure 2: Rates of transition from employment to non-employment among individuals ages 20 to 64, 2019-2020 (Statistics Canada, 2020a)



In contrast, some industries have benefitted from the crisis in terms of employment growth. Health, education, professional, scientific, and technical services are sheltered from this crisis due to increasing demand for their products and services and their ability to shift more seamlessly to work-from-home arrangements. The pandemic is also changing customer preferences and labour demand, and businesses and workers will all have to adjust their corresponding practices and behaviours both in the short-run and long term (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020; Baert et al., 2020). According to a Canadian consumer survey published during the pandemic, Canadians are becoming accustomed to digital activities, including online shopping, remote learning, and online meetings. They are expected to continue reducing in-person activities, such as travel, events, and shopping (McKinney, 2020), which means businesses may need to increase their investment in shifting more of their operations online and supporting remote work. Immigrants are also showing a growing presence in the professional, scientific, and technical sectors, which provide a base for change in the business world (Yssaad & Fields, 2018).

The pandemic crisis has caused a large number of organizations to downsize or close, which means fewer job opportunities and more layoffs, even for experienced workers. Post-secondary students graduating this year are facing an even worse situation because organizations prefer to hire experienced workers. Recent graduates have had to accept

lower paying jobs since the financial crisis in 2008 (CNBC, 2020). They may even experience consistent disadvantages in the labour market for the next 2 to 10 years because of this crisis. These challenges will be especially difficult for those with fewer skills and degrees from less prestigious schools or disciplines (Oreopoulos et al, 2012). Due to their lack of social networks and the fact that they have fewer employment contacts, and potential discrimination, it is even harder for international students to find job opportunities (Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Scott et al., 2015). Without a job, there is no reason for them to stay in Canada as they cannot support themselves and their families, and they may return to their home country instead (Esses et al., 2018). Hence, it is extremely important to remove employment barriers faced by newcomers and international students, who are one of the most vulnerable groups during the global crisis from the employment point of view.

3.0 DATA ANALYSIS AND MAJOR FINDINGS

The project explores five key aspects of employers' perceptions and experiences related to hiring newcomers and international students based on our pre-COVID employer survey conducted in 2019.

- Employers' perceptions of the local economy, business performance, and hiring activities;
- Employers' perceptions of labour or skills shortages and hiring difficulties;
- Employers' attitudes towards hiring immigrants and international students;
- Employers' perceptions of the effectiveness of immigration policies for Atlantic Canada; and
- How the retention of immigrants and international students can be improved.

3.1 Employers' perceptions of the local economy, business performance and hiring activities

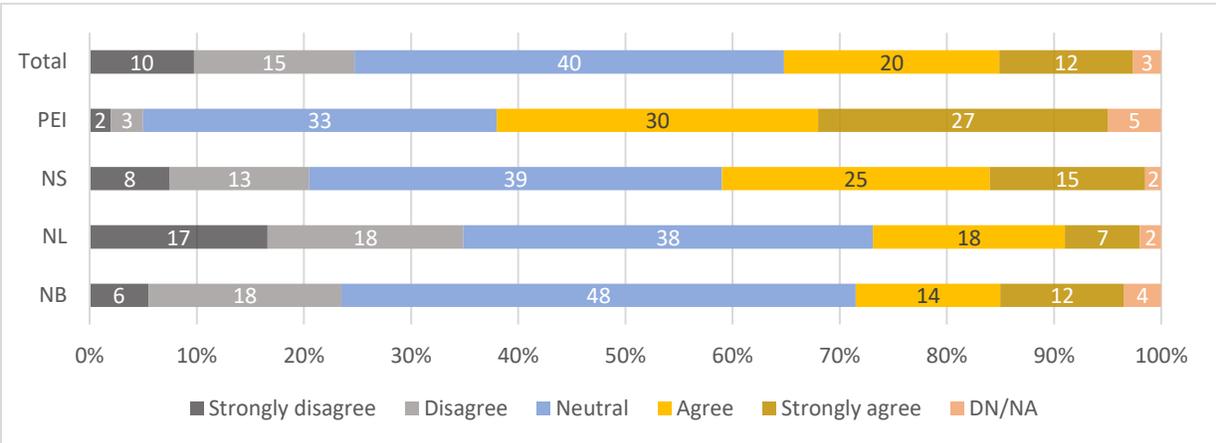
Along with capital and technology, labour (in terms of both quality and quantity) affects economic growth. Economic growth in turn leads to more hiring. As such, economic growth stimulates more job creation and can thus serve as a useful predictive tool for employment growth (Schmid, 2008). According to the World Economic Forum and the International Monetary Fund, a one percent increase in GDP in Canada is associated with an increase in national employment of 0.6% or higher (WEF & IMF, 2016).

Employers tend to hire more workers when their perception of the economy is positive (Bank of Canada, 2019). Growth tends to absorb more labour in some industries than other industries, especially in industries that involve more innovation and knowledge creation. However, limits on the number of available qualified workers can constrain such expansion.

3.1.1 Employers’ perception of economic growth in the next 3 years

Employers’ perceptions of the current and potential near-term performance of the economy may provide an indicator of possible hiring trends, which can be useful in formulating regional policies and practices to alleviate skill and labour shortages. Figure 3 illustrates overall employer confidence before the COVID-19 pandemic regarding whether the economy would grow over the next three years.

Figure 3: Employer perceptions of provincial economic growth in the next three years (% of employers; before the pandemic)



Overall, 40% of respondents were unsure about whether the economy would grow, and there were more respondents who felt it would grow than who felt it would not. At a provincial level, however, differences appeared. Employers in PEI were much more optimistic about the provincial economy. Fifty-seven percent of organizations agreed to some degree that the economy would grow in the next three years, whereas 33% held neutral opinions and 5% disagreed that such growth would occur. PEI is currently benefiting from steady immigration and a booming tourism industry (Conference Board of Canada, 2019). Economic migration has driven PEI’s healthy population growth, which supports economic activities and hiring. While PEI has experienced difficulty retaining newcomers, this is improving as more immigrants choose to stay in the province

(Conference Board Report, 2017). This and other developments suggest an above-average growth trajectory in the region for PEI's economy.

In Nova Scotia, 40% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the economy would grow in the next three years, while 21% disagreed or strongly disagreed. The province's job growth is still robust, and its housing market is brisk; both are fuelled by strong population growth as a result of international migration. Rising immigration targets, especially under the Atlantic Immigration Pilot programme, will likely attract more economic immigrants. This should support labour market activities and household income, which in turn support consumer spending and investment in the housing market.

New Brunswick respondents were more muted in their expectations for economic growth. This may be due to the province's subdued non-residential investment, weakness in manufacturing, and struggling export-oriented industries.

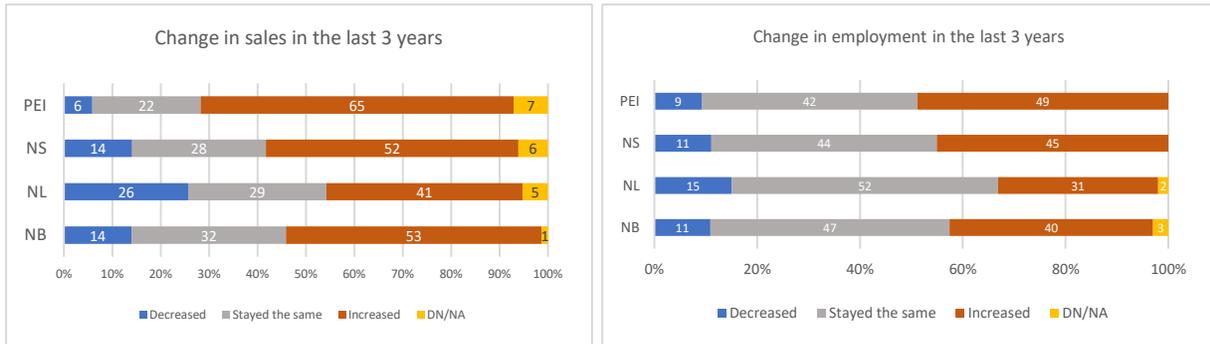
Respondents in Newfoundland and Labrador were least optimistic about the economic prospects over the next three years. Just 25% of surveyed respondents agreed to some degree that the provincial economy would grow in the next three years, while 35% disagreed to some degree. The provincial economy is heavily dependent on oil, gas and related industries. However, the unstable price of oil has had a large impact on business confidence and, as a result, has indirectly affected hiring, sometimes acting as a catalyst for employment growth and other times as an obstacle that may force some employers to put their hiring plans on hold for fear of having to lay off new hires when the economy turns sour.

3.2 Employers' current sales and hiring

3.2.1 Current sales and hiring by province

Respondents in the for-profit sector experienced growth in both sales and hiring over the last three years. There were differences in the provinces' experiences over the past three years, as shown in Figure 4. PEI had the largest number of respondents reporting growth in both revenue (65%) and employment (49%). Newfoundland and Labrador had the largest percentage of employers reporting decline in both sales (26%) and employment (15%). In fact, our data show that there is a strong correlation between responses in sales and employment.

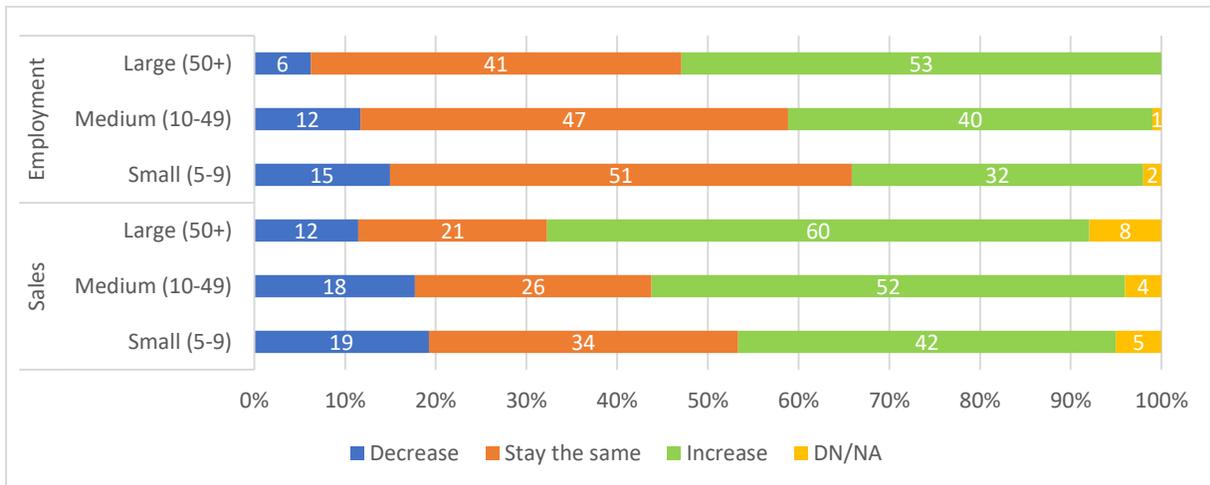
Figure 4: Change in revenue/employment over the past three years



3.2.2 Current sales and hiring by size and location

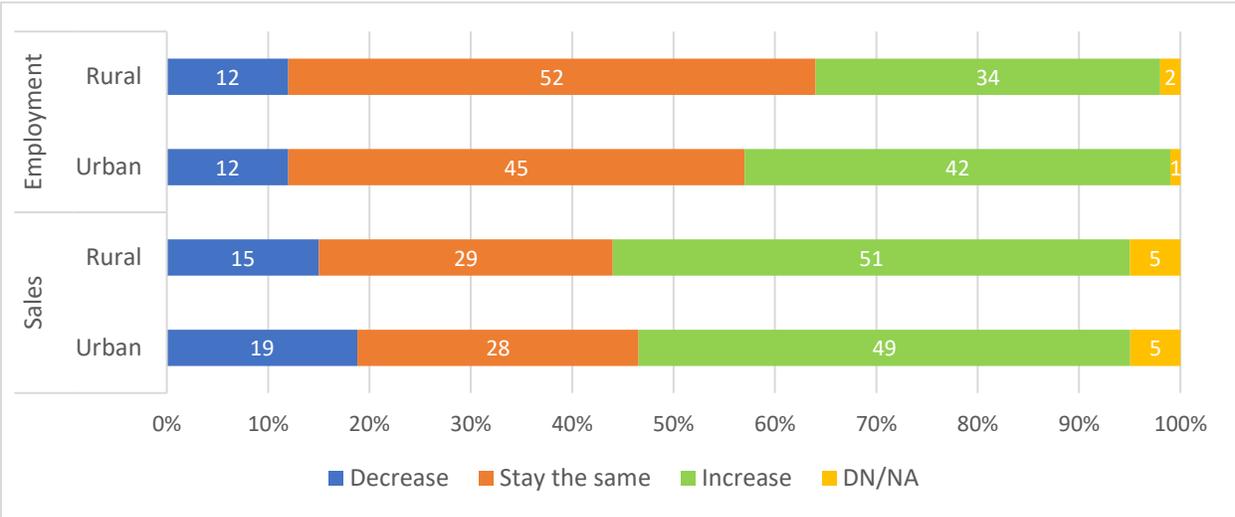
Economies of scale are related to firm size. The larger the firm is, the more capacity and resources (necessary and slack resources) it has, which leads to firm expansion in terms of both revenue and employees. Different types of slack resources, such as financial, human, and social resources, can be mutually substituted, which is very important in a tight labour market and helps buffer firms against external shocks (George, 2005).

Figure 5: Current sales and hiring, by size



As Figure 5 shows, the larger the firm is, the more likely it is to have reported sales and employment growth in the last three years.

Figure 6: Current sales and hiring, by location



Generally, for businesses in rural areas, especially for rural service firms, it is difficult to build economies of scale because of limited local demand. It is also difficult to acquire resources and access services, such as the internet and transportation, in rural areas. The trends of ageing and declining populations are most egregious in rural areas in Atlantic Canada, which means there is also lower demand for businesses.

According to the survey, employers in urban areas were more likely to report growth in employment than those in rural areas (42% vs. 34%), while employers in rural areas saw slightly more revenue growth than those in urban areas (51% vs. 49%) (Figure 6). The reason for this is that more employers in rural areas are in the retail sector, which had a much higher probability of reporting revenue growth than other sectors. However, employment growth in the other service sectors was higher in urban areas than in rural areas and surpassed the employment growth in the retail sector. There is also a high portion of small and medium firms in rural areas, and such firms have a lower capacity to attract and assimilate employees.

3.3 Employers’ expected revenue and hiring

3.3.1 Expected revenue and hiring by province

Looking at the next three years, firms were quite optimistic regarding their sales while believing that employment growth would remain stable with that over the last 3 years. As expected, very few expected revenue and employment to shrink (Figures 7 & 8).

Figure 7: Expected change in revenue over the next 3 years

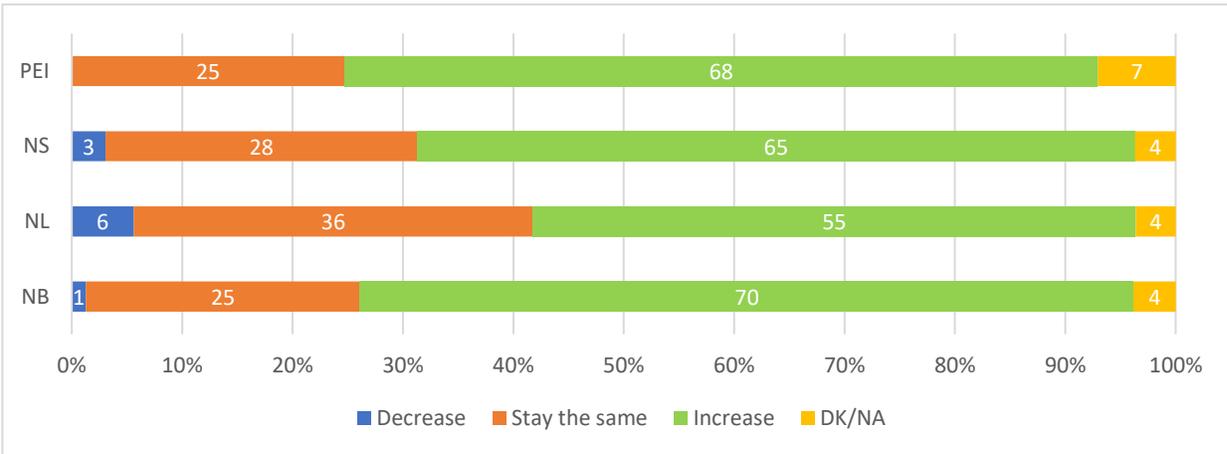
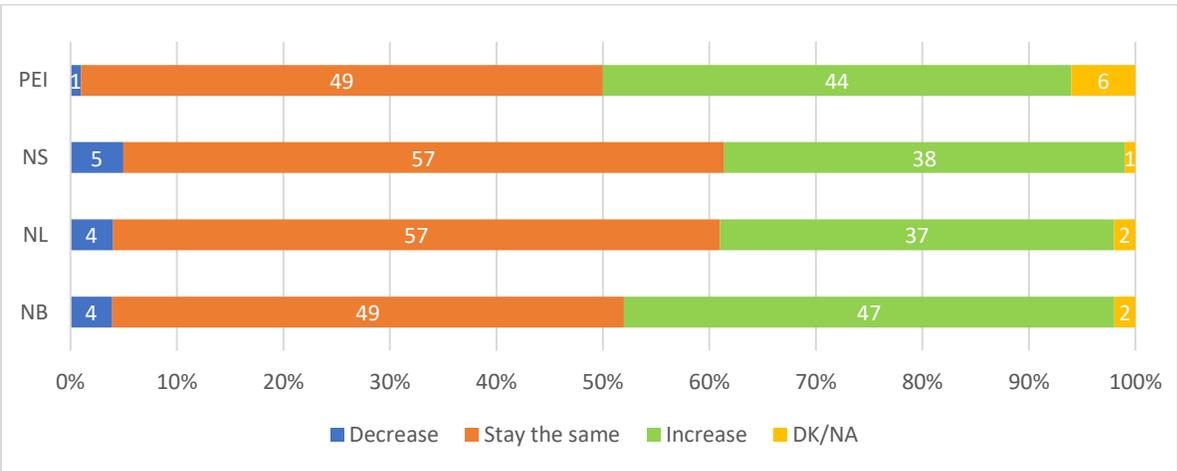


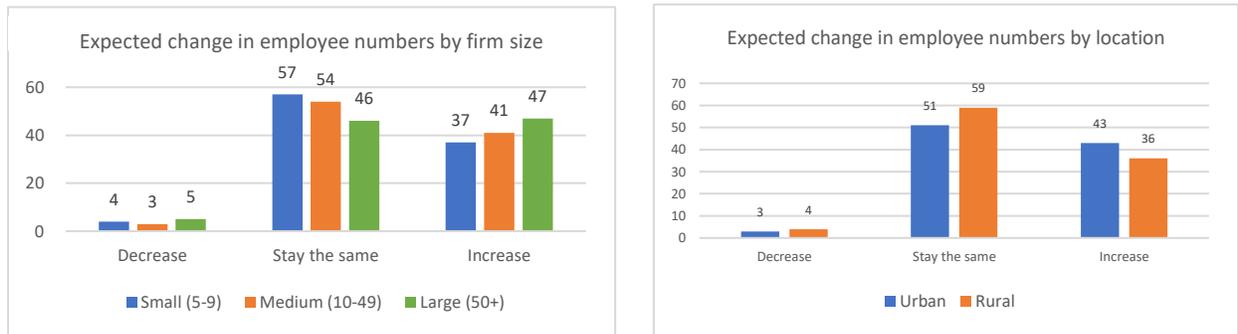
Figure 8: Expected change in employee numbers over the next 3 years



3.3.2 Expected hiring by location and size

Expected employment growth differed by organizational size and location (Figure 9). The relative optimism of larger organizations may reflect their relative strength from being more established and having access to more resources than smaller businesses. It is not surprising that there is more optimism in urban areas than in rural areas. Because SMEs employed 81% of the total private labour force in 2017 (Government of Canada, 2019) and more than 60% of the population of Atlantic Canada was living in rural areas (APEC, 2019), it is important to help and support employers in SMEs and rural areas improve their businesses in order to attract and assimilate more employees.

Figure 9: Expected change in employee numbers (%)



According to the employer survey, there is a strong correlation between revenue growth and employment growth and between current revenue growth and near-term revenue growth, while there is much less correlation between firms' business performance and the provincial economy.

The private sector across Atlantic Canada experienced healthy revenue and employment growth (Figure 4), and even more organizations expected continuous strong hiring and business activity over the next three years (Figures 7 & 8). Employers in PEI were the most optimistic about revenue and employment growth. They were also the most optimistic regarding the current state of the provincial economy. Employers in Newfoundland and Labrador, on the other hand, were the most pessimistic about their business outlook and hiring.

Employers in larger organizations displayed more optimism about the economic outlook for their province. Those in transportation and warehousing; arts, entertainment and recreation; public administration; and education services were more optimistic than those in other industries. Employers in real estate rental and leasing; agriculture, forestry, fishing; administrative support, waste management, and remediation services; professional, scientific, and technical services had a more pessimistic outlook. Obviously, the perception by industry may vary across provinces and regions as well.

3.4 Labour and skill shortages and hiring difficulties

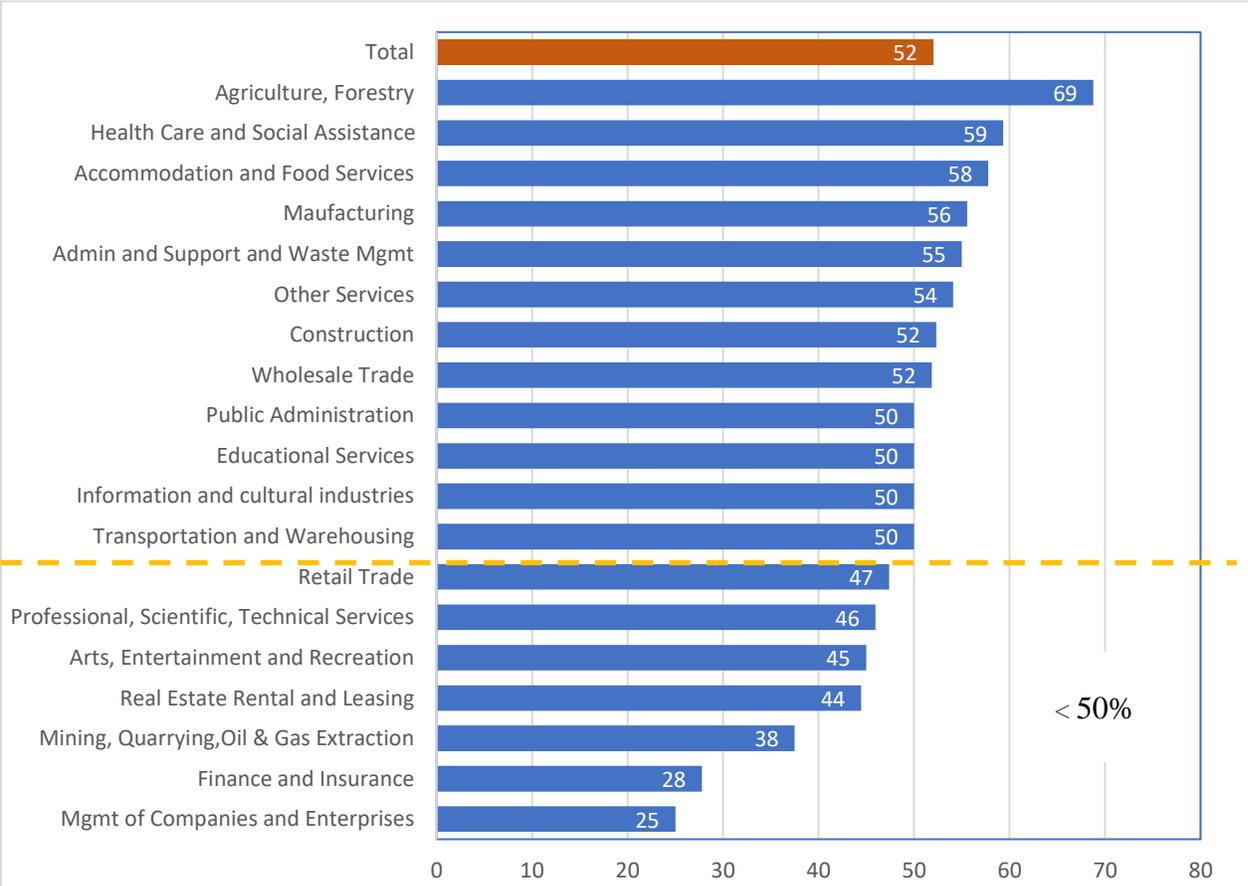
Labour and skill shortages occur when labour demand surpasses the quality or quantity of the labour supply. Labour shortages occur when there is an insufficient supply of job candidates, while skill shortages occur when there is a lack of skills necessary for and specific to the available jobs. There are two major types of skill/labour shortages, cyclical and structural; cyclical shortages are mainly driven by the economic cycle and can be

resolved in the near term, while structural shortages are mainly driven by demographic and technological changes and cannot be resolved in the short term (Fang, 2009).

3.4.1 Hiring difficulties

Approximately 52% of the employers in Atlantic Canada surveyed reported that they had had difficulty filling job vacancies in the last three years. There was cross-province and cross-regional variation. The difficulties were more serious in NB (59%), PEI (58%) and NS (56%) than in NL (46%). When asked about whether they think the province will face labour and skill shortages in the next three years, a high percentage of employers expected this situation to happen (60%).

Figure 10: Share of employers reporting hiring difficulties in the last 3 years by industry (%)



Employers in rural areas were more likely to have experienced hiring difficulties in the last 3 years than those in urban areas (56% vs. 50%).

The larger the organization is, the higher the chance it experiences difficulty filling job vacancies. Only 42% of small-sized employers reported having hiring difficulties, while 70% of large-sized employers reported having hiring difficulties in the last 3 years.

Shortages do not have an equal impact on all industries. Figure 10 shows considerable discrepancies in hiring difficulties across industries. Industries with challenging work conditions are most likely to report labour and skill shortages: agriculture, forestry and fishing; health care and social assistance; accommodation and food services; manufacturing; administrative support, waste management and remediation services; and construction. The industries that enjoy more labour force supply and are less likely to report hiring difficulties: company and enterprise management; finance and insurance; mining, quarrying, and oil & gas extraction; real estate rental and leasing; arts, entertainment and recreation; professional, scientific, technical and management services; and retail trade. Other studies have identified a similar pattern of hiring difficulties across industries (House of Commons, 2013; BDC, 2018)

3.4.2 Main reasons for hiring difficulties

The top five reasons for hiring difficulties were lack of applicants (27%), lack of necessary experience in applicants (21%), lack of necessary skills in applicants (20%), lack of work ethic (7%), lack of necessary education (5%), and high salary expectations (5%). This indicates that Atlantic Canada is undergoing structural labour/skill shortages, which cannot be solved in the short term by prolonging working hours, increasing wages, or initiating recruitment campaigns.

Table 2 indicates cross-province variation in the reasons behind hiring difficulties. For organizations in PEI and NB, the lack of job applicants is the primary reason for labour and skill shortages. For businesses in NL and NS, these shortages are mainly caused by job applicants' lack of necessary work experience. Employers from all four provinces reported similar attitudes towards a lack of necessary skills. Smaller percentages of employers also cited lack of work ethic, education, and high salary expectations as reasons behind their labour and skill shortages.

Table 2: Main reasons for hiring difficulties

	NB	NL	NS	PEI	Small size	Medium size	Large size	Urban	Rural
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Too few applicants (1)	<u>33</u>	24	20	<u>34</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>29</u>	21	20	<u>37</u>
Lack of necessary experience (2)	21	<u>26</u>	<u>22</u>	9	25	20	19	24	17
Lack of necessary skills (3)	19	21	20	19	13	21	<u>25</u>	<u>24</u>	13
Work ethic (4)	3	8	7	12	7	6	7	7	6
Lack of necessary education (5)	7	2	6	3	5	4	6	5	4
Salary issues	3	9	3	7	9	5	1	5	6
Lack of necessary experience & skills (2)+(3)+(5)	47	49	48	31	43	45	50	53	34

Job skills can be measured with two basic approaches: school-based and work-based approaches (Schultz, 1972; Nafukho et al., 2004). Work experience is an implicit learning process in the workplace that involves formal on-the-job training and informal training that comes from learning by doing and helps build job-related skills (Tesluk & Jacobs, 1998). If education and work experience are considered sources of skills, we can see that applicants' lack of necessary skills is the most important reason for hiring difficulties (46%) for employers in NB, NL, and NS. Due to the small population in PEI, the labour force pool there is smaller and less elastic in facing business expansion, which is similar to the situation in other small rural areas. In terms of organizational size, the larger the organization is, the more skilled occupations it has, and the more likely it faces skill shortages.

The survey also shows that salaries are not an issue for large organizations when seeking qualified workers, mainly because larger organizations are normally unionized and have more resources to provide higher, above average salaries (Kuman & Stengos, 1985; Benjamin et al., 2017). A higher percentage of employers in NL reported that salary issues kept them from attracting workers, and the province also has the lowest minimum wage in the Atlantic provinces.

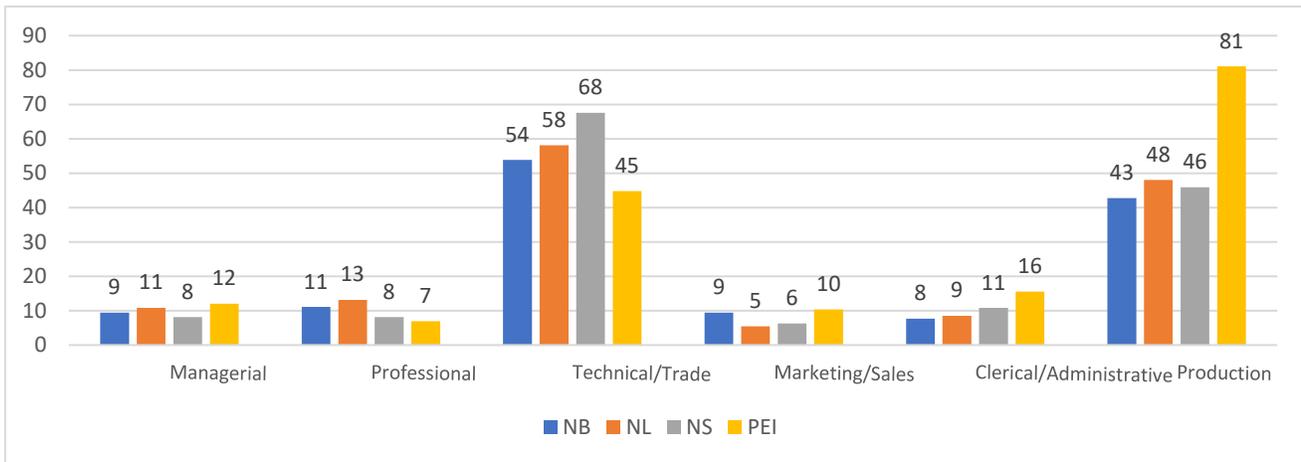
According to the survey, “too few job applicants” was the most common reason for hiring difficulties as reported by organizations in trade, accommodation and food services; agriculture, forestry, and fishing; and transportation and warehousing, which are very labour-intensive industries. “Lack of applicants with the necessary experience” was the most common reason given by organizations in construction, health care and social assistance; mining, quarrying, and oil & gas extraction; and arts, entertainment and recreation, where a certain level of hands-on experiences or trade certificates is required to perform the job tasks. A lack of applicants with the necessary skills was the primary reason given by respondents in the manufacturing; information and cultural industries; finance and insurance; professional, scientific, technical and management services; administrative support, waste management and remediation services, which are mostly knowledge-intensive industries where a certain level of skill is essential for most jobs.

3.4.3 The main types of occupations experiencing shortages (in the last three years)

The most common types of occupations in which employers reported difficulty filling vacancies were technical/trade roles (58%), production roles with no trade/certification requirements (51%), professional roles (10%), managerial roles (10%), and clerical/administrative roles (10%).

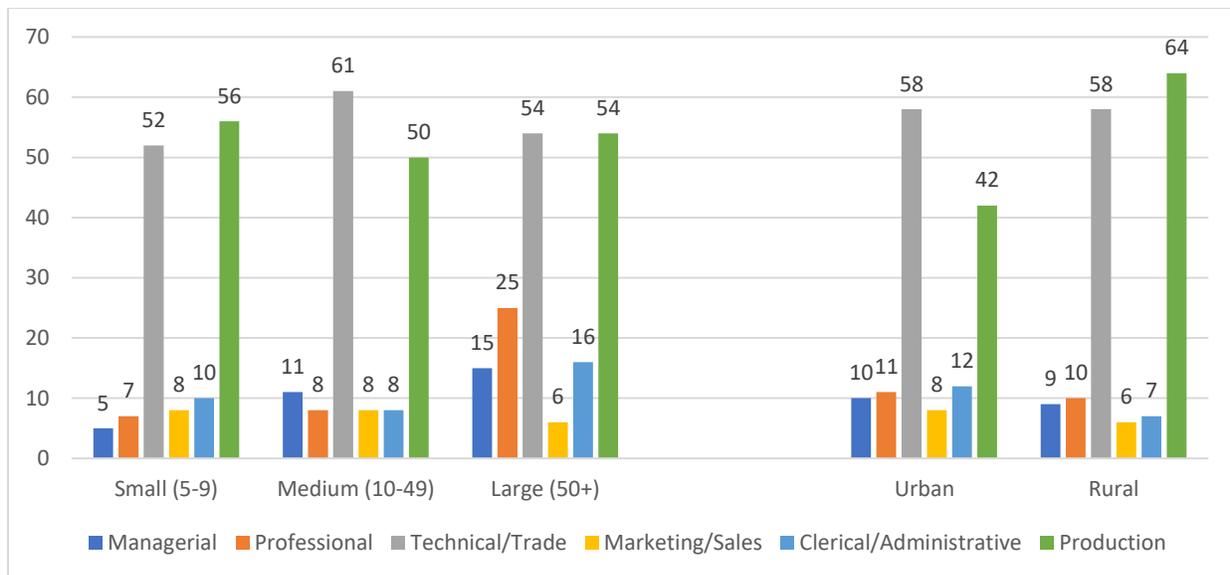
Technical/trade roles and production roles with no trade/certification requirements are the two most common areas of shortages in all four provinces. However, there is a subtle difference across provinces. Employers in NB, NL, and NS were most likely to report shortages in technical/trade positions, which require experience and skills. A lack of workers for production roles with no trade/certification requirements was ranked as the most common reason for shortages in PEI, likely driven by the province’s pillar industries such as agriculture, fishery, and tourism. This is also consistent with the result that PEI faced more serious labour and skill shortages than other provinces, and the main reason for hiring difficulties in PEI was “too few applicants” (Figure 11).

Figure 11: The main types of positions experiencing hiring difficulties by province (%)



Organizations in urban areas were slightly more likely to report hiring difficulties due to lack of experience and skills than those in rural areas (53% vs. 34%) (Table 2). Organizations in rural areas were much more likely to experience shortages due to lack of applicants, especially workers for production roles without trade/certification requirements (64% vs. 42%) (Figure 12).

Figure 12: The main types of positions experiencing hiring difficulties by location and size



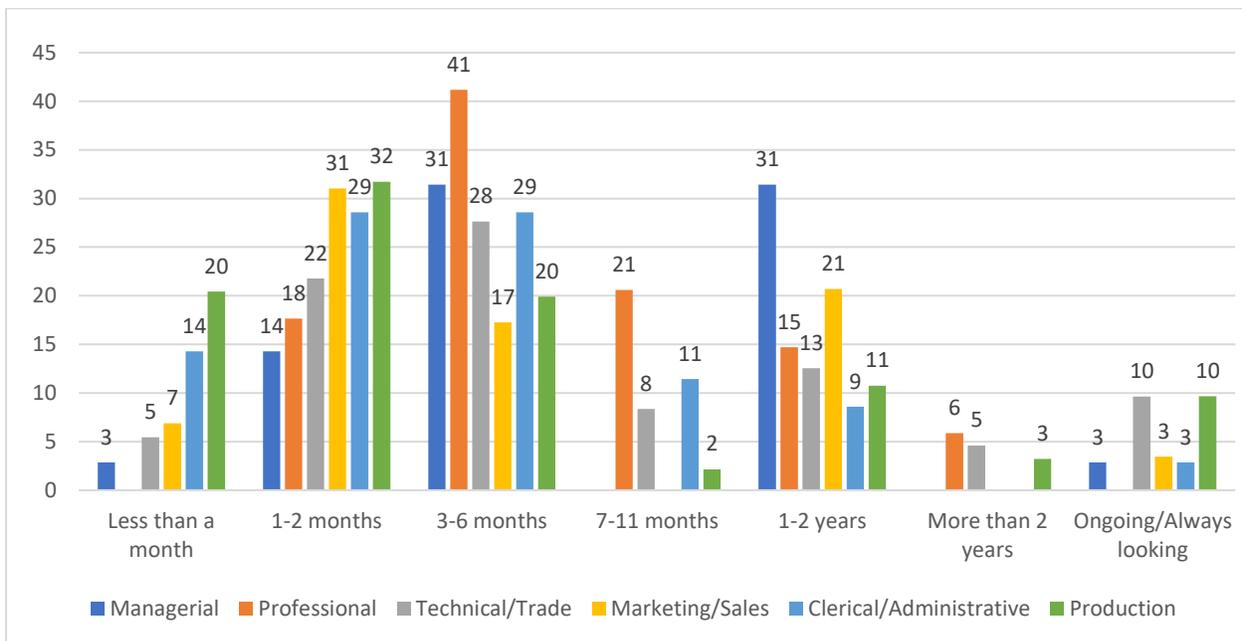
As Figure 12 shows, small- and medium-sized organizations were more likely to report shortages of technical/trade workers and workers for production roles without trade/certification requirements than larger organizations were. However, large

organizations also experienced some shortcomings in technical/trade and professional positions.

3.4.4 The approximate duration of vacancies

The survey classified positions into six categories: managerial, professional, technical/trade, marketing and sales, clerical/administrative, and production (with no trade/certification requirements).

Figure 13: The approximate duration of vacancies reported by employers, by occupation (% of employers)



In general, approximately 50% of employers reported vacancies in all kinds of occupations that can be filled within 6 months, and occupations requiring higher skill levels are reportedly more difficult to fill. Manager positions typically require multiple skills and have a greater impact on the performance of a team or organization (Augier & Teece, 2009). Therefore, employers suggested these positions take the longest time to fill: approximately 31% of employers reported they take more than 2 years to fill, while 31% of them responded that they require 3-6 months to fill. Professional positions reportedly take longer to fill than technical/trade positions. Employers reported a similar perception of hiring difficulty for positions in clerical/administration and marketing/sales, saying that most of these positions can be filled within 6 months. Not surprisingly, employers found workers for production roles with no trade/certification requirements are typically the

easiest to fill. Even so, hiring difficulty was still widely reported (30%) in Figure 11. Some positions may take longer because of their lower wages, harsh working conditions, remote locations or a combination of these factors, according to the employer survey.

3.5 Attitudes and behaviours towards hiring immigrants and international students

Immigrants within the core working age group comprised 26% of the Canadian labour force in 2017 and made 66% of the employment gains between 2016 and 2017 (Yssaad & Fields, 2018). The transition rate of international students to permanent residences also continues to increase (Lu & Hou, 2015), and providing better job opportunities that match their education and skills is essential to ensure that they stay (Esses et al., 2018). Employer attitudes towards hiring immigrants and international students have an important impact on such individuals' integration and retention.

3.5.1 Hiring tools

In the past, word of mouth, newspaper ads, and job fairs were the most common recruiting channels. With the advancement of new technologies, organizations increasingly rely on internet-based recruitment channels and other online technologies, such as online recruitment websites and social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook, to access the right candidate for the right position, and these technologies enable employers to reach a wider audience and provide efficient data analysis (Krishna & Mohan, 2016).

When asked about their most important recruitment tool, the frequently mentioned tools by employers are: online job banks (35%), word of mouth/recommendation (19%), and social media (17%). When other tools were taken into consideration, the number of employers selecting online job banks increased to 47%, those selecting word of mouth/recommendations increased to 34%, and those selecting social media increased to 32%. We can see that personal social networks, which immigrants and international students lack, are still very important for job hunting. Traditional tools such as newspaper ads and job fairs are now rarely used by employers (1% and 3%, respectively).

The larger an organization is, the more it uses formal recruitment channels. For example, 49% of larger organizations use online job banks, while 30% of small organizations use them; 25% of the small organizations use word of mouth/recommendations, while only 10% of large organizations use these.

Employers in urban areas make heavy use of online job banks (41%); in rural areas, word of mouth/recommendations (21%), online job banks (23%), and social media (22%) are used by employers. These results show that it would be even more difficult for newcomers and international students without social networks to find job opportunities in rural areas. Community service organizations should provide a bridge to connect them with employers.

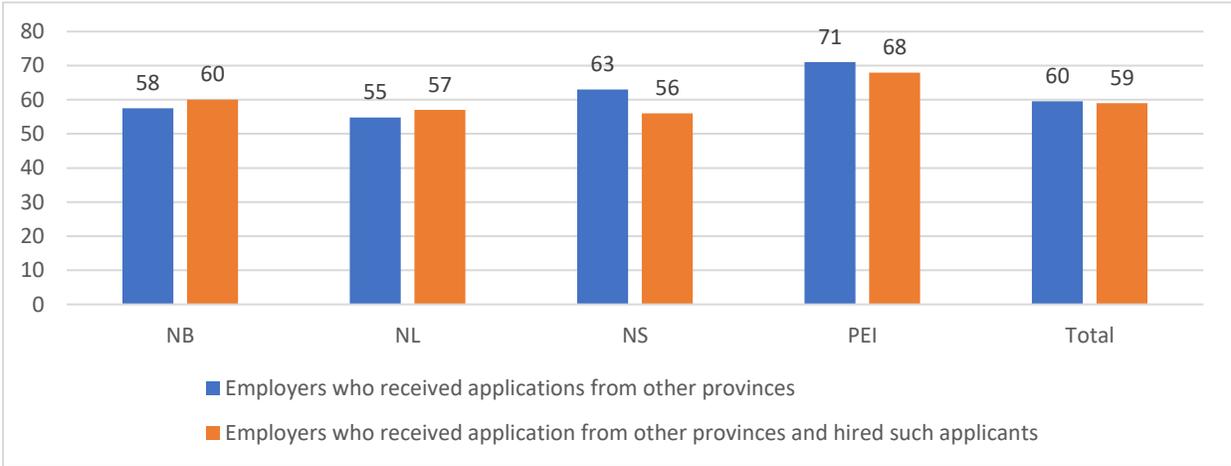
As shown in section 3.4.1, approximately 52% of the employers in Atlantic Canada surveyed reported that they had had difficulty filling job vacancies in the last three years. Such difficulties are more common in NB (59%), PEI (58%) and NS (56%) than in NL (46%). Therefore, employers in Atlantic Canada have been trying to recruit employees from outside of the province or other countries/regions.

3.5.2 Hiring from other provinces

Figure 14 shows that 60% of employers received applications from people in other provinces, but of those, only 59% hired an applicant from a different province. In total, 35% of employers hired applicants from other provinces.

Figure 14 also shows that PEI is more attractive to job applicants from other provinces than the other three provinces are, and PEI employers are more likely to hire those applicants, while NL is least attractive to applicants from other provinces. Employers in NL were less likely to report hiring difficulties. However, they are more willing to hire applicants from other provinces if there are labour and skill shortages. Even for people from other provinces with Canadian work experience and no language barriers, the lower proportion of employers hiring them in Atlantic Canada shows that employers may not believe they will stay for a long time—at least, not according to our employer consultations in all four Atlantic provinces.

Figure 14: Hiring from other provinces (%)

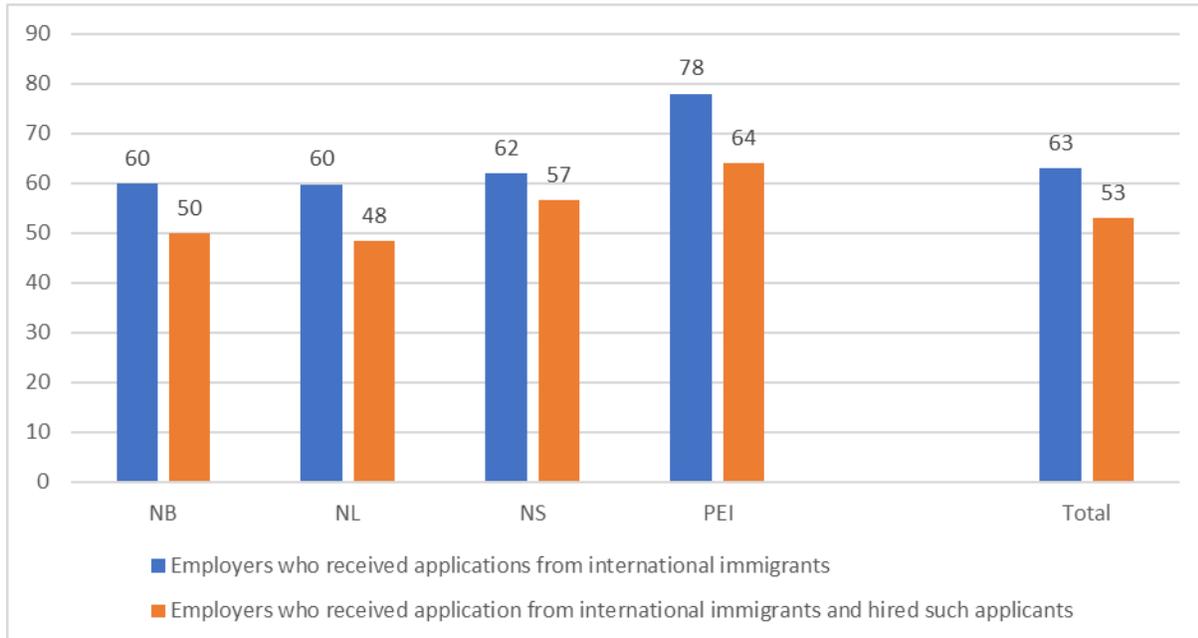


3. 5.3 Immigrant hiring activities by province

The survey shows that immigrants and international students actively participate in the labour market. Approximately 63% of employers interviewed have received job applications from immigrants and international students. The survey showed that 78% of the employers in PEI received applications from newcomers and international students, the highest percentage among the Atlantic provinces (Figure 15). Approximately 60% of employers received such applications in the other three Atlantic provinces.

Among those employers who have received applications from immigrants and international students, 53% of employers hired immigrants and international students. Among them, PEI employers were most likely to hire such applicants (64%), while employers in NL were the least likely to hire such applicants (43%) (Figure 15). In fact, PEI employers were also the most likely to help immigrants integrate into organizations or local society by changing their operation practices to better accommodate immigrants and international students. Approximately 24% of PEI employers interviewed who have hired immigrants and international students have changed their operation practices, and 29% of them have helped employees become permanent residents or landed immigrants.

Figure 15: Hiring immigrants by province (%)



3.5.4 Immigrant hiring activities by industry

In 11 out of 19 industries, more than half of the employers hired immigrants and international students, while in the other seven industries, half or less than half of the organizations hired immigrants. There are major disparities between organizations in different industries. The top industries hiring immigrants were real estate rental and leasing (100%); agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting (75%); and information and culture industries (70%) (Figure 16). Those at the bottom were finance and insurance (22%), transportation and warehousing (30%), and wholesale trade (38%) (Figure 17).

Figure 16: Industries in which more than 50% of employers have hired immigrants or international students in the last three years

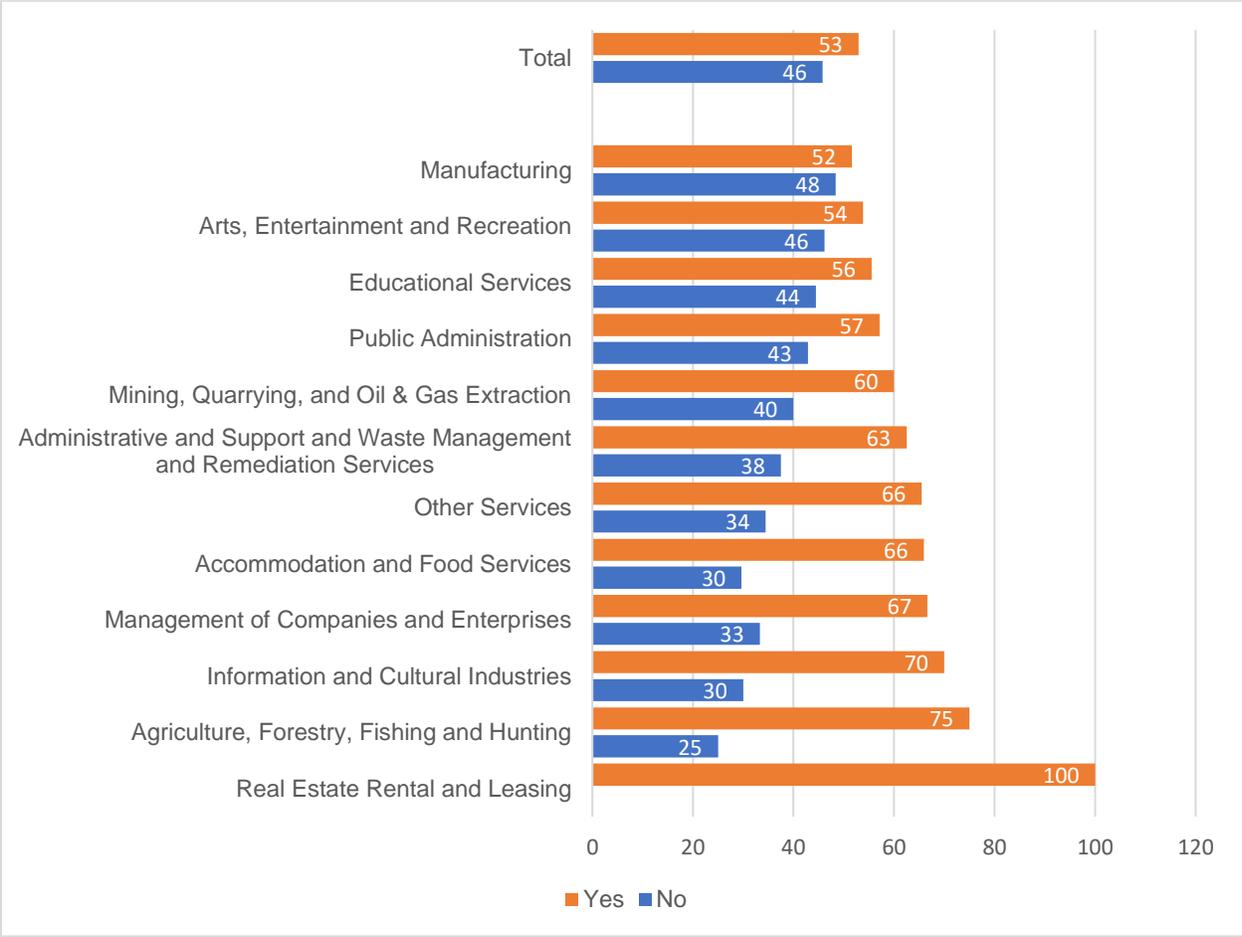
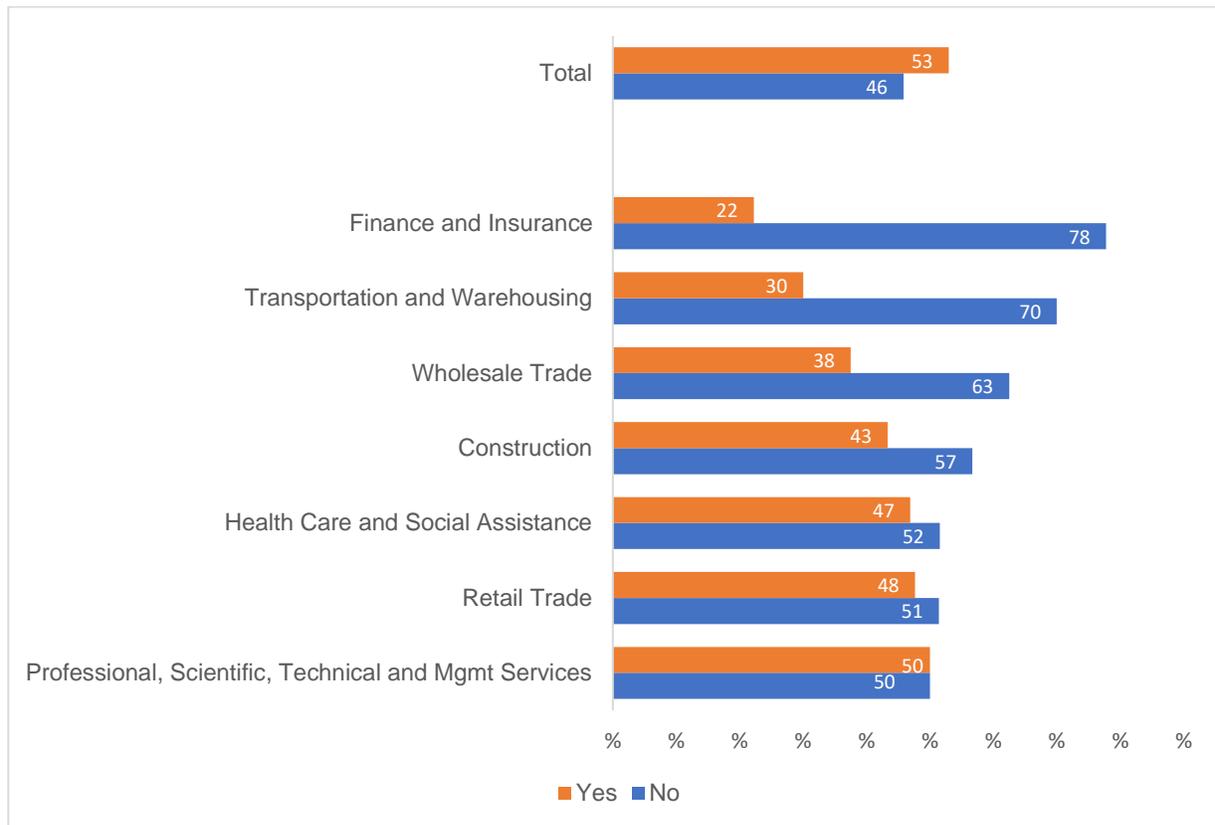


Figure 17: Industries in which fewer than 50% of employers have hired immigrants or international students in the last three years



3.5.5 Immigrant hiring activities, by organizational size

The survey shows that the larger the organization, the greater the probability that the organization received applications from immigrants or international students (in small, medium, and large firms: 49%, 65%, and 90%, respectively) and hired them (from small to large firms, 21%, 33%, and 71%, respectively). This can be attributed to the fact that larger organizations have more vacancies, tend to pay better wages and provide better benefits, and have more experience and resources for human resource management, which allows them to more easily hire newcomers and international students. Additionally, larger organizations have access to more information and support from settlement agencies and immigration policies, which helps organizations integrate immigrants more easily. In fact, large firms who have hired immigrants and international students were the most likely of all firms (19%) to report having changed their practices to better accommodate immigrants and international students, and 38% of large firms have helped employees become permanent residents (PRs).

3.5.6 Immigrant hiring activities, by location

Approximately 64% of the organizations surveyed were located in urban areas, and 36% were located in rural areas. Among those who received applications from immigrants, organizations in urban areas were much more likely to hire immigrants and international students than those in rural areas (57% vs. 43%) over the last three years. In urban areas, there is more institutional support for employers from the government, settlement agencies, and colleges and universities. Additionally, immigrants and international students normally choose to live in urban centres because they have more access to diverse facilities, immigrant communities, and employment opportunities at high skill levels there, and such areas are therefore better suited for their needs because recent immigrants and international students are typically highly skilled (Grogger & Hanson, 2011).

3.6 Employer attitudes towards hiring immigrants and international students

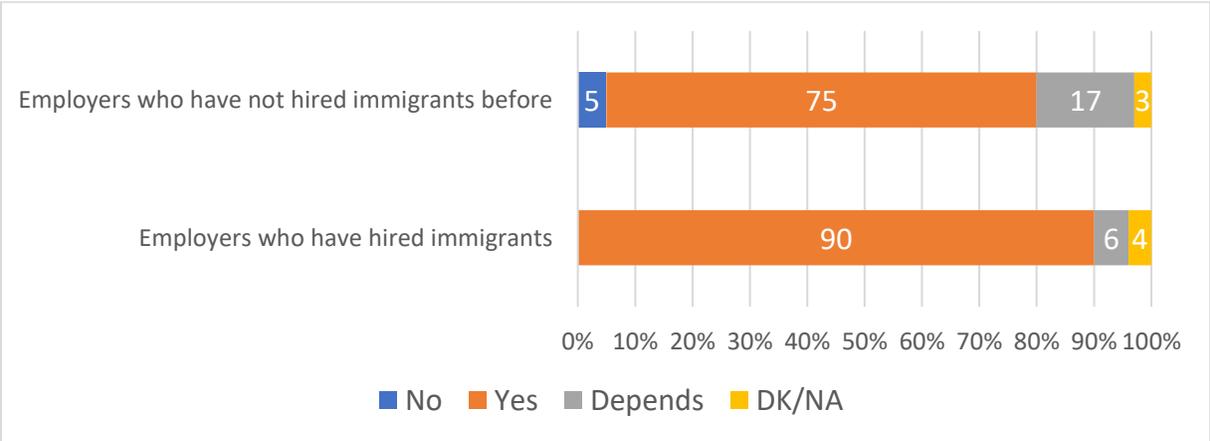
Attitudes towards hiring immigrants vary between employers who have previously hired immigrants and international students and employers who have not. According to existing research and public opinion surveys, one important motivation for employers to hire immigrants and international students is the potential for innovation that stems from having a diverse workforce (Hunt & Gauthier-Loiselle, 2010; Wright et al., 2020), improved exports due to having employees from other countries (Head & Ries 1998; Wright, 2007), and increased productivity because of higher human capital as well as the strong work ethic of immigrants and international students (Peri, 2016; Gu, 2019). On the other hand, there is also concern among the general public that immigrants and international students may take jobs away from native-born Canadians, especially given the higher unemployment rate in Atlantic Canada than in other provinces.

3.6.1 Employers' attitudes and perceptions regarding hiring immigrants and international students

When asked about their attitudes towards hiring immigrants and international students in the future, 80% of employers reported that they would be willing to hire immigrants in the next three years. Another 6% of employers responded that they would be willing to hire immigrants depending on the applicants' qualifications and whether those are relevant to the company.

To determine how previous hiring experience influences employers' willingness to hire immigrants in the future, we divided employers into 2 different groups: employers who had hired immigrants before and employers who had not. We can see that for employers who had hired immigrants before, 90% reported that they would like to hire immigrants in the next three years, and 75% of those who had not hired immigrants before reported that they would also like to do so (Figure 18). One reason that employers received applications from immigrants but did not hire them was partly because they were concerned about the immigrants' qualifications and language issues. Employers who had prior experiences with immigrants were more confident with immigrants' capacity and skills and were more willing to hire immigrants in the next three years, while 6% reported that they will hire immigrants in the future if they meet the needed qualifications.

Figure 18: Future plans for hiring immigrants (Yes/No)



In general, as shown in Table 3, employers who had already hired immigrants held more positive perceptions towards immigrants compared to those who had never hired an immigrant worker. Table 3 shows that the majority of employers believe that immigrants enhance creativity in the workplace. The majority of employers do not think immigrants take jobs away from local workers. This finding supports the argument that immigrants do not compete with local workers (Islam, 2007). In fact, they are complementary to local workers in the labour market. Immigrants are occupying positions that native workers are either unwilling or unable to occupy (Amelie, 2014).

Our survey also shows that more employers believed that immigrants are harder working and more productive than Canadian-born workers and can improve a firm's export opportunities. They did not believe immigrants worked for less pay than local workers (Table 3).

Table 3: Employer attitudes and perceptions regarding hiring immigrants and international students between employers who have and have not hired such applicants (%)

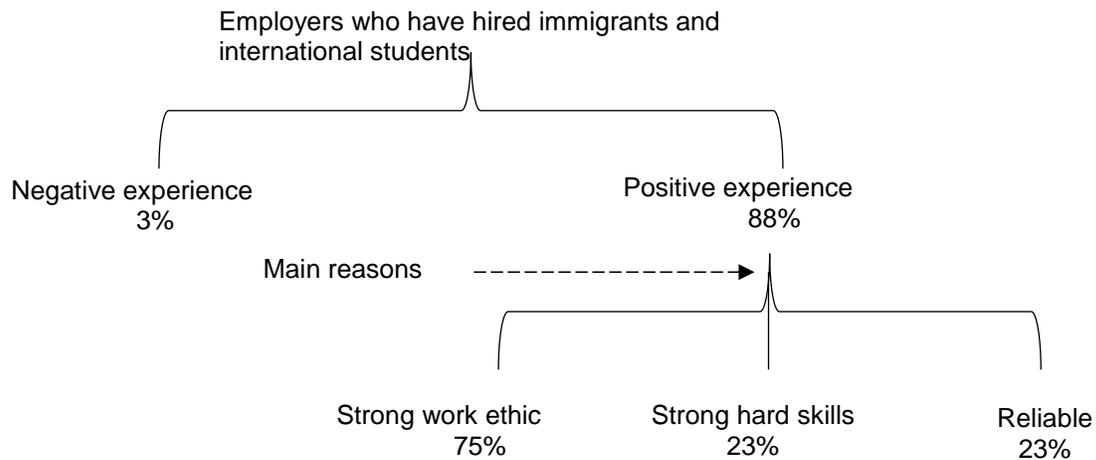
	Employers who have hired immigrants and international students		Employers who have not hired immigrants and international students	
	Disagree & Strongly disagree	Agree & Strongly agree	Disagree & Strongly disagree	Agree & Strongly agree
A multicultural workforce enhances creativity in the workplace	5	81	7	69
Immigrants will not take jobs away from locals	7	84	9	71
Immigrants will work for less pay than local workers	53	14	30	21
Immigrants are harder working than local workers	21	40	20	25
Immigrants are more productive than local workers	22	30	22	22
Having employees from other countries can improve our firm's export opportunities	18	30	21	33

3.6.2 Reasons behind employers' attitudes and perceptions towards hiring immigrants and international students

Only 3% of employers who hired immigrants and international students reported having a negative attitude towards such workers, mainly because of language barriers. The importance of language skills has been mentioned in many studies and is not just a communication skill but also a mediating skill for fully utilizing immigrants' other skills (Sweetman, 2019). Other reasons, such as the complicated administrative paperwork required for hiring such workers, disputes in the workplace caused by cultural conflicts, and difficulty in retaining such employees, were also mentioned.

As Figure 19 shows, the majority of employers (88%) who had hired immigrants reported a highly positive perception of immigrant and international student employees. They held such positive attitudes because they believe that immigrants have had a strong work ethic (75%), have strong qualifications/skills (23%), are reliable (23%), have a positive/friendly attitude (21%), have a willingness to learn (14%), and increase diversity (8%).

Figure 19: Employers' attitudes towards hiring immigrants



3.6.3 Employers' potential concerns when hiring immigrants and international students

When hiring immigrants, employers were mainly concerned about the potential lack of language proficiency, lack of Canadian work experience, and high labour mobility. Additionally, employers who had already hired immigrants held more positive perceptions about such employees (Table 4). They were comfortable about immigrants' credentials and did not believe that immigrants incurred additional training costs or that cultural differences would create confusion in the workplace.

The results show the dilemma that employers face when hiring immigrants and international students. On the one hand, employers need to provide more training to immigrants and international students in terms of either general language or specific work-related knowledge and skills to bridge any knowledge and skill gaps, which leads to additional training costs. On the other hand, employers may be reluctant to provide such training because they believe that immigrants and international students would leave within a short period of time, especially in the Atlantic provinces, which have the lowest retention rate in Canada (Hum & Simpson, 2003; Barrett et al, 2013).

Table 4: Employer concerns about hiring immigrants between employers who have not hired immigrants and those who have hired immigrants

	Employers who have hired immigrants and international students		Employers who have not hired immigrants and international students	
	Disagree & Strongly disagree	Agree & Strongly agree	Disagree & Strongly disagree	Agree & Strongly agree
Language differences make it difficult to communicate	31	31	17	48
Immigrants are unfamiliar with Canadian business and workplace practices	35	23	22	23
Immigrants will leave for another part of the country within a short period of time	33	26	29	28
Hiring newcomers will require incurring additional training costs	61	15	36	28
Immigrants have unreliable credentials	72	6	47	8
Cultural differences create confusion in the workplace	67	11	49	17

3.7 Employers' perceived effectiveness of immigration policy in Atlantic Canada

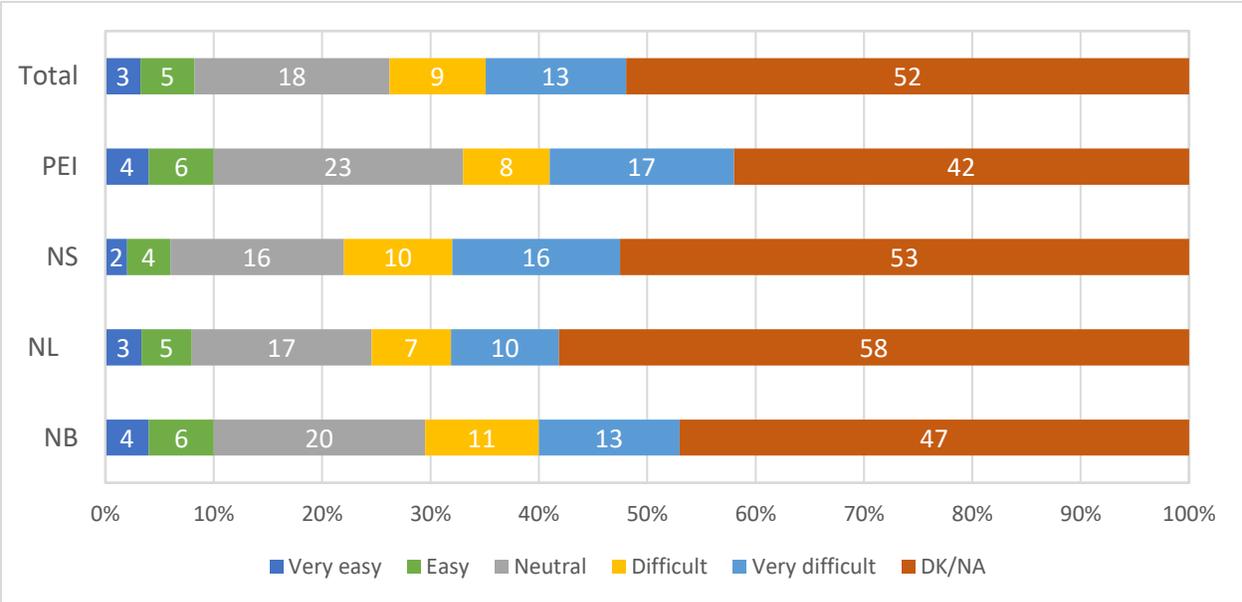
Atlantic Canada has the lowest immigration and retention rates in Canada but the highest average population age in Canada. An effective immigration system that aims to meet regional economic and demographic goals and fulfil humanitarian objectives would help Atlantic Canada attract and retain more immigrants, which would help the region cope with impending demographic and labour and skill shortage (Termote, 2011). Employer perceptions of or experience with immigration policy effectiveness may encourage or discourage employers from hiring immigrants and international students.

3.7.1 Rating of the ease of navigating Canada's immigration system

From the full sample of employers interviewed, as shown in Figure 20, only 8% thought it was easy or very easy to navigate the immigration system, and 22% held the opposite opinion. Approximately 52% of employers interviewed had little knowledge of how to

navigate Canada’s immigration system. This can be attributed in part to the fact that most employers have little experience navigating the immigration system because only 16% of employers have helped an employee become a PR and that just 33% of employers in the whole sample have hired immigrants and international students. Among these, the highest percentage was in Newfoundland and Labrador (58%), followed by Nova Scotia (53%), New Brunswick (47%), and Prince Edward Island (42%). In fact, employers in PEI are very active in hiring immigrants and international students, and the province’s economic and population growth benefits from its ability to attract immigrants (Statistic Canada, 2019).

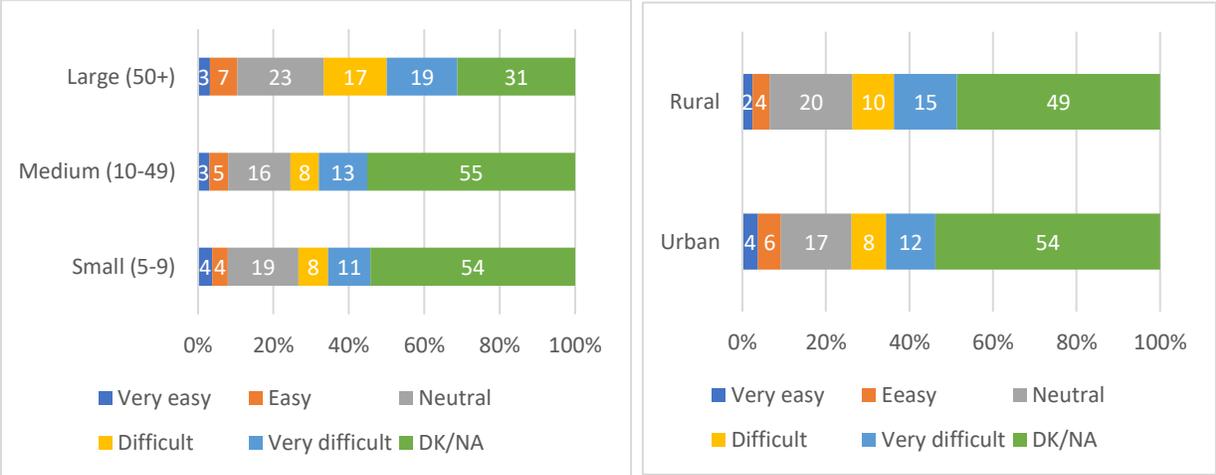
Figure 20: Rating of the ease of navigating Canada’s immigration system by province



With respect to the ease of navigating Canada’s immigration system, employers from large organizations showed a better understanding of Canada’s immigration system than those from organizations of other sizes (31% of respondents from large firms, 55% from medium firms, and 54% from small firms reported having a low understanding of the immigration system). This is likely because large organizations tend to have more HR capacity and resources, such as specialized HR professionals, which allows them to hire more immigrants and accumulate more experience helping employees with immigration issues. As they gain more experience with immigration issues, respondents from large organizations also reported greater difficulty navigating the immigration system than those from medium- and small-sized organizations (36% vs. 21% and 19%) (Figure 21).

Similarly, organizations in urban areas may have more exposure to international migrants and international students/graduates than their rural counterparts do, and they have more experience hiring newcomers, they are also somewhat more likely to report ease in navigating the immigration system than the rural counterparts (10% vs. 6%), and less likely to report difficulty navigating the system (20% vs. 25%), as shown in Figure 21. Interestingly, organizations in rural areas are slightly less likely than those in urban areas in reporting lack of understanding of the Canadian immigration system, possibly due to having less access to information and support so they need to explore the system by themselves as they are also facing more acute labour and skill shortages than their urban counterparts (49% of rural respondents vs. 54% of urban respondents lack of knowledge about Canadian immigration system).

Figure 21: Rating of the ease of navigating Canada’s immigration system by size and location



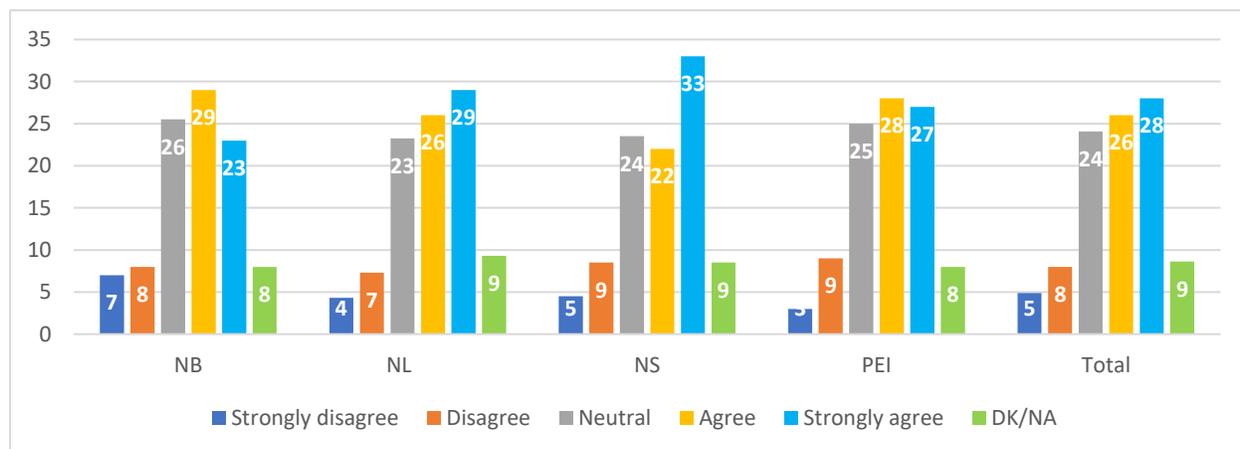
3.7.2 Extent to which governments, immigrant and refugee service organizations, or communities should work together to make the immigration process easier and faster

More than half of the employers interviewed (54%) agreed or strongly agreed that governments, immigrant and refugee service providers, and communities should work together to make the immigration process easier and faster (Figure 22). The sentiments toward improving the immigration process were fairly similar across the four Atlantic provinces.

Unsurprisingly, large organizations were most supportive of improving the immigration process, whereas medium- and small-sized employers were less supportive (68% vs. 53%) (Figure 23). This is consistent with the fact that large organizations are also more

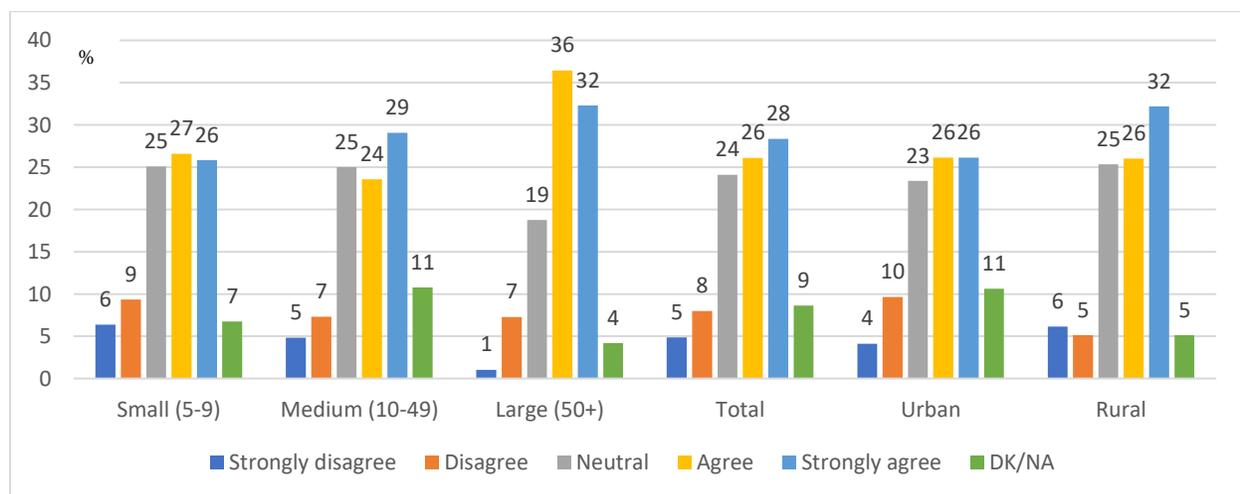
likely to hire immigrants or help employees become permanent residents, according to our survey.

Figure 22: Extent to which employers believe that governments, immigrants, refugee service providers, or communities should work together to make the immigration process easier and faster by province (%)



Overall, organizations in rural areas more strongly agreed than those in urban areas that governments, immigrant and refugee service providers, and communities should attempt to make the immigration process easier and faster, likely because the former may have experienced more challenges of navigating the immigration system, as they have been less exposed to workers who are international immigrants, and have received less information and support from immigration policies and programs (Figure 23).

Figure 23: Extent to which governments, immigrant and refugee service providers, and communities should make the immigration process easier and faster by size and location (%)



3.7.3 Comparison between different types of employers

The extent to which employers are involved in the immigration system has an important effect on their perception towards the effectiveness of the immigration system. Therefore, we further divided employers into three different categories.

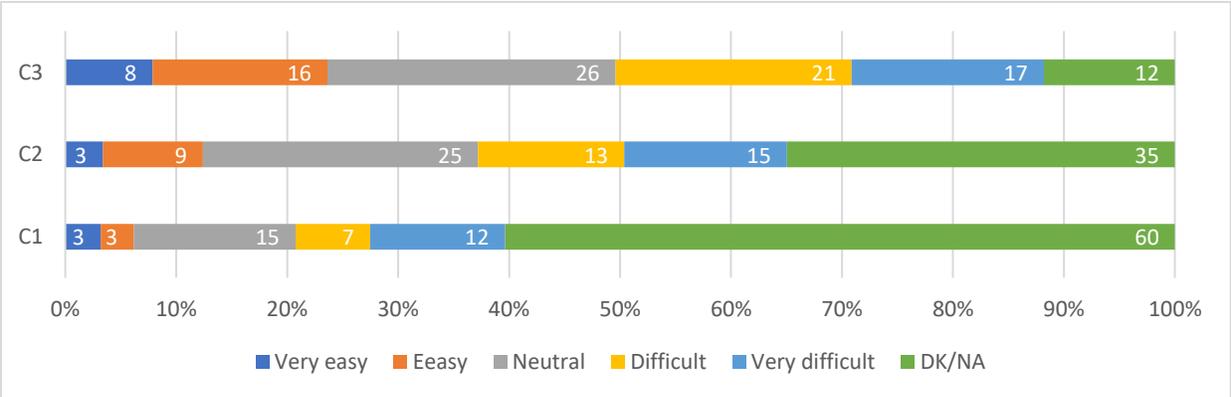
Category 1–C1: Employers who had not hired immigrants

Category 2–C2: Employers who had hired immigrants

Category 3–C3: Employers who had helped an employee become a permanent resident

Clearly, those employers who have been involved in the immigration system are much more familiar with that system than those who have not. The proportion of employers who were not familiar with the system was lowest among those who had helped employees become permanent residents (12%), followed by those who had hired immigrants (35%), and then by employers who had not hired immigrants (60%). Those who knew the system best (who had helped employees become PRs or who had hired immigrants) also found it more difficult to navigate (38%, 28%) than those who had not (who had not hired immigrants, 19%). Interestingly, those who were more involved and perhaps accumulated the most experience with immigrants also reported finding the system easy to navigate (24%, helped; 12%, hired; 6%, never hired) (Figure 24).

Figure 24: Rating of the ease of navigating Canada’s immigration system (by different categories of employer)

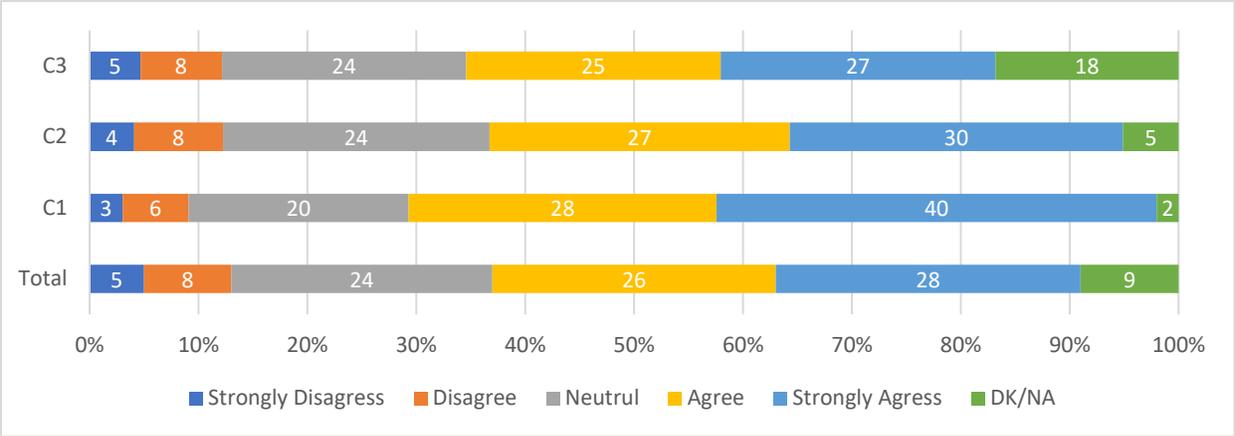


* C1: Employers who had not hired immigrants
 C2: Employers who had hired immigrants
 C3: Employers who had helped an employee become a permanent resident

Approximately 54% of employers agreed that the current immigration system should be improved. As expected, those employers who were more involved in the immigration

system were also more supportive of improving the system’s effectiveness. The percentage of organizations that held this view was highest for those who had helped employees become permanent residents (68%), followed by those who had hired immigrants (57%), and then by those who had never hired immigrants (52%) (Figure 25).

Figure 25: Extent to which respondents agreed that the immigration process should be made easier and faster (by different categories of employer)



* C1: Employers who had not hired immigrants
 C2: Employers who had hired immigrants
 C3: Employers who had helped an employee become a permanent resident

3.8 Improving retention of newcomers and international students

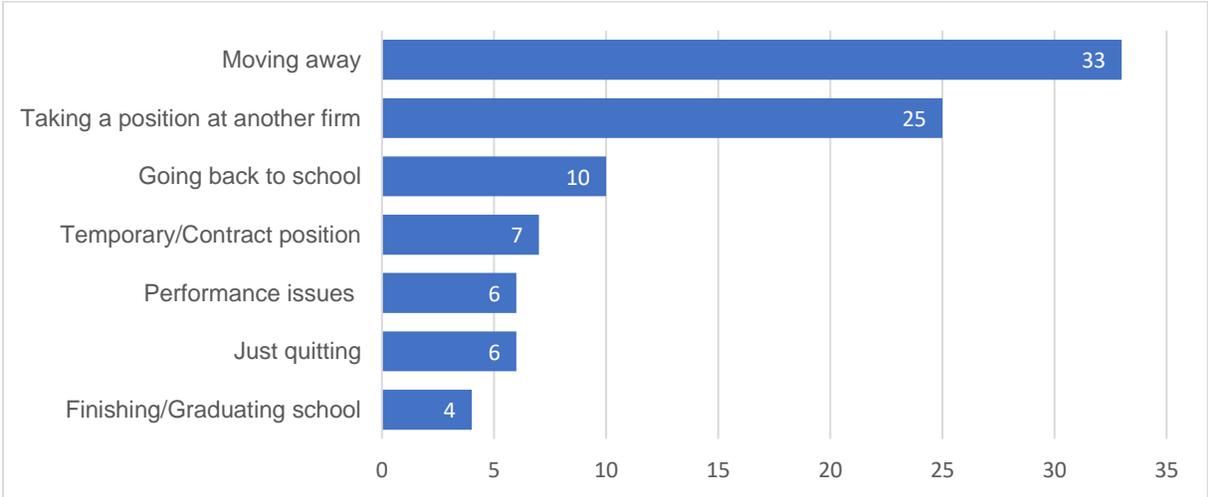
The immigrant retention rate varies significantly across Canada, from 91% in Ontario to 16% in PEI. In general, the retention rate in Atlantic Canada is far below the average level in Canada (46% vs. 88%) (Statistics Canada, 2018b). Hann’s research also explored the relatively lower retention rate of international students in Atlantic Canada: the retention rate was 18.4% in New Brunswick and 14.9% in Nova Scotia, while the average rate in Canada was 27.4%, and the highest was 38.3% in Quebec.

Although employment opportunities are key for attracting and keeping immigrants and international students, other factors, such as existing immigrant communities, settlement support and infrastructure, which provide off-the-job embeddedness, also have a great impact on newcomers’ decisions regarding where they stay (CIC News, 2020). Therefore, it takes a collaborative effort among employers, all levels of government, settlement agencies, immigrant communities, and educational institutions to achieve the desired immigrant retention outcomes (Alexander, 2012; Thomas, 2015; Ryan and D’Angelo, 2017; Walton-Roberts, 2011).

3.8.1 The main reasons that immigrant employees leave an organization

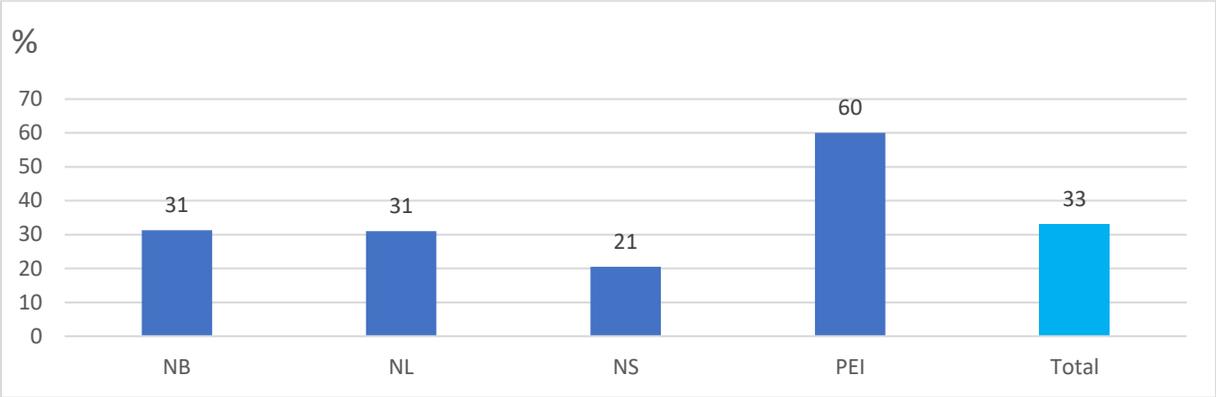
Some of the literature has explored the main reasons a migrant employee might leave a job prematurely, which is associated with both tangible and intangible financial costs and may discourage employers from investing in or attracting immigrant human capital (Shah, 2009; Halvorsen et al., 2014). The main reasons behind the high voluntary turnover rate among immigrant workers according to the employers in our survey were: moving away (33%), taking a position at another employer (25%), going back to school (10%), holding a temporary position (7%), having performance issues (6%), just wanting to quit the job (6%), and finishing school (4%) (Figure 26). This result is consistent with our other survey findings, which show that employers are concerned about whether immigrants are likely to leave their job and the province within a short time period.

Figure 26: The percentage of employers reporting that “moving away” was the main reason immigrant employees left their organization (%)



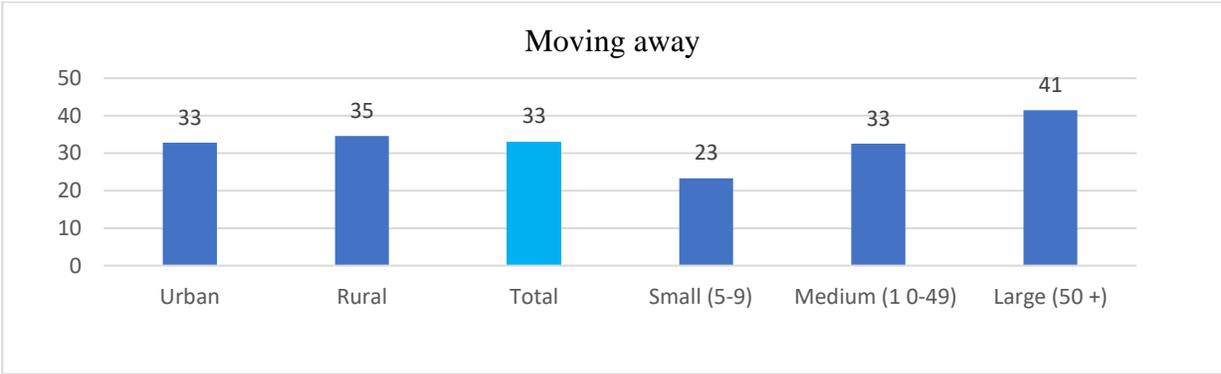
If we look at the most common reason given (“moving away”) as it appeared in each province, we can see that PEI had the greatest percentage of employers who listed this as a main reason (60%), almost double the percentage in NB and NL (31%), and nearly three times that in NS (21%) (Figure 27). This is consistent with PEI having the lowest immigrant retention rate in the country, highlighting that retention remains a significant challenge for the province. Organizations in NS reported the lowest percentage of immigrants moving away (21%), which is also in line with another report (Conference Board, 2019, 2020) showing that the province has improved its newcomer integration and retention in recent years, thanks to Halifax being a regional centre and to proactive immigrant settlement and integration initiatives in recent years.

Figure 27: Percentage of employers reporting that “moving away” was the main reason immigrant employees left their organization by province (%)



Figures 28 and 29 show that there was little difference between urban and rural employers who reported that immigrant employees left the organization because they moved away. However, urban employers were more likely than rural employers to report immigrant employees leaving the organization because they took another job, probably because there are simply more job opportunities and labour market information in urban areas.

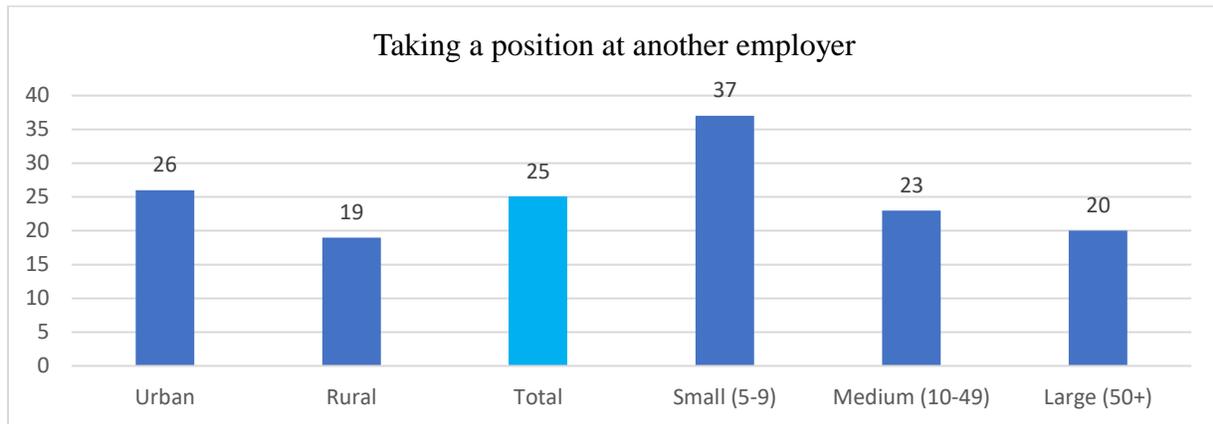
Figure 28: Percentage of employers reporting that “moving away” was the main reason immigrant employees left their organization by location and size (%)



In terms of firm size, larger organizations tended to report that immigrant workers left the organization because they moved away. In contrast, smaller employers were more likely to report that immigrant workers left the organization because they took another job. Employees in large organizations typically enjoy superior compensation, including both higher salary and better benefits, more career development opportunities, such as training and promotion, and better psychological well-being, including having a meaningful job and a better working environment. They leave the organization largely due

to family reasons (Lee et al., 2008). In contrast, Employees in smaller organizations might leave the organization for another job in pursuit of better pay and benefits.

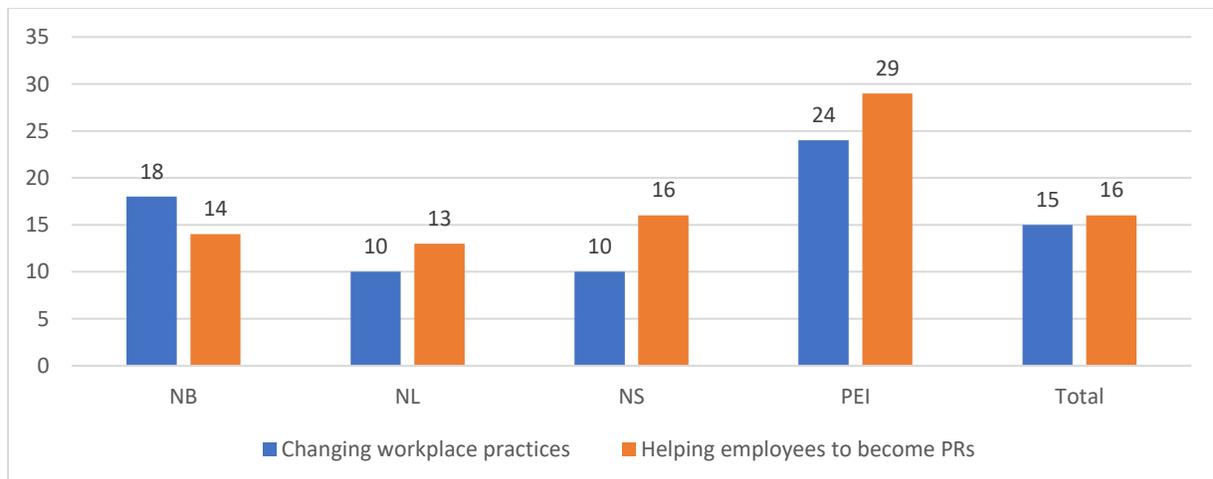
Figure 29: Percentage of employers reporting that “taking a position at another employer” was the main reason immigrant employees left their organization by firm location and size (%)



3.8.2 Effect of employer assistance on retaining immigrant employees

As shown in Figure 30, organizations in PEI who hired immigrants demonstrated the highest level of assistance towards immigrants in terms of changing their workplace practices (24%) and helping employees become permanent residents (29%), which may lead to better attraction and retention of immigrants in PEI relative to that in other Atlantic provinces. This is consistent with PEI’s high immigrant population growth and greater number of immigrants admitted through the AIP programme relative to its population (IRCC, 2020).

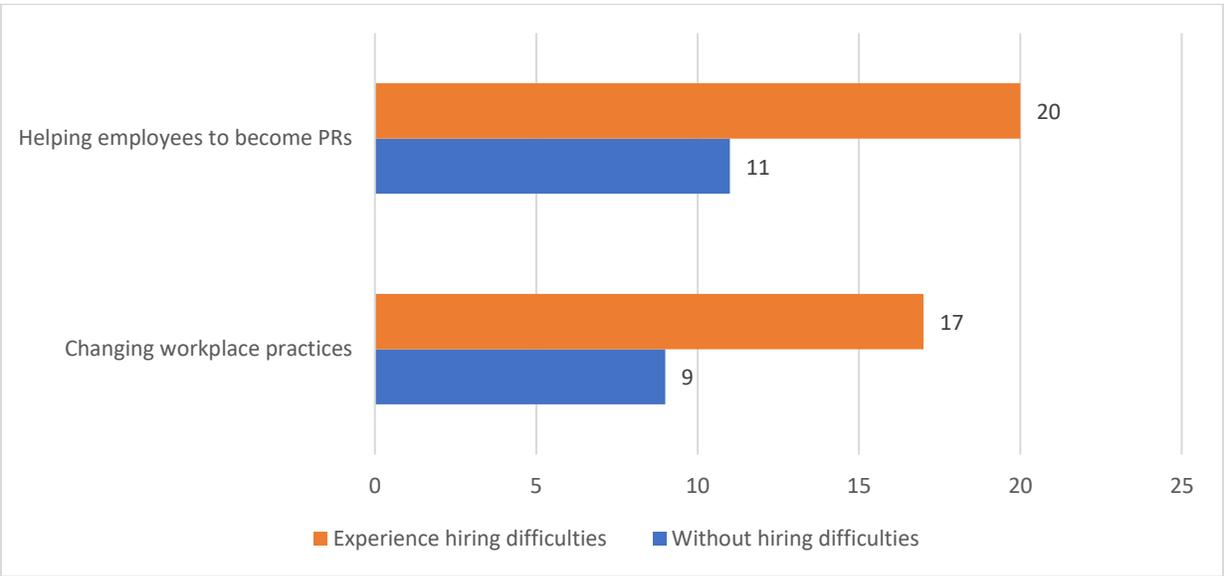
Figure 30: Employer assistance by province (%)



NL organizations that hired immigrants were least likely to have changed their workplace practices (10%) to accommodate immigrant workers or helped newcomer employees become permanent residents (13%). Employers in NB and NS were somewhere in between those in PEI and NL.

It is interesting to note that when an organization has hiring difficulties, the employer is also more likely to exhibit more helping behaviours, such as changing the workplace to accommodate immigrants and international students or helping employees become permanent residents, which may facilitate the attraction and retention of international immigrants and alleviate labour and skill shortages (Figure 31).

Figure 31: The relationship between employer assistance and hiring difficulties (%)



However, if the organization helps employees become permanent residents, the likelihood of employees moving away actually increases (Figure 32). Under the AIP programme, newcomer employees rely on employer support to apply for permanent resident status. Because of the lower acceptance standards in other terms and conditions, immigrant workers who cannot be admitted through other programmes may choose the AIP programme to obtain PR status. However, they can move freely after they receive permanent resident status.

Figure 32: The relationship between employer assistance towards immigrant employees and employer reporting immigrants moving away as main reason of leaving the organization (%)

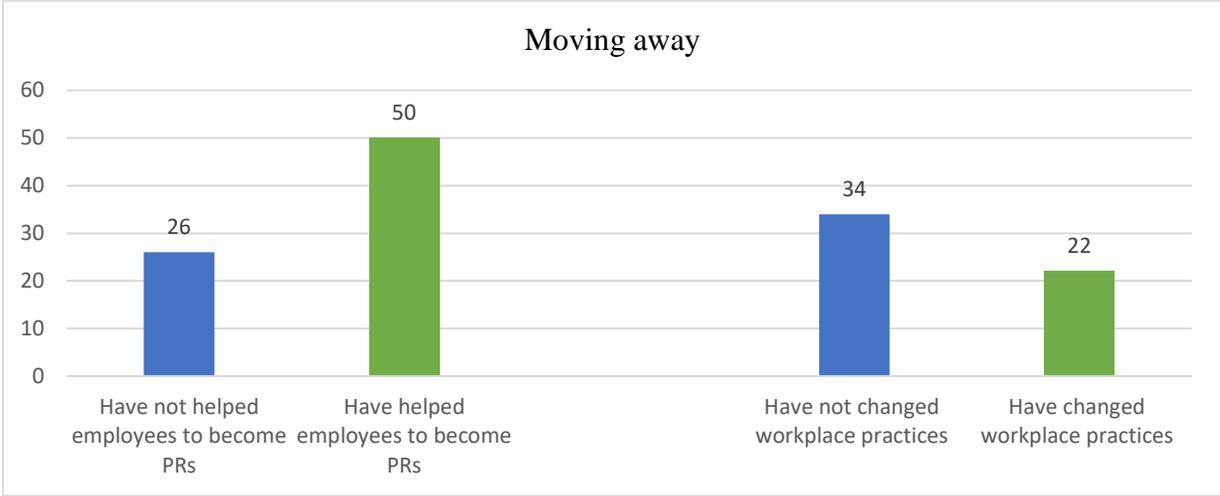
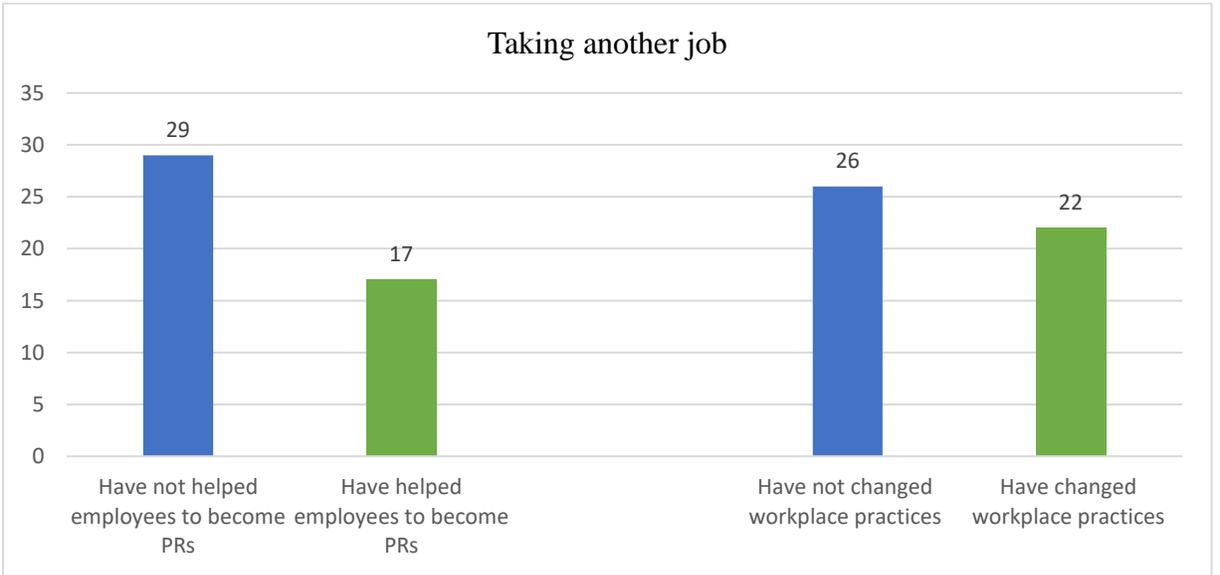


Figure 32 also shows that percentage of employers reporting immigrant employees' moving away as main reason of leaving the organization is lower if the organization has changed workplace practices to better accommodate immigrant workers. It appears that changing workplace practices could be a useful retention tool to keep immigrants and international students in the workplace.

Figure 33: The relationship between organizational assistance and percentage of employers reporting immigrant employees taking another job as the main reason of leaving the organization (%)



As shown in Figure 33, employers who have helped employees become permanent residents or changed workplace practices reported a lower proportion of immigrant employees leaving for another job.

3.8.3 Ways to facilitate the integration and retention of immigrants

As discussed in sections 2.3.5 and 2.4, language barriers, cultural differences, credential assessment, and the immigration process are employers’ main concerns when hiring immigrants and international students. It is important to alleviate employers’ concerns in order to encourage them to attract and retain immigrants and international students by providing employment opportunities. There are different perceptions of the issues faced when hiring immigrants between employers who have hired immigrants and those who have not. When organizations employ immigrants, they have a clearer picture of how to recruit immigrants and of the benefits of having immigrants in the workplace.

Figure 34: Ways to facilitate the integration and retention of immigrants

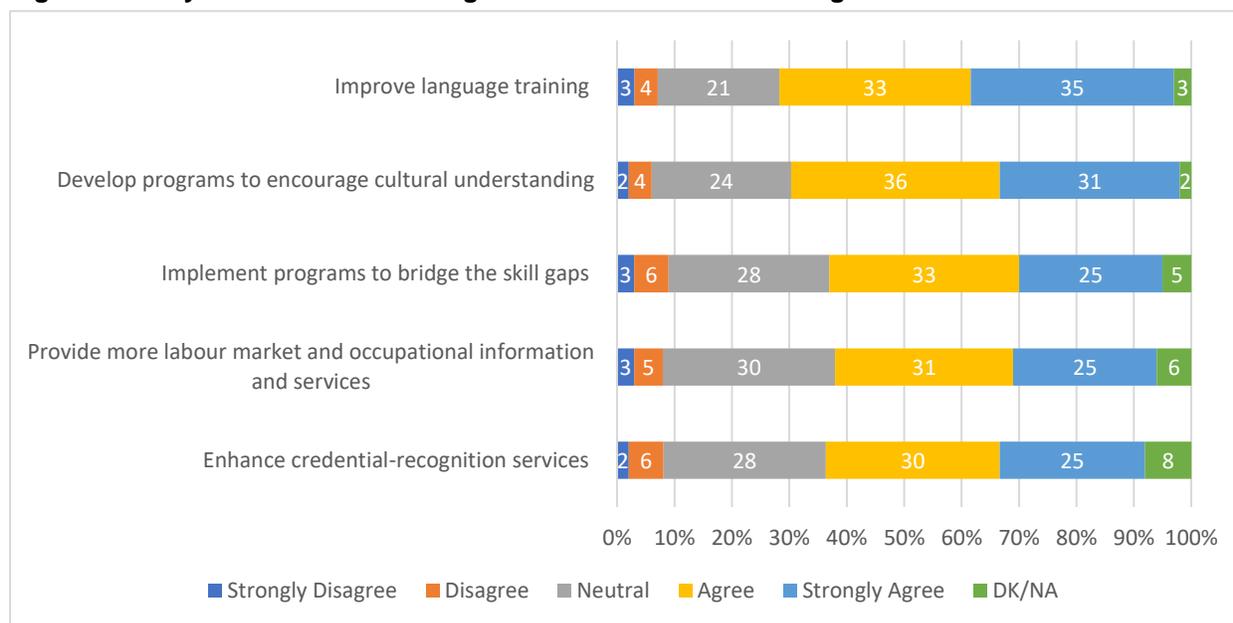


Figure 34 shows that the majority of employers believe that more work should be done to develop language training, cultural understanding, bridge programmes, and employment-related information services as well as to enhance credential-recognition services.

The employers surveyed also suggested that the government, settlement agencies, NGOs and education institutions should do more to support immigrants’ work and family lives by, for example, providing more training programmes to both adult immigrants and

their children, offering more affordable housing and childcare, and providing more accessible public transportation. In addition, the employers hoped that more social/community connection activities could be provided to immigrants.

These possible solutions will facilitate immigrants' integration into the society and economy of the Atlantic Region. Improving language training and cultural understandings will be beneficial to not only immigrants' working life but also their everyday life. Providing more social/community connections, bridge programmes to fill skill gaps, and labour market and occupational information and services will help immigrants find jobs more easily and help employers find appropriate job candidates more quickly. Improving credential-recognition services and immigration processes will reduce the time and costs for both employers and immigrant workers and help retain immigrants and international students in the Atlantic region.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Making Full Use of Human Capital to Alleviate Labour and Skill Shortages in Atlantic Canada

The ageing population, technological changes, and economic growth have all contributed to the current labour and skill shortages in the Atlantic provinces according to our survey of 801 employers in all four Atlantic provinces. Vacancies cannot be filled mainly because of a lack of applicants and a lack of necessary education, experience, or skills, suggesting that there are structural labour and skill shortages in the region. Although employers have strived to attract immigrants, international students, and workers from other provinces, they also anticipate that more serious labour and skill shortages will occur in the next three years.

Structural labour and skill shortages driven by demographic and technological changes can be difficult to mitigate, at least in the short term (Fang, 2009). To alleviate labour and skill shortages, a multi-faceted strategy that includes the following is urgently needed:

- Making full use of existing human resources in the Atlantic provinces. As the survey shows, employers reported a high percentage of hiring difficulty in both urban and rural areas in semi-skilled technical/trade occupations and in relatively low-skilled occupations such as production workers with no trade/certification.

- Encouraging the labour force participation of underrepresented groups. The latest participation rate across Canada is 65.5%, but it is only 57.1%, 62.4%, 60.7%, and 66.8% in NL, NS, NB, and PEI, respectively (Statistics Canada, 2020b). Therefore, except in PEI, there is room for improvement when comparing the national level, meaning we need to find ways to help or encourage members of untapped labour groups, including women, youth, older workers, recent immigrants, international students, indigenous people, and people with disabilities to take part in labour market.
- Attracting and retaining skilled workers from outside the Atlantic provinces and outside Canada. Given that the majority of employers in the region received job applications from both outside the region and outside Canada, employers should develop HR competencies and immigration expertise to fully utilize their human capital and fill labour and skill shortages.

4.2 Gaining a Better Understanding of the Needs and Challenges of Employers Hiring Newcomers and International Students

This survey of employers showed that most employers held positive attitudes towards hiring immigrants. Moreover, employers who had hired immigrants and international students in the last three years had even more positive attitudes towards hiring such employees. Among the four provinces, PEI reported the most favourable attitude towards hiring immigrants, which is consistent with the fact that employers in PEI are the most active in recruiting immigrants and international students.

Most employers reported that immigrants are harder working and are more productive than their native counterparts; they bring creativity to the workforce and improve export opportunities. Despite commonly held perceptions that immigrants take jobs from local workers, most employers surveyed do not believe this is the case. This is consistent with the evidence that immigrants tend to complement local workers in the labour market (Dungan, Fang, and Gunderson, 2013; Hou et al., 2018). Our survey results also suggest that employers who had previously hired immigrants held more positive attitudes towards them.

Employers were concerned about hiring immigrants mostly because of their lack of language proficiency, high labour mobility, and lack of Canadian work experience. However, employers did not believe that immigrants have unreliable credentials, incur

additional training costs, or create cultural differences that cause confusion in the workplace.

Language training is particularly useful for the economic, social, and cultural integration of immigrants, and it also improves immigrant employee retention. Intercultural training for both immigrants and employers may facilitate workplace communication and enhance immigrant productivity and organizational performance.

It is clear from the survey results that small- to medium-sized businesses and businesses located in rural areas are less likely to hire immigrants than their counterparts are. The social and economic benefits of hiring immigrants and international students should be demonstrated to these employers, who should be supported with additional immigration information, funding, and personnel. Prioritizing such actions can encourage employers to hire immigrants and international students and help them in doing so.

4.3 Making the Immigration Process More Transparent, Easier and Faster

Regional and local governments in Atlantic Canada are eager to attract and retain more immigrants to mitigate the area's ageing population and skill shortages and to ensure the long-term economic prosperity of the region. In doing so, employers play a crucial role in providing employment opportunities and social connections to help immigrants successfully integrate into the economy and society in Atlantic Canada, especially under employer-driven immigration programmes such as the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP), and more recently, Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program (AIPP). Our employer survey findings show that a widely understood and employer-friendly immigration system will help employers better utilize the system. Additionally, most employers wanted governments, communities, and immigrant and refugee service providers to work together to make the immigration process easier and faster.

4.4 Supporting Newcomers and International Students in Integrating and Staying in Atlantic Canada

The Canadian immigration system is ranked as one of the most successful systems in the world because it ensures population growth while serving the public interest effectively (OECD, 2019). For Atlantic Canada, the regional immigration policy (e.g., AIPP) has proven successful in terms of the number of immigrants admitted through this programme

since 2017. However, retaining immigrants in the region has been a major challenge. Our survey of over 800 employers in the region shows how changing workforce practices to better accommodate the needs of immigrants could be a useful way to retain them in the organization and in the region. In addition, providing occupational training, labour market information, and networking opportunities can help them find meaningful employment and better integrate them into the organization and community. Moreover, providing newcomers and international students with necessary work and family support, including spousal employment, accessible public transportation, and affordable childcare, housing, and education has also proven to be beneficial in attracting and retaining newcomers in Atlantic Canada. Therefore, it is essential for all stakeholders to work together and make a concerted effort to provide holistic services and support to facilitate the long-term integration and retention of international immigrants and their families and to help immigrants find gainful employment, make a valuable contribution to the economy, and develop a great sense of belonging to their community and region.

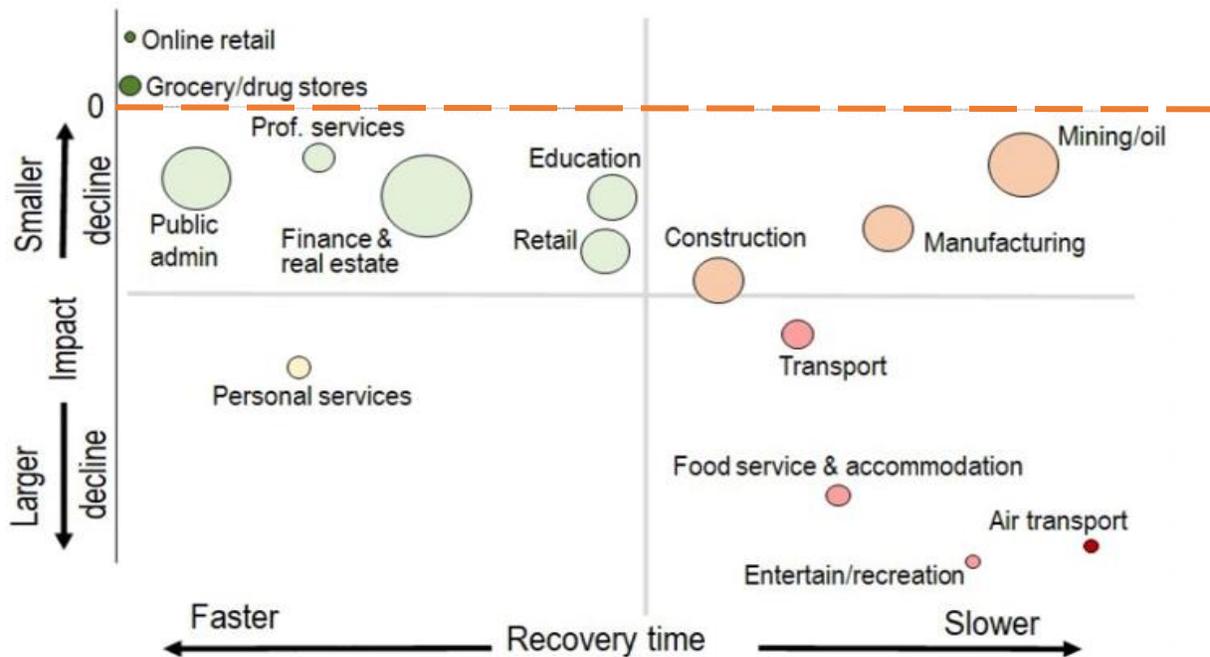
Newcomers, including permanent residents, temporary foreign workers, refugees, and international students, come to Canada with various purposes, needs, characteristics, and challenges in integrating into the local labour market and society. Therefore, rather than homogenized policies, support and services, there is a need for specialized strategies and services for addressing the demands and difficulties of different types of people.

In addition to from economic integration, social and cultural factors are also of paramount importance, which facilitate economic integration, provide a sense of belonging to communities, change public attitudes towards immigrants and international students (welcoming communities), and decrease employment discrimination (Dietz et al. 2015).

4.5 The Effects of COVID-19 on the Regional Labour Market and Employer Perceptions

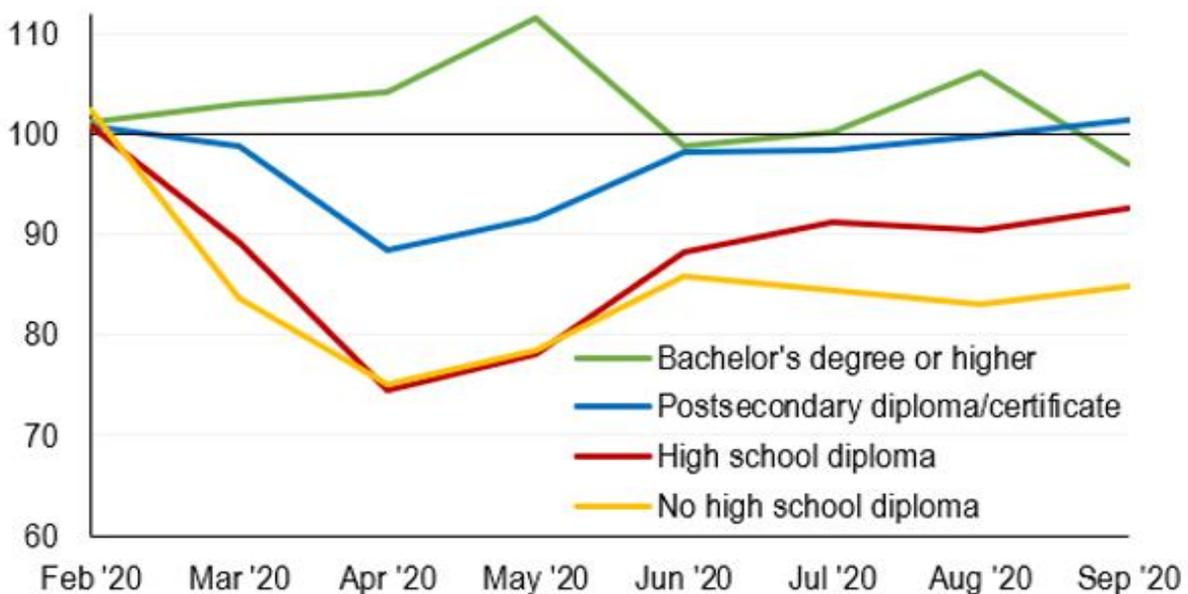
The employer survey was completed before the outbreak of COVID-19, so the potential effects of the global pandemic are beyond the scope of the proposed study. However, we conducted some analyses based on the extant literature and alternative data sources. There is a clear dichotomy in terms of COVID effects by industry (Figure 35).

Figure 35: Economic impact and recovery time, selected industries, Atlantic Canada (APEC, 2020b)



Frontline industries such as retail, food services and accommodations, which hire disproportionately large numbers of immigrants, especially recent immigrants and international students, were particularly hard hit, in part because most jobs in these industries cannot be performed at home or remotely (Figure 1).

Figure 36: Employment in Atlantic Canada (indexed to monthly level in 2019) (APEC, 2020a)



Immigrants working in these industries have suffered more significant job losses and have experienced slower recovery after the first wave of the pandemic. This is even more so the case for recent immigrants and those who have lower education levels (high school or less), who are considered to have been the most vulnerable group of workers during the pandemic (Figure 2 & Figure 36). Those working in other industries, such as professional and educational services finance and real estate, are somewhat sheltered from the dramatic effects of the COVID because alternative work arrangements are often available to employees in these industries. Although we do not have direct survey evidence, public opinions and employer hiring attitudes appear to be more negative towards newcomers and international students during the economic recession and global pandemic. As no one-size-fit-all policies would be effective during exogenous shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic, more targeted support, training programs for shock-proof skills, and anti-discrimination policies should be considered to help vulnerable groups recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and future crises of a similar nature.

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