

An Atlantic Perspective

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Under the leadership of Prime Minister Mark Carney, the federal government has an immigration policy that largely resembles that of former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. While immigration remains important both to national identity and economic growth, the incoming government also favours a “balanced” and “sustainable” approach. Most details about this immigration policy remain unknown, although it will likely result in reduced immigration levels. The appointment of Lena Metlege Diab as Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, as well as recent immigration trends, suggests that immigration will continue to play an important role in Atlantic Canada.

Government Mandate

On May 21, 2025, Prime Minister Carney sent a mandate letter to his Cabinet which outlined priorities for the incoming government. The letter identifies seven key priorities that support the core need “to stand up for our country and to build a strong economy.” These priorities are largely unsurprising given the current political climate: Canada’s relationship with the United States and other trading partners; strengthening the economy; the cost of living; affordable housing; national sovereignty and security; immigration; and reduced government spending.

The sixth priority acknowledges the value of immigration while also addressing concerns about high immigration levels. This priority notes the importance of **“attracting the best talent in the world to help build our economy, while returning our overall immigration rates to sustainable levels.”** Carney’s government recognizes the value of and need for immigration in Canada, and especially its role in economic growth and development. However, he also suggests a restrained approach that aligns with the 2025-27 Immigration Levels Plan (ILP) and the intent to reduce immigrant admissions over the next three years.

Carney’s approach to immigration seems largely aligned with that of the Trudeau government. While the previous government was responsible for historically high immigration levels, and initially anticipated 500,000 admissions in both 2025 and 2026, this position shifted significantly in the fall of last year. The 2025-27 ILP now indicates shrinking immigrant admissions from 395,000 in 2025 to 365,000 in 2027. Nevertheless, this plan still keeps immigration levels higher than any year prior to 2021. And while the ILP does not provide a provincial distribution of admissions, demographic trends suggest that Atlantic Canada will retain a focus on immigration. *Table 1* shows that the percentage of immigrant admissions to Atlantic Canada has nearly tripled over the past decade. The most recent data for 2025 (January to March) indicates that 8.1% of all immigrant admissions were in the Atlantic region.

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total PR admissions	271,840	296,375	286,535	321,055	341,175	184,600	406,055	437,630	471,820	483,640
Atlantic admissions	8,315	13,740	11,705	14,245	17,900	8,600	19,145	29,050	32,370	39,510
Atlantic as %	3.1	4.6	4.1	4.4	5.2	4.7	4.7	6.6	6.9	8.2

Table 1: Permanent resident admissions in Canada and the Atlantic region, 2015-2024 (Open Government).

Speech from the Throne

The Speech from the Throne, delivered by King Charles on May 27, 2025, expanded on the government’s priorities. After an introduction that considered “Canada’s unique identity” and the “dangerous and uncertain” global context, the speech provided details about how the government will address its priority issues. For example, it explained the tax cuts that will make housing more affordable and the country’s commitments to national defence.

The speech did not elaborate on immigration policy. Immigration is grouped with other features that “make Canada unique” such as the French language, the country’s relationship with Indigenous peoples, and nature. The King noted **“Canada’s immigration system has long been a source of pride for Canadians and of dynamism for the economy. The Government is dedicated to rebuilding the trust of Canadians in immigration by restoring balance to the system.”** As with the mandate letter, the speech stated the importance of immigration both to Canada’s national identity and economy, but also acknowledged recent concerns about high immigration levels. Other than capping temporary residents at less than 5% of the population by 2027, which had already been outlined in the ILP, there are no further details about the government’s plans for immigration.

Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship

Lena Metlege Diab was appointed as the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship on May 13, 2025. Diab returns as the MP for Halifax West, where she was first elected to Parliament in 2021. Her riding is noteworthy because it has been significantly shaped by immigration in recent years. Ten out of 11 federal ridings in Nova Scotia – including Halifax West – were recently redrawn in response to population growth in the province. Halifax West in particular grew by nearly 25,000 people over the past decade, with this growth attributed partly to increased immigration. Prior to running in the 2021 federal election, Diab sat in the Nova Scotia Legislature where she served in several roles, including as the Minister of Immigration.

The appointment of Cabinet Ministers is informed by experience and expertise, but it is also a strategic and symbolic decision that can signal the government’s priorities for a particular portfolio. Before Diab, the previous Ministers of Immigration – Marc Miller and the short-serving Rachel Bendayan – both represented Montreal ridings. Sean Fraser, MP for Central Nova in Nova Scotia, served as the Minister of Immigration from 2021 to 2023. It is important for Atlantic Canada to be represented in the Cabinet, and especially with the immigration portfolio. (Other Cabinet Ministers from Atlantic provinces include Dominic LeBlanc, Heath MacDonald, and Joanne Thompson.) Immigration has played an increasingly important role in the region over the past decade. Atlantic Canada has received a growing share of immigrants, and economic immigration is especially crucial for the region. In 2024, economic immigrants represented 58% of all admissions to Canada but 85% of admissions to the Atlantic region.

Supporting Immigrants and Refugees in Uncertain Times

The settlement and integration sector is shaped by diverse forces. Domestic and foreign policies impact who and how many people will immigrate; demographic and social contexts determine how immigrants integrate into their new communities; and each immigrant has a unique experience and story to tell. It is important to consider all of these dimensions when serving newcomer populations and when presenting our work to the broader community. *Shaping Perspectives, Bridging Divides*, a new toolkit from ARAISA, provides settlement and integration organizations with communications best practices and messaging that articulate the value of immigration to local communities and the benefit of settlement services in unlocking that value. This toolkit can help give meaning to data and ensure that newcomers feel welcome in their new homes.



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