

ATLANTIC IMMIGRATION SPOTLIGHT ON DATA



IMMIGRATION IN SMALL CENTRES AND RURAL AREAS

Small centres and rural areas are demographically distinct regions that require unique approaches to newcomer settlement, integration, and retention.

While the majority (61%) of immigrants in Atlantic Canada live in large and medium centres, more than a third (39%) live in the region's small centres and rural areas.

Small centres and rural areas are typically less diverse and have proportionally fewer immigrants than larger population centres. Newcomers living in these areas can face greater obstacles to employment, housing, public transit, interpretation, and accessing public services. Settlement service providers can support immigrant retention in small centres and rural areas through intercultural awareness education, tailored settlement support, and by building bridges between newcomers and more established residents.

Population Distribution in Atlantic Provinces, 2021

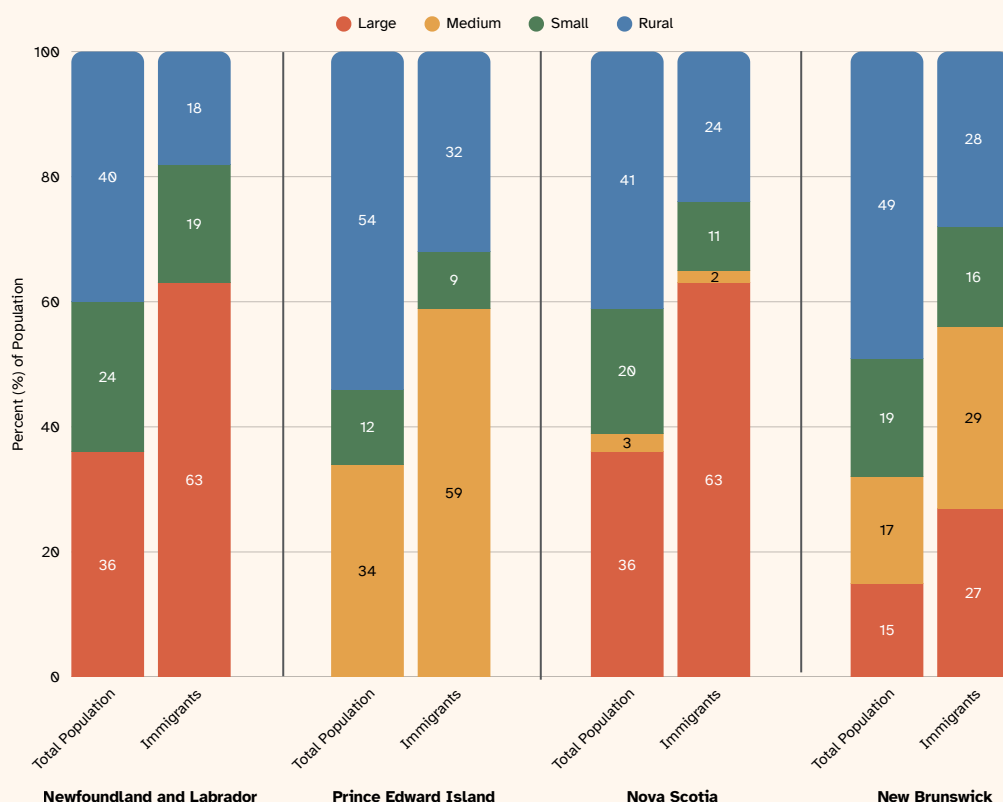


Figure 1: Population distribution in the Atlantic provinces by large, medium, and small population centres and rural areas, 2021. Data from [Statistics Canada](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/92-621-x/2021001/article/00001-eng.htm).

Large centres have populations of 100,000 or more; **medium centres** have populations between 30,000 and 99,999; **small centres** have populations between 1,000 and 29,999; and all other areas are classified as **rural areas** (see [Statistics Canada](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/92-621-x/2021001/article/00001-eng.htm)). A **Census Metropolitan Area (CMA)** has a total population of at least 100,000 where at least 50,000 live in the population core (see [Statistics Canada](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/92-621-x/2021001/article/00001-eng.htm)).

Permanent resident admissions by CMA of intended destination, 2021-25

What is the data?

Figure 1 shows population distribution in the Atlantic provinces according to large, medium, and small population centres and rural areas, as of the 2021 Census. For each province, the graph shows the distribution both for the **total population** and for **immigrants only**.

Figure 2 shows the proportion of permanent residents in Atlantic Canada who intended to settle in a CMA or non-CMA location, combined for 2021 through 2025. As the largest population centre in the province, this analysis treats Charlottetown as a CMA for comparative purposes.

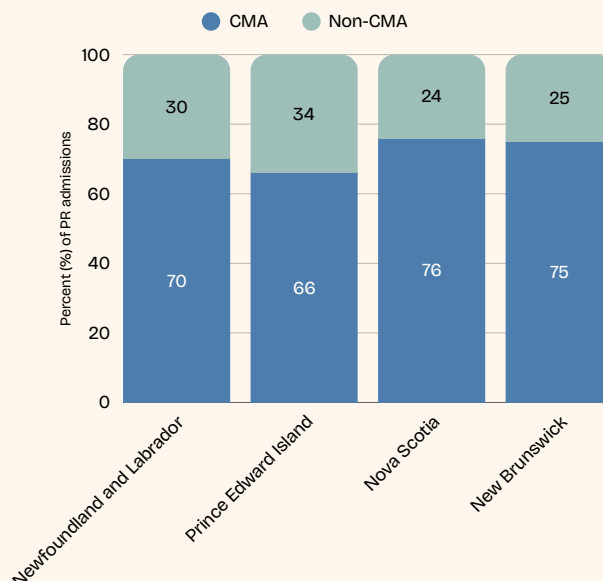


Figure 2: Permanent resident admissions by intended destination, 2021 to 2025. Charlottetown is treated as a CMA. Data from [Open Government](#).

What does the data say?

- Although immigrants tend to concentrate in large and medium population centres, more than a third live in the region's small centres and rural areas. Across Atlantic Canada, **61% of immigrants live in large and medium centres with the other 39% living in small centres and rural areas**. It is unlikely that these patterns have changed in recent years. Over the past five years (2021-2025), **nearly three-quarters (74%) of new permanent residents intended to settle in one of the region's CMAs**, suggesting that recent immigrants prefer larger centres to small centres and rural areas.
- In contrast to the immigrant population, the total population in Atlantic Canada is distributed more evenly across population centres and rural areas. **Nearly two-thirds (64%) of the region's total population live in small centres and rural areas while the other third (36%) live in large and medium centres**.
- Small population centres and rural areas are demographically distinct and typically less diverse than large and medium centres. **Immigrants comprise only 3.5% of the population in the region's small centres and rural areas** in comparison to 10% for large and medium centres. Similarly, **racialized groups (or visible minorities) represent about 3% of the population in small centres and rural areas** in comparison to 14% for large and medium centres ([Statistics Canada](#)). While immigrants do not necessarily belong to racialized groups, there is considerable overlap between these populations.



What does the data mean for settlement and integration?

- Integration and community engagement is especially important in small centres and rural areas. Since small centres and rural areas are typically less diverse and have fewer immigrants than larger centres, newcomers can face greater barriers to integration. These challenges can be mitigated by **programs and services that bridge newcomers with established communities**, such as multicultural festivals, community volunteer opportunities, youth leadership programs, and Local Immigration Partnership initiatives. Integration can be further supported by ensuring **intercultural awareness** education is widely available to schools, employers, and other local organizations.
- Newcomers living in small centres and rural areas may have greater settlement needs than those in larger centres. Life in small centres and rural areas can present specific challenges such as limited access to public transit, fewer employment opportunities, limited housing options, limited access to interpretation, fewer public services, as well as remoteness and isolation. Newcomers may require **tailored and ongoing support through their settlement journeys** to navigate these challenges. This support can be aided by comprehensive needs assessment, community guides or navigators, matching programs, and [Settlement Workers in Schools](#).
- **The integration and retention of newcomers in small centres and rural areas is critical to the region's continued growth.** Atlantic Canada is the most rural part of the country, not including the territories ([Nova Scotia Department of Finance](#)). For the region to thrive, it will be necessary not only to attract newcomers to small centres and rural areas but to provide support that allows newcomers to stay. Through coordinated, evidence-based services and programs, the settlement and integration sector will continue to play an important role in Atlantic Canada's growth. For more information about the impact of immigration on regional growth, see ARAISA's [Growing Our Region](#) report.



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