ATLANTIC IMMIGRATION SPOTLIGHT ON DATA

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SENSE OF BELONGING AMONG NEWCOMERS

Most newcomers in Atlantic Canada have a strong sense of belonging to their local community.

In 2024, 89% of newcomers in the Atlantic provinces described their community as welcoming while 75% said they have a strong sense of belonging to their local community.

Data further shows that newcomers have the strongest sense of belonging to their workplaces (87%). These findings suggest that people develop a strong sense of belonging when they make tangible contributions towards common goals. Integration can therefore be strengthened by programs that engage newcomers in collaborative projects with the broader community, such as community gardens, sports programs, and arts-based activities.

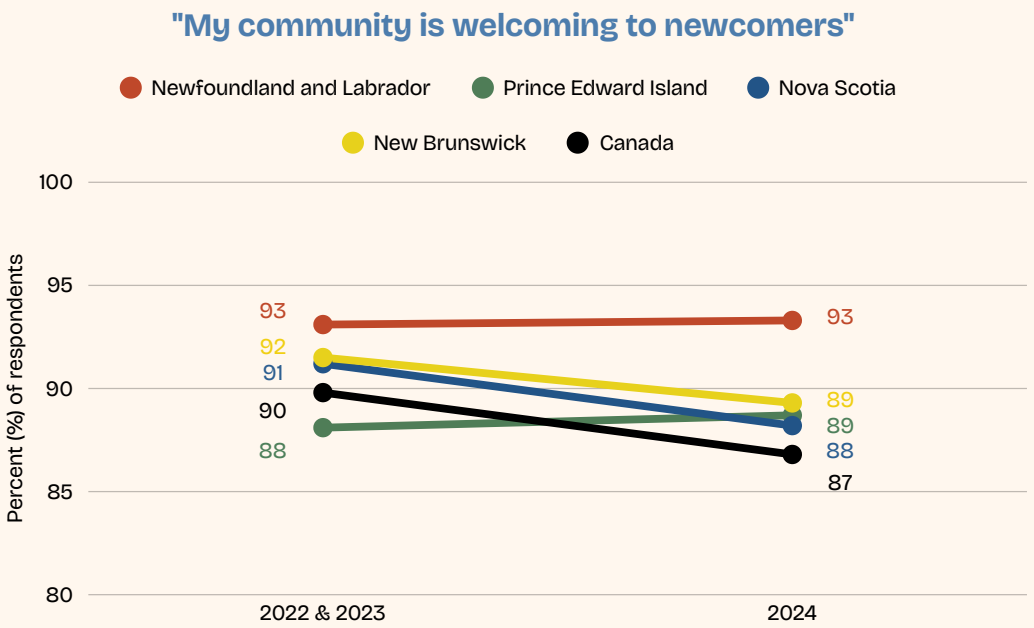

Figure 1: Percent of respondents who describe their community as welcoming. Data for the Atlantic provinces and Canada. Source: IRCC, Newcomer Outcomes Survey.

What is the data?

Data is from the **Newcomer Outcomes Survey** (NOS). Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) conducts the NOS annually with permanent residents admitted in certain years (i.e. four years staggered apart). The 2024 survey was completed by 80,808 newcomers nationally including 4,128 respondents in the Atlantic provinces. The 2022 and 2023 surveys were completed by a combined 153,247 newcomers nationally including 6,018 in the Atlantic.

Figure 1 shows the percent of respondents who agreed with the statement “In my experience, my community is welcoming to newcomers.” ***Figure 2*** shows the percent of respondents who indicated a “strong sense of belonging” to “the local community where [they] live.” All numbers were calculated to one decimal place but presented to the nearest percent.

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What does the data say?

Most newcomers see their local communities as welcoming places. In 2024, between 88% and 93% of newcomers in the Atlantic provinces described their local community as welcoming towards newcomers. These proportions are higher than the national score (87%), which showed a decrease from previous survey years (90% in 2022 and 2023, and 92% in 2020 and 2021). This decrease may be partly related to a rise in negative sentiment towards immigration (Environics Institute). While Nova Scotia and New Brunswick also saw decreases, Newfoundland and Labrador and Prince Edward Island showed slight increases.

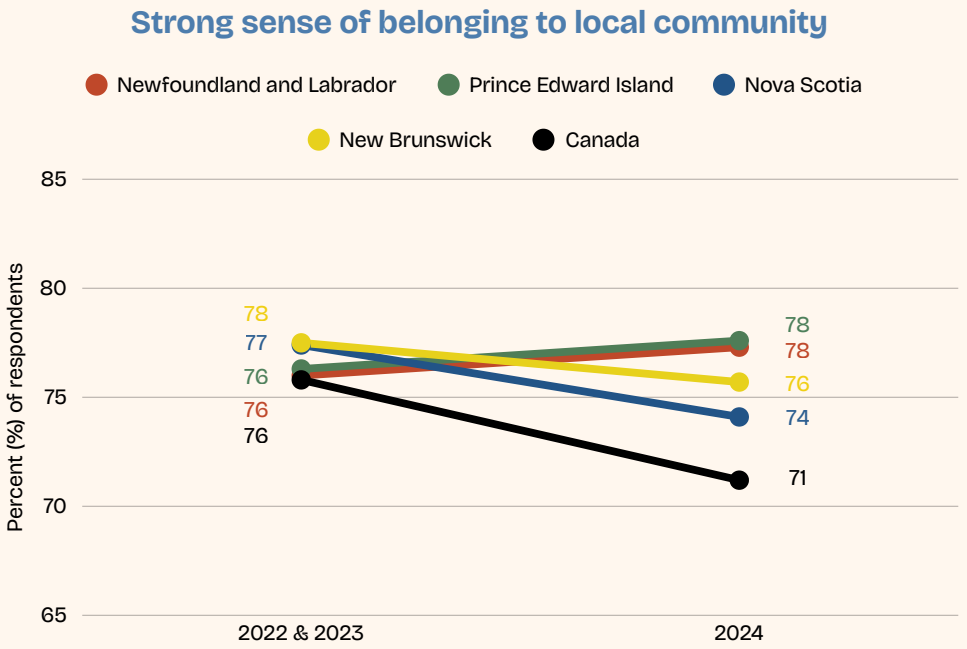

Figure 2: Percent of respondents with a strong sense of belonging to their community. Data for the Atlantic provinces and Canada. Source: IRCC, Newcomer Outcomes Survey.

The majority of newcomers have a strong sense of belonging to their local community. In 2024, between 74% and 78% of newcomers in the Atlantic provinces indicated a strong sense of belonging to their local community. As with welcoming, these proportions are higher than the national score; the national score (71%) showed a decrease from previous years (76% in 2022 and 2023, and 79% in 2020 and 2021). NS and NB also saw decreases from previous years while NL and PE saw increases.

Newcomers' sense of belonging depends on their point of reference. The NOS asks newcomers about their sense of belonging to Canada, the province where they live, their local community, and their workplace. Sense of belonging is generally lowest for the local community and province (between 74% and 80% in the Atlantic provinces) and somewhat higher for Canada (between 81% and 86%). **Sense of belonging is highest in the workplace**. For 2024, the proportion of respondents who indicated a strong sense of belonging to their workplace was 91% in NL, 88% in PE, 85% in NS, and 87% in NB.

What does the data mean for settlement and integration?

Although most newcomers feel welcome, this does not necessarily lead to a strong sense of belonging. Across the Atlantic region, nearly 9 out of 10 newcomers see their communities as welcoming but only three-quarters have a strong sense of belonging to these communities. While it is important to build communities where newcomers can live and thrive, it is also necessary to provide newcomers with the skills, resources, and opportunities to become integrated parts of these communities.

People feel a strong sense of belonging when they contribute to shared goals through collaboration and partnership. It is not surprising that newcomers feel a strong sense of belonging in the workplace, since the workplace is often where an individual's contributions are most obvious and concrete. That is, **community-building is an important part of integration, but it must be treated as a process both *for* and *with* newcomers**. The Building Welcoming Workplaces online course can support employers looking to create a diverse and inclusive workplace culture.

Integration can be supported by community-based programs where people work together towards common goals. Such programs encourage teamwork and collaboration while helping individuals make tangible contributions to shared ideas (Çalışkan and Lavoie). These programs also provide environments for people to build new relationships. Examples include community gardens, sports programs, creative or arts-based projects, community archive or storytelling projects, and community fundraisers.

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