

House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration
Study of Immigration to Atlantic Canada
Submission from: Nova Scotia Office of Immigration

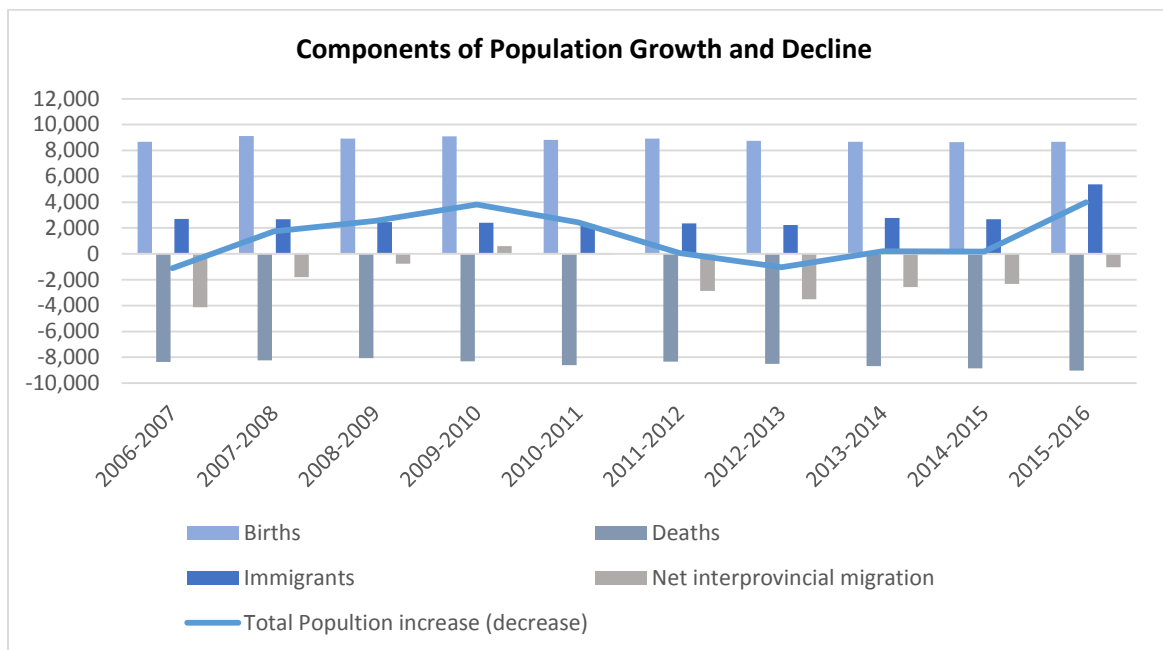
Study on Immigration to Atlantic Canada

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Challenges associated with an aging population and shrinking population base

Overall population decline

Statistics Canada identifies three key demographic trends severely limiting growth in Nova Scotia (illustrated in the graph below) – negative interprovincial migration, negative natural increases (births versus deaths) and an aging labour market.



Not unlike the other Atlantic provinces, Nova Scotia’s natural population change (number of births less number of deaths) has been negative for several years. In fact, Nova Scotia’s population of seniors now exceeds the population of children under 15 years. According to 2016 census data, the number of Nova Scotians over 65 has increased by 19.9 per cent since 2011.

Historically, outmigration has contributed to Nova Scotia’s population issues. As the chart above illustrates outmigration has reduced over the years but NS still faces a situation where more people are leaving the province than moving here.

Labour Market

The population challenges outlined above are impacting the province’s labour market. The 2016 Census shows that the working age population (people aged 15-64) has decreased significantly between 2011 and 2016. Nova Scotia will not be able to address the declining working age population within its current

population. The number of youth and children in the province is decreasing. From 2011 to 2016, the population aged 0-14 shrank by 3.2 per cent.

Employers in the province are reporting labour gaps that cannot be filled by Canadians. Employers in the Information Communications Technology (ICT) and Finance sector report difficulty finding workers. Digital Nova Scotia, the province's ICT industry association, projects 3.5 per cent growth in the industry in the province between 2017 and 2021. Nova Scotia's Finance sector has experienced significant growth over the past 10 years with a number of major international firms establishing operations in Halifax.

A 2017 analysis of in-demand occupations completed for NSOI found that by 2021 Nova Scotia will need 55,000 new workers due to a shrinking labour pool. A declining number of youth and increasing number of retirements is shrinking NS' labour pool. The industries where the labour shortage will be felt the most include health, education, construction, hospitality, business services and technical services.

Employers in more traditional based industries, such as fish and seafood processing and boat building, often in more isolated rural areas, report challenges accessing labour and limited local or international labour options.

Impact of Immigration

NS is welcoming a record number of immigrants. In 2016, nearly 5,500 immigrants made NS their home. This is the highest number of immigrants to NS since the second world war.

Nova Scotia's population in October 2016 was a record high at 952,333. In January 2017, NS's population was 952,024 the second highest population for the province. Compared to January 1, 2016 NS' population has increased by 0.65 % (6,174), the national population grew by 1.29 %.

Statistics Canada attributes immigration to changing the picture in the province from population decline to a population increase.

The Nova Scotia government has made immigration to the province a key part of the province's plan to address the aging population as well as labour market need. In recent years, NSOI has been leading an aggressive, action-oriented approach to immigration including the following initiatives.

- Investments in digital infrastructure. Applicants can now apply online to the Nova Scotia Nominee Program (NSNP) from anywhere in the world and from any device.
- Streamlined processing and service delivery. NSOI provides seamless client service and has improved application processing times.
- Expanded pathways available to immigrate to Nova Scotia.
 - In 2015, NSOI launched Nova Scotia Demand Express Entry that targets in-demand occupations and Nova Scotia Experience Express Entry targeting individuals who have one year work experience in Nova Scotia, many of these are international graduates.
 - Also in 2015 two Entrepreneur programs were launched: Entrepreneur Program for individuals who want to start or purchase businesses in the province; and International Graduate Entrepreneur Program, the first in the country, for international graduates who have started a business.

- Successfully negotiating increases in NS' Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) allocation. Nova Scotia doubled the Nominee Program allocation between 2013 (allocation was 600) and 2017 (allocation is 1.350).
- Enhanced international attraction. The office partners with government departments and community stakeholders to target international attraction to markets that align with the province's population and labour needs and skill gaps.
- Increased resources to focus on employer engagement. Working closely with employers is critical to helping them better understand immigration and help them navigate the immigration system to allow them to meet their labour needs.
- Broader community outreach. NSOI has held community conversations across the province with newcomers, stakeholders and the general public on the benefits of immigration and how immigration can help the province.
- Settlement support across the province to encourage integration and retention. Increased immigration to the province means a higher demand on settlement programming and NSOI has responded with increasing funding to settlement service providers each year since 2013.

Retention of current residents and the challenges of retaining new immigrants

Retention of current residents and new immigrants has improved in Nova Scotia.

- The rate of out migration has declined since 2013 and is currently the lowest in Atlantic Canada.
- The overall retention rate of immigrants in NS has improved dramatically in the past ten years. In 2014, 73% of individuals who landed in NS between 2008 and 2013 remain in the province in 2014. In the early 2000s retention was 48% in NS.
- More international students are choosing to stay in NS. In 2011, NS nominated 180 international graduates, in 2016 512 international graduates were nominated by NS.
- Nova Scotia's retention rate is the highest in the region and NSOI is focussed on continuing to improve the province's retention rate.

NSOI has directed significant resources to ensuring settlement services meet the needs of immigrants across the province. With 11 universities, NS has a large international student population, a well educated population who already have attachments to the province. NSOI has improved the pathways available to immigrate to the province for international graduates (Nova Scotia Experience Express Entry and the International Graduate Entrepreneur Program). With NS' improving economy, the province is now seeing more and more immigrants coming and staying in NS.

Analysis of the AIP initiatives

The three-year Atlantic Immigration Pilot was launched in March 2017. The Pilot will bring up to 2000 new workers, and their families, to the Atlantic Region in 2017 (approximately 800 to Nova Scotia) with numbers potentially rising in future years based on performance.

The Pilot is a federal program with an identified role for provinces. Provinces work directly with employers. The federal government processes candidate applications for Permanent Residence.

The pilot is testing new ways of doing immigration, with the aim to enhance retention in the region. The program is employer driven. Unique to any immigration program, employers are being asked to

demonstrate their support for the settlement and integration of candidates and their family members. The program includes three streams one for high-skilled occupations, one for semi-skilled occupations and one for international graduates.

In Nova Scotia, there has been considerable interest from employers in the pilot. As of August 21, 263 employers have applied for designations and 180 have been designated and approved to recruit foreign nationals to fill their labour needs. Employers have submitted 117 endorsement applications and 70 foreign nationals have been endorsed.

The level of interest in the program and the success of the program to date indicates that the program is meeting a need. NSOI now has increased resources focused on employer engagement. Notably, the program's semi-skilled stream and international graduate stream are offering more flexible pathways than the NSNP. Unlike the NSNP, both streams do not require work experience in Nova Scotia.

Implementation of the Pilot is in the early stages. It is challenging to provide further analysis and insight into the program at this time. The Pilot has a comprehensive evaluation framework that will allow for analysis of the program based on quantitative results.

Recommendations on how to increase immigration to the region

An accessible, innovative and responsive immigration system is critical. It is important for local employers to be able to access the human capital needed to support their labour needs and to strengthen the local economy. Part of this is allowing provinces the ability to tailor their Provincial Nominee Programs to the needs of the local economy, both in terms of number of programs and type of programs.

A multi-year approach to levels setting would provide stability in the immigration system. It would provide increased certainty for Provinces and Territories and their stakeholders, and would inform long-term program and operational planning at both the federal and provincial/territorial levels of government.

Create flexibility by allowing Nova Scotia, and the other Atlantic provinces, to each propose its target PNP allocation on an annual basis. This target would be based on criteria that demonstrates absorptive capacity (i.e. labour market information, settlement supports, etc). Nova Scotia has successfully demonstrated its dedication and ability to welcome newcomers while also having the necessary supports in place to allow them to settle successfully once they arrive.

Address the challenges currently faced by employers using immigration to meet labour needs. NSOI hears the following from employers:

- Federal processing times for immigration are too long.
- Immigration is complicated and difficult to understand.
- Employers lack the resources to utilize immigration to meet their labour needs.
- Duplication of information requested at the provincial and federal levels.
- Labour Market Impact Assessment is a disincentive

NSOI is working to make programming more responsive to employer needs. NSOI has streamlined processing and invested in digital infrastructure to allow for more applications online. NSOI has dedicated more resources to working directly with employers to help them more fully utilize immigration programs to meet their labour needs.

In addition to this work it would be helpful to:

- reduce duplication in information requested between at the federal and provincial level
- reduce PNP processing times at the federal level

Communication with the broader community on the benefits of immigration. NSOI has held community conversations on Immigration across the province. These are helpful to build an understanding of immigration, an understanding of community strengths and activities that can be supported through immigration and to encourage collaboration.

International attraction through international recruitment events and webinars. NS often participates in international recruitment with Atlantic partners under the “Canada’s East Coast” brand to maximize resources and reach. In 2017, NSOI is adopting a new international marketing and attraction approach that aims to promote immigration to the province, within new markets, and specifically targeting individuals that match job market demand, entrepreneurs in the growing sectors, and people with strong community connections to Nova Scotia. We would welcome the opportunity to have IRCC partner with us and support our international attraction efforts.

A strong network of support for immigrants is critical to successful integration in the community. NSOI’s network of settlement support service providers offer language training, employment supports, bridging programs, welcoming community activities, programming with youth and children in school. NSOI has increased investments in settlement supports year over year since 2013.

A coordinated settlement approach between provinces/territories and federal government would improve settlement programming, reduce duplication of federally and provincial funded programming and allow for programming tailored to provincial needs.

Nova Scotia Office of Immigration

The Nova Scotia Office of Immigration (NSOI) was established in 2005 and currently has a staff of 35 FTEs.

NSOI works with private, public, academic and non-governmental organizations to:

- a) Market the province as an attractive immigration destination and promote all immigration pathways to Nova Scotia;
- b) Select immigrants through the Nova Scotia Nominee Program who fulfil a labour market need and who will make a contribution to Nova Scotia's economy;
- c) Strengthen immigration and settlement planning, policy and programming in the Province in order to encourage integration and retention; and
- d) Promote welcoming communities including raising awareness and understanding of immigration and diversity issues.

NSOI administers the Nova Scotia Nominee Program. Currently there are 5 active streams, each with a different focus:

- Skilled worker – for people with a full-time job offer from a NS employer
- Nova Scotia Experience: Express Entry – for high skilled people with 1 year of experience in Nova Scotia
- Nova Scotia Demand: Express Entry – for high skilled people with experience in “in-demand” occupations
- Entrepreneur – for people who want to start or purchase a business in NS
- International Graduate Entrepreneur – for international graduates who have started a business after graduating from a post-secondary institution in NS

NSOI is exploring the addition of new streams to address other critical gaps in Nova Scotia's labour market.

New for this year is the Atlantic Immigration Pilot, a federal program with provinces designating and endorsing employers who participate in the program. The Pilot is an employer-back program with a focus on settlement and retention and includes streams for international graduates, high skilled workers (NOC 0, A, B) and semi-skilled workers (NOC C).

NSOI partners with community agencies to support delivery of settlement and integration programming for newcomers to Nova Scotia through two funding envelopes: Settlement Funding Program and Immigrant Labour Market Integration Program.

Resources for employer outreach and engagement have been increased this year. NSOI works with employers to inform on how immigration can help address their labour needs and provide assistance with the immigration process.