

Notes from the **EduNova Student Recruitment Committee Meeting** held on December 11, 2024, at Saint Mary's University, Halifax.

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Presentation Topic: **“International Students in Atlantic Canada: A Survey on their Academic and Socio-Economic Experiences”**

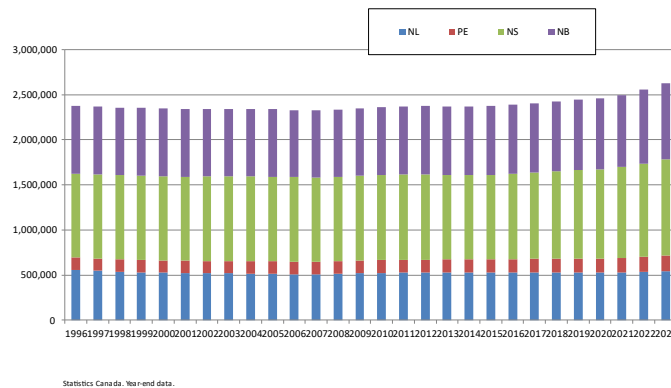


The Atlantic Research Group on Economics of Immigration, Aging and Diversity (ARGEIAD), in collaboration with IRCC, ACOA, and ATN, conducted a survey of international students. The main motivation of the survey was to assess the satisfaction of international students at universities and colleges in Atlantic Canada. It focused on areas such as education, campus services, social interactions, employment opportunities, and the immigration process.

Retaining international students is vital for driving economic growth and addressing labor market shortages in the region. Policymakers seek to enhance retention strategies by analyzing these. After decades of stagnation or decline, population in Atlantic region increased remarkably over the past few years. However, there are still concerns in an aging population resulting from declining natural growth of population happening in Atlantic Canada at a faster rate and this has economic implications for the region. The aging population, migration of youth, and low birth rates in Atlantic Canada can cause a reduced demand for goods and services due to a smaller population. Politically, this demographic shift has significant

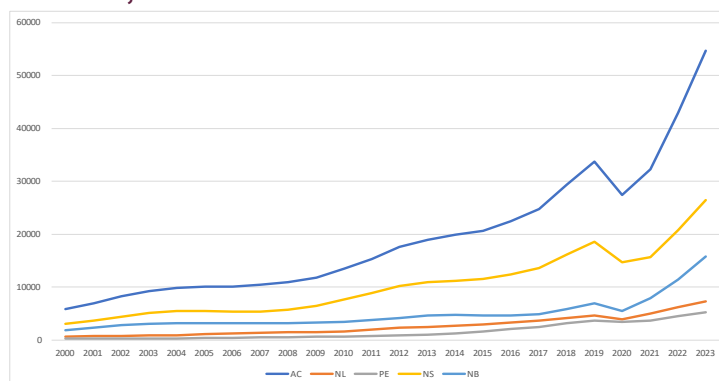
implications: if a province's population decreases, it may lose seats in the House of Commons, leading to a reduction in its proportional representation.

Population in Atlantic Canada, 1996-2023



From 2010 to 2019, the number of international students enrolled in Canadian public postsecondary educational institutions more than doubled from 142,200 to 388,800, and their share of total postsecondary student enrolments increased from 7% to 18% . Development strategies are based on a labour force that can sustain continuous growth, including increasing the number of international students at the region's universities and colleges, and encouraging them to seek permanent resident status at the end of their studies and join the labour force. These students have Canadian qualifications, are fluent in one or both official languages, and are familiar with the culture.

Study permit holders in Atlantic Provinces on December 31,2023



The target population for the survey consisted of 68,845 post-secondary students who enrolled at Atlantic institutions between 2017 and 2023. The survey received 3,584 valid responses, roughly equally split between males and females, and spanning a wide range of ages. Approximately 60% of respondents received their study permit within three months of application, with few experiencing delays in starting their programs as a result. Overall, the Canadian application process is generally comparable to, if not somewhat easier than, those in other countries.

The survey found that about half of respondents learned about Atlantic Canada as a study destination through family and friends, while one-fifth cited recruitment agencies or social media. The main reasons for choosing the region were the cost of living, tuition fees, academic reputation, and program flexibility. However, some students experienced unexpected hikes in tuition and accommodation costs. When it came to choosing an institution, financial reasons were the main factor, and only about one-fifth of respondents were satisfied with the accuracy of the information they received from institutions.

About a quarter of international students faced delays in their studies due to processing delays with their visas. Additionally, a quarter of those who had experience with student visa applications in other countries found the Canadian process to be more complex and stressful. Since Atlantic Canada receives fewer international students than the rest of Canada and aims to attract more, addressing visa delays and the complexity of the application process should be a priority at the policy level.

Almost 90% of students worked part-time while studying, with some expecting their income to cover living and tuition costs, but they found that available jobs were mostly low-paid. Over 70% expressed satisfaction with their work experience, while most students who didn't work cited a lack of time due to their academic commitments.

More than 70% of students were satisfied with their interactions with domestic students, although some found it easier to make friends with other international students. About one-third reported feeling socially isolated on campus, while about one-quarter had interactions with families off-campus, most of which were described as warm and welcoming.

About half of the students were satisfied with their accommodation experiences, while about two-thirds faced difficulties in finding accommodation. Many did not expect the process of securing housing to be so challenging.

Almost three-quarters of international students accessed on-campus settlement services, mostly for academic or employment counseling, while only about one-quarter used mental health services. Financial concerns were a major source of stress, impacting academic

performance. Most students were satisfied with the academic counseling they received, and teachers' passion for teaching was a key source of satisfaction, alongside other factors.

More than 90% of students reported good to excellent grades, with over half reporting excellent marks, and none had grades below "satisfactory." These grades are self-reported, and future research could compare them with the actual grades of domestic students. Financial stress was the main factor negatively affecting academic performance. Challenges included adjusting to a colder climate, a new academic structure, and difficulty finding accommodation, while high-quality teaching had a positive impact on their performance.

Almost two-thirds of students found their first job in the province where they studied, with more than 10% remaining unemployed. Over half were employed in their field of study, and nearly two-thirds had permanent jobs. Almost two-thirds found employment within three months of completing their studies, and more than four in five found their employers to be flexible and supportive. However, one in five students felt they had suffered discrimination or unfair treatment from their employers.

Around 70% of students expressed a desire to stay in the province where they studied, with Nova Scotia being particularly notable in this regard. However, survey data suggests only about a 44% chance that an international student will actually stay in an Atlantic province. This likelihood is higher for males than females, and improved by greater cultural acceptance and ease in making friends. It is reduced by finance-related mental stress and accommodation challenges. The chance of retention is similar across Atlantic Canada and unaffected by interactions with domestic students, faculty, staff, or the general community.

The overall results of the survey are positive for Atlantic Canada. However, there are concerns that need to be addressed by institutions and governments, such as better informing students of conditions before their arrival ("managing expectations"), particularly regarding academic requirements, financial concerns, accommodation, cultural acceptance, and weather conditions. Additionally, alumni connections and financial aid can be effective tools for attracting students.

The meeting emphasized refining strategies to improve international student retention and their integration into the labour market. Suggestions for further research include exploring challenges faced by international students across all of Canada, examining the effectiveness of existing support services, and investigating sustainable funding models for these services.

In response to the question about the geographical representation of international students, a detailed breakdown was provided. The largest group of international students came from India, making up 26% of the total, followed by Nigeria with 9%. Students from China, Bangladesh, and the Philippines comprised 7%, 5%, and 4%, respectively. The remaining 49% of international students came from a variety of other countries.