IMMIGRANTS IN RURAL CANADA

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HIGHLIGHTS

♦ Immigrants tend to prefer urban to rural: in 1996, they made up 27 percent of the population in predominantly urban regions, compared with 6 percent of the population in predominantly rural regions.

♦ Recent and new immigrant groups intensified this urban trend: those who arrived between 1981 and 1996 made up only 2 percent of the predominantly rural region population, but 13 percent of the predominantly urban region population.

♦ In predominantly rural regions, immigrants had a higher level of education, compared with the Canadian-born: a lower proportion had less than a high school diploma and a higher percentage were university graduates.

♦ In predominantly rural regions, immigrants who arrived before 1981, when compared to the Canadian-born,
  • had a higher employment rate,
  • were more likely to work in professional services, and
  • had higher employment incomes.

♦ In predominantly rural regions, recent and new immigrants (who have arrived since 1981), when compared to the Canadian-born,
  • had a lower employment rate,
  • were more likely to work in sales and services, and
  • had lower employment incomes.

♦ Immigrants in the rural northern regions had more favorable socio-economic profiles than in other regions.

Introduction

In 1996, 17 percent of Canada’s total population were immigrants, and 88 percent of them were living in urban regions. The three provinces with the largest urban centres attracted most immigrants: 55 percent went to Ontario, 18 percent to British Columbia and 13 percent to Quebec, a pattern that has remained constant for immigrants who have arrived since 1961.

1. Census 2001 data for immigration, ethnic origin and visible minorities will be released in February 2003.
The remaining 12 percent (or 580,000 people) were living in predominantly rural regions. They can be characterized by the period in which they arrived in Canada. Recent and new immigrants were better educated than pre-1981 immigrants, particularly in terms of university education. But pre-1981 immigrants had the highest employment rate and were more likely to have professional service occupations than the Canadian-born.

Visible minority immigrants fared worse, in socio-economic terms, than non-visible minority immigrants; these differences were more pronounced in predominantly rural regions.
The profiles of immigrants in predominantly rural regions were similar to those in predominantly urban regions. However, the few immigrants who resided in rural northern regions had a very different and more favorable profile.

Box 1

**Definitions**

**Predominantly rural regions** are census divisions (CDs) where more than 50 percent of the population lives in rural communities. A **rural community** has a density of less than 150 persons per km². The predominantly rural regions are disaggregated into three subregions: rural metro-adjacent regions, rural non-metro-adjacent regions, and rural northern regions.

**Predominantly urban regions** are CDs where less than 15 percent of the population lives in rural communities. There are also intermediate regions, where between 15 percent and 50 percent of the population lives in rural communities.

**Population groups** studied in the paper come from the 1996 Census and include the following:

- **Immigrants** are those born outside Canada and are, or have been, landed immigrants. A landed immigrant is a person who has been granted the right by immigration authorities to live permanently in Canada. Some immigrants have lived in Canada for many years while others are recent (1981 to 1990) or new (1991 to 1996) arrivals. Children born in Canada to immigrants are counted with the Canadian-born population.


- **The non-visible minority population** comprises those who are Caucasian in race or white in colour.

- **The Canadian-born** are those born in Canada and, therefore, not part of any immigrant group.

**Non-permanent people** are those who were not Canadian citizens by birth and did not have landed immigrant status (e.g., people with a student or employment visa or a Minister’s permit, or refugee claimants) at the time of the 1996 Census. They are excluded from this analysis.

**The experienced core labour force** comprises people aged 25 to 54 years, excluding institutional residents, who were employed or unemployed during the week prior to Census Day, and who had worked for pay or in self-employment in either 1995 or 1996.

**Occupations** have been separated into the following groups:

- **Professional services**
  - Management
  - Business, finance and administration
  - Natural and applied sciences and related occupations
  - Health
  - Social science, education, government service and religion

- **Cultural**
  - Arts, culture, recreation and sports (Note: Because of the low numbers in this occupational group, cultural occupations have not been included in this analysis.)

- **Sales and service** (e.g., retail trades, real estate agents, policeman/firefighters, travel agents)

- **Trades and industrial**
  - Trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations
  - Occupations unique to processing, manufacturing and utilities

- **Primary** (e.g., farmers, crop harvesters, fishing boat deckhands, miners, chainsaw operators)

**Employment rate** refers to the number of people employed in the week prior to Census Day, expressed as a percentage of the total population (for the given age class).
Few immigrants resided in predominantly rural regions

The immigrant proportion of each regions’ population varied considerably (Figure 1). In predominantly urban regions, immigrants made up 27 percent of the total population compared with only 6 percent of the predominantly rural population. The share was slightly higher in rural metro-adjacent regions than in rural non-metro-adjacent and rural northern regions.

Immigrants that settled in predominantly rural regions preferred the higher-income provinces (British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta) and the Yukon (Figure 2). In the predominantly rural regions of Saskatchewan and in Canada’s five eastern provinces, immigrants represented less than 4 percent of the total population.
Recent or new immigrants made up a small proportion of the population of predominantly rural regions (Box 1 and Figure 3). These immigrants were overwhelmingly found in predominantly urban regions. The predominantly rural regions in each province had a low share of the population that were recent or new immigrants – ranging from less than 1 percent in the five eastern provinces to just over 2 percent in the higher-income provinces and the Yukon (Appendix Table 1).
Visible minority immigrants made up an increasing share of total immigrants, but few resided in predominantly rural regions

The origin of immigrants has changed significantly, so that the majority of new immigrants to Canada are now members of a visible minority group (Box 1). Of those immigrants who arrived between 1991 and 1996, 74 percent were visible minority immigrants, compared to about 3 percent of all immigrants who arrived three decades earlier (data not shown). By 1996, there were almost 2.2 million visible minority immigrants residing in Canada, representing 44 percent of all immigrants.

In predominantly rural regions, visible minority immigrants numbered almost 83,000, representing 14 percent of all predominantly rural immigrants and almost 4 percent of all visible minority immigrants in Canada.
The immigrants in rural regions were better educated than the Canadian-born

The proportion of immigrants with lower educational attainment—i.e., less than a high school diploma—was similar to that of the Canadian-born. A larger proportion of the immigrants had a higher education—i.e., were university graduates—than the Canadian-born. In rural regions, on average, immigrants were markedly more highly educated than the Canadian-born.

In Canada in 1996, 23 percent of the Canadian-born had not graduated from high school. The proportion of total immigrants\(^2\) was similar but slightly lower. In predominantly urban regions, 18 percent of the Canadian-born had less than a high school diploma, while all immigrant groups were about 4 percentage points higher (Figure 4). However, in predominantly rural regions, a higher percentage of the Canadian-born had not graduated from a high school, with the greatest difference found in the rural northern regions.

In rural regions, the proportion of visible minority immigrants lacking a high school diploma was always greater than that of non-visible minority immigrants (data not shown).

**Figure 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predominantly rural regions, immigrants had a smaller share than the Canadian-born with less than a high school diploma, 1996</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent of population aged 25 to 59 with less than a high school diploma</td>
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<td>25</td>
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</table>


In all regions, Canadian-born women were better educated than Canadian-born men, that is, a smaller proportion of women had less than a high school diploma and a larger proportion had a university degree (data not shown). Among recent and new immigrants, however, a larger share of women than men had less than a high school diploma, but women were almost equal to men in terms of having a university degree.

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\(^{2}\) In this bulletin, ‘total immigrants’ is discussed but not shown. ‘Total immigrants’ is the weighted average of all the immigrant types.
Regarding university graduates, 23 percent of total immigrants had graduated from university whereas only 17 percent of the Canadian-born had. Generally, across all region types, the recent and new immigrants were much more likely than the Canadian-born to be university graduates (Figure 5). In predominantly rural regions, a greater proportion of the visible minority immigrants than of the non-visible minority immigrants were university graduates (data not shown).

**Figure 5**

| New and recent immigrants were more likely to be university graduates in most regions, 1996 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Percent of population aged 25 to 59 with a university degree |
| Canada | Predominantly urban regions | Intermediate regions | All predominantly rural regions | Rural metro-adjacent regions | Rural non-metro-adjacent regions | Rural northern regions |
| 35 | 30 | 25 | 20 | 15 | 10 | 5 | 0 |

In predominantly rural regions, immigrants (except new immigrants) were more likely to be employed than the Canadian-born

In Canada, the total immigrant employment rate was lower than the Canadian-born rate (73 percent versus 78 percent). However, there were differences among the immigrant groups. Pre-1981 immigrants had a higher employment rate of 80 percent (Figure 6). Urban and intermediate regions were similar to this Canadian profile. However, in predominantly rural regions, all but the new immigrants had slightly higher employment rates than the Canadian-born. In the rural northern regions, the total immigrants population had the largest lead over the Canadian-born (80 percent versus 71 percent).
New immigrants had the lowest employment rate in each type of region. However, their employment rate was higher by 12 percentage points in predominantly rural regions than in predominantly urban regions (70 percent versus 58 percent).

New immigrants were less likely to be employed, but immigrants in predominantly rural regions had similar employment rates to the Canadian-born.

Figure 6

![Figure 6: Comparison of employment rates for different groups](image)


While pre-1981 immigrants in rural regions were more likely to have a professional occupation, recent and new immigrants were not, 1996.

Figure 7

![Figure 7: Professional occupation rates for different groups](image)

Pre-1981 immigrants had the highest share with professional services occupations in predominantly rural regions

In predominantly rural regions, pre-1981 immigrants had the highest proportion (45 percent) working in professional services (Figure 7). This was 5 percentage points higher than the Canadian-born. This pattern prevailed in all of the rural regions except rural northern regions, where all immigrants had a higher proportion than the Canadian-born in professional service occupations. Only in predominantly urban regions did the Canadian-born have the highest percentage working in professional services.

In intermediate regions, the proportion of visible minority immigrants in professional service occupations was higher than the proportion of non-visible minority immigrants (data not shown). However, in predominantly urban and predominantly rural regions, the opposite was true: a higher share of non-visible minority immigrants worked in these occupations, a finding that was accentuated in the rural northern regions.

In most regions, immigrants were more likely to work in sales and service occupations than the Canadian-born

Nationally and in most regions, the percentage of all immigrants working in sales and service occupations was higher than the percentage of the Canadian-born (Figure 8). The more recent the date of arrival of the immigrant, the higher the proportion working in these occupations. In predominantly rural regions, the difference between the Canadian-born and new immigrant groups working in sales and service occupations was 7 percentage points; the difference was highest (14 percentage points) in rural northern regions.

Figure 8

![New immigrants were more likely to have a sales and service occupation in most types of regions, 1996](image_url)

In predominantly urban regions, visible minority immigrants were more likely to have sales and service occupations compared to non-visible minority immigrants (Figure 9). In all of the predominantly rural regions this finding was accentuated, particularly in the rural northern regions.

**Figure 9**

Visible minority immigrants in rural regions were more likely than non-visible minority immigrants and the Canadian-born to have sales and service occupations, 1996

In predominantly rural and intermediate regions, a lower percentage of the immigrant groups than of the Canadian-born worked in manufacturing, processing and trade occupations. Intermediate regions had shares that were almost equal, but predominantly rural regions showed a greater difference—27 percent for Canadian-born, compared with 18 percent for new immigrants (Figure 10). The gap between these two groups was even wider in rural northern regions. Only in predominantly urban regions did all immigrant groups have a higher proportion than the Canadian-born working in manufacturing, processing and trade occupations.

In predominantly rural regions, a lower proportion of immigrants than of the Canadian-born worked in manufacturing, processing and trade occupations

In predominantly rural and intermediate regions, a lower percentage of the immigrant groups than of the Canadian-born worked in manufacturing, processing and trade occupations. Intermediate regions had shares that were almost equal, but predominantly rural regions showed a greater difference—27 percent for Canadian-born, compared with 18 percent for new immigrants (Figure 10). The gap between these two groups was even wider in rural northern regions. Only in predominantly urban regions did all immigrant groups have a higher proportion than the Canadian-born working in manufacturing, processing and trade occupations.
In predominantly rural regions, immigrants were more likely than the Canadian-born to work in primary occupations

The share of the Canadian-born working in primary occupations was less than that of most immigrant groups in predominantly rural regions (data not shown). The more recent the immigrant, the higher the share working in these occupations.

Within predominantly rural regions, the percentage of recent and new immigrants working in primary occupations was highest in rural metro-adjacent regions and non-metro-adjacent regions. The rural northern regions did not have enough observations to allow a reliable regional comparison.

The differences between visible minority and non-visible minority immigrants were fairly consistent: non-visible minority immigrants had a larger percentage in primary occupations. However, in rural non-metro-adjacent regions, this pattern was reversed, with a greater proportion of the visible minority immigrants in primary occupations.

Pre-1981 immigrants earned more employment income than the Canadian-born, particularly in the north

In Canada, the pre-1981 immigrant group earned the highest average employment income ($30,700), about 16 percent more than the Canadian-born (Figure 11).
The recent and new immigrant groups earned less than the Canadian-born—16 percent and 40 percent less, respectively. Most of the rural regions maintained this profile except rural northern regions, where recent immigrants earned 13 percent more than the Canadian-born. This region also had the greatest difference between pre-1981 immigrants and the Canadian-born, with the former earning 38 percent more.

All female groups in each region earned less employment income than their male regional counterparts (data not shown). In 1996, in predominantly rural regions, Canadian-born women earned 40 percent less than Canadian-born men and new immigrant women earned 48 percent less than new male immigrants. In predominantly urban regions, a similar picture emerged: Canadian-born women earned 34 percent less and new immigrant women earned 31 percent less than their male counterparts.

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3 These comparisons should be regarded with care. Income data was taken from the Census 2B or ‘long’ form, which has a one-fifth or 20 percent sampling. Therefore, in the rural northern regions, while Canadian-born had a representative sample of 75,523, the pre-1981 immigrant income data was taken from a representative sample of only 3,553.
Comments and analysis

Immigration was Canada’s main source of population growth in the period from 1996 to 2001. In fact, immigration accounted for more than one-half of Canada's population growth between 1996 and 2001 (Bélanger, 2002). For rural communities that are seeing out-migration of their educated youth, attracting immigrants is an important development strategy. The potential for rural communities to recruit immigrants from outside Canada is already under discussion as a community development strategy. The challenge is first, to attract individuals and second, to keep them here (Citizenship and Immigration, Canada).

While the pre-1981 immigrants had integrated well into the labour force, new and recent arrivals, despite a higher share with a university education, were still adjusting to the economy (Badets and Howatson-Leo, 1999).

This may be due to a number of factors, including:

• lack of Canadian work experience, lack of networks, sex, age at arrival in Canada and lack of knowledge of English or French (Boyd and Vickers, 2000), and
• lack of recognition of foreign credentials and work experiences (Couton, 2002; Thompson, 2002).

More controversial reasons include:

• a weak professional education, restricted mobility and inequitable earnings within the professions (Couton, 2002), and
• racial discrimination (Smith and Jackson, 2002).

New immigrant arrivals may have also been caught in the recession of the early 1990s and maintained slow earnings growth compared with immigrants who arrived earlier and the Canadian-born (Couton, 2002; Thompson, 2002).

Not many immigrants have decided to make rural regions their home. In 1996, immigrants constituted only 6 percent of the predominantly rural population, compared with 27 percent of the predominantly urban population. The pattern is more stark for immigrants who have arrived since 1981: they make up less than 2 percent of the predominantly rural population but over 12 percent of the predominantly urban population.

Among the immigrants presently living in predominantly rural regions, pre-1981 immigrants have integrated well, sometimes outperforming the Canadian-born. However, the new and recent immigrant groups have not integrated as well in predominantly rural regions.

The socio-economic differences between visible minority immigrants, the primary source of new immigrants, and the other population groups were more pronounced in the predominantly rural regions.
Visible minority immigrants reported:
- a higher proportion lacking a high school diploma,
- a higher proportion with a university degree,
- a lower employment rate,
- a higher likelihood of having occupations in sales and services, and
- lower incomes.

Many of the predominantly rural immigrant profiles were also found in predominantly urban regions. However, the few immigrants that lived in the rural northern region have a very different profile, with:
- increased levels of education,
- higher employment rates,
- occupations in professional services, sales and service, and
- higher employment incomes compared with the Canadian-born.
These immigrants have the advantage of mobility and education to access well-paying and professional employment.

Roland Beshiri is an analyst in the Research and Rural Data Section, Agriculture Division, Statistics Canada. Emily Alfred is a student at the University of Waterloo and contributed to this paper during a co-op work term at Statistics Canada.
References


### Appendix Table 1

**Immigrant population, Canada and Provinces, 1996**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Predominantly urban regions</th>
<th>Intermediate regions</th>
<th>All predominantly rural regions</th>
<th>Rural metro-adjacent regions</th>
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**Percent of immigrants in total population**

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<th>Intermediate regions</th>
<th>All predominantly rural regions</th>
<th>Rural metro-adjacent regions</th>
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**Percent of recent and new immigrants in total population**

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<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>3.9</td>
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<td>25.1</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3.3</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
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<td>...</td>
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<td>1.8</td>
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<td>1.6</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Statistics Canada. 1996 Census of Population.

... = 'not applicable'
Appendix Figure 1

Population groups, 1996

Number key:
- Total population
- ( ) Labour force (ages 15+)
- [ ] Core experienced labour force (ages 25-54)

Total Population¹
28,528,125
(14,748,855)
[10,877,815]

Canadian-born
23,390,340
(11,909,715)
[8,710,815]

Immigrants
4,971,070
(2,839,135)
[2,176,000]

Non-visible minority immigrants
2,795,125
(1,547,900)
[1,348,445]

Recent immigrants
381,185
(247,975)
[199,225]

New immigrants
269,360
(142,815)
[118,930]

Pre-1981 immigrants
2,144,580
(1,157,105)
[816,295]

Visible minority immigrants
2,175,945
(1,291,235)
[1,032,545]

Recent immigrants
381,185
(247,975)
[199,225]

New immigrants
269,360
(142,815)
[118,930]

Pre-1981 immigrants
695,085
(507,820)
[400,410]

¹ Total population does not include non-permanent population (Box 1)
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