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NowNS: Immigrants thrive in Bluenose country

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Prime Minister Justin Trudeau personally welcomed the first wave of 25,000 Syrian refugees coming to Canada on Thursday and Premier Stephen McNeil has asserted that his government will welcome as many as the feds are willing to relocate to the province.

This being the case, it is worth asking how immigrants fare here, given that the answer will likely give us some hints on how well refugees will integrate.

A [recent report for Pathways to Prosperity \(P2P\)](#), conducted by researchers at Dalhousie and Saint Mary's universities in partnership with the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS), suggests that immigrants do well in Nova Scotia.

Findings look at the economic outcomes of immigrants by landing category and cohort from 1990 to 2012, the last year with available information.

The report busts a number of myths. The first is that immigrants don't do well in the province. This may have been the case a couple of decades ago. However, economic principal applicants landing in Nova Scotia between 2010 and 2012 actually have higher rates of employment one year after arriving (76 per cent) compared to Canada as a whole (73 per cent).

Another busted myth is that immigrants will be underemployed compared to other parts of the country.

When this is examined, the report finds that one year after landing in Nova Scotia, economic principal applicants' earnings are \$44,000 compared to \$36,000 nationally. The employment and earnings trends are also seen across other categories of immigrants, save family-sponsored parents and grandparents.

Changes in policy and the success of settlement organizations, such as ISANS, have clearly worked at better integrating recent cohorts of immigrants to province.

One more busted myth is that only economic stream immigrants contribute to the economy.

The report shows that 96 per cent of spouses and partners who come with economic immigrants and 91 per cent of family-sponsored spouses and partners are of "prime" working age, between 20 and 55 years old.

The majority of spouses and partners are also employed one year after arrival and over a third have a university degree. Policy-makers should not underestimate the economic potential of sponsored family immigrants.

The report, however, also identifies some trends that should be examined further and that need policy attention.

For instance, the overwhelming majority (66 per cent) of principal applicants are men as well as their sponsored children (64 per cent), while the opposite is true of spouses and partners who come with them and other family-sponsored immigrants.

Also striking is the fact that the province attracts immigrants from a narrow range of countries — 58 per cent of economic principal applicants to Nova Scotia, landing between 2010 and 2012, were from just six countries: Britain, China, the Philippines, India, Egypt and Iran.

When gender and source country are considered together, this means the province is losing out on attracting a wide range of immigrants.

When a comparison is made between economic and family-sponsored stream immigrants, interesting findings emerge. For instance, among cohorts of immigrants landing in Nova Scotia in the 1990s and early 2000s, family-sponsored spouses and partners rivalled and even outperformed economic-stream principal applicants.

Even so, noticeable differences remain between economic vs. family-sponsored spouses and partners, with the latter having better economic outcomes than the spouses and partners coming with principal applicants.

It is unclear why this might be the case and this should be a focus of future policy analysis. Is it because family-sponsored spouses can tap into more established social networks that lead to jobs, or is it because their families face greater financial pressure driving them into the paid labour force?

Questions like these mean that it is important for the province to continue to invest in researching immigration. It is through investigation that evidence-based policies can be developed and such policies, combined with quality efforts by settlement organizations, are what have led to the dramatic shift in how immigrants fare in Nova Scotia.

Taken together, if refugees compare to immigrants, then Premier McNeil and Immigration Minister Lena Diab are right to encourage them to come to Nova Scotia.

They will likely be successful in integrating into jobs and making meaningful contributions to the province.

It is now time to let the rest of Canada into our secret: immigrants do well here.

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