

*The experience with immigration of mid-sized cities in the Prairie Provinces is under-explored and is expected to differ from the experience of Canada's three largest metropolises in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons. Local contextual features for each city influence locational decisions and provide a preliminary analysis of gaps to be addressed in local planning and policy decisions. Factors that appear to be significantly related to relocation decisions include the diversity of the population in the host community, income and poverty rates. This research explores how individual municipalities are responding to these issues and highlights the services they provide to both newcomers and established immigrant populations in these communities.*

# An Analysis of Immigrant Attraction and Retention Patterns Among Western Canadian CMAs\*

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Over the past decade (1991-2000), the five western Canadian cities of Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon, Calgary and Edmonton received a total of 184,632 immigrants, accounting for only 8.3% of all immigrants to Canada. Over the course of this decade, the share of Canada's immigrants landing in the western cities ranged from a low of 7.4% in 1996 to a high of 9.5% in 1991 and 1994.

It is projected that important labour shortages that have begun to emerge in the Canadian labour market will continue to worsen over the next 25 years due to the ageing of the workforce. To the extent that immigration is expected to account for labour force growth, the ability of cities, and the western region, to attract and retain immigrant labour will be critical for economic growth, and will be even more critical for smaller centres as intra-regional competition for labour may grow. Not only will western cities be competing against more established immigrant centres in central Canada, they will be increasingly competitive among themselves for a share of the immigrant population destined

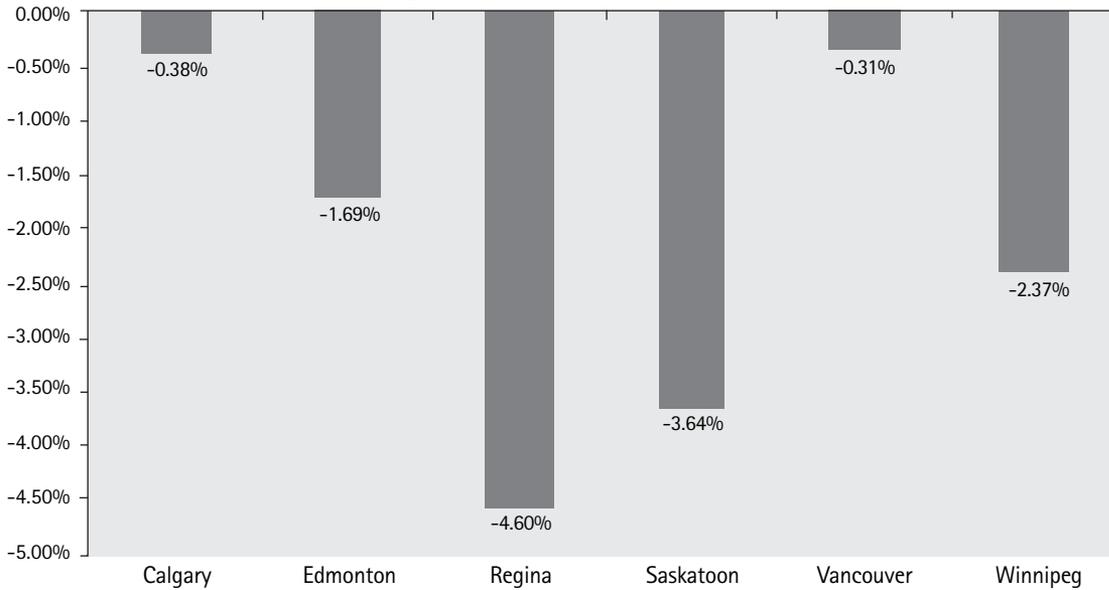
for western Canada. Consequently, the attraction and retention of immigrants will be a pressing and growing challenge.

In order to be prepared to address these challenges and to do a better job of retaining immigrants, it is imperative that municipalities are able to measure emerging population trends and understand the experiences of newcomers who arrive in their communities. However, there is currently no effective measure that provides a clear picture of how internal migratory trends change the ethnic diversity of these populations. In order to better understand these trends and their potential impacts on western Canadian cities, a research tool was developed to elucidate

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FIGURE 1  
Annual retention rate, total immigrants



the migratory patterns among various immigrant groups. In addition, representatives from each of the major cities in Western Canada completed questionnaires relating to the efforts being made at the municipal level to welcome and address the integration needs of immigrants. The intention was to use the data collected to better inform municipal policy and program planning in order to better address the particular needs of these emerging populations.

### Methodology

This research employed both quantitative and qualitative analyses and examined the period from 1991 to 2000. A quantitative analysis was conducted using federal Census and Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) immigrant landings data to establish retention rates among six western cities. The results of this analysis were presented to a regional forum in April 2007 where representatives from these cities discussed the results and provided local contextual data. These qualitative data were then used for further quantitative analyses to assess the impact of the issues identified by stakeholders on local retention rates (for the full report and details of the model, see Pruegger and Cook 2007).

### Results: Regional overview

The results showed different historical immigration patterns and current retention

patterns among the five prairie cities. While the western region as a whole exhibited a relatively stable immigrant population, significant shifts and differences between cities in the region were not evident. Among cities in the Prairie Provinces in 1991, Edmonton had the highest immigrant population (152,830) followed by Calgary (151,760), Winnipeg (113,755), Saskatoon (17,150) and Regina (15,885).<sup>1</sup>

Between 1991 and 2001, the cities of Winnipeg, Saskatoon and Regina all experienced a net loss of immigrants, while the cities of Calgary and Edmonton experienced a net gain in the number of immigrants. The greatest loss of immigrants was reported in Regina, where immigrant population declined by 11.8%, followed by Winnipeg with a 3.8% decline and Saskatoon with a 1.7% decline. By contrast, the immigrant population grew in Calgary, with a 30.1% increase, and in Edmonton, with an 8.1% increase.

Notwithstanding robust growth of the immigrant population in the three largest western cities, the immigrant population of the western cities, including those that gained population, fell below what would have been

<sup>1</sup> The original research included Vancouver but these data were not included due to this issue's focus on the Prairie Provinces (although they do remain in the graphs). Researchers interested in the full analysis can contact Valerie Pruegger at [vpruegger@calgary.ca](mailto:vpruegger@calgary.ca) for a copy of the final report.

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projected assuming 100% retention. Therefore, among western cities, all major CMAs experienced negative retention rates, indicating secondary out-migration of varying degrees. The lowest retention rate was experienced by the CMA of Regina (95.4%), followed by Saskatoon (96.4%), Winnipeg (97.6%), Edmonton (98.3%) and Calgary (99.6%), as shown in Figure 1. In terms of actual population, the greatest net population loss was experienced by the CMA of Edmonton (-24,328), followed by Winnipeg (-23,469), Regina (-6,213), Calgary (-5,951) and Saskatoon (-5,485), as shown in Figure 2.

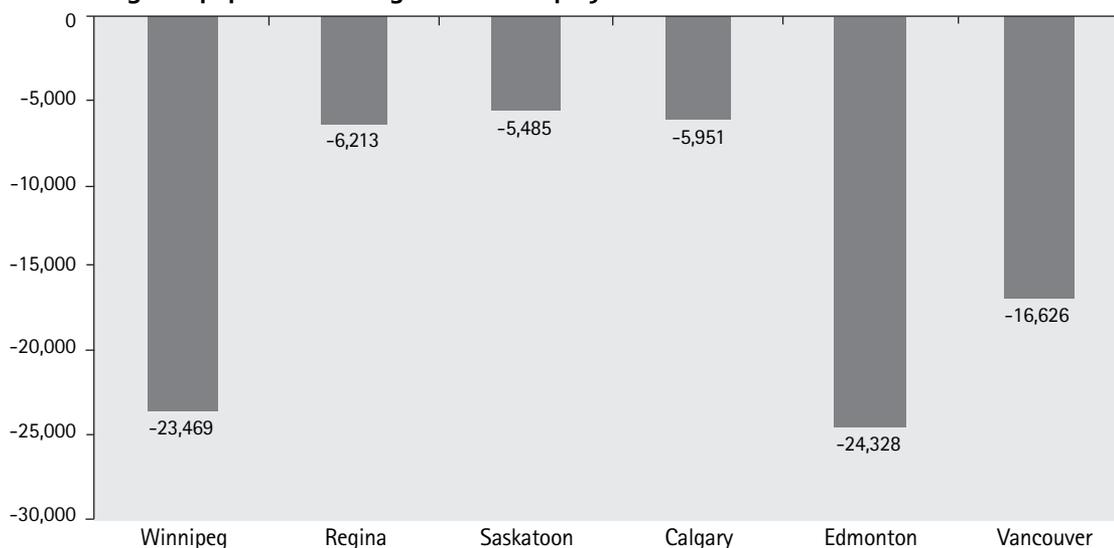
Retention rates also varied considerably by the source region of immigration. Immigrants from Asia tended to have the lowest retention rates in all cities, while the highest retention rates tended to be among immigrants from Europe. The low retention rate of Asian immigrants is problematic due to the importance of Asia to overall immigration in Western Canada. The low retention is resulting in a significant loss of labour force potential in some cities.

Finally, retention rates varied significantly by immigration period. Retention rates were positive

among all cities for immigrants who arrived between 1961 and 1980 and lowest among immigrants who arrived between 1981 and 1990. However, the CMAs of Regina and Saskatoon reported significantly lower retention rates among recent immigrants (1991-2000), with Regina posting a retention rate of only 87.7%. At the same time, the CMA of Calgary reported a positive retention rate for recent immigrants, suggesting some movement of recent immigrants from other CMAs to Calgary.

Cities present at the roundtable identified a range of factors that they considered to affect local retention rates. Attractors included the bilingual (English and French) nature of the community (e.g., Winnipeg) as well as the degree of diversity of the population. Detractors included a lack of affordable housing, racism/discrimination, underemployment/unemployment, inadequate public transportation and inadequate levels of ESL and settlement services. It was also suggested that low retention rates could be attributed to general patterns of population decline in some cities, not unique to the immigrant population in particular.

**FIGURE 2**  
**Net immigrant population change, actual vs. projected, Western Canada, 1991-2000**



In order to test these factors, where possible, indicators for each factor were selected. Poverty was also tested. These indicators were then used for a correlation analysis between the factor and the retention rate for each specific immigrant group in each city. Results showed a number of factors related to migration decisions, including the level of diversity of the host community, higher levels of population diversity as measured by the immigrant and visible minority populations in those cities and economic security. Employment opportunities and affordable housing did not appear to be significantly related to migration decisions. In fact, average housing cost was positively correlated with retention. This may suggest that larger cities are more effective at attracting immigrants for a variety of reasons, such as their greater level of diversity, and that these benefits may offset factors such as higher housing costs. From these findings, it is evident that a qualitative study that discusses these issues with immigrants themselves would provide an important addition to our understanding of these findings.

### **Local challenges**

Each municipality identified a number of local challenges to attracting and retaining immigrants. While some of these were unique, there were many commonalities. The first set of challenges was the capacity of public agencies to address the barriers facing local communities in a coordinated manner. There appears to be uncertainty over roles and responsibilities and a lack of leadership and coordination of services in the various orders of government involved in immigration and settlement. At the same time, governments and government agencies are seen to lack the organizational and resource capacity to effectively address immigration issues.

Municipalities are facing growing demands for services to address immigration and settlement issues but lack the resources to address these demands, which lie outside of their mandates. This has led to a growing concern about the lack of inclusion of municipalities in discussions around immigration policy and settlement.

A lack of affordable housing and adequate public transportation were also identified as local challenges, as were economic challenges like the problems of underemployment and unemployment facing recent immigrants. It was suggested that this pattern of labour market disadvantage was contributing to a widening

income gap in urban areas and highlighted the need for resources for municipalities to develop long-range economic development strategies for newcomer communities.

Another challenge identified by stakeholders was the lack of cultural diversity in the smaller urban centres. It was felt that this poses barriers to creating welcoming environments for newcomers and may contribute to their subsequent decision to leave the community. At the same time, Winnipeg identified its cultural diversity as an asset that may help attract and retain immigrants. However, most cities expressed a concern about racism and discrimination in their communities and viewed this as a significant obstacle to creating welcoming environments that could effectively attract and retain immigrants.

A number of emerging issues were identified, including lack of representation from immigrant or racialized populations on local government councils, commissions and boards; the need for more integration of health and education systems into policy and strategy planning; the need for more regional collaboration and better communication between cities and within communities; and recognition of the funding imbalances, which restrict action in smaller urban centres.

### **Supports and services**

To meet these challenges, all of the municipalities participating in the study had a range of support services from community to not-for-profit to government-sponsored services. However, the partners recognized that an increasing immigrant population with increasingly complex and diverse needs is straining this infrastructure, one that is loosely coordinated at best. There has been a range of responses by the municipal governments to meet this demand for services and supports. While some municipal governments, particularly in areas that are actively working to attract immigrants to their communities, have recognized the importance of specifically addressing immigrants and immigration in business plans, policy and practice (e.g., Regina, Saskatoon, Edmonton), others see it as the responsibility of other orders of government and are reluctant to take on a costly and complicated issue outside their mandates.

### **Policy recommendations**

There needs to be more inter-governmental cooperation and coordination of services. Bi- or tri-lateral immigration agreements can offer an

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opportunity to create more holistic and integrated approaches by providing a lever to bundle services and policies that assist efforts to improve immigrant economic and social integration outcomes (Cappe 2007). Many of the partners in this study highlighted the importance of creating tri-lateral agreements to ensure local governments have a voice in immigration policy and programs. All agreed that municipal governments have key roles to play in terms of creating welcoming communities and fostering integration of newcomers into their communities.

We also need to think of immigration over the lifespan and how settlement factors differentially impact different groups. Currently, we are seeing a growing diaspora of immigrants and their Canadian-born children due to lack of opportunities in this country (see Mandel-Campbell 2007). A recent study has noted that about four in ten newcomers who arrived in the business and skilled worker classes left within ten years after arrival (Statistics Canada 2006). This represents an important draining of needed resources and community capital. How can we stem this tide and understand what is required to keep people in Canada? Many cite the lack of opportunities for racialized individuals, which speaks to a need to address the foreign credential recognition issue in a meaningful way, and to put teeth into Canada's Action Plan Against Racism.

Exploitation of temporary foreign workers (TFW) is also an issue. There is evidence that some employers are using TFW programs in an exploitive manner, contributing to worker vulnerability at the job site and in the broader community. There is also evidence of growing resentment among established immigrant populations who perceive employers as using the TFW program to access vulnerable and cheap labour from overseas while overlooking qualified immigrant job-seekers already here in Canada. As these programs expand, provincial and federal authorities must allocate resources for monitoring employers and responding effectively to worker complaints. Every effort should be made to ensure that TFW practices occur within the parameters set out in human rights legislation and

employment standards law at both the provincial and federal levels. For a thorough discussion of some of the issues and recommendations for Alberta, see Alberta Federation of Labour (2007). We also have to examine the exploitation of live-in care workers and how long-term issues such as de-skilling and high poverty rates impact local communities.

Housing is one of the critical issues related to effective settlement among immigrants. Housing policy needs to recognize that decent, secure housing is a precondition for many other outcomes, such as success in school and stable employment. We need to ensure that relevant ministries are working together to create successful integration outcomes for newcomers.

Greater sharing of information and coordination of action between ministries is also required in order to address intersecting needs in areas such as employment, housing, health, justice and childcare. The federal government needs to ensure that municipal governments and settlement agencies receive adequate funding in order to address immigration and integration. The competition for a small pool of dollars prevents many settlement agencies from being able to respond to the demand for services, especially in smaller immigrant-receiving communities. There is also evidence that internal migration trends increasingly represent the movement of secondary migrants. A more concerted effort is needed to identify these movements, consider these populations at a policy level and distribute resources in a flexible manner that will best meet changing needs within given municipalities and regions. Governments and service providers should develop a one-window service support model to connect immigrants to what they need on arrival to allow them to fully participate in the community – a wrap-around approach (Cappe 2007).

## **Conclusion**

The extent to which integration is successful and allows our communities to benefit from the enormous social and economic capital newcomers bring with them will depend on our

ability to work more effectively with other orders of government and community agencies in a coordinated fashion. This study has demonstrated the utility of the model in helping local governments identify patterns in their communities that can lead to targeted solutions and regional cooperation strategies. While municipalities, individually, largely lack the jurisdiction and resources to affect many of the factors that contribute to migration decisions, the development of a collective regional strategy may provide municipalities with the opportunity to collectively address such issues.

Immigration will continue to be a challenge and opportunity for municipal governments and communities into the foreseeable future. We need to be aware of the unique needs and challenges in different areas so that we do not try to develop a one-size-fits-all model for integration and services. We have seen that the cities in this study have unique attractors and retention issues, which will require creative solutions. We have also seen the value of looking at regional patterns as a way to learn effective practices and approaches from each other.

### About the authors

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## Immigration and Diversity in Francophone Minority Communities

Special Issue of *Canadian Issues / Thèmes canadiens*

The Metropolis Project and the Association of Canadian Studies have produced a special issue of the magazine *Canadian Issues* on immigration and diversity in Francophone minority communities. The issue (spring 2008) presents a range of perspectives on Francophone immigration and diversity in Canada. For the last ten years or so, Francophone minority communities have considered these issues to be critical to their economic, social and cultural development. The edition features an introduction by Chedly Belkhodja of the Université de Moncton and over 30 articles by knowledgeable policy-makers, researchers and non-governmental organizations.

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