



**BORDERS IN
GLOBALIZATION**

**BIG POLICY BRIEF
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Chilly communities in Atlantic Canada: While formal supports for immigrants are plentiful, community inclusion remains



Chilly communities in Atlantic Canada

The challenges faced by immigrant populations do not end upon arrival to Canada. The hurdles present during the application and resettlement process are replaced by [newer hurdles](#) – integration, community building, and establishing a sense of membership in their new society and their new community. In some cases, immigrants receive help in meeting these challenges in the form of municipal, provincial and territorial, and federal programs aimed at helping newcomers to settle.

Yet despite these supports, community integration remains elusive, as non-immigrant residents can remain ambivalent about the presence of immigrants in what they see as their communities.

THE RESEARCH

Investigators with the Borders in Globalization project (BIG) examined the experiences of immigrants in Nova Scotia. Specifically, researchers were interested in understanding how immigrants in that province experienced integration and community building.

Immigrant experiences integrating into their new communities are important to understand, as a lack of integration can result in employment difficulties for immigrants, as well as feelings of isolation or disconnection from their new societies. The problem for many immigrants, is that while there was a recognition on the part of government agencies that a failure to find a sense of belonging was present, few if any resources were available to help address the issue.

BIG [researchers noted](#) that immigrants in Nova Scotia had access to multiple levels of support from sev-

eral government agencies. These supports focused on skills development, job placement, and language development – everything to help a newcomer to succeed in the Canadian and Nova Scotian economy. Despite the presence of these programs however, immigrants often found the region to be less than welcoming to them and their families.

As one immigrant observed, “I’ll be leaving soon too – I give myself the next two years. It’s good to bring up the children in Nova Scotia but after that there’s nothing here in Nova Scotia because Nova Scotians are not open. They’re not accepting.”

Advocacy groups have noted that in areas where community inclusivity is low, immigrants have a more challenging time finding work, and are more likely to give up on trying to find inclusion or to become involved in the community, preferring instead to remain culturally isolated with other immigrants from similar backgrounds. Rather than finding Canada – and Nova Scotia – to be the welcoming place it is so often purported to be, immigrants [find themselves](#) marginalized and isolated, prompting them to leave for larger cities.

Nova Scotia is not alone; most regions in Canada face similar challenges to fully integrating immigrant populations into their communities, as BIG research has [indicated](#).

This is especially true in rural spaces or in regions experiencing rapid population growth as their [economies open](#) to global markets. In such spaces, cultural identities remain fairly homogeneous, presenting an additional barrier to entry and inclusion for immigrants. Rather than facing barriers because of language, immigrants find difficulty under-



standing and interpreting cultural [symbols, signs and meanings](#). Without the assistance of locals to help newcomers navigate these unwritten expectations, many immigrants find it easier to simply leave, rather than try to become integrated on their own.

THE POLICY

While many issues faced by immigrants require the input of federal, provincial, or municipal resources, the challenge of entering local cultures is not one that can be solved by throwing money at newcomer populations. In fact, increased taxpayer-funded interventions have an increased chance at backfiring, as locals perceive such programs as “gifts” or worse, “handouts” given to immigrants at their expense. More importantly, such spending programs are unlikely to help, as immigrants are not the problem; the issue is local resistance to newcomers in their midst. Giving additional money to immigrant programs assumes that immigrants are the ones best able to solve the problem. Instead, non-immigrant populations in regions that are experiencing relatively higher numbers of new arrivals need help to manage their own anxieties and to break the cycles of exclusion that have limited immigrant integration in the past.

One of the ways this can be achieved is to strengthen ties of partnership between settlement programs, diasporic community advocates, and non-government groups and organizations within communities. Such partnerships would allow stakeholders to reach across cultural boundaries more easily and facilitate cultural exchange and integration.

The importance of these partnerships is often overlooked, but they are critical elements of successful immigrant integration. It makes sense to want to focus on job-placement and training programs for new immigrant populations but possessing the skills for a job does not guarantee that a person will remain

employed. If an immigrant cannot build ties within a community, or if they feel that there are barriers to entry, they may lose access to critical informal social networks that are often critical to career success.

Integration is a two-way conversation, and all too often, immigrants are made to feel as though they must supply both sides of it themselves. In the short term, the challenge of integration can, if not addressed, lead to limited job prospects or chances at advancement. In the longer term, the feeling of being shut out of their newfound communities can lead to immigrants

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choosing to leave, or to close themselves off. While both outcomes are solutions of sorts, they are the worst kind. Without long-term support and buy-in from non-immigrant residents, attempts at immigrant settlement, integration, and long-term residence will come with a high risk of failure.

More information and research can be found by visiting the Borders in Globalization [website](#).

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Photo Credit: Richard Gould



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