

Community Survey Results

This report outlines findings from the **Western Regional Enterprise Network's (REN) Community Survey** which gathered input from 111 people in October 2021. The survey asked residents of the Western Region (Yarmouth County, Digby County, and the Municipality of Barrington) a series of questions in order to learn more about community priorities, concerns, and attitudes about immigration. Survey results will help form a data baseline for the region and identify possible strategies that could be implemented to make the region more welcoming to immigrants and will also be used to inform the Western NS LIP Strategy.

Here are the highlights of our findings.

The questions asked in this survey contained positive and negative statements around immigration. This was done intentionally in order to provide an opportunity to respondents to consider immigration from different perspectives and freely express support or concern around immigration in the Western Region.

47% of respondents had always lived in the Western Region, 14% were born elsewhere in NS. 16% born elsewhere in Canada and 23% of respondents were born outside of Canada. Participants ages ranged from 18 to over 80, with the most common age ranges being between 36 to 50 and 51 to 65.

Opinions tend to be quite positive related to questions focused on the benefits of immigration to our region but became less positive related to questions about the supports available and how welcoming an area we were to newcomers. 71% agreed that it is a good thing for any society to be made up of people from different races, religions, and cultures. 86% agreed or strongly agreed that immigrants make our region more productive and innovative.

An area of polarization in the responses is around the statement “The Western Region does **enough** to support immigrants and refugees” only 21% either agreed or strongly agreed, 26% chose “Neither agree or disagree”, 23% disagreed, 6% strongly disagreed and 24% answered “Don’t know” to this question.

“Forming friendships following immigration shows that the first few days after coming to a new home country may be the most important for a happy integration process” (*source <https://www.concordia.ca/cunews/main/releases/2017/01/10/the-importance-of-making-friends-fast-for-immigrants.html>*). 56 % of respondents indicated that they have friendships with immigrants who lived in the Western Region with the majority of those friendships being formed at work or in their neighbourhoods.

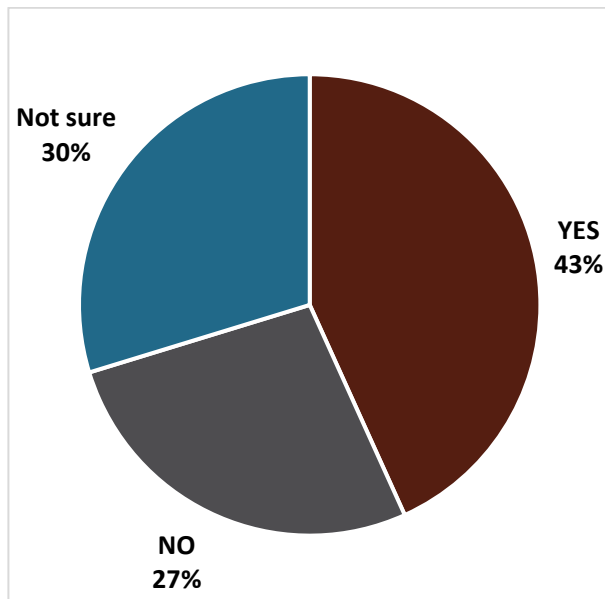
The topic of discrimination was surveyed with 53% of respondents saying they had **witnessed** discrimination and 35% having had **experienced** discrimination.

The province of Nova Scotia has “Set a population goal of 2,000,000 by 2060 by attracting on average of 25,000 people per year” and “Encourage moves to areas outside of Halifax that have been experiencing a decline.” As immigration numbers grow in our region, it is important to periodically measure public perceptions of immigration at the local level and the reasons behind those perceptions. The results are a useful tool in to address myths and misconceptions around immigration and foster public support for immigration at community level.

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Survey Results

Overall, do you feel that the Western Region is a welcoming place to immigrants?



Sample comments:

“There is a very strong “come from away” bias in many of the communities I know. It’s okay to work here, but don’t say anything and don’t try to change anything because you’re not really from here”

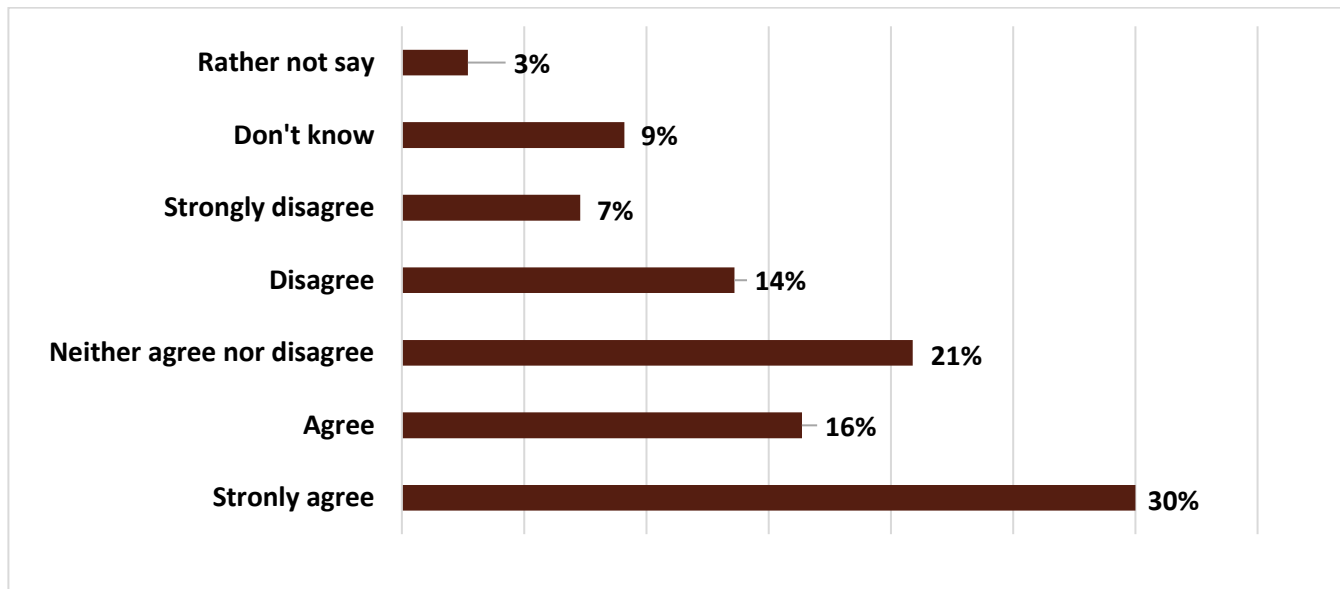
“Smaller communities are often uninterested in meeting newcomers. The complaint is heard that they don’t know anyone in the neighbourhood anymore.”

“I think there are a lot of people who have never lived outside of the region who do not understand the benefits of having a diverse community”

“I am not aware of any immigrants”

Responses to statement

“I am proud of the Western Region’s reputation as being open and welcoming for immigrants and refugees”



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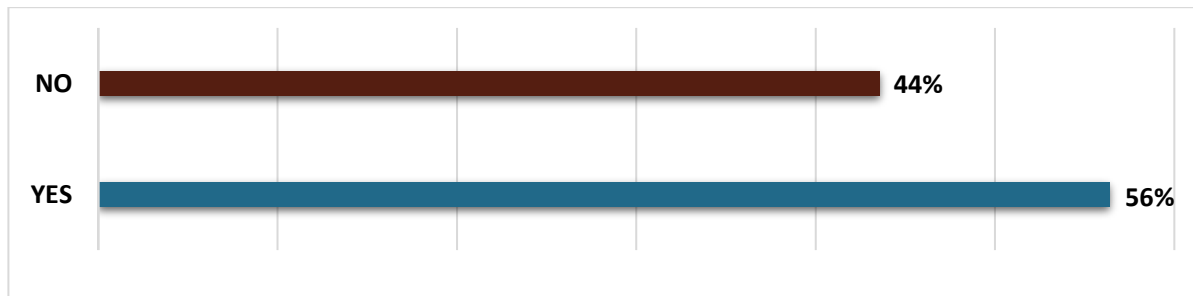
Do you feel that diversity is beneficial to our community?

- **YES 93%**
- **NO 5%**
- **Not sure 2%**

Sample comments:

- “Newcomers bring ideas, energy, enthusiasm, money.”
- “The only way communities in rural areas will thrive is through diversification of culture.”
- “Definitely! Immigrants often create businesses and hire locals”
- “Absolutely but first, we must look after our own”
- “I think it will minimize our Acadian/Native culture”

Do you have friendships with immigrants in the Western Region?



If you have friendships with immigrants who live in the Western Region, where are you forming those friendships?

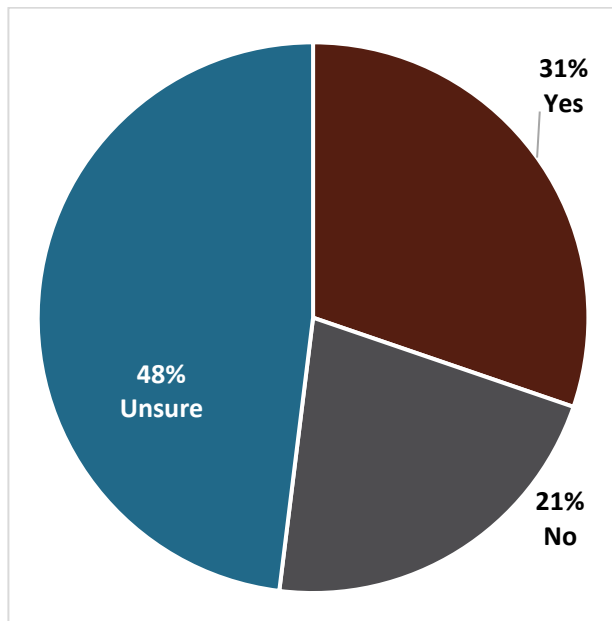
31%	At work
31%	In my neighbourhood
30%	Through mutual friends
27%	I do not have friendships with immigrants who live in the Western Region
12%	At my children’s school
8%	In a recreational group
8%	Other (see comments below)
7%	At church
7%	Through family
5%	At school

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Sample comments:

- “Through sponsorship that turns into friendship”
- “Retired. Don’t attend church. Don’t belong to any large groups, organizations or charities. So, I don’t have the opportunity to meet and interact with new immigrants. I live in a rural area where there isn’t a “neighborhood” per se.”
- “Farmer’s market, some organizations”

Overall, do you feel immigrants are connecting with other residents of the Western Region?



Sample comments:

“We do not have many social spaces that aren't alcohol focused. This creates real barriers. Our community events/volunteer spaces are often close knit, and exclusionary to people not of the community.”

“They seem to keep to themselves.”

“Many resources rely on social media which is not necessarily something many immigrant women can access or have been able to access. Language is also a barrier, and most materials are available in English, and are written which requires a high English literacy level.”

“I have yet to see advertising for groups, meetings or programs, formal or informal to welcome them to town.”

In your opinion, how can immigrants and other residents better connect with one another?

Sample comments:

“We need small, local welcoming committees, that provide predictable, accessible pathways into various community spaces.”

“We should create and join support groups, just coffee mornings, Facebook groups etc..”

“We moved here less than a year ago. It’s hard to find local resources. Everyone knows everyone but is newcomers don’t know who to call or not call for repairs.”

“A navigator position to help people connect, not just doctors, based with a community organization like the Women’s Centre, Church or Mariner’s Centre.”

“Community coordinators that bring families to different events beyond the sponsoring organization.”

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“Not sure- but campaigns that demonstrate the importance and value of immigrants are beneficial”

“I think the best connections are made through children, mainly through school and activities. Parents look out for one another’s children.”

“Once again if the government doesn’t want people to be upset about immigrants, they must look at their own first. When a community comes together to purchase a house, transportation, and everyday essential stuff only to have Mary who grew up in the community have no other choice put to sleep in her car and visit the food bank frequently. That’s the divide.”

Discrimination happens when people are treated unfairly because they are seen as being different from others.

Experienced Discrimination

35% of respondents have experienced discrimination

55% of respondents have not experienced discrimination

10% of respondents are not sure if they have experienced discrimination

The following indicated the number of “votes” **where** respondents say the discrimination they **experienced** occurred and what they think was the **reason** for the discrimination:

	At work of searching for a job	While looking for housing	In a store/ bank/ restaurant etc.	In a school/ hospital/ public agency	On the street	With police or in the courts	Other location
Ethnicity/ culture	14	6	5	10	7	4	14
Race or skin colour	3	2	3	7	8	2	8
Language or accent	13	2	9	7	8	3	10
Religion or beliefs	5	1	2	3	3	2	4
Gender identity	7	3	6	5	5	5	6
Sexual orientation	4	2	3	3	5	3	3
Disability	4	2	2	2	2	1	3
Age	12	2	6	5	6	3	6
Other	5	1	3	5	7	3	7
Total	67	21	39	47	51	26	61

“People just need to be exposed to different cultures so they’re not racist anymore. It’s gradual — not something that can change overnight”

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Witnessed Discrimination

53% of respondents have witnessed discrimination

38% of respondents have not witnessed discrimination

10% of respondents are not sure if they have witnessed discrimination

The following indicated the number of “votes” **where** respondents say the discrimination they witnessed occurred and what they think was the **reason** for the discrimination.

	At work of searching for a job	While looking for housing	In a store/ bank/ restaurant etc.	In a school/ hospital/ public agency	On the street	With police or in the courts	Other location
Ethnicity/ culture	21	14	19	15	25	10	17
Race or skin colour	21	13	20	20	25	12	16
Language or accent	21	7	16	12	17	7	19
Religion or beliefs	10	7	9	12	15	8	11
Gender identity	14	9	9	10	13	8	11
Sexual orientation	10	6	7	8	10	5	14
Disability	13	8	11	9	10	6	9
Age	16	8	7	7	9	5	7
Other	7	4	4	5	6	4	7
Total	133	76	102	98	130	65	111

Open-ended question responses

What changes do you think could be made that would allow immigrants to feel more welcome in the Western Region?

- Educating our ignorant masses is the #1 true answer. Without the understanding that immigrants are not 'stealing' our jobs, doctors, and homes, this will continue to be a fairly unwelcoming place for immigrants to establish roots. I'd consider offering some services in a variety of languages or other accommodations (illustrations/pictures for example) in order for everyone to understand.
- "Welcome to" signage in multiple languages
- Maybe a community welcoming basket
- Perhaps ask for volunteers or a family or members of a club to act as a mentor or support for an individual or family moving into our area
- More public display of their culture. Maybe add flag poles to a public area in town and hang the flags of newcomers as they arrive for a month or more? Maybe encourage for a mural in town that celebrates our hidden diversity!!

Bottom Line

The statistics and comments in this report highlight that there is much opportunity and work to be done in order for our region to become more welcoming to newcomers. Participants also stressed the importance of education in the community regarding immigration and the value of connecting with immigrants.

Changing people's attitudes and perceptions can occur when information is shared. Newcomers and community members are learning from each other and are interested in further opportunities where they can meet and get to know each other informally.

Discrimination needs to be addressed in various locations/organizations. It begins by listening, educating, raising awareness, and challenging everyday discrimination and racism when we hear and see it.