

Labour Survey Results

This report outlines findings from the **Western Regional Enterprise Network's (REN) Labour Needs Survey** which gathered input from 149 employers in September and October 2021. The survey asked the owners of businesses in the Western Region (Yarmouth County, Digby County, and the Municipality of Barrington) a series of questions to assess the impact of labour shortages on their company and how immigration might play a role in helping to fill those needs.

Survey results will help form a data baseline for the region and identify the sectors and workers most impacted and most in need of services. This data will be used to channel regional concerns to government, and other stakeholders to assist with their planning needs. Information gathered through this survey will also be used to inform the Western NS LIP Strategy.

Here are the highlights of our findings.

Our study found that labour shortages are hurting businesses from many different sectors in various ways. From not being able to fulfill their orders (27%), cancelling expansion plans (21%), and even considering closing their business (14%), the competition for workers has been top priority for the majority of employers. This has meant that some companies have changed their hiring practices (50% stated they had to hire less qualified workers) and increased the wages and benefits (35%) to attract new and retain their current employees.

The COVID-19 pandemic has added to the labour shortage with many people stepping away from the workforce for a variety of reasons. 75% of employers responded that the availability of CERB or other government supports were the #1 reason they were having trouble recruiting or retaining employees.

"In April 2021, Nova Scotia has experienced the strongest employment recovery in the country, reflecting increases in professional, scientific, and technical services, and educational services. Third wave COVID-19 restrictions imposed in late April caused employment to decline by 4.8% in May, as the recovery in total employment slowed to the lowest of all provinces. The province also experienced the strongest recovery in manufacturing and wholesale trade sales in Canada, as of March" (*source <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-631-x/11-631-x2021002-eng.htm>*)

As can be seen above, some sectors have rebounded and demand for their products/services has reached pre-pandemic levels, but the labour force shortages have continued. As the global pandemic and the border restrictions imposed to slow the spread of COVID-19 crippled economies throughout the world, they also slowed immigration to Nova Scotia. Only 31% of employers surveyed currently employed immigrants but when asked the number and types of positions that they would consider hiring immigrants for, it was basically on par with the numbers and types of positions they would hire Canadian workers for.

The reasons given for why they were not currently hiring immigrants:

- 42% Do not have time to dedicate to paperwork and/or process
- 40% Our labour need is immediate (cannot wait)
- 31% Providing settlement support services to international employee
- 29% Do not know where to start

Over 30 employers requested to speak to one of our Western REN team members about options available to help recruit international candidates for their business.

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Survey Results

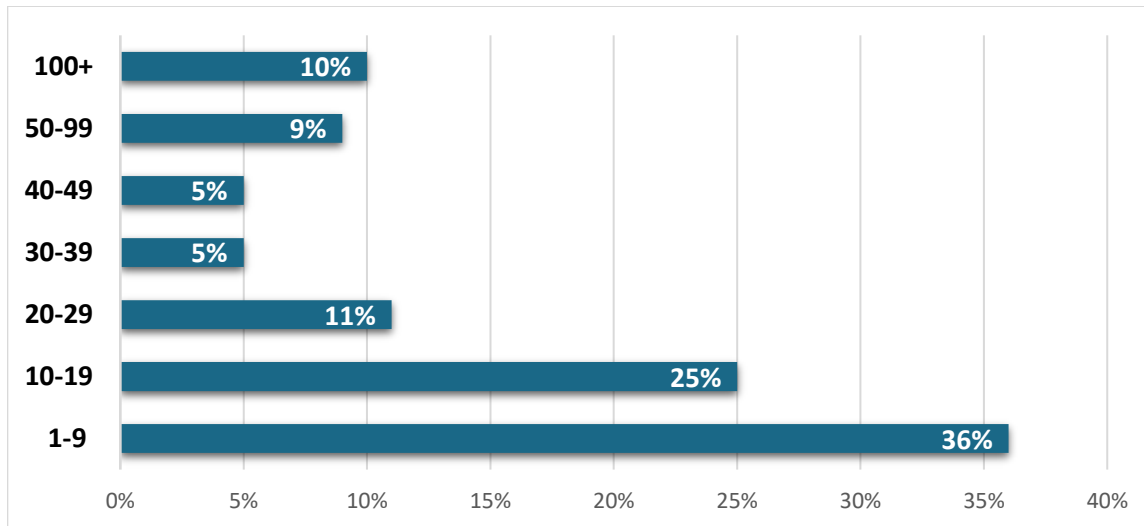
What is your industry?

Accommodation and food services	23%
Retail	14%
Other services*	13%
Manufacturing/processing	9%
Seafood harvesting	8%
Health care and social assistance	7%
Automotive	5%
Construction	5%
Boat building	4%
Professional, scientific, and technical services	4%
Educational services	2%
Finance and insurance	2%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	1%
Information and cultural industries	1%
Public administration	1%
Transportation and warehousing	1%
Wholesale trade	1%
Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services	0%
Agriculture, forestry, and hunting	0%
Management of companies and enterprises	0%
Mining, Quarrying, Oil and Gas	0%
Real estate and rental and leasing	0%
Utilities	0%

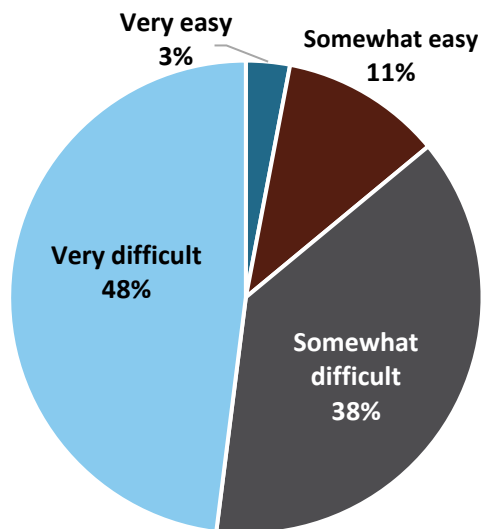
Other services* noted: seafood/sea products-processing and live (10), collision repair (2), auto service/repair (3), car dealership (3), speciality manufacturing (2)

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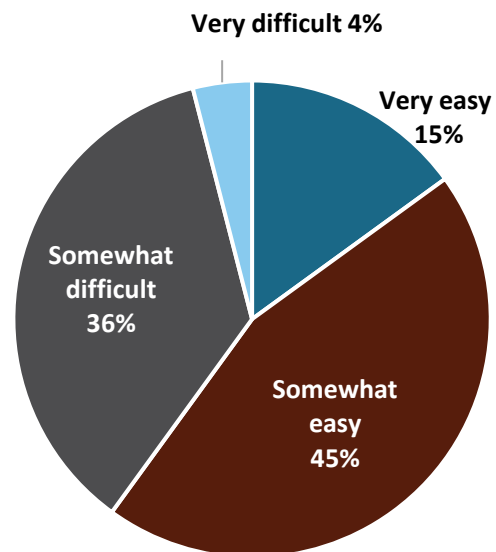
How many employees does your business currently have? 36% have 1-9 employees



How easy is it for you to recruit new employees? 86% say it is somewhat or very difficult



How easy is it to retain your existing employees? 60% say it is somewhat or very easy

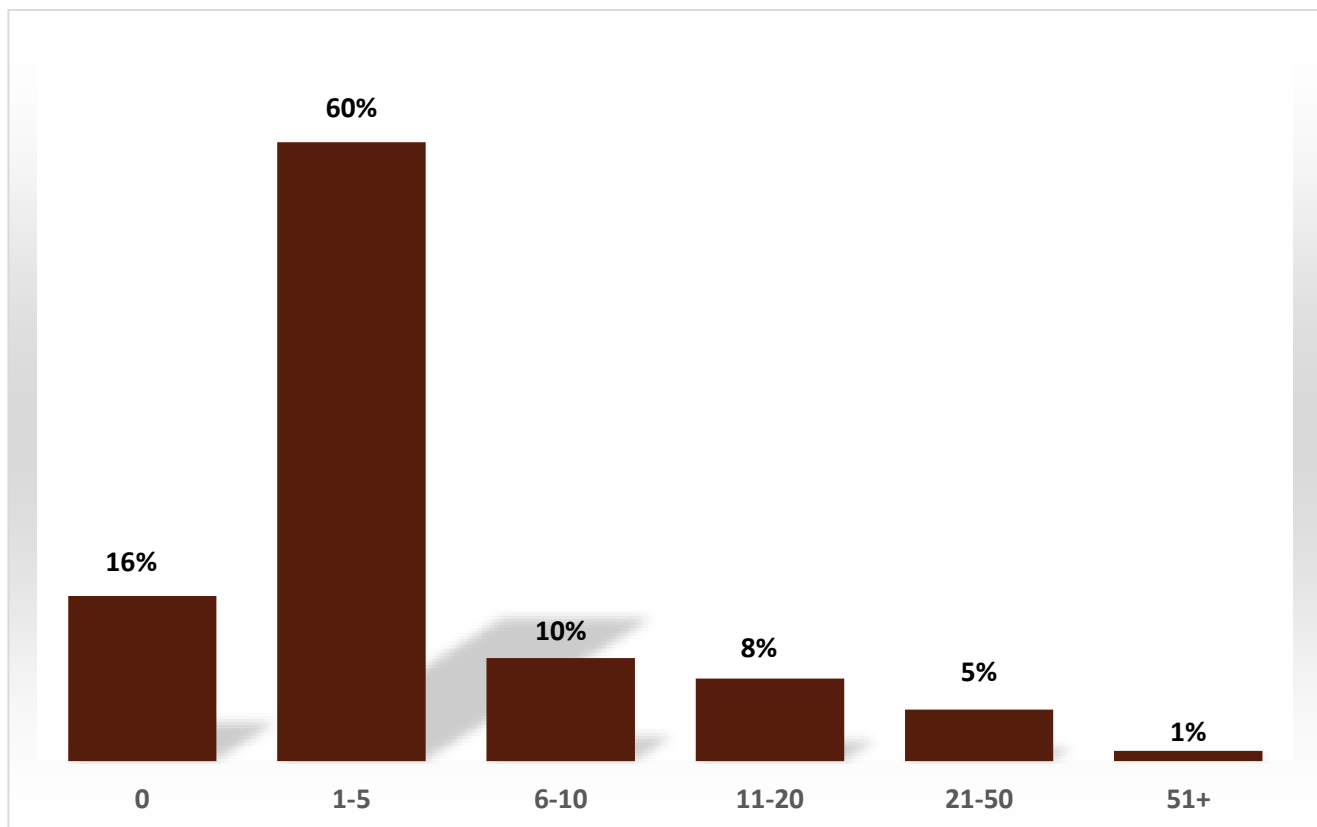


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Why do you feel your business is having trouble recruiting or retaining employees?

- 75% Workers on CERB or other government benefits
- 73% Lack of good/hard working candidates
- 44% High competition for workers
- 36% Cannot find specialized workers
- 31% Lack of housing options available
- 30% Limited money to pay workers higher wages

As of today, how many employees in total is your business looking to hire? 60% are looking to hire 1-5 people

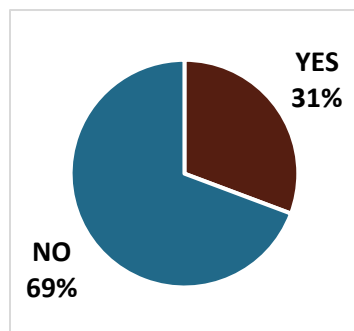


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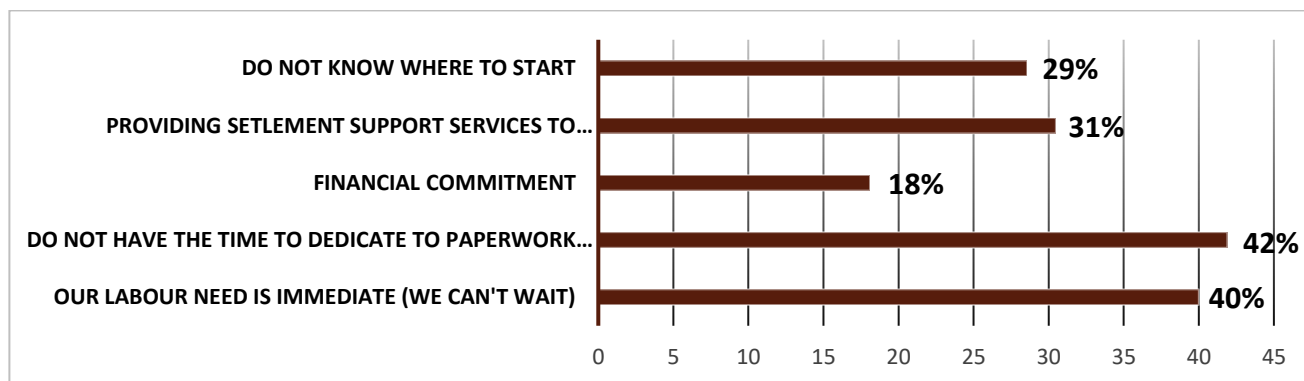
How has the labour shortage affected your business?

60%	Our existing employees and/or owners must work more hours
50%	Had to hire less qualified workers
47%	It has limited our ability for growth, innovation, and creativity
35%	Had to raise wages and salaries and/or improve benefits to employees
28%	Limited the range of services/products we usually provide
27%	We are unable to fulfill orders, or they are delayed
27%	Recruited younger workers
25%	We had to turn away sales
21%	Postponed or cancelled expansion plans
14%	Are considering selling or closing their business

Does your business currently hire any immigrants? 69% have not hired immigrants



What are the reasons you are not currently hiring immigrants? 42% do not have time to dedicate to paperwork and/or process

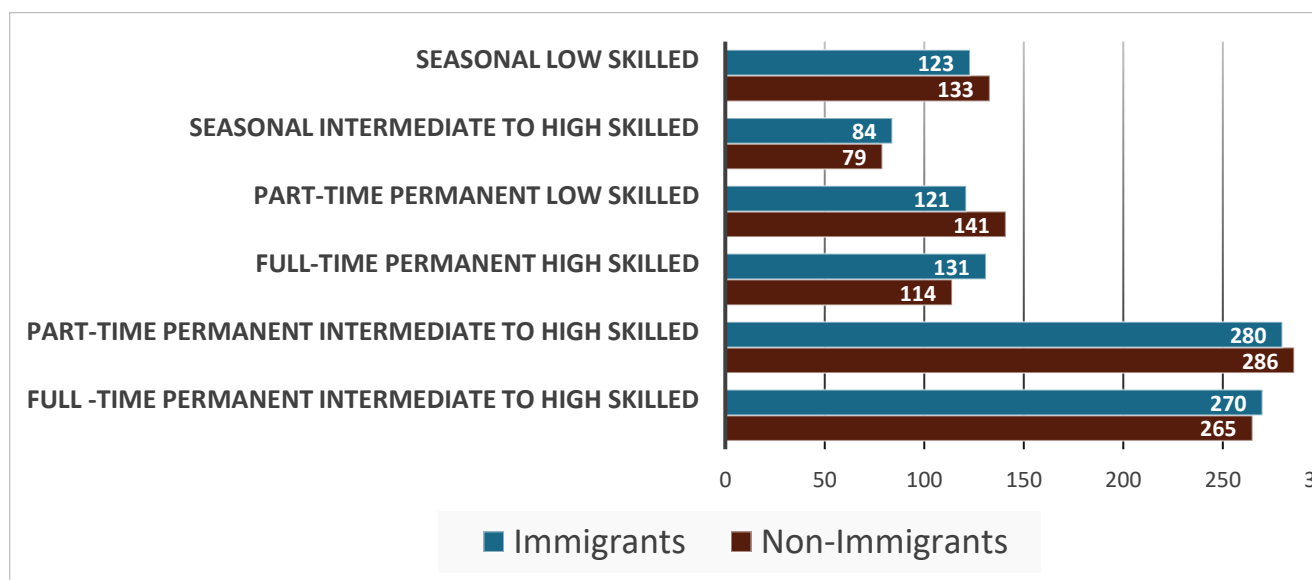


When asked the reasons why they are not currently hiring immigrants 24% chose “Other” and were asked to elaborate. The following are a sample of the responses:

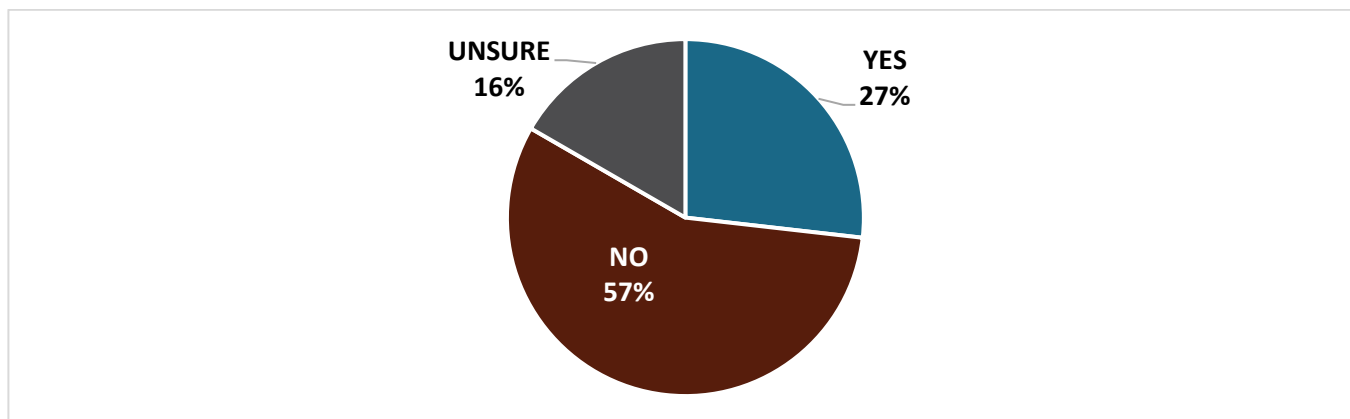
- Lack of housing
- Application was denied
- Concern about barriers or difficulty in reference checking, criminal and other employment check.
- Concern about bringing someone here and then what if they don't work out?
- Covid has stalled the process of recruitment
- None have applied. It may be difficult to hire international candidates as our job opportunities often start as casual and then become full or part-time.
- Dealing with the public- language barrier could be an issue

Types of positions you are looking to hire for AND would you consider hiring immigrants for these positions?

- **Employers are looking to fill more intermediate to high skilled positions (full and part-time) than low skilled positions.**
- **Employers would consider hiring immigrants for nearly all positions they would consider hiring non-immigrants**



Is your company designated with the Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program?



Sample open-ended question responses

What do you feel would help to fix the labour shortages you may be experiencing?

- Reduce immigration hurdles and timelines.
- We are in competition with EI programs available to minimum wage workers. We even raised our starting pay to \$15/hour but that does not compete with what Nova Scotian labourers can collect at home on EI, so we are told by the people who have come to work for us and find the work too laborious.
- Speed up TFWP (*temporary foreign worker program*)
- A program at NSCC to train cooks in the area
- We need access to funds to retrain existing employees and expand their skill set.
- Places to advertise for immigrant workers
- Better childcare services in our municipality might also allow some parents who want to go back to work, but cannot commit without guaranteed childcare
- Have more visibility to our job opening
- Better targeted government benefits, that actually provide incentive to go back to work or continue working.

AND 47 responses calling for an end to CERB/and or re-examination of EI program (low requirements to draw without the expectation to find employment before EI is provided).

Tell us a specific example of how labour shortages have affected your business

- Our workers work more hours, with less skilled workers. This means we have to pay overtime for one, and less quality service for another
- Production has been throttled. We are late getting orders out the door. Customers have cancelled orders.
- Less hours / can not expand or grow / I have not had a day off in 2 years I am wiped out
- I have been struggling to fill a very important full-time position that represents 20-25% of our staff since February of this year. We are also in the midst of being busier than we have been at any point in the past 5 years., We have had to stop taking on new clients, until we fill this position.
- Long Term Care, elderly population still receive care, however they may have to wait longer to receive the personal attention and also less time to sit with the residents and really listen to their needs and or desires as they have limited amount of time per resident per day.
- We were able to complete 4 boats a year now we are down to one
- I had eighteen staff pre-COVID. Now, I have five. We had twenty-one interviews scheduled and only two showed up.
- We are losing staff to burn out, and injury. Overtime at a all time high. Moral is low. Mental, Physical, Emotional, and financial issues.
- Boats can't go fishing without proper crew, takes longer to pack seafood with smaller crew so can't ship as much and takes longer to get through the product.
- Factory staffing affects the time to process, meaning harvesters & service providers have less work.
- We have enough sales to employ a second production shift and cannot find the employees to run it.
- Our skilled workers are working extra hours therefore having to pay overtime when we can't afford it
- As the manager, one day on our 33-acre property. I was the only one on from 9AM-8PM including housekeeping, maintenance, front desk, and management as I had no staff able to work
- Where I work, we have to close services due to lack of nursing
- We are behind by more than a month on the progress of a new construction because we cannot find the number of people needed to progress at a sufficient speed. We have had 5 consistent and reliable employees working at the project since last year but every new hire who comes in to join the fibreglassing team, leaves after a day or two of work because it is too hard and doesn't pay much more than their EI.

The words “exhausted”, “stress”, “overworked” and “burning out” **were mentioned in 17 comments**

Bottom Line

The statistics and comments in this report highlight that there is an openness by businesses to considering hiring immigrants to help solve their labour shortages. We at the Western REN commit to working with our partners on immigration strategies and initiatives that may help employers as well as make the Western Region more welcoming to immigrants.