Attracting Immigrants to Rural Areas During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Renfrew Lanark Local Immigration Partnership

RURAL IMMIGRATION

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RURAL IMMIGRATION

THE STATE OF RURAL IMMIGRATION

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RURAL IMMIGRATION

- Dominance of **MTV**

- historically low arrivals in rural, tide is changing

- Rural immigration strategies often aligned to:
  - Address labour shortages in local economies
  - Population growth
  - Increase cultural diversity

How can rural communities attract the next generation of immigrants?

Douglas Todd: Immigrants could prosper in Canada's small towns

Canada's small cities and rural areas desperate for immigrants

Deep in Manitoba's Bible Belt, the small cities of Winkler and Morden have drawn so many immigrants recently that newcomers are helping create new places of worship.

There are now more than 25 churches in Winkler, up from 18 at the turn of the millennium.

More churches are under construction, while Muslim families in Winkler and Morden leased a building in downtown Winkler this year and converted it into a mosque.

Immigration programs target rural Canada

Is Immigration to Rural Areas in Canada's Future?

A surge in urbanization in Canada has led to the decline of rural areas, leaving Canadians with the hope that immigration can fill the void.

Canada's most recent census, administered in 2011, made it clear that Canada's major cities are booming. More than 23.1 million Canadian live in one of Canada's 33 metropolitan areas, marking just under 70% of the population as city dwellers. A total of 35% of Canada's population lives in one of Canada's three largest cities, Toronto, Montreal, or Vancouver.

While the population growth in cities is an excellent prospect for business in major cities, the growth seems to be occurring at the expense of rural areas. Much of the growth in urban areas is driven by a combination of immigration from abroad and migration from small towns and rural areas, leaving Canada's rural areas to shrink in both population and economic impact.

Lena Gahwi, left, Shetha Roomi, Naomi Finseth, Gemma Mendez-Smith and Oliver Pryce spoke recently at a conference about promoting rural areas to new immigrants. | Jeffrey Carter photo

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» approximately 146,010 immigrants in rural Ontario
» 5% of all immigrants in Ontario
» 7,955 immigrants arrived between 2011-2016
» 62% arrived before 1980

3% - 10%
10% - 20%
20% - 30%
30% - 40%
40% - 50%
50% or more

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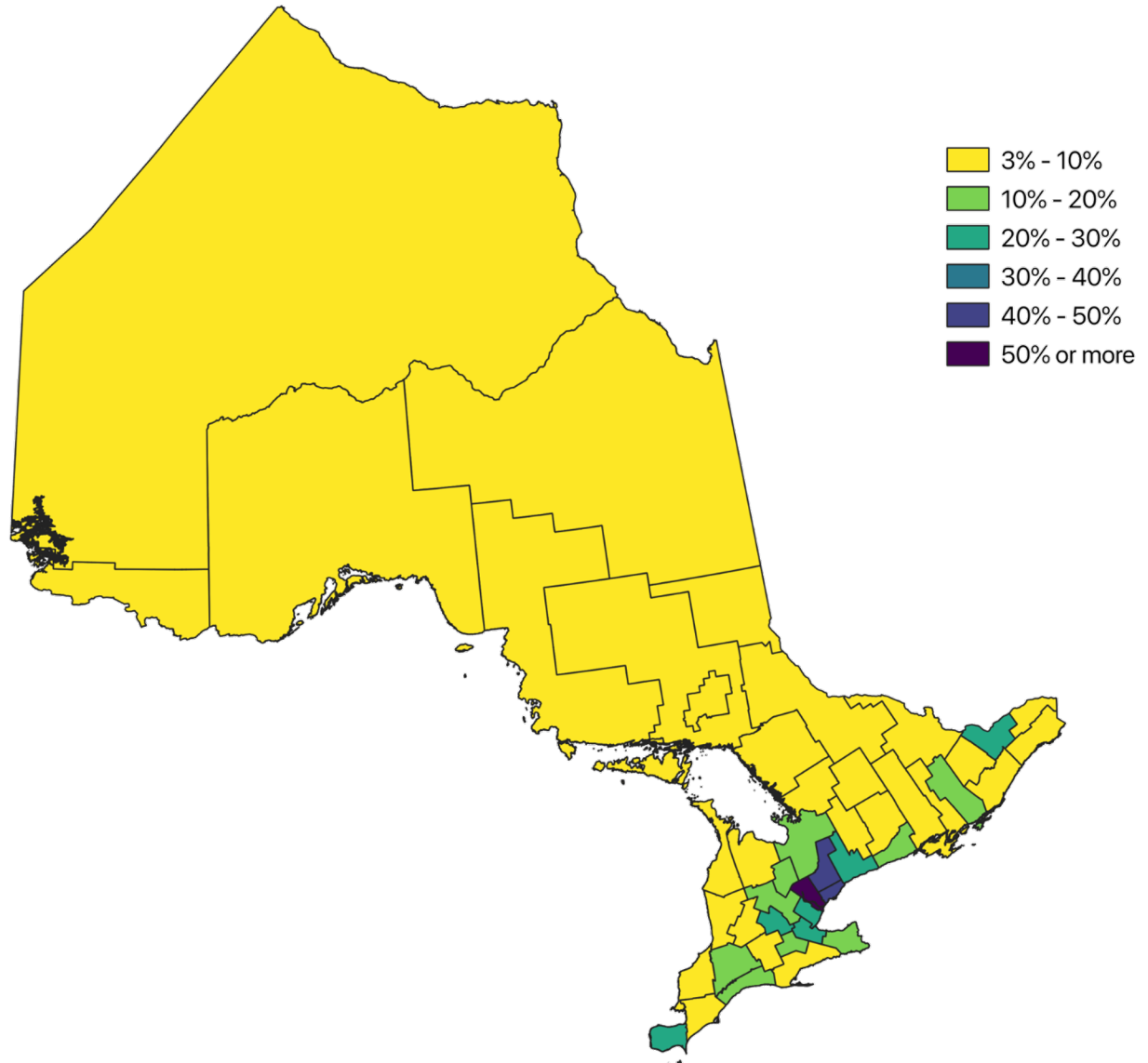
RURAL IMMIGRATION

Immigrants arriving between 2011-2016

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235

265

760

50

400

95

60

1000

260

140

350

265

180

400

40

200

30

655

1680

380

355

410

105

190

65

465

10320

85

4025

187950

240

5145

11760

520

455

635

685

10805

660

	0 - 200
	201 - 500
	501 - 1,000
	1,001 - 5,000
	5,001 - 10,000
	10,001 - 20,000
	20,001 - 50,000
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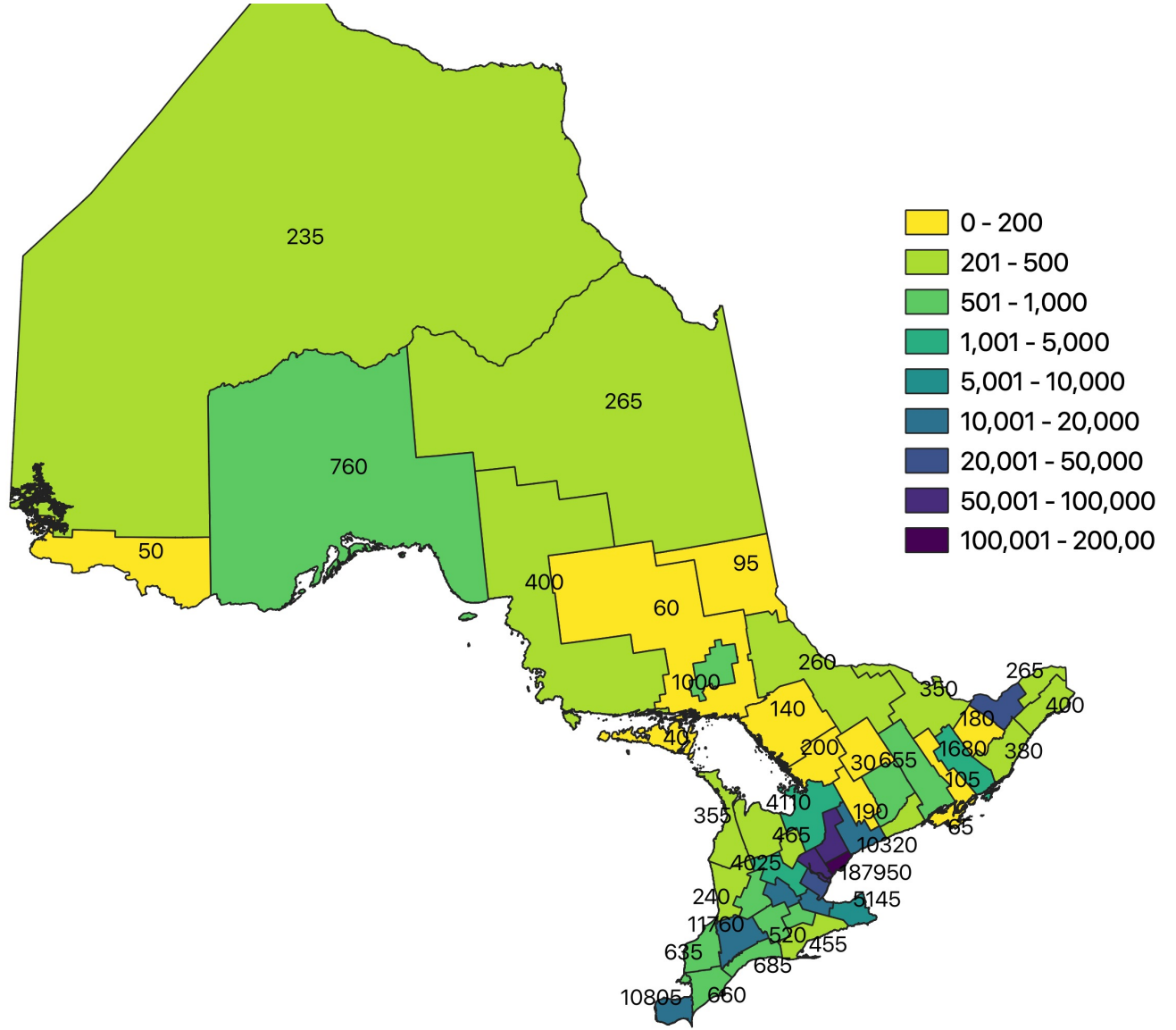
Rural Considerations

RURAL IMMIGRATION

CHALLENGES

- Distance and density
- Availability of settlement services
- Smaller employment markets
- Historically, low cultural diversity

OPPORTUNITIES

- Strong voluntary and charitable sectors
- Strong sense of 'place' and 'attachment'
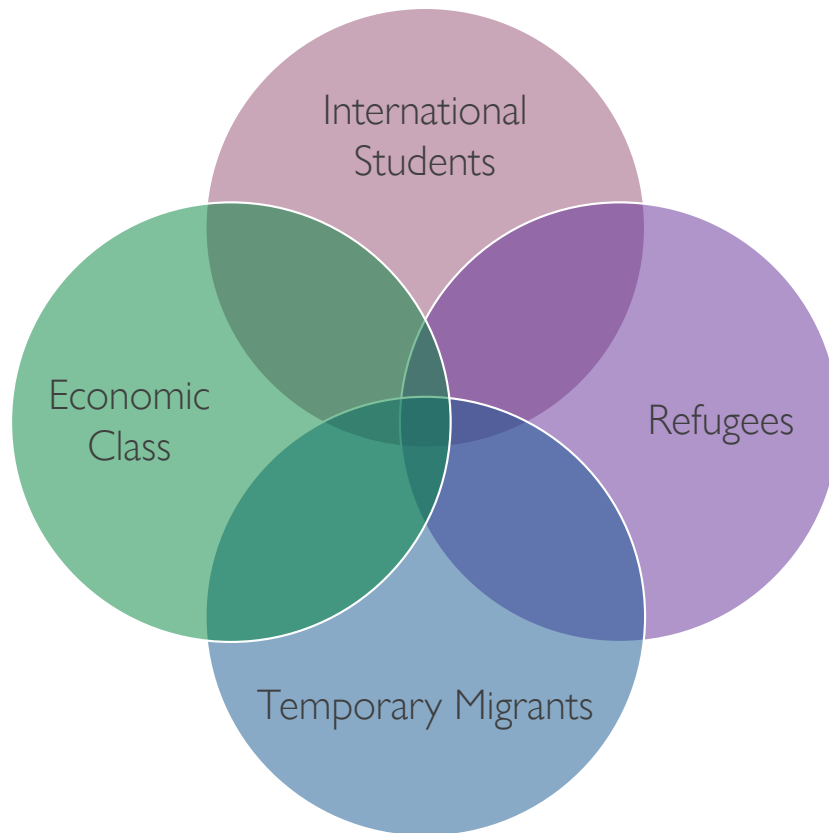- Affordable housing
- Employment opportunities
- Quality of life

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THE COVID-19 DISRUPTION

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COVID-19 FACTORS HINDERING RURAL IMMIGRATION

RURAL IMMIGRATION

- Border closures; restricted travel
- Disrupted employment opportunities in rural
- Disruptions to immigrant settlement service delivery
- Increased pressure on housing from urban residents re-locating
- Immigration processing slowed down
- Limited broadband connectivity
- Decreased access to health and social services (particularly if no broadband or vehicle access)
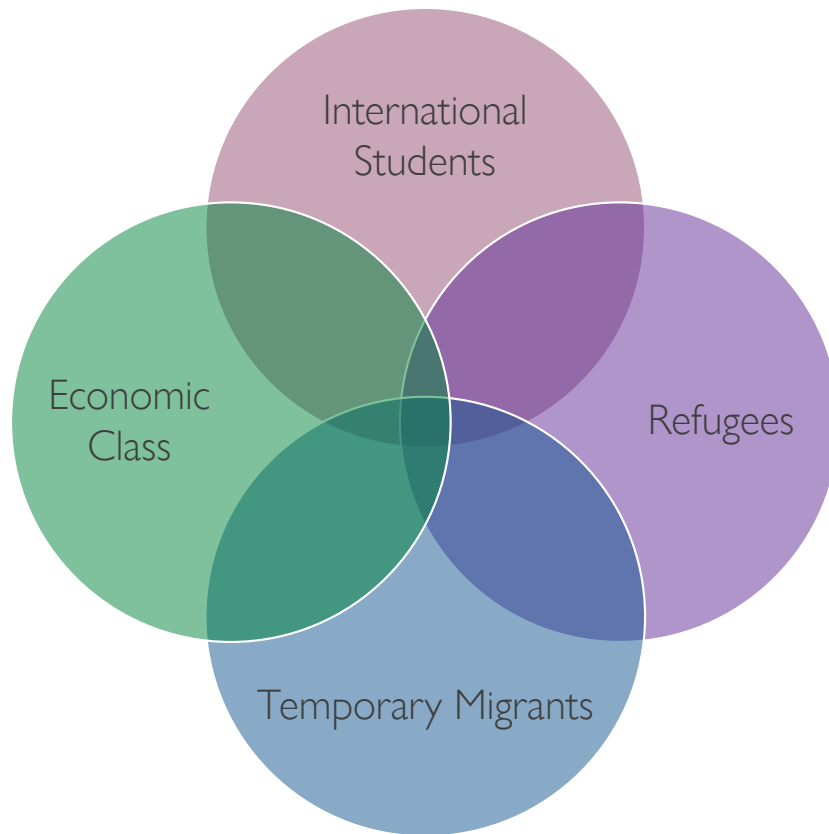- Intra-regional and intra—provincial travel discouraged

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IMPACT CHANGES BY IMMIGRANT TYPE

RURAL IMMIGRATION

International Students

Economic Class

Refugees

Temporary Migrants

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

- loss of income,

- closure of educational facilities,

- uncertain whether to remain in Canada or return home,

- not eligible for many COVID-19 support programs provided to Canadian residents

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IMPACT CHANGES BY IMMIGRANT TYPE

RURAL IMMIGRATION

International Students

Economic Class

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TEMPORARY MIGRANTS

- Delayed employment, loss of income
- Vulnerable to illness
- Variability in working conditions
- Social isolation

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED …

RURAL IMMIGRATION

- Rural immigration challenges ≠ urban immigration challenges
- Increased stress and uncertainty for rural immigrants due to COVID-19
- Increases in discrimination and racism towards newcomers
- Newcomers face additional vulnerabilities, often unnoticed
- Spaces for building welcoming communities are compromised by social distancing
- Broadband connectivity is critical infrastructure
- Innovative support for rural newcomers
- Human and financial capital is nearing exhaustion

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WELCOMING COMMUNITIES IN COVID-19?

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POST-COVID-19 WELCOMING COMMUNITIES

- Need to re-think and innovate welcoming community strategies and activities
  - Bridge electronic connections and relationships
  - Need to ensure online information about communities is up to date
- Continue multi-stakeholder approach to activities and information sharing
- Primary drivers of rural immigration still important:
  - Jobs
  - Housing
  - Quality of life
- Caution around per capita funding formulas for settlement services

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MOVING FORWARD

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- Mitigate negative impacts of COVID-19
- Advocate that urban strategies are not sufficient in rural communities
- Empower place-based approaches
- Evidence based decision making

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www.ruraldev.ca