



LABOUR FORCE DYNAMICS IN RURAL ONTARIO

PERSPECTIVES FROM
ONTARIO COMMUNITY
FUTURES DEVELOPMENT
CORPORATIONS

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Introduction

The future of rural businesses and communities is dependent on appropriate and effective workforce development strategies. Rural businesses and communities are confronted with challenges in accessing relevant human capital to support, maintain, and grow their operations. Without deliberate and place-based strategies, rural businesses and rural economies will be negatively impacted.

Researchers at the University of Guelph and Selkirk College are interested in enhancing our understanding of innovative rural workforce strategies, plans, and policies to address current and future labour gaps. To understand the experiences and dynamics taking place in Ontario we asked business supporting organizations and work force planning organizations from across the province to share insights on labour force dynamics from their communities and regions.

Building on labour force and workforce development themes from local newspapers and academic literature, an online survey was developed with a series of 10 questions. The questions asked business supporting organizations and workforce planning organizations to gauge their insights on the impact of COVID-19, the types of business supports or resources provided by organizations, and any potential innovative rural workforce strategies and policies. The online survey was circulated to all Community Futures Development Corporations and Workforce Planning Boards in Ontario.

The online survey was circulated to executive directors, or similar positions, in all 71 Community Futures Development Corporations in Ontario based on publicly available contact information. An invitation to participate in the survey was circulated on October 30, 2023, with a reminder circulated on November 15, 2023. The online survey took respondents approximately 15 minutes to complete. A total of 16 Community Futures Development Corporations participated in the online survey, representing a response rate of 31%. This report shares key information gathered through the online survey.

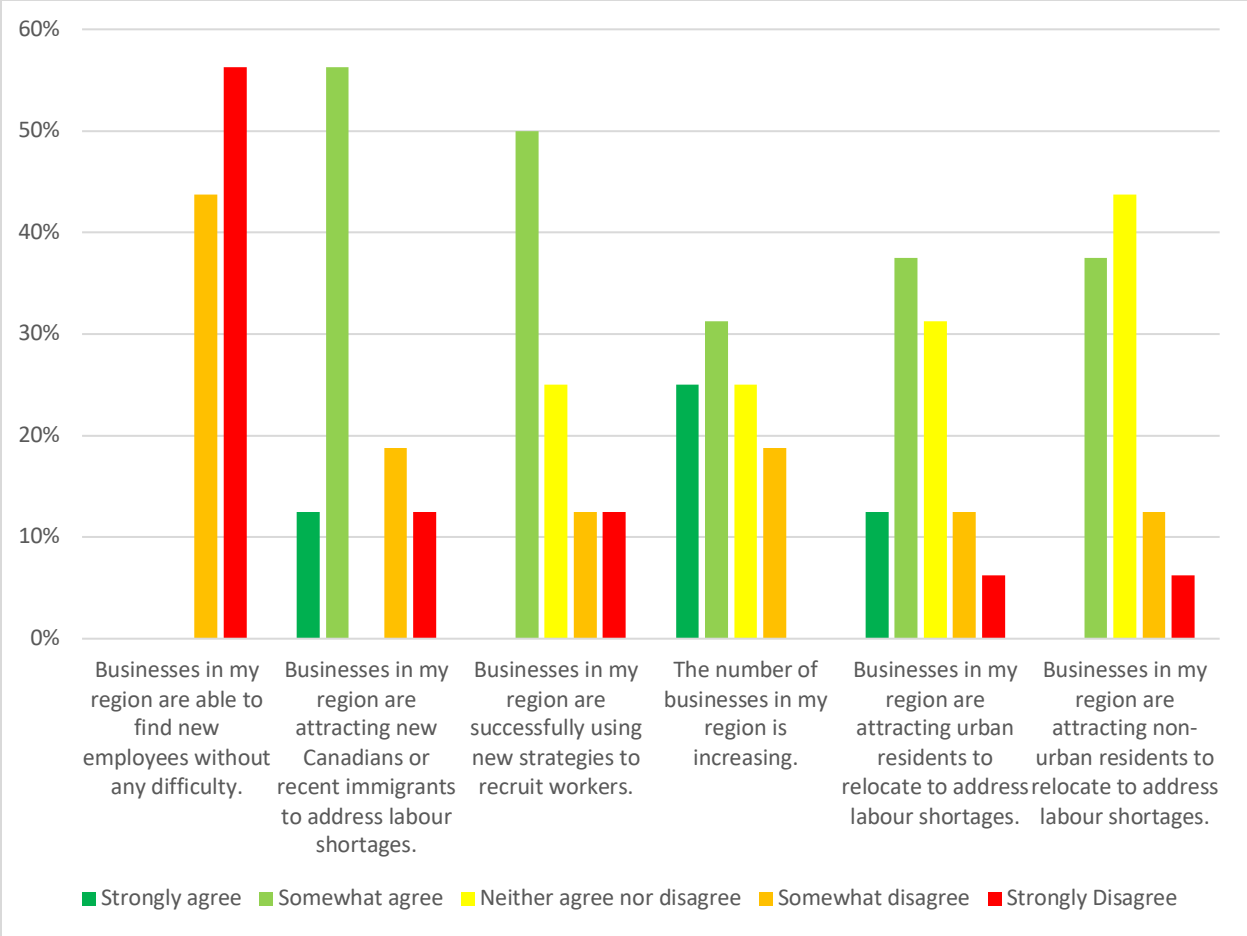
This survey is part of a multi-year research initiative examining labour shortages in rural communities called [Addressing Labour Shortages through Newcomer Attraction in Rural Ontario](#). This research is funded by the [Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance](#), a collaboration between the Government of Ontario and the University of Guelph.

Findings

Experiences of Rural Businesses

Participants were asked to agree or disagree with six statements regarding businesses in their region. The graph below outlines all responses from the Community Futures Development Corporation participants. Key findings from the table include:

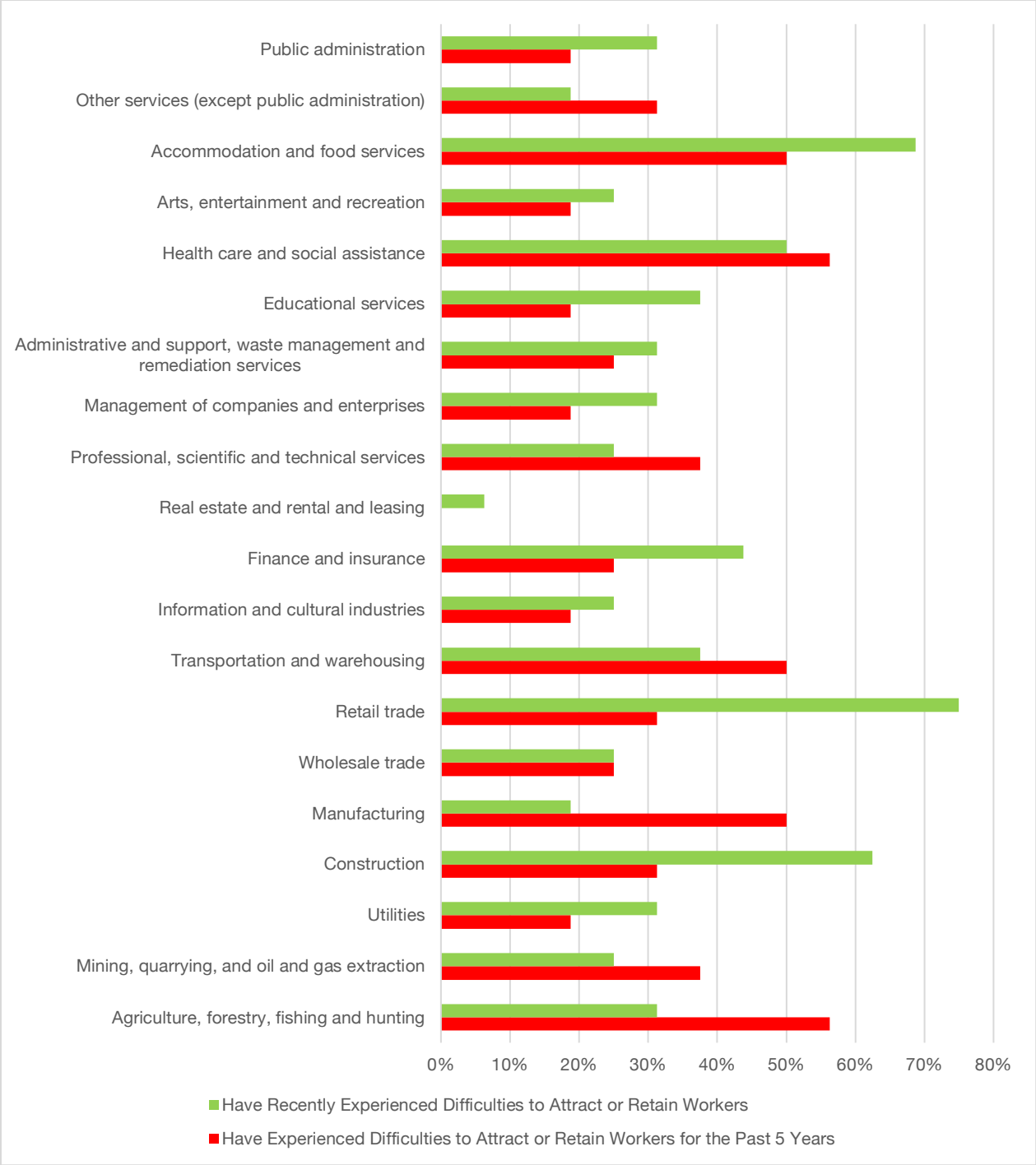
- 100% of respondents indicated businesses in the region are not able to find new employees without difficulties.
- 69% of respondents either strongly or somewhat agreed businesses in their region were attracting new Canadians and recent immigrants to address labour shortages.
- 56% of respondents indicated the number of businesses in their region is increasing.
- 50% of respondents indicated businesses in their region are successfully using new strategies to recruit workers.
- 50% of participants somewhat agreed that businesses in their region were attracting urban residents to relocate to address labour shortages.
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Industries Experiencing Difficulties in Attracting or Retaining Workers

Ontario Workforce Planning Board representatives were asked to identify which sectors of their economies were (a) currently experiencing difficulties in attracting and retaining workers and (b) have been experiencing difficulties in attracting and retaining workers for the past 10 years. Sectors were defined by the [North American Industry Classification System](#) (NAICS) codes. The table below outlines their perspectives.

The five most frequently noted sectors experiencing the most difficulty in attracting retaining workers at the time of the survey were: Retail Trade (75%), Accommodation and Food Services (69%), Construction (63%), Health and Social Assistance (50%), Finance and Insurance (44%). The five most frequently noted sectors experiencing difficulty in attracting and retaining workers over the past five years were: Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting (56%), Health Care and Social Assistance (56%), Accommodation and Food Services (50%), Transportation and Warehousing (50%), Manufacturing (50%).

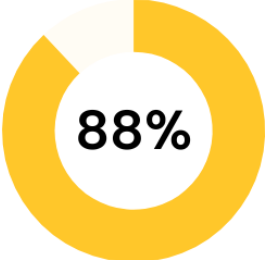


Greatest Difficulties Experienced

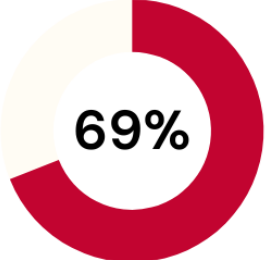
Community Futures Development Corporations noted businesses in their regions had the greatest difficulty in the following areas:



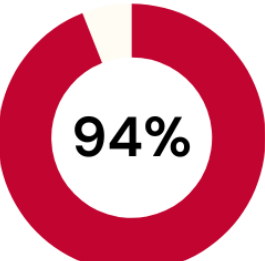
100%
Lack of workforce and/or shortage of workers in their community or region



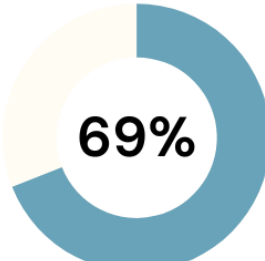
88%
Low level of applicant experience, skills and training



69%
Limited availability of child care



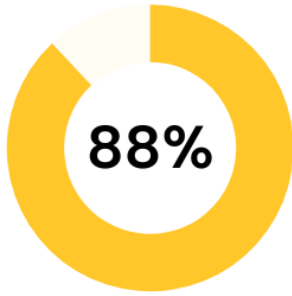
94%
Difficulty in retaining their current workforce



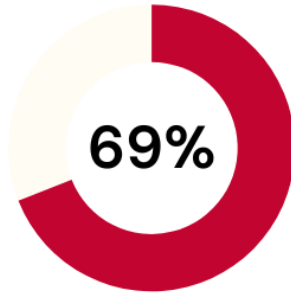
69%
Difficulty surround cost of living



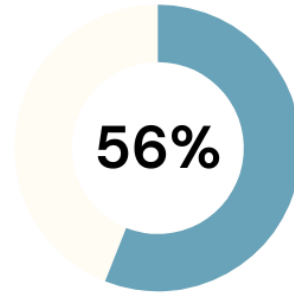
50%
Difficulty with immigration policies and programs



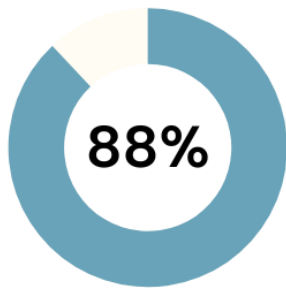
Difficulty in locating affordable housing



Difficulty in attracting workers to the community



Difficulty expectations around wage rates and benefits

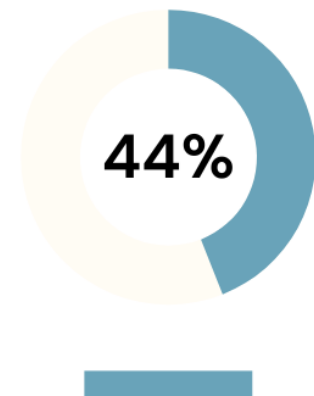


Difficulty with transportation



Impacts of COVID-19 on the Attraction and Retention of Workers

Respondents were asked to comment on the influence of the global COVID-19 pandemic on the attraction and retention of workers in their region. Fifty-six percent indicated COVID-19 did not impact the attraction and or retention of workers in their regions. The remaining 44% of respondents indicated that COVID-19 impacted the attraction and/or retention of workers in their region.



Respondents indicated COVID-19 impacted the attraction and/or retention of workers in your region

For respondents indicating COVID-19 had an impact the following about impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic:

- 11% indicated COVID-19 resulted in early retirements in their regions,
- 11% indicated COVID-19 resulted in an increased number of employees working from home, and
- 100% indicated COVID-also impacted business recovery, socialization, cost of living, and insufficient workforces.

Innovative Workforce Strategies

Respondents identified a number of innovative rural workforce strategies, plans, and/or policies implemented by businesses and/or industries both in their regions and elsewhere:

- Businesses running their own training programs
- [Eastern Ontario Innovation Corridor](#)
- [Eastern Ontario Leadership Council \(EOLC\)](#)
- [GEARS Initiative through the Huron Manufacturing Association](#)
- Government partnerships to attract apprenticeship training programs
- Hiring incentives for Nova Scotia health care workers
- Housing, training, and education subsidies
- Local mines providing funding to assist with housing
- Recruiting and providing housing for Ukrainian refugees
- [Strategy implemented by the Western Ontario Wardens Caucus](#)

- [The Rural Northern Immigration Pilot Program](#)

Supports and Resources to Assist Businesses in Addressing Attracting and Retaining Workers

Over 75% of respondents indicated their organization provides the supports or resources to businesses in order to address attraction and/or retention of workers. Services provided included:

- Loans and business advice
- Consulting services
- Workshops
- Participation in Community Partner Events
- Hosting job fairs
- Partnership with Western Ontario Wardens Caucus
- Financial contributions to collaborative workforce initiatives
- Connections to companies offering assistance to find immigrants
- Preparing employees and employers for tourist season by:
 - Teaching them to write compelling job ads;
 - Training around diversity, equity and inclusion;
 - Funding for French language translation, and;
 - How to brand businesses as attractive places to work

Next Steps

The information collected from the Community Futures Development Corporations identifies rural workforce dynamics from across Ontario. This information will be integrating into the larger Addressing Labour Shortages through Newcomer Attraction project. Key next activities for the project include:

- Conducting a similar online survey with Ontario Workforce Planning Boards (Spring 2024)
- Building summaries of Ontario innovative workforce planning approaches and initiatives identifying through the survey (Spring 2024)
- Conducting case studies on 2-4 to document innovative workforce planning approaches and initiatives in Ontario and to understanding their effectiveness, and transferability (Fall 2024)
- Sharing knowledge emerging from the project to stakeholders across Ontario (until Winter 2025)

Updates emerging from the Addressing Labour Shortages through Newcomer Attraction can be found at www.ruraldev.ca/lzna.



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