

Immigration and Population Growth

Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration

Key Messages

- We found the Nova Scotia Nominee Program targets individuals with skills and experience needed within the province, but the Department needs a process to identify labour market needs
- Applications to provincial immigration programs not consistently assessed but applicants that are nominated, designated, and endorsed are meeting eligibility criteria
- Unknown whether \$6.4 million per year in settlement services funding achieving objective of retaining immigrants or being used for its intended purposes
- Further steps needed to address fraud
- Successfully surpassed 2016 – 2020 performance targets but more comprehensive performance indicators needed given aggressive population growth targets

Why We Did This Audit

- Immigration vital to address labour market shortages and promote economic growth
- Nova Scotia experiencing highest immigrant landings in Atlantic Canada
- Annual population growth would have to more than double from approximately 10,000 people that arrived in fiscal 2020-21 to 25,000 per year to achieve the 2060 two million population target
- Fraud is an ever-present risk in the immigration field

Nova Scotia Nominee Program Responsive to Specific Labour Shortages But Process Needed to Determine Provincial Labour Market Needs

- No process to determine provincial labour market needs and assess whether these are being addressed by the Nova Scotia Nominee Program.
- A review to assess five recent changes to the streams of the Nova Scotia Nominee Program found each was supported by research and consistent with labour market needs.
- Unable to assess whether other changes to the Nova Scotia Nominee Program should have been made or if the changes made were timely.

Applications to Provincial Immigration Programs Are Not Consistently Assessed

- There are clearly defined eligibility criteria for provincial immigration programs.
- Inconsistencies found in staff assessment of applications to provincial immigration programs. However, for all 40 approved applications tested, eligibility criteria were met.
- Procedures to guide staff's assessment of applications to provincial immigration programs either not properly communicated to staff or not in place for all of the audit period.
- No formalized, mandatory training plan for staff responsible for assessing applications to provincial immigration programs.
- No quality assurance process to review staff assessment of applications to provincial immigration programs to identify where improvements can be made.
- Performance indicators established to assess success at attracting and retaining immigrants, but more comprehensive performance indicators needed.

Unknown Whether \$6.4 Million per Year in Settlement Services Funding is Achieving its Objective of Retaining Immigrants

- The Department has not assessed the settlement needs of immigrants.
- The Department relies on service providers to determine settlement needs of immigrants.
- Process improvements needed to select settlement services providers, including conflict of interest attestations for selection committee members and documentation to explain why some service providers are awarded funding while others are not.
- Funding agreements in place with settlement service providers include terms to protect the province including confidentiality, termination, monitoring, and reporting requirements, but annual audited financial statements are not required.
- Improved monitoring of service providers required to ensure funding is used as intended.

Further Steps Needed to Address Fraud

- Investigations and Compliance Division established in April 2021.
- No procedures to guide staff in identifying and addressing fraud when assessing applications to provincial immigration programs.
- No structured fraud training program for staff; training delivered on an ad hoc basis.
- None of the eight recommendations from a 2020 fraud risk assessment has been implemented.
- A documented procedures manual to guide investigations is needed.