



Title: Regionalization BC 2008: Regionalization and Rural Immigration in British Columbia

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Research Question: What does regionalization of immigration look like in British Columbia and across Canada? What are the social factors and policy directions that have led to the intensification of settlement in the Lower Mainland and the need to regionalize immigration in BC? What channels lead (im)migrants to urban vs. rural locations?

Importance: National and provincial concern with the intense concentration of immigrants in the gateway cities of Vancouver, Toronto, and Montréal is coupled with a desire for the geographic dispersal of immigrants in order to share growth and opportunity with smaller centres so they too can benefit from Canada's immigration vision. The overall goal of this project is to develop a better understanding of the complexity of regionalization in British Columbia (BC) and to develop recommendations and opportunities for community-based solutions that will attract and retain immigrants. We review factors underlying immigrant decisions about destination, settlement, and leaving rural regions or small towns.

Research Findings: We identify gaps in the literature related to the conditions under which the social inclusion of immigrants thrives in rural communities and find that settlement resources in regions of low immigration must come first if we expect newcomers to settle and stay in these areas. BC strongly encourages settlement outside of Vancouver and Victoria, and since 2007 monies have been directed toward new and expanded initiatives aimed at supporting welcoming and inclusive communities for immigrants. Through this project, we identify a troubling contradiction between the use of the points system for permanent residence and the temporary foreign workers programs in British Columbia and beyond. The points system **indirectly encourages metropolitan settlement** and creates an unintended **push** for immigrants to move to **urban** areas by prioritizing highly skilled, educated, business owners, and others likely drawn to urban centres for immigration to Canada over those with different skills and education who might be drawn to non-metropolitan regions. Also, the Canadian government encourages entry as **temporary foreign workers** (TFW), particularly agricultural, service, and construction workers. The skills possessed by some of these workers potentially attract them to **rural, northern, and/or non-metropolitan** areas but the programs often stipulate and enforce **temporariness**, which reinforces social exclusion and discourages social integration.

Implications: Immigrants select a place to settle based on several factors, such as a warm and welcoming community, locally accessible immigrant services, and educational, cultural and economic opportunities. One size does not fit all in terms of approaches to regionalization—there is no typical rural or small town reality. The percentage of rural dwellers varies across provinces and among rural areas while differences among rural areas and regions carry important implications for public policy aimed at rural development. Additionally, from a human rights perspective, we encourage a focused examination on the permanence associated with urban settlement and the temporariness associated with temporary foreign workers that is increasingly associated with rural settlement in British Columbia in particular, and Canada in general.