

Summary: ‘Settling beyond big cities: A scoping review of the Canadian literature on immigration to rural and smaller communities’

PUBLICATION REVIEWED: Haugen, S., McNally, R., and Hallström, L. K., (2024). Settling beyond big cities: A scoping review of the Canadian literature on immigration to rural and smaller communities. *The Canadian Geographer*.

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ORGANIZATION: The Canadian Geographer

DATE OF PUBLICATION: 2024/03/10

LINK: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/cag.12917>

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DATE OF SUMMARY: 2024/05/13

Book Journal Article Website Report Other (specify):
Review Article

KEYWORDS: Canada, Settlement, Rural and small town, Integration, Housing, Access to services, Employment and jobs, Community, Secondary migration

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Executive Summary

- This article reviews and analyzes existing literature and studies on immigrant and refugee resettlement and integration in smaller communities in Canada, identifying “knowledge gaps and opportunities for future research and public policy change” by answering two questions:
 - “From where is knowledge being produced about immigrant settlement and integration in smaller and rural places?”
 - “What aspects and themes are being studied?” (p. 2)
- There is a gap in knowledge of settlement in more rural and northern parts of the country because the existing literature and studies focus on densely populated regions close to major urban centres.
- The authors identify 14 common themes from existing literature and studies, grouped into six categories for analysis: settlement services, employment, welcoming communities, public policy, infrastructure and services, retention and secondary migration.

Main Findings

- Research and policy on the resettlement of refugees in Canada has focused on immigration in Canada’s biggest cities despite increasing numbers of immigrants and refugees settling in small urban centres and rural areas.
- There is a lack of research on both the challenges and the benefits of resettlement in smaller and rural places, specifically the most rural and northern communities in Canada.
- Existing literature identifies several factors that make immigration in smaller and rural places challenging. The main issues are “a lack of settlement services, employment and education opportunities, welcoming spaces, public services, and infrastructure” (p. 9).
- However, benefits are also identified “including affordability, increased space, access to available services, and a sense of community, among others” (p. 9).
- The variety of benefits and challenges of immigration in smaller and rural places demonstrates the diversity of rural Canada. “Community size and diversity, provincial context, distance from urban centres, and economic opportunities” (p. 9) play a role in diversifying benefits and challenges. Some of the identified challenges are not specific to rural areas, but they are amplified compared to urban areas.
- Rural communities, including newcomers, are adversely affected by the Canadian public policy bias towards urban centres.
- Successful settlement in rural Canada requires systemic public policy change that recognizes both the varying types of rural places and the challenges that refugees, immigrants, and, frequently, all members of these communities’ face, including:
 - A lack of cultural and ethnic diversity;
 - A lack of amenities and services, as well as the distance and lack of public transportation to the cities where they are overwhelmingly located; and
 - A lack of government funding flowing to these communities due to their low population densities.