



# Immigration and the Demographic Challenge: A Statistical Survey of the Ontario Region

*By Magdy EIDakiky and John Shields*

*The Study in Brief*

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## Issue

**Demographic distribution of immigrants; settlement outside Ontario's gateway city**

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### Overview

The modern history of immigration is about migration to large urban centres. In Canada, Ontario has

been the province that has been the prime magnet for newcomers, yet settlement in the province has been highly skewed, with most immigrants coming to the Greater Toronto Area. This raises the question of the distribution of settlement in the province. This paper seeks to graphically examine contemporary Ontario immigrant settlement patterns.

### Key Observations

Noteworthy findings from this report include the following:

- 1) Many slow growth communities in Ontario would welcome more immigrants as a way to generate population growth and labour market renewal.
- 2) Immigration projections for 2000-2026 indicate that over 54% of newcomers will come to Ontario; however, they are projected to settle in the Greater Toronto Area and a few second tier cities.
- 3) Communities outside the biggest urban centres are far more likely (200% higher) to be home to a foreign-born population made up of European background, and hence they are less diverse communities with slower growth.
- 4) Demographic patterns tell us that many Ontario communities remain unattractive sites for newcomer settlement.

### Approach

This study examines immigration and shifting demographic patterns of permanent residents in Ontario broken down at the region and community level. Data analysis is based predominantly upon Statistics Canada Census data from

1996 and 2006.

### Policy Implications

The question of highly uneven immigrant settlement patterns has emerged as an important policy issue. This is particularly the case since gateway cities have experienced difficulty in successfully absorbing immigrants into their labour markets, while other communities are experiencing population decline and severe human resource shortages. The starting point for tackling this policy challenge is to statically unpack current immigration patterns at the regional and community level, in order to gain a better picture of the dimensions of uneven settlement patterns.

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*The Study in Detail*

**Introduction**

*“One of the topics [from a federal government and NGO working group on small centre strategy meeting] was immigration to smaller centres since the regionalization of immigration was, and continues to be, a current topic of interest in Canada. At a time when parts of the country were experiencing a population decline or were dissatisfied with stagnant or minimum growth, other places were experiencing remarkable growth and were attracting most of the immigrants. It had become apparent that it would be desirable for the benefits of immigration to be spread more evenly across Canada.”*  
 (Belding and McRae 2009, p. 42)

The increased immigrant concentration in gateway cities such as Toronto has raised extensive public interest and policy debate on whether a ‘more balanced geographic distribution of immigrants’ could be achieved (Akbari and Harrington 2007). Large in-flows of newcomers often exert enormous pressure on the absorptive capacities of major immigrant receiving centres. Meanwhile, many slower-growth regions would welcome more immigrants as a way to generate population growth and

labour force renewal. Further, a wider dispersion of newcomers would help to reduce growing disparities in the socio-demographic composition of the receiving society’s population (Hou 2005).

Currently immigration accounts for some two thirds of Canada’s population growth. Canada’s population by January 2008 reached 33,143,600 persons up 344,900 people compared with the previous year. Two thirds of this growth is attributed to net international migration (Statistics Canada 2008c). Some 82.6% of immigrants chose to reside in Ontario, Quebec or British Colombia, with most of these migrants settling in the Greater Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal areas. Most newcomers were from the 25-44 year old age group – the prime working age cohort.

The fact that most rural and smaller town centers are experiencing a serious decline in population, while a vast proportion of immigrants continue to settle in major cities, which have been growing quickly, justifies a serious discussion and investigation regarding how best to recruit and retain permanent resident newcomers outside the major immigrant receiving centers (Citizenship Immigration Canada 2001). The

demographic challenge facing rural and small town Canada is further intensified by both significant levels of youth out-migration, as young people seek higher education and ‘better’ employment and living opportunities, and by a smaller in-migration of aging people of European origin to some of these areas (Statistics Canada 2008a).

*“Ontario is one of the most diverse jurisdictions on the planet. The breadth and depth of our immigrant communities give us an edge in the competition for talent and are a key connection to the global world. ... Our province must see these immigrant communities as a key element in our global trade and development strategy.”*  
 (Martin and Florida 2009 p. 33)

In the largest urban centres, many immigrants face a significant initial income disadvantage, and subsequent income increases are not sufficient for most of them to achieve income parity with comparable native-born groups. There is some evidence, however, of better economic integration of immigrants outside the largest urban centres, even after taking into consideration differences in terms of immigrants’ education upon arrival, prior ability in an official language, admission class and country of origin

(Bernard 2008). Such findings further reinforce the need for more serious consideration of immigrant settlement patterns.

For its part Ontario has been the first choice for the majority of immigrants who come to Canada. Census data from 2006 reveals that more than half (52.3%) of the 1.1 million newcomers who arrived in Canada during the previous five years chose to live in Ontario (Statistics Canada 2007a). Statistics Canada population projections for 2000-2026 indicate that 54.24% of all immigrants to Canada will come to this province (Statistics Canada 2008c). These migration trends may be modified downward because of the economic restructuring the Ontario economy has experienced in recent years.

Large parts of the Ontario economy, nonetheless, have yet to meaningfully benefit from this influx of immigrants. Shortages of skilled labour in rural communities have recently prompted the Ontario government to support pilot projects aimed at attracting greater numbers of immigrants to smaller communities.

*Rural Canada has become “so irrelevant demographically that it increasingly exists only as myth”.*  
(Ibbitson 2007, p. A6)

Some of these projects are aimed at building the municipal portal to increase connectivity of these smaller communities to immigrants and improve their access to settlement resources (Ontario Ministry of Citizenship 2007). Other initiatives seek to attract increased levels of immigration to municipalities outside the traditional immigrant gateways, and improve their ability to retain them (Call for Proposals 2008).

Hence, there is good reason to more closely consider the potential advantages of greater dispersal of immigrant settlement patterns in Ontario. However, the starting point must be to gain a better understanding of the actual statistical patterns of immigrant settlement patterns and their connection to demographic change in Ontario.

**Focus and Approach**

The focus of this study is immigration and the changing demography of Ontario. The intent is to identify some of the salient patterns of immigrant dispersion in Ontario’s cities, communities and regions. This paper does not attempt to explore ways to attract newcomer populations to areas outside gateway and other large cities. Rather, it provides a statistical profile of recent

Ontario population and immigration data as a first step to better understand the challenges posed by existing immigration settlement patterns.

The statistical analysis in this study is based on Statistics Canada data sources. In particular two major data files have been utilized. The first is the 2006 Census data on immigration and immigrant distribution in Ontario by origin. The second is 1996 Census data, used at points in conjunction with 2006 Census data. All figures, except those from Figure 6, are self generated and employ Statistics Canada data.

*“... many considerably smaller communities have become active participants in seeking to attract new residents with the skill sets these communities desperately need to grow and prosper.”*  
(Agrawal, Andrew and Biles 2009, p. 4)

**Analysis**

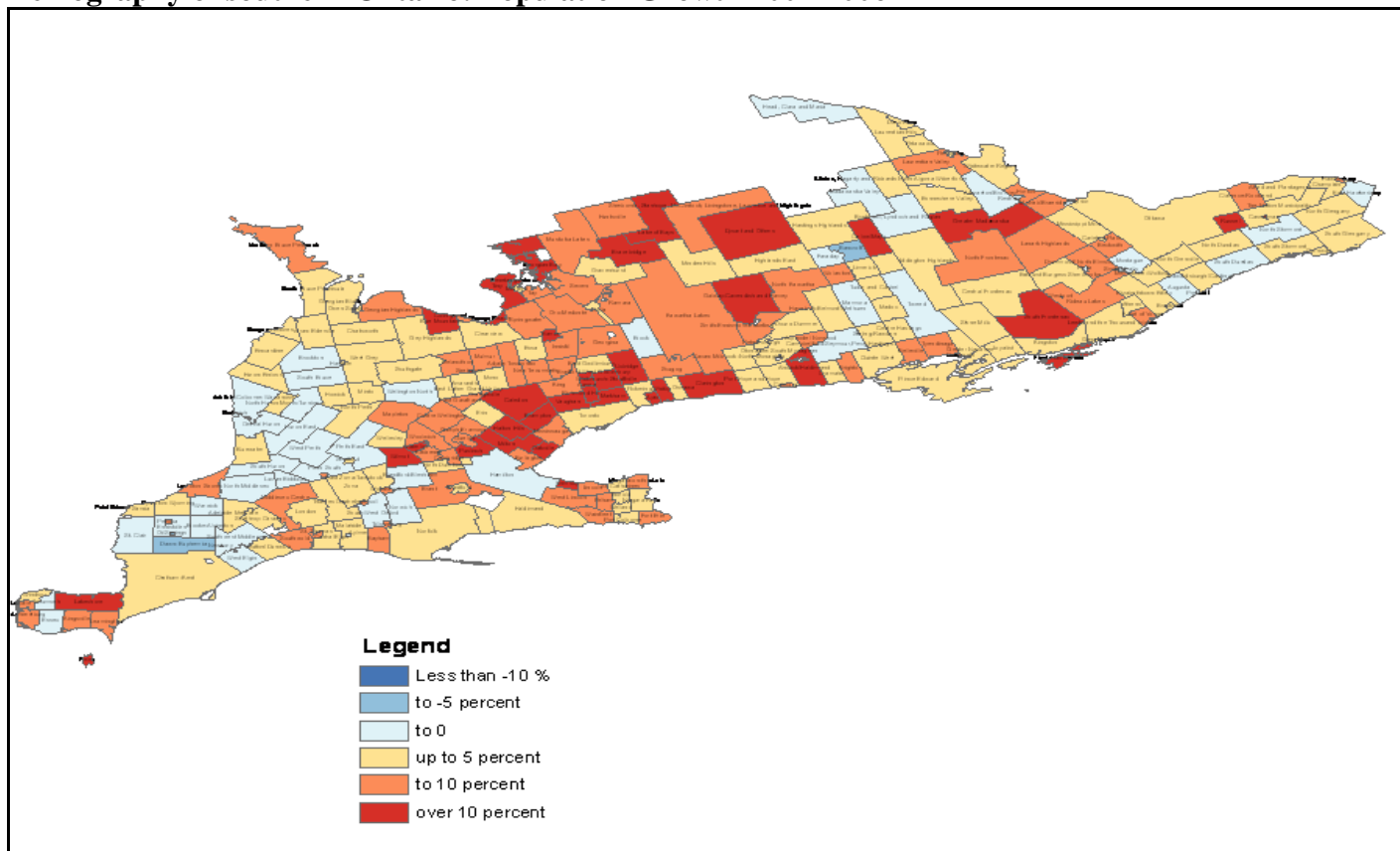
Figure 1 is Statistics Canada population change data for 2001-2006, projected on a southern Ontario map. The national average population growth rate for Canada, between 2001 and 2006, is calculated at 5.4% (Ontario Ministry of Finance 2007).

Large growth rate variation can be observed among Ontario regions when compared to the national average. The highest growth rates are concentrated in the central region and in large urban centers. Most of Eastern

and South Western Ontario population growth rate is slow, stagnant or declining as shown on the map. Higher population growth is largely restricted to Kitchener-Waterloo and parts of Essex County in the south west,

and Ottawa and Peterborough in the east. The areas of high population growth, for the most part, closely match communities with strong levels of newcomer settlement.

**Figure 1**  
**Demography of southern Ontario: Population Growth 2001-2006**



Map generated from Statistics Canada Data: Immigration and Citizenship 2006 Census, Catalogue No. 97-557-XCB2006012

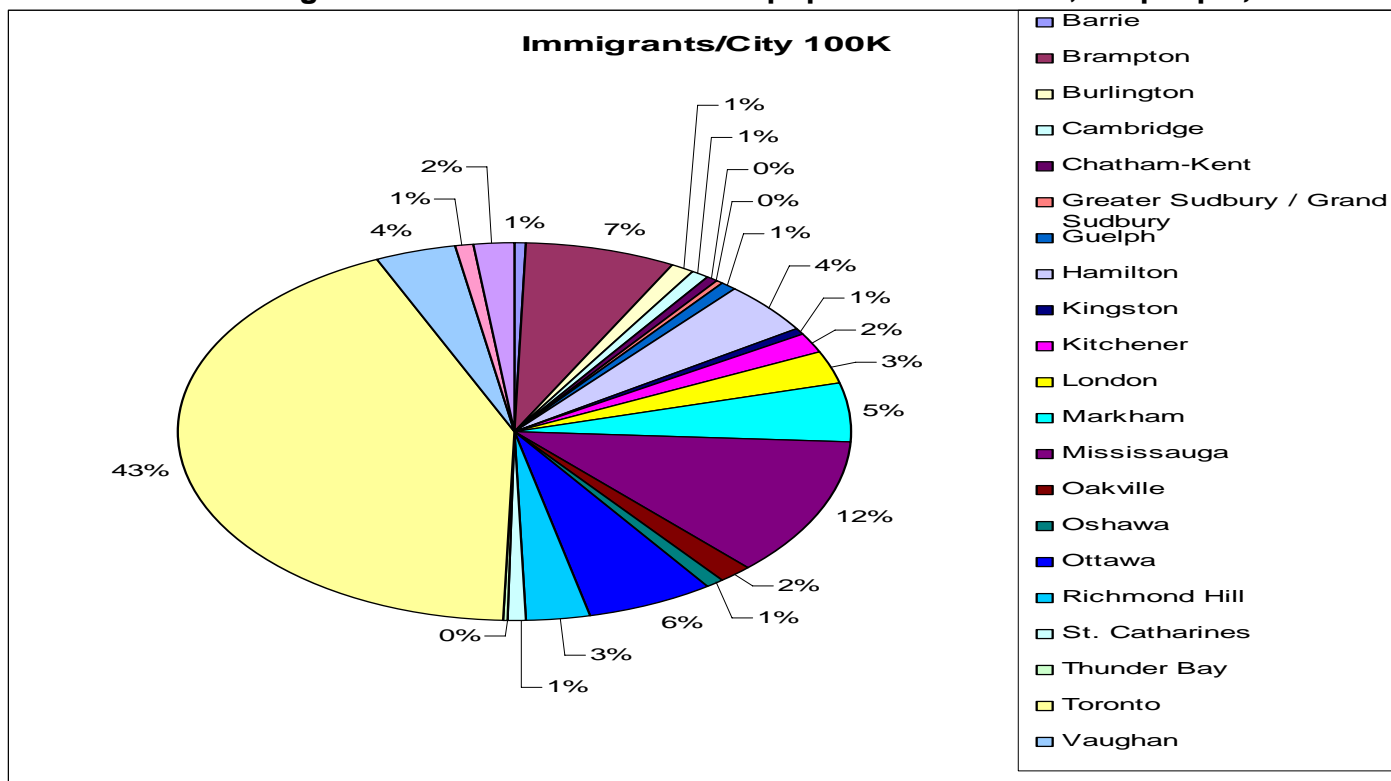
In total, the 2006 Census enumerated 3,398,700 foreign-born individuals in Ontario. They represented 28.3% of the province's population, the highest proportion of all 10 provinces and the highest level

in the modern history of Ontario. Most foreign-born Ontarians lived in the Census Metropolitan Area of Toronto (68.3%). Other key Ontario metropolitan areas were home to some 18% of the province's

foreign-born population, namely the Ontario portion of Ottawa - Gatineau (5.3%), Hamilton (4.9%), Kitchener (3%), London (2.6%) and Windsor (2.2%) (Statistics Canada 2007 a). The remaining

Figure 2

Distribution of immigrants in Ontario in cities with population over 100,000 people, 2006



Generated from Statistics Canada Data: Immigration and Citizenship 2006 Census, Catalogue No. 97-557-XCB2006012

immigrants (13.7%) are distributed among other smaller communities throughout the province. As shown in Figure 2, the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) absorbed the bulk of all immigrants to Ontario.

Distribution of immigrants to Ontario in the period 1996-2006 by region is provided in Figure 3-a. The Figure displays immigrant distribution divided

into the central, eastern, south western and northern regions of Ontario. The graph vividly demonstrates the regional concentration of immigrants within the province. The region of central Ontario is, by a very wide margin, the dominant draw for newcomers.

Figures 3-b to 3-d provide more detailed immigrant distribution numbers for the central, south

western and eastern regions. The northern region is not displayed due to the very small number of immigrants attracted to the region. Figure 3-b provides some supporting evidence for the observation that the 905 area surrounding Toronto proper is becoming a new growth magnet for Ontario-destined newcomers. As housing prices and rental accommodation continue to rise

in the City of Toronto, less wealthy populations are driven to settle close to but outside the city proper. Figures from the Canadian Census reveal that these areas are now the fastest growing in the province due to their appeal to newcomers (Anisef, Rummens and Shields 2007, p. 8; FCM 2009, p. 5).

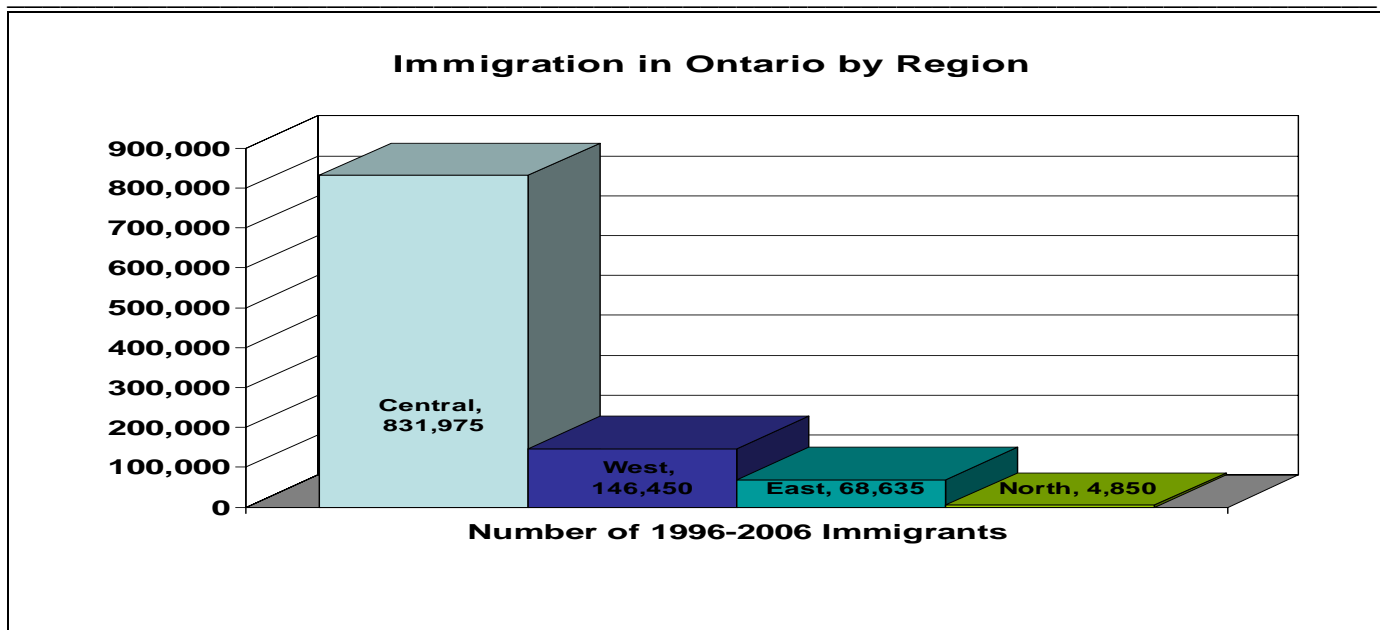
For its part, Eastern Ontario is attracting less than 50% of immigrants than is south western Ontario. Hamilton, Waterloo and Windsor/Essex, in particular, have enjoyed some success in attracting immigrants. In Eastern Ontario, the only numerically significant immigrant magnet is the

Ontario portion of Ottawa – Gatineau.

*“Immigration is seen as a means to increase population and labour force growth, enhance the stock of human capital and alleviate skill shortages”.*

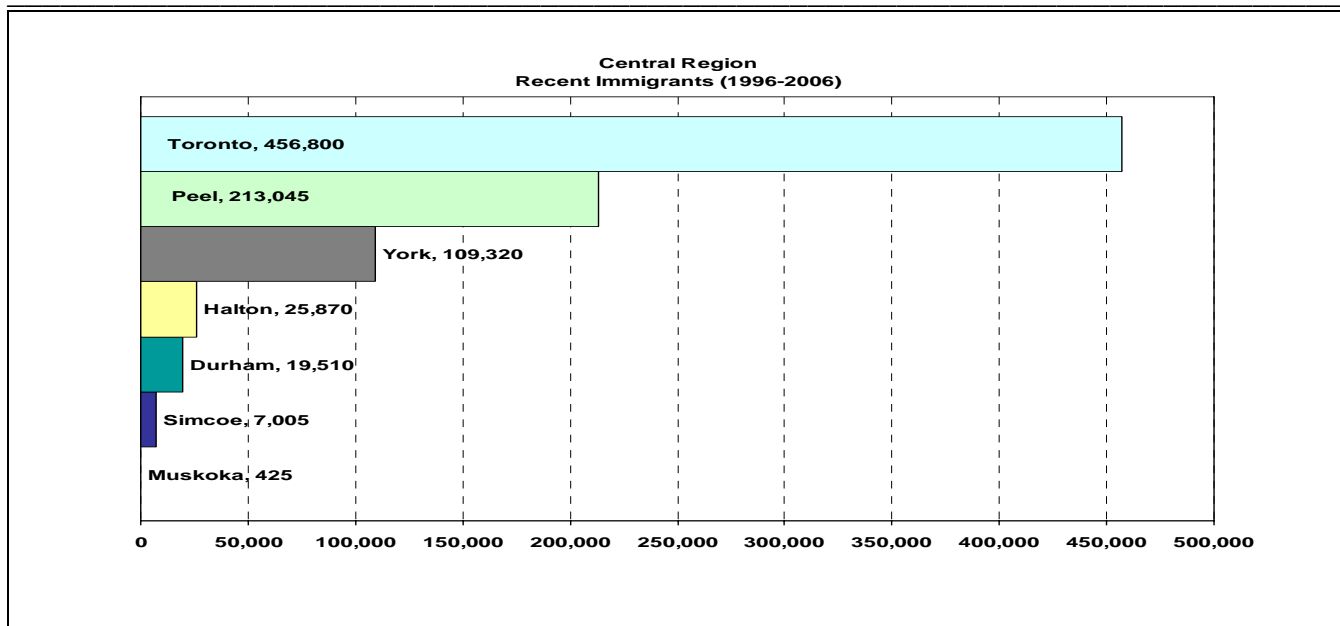
*(APEC 2001, p. 4)*

**Figure 3-a**  
**Immigration in Ontario by Region 1996-2006**



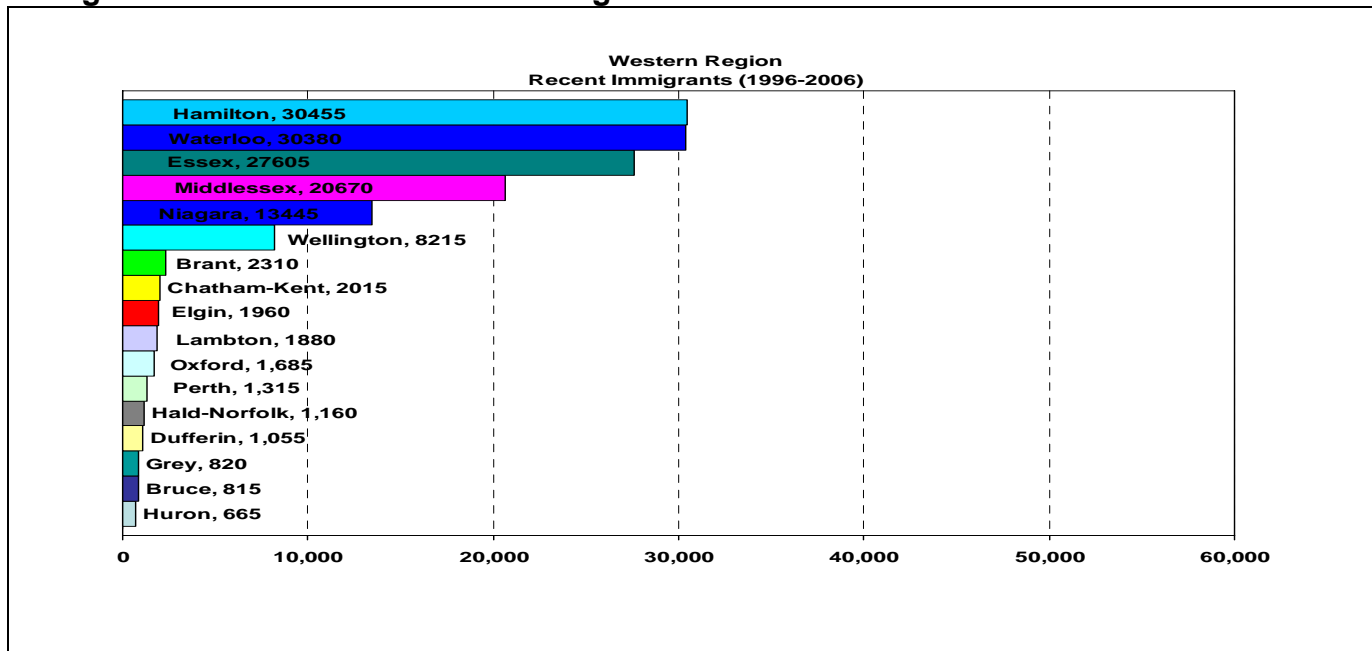
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**Figure 3-b**  
**Immigration in the Central Ontario Region 1996-2006**



Generated from Statistics Canada Data: Immigration and Citizenship 2006 Census, Catalogue No. 97-557-XCB2006012

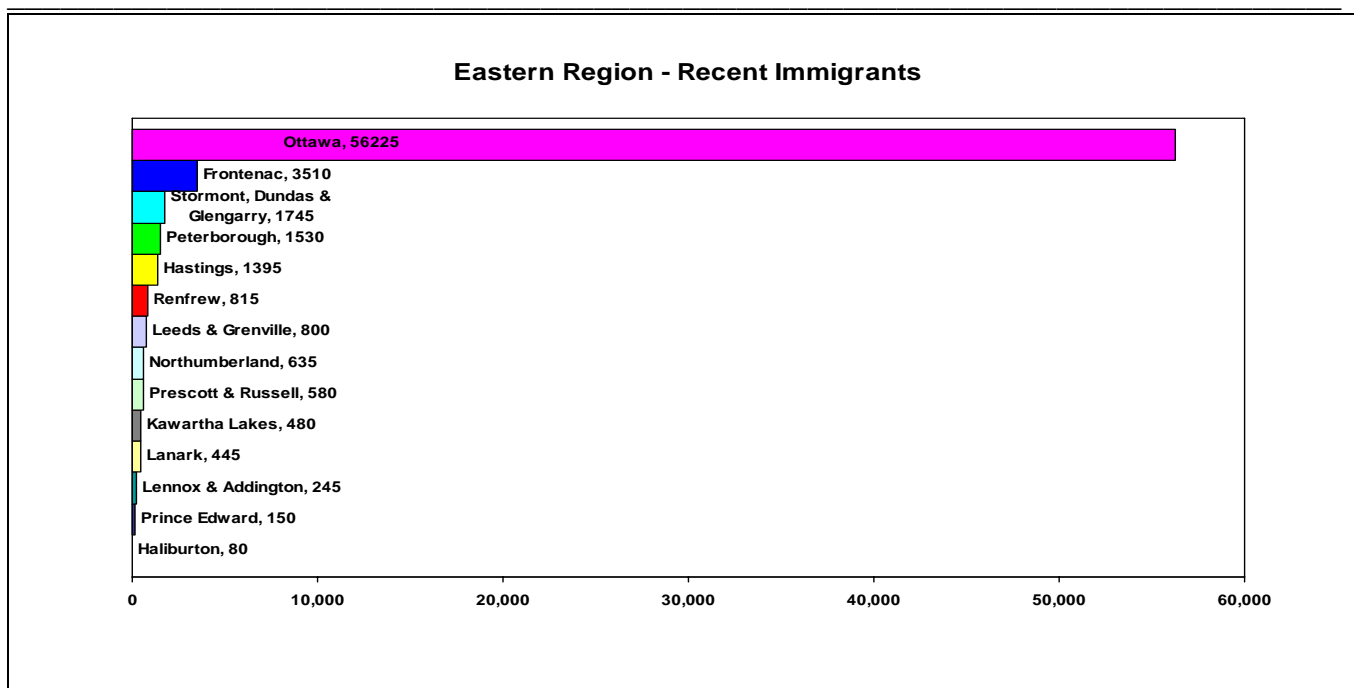
**Figure 3-c**  
**Immigration in the Western Ontario Region 1996-2006**



Generated from Statistics Canada Data: Immigration and Citizenship 2006 Census, Catalogue No. 97-557-XCB2006012



Figure 3-d  
Immigration in the Eastern Ontario Region 1996-2006



Generated from Statistics Canada Data: Immigration and Citizenship 2006 Census, Catalogue No. 97-557-XCB2006012

The continued arrival of immigrants in Ontario will reshape the ethnic and racial landscape of the province over the next 20 years and beyond. In fact, by 2025 it is anticipated that 36% of Ontario’s population will be foreign-born (Ontario Ministry of Tourism 2007). The ethnic makeup of the province does, however, vary considerably depending on location.

The ethnic composition of the big urban cities is considerably more diversified than in medium sized cities and smaller

centers. Figure 4-a displays the ethno-cultural mosaic of the foreign-born population in Ontario based on 2006 Census data. The two major ethnic groups are from Asia and the Middle East at 41% and Europe at 38%. The significant numbers of European immigrants is largely a result of early waves of immigration before the seventies, as well as more recent migrations from Eastern Europe. The ratio of Asian and Middle Eastern immigrants is attributed to the waves of immigration after 1970.

*“Between 2001 and 2006, Canada’s visible minority population grew by 26.2 percent, which is almost five times faster than the 5.4 percent increase of the whole population. This growth is primarily driven by immigration from non-European countries ... . Ontario’s visible minority population has risen more rapidly than that of the rest of Canada. ... . Eighty percent of Ontario’s visible minority population lives in Toronto.”*  
(Seljak 2009, p. 220)



When we look at ethnic origins in the big urban centers with populations of over half a million, the Greater Toronto Area and Ottawa, compared with the other parts of Ontario, notable differences are apparent. Big urban centers are able to attract newcomers in large numbers, regardless of their ethnicity/country of origin. Consequently these big urban centers have been growing and their ethnic mosaic is shifting based on the origin of significant numbers of newly arriving immigrants.

*“Danger resides in the economic and social challenges that face smaller cities. ... Over time, this situation would only aggravate the existing divide between large, economically successful, multicultural centres and smaller ageing, shrinking and stagnating communities whose cultural profile has not shifted significantly from its 1950s European base.”*  
 (Burststein 2009, p. 51-52)

Figure 4-b shows that big urban centers have a higher percentage of immigrants from Asia and the Middle East and a lower percentage from Europe than the Ontario average. The rest of Ontario, which is composed of medium size cities and small centers and rural

areas, displayed a very different ethnic composition pattern, as shown in figure 4-c. The rest of Ontario outside the big urban centers is much more European in background.

In 2006, as shown in Figure 8-c, the ratio of European foreign-born to the total foreign-born population was 200% higher in the rest of Ontario versus the big urban centers. Moreover, the Asian and Middle Eastern foreign-born, as a proportion of the total foreign-born population, was 300% lower in the rest of Ontario, in contrast to big urban centers. This means Ontario regions outside the big urban centers are still marked by a pattern of immigration more characteristic of the pre-1970 period.

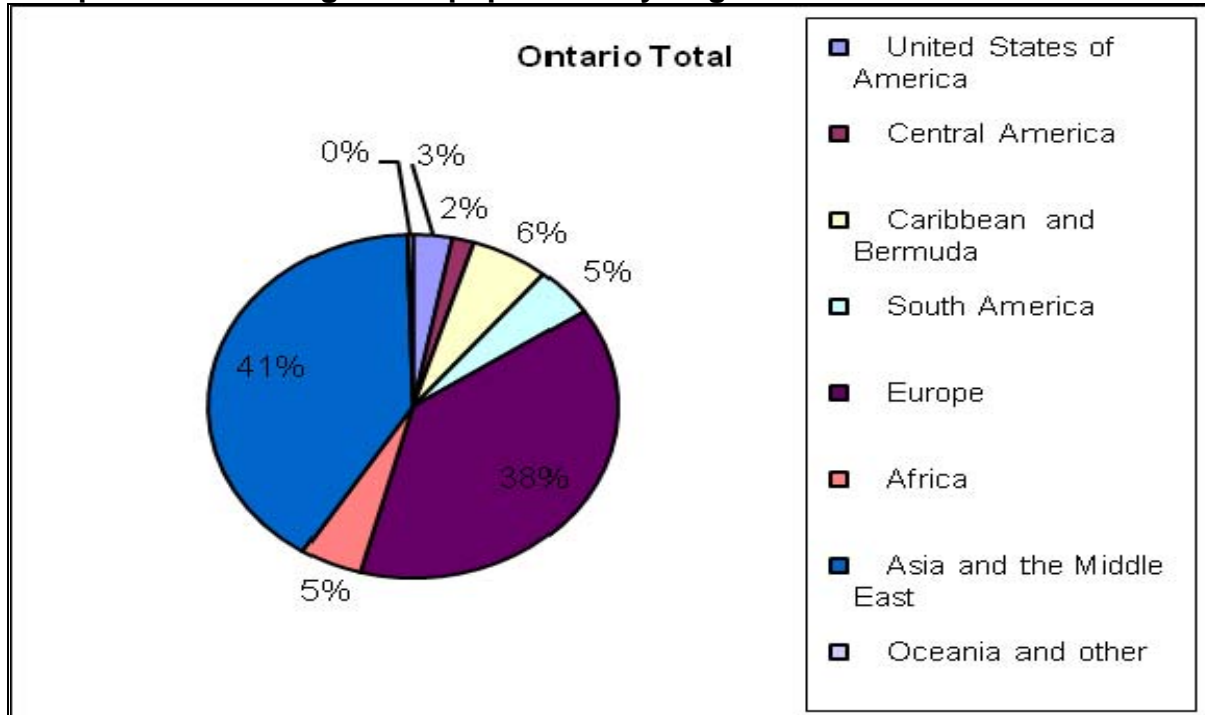
Multifaceted factors must be considered in order to understand these different patterns. The big urban centres attract the vast bulk of immigrants to Ontario. Some of these areas outside the big centres are stagnant or slow growth population areas. The comparative advantage of large gateway cities has created a population growth disadvantage for the rest of Ontario, hindering their greater ethnic diversification and the consequent benefits that

newcomers provide in terms of labour market and population growth.

*“One of these patterns is the decline in rural residence by recently arrived migrants. [Evidence] shows the sharp decline in recently arrived immigrants residing in third-tier centres. Immigrants arriving in Canada prior to 1971 (29%) were roughly three times more likely to reside in third-tier centres than those arriving more recently (9% of those arriving between 1991 and 2001). ... [F]ewer than 32,000 immigrants settled in rural areas between 1996 and 2001, and made up less than half a percent of rural residents in Canada.”*  
 (Wilkinson and Kalischuk 2009, p. 18)

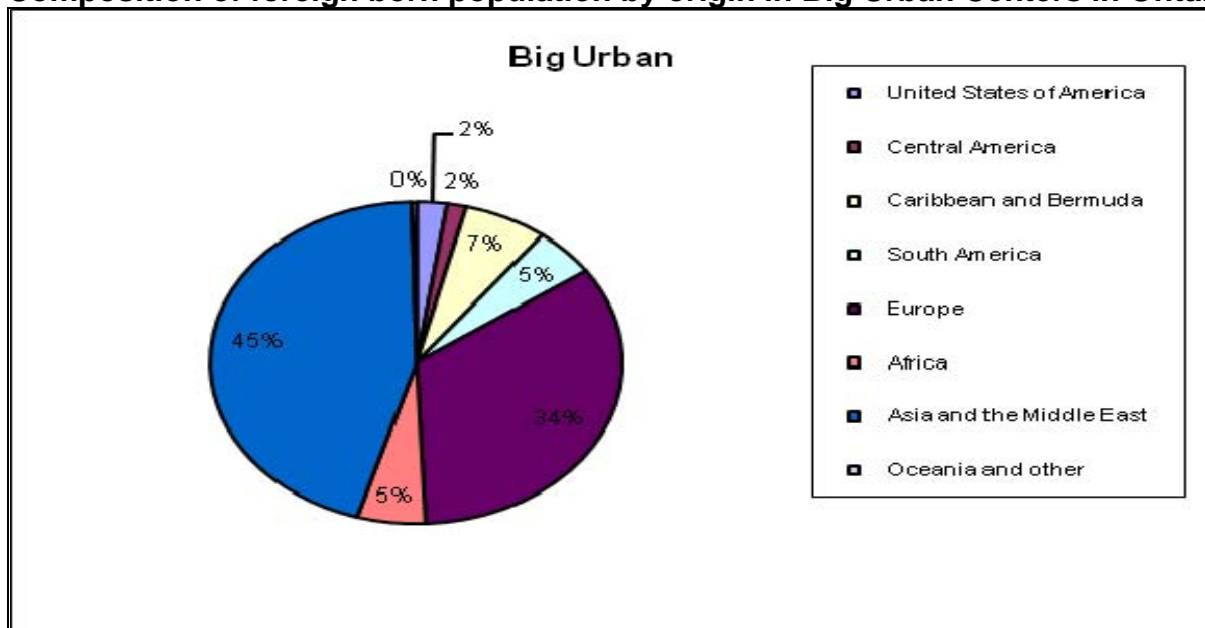
Smaller communities also often lack the capacity to adequately reach out to immigrants and place themselves on the immigration radar. However, the most critical and determining factor may well be the capacity of the relatively homogeneous social fabric in many of these communities to open up and to be inclusive toward more diverse ethnic groups and their different cultural values, which likely serve as preconditions for attracting newcomers.

**Figure 4-a**  
**Composition of foreign born population by origin in Ontario in 2006**



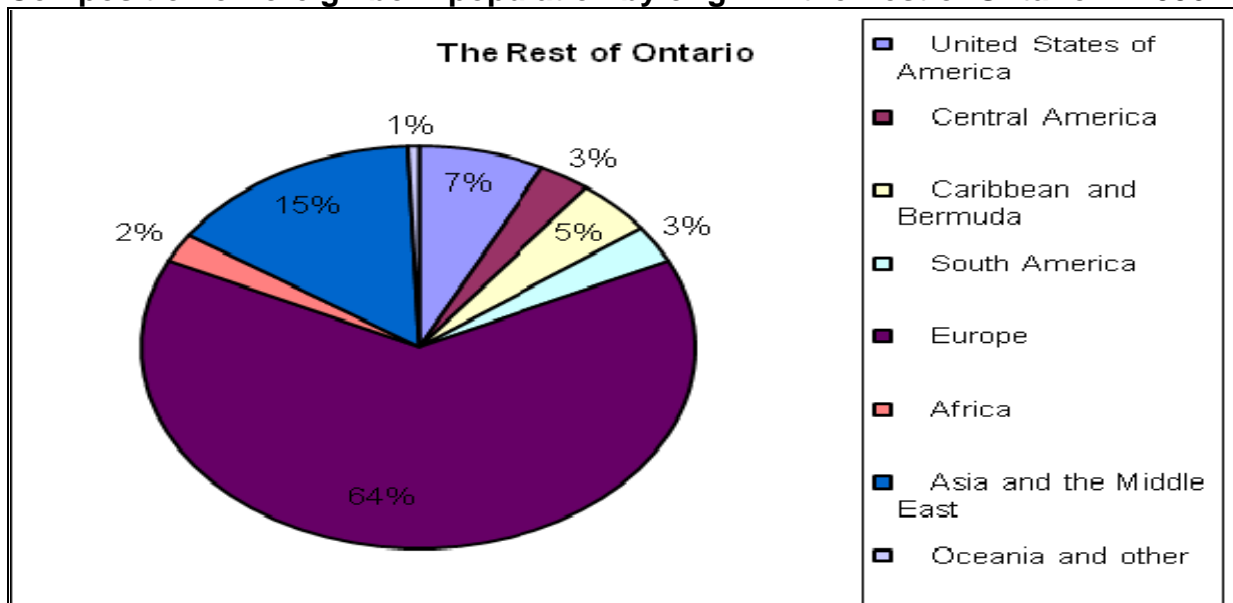
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**Figure 4-b**  
**Composition of foreign born population by origin in Big Urban Centers in Ontario in 2006**



Generated from Statistics Canada Data: Immigration and Citizenship 2006 Census, Catalogue No. 97-557-XCB2006012

Figure 4-c  
Composition of foreign born population by origin in the Rest of Ontario in 2006



Generated from Statistics Canada Data: Immigration and Citizenship 2006 Census, Catalogue No. 97-557-XCB2006012

Immigration data for a select group of large, medium and small centers in Ontario between 1996 and 2006 provides reinforcing evidence for the settlement patterns identified above. Figures 5-a to 5-e display the origin of landed immigrants between 1996 and 2006 in Toronto, Ottawa, Waterloo, Peterborough and Huron County.

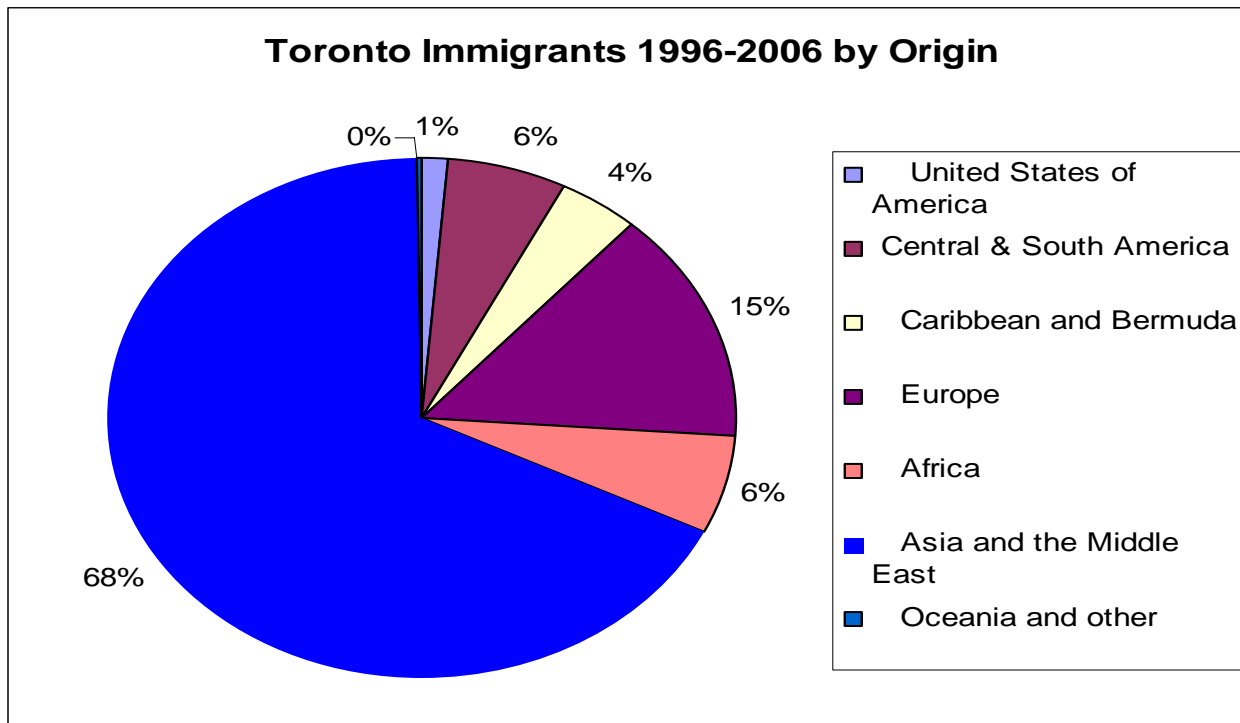
Landed immigrants from Asia and the Middle East represented

68% of all landed immigrants in Toronto between 1996 and 2006. By contrast, they represented 53% of landed immigrants in Ottawa, 46% in Waterloo, 41% in Peterborough and 11% in Huron County. This sequence is the inverse when it comes to immigrants from Europe in the same period, where immigrants from Europe represented 72% of the total immigrants in Huron County when the same group

represented 15% of immigrants in Toronto.

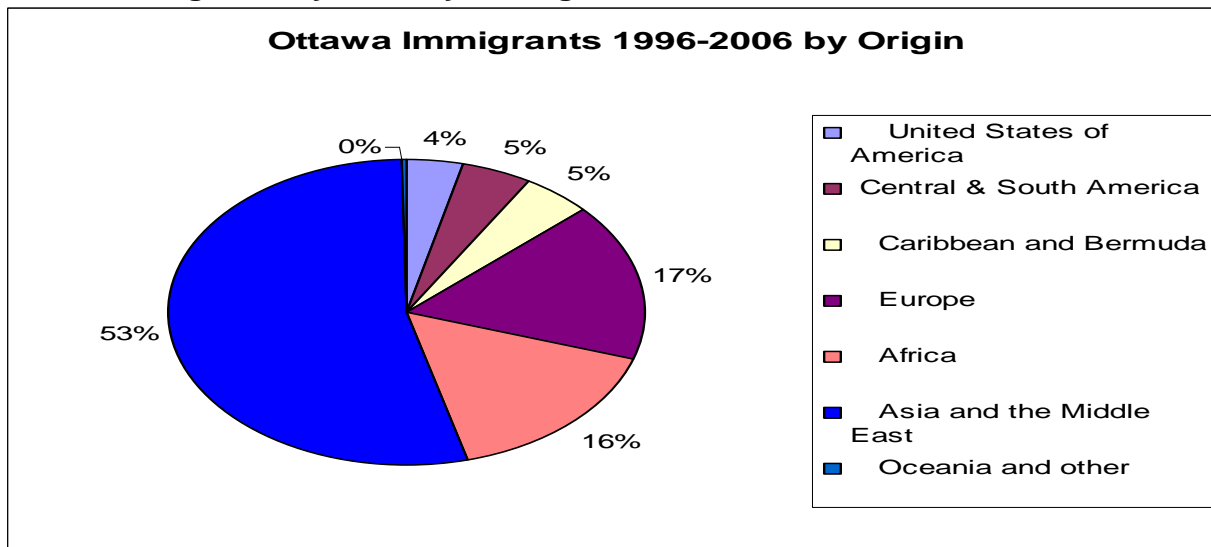
*“The most culturally diverse communities are those where the visible minority population accounts for 40 to 50 per cent of total population, and include Toronto, Peel and Vancouver.”*  
(FCM 2009, p. 9)

**Figure 5-a**  
**Toronto Immigrants by Country of Origin, 1996-2006**



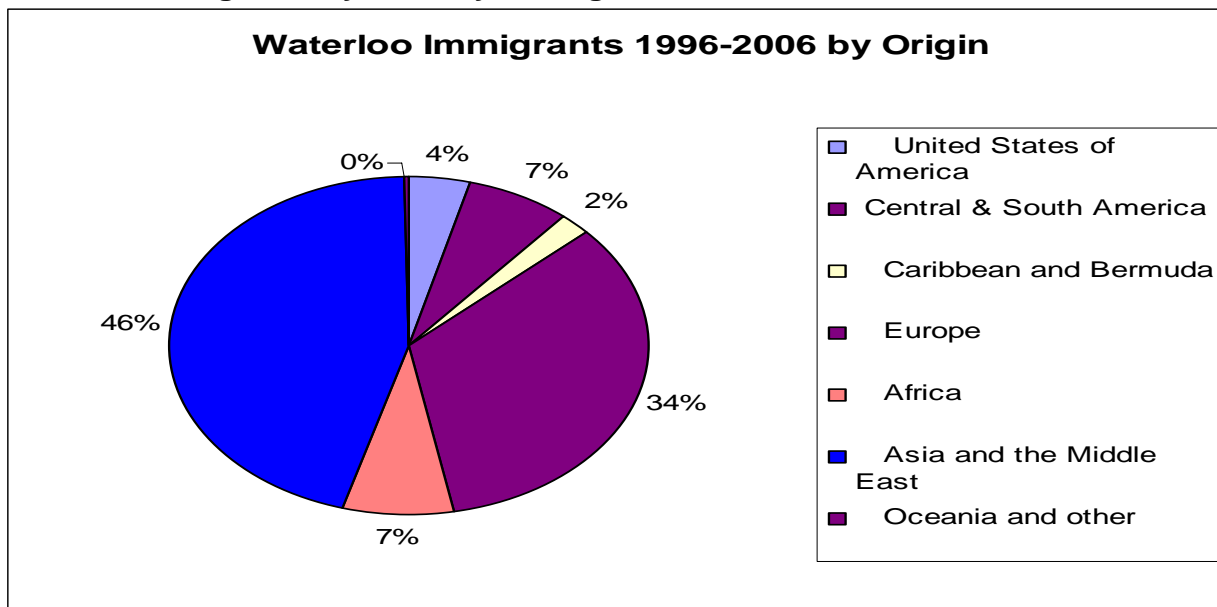
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**Figure 5-b**  
**Ottawa Immigrants by Country of Origin, 1996-2006**



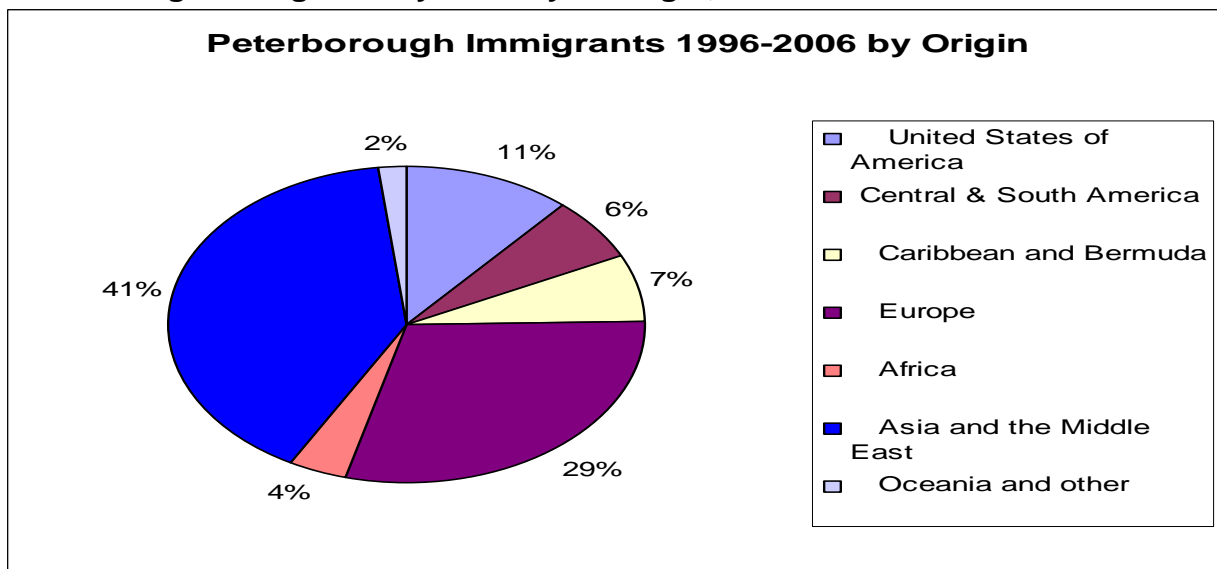
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**Figure 5-c**  
**Waterloo Immigrants by Country of Origin, 1996-2006**



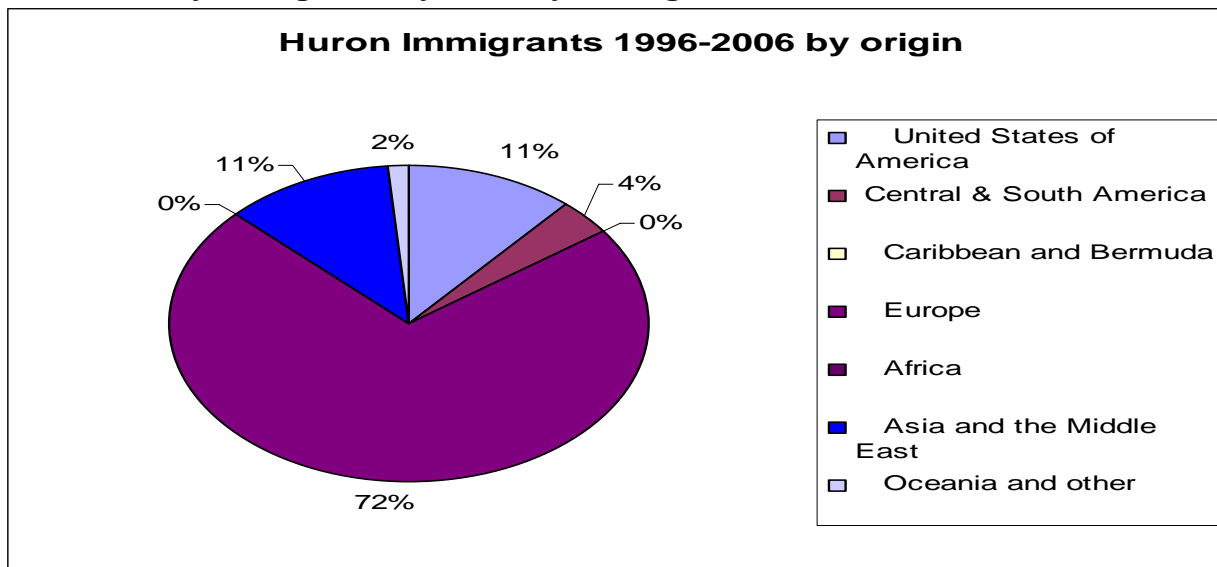
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**Figure 5-d**  
**Peterborough Immigrants by Country of Origin, 1996-2006**



Generated from Statistics Canada Data: Immigration and Citizenship 2006 Census, Catalogue No. 97-557-XCB2006012

**Figure 5-e  
Huron County Immigrants by Country of Origin, 1996-2006**



Generated from Statistics Canada Data: Immigration and Citizenship 2006 Census, Catalogue No. 97-557-XCB2006012

Figure 6 provides a comprehensive breakdown of Ontario cities, communities and regions identifying their population base as of 2001 and their average annualized immigration attraction numbers between 1991 and 2001. These figures reinforce the patterns identified in previous figures in this report. Namely, that immigration is concentrated in the central region of Ontario, centred around the city of Toronto, and that a number of second-tier cities such as

Ottawa, Hamilton, Waterloo/Kitchener, London and Windsor/Essex are also achieving some success in attracting immigrants.

By contrast, other communities in Ontario remain relatively unattractive to newcomer populations. This represents a challenge to these communities, especially in the context of a rapidly aging Ontario population. For example, in 2006 some 30% of Ontarians were over the age of 55, with 16% over 65, but by 2025 these

percentages are projected to increase to 41% and 24% respectively (Ontario Ministry of Tourism 2007).

The areas of the province most negatively affected by these population trends are those communities with poor immigration recruitment. Creating vibrant and sustainable communities will be difficult if local labour markets and population bases are shrinking and as age distribution becomes overly skewed.

**Figure 6**  
**Ontario Population Bases and Annual Average Rates of Immigration Attraction, 1991-2001**

Type of Population Base	Municipality / Geographic Area	Population, 2001 (Annual Average Immigrants, 1991-2001)
Toronto, Global City	1. City of Toronto	2,481,494 (51,663)
Single Tier City	2. City of Brantford	86,417 (211)
	3. Municipality of Chatham-Kent	107,341 (156)
	4. City of Greater Sudbury	155,219 (104)
	5. City of Guelph	106,170 (604)
	6. Haldimand County	43,728 (34)
	7. City of Hamilton	490,268 (2,975)
	8. City of Kawartha Lakes	69,179 (34)
	9. City of London	336,539 (1,848)
	10. Norfolk County	60,847 (109)
	11. City of Ottawa	774,072 (6,371)
	12. City of Peterborough	71,446 (89)
	13. City of Prince Edward County	24,901 (7)
	Upper Tier Region	14. Region of Durham (9 municipalities, including Region)



Type of Population Base	Municipality / Geographic Area	Population, 2001 (Annual Average Immigrants, 1991-2001)
	15. Region of Halton (5 municipalities, including Region)	375,229 (1,623)
	16. Region of Niagara (13 municipalities, including Region)	410,574 (1,037)
	17. Region of Peel (4 municipalities, including Region)	998,948 (15,898)
	18. Region of Waterloo (8 municipalities, including Region)	438,515 (2,631)
	19. Region of York (10 municipalities, including Region)	729,254 (9,491)
County	20. Brant County (1 municipality, including County, excluding Brantford)	32,068 (31)
	21. Bruce County (9 municipalities, including County)	63,892 (51)
	22. Dufferin County (9 municipalities, including County)	51,013 (85)
	23. Elgin County (9 municipalities, including County)	81,553 (212)
	24. Essex County (10 municipalities, including County)	374,975 (2,688)

Type of Population Base	Municipality / Geographic Area	Population, 2001 (Annual Average Immigrants, 1991-2001)
	25. Frontenac County (6 municipalities, including County)	138,606 (336)
	26. Grey County (10 municipalities, including County)	89,073 (65)
	27. Haliburton County (5 municipalities, including County)	15,085 (15)
	28. Hastings County (17 municipalities, including County)	125,915 (131)
	29. Huron County (10 municipalities, including County)	59,701 (76)
	30. Lambton County (12 municipalities, including County)	126,971 (148)
	31. Lanark County (10 municipalities, including County)	62,495 (109)
	32. Leeds and Grenville 14 municipalities, including County	96,606 (87)
	33. Lennox and Addington County (5 municipalities, including County)	39,461 (17)
	34. Middlesex County (9 municipalities, including County, excluding London)	403,185 (1,921)

Type of Population Base	Municipality / Geographic Area	Population, 2001 (Annual Average Immigrants, 1991-2001)
	35. Northumberland (8 municipalities, including County)	77,497 (59)
	36. Oxford County (9 municipalities, including County)	99,270 (146)
	37. Perth County (7 municipalities, including County)	73,675 (115)
	38. Peterborough County (9 municipalities, including County, excluding Peterborough)	54,400 (27)
	39. Prescott and Russell (9 municipalities, including County)	76,446 (72)
	40. Renfrew County (19 municipalities, including County)	95,138 (79)
	41. Simcoe County (19 municipalities, including County)	377,050 (569)
	42. Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry United Counties (8 municipalities, including County)	109,522 (127)
	43. Wellington County (8 municipalities, including County, excluding Guelph)	187,313 (721)
Geographic Region	44. Algoma (22 municipalities)	109,857 (57)

Type of Population Base	Municipality / Geographic Area	Population, 2001 (Annual Average Immigrants, 1991-2001)
	45. Cochrane (13 municipalities)	79,451 (25)
	46. Kenora (9 municipalities)	38,583 (36)
	47. Manitoulin (10 municipalities)	8,070 (1)
	48. Muskoka Lakes (7 municipalities)	53,106 (33)
	49. Nipissing (11 municipalities)	79,625 (30)
	50. Parry Sound (22 municipalities)	36,278 (18)
	51. Rainy River (10 municipalities)	18,588 (13)
	52. Sudbury (9 municipalities, excluding Greater Sudbury)	19,740 (7)
	53. Thunder Bay (15 municipalities)	141,451 (136)
	54. Timiskaming (23 municipalities)	20,200 (10)

Source: Modified from Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, 2006, Immigration Municipal Content Strategy, Final Draft, (Toronto: Queen's Printer) pp. 17-19

**Conclusion**

This study offers a statistical profile of population and immigration data for Ontario regions and communities. It attempts to identify some broad patterns of newcomer settlement and the impact this is having on such factors as population growth and ethnic/country of origin

composition. It graphically shows the highly uneven distribution of the immigrant population in the province.

By 2025, 36% of Ontario's population will be foreign-born and the province will have 50% more foreign-born residents in 2025 than it did in 2006 (Ontario Ministry of Tourism

2007). Given long-term population patterns in the province, this suggests that newcomers will continue to concentrate in gateway and select second tier cities in the province, unless substantive efforts are undertaken to make other parts of Ontario more welcoming communities that

can attract and retain immigrant populations.

For creating a settlement strategy that promotes better regional distribution of immigrants, governments and communities in Ontario and elsewhere, will need to work in close partnership. Meaningful partnerships will be critical for the long term health of many of our struggling population

centres. They should also provide considerable opportunity for newcomers to find meaningful employment that will engage the considerable assets in human capital they bring to the province.

*“Now smaller and rural communities face greater imperative to move rapidly and effectively to integrate immigrants into skill and career mobility paths and into broader roles in community life.”*  
(Harper 2008, p. 53)

*“In 2006, 95 per cent of Canada’s foreign-born population and 97 per cent of recent immigrants who arrived in the last five years lived in an urban area. This compares with 78 per cent of the Canadian-born population.”*

(FCM 2009, p. 1)

**NOTE**

\* The authors of this report would like to thank Al DeJong for generating Figures 1 & 3.

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## About Metropolis

Launched in 1996, the **Metropolis Project** aims to improve policies for managing migration and diversity by focusing scholarly attention on critical issues. It involves policymakers, researchers, and NGOs in all project initiatives.

**Metropolis'** goals are to:

- Enhance academic research capacity;
- Focus academic research on critical policy issues and policy options;
- Develop ways to facilitate the use of research in decision-making.

Structured as a partnership, the project has both Canadian and international components. **Metropolis** encourages communication between interested stakeholders at the annual national and international conferences and at workshops, seminars, and roundtables organized by project members.

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