



New Brunswick Population and Demographic Counts Update: **2023 Data**

November 2024

Ali Beykzadeh, Bethany Jones, Ted McDonald, Pablo Miah

Introduction

In 2021, the New Brunswick Institute for Research, Data and Training (NB-IRDT) released the first report in a Population and demographics count series that provides a snapshot of the population of New Brunswick each year.

These reports measure the total population count of New Brunswick and include information on New Brunswickers' demographic and geographic characteristics, as well as movement to and from the province. Each new update provides an overview of how the population has changed since the previous report was released, allowing us to see whether NB is attracting new residents and if individuals who previously left are now returning.

This is the fifth report in the series, and it updates our population snapshot by presenting annual results from **January 2020 until December 2023**.

The total population of NB at the end of 2023 was **838,255**.

The NB population grew each year between 2020 and 2023:

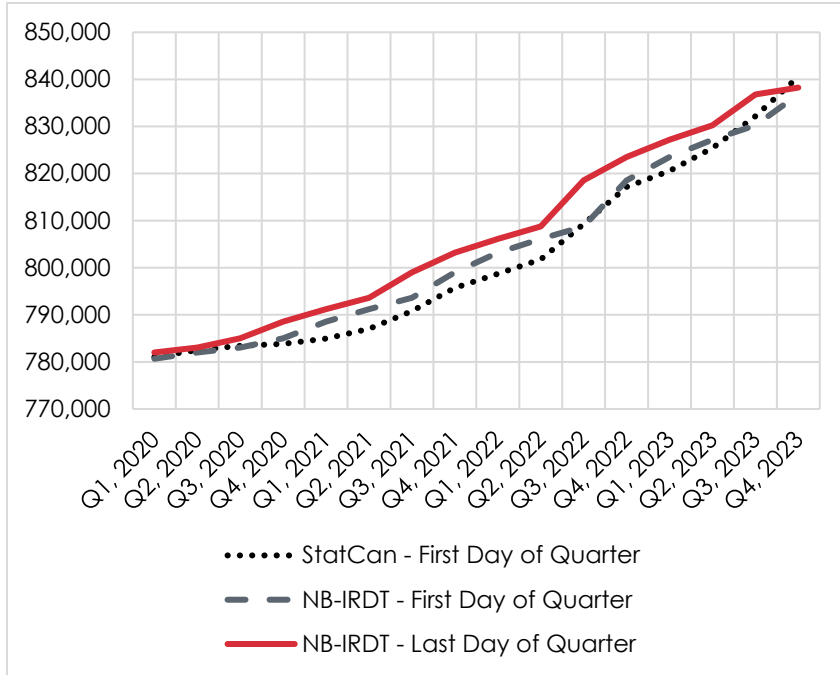
2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
1.9%	2.5%	1.8%

While the overall rate of population increase in 2023 was slower than in 2022, NB saw higher levels of in-migration from work and study permit holders in 2023 than in earlier years.

Increasing in-migration was accompanied by increasing out-migration, which likely reflects a general increase in population movement across the board.

Funding for this project was provided by the Government of New Brunswick, Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour (PETL) as part of a five-year research agreement between PETL and NB-IRDT. Data were accessed under an Information Manager Agreement with the NB Department of Health (DH). The views expressed in this study do not necessarily represent those of PETL, DH, or their partners.

Total Population Counts, Quarterly (2020-2023)



Quarters:

Q1: Jan. 1 - Mar. 31

Q2: Apr. 1 - Jun. 30

Q3: Jul. 1 - Sep. 31

Q4: Oct. 1 - Dec. 31

The NB population has been growing!

Yearly growth:*

2020-2021: + 1.9%

2021-2022: + 2.5%

2022-2023: + 1.8%

*compared to previous year

Notes: This figure presents population counts based on NB-IRDT data and Statistics Canada projections.¹

Source: [Appendix Table 1A](#) (see corresponding note in the Appendix on updates to population counts by immigration status between the current and previous report (Beykzadeh et al., 2023)).

Where do NB-IRDT's population counts come from?

NB-IRDT's counts are based on **Medicare eligibility status** on the last day of the quarter, with annual counts based on the last day of Quarter 4. We assume those with active Medicare status live in NB because individuals are no longer eligible for Medicare once they leave the province.²

Based on NB-IRDT data:

The total population of NB at the end of 2023 was 838,255.

Immigration Status

The following pages break down population counts and movement by immigration status. Individuals are assigned a status based on the "Citizen Status" variable in their Medicare registry.

Citizen Canadian, Dual Citizen, Status Indian, Unknown (with country: Canada)

Non-Citizen Permanent Residents and Permit Holders (work/study permits)

¹ Statistics Canada's numbers are based on projections for the first day of each quarter (while NB-IRDT counts are based on **Medicare eligibility status** on the last day). This would explain why NB-IRDT counts appear higher than StatCan estimates. However, when we adapt NB-IRDT data to show **Medicare eligibility status** on the first day of the quarter, instead of the last, we see that the two sets of results are closely aligned. This comparison is used to validate our results.

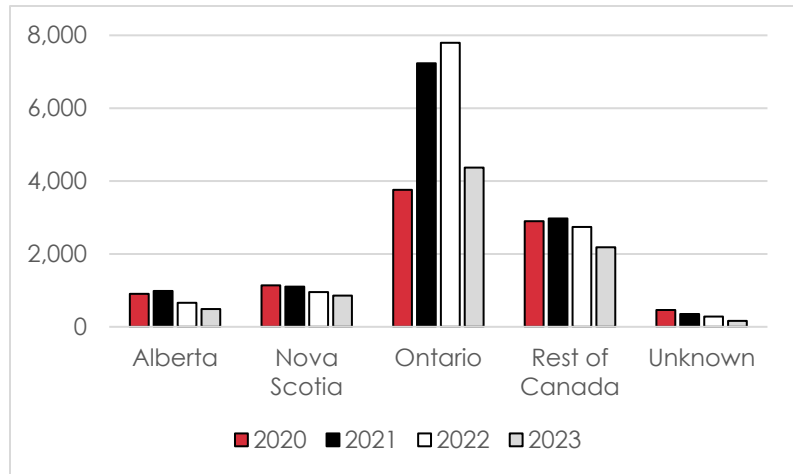
² However, individuals have a 3-month "grace period" in which to change their Medicare status after leaving the province. This transition period may result in up to a 1-quarter lag in counts compared to other sources.

In-Migration: First-Time Arrivals (Canadian Citizens and Non-Citizens)

Citizens from Other Provinces

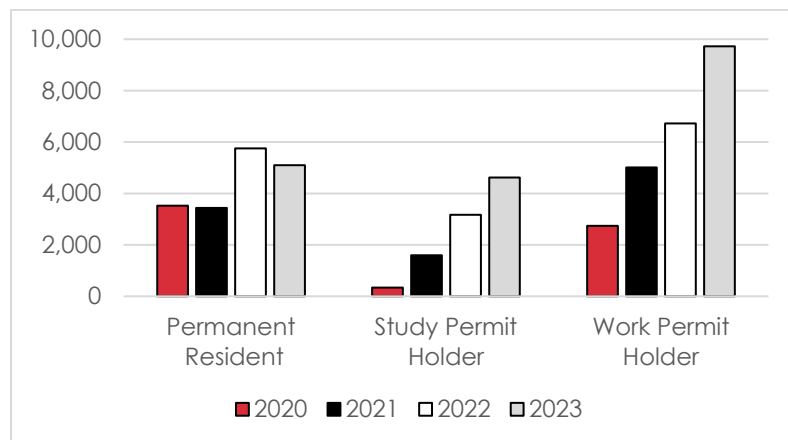
2023 brought a decrease in first-time arrivals from all parts of Canada, with a large, notable drop in arrivals from Ontario compared to 2022.

However, we see in the figure below that the overall number of non-citizens arriving in NB for the first time grew – with numbers higher in 2023 than in 2020.



Source: [Appendix Table 5](#)

Non-Citizens Arriving from Other Provinces and Countries



Source: [Appendix Table 5](#)

The number of work permit holders increased more than 3-fold from 2020-2023, while study permit holders grew more than 10-fold over the same period.

The low numbers in 2020 were likely due to COVID-19 impacts, such as delays in Medicare registration and post-secondary admission, as well as an increase in students taking online courses.

Nearly all working-age categories saw an increase in non-citizens from other provinces between 2022 and 2023. The number of 18-24 and 25-34-year-olds in particular increased nearly 2-3 times over – reaching levels similar to 2020.

This increase in non-citizens from other provinces suggests NB may have been receiving secondary arrivals: non-citizens who landed in other parts of Canada before moving to NB.

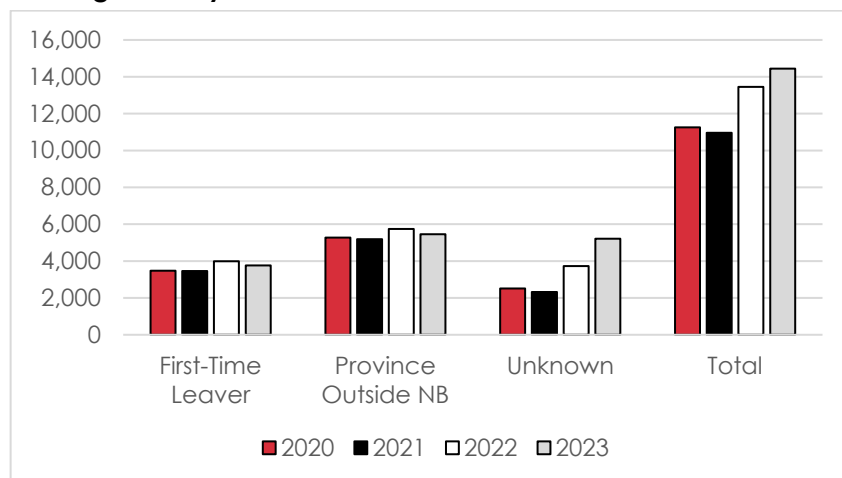
Non-Citizens Arriving from Other Provinces (by Age)

Age	2020	2021	2022	2023
0-17	345	340	295	375
18-24	1,315	985	385	1,000
25-34	930	875	655	1,155
35-44	435	430	455	530
45-54	125	200	175	185
55-64	60	85	75	50
65+	20	35	45	20

Source: [Appendix Table 15](#)

Out-Migration: Previous Residence and Immigration Status

Out-Migration by Previous Residence

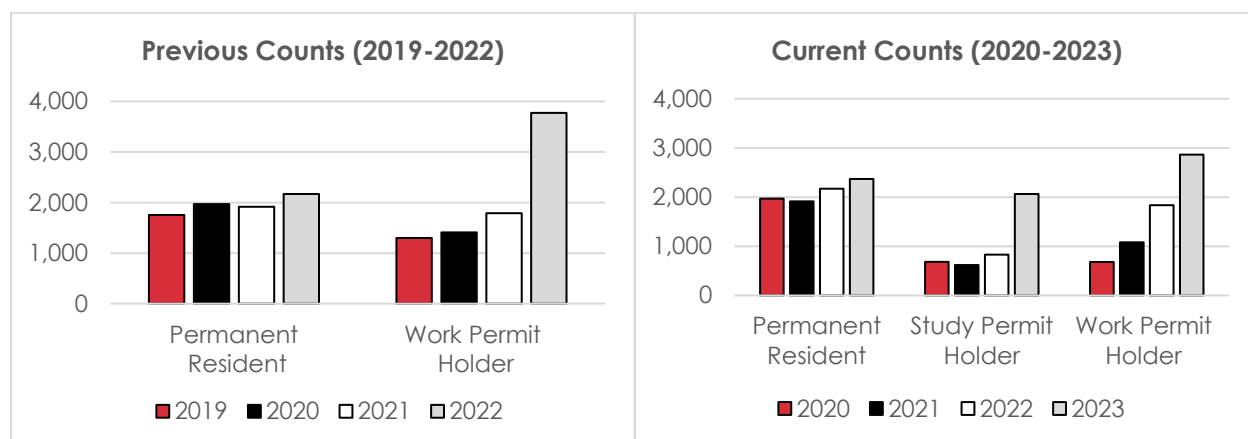


When we look at the out-migration of individuals who had always lived in NB (“first-time leavers”), as well as citizens and non-citizens who moved to NB from another province or from outside Canada (“Unknown”), we see out-migration was on the rise in 2023 – but only due to a spike in out-migration of those from outside Canada.

Source: [Appendix Table 3](#)

Out-Migration of Non-Citizens Living in NB for the First Time

When we compare the out-migration of non-citizens living in NB for the first time, we see some pronounced differences between counts in the previous report (Beykzadeh et al., 2023) and current counts. These differences are explained by data limitations that had previously led us to classify student (i.e., study permit holder) exits between 2019 and 2022 as zero. However, updated data from our partners allow these exits to be observed.



Source: [Appendix Table 6B](#)

Source: [Appendix Table 6A](#)

While there was a gradual rise in out-migration of permanent residents and a notable increase among work permit holders, the number of study permit holders who left NB more than doubled between 2022-2023 – from 830 to 2,065. While 20% of study permit holders in NB left the province in 2022, the out-migration rate of study permit holders increased to 30% in 2023.³

³ Outmigration rate = share of out-migration compared to study permit population in previous year.

Discussion of Findings

The province of New Brunswick (NB) has seen overall population growth each year between 2020 and 2023, with fluctuating in-and out-migration patterns among certain groups. While population growth during the early years of the study period may have been driven by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the continued (though comparatively slowed) growth during the post-lockdown years is likely due to continued high annual immigration targets.⁴ Though the impacts of rising inflation, higher interest rates and the surging prices of real estate and the rental market are being felt Canada-wide, including in NB, these impacts are most pronounced in larger Canadian municipalities outside the Atlantic provinces (Cox, 2024). Similarly, a nationwide shortage of educational and healthcare resources (including a shortage of teachers and medical professionals) is under greater pressure in larger municipalities. These factors may be motivating migration to NB by individuals in search of a more affordable lifestyle and access to resources (MacFarlane, 2024).

During the pandemic years (2020-2021), NB received a growing number of Canadian citizens who had never lived in the province before, particularly from Ontario. However, post-pandemic (2022-2023), the number of Canadian citizens moving to NB for the first time from other provinces slowed, with NB receiving fewer Canadian citizens in 2023 than it had in the three preceding years. The province of Ontario was the only exception – even though the number of Ontarians moving to NB dropped by nearly 50% between 2022 and 2023, the number of arrivals in 2023 still remained slightly above 2020 levels. Again, the continued in-migration of Ontarians likely reflects the impact of an oversaturated housing market, high interest rates and surging real estate prices motivating families from more expensive regions (i.e., Toronto) to move elsewhere (Butler, 2023).

In contrast, we see a growing number of work and study permit holders arriving in NB, with the rate of in-migration accelerating from 2020 on. The number of work and study permit holders was low in 2020 – likely due to COVID-related delays in Medicare, education registrations and a backlog in application processes through Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. Yet, since then, NB has seen a 3-fold increase in work permit holders and 10-fold increase in study permit holders, boosting in-migration levels despite lower in-migration from Canadian citizens.

The large increase in work and study permit holders arriving is accompanied by an increase in both types of permit holder leaving in 2023, reflecting increasing levels of population mobility – possibly due to labour shortages in key occupations and relatively low unemployment rates, which are drivers of migration. Among permit holders, the proportion of study permit holders has been increasing relative to the proportion of work permit holders; and students – who are generally a more mobile demographic – may be leaving the province in search of employment opportunities better suited to their skills and fields of study. While out-migration of work permit holders has increased steadily year-by-year since 2020, the out-migration of study permit holders did not increase markedly from 2020-2022, but it more than doubled from 2022-2023. That being said, the number of non-citizens leaving NB in 2023 is less than half the number arriving in the same year – across each immigration status category.

⁴ It remains to be seen what impact reductions in immigration targets for both permanent and temporary residents (especially international students) announced in October 2024 will have on future inflows and retention.

Key Takeaways

New Brunswick is experiencing fluctuations in population mobility, but these shifting in- and out-migration levels have not disturbed an overall positive trend of population growth.

In recent years, changes in immigration policy and economic factors (including rising inflation, higher interest rates and strains on the housing, education and healthcare sectors) have led to greater population movement. We see increasing levels of in- and out-migration in New Brunswick – particularly among work and study permit holders, whose numbers are increasing each year.

It is important to note, however, that while migration to New Brunswick may be driven by the rising cost of living and a lack of education and healthcare resources in Canada's larger municipalities, New Brunswick faces the same challenges. As the New Brunswick population continues to grow, the demand for housing will also continue to grow, along with increased pressure on the province's already strained school system and healthcare resources. It will be interesting to see whether these challenges impact migration trends in the coming years, as more data and future report updates become available.

References

- Butler, C. (2023, March 15). Ontario's young adults are leaving the province in droves. The soaring cost of living is to blame. *CBC News*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/ontario-alberta-move-migration-population-outflow-1.6778456>
- Cox, W. (2024, October 24). Opinion: Want to help solve Canada's housing crisis? Move. *Financial Post*. <https://financialpost.com/opinion/want-help-solve-canada-housing-crisis-move#:~:text=Canadians%20may%20be%20solving%20the,migration%20data%20from%20Statistics%20Canada>
- MacFarlane, J. (2024, May 27). Seeking affordability, young families flee Canada's big cities for cheaper options. *yahoo!finance*. https://ca.finance.yahoo.com/news/seeking-affordability-young-families-flee-canadas-big-cities-for-cheaper-options-192548346.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLnNvbS8&gucce_referrer_sig=AQAAAE47NiE2fkMD_B3wi8Lcd4Nd28aZdYdEmU7oNVOFnk7EyNYFBbtvXxR_7R8nepbeHEVEFKuruYr5Ukf3NQX7vVNLX1_mBeEpiY1e7g9pHExqDfHoACH77zHPFfdwx6J6scM4wLNezO9asRt9iirxBWaBcDMzhFMNqI03NPZ0a_m

How to cite this product: Beykzadeh, A., Jones, B., McDonald, T., & Miah, P. (2024). New Brunswick population and demographic counts update: 2023 data. Fredericton, NB: New Brunswick Institute for Research, Data and Training.