

Intersectional Analysis on Immigrant Composition and Accessibility in CMAs in Canada

Mosaic Migrants, Toronto Metropolitan University

Introduction

According to the 2021 Census, immigrants account for 23% of the total population in Canada.¹ Many immigrant population lives in large cities; in 2021, over 9 in 10 recent immigrants lived in one of Canada's 41 census metropolitan areas (CMAs), large urban centres with over 100,000 residents. For example, Toronto is home to 46.6% of the immigrant population, and 41.8% of the immigrant population lives in Vancouver.²

Spatial access measures quantify the connectivity between an Aggregate Dissemination Area (ADA) and its closest amenities.³ The measurement is calculated based on the connection between area and the amenities based on the accessibility through active transportation and public transit. Active transportation is most widely used when the trip distances do not exceed 5km for walking (about a 1-hour walk) and 15-20 km for cycling (about a 1-hour bike ride).⁴ It provides many societal and personal benefits, for example, lower energy consumption, boosts the local economy, and improves physical health.⁵

In this report, we are going to analyze the location where different groups of immigrants live (recent immigrants, classes, generations, and women refugees) and their accessibility to their workplace or schools of immigrants, disaggregated by the CMA or Census agglomeration (area), through a curated dataset from Statistics Canada. We aim to explore the nuances in accessibility by answering the following:

1. Which areas have a higher-than-average density of **recent immigrants** (2016–2021)?
2. How do different **immigrant classes** (economic, family, refugee, and other) vary in areas with high vs. low workplace accessibility?
3. How does **generational composition** differ in areas with high vs. low access to primary/secondary education?
4. In areas with high populations of **women refugees**, do they face greater barriers to workplace accessibility?

In answering these questions, we will calculate the weighted average of the spatial access measures, weighted by the population in ADA and aggregated by CMA or census agglomeration.

¹ Statistics Canada. (2023). *Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>

² Statistics Canada. (2022, October 26). *Immigrants Make Up the Largest Share of the Population in Over 150 Years and Continue to Shape Who We are as Canadians*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221026/dq221026a-eng.htm>

³ Statistics Canada. (2023, July 17). *Spatial Access Measures*.

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/27-26-0001/272600012023001-eng.htm>

⁴ Cape Breton Regional Municipality. (2022). *Active Transportation Plan*.

https://www.cbrm.ns.ca/images/CBRM_Active_Transportation_Plan.pdf

⁵ Centre for Active Living. (2017). *Benefits of Active Transportation*. University of Alberta.

<https://www.ualberta.ca/en/kinesiology-sport-recreation/media-library/research/centres-and-units/centre-for-active-living/2017-active-transportation-factsheet-rev.pdf>

Newcomer Population

In this section, we explore the demographic composition of all areas across the country and figure out the areas with a higher-than-average immigrant influx. We visualized the percentage of recent immigrants (those who immigrated to Canada between 2016 and 2021),⁶ to understand where the most recent immigrants live. Figure 1 shows a map⁷ visualizing areas with a high immigrant influx:

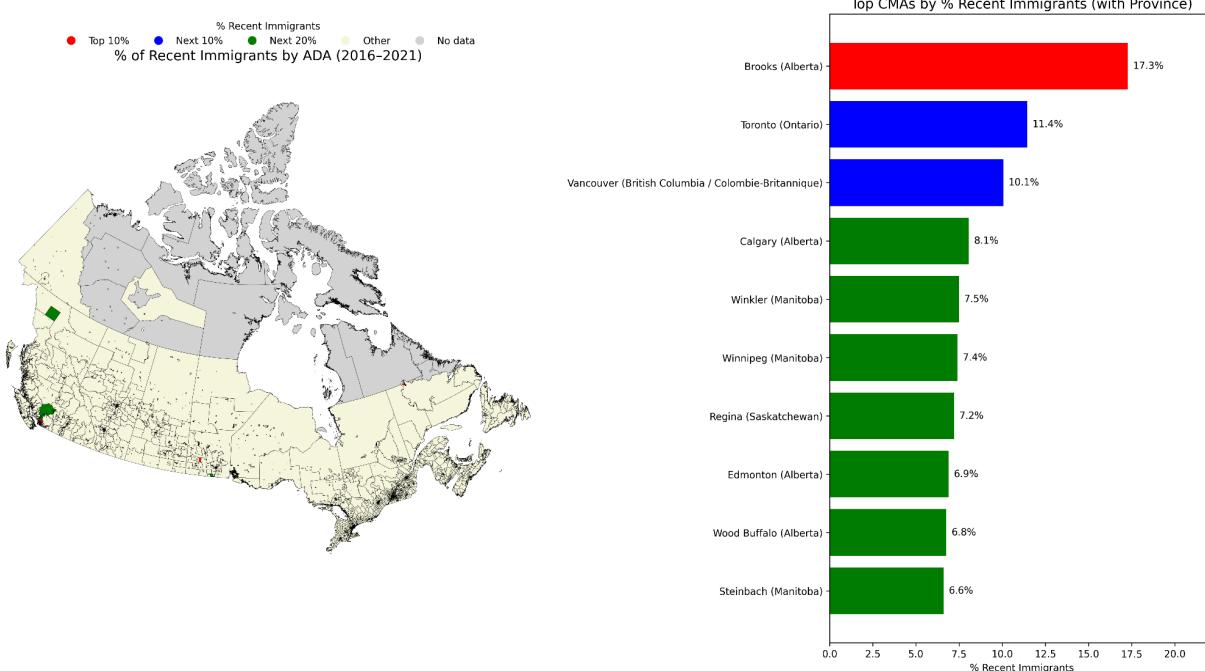


Figure 1: *Percentage of Recent Immigrants*

The figure shows that Brooks, AB has the highest newcomer population at 17.3%, followed by Toronto, ON at 11.5%, Vancouver, BC at 10%, and Calgary, AB at 8.1%. These cities have a much higher immigrant influx than the national average, at 3.7%.⁸

Then, we compare the modes of transportation to work and their accessibility between areas with higher-than-average newcomer density and those that do not. Figure 2 shows a direct comparison of workplace accessibility in areas with a high immigrant influx and those that do not.

⁶ Statistics Canada. (2017, August 31). 2016 Census of Population: Immigration and ethnocultural diversity. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/98-501/98-501-x2016008-eng.cfm>

⁷ Statistics Canada. (2023, September 29). 2021 Census – Boundary files.

<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/geo/sip-pis/boundary-limites/index2021-eng.cfm?year=21>

⁸ Statistics Canada. (2023). *Census Profile. 2021 Census of Population. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001*. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>

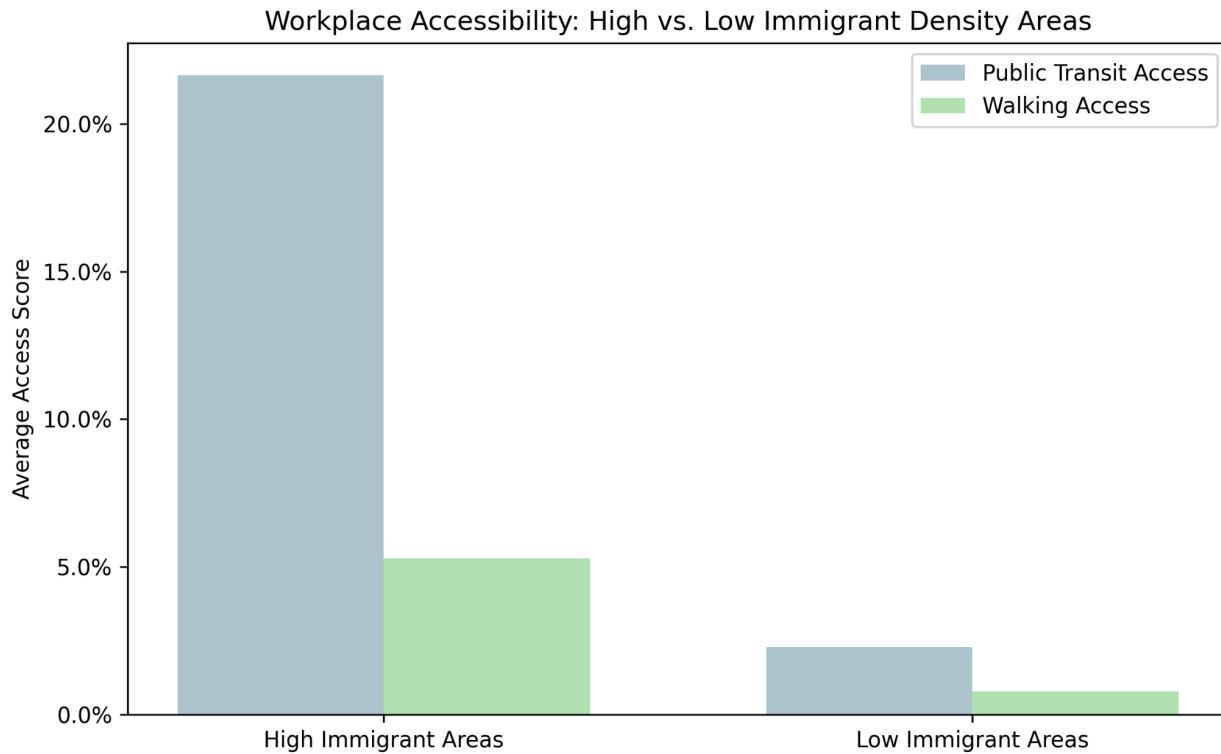


Figure 2: *Workplace accessibility in areas with high and low newcomer populations*

The chart shows that public transit connects the workplace better to the communities. Meanwhile, newcomers are more likely to reside in areas with higher general accessibility to their workplace. It also shows that the areas with high immigrant influx usually have a better public transportation system, as they have a greater gap in access score between public transit and walking access.

Immigrant Classes

The experiences of immigrants, newcomers, and refugees in Canada are heavily influenced by their legal status, and experiences differ depending on their immigration “category” through which they came to Canada (e.g., through the economic class, as refugees, etc.).⁹

We will explore the characteristics by identifying areas with high and low spatial access measures by walking or public transit. Then, by comparing the class composition of these areas, we will see how different immigrant classes tend to live in different parts of Canada. Figures 3 and 4 show the composition of the immigrant classes in areas with the highest and lowest weighted average of the spatial access measures to the workplace, by walk and public transit, respectively.

⁹ Sutter, A., & Esses, V. (2021). *A qualitative look at serious legal problems facing immigrants in London and Toronto, Ontario*. Department of Justice Canada.

https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/jr/lto/docs/rsd_rr2021_immigrants-london-and-toronto-en.pdf

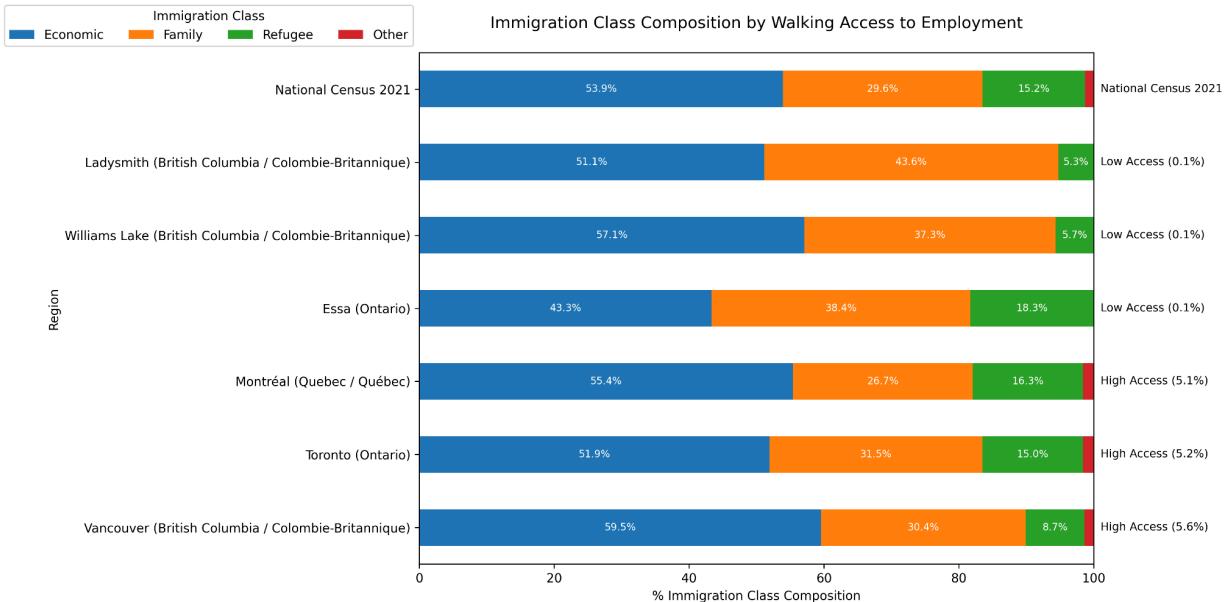


Figure 3: Immigrant class composition – High vs. low walk accessibility to the workplace

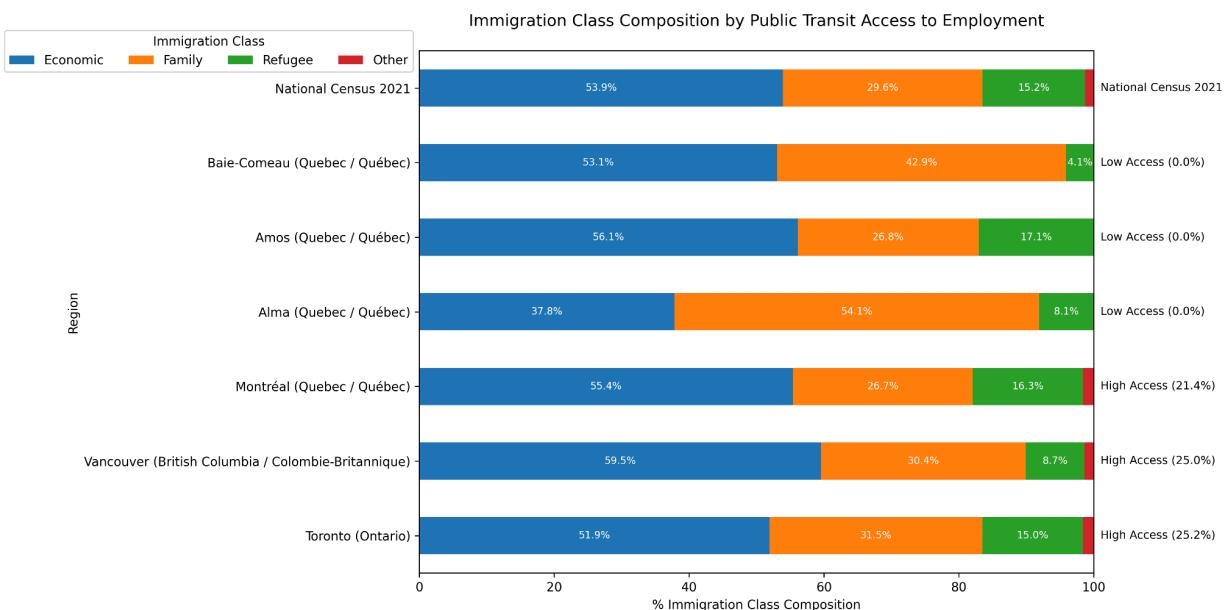


Figure 4: Immigrant class composition – High vs. low transit accessibility to the workplace

Both graphs show that Vancouver, Toronto, and Montréal have the highest walk and public transit accessibility to the workplace, and they have a similar composition to the national data. These cities also have a large immigrant population of 25% or more. Meanwhile, cities with the lowest accessibility to the workplace, particularly Baie-Comeau and Alma, have more family class immigrants and fewer economic class immigrants and refugees compared to others, and they have fewer than 2% of the immigrant population.

Education Accessibility for Second-generation Immigrants

Second-generation immigrants have to balance the values and expectations of their immigrant parents with those of Canadian society. However, they may still encounter discrimination in their life.¹⁰ This section explores their accessibility to primary and secondary education. Figures 5 and 6 show the generational compositions in areas with the highest and lowest weighted average of the spatial access measures to educational facilities, by walk and public transit, respectively.

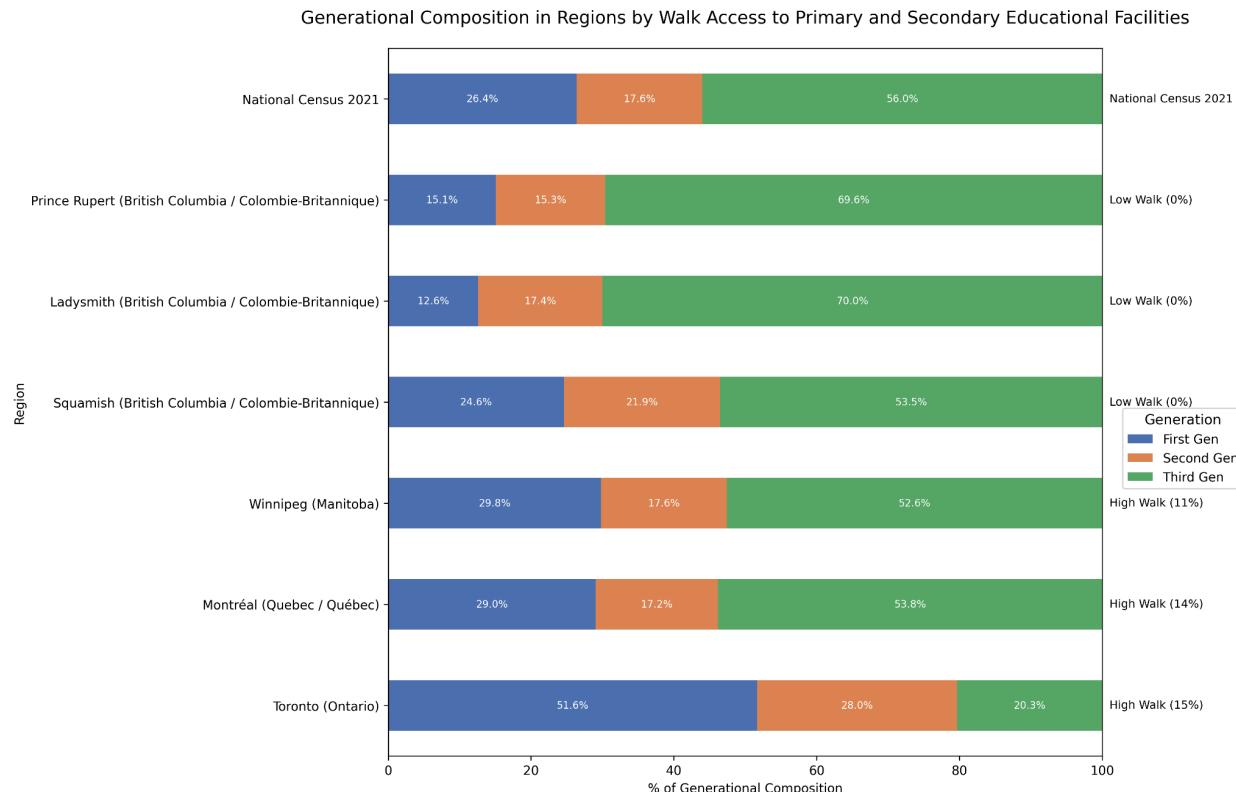


Figure 5: *Generational composition – High vs. low walk accessibility to education*

The figure shows that Toronto, Montréal, and Winnipeg are the three areas with the highest walk accessibility to primary and secondary educational accessibility. Among these areas, Toronto shows the highest proportion of first and second-generation immigrants, likely due to the large immigrant influx coming as a dependent child to their parents working in the city. However, we do not see a big difference between Montréal, Winnipeg and the national average.

Comparatively, areas with the lowest walk accessibility have a higher proportion of third-generation immigrants; the 2021 Census data shows that these regions have at least 5% Indigenous populations.¹¹

¹⁰ Jarrett, N., & Parkin, A. (2024). *The perspectives of second-generation immigrants in Canada*. Environics Institute, Century Initiative, & Diversity Institute. https://fsc-ccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/The-Perspectives-of-Second-Generation-Immigrants-in-Canada-Report_EN.pdf

¹¹ Statistics Canada. (2023). *Census Profile. 2021 Census of Population*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>

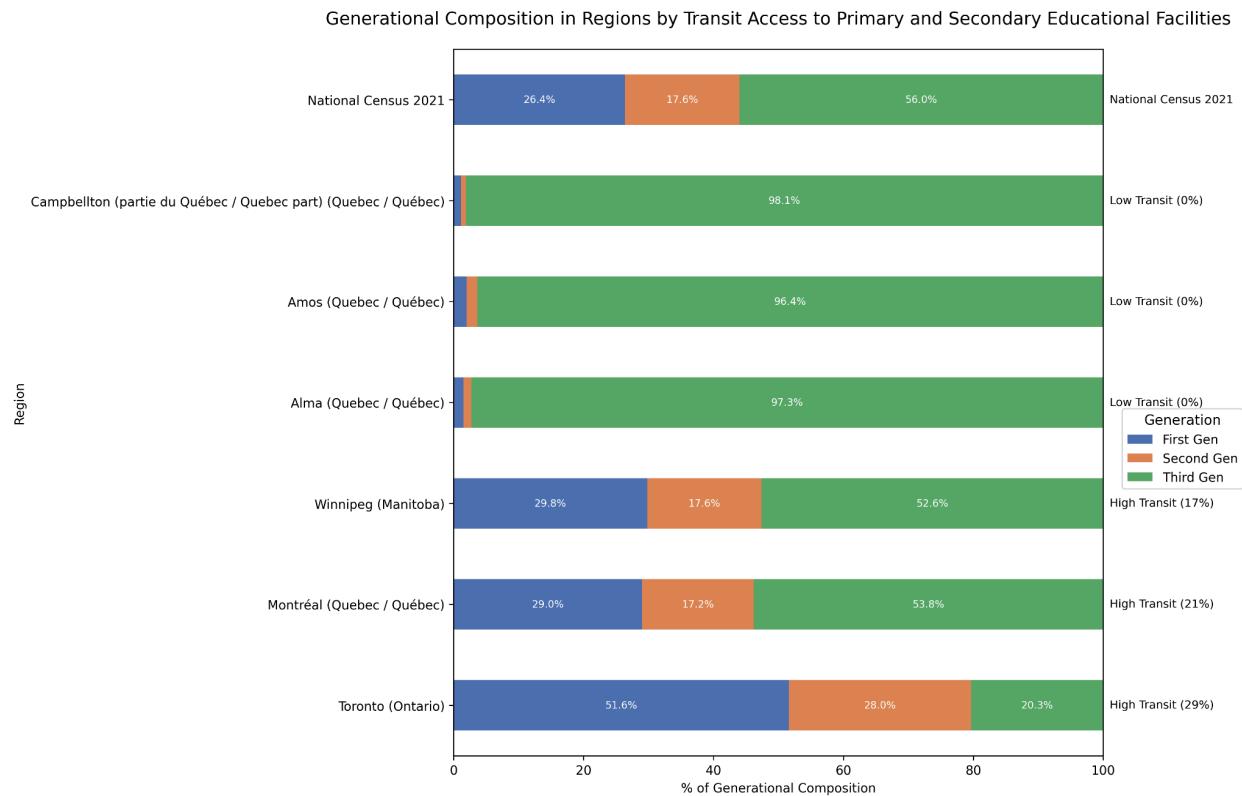


Figure 6: *Generational composition – High vs. low transit accessibility to education*

The figure shows that Toronto, Montréal, and Winnipeg also have the highest public transit accessibility to primary and secondary education. Meanwhile, the areas with the lowest public transit accessibility, namely Camobellon, Amos, and Alma, with 1.5% or less immigrants in their population,¹² have a majority of third-generation immigrants in the cities.

Intersection of Gender Identity

Intersectionality was coined by the Black feminist and legal scholar Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw to understand how multiple aspects of a person's identity overlap to create distinct experiences of discrimination.¹³ We aim to understand the intersectional experience of women refugees in their lives in Canada.

Table 1 shows the weighted average of the spatial access measures to workplace, primary or secondary education, and healthcare facilities by walk and public transit of the areas with the lowest and highest population of women refugees.

¹² Statistics Canada. (2023). *Census Profile. 2021 Census of Population. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001*. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>

¹³ Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>

Table 1: Accessibility of areas with the highest and lowest women refugee populations

Region	% Women Refugees	Public Transit: Primary & Secondary Education	Public Transit: Workplace	Public transit: Health Care Facilities	Walk: Primary & Secondary Education	Walk: Workplace	Walk: Health Care Facilities
Brooks, AB	6.59%	0	0	0	0.01961	0.01611	0.0066
Windsor, ON	3.12%	0.00385	0.00167	0.00193	0.06127	0.01275	0.01549
Kitchener - Cambridge - Waterloo, ON	2.77%	0.07711	0.04693	0.03081	0.07935	0.01757	0.01945
Saguenay, QC	0.02%	0.02089	0.0107	0.00784	0.03792	0.00713	0.00783
Rouyn-Noranda, QC	0.02%	0.00828	0.005	0.00288	0.04786	0.01084	0.00784
Cape Breton, NS	0.03%	0	0	0	0.02674	0.00415	0.00516

Table 1 shows that areas with the highest women refugee population in general are more accessible to primary and secondary educational facilities, which shows that if they are the sole caregivers to the household, they could send their children to school by walking easily, compared to those living in other communities. Further, Kitchener also shows higher public transit accessibility compared to others. However, other locations exhibit low accessibility to the workplace in general, meaning that they may have to drive to work, hence showing a barrier to employment opportunities.

Conclusion

Projections show that by 2041, 52.4% of the Canadian population will be immigrants and their Canadian-born children.¹⁴ As immigrants are the key to the workforce growth in Canada, it is crucial to identify and address barriers and employment gaps for them. Further, examining the experience of studying for their second-generation immigrant children helps inform the pipeline from which the future workforce comes. Our analysis finds that immigrants gravitate toward areas with accessible employment and educational infrastructure. However, systemic barriers remain.

It is worth noting that immigration has always been a measure to address labour supply challenges.¹⁵ However, statistics show that underemployment still exists among the immigrant population, where 25.8% of immigrants with a foreign university education are working in jobs

¹⁴ Statistics Canada. (2022, September 8). *Canada in 2041: A larger, more diverse population with greater differences between regions.*

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220908/dq220908a-eng.htm>

¹⁵ Statistics Canada. (2022, June 22). *Immigration as a source of labour supply.*

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220622/dq220622c-eng.htm>

that do not require a university degree in 2021, compared to 10.6% for Canadian-born counterparts.¹⁶ Immigrants face many obstacles in their new life in Canada, for example, devaluation of foreign credentials and experiences,¹⁷ information barriers to access primary healthcare and mental health care services,¹⁸ and religion-based discrimination in the workplace.¹⁹ Addressing these disparities through an intersectional lens is key to building an equitable and inclusive society.

¹⁶ Statistics Canada. (2022, November 30). *Canada leads the G7 for the most educated workforce, thanks to immigrants, young adults and a strong college sector, but is experiencing significant losses in apprenticeship certificate holders in key trades.*

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221130/dq221130a-eng.htm>

¹⁷ Ontario Human Rights Commission. (n.d.). *Policy on Removing the “Canadian experience” barrier.* Retrieved October 8, 2024, from

<https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-removing-canadian-experience-barrier/3-legitimate-employment-requirements>

¹⁸ Sundareswaran, M., Martignetti, L., & Purkey, E. (2024). Barriers to primary care among immigrants and refugees in Peterborough, Ontario: a qualitative study of provider perspectives. *BMC Primary Care*, 25, 199. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12875-024-02453-x>

¹⁹ Cukier, W., Parkin, A., Saiphoo, A., Borova, B., & Edwards, M. (2024). *Gender, diversity and discrimination in the workplace.* Environics Institute, Diversity Institute, Future Skills Centre. https://www.torontomu.ca/content/dam/diversity/reports/gender--diversity-and-discrimination-in-the-workplace/Gender.%20Diversity%20and%20Discrimination_EN.pdf



INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS ON IMMIGRANT COMPOSITION AND ACCESSIBILITY IN CMAS IN CANADA

Mosaic Migrants,
Toronto Metropolitan University

Ishrat Jaben Bushra
Derek Liu
Muhammad Zaka Shaheryar

INTRODUCTION & OBJECTIVES

Canada's 2021 Census shows that immigrants make up 23% of the population, mostly concentrated in major urban centres.

We analyze how immigrant location and type affect access to educational institutions, workplaces etc., using Statistics Canada data and spatial access measures.

1. Which areas have a higher-than-average density of **recent immigrants** (2016–2021)?
2. How do different **immigrant classes** (economic, family, refugee, and other) vary in areas with high vs. low workplace accessibility?
3. How does **generational composition** differ in areas with high vs. low access to primary/secondary education?
4. In areas with high populations of **women refugees**, do they face greater barriers to workplace accessibility?

EMPLOYMENT ACCESS OF RECENT IMMIGRANTS

AREAS WITH THE MOST NEWCOMERS

- According to the 2021 Census, 3.7% of the national population are immigrants.
- Brooks, AB has the highest newcomer population at 17.3%, followed by Toronto, ON at 11.5%, Vancouver, BC at 10%, and Calgary, AB at 8.1%.

ACCESSIBILITY TO WORKPLACE

- Public transit connects the workplace better to the communities.
- Newcomers are likely to reside in areas with higher general accessibility to their workplace.
- Areas with a high immigrant influx usually have a better public transportation system.

EMPLOYMENT ACCESS BY IMMIGRANT CLASSES

- The experiences of immigrants, newcomers, and refugees in Canada differ depending on their immigration “category” through which they came to Canada
- Vancouver, Toronto, and Montréal have the highest walk and public transit accessibility to the workplace, these cities also have a large immigrant population of 25% or more.
- Meanwhile, cities with the lowest accessibility to the workplace have more family class immigrants and fewer economic class immigrants and refugees compared to others, and they have fewer than 2% of the immigrant population.

EDUCATION ACCESS BY GENERATIONS

Generational Patterns

- **Second-generation immigrants** often balance their parents' values with Canadian norms, yet still face discrimination.
- We examined their access to **primary and secondary education** using spatial access scores by **walking** and **public transit**.

Walk Accessibility

- Top walk-access cities: **Toronto, Montréal, Winnipeg**.
- **Toronto** shows the highest share of **first- and second-generation** immigrants.
- **Low-access areas** (e.g., remote regions) show a higher share of **third-generation** populations and include **at least 5% Indigenous** residents.

Public Transit Accessibility

- Again, **Toronto, Montréal, Winnipeg** lead in transit access to education.
- **Low-access areas** like **Campbellton, Amos, Alma** have **very low immigrant populations (1.5% or less)** and are majority **third-generation** residents.

INTERSECTIONAL ACCESS BY WOMEN REFUGEE POPULATION

Intersectionality is the concept describing how overlapping identities (e.g., gender, immigration status) shape unique experiences of discrimination.

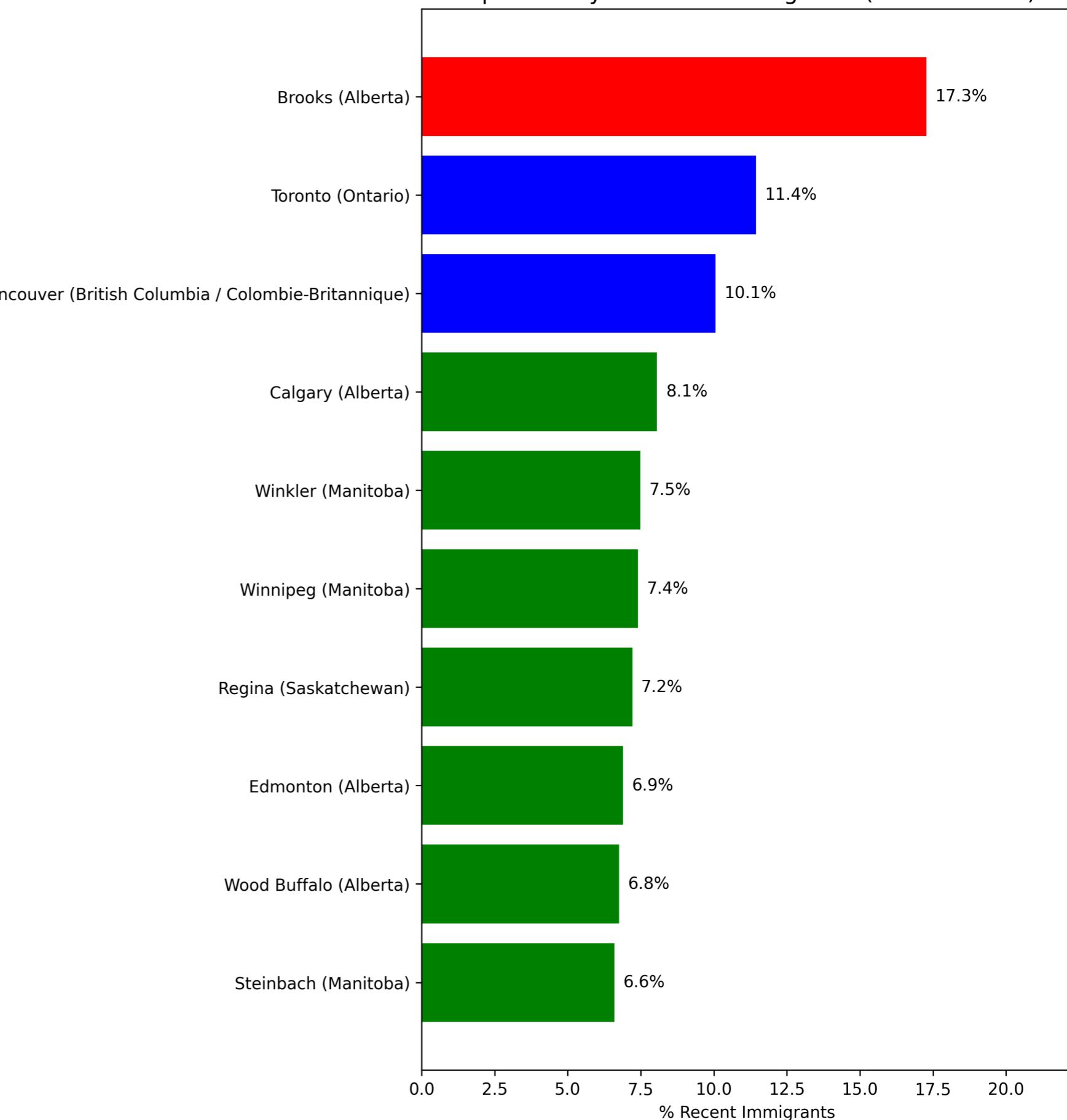
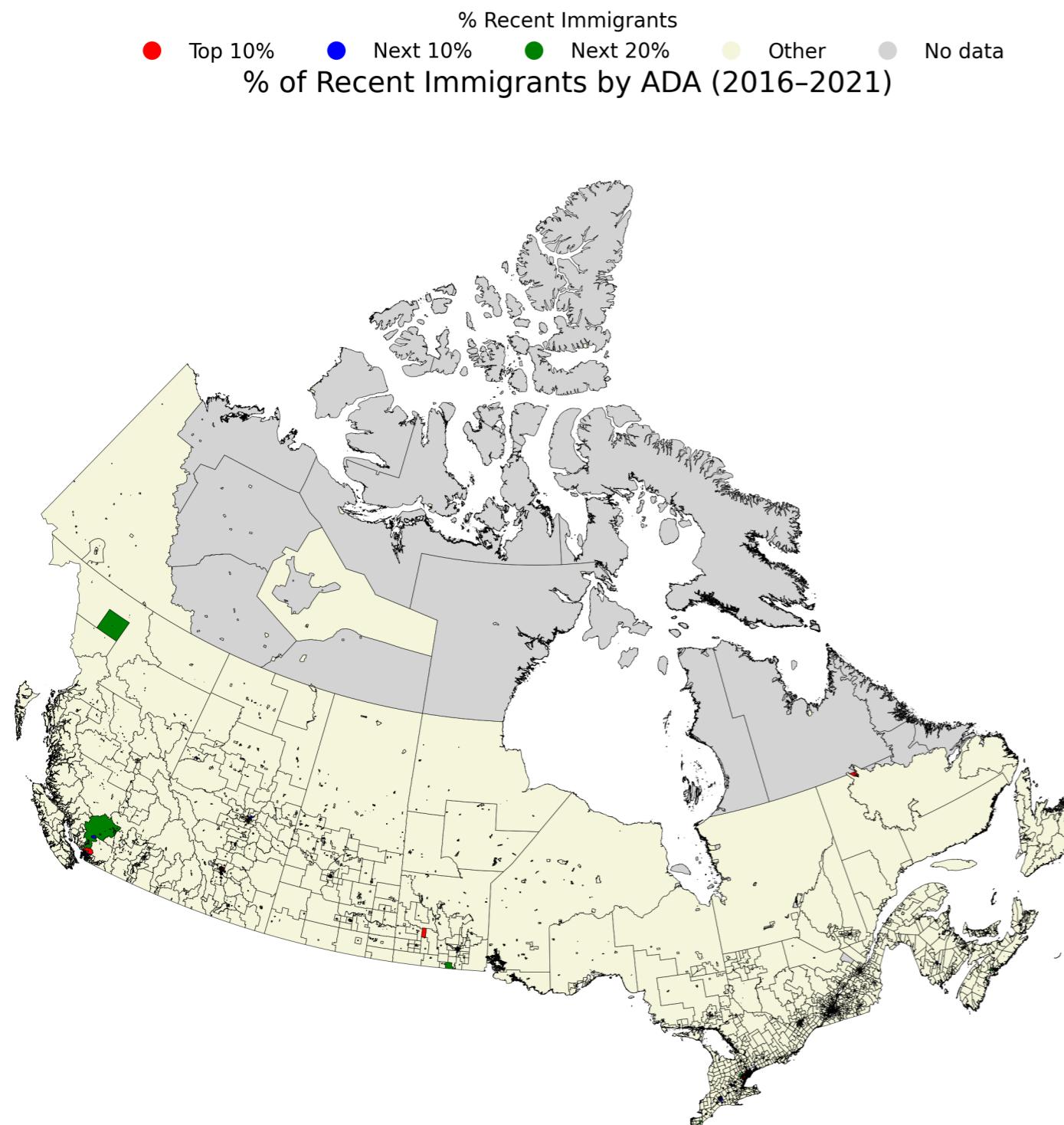
We analyzed how **women refugees** access educational facilities , healthcare, and workplaces in areas with the **highest and lowest percentage of women refugees**.

- **Top regions:** Brooks (AB), Windsor (ON), Kitchener–Cambridge-Waterloo (ON).
- **Education access (by walking)** is **relatively high** in high-refugee regions → supports caregiving needs (e.g., school drop-offs).
- **Kitchener–Cambridge-Waterloo** shows **better transit access** across all services.
- **Workplace access (both walk and transit)** remains **low** in most regions → indicating potential **employment barriers** for women refugees.

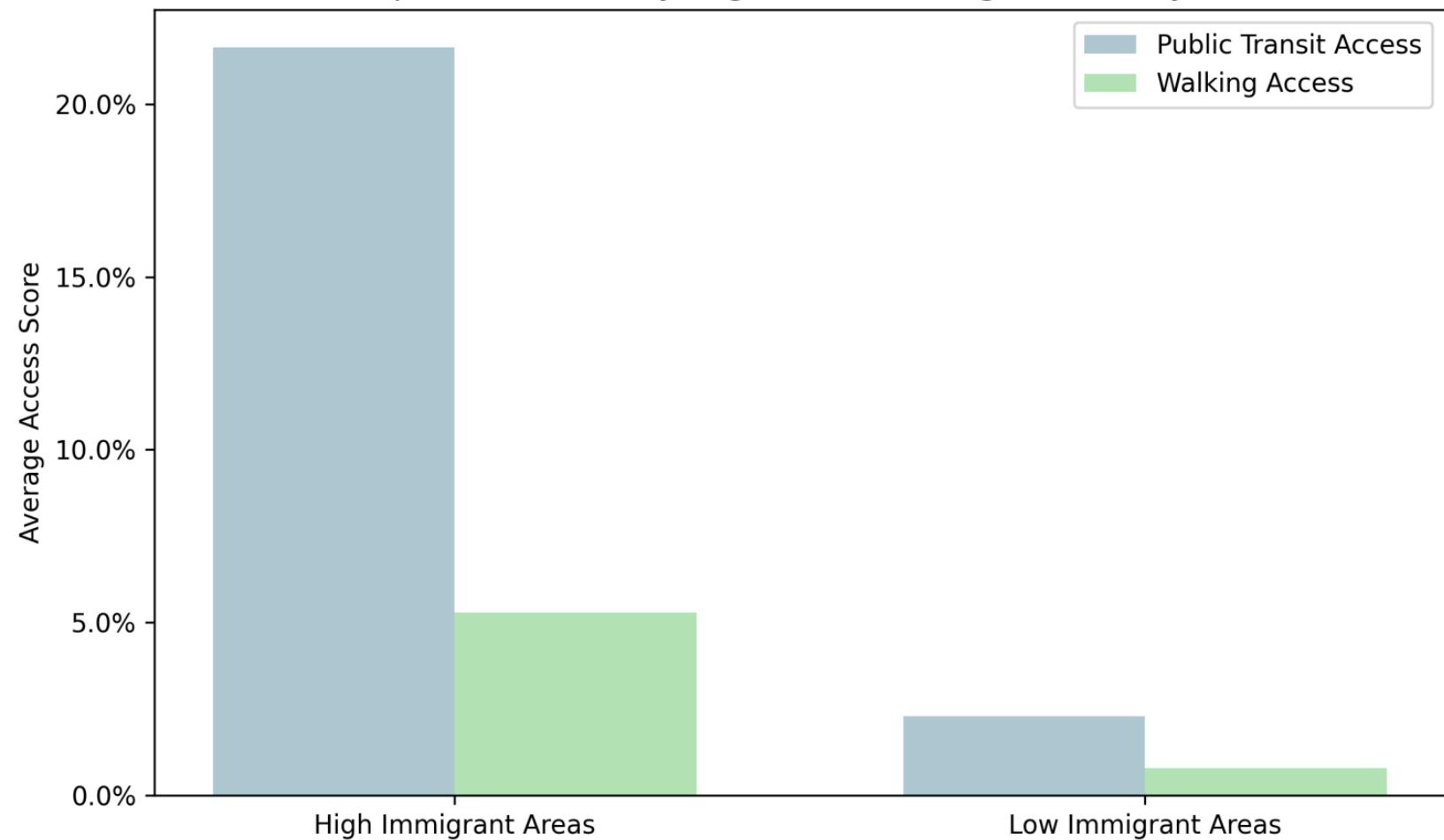
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Top CMAs by % Recent Immigrants (with Province)

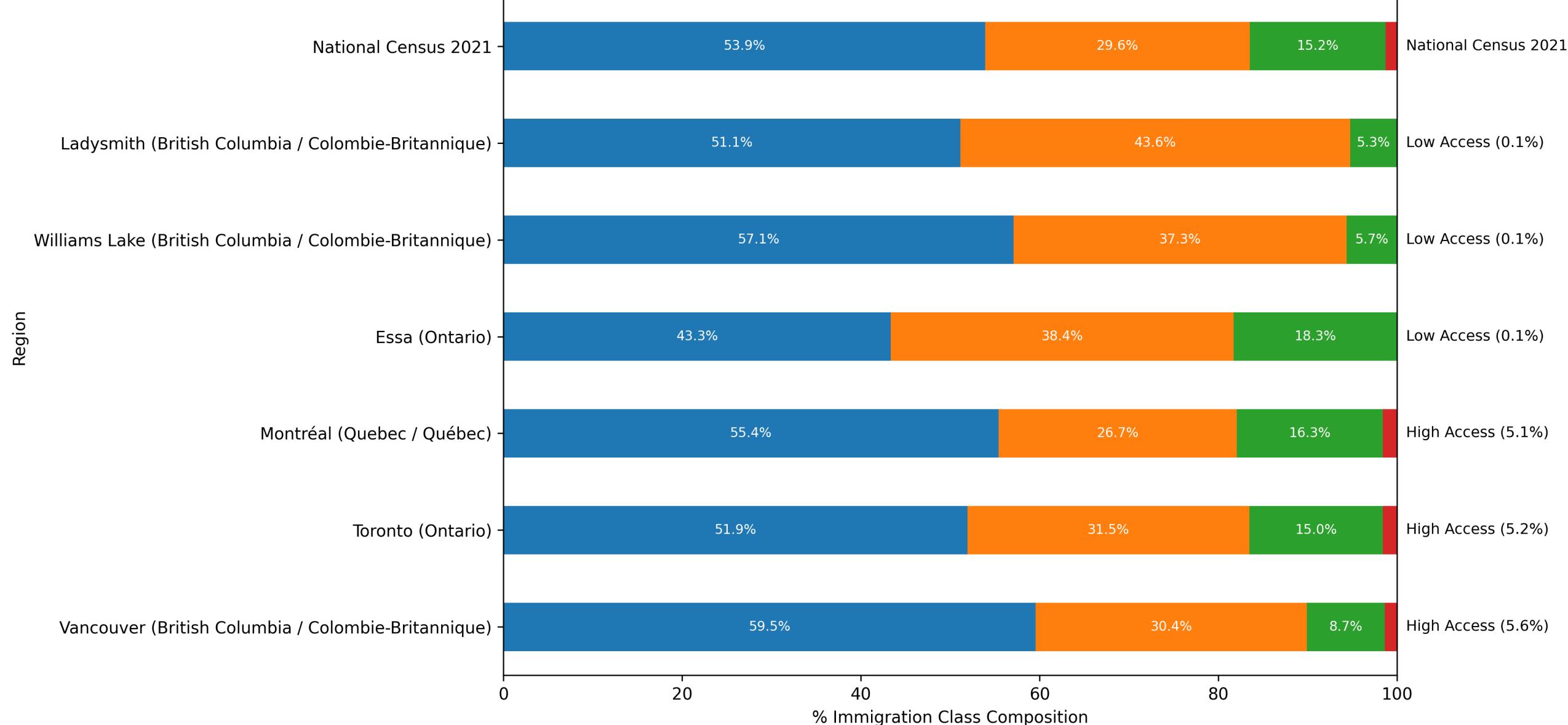


Workplace Accessibility: High vs. Low Immigrant Density Areas

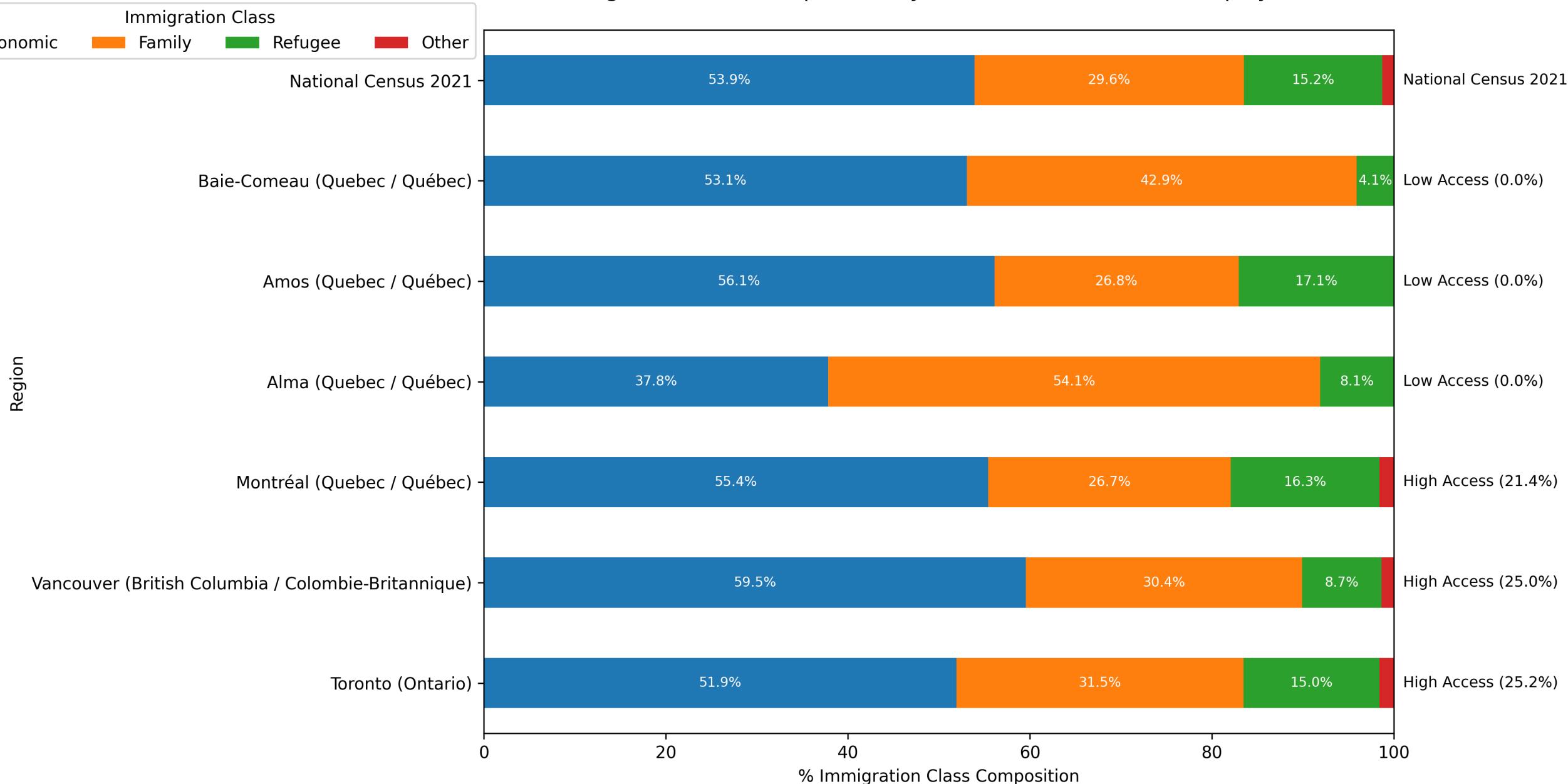




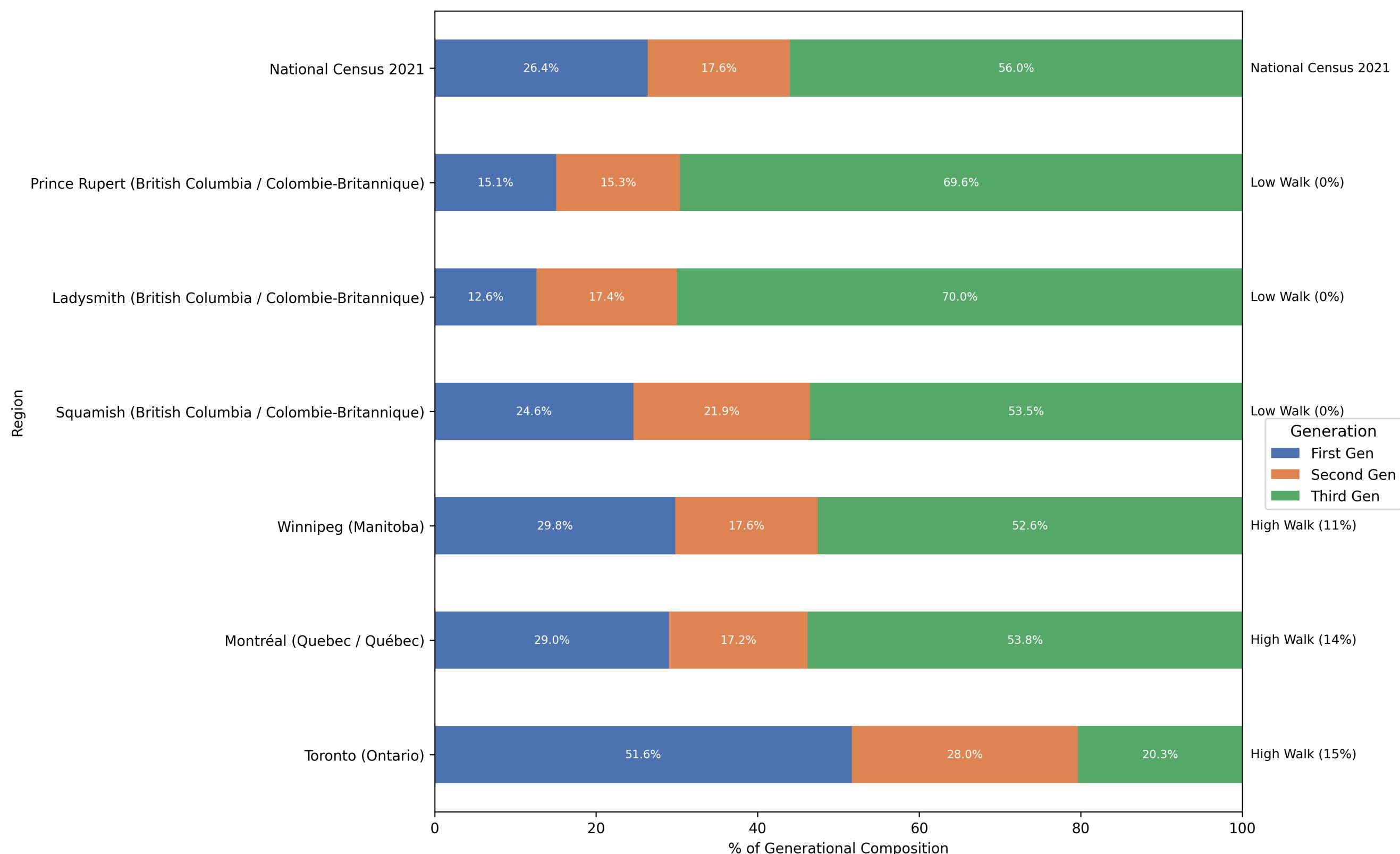
Immigration Class Composition by Walking Access to Employment



Immigration Class Composition by Public Transit Access to Employment



Generational Composition in Regions by Walk Access to Primary and Secondary Educational Facilities



Generational Composition in Regions by Transit Access to Primary and Secondary Educational Facilities

