

TRENDS

IN MARITIME HIGHER EDUCATION

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The Maritime College Student Population: 2017-2018 to 2022-2023

Highlights

Between 2017-2018 and 2022-2023, more than 25,000 students were enrolled in Maritime public colleges every fall. In 2022-2023, 77% of students were enrolled in a post-secondary program leading to a college certificate or diploma.

Trends in fall enrolment in post-secondary programs between 2017-2018 and 2022-2023

- ❖ Overall enrolment in post-secondary programs increased by 9% over five years to reach 20,718 in 2022-2023.
- ❖ The number of Maritimers enrolled in the region's colleges decreased by 8%. International students accounted for most of the enrolment growth, increasing by 267%. In 2022-2023, international students made up 20% of enrolment. In 2022-2023, the Philippines surpassed India as the top country of citizenship.
- ❖ The number of men remained relatively stable (+1%), while the number of women increased by 13%. In 2017-2018, men represented 53% of enrolment, but by 2022-2023 the gender gap has closed.
- ❖ The number of students aged 25 years or older increased by 31%. This change is due to an increase in the enrolment of international students who tend to be older than Canadian students.
- ❖ Enrolment in Business, management and public administration has increased by 16%. This increase was driven by an increase in international students over the same period.
- ❖ Enrolment in Humanities, arts, social sciences and education have increased by 34%. This increase was mostly driven by enrolment in early childhood and other education programs. Enrolment in computer and information science increased by 46%.

Trends in full-year enrolment

- ❖ In 2022-2023, a total of 39,944 individual students were enrolled over a 12-month period in all program types combined.
- ❖ In short programs, students are often enrolled for a single term, and full-year enrolment provides a better measure to explore enrolment trends in these programs. Between 2017-2018 and 2022-2023, full-year enrolment in Apprenticeship (technical training) decreased by 8%, in Basic education and skills programs increased by 19%, and in continuing education it decreased by 31%.

Trends in credentials granted

- ❖ In 2022, Maritime colleges granted 9,326 post-secondary credentials, an increase of 6% over five years
- ❖ The number of credentials granted to international students increased by 213% between 2018 and 2022, while over the same period the number of credentials granted to Canadian students decreased by 5%.
- ❖ The gap left by anticipated retirements over the next five years will be too large to be solely filled by Maritimers graduating from the region's colleges. International students who attend and graduate from Maritime colleges are an important future source of skilled labour in the region.

Introduction

This report is the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission's (MPHEC) first release of statistics on the Maritime college student population drawing upon data from the MPHEC Post-Secondary Student Information System (PSIS). The MPHEC and colleges have collaborated to collect, develop and validate standard measures of enrolment and credentials granted across the region. This report focusses on the demographic and academic profile of students enrolled in the region's public colleges over a six-year period from 2017-2018 to 2022-2023.

Fall Enrolment

Public colleges in the Maritime provinces offer a variety of programs and courses, ranging from post-secondary diploma and certificate programs (Post-secondary), technical or classroom components of apprenticeship training (Apprenticeship), secondary level course or second language training (Basic education and skills) and short courses or programs for personal or professional development (Continuing education). Annual enrolment is usually measured in the fall term as this is the time of year where enrolment in post-secondary is at its highest. Fall enrolment provides a standard measure to monitor demographic and academic trends over time. The PSIS data collected by the MPHEC also provides a full-year picture of enrolment in colleges which will be discussed later in this report.

In 2022-2023, 27,079 students were enrolled in Maritime colleges showing an increase of 5% over the previous year, and a decrease of 1% over five years (Fig. 1). The majority of students (77%) were enrolled in post-secondary programs or courses, 6% were enrolled in apprenticeship training, 9% in basic education and skills programs, and 9% in continuing education.

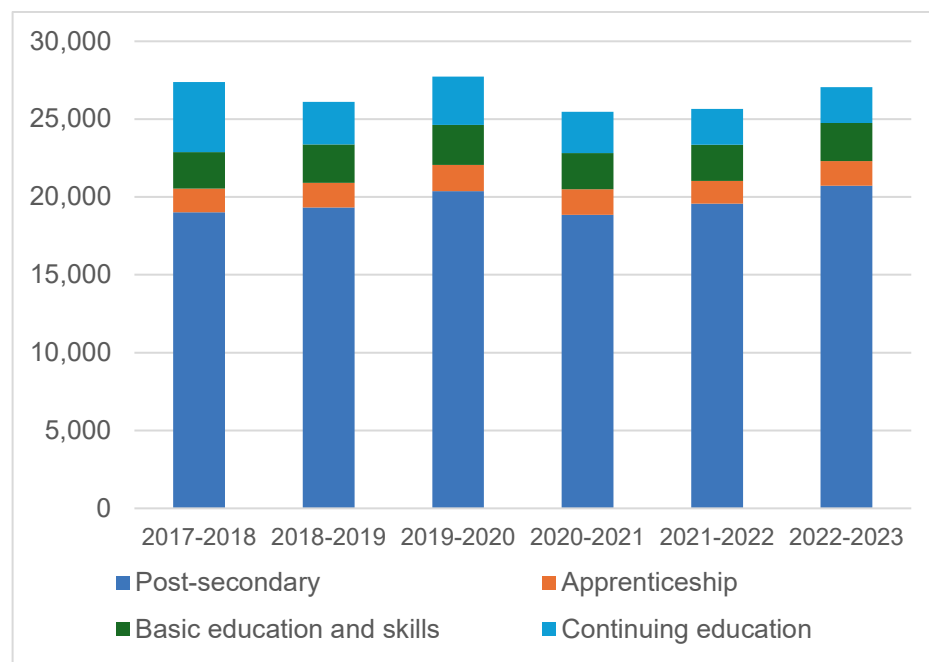


Figure 1. Enrolment by program type, 2017-2018 to 2022-2023

About the MPHEC Post-Secondary Student Information System (PSIS)

PSIS is an annual survey of administrative data designed by Statistics Canada in collaboration with the MPHEC. PSIS data is collected at the end of the academic year and goes through a rigorous verification process to build a data warehouse that can be used to answer many questions about post-secondary students in the Maritime provinces.

From one annual data collection, the MPHEC collects the data it needs to calculate standard enrolment and credentials granted and create longitudinal records of students to follow their pathways through the Maritime post-secondary system.

PSIS was fully implemented for Maritime universities in 1999. In 2017, the MPHEC expanded its annual data collection from post-secondary institutions to include all public colleges in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. MPHEC staff, in consultation with institutional researchers and registrars from the region's colleges developed standard definitions of enrolment for the region.

For more information on the methodology and definitions please consult the document: [Maritime Colleges: Enrolment and Credentials Granted, Definitions, Methodology and Statistical Tablesⁱ](#)

Enrolment in Post-secondary Studies

The first part of this report focusses on fall term enrolment in programs and courses that lead to a post-secondary college certificate or diploma. Overall enrolment in post-secondary programs has increased steadily over five years from 19,015 in 2017-2018, to 20,718 in 2022-2023. There was a dip in enrolment in 2020-2021 which is likely linked to the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions.

The growth in post-secondary enrolment was greatest in programs leading to a diploma.

In 2022-2023, 13,554 students were enrolled in a diploma program (+15% over five years) (Fig. 2), 5,629 students were enrolled in a certificate program (-4% over five years), and 376 students were enrolled in short programs leading to another type of post-secondary credential (+33% over five years). A total of 1,169 students were enrolled in post-secondary courses without being enrolled in a program.

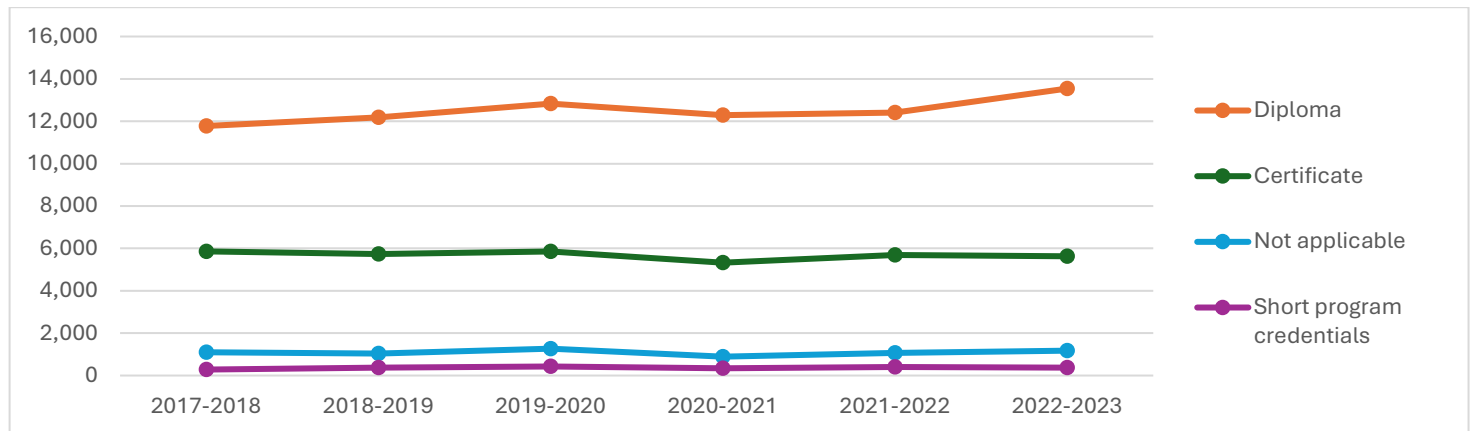


Figure 2. Enrolment in post-secondary studies by credential type, 2017-2018 to 2022-2023

International students accounted for most of the enrolment growth.

In 2022-2023, 16,037 (77%) of students were from the Maritime provinces (Fig. 3). Overall enrolment of Maritimers decreased by 8% over five years, but the trend was not the same across the three provinces of origin. The number of New Brunswickers enrolled in Maritime colleges increased by 1%, the number of Nova Scotians decreased by 14%, and the number of Islanders remained stable over the same period. Only 2% of enrolment were of Canadians from outside the Maritime region in 2022-2023. Their numbers decreased by 2% over five years. In 2022-2023, international students represented one in five students. International students showed the strongest enrolment growth over five years increasing by 267%, from 1,154 to 4,236.

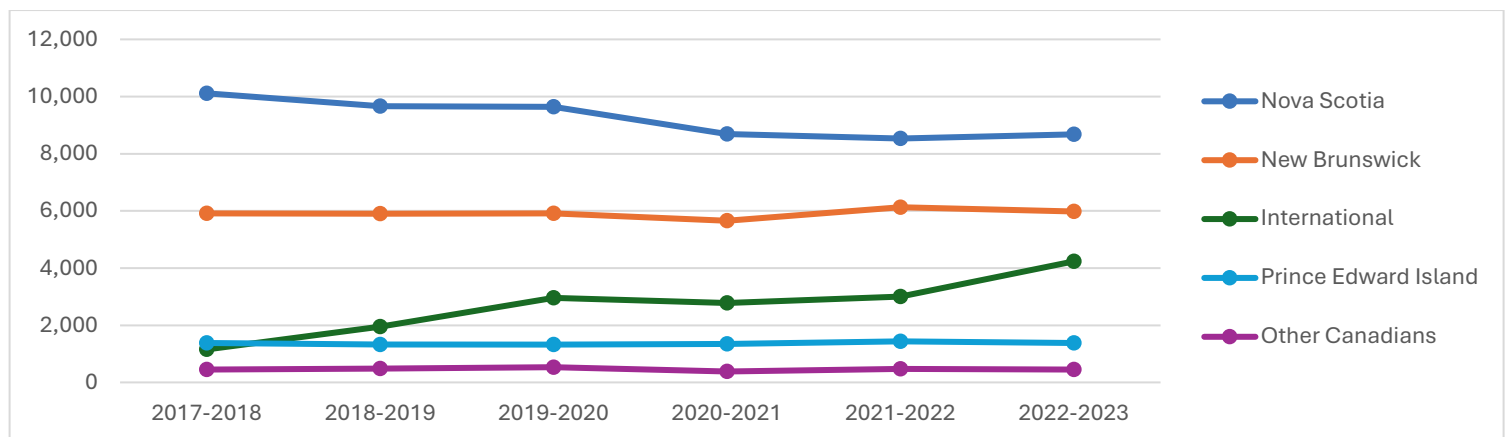


Figure 3. Enrolment in post-secondary studies by region of origin, 2017-2018 to 2022-2023

Between 2017-2018 and 2022-2023, International students came from over 150 countries to study in the Maritimes.

Between 2017-2018 and 2021-2022, India was the top country of citizenship. Enrolment from Indian students peaked at 552 in 2020-2021 and then decreased to 488 in 2022-2023. In 2022-2023, the Philippines surpassed India as the top country of citizenship. Enrolment of students from the Philippines increased from 15 in 2017-2018, to 605 in 2022-2023. Enrolment from Cameroon, Brazil, and Nigeria each grew by more than 350% over the same period.

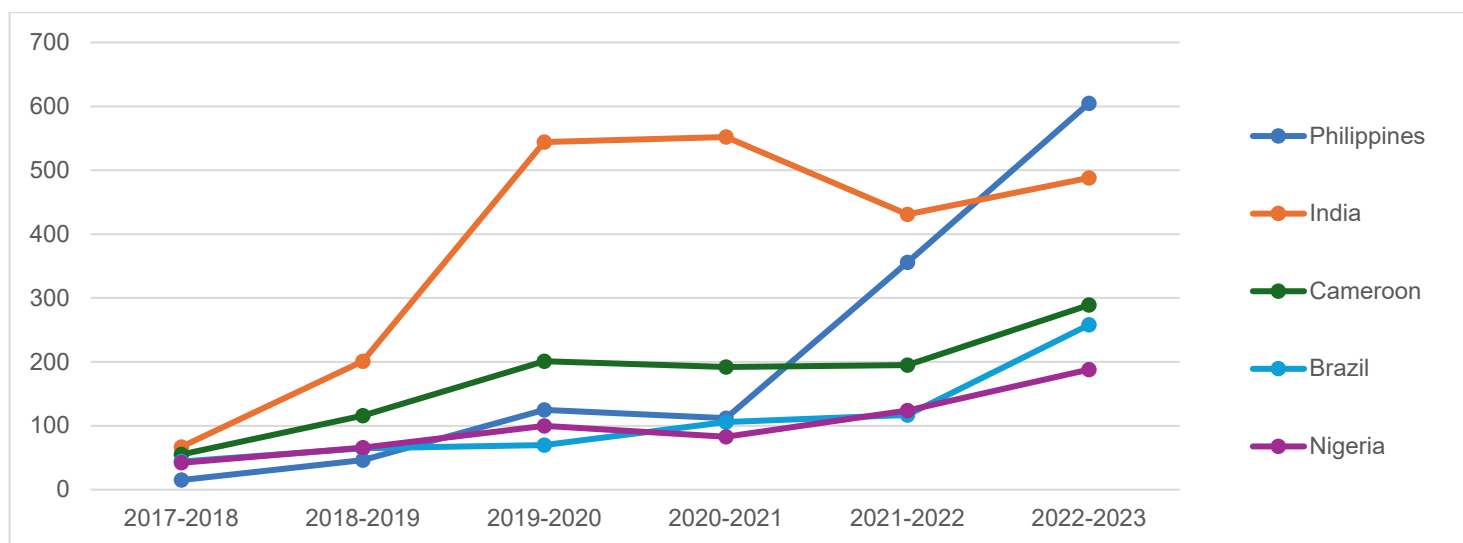


Figure 4. Enrolment in post-secondary studies in Maritime colleges by top 5 countries of citizenship, 2017-2018 to 2022-2023

The gap in enrolment between men and women has closed.

Between, 2017-2018 and 2022-2023, the enrolment of men in post-secondary studies remained relatively stable (+1%), while the enrolment of women increased by 13% (Fig. 5). Over the same period the number of students opting to not declare a gender has increased by 132% and represents 4% of students. A small percentage of students have also indicated a non-binary gender, but the number remains too small to analyze. If we exclude the gender data for 'non-binary person or not reported', in 2017-2018, men represented 53% of enrolment in post-secondary programs, but the gap in enrolment between men and women has closed over the last five years.

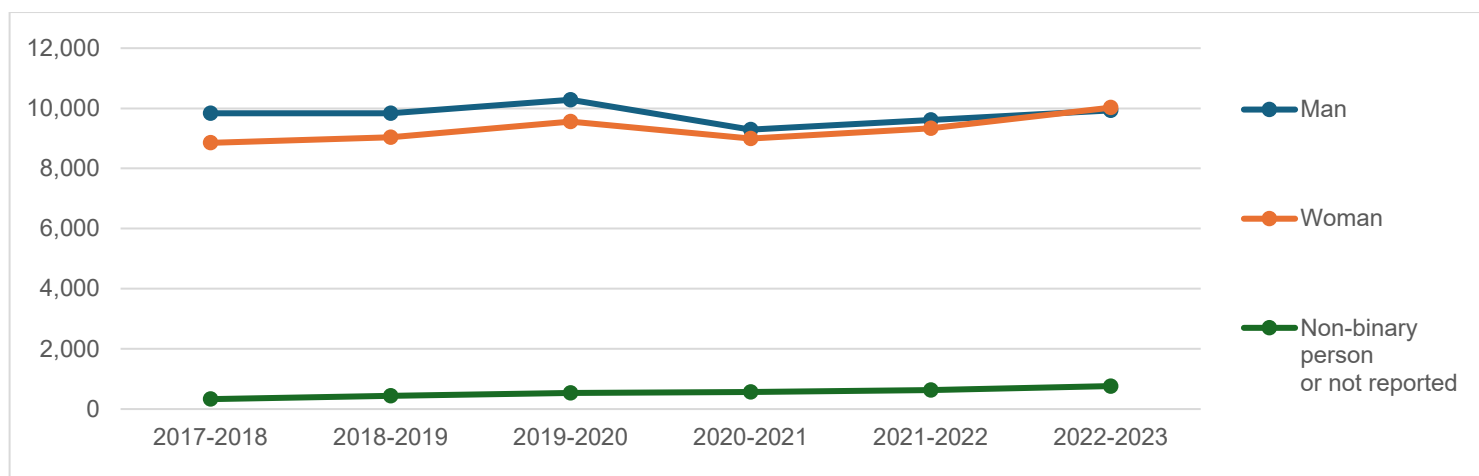


Figure 5. Enrolment in post-secondary studies by gender, 2017-2018 to 2022-2023

Canadian and International students show different gender ratios.

The number of Canadian men decreased by 16% between 2017-2022 and 2022-2023, and the number of Canadian women decreased by 3% over the same period. In 2017-2018, 52% of Canadian students were men compared to 48% in 2022-2023 (Fig. 6a). International students are more likely to be men and the increase in the number of international students has masked the change in gender ratio among Canadian students. The enrolment gap between men and women has also decreased for international students (Fig. 6b). This is due to a faster increase in the enrolment of women (+334%) compared to men (+228%) among international students.

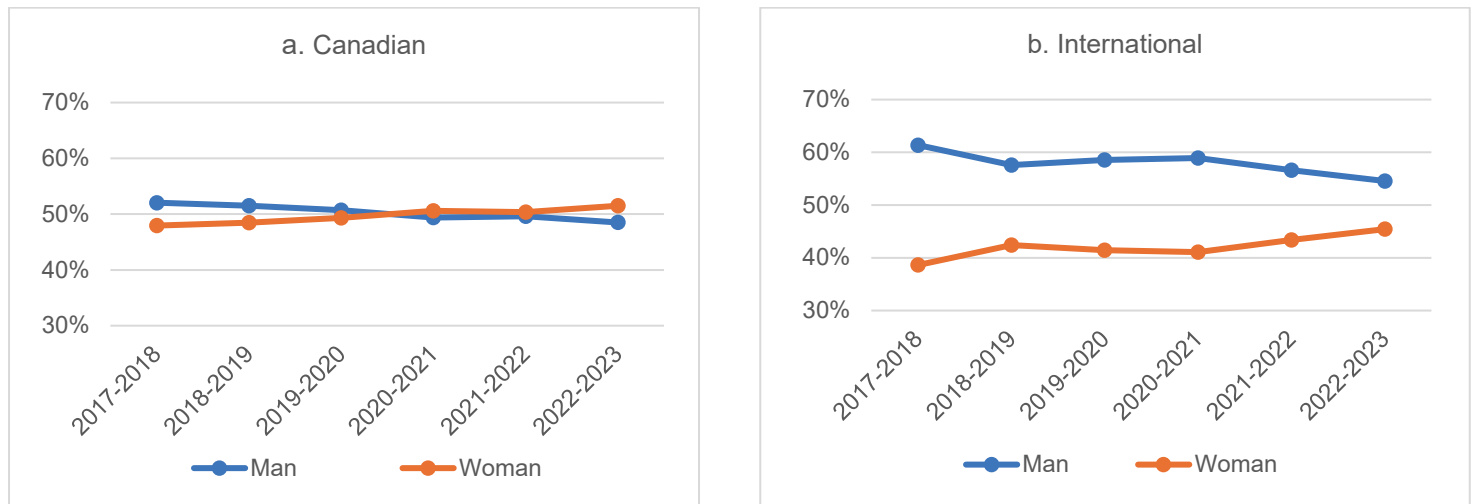


Figure 6. Enrolment in post-secondary studies by gender and by status of student in Canada, 2017-2018 to 2022-2023

The enrolment of older students in post-secondary programs is increasing.

Between 2017-2018 and 2022-2023, the enrolment of students aged 19 years or younger decreased by 4% and the enrolment of 20- to 24-year-olds decreased by 4% (Fig. 7). In contrast, the number of students aged 25 years or older increased by 31%. In 2022-2023, 45% of students were 25 years or older. This change has been due to an increase in the number of international students who tend to be older than Canadian students. In 2022-2023, 28% of Canadian students were 19 years or younger, 31% were 20 to 24 years old, and 41% were 25 years or older. In contrast, only 8% of international students were 19 years old or younger, 33% were between 20 and 24 years old, and 59% were 25 years old or older.

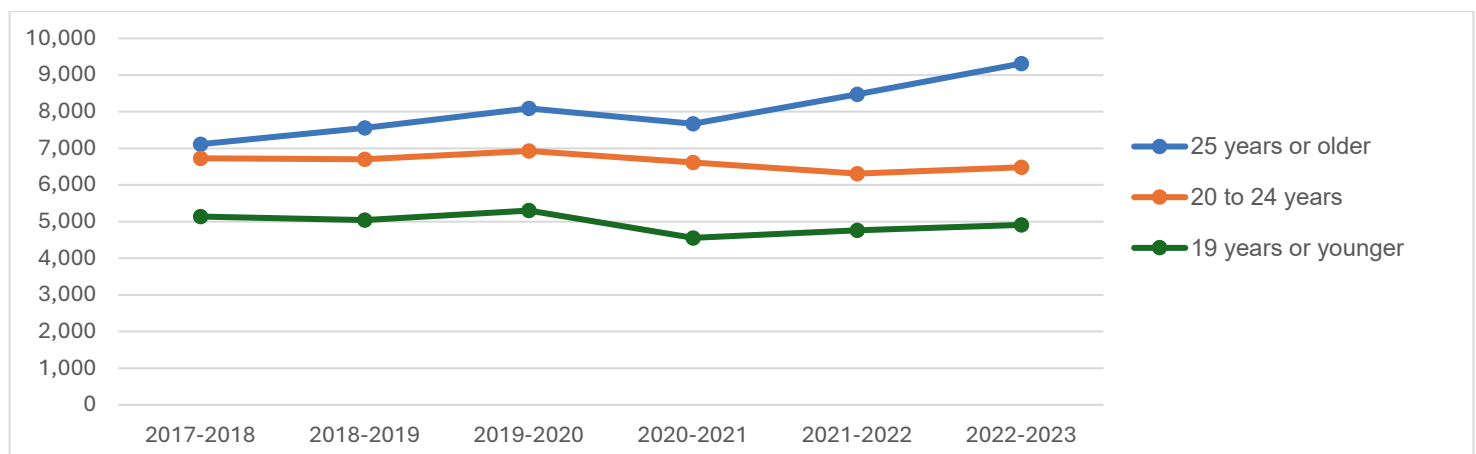


Figure 7. Enrolment in post-secondary studies by age group, 2017-2018 to 2022-2023

Enrolment trends vary by field of study.

Programs were grouped into eight field of study categories for analysis. One of the largest groupings is *Engineering technologies and construction trades* which has shown a drop in enrolment of 6% over five years (Fig. 8). Enrolment was at its lowest in 2020 but has rebounded over the last two years. Enrolment in *Humanities, arts, social sciences and education* has increased by 34% over five years. This increase was mostly driven by enrolment in early childhood and other education programs. Enrolment in *Computer and information sciences* increased by 46% over the same period. Enrolment in *Business, management and management* increased by 16% over five years.

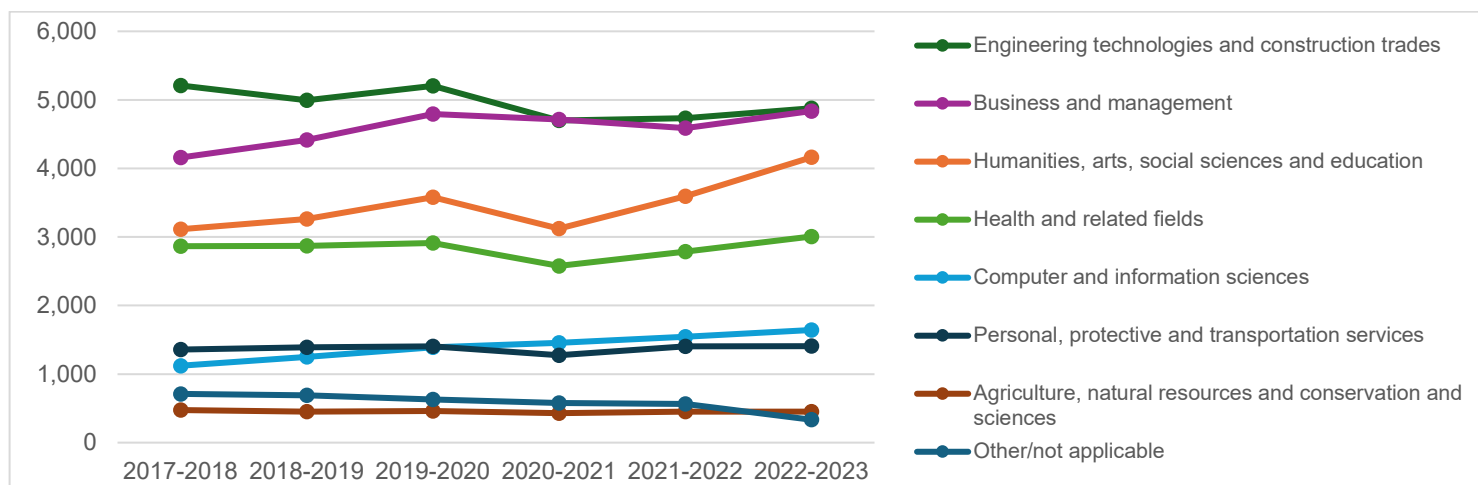


Figure 8. Enrolment in post-secondary studies by field of study, 2017-2018 to 2022-2023

International enrolment contributed to growth in certain fields of study.

In 2022-2023, International students represented 35% of enrolment in *Business and management*, 30% of enrolment in *Computer and information sciences*, and 21% of enrolment in *Engineering technologies and construction trades* (Fig. 9). The number of international students enrolled in *Business and management* programs increased by 313% between 2017-2018 and 2022-2023 contributing to most of the growth in this field. In contrast the enrolment of Canadian students in *Business and management* programs decreased by 16% over the same period. The enrolment of Canadian students in *Engineering technologies and construction trades* decreased by 22% over five years, but the recent increase in international students in these fields (+305% over five years) contributed to the rebound observed in the last two years. Both Canadian and International students contributed to the enrolment growth in Computer and Information Sciences programs (+17% and +273%, respectively over five years).

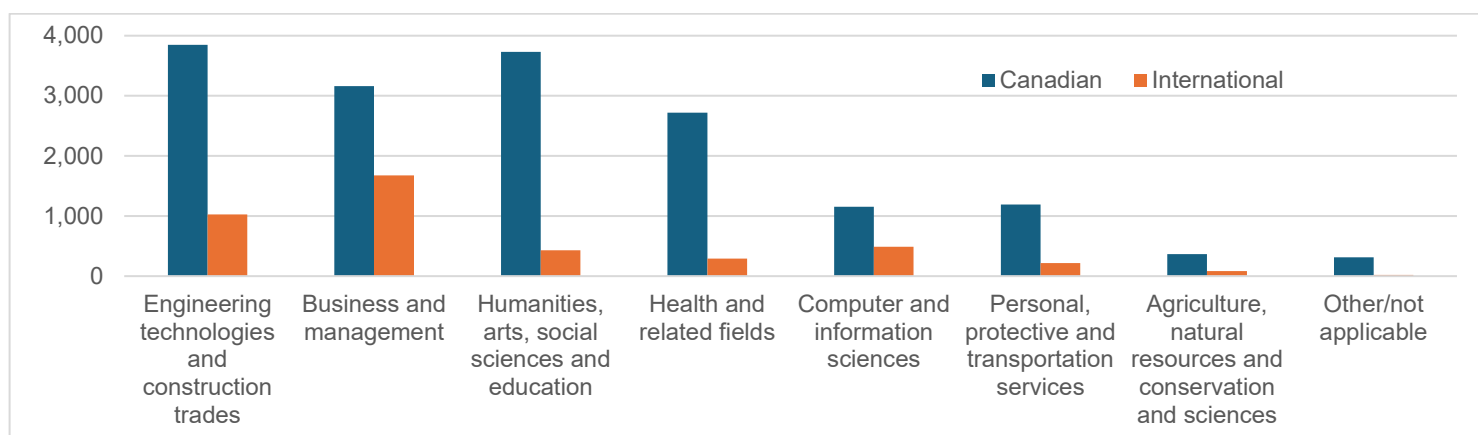


Figure 9. Enrolment in post-secondary students by field of study and status of student in Canada, 2022-2023

Men and women chose different fields of study.

Women outnumber men in *Business and management* programs, *Humanities, arts, social sciences, and education* programs, and *Health* programs (Fig. 10). Men are more likely to enrol in *Engineering technologies and construction trades* and *Computer and information sciences*. Like the status of students in Canada (Canadian vs. International), gender is also linked to the differences in enrolment by field of study. More specifically, there is an interplay between student origin and gender. The decrease in the number of Canadian men enrolled in Maritime colleges (see Fig. 6a) has led to the decrease in enrolment in *Engineering technologies and construction trades* over five years. The increase in international men has halted the decrease in this field of study over the last two years.

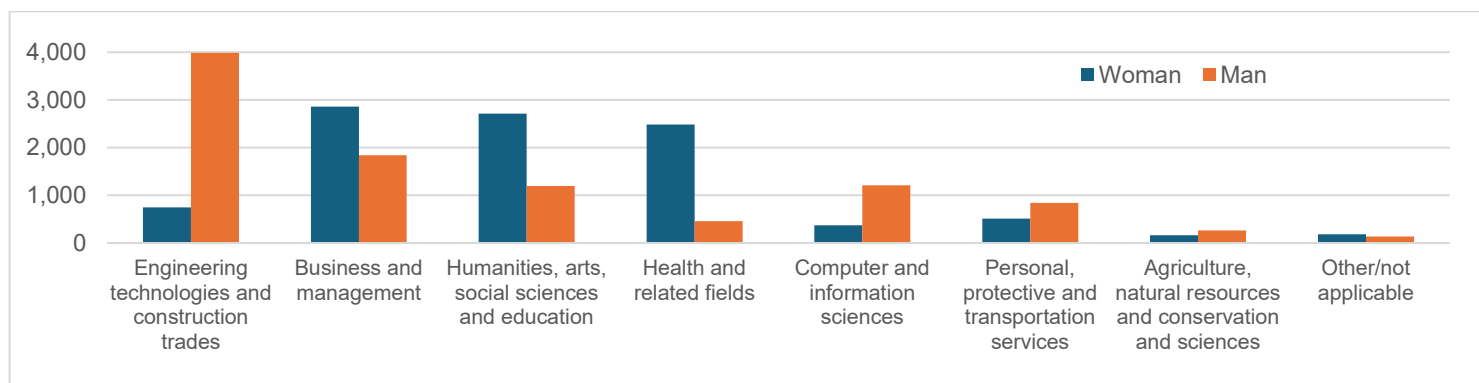


Figure 10. Enrolment in post-secondary studies by field of study and gender, 2022-2023

Full-year enrolment

In short programs, students are often enrolled for a single term, and full-year enrolment provides a better measure to explore enrolment trends in these programs. Enrolment can be calculated for each term: fall, winter, spring and summer. In 2022-2023, a total of 39,944 individual students were enrolled over a 12-month period (Fig. 11). Enrolment in post-secondary programs was slightly lower in the winter term than in the fall term (-1%). The full-year enrolment in post-secondary programs over the full year was 20% higher than in the fall term. In shorter programs, the difference between fall and full-year enrolment is much larger than for post-secondary programs. Enrolment in apprenticeship training was 41% higher in the winter term than in the fall term, and the full-year enrolment was 161% higher than the fall term. Enrolment in basic education and skills program was lower in the winter term than in the fall term, but full-year enrolment was 56% higher than in the fall term. Over 90% of students in continuing education were enrolled for only one term over the course of a year. Enrolment was highest in the combined spring and summer terms, and full-year enrolment was 222% higher than fall term enrolment.

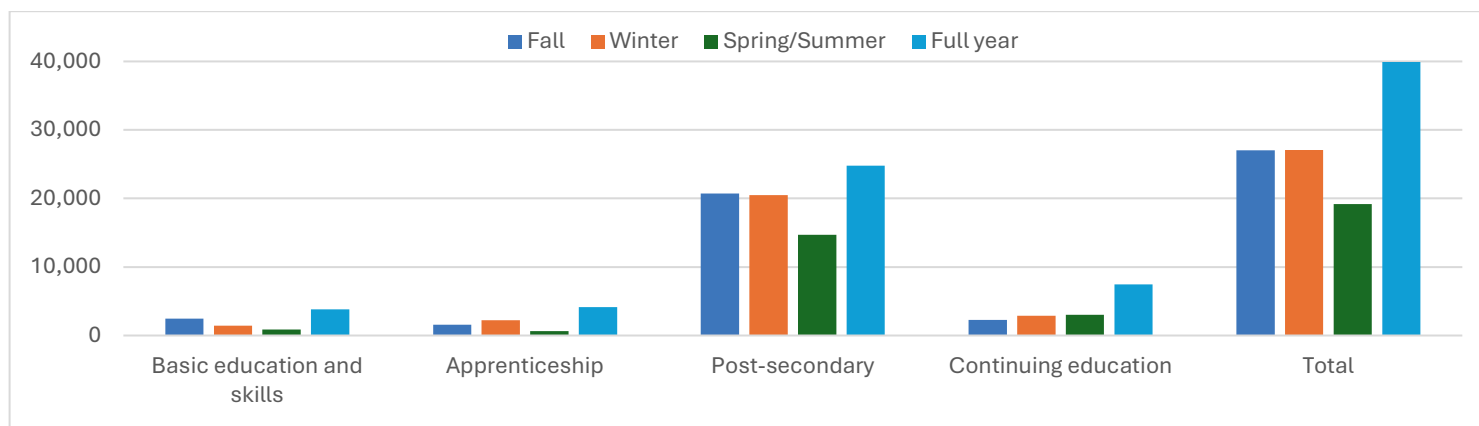


Figure 11. Term by term and full-year enrolment by program type, 2022-2023

Trends in full-year enrolment differ among program types.

Between 2017-2018 and 2022-2023, full-year enrolment in apprenticeships decreased by 8% from 4,503 to 4,140. Full-year enrolment in Basic education and skills programs increased by 19% from 3,213 to 3,815. Full-year enrolment in continuing education decreased by 31% over the same period from 10,771 to 7,474.

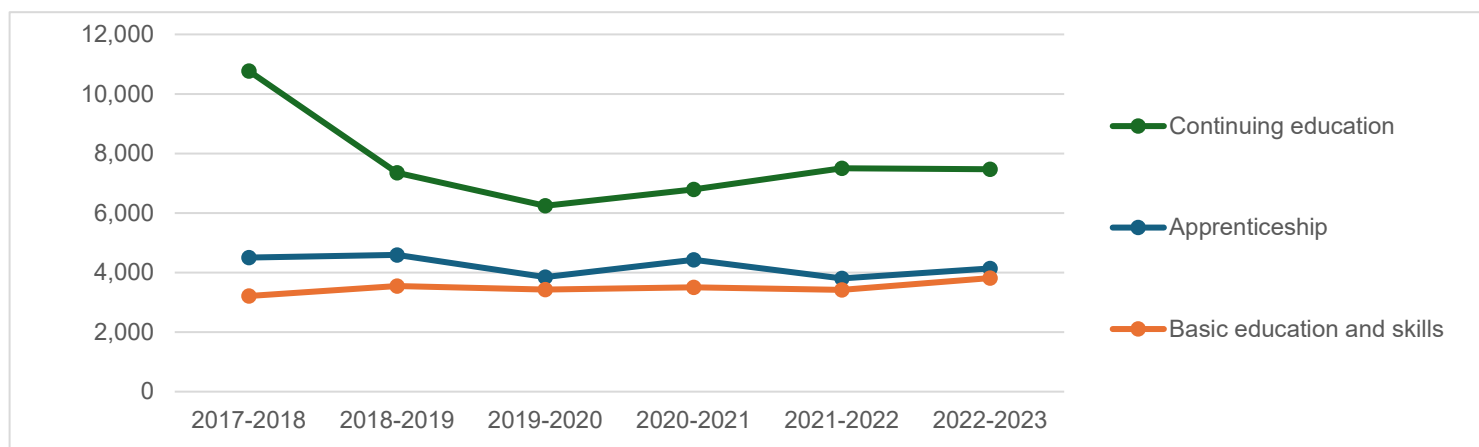


Figure 12. Full-year enrolment in apprenticeship, basic education and skills, and continuing education, 2017-2018 to 2022-2023

Credentials Granted

The number of credentials granted is measured over a calendar year and includes formal qualifications granted for the successful completion of a program. It excludes credentials awarded for programs where the learning or performance is not measured or evaluated, such as a certificate of attendance.

The total number of post-secondary credentials granted increased over five years.

In 2022, Maritime colleges granted 9,326 post-secondary credentials, an increase of 6% over five years (Fig. 13). The number of diplomas granted in 2022, however, decreased by 2% over five years and 17% over one year. This is linked to a decrease in enrolment in diploma programs two years earlier, in fall 2020 (see Fig. 2). The increase in enrolment in the subsequent years will likely be reflected in the number of diplomas granted in 2023 and 2024.

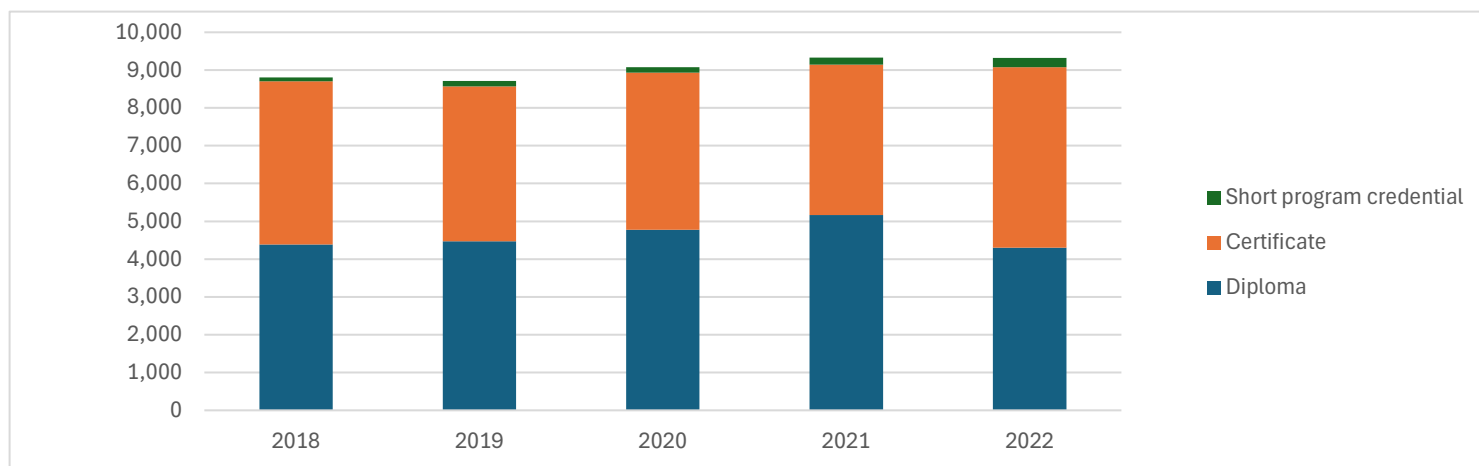


Figure 13. Post-secondary credentials granted by type of credential, 2018 to 2022

International graduates have helped maintain the number of college credentials granted.

The number of credentials granted to international students increased by 213% between 2018 and 2022, while over the same period, the number of credentials granted to Canadian students decreased by 5% (Fig. 14). The number of credentials granted to Nova Scotians decreased by 6%, the number of credentials granted to New Brunswickers decreased by 3%, and the number of credentials granted to Canadian students decreased by 19%. In contrast, the number of credentials granted to Islanders increased by 9% over the same period.

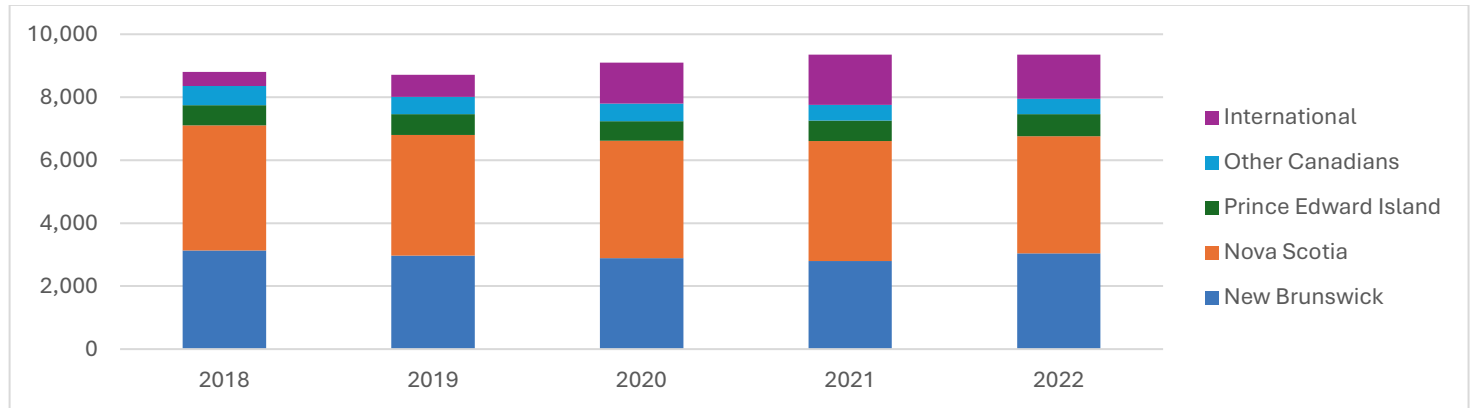


Figure 14. Post-secondary credentials granted by region of origin, 2018 to 2022

Demographic and labour market projections

Maritimers of retirement ageⁱⁱ outnumber young Maritimers of high-school graduation ageⁱⁱⁱ by about 9,000 per year (Fig. 15)^{iv} and gap will continue to be significant over the next five years. It is expected that over the next decade, 39% of jobs will require a college certificate and diploma^v. Although we expect an increase in the number of Maritimers graduating from high school (+13% in the number of 18-year-olds between 2026 and 2033) and entering post-secondary, the gap left by anticipated retirements during the same period will be too large to be filled by young Maritimers graduating from the region's post-secondary institutions. International students who attend and graduate from Maritime colleges will be an important future source of skilled labour in the region.

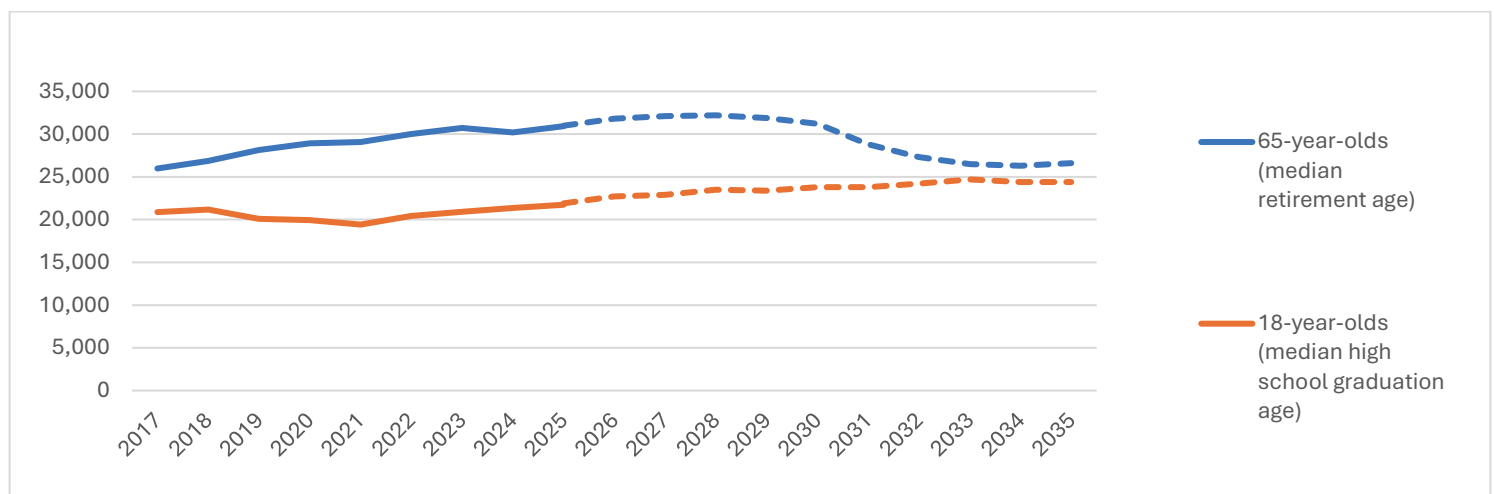


Figure 15. Actual and projected population of Maritimers of retirement age (65-year-olds) and of high school graduation age (18 years old) from 2017 to 2035

Summary and Implications

Patterns of enrolment of Maritimers did not follow demographic changes in the period covered by this report. The Maritime provinces have experienced significant population growth between 2017 and 2022. Among the 18 to 24 age group, the population grew by 6%^{vi}, but enrolment of Maritimers in Maritime colleges decreased by 8%. Statistics Canada population estimates indicate that the population of 18- to 24-year-olds in the Maritimes grew by another 4% since 2022.

International students were the main source of enrolment growth in college post-secondary programs between 2017-2018 and 2022-2023, increasing by 267% over five years, and accounting for one out of every five students in 2022-2023. In 2023 and 2024, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada implemented a number of changes to the International Student Program and eligibility requirements for post-graduation work permits (PGWP), including a cap on the number of study permits to be issued, and restrictions on PGWP linked to credential type and area of study. Although the period observed in this report was not yet impacted by these changes, it is anticipated that certain fields of study will be disproportionately affected. The majority of international students enrol in Business and management programs yet only 5% of these enrolments in 2022-2023 would have been in programs that are now eligible for PGWP. Overall, in 2022-2023, 68% of international students were enrolled in programs that would no longer qualify for PGWP if they were to graduate today.

The number of Canadian men enrolled in college post-secondary programs in the Maritimes decreased by 16% between 2017-2018 and 2022-2023, while the number of Canadian women enrolled decreased by 3%. Similar trends have been observed in the region's universities over the same period (Canadian men -8% and Canadian women +2%). Previous work by the MPHEC has shown that young men are less likely to attend post-secondary education when unemployment rates are low.^{vii} The same trend was not observed in women. Over the past few years, the Maritimes has experienced the lowest unemployment rates in the last 5 decades. Between 2017 and 2022, unemployment rates among 15- to 24-year-olds decreased by 1.2 percentage points (pp) in New Brunswick, 5 pp in Nova Scotia and 1.2 pp in Prince Edward Island.^{viii} Since 2022, unemployment rates have changed by less than 1 pp in each province (- 0.2 pp in New Brunswick, +0.7 pp in Nova Scotia and -0.6 pp in Prince Edward Island).

ⁱ MPHEC. *Maritime Colleges: Enrolment and Credentials Granted. Definitions, Methodology and Statistical Tables. November 2025*

ⁱⁱ The median retirement age in Canada in 2024 was 65.3 years. Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0060-01 Retirement age by class of worker, annual. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25318/1410006001-eng>

ⁱⁱⁱ The median age of high school graduates in 2022-2023 was 18 years in PEI and 17 years in NB and NS. Statistics Canada. Table 37-10-0008-01 Number of graduates from regular programs for youth, public secondary schools, by age and sex

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25318/3710000801-eng>. It is assumed that the median age of high school graduates on the date the population is estimated (July 1) is 18 years old.

^{iv} Statistics Canada. Table 17-10-0005-01. *Population estimates on July 1, by age and gender, annual.*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25318/1710000501-eng>

Statistics Canada. Table 17-10-0057-01 Projected population, by projection scenario, age and gender, as of July 1 (x 1,000) Projection scenario M1: medium-growth; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25318/1710005701-eng>

^v *Employment and Social Development Canada - 2024 COPS Projections.* <https://occupations.esdc.gc.ca/sppc-cops/l.3bd.2t.1.3lshhtml@-eng.jsp?fid=54&lid=69#Fig3> Data modified: 2025-01-30

^{vi} Idem. Statistics Canada. Table 17-10-0005-01.

^{vii} MPHEC. *Surveying the Enrolment Landscape: Factors and Trends in Maritime University Enrolment: 2000-2001 to 2005-2006.* Trends in Maritime Higher Education, Volume 5, Number 1. June 2007.

^{viii} Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0327-01. *Labour force characteristics by gender and detailed age group, annual.*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25318/1410032701-eng>

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