



**NB-IRDT**

New Brunswick Institute for  
Research, Data and Training

# **Graduate Retention in New Brunswick**

## Supplementary Report on Graduates in Social Work



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## **Project Title**

Graduate retention in New Brunswick: Supplementary report on graduates in social work

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## **Abbreviations and Definitions**

MPHEC	Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission
NBCC	New Brunswick Community College
NB-IRDT	New Brunswick Institute for Research, Data and Training
STU	St. Thomas University
UdeM	Université de Moncton

## Executive Summary

In January 2023, the New Brunswick Institute for Research, Data and Training released a report called *Graduate retention in New Brunswick: 2019 and 2020 cohort update* (Balzer et al.),<sup>1</sup> which gave an overview of post-secondary graduates' retention patterns, disaggregated by their field of study. While this provided many valuable insights into graduates' education and mobility decisions, the fields of study examined were purposely broad. This allowed for comparison between graduates of programs in arts, science, business, and healthcare, for instance, but it did not allow for a narrower focus on the outcomes of graduates of specific fields of interest.

In New Brunswick, social work is one such field of interest. The retention of social work graduates<sup>2</sup> is an important topic in the public sphere, as social work has been identified as the second highest profession in need of a recruitment and retention strategy in New Brunswick, and pre-pandemic projections suggest the province could have a shortage of 272 social workers by 2030 (New Brunswick Association of Social Workers [NBASW], 2022). Given the increased demand for social workers since the start of COVID-19, this shortage could be even greater (NBASW, 2022).

This study focuses on the retention of social work graduates in New Brunswick and acts as a supplement to the earlier work by Balzer et al. (2023), using the same data and methodology but further breaking down the field of study category to examine social work specifically. The findings in this report provide an overview of social work graduates' demographic backgrounds and mobility decisions and can help guide public policy discussions around education and training strategies to retain social workers in NB.

### Highlight of Findings

**Overall Retention:** Social work graduates' retention rates are found to be higher than those of the overall graduate population examined in Balzer et al. (2023).

- One year after graduation, 72.2% of university graduates and 91.5% of college graduates in social work are retained in the province, compared to 65.8% of university graduates and 89.2% of college graduates overall (Balzer et al., 2023).
- Ten years after graduation, more than half of social work university graduates (56.8%) remain in the province, which is also higher than the 10-year retention rate for overall university graduates (39.6%) found in Balzer et al. (2023).

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<sup>1</sup> *Graduate retention in New Brunswick: 2019 and 2020 cohort update* (Balzer et al., 2023) is available to read online at <https://www.unb.ca/nbirdt/research/publications/graduate-retention-in-new-brunswick-2019-and-2020-cohort-update.html>.

<sup>2</sup> In this report, we refer to graduates of university social work programs and college social service community worker programs as "social work graduates."

**Sex:** The majority social work graduates in New Brunswick are female, and they have higher retention rates than their male counterparts.

- Over 90% of university graduates and 87.2% of college graduates in social work are females.
- One year after graduation, 72.7% of female university graduates and 95.1% of female college graduates in social work are retained in the province.

**Post-Secondary Institution:** Social work graduates of Université de Moncton (UdeM) have higher retention rates than social work graduates of St. Thomas University (STU). Although NBCC graduates also have relatively high retention rates, these rates should not be directly compared to those of university graduates.

- One year after graduation, 91.2% of social work graduates from UdeM are retained in NB. This is the highest retention rate of the two NB universities that offer a social work degree. Social work graduates from the other university, STU, have a one-year retention rate of 54.7%.
- One year after graduation, 91.5% of social work graduates from NBCC are retained in NB.

**Post-Graduation Residence in NB:** There are notable differences in the post-graduation locations of residence for university and college social work graduates, which may reflect the different job profiles and different levels of demand for each level of education. Because university and college graduates obtain different program credentials and are qualified for different types of work, their outcomes are not directly comparable.

- Saint John CMA<sup>3</sup> has the lowest proportion of retained university social worker graduates (5.2%) and the second-highest proportion of retained college social service worker graduates (25.6%).
- The two other largest cities in NB have higher proportions of retained university social work graduates (21.5% in both Moncton CMA and Fredericton CA<sup>4</sup>) than retained college social work graduates (11.6% in Moncton CMA, 9.3% in Fredericton CA).
- Approximately one-third (34.3%) of retained university social work graduates reside in areas outside the province's Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) and Census Agglomerations (CAs) one year after graduation. A higher percentage of retained college social work graduates (44.2%) also reside outside the province's CMAs/CAs one year after graduation.

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<sup>3</sup> The acronym CMA stands for Census Metropolitan Area, while CA stands for Census Agglomeration. Both refer to geographical divisions in NB. A CMA must have a total population of at least 100,000, of which at least 50,000 or more live in the core. A CA must have a core population of at least 10,000.

<sup>4</sup> Although Fredericton became a CMA for the 2021 Census year, we continue to use the terminology Fredericton CA in this report, as the change in geography classification occurred after the study period.

## Key Takeaways

While our findings show that social work graduates have higher retention rates than the overall population of post-secondary graduates in New Brunswick, there is still a need to search for ways to boost retention even higher to fill projected labour gaps. The relatively low proportion of males graduating from social work programs is interesting, but it should be noted that male university graduates of most disciplines are more mobile (and more likely to leave NB) than their female counterparts (Balzer et al., 2023) – therefore, a focus on recruiting more males might not boost retention as much as initiatives to boost program capacity and recruitment generally.

Another notable result is the difference in one-year retention rates for university social work graduates of UdeM (91.2%) and STU (54.8%). These retention rates may reflect students' locations of residence before enrolling, as previous research by NB-IRDT shows that UdeM has, by far, the lowest proportion of graduates from Out of Province (7%) compared to the other public universities, including STU (21%) (Bhuiyan et al., 2021<sup>5</sup>). We know from previous research that students originally from NB are more likely to be retained than students from Out of Province. After one year, 89% of university graduates and 97% of college graduates from NB are retained, compared to 30% of university graduates and 27% of college graduates from Out of Province (Bhuiyan et al., 2021). While these findings reflect post-secondary graduates overall, and not social work graduates specifically, they may help explain the relatively high retention rate of UdeM and relatively low retention rate of STU.

These retention rates may also reflect language differences between the two institutions and their graduates. As the STU Social Work program is offered in English, it is likely that many STU graduates are Anglophone; likewise, as UdeM is a French language university, many UdeM graduates are likely to be Francophone. Linguistic profiles are likely to impact where graduates settle and work, as Anglophone graduates are likely to have more job opportunities throughout Canada, while Francophone graduates are likely to have job opportunities centralised in NB and Quebec. Further research using tax filer data could shed light on this by reflecting where the social work graduates who are leaving the province choose to settle.

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<sup>5</sup> *College & university graduate retention in New Brunswick* (Bhuiyan et al., 2021) is available to read online at <https://www.unb.ca/nbirdt/research/publications/college-and-university-graduate-retention-in-new-brunswick-2010--2018.html>.



## Introduction

This report focuses on the retention of post-secondary social work graduates<sup>6</sup> in New Brunswick and acts as a supplement to the previously released NB-IRDT report, *Graduate retention in New Brunswick: 2019 and 2020 cohort update* (Balzer et al., 2023).

This study further breaks down the analysis undertaken by Balzer et al. (2023), which reports on post-secondary graduate retention by field of study. In the previous work, social work graduates were included alongside graduates of related fields under the category of “Business, management, and public administration.” Here, we focus solely on the numbers, demographics, and retention rates of social work graduates from NB post-secondary institutions, using NB University Graduates data from the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC) and Student Data from the New Brunswick Community College (NBCC).<sup>7</sup>

## Background

Understanding the mobility decisions of NB social work graduates is an important step in guiding the development of strategies to meet the needs of the future labour market. According to the New Brunswick Association of Social Workers (NBASW), projections from before the COVID-19 pandemic suggest the province may face a shortage of 272 social workers by 2030; and the increasing demand for social workers since the start of the pandemic could result in this shortage being even greater than anticipated (2022). Shortages of social and community service workers are also being projected across Canada, with results from the Canadian Occupational Projection System (2022-2031) suggesting that by 2031 there will be 59,100 job openings but only 51,300 social and community service workers looking to fill them (Government of Canada, 2021).

The effects of staff shortages are already being felt in NB, according to the results of a survey the NBASW distributed to its 2,200 members in 2022. To help combat the resulting high levels of stress and employee burnout, respondents emphasized the need to develop a strategy that focuses both on recruiting and retaining social workers in the province (NBASW, 2022).

Filling these labour gaps is important for the health, safety, and wellbeing of New Brunswick as a whole. Every day, social workers and community service workers serve New Brunswickers in the areas of child and adult protection, disability support, mental health and addictions, long-term care, housing, social assistance, support for seniors, behavioural intervention, residential care, and more (NBASW, 2023; NBCC, 2023). For many New Brunswickers, the services they receive from social and community service workers are necessary for their physical and mental health; for others, these services allow them to care for themselves or their family members at home, or

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<sup>6</sup> In this report, we refer to graduates of university social work programs and college social service community worker programs as “social work graduates.”

<sup>7</sup> We also looked at NB Student Data from Le Collège communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick (CCNB). However, as no graduates are observed in CCNB's program data during the study period, this data set is not included in the Results.

they may enable them to provide financially for their households during difficult times. A shortage of social and community health workers is likely to impact the capacity of social service-oriented programs to meet New Brunswickers' needs in a timely manner.

The Government of New Brunswick is committed to helping protect and improve quality of life for its constituents through its programs and services. This report aims to assist in this endeavour by providing evidence to inform decision makers as they develop strategies to boost retention and meet labour demands. Understanding the characteristics and retention rates of recent social work graduates can provide insights into which New Brunswickers are most likely to study social work, which graduates (and how many) are most likely to remain in NB, which post-secondary institutions have the greatest success in retaining their graduates, and which areas of New Brunswick are attracting the most social work graduates to settle down. While knowing the number and retention rates of social work graduates can help decision makers estimate the number of future employees that may be available to fill existing labour gaps, understanding more about who these graduates are, where they graduated, and where they chose to settle may help develop more targeted strategies in areas where they may be most effective.

## Data and Methodology

### Data

Following Balzer et al. (2023), this report uses NB University Graduates data from MPHEC, which holds data from the province's four publicly funded universities<sup>8</sup> within one data source, as well as Student Data from NBCC and CCNB – all held on NB-IRDT's secure platform. Each data source includes information on the post-secondary institutions' programs and course offerings, student demographics, programs and course registration, and credentials granted. Using the same practice as Balzer et al. (2023), our analysis is limited to the years for which these post-secondary institutions collected a full 12 months (calendar year) of data (see Table 1 below).

We also use information from the Citizen Data, a longitudinal and administrative database containing basic demographic and geographic information on all NB residents with an issued provincial Medicare card. The Citizen Data indicates whether an individual is still residing in the province based on their Medicare status. This report uses entries in the Citizen Data from 2010 until the end of 2021, also available through NB-IRDT's secure platform.

Among the four public universities in the province, a social work program is offered by two: St. Thomas University and Université de Moncton. Among the province's colleges, NBCC offers a Social Service Community Worker program, and CCNB offers Gestion des services de santé et

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<sup>8</sup> The four universities are Mount Allison University (MTA), St. Thomas University (STU), Université de Moncton (UdeM), and the University of New Brunswick (UNB).

des services communautaires: a health and community services management program. However, no social work graduates from CCNB are included in the data available at the time of study due to gaps reflecting when the program was offered. Therefore, only NBCC data are used to present results on social work college graduates.

**Table 1: Data Ranges of NB Post-Secondary Institutions Offering Social Work Programs**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>This Report</b>
<b>UdeM</b>	2010-2020
<b>STU</b>	2010-2020
<b>NBCC</b>	2014-2020
<b>CCNB*</b>	2014-2020

*Note: Data ranges are in calendar years.*

*\*Because no social work graduates from CCNB are included in the data currently available at the time of study, CCNB data are not included in the presentation of results.*

## Methodology

Using NB University Graduates data, we flagged individuals who graduated with either a Bachelor of Social Work (STU and UdeM) or a Master of Arts in Social Work (UdeM) as university graduates in social work.<sup>9</sup> Using NBCC Student Data, we flagged graduates from the Social Service Community Worker program as graduates in social work.

This report uses the same methodology as Balzer et al. (2023) to estimate retention of graduates. An individual's NB Medicare status in the Citizen Data is used to indicate whether they reside in the province and the duration of their stay in NB. Graduates who are "Matched" (graduates with Medicare information) are considered to be retained if they have an "Active" Medicare status in NB one, three, five, or ten years after the year of graduation. A graduate is flagged as having left the province by the date of a "Terminated" status in their Medicare in the Citizen Data.<sup>10</sup> If a graduate does not have an "Active" Medicare status after graduation, the individual is assumed to have left the province. "Unmatched" individuals (graduates with no Medicare information) are also assumed to have left the province.

We present a full historical series of retention rates of social work graduates from NB universities and colleges. We present counts and retention rates by sex, level of education, post-secondary institution, and intra-provincial mobility. Due to small counts, only one-year retention rates are presented for these categories. Counts and retention rates are presented by calendar year, and counts are randomly rounded to base 5 to protect the confidentiality of small sample sizes.

<sup>9</sup> STU began offering a Master of Social Work program in 2021; because this occurred after the study period, this program is not included in the study data.

<sup>10</sup> Persons living in NB are extremely likely to have registered with NB Medicare, as this government program covers the cost of many medical expenses. Therefore, we assume that individuals residing in NB will appear in the Medicare registry (i.e., Citizen Data).

## Results

### Total Graduates in Social Work

#### Counts and Retention Rates

The number of graduates in social work<sup>11</sup> from NB universities (STU and UdeM) hovers around 100 for each graduating cohort between 2010 and 2020, as shown in Table 2. Approximately 70% of university social work graduates are retained in the province one year after graduation. After three years, around two-thirds (66.5%) of university social work graduates still reside in the province. More than half (56.8%) remain in the province ten years after graduation.

**Table 2: Number and Retention Rates of University Graduates in Social Work**

<b>Graduation Year</b>	<b>Total Graduates</b>	<b>1-Year Retention</b>	<b>3-Year Retention</b>	<b>5-Year Retention</b>	<b>10-Year Retention</b>
<b>2010</b>	105	66.7%	57.1%	52.4%	52.4%
<b>2011</b>	115	69.6%	65.2%	60.9%	60.9%
<b>2012</b>	105	71.4%	61.9%	66.7%	NA
<b>2013</b>	105	71.4%	61.9%	57.1%	NA
<b>2014</b>	115	69.6%	65.2%	60.9%	NA
<b>2015</b>	105	71.4%	71.4%	61.9%	NA
<b>2016</b>	95	73.7%	68.4%	63.2%	NA
<b>2017</b>	130	73.1%	69.2%	NA	NA
<b>2018</b>	95	84.2%	78.9%	NA	NA
<b>2019</b>	95	73.7%	NA	NA	NA
<b>2020</b>	120	70.8%	NA	NA	NA
<b>Overall</b>	<b>1185</b>	<b>72.2%</b>	<b>66.5%</b>	<b>60.4%</b>	<b>56.8%</b>

Table 3 shows that the 1-year retention rate for college graduates in social work is over 91% for both 2019 and 2020 cohorts. The counts and retention rates for college graduates are comprised of NBCC graduates in the Social Service Community Worker program.

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<sup>11</sup> Social work is a subset field of the study category "Business, management, and public administration" reported in Balzer et al. (2023).

**Table 3: Number and Retention Rates of College Graduates in Social Work**

Graduation Year	Total Graduates	1-Year
2019	115	91.3%
2020	120	91.7%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>91.5%</b>

## By Sex

### Counts

Over 90% of university social work graduates are female. The proportion of female college social work graduates (87.2%) is relatively lower than female university graduates; but in both cases, females constitute the majority of social work graduates.

**Table 4: Number of University & College Graduates in Social Work by Gender**

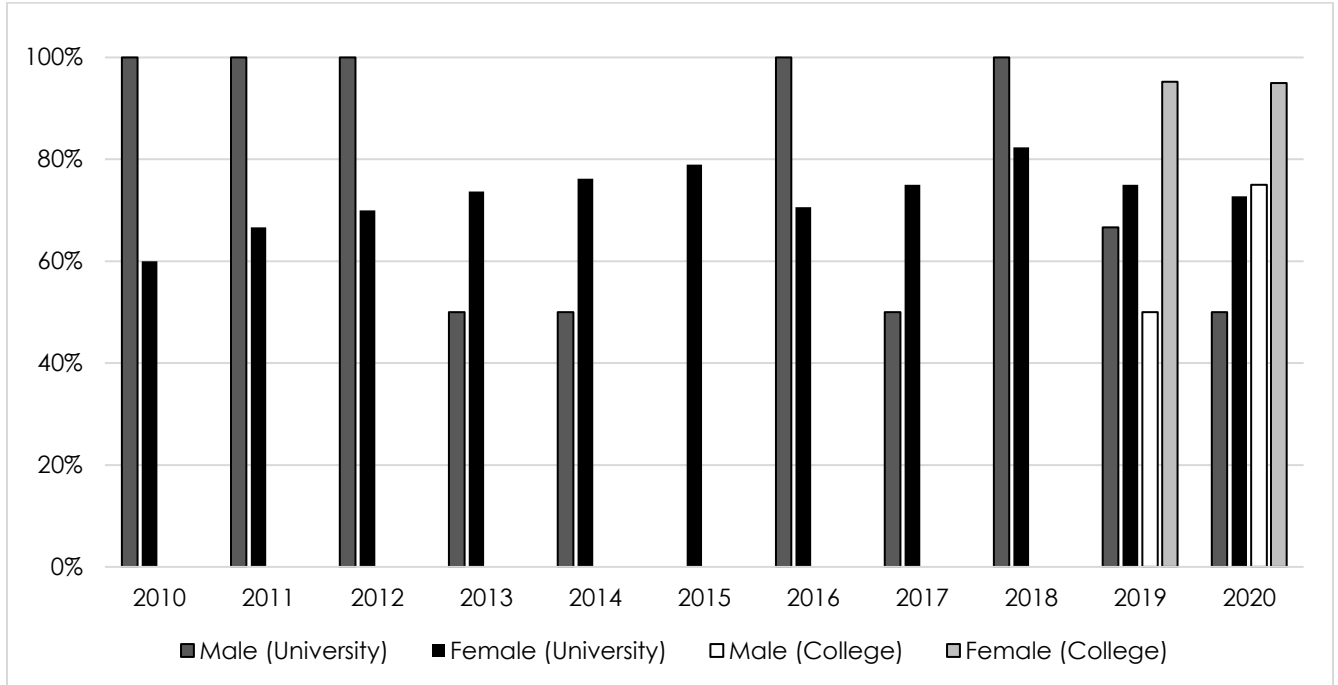
Graduation Year	University		College	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
2010	5	100	NA	NA
2011	10	105	NA	NA
2012	5	100	NA	NA
2013	10	95	NA	NA
2014	10	105	NA	NA
2015	10	95	NA	NA
2016	10	85	NA	NA
2017	10	120	NA	NA
2018	10	85	NA	NA
2019	15	80	10	105
2020	10	110	20	100

### Retention Rates

On average, the 1-year retention rate for female university graduates in social work is about 73%, while for male graduates it is 67% (Figure 1). It should be noted that small underlying sample sizes led to increased variability of retention rates for male university graduates.

For college graduates in social work, approximately, 95% of female graduates are retained while about two-thirds (66.7%) of male graduates remain in the province after one year. [Table 7](#) in the Appendix shows the corresponding data.

**Figure 1: 1-Year Retention Rates of University and College Graduates in Social Work by Sex**



## By Level of Education

### Counts

While both UdeM and STU currently offer a master's degree in social work, STU launched its Master of Social Work program much more recently, in 2021. As our data only include information on graduating cohorts up to 2020, our results only reflect master's degree holders from UdeM.

Table 5 shows that the number of master's students in social work at UdeM ranges from 5-10 individuals in each graduating cohort.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The sample counts for social work postgraduates (UdeM) are small, and retention rates by post-secondary institution (UdeM) are shown in the next section. To meet residual disclosure regulations, retention rates by level of education are excluded.

**Table 5: Number of University Graduates in Social Work by Level of Education (UdeM)**

<b>Graduation Year</b>	<b>Undergraduate</b>	<b>Master's</b>
<b>2010</b>	50	0
<b>2011</b>	50	5
<b>2012</b>	50	10
<b>2013</b>	55	5
<b>2014</b>	50	0
<b>2015</b>	45	10
<b>2016</b>	40	5
<b>2017</b>	50	5
<b>2018</b>	45	5
<b>2019</b>	35	5
<b>2020</b>	35	10

### By Post-Secondary Institution

#### Counts

Table 6 shows the number of social work graduates by post-secondary institution between 2010 and 2020 (graduating cohorts). STU has higher numbers of graduates compared to UdeM, with the greatest difference in the 2020 cohort (75 graduates from STU vs. 45 graduates from UdeM).

On the other hand, about 115-120 individuals graduate from NBCC's Social Service Community Worker program each year.

It should be noted that these programs are capacity-constrained, and the designated program seats at each institution are typically full.

**Table 6: Number of University and College Graduates in Social Work by Post-Secondary Institution**

<b>Graduation Year</b>	<b>STU</b>	<b>UdeM</b>	<b>NBCC</b>
2010	55	50	NA
2011	60	55	NA
2012	45	60	NA
2013	45	60	NA
2014	65	50	NA
2015	50	55	NA
2016	50	45	NA
2017	75	55	NA
2018	45	50	NA
2019	55	40	115
2020	75	45	120
<b>Total</b>	<b>620</b>	<b>565</b>	<b>235</b>

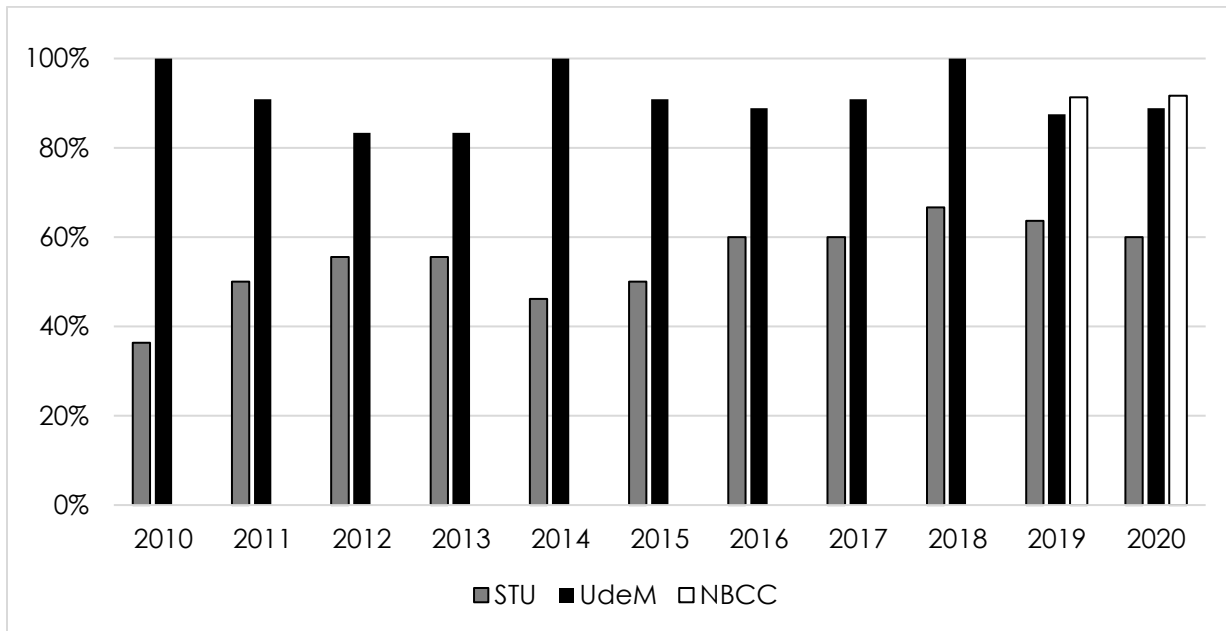
### **Retention Rates**

Figure 2 shows that between the two universities offering social work programs in the province, UdeM graduates exhibit much higher 1-year retention rates compared to graduates from STU.

Around 91% of UdeM social work graduates remain in the province one year after graduation, while the average 1-year retention rate for STU social graduates is nearly 55% – though, it should be noted that STU's social work graduate retention rates since 2016 (graduating cohort) remain over 60%. The 1-year retention rate for NBCC graduates in the Social Service Community Worker program is around 91%. [Table 8](#) in the Appendix shows the corresponding data.



**Figure 2: 1-Year Retention Rates of University and College Graduates by Post-Secondary Institution**



### Intra-Provincial Mobility (Location Within NB)

Figure 3 shows the location of university graduates who are retained in the province one year after their graduation. For the purposes of this study, we have categorized their locations in NB as Moncton CMA,<sup>13</sup> Saint John CMA, Fredericton CA,<sup>14</sup> Other CAs,<sup>15</sup> and Non-CMA/CA.<sup>16</sup>

Among university social work graduates who are retained after one year of graduation, about one-third (34.3%) are located in a Non-CMA/CA, while 43% are located in Moncton CMA and Fredericton CA (21.5% each). The lowest share of graduates resides in Saint John CMA (5.2%). [Table 9](#) in the Appendix shows the corresponding data.

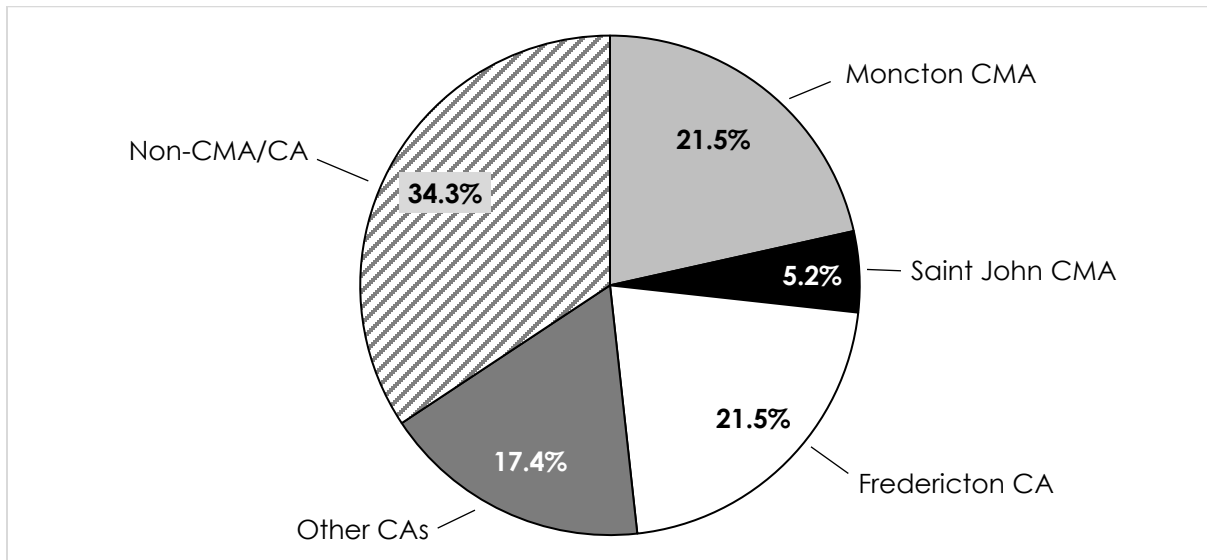
<sup>13</sup> The acronym CMA stands for Census Metropolitan Area, while CA stands for Census Agglomeration. Both refer to geographical divisions in NB. A CMA must have a total population of at least 100,000, of which at least 50,000 or more live in the core. A CA must have a core population of at least 10,000.

<sup>14</sup> Although Fredericton became a CMA for the 2021 Census year, we continue to use the terminology Fredericton CA in this report, as the change in geography classification occurred after the study period.

<sup>15</sup> Other Census Agglomerations (CAs) include Bathurst, Edmundston, Miramichi, and Campbellton. Due to small counts, these CAs are combined.

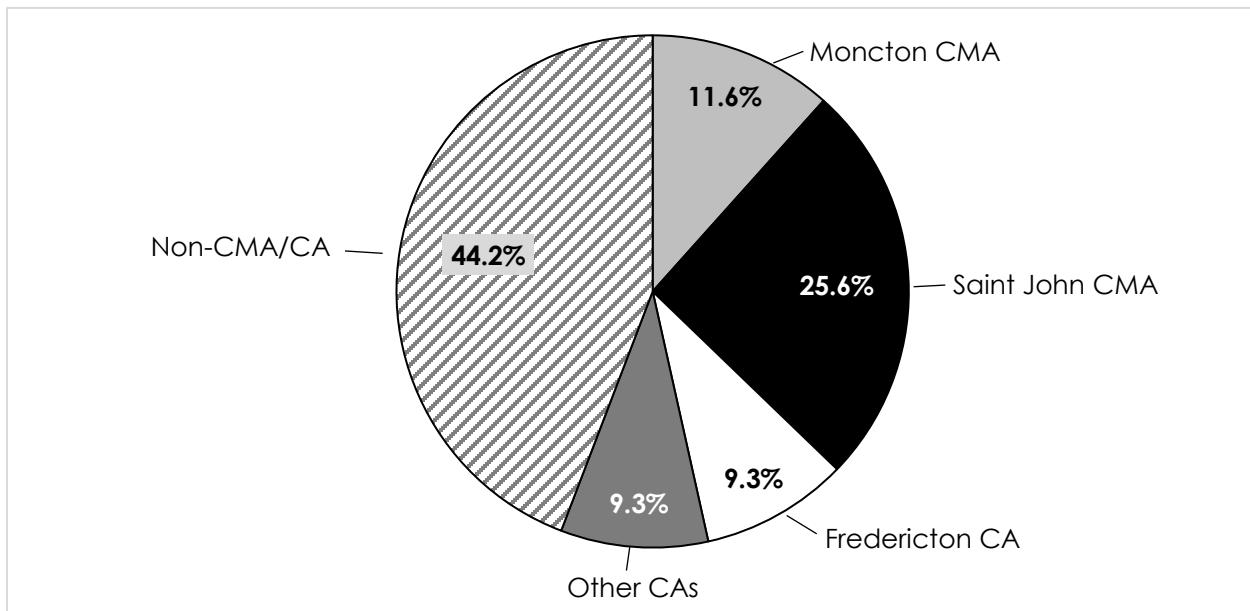
<sup>16</sup> Non-CMA/CA refers to other locations in NB apart from its CMAs/CAs.

**Figure 3: Location of Retained University Graduates in Social Work (1 Year After Graduation)**



Similar to university graduates, the highest proportion of retained college social work graduates is located outside the province's CMAs/CAs (44.2%). However, unlike university graduates, Saint John CMA holds the second highest share (25.6%) of retained college. [Table 10](#) in the Appendix shows the corresponding data.

**Figure 4: Location of Retained College Graduates in Social Work (1 Year After Graduation)**



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## Appendix

**Table 7: 1-Year Retention Rates of University and College Graduates in Social Work by Sex**

Graduation Year	Male (University)	Female (University)	Male (College)	Female (College)
2010	100.0%	60.0%	NA	NA
2011	100.0%	66.7%	NA	NA
2012	100.0%	70.0%	NA	NA
2013	50.0%	73.7%	NA	NA
2014	50.0%	76.2%	NA	NA
2015	0.0%	78.9%	NA	NA
2016	100.0%	70.6%	NA	NA
2017	50.0%	75.0%	NA	NA
2018	100.0%	82.4%	NA	NA
2019	66.7%	75.0%	50.0%	95.2%
2020	50.0%	72.7%	75.0%	95.0%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>66.7%</b>	<b>72.7%</b>	<b>66.7%</b>	<b>95.1%</b>

**Table 8: 1-Year Retention Rates of University and College Graduates in Social Work by Post-Secondary Institution**

Graduation Year	STU	UdeM	NBCC
2010	36.4%	100.0%	NA
2011	50.0%	90.9%	NA
2012	55.6%	83.3%	NA
2013	55.6%	83.3%	NA
2014	46.2%	100.0%	NA
2015	50.0%	90.9%	NA
2016	60.0%	88.9%	NA
2017	60.0%	90.9%	NA
2018	66.7%	100.0%	NA
2019	63.6%	87.5%	91.3%
2020	60.0%	88.9%	91.7%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>54.8%</b>	<b>91.2%</b>	<b>91.5%</b>

**Table 9: Location of Retained University Graduates in Social Work (1 Year After Graduation)**

Graduation Year	Location of Retained University Graduates						Left The Province
	Moncton CMA	Saint John CMA	Fredericton CA	Other CAs	Non-CMA/CA	Total Retained	
2010	20	0	10	10	30	<b>70</b>	35
2011	20	5	10	20	25	<b>80</b>	35
2012	20	5	15	5	30	<b>75</b>	30
2013	20	5	10	10	30	<b>75</b>	30
2014	20	5	15	15	25	<b>80</b>	35
2015	25	5	15	20	15	<b>80</b>	30
2016	10	0	20	15	25	<b>70</b>	25
2017	15	5	25	15	35	<b>95</b>	35
2018	10	5	15	20	30	<b>80</b>	15
2019	15	5	20	10	20	<b>70</b>	25
2020	10	5	30	10	30	<b>85</b>	35
<b>Total</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>295</b>	<b>860</b>	<b>330</b>

**Table 10: Location of Retained College Graduates in Social Work (1 Year After Graduation)**

Graduation Year	Location of Retained University Graduates						Left The Province
	Moncton CMA	Saint John CMA	Fredericton CA	Other CAs	Non-CMA/CA	Total Retained	
2019	10	30	10	10	45	<b>105</b>	10
2020	15	25	10	10	50	<b>110</b>	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>20</b>