



**Brief to the
House of Commons
Standing Committee on
Citizenship and Immigration**

**The Recognition of International
Experience and Credentials of
Immigrants**

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April 2005

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Summary of recommendations

Recommendation 1

The federal government should take the lead in expediting the coordination of immigrant settlement and skills development and employment support services and involve all other orders of government, including the City of Toronto.

Recommendation 2

The federal government should support the development of an integrated and coordinated labour force development plan in Toronto that would involve the collaboration of all three orders of government and would include strategies to facilitate immigrants into the Toronto labour market.

Recommendation 3

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada should place a moratorium on the implementation of the call-for-proposal process for the allocation of funding contracts. During this moratorium, the process should be evaluated and be guided by the Code of Good Funding Practice developed by the Government of Canada's Voluntary Sector Initiative to address accountability and sectoral stability and capacity.

Recommendation 4

The federal government should play an active role in engaging both private and public sector employers in integrating internationally trained professionals in the labour market, particularly in regions with a high concentration of immigrants.

Recommendation 5

The federal government should develop effective information and communication campaigns to make employers aware of support services, such as credential assessment and mentoring and internship programs. In addition, the federal government should offer incentives, such as subsidized workplace language training, for employers.

Recommendation 6

The federal government should provide employers with the tools and incentives to promote a supportive work environment that is free from discrimination and that supports, values and welcomes diversity.

Recommendation 7

An integrated and coordinated labour force development plan should address the needs of all immigrants, including immigrants from both the family and economic class and immigrants with little or no professional training.

Recommendation 8

A gender and equity analysis should be applied in the design, development, implementation and evaluation of any strategy and plan to ensure that it is equitable and beneficial to all immigrants.

Recommendation 9

The federal government should establish strong partnership with municipal governments and all key players in local communities, including employers and immigrant groups in implementing and reporting on the progress of the Action Plan against Racism.

1. Introduction

The City of Toronto welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the important issue of recognizing the international experience and credentials of immigrants to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. The City's position on this issue must be understood within the context of the City's overall approach to immigration and settlement.

2. Context

In our previous submission to the Standing Committee on Bill C-11, *The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, March 2001, the City of Toronto said:

- The City of Toronto is committed to the principle that newcomers must have access to support to ensure their participation in all aspects of civic and community life to realize the social, economic and cultural benefits of immigration.
- The City of Toronto must be at the table with the federal and provincial governments in the discussion of immigration and refugee policies and programs.
- The federal funding allocation for settlement and integration to provinces should be fair and equitable.
- To speed up resolution of the long-standing problem of immigrants' access to professions and trades, the Government of Canada should take an active role in facilitating the economic integration of immigrants, involving the key players, such as professional and regulatory bodies and the City of Toronto in identifying appropriate measures and increasing funding to employment-related language training.
- Undocumented refugee children and youth under the age of 18, as per the *Ontario Education Act* (Section 49.1), should be admitted to schools without authorization by Citizenship and Immigration Canada.
- The Governments of Canada and Ontario should provide assistance to the School Boards in the Toronto District for the language training needs of immigrant and refugee children and adults.
- Canada's policies and programs regarding immigration and refugee determination should reflect Canadian core values of democratic principles and human rights standards.
- The City of Toronto supports the stated commitment of the Government of Canada in *The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* to establish an appeal division of the Immigration and Refugee Board.

3. Toronto is a city of immigrants

"Diversity our Strength" is the City of Toronto's official motto. Toronto's diversity includes the immigrants who have made their home in the city. Toronto continues to be the primary destination for new immigrants, whose successful settlement is vital to Toronto's future, and by extension, Canada's future.

- The City of Toronto is home to 8% of Canada's population and 22% of all immigrants. One-half of Toronto residents are born outside of Canada.
- Since 1996, the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area received an average of 90,000 immigrants each year, representing one-half of all arrivals to Canada. Of these, two out of three settled in the City of Toronto.
- Asia has become the primary source of new immigrants to Toronto: China (1996-2001: 46,000), India (1996-2001: 26,600) and Pakistan (1996-2001: 17,500).
- In 2002, 64% of immigrants were Economic class, 28% Family class and 8% Refugees.
- Recent immigrants are skilled and educated. In 2002, more than half had post-secondary education and 12% had Master's degrees or higher.

But recent immigrants experience many challenges in being able to participate in the labour market.

- It is very difficult for internationally trained professionals who are new to Canada to secure employment in their field of expertise. In general, their skills are unrecognized and under-utilized. Many of them work in low level jobs.
- It now takes approximately 12 years for the average immigrant to achieve wage parity with those born in Canada. In the 1980's, immigrants typically achieved wage parity with Canadian-born workers within 8 years.

4. Importance of immigrants' successful participation in the labour market

The City of Toronto is located in the heart of a Greater Toronto Region (GTA), which is also Canada's flagship economic region. The region generates about 44 percent of Ontario's gross domestic product, and 20 percent of Canada's gross domestic product.

Toronto depends on immigrants to maintain its population and labour force growth. Key findings of the Toronto Labour Force Readiness Plan forecast labour and skills shortages by 2008 due mainly to retiring baby boomers and low birth rate and that immigration will play an increasingly critical role in maintaining Toronto's workforce. In addition, skills shortages are anticipated across many occupations and at all education levels.

In addition, Toronto's diversity offers the City tremendous opportunity to be a dynamic centre of innovation and prosperity. Diversity means cultural richness, skills and knowledge, new ideas and new economic connections with the world.

Studies have shown that diversity can make an organization or a group more flexible, better at problem-solving and can enhance creativity, which are important assets in a

knowledge-based economy. A study by professors Meric Gertler and Richard Florida and their colleagues finds that the most successful city-regions in North America have a social environment that is open to creativity and diversity. The study concludes that Toronto's critical mass of creative people and its high levels of social diversity position it very well for future knowledge-intensive economic growth (*Competing on Creativity: Placing Ontario's Cities in North American Context*, November 2002).

5. The role of City of Toronto in facilitating immigrants' labour market participation

The City of Toronto plays a very active role in facilitating immigrant settlement, including labour market participation.

The City's access, equity and human rights policies and programs foster a welcoming and accepting climate to immigrants. Our immigration and settlement policy framework provides strategic directions to address the settlement and integration of immigrants and refugees. The City's grants programs, procurement policy and community and economic development initiatives help immigrant communities build their capacity to participate in society. City departments are integrating the needs of immigrants and refugees in their service planning and delivery and are providing services in different languages with culturally sensitive approaches.

The City also has policies and programs that address specifically immigrants' labour market participation.

- The City has a Human Rights Policy, an Employment Equity Policy and a Fair Wage Policy. As an employer, the City does not exclude applicants because they lack Canadian experience. Work experience gained outside of Canada is evaluated for equivalency. Credentials are only used when required by law or as a *bona fide occupational requirement*. Applicants who have foreign credentials are allowed time to get the credentials assessed. Human resources staff are provided with the names of organizations that conduct credential assessments.
- The City, in partnership with a consortium of community training and settlement agencies, provides a mentoring program for internationally trained professionals (ITP) by City employees participating as mentors. The result of the mentoring program in 2004 was that over 60% of the participating ITP found employment in their own fields. The program target in 2005 is to provide mentoring opportunities to 50 internationally trained professionals from accounting/finance, engineering, information technology, human resources, purchasing and facilities management.
- The City has committed to providing 10 internship positions through Career Bridge in 2005.
- The Social Services Division has service agreements with a number of community-based employment services agencies. Some of these agreements have been

developed to address the needs of the internationally trained professionals who are Ontario Works clients. Through the employment placement program, Social Services also offers financial incentives to employers to provide placement to Ontario Works clients, including those who do not have Canadian work experience. Through Social Services, clients can access funds to have their credentials assessed.

- The Technical Services Division, in collaboration with adult learning centres and adult day schools, provides a co-op program to internationally trained engineers. Some of these co-op engineers have been placed as students, temporary and permanent employees in Works and Emergency Services Department after completing the co-op program.
- The Economic Development Division co-sponsors an annual Internationally Educated Professionals Conference to assist internationally trained professionals to find employment in their fields of expertise.
- The Economic Development Division has developed a Toronto Labour Force Readiness Plan, the first study of its kind to examine labour force supply and demand at the city-region level. To implement the recommendations of the Plan, the City will consolidate a bridging-to-employment strategy which will include mentoring and internship of internationally trained professionals, and will advocate for partnership with other orders of government to advocate for the integration of training and bridging programs with immigrant settlement services and the development of a coordinated labour force development system in Toronto.

6. Issues and recommendations

A. The need for inter-governmental and system-wide coordination

The recognition of international experience and credentials of immigrants is a complex and multifaceted issue. To address this issue effectively, coordination and collaboration is needed by all orders of government, different government ministries and departments as well as a range of key players, including employers, labour unions, education institutions, regulators, professional associations, credential assessment bodies and community-based training and immigrant settlement agencies. Although the different sectors, including governments, have made significant progress in engaging each other in finding solutions to the issue, more effort needs to be made to quicken the pace of change in order to address the high incidence of unemployment, under-employment and poverty among recent immigrants.

A critical area that needs to be dealt with expeditiously is the integration of immigrant settlement and employment support services. In the current system, training and skills developing and other employment supports fall under the jurisdiction of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, while immigrant settlement is a Citizenship and Immigration

Canada and Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration responsibility. Consequently employment services are often offered separately from settlement services.

In addition, existing employment initiatives do not adequately support immigrants. For instance, the current requirements for Employment Insurance benefits exclude many immigrants since they have no prior labour market attachment, have not worked the required number of hours. In addition, since many recent immigrants are part-time and casual workers, they do not have continuous labour force participation to qualify.

These issues impact directly on the quality of life of many Toronto residents who are recent immigrants, the social cohesion of the city and the health of Toronto's economy. As city-regions become increasingly important in the global economy, the City of Toronto can provide valuable input to the federal government on labour market and economic development issues. The City of Toronto must be an equal partner with other orders of government in effectively addressing immigrant settlement and immigrant labour market participation.

Ontario is currently the only province which does not have a Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA) with the federal government. The likely development of such an agreement under the new leadership at all three orders of government may provide the opportunities for the establishment of a truly integrated and coordinated labour force development system in Toronto. The Toronto Labour Force Readiness Plan points out that whatever form the LMDA takes, such a system would require the collaboration of all three orders of government. The system should be responsive, fair and equitable, and would include components to facilitate immigrants into the Toronto labour market.

Recommendation 1

The federal government should take the lead in expediting the coordination of immigrant settlement and skills development and employment support services and involve all other orders of government, including the City of Toronto.

Recommendation 2

The federal government should support the development of an integrated and coordinated labour force development plan in Toronto that would involve the collaboration of all three orders of government and would include strategies to facilitate immigrants into the Toronto labour market.

B. Commitment to support the non-profit community-based employment service sector

Renewed government commitment to support the non-profit community-based employment service sector is one of the prerequisites for an integrated system to facilitate immigrant participation in the labour market. Some of the community-based

employment agencies are pioneers in programs such as job preparation, mentoring and other specialized programs for internationally trained professionals.

Human Resources Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) has implemented a call-for-proposal (CAP) process for allocating funding contracts in the City of Toronto. This has had significant consequences for the community-based employment service sector that provides services to immigrants. These consequences include short-term funding agreements with month to month contract extensions and the rapid turnaround to respond to a call for proposal, requiring the completion of a very large and detailed proposal. The approval time for a HRSDC agreement has also lengthened from an average of approximately two months to four months or greater. The complexity and confusion with respect to the approval process puts current service providers at risk both financially and in terms of compromising current service delivery.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada has also recently announced its intention to move to an open CFP process in 2006 for settlement services. Even if limited to the not-for-profit sector, the changes in funding processes can be expected to impact the infrastructure of some community-based services.

The City of Toronto has been supporting the community-based service sector through its grants programs and is engaged in an ongoing dialogue with community partners to ensure the long-term stability and capacity of the sector. Specifically, community-based employment services play a role in facilitating immigrant participation in the labour market and should be an integral part of a coordinated and integrated labour force development system in Toronto. They also play an important role in strengthening neighbourhoods, improving service planning and co-ordination, and promoting civic engagement and participation.

Recommendation 3

HRSDC needs to consider a moratorium for the implementation of the call-for-proposal process for the allocation of funding contracts. During this moratorium, the process should be evaluated and be guided by the Code of Good Funding Practice developed by the Government of Canada's Voluntary Sector Initiative to address accountability and sectoral stability and capacity.

C. The need to effectively engage employers

With Canada's priority to recruit skilled immigrants, employers stand to benefit from hiring immigrants. Yet studies have shown that many employers are not tapping into the resources of the skilled immigrants. The survey and focus groups conducted by the Public Policy Forum (November 2004) revealed that employers see many positives and few negatives in hiring recent immigrants and welcome the opportunity to participate in strategies that seek to better integrate immigrants into the workforce. However, it was also found that employers overlook immigrants in their human resource planning, do not hire immigrants at the level at which they were trained and face challenges integrating

recent immigrants into their workforce, such as immigrants' lack of occupation-specific language and knowledge of Canadian workplace practices. To address these challenges, the Public Policy Forum has developed several recommendations, including addressing practices that may discriminate against immigrants, promoting existing credential assessment services and improving occupation-specific language training.

A survey by the Policy Roundtable Mobilizing Professions and Trades (PROMPT) (March 2005) found that employers are not aware of the more active role they need to play and the services available to support them in hiring recent immigrants. Employers are not familiar with credential assessment services and mentoring and internship programs for internationally trained professionals. The employer respondents to the survey identified that a better understanding of educational equivalencies and supporting language proficiency programs for immigrants, perhaps through subsidized workplace language training, would provide some incentives to them in hiring recent immigrants. The internationally trained professionals participating in the survey reiterated that the federal government needs to carry out, as part of the implementation of its immigration policy to recruit skilled immigrants, a marketing campaign to disseminate information to employers regarding skilled immigrants and their availability in the Canadian labour market.

Recommendation 4

The federal government should play an active role in engaging both private and public sector employers in integrating internationally trained professionals in the labour market, particularly in regions with a high concentration of immigrants.

Recommendation 5

The federal government should develop effective information and communication campaigns to make employers aware of support services, such as credential assessment and mentoring and internship programs. In addition, the federal government should offer incentives, such as subsidized workplace language training, for employers.

Recommendation 6

The federal government should provide employers with the tools and incentives to promote a supportive work environment that is free from discrimination and that supports, values and welcomes diversity.

D. Responding to all immigrants

It is important to recognize the needs and potential of all immigrants from both the family and economic class, including those with little or no professional training. They can all potentially contribute to filling the anticipated skills shortage across many occupations

and at all education levels in Toronto, as indicated in the Toronto Labour Force Readiness Plan.

We need a range of employment support programs across the skills spectrum to meet the needs of all immigrants. The research findings by PROMPT (March 2005) show that current immigrant employment programs are available to primarily immigrants at the very extreme ends of the skills spectrum: general skills and the high professional skills.

The majority of programs include basic language skills and basic job readiness programs. Initiatives that aim at supporting highly skilled professionals include bridging programs funded by the Access to Professions and Trades Unit of the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. However, these bridging programs are available for only a small number of professions and are offered in selected locations in the province. There are other programs that offer mentoring, internship and co-op placements. While these programs do help immigrants access the labour market, they are relatively few in number compared to the large number of skilled immigrants who need them.

In language training, the majority of programs are focused on developing basic language skills (level 1-5). There is a demand for training to be available at much higher levels (level 9 – 10) and to incorporate profession-specific components. It is a positive step that Citizenship and Immigration Canada has injected \$20 million per year into funding enhanced language training and has established bilateral agreements with provinces. The goal of the program is to reach 20,000 skilled immigrants each year.

A comprehensive strategy and an integrated and coordinated labour force development plan is needed to identify gaps in the system and the allocation of necessary resources. It is critical too that the integrated plan is accessible, fair and equitable. In responding to all immigrants, it is important to apply a gender and equity analysis to ensure that immigrant women, immigrants who are racial minorities, immigrants with disabilities and immigrants of all educational and skills levels would benefit.

Recommendation 7

An integrated and coordinated labour force development plan should address the needs of all immigrants, including immigrants from both the family and economic class and immigrants with little or no professional training.

Recommendation 8

A gender and equity analysis should be applied in the design, development, implementation and evaluation of any strategy and plan to ensure that it is equitable and beneficial to all immigrants.

E. Public education and workplace strategy to eliminate racism and discrimination

Three quarters of the immigrants who come to Canada today are racial minorities. In our extensive consultations with Toronto's communities in 2002, we heard evidence of racism and different forms of discrimination, both direct and systemic, being experienced by residents and workers in Toronto. The Toronto City Council responded by adopting a City of Toronto Plan of Action for the Elimination of Racism and Discrimination, which outlines strategic directions and an implementation plan to eliminate racism and discrimination.

On the UN International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, March 21, 2005, Minister of State (Multiculturalism), the Hon. Raymond Chan announced *A Canada for All: Canada's Action Plan against Racism*. On the occasion, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, the Hon. Joe Volpe said, "The Government of Canada is firmly committed to breaking down the barriers to full participation in Canada's labour market and society that many newcomers face, and to ensuring that they have the tools they need to succeed". "This Action Plan will help achieve that vision by educating the general public about the many valuable contributions newcomers to Canada make and by helping to build truly welcoming communities across this great country. Minister of Labour and Housing, the Hon. Joe Fontana said, "Eliminating discrimination in the workplace is key to Canada's economic and social development and will help our businesses succeed in the 21st century economy." "The Racism Free Workplace Strategy will contribute to the Action Plan by promoting fairness and eliminating barriers to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to participate in the workplace."

The City of Toronto supports Canada's Action Plan against Racism and the collaborative approach between different federal departments and agencies in the implementation of the Action Plan. Canada prides itself being a nation that values equality rights, respect for differences and participatory democracy. It is critical that the federal government takes the lead in implementing public education and workplace strategy to foster communities and workplaces that embrace diversity and are free from racism, discrimination and harassment.

Recommendation 9

The federal government should establish strong partnership with local municipal governments and all key players in local communities, including employers and immigrant groups in implementing and reporting on the progress of the Action Plan against Racism.

7. Conclusion

The difficulties faced by immigrants in labour force participation have imposed huge costs on both the newcomers and the social and economic health of Toronto. They also challenge the effectiveness of Canada's immigration policy and its reputation in the world as a society, which is just, equitable and prosperous with equal opportunities for

all. Quick and decisive action is needed to address Canada's inability to ensure that newcomers have the opportunity to contribute to their full potential in the labour market.

In the brief, we recommend actions to build inter-governmental and system-wide coordination, to support the non-profit community-based employment service sector, to engage employers, to respond to all immigrants and to implement public education and workplace strategies to eliminate racism and discrimination. It is decisive action that is needed now!