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Making the Connections

Ottawa's Role in Immigrant Employment

Naomi Alboim
Elizabeth McIsaac

Immigration and Refugee Policy

IRPP

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IRPP
1470 Peel Street, Suite 200
Montreal, Quebec H3A 1T1
Telephone: 514-985-2461
Fax: 514-985-2559
E-mail: irpp@irpp.org

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About the Authors

Naomi Alboim is a fellow, adjunct professor, and vice-chair of the Policy Forum at the School of Policy Studies at Queen's University. She is also an active public policy consultant, advising governments and NGOs across Canada and abroad. Naomi is an associate of the Maytree Foundation, and in that capacity she works on issues pertaining to the integration of skilled immigrants into the Canadian labour market. She is on the board of the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) and is the chair of its Intergovernmental Relations Committee. Prior to this, Naomi worked at senior levels in the federal and Ontario provincial governments for twenty-five years, including eight years as deputy minister in three different portfolios, one of which was the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship. She is a member of the Order of Ontario and a recipient of the Queen's Jubilee Gold Medal for public service.

Elizabeth McIsaac is the executive director of TRIEC. Elizabeth has worked with TRIEC since it was launched in 2003 as a project of the Maytree Foundation. She has held various positions at the Maytree Foundation, most recently as the director of policy. Before joining the foundation, Elizabeth was executive director of the Association of International Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, advocating for policy changes to improve access to licensing for immigrant doctors in Ontario. Prior to this she worked in direct service with immigrant and refugee communities, as well as in various roles in research and teaching.

Shaping Canada's Future: Immigration and Refugee Policy / Bâtir l'avenir : la politique relative à l'immigration et aux réfugiés

Research Director / Directrice de recherche
Geneviève Bouchard

This series comprises individual *IRPP Choices* and *IRPP Policy Matters* studies on Canadian immigration policy and its challenges, and also on other countries' immigration and refugee policies. Issues discussed in this research program include the relationship between sovereignty and economic integration, security and border control, and reconciliation of economic and humanitarian objectives.

Cette série comprend des études *Choix IRPP* et *Enjeux publics IRPP* qui portent sur la politique canadienne d'immigration et ses nouveaux défis, mais également sur les différentes politiques d'immigration et de protection de réfugiés à travers le monde. Les questions abordées dans ce programme de recherche touchent aux rapports entre souveraineté et intégration économique, sécurité et contrôle des frontières, conciliation des objectifs économiques et humanitaires.

Contents

List of Acronyms

CIC	Citizenship and Immigration Canada
CLB	Canadian Language Benchmark
EI	employment insurance
ELT	Enhanced Language Training
FCRP	Foreign Credential Recognition Program
HRSDC	Human Resources and Social Development Canada
LMDA	Labour Market Development Agreement
LMPA	Labour Market Partnership Agreement
PNP	Provincial Nominee Program
PROMIS	PROMotion-Intégration-Société nouvelle
RNEN	Regional Newcomer Employment Networks
TRIEC	Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council

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Introduction

Immigration levels for 2007 have been set for an increased range of 250,000 to 265,000 new permanent residents.[1] This is 10,000 above the projections for 2006, and it signals an ongoing commitment on the part of the Canadian government to seek in immigration solutions to ever-widening gaps in the labour market and to demographic pressures.

As the government adheres to the traditional view of immigration as a cornerstone of nation building, its decision to increase immigration levels is an unremarkable one. What requires consideration, however, is the policy architecture that is being constructed to support this direction. As an element in the broader context of human capital development, the positioning of immigration as a solution to labour market shortfalls can only succeed if it is systemically articulated with related policy developments – that is, labour market development and education and training.

In the 2006 federal budget, the government committed $18 million toward establishing an agency "to ensure foreign-trained immigrants meet Canadian standards, while getting those who are trained and ready to work in their fields of expertise into the work force more quickly" (Finance Canada 2006, chap. 3). The mandate, structure and governance of the proposed agency were left to be determined through consultations with the provinces and other stakeholders.

In the 2007 federal budget, the government announced that a foreign credential referral office would be created by late spring with a $13-million investment over two years, funded from existing sources. "This new Office will provide prospective immigrants overseas and newcomers already in Canada with information about the Canadian labour

market and credential assessment and recognition requirements. As well, it will provide immigrants with path-finding and referral services to identify and connect with the appropriate assessment bodies" (Finance Canada 2007, 24). The office is yet another response to an already cluttered arena of policy instruments, funding programs and jurisdictional arrangements. As such, it will either be a useful tool to clarify and coordinate the landscape or merely add to the noise and confusion.

There are many players involved in the domain of skilled immigrant employment.[2] Within government, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) and Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) are the lead players at the federal level, and then there are their provincial counterparts. For skilled immigrants who belong to regulated professions, provincial regulatory bodies play a significant role, as do post-secondary educational institutions and credential assessment services, all of which are under provincial jurisdiction. In addition, community-based service organizations — and, of course, employers — are key players. This multiplicity of stakeholders makes finding policy solutions a complex task.

This paper focuses particularly on the role of the federal government in finding solutions to skilled immigrant employment in Canada, with special attention to foreign credentials and skills recognition and effective labour market integration strategies. To provide a context, we will briefly review the current experience of skilled immigrants in the labour market and Canadian labour market demands. We will then explore the current federal policy landscape for both immigration and labour market issues and review programs and practices that provide examples of successes upon which we can build. Finally, based on the existing context, relationships and promising practices, we will recommend ways in which the federal government can play a strategic role in resolving this issue.

Profile of skilled immigrants and their labour market experiences

The profile of immigrants arriving in Canada has shifted dramatically over the last three decades, particularly in terms of levels of education and countries of origin. The proportion of university graduates among all categories of immigrants — including refugees, family-class immigrants and economic immigrants — is substantially higher than that among the Canadian-born in the same age group. Among permanent residents over the age of 15 who were landed in 2005, 45.9 percent had a university degree. Within the economic class, or skilled-worker category, 79.5 percent of principal applicants had at least one university degree (CIC 2006b).

The change in continents from which immigrants are coming — the most significant source shift is from Europe to Asia — has altered the face of Canada, and it has also been identified as one of the causes of the negative labour market outcomes that these immigrants experience (see Sweetman 2005). Related factors may include reduced official language competency, lack of credential recognition and discrimination. The top four source countries in 2005 were China, India, the Philippines and Pakistan.

As well, immigrants to Canada have a high propensity for settling in cities — in particular, Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal: in 2005, 43 percent settled in the Greater Toronto Area (CIC 2006b). Recent immigrants identify the most important factors influencing their choice of destination as the presence of family and friends and the existence of established immigrant communities (Statistics Canada 2005).

Although the immigrants who have arrived since the 1990s are the most educated to date, their labour market outcomes are not comparable with those of previous cohorts of immigrants or their Canadian-born counterparts. These reduced outcomes seem incongruous in light of the labour and skills shortages experienced throughout Canada. The expectation is that by 2011 immigrants will account for 100 percent of net labour market growth. There is therefore a growing imperative to develop policy responses that facilitate improved labour market performance for skilled immigrants. While immigrants, including recent ones, had higher labour market participation rates than Canadian-born individuals in the early 1980s, by 1991, the situation had reversed so that the participation rate for immigrants fell below the national average, and the gap grew even wider for recent immigrants. This gap has persisted, despite economic recovery in the latter half of the 1990s.

With respect to levels of earnings, immigrants have historically caught up with their Canadian-born counterparts within 10 years of arrival. However, this trend has not continued for immigrants who arrived in the 1990s. Although some recent immigrants have found jobs in high-skilled occupations, especially in the field of information technology, many, regardless of education, are employed in low-skilled occupations. There is an overrepresentation of university-educated immigrants in low-skilled jobs, and many recent

immigrants with university degrees are employed in jobs that typically require a high school education or less. The Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada, which surveyed approximately 12,000 immigrants who arrived in Canada in 2000-01, found that only 40 percent of skilled principal applicants are working in the occupation or profession for which they were trained, effectively making 60 percent downwardly mobile (Statistics Canada 2005). However, there are variations in these figures, as stronger or weaker labour market opportunities in particular sectors create different outcomes. As well, skilled principal applicants — the only category selected on the basis of the point system — have been found to have better long-term economic outcomes than other immigrant classes (Hiebert 2006).

The economic recession of the first part of the 1990s had a significant impact on the labour market performance of newly arrived immigrants, and their performance did not rebound in the same way as that of their Canadian-born counterparts. Overall, there have been deteriorating labour market outcomes for all new labour market entrants; among recent immigrant men, for example, this accounts for 40 percent of the decline in entry-level earnings (Picot and Sweetman 2005, 20).

Barriers and challenges

The barriers to appropriate immigrant labour market participation in Canada include, but are not limited to, a broad range of issues that relate to employer and regulatory requirements for Canadian work experience, credential recognition, licensing for regulated professionals, lack of labour market language training, lack of customized upgrading and support opportunities, and lack of information overseas and in Canada. But contextual factors also affect these barriers and challenges. While the immigrants who are arriving have more education, they must compete with a better educated Canadian labour force. Research has found that competition from the Canadian-born is also a contributing factor to labour market outcomes for new immigrants, especially in a knowledge economy that supports credentialism (see Reitz 2001) and relies heavily upon communication skills. And within this knowledge economy are the jobs for which many immigrants, selected especially for their education and skills, are striving.

There is also the challenge posed by the fact that while immigration selection criteria now focus on education, language competency and skills that fit this new labour market, the types of programs needed to facilitate settlement — and, more specifically, labour market entry — have not been changed accordingly. To a great extent, these programs continue to focus on the reception needs of new arrivals and not on communication and labour market entry supports. Most commonly cited by immigrants as a barrier to the labour market is lack of Canadian work experience. This barrier creates a vicious circle for new labour market entrants and leads many highly skilled immigrants to take survival jobs. Research has shown that this can have negative longer-term impacts on labour market performance. For professionals, prolonged under- or unemployment can lead to deskilling, seriously affecting their prospects of re-entering the profession. It can also result in chronic occupational dislocation, lower income and downward social mobility (see Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities 2002). The requirement of Canadian work experience adopted by employers and some occupational regulatory bodies can be bona fide where specificities of the Canadian profession and/or context demand a knowledge of particular laws, practices or ethics. However, it is often used as a means to mitigate risk when a candidate's experience is unknown or unfamiliar, and it is sometimes exploited in a discriminatory fashion to exclude candidates.

The second most common barrier cited by immigrants is credential recognition. According to the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada, of those immigrants who had their credentials assessed, 56 percent were fully accepted, 19 percent were partially accepted, 15 percent were still in process and 11 percent reported that their credentials were not accepted (Statistics Canada 2005). However, having one's credentials assessed does not mean having them recognized and valued by an end-user — that is, an employer or occupational regulatory body.

One of the challenges of credential recognition in Canada is that there is no standardized approach to assessment, and therefore no portability. There is a variety of service providers — including colleges, universities, occupational regulatory bodies and independent assessment service agencies — but there are jurisdictional limitations on the recognition of assessments across provinces and institutions. In addition, there are no standardized methods for allowing immigrants to demonstrate their competencies and experience.

Furthermore, in many cases, employers are not familiar with the value of the assessment. The

Conference Board of Canada has calculated that non-recognition of immigrant credentials costs the Canadian economy $3.42 billion to $4.97 billion annually.[3] Another study, published in 2001, demonstrated a similar impact, estimating that immigrants with foreign credentials earned $2.4 billion less than nonimmigrant Canadians with formally comparable skills. The reason provided was that immigrants worked below their skill level. The study further suggested that at least two-thirds of their unutilized skills, worth $1.6 billion, were in fact transferable to the Canadian context (Reitz 2001).

However, while credential recognition is cited as a key problem, research shows that it has not worsened over the last two decades (Picot and Sweetman 2005). This suggests that it is not the primary causal factor in the falling employment rate and widening earnings gap experienced by immigrants. Other important factors include the discounting of foreign experience, the change in immigrant source countries and the impact of macroeconomics on immigrants.

Recent research that looks at the return on foreign work experience and education shows that foreign work experience is particularly discounted by the labour market: one year of it is worth only about one-third of a year of Canadian work experience. Similarly, foreign education is worth only about 70 percent as much as Canadian education. However, immigrants with a foreign education who also obtain a Canadian credential receive a higher return on their total education, suggesting that a Canadian credential can convert a foreign degree into a more valuable one (Alboim, Finnie and Meng 2005). These findings help to explain some of the variance in earnings between similarly educated immigrants and the Canadian-born.

As we have noted, the shift in source countries for immigration has important implications for labour market performance — Canada now receives far more immigrants from Asia than from Western Europe. This shift results in changes in language capacities and the ethno-racial composition of immigrants. Research suggests that one-third of the decline in earnings among immigrants is attributable to changes in source regions and home language (Picot and Sweetman 2005). Although the source country issue involves a complex blend of factors that are difficult to separate, there is ample research that documents the correlation between race and poverty in Canadian society (Ornstein 2000) and, increasingly, that points to racial discrimination within the labour market (Teelucksingh and Galabuzi 2005). But, again, the issue is complicated by associated factors — foreign credentials, foreign work experience, and language — which make definitive causal linkages difficult to identify.

The shift in source countries may also have an impact on qualifications recognition. Institutions that formally or informally undertake assessments of immigrant qualifications (occupational regulatory bodies, colleges, universities, employers) may not be familiar with the qualifications earned in certain countries, and they may not have the capacity to assess their equivalence appropriately. There may also be real gaps in the qualifications being presented — gaps that must be filled before an equivalency is granted.

Immediate and impending labour market demands

Skill and labour shortages are being felt acutely in particular regions and industries across Canada. In its study of long-term vacancies in small businesses, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business found that the persistent shortage of qualified, skilled labour challenges small-business owners and threatens their growth potential. When polled at the end of 2005, one in two small-business owners in Canada (52 percent) named employee shortages as a point of concern (Bourgeois and Debus 2006).

Skill shortages are particularly evident within the booming oil industry in Alberta, where the shortfall of skilled labour is expected to reach 100,000 workers over the next 10 years. British Columbia is not far behind in its growing need for particular skill sets, with an emphasis on the trades. These demands put mounting pressure on policy-makers to facilitate worker recruitment and develop policies to effectively integrate skilled immigrants into the economy.

A key challenge in this regard is represented by the fact that close to 500,000 applications (for 800,000 people) to immigrate to Canada have been submitted, and there is a four- to five-year wait for processing. Employers are frustrated that there is no means to fast-track applicants whose skills are needed immediately; the process is largely paper-based, so the possibility of conducting searches is limited. They have put pressure on Ottawa to increase the capacity and speed of the Temporary Worker Program, which is jointly administered by CIC and HRSDC, in some cases using that program inappropriately to circumvent the Skilled Worker Permanent Immigration Program. The Temporary Worker Program was designed to either fill short-term needs or bring in temporary personnel until permanent

employees could be found; it was not intended to be a stepping stone in a permanent immigration process.

In 2006, almost 100,000 workers with temporary resident status arrived in Canada. This number has been steadily growing over the last decade and is expected to rise even higher, given the new initiatives announced in the 2007 budget. A two-year investment of $51 million will be made to improve the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, and a significant policy shift accompanied by a two-year, $33.6-million investment will allow skilled foreign workers and Canadian-educated foreign students who are already in Canada to apply for permanent residence without leaving the country. It is expected that these two measures will greatly increase the number of people entering and staying in Canada through "temporary" programs.

While there are certainly some positive aspects to these policy changes, the fact that there will be increased numbers of people in Canada with temporary status hoping to become permanent residents could have some negative repercussions. These include the potential exploitation of temporary workers, suppression of wages in certain sectors, and ineligibility of temporary workers and their families for services. In addition, there will be less incentive for employers to train or hire those immigrants already here and other under- or unemployed individuals. Another potential difficulty of granting permanent residence to an additional 25,000 people from within Canada (as estimated in the 2007 Budget [Finance Canada 2007, 218]) is that because they will be accommodated within current immigration levels, the 800,000 people currently applying for permanent residence directly from abroad will have to wait even longer to come to Canada.

Another mechanism being used to address the need for quicker processing of workers is the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP), which allows provinces and employers to identify particular labour market needs and the people who can fill them. Provinces are also using the PNP to attract immigration to areas other than Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver in order to address their economic and demographic needs.

Immigration remains a core element of Canada's human capital strategy, although there are variations in the specific needs of regions and sectors. The federal government therefore has a Canada-wide priority to deliver clear leadership on this issue.

The Current Landscape

Labour markets are inherently local in nature and have particularities that require responsive and flexible policies and programs. The current reality in the Calgary-Edmonton-Fort McMurray corridor is profoundly different from that in Miramichi or in Hamilton or in Winnipeg. What works in Toronto may not be relevant in Vancouver. Industries vary, labour market shortages are distinct, and conditions for growth are unique. Despite this, however, we require pan-Canadian policies that allow for the development of *all* our human resources and the interprovincial mobility of workers.

New labour market entrants — youth, women, Aboriginal people or immigrants — need appropriate training and linkages to employers. Each group has particular challenges and may require special interventions that address the barriers it faces. In the case of skilled immigrants, it is essential to involve a broad array of stakeholders in the design, development and delivery of such interventions. These stakeholders include post-secondary educational institutions that provide skills assessment, language training or bridging programs; credential assessment services that validate qualifications obtained overseas; occupational regulatory bodies that certify and license for some professions; community agencies that implement federal, provincial and municipal labour market programs; and, of course, all three levels of government, which design, resource and implement immigration and labour market development policies and programs. The existence of this complex web of stakeholders gives rise to the challenge of ensuring coordination, collaboration and coherence while also allowing an effective response to local needs within a pan-Canadian framework.

The complexity of this policy area is the result of the policy silos that have been established for each of the various elements of human capital development. There are discrete areas of responsibility and accountability within departments and ministries federally and provincially, and this makes vertical and horizontal coordination challenging.

Immigration

According to section 95 of the Constitution, immigration is a shared federal and provincial responsibility. CIC has the federal responsibility for both selection and settlement. In terms of settlement, its

responsibilities are constrained by its mandate — that is, it must provide programs and services that relate to the settlement of immigrants (language training and settlement counselling) but nothing explicitly related to labour market integration. In a broad sense, some of the recent developments in language programming include labour market orientation and involve establishing connections with employers, but this is as close to labour market linkages as CIC gets. In fact, the expansion of current settlement programming to include labour market activity would require a change in the terms and conditions of the programs, but that would be welcome. As well, CIC has joint responsibility with HRSDC for determining policy on temporary workers and is a partner in the implementation of provincial nominee programs.

Provincial ministries with responsibility for immigration are cast variously, based on the province's vision and organizational imperatives. Some provinces, like Manitoba, place immigration with labour; others situate it within ministries of employment, human resources or economic development. The provincial linkages of immigration with labour market responsibilities indicate the need for close alignment between these areas in both policy development and program delivery. However, some provinces, like Ontario and Quebec, have separate ministries that mirror the federal construct.

In order to enhance vertical coordination in the delivery of services, CIC has signed immigration agreements with British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, the Yukon and Prince Edward Island. The Canada-Quebec Accord is the most comprehensive of these agreements. Signed in 1991, it gives Quebec full authority to select skilled workers and control over its own reception, language training and integration services. The agreements with Manitoba and British Columbia transfer federal funds and responsibility for settlement services to those provinces. The other agreements focus primarily on information sharing, provincial nominee programs (with the exception of PEI and the Yukon) and international students. The November 2005 agreement with Ontario is the most recently signed; its implementation and funding began in January 2007. While it does not transfer funds to the province, it is comprehensive, covering settlement and language training services and a provincial nominee program, and, importantly, it is the only agreement that includes recognition of the role of municipalities.

Provincial nominee programs allow provinces to determine immigration initiatives that respond to their particular labour market needs. These initiatives can involve nominating immigrants to fill shortages, or nominating those who have been specifically identified by employers, whether or not they fulfill the point system criteria for federal skilled workers; they can also provide for international students to work in the province for two years after completing their studies. In most cases, provincially nominated immigrants are fast-tracked by CIC, since the nominating province has already conducted the selection screening.

Labour market

At the federal level, labour market programming, including implementation of the *Employment Insurance Act*, falls under the jurisdiction of HRSDC. The Act delineates the benefits and supports available to individuals who have lost employment and are seeking to re-enter the labour market. Most of the resources allocated are destined for those individuals with a previous significant Canadian labour market attachment, and they are not generally available to new labour market entrants. In fact, the EI (employment insurance) program has been roundly criticized for covering only a very small percentage of the unemployed (22 percent in Toronto; 25 percent in Vancouver). HRSDC, as noted earlier, is also responsible for the administration of the Temporary Worker Program.

In the 1996 Speech from the Throne, the Government of Canada made a commitment to withdraw from providing labour market training directly and to create new partnerships with the provinces and territories in the form of Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs). These agreements were intended to improve labour market program objectives, such as servicing clients, reducing duplication of federal-provincial programs, and meeting more effectively the needs of regional and local labour markets.

LMDAs have been concluded with all provinces and territories using one of two models. Under the comanaged model, HRSDC delivers employment benefits and support measures but shares responsibility for the design, management and evaluation of these programs with the provinces and territories. Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, British Columbia, the Yukon and Nova Scotia have comanaged models; Nova Scotia's is structured as a strategic partnership — a variation of the comanagement model. The remaining provinces and territories have transfer LMDAs, according to which the provinces and territories assume

responsibility for the delivery and management of labour market programs, which are funded under part 2 of the *Employment Insurance Act*. The 2007 budget contains the federal government's offer to negotiate full-transfer LMDAs with provinces and territories that do not yet have them.

The employment benefits delivered under the LMDAs help unemployed EI-insured individuals gain work experience (Job Creation Partnerships), improve job skills or start new businesses as well as encourage employers to provide opportunities for work experience (Targeted Wage Subsidies). The funding is also used to address human resource, labour market and labour force issues.

The gap in horizontal coordination

While both the immigration agreements and the LMDAs recognize the need for vertical collaboration and coordination, the same level of formalized coordination does not exist horizontally between departments and ministries within a particular order of government. As noted earlier, neither set of agreement focuses specifically on the labour market integration needs of immigrants. Immigration agreements do not focus on the labour market, and while LMDAs facilitate reentry into the labour market for EI-insured individuals, there is a gap in labour market programming for new immigrants, who do not have the same level of Canadian labour force attachment as other EI-eligible workers.

This lack of funding, targeting and coordination in the planning, development and delivery of labour market services and programs for immigrants has a direct impact on the experience of the immigrant and on our ability to maximize available human capital. It challenges the existing policy architecture and demands remedies. Should existing programs and services funded in accord with part 2 of the *Employment Insurance Act*[4] and delivered either at the federal or provincial level be expanded to include immigrants? Or should a new stream of program initiatives targeted at immigrants and funded by other sources be developed?

The federal government has chosen a third path. In the 2007 budget, it announced its intention to establish (beginning in 2008-09) a program to invest $500 million annually through bilateral arrangements with each province and territory to address the gap in labour market programming support for those who do not currently qualify for training under the EI program. While this is a start, there is no particular emphasis on the training needs of the immigrant population, and the amount of funding allocated is likely inadequate to serve all of those not eligible for EI.

The federal government has also created the Foreign Credential Recognition Program within HRSDC to address some of the problems faced by skilled immigrants, but it is limited in size and scope: $68 million over six years has been allocated to implement the program and to develop tools for assessing and recognizing the credentials of foreign-trained individuals, although the federal government will not actually conduct credential assessment. Still, the challenge of integrating skilled immigrants into the labour market requires a more comprehensive and systemic approach.

Other federal departments also play a role here, including Canadian Heritage and Industry Canada. As well, Health Canada has devised a strategy to support the integration of internationally educated health professionals. The federal government has a vital role to play in ensuring that immigration continues to be an important nation-building project and a contributor to a thriving pan-Canadian labour market, and it must therefore find effective ways of responding to the labour market integration needs of immigrants.

Promising Practices

While much attention is paid to statistics and surveys that document the labour market failures of skilled immigrants, some programs, initiatives and practices have met with success. Although six out of ten skilled immigrants may be deemed downwardly mobile, their skills underutilized, four out of ten find appropriate employment — some independently and some through intervention (Statistics Canada 2005). This section reviews several practices that are making a difference.

Work experience

The most commonly cited barrier to employment for skilled immigrants is the requirement of Canadian work experience. An immigrant may have all the academic credentials, language skills and technical skills necessary to practice an occupation but still lack a sufficient knowledge of the Canadian workplace — knowledge of, for example, employment standards and occupational health and safety legislation, workplace cultural expectations and practices,

organizational structures and effective communication styles. Immigrants can acquire this type of knowledge and experience through co-op placements, internships, job-shadowing or on-the-job training.

Of the wide array of employment support programs, the most successful are work experience programs that directly involve employers.[5] These yield professional references and provide Canadian experience, both of which reassure risk-averse employers. As we have mentioned, HRSDC funds a number of generic programs that provide work experience at some level through Targeted Wage Subsidies, Job Creation Partnerships or projects funded through Employment Assistance Services. However, only EI clients are eligible for these programs, and so they have limited relevance for new immigrants.

In Toronto, Career Bridge, an internship program designed by the Career Edge Organization, has been initiated to address the Canadian work experience barrier confronting immigrants; it was funded as a pilot by the Ontario government. The program offers four-to-twelve-month paid internships to recent skilled immigrants who have been screened for language competency and job readiness. Employers pay a program fee that covers administrative costs and give a monthly stipend to the intern. Since the pilot was launched, in the fall of 2003, over 500 internships have been filled; as of January 2007, more than 80 percent of participants have found permanent employment in their field. Projet d'immersion is a Quebec internship program for immigrants who are looking for their first Canadian work experience. It places approximately 360 people per year in Montreal-based positions, providing a six-month wage subsidy to the employer that covers 50 percent of the employment cost. This initiative is a component of the Immigrant and Visible Minority Employment Integration Assistance Program administered by Emploi-Québec. PROMIS (PROMotion-Intégration-Société nouvelle), a community-based organization serving immigrants, is one of the delivery agencies; in 2005, it placed 48 people. The organization monitors the experience of participants, conducting follow-up visits one month and three months after the initial placement. Ninety percent of program participants secure permanent employment (Birrell and McIsaac 2006). In addition, projects funded by the CIC Enhanced Language Training (ELT) Program may include workplace experience.

The challenge for such interventions is to take the program to scale. The demand for internships far surpasses the number of participating employers and positions. At Career Bridge, close to 1,200 qualified and screened candidates for internships remain in the database. A measure of success for such an initiative must be the number of internship-providing employers it can enlist, and on that front, there is still much room for creative policy work — incentives for employer participation are required.

Social capital

As we pointed out earlier, the profile of skilled immigrants has changed dramatically in recent years. Today's immigrants to Canada are more educated, and so they seek more skilled positions in the labour market. Many have the education, experience and language skills to excel in the workforce but lack the social capital — the connections and networks — they need to increase the prospects of a successful job search.

Mentoring is one way of overcoming this barrier (Affiliation of Multicultural and Social Service Agencies of British Columbia 2006). The objective of this strategy is to give under- or unemployed, skilled immigrants access to a person employed in the occupation for which they are trained. The mentor shares professional networks and offers guidance through the job search and/or licensing process; the job-seeking immigrant gains a greater understanding of a specific occupational context and its trends. The objective is not necessarily to find employment for the immigrant in the mentor's place of work, but participating immigrants often secure positions in their field. Mentoring programs have been undertaken through a number of community-based agencies. Successful programs focus on growth sectors in the labour market. They also ensure that a close occupational fit exists between mentor and skilled immigrant worker and that both parties have clear expectations of the match. Finally, they provide training, support and monitoring of matches. However, creating a strong pool of mentors has been difficult. This may be due to the fact that while successful mentoring programs are remarkably cost-efficient, there is a lack of funding for marketing and mentor outreach.

The Mentoring Partnership in the Toronto region, an initiative of the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC), has addressed these challenges directly, mounting a broad-based initiative to consolidate efforts on mentor recruitment and standardizing the service delivery model. In the first year of the program, 1,000 skilled immigrants were matched with mentors. This was a big step forward in taking the mentoring intervention to scale — previously, individual programs would pro-

duce fewer than 50 matches per year. The employment outcomes have also been encouraging. To date, of the 700 participants who have completed the mentoring program, 68 percent have found full-time employment, 46 percent of them in their field.

Funding for the service delivery side of the Mentoring Partnership was made available by HRSDC under the Employment Assistance Services stream, an important policy allowance in making the program available to non-EI-eligible clients. On the mentor recruitment and marketing side of the program, funding was provided by TD Bank Financial Group, the Ontario Trillium Foundation, and the Maytree Foundation. However, the Mentoring Partnership will have to develop a sustainability model to continue mentor recruitment.

Enhanced language and communication

When the profiles of skilled immigrants selected under the current point system are compared to labour market needs, there are some matches. The most common occupations among principal applicants are computer programmer and systems analyst; engineer (electronic, mechanical, civil, computer); financial investor and analyst; financial auditor, analyst and accountant; and business services professional. However, these occupations require not only specific technical skills but also — given the level of education and work experience that most skilled immigrants bring with them and the type of work for which they are most suited — well-developed communication skills.

Such skills are a key to successful employment. Employers have identified lack of language proficiency as a significant barrier to hiring skilled immigrants.[6] Increasingly, immigrants need more specialized language training to improve their communication skills and occupation-specific language skills for the workplace. Skilled immigrants seek employment that is relevant to their education and experience, often professional and mid-management positions. However, most language training programs do not prepare them adequately for this level of employment.

There are many government-supported English- and French-language training programs, and these are funded primarily by CIC through Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada and provincial ministries. While much of the available funding is directed toward basic language training up to Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) levels 6 to 7, immigrants and employers have indicated that most positions require language and communication skills that exceed this level.

Higher-level language training is sometimes provided by school boards, community colleges, universities and private schools. It is generally available for a fee, and can include instruction in advanced writing, public speaking and business communication skills. These programs are not available in all communities, and their quality and content varies. Not all private training schools are regulated, and non-regulated programs are not aligned with CLB levels, which makes portablity difficult.

In 2004, CIC implemented the ELT program. ELT projects address CLB levels 7 to 10 and offer employment-related language training at these levels. The program combines language training with labour market support — such as information on Canadian work culture and the labour market, job search, licensure preparation, bridge-to-work and mentoring components. Program costs can be shared among governments, employers, educational institutions and nongovernmental organizations. The problems with the ELT program are that it has a much smaller budget than basic language training, it is project-based and it requires employer investment wherever project delivery is workplace-based.

Bridge training with a workplace component

A number of occupation-specific and sector-based bridging programs have been developed and implemented. In them, key stakeholders — employers, occupational regulatory bodies and educational institutions — work together to assess immigrants' skills and competencies, to deliver training (including occupation-specific language training) and to provide workplace experience. The objective is to integrate professionals more quickly into the labour market and to avoid compelling them to duplicate their foreign training.

Bridge training projects funded to date involve various sectors. Within the health care sector, there have been projects for nurses, midwives, medical radiation technologists, medical laboratory science technologists, respiratory therapists, dieticians and pharmacists. There have also been projects for those in engineering, precision machining and tooling, information technology for the financial services sector and health informatics, teaching, biotechnology, and apprenticeship preparation for construction and the manufacturing trades. Most bridging programs have been funded by provincial ministries with responsibilities for training, education and/or immigration.

An example from Manitoba is the Early Childhood Educator Qualifications Recognition Project. Initially

developed to address a local shortage of child care professionals, and funded by ELT, the project is a 14-week bridging program for internationally trained early childhood educators. It includes mentoring and work-based assessment using a competency assessment framework. Trainees, employed as registered child care assistants, complete a work placement in a child care centre and have their skills assessed on the job. Assessors use standards and a learning outcome framework that was adapted for the project in consultation with local colleges, professional associations and other stakeholders. The project also works with the Manitoba Academic Credential Assessment Service, provided by the province's labour and immigration department to assess trainees' previously acquired qualifications. As of May 2006, 22 people had successfully completed the program (Birrell and McIsaac 2006).

While the outcomes of this and many other bridging programs have been promising, the programs are only accessible to a small portion of the population and are not yet self-sustaining. Bridging programs do not qualify for the same financial resources for training or academic upgrading as other post-secondary degree or diploma programs. There is a need for a loan program that will enable immigrants to pay for courses, equipment and materials and give them some income support while retraining. This year in Ontario, one such program was announced by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, building on a program funded and delivered by the Maytree Foundation, and it is an excellent start.

Nevertheless, funding formulas for post-secondary educational institutions must be adjusted to support and encourage the development of bridging and modularized initiatives in a way that is sustainable and integrated into the broader systems of training and education. While many colleges across the country have recognized their role in providing labour market preparation programs for skilled immigrants, most universities have not yet acknowledged this as part of their mandate.

Employer capacity

Employers are critical stakeholders in the integration of skilled immigrants into the labour market. All related policies, programs and initiatives should lead to a more effective connection between these two sets of players. While most energy, thinking and investment has so far been focused on immigrant needs, it is equally important to address the shortcomings and requirements of Canadian employers; they need to be better equipped to recruit and retain skilled immigrants. In fact, while the vast majority of new jobs are in small- and medium-sized enterprises, a recent survey by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business found that employers in this sector do not recognize immigrants as an important resource to be tapped (Bourgeois and Debus 2006).

Web sites have been developed to make information and assistance easily available to employers. For example, hireimmigrants.ca provides employers with the tools to improve their human resources practices as they relate to skilled immigrants. The site includes a compilation of employers' stories and strategies related to the successful hiring of skilled immigrants. Companies like Deloitte, RBC, Apotex and Teshmont Consultants are profiled. Similarly, lookingahead.bc.ca, funded by the Government of British Columbia, provides case studies and links to useful tools for BC employers.

The case of hireimmigrants.ca exemplifies the way in which a series of government funding bodies can bring an initiative to life. Canadian Heritage provided the initial funding to research and document promising employer practices. CIC funded the primary development of the site. The Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration funds the ongoing development of the site and its active engagement with employers. This support includes a grant to mount an employer awareness campaign and to create strategies for building the capacity of small- and medium-sized enterprises, which often lack human resources management structures.

Local coordination

As immigrant labour market integration is increasingly recognized as a local issue, there is a growing imperative for cities and regions to provide services that will allow them to reap the social and economic benefits of immigration. New arrangements and relationships are needed if cities and regions are to develop and deliver local strategies for the economic integration of skilled immigrants and provide input on policy direction. For municipal and regional governments, this means a seat at the policy table — or, in some instances, formal agreements that outline their participation. In the case of the recently negotiated Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement, a memorandum of understanding on immigration and settlement was signed in September 2006 that formalizes the collaboration of three orders of government on this issue.

Cities and regions must also be given the means to convene businesses, educational institutions, immigrant groups and other stakeholders in order to identify which programs and services are needed to facilitate individual and community growth and thus attract and

retain all kinds of people — not just immigrants. Local coordination can also be used as a mechanism for both vertical and horizontal coordination, between and within governments and stakeholder groups. But developing the multistakeholder mechanism to envision and effect local solutions to the problem of integrating immigrants into the labour market requires convening capacity.

In September 2003, the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) was established with a mandate to identify local ways of improving access to the labour market for skilled immigrants. TRIEC is a multistakeholder council, led by the private sector, in which over 65 stakeholders from assessment services, community organizations, post-secondary institutions, the employer community, occupational regulatory bodies, labour unions and all three orders of government participate.

While the overall mission of TRIEC is to facilitate the integration of immigrants into the Toronto-region labour market, it has three specific objectives:

- To increase access to value-added services for skilled immigrants: While there are many services available, most do not address directly the particular barriers that immigrants face, they do not match the skill levels of today's immigrants, or they have a limited capacity.
- To change the way stakeholders value and work with skilled immigrants: Educating, encouraging and assisting stakeholders — especially employers, post-secondary educational institutions and occupational regulatory bodies — to understand the issue and to create and promote best practices for integrating skilled immigrants into the labour market.
- To change the way government works on this issue: Generating better labour market outcomes for skilled immigrants through enhanced coordination and collaboration, efficient investments, and adjusted policies and practices across and between all three levels of government.

This third objective involves creating a new environment for intergovernmental cooperation. While this kind of coordination does happen at various levels among federal departments and across provincial ministries, before TRIEC there had been no coordinating effort on the issue of immigrant labour market integration at the local level. TRIEC's Intergovernmental Relations Committee consists of representatives of all departments and ministries in all three orders of government that have an interest in the issue. The committee meets regularly and seeks opportunities for collaboration and new mechanisms for funding, program delivery and policy input.

As a local initiative, TRIEC is well positioned to act as a generator of, and incubator for, ideas and solutions related to immigrant labour market access. Its role is to act as convener, facilitator and solution seeker. Funding for the secretariat function of the council has been provided by CIC and the Maytree Foundation, a private charitable institution. However, the CIC funding was granted on an exceptional basis. Communities that want to replicate or adapt this model of local coordination must establish a dedicated stream of funding to support the activity[7] — despite the fact that many departments and ministries do not prioritize funding for collaborations and are oriented toward project-based contributions.

TRIEC has not proactively introduced itself to other cities or regions; to date, neither expansion nor replication has been part of its mandate. However, similar initiatives have developed elsewhere, indicating a local imperative: the Waterloo region has a well-developed immigrant employment network hosted by the Chamber of Commerce; Ottawa has launched a multistakeholder initiative to engage employers; Vancouver has been convening stakeholders in the issue for a number of years; and there are other examples across Canada that demonstrate varying degrees of capacity and impact.

An important lesson that we can draw from the TRIEC experience is that for an effort in local coordination to be successful, certain basic criteria must be in place. These include, first of all, a strong rationale for engaging in the issue. This would exist in cities or regions that have received large numbers of immigrants, or those that have the potential for economic growth but are experiencing skills and labour shortages and are having difficulty attracting immigrants. A second criterion is an indication of support and readiness. This would be found in cities or regions where there are corporate champions, a host organization with the capacity to convene the relevant stakeholders, and a catalyst to mobilize and lead the initiative, whether individual or organizational. The need for local solutions is well recognized. The challenge is to find the policy and funding instruments to bring local coordination and collaboration to life.

Elements of success

To summarize, success is achieved when policies, programs and initiatives directly address the barriers that skilled immigrants face. When these immigrants are

provided with Canadian work experience, labour market communication skills, specific gap-filling training and mentoring; and when employer capacity is developed; then the critical barriers that prevent effective labour market entry are removed. Also, initiatives that are conceived, developed and implemented with the active participation of all the relevant stakeholders are obviously more likely to generate success, and in the case of immigrant labour market integration, this means employer involvement. Another key to success is the alignment of initiatives with labour market needs. An ongoing challenge for immigrant selection and economic integration has been the dearth of good labour market information. Historically, it has been extremely difficult for employers and governments to accurately forecast labour market needs and for the immigration program to process immigrants expeditiously so that they can bring their skills to the labour market when they are needed. Yet another key to success is the application of a local lens that will permit local labour markets to identify their particular needs.

A Strategic Role for the Federal Government

Given the current landscape, and in light of what we have learned about which policies, practices and interventions actually work, we will explore in this section possible roles for the federal government in creating solutions that are sustainable and that benefit both the immigrant and the country. First, we will consider how the federal government collaborates with other orders of government to facilitate the labour market integration of immigrants. Next, we will review existing federal programming and opportunities for enhancing outcomes for immigrants entering the labour market. Finally, we will look at the current government's proposal to create an office of foreign credential assessment and recognition and consider the ways in which the new federal initiative could be positioned to bring about more effective systemic change and enhanced outcomes.

Collaboration with other levels of government

As we noted in the second section of this paper, two main instruments of federal-provincial collaboration have been implemented: immigration agreements and Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs).

The limitation of immigration agreements is that they do not include labour market programming, because that falls under the purview of HRSDC. LMDAs are limited in that the programs they fund are available only to EI-eligible clients, who, by definition, have significant previous Canadian labour market attachment. As indicated earlier, the current EI program only covers a small percentage of unemployed persons. Skilled immigrants are new labour market entrants, and they therefore fall through the cracks of these two instruments. A federal-provincial innovation on this issue was to have been Labour Market Partnership Agreements (LMPAs), which would have provided labour market programming for non-EI-eligible clients, including new immigrants.

LMPAs

In November 2005, the federal government negotiated and signed LMPAs with the provinces of Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario. These agreements were in addition to the existing LMDAs in Manitoba and Saskatchewan and the LMDA signed with Ontario at the same time. The purpose of the agreements was to support six areas of labour market programming: expansion and enhancement of apprenticeship; labour market integration of recent immigrants; literacy and essential skills; workplace skills development (such as incentives to upgrade skills of existing workers); assistance for Aboriginal Canadians; and assistance for others facing labour market barriers (such as older workers, displaced workers and persons with disabilities).

Then minister of finance Ralph Goodale commented that these agreements represented "a major departure in federal support for an innovative and collaborative approach with provinces and territories. This new partnership agreement will change the architecture of labour market programming and focus on priorities that both levels of government have identified" (Human Resources and Social Development Canada 2005). Funded through general revenues, the financial commitments contained in these agreements were significant: Ontario would receive $1.368 billion over six years, with $292.5 million for recent immigrants; Saskatchewan would get $109.2 million over six years, with $4.35 million for recent immigrants; and Manitoba would get $128.9 million over six years, with just over $7 million for recent immigrants.

Under the terms of the agreements, there were three goals for the labour market integration of recent immigrants:

- To provide better information: Develop labour market information, including provincial occupation

requirements for immigrants prior to, and upon, their arrival in the provinces.

- To improve access to employment-need determination and counselling on relevant employment opportunities: Strengthen the capacity to provide appropriate services for immigrants, including assessment, occupation-specific language training and workplace-based essential skills training.
- To expand bridge-to-work programs: Increase the scope of existing bridge-to-work programs and create new ones that include training, work placements, mentoring, self-employment support and skills upgrading.

The LMPAs, however, were never implemented, as funding for them was not included in the new Conservative government's 2006 budget. This meant the loss of an investment of more than $300 million in programs and services that would have directly addressed the needs of new immigrants and the labour market in three provinces.

It remains to be seen what the impact on immigrants will be of the new program funding announced in the 2007 budget: $500 million annually for those who do not qualify for training under the EI program. Given that the program is not slated to begin until 2008-09, and funds will only flow once bilateral agreements have been negotiated and signed, at least two years of funding for immigrants under the LMPAs has already been lost. No dollars are targeted specifically at immigrants, so a province's per capita allocation does not take into account its proportion of immigrants — which would be high in a province such as Ontario. The competition for these new dollars will be stiff, as the vast majority of unemployed persons are ineligible for LMDA-EI funded programs.

Municipal governments

Immigration is an increasingly important urban fact in Canada, and there is a growing imperative for municipalities to have greater capacity and resources for planning and providing services if they are to realize fully the social and economic benefits of immigration. The Canadian constitutional framework does not technically allow for direct federal-municipal relationships, but there is a practical need for new arrangements and relationships. Cities need to be able to participate in the development of policy direction on issues that are local in nature. They must also have the capacity to work productively with businesses, educational institutions, immigrant groups and other stakeholders to identify the programs and services required to effect the labour market integration of immigrants.

The Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement is the first federal-provincial agreement to include a formal role for municipalities. Annex F outlines the way in which the federal and provincial governments will work with Ontario municipalities and lists their shared priorities. Cities will be represented by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. The agreement also recognizes that the City of Toronto has unique experience and expertise with respect to immigration; for this reason, the federal and provincial ministers signed a separate memorandum of understanding with Toronto in September of 2006 that details the framework in which they will work together. Toronto now sits as a full member at a variety of intergovernmental tables charged with implementing the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement Strategic Plan for Settlement and Language Training. Similar models for ensuring municipal involvement, adapted for different contexts, should be considered for other federal-provincial immigration agreements.

Enhanced federal programming

As outlined earlier, federal programming in this area is divided primarily between CIC (language training) and HRSDC (labour market programming). Within the current landscape of programs and services, there is opportunity to enhance and expand the role of the federal government to deliver better outcomes. Here we offer suggestions for these expansions and enhancements.

Language assessment and training

Assessment

A variety of language assessment tools are available, which are recognized by different end-users (educational institutions, for admission purposes; regulatory bodies, for licensure; language training providers, for placement purposes). Language assessment for employment purposes (CLB levels 7 and above) should be made available through existing language assessment networks. Employment assessment tools should be portable, they should be recognized by end-users and they should provide a certificate with a certified benchmark level. As the primary funder of language training and assessment in Canada, CIC should take the lead, in collaboration with its provincial partners, in designing and implementing such tools. Assessments for employment purposes should include additional components — they should have

the capacity to measure broad communication skills (presenting, reporting, and so on) as well as technical, occupation-specific vocabulary.

Training
Language training programs should be evaluated in light of the needs of a changing, highly skilled and educated immigrant population. Language training programs should be better tailored to skilled immigrants who are seeking immediate access to the labour market in their fields. A number of program delivery enhancements are therefore required: the expansion of federally funded language training programs to CLB level 10; the expansion of ELT; inclusion of components in these programs that address broader workplace communication skills; the provision of exit standards that are relevant to employers; the linkage of language training to bridging and work experience programs; and an increase in program flexibility to ensure accessibility to immigrants prior to, and during, employment. Federally and provincially funded programs must be made complementary and capable of providing the range of language/communication training courses necessary to meet the needs of a varied clientele.

Employer awareness
Employers need to be made more aware of the ways in which language training programs and assessment benchmarks reflect workplace skills and competencies. Also required is employer feedback on how workplace communication and language training can be better designed to serve their needs. CIC, in partnership with provincial governments, should design, develop and implement a language/workplace communication training marketing strategy aimed at employers.

Labour market programming

Much of the labour market programming funded by the federal government that is currently available to immigrants without previous labour market attachment is limited to job search support programs. These programs, whether funded by CIC or HRSDC, should offer a better response to the employment needs and objectives of skilled immigrants; they should be enhanced to prepare skilled immigrants for appropriate employment opportunities. From resumé preparation to networking, skilled immigrants require access to more sophisticated services — those that take into account their level of education and professionalism. Additional features that have proven extremely successful, such as mentoring and work experience opportunities, should be made available. The new federal funding beginning in 2008-09 could potentially allow for the development and enhancement of labour market programming (such as that detailed in the following sections) geared to this population group.

A national mentoring program
Building on the model of the Mentoring Partnership, HRSDC should create a federally funded mentoring program that matches established professionals with newcomer colleagues. Since the service delivery side of the Mentoring Partnership was funded through the Employment Assistance Services stream, this can be replicated across the country. Ideally, the program would be embedded within existing local employment services and infrastructure for skilled immigrants. Alternatively, it could be funded by CIC as part of a modified host program, which would match newly arrived immigrants with Canadian volunteers who would help the immigrants to learn the language and the culture of their new community and to participate in it.

Bridge training
While most bridge training programs are funded by provincial ministries with responsibility for training and education, there is now an opportunity, given the federal government's renewed interest in investing in post-secondary education, to create a sustainable investment stream for bridge training programs. A federal program could create opportunities for coordinated program development across provinces.

Loan programs
Often, immigrants participating in bridge training programs at colleges and universities are not eligible for student loans because the programs are not degree or diploma oriented. The federal government should develop a loan program that would allow immigrants to pay for these courses — as well as assessments, equipment, uniforms and materials — and to have some income support while retraining. The loan program recently announced by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration is an excellent start, but such a resource should be available in all provinces, and the federal government should play a role in supporting its replication, either by complementing provincial student loan programs or by establishing a federal fund similar to the current transportation loan fund for refugees.

Work experience

Employer-led programs that offer work experience to immigrants should be supported with a national strategy that offers a variety of program instruments, including paid internships; wage subsidies; and tax credits, which may be needed to encourage the participation of small- and medium-sized businesses. The work experience should earn the immigrant a Canadian competency credential. The Ontario government has implemented a paid internship program for skilled immigrants, employing 70 people to date, some of whom have already graduated to permanent employment inside and outside government. This could be replicated across the country.

The federal government will not appear credible in its appeal to employers to provide work experience to immigrants if it does not do so itself. It should therefore undertake the necessary policy changes to lead by example and offer internships and other work experience opportunities to immigrants.

A new federal office

In the campaign leading up to the January 2006 federal election, the Conservative Party promised to establish a Canadian agency for the assessment and recognition of foreign credentials. Once in power, the new government followed through on its promise and committed $18 million in the 2006 budget to the establishment of this agency over a two-year period. It was determined in the consultation process that followed that the new entity would have two objectives: to enhance information available to immigrants before and after they arrive in Canada; and to create effective path-finding and referral services. The 2007 budget confirmed the government's intention to establish this entity, called the Foreign Credential Referral Office. The development process continues, and the government intends to open the office in the late spring. In the following section, we discuss activities that could fulfill the office's objectives and suggest ways in which these objectives could be positioned.

Objective one: information

The information gap experienced by immigrants is not caused by a lack of information. In fact, there is a plethora of information, but not all of it is accurate, well coordinated or effectively disseminated. Individuals planning to immigrate to Canada need good information about the context of their profession in this country, practicing requirements and labour market realities. Much of this information is already available on a variety of Web sites, but it is a challenge to locate and access the relevant information and ensure that it is up to date. There is certainly a need for better navigation tools to assist immigrants in their search for occupation- and sector-pecific information — such as educational or regulatory requirements to practice in Canada, employer information, and material on job opportunities and the transferability of skills.

Portals

Several years ago, the federal government created a national portal — called Going to Canada — which is a complex collaborative effort among several departments intended to serve a number of audiences. Now, some provinces are developing their own portals for immigrants, and some cities and regions are doing likewise. The challenge is to ensure that coordination mechanisms are in place to facilitate and enhance the exchange of information between these portals. Existing and new portals should provide multiple points of access to accurate, integrated, generic and occupation-specific information, as well as to on-line tools to begin the process of credential recognition and labour market connection.

In order to make these various portals effective, a coordinated marketing strategy to increase awareness and facilitate access to information both abroad and in Canada will be required. Potential immigrants should be made aware of information resources when they apply to come to Canada. As well, a strategic initiative should be undertaken to ensure the flow of good information to informal channels and ethno-specific communities. Given the overwhelming reliance of new and prospective immigrants on friends and family for information, these people are critical conduits, and connecting with them more effectively is a necessary part of the solution.

Direct service

There are two opportunities to provide information and services directly to skilled immigrant applicants: when they first apply to immigrate to Canada, and when they receive confirmation of their acceptance. On average, these events are separated by more than five years. Upon application, immigrants should be referred to credential assessment services and be furnished with information on the licensing requirements for regulated occupations in all provinces, the Canadian labour market, programs for targeted occupations, self-assessment tools, ways to make their

profiles available to Canadian employers, on-line discussion boards on working in Canada, and recognized language and upgrading programs offered by institutions in their home country or on-line through Canadian institutions. Immigrants should be informed that they can initiate academic credential assessment and even some licensing examination processes before they leave their home country and then continue with the relevant assessment body in Canada.

Once an individual has been approved for immigration, he or she should be given access to Canadian employment applications and on-line mentors. The Foreign Credential Referral Office could develop a model for this in collaboration with provincial governments, professional regulatory bodies, post-secondary educational institutions, service-providing organizations and employer associations. This project could be linked with the pilot project funded by HRSDC, currently being implemented in India, China and the Philippines by the Association of Canadian Community Colleges, that provides information and path-finding sessions to approved immigrants who are still in their home countries.

A database

Research shows that the sooner after arrival immigrants find work appropriate to their skills and education, the better it is for them, their employers and the economy. However, there are currently no systems in place that allow employers access to inventories of people being processed to come to Canada or of newly arrived immigrants. Nor is there a database on which immigrants can post their resumés to be accessed by employers. Therefore, it is nearly impossible for employment matches to be made early enough to expedite labour market entry.

A searchable database for employers containing immigrants' voluntarily posted resumés could match employers with applicants for immigration as well as immigrant visa-holders still overseas and those already in Canada. It would allow employers to tap into a very large labour pool and to make offers of employment; this, in turn, would expedite the processing of applicants whose skills are needed in the short term. An incentive for employers to use the database would be a requirement that they use it before they can receive authorization to bring in temporary foreign workers.

Objective two: path-finding and referral services

Given the jurisdictional complexities of credentials recognition in Canada, the proposed office is correctly positioning itself not to participate in the actual task of assessment recognition, but rather to take on a facilitative role. In fact, this is a logical extension of an information coordination role. Offering referrals to provincial regulatory bodies, assessment services, bridging programs, or municipal and community services appropriate to the individual immigrant is a deeper and more interactive form of information provision. A consideration of where in Canada the person plans to live, as well as his or her particular occupation and the requirements for assessment and practice, would direct the referral. From a jurisdictional point of view, this approach would respect current responsibilities, and it would help to fulfill the need for clear messaging and pathways for skilled immigrants. However, if the office is to be a successful provider of such referrals, it must work closely with provinces and stakeholders to organize a national clearing house for materials on requirements, programs and services, and information access mechanisms.

Proposed objective three: developing tools for stakeholders

Although it was not included in its announced mandate, the office should have a third objective: the development of instruments to improve the process of credential recognition in Canada. Some of this work is currently the responsibility of the Foreign Credential Recognition Program (FCRP), which is presently housed in HRSDC. While the first two objectives have to do with meeting the needs of immigrants in the area of credential assessment and recognition, the third objective should involve those institutions and sectors that are responsible for this: assessment service providers, occupational regulatory bodies, post-secondary institutions and employers. This could be the most exciting component of the office's role.

Credential assessment services

Provincially mandated credential assessment services have already organized themselves within the Alliance of Credential Assessment Services of Canada. The alliance is well positioned to provide enhanced portability of assessments and to strengthen the existing framework of credential assessment services. It has already begun forming relationships with other credential assessment providers and end-users such as regulatory bodies, employers and post-secondary educational institutions, in order to establish common standards and portability. With assistance from the office, a common database of international universities could be created, joint evaluation missions could be undertaken to immigrant source countries by credential issuing

bodies, agreements could be developed among service providers on assessment standards and mutual recognition, and a central referral source could be established to direct immigrants to the appropriate academic credential service before they arrive in Canada. There is also value in reviewing international practices of assessment and credentialing in order to determine their relevance for Canada.

Occupational regulatory bodies
Occupational regulatory bodies, responsible for credential recognition and professional licensing, are accountable to provincial governments. Their assessment, recognition and licensing practices, including their use of standards and accountability frameworks, therefore vary from province to province. Compiling and disseminating best practices and tools would be a valuable role for the office. In addition, the office could work with the provinces and the occupational regulatory bodies in developing standards and establishing accountability frameworks, building on models already in place – such as the interprovincial mutual recognition agreements for occupational mobility, other such agreements in Quebec, or the *Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act*, which was recently passed in Ontario.

Post-secondary educational institutions
Similarly, the office could work with the umbrella organizations of post-secondary educational institutions to support the development of tools and best practices for recognizing immigrant qualifications. These might include prior learning assessment tools, bridging initiatives, modularized learning, co-op and clinical placements, and skills upgrading, which would facilitate replication. A model for College Centres of Expertise in Immigrant Integration has recently been developed by the Association of Canadian Community Colleges, and it could be supported by the office.

Employers
Employers are key stakeholders in the issue, as it is they who ultimately recognize or reject the credentials and skills of job applicants. There are many ways for the office to work with employers. For example, it could increase employer awareness of the value of immigrant skills and help employers to forecast their own labour needs. The office could also introduce employers – particularly small- and medium-sized ones – to the programs and supports that can help them to be more effective in hiring and retaining skilled immigrants. As well, the office could work with employer associations to develop new tools for employers.

All tools for assessment (of language, academic credentials or occupational competencies) should have the confidence of employers and other stakeholders. The office could convene sector councils, other sector-specific employer associations and regulatory bodies to participate in the development, recognition and promotion of sector-specific language and occupational competency assessment tools. In addition, the office could undertake (in partnership with the other stakeholders) a marketing strategy aimed at employers that would build employer confidence in the assessment tools. In the human resources management field, promising practices and policies are emerging related to recruiting, retaining and promoting skilled immigrants; the office could also help to increase employer awareness in this context.

Is an office within CIC the right idea?

Given the challenges presented by the HRSDC and CIC silos, the Foreign Credential Referral Office should be structured in a way that will enhance the coordination and collaboration of these departments and their policies and programs. The office should therefore be an integrated unit that combines the new information and referral functions for immigrants with the stakeholder-focused initiatives of the FCRP; it should have dual reporting relationships with each department and minister, and a common budget to which each department contributes. This structure will signal accountability and create a mechanism for coordination. Separating the information and referral functions from the policy and program levers of the departments would be a recipe for ineffectiveness. It will be necessary for the office to monitor the trends and gaps in service identified through direct contact with clients (immigrants and stakeholders) and to to communicate them to the policy and program arms of the departments in order to respond to changing needs.

The priority of any new federal initiative must be to clarify the issue and improve the situation for immigrants, not to further complicate existing processes. A broad but central problem that emerges in relation to skilled immigrant employment is disconnection. A new federal unit addressing the issue must forge connections. There are multiple stakeholders at every jurisdictional level. Sometimes they play complementary roles and sometimes they play competing ones in their joint objective to achieve immi-

grant employment. The challenge is to bring to this issue coordination and collaboration — to connect players and objectives, and, ultimately, to connect immigrant and employer.

The goals that follow from this vision should be to identify gaps in programming and services and to work actively with federal, provincial and local partners to develop ways to fill those gaps. Connection must be facilitated at a local level: labour markets and employers operate at this level, and it is here that real connections are made and that immigrants find employment. In order to work with employers in a strategic way, the new federal office must have the capacity to coordinate locally. The office should therefore be designed to serve as a funder and facilitator of local coordination. By positioning it as a federal reference point on the issue of immigrant employment and as a facilitator of solutions, the government would significantly enhance accountability on this issue at a national level. Finally, and importantly, as an office within the federal government — a large Canadian employer — the new entity should make the federal public service itself more accessible to immigrants entering the Canadian labour market.

Conclusion

We have attempted to describe the lack of policy and program coherence that currently exists in Canada in relation to the labour market integration of immigrants in the Canadian economy. Labour market programs do not specifically address the needs of immigrants, and immigration programs do not effectively respond to labour market needs. Despite this, there are positive initiatives that could be expanded or enhanced to ensure better labour market outcomes for immigrants. These include interventions specifically targeting immigrants, such as enhanced language/communication training, mentoring, bridge training programs, work experience programs and loan programs.

However, these immigrant-focused interventions alone will not resolve the bigger systemic issues. Initiatives directed at assisting employers, professional regulatory bodies, post-secondary institutions, and other stakeholders to integrate internationally educated immigrants into the workforce are also required, as are changes to the way federal departments work with one another and with other orders of government, and the way in which they respond to local needs. The initiatives announced in the 2007 federal budget regarding temporary workers, the new labour market training architecture and the Foreign Credential Referral Office may make some headway in addressing these issues. However, if they are badly implemented, or if opportunities are not taken to bring coherence to the federal policies and programs, they may actually exacerbate the problem.

Although Canada is often defined by its competing regional priorities, the federal government still has a leadership and coordination role in the area of immigrant employment. The economic union and competitiveness of Canada is dependent on a human capital strategy that works, and a key element of this strategy is immigration. For this reason, the federal government must offer stewardship and solutions. However, there is no silver bullet. Instead, there is a complex policy landscape that requires navigation and coordination.

Past governments, the current government and, in all likelihood, its successors will look for answers to the issue of immigrant employment. A successful resolution will depend on the federal government's capacity to facilitate coordination not only within and among levels of government, but also across sectors and stakeholder groups. The federal government must make the connections and guide the various parties toward sustainable solutions.

Notes

1 These numbers include three broad classes of arrivals: economic immigrants (141,000-158,000), family-class immigrants (67,000-69,000) and refugees (25,900-30,800). Within the economic class – those selected for their skills and/or economic investment – the largest category is made up of skilled workers (90,000-100,500). However, this number also includes spouses and dependants, who may not be labour market destined, and only the principal applicant of these family units is actually assessed on the basis of the point system. It is important to bear in mind that potential labour market entrants do arrive under all categories.

2 For the purposes of this paper, skilled immigrants are defined as individuals who have immigrated to Canada after having acquired a post-secondary education and/or professional training and experience and who are labour market destined – they are not exclusively people who have been selected under the skilled-worker category of the economic class.

3 The figure cited in Bloom and Grant (2001) is even higher, as it includes credential recognition of all Canadians. The figure cited in the present study for the impact of immigrant credentials was provided by Michael Bloom (personal communication, 2004).

4 Part 2 of the Act allows for contributions collected from employers and workers to be used only for labour market re-entry programs and services for EI-eligible clients.

5 The vast majority of employment preparation programs available to new immigrants without previous labour market attachment are limited to job-search supports and workshops, and these do not offer direct connections to employers.

6 The Public Policy Forum found that 46 percent of employers think that immigrants face language and communication barriers in the application phase, 36 percent during the interview phase, and 22 percent during the second interview job offer phase (2004). As well, *Canadian HR Reporter* has found that 81.9 percent of employers have concerns about language issues (2005).

7 In *The Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement: Strategic Plan for Settlement and Language Training*, support for employer engagement through Regional Newcomer Employment Networks (RNENs) was identified as an action area for funding (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2006a).

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Résumé

Tout indique que le Canada continuera d'encourager l'immigration de façon soutenue ; il est donc important de se demander si l'ensemble des politiques actuelles dans ce domaine est efficace et produit les résultats visés — en particulier celui de permettre aux travailleurs immigrants d'occuper un emploi. Des données récentes indiquent que ceux-ci doivent surmonter d'importants obstacles pour trouver un emploi qui correspond à leur expérience et à leur formation.

Comme plusieurs intervenants sont impliqués dans la tâche de faciliter l'accès à l'emploi des immigrants qualifiés, l'élaboration des politiques dans ce domaine et leur mise en œuvre sont fort complexes.

Les deux derniers budgets fédéraux prévoyaient des investissements spécifiquement destinés à améliorer l'intégration des travailleurs immigrants. Plus récemment, le gouvernement a annoncé la création du Bureau de reconnaissance des titres de compétences étrangers (avec un investissement de 13 millions de dollars sur deux ans). Voilà un acteur supplémentaire dans un domaine où les moyens d'action et les dispositions en matière de financement sont déjà nombreux, et la répartition des compétences n'est pas aisée. Avec le mandat qu'on lui a confié, cette nouvelle instance pourrait ajouter à la confusion à moins de devenir un instrument utile pour élucider la situation actuelle et y introduire plus de cohérence.

Dans cet article, Naomi Alboim et Elizabeth McIsaac se penchent sur le rôle que doit jouer le gouvernement fédéral pour favoriser l'intégration des travailleurs immigrants qualifiés au marché du travail. Plus particulièrement, les auteures s'intéressent à la reconnaissance des titres de compétences étrangers et aux stratégies visant à accroître l'employabilité des immigrants.

Les chercheuses tracent d'abord un portrait des immigrants qualifiés, de leurs expériences de recherche d'emploi et de l'état du marché du travail, et analysent ensuite les politiques actuelles. Elles constatent que les programmes gouvernementaux dans ce domaine fonctionnent en silos : il y a d'un côté le développement de l'emploi et de l'autre, l'immigration. Les responsabilités et l'obligation de rendre des comptes sont répartis entre différents ministères et paliers de gouvernement, ce qui crée des problèmes de coordination à la fois verticale et horizontale. À ce titre, les auteures constatent qu'aucune entente fédérale-provinciale et aucun progamme interministériel ne concerne de façon spécifique les besoins des travailleurs immigrants, en tant que groupe distinct, relativement à leur intégration au marché du travail.

En examinant la multitude de programmes et de pratiques, les auteures font le point sur certaines réussites, qui peuvent servir de base pour établir des façons de faire plus efficaces. Elles notent que les initiatives qui obtiennent le plus de succès sont celles qui s'attaquent aux obstacles auxquels font face les travailleurs immigrants et visent les objectifs suivants : aider les immigrants à acquérir une expérience de travail au Canada, leur offrir une formation précise pour combler certains besoins en matière de compétences et améliorer leur habileté à communiquer ; créer des réseaux professionnels ; et accroître la capacité des employeurs à intégrer ces travailleurs. Les initiatives qui sont conçues et mises en œuvre avec la participation active de tous les intervenants concernés sont plus susceptibles de donner des résultats, et, dans le cas de l'intégration des immigrants au marché du travail, cela implique de façon toute particulière la participation des employeurs.

Étant donné la situation actuelle, et en se basant sur les politiques et les mesures qui ont déjà fait leurs preuves, les auteures concluent en faisant quelques recommandations touchant le rôle stratégique du gouvernement fédéral.

- Une meilleure collaboration est nécessaire parmi les différents paliers de gouvernement. Les ententes fédérales-provinciales actuelles doivent être revues pour que les besoins spécifiques des immigrants sur le marché du travail soient pris en compte. On doit aussi reconnaître le rôle des municipalités, et leur donner les capacités et les ressources nécessaires pour offrir des services.
- Dans le cadre des programmes et services actuels, il est possible d'améliorer et d'étendre le rôle du gouvernement fédéral pour gagner en efficacité — par exemple en ce qui concerne les services d'évaluation et de formation en matière linguistique, la sensibilisation des employeurs, le mentorat, la formation pour faciliter la transition, les prêts étudiants et les programmes de stages rémunérés.
- Le mandat du Bureau de reconnaissance des titres de compétences étrangers, qui ouvrira au printemps de 2007, doit être clarifié et élargi. Le premier objectif de l'organisme étant de fournir une meilleure information aux immigrants, les auteures recommandent que l'accent soit mis sur la coordination des réseaux d'information existants et sur l'établissement de liens efficaces entre eux très tôt dans le processus d'immigration. Elles recommandent également qu'il facilite la création de réseaux entre les futurs immigrants (avant leur arrivée au pays) et les employeurs. Concernant le deuxième objectif du Bureau — offrir un service de référence sous forme de guichet unique —, les auteures insistent sur l'importance de la collaboration étroite entre le fédéral, les provinces et les autres intervenants pour mettre sur pied un centre national qui recueillirait l'information sur les exigences professionnelles des différents secteurs d'occupation, les programmes et les services disponibles, et dont les points d'accès seraient facilement repérables. Les chercheuses proposent enfin un troisième objectif pour le Bureau : créer des outils pour améliorer la reconnaissance des titres et des compétences au Canada. Pour ce faire, les institutions directement concernées (fournisseurs de services d'évaluation, organismes de réglementation professionnels, institutions d'enseignement postsecondaire et employeurs) devront s'impliquer davantage.

L'ensemble des politiques publiques actuelles touchant l'accès à l'emploi des travailleurs immigrants qualifiés est très complexe, et requiert une meilleure orientation et plus de coordination. Cette tâche repose sur la capacité du gouvernement fédéral à accroître la collaboration des différents paliers de gouvernement mais aussi la coopération entre tous les intervenants concernés. C'est le gouvernement fédéral qui doit faciliter ces liens et guider les parties dans la recherche de solutions durables.

Summary

With strong indications that Canada will maintain its commitment to sustained levels of immigration, it is important to consider whether the current public policy architecture functions effectively and produces the desired outcomes. One of the most important of these is successful immigrant employment. Recent evidence indicates that skilled immigrants face significant barriers to finding employment commensurate with their experience and education.

There are many players involved in the task of improving employment opportunities for skilled immigrants, and this multiplicity of stakeholders makes finding and implementing policy solutions a complex task.

The last two federal budgets made explicit investments aimed at improving labour market outcomes for skilled immigrants. Most recently, the proposed Foreign Credential Referral Office, with a $13 million investment over two years, represents yet another response to an already cluttered mix of policy instruments, funding arrangements and jurisdictional complexities. As such, it could either become a useful tool to help clarify the landscape and improve its coherence, or it could add to the noise and confusion.

In this paper, Naomi Alboim and Elizabeth McIsaac focus on the federal government's role in improving skilled immigrants' employment integration, paying special attention to foreign credential and skills recognition, as well as effective labour market integration strategies.

Following an overview of the profile of these immigrants, their experiences in finding employment, and the labour market context, the authors survey current policies. Government policies and programs on immigrant employment are characterized by silos for labour market development, on the one hand, and for immigration, on the other. The existence of separate areas of responsibility and accountability between federal and provincial departments and ministries produces challenges in coordination, both vertical and horizontal. One challenge is the fact that neither the horizontal nor the vertical agreements focus specifically on the labour market integration needs of immigrants as a particular population group.

In reviewing the existing array of programs, projects, and practices, Alboim and McIaac provide examples of successes upon which we can build. The most successful initiatives are the ones that directly address the barriers faced by skilled immigrants – helping them gain Canadian work experience, get training to fill specific skills gaps and enhance their communication skills; creating professional networks; and building employer capacity. Initiatives that are conceived, developed and implemented with the active participation of all the relevant stakeholders are obviously better positioned to generate positive outcomes, and in the case of immigrant labour market integration, this entails very specifically the participation of employers.

Given the current situation, and based on the policies, practices and interventions that actually work, the authors propose a number of recommendations, with a focus on the strategic role of the federal government.

- There must be better collaboration among all levels of government. Existing federal-provincial agreements must be enhanced so that the specific labour market needs of immigrants can be effectively addressed. There is also a need to recognize municipalities' role and to improve their capacity and resources for planning and for providing services.
- Within the present landscape of programs and services, there is an opportunity to enhance and expand the federal government's role in order to deliver better outcomes. This includes improving services for language assessment and training, employer outreach, mentoring, bridge training, student loans, and subsidized work experience programs.
- The stated mandate of the Foreign Credential Referral office, scheduled to be opened in spring 2007, needs to be clarified and further developed. Regarding the new Office's first objective, which is to provide better information to immigrants, the authors recommend that the focus be first, on coordinating existing channels of information and providing effective links between them early in the immigration process, and second, on facilitating the creation of networks among prospective immigrants and employers while the immigrants are still overseas. With respect to the second objective of the office, which is to provide a one-stop referral service, the authors stress that the government will have to work closely with provinces and stakeholders to organize a national clearing house to collect information on occupational requirements, programs and services, with clear points of access. The authors propose a third objective for the office – to develop tools to improve credential and skills recognition in Canada. They argue that to achieve this there should be more involvement by the institutions that have direct responsibilities in this area: assessment service providers, occupational regulatory bodies, post-secondary institutions and employers.

The current policy architecture for facilitating skilled immigrant employment is a complex landscape that requires navigation and coordination. Finding successful solutions will depend on the federal government's capacity to improve collaboration not only within and between levels of government, but also across sectors and stakeholder groups. The federal government must make these connections and guide the various parties toward sustainable solutions.