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May 22, 2007

NEWS RELEASE

Immigrants Falling through the Cracks, says IRPP Study

Federal government needs to play a strategic role in coordinating the multiple layers of organizations, programs and services aimed at improving immigrants' employment outcomes

Montreal – Because of the labour shortages expected as a result of an aging population, the federal government plans to maintain high levels of immigration for some time. This makes the successful integration of newcomers into the labour market all the more important. The problem, according to the IRPP study being released today, is that Canada's policies designed to that effect are not working as well as they should.

Authors Naomi Alboim (Queen's University) and Elizabeth McIsaac (Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council) review the existing array of immigrant employment programs, projects and practices in Canada, and conclude that there is a lack of coherence as a result of too many stakeholders working on different aspects of the problem. The role of the federal government, say the authors, should be to improve collaboration and make the connections among the various parties involved. The paper serves as a reminder that if Canada is to continue to reap the immense benefits of immigration and meet its impending labour market demands, it must ensure that newcomers are integrated successfully into the workforce.

According to the authors, part of the problem stems from the "policy silos" at the federal level created by the division of responsibilities between the departments of Citizenship and Immigration (CIC) and Human Resources and Skills Development (HRSDC). The former is responsible for selection and settlement of immigrants – though not specifically their labour market integration. The latter is responsible for labour market programming in general, and the implementation of the *Employment Insurance Act*. The end result is that no department is specifically tasked with immigrant labour market integration, and this important responsibility falls in between the silos.

The authors suggest a variety of policies and directions that would improve the employment outcomes of skilled immigrants, with a focus on the strategic role of the federal government. Among their recommendations:

- ◆ Enhancing federal/provincial agreements so that the specific labour market needs of immigrants can be effectively addressed. There is also a need to recognize

municipalities' role and improve their capacity and resources for planning and for providing services.

- ◆ Expanding the federal government's role in order to achieve better outcomes. This includes improving services for language assessment and training, employer outreach, mentoring, bridge training, student loans, and subsidized work experience programs.
- ◆ Clarifying and expanding the stated mandate of the new Foreign Credential Referral Office in order to:
 - Create networks among employers and prospective immigrants while they are still overseas
 - Provide a one-stop referral service, which would require the federal government 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
 - Develop tools to improve credentials and skills recognition in Canada and better involve institutions that have direct responsibilities in this area: assessment service providers, occupational regulatory bodies, post-secondary institutions and employers.

"Making the Connections: Ottawa's Role in Immigrant Employment," by Naomi Alboim and Elizabeth McIsaac, can be downloaded for free from www.irpp.org

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