

Federal Pre-Budget Consultations 2022

World Education Services (WES)

February 2022

Summary: Priority Recommendations

1. Build an immigrant-inclusive economy as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic
 - Invest in labour market research to enable access to timely labour market information to identify skills shortages and inform targeted skills-training programs
 - Catalyze innovation and support scalable solutions that improve labour market alignment with immigrants' skills, credentials, and experiences with known and projected labour/skills shortages
 - Support the development, implementation, and evaluation of inclusive, equitable recruitment and hiring strategies that incorporate immigrants and refugees, such as competency-based practices
 - Implement tax incentives for small and medium enterprises to encourage immigrant recruitment and retention to ensure Canada benefits from increased immigration targets
 - Promote inclusive economic growth by investing in social procurement models, including Community Benefits Agreements, that can drive local economies and provide social and economic benefits for all
 - Continue to collect and report on disaggregated, race-based data to better understand the short and long-term impacts of the pandemic on equity-seeking communities
 - Leverage government infrastructure and invest in programs to enable racialized immigrant women and youth to enter high quality employment in sectors with skills shortages
 - Take tangible steps to confront growing xenophobia, racism, and polarization in Canadian society, which impacts immigrants and refugees' integration into the labour market and local communities
2. Rebuild the health care workforce by ending the underutilization of immigrant health professionals
 - Expedite permanent residency status and work permits and for internationally trained health care workers
 - Streamline the LMIA process for individuals seeking to enter health occupations in Canada
 - Convene relevant stakeholders to develop and implement a cohesive pan-Canadian health care workforce strategy that addresses the immigration, licensure and workforce inclusion pathways of immigrant health professionals

- Improve IRCC’s data collection on educational background and intended occupation for all classes of immigrants and continue IRCC’s collaboration with Statistics Canada to develop the Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB)
 - Leverage 2021 Census data on fields of study and current occupations of IEHPS to identify how many IEHPS are in Canada and whether they are working in the fields they trained for
3. Address the needs of international students and temporary work permit holders
 - Expand the existing Post-Graduate Work Permit (PGWP) program to facilitate labour market entry into sectors experiencing labour/skills shortages
 - Expand scope of settlement and integration services to include international students and temporary work permit holders
 4. Ensure that all provinces and municipalities benefit from immigration
 - Support smaller and rural communities in attracting, recruiting, and retaining immigrants and refugees, with cultural integration supports and constructive measures to counter xenophobia
 - Invest in the promotion of labour market opportunities in small, rural, and Northern communities to encourage relocation/resettlement
 5. Build seamless immigration and settlement model that connects policy to implementation
 - Ensure that labour market information, including international credential recognition, registration/licensure requirements, and information about alternative career pathways is easily accessible to immigrants and refugees at the appropriate time in their immigration journey

1. Build an immigrant-inclusive economy as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic

With an aging population and low birth rates, Canada is one of many countries globally that **relies** on the migration of internationally-educated immigrants and students for economic and workforce stability. However, the socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have disproportionately and negatively affected new **immigrants**, in particular, **racialized** immigrant women and **youth**. Employment rates for these populations **dropped** more significantly throughout 2020, and were slower to recover throughout 2021.

At the same time, economic recovery from the pandemic has resulted in a sharp rise in job vacancies throughout 2021, with vacancies reaching an **all-time high** of 912,600 in Q3 of 2021. As Canada looks to **welcome** over 1.3 million immigrants and refugees between 2022 and 2024, it is more important than ever to ensure that all individuals are able to fully contribute their skills and experience to the labour market through meaningful, commensurate employment.

Recent research shows that individuals who participate in skills development interventions earn higher incomes and are **more likely** to find jobs after training. Wraparound supports, including **childcare** and mental-health services, are critical to supporting immigrant women enter and advance in the workforce. As educational and skills-training programs adapt to digital and hybrid-delivery, ensuring equitable access to technology-enabled services, including through digital literacy training, will also be critically important.

Achieving equitable economic and labour market integration for immigrants and refugees will also require an expansion of targeted, demand-driven training and re-skilling programs, including sector-based training.

The success of Community Benefit Agreement **initiatives** supported by WES have facilitated high quality employment opportunities for immigrants and refugees in the construction sector in Ontario. These types of social procurement models should be amplified and scaled to promote maximum benefits for workers and communities.

Achieving equitable economic and labour market integration will also require inclusive attitudes and behaviors on the part of employers.

An inclusive economy and labour market ultimately requires inclusive and welcoming attitudes from community members. Recent **displays** of xenophobia and racism in Canada must be confronted.

Recommendations:

- Improved **access** to timely, disaggregated labour market information and tools so that people and businesses are able to make informed decisions about training and employment options.
- Build on the Labour Market Information Council (LMIC) and predictive modeling initiatives, such as the **Canadian Occupational Projection System** (COPS).
- Promote competency-based assessment and hiring practices amongst employers as critical **key** to recognizing needed and available talent.
- Promoting investments in and adoption of social procurement strategies and models, including Community Benefits Agreements, will also be key to supporting inclusive economic recovery and growth.
- Take concrete measures to address persistent and rising xenophobia and racism.
- Adopt accountability measures and provide funding to community-based anti-racism and anti-hate initiatives.
- Collect and report on disaggregated, race and gender-based data to better understand the short and long-term impacts of the pandemic on equity-seeking communities.

2. Rebuild the health care workforce by ending the underutilization of immigrant health professionals

The pandemic has exposed vulnerabilities and strained the health care workforce globally. Across Canada, provinces are facing **critical staffing shortages** in health care, including long-term care. Thousands of internationally educated health professionals (IEHPs) stand ready to contribute their skills and training in Canada, but too many struggle with unreasonable barriers to re-entering and advancing in their professions. The contributions of IEHPs are vital to Canada's health system, with immigrants **comprising** 25.5% of the health care and social assistance sector in Canada. However, many IEHPs, in particular, racialized, immigrant women, are **underemployed** or unemployed outside the health sector.

Recommendations:

- Expedite permanent residency status and work permits for health care workers.
- Streamline Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) processes for workers in health care occupations.
- Convene all stakeholders necessary to develop and implement a cohesive pan-Canadian health care workforce strategy . strategy that addresses the immigration, licensure and workforce inclusion pathways of immigrant health professionals.
- Facilitate the collection and analysis of accurate, comprehensive, and meaningful data illustrating the scope and challenges facing the IEHP community.
- Undertake a collaborative study by IRCC, ESDC, Health Canada, and Statistics Canada, using 2021 census data on field of study and current occupations of immigrants and refugees in Canada, to provide an enhanced picture of the total pool of internationally educated health professionals in Canada and better inform programmatic and policy solutions.
- Improve data collection on educational backgrounds and intended occupations for all classes of immigrants, including temporary workers, utilizing a race and gender analytical lens.

3. Address the needs of international students and temporary work permit holders

Canada remains a top destination globally for international students **because** of the quality of the education system, Canada's reputation as a tolerant society, and Canada's reputation as a safe country. A recent **survey** of 3,650 students from 55 countries worldwide showed that 39% of students identified Canada as their first choice for postsecondary studies.

The international student population in Canada has **tripled** in the last ten years. As of December 2019, there were 498,735 post-secondary international students in Canada, a 13% increase since just 2018.

International students make up **roughly** 18% of Canada’s post-secondary enrollment and it is estimated that this group contributes over \$22 billion to the economy annually, **supporting** over 170,000 jobs. According to a recent survey from CBIE, **approximately** 60% of international students are interested in becoming permanent residents in Canada after completing their postsecondary education. Enabling this pool of young, skilled, and motivated individuals to pursue their personal and professional goals in Canada should be a priority for the Canadian government.

The pandemic has exacerbated longstanding issues facing international students. This includes **financial** barriers; lack of **access** to settlement and career services through postsecondary institutions, and; **delays** securing Post-Graduate Work Permits (PGWP).

Recommendations:

- Expand the scope of settlement and integration services to include international students and temporary foreign workers.
- Monitor the impacts of PGWP **reforms** on international student outcomes.
- Expand **two-step pathways** that enable international students graduating from postsecondary institutions to transition to permanent residency.

4. Ensure that all provinces and municipalities benefit from immigration

Settlement and immigration patterns **reveal** that most immigrants and their families settle in large cities, such as Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. Smaller, rural, and northern communities continue to face **challenges** in recruiting and retaining immigrant and refugee talent to fill labour shortages.

Recent initiatives, including the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot, Atlantic Immigration Pilot, and the Municipal Nominee Program (MNP) complement federal immigration programs and have shown **positive outcomes** in terms of attracting immigrants to rural and smaller communities across Canada.

Recommendations:

- Expand on successful regional immigration initiatives that enable immigrants and refugees to obtain employment and settle long-term in small, rural, and northern communities
- Communicate employment opportunities to new immigrants and refugees through enhanced pre-arrival information
- Deepen support to small, rural, and Northern communities in their **efforts** to combat xenophobia
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5. Build a seamless immigration and settlement model that connects policy to implementation

A major **challenge** in Canada's immigration and settlement model is overlap in services, which can be confusing and frustrating for immigrants, refugees, and international students who want to access resources, support, and programs easily and quickly. Web-based information on available programs and services is overwhelming and difficult to navigate and services are often delivered in isolation leading to the duplication of efforts.

Recommendations:

- Expand the provision of pre-arrival information regarding international credential recognition and alternative careers to prospective immigrants.
- Undertake a detailed review of the current settlement model to determine opportunities for improvements that can create a seamless, end-to-end immigration and settlement experience.

About World Education Services

World Education Services (WES) is a non-profit social enterprise dedicated to helping international students, immigrants, and refugees achieve their educational and career goals in the United States and Canada. For more than 45 years, WES has set the standard of excellence in the field of international academic credential evaluation.

Through WES Global Talent Bridge, the organization joins with institutional partners, community-based organizations, and policymakers to help immigrants and refugees who hold international credentials fully utilize their talents and education to achieve their academic and professional goals. Its philanthropic arm, the WES Mariam Assefa Fund, supports catalytic leaders and organizations working to build inclusive economies and to ensure that immigrants and refugees can achieve their aspirations and thrive. Since 2013, WES has been a designated provider of Educational Credential Assessments (ECAs) for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.