

IMMIGRATION POLICY AT MAYTREE



Canada's immigration and refugee policies work in the national interest when they are committed to attracting our future citizens, not when they aim solely to fill short-term labour market gaps. We must provide immigrants and refugees with the tools they need to succeed.

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Maytree develops, tests and implements programs and policy solutions related to immigration, integration and diversity in the workplace, in the boardroom and in public office. Maytree undertakes research and policy analysis to support this work and to ensure that findings from these programs are communicated and translated into good public policy.

Immigration Is Essential to Canada's Future

Canada needs immigrants. A vibrant immigration program is essential to maintain or grow the population base, achieve labour market growth and contribute to innovation. Projections show that net immigration may become the only source of population growth by about 2030 and could account for virtually all net labour force growth by 2011.

Traditionally, the majority of immigrants arrived through the skilled worker class which evaluates the principal applicant on a point system and gives high marks to those with good language skills, high levels of education and work experience. Research suggests that this group of immigrants brings the skills needed for adapting to Canada's evolving economy and fares best economically, because both parties (Canada and immigrants) make a long-term commitment to each other. They arrive as permanent residents and after three years can apply for Canadian citizenship. As permanent residents, and later citizens, these individuals are the cornerstone of our nation building strategy: They work, volunteer and contribute to Canada in many ways. They put down roots, have children and become a long-term feature of the Canadian cultural, social and economic landscape.

However, there are four trends that are shifting our immigration program away from its focus on long-term economic needs and nation-building to one that focuses solely on short-term labour market needs.

Restrictions to the Federal Skilled Worker Class: Fewer immigrants are eligible for the Federal Skilled Worker Class because of the Occupation List which was created by Ministerial Instructions in 2009. Immigrants whose occupations are not on the list, or do not have a pre-approved job offer, are no longer able to immigrate through this Class. This assumes that Canada is able to accurately predict labour market trends, something which we have never been able to do successfully. In the meantime, however, potential skilled



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workers are not able to apply, barring us from a significant potential supply of skilled workers.

Expansion of Provincial Nominee Programs: There has been a rapid increase in the numbers of immigrants recruited through Provincial Nominee Programs which allow provinces to select immigrants based on regional needs.

Growth of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program: The Temporary Foreign Worker Program is growing exponentially, particularly the “Low Skill” Pilot Project which recruits foreign workers for jobs requiring only high school education or on-the-job training. Temporary foreign workers are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse and do not have access to the same supports and services as permanent residents.

Creation of the Canadian Experience Class: This program provides an avenue for permanent residence for qualifying international students and highly skilled temporary workers. While this program welcomes an excellent pool of immigrants, it could squeeze out the skilled worker class.

Policy Ideas to Reform Immigration

- 1. The best short- and long-term strategy to meet our labour market needs is through the Federal Skilled Worker Class. This should be a priority for investment and improvement.**

The Federal Skilled Worker Program should be treated as the cornerstone of economic immigration to Canada and the Occupation List should be immediately discontinued. Skilled worker applicants should comprise the largest proportion of economic immigrants and receive priority processing. More resources should be devoted to eliminating the backlog and processing new applications quickly.

To strengthen the program, the federal government should also give more points for younger applicants, family connections and tradespersons, and develop language tests for those arriving from non-English or non-French speaking countries.

In addition, the federal government should create a searchable database of the résumés of skilled worker applicants and facilitate overseas recruitment sessions for these applicants. Employers would be required to search the database before being considered for approval to recruit temporary foreign workers.

2. Eliminate the “Low Skill Pilot Project” for temporary foreign workers.

Temporary foreign workers who are recruited to fill jobs which require only on-the-job training or high school education are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. We risk developing Canada’s own version of the failed European guest workers’ program which led to a large undocumented population. Unlike the Live-In Caregiver Program which has a built-in transition to permanent residence, and the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program which is tightly controlled, the “Low Skill” Pilot has enough loopholes to make it highly vulnerable to abuse. It will also lead to a growing undocumented community as it is likely that these temporary foreign workers will not leave on the expiration of their work permits. Undocumented persons live on the margins of society, face increased risks of exploitation, and are unable to fully participate in Canadian social and political life.

To fill low-skilled jobs, Citizenship and Immigration Canada should increase family class and refugee admissions. As permanent residents, they have rights and access to services. Increasing points in the Federal Skilled Worker Program for occupations that are in demand, the trades, and validated job offers will also broaden the pool of workers.

3. Expand immigrant services to include new citizens, temporary workers, international students and refugee claimants.

Settlement services are essential to facilitate full integration into Canadian society. In fact, research suggests that those who are provided with services experience better employment outcomes. Temporary workers, international students and refugee claimants do not qualify for federally-funded settlement services until they are approved in principle for permanent residence. This delay can hinder their ability to integrate successfully. On the other hand, new citizens are not eligible for federal services even though it takes only three years to be eligible for Canadian citizenship. Language training and other settlement services are often still required after that period of time.

Further Reading:

Naomi Alboim and Maytree. (2009). *Adjusting the Balance*, July.

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