

TORONTO REGION IMMIGRANT EMPLOYMENT COUNCIL (TRIEC)



**Immigration and
Integration**

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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The Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) accelerates the employment of immigrants, relevant to their training and experience, in order to strengthen the local economy. TRIEC brings together employers, regulatory bodies, educators, labour, community groups, government and immigrants to strategize and lead this process. It connects employers to programs that can help them hire better; it educates the public through media and events; and it brings together partners in new and unique ways.

Engaging Local Employers on Immigration Issues

Immigration continues to play a vital role in contributing to labour market growth, productivity and economic competitiveness in Canada. However, the extent to which the skills and experience of immigrants can be effectively leveraged to realize this role remains challenged by our ability to recognize and integrate skilled immigrants into local economies. Employers have an essential role to play.

Some employers do not understand the work experience of immigrant applicants, are not familiar with their credentials, or are concerned that immigrants do not have good communication skills. This leads to widespread non-recognition of immigrant qualifications by employers.

Only four out of ten immigrants find appropriate employment, some independently and some through labour market programs. Roughly six out of ten skilled immigrants experience downwardly mobility and underemployment. Some programs, initiatives and practices have met with success, and future initiatives should build on these successes. All of the following ideas could be led by the Foreign Credential Recognition Office, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, in consultation and cooperation with the provinces.



Elizabeth McIsaac

Elizabeth McIsaac is the Executive Director of TRIEC. She has worked with TRIEC since it was launched in 2003 as a project of Maytree. She has also held various positions at Maytree, most recently as the director of policy. Before joining the Foundation, Elizabeth was the executive director of the Association of International Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, a non-governmental organization advocating for policy changes that would create better access to licensing for immigrant doctors. Previous to this she worked in direct service with immigrant and refugee communities, as well as holding various roles in research and teaching.

Policy Ideas for Skilled Immigrants and Local Economies

1. Implement national internship programs that provide work experience opportunities for skilled immigrants.

Internships, or work experience programs more generally, are successful employment support interventions because they involve employers directly. On average, more than 80 percent of participants find full-time work in their field upon completion of the program – a highly successful outcome, both for the individual and the economy.

The demand for internships far exceeds the number of participating employers and positions. In many cases, there are employers and communities across the country that would welcome an internship program, but lack the capacity required to establish one or to take a program to scale. New immigrants are not eligible for Employment Insurance programming, and as a result they cannot access the vast majority of work experience programs offered across the country.

A national internship program for skilled immigrants who do not have previous labour market attachment should leverage the participation of employers across the country through a variety of instruments, including paid internships, as well as wage subsidies and tax credits. These incentives may be needed to encourage the participation of small- and medium-sized businesses.

2. Implement national programs that provide mentoring opportunities for skilled immigrants.

Mentoring programs connect skilled immigrants with a colleague or mentor who is established in their occupation or profession. Almost 80 percent of surveyed participants in The Mentoring Partnership (a program of TRIEC) have found work in their field.

Mentoring programs offered by community agencies face challenges in accessing high quality mentors, lack marketing resources, experience inconsistent program standards, and lack coordination among the many agencies offering similar programs. In addition, they lack funding even though mentoring programs demonstrate significant cost efficiency. A national mentoring program would support communities through the development of tools and coaching for consistent standards in program delivery, allow for enhanced program coordination, increase employer participation, and provide reliable and sustained funding.

3. Dedicate funds to the development of occupation-specific training opportunities across Canada.

Bridging programs are training programs which fill any gaps in knowledge or skills, and integrate immigrant professionals more quickly into the labour market, avoiding duplication of their education and training. Most bridging programs have been funded by provincial ministries with responsibilities for training, education and/or immigration, and while the outcomes of bridging programs have been promising, their development and growth has varied significantly across the country. Some bridging programs do not qualify for the same financial resources for training or academic upgrading as other post-secondary degree or diploma programs. The federal government should create a sustainable investment stream for the development and coordination of bridge training programs across provinces and territories.

4. Create a national strategy for employers so that they are better able to recruit, retain, and promote skilled immigrants in their workplaces.

A national strategy to develop awareness among employers, create and disseminate tools that support employers in working with immigrants, and connect employers to programs and supports is required. This strategy should focus on:

- increasing employer awareness of the value of immigrant skills and immigration to the economy;
- convening 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;
- identifying the incentives that would encourage employers, particularly small and medium-sized employers, to participate in work experience programs; and
- creating a single point of entry for employers to find resources, supports and incentives, in order to reduce the red tape and complexity, particularly for small and medium-sized employers.



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