



Canadian Employee Relocation Council  
(CERC)

The Impact of Processing Delays of Work  
Permits and Immigration Visas on Canadian  
Employers

January 5, 2021

## **The Impact of Processing Delays of Work Permits and Immigration Visas on Canadian Business**

The Corona Virus (COVID-19) created significant challenges for the Government of Canada in the processing of work permits and business visas throughout 2020. Visa offices were closed, staff within the department of Immigration Refugees Citizenship Canada (IRCC) were redeployed, lockdowns required work from home without advance planning – all which have resulted in extensive delays for employers in accessing and on-boarding highly skilled international talent.

This report, based on recent survey findings, outlines how those delays have impacted the operations of Canadian employers. The online survey was conducted during the months of November and December 2020. A total of 26 organizations that regularly access international mobility programs participated in the survey.

The key findings and recommendations are summarized in this report.

## **About the Canadian Employee Relocation Council**

The Canadian Employee Relocation Council (CERC) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to removing barriers that restrict mobility and deployment of human capital, which are vitally important to Canada's future prosperity. Established in 1982, the Council represents the interests of its members on workforce mobility matters. Many of the Council's members are listed in Canada's Financial Post Top 500.

### **Copyright**

This document or any part thereof, may not be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means without the express prior written consent of the Canadian Employee Relocation Council.

© 2021 Canadian Employee Relocation Council (CERC).

All rights reserved.

Canadian Employee Relocation Council

Suite 1711, 44 Victoria St.

Toronto ON M5C 1Y2

416-593-9812

1-866-357-CERC (2372)

[www.cerc.ca](http://www.cerc.ca)

*Leadership for Workforce Mobility*

## Participating Organizations

Air Canada

Apple

Babcock Canada Inc.

Ballard Power Systems Inc.

Business Travel and Management Services

Canada Post

CGI Inc

CPPIB

Finning International

GHD Limited

Husky Energy

IBM Canada

J.D. Irving, Limited

L3HARRIS

McCain Foods Limited

McKinsey Company Canada

Nestle Canada Inc.

Nutrien

NVIDIA Development Inc.

PCL Constructors Inc.

Pembina Pipeline Corporation

TD Bank

Teck Resources Ltd.

University of Saskatchewan

WestJet

Zynga

## Key Findings

*“Unless addressed, increasing processing times are likely to have a negative impact on our business operations within the next year.”*

*“In 83 per cent of organizations, cancelled or delayed projects are the most common consequence of the delays.”*

### Industry breakdown – Top 5 sectors

Participating organizations came from a broad cross section of Canadian industry and rely on access to international talent to fill skills gaps and meet talent needs. The top five sectors represented in the survey were:

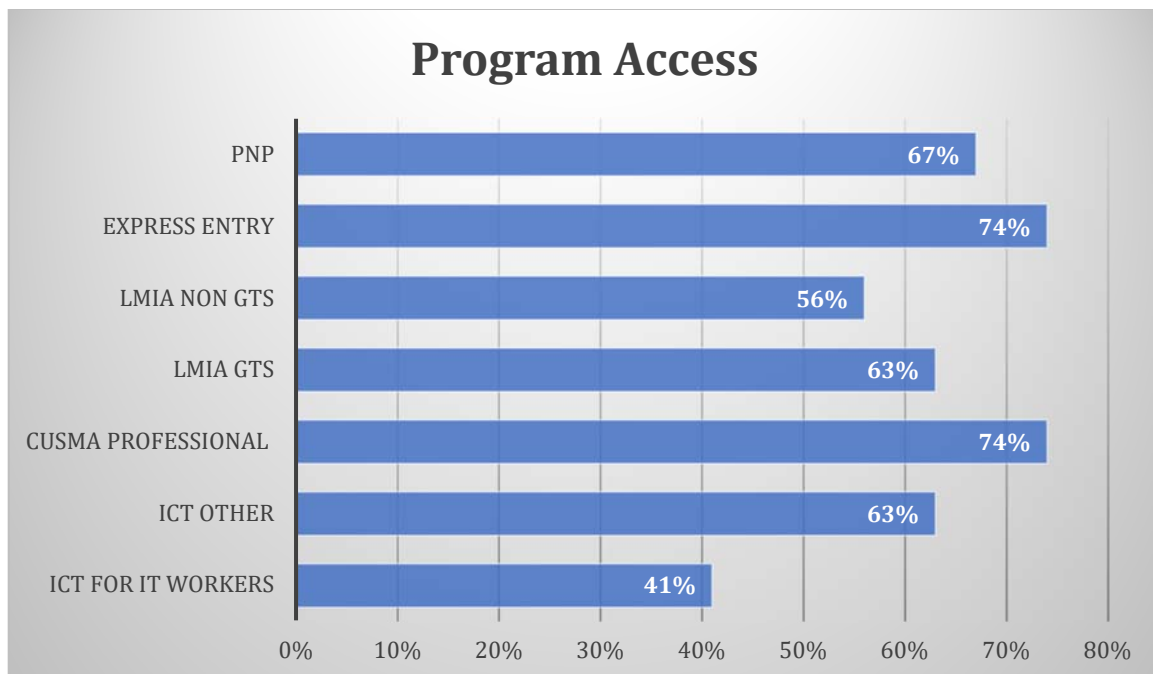
1. Technology
2. Manufacturing and Manufactured Products
3. Government / Health Care / Education
4. Natural Resources
5. Construction / Engineering Services

Almost two thirds of participating organizations employ over 2,000 workers and one third employ over 10,000 workers.

### Program Access

All participating organizations access temporary residence workers, and 44 percent report using economic immigration programs to meet their talent needs.

Just over half (52 %) recruit over 30 temporary residence workers in a normal year.



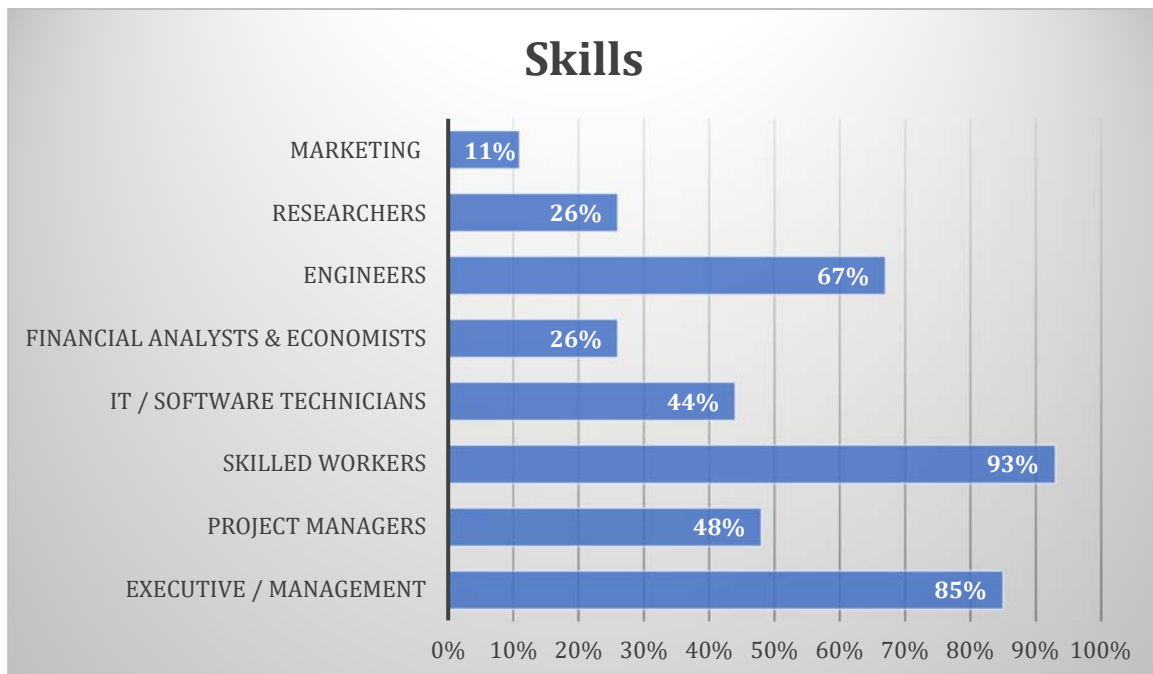
Several organizations also report using IEC (young professional) and C10 and C20 categories to access needed international talent.

### Skills

Skills are in high demand within Canadian businesses and there are growing shortages of workers with the requisite skills across many sectors.

Of the top three skills accessed using immigration and international mobility programs, skilled workers account for 93 per cent; executive management account for 85 per cent and; engineering staff account for 67 per cent.

Of note, University Faculty, Doctoral Fellows and Visiting Professors are also in high demand and transferred into Canada under these programs.

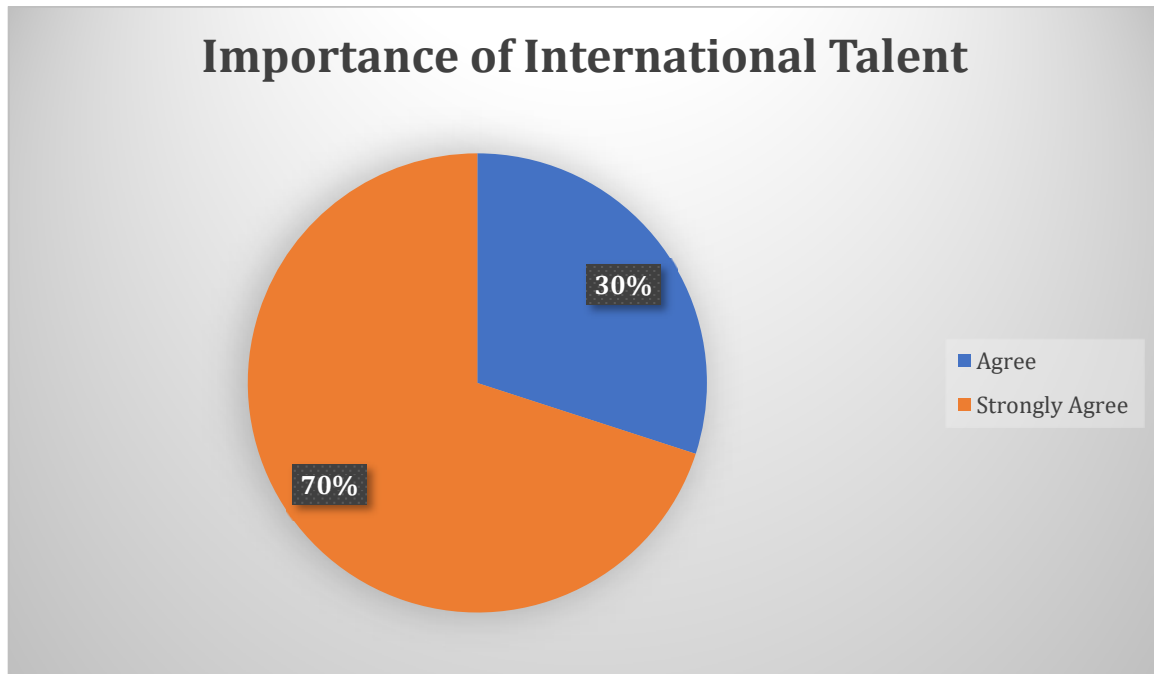


It is also noted that a growing demand exists for non-degreed professionals and technical staff in occupations where university degrees are not required. Current regimes place an unnecessary burden on business in accessing this in demand talent.

*“Technologists with specialized knowledge. They generally are non-degreed professionals so don't have a degree and so more difficult to get into Canada.”*

### Importance of International Talent to Business Operations

When asked about the importance of international talent to business, 100 per cent of those surveyed agreed with the statement, *“The contributions of international talent are important to our business”*, while 70 per cent strongly agreed.



### Impact on Business Operations

*“In 83 per cent of organizations, cancelled or delayed projects are the most common consequence of the delays.”*

*Fifty two percent of businesses strongly agreed that “Unless addressed, increasing processing times are likely to have a negative impact on our business operations within the next year.”*

Survey results indicate that processing delays have had, or are expected to have, wide ranging impacts for business. In 83 per cent of organizations surveyed, cancelled and or delayed projects are the most common consequence of the delays, and almost two thirds expect the delays to result in lost revenues.

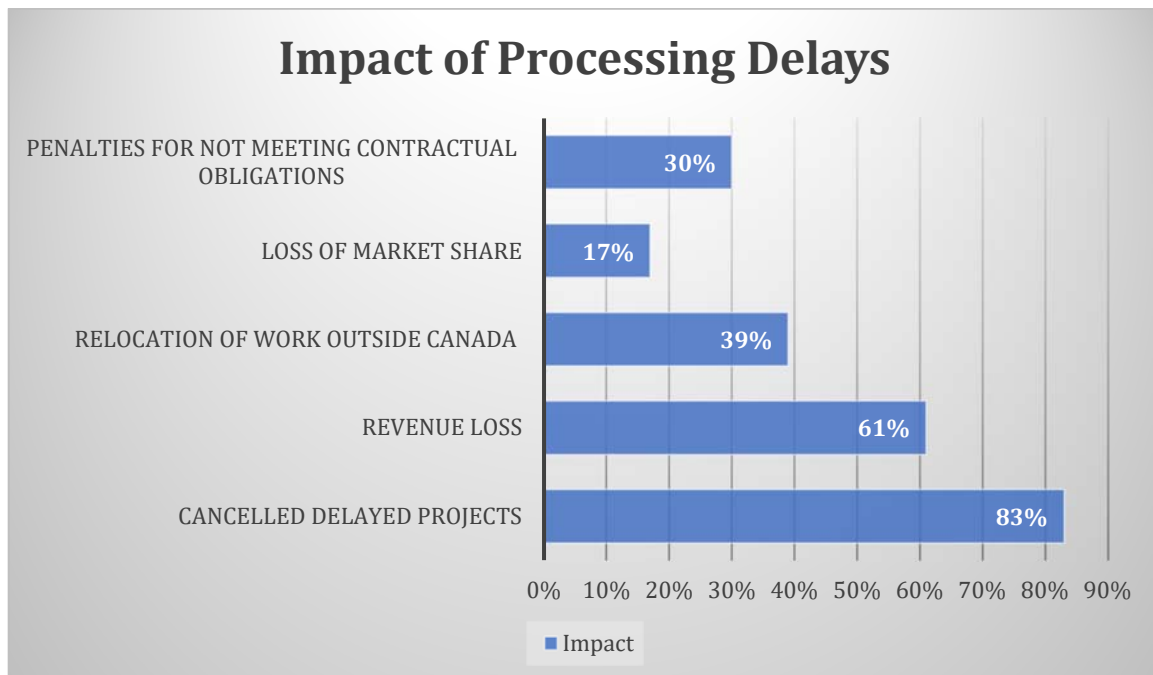
*“The current processing times are absolutely ridiculous.”*

*“The impact is extremely serious, we have gained new contracts during the summer, and we are not able to staff and deliver on some of our commitments, the need in talent is equivalent to before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.”*



In addition to the extensive delays in the processing times, the continued closure of Consulates, High Commissions and VAC abroad has had a great impact as biometrics cannot be completed in the home country, were also cited as ongoing challenges.

Most employees (82%) entering Canada as temporary residents, normally apply at the port of entry. This may vary by location and industry sector. *“Unless the employee is entering from the US, from our experience this results in a processing time of approximately four months.”*



### Expedited Processing

For many years, the payment of an additional processing fee by employers, or the development of a Trusted Employer Program, to ensure employers receive efficient processing that meets business needs have been discussed with government.

*When asked if they would be willing to pay an additional fee for expedited processing of applications, ranging between 10% and 25% above current processing fees (e.g., to cover additional governments costs) 89 per cent of respondents answered favourably.*

## Recommendations to Improve Processing Times

Participants were asked to share their recommendations for improving processing times, and there are a number of key themes summarised below.

1. IRCC should resume normal staffing levels, as we understand that there was a substantial number of employees who were unable to work during the summer of 2020. Although we are seeing processing times for extensions declining substantially, as noted throughout this report, long processing delays for the initial entry applications has severely impacted business.
2. While it appears the government is making efforts to tackle processing times for initial applications, this has not been uniform throughout the system. For example, we have observed that applications filed in late October/early November 2020 have been processed, while applications filed before that time have yet to be processed. It is unclear why earlier applications remain backlogged. Greater transparency in the triaging of files and criteria used for faster processing could help to reduce unpredictability in the system and frustration among applicants and employers.
3. To address this situation IRCC's processing/review teams should be expanded to meet Canadian economic demands and the growing backlog in applications.
4. Measures must also be taken to improve technology to provide ongoing tracking and up to the minute information about the status of the application.
5. At the same time, we would encourage the government to use the scientific tools available to monitor the spread of COVID-19 with travel and expand programs such as the Alberta testing pilot and use fast-result type COVID testing kits to ensure travelers are screened properly upon arrival. Having more concrete quarantine exemption criteria (including testing criteria pre and post arrival) could also help reduce the possibility of individuals who meet requirements for a quarantine exemption from inadvertently spreading COVID-19 in Canada.
6. Steps should be taken to waive the biometrics in countries where VACs are closed, or alternatively collect biometrics at the port of entry.
7. With the increasing numbers of individuals who are entering Canada from the US to apply for work permits at the POE, we recommend that IRCC should also consider reinstating POE applications for visa exempt nationals. This would alleviate pressures on consular application processing and the stress on processing times.

## Conclusion

As noted, the ongoing delays in the processing of work visas and temporary residence applications are having a significant impact on business operations for organizations that access immigration and international mobility programs.

While some improvements have been implemented by IRCC recently, the need for Canadian employers to access international talent on an expedited basis will be vitally important in rebuilding the Canadian economy. Reallocation of resources, modernization of systems through better use of technology, and consideration of expedited processing channels, including a Trusted Employer Program, are measures that should be adopted with urgency to address the ongoing delays in processing of applications.