



CERC Response to the Government of Canada's on-line Immigration Consultations:

August 2016

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Strengthening our Canadian fabric

Questions

1. How many newcomers should we welcome to Canada in 2017 and beyond?

Response:

Canada's population growth will depend largely on immigration programs. In 2010 the ratio of working age people (age 15-64) supporting one retiree in Canada was almost four (3.96) to one; by 2021 that ratio is expected to decline 2.90 to one retiree. According to Statistics Canada, the Canadian population must grow to about 43 million people over the next two decades. Immigration and labour mobility are key (and fairly immediate) solutions to an ageing population and will help build the modern economy of the future.

Immigration is vitally important our future growth and prosperity. A target should be established over the longer term that will ensure population growth levels are attained. This could be adjusted periodically as population targets are achieved.

2. How can we best support newcomers to ensure they become successful members of our communities?

Response:

By ensuring immigration selection processes select immigrants with pre-arranged employment, or have the requisite skills and experience to secure employment in Canada for in demand occupations and highly skilled workers.

Canada should fast track approvals for Permanent Residence for any Temporary Foreign Worker who is currently in a full-time job in Canada and has been for at least 2 years.

3. Do we have the balance right among the immigration programs or streams? If not, what priorities should form the foundation of Canada's immigration planning?

Response

Skilled immigration programs under the economic class stream must be a priority. Targets for economic class immigrants should be established for principal applicants, net of spouse and dependents. In 2014, just 66,189, (46%) of the total number of economic immigrants were principal applicants. (Note:

excluding caregivers). Targets for economic class immigrants should be for principal applicants only. Spouses and dependents of economic class immigrants should be included in the global targets of family reunification.

Unlocking Canada's diverse needs

1. How can immigration play a role in supporting economic growth and innovation in Canada?

Response:

Skills shortages within Canada are a concern among business leaders. According to the OECD Canada's literacy rate for 16-24 year olds is below the average of other OECD member countries. If Canada is to continue to transform to a knowledge based economy, immigration and mobility are critical.

Shortages will be especially acute among the ranks of senior management, skilled workers, healthcare professionals and managers in public administration. In British Columbia it is projected that by 2019, the province will have over a million job openings, and over 75% of those will require post-secondary education.

A report published by Miner Management Consultants, projects a shortage of about 2 million skilled workers by 2026.

2. Should there be more programs for businesses to permanently hire foreign workers if they can't find Canadians to fill the job?

Response

Yes. For high skilled in demand occupations, labour market tests should be eliminated. Hiring foreign workers is a timely and costly endeavour, and employers will strive to recruit Canadians where possible. (It is not unusual for a company to spend over \$500,000 to hire a senior executive with the right skills). It is important to make the distinction that hiring Canadians may not always be in the best interests of Canada.

Programs such as the CERC proposed Trusted Employer Program should be implemented to streamline processes.

3. What is the right balance between attracting global talent for high-growth sectors, on the one hand, and ensuring affordable labour for businesses that have historically seen lower growth, on the other?

Response

Where there is demonstrated demand in specific industry sectors the system should be flexible to respond.

4. How can immigration fill in the gaps in our demographics and economy?

Response

See earlier comments that respond to this question.

5. What Canadian values and traditions are important to share with newcomers to help them integrate into Canadian society?

Settlement services should be expanded to meet the increased diversity and demands of recent immigrants.

Modernizing our immigration system

Questions

1. Currently, immigration levels are planned yearly. Do you agree with the thinking that planning should be multi-year?

Response

We are supportive of a multi-year process with an annual progress review.

2. What modernization techniques should Canada invest in for processing of applications?

The 2016 Federal budget contained \$56 million to improve processing systems. This must be directed at building an electronic infrastructure to process applications/ work permits etc. The system must be transformed to be completely electronic, eliminating unnecessary inefficiencies (i.e. fax/postal services).

3. What should Canada do to ensure its immigration system is modern and efficient?

In addition to improving efficiency, the narrative around immigration much change. The system must also adapt to the changing reality that filling in demand skills may not always be possible, or necessary through permanent residency. Many new industries are high growth /project based that need access to global resources not available in Canada. Fast track systems for high skilled project workers are needed to expedite processing and ensure that Canada has access to the best international talent. A flexible and efficient temporary high skilled stream is also important due to Canada's smaller economy. A highly skilled worker may only be required on a single project for a specific client. Longer term, there may be no need for this skill in the market and by focusing only on permanent migration without a short term option, we run the risk of creating a financial burden on Canada's economy in the long term.

Improve Compliance and Administrative Monetary Penalties (AMP) program management and develop an independent appeals body.

Implement fast and efficient administrative review processes.

4. Is there any rationale for providing options to those willing to pay higher fees for an expedited process?

Yes. A survey of employers conducted by CERC found that almost 75% responded positively and would be willing to pay an annual administration fee to participate in a Trusted Employer Program that would provide expedited processing.

In addition to a Trusted Employer approach, a similar option for small and medium sized businesses who may not be frequent users of this system and only require a foreign worker on a limited basis, should be considered.

Leadership in global migration and immigration

1. Is it important for Canada to continue to show leadership in global migration? If so, how can we best do that?

Response

There is growing opposition to immigration in many regions of the world, presenting Canada with a unique opportunity to demonstrate leadership and develop programs to attract the best talent.

At the same time the Canadian government, in partnership with business and other stakeholders, must work to demonstrate the positive benefits of global migration to Canada, whether that is of a permanent or temporary nature.

2. How can Canada attract the best global talent and international students?

- Establish an Advisory Committee for Economic Immigration, to provide government with input on programs and growing demands.
- Create industry based immigration pathways or programs specifically for Industries experiencing rapid growth and high demand for skilled workers.
- Implement expedited processing for high skilled workers, relax market testing and job advertising for executives and other high pay occupations.
- Provide bridge work permits: Relax age factors for senior and skilled workers; allocate more points for employed applicants under the Express Entry system.
- Implement expedited processing stream and provide more flexible pathways to permanent residency for international students studying full time in Canada, particularly in selected disciplines of study (i.e. STEM)

3. In what ways can Canada be a model to the world on refugees, migration and immigration?

Response

This has been covered in several areas of our response.

Canada has made a very powerful statement taking welcoming over 25,000 refugees from Syria over the past year.

Steps are also needed to set Canada apart from other nations as a great place for companies to innovate, have easy access to highly skilled workers and drive economic growth and prosperity for all.

NOTE

This on-line submission is a summary of a much more comprehensive set of recommendations that will be submitted to the Minister of Immigration in September 2016.