

Human Resources, Skills & Immigration

30. Accelerating Immigration Programs in Canada

DESCRIPTION

Currently, Canada's immigration system has unintended barriers which hinder immigration efforts. These barriers can be addressed through making it standard practice in all Canadian immigration programs for work permit applicants to apply online with expedited processing for visa requiring individuals, or at a port of entry for visa exempt individuals.

BACKGROUND

The Atlantic Immigration Pilot Project (AIPP) was launched in 2017. Its goal is to stimulate the economy in Atlantic Canada by creating three employer-friendly streams that seek intermediate or high skilled workers and Atlantic Canadian university graduates to fill labour market gaps. This program is fast-tracked; Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada aims to process 80% of permanent residency applications received within six months of receipt.

In brief, the AIPP works as follows:

- Employers first apply to become designated under the program and, once designated, are Labour Market Impact Assessment exempt on a go-forward basis for the purposes of AIPP applications.
- The designated employer identifies a potential temporary foreign worker and the employer and temporary foreign worker apply to the Atlantic Province in which the employer is located, to endorse the foreign national under the AIPP.
- Foreign nationals can then apply for a work permit by submitting a paper-based application either inland, if they are extending a work permit and already living in Canada, or at a Canadian Embassy responsible for their home country if they have never worked or lived in Canada. Work permit applications cannot be applied for online or at a port of entry.
- Foreign nationals must then commit to making an application for Permanent Residency (PR) within 90 days of receiving their work permit.
- Employers are responsible for assisting the foreign nationals settle in their new community.

The AIPP is a welcomed program in Canada. However, the requirement for applicants to submit a paper-based application for a work permit prevents foreign nationals from quickly and easily filling labour shortages. Processing for an inland work permit extension application is currently taking approximately 100 days. Processing for an outside Canada work permit application can take anywhere from two weeks to six months, depending on the applicant's country of residency. By contrast, the permanent residency portion of the application is expedited, taking only 6 months to obtain PR. In many instances, it takes almost the same amount of time to get PR as it does to get the work permit. This is too long for many employers. Additionally, for those visa-

exempt applicants eligible to apply at a port of entry, a work permit can be issued at the time they enter the country for every other type of work permit application.

Applicants under the AIPP, however, are discouraged from applying at the border and instructed to apply by paper. The reality of the delayed processing times for paper-based applications means employers can be left short-staffed for longer periods of time and, consequently, less able to service their markets.

Ensuring that work permit application processes are efficient will assist employers by providing an expeditious way of filling labour shortages with qualified foreign nationals. Online applications should be a standard process in all of Canada's immigration programs. With other new programs such as the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot in effect and the Municipal Nominee Pilot announced, it is imperative that Canada moves away from paper-based applications for work permits and allow for visa exempt individuals to apply at a port of entry for all immigration programs that are applicable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Government of Canada:

1. Allow immigration work permit applicants to apply online with expedited processing for individuals requiring a visa, or at a port of entry for individuals who are visa exempt. These options should be standard for Canada's immigration system and for pilot programs across the country.

31. Addressing Labour Market Disruptions through Basic Income Pilot Project

DESCRIPTION

The economy has and will continue to drastically change in the years ahead. With developing technologies and increased automation, government policy needs to adapt in order to respond to potential disruptions in the labour market. An ongoing basic income program is one means of managing market disruptions on a going forward basis, from automation to pandemics alike.

BACKGROUND

Government policy needs to adapt in order to respond to potential disruptions in the labour market.

In recent months, the COVID-19 impacted Canada, resulting in unforeseen economic disruption. Statistics Canada reported an unemployment rate of 13.7%, the highest in more than four decades of comparable data. Over this period of market disruption, three million jobs were lost across Canada, and about 2.5 million more Canadians had their work hours reduced.⁹⁸

In response to this market disruption, the Government of Canada introduced the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), which gives financial support to Canadians affected by COVID-19. Canadians earning less than \$1000 a month were among those eligible to access CERB funds, which offered eligible applicants \$2,000/month. As of June 2020, four months into the program's existence, the Government of Canada received 15.4 million applications from 8.4 million unique applicants.⁹⁹

Canada's CERB program was created mid-crisis. An ongoing basic income program is one means of managing market disruptions on a going forward basis, from automation to pandemics alike.

In 2017, the Government of Ontario selected three cities to take part in a three-year basic income pilot project. However, the program was cut short and evaluations were not completed as planned. To account for this potential loss of policy insight, the Hamilton Community Foundation funded a study by McMaster University and Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction to assess the effects of basic income on the lives of recipients in Hamilton, Brantford and Brant County. The results of this 2020 study showed that nearly 80% of respondents reported feeling more motivated to find better paying jobs while receiving basic income support, "dispel[ling] the view that giving individuals a basic income will lead to their withdrawal from the labour market" (pg 12).¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ <https://globalnews.ca/news/7029601/canada-may-unemployment-rate/>

⁹⁹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/ei/claims-report.html>

¹⁰⁰ <https://labourstudies.mcmaster.ca/documents/southern-ontarios-basic-income-experience.pdf>

A fulsome, completed basic income pilot project would serve evidence-based policymakers, by helping governments understand and confirm whether basic income payments:

- Influence recipients' socio-economic outcomes, their participation in the labour market, and/or their uptake of education/training opportunities;
- Alter participants' use of existing social and/or income redistribution programs;
- Lead to an increase in entrepreneurial activity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Government of Canada:

1. Support the creation of basic income pilot projects through existing funding within employment and social development Canada with an aim to develop a report and strategy that thoroughly assesses the results, along with a cost-benefit analysis, outcomes and program trade-offs of a nationwide basic income strategy.
2. Assess the costs, benefits and outcomes of all government assistance programs on an ongoing basis and publicly report the results.

32. A Focus on Refugees

DESCRIPTION

The concern is that Federal support for publicly sponsored refugees is only for one year. Given that it is unreasonable to expect refugees to find sustainable employment within a year of arrival due to waitlists for language and job skills training, and because the family health and emotional needs and the associated challenges of integrating to a very different society, service providers are now advocating for the provincial support services to be increased by a value that mitigates the impact of transitioning funding sources.

BACKGROUND

The United Nations Refugee Agency says Canada has admitted the largest number of resettled refugees in recent years to its country and has had the second highest rate of refugees who later gained full citizenship. Canada accepted 28,100 of the 92,400 refugees who were resettled across 25 countries in 2019. British Columbia became home to 3,850 of asylum claimants, who settled in Canada in 2019. Ontario had, in 2019, 225 Inland asylum seekers and 7,470 from all ports of entry (land, air, and marine), and Quebec had 195 inland and 19,825 at all ports of entry (land, air, and marine).

Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) are referred by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for resettlement to Canada and are selected based upon "need for protection." The Government of Canada fully supports their initial settlement for up to one year. When they arrive, GARs receive Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) services, including temporary accommodations, assistance in finding permanent accommodations, orientation to life in Canada, and one year of financial support roughly equivalent to provincial Income Assistance rates. In a 2016 report evaluating the resettlement programs (GAR, PSR, BVOR and RAP); it was found that RAP is inadequate and recommended that:

"IRCC should develop policy options to ensure that refugees supported by the Government of Canada are provided with an adequate level of support (including RAP income support) to meet their resettlement needs in support of their successful integration.

Many Government Assisted Refugees have limited English or French skills, have varying levels of trauma and medical needs and are learning how to adapt to Canadian society. Their day to day settlement needs - finding appropriate housing, furniture, appropriate clothing, food and living costs, enrolling children in school, figuring out the public transit system, finding their way to medical appointments, and finding social and emotional support networks- takes the majority of their time in the first year. In addition, the emotional trauma of having left loved ones behind has an understandable impact on their resettlement efforts. Service providers across Canada have done their best to accommodate these refugees, but wait lists for services, English language training, basic job skills training can take multiple weeks.

There is a need to ensure refugee families continue to be supported beyond the one year federally funded period at a level that provides sufficient economic security to continue with English and employment related training. Recognizing the challenge to federal resources, once employed, refugees will be able to contribute back to Canada through taxes as well as economic activity in their community.

A number of refugees have various education backgrounds such as engineering, or other professional credentials. Many have had their education interrupted and would like to continue; however, with lengthy waitlists for English instruction that will expedite employment opportunities, a provincial “top up” of the income assistance (IA) funding will assist refugee families transition until their English becomes relatively proficient. Currently the federal government provides all government assisted refugees with the ability while on federal income support to earn fifty percent (50%) of their monthly income support without claw back.

It should be noted that between 1979 and 1981, Canada accepted 60,000 “boat people” from Southeast Asia. Within a decade, 86% of those former refugees were working, healthy and spoke English with some proficiency, achieving the basic criteria for success set out by academic Morton Beiser in his landmark study of their integration into Canadian society (*Strangers at the Gate: The Boat People*). They were less likely to use social services and more likely to have jobs than the average Canadian. One in five was self-employed and did not become a drain on the taxpayer—they were taxpayers.

In December 2015, VanCity Credit Union released a report entitled: *From Crisis to Community: Syrian Refugees and the B.C. Economy*. The report outlined that Syrian refugees settling in British Columbia would generate at least \$563 million in local economic activity over the next 20 years. This report can be extrapolated to be applicable to many regions across Canada.

Canada has a rapidly aging population. Over 6 million Canadians are aged 65 or older, representing 15.6 percent of Canada's population. By 2030—in less than two decades—seniors will number over 9.5 million and make up 23 percent of Canadians. Additionally, by 2036, the average life expectancy at birth for women will rise to 86.2 years from the current 84.2 and to 82.9 years from the current 80 for men. The demographic shift is expected to shrink work-force participation, erode labour productivity and drive up expenditures for things like elderly benefits. At the same time, the Advisory Council on Economic Growth advised the Government of Canada to increase immigration levels to 450,000 annually as one step to address the projected challenges to the Canadian economy. According to a Conference Board of Canada report, we will need to attract 350,000 immigrants annually by 2035, up from 260,404 in 2014.

What is needed is not just a discussion of how to facilitate immigration—of refugees and others—but how to ensure our new residents integrate swiftly into the economy. But all of this requires a shift in thinking. Done properly, bringing refugees into our country isn't about charity. It's about investing in the future of business —both theirs and ours.

Statistically, Privately Sponsored Refugees are more likely to be employed in their first year of arrival than GARs. While GARs may transition onto provincial social assistance, funding for settlement services is federally funded. The Province provides limited funding for temporary migrants (e.g. TFW, RC, international students) and naturalized Canadian Citizens.

GARs also need to pay back their transportation loans. These repayment requirements are often made before saving for a home, or other necessities. The loans, the difficulty in securing stable housing, and learning a new language all lead to the GARs inability to find adequate employment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Government of Canada:

1. Support Government Assisted Refugees by:
 - a. Working with employers to provide access to employment supports including English and French language training; and
 - b. Ensuring that federal financial assistance is extended by one year, for a total of two years.
2. Provide wage incentives for employers who provide employment within the first two years of settlement of a GAR

NOTES

101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108

¹⁰¹ <https://www.vancity.com/AboutVancity/News/MediaReleases/RefugeesBoostLocalEconomy-Dec2-15/>

¹⁰² <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/reports-statistics/evaluations/resettlement-programs.html#toc7>

¹⁰³ https://www.amssa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/AMSSA_RefugeeExperience-sm.pdf

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/asylum-claims/asylum-claims-2019.html>

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/asylum-claims/asylum-claims-2019.html>

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/5d08d7ee7/unhcr-global-trends-2018.html>

¹⁰⁷ <http://ceris.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/CERIS-Research-Synthesis-on-Refugees.pdf>

¹⁰⁸ https://canada.metropolis.net/publications/aec_citc_fall2010_e.pdf