

## Business Council of British Columbia

### Input to the Federal Government's 2016 Immigration Consultation Process

<https://secure.cic.gc.ca/consultations/ViewsOnImmigration-en.aspx>

#### *How many newcomers should we welcome to Canada in 2017 and beyond?*

The overall target number is in a range that is broadly appropriate for the Canadian economy. Immigration of 260,000 amounted to 0.7% of Canada's population in 2014. Reaching a target of 300,000 permanent residents would increase this proportion to 0.8%.

The targets, however, should be regularly evaluated and reviewed. Policy makers should pay close attention to labour markets and economic conditions in the country. Although there are challenges associated with trying to anticipate what conditions will be like one or two years out, the annual number of immigrants should still be regularly reviewed and adjusted to take into consideration evolving labour market requirements. In this regard, policy makers need to recognize that demographics and slower population growth are dragging down labour force growth and weighing on overall economic growth. As labour force growth continues to slow over the next decade, there may be a need to consider increasing overall immigration numbers, particularly in the economic stream.

#### *How to best support newcomers?*

One important way to support new comers is by providing them with good information about what they can expect prior to arriving in Canada, especially with respect to employment and the labour market. Newcomers proficient in one of the official languages fare better and have better labour market outcomes. Immigrants may need to be prepared for challenges in finding work and the reality that they may not receive as much credit or recognition of past employment experience gained outside of Canada as they were anticipating.

#### *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?*

The 2016 planned immigration target is for 300,000 permanent residents. Ranges for the main classes are:

- Family: range 75,000 - 82,000
- Refugees and humanitarian: 51,000 - 57,0000
- Economic: 151,200 – 162,400

The inflow of permanent residents to Canada should become more oriented to the economic class. In particular, Canada's immigration program should put more emphasis on attracting high-skill individuals. Similarly, the system should put greater emphasis on retaining more foreign students who graduate from Canadian post-secondary institutions. Such students are proficient in one of the country's official languages, are young and have comparatively high levels of human capital. Employers looking for talent and skilled labour to grow their businesses are likely to view foreign students with Canadian educational qualifications as an attractive labour pool on which to draw.

It is important to recognize that the number of immigrants coming to Canada in the economic stream also includes spouses and dependent family members of individuals immigrating to the country under any of the economic programs. This means that the number of immigrants who will immediately enter the workforce upon coming to Canada is actually far smaller than the overall number of "economic immigrants". If an economic immigrant comes to Canada with a spouse and two children, potentially there will be only one person entering the workforce even though four are counted as part of the economic class. We would encourage more detailed reporting of immigration in the economic class to provide an accurate picture of the number of people who will actually be entering the workforce soon after immigrating, as well as those who may join the workforce within a few years of arriving in Canada.

Within the economic stream, we would encourage policy makers to consider increasing the quota of individuals entering the country through the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP). The PNP has been an effective way for employers to recruit talent from other countries and move them through the immigration process and into permanent residency in a timely manner. We routinely hear from BC employers that the PNP is valuable and an important means of helping them meet their human resource needs.

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

Immigration can support economic growth and innovation through the attraction of highly skilled individuals, including academic researchers and individuals with STEM qualifications as well as skilled tradespeople. Individuals with high levels of human capital are an essential part of fostering innovation and new ideas and processes. Having a sufficient amount of top managerial talent is also essential to support growth and innovation, so the immigration system should explicitly recognize the need for managerial talent. Canada should be specifically targeting a broad range of high-skill immigrants and ensuring they are able to become permanent residents in an expedited manner. The system should also put additional weight on the fact that foreign students are a key source of talent and new ideas, especially at the graduate level.

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

Yes, there should be more programs for businesses to permanently hire foreign workers when Canadians are not available. As previously noted, it is critical that businesses are able to attract skilled individuals in a timely manner. In BC, the PNP program is often fully subscribed. Expanding the quota or alternatively introducing other programs that streamline the pathway to permanent immigration would be beneficial to the province and the country more generally. One consideration is that there are regional labour market needs, which often manifest themselves in a shortfall of workers. Currently the PNP program is somewhat dual purpose – it is used to allow businesses to bring in high skill people as well as lower skill individuals to address regional labour market requirements. Potentially these two different purposes could be operated as distinct programs.

*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?*

It is difficult to be overly prescriptive on what the right balance is between attracting global talent for high-growth sectors and ensuring affordable labour for business that have experienced lower growth. We would suggest, however, that attracting top talent should be a higher priority, and any immigration programs should be tilted more towards attracting high-skill individuals, particularly from the sciences, engineering and technology space, but also from a broad array of other skill sets.

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

The most effective way for immigration to fill “gaps in our demographics” is to attract a sufficient number of people to help meet labour market needs in the country – and to do so while they are relatively young. Targeting younger individuals in general will also help address some of the demographic challenges around the overall aging of the population.

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

A multi-year planning horizon would have merit and provide more certainty for the system, especially for the economic class. Having said that, it will also be important to retain a fair amount of flexibility in the system because economic and labour market conditions can change quickly. If a three or five year plan were to be put in place it should be set up as a general framework with target numbers but also retain a degree of flexibility and adaptability.

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

Continue to streamline and improve the Express Entry System. This system and the associated web-based interface could be used to better prepare immigrants for their arrival in Canada.

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

To provide a comprehensive answer, it is necessary to have more details relating to who is paying and how paying for an expedited process might work. If it is the employers who would be paying, theoretically it could be beneficial if it were structured to help guarantee that companies could process important applicants in a short period of time. Here the key would be providing a much higher degree of certainty around the whole process. We would, however, also caution against excessive fees that might discourage employers from utilizing the program.

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

No comment provided

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

Canada is in competition with other advanced economies around the world for the best talent. While it is a desirable place to live there are other attractive jurisdictions, some of which may offer greater economic opportunities. Canada needs to be competitive in its schooling and immigration. Policy makers should examine the potential to further extend student work visas.

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

No comment provided