BARRIERS TO BELONGING

PAVING A SMOOTHER PATH TO IMMIGRANT INCLUSION

February 2016

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

We would like to thank Action Canada's executive team, staff, and advisors for their support and guidance, and for the opportunity to expand our horizons over the course of the Action Canada fellowship program. We would like to extend our particular thanks to Eva Czigler, for her excellent advice, good humour, and patience throughout. Finally, we would like to thank all of the experts and community leaders who shared their insights with us. In particular, the support of Andrew Griffith, author of *Multiculturalism in Canada: Evidence and Anecdote*, in reviewing our report, was invaluable. Any errors in the report are the authors' own.

DISCLAIMER:

This Action Canada task force report was prepared by Joshua Bates, Aisha Bukhari, Sarah Doyle, Grace Pastine, Christopher Skappak, and Pamela Wolfe-Roberge, under the helpful guidance of Eva Czigler, task force advisor. The views represented in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of every team member.

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1 INTRODUCTION

After a long day of travel, Madeleine, 16 months old, clung to her father, Kevork Jamkossian, as he steered his family through processing at the Toronto airport. The family was part of the first group of Syrian refugees airlifted to Canada.

Mr. Jamkossian, a blacksmith, and Madeleine's mother, Georgina Zires, a sales clerk — fled Syria and spent eight months in Lebanon before arriving in Canada.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau greeted the family, "You are home," Trudeau said. "Welcome home." As Trudeau explained in an address to the crowd gathered at the airport, this family and the other 160 Syrian refugees that arrived were at the beginning of a new journey.

"Tonight, they step off the plane as refugees but they walk out of this terminal as permanent residents of Canada with social insurance numbers, with health cards and with an opportunity to become full Canadians," he said.

When some of the newcomers spoke briefly to reporters, their words echoed the hopes of others new to this country, as well concerns about the challenges they were about to face.

Approximately 400,000 immigrants arrive in Canada every year to work, reunite with family, study or find refuge from persecution and conflict. Of these, approximately 250,000 arrive as permanent residents – that is, they have been granted the right to live in Canada permanently but are not yet Canadian citizens.[1]

There are currently 1.6 million permanent residents in Canada.[2] These newcomers are central to the economic, political, and social fabric of the country. Canada works hard to facilitate the entry of permanent residents into Canadian society so they are able to build a life for themselves, their families, and contribute to the growth of the country.

Yet these recent immigrants continue to face considerable challenges to participating in the full spectrum of Canadian life – what our report characterizes as "barriers to belonging." These barriers include difficulty finding jobs, earning fair wages and being accepted into the social and political fabric of their communities. If Canada does not tackle these challenges, our economy and our communities will suffer. There is a pressing need for new approaches.

Drawing on the knowledge of experts from front-line service organizations, governments, and academic institutions, this report recommends a number of policies to improve the successful inclusion of recent immigrants in Canadian communities. Our focus is largely on permanent residents. Some recommendations, however, apply more broadly to recent immigrants who are living, working, or going to school in our communities under temporary status – some of whom will become permanent residents, for example through the Canadian Experience Class.

Our report offers general recommendations on citizenship and selection policy, as well as specific recommendations in three areas where change would have a big impact: designing smarter services; building bridges to employment; and strengthening political engagement. We hope that our recommendations will pave a smoother road to inclusion for immigrants to Canada.

2 BARRIERS TO BELONGING

THE CHALLENGE

Barriers to immigrant inclusion are evident across the three interconnected fronts of economic, political and social inclusion.

Economic Inclusion: Immigration is central to Canada's economic success. However, immigrants generally face greater challenges in securing employment that corresponds with their skills, and higher levels of unemployment. Even after 20 years, they continue to earn lower wages than those born in Canada. Experts estimate that the annual cost to Canada's economy in unrealized earnings at $11.37 billion.[3]

Social Inclusion: Social inclusion includes community ties, standard of living, and a sense of belonging. While harder to measure, some indicators are available. Volunteerism rates, for example, are lower for immigrants than for those Canadian-born and, more starkly, a higher proportion of immigrants live in low-income neighbourhoods.[5] While an inclusive, diverse society is a key part of the Canadian story, this should not be taken for granted. Recent assaults on women wearing the hijab, for example, make it clear that Canada is unfortunately not a stranger to xenophobia.

Political Inclusion: The political inclusion of immigrants is vital for a healthy democracy – in which public policies and services reflect the diverse perspectives of all community members. However, from contacting elected officials to participating in demonstrations, recent immigrants report lower levels of political engagement compared to those born in Canada.[4]

THE OPPORTUNITY

By breaking down these barriers, Canada stands to gain economically, through increased labour market participation, productivity, entrepreneurship and tax revenue. We will also benefit from more politically and socially inclusive communities, in which all members are able to succeed and feel at home.

CASE STUDY 1: WELCOMING AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES DIALOGUE INITIATIVE[6]

This initiative was implemented by the province of British Columbia in partnership with Simon Fraser University. It convened community-based dialogues related to the themes of multiculturalism, elimination of racism, and inclusive communities. This initiative brought together First Nations, immigrants, businesses and other stakeholders in communities across the province. The planning process involved members of the host communities, including youth. This ensured that each dialogue reflected local realities and aspirations, and could be used to inform future community projects.

3 THE BROADER CONTEXT: CITIZENSHIP AND SELECTION

ISSUE

Immigrant inclusion cannot be considered in isolation of citizenship or immigrant selection policies, both of which have undergone significant change in recent years. Some reforms have made citizenship harder to acquire – for example, raising the citizenship application fee and increasing the length of time applicants must wait before applying for citizenship. This could lead to fewer permanent residents choosing to become naturalized citizens. Indeed, the percentage of permanent residents who acquire Canadian citizenship has dropped dramatically in recent years.[7]

In Canadian policy and public opinion, permanent immigration has been viewed as an important part of nation building.[8] However, the proportion of temporary workers and students in Canada increased significantly over the last decade.[9] Many low-skilled temporary workers will never have access to citizenship, even if they have been in Canada for an extended period. There is also a risk that temporary residents may stay in Canada after their visas expire. While temporary immigration streams respond to important economic and social needs, they could have the unintended consequence of creating a large class of people with no voice in policies that affect them, and with less attachment to the communities in which they live.

Similarly, selection policy has significant impacts on the inclusion outcomes of recent immigrants. Recent changes have made it more difficult to sponsor certain family members, for example, by lowering the maximum age of dependent children from 22 to 19 and placing a temporary moratorium on applications to sponsor parents and grandparents.[10] Family provides an important social support network. Without it, one parent may have to stay home to look after children. While this is not unique to recent immigrant families, it is important to note that limitations on family reunification may undermine the economic potential of recent immigrants as well as Canada's reputation as a destination of choice for "the best and the brightest."

In the 2015 mandate letter to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Prime Minister Trudeau instructed the Minister to make a number of changes that will open up more opportunities for family reunification – including for parents, grandparents, dependent children, spouses and siblings.[11] These proposed changes are in keeping with our recommendations, below.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TARGET AUDIENCE: FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

1. Recognize and facilitate permanent immigration and citizenship acquisition as critical to nation building in selection, citizenship, settlement and integration policies. Avoid policies that risk leading to long-term residence without permanent status or citizenship.

2. Factor the settlement and integration needs of immigrants into selection policy, alongside the long-term social and economic needs of the country.

4 DESIGNING SMARTER SERVICES

ISSUE

The federal government invests almost $1B annually to help immigrants settle and integrate in Canada.[12] Settlement services include language and job training, assistance in finding a home, and other services to help newcomers transition to their new country. However, the barriers faced by recent immigrants remain high. Moreover, the results of this expenditure are unclear, due to limited data on whether services are in fact improving the inclusion outcomes of recent immigrants.[13]

The federal government could improve the impact of this expenditure by increasing its focus on three elements of effective service delivery: collecting and sharing data on client needs and service impacts; focusing funding and reporting requirements on long-term client outcomes; and aligning eligibility requirements with community needs. Importantly, the changes proposed in this section would facilitate service design that reflects the unique needs and insights of each community.

While settlement policy is primarily a federal responsibility, in 1991, Quebec obtained exclusive authority for immigrant settlement policy. Therefore, recommendations in this section aimed at the federal government could be implemented by the provincial government in Quebec.

EVIDENCE-BASED SERVICES

Data are important to ensure that settlement services meet immigrant needs. The federal government has made a significant contribution to data in the area of immigrant inclusion through the Longitudinal Immigration Database, which links immigration and tax data, and iCARE, which requires recipients of federal funding to regularly submit data on immigrant services. However, service providers lack access to important information, such as pre-arrival data on immigrants' skills, language abilities, and intended destination in Canada. Local-level data is generally not disaggregated by neighbourhood and often does not correspond to municipal boundaries. This makes it difficult to determine where services are most needed.

Data are also vital to find out what works, to adapt or design new services based on evidence, and to direct funding to services that are delivering real impact. Settlement service providers generally lack capacity to fund robust data tracking and evaluation on their own. Data sharing between service providers has also been limited and lessons about what works are not always transferred – although the Local Immigration Partnerships are helping to address this (see Case Study 4).

INCENTIVES TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES

In exchange for government funding, service providers are generally required to report on short-term outputs, such as the number of people reached, rather than outcomes, such as the number of people who are sustainably employed as a result of a training and employment service. Measuring outcomes requires a longer time period for evaluation. A pay-for-success fund is one way of ensuring that settlement services provide results. It allows governments to specify maximum prices that they are willing to pay for specific outcomes, leaving service providers to respond with innovative proposals.

Governments only pay if target outcomes are achieved. Because most service providers lack the revenue to fund their activities, up-front capital can be raised from private investors. Investors get their capital back, with an appropriate return, depending

on the level of success achieved. This model – sometimes called the "social impact bond" – allows governments to commit public funds to services without taking on the financial risk of failure, since this risk is transferred to investors.

This model facilitates new partnerships. Improving the outcomes of a person or a population is generally dependent on the collective impact of multiple services and stakeholders. Improving employment outcomes, for example, requires language and job training, childcare to enable parents to attend classes and work, and partnerships with employers.

CASE STUDY 2: BRUSSELS MIGRANT UNEMPLOYMENT SOCIAL IMPACT BOND (SIB)

A non-profit organization in Brussels is helping 18-30 year-old immigrants find jobs by matching them with retirees in their field and providing individualized follow-up. Private investors have provided €234,000 to finance the program, which will work with about 180 individuals over three years. Actiris, a government-funded regional employment office, will pay investors back, with a return of up to 6 percent, only if the intervention succeeds in improving the employment rates of participants relative to a control group. The target is for 35 percent of the cohort to find jobs who otherwise would not have. This relatively small SIB is intended as a pilot, to test the intervention for broader scale-up in Belgium.[14]

CASE STUDY 3: UK DEPARTMENT OF WORK AND PENSIONS (DWP) INNOVATION FUND

In 2011, DWP launched a fund of up to £30M that specified target outcomes related to education, training and employment of disadvantaged youth and set maximum prices for each. This fund has led to ten pay-for-success contracts supporting over 5,000 disadvantaged youth, as well as new partnerships between service providers that saw an opportunity to combine their efforts to achieve specific outcomes. Results to date show that target outcomes are already being achieved.[15]

ACCESS TO SERVICES

Federally funded settlement services are available for the first three to five years after arrival; however, some experts argue that settlement can take much longer. Federal funding for these services is restricted to permanent residents, leaving citizens and temporary residents who may later become permanent without access. While provincial funding sometimes fills these gaps, federal funding restrictions challenge the ability of settlement service providers to direct services to those most in need.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We need new approaches to move the needle on immigrant inclusion in the economic, political and social life of our communities. A recent federal commitment to dedicate a fixed percentage of program funds to experimenting with new approaches presents a compelling opportunity. The following recommendations would support innovation in the area of settlement and integration services.

TARGET AUDIENCE: FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

1. Engage stakeholders to identify information gaps, design usable data formats, and create platforms for consolidating evidence on what works. Include, at a minimum, settlement service providers, and provincial and municipal governments.

2. Create a $10M pay-for-success fund – about 1% of the total settlement and integration budget – focused on immigrant inclusion outcomes. This could be modeled on the UK DWP Innovation Fund.

3. Expand eligibility criteria for settlement services.

5 BUILDING BRIDGES TO EMPLOYMENT

ISSUE

Immigrants often struggle to have employers recognize the education, qualifications, and work experiences they acquired outside Canada. They also face challenges related to employer biases, unfamiliarity with Canadian business norms, language barriers, and a lack of professional networks. Experts agree there is a pressing need to enhance and expand pre-arrival orientation services and improve foreign credential recognition.[17] This section, however, will focus on two areas that have received less attention but where significant gains could be made: encouraging demand-driven employment, and immigrant entrepreneurship.

DEMAND-DRIVEN EMPLOYMENT

Demand-driven employment programs respond to current and projected employer needs (skills, jobs, etc.), and are therefore more likely to lead to sustainable employment. Traditionally, there has been an emphasis on training immigrants to improve employment outcomes. However, without active engagement of employers, there is a mismatch between the training immigrants receive and the skills employers need.

Engaging employers is challenging, given their diversity in size, location, and employment sectors. However, many employers have an interest in helping to address these barriers, given their need for skilled labour.[18] Incentives have been used to increase employer interest in hiring immigrants, including wage subsidies or preferential loan conditions, and the new Express Entry stream has given employers a bigger role in immigrant selection. Engagement could go further, however, to bring employers to the table in conversations about

CASE STUDY 4: LOCAL IMMIGRATION PARTNERSHIPS (LIPS)

LIPs were initially introduced in Ontario in 2005. They bring together settlement service providers and other stakeholders – such as municipal governments, police, schools, employers, and academics – to improve service coordination. Some LIPs are commissioning research on community needs, or seeking to standardize measurement and reporting. LIPs were recognized as a best practice in 2010 by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration and have since been expanded to other provinces. They provide a valuable source of local level insights.

A report on LIP outcomes from 2008 to 2013 found that LIPs have succeeded in fostering improved service coordination and information sharing among members. They vary significantly across the country, however, and have certain limitations. According to some experts, they are generally not serving as a vehicle for collectively defining target outcomes or developing solutions. LIP membership also varies. Important players are sometimes missing, for example from regional immigrant employment councils, chambers of commerce, or government, and member organizations do not always send senior decision makers. However, this model provides a strong foundation for further efforts to improve immigrant outcomes based on local and multi-sector collaboration.16

immigrant inclusion – including as part of Local Immigration Partnerships – to generate a better understanding of employer needs and develop employer-led solutions.[19]

CASE STUDY 5: SOCIAL CAPITAL PARTNERS (SCP) DEMAND-LED DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

SCP is working with employers in Manitoba to develop and test job training and placement services that will work for employers and for jobseekers who face employment barriers. Services will be based on a sector analysis of current and future skill gaps and hiring needs, and employers will play a key role in design. Participant employment outcomes, including retention, will be compared to a control group.[20]

IMMIGRANT ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION

Immigration contributes to Canada's capacity for innovation. Immigrants enrich the labour pool, create new businesses, and provide valuable trade and cultural ties to their countries of origin. Immigrants are more likely to seek self-employment[21] and are known to be entrepreneurial.[22] For example, results from the 2015 Ontario Regional Innovation Centre survey show that approximately 50% of the ventures surveyed have at least one foreign-born founder, while 25% have only foreign-born founders.[23] Attracting and supporting immigrant entrepreneurs is important.

The federal government recognizes the value of immigrant entrepreneurs. It introduced a Startup Visa program in 2013, the first of its kind in the world, to attract highly skilled immigrants that will build high-tech and high growth companies.

Immigrants who enter Canada should have access to the same support programs and services that are in place for all entrepreneurs. However, these programs have not been developed and tailored to meet the specific needs of immigrant entrepreneurs. Immigrant entrepreneurs face unique barriers.[24] For example, they often have limited Canadian credit and work history; lack knowledge of Canadian legal and financial systems; and are missing established social and professional networks.[25] This limits the ability of entrepreneurial immigrants both to open "main street" businesses and to start ventures in high-growth technology sectors.

There are some support programs and services that are targeted specifically for immigrant entrepreneurs. These need to be expanded.[26] Initiatives targeted to recent immigrants, such as loan and guarantee programs for small and medium-sized enterprises, business education and mentorship programs, and venture capital funds, would help immigrant entrepreneurs to succeed.[27]

RECOMMENDATIONS

TARGET AUDIENCES: FEDERAL, PROVINCIAL AND TERRITORIAL GOVERNMENTS

1. Engage employers to develop demand-driven employment solutions.

2. Work with small and medium-sized enterprise business support programs, accelerators, incubators and innovation hubs to create entrepreneurship training, mentorship, loan and venture capital programs targeted to recent immigrants.

6 STRENGTHENING POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

ISSUE

Every day, recent immigrants interact with municipal services and are impacted by decisions taken by their municipal representatives. Yet they are unable to vote in municipal elections, and are not always eligible to serve on municipal governance bodies. Engaging all voting-age legal residents of a municipality – including recent immigrants – in municipal decision-making would foster a sense of belonging, strengthen civic engagement, and promote policies that better meet the community's needs and interests.[28]

MUNICIPAL VOTING RIGHTS

Voting in an election is a cornerstone of democracy that gives community members a voice in their government. Yet many recent immigrants – who own homes, send children to schools, work, and pay property taxes – are denied the right to vote in municipal elections, or to elect school board representatives. Canada is home to over 1.6 million permanent residents, none of whom can vote. This number grows to about 2 million when people with temporary status are included.

This is an increasingly visible political issue. Municipal councils in Toronto, Saint John, Halifax and North Bay have officially adopted the position that permanent residents should have the right to vote in municipal elections. Although all provinces and territories currently restrict municipal voting rights to Canadian citizens, internationally, there are many examples of jurisdictions that have provided voting rights to resident non-citizens in local elections.[29] There are also campaigns in several large American cities to expand the right to vote to non-citizens, and six towns in Maryland have already adopted this policy. Most jurisdictions that have extended the vote in this way limit non-citizen participation to local elections. However, New Zealand, Malawi, Uruguay and Chile allow non-citizens to vote in national elections as well. There is evidence that extending voting rights encourages immigrants to get involved in other political activities. They are more likely to join political parties, trade unions, and other community associations than immigrants without voting rights. There is also evidence that non-citizen voting rights may lead to an increase in immigrant municipal councilors over time.[30]

Provincial statutes set out the governance structures for municipalities and school boards, including the process for elections and conditions for eligibility to vote. A change would therefore require amendments to provincial legislation.

CASE STUDY 6: NON-CITIZEN VOTING IN SWEDEN

Non-citizen immigrants can have a profound impact on municipal politics. The Swedish National Parliament in 1975 granted foreign citizens with three or more years of permanent residence the right to vote in elections in all of Sweden's municipalities. This reform was correlated with a substantial increase in local spending on education and social and family services. The impact of the reform on education spending was larger where more non-citizens were school-aged, and the impact on social and family services was larger where many non-citizens were preschool-aged, suggesting that the immigrant vote stimulated local efforts in these areas.[31]

CASE STUDY 7: NON-CITIZEN REPRESENTATION ON NEW YORK CITY SCHOOL BOARDS

Non-citizens were allowed to vote in New York City's school board elections between 1970 to 2002, until the city changed to an appointed school board system. In 1989, the school board and parents of students in New York City's district six, one of the most ethnically diverse in the city, successfully lobbied the city for $300 million to build eight new schools. The participation of non-citizens on the school board has been pointed to as the driving force behind this success.[32]

Figure 1: Eligibility to participate on municipal governance bodies

MUNICIPALITY	REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTICIPATION ON MUNICIPAL COMMITTEES
Calgary	Must be a Canadian citizen; Must be over the age of 18 - Provincial Act
Charlottetown	Must be a resident of the municipality
Edmonton	Must be a Canadian citizen; Must be over the age of 18 - Provincial Act
Halifax	Must be a resident of the municipality; Must be over the age of 18
London	Must be a Canadian citizen
Montreal	Must be a Canadian citizen; Must be a resident of the municipality
Mississauga	Must be a Canadian citizen; Must be over the age of 18; Must be a resident of the municipality
Ottawa	Must be residents of the municipality; Must be over the age of 18
Regina	Must be a Canadian citizen; Must be over the age of 18 - Provincial Act
Saskatoon	Must be a Canadian citizen; Must be over the age of 18 - Provincial Act
St. John's	Must be a resident of the municipality
Vancouver	Must be a Canadian citizen or a resident of the municipality for at least 6 months
Whitehorse	Must be a resident of the municipality
Winnipeg	Must be a Canadian citizen; Must be a resident of the municipality

REPRESENTATION IN MUNICIPAL GOVERNANCE

In addition, immigrants are often underrepresented on municipal governance bodies – including commissions, boards, and committees that oversee, for example, housing, transit, museum, library, park, and accessibility services – and therefore have a more limited voice in shaping municipal policies and services.[33]

There is currently a patchwork of regulations across Canada regarding the eligibly of non-citizen residents to serve on municipal governance bodies (see Figure 1, previous page). In some municipalities, non-citizens are unable to serve on municipal governing bodies by virtue of municipal by-laws or provincial legislation requiring citizenship.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TARGET AUDIENCE: PROVINCIAL AND TERRITORIAL GOVERNMENTS

1. Amend provincial and territorial legislation to remove barriers to non-citizens voting in municipal elections, including school board elections.

TARGET AUDIENCE: PROVINCIAL, TERRITORIAL AND MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS

2. Remove barriers to non-citizens becoming members of municipal governance bodies.

3. Publish an annual report card on the extent to which municipal governance bodies reflect the diversity of the communities they serve. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities should spearhead this initiative, alongside leading municipalities.

7 CONCLUSION

Canada's ability to meet the challenges of the 21st century will depend largely on our ability to build inclusive communities in which everyone — including recent immigrants — has a chance to realize their potential.

This report is necessarily incomplete, given the breadth of the challenges affecting recent immigrants and intersections with different areas of policy. We believe that our recommendations would, however, have a transformative impact on the ability of recent immigrants to succeed and to contribute to Canada's economic, social and political life.

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