

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration Recommendations on Settlement Sector Study

Submitted by
Olga Stachova, Chief Executive Officer, MOSAIC

MOSAIC's services are part of Canada's settlement and integration system that serves as a model for many countries around the world. We appreciate the efforts that the federal government makes to strengthen our system through setting multi-year immigration levels with corresponding funding, reallocating resources in response to emerging needs, and developing and streamlining pre-arrival services. We are grateful for our partnership with the Province of British Columbia in providing settlement support for newcomers with temporary status and thus ensuring universal access to services, which is a top priority for our settlement sector. However, there is always room for improvement and we welcome the opportunity to share with you recommendations that, in MOSAIC's opinion, will lead to the improvement of economic outcomes of newcomers.

1. Canadian Work Experience and Re-Skilling Programs

Study after study shows that Canada needs immigrants to meet growing labour shortages, yet recent immigrants in particular have higher unemployment rates than those born in Canada. Immigrants in general are more likely to be in jobs that under-utilize their education, skills and experience. A report done for the Conference Board of Canada estimated that immigrants would earn up to 12.7 billion dollars more per year if their skills and education were recognized.¹

Under-employment of newcomers is often attributed to the need to improve the credentials recognition process. While credential recognition is important, it is not the only barrier as we also witness significant under-utilization of newcomers in unregulated positions. We believe that the most significant barrier lies in the inability to provide newcomers with on-the-job experience that would allow employers to test their readiness and provide feedback on actual training gaps, as well as equip newcomers with Canadian experience and references. We also believe that, given the pace at which technological advancements are changing, the nature of jobs and the skillsets required for emerging jobs, re-skilling and training programs will need to recognize the role employers will increasingly play in on-the-job training. Educational institutions may not always be able to respond with their curriculum to the emerging skills requirements, nor may going back to university or college be viable for individuals in mid-career.

MOSAIC has been delivering employment programs in partnership with the Government of British Columbia and the Government of Canada for over 25 years. Working with thousands of employers and future employees we have learnt that the most successful programs are the ones designed and delivered jointly with employers.

¹ Grant, Michael. Brain Gain 2015: The State of Canada's Learning Recognition System, Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada, 2016.

Recommendation #1:

Establish Canadian Work Experience Co-op Program that will adapt the well-established co-op program model offered by universities and colleges around the world to meet the challenge of fully integrating educated immigrants into the Canadian labour market. This co-operative labour market integration model, based on work-integrated learning, would be jointly undertaken by immigrant serving organizations and employers.

This recommendation is targeted at improving labour market outcomes of recent immigrants seeking Canadian work experience in unregulated occupations with a minimum of a bachelor's degree, three years of relevant international experience, and at least CLB Level 7 in English. It builds on the experience and outcomes from a robust framework in place in Canada supporting young people in gaining work experience and successfully transitioning into the labour market, in particular through co-op placements, internships, and employer incentives provided by the Youth Employment Strategy programming. Co-op experience for newcomers can be augmented by employment-specific language support and training on Canadian workplace culture.

Recommendation #2:

Create an ongoing funding envelope for re-skilling programs designed and delivered in partnership with employers and business associations. These should be driven by employer needs, combine technical training with training on Canadian workplace culture, and on-the-job training experience allowing employers to test-drive talent.

This recommendation is based on successful pilots delivered in partnership with the BC Ministry of Jobs, Trade, and Technology for newcomers who needed to upgrade their skills through short-term, skill-specific training. Whether it was working with the BC Alliance for Manufacturing to upskill refugees for the niche apparel manufacturing positions or working with the BC Care Providers Association to train care aids for BC senior homes, 85% of trainees landed full time positions in their field at the end of the program. The ability to meaningfully engage with employers and establish an efficient pipeline to jobs requires ongoing funding commitment.

MOSAIC has partnered with Arc'teryx, the Canadian outdoor clothing and sporting goods company. Arc'teryx reached out to MOSAIC to connect with newcomer talent and they hired and continue to hire refugees. They have found hard working, passionate employees who are eager to show what they can do. Arc'teryx provides English language classes after work to their employees and has an Arabic-speaking administrator to make the communication with employees easier.

Programming needs to provide skills and language training as required, and on-the-job experience and learning. It needs to be designed and delivered by immigrant serving organizations and employers and/or employer organizations working in partnership. The role of immigrant-serving organizations can be crucial to the success and sustainability of more rapid integration of refugees into the workplace. In addition to identifying suitable candidates for work-related training, MOSAIC is able to provide refugee clients with language and settlement assistance, pre-

employment and post-placement support, orientation about Canadian workplaces, and cultural integration training.

Recommendation #3:

Allocate specific funding envelope to support integration of newcomers with complex employment needs using intensive case management approach by settlement organizations.

MOSAIC uses intensive case management approach working with individuals to identify their skills and abilities and finding employers who are willing to make accommodations and adapt their job requirements to ensure economic stability for the most vulnerable. It is essential that settlement service providers are able to invest in outreach and in building relationships with the host community and employers, not only deliver direct services.

Recommendation #4:

Encourage the Canadian Human Rights Commission and other commissions across the country to declare that requiring candidates to have Canadian experience is discriminatory. Similar to the position taken by the Ontario Human Rights Commission² in many circumstances Canadian experience is not a legitimate job requirement.

2. Inaccessibility of LINC Services

Newcomers with young children cannot avail themselves of much needed English language instructions in order to increase their integration in Canadian society due to a lack of childcare spaces or, in remote locations, the unavailability of any LINC classes. These caregivers, who are mostly young mothers, are isolated at home and are fully dependent on their partners. When domestic violence occurs, the caregivers do not believe that they can become independent due to their low level of English proficiency.

Recommendation #1:

Provide additional LINC funding for the creation of a new program comprised of a customized online LINC platform supplemented by weekly social interactions specially designed for care givers and those in remote locations. Given the limited contiguous amount of time which is available to those looking after young children, the curriculum can be designed in easily digestible 15-minute blocks, with topics relevant to caring for children and integration into Canadian life. The program could also be enhanced with socialization exercises on Saturdays where the care givers can meet and support each other.

² <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/removing-canadian-experience-barrier-brochure>

3. Family Reunification

All families have equal value. However, Canada's immigration system introduces inequalities in treatment of families and family members, depending on their immigration category or country of origin.

Family reunification is crucial to the economic success of newcomers. Long delays and barriers in processing of applications for spouses and children, as well as parents and grandparents leave families divided and more fragile. This is especially important for economic integration and prosperity of newcomer women, since parents and grandparents could take on childcare tasks and enable newcomer women to participate in training and the labour force.

We urge the Government to continue its efforts to increase opportunities for timely family reunifications.

Recommendation #1:

Introduce the same standard short processing times for family reunification for spouses and children, regardless of immigration category and country of origin.

Recommendation #2:

Regularly publish data on processing times by category and region to provide transparency for public, and progress towards desired standard.

Refugees wait much longer for family reunification than newcomers in the Family Class. In December 2016, the government announced faster processing for spousal sponsorships, but no measures have been announced to expedite family reunification for refugees. Family reunification processing time for children under family class averaged 15 months in 2015. In comparison, processing time for family members of refugees averaged 38 months in the same year.

Processing in Africa and some other regions is much slower than the global average. Dependents of refugees processed in Nairobi had to wait 40 months in 2015, compared to the processing time of 11 months experienced by dependents processed in Beirut.

4. Improving Participation of Newcomers in Civic Engagement

Numerous studies have found that neighbourhoods with high levels of civic engagement are healthier, have lower crime rates, are more economically productive and have higher voter turnout rates. There is evidence that newcomers have lower levels of civic engagement than those who were born here.

For example, levels of newcomers' participation in activities in the political sphere were found to be significantly below national averages in a 2016 survey of newcomers in the Tri-Cities area of Metro Vancouver.³ A 2011 study found under-representation of visible minorities (many of whom are immigrants) across a wide swath of leadership positions in Metro Vancouver. Only 10% of boards of directors of non-profits, for example, were visible minorities.⁴

Successful integration is often measured by the sense of belonging; the sense of not just being tolerated, but being truly accepted and appreciated. It is our belief that the integration process does not conclude with meeting immediate settlement needs and finding employment. Newcomers come with lots of knowledge, experience, and eagerness to give back to the society that opened its doors to welcome them. MOSAIC would like to see specific support provided to increase the involvement of newcomers in applying their expertise in shaping the communities, municipalities, and provinces they live in. This process is no different than the path to employment; it requires training, networks, and access to opportunities.

Recommendation #1:

Include civic engagement participation as an important step in the settlement continuum. Fund specific programming to enable newcomers to access training, networks, and opportunities for applying their expertise in shaping and directing services in their communities, municipalities, and provinces through access to seats at advisory committees, boards of directors of community organizations, and taking part in community consultations.

About MOSAIC

MOSAIC has served newcomers in British Columbia for the past 42 years. Our 350 staff, 700 volunteers and 300 contractors deliver services in person from 26 locations as well as online. MOSAIC provides services to newcomers of all ages and genders, including settlement assistance, English language and cultural competency training, employment programs, interpretation and translation, community outreach, and specialized gender and victim support counselling services. MOSAIC is also a Sponsorship Agreement Holder and supports Canada's refugee resettlement efforts. In partnership with ESDC, MOSAIC is currently leading the establishment of the first provincial Temporary Foreign Workers' Support Network.

³ Tri-Cities Local Immigration Partnership, civic Engagement of Immigrants in the Tri-Cities, 2015.

⁴ Diversecity Counts: A Snapshot of Diversity in Leadership in Metro Vancouver; Executive Summary, Vancouver: Social Planning and Research Council of BC, 2011.