

## Submission to Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration (CIMM)

World Education Services (WES)  
November 24, 2020

### Recommendations

#### **I. Build an-immigrant inclusive economy as we recover from COVID-19 pandemic**

1. Support inclusive recruitment and hiring strategies that incorporate immigrant and refugee talent sources
2. Catalyze innovative and scalable solutions that enable better recognition of education, skills, and experience gained outside Canada
3. Support movements and initiatives focusing on the inclusion of vulnerable groups in our rebuilding stage to avoid further exacerbating inequality

#### **II. Address the on-going underutilization of immigrant health professionals**

4. Create a national strategy to address the underutilization of the education, skills, and experience of Canada's internationally educated health professionals (IEHPs)

#### **III. Demonstrate Canada's commitment to international collaboration on enhancing global recognition and mobility**

5. Uphold international and humanitarian commitments by offering protection to immigrants and refugees as per the Global Compact on Safe and Orderly Migration (GCM) and Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)
6. Provide fair and timely assessment of academic credentials, skills, and experience of newcomers, even displaced individuals who cannot prove their credentials through documentary evidence in compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) and UNESCO's Convention on Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education

#### **IV. Ensure that all provinces and municipalities benefit from immigration**

7. Support smaller and rural communities to attract and retain immigrants

#### **V. Build a seamless immigration and settlement model**

8. Ensure that labour market information, including foreign credential recognition and alternative career options, is available to newcomers easily and at the appropriate time in their immigration journey

## Body of Submission

### I. Build an Immigrant Inclusive Economy as We Recover from Pandemic

Canada looks to immigration to drive our economy and to secure its future stability and growth. With a low birth rate and more than eight million baby boomers exiting the workforce, Canada will need to rely heavily on immigration to fill this gap. It's expected that immigration will account for all of Canada's net labour force growth in the coming years. The ambitious 2021-2023 immigration plan will help address our demographic challenges, labour market shortages, and improve Canada's competitiveness in the global market.

Unlike previous recessions, the economic impact of COVID-19 is hitting service sector industries the hardest and the fastest. These sectors have a significant portion of immigrant workers and are less likely to be unionized which makes these workers' employment more precarious and disproportionately affected. For instance, women, predominantly immigrant women and visible minorities, represented 63 percent of jobs lost in March, and in some industries such as health care and social assistance, women accounted for almost 100 percent of jobs lost<sup>i</sup>.

The pandemic has already amplified the existing problem of underemployment of immigrants, an issue that is evident and well documented. In 2019, WES **released a report on the employment outcomes of skilled immigrants in Canada**. The research was based on survey findings from more than 6400 skilled immigrants who were admitted to Canada as permanent residents through one of the skilled immigration programs in the Express Entry system. Key findings include:

- 80.3 percent were employed, however, less than half (47.2 percent) were working in the same sector as they were pre-migration
- There were significant changes in pre- and post-migration sectors for those working in management, education, health, and professional sectors in their home country; following migration to Canada, more new immigrants worked in food services, manufacturing, construction, and other sectors
- Survey respondents who reported that they worked in a regulated profession experienced lower rates of employment than respondents who worked in non-regulated professions

As we recover from the pandemic, we need to address the underemployment of highly skilled immigrants. Now is the time to support initiatives that build a more immigrant-inclusive economy in a way that creates opportunities for immigrants to fully leverage their skills, education, and experience in the Canadian labour market.

1. **Build inclusive recruitment and hiring strategies that incorporate immigrant talent sources.** One million immigrants have arrived in Canada over the last three years—ready to contribute their skills and experience. We need to ensure that these immigrants are not economically “scarred” by the current downturn. Let’s build inclusive recruitment and hiring strategies that incorporate immigrant talent sources. Canada’s economic growth depends on immigration; without it, future growth potential will be constrained.
2. **Catalyze innovative and scalable solutions that enable better recognition of skills, education, and experience gained outside Canada.** To build a more diverse workforce, employers need the tools to better understand skills, experience, and education gained outside of Canada. We need to look beyond the traditional model of who we know, and credentials and experience we’re familiar with. Competency-informed hiring tools are key to this shift.
3. **Support movements and initiatives focusing on the inclusion of vulnerable groups in our rebuilding stage to avoid further exacerbating inequality.** We need to ensure that amidst this pandemic, we’re not leaving immigrants and refugees behind in the immediate assistance, as well as during the recovery phase. Many immigrants are in high-risk roles during the pandemic—as health care and essential workers—and we need to ensure their safety and livelihood long-term. For instance, immigrant youth (15-34) who comprise 21 percent of the working youth population of Canada, are particularly vulnerable to the disruptions the pandemic has caused. Many are at risk of being left behind in education, economic opportunities, health and wellbeing. They are likely to be unemployed or to be in precarious job contracts and, thus, lack adequate social protection. Although there are programs focusing on newcomers that youth can access, these programs are often not appropriately structured to respond to the concurrent challenges facing immigrant youth.

Immigrants contribute to Canada, and our policies and programs should reflect the same inclusive and caring nature. The pandemic is a reminder that we are all part of a global community. A resilient Canada is one that takes care of everyone.

## **II. Address the On-going Underutilization of Immigrant Health Professionals**

The issue of the underutilization of immigrants' skills is increasingly pressing. Although educational credentials among immigrants have been higher on average than those of Canada's native-born workforce, immigrants are about twice as likely to be overqualified<sup>ii</sup>. According to WES research conducted in late 2019 focusing on labour market outcomes, regulated professionals were less likely to be employed in commensurate employment.<sup>iii</sup>

There is ample evidence of the underutilization of immigrant health professionals. Overall, immigrants comprise 25.5 percent of health care and social assistance sector in Canada<sup>iv</sup>. Yet, according to a recent **Statistics Canada** study, almost half (47 percent) of immigrants with health education from abroad are unemployed, underemployed, or in jobs requiring only a high school education and not utilizing their health skills earned.<sup>v</sup>

In recent decades, the persistent issue of barriers to the workforce integration of internationally educated health professionals (IEHPs) has been framed principally in terms of licensure and regulation. Indeed, occupational regulatory bodies have a key role to play, as they set professional standards and are charged with protecting the public. However, especially in the context of the pandemic and the strains it has put on our health care and long-term care workforce, we believe it is time to reframe the issue as primarily a health human resource and workforce integration issue, with a regulatory component.

Framed in this way, the goal becomes to holistically and strategically address the intersecting challenges of a large, underemployed skilled immigrant workforce and the needs of our health care systems in Canada. This approach would bring a broader group of stakeholders, including health sector employers, to the table. It would bring the resources, capacity, and innovation of health care employers more fully to bear on the issue. We believe this approach can lead to a more comprehensive set of collaborative solutions to address a longstanding problem that has significant costs for Canadians and their health.

WES is seeing the potential of this approach in our current work. During the pandemic, longstanding human resource issues in the long-term care (LTC) sector have been

significantly exacerbated, leading to severe staffing shortages contributing to outbreaks and deaths. At the same time, the degree to which the workforce in LTC is comprised of recent immigrants, and racialized immigrant women in particular, has been highlighted in a number of recent studies. WES has begun to convene a multi-stakeholder conversation in Ontario to bring together long-term care employers, existing bridging programs for internationally educated nurses, and other stakeholders to seek long-term solutions.

The pandemic is presenting a critical opportunity to create new partnerships and develop win-win solutions for IEHPs seeking to use their skills and for the LTC system seeking to build a sustainable workforce in Ontario and nationally. Stakeholders are exploring ideas for innovative workplace-based models built on proven practices and programs to effectively bridge IEHPs into roles that use their health care backgrounds and create opportunities for many to be re-licensed in their professions, while increasing the sector's ability to retain them.

Create a national strategy to address the underutilization of the skills, education, and experience of Canada's IEHPs. Canada has the opportunity to leverage the renewed attention on this issue during the pandemic to convene a national, multi-stakeholder committee to build a national strategy. This should include employers, regulators, educators, IEHPs, the immigrant serving sector, and government to address the ongoing underutilization of immigrant health professionals in our health care system. IRCC, ESDC, Health Canada, and their provincial counterparts have key roles to play in supporting this process and the development of a national strategy.

### **III. Demonstrate Canada's Commitment to International Collaboration on Enhancing Global Recognition and Mobility**

As a signatory to several international agreements, including the **Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)** and the **Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)**, Canada must demonstrate its commitment to global recognition and mobility. Canada needs to continue playing a significant role in upholding its international and humanitarian commitments by offering protection to refugees and persons in need of protection.

Canada ratified the **Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC)** which became effective in August 2018. The LRC is a legally binding document that necessitates fair recognition of

individuals who settle in Canada, even displaced individuals who cannot prove their credentials through documentary evidence. Professional regulators are obliged to ensure that systems are in place to conduct fair and timely assessments.

Moreover, on November 25, 2019, UNESCO's member states adopted the first **United Nations Convention on Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education**. The new convention establishes universal principles for recognition of studies and degrees, and will improve mobility for the more than 220 million students enrolled in higher education worldwide. Canada needs to ratify this Convention and promote the right of individuals to have their higher education qualifications evaluated through fair, transparent, and non-discriminatory mechanisms.

The pandemic presents tremendous opportunities to revisit these international commitments and work towards their implementation to promote global recognition and mobility. More so, Canada's commitment to the **2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, commonly referred to as a "roadmap for humanity", will be crucial to ensure a stable and prosperous life for every person and to lead a sustainable and inclusive recovery. The SDGs will serve as benchmarks to promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.

#### **IV. Ensure that all Provinces and Municipalities Benefit from Immigration**

Settlement and immigration patterns reveal that the majority of immigrants and their families settle in large cities, such as Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. However, local municipalities and smaller communities face major challenges to fill local labour shortages.

Programs such as the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot, Atlantic Immigration Pilot, and the recently introduced Municipal Nominee Program (MNP) complement federal immigration programs and attract immigrants to rural and smaller communities across Canada. They will contribute to the overall growth of the economy and reduce disparity in immigration. For instance, MNP addresses the following gaps that other programs do not.

- **Greater leverage in attracting immigrants:** Smaller communities, which may not be an immigrant's first choice, will be afforded the opportunity to make themselves more attractive to immigrants. The MNP incentivizes immigrants to think beyond the big cities and positions smaller and rural communities as a destination.

- **Path to gainful employment:** The MNP helps to ensure that immigrants' skills are well recognized and that they will be gainfully employed, giving them the means to support themselves. Without this direct link to employment, it is far less likely that immigrants will move out of major cities that provide more and varied job prospects.

## **V. Build a Seamless Immigration and Settlement Model**

One of the major challenges in Canada's immigration and settlement model is overlap in services, which is confusing and frustrating for newcomers who want to get labour market information easily and quickly. Web-based information on available programs and services is overwhelming and difficult to navigate. Moreover, services are often delivered in isolation leading to the duplication of efforts.

WES suggests undertaking a detailed review of its settlement model to determine service improvements to create a seamless model. Information regarding foreign credential recognition and alternative career options should be provided in a holistic manner. Such an approach would facilitate a more effective use of skilled immigrants' talents and ensure successful integration of newcomers in the economy.

It will also be important to establish a national committee of diverse stakeholders (including employers, licensing bodies, settlement agencies, post-secondary institutions) to consult and advise on how best to address the significant underutilization of the talent newcomers bring to Canada, with a view to promoting a labour force that is highly skilled and inclusive.

### **About World Education Services**

**World Education Services (WES)** is a non-profit social enterprise whose mission is to foster the integration of internationally educated persons into academic and professional settings. WES advances global mobility and enables skilled immigrants, international students and refugees to fully contribute their education and talents.

WES works to enable individuals and to create systemic changes by building partnerships with post-secondary institutions, regulatory bodies, employers, and immigrant-serving organizations to undertake initiatives targeted at successful economic integration of immigrants. Since 2013, WES has been a designated provider of Educational Credential Assessments (ECAs) for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.



<sup>i</sup> Behind the Numbers: *Women bearing the brunt of economic losses: One in five has been laid off or had hours cut*, April 10, 2020

<sup>ii</sup> Statistics Canada: *Persistent over qualification among immigrants and non-immigrants*; Statistics Canada: ***The Canadian immigrant labour market: Recent trends from 2006 to 2017***

<sup>iii</sup> World Education Services(WES): *Who is Succeeding in the Canadian Labour Market? Predictors of Career Success for Skilled Immigrants*, 2019

<sup>iv</sup> *Labour Force Survey 2017*

<sup>v</sup> Statistics Canada: *Adults with a health education but not working in health occupations*, April 2020