

Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the Upcoming Federal Budget

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List of recommendations:

- **Recommendation 1:** That the government create a fund of \$1 million to allow immigrant employment councils to develop and scale programs aimed at helping employers to build inclusive workplaces.
- **Recommendation 2:** That the government support the continued growth of newcomer mentoring programs across Canada, with \$11 million for existing programs and \$1 million to develop programs aimed at immigrant women in smaller cities and towns.
- **Recommendation 3:** That the government create opportunities to connect international students to employment to spur economic growth.

Background

Economic recovery from COVID-19 will require that all Canadians' skills are brought to bear, including newcomers', whose global knowledge and experience will be key to strategic recuperation, revitalization, and eventual growth. Directing funding to organizations that work not only with newcomers themselves in relation to employment but, as importantly, work with employers to create demand for immigrant talent will have a lasting and measurable impact on Canada's economy across all sectors.

Without doubt, COVID-19 has had a negative impact on employment, with women and newcomers particularly affected. Newcomers are more likely to be found in precarious work and therefore were most susceptible to job loss during the pandemic, as noted in the July fiscal snapshot presented by the Government of Canada. Employment for recent immigrants in May was 22.6 per cent lower than in February.¹ Meanwhile, women held 60 per cent of the jobs lost between late February and March and lost 50 per cent more work hours than men.² 'This 'she-cession' has been driven by the closure of childcare centres and schools, along with the effects of the pandemic-induced lockdown on jobs in the service sector where women are overrepresented. While post-pandemic recovery began in May, men have continued to see greater increases in employment than women and, unsurprisingly, immigrant women have fared worst of all.

Helping to solve these immediate challenges will be key to building sustainable growth and attracting top tier talent from around the world in the long-term. Encouragingly, in spite of COVID-19, the majority of prospective immigrants are not deterred in their desire to come to Canada, with 57 per cent saying the pandemic has not altered their intention to immigrate.³ This will be important given that, in the next two decades, immigration is set to account for all net growth in Canada's population and workforce.⁴ An aging population and increased pressure on healthcare, pensions, and other social services means a dynamic and productive skilled workforce will be essential to maintaining Canada's standard of living and ability to remain competitive on the global stage. Underemployed immigrants (those working in jobs below one's level of skill, education and experience) have been identified as "a stranded resource, something the country cannot afford, in either economic or social terms."⁵

This is avoidable if programs to support newcomer employment are adequately resourced. The persistent issue of underemployment among Canada's skilled immigrants can be addressed through employer relations programming focussed on **building more inclusive workplaces** as well as those supporting the **mentoring of newcomers** on job searching and networking in their fields, both of which have proven results in driving change and creating opportunities. In addition, **opportunities to connect international students to Canadian employers** would position them as a valuable talent pipeline, helping to staff Canadian organizations with diverse, educated colleagues who are well poised to contribute to Canadian workplaces.

¹ Statistics Canada

² Professor Tammy Schirle interview with Global News (2020) <https://globalnews.ca/news/6907589/canada-coronavirus-she-session/>

³ WES: *Are intentions to immigrate to Canada changing in the face of COVID-19?* (2020)

⁴ Statistics Canada

⁵ Centre for International Governance and the Pierre Trudeau Foundation: *Diversity Dividend: Canada's Global Advantage* (2017)

In our close work with employers and with immigrant professionals, Canada's immigrant employment councils and our partners have identified the following three recommendations for the Government of Canada to invest an additional **\$13 million**, to enhance immigrants' unique opportunity to contribute to the recovery and growth of the Canadian economy and society.

Recommendations

- 1. That the government create a fund of \$1 million to allow immigrant employment councils to develop and scale programs aimed at helping employers to build inclusive workplaces.**

Supporting employers to reduce barriers to acquiring diverse talent through more inclusive hiring practices, as well as tools and resources for generating a sense of true belonging for all members of their workforces, will be an essential part of positioning Canada as a destination for the world's best and brightest in the years to come. Opportunities to offer their full breadth of skills and talent, irrespective of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, country of origin are not only essential to employee satisfaction and demonstrative of a fair society, but have been proven to deliver the best economic results. **Workplaces that are genuinely diverse and inclusive out-perform their competitors in both innovation and revenue.**⁶ Ensuring a diverse and inclusive workplace is simply good business.

Diversity and inclusion programs offered by immigrant employment councils include training and resources, certificate courses and strategic consultations, all focussed on supporting employers to develop inter-cultural competence. This lens of diversity looks at the ways in which a workplace may both consciously and unconsciously take on behaviours of a dominant culture that fail to allow those from other cultures the opportunity to participate, collaborate and innovate to their full potential. While cultural competence is only one lens of diversity, these offerings take into account the ways identities intersect around race, gender, class, sexual orientation and ability, and provide employers with useful, strategic tools and approaches to create a workplace that is truly inclusive. Investing in this work will mean the Government of Canada is not only helping to address the issue of persistent underemployment among immigrants but ensuring increased career advancement opportunities for immigrants with better representation at all levels within organizations, including leadership.

- 2. That the government support the continued growth of newcomer mentoring programs across Canada, with \$11 million for existing programs and \$1 million to develop programs aimed at immigrant women in smaller cities and towns.**

Newcomers participating in occupation-specific mentoring programs with established professionals in the same or similar field or sector has been proven to help them acquire work in line with their global skills and experience. The results are measurable for both the individual and the economy. Unfamiliarity with the new labour market, costly re-licensing processes, and a lack of a professional network are common barriers for newcomers that lead to underemployment. Mentoring is a solution that reduces the chances of immigrant underemployment, while increasing newcomers' ability to contribute their full potential to their workplaces, as well as the broader economy.

Successful models for newcomer mentoring make up the National Mentoring Partnership (operating now in British Columbia, Edmonton, Calgary, London, Niagara, Toronto, Ottawa and Nova Scotia). The

⁶ McKinsey & Company: *Delivering through diversity* (2018).

Government of Canada's further investment in proven, cost-effective mentoring solutions, and growing similar programs across the country can reach thousands of more immigrants and their families, giving them that important first Canadian job at the right level for their skills and experience. The benefits are enormous—to individuals, to their families and to their communities, which can reach well beyond urban centres where these programs exist today.⁷

In the Greater Toronto Area, TRIEC's Mentoring Partnership program has been subject to an external evaluation by funded by Employment and Social Development Canada. The results show that mentoring helps newcomers, particularly women, find work, build a career beyond precarious employment and expand professional networks. Specifically, it found that compared to a control group of similar professionals, **newcomers who enrolled as mentees in TRIEC Mentoring Partnership were 2.5 times more likely to find good quality jobs in their field** within three months.⁸

The external evaluation also analysed six other metropolitan areas in Canada and estimated that around 120,000 university-educated newcomers across Canada who are unemployed or underemployed could benefit from mentoring.⁹ The Government of Canada's investment of \$11 million would support the continuity of existing programs with proven track records of success, and an investment of \$1 million would support opportunities for new programs in other regions, including those where other immigration pilots and initiatives are taking place. The funding of new programs must aim to take an intersectional lens, which may include customizable mentoring specifically for immigrant women, who not only start with so much ground to make up, but have been hard-hit in particular by the pandemic.

3. That the government create opportunities to connect international students to employment to spur economic growth.

International students represent a key, largely untapped, talent pool for Canadian employers at a time of much-needed economic recovery. Canada had 642,480 international students in 2019¹⁰. Furthermore, 60 per cent of international students intended to become permanent residents in 2018.¹¹ **International students' contributions to the GDP have exceeded \$21.6 billion and created 168,000 jobs.**¹² Over the past few months, federal government debt has increased precipitously due to large spending on relief

⁷ TRIEC has been working diligently to make the case for increased investment and augment its capabilities to successfully manage such an investment. In 2014, the Mentoring Partnership was chosen by LEAP: The Centre for Social Impact for in-kind investment to accomplish these goals. LEAP applies the discipline of private equity investing to select, support and scale charities with quantifiable social impact. TRIEC has received in-kind consulting support from the Boston Consulting Group, Cossette, Ernst & Young, the Offord Group and McCarthy Tétrault and has generated \$1,600,000 to support technology upgrades, recruiting new employer partners and reaching out to more immigrant professionals.

⁸ Blueprint ADE, TRIEC Mentoring Partnership Evaluation (2020) <http://triec.ca/research-and-insights/mentoring-evaluation/>

⁹ Blueprint ADE, TRIEC Mentoring Partnership Evaluation (2020) <http://triec.ca/research-and-insights/mentoring-evaluation/>

¹⁰ Canadian Bureau for International Education: *International students in Canada continue to grow in 2019* (2019) <https://cbie.ca/international-students-in-canada-continue-to-grow-in-2019/>

¹¹ Canadian Bureau for International Education: *The Student's Voice* (2018) https://cbie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Student_Voice_Report-ENG.pdf

¹² Government of Canada: *Building on Success: International Education Strategy (2019-2024)* (2019) <https://www.international.gc.ca/education/strategy-2019-2024-strategie.aspx?lang=eng>

programs (e.g. CERB) aimed at helping Canadians impacted by the pandemic. This means our labour market must respond in kind to avoid an unnecessarily long period of interest payments. Canada must attract and retain all the potential talent it can, especially considering in twenty years' time, immigration will be the main cause of growth of both Canada's population and economy.¹³

The percentage of international students who transition from student visa to post-graduate work permit and then to the permanent residency is low. Contributing factors to this are a combination of a general lack of work experience faced by new graduates as well as many of the same challenges that affect immigrant professionals generally in terms of non-inclusive hiring practices. Gaining Canadian work experience directly correlates to international students' prospects for settling in Canada. The more opportunities an individual has to gain work experience while a student or while on their post-graduation work permit, the more likely they are to transition to permanent residency.¹⁴

Presently, international students are ineligible for the support programs funded by the federal government. But this group could benefit substantially from programs that connects them to employers and employment opportunities. They are ready and eager to make major contributions to the Canadian workforce and economy. What is required for putting this group of young people to work in their fields of study is the same types of networking, mentoring, job-seeking support offered by the existing settlement sector. Bridging the gap between international students and employers through effective programming will significantly reduce precarious employment and ensure they are able to make the best possible and most long-term economic and professional contributions.

¹³ Centre for International Governance and the Pierre Trudeau Foundation: *Diversity Dividend: Canada's Global Advantage* (2017)

¹⁴ Century Initiative: *Scaling International Education* (2019): <https://www.centuryinitiative.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/CI-Inter-Education.pdf>.