

**Recommendations for Restructuring Express Entry to Support Long-Term
Economic Growth**

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Executive Summary

Canada's Express Entry system has deviated from its original intent: selecting high-skilled, high-potential immigrants to support long-term economic prosperity. While recent government plans claim to reflect stakeholder feedback and economic realities, a close analysis reveals a system increasingly shaped by political goals, short-term thinking, and unclear decision-making. This brief outlines five key problems in our current immigration policy and pairs each with a targeted recommendation and expected outcome for realigning the system with Canada's long-term economic interests and stakeholder expectations.

1. Overprioritization of Francophone Immigration Targets

The Problem

The 2025 Immigration Levels Plan includes a target of 8.5% for French-speaking PR admissions outside Quebec, rising to 10.5% by 2028.¹ While this appears modest, the actual impact is heavily concentrated on the skilled immigration streams applicable outside Quebec. 23.2% of Express Entry Invitations to Apply in 2024 were allocated to Francophone candidates.² This year alone from Jan 1st, until the date of this brief, out of 85,100 total Express Entry ITAs in federal program selection, IRCC issued a whopping 42,000 to the Francophone category candidates (49.3%).³

This contradicts stakeholder feedback given in the 2024 Consultations on Economic Priorities: the lowest percentage, 14.6% of respondents identified a "great need" for prioritizing Francophone immigration for economic needs, being exceeded by more than double the support for STEM and Trades, while healthcare had nearly 4 times the percentage of "great need" support.⁴

This policy has practical trade-offs. Candidates without French-language proficiency, including many high-skilled tech workers, senior managers and existing high skilled workers in Canada, are disproportionately excluded. Moreover, over 84% of Francophone category PR Invitees

¹ "Supplementary Information for the 2026-2028 Immigration Levels Plan"

<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/mandate/corporate-initiatives/levels/supplementary-immigration-levels-2026-2028.html>

² "Express Entry Year End Report"

<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/express-entry-year-end-report-2024.html#s5>

³ Previous Draw History:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/mandate/policies-operational-instructions-agreements/ministerial-instructions/express-entry-rounds.html>

⁴ 2024 Consultations Express Entry Selection Report:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/transparency/consultations/2024-consultations-express-entry-selection-report.html#toc4>

qualify under the Federal Skilled Worker Program, which means they do not have at least 1 year of skilled Canadian work experience (overwhelmingly these PR invitees reside overseas).⁵

It should also be noted that the average French score (when adjusting for bonus points that distort human capital factors as they are granted solely by membership in the category) is substantially lower. The average CRS (human capital factors) cutoff score for Francophone category draws was 384 points compared with a stratospheric 536 CRS for general draws, 524 points for the Canadian Experience Class and a 491 average cutoff CRS for STEM 2024.

The Solution

The federal government should remove general national Francophone quotas from Express Entry and direct all French-speaking immigration outside of Quebec to the *Francophone Community Immigration Pilot*. This would allow targeted, community-driven selection in regions with the capacity to support integration, while avoiding arbitrary trade-offs in the broader Express Entry pool. This mirrors stakeholder suggestions and supports cultural and language goals without undermining economic immigration priorities.

Expected Outcomes

Francophone immigration will be driven to the regions and communities that have the best foundation and language capacity to absorb and support these newcomers. The burden of finding employment and successful settlement in non-Francophone regions will not be left up to the newcomers themselves and the local ecosystem. The skilled immigration spots taken away from higher skilled workers to support the Francophone immigration cause will be repurposed and given to candidates better suited to integrate in the economy in general.

2. Deprioritization and Collapse of the STEM Category

The Problem

Canada has not held a single STEM-specific Express Entry draw since April 2024. Meanwhile, IRCC quietly removed 19 vital STEM occupations in early 2025, including software developers, data scientists, engineers, and urban planners. These are high-income, high-productivity professions that drive innovation and economic growth. Their removal undermines Canada's competitiveness and shuts the door on thousands of international graduates with Canadian degrees in science and technology fields.

In their place, less relevant roles like "Insurance agents and brokers" were added to the STEM list, despite lacking a clear connection to science or technology. The decisions appear driven by

⁵<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/express-entry-year-end-report-2024.html#s8>

lagging labour market projections (e.g., COPS data) rather than strategic foresight or real-time economic needs.⁶

The Solution

IRCC should eliminate the rotating category-based model and instead define a limited number of **permanent priority categories**, starting with STEM and high-skilled healthcare. These categories should be maintained well and consistently: they should only include NOC codes that align with skill-intensive, high-impact roles. At the same time, IRCC should restore a transparent, regular cadence of draws to reduce uncertainty and volatility in the system.

Expected Outcomes

High-skill, high-demand workers will have a consistent pathway for transitioning to permanent residence in Canada. This will increase the appeal for these students and workers to come to Canada and begin building a life and foundation here. They will see the stability in the immigration system for their professions. This is as opposed to now, when it's unclear if they'll ever be selected in a draw again.

3. Lack of Long-Term Planning in Category-Based Selection

The Problem

As of November 2025, IRCC has yet to announce the category-based selection criteria for 2026. This unpredictability undermines confidence in the system for applicants, employers, and institutions. Worse, the 2025 categories reveal inconsistent logic: cooks dominated the “trades” draw over chefs and regulated construction roles, and low-wage, unlicensed pharmacy assistants got prioritized as healthcare professionals in dedicated draws. These choices appear driven by tactical COPS projections rather than any long-term strategy.

The Solution

By shifting away from reactive category designations and toward fixed, strategic priorities, Canada can build a more stable, economically aligned immigration system. Parallely, the Express Entry Federal Skilled Trades draws should be reinstated for workers with Canadian certifications to enable a correct prioritization and consistent selection of trade workers throughout the year.

Expected Outcomes

⁶ Express Entry Category Changes, Feb 2025:
<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2025/02/canada-announces-2025-express-entry-category-based-draws-plans-for-more-in-canada-draws-to-reduce-labour-shortages.html>

This will reduce the chaos and lack of planning so evidently seen in the immigration system today. It will bring back a consistent system and refocus immigration planning on long-term economic impact as opposed to constantly solving short-term labor shortages.

4. Misalignment with Stakeholder Feedback

The Problem

Across every major question in IRCC's 2025 stakeholder consultations, the message was clear: prioritize economic immigration. Over 90% of organizations ranked "addressing economic and labour force needs" as a top priority. 70% supported increasing economic class immigration if overall levels rise. By contrast, only 16% prioritized Francophone immigration, and fewer than 5% of prospective Francophone immigrants had sufficient English proficiency for easy integration outside Quebec.⁷

Despite this, Express Entry policy in 2025 and 2026 has done the opposite: it deprioritized STEM and economic-class draws while expanding Francophone-specific rounds. Francophone draws accounted for the largest quantity of ITAs issued in 2025.

The Solution

Stakeholder consultations must directly inform immigration targets and program design. This applies to both the annual Levels Plan and the overall Express Entry program setup. If feedback is sought, it must shape policy. Otherwise, the process risks becoming performative and eroding trust in public consultation altogether.

Expected Outcomes

Stakeholders and the populace in general will begin to feel like their feedback is being valued and incorporated. They will see the value of being a part of a process that solicits their feedback and actually incorporates it. Most importantly, the public will have an active say in the immigrants they are expected to accommodate.

5. Lack of Transparency in Immigration Planning

The Problem

The 2025 federal budget introduced two major "one-time" PR pathways: one for temporary workers (economic) and the other for protected persons (refugees). Only the economic measure (33,000 admissions) was disclosed in the 2025 annual budget tables.⁸ The refugee measure's

⁷ 2025 Consultations Immigration Levels Report: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/transparency/consultations/2025-consultations-immigration-levels-report.html>

⁸ Budget 2025: <https://budget.canada.ca/2025/report-rapport/pdf/budget-2025.pdf>

exact admission quantity (115,000) was presented in the 2026-2028 immigration levels plan⁹ but left out of the budget itself. This created a false impression that the economic expansion was larger than it was, while hiding the scale of the humanitarian expansion.

Moreover, this puts the real immigration targets for 2026 and 2027 significantly higher than presented since 74,000 applicants are being added annually through this measure. The real 2026 total immigration target is 454,000, not the 380,000 headline figure. Such misrepresentation undercuts transparency and prevents meaningful engagement from the populace.

The Solution

All immigration pathways, regardless of class, must be disclosed in full in both the Immigration Levels Plan and the federal budget. This includes one-time measures, pilot programs, and category-based allocations. Without transparent numbers, stakeholders are left in the dark, and public trust suffers.

Expected Outcomes

The trust in the immigration system will be rebuilt. The government will be clearly displaying all of the numbers in all of the categories so that the public can fully understand the impact of the immigration planning.

Summary of Recommendations

Remove National Francophone Quotas from Express Entry: The federal government should eliminate general national Francophone quotas from the Express Entry system and instead direct French-speaking immigration (outside Quebec) to the Francophone Community Immigration Pilot to better support regional integration.

Establish Permanent Priority Categories: IRCC should abolish the rotating category-based model in favor of a limited number of permanent priority categories, such as STEM and high-skilled healthcare, while ensuring only skill-intensive, high earning NOC codes are included.

Restore Draw Regularity and Specific Streams: The government must restore a transparent, regular cadence of draws to reduce system volatility and reinstate Federal Skilled Trades draws for workers with Canadian certifications to ensure consistent selection.

Align Policy with Stakeholder Feedback: IRCC must ensure that immigration targets and program design, specifically the Annual Levels Plan and Express Entry setup, are directly

⁹ 2026-2028 Supplementary Information for Immigration Levels Plan:
<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/mandate/corporate-initiatives/levels/supplementary-immigration-levels-2026-2028.html>

informed by stakeholder consultations rather than overriding economic priorities for political goals.

Mandate Full Transparency in Planning: All immigration pathways, including one-time measures, pilot programs, and category-based allocations, must be fully disclosed in both the Immigration Levels Plan and the Federal Budget to restore public trust.