



# Municipal Perspectives on Immigration to Ontario

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Submission to the Federal Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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Ontario's municipal governments are welcoming communities. Although immigration is a shared federal and provincial responsibility, immigrants and refugee claimants interact with municipal services such as emergency shelters, housing supports, recreation, cultural, transit, public health, employment programs and other social services almost immediately upon arrival. Many municipal governments also actively undertake efforts with dedicated resources to attract new immigrants to their communities. For example, many communities with post-secondary institutions have an interest in encouraging international students to apply for permanent residence. We are proud of the role we play in helping to attract, settle and integrate newcomers into our towns, villages and our cities.

However, we cannot do it alone. Ontario municipal governments continue to need a federal partner willing to support municipal governments and community partners in doing this work by providing additional financial and resource supports. One successful example of such a support, for which we are grateful for, are federal funds for Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) councils. More funding to enhance existing LIPs and to expand new ones across Ontario would further municipal, provincial and federal immigration objectives.

We also need federal leadership willing to engage directly with municipal and provincial partners to find ways to help disperse the benefits of immigration to communities of all shapes and sizes, including in urban, rural, northern, and francophone Ontario. Some Ontario municipal governments have called on the federal government to implement immigration pilot projects in their region. AMO recommends that the federal government explore options with AMO and these municipal governments to address their immigration-related needs. Enhancing foreign-credential recognition so that new Ontarians can get to work in local economies is also important.

All orders of government have a role to play in ensuring our immigration and refugee systems function efficiently and compassionately. The current challenges raised by the asylum seekers crossing into Canada between points of entry highlight the need for a more coordinated, trilateral approach to immigration and refugee settlement involving all three orders of government. Developing and implementing a coordinated settlement plan for Ontario is especially necessary if this type of asylum seeker migration becomes a new norm.

Immigration remains a priority for many of Ontario's municipal governments. The asylum seekers are no exception. Immigration is vital to address labour market shortages and to advance local economic development in our communities. Newcomers also enrich our social fabric.

Reforms to improve and speed up Canada's refugee determination system are necessary to make sure Ontario communities can continue to benefit from immigration. A coordinated triage plan to connect refugees with the appropriate skillset to regions where there are employment opportunities is also important. Refugee claimants and other immigrants also need timely access to work permits so that they can begin contributing to our local economies immediately after arrival.

As the committee discusses migration-related challenges and opportunities in Canada in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we urge committee members to consider ways Canada can engage with municipal and provincial partners. One way is to enhance trilateral forums such as the Municipal Immigration Committee under the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement. Leveraging these types of tripartite forums that allow for timely information sharing and a municipal role in immigration policy development will be key moving forward. Direct federal engagement with individual municipal governments is also necessary to ensure a coordinated and thoughtful approach to newcomer attraction and settlement in the future.

## Summary of Recommendations:

To improve Canada's immigration and refugee systems in a way that benefits municipalities across Ontario AMO recommends that:

- 1) The federal government **engage AMO, provincial and municipal government partners** by leveraging the tripartite Municipal Immigration Committee under the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement to enable timely-information sharing, enhanced coordination between the three orders of government and a municipal role in newcomer-related policy development and decision-making;
- 2) The federal government work directly with municipal governments and through the Municipal Immigration Committee and Local Immigration Partnerships in order to receive policy advice to explore new ways to **disperse the benefits of immigration more widely throughout Ontario**, including in urban, rural, northern and francophone municipalities;
- 3) The federal government **increase funding and supports** to provide services to refugee claimants, including those impacted by the recent increase in asylum seekers.
- 4) The federal government **increase funding to enhance existing and expand new Local Immigration Partnership councils** across Ontario and leverage their policy advice;
- 5) The federal government **increase the capacity of the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB)** to speed up the processing of refugee claims;
- 6) The federal government **speed up the processing of work permits** so that newcomers, including refugee claimants, can quickly find employment and contribute to local economies; and,
- 7) The federal government continue to identify ways to **improve foreign credential recognition** across Canada.

***The Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) is a non-profit organization representing almost all of Ontario's 444 municipal governments. AMO supports and enhances strong and effective municipal government in Ontario and promotes the value of municipal government as a vital and essential component of Ontario and Canada's political system.***

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Submitted by:



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