



The AAISA Research Bulletin has been developed to provide information to members and community partners around a wide range of policy and legislation trends and implications affecting immigrants and immigrant-serving agencies in Canada and Alberta. Our goal is assisting Albertan settlement agencies to work in and understand changes impacting the sector.

Expression of Interest: A New Immigration Model

Summary

The Federal Government believes Canada can and should compete actively to attract the best and brightest individuals to make Canada home, and is planning to revolutionize the way it processes and selects immigration applications through a new Expression of Interest (EOI) system, scheduled for implementation in 2015. EOI will select immigrants based on the skills Canadian employers need and, in turn, should they pursue citizenship, their immigration applications will be prioritized and fast-tracked. This Research Bulletin provides a summary of EOI and considers its projected impact on the settlement sector.

Setting the stage:

Reasons for Governmental Immigration Policy Changes

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) has reported that trends in the labour market indicate that due to two major demographic challenges: the retirement of baby boomers and a limited number of new Canadians entering the labour market, newcomers will become increasingly important to the Canadian labour market. The Hays Global Skills Index¹ found that Canada is 9th worst among 30 developed countries for the severity of skills shortages to meet employment needs – and the skill gap is widening.

What is the EOI?

- EOI is an Immigration system to be implemented in 2015. More opportunities for Economic Immigrants will be created. Economic immigrants will make up 63% of all immigration to Canada.
- Enables Canadian employers to hire from a pool of prospective skilled

¹ The Hays Global Skills Index 2013, Available at: <http://www.hays-index.com/2013/>



immigrants

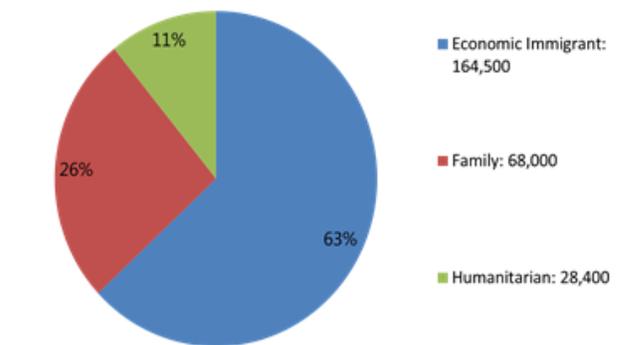
- Applicants will be ranked on a points scale for their skills, qualifications and language proficiency. Employers and federal, provincial and territorial governments can then select desirable immigrants to be selected, based on a match between employment needs and applicant skills.
- Means that more desirable immigrants matching Canada's labour shortages will have an immigration advantage
- CIC is planning in 2014 to begin accepting more immigrants from the Economic class than previously, to continue and extend into the EOI system in 2015

How Does EOI Work? A Two-step Process

Step 1: Prospective immigrants would indicate their interest in coming to Canada by providing information electronically to Citizenship & Immigration Canada about their skills, work experience and other attributes.

Step 2: Individuals who meet certain eligibility criteria will have their "expressions of interest" placed in a pool and ranked against others already in the pool. CIC would only invite the best candidates, including those with in-demand skills or with job offers, to apply for a visa. Expressions of interest that are not chosen after a period of time may be removed from the pool. As a result, application backlogs would not accumulate and processing times will be kept to a minimum².

Projected Immigration to Canada in 2014



Source: Stats Canada: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/department/media/releases/2013/2013-10-28.asp>

² Citizenship & Immigration Canada: Backgrounder—Expression of Interest (EOI) - Preparing for Success in 2015. Available at: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/department/media/backgrounders/2013/2013-10-28b.asp>



Settlement Sector Implications: Pros and Cons

Implications of moving towards an economic system of immigration will mean that immigrants arriving in Canada and Alberta will be more highly skilled and qualified than in the current system. This means that settlement agencies will change from proactively assessing labour market trends and forecasts in Alberta in order to realign services to this changing demographic. Some current and short-term employment trends in Alberta are revealed in this bulletin.

Pros:

- Could benefit skilled immigrants as they could arrive in Canada with employment on arrival. Since immigrants will be coming equipped with skills needed in the economy, chances of finding work upon arrival are enhanced
- Canada could attract highly skilled workers away from countries (such as the USA) with more restrictions on skilled worker immigration, creating more domestic talent
- According to CIC Minister Chris Alexander, "Securing economic growth is and will remain our Government's top priority...Canada is in a global competition for the best and brightest immigrants, and this plan is crafted with attracting the people we need for Canada to succeed³."

Cons:

Though there is little negative publicity on this proposed system at present, immigration lawyer Andy Semotiuk made the following comment: "The whole premise of a centrally planned, "federal mind" matching Canadian employers with foreign employees is fatally flawed. If the plan is for someone in Ottawa to decide how many chefs, pilots, tailors, and miners are needed in, say, Vancouver, Montreal, Saskatchewan, and Sudbury, then it is not going to work. These and a million other decisions change from moment to moment and from day to day. To try and read the tea leaves on these considerations is practically impossible. There is no realistic way for the federal government to do this - only the unfettered free market is capable of effectively doing this kind of match making.⁴"

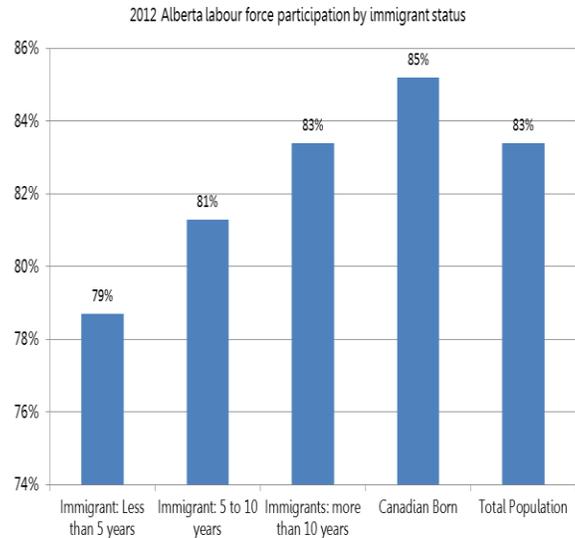
³ <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/department/media/releases/2013/2013-10-28.asp>

⁴ Pace Law Firm, Available at: <http://paceimmigration.blogspot.ca/2013/10/the-expression-of-interest-system-is.html>



Albertan Economic Landscape

Alberta is placed uniquely among Canadian provinces as the province with greatest economic growth, which means that its projected labour needs moving forward will be high compared with other areas of Canada. The EOI immigration model therefore has significant potential to address upcoming labour shortages that Alberta could be facing unless it can continue ensuring there is sufficient capacity in the workforce to supply labour demand. Alberta has led the provinces in economic growth over the past 20 years, with an average annual GDP growth of 3.6%. The provincial economy grew by 3.9% in 2012, more than double the national increase of 1.8%³. Alberta's labour force participation rate consistently remains the highest among Canadian provinces since 2007. Alberta's rate was 73.4% in 2012, while the national rate was 66.7%⁴.



Immigrants who have been in Canada for 5 years or less have a lower employment rate than the rest of the population in Alberta, standing at 78.7% employment, compared with 84.5% employment in the general population. EOI, in theory, could enable new immigrants to find jobs in their field of expertise more easily.

The Struggle for Workers in Alberta

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) has released the first in a new series of quarterly reports on Canada's labour market that shows Saskatchewan and Alberta have the highest rate of private sector job vacancies in the country.

What This Means for Settlement Agencies

The immigration changes planned may not have immediate effects on the settlement sector, which is already working to respond to the needs of the immigrant population it sees on the ground; however policy does tend to trickle down and also affect funder priorities, so is likely to have an impact in 2015 and beyond.



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It will be important for settlement services to remain informed on EOI development and implementation going forward. AAISA will continue to report on it as developments occur.

Disclaimer: This report has been drafted, compiled, and reviewed by the AAISA Research Committee and staff person. It has not been sanctioned by any government agency representatives and should be confirmed as appropriate.

A MESSAGE FROM



AAISA is dedicated to providing current, evidence-based research and policy updates to its Alberta member agencies and stakeholders. The Research and Policy Brief project serves to offer a detailed account regarding the issues directly facing the settlement sector across our province. Our goal is to offer our members and stakeholders the best information available to enhance and inform their practice.

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