STRENGTHENING EMPLOYER FEEDBACK CHANNELS

Centering Employer Voices in Shaping Immigration and Workforce Integration Systems

IMMIGRANT EMPLOYMENT COUNCIL OF BC **IEC**BC

Connecting Employers to Immigrant Talent

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ABOUT THE IMMIGRANT EMPLOYMENT COUNCIL OF BC

The Immigrant Employment Council of BC (IEC-BC) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to empowering BC employers with the solutions, tools, and resources needed to effectively attract, hire, and retain skilled immigrant talent. We understand that the successful integration of skilled newcomers into BC's labor force is essential to both their success and the province's long-term economic performance. By collaborating with employers, government, and other partner stakeholders, we ensure that BC employers can effectively integrate global talent.

ABOUT THE IMMIGRANT EMPLOYMENT COUNCILS OF CANADA (IECC)

The National Network of Immigrant Employment Councils of Canada (IECC) is a collaborative body dedicated to improving labour market outcomes for immigrants through strategic partnerships and innovative solutions. It supports a stronger Canadian economy by fostering connections between employers, immigrants, and key stakeholders.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Employers are often viewed as part of the problem when it comes to the employment outcomes and integration of immigrants—perceived as slow to adapt more skills-based hiring practices or hesitant to invest in inclusive onboarding. The national Strengthening Employer Feedback Channels (SEFC) project challenges this narrative by positioning employers as essential partners in shaping more effective immigration and workforce integration outcomes.

Employers play a critical, frontline role in advancing Canada's immigration priorities, from recruitment and onboarding to long-term retention and career development. Yet, their voices and active roles are rarely integrated into the policies and programs that govern immigration and settlement. This disconnect results in missed opportunities to align talent strategies with real-world business needs and limits the effectiveness of newcomer integration efforts.

In response, the IECC launched the SEFC project to create structured, intentional pathways for employers to share feedback and co-design solutions. This project was managed by IEC-BC on behalf of the IECC network and delivered in collaboration with a network of local immigrant employment councils and community-based organizations, including:

- Calgary Region Immigrant Employment Council (CRIEC)
- Edmonton Region Immigrant Employment Council (ERIEC)
- Rural Manitoba Immigrant Employment Council (RMIEC)
- Saskatoon Open Door Society (SODS)
- Workforce Collective (based in Niagara, Ontario)
- Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC)
- New Brunswick Multicultural Council (NBMC)
- Halifax Partnership (Nova Scotia)

Through a series of in-person and virtual forums and follow-up activities hosted across nine communities, the SEFC project engaged employers, business leaders, and community service providers to:

- Share their experiences navigating Canada's immigration and settlement systems
- Identify systemic barriers and challenges in recruiting and retaining immigrant talent
- Co-create actionable strategies to improve policy responsiveness and organizational practices

The insights gathered are informing national-level recommendations and helping shape a more adaptive, inclusive, and employer-informed immigration system. The SEFC project underscores the importance of equipping employers with the voice, tools, and support they need to become champions of immigrant workforce inclusion—and, ultimately, to strengthen Canada's economic and social fabric.

This initiative built upon the successful methodologies and insights gained from the Service Delivery Improvement work conducted in the Engaging SMEs project, which demonstrated the effectiveness of interactive design labs and collaborative approaches in engaging employers.

PROJECT FUNDER

PROJECT PARTNERS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Employers across Canada increasingly recognize the valuable contributions that immigrants bring to the workforce and the broader economy. Yet, realizing the full potential of this talent remains constrained by challenges that extend beyond recruitment —including complex system navigation, credential recognition barriers, workforce retention gaps, and limited access to essential community supports such as housing, transportation, childcare, and family services.

From September 2023 to March 2025, the SEFC project engaged **1,181** participants through **77** forums held across both rural and urban communities in Canada. Building on successful methodologies developed through the Engaging SMEs Service Delivery Improvement initiative—which demonstrated a 91% likelihood of future immigrant hiring among participating SMEs—this project expanded its stakeholder engagement model to include a wider cross-section of contributors. These included employers (54.4%), immigrant service-providing organizations (16.0%), municipalities (6.9%), academic institutions (8.6%), professional associations (4.7%), Local Immigration Partnerships (2.8%), and others (6.5%).

Forum discussions revealed that, despite growing familiarity with Canada's immigration and settlement systems, employers continue to face systemic barriers to fully integrating immigrant talent. Nearly half of employer participants reported challenges hiring newcomers, even though 85.6% had done so previously. Encouragingly, 72.5% of all participants felt better equipped to address integration barriers after the sessions, and 95% affirmed that the forums created meaningful opportunities for dialogue, collaboration, and actionable learning.

Key priorities emerged across all communities. Participants identified the need to:

- Streamline credential recognition processes
- Expand sector-specific training and occupation-specific language supports
- Strengthen inclusive hiring frameworks and onboarding practices
- Improve coordination across immigration, employment, and settlement services

Regional insights added depth to these findings. Rural communities emphasized employer capacity-building and expanding access to services, while urban areas pointed to affordability pressures, regulatory complexity, and the need for structured diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) approaches.

The SEFC project highlights a significant evolution in employer perspectives. Integration is no longer seen as only a hiring action, but as a comprehensive process that demands attention to long-term retention, career advancement, and community inclusion. Achieving sustainable outcomes will require coordinated action across employment, settlement, and community systems, underpinned by responsive policies capable of addressing persistent structural barriers.

The project's findings point to four critical areas for action that align with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's (IRCC) national priorities as outlined in "An Immigration System for Canada's Future."

| SKILLS AND TALENT DEVELOPMENT | CLIENT SERVICE EXCELLENCE | RURAL IMMIGRATION AND INTEGRATION SUPPORT | IMPROVED ACCESS TO HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION |

Progress in these areas will depend on a dual approach: targeted, locally grounded interventions paired with systemic reforms at the national level. Strengthening these linkages will be essential to building a more resilient, responsive, and inclusive labour market—one that advances newcomer integration while fueling Canada's economic growth.

PROJECT TIMELINE

2 FEEDBACK FORUMS, 2 FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES PER PROJECT PARTNER

6 FEEDBACK FORUMS, 4 FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES PER PROJECT PARTNER

1 FEEDBACK FORUM, 1 FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY PER PROJECT PARTNER

3 FEEDBACK FORUMS, 2 FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES PER PROJECT PARTNER

PHASE 1

SEPTEMBER 2023 - MARCH 2024

PHASE 2

APRIL 2024 - MARCH 2025

PROJECT TACTICS

The SEFC project was designed to advance immigrant workforce integration by centering employer voices and creating opportunities for reflection, dialogue, and coordinated action. The methodology was rooted in a positive feedback loop approach—intentionally designed to generate momentum, deepen understanding, and shift long-standing narratives around employer engagement and newcomer inclusion.

Rather than treat each forum as a one-off consultation, SEFC activities were structured as a dynamic learning process. Conversations evolved from session to session, building on previous insights and continually digging deeper into emerging themes. This iterative format allowed the project to move from initial listening to reflection, interpretation, and the identification of actionable strategies.

The methodology centered on four interrelated components:

Deep Listening and Insight Generation

Forums brought together employers and system actors in structured, small-group conversations. Facilitators created space for participants to share real-world experiences with recruiting, hiring, and retaining immigrant talent. These sessions emphasized active listening—not just documenting challenges, but uncovering patterns, identifying root causes, and elevating the nuances of employer realities. This helped surface new insights often lost in one-directional consultations.

Multi-Stakeholder Engagement

The SEFC project deliberately engaged a diverse set of stakeholders, including employers, service-providing organizations, municipal leaders, academic institutions, professional associations, and Local Immigration Partnerships. This diversity enabled rich, cross-sectoral dialogue that broke down silos and revealed the interdependencies between employment systems, settlement services, and community infrastructure. It also helped ensure that emerging solutions reflected the complexity of the challenges at hand.

Regional Contextualization

Each regional partner tailored their forum design to local labour market conditions, demographic realities, and community priorities. By grounding conversations in local context, from major urban centres to rural and remote communities, the project captured a wide range of region-specific barriers and innovations. This ensured that findings were both nationally relevant and locally actionable.

Action-Oriented Framing

While the forums focused on listening and learning, they also invited participants to begin identifying opportunities for change within their workplaces, sectors, and communities. The project prioritized the development of insights that could inform near-term actions, long-term strategies, and system-level recommendations. This emphasis on real-time reflection and continuous learning created pathways from dialogue to impact.

Building Momentum Through a Positive Feedback Loop

At the heart of SEFC's design was a positive feedback loop, an intentional cycle of listening, collecting, interpreting, disseminating, and acting on insights. This approach was used to break the persistent cycle of repeating the same issues around immigrant inclusion in the workplace. Each engagement built upon the last, creating a sense of shared progress and reinforcing key themes over time. The loop served not only to inform immediate responses but to influence longer-term system change.

By structuring the project this way, SEFC successfully created the conditions for deeper employer involvement, more integrated cross-sector collaboration, and a clearer path from insight to implementation.

ACT
- Problem solve
- Policy advocacy
- Influence decisions (short-medium-long term)

LISTEN
- Multi-Stakeholder dialogue
- Theme-based facilitated conversations

PROJECT CORE IDEA

DISSEMINATE
- Engagement surveys
- Dialogue reports
- Information sharing

COLLECT
- Gather and map concerns
- Identify problems
- Capture solutions & best practices

INTERPRET
- Analyze data
- Check facts
- Synthesize Information

IMPACT

The SEFC project engaged employers and system actors across Canada through a range of coordinated initiatives designed to build insight, amplify promising practices, and strengthen collaboration in support of immigrant workforce integration.

FORUM DELIVERY AND REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT

77 employer forums were delivered across the country, with each regional partner hosting at least eight forums.

8 employer forums were jointly delivered by ERIEC and CRIEC in Alberta

Each forum was complemented by follow-up activities, with partners conducting one follow-up engagement per region in 2023–2024, and four per region in 2024–2025, resulting in 41 total follow-up activities.

Participants were invited to complete a baseline survey prior to their first session and a feedback survey after each forum, enabling the project to capture evolving insights and impacts over time.

AMPLIFYING EMPLOYER VOICES THROUGH VIDEO

A 19-part video campaign was developed to elevate employer voices and highlight practical experiences. Each regional partner produced videos featuring local employers and system actors sharing challenges, best practices, and lessons learned in hiring and retaining immigrant talent. The campaign positioned immigrants as drivers of innovation and economic growth, creating a resource for both policymakers and employers looking to improve inclusive hiring.

SHOWCASING INNOVATION IN WORKFORCE INTEGRATION

The Visionary Voices Catalogue showcased leading-edge innovations in immigrant workforce integration from across the country. Featuring 22 in-depth articles, the catalogue spotlighted forward-thinking strategies, tools, and stories of multi-stakeholder collaboration that demonstrate how coordinated efforts can lead to more effective outcomes for newcomers and employers alike.
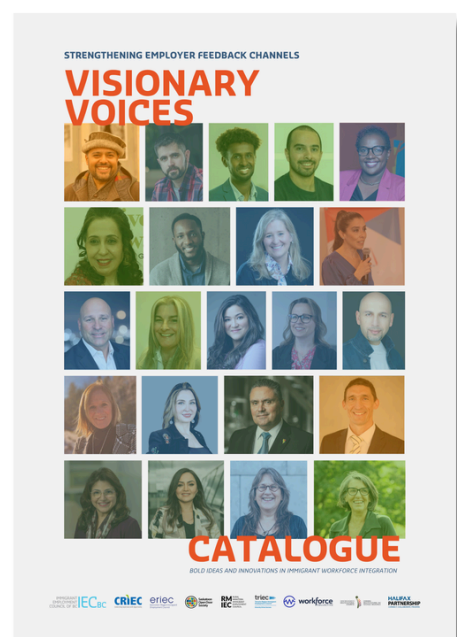
CELEBRATING EMPLOYER LEADERSHIP

The project hosted nine regional employer recognition events to celebrate organizations that demonstrated leadership and innovation in hiring and supporting skilled immigrants. These events not only highlighted successful practices but also strengthened employer networks and fostered ongoing peer learning and collaboration.

MEASURING IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

To evaluate the project's effectiveness, 17 video interviews were analyzed to better understand employers' motivations for participation and the value they found in engaging with IECs. An additional six one-on-one interviews explored alignment with expectations and priorities for future engagement. The project's feedback survey was also enhanced to assess tangible impacts on participants and their organizations.

Among 206 respondents:

174 identified ways their organization could benefit from continued engagement

141 reported new insights they planned to bring back to their organizations

10 had already implemented changes in their workplace based on forum learnings

Together, these activities reflect the SEFC project's commitment to advancing not just dialogue, but meaningful, measurable progress in employer engagement and immigrant workforce inclusion.

HOW DID EMPLOYER FEEDBACK SHAPE PROJECT OUTCOMES?

The SEFC project was guided by a positive feedback loop, ensuring that employer input directly influenced project activities, outputs, and direction in real time. Feedback collected during forum sessions was systematically analyzed and shared with project partners, participants, and funders. These insights informed future forum design, follow-up activities, and stakeholder engagement strategies—creating an evolving and responsive cycle of learning and action.

The project also aligned closely with IRCC's national priorities as outlined in An Immigration System for Canada's Future. Among the action areas identified by IRCC, SEFC focused on better aligning immigration with labour market needs and positioning employers as central to system feedback. Forum themes were designed to complement and reinforce IRCC's national consultation efforts, ensuring that employer perspectives contributed meaningfully to broader modernization goals.

WHAT MADE THIS PROJECT UNIQUE?

The SEFC's approach moved beyond one-time consultations to create an ongoing cycle of insight, interpretation, dissemination, and action. This ensured that:

Employer feedback was continuously collected and analyzed	Insights were regularly shared with stakeholders	Learnings directly informed future engagement activities

This iterative structure kept momentum alive across regions and allowed for a cumulative, deepening understanding of employer experiences with immigrant workforce integration. SEFC also extended and reinforced IRCC's national vision by grounding its work in the real-world challenges and opportunities identified by employers. Through carefully aligned thematic discussions, the project provided both local and national value, capturing grassroots insights while contributing to policy-level discourse.

KEY FINDINGS

EMPLOYER UNDERSTANDING AND EXPERIENCE

Employers demonstrated a moderate level of familiarity with Canada's immigration and settlement systems and perceived these systems as only somewhat aligned with their workforce needs. Those with greater familiarity tended to report stronger alignment.

Despite this, nearly half of employers reported challenges in hiring, recruiting, or retaining newcomer talent, even though 85.6% had previously hired immigrants. This highlights a gap between intent and implementation, suggesting systemic and operational barriers remain.

After participating in SEFC sessions:

72.5% of participants (including employers and other system actors) felt better equipped to address challenges related to immigrant workforce integration

95% agreed that the forums offered meaningful opportunities for dialogue, learning, and collaboration

COMMUNITY AND NATIONAL INSIGHTS

Forum discussions revealed several recurring themes that align with IRCC priorities. These themes reflect both shared and region-specific challenges.

SKILLS AND TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Employer engagement was a top priority across all forums.

- Credential recognition was widely identified as a key barrier to immigrant employment.
- Urban employers emphasized the need for structured DEI strategies, formal onboarding, and retention frameworks. They also noted regulatory complexity and high operational costs as major obstacles.
- Rural employers focused on trust-building, strengthening business relationships, and expanding HR capacity to support integration.
- Other common priorities included improving workplace integration, advancing anti-racism and inclusion practices, expanding sector-specific training, and updating hiring systems.

CLIENT SERVICE EXCELLENCE

Navigating the immigration and settlement systems continues to pose challenges for employers and newcomers alike.

- Rural participants reported long travel distances and limited access to services.
- Urban stakeholders highlighted fragmented and duplicated services that created confusion and inefficiencies.
- Additional priorities included simplifying immigration pathways, improving policy alignment with labor market needs, and strengthening pre- and post-arrival supports.

SOCIAL COHESION

Community integration supports were recognized as vital to newcomer retention and long-term success.

- Rural communities pointed to social isolation, limited cultural resources, and gaps in community services.
- Urban participants cited high living costs and long wait times for critical services, such as childcare.

HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION

Access to affordable housing and reliable transportation was considered essential for successful employment and integration.

- Rural communities noted shortages in rental housing and minimal or nonexistent public transit options.
- Urban participants raised concerns about high living and transportation costs and the long commutes required to access affordable housing.

FRANCOPHONE IMMIGRATION

Challenges noted included limited service availability and difficulties with system navigation.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The SEFC project used a `mixed-methods` approach to examine its impact.

Quantitative data from participation and survey responses were complemented by qualitative insights from forum discussions and regional reports. This integrated analysis provides a multi-layered understanding of the experiences, barriers, and opportunities related to immigrant workforce integration across Canada.

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Across Canada, a total of
1,181 participants
gathered in **77 forums**
to share experiences, deepen understanding,
and explore ways to strengthen
newcomer hiring
and integration.

Of these participants,
54.4% were employers,
with the remainder representing system actors including
service providers, municipalities, academic
institutions, professional associations, and
Local Immigration Partnerships.

BASELINE SURVEY INSIGHTS

A total of
528 individuals
completed the baseline survey

A total of
477 responses
were collected from the

POST-FEEDBACK SURVEY

UNDERSTANDING OF IMMIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT SYSTEMS

Employers rated their familiarity and confidence as follows:

3.56 out of 5

for overall familiarity with immigration and settlement systems
(between "neutral" and "somewhat aligned")

3.41 out of 5

for confidence in understanding immigrant employment factors
(e.g., work permits, credential assessment, cultural norms)

3.38 out of 5

for how well the system aligned with their needs
(between "neutral" and "somewhat familiar")

Employers in urban areas were generally more familiar with the system than those in rural communities. Employers with higher familiarity were more likely to report alignment between the system and their needs.

Although **85.6%** of employers had hired newcomers in the past, nearly half reported challenges in doing so. Among employers who had not hired newcomers, **30.3%** had attempted to hire but faced barriers.

❝

One of the challenges we face when hiring newcomers into our management pools is that what's considered best practice in some countries can become a barrier here. We're working to recognize those barriers and account for them in our decision-making. **❞**

INCLUSIVE HIRING PRACTICES

70.3% of employers reported adopting at least one inclusive hiring practice. These included:

- Unconscious bias and DEI training for hiring managers
- Structured interviews and standardized evaluations
- Removing restrictive job criteria such as Canadian experience
- Supporting flexible work, language learning, and mentorship

Employers rated the importance of inclusive practices at **4.39 out of 5** (between "somewhat important" and "extremely important"), showing broad recognition of their value.

Larger businesses were more likely to adopt inclusive practices than micro or small businesses.

❝

Hiring immigrants has been a beautiful thing for us. It has not only diversified our workforce but also fostered a culture of acceptance and openness. **❞**

SYSTEM ACTOR PERSPECTIVES ON EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

System actors rated employers as follows:

3.08 out of 5
for level of involvement
in hiring newcomers
(slightly above moderate)

3.02 out of 5
for readiness to
incorporate inclusion
(slightly above moderate)

2.90 out of 5
for level of engagement
(slightly below moderate)

" We present ourselves as a stepping stone. We want to give individuals that first Canadian experience. "

MOTIVATION TO ATTEND FORUMS

The most common motivations for attending were:
- Making new connections
- Learning more about immigration systems

Employers were more likely than system actors to report attending because they were actively interested in hiring newcomers.

POST-FORUM FEEDBACK

Participants gave an average score of **4.05 out of 5** on how much their knowledge of the immigration system improved after attending.

72.5% felt better equipped to integrate immigrant talent

95% agreed that the forums created meaningful opportunities for learning and collaboration

" I didn't realize how many resources were available. This completely changed my approach to recruitment. "

Participants reported gaining insights on:

- Inclusive hiring and onboarding strategies
- Sector-wide recruitment challenges
- The importance of cultural awareness and retention supports
- The value of collaboration and peer learning
- Understanding available community and policy resources

" We overcome challenges by working together—within our organization and with external partners. "

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

COMMUNITY INSIGHTS

Forum discussions across regions consistently echoed core themes aligned with IRCC's An Immigration System for Canada's Future, including:

SKILLS & TALENT

(e.g., employer engagement, workplace integration, credential recognition, DEI, and training)

CLIENT SERVICE EXCELLENCE

(e.g., navigation and accessibility of immigration and settlement systems)

FRANCOPHONE IMMIGRATION

SOCIAL COHESION

(e.g., community integration and inclusion)

RURAL IMMIGRATION

(e.g., place-based barriers and supports)

While these themes were shared nationwide, each region offered unique insights shaped by local realities. Below is a synthesis of those regional perspectives:

CALGARY REGION IMMIGRANT EMPLOYMENT COUNCIL (CRIEC)

Forums in Calgary emphasized the importance of long-term employer engagement and intentional strategies for workforce integration

- Employers should play an active role in co-designing workforce solutions. Engagement should be treated as a trust-building process rather than a one-time service.
- Onboarding should be reframed as a starting point, with strategies to foster cultural navigation, psychological safety, time-phased onboarding, and structured feedback.
- Mentorship models should support mutual, cross-cultural learning between newcomers and existing staff.

EDMONTON REGION IMMIGRANT EMPLOYMENT COUNCIL (ERIEC)

Discussions in Edmonton highlighted ongoing challenges in system navigation and access, particularly for both employers and newcomer job seekers.

- Employers and job seekers often lack awareness of available services or do not know where to turn for support.
- Credential recognition and workplace safety, especially in trades and apprenticeships, were key concerns.
- Some employers expressed hesitancy in hiring newcomers for entry-level roles, viewing them as "risky" hires.
- Outdated recruitment processes and newcomer overqualification were also recurring issues.

HALIFAX PARTNERSHIP

Forums in Halifax revealed the need for stronger employer input in shaping immigration policy and addressing systemic challenges.

- Employers and industry should co-lead solutions to workforce gaps by aligning training programs and creating talent pipelines.
- Confusion around federal policies (e.g., permits, post-graduation pathways, PR timelines) and communication gaps with IRCC impede timely hiring and retention.
- Misalignment between federal and provincial immigration policies leads to talent loss, highlighting a need for better coordination and data sharing.
- Employers expressed knowledge gaps regarding regulations and the tools available to support recruitment and retention.

IMMIGRANT EMPLOYMENT COUNCIL OF BC (IEC-BC)

In British Columbia, discussions focused on persistent labour shortages and the need for streamlined employer-facing supports.

- Employers in healthcare, construction, tech, and regulated professions are eager to hire but face navigation barriers.
- A centralized digital tool or service portal was suggested to support employer access to coordinated services.
- Greater alignment between federal and provincial programs, along with robust pre- and post-arrival supports, is needed to improve labour mobility.
- Participants called for improved data sharing and outcomes tracking across agencies.

NEW BRUNSWICK MULTICULTURAL COUNCIL (NBMC)

Discussions in New Brunswick focused on system navigation challenges and the added complexity of Francophone immigration in rural and bilingual communities.

- In smaller communities, limited HR capacity and administrative fatigue hinder employer engagement, especially due to immigration paperwork.
- Trust in the system is essential to overcoming hesitancy about newcomer credentials and experience.
- Newcomers are often overqualified for local roles or blocked by unnecessary experience requirements.
- Bilingual communities lack sufficient access to Francophone services and supports, creating additional barriers.

RURAL MANITOBA IMMIGRANT EMPLOYMENT COUNCIL (RMIEC)

Forums in rural Manitoba underscored issues of community integration and the logistical challenges of navigating services.

- Limited transportation and housing reduce access to employment and community supports.
- Isolation and lack of cultural services exacerbate integration challenges for newcomers in rural settings.
- Communities should invest in informal mentorship, cultural events, and initiatives that foster belonging.
- Advertising job and career opportunities remains a challenge; highlighting the benefits of rural living can help attract and retain talent.

SASKATOON OPEN DOOR SOCIETY (SODS)

In Saskatoon, forums focused on credential recognition and the implementation of meaningful inclusion and anti-racism strategies.

- Barriers such as high credential assessment costs, biased hiring tools, and inconsistent recognition hinder newcomer employment.
- Cross-sector standardization and better alignment between immigration, settlement, and labour systems are needed.
- Biased screening tools, including AI-driven recruitment, should be addressed through structured DEI policies with accountability measures.
- Inclusion efforts must be coordinated across employers, governments, and institutions.

TORONTO REGION IMMIGRANT EMPLOYMENT COUNCIL (TRIEC)

Toronto forums emphasized systemic barriers in hiring and promotion, especially those tied to bias and inclusion.

- Unconscious bias in hiring, reliance on "Canadian experience," and credential evaluation inconsistencies create disconnects between immigration goals and hiring practices.
- Cultural onboarding is often missing and should be embedded into workforce strategies.
- Bi-directional mentorship and professional networking can improve workplace integration and support mutual learning.
- Employers should foster belonging and wellness and account for the life transitions newcomers experience when adjusting performance expectations.

WORKFORCE COLLECTIVE (NIAGARA AND HAMILTON)

In the Niagara and Hamilton region, forums focused on deepening employer engagement and addressing challenges in credential recognition.

- Employers should be more fully integrated into systems that support immigrant employment, beyond one-way information sharing.
- Many employers are unfamiliar with international credentials and some perceive newcomers as more "risky" hires.
- Unrecognized international experience remains a major barrier, especially for entry- and mid-level positions.
- Strengthening ties with international students was identified as a pathway to improving employment outcomes and long-term retention.

While these summaries do not capture every discussion, they offer a snapshot of distinct regional insights. From rural Manitoba to downtown Toronto, the forums consistently reinforced the need for systems that are human-centered, easier to navigate, and better aligned with both employer realities and newcomer experiences.

NATIONAL INSIGHTS:

A Shared Story Across Regions

Drawing from the rich discussions held through 77 community forums across Canada, several national themes emerged that highlight both the shared and unique experiences of employers and system actors across rural and urban regions. These themes are interconnected, forming a narrative of opportunity, challenge, and potential system transformation.

Organized under IRCC's thematic priorities—Skills and Talent, Client Service Excellence, Social Cohesion, and Housing and Transportation—the following analysis reflects what we consistently heard at the national level and identifies areas for system improvement, policy alignment, and targeted employer support.

SKILLS & TALENT

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT
was the most consistently prioritized theme across all regional partners.

- In urban areas, discussions focused on formalizing DEI, onboarding, and retention strategies.
- In rural areas, the emphasis was on trust-building, tailored outreach, and long-term relationship development.

Employer hesitation remained a central issue—many are open to hiring newcomers but lack the clarity and confidence to do so effectively. Participants repeatedly stressed that successful engagement must be sector-specific, locally relevant, and sustained through long-term partnerships.

CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION
was a persistent barrier across all regions.

- Challenges included slow, costly, and inconsistent assessment processes, compounded by employer-side biases in evaluating international qualifications.
- Urban participants were more likely to reference complexity due to multiple regulatory bodies and credentialing authorities.

Alternative models, such as competency-based hiring and streamlined pathways for assessing prior learning and experience, were frequently proposed.

COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE BARRIERS
Participants across regions stressed that language barriers affect not only employability but also workplace integration and community participation.

- Sector-specific language supports, confidence-building, and understanding of workplace norms were repeatedly mentioned as necessary elements.
- Effective communication was seen as a mix of language proficiency, cultural fluency, and context awareness.

EMPLOYER EDUCATION

Employers across regions expressed a strong need for better education on:

- Immigration pathways
- Credentialing systems
- Available services and supports
- Inclusive leadership practices (e.g., unconscious bias, cultural competence)

Urban discussions leaned toward system-level reform and accountability, while rural employers emphasized the need for accessible, straightforward tools given limited HR capacity.

JOB AVAILABILITY AND ALIGNMENT

Though job vacancies exist across regions, participants noted persistent misalignment between available jobs and newcomer skills.

- Rural areas reported immediate needs in sectors like agriculture, trades, and health—but roles were often entry-level or physically demanding, with limited visibility into advancement pathways.
- Urban employers spoke about job saturation, fierce competition, and complex hiring landscapes that newcomers find difficult to navigate.

Alternative models, such as competency-based hiring and streamlined pathways for assessing prior learning and experience, were frequently proposed.

CLIENT SERVICE EXCELLENCE

SYSTEM NAVIGATION
remains a two-way challenge.

- Newcomers struggle to find the right supports at the right time.
- Employers are unsure where to access assistance in hiring or integrating immigrant talent.

Participants called for:

- Centralized referral systems
- Navigation portals or digital tools
- Improved collaboration among SPOs to streamline service delivery

While rural areas often lack local service options entirely, urban areas suffer from fragmented services and overwhelming program choices, resulting in duplication or missed connections.

SOCIAL COHESION

Although not always the primary focus of forums, social cohesion was consistently identified as crucial to retention and long-term integration.

- Rural participants raised concerns around isolation, lack of settlement services, and limited cultural awareness. Local institutions such as schools, churches, and volunteer networks were seen as essential integration agents.
- Urban forums pointed to long wait times and inadequate culturally responsive services. High childcare costs also emerged as a major barrier to employment, especially for newcomer women.

HOUSING

- Rural areas reported limited rental supply and housing shortages that directly impacted employers' ability to attract and retain workers.

- Urban areas highlighted high rental costs, fierce competition, and long commute times, all of which strain financial stability and reduce access to work.

TRANSPORTATION

- Rural regions often lack public transit entirely. Newcomers may rely on personal vehicles, which present licensing and affordability challenges.

- Urban participants noted that while transit exists, costs and commute lengths pose serious challenges, particularly for those in entry-level roles or living in more affordable but distant suburban areas.

HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION

ALIGNMENT WITH IRCC's NATIONAL ACTION PLAN

The insights outlined in this section are the result of a structured synthesis of community forum data and employer feedback. This analysis was explicitly guided by and mapped against the Government of Canada's priorities outlined in An Immigration System for Canada's Future (2023).

Each national theme aligns with IRCC's stated action areas, labour market alignment, client service excellence, social cohesion, and enabling infrastructure like housing and transportation. The findings reinforce these priorities while offering grounded, regionally informed perspectives and solutions.

By centering employer voices and surfacing actionable insights from across the country, the SEFC project contributes directly to advancing IRCC's vision of a more responsive, inclusive, and future-ready immigration system, one that supports both economic growth and meaningful newcomer integration.

ACTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following actionable insights and recommendations reflect key priorities raised through national engagement efforts. Aligned with IRCC's "An Immigration System for Canada's Future: Strengthening Our Communities," they are intended to guide policy development, inform service improvements, and support stakeholder collaboration at local, regional, and national levels.

While these insights address broad, cross-cutting themes, regional discussions also surfaced location-specific considerations such as Francophone immigration and the needs of refugees and displaced persons. Importantly, although social cohesion was identified as a distinct theme by IRCC, issues such as workforce integration, housing, transportation, and service access are deeply interconnected with a newcomer's ability to build lasting ties within their community.

SKILLS & TALENT

EMPLOYER SUPPORT FRAMEWORK

- Increase employer awareness of newcomer talent through better hiring and onboarding practices.
- Offer targeted employer training and resources on hiring international talent, including digital tools and AI-driven skills matching.
- Simplify hiring by creating standardized job descriptions and assessment tools to reduce bias.
- Promote inclusive workplaces through DEI training, cultural adaptation programs, and internal champions.
- Pilot innovative recruitment approaches such as Reverse Job Fairs and partnerships with academic institutions.
- Provide data-driven insights and financial/tax incentives that support integration.
- Strengthen knowledge-sharing platforms for employers, service providers, and job seekers.
- Create and expand mentorship programs, including peer-to-peer and sector-based networks.
- Build collaboration with immigrant-serving organizations, Chambers of Commerce, and regional employer networks.

CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION REFORM

- Streamline recognition processes for regulated professions.
- Implement standardized, flexible trade certification pathways.
- Expand bridging programs to meet licensing and professional standards.
- Facilitate job-specific training and credential support services.
- Strengthen collaboration between government, employers, and academic institutions.

ENHANCED LANGUAGE TRAINING

- Expand access to employer-supported ESL programs and integrate language training into the workplace.
- Strengthen communication through job-specific and sectoral language training.
- Create technical and family-focused language programs.
- Support virtual and hybrid delivery to enhance accessibility.
- Offer wraparound supports such as childcare and transportation.

TEMPORARY VISAS & INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

- Create clear pathways from international study to permanent residency.
- Expand work rights for students during and after studies.
- Support transition with targeted bridging and employer engagement programs.
- Align educational programming with labour market needs.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & LABOUR MARKET ALIGNMENT

- Prepare for future demand with integrated training and upskilling incentives.
- Provide hiring frameworks and decision-making tools for employers.
- Focus on job-relevant, sector-specific training programs.

CLIENT SERVICE EXCELLENCE

INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY AND NAVIGATION

- Establish centralized hubs and one-stop service centers.
- Develop digital tools and resource maps for easier navigation.
- Assign system navigators or case managers.
- Strengthen coordination among SPOs, educational institutions, and government departments.

IMMIGRATION POLICIES & PROCESSES

- Streamline work permit procedures and reduce administrative barriers.
- Extend permit duration to support stability and integration.
- Develop designated employer models and simplified sector-specific pathways.
- Create regional platforms for job listings, training programs, and settlement supports.

DIGITAL TOOLS AND DATA

- Apply AI-driven tools for recruitment and job-matching.
- Use data to guide system planning and policy alignment.
- Enhance digital platforms that support both employers and newcomers.

SUPPORTING RURAL IMMIGRATION

REGIONAL-SPECIFIC SETTLEMENT STRATEGIES

- Expand rural immigration incentives and promotional campaigns.
- Fund mobile settlement services and creative transport solutions (e.g., carpool networks).

COMMUNITY INTEGRATION & SERVICES

- Strengthen inter-agency collaboration to ensure equitable service access.
- Provide employer training on mental health, communication, and workplace adaptation.
- Fund local programs that build social cohesion and offer mental health support.

HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION

HOUSING

- Implement employer-led housing initiatives in rural and urban areas.
- Align immigration targets with local housing plans.
- Offer targeted housing subsidies and allowances.

TRANSPORTATION

- Invest in community-based transit options in underserved areas.
- Adjust driver licensing regulations to reduce employment barriers.

FRANCOPHONE IMMIGRATION

FRANCOPHONE INTEGRATION

- Expand recruitment and support for Francophone newcomers.
- Partner with Francophone networks to build bilingual workforce pipelines.
- Provide cultural and onboarding resources tailored to Francophone employees.

CONCLUSION

The SEFC project offers a national perspective on the complexities of newcomer workforce integration, revealing how shared challenges and regional differences shape distinct local realities. These findings affirm that effective integration requires a multi-layered, systemic approach that embraces local variation while promoting national coordination.

Across Canada, employers are reframing their roles, not only as recruiters of talent but as partners in long-term inclusion and workforce transformation. They see integration as a shared responsibility that depends on access to housing, transportation, services, and community belonging.

The project also underscores a critical gap in coordination across service providers, employers, and government agencies. Moving forward, success will require intentional system alignment, robust policy frameworks, and mechanisms that support both shared learning and scalable solutions.

The recommendations presented here directly support IRCC's vision in An Immigration System for Canada's Future, offering actionable strategies to bridge the gap between labour market needs and immigrant inclusion. By advancing both place-based innovation and system-level reform, Canada can build a more inclusive, resilient, and future-ready workforce.

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

The dialogue and activities of the SEFC project are ongoing. Employers, community leaders, and other system actors are encouraged to bring their perspectives, ideas, and solutions to the table. To participate or learn more, reach out to the Immigrant Employment Council in your region.

If you represent a national organization or partner interested in supporting this work across Canada, please contact the national team at IEC-BC at info@iecc.network to get involved and explore opportunities for collaboration.

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- Workforce Collective
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- New Brunswick Multicultural Council (NBMC)
- Halifax Partnership
- Immigrant Employment Council of BC (IEC-BC)

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