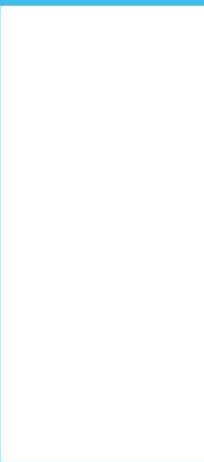


Strengthening Employer Feedback Channels

FORUM DIGESTS



VOLUME 1&2: MARCH 2024

ABOUT 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 labour 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 THIS PROJECT

In response to Canada's ambitious goal of welcoming up to 500,000 immigrants by 2025 and the employment disparities faced by newcomers highlighted by Statistics Canada, the Immigrant Employment Councils of Canada (IECC) has launched the National Employer Feedback Forums Project. This crucial initiative shifts the focus to employers' perspectives by establishing a structured feedback mechanism designed to inform both government and organizational strategies on immigration. By gathering insights from employers, local business leaders, and community service providers nationwide, the project aims to refine immigration policies and foster a collaborative environment for sharing best practices. The forums, hosted across nine regions in Canada, promote vigorous discussions on strategies to align immigration efforts with labor market needs and improve the integration and inclusion of immigrant talent in the Canadian workforce. This project underscores the critical role of empowering employers with the necessary tools and voice to effectively recruit and integrate top immigrant talent, ultimately bolstering Canada's economic success.

This digest reflects the local discussions hosted in British Columbia. Following each forum, a digest is produced to summarize key discussion points, themes, and findings from pre- and post-forum surveys.

Canada



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Immigration, Réfugiés
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INAUGURAL FEEDBACK FORUMS DIGEST

A Heartfelt Thank You to Our Participants

We extend our deepest gratitude to everyone who participated in our inaugural Feedback Forums on February 27 and March 20, 2024. Your voices were not only heard—they made a significant impact. The rich discussions and perspectives shared during these forums are systematically documented and will be presented to policymakers and program partners. Together, we are shaping the future of Canada’s immigration programs and policies, building communities where every newcomer feels welcomed and valued.

Our forums brought together a diverse group of attendees, including employers, immigrant service providers, representatives from local immigration partnerships, academic institutions, and professional associations. Each of you contributed a unique perspective, helping to create a more integrated and supportive environment for newcomers across Canada.

Here’s what we heard

Participating employers identified several significant challenges, including the substantial costs and complexities associated with recognizing and assessing foreign credentials and work experience. They emphasized the need to prioritize skills that are in high demand and expressed concerns about slow application processing times. Additionally, employers highlighted issues such as persistent communication and language barriers, the high cost of living that makes it difficult to attract and retain talent, unmet talent needs, and restrictive policies.

Good to know

How aligned has the immigration system been with employers’ business needs?

FORUM 1

75% SOMEWHAT ALIGNED

12.5% VERY ALIGNED

12.5% NEUTRAL (NEITHER ALIGNED NOR UNALIGNED)

FORUM 2

50% SOMEWHAT ALIGNED

25% VERY ALIGNED

25% NEUTRAL (NEITHER ALIGNED NOR UNALIGNED)



Employer engagement with newcomer talent

Nearly all employers have experience hiring newcomers, yet many face significant challenges in the process. These challenges range from mismatched expectations between hiring managers and newcomers to issues with licensing and the requirement for Canadian experience. 50% of the employers reported difficulties in hiring newcomers, while 37.5% struggled with recruiting them. Despite these challenges, all employers implemented some form of inclusive hiring practices, with bias awareness training being the most common.

Employers identified cultural differences and systemic barriers as the most significant obstacles to successfully integrating newcomer talent into the workforce.



Non-employers' perspectives on system challenges

In our discussions, we explored diverse perspectives on employer engagement in hiring newcomers and their readiness for inclusive practices. In the first forum, 40% of participants felt employers were highly engaged, while an equal number saw only slight involvement. A recurring concern was the difficulty in effectively showcasing newcomers' skills to potential employers.

In the second forum, about two-thirds of participants observed moderate employer involvement, with a noticeable gap in connecting with and effectively hiring newcomers. Participants emphasized the need for improved hiring processes and deeper engagement in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives.

Common Themes and Key Insights



Localized support systems empower newcomers for a seamless settlement transition.

To achieve newcomer service excellence, there is a pressing need for more localized support systems for living and working in Canada, integrated into both pre-arrival and settlement processes. Additionally, there is a need for robust data collection, active involvement of Chambers of Commerce, and targeted training for hiring managers and recruiters to ensure that the system is effective and efficient in meeting newcomer needs, supporting their successful integration into society.



Housing costs impact successful newcomer integration.

The high cost of housing significantly affects employers' ability to offer competitive compensation, which in turn impacts skilled immigrants' ability to settle in areas they cannot afford. As a result, newcomers may find themselves juggling multiple jobs to make ends meet or accepting roles that leave them underemployed. This disconnect between pre-arrival expectations and post-arrival realities can hinder social cohesion. Moreover, limited access to healthcare and childcare further challenges newcomers' integration into their communities and the workforce.



Aligning the immigration system with workforce needs bridges the skills gap for newcomers.

The lengthy immigration process and changing labour market can leave skilled newcomers, who may meet current needs, to struggle to match future employer needs. Many encounter a mismatch between their qualifications and available opportunities, often needing re-certification or credential upgrades. While employers are ready to hire newcomers, they encounter challenges navigating the complex immigration system. Newcomers need better support to fully utilize their talents, such as addressing "Canadian experience" requirements, tackling implicit bias, and aligning immigration priorities with local labor demands. Language barriers, communication challenges, and differing expectations—such as newcomers being unaware of employer needs or employers not fully understanding international experience—widen the gap between newcomer job seekers and employers, making it crucial to bridge these divides for successful integration.

Challenges

- Employers struggle with a significant mismatch between the skills they need and how these needs are assessed
- Issues in credential recognition and assessment processes create significant barriers for skilled talents
- Lengthy immigration processes delay the onboarding of skilled talent for employers in need of immediate hires
- Misalignment between immigration policies and the effective integration of newcomers into the labor market
- The high cost of living presents challenges for newcomers in settling in their communities
- Persistent biases label immigrant hiring as risky, leaving this talent pool vulnerable during economic downturns
- The overemphasis on "Canadian experience" skews hiring practices, pushing many newcomers into survival jobs to gain the required local experience

Barriers for Immigrants

- Automated HR systems frequently overlook the valuable experience that newcomers bring
- Navigation of regulations for skilled work alongside high cost of living
- Underutilization of social services that are available to newcomers
- Underinvestment in housing infrastructure exacerbates the housing crisis
- Existing data is too high-level, failing to provide nuances into familial dynamics
- Language proficiency tends to be over-relied on by employees, even in fields like tech, where practical skills should take precedence

Opportunities

- In fields like tech, where skills often matter more than credentials, there's a chance to shift focus from certifications or specific education to practical skills

- Pre-interview programs and group sessions can better prepare potential hires, supporting them to succeed in the interview process
- Partnering with post-secondary institutions can ensure that immigrant skills and credentials are recognized and valued
- Recognizing the value of diverse experiences and perspectives can drive innovation in the workplace
- Training hiring managers and recruiters to assess skills beyond traditional methods can create new employment opportunities for newcomers
- Redefining "Canadian experience" to include diverse skill sets and global backgrounds can enrich the workforce and create a more inclusive economy
- Investing in comprehensive data collection can help communities and employers better understand incoming talent, aligning skills with business needs and centralizing this information for easier access

Actions and Proposed Solutions

- Deepen employer collaboration by actively involving employers in the conversation and problem-solving process within the immigration ecosystem. Establishing measurable goals and metrics is crucial to track the real impact of these initiatives.
- The government must play a more prominent role in discussions aimed at enhancing user experiences. Their presence is crucial in driving meaningful debate and ensuring that policies are responsive to the needs of all stakeholders.
- Encourage local Chambers of Commerce, or similar third-party organizations, to facilitate dialogues between employers and other key actors to enhance understanding of needs.
- Offer government incentives that support employers' investments in newcomer hiring and training, which can be beneficial in promoting inclusive hiring practices.
- Implement new training programs for hiring managers and recruiters, with a focus on inclusive and diverse approaches to skills assessments to broaden candidate pools.



Our insights

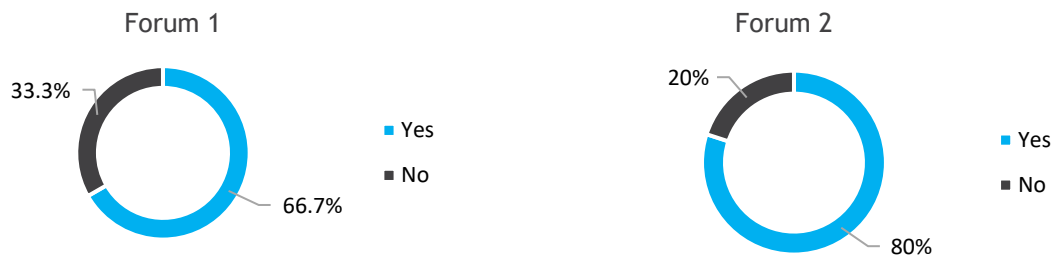
- **Sustainably scale initiatives and strengthen collaborations.** Enhance and expand initiatives by fostering strong connections between government, education, business, and immigrant communities. It's essential that growth in these efforts is sustainable, ensuring long-term impact and resilience.
- **Provide up-to-date insights on skills mismatches and labor market needs.** Immigration policies should be informed by the latest data on skills mismatches and future labor market demands. This will help align immigration strategies with the evolving needs of the economy.
- **Adopt a collaborative, intersectional approach to overcome job market challenges.** Tackle the challenges faced by newcomers through a comprehensive approach that includes better data collection, improved communication between job seekers and employers, and the removal of social barriers that hinder successful integration.



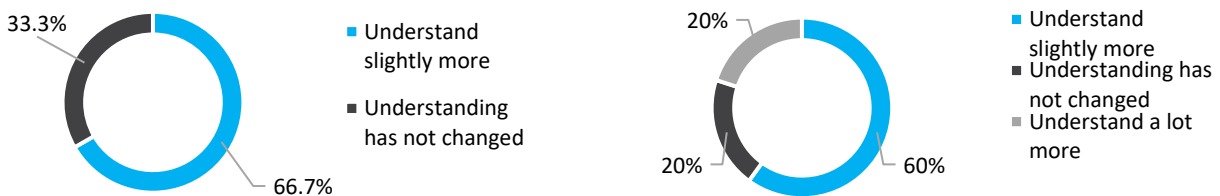
The impact is clear.

Integrating immigrant talent into the workforce is a shared responsibility, and our recent forums have been instrumental in equipping participants with the knowledge and confidence to navigate this complex landscape. The post-survey results are compelling, highlighting the significant impact of these sessions and the progress we've made together.

Did participants feel better equipped to tackle the challenges of integrating immigrant talent into their workforce?



How has participants' knowledge of the immigration system changed?



As of March 26, 2024, baseline insights were gathered from 229 individuals and follow-up insights were collected from 180 individuals across these communities.

Baseline insights were gathered from 230 individuals and follow-up insights were collected from 191 individuals across these communities.

We value your feedback! If you have any questions or insights, reach out to us at employerengagement@iecbc.ca.

If you're interested in participating in our Feedback Forums, register now to receive exclusive invites, updates, and access to valuable resources. **Join the conversation in shaping our future initiatives!**

SIGN UP NOW

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