

Strengthening Employer Feedback Channels

FORUM DIGESTS



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 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 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.



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FEEDBACK FORUM DIGEST

A Heartfelt Thank You to Our Participants

We extend our deepest gratitude to everyone who participated in our Feedback Forum on February 19, 2025, in Nanaimo. Your insights and contributions were invaluable and have made a significant impact. The thoughtful discussions and diverse perspectives shared during the forum have been carefully documented and will be shared with policymakers and program partners. Together, we are shaping Canada’s immigration programs and policies to build communities where every newcomer feels welcomed and valued.

Our forum brought together a diverse group of attendees, including employers, immigrant service providers, community-based organizations, and academics. Each of you brought unique perspectives, fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for newcomers across Canada.

Here’s what we heard

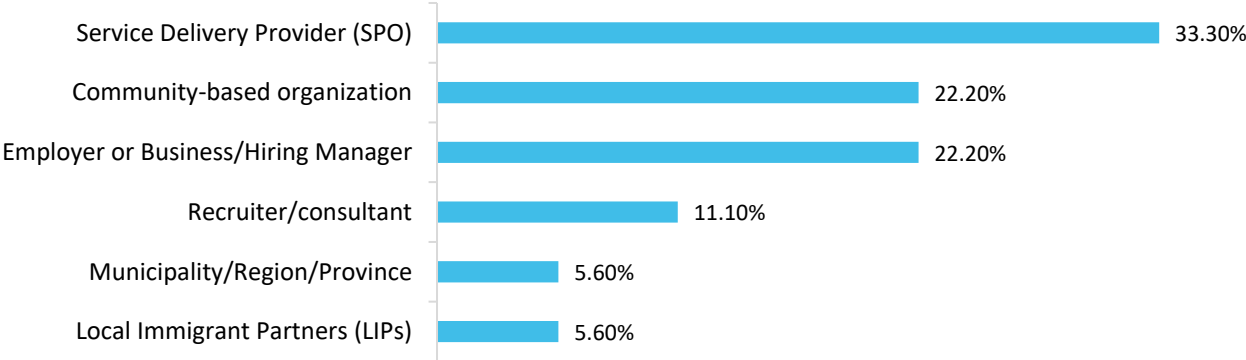
Nanaimo faces several barriers to newcomer workforce integration, including labor market mismatches, informal hiring practices, and employer hesitations in hiring immigrants. While industries like education, healthcare, and tourism have job openings, limited access to sector-specific training, complex immigration processes, and restricted eligibility for work-permit holders make it difficult for newcomers to secure employment.

Beyond jobs, housing affordability, public transit limitations, and gaps in healthcare access create additional challenges for retention. Childcare shortages, high costs, and limited social inclusion efforts further contribute to isolation, making it harder for newcomers to integrate into the community and workforce. Addressing these systemic issues is essential to supporting long-term newcomer success.

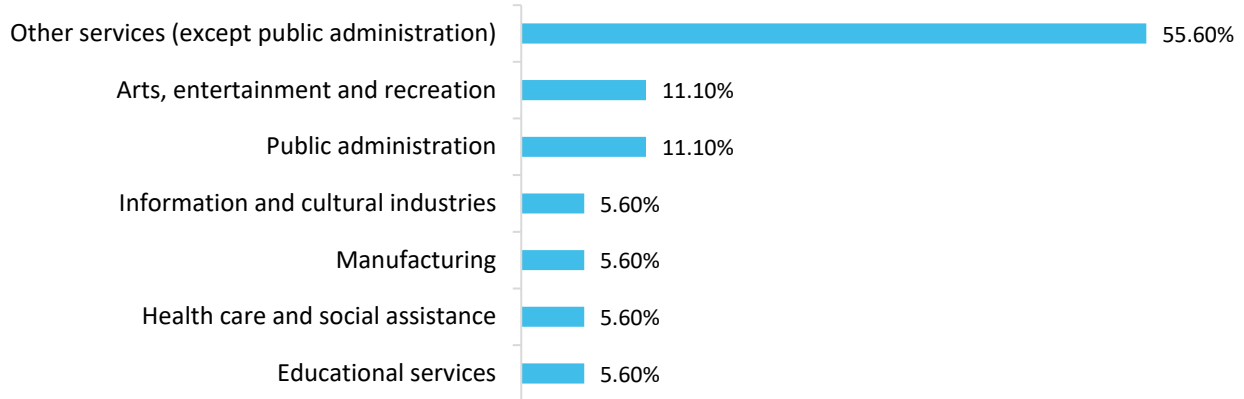
Good to know

Baseline insights were collected from 18 forum participants.

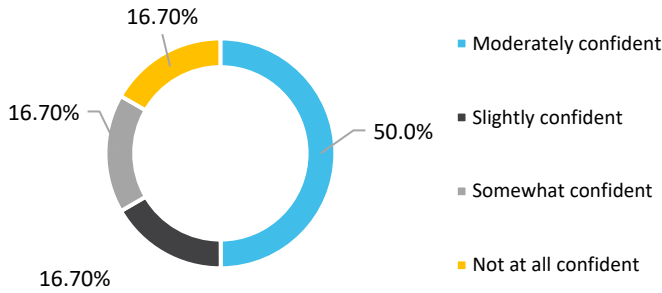
Who shaped the conversation in the forum?



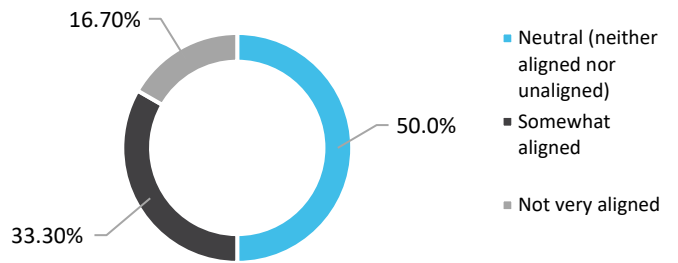
What are the industries represented?



How confident are the participants in understanding factors around immigrant employment?



How aligned has the immigration system been with their needs?



Employer engagement with newcomer talent

Among participating employers and recruiters,

100% hired newcomers in the past

66.7% experienced challenges recruiting newcomers

83.3% adopted inclusive hiring practices

50% experienced challenges hiring and retaining newcomers



Non-employers' perspectives on system challenges

Insights from service providers, community organizations, local immigrant partners, and municipal representatives highlighted language barriers and frequent immigration policy changes as key challenges. These issues create uncertainty and limit access to employment, emphasizing the need for clearer pathways and stronger collaboration to support newcomer integration.

Among participating system actor representatives,

58.3%

indicated that employers are **moderately ready to incorporate inclusion in their hiring practices**

41.7%

indicated that employers are **slightly engaged in newcomer hiring**

Common Themes and Key Insights

Forum participants explored barriers to recruiting newcomer talent in education, healthcare, technology, social services, retail, and tourism, examining how policies, employer practices, and collaboration among system actors could address these challenges. These discussions centered around key themes drawn from an extensive consultation and review of Canada's immigration system, as outlined in [An Immigration System for Canada's Future](#).



Fostering inclusion amid population growth

Nanaimo has historically attracted fewer immigrants than other communities, and participants noted its reputation for having an "Islander Spirit"—a more insular atmosphere compared to larger urban centers like Vancouver. Despite recent population growth, cultural inclusiveness has not kept pace. The slow development of diverse community resources, such as cultural events, places of worship, and community centers, has led to social isolation among newcomers. As a result, many leave in search of a stronger sense of belonging, with few returning.

Limited wraparound support for families further challenges newcomer retention. Long childcare waitlists, high costs, and limited off-hour availability make it difficult for families to access essential services. Schools face shortages in spaces for incoming students, while healthcare access remains strained, with only one walk-in clinic and a shortage of family doctors. These gaps not only affect newcomers' well-being but also limit their ability to fully participate in the workforce and integrate into the community.



Addressing labor market mismatches and hiring barriers

While skills and talent were not identified as major challenges for newcomers, systemic issues persist. Discussions highlighted a gap between immigration expectations and local labor market realities, particularly in securing skills-related jobs. For example, there is demand for Early Childhood and Education certifications, yet few newcomers hold these qualifications. Meanwhile, key sectors like forestry, tourism, and retail offer mostly temporary or low-wage roles, reflecting a disconnect between immigration policies and labor market needs.

Informal hiring practices, such as word-of-mouth recruitment instead of public job postings, make it difficult for newcomers without local connections to find employment. Other barriers include work-permit holders' ineligibility for wage subsidies through programs like Canada Summer Jobs, lengthy Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) processes, and limited access to specialized training and language support, which employers consider essential for workplace safety.

Additionally, many employers hesitate to hire newcomers, assuming they take entry-level jobs primarily to gain experience before moving on to higher-skilled opportunities. This concern over turnover, combined with a lack of cultural competency and anti-bias training, further limits workforce integration.



Managing employer challenges in immigration programs

Employers face challenges engaging with key immigration programs, including justifying the use of Temporary Foreign Worker programs, the complex and time-consuming LMIA process, and confusion around the points-based system. Privacy regulations also limit the support employers can provide during permanent residency applications, often requiring them to hire lawyers or consultants for guidance. These barriers affect employee retention and business operations, leading some employers to prioritize hiring individuals with permanent residency or Canadian citizenship.



Navigating housing costs and transportation barriers

Rising mortgage rates and the increasing cost of living, combined with financial policies that restrict access to homeownership, present significant challenges. Limited public transportation, particularly during off-hours, further restricts employment opportunities for individuals without a personal vehicle.

Actions and Proposed Solutions

Enhancing Workforce Integration and Employment Access

- Expand employer outreach and develop sector-specific hiring programs to better integrate immigrants into the workforce.
- Educate employers on recognizing international experience and implement training programs for HR and leadership on inclusive hiring practices (e.g., ASCEND for Employers, B2B MentorConnect).
- Diversify hiring strategies to ensure job opportunities are accessible to all.
- Align federal immigration policies with local labor market needs to bridge gaps between professional skills and job openings.
- Update pre-arrival programs with current job market insights and guidance on credential evaluations.
- Organize structured networking and mentorship events to connect newcomers with local professionals and employers before and after arrival.
- Establish clear career pathways and internal retention strategies to attract and retain talent.
- Fast-track Early Childhood Education certification programs to address local workforce shortages.

Strengthening Language and Skill Development

- Develop multilingual resources to improve job accessibility and offer pre-arrival English courses to enhance employment readiness.
- Encourage corporate sponsorship for community-based English learning programs and expand communication initiatives like Toastmasters.
- Promote employer-funded participation in professional language programs to support workplace integration.
- Host drop-in English reading sessions and conversation circles at public libraries to enhance language proficiency and community engagement.

Fostering Community and Social Inclusion

- Establish inclusive community centers and multi-faith spaces to support diverse cultural and religious needs.
- Expand community engagement initiatives to promote social integration and reduce isolation among immigrants.

Expanding Infrastructure and Services

- Advocate for long-term infrastructure planning, including school expansion, affordable housing initiatives, and economic development strategies to support immigrant retention.
- Invest in new walk-in clinics and foster employer partnerships to provide health benefits and connections to medical services.
- Promote employer carpooling programs to enhance workplace accessibility.
- Advocate for extended public transit hours to better accommodate commuting needs.



Our insights

Expanding sector-specific hiring programs, employer training on inclusive recruitment, and workforce development initiatives will improve newcomer employment outcomes. Strengthening language training, mentorship programs, and career development pathways will further support workforce integration. Aligning immigration policies with local labor market needs and streamlining employer processes will also improve access to skilled talent.

Beyond employment, affordable housing, accessible transit, and improved healthcare services are essential for retention. Strengthening family support, inclusive community spaces, and engagement programs will foster a more welcoming environment. Increased collaboration between employers, policymakers, and community organizations will help build a more inclusive and economically sustainable community.



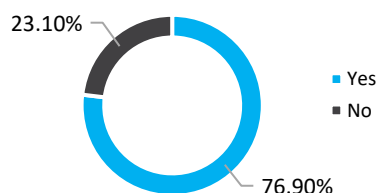
The impact is clear.

Integrating immigrant talent into the workforce is a shared responsibility, and our recent forum has been instrumental in equipping participants with the knowledge and confidence to navigate this complex landscape.

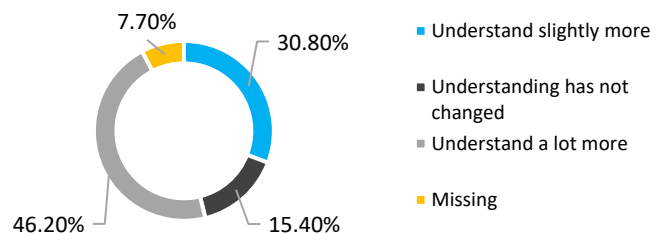
The post-survey results are compelling, highlighting the significant impact of the session and the progress we've made together.

Follow-up insights were collected from 13 forum participants.

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?



We value your feedback! If you have any questions or insights, reach out to us at communications@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!**

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