

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 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

As Canada continues to refine its immigration strategy to better align with labour market needs, the Immigrant Employment Councils of Canada (IECC) launched the Strengthening Employer Feedback Channels (SEFC) Project, an initiative that places employer perspectives at the centre of the conversation.

The project creates a structured feedback mechanism that enables employers, local business leaders, and community service providers to share on-the-ground insights that help inform both government and organizational strategies on immigration.

Through forums held across eight regions in Canada, the SEFC Project promotes vigorous discussions on systemic challenges, fosters a collaborative environment for dialogue, and encourages the sharing of best practices to improve the integration and inclusion of immigrant talent in the workforce. The project underscores the critical role of employers in shaping more responsive and inclusive immigration systems and supports the co-development of practical solutions for attracting, onboarding, and retaining global talent, ultimately bolstering Canada's economic success.

This digest reflects the forum hosted in Victoria, B.C. Following each session, a digest is developed to summarize key discussion points, emerging themes, and findings drawn from participant surveys conducted before and after the forum.

Canada



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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 November 5, 2025. Your insights and contributions were invaluable and have 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.

Our forum brought together a diverse group of attendees whose perspectives help foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for newcomers across Canada.

Together, we are shaping the future of Canada’s immigration programs and policies, building communities where every newcomer feels welcomed and valued.

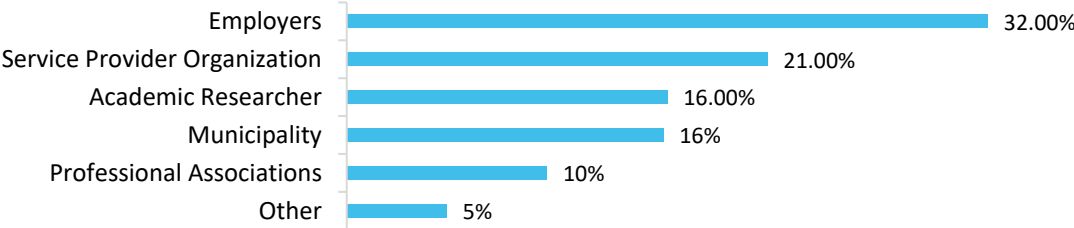
Here’s what we heard

The labour market continues to grow more complex and misaligned, with fewer entry-level roles, higher job expectations, and intensified competition for newcomers and youth. Limited recognition of international experience, combined with “Canadian experience” expectations tied to trust, familiarity, and professional networks, pushes many skilled immigrants into survival jobs and further crowds an already constrained entry-level market. Employers across sectors reported slow and fragmented work permit, LMIA, credential recognition, and licensing processes, particularly in regulated professions, which create uncertainty, discourage investment in training, and contribute to persistent vacancies. Strengthening pre-arrival preparedness, clarifying and accelerating licensing pathways, and improving alignment across systems will be essential, alongside addressing housing, childcare, workplace culture, and family integration as critical factors shaping attraction, retention, and long-term workforce stability.

Good to know

A total of 19 participants attended the session, with baseline insights collected from 16 attendees.

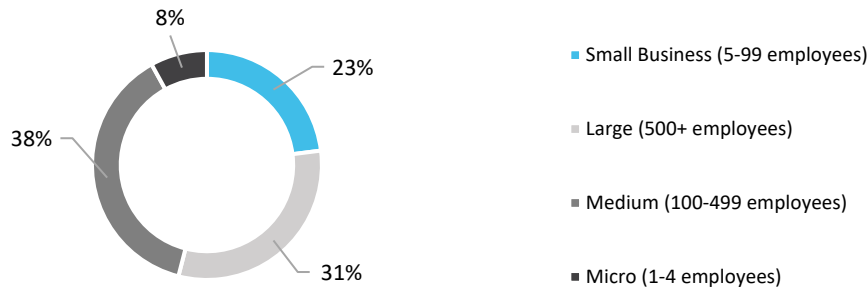
Who shaped the conversation in the forum?



What are the industries represented?

Participants were primarily from the **education, public service, non-profit, information and communications technology (ICT), finance and insurance, and construction sectors.**

How were businesses of different sizes represented?



Employer Insights on Immigration, Hiring, and Inclusion

100% reported being **somewhat or moderately familiar** with the immigration and responded that **it's somewhat or very important** to use inclusive hiring processes in your workplace.

83% said their organization **adopted inclusive hiring practices** to support the recruitment or retention of internationally trained talent.

66% saw that the **immigration system was somewhat unaligned** with their labour market needs.

Nearly 60% participants

said they **feel moderately confident understanding key factors in immigrant employment**, including work permits, credential assessments, cultural norms, and references.

Non-Employer Perspectives and System Challenges

- Employer needs are **moderately considered** in immigration selection policies.
- Employers are **moderately invested** in hiring newcomers.
- Employers are **moderately engaged** with the broader settlement and integration system.

Common Themes and Key Insights

Collectively, forum participants explored key themes drawn from an extensive consultation and review of Canada's immigration system, as outlined in [An Immigration System for Canada's Future](#).



Skills and Talent

Navigating Labour Market Complexity and Entry-Level Barriers

A growing disconnect exists between immigration policy and real employment opportunities as labour market complexity increases across sectors. Workforce reductions, greater reliance on technology, and tighter budgets have shifted many roles once considered entry-level into senior or analyst positions, often requiring a single employee to perform multiple functions. These changes have narrowed entry pathways for newcomers and young people and intensified competition for fewer entry-level roles, with internationally trained professionals frequently competing with more experienced candidates. Without adapting hiring practices and investing in structured onboarding, internal training, and clear progression pathways, employers risk shrinking future talent pipelines and limiting long-term workforce sustainability.

Strengthening Recognition of International Experience

Barriers to recognizing international education and work experience persist across employers and regulatory bodies, often forcing skilled immigrants into survival jobs unrelated to their profession. This underutilization further crowds an already shrinking entry-level labour market, where newcomers compete with youth and experienced workers for limited opportunities, leading to frustration and dissatisfaction, particularly among those who held professional roles prior to arriving in Canada. References to a lack of "Canadian experience" often reflect broader concerns related to trust, familiarity with local industry practices, workplace norms, and access to professional networks or references, rather than gaps in technical skills.



Addressing System Barriers in Credential Recognition and Immigration Pathways

Integrity of Canada's Immigration System

Slow and complex work permit and LMIA processes, frequent policy changes, and weak alignment between immigration pathways and labour market needs continue to create uncertainty for both employers and immigrants. These conditions undermine efforts to attract and retain skilled talent and discourage hiring, particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises, when training and onboarding investments may not be realized before work permits expire. Rather than reflecting a shortage of talent, these barriers point to broader system misalignment that limits employers' ability to plan and invest with confidence.

Credential recognition and licensing pose additional and persistent obstacles, especially in regulated professions such as engineering, architecture, nursing, and medicine. Internationally trained

professionals must navigate lengthy, costly, and fragmented licensure pathways, with most supports restricted to permanent residents, leaving temporary permit holders without sufficient time or resources to complete requirements before permits lapse. Even after credentials are assessed, licensure often remains a separate hurdle, contributing to underemployment in survival jobs. Inconsistent standards across provinces and institutions, limited recognition of international education, licensing delays, and uneven training quality, particularly between private colleges and approved institutions, further complicate workforce entry. Unclear guidance on funding eligibility, work permits, and licensing processes reinforces the need for clearer pathways, harmonized credential requirements, and stronger coordination among regulators, employers, and government bodies.



Client Service Excellence

Improving Pre-Arrival Information and Preparedness

Stronger pre-arrival preparedness can significantly improve newcomer experiences and reduce early employment challenges. Providing clear and realistic information before arrival on labour market conditions, housing costs, and licensing timelines would enable newcomers to make informed decisions and better plan their settlement and employment pathways. Moving portions of credential recognition and licensing processes to the pre-arrival stage, drawing on models such as New Zealand's, could improve transparency, ease onboarding pressures for employers, and reduce early attrition driven by misaligned expectations.

Sustaining Settlement and Employment Support Services

The sustainability of settlement and employment services remains a growing concern, particularly as resources to support employers and newcomers face increasing strain. Funding constraints, high staff turnover, and inconsistent training limit service providers' capacity to deliver reliable and effective support. Maintaining service quality will require stable and predictable funding, stronger coordination among agencies, and improved visibility of existing programs to help newcomers navigate increasingly complex systems. Strengthening collaboration among employers, service providers, and government will be critical to addressing these challenges and supporting long-term labour market integration.



Navigating Housing and Infrastructure Constraints

Housing

High living costs and limited social infrastructure continue to challenge employers' ability to attract and retain talent. A lack of affordable housing discourages skilled workers and their families from choosing the region as a long-term home, creating barriers to workforce growth and retention. These pressures intersect directly with immigration policy and workforce planning, reinforcing housing affordability and infrastructure as foundational conditions for successful newcomer integration. Targeted government support to offset relocation costs in high-cost regions could help reduce financial strain for newcomers

and their families, support successful settlement, and improve retention by making employment opportunities more viable in communities facing housing and infrastructure constraints.



Social Cohesion

Supporting Workplace Cultural Integration

Hiring decisions often rely on trust and familiarity with workplace culture, which can create barriers for newcomers who are less familiar with workplace norms, communication styles, and unspoken expectations. These gaps increase the risk of misunderstandings and can reinforce unconscious bias, leading employers to favour candidates with similar backgrounds. Practical Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training can help build employer confidence in hiring and supporting diverse talent. Structured mentorship and networking opportunities also play an important role in helping newcomers navigate workplace culture, build professional relationships, and expand access to local networks.

Recognizing Family and Childcare Barriers to Retention

Family-related challenges often operate as invisible but significant factors affecting employee retention, particularly family isolation and childcare shortages. When daycare spaces are unavailable, newcomer families may rely on a single income, creating financial strain and affecting mental health and overall stability. Limited integration beyond the workplace can also leave spouses and children feeling isolated, which in turn affects the primary earner's well-being and job performance. Adopting a more holistic, full-family approach recognizes that hiring an employee also means supporting their household. Flexible work arrangements and access to family- and child-focused resources can strengthen stability and serve as preventative measures against high turnover, rather than being treated solely as employee benefits.



Sector-Specific Insights

Public Service:

Challenges

Security Clearance Delays

Unpredictable and lengthy security clearance processes create a significant but often hidden barrier to hiring newcomers, particularly in public sector roles. Minor errors in application forms can restart the process entirely, while limited guidance increases the risk of candidates losing job opportunities when clearances are not granted in time. These delays introduce uncertainty for both employers and candidates and can significantly extend hiring timelines.

Limited Flexibility in Work Arrangements

Rigid policies, particularly in unionized environments, limit employers' ability to offer flexible work arrangements or family supports. This lack of flexibility makes it more difficult to support newcomer

integration and retention, especially as workforce expectations shift toward more adaptable schedules and family-responsive practices.

Interview Assessments and Accessibility

Many hiring processes still rely on rigid tests or interview exercises that fail to reflect the tools, technologies, and collaborative approaches used in day-to-day work. These methods can disadvantage newcomers and individuals with disabilities, creating unnecessary barriers to entry. Modernizing assessments, strengthening accommodation options for diverse needs, and supporting interviewers in focusing on job-relevant skills rather than outdated norms would help address these gaps. Increasing awareness of cultural differences, disabilities, and generational diversity also plays a key role in making hiring processes more inclusive and less interrogative.

Opportunities

- **Embed accommodations into policy design:** Leverage existing accommodations resources to build employer knowledge and develop flexible workplace policies that better reflect operational realities and diverse employee needs.
- **Expand wraparound supports:** Provide access to childcare, mental health services, form-filling assistance, and other supports that address barriers beyond the workplace and outside of standard working hours.
- **Adopt a whole-family approach:** Recognize and address the social isolation experienced by newcomer families by offering family-inclusive supports that strengthen employee stability and retention.
- **Expand work-integrated learning pathways:** Increase co-op and experiential learning opportunities while reducing barriers to skills development and progression into higher-skilled roles.
- **Strengthen support for security clearance processes:** Offer clear guidance and hands-on support for completing security clearance forms to prevent errors that can cause costly delays and missed employment opportunities.

Non-Profit:

Challenges

Short-Term Contracts and Turnover

Short contract periods, frequent turnover, and uncertainty around retention make employers hesitant to invest in onboarding and training temporary workers. These conditions limit employers' ability to plan workforce investments and discourage longer-term skills development.

Limited Career Pathways and System Misalignment

Limited career pathways and complex, shifting regulations make long-term planning difficult for both employers and workers. Improving coordination across immigration, labour, and education systems,

alongside stronger employer supports, clearer progression pathways, and more inclusive hiring practices, would be essential to strengthening workforce stability and retention.

Opportunities

- **Introduce minimum employment duration agreements:** Implement minimum employment periods, within fair labour standards, to improve retention and increase employer confidence in training and onboarding investments.
- **Plan hiring and role alignment pre-arrival:** Align roles and workforce needs before arrival to ensure positions match workers' skills, experience, and longer-term career goals.
- **Create pathways from temporary to long-term employment:** Develop structured apprenticeship, co-op, or work-integrated learning programs that connect temporary workers to sustainable career pathways.
- **Strengthen employer navigation supports:** Provide small and medium-sized businesses with clear guidance and administrative support to navigate legal and regulatory processes when hiring temporary workers.
- **Improve coordination in credential recognition:** Explore coordinated systems or "sister education" frameworks between Canadian and international institutions to streamline credential evaluation.
- **Increase transparency in licensing processes:** Improve clarity and consistency around credential recognition and licensing requirements across jurisdictions to support workforce mobility and integration.

Education:

Challenges

Barriers to Entry-Level Access and Workforce Sustainability

Rising job complexity has reduced access to entry-level positions for newcomers and youth, as many roles now demand broader skill sets and higher levels of experience. Low wages and high turnover further strain non-profit organizations and educational institutions, limiting their ability to invest in training and long-term workforce development.

Licensing Requirements and Pre-Arrival Information Gaps

Lengthy and costly licensing requirements in regulated professions, such as teaching, leave many skilled immigrants underemployed. Limited access to realistic pre-arrival information further contributes to frustration and mismatched expectations, complicating labour market entry, workforce planning, and retention.

Opportunities

- **Introduce targeted government incentives:** Use wage subsidies and training supports to encourage employers to hire, train, and retain newcomers.
- **Expand work-integrated learning opportunities:** Increase WIL options that allow newcomers to gain Canadian experience while pursuing credential recognition or licensure.
- **Develop mentorship and supervised practice pathways:** Create structured mentorship and supervised practice programs that support internationally trained professionals in transitioning into their fields.
- **Shift credentialing and licensing steps to pre-arrival:** Move portions of credential recognition and licensing processes to the pre-arrival stage to reduce time spent in survival jobs.
- **Elevate newcomer success stories:** Increase visibility of success stories from underrepresented newcomer communities to build employer confidence and trust.
- **Improve awareness of existing programs and supports:** Strengthen outreach and marketing to ensure employers and newcomers can easily identify and access available resources.
- **Standardize training for settlement workers:** Provide consistent, up-to-date training to ensure accurate and uniform guidance across the settlement sector.
- **Engage regulatory bodies in solution-building:** Involve regulators directly in dialogue and co-design efforts to create faster, clearer, and more predictable pathways to licensure.

Mixed Sector:

Challenges

Policy Instability and Long-Term Planning

Frequent changes in immigration policies create uncertainty for employers and newcomers, making long-term workforce planning and career decision-making difficult.

Opportunities

- **Expand financial supports for credential recognition:** Strengthen collaboration between employers, government, and newcomer-serving organizations to offer targeted financial assistance or micro-loans that help offset the costs of credential recognition and licensing.
- **Centralize information and guidance:** Create a single, up-to-date platform where employers and newcomers can easily access clear, reliable information on immigration pathways, credential recognition, and employment supports.

Actions and Proposed Solutions

Policy & System Alignment

- Introduce government incentives (wage subsidies, training grants, tax credits) to reduce employer risk when hiring and upskilling newcomers.
- Streamline work permit/LMIA processes and stabilize policies to improve planning certainty for employers and candidates.
- Pilot hybrid work permits (e.g., closed permits that convert to open after 6–12 months) with employer safeguards and incentives.
- Create guaranteed PR pathways for priority occupations (e.g., health care, teaching) to improve retention in critical roles.
- Engage regulatory bodies directly in regional forums and working groups to co-design licensing improvements.
- Establish cross-government coordination (federal–provincial–municipal) that ties immigration targets to local labour demand, housing, and childcare capacity.

Credential Recognition & Licensure

- Move portions of licensing and credential assessment to the pre-arrival stage (New Zealand-style) to reduce time spent in survival jobs.
- Develop supervised practice/conditional licensing streams so internationally trained professionals can work under supervision while completing licensure.
- Align federal credential recognition with provincial licensing requirements; publish unified, transparent roadmaps by profession.
- Reduce wait times for exams/bridging programs and expand seat capacity; offer evening/online options to fit work schedules.
- Provide micro-loans, fee waivers, or employer co-funding for exam fees, membership dues, and credential evaluation costs.
- Recognize prior international experience through competency-based assessments rather than time-in-Canada proxies.

Employer Practices (Hiring, Onboarding, Inclusion)

- Implement skills-based hiring (name-blind screening, structured interviews, practical job-relevant tasks) to mitigate bias against “Canadian experience.”
- Offer inclusive interview accommodations (extra time, alternative formats) and train panels on cultural differences and neurodiversity.
- Build mentorship programs pairing newcomers with experienced employees or sector peers (cross-company and cross-sector).
- Provide on-the-job language support (translation tools, plain-language SOPs) and cultural onboarding for newcomer employees.

- Invest in manager soft-skills training (communication, flexibility, accommodation literacy) to support diverse teams.
- Create structured progression pathways for entry-level hires (apprenticeships, co-ops, rotations) that lead to higher-skilled roles.
- Launch inclusive onboarding toolkits and DEI training that are practical, role-specific, and measured for impact.

Pre-Arrival Preparation & Candidate Readiness

- Offer sector-specific pre-arrival webinars detailing licensing steps, timelines, costs, job expectations, and regional realities (housing/childcare).
- Facilitate pre-matching of roles and career plans before arrival (conditional offers, supervised practice placements).
- Provide profession-specific information portals with verified, current guidance and contact points for employers and candidates.

Regional Attraction & Retention

- Develop housing partnerships, relocation stipends, or temporary accommodation supports to make offers competitive in high-cost regions.
- Expand flexible work arrangements (hybrid schedules, compressed weeks) to offset cost-of-living and family care constraints.
- Partner with childcare providers for priority access or subsidies; explore employer-supported on-site or near-site childcare.

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Service Provider Capacity & Employer Support

- Co-fund settlement/employment services to stabilize delivery (reduce turnover, standardize training, ensure updated info).
- Create a Small Business “Support Concierge” to guide SMEs through legal, licensing, and HR processes for newcomer hiring.
- Build shared tools and resource guides (templates, checklists, timelines) for employers navigating documentation and compliance.
- Encourage municipal/chamber convening to align employers, SPOs, and regulators; commit to shared metrics and regular check-ins.

- Track and evaluate pilots (mentorship, inclusive onboarding) and publish case studies to scale practices that improve retention.

Assessment Modernization (Public Sector emphasis)

- Replace outdated practical tests with real-world, tool-enabled tasks that reflect the job (use standard software/templates).
- Provide form-filling support and Q&A help for security clearance applications; publish clear timelines and error-prevention guidance.

Cross-Cultural Integration & Social Cohesion

- Promote newcomer professional networks and cross-sector communities of practice to increase visibility and trust.
- Highlight success stories from underrepresented countries/regions to broaden employer reference points and reduce perceived risk.



The impact is clear.

Follow-up insights were collected from 13 forum participants.

The forum had a clear and meaningful impact, with participants reporting increased understanding, confidence, and readiness to take action on the integration of internationally trained talent.

92%

agreed the session **revealed critical policy and system-level gaps.**

62%

felt **better equipped** to take action on immigrant workforce integration.

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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