

# **The Labour Market Integration Of Recent Immigrants to BC**

## **An IICC Response to Rupert Downing's Discussion Document**

Prepared by the  
Employment Programs Advisory Working Group  
on behalf of  
AMSSA's Immigrant Integration Coordinating Committee  
(IICC)

September 17, 1997

# Introduction

The IICC recognizes the discussion document, *“The Labour Market Integration of Recent Immigrants to BC”*, as a valuable tool in understanding the demography of an expanding immigrant population in British Columbia. It provides a quantitative analysis of the effects of current immigration levels and trends, as well as an indication of anticipated changes. This information is especially beneficial to service providers in that it offers critical information about the context of immigrant when we consider program development, delivery and evaluation.

The Action Plan outlined on pages 57 to 59 proposes preliminary steps that will assist the sector in moving towards an integrated labour market training initiative. The IICC supports the steps presented including: (1) *annual reporting*, (2) *fair federal funding*, (3) *labour market integration initiatives*, (4) *consultation*, and (5) *BC representation*. With each of these steps however there are challenges to be faced and issues that will need to be addressed.

This response attempts to articulate these challenges and offer reasonable suggestions as to the best practices and/or strategies to address these issues. In addition, this response identifies areas that require further clarification. The IICC looks forward to an ongoing, productive partnership with government in the effective delivery of employment initiatives in a changing environment.

## I. Analysis of the Action Plan

### Step #1. Annual Reporting

Information that is both timely and relevant is critical in developing appropriate needs assessments, anticipating trends, defining specific objectives and delivering responsive programs. The IICC supports the concept of targeted research relating to immigrant integration & employment themes and inter-Governmental & inter-Ministerial information sharing. Effective communications will ensure accuracy in the status of newcomers in the province.

#### *The Challenges*

- **To deliver relevant and timely information that provides a thorough analysis of demographic trends and needs identification.**

#### *Suggested Strategies*

1. **Establish a working group on immigrant employment integration that would consist of representatives from the IICC’s Employment Programs Advisory Committee, a business federation representative, a professional association**

representative, and inter-Governmental & inter-Ministerial staff members. The purpose of this working group would be to articulate & prioritize emerging research themes, to develop working strategies to address emerging issues, and to ensure widespread involvement in the gathering of research data.

2. Provide quarterly updates in both hard copy and via the Internet in addition to the planned annual reports.

## Step #2. Fair Federal Funding

Fair funding is essential in the delivery of effective employment-related initiatives for newcomers to BC. The IICC supports the Province's assertion that recent cutbacks to HRDC funding has negatively affected employment programs specifically targeted to BC's immigrant population.

However, the IICC is concerned that the Province has not demonstrated its commitment to this end in light of the recent decision to use increased federal payments (\$22.4 million annually) for general revenue. These additional monies provide an opportunity to develop specific employment interventions for the immigrant community in British Columbia. It is our opinion that current levels of federal settlement funding would be inadequate to fund settlement services, language acquisition programs and employment initiatives without the use of these increased funds to the Province.

### *The Challenges*

- To ensure BC receives a fair share of federal dollars that will be specifically targeted to immigrant employment-related initiatives.
- To maintain integrity in the use of existing federal funds for their intended purpose while offering flexibility in client eligibility and program options.

### *Suggested Strategies*

1. Negotiate a Canada/BC agreement that recognizes the current demographic realities and future migration trends concerning immigrant settlement in BC.
2. Use recent increases in federal transfer payments to fund research initiatives and the development & delivery of employment-related programs targeting the immigrant population in British Columbia.
3. Designate immigrants as 'special interest participants' who would be exempt from either waiting periods or EI eligibility criteria.
4. Analyse, develop and fund programs based on participant need as opposed to using pre-determined program models.
5. Provide multi-year program funding to ensure program continuity and flexibility.

## Step #3. Labour Market Integration Initiatives

The IICC supports the development of labour market integration initiatives on an inter-Governmental and inter-Ministerial basis. The discussion document outlines critical target areas including: best practices in employment training that combines language and vocational training; industries where economic change is likely to generate additional skill demands; the unique needs of immigrant women; best practices in managing diversity to achieve increased competitiveness; foreign trained professionals & trade workers unable to work in their respective occupations; adjustment services & further education; apprenticeship initiatives; workplace training; immigrant youth at risk; research & performance measurements to assess value for government intervention; and integration of labour market training with settlement services.

We are concerned, however, that existing inter-Governmental and inter-Ministerial priorities, practices and accountability/outcome measurements do not reflect the uniqueness of the immigrant population or the requirements of the service providing organizations that work in this field. Settlement Renewal provides a window of opportunity to define and establish a ‘made-in-BC’ approach to service delivery.

### *The Challenges*

- **To maintain the distinctiveness of the immigrant services sector in the overall Labour Market Integration (LMI) Strategic Initiative.**
- **To ensure a broad representation of client groups, service-providing organizations, employers, and government stakeholders in identifying and formulating [best practices].**
- **To initiate policies and programs that allow flexibility in responding to demographic and economic change.**
- **To maintain integrity in the following strongly supported concept:**

*[Initiatives will be designed to incorporate immigrant training and adjustment needs in provincial labour force development policies and programs, and in BC’s model for a renewed immigrant service system]*

### *Suggested Strategies*

1. **That the Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism & Immigration be designated as the lead agency in the delivery of specialized settlement, language acquisition, and employment-related programs targeting newcomers to BC.**
2. **That MRMI work with members of the Immigrant Integration Coordinating Committee (IICC) to define standards in service delivery and identify established ‘Best Practices’ in consultation with other service providing organizations, business federations, professional associations, unions, and related government Ministries.**
3. **That an inter-Ministerial and inter-Governmental planning committee, consisting**

**of representatives from MRMI, MEST, HRDC and CIC, develop and co-ordinate a specialized labour market integration initiative in consultation with the Immigrant Integration Coordinating Committee (IICC), other service providing organizations, business federations, and professional associations.**

- 4. Remove barriers by offering appropriate incentives to Canadian businesses offering work experiences.**
- 5. Work with professional associations to identify systemic barriers.**
- 6. Provide relevant labour market information to pre-landed immigrants abroad.**

## **Step #4. Consultation**

Although the concept of consultation is strongly supported by the IICC, efforts must be made to ensure equitable and knowledgeable representation in a consultation process.

Without clearly defined accountability guidelines and selection processes, representatives of service providing organizations may find themselves in potential conflicts of interest when serving on advisory bodies. Articulated guidelines for representation would ensure accountability to the broader community thereby eliminating this potential conflict. In addition, the availability of resources to assist in information gathering and dissemination would complement the individual's ability to truly represent his or her constituency.

Client groups represent a unique challenge as it is often difficult to determine whom the client is speaking for and to whom the client is accountable. Involvement in focus groups rather than participation on advisory bodies assures broader representation and alleviates the problem of obscure accountability.

*The Challenges:*

- To develop an effective consultation process that moves beyond historical representation paradigms and encourages new thought processes leading to innovative, client-centred initiatives.**
- To ensure effective dialogue between the stakeholders that leads to a more integrated system of labour market integration for immigrants.**

*Suggested Strategies*

- 1. That 'Guidelines for Effective Consultations' be developed through a partnership with the Immigrant Integration Coordinating Committee (IICC), other representatives of service providing organizations, business federations, professional associations, and inter-Ministerial & inter-Governmental stakeholders.**
- 2. Ensure various service areas from immigrant services are represented (i.e. employment, LINC, settlement, multicultural services) in the consultation process.**

3. **Develop a plan to ensure immigrants, themselves, are consulted on a regular basis throughout the province utilizing existing opportunities (i.e. Private training outcomes survey project, surveys at multicultural fairs, LINC program surveys) and targeted focus groups.**
4. **That stipends and/or cost recovery be available to appointed representatives on advisory bodies to minimize agency costs and ensure effective communication within their respective constituencies.**

## **Step #5. BC Representation**

The IICC supports a more direct involvement of the Provincial government in matters of immigration and policy-making. However, there are serious concerns with respect to honouring international agreements relating to humanitarian interventions. Canada, as a signatory nation to the UNHCR, is committed to the resettlement of refugees. This is an important priority that has not been identified as a priority by the Province.

In addition, the IICC strongly believes family reunification has a direct impact on the ability of newcomers to integrate successfully and survive the effects of international migration. We recognize there are costs associated with the breakdown in family sponsorship, however we believe the little consideration have been given to the costs that may result from a more restrictive policy relating to family reunification. We are opposed to any initiative that would impede the essential dynamics of the family support system.

### *The Challenges*

- **To maintain a strong BC voice in the decisions of immigration planning.**
- **To maintain a strong humanitarian commitment to assisting refugees and supporting family reunification.**

### *Suggested Strategies*

1. **Ensure that a Settlement & Integration Advisory Body is available to support the work of Province in addressing the needs of BC's immigrant population and that participation on the advisory body be well represented with relevant expertise.**
2. **That the Province seeks a more direct role in recruitment, promotion and selection of immigrants that match the skill and entrepreneurial demands of the BC economy.**
3. **That the Province articulate its commitment to Canada's international humanitarian obligations and develop specific targets that reflect this commitment.**
4. **That research is conducted to determine the primary cause of family sponsorship breakdown and to consider alternatives in addressing this problem without the necessity of a more restrictive family reunification policy.**

## II. Areas Requiring Further Clarification

In addition to the aforementioned identified challenges and proposed strategies, the IICC is concerned that a number of concepts and/or issues are either under-explored or omitted in the discussion document. These items need to be addressed or further clarified before a more detailed response can be achieved. These include:

- ***anti-racism*** - more discussion is needed
- ***seasonal workers*** - little mention of the issues involved with seasonal workers (i.e. English communication, technical skills, Canadian certification, lack of information on how to change job and insufficient funds for career advancement)
- ***refugee claimants*** - lack of eligibility for LINC and employment training
- ***user fees*** - no discussion about criteria for putting into place
- ***client eligibility*** - this is still a problem due to restrictions of federal government
- ***employment, language and settlement renewal processes*** - how does one process speak to another?
- ***professional/non-professional women re-entering the labour force***
- ***child care*** - issues here have still not been addressed
- ***PPSEC accreditation*** - are all training deliverers subject to the same accreditation fee?
- ***job creation strategy*** - how does the ‘action plan’ fit into a larger job creation strategy?
- ***development of the Employment Advisory Committee*** - what will the terms of reference be and who will be involved?.
- ***skills training initiatives with occupation specific English and work experience components*** – should be designed targeting under-employed and the unemployed
- ***pre-landing information for new immigrants*** – focusing on local employment rates, labour market information and foreign credential evaluation to make realistic decisions regarding work
- ***clarification of funding priorities for the Federal/Provincial Labour Market Integration Initiative***
- ***employer education and ‘buy-in’*** – how will employers be involved?
- ***exploitation issues*** – more discussion is needed
- ***transportation allowances*** – to ensure accessibility
- ***funding for liability insurance & workers compensation***

# Conclusion

The information presented within the discussion document clearly demonstrates that immigration has contributed net benefits to the BC economy. It also defines current barriers and/or emerging needs within the immigrant community. The author correctly states that: *'Maintaining the benefits of immigration to the economy will require management of these impacts and costs'* (page 7). The IICC supports the Province's role as a lead partner in facilitating this management process.

The proposed five step action plan provides an excellent framework to initiate the effective management of this sector, however, more work is required in developing specific initiatives that will address the identified concerns. This IICC is committed to being a full participant in the ongoing development of this strategy. We look forward to working with inter-Ministerial, inter-Governmental, business, articulation/accreditation, education, and other community stakeholders in this process.

# Appendix

The following represents additional comments that were received from members of the IICC upon their review of the response that had been circulated for consideration prior to submission. Each quotation is followed by an indication of how the individual felt about the response:

## I. Analysis of the Action Plan

### Step #1 – Annual Reporting (pages 2 – 3)

*‘Concern – how would the representatives be chosen? Would diversity be part of the consideration to chose participants?’ (Somewhat agree)*

*‘Good in theory – wonder how practical? A lot of consultation is happening now so it’s possible to spend all time at meetings & therefore have nothing to report on because there’s no time to a) do the work/project and b) check in with front line staff and do the two way feedback.’ (Somewhat agree)*

### Step #2 – Fair Federal Funding (page 3)

*‘Ensure that “immigrants” include refugees who are currently excluded from training programs. I’m very concerned about the “black hole” which swallowed the \$22.4 million. How can we ensure appropriate targeting of these funds?’ (Strongly Agree)*

### Step #3 – Labour Market Integration Initiatives (pages 4 – 5)

*‘Need to involve other sectors more broadly – corporate, Canadian businesses, etc.’ (Strongly Agree)*

*‘I hope we don’t forget that immigrants do bring lots of skills and knowledge already. If given the opportunity, space, they could continue using those skills and knowledge.’ (Somewhat Agree)*

*‘Ensure that implementation of ‘best practices’ is practical. Could in turn mean more outlay of funds as staff may require upgrading/training in order to comply with ‘best practices’. Include area of small business development (micro & home-based business) as practical alternative for immigrants. Recognize that waiting periods and the “Welfare to Work” programme is a barrier to new immigrants’. (Strongly Agree)*

### Step #4 – Consultation (pages 5 – 6)

*‘Hopefully in associations you are including women’s associations such as Philipino Women’s Association, Spanish Speaking Women’s Associations. They have another point of view.’ (Strongly Agree)*

*‘Yes, focus groups can help vary the standard responses, as long as the interest base of the group is recognized. Small groups like this would be a good way of including a wider range of opinions’ (Strongly Agree)*

## Step #5 – BC Representation (page 6)

*'Yes, but need to respect the National/International context. Risk of becoming too insular.'*  
(Strongly Agree)

## II. Areas Requiring Further Clarification

*'Yes, hopefully anti-racism will be priority #1. If we don't concentrate in this area systemic barriers will keep anybody that is different (i.e. people with non-Canadian education, people without traditional education) out of the decision making processes.'* (Strongly Agree)

*'Additional Concerns:*

*Exploitation of labour standards. Advocacy is an issue when immigrants are afraid to make a complaint. Acceptance of exploitation affects labour market in general. Official representatives for Human Rights/Employment Standards will only give workshops to group of 20 or more so smaller groups are excluded. Should include a provincial ministry (e.g. Ministry of Human Resources).*

*Transition to employment allowance and travel allowance not available to claimants. Some entry level jobs are available in industrial locations that require private transportation for access so 'out of bounds' for newcomers.'* (Strongly Agree)