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**The Integration of Immigrants into the
Newfoundland and Labrador
Workforce**

Final Report - Summary

**Prepared by
Association for New Canadians
Newfoundland and Labrador**

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Executive Summary

Every Year, Newfoundland and Labrador welcomes some of the most educated and qualified immigrants in Canada, but their skills remain an underutilized resource in this province. Newfoundland and Labrador has the lowest retention rate of immigrants in the country because individuals often leave in search of meaningful employment. The issue of immigrant retention gains increasing importance as the province experiences a steady decline in population, both through a decreased birth rate and continued out-migration. The results of this study show that there are numerous immigrant employment barriers to be addressed in order to attract new immigrants and to increase their retention rate in Newfoundland and Labrador.

In an attempt to address some of the barriers to greater immigrant employment across the country, on 25 April 2007 the Government of Canada launched the *Internationally Trained Workers Initiative*, an integrated, comprehensive strategy in which over fourteen (14) federal departments work together to address employment barriers for internationally trained workers.¹ One of the key components of the initiative is the *Foreign Credential Recognition (FCR)* program, aimed at facilitating the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications for both regulated and non-regulated occupations.² This study is a part of the FCR program, albeit with a somewhat larger scope that encompasses a variety of issues surrounding the integration of immigrants into the Newfoundland and Labrador labour market. The study also builds on the new provincial immigration strategy, *An Immigration Strategy for Newfoundland and Labrador: Diversity ~ Opportunity and Growth*, by providing suggestions and recommendations for higher retention numbers and better workforce integration of immigrants.

The foreign credential recognition process is a set of procedures which help verify that the education and job experience obtained in another country are equal to the standards established for domestically educated and employed workers. These procedures are necessary for employment in regulated trades and professions, and even in some non-regulated employment areas. However, these procedures can be challenging, complex and time-consuming, especially for people whose first language is not English and who are not familiar with the Canadian employment culture. One of the main purposes of this study is to contribute to easier and more efficient assessment of internationally acquired education and work experience.

The objectives of the study are to:

- Identify the main barriers to employment encountered by immigrants in Newfoundland and Labrador.
- Identify the barriers employers see limiting greater integration of immigrants into the Newfoundland and Labrador work force.
- Identify potential incentives for better integration of immigrants into the local work force.

There has been extensive literature review conducted on foreign credential recognition and the lack of efficient and meaningful integration of immigrants into the Canadian work force, which was thoroughly utilized for the purposes of informing this study. The academic community recognizes the existence of barriers to employment when it comes to new Canadians, and it identifies four main theories to understanding the labour market integration of recent immigrants to Canada: Human Capital theory, Cultural Capital theory, Institutional theory and Systemic Discrimination theory. This report is based mostly on the Institutional Theory, which essentially blames systemic factors, such as institutionally required skills, qualifications and experiences of receptor countries for difficulties in integrating. The study also takes into consideration elements of Cultural Capital, in that many local immigrants do not have established social or professional networks to help them find a job in their field. Systemic Discrimination is a more academic

¹ Citizenship and Immigration Canada, taken from the News Release, <http://www.cic.gc.ca/ENGLISH/press/05/0513-e.html>, Accessed on April 25, 2007

² Human Resources and Social Development Canada, <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/cs/comm/hrsd/news/2005/050425bb.shtml>, accessed on April 25, 2007

approach and perhaps more difficult to identify by host societies, and requires much more in-depth analysis than we have provided in this report.

The report also reviews the best practices of other provinces and countries, and their latest initiatives in breaking down the barriers to successful labour market integration of immigrants. From new and comprehensive provincial immigration strategies to municipal integration efforts, attraction and retention of immigrants today proves to be a prominent issue with Canadian and foreign governments. All the reviewed initiatives offer fresh and useful perspectives to be considered in recommending new and effective ways of successful immigrant integration.

The quantitative and qualitative research in this study is based on the experiences of local employers and all classes of immigrants, including international students throughout the province. The project team reviewed the relevant statistics and conducted two major surveys with immigrants and local employers focusing on employment barriers and incentives for hiring immigrants. The employer survey was designed to investigate several key issues which influence how successful immigrants are in their efforts to fully integrate into the Newfoundland and Labrador workforce. The immigrant survey contained a number of questions about employment status and job satisfaction, access to the local labour market, perceptions of major employment barriers, and future settlement plans. In addition to the surveys, the research team conducted interviews and focus groups with immigrants, international students, and key informants from government, educational institutions, community, businesses, and regulatory and non-regulatory bodies.

The study concludes that the barriers to employment integration, including, but not limited to, the non-recognition of foreign credentials, must be eliminated in both formal and informal contexts so that immigrants and employers can come together in a way that helps immigrants use their skills and abilities and also helps employers meet their employment needs.

The report provides recommendations to improve the integration of internationally trained individuals into the local work force, specifically focusing on breaking down the barriers to the recognition of internationally acquired education and work experience. Removing these barriers could lead to meaningful employment and contribute to the economic development of the province.

In particular, the report recommends that:

- Governments, regulatory and non-regulatory bodies, educational institutions, service providers, community and employers need to work together to assist immigrants in making their transition to the new society successful. The latest provincial government immigration strategy, *An Immigration Strategy for Newfoundland and Labrador: Diversity ~ Opportunity and Growth* provides excellent groundwork for further development of programs and initiatives regarding successful integration of immigrants in Newfoundland and Labrador.
- Considering that both immigrants and employers find economic conditions in Newfoundland and Labrador a major employment barrier, the strategic matching process of immigrant skills and competencies with local labour market demands should be encouraged and intensified prior to their arrival to Canada and this province. This particular initiative would require close collaboration of businesses, municipalities and rural communities, and the provincial government. The government of Newfoundland and Labrador has already taken a step forward in optimizing the effectiveness of the Provincial Nominee Program through a newly created Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism.
- Occupation-specific language training would increase a candidate's chance of success in the workforce.
- Host societies could be more active in assisting immigrants find and understand the correct

information about the labour market and professional requirements.

- Settling in NL is about building a lifestyle rather than just making money. Immigrants need assistance with finding the right information about employment opportunities and developing positive attitudes about building that lifestyle.
- All the relevant players must work to build a stronger alignment between what happens nationally, regionally and provincially on matters relating to Foreign Credential Recognition, to improve and expedite immigrant labour market integration across the country.

Key Findings

As a result of both survey analysis and the analysis of qualitative data collected through interviews and focus groups, the study reveals barriers to employment most commonly encountered by employers and immigrants in our province. The study also discovers that there are various incentives local employers are willing to implement to encourage hiring of internationally trained workers.

According to both qualitative data and quantitative results of the immigrant survey, the non-recognition of the foreign credentials is the most significant and most commonly encountered barrier to workplace integration in Newfoundland and Labrador. A great number of surveyed immigrants (82%) identify foreign credential recognition as a major barrier. Highly educated and trained individuals often cannot utilize their skills due to the complex processes of credential recognition. If better regulated and made easily accessible, the recognition of internationally acquired education and experience can contribute towards the achievement of high-level goals of employment, skill enhancement, equality, social inclusion and active citizenship.

The non-recognition of foreign credentials is ranked third by employers as a barrier to immigrant employment, as sixty percent (60%) of them believe it significantly affects the process of immigrant integration into the local labour market. Employers are not usually involved in foreign credential recognition assessment procedures, so the fact that they recognize FCR as a barrier is a significant finding of this study.

Economic conditions in Newfoundland and Labrador is the second most significant employment barrier for immigrants. Both surveyed immigrants (72%) and employers (65%) agree that economic conditions in Newfoundland and Labrador represent a major immigrant employment barrier, which can be further interpreted as the lack of demand on the labour market, hence no job availability. However, through the same sources of information this study discovers that there are at present skills shortages in various employment sectors, as well as a large number of immigrants contentedly employed in their field. This discrepancy may require additional research. It also shows that unfavourable economic conditions may just be perceived as a barrier, as opposed to representing a real obstacle to meaningful employment.

Sufficient knowledge of English language, which also includes occupation-specific language skills, did not rate very high as an employment barrier for immigrants, as sixty percent (60%) identify this as a significant barrier. However, the employer survey shows that language skills are a great concern for local employers. Surveyed employers (78%) rated English language as the most significant barrier to immigrant employment. This contrast in opinion leads one to conclude that assessing English as a second language by both immigrants and employers can be a subjective matter that may cause misunderstanding and develop perceptions of pronounced cultural differences or create other additional barriers to successful employment.

Other important employment barriers for immigrants found through qualitative analysis are: Canadian workplace practices; Canadian work experience and lack of mentoring, internships and apprenticeships; information for employers; information for immigrants before arrival; access to labour market information, retraining costs and financial requirements; cultural differences; supportive community; service external to the workforce; current living conditions in Newfoundland and Labrador; family; and racism/discrimination.

The study subsequently attempts to identify ways in which all the key stakeholders could contribute to greater immigrant employment. As the survey results and the qualitative analysis show, the key stakeholders are unanimous in recognizing the necessity for the incentives that would raise the numbers and improve the conditions of immigrant employment, even if proposed incentives vary. Strategic implementation of incentives can provide a platform for both immigrants and employers to utilize knowledge and skills needed to launch a successful career and fulfill employment needs respectively. Encouraging employment of highly qualified and trained individuals through strategic implementation of incentives is a joint responsibility, and if successful and fruitful, it will also benefit the whole community. Incentives considered most beneficial to employers, but also to immigrants, are occupation-specific language training, skills matching database for immigrants, sponsored internships or mentoring programs, occupations information prior to arrival, creation of an Atlantic assessment center, wage-subsidy, assistance of regulatory bodies with FCR, and promotion. Most of these incentives would contribute directly to the removal of above mentioned barriers, and they would follow similar and already established programs across the country.

Targeted Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the findings from this study. The study was conducted through surveys, interviews and focus groups with the key stakeholders.

1. Foreign Credential Recognition (FCR)

Internationally trained immigrants perceive the Canadian credentialing/assessment/ licensing/certification process as a web with multilayers. At any stage in this lengthy process, these individuals could encounter unforeseen challenges such as additional language requirements, document translations, prohibitive costs related to additional examinations, and a lack of required Canadian work experience. Adopting a collaborative approach and forging strategic alliances with key stakeholders such as governments, business and industry, educational organizations, regulatory/licensing bodies, sector councils, unions, and immigrant serving agencies is paramount to planning a coherent vision leading to the advancement of FCR and prior learning, training, and experience.

Recommendation

It is recommended by key stakeholders that the Province work towards a comprehensive local approach to streamlining Foreign Credential Recognition, keeping in mind regional and national considerations. This would involve developing partnerships with professional associations, corporations, regulated and non-regulated occupations, post-secondary institutions and other key community groups. This initiative would map out a needs-based approach to create workable solutions to credentialing and competency processes and to facilitate the process of integrating internationally trained workers in regulated and non-regulated occupations. This would address such key areas as: specific labour sector demands, mobilizing and increasing employer confidence, regulatory practices, assessment tools, engagement of national regulatory bodies, and building increased capacity at the local, regional and national level.

This study clearly indicates that immigrants placed high priority on the importance of recognizing and streaming internationally obtained education, skills and abilities.

2. Perception of Economic Conditions in Newfoundland and Labrador

From the research conducted, economic conditions in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador registered as a key barrier among those immigrants surveyed. First and foremost, the answer to this

perceived or real barrier may require all players to have a “positive attitude”, set realistic expectations, and have access to accurate labour market information in order to make informed decisions. Strategic matching of immigrants’ skills and competencies with local labour market demands should be encouraged and intensified prior to coming to Canada. There are mechanisms in place such as the federal initiative *Going to Canada* web portal, where immigrants can readily access current and comprehensive information. The new Federal Referral Agency Office will also be beneficial in assisting immigrants very quickly find appropriate regulators, self assessment tools and access relevant services.

Recommendation

It is recommended that representatives of governments, labour, industry, and post - secondary organizations work together to identify on a regular basis skill shortages in the province and communicate these shortages to potential employers and immigrant-serving agencies.

It is further recommended that the ANC take the lead in working with the above mentioned groups to develop and maintain a comprehensive employer/employee matching database for immigrants.

3. English Proficiency

Employers who participated in this study considered a lack of knowledge of English language skills, including sector specific language skills, a major barrier facing immigrants who are entering the workforce and might need additional language training.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the ANC partner with employers and governments to investigate the feasibility of providing a pilot on - site workplace language program and sector specific language assessment for those internationally educated and talented workers who require additional training.

4. Canadian Work Experience

It has been demonstrated that job shadowing, coaching and job mentoring have definite value as they provide much needed experience. Recognizing and utilizing the education, skills and experience of foreign trained workers requires additional resources and improved infrastructures. In the local economy, as demand for certain professions trades and services increases, so will the need for more highly trained and experienced professionals. Given today’s competitive global markets and a very mobile work environment, the focus should be on job related experience in general rather than exclusively Canadian experience. No doubt immigrants will bring these global perspectives to local situations. To expedite these transitions, it is timely for all stakeholders to look for solutions.

Recommendation

It is recommended that key stakeholders, governments, licensing bodies, sector councils, professional associations, post-secondary institutions, employers, ANC and other organizations collaborate to increase mentorships and internships as well as establish bridging programs to expedite labour market attachment for prospective immigrant workers.

It is further recommended that professional organizations that have programs in place could look at exploring other programs or expanding those already in place.

5. Canadian Work Place Practices

For immigrants, Canadian work place practices are often very different from those in their former countries and pose real challenges both for them as they start a new job, and for the employer and other employees. These differences range from the initial job search to job acquisition to social and workplace norms. Assisting and supporting immigrants through these processes, encouraging them to volunteer, and helping them understand the Canadian system is critical to their success in the Newfoundland and Labrador workplace.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the ANC work with key stakeholders to increase promotional activities to highlight the advantages of hiring immigrants and benefits of assisting immigrants in accessing internships, mentorship programs and workplace training programs.

It is recommended that governments, employers, the ANC and community agencies work together to provide immigrants with assistance in understanding the Canadian workplace through sector specific workshops involving workplace safety training and orientation. These programs and services could be made available on site or through distance learning.

It is further recommended that these players identify “best practice” in the area of diversity training and cultural understanding in the workplace and make information and training available to both Canadian and potential immigrant workers.

6. Employer Information

Employers need to have the tools, resources and knowledge necessary to embrace a multicultural workforce in terms of diversity training and organizational change. As well, they need to know how and where to access immigrant candidates who have the skills and education to fill their employment needs.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the ANC partner with governments to disseminate knowledge about the tools and resources that are already available for employers and other stakeholders particularly in terms of accessing the talented pool of internationally trained workers who are presently in the province and expediting their labour market attachment.

7. Financial Assistance

Financial requirements relating to assessments, registrations, licensing examinations and retraining costs often create challenges for immigrants to our province. Many professions such as Engineering and Medicine may require additional resources for retraining. A small loans program could be established to assist immigrants with fees and assessment costs dealing with the certification system in acquiring licensure and entry into a professional practice or skilled trades.

Recommendation

In light of the success gleaned in other provinces regarding financial support for immigrants, it is recommended that the province initiate an Immigrant Small Loan Fund Program of up to \$5000 to help internationally trained professionals, such as nurses, teachers, accountants, doctors, engineers and others complete their certification requirements.