

Putting out the Welcome Mat: *Why Immigration Matters to Ontario's Municipalities*

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Association of
Municipalities
of Ontario

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Executive Summary

Context of Immigration in Ontario:

Each year, Ontario welcomes 125,000 newcomers, over half of all immigrants to Canada. These immigrants represent the future workforce, bringing with them an impressive array of academic achievements and diverse cultural experiences. The skills and education of these newcomers is a valuable resource to municipalities across Ontario, and now, more than ever before, is the time for municipalities to actively engage in immigration attraction strategies.

It is estimated that by 2011 Ontario's net labour force population growth will rely on immigration. With the natural rate of increase in the population slipping, net international immigration to Ontario is projected to account for approximately 84 per cent of the total annual increase in the province's population by 2030.¹ These figures articulate the significance that immigration will have on the social, economic and planning policies of the future. They also give weight to the impact that municipalities can make by having progressive and responsive policies in place for their newcomers – it is imperative to ensure that immigrants can contribute to their full potential.

In an arrangement unique to Ontario, the Canada Ontario Immigration Agreement (COIA) recognizes municipalities as a key factor to developing successful immigration strategies. In 2004, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) worked together with Ontario and Canada to create Annex F under the COIA. Annex F ensures that AMO and its members are engaged in immigration program and policy development through the Municipal Immigration Committee (MIC), a tripartite Committee that brings AMO and municipalities to the frontline of immigration discussions with the Provincial and Federal governments.

Objectives of this Paper:

The objective of this paper is to provide a resource and advocacy tool for municipalities by identifying policy and service gaps as well as providing considerations on how municipal government can strengthen their ability to attract, retain and settle immigrations. This paper reflects the desire of municipalities to have forward-thinking policies in the following key areas: Attraction, Retention, and Settlement of Immigrants.

This paper includes information on issues, challenges and strategies related to immigration gathered from municipalities across Ontario. As it can be appreciated that some municipalities are more advanced in developing local strategies, this paper builds on the experience of those working ahead on immigration issues and strategies.

1 The Conference Board of Canada, *Provincial Outlook 2007, Long-Term Economic Forecast*, pp. 38-39.

Giving the Local Experts a Voice:

The experts on attracting, retaining and settling immigrants are at the local level. This is because, while, constitutionally, citizenship and immigration is the responsibility of the Federal government, the reality is immigrants move into and settle into communities. It is municipalities who are responsible for a broad range of services that have an immediate impact on newcomers, including the provision of social and health services. Municipal governments have first-hand insight into the effects of immigration policies and programs and of what is needed locally to support successful attraction, retention and settlement of newcomers.

Municipalities are responsible for providing many day-to-day services that people rely on such as Ontario works, library services, arts and culture, economic development, long-term care and housing for seniors, child care, social housing and public transit, along with a host of other duties such as administration and tax collection. The increasing numbers of newcomers to Ontario will obviously be relying on all of these services, as well as perhaps a wider range and new approach to coordinating these services, such as providing services in a variety of languages.

How municipalities choose to provide these services is a delicate job of balancing what is best for the immediate needs of their residents, along with future considerations such as economic growth, planning new neighbourhoods and enhancing the existing communities. The importance of well coordinated and accessible service provision will be high.

Considerations Addressed Within the Paper:

Emphasis is placed on the importance of taking stock of services available within the community, the demographics of their communities, any population shortage or growth trends as well as emerging labour and skills shortages. Successful strategies for attracting immigrants work best when they are flexible to the community they are serving. As such, the more knowledgeable municipal governments are of the demographic and economic realities of the municipality; along with the diverse strengths and unique needs of the municipality, municipalities are strengthening their ability to attract and settle immigrants into the community. By creating a strategy for attracting immigrants based on knowledge of a municipality's specific needs and strengths, it is more likely that the results will be a "win- win" scenario.

Promoting the strengths and potential for community growth that immigration would bring to as much of the community as possible is acknowledged as an excellent way of engaging with community members, increasing social capital and support for immigrants when they arrive. A community that is involved in this process will also be a more tolerant and welcoming community not only for when immigrants arrive, but for all citizens. The benefits of this include less of a struggle to settle immigrants, and perhaps more willingness on the part of employers to hire immigrants.

Suggestions to municipalities facing challenges in attracting immigrants to their communities were addressed, along with examples of communities who have had success in attracting immigrants. Central to this discussion was making information available to immigrants. Any available settlement services, job opportunities, or examples of successful immigrant integration should be clearly showcased to potential immigrants. This can be done through a media campaign that uses traditional mass media as well as ethnic newspapers or by using a community web portal.

Encouraging employer engagement and working on reducing cumbersome restrictions to Canadian professional job licenses are ways that municipalities can become involved in labour market integration. Because employment is usually the primary goal of immigrants and labour market integration an important goal of municipal economic development plans, municipalities who are beginning to put together both formal and informal immigrant employment initiatives, such as immigrant networking groups and employer engagement events, are highlighted in the paper. These are proving to be highly successful and are garnering large amounts of interest from both immigrants and the business community. As an ancillary benefit, they also offer an opportunity for immigrants to interact and become more socially engaged with Canadian society.

Skill-discounting, lack of recognition of foreign credentials and sometimes just a lack of Canadian job experience is leading to high levels of unemployment and underemployment of immigrants. This is counterintuitive to the reasons for many immigrant attraction strategies, and suggestions where municipalities have the capacity to work to curb the incidence of this are put forward.

Addressing some of the social problems and inequitable practices that unfortunately still exist in Ontario is also put forward as a strategy for municipalities, along with Provincial and Federal governments to undertake in order to settle immigrants into their communities. Cultural differences, misunderstandings surrounding the intentions of newcomers and old-fashioned stigmas must be openly addressed if municipalities wish to have an immigration strategy that works. Municipalities who work to address issues through educating both municipal employees and the general public by encouraging ethno-cultural and anti-racism training will find that education can go a long way in eliminating hostile environments and creating healthier, vibrant and strong communities.

Municipalities have a vested interest in ensuring that immigrants are fully integrating into the labour market, as this goes hand in hand with municipal economic development strategies, as well as plans for healthy, sustainable communities. This paper was an initiative of AMO's reflecting their commitment through the MCI to work in partnership with the three orders of government. It is hoped that this research will form part of the knowledge base for future planning efforts to achieve immigrant integration goals.

Recommendations:

After taking note of the best practices and priority considerations highlighted within the paper, the following recommendations can be provided on the basis of our research:

1. That the COIA be extended beyond 2010 and supported by sustained long term funding. And, that the COIA, or any future agreements ensure that all Federal and Provincial policy planning be informed by municipal experience and expertise as currently carried out through the MIC.
2. That all orders of government work together, with institutions and professional associations where appropriate, in addressing the severe under-utilization of immigrants' skills and foreign credentials.
3. That municipal involvement in Provincial and Federal immigration policy and program development is crucial. Continued advocacy and consultation with the Provincial and Federal governments is necessary to address local immigration concerns in a meaningful way.
4. That municipalities develop immigration plans that include a comprehensive and well researched community profile that recognizes the demographics of impending labour shortages and other profiles that assist in the attraction, retention and settlement of newcomers.
5. That immigration is recognized as part of a solution to demographic and economic challenges of rural and northern municipalities.
6. That the Local Immigration Partnerships Strategy (LIPS) program and the immigration web portal funding be expanded for additional municipalities and newcomers to benefit from.
7. That municipalities continue to support the Provincial and Federal governments in addressing accreditation and licensing concerns. In addition, employment legislation regarding hiring and employment practices be identified and promoted through a public education campaign.
8. That adequate language training is recognized as part of the solution to labour market integration of immigrants. Furthermore, that Provincial and Federal governments provide predictable, adequate funding for language training initiatives.
9. That municipalities consider establishing appropriate immigration employment networks as demonstrated by the success of NIEC and WRIEN and that the Provincial and Federal governments provide resources for career transition and employability initiatives.

10. Predictable and sustained sources of funding, from both the Provincial and Federal governments is required for local planning. This will allow municipal governments, community-based organizations and local immigrant service providers to plan and allocate funds in an effective and efficient manner.
11. As required, when faced with refugee surges or other unforeseen immigration influxes, the Provincial and Federal governments must share in the fiscal burden of assisting municipalities in addressing those needs.
12. That municipalities, along with the Provincial and Federal governments, work to support newcomers who are at risk of domestic abuse. This should include educational awareness programs that include a focus on Canadian women's rights and Canadian laws.
13. That municipalities should ensure ethno-cultural and race relations sensitivity training and provide staff and public educational awareness and understanding of cultural and racial differences.
14. That AMO continue to work with the Provincial and Federal governments to advance the growth and development of welcoming communities in Ontario.

Introduction

COIA recognizes municipalities as partners in developing immigration strategies.

In an arrangement unique to Ontario, the 2005 Canada Ontario Immigration Agreement (COIA) recognizes municipalities as partners in developing successful immigration strategies. In 2004, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) worked together with Ontario and Canada to create Annex F under the COIA. Annex F ensures that AMO and its members are engaged in immigration program and policy development through the Municipal Immigration Committee (MIC), a tripartite Committee that brings AMO and municipalities to the frontline of immigration discussions with the Provincial and Federal governments.

AMO believes that the key to successful immigration policy and outcomes rests in the strength of the partnership being fostered between all orders of government. As partners, each order of government has a role in and responsibility for ensuring immigration policy and programs are responsive to the social, economic and labour market priorities of our communities.

At the same time, governments must ensure that newcomers are provided the opportunity to contribute to the health and sustainability of our communities. The successful attraction, retention and settlement of immigrants in our communities is dependent on the availability of employment, and social support systems, access to health care and housing, the opportunity for financial stability, participation in community life, language and skills training and most importantly, a community that is welcoming. By working in collaboration, providing these resources and opportunities is far more achievable.

Ontario's arrangement provides an important opportunity to work together to create a coordinated system of service that can maximize Federal and Provincial priorities while responding to local needs, goals, and circumstances.

AMO believes that the dialogue that has begun between the orders of government is a good first step. But, we recognize that further dialogue, collaboration and greater understanding of how each order of government can support the other in our immigration efforts is required.

This paper is an exploration of emerging issues and trends in immigration, challenges that municipalities experience and examples of municipal innovation and strategies for addressing this important issue. Our goal is to provide ideas, information, resources and advocacy tools for municipalities. This paper also represents another opportunity for dialogue and collaboration between AMO, municipalities, the Provincial and Federal governments in our efforts to create vibrant, welcoming communities arising from sound policy and program delivery.

Municipal Context

Ontario is facing a serious workforce shortage. With the global and local labour market trends on the horizon, we must ensure that immigrants can contribute to their full potential. It is estimated that by 2011 Ontario's net labour force population growth will rely on immigrationⁱ. Currently though, our immigrant workforce is under-utilized due to a lack of recognition of credentials and past work experience resulting in fewer relevant employment opportunities.ⁱⁱ

Over the past 20 years, immigrants have been falling behind economically in comparison with Canadian-born residents. In fact, it is estimated that one half of all immigrants who arrive in Canada in the "skilled economic class" will remain chronically poor and, of those, 41% have degrees... up from 13% in the early 1990s.ⁱⁱⁱ These are people with the strengths and skills that have the potential to strengthen our communities and fuel our economy.

The Conference Board of Canada has noted that the province faces a shortage of more than 360,000 skilled employees by 2025. This will further escalate to a shortage of more than 560,000 skilled employees by 2030.^{iv} Canada's Human Resources and Social Development Minister Monte Solberg has called the skills shortage the biggest challenge facing the country.^v

Each year, Ontario welcomes 125,000 newcomers, over half of all immigrants to Canada. These immigrants represent the future workforce, bringing with them an impressive array of academic achievements and diverse cultural experiences. The skills and education of these newcomers is a valuable resource to municipalities across Ontario, and now, more than ever before, is the time for municipalities to actively engage in immigration attraction strategies.

Priority Consideration: Ontario is facing a serious workforce shortage. Our immigrant workforce is under-utilized yet these are the people who have the abilities and potential to strengthen our communities and fuel our economy.

The experts are at the local level: but they can't go it alone.

Municipalities have first-hand insight into the effects of immigration policies and programs. While citizenship and immigration is the constitutional responsibility of the Federal and Provincial governments, immigrants move and settle into municipalities. Municipalities are responsible for a broad range of services that have an immediate impact on newcomers, including the provision of social, health and employment services. This gives them knowledge of what is needed locally to support successful attraction, retention and settlement of newcomers.

There is concern regarding the increasing amount of resources that immigration is costing municipalities. Municipalities work to sustain and enhance the well being of the community, to build strong communities for future generations to come. Municipalities do this by providing many services that people rely on such as Ontario Works, library services, arts and culture, economic development, long-term care and housing for seniors, child care, social housing and public transit, along with a host of other duties such as administration and tax collection. The increasing numbers of newcomers to Ontario will be relying on many of these services, and these services will need to evolve to meet their needs. To address emerging needs -- immigrants require access to sufficient and responsive services. This requires a service system that is efficiently planned and coordinated and adequately funded. Discussion and planning on the role of municipalities together with the role of Provincial and Federal governments is required for successful immigration policy and outcomes.

Every municipality is unique. Municipalities must determine how to meet the immediate needs of their community, along with future considerations such as encouraging economic growth, enhancing existing communities, and adapting to demographic and labour market shifts. It is with this in mind that we have included, throughout the paper, examples from a variety of municipalities, each at different stages of local immigration strategies.

The need for municipal involvement in immigration policy and program development is significant. Successful immigration strategies require a coordinated and integrated approach to the complicated matters arising at the local level when providing services to attract, retain and settle newcomers. Services that municipalities are responsible for delivering to their residents will be under additional pressure as newcomers' needs must be addressed. As mentioned, it is in communities where newcomers settle -- policy and program decisions must reflect this reality to ensure successful outcomes.

Priority Consideration: Municipal involvement in Provincial and Federal immigration policy and program development is crucial. Continued advocacy and consultation with the Provincial and Federal governments is necessary to address local immigration concerns in a meaningful way.

Attraction of Immigrants

Getting the community involved: what makes a community welcoming?

There is a need to attract immigrants to municipalities. A key determinant in the ability of communities to address labour market demands and retain economic growth levels the community is accustomed to, will be their capacity to attract immigrants. For this, a welcoming community is required. This starts by communicating the benefits of immigration to the community – to residents and businesses alike.

A recent example of a successful immigration strategy in a rural community can be found in Steinbach, Manitoba. Steinbach was a community unable to meet the labour requirements of growing business industries, and engaged immigration consultants to actively recruit labour in Germany. Steinbach offered arrivals the opportunity for open spaces, excellent schools and plentiful work. As a result, over 1300 Germans (including many who had previously emigrated from Russia) immigrated to Steinbach between 1999 and 2004.^{vi}

Kim Shukla, Program Manager at Manitoba's Steinbach and District Immigration Settlement Program, explains that by having a majority of the community informed about the process of immigration led to a more positive experience and greater success. Potential grounds for misunderstanding exist when there is confusion, such as concerns over job security and housing prices being driven up. By generating enthusiasm and clarifying why immigration is a positive course of action for the community, many of these concerns can be alleviated, with a more welcoming community as a result.

An attraction plan to entice immigrants should include steps to address areas that will be of interest to newcomers, and will help ensure their eventual settlement. With a more robust framework to work with, there is a greater opportunity to attract immigrants who may be searching to find a municipality that has more on offer than just that one "selling point". A municipality hoping to fill a large number of vacant positions should also take note of available English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, settlement agencies or an active cluster of religious organizations that may make the municipality a much more enticing community, and may also be able to assist in the process of attracting newcomers. For example, the City of North Bay uses their "no wait time" for ESL classes as a selling point for potential newcomers.

Addressing the initial challenge of attracting immigrants to a municipality may not be sufficient in the long run. When in the beginning stages of attraction, by informing and involving key community stakeholders, such as local businesses, schools, faith centres, police services, hospitals and settlement agencies of newcomers in advance, there will be more likelihood that the resources and partnerships will be ready to help meet settlement needs. Shukla explains that when an influx of immigrants arrives in a community, there are all kinds of "support pieces" that require consistent and reliable organization from the community, including appropriate amounts of human resources and funding to coordinate effectively.

Shukla identifies the following as key components of a successful local immigration strategy: excellent partnerships with government and the community, media profile, a champion who is willing to take on the challenges of change and a plan for the evolution of local partnerships.

For newcomers, a welcoming community is one that "takes newcomers by the hand" and helps them negotiate through the many aspects of settlement.

Priority Consideration: Welcoming communities are required to attract immigrants. Residents, businesses and social service agencies must be made aware of both the benefits and challenges of attracting immigrants to their municipalities.

Strategies for attracting immigrants must be flexible. In this instance, a little research can go a long way. Municipalities must first know themselves – what are their expectations for immigration? What does their municipality already offer to prospective immigrants? Are these services being duplicated? What are the most common service gaps? What are the demographic realities of this community? Are issues surrounding immigration being considered in broader policy decisions within the community? And as mentioned, as an effort to dispel fear and uncertainty, what do existing residents need in order to make a local immigration strategy successful? Without first making a comprehensive assessment of issues like these, municipalities may spend time and resources on a strategy that may not fit within broader community planning or needs.

As an example, community demographics can be an excellent indicator of “selling points” for a community. York Region found out during a project on demographics that they have a level that is above Ontario’s average of two-parent families – in fact, York Region has the highest proportion of married couples with children in Canada.^{vii} It is believed that this has been a drawing point for many recent immigrants.²

The Town of Newmarket Mayor Tony Van Bynen, Co-Chair of the York Region Community Reference Group, explains the benefit of having facts on his community available. “The business community, school boards, municipalities and other stakeholders can turn this knowledge into action and adjust programs and services to suit the changing needs of our residents...this will help ensure that we allocate our resources effectively and maintain our quality of life.”^{viii}

By compiling information about immigration within the community, municipalities are making valuable contacts within the community that could later provide support, advice and ties to ethnic groups within the area. Peel Region attributed their success in attracting newcomers by having both a history of collaboration and communication with community groups. This helps ensure a broad supportive base that will be required to retain and settle immigrants within the community. Local coordination and engagement with service providers is an important tool in helping connect newcomers with resources and services. A well coordinated system makes an experience that is often fraught with confusion and anxiety, more manageable -- reflecting a community that welcomes newcomers.

² This is thought to be the case based on key findings showing that along with having a very high number of married immigrants of childbearing age, immigrants in York region are twice as likely to be living with relatives, as part of extended family, than the total population.

Best Practice: Municipalities are developing immigration plans that include a comprehensive and well researched community profile recognizing impending labour shortages to assist in the attraction, retention and settlement of newcomers. Where appropriate, municipalities may consider working with local economic development offices and boards of trade to conduct labour market research on future skills and job shortages. This knowledge can inform the marketing and communication of opportunities available in the municipality.

What about immigration in northern and rural communities?

Out migration in northern and rural communities may make many communities wonder what they have to offer immigrants arriving in large cities. However, northern and rural communities offer a quality of life and sense of community that is unique and unfortunately often unknown to newcomers. Many newcomers to Canada list “peace” and “low crime rates” as reasons for moving to Canada. Now is an ideal time for these communities to promote alternatives to city living.

As in all local immigration planning, while it is important to focus on the strengths of the community, it is equally important to accurately convey the facts in an upfront manner. Newcomers need to know in advance what the cost of living is like, what social services are available and what the housing situation is. Shukla explains that when newcomers arrive in Steinbach, Manitoba, before anything else, they need to find shelter, employment, and enroll their children in school.

An additional important consideration is how to include the family and partners in community life. As experienced in Steinbach, families were brought to the community to support local industry. While the employed member of the family had the opportunity to engage in community life, what was not originally considered was the isolation and loneliness of the partners and other family members not employed or otherwise engaged in community life. This may be heightened in communities where immigrant enclaves have not been established. Many families did not remain in Steinbach to begin with, but once local agencies and churches began outreach with all family members, the experience turned around.

Priority Consideration: Immigration can be part of a solution to demographic and economic challenges of rural and northern municipalities. Highlighting opportunities and strengths of these communities to newcomers and making settlement services available will increase their success of integrating newcomers.

The North Bay Experience:

The Mayor's Office of Economic Development for the City of North Bay began looking at immigration as a population growth strategy three years ago, as part of a solution to the increasingly common demographic and economic challenges of Northern Ontario. They focus on targeting specific immigrant groups believed most likely to settle in the North Bay area. North Bay's Immigration Plan calls for a strategic plan to address and dispel misconceptions of Northern Ontario, while at the same time increasing community motivation and support of newcomers. This has been done through effective media engagement of positive portrayals of local immigrants, international themed events such as a food festival and a diversity awareness program.

The North Bay Newcomers Network was also created, with representatives from the business and not-for-profit community. The Network aims to fill current and future gaps in the skilled and professional labour market, along with identifying and attracting new entrepreneurs and investors to the community. "Familiarization Tours" are organized, where visiting business immigrants from Toronto are brought to the City of North Bay where businesses for sale and potential investments are showcased.

Highlighting the commitment to the immigration strategy of North Bay has been their resourcefulness in achieving an accurate picture of the immigrants already in their community. After understanding that analysis of local newcomers' demographics did not include international students or temporary workers, a student was engaged to carry out a more accurate local analysis. With this information, North Bay was successful in garnering funds from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) for a multicultural centre. CIC also provides funding for the local Youth Host program, delivered by the Big Brothers Big Sisters charity, and funding for Immigrant Settlement & Adaptation Program (ISAP) that delivers settlement services to newcomers.

Best Practice: The creation of a specialized North Bay immigration strategy works to showcase the best North Bay has to offer, with a positive media campaign and familiarization tours to the area for potential newcomers. The strategy has been successful in bringing a multicultural centre, and programs such as ISAP and Youth Host to North Bay.

Local Immigration Partnerships and Municipal Immigration Information Online:

Recently, arising from the work of the Municipal Immigration Committee, CIC and Ontario's Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (MCI) released the Local Immigration Partnerships Strategy (LIPS)³. This initiative is an excellent opportunity for communities to obtain the necessary funding to reach their immigration goals. Through an initial invitation for proposals, municipalities and community organizations were able to submit

³ For more information on the LIPS visit:

http://atwork.settlement.org/sys/atwork_library_detail.asp?doc_id=1004478

proposals outlining a strategy and action plan for achieving the immigration objectives of their communities. Key to this initiative is the need for a collaborative and coordinated approach between local immigration services and agencies and municipalities. A coordinated, collaborative approach not only maximizes resources and outcomes, but celebrates the notion of community that is vital to attracting, retaining and settling newcomers ⁴.

The Federal and Provincial governments are to be commended for supporting the creation of the LIP initiative. With a focus on community planning to determine local needs this initiative will encourage greater collaboration among community agencies and reduce unnecessary duplication and reflects the understanding that communities have different needs and pressures.

While the LIP initiative will create local strategic plans, the Federal and Provincial governments are encouraged to consider simplifying funding formulas and move away from the streams where funds are allocated according to the category of the newcomer (i.e., conventional refugee or permanent resident) and towards general support for all newcomers. The current process puts the onus on the community agencies to modify the services they deliver in accordance to the latest proposals in order to maintain adequate funding for their organization. It also requires municipalities to have a firm understanding of the delineations (who is eligible for how much) in order to determine eligibility for Ontario Works and municipally directed discretionary items. Furthermore, refugee claimants are not eligible for any substantive programs as funded by the Federal government, a fact which has made these newcomers a provincial/ municipal responsibility. Simplifying funding streams to be more responsive to community and newcomer needs will support the success of the LIPS initiative.

As municipalities progress with their partnership councils and planning efforts with respect to newcomers, the Federal and Provincial governments should continue to look to municipalities for recommendations regarding immigration policy. The Municipal Immigration Information Online (MIIO) has assisted municipalities in promoting their communities as immigration destinations. With the assistance of Federal funding, web portals profiling municipalities are developed to offer information of programs and services; labour market facts and other tools to make a smoother transition to a new community. Interested potential newcomers are able to get a sense of opportunities and community life through the portals while local businesses, key stakeholders and municipalities are able to promote the benefits of their communities.⁵

⁴ An early example of a LIP model is the Peel Newcomer Strategy Group. Information is available at : <http://www.peelnewcomer.org/>

⁵ Currently municipalities include London/Middlesex, Windsor/Essex, Ottawa, York Region, Peel Region, Niagara Region, Waterloo Region, Brantford, Chatham/Kent, Toronto, Sudbury, Smith's Falls, Sault Ste. Marie, Timmins, North Bay, Hamilton and Lambton County

Best Practice: By taking advantage of the LIPS and web portal funding, municipalities are maximizing resources as well as promoting local programs, services and labour market opportunities to potential newcomers. Better integrated planning at the community level will result in more effective services.⁶

Settlement and Retention of Immigrants

What makes a community home?

As demographics shift, there will be increased competition to retain immigrants. Currently, only four per cent of Ontario immigrants settle into rural areas,^{ix} and while Toronto remains the largest gateway for immigrants in Canada, studies also show that immigrants are opting to live in other municipalities within the metropolitan area.^x Government programs and policies, from all three orders of government, must rise to the challenge of accommodating high settlement in urban centres, attracting newcomers to smaller and northern communities, retaining newcomers in border communities, and integrating newcomers successfully through meaningful language services, skills development and employment opportunities.

York Region has put together a long term strategy – “Vision 2026” – with the goal of recognizing and celebrating diversity of the multicultural population, and working to respond to the diversity with innovative service delivery options. Along with this goal, two other similar initiatives; self-identifying as a “Character Community” and also hosting an “Inclusivity Summit” have occurred⁷. By understanding new and diverse populations, better supports will hopefully give immigrants the opportunity to fully integrate into the region. These initiatives support newcomers, enhance community development and cohesion-celebrating differences, and establish shared goals.

Some communities, the City of Thunder Bay as an example, have established committees to assist in the various aspects of newcomer settlement. These include: a Diversity Awareness Committee that offers workshops to educate municipal staff, local business, an Immigration Planning Committee that oversees how various immigrants are settling into the community, this is complimented by a Long-Term Settlement Committee that oversees settlement up to four or five years post arrival and, an active Newcomers Club.

6 For a look at municipal web portals, please see Sudbury’s portal at <http://www.mysudbury.ca/immigration> or the City of Ottawa’s portal at http://www.ottawa.ca/residents/immigration/index_en.html

7 For further information regarding the “Character Communities” initiative, please visit the website: <http://charactercommunity.org/>

Inclusionary Planning:

Newcomers need access to affordable housing. Municipalities have a role in ensuring that newcomers have access to affordable housing – generally newcomer families require more and complex support to maintain their housing.^{xi} Policies, rights and responsibilities around subsidized housing can be challenging for newcomers. In some cases, families and extended relatives will live together in a single family dwelling because it is all they can afford, often hours away from their place of work. The plight to find affordable homes suggests a need for cost effective and socially inclusive solutions such as allowing secondary suites.

As the demographics of Ontario's urban spaces change, so too does the urban design. Immigrants moving to urban cities are bringing with them creative and culturally diverse ideas of design and public space, such as cultural centers and places of worship. Municipalities with growing population diversity may wish to examine public transit routes, planning and zoning policies that can adapt to diverse communities.

Recognizing skills and knowledge:

Newcomers need gainful employment. Yet during their first two years in Canada, less than half of prime working-age immigrants found employment in their intended occupation.^{xii} Effective labour market integration is one of the most important elements of any settlement strategy, as well as one of the more convoluted and challenging issues newcomers will have to face during their settlement period. Communities and employers who clearly convey the type of work available, along with what qualifications are required can help to ease the difficulty immigrants have in this area.

While many municipalities have opted to attract immigrants due to population shortages in an effort to support local industry; if the newcomers are not able to have their skills recognized, this can be troubling for the community and fly in the face of reasoning for attracting immigrants in the first place. Barriers to licensing and accreditation are particularly cumbersome at this point. Noting that communities across the province are facing an acute doctor shortage as doctors retire, the municipality of Kincardine has passed a resolution to garner other municipalities support for legislation that removes barriers for internationally trained medical practitioners to obtain their Ontario medical licensing requirements.

The Conference Board of Canada found Canada loses an estimated \$5.9 billion annually by under-employing internationally trained workers – with a significant portion of that loss affecting the Ottawa area.^{xiii} The skill-based selection criteria that permit immigration to Canada for many create an expectation that those skills will be recognized once in Canada. However, according to Statistics Canada's Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (SCLSIC) after two years of job hunting, almost 60 % of immigrants were not working in their desired occupations. This is in large part due to "skill-discounting" – the devaluation and lack of recognition of skills and foreign credentials.^{xiv} This issue has been recognized by the Provincial and Federal governments and efforts to improve the recognition of foreign trained professionals are underway.

It is important to note that skill and knowledge discounting has impacts beyond loss of income and that cost us all. The incidence of mental health and family breakdown has been reported by many caseworkers to increase the longer newcomers are disconnected from the labour market. This includes increase in mental health problems with newcomer children and youth.

Creating welcoming and vibrant communities requires consideration beyond the economic imperative. Assisting newcomers in utilizing their skills and education makes sense. Doing so will benefit our economy, community growth and sustainability and will match the objectives of why immigrants seek to make Ontario their home in the first place.

Removing Barriers for Internationally Trained Professionals and Graduates

In 2006, the Provincial government passed the *Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act*. The purpose of the *Act* is to help ensure that regulated professions and individuals applying for registration by regulated professions are governed by practices that are transparent, impartial and fair. The goal of the *Act* is to ensure that internationally trained professionals are given the opportunity to put their skills and experience to use, regardless of where they were trained.

Regulatory bodies and identified association must assess and identify their registration. This currently includes, fourteen professions and twenty-one health professions, with five more professions soon to come under the purview of the law.

Audits of the practices of Ontario's regulatory bodies are set to begin and will be conducted by the Office of the Fairness Commissioner⁸. This important move by the Provincial government will work to ensure that skilled and experienced immigrants will be assisted in accessing gainful employment as well as providing the opportunity to contribute to the vibrancy of our communities.

Priority Consideration: Our immigrant workforce is underutilized which in turn is costing Ontario's economy. Supporting policy that removes excessive licensing barriers and collaborating with Provincial and Federal labour market integration projects enables municipalities to have meaningful involvement in creating solutions to this problem.

Immigrants are falling behind economically. Incidence of low-income among recent immigrants rose from 24.6% in 1980, to 35.8% in 2000. By contrast, low-income rates among the Canadian-born population fell from 17.2% in 1980 to 14.3% in 2000.^{xv} Grown children of newcomer families at times forsake secondary and post secondary education in order to support their families. Families will continue to live in poverty through to the next generation if this trend is not addressed.^{xvi}

⁸ For more information on the Office of the Fairness Commissioner and the *Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act*, visit: <http://www.fairnesscommissioner.ca/en/>

While recent immigrants generally have a higher level of education than non-immigrants, recent immigrants earn less than non-immigrants with the same level of education. In fact, the income of recent immigrants with a university degree, diploma or certificate is 40 per cent less than non-immigrants with comparable levels of education.

This trend is attributed to several barriers, the most common of them being a lack of proficiency in English or French. Employment prospects and outcomes are significantly affected by one's ability to understand and use information from text. Proficient language skills are vital for knowledge work that requires advanced language skills.

The Language Instruction for Newcomers (LINC) program, is delivered by CIC and provides basic English and French classes for adult permanent residents. English as a Second Language (ESL) is a program the Provincial government funds and local boards of education, community and immigrant services organizations, public libraries and colleges and universities run. Basic English skill classes do not always cover the more technical language that newcomers require to enter their chosen professions.

While funded by the Province, ESL classes are not mandated and concerns have been raised over the availability of the classes and the funding that is provided. The Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration does not fund the cost of operating the building where classes are held, this raises additional challenges for underfunded school boards to meet the demands for heat and power.

The Provincial and Federal governments must be encouraged to assist communities in securing funding for ESL classes, as well as funding for the buildings that these classes will be held in. Many immigrants arriving with the training and skills that employers require are unable to obtain employment simply due to inadequate language skills.

At the same time, professional associations can assist in addressing the largest barrier to licensing foreign trained professional and graduates - English proficiency. A good example to consider in overcoming the language barrier for licensing foreign trained professionals is the Essential Skills Technical English Curricula (ESTEC) for Engineers.

The objectives of the ESTEC for Engineers are to increase employment opportunities or promotion for foreign trained engineers through enhancing communication skills of internationally trained engineers or graduates to the levels of Canadian Language Benchmarks to 7/8 or 9/10. The ESTEC for Engineers applies occupation-related context and content to assist in language development and also focuses on oral communication, thinking and technical business writing skills. This is further enhanced by employing career-related terminology, procedures and jargon. The ESTEC for Engineers emphasizes appropriate grammar structures in meaningful spoken and written communication to reinforce oral comprehensibility. The ESTEC for Engineers also builds awareness of cultural aspects and expectations within the Canadian workplace.

The ESTEC for Engineers provides foreign trained engineers the opportunity to overcome the technical and practical barriers to entering their profession. Initiatives like the ESTEC for Engineers can be further enhanced through mentorship programs. Canadian professionals could mentor foreign trained professionals or graduates on the job. The mentorship could be honoured as equivalent Canadian experience during the application process to professional associations.

Best Practice: Professional associations may consider following the objectives of the Essential Skills Technical English Curricula for Engineers. To support reducing barriers for foreign trained professionals and graduates, the Provincial and Federal governments should provide resources for professional associations to invest in this training.

Priority Consideration: For our immigrant workforce to reach their potential, adequate language training must be part of the solution. Accessing language instruction is a challenge for newcomers, and providing the services is a challenge for municipalities. Provincial and Federal governments should be encouraged to assist communities in securing funding for ESL classes including advanced language training that ensures proficiency in technical and working language.

The benefits of Immigrant Employment Councils and Networks:

Communities in Ontario are creating local solutions to labour market challenges. Communities in Ontario are creating support systems to help recent immigrants enter the workforce. In a province where businesses are in need of the labour force and immigrants are looking for gainful employment, this gives these municipalities a competitive edge.

The first community-based immigration council upon which many other models have been developed, is the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC)⁹. This award winning program helps immigrants find work in a more efficient and appropriate way. Some of these offer direct services to immigrants, delivered through partner organizations; others work with employers and other groups to increase their capacity for working with and hiring immigrants.

Another example is the Niagara Immigrant Employment Council (NIEC). NIEC is a region-wide multi-stakeholder collaboration of businesses, community organization, immigrants, occupational regulatory bodies and governments dedicated to enhancing Niagara's economic competitiveness and prosperity, focusing on the recruitment of internationally trained individuals. Niagara Region has been a gateway for newcomers to Canada for many years now, and during the five year period of 2001-2006, more than 7,885 immigrants and refugees settled throughout the region.^{xvii}

9 For more information on TRIEC visit: <http://www.triec.ca/>

NIEC is currently focused on researching and helping to implement best practices and solutions to create effective immigrant labour market integration, along with encouraging prospective immigrants to choose Niagara as their destination of choice. NIEC uses public awareness campaigns focusing on contributions immigrants make to Canadian economic growth and the long-term prosperity of the Niagara Region.

NIEC works to create a regional environment of collaboration and partnership by providing a forum where employers, immigrants, and other stakeholder groups develop employment strategies to assist employers with recruitment and retention of internationally trained individuals. NIEC uses a multi-stakeholder collaborative approach, to ensure that NIEC's goals, objectives and mandate are determined by all three orders of government, community business leaders, community stakeholders and immigrants themselves.

By approaching businesses with a concrete plan, NIEC was able to secure support from a wide representation of key stakeholders. The objective behind this strategy is to get employers to talk about the benefits they have found by employing immigrants, in order to have other employers listen and learn. The Niagara Region was very supportive of the development of this Council, and continues to support it and gives an in-kind donation of office space for NIEC within the Niagara Region Community Service Building. NIEC also received a generous funding contribution from Ontario's Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration.

A program of similar goals and strategies is WRIEN, the Waterloo Region Immigrant Employment Network. Funded by Waterloo Region, along with another half dozen funding partners, WRIEN brings together cross-sectoral partners in order to connect employers with skilled immigrants, and boost immigrant visibility in the community. While it is not a specific employment program, it is a network designed to create community conditions favourable for immigrant employment, through employer engagement strategies and networking events.

The Network has five work groups, each supporting one element of the overall WRIEN agenda: Employer Initiatives; Qualification Recognition and Enhancement; Immigrant Support; Immigrant Attraction and Investments. WRIEN is responsible to the broader region and community and demonstrates this accountability through annual reports and regular consultations with stakeholder communities.^{xviii}

WRIEN stimulates and supports new and emerging collaborative interventions such as a mentorship program, an immigrant loan program, an immigrant web portal, and immigrant networking breakfasts and forums.^{xix} With the help of its partners, WRIEN has developed a bridge program for internationally trained social workers; a fast track program for Registered Practical Nurse (RPN); and is currently identifying other possible Fast Track opportunities.

While initiatives such as NIEC and WRIEN may appear appealing to some, other municipalities may feel that at this point in time the need for such a large endeavour is either not required or the funding and capacity is not currently available. In cases such as this, municipalities can still work towards ensuring that local employers recognize

their multicultural population and respond to the diversity of their populace with compatible service delivery options.

A positive example of employers taking an encouraging stance is the London meat-processing factory Cargill. With more than 60% of the plant's staff of 900 having a mother tongue other than English, Cargill partnered with the London School Board to offer ESL classes for their employees. 85 workers signed up for the 14-week session – workers explained that it was the need to work that prevented taking English classes before, but having the classes available at work made it convenient and supportive.^{xx}

This paper identifies the importance of addressing the underutilization of immigrant skills. As mentioned, addressing some of the accreditation and licensing skills and employer engagement are important aspects of this. The Provincial and Federal governments can assist in this effort through providing dedicated funding to support the creation of internships and other career transition programs. This in turn will assist communities in engaging more local employers in immigration employment initiatives.

Best Practice: Regional immigrant employment initiatives are finding local solutions to a province-wide problem. This gives these municipalities a competitive edge, by engaging local employers to help integrate immigrants into the labour force, resulting in reduced immigrant unemployment.

Challenges in settlement outside urban areas:

In areas where immigrants have been settling for a long time, such as Toronto, there is a well-established network of settlement services that address newcomers many needs, from job hunting and housing support to ethnicity-specific services dealing with religious services and burial rites. Outside of large urban areas the settlement sector is still maturing and in some instances lacking the capacity required to address the many settlement needs of some communities.

As part of the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement, programs are currently underway in various parts of the province to help newcomers bridge their international credentials and experience into Ontario qualifications. Of the \$920 million earmarked for the COIA, the Province of Ontario recently announced that \$27.4 million of that will go directly to help fund bridging programs across the province. For municipalities that have institutions in their jurisdiction receiving funds -- this is an excellent opportunity to connect them with a larger municipal immigration framework. Though, it is important to note, that funding to local services and agencies should be carried out through a consultative process that ensures the local area agencies and the municipal service manager are aware of program and service enhancements. Local consultation also provides an opportunity to reduce duplication of services and increase coordination and cooperation. Also, as previously mentioned, revision of exiting funding streams should be considered.

While the human resources and funding challenges for smaller municipalities can be understood, the practice of bridging newcomers into the Ontario workplace can be done on an incremental basis, starting with smaller steps such as connecting with local chambers of commerce. Many times newcomers have transferable skills that businesses can tap into, and local chambers of commerce are a good facilitator for holding workshops on this type of activity. Municipalities can also lead by example, by ensuring that their own hiring practices account for international experience.

Moving forward: addressing current challenges

The Peel Newcomer Strategy Group acts to identify both geographic and service gaps. The group has expressed concern that some settlement agencies are having their budgets expanded many times over, as a result of COIA funding, while others may not be receiving the funding they require. As noted earlier, the need for a coherent planning mechanism to determine where the funds would be best suited is required. Other municipalities have mentioned their desire for more predictable funding, instead of funding based on what are often short-term competitions for funding. It is well understood that successful planning, requires predictable, long-term funding.

While obtaining gainful employment is extremely important to newcomers, just like all other residents, there are many other factors that contribute to why a newcomer will choose to settle into a community. A recent study on ethnic enclaves in Peel found that except for language training, immigrants ask for the same services as those available to the general public.^{xxi} Therefore, one way municipalities can ease the challenge immigrants face when settling into a community is to provide easy access to the services that are provided.

Improved service access and availability provides benefits for all residents of a community. Making information accessible to newcomers is a challenge that many municipalities are accepting head on. Some municipalities are printing literature on their services in languages other than English and French. For example, Durham Region has recently printed brochures with information on services provided by Ontario Works in Hindi, Punjabi, Spanish, and Farsi.

Priority Consideration: More predictable sources of funding, from both the Provincial and Federal governments, will help municipal governments, community-based organizations and local immigrant service providers to plan and allocate funds in an effective and efficient manner.

Good planning is not always enough:

There are challenges related to being a welcoming city that are not always considered, even through good municipal planning. A recent example includes the influx of refugee claimants into Canada from the United States, where the majority had been considered illegal immigrants. The influx to Canada was prompted by many factors including the US Federal government's Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) initiative where

local law enforcement was empowered to detain illegal immigrants and recommend for deportation. This threat resulted in individuals and families leaving their homes and seeking asylum in Canada. The City of Windsor, Social and Health Services placed over 400 claimants into its emergency shelter system between September and December 2007, with an average of 50 claimants per month in 2008. These numbers represent approximately 34% of the total number of claimants entering Canada through the City of Windsor during that time period.

The influx of refugee claimants in the emergency shelter system (a municipal responsibility) as well as on the community partners which provide service to newcomers, was considerable. While the Federal government funds services for specific populations (such as conventional refugees) no funding is provided to cover expenses related to refugee claimants. This results in the municipality having to absorb the 20% cost share with the Province for the provision of emergency shelter and financial assistance such as Ontario Works. The City of Windsor is projecting a gross cost of \$1.75 million with a municipal net cost of \$351,000 for the provision of services to refugee claimants in 2008.

Priority Consideration: When municipalities experience a surge in refugee claimants or other unforeseen immigration influxes (i.e., arrival of Lebanese evacuees in 2006), the Federal Government must assume the financial burden placed on municipalities, including staff costs, for the provision of emergency assistance. Local tax bases are not in a position to assume unanticipated expenses caused by decisions made at the Federal level of government.

A balancing act: change brings challenges:

Equity and equal access to opportunity are priorities for municipalities. Despite the excellent best practices that municipalities already have in place, along with the some of the recent benefits of the Canada-Ontario Immigrant Agreement, there are still areas of concern that suggest that newcomers needs are not being adequately met. For example, Ontario has a growing segment of racialized communities that face a disproportionate and increasing risk of being poor or without adequate support.^{xxii} Racialized families in Ontario are from two to four times more likely to fall below the Low Income Cut Off, many of whom are immigrant families.^{xxiii}

In the May 2008 Auditor General's report announced that 41,000 illegal immigrants, many of them believed to be failed refugee claimants, are living in Canada.^{xxiv} Many of these non-status newcomers are afraid of the consequences of being found out, and therefore may not seek police protection or health and social services.

In the case of police services, broader community safety is put at risk by unreported crimes, and municipalities are unable to have accurate data on crime rates for their communities. This is a complicated issue that must be discussed between all three orders of government.

In the case of school boards, the *Ontario Education Act* states that no child under the age of 18 in Ontario can be denied access to schools because of their immigration status or that of their parents; yet recent reports have indicated that children are indeed being denied enrolment based on immigration status^{xxv}. Following these reports, Premier Dalton McGuinty stated "If a child shows up at the door looking for an education, our responsibility is to provide that education."^{xxvi}

Businesses that engage in the unlawful practice of hiring immigrants "under the table" in order to save money should not go unnoticed. This is a practice that puts immigrants in a vulnerable position, but it also has broader reaching repercussions for municipalities, such as a deterioration of the safety standards set out by the Province's occupational health and safety system. This is something that must be discussed with all three orders of government.

An additional issue of concern is domestic violence. Immigrants can be especially vulnerable to domestic violence or exploitation because of their status or dependence on others and may be reluctant to report incidences of abuse. This has been found to create a significant challenge for some immigrants, which is compounded when combined with a lack of proficiency in one of Canada's official languages.^{xxvii} Strategies to support immigrant and refugee women who are at risk of domestic violence and homelessness include educational awareness programs that include a focus on Canadian rights and Canadian laws. As well, more transitional housing and emergency shelters for abused women are needed. In order to address this issue all orders of government must recognize their responsibility in providing adequate care to these women.

Priority Consideration: Concerns exist surrounding the vulnerability of immigrants. Strategies to support immigrant women who are at risk of domestic violence and homelessness should include educational awareness programs that include a focus on Canadian rights and Canadian laws.

Asian Canadian Anglers Issue:

One of the more difficult issues that has been brought to light in recent months is the discrimination faced by Asian Canadian anglers in some communities in Ontario. Municipalities experiencing the issue have been quick to respond. A race relations committee has been set up in Georgina with the assistance of the Municipality of Georgina and York Regional Police, and the City of Kawartha Lakes has increased its police presence and awareness of this issue. The City of Peterborough has also set up a Race Relations Committee that has been successful in raising the issue and changing attitudes. Along with this, school boards and the Ministry of Education are now providing training on anti-racism and anti-discrimination to teachers in an attempt to raise awareness of racism and its effects.

Ethno-Cultural and Anti-Racism Training Programs:

Ethno-cultural and anti-racism training programs are important ways for municipal governments to adapt to an increasingly multicultural population. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) explains that as society becomes more diverse, ethno-cultural training programs can help to bring out “multicultural access,” by “helping municipal staff bridge the gap in knowledge and skills and thereby help eliminate cultural misunderstanding and bias that can undermine the efficacy of a workforce and the long term effectiveness of government programs.”^{xxviii}

It is important that staff develop skills and knowledge on working with newcomers. This includes understanding details such as the changing demographics of municipalities and how that affects service delivery and workforce diversity, along with information on family structure, cultural values, practices and religious beliefs of different cultural groups. Skills can be developed with respect to human relations training including feedback, listening and effective ethno-cultural communication as well as developing an awareness of bias in verbal and non verbal communication.^{xxix} While many municipalities are engaged in training, it is important that training remain relevant as new cultural and ethnic groups settle into communities.

Anti-racism, training teaches municipal staff to recognize and develop strategies to eliminate discrimination, racism and related problems in the workplace. Some examples of these issues include: inadequate consultation with multicultural communities in developing services and programs; insufficient use of ethnic community resources and media; linguistic, cultural or religious biases in provision of services; and under-representation of minorities in decision-making in a municipality's boards and committees.^{xxx}

Confronting racism and discrimination can be difficult; however the Ontario Human Rights Commission maintains that when racism is named and understood as a problem, organizations become better equipped to appropriately address and prevent it, and are better able to give voice to people who experience it.^{xxxi} Education, awareness and understanding racism and its impacts are all important priorities for any municipality wishing to make theirs a welcoming one.

Anti-racism training and other initiatives that have the goal of understanding what racism and discrimination are and how to address these issues are important. Raising awareness and addressing areas that require systems change will result in greater success in supporting newcomers in the community and workplace. Systems of social assistance and social supports continue to oppress the people they were designed to serve when they do not acknowledge or understand people's experience of racism and discrimination.^{xxxii}

Best Practice: In recognition that change can bring challenges; municipalities are providing ethno-cultural and anti-racism training. Municipalities are also providing staff with public educational awareness and understanding of cultural and racial differences in an effort to limit harm and discrimination while promoting equity and diversity. Building on the experience of the City of Peterborough, municipalities may also wish to establish race relations committees.

Realizing the full potential of COIA remains a challenge

This paper highlights a number of key immigration issues including the following; the importance of immigration in addressing population and economic growth, the need for Ontario's municipalities to develop attraction, settlement and retention strategies, the importance of immigrants having the opportunity to attain employment and improve incomes. While significant steps have been made in *understanding* these issues, we know that taking up the challenge of immigration requires a cooperative, coordinated, integrated and a well-funded approach.

The 2005 signing of the COIA committed \$920 million for Ontario in new Federal funding for settlement and language training through to 2010. This substantial increase in funding was intended in part, to address inequities in Federal funding for newcomers in Ontario. Historically, Ontario, like other provinces, saw a significantly smaller portion of funding for these services than Quebec.

Regrettably, at this point in the Agreement, \$674 million should have been spent by CIC in Ontario. Currently, the Federal settlement and language training funding agreed to in the COIA is under-spent by an estimated \$156 million in the first three years of the Agreement.

The under-spending has raised real concerns that CIC will not be able to meet its full funding commitment before the Agreement expires on March 31, 2010. As a result, newcomers to Ontario will not benefit from the full investment in programs and services that was promised and Ontario's municipalities, communities and economy will remain challenged.

The under-spending of the COIA funds once again highlights the historical inequity in Federal immigration funding. In fact, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce ¹⁰ has identified that for 2008 and 2009, while Ontario received \$2,637.00 per immigrant from the Federal government, Quebec received \$4,934.00.

10 Ontario Chamber of Commerce "Act Now for Ontario" campaign: <http://actnowforontario.com/>

In 2007, Ontario received 47% of all newcomers to Canada. It is not clear, that while receiving the greatest number of immigrants, why Ontario continues to receive less funding than Quebec, or any other province for that matter. To support the growth of diverse communities and the economy and ensuring that professionals and skilled labourers exist to fill current and future employment opportunities, good immigration policy and access to services in a timely manner are needed. Most importantly, fair and equitable and appropriate funding is needed to support this.

Priority Consideration: Our country requires immigrants to sustain its labour force and its services and grow its communities. The potential of losing the funding earmarked to help settle Ontario's newcomers means everyone loses. CIC should work with Ontario and its municipal partners to expedite, where possible, the spending of the Federal funding earmarked for settlement and language training. In the event this is not achieved within the timeframe of the Agreement, it is recommended the Agreement be extended to ensure its goals and objectives are realized. Ensuring that Ontario receives its fair share of funding is a priority; this includes equitable funding per immigrant.

Concluding Thoughts and Important Considerations

Research tells us that immigrants have never been so skilled as they are today, yet have never taken so long to achieve incomes comparable to their Canadian born counterparts. Immigrants are the workforce of tomorrow, not just for Ontario's municipalities but for Canada and countries around the world. Successful immigration strategies will be paramount in remaining economically competitive in the globalized world we live in.

This paper has demonstrated that a successful attraction, retention and settlement strategies means accessible language training, foreign credential recognition and fast track education programs. It means promoting the strengths and potential immigrants bring to our communities, businesses and our national economy. It also means making difference visible and becoming a more culturally sensitive and welcoming society.

These are big steps, and municipalities cannot and should not have to do this on their own. The 2005 COIA recognizes municipalities as partners in developing successful immigration strategies. Annex F under the COIA ensures that AMO and its members are engaged in immigration program and development through the Municipal Immigration Committee (MIC). Collaboration and greater understanding of how each order of government can support the other in our immigration efforts is required. It is AMO's hope, that continued engagement by all orders of government through the Municipal Immigration Committee (MIC) and other forums and initiatives will ensure coordination and integration of policies, programs and initiatives.

As this paper has demonstrated, immigration within Ontario brings with it a host of challenges, and opportunities, for municipalities. It is estimated that by 2011 Ontario's net labour force population growth will rely on immigration. Net international immigration to Ontario is projected to account for approximately 84 per cent of the total annual increase in the province's population by 2030.^{xxxiii} These figures articulate the significance that immigration will have on the social, economic and planning policies of the future. They also give weight to the impact that municipalities can make by having progressive and responsive policies in place for their newcomers.

Municipalities have a vested interest in ensuring that immigrants are fully integrating into the labour market, as this goes hand in hand with municipal economic development strategies, as well as plans for healthy, sustainable communities. This paper was an initiative of AMO's reflecting their commitment through the MCI to work in partnership with the three orders of government. It is hoped that this research will form part of the knowledge base for future planning efforts to achieve immigrant attraction, retention and settlement goals.

AMO understands that the goal of welcoming communities includes the richness of experience and knowledge that newcomers bring to enhance our communities. This includes the importance of engaging newcomers in the civic life of our communities through municipal politics, participation in public meetings and volunteerism as examples. Important work has been carried out in examining these issues by such organizations as the Maytree Foundation and the Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement as examples.

We appreciate the good work and partnerships that have been developed with our Provincial and Federal partners. We also recognize that more work remains. This includes continuing to develop successful local partnerships in creating welcoming communities as well as addressing systemic policy barriers that create hardship for newcomers and refugees. As mentioned, professional accreditation and language skills are key priorities but also, ensuring policies that provide livable transitional financial assistance to avoid the cycle of poverty for newcomers and refugees must be addressed by the Provincial and Federal governments.

AMO will continue to work towards a better understanding of what is needed to make Ontario's communities welcoming. This includes continuing to work for policies that reflect the needs of our communities and newcomers and sustainable funding to assist municipalities in this effort.

Recommendations

After taking note of the best practices and priority considerations highlighted within the paper, the following recommendations can be provided on the basis of our research:

1. That the Canada Ontario Immigration Agreement (COIA) be extended beyond 2010 and supported by sustained long term funding. And, that the COIA, or any future agreements ensure that all Federal and Provincial policy planning be informed by municipal experience and expertise as currently carried out through the MIC.
2. That all orders of government work together, with institutions and professional associations where appropriate, in addressing the severe under-utilization of immigrants' skills and foreign credentials.
3. That municipal involvement in Provincial and Federal immigration policy and program development is crucial. Continued advocacy and consultation with the Provincial and Federal governments is necessary to address local immigration concerns in a meaningful way.
4. That municipalities develop immigration plans that include a comprehensive and well researched community profile that recognizes the demographics of impending labour shortages and other profiles that assist in the attraction, retention and settlement of newcomers.
5. That immigration is recognized as part of a solution to demographic and economic challenges of rural and northern municipalities.
6. That the Local Immigration Partnerships Strategy (LIPS) program and the immigration web portal funding be expanded for additional municipalities and newcomers to benefit from.
7. That municipalities continue to support the Provincial and Federal governments in addressing accreditation and licensing concerns. In addition, employment legislation regarding hiring and employment practices be identified and promoted through a public education campaign.
8. That adequate language training is recognized as part of the solution to labour market integration of immigrants. Furthermore, that Provincial and Federal governments provide predictable, adequate funding for language training initiatives.
9. That municipalities consider establishing appropriate immigration employment networks as demonstrated by the success of NIEC and WRIEN and that the Provincial and Federal governments provide resources for career transition and employability initiatives.

10. Predictable and sustained sources of funding, from both the Provincial and Federal governments is required for local planning. This will allow municipal governments, community-based organizations and local immigrant service providers to plan and allocate funds in an effective and efficient manner.
11. As required, when faced with refugee surges or other unforeseen immigration influxes, the Provincial and Federal governments must share in the fiscal burden of assisting municipalities in addressing those needs.
12. That municipalities, along with the Provincial and Federal governments, work to support newcomers who are at risk of domestic abuse. This should include educational awareness programs that include a focus on Canadian women's rights and Canadian laws.
13. That municipalities should ensure ethno-cultural and race relations sensitivity training and provide staff and public educational awareness and understanding of cultural and racial differences.
14. That AMO continue to work with the Provincial and Federal governments to advance the growth and development of welcoming communities in Ontario.

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