



TRIEC

Toronto Region Immigrant
Employment Council

New Realities. New Opportunities.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua, MP
540-N Centre Block
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

August 1, 2008

Dear Mr. Bevilacqua:

The Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) welcomes the opportunity to provide input and advice to the federal Liberal party on the issue of immigrant employment. Immigration is a fundamental component of Canada's heritage and critical to Canada's continued economic growth.

TRIEC is a non-profit organization working to remove the barriers immigrants face when entering the labour market, while at the same time helping organizations benefit from the talents and skills immigrants bring with them to Canada. Since its inception in 2003, TRIEC has facilitated collaboration among a diverse group of stakeholders, including employers, post-secondary institutions, employment service providers, regulatory bodies and all three levels of government. Our objectives are threefold: to increase immigrant access to services that will more quickly and effectively integrate them into the labour market; build the capacity of key stakeholders, especially employers, to work with skilled immigrants; and third, to strengthen the coordination and collaboration of government, vertically and horizontally.

Based on our work, the following are key recommendations that we believe the federal Liberal party should be considering in their election platform:

1. Invest in labour market programming

Currently, much of the labour market programming funded by the federal government that is available to new immigrants without previous labour market attachment is limited to job search support programs. However, TRIEC's work has highlighted that more effective labour market integration occurs with programs that build the social capital of skilled immigrants and provide them with the opportunity to gain valued Canadian work experience. These are two key areas in which TRIEC believes the federal government should invest.



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Provide funding to support workplace experience programs for internationally trained professionals

While the most recent Labour Market Agreement (LMA) signed between Canada and Ontario provides funding for non-EI eligible persons, including new immigrants for labour market programs, the agreement needs to provide sustained funding specifically for skilled immigrants. Studies have shown that this group have demonstrated incredible economic successes if there are early interventions to help link immigrants directly to employers and gain Canadian work experience.

Employer-led programs that offer work experience to immigrants should be supported with a national strategy that offers a variety of program instruments that encourage small and medium sized businesses to participate.

Demonstrate leadership by implementing a national mentoring program

Mentoring has been extremely successful at providing skilled immigrants with exposure to professional networks and Canadian workplace culture, which supports effective linkage and integration into the labour market. The outcomes are impressive:

- The Mentoring Partnership (a TRIEC program) has 50+ corporate partners, with more than 3000 matches made since February 2005. 80% have found employment, of which 83% is in their own field.

The Ontario government has invested significantly in this area with plans to expand the program across Ontario. There is every reason to consider the value of investing in a nationally available program so that immigrants across Canada can benefit from mentoring. As well, the federal government is a large national employer and there is an opportunity to build on the success of existing programs by leading by example as a partner organization for The Mentoring Partnership.

2. Continue and enhance investment in language training programs

Enhanced language training is vital to the successful integration of skilled immigrants into the labour market. Often, employers point to weak language and communication skills as the one of the key barriers to hiring skilled immigrants. In order for skilled immigrants to meet the demands of employers, language training programs need to be made more relevant to this objective. As such, enhancements to existing programming in this area could include expansion of federally funded language training programs to Canadian Language Benchmarks level 10; expansion of Enhanced Language Training; inclusion of components in the curriculum of these programs that address broader workplace communication skills; provision of exit standards that are relevant to employers; linkage of language training to bridging and work experience programs; and flexibility of program design to ensure accessibility to immigrants prior to and during employment.



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3. Develop employer awareness and capacity

Employers continue to be key stakeholders in the issue as they are the ones who ultimately recognize or do not recognize the credentials and skills of those applying to them for work. As a first step, there is need to increase employer awareness of the potential value of immigrant skills in their labour force and build their capacity to forecast their own labour force needs. Building on this awareness, employers, particularly small and medium sized enterprises, could be made aware of available programs and supports that will enable them to be more effective in hiring and retaining skilled immigrants.

Again, as one of Canada's largest employers, it would be appropriate for the Public Service Commission to position itself as a leader on this issue and undertake as an employer to actively recruit skilled immigrants into its workforce. This could be achieved through existing and proven internship programs, or through a newly introduced initiative particular to the needs of the public service.

4. Support the work of provinces in setting standards and establishing accountability frameworks for the occupational regulatory bodies

Canada receives a large number of highly educated and experienced immigrants each year. However, the process by which their foreign credentials are recognized is long and cumbersome. Often, foreign trained professionals find that they cannot practice in their field and find alternative unrelated occupations. This is a great waste of talent for Canada's economy.

Many regulated occupations are facing critical shortages. While it is important to validate foreign credentials and experience, occupational bodies should not act as gatekeepers for protecting the market. While the role of the federal government is limited in jurisdiction, there is opportunity to encourage cooperation amongst the provinces on this issue through the Agreement on Internal Trade. By ensuring that there is a federal mechanism to develop the occupational standards and accountability frameworks, this will help facilitate better labour mobility for internationally trained professional across the country. Additionally, compiling and disseminating best practices and tools from models across the provinces would be valuable.

5. Recognize the vital role of local coordination in labour integration and invest in this mechanism

TRIEC's success over the past five years is founded on its ability to coordinate stakeholders to build a common vision for immigrant employment and identify solutions that work in a local context. For a seamless and systematic approach to labour market integration of immigrants, all stakeholders needs to collaborate and work together at a local level. As the vast majority of immigrants settle in cities, it is crucial that this local



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coordination mechanism be supported and enhanced through sustained collaboration, partnerships and information sharing.

Each of these recommendations contributes to a robust plan that has the promise of creating meaningful employment for new immigrants. TRIEC is committed to finding innovative solutions that links immigrant skills with labour market needs in the Toronto Region.

Please let us know how TRIEC can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth McIsaac
Executive Director

Copy: Mr. Michael Ignatieff, M.P.