

Surrey Leadership Series: Panel on Immigration and its Impacts on Business

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*“Smarter Immigration: Ensuring
Canada’s, BC’s and Surrey’s
Diversity & Economic Growth”*

prepared by:



Immigration as a Nation Builder

The four main factors of economic growth are land, labour, capital, and entrepreneurship.

- Canada – Immigration as nation-building
- Surrey – A BC powerhouse built on growth and diversity
- Population, talent and economic growth – younger, more educated talent pool and offsetting lower birth rates and population aging)
- Several complex pathways for employers and permanent and temporary migrants and challenging ecosystem of programs to navigate

My focus today: economic immigration



Focus of my remarks

Addressing the gaps between the desired and current state of economic immigration (60% of the Immigration Plan in 2025):

- “The OECD has predicted Canada’s economic growth will be dead last among 40 advanced economies over the next half decade. This shocking statistic is based on per capita growth in GDP, which is the country’s productivity divided by the total population.” (The Globe and Mail, June 13, 2023)



The 'elephant in the room'

- Increased pressure on:

- housing
- health services
- childcare
- education
- other community infrastructure

Balance:

- “Policymakers must strike the right balance between the ability to absorb population growth within the economic and social infrastructures, while leveraging policies to better utilize the current workforce and integrate new Canadians.”
(TD Economics, July 26, 2023)



Employer-Service Provider Linkages

- Employers need labour market 'signals' on talent availability – clear communication of talent needs and flexible responses by service providers
- A complex ecosystem of immigrant programs and services - Employers need support to navigate this – the first step is awareness
- Work with industry associations, employers and service providers to identify skill priorities and prepare immigrants and connect them to priority occupations and locations



Rural and Remote BC Communities

- More needs to be done to influence migrants to land outside the larger centres
- Communities and service providers need more incentives and other support to retain newcomers and to facilitate immigrant mobility within BC
- Governments need to connect the dots (a.k.a. silos) among their funding and programs for communities
- In smaller communities, the economy is driven by local industry – support them and service providers



International Credential Recognition (ICR)

- “Poor recognition of foreign credentials is the primary obstacle to better utilization of immigrant skills. Eliminating this barrier will be critical to ensuring the Canadian workforce is not only larger - but more productive.”
(RBC, N. Janzen and C. Fan, Feb. 2023)
- “If immigrants with foreign degrees were employed in their fields at the same rate as those educated in Canada,...there could be 27,350 more registered nurses and 15,730 more doctors working in this country.” (The Globe and Mail, June 9, 2023)
- In the recent history of immigration in Canada, the lack of ICR has produced a terrible and unfair under-utilization of immigrant talent
- There are a few positive signs in some provinces and professions where the myth of ‘Canadian experience’ has been cracked
- Greater role of employers and industry associations in the ICR process
- The Province of BC and employers need to advocate strongly for a more widespread removal of professional protectionism



International Student/Employer Linkages

- Many employers (especially SMEs) are not aware of the availability for work of international students
- Industry associations should create strategic partnerships with post-secondary institutions to tap into this potential
- Facilitate faster and more frequent transition to permanent residency



Leveraging the talent of those already here

- There are hundreds of thousands of skilled new Canadians with and without permanent residency and/or employment
- Opportunities for facilitating better transition of these former migrants in Canada to permanent resident status
- Clearer and easier pathways need to be built and promoted for new Canadians to complete relevant skills development and move into high-demand jobs across BC and in certain communities (e.g., healthcare, technology, trades, major projects, etc.)



Leadership - Stepping Up

- Canada

- More strategic and targeted
- Further streamlining and quick response
- Recognition of international competition for citizens and talent

- BC

- A bigger role for BC
- An immigration policy framework
- Clear direction to regulators
- Support to employers, jobseekers and communities
- Ensure cross-government integration

- Surrey

- A strategic partnership with SBOT and other business groups
- Tie service provider and broader settlement community to labour market demand and employers
- Alignment with a bigger provincial role

- All levels of government:

- Clear visions and goals for immigration
- Integration across policy areas (eliminate siloism)
- Better labour market information on immigrant and refugee inputs, outputs and outcomes

- And from industry groups



Back to Economic Immigration...

“Such a plan would start with articulating the goal of economic immigration – an improved standard of living for all Canadians.

That would entail a clear-eyed review of the standards for assessing economic migrants, and an acceleration of efforts to dismantle artificial barriers that prevent any new Canadian from fully utilizing their skills and training.” (The Globe and Mail, June 10, 2023).



Thank you!

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