

OCASI – Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants

Presentation on Economic Prosperity of Immigrants

To

Standing committee on Citizenship and Immigration

March 26, 2015

OCASI represents the collective voice of immigrant and refugee-serving organizations in Ontario, and we now have 220 member agencies across the province.

Our member agencies provide a range of services, including settlement, language training, employment, skills training, health and mental health, legal, housing, violence prevention, family counselling; and specialized services for women, youth, seniors, LGBTQ, and people with disabilities.

With respect to economic integration, they support clients with credential recognition, occupational language training, bridging, apprenticeship, job search, job development and employer engagement, mentoring, internship, entrepreneurship, professional networking, and ongoing support for job retention and career advancement.

Less than half our member agencies receive funding from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). The majority of services related to economic integration are funded by the provincial government, other sources of funding and supported by hundreds of volunteers.

OCASI's 2012 research, Making Ontario Home, based on a survey of over 2,500 newcomers to Ontario, found that employment is the number one challenge for immigrants.

Much has been written about the growth of precarious jobs in Canada and the impact on Canadian workers, especially younger workers. The 2013 Study, "It's More Than Poverty"¹ showed that immigrants are over-represented in precarious jobs, which also means they are under-represented in those who have access to EI programs. It found that barely 25% of immigrants are employed in secure jobs upon arrival, and that for many it can take more than ten years to be in permanent, full-time employment compared to non-immigrants. The report also noted that temporary immigration tended to place workers in precarious employment.

¹ It's More Than Poverty: Employment precarity and household well-being. McMaster University and United Way Toronto. 2013. <https://pepsouwt.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/its-more-than-poverty-feb-2013.pdf>

‘Colour-Coded Labour Market By the Numbers’ found that the 2008 recession widened the gap between the labour market experience of both established and recent immigrants and the Canadian-born, and that racialized immigrants were the most affected. This study is based on the 2011 voluntary National Household Survey, and notes that the non-response bias for some groups has affected data quality. Without the mandatory long-form census, we will continue to risk leaving out certain vulnerable populations when we look at issues like economic integration.

These findings tell us that economic integration requires many interventions including regulatory bodies to improve accreditation practices, employers to improve hiring and retention practices, government to introduce incentives through the tax system for employers (with conditions such as retention for a specific amount of time), Immigrant and Refugee-Serving agencies to engage employers and to provide the necessary employment supports just as much as immigrants are required to improve skills where and when necessary.

In preparing for this presentation, I canvassed OCASI member agencies for their insights on supporting economic integration through settlement services. This is what they said:

- CIC-funded settlement services are an important anchor for settlement and integration, and work well to allow immigrants and refugees to access what they need
- Pre-arrival services are a useful component for most immigrants arriving through Express Entry. However settlement needs become concrete after arrival and while settling in the new community, and can shift depending on the circumstances that arise from the settlement process
- Employment is a critical aspect of settlement, however having a job - even a good job doesn't mean that all settlement needs have been met. Other supports are needed to maintain employment, including job integration issues, health and mental-health, and the settlement needs of the accompanying family members. Those who arrive in Canada with a job offer will also face these challenges and will need support.
- Ontario has improved credentials recognition for internationally-trained immigrants, thanks in large part to the work of the Fairness Commissioner – but the time, cost and limited practicum spots are still barriers. Also, credential recognition alone will not result in a job.
- There is growing interest in entrepreneurship, but little support for immigrant entrepreneurs across all immigration streams.
- Family reunification is an important element that contributes to better economic integration, and family separation can negatively affect job search and retention. Without family, we are creating a lonely world that will affect integration. **Economic success is not possible without social integration.** A sense of belonging can support economic integration, better health, mental health and well-being.
- Discrimination, prejudice, intolerance and racism in the labour market and in the community affect labour market entry and job retention.

- Francophone immigrants face major challenges in trying to get a job in the primarily Anglo labour market outside of Quebec. Unilingual French speakers in Ontario are most disadvantaged. A recent joint study by OCASI and FrancoQueer (a provincial group concerned with the social, legal and economic well-being of Francophone LGBTIQ communities including immigrants and refugees) highlights the complex challenges of being a new immigrant, racialized, and LGBTQ, with the primary challenge being finding employment and housing in a LGBTQ-safe environment.

The introduction of Express Entry, and speculation about the potential demographic shift has dominated every sector discussion. But some things will remain the same:

- The new cohort of immigrants and their families will continue to need some degree of support to settle and integrate in their new life.
- Immigrant serving organizations are the best positioned to serve these needs, given their years of service experience, credibility in the community, and strong and enduring relationships with a multiplicity of stakeholders including governments, employers, educational institutions, public institutions and more.

Also, many immigrant-serving agencies have acted with initiative to develop and deliver integrated settlement – employment – and entrepreneurship programs, with great difficulty and often without CIC funding. Some had put these ideas forward in their RFP submission for the ‘Modernized Settlement’ call for proposals, but were not funded. There is a need for ongoing funding for these initiatives, either from CIC or other sources.

I have the following recommendations:

- CIC-funded settlement services are important and needed. Ideally, they should be delivered seamlessly together with employment services, and the Settlement Plan should include employment, together with case management and follow up.
- Settlement services should be delivered seamlessly from pre-arrival to post-arrival support. Some aspects of settlement will be realized only after arrival, and immigrants will need settlement support in Canada after arrival. Local immigrant serving agencies are best positioned to do that well.
- Mentorship/Work experience (internships) should be integrated in all employment initiatives. TRIEC is reporting a 90% success rate because of mentorship. The ‘Practice Firms’ model is a good one for newcomers, resulting in over 80% becoming employed in their field². Immigrant entrepreneurship must be supported.
- Bring Francophone services sector on par with Anglophone services. The desirable goal is to ensure that unilingual (and bilingual) Francophone immigrants have access to the full range

² A Practice Firm does all the business activities of a real business but does not actually get money for its products or services. Newcomers volunteer for real roles in the Firm – ie. accountant. MTCU stopped funding in 2012.

of services available in English as well as French – from language training to settlement to employment including employment mentorship and bridge-training.

- Like in any other field, there is a need for ongoing PD and training for settlement workers (English and French). This is particularly urgent given the many changes to immigration policies and programs, E-learning is growing in popularity and is a good way to maximize resources, but some learning must be done face-to-face and in the company of peers.
- We must not neglect the importance of family reunification. Economic and social integration are inter-connected, and no woman or man is an island.