

Making Use of Immigrant Skills



A Brief Summary of the Need for Immigrant Skills Within the
Labour Market Reality of Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk Counties

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A project conducted by the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services with the Grand Erie Training and Adjustment Board

Making Use of Immigrant Skills to Strengthen the Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk Counties: Labour Market Scan

The Issue

The 2001 Canada census yet again demonstrated Canada's reliance on immigration for population growth, and on their skills to build our country and fuel our economy. Over 18% of all Canadians are immigrants (only Australia has a higher percentage of immigrants). Each year about 250,000 immigrants come to Canada, with a target of about 300,000 in years to come.

Canadian immigration policy favours immigrants with higher education and skills. Yet there are well-documented barriers for immigrants to access their regulated professions and trade.¹ We know, for example, that:

- the unemployment rate of internationally-trained professionals is over three times as high as other people in Ontario.
- 60% of internationally trained professionals who took jobs unrelated to their training when they first came to Canada held the same job three years later.
- less than one-quarter of internationally-trained professionals who were employed were working in their exact field, and 47% were doing something irrelevant to their field.²

It is estimated that by 2011 100% of Canada's net labour force growth will come from immigration. Within 20 years it is estimated that Canada will be facing a labour shortage of up to 1 million workers. Critical job shortages across the country loom in health, education and construction fields due to an ageing Canadian population.³ Not using immigrant skills therefore not only impacts immigrants and their families, but also negatively effects our communities as a whole. As a country and as a community, we face choices as to how we will respond to these realities.

Provincial Context

Approximately one-half of Canada's immigrants come to Ontario. In each of the past few years, Ontario has received over 100,000 immigrants from 180 different countries. Approximately 60% of skilled immigrants come to Ontario. Major skilled immigrant groups over the past five years include:⁴

- Engineers (60% of all skilled immigrants)
- Health care providers (9%)
- Engineering technicians/technologists (15%)
- Teachers (2%)
- Accountants (10%)

A full 43% of all immigrants to Canada go to Toronto. In 2001, immigrants made up almost half (47%) of the Toronto workforce. Other areas in Ontario, such as the Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk Counties, also receive immigrants and are becoming increasingly diverse. These communities rely on the skills that immigrants bring to make them strong.

Across the province there are people calling for better access to professions and trades for immigrants. They encourage professional regulatory bodies, government ministries, politicians, educational institutions, and employers to take down barriers and allow immigrants to use their skills in the workforce. In some professions, progress has been made. For example, some regulatory bodies (organizations set up by the province to regulate professions in the public interest and to decide who can enter a profession) have begun to reassess how their regulations apply to people trained internationally. The pharmacy profession is an example. But for the most part the change is slow, as the political will often lags behind the demographic reality.⁵

It's Old News

"A great waste of potential: Many immigrant professionals forced to subsist on low-wage jobs, welfare." *Winnipeg Free Press*, January 14, 1995

"Degrees don't mean jobs for third world professionals" *The Toronto Star*, June 17, 1995

"Skilled immigrants meet job barriers: more trained people than ever are coming in but bureaucrats are not ready to handle them." *The Globe and Mail*, November 19, 1996

"Immigrant women forsake careers." *The Toronto Star*, October 15, 1999

"Canada wasting immigrant talent." *The Toronto Star*, October 16, 1999

"For immigrants, the trend seems to be towards exclusion from the knowledge economy," Jeffrey Reitz, University of Toronto. *Southam Press*, April 27, 2000

The Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk Counties Context

The Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk Counties are home to approximately 220,000 people. While Brantford and Brant have strong manufacturing, industrial and service sectors, some of the region’s smaller communities have more rural-based economies. With the retooling of the manufacturing sector in the 1990s, the local economic situation in Brant county has been generally positive. This period was also witness to a growth in the service sector with the entrance of call centres and the Casino. Brantford is home to campuses for both Wilfrid Laurier University and Mohawk College. Nine other universities and ten colleges are located within a 112-kilometre radius.

Twelve percent of Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk County residents (or 27,045 people) are immigrants. Between 1991 and 2001, 3840 new Canadians came to these counties (2410 to Brant County and 1430 to Haldimand-Norfolk). Statistics from Citizenship and Immigration Canada indicate that the major recent immigrant groups to Brantford include India, Pakistan, China, Poland, Vietnam, Ukraine, Yugoslavia, and Britain. This region has a long history of welcoming immigrants, with several long-standing organizations offering both formal and informal services.

Occupational and Skills Demands in Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk Counties

Sector	Occupations/Skills
Farming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Value-added food processing, <input type="checkbox"/> Ag-related manufacturing <input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural consulting <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation of products <input type="checkbox"/> Supply of fertilisers, chemicals, and other raw materials; farm retail <input type="checkbox"/> Farm equipment maintenance <input type="checkbox"/> Speciality construction <input type="checkbox"/> Agri-tourism <input type="checkbox"/> Farm financial services, etc.
Skilled trades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Welding <input type="checkbox"/> Millwright <input type="checkbox"/> Tool & Die Maker <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial electricians <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Auto body <input type="checkbox"/> Food service <input type="checkbox"/> Early childhood education <input type="checkbox"/> Homebuilding <input type="checkbox"/> Hairstyling
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Qualified drivers <input type="checkbox"/> Dispatchers <input type="checkbox"/> Owner-operators
Wholesale, Distribution, and Warehousing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Line Haul Co-ordinators Skills being focused on teams, customers, communications, problem solving, and project management <input type="checkbox"/> Purchasing, distribution, transportation, customs, international freight forwarding, etc.
Construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Heavy Equipment Operators
Sales and Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The number of vacancies peaked in 1999 and has been declining since then but still rank #1 of the top 4 sectors
Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> A new tourism centre is being constructed in Brant County; The Brantford Casino is in the process of expanding its facilities, which expect to add 40 jobs.
Clerical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Workers who have strong employability skills, especially customer service and communication, well educated (minimum grade 12), familiar with computer technology, adaptable and able to problem-solve
Business Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Financial experts <input type="checkbox"/> Computer network specialist <input type="checkbox"/> Sales professionals in business service
Health Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Qualified medical doctors <input type="checkbox"/> Nurses

Source: GETAB Environmental Scan 2002

Priority Occupations

According to a staff member of the Grand Erie Training and Adjustment Board (GETAB), anecdotal information indicates that the following lists of regulated professions and trades represent those who appear most needed in the Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk Counties today:

Regulated Professions:

1. Physician or Surgeon
2. Nurse/Practical Nurse
3. Teacher
4. Engineering Technician or Technologist
5. Speech-Language Pathologist
6. Physiotherapist
7. Psychologist⁶

Trades:

1. Professional Truck Operator
2. Construction Equipment Operator
3. Heavy Duty Equipment Operator
4. Automotive Service Technician
5. Electrician
6. Truck and Coach Technician
7. Industrial Electrician
8. Industrial Mechanic Millwright
9. Fitter- Welder
10. Construction Millwright

Impact of Skill Gaps

According to labour market experts with whom we spoke, the region is facing a shortage of skilled workers in the trades. Employers in the skilled trades sector are often able to find employees. The challenge, however, appears to be demands for increased skill levels as well as the minimal commitment to employee training due to the steep costs incurred by the employer.

The current shortage of skilled workers in the health care sector has left many without access to consistent care. This shortage is considered particularly problematic, as our ageing population requires an increased number of medical professionals. Through increasing the number of workers in both the health and education sectors it is believed that our local economy would be strengthened and our quality of life improved. Quality services in such basic areas are considered essential to building a healthy community and to attracting new people.

About This Research Project

This action research project is being conducted by The Centre for Research and Education in Human Services, a nonprofit social research organization, and guided by steering committee of community members. The purpose is to raise awareness among Canadians that fully using the skills of immigrants will strengthen our community in a number of ways. The Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk counties will focus on the healthcare professions as well as the transportation and construction fields. Future bulletin updates will include:

- Survey results of local immigrant skills not being used
- Case studies of unused local immigrant skills and what is being done to improve access to regulated professions.
- A local “call for action” appealing for the better utilization of immigrant skills

Why Make Use of Immigrant Skills?

- ✓ An aging population and low birth rate is leaving skill shortages.
- ✓ International perspectives and connections are needed to compete in the increasingly global marketplace.
- ✓ Job satisfaction of working in field of expertise contributes to personal and family well-being.
- ✓ Able to take advantage of human capital (“brain gain”) brought to our country and economy.
- ✓ Capitalize on savings in educational costs.
- ✓ Adds to new, innovative ideas in the workplace.
- ✓ Demonstrates that our society gives equal opportunity to all and embraces cultural diversity.

For more information about this research contact Jill Wood at (519) 756-1116 or Rich Janzen at (519) 741-1318.

Sources:

- ¹ Janzen, R., Ochocka, J., & Wing Sang Wong, V. (1998). *Dignity and opportunity: Assessing the economic contribution of foreign trained newcomers*. Kitchener, ON: Centre for Research and Education in Human Services.
- ² Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. (2000). *The facts are in: Newcomer experiences in accessing regulated professions in Ontario*.
- ³ Statistics Canada. *2001 Census*. All remaining demographics are 2001 Census unless otherwise noted.
- ⁴ Roundtable on Access to Professions and Trades (2003). *Chronology of Access to Professions and Trades Initiatives and efforts in Ontario*. Toronto, ON. Council of Agencies Servicing South Asians.
- ⁵ Janzen, R., Azmi, S., Chakkalakal, A. (2001) *Making a change together: A Resource handbook for promoting access to professions and trades for foreign-trained people in Ontario*. Kitchener, ON: Centre for Research and Education in Human Services and Skills for Change.
- ⁶ The final three priority regulated professions were derived from the 2002 *Ontario Hospital Association Labour Market Survey*.