



# Improving Immigration

## A Policy Approach for Western Canada

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**BUILDING** THE NEW WEST  
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# BUILDING THE NEW WEST

This report is part of the Canada West Foundation's Building the New West (BNW) Project, a multi-year research and public consultation initiative focused on the strategic positioning of western Canada within the global economy.

Five key priorities emerged from an extensive research and consultation process and provide a framework for the Building the New West Project:

- the West must create the tools to attract, retain, and build HUMAN CAPITAL;
- the West must continue ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION;
- the West must strengthen its TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE;
- the West must promote the global competitiveness of its MAJOR CITIES; and
- the West must develop new ways of facilitating REGIONAL COORDINATION.

To learn more about the BNW Project, please visit the Canada West Foundation website ([www.cwf.ca](http://www.cwf.ca)).

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*Improving Immigration* presents the results of a year-long research study, that included consultations with 180 immigration professionals across the four western provinces. This report provides a mix of research and professional opinion to suggest a series of recommendations for improving the immigration experience in western Canada.

The findings of this study include:

- Immigrants in the West provide a host of economic, non-economic, cultural and humanitarian contributions to the region.
- Immigrants are a source of population growth, particularly in high needs areas.
- Immigration's critical role in meeting current and future labour shortages is not well understood by the general public.
- Even though there are proportionately fewer immigrants coming to the West, those who do settle in the region may fare better economically than do immigrants in other parts of Canada.
- Western Immigrants are most likely to have Asian and middle eastern backgrounds—distinctions that carry with them unique impacts on the cultural, language and community supports in the West.
- Proportionately more refugee class immigrants settle in the West and therefore offer additional humanitarian benefits for the western communities but they may have special needs upon coming to Canada.
- Provincial-Federal immigration agreements (Provincial Nominee Programs) offer a means by which specific provincial and regional population and labour needs can be addressed.

Recommendations drawn from a series of five consultations in western cities suggest that much can be done to make the region more welcoming to immigrants and, perhaps more importantly, to allow for the economic and non-economic potential of immigrants to be more fully realized. Immigrant struggles in the West include foreign skills recognition, application processing delays, employer prejudices, negative public attitudes, lack of affordable housing, and the need for more language training.

To address these concerns, the following recommendations are suggested to improve immigration policy in western Canada:

- *Research and promote the contributions of immigrants in western Canada.*
- *Develop new measures by which to evaluate successful immigration outcomes.*
- *Provide employer education and information on the positive economic value of foreign experience and training.*
- *Make available more advanced language training for adults in jobs and for immigrant children in schools.*
- *Centralize information for immigrants regarding employment, education and regulation, provision of basic needs, and cultural opportunities.*
- *Collaboration between different areas of government, social service organizations, school systems and employers.*
- *Increase funding of the immigrant selection and screening process.*
- *Base immigration selection criteria on improved market data.*
- *Invest in building local capacities to welcome, integrate and retain immigrants.*
- *Enhance the policy focus on the needs of refugee immigrants in western Canada.*
- *Provide incentives and opportunities for immigrants to settle in areas other than the main urban centers.*
- *Use Provincial Nominee Programs to encourage more immigration in high need areas.*

The broad theme of these recommendations is the need for more and better use of government and employer resources to improve the entire immigrant experience—from start to finish. The message highlighted by our consultations with those working in immigration related fields in western Canada is that more should be done to assist immigrants as they make the difficult transition from their former homes to their new home in western Canada. The expenditure of more public money on improvements to selection, processing and settlement services can pay off in higher economic returns and reduced social assistance demand, thereby improving the contribution that immigration makes to all Canadians.

## Introduction

An aging labour force and a declining birthrate represent a much-discussed future challenge for the western provinces. Federal and provincial immigration policies aimed at addressing these labour and population needs often fail to meet high public expectations. The result is often criticism from all sides, including immigrants, community groups, businesses and the editorial pages.

For those who see immigration as a panacea for western Canada's current and future ills, the perceived policy failures are limiting immigrants potential. For those that see Canada's immigration targets as contributing to western decline, the policy failure is that immigration levels are too high.

This latter viewpoint has gained in popularity because of research that suggests immigrants who arrived over the last decade may now never earn as much as Canadian-born workers. For example, if immigrants, on average, do not equal or out-perform native-born Canadians, are Canada's immigration needs overstated? Or, if large numbers of immigrants are unable to plug into the economy in their areas of training, are current immigration selection criteria inappropriate for what are largely labour and trade-based market needs?

Critiques of this nature are shortsighted. First, the value of immigrants extends beyond their ability to generate higher levels of personal income. Immigrants also add economic value by increasing exports, bringing external problem solving experience to business, and acting as consumers for locally produced goods. Second, immigrants fill a number of crucial labour and service roles in the economy at lower paying positions. They are not able to achieve equivalent rates of pay to Canadian-born workers, but are just as important to the productivity of the economy. Third, measures of this type ignore all the non-economic value of immigration's cultural, political and community contributions. Like Canadian-born residents, not all immigrants will participate in the workforce, but this does not reduce their value to nothing. And finally, the value of immigration extends beyond the achievement of a single generation. Immigrant children achieve high levels of economic success and are critical for addressing labour shortages.

The recent relatively lower economic performance of immigrants is the product of a combination of failures on the part of employers, professional associations, governments and researchers to match immigration policy to labour market need. On the one hand,

market need is a dynamic concept that is difficult to measure and track, and on the other hand, immigration policy is relatively static and the immigration process slow due to the high volume of demands on those involved in screening immigrants.

Settlement agencies, for their part, can help bridge some of this gap through efforts to match employers with skilled immigrants, but it isn't enough. Professional designations, poor research, employer biases and immigration procedural requirements combine to disrupt the fit between real market needs and the type of available labour. The mobility rights of immigrants, moreover, limit the ability to create a perfect match between immigrants and the needs of the labour market.

Addressing these substantial inefficiencies requires more than just a reworking of a few policies. The barriers to immigration success include discriminatory hiring practices by employers, professional associations with self-interested motivations, and negative attitudes towards immigrants among some of the Canadian-born population (and vice-versa). Changing these attitudes and issues may take generations, but improving today's policies and regulations can play an important role in catalyzing this process.

*Improving Immigration: A Policy Approach for Western Canada* examines the main immigration issues in western Canada and offers a description of the solutions recommended by those dealing with "on the ground" immigration issues in western Canada. Specifically, the research questions posed in *Improving Immigration* are:

- What are the main immigration policy issues in western Canada?
- What are the primary local immigration needs in western Canada's large cities?
- What changes to immigration policy would best address these immigration concerns?
- What are the unique western Canadian immigration trends that influence policy development?

The basis for this analysis is a year-long research study and a series of consultations held in October and November 2004 with over 180 immigration professionals across the four western provinces. This report provides a mix of research and professional opinion to suggest a series of recommendations for improving the immigration experience in western Canada.

## Immigration Consultations in Western Canada

Immigration trends vary from city to city (and even within areas of a city) across Canada. Depending on where you look, these concerns can include too many or not enough immigrants, immigrants working in low pay jobs, insufficient language training availability, lack of affordable housing, international security concerns, or immigrant crime activity. These issues do not equally apply, and many are not reflective of the situation in all western Canadian centers.

To examine the improvements needed in immigration policy, a series of consultations was held in Calgary, Regina, Winnipeg, Vancouver and Edmonton in October and November 2004. The consultations involved 180 immigration professionals and immigrants from a wide variety of backgrounds including government, social service agencies, professional associations and immigration consultants. Participants in each consultation were separated into small groups to answer the same questions and develop priorities.

The text that follows provide an analysis and summary of the main concerns and recommendations drawn from these workshop participants. The opinions represented are those of the participants and professionals working in immigration related fields.

It is important to keep in perspective that these views were not evaluated for accuracy or completeness. A number of ongoing initiatives on behalf of governments recognize and are trying to address many of these same concerns, but may not have had enough time to influence perceptions of the problems.

### **Question 1: What are the priority immigration issues in your community?**

Despite immigration activity that ranged from several hundred new arrivals a year in Regina to many thousands in Vancouver, the immigration priorities addressed in each city are markedly similar. With only a few exceptions the main priorities in each consultation involved the need for more and better use of government resources to improve the entire immigrant experience—from start to finish. Participants in each session called for an increase in the amount and the accuracy of the information available to prospective immigrants; faster and more efficient processing

systems; more settlement and integration resources; greater efforts to make Canadian-born residents more welcoming of immigrants; and improved workplace transition and skills acquisition opportunities for immigrants.

The specific high priority and oft-repeated issues of concern related to the immigration experiences in western Canada included (see Figure 1):

- More employment-specific language instruction for immigrant adults and similar levels of school-specific instruction for children.
- Underemployment of immigrants because of mismatched skills and credential issues, and poor labour market information informing the immigration process.
- The need for more public education and information on the value of both the economic and non-economic contributions of immigrants. Current public attitudes (including those of governments and employers) towards immigrants are not as welcoming as needed to maximize immigration's potential benefits.
- Providing a broader and deeper range of settlement services to meet cultural needs and improvement in the basic needs (e.g., higher minimum wage, more affordable housing, higher social assistance rates) to assist immigrants make the transition into communities.
- The need for linkages and coordination between immigrant support services (e.g., employment services, the school system, social service agencies).

Beyond the areas of commonality shared by participants, there were some high priority regionally-specific issues that tended to relate to the wide disparity of immigration levels among western Canada's cities. Participants in Vancouver, Winnipeg and Calgary—cities with proportionately higher rates of immigration—mentioned issues related to settlement and funding as a high priority. Those in Edmonton and Saskatoon—cities that draw less than their share of immigrants—mentioned the need for creating a welcoming atmosphere and making immigration a priority for their communities.

**Figure 1: What are the priority immigration issues in your community?**

Calgary	Regina	Winnipeg	Vancouver	Edmonton
Recognition of skills of immigrants by employers.	Attraction and retention of immigrants by building and enhancing support network.	Settlement services have not kept pace in accordance with successfully increased rates of immigration.	Recognition of skills of immigrants by employers. Lack of Canadian work experience among immigrants.	Attracting immigrants and competing with Calgary for immigrants
Language instruction for immigrant adults and children.	Immigration policy made in Ottawa that is not responsive to regional areas.	Language training at all levels, reduce wait list for training.	Skill shortages in doctors, trades and technical jobs.	Migration of immigrants from other provinces stressing local supports
Social services for immigrant children and families with focus on long-term integration issues.	Language instruction for immigrant adults and children.	Foreign embassies promoting smaller centers and providing realistic information about resettlement here, educating potential immigrants abroad.	Need to develop an economic base to attract immigrants to rural areas. High concentration of immigration to lower mainland/urban areas.	Very little involvement by municipal government and municipal organizations in immigration issues.
General public perception of immigration – still view immigration as humanitarian rather than economic advantage.	Resources for immigrant settlement community groups. There are insufficient funds needed to attract people to SK.	Recognition of skills of immigrants by employers and more services to support and assess skills to speed the process.	Building social, emotional, practical supports for integration/adaptation of children and families.	Public education needed on economic importance of immigration and value of intercultural competence.
Lack of readiness of institutions and the public to integrate new immigrants.	Need to shift immigration policy focus away from “policing” who gets into Canada and toward a “facilitative” role for immigrants here.	Under-employed immigrants creating low earnings, poor living conditions.	High expectations among immigrants of economic, social, environmental conditions and job opportunities.	Helping newcomers make connections with Canadians at the individual/personal level as well as the institutional level.
Need for complete and correct information about immigrant services available in community and a central place where this information can be obtained.	Shortages of skilled labour (e.g., truck drivers).	Publicizing the good news and benefits of immigration to Canadians.	Need for more education of Canadian employment standards in country of origin prior to immigrating.	Recognition of skills of immigrants by employers.
Working with employers in terms of allowing opportunity for immigrants at proper level.	Public recognition of importance of immigration in economic development.	Access to affordable housing that is culturally appropriate.	Language training, particularly at the advanced level for transitioning to workforce.	Need bridging programs to help immigrant transition to the labour market.
Managing immigrant expectations vs. the realities of life in community.	Overcoming the size and population disadvantages working against Saskatchewan.	Retention of immigrants lost to other provinces, especially PNP immigrants.	Publicity and information on how Canada/BC can benefit from immigration.	Language training focused on skill mastery and on children in schools.
Attracting and retaining immigrants because of low minimum wage and politicians projecting a negative image of Alberta to immigrants.	Learning how to effectively market Saskatchewan as a desirable destination.	Inability of Canada to process immigrant/refugee applications in a timely manner.	Resources for most small business employers to properly give immigrants the needed on the job training.	Settlement services (e.g., ESL) that are underfunded or inadequate.
Incongruency between labour market needs and policies on recruitment.	Length of time to process immigrants through system.	Poor labour market information creating mismatch between what skills are actually needed and immigration selection.	Coordination of support services for immigrants (employment, schools, social services have no linkages).	Length of time for processing applications for immigration.
More provincial autonomy for addressing immigration labour market needs.	Barriers in the entrepreneurial class of immigrants (e.g., farmers not having money to qualify to immigrate).	No clear picture or strategy for integration creates a system of handing off problems to other organizations and agencies.	Disconnect between immigrant selection, education, employment and community needs (skills/people) and information/marketing of immigration opportunities internationally.	Need for a one-stop source of good information on employment issues and marketing.
No success measures available for recording the non-economic contributions of immigrants.	High immigration targets would overwhelm most support groups and agencies.	Overt discrimination and lack of sensitivity among the public to cultural differences.		
Lack of collective effort at the municipal government level to encourage immigrants to City.	Need to change the perception that refugees are an economic burden.	Qualified immigrants disappointments and demoralization in realities of Canadian job market not meeting their expectations.		
	Base numbers of immigrants are so low it is difficult to build up a critical mass.			

In Winnipeg, the success associated with its rapid increase in immigration over the last three years has created a number of high profile issues related to the funding of settlement services, available housing and wait lists for training. Interprovincial competition for immigrants, and the climate and urban appeal of other destinations within Canada are recognized as a threat to retaining the positive aspects of immigration. Participants spoke of particular concerns about losing immigrants to Ontario and Alberta.

For Regina, interprovincial competition for immigrants is described as making it difficult for Saskatchewan to appear as an appealing destination. Participants indicated that more flexible immigration policies might enable the area to more easily attract immigrants. For example, finding rural immigrant farmers is hindered by high financial qualification criteria. Lowering the bar might encourage more immigrants to settle in rural areas and take over rural farms. Another specific community problem mentioned in Regina is that the current low numbers of immigrants make it difficult to develop the kind of critical mass of services which will offer a welcoming place for immigrants.

Calgary draws a great deal more immigrants than its share of the national population, and participants in this session focused on issues related to concentration. In particular, secondary migration from other provinces was a concern for participants as settlement funding is not as available for secondary migrants. Alberta's low minimum wage was also mentioned as a specific challenge for Calgary immigrants. Many immigrants occupy the lowest paying jobs in community and may have difficulty meeting their basic needs in an increasingly costly city. Also unique to Alberta, participants felt that immigration suffers from negative perceptions among the public and elected officials, giving the impression of Calgary as an unwelcoming community.

These concerns were largely echoed by Edmonton participants. The low wages and the perception of negative attitudes represented even more of a barrier to attracting and retaining immigrants in Edmonton as it is not a major port of entry for immigrants. Edmonton respondents felt that greater municipal government awareness of immigrants' value to the city would go a long way to making it more attractive.

Vancouver participants' priority issues are reflective of the region's experiences with high volumes of immigrants. However, it's important to note that high concentrations of immigrants were not described as a problem for the area. Rather, the priority issue was better distribution of the benefits of immigration into the surrounding rural areas outside the Vancouver region. Otherwise, despite much higher volumes of immigrants in the region, the main priority issues are similar to those in other western cities.

**Question 2:  
How are current immigration policies addressing/failing to meet local immigration needs?**

Although given the opportunity to discuss the good and bad in the current systems of immigration, more often than not, participants focused on the perceived failings of current immigration policies. However, the unbalanced presentation of these concerns is perhaps more reflective of the sentiment that a vast number of improvements are needed and not that the system is fatally flawed. A number of opinions were that "more" of some already good ideas and policies are required.

Nonetheless, the majority of the feedback from workshop participants with knowledge of and experience with immigration policies is that a great deal of improvement is in order. The common policy failings arising from the workshops were (see Figure 2):

- Lack of availability of accurate information on the climate, culture, living costs, and job markets prior to immigration so that the experiences of immigrants upon arrival better match their expectations regarding job qualifications, expected income level, demographic profile of the community, etc.
- Long time delays partially due to the under-funding of the immigrant selection and screening process.
- Selection criteria that do not give enough consideration to current western labour market and population needs.
- Lack of coordination or a single overarching body to integrate and improve the various systems that deal with immigrant issues (e.g., overseas immigration offices, governments, employers and professional associations, school systems, social services, community groups).

**Figure 2: How are current immigration policies addressing/failing to meet local immigration needs?**

Calgary	Regina	Winnipeg	Vancouver	Edmonton
<p><b>Not Working:</b> Immigration is not on municipal agenda.</p> <p>Corporate sector not encouraged to participate in assisting integration.</p> <p>Lack of coordination between embassies, overseas immigration offices, and government services, employers, and communities. No single collective body looking after immigrant policy.</p> <p>Lack of leadership from the federal/provincial governments to encourage associations/licensing bodies to have fair, objective centers for recognition of foreign credentials.</p> <p>Lack of engagement of employers/associations in recruitment and integration of immigrants. Policies need to inform and encourage employers to hire immigrants.</p> <p>Government not focused on integrating people who immigrate, providing a sense of belonging.</p> <p>Children of immigrants fall into the cracks with respect to provision of education; no one wants to pay for ESL education and services for children.</p> <p>Immigration policies deal with only immigrants, but fail to help institutions/communities to adapt to immigration.</p> <p>Refugee immigrants need more support in terms of trauma counseling, etc.</p> <p>Government under-funding of multiculturalism, ESL, advanced education and trade programs for immigrants.</p> <p>Lack of public education on settlement and integration issues.</p>	<p><b>Not Working:</b> Federal policy not focused on rural and small centre immigration needs.</p> <p>Retention and attraction of immigrants.</p> <p>Immigration policy is not reflective of Saskatchewan's urgent population and labour concerns.</p> <p>More flexible selection criteria would help the province to attract those who are willing to live in SK. Need to be able to use tax incentives and other strategies to attract immigrants.</p> <p>Provincial Nominee Program needs to establish itself, it is growing and it has a bit of a successful track record to build on. Must be better marketed to employers to really get going.</p> <p>There are a lot of organizations in SK working on immigration, but not in any organized or systemic way.</p> <p>Being able to accommodate the needs of immigrant students whether ESL, social, emotional, or limited learning capacities, and attitudes towards culturally-specific backgrounds.</p> <p>Marketing our province, our communities, so that potential immigrants overseas understand what kind of specific opportunities SK offers.</p> <p>Balancing immigrant needs and concerns against the needs of the Aboriginal community.</p> <p>Federal selection and processing system needs to be better integrated into the provincial one, so it takes less time to get people through the system.</p> <p>Lack of consultation with schools, committees and agencies (e.g., language issues in the schools).</p> <p>Backlogs and delays in getting language training. Immigrants cannot get the skills for language purposes to write the exams they need.</p> <p>Change policies to make it easier to attract rural farmers by lowering the investment level needed to immigrate.</p>	<p><b>Working:</b> Settlement system good, but not without gaps.</p> <p>Addressing, but not fast enough, higher order language needs (level 7 &amp; 8) to be able to work/get job.</p> <p><b>Not Working:</b> Point system of choosing professionals means that immigrants are higher qualified than realities of the job market.</p> <p>Need initiatives to allow better opportunities for foreign students to work while in Canada.</p> <p>Lack of affordable housing.</p> <p>Lack of matching labour supply and labour demand skills.</p> <p>Immigration is a non-integrated and coordinated system; immigration is handed off to the province, city, schools once immigrant arrives.</p> <p>Need recruitment strategy to sustain ethnocultural and regional communities.</p> <p>Extra merit/weight should be given in federal immigration to sponsoring communities, labour needs, and capacity of community to integrate.</p> <p>Not trying to retain foreign students.</p> <p>School age ESL needs improving</p> <p>Resource tensions between Aboriginal and immigrants.</p> <p>Minimum wage too low, many immigrants at minimum levels.</p>	<p><b>Not Working:</b> Immigration is very slow, cumbersome, bureaucratic; policy is not addressing long waiting times and insufficient capacity.</p> <p>Regulatory and immigration policies often in conflict.</p> <p>Point system is not as relevant to current needs or may not meet needs of rural areas—may even be prohibitive to rural areas.</p> <p>Mismatch of skills and qualifications of immigrants with what's needed in various geographical areas.</p> <p>Not addressing current sector specific labour shortages.</p> <p>Credential recognition not working and a lack of prior learning assessment programs.</p> <p>Lack of adequate ESL services.</p> <p>Questionable recruitment strategies and misinformation found abroad.</p> <p>Settlement funding has decreased but immigrants needs have increased. Funding is not at par with Toronto and Montreal. Levels in Vancouver are insufficient.</p> <p>Inconsistent policy enforcement by federal government.</p> <p>Centralized immigration processes are automated, therefore no human contact.</p> <p>Poor coordination and connection of municipal governments with provincial &amp; federal governments on immigration issues.</p> <p>Need more local involvement in policy development, e.g., services/activities tailored to groups in need.</p> <p>Immigrant transition is the current policy focus instead of a long-term integration policy focus.</p> <p>Lack of flexibility or policy tools to re-distribute concentration of immigrants, especially to rural areas.</p> <p>Lack of publicity on the positive aspects of immigration, e.g. successful stories, research on the benefits that immigrants bring.</p> <p>22 municipalities in GVRD; there is no regional cohesive immigration policy.</p>	<p><b>Working:</b> Fed/provincial/agency partnerships work well and are a creative approach.</p> <p>International Qualifications Assessment Services (IQAS) very valuable, it needs more profile.</p> <p><b>Not Working:</b> K-12 ESL not meeting needs of children and families.</p> <p>Inadequate, under funded language training, particularly for an immigrant population (Asian) that needs more language learning opportunities.</p> <p>Lack of awareness that immigrants also have a non-economic value.</p> <p>Lack of integration/coordination between government departments.</p> <p>Regionalization incentives needed to draw immigrants out of big 3 cities.</p> <p>More help with family reunification immigrants.</p> <p>Municipal government not seeing benefit of immigration as priority; immigration seen as a federal policy issue.</p>



- Solving skills recognition problems has eluded policy solutions, the issue needs comprehensive approaches that alter employers and professional associations hiring and qualification practices. Prior learning skills assessment services also need larger application and availability.
- Regulation and transition issues are at the forefront of most policy, whereas settlement and integration concerns are too much of a policy afterthought. Better immigration outcomes would result from more attention to the immigrant experience upon arrival in Canada.
- Provincial Nominee Programs are a good start of the kind of programs that can be successful at bringing immigrants to the areas of need in the West. For the most part, these efforts are

currently under-advertised among employers and communities and underutilized (Manitoba being the exception).

**Question 3:  
Are there any local immigration concerns that are unique and different from the national picture?**

To draw out the regional and specific city issues, participants were asked to try to identify which of their policy concerns were unique to their area. The purpose of this exercise was to attempt to gain a better understanding of how specific immigration policies and external factors affect each area differently. In Winnipeg, these unique factors include an equivalent need to address the city’s Aboriginal employment issues, underfunded and overburdened settlement services associated with the growth of immigration activity, and the need to make the city more attractive to immigrants in order to attract and retain the

**Figure 3: Are there any local immigration concerns that are unique and different from the national picture?**

Calgary	Regina	Winnipeg	Vancouver	Edmonton
Attitude in Alberta that province does not need to attract workers – they come here anyway renders immigration a lesser concern.	Aboriginal issues more top of mind, higher profile. Immigration takes a back seat to Aboriginal labour force policy.	Newcomers will leave if opportunities don’t materialize and expectations not met.	High housing costs; high childcare costs; high cost of living; high transportation costs from suburbs.	Lack of employment (need for skilled workers in oil sands activity).
Harder to qualify for social assistance in Alberta and lower rates of support.	International perceptions of Saskatchewan as a non-economic center. In most countries, places the size of Regina and Saskatoon are apart from the centre of economic activity.	Immigrant settlement is a slow process – may be unable to provide bridging supports until newcomers can make stronger attachments to labour market.	Competition with China (immigrants returning to China) acting as “astronaut” immigrants (not residing in Canada).	Under-recognition of issue from business and politicians in Edmonton – lack of commitment or concern.
Negative attitudes towards immigrants in the province (racism, discrimination, stereotypes). Negative comments by Alberta politicians creating an image issue.	Province disadvantaged because of the size of SK population, and also because of the size of our ethnic and cultural groups.	Lack of affordable housing; rental and short-term housing.	Economic structure and scale of size as a metro city smaller than Toronto & Montreal (less manufacturing and industry) yet high levels of immigration.	Negative attitudes among Albertans towards immigrants.
Inter-provincial migration from other provinces to Calgary not reflected in data or funding of settlement services in Calgary.	Inhospitable weather/climate in province.	Smaller family-oriented city may not appeal to international immigrants.	Port of entry security issues; accessible to more criminal activity.	High percentages of refugees with more special needs.
Lack of representation of immigrants in government, institutions, media.	Not on the province’s policy radar-- the provincial department responsible for immigration does not even include “immigration” in its name.	Large aboriginal population limiting immigration capacity for some services.	High concentration in urban area; large number of refugees.	Edmonton not a common port of entry so there are few supports. Internal migrants do not have access to the early supports (e.g. transition housing, etc.).
High drop out rates among immigrant children in schools.	Immigration farming restrictions make it difficult for immigrant farmers to have the resources to immigrate.	Collapse of garment industry lost a number of immigrant jobs.	Pressure on social services and resources with high concentration of immigrants in Vancouver.	
	Currently weaker employment picture makes it difficult to justify bringing in more immigrants.	Federal funding has not caught up with large increases in immigration because of funding formula.	Due to good climate attracts higher number of immigrants from Pacific Rim – China, India, Asian countries.	
	Raises the importance of streamlining and easing foreign credentialing delays.		Expectations of immigrants that there are greater economic opportunities in region than actually exist.	
			Increasing racial tensions.	

desired/targeted population growth levels. Urban Aboriginal priorities and difficulty in attracting immigrants are also significant barriers for Regina. Regina participants recognize that increasing immigration is difficult because the city has a number of strikes against it including: climate, little or a negative international reputation, historically low immigration levels, and relatively limited economic opportunities.

Edmonton and Calgary respondents independently indicate that Albertans present a troublesome and uniquely negative outlook towards immigrants. This represents a barrier for attracting immigrants and a settlement issue for those immigrants that do come to Alberta. In spite of this, Calgary's economic opportunities continue to be a draw for a disproportionately high number of immigrants. A Calgary-specific concern is that secondary migration to the region does not come with sufficient settlement funding. Unlike Calgary, Edmonton does not draw a proportionate share of immigrants. Edmonton participants attribute the lower levels of immigration to a lack of focus on attracting immigrants by municipal governments and local businesses having created few opportunities in the region.

Although sharing a great number of issues, when pressed to identify specific regional issues, Vancouver participants were able to distinguish a number of unique immigration policy priorities in the region. Vancouver attracts proportionately high levels of immigrants, particularly from the Pacific Rim, which participants indicate creates some tensions with respect to social services, increases perceptions of immigrant-related crime, and fosters more racial tension in the community. Further, the cost of living in the region is high and yet the economic opportunities for immigrants are not as bountiful as in some other centres. Most unique to Vancouver are some specific concerns over "reverse immigration" or "astronaut" immigrants who return to their country of origin, but retain Canadian immigrant status.

**Question 4: What policy changes would you suggest to better address local concerns?**

In addition to the broad scope of changes and resource investments recommended earlier, participants were asked to recommend the policy changes that could best address local issues and priorities. For the most part these policy changes are achievable in both the short-term and at a local level. To improve immigration in the western centres, the following specific initiatives are recommended (see Figure 4):

- More flexibility in immigrant selection systems to lower some barriers and increase likelihood of finding qualified immigrants who meet western labour and population needs.
- Invest in building local capacities to welcome, integrate and retain immigrants. Highest needs include: (1) the creation of a local housing policy that would provide specific housing opportunities for new immigrants, and (2) early language training for better community integration, and development of K-12 school-based language training.
- Centralization of information for immigrants regarding employment, education and regulation, provision of basic needs, and cultural opportunities.
- Collaboration between different areas of government, settlement lawyers, social services, school systems and employers.
- Exposure, advertising, and funding to build on the theoretical and practical successes of Provincial Nominee Programs to meet local needs.
- Aggressive public relations to increase the profile of the economic and non-economic benefits of immigration both now and in future.
- Municipally-driven initiatives to find locally-developed community-specific approaches to improving immigration experiences in cities.
- Implement hiring practices in government and local business that represent the appropriate portion of immigrants in the population.
- Provide direction and incentives for local businesses on how to maximize the benefits of hiring immigrants to increase exports and profits.

**Figure 4: What policy changes would you suggest to better address local concerns?**

Calgary	Regina	Winnipeg	Vancouver	Edmonton
<p><i>Calgary participants were asked* : Is the future outlook for immigration in Calgary encouraging?</i></p> <p>Yes, at the grass roots, advocacy by community groups produces goodwill.</p> <p>Yes, because there's a core of people who can support change. Calgary is chosen as a destination because it has a lot to offer immigrants.</p> <p>No, as immigration does not have strong recognition in levels where decisions are made. This requires significant remaking of Canadian workplaces and society (putting more immigrants in decision making positions).</p> <p><i>(*this question was replaced following the Calgary session)</i></p>	<p>PNP is part of solution but program needs exposure, funding and flexibility and quicker processing times.</p> <p>Public relations work to improve Immigrants' receptiveness to Saskatchewan as welcoming. Challenge is to present Saskatchewan as being sophisticated urban centre.</p> <p>Removal/reduction of barriers in the entrepreneurial class of immigrants.</p> <p>Invest in building local capacity to welcome, integrate and retain immigrants.</p>	<p>More flexibility in finding qualified business class immigrants.</p> <p>More funding for settlement services.</p> <p>Create a housing policy that would provide specific housing for refugees/immigrants.</p> <p>Centralized information for immigrants in community, better information about community abroad.</p> <p>Tool kit for new Canadians regarding education, regulations, and professional bodies.</p> <p>More collaboration between different areas of government, settlement lawyers and other stakeholders (recent immigrants).</p> <p>Lower fees and processing timelines for spouses and parents.</p>	<p>Municipal/GVRD involvement in immigration strategy consultation.</p> <p>Use PNP to encourage dilution of the concentration of immigrants (regionalization).</p> <p>Change negative opinions by promoting awareness of positive benefits immigrants add to the province (need better research on these benefits).</p> <p>Start English language training in origin country prior to arrival to improve transition experience.</p> <p>Small and medium sized businesses need direction and incentives to build trade links with China or other interested markets.</p> <p>More support for local initiatives by Settlement and Multiculturalism branch.</p> <p>Help immigrants to settle in rural areas by providing employment opportunities, community services, local immigrant incentives and funding to assist in this process.</p>	<p>Increase low provincial minimum wage for working poor.</p> <p>City of Edmonton initiate a process specially tuned to the Edmonton business community's needs; develop communities' own ideas.</p> <p>Change local attitudes with more focus on the population growth component of immigration to complement the skilled labour issue.</p> <p>Change AB policy of inadequate social assistance funding for new Canadians.</p> <p>More direct consultation with immigrant community in Edmonton—not just via the immigration agencies.</p> <p>Work on changing the political and government institutions to implement hiring practices that better reflect the population.</p>

## Unique Immigration Trends in Western Canada

The opinions of consultation participants reflect the unique circumstance of immigration policy, activity, and history in the West. Building off previously released Canada West Foundation research documents on immigration (Increasing Western Canadian Immigration and Closer to Home) and other topical research, this section of the report isolates and summarizes the unique immigration trends that impact the western experience with immigration. These trends shape current policy and opinion in the West towards immigration, and complement the experiences and recommendations brought forward in our consultations.

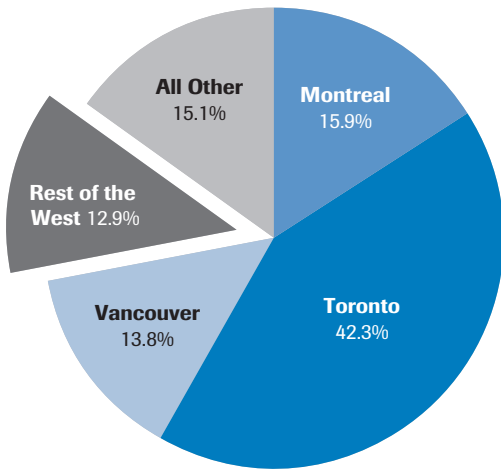
### 1. Immigration Outside the Shadow of the Big “3” Destinations

Almost three-quarters of immigrants tend to settle in one of three

cities in Canada—Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal—the “Big 3.” The attraction of these centres includes the availability of cultural supports such as religious organizations, art and music, food, language, and people of similar background, and their international reputation (Figure 5).

This disproportionate concentration has a critical impact on our understanding of immigration issues across the country as a whole. Because the Big 3 are also home to the majority of media sources, business and opinion leaders, think tanks, academics and analysts there are relatively few sources reporting on how the western immigration experience (outside of Vancouver) is different from the rest of Canada. As a result, our perceptions of immigration are influenced by observations and data that may or may not be reflective of the local realities. Most problematic of all, public attitudes towards immigration in the West are skewed by the circumstances of these major centres—often in a negative manner.

Figure 5: Initial destination of immigrants, 2004



Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2005 (preliminary data)

The negativity can stem from the higher numbers of just arriving immigrants settling in these major centers. For that reason alone, new immigrants in Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal face the highest employment barriers associated with acquiring language skills, having their foreign work and education experiences rated and recognized, and beginning job searches and networking.

Not surprisingly, then, immigrants in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver face much higher rates of unemployment than immigrants who arrive in many western destinations (Chui 2003). In a 2001 survey of all people unemployed in Toronto aged 25-54, 38% were immigrants, much higher than the 14% in Calgary. Again, the point to underline is that the experiences of immigrants in the major immigration centres are unique and not representative of immigration in less popular destinations.

Similarly, delays associated with the recognition of foreign work experience and education are primarily a function of the capacity of provincial licensing agencies, educational institutions and professional associations. The processing and evaluation speed of these services will be a function of the number of requests received. Delays can result in underemployment, unemployment and negative perceptions associated with the seemingly ubiquitous circumstances of underemployment.

The apparent frequency of crime and racial tensions will also influence the populations outside of these major destinations. Due to the higher numbers of immigrants in the major centers there will be more incidents reported—irrespective of the actual per

capita rates of crime in those cities. Again, the local policy thinkers and media centres are influenced by these local realities and yet this impacts western perceptions.

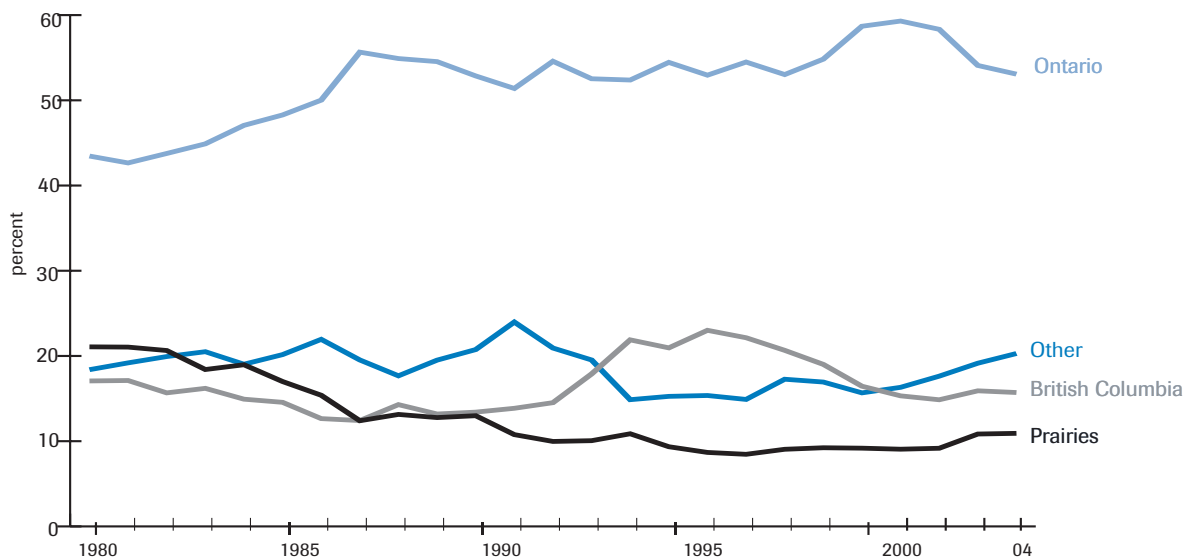
For the 28% of immigrants who settle outside of Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto, they are more likely to have employment secured, more likely to earn a better wage (Chui 2003), and represent smaller portions of the population. Therefore, the merits of immigration and immigration policy in western Canada ought to be evaluated on western data whenever possible.

**2. Prairies Share of Immigrants in Decline**

A second trend affecting western immigration is the overall declining rate of immigrants choosing western Canada as an immigration destination. Proportionately, the number of immigrants choosing to live in the West (including Vancouver) is nearly one-half the levels of 20 years ago (Figure 6). Most of this loss has been picked up by increased immigration activity in Ontario. Buoyed by Manitoba’s immigrations successes 2003 and 2004 have seen this trend reverse upwards, yet nevertheless the West share of immigrants remains below its share of the population. (Note: these data reflect only the first destination of immigrants. Immigrants who move after a period of acclimation may settle in western Canada.)

Relatively light immigration rates can have a number of negative consequences. Chief among these is the impact on future labour needs. Western Canada, like many other parts of the world, is in competition to find a future labour force to replace the baby boom workforce that is nearing retirement. This urgency stems not only from the need to maintain economic productivity, but also from the need to increase the tax-paying base to help pay for the increased cost of delivering health services that an aging population will need. A consequence of the West’s inability to draw a proportional share of immigrants suggests that the region will face a relatively tough road in trying to fill these shortages.

Immigration’s potential role in filling future labour demand is not well understood. Changes in technology, wage increases, productivity increases, and better education and training of Canadians will mean that not every predicted lost job will need an immigrant replacement—some jobs

**Figure 6:** Initial destination of immigrants by region, 1980-2004

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2005 (preliminary data)

will become obsolete, the retirement age may increase, labour force participation rates may improve in underutilized segments of the population (e.g., Aboriginals) and people may work longer hours more efficiently. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to assume that some labour shortages will remain and others will emerge.

In areas of near full employment and in particular sectors, however, these shortages are almost certain to occur. Immigration policy, if it can be responsive, offers the potential to maintain positive economic momentum by filling in these needs rapidly and with the skilled resources. However, that is a very big “if” and the critiques of current immigration policies identified in our consultations rightfully center upon a lack of responsiveness.

The process of correctly identifying a market need, communicating that need to local industry and international agencies, locating immigrants who fit that need, and having people immigrate to Canada itself is only part of the problem. Upon arrival in Canada, immigrants will then experience delays in getting approval for prior experience and education to satisfy licensing authorities, acquiring the training or additional education needed to for qualify work in Canada, and acquiring the language and Canadian work experiences to land a job.

Although the depth of the predicted labour shortage crunch is still a few years away and may vary in severity, a number of skilled labour shortages have been identified. Evidence of these shortages can be found in a number of sources:

- 62 out of 76 industry associations surveyed by Canada West Foundation indicate they currently see signs of shortages of skilled labour (Hirsch 2004);
- Canadian Federation of Independent Business survey finds nearly half of all small and medium enterprises worry about labour shortages (59% in Manitoba and 55% in Alberta) (CFIB 2002);
- Alberta Government describes severe labour shortages in the health care, information technology, and construction sectors (Government of Alberta 2001);
- BC Government states that education, health, utilities, government and forestry services will face future shortages (Government of BC 2001a);
- ITAC Commission states BC faces serious trades and technical shortages that Canadian training cannot meet (Government of BC 2001b);
- Unemployment rate was 0.5% in health professionals in Alberta (Government of Alberta 2001); and

- Alberta (4.5%) and Manitoba (5.4%) have unemployment levels that are significantly below the national average (7.3%) (Statistics Canada 2005) and have been for several years. In these regions, the value of immigrant skilled labour is perhaps the highest.

Due to its lower share of overall immigration levels, the West also fails to maximize the export and job creation advantages associated with higher levels of immigration. This has an impact on both the economy of the West and the perceptions of the benefits of immigration held by westerners. Research suggests that immigrants, over the long-term, are substantial net economic contributors to growth. Findings include:

- Business-class immigrants contributed an estimated \$2.6 billion between 1986-1990 (Kunin 1995);
- Entrepreneur-class immigrants for 2002 contributed over 800 full- and part-time jobs in Alberta and BC (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2003);
- Each immigrant generates an additional \$3,000 in exports (Head and Ries 1995);
- 10% increase in immigration generates 1% increase in exports (Head and Ries 1995); and,
- Cultural diversity brings new ideas and innovation to business solutions (Thomas 1992).

Policy driven efforts to increase immigration, such as those undertaken by the Manitoba government, do appear to lead to positive economic outcomes in those areas in need of population growth. Net economic growth activity fueled by immigrant contributions can, in turn, have a positive impact on regional public opinion toward immigrants.

### 3. Lack of Awareness of the Role of immigration

A third major trend influencing immigration in western Canada is a lack of awareness of the importance or value of immigration to the region's future. While, on the whole, westerners exhibit more favourable attitudes towards immigration than does the rest of Canada, these data are influenced by strong positive impressions of immigration in Saskatchewan and Manitoba (Angus Reid Group 2000, Légér 2002, Palmer 1999).

Even though there is encouraging economic data on the role of immigrants, for the most part the potential economic importance (both now and in the future) is not well understood by the general public. As a consequence, immigration issues do not rank as a significant concern to western Canadians. Of the 13 policy

issues polled in Canada West Foundation's 2003 and 2004 Looking West Surveys, increasing immigration was the least important concern for western Canadians—by a wide margin. In the 2004 survey, only one in 10 westerners saw attracting immigrants as a high priority (CWF 2004).

Ironically, the same surveys found that “ensuring skilled labour” ranked as the second highest priority (71% of westerners rated this as a high priority) (CWF 2004). These data are telling. There is a clear recognition of the current and future skilled labour shortage in western Canada, but virtually no connection with immigration's role in supplying labour. While a part of this variance may be attributed to a belief that immigration is not necessary to meet labour shortages, it is reasonable to conclude that there is currently very little public understanding of the role of immigration in the future economies of the region.

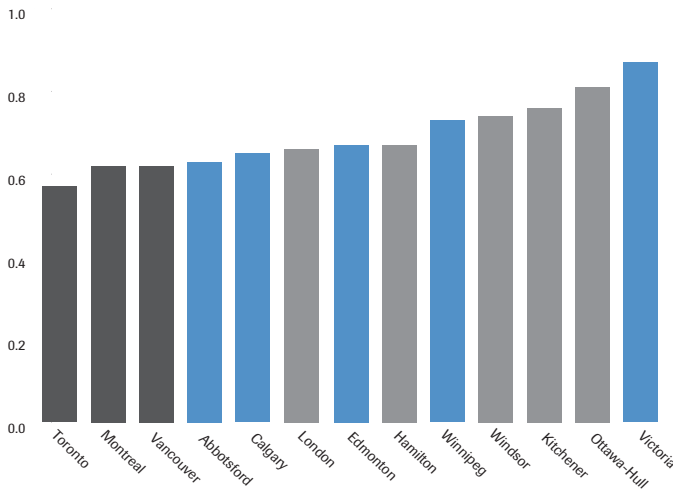
### 4. Economic Successes of Immigrants in the West

In spite of (or perhaps because of) the lower proportion of immigrants that first settle in the West, recent immigrants may fair better economically in many smaller western cities. Male immigrants aged 25-54 and working full-time in medium and smaller sized cities for example, are more likely to be earning wages that are closer to non-immigrant wages (Figure 7) than are immigrants in Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal. Immigrants in Canada's largest cities earn on average only 60% of non-immigrant wages. This compares with immigrant wages that are over 70% equivalent in Winnipeg and over 80% equivalent in Victoria. These data imply a good opportunity for economic advancement, and low barriers to entering the workforce in these cities.

Figure 8 demonstrates another economic advantage of smaller and mid-sized cities, particularly in the West. Male immigrants aged 25-54 in western Canada's cities are significantly more likely to be employed full-time than are immigrants in the rest of Canada. The six cities in which immigrant unemployment rates are most closely matched to Canadian-born rates are all located in the West. Winnipeg immigrant employment levels are the highest at only 1.4 to 1 ratio.

The stronger immigrant employment situation in the West is reflective of employment activity in the region and lower concentrations of recent immigrants. Combined, these data suggest it is easier for those immigrants who settle in the

**Figure 7:** Ratio of average recent immigrants earnings to Canadian-born aged 25-54 males in CMAs, 2000 (immigrants 1991-1999 only)



Source: Chui 2004

West to enter the workforce. However, it should be noted that these data cannot indicate if the employment is more likely to be within the immigrant’s area of study or experience in the West, only that immigrants are more likely to have a job.

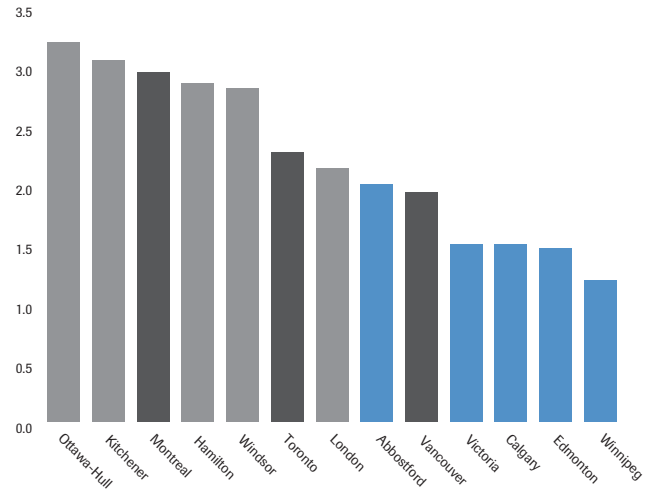
**5. Non-recognition of Foreign Experiences and Education**

The immigration trend with arguably the highest profile in recent months is that of foreign credential recognition. A seemingly increasing number of immigrants are experiencing underemployment in low paying or menial positions in Canada. This change has been coincident with the emergence of the credentials-driven knowledge-based economy. The decades-long swing in employment towards technology and service industries has brought increased profile to the immigrant credential recognition problem.

As ubiquitous as these underemployment circumstances may seem, solving the “foreign credential problem” has eluded federal and provincial policy solutions to date, despite considerable and noble efforts. The large number of actors involved and vested interests in the credential recognition process, and the well-entrenched attitudes of employers to favour Canadian-experience, represent sizeable and in some cases near immovable barriers.

Before delving into this issue, it is best to properly frame this issue not as a foreign credentialing problem, but rather as problem with the non-recognition of foreign experiences and education. In practice, the actual process of receiving appropriate paper credentials is regimented (although slow) and

**Figure 8:** Ratio of unemployed recent Immigrants to Canadian-born aged 25-54 males in CMAs, 2000 (immigrants 1991-1999 only)



Source: Chui 2004

the expectations of the cost and length of the process will often be available to immigrants either before coming to the Canada or upon arrival through employment assistance services for immigrants. There may be language tests to take, applications, testing and annual fees for obtaining sufficient work licenses, the re-taking of classes or entire degrees, required classes on Canadian standards, and technical proficiency exams. This is an onerous set of tasks, and not without efficiency critiques, but the process is transparent and accountable.

The more germane policy issue involves the non-recognition of foreign obtained education and work experience through the use of standards and biases by employers, professional associations and governments. These standards may not be current or relevant, can be overly difficult and costly to achieve, vary from province to province seemingly without explanation, and may even be part of latent wage protection policies designed to keep the supply of labour low.

Problematically, the application of these standards is subject to concerns that they are not only in place to protect public health. The same minimum qualifications designed to ensure a health and safety standard may also be used as a means to support the education system in Canada by discounting degrees obtained abroad. Setting a high standard can also be used to control the escalating costs of delivering public services by limiting the availability and access to some services.

For this report, we examined the current variance among the western provinces on their approaches to professional designations in the areas of engineering, teaching, nursing, and international medical graduates. This review raises interesting questions as to how and why standards are set, as it appears that the acceptable minimum standard can vary between the provinces. Notable areas of variance included number of years of education and hours of experience for certification to be a teacher, the need for Canadian-specific work experience and an English language requirement for engineers, and a host of differences for international doctors including the length of Canadian-resident requirements, assessment periods, type of program required, length of servitude in rural areas and English language minimums. Considering these differences, it appears that the supply and demand for labour, coupled with employer needs and the objectives of professional associations, can play a role in determining what is a minimum standard.

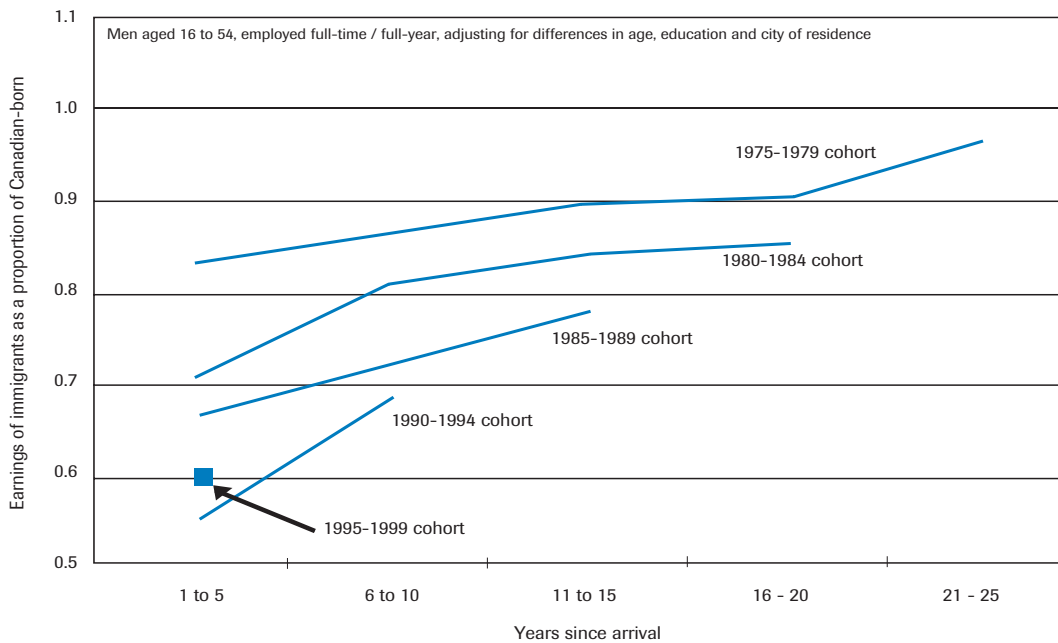
Even if immigrants are able to meet these standards, they can face hiring practices that informally further devalue their foreign work experiences relative to Canadian work experience. Meeting the minimum required skills (e.g., English language testing) for a position may also not be sufficient if other candidates with less experience better meet the employer’s expectations. The issues of non-recognition and devaluation of foreign education and

experiences by employers and non-government industry associations are not easily met by policy-based solutions.

The resulting underemployment of immigrants associated with these practices is costly for Canada. Estimates suggest that eliminating or reducing underemployment could result in billions of dollars of additional wage income annually for Canadians (Bloom and Grant 2001). These wages would be created from the combined effect of reduced unemployment for those not working and reduced underemployment for those working in unrelated occupations. It is estimated that in Alberta alone, the unemployment of international medical graduates cost the province between \$34 and \$64 million in wasted human capital (Emery 2002). Emery found that the average annual earnings of those unlicensed foreign medical graduates who had at least a part-time job was only \$16,500.

The combination of these trends has also had a significant impact on the earnings of immigrants. Each successive cohort of immigrants coming to Canada between 1975 and 1994 found that their starting wages were increasingly devalued compared to Canadian-born workers (Figure 9). As a consequence, it now takes longer for immigrants to “catch up.” Indeed, research indicates that recent immigrants may never earn an equivalent wage as their entry

**Figure 9:** Earnings of male immigrants relative to Canadian-born counterparts by landing cohort and years since arrival



Source: Chui 2004



point has declined so low that too few working years are available to catch up. (It is of note that the 1995-1999 cohort was able to reverse this trend slightly.)

This decline is primarily associated with the declining value of foreign education and experience relative to changes in Canadian education and training over the last 20 years (Chui 2003). Better Canadian education programs and increased enrollment rates in post-secondary training have increased the supply of Canadian labour, and in doing so increased the competition faced by immigrants (Reitz, 2005). Subsequently, employers have more candidates with the requisite skills and Canadian backgrounds to choose from in the hiring process. Immigrant wages have been in decline because their relative lack of Canadian experience is an employment barrier.

This analysis is not meant to suggest that Canadian experience or education is superior to internationally acquired credentials. Rather, the implication is that there is an employer bias towards hiring and promoting individuals with Canadian experience. These biases may be masking a host of other issues, including discriminatory hiring policies and inadequate language skills among immigrants (Ruddick 2003). This problem can be self-perpetuating if employers see few incentives to participate in developing Canadian experience among immigrants.

Also driving wages downward is the fact that, in spite of the diminished earnings over the 1990s, the supply of immigrant labour has remained strong. The leakage (emigration out of Canada) of immigrants in the 1990s remained small—only 4.3% of tax-filing immigrants in the 1990s had emigrated by 2000 (Dryburgh and Hamel 2004). The declining wages and underemployment of immigrants has not encouraged immigrants to leave Canada for greener pastures. However, for immigrant doctors and health care managers (both high need occupations) the leakage rate is more than double at 11.7% (Dryburgh and Hamel 2004). Policies that have created relatively low immigrant wages may have higher economic costs in these areas where international competition for human capital is strongest.

Finally, the inefficiencies created by the non-recognition of foreign credentials data have lead some to suggest that government immigration targets are set too high or are aiming at the wrong type of immigrants. Given the embedded nature of forces contributing to the mismatch of skills and labour needs, these types of conclusions are understandable, yet perhaps off the

mark. What is more urgently needed are policy instruments that can encourage employer and professional organization behaviour in a manner that more readily accepts the previously obtained skills of immigrants. These instruments can include an evaluation of existing standards for relevancy, providing resources to assist in the evaluation of international programs, diversity and awareness programs for employers, and access to research on the economic value of immigrant hiring.

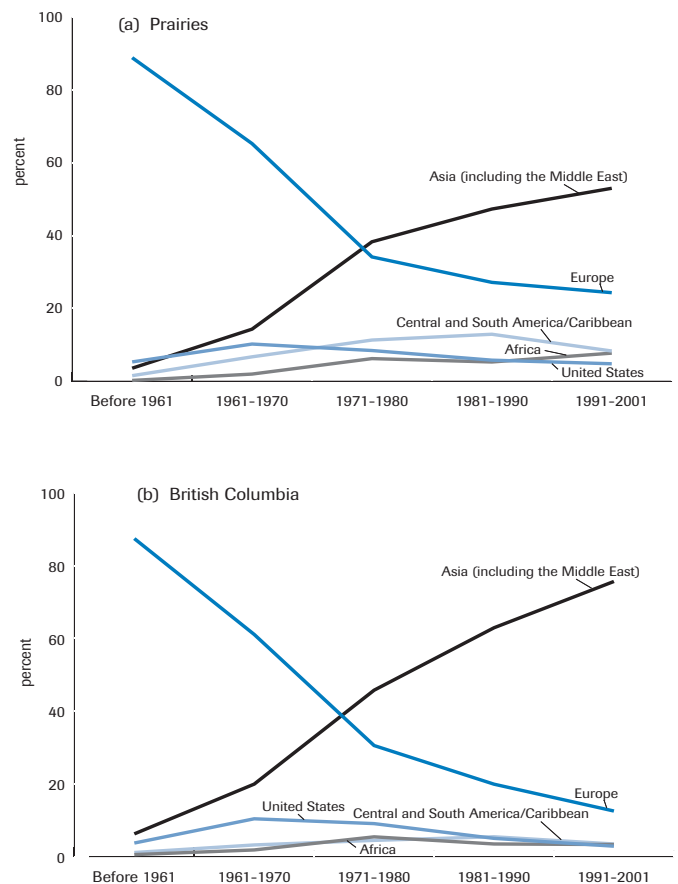
**6. Changing demographics among immigrants in western Canada.**

The unique demographics of western Canadian immigrants serve to amplify some of the preceding trends and mute others. Features of the western Canadian immigrant population also highlight the importance of some policy solutions. Four of the more relevant demographic changes are:

*1. Increasing proportions of Asian and Middle Eastern immigrants*

Over the last four decades, Asian and Middle Eastern immigrants have increasingly made western Canada their

**Figure 10:** Immigration to western Canada by source country (%)



Source: CIC 2004

arrival destination (Figure 10). For the period 1991-2001, almost 80% of BC immigrants and 60% of immigrants to the prairie provinces were from the Middle East and Asia. African immigrants in the prairie provinces have also doubled in the last 30 years. These changes have run parallel to a decline in formerly higher concentrations of European immigrants. This change has meant new language and cultural issues for the agencies that work on settlement and transitions to the workplace, and for the employers and communities of the West.

These data have an important policy impact in the West. Asian and African immigrants face the most substantial employment obstacles. The employment rate of Asian immigrants aged 25-44 was only 49.3% –the second lowest after African Immigrants (Chui 2003). Inherent in these data are language barriers, credential delays, and the devaluation of immigrant degrees and work experiences relative to Canadian-born workers described earlier.

Asian immigrants (a majority of western Canadian immigrants) in particular face a substantial earnings penalty. Research suggests that Asian immigrants, both with and without credentials, appear to gain the least value from their previous experiences and education, when compared to other immigrant groups (Najm 2001; Ferrer and Riddell 2003). Addressing the systemic barriers associated with the underemployment of Asian immigrants is a particularly pronounced problem for western Canada.

2. The Emergence of Provincial Nominee Programs

The last decade has brought provincial policy inroads into immigration through Provincial Nominee Programs (PNP) that allow the provinces to cooperate with the federal government in selecting individuals for immigration. Provincial agreements are different in each province, based on provincial needs and available resources. Of the provinces, Manitoba’s approach is the most aggressive (Figure 11). Half of all Manitoba immigrants now enter through a provincial immigration procedure as part of a provincial population strategy.

There are a number of positive outcomes associated with the use of PNP that bear consideration. First, PNP procedures can ensure, at least initially, that improved immigrant distribution can occur to non-major centers by accepting immigrants who are willing to settle in specific areas. Second, the use of temporary workers already in Canada as candidates for PNP allows the immigration candidates to experience the climate and culture of the place they will live prior to immigration. Similarly, these immigrants can jump start their language training and already be familiar with housing and transportation issues.

A third major benefit of PNP is the direct involvement of employers in sponsoring immigrants. This allows a modicum of control of labour shortage issues faced by employers and may also be helpful in streamlining the credentialing process.

**Figure 11: What are your thoughts on provincial nominee immigration programs? Have they been successful in addressing local immigration needs?**

Calgary	Regina	Winnipeg	Vancouver	Edmonton
800 available spots, but only a fraction of that space used by immigrants.  Manitoba appears to have done a good job with its PNP but some of those immigrants leave and come to Calgary.  AB government has not given much profile to the program. Should use PNP more by also engaging communities, and employers in the selection process.	PNP is part of solution but it needs more funding and profile.  Federal role (e.g., security checks) needs to get done more quickly.  Good program; the only thing is the lack of funding support to settlement agencies.  PNP needs more profile, need to let employers know more about the program.  PNP represents a good start on the kind of idea that will be successful in Saskatchewan.	It is clear that the PNP has been effective in attracting immigrants to Winnipeg; now retention must be the focus.  PNP is a successful in addressing local population and employment needs.  PNP programs have higher public profile than federal immigration issues.  Some immigrants lose their PNP job offers because of lengthy immigration process.	PNPs are successful and program to be modified to allow a focus on specific regions and industries of higher needs.  Many skilled immigrants in BC are already not properly integrated, it is hard to suggest an overall need to attract more under PNP. Given these circumstances, targeting needed.  Low awareness of the program, a very small part of the immigration process in BC.  Successful program that needs to work on shortening immigration process.  More likely to be successful if supported by other services, (e.g., help to start business, or find employment).  Need more information about the program at the professional associations and regulatory bodies levels.	More emphasis and profile needed for the program at the provincial and municipal levels in Alberta.  Modify the criteria to also allow for addressing family reunification needs within the PNP.  PNP program should be reflective of the demographics of the city.  Importance of foreign worker recruitment workshops for employers.  Streamline the PNP process. It is currently very complex and intimidating (federal/provincial complexity).

Finally, the PNP allow each province to address their own specific needs and immigration issues. The result is a range of programs that allow some flexibility and the distribution of immigrants into high need areas and labour markets.

Suitably, the availability of PNP is recognized as a substantial improvement in immigration policy for western Canada. Participants in the Canada West Foundation’s consultations provided an opportunity for some specific feedback on the value of PNP as seen by immigrants and those working in immigration fields. On the whole, PNP were viewed as good programs that, with greater exposure and resource investment, have the potential to serve as a population growth strategy in Saskatchewan, and for regionalization and specific labour needs in Alberta and BC.

### 3. Refugee Immigrants

The prairie provinces are home to a much higher proportion of Canada’s protected persons immigrants—38% of the 10,500 government-assisted and private refugees class in 2004 settled in West compared with only 26% for the immigrant population as a whole (CIC 2005, preliminary data). Saskatchewan is of particular note as 27% of all immigrants that settled there in 2004 had government-assisted and private refugees class status, compared to a national average of only 4.5%—more than five times as many.

The implications of these data are varied. The prairie region benefits strongly from the humanitarian effects of immigration, fostering compassion within communities. Yet the economic contributions of refugee immigrants may be less vibrant than economic class immigrants. A 2001 Statistics Canada survey found that 59% of economic class immigrants were employed at the time of the survey compared to 39% of family class and only 21% of refugee class immigrants (Chui 2003).

Refugee needs also place an additional burden on community supports in the West because the specific circumstances of their compassionate grounds can require social supports that are not easily created or made available. Given the high numbers of non-economic class immigrants in the West, the double impact of employment barriers and additional support needs make refugee assistance programs a high profile western concern.

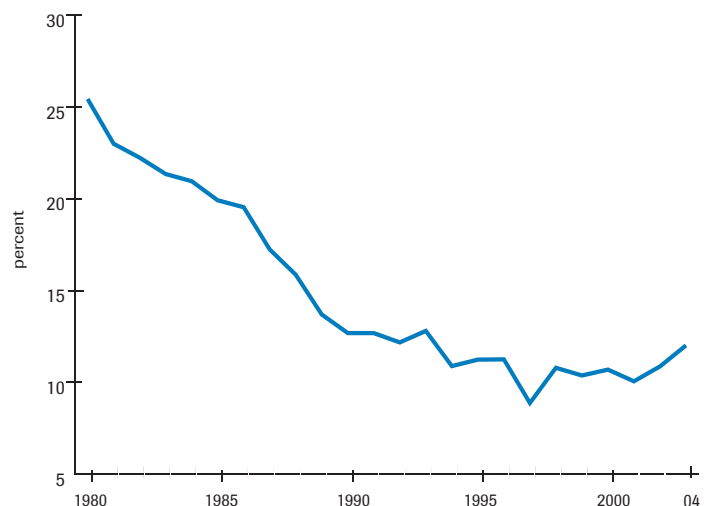
### 4. Urbanization

A final point of discussion relates to the increasing urbanization of immigrants (Figure 12). Western immigrants, much like Canadian-born residents, are increasingly finding that urban settings offer the cultural and employment opportunities that suit their needs. In particular, the past rural job opportunities for immigrants associated with stronger resource-based rural economic activity have eroded in recent years. There are now fewer economic motivations for immigrants to head to rural areas.

This trend represents a rural development challenge. Rural areas that do have job opportunities for immigrants must compete against the draw of the urban centers. Doing so requires the ready availability of jobs for immigrants and some minimum community supports (e.g., churches, schools, language training, suitable climate). Communities have great difficulty creating these artificial draws and in the absence of temporary restriction on mobility rights, there are few policy tools available to reverse this trend.

While the immigrant rural success stories in recent years are admittedly rare, they are not without promise for other communities. Southern Manitoba, in particular, has flourished due to a combination of economic opportunity and community awareness of the value of immigrants. The economic success of Winkler or Steinbach in Manitoba or Brooks in Alberta cannot be replicated in every western rural areas, but offer instruction on the needs of rural immigrants.

Figure 12: % of western immigrants settling outside cities



Source: Citizen and Immigration Canada 2005 (preliminary data)

As rural attitudes shift towards being more welcoming toward immigrants, rural communities may be more readily positioned to take advantage of those windows of economic activity as they occur. There is significant rural competition for those few industries that can operate profitably in rural areas. Communities that are perceived as offering a suitable climate to absorb immigrant workers will have a distinct advantage.

One positive outcome for rural areas relates to the Provincial Nominee Programs. These programs have given the provinces the ability to select immigrants who have specific knowledge of the rural areas, the climate, and the employment circumstances, and fit rural development needs. As a result, in Alberta (45%) and Saskatchewan (40%) almost half of PNP immigrants have settled outside the cities.

## **Conclusion**

Over the past year, this project has considered immigration from the unique perspective of the western provinces and, as a result, has identified a number of unique policy priorities and conclusions. On the whole, the research we obtained and analyzed suggests that, although there are proportionately fewer immigrants coming to the West, those who do settle in the region fare better economically than do immigrants in other parts of Canada. Most of the region draws fewer immigrants because it lacks the international profile of Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal, and may not have climate and cultural and familial supports available elsewhere—yet not for a lack of opportunity for economic success.

Immigrants in the West provide a host of non-economic, cultural and humanitarian contributions to the region and provide important population growth possibilities, particularly in high need areas. There are a number of immigration successes, particularly in Manitoba, that point to and underline the contributions that immigrants are making to the West in manufacturing, community building, population growth, innovation, development of export markets, and cultural diversity. Even in the Vancouver region, with its high concentrations of immigrants, there were few concerns expressed that the city needs fewer immigrants. Indeed, the focus of participants at our consultations was on how to bring the similar benefits of immigration into the surrounding areas and on improving

settlement for those immigrants who are drawn to the city. In spite of this potential, the immigration experience is flawed and immigrants are not able to achieve their potential. While a complete fix may elude current policy instruments, improving the immigrant experience and deriving more societal benefit for the West is within the scope of policy change. The following recommendations gathered from our consultations and research suggest that much can be done to make the region more welcoming to immigrants and, perhaps more importantly, to allow for the economic and non-economic potential of immigrants to be more fully realized. Many current immigrant struggles in the West (e.g., skill recognition, processing delays, employer prejudices, negative public attitudes, lack of affordable housing, insufficient language training) represent concerns that can be eased through direction from governments, employers, professional associations and community agencies.

### **Recommendations**

#### **1. Research and promote the contributions of immigrants in western Canada**

The merits of immigration in western Canada ought be evaluated and promoted on a regular basis to publicize the economic and non-economic opportunities available to immigrants who choose the West as a destination. This requires regular research on the labour market outcomes of immigrants and the positive contributions of immigrants to community quality of life. Public awareness of the positive impacts of immigration can, in turn, have a positive impact on regional public opinion toward immigrants. This is particularly true in the West, where public attitudes towards immigration are negatively skewed by the circumstances of the major immigrant destinations.

#### **2. Develop new measures by which to evaluate successful immigration outcomes**

Underlying the first recommendation is the need to develop a means to measure immigrants' value that includes: (1) multi-generational immigration outcomes; (2) both the economic and non-economic contributions of immigrants; and, (3) data that are not measured relative to Canadian-born workers. The evaluation of immigration policy requires time frames that extend beyond a single generation as arguably the direct impact of immigration extends to at least the children of immigrants raised in Canada. Suitable measures of immigrant value would also calculate contributions that immigrants make to non-economic activity such as volunteerism, arts and culture, politics, and the running of governments. Finally, measurement

criteria should be independent from the accomplishments of Canadian-born workers as a control group. The economic performance of immigrants and Canadian-born populations are influenced by different enough factors that make relative comparisons less instructive for creating policy change.

### **3. Provide employer education and information on the positive economic value of foreign experience and training**

While a number of federal and provincial efforts are underway to address the issues of speeding skill recognitions and foreign credential processing, and to provide more opportunities for training, there is also an employer component that needs to be addressed. Employers need education and information on the value to their organizations of foreign training and work experience to help lower the bar facing immigrants once they have obtained the requisite paper credentials for employment. Employers (and governments) should also be encouraged to implement hiring and promotion practices that represent the proportion of immigrants in the population.

### **4. Make available more advanced language training for adults in jobs and for immigrant children in schools**

Language barriers for immigrants in western Canada are particularly pronounced as high proportions of Asian, African and Middle Eastern immigrants settle in the West. Addressing the employment and learning barriers associated with language training for these groups represents a higher need priority in western Canada. Employer and school involvement in language training is also needed in order for the training to be geared to the skills needed to work and learn. In-school and in-job language programs need to be developed and funded.

### **5. Centralize information for immigrants regarding employment, education and regulation, provision of basic needs, and cultural opportunities**

The lack of availability of accurate information on the climate, culture, living costs, and job markets prior to immigration is a significant deficiency of current immigration policy. Good accurate information means that the experiences of immigrants upon arrival better match their expectations regarding job qualifications, expected income level, demographic profile of the community, etc. Better and more readily available labour market information, for example, could reduce underemployment issues upon arrival as immigrants know in advance what skills are in demand and what qualifications are required.

### **6. Collaboration between different areas of government, social service organization, school systems and employers**

Lack of coordination or a single overarching body among the numerous agencies that deal with immigration creates a disjointed and complex immigration process. An entity to coordinate the overseas immigration offices, governments, employers and associations, school systems, social service agencies, and community groups would greatly enhance and clarify the immigrant experience and better use the existing resources.

### **7. Increase funding of the immigrant selection and screening process**

Many of the participants at our consultations spoke of the overburdened and troublesome nature of the selection and screening process for immigration into Canada. A host of problems related to these conditions include long time delays, poor application of the selection criteria, failure to meet immigration targets and perceptions of an increased security risk. Time delays can also contribute to immigrant underemployment by increasing the gap between identifying labour market needs and being able to fill those needs with immigrants.

### **8. Base immigration selection criteria on improved market data**

More accurate information on the specific labour needs and shortages in specific communities is needed to inform and alter immigrant selection criteria. The current bias towards higher education in selection criteria may no longer be as relevant given the apparent underemployment and non-recognition of skills of immigrants once they arrive. The mismatch of skills and labour can be reduced if the immigrant selection process considered providing additional immigration opportunities for lower skilled immigrants.

### **9. Invest in building local capacities to welcome, integrate and retain immigrants**

In particular, municipally-driven initiatives to create community-specific approaches to improving immigration experiences in cities are required. The lack of sufficient municipal engagement was an oft-repeated concern of participants in our consultations as municipalities have resources, and coordination and communication capacities, that are needed to upgrade the local capacity to help immigrants.

## 10. Enhance the policy focus on the needs of refugee immigrants in western Canada

The employment barriers and support needs faced by refugee immigrants may be the most pronounced of all immigrants. Given the high numbers of non-economic class immigrants in the western provinces, there is a need to focus on increasing employability and employment opportunities for refugee class immigrants. Refugee class immigrants can also have higher community service needs and fewer family supports available. Hence, policy and funding ought to recognize these extra burdens faced by many western communities and provide suitable policy instruments to support them (e.g., higher minimum wage, more affordable housing, higher social assistance rates).

## 11. Provide incentives and opportunities for immigrants to settle in areas other than the main urban centres.

Although immigrants have the same mobility rights as Canadian-born residents, there are policy tools via incentives that can encourage population growth in designated high-needs locations. Underlying the data on the declining earning incomes of immigrants is an apparent disconnect between high-need jobs areas, and the settlement preference of new immigrants. Business loans, income support, additional training opportunities, family reunification priority and other incentives exist that can help reduce the risk of leaving the broader community supports

available in the urban immigrant destination. Similar incentives can also be made available to communities themselves to acquire the minimum community supports (e.g., churches, schools, language training, housing) needed to create a hospitable integration period for immigrants.

## 12. Use Provincial Nominee Programs to encourage more immigration in high need areas

Policy-driven efforts to increase immigration, such as those undertaken by the Manitoba government under the Provincial Nominee Program, can create population increases in specific targeted areas or industries. Responsibility for the retention of those immigrants requires employers, communities, and governments to cooperate on recognizing and addressing this priority, and to implement welcoming programs, cultural opportunities, and family reunification opportunities.

In sum, the message highlighted by these recommendations is that more can and should be done to assist immigrants as they make the difficult transition from their former homes to their new home in western Canada. The expenditure of more public money on improvements to selection, processing and settlement services can pay off in higher economic returns and reduced social assistance demand, thereby improving the contribution that immigration makes to all Canadians. ■

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