

## **Focus Groups on Newcomer and Immigrant Issues**

### ***Executive Summary***

*Prepared for:*  
Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC)

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*Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français sur demande.*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) commissioned Environics Research Group to conduct qualitative public opinion research among newcomers and settled immigrants. This research was designed to gauge the issues, preferences and needs of newcomers and longer term immigrants to Canada including:

- Key issues facing their communities;
- Views on Canada as a country of immigration;
- Citizenship;
- Settlement and integration
- Views/expectations of the federal government; and
- Communication needs and preferences.

## Methodology

Environics Research conducted a series of 14 focus groups with immigrants to Canada between December 1 and 9, 2014. Sessions were conducted in Surrey, Vancouver, Winnipeg, Brampton, Toronto (2 nights) and Montreal. The two sessions in each of Surrey and Brampton were conducted in Punjabi among South Asians, the two sessions in Vancouver with Richmond residents were conducted in Mandarin, two of the sessions in Toronto were conducted in Cantonese and one session in Montreal with newcomers from Lebanon was conducted in French. Five sessions with Filipinos in Winnipeg (2), Toronto (2) and Montreal (1) were conducted in English. In each location, one focus group was conducted with people who were permanent residents or Canadian citizens who had arrived within the past five years. The second group consisted of Canadian residents and citizens who had lived in Canada for five to 10 years. The fourteen sessions were distributed as follows:

Date and time	Group Composition
December 1, 5:30 p.m. PAC	In Canada 5 yrs or less – Surrey, British Columbia (Punjabi)
December 1, 7:30 p.m. PAC	In Canada 5-10 yrs – Surrey, British Columbia (Punjabi)
December 2, 5:30 p.m. PAC	In Canada 5 yrs or less – Richmond, British Columbia (Mandarin)
December 2, 7:30 p.m. PAC	In Canada 5-10 yrs – Richmond, British Columbia (Mandarin)
December 3, 5:30 p.m. CTL	In Canada 5 yrs or less – Winnipeg, Manitoba (Filipinos in English)
December 3, 7:30 p.m. CTL	In Canada 5-10 yrs – Winnipeg, Manitoba (Filipinos in English)
December 4, 5:30 p.m. EDT	In Canada 5 yrs or less – Brampton, Ontario (Punjabi)
December 4, 7:30 p.m. EDT	In Canada 5-10 yrs – Brampton, Ontario (Punjabi)
December 6, 11:00 a.m. EDT	In Canada 5 yrs or less – Toronto, Ontario (Filipinos in English)
December 6, 1:00 p.m. EDT	In Canada 5-10 yrs – Toronto, Ontario (Filipinos in English)
December 8, 5:30 p.m. EDT	In Canada 5 yrs or less – Toronto, Ontario (Cantonese)

Date and time	Group Composition
December 8, 7:30 p.m. EDT	In Canada 5-10 yrs – Toronto, Ontario (Cantonese)
December 9, 5:30 p.m. EDT	In Canada 10 yrs or less – Montreal, Quebec (Lebanese in French)
December 9, 7:30 p.m. EDT	In Canada 10 yrs or less – Montreal, Quebec (Filipinos in English)

The participants were recruited using a combination of random calls to individuals and use of a database of individuals, identified primarily through quantitative surveys, who have agreed to be re-contacted for research purposes. Recruitment involves contacting persons on the list who live in the required geographic regions on a random basis and then screening for eligibility according to the study design.

**Statement of Limitations:** Qualitative research provides insight into the range of opinions held within a population, rather than the weights of the opinions held, as would be measured in a quantitative study. The results of this type of research should be viewed as indicative rather than projectable.

**Use of research:** By gauging and analyzing the opinions of newcomers and immigrants, the Government of Canada gains insights into important policy areas related to the mandate of the department and related services. The information gained through this public opinion research will be shared throughout Citizenship and Immigration Canada to assist it when establishing priorities, developing policies, and planning programs and services.

The total cost for completing this research is \$158,355.25 (including HST).

## General Findings

### Priorities for the federal government

- The cited top issue cited most often by participants related to jobs. Quite a few participants – especially those who arrived in Canada within the last 5 years – suggested that the federal government’s top priority should revolve around the settlement of immigrants, including helping them find training and jobs, language training, and improving foreign credential recognition . Other priorities mentioned less often included child care, pensions, services for seniors and cheaper prescription drugs.

### Current economic situation in Canada

- When participants were asked to circle words that they felt best described the state of the Canadian economy, they tended to select a variety of positive and negative words. For the most part recent immigrants – particularly those arriving in the last five years – chose positive words such as “stable”, “strong”, “growing”, “competitive” and “safe” to describe the economy. Negative words chosen included “sluggish”, “uneven”, “unreliable” and

“stagnant”. In explaining the more negative words they selected, some felt that Canada needed more investments, either by government or by the private sector, which would create jobs.

- Views on the current state of the Canadian economy were often framed in relation to the economic performance in the United States or their former country. Participants would often compare the Canadian economy favourably to that of the countries from where they came and there was also some sentiment that Canada’s economy was sluggish, “un-dynamic” and “just OK.” The word “stable” was often used, but concerns were also expressed about the difficulties people have in finding work.
- There was also a widely held belief that Canada had withstood the world recession better than other countries – especially the U.S. There were also concerns voiced about the growing income gap among some people and a lack of jobs with decent wages.
- Most participants had a hard time identifying threats to the Canadian economy as a whole. Some mentioned the declining price of oil, the falling dollar, the possibility of another global recession, or a possible bursting of a Canadian housing bubble at some point.

### **Support for Families**

- Top of mind awareness of the federal government’s recent announcements on new supports for families was relatively low. In some cases people confused federal policies with provincial government policies.
- When prompted, a couple of participants in most sessions expressed a vague awareness that the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) was being increased and/or that the Children’s Fitness Tax Credit was increasing. There was also scattered awareness of the proposed Family Tax Cut, or family income splitting. Those who had heard of this measure were able to articulate, to a certain extent, what had been proposed. Based on their understanding of these measures they tended to approve, though some participants who did not have young families wanted measures for older people and single people as well.
- There was some awareness of changes to the live-in caregiver program that allows live-in caregivers the option of living elsewhere, other than their employer’s home and this change was applauded. There was some confusion as to whether it was now easier or harder for people coming to Canada under this program to become permanent residents.

### **Changes to the Citizenship Act**

- When participants were asked for unprompted recollections of changes to the Citizenship Act it was apparent that many participants easily confused policies around citizenship with policies around immigration (e.g. Express entry, changes to family reunification, investor class immigration or requirements to speak fluent English) with changes to citizenship laws.
- When asked to focus specifically on citizenship quite a few participants had at least some awareness about changes to residency requirements to 4 out of 6 years and that the processing fee for citizenship applications had increased. There was less awareness of processing times being reduced, something that received strong approval among

participants. Only the odd person made any unprompted mention of how Canadian citizenship could now be revoked under certain circumstances.

- The vast majority of participants approved of the requirement that those applying for citizenship live in Canada for 4 out of 6 years and be physically in Canada for at least 183 days a year. Many tended to feel that if a person wants to be a citizen they should show some commitment to Canada, and that was best exemplified by living here.
- Participants welcomed faster processing times for citizenship applications but expressed concerns about the cost and some wished they could have the option of paying extra for faster processing. Most participants were not aware that non-citizens can join the Canadian Forces at all, let alone obtain citizenship faster if they do so.
- The new measures around revocation of Canadian citizenship from dual citizens for those convicted of terrorism or treason or other very heinous crimes was somewhat more divisive and confusing. For participants who come from countries that do not allow dual citizenship (such as China) revocation was a non-issue that did not apply to them. But to other participants from places where dual citizenship is permitted, after initially voicing approval of any measure that punishes people for terrorism or treason, some were concerned that dual citizens as a whole were being stigmatized and singled out. Some wondered what would happen to “single citizens” convicted of these crimes.

## Advertising Concepts

Two television and online/print concepts were tested with participants.

- **Ad concept 1** included a TV concept consisting of visuals of citizens engaging in common activities within Canada and a print / online concept addressing the myth that “It is very difficult to become a Canadian citizen.”  
Ad Concept 1 was tested in some initial groups and participants felt it did not convey a clear message. They also perceived the ad to be something that would run outside of Canada to convince potential foreigners to come to Canada, as opposed to being directed towards recent immigrants
- **Ad concept 2** included a TV concept consisting of visuals of the process followed to become a Canadian citizen and a print / online concept addressing the myth that “New citizens are at risk of having their citizenship revoked for minor infractions such as parking tickets.”
  - Participants liked the idea of an ad that promotes Canadian citizenship and tells them where to learn about changes to the Citizenship Act. They liked images of people applying, taking the oath, doing the test and so on, they liked being directed to a website and they found the slogan “Proud. Strong. Free” to be effective. The reference to protecting all Canadians from dual citizens who commit terrorist acts was seen as being out of place in an otherwise “feel good ad”.
  - References to “shorter processing times” stood out to participants, though they wondered why the ad had details about the new revocation policy that applies to the few, while being vague on other changes that affect the many who are in the process of applying for Canadian citizenship.

- Participants emphasized that many, if not most, people immigrate to Canada in the first place to join family members in Canada or because they think it will be a benefit to their children to grow up in Canada. Thus, there were several suggestions that the ad ought to include images of families.
- The print ad that was tested focused entirely on exploding the myth that changes to the *Citizenship Act* would mean that dual citizens could have their citizenship revoked even for very minor misdemeanors such as a parking infraction. No participant thought that citizenship could be revoked for minor crimes, although there was some confusion as to what serious crimes might lead to revocation.

### **Radicalization**

- The introduction of the topic of radicalization among young people in Canada did not spark a lot of discussion. Most participants were aware of isolated cases they had heard about in the media. They tended to view these cases as wayward youth who could just as easily have turned to drug addiction or crime.
- Participants tended to dismiss the idea that young people in their own communities were becoming radicalized, noting that they had not witnessed this phenomenon in their respective communities.

### **Sources of News**

- When asked where they typically get their news and stay up to date on current affairs, participants provided a range of sources, both mainstream and specific to their ethnicity. The Internet is a very popular destination for news. Participants noted that they could easily access a wide variety of sites and get the exact type of news that interested them the most, in the language of their choice.
- Television was also cited often, with participants accessing a mix of English and ethnic channels. Radio was mentioned, but wasn't used nearly as much as television and the Internet. Newspapers were mentioned as a source used by many, especially the free dailies, though participants indicated that they used this type of medium less commonly than others. There were also some participants who said they were avid users of social media when it comes to getting the news that matters to them, such as Facebook and Twitter.