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Focus Groups on Newcomer and Immigrant Issues Summary Report

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Prepared for:

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC)

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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 with regard to the issues including:

- Key issues facing their communities;
- Views on Canada as a country of immigration;
- Express Entry;
- Recently announced changes to the Citizenship Act;
- 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 April 11 and 21, 2015. 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 the two sessions in Montreal with newcomers from the Middle East and North Africa were conducted in French. Four sessions with Filipinos in Winnipeg (2) and Toronto (2) 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
April 11, 10:00 a.m. EDT	In Canada 5 yrs or less – Toronto, Ontario (Filipinos in English)
April 11, 12:00 p.m. EDT	In Canada 5-10 yrs – Toronto, Ontario (Filipinos in English)
April 11, 2:00 p.m. EDT	In Canada 5 yrs or less – Toronto, Ontario (Cantonese)
April 11, 4:00 p.m. EDT	In Canada 5-10 yrs – Toronto, Ontario (Cantonese)
April 13, 5:30 p.m. EDT	In Canada 5 yrs or less – Brampton, Ontario (Punjabi)
April 13, 7:30 p.m. EDT	In Canada 5-10 yrs – Brampton, Ontario (Punjabi)
April 14, 5:30 p.m. PAC	In Canada 5 yrs or less – Surrey, British Columbia (Punjabi)
April 14, 7:30 p.m. PAC	In Canada 5-10 yrs – Surrey, British Columbia (Punjabi)
April 15, 5:30 p.m. PAC	In Canada 5 yrs or less – Richmond, British Columbia (Mandarin)
April 15, 7:30 p.m. PAC	In Canada 5-10 yrs – Richmond, British Columbia (Mandarin)
April 20, 5:30 p.m. EDT	In Canada 10 yrs or less – Montreal, Quebec (Arabs in French)
April 20, 7:30 p.m. EDT	In Canada 10 yrs or less – Montreal, Quebec (Arabs in French)
April 21, 5:30 p.m. CTL	In Canada 5 yrs or less – Winnipeg, Manitoba (Filipinos in English)

Date and time	Group Composition
April 21, 7:30 p.m. CTL	In Canada 5-10 yrs – Winnipeg, Manitoba (Filipinos in English)

The groups lasted approximately 90 to 120 minutes, and consisted of 8 to 10 participants (out of 10 people recruited for each group).

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.

Cost of research

The cost of this research was \$155,958.98 (HST included).

Use of findings of the qualitative 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.

General findings

Participants were asked to identify what they believe should be the current priority for the Government of Canada. More recent immigrants to Canada in particular are often confused as to what issues are federal as opposed to provincial or municipal issues. Some of the more common themes that surfaced included: employment for new Canadians, immigration and citizenship issues, health care and taxes. Other priorities mentioned less often included crime and national security, public transportation and infrastructure, affordable housing, education, and live-in caregiver work conditions. All in all jobs were probably mentioned more often than any other single issue.

When participants were asked to circle words that they felt best described the state of the Canadian economy, they tended to pick a wide variety of words – some with negative and some with positive connotations. Participants very rarely referred to the economy as “strong” and were more likely to refer to it as stable, sluggish, uneven, in crisis, stagnant, weak, tepid and in outright decline. Others chose positive words such as “stable”, “strong”, “growing”, “competitive” and “safe” to describe the economy.

Many participants had a hard time identifying threats to the Canadian economy as a whole since their focus was so personal. Some mentioned the declining price of oil, the falling dollar, terrorist attacks and not taking full advantage of the skills offered by recent immigrants as threats.

Top of mind awareness of the federal government’s recent announcements on new supports for families was relatively low. In most sessions people with children were aware that the UCCB was being increased and to a lesser extent that the tax credit for children’s fitness was going up. There was also scattered awareness of the proposed income splitting measures and those that had heard of it had at least some awareness of what it actually meant.

To the extent that people knew about changes to family support programs, they tended to approve of them. Beyond that, there was clear interest among most participants in how the policies could be expanded to other segments of the population. For instance, participants who did not have young families wondered about programs for older citizens and single people.

Participants struggled to identify issues or actions for the federal government that related specifically to their community. They focused much more on what needed to be done for immigrants in general regardless of where they came from and this took the form of more lenient or supportive family reunification/ family sponsorship policies, better language programs for new immigrants or less rigid language proficiency requirements, and better programs to help immigrants get their credentials recognized in Canada. Less common issues included affordable housing and lowering residency requirements for citizenship.

Overall, awareness of Express Entry was relatively low. Some had simply heard the name and assumed that it would accelerate the immigration process and thus would be a good thing. In some sessions, many claimed to be aware of Express Entry, but rather than describing the new electronic system to manage applications from skilled workers, they cited ways they believed processing times for certain applications could be expedited.

When participants were asked for unprompted recollections of changes to the Citizenship Act, many immigrants confused policies around citizenship with policies around immigration. The most noteworthy immigration-related issue raised here related to “tougher” language requirements and how the exemption from these was being raised to 65 instead of 55.

Participants welcome 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 could join the Canadian Forces at all, let alone get citizenship faster if they do so.

There was little awareness of the new measures around revocation of Canadian citizenship for those convicted of terrorism or treason. Participants were more aware of how citizenship could be revoked for a fraudulent application.

Only a few participants spontaneously mentioned the recent controversy about allowing a woman to wear a niqab during a citizenship oath. Opinion on this issue was very mixed. Some agreed that immigrants ought to adopt “Canadian values” and remove any face covering during the oath. Others felt that Canada was a diverse country with religious freedoms that should be respected. Many wanted some sort of compromise whereby a Muslim woman could show her face in private to verify her identity and then cover her face when in a room full of people for the actual ceremony.

Opinion was also very mixed about Canada’s involvement in the conflict with ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Some thought Canada had a duty to take part alongside our allies. Others felt that Canada should be a country of peace and would risk making itself a target for terrorist attack if it took part. Overall awareness of Canada’s role here was quite low.

Most participants felt that being “settled and integrated” meant first and foremost having a stable job that was in their field. It meant moving beyond the initial “survival job”. Some also mentioned having a home, sending their children to school as other markers of integration.

The feeling of belonging in Canada was often tied to socializing with other Canadians, seeing their children interact with Canadians from other communities, benefitting from Canadian social programs and benefits such as health care, EI, pensions etc... and also integrating in the workplace with people from all levels. Some identified the citizenship ceremony itself as a moment where they felt they belonged.

Most said that they had made an effort to expand their social circle beyond their own community. It was clear that language skills were a big factor here. Some newcomers arrived in Canada already being highly fluent in English or French and so it was natural for them to make friends in the workplace and in their neighbourhoods or religious institutions with people from other places. Newcomers from China had much bigger language problems that impeded them from interacting with people outside the Chinese community.

People mentioned a wide variety of news sources. Most reported using social media and online sources such as Facebook and yahoo and google to get news. There was also a mix of local mainstream Canadian TV, radio and newspapers mentioned as well as ethnic media sources.

If the Government of Canada needed to communicate to people in other countries about new requirements for visitors, a variety of tactics could be considered – and these varied by the countries of origin. Some from India mentioned going through travel agents, while those from China were more dismissive of this idea. Others spoke of putting new information on embassy websites and the CIC website since that is where people go to get up to date information on documentation like visas. In fact, in situations where visitors must obtain a visa, it was thought that any new additional documentation requirements should be communicated at the visa application stage.

Political neutrality statement and contact information

I hereby certify as a Senior Officer of Environics Research Group that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research. Specifically, the deliverables do not contain any reference to electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leader.



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