



Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés
et Citoyenneté Canada

2021-22 IRCC Annual Tracking Qualitative Research

Executive Summary

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Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.

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This public opinion research report presents the results of a series of 16 online focus groups conducted by Quorus Consulting Group Inc. on behalf of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada between February 22 and March 7, 2022.

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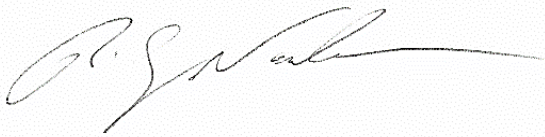
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Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rick Nadeau", is centered on a white rectangular background with a light gray grid pattern.

Rick Nadeau, President
Quorus Consulting Group Inc.

Executive summary

Background and study objectives

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) conducts an ongoing research program to help the Department develop a better understanding of Canadian attitudes toward the issues surrounding citizenship and immigration.

The research objectives of this study included assessing, in the context of COVID-19, Canadians' perceptions of:

- immigration levels;
- the impact of immigration on Canada;
- Canada's immigration system and priorities; and
- the settlement and integration of newcomers.

By gauging and exploring Canadian attitudes about key elements of the department's mandate, this research supported IRCC in:

- ensuring high quality policy options, program design and advice;
- encouraging and effectively managing citizen-focused services;
- managing organizational and strategic risks proactively; and
- gathering and using relevant information on program results.

The value of this contract, including HST, is \$115,347.00.

Methodology

This research project included 16 two-hour online focus groups that Quorus completed between February 22 and March 7, 2022. Participants were recruited from across the country and from both urban areas and smaller communities, including Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP) communities; besides general population groups (Canadian adults 18+), target audiences consisted of newcomers to Canada who arrived since 2011 and Indigenous Peoples. Thirteen groups were conducted in English and three in French. A total of 111 people participated.

Qualitative Research Disclaimer

Qualitative research seeks to develop insight and direction rather than quantitatively projectable measures. The purpose is not to generate "statistics" but to hear the full range of opinions on a topic, understand the language participants use, gauge degrees of passion and engagement and

to leverage the power of the group to inspire ideas. Participants are encouraged to voice their opinions, irrespective of whether or not that view is shared by others.

Due to the sample size, the special recruitment methods used, and the study objectives themselves, it is clearly understood that the work under discussion is exploratory in nature. The findings are not, nor were they intended to be, projectable to a larger population.

Specifically, it is inappropriate to suggest or to infer that few (or many) real world users would behave in one way simply because few (or many) participants behaved in this way during the sessions. This kind of projection is strictly the prerogative of quantitative research.

Summary of research findings

Economic recovery and the role of immigration

- While many brought up social challenges such as the “divide” they are feeling in society over people’s approaches to pandemic responses, restrictions and loosening thereof, there was also mention of economic issues such as unemployment, businesses that failed and have to rebuild, labour shortages in certain jobs or sectors, and the increasing cost of living.
 - Housing affordability and availability were also issues that were often mentioned in this context, as well as throughout the discussions.
- Newcomers are by and large seen as more helpful than harmful to Canada’s economy and post-pandemic economic recovery.
- The majority of participants agreed with the statement that *“Put simply, increased immigration means more people in Canada participating in our workforce, engaging in our communities, and giving back to our economy.”*
 - They said that most immigrants gave back to the economy, which was understood as being employed, paying taxes and spending money. Some also mentioned that they saw an entrepreneurial spirit in many newcomers, who might start businesses which in turn pay taxes and employ other Canadians.
 - While most participants also agreed that newcomers engage in Canada’s communities, there were those who countered that they saw newcomers being more likely to stick to themselves and stay within their own ethnic communities instead.
- The statement *“The reality is that Canadians are living longer and having fewer children. This also has an impact on our economy—not just today, but in the years and decades ahead. This*

is why Canada needs to increase the number of immigrants we welcome each year,” was also mostly met with agreement.

- The vast majority agreed with the first sentence and said they saw evidence of this around them.
- Some participants disputed the last sentence, saying either that there were alternative ways to address the demographic shifts, or that Canada might not need increased immigration, but rather the same level as in the past.
- The third statement discussed was: *“Canada has regained 106% of the jobs lost during the pandemic. Despite these achievements, there are still more than 960,000 unfilled jobs. This is a clear sign that we have a strong economic need for increased immigration.”* While most agreed with this statement, not everyone felt the statistics led to them feeling it was a “clear” sign that there was a “strong” economic need for more immigration.
 - Again, there was some hesitation to fully endorse increased immigration as the only or foremost solution to the current labour market issues, with some suggesting that Canada should focus on unemployed or underemployed Canadians first.
- Overall, while the facts and statistics shown in the statements went undisputed, they did not go as far as to change the views among most of those who were generally less supportive of immigration to begin with. At the same time, those who were already in favour of immigration saw their position further entrenched.

Immigration Levels and Mix

- The recently announced plans to admit 432,000 permanent residents in 2022; 447,000 permanent residents in 2023; and 451,000 permanent residents in 2024, was generally supported. The accompanying fact that this was roughly 1% of Canada’s population helped solidify this support.
 - However, quite a few participants also admitted to not being entirely certain what the “right” levels were, sometimes wondering how these levels compared to those in the past, where in the country immigrants would settle and what the breakdown of “types” of immigrants would or should be.
- When shown the proposed mix of classes of immigrants, there was also a general sense that this was “probably right.” There was a general consensus that the skilled workers category should make up the largest proportion; however, there was some more discussion about the level of refugees vs. family reunification, with some calling for more refugees.

- Many participants wondered and hoped that there was flexibility in the overall levels and the mix to accommodate the sudden need to receive refugees, especially in light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- When prompted to think of particular skills, education or experience that Canada should prioritize these days, the health care sector was most often mentioned. Other mentions included education, people in the IT field, manufacturing, and people in skilled trades.
 - Generally, and after some reflection on what people were seeing around them, groups tended to agree that there was a need for a mix of higher educated or more professional newcomers, those who would be able to work skilled trades, as well as unskilled labour – those “willing to take on anything they could.”
- Although there was support for prioritizing immigrants who can speak at least one of the official languages, there was no strong sense that Canada should try to increase the number of Francophone newcomers in particular.

Integration

- Views on how ready Canada is to integrate newcomers were mixed, with participants often saying Canada was ready in certain ways, but that there were also societal barriers or larger issues that should be addressed before they felt the country and their communities would be fully ready to easily integrate newcomers.
 - Besides the sentiment that there should be a focus on pandemic recovery, the main specific barrier discussed was the current housing market or housing crisis.
 - In the context of integration, there was not a lot of discussion about the level of formal or government newcomer services, although there was general agreement that newcomer services were important, including for example language training and help with finding employment, or housing.
- On a community or personal level, it was generally seen as true that “everyone could do their part” and could and should be “welcoming.”
 - Some suggested that individuals or community groups could help newcomers with finding jobs, navigating systems and services (such as banking, Service Canada, registering children for school, etc.) and day-to-day activities such as grocery shopping.

- To most, being welcoming means treating newcomers with respect, being friendly or neighbourly, and helping out in small ways to make them feel accepted into their new community.
- When asked to reflect on their own experiences, newcomers mostly spoke of supports they received through and in their community, whether they be through established members of their home community (in person or online), through churches or mosques, or through family members and friends who had immigrated before them.
 - Asked about how and when the Government of Canada should communicate with newcomers about its services, suggestions were to have information packages available at airports upon arrival, and to include information at key points that any newcomer has to go through, such as when getting a SIN number from Service Canada, or online/through email when filling out paperwork related to their immigration process.

Afghan refugees

- The Government of Canada's plans to admit 40,000 Afghan refugees over two years was supported by most participants. There was some general knowledge that Canada intended to resettle those who had "worked for Canada," which was also endorsed, reflecting the general sentiment of support for admitting refugees, irrespective of their country of origin.
 - Information about the targeted refugee groups, including regarding those with skills proven to be of help to Canada and those who spoke English, resulted in a higher level of support and the sense that at least a large proportion of Afghan refugees would be employable and would be less likely to need a high level of supports.
- While this group was generally seen as probably in need of the same supports as other refugees, it was often mentioned that mental health supports to help with trauma would be required for this group in particular.
- Where some had concerns about Afghan refugees in particular, it was less about the proposed numbers, but more about the perception that they would not easily integrate into Canadian society due to linguistic, cultural, religious or social differences.

Irregular migration

- Irregular immigration or asylum seeker issues at the Canada-U.S. border were not top-of-mind. When probed, some recalled the news about a family fleeing Canada across the Manitoba border into the U.S. in the winter, resulting in deaths. In a few groups, a participant

remembered reading about irregular immigration in Lacolle, Quebec. If anything, participants seemed to feel this had been more of a pre-pandemic issue rather than anything recent.

- When more information was shared, there were still quite a few unanswered questions, namely about how prevalent that was (with the assumption mostly being that it was not such a “big deal” as it was a largely unfamiliar issue) and why people would use irregular points of entry rather than regular channels.
- Overwhelmingly, the sentiment was that Canada should help and accept asylum seekers, and that they should be allowed to go through the process of making a claim, no matter how they entered.
 - Some were a bit more cautious, feeling that those entering through irregular channels should be put under additional scrutiny as they were trying to do something illegal, which made them question these claimant’s morals. Still, they said that claimants should be heard and allowed to prove their case; there was no suggestion that anyone should be turned back without due process.