



To the new Prime Minister of Canada

January 16, 2006

Throughout the country, and across the political spectrum, there is consensus that Canada needs a strong economy; one that is competitive on a global stage, creates opportunities for growth, and effectively taps into its wealth of experience and expertise. In Canada today, the locus of this economic activity is firmly rooted in urban centres.

A vital element of Canada's economic growth is immigration, which across the country is experienced as an urban phenomenon. Almost half of all immigrants come to the Toronto region, with the vast majority of the rest going to Montreal and Vancouver, and to a lesser extent other metropolitan centres. Immigrants want what Canadians want – to live where economic opportunities exist. And so, immigration and urbanization have become defining realities for the future of Canada – realities that must be properly understood and supported by all levels of government, especially the federal government.

However, before the government of Canada begins to delineate the specifics of immigration policy and program, it needs first to understand the place and purpose of immigration more broadly. As a nation with a history defined by immigration and a future dependent on it, the federal government must focus on the core elements of an immigration policy that is good for Canada. The policy framework should:

- **Complement international objectives and relationships**

Canada needs to position its immigration vision in terms of enhancing its international relationships so that they can serve multiple national objectives. While immigration can make vital connections between our economy and that of other countries, it can also be linked more effectively to our international goals in peace-making, peace-keeping, the provision of humanitarian aid, research and education, and arts and culture.

- **Alleviate suffering**

Canada has longstanding humanitarian commitments to refugees, which is perhaps the highest moral expression of our immigration policy, and of our soul as a people. Through international covenants and domestic precedents, Canada has committed itself to providing protection and support. Programs and practices have been developed to achieve worthy and just humanitarian goals, and these must be protected and enhanced wherever possible.

- **Promote diversity**

Diversity makes a vital contribution to social and cultural vibrancy and innovation in society. As a value, diversity works well in societies where different ideas, beliefs, and practices can each strengthen the other. Canada has benefited and should continue to grow from the inclusion of diversity in all spheres; economic, social, cultural and political.

- **Serve the economy**

This is the most pragmatic aspect of an immigration policy. While there is agreement that immigration is vital and imperative for future economic growth, there has been much debate on how to make this aspect work most effectively. What follows is a series of recommended policy interventions to realize this goal.

National and Local Immigration Policy

Part of the ongoing challenge of immigration policy in Canada is that it is understood as a national matter, but the processes of immigrant settlement are inherently local. The early stages of finding housing, schools and jobs, accessing health care and other government services, all are local in nature. And the later stages of discovering and exercising the whole range of citizen engagement opportunities as well as citizenship rights and responsibilities are also mostly local. Much of the local integration work falls to city governments and their agencies, and to local NGOs. The long and deep experience of settlement is at the local level, but cities have very little hand in the design of policy and programs, and in decisions about how financial resources will be allocated.

Recommendation:

Create a **seat at the federal immigration policy table for Canada's key urban regions that receive immigrants**. Recognize this role through federal-provincial-municipal agreements that allow for joint planning and allocation decisions by all levels of government, and coordination at a local level to meet local needs.

This issue is exacerbated by Canada's fiscal arrangements. The federal government is the tax collector, distributing by agreement some of that revenue to provincial governments. Municipal governments are not part of these arrangements, and only receive money as those other levels of government decide from time to time. The disconnection is profound and problematic. It is problematic because it undermines the efficient allocation of assets to do the tasks most effectively. And the fact remains that urbanization will only intensify, and the need for effective immigration and labour market integration strategies becomes increasingly urgent.

Recommendation:

Drawing on the success of the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) provide **funding to urban regions to convene the relevant stakeholders and local leadership** to find local solutions that link new immigrants to employment appropriate to their education and experience.

Urban Investment

The time has come to be smart about how to understand and support immigration and urban growth. Priority must be given to those urban regions where immigration is already a reality, and where economic growth is strong. In cities where large numbers of new immigrants arrive each year, there is an urgent need for capital investment in people services, including all levels of education, health, housing, and recreation. Meaningful and planned urban investment that reflects the changing profiles and realities in our cities is imperative, and policy responses must stretch beyond the typical silos of government action.

Recommendation:

Plan for and invest in the human services that are impacted by significant population growth and change, with particular attention to those services that support the successful settlement and integration of immigrants; specifically health, housing, education, and recreation.

Fulfilling the Promise

We should be concerned that Canada has made a promise to immigrants and that as a nation we are not living up to it. The focus has been to select the best and the brightest through a demanding points system. As a result, Canada receives highly educated and experienced immigrants, but the programs and supports that are made available to them do not measure up – they reflect the profile of immigrants from another time. The priority now must be to recognize the credentials that immigrant professionals bring with them, and to separate out real issues of competence from those of protecting the market. Programs need to build true bridges that will accelerate immigrants finding work for which they are trained and capable. There is need for more internship, mentoring, and bridging programs that link immigrants directly to employers. The key is getting employers to the table, and here government has a dual role to play, as a broker and as an employer. Programs developed to reach these goals should be comparable across the country and have strong federal support, but their delivery should be locally defined and managed.

Recommendation: Support the work of the provinces in **setting standards and establishing accountability frameworks for the occupational regulatory bodies** that are responsible for credential recognition and licensing professionals.

Recommendation: Establish a **mentoring program** that connects skilled immigrants with established professionals in both the public and private sectors who share the same occupation, helping to build their social capital and more effectively understand and access the Canadian labour market.

Recommendation: Establish an **internship program** in both the public and private sectors that provides a paid first employment experience to skilled immigrants.

Recommendation: Invest in **higher level language training** and **occupation specific bridging programs** that link immigrants to labour market opportunities.

Recommendation: **Work directly with employers** so that they are better able to recruit, retain, and promote skilled immigrants in their workplaces.

Social Cohesion

The ultimate indicator of successful immigration policy is the achievement of social cohesion in our cities and country, which will depend on how we approach diversity. Diversity is a worthy goal in itself and promotes vigour and innovation in society. But diversity as a value in society does not happen on its own – it requires support and commitment. In order for true diversity to flourish, it means inclusion in the governance and leadership of society. Changing the face of leadership and governance is a critical step toward an expression of diversity that has meaning and impact.

Recommendation: Invest in local initiatives to **accelerate the participation of immigrants in the leadership of agencies, boards and commissions** which govern many aspects of community life: library, university, college and hospital boards, public health agencies, various government agency boards, all of which play vital community roles.

Federal Government Leadership

If we view immigration as good, and we do, then we need to see it as an asset in which we invest. If we view immigration as merely an issue to manage, we will tend to think in terms of containing immigrants, of making sure that we limit their impact on society so that they do the least damage. It is a very different mindset, and one that is unlikely to work or yield success for Canada. So to your new government, there is a key question that you must answer, will Canada give immigrants wings, or shackles? For a strong and vibrant Canada that is competitive on the global stage, the answer is clear, and the time for action is now.



Alan Broadbent
Chairman



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