



CISSA-ACSEI Position Paper: National Conversation on Immigration

Introduction:

The Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector Alliance- Alliance canadienne du secteur de l'établissement des immigrants (CISSA-ACSEI) is a pan-Canadian Association which represents the immigrant settlement sector in Canada including bringing the sector's expertise to bear on public policies and programs for enhancing the settlement and integration of immigrants and refugees. CISSA-ACSEI's membership, consisting of provincial and regional umbrella associations, represents over 400 immigrant and refugee serving agencies across Canada. CISSA-ACSEI is uniquely positioned to provide specialized expertise regarding services to successfully settle and integrate immigrants into Canadian society, and a national perspective on proposed changes to the future direction of immigration in Canada. Canada's immigrant settlement sector has accumulated a wealth of unique knowledge and expertise over several decades of delivering settlement and resettlement services, language instruction, employment services, host volunteer programs and first language support services and programs – which are key elements for the successful integration of newcomers.

Strengthening our Canadian Fabric:

We believe that immigration is first and foremost about nation building that includes both the need for economic and social integration of newcomers. Social cohesion is also a vitally important element in nation building. Canada is facing significant labour shortages, an aging population and declining birthrate. There is also a critical need to attract and retain immigrants to smaller centres across Canada. Strengthening our Canadian fabric can only be accomplished through increased immigration levels, clear pathways to permanency, expedited processing times and adequate resources and infrastructure to support newcomer settlement and integration processes. With these elements in mind our membership believes that the Government of Canada should move towards one percent (1%), or even higher, immigration levels starting in 2017. Although this may seem obvious it will be necessary to ensure that adequate resources and the necessary infrastructure are planned and put into place both in Canada and abroad in advance to raising immigration levels by 100,000 or more annually. Whether the one percent (1%) or 350,000+ annual immigration levels commences in 2017 or is phased in over more than one year will be dependent on resource allocations and adequate advance planning. We must ensure waitlists for settlement and language services and programs in Canada as well as some lengthy overseas processing times (e.g. family reunification) etc. are addressed to ensure new immigrants and refugees can fully participate and contribute to Canadian society. A case in point, the current settlement allocation model (SAM) is based on the past three (3) year rolling average of the number of permanent residents landed in each province and territory. Furthermore, the current funding formula doesn't address the issue of secondary migration thus putting excessive strain and growing waitlist in settlement programming in certain regions of the country. While our membership is in agreement to increasing immigration levels we need to move forward in reviewing SAM while avoiding the complicated situation of supplemental funding and reporting that we currently must adhere to in response to the influx of Syrian refugees. If immigration levels are significantly increased in 2017 we can't use a funding model based on past PR landings to adequately respond to increase immigration levels.



While the majority of immigration will remain focused on skilled workers -economic categories it is nonetheless important that future immigration levels provide increase opportunities for family and humanitarian categories and that we see all immigration categories contributing towards nation building and labour market needs. The growing global refugee crisis, for instance, and our success in welcoming upwards of 44,000 refugees this year alone bodes well in increasing the target for both government assisted and privately sponsored refugees. There is also momentum and additional staffing resources already in place across Canada that could easily be expanded and adapted going forward to address increase refugee resettlement targets. Equally important, the Canadian public remains supportive of the current Syrian refugee resettlement initiatives and refugees in general. With adequate funding, infrastructure, and some adjustments to the terms and conditions of the resettlement assistance program we could easily resettle upwards of 20,000 or more government assisted refugees annually. How quickly we implement higher baseline multi-year refugee resettlement target is largely dependent on adequate advance planning and resource allocations.

Unlocking Canada's Diverse Needs:

CISSA-ACSEI recognizes the growing labour market demands for both lower and higher skilled workers, including live-in-caregivers but first and foremost the emphasis must be placed on identifying, selecting and expediting the process for permanent resident applications. We have observed first-hand the challenges and issues associated with the excessive use of temporary foreign workers in some regions of Canada over the past decade. We appreciate that there are businesses that need highly skilled and experienced workers that are not currently available in Canada or specific high and low skilled workers required on a seasonal basis (e.g. agricultural workers, ski instructors, etc.) We are also aware of existing bilateral agreements that allow Canadians to work abroad and foreign nationals to do the same in this country on short term basis. However, the vast majority of Canadians do not distinguish between permanent immigration and temporary foreign workers. This in turn can hinder the social and economic integration of newcomers overall when Canadians draw conclusions or question why "immigrants" are coming to Canada to do certain jobs while Canadians are being displaced although they are qualified. Thus, with a priority placed on permanent residents and a need to maintain some temporary foreign workers it may be prudent to introduce clear categories of temporary foreign workers to better clarify to Canadians why such individuals are needed in Canada. Nonetheless, we believe there should be expedited and clear pathway options to permanency for those temporary residents wanting to remain in Canada. Of particular concern is the lack of legal status faced by undocumented individuals residing and working in the underground economy, particularly in certain sectors (e.g. construction). As part of defining the next chapter of Canada's immigration story it is essential that we also address and provide pathways for permanency for undocumented individuals.

Modernizing our Immigration System

CISSA-ACSEI strongly believes in the proposal to move towards multi-year immigration level planning. We support the move towards three-five (3-5) year immigration planning levels. We have raised the challenges and shortfalls of annual levels plans for several years. We also believe that the settlement program evaluation cycle as dictated by Treasury Board requirements and the IRCC department call for proposal process for settlement and language



programming should be aligned with the proposed multi-year immigration planning levels and cycle. Moving towards multi-year planning will greatly assist our membership with more effective sector program and strategic planning as well as some of our key international partners such as the UNHCR. Our members were involved in collaborative planning with Department officials when multi-year refugee resettlement commitments were introduced. These commitments were extremely helpful to our membership in planning and anticipating resettlement assistance program (RAP) needs while also allowing multi-year planning for the UNHCR and IOM. In short, we see no rationale or benefits for continuing annual immigration levels.

As we look at the increased need for immigration in all regions of Canada we also need to evaluate pre-arrival services to ensure these services are meeting the necessary needs of immigrants. While there are many new and expanded players who are targeting pre-arrival services there appears to be no coordination and overall plan for service investments. Pre-arrival services are currently disjointed and not particularly aligned with post arrival services. There have been some discussions raised during this consultation process on exploring the introduction of new fee structures e.g. charging fees to immigrants and/or businesses that would expedite certain immigration processes. CISSA-ACSEI is not in favour of introducing a two-tier immigration system; we feel a two-tier system is completely contrary to Canadian values.

CISSA-ACSEI members have worked in recent years with Department officials on introducing ways to reduce and simplify reporting and contract relationships while maintaining service and funding accountability. While we strongly agree on the need for fiscal accountability, the current “contribution agreement” contracting regime does not allow the sector to focus on service outcomes. The contracting relationship continues to be overly and unnecessarily focused on financial management and monitoring of “contribution” agreements. When the sector spends considerable time justifying services and/or financial expenditures on, for example, specific field trips as deemed responsive to client demands it limits our ability to maximize funding to enhance the social and economic integration of newcomers to Canada. Modernizing the immigration system should also include modernizing the contracting relationship and move us towards service outcomes.

As part of modernizing our immigration system, CISSA-ACSEI believes that the federal settlement program eligibility should be adjusted to include some allowable service interventions for Temporary Foreign Workers, international students, refugee claimants and some naturalized citizens. We believe that program eligibility should be determined by need rather than immigration category. We are not suggesting that all temporary residents will require settlement supports but there are a growing number of temporary residents that are seeking and gaining pathways to permanency and as such, would benefit from some settlement program support upon arrival. While the number of refugee claimants increases in certain regions along with increased acceptance rates, expanded program eligibility and services based on need would greatly support one of the most marginalized and vulnerable newcomer populations that we try to support.

Leadership in Global Migration and Immigration:

Canada is known worldwide for our ability to build welcoming and inclusive communities while enhancing the social and economic integration of newcomers. While we can play a leadership role in several global and immigration related forums we would suggest that our leadership on



humanitarian related immigration provides opportunities for the greatest contributions and impact. With the recent worldwide attention on Canada's humanitarian mission to resettle more than 25,000 Syrian refugees it has once again put our members' work on the front line across Canada into greater focus through numerous innovative and promising refugee integration practices. In addition, there is a growing interest by states and other actors on specific aspects of our refugee resettlement schemes including our private sponsorship model. Canada has the opportunity to provide key global leadership on the refugee crisis through a multi-pronged approach such as through our work with refugee resettlement and integration as well as other initiatives that support such needs as public education models in protracted refugee camp situations, peace keeping missions, etc. Upcoming summits this Fall in New York as well as ongoing active involvement and leadership in bodies like the UNHCR Annual Tripartite Consultation on Resettlement should be actively encouraged and supported. The last time that the UNHCR convened an international conference on refugee integration was hosted by Sweden in April 2001. Among many outcomes of this international gathering, the conference led to the creation of the UNHCR handbook on resettlement. We would suggest that with all of the new and emerging states and actors involved in refugee resettlement worldwide that Canada should consider offering to host in partnership with UNHCR an international conference or summit on refugee integration.