

Western Region Working Group Environmental Scan - Executive Summary - May 29, 2014



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1 Introduction

The Western Region Working Group (WRWG) is a collective of the four provincial (BC, AB, SK, and MB) umbrella and one territorial (YK) settlement organizations that function within Citizenship and Immigration Canada's (CIC) Western Region as defined in 2013. Along with the Eastern Region and Ontario, the Western Region is one of three Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) regions in Canada. Newly formed in October 2013, the group was established for these five partners to work together collaboratively to rationally influence best practices in the settlement sector.

The WRWG is currently undertaking an environmental scan and strategic plan to establish a common knowledge base and focus for its initial activities. As a point-in-time snapshot, an environmental scan is intended to explore and capture current trends, successes and challenges at the immigrant sector's system level, generate a coherent narrative supported by facts, and set the foundation for dialogue, strategic planning, and stakeholder influence. The WRWG has pursued completion of an environmental scan in advance of, and to inform, its strategic plan development.

The following strategic question sets the stage for the environmental scan:

What facts, trends and experiences describe and differentiate the Western Region immigration and settlement sector from Canada as a whole?

The content and findings in the report represent a combination of literature review, data from CIC and Statistic Canada, and interviews with WRWG and CIC representatives. The main report is supported and supplemented by data and information in its six appendices.

2 National Trends

An overview of national political, economic, demographic and technological trends sets the context for the report. Through exploration of several factors as they relate to immigration, this section illustrates the importance of successful immigration to Canada as a whole, and our economy in particular.

The growth of Canada's economy is a clear priority for the Government of Canada (GC). Predictions of declining natural population growth are accompanied by recognition of the key role which newcomers need to play in Canada's economy by contributing to its labour force. CIC forecasts that "Immigrants are expected to account for all net labour force growth by 2011, and for all net population growth by 2031". These demographic trends, coupled with recent concerns about sub-optimal immigrant integration outcomes and system shortcomings, have lead to system reform from policy development and internal delivery standpoints.

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Clearly, the interest of the GC is to employ immigration as a primary vehicle to support Canadian growth and development with successful integration and public support for immigration being essential ingredients to this aim. Changes have been made to the immigrant selection system and a national approach is now underway in providing settlement services.

While urbanization across Canada is increasing, recognition of support for Canada's rural and smaller communities is also apparent. Immigration is seen to hold a potential for revitalization of smaller centres by contributing to the tax base, and creating economic development through spending on consumer goods and housing.

Technology trends and advancements and their increasing uptake in the nonprofit sector have implications for increasing service effectiveness and improved work processes. Three best practices are identified which are critical to nonprofit success in technology use: (1) content marketing and curation, (2) targeted communications and (3) data informed decisions.

3 Sector Trends

CIC Governance and Legislative Changes

This section further explores the changes to the immigration system under the responsibility of CIC. With the repatriation of British Columbia in 2014 and Manitoba in 2013, settlement policy and funding for all provinces and territories (with the exception of Quebec) is within CIC responsibility. CIC interest in a centralized governance model is seen through some of its key directions such as regionalization and efforts to equalize regions in terms of level of activity and consistency of approach. As well, and beginning with the 2008 amendments to the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, a series of legislative and policy changes have been made, with many significant ones occurring in 2012 regarding immigrant selection and processing (Maytree 2012).

Cross Jurisdictional Collaboration

The importance and potential of cross jurisdictional initiatives is also noted. Provincial and municipal governments have a role in immigration and a clear stake in its success. The provinces' role is conferred on them constitutionally and each exercises its mandate uniquely (e.g. Provincial Nominee Programs to address specific labour needs). While municipal governments have a less explicit mandate in this area, municipal services are often needed to support immigrants. In recognition of the importance of engagement at the local level as well as the central role which municipalities play in immigration, in the mid 1990's CIC began encouraging the involvement of other jurisdictions through the creation of Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs). The model is noted to be a national priority (CIC personal interviews) and has begun developing in the Western Region. The settlement sector has a natural place in facilitating conversation and strategies. It is well positioned to lead multi sector involvement, developing bridging strategies between mainstream and newcomer communities and essentially becoming a 'band leader'. (Burstein 2012)

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Outcomes

There has historically been a lack of solid information on client needs and outcomes. Burstein notes that "agency information is not comparable and cannot be aggregated" (Burstein 2012). However, the issue is larger than the difficulties of defining and correlating service information. It extends to all aspects of the immigration system and therefore system-level developments are likely necessary to address it. CIC is focusing attention on outcomes achievement from several perspectives. These include the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Vision Action Plan for Immigrants which will pursue a national approach to defining settlement outcomes and the CIC Modernization Approach which sets out a framework of settlement service streams and outcomes as reflected in its 2012 national Call for Proposals.

Immigrant and Newcomer Challenges

Even though Canada's economic future is directly tied to its ability to successfully attract and retain new immigrants, newcomers face immense barriers to success and are falling behind their Canadian counterparts (Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2011) and their predecessors (Community Foundations of Canada and the Law Commission of Canada, 2006). Settlement is very complicated and often longer than the funded three years. Overall success is interwoven with labour market integration with the latter also affected by English/French language ability.

Best Practices

Best practices are explored from three sources. The House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration prepared a report on Best Practices in Settlement Services, which identifies best practices in program delivery. Its six strategic recommendations are aimed at furthering information sharing and collaboration to improve immigrant settlement and address gaps in settlement programming. A 2012 study sponsored by CISSA-ACSEI identified excellent practices and a process for replicating them through a detailed analysis of 19 case studies of settlement initiatives (Burstein & Esses, 2012). The study concluded that innovation is possible through the creativity, dedication and entrepreneurship already resident in settlement sector; areas which could be supported by CIC policy and process changes. The third area focused on industry support. It noted that small and medium sized employers (SMEs) need non-traditional methods of recruiting immigrant talent including advertising in ethnic media and seeking referrals from immigrant-serving organizations and identified five best practices for providing support.

4 Western Region Trends

This section explores the demographics, patterns, drivers and practices which make the Western Region unique & distinct.

Demographic and Immigration Patterns

When comparing 2012 to 2003, the WR has seen large increases in the numbers of family class (19.5%), economic immigrants (102%) and temporary foreign workers (186%). This compares to the OR where both the family class and economic immigrant categories saw declines and the ER

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where increases were much more moderate. Data also indicates that CIC regional funding has not mirrored immigration activity changes; WR's portion of funding (28.2%) is below its proportion of immigrants in 2012 (37.8%).

Economic Drivers

The West is forecasting job growth and labour shortages and will rely increasingly on migrants to fill them. Labour shortages could limit the economy's ability to sustain and grow, and ultimately affect the standard of living for its citizens. All five provinces/territory are predicting job growth, with BC, AB and MN also forecasting labour shortages of 61,500, 96,000 and 20,000 respectively over the next several years (See main report for references).

Regional Challenges

General research and also Interviews with WRWG representatives identified several challenges and issues being experienced by some or all of the four provinces and territory.

Because of labour market pressures, the West is a growing user of the Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) Program. Between 2003 and 2012, the West's proportion of Canada's TFW's grew from 32% to over 44% and actual numbers increased from 33,000 to over 94,000 (CIC Facts, 2012). There are many concerns with this group, including their service ineligibility and enforcement of labour standards for employers. Additional pressure is placed on the service provider organizations which either need to find ways to accommodate service requests or deny client services: Neither is a satisfactory approach to such a critical issue and both put the sector and its providers at the crux of a problem which is neither its responsibility nor its creation.

Additional WR challenges are summarized as: regional growth in immigration numbers; entry of new service providers; changes to funded services; challenges in developing/retaining provincial involvement; rural and remote settlement; promoting the benefits of immigration to get public support; and, service usage.

5 Umbrella Organizations

There is great potential for provincial newcomer umbrella groups to have a greater role and influence in advancing Canada's approach to immigration. Each of the five organizations of the WRWG characterized its role as that of convener, provincial leader and voice for settlement sector as well as overall newcomer issues in their province/territory. This multi-faceted role includes bringing member agencies and other stakeholders together for service and strategic planning as well as member education and professional development; undertaking cross sector initiatives (e.g. LIP's) as well as interfacing with government.

Umbrella organizations (UO) have existed in the immigrant and refugee sector since about the 1970s with all provinces having an entity by 2007. In addition all members of WRWG also belong to the national organization CISSA-ACSEI (Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector

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Alliance - Alliance canadienne du secteur de l'établissement des immigrants). Many of their would also belong to Canadian Council for Refugees.

Interviews with the five representatives of WRWG and two CIC Regional Directors identified several best and promising practices within the individual umbrella organizations, member province/territory or in other parts of Canada.

Comments were generally quite positive about the relationship between the UO's and CIC and some joint interests and issues were identified. There was general agreement among UO's and CIC that an optimal relationship would be mutual and partnership-oriented. Both also saw the opportunity to create better understanding of the particular challenges and best practices of the Western Region. Some of the challenges appear to be transitional issues that stem from regionalization and/or recent program repatriation in BC and MB while others are more directional in nature.

The five UOs are at different points in their evolution, with AMSSA, AAISA and SAISIA having operated for 37 and 34 and 27 years respectively and MIRSSA and MCY more recently developing over the past seven years. Each is addressing relevant issues arising in their provinces and/or priorities of their members, such as transition support in the cases of MIRSSA and AMSSA. Each UO identified areas of organizational success and value to members.

6 **Synthesis**

The national focus on the economy, coupled with the contribution which immigration can and will have on Canada's economic growth renders the immigration system a focal point for government, business and the public. Poor immigrant outcomes along with the economic imperative for newcomers to be successful have been catalysts for system reform and broader engagement. There is a growing understanding that cross-jurisdictional, multi-stakeholder strategies are the only way to improve the settlement process and longer-term integration outcomes. There is also clear belief that the settlement sector is uniquely positioned to champion and take a leadership role on such strategies.

For the WRWG, these national and sector trends create opportunity. As one of only 3 CIC regions, and the one where the greatest numbers of immigrant and refugees are arriving, the WR can influence the national conversation and agenda. The strategies and mechanisms to develop a strong regional presence are many and reside primarily in adopting parallel internal organizational and external sector/stakeholder foci.

With the scope and magnitude of sector change that has accompanied the recent establishment of WRWG, defined purpose would benefit WRWG and with CIC to establish parameters of their partnership and purpose and focus alignment. WRWG could support CIC as a sector convener and in developing the ability and credibility to speak on behalf of sector. The idea of a cohesive entity with one voice/story was of particular interest.

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There may also be conflicts to surface and resolve. The greatest success will lie at the intersection of mutual interests where both WRWG and CIC achieve their goals.

In each of the report's major sections, opportunities arising from key trends are identified. These opportunities are collated in the final section for the WRWG to consider as it prepares its inaugural strategic plan. Through broad categorization, they include the following directions:

- Develop the WRWG entity; create a strong regional presence and a united voice.
- Further develop WRWG and member convener roles; advance cross jurisdictional and multi-stakeholder strategies.
- Develop full knowledge of the system in order to clearly identify and act on WRWG's contributions to national, regional, provincial and member agendas.
- Strategically leverage immigration trends, challenges and changes to create value for CIC, develop related initiatives and also advance a case for additional resources.
- Seek ways for WRWG to work in partnership with CIC, to both organizations' mutual benefit.
- Use the current system reform agenda as a vehicle for introducing creativity, innovation and capacity building into settlement and integration services.