



SURREY
LOCAL IMMIGRATION
PARTNERSHIP

Immigrant Labour Market Research Project

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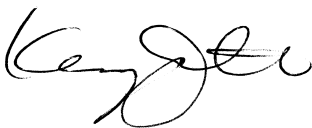


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Executive Summary

Surrey receives an average of 7,000 new immigrants and 250 refugees every year. These newcomers to the community often have difficulty integrating into the local economy. Access to employment and the programs and services that support this are critical to successful immigrant settlement and integration.

The Surrey Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) has identified the need to explore the challenges and successes of immigrants to access employment in Surrey and to identify promising practices by various stakeholders in facilitating immigrant labour market attachment.

The Surrey LIP is a committee of representatives of thirty organizations including community and immigrant serving organizations, education, business, government and other local agencies.

The Surrey LIP is seeking a better understanding of the issues faced by immigrants who want gainful employment in Surrey and to find actionable solutions and practices to maximize this. Human Capital Strategies (HCS) was contracted to the City of Surrey to conduct a labour market integration study for the Surrey LIP.

The findings from this project will be used by the Surrey LIP to guide and inform the development of both its Immigrant and the Refugee Settlement and Integration Strategic Plans.

The goals of the Surrey LIP Labour Market Integration Study were to:

1. Obtain an understanding of Surrey's current and looming labour market needs;
2. Understand the barriers and challenges faced by Surrey employers in their attempts to recruit, hire and retain new immigrant and refugee workers;
3. Understand the successful practices of Surrey employers who have and are currently recruiting, hiring and retaining new immigrant and refugee workers;
4. Understand the successful practices, supports, and key steps taken by new immigrants and refugees who have successfully entered the labour market;
5. Identify the gaps in service between the needs and demands of immigrants and refugees and the recruitment/employment demands and expectations of employers in Surrey; and
6. Identify improved means and methods of connecting employers with local immigrant talent.

Project Approach and Methodology

One hundred and seventy-four individuals participated in the primary research of this project. HCS used a comprehensive methodology to understand the challenges faced by immigrants and refugees seeking employment and the potential solutions for ameliorating them. This included a literature review, a survey of Surrey employers, a Surrey employer focus group, interviews of several Surrey employers, a focus group of Surrey immigrants, interviews of several Surrey immigrants, a focus group of Surrey immigrant-serving organizations (ISOs), and interviews of several ISO representatives.

Literature Review

A detailed literature review was undertaken by HCS, including the review of over thirty reports and relevant data sources. A summary of the literature and data included a focus on immigrants in Surrey and the broader provincial context, immigrant barriers to employment, employer involvement with and employment related to immigrants in Surrey, labour market integration, challenges and opportunities for immigrant employment in Surrey, and sixteen promising practices.

Employer Survey

The employer survey was designed to gather information from employers on several key topics that allowed the consultant project team to gauge the respondent profile, data on immigrant hiring practices, perceived barriers, incentives and supports, along with information on the usage of existing immigrant support programs. The survey also probed for information on current and future labour force demand.

Key findings from the employer survey include:

- Nearly one-third of employer respondents are immigrants themselves
- The majority (69%) of employers surveyed are forecasting employee growth in the next three years with biggest increases seen in business generalist roles and skilled trades.
- The vast majority of employers employ immigrants and recruit through referrals from their existing employees
- While over 70% of employer respondents have a workforce diversity policy, only 35% proactively recruit immigrants
- Strong desire by employers for assistance in verifying foreign credentials, recruiting qualified immigrants, training grants and information on legal working requirements for immigrants
- Less than one third of employer respondents have worked with an ISO in the past.

Employer, Immigrant and ISO Interviews

Key findings from the in-depth interviews with **employers** include:

- Employers rely heavily on online postings (not always accessible to new immigrants) and referrals from existing employees to recruit new hires. In cases where the existing employee base has a high number of immigrants, referrals tend to result in more immigrant hires.
- Most employers have training in place for new hires but none of it is specifically designed to accommodate the needs of new Canadians.
- Employers are not formally tracking the ratio of immigrant to Canadian-born employees and estimates range from 10% to 80% of the workforce.
- There was general acknowledgement among employers that immigrants work hard despite (or perhaps because of) challenges including limited English language skills, a lack of awareness of Canadian workplace culture, minimal Canadian work experience and difficulty matching foreign qualifications to their Canadian equivalent.
- Finally, 'awareness' was a significant theme among employers. Employers reported that while they were aware of some support programs, there were many programs and services that were simply 'off their radar'. Many employers in the survey and focus group demonstrated a commitment to actively seeking ways to enhance their awareness of available programs and services as a result of their participation in this study.

Key findings from the in-depth interviews with **immigrants** include:

- The majority of respondents said that chose to come to Surrey to join other family members and because of Surrey's reputation for good schools and relatively affordable housing.
- Many interviewees said that while they had hoped to continue the careers they began in their home country, there were few opportunities to do so. This resulted in many new immigrants taking what they called 'survival' work – just to make ends meet. A common theme was that the immigration 'points system' gave them hope that skills and experience gained in their home country would be in demand in Canada. Often, this proved not to be the case.
- Interviewees said that, for the most part, they did not reach out to their respective ethno-cultural community for help in securing employment. Instead, they tended to seek help from their professional or religious communities. None of the interviewees reported experiencing any active discrimination.
- When asked about their awareness of immigrant programs and services, many were surprised to learn that there were 'so many' organizations willing to help.
- When asked about what they felt would break down some of the barriers to employment in their chosen field, many said they would be willing to volunteer if doing so would allow them to earn Canadian experience.
- Finally, immigrant interviewees suggested that more coordination and better communication among ISOs and immigrants (especially new immigrants) would be a significant benefit to them.

A total of 8 **ISOs** were interviewed for this study. Some common themes emerged among them, despite their differences. It was noted that it is more common for ISOs to reach out to employers than for employers to approach ISOs. Mandates among ISOs differ – some focus on settlement while others concentrate on employability skills (e.g. English language), and others are credential-focused.

ISOs said that it is challenging to follow-up on individual immigrants once they have been hired. As a result, they prefer to work with employers that share such information with them. Eight employers were identified as being particularly helpful in that regard.

ISOs suggested that there are certain occupational groups that offer a higher level of successful workforce attachment for immigrants. These include entry-level positions in hospitality, healthcare, retail, manufacturing, information technology and others.

Employer, Immigrant and ISO Focus Groups

The interviews of each group helped inform the types of questions and further probing of participants in focus groups of employers, immigrants and ISO representatives.

A focus group consisting of sixteen individuals from the City of Surrey' Immigrant Advisory Roundtable (IAR) was held as part of this project. **Immigrants** cited a number of examples of what is working well with respect to Surrey Immigrants finding and retaining meaningful employment with Surrey employers.

There was an example that one of the participants provided a story of how a group of newcomers in Surrey attended some job search programs and continued informally meeting after the program finished on a weekly/semiweekly basis to support each other socially and in the job search process. The participant also attends these meetings and found them valuable, and asked how could more of this be facilitated.



Participants felt that creating more opportunities for job shadowing, volunteer work and internships would help immigrants obtain critical Canadian experience. The group also agreed that employers

should be encouraged to increase diversity in the workplace and that expanding and extending eligibility would encourage greater participation in programs to accommodate immigrants who cannot get into the workforce immediately after immigrating.

It was felt that the federal government should expand the Federal Internship for Newcomers Program (FINP) and create programs like Ontario's 'Career Edge', an industry-specific language training initiative.

The project team spoke with a group of five individuals from various **ISOs** operating programs in the City of Surrey. ISOs shared some of the same concerns as other focus group participants. This group cited the language profile of immigrants as a significant barrier – some immigrants simply have not enough English for the workplace. In addition, unfamiliarity with Canadian work culture and lack of Canadian work experience were flagged as significant barriers.

Participants felt that incentives to encourage immigrants to “move to where the jobs are” – often outside of urban centres – was a positive approach. The ISOs highlighted two international examples as suggested approaches for Surrey.

In a focus group of Surrey Board of Trade **employer** members, networking was cited by several participants as a successful strategy for immigrant candidates. Networking offers immigrant candidates an opportunity to:

- Tap into the 'hidden job market'
- Meet potential employers and connect with them at a personal level
- Learn about work culture in their industry of choice
- Potentially meet fellow ex-pats in their industry who will have a personal interest in helping them find meaningful work

Participants suggested that employers who wish to be successful at integrating immigrants into their workforce need to ensure that there is a workplace culture onboarding process.

The City of Surrey, as an employer, has been successful in participating in the Immigrant Employment Council of BC's Connector Program in which immigrants and employers and professionals are connected thereby helping immigrants build professional networks and find local opportunities.

Focus group participants were united in their intent to push the responsibility back to the candidate: If the candidate wants a job, they need to make an effort to improve their English skills. They emphasized that the hires they see practicing English at home – not just in ESL class – tend to pick up English much more quickly and with greater proficiency. It was noted that there are certain roles that require less English and might be a better fit (e.g. a Blackjack dealer at a Casino does not need to know much English).

Themes of Key Challenges

Based on the secondary (literature review and available data) and primary research (interviews, survey, focus groups) and secondary research (literature review), it is evident that there are significant challenges facing immigrants seeking employer in Surrey.

These challenges are as follows:

1. English Language
2. Canadian Workplace Culture
3. Training/Internship Opportunities
4. Employer Capacities and Knowledge
5. Lack of Central Coordination
6. Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment Opportunities
7. Funding Challenges

These gaps are not radically different from those seen in, for example, the early days of the Toronto Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs). The integrated approach that the City of Toronto and a number of regional and community LIPs are taking towards addressing these gaps proves that there are potential viable solutions. Each of the above gaps is discussed in more detail below.

Recommendations

Given the limited resources available to the Surrey SLIP stakeholders to take on new projects or expand existing services, this report's recommendations focus on what can be realistically achieved with little or no new funding:

1. Surrey LIP strengthening coordination of immigrant employment- and employer-related programs and services in Surrey.
2. Partner with Surrey School District to enhance English language training
3. Encourage employers and industry groups to adopt occupation and sector-specific English language training (on-site) strategies.
4. Create a Surrey Labour Shortage Task Force
5. Use the Surrey LIP to create an employer / immigrant portal focussed on jobs and employment
6. Strengthening Business Sector Involvement in the Surrey LIP.
7. Engage Local Professional Immigrant Networks.
8. Host an annual Surrey Immigrant Employment Conference or Summit. The
9. Increase Surrey employer and industry awareness of ISOs and capacity for employing Surrey immigrants.
10. Create an Employer Advisory Roundtable to the Surrey LIP.
11. Leverage increased funding for Surrey immigrant employment strategies.

12. Encourage and increase immigrant development in entrepreneurship and self-employment.
13. Advocate for and working with ISOs, governments and employer groups to increase immigrant bridging and internship programs.
14. Pursue opportunities for further research on immigrant employment in Surrey.

Conclusion

The Immigrant Labour Market Integration Research Project aimed to identify the gaps specific to newcomers entering Surrey labour market and existing and desirable solutions to improve immigrant labour market outcomes. As a result, a variety of promising immigrant employment practices have been uncovered in Surrey and other jurisdictions that support immigrant labour market integration. At the same time, the study has identified some clear challenges in Surrey with regards to immigrant employment and some constructive solutions reflected in the aforementioned recommendations.

Some clear challenges in Surrey with regards to immigrant employment have been identified in this report, and some relatively inexpensive and constructive solutions have been offered that can be implemented to further address the issues. In the long run, a looming labour shortage should drive increased interest in immigrant employment in the next five years that may open up new funding to address immigrant employment challenges.

In the meantime, the community of Surrey possesses two key success factors for immigrant employment and career success:

- The Surrey LIP members' commitment to immigrant settlement and integration – and in particular to immigrant training and employment; and,
- The Surrey LIP's body of work, strong advocacy role and comprehensive membership.

Surrey, therefore, is well-positioned to increase immigrant employment and career success through collective efforts of the City, the Surrey LIP, individual immigrant-serving organizations, business groups like the Surrey Board of Trade and many others.