



**TRIEC**

Toronto Region Immigrant  
Employment Council

New Realities. New Opportunities.

# **Invest in Immigrant Employment for a Stronger Economy**

**2009 Provincial Pre-budget Submission**

**November 21, 2008**

## **Summary of Recommendations:**

### **TRIEC recommends that the Government of Ontario:**

1. Sustain its commitment to mentoring and the expansion of this program to other communities in Ontario;
2. Continue its support of bridging and language programs to ensure a quick transition of highly skilled immigrants into the labour market;
3. Continue investing in initiatives that enhance employer capacity to effectively hire skilled immigrants and create an inclusive workplace;
4. Continue its participation in mentoring and internship programs through Career Bridge and the Mentoring Partnership; and
5. Maintain its support for the Office of the Fairness Commissioner and ensure that the Office has the required resources to continue its work.

## 2009 Provincial Pre-Budget Submission

The Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) welcomes this opportunity to provide input to the Government of Ontario during the Minister's pre-budget consultations.

TRIEC is a multi-stakeholder council that convenes local leaders to find innovative solutions that connect skilled immigrants more effectively with the local labour market. We do this by working with a range of stakeholders to raise their awareness of the value of skilled immigrants, increase their acceptance to explore local solutions, and enhance their capacity to act.

Even in these tougher economic times, there are some industries facing serious labour market shortages which threaten to impact current levels of productivity. For example, the Federal government lists many occupations under pressure, including finance and engineering. The Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC) estimates that there will be more than 90,000 IT jobs that must be filled over the next three to five years to maintain current levels of competitiveness. According to a Conference Board report, this shortage has a dramatic impact on the Canadian economy of \$10.6 billion per year if these positions are left unfilled.<sup>1</sup>

While some companies have strong labour market demand, many skilled immigrants have difficulty finding meaningful employment. Despite their high levels of education and years of experience, over ten per cent of recent immigrants were unemployed in 2006, as reported by Statistics Canada. This is twice that of the Canadian born population.

There is clearly a labour market failure when skilled immigrants are not connecting with employers with labour shortages. Since 2003, with the support of the Ontario government, TRIEC has worked closely with private and public sector partners to:

- Develop effective measures that build the social capital and networks of skilled immigrants;
- Enhance services available to both employers and immigrants; and
- Provide employers with the tools they need to recruit and retain skilled immigrants.

These initiatives have proven successful in addressing labour market failures and are delivering successful outcomes for both immigrants and employers.

Immigration can be leveraged to help Ontario through this tough economic climate. As Ontario seeks to diversify its markets in light of the U.S. economic downturn, immigrants can be key to opening doors to global markets. Every year, over a hundred thousand immigrants settle across Ontario and drive economic growth locally and globally. The town of Markham recently reported the benefits of its diverse population in helping to grow local businesses and make connections to global markets. Markham Mayor Frank Scarpitti remarked "We're opening our doors and there is no doubt that we need immigrants to ensure our future economic prosperity."<sup>2</sup>

Skilled immigrants arrive with a wealth of experience and knowledge which Ontario can leverage for future economic growth. We urge the Government of Ontario to continue its investments in the labour market interventions that add value to the economy. TRIEC believes that investing in these areas will better position Ontario to meet the economic challenges ahead and increase its global competitiveness.

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<sup>1</sup> Conference Board of Canada, "Findings from Securing Our Future Case Studies", June 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Globe and Mail Report on Business, "Boom in the 'burbs", Friday, October 31, 2008.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **1. Building social capital is effective as an early intervention for newcomers**

TRIEC is pleased that the Government of Ontario recognizes the importance of mentoring as a tool for successful labour market integration. The Government's commitment to mentoring is demonstrated through its annual investment and support of community agencies that deliver The Mentoring Partnership, and the plans to expand this program province-wide.

Mentoring has been extremely successful at providing skilled immigrants with exposure to professional networks and Canadian workplace culture, which supports effective linkage and integration into the labour market. The metrics to date are impressive:

- The Mentoring Partnership has 52 corporate partners, with more than 3700 matches made since February 2005.
- Eighty per cent of mentees have found employment, of which 85 per cent are working in their own field.

TRIEC's work confirms that mentoring is one of the most effective interventions that help skilled immigrants attach themselves to the labour market. It also links Ontario employers to new global and local markets. Good economic outcomes for skilled immigrants lead to a stronger provincial economy for the future.

**TRIEC recommends that the Government of Ontario sustain its commitment to mentoring and the expansion of this program to other communities in Ontario.**

### **2. Bridging programs and language training are critical to seamless integration**

TRIEC strongly believes that bridging programs are critical to successful integration of skilled immigrants into the labour market. Bridging programs are designed specifically to enable new immigrants to transition more quickly into the Canadian labour market through in-class training and work placements to bridge their prior education and work experience to meet the requirements to practice in their field in Canada.

From our work with various employers, three independent surveys have cited that 80 per cent of employers consistently name language and communication skills as the number one barrier to hiring skilled immigrants. As such, enhancing newcomers' language and communication skills is imperative to helping immigrants integrate effectively and succeed in the workplace.

Since 2003, Ontario has invested more than \$85 million to fund 145 career bridging projects to help 20,000 foreign trained immigrants. Another \$3.4 million will be spent on job-specific language training in classrooms and workplaces in the next two years. TRIEC applauds the government's commitment and hopes that this level of investment will continue in the future.

These programs play a dual role: they provide opportunities for skilled immigrants to bridge any gaps in knowledge and experience so they can move smoothly into the Canadian workplace; and they play an important role in mitigating any risks that an employer may perceive in hiring a skilled immigrant. Programs that bridge skilled immigrants to licensure and employment are working to solve the labour market disconnect.

**TRIEC recommends that the Government of Ontario continue its support of bridging and language programs to ensure a quick transition of highly skilled immigrants into the labour market.**

**3. Initiatives that support employers as key stakeholders in building a stronger and inclusive workplace are essential**

The Canadian workplace is changing quickly. Diversity is becoming a key ingredient to strong economic success. Recently, the Financial Post wrote:

“With the increasing difficulties businesses are facing in attracting top talent, companies that create a workplace that is welcoming to people from different cultures will have a competitive advantage today and tomorrow, when it is projected that new immigrants will be the largest source of workforce growth in the country.”<sup>3</sup>

With this changing workplace, employers must now deal with issues which may be unfamiliar to them, including religious accommodation and cultural competence. Many small and medium sized employers do not have the HR capacity to address these issues.

TRIEC works to bridge the gap between employer needs and the skilled immigrant talent pool. With the Government of Ontario’s support, TRIEC works with employers to help build their capacity to recruit, retain and promote skilled immigrants.

TRIEC is creating a learning community between employers and HR professionals through a range of tools and resources, including webinars, case studies, employer workshops, and videos about recruiting and selecting skilled immigrants and cultural competency training. These initiatives have been very well received by employers and demand for them continues to grow, particularly those targeted at the small and medium sized enterprises.

We are at a critical point for this learning community. Employers are starting to recognize the benefit of diversity in the workplace and are eager to leverage the talents of skilled immigrants to build their business. It is important for the Government of Ontario to continue supporting new and existing initiatives that enhance employer capacity that effectively create an inclusive workplace and better integrate skilled immigrants into the local labour market.

**TRIEC recommends that the Government of Ontario continue investing in initiatives that enhance employer capacity to effectively hire skilled immigrants and create an inclusive workplace.**

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<sup>3</sup> Financial Post, “How can diversity help business?” Friday, November 14, 2008.  
[http://www.financialpost.com/small\\_business/businesssolutions/story.html?id=960658](http://www.financialpost.com/small_business/businesssolutions/story.html?id=960658)

#### **4. Be a leader among Ontario's employers**

TRIEC applauds the Government of Ontario for its commitment to providing immigrants with Canadian work experience by participating in internship and mentoring programs for skilled immigrants. As Ontario's largest employer, it is important that the Ontario government continue to lead by example through its participation in the Mentoring Partnership and Career Bridge programs. Canadian work experience opportunities are the most effective way for skilled immigrants to find meaningful employment.

Studies have shown that early interventions are important to helping immigrants find gainful employment. More importantly, if immigrants can avoid taking a survival job during their first year in Canada, their probability of remaining out of low income and poverty significantly improves.

**TRIEC recommends that the Government of Ontario continue its participation in mentoring and internship programs through Career Bridge and the Mentoring Partnership.**

#### **5. Fairness in regulated professions is required to level the playing field for skilled immigrants**

TRIEC is pleased that the Government of Ontario established the Office of the Fairness Commissioner in 2007 to ensure that Ontario's regulated professions have practices that are transparent, objective and fair. This office will play an important role in leveling the playing field for skilled immigrants in regulated professions.

Currently, many internationally trained professionals have difficulty getting licensed to practice in their fields. While there has been considerable progress made in implementing measures to address this issue, it will be important for the Government of Ontario to ensure that credential assessment and recognition of internationally trained professionals is streamlined for future growth.

**TRIEC recommends that the Government of Ontario maintain its support for the Office of the Fairness Commissioner and ensure that the Office has the required resources to continue its work.**

#### **Conclusion**

TRIEC appreciates that the Government of Ontario has difficult decisions to make in its upcoming 2009 Budget. The global economic downturn, especially south of our border, has dramatic impacts on our economy and our industries. Governments, companies and consumers are all cautious of their expenditures over the coming months; each will be looking for ways to save money and protect themselves from economic shocks.

TRIEC believes that skilled immigrants are key to stronger economic growth. Investing in the areas that connect skilled immigrants more effectively to the local labour market will reap rewards for the Ontario economy. TRIEC hopes that the Government of Ontario will continue to invest in these areas as part of a long-term strategy to build Ontario's labour force and strengthen the economy for sustainable future growth.