



Toronto Region Immigrant
Employment Council

Diversity Drives Success



Embracing Immigrant Talent: Perspectives and Practices of Toronto Region Employers

Summary Report

Introduction

The employment gap between newcomers and Canadian-born workers has been narrowing over the past decade, but there is still some way to go. Barriers that push skilled immigrants into low-wage jobs and impede their career progression persist.

Improvements can be made, and employers have significant power to shape the labour market experiences of immigrant professionals.

TRIEC's report *Embracing Immigrant Talent: Perspectives and Practices of Toronto Region Employers* explores employers' attitudes and actions related to immigrant integration in Greater Toronto Area (GTA) workplaces. It is based on a survey of 500 human resource professionals, hiring managers and equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) practitioners in the GTA, as well as 15 in-depth interviews and a document review. See the [full report](#) for further details on the methodology.

Key Findings

- Finding qualified employees often requires time, outreach and effort. Over the past year, 40% of organizations have suffered a loss in contracts, sales or business resulting from a lack of qualified employees.
- Immigrants made up the majority of the workforce for 22% of organizations in the GTA. Forty percent of GTA organizations have seen the percentage of immigrants in their organization increase in the past five years.
- Slightly less than half (46%) of employers indicated a specific focus on hiring immigrants and/or temporary residents in their organizations — and that drops to 31% in the high-skilled job market for immigrants already in Canada.

- For organizations with a focus on hiring from the immigrant talent pool, the most common reason they do it is to add diversity to the workplace (41%). Strong work ethic and commitment (30%) and possession of needed skills (30%) are also commonly mentioned reasons. Additionally, when considering new candidates, immigrants are perceived as more likely to take less pay.
- Fifty-one percent of employers hire immigrants through the same processes as other employees — they do not use targeted recruitment channels.
- Eighty-one percent of organizations face barriers or challenges when attempting to hire immigrant talent, such as understanding foreign credentials (36%) and verifying international references (32%). And 83% face some challenges when integrating immigrant talent into their teams. The biggest challenges after hiring a new immigrant are English language proficiency (30%) and lack of full understanding of Canadian workplace culture (24%). While all employers mention the need to prioritize technical skills, many emphasize “culture fit.”
- Eighty-nine percent of the employers surveyed have taken at least one action to ease the transition of new immigrants into their workforce. This includes accommodating cultural and religious practices (28%), providing job shadowing opportunities (25%) and offering extra training to satisfy job specifications (23%). Some also provide cultural awareness training (20%) to existing employees and assign a mentor/buddy as a go-to resource (19%). In interviews, mentoring was mentioned by employers as a particularly effective way to help new employees get up to speed and adapt to the job.
- Employee retention is a challenge for many organizations. Employers with retention strategies tend to focus on providing clear pathways for career advancement within the organization. Fewer train managers and team leaders on inclusive leadership practices.
- Formal diversity and inclusion initiatives are not yet commonplace within organizations; 81% of employers indicated making progress, but just 29% have integrated a strategy and/or systematic approach in their organization. Some employers without official policies said that the creation of an inclusive environment happens organically within their organization.
- Although 45% of survey respondents reported that their diversity and inclusion strategies consider immigrants, a review of publicly available documents of top employers in the GTA shows that just 4% mention specific actions targeting immigrant employees.
- Many employers don't know much about immigrant-serving organizations that could connect them with newcomer job seekers and help with onboarding and retention. Three-quarters (74%) of employers have used outside help to hire and/or integrate immigrants, with 20% using wage subsidy programs. However, only 15% identified working with immigrant-serving agencies.
- Employers noted that organizations working with immigrants should help provide better information and education on workplace norms, cultural expectations and language support alongside job training. Employers would also be in support of a streamlined skills assessment process to save time, eliminate guesswork and choose candidates with more confidence.



Main Recommendations

Drawing from the findings, the report offers three main recommendations for strengthening employers' capacity to create environments and structures that promote equal opportunities for all workers:

1. Support employers in assessing transferable skills and experience to mitigate perceived hiring risks related to immigrants.

For many employers, hiring is a risk management process. Hiring managers may find it challenging to evaluate applications from immigrants because they are unsure of the quality or relevance of international education, work experience and soft skills, and they are unfamiliar with credential recognition services. When employers do not have effective or systematic processes for determining whether applicants actually have the traits they are looking for, hiring managers rely on flawed proxy indicators, such as trusted referrals and Canadian experience. Raising awareness about education credential assessment services among employers and working with them to develop effective competency-based assessment tools for different positions can help hiring managers better recognize the skills and expertise of immigrants.

2. Improve outreach to employers and assist them to recruit, hire and retain immigrants.

Even if they are committed to hiring immigrants, employers may find it challenging to connect with immigrant professionals. They may not know how to access resources and services, resulting in confusion and a low level of awareness. While some employers appreciate the work of settlement agencies, there is a need for better outreach from service providers to employers. Employers may appreciate agencies that can:

- revise job postings and screening practices to eliminate barriers for newcomers
- circulate job postings and information to immigrant job seekers

- provide pre-screened, qualified candidates
 - support with newcomer-specific onboarding programs
 - facilitate workplace/occupation-specific language training
 - offer mentorship programs and opportunities for intercultural exchange and interaction
 - act as a coordinating body or one-stop shop for all of the above services
3. Support employers to remove bias and discrimination in their human resource practices.

Employers who provide a more inclusive working environment for immigrant workers are better able to fill positions with international talent. But many employers may not have the necessary knowledge or tools to embrace immigrant-inclusive approaches to hiring and retention. Even if a company believes in the importance of EDI, turning that belief into tangible, lasting change isn't always easy, particularly for small businesses. This is an area where employers need hands-on and continued support. Governments must invest in solutions focused on addressing systemic barriers to immigrant employment, and not just on individualized support to newcomers to overcome personal barriers.

Acknowledgements

The [full report](#) was prepared by TRIEC, based on survey and interview data and summary analyses provided by Léger. Financial support to make this work possible was provided by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

The views expressed in the report are those of the author only.

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