

***Renewing Municipal Infrastructure and  
Integrating Internationally-educated and  
Experienced Workers Into the Workforce: An  
Exploration of Immediate National Needs***

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### ***Abstract***

Following a review of some of the challenges facing municipalities in terms of their needs for infrastructure renewal, ***Renewing Municipal Infrastructure and Integrating Internationally-educated and Experienced Workers Into the Workforce*** identifies the work needed to renew Canada's urban infrastructure and the role that can be played by internationally-educated and experienced workers in such projects. A brief prepared for the Canadian Labour Congress, this paper explores the possibilities of revitalizing urban environments and employing skilled immigrant labour in the process. To make this point, the paper examines the continuing barriers facing internationally-educated and experienced workers seeking to use their skills in the Canadian workforce. It also reviews some of the current federal, provincial and municipal programs aimed at easing the integration of these workers. In doing so, it suggests that there should be a focus by all levels of government on building a sustainable infrastructure renewal program and having targeted bridging programs that enable internationally-education and experienced workers to gain employment in the infrastructure renewal process.

While this paper expresses my own views on this subject, I wish to thank Harisha Sivalinkam for her invaluable research assistance and Karl Flecker for his feedback on the draft of this paper.

*The Government of Canada is committed to improving immigrant integration into the labour market. Indeed, Prime Minister Harper has promised that our common goal “will be to get those who are trained and ready to work in their fields of expertise into the workforce more quickly.” To achieve that goal, I am working closely with the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to implement a series of measures that will help newcomers to integrate more effectively into the Canadian workforce.*

Message from **the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC), Monte Solberg**

**1. Introduction:**

Over the past decade, municipalities have been putting pressure on the federal government to recognize the urgent need for improvements to municipal infrastructure (e.g., road repairs, water treatment, waste management, parks, recreational and cultural facilities). At the same time, urban centres have been hit hard by the downloading of provincial responsibilities for human, social and recreational services, particularly in the areas of mandated programs, e.g., social welfare assistance and housing for low-income earners and the poor. This, in turn, has created a downward pressure on funding available for infrastructure renewal as the costs of mandated programs increases without corresponding increases in provincial transfer payments. As such, municipalities are forced to fund these essential human services as a priority and this leaves less and less funding over time for infrastructure renewal.

While this dilemma continues with much debate between urban leaders and those from the provincial and federal governments, the current configuration of the Canadian economy faces significant skills and labour shortages in specific regions and sectors. One of the ways Canadian governments, federal and provincial, have begun to address these challenges is through increases in immigration levels and more selective targets aimed at attracting immigrant labour to meet Canadian labour market needs. On the one hand, while immigration levels have increased and there has been a more selective approach to immigrant selection, internationally-educated, skilled and experienced immigrants continue to face significant barriers to the recognition of their knowledge and skills. This leads to barriers these immigrants encounter in being employed within the profession for which they have studied and practiced in for many years.

The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) has noted both of these challenges and is interested in addressing both through a collaborative set of strategies that aims to enhance municipal infrastructure renewal and employment of internationally-educated and experienced workers. This brief sets out the challenges identified by the CLC in terms of the following:

- 1) The Critical Need for Infrastructure Renewal

- 2) The Challenges of Increasing Immigration and Canadian Labour Markets
- 3) The Continuing Challenges of International-Credential Recognition
- 4) Opportunities for Action on Infrastructure Renewal
- 5) Next Steps to Pursue Collaborative Strategies

This brief for the CLC summarizes information in each of these sections and suggests in conclusion that a national infrastructure program is needed and that such a program can and should be used to integrate internationally-educated and experienced immigrants into the Canadian workforce through various programs that will provide these immigrants with skills-training, upgrading and workplace education while, at the same time, matching their skills with the competencies required to support infrastructure renewal projects.

## 2. The Critical Need for Infrastructure Renewal:

In November 2007, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) released a document entitled ***Danger Ahead: The Coming Collapse of Canada's Municipal Infrastructure***<sup>1</sup>. Prepared by Saeed Mizra, Professor of Civil Engineering and Applied Mechanics at McGill University, this report begins by assessing the current crisis as follows:

Canadian municipalities build, own and maintain most of the infrastructure that supports our economy and quality of life. Yet for the past 20 years, municipalities have been caught in a fiscal squeeze caused by growing responsibilities and reduced revenues. As a result, they were forced to defer needed investment, and municipal infrastructure continued to deteriorate, with the cost of fixing it climbing five-fold from an estimated \$12 billion in 1985 to \$60 billion in 2003. This cost is the municipal infrastructure deficit, and today it has reached \$123 billion. (2007:2).

Arguing that the municipal infrastructure across Canada “has reached the breaking point...(as m)ost was built between the 1950s and 1970s...(and that) much of it is due for replacement...” Mizra suggests that this \$123 billion deficit is most notable in such areas as: water and waste systems (\$31 billion); transportation (\$21.7 billion); transit (\$22.8 billion); waste management (\$7.7 billion); and community, recreational, cultural and social infrastructure (\$40.2 billion) (2007:2).

Municipalities have been hard hit with increasing responsibilities for human services, e.g., social welfare payments and public housing, and reduced transfer payments from senior levels of government. Unlike senior levels of government, municipalities have few opportunities to generate revenues and cannot have operating budget deficits. As a result, capital expenditures have been delayed in the face of the more immediate pressures of operational costs. This has had a significant impact on infrastructure deterioration (Mizra, 2007:5).

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<sup>1</sup> This report is similar to the position paper presented by the FCM in September, 2006 *Submission to Transport, Infrastructure and Communities Canada*

Investment in new infrastructure was at 4.8 per cent annually between 1955 and 1977 and 'closely matched' Canada's population growth and rate of urbanization. This is in stark contrast to the 0.1 per cent annually between 1978 and 2000 and represents a significant under-investment by all orders of government (Mizra, 2007:6). While new investments in municipal infrastructure have increased to 7.5 per cent annually between 2001 and 2003, Mizra argues that

...this recent growth in infrastructure spending should not be considered a solution to the infrastructure deficit...(as much of this recent increase in investment can be traced to increased urbanization during the past 10 years, and it is not clear that the increase in capital stock is sufficient to meet population growth. Moreover, this increase in investment has not met the annual rehabilitation needs of existing capital stock, or alleviated the backlog of maintenance and rehabilitation accumulated over the decade. (2007:6).

Specifically, Mizra identifies five categories for infrastructure renewal:

1. Transportation (roads, bridges, curbs, sidewalks);
2. Water (distribution, supply and treatment);
3. Wastewater (sanitary and storm sewers and related treatment facilities);
4. Transit (facilities, equipment and rolling stock); and
5. Other public infrastructure (e.g., cultural, social, community and recreational facilities).

In terms of the importance of infrastructure renewal, Mizra cites the following two key sources:

- The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the collapse of a portion of the de la Concorde overpass (2007:198) which stated "The Commission's mandate revealed the need to modernize our infrastructure, built largely in the 30 years following World War II. Quebec is not alone; the situation is similar across all of North America. At issue is not only public safety but the ability to maintain first-rate infrastructure, which plays a role in the quality of life of Quebec's residents and its economic development." ; and
- The Federal budget 2006 ***Restoring Fiscal Balance in Canada – Focusing on Priorities*** which stated "Canada's quality of life and economic competitiveness depend in part on having reliable, efficient infrastructure that is provided in large part by the municipal, provincial, territorial and federal governments."

Mizra cites other studies that share the same perspective, i.e., the Canada West Foundation which in 2003 estimated the total cost for infrastructure renewal at \$125 billion, and, the Mizra/Haider study of 2003 which found that the infrastructure deficit could reach \$400 billion by 2020 (2007: 9). Mizra also notes surveys conducted by:

- ✓ the FCM and McGill University that show the infrastructure deficit increased from \$12 billion in 1985 to \$44 billion in 1996;
- ✓ the Technology Roadmap, the Canadian Society of Civil Engineering, the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers, the Canadian Public Works Association and the National Research Council of Canada that place the infrastructure deficit at \$57 billion in 2003; and
- ✓ TD Economics which estimated that the infrastructure deficit was growing by \$2 billion per year (2007:9)

To address this accruing deficit, Mizra argues that “(a) comprehensive, national inventory of infrastructure assets is required to properly determine the size, scale and geographic character of the municipal infrastructure deficit. However, until such a project is undertaken, there remains a pressing need to track the deficit as accurately as possible...This is especially important given a growing body of evidence that the municipal infrastructure deficit is reaching crisis proportions...(and that if) we do not act prudently, the economic, social, and environmental costs of the deficit will grow at a rapidly increasing rate.” (Mizra, 2007:8).

### **3. Demographic Changes and Labour Market Needs:**

It has long been acknowledged that Canadian society is rapidly changing as a result of increased immigration levels. As Alboim and Mclsaac suggest “Immigration levels for 2007 have been set for an increased range of 250,000 to 265,000 new permanent residents. This is 10,000 above the projections for 2006, and it signals an ongoing commitment on the part of the Canadian government to seek in immigration solutions to ever-widening gaps in the labour market and to demographic pressures.” (2007:2. See also Flecker, 2007:11).

However, Alboim and Mclsaac are cautious about the potential impact of this on soon-to-be Canadians. They write “As an element in the broader context of human capital development, the positioning of immigration as a solution to labour market shortages can only succeed if it is systematically articulated with related policy developments – that is, labour market development and education and training.” (2007:2)

Alboim and Mclsaac’s cause for concern is evident in their description of immigrants who settle in Canada. They describe recent immigrants, those within the past 30 years, as having higher educational credentials than Canadian-born persons in the same age group. They point out that these immigrants are predominantly from non-European source countries and, therefore, are predominantly racialized. These immigrants also tend to settle in large urban areas, i.e., Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal. In identifying these characteristics, Alboim and Mclsaac suggest a significant downside to the experiences these immigrants tend to share when settling in Canada. They write

Although the immigrants who have arrived since the 1990s are the most educated to date, their labour market outcomes are not comparable with those of previous cohorts of immigrants or their Canadian-born counterparts. *These reduced outcomes seem incongruous in light of the labour and skills shortages experienced throughout Canada. The expectation is that by 2011 immigrants will account for 100 percent of net labour market growth. There is therefore a growing imperative to develop policy responses that facilitate improved labour market performance for skilled immigrants (my emphasis)* (Alboim and Mclsaac, 2007:3)

In this context, Alboim and Mclsaac note that:

- In the early 1980s, immigrants had higher labour participation rates than individuals born in Canada but that this had reversed itself by the early 1990s when the labour market participation rate for immigrants fell below the national average; and
- While some recent immigrants have found lucrative employment in specific high-skilled occupations, “(t)here is an overrepresentation of university educated immigrants in low-skilled jobs...” (2007:3).

In addition to this, Flecker suggests that by 2016, immigration will comprise close to 66 percent of Canada’s population growth and, by 2030, Statistics Canada projects immigration will account for 100 percent of Canada’s population growth (2007:4). Flecker also argues that currently 75 percent of Canada’s net labour growth is from immigration and that some projections indicate this source will be 100 percent of Canada’s labour growth in six years (2007:11).

These factors are evident despite increasing recognition of largely regional skill and labour shortages, e.g., service industry, small businesses, the Alberta oil industry, and trades in B.C. (Alboim and Mclsaac, 2007:5). As a result, it has been noted that:

- i) in 2001, 44.6% of recent immigrants (those settling in Canada between 1996-2001) fell under the Low-Income Cut-off rate;
- ii) Close to 60% of newcomers working are employed in part-time, contract-based employment; and
- iii) Between 1981 and 2001, despite having higher educational qualifications, poverty amongst recent immigrants in Toronto grew by 125%. (Colour of Poverty Campaign, 2007: Fact Sheet #8).

Citing StatsCan data, Canadian Labour Congress research papers also acknowledge that 34 percent of immigrants to Canada between 1995 and 1999 lived in low-income situations compared with 11 percent of non-immigrants (2007:11-12). Further, the Conference Board of Canada has calculated that non recognition of immigrant credentials amounts to a loss of \$3.42-

\$4.97 billion to the Canadian economy (Alboim and McIsaac 2007: 5). This is because immigrants work below their skill level, at least two-thirds of their unused skills worth \$1.6 billion were in fact transferable to the Canadian context. (Alboim and McIsaac 2007: 5).

Finally, in its paper *Labour's Agenda for Good Jobs*, the CLC notes various skills shortages affecting the growth of the Canadian economy and suggests "In the context of some skill shortages in particular occupations (such as skilled trades and some health professionals) and in some regions, we have a major opportunity to move unemployed, under-employed and low-paid workers into better jobs. Access to training should be greatly enhanced for the 40% of workers with limited literacy and numeracy skills, and recent immigrants who are under-employed relative to their education and credentials." (CLC, 2007:8-9). The CLC paper goes on to state:

Due to demographic trends and differences in regional economies, Canada is likely to face increasing shortages of workers in particular occupations and particular regions. The CLC supports an expanded immigration program which will help us meet these future labour market challenges. (CLC, 2007:9).

These data suggest that there is an urgent need to consider the role of immigrant settlement and labour market needs with a view to accelerating the integration of internationally-educated and skilled workers into the Canadian workforce.

#### **4. The Continuing Challenges of International-Credential Recognition:**

A Toronto Star article discusses the interest of the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, Monte Solberg, to encourage Canadians to "...grab a hammer, turn a lathe, drive a truck or do whatever is necessary to keep the economy going." (Brennan, 2008:A17). In response to a Price-Waterhouse Coopers survey that suggests 60 per cent of companies believe a shortage of qualified workers is slowing growth, Brennan quotes Solberg as saying "I truly believe it is the most important issue facing the country." Solberg goes on to say "We have to find ways (of attracting people back into the workforce)...We need people ready to step in... all kinds of people who really struggled to get into the labour market in the past." (Brennan, 2008:A17).

Solberg notes the potential role immigrant labour can play to meet these work shortages and is quoted saying "There is no question that immigration is going to be a major part of how we address our labour market challenges...but there are challenges, not the least of which is that every country in the world is looking at the same pool of people." (Brennan, 2008:A17)

Based on this comment, it would seem in Canada's best interest to present attractive opportunities to potential immigrants so that they are compelled to choose Canada as their destination. However, despite Solberg's interest, a recent Stats-Can report notes that while immigrant employment is seen as a way to offset projected labour shortages, the increasing

retention of immigrant employment was not enough to prevent the gap between immigrants and native-born Canadians (as cited in National Post, 2008:FP6).

This seems to suggest that, rather than presenting opportunities that would attract internationally-educated and experienced immigrants, the historical barriers preventing the accelerated integration of these workers are still evident. For example, some of the continuing barriers preventing the integration of skilled immigrants into the labour market include:

1. A perceived lack of “Canadian work experience” and often unjustified rationale as to relevance by prospective employers ;
2. Limitations within official language competency;
3. The lack of a database that allows employers access to inventories of skilled immigrants being processed to come to Canada;
4. Continued challenges to licensing for regulated professionals;
5. The lack of information overseas and in Canada on employment needs in Canada and required qualifications;
6. The lack of employer recognition of immigrant skills;
7. Racial discrimination faced by immigrant workers;
8. Increased competition by highly educated Canadian labour force;
9. Long wait times for processing of immigrant papers;
10. The lack of connections and networks for immigrant workers; and
11. The lack of financial assistance to support educational and skills upgrading

While immigrant selection criteria focuses on education, training competency and skills that fit the new labour market, some of the literature continues to suggest that integration policies to facilitate labour market integration are weak. Concerns on these issues are discussed briefly below.

1. **Lack of Canadian work experience.** “The most commonly cited barrier to employment for skilled immigrants is the requirement of Canadian work experience.” (Alboim and McIsaac 2007: 4) Despite meeting every other requirement necessary for employment, insufficient knowledge of the Canadian work place, knowledge of employment standards and occupational health and safety legislation, workplace cultural expectations and practices, organizational structures and effective communications styles continue to be barriers for internationally-educated and experienced workers.
2. **Lack of language competency.** Employers site this issue as one of the major barriers preventing immigrants from landing professional jobs in Canada. Immigrants need more specialized language training to improve their communication skills and occupation specific skills for the work place.
3. **No database that allows employers access to inventories of skilled immigrants being processed to come to Canada.** Some employers are simply unaware of how many skilled immigrants are entering or looking to enter the labour market in Canada.

This makes early match-making of immigrant skills and employment opportunities impossible because most immigrants upon arriving in Canada hope to start working immediately.

4. **Licensing for Self-Regulated Professions.** Immigrants experience great difficulty obtaining a license to practice their profession in Canada and, as a result, need bridging programs to fill the gap between the value of their education abroad and the value of the same degree in Canada.
5. **Lack of Information.** Immigrants come to Canada under the impression of leading productive lives, hoping to achieve economic prosperity given the skills and education they worked so hard to achieve overseas. Immigrants back home are simply not aware of the labour market needs in Canada, and also whether their credentials and skills are transferable into the Canadian economy.
6. **Employers are not aware of the value of immigrant skills.** Many employers do not recognize immigrants as an important resource to be tapped. In addition, Canadian employers are unable to accurately evaluate the value of an international obtained degree. (Alboim and McIsaac 2007: 11) This uncertainty is interpreted as a risk that many employers are not willing to take. (Alboim, Finnie, Meng 2005: 14).
7. **Credential Recognition.** In Canada there is no standardized approach to assessment of international credentials, and therefore little portability of skills and education (Alboim and McIsaac 2007:4). In addition, there are no standardized methods for allowing immigrants to demonstrate their competencies and experience. The problem is that having one's credentials assessed does not mean having them recognized and valued by an employer. Employers are simply unaware of the value of assessment and the possible economic benefits of hiring skilled immigrants.
8. **Discrimination/Racism.** A majority of immigrants are racialized persons and, though immigrants often have higher credentials than those born in Canada, they continue to earn disproportionately less than non-racialized immigrants (Reitz 2005: 12).
9. **Long wait times for processing applications.** Currently, there is 4-5 year wait for processing applications because the system is completely paper based and is inefficient. Employers often find themselves frustrated, because skills are needed immediately.
10. **The lack of connections and networks.** This poses a barrier to many skilled immigrants seeking employment because "who you know" can be a major advantage in today's competitive labour market.
11. **Lack of Financial Assistance/Loan Program.** Immigrants participating in bridge training programs are not eligible for student loans because the programs are not degree or diploma oriented. Also post-secondary students or workers in training programs don't

necessarily have the collateral or means of securing loans (Alboim, Finnie, Meng, 2005:15).

These barriers need to be challenged in order to accelerate the integration of internationally-educated and experienced immigrants into the Canadian workforce. In some areas, as the next section will suggest, there is a need for moving quickly through specifically targeted programs aimed at specific areas within the Canadian workforce where there is a need for highly educated and skilled workers. Canada cannot reasonably expect that immigrants will continue to identify strongly as Canadians if they feel they have been lured into the country under false pretences only to have to accept demeaning, low-paying and insecure jobs that lock them and their families into poverty.

## **5. Opportunities for Action on Infrastructure Renewal:**

The evidence provided in the aforementioned FCM report clearly identifies the urgent need for a well-planned, resourced and sustained infrastructure renewal program. Mizra provides specific detail on infrastructure needs which indicate that:

- 1) Water and wastewater systems require attention in the areas of treatment, supply and distribution which include work on water mains, distribution pipes, pressure reducing stations, water meters, treatment plants, storage capacity and pumping stations as well as sanitary and storm sewer treatment including storm water pipes and interceptors, combined sewage pipes and interceptors, manholes, treatment plants, retention basins, septic tanks and lift stations (2007:12);
- 2) Transportation requires attention in terms of paved/unpaved roads, sidewalks/curbs, bicycle paths, bridges, overpasses, road-cleaning and snow-removal equipment;
- 3) Transit requires attention in: rapid transit and light transit systems and subways including work on tracks, rolling stock, stations, service and parking facilities; buses including work on dedicated lanes, rolling stock, stations, service facilities and park-and-ride facilities; and trams including work on tracks, rolling stock, stations, service facilities and park-and-ride facilities; (2007:13);
- 4) Cultural, social, community and recreational facilities require attention specific to government buildings, public housing, public buildings, multi-purpose complexes, indoor and outdoor recreational facilities, parks and playgrounds; and
- 5) Waste management facilities require attention specific to landfills, municipal recycling facilities, and hazardous waste disposal/storage/recycling facilities (2007:14).

These needs can and should be aligned with the skills of internationally-educated and skilled workers. In this regard, it is imperative to establish programs specifically-targeted to address

these matters. Since the Federal government has formalized Immigration Agreements with numerous provinces (B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, the Yukon and Prince Edward Island), these government have undertaken various initiatives in response to the ineffective utilization of immigrant skills in Canada's. Some of these initiatives are summarized below. In reviewing them, however, it becomes evident that none of them lend themselves directly to the issues addressed in this paper.

### 5.1 Federal Programs:

There are several federal programs aimed at integrating internationally-educated and experienced workers into the workforce. These include:

1. **Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC).** This federal department is responsible for both immigrant selection and settlement. In terms of settlement, its responsibilities are constrained by its mandate which is to provide programs and services that relate to the settlement of immigrants (e.g., language training and settlement counseling) but nothing explicitly related to labour market integration (Alboim and McIsaac 2007: 7). CIC has joint responsibility with HRSDC for determining policy on temporary workers and is a partner of the PNP. CIC also offers, *Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada*. This program offers free basic French and English language courses to adult permanent residents.
2. **Enhanced Language Training Program (ELT).** This program is sponsored by the CIC and provides advanced level English language training. What is unique about the ELT program is that most English training courses provide Basic English programs, and in the labour market excellent communication skills are an asset to most employers. This program also specializes in job-specific, labour-market language training to help newcomers find jobs that match their skills and qualifications. ELT is a solution to the language barrier that many immigrants face when placed in a new country. ELT is equivalent to Canadian Language Benchmark level 7-10, and the program also provides bridging programs, mentorship, placements and other employment assistance.
3. **The Temporary Worker Program.** The demand for labour in specific areas and occupations is greater than others. To meet these needs Service Canada (SC) and HRSDC have designed this program to fill short term needs or bring in temporary personnel until they can become permanent residents of Canada (Alboim and McIsaac 2007:6).
4. **Labour Market Partnership Agreements (LMPA)** This program sets out to improve the labour market participation of those facing specific barriers, including, but not limited to, recent immigrants, Aboriginal peoples, older workers, and persons with disabilities. The program seeks to offer apprenticeships and labour

market integration of recent skilled immigrants, provide literacy and workplace skills development. For example, Ontario will receive \$1.368 billion over 6 years with \$292.5 million for recent immigrants. The program intends to provide better information for immigrants prior to their arrival in the province and to improve labour market access by providing language training, occupation specific labour training and further assistance. The program also aims to provides bridging programs that include training, work placements, mentoring, self employment support and skills upgrading. Unfortunately, the program has not been implemented as funding for them was not included in the new Conservative government's 2006 budget (Alboim and Mclsaac 2007:14)

5. **Foreign Credentials Referral Office.** The Federal government created this office as a referral service to help internationally-educated workers succeed and put their skills to work in Canada. The office provides prospective immigrants overseas and newcomers already in Canada with information about the Canadian labour market as well as credential assessment and recognition processes.
6. **Going to Canada.** This program provides a national portal that gives prospective immigrants to Canada an overview of the Canadian labour market demands. This program was intended to challenge the barrier that immigrants did not have enough information about the Canadian labour economy and integration requirements. It also offers tools to begin the process of credential recognition and matching immigrant skills with jobs in demand.
7. **Canadian Immigration Integration Project.** Funded by the Government of Canada's Foreign Credential Recognition Program, this program is managed by the association of Canadian Community Colleges. Its objective is to help immigrants prepare for integration into the Canadian labour market while they are still in their country of origin completing final immigration requirements. Specifically, the programs aims to inform prospective immigrants about:
  - Trends in the Canadian labour market and in their province of destination;
  - Employment requirements in particular occupations;
  - Challenges involved in settling in Canada and what can be done to overcome those challenges;
  - The job search in the Canadian context;
  - Contact information for organizations that may provide practical assistance in: credential assessment and recognition; language and skills testing and upgrading; professional licensing; employment assistance.

## 5.2 Provincial Programs

The following section briefly describes some provincial programs aimed at integrating internationally-educated and experienced workers into the workforce.

- 1. Career Bridge.** This is an Internship program funded by the Ontario government for internationally-educated professionals. It addresses the lack of Canadian work experience by offering 4-12 month paid internships to skilled immigrants. This program provides a bridge to fill the gap between international and Canadian work experience. The base stipend is \$2,167 a month and employers are at liberty to top up this amount. Since its launch in 2003, over 500 internships have been filled and, as of January 2007, more than 80% of participants have found permanent employment in their field. However, 1,200 candidates qualified for internships remain in the database as a result of lack of employer involvement in and awareness of the program (Alboim and McIsaac 2007: 9).
- 2. Provincial Nominee Program (PNP).** This program allows provinces and employers to identify particular labour market needs and the people who can fill them. Provinces are using the PNP to attract immigration to areas other than major cities which traditionally have had the highest numbers of immigrant settlement. As an example of how this program operates, Ontario's pilot was launched on May 24, 2007 and enables the provincial government to have a role in the selection of skilled immigrants in 3 streams: (i) the Professional Stream; (ii) the Skilled Worker Stream; and (iii) the International Student Stream. Provinces are also able to nominate individuals who have been specifically identified by employers, whether or not they fulfill the criteria for federal skilled workers.
- 3. Projet D'immersion.** This is a Quebec internship program for immigrants who are looking for their first Canadian work experience. It has a placement rate of approximately 360 people per year in positions predominantly based in Montreal. The program also provides a six-month wage subsidy to involved employers to cover a part of the immigrant employment integration assistance program managed by Emploi-Quebec. (Alboim and McIsaac 2007:9)
- 4. Affiliation of Multicultural and Social Service Agencies of British Columbia (AMSSA)** The AMSSA is a mentorship program that works to enable immigrant workers to have connections and establish networks upon arrival in British Columbia. The program provides immigrant settlement services, creates networking opportunities, provides professional development and, more specifically, it pairs unemployed immigrants seeking employment with an individual employed in the occupation for which they are trained. The mentor shares professional networks and offers guidance through the job search and or licensing process. However, creating a strong group of mentors has been challenging because there is a lack of funding for marketing and mentor outreach.

- 5. Manitoba early Childhood Educator Qualifications Recognition Project.** This is a 14 week bridging program for internationally-educated early childhood educators that includes mentoring and work-based assessment using a competency assessment framework. Trainees are placed directly in the job as assistants and then have their skills assessed on the job. As of May 2006, 22 people have successfully completed the program (Aboim and Mclsaac 2007: 11) .

### **5.3 Municipal Programs**

The following section briefly describes some municipal programs aimed at integrating internationally-educated and experienced workers into the workforce.

- 1. Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC).** This program started in September 2003 and its primary goal is to find and implement local solutions that help break down the barriers immigrants face when looking for work in the Toronto Region. Its mandate is to: (i) identify ways of improving access to the labour market for skills immigrants; (ii) increase access to and availability of services that help immigrants gain access to the labour market more efficiently and effectively; (iii) change the way stakeholders value and work with skilled immigrants; and (iv) change the way governments relate to one another in planning and programming around these issues. In its first year, 1000 skilled immigrants were matched with mentors (Mclsaac, 9) and, of the 700 participants who have completed the program, 68% found full time employment, 46% of them in their field (Aboim and Mclsaac 2007: 10).
- 2. The Mentoring Partnership.** This program provides new immigrants in the city of Toronto, and the regions of Halton, Peel and York with occupation specific mentoring. Immigrants in this program have all the educational and language requirements to join the Canadian labour market, but lack the connections and networks. The mentoring partnership opens networks and relationships leading to employment. Fifty corporate partners have joined the program wherein mentors and mentees meet in person to negotiate the objectives of the mentoring relationship and sign the partnership agreement. These objectives may include supporting mentees to: (i) understand Canadian workplace culture; (ii) identify skills required by market demands; (iii) provide advice on proceeding with accreditation if relevant; (iv) improve professional terminology; (v) master self-marketing techniques and confidence-building; (vi) select technical skills upgrading programs and resources; (vii) locate publications and workshops on recent developments in their field; (viii) gather information on local industries and potential employers; (ix) establish professional networks; (x) identify employment or job training placement opportunities; and (xi) support efforts to become professionally established. Mentors and mentees work together for a total of 24 hours over a period of four months. Coaches provide immigrants with communication and relationship support as necessary. Mentors and mentees are advised to contact their coach at any point during the relationship if they

have any questions or concerns. At the conclusion of the relationship, both mentors and mentees provide evaluative feedback.

3. **Hireimmigrants.ca.** This program assists potential employers by providing them with the tools necessary to improve their human resources practices as they relate to skilled immigrants. Currently, the program includes employers such as RBC, Apotex and Teshmont Consultants (Alboim and McIsaac 2007: 11) .

#### **5.4 Shortcomings and the Need for Targeted Programs:**

Clearly, there are several programs now in operation to address many of the needs and challenges faced by internationally-educated and experienced workers. Some of these programs are very useful as they provide appropriate language training, mentoring, and opportunities for gaining work experience. However, none of them are targeted to particular employment sectors and none aim to provide the competencies and skills needed to renew the infrastructure of Canada's municipalities. Given the urgency of infrastructure renewal and the that the primary source of labour market growth will be through increased immigration levels, it would seem that what is urgently needed now are federal-provincial-municipal programs targeted to infrastructure renewal and use of internationally educated and experience.

While there are many benefits to the programs noted above, none of them specifically address the targeted needs discussed in this paper and they do not address some barriers that are well known. For example:

- To counter employers perceptions with a "lack of Canadian work experience" and its relevance for internationally-educated workers, more work is needed with employers to both better define and ensure that "Canadian work experience" is a bona fide job requirement in today's global economy. In cases where such work experience is job relevant it has been suggested that co-op placements and internships can provide work experience paid specifically for newcomers to fill the gap of individuals who have all the academic credentials, language skills and technical skills necessary to practice an occupation but lack the sufficient knowledge of Canadian work place. This option also allows newcomers to develop networking skills, and develop relationships with their peers which also gives them a reference in the future for future employment opportunities; Union's can play an important role in supporting such placements, given affiliates experiences with worker to worker education and training programs.
- A searchable database that would enable employers to tap into the large immigrant labour pool to make offers of employment. Such a database would not only allow immigrants to enter their skills sets and credentials but also provide them and employers with a links to National Occupational Classifications needed for infrastructural renewal jobs. This could be a database that is municipality specific and include a role for loca;

unions representing workers in municipal workplaces to add their knowledge of the municipal worksite, retirement rates, etc.;

- The government has yet to invest in credential assessment programs because this service may be too costly for smaller businesses to provide. Furthermore, governments should provide some form of incentive for business to hire newly skilled immigrants;
- Governments do not provide financial assistance or loans that would allow immigrants to pay for the courses and have income support while they are in training;
- The Temporary Worker Program is viewed as exploiting temporary workers by employing them with lower wages in certain sectors and there is less incentive for training programs by employers because these individuals are under temporary status not permanent. (Canadian Labour Congress; 10; Alboim and McIsaac, 2007: 6);
- The federal-provincial-territorial immigration agreements do not include labour market programs which fall, instead, under Human Resource Services Development Canada (Alboim and McIsaac, 2007:13).

As noted earlier, the argument advanced in this paper suggests that a national, comprehensive, sustained and sustainable municipal infrastructure renewal plan is needed and, further, that the skills of internationally-educated and experienced workers can and should be employed to meet these labour shortages.

To do this, more research is required to clearly identify the range of competencies and skills required for infrastructure renewal projects and to match these against the available pool of recent immigrants as well as those interested in immigrating to Canada who have been internationally-educated and have work experiences in other countries. For example, while Mizra identifies several key areas for infrastructure renewal, there isn't enough detail in the FCM paper to identify the specific skills and experience required for such projects. This exploration is needed in order to enable internationally-educated and experienced workers to gain employment in these projects.

Such a 'matching process' should be established so that specifically targeted programs can be developed to 'bridge' the education and experience of internationally-educated and experienced workers so that employers can integrate these workers into infrastructure projects in ways that will accelerate the latter's entry into the Canadian workforce while at the same time meeting immediate labour needs and skills shortages.

To take advantage of this opportunity, it would be feasible to initiate pilot projects in three to five municipalities where, initially, the following criterion can be applied:

1. there is a defined need for municipal infrastructure renewal projects
2. there is a sizeable presence of skilled immigrants

3. there is presence of union representing municipal workers
4. there are immigration/settlement agencies skilled with bridging programs

## **6. Next Steps to Pursue Collaborative Strategies:**

Immigrants settle in cities. As such, it would make sense to ensure municipalities have a key role to play in all aspects of immigrant settlement, including integration into the workplace as well as language training and other services that enable immigrants to become established in local communities. As Alboim and Mclsaac suggest “Immigration is an increasingly important urban fact, and there is a growing imperative for municipalities to have greater capacity and resources for planning and providing services if they are to realize fully the social and economic benefits of immigration.” (2007:14).

Regrettably, municipalities are not able to participate directly in a direct relationship with the federal government. However, the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement does provide a formal role for municipalities and Ontario cities are represented by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario in this regard. Further, in recognition of the City of Toronto’s unique experience with immigrant settlement services, the federal and provincial governments have signed a separate memorandum of understanding in 2006 indicating how all three levels of government will work together (Alboim and Mclsaac, 2007:14). These two models may be appropriate to consider in developing a municipal infrastructure renewal program that targets employment opportunities for internationally-educated workers.

By involving local municipalities more deeply in immigrant settlement services and adding a targeted infrastructure renewal program as suggested in this paper, internationally-educated workers would develop a close relationship with the level of government closest to them. As well, municipalities would assume greater responsibility for providing, funding and supporting service delivery and employment opportunities to its newest residents.

This would represent a full spectrum of services for those internationally-educated and experienced workers who would have the background knowledge and skills to participate in municipal infrastructure renewal projects. In this regard, municipalities working with union would provide the language upgrading and training, mentoring, community and workplace integration support network, coaching and skills upgrading specific to the work required for a comprehensive municipal infrastructure renewal.

To move ahead on such an initiative, the CLC should seek to work with the FCM and such organizations like TRIEC or their equivalents in cities that attract the most significant number of immigrants, i.e., Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal. Such a collaborative approach may make it possible for negotiations to begin with the Federal and provincial governments to both support a sustained infrastructure renewal program and targeting employment to internationally-educated and experienced workers.

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