



2ND EXPERT CONSULTATION FOR BUSINESS AND CITIES ON MIGRATION AND URBANISATION

TORONTO

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SUMMARY

The topic of migration seen from the perspective of business and cities is not new to the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), where attention has been paid to this nexus over the last ten years. However, THP's initiative to organise an Expert Consultation in cooperation with CivicAction offered an opportunity for a broad selection of representatives from the region to get an international perspective on migration trends, and to consider these trends in the context of regional issues around migration with THP's international representatives. The consultation allowed participants to explore the challenges presented by immigration trends and the opportunities for better collaboration between the private sector and the various levels of government.

Very evident in the discussion was the widely held conviction that immigration is crucial to and intimately linked to the economic prosperity of Canada and specifically to that of the GTA region. This **business imperative** was at the centre of the group's reflections on migration priorities and the group emphasised the importance of continuing to attract (highly) skilled labour to the GTA. Collective efforts are being made by a number of organizations to identify emerging labour force needs in a more coordinated fashion, to improve efforts to attract people with the required skills from around the world, and to retain immigrants once they have settled.

Existing initiatives – often co-sponsored by the private sector – address issues including language training, housing, awareness of legal conditions, recognition of foreign education and credentials, child care, and social cohesion. Businesses recognise the need for long term labour migration planning. They have developed active recruitment strategies and cooperate with services and information NGOs like the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) to streamline procedures and to make immigrants feel comfortable in their new environment.

To integrate people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds in the workforce, emphasis is being put on developing cultural competencies at all levels of organisations. For example, mentoring programs are being created to enhance the chances of success for the newcomers. All participants recognized the need to continue and expand efforts to address the existing social and economic challenges faced by newcomers.

Participating business representatives identified the following key challenges:

- Identifying and communicating the skills that businesses need to other sectors, including government
- Making it easier for SMEs to hire and retain immigrants
- Developing English language proficiency sufficient for business
- Recognizing foreign education and credentials
- Assessing and recognizing work experience as well as individual skills and abilities
- Competing for skilled workers in the future

The primary role of **cities** in this domain is to promote the economy of the GTA. This includes informing businesses and sharing data about figures and trends in the labour market. Governments strive to attract businesses and provide the workforce with the talent they need to thrive. Making the Toronto region attractive in economic and in social terms creates an environment that appeals to skilled workers. Providing services to its residents – either native or foreign-born, documented or undocumented – is the main objective of municipal policies.

Municipal governments in the GTA consult with the private sector on gaps in the workforce and skills shortages, and advise higher orders of government (provincial or federal) on policy needs. Governments provide funding to NGOs to support the integration of newcomers and address some of the challenges they face. Additional funding comes from businesses, private foundations and other donors. Organisations like TRIEC, Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office, and York Region’s Welcome Centre Immigrant Services fall into this category. There is a movement towards the creation of “one-stop shopping” points, where businesses and newcomers can obtain a number of services that formerly were dispersed between various NGOs. These service points provide businesses with more efficient and often more cost-effective solutions.

Challenges municipal governments face:

- lack of extensive and reliable data (in part due to privacy considerations regarding polls and the reduced scope of Statistics Canada census data collection)
 - o lack of data limits understanding of full economic and social impact of immigration
- difficulties measuring the success of integration and diversity policies
- fragmentation of the domain because of multiple and sometimes overlapping service providers

Intersection between Business and Cities

What already is in place:

- recognition of mutual dependence
- existing partnerships, e.g. with TRIEC, ALLIES
- regular consultations between municipal government, business representatives, agencies and other actors

Participants identified the following opportunities for improvement:

- better identification of labour skills requirements by businesses
- improved mechanisms for recognizing skills, credentials and competencies
- continue to assist newcomers gain Canadian work experience and develop ways to better gauge equivalents
- create an annual summary on the social and economic impact of migrants (employment figures, income gaps e.g.)