

Intelligence MEMOS



From: Tingting Zhang

To: Labour Force Observers

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Re: **HOW TO SOLVE THE CANADIAN WORK EXPERIENCE HIRING CONUNDRUM**

Immigrants contribute to Canada's economy in many ways, but the country fails to utilize their talents to their full potential. For newcomers, requirements for Canadian work experience are a significant hindrance to their integration into the labour market.

The [December](#) Labour Force Survey asked about challenges newcomers faced in the labour market. Among newcomers who arrived in Canada less than five years ago, about six in 10 (58.2 percent) reported difficulties finding work related to their experience or credentials in the past two years. The most common challenges were not enough Canadian job experience (22.7 percent), no connections in the job market (20.3 percent) and lacking Canadian references (18.5 percent).

To get jobs that match their education and skills, newcomers in many regulated professions also need to provide Canadian work experience to be licenced. However, they cannot work in their field without a licence and gain Canadian work experience. This is a dead-end cycle. Many highly skilled immigrants spend years trying to break this cycle and end up working in low-skilled, low-paying jobs in the first few years after landing.

This devaluation of immigrants' prior education and experience inevitably poses a [cost](#) to immigrants, employers, and the economy.

On the other hand, Canadian employers often ask applicants to have Canadian work experience as part of their hiring decisions. Findings from an employer survey [show](#) that although most employers report positive attitudes towards newcomers, some report negative perceptions that immigrants are unfamiliar with Canadian workplace norms, face language barriers, hold unreliable credentials, have low retention rates and higher training costs. These factors significantly influence employers hiring immigrants.

The Ontario government will [ban](#) the use of Canadian work experience as a requirement in job postings or application forms this year to help newcomers integrate into the labour market. While this is a promising step, it may yield little fruit if the government fails to address the factors influencing employers' hiring decisions.

As immigrants' education and experience quality vary from country to country, employers often lack information and evaluation capacity to recognize these credentials. The federal and provincial governments need to educate employers, especially small and medium sized business owners, about credential assessment [services](#) and encourage them to use such agencies to assess foreign credentials. At the same time, to give employers comfort about the process, governments need to ensure these service agencies evaluate immigrant qualifications rigorously. Providing more support and implementing a systematic evaluation [can](#) help improve the labour market effectiveness of these services.

Meanwhile, employers also face challenges in knowing whether immigrants can adapt to the Canadian business environment. Federal and provincial governments need to invest more in language training tied to Canadian work cultures, [bridging training programs](#), practice-ready assessment programs, and internship opportunities. Bridging programs such as [Canada Work Experience](#) that connects immigrants with experienced professionals in their respective fields through experiential learning, internship, or unlicensed opportunities can help new immigrants understand the local job market and learn the workplace culture.

Coordination among employers and local immigrant service organizations is also important to develop and promote work experience opportunities that support new immigrants in understanding Canadian workplace practices. These service agencies need to actively reach out to local employers and ask for internships or other work opportunities. They also need to promote more matching activity between immigrants and employers. For example, they can organize networking events, job fairs, or industry-specific forums where employers can interact with skilled immigrants and learn about their qualifications. Professional and employee associations also need to be involved in helping immigrants present and employers understand their qualifications.

For employers, active participation is crucial in fostering a more inclusive hiring process. They need to develop scenario-based questions or practical tests to assess candidates by testing the essential skills required for the job. They also need to provide paid internships, short contracts or positions with probationary periods to allow an applicant to prove their qualifications, as recommended by an Ontario Human Rights Council [report](#). These opportunities allow employers to assess new immigrants in local employment situations. Employers can also hire new immigrants at a lower level of responsibility and help the candidates obtain the licencing needed while on the job.

Tingting Zhang is a Junior Policy Analyst at the C.D. Howe Institute.

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