



March 18, 2026

From: Christopher Worswick
To: Concerned Canadians
Re: CANZUK-PLUS LABOUR MOBILITY DEALS WOULD BE WIN-WIN

In 1957, my parents left the north of England to come to Canada. They did not expect this country to be their long-term home, but they had great careers and close to 70 happy years together in Canada.

When I first looked for an academic job 1995, I landed a great faculty position at the University of Melbourne. After five amazing years in Australia, my own family returned to Canada having made lifelong friends and with a deep understanding of another country.

My travels were different from my parents', though. As recently as the 1950s, Canadian citizens were considered British subjects, and there were certain labour mobility privileges that were reciprocal within Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

My option to work in Australia was owing to the generosity of Australia's immigration program at the time, rather than any such arrangement.

What if Canada could take inspiration from our past and introduce reciprocal migration agreements now, and not just with Australia, Britain and New Zealand – the old CANZUK idea – but also with the likes of Japan or Singapore?

This may sound radical, but there is support for moving in that direction. A 2018 poll showed 76 percent of Canadians are in favour of CANZUK. Pierre Poilievre, in a visit to Britain this month, called for such an arrangement, and the Liberal Party endorsed CANZUK at its 2023 convention.

Labour mobility is a central feature of the European Union's common market. It makes countries better off because it allows workers to move to the nation where their skills are most highly valued. Using a standard economic model, the US economist [George Kennan](#) found that, hypothetically, allowing free labour mobility across the world could generate 50- to 100-percent increases in global GDP. And reciprocal migration agreements need not cover the entire world to have some of these benefits. In 2017 alone, free movement of workers in the EU [raised](#) collective GDP by an estimated €106 billion (\$160-billion).

A common labour market also helps smooth country-specific shocks. If there is a sectoral shock in one country, the capacity of some displaced workers to migrate will offset at least some of the negative consequences. Researchers find that labour mobility across the euro area, primarily by immigrants, [reduces](#) the overall variation in employment rates over the business cycle.

All this, of course, raises the issue of whether one country may be worse off under such labour arrangements. A migration agreement could lead to a large influx of low-wage workers from a low-wage country to a high-wage country. But for countries with comparable economies, what results is not so much any net changes in workforces but a more efficient distribution of labour, benefiting both.

Canada has primarily focused on economic immigration designed to admit large numbers of immigrants to support the growth of average living standards. However, in recent years, Canada's immigration focus has shifted to population goals rather than raising GDP per capita.

Added to this policy shift, the Trudeau government's massive expansion of the number of temporary residents in Canada greatly expanded the number of workers in their 20s – primarily coming from lower-wage countries – competing with younger Canadians.

It is time to chart a new course.

We can build on what we already have. Canada has been slowly and cautiously adding limited migration agreements as clauses of new free-trade agreements. Starting with the 1989 Canada-US Free Trade Agreement, workers in certain higher-wage occupations can automatically receive visas to work temporarily in the other country if they have a job offer. These visas have led to migration of some workers, but they do not lead to permanent residency status.

Even with all of Donald Trump's concern about immigration, these visas survived the NAFTA renegotiation that led to the CUSMA agreement. [As I have argued in the past](#), we should deepen this labour-market integration with the United States by expanding the number of higher-wage occupations eligible for the CUSMA visas.

Now, we must further our labour integration through deeper reciprocal migration agreements with Australia, New Zealand, European countries, as well as other higher-wage countries, such as Singapore and Japan.

This is about the bigger picture, too. As Mr. Carney argued in Davos, countries like Canada need to build “the coalitions that work, issue by issue, with partners who share enough common ground to act together.” Reciprocal migration agreements with other developed, market-oriented countries can be an important part of that process.

These agreements can also enhance permanent immigration programs and open pathways for older Canadians to live for extended periods in other countries. As the allure of retiring to the US sunbelt wears away for many Canadians, imagine how popular a right to live in Australia, New Zealand, Europe or Asia could be if reciprocal migration agreements can be made.

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