



LEVEL YOUTH POLICY PROGRAM

Educated Social Immigrants for a Globally Competitive Canada

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The LEVEL Youth Policy Program takes place on the traditional and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓ əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), & səliilwətaʔ (Tseil-Waututh) Coast Salish peoples.

ABOUT THE LEVEL INITIATIVE

LEVEL is a youth-engagement initiative of Vancouver Foundation that aims to address racial inequity. We do this by investing in the leadership capacity of Indigenous, racialized, immigrant, and refugee youth to create more opportunities throughout the non-profit and charitable sector.

Despite being the fastest-growing youth population in British Columbia, Indigenous, immigrant, and refugee youth don't have the same opportunities as other young people. Race continues to be a factor that hinders their ability to have a say in decisions that impact their lives.

LEVEL empowers these youth by building their capacity to challenge and change those systems that hinder their ability to build a more just world.

LEVEL CONSISTS OF
THREE PILLARS OF
WORK TO ADVANCE
RACIAL EQUITY:



ABOUT THE LEVEL YOUTH POLICY PROGRAM

The LEVEL Youth Policy Program (LEVEL YPP) brings together young people between the ages of 19 and 29 from across British Columbia who identify as being Indigenous or racialized immigrants or refugees. Indigenous and racialized Newcomer youth are disproportionately impacted by certain public policies and are rarely included in the development and implementation of public policy process. The LEVEL YPP aims to provide these youth with equitable training and leadership opportunities to better navigate the public policy landscape, and to develop new tools and skills to influence, shape, and advocate for policy changes that are relevant in their own communities. Having young people directly involved in shaping policies that impact their lives is essential to creating systemic, meaningful change. The LEVEL YPP's training is grounded from and within Indigenous peoples' worldviews, which the program acknowledges, could vary from person-to-person or nation-to-nation. Indigenous worldviews place a large emphasis on connections to the land. This perspective views the land as sacred; where everything and everyone is related and connected; where the quality of the relationships formed are key in life; where what matters is the success and well-being of the community, and where there can be many truths as they are based on individual lived experiences.¹ As such, an important premise of this training is to centre and place a particular focus on the fact that the work that has gone into developing this training, as well as the training itself, has taken and will take place on unceded (never given away/stolen) territories of the hən̓d̓əmin̓əm̓-speaking Musqueam peoples, of the Halkomelem-speaking Tseil-Waututh peoples, and of the sn̓íchim-speaking Skwx_wú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

1 <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/indigenous-peoples-worldviews-vs-western-worldviews>



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Nargis Babrakzai is currently studying at Kwantlen Polytechnic University. She came to Canada as an immigrant in 2015. Since then, she has volunteered in different programs and organizations. Recently she has been working as the Surrey Refugee Youth Team Co-chair. She would like to continue working in roles to serve community. Her aim is to be one of many Newcomer youth voices at government level.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Canada has an ambitious three-year plan to bring 1.3 million immigrants to the country between 2018 and 2021. Today, more than 40% of Canadian population is either a first- or second-generation immigrant. This speaks volumes about Canada's reliance on immigration. The main driver of this immigration plan is lack of population growth. For a country to sustain itself and survive, it must grow its population. Current reproductive rate of the country is at 1.6 children per woman (1. statcan.gc.ca). For the country to sustain its current population, it must have a reproductive growth rate of two children per woman. And if the country wants to grow its population, it must have a reproductive rate above two children per woman. This challenge is not unique to Canada it is a common problem facing developed nations. Underdeveloped nations on the other hand are known for high-reproductive rates. Canada is a great candidate for immigration as it has one of the lowest-population densities in the world, it's the second largest country in the world after Russia, but with population of only 37 million people. Bringing more people is easy, however standards must be applied to ensure competitiveness of human resources. With a composition of people from more than 200 countries, Canada has the potential to ensure long term economic and global competitiveness. This policy brief examines opportunities to better utilize immigrant human resources to ensure Canada grows its population and maintains competitiveness.

This policy brief shows that alleviating challenges facing social immigrants can unlock an immense human potential, which would otherwise be lost. It also explores the current challenges. In case of immigrant dependency on welfare, their children's chance of education attainment decreases significantly. When parents of social immigrants are not economically active and educated in the host country, it has long-lasting effect on the future economic activity of their children. Immigrants often are from the middle- to upper-class of their society. However, when they come to Canada, unless they are skilled immigrants, they face tremendous challenges and end up entering lower socioeconomic levels of society. This experience of change in class is a shock and disappointment to many. Immigrants are often risk-takers, innovative, and leave home in hopes of giving their children a better future. What they don't know is that the host country might have the opportunities but substantial barriers will prevent the family from achieving their goals. We will look at opportunities to significantly reduce those barriers.



Being a first generation immigrant myself, I can attest to the challenges of integration. The recommendations here are a combination of my observations of other immigrants and research conducted. To give immigrants the best chance at a life in Canada, and to give Canada the competitive edge it requires to succeed in future, it is best to invest in undergraduate education of social immigrants. This equips them in the best way possible. Four years of a Western-style undergraduate degree trains the mind to think critically, and to make the most out of the knowledge of home country and host country. Other forms of training and education, including a Masters degree, while useful, does not have the depth and strength to transform life of an individual. The four years of education allows enough time to explore self, Canada, history of Canada, the world, and to put everything in perspective. Because of the profound experience of immigration, an immigrant is ready to absorb information at the early stages of arrival. This would be an ideal time to offer them incentives and scholarships to enroll in an undergraduate degree. That is despite having a degree from home country, which is often not enough due to often limited and different style of education. Additionally, for the individuals working in the more-globalized world of tomorrow, information from both home and host country is essential. Therefore the previous degree is a plus, but a Canadian degree is essential as well. Canada needs smart immigration with the most impactful experience for the immigrant. When they are empowered and transformed, their product is a strong economy, innovative nation, and increased global trade.

PROBLEM DEFINITION

Social immigrants are systematically and economically disadvantaged due to lack of intentional support from the Canadian government to pursue higher education.

BACKGROUND

Canada has one of the most comprehensive immigration plans in the developed world. Between 2018 and 2021, 1.3 million new Permanent Residents are expected to settle in Canada. These immigrants will fall into one of the four classes of immigrants: family-class (closely related persons of Canadian residents living in Canada), economic immigrants (skilled workers and business people), refugees (people who are escaping persecution, torture or cruel and unusual punishment), and the humanitarian and "other" category (people accepted as immigrants for humanitarian or compassionate reasons). In addition to these Newcomers, the current makeup of Canada has considerable number of immigrants. In 2011, the National Housing Survey (NHS) showed 7.2 million people or 22% of the population was born outside Canada. This group represented 200 countries and are referred to as first-generation immigrants. Additionally in 2011, NHS found that 5.7 million were second-generation immigrants (2. statcan.gc.ca). Second-generation immigrants are defined as having at least one parent born outside Canada. The sum of first and second generation alone is 12.9 million or 40% of the total Canadian population. With these statistics, and the current 1.3 million addition, Canada is one of the most diverse of the developed countries (3. cbcnews.com). This also means sound strategies must be in place to manage this group and to achieve economic and social objectives. Canada cannot afford to increase immigration and then mismanage the population and, as a result, lower the standard of life for everyone. First- and second-generation immigrants present golden opportunities in the globalized world of today and tomorrow. In this policy brief we will explore those opportunities (the main one being lack of higher education in the host country), and make recommendations on necessary investments in future of immigrants and therefore Canada. Since skilled immigrants arrive with higher education, they are therefore not the focus of this paper, although some of the recommendations do apply to them. The rest of the immigrants are grouped and called "social immigrants" for purposes of this paper, and will be focus of this policy brief. Social immigrant(s) and immigrant(s) will be used interchangeably.

Immigration is an integral part of Canadian population-growth policy. The need for population growth is the driving force behind past and present immigration policies. Canada is the second largest country in the world behind Russia, yet it has the second lowest population density per square kilometer (km). Canada has four- people per square km, or a population density of four. It's falls behind Australia, which has population density of three. Compare this to the world highest population density of Bangladesh, which is 1160 people per square km (4. Wikipedia.com). In the long run, such imbalances between nation populations have consequences to the survival of nations. In the case of a global crisis, lack of population leaves a nation open to potential attack

from competing nations. Canada, like other developed nations, is facing reduced birth rates, or 1.6 births per woman. Two births per woman are needed only to sustain the population – let alone growth. This shows that Canada will not be able to grow its population and the answers must come from immigration. Canada holds potential for housing more people, the question is who gets selected, and once they are here how will they be prepared so that they are able to contribute to a globally competitive Canada.

By the way of immigration, while adding to human capital of the country, significantly helps the population, economic benefits of the Newcomer strictly depends on sound policies to ensure their, and their future generations, integration and success. You can bring social immigrants without systematic support. But in this case, without knowledge of the host country's systems, language, and environment, these social immigrants will likely end up in poverty and low economic activity, and as a result bring down standards and average income per capita. Unfortunately this is the status quo for most social immigrants (see following facts section). This reduces Canada's global competitiveness in an ever more globalized world. Yet we can take the same immigrants, invest in them, and turn them into global competitive advantages as they know the world landscape, languages, and represent almost every country. By encouraging them to keep connections with their heritage and equipping them with education and skills to succeed in Canada, they can become the equivalent of "sum" of the world but in Canadian image. Once educated, Canada can utilize their connections for trade and political advantage in relation to other nations.

STATUS QUO AND FACTS:

1. Immigrants are systematically at a disadvantage and enter low socioeconomic levels of society. "In the year 2005, the immigrants in the Census database, who arrived in Canada over the period of 18 years from 1987 to 2004, had an average income of \$25,396, on which they paid an average of \$3,438 in income taxes. The comparable for all Canadians were \$35,057 for income and \$5,995 for taxes, based on the entire sample of individuals. The data thus implies that, on average, immigrant incomes were only 72.4% of income earned by all Canadians and that they paid only 57.3% of taxes" (5. Welfare state).
2. "Many native-born children of immigrants – the 'second generation' – obtain lower levels of education achievement than those of non-immigrant background. In consequence, migrants tend to show lower labor market activity rates and income levels compared to people without immigrant background. They also tend to be exposed to higher risks of unemployment and depend on social welfare more often" (6. eric.ed.gov).
3. Social immigrants low skill levels and increased dependence on welfare has long-term and generational impact. Children of parents on welfare are at higher risk of hospitalization and have a 45% rate of asthma, compared to 27% for the general population. They also face three times higher school dropout rate, as well as criminal and gang involvement. Additionally, children who have parents with low or no economic activity tend to have "low aspirations regarding their own employment prospects and thus make life choices about schooling and childbearing that may actually constrain the economic options available to them" (7. Nap.edu).

4. In the status quo there is no intentional and systematic investment in parents of immigrant children. These immigrants are thought to be the sacrificial generation and their children are expected to do better than parents. But if the parents don't do well, it sets low expectations for their children's performance, and thus creates a cycle of poverty and a multitude of other issues. "Where families had been on welfare for at least six years, young people were almost three times as likely to have been suspended from school compared with young people with no family welfare history" (8. smh.com.au). Lack of education in the host country becomes a significant barrier to understanding the host country culture, history, economy, and the immigrant and his/her children's place in this context.
5. High hopes and big dreams for immigration, but lack of support systems to achieve immigrant goals upon arrival. Immigrants often come from well-off backgrounds in their home country. Most cite reason for immigration as a better future for their children. Due to lack of support and systems catering to their needs, in the process of immigration those aspirations get deprioritized in order to make a living. They are often ill-prepared for the realities of life once they immigrate. Some of the most often cited qualities of immigrants are resilience, risk-taking, and there is evidence they are more innovative than people who have never immigrated. Despite all of this, they end up being disproportionately disadvantaged in terms of socioeconomic, economic activity, educational, and even health levels. This is also an indication of an opportunity that can be explored and invested into. Canada can capitalize on their dreams for a better life by providing specific and targeted educational opportunities for immigrants, and for their children, which would be welcomed, and from which Canada will benefit.
6. From personal experience of immigration, I know the challenges facing first generation immigrants. I know there are opportunities in Canada but when you immigrate to a country you don't speak language of, it is equivalent of going deaf and blind and mute overnight. You can't read and understand text, you can't understand what is being said and you can't say what you want to say. When I came initially it was difficult to find support catered to me in light of my future goals. I am lucky in that I have highly educated family who have lived in the west but some might not be as lucky. Depending on their goals and capabilities, there are multiple paths immigrants can take in Canada. They need access to personalized immigration coaches to guide them through major initial milestones.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Before the recommendations it is worth noting the very unique nature of immigrants and the impact of education on them. Educating immigrants yields unique results in comparison to educating someone without heritage in another country. These benefits are therefore only applicable to immigrants. If implemented, the policy recommendations can bring the following benefits.

Due to lack of focus on social immigrant education, there is not much written on impact of educating social immigrants. However, there is research on the impact of skilled immigrants, which share some of the same characteristics as social immigrants. Skill immigrants are connected to a global network, which easily allows them to conduct international business or run multinational companies. As an example, recently retired CEO of Pepsi Indra Nooyi and current CEO of Google Sundar Pichai are both from India. With higher education, this group is also able to invest more into the economy and this results in higher economic activity and benefit to the economy. Skilled immigrants also tend to form strong networks in their host country and support each other. When educated, they tend to earn more and have reduced rate of unemployment. When education rates goes up, productive, and thus economic, activity goes up. When people are educated they impact others as well, and in ways that cannot be measured (9. ftp.iza.org). Most of these benefits become unlocked only after social immigrants are educated.

Naturally, immigrants have a lot of support needs in order to achieve their full potential. There is some investment in the immigrant, however, based on what we saw the results can be improved. In order to spend, with the most impact possible, consider the following policy recommendations:

1. Immediately upon arrival, everyone above the school age of seven is assigned an immigration coach.
 - a. For children between ages of seven and 18, the coach will work with other support staff, like specialized school councilors, to ensure the children's needs are being met and they are set for success.
 - i. Assign immigrant children a school councilor with immigration background. Currently 37% of Information Technology (IT) professionals in the country are immigrants. Is there the same proportion of immigrants in the school counseling sector? No, that is because there is imbalance of immigrants in certain professions. If 40% of total population is immigrants, 40% of the school councilors need to be immigrants as well, to serve the needs of immigrants. Otherwise, inefficiencies can be created. Children of immigrants are at a higher risk of dropping out and not continuing higher education, a strong connection with school counselors has been shown to change their prospects.
 - b. Assign immigrant parents a Canadian career and an immigration coach with a focus on encouraging higher education, regardless of whether they have a degree from their home country. Home-country education is independent of host-country education, and one cannot replace the other. Education in Canada is key to successful integration and exponentially increased economic impact. This is also an opportunity for the government to offer special higher-education scholarships and other significant incentives with a priority to undergraduate degrees. An undergraduate

from another country with a one-year master's degree from Canada may get the person a job, but does not unlock the ideal integration and maximum future global competitiveness goals. Undergraduate degrees in Canada, and from any Western country, are the key reasons for the country's progress. Anyone that is beneficiary of a Western undergraduate degree will therefore also become part of future success of the country.

2. Fund and create certification programs where past successful immigrants can become immigration coaches to guide Newcomers through different personal and career milestones. Just like there is a yearly physical health check, there needs to be a yearly or monthly "immigration health check." If we are welcoming immigrants and making them one of our own, let's give them our best so that they can one day give us their best.
3. If first-generation immigrants are already receiving welfare, it might be due to old age. I have observed others receiving welfare, and it is not due to old age, but it is due to never having learned English or integrating into the Canadian society. Most of these are people who came to Canada at an age older than 25 or they never pursued education. The free English courses, other than the ones focused on college preparation, are great for socializing but not to learn to perform at highly skilled jobs. One individual I know fits into this category. This person had potential but old beliefs, no support system to learn about Canadian opportunities, not going to school for a significant amount of time to interact with society and information, and perhaps trauma of immigration, caused them to have never learned proper English, and so this person could only take minimal, menial jobs. For this generation, if they have children, an immigration coach needs to be assigned to help them make better choices in the future. And if they are under the age of 45, they, too, need to be assigned a career coach to understand their aspirations, and then help them with their options.
4. Some immigrants arrive with certain beliefs based on what they know back home, and this can be good or bad. For example, in some countries getting an education loan from government is not possible. If people don't have money, and they don't get into government universities, they simply are not able to go to university for financial reasons. When they come to Canada they simply assume the same is true in Canada. In addition to an immigration coach, a host-country education guide needs to be created, which explains options and rights and has a focus on presenting information to the immigrant, specifically about the higher-education financial-aid system, immigrant scholarship options, and other incentives.
5. Create government-funded scholarships for undergraduate degree for all immigrants.
6. In light of these recommendations, Canada needs to prioritize education vs. immediate work entry of immigrants.
7. Utilize advanced social media technologies like YouTube, Facebook, and others to create informational videos and reach audience.
8. Conduct surveys to identify barriers to undergraduate education among immigrants, as well as other needs.
9. National conferences need to be held by the Ministry of Education to further the cause of education within the immigrant community.

CONCLUSION

In summary, immigration seems to be the sweet spot where population growth and sustenance of the nation can be ensured for generations to come. As much as increasing population is important, we have a duty to ensure quality of life for everyone. Understanding the challenges facing immigrants, and the unique opportunities they present, is key to a more impactful immigration policy. Immigrants have challenges, but if given the right opportunities and if they are empowered with the best educational tools, they can be one of the best investments in the history of Canada. Education in other countries, especially non-Western countries where most of the immigrants come from, does not compare with, or substitute for, Canadian education. This is why a Canadian undergraduate degree is encouraged and recommended. If an immigrant has a degree from their home country that is a plus, but it is not a substitute for a Western-style degree. A Western-style education is perhaps not as appreciated by locals, but its combination with an immigrant experience creates an opportunity to transform people in ways otherwise impossible. Information and its collection and propagation are the key reasons for success of Western civilizations. It's important to realize the value of what we can offer to immigrants so that they have the best chance at success for themselves and for their new home, Canada.

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ABOUT VANCOUVER FOUNDATION

Vancouver Foundation is Community Inspired. We are a community foundation that connects the generosity of donors with the energy, ideas, and time of people in the community. Together, we've been making meaningful and lasting impacts in neighborhoods and communities since 1943. We work with individuals, corporations, and charitable agencies to create permanent endowment funds and then use the income to support thousands of charities. We recognize that communities are complex and that collaboration between multiple stakeholders is needed to help everyone thrive and evolve. Vancouver Foundation brings together donors, non-profits and charities, government, media and academic institutions, local leaders, and passionate individuals to build meaningful and lasting change in the province of British Columbia. We see young people, their voices and experiences as part of that vision to building meaningful change.



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