POLICY BRIEF

What's the Score?
Rethinking Canadian Immigration Policy through Social Cohesion & Reconciliation

AMAN SAINI

The LEVEL Youth Policy Program takes place on the traditional and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish) & səl̓ilwətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) Coast Salish peoples.
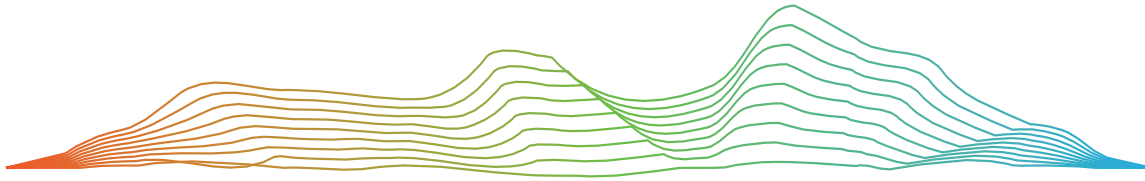
Contents

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 populations 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

1. LEVEL Youth Policy Program
2. LEVEL Youth Organizing
3. LEVEL Youth Granting

About the LEVEL Youth Policy Program (LEVEL YPP)

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 but 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 hə̓n̓q̓əmin̓əm̓-speaking Musqueam peoples, of the Halkomelem-speaking Tsleil-Waututh peoples, and of the sníchimspeaking Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

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

Biography

Aman Saini

The most you can ever possibly come to know is nothing but yourself.

I am a multilingual knowledge mobilizer and public communicator consistently capturing the issues at the intersections of Public Policy Research, International Relations, Social Justice, Religion, Literature, Economics, Politics, Technology, and Media. I have worked with a diverse array of organizations across government, non-governmental, and private sectors. I am currently working on a Public Policy project rethinking the role of the Canadian Immigration policy with regards to Social Cohesion and Reconciliation. I am passionate about Knowledge Management, Policy Research, Public Communication/Facilitation, Global Cultural Awareness, and Social Media Communications.

Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

Standing at the intersections of its Indigenous past, colonial present, and ongoing cosmopolitan future, Canada is seeking to reinvent its federation in the 21st century.

Still, in this pursuit, its scholars, policymakers, and legislators seem to have overlooked a vital interconnection in the immigration policy. Social cohesion and Reconciliation present an indivisible challenge to the current immigration policy. Since increased levels of migration have changed the demographic profile of the country by a great measure, its accompanying ethnic diversity and the continued marginalization of Indigenous people necessitate an integrated understanding of the situation. Thus, in this regard, a rethinking of immigration policy and its incentive structure is necessary to counteract the logic of settler state, its perpetuation of the colonial legacy, and policies into the future. To this effect, an active policy design, which

grows on an interconnected understanding of social cohesion and Reconciliation, offers the best template for effective action. It not only enhances the intergroup relationships amongst various immigrant communities and Indigenous peoples, but also mainstreams the Indigenous perspectives from centuries of sustained colonial marginalization. Hence, through a reflexive process of dual empowerment of immigrants and Indigenous people, Canadian immigration policy can be the vehicle in furthering responsible national development through meaningful decolonization.

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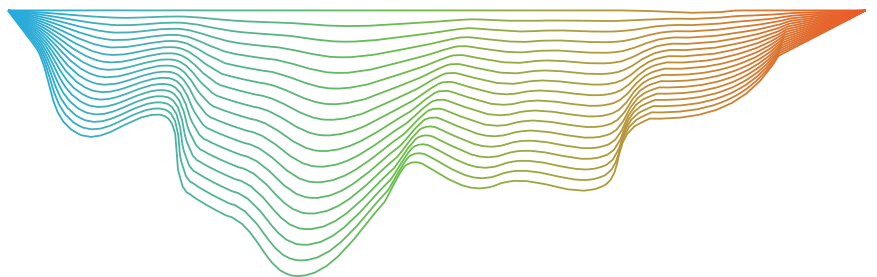
Problem Definition and Background

A broad examination of statistics reveals that Canada has been increasing its immigration at a rate that is steady over the past couple of decades.

From 2000 to 2015 the annual immigration rate, on average, has been 246,500 immigrants each year, which increased to 317,580 immigrants during 2016 to 2019. As per the Immigration Levels Plan projections of the government during 2020-2022, there will be a further increase with the High Range target being pegged at 370,000 immigrants in 2020. In the successive years, the projections envisage an increase in immigrant intake by 10,000 each year up to the year 2022, thus making it 390,000 immigrants by the end of 2022.[1, 2] This rate of intake will contribute to a larger shift in the demographics of Canada. According to the 2016 Census, 7,540,830 people, that is, 21.9% of the Canadian population, were foreign-born (immigrants), 26,412,610 (76.6%) were Canadian-born (non-immigrants) and 506,625 (1.5%) were non-permanent residents.[3] Comparatively in the same census, the population of Aboriginal people 1,673,780 people making up 4.9% of the population.[4]

In analyzing the composition of the population in the categories in the aforementioned statistics, the role of immigration policy is quite apparent. Historically, the process of

Canadian Immigration can be framed under four patterns:

1. Pre-Confederation Canada: the origins of settler society,
2. From Confederation until the 1960s: expansion and exclusion,
3. Immigrant activism and a reformed immigration policy: the 1960s to the 1990s and
4. Refugees.[5]

Politics and the interests of settler society have been cardinal in framing the domestic realities of Canada and its immigration policy has been no exception. Although the current immigration policy has undergone progressive reforms in recent years, still the discourse is dominated by the labour economics perspective unable to see the more significant ramifications and the interconnectedness between the ongoing demographic shifts and existential issues pertaining to origins of the Canadian Federation.

Social cohesion and Reconciliation present an indivisible challenge to the role of immigration policy in Canada. The current system on social cohesion is reactive or *post hoc* to the process of immigration, as the approach practised by the Government tends to view social cohesion through the lens of integration and settlement services. In this notion, social cohesion is comprehended as a goal that can be achieved by making accessible certain services, and

also removing specific barriers alone. The current system does not undertake a more proactive approach in rethinking the problem beforehand on the aspect of deeper social cohesion and Reconciliation within the broader immigration policy design.

In my assessment, this ignorance emerges because of not paying due attention to the qualitative attributes of social cohesion in the point system used by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). A perusal of ongoing system reveals that "in 2015, Canadian immigration officials introduced a new system for processing immigration applications known as Express Entry, in an effort to solve the backlogs and skills mismatched that challenged the existing selection system. The Express Entry system sought to speed up the processing of applications, improve the ability of the selection system to address labour market needs, reduce the inventory backlog of applications, and enable selection of the best candidates."[6] Under this process, those who meet the minimum eligibility requirements of one or more of Canada's immigration programs, are entered in the Express Entry pool. Candidates are then awarded points (up to a maximum of 1,200) for a variety of factors, the relative weight of which is determined by the Comprehensive Ranking System (CRS).[7] Thereafter the candidates are ranked, typically once every two weeks, and those with the highest scores are invited to apply for one or more of the immigration programs.[8] As per this scheme of points-based assessment, virtually no points are awarded to the candidates for their social contribution, which constitutes their Social Capital in Canada.

Since the CRS works as an incentive structure for immigrants in framing conditions for their inclusion into Canadian society, the network

effects and social ramifications of the points system are quite pronounced than what is typically deduced. Incentives in any system perform the role of communicating information to the players in that system. It signals value position to players in outlining what is desired by the system and, therefore, animates human behaviour towards the achievement of its own self-described goals, which the players see as the rewards for their compliance with the system. So, if this mechanism is probed with respect to the Canadian immigration policy, the injudicious omission of social capital as a critical parameter comes across as a matter of great concern. American political scientist Robert D. Putnam explains the necessity for this concept in his writings: "Social capital refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called 'civic virtue.' The difference is that 'social capital' calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most-powerful when embedded in a sense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital."[9] For this reason, a country whose significant proportions of the population have immigrant origins, and is also pursuing progressive immigration targets on an annual basis, an absence of qualitative social metrics presents a major structural problem with the present CRS evaluation approach.

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Thus, social capital incentives need to be identified with the chief task of promoting social cohesion alongside the imperatives outlined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) in 2015. In his
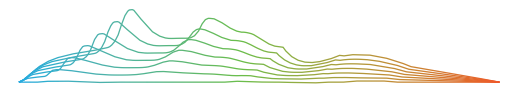
testimony to the Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science, and Technology, Zheng Wu (of the University of Victoria) explained that social cohesion refers to: "the material and social conditions that connect people and encourage solidarity between them. In plural societies, social cohesion is a barometer of intergroup or race relations that implies a level of acceptance of ethnic diversity. In other words, it represents the capacity of communities to integrate their members and avoid social isolation and marginalization of minorities."[10] Notwithstanding the principal insight of this point, an analogous interpretation of the imperatives highlighted by the TRC demonstrates social cohesion as a corollary to its 10 directives principles.[11] In these principles, calls for progressive commitments are outlined that acknowledge the creation of Canadian Confederation at the cost of dispossession of Indigenous people and their institutions. However, the magnitude of demographics effects experienced by Canada have been severe but, "immigration narratives, albeit still inchoate, privileged European settlers, then Asian migrant workers, over Indigenous people for work. It was also during these years that the State adopted the Indian Act and implemented the residential schools programs, thus undermining for the long term the social and cultural reproduction of Indigenous peoples."[12] So the inclusion of critical historical perspectives in "[a]nalyzing immigration and Indigenous peoples' issues together is an invitation to explore with new tools the mainstream history of immigration. The concept of Migration narrative can be a useful tool for analyzing these shifting relationships between Indigenous peoples and immigration dynamics."[13] As Kiera Ladner, an Indigenous

governance scholar suggests, "We need to create a renewed relationship based upon a true partnership in Confederation, which is based upon a realization of a post-colonial vision and not a perpetuation of colonialism."[14] While an Indigenous Legal Scholar also adds, "A faithful application of the rule of law to the Crown's assertion of title [and thus, sovereignty] throughout Canada would suggest Aboriginal peoples possess the very right claimed by the Crown" (Borrows 2002). This means any policy proposal must take into account the indivisible relationship that exists between social cohesion and Truth and Reconciliation in Canada. In essence, immigration policy does not operate in a vacuum, and therefore cannot be oblivious to the merit of these obligations, so in its role of crafting the national character of the Canadian Federation, immigration policymaking must bear a responsible cognizance in not perpetuating the legacy of colonialism, and immediately act in the aforementioned direction.
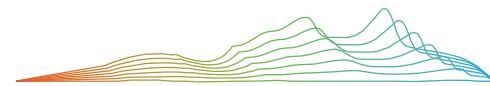
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Policy Recommendations

To engage with the indivisible challenge of social cohesion and Truth and Reconciliation, I recommend the following two policy proposals as they promote an active and reflexive policy approach towards dual empowerment of immigrants and Indigenous people:

1 **Include Points for Social Capital to Incentivize Social Cohesion in Comprehensive Ranking System (CRS).**

Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology June, 2013 in reducing barriers to Social Inclusion and Social Cohesion have made the following two recommendations:[16]

- That the Government of Canada initiate research that will lead to the development of a set of indicators to measure levels of social inclusion and social cohesion in Canada:
  a) That the Government of Canada, using these indicators, establish goals for social inclusion and social cohesion in those areas which fall within its responsibilities as set forth under the Canadian Constitution; b) That the Government of Canada use these indicators, when appropriate, in the design and evaluation of its policies, programs, and activities; and c) That the Government of Canada measure, at regular intervals, the extent to which its policies, programs, and activities are achieving the social inclusion and social cohesion goals it has established, and report the results to the Parliament of Canada.
- That the Government of Canada employ campaigns explaining the importance of community engagement and to promote volunteerism among immigrant communities.

In light of stipulated committee recommendations and their directive emphasis, I put forward the proposal to the IRCC to award points under the CRS system to the candidates who sufficiently demonstrate social contribution through their community volunteering. This method can be actualized in the following two ways:

i. Pilot Test Under the Proposed Municipal Nominee Program (MNP)
In assessing the potential and feasibility of this recommendation, MNP could be a great platform in testing the appropriate weightage of points that could be awarded for the community volunteering, in demonstrating a candidate's ties to the community.

ii. Allowing the Criteria Across All Immigration Programs
Since the overarching objective is to broad base the process of social cohesion as a critical element of the Immigration Policy, the aforementioned approach for awarding points to the social contribution of the candidates must become accessible to all immigration programs under Express Entry.

Currently, the practised method for assessment of ties to the community considers only the following criteria in CRS:

- A job offer
- Completion of post-secondary education in Canada (in the concerned city)
- Obtaining post-graduate work experience
- Having family members in the community

Moreover, alongside the aforementioned criteria, there are other eligibility requirements such as age, education, language skills, and work experience, which are included in the overall assessment of a candidate's profile. But they prominently lack the required inclusion of a social capital parameter, which allows for the measurement of a candidate's social contribution through community volunteering.

To avoid potential misuse of these criteria and ensure its rigorous objectivity, city governments and their equivalent authorities across Indigenous governance structures can be brought on board to create volunteer banks. This will not only allow them to address local shortfalls for community volunteers in critical areas, but will also enable them to reinvigorate their role in the promotion of civic engagement across their communities.

2 Creating a Mechanism for the Inclusion of Indigenous Perspectives in Immigration Policymaking.

At the Federal Level (in the light of the imperatives stipulated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's ((TRC)) ten principles and 94 calls to action), steps need to be initiated and deliberated to establish a consultation mechanism in ensuring a permanent role and involvement of Indigenous people in immigration policymaking, including the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration (CIMM). Correspondingly, this mechanism must explore the intersections of Indigenous laws and rights with the Canadian Immigration policy on a continual basis. To conclude, it will facilitate a broader and more comprehensive process for the decolonization of the existing systems and procedures in place.
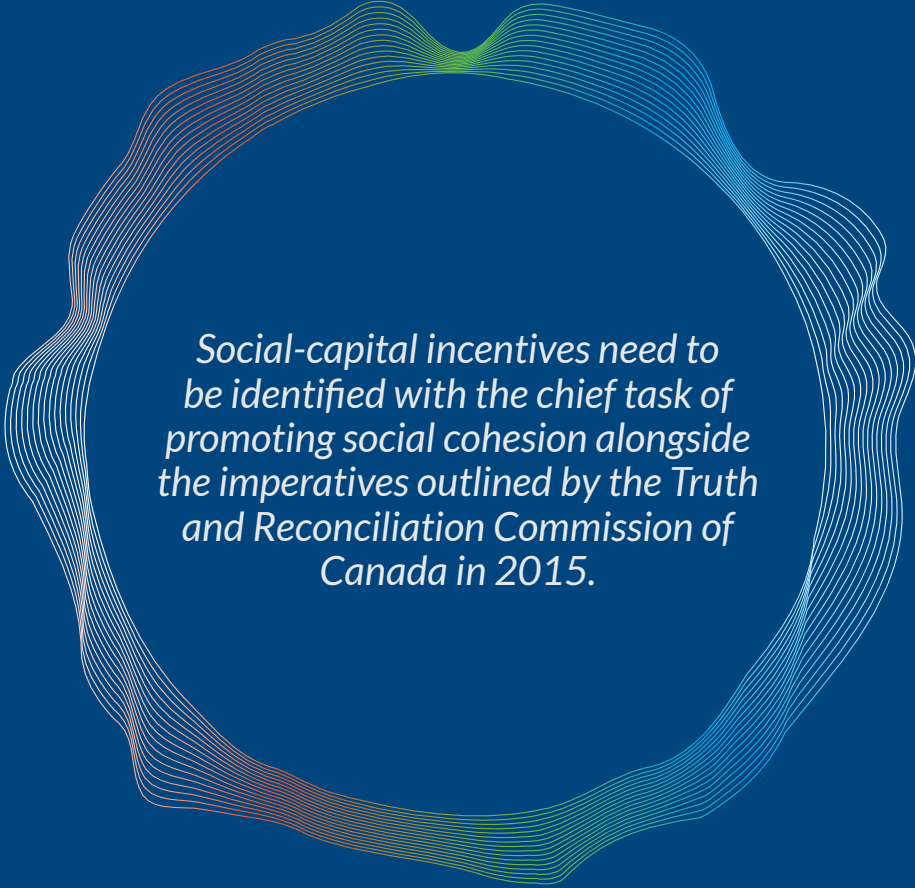
Conclusion
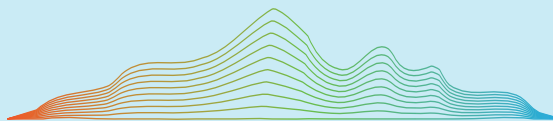
The process of rethinking immigration reform in Canada requires substantive immigrant and Indigenous policymaking perspectives. These two stakeholders hold the "golden key" in enabling Canada to realize its Indigenous past and meet the challenges of its cosmopolitan future in an integrated manner. Thus, through a reflexive process of dual empowerment in promoting social cohesion and Reconciliation, the resultant policy response will realise indivisible social capital, which will redefine the intergroup relations in Canada. Correspondingly, it will pave the way for an incentive structure that will inspire and reward immigrants to develop deeper connections with the communities they live in, while also ensuring a meaningful Indigenous presence in policies affecting the national character of Canada.

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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.

LEVEL

AN INITIATIVE OF
vancouver
foundation