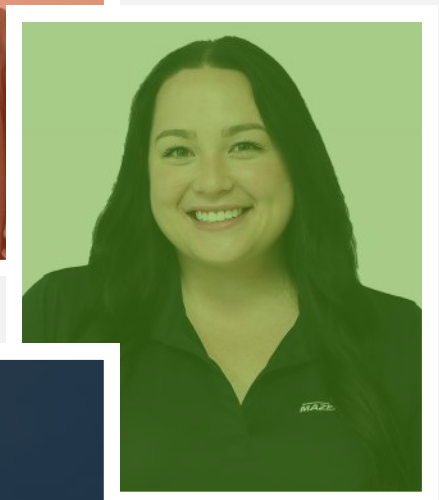

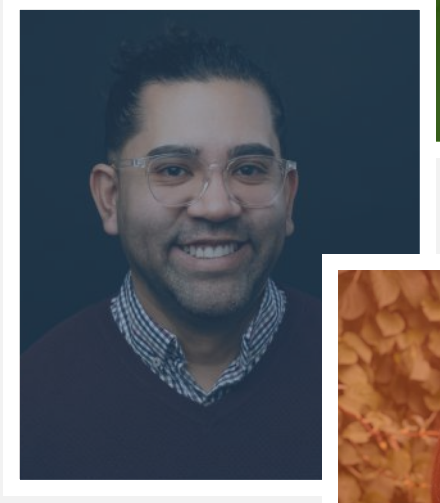

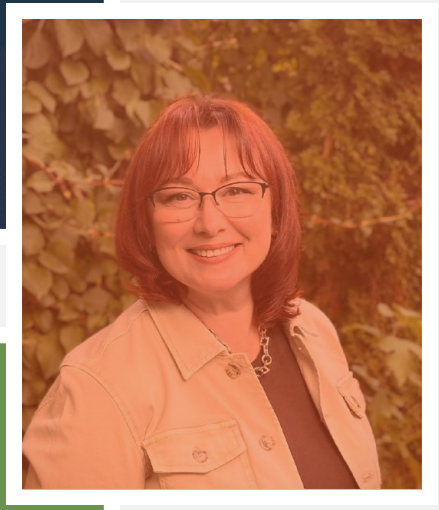

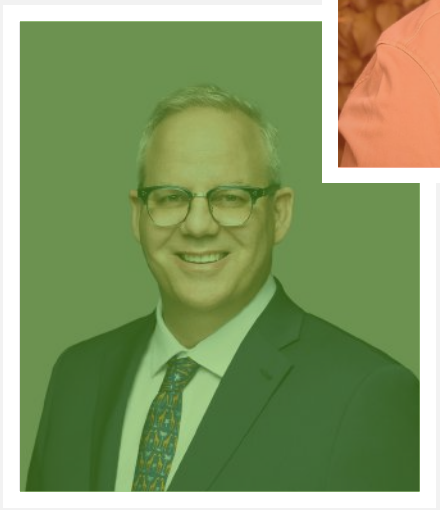

FutureWorks Canada Tour Edition

VISIONARY VOICES

Employer Insights *on Future-Proofing Immigration for Canada's Workforce*

IMMIGRANT EMPLOYMENT COUNCIL OF BC IECBC

CRIEC Connecting Experience with Opportunity

eriec Edmonton Region Immigrant Employment Council

Saskatoon Open Door Society

Manitoba IEC IMMIGRANT EMPLOYMENT COUNCIL

RM IEC RURAL MANITOBA IMMIGRANT EMPLOYMENT COUNCIL

willimmploy

workforce COLLECTIVE

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NEW BRUNSWICK MULTICULTURAL COUNCIL CONSEIL MULTICULTUREL DU NOUVEAU-BRUNSWICK

HALIFAX PARTNERSHIP CONNECT. COLLABORATE. PROSPER.

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ABOUT IECC

The National Network of Immigrant Employment Councils (IECC) is a collaborative body dedicated to forging effective partnerships and innovative solutions.

It aims to significantly improve labour market outcomes for immigrants and support a stronger Canadian economy.

IMMIGRANT EMPLOYMENT COUNCILS OF CANADA

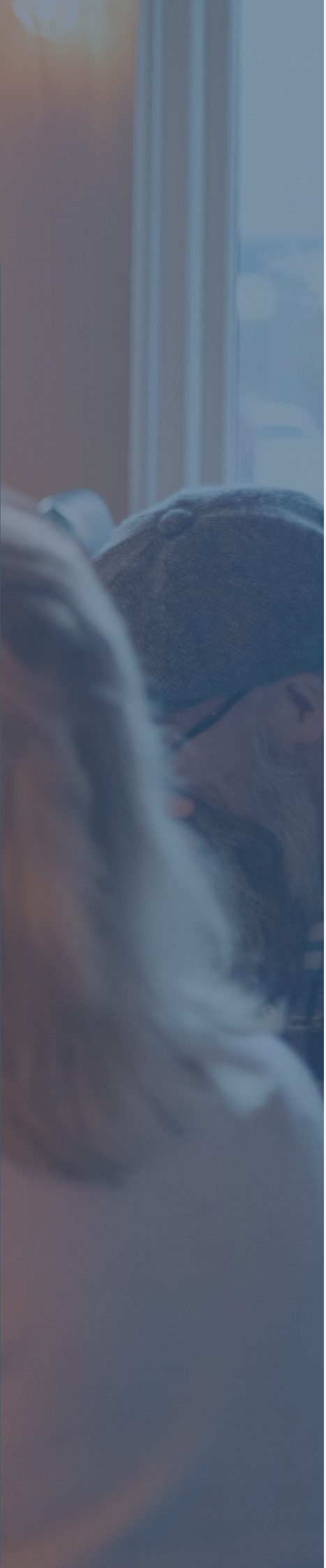
Funded by:

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

Financé par :

Immigration, Réfugiés et Citoyenneté Canada

FUTUREWORKS CANADA TOUR



The FutureWorks Canada Tour Project is a national knowledge-mobilization initiative designed to share, collect, and synthesize employer feedback to strengthen and inform how immigration can best serve Canada's future workforce strategy. It brings employers, policymakers, educators, and community partners together to examine how immigration and skills development must evolve alongside industry needs so Canada remains competitive, innovative, and prepared for emerging labour demands. By elevating employer perspectives and deepening cross-sector collaboration, the project surfaces practical solutions that support workforce readiness, economic growth, and long-term prosperity.

Led by the Immigrant Employment Council of BC in collaboration with the IECC Network, the initiative builds on national efforts to convene employers and system actors across Canada to identify challenges, share insights, and co-create solutions that better align immigration pathways with labour-market needs.

Funded by:

Future Skills Centre
Centre des Compétences futures

VISIONARY VOICES CATALOGUE

The Visionary Voices Catalogue elevates employer and key system actor voices from industry leaders shaping the future of Canada's workforce. Through firsthand insights and practical experience, this collection highlights how employers are advancing immigrant workforce integration, building inclusive workplaces, and aligning skills and talent strategies with evolving labour market needs.

This FutureWorks Canada Tour edition brings a skills-focused lens to these conversations, spotlighting employers and system partners who are preparing for the future of work while responding to today's labour realities. Leaders featured in this edition share on-the-ground perspectives on navigating talent shortages, evolving skills demands, technological and industry shifts, and the changing expectations of a modern workforce. Their experiences reflect diverse regional contexts across British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, and rural Manitoba, demonstrating how both rural and urban employers are building talent systems that support long-term growth and competitiveness.

Through these conversations, employers emphasize that immigrant talent is not only filling critical workforce gaps, but also strengthening innovation, productivity, and business resilience. Their insights underscore the importance of connecting immigration and skills development, building inclusive workplace practices, and forging partnerships across education, government, industry, and community to ensure employers have access to the talent and skills needed for today and tomorrow.

We are grateful to the visionaries who contributed to this edition; your expertise and practical insights are helping shape more resilient, competitive, and future-ready workplaces across Canada.

CODY MARTIN

Talent Acquisition Lead
FortisBC

"We need to start with a mindset shift. Employers must recognize the value newcomers bring and create systems that allow them to contribute right away.

That begins by rethinking how we select talent. Are recruitment practices truly inclusive? Is the interview format the best way to assess skills? Is the hiring panel itself diverse and reflective of the community? These are critical questions organizations should be asking. If we avoid them, we risk overlooking top talent. By challenging our assumptions and making more inclusive choices, we can build a workforce that is better prepared for the future."

ENERGY

Can you introduce yourself and tell us about your role within your organization? What motivated you to engage in immigrant workforce integration? Were there personal or professional experiences that shaped your active role in this space?

My name is Cody Martin, and I am a Talent Acquisition Lead at FortisBC, overseeing recruitment for operations and engineering roles across the province. I've been with the company for eight years and have spent my career in HR, connecting skilled professionals to meaningful work in the energy sector.

My involvement in immigrant workforce integration began naturally through recruitment. Meeting newcomers eager to join our organization opened my eyes to the barriers they face—especially the difficulty of validating education, experience, and credentials. That experience motivated me to take action.

THROUGH IEC-BC'S EMPLOYER ADVISORY GROUP AND THE MENTORCONNECT PROGRAM, I GAINED A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF POLICY GAPS AND WHERE WE AS EMPLOYERS CAN APPLY BEST PRACTICES TO BREAK DOWN BARRIERS AND BUILD A MORE INCLUSIVE, SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT.

Witnessing one of my mentees successfully transition from a retail role into a career in Human Resources has been a powerful reminder of why inclusive workforce development is so essential. This experience has deepened my commitment to fostering equitable opportunities and continues to fuel my passion for inclusion and talent development.

What are the top three workforce challenges your sector/organization is currently facing, such as skills gaps, talent shortages, or systemic barriers, that affect both your immediate needs and your readiness for the future of work?

AN AGING WORKFORCE IS ONE OF THE MOST PRESSING CHALLENGES FACED BY OUR SECTOR IN CANADA.

With retirements accelerating across the industry, there have been a high volume of opportunities within organizations—but also growing difficulty in retaining top talent. As employees gain experience, they're quickly promoted or move on, making it harder to maintain consistency in critical roles.

THAT TURNOVER LEADS TO A SECOND CHALLENGE: KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER.

When experienced staff leave, the industry risks losing not just procedures and technical know-how, but also institutional context on how and why we do things a certain way. Lower retention rates affect an organization's training quality too, with junior staff often tasked with onboarding new hires before they've fully developed their own expertise.

THE THIRD SECTOR-WIDE CHALLENGE IS CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION.

Many newcomers have strong qualifications, but delays in validating their international education and experience, especially for roles that require micro-credentials or professional designations, create significant barriers. These obstacles prevent them from contributing fully and slow down workforce readiness at a time when talent is urgently needed.

How is technology, AI, or automation changing the skills your workforce needs? Where do you see immigrant talent fitting into these shifts?

TECHNOLOGY AND AI ARE CREATING IMPORTANT OPPORTUNITIES TO REDUCE ADMINISTRATIVE TASKS AND FREE UP CAPACITY FOR MORE STRATEGIC WORK.

By automating routine functions, our teams can focus more on problem-solving, critical thinking, and high-impact deliverables. These tools also support onboarding and training by making it easier to access job aids and internal resources, which are especially helpful for newcomers who are still adjusting to a new language or work environment.

As technology evolves, it levels the playing field for all applicants, including immigrant talent. Those who are curious, adaptable, and able to quickly learn and apply these tools can stand out and immediately add value. In today's environment, proactively learning emerging technologies is a key advantage.

AT THE SAME TIME, WE NEED PEOPLE WHO UNDERSTAND NOT JUST HOW TO USE AI, BUT WHEN TO USE IT.

These tools can enhance performance, but they aren't always accurate or reflective of best practice. The ability to interpret outputs critically and apply judgment is essential. Those who know how to leverage AI responsibly and with purpose will have an advantage when integrating these new technologies.

As Canada transitions toward a low-carbon economy, how is your sector preparing? Do you see opportunities for immigrant talent in this transformation?

The energy sector is evolving, and that shift calls for talent that brings innovation, creative thinking, and a solutions-oriented mindset. As new technologies and priorities shape the future of energy, our workforce must stay alert to emerging pathways and find ways to adapt and lead within them.

THIS TRANSFORMATION CREATES SPACE FOR DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES, INCLUDING THOSE OF IMMIGRANT PROFESSIONALS, TO HELP SHAPE HOW WE MOVE FORWARD.

Success will come from being open to new ideas and building energy solutions that support the future of the province and the country.

How do you see immigration helping to address these challenges in your sector/organization? Are there specific skills, roles, or contributions that immigrant talent can provide to strengthen your workforce?

Immigration plays a vital role in building a resilient and future-ready workforce. Immigrants are highly skilled professionals who bring valuable insights into how work is approached and executed. Their diverse perspectives challenge conventional thinking, drive process improvements, and ignite innovation.

BY LEVERAGING THEIR INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE, NEWCOMERS CONTRIBUTE FRESH IDEAS AND ADAPTABLE SOLUTIONS THAT ENHANCE ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS TO HELP US EVOLVE HOW WE WORK.

Beyond technical expertise, newcomers bring adaptability and resilience, qualities that come from the experience of starting over in a new country. These traits are already well developed before they enter the workforce, and they contribute meaningfully to team dynamics and performance. We actively consider these attributes when evaluating new hires, recognizing that immigrant talent adds both depth and diversity to our organization.

Looking ahead, how do you see your organization's role evolving in integrating immigrant talent and preparing your sector for both today's and tomorrow's workforce needs?

As we face an aging workforce and a growing number of openings, immigrant talent plays a vital role in meeting both current and future labour needs.

AT FORTISBC, WE ARE COMMITTED TO INCLUSIVE JOB ADVERTISING TO ENSURE OPPORTUNITIES ARE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL MEMBERS OF OUR COMMUNITY AND NOT EXCLUDING ANY GROUP.

We also continue to advance a culture of belonging so that when newcomers join our organization, they feel supported, valued, and motivated to stay.

IT IS NOT JUST ABOUT HIRING TO FILL IMMEDIATE GAPS, BUT EQUALLY ABOUT CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR LONG-TERM CAREER GROWTH AND RETENTION.

In your view, how can government, education and training institutions, settlement organizations and other system actors more effectively work with employers to ensure immigration and skills development keep pace with evolving labour market realities?

With so many actors involved in the immigration journey, and with constant changes in policy, labour markets, and regulatory systems, employers need better ways to stay informed and responsive.

ONE SOLUTION IS TO BUILD INTERNAL SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTISE FOCUSED ON IMMIGRATION, I.E. SOMEONE WHO CAN TRACK CHANGES, INTERPRET THEIR IMPACT, AND SHARE INSIGHTS WITH HIRING TEAMS.

Organizations like IEC-BC play an important role in bridging that gap by offering resources and up-to-date information that help employers adapt and make more informed decisions as the landscape continues to shift.

What are the gaps you see in current policies, programs, or partnerships, and what would it take to close them?

Many immigration policies and programs are complex, and employers often lack clear information on how to get involved. This knowledge gap creates uncertainty, which can lead to hesitation in hiring or supporting newcomers.

WHEN EMPLOYERS DO NOT FULLY UNDERSTAND THE PROCESS, THEY MAY SHY AWAY FROM ENGAGING WITH IMMIGRANT TALENT, DESPITE THE VALUE IT BRINGS.

Building stronger relationships and improving communication between system actors and employers is a critical first step to closing these gaps and giving organizations that confidence to participate more actively.

What is your vision for your sector's workforce, particularly how immigration, skills development, and industry priorities can align to drive growth, innovation, and inclusion across Canada?

IN OPERATIONS AND ENGINEERING, WHERE CERTIFICATION IS ESSENTIAL, WE NEED A MORE SEAMLESS PROCESS FOR RECOGNIZING INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND CREDENTIALS.

Delays in recognition prevent newcomers from contributing at the level they are qualified for, and the longer someone is removed from their profession, the harder it becomes to re-enter. Employers may start to lose confidence in their ability, and highly skilled individuals can become disengaged in roles far below their potential.

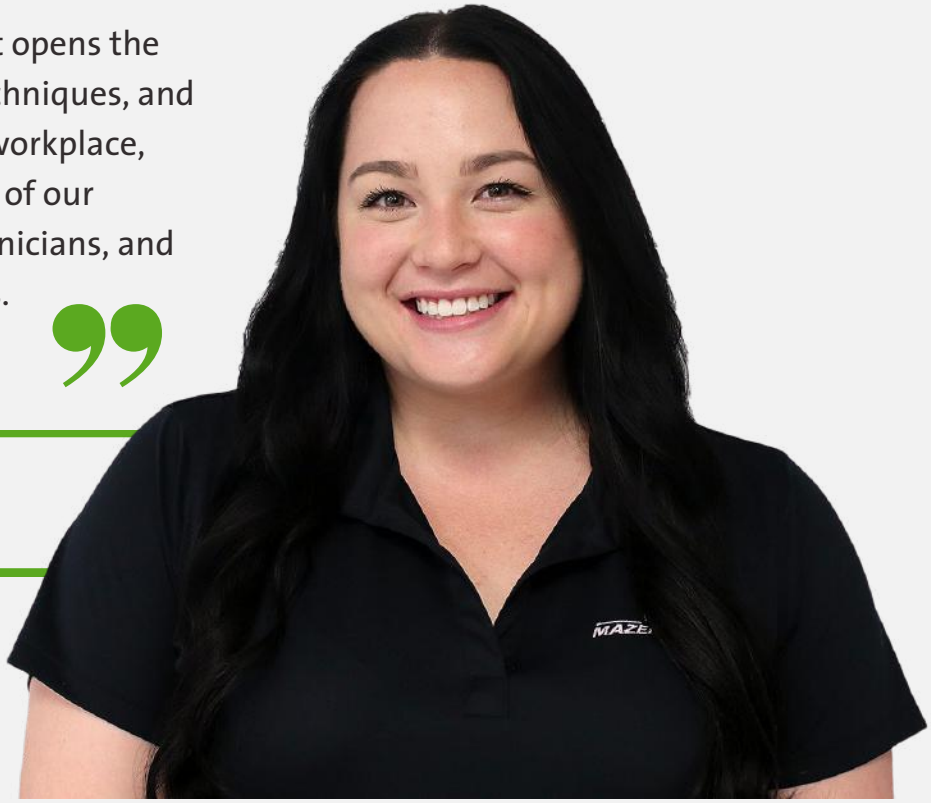
MY VISION IS A SYSTEM WHERE QUALIFIED NEWCOMERS CAN INTEGRATE EARLIER AND CONTRIBUTE MEANINGFULLY, WITHOUT UNNECESSARY DELAYS OR BARRIERS.

Our vision is to continue bringing in talented people who will help grow and shape our up-and-coming workforce.

Welcoming immigrant talent opens the door to new perspectives, techniques, and experiences that enrich our workplace, strengthen the development of our apprentices and current technicians, and ultimately grow our business.

Talent Acquisition Specialist
Mazergroup

MACHINERY AND EQUIPMENT



COURTNEY MATIENZO

Can you introduce yourself and tell us about your role within your organization? What motivated you to engage in immigrant workforce integration? Were there personal or professional experiences that shaped your active role in this space?

My name is Courtney Matienzo, and I am the Talent Acquisition Specialist at Mazergroup, a family of machinery dealerships offering agricultural, construction, and commercial turf equipment, sales, parts, and service. With eighteen locations across Manitoba and Southern Saskatchewan, we are well-positioned to serve customers across our territory.

My motivation to support immigrant workforce integration stems from both personal and professional experiences. My father's journey immigrating to Canada from the Philippines shaped my understanding of the newcomer experience, while my time at Maple Leaf Foods in Brandon (now Canada Packers) deepened that perspective.

These experiences inspired me to pursue a Graduate Diploma in Immigration and Citizenship Law, supported by Mazergroup. I intend to complete the Entry-to-Practice Exam to become a Regulated Canadian Immigration Consultant after seeing many people struggle with immigration applications through no fault of their own.

What are the top three workforce challenges your sector/organization is currently facing, such as skills gaps, talent shortages, or systemic barriers, that affect both your immediate needs and your readiness for the future of work?

MANY OF OUR OPERATIONS ARE BASED IN RURAL COMMUNITIES SUCH AS ROBLIN AND DAUPHIN, WHERE LIMITED HOUSING OPTIONS CREATE BARRIERS TO RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION.

Even when candidates are willing to relocate, the lack of available and suitable housing may prevent successful onboarding and long-term employment.

WE ALSO FACE A CRITICAL SHORTAGE OF SKILLED TECHNICIANS, PARTICULARLY HEAVY-DUTY AND AGRICULTURAL EQUIPMENT TECHNICIANS WITH JOURNEYPERSON CERTIFICATION.

While partnerships with Assiniboine College and Sask Polytech help bring in pre-employment students, we struggle to provide sufficient mentorship due to the limited number of certified technicians.

AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL, LABOUR MARKET TRENDS POINT TO ONGOING CHALLENGES.

The Canadian Occupational Projection System projects a strong risk of labour shortages for heavy-duty and agricultural equipment technicians from 2024 to 2033, with job openings expected to continue outpacing the number of qualified job seekers across Canada.

How do you see immigration helping to address these challenges in your sector/organization? Are there specific skills, roles, or contributions that immigrant talent can provide to strengthen your workforce?

IMMIGRATION HELPS MAZERGROUP ADDRESS WORKFORCE CHALLENGES, ESPECIALLY IN RURAL LOCATIONS WHERE TALENT SHORTAGES ARE MOST SEVERE.

We utilize programs such as the Rural Community Immigration Pilot (formerly RNIP), the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program (SINP), and the Temporary Foreign Worker Program through Labour Market Impact Assessments to fill critical gaps.

Immigrant talent strengthens our workforce with their technical expertise and the diversity, energy, and enthusiasm they bring to our shops. They enhance team dynamics and help build a more inclusive workplace. Temporary Foreign Workers can be essential to supporting apprentices and domestic hires with the knowledge they bring forward.

THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS ENABLE US TO MENTOR AND TRAIN NEW TECHNICIANS, WHICH REMAINS A TOP PRIORITY GIVEN THE ONGOING SHORTAGE OF JOURNEYPERSONS ACROSS THE SECTOR.

Looking ahead, how do you see your organization's role evolving in integrating immigrant talent and preparing your sector for both today's and tomorrow's workforce needs?

Mazergroup has made significant progress in attracting and integrating diverse talent across its operations. From heavy-duty and agricultural technicians to truck, transport, and automotive mechanics, we have broadened the range of expertise in our shops.

INTEGRATING IMMIGRANT TALENT NOT ONLY ADDRESSES CURRENT WORKFORCE GAPS BUT ALSO BUILDS A SUSTAINABLE, FUTURE-READY WORKFORCE BY SUPPORTING SUCCESSION PLANNING AND CREATING A STRONG PIPELINE OF SKILLED EMPLOYEES.

Each new team member brings unique perspectives and experiences that help us strengthen onboarding, training, and workplace culture for future hires.

We also provide dedicated support to current employees pursuing permanent residency, which helps us retain skilled immigrant talent in both rural and urban locations. This initiative reinforces our long-term commitment to building an inclusive and stable workforce.

In your view, how can government, education and training institutions, settlement organizations and other system actors more effectively work with employers to ensure immigration and skills development keep pace with evolving labour market realities?

Stronger collaboration between government, education and training institutions, and settlement organizations is essential to help employers keep pace with evolving labour market needs, particularly around immigration and skills development.

ONE KEY GAP LIES IN ACCESS TO PRACTICAL RESOURCES AND GUIDANCE. MANY EMPLOYERS STILL LACK CLEAR INFORMATION ON HOW TO HIRE INDIVIDUALS WITH WORK PERMITS OR NAVIGATE THE TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKER PROGRAM.

Even small gaps in understanding, such as not knowing what conditions may be attached to a work permit, can lead to missed hiring opportunities or compliance risks.

More frequent and accessible information sessions, FAQs, or short training modules like "Hiring Immigrant Talent 101" would help address these issues. Sessions that cover topics such as credential recognition, immigration pathways, and legal responsibilities can equip employers to make informed decisions and build confidence in their hiring practices.

WHILE SOME RESOURCES ALREADY EXIST, MORE OUTREACH IS NEEDED TO REACH EMPLOYERS WHO HESITATE TO ASK FOR GUIDANCE. EXPANDING ACCESS AND AWARENESS WOULD HELP BRIDGE KNOWLEDGE GAPS AND ENCOURAGE MORE EFFECTIVE AND RESPONSIVE HIRING PRACTICES ACROSS SECTORS.

From your perspective, what supports would help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), or your organization if you are an SME, adapt more effectively to workforce changes, whether in scaling, innovating, or responding to labour market disruptions?

SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES ADAPT MORE EFFECTIVELY TO WORKFORCE CHANGES WHEN THEY CAN SPEAK DIRECTLY WITH SOMEONE WHO UNDERSTANDS THEIR CHALLENGES.

In communities like Brandon, employers prefer to connect with a knowledgeable person rather than be directed to unfamiliar online resources. They want clear answers, practical steps, and the confidence to follow through.

Many SMEs operate without dedicated HR professionals or staff experienced in workforce development or immigration processes, so they often handle these responsibilities. This can cause confusion and missed opportunities.

"HAVING A SINGLE POINT OF CONTACT WHO CAN PROVIDE TIMELY AND RELIABLE GUIDANCE HELPS EMPLOYERS MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS AND RESPOND QUICKLY TO WORKFORCE DISRUPTIONS."

JHON CANON

Human Resources Manager
Stolk Construction

CONSTRUCTION

My vision is a construction workforce that is inclusive, resilient, and prepared for the future.

This means removing barriers for newcomers, internationally trained professionals, women, and other underrepresented groups. Immigration will remain essential, but pathways must align with labour market needs by engaging employers, educators, settlement services, and industry organizations.

Skills development must also evolve, with improved apprenticeship ratios, higher completion rates, and streamlined credential recognition so internationally trained tradespeople can contribute more quickly.

The priorities for our sector are clear: innovation, skills development, and inclusion, all dependent on a workforce that is both highly skilled and broadly representative. By addressing systemic barriers and aligning immigration, training, and industry priorities, we can build a construction sector that meets Canada's capacity needs.

Can you introduce yourself and tell us about your role within your organization? What motivated you to engage in immigrant workforce integration? Were there personal or professional experiences that shaped your active role in this space?

My name is Jhon Canon, and I am the Human Resources Manager at Stolk Construction, a general contractor specializing in ICI projects in the Niagara Region. My motivation to remove systemic barriers to immigrant employment stems from both personal and professional experiences.

As an immigrant, I adapted quickly when I arrived at a young age yet still faced challenges like being judged for my accent, which made me realize how much harder it is for others. In over a decade managing a staffing agency, I saw internationally trained professionals and international students struggle to use their skills while employers were often unprepared and resources difficult to access.

FOR ME, HIRING ALONE IS NOT ENOUGH—SUPPORT MUST BE BUILT IN. THE GOAL IS NOT JUST INTEGRATION BUT THE REMOVAL OF SYSTEMIC BARRIERS LIKE CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION, CULTURAL UNFAMILIARITY, AND EMPLOYER READINESS SO THAT THE SKILLS OF IMMIGRANTS ARE RECOGNIZED AND EFFECTIVELY PUT TO WORK.

What are the top three workforce challenges your sector/organization is currently facing, such as skills gaps, talent shortages, or systemic barriers, that affect both your immediate needs and your readiness for the future of work?

In the construction sector, we face three interconnected challenges that affect both current capacity and long-term readiness.

FIRST, SKILLS GAPS AND TALENT SHORTAGES ARE WIDENING as an aging workforce nears retirement, housing and infrastructure demands increase, and apprenticeship completion rates remain low, leaving too few workers reaching journeyperson status on time.

SECOND, SYSTEMIC BARRIERS IN APPRENTICESHIP AND TRAINING, such as restrictive ratios and lengthy timelines, further slow the pipeline of new talent and delay workers from contributing at full capacity.

THIRD, IMMIGRATION PATHWAYS FOR TRADES ALSO FALL SHORT, OFTEN COMPLEX, SLOW, AND MISALIGNED WITH LABOUR NEEDS with requirements and assessments that prevent internationally trained tradespeople from entering the roles where shortages are most severe.

Until training systems, immigration policy, and industry needs are better aligned, these gaps will continue to grow.

How is technology, AI, or automation changing the skills your workforce needs? Where do you see immigrant talent fitting into these shifts?

Technology, AI, and automation are reshaping the skills needed in construction. Digital tools now influence every level of work, while new methods such as modular and off-site building demand different technical and logistical skills than traditional approaches.

AS MORE PROCESSES ARE AUTOMATED OR MOVED INTO FACTORY SETTINGS, DIGITAL LITERACY, ADAPTABILITY, AND PROBLEM-SOLVING ARE BECOMING JUST AS IMPORTANT AS HANDS-ON TRADE SKILLS.

Immigrant talent has a vital role in this transition, as internationally trained workers often bring experience with innovation, digital tools, and diverse building methods that can accelerate adoption and fill knowledge gaps. To fully realize this potential, immigration programs must align more closely with evolving workforce needs so Canada can attract and retain the talent required for the future of construction.

How do you see immigration helping to address these challenges in your sector/organization? Are there specific skills, roles, or contributions that immigrant talent can provide to strengthen your workforce?

Immigration presents both challenges and opportunities for construction. There is still a disconnect between immigration pathways and labour needs, with too few internationally trained tradespeople able to enter trade-specific roles directly. Yet immigrant talent strengthens the workforce by bringing technical expertise, project management skills, and exposure to innovative methods and digital tools.

FOR IMMIGRATION TO BE A TRUE WORKFORCE SOLUTION, PROGRAMS MUST ALIGN WITH INDUSTRY NEEDS, AND CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION, LICENSING, AND EMPLOYER READINESS MUST EVOLVE SO SKILLS ARE PUT TO WORK QUICKLY AND EFFECTIVELY.

Immigration can be one of the strongest drivers of growth in construction, but only if systemic barriers are addressed and pathways connect directly to the roles where shortages are most severe.

Looking ahead, how do you see your organization's role evolving in integrating immigrant talent and preparing your sector for both today's and tomorrow's workforce needs?

OUR ROLE BEGINS WITH BEING PREPARED TO WELCOME DIVERSITY BY ENSURING ONBOARDING, TRAINING, AND DEVELOPMENT REFLECT THE NEEDS OF A MULTICULTURAL WORKFORCE.

This means fostering inclusive leadership, cultural understanding, and flexibility in scheduling and skill development. Supporting a diverse workforce is an ongoing process, and we must engage employees, listen to their experiences, and adapt as needs change. Immigrant talent will remain essential to meeting both today's shortages and tomorrow's skill demands, and our role is to remove barriers that limit their full contribution.

Beyond internal efforts, collaboration with employers, settlement agencies, educators, policymakers, and industry groups is critical.

NO SINGLE EMPLOYER CAN ACT ALONE; ONLY THROUGH COLLECTIVE EFFORT CAN WE CREATE STRONGER PATHWAYS AND MORE INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES FOR THE FUTURE.

In your view, how can government, education and training institutions, settlement organizations and other system actors more effectively work with employers to ensure immigration and skills development keep pace with evolving labour market realities?

Systemic change requires collaboration, as employers cannot close skills gaps or remove barriers alone. Government, education, training institutions, settlement services, and policymakers must work with industry to keep immigration and skills development aligned with labour market realities.

Positive examples include the IECC Network, Workforce Collective, and settlement agencies creating spaces for engagement, and initiatives like the Niagara Workforce Coalition that show the value of coordinated action.

THE PATH FORWARD IS TO MOVE FROM AD-HOC CONSULTATION TO STRUCTURED PARTNERSHIPS THAT SHARE RESPONSIBILITY, TRACK RESULTS, AND ADAPT QUICKLY AS NEEDS EVOLVE. STRENGTHENING THESE COLLABORATIVE MODELS WILL ENSURE IMMIGRATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT CONTRIBUTE FULLY TO CANADA'S EVOLVING WORKFORCE.

What are the gaps you see in current policies, programs, or partnerships, and what would it take to close them?

Current programs are often slow and misaligned with labour market needs. Employers feel gaps immediately when roles go unfilled, while immigration and training pathways adapt too slowly.

CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION IS A MAJOR BARRIER, WITH COMPLEX PROCESSES THAT VARY BY PROFESSION AND PROVINCE DELAYING HOW QUICKLY INTERNATIONALLY TRAINED WORKERS CAN CONTRIBUTE AT FULL CAPACITY.

Supports such as the Workforce Innovation Network, LINK, and ACE exist but uptake is uneven due to limited awareness or capacity.

Closing these gaps requires faster immigration processes, streamlined credential recognition, and stronger employer engagement through programs that are practical, accessible, and widely promoted.

From your perspective, what supports would help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), or your organization if you are an SME, adapt more effectively to workforce changes, whether in scaling, innovating, or responding to labour market disruptions?

SMEs face unique challenges in adapting to workforce changes, often lacking the resources larger organizations dedicate to workforce development. Even when supports exist, they can be hard to identify, access, or implement, leaving many SMEs unable to benefit from programs that could help them innovate or respond to disruptions.

Access to talent is another challenge, as finding qualified tradespeople remains difficult and immigration pathways do not always align with the roles most urgently needed. To address these gaps, supports should be practical and accessible, with funding for training, easier adoption of digital tools, and hands-on guidance to navigate existing programs.

MORE OUTREACH, SIMPLIFICATION, AND ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT ARE ESSENTIAL SO SMALLER EMPLOYERS CAN PARTICIPATE FULLY AND ADAPT EFFECTIVELY.

Looking to the future, what skills horizon do you imagine for your sector? What must change to ensure Canada's workforce remains inclusive, adaptable, and innovative?

The skills horizon for construction is shifting rapidly.

DIGITAL LITERACY AND AI FLUENCY WILL BECOME BASELINE REQUIREMENTS, WHILE MODULAR AND OFF-SITE CONSTRUCTION, AUTOMATION, AND GREEN BUILDING WILL DEMAND NEW TECHNICAL EXPERTISE AND ADAPTABILITY.

To prepare, education and training must be more agile, apprenticeship timelines improved, and credential recognition streamlined so internationally trained professionals can contribute without delay.

Inclusion and adaptability are equally critical, with employers encouraging cross-cultural leadership, flexible learning, and a workplace where all voices are heard.

Immigration selection must also align with emerging needs in areas such as sustainable construction and digital innovation.

AN INCLUSIVE, ADAPTABLE, AND INNOVATIVE WORKFORCE WILL BE ESSENTIAL TO CANADA'S FUTURE, ENABLING THE SECTOR TO DELIVER THE HOUSING, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND ECONOMIC GROWTH THE COUNTRY REQUIRES.

OLYA LOSHKIN

Professor, Fanshawe College
Founder, LOSHKINS

APPLIED LANGUAGE TRAINING

Employers need to be at the center of program design.

Too often, solutions are created without their input, making it harder to meet real workplace needs. Training programs for newcomers must align with employer demands. One approach could be providing targeted funding directly to employers or associations, along with a list of vetted programs. If they use the funds, they benefit. If not, the opportunity passes. That structure could encourage participation and practical adoption.

Still, funding alone is not enough. Many employers do not see the value of workplace communication or culture training. You cannot just tell them it matters. They need to experience the difference. Pilots would help with that.

From my own work in OSLT and building a business focused on employer engagement, I have seen how difficult it is to promote these services. That is why I am investing my time to work with a few employers locally, demonstrate the benefits, and build trust from the ground up. If government supported organizations to offer similar services at no cost through pilots, more employers might begin to understand the value and engage in more inclusive practices.

Can you introduce yourself and tell us about your role within your organization? What motivated you to engage in immigrant workforce integration? Were there personal or professional experiences that shaped your active role in this space?

My name is Olya Loshkin, and I am a professor at Fanshawe College in London, Ontario, specializing in workplace communication, language, and culture. For over 13 years, I have been teaching Occupation-Specific Language Training (OSLT) and English for Academic Purposes to immigrants and international students. I have also developed a variety of pilot programs for newcomers, including a self-employment program that supported newcomers in launching their own businesses.

I am also the founder of LOSHKINS, where I deliver customized workshops focused on professional communication, cultural awareness and workplace readiness for employers. My background in project management, consulting, and international business allows me to connect practical industry needs with communication and language training.

As an immigrant, I understand how challenging the settlement process can be. It requires not only learning new skills but also relearning how to apply them in a new cultural and professional environment.

I SEE WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION AS ONE OF THE MOST ESSENTIAL AND OFTEN OVERLOOKED AREAS FOR SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION.

What are the top three workforce challenges your sector/organization is currently facing, such as skills gaps, talent shortages, or systemic barriers, that affect both your immediate needs and your readiness for the future of work?

While I am not directly involved in hiring, I hear recurring challenges through conversations with employers, colleagues, and students.

THE MOST PROMINENT ISSUE IS RETENTION, PARTICULARLY WHEN COMMUNICATION GAPS EXIST BETWEEN NEWCOMERS AND EMPLOYERS.

Workplace communication affects every part of the job—from safety protocols and written correspondence to understanding authority and navigating hierarchy. Differences in communication styles, comfort with asking questions, or responding to instructions can lead to misunderstandings that impact long-term retention. Immigrant managers often bring global experience and strong leadership skills, but in today's diverse workplaces, effective leadership goes beyond technical expertise. Specifically for immigrant managers, understanding cross-cultural professional communication is key to building trust, motivating teams, and leading with confidence.

Addressing these gaps requires a deeper focus on building communication skills that align with the expectations of Canadian workplaces.

How is technology, AI, or automation changing the skills your workforce needs? Where do you see immigrant talent fitting into these shifts?

Adaptability plays a central role in today's workforce. While younger professionals may feel comfortable with technology, many struggle with communication and collaboration. Immigrant professionals often bring strong technical backgrounds and a willingness to learn. I see clear progress in areas like email writing, where AI tools support development, but real understanding still requires practice, judgment, and cultural awareness. When given the tools and support, immigrants build confidence and become highly effective contributors.

Digital skill gaps often reflect previous work environments or generational differences. Some experienced professionals arrive with strong credentials but limited exposure to digital systems. I have seen this limit their ability to continue in their fields. At the same time, many newcomers bring advanced digital skills and introduce valuable knowledge to their teams. When organizations recognize and invest in this potential, immigrant professionals adapt quickly and help drive innovation.

How do you see immigration helping to address these challenges in your sector/organization? Are there specific skills, roles, or contributions that immigrant talent can provide to strengthen your workforce?

Immigrant talent strengthens the workforce, but employers need support to integrate them effectively. Many employers recognize the skills newcomers bring but hesitate because of workplace communication challenges. Employers can provide tailored onboarding programs that focus on applied communication through language and cultural awareness training.

WHEN PROGRAMS TEACH PEOPLE TO COMMUNICATE CLEARLY AND RESPECTFULLY AND UNDERSTAND WORKPLACE CULTURAL NORMS, THEY CLOSE THE GAP BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AND WORKPLACE EXPECTATIONS.

These programs must move beyond surface-level cultural overviews. They need to build practical skills in grammar, tone, and real workplace scenarios so newcomers can apply their knowledge effectively in Canadian contexts. For instance, learning how to shift from direct to polite questioning can greatly improve communication at work. If governments fund or certify these programs and encourage employers to adopt them, organizations can strengthen retention and help immigrant professionals contribute at their full potential.

Looking ahead, how do you see your role as an educator and trainer evolving to support the integration of immigrant talent and prepare them for success in today's and tomorrow's workforce?

I see this work as a way to bring people together through shared understanding. My goal is to support immigrant employees while engaging employers in building inclusive, collaborative workplaces.

INTEGRATION SHOULD NOT CREATE SILOS. IT SHOULD CONNECT EMPLOYERS, EMPLOYEES, AND FACILITATORS IN ONE CONVERSATION.

Training must combine cultural learning with practical communication skills through language instruction and real-world scenarios. This approach bridges gaps in expectations and builds mutual confidence.

To prepare for the future, academic institutions must take a stronger role, especially in supporting international students. These students arrive motivated, self-funded, and ready to contribute to Canada's economy. Embedding workplace communication into academic programs and requiring co-ops or practicums would better prepare both students and employers.

The upcoming closure of OSLT is leaving a gap, but the demand for structured, applied communication programs is urgent. Immigration systems should also consider cultural dimensions more intentionally. Training selection officers need to understand how culture influences workplace norms can help shape a workforce that is inclusive, cohesive, and ready to meet the future.

In your view, how can government, education and training institutions, settlement organizations and other system actors more effectively work with employers to ensure immigration and skills development keep pace with evolving labour market realities?

We need more open and honest conversations between system actors and employers. Initiatives like this catalogue bring diverse voices together and create space for sincere conversations that move beyond assumptions. In my experience, when newcomers, employers, and facilitators connect without fear of judgment, it becomes easier to identify shared challenges and surface practical solutions.

WE ALSO NEED SPACE TO TEST AND REFINE NEW APPROACHES. GOVERNMENTS AND FUNDERS CAN SUPPORT PILOT PROGRAMS THAT ALLOW EDUCATORS, EMPLOYERS, AND COMMUNITY LEADERS TO EXPERIMENT AND MEASURE IMPACT.

The solutions are often already within reach. We just need to uncover them through thoughtful collaboration, flexibility, and research-informed practice.

What are the gaps you see in current policies, programs, or partnerships, and what would it take to close them?

CURRENT POLICIES FEEL DISCONNECTED FROM ON-THE-GROUND REALITIES. CANADA CONTINUES TO WELCOME LARGE NUMBERS OF IMMIGRANTS, YET SUPPORT PROGRAMS ARE BEING CLOSED INSTEAD OF EXPANDED.

Rather than launching isolated initiatives, we need a strategic and collaborative approach. I would form a diverse committee that brings together government, employers, educators, service providers, and immigrants to investigate gaps, consult stakeholders, and co-create solutions based on real experiences.

Participating in the Strengthening Employer Feedback Channels project reminded me how powerful it is when people come together across sectors to speak honestly and listen carefully. That kind of space helps uncover blind spots and points us toward solutions that are both practical and inclusive. We need more of that across the system.

Looking to the future, what systemic changes are needed to ensure Canada's workforce remains inclusive, adaptable, and innovative?

CANADA MUST EQUIP ITS WORKFORCE AND ITS EMPLOYERS TO VALUE CULTURAL COMPETENCE AS MUCH AS TECHNICAL SKILL.

Many immigrants bring strong expertise but face barriers when navigating an individualistic work culture that differs from their collectivist backgrounds. These cultural gaps often cause miscommunication around power dynamics, gender identity, and workplace norms. We cannot assume this knowledge is universal.

To build an inclusive and adaptive workforce, we need to train both newcomers and employers to understand what lies beneath surface-level culture. Teaching technical skills is a known quantity, but communication skills require deeper learning.

> **BY DELIVERING TARGETED TRAINING ON CULTURAL AWARENESS AND WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION, WE CAN BRIDGE GAPS, PROMOTE UNDERSTANDING, AND ENSURE IMMIGRANT TALENT DRIVES MEANINGFUL INNOVATION ACROSS CANADA.**

CONSTRUCTION

SAM KEMBLE

Chief Operations Officer
National Construction Council

The future of construction requires more harmonized systems that reflect a national and international workforce.

Current approaches vary widely by province and territory, limiting mobility and complicating immigration. For someone arriving from abroad, opportunities should not depend on whether they land in Toronto or Edmonton — only on where work is available. Overly rigid provincial rules not only fragment the labour market but also discourage international talent from entering. We should create a more consistent, flexible framework across Canada to build a workforce that is inclusive, adaptable, and aligned with future demands.

Can you introduce yourself and tell us about your role within your organization? What motivated you to engage in immigrant workforce integration? Were there personal or professional experiences that shaped your active role in this space?

My name is Sam Kemble, and I am the Chief Operations Officer of the National Construction Council, creating opportunities in new markets for over 70,000 United Brotherhood of Carpenter members in Canada and more than 670,000 across North America.

My motivation is shaped by personal experience: I grew up in a family electrical business that went under when I was 13, which showed me both the strength and fragility of the balance between working people and job creators. Over two decades in construction and labour relations, I have negotiated hundreds of agreements, hired tens of thousands of workers, and supported workforce development on major projects across Canada.

WHAT INSPIRES ME MOST ARE NEWCOMERS WHO ARRIVE WITH IMPRESSIVE EXPERIENCE YET MUST RESTART IN JOBS FAR BELOW THEIR SKILL LEVEL.

Their resilience is inspiring and drives my belief that employers must do more to ensure immigrant talent is recognized and fully utilized.

What are the top three workforce challenges your sector/organization is currently facing, such as skills gaps, talent shortages, or systemic barriers, that affect both your immediate needs and your readiness for the future of work?

In construction, three workforce challenges stand out.

THE FIRST AND MOST SIGNIFICANT IS SUPPORTING NEWCOMERS, BOTH TO THE INDUSTRY AND TO CANADA.

Employers often choose third- or fourth-year apprentices over those just starting out, which leaves many newcomers struggling with false starts — short periods of employment followed by long gaps that make it difficult to stay engaged.

THE SECOND IS CREDENTIALING. TOO OFTEN, THE FOCUS IS ON CERTIFICATES WITH A RESISTANCE TO RECOGNIZING REAL-LIFE EXPERIENCE OR EQUIVALENT SKILLS.

Without fair assessment, newcomers are left without a clear entry point or career path.

THE THIRD IS HOW WORK IS ORGANIZED. THE INDUSTRY REMAINS HEAVILY SILOED BY TRADE, EVEN THOUGH MANY SKILLS OVERLAP.

For example, both ironworkers and pipefitters spend much of their time on rigging tasks, yet some apply the trade boundaries rigidly, preventing the overlapping task portion of trades from being recognized across disciplines.

Breaking down these silos would create greater flexibility and allow both domestic and immigrant workers to contribute their full range of skills.

How is technology, AI, or automation changing the skills your workforce needs? Where do you see immigrant talent fitting into these shifts?

Technology is transforming construction, with modularization shifting much of the work from traditional on-site “stick building” to modularization and prefabrication in off-site shops. This reduces on-site hours and changes skill needs, placing more emphasis on assembly, rigging, and material handling while creating new opportunities in urban centers. At the same time, mechanical and increasingly automated processes in shops reduce tasks like pipe welding in the field.

IMMIGRANT TALENT IS VITAL IN THIS TRANSITION, AS INTERNATIONALLY TRAINED WORKERS BRING EXPERTISE IN LARGE, COMPLEX PROJECTS WHERE CANADA LACKS EXPERIENCE.

On projects such as LNG plants, newcomers not only filled critical gaps but also transferred knowledge to Canadian workers, building long-term capacity and strengthening the workforce.

As Canada transitions toward a low-carbon economy, how is your sector preparing? Do you see opportunities for immigrant talent in this transformation?

As Canada shifts toward a low-carbon economy, the trades needed in construction are also changing. Conventional energy projects like oil and gas relied heavily on pressure welding and piping, while new green projects in solar, wind, and critical minerals require ironworkers, millwrights, and others skilled in installing equipment and conveyance systems. This shift opens doors by lowering some of the barriers to entry, creating broader opportunities for workers who may not have had access to conventional roles.

With much of the current workforce aging, the transition allows us to build a new workforce aligned with emerging needs. Immigrant talent will be key to this transformation, bringing the skills and flexibility needed to support new industries while reshaping Canada’s workforce to meet changing needs.

How do you see immigration helping to address these challenges in your sector/organization? Are there specific skills, roles, or contributions that immigrant talent can provide to strengthen your workforce?

Immigration is critical to addressing construction's workforce challenges, especially as Canada builds new types of projects. On large-scale developments like LNG plants, internationally trained workers who have built similar facilities abroad bring experience that reduces risk, boosts productivity, and transfers knowledge to the domestic workforce. Having even a portion of the workforce with prior expertise can make the difference between success and failure on complex projects.

At the same time, with many Canadians not entering construction and much of the current workforce aging, immigration also fills essential capacity gaps. In the long term, permanent migration and fair recognition of credentials are key so that newcomers can contribute at the level of their skills and help strengthen Canada's workforce for the future.

Looking ahead, how do you see your organization's role evolving in integrating immigrant talent and preparing your sector for both today's and tomorrow's workforce needs?

Industry's role is to stay closely engaged as policies and systems evolve, providing a reality check on how they work in practice.

EFFORTS TO HARMONIZE APPRENTICESHIP STANDARDS AND IMPROVE LABOUR MOBILITY ARE IMPORTANT, BUT IF APPLIED TOO RIGIDLY, THEY RISK SHUTTING OUT INTERNATIONALLY EXPERIENCED WORKERS WHOSE SKILLS AND NON-TRADITIONAL PATHWAYS SHOULD STILL BE RECOGNIZED.

Many have decades of expertise that should not be treated as entry-level.

Ongoing consultation with industry is essential to strike the right balance, ensuring standards support mobility without creating new challenges, and that both domestic and immigrant talent are fully integrated into the workforce.

In your view, how can government, education and training institutions, settlement organizations and other system actors more effectively work with employers to ensure immigration and skills development keep pace with evolving labour market realities?

Stronger collaboration starts with expanding training capacity.

Apprenticeship and classroom seats are limited in many jurisdictions, and in some cases, training providers restrict access to maintain control, leaving numbers far below what the industry needs.

GOVERNMENTS SHOULD INVEST MORE IN APPRENTICESHIP SEATS AND ALSO FUND EQUIVALENCY OR "UPGRADER" COURSES SO INTERNATIONALLY EXPERIENCED WORKERS CAN HAVE THEIR SKILLS ASSESSED AND RECOGNIZED WITH PROPER CERTIFICATION.

In construction, workers often move between multiple employers in a single year, and employers rely on certifications to quickly confirm qualifications. Without accessible pathways to certification, newcomers face repeated barriers every time they change jobs. Ensuring training is well-funded, open to all who can legally work in Canada, and free from protectionism is essential for immigration and skills development to keep pace with labour market realities.

What are the gaps you see in current policies, programs, or partnerships, and what would it take to close them?

A major gap is the politicization of immigration. Treating international workers as a political issue creates fear and rigidity in how programs are designed and administered. Instead of evolving to meet industry needs, credentials and entry points have become overly rigid and administrative, stifling innovation and practical solutions. This culture discourages organizations from proposing needed changes and damages the system. On a practical level, policies such as closed work permits add further barriers. If someone has the skills to work, they should be able to contribute without unnecessary restrictions.

What is your vision for your sector's workforce, particularly how immigration, skills development, and industry priorities can align to drive growth, innovation, and inclusion across Canada?

THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR NEEDS TO REORGANIZE SKILLS AND CREDENTIALING TO BETTER REFLECT HOW WORK IS ACTUALLY DONE, REDUCING RIGID CRAFT SILOS THAT LIMIT CAPACITY.

Many tasks overlap across trades, yet the current system restricts workers to narrow roles. By focusing on transferable skills and overlapping tasks, we can expand workforce flexibility, increase project capacity, and open more opportunities for immigrant workers whose experience spans multiple areas of expertise.

LET'S KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING.

The voices in this catalogue reflect a shared vision—one that sees immigration not only as a response to labour market needs, but as a catalyst for innovation, resilience, and long-term growth.

Register to take part in ongoing regional and national dialogues across Canada and gain access to exclusive updates, resources, and opportunities to help shape future initiatives.

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