



EMPLOYER
ENGAGEMENT
PROJECT

ANNUAL
REPORT

2020-2021



immemploy

CONNECTING EMPLOYERS TO IMMIGRANT TALENT

WHAT IS IMMPLY?

Immply is a project of WIL Employment Connections, a nonprofit organization serving Southwestern Ontario to drive innovative employment solutions that bring immigrants and employers together. Immply links you, your company and your professional networks to effective immigrant employment tools and resources including:

- Mentoring programs that strengthen the leadership, coaching and cross-cultural skills of your employees
- Education and training to support employers in building more inclusive practices for the recruitment and retention of newcomers
- Screening support for evaluating international credentials and language skills

- Recruitment services to access a pool of qualified immigrant talent
- Connections with business leaders and other professionals who have successfully attracted and retained immigrant talent

Today's Immply started initially as small London Middlesex Immigrant Employment Task Force (LMIETF) of employers in 2006. As that Task Force grew, it evolved to a London Middlesex Immigrant Employment Council (LMIEC) in 2008. A strategic planning process resulted in the launch of the new Immply brand in May 2017. With a new brand that better reflects its regional growth and value proposition for business leaders, Immply is well positioned to advance its mission of connecting employers with immigrant talent to foster economic prosperity.

Who is a Newcomer?

For purposes of this report, newcomer is identified as any work-authorized individual who defines themselves as an immigrant to Canada; this includes but is not limited to Canadian Citizens, Permanent Residents, Convention Refugees, Refugee Claimants and Temporary Residents.

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE

The landscape of the Canadian workforce is changing. According to the Conference Board of Canada – National Immigration Centre, by 2030, baby boomers will be of retirement age. This group accounts for 9.2 million of our current worker cohort. On top of this, Canada’s fertility rate is not high enough to replace the Canadian population. So, what does this mean? This means that immigration is imperative for labour force growth in Canada. This means that our workforce, and our economy, is reliant on the recruitment and integration of newcomers [1].

On average, Canada has welcomed approximately 300,000 immigrants each year with this target continuing to rise. In response to a decrease in new immigrants to Canada due to COVID-19, efforts are being made to retain temporary

residents in Canada by raising the quota of invitations for permanent residency to 400,000 per year [2].

Currently, Canada’s immigration rate sits at 0.8 percent, however if this were to increase to just 1 per cent by 2030, newcomers would contribute 5.3 million workers to the labour force [3].



In the City of London more specifically, immigrants are a fast-growing group in the job market. The growth rate is expected to increase. In 2016, newcomers represented 22% of the population [4]. With increases in immigration levels, we are also seeing increases in the self-identified visible minority population as well, with 20% of the population identifying as a 'visible minority' [5]. So, while we are talking about newcomers more generally, it is important to understand that race also impacts the experience that a newcomer has in settling into their personal and professional lives in Canada.

We have also seen a dramatic increase in the enrollment of international students in London with an 86% increase from 2013 – 2017. This accounts for over 15,000 students per year and presents a great opportunity for employers to hire newcomers who have Canadian education, possibly Canadian workplace experience and have spent time

learning and adapting to Canadian norms [6].

Employers across the country and in Southwestern Ontario must consider the future of their workforce if they are going to continue to thrive in a changing environment. The talent is here, but what does it take to effectively recruit and retain an increasingly diverse workforce? This report has been developed to capture learnings from Immploy's Employer Engagement Project to support employers in the recruitment and retention of newcomers. This report will also provide insight for newcomer job seekers based on insights from employers in the Southwestern Ontario region.



THE EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT PROJECT

In 2020, Immploy launched the Employer Engagement Project in response to the changing landscape of the workforce and the emerging needs of employers across the region. The project consists of three main activities: consultation, education/training and workplace integration. This report focuses on the learnings from the consultations.

Throughout 2020 – 2021, Immploy invited employers from across Southwestern Ontario to participate in employer consultations to capture information on key transferable skills, company culture, emerging labour market demands, intercultural competency, and company best practices/barriers to recruiting and retaining international talent.



The Consultation

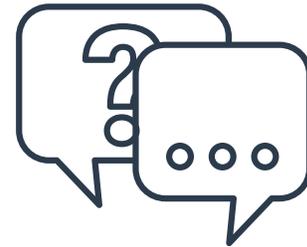
There is an economic imperative in our communities to recruit and retain newcomers for our economy to sustain itself and thrive. Not only this, but research has also demonstrated time and again the benefits of diversity in the workplace as it increases productivity, creativity, innovation and problem solving.

Newcomers require fulfilling and sustainable employment. Employers need talented workforces. Despite this reality, many employers have communicated difficulty in recruiting and/or retaining newcomer staff. In addition to the information provided in this report, the consultation sessions cultivated information that will be used to better support employers, and in turn the larger community through:

- Development of customized training for employers that addresses any challenges or barriers in recruiting, onboarding or retaining newcomers
- Summary of learnings provided to employers, newcomers and community stakeholders
- Communication to Newcomer jobseekers through newcomer serving organizations to better prepare them for the Canadian workforce

Format

Consultations included a short online survey completed prior to the consultation session with Immploy staff.



Consultations were facilitated either one-on-one with individual organizations or companies or in small group sessions. The sessions were question and answer format over the span of 1.5 hours.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions and increased health risks, all consultations have been facilitated virtually.

The consultation questions focused on four key areas:

- Recruitment
- Onboarding
- Retention
- Equity & Inclusion

The 2020 – 2021 consultation sessions focused on the following sectors/industries in Southwestern Ontario:

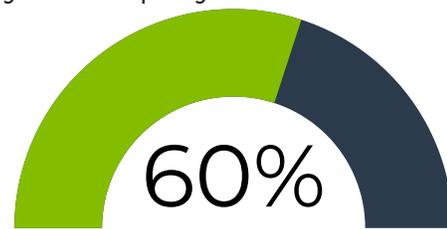
- Nonprofit Sector
- Manufacturing
- IT/Technology

EMPLOYER INSIGHTS

The landscape of the labour market is changing. The popularity of remote work as a result of progressive technology and the impacts of COVID-19, coupled with a greater global economy, has increased competition in the labour market, making recruitment and retention increasingly difficult for employers.

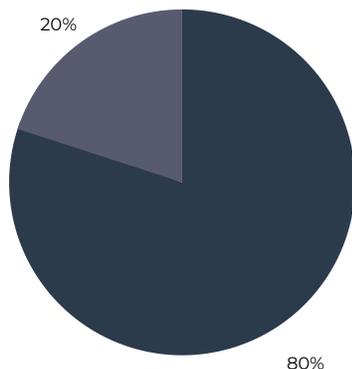
According to the 2020 EmployerOne Surveys completed across the Southwestern Ontario region, the majority of employers in these communities have been challenged by recruitment and retention of staff.

Approximately 50-60% of employers across these regions reported that they



had positions that were difficult to fill with the number one reason being a lack of applicants. The majority of employers indicated that the availability of qualified workers in the area was fair or poor and the majority found recruitment itself to be a challenge [7].

Many employers are also facing challenges when it comes to retention. Close to 80% of all employers surveyed across the region had experienced 'separations', the majority due to employees quitting for other opportunities, even amidst the COVID-19 pandemic [7].



Through employer consultations during 2020 – 2021, Immploy was able to harvest information from employers to better understand their recruitment and retention practices. When it comes to the recruitment of new employees, many companies/organizations tend to use traditional approaches to attracting, screening and interviewing talent. The majority of participants

indicated that not much has changed in terms of how they approach recruitment in the past 5 – 10 years.

Employers have a tendency to develop job descriptions based on the 'ideal' candidate, including a large number of qualifications and skills that they are looking for. When interviewing, priority tends to fall on 'soft skills' and 'culture fit' for the majority of companies and organizations consulted.

When hiring, a number of employers consulted shared that they often feel forced to engage in 'reactive' hiring as opposed to proactive hiring (i.e. hiring quickly based on an immediate need). Participants indicated that employment opportunities are generally shared through a small number of online channels such as LinkedIn, traditional job sites including Indeed, Knighthunter, and Monster, and through personal or professional networks. Some employers, specifically in the technology sector, indicated that hiring through educational placement programs was common.

The majority of employers engaged indicated that they did not consider newcomers as a specific target demographic when recruiting. Although the majority of employer participants understood the importance of engaging newcomers, many had little to no experience and for those that did, it was not necessarily through an intentional recruitment strategy.



When it comes to the interview process, employers' approaches vary. Some opt for less formal, conversational approaches to interviewing while others facilitate a structured, more consistent approach. Despite differences in interview style, the majority emphasized the importance of panels to reduce bias and the desire to understand soft skills and how candidates will fit with the team and culture.

The consultations also explored retention via onboarding practices and workplace integration approaches. Although most employer participants named accessibility accommodations as an important consideration, the majority of employers indicated that their onboarding processes are fairly structured and consistent regardless of the employee.

Beyond onboarding, many employers incorporate opportunities for engagement within the workplace to support retention, such as team building activities, celebrations of success, employee resource groups, and employee feedback opportunities. When asked how employers create a 'good culture' and a sense of belonging, many pointed the examples listed above, however, some indicated that there was not an intentional approach to develop this, but that it happens organically.

Top Challenges:

- Connecting with Newcomers in the recruitment process
- Establishing a pro-active hiring approach
- Understanding foreign credentials
- Recruiting and retaining candidates that align with company values & work well with the current team
- Recruiting and retaining candidates with niche skill-sets
- Difficulties in recruitment due to a lack of Canadian workplace experience

How can Employers Address these Challenges?



BEST PRACTICES

Job Postings

- Use clear, concise, plain language in job titles and roles/responsibilities and avoid the use of cultural metaphors, slang or industry jargon
- Focus on the essentials - opt for must-haves versus nice-to-have skills/qualifications
- Be specific about the role, responsibilities and qualifications required - don't leave people guessing!
- Be accessible and encourage questions about the application process
- Communicate your commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion & invite newcomer candidates to apply

Ask yourself: Why do we do what we do? How can we adjust our requirements to widen our talent pool?

Outreach

- Develop and implement a pro-active hiring approach so that you can build newcomer engagement into your process
- Widen your search by engaging diverse members of your team to connect with candidates outside your current personal and professional networks
- Partner with community groups and nonprofit organizations that engage and support newcomers
- Leverage diverse online platforms so that you are not always pulling from the same candidate pool
- Attend job fairs, networking events, etc. in order to connect with newcomers in the community
- Set goals for your recruitment strategy to hold your company/organization accountable and to ensure your candidate pool reflects your community

Hiring

1. Reduce bias by screening resumes without names, building a diverse hiring committee to review resumes and training hiring staff on cross-cultural awareness, equity and inclusion
2. Look for what is essential for the role and consider the value-add of non-essential skills (e.g. experience with international markets, multiple languages, etc.)
3. Evaluate experience based on tasks and transferable skills (not job titles and locations), leverage credential validation resources available
4. Consider whether Canadian experience or education is absolutely necessary
5. Consider a candidate's ability to carry-out the specific communication tasks required of the role, rather than generalized "effective communication skills"
6. Take into consideration that resume styles vary depending on country of origin – content/experience is what is most important
7. Consider that an immigrant's job history may be atypical due to factors such as immigration or licensing. It is best to ask for clarification before dismissing candidates
8. When interviewing, consider asking candidates to perform a task or activity to demonstrate their skillset
9. Prepare candidates for the interview process – explain the interview format and expectations
10. Use clear, plain English free from cultural metaphors, slang or industry jargon and ask consistent questions of all candidates
11. Shift your hiring perspective from 'culture fit' to 'culture add'



Retention

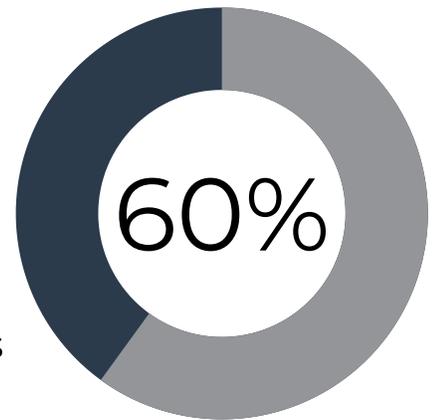
1. Consider the unique needs of each individual that you onboard – create opportunities for people to ask for accommodations, provide guidelines for communication in the workplace and offer a workplace culture orientation
2. Establish an internal mentorship program for new staff, specifically newcomers to the country
3. Create opportunities for new staff to provide feedback throughout the first year (and consistently beyond that)
4. Encourage and support the development of employer-led employee resource groups
5. Develop and implement Equity and Inclusion training and policies
6. Engage in team building activities, both formal and informal, to create a sense of belonging and connection
7. Establish and support multi-cultural groups and/or opportunities to learn about employee's diverse cultures
8. When challenges in the workplace related to relationships or performance arise, check assumptions and ask questions to understand the root of the problems
9. Communication is rooted in culture. Pay attention to context, tone and style of communication and seek confirmation when working with people whose second language is English
10. Determine and discuss 'Paths of Progression' based on newcomer employees skillsets and experience including promotions and professional development
11. Orient newcomers not just to the workplace, but to the community as well. Retention rates are much higher when newcomers feel connected to the community in and outside the workplace
12. Allow the opportunity for your work culture to evolve with the changing workforce – be open to the creativity and innovation that a diverse workforce brings

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

In recent years, diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) has been at the forefront of many conversations around human resources (HR) practices, and the future of the workplace. 50% of organizations consulted said they have DEI policies in place and 60% had engaged in DEI trainings before.



Have DEI Policies



Engaged in DEI Training

While some organizations have DEI staff, the majority of organizations consulted do not currently have staff solely dedicated to this work. Some might assume that HR teams would head this work, however, 50% of the organizations consulted do not have an HR team. This begs the question, who in an organization is involved in decision-making around equity, diversity and inclusion practices, of which hiring and retention strategies are influenced?



Have a Human Resources team

Company culture really drives diversity and inclusion efforts, and many employers consulted had great examples to share. Some initiatives were more formal such as forming Multi-Cultural Networks or other types of groups with a DEI focus, and integrating staff surveys to gather anonymous feedback on their feelings about inclusion and what could be different. Other best practices were more informal such as hosting "lunch and learns" to educate employees about different communities and cultures, or, dinners outside of work hours related to cultural experiences. For example, one employer held a big company dinner during Ramadan to break the fast together.



How team members communicate with each other also has a major impact on day-to-day work and long-term retention. The English language requires context for it to make sense, and this context along with tone can completely change meaning. One employer talked about taking accountability for improving communication versus blaming others for not understanding. When a miscommunication did occur, their default was to ask themselves "did I ask an unclear question?" before making any assumptions.

Ensuring there is clarity and that both employee and employer are on the same page is crucial to retention. In some cultures, it is not appropriate to ask questions of your superior, meaning some may say they understand even if it is not entirely clear. One employer explained that they would ask newcomer employees to summarize the task to confirm they were clear, instead of assuming. In another employer's case, expectations of the employee were not clear, and eventually they left and took their knowledge and experience with them.

Some employers have been challenged by the low number of diverse applicants applying for positions, which made it difficult to diversify their workforce. With an absence of diverse employees, some employers struggled to make DEI a priority. This also posed a challenge for retention, as one employer recalled a time where they discovered in an exit interview that the employee felt intimidated as the only immigrant and only person of colour in their workplace.

Perceptions of immigrants who are often stereotyped as being the same, was identified as a challenge not only in the hiring and interviewing



process, but also in workplace integration. Everyone from hiring managers and senior leadership, to teams and individual employees should be encouraged to understand more about diversity of culture, and how that impacts people in the workplace.

Other employers noted having lower salaries could cause issues with finding and retaining diverse talent. For example, the priority for many newcomers may be financial stability to support their family. If salary is not high enough, employers often experienced quick turnover.

For some, they had great policies and strategic plans in place, but were challenged with bringing DEI practices into their everyday work (in recruitment, onboarding, etc.). Additionally, some employers were challenged with trying to incorporate an intersectional lens – they often focused initiatives on a particular area of diversity versus incorporating the multiple aspects of a person and the barriers they may face.

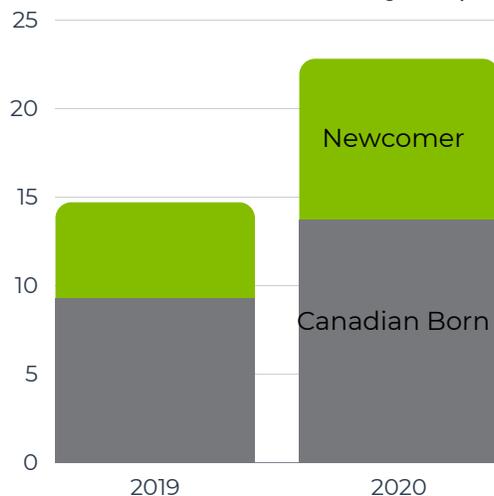
While there were some challenges, there were also some great successes that employers had to share. Successful DEI practices hinge on investment, whether it be monetary or other resources such as dedicated staff to this work. It is also important to have buy-in from the entire organization, including senior level management, human resources, managers and employees.

One organization was a registered B-Corp, which is the term used for any for-profit entity that is certified by the nonprofit B Lab as voluntarily meeting higher standards of transparency, accountability, and performance. Standards and goals are set for the organization in several categories, of which DEI practices and diversity in hiring are one. Another mentioned paying for bus passes for interns as compensation and to ensure they had access to reliable transportation. Some focused their efforts on providing education for their staff and board members about DEI in the workplace to increase awareness and understanding. Others focused on the future of their sector by funding scholarships for underrepresented groups to study in that field.



INSIGHTS FOR JOB SEEKERS

In 2019, there were over 8 million immigrants with permanent residency in Canada[8], not including temporary residents such as international students which amount to an additional 640,000 people[9], with half of them residing in Ontario. Studies indicate between 60-80% of said students wish to settle in Canada and obtain their permanent residency after their studies. So, while newcomers and immigrants are already a considerable proportion of the workforce, this is only expected to increase over time.



However, the impact of Covid-19 has hit newcomers (those who landed less than five years ago) the hardest in terms of employment, with an increase in the unemployment rate from 9.3% in 2019 (compared to 5.4% in Canadian born citizens) to 13.7% in 2020 (compared to 9.1%)[10].

Newcomers face additional challenges if they have language barriers, a lack of Canadian experience, or unfamiliar educational credentials. One study indicated 14% of immigrants who studied outside Canada experienced overqualification (holding positions that do not require the level of education they possess), compared to 4% of those who studied in Canada[11].

To understand these challenges from an employer's perspective and to provide insights to newcomer jobseekers to overcome them, our consultations in 2020-2021 also included questions on skills & qualifications, occupations in demand and tips for job seekers in applying and interviewing for positions.

In-Demand Occupations

- In-demand occupations listed were mainly in the health care and media or technology fields, but some in the education and manufacturing sector were also mentioned. The following is a list of positions employers identified during the consultations as “difficult to fill” in their organization and sector, either due to lack of qualified applicants, competition from other employers for talent or the rarity of the skills they are looking for.
- Clinical Data Management
- Biostats Professionals
- Video Game Developers
- Entry level positions in manufacturing (production, assembly, etc.)
- Supply teachers & Education Assistants
- Personal Support Workers
- Software Engineers/Developers:
- Web Developers (Frontend, Backend, PHP, UI/UX, Software development) (mid-level experience difficult to find for employers)
- E-Commerce Managers
- Content Marketing
- Digital Advertising/Marketing
- E-mail Marketing
- 3D Developers & Generalists
- VFX Artists

Skills & Qualifications

Employers were asked about the skills and qualifications they are looking for when they hire, and which they find the most difficult to find. This included both soft interpersonal skills and hard technical skills. The following is a list of in-demand skills as identified by employers through consultation.



Soft Skills

- Adaptation to virtual work (which may persist beyond the pandemic for some)
- Ability to fit in with the team they would be working with
- Ability to multi-task
- Communications skills (internal and external)
- Relationship building
- Openness to new technology
- Genuine care for the community and mission of the organization (Nonprofit organizations mentioned this in particular)
- Solutions or problem-solving mindset
- Collaboration and teamwork skills
- Respect for diversity in the workplace
- Understanding of the company or organization's culture
- Understanding of work in the Canadian context
- Passion for the work (cover letters are a great way to demonstrate this)
- Desire for ongoing learning and growth
- Understanding of common industry terminology
- Self-directed/able to manage time efficiently
- Adaptable
- Ability to take initiative

Hard Skills

- Knowledge of Google Ads & Analytics, Facebook advertising
- Familiarity with e-commerce platforms (e.g., Magento, Shopify, Squarespace, etc.)
- Nonprofit financial tools (Razor's Edge, etc.)
- Administrative experience
- Project management
- Online tools such as Microsoft, Outlook, Google Drive
- Writing
- Lab skills
- English language skills (not always necessary to have high level in roles such as developers or production line workers but is in sales or communications roles)
- Niche skills in software development and design (UX/UI, PHP, etc.)
- Graphic design, e-mail marketing, Contact Management Systems, plug-ins

There were differing opinions about the importance of having prior Canadian experience. For some, there were specific reasons for requiring it, such as in-depth knowledge of health care policies, but others spoke about appreciating any volunteer or paid Canadian experience, some dropped the requirement all-together.

Some employers also spoke about shifting away from specific educational requirements and more towards looking at a combination of education and experience to indicate if someone is qualified.



The Job Search

Employers also shared tips and insights for newcomer job seekers that are searching and applying to positions. One key tip was about the importance of networking, which could include asking people from companies in your field if they would be willing to take part in informational interviews or informal meetings in order to build relationships that could result in referrals or opportunities in the future.



For international students, placements and internships are a great way to connect with employers and network with people in the industry. Personal references are important, and these are two great ways to build connections and references who can be called on by potential future employers.

Before applying to positions, newcomers should carefully research the sector and the organizational culture of their prospective employer. This knowledge can be used for the application, as well as during the interview, to demonstrate an understanding of a company's values. Job seekers were also encouraged to ask questions during the application or interview process when they are unsure of something. For technological or creative roles, employers often expect portfolios, so job seekers in those fields should assemble their current work and consider adding more to it if necessary, before applying.

Job seekers are encouraged to start job searching and tailoring applications as early as possible, and know that this is a skill to practice and perfect over time. It is also important to set realistic expectations when it comes to job titles and qualifications. For example, a managerial role in another country may be similar to a coordinator role within Canada based on the job functions, so job seekers should keep an open mind to what the role itself is versus the title, and that sometimes someone may need to accept a more junior role initially in order to work their way up and grow within the organization.

The Interview Process

For interviews, the biggest piece of advice was to prepare. Candidates should be prepared to answer questions that may come up in the interview, but avoid appearing to be “over-coached”. Employers encouraged job seekers to come out of their shell and focus on conveying their potential to the employer, and not to worry as much about the “right answer” or giving a routine answer. In some professions such as coding, the interview process may include a test, so it is a good idea to get familiar with that type of activity or task.

Best Practices for Newcomer Job Seekers:

1. Research the company/organization – not just what they do – but their culture, values, and community engagement
 2. Research emerging trends, tools and industry language within the Canadian context
 3. Ask questions when you are unsure about the application process, the role or the company/organization
 4. Take advantage of community events, networking opportunities and engage in mentorship programs to get connected
 5. Look for placements or internships in order to gain Canadian experience in your field and network within your industry
 6. Gain Canadian experience and build your network through volunteerism in the nonprofit sector
 7. Engage on popular online platforms including LinkedIn, other Social Media platforms, and Job Boards
 8. Don't assume you need everything from a job listing
 9. Prepare to speak about how your experience and transferable skills will contribute to the culture and growth of the company/organization
 10. Develop a portfolio to showcase your experience or skill-sets
 11. Avoid routine responses to interview questions – prepare and present examples related to your unique experiences
 12. Bring your personality – most employers are eager to find out what you bring to the team on both a personal and professional basis
 13. Highlight the added value you bring with you in terms of language, international networks, local community connections and skills/qualifications
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Solutions to our labour market challenges exist, and they exist right within our communities. Immploy continues to engage employers, not just to create awareness about the diverse and talented group of newcomers in Southwestern Ontario, but also to capture and share the incredible efforts employers are making to build more diverse and inclusive workforces.

Immploy will be expanding consultations to engage employers across Southwestern Ontario, outside of the Middlesex-London region throughout 2021-2022. Learning from these sessions will be leveraged to inform both public and customized, private education and training sessions for employers.

If you are interested in participating in the Employer Engagement Project please contact info@immploy.ca

To get involved today, consider becoming an Immploy Champion, sending job vacancies to Immploy Job Match or volunteering your time as an Immploy Mentor to newcomers in your field.

*Thank
you*

We would like to acknowledge the individuals, organizations and companies that participated in the 2020-2021 consultation sessions. We appreciate your vulnerability, your insights and your willingness to welcome newcomers into your workplace.

Funded by:

Financé par :



Immigration, Refugees
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1. Why Is immigration important to Canada? – The Conference Board of Canada
2. Government of Canada raises immigration levels by 50,000 per year – The Conference Board of Canada
3. Can't Go it Alone. – The Conference Board of Canada
4. City of London Newcomer Strategy 2018 - 2023
5. Statistics Canada
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7. Employer ONE Surveys:
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 - Employer ONE Survey 2020 Sarnia Lambton Results
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8. Statista
9. CIC News
10. Statistics Canada
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