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## **Backgrounder**

### **Who We Are**

The Immigrant Sector Council of Calgary (ISCC) is comprised of 20 organizations representing immigrant serving agencies; funding bodies; ethno-cultural/multicultural groups and other community (public sector) partners. It is a complex, collaborative organization aiming to meet the needs of a diverse group of stakeholders with differing needs, interests, perceptions and agendas. These challenges come with the important reward of helping newcomers to feel included, respected and integral to our community and to Canada in general. The ISCC is an organization of committed individuals who represent the key areas of expertise required for helping newcomers find success in Calgary.

We welcome immigrants by supporting their settlement, integration and participation in the Calgary community. We support and build upon the many programs and services offered by those immigrant-serving agencies, public sector groups, government representatives, funders and multicultural associations that are represented on the Council. The members of the ISCC support and welcome immigrants through a wide range of services and programs including those that address language needs/training, employment training, settlement services, housing, youth services, and justice/legal and health services. We are also forging important partnerships that will help immigrants to integrate, settle and participate in the Calgary community. For example, we recently joined the Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations to increase opportunities for networking, learning and access to research relating to the voluntary sector.

### **Our Mission & Vision**

We strive to be the collective voice to address the needs and concerns of immigrants settling and integrating in Calgary. Our mission is to facilitate timely and equitable integration and settlement of all immigrants in Calgary.

#### **Vision**

Community attitude and public policy reflect and value the enriched environment provided by a diverse community. Immigrants and refugees in Calgary have opportunities to participate fully and equitably in the community.

## **Why We Exist**

We believe that immigration is necessary for a vibrant, thriving and diverse community. Immigrants contribute to the social, cultural and economic vibrancy of Calgary by:

- Volunteering, creating jobs, supporting the public safety net, investing in the community, and educating others about the value and strength of diverse communities.

The benefits of a diverse society include greater adaptability, greater creativity, and a broader range of ideas/solutions (*Building the New West-2004 Canada West Foundation*). And, creative and culturally diverse cities are said to be a factor in driving a vibrant economy. (*Building the New West-2004 Canada West Foundation*)

## **Key Goals**

We strive to be effective and efficient as a sector. We are also working to enhance coordination within the immigrant serving sector to facilitate and promote cultural competence. And we are striving to influence, share and facilitate understanding of immigrant sector with key stakeholder like the Calgary community, all levels of government and the media.

## **Key Challenges and Opportunities**

Newcomers face many challenges as they settle into a new community. They generally require years of language training and require access and availability to employment training. Additionally they need to learn the Canadian justice and health systems as well as find housing. One of the key challenges for our immigrant-serving agencies is the waiting lists. Waiting lists exist for many current services and programs. Increases in these existing waiting lists are expected and the capacity to serve newcomers will likely be stretched as more newcomers come to Calgary.

The ISCC supports the Alberta Government's policy (*Supporting Immigrants & Immigration to Alberta*) which has a goal of bringing 24,000 newcomers to Alberta on a yearly basis, many of whom we expect to settle in Calgary. However, current resources (people and money) do not sufficiently support the needs of immigrants already in Calgary.

The ISCC wants to be able to impact public policy so that the needs of the newcomers are addressed and so that the immigrant sector is receiving the appropriate level of priority for funding.

Additionally, inequalities exist in funding and the decisions around funding across Canada and within Alberta. For example, Calgary receives three times the numbers of immigrants that Edmonton receives, yet the funding levels do not reflect these numbers.

There is also a need to educate and create awareness about immigration, immigrants and refugees – and about their challenges and the contributions they make to Calgary. We also aim to promote the benefits of diversity to a vibrant community.

Another challenge is the gap in knowledge about services and programs by newcomers. Services and programs and access to such must be promoted to potential and current newcomers to help them be successful in Calgary.

Finally, staff in the immigrant-serving sector is the lowest paid amongst all non-profit staff and there are limited opportunities for professional development and career succession. This creates issues for a sector already stretched to the limit and for a sector that is competing with other non-profits as well as the profit sector for skilled employees.

Resources are vital to support and to retain increasing numbers of immigrants to Calgary. Adequate resources as well as social changes and the elimination of barriers for immigrants are all required to maximize the benefits of immigration and to build a thriving, diverse community.

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## Fact Sheet

### **Key Priorities**

Language training and needs, employment and training, settlement services (those basic needs of all citizens) are the key priorities for immigrants and for the organizations that serve them. Gaining Canadian work experience is critical to meaningful employment for newcomers, but it is difficult to obtain Canadian work experience in line with credentials/qualifications. Housing, cultural training and youth services are also key priorities for immigrant serving agencies.

### **Issues for the Sector**

There are committed organizations, staff, volunteers and funding bodies in the area of immigrant services in Calgary. However, there are issues with the ability of these organizations to be able to provide all the necessary services to all immigrants for a number of reasons:

- Current policies and trends are limiting the benefits immigrants bring to Alberta.
- Funding levels do not reflect current reality of the costs involved in settling immigrants.
- The immigrant sector reflects the lowest-paid staff within the non-profit sector. This factor combined with the strain on current resources is contributing to the loss of key people in the sector.
- Current capacity issues will be stretched even further as Calgary's immigrant community grows with the efforts of the government and businesses to address labour shortage and economic issues by increasing the numbers of immigrants in Calgary. The Alberta government is aiming to increase the number of immigrants who choose to come to Alberta (*Supporting Immigrants and Immigration to Alberta*) – including Calgary. The objective is to increase immigrants landing in Alberta by 10 per cent each year. Without a coordinating increase in the capacity (money and resources), wait lists and staff/volunteer strain will increase.

### **Diversity and the Benefits of Newcomers to Communities**

There is a need for diversity and immigration. Diversity and immigration benefit a community socially, economically and culturally. According to *Building the New West* (2004 Canada West Foundation), there are several arguments in favour of immigration including:

- Immigrants can help fill labour shortages. They are a particularly attractive solution because many are working age and most are educated/trained.
- Immigrants help support public services. They are net contributors to public services – paying in more than they take out – lowering the costs of maintaining these services for everyone. A shrinking tax base has implications for public funding models particularly for health care and education. On average, immigrants subsidize the consumption of public services by those born in Canada.

- Immigration enhances business innovation. Creative and culturally diverse cities are said to be factor in driving a vibrant economy. There is also a positive correlation between the number of immigrants and cultural diversity.
- Immigration has humanitarian benefits.

Alberta's demographic challenges include an aging population, low birthrate, urbanization and decreased inter-provincial migration, these factors along with a very low unemployment rate (3.3 per cent in December 2006) with especially severe shortages in health care, information and communications technology, construction, agriculture, food processing and tourism/hospitality, are creating a demand for newcomers. This makes immigration and support for newcomers all the more important even when just the economic costs/benefits of immigration are considered, never mind the social/cultural and diversity benefits to Calgary.

According to the AB Government's Report (*Supporting Immigrants and Immigration to Alberta*), small- and large-scale projects (estimated at over \$100 billion planned or underway in Alberta) are in jeopardy if we do not find enough people to fill the expected 100,000 worker shortage estimated by 2014. Immigrants can help fill these shortages with qualified, educated individuals who have proven results in the economic benefits they provide to Alberta. Immigrants are active and contributing members to the workforce and a large portion are well educated.

Other facts according to the AB Government's Report (*Supporting Immigrants and Immigration to Alberta*) include:

- Of the immigrants who moved to Alberta in 2004, 48 per cent held a university degree, five per cent held a trade certification and 11 per cent held a non-university diploma.
- Immigrants create jobs. Independent-class immigrants contributed to over 200 full- and part-time jobs in Alberta in 2002. In addition, there is an economic benefit just by expanding the available market for goods and services. Immigrants expand trade markets. Their country-specific knowledge of language, home markets, and business contacts contribute to an estimated one per cent increase in exports for every 10 per cent increase in immigration.
- Independent-class immigrants who came as entrepreneurs invested over 10 million dollars in 2002 and contributed over 200 full-time and part-time jobs in Alberta.
- Immigrants provide essential linkages between provincial and international economies. Estimates show that a 10 per cent increase in immigration is correlated with a one per cent increase in exports.

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## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What organizations are represented on the ISCC?**

The ISCC has over 20 member organizations including agencies, funders, public bodies and ethno cultural groups. Please refer to appendix I for a full list.

### **What is the ISCC trying to do for the immigrant sector?**

Immigration is necessary for a vibrant, thriving and diverse community.

We strive to be the collective voice to address the needs and concerns of immigrants settling and integrating in Calgary. Our mission is to facilitate timely and equitable integration and settlement of all immigrants in Calgary.

We support and build upon the many programs and services offered by those immigrant-serving agencies, public sector groups, government representatives, funding organizations and multicultural associations that are represented on the Council. The members of the ISCC support and welcome immigrants through a wide range of services and programs including those that address language needs/training, employment training, settlement services, housing, youth services, and justice/legal and health services.

### **What are the key challenges for immigrants in Calgary?**

We believe that many of the challenges facing newcomers to our city are not unlike those already living in Calgary. Like many other Calgarians, immigrants need housing, good educational opportunities for their families, meaningful work in line with their backgrounds and skill sets, accessible health care and opportunities to be involved in the community and to actively participate in decisions made about issues that impact their lives.

Additionally, many immigrants face specific challenges around language needs, recognition of their foreign credentials and a lack of understanding about the Canadian health, political and justice systems. Many immigrants also face discrimination and injustices based upon their ethnic backgrounds or lack of language skills and some are struggling with poverty.

### **What are some misconceptions about immigrants?**

Immigrants contribute to the social, cultural, and economic vibrancy of Calgary. Misconceptions about immigrants do exist including perceptions that immigrants:

- Don't contribute positively to the economy and are a drain on resources.
- Are not as educated as Canadian-born individuals.

Additionally, there questions are raised about the value of diversity to a community.

The ISCC aims to address these misconceptions with facts and examples including:

- Immigrants help support public services. They are net contributors to public services – paying in more than they take out – lowering the costs of maintaining these services for everyone. A shrinking tax base has implications for public funding models particularly for health care and education. On average, immigrants subsidize the consumption of public services by those born in Canada. *Building the New West* (2004 Canada West Foundation)
- Immigration enhances business innovation. Creative and culturally diverse cities are said to be factor in driving a vibrant economy *Building the New West* (2004 Canada West Foundation). There is also a positive correlation between the number of immigrants and cultural diversity.
- Of the immigrants who moved to Alberta in 2004, 48 per cent held a university degree, five per cent held a trade certification and 11 per cent held a non-university diploma. AB Government's Report (*Supporting Immigrants and Immigration to Alberta*).
- The vast majority (87%) of the "skilled worker principal applicants" group aged 25-44 have a university degree compared with 25 per cent of all Canadians in that age group (*Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada—Progress and Challenges of New Immigrants in the Workforce – StatsCan 2003*).
- Immigrants create jobs. Independent-class immigrants contributed to over 200 full- and part-time jobs in Alberta in 2002. In addition, there is an economic benefit just by expanding the available market for goods and services. Immigrants expand trade markets. Their country-specific knowledge of language, home markets, and business contacts contribute to an estimated one per cent increase in exports for every 10 per cent increase in immigration. AB Government's Report (*Supporting Immigrants and Immigration to Alberta*)
- Independent-class immigrants who came as entrepreneurs invested over 10 million dollars in 2002 and contributed over 200 full-time and part-time jobs in Alberta. AB Government's Report (*Supporting Immigrants and Immigration to Alberta*)
- Immigrants provide essential linkages between provincial and international economies. Estimates show that a 10 per cent increase in immigration is correlated with a one per cent increase in exports. AB Government's Report (*Supporting Immigrants and Immigration to Alberta*)

### **What is the ISCC's position on foreign credentials recognition, religious freedom for immigrants, and diversity in our neighbourhoods?**

The ISCC is an organization of committed individuals who represent the key areas of expertise required for helping newcomers find success in Calgary.

Part of that success is finding meaningful work that provides enough income to support families; therefore, the ISCC stands behind all government efforts to improve the recognition of foreign credentials as well as to increase the opportunities for immigrants to obtain Canadian work experience in their quest to find work that is meaningful and relevant based upon their skills, experience and professional backgrounds.

We also believe that diverse communities represent success for all, and; therefore, we support the integration and settlement of immigrants to Calgary. This integration and settlement includes our support of immigrants being able to fully participate in the community and have access to the education, health and justice systems including the freedom to practice their own religions. We believe these are freedoms of all Canadians, including those newly joining our city.

### **How can the ISCC help the immigrant serving sector to reduce waiting lists and ensure newcomers to our city are successful?**

Resources are vital to support and to retain increasing numbers of immigrants to Calgary.

The ISCC is positioned to address these issues, but resources will be required to impact public policy and hopefully, funding, for the sector. In addition, it will take time for the ISCC to make an impact in addressing these issues through an overall strategy which consists of:

- Education and awareness
- Government relations and the influencing of public policy
- Operational and organizational changes
- Long-term systemic change.

There is a recognized need to educate and create awareness about the contributions – social, economic and cultural – of immigrants and their families to the Calgary community. It is hoped that through this awareness, the image and perceptions held by the general community will become more positive or build upon the positive perceptions already in the public arena. This will pose some challenges as once there is more awareness and education, there may be more support, but there also may be more questions and public dialogue about the role of immigrants and immigration. We welcome more public dialogue and we need the resources to ensure that we can have a role in any dialogue about immigrants, immigration and the benefits/challenges of diversity.

### **Where is more information available?**

The Immigrant Sector Council of Calgary: [www.isccalgary.ca](http://www.isccalgary.ca)

Other organizations and links: [http://www.aaisa.ca/files/other\\_settlement\\_links.html](http://www.aaisa.ca/files/other_settlement_links.html)

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## **Appendix I: Composition of the Immigrant Sector Council of Calgary (ISCC)**

### **Funding Bodies**

- Alberta Employment and Immigration, Community and Business Services
- Alberta Employment and Immigration, Settlement Services Integration Program
- Calgary & Area Child and Family Services
- Calgary Learns
- Canadian Heritage
- Citizenship & Immigration Canada
- The City of Calgary, Family and Community Support Services
- United Way of Calgary and Area

### **Immigrant Serving Agencies**

- Calgary Bridge Foundation for Youth
- Calgary Catholic Immigration Society
- Calgary Immigrant Educational Society
- Calgary Immigrant Women's Association
- Centre d'accueil pour les nouveaux arrivants francophones (CANAF)
- Centre for Newcomers
- Immigrant Services Calgary
- Jewish Family Service Calgary

### **Public Sector Organizations**

- Calgary Board of Education
- Calgary Catholic School District
- Calgary Health Region, Healthy Diverse Populations

### **Multicultural/Ethno-Cultural Groups**

- Calgary Multicultural Centre
- Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary