# **Reforming Settlement Services to Include Temporary Migrants**

**POLICY PREVIEW** 

### By

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### Introduction

The Canadian system of settlement and integration services is publicly funded but delivered largely by nonprofit organizations in communities where immigrants and temporary residents settle. By international standards, the services provided for permanent residents are comprehensive including information & orientation, language, employment and needs assessment services, among others (Praznik & Shields 2018). Often described as a 'best practice' (Richmond & Shields 2005), the public investment in services reflects the importance of immigration to the country's economic prosperity and national identity (Valenzuela Moreno et al. 2018). Gaps in the system have become increasingly apparent, especially the exclusion, in most instances, of non-permanent migrants. Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) differentiates migrants based on admission category, with some of the most vulnerable: temporary foreign workers, international students and asylum seekers on temporary visas, being largely ineligible for public services, including the services offered by immigrant-serving agencies funded by IRCC. Even though temporary migrants contribute substantively to the economy and society, they are denied access to the settlement and integration services that are available to migrants who arrive as permanent residents and that strengthen migrants' resilience as they face the inevitable challenges of settlement and integration (Preston, Shields and Akbar 2022).

This policy review addresses recent efforts to expand eligibility for services to

temporary residents by outlining recent policy changes and consultations about federally funded services and assessing recent initiatives that provide settlement and integration services to temporary migrants such as Ukrainian asylum seekers and temporary foreign workers. The recent expansion of eligibility for services to international students, temporary foreign workers and asylum seekers in Quebec and other provinces is also considered. Public information about these initiatives was obtained from a search of government websites, policy documents, and media using keywords such as temporary foreign workers, international students, asylum seekers, two-step migration and pathways to permanence. Recommendations to resolve some of the contradictions inherent in policies that expanded the numbers of temporary residents admitted to Canada while simultaneously restricting their access to many public services end the policy review.

# **Setting the Context: The Changing Immigration and Policy Landscape**

The immigration landscape in Canada is witnessing rapid changes in policies and programs with swiftly increasing numbers of permanent residents and migrants admitted on temporary visas since 2015. The number of permanent residents admitted annually has increased with 2024 targets of a record 485,000 admissions (Government of Canada 2023; Paperny 2024). The rise in the number of permanent residents has been accompanied by even larger increases in temporary migrants. For example, the



number of temporary visas issued in 2022 increased by a staggering 46%. While the arrival of large numbers of Ukrainian refugees in 2022 inflated these numbers (Statistics Canada 2023), the rapid increase called attention to the expansion of temporary migration programs since the 2010s when the government first admitted more temporary migrants than permanent residents (Triadafilopoulos & Taylor 2023, 712). As of July 1, 2023, the number of nonpermanent residents residing in Canada reached a record of almost 2.2 million individuals (Statistics Canada 2023). Nonpermanent residents constituted 2.5% of the total population in 2022 (Tuey & Bastien 2023) and the percentage had grown to 6.8% by April 2024 (Paperny 2024).

Recently, the federal government announced new 2025-2027 admission targets intended to reign in the total number of international migrants admitted annually. The recent plan renews the historical emphasis on the admission of permanent residents by reducing drastically the number of temporary visas issued annually. Overall, the plan will decrease permanent resident admissions by some 20%, and reduce the numbers of temporary residents admitted annually by more than 445,000 (Rana 2024; Government of Canada 2024b & 2024c)<sup>1</sup>.

The planned reductions need to be placed in context. Canada remains a country of high permanent and temporary migration. The

<sup>1</sup> The government has justified the reduction on the grounds that the large numbers of permanent residents and temporary migrants admitted earlier exacerbated housing affordability issues, restricted access to health services, and even suppressed wages

2027 permanent immigrant target of 365,000 (Rana 2024) still exceeds average immigration numbers that were in the low 300,000s from 2015-2016 until the start of the COVID19 pandemic (Statista 2024). The annual number of non-permanent residents will decrease significantly but the numbers will still be substantial. The government's goal is to ensure that the temporary migrant population is 5% of the Canadian population, a large decrease from the current percentage of 6.8% (Government of Canada 2024b; Paperny 2024).

In response to the large numbers of temporary residents living in Canada, twostep migration pathways in which people initially enter Canada as temporary residents before transitioning to permanent status have proliferated (Hari & Wang-Dufil 2023). The current admission targets assign priority to temporary migrants who remain integral to the federal government's use of immigration as an economic stimulant to address the challenges of Canada's ageing workforce and fill labour shortages. Fully 40% of the annual numbers of permanent residents to be admitted in 2025 and 2026 are expected to be temporary residents making the transition to permanent residency (Government of Canada 2024b).

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed many flaws and contradictions in two-step migration pathways. As a condition of receiving federal funding, immigrant-

for some jobs (Government of Canada 2024b; Rana 2024; Yousif and Jessica Murphy 2024). Critics argue that the effects of migration on these problems have been exaggerated and that cuts in admissions are driven mainly by political considerations (Brunner & Coustere 2024; Makan 2024).



serving agencies are forced to exclude temporary migrants from most services. During the pandemic, the shift to on-line services by immigrant-serving agencies opened access to some services for temporary migrants blurring "the sharp distinctions between eligible and ineligible migrants" (Preston et al. forthcoming). Nevertheless, immigrant-serving agencies, local governments, and other non-profit agencies struggled to provide essential emergency supports to temporary migrants (Preston & Shields 2024). Even as the federal government drew heavily on the large pool of temporary migrants already living in Canada to maintain permanent resident numbers (IRCC 2021), most temporary residents were excluded from IRCC-funded settlement and integration services<sup>2</sup>.

Supporting all migrants regardless of admission category is an important investment in the health, well-being, and human capital of an increasingly vital segment of the Canadian population. It would bring substantial benefits to Canada as a whole, contributing to a more resilient and interconnected society where the diverse contributions of all residents, regardless of immigration status, are recognized and valued. Expanding eligibility for services reduces temporary residents' vulnerability to exploitation and improves the prospects for future migrants (Boucher 2020). It would also encourage the flexibility and responsiveness that is key to the future success of immigrant-serving agencies

<sup>2</sup> Recent news that federal funding for immigrantserving agencies will be reduced substantially in 2025-26 increases the likelihood that temporary (Robitaille 2023b, Majumdar 2023, Hari & Wang-Dufil 2023).

# **Setting the Context: IRCC Call-For- Proposals 2024 Stakeholder Consultations**

In the Call-For-Proposals (CFP) 2024 Stakeholder consultations, conducted from July 10 to August 16, 2023, IRCC engaged with diverse stakeholders representing immigrant-serving agencies (ISAs), other nonprofit service organizations, academic institutions, and government bodies. Over zoom webinars, 1,187 participants contributed to a dialogue about programing to enhance migrants' settlement and integration. (IRCC 2023, 2; Robitaille 2023b). While the consultations identified numerous areas that were working well, discussions identified several 'opportunities' for development, improvement, and change including the needs of migrants who have been underserved by immigrant-serving services, particularly temporary residents seeking permanent residence (IRCC 2023, 6). Many stakeholders requested that eligibility for services be extended to all temporary migrants: temporary foreign workers, international students, and asylum seekers. Earlier consultations in November 2023 had also recommended broadening the eligibility for services with a specific focus on asylum seekers and temporary residents actively pursuing a clear pathway to permanent residence. The consultation report sheds light on the growing numbers of temporary foreign workers, employed

residents will be excluded from services as agencies struggle to serve their core clientele of permanent residents (Keung 2025).



outside agriculture and food-processing. Despite their substantial contributions to the economy, temporary foreign workers still cannot access publicly funded services that will help them overcome their reluctance to report abuse from employers, landlords, and other authorities and enhance their integration in Canada (Singer 2021; Crépeau & Purkey 2023). Adequate funding for organizations supporting migrants was identified as a crucial prerequisite for expanding service eligibility.

The consultations also recommended more flexible administration of IRCC funding. The funding model for immigrant-serving agencies and the mandate of IRCC have not adapted to the rise in temporary migration to Canada and associated two-step pathways to permanent residency. Historically, few temporary residents had a clear pathway from temporary to permanent residency. A strategic shift towards prioritizing tangible client impact over mere quantitative metrics is proposed to address effectively the dynamic needs of migrants. Participants in the consultations underscored "the need to ensure greater visibility of services, including for specific populations" (IRCC 2023, 9).

Calling for a unified response from all stakeholders, including IRCC, provinces, academic institutions, and employers, the discussions reflected ongoing efforts by federal, provincial, and territorial governments to address the evolving needs of individuals navigating diverse pathways to permanence (Majumdar 2023). By collaborating, federal and provincial authorities expect to adapt quickly to rapidly shifting migration flows, meet the urgent,

short-term needs of many migrants, and improve the quality and comprehensiveness of services provided to migrants.

Recent initiatives expanding access to the services provided by immigrant-serving agencies underscore the importance of the recommendations. The provision of some services to Ukrainians admitted on temporary visas, the Migrant Worker Support Program for temporary foreign workers, and various provincial programs for which international students and other temporary migrants are eligible demonstrate the benefits and challenges of expanding eligibility for settlement and integration services.

### **Ukrainian Newcomers Program**

The Russian invasion of the Ukraine in 2022 and subsequent war has resulted in a large wave of Ukrainians (specifically women, children and seniors) seeking refuge outside Ukraine. Canada has been highly supportive of this refugee population by eliminating red tape and implementing measures such as direct flights (Pardy 2023). Canada opened its doors to welcome an unlimited number of Ukrainians under the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (IRCC 2022). This initiative eliminated standard visa requirements, prioritized applications from Ukrainian nationals, and allowed successful applicants to stay for up to three years as temporary residents (Pardy 2023). The federal government, implemented a special measure making Ukrainians who enter as temporary residents under the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET) eligible for all



services offered by immigrant-serving agencies with funding from IRCC (Government of Canada 2022a; IRCC 2022). This temporary measure aimed to support Ukrainians arriving under this unique temporary residence pathway that was also extended to include an accelerated pathway for permanent residency (Paas-Lang 2023). The services offered to Ukrainians include language training, information and orientation about life in Canada, assistance with enrolling children in school, support for accessing the labour market such as mentoring and skills development, activities fostering community connections, assessments of additional needs, and referrals to relevant agencies. Specialized services were also targeted to women, seniors, youth, and LGBTQ2+ persons, in addition to other settlement support available through the Settlement Program (IRCC 2022; Canada Visa 2023). In addition, each person admitted under CUAET was eligible for income support of \$3,000 per adult and \$1,500 per child. Demonstrating its readiness to address additional needs, the federal government remained open to considering various options for assistance.

Provinces actively supported Ukrainians and the non-profit organizations providing support. Provinces contributed funds to immigrant-serving agencies providing services to Ukrainians. Eligibility for provincially provided services also expanded, although the details varied from one province to another. For example, in Ontario, Ukrainians admitted under CUAET had more access to publicly funded provincial programs than other temporary

visa holders - they could enroll immediately in the Ontario Health Insurance Program (OHIP) and they were also eligible to apply for social assistance from the Ontario government (Ontario 2022). The collaboration between the Government of Canada and provinces and territories played a pivotal role in providing support to Ukrainians arriving in the country. Provinces and territories actively mobilized to assist temporary residents through settlement and social services (Xhardez & Soennecken 2023).

Crucial settlement services were delivered through a network of over 550 agencies across Canada (Robitaille 2023a).

Commencing in early April 2022, the Canadian Red Cross, in collaboration with the Government of Canada, was responsible for providing arrival services at international airports in Toronto, Edmonton, and Vancouver (Canadian Red Cross 2023). This support consisted of translation services. delivering information in the language of choice, and helping to connect Ukrainians with government and community services (Pardy 2023; Canada Visa 2023).

The quick and effective response to Ukrainian newcomers showcased the adaptability and effectiveness of Canada's settlement and integration services, setting a precedent for tailored approaches that would meet the specific needs of other migrant groups. The high level of cooperation between governments that took place with this initiative has some parallels with the Syrian refugee crisis (Canada 2019). It not only demonstrates the effectiveness of such services but also underscores the need for their continued provision (Graveland 2023).



This initiative provides another welcome precedent for effectively addressing refugee crises. The special measures implemented for Ukrainians under CUAET can serve as a blueprint for the extension of similar assistance to all asylum seekers.

The treatment of Ukrainians highlights inconsistency in how different migrants are treated. For asylum seekers, the Ukrainian example emphasizes the need for a more equitable and consistent approach to supporting asylum seekers regardless of their country of origin (Pardy 2023). The distinction between permanent residents who are eligible for services provided by immigrant-serving agencies with funding from IRCC and non-permanent residents who have been ineligible for services has also been decisively shattered in this case.

## The Migrant Workers Program and the Extension of Worker Supports by ESDC

The Migrant Workers Program in Canada has a long history that reflects the economy's evolving needs for workers and immigration policies. Initially targeting nurses and farm workers, the program has significantly broadened its scope, providing opportunities for "high-skill" and "low-skill" workers in Canada. The Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP), established in 1966 remains a significant component, allowing Canadian farmers to hire temporary foreign agricultural workers, primarily from the Caribbean. When the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) commenced in 1973, it primarily brought in high-skill workers, including medical specialists (Fudge & MacPhail 2009). However, in 2002, a "low-skilled workers" category was

introduced, which now makes up a significant portion of the temporary foreign workforce. The program underwent substantial revisions in 2006, introducing fast-tracking for certain locations. In 2013, reports indicated that some employers were abusing the TFWP by bringing in temporary foreign workers to work in locations where qualified local workers were collecting Employment Insurance (EI) benefits. The program was reformed with more scrutiny of applications and increased surveillance of employers. Wage requirements increased, employers paid higher fees, and accelerated applications were eliminated (Government of Canada 2014).

The global pandemic accelerated change in the Migrant Worker Program. In 2020, the Canadian government legislated increasing labour protection for temporary foreign workers (Triadafilopoulos 2021). From January 30, 2023, until January 21, 2025, the government also expanded eligibility for open work permits for spouses and dependent children to include low-skilled temporary foreign workers as well as highskilled temporary foreign workers. The continual evolution of the Migrant Workers Program reflects the interplay between Canadian economic needs and growing pressure to protect the rights and well-being of temporary foreign workers. The changes in policy also highlight the complexities and challenges faced by migrant workers (Triadafilopolous & Taylor 2023; Triadafilopoulous 2021). Under the SAWP, workers are tied to a single employer by a seasonal contract and must return to their home countries after the season ends, while those in the TFWP may be employed year-



round but are often tied to a single employer, limiting their mobility and making them vulnerable to exploitation (Carreño Rosas 2023; Raza 2022; Henaway 2023). Caregivers, who have a potential route to permanent residency, may face long separations from their families and stringent requirements to qualify (Keung 2021).

Given the many different challenges facing migrant workers, the federal department of Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) funded the Migrant Worker Support (MWS) program in 2022 proving more than 110 community-based organizations with

"in community and upon-arrival services to support migrant workers to learn about and exercise their rights. Funded organizations do so by providing migrant worker-centric support programs and services, such as on-arrival orientation services, information workshops, legal support, and assistance in emergency and at-risk situations" (Government of Canada 2024a).

The program is intended to help people who arrive in Canada as temporary foreign workers "access needed services and promote inclusion in the community" (Quesada Rebolledo 2023). At information workshops, workers learn about their rights as employees, how to recognize and address abuse and exploitation, and local sources of assistance. In addition to information about their legal rights, the programs inform workers about local health, community, recreational, transportation, and retail services, put workers in touch with religious

establishments, and in some cases arrange transportation to services. Tailored services for temporary foreign workers play a crucial role in improving their economic security, ensuring job security, and safeguarding fundamental rights, thereby contributing to a fair and inclusive work environment and community inclusion.

The Migrant Worker Support Program is led by ESDC rather than IRCC, the federal government department that historically has been responsible for funding and overseeing immigrant-serving agencies. As a result, the scope of the program is limited mainly to employment-related issues rather than the wide range of services offered typically by immigrant-serving agencies. Moreover, a wide range of community-based organizations offer the Migrant Worker Support Program, not only immigrant-serving agencies.

### **Provincial Initiatives**

Even though IRCC remains the primary funder of immigrant-serving agencies and their programs, provinces have started to fund some settlement initiatives independent of IRCC programming (Paquet & Xhardez 2020). As immigration is a shared area of constitutional jurisdiction and Provincial Nominee Programs give provinces more control over admissions, provinces are increasingly taking action in this policy field (Paquet 2019). Eligibility criteria for provincially funded settlement services vary significantly, resulting in disparate support structures for permanent and non-permanent migrants.



Provinces other than Quebec sometimes provide funding for settlement programming that serves temporary migrants, but this is not offered consistently. Generally, supports for temporary migrants are justified as aids to regional economies. This programming often targets temporary migrants who are prime candidates for permanent residency in the province under each province's distinctive and different two-step migration system. Such services are particularly attractive to provinces that have difficulty attracting and retaining economic class immigrants selected by the federal government. Consequently, provincial involvement in settlement and integration services for temporary migrants is more common in provinces outside Ontario (See Paquet & Xhardez 2020, including the Supplemental Material for the Article: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/suppl/10.1 080/00343404.2020.1808881?scroll=top). For example, Manitoba facilitates transitions to permanent residency for skilled temporary foreign workers who may apply to the provincial nominee program after working in the province for only six months. Applicants can expect to be permanent residents within 18 to 24 months (Manitoba n.d.). Other provinces fund services for temporary residents. In Ontario, the International Student Connect program provides on-line and in-person integration services to international students enrolled at partner post-secondary institutions in the province (International Student Connect 2016).

Quebec is the only province that controls the settlement and integration services offered by immigrant-serving agencies and other non-profit organizations. The 1991 Canada-Quebec Accord granted the province full autonomy over settlement and integration services and guarantees funding that increases with the consumer price index. For 2024-2025 Quebec received a grant of \$650 million in support of its immigration programming from the Government of Canada (Hari & Wang-Dufil 2023). The types of services offered to migrants in Quebec are similar to IRCC-funded services in the rest of Canada. They include information and orientation services, French language classes, and assistance with employment.

There are important differences regarding program eligibility and levels of funding per-client between Quebec and IRCCfunded immigrant-serving agencies. Quebec extended eligibility for settlement and integration services beyond permanent residents to temporary foreign workers, international students, and asylum seekers in 2019 (Government of Canada 2020). Eligibility for services in Quebec is limited to the five years following initial registration for services unlike IRCC-funded services that permanent residents can access until they become Canadian citizens. Quebec also provides more funding per client for services provided by immigrant-serving agencies than the federal government. The differences in eligibility were apparent during the pandemic. With a mandate to serve temporary migrants, Quebec agencies reported that the size of their clientele either increased or was stable during the pandemic. International students and temporary foreign workers sought services even as the numbers of permanent residents who were eligible to



receive services did not increase (D'Souza et al. 2023). In Ontario, the total volume of services often increased slightly, but agencies were more likely to report that their clientele had declined or was stable (D'Souza et al. 2022)

### **Conclusion: Policy Action**

Settlement and integration services in Canada are already in flux. The substantive changes to the Canadian immigration system over the last fifteen years have greatly expanded temporary migration and two-step pathways to immigration. Yet current eligibility criteria that exclude temporary residents leave many migrants without timely access to publicly funded settlement and integration services. Denial of service places temporary residents at risk and increases their vulnerability to exploitation, especially in labour and housing markets. Without access to services, the integration of temporary migrants who transition to permanent residency is likely to be delayed. Such delays are costly for individual migrants, their communities, and Canadian society as a whole.

Temporary migrants make substantive contributions to Canada's aging labour force and as consumers. In 2022 alone, international students contributed more than \$31 Billion to the economy (ICEF Monitor 2024), including \$7.4 Billion in tax revenue (Government of Canada 2022b). As taxpayers, temporary migrants have legitimate claims to services. The fact that settlement and integration services have been given to non-permanent migrants in specific instances, Ukrainian refugees and

temporary foreign workers, reveals the contradictory application of the inadmissibility restrictions. The shift in policy and programing required to support 'non-permanent' migrants is a movement already underway at the provincial level, most substantively in Quebec.

Three recommendations flow from this review of recent initiatives to provide settlement and integration services to selected temporary residents. First, there is a compelling need to reform IRCC-funded settlement services to include eligibility for all non-permanent migrant residents. Even as Canada reduces its immigration targets and its funding for immigrant-serving agencies (Keung 2025), the arguments for extending integration and settlement services to temporary residents become more compelling. Government reliance on the current pool of temporary residents as a source of permanent residents combined with the success of recent initiatives to serve temporary residents underline the importance and feasibility of access to integration and settlement services that will help temporary residents contribute to Canadian society.

Second, services should be adapted to address the diverse needs of temporary residents. Temporary residents have diverse experiences in part due to the various rights and responsibilities associated with each admission category and the many different pathways to permanent residency currently available. In this respect, the provision of services tailored to the needs of Ukrainian temporary residents is exemplary.



Third, longitudinal research is needed to evaluate the impact of recent initiatives that have provided settlement and integration services to temporary residents. Since the impacts of settlement and integration services develop over time and two-step pathways to permanence are often lengthy, longitudinal evaluations are required to identify the services that enhance integration for specific groups of temporary residents.

The federal and provincial initiatives described here demonstrate the growing recognition of the value and logic of extending settlement services to the temporary migrant population. Preston et al. note how:

Expanded eligibility will also buttress the resilience of the immigrant-serving sector by expanding its clientele, reducing the resources devoted to accommodating those now considered ineligible, and enhancing the "warmth of the welcome" in many communities where there are now two classes of migrants: the eligible and the ineligible (forthcoming).

Guaranteeing the continuation of recent initiatives and expanding them to all temporary residents will bolster successful settlement and integration of all migrants and enhance the resources that can facilitate the success of future migrants.

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