

## ***Forum on Canada's Immigration Policy***

Early this month, a so-called "national conversation on immigration" was launched by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), formerly known as Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). The IRCC press release states that this initiative will run for a month, from 5 July 2016 until 5 August 2016.

This consultation project will include "cross-Canada round-table discussions led by the Minister and Parliamentary Secretary, stakeholder engagement by departmental officials; and, public opinion research." For most of us who may not have the chance to participate in these in person consultation activities, IRCC also invites online written submissions through its website at <http://www.cic.gc.ca> - just enter "conversation on immigration" in the search box and you will find the relevant link as the very first item in the search results.

Please note that this online forum is not meant for advocating specific cases or applications but to inform and influence future immigration policies. Hence, to ensure that your views will be properly considered, it will be best to provide views and suggestions that may have been based on personal experiences, but which are meant to provide constructive insights that will help shape immigration law and policy. IRCC also provided a list of topics and guide questions that will help structure the online submissions. They are reprinted below verbatim:

### Strengthening our Canadian fabric

- How many newcomers should we welcome to Canada in 2017 and beyond?
- How can we best support newcomers to ensure they become successful members of our communities?
- Do we have the balance right among the immigration programs or streams? If not, what priorities should form the foundation of Canada's immigration planning?

### Unlocking Canada's diverse needs

- How can immigration play a role in supporting economic growth and innovation in Canada?
- Should there be more programs for businesses to permanently hire foreign workers if they can't find Canadians to fill the job?
- What is the right balance between attracting global talent for high-growth sectors, on the one hand, and ensuring affordable labour for businesses that have historically seen lower growth, on the other?
- How can immigration fill in the gaps in our demographics and economy?
- What Canadian values and traditions are important to share with newcomers to help them integrate into Canadian society?

### Modernizing our immigration system

- Currently, immigration levels are planned yearly. Do you agree with the thinking that planning should be multi-year?
- What modernization techniques should Canada invest in for processing of applications?
- What should Canada do to ensure its immigration system is modern and efficient?
- Is there any rationale for providing options to those willing to pay higher fees for an expedited process?

### Leadership in global migration and immigration

- Is it important for Canada to continue to show leadership in global migration? If so, how can we best do that?
- How can Canada attract the best global talent and international students?
- In what ways can Canada be a model to the world on refugees, migration and immigration?

While these are useful guidelines that will help focus the discussion and elicit varying perspectives, people should not feel limited, or even intimidated, by them. Anybody who feels strongly about Canadian immigration or who care enough about the future of this country should take advantage of this opportunity to be heard. As long as the tone is courteous and the contents are constructive, all thoughts and submissions can be valuable, if not crucial in monitoring the public pulse. As stated however, this is not meant as a tool to contact the immigration department regarding a specific file but to help shape laws, policies and bureaucratic decision-making. (If you really need to find the appropriate link to follow up a pending application or specific file, you may search instead, "Case Specific Enquiry" in the same <http://www.cic.gc.ca> website.)

IRCC states that "the feedback gathered from Canadians will be used to help guide decisions on how many people we will welcome in the coming years and the future of immigration in Canada. ... The Government of Canada is committed to an immigration system that supports Canada's diversity and helps grow our economy as it strengthens our society. This is an ambitious undertaking that will help determine the way forward on immigration to Canada."

Since this particular initiative will only run for a month, the "national conversation" of course will not and should not stop there. It is just one of the many wonderful tools available in a free and democratic nation such as ours. There are several other legal avenues available year-round, which allow us to take part in an ongoing dialogue with the powers that be, such as contacting members of Parliament or cabinet officials and even the oft neglected duty to cast our ballots during elections. Let us show our gratitude for these hard-fought rights and freedoms by exercising them at every opportunity. As Charles De Gaulle once said: "Politics is too important a matter to be left to the politicians."

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