

**LEADING PRACTICE GUIDE**

**Reducing  
Integration  
Barriers for  
Immigrant  
Workers**

# Introduction

Talent attraction and retention have never been more critical. We live in both an innovation age and a highly competitive market for talent. Businesses of all sizes are under more pressure than ever to set themselves apart as a great place for talented people to work.

Managing and developing talent remains critical to a company's growth prospects. Our region's businesses must rise to the occasion, leveraging best practices and established expertise to build their talent pipeline over time. That's why the Board is pleased to introduce our six Leading Practice Guides, born from our workforce development strategy, "[Unlocking Talent](#)".

Unlocking Talent highlighted how we can turn system gaps and barriers into opportunities in three areas: (i) collaborating to narrow the skills gap; (ii) promoting collective workforce development in the skilled trades; and (iii) growing the region's youth talent pipeline and immigrant talent pipeline.

To build on these areas, the Board convened senior business leaders for a series of roundtables, to share lessons learned and best practices on pressing workforce development challenges and opportunities. As a result, we have focused on 6 urgent priorities for the Leading Practice Guides:



Supporting Employee  
Soft Skill Development



Reducing Integration Barrier  
for Immigrant Workers



Finding the Right  
Entry-Level Workers



Increasing Work-Integrated  
Learning ("WIL") Opportunities



Tapping into the  
Immigrant Talent Pool



Expanding Mental Health  
Supports for Younger Workers

We hope they will be used as blueprints for success, helping businesses of every size contribute to a workforce that thrives in tomorrow's economy.

## Giles Gherson

President & CEO,  
Toronto Region Board of Trade

## Blaine Woodcock

National Strategy, Analytics & M&A Portfolio Leader, Deloitte  
Vice Chair of the Talent Committee, Toronto Region Board of Trade



# Overview

The federal and provincial governments have articulated a need to remove certification barriers for foreign workers entering the labour force, including eliminating Canadian work experience requirements for professional registration and licensing, reducing duplicative language proficiency testing, and enabling faster registration / licensing processing times. This is an excellent start, but many systemic non-certification and non-licensing barriers still exist that prevent immigrants from accessing the jobs for which they have the requisite skills or experience.

## This Leading Practice Guide will:

- Identify examples of non-certification barriers that prevent immigrants from accessing jobs they are trained for
- Identify existing programs that employers can access to help them in hiring immigrants
- Advance examples and best practices of programs that have been implemented at different workplaces to support immigrant integration

# Leading Practices

## STEP 1

# Recognizing Barriers to Accessing Jobs

According to Statistics Canada, nearly 60% of new immigrants are working age and have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher; yet, only 25% of internationally educated immigrants are employed in the professions for which they are trained,<sup>1</sup> regardless of a candidate's qualifications.

As noted previously, while certification and licensing requirements remain a leading barrier to immigrants accessing jobs for which they are trained, there are many other barriers preventing full access to the workplace. A 2014 report from the Government of Canada, based on consultations conducted by the [Panel on Employment Challenges of New Canadians](#), outlined several key employment barriers faced by newcomers.<sup>2</sup>

**Only 25% of internationally educated immigrants are employed in the professions for which they are trained**



## CHALLENGES FACED BY NEW CANADIANS WHEN FINDING WORK IN CANADA RANKED BY # OF REFERENCES

#	BARRIERS	IMPACT OF THE BARRIERS
1	<b>Difficulty obtaining/lack of Canadian experience</b>	The lack of Canadian experience can hinder immigrants' ability to compete in the job market, as employers may be uncertain about how an individual's foreign qualifications and skills align with Canadian workplace norms and expectations.
2	<b>Difficulties with the recognition of foreign credentials</b>	This barrier can result in immigrants being underemployed, meaning they end up in jobs that do not align with their qualifications or expertise. It can also lead to lost opportunities, as immigrants may need to invest time and resources in having their foreign credentials assessed, recognized, or supplemented with additional Canadian qualifications or certifications.
3	<b>Perceived employer bias</b>	This perceived bias can lead to a sense of unfair treatment and hinder immigrants' confidence and opportunities in the labour market.
4	<b>Lack of social and professional networks</b>	Limited social and professional networks can make it more challenging for immigrants to find suitable job opportunities, learn about the local job market dynamics, or access professional development and mentorship.
5	<b>Overqualification</b>	Overqualification can result in immigrants feeling unfulfilled, underemployed, or frustrated, as they may be unable to secure positions that align with their career aspirations and potential.
6	<b>Language competency challenges</b>	This barrier can hinder effective communication in the workplace, impacting their ability to perform tasks, follow instructions, and collaborate with colleagues.
7	<b>Cultural adaption challenges</b>	Immigrants may encounter differences in work culture, communication styles, work ethics, and management practices that contrast with their previous experiences in their home countries. These disparities can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations in the workplace.
8	<b>Challenges associated with the immigration system</b>	This usually refers to the obstacles and complexities immigrants encounter while navigating the legal and administrative processes related to immigration, work permits, visas, and residency status in their new host country.
9	<b>Inadequate pre-arrival information (including labour market information or misinformation)</b>	Lack of key pre-arrival information can hinder immigrants' job search and career planning.

Source: Panel on Employment Challenges of New Canadians





In addition to the barriers above, other challenges raised by employers from our consultations with the business community include:

- **Workforce housing affordability:** Housing affordability is a social and economic necessity. Immigrants may face high housing costs, including rent or mortgage payments, which can consume a significant portion of their income. This financial burden can limit their ability to meet other essential expenses. Employers are testing different methods to attract and retain talent in the current housing market. Some employers are actively involved in building (in partnership with other entities) or advocating for workforce housing so employees can access housing close by at a reasonable cost; others are sharing resources to help newcomers navigate the housing landscape, access supports, etc.
- **Gender considerations:** Males immigrants are more likely to have employment commensurate with their skills and credentials compared to women. Female immigrants not only face all the broader barriers mentioned previously but often also juggle familial responsibilities and caregiving duties, which can further limit their availability for full-time employment or career advancement. Addressing the challenges faced by female immigrants in the labour market requires gender-sensitive policies, workplace diversity and inclusion initiatives, targeted support programs, and efforts to combat gender-based discrimination. These measures aim to ensure that immigrant women have equal opportunities and can fully contribute to the Canadian workforce.

**STEP 2**

# Removing Barriers and Promoting Integration

Several studies have explored how employers can better integrate and retain newcomers. Responses from the 2014 federal panel referenced above included fair hiring practices (i.e. mitigating bias in hiring), providing opportunities for Canadian workplace experience, placing more value on foreign credentials and experience, increased on-the-job training, and partnering with other stakeholders (such as training institutions). Other studies – such as [‘Improving Immigrant Inclusion in the Workplace’](#) and the [Employer Playbook: Strategies for Immigrant Inclusion in Canadian Workplaces](#) developed by World Education Services and other partners, provide additional recommendations for employers to improve integration and reduce barriers, including better recruiting practices, mentorship opportunities, fostering cultural exchanges, and clear workplace communication.



## Action Summary

1. Acknowledge and understand barriers faced by immigrants.

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2. Reflect and identify the barriers that are most likely preventing immigrants from finding appropriate employment at your company

Based on these studies, employers can leverage the following approaches and tools to help integrate immigrants into the workplace.

### **Tackling Biases in the Recruitment Process**

**Potential solution for: perceived employer bias, cultural adaptation challenges, and gender-based biases.**

The recruitment process can be influenced by biases in job descriptions and applicant assessments. Employers must proactively put in processes and adopt tools to ensure a balanced approach is taken when hiring candidates – where an individual’s gender, religion, nationality, and other factors do not influence outcomes.

#### **Tools**

1. Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion’s [toolkits](#) for reducing bias
2. [Gender Decoder](#) tool to find linguistic biases in job descriptions which may deter applicants from applying
3. [Unbiasify](#) Google Chrome extension to hide names and photos to reduce unconscious biases
4. The Government of Canada’s [“Fairness Review Checklist”](#) to help ensure that employment assessments are fair

### **Improving Access to Local Networks**

**Potential solution for: difficulty obtaining/ lack of Canadian experience, lack of social and professional networks.**

New to the country, many immigrants may not have access to local professional networks, making it difficult for them to learn about potential opportunities without these connections. Adding to potential language barriers and cultural adaptation challenges, it deepens the opportunity gap between local and international talent.

#### **Tools**

1. Attendance and support of dedicated immigrant hiring events such as the Canadian Immigrant Fair and the Toronto Refugee Hiring Event
2. Additional resources: employment services organizations like [Acces Employment](#), and immigrant services agencies such as [COSTI](#).

### **Understanding Foreign Credentials**

**Potential solution for: difficulties with the recognition of foreign credentials and overqualification.**

Organizations like the [World Education Services \(WES\)](#) and [International Credentials Assessment Service \(ICAS\)](#) evaluate credentials received outside of Canada to help hiring managers understand foreign credentials. However, skills assessments (see Leading Practice Guides: Supporting Employee Soft Skill Development & Finding the Right Entry-Level Workers) may better assess competencies of prospective employees and factor in work experience from their countries of origin.



### Providing Mentorship

**Potential Solution for: Lack of social and professional networks, and language competency challenges.** Formalizing the socialization process through mentorship programs can help employers prevent productivity loss and promote integration. Immigrants have found it especially beneficial to connect with other foreign employees who can empathize with their challenges and offer both emotional and informational support. Local mentors can also offer valuable insights and assistance in connecting immigrants with local professional and social communities. Therefore, a combination of mentors from diverse backgrounds may be most effective in supporting immigrant employees.

### Tools

1. Immigrant mentorship programs: [TRIEC Mentoring Partnership](#), and [YMCA Mentoring Program for Immigrants](#)
2. Smaller size companies can look to their industry associations for mentorship programs.

### Supporting Cultural Exchanges

**Potential Solution for: Cultural adaptation challenges and a lack of social and professional networks.** Employers can help immigrants better integrate into the workplace by facilitating informal and formal events and intercultural exchanges.

### Providing Housing Supports

**Potential Solution for: Workforce housing affordability.** In Canada, workforce housing stands as a linchpin for the successful integration and retention of immigrant talent. As newcomers seek employment opportunities in this vast and diverse country, accessible and affordable housing near job centers becomes not only a practical necessity but also a fundamental factor in their ability to thrive long term.

### Tools

1. [Settlement.Org](#): is a comprehensive online resource for newcomers to Ontario, including Toronto. It offers information on housing options, tenant rights, and financial assistance programs.
2. The City of Toronto's Newcomer Office: provides information on housing, employment, and settlement services. They offer resources and guidance on finding affordable housing in the city.



# Additional Resources for Employers

✔ Immigrant Employment Council of BC's [Employer Tools & Resources Library](#) includes best practices from employers, partners, and key organizations across the country to help employers successfully navigate the employment cycle and create a more inclusive workplace.

✔ [Hamilton Employers Hire Immigrants](#) is a new initiative created by the Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council (HIPC) that supports employers in accessing immigrant talent.

✔ [Workforce Planning Board of York Region](#) has resources for employers integrating newcomers into the workplace.



## Action Summary

1. Understand the key approaches of removing barriers and promoting integration
  - A. Tackling biases in the recruitment process
  - B. Improving access to local networks
  - C. Understanding foreign credentials
  - D. Providing mentorship
  - E. Supporting cultural exchanges
  - F. Providing housing support
2. Finding and prioritizing the tool(s) that suit your needs and address key barriers



# Case Study

## Fast Growing Data Consulting Firm Sourcing Top Talent<sup>3</sup>

### COMPANY

Pythian, a global leader in data consulting and managed services, specializing in optimizing and managing mission critical data systems.

### OBJECTIVE

The company strives to hire and retain the best available talent in support of a rapidly growing tech labour market.

### Approach

Pythian takes great pride in its role as an employer that welcomes new Canadians with open arms, setting exceptionally high standards and showing a genuine commitment to each individual's professional journey. In Ottawa, Pythian has implemented a variety of strategies aimed at seamlessly integrating professionals with international training:

- Pythian does not impose any requirements for Canadian experience or specific credentials during its hiring and selection process, creating an inclusive environment where qualifications are evaluated on a broader basis.
- The company invests in cross-cultural competency training for its managers, fostering a work environment that respects and embraces diverse backgrounds.
- All new hires at Pythian go through a comprehensive onboarding process, which includes presentations

from various functional departments, “coffee with the CEO” sessions, and participation in a new hire mentor program.

- To promote inclusivity and alignment, Pythian emphasizes clear and transparent communication, exemplified by its “all hands meetings” that unite employees from around the world.
- Pythian’s leadership team is unwavering in its dedication to becoming an employer of choice for all, actively championing diversity and recognizing the value of immigrant talent within the organization

### Results

According to its Director of Human Resources, Heidi Hauver, a diverse and inclusive workplace is a key to their success. Pythian’s diverse workforce enhances their ability to service a worldwide clientele including National Geographic, Toyota, and Western Union. It also greatly contributes to their ability to hire top talent in the industry from around the world.

## Endnotes

- 1 Canada not doing enough with its highly educated immigrants, StatsCan says. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/stats-can-education-census-1.6666984>
- 2 Panel on Employment Challenges of New Canadians: Summary of the Panel's Online Consultation. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/foreign-credential-recognition/consultations/emp-challenges.html>
- 3 Pythian Seeks Top Talent to Support A Rapidly Growing Global Business. HIO Case Study. [https://www.hireimmigrantsottawa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/HIO\\_PythianCaseENWEB.pdf](https://www.hireimmigrantsottawa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/HIO_PythianCaseENWEB.pdf)



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The Toronto Region Board of Trade is one of the largest and most influential chambers of commerce in North America and is a catalyst for the region's economic growth agenda. Backed by more than 11,500 members, we pursue policy change to drive the growth and competitiveness of the Toronto region, and facilitate market opportunities with programs, partnerships and connections to help our members succeed – domestically and internationally.

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