

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

16TH ANNUAL PANEL DISCUSSION

Shifting Perspectives: Adapt, Adopt and Celebrate Progress

November 5, 2021



16th Annual Panel Discussion

Shifting Perspectives: Adapt, Adopt and Celebrate Progress

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Overview

Recognizing the tremendous value of immigration to the country's prosperity and way of life, Canada remains committed to welcoming and helping newcomers settle and integrate. Despite the extraordinary challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), the Ministry of Labour Training and Skills Development (MLTSD) and the Ministry of Education, Ontario (MEO) have been taking steps to adjust and adapt to the effects of the pandemic, while ensuring that newcomers have access to the training programs and education they need to integrate into their new country.

Incorporating novel approaches, adjusting funding distribution and putting out calls for proposals, Canada's ministries are staying on top of current and shifting needs, as well as strategizing for the future. Aligned in their overall goals, the different government organizations seek to strengthen partnerships and improve newcomer settlement and language education outcomes.

Context

Under the theme of **Shifting Perspectives: Adapt, Adopt and Celebrate Progress**, a panel of presenters from different ministries provided updates on provincial and federal initiatives, discussed their current programs and future plans, and shared how they have adjusted to the changes brought on by the continuing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)

Mélanie Pronovost, Director of Language Training Policy, discussed the progress IRCC has made on ongoing initiatives and priorities in language training for newcomers to Canada. She provided an overview of the advancements IRCC has made to its settlement program, progress on ongoing initiatives and priorities and how IRCC has adjusted to meet clients' shifting needs.

[Recognizing the value of immigrants to the success of the country, Canada establishes an annual Immigration Levels Plan.](#)

Immigrants enrich Canada beyond measure, and no accounting of our progress over the last century and a half is complete without including the contributions of newcomers. Even as we adjust to the extraordinary challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, we cannot lose sight of the enormous benefits immigration presents to our prosperity and way of life. Newcomers bring their heritage and culture, but also their talent, ideas and perspectives.

Despite the pandemic, Canada remains committed to meeting immigration goals. The Department's first-rate selection and settlement programs respond effectively to the large numbers of people seeking a new life and new opportunities in Canada. Immigration will be crucial to the country's short-term economic recovery and long-term economic growth, especially as Canada continues to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Immigration Levels Plan promotes a managed immigration system and sets a goal for the number of permanent residents that are planned to be admitted to Canada. Applicants are selected based on a variety of factors, including economic contributions, family reunification, support for refugees, protected persons or humanitarian and compassionate needs.

The key elements of the 2021-2023 Immigration Levels Plan include the following:

- The 2021-23 plan seeks to increase immigration levels to admit 421,000 permanent residents in 2023, which is 1.08% of Canada’s population. This will help address demographic challenges of Canada’s aging and diminishing population.
- Adjusts previous targets: This most recent ambitious immigration plan also aims to offset the COVID-related shortfall in admissions due to border closures.
- Overall targets of 401,000 in 2021, 411,000 in 2022 and 421,000 in 2023.
- The Levels Plan also highlights a target for French-speaking admissions necessary to meet the 4.4% objective of French-speaking newcomers, as part of the Francophone Immigration Strategy.

Settlement is a hallmark of Canada’s approach to managed migration, and IRCC’s settlement programs are designed to ensure successful integration.

Settlement involves complex delivery and partnerships, and as immigration levels have risen, so has funding.

Settlement programming ensures that newcomers have the tools, skills and abilities to contribute and participate in the social, economic and cultural fabric of Canada. IRCC funds a full array of programming to deliver services and create welcoming communities. Importantly, successful integration involves a “whole of society” approach that connects Canadians and newcomers.

“Canada is recognized internationally for its inclusive policies that support diversity and for its unique two-way approach to integration. One of our immigration objectives, as provided for in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA), at paragraph 3(1)(e) is ‘to promote the successful integration of permanent residents into Canada, while recognizing that integration involves mutual obligations for new immigrants and Canadian society.’”
 Mélanie Pronovost

Settlement programming ensures newcomers have the tools, skills and abilities to contribute and participate in the social, economic and cultural fabric of Canada. When newcomers succeed they contribute to prosperity and public support for the immigration program.

As part of the suite of settlement services offered to newcomers, IRCC’s Settlement Program provides:

- **Language Training:** formal language training, employment-related language training and language training adapted to the needs of newcomers settling in Francophone minority communities.
- **Community Connections:** informal language learning, such as conversation circles.
- **Indirect and Support Services:** indirect services such as childminding and transportation.

While IRCC has made significant investments, the language programs are comprehensive and community-led through a large network of organizations. Investments have been aligned with migration growth to ensure that new cohorts of permanent residents have access to services.

The training programs are flexible, with courses offered full time, part time, evenings and weekends. They can be targeted to specific groups, women only, elderly or newcomer youth. Training is delivered online, as well as a blended approach of teacher-led and online classes.

Settlement programs are at a crucial point, as the number of clients accessing settlement services has grown significantly – we have seen an increase of approximately 35% in recent years.

In response to the growth, IRCC has changed its footprint and is funding new settlement service providers. In addition to the increase in the number of clients, IRCC also takes into account the profile of clients in developing programs.

For reference, the top five source countries for language training clients are China (12%), India (12%), Syria (10%), Philippines (7%) and Iran (4%). Based on the data, 54% of newcomers have some knowledge of English upon arrival, compared to 2% who have knowledge of French.

Client profiles



Settlement language priorities are also evolving and responsive to needs of our newcomer clients. Through continued engagement with language sector stakeholders, service providers and partners, IRCC has made enhancements to its programs to ensure quality services to its language clients.

Some of these enhancements include a shift to alternative modes of direct and indirect service delivery for maximum flexibility, projects to improve infrastructure and national consistency, and innovative service delivery.

IRCC is building an infrastructure to support language training across various modes of instruction.

Going forward, IRCC will be putting in place an integrated national system to deliver language instruction. Major national projects will work together to support pillars across the eLearning continuum.

Having this foundation in place prior to the start of the pandemic allowed language instruction to successfully move to a virtual environment. The new platform, launched in summer 2020, was created to support the delivery of online and blended programming.

An independent assessment, the Evaluation of Language Training Services, was published in May 2021 and is publicly available on the IRCC website.

The Evaluation of Language Training Services was conducted to provide an in-depth assessment of IRCC’s language training program. Covering the period before the pandemic, the evaluation’s primary focus was to better understand language skills progression—what works for whom, and under what conditions—with an eye toward determining the specific characteristics that influence language skills improvement for newcomers.

The secondary area of focus was whether the learning framework was adapted to address newcomers’ needs, and examined a wide range of programming features, including stakeholder engagement, instructor resources training and client enrollment support services, and programming types such as general language training, employment-related language training and literacy programming, as well as informal language learning.

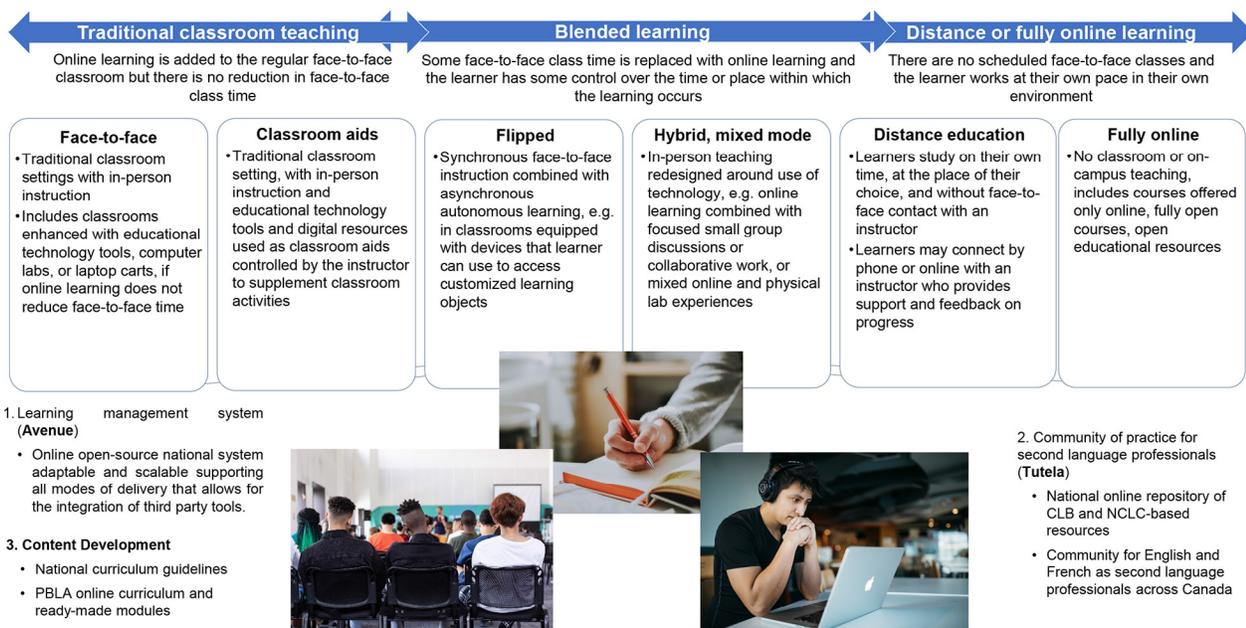
The evaluation’s key findings showed that, overall, the program is working well but also made some recommendations for improvement. In response to the findings, IRCC created a management response action plan to identify action steps and timelines for program improvements. The plan is ambitious and provides IRCC with an opportunity to review program parameters, including how we define outcomes and indicators for language investment.

IRCC is looking ahead with plans to advance its work and introduce new initiatives.

In addition to taking steps in response to the Evaluation of Language Training Services, IRCC is examining how to do more to incorporate the history of Indigenous Peoples into its curriculum.

With a commitment to recognizing and reflecting the important contributions Indigenous Peoples have made and continue to make to Canada, IRCC believes that working with Indigenous Groups to add Indigenous content to its programs will strengthen newcomers’ understanding of Canada. In particular, the Department seeks to ensure that lessons from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission are taken into account and can contribute to a shared understanding of systemic racism, diversity and inclusion. While there are already a number of IRCC-funded Indigenous initiatives being developed by individual service

Delivered through a variety of modes along the e-learning continuum



provider organizations, IRCC will work toward a unified message across the sector and provide CLB/NCLC level appropriate lesson plans and resources to instructors.

IRCC will also continue to make Canada's two official languages a priority and will continue to collaborate with the Department of Canadian Heritage to support the promotion and strengthening of French and English language training across the country.

Finally, IRCC plans to partner with provinces and territories to improve coordination in the design and delivery of language training, programming and alignment of roles and responsibilities.

Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development (MLTSD)

Ursula Lipski provided an overview of MLTSD's highlights over the past year. She shared news of COVID's impact on newcomers in MLTSD's language training program, as well as the implications for recovery from the pandemic. Ms. Lipski offered insights into the integration of MLTSD's newcomers' settlement and language training programs, which have been shifted to support the social and economic integration of newcomers.

The past year has been a year of transition for MLTSD due to new programs being placed under its responsibility.

In April of 2021, the government announced that all settlement and integration programs previously under the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services would be transitioned to MLTSD. The shift has presented an opportunity for newcomer programming in Ontario because it has reintegrated all programming, including immigrant policy, settlement language and employment programming. This will allow MLTSD to reunite all functions and create a strong and cohesive set of programs.

Settlement Programs At-a-Glance

Newcomer Settlement	Language Training	Bridge Training
Information, orientation and referral services to help newcomers start their lives in Ontario and integrate successfully. ~ 80,000 annual clients	Language assessment and training to help adult immigrants gain the language skills they need to live and work in Ontario. ~ 70,000 annual clients	Occupation-specific training, licensure preparation and employment supports to help skilled immigrants obtain employment in their field ~7,500 annual clients
Newcomer Employment & Training Initiative	Language Interpreter Services	Global Experience Ontario
New, one-year initiative to support newcomers in the recovery process. Develops tools, resources, and training to help newcomers enter or re-enter the labour market.	24/7 language interpreter services to help victims of domestic or sexual violence with language barriers access community, healthcare, and legal services. ~ 10,000 annual clients	Ontario government information service that helps newcomers navigate licensure and registration processes in non-health regulated professions and trades.

COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on newcomers.

Newcomers—women, in particular—have felt the effects of the pandemic more significantly than other groups. In addition to exacerbating employment needs for newcomers, COVID is the reason for a decrease in demand for language training services.

Additional COVID-19 impacts on newcomers:

Economic Impacts:

- Immigrants are disproportionately represented in jobs with greater exposure to COVID-19.
- 34% of front-line/essential service workers identify as visible minorities (compared with 21% in other sectors).
- Newcomers have been impacted by COVID-related job losses, both temporary and potentially permanent.
- The unemployment rate of immigrants who landed 5-10 years earlier increased from 5.7% in 2019 to 10.4% in 2020, compared to 6.7% unemployment for the Canadian born.

Health Impacts:

- Immigrants, refugees and other newcomers made up 27.6% of all COVID-19 cases in Ontario as of end September 2021—a decrease in rate (28.5%) since the end of August 2021.
- Hospitalization and death rates are higher (four and two times respectively) among individuals living in the most diverse neighbourhoods compared with the least diverse neighbourhoods.
- Service providers report that newcomers have expressed increased mental health issues during the pandemic.

COVID-19 has had an impact on all services across the board, including language training services. With travel restrictions in place, the number of newcomers decreased significantly, paralleling a decrease in the number of language training assessments and a decrease in the number of language learners from a peak of 70,000 to under 50,000. Understandably, there has been an increase in the number of virtual learners.

COVID-19 Impacts on Language Training

Impact on Program

Over the past year we have noted that:

- Fewer immigrant arrivals
- Decrease in number of language assessments
- Decrease in number of language learners
- Increase in delivery of virtual language training



Impact on Learners

- Learners with higher CLBs have adapted quickly to the virtual method of delivery
- Literacy and lower-level learners experienced more difficulties with online classes
- Some learners also faced challenges due to digital literacy issues or access to technology
- With re-opening of schools and delivery of in-person classes:
 - Learners with lower language and digital skills most likely to return to in-person classes.
 - Many higher-level language learners prefer to remain online.

MLTSD is committed to programming that addresses both the social and economic needs of immigrants.

The federal government has announced a significant increase in the expected number of immigrant arrivals over the coming years. Newcomers play a key role in economic growth and meeting the needs of the labour market. In Ontario, they make up one-third of the labour force.

“Unfortunately, they continue to face barriers to employment due to a combination of factors, including language. Proficiency in language is a key predictor of economic success and entry into the job market.”
 Ursula Lipski

Before implementing change over the summer, MLTSD held a series of consultations with stakeholders to get feedback on a proposed model of program delivery. Based on the consultations, MLTSD moved to integrate the language and settlement streams of work, with new features that are more employment oriented. Enhancing the service scope to improve employment outcomes will help newcomers in terms of career planning and supporting their recognition of foreign qualifications. The goal is to ensure they are prepared with the language skills necessary to enter the market.

MLTSD has launched a call for proposals for five-year funding. The call is open to all service providers for both settlement and language training services. Proposals have been received and are currently going through a review process that will continue into the fall. New funding decisions will be communicated to successful applicants for the next fiscal year, and contracts will be awarded for a five-year period.

Call for Proposals Features

Program Objective – Support newcomers’ social and economic integration	
Settlement and Orientation	Language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Settlement services: assessment, information, orientation and referral services • Labour market orientation: employment readiness, career planning and support for foreign qualification recognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language assessment: language proficiency assessment and referrals • Core language training: English and French language instruction • Workplace language and skills training: occupation and employment related language training
<p>Key Changes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced service scope to improve newcomer employment outcomes • Integrated and streamlined funding approach. One program with two funding streams. All funding awarded through a competitive process on a 5-year fiscal cycle. • Expanded service delivery network. All eligible applicants can apply to deliver the mix of services under both funding streams. 	

The new program model incorporates services currently delivered such as settlement, language assessment and core language training. To enhance these offerings, MLTSD has added a component for employment-related language training including workplace language and skills, and occupation-specific language training.

MLTSD is also expanding the service delivery network. Previously, language training services were only delivered by school boards in Ontario. That stream is being opened and all eligible organizations can apply to deliver both settlement and language training services.

Ministry of Education in Ontario (EDU)

Pauline McNaughton discussed the current programs and services EDU is offering to support adult learners in Ontario, many of whom began as newcomers in language training programs and moved on to other programs to achieve their goals. Ms. McNaughton shared progress on adult credit delivery, as well as EDU’s efforts to ensure that prior learning is captured and recognized for credit.

EDU has been pleased with the overall flexible adult credit delivery options available across the province but recognizes there is more to be done.

The adult credit program offered by EDU is aimed at adults seeking to complete an Ontario Secondary School diploma. Approximately 75,000 adult learners avail themselves of the programs offered by EDU each year. Half of these adult learners are between the ages of 18 and 25, which means they have many years ahead of them in the labour market.

EDU is pleased with the overall flexible adult credit delivery options available across the province but recognizes there is more to be done. In large part, the adult credit programs can support continuous intake through quadesters, and are able to have up to six terms per year. In 2019-2020, \$84.5M was provided to school boards to support adult and continuing education programs, and \$2.53M was provided to recognize prior learning for mature students.

There is a wide range of programs available through continuing education for adults.

Program offerings through Adult & Continuing Education available to adult learners include adult day school, summer school, literacy and math (outside the school day) and online learning. The most relevant and of greatest importance for new immigrants/adults is a program called “Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) for Mature Students.”

PLAR is a process whereby the knowledge and skills adults previously acquired (e.g., job training, parenting skills), in both formal and informal ways outside secondary school, are recognized

for credit. It is particularly critical for internationally educated and trained professionals to expedite their path through the Ontario education system, allowing them to earn an Ontario secondary school diploma and move on to further training, post-secondary education and/or the workplace.

The government has announced its interest in expanding the number of healthcare workers.

There have been several announcements related to the government's priority on expanding the number of personal support workers (PSWs) to address not just the current shortages, but also long-term needs and planning. For 2021-2022, the Ministry of Long-Term Care provided \$33M to support personal support worker programs offered through Ontario district school boards. Students in the program can receive up to \$7,115 for equipment, books and other fees.

Those interested in becoming personal support workers can apply through their local school board and receive their certificate in as little as five months. Highly regarded by employers, the PSW certificate helps many students get a job. The program is flexible and allows students to earn their high school diploma in conjunction with the PSW certificate. Students can also gain credits that will help them bridge to other healthcare careers in college or university programs such as nursing and pharmacy.

"Personal support worker programs attract many immigrants who come from healthcare backgrounds and are looking for a way to move into the healthcare system in Ontario."

Pauline McNaughton

The Ontario Association of Continuing Education School Board administrators have set up a dedicated website for students to learn about and locate PSW offerings at school boards in different communities: <https://cesba.com/get-my-psw/>.

Pre-Employment / Pre-Apprenticeship Training offered within Adult Credit programs

- Basic Military Training (Co-op)
- Culinary Arts
- Custodial Services
- Childcare Assistant
- Hairstyling
- Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP)
- Personal Support Worker (PSW)



Adults 21+ years of age enrolled in adult day school and/or continuing education can pursue dual credits in order to complete their Ontario Secondary School diploma.

Adult dual credit is a longstanding program that has been available to students up to the age of 20. In recent years, however, EDU has been able to add additional funding to enable adults over 21 to participate as well beginning in 2017/2018, and adult participation has been steadily growing. The program also provides access supports offered by college advisors and may also include application fees to apply to post-secondary programs. The adult dual credit program allows students to earn a secondary school credit, as well as a college credit at the same time. It also has the added benefit for many adult learners of exposing them to what a college campus or college courses will be like. It builds confidence and prepares them for what lies ahead.

Discussion

After the presentation, the audience raised key points for consideration and discussion, which were fielded by the panel.

Flexibility in program delivery has proven helpful.

The flexibility built into the design of IRCC's language program delivery services have been beneficial. The ability to take courses at various times of the day was noted as extremely helpful in the evaluation conducted about the program. Additional client support such as transportation and childcare also helped ensure that the education was available and accessible to all. While there is considerable expertise across various entities, there is a concerted effort toward a consistent national approach.

Teachers have concerns about portfolio-based language assessment (PBLA).

There is concern that PBLA has caused undue hardships for teachers and is not helping clients learn. While instructors derive value from PBLA, it can be seen as subjective, time-consuming and difficult to implement. The IRCC and MLTSD are aware of some of the issues and are continuing to make improvements, seek input and collaborate—taking various perspectives and research into consideration to improve the model.

The IRCC is making efforts to recognize foreign qualifications.

The IRCC is involved with the Foreign Credential Recognition Program under the Department of Employment and Social Development. The goal is to ensure people can make a swift integration into the employment sector. There is ongoing work at the federal level to ensure foreign credentials are taken into account.

Teachers need assistance with newcomers struggling with trauma or PTSD.

While the organizations represented on the panel have not put together a strategy or put out a call for proposals on the issue of teaching newcomers with trauma, they are aware of the importance. There is nothing to prevent ESL and FSL providers, however, from developing curriculums or programs that address these needs. The panel members were clear that they would be open to collaborating with providers interested in taking on that challenge as part of their work.

While MLTSD is concerned with economic integration, it also recognizes the importance of social integration.

MLTSD continues to remain committed to its newcomers' settlement services to support social integration. The emphasis on economic integration should not be construed to mean the social angle is not important as well. However, over the years, economic integration was recognized as a gap in programming that consistently emerged as an area of concern.

Biographies

Mélanie Pronovost

Director, Settlement and Integration Policy, Refugee, Employment and Language Policy Division, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)

Mélanie Pronovost is currently a Director in the Settlement and Integration Policy Branch at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, responsible for language training, employment and refugee resettlement policy. She has been with IRCC in various roles since 2009: with Regulatory Affairs, Legal Services, Case Management and Passport Program Strategic Direction and Partnerships.

Before joining the public sector, Ms. Pronovost worked for the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, in Tanzania, and completed her articles at Canada's largest law firm, Borden Ladner Gervais LLP. Ms. Pronovost has a law degree from the University of Ottawa, with a specialization in Public International Law, and is a member in good standing of the Law Society of Ontario.

Ursula Lipski

Manager of Program Transformation, Global Talent and Settlement Services, Ministry of Labour Training and Skills Development

Ursula Lipski is the Manager of the Program Transformation Unit of the Global Talent and Settlement Services Division in the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development (MLTSD). Ursula is responsible for program policy and design for settlement, language training and bridge training programs and services for newcomers to Ontario. She has worked with the Ontario government for close to 15 years in various managerial roles related to immigrant settlement and integration. Prior to joining the Ontario Public Service, Ursula worked in a variety of non-profit and public sector organizations in areas of mental health, public health and social and community programming.

Pauline McNaughton

Manager, Enhanced Programming, Skills Development and Apprenticeship Branch, Student Achievement Division - Ontario Ministry of Education

Pauline McNaughton is Manager of the Enhanced Programming unit of the Skills Development and Apprenticeship Branch in the Ministry of Education, collaborating closely with the Ministries of Colleges, Labour Training and Skills Development and Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services to deliver policies, strategies and programs to support engagement, transitions and pathways for all learners from Kindergarten to Adult. Previous to her past 12 years with the Ontario Government, Pauline worked in the adult education sector, serving as Executive Director, Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, Field Services Manager, AlphaPlus Centre, and Lead Teacher in the Continuing Education department of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board as well as Instructor with Arctic College on Baffin Island.



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