

SUBJECT: Improving Saskatchewan's Immigration System

SUBMITTED BY: Human Resources Committee

BACKGROUND

The sharp increase in the number of immigrants coming to Saskatchewan over the past few years through the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program (SINP) indicates that the program is effectively identifying the various kinds of people Saskatchewan needs and that potential immigrants are also seeing the value in getting nominated through the program.

As the Government of Saskatchewan has taken a more strategic approach towards attracting immigrants, there has been a significant increase in the effectiveness of SINP as a vehicle through which potential immigrants can apply to come to the province. Part of the government's strategy has been to address chronic staffing shortages in some of the immigration department's various units (i.e. the Entrepreneur Unit), by either allocating sufficient resources to undertake the necessary hiring, or through ensuring managers actually use the allocated resources to fill the vacancies.

As long as the Government of Saskatchewan continues to supply the political will and budgetary support to SINP, the number of immigrants that choose to become nominees through the program will likely continue to grow. The abundance of employment opportunities in the province has made Saskatchewan a more attractive destination for people that might have otherwise settled in another jurisdiction, and barring any unforeseen downturns in the provincial economy, that advantage will also likely be present for quite some time.

ISSUE

While overall immigration to Saskatchewan has been increasing, the ability to track Saskatchewan's retention of immigrants is still underdeveloped.

The retention of immigrants is an important issue for Saskatchewan, especially for those coming here through SINP, because the program was designed to help disperse immigrants more evenly across the country, away from the traditional destinations of Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia. Without the ability to accurately track where the immigrants stay or move to in the years subsequent to their arrival in Canada, it is difficult to evaluate whether there needs to be significantly more work done on retention programs, or whether only minor changes would suffice.

Statistics Canada's Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB) merges immigration records with tax filing information to see where immigrants are filing their taxes each year. This merged data is intended to make it easier to determine whether immigrants

continue to file taxes from the province to which they originally went to, or whether they have migrated to another jurisdiction within Canada since their arrival.

While the concept behind the IMDB seems straightforward, the database is not actually as effective as it could be. The database only contains tax filing information up until the 2011 tax year (as of March 2014) and that data cannot be accessed through the IMDB website by the general public. The public does have access to reports that are based on information contained in the IMDB, but the majority of these reports are based on information only up until the 2011 tax filing year.

Since Saskatchewan has had a significant amount of immigration growth in recent years, these reports are not very useful in determining the current rate of immigrant retention in the province. The lack of public access to the data in the IMDB also makes it difficult for people to see the more recent data from 2011 in order to make assumptions on the data.

Statistics Canada should make an effort to ensure that the tax filing and immigration data from the most recent year is made available as soon as possible to those people and organizations that would like to use the data to evaluate immigrant retention rates. If the raw data is too complicated for the average person to understand, then an effort should be made to transfer the data into visual representations or reports as soon as the raw data becomes available.

There is also a lack of follow-up surveys and interviews done with new immigrants in the years subsequent to their arrival in Canada. More of an effort needs to be made at both the federal and provincial level to conduct surveys of recent immigrants to see where they are, what kind of work they are doing, whether there are things they found cumbersome in the immigration process and whether they feel they are utilizing their skills to their full potential.

Without actually having more comprehensive survey systems in place, all of the feedback from new immigrants that could potentially be gathered through such techniques is going relatively uncollected.

There should also be a much more comprehensive process for surveying employers that participate in the immigration process. Many Saskatchewan employers have actively participated in bringing immigrants to the province in order to fill vacancies, but there should be a formal feedback mechanism through which their comments on the experience are recorded and used to improve SINP and the overall immigration process.

Another issue is the federal government's annual limit on the number of immigrants that are allowed to come to Canada. Considering that within the next five years, all of Canada's labour force growth will come from immigration, having a quota on the total allowable number of people that can come to Canada seems short-sighted, since the

country should be trying to attract as many people as possible in advance of worsening labour shortages.

Since this quota applies to overall immigration into Canada, it could potentially impact Saskatchewan's ability to attract immigrants if the quota is met and too many new immigrants end up staying in Ontario, British Columbia, or Quebec. If the Canada-wide quota is reached, it should not be allowed to limit the overall immigration rates to Saskatchewan, since the majority of those people will ultimately end up in the traditional destinations such as Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver.

While the total number of immigrants going to provinces other than Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia has increased significantly in recent years, the national quota is still a factor that could potentially penalize the other seven provinces that draw fewer immigrants than the top three destinations.

If the federal government feels that it is necessary to maintain a quota on Canadian immigration, then that quota should only apply to British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec, since most of the remaining provinces, especially Saskatchewan at the moment, need as many new people as possible to enter the labour force in order to fill the available jobs and keep their economies growing.

RECOMMENDED

1) That the Government of Saskatchewan, in partnership with the Government of Canada and other provinces and territories, create a comprehensive plan to effectively monitor the provincial and territorial retention rates of new immigrants moving to each jurisdiction. Such a plan could include making the data contained in the Longitudinal Immigration Database more up-to-date and accessible to the public, conducting a greater number of follow-up surveys and interviews with new immigrants in the years subsequent to their arrival in Canada, as well as doing post-hiring interviews and surveys with employers. This additional data will be used to more effectively determine the retention of immigrants moving to Saskatchewan, which may allow for further improvements to the province's immigration system.

2) That the Government of Canada adjust the way it calculates its annual national immigration targets so that it will not unfairly constrain the levels of immigration to non-traditional immigration areas like Saskatchewan at the expense of the primary immigrant destinations of British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec.