

## IMPROVING CANADA'S SELECTION OF ECONOMIC IMMIGRANTS

Robert Vineberg

### SUMMARY

Immigrants coming to Canada over the last two decades have been doing considerably worse in terms of economic outcomes than in previous decades and observers could be missing the real reason why. Until now, we have heard suggestions that it has to do with the changing economy, systemic racism or barriers to getting foreign work credentials recognized. But one likely possibility has not yet been seriously considered: that changes in the early 1990s to the way economic immigrants are processed may have resulted in a system that is poorer at selecting those immigrants likeliest to succeed in Canada. The good news is that this problem is fixable.

There is no question that the decline in wages and labour-force participation among immigrants, and their rise in poverty rates, is striking. While, in 1980, employed immigrant men earned 85 cents for every dollar earned by employed Canadian men, that had fallen by 2005 to 63 cents. For employed immigrant women, earnings fell from 85 cents of every dollar earned by Canadian-born women in 1980 to 65 cents in 2005.

While Canadian-born people saw entry-level earnings rise by 20 per cent between 1981 and 2007, wages for immigrants classified under the Federal Skilled Worker program went the opposite direction, actually falling by more than 20 per cent over the same period. In addition, the number of immigrants who live below Statistics Canada's low-income cut off grew by more than a third since 1991, even as the number of Canadian-born people below the cut off shrank by a third over the same period.

It is hard not to notice that the declines in outcomes began right after changes were made to the way these immigrants were evaluated for entry into Canada. Most significant was replacing in-person interviews with so-called "perfected applications" submitted by mail, and later, online. Under the previous procedure, an interview with an immigration officer would often flesh out important information concealed by an impersonal application. For example, the policy was to interview those applicants who fell just short of qualifying under Canada's

points-based system. This was in case something was discovered during the in-person interview that gave the officer reason to add extra points or recommend admission anyway. Likewise, those applicants who looked good on paper were sometimes deemed by an officer to be less qualified than their application suggested. Today, applicants typically hire lawyers or consultants to fill out their application and those professionals know how to make an application look good.

If the government wants to improve outcomes for immigrants, it should run a pilot program with two streams of applicants in one or more intake offices: assess half of them using the current procedure and the other half using the old interview method, then measure their outcomes over the years.

That should be done alongside other improvements to the immigration system, including: lifting the caps on provincial nominees, who have a stronger record of success; providing Canadian Experience Class applicants a shorter route to immigration, so they don't abandon their attempts; reintroducing a limited version of the Assisted Relative Class; and reducing larger immigration offices in overseas capitals in favour of smaller, more regional offices nearer newer immigrant pools. As the government moves to increase immigration levels, these changes could make Canada's already highly successful immigration system even more successful.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

With the federal government's recent decision to increase immigration levels, there is a need to consider how to improve our selection system for economic immigrants.<sup>1</sup> Research has pointed to the fact that immigrants admitted since the 1990s have been slower to reach average Canadian income levels. While the changing Canadian economy, latent racism and barriers to recognizing qualifications have been blamed for this decline, the quality of our system of selection of economic immigrants has rarely been blamed. However a major change in selection procedure was introduced in the early 1990s, concurrent with the start of the decline in settlement outcomes: namely, immigration officers stopped interviewing applicants and started to depend on the so-called "perfected application" submitted, first on paper and more recently, online.

This paper will examine the major changes in immigrant selection since the adoption of a non-discriminatory selection system in 1962. It will identify the major advantages and disadvantages of changes to the selection system, both in law and in practice, and will make recommendations for the improvement in the selection of skilled workers. The Canadian system of immigrant selection is widely considered one of the best in the world. Nevertheless, Canada must continue to strive to improve the system and this paper is designed to contribute to that process.

## 2. OVERVIEW OF THE EVOLUTION OF IMMIGRANT SELECTION FROM 1962 TO THE PRESENT

The modern era of immigration selection in Canada began in 1962. Prior to 1962, immigrants were selected on the basis of a preference system in which immigrants faced varying degrees of difficulty in being admitted to Canada. The most favoured were British subjects from the United Kingdom, Newfoundland (prior to Confederation in 1949), Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, and American citizens, all of whom were eligible to enter Canada provided they could support themselves until employment was found. In many cases, travel subsidies were available.

The second preference applied to citizens of Northern Europe and Scandinavia, who could enter freely on the same basis as British and Americans, although there was no travel subsidy available. The third preference applied to citizens of Central and Southern European countries, who could only enter Canada if they were agricultural workers, domestic servants, or close relatives of Canadian residents. Any other workers required a special permit issued by the minister of immigration. The fourth preference group comprised the rest of the world and admission was limited to those whose potential employer or relative in Canada could obtain a ministerial permit (Kelley and Trebilcock 2010, 192). Furthermore, Section 61 (g) of the 1952 Immigration Act provided for inadmissibility on the grounds of nationality, citizenship, ethnic origin, peculiar customs and unsuitability to Canada's climate and social conditions, among others (Canada 1952), and these were repeated in Section 20(1) of the 1953 Immigration Regulations (Canada 1953). All were blatantly discriminatory and officially remained in effect until 1962.

In 1962, then minister of citizenship and immigration Ellen Fairclough succeeded in passing regulations that eliminated the preference system and all reference to discrimination against particular groups (Canada 1962), intending instead that immigrants would be assessed on the basis of their education, training, skills and adaptability. The Globe and Mail greeted the change with a banner front-page headline: "Canada Unlocks Its Doors To All Who Possess Skills" (Langevin 1962). In 1967, similar criteria (education and training; personal qualities; occupational demand; age; pre-arranged employment; knowledge of English and French; and the presence of

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper does not deal with close family members sponsored by Canadians or permanent residents ("Family Class") nor does it deal with refugees and other humanitarian classes of immigrants.

a relative in Canada) were incorporated into the world's first points system to select immigrants (Canada 1967). The regulations also provided for Canadian residents to "nominate" their close relatives such as brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews, who received "bonus points" towards acceptance. And, finally, in 1976, a new Immigration Act was passed (Canada 1976) that eliminated the odious language of the 1952 act.

The points system continues in effect, but it has evolved over the years. The points system was adjusted somewhat in the 1978 Immigration Regulations (Canada 1978, Schedule 1). A major change came in 1993 when the Nominated Relative Class (after 1978 known as the Assisted Relative Class) was abolished. It was felt that the large point bonus to siblings in particular resulted in many immigrants arriving without the skills to succeed in Canada. Yet cancelling the Assisted Relative Class resulted in a further concentration of immigration to Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. In 1991, immigration to the three Prairie provinces was 13 per cent of the national total (CIC 1999, Table IM8). By 1997, this had declined to 8.5 per cent (CIC 2007, 37). Several provinces pressured Citizenship and Immigration Canada (since renamed Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada) to allow them to have a say in selection to address their needs that, apparently, the federal system of selection was not able to address. The Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) was created in 1998 to allow provincial and territorial governments to select a certain number of economic immigrants to meet the unique needs of their local labour markets (CIC 2011, 1).

The PNP has been an enormous success and has been largely responsible for an increasing number of immigrants choosing to settle outside of Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. By 2015, immigration to the Prairies had more than tripled since 1997 and represented 27.4 per cent of Canadian immigration (Canada 2017). While it is true that the economy of the Prairie provinces has been strong over most of this period and has probably served as a "pull factor," the region's economy had been strong in the past and immigration to the Prairies remained well below what it should have been in proportion to the population. The only difference in the last 20 years has been the PNP, so credit for this increase must go to the PNP. However, since 2009, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) has imposed caps on the program that set the number of applicants a province can approve, limiting provinces' ability to grow their labour markets and provincial population (El-Assal 2017, 24-27).

The current legislation, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA), was approved by Parliament in 2001 (Canada 2001) and came into effect the following year with the introduction of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations (Canada 2002). The points system included in the new legislation focused on skills and was known as the "Human Capital" model (Canada 2002, sections 78-83). In 2008, a major change occurred with the introduction of the Canadian Experience Class (CEC) that allowed individuals already in Canada, who had Canadian work experience in higher-skill jobs or who were foreign post-secondary graduates, to apply through a simplified assessment that recognized their Canadian experience. This was consistent with the government's priorities to "provide further incentives to retain educated and experienced talent" and "to support Canada's ability to compete internationally for skilled workers, and international students" (CIC 2013, 81).

Recently, enormous changes were made to the discretionary power of the minister to allow the minister to make major changes to the selection system, changes previously only allowed by regulation. In 2008, the omnibus Budget Bill included a provision to issue ministerial instructions concerning immigrant selection that previously required amendments to regulations. These powers were further expanded in 2012. A subsequent major change in the selection system was

the introduction of the Express Entry system, which led, initially, to a move away from the Human Capital model of selection. And all of this occurred without public or parliamentary debate (Banting, 2015).<sup>2</sup>

The Express Entry system involves placing limits on the number of immigrant applications in the economic streams and adding a second assessment system in addition to the points system defined in the IRPA regulations. Prior to Express Entry, there had been no limit on the number of applications and a backlog of hundreds of thousands of application had built up. Express Entry has dealt with this problem by creating an “Expression of Interest” stage, at which potential immigrants complete an application to apply for immigration to Canada. That “expression of interest,” if it meets the minimum entry criteria, is placed in the Express Entry pool and assessed according to the “Comprehensive Rating System” (CRS) established by ministerial instruction, not by regulation. On a regular basis, the highest-ranking applications are selected and invited to make a formal application to immigrate. The numbers of applications invited are based on IRCC’s assessment of the number of applications required to meet the annual levels established by the minister (IRCC 2018a).

Originally, the CRS was designed to require all but the best candidates to have approved job offers and 600 of the 1,200 available points were allocated to having a job. This focus on jobs, rather than human capital, resulted in large numbers of people with job offers in mid-range skills being accepted, and only about 40 per cent selected on the basis of their human capital. Accordingly, in the fall of 2016, the minister changed the CRS by lowering the maximum points allocated for a job from 600 to 200 points, and in 2017 further changes provided a small number of points for candidates with siblings in Canada (IRCC 2016 and IRCC 2018b). This has resulted in a system more focused on human capital (IRCC 2018d, 15), but it also means that now the CRS (IRCC 2018c) is not that dissimilar to the points system in the regulations (IRCC 2017a) that every Federal Skilled Worker applicant must qualify against in addition to the CRS. Table 1 provides a comparison of the two rating systems. The table demonstrates that the major difference is that some weightings are higher in the CRS, for instance, up to 23 per cent for job offers compared to 10 per cent in the regulations. The CRS has additional points for skills transferability, but this is roughly comparable to the regulations adaptability assessment.

---

<sup>2</sup> See Alboim and Cohl (2012) for an overview of changes to the immigration program in the period 2008 to 2012.

**TABLE 1 THE COMPREHENSIVE RANKING SYSTEM AND THE REGULATORY POINTS SYSTEM COMPARED**

Comprehensive Ranking System (CRS)		Points				Δ Regs vs. CRS	%	Points	System (Regs)
Factor		With Spouse		No Spouse	%			Points	Factor
		A. Core/							
Human Capital Factors	Age	100		110	13%	1%	12%	12	Age
	Education	140		150	17%	8%	25%	25	Education
	Official Language Proficiency	150		160	18%	10%	28%	28	Languages
	Canadian Work Experience	70		80	9%	6%	15%	15	Work Experience (anywhere)
B. Spouse's Factors									
	Education	10							
	Official Language Proficiency	20							
	Canadian Work Experience	10							
Sub-Total A+B			500						
C. Skills Transferability									
	Post-secondary degree and strong language proficiency		50		6%	6%			
	Post-secondary degree and Canadian Work Experience		50		6%	6%			
Sub-Total C			100						
Sub-Total A+B+C			600						
D. Additional Factors									
	Sibling in Canada		15		2%		10%	10	Adaptability (includes work or study in Canada or close relative in Canada)
	Skill in 2nd Official Language		30		3%				
	Post Secondary education in Canada		30		3%				
	Arranged Employment*		200		23%	13%	10%	10	
	Provincial Nominee Cert.**		600		50%				
Maximum Allocation Part D			600						
Total with Provincial Nomination			1200						
Total without Provincial Nomination			875		100%		100%	100	Total
Pass Mark			Depends on Draw				67		Pass Mark

\* Most applicants only receive 50 points. Only Senior Executive positions receive the full 200 points.

\*\* Provincial Nominees are not assessed under the regulatory points system.

The fact that IRCC is using two not very dissimilar selection systems for the same applicants is inefficient, as it adds to the assessment workload and it is also less than transparent for something as important as how Canada selects its immigrants. Criteria established by regulation require a public consultation period before they can be approved by cabinet. The CRS and any changes to it require only the direction of the minister.

Another matter of concern is that qualified applicants who are already in Canada, such as temporary foreign workers and foreign post-secondary graduates, who we want to stay in Canada and qualify for the Canadian Experience Class, now have to go through the Express Entry system. This creates an unnecessary element of uncertainty for them in contradiction of the original objectives of the CEC to encourage and facilitate such applicants. Many are having trouble getting potential employers to commit to them without an assurance that they will become permanent residents. This results in excellent candidates for immigration — people who are already here and, through schooling or work experience or both, have already largely adapted to Canada — deciding to leave

Canada.

### **3. RECONFIGURATION OF THE IMMIGRATION DELIVERY SYSTEM: ‘WE CAN SERVE YOU BETTER BY SEEING YOU LESS’<sup>3</sup>**

Changes to how Canada operates its immigration system can involve bureaucratic as well as political decisions. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, federal finances were under great pressure and the Immigration Department needed to reduce processing costs. It established centralized processing centres in Canada to which so-called “perfected applications” would be sent. The applicant would never see an immigration officer in most cases. Similarly, the “perfected application” was also adopted in Canadian offices overseas and the network of immigration offices was radically reduced by closing many of the smaller offices and concentrating work in regional processing centres in places such as London, Paris, Damascus (now closed), Buffalo, N.Y. (later moved to New York City), Hong Kong and New Delhi. The work was handled by mail and, again, most applicants never saw an immigration officer. The associate deputy minister at the time summed up the changes, saying “We can serve you better by seeing you less.”

Prior to the service reconfiguration almost all economic immigrants underwent a selection interview by an immigration officer trained to determine whether the qualifications and experience claimed by the applicant were indeed accurate. The process included inviting for an interview those applicants whose points total was just under the pass mark. It was recognized that, at the interview, officers might not only determine that an applicant who looked great on paper actually did not qualify, but they might also discover that an applicant whose paper application was weak was actually fully qualified to emigrate to Canada. This could occur through a reassessment of the point total based on information obtained during the interview, in which case the application would proceed or be refused on the basis of points. Alternatively, officers could also exercise their discretion to substitute their own evaluation, based on their own assessment, regardless of the point total (Canada 2002, s. 76(3) and (4)).<sup>4</sup> This almost never takes place any more. However, due to the requirement to have a perfect application and in the face of complex instructions, more and more, applicants have turned for help to lawyers and immigration consultants to complete their applications. Lawyers and consultants are paid to ensure that the paper (now electronic) applications put the best possible light on the applicant. This does not necessarily mean that the applicant is more likely to settle successfully in Canada.

### **4. SETTLEMENT OUTCOMES**

Since the 1990s through to the first part of the current decade, economic outcomes of immigrants have consistently declined on the basis of several factors when compared with Canadian-born people. Table 2 below shows that wages among immigrants have declined, their labour-force participation has declined and the proportion of immigrants with incomes less than the Statistics Canada low-income cut off has increased by one-third since 1991, while the number of Canadian-born people below the cut off has declined by one-third (CIMI 2018).

---

<sup>3</sup> This section is based on the author’s personal experience. To my knowledge, there has been no published research on this issue.

<sup>4</sup> Some might fear that such a determination might be subject to bias on the part of immigration officers. However, an officer’s recommendation to approve or reject despite the points score must be reviewed and approved by the officer’s supervisor. In my own experience, I recommended the use of “positive” discretion far more often than I recommended “negative” discretion.

**TABLE 2 ECONOMIC INDICATORS OF IMMIGRANT SETTLEMENT OUTCOMES**

Time Period	Indicator								
	Wages			Proportion with income below StatsCan low income cut-off			Labour Force Participation		
	Immigrants	Canadian-born	Δ	Immigrants	Canadian-born	Δ	Immigrants	Canadian-born	Δ
1991-1995	\$33,627	\$32,607	3.0%	14.8%	19.2%	-30.0%	78.2%	80.0%	-2.3%
1996-2000	\$37,376	\$37,431	0.0%	26.5%	18.3%	45.0%	74.0%	78.5%	-5.7%
2001-2005	\$41,344	\$41,863	-1.2%	21.9%	15.0%	46.0%	61.2%	68.1%	-10.0%
2006-2010	\$46,336	\$47,525	-2.5%	22.1%	13.8%	60.0%	77.3%	80.9%	-4.4%
2011 -	\$54,699	\$56,369	-3.0%	20.0%	13.2%	51.5%	73.2%	76.8%	-4.9%

Note: Statistics Canada uses the term 'non-immigrant' rather than 'Canadian-born'. 'Canadian-born' is used here so as not to be confused with immigration usage of 'non-immigrant' to refer to temporary migrants.

Source: The Canadian Index for Measuring Integration. [www.integrationindex.ca](http://www.integrationindex.ca)

A recent government report showed that while the disparity in labour-force participation of immigrants and Canadian-born people is the lowest among OECD countries, the 2006 Census showed that earning disparities between recent immigrants and Canadian-born workers continued to increase in the first decade of the 2000s. While, in 1980, immigrant men with employment income earned 85 cents for every dollar earned by Canadian-born men, this had dropped to 67 cents in 2000 and to 63 cents in 2005. The earnings ratio of immigrant women to Canadian-born women fell even faster, from 85 cents in 1980 to 65 cents in 2005 (Kustec 2012, 16). While the Canadian average entry-level employment income (in 2008 dollars) grew from just over \$35,000 in 1981 to about \$42,000 in 2007, that of immigrants classified under Federal Skilled Workers fell from over \$45,000 in 1981 to under \$35,000 in 2007 (Kustec 2012, 16,17).

Picot and Sweetman (2005) argue that recent cohorts of immigrants have been less successful in closing the earnings gap between themselves and Canadian-born workers. Picot and colleagues in 2007 also provide evidence that recent cohorts of immigrants are more likely to remain in the low-income group for longer periods of time (Picot et al. 2007). Picot and Lu followed up with a further report in 2017 comparing immigrants and Canadian-born people in chronic low income, which is defined as low income lasting for five consecutive years or more. While the proportion of immigrants in chronic low income fell from 16.3 per cent in 2004 to 12.3 per cent in 2012, the proportion of Canadian-born people fell much more rapidly from 6.1 to 3.7 per cent. In 2000, chronic low income was 2.6 times more prevalent among immigrants than Canadian-born people, but by 2012 it was 3.3 times higher. As would be expected, the situation was least bad among economic immigrants where the chronic-low-income rate in 2012 was 10.2 per cent — lower than the overall immigrant average, but still 2.75 times worse than for Canadian-born people (Picot and Lu 2017, 12-14).

By contrast, the earnings of those admitted under the Provincial Nominee Program have continuously increased since the arrival of the first provincial nominees in 1999. Their entry-level income (in 2008 dollars) increased from just over \$30,000 in 1999 to about \$43,000 in 2007, in which year, the PNP average entry-level income exceeded that of those admitted as Federal Skilled Workers (Kustec 2012, 17). One of the reasons for the higher entry-level wages is that many provincial nominees had already been working in Canada as temporary foreign workers prior to their PNP application. A recent evaluation of the PNP has indicated that, for the most part and in most provinces and territories, it is working well and meeting its objectives, which include meeting regional labour-market needs and a better nationwide distribution of immigrants (IRCC 2017b, 7, 31).

A more recent report looking at annual income of immigrants relative to the Canadian national average for the period 1981 to 2011 shows that entry-level (one year after landing) earnings for

Federal Skilled Worker applicants actually exceeded the Canadian average for most of the 1980s, but since the 1990s have been consistently below the Canadian average. On a positive note, within three years, most Federal Skilled Worker cohorts catch up to the Canadian average (Dempsey 2014, 2). The same report, however, shows that with the introduction of the Provincial Nominee class in 1999, principal applicants in this category have had, and continue to have higher than the Canadian average income for the year since arrival and afterwards (Dempsey, 2014, 4).

Statistics Canada has reported that data from tax returns in 2016 indicate that the median entry wages of immigrant tax filers in 2015 who had become permanent residents a year earlier in 2014 were \$24,000, compared to \$36,000 for Canadian-born people. While the gap closes over time for most immigrants, some are more successful than others. For example, members of the Canadian Experience Class who had already been working in Canada on temporary work permits but became permanent residents in 2014, reported a median income of \$53,000. By comparison, provincial nominees had a median income of \$37,000 or slightly above the Canadian-born figure, but Federal Skilled Workers had a median income of only \$26,000, barely above the median income for all immigrants, including Refugees and Family Class members who are not selected for economic reasons (Statistics Canada, 2017).

Many studies, including Nadeau (2011), list the usual factors considered in successful economic outcomes, such as arranged employment, language proficiency, education, Canadian experience and relative youth. However, no reports have suggested that selection following an interview with a Canadian immigration officer may be an important factor, despite the fact that interviews were stopped at more or less the same time that settlement outcomes for economic immigrants began to decline. This, and how Canada configures its selection grid, may possibly point to improved settlement outcomes.

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE THE IMMIGRANT-SELECTION SYSTEM**

Canada's immigrant-selection system is among the best in the world and elements of it have been emulated by many countries. That is not to say that we can't improve it. The foregoing discussion of settlement outcomes suggests that we need to do just that. There are a number of ways that this can be done in various parts of the selection system.

### **Recommendation 1:**

#### **Lift the caps imposed on the number of provincial nominees.**

Income data and the federal government's own evaluation (IRCC 2017b) demonstrate that the Provincial Nominee Program is very successful. Given the higher overall immigration levels that the federal government has committed to, there is room to increase PNP allocations to provinces and territories.

### **Recommendation 2:**

#### **Eliminate the Comprehensive Ranking System for Express Entry and use the existing points system in the regulations.**

Now that the points for employment in CRS have been reduced, both the points system in the regulations and the CRS are largely comparable. There is no apparent reason for two separate assessment systems. If the points system does not reflect every component of the CRS, then IRCC should proceed with a regulatory submission to amend the points system, with all the legal

transparency involved in that process. Ministerial instructions could still be used to adjust the points allocated to individual criteria and to set the number of applications to be processed. IRCC could easily use the regulatory points system to populate the Express Entry pool and draw people out of the pool in much the same way it has used the CRS. Why add a second points system when the regulatory one, properly administered, would work fine?

### **Recommendation 3:**

#### **Exempt qualified Canadian Experience Class applicants from the Express Entry system.**

IRCC should exempt qualified CEC cases from Express Entry. These persons should not be penalized by having to wait in the Express Entry pool. Express Entry works well to control the number of applicants from abroad, but it is simply another unneeded barrier for applicants within Canada whom we want to encourage to stay in Canada and become permanent residents.

### **Recommendation 4:**

#### **Reintroduce a limited version of the Assisted Relative Class, restricted to siblings only.**

The introduction in the Express Entry CRS of points for the presence of a sibling in Canada willing to assist is acknowledgement that close relatives do assist in the settlement of immigrants. The government should go a step further and reintroduce a limited version of the former Assisted Relative Class, but restrict it to adult siblings only, and the bonus points awarded should not exceed 15 per cent of the total possible. The sibling in Canada should be required to complete a legal undertaking of support, as is the case for Family Class sponsorships.

### **Recommendation 5:**

#### **Reconfigure IRCC's overseas network of offices to have more small offices closer to pools of potential immigrants.**

IRCC's network of overseas offices needs to be reconfigured to reflect the realities of the digital era. The large processing offices in expensive world capitals should be reduced in size and a larger number of smaller offices should be opened closer to pools of potential immigrants. This broader network would allow immigration officers both to promote Canada in more areas around the world that have been ignored or underserved over the past two decades and to provide interview locations closer to immigrant applicants (see Recommendation 6).<sup>5</sup>

### **Recommendation 6:**

#### **Run a pilot project in which immigration officers return to interviewing applicants to determine whether most economic immigrants ought to be subject to a selection interview.**

As noted above, poorer economic immigrant settlement outcomes coincide with move to a "perfected application" mail-in (now electronic application) system in the early 1990s. While this is circumstantial evidence, the correlation is striking. To determine whether there is a cause and

---

<sup>5</sup> It is likely that posting immigration officers from high-cost cities to lower-cost cities might result in operational savings.

effect, IRCC should run a substantial multi-year pilot project in which immigration officers return to interviewing applicants. The current online-only model encourages immigration consultants to prepare “made-to-order” applications that cannot be properly assessed without an interview. Also, our largest missions are in the most expensive cities in the world (London, Paris and New York, for example). Smaller missions without large management overhead and closer to immigrant source areas may be more effective and efficient in today’s wired world. Interviews would also allow officers to ensure that applicants can speak English or French as claimed. The current language-testing regime is open to fraud since it is administered by third parties.

Arguments against returning to interviewing applicants will, no doubt, include the additional cost. The pilot project should therefore include provision for cost control. It could be run at two or three large immigration offices abroad where volumes would be sufficient to have two teams in place, one of which would continue to process cases without interviews and one of which would interview applicants.<sup>6</sup> Effectiveness of the immigration process, not just cost, ought to be the determining factor, but any cost implications need be determined.

Over the length of the pilot project, the settlement outcomes of immigrants who were interviewed could be compared with those who were not in order to determine whether there is a significant difference in settlement success.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has examined the major changes in immigrant selection since the adoption of a non-discriminatory selection system in 1962. It has identified the major advantages and disadvantages of changes to the selection system both in law and in practice and has made recommendations for improvements in the selection of skilled workers.

The most important recommendation may well be the last recommendation. I believe that immigration has to do not just with workers, but with people, all of whom are individual and many of whom do not fit exactly into the carefully crafted categories of the immigration legislation. There needs to be the opportunity in the selection process to assess the real person, not just the version represented in a paper or electronic immigration application. This will result in accepting some who are not being accepted now and refusing some who are being accepted now, but overall, allowing those best able to settle successfully in Canada to become permanent residents. I strongly believe that this assessment can only be done in person, by a skilled immigration officer.

All six recommendations, if implemented, would improve the selection and processing of immigrants to Canada and serve to improve Canada’s excellent selection system for economic immigrants.

---

<sup>6</sup> Certain types of economic immigrants who in the past often had their interviews waived, such as people with previous Canadian work experience and senior inter-company transferees, would be excluded from the pilot and would not need to be interviewed.

## 7. REFERENCES

- Alboim, Naomi and Karen Cohl. 2012. *Shaping the Future: Canada's rapidly changing immigration policies*, Toronto: Maytree Foundation.
- Banting, Keith. 2015. "Beyond Government by Surprise." Paper presented at the National Metropolis Conference, Vancouver, March 2015.
- Canada. 1952. R.S.C. 1952, c. 325, *Immigration Act*.
- Canada. 1953. *Immigration Regulations*, Order in Council, P.C. 1953-0859, May 26, 1953.
- Canada. 1962. *Immigration Regulations*, Order-in-Council P.C. 1962-0082, January 18, 1962.
- Canada. 1967. *Immigration Regulations*, Order-in-Council P.C. 1967-1616, August 16, 1967.
- Canada. 1976. *Immigration Act*, R.S.C. 1976-77 c. 52.
- Canada. 1978. *Immigration Regulations, 1978* (Order in Council, P.C. 1978-0486).
- Canada. 2001. S.C. 2001, c.27, *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA)*.
- Canada. 2002. SOR 2002-227, *Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations (IRPA Regs)*.
- Canada. 2017. "Statistics and Open Data – Facts and Figures 2015." Accessed May 26, 2018.  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/reports-statistics/statistics-open-data.html>.
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). 1999. *Immigration Statistics, 1996*. Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services.
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). 2007. *Facts and Figures 2006*. Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services.
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). 2011. Evaluation Division, *Evaluation of the Provincial Nominee Program*. Ottawa: CIC.
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). 2015. Evaluation Division, *Evaluation of the Canadian Experience Class*. Ottawa: CIC.
- Canadian Index for Measuring Integration (CIMI). Accessed May 12, 2018.  
<https://www.integrationindex.ca>.
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). 2015. "Express Entry System." Workshop presentation at the National Metropolis Conference, Vancouver, March 2015. (CIC, 2015).
- Cote, Langevin. 1962. "Canada Unlocks Its Doors to All Who Possess Skills," *The Globe and Mail*, January 20.
- Dempsey, Coleen. 2014. *Annual income of Immigrants Relative to the Canadian National Average, 1981-2011*. Ottawa. Research and Evaluation Branch, Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/reports-statistics/research/annual-income-immigrants-relative-canadian-national-average-1981-2011.html>.
- El-Assal, Kareem. 2017. *A New Era – Canadian Immigration Governance in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada.

- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). 2016. “An Overview of Changes to Express Entry – Fall 2016,” PowerPoint presentation.
- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). 2017a. Six Selection Factors—Federal Skilled Workers. Accessed May 13, 2018. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/immigrate-canada/express-entry/become-candidate/eligibility/federal-skilled-workers/six-selection-factors-federal-skilled-workers.html>.
- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). 2017b. Evaluation Division. *Evaluation of the Provincial Nominee Program*, Ottawa 2017.
- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). 2018a. “How Express Entry Works.” Accessed May 13, 2018. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/immigrate-canada/express-entry/works.html>.
- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). 2018b. “What changes have recently been made to Express Entry?” Accessed May 13, 2018. [http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/helpcentre/answer.asp?qnum=1318&top=29&\\_ga=2.263637836.1768802141.1522188256-243031271.1518817819](http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/helpcentre/answer.asp?qnum=1318&top=29&_ga=2.263637836.1768802141.1522188256-243031271.1518817819).
- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). 2018c. “Comprehensive Ranking System (CRS) Criteria – Express Entry.” Accessed May 13, 2018. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/immigrate-canada/express-entry/become-candidate/criteria-comprehensive-ranking-system/grid.html>.
- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). 2018d. *Express Entry Year-End Report 2017*, Ottawa: IRCC. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/express-entry-year-end-report-2017.html>.
- Kelley, Ninette and Michael Trebilcock. 2010. *The Making of the Mosaic, A History of Canadian Immigration Policy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Kustec, Stan. 2012. *The role of migrant labour supply in the Canadian labour market*. Ottawa: Research and Evaluation Branch, Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/reports-statistics/research/role-migrant-labour-supply-canadian-labour-market.html>.
- Nadeau, Serge. 2011. *The Economic Contribution of Immigration in Canada—Recent Developments: What do we know? What does it mean for policy?* Ottawa: Research Group on the Economics of Immigration, University of Ottawa.
- Picot, Garnett, Feng Hou and Simon Coulombe. 2007. *Chronic Low Income and Low-income Dynamics Among Recent Immigrants*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada – Catalogue no. 11F0019MIE – No. 294.
- Picot, Garnett and Yuqian Lu. 2017. *Chronic Low Income Among Immigrants in Canada and its Communities*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada – Catalogue no. 11F0019M – No. 397. Available at <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11f0019m/11f0019m2017397-eng.htm>.
- Picot, Garnet and Arthur Sweetman. 2005. *The Deteriorating Economic Welfare of Immigrants and Possible Causes: Update 2005*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada; and Kingston: School of Policy Studies, Queen’s University. Catalogue 11F0019MIE No. 262.
- Statistics Canada. 2017. *The Daily*, “Income and mobility of immigrants, 2015.” Accessed October 23, 2018. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/171127/dq171127a-eng.htm>.

## About the Author

**Robert Vineberg's** career in the Federal Public Service spanned 35 years, of which 28 were with the immigration program, serving abroad, in policy positions in Ottawa and, as Director General of Citizenship and Immigration Canada's Prairies and Northern Territories Region, based in Winnipeg. He retired in 2008. Mr. Vineberg has published several peer reviewed articles on immigration history and on military history. His book, *Responding to Immigrants' Settlement Needs: The Canadian Experience* (Springer), was published in 2012. He co-edited and contributed two chapters to *Integration and Inclusion of Newcomers and Minorities Across Canada* (McGill Queen's University Press, 2011), and has contributed chapters to *Immigration Regulation in Federal States: Challenges and Responses in Comparative Perspective* (Springer, 2014) and *Immigrant Experiences in North America* (Canadian Scholars' Press, 2015). His chapter, "The Winds of Change: Ellen Fairclough and the Removal of Discriminatory Immigration Barriers" has just been published in *Reassessing the Rogue Tory - Canadian Foreign Relations in the Diefenbaker Era* (UBC Press, 2018). Mr. Vineberg has a BA in History from the University of Toronto as well as an MA in Canadian History and a Graduate Diploma in Public Administration, both from Carleton University, in Ottawa.

## ABOUT THE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY

The School of Public Policy has become the flagship school of its kind in Canada by providing a practical, global and focused perspective on public policy analysis and practice in areas of energy and environmental policy, international policy and economic and social policy that is unique in Canada.

The mission of The School of Public Policy is to strengthen Canada's public service, institutions and economic performance for the betterment of our families, communities and country. We do this by:

- *Building capacity in Government* through the formal training of public servants in degree and non-degree programs, giving the people charged with making public policy work for Canada the hands-on expertise to represent our vital interests both here and abroad;
- *Improving Public Policy Discourse outside Government* through executive and strategic assessment programs, building a stronger understanding of what makes public policy work for those outside of the public sector and helps everyday Canadians make informed decisions on the politics that will shape their futures;
- *Providing a Global Perspective on Public Policy Research* through international collaborations, education, and community outreach programs, bringing global best practices to bear on Canadian public policy, resulting in decisions that benefit all people for the long term, not a few people for the short term.

The School of Public Policy relies on industry experts and practitioners, as well as academics, to conduct research in their areas of expertise. Using experts and practitioners is what makes our research especially relevant and applicable. Authors may produce research in an area which they have a personal or professional stake. That is why The School subjects all Research Papers to a double anonymous peer review. Then, once reviewers comments have been reflected, the work is reviewed again by one of our Scientific Directors to ensure the accuracy and validity of analysis and data.

### The School of Public Policy

University of Calgary, Downtown Campus  
906 8th Avenue S.W., 5th Floor  
Calgary, Alberta T2P 1H9  
Phone: 403 210 3802

---

#### DISTRIBUTION

Our publications are available online at [www.policyschool.ca](http://www.policyschool.ca).

#### DISCLAIMER

The opinions expressed in these publications are the authors' alone and therefore do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the supporters, staff, or boards of The School of Public Policy.

#### COPYRIGHT

Copyright © Vineberg 2018. This is an open-access paper distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons license [CC BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/), which allows non-commercial sharing and redistribution so long as the original author and publisher are credited.

#### ISSN

ISSN 2560-8312 The School of Public Policy Publications (Print)  
ISSN 2560-8320 The School of Public Policy Publications (Online)

#### DATE OF ISSUE

December 2018

#### MEDIA INQUIRIES AND INFORMATION

For media inquiries, please contact Morten Paulsen at 403-220-2540. Our web site, [www.policyschool.ca](http://www.policyschool.ca), contains more information about The School's events, publications, and staff.

#### DEVELOPMENT

For information about contributing to The School of Public Policy, please contact Sharon deBoer-Fyie by telephone at 403-220-4624 or by e-mail at [sharon.deboerfyie@ucalgary.ca](mailto:sharon.deboerfyie@ucalgary.ca).

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS BY THE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY

### SOCIAL POLICY TRENDS: DURATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT IN ALBERTA

<https://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Social-Policy-Trends-UR-Duration-November-2018.pdf>  
Ronald Kneebone and Margarita Wilkins | November 2018

### ALBERTA'S LONG-TERM FISCAL FUTURE

<https://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/AB-Fiscal-Future-Tombe.pdf>  
Trevor Tombe | November 2018

### THE PROS AND CONS OF CARBON TAXES AND CAP-AND-TRADE SYSTEMS

<https://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Carbon-Pricing-Wood.pdf>  
Joel Wood | November 2018

### ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY TRENDS: CARBON REBATES UNLIKELY TO UNDERMINE INCENTIVES

<https://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Energy-Prices-and-Rebates-EEP-Trends-Nov-2018.pdf>  
G. Kent Fellows, Trevor Tombe and Brendan Boyd | November 2018

### HOUSING, HOMELESSNESS AND POVERTY

<https://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Homelessness-Kneebone.pdf>  
Ronald Kneebone | November 2018

### SOCIAL POLICY TRENDS: MONTHLY RENT PAYMENTS IN THE TWENTY LARGEST CANADIAN CENSUS METROPOLITAN AREAS (2017)

<https://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Social-Policy-Trends-Canada-Rents-October-2018.pdf>  
Margarita Wilkins and Ronald Kneebone | October 2018

### ASSESSING POLICY SUPPORT FOR EMISSIONS-INTENSIVE AND TRADE-EXPOSED INDUSTRIES

<https://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Assessing-EITE-Policy-Winter-Dobson.pdf>  
Sarah Dobson and Jennifer Winter | October 2018

### TAX POLICY TRENDS: CANADIAN POLICY MAKERS CONSIDER RESPONSE TO U.S. TAX OVERHAUL

<https://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Tax-Trends-US-Tax-Overhaul-Mintz-Bazel-Final.pdf>  
Jack Mintz and Philip Bazel | October 2018

### FISCAL POLICY TRENDS: ALBERTA'S GOVERNMENT SPENDING: HOW BIG A PROBLEM?

<https://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Fiscal-Trends-AB-Gov-Spending-McMillan.pdf>  
Melville McMillan | October 2018

### CANADA'S PROGRESSIVE TRADE AGENDA AND A FREE TRADE AGREEMENT WITH CHINA: ARE THEY INCOMPATIBLE

<https://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Progressive-Trade-Agenda-Stephens-final.pdf>  
Hugh Stephens | October 2018

### 50 YEARS OF GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA BUDGETING

<https://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/50-Years-AB-Budget-Kneebone-Wilkins.pdf>  
Ronald Kneebone and Margarita Wilkins | October 2018

### SOCIAL POLICY TRENDS: HEALTH VERSUS SOCIAL SPENDING BY CANADIAN PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS

<https://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Social-Policy-Trends-Health-vs-Social-Spending-September-2018.pdf>  
Margarita Wilkins and Ronald Kneebone | September 2018

### WHY ALBERTA NEEDS A FISCAL CONSTITUTION

<https://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Fiscal-Constitution-Morton-final.pdf>  
F.L. (Ted) Morton | September 2018