



MOSAIC

Together we advance an inclusive and thriving Canada.

Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

BC Budget 2021 Consultation Submission

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As one of the largest federally funded settlement organizations in BC, MOSAIC is proud of its long-term partnership with the Province of British Columbia; whether it is in providing settlement support for newcomers with temporary status, promoting diversity and multiculturalism, or delivering employment programs to BC residents. We welcome the opportunity to share with you recommendations that, in MOSAIC's opinion, will lead to the improvement of the well-being and labour outcomes of newcomers in our Province.

1. **Re-Skilling Programs for Newcomers**

British Columbia lost close to 400,000 jobs between February and April of this year. According to Statistics Canada, employment among very recent immigrants fell by 23% compared to 14% among those born in Canada. This is attributed to immigrants being more likely to work in industries that have been particularly affected by COVID-19, such as retail and hospitality.

Study after study shows that even during times of economic growth, recent immigrants have higher unemployment rates than those born in Canada. Newcomers in general are more likely to be in jobs that under-utilize their education, skills and experience. Under-employment of newcomers is often attributed to the need to improve the credential recognition process. While credential recognition is important, it is not the only barrier as we also witness significant under-utilization of newcomers in unregulated positions. We believe that the most significant barrier lies in the inability to provide newcomers with on-the-job experience that would allow employers to test their readiness and provide feedback on actual training gaps, as well as equip newcomers with Canadian experience, networks, and references.

The evolving COVID-19 pandemic will have a compounding effect on the unemployment rate of newcomers and their ability to enter and/or re-enter the labour market. Newcomers will face more competition for scarce job opportunities and find it even more difficult to obtain Canadian work experience. In addition, many newcomers are not well represented in sectors that are currently recruiting and will need supported referrals, training and re-skilling in order to gain employment.

Recommendation #1:

Create funding dedicated to newcomer re-skilling programs that newcomer serving organizations can design and deliver in partnership with employers and business associations. These should be driven by employer needs, combining technical training with training on Canadian workplace culture, and on-the-job training experience allowing employers to test-drive talent.





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Given the compounding effect of the pandemic on newcomers' ability to enter or re-enter the workforce, newcomers will require a customized approach in order to succeed. Targeted support will need to include assessment of skills, qualifications and experience, pre-employment and post-placement support, orientation to Canadian workplaces, occupation-specific training for in-demand job sectors, hands-on workplace experience through practicums, temporary employment, and mentoring, as well as financial support to help with necessary skills and language training.

2. Digital Equity for Vulnerable Populations

As many have noted, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the weaknesses and inequities in our society. As access to timely information, benefits and financial supports, and learning have all moved online over the past two months, we witnessed first hand that access to technology and high-speed internet, that many of us take for granted, is a major obstacle for newcomer communities. Despite the importance of high-speed Internet, almost half of Canadian households with an annual income of \$30,000 or less do not have access.

Immigrants, refugees, migrant workers, isolated newcomer seniors, youth and low income families are the least likely to have the resources and skills to access government programs and benefits they often depend on, especially in a time of crisis. We see, through our direct service to vulnerable clients, the challenge that lack of access to high-speed internet connection or a working digital device, coupled with low digital skills, and lack of fluency in English or French, can create in terms of accessing vital social programs and benefits.

Recommendation #2:

We ask the Government of BC to create an inclusive digital strategy to ensure that the existing infrastructure can be leveraged towards the economic and social well-being of vulnerable populations. We recommend the expansion of the Connected Communities initiative that currently supports the digital readiness of rural communities to include urban areas and vulnerable communities in our cities. We recommend that funding is provided to social service and settlement organizations to partner with the for-profit sector in equipping vulnerable communities with the tools, skills and connectivity they need to succeed and thrive

It is time to close the digital divide in BC. It is time to treat digital connectivity as a right, not a privilege.

On behalf of MOSAIC, thank you for giving us this opportunity to be a voice for newcomers and for allowing us to offer recommendations to strengthen our communities.

