



O D U 2024 S

## Canadian Immigration Lawyers Association

---

Suite 1120 Bankers Hall West  
888 3<sup>rd</sup> Street SW  
Calgary, AB, T2P 5C5

8664062452

[www.cila.co](http://www.cila.co)

[research@cila.co](mailto:research@cila.co)

## About CILA

[CILA](#) was conceived in 2020 by a group of leading immigration lawyers to provide a national organization focused exclusively on immigration law. CILA's Founding Members recognized the need to create an organization capable of effectively representing the immigration bar, fostering an independent community of immigration lawyers, law students and academics, providing professional resources, mentorship and affordability for our members, while engaging with stakeholders to promote the rule of law, access to justice and improvements to the Canadian immigration system.

## Acknowledgments

This report was prepared by:

Samuel Escobar, Director  
Lou Janssen Dangzalan, Director  
Vance Langford, Co-President  
Kareem El-Assal, Executive Director  
Ruwanthi Mudalige Kay, Events Coordinator

**CILA thanks Windmill Microlending for sponsoring the report**



[Windmill Microlending](#) is a public and private funded, leading national charity, offering loans of up to \$15,000 to skilled immigrants and refugees at affordable fixed interest rate of 6.7%\* so they can succeed in their careers. We support clients to obtain the Canadian licensing or training required to work in their field, or to secure a position which matches their level of education, skills, and experience. Our loans can pay for exams, training, assessments, books and materials, living allowance, relocation costs, professional association fees, and other expenses related to advancing their career.

## FOREWORD



Windmill was pleased to attend this CILA event in Calgary and speak to the CILA members about our mission, and our achievements in helping immigrants and refugees overcome costly barriers to employment by providing affordable loans and career services. By helping newcomers gain employment in their chosen career in Canada, we support their successful integration not only into our economy, but into communities across the country.

As Calgary and other cities across Canada known for their vibrant diversity welcome more newcomers, it is important that we address persistent obstacles to integrating immigrant talent, such as the ***lack of foreign credential recognition and an over-emphasis on “Canadian experience.”*** When Windmill clients – who are trained doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, vets, engineers, architects, lawyers and many other types of professionals – can resume their practice in Canada, they not only triple their income on average but contribute billions more in lifetime taxes to Canada than if they had remained on their pre-Windmill trajectory.

Obviously, the faster we can get highly educated, trained licensed professionals back into their trained careers in Canada, the better. The labour issues faced by economic immigrants to Canada are relevant to policymakers, employers and lawyers representing immigrant clients. By understanding the challenges faced by highly skilled newcomers, and the benefits that exist if we pursue collective solutions, we can mobilize to boost economic development and social inclusion in Calgary and beyond.

We encourage everyone reading this report to join our mission in helping skilled immigrants and newcomers return to their professions in Canada. As members of a prestigious association like CILA, we invite you to refer clients, friends, family and future lawyers you may know, who could benefit from an affordable career loan from Windmill.

To know more about us, our impact and our client success stories visit our website:

[Windmill MicroLending](#)

## **Overview**

On September 29, 2024, the Canadian Immigration Lawyers Association (CILA) hosted an event in Calgary featuring a panel discussion entitled “Business Insights on Immigration Policy: A Western Canada Perspective.” The purpose of the discussion was to convene leaders in Calgary to explore how immigration can continue to support business and economic development in Alberta. The panel featured Leslie Shier (Calgary Economic Development), Neeraj Gupta (Lawcubator), Mike Holden (Business Council of Alberta), Wunmi Adekambi (Immigrant Techies Alberta), and moderator, Vance Langford (CILA). This report summarizes the key discussion points and recommendations that emerged from the discussion.

## **Immigration's Role in Alberta's Economic Growth**

Immigration is a driving force behind Calgary's rapid growth and diversification, making it the third most diverse city in Canada, with 165 languages spoken and 35% of the population identifying as a visible minority. Alberta's population has grown by 4.4% over the past year largely thanks to immigration, following by the fact more Canadians are moving to the province due to its attractive economy.

Alberta's transition from an oil and gas-dominated economy to sectors like tech, aerospace, and AI is growing but not yet fully mature and has created significant opportunities for immigrants, particularly those in the tech sector. However, the sector is still in its infancy, presenting both opportunities and challenges for integration. Economic immigration pathways, such as the Alberta Advantage Immigration Program and the federal Global Talent Stream, are vital in attracting high-skilled workers, particularly in trades, healthcare, and tech, which are in long-term demand.

## **Challenges in Absorptive Capacity**

While immigration has prevented Canada's economy from entering a recession, the pace of infrastructure development (e.g., housing, public services) has not kept up with population growth, straining current resources. There has been growing public resistance to immigration, often due to misinformation or economic anxiety.

## **Systemic Barriers to Employment**

Credential recognition and employment barriers remain major issues for many immigrants who arrive with valuable skills and experience, but the Canadian system often fails to recognize these, leading to underemployment and frustration. There is a mismatch between the skills immigrants bring and the opportunities available. In addition, the panel emphasized that small and mid-sized companies, especially in tech, face difficulties navigating complex immigration processes, which limits their ability to attract talent.

## **Recommendations**

The panel made an array of policy recommendations to strengthen immigration's role in Alberta's economic development including:

### ***1) Strengthening public support***

Panellists emphasized the need for clear communication about the positive impacts of immigration and the success stories of immigrants contributing to Alberta's economy. The conversation around immigration must shift to highlight the critical role immigrants play in sustaining and growing the province's economic future.

In addition, the panel observed public sentiment is not necessarily anti-immigrant, but rather, is focused on whether current immigration levels are sustainable and what impacts the levels are having on wages and overall living standards. Hence, it is important for Alberta to continue to ensure it offers quality health care, infrastructure, education, and housing so that Albertans and newcomers alike can benefit.

### ***2) Wider government consultations with experts***

The panel noted the importance of government consulting widely to allow as much expertise as possible to inform policy decisions. A panellist noted they were recently invited to a government consultation on making Alberta more attractive to the TV and film industry but there were no immigration lawyers invited to share expertise on how to optimize Canada's visa policies for entertainment workers.

### ***3) Promoting immigration in smaller Alberta communities***

The panel stressed the importance of capacity-building in rural and remote communities across Alberta that may have less experience welcoming newcomers. Suggestions included more funding for immigrant-settlement services to give newcomers the help they need upon arrival. The panel also encouraged attendees to share their feedback with local economic development organizations on ways rural and remote communities can do a better job of helping newcomers feel at home.

### ***4) Improving labour market integration***

Several suggestions were offered to help improve the integration of immigrants into Alberta's labour market. We need to consider better ways of allocating points to economic class immigrant candidates. Right now, various federal and provincial pathways award points based on level of study rather than based on in-demand disciplines.

In addition, we need to address challenges created by gatekeepers that prevent immigrants from practicing in regulated professions in Alberta.

The panel also called on attendees to advocate to employers to consider hiring immigrants and to also invite them to participate in immigrant hiring initiatives such as fairs. Employers may not feel it is necessary to participate given they have their own recruitment processes, but a panellist said inviting them to such events can help to break down employment barriers for newcomers.

Bridging programs offered by universities as well as microcredentialing programs also need to be promoted more to help newcomers get their foot into the door of Alberta's economy.

A panellist also called on the federal and provincial governments to ensure adequate settlement services are made available to newcomers. They pointed out that prolonged wait times to access ESL services, as an example, delays a newcomer's ability to integrate into the labour market.

## **Conclusion**

Finally, one panellist noted that despite current challenges, Alberta has become a gateway to North America since it offers more favourable immigration policies than the United States and remains more affordable than the likes of British Columbia and Ontario. This is resulting in "positive chaos" that will eventually yield long-term benefits for the province.