

## **Summary Report**

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Entrepreneur & Investor Immigration Summit 2018  
Conference Board of Canada  
Ottawa, November 27-28, 2018

### **Overview of the summit**

Hosted by the Conference Board of Canada in Ottawa, this Summit explored a variety of topics relating to immigration, entrepreneurship and investment, such as: the latest insights on global business immigration programs and initiatives; provincial immigrant entrepreneur and investor streams; and common challenges (institutional/ legal, financial, etc.) faced by immigrant entrepreneurs who want to settle and start a new business in Canada.

The great majority of the audience present at this event appeared to be service providers to newcomers, in particular immigration attorneys and immigration consultants. Some of them were also there to promote their services (booths) and/or to sponsor the event. A small number of settlement service providers – provincial and municipal – were also in attendance.

Overall the goal of the Summit was to highlight entrepreneurs' and investors' difficulties (e.g., relating to visas and pathways to permanent residence, business regulation knowledge, loans and financing, networks for support, etc.) in order to rethink current immigration policy based on service providers' experiences and recommendations.

Speakers included lawyers, consultants, and a number of government representatives (mostly from Provinces and Territories, as well as key cities that have implemented programs serving immigrant entrepreneurs such as the City of Hamilton). Both days were structured to start with plenary sessions in the morning around key issues related to how Canada can become a leader in facilitating immigrant entrepreneurs and investors pathways. In the afternoon, panels were organized and allowed for interesting conversations between and among the various types of service providers.

### **Highlights about challenges faced by immigrant entrepreneurs and investors**

In his opening remarks to the Summit, Kareem El-Assal from the Conference Board of Canada shared latest research findings on key issues affecting Canadian entrepreneur and investor immigration. El-Assal highlighted the current disconnect in immigration and investment priorities, thus the need for rethinking an "Immigrant Investor Program" (IIP – shut down in 2014) that would help increase funding to economic areas that currently need the capital in Canada. Following this introduction, most presentations and discussions at the Summit offered critical insights into past and present immigrant

entrepreneur and investor policies. The approach was open and aimed to better understand how to implement a new program and address issues such as the low retention in provinces where entrepreneurs had applied.

Some challenges that foreign entrepreneurs and investors face are related to documentation and processing times, with no clear paths to permanent residence; these factors often cause foreign entrepreneurs to cease investment in Canada. The lack of support and integration into Canadian society also remains a significant obstacle for self employed/ entrepreneur newcomers. Moreover, participants emphasized the need for more business/entrepreneurial mentoring once immigrants are settled in Canada.

### **What we learned: How these discussions benefit the BMRC-IRMC Partnership research on employment and building migrant resilience**

- Some policy recommendations speakers provided at the Summit
  - Need to expand the definition of the “self employment” category to include more people, including young innovators with little to no investment;
  - No requirement of net worth for young entrepreneurs in the “Entrepreneur Visa start up” program;
  - Facilitating international students’/ graduates’ pathways to build their company in Canada and obtain permanent residence (instead of multiplying temporary permits – study and/or work);
  - Need of a national business succession immigration program to facilitate matching between current business owners who are retiring and immigrants who want to own/start a business in Canada. Creating such program would build the resilience of the national and local economy, as well as the resilience of settling new Canadian business owners.  
Example of successful local initiatives matching immigrant entrepreneurs with local businesses: “Succession Connect” program in Fredericton (Chamber of Commerce) including a business immigrant mentorship program.

- Opportunities and Challenges for newcomers to take into account in research under the BMRC-IRMU Partnership

In the panel “Immigrant Voices”, panelists shared how useful it was to connect with a business community rather than seek a settlement service provider. Newcomer entrepreneurs need more practical advice on business culture in Canada, how to build their business here, how to network with their niche clientele, etc. Thus one clear challenge that was identified is the necessity to build a true support system for newcomers within existing entrepreneur/business networks and associations.

Recommendations were also made to facilitate navigating available information for immigrant entrepreneurs who are already in Canada. While there are many settlement programs across the country (provincial and municipal/regional), one main challenge remains accessing all relevant information in an easier manner, perhaps with more adequate online settlement tools.

Two examples: successful app launched by ISANS (Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia)<sup>1</sup> in 2017 and called “Immigrant Business Marketplace”. This mobile tool features and celebrates immigrant businesses in Nova Scotia. A team of immigrants, mostly international students, have also created a bot (intelligent platform) called “Destin.ai”<sup>2</sup> which assists newcomers to find immigration experts to help them in their journey to Canada.

- International Students

Throughout the summit, recommendations were made to create more incentives for international students to stay in Canada after they graduate so they can build companies here. One of the speakers, Chad Ellsworth (an immigration lawyer) provided examples from the UK (“Graduate Entrepreneur Visa”) and the US (“US Stem Opt Status”)<sup>3</sup> where programs have been put in place to better support international students.

One participant also considered how Canada could allow entrepreneurial international students to work on their start up and have this work count towards their permanent residence.

- Language

The potential of attracting and facilitating settlement of Francophone immigrant entrepreneurs was absent from conversations at the Summit. This is an area where there is still much research to do for the Partnership.

- Gender

The gender gap for immigrant entrepreneurship is an aspect that was explored in some discussions following plenary sessions, but it still requires more attention and relevant policy recommendations. For instance, one of the participants insightfully suggested that Canada look into creating an incubator program for foreign women entrepreneurs and investors.

### **Moving Forward: Potential partners we should consider in future BMRC-IRMU Partnership research projects**

Attending this summit highlighted the necessity to involve two sets of partners that will enrich our knowledge and approach for drafting innovative recommendations for current (and future) policies:

- Conference Board of Canada

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<sup>1</sup> Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia, [www.isans.ca](http://www.isans.ca) App: <https://marketplace.isans.ca>

<sup>2</sup> <https://destin.ai/>

<sup>3</sup> Let us note however that the current US administration is looking to further restrict these programs for innovation.

The Conference Board of Canada has a very active National Immigration Centre<sup>4</sup> that conducts research, especially on Entrepreneur and Investor Immigration, International Students, and Canadian economy and Immigrant Settlement Programs. They also host many events and produce reports that aim at strengthening Canada's immigration system and policy. The Conference Board of Canada has a wide network of professional members and partners that could help broaden our perspective on building migrant resilience in Canada.

- Immigration Lawyers

I was particularly interested by the insightful remarks and innovative recommendations shared by Stephen Green (a lawyer from Green and Spiegel LLP, Toronto). It would be worth talking further with lawyers who have both a great understanding of current policies (and their limitations) and interact daily with newcomer clients who share with them the specific challenges they encounter.

Furthermore, in the immigrant voices panel, immigrant entrepreneurs who were invited to share their stories of success and resilience, specified that at the time of settlement, they unfortunately had no idea of what free services were available to them (e.g., government funded programs) and turned towards immigration lawyers and consultants for practical help and resources. This practice clearly indicates that lawyers represent key actors in the settlement process, even after arrival, especially for those looking to set up a business (or even take over a former business for sale).

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<sup>4</sup> National Immigration Centre: <https://www.conferenceboard.ca/nic/default.aspx>