



Preface

IMMIGRANTS have always played a vital role in Canada, shaping our culture, our communities and contributing to our economic success. This handbook is about the role of immigration in meeting the national skills challenge facing

Canada. What is the skills challenge? It is ensuring that Canada's standard of living and future opportunities for economic success and prosperity are not jeopardized by a lack of needed skills, or limited by the inability of individuals to put skills to use. It's about individual Canadians being equipped with the right skills, and having the resources and capacities to expand and update skills on an on-going basis. What makes this skills challenge a national priority are unique circumstances:

- > Canada's labour force growth is expected to remain below one percent over the next three decades. We must make maximum use of our available human resources.
- > The Canadian workforce is ageing: workers 45 years of age and over formed an increasing share of the labour force during the 1990s (26 percent in 1990; 34 percent in 2002).
- > The near retirement population is growing, with the median retirement age at 61.8.
- > Unprecedented international competition among business establishments: to be successful in this environment, business needs to be innovative, and the workforce needs to be skilled. Canada has been successful on both these fronts. Evidence from Statistics Canada's Workplace and Employee Survey for example, tells us that in a given year, one-half of business establishments introduce some product or process innovation. Supporting this innovation is a skilled workforce, in which one out of every two workers holds a post-secondary certificate, diploma or degree.
- > Within Canadian sectors, from high tech to transportation to health care, issues of recruitment, retention and

knowledge transfer are increasingly important aspects of dealing with the issues of skills acquisition and retention.

The Canadian Labour and Business Centre's *2002 Viewpoints Survey* found the issue of skill shortages among the top concerns of both business and labour leaders in both the public and private sectors. The Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters' 2003-2004 *Management Issues Survey* found that 40 percent of businesses cited lack of qualified personnel as a constraint on performance improvement, and 25 percent said the availability of skilled personnel is a major challenge they expect to face over the next five years. Canadian Labour Congress President Ken Georgetti recently stated that "it is imperative that we more closely connect the skills agenda to that of economic development".

Over the past decade, recent immigrants have accounted for 70% of Canada's net labour force growth. Immigration cannot solve our skills challenge, but as these numbers suggest, it has to be part of the solution. This handbook provides a factual

starting point for those interested in the broad scope of public policy issues that are tied to the role of immigration in meeting Canada's human resource challenges. As a reference tool designed for a wide-ranging stakeholder audience, the *CLBC Handbook on Immigration and Skill Shortages* seeks to draw attention to the factors affecting successful integration and utilization of immigrant skills, and to those aspects of Canada's immigration policies and practices that deserve greater attention if we are to meet the human resource and economic development challenges ahead.



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