

Addressing economic immigration in the new Expression of Interest (EOI) system

Citizenship and Immigration Canada will be introducing an Expression of Interest (EOI) system to turn the Federal Skilled Worker program into a demand-driven approach with an increased role for employers to select potential immigrants. The new EOI system is expected to be introduced by the end of 2014, or early in 2015.

Since the fall of 2012, CIC has been holding consultations on the implementation and detailed design of the new system. Both New Zealand and Australia have EOI programs which are potential models for Canada. (New Zealand's program has been in place since 2003, while Australia introduced its program in July 2012).

An EOI system has three key features: 1) it is just-in-time (and will be online only); 2) it will allow CIC to manage front-end intake (by adjusting criteria, or even closing the system to applicants); and 3) it will be demand-driven, by involving employers through the selection process.

CIC is considering establishing an employer registry for employers to have access to the EOI database of candidates. A job offer by an employer would take a candidate from stage 1 in the EOI system to stage 2, when the permanent resident (PR) application can be submitted for processing and screening. In Australia, the processing time is between three to six months for candidates' PR applications.

Many employers rely on legitimate third parties to assist them with their immigration and recruitment needs. Those employers and others may prefer not to register for access to the EOI database. This raises the question where CIC would be willing to allow third parties to be registered and possibly bonded to be eligible players, on behalf of employers, within the EOI system.

There will be several key benefits to employers with this system including the opportunity to review potential candidates who have "expressed interest" and then to benefit from a timely processing of candidates with job offers.

A demand-driven process will still require attention to other aspects of economic immigration.

For example, the location of employment should still be combined with the availability of settlement services for immigrants, wherever possible. In addition, it is important that candidates are aware of the state of the local economy where they may work, including the availability of housing and the cost of living relative to wages.

For as long as National Occupational Classification (NOC) codes are used in a new EOI system, there should be an effort to ensure that the skills required within a regional or local economy are reflected on a timely basis by the NOC codes listed as eligible occupations for entry via the program. Currently, NOC codes are updated once every five years and the revision of the eligible occupations list is completed on an ad hoc basis.

It is also worth considering the potential impact of an EOI system on the Provincial Nominee Program, which is largely a demand-driven approach where employers are involved in the selection or nomination of immigrants. CIC has indicated, however, that there are fraud issues with the PNP. As the CIC moves to implementing an EOI system by late 2014, employers who have relied on the PNP should ensure the EOI will help attract immigrants to regions outside Canada's major cities as the PNP has in certain provinces.

Recommendations

That the federal government, working in concert with provincial and territorial governments, ensure that the new Expression of Interest system for immigration:

1. Be expedient, responsive, and efficient in identifying regional labour needs and in processing applications from both employers and potential workers to meet those needs.

2. Be open to third parties including, but not limited to, international recruitment firms, immigration lawyers and industry groups, which are acknowledged by the Regulated Canadian Immigration Consultants and/or provincial regulatory boards.
3. Encourages regional distribution based on skills and population needs.