

House of Commons
Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

**Special Immigration and Refugee Measures for
the People of Hong Kong**

Policy Brief
submitted by

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March 2021

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Background information:

In my 18 years of working as a financial advisor, I encountered a number of immigrant clients who had extensive professional or academic backgrounds in their countries of origin. Despite their extensive academic or professional experience, many of them faced - and some continue to face - difficulties in resuming their original professions in Canada. For skilled professional immigrants, the story of immigration to Canada is often one in which ambitions, and expectations are replaced by frustration at being unable to contribute to Canadian society. By way of illustration, I am presenting some examples on some clients I have spoken to within the past year:

1. Dr. X holds a PhD in Biostatistics and worked as a clinical research associate coordinated and involved in several clinical research projects for over five years which were funded by the government and other authorities. He authored more than 20 articles, mostly published in high-impact peer-reviewed journals in his country of origin. However, he was advised to work as a supermarket cashier in order to obtain Canadian work experience by a Job Developer from the Enhanced Language Training (ELT) course provided by COSTI¹;
2. Mrs. Y holds a Master’s degree in primary education in her country of origin, and had more than 10 years of teaching experience; during that time, she wrote a book about teaching strategies for primary school teachers. She was able to work as a part-time tutor in a private tutorial school for four months after she landed, but was laid off due to COVID-19. She still cannot find another job till now although she had also applied to work at a local cafe;
3. Dr. P holds a doctorate in healthcare and was a registered nurse working in a tertiary institution in her country of origin. She had more than 20 years’ clinical and teaching experience and had written numerous publications including peer-reviewed journals, book chapters, books and as a speaker in international conferences. Furthermore, she also conducted several clinical research projects and other projects as a Principal Investigator and Project Advisor, which were funded by the government and organizations. Dr. P planned to

¹ A non-profit, multicultural organization that offers educational, employment and social services and opportunities to newcomers, formed out of specific needs and concerns in the Greater Toronto Area in Ontario. <http://www.costi.org/>

apply for a research assistant position requiring only a bachelor's degree and no work experience, but several job developers and mentors from COSTI, as well as a Mentoring Coach at the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC)² mentoring program, all told her that it would be impossible to apply for such a "prestigious" job without any Canadian academic and work experience;

4. Mr. A, a Chartered Professional Accountant (CPA) with a Master's degree in accounting, worked as a senior accountant in a large accounting firm for more than a decade in his country of origin, was advised to work as a Junior Bookkeeper and not to "expect" to work as a Senior Bookkeeper or Junior Accountant in Canada;
5. Mr. C arrived in Canada in March of 2011, speaking, reading and writing fluently in English. He had around seven years of professional retail experience in Dubai - one of the world's busiest tourist hubs. Nonetheless, he was never able to find a job in retail due to a lack of "Canadian experience."

These immigrants have spent years, if not decades, as professionals in their countries of origin. Yet none of them were able to find work or continue in their professions because of a lack of Canadian academic or work experience. They were not able to obtain Canadian recognition for their existing professional or academic qualifications. Although many are willing to engage in volunteer work to gain work experience and familiarity with Canadian culture, volunteering is not an adequate substitute for paid employment similar to the work they performed in their countries of origin.

After attaining high social status and income levels in their countries of origin, new immigrants are reluctant to apply for government subsidies because they wish to make a living with their expertise in Canada, and to integrate themselves with dignity. The advice regularly given by welcome centers and job developers to newcomers - to work as volunteers for at least a year - is an enormous setback for immigrants, especially for those with families. Extended periods of unpaid volunteer work frequently exact a heavy financial and emotional toll on newcomers.

These difficulties do not merely affect those immigrants and their immediate families. They also limit new immigrants' ability to re-enter their original professions and their ability to contribute to Canada's economic development. This defeats the purpose of Canada's efforts to attract and retain skilled professionals as immigrants.

Supporting evidence:

The cases mentioned above are only the tip of the iceberg. As Employment and Social Development Canada noted in a 2020 report³:

"Recent immigrants (meaning those who have lived in Canada less than 10 years) may face discrimination, racism, difficulty having their educational and professional credentials recognized, language barriers and difficulty building social

² A mentorship program that brings recent skilled immigrants and established professionals in the Greater Toronto area to occupation-specific mentoring relationships. www.mentoringpartnership.ca/

³ Building Understanding: The First Report of the National Advisory Council on Poverty <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/poverty-reduction/national-advisory-council/reports/2020-annual.html>

networks when they arrive in Canada. In 2018, 26.0% of immigrants who had been in Canada for 4 years or less and 14.4% of immigrants who had been in Canada for 5 to 9 years were living in poverty.”

The Hong Kong education system is comparable in format and academic standards with the Canadian education system (see Tables 1 to 4). Immigrants from Hong Kong who have been educated in that system should be able to benefit from a more streamlined system for recognition of their professional qualifications. This is particularly true of immigrants who have scored highly in the Comprehensive Ranking System, such as doctors and nurses.

In light of the continuing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing shortage of healthcare professionals in Canada, qualified immigrants should be able to have their postgraduate medical degrees accepted for the purposes of professional qualification in Canada.

Table 1. The QS World University Rankings by Subject 2021: Medicine (Source: [QS World University Rankings for Medicine 2021 | Top Universities](https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/university-subject-rankings/2021/medicine))⁴

Rank	University	Overall score
14	University of Toronto	89.7
25	McGill University	85.5
31	University of British Columbia	84.1
39	The University of Hong Kong	82.7
40	The Chinese University of Hong Kong	82.6
41	McMaster University	82.2
66	Universite de Montreal	79.3
89	University of Calgary	76.9
92	University of Alberta	76.8
151-200	University of Ottawa	-

Table 2. The QS World University Rankings by Subject 2021: Nursing (Source: [QS World University Rankings for Nursing 2021 | Top Universities](https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/university-subject-rankings/2021/nursing))⁵

Rank	University	Overall score
12	University of Toronto	89.3
14	University of Alberta	88.7
15	McMaster University	88.5
22	The Chinese University of Hong Kong	87.0
27	University of British Columbia	85.8
32	McGill University	84.2
38	The University of Hong Kong	82.8
43	The Hong Kong Polytechnic University	82.1

⁴ <https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/university-subject-rankings/2021/medicine>

⁵ <https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/university-subject-rankings/2021/nursing>

50	University of Calgary	81.1
51-100	Universite de Montreal	-

Table 3. The QS World University Rankings by Subject 2021: Civil Engineering (Source: [QS World University Rankings for Engineering - Civil and Structural 2021 | Top Universities](https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/university-subject-rankings/2021/engineering-civil-structural))⁶

Rank	University	Overall score
16	The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology	84.7
19	The University of Hong Kong	84.5
21	The Hong Kong Polytechnic University	83.9
25	University of British Columbia	82.2
34	University of Toronto	80.3
43	McGill University	78.7
51-100	University of Waterloo	-
101-150	University of Alberta	-
101-105	Universite de Montreal	-
151-200	Queen's University	-

Table 4. The QS World University Rankings by Subject 2021: Accounting and Finance (Source: [QS World University Rankings for Accounting and Finance 2021 | Top Universities](https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/university-subject-rankings/2021/accounting-finance))⁷

Rank	University	Overall score
22	The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology	81.4
27	University of Toronto	80.7
28	The University of Hong Kong	80.1
39	The Chinese University of Hong Kong	77.3
43	University of British Columbia	75.5
58	City University of Hong Kong	72.8
59	The Hong Kong Polytechnic University	72.7
85	McGill University	68.2
95	York University	67.0
99	Universite de Montreal	66.5

Canada prides itself on its multiculturalism and its willingness to accept immigrants with diverse cultural and national backgrounds. In the case of skilled immigrants with professional backgrounds, Canada should facilitate their re-entry into their professions in Canada. A failure to do so dissuades newcomers from resuming their previous professions, limiting their potential contribution to their adopted country.

Different cultures and practices also have their own merits, especially in the healthcare and engineering fields. For example, healthcare professionals from Hong Kong with experience in

⁶ <https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/university-subject-rankings/2021/engineering-civil-structural>

⁷ <https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/university-subject-rankings/2021/accounting-finance>

addressing outbreaks of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Swine Flu and COVID-19 in 2003, 2009 and 2019, respectively, will be particularly valuable in addressing the effects of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Newcomers have also encountered insufficient or inconsistent guidance on how to access public services. In one case, a client visited a Service Canada branch to obtain a Social Insurance Number (SIN). S/he received four different sets of instructions from four different staff members in the same Service Canada branch - all of which differed from the written instructions available online. In some other cases, newcomers trying to join the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) were required to visit more than one Service Ontario branch on the same day with the same documents. In one particular case, an applicant apply for OHIP was told that the written guidelines provided by the Service Ontario named as "Ontario Health Insurance Plan Document List"⁸ for submitting documents as per request mentioned in the official guideline for applying OHIP are "for reference only", and that the staff who are responsible for processing the OHIP card "may request additional documents" not referred to in the guidelines.

Another newcomer client complained that she received an email from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada acknowledging her arrival, but that the email contained no information on where to go for information on accessing public services, such as applying for a SIN and provincial health insurance. Her spouse, who received a work permit upon arrival, was not aware that she needed to apply for a SIN until prompted by her employer's human resources department. IIRCC can definitely make it easier for newcomers to access social services by providing detailed information on such services.

Impact on Canada:

These experiences negatively impact Canada as a whole. Hong Kong is a metropolitan city with a total of 7.34 million residents (Hong Kong Population By-census, 2016).⁹ As of 2016, more than 110,000 Hong Kong residents have settled in Canada, making the territory the fifth-largest source of Asian immigrants that year (Canada Census Profile, 2016)¹⁰. An estimated 300,000 Canadians live in Hong Kong, making it one of the largest Canadian communities abroad (Government of Canada, 2020)¹¹. Based on the projected targets of the 2021-2023 Canadian Immigration Plan, another 20,000 new permanent residents will arrive in the next three years (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2020)¹². The following problems, frequently encountered by new immigrants, will likely be exacerbated as a result:

1. Immigrants score high marks when their professions are identified on the Immigration Department's job priority lists. However, difficulties in obtaining recognition of professional

⁸ Which can also be found online at <https://www.ontario.ca/page/documents-needed-get-health-card>

⁹ <https://www.bycensus2016.gov.hk/en/Snapshot-01.html>

¹⁰ <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=PR&Code1=01&Geo2=&Code2=&SearchText=Canada&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&TABID=1&type=0>

¹¹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2020/11/canada-announces-immigration-measures-supporting-hong-kong-residents-and-canadians-in-hong-kong.html>

¹² <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/ircc/migration/ircc/english/pdf/pub/annual-report-2020-en.pdf>

and academic qualifications obtained elsewhere frustrate the purpose of the points system in attracting skilled immigrants;

2. As a consequence of newcomers' inability to resume the professions they practiced prior to their arrival in Canada, immigrants and their families are often forced to adapt to substantially lower income standards. The financial and emotional toll of such changes is borne not only by skilled immigrants themselves, but by their family members as well;
3. Newcomers who decide to stay in Canada, despite these challenges:
 - a. pay less in taxes due to their reduced income;
 - b. are at risk of developing emotional problems and mental illness, creating further constraints on our healthcare system; and
 - c. may eventually need to apply for welfare, putting avoidable pressure on the welfare system.
4. Some immigrants leave Canada altogether after obtaining citizenship, providing no tax dollars to the Canadian government during their working years;
5. Loss of these professionals in their relevant job markets constitutes an avoidable "brain drain"; and
6. Many immigrants who subsequently leave Canada only return upon retirement, leaving Canada responsible for their Old Age Security payments.

Recommendations:

As a country, we must make it easier for immigrants to use their skills and contribute to Canada. To improve and enhance our society, rebuild the confidence of all immigrants and future newcomers and integrate them into the Canadian family, we recommend the following:

1. Federal government departments should work closely with provincial governments, as well as union bodies and professional bodies to establish a streamlined process to recertify professionals such as doctors, lawyers, engineers and nurses graduated from overseas educational institutions, especially for those graduated from countries with equivalent education qualifications. We should value both Canadian and country of origin's academic and work experiences. We are a multicultural and welcoming country so we must integrate international up-to-dated industrial-specific practice into our professional practices;
2. Each profession, especially in the healthcare industry, should develop a network for different ethnic groups. For instance, connect doctors with community networks, which will provide support, guidance and mentorship to newcomers in how to integrate into our professional circles. These networks can also serve the seniors and persons in need within our ethnic communities better since the members have identical cultural backgrounds and can handle situations in best possible ways;
3. Immigration department should offer services and help newcomers to apply for and emphasize to them the importance of securing essential documents like SIN, health card and so forth;
4. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada should establish true beginners' French courses to help more new immigrants to be bilingual. Many "beginners French courses" currently running expect students to know some French already and most Hong Kong immigrants do not meet this requirement; lastly

5. Programs and projects can also be done by the Canadian government in collaboration with NGOs and well-established Canadian community organizations with a long history and track record of serving the Hong Kong-Canadian community. These programs could henceforth help those who arrive in Canada to achieve employment, seek options for help during their settlement period and, in the long term, become contributing residents to the diverse Canadian fabric.¹³

Conclusion:

The Government of Canada should take initiatives and have comprehensive plans to make sure it utilizes all the resources it has to help immigrants and convention refugees settle. By streamlining the requalification of professionals from abroad, we effectively increase the productivity of Canada, capture any potential innovative ideas they bring in, increase tax payable, improve immigrants and refugees' living conditions, and avoid unnecessarily potential burden on our economical, social and medical system.

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Financial advisor since 2003 and has been working with a wide range of Canadians, some of whom are immigrants of diverse origin. Sadly all had similar frustrations when they shared their settlement stories. The Torontonians HongKongers Action Group has been organizing events since June 2019 in Toronto to raise awareness and support for the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong sparked by the proposed amendment to the extradition bill to China. Lee is one of the conveners of the group.
[fb.com/THKAG](https://www.facebook.com/THKAG)

¹³ Mentioned by Henry Chan, co-director for Saskatchewan Stands with Hong Kong at CIMM Committee Meeting 17, February 22, 2021 <https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/43-2/CIMM/meeting-17/evidence>.