

Speaking Notes: Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration (CIMM)

March 1, 2022

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak before the Committee.

My name is Shamira Madhany, and I am the Managing Director for World Education Services (WES)-Canada. WES is a not-profit social enterprise, dedicated to helping international students, immigrants, and refugees to achieve their educational and career goals.

On behalf of WES, I would like to express my appreciation for the work of the Standing Committee.

As you have heard from previous speakers before the committee, Canada is a top destination for international students.

- The international student population in Canada has **tripled** in the last ten years and they also contribute to the broader economy as consumers, contributing **\$22 billion to GDP annually**, and supporting more than **170,000 jobs**.

Many prospective international students perceive study permits as an **easier path** to permanent residency.

Therefore, it is important to consider **the entire journey** of international students—from pre-arrival, to studying in Canada, and finally transition into the workforce.

Looking more holistically at their experience will help the committee understand the challenges that they face, as they go through their journey and key recommendations to address these gaps.

It is important to note that this will require increased collaboration among the many stakeholders.

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Today, World Education Services is making **four recommendations** to support the success of international students—academically and professionally.

1. Providing Accurate Information Before Arrival

Prospective international students seeking to study in Canada often get advice and assistance from recruitment agents. A November 2021 report from ICEF Monitor (a global organization that supports global student mobility through networking) estimates that almost **50 percent** of international students studying in Canada are referred by an agent.

Inaccurate or missing information from recruitment agents presents so many challenges and unfortunately--- international students often rely heavily on these agents to make life-changing decisions.

We have a model right here in Canada-- that can address this issue. In 2016, Manitoba introduced legislation to regulate the educational service provider industry and protect international students from recruitment agents in Canada and abroad that may lead them astray.

Our first recommendation is for the federal government to encourage provinces to introduce similar legislation like Manitoba to regulate recruitment agents.

This will enable prospective international students to access accurate information and reduce fraudulent activities.

2. Succeeding in Canada After Arrival

International students must be set-up for success if they make the decision to stay in Canada as potential immigrants. Canada needs to support them in the same way as we do with other prospective immigrants. These students need to have access to the same supports—and in some cases additional unique supports—to facilitate their labour market transition. This means **ensuring equitable access to settlement and employment services.**

Our second recommendation is for the federal government to significantly expand the scope of settlement and integration services. This includes directly supporting settlement agencies as well as post-secondary institutions to provide settlement and employment services to international students.

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Supporting international students in their transition to the Canadian labour market requires expanding access to, and funding for, work-integrated learning programs and summer job opportunities.

According to Statistics Canada, the importance of Canadian work experience is well-recognized and contributes to a clear **earnings advantage** for international students with Canadian education and employment experience.

Currently, international students are capped at a maximum of 20 hours of ---off-campus employment. For some, the 20-hour restriction means that they cannot apply for relevant internships or co-op work placements.

Our third recommendation is for the federal government to provide international students the opportunity to gain Canadian work experience through different work integrated programs. This requires, amongst other things, revisiting the current maximum cap on working hours depending on the occupation that is chosen.

3. Transitioning to Permanent Residency

Last year, the federal government introduced a new permanent residency pathway for international students, and the cap of 40,000 applications was reached in **just 24 hours**.

Also, according to a recent survey from Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), about **60 percent** of international students are interested in becoming permanent residents in Canada after completing their postsecondary education.

To qualify for a study permit, international students must provide evidence that they will enter the country temporarily and leave after completing their studies. We know that some prospective students have been rejected for study permits because they cannot prove their intention to leave.

This creates a catch-22 situation in which applicants are assessed based on their intention to come to Canada just to study, while at the same time the government is encouraging international students to apply for permanent residency—after completing their schooling.

Nova Scotia’s **“Study and Stay”** program is one example of an initiative focused on encouraging international students to remain in the province as permanent residents.

Our fourth and final recommendation is that the federal government should provide transparent and consistent information to international students. Policy coherence and alignment between study permit criteria and immigration pathways criteria--- is important.

Clear policies, accurate information, and streamlined supports will benefit Canada and international students who choose to study and live here!

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.