



Immigration, Refugees  
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés  
et Citoyenneté Canada

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**MEMORANDUM TO THE DEPUTY MINISTER AND THE ASSOCIATE DEPUTY MINISTER**

**PROGRESS UPDATE ON STRATEGIC IMMIGRATION REVIEW**  
**COMMITMENT FOR SKILLS MISSIONS**

**FOR INFORMATION**

**SUMMARY**

- The purpose of this memorandum is to provide you with an update on ongoing work to define and conduct skills missions to assist with international recruitment of skilled workers to support the Canadian economy.
- The Strategic Immigration Review public report, released October 31, 2023, included a commitment to create the new role of a Chief International Talent Officer to align Canada's immigration policies with a long-term skills and labour strategy. This role will include organizing global skills missions in collaboration with government representatives, employers and stakeholders, to recruit the talent Canada needs while also supporting other Government priorities, including Francophone immigration.
- The Department has made significant progress building the foundations for skills missions, including: developing a work plan, mapping existing services at the federal, provincial and municipal levels, taking stock of ethical recruitment practices and standards, and conducting preliminary discussions with internal and external stakeholders. Other streams of work are underway, such as the validation of findings with external stakeholders, an inventory of sector-specific immigration options, and the development of recommendations for talent pools, source countries and service offerings.
- In anticipation of Director General-level International Steering Committee and Policy Committee discussions in January/February 2024, and as we advance the recruitment and onboarding of a Chief International Talent Officer, the Department views this as an opportune time for a check-in on current directions. We expect to return to you for more formal approval on a recommended approach to skills missions, informed by the continuing work and discussions before the end of this fiscal year.

## **BACKGROUND:**

- Attracting and retaining top talent across all sectors relies on identification of needed skills in Canada, awareness of available international pools of foreign workers with these skills, and strategies for how best to match the international talent to available jobs in Canada.
- Employers have indicated they face challenges navigating the immigration process to support and onboard new employees, and that Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) initiatives to support their international recruitment needs would be well-received.
- As such, the Strategic Immigration Review public report, *An Immigration System for Canada's Future*, included a commitment to establish the new executive position of the Chief International Talent Officer (CITO), with a mandate to align Canada's immigration policies with a long-term skills and labour strategy. In addition to undertaking a comprehensive approach to mapping future skills needs, linking to industrial, regional and sectoral strategies, and liaising with labour market partners, the CITO will be charged with conducting global skills missions to assist employers and stakeholders in recruiting the international talent that Canada needs. This work will be done in collaboration with other departments, including Employment and Social Development Canada and Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED), given their related mandates in this space and to ensure complementarity with other federal government activities and priorities.
- In advance of identifying a CITO, the Department has completed an initial scoping exercise to conceptualize skills missions. An early process map (see Annex A) and document outlining frequently asked questions and answers (see Annex B) have been developed in consultation with several branches of the Department; these materials will be finalized as we advance this work.

## **CURRENT STATUS:**

- In order to ensure that IRCC skills missions serve a distinct need and provide complementary rather than duplicative services to support recruitment, the team has engaged in exploratory discussions within IRCC and other federal departments and employer/employer associations. At the same time, we have conducted comprehensive environmental scans to take stock of existing skills missions offerings and ethical recruitment best practices.
- There are numerous public sector entities that are active in the international recruitment space. Many provinces and territories, as well as municipal investment attraction agencies, have launched their own skills missions, and are continuing to bolster their collaborations with private businesses and stakeholders. At the federal level, ISED, Invest in Canada and Global Affairs Canada's foreign direct investment teams and trade commissioner networks also support international recruitment.

- It is clear that different industries, businesses, and stakeholders have different needs for support in their international recruitment efforts. While some companies have well established international recruitment activities, including support of recruitment agencies and in-house support teams to assist with the filing and processing of immigration applications, other stakeholders have limited internal capacity and require relatively higher levels of government support to achieve their goals.
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- As such, it is anticipated that there will be a range of support services that will be offered as part of skills missions, depending on the needs, industry and experience level of participating stakeholders. Skills missions will leverage, and also build upon, existing departmental infrastructure, including the Domestic and Global Networks' engagement functions. It is very likely that skills missions will look different depending on participating employers, destination country, and sector focus.
- Skills missions also offer the opportunity to strategically advance departmental and Government of Canada priorities such as measures to support increased volumes of skilled immigrants in the construction and health human resource sectors, and broader sectoral strategies such as the Global Hypergrowth initiative. A principled approach to skills mission destination countries may also help to advance Canada's commitments towards ethical migration.
- In order to support the Department's obligations under the modernized *Official Languages Act* and the forthcoming Francophone Immigration Policy, skills missions can be used to help restore and increase the demographic weight of Francophones outside of Quebec by selecting target countries with Francophone populations.
- The Intergovernmental Government Relations and Engagement Branch, with the support of key implicated branches, such as Domestic Network, International Affairs, and Client Support and Engagement, continues to collaborate with other federal partners to advance work in the following areas:
  1. **Options development** to identify potential source countries that could be considered for early skills missions by the incoming CITO, and to determine the continuum of services that could be offered as part of skills missions. This may include *à la carte* options to support employers dependent on experience, industry, and destination country. A Director-General-level meeting, the International Steering Committee within IRCC in January 2024, is expected to help shape recommendations.

2. **Validation with key stakeholders** to ascertain whether there are additional services, needs or gaps that could be addressed by skills missions, and determine level of support for possible IRCC offerings for skills missions. Some key partners include provincial and territorial governments, economic development organizations and employer associations. Consultations are anticipated to be held in February 2024 to support this activity.
  3. **Recommendations to Senior Management** (including a possible presentation to ExCom) on scope of skills missions, outlining options and recommendations to position skills missions within the broader context of service offerings and role of CITO. Recommendations will be routed for approval before the end of the fiscal year.
  4. **Onboarding of Chief International Talent Officer** (targeting April 1) and mission planning for the first skills mission. Additionally, we are working towards defining a new stakeholder engagement function that will further support skills missions by facilitating departmental interactions and information sharing with key industries, businesses and stakeholders.
- - Full-scale skills missions will be implemented later this year, with timelines being option-dependent.

#### NEXT STEPS:

- The Department expects to route options (with information about a potential pilot and corresponding timelines for possible missions) and recommendations for your approval by the end of the 2023-2024 fiscal year. This timing will also allow for the establishment of the Chief International Talent Officer role and support team, ensuring the capacity and resources to successfully deliver a skills mission in 2024.

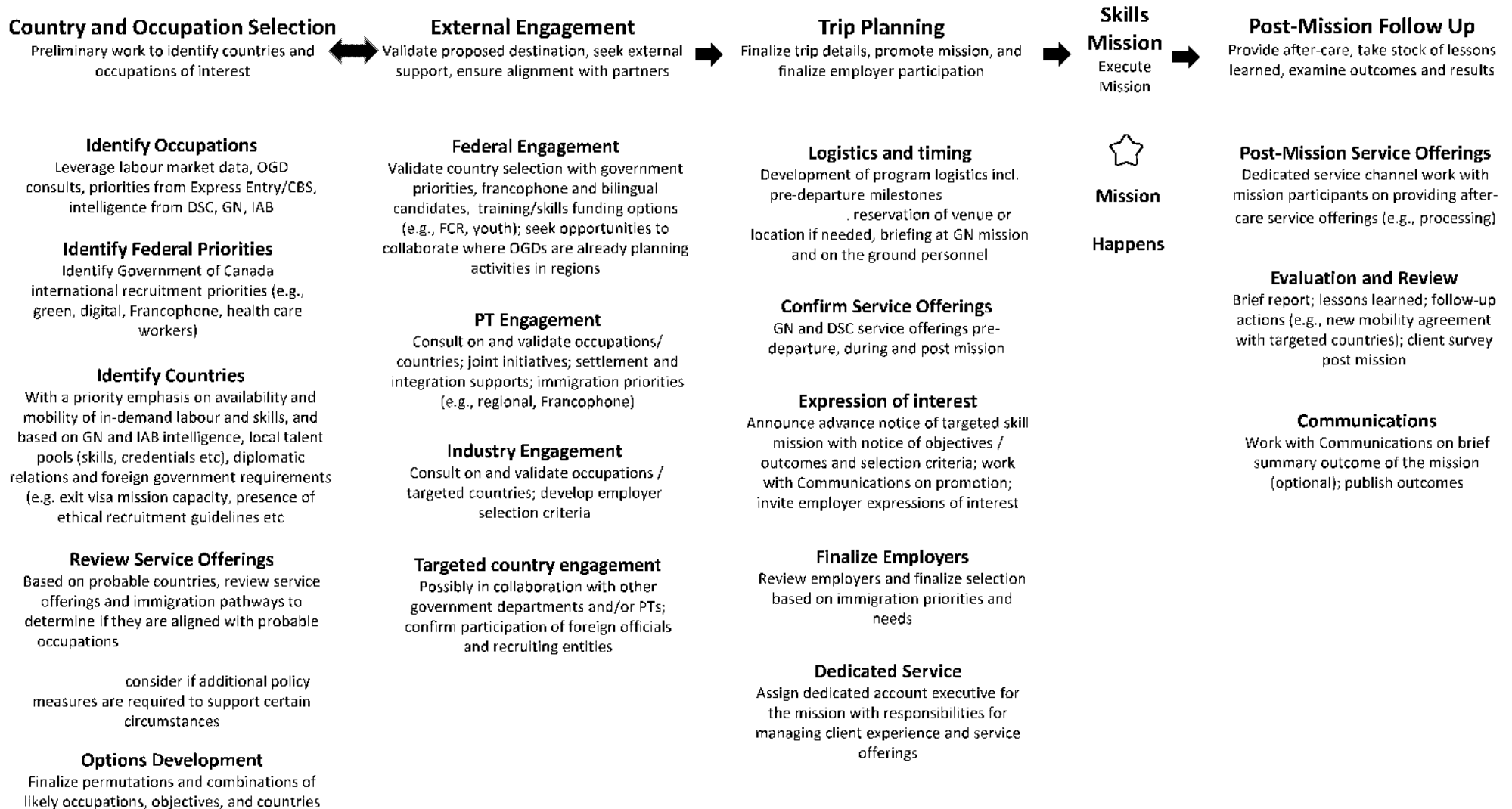
Louise Baird

#### Annexes (2):

A: Draft Skills Mission Process Map

B: Skills Missions Questions and Considerations

## Annex A – Skills Missions – Process Flow



## **Skills Missions Questions and Considerations**

*Several decision points will be required in order to accurately define and establish IRCC's role in hosting international skills missions and the role of the Chief International Talent Officer. This document outlines key questions and early thoughts for the purpose of discussion as proposals and recommendations are developed.*

### **What are skills missions?**

A skills mission is an international event led by IRCC dedicated to supporting Canadian provinces and businesses in their recruitment efforts for foreign workers. By filling short- and long-term labour market needs with foreign talent, skills missions contribute to the overall growth of the Canadian economy.

### **Why is IRCC implementing skills missions?**

During the Strategic Immigration Review, numerous employers and industry associations indicated they find the process of hiring foreign workers to be daunting. Leveraging the technical expertise and convening power of the federal government, skills missions will help simplify the immigration process of hiring foreign workers by bringing relevant parties together to address specific foreign talent needs.

At the same time, IRCC plans to leverage skills missions in support of other immigration objectives, including to support francophone immigration targets, international diplomacy efforts, and diversification of source countries.

### **What services will IRCC offer as part of the skills missions?**

It is expected that IRCC will offer a variety of services as part of a skills mission, based on the unique considerations of each trip (including employer needs, selected country and mission capacity). Possible services include site visits to local education institutions or industry associations to identify talent pipelines, meetings with foreign officials to discuss best practices in recruitment (and local government requirements), immigration information sessions with potential applicants, and dedicated immigration services (such as application processing, appointments for medicals and biometrics, etc). In order to effectively manage expectations, IRCC will need to decide and clearly communicate in advance what services it will offer as part of a skills mission.

Employers participating in skills missions will also benefit from a dedicated account officer to provide advice on immigration pathways and provide pre, during and aftercare immigration services.

In rare circumstances (e.g., based on critical labour market information and/or gaps in existing immigration pathways), IRCC may

As these value-added services may not be feasible in certain locations, the services required for each mission will be determined on a case by case basis, and tied to expected results and outcomes.

### **What service offerings will IRCC not provide?**

While IRCC will be providing immigration services throughout the recruitment process, it will not take part in any recruitment activities by employers in the selection of foreign workers. Employers will be

responsible for obtaining the services of an external recruiter (if necessary), the selection and interview of candidates, and for following all guidelines in place relating to ethical recruitment.

Employers and successful candidates will be responsible for application submission, with the assistance of outside parties (lawyers, consultants) as necessary. Employers will also be responsible for navigating any requirements relating to foreign credential recognition (working with provinces and/or regulatory bodies) and pre-arrival orientation services about their company.

### **What occupations are being targeted as part of skills missions?**

It is expected that occupations of interest will vary according to the region selected for a skills mission, as well as participating employers. However, in general, occupations will be identified on the basis of empirical data from ESDC's Canadian Occupational Project System – a suite of models developed by ESDC to project labour demand and supply by 2031. For example, current data indicates shortages in healthcare occupations (i.e. registered nurses), skilled trades (i.e. carpenters), and STEM (i.e. engineers). These occupational groupings could easily be the focus of initial missions, subject to feedback from provinces, businesses and industry associations (ie: to ensure that the occupations align with unique regional or employer needs). As a federal government, with a focus on national objectives and longer-term positive immigration outcomes, it will be important to not be driven solely by short-term individual employer/regional needs.

### **What countries are being targeted?**

The location for a skills mission will depend heavily on the occupational groups identified for each mission (i.e. need to have a sufficient pool of talent in a particular occupation within the country). In general, there are two likely paths and considerations for country selection, distinguished between regulated and non-regulated occupations:

1. Regulated occupations:
  - Where an occupation is regulated, verification will first be done with international regulatory bodies (e.g.: World Health Organization for healthcare occupations) to determine if there are lists of countries with shortages in the field, so as not to be perceived as poaching high-capital talent.
  - Work will also be conducted to identify countries whose training and accreditation for certain occupations is similar to Canada, to help facilitate future credential recognition. As an example, some provinces already have facilitative arrangements in place between their jurisdictions and foreign regulatory bodies in a particular country (e.g.: New Brunswick has a reciprocity agreement in place with French accountants), which can serve as a starting point.
  - Intelligence from federal partners, industry associations, IRCC overseas officers, and other sources that provide evidence of large pools of labour concentrated in one geographic area will also be leveraged.
2. Non-regulated occupations:
  - Where an occupation is not regulated (such as occupations in the accommodation, services or agricultural sectors), country selection will be informed by intelligence from federal partners, industry associations, IRCC overseas officers, and other sources that provide evidence of large pools of labour concentrated in one geographic area.

An additional consideration in country selection will be the presence of bilateral agreements on labour mobility (which can cover both regulated and non-regulated occupations). This could include, for example, countries with whom Canada has free trade agreements including labour mobility clauses (Trans-Pacific Partnership, Chile, Peru, Colombia, Korea, European Union, United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, Panama) as well as non-trade related agreements (e.g. Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program with Mexico and Caribbean countries; agreements between select provinces and the Government of the Philippines to support the ethical recruitment of workers).

Finally, operational and policy considerations will be factored in. This includes the need to meet certain policy objectives (such as francophone immigration) and the capacity of the given IRCC mission serving a country to assist with the event.

### **Who can participate in skills missions?**

- IRCC would welcome businesses and industry associations of all sizes and diverse backgrounds (i.e. regional, francophone) with significant labour shortages in selected occupation groups. Depending on the industry and location, it may be preferable for IRCC to partner with industry organizations to identify and coordinate participating employers. Identification of which employers and associations to include in a skills mission would be completed in consultation with the Dedicated Service Channel and would include consultation with key Departments such as ISED, ESDC and GAC. Criteria for assessment of participating employers would have to be transparent and fair, and could include considerations such as whether the employer has:
  - o Conducted research on foreign market labour pools, especially in the targeted country
  - o Launched a recruitment campaign and demonstrated ethical recruitment practices
  - o Is ready to offer employment commensurate with any eligibility requirements for the chosen immigration pathway (i.e. LMIA requirements re: advertising, wages)
  - o Has a strategic HR plan with dedicated resources to support their integration and transition

Preference will be given to businesses that:

- Require workers in the selected targeted occupations
- Are located in regions with high labour shortages in select occupations.

### **How does one signal interest in participating in skills missions?**

It is likely that IRCC will adopt an expression of interest model for employers and associations to express their interest in a skills missions (ie: IRCC will create a registration page for interested parties to sign up). Each advertised mission will have detailed information on the overall program, including timelines, targeted occupation groups and selected country. Depending on the location and occupation of a mission, IRCC may also reach out to select groups to participate, where there is a known interest.

### **How long will each skill mission last?**

It will vary depending on the number of participants, capacity at missions abroad, pre-departure recruitment efforts by employers and availability of local authorities. That said, each skills mission will



generally take place within a one week period and could involve visiting multiple cities or multiple countries.

**What are the travel arrangements and expenses for participating in skills mission?**

Programming and travel details (such as in-country transportation options and hotel block bookings) will be shared with confirmed participants as information becomes available. Participants are responsible for organizing their own travel arrangements, including all air and ground transportation to and from the airport, and to make their own accommodation reservations.

IRCC may assume responsibility for expenses in relation to hosting of meetings (venues) and hospitality for participants, as necessary.

**Are there funding programs provided by IRCC to support employers interested in skills missions?**

IRCC does not have dedicated funding to support employers attending skills missions. Participants are responsible for covering all expenses, including airfare, accommodations, ground transportation and meals.

**Which sector will be responsible in leading skills missions?**

The new Chief International Talent Officer branch under Strategic Policy will assume leadership of organizing and managing skills missions on behalf of IRCC. Given the linkages to economic and international affairs, the newly created branch will work closely with permanent economic immigration, Domestic Network and international affairs branches, as well as key OGDs, to identify key occupation groups and countries.