

# NEW VOICES



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Working together to reduce poverty and enhance newcomer voices!



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Hard work ahead to achieve employment equity

Door closed to second career

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A boost to employment

Newcomers call for roundtable talks

**REFUSING TO SETTLE  
FOR LESS!**

# EDITORIAL

# NEW VOICES, NEW SOLUTIONS

By Tanya Chute Molina  
Executive Director

Newcomer job applicants often face a double bind. They can't get a job because they don't have Canadian experience and they can't get Canadian experience because no one will give them a job.

As one internationally trained worker puts it: "Many bosses will ask you if you have local experience. How can we answer this? We can only say that we live here and we don't have a job yet. If we do not have a job, how can we get Canadian experience?"

"You never start," she adds. "It's unfair."

During the summer of 2009, the Mennonite New Life Centre undertook a participatory action research project to look beneath the surface of the oft cited barrier of "Canadian experience."

Through our research, we began to ask new questions. Is the real issue the immigrant job applicant's lack of "Canadian experience," or does this way of stating the problem mask underlying practices of discrimination and exclusion? Is the problem the immigrant or the system? Individual deficit or structural exclusion?

New immigrants struggle to integrate into the labour market, despite having higher levels of education than native born Canadians.

That Canada is not living up to its promise to newcomers is more than clear. Report after report shows that new immigrants struggle to integrate into the labour market, despite having higher levels of education than native born Canadians. They are underrepresented in professional and leadership positions, and overrepresented in precarious and low-paid jobs.

Our research participants were living the familiar statistics: 73% had attended university in their home country and 38% had pursued higher education in Canada. Nevertheless, 25 of 45 participants reported that their situation had "deteriorated" since arrival in Canada. 37% were currently unemployed, and 60% had been unable to find work in their field of expertise. 53% reported annual incomes below \$20 000.

What is needed to change these statistics?

More importantly, what is needed to transform the daily struggles, broken dreams and unfulfilled potential hidden behind the numbers?

Much employment programming focuses on helping newcomers fill gaps in knowledge or skills to prepare themselves for the Canadian labour market. Yet the income gap between racialized and non-racialized workers continues to grow. Do we need better programs or better policies? Or maybe both.

Through a series of seven focus groups, the Mennonite New Life Centre engaged newcomer participants in collective reflection on the barriers they faced in looking for employment, and their recommendations for change.

The recommendations were many and diverse, ranging all the way from improving language instruction programs to eliminating the differentiation between "skilled" and "temporary" workers in Canadian immigration policy.

Any action plan calls for prioritization. During a collective analysis session, we asked participants to vote with their feet, moving to the posted recommendation that they felt was most urgent. The overwhelming majority rallied around recommendations to create more paid internship opportunities for newcomers and to bring back employment equity legislation in the province of Ontario.

Programs or policies? Employer incentives or legislative imperatives? Newcomers told us that



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Opportunity or dead end? Too often, job boards full of ads for cooks and truck drivers leave newcomers frustrated in their search for fair and meaningful employment

both are needed to liberate the full potential of the immigrant work force. “Employers need incentives,” they told us. But incentives are not enough. Hiring practices need to be legislated: “Asking for Canadian experience should be illegal.”

In the pages that follow, internationally trained journalists explore the themes of employer incentives and legislative change, newcomer internships and employment equity. They tell the job search horror stories that call for change, and the internship success stories that point to best practices. They talk to newcomers, employers, policy analysts and decision makers about the benefits and challenges of establishing a new job creation fund, or bringing back employment equity legislation to a province that repealed such measures in 1995.

Above all, our writers point to the importance of newcomers participating in the search for program and policy solutions to the complex employment challenges they face. New voices are called for. Solutions, however, can only be found in the dialogue between new voices and old, between newcomers, allies, service providers, employers and government.

As one of our research participants suggests, we need a roundtable mechanism for diverse stakeholders to meet on a regular basis to review immigrant employment challenges and develop a coordinated strategy to improve labour market outcomes.

It will take time to achieve such an ambitious proposal, but spaces for dialogue continue to open up through consultations, conferences, community forums. On March 27, the Mennonite New Life Centre invites you to join us in a community forum entitled Refusing to settle for less: Newcomer policy recommendations to overcome poverty. In this forum, we will bring together new voices and old, reflecting together on newcomer recommendations to improve access to fair and meaningful employment. Read on for more information about how to get involved.

Together, we can change the statistics and live the success stories.

# HARD WORK AHEAD TO ACHIEVE EMPLOYMENT EQUITY

By Oscar Vigil

Efforts to return employment equity legislation to Ontario received a shot in the arm recently with Ontario Trillium Foundation funding of \$255,000 for the Colour of Poverty Campaign (COPC).

The funding commitment, announced at a press conference October 1 at the Centre for Social Innovation in Toronto, will enable COPC and its partners across the province to develop and recommend policy imperatives “to level the employment playing field for racialized communities and other historically disadvantaged groups,” as per the campaign’s framework for action.

Many of COPC’s members represent immigrant communities or agencies that serve them. They seek better opportunities for individuals from these communities through building policy and law around employment equity.

“Today in Ontario those who are poor are most likely to be people of colour,” says Avvy Go, clinic director of the Metro Toronto Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic, a member organization of COPC.

“While there has been increasing awareness among the general public about the growing disparity between the rich and the poor, few people realize that poverty in this province impacts communities differently,” Go added.

COPC received strong support for its work from Roy McMurtry, a former chief justice of Ontario and co-author of the landmark Report on the Roots of Youth Violence, who spoke at the event about the importance of writing legislation that would not only facilitate access to jobs, but also promote conditions to benefit young people and educate them so they can be successful.

The Trillium funding will allow COPC to continue research and public education on two critical priorities – bringing back the policy imperatives of employment equity to Ontario, and tracking disaggregated data from various sources to better identify systemic disadvantages that create barriers to jobs for many immigrants.



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Ryerson professor Grace-Edward Galabuzi, a leading expert on race and poverty in Canada, speaks to the press on the urgency of the Colour of Poverty Campaign.

COPC members recognize the difficulties of the task that lies before them – restoring the legislative commitments of Ontario’s short-lived Employment Equity Act, which came into effect in 1994 only to be dismantled a year later under then premier Mike Harris’s Conservative government.

“I suspect that although this is something that we would like to see happen very quickly, we have a lot of work to do,” said Duberlis Ramos, executive director of the Hispanic Development Council, a COPC member. “This is a very politically charged discussion... I think the experience and echoes of 1995 are still there and in the middle of a recession this will be an even greater challenge.”

The recession has been especially hard on new immigrants. Research released in November by Statistics Canada shows immigrants who had arrived in the last five years lost their jobs at a far faster rate during the recession than Canadian-born workers. Their employment fell 12.9 per cent during the past year, more than five times as much as for workers born in Canada. Many jobs held by new immigrants are in the manufacturing sector, which has been hit hard by the economic downturn.

The current situation reflects a deepening of trends seen in an earlier StatsCan report, "Canada's immigrant labour market – 2007." That report showed new immigrants struggling to integrate into the labour market, even though they were more likely than their Canadian-born counterparts to have a university education. At that time, the jobless rate for immigrants in Canada less than five years was 11.5 per cent, compared with 4.9 per cent for the Canadian-born population.

The 2007 report cited a "lack of Canadian work experience, lack of recognition of foreign credentials and language barriers as the most severe impediments to labour force integration for recent immigrants to Canada."

New studies by the national statistics agency, released in late November amid the recession, show immigrants face lower wages and are more likely than Canadian-born workers to be forced to work temporary or part-time jobs, despite being overqualified in many cases.

On average immigrants worked 38.3 hours each week at their main job, slightly more than the 38.1 hours for Canadian-born workers. Immigrant workers aged 25 to 59 earned an average of \$2.28 an hour less than their Canadian-born counterparts.

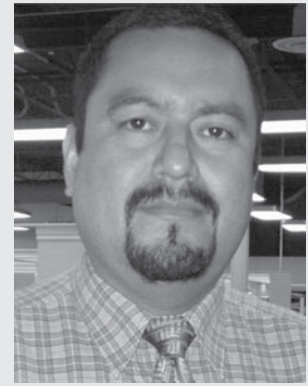
COPC members and their supporters are seeking a return to the provincial policy framework that led to implementation of the 1993 Act to Provide for Employment Equity for Aboriginal People, People with Disabilities, Members of Racial Minorities and Women. To a great extent this was the result of a long struggle by communities and individuals to promote employment access and stability for minority groups, particularly those identified in the legislation.

Ramos remembers when the legislation was passed under then NDP premier Bob Rae's government. He also remembers that the whole framework was dismantled shortly afterwards: "Unfortunately, the implementation of the legislation was too short-lived and there was no time to see its actual effects."

Now, employment equity has worked its way back into Ontario politics. Provincial commitments to poverty reduction set the stage for COPC's work on employment equity.

The Ontario government's report, "Breaking the Cycle – Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy," released in December 2008, says: "The poverty reduction strategy must recognize the heightened risk among groups such as immigrants, women, single mothers, people with disabilities, aboriginal peoples and racialized groups."

Employment equity is one strategy to recognize and address heightened risk of poverty. This time, COPC - and the immigrant communities it advocates for - are eager to see its effects.



## Oscar Vigil

Oscar Vigil came to Canada in 2001, bringing over 20 years of journalistic experience in Latin America. He is currently director of the online magazine [RevistaDebate.ca](http://RevistaDebate.ca) and overseas correspondent for *La Prensa Grafica* in El Salvador. Vigil is also involved with *Journalists in Exile*, an organization that gives voice to journalists forced to flee their homelands.

**revistadebate.ca**

**Journalists in Exile**  
Canada's Voices

# DOOR CLOSED TO SECOND CAREER

By Shan Qiao

Like many immigrants, Peiyun Liu faces some hard choices in this recession. Out of a job now, after working more than 10 years as a business journalist in China and Canada, Liu is at a crossroads: either go back to Asia to pursue opportunities there in journalism or stay in Canada and settle for less.

Liu's story is similar to others throughout the Canadian media sector, where hundreds of journalists have lost their jobs amid corporate restructurings during the recession. Big player CanWest has gone into bankruptcy protection and Torstar, owner of the Toronto Star, has announced buyouts with industry insiders expecting labour force reductions of 100 to 200 people.

Between November 2008 and January 2009, some 1,200 full-time journalism jobs were lost in Canada.

Hoping to improve his chances of staying in the sector, Liu, who immigrated here in 2004, sought help from Ontario Skills Development.

That was back in the summer and now Liu, like many others, faces dimmer prospects with a decision by the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to slow down processing of applications to its Second Career and Skills Development program in October due to oversubscription.

In a bulletin posted on its website, the ministry said that "in just 16 months, it has helped 21,000" laid-off Ontarians. The flood of applications has outstripped its budget to help 20,000 unemployed workers over three years.



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Tools of the trade. Internationally trained journalists struggle to maintain hope in a tough job market.

New guidelines from November 20 will prioritize applicants who plan to gain new skills for high-demand occupations or for those who have a high-school education or less.

Factors considered by Second Career administrators include work experience, education and length of unemployment.

Liu says he hopes to apply for up to \$28,000 a year to cover the cost of training and living expenses.

"The case manager told me that if I can prove the skills I need to learn are under NOC (National Occupation Classification) Level B or lower, then I can get the funding," he said. Level B means two to three years of post-secondary education at a community college.

That's created a problem for Liu, who may be overqualified with a university degree. Ironically, Liu used that same degree to satisfy immigration officials when he applied to come to Canada as a journalist.

"If you have a university degree already, the government thinks you don't need any training in finding employment," Liu said.

"I'm admitted (to Canada) by the federal government's immigration points system, because my academic degree is high enough," he added, "but I am not qualified for the provincial (Second Career) program because my degree is not low enough."

If he can sort out training in computer skills, he thinks this give him a better chance at re-entering the media sector, as many news organizations move their products to the Internet. However, he will still have to face the challenge of landing a job.

Liu says he's most interested in continuing his career as a journalist, and has considered enrolling in Toronto-based Sheridan College's "Media for Global Professionals" retraining program.

But it can be tough for internationally trained journalists who are trying to break into the Canadian media sector, said Sandy McKean, a former CBC reporter and now associate dean of Media and Journalism at Sheridan.

"I'm admitted by the federal government because my degree is high enough, but I am not qualified for the provincial program because my degree is not low enough"

"There is racism in the industry," McKean told a crowd of prospective students at a recent information session. "What you've seen in the newsroom are white males and females."

McKean admitted that success after the program, now in its fourth year, is not guaranteed.

One graduate has been able to secure a part-time gig with CBC, while others are driving taxis to make ends meet.

Enrolment in the program has also fallen, from 31 graduates in the first year, to 25 the second year, then 15 in the third. In 2010, about 15 to 20 students are expected to enroll in the program.

Opportunities are scarce with the recession in full swing, and with parts of the media sector unregulated and lacking even self-regulated professional organizations, it's difficult to promote employment equity.

"The provincial government has much more power to encourage the self-regulated professions to recognize the expertise, work experience and educations of newcomers," suggests Michael Kerr, campaign co-ordinator for the Colour of Poverty Campaign that was recently awarded \$255,000 by the Trillium Foundation to research policy on employment equity.

"Historically, the provincial government has chosen not to exercise that power," Kerr added.

Says Liu: "I guess journalists are a dying breed. I either go back to China to do what I like, or I get a college certificate here to make a living. Either way, it's hard to think about."



## Shan Qiao

Shan Qiao is a Chinese Canadian journalist based in Toronto. Qiao has covered municipal, provincial and federal elections, as well as the Chinese Head Tax redress campaign and official apology by Prime Minister Harper. On a lighter note, she has reported on the Toronto International Film Festival and the Beijing Olympic Games. Also a freelance photographer, Qiao has worked for several media outlets such as CNW Group, the Toronto Star, and Xinhua News. Her work and portfolio can be viewed at [www.qshan.com](http://www.qshan.com)

# ROUTES TO SOCIAL INNOVATION?

By Gerardo Correa



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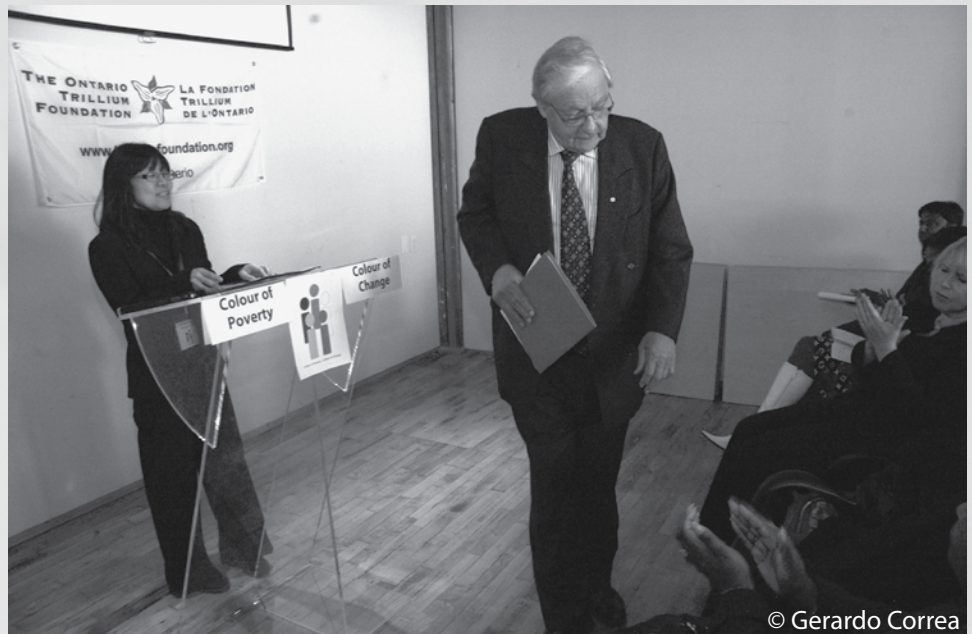
LINC students work to overcome the language barrier at the Mennonite New Life Centre.





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Administrators scan resumes and cover letters, while applicants wait to be called for interviews. The brevity of the resume disadvantages newcomer job seekers, who struggle to communicate their expertise to hiring managers unfamiliar with international universities and employers.



Former Chief Justice of Ontario Roy McMurtry concludes his speech at the Colour of Poverty press conference, to the applause of Minister of Children and Youth Services Deb Matthews. The Colour of Poverty Campaign advocates for employment equity legislation to overcome the systemic barriers experienced by racialized workers.

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A health fair opens many doors to newcomers, offering information on health, safety and workplace rights, while also building social networks. Pedro and his friends enjoy a moment of laughter in Leamington.

# A BOOST TO EMPLOYMENT

By Luis Castro

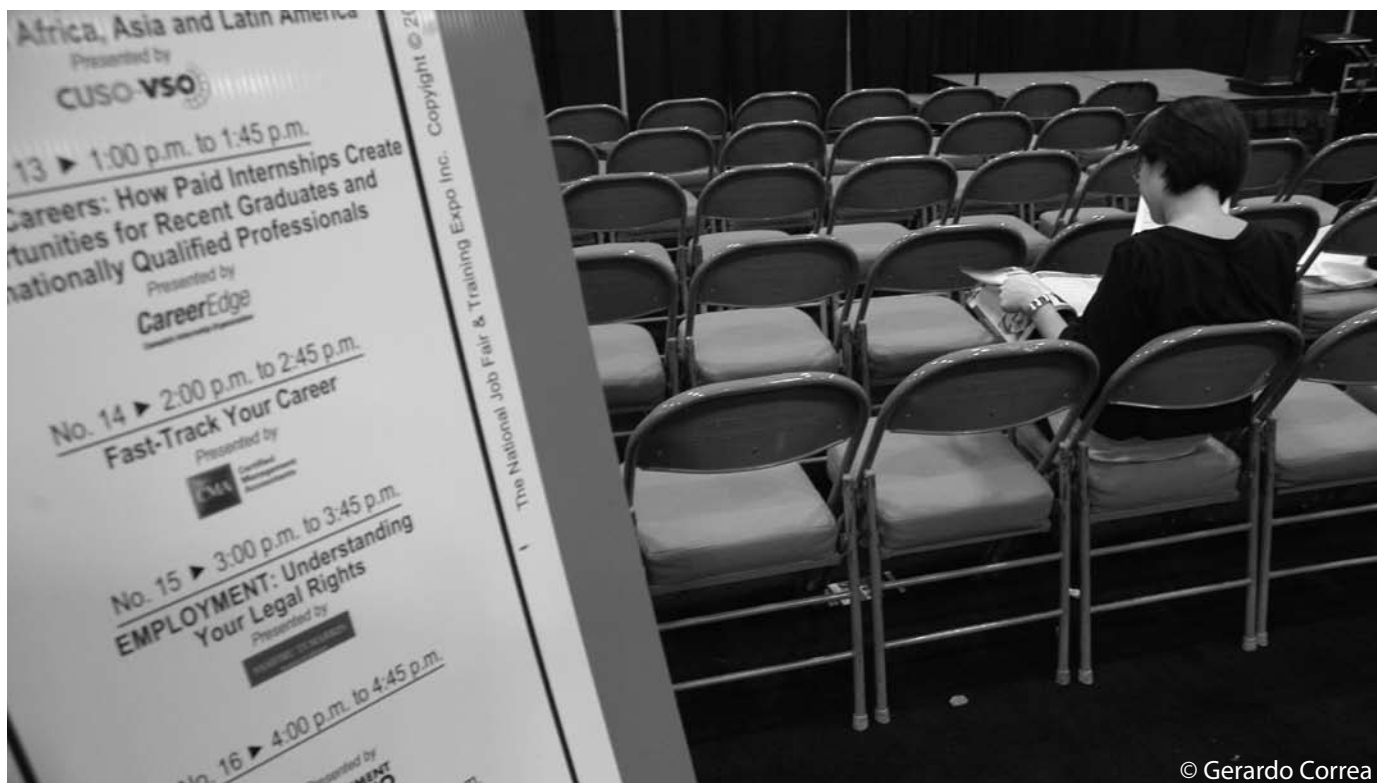
An average of 200 newcomer professionals a year find paid internships in business or public service settings in Ontario. It's a small figure, given the number of skilled immigrants entering the province each year. In 2008, Citizenship and Immigration Canada recorded a total of 75 752 economic immigrants arriving in Ontario.

But for the lucky few who secure an internship, the benefits are immeasurable. "We know that paid internships work," says Ken Goldberg, retired social worker and a partner with Social Venture Partners Toronto. "Interns are often hired on after the internship. At least, they get some Canadian experience and a Canadian reference. They are better situated to find a job."

The Toronto Regional Immigrant Employment Council reports that nearly 80% of newcomers placed in internships through the Career Bridge program subsequently found full-time employment in their field of expertise. TRIEC has been recognized by the International Labour Organization for modeling "good practice" in labour migration.

Internships are not the only answer to employment access for newcomers. For some employers, it may take legislative imperatives, not just economic incentives, to produce a visible change in hiring practices. But for many newcomers, a paid internship is just the opportunity they've been waiting for to showcase skills that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Yulei Wang has experienced first hand the benefits of internship programs. A 27 year old graduate student from China, Wang joined the Mennonite New Life Centre as a research and advocacy intern through the Canada Summer Jobs Program. Wang notes that the placement offered him "a nurturing experience serving newcomers."



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Waiting for opportunity. A job fair and training expo features a workshop on paid internships for internationally trained professionals.

Wang is now making a career out of working cross culturally. Just a few months after finishing his internship, he took on a full time job with the United Nations in Cambodia.

Wang credits his current understanding of diversity to his internship experience: "Before joining Mennonite New Life Centre as a summer student, I truly had no direct exposure to a multicultural environment," says Wang. "The summer job helped me immensely in terms of conceptualizing the practical meaning of "diversity" and "multiculturalism."

Internships are not a panacea. Not every employer is ready to make the extra effort to offer opportunities to newcomers.

"If there is a lot of red tape to be done to access wage subsidies for internships, then the employer does not bother in pursuing this avenue," says Eduardo Garay, Settlement Program Manager at the Learning Enrichment Foundation.

"Even those who do make that effort sometimes fail to provide meaningful employment experiences. Internships such as those offered through the Canada Summer Jobs Program can be a mixed story, notes Wang.

"While my experience with the Mennonite New Life Centre was a high quality summer job opportunity, it does not necessarily assume that each opportunity provided by the program is equally high quality."

"To what extent a given intern or summer student benefits from the experience largely depends upon the job duties required by different employers," Wang adds.

Another limitation of the Canada Summer Jobs Program is the age restriction. Designed for full time students, the program funds positions for individuals up to 30 years of age.

Expanding internship opportunities requires a comprehensive strategy and well resourced fund, in order to promote job creation for internationally trained workers of all ages and professional backgrounds.

It requires building bridges with employers from many sectors, educating them about the skills of internationally trained workers, and encouraging them to provide career relevant experience.

In November, Statistics Canada reported that two thirds of university educated newcomers are underemployed. That's 33% employed in their field of expertise, compared to nearly 80% after completing a Career Bridge internship.

If made widely accessible, a career track internship program could make all the difference for internationally trained job applicants.

"We know that paid internships work. Interns are often hired on after the internship."



## Luis Castro

A journalist and communications specialist from Mexico, Luis Castro has experience as a columnist and editor in print media and news websites. His passion for language has also led him to teach English as a Second Language and to study French and Farsi. Since 2008, Castro has lived in Toronto, where now works in the health field. Castro participates in the Newcomer Advocacy Committee at the Mennonite New Life Centre.

# NEWCOMERS CALL FOR ROUNDTABLE TALKS

By Luis Alberto Matta

The head of Canada's largest bank says it's time for Canadians to be more inclusive when welcoming immigrants to this country, helping them to settle and find jobs here.

"We must do a better job of leveraging the diversity of our current and future workforce," says Gord Nixon, president and chief executive officer of RBC Financial Group.

"If we do, we will have an unrivalled advantage. If we don't, we will face an uphill battle just to maintain our current competitiveness."

New immigrants bring knowledge and experience to the Canadian economy, and provide a steady supply of willing participants to fill out the ranks of the Canadian labour market. The challenge in recent years –and through the current recession –has been in integrating newcomers' skills and expertise into the economy.

Looking for a better formula to make this happen, agencies serving immigrants are proposing publicly funded roundtable talks on new strategies to develop genuine options of integration for skilled immigrants to work.

All stakeholders, from new immigrants themselves to settlement and employment agencies, government and employers, would have their say in creating effective policies that result in better economic outcomes.



On the wrong side of the tracks. Poverty and wealth collide in Toronto.

© Gerardo Correa

"If Canada is to maintain and improve its standard of living, we must become the destination of choice for skilled immigrants, scientists, professionals and entrepreneurs," Nixon said.

Support for the roundtable initiative appears to be growing.

With specific goals and objectives and a strong participatory framework, the Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism would support such an initiative, a ministry spokesperson says.

"It is a remarkable proposal," said Michel Payen-Dumont. "Nevertheless, we have done quite a similar job through seminars and conferences."

The key difference of the proposed roundtable talks would be the proactive and inclusive nature of the exercise, especially if newcomers are given an active role in creating the framework for consultation.

The need for such talks is abundantly clear: recent studies by Statistics Canada show immigrants have been hit much harder by the recession than their Canadian-born counterparts.

"Their employment fell 12.9 per cent during the past year, more than five times as much as for workers born in Canada," StatsCan said in a November report. Previous StatsCan analysis has shown that new immigrants constitute the main source for the growth of the national workforce.

However, there are many obstacles that stand in the way of newcomers landing sustainable jobs once they get to Canada. Foreign-trained professionals are challenged by the need to acquire Canadian credentials and meet industry-defined standards. Some employers unfairly demand that job seekers have "Canadian experience."

Language training is also necessary for new immigrants who must acquire enough proficiency not only to meet basic daily needs, but also to build networks to access jobs and other social necessities.

Parts of the formula for building immigrant success stories are already in existence. Some Canadian businesses and non-governmental agencies are providing some solutions to these challenges through their own mentoring programs.

Doug Maybee, a spokesperson for Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, provided examples of the bank being proactive in its hiring policies, giving newcomers a chance to be recruited through its "mentoring speed program," a co-ordinated approach that is supported by settlement and employment agencies in Toronto.

"CIBC also participates as a host organization to Career Bridge," added Maybee. The program assists qualified candidates from internship programs to find full-time positions at the bank.

"Mentoring matches well skilled immigrants with mentors who share similar professions," said Emily Mills of the Toronto Immigrant Employment Council.

Both Mills and Maybee said they would welcome roundtable talks on creating better employment outcomes for newcomers, particularly creating policies to integrate skilled immigrants into the workforce.



## Luis A. Matta

A researcher and writer from Colombia, Luis Alberto Matta has written extensively about the armed conflict, human rights abuses and peacebuilding efforts in his native country. After coming to Canada, he was selected to participate in PEN Canada's Writer's in Exile Program. More recently, Matta completed a certificate in Migration and Refugee Issues at York University. He now works as a Settlement and Employment Counsellor.

Toronto, December 2009

Dear Friends:

On behalf of the Mennonite New Life Centre and our Newcomer Advocacy Committee, we would like to invite you to participate in our community forum **Refusing to settle for less: Newcomer policy recommendations to overcome poverty**. This forum will be held on **Saturday March 27th, 2010 from 9:30 am to 4:30 pm** in our meeting space at 1774 Queen Street East.

As you know, the Mennonite New Life Centre is a vibrant, multi-cultural settlement agency for newcomers, with a vision for a city and province where people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds participate fully in the social, economic and political life of Toronto and Ontario.

During the forum, we hope to engage a wide variety of stakeholders in dialogue regarding newcomer employment challenges and policy proposals, and to identify new ways of working together so that newcomers might contribute their skills and their ideas to this country. To facilitate this dialogue and action planning, we are planning four roundtable discussions around the themes of access to employment and political voice for newcomers:

1. **Employment Equity Legislation:** a proposal to ensure equitable representation of diverse groups in the workplace.
2. **Paid Internships:** an employer incentive strategy.
3. **Upcoming Municipal and Provincial Elections:** opportunities and challenges for newcomer civic participation.
4. **Community organizing experiences:** learning from grassroots newcomer initiatives

Your participation is key to the success of this forum. We look forward to hearing your experiences, ideas and proposals for improving access to fair and meaningful employment for newcomers and building strong and inclusive communities where immigrants and refugees participate fully in civic life. We look forward to your participation in our **March 27th 2010 Forum**. Please mark this date in your calendar!

Regards,

MNLCT and Newcomer Advocacy Committee

**FORUM**  
**REFUSING TO SETTLE FOR LESS:**  
**Newcomer policy recommendations**  
**to overcome poverty.**

**Date: Saturday March 27th**  
**9:30 to 4:30 pm**

**Location: 1774 Queen Street East, Toronto ON M4L 1G7**

Followed by an evening program of music and artistic expression on themes of newcomer employment and civic participation.

**Forum Goals:**

To reduce poverty and strengthen newcomer voices.

To bring together newcomers, allies, service providers, employers and government to build shared solutions to newcomer employment challenges

To share newcomer policy recommendations for improving access to fair and meaningful employment

To discuss strategies for achieving full civic participation by newcomers to Ontario.

For more information, contact Adriana Salazar at 416-699-4527 X229 or [asalazar@mnlct.org](mailto:asalazar@mnlct.org)  
Forum agenda and registration form will be available in January.

**Interested in supporting New Voices?**

Contact us to contribute, join our mailing list or make a donation.

All donations are gratefully acknowledged with a receipt for income tax purposes.

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**NEW**  
**VOICES**

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**“The Mennonite New Life Centre recognizes that each migration and settlement experience is unique and influenced by intersecting oppressions. In our services and advocacy, we will acknowledge and challenge barriers and discrimination faced on grounds including ethnicity, race/colour, religion/creed, political opinion, country of origin, citizenship/immigration status, age, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic class, family status, type of housing, neighbourhood of residence, language, and ability.”**

**Mennonite New Life Centre Commitment to Anti-Opression**

