

Overcoming structural racial discrimination: An analysis of the  
Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council's approach to improving  
skilled immigrant labour market integration

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## Executive Summary

Structural racial discrimination is a reality in the Canadian labour market. Currently, skilled and professional immigrants are experiencing significant barriers to obtaining appropriate employment. The purpose of this research paper is to assess the work of the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) in improving skilled immigrant employment outcomes. In Toronto, as in many regions in Canada, the widespread underemployment of skilled and professional immigrants has become a major problem.

In assessing the work of TRIEC, I conducted semi-structured interviews with two employees from its secretariat and analyzed TRIEC communications materials, as well as newspaper coverage of its initiatives and programs. TRIEC has made some significant inroads in coming up with solutions to address the problem of low labour market integration of skilled immigrants. The programs it has initiated to help immigrants obtain Canadian work experience and connect with mentors in their fields have been quite successful. Its unique position as a multi-stakeholder council, which includes the federal, provincial, and municipal governments, has also enabled it to facilitate the creation of policy changes to better respond to the needs of skilled immigrants.

While TRIEC has been active in its work to improve the employment outcomes of highly trained and educated immigrants, it has been less directly focused on addressing issues of structural racism and discrimination. In conforming to the liberal model of multiculturalism, which emphasizes harmonizing race relations to facilitate global capital accumulation, TRIEC has neglected the social justice dimension of the issue. TRIEC should incorporate a stronger emphasis on employment equity in its policy and programming. This entails engaging with discussions of structural forms of racial discrimination in the labour market. Broaching the subject of discriminatory barriers will help to move national discourse on the subject towards a more productive and politicized engagement with these issues.



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## Introduction

Immigration in Canada today is primarily an urban phenomenon. The ability of cities and city regions to successfully integrate immigrants is critical to the overall success of multiculturalism and pluralism in Canada. A major part of this success is related to the social and economic planning of cities to integrate immigrant newcomers into the labour market.

The Canadian economy relies on the contributions of skilled and professional immigrants to sustain growth. Over the last thirty years, the Canadian government has adjusted its admission requirements to increasingly favour immigrants with specialized skills and advanced degrees. However, many of these immigrants have been unable to obtain employment commensurate with their skills and experience, despite their qualifications. Even after taking measures to upgrade skills where necessary, undergoing re-testing or re-qualifying procedures, many immigrants find they are turned down after an interview because they do not have Canadian work experience. Many highly qualified immigrants have to take low-paying jobs or return to their home country. In addition to the egregious waste of human capital this represents, many immigrants are highly disaffected by their experiences in Canada.

In Toronto, as in many other Canadian cities and regions, the underemployment of skilled and professional immigrants has developed into a major problem. Toronto receives over half of the nation's immigrants—about 100,000 annually. If the trend towards the under-use of immigrants' skills continues, there will be an increasingly growing population of economically marginalized and disadvantaged immigrants—many of whom are racial minorities. As Canada is defined, in part, by the success of its pluralism, this trend is clearly unsustainable for the successful integration of skilled newcomers.

In 2003 the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) was established to help reverse this problem. TRIEC is a multi-stakeholder council, composed of employers, occupational regulatory bodies, post-secondary institutions, immigrant-serving agencies,

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and all three levels of government. It works to improve employment outcomes for skilled and professional immigrants in the Toronto region.

In this report I analyze how TRIEC works to improve immigrant employment outcomes. Does it work towards promoting broader, structural change or does it concentrate on the immediate need to match skilled immigrants with appropriate jobs? Given that TRIEC is a multi-stakeholder organization, how does it negotiate the different priorities of stakeholders? Does it focus on building a contact network of employers to increase possible employment opportunities for immigrants? Does it engage in advocacy work or research? How does it address issues of racism and discrimination? Through analysis of TRIEC communications materials and media coverage, as well as interviews with TRIEC representatives, I examine how the organization works towards integrating qualified immigrants into the work force.

These are timely questions to ask, as TRIEC is widely recognized as having achieved some important successes and is becoming a model for the formation of other organizations across Canada and even abroad. It is important to reflect on the work of TRIEC and evaluate its achievements and possible shortcomings. Reitz, a prominent researcher on immigrant economic outcomes and discrimination, has pointed out the need for more evaluative research on policies and programs that work directly towards improving the employment prospects of immigrants, such as credential assessment services, bridge-training programs, and information services.<sup>1</sup> To this list I would add multi-stakeholder bodies like TRIEC.

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<sup>1</sup> Reitz, J.G. (2007b). Immigrant employment success in Canada, part II: Understanding the decline. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 8(1): 37-62.

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## **Immigrant characteristics, hiring practices, and labour market conditions**

Before delving into an examination of the work of TRIEC, it is necessary to have some understanding of the empirical research that has revealed the decline in immigrant economic outcomes. It is also important to consider some of the explanations that have been put forward in the literature, relating to changes in immigrant characteristics, hiring practices and the Canadian labour market.

In 1967, Canadian immigration authorities adopted a universalized points-based system to select immigrants based primarily on their education, skills, work experience and official language ability. This system was intended to select immigrants who would be economically successful in Canada. The reform also allowed for the elimination of a biased system of selection, as immigrants would be admitted based on objective standards of merit.

As the selection system was reformed, a higher proportion of educated immigrants began to arrive and the source countries of immigrants shifted from largely western European countries and the U.S. to Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America. The shift of immigrant source countries has been quite dramatic and rapid. In 1966, 80%-90% of immigrants to Canada were from Europe or the U.S.<sup>2</sup> By 2006, the top four immigrant source countries were China, India, the Philippines, and Pakistan.<sup>3</sup>

### **Immigrant characteristics and hiring criteria**

In considering the trend towards the general declining economic outcomes of immigrants, we must first examine the effect of immigrant characteristics like education, work experience and language ability. As noted above, highly educated immigrants are coming to Canada in higher numbers than ever before. Of the immigrants entering Canada in

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<sup>2</sup> Ley, D. (1999). Myths and meanings of immigration and the metropolis. *Canadian Geographer*, 43(1): 2-18.

<sup>3</sup> Citizenship and Immigration Canada. (2006). *Facts and figures 2006 immigration overview: Permanent and temporary residents*. Ottawa: Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

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2000, 43.9 % of men and 37.5% of women held a bachelor's degree or higher. In comparison, for the Canadian-born population the figures are 21.7% and 16.6%, respectively.<sup>4</sup> However, immigrants are not enjoying the same returns on their education as the native population. Between 1990 and 2000 the relative earnings of recent immigrants (compared to the native-born population) did not improve, despite the fact that many more of them were university graduates.<sup>5</sup> Many studies have found that the market value of immigrant credentials is generally less than that of native Canadians. Arguably foreign qualifications do have relevance in the Canadian context, but employers and regulatory bodies often do not recognize this relevance.<sup>6</sup>

Work experience is also an important factor in determining immigrants' hirability. However, studies have found that Canadian employers place little importance on foreign experience—in fact it seems to count for even less than foreign credentials in the Canadian labour market. This has been a significant contributing factor to the declining earnings of immigrants.<sup>7</sup> Why the decline in value of foreign work experience? Many employers do not believe that foreign work experience is transferable to the Canadian context. As with the non-recognition of foreign credentials, the devaluation of overseas work experience is, to a certain extent, a result of racial discrimination as a shift in the source countries of immigrants has occurred.

Language ability is another important factor influencing the hirability of immigrants. To a certain degree, as the source countries of immigrants has shifted from Western European countries and the U.S. to Asian, African, and Latin American countries, the overall

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<sup>4</sup> Reitz, J.G. (2007a). Immigrant employment success in Canada, part I: Individual and contextual causes. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 8(1): 11-36.

<sup>5</sup> Frenette, M., & Morissette, R. (2003). *Will they ever converge? Earnings of immigrant and Canadian-born workers over the last two decades* (Analytical Studies Branch Research Paper Series). Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

<sup>6</sup> Cumming, P.A., Lee, E.L.D., Oreopoulos, D.G. (1989). *Access! Task force on Access to Professional and Trades in Ontario*. Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Citizenship.; Goldberg, M. (2000). *The facts are in! Newcomers' experiences in accessing regulated professions in Ontario*. Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, Access to Professions and Trades Unit.

<sup>7</sup> Green, D., & Worswick, C. (2006). *Immigrant earnings profiles in the presence of human capital investment: Measuring cohort and macro effects*. Paper presented at conference on Immigration: Impacts, integration, and intergenerational issues, University College, London, England, March 29-31.; Schaafsma, J., & Sweetman, A. (2001). Immigrant earnings: Age at immigration matters. *Canadian Journal of Economics*, 34(4): 1066-1099.

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English or French language proficiency of recent groups of immigrants may be lower than before the 1960s. However, skilled immigrants who enter Canada under the economic class are assessed based on their language ability in addition to other qualifications. Thus these immigrants have relatively good language proficiency. It has been suggested that overt accents when speaking English are negatively perceived.<sup>8</sup> For example, Creese and Kambere have shown that African women with advanced degrees from English-language institutions are perceived as less competent because they speak with accented English. This has negatively affected their ability to gain access to social goods, including jobs.<sup>9</sup>

Other factors also likely play a part in the devaluation of foreign expertise. Some scholars have suggested that a possible factor is the rapid rate of technological change.<sup>10</sup> Because of this, some Canadian employers place less value on Asian and Eastern European experience, as these countries are perceived to be behind on technological development. Others say that age is a factor.<sup>11</sup> Immigrants with more work experience are likely to be older. In some cases, employers are less willing to hire older employees. It has also been pointed out that greater use of personal and professional networks in contemporary hiring practices, especially for managerial level positions, has proved another disadvantage for immigrants, who, as newcomers, have less access to these networks.<sup>12</sup>

### Labour market conditions

Apart from immigrant characteristics, labour market conditions affect the economic outcomes of immigrants. To a certain extent, the increasing segmentation of the labour

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<sup>8</sup> Scassa, T. (1994). Language standards, ethnicity and discrimination. *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 26(3): 105-121.; Creese, G., & Kambere, E.N. (2003). What colour is your English? *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 40(5): 565-573.

<sup>9</sup> Creese & Kambere, *What colour is your English?*

<sup>10</sup> Picot, G., & Sweetman, A. (2005). *The deteriorating economic welfare of immigrants and possible causes: Update 2005* (Analytical Studies Branch Research Paper Series). Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Business and Labour Market Analysis.

<sup>11</sup> Schaafsma & Sweetman. *Immigrant earnings: Age at immigration matters.*

<sup>12</sup> Reitz, *Immigrant employment success in Canada, part II.*

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market is contributing to declining immigrant outcomes.<sup>13</sup> The growing differentiation between secure, well-paying managerial and select professional positions and insecure, low-wage, and non-unionized jobs has put pressure on new labour market entrants. As income distribution has become more unequal, immigrants, including highly skilled ones, crowd into low-end jobs. In major urban centres, where they compete with the most skilled of the native-born population for higher-wage occupations, it is even more difficult to obtain work commensurate with their skill and education levels.

These factors must also be considered in context with the overall downward trend for *all* new labour market entrants, although Reitz points out that research has provided no real explanation for this downward trend.<sup>14</sup> In addition to this, the education levels of native-born Canadians have increased as the economy has shifted towards ‘knowledge-based’ occupations. Highly skilled and educated immigrants are competing with a more educated native work force. Thus, many immigrants experience a devaluing of their educational credentials as education levels of the native-born population increases.

It is also important to consider occupations outside the knowledge sector. There is some evidence that the ‘earnings penalty’ (that is, the lower average wages of immigrants as compared to native-born Canadians) of jobs outside the knowledge sector is higher than that within, at 25%–34% lower as compared to 12%–16% lower within the knowledge sector.<sup>15</sup> In fact the declining earnings for immigrants outside the knowledge sector have contributed significantly to the overall decline in earnings. Reitz suggests that the knowledge requirements of positions outside the knowledge sector are less well-defined, which contributes to immigrants’ difficulty in demonstrating the equivalency of their education for these jobs.

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<sup>13</sup> Grant, H.M., & Oertel, R.R. (1998). Diminishing returns to immigration? Interpreting the economic experience of Canadian immigrants. *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 30(3): 56-76.

<sup>14</sup> Reitz, *Immigrant employment success in Canada, part II*.

<sup>15</sup> Reitz, J.G. (2003). Occupational dimensions of immigrant credential assessment: Trends in professional, managerial, and other occupations, 1970-1996. In (eds.) Beach, C., Green, A., Reitz, J.G., *Canadian Immigration Policy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. pp. 469-506. Kingston: John Deutsch Institute for the Study of Economic Policy.

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## Unequal opportunity

Certainly, immigrants report frustrations over the barriers they experience in obtaining appropriate work and the discrimination they experience.<sup>16</sup> These barriers are a source of significant discontent and pain amongst some who have attempted to settle in Canada.<sup>17</sup>

The most common reasons that immigrants cite for failing to get work are: lack of Canadian experience, non-recognition of foreign credentials and experience, and lack of knowledge of an official language.<sup>18</sup>

While some skilled immigrants have found jobs relevant to their education and skill levels, many more are employed in low-skilled occupations. Many university-educated immigrants hold jobs that require no more than a high school education. It is difficult to isolate the extent to which each factor—whether relating to immigrant characteristics, hiring and promotion practices, or labour market conditions—plays a part in the declining economic outcomes of immigrants. The important point to note is that the downward trend exists *even after taking into account the qualifications and experience of immigrants and fluctuations in the economy*.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, it takes significantly longer for non-European-origin immigrants to achieve upward economic mobility. Research indicates that many visible minority immigrants and more recent immigrant cohorts (which include more non-whites than those cohorts prior to the reform in the immigration

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<sup>16</sup> Basran, G.S., & Zong, L. (1998). Devaluation of foreign credentials as perceived by visible minority professional immigrants. *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 30(3): 7- 23.

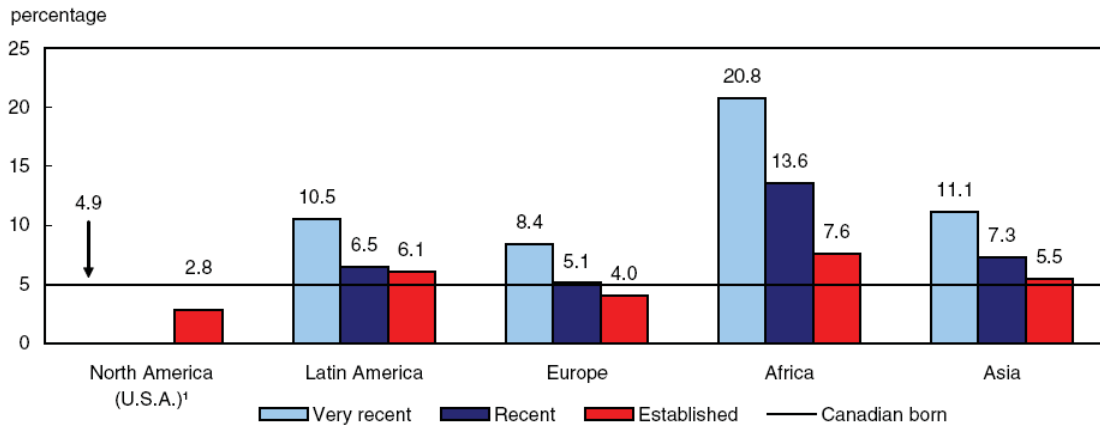
<sup>17</sup> For example, see [www.notcanada.com](http://www.notcanada.com); [www.notcanada.net](http://www.notcanada.net).

<sup>18</sup> Statistics Canada. (2005). *Population projections of visible minority groups, Canada, provinces and regions, 2001-2017*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Demography Division.

<sup>19</sup> Aydemir, A. & Skuterud, M. (2005). Explaining the deteriorating entry earnings of Canada's immigrant cohorts: 1966-2000. *Canadian Journal of Economics*, 38: 641-72.; Picot, G., & Hou, F. (2003). *The rise in low-income rates among immigrants in Canada (Analytical Studies Branch Research Paper Series)*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.; Canadian Council on Social Development. (2000). *Unequal access: A Canadian profile of racial differences in education, employment and income*. Toronto: Canadian Race Relations Foundation.; Christofides, L.N., & Swidinsky, R. (1994). Wage determination by gender and visible minority status: Evidence from the 1989 LMAS. *Canadian Public Policy*, 22(1): 34-51.; Boyd, M. (1992). Gender, visible minority and immigrant earnings inequality: Reassessing an employment equity premise. In (ed.) Satzewich, V., *Deconstructing a nation: Immigration, multiculturalism and racism in the 1990s Canada*. pp.279-321. Toronto: Garamond Press.

system) will not achieve parity with the native population.<sup>20</sup> The unemployment rate is highest amongst immigrants from Africa, Asia, and Latin America (see graph below).

Unemployment rate among immigrants aged 25-54, by region of birth, 2006



\*Very recent: in Canada 5 years or less; Recent: in Canada 5-10 years; Established: in Canada 10+ years

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey<sup>21</sup>

These findings point to the fact that many immigrants, especially immigrants of colour, face barriers to entering the Canadian work force or face glass-ceiling effects once in the work place. To the extent that immigrants experience these barriers, they are victims of discrimination in the labour market. Systemic discrimination refers to the institutionalization of discrimination through policies and practices, which may appear neutral on the surface, but have an exclusionary impact on particular groups, such that various minority groups are discriminated against, intentionally or unintentionally.<sup>22</sup> Beck *et al.* note that such systemic discriminatory practices

can include informal selection based on unnecessary qualifications (the requirement for Canadian experience, for example), informal recruitment systems (through “word of mouth” or networking where the networks do not extend into minority groups), and selection committees consisting only of long-term employees (few of whom happen to be members of minority groups). Some of these practices may not have been discriminatory

<sup>20</sup> Li, P. (2000). Earnings disparities between immigrants and native-born Canadians. *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 37(3): 289-311.; Bloom, D.E., Grenier, G., Gunderson, M. (1995). The changing labour market position of Canadian immigrants. *Canadian Journal of Economics*, 28: 987-1005.

<sup>21</sup> Gilmore, J. (2008). *The Canadian immigrant labour market in 2006: Analysis by region or country of birth*. Catalogue No. 71-606-X2008002. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

<sup>22</sup> Canadian Race Relations Foundation (2005). Web Site. <http://www.ccr.ca/>

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when first implemented, but become so with the changing racial composition of the labour force.<sup>23</sup>

This discrimination amounts to serious inequalities, with material consequences, between immigrants and native-born Canadians. Overt instances of racism in the hiring process are much less common. In the current environment, racism is more subtle but still a matter of concern. Scholars assert that racial discrimination in Canada has simply gone “underground.”<sup>24</sup>

### Employment equity

In an effort to combat the discrimination that was being experienced by various groups—women, aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, and members of visible minority groups—employment equity legislation was implemented by the federal government.<sup>25</sup> The *Employment Equity Act* came into effect 1986. The *Act* required all employers and crown corporations with one hundred or more employees to file an annual report with the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission to provide information on the representation of designated groups, their salary levels, promotions, and terminations. These employers were also required to prepare annual employment equity plans. In 1995, the *Act* was strengthened to bring the public service, the RCMP, and the military within its purview.

After the *Act* was passed, many of the employers that came under the legislation began to implement employment equity plans and engage in ‘cultural sensitivity’ training and other diversity training. The human resources and management literatures indicate mixed results from of employment equity legislation. Legislation can be evaded, especially

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<sup>23</sup> Beck, H., Reitz, J., Weiner, N. (2002). Addressing systemic racial discrimination in employment: The Health Canada case and implications of legislative changes. *Canadian Public Policy*, 28(3): 373-394.

<sup>24</sup> Taylor, D.W., Wright, S., Ruggiero, K. (2000). Discrimination: An invisible evil. In (eds.) Driedger, L., & Halli, S.S., *Race and racism: Canada's challenge*. pp. 186-203. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

<sup>25</sup> Samuel, T.J., & Karam, A. (2000). Employment equity for visible minorities. In (eds.) Driedger, L., & Halli, S.S., *Race and racism: Canada's challenge*. pp. 134-149. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

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when managers have considerable discretion in implementing policies.<sup>26</sup> Kossek *et al.* note that many major corporations have been successful in hiring women and minorities but have been less successful in retaining and promoting them.<sup>27</sup> In the Canadian context, Samuel and Karam show that employment equity legislation has achieved mixed results.<sup>28</sup> They note that the many private sector firms and major banks are making positive steps towards encouraging and supporting diversity amongst their employees. Samuel and Karam observe that those organizations making the most progress in this regard tend to be led by senior managers who took an active interest in having more racially and ethnically diverse employees because they believed that diversity contributed to increased performance. The transportation sector performed poorly in terms of employment equity and the federal government also lags behind on equity measures. In reporting on the federal public service, the Visible Minority Consultation Group on Employment Equity found abuse of acting appointments, employee perception of biased selection boards, and too much emphasis on ‘personal suitability’ in hiring and promotion decisions.<sup>29</sup> In 1997, the Human Rights Tribunal found some of these conditions in effect within Health Canada.

In their analysis of the finding that systemic racial discrimination was operating within the federal public service of Health Canada, Beck *et al.* note the “elusive nature of systemic racial discrimination” because of the difficulty of proving the case.<sup>30</sup> In this particular case, the National Capital Alliance on Race Relations (NCARR), a non-profit anti-racism advocacy group, filed a complaint against Health Canada. The main basis of the complaint was the low representation of people of colour in senior management positions. At the same time, the president of NCARR filed his own complaint against

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<sup>26</sup> Webb, J. (1997). The politics of equal opportunity. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 4(3): 159-167.; as cited by Kirton, G., & Greene, A. (2000). *The dynamics of managing diversity: A critical approach*. Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann.

<sup>27</sup> Kossek, E. E., Lobel, S.A., Brown, J. (2006). Human resource strategies to manage workforce diversity: Examining the ‘business case’. In (eds.) Konrad, A.M, Prasad, P., Pringle, J.K., *Handbook of workplace diversity*. pp. 75-94. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

<sup>28</sup> Samuel, T.J., & Karam, A. (2000). Employment equity for visible minorities. In (eds.) Driedger, L., & Halli, S.S., *Race and racism: Canada’s challenge*. pp. 134-149. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press.

<sup>29</sup> Visible Minority Consultation Group on Employment Equity. (1992). *Breaking through the visibility ceiling*. Ottawa: Treasury Board Secretariat.; as cited by Samuel & Karam, *Employment equity*.

<sup>30</sup> Beck *et al.* *Addressing systemic racial discrimination in employment.*, p. 374.

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Health Canada for discriminating against him by failing to give him proper opportunity to compete for a management position. In making the decision not to promote him, it was found that managers had attributed his interpersonal style to his ‘cultural’ background; too much weight had been given to his personal suitability. As part of the investigation, a survey given to Health Canada employees revealed that “visible minorities less often sat on selection boards” and that “managers very strongly favoured whites over minorities.”<sup>31</sup>

While this particular case concerns *promotion* more so than *hiring*, it is still indicative of how systemic discriminatory practices can operate within employment situations to effectively exclude outgroups. The same biased attitudes that work to prevent people of colour from being hired are often the same attitudes that prevent them from being promoted within an organization. Employment equity legislation has contributed to creating more equitable, diverse workplaces, but laws can be skirted. There is still more work that needs to be done to change workplace cultures and values, and eliminate systemic racial discrimination in the labour market.

In light of the issues and problems outlined above I now turn to an examination of how TRIEC has responded, specifically the ways in which it has attempted to improve the labour market outcomes of skilled immigrants.

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 383

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## Evaluating TRIEC's progress

### The Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council

TRIEC formed in September 2003 in response to the problems skilled immigrants in the Toronto region face in successfully integrating into the labour market. TRIEC began as an initiative of the Toronto City Summit Alliance (TCSA), a coalition of civic leaders that formed to address challenges to the future of Toronto.<sup>32</sup> One of the challenges identified was the poor integration of skilled immigrants into the labour force. Recognizing that obtaining meaningful employment is a major part of successful immigrant settlement and integration, TCSA partnered with the Maytree Foundation<sup>33</sup> to create the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council.

TRIEC works to create and implement local solutions to help break down the barriers immigrants face when looking for work in the Toronto region.<sup>34</sup> Its goals are to:

1. Increase access to and availability of services that help immigrants gain access to the labour market more efficiently and effectively;
2. Change the way stakeholders value and work with skilled immigrants;
3. Change the way governments relate to one another in planning and programming around this issue.

TRIEC stakeholders include employers, occupational regulatory bodies, post-secondary institutions, assessment service providers, community organizations (including immigrant-serving groups), and the federal, provincial and municipal governments.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Toronto City Summit Alliance. (2007). Web Site. <http://www.torontoalliance.ca/>

<sup>33</sup> The Maytree Foundation is a private charitable organization.

<sup>34</sup> Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council. (2007). Web Site. <http://triec.ca/>

<sup>35</sup> See Appendix A for more details on TRIEC's structure, as well as a full list of stakeholders.

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## Research Questions

The central question I am concerned with is to what degree is TRIEC working towards structural or policy change versus the immediate need to match skilled immigrants with appropriate jobs? As a multi-stakeholder organization that includes representatives from disparate sectors, such as employers, labour groups, immigrant-serving organizations, post-secondary institutions and the three levels of government—is it difficult for TRIEC to negotiate how it approaches the complex issue of integrating immigrants into the labour market and improving their economic outcomes? Does it emphasize to employers the valuable skills that immigrants can contribute to the work force? Where does it feel it can make the most impact? How does it deal with issues of racism and discrimination? I investigate where TRIEC concentrates its efforts and why. This will necessarily include a general evaluation of its initiatives and what it has achieved so far. I also use this information to help answer the broader question of how it approaches its objective of improving immigrant labour market outcomes.

## Research Methods

I examined a variety of sources to achieve my research objectives. First I analyzed TRIEC's official communications materials, including reports and annual reviews. In addition, I examined media coverage of TRIEC and its associated programs, focusing on two *Toronto Star* special editions from May 2006 and September 2007. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with TRIEC secretariat employees throughout the winter of 2007–08, including the Communications Manager and the Project Development Coordinator.

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## TRIEC's progress

### *Working with Employers*

An examination of TRIEC's website, pamphlets, and annual reviews reveals an overall emphasis on the positive message that skilled immigrants can bring valuable talent to employers. This is the underlying strategy that TRIEC employs to directly connect more immigrants to more jobs. "With *employers at the forefront* and government and community as partners [TRIEC has] earned some early success." (my emphasis).<sup>36</sup> Indeed, its most important programs work directly with employers. There are three main programs that it has initiated to help connect immigrants to employers in the Toronto region:

- 1) Career Bridge, an internship program for internationally qualified professionals, aims to help immigrants obtain the essential 'Canadian work experience'.
- 2) The Mentoring Partnership facilitates connections between immigrants and professionals in their fields.
- 3) hireimmigrants.ca aims to assist employers in recruiting, retaining and promoting skilled immigrants.

### *Working with occupational regulatory bodies*

TRIEC has also made some inroads in supporting occupational regulatory bodies to get skilled and professional immigrants licensed and able to work in Canada.<sup>37</sup> For example, York University has taken the initiative to assist foreign-trained nurses pick up their careers in Canada, by creating a program that allows these individuals to enter the third year of the nursing program, so as to facilitate the process of becoming licensed to practice in Canada. A program initiated by St. Michael's Hospital helps foreign-trained nurses prepare for the nursing exam and connects them with work experience opportunities and support networks. Professional Engineers Ontario (PEO) has also

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<sup>36</sup> TRIEC. (2004). *Collaborating for change: 2004 annual review*. p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> Manea, L., Communications Manager, TRIEC (personal communication, 29 October 2007).

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initiated its own mentoring program and is focusing on helping foreign-trained engineers go through the Ontario licensing process. There are many other bodies and stakeholders that have started their own initiatives for assisting skilled immigrants become licensed to practice their professions in Ontario.

*Working with government to initiate policy solutions*

Another central function that TRIEC fulfils is to provide a forum for facilitating intergovernmental communication and cooperation. Various government departments<sup>38</sup> at the federal and provincial levels have been meeting and working together on immigrant labour market integration. However, TRIEC's Intergovernmental Relations Committee represents the first substantive step towards involving the local level of government in discussing immigrant labour market integration. In fact, TRIEC's secretariat considers the involvement of the City of Toronto as a significant achievement towards meaningful intergovernmental dialogue.<sup>39</sup> The Committee has enabled City officials to share some of its successes and concerns in integrating immigrants and to discuss the work that has been done in Toronto on this front. Prior to the formation of the Intergovernmental Relations Committee, the City had often felt left out of policy and programming discussions surrounding the settlement and integration of immigrants in the region. The Committee provides the opportunity and a forum for the City to be represented as an "equal" with the provincial and federal governments.<sup>40</sup> An important outcome of these discussions is the inclusion of the City of Toronto in the *Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement*. It is the only federal-provincial immigration agreement to include recognition of the role of the municipal government. This represents an important step towards more comprehensive intergovernmental collaboration on improving immigrant economic outcomes.

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<sup>38</sup> At the federal level the main government departments involved are Citizenship and Immigration Canada and Human Resources Skills Development Canada. At the provincial level various departments are involved (e.g. immigration is placed variously with labour, economics, employment, education or citizenship), depending on the province.

<sup>39</sup> Nasi, Z., Project Development Coordinator, TRIEC (personal communication, 2 November 2007).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

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An example of an initiative to come out of the work of the Intergovernmental Relations Committee is a move to more appropriately allocate funding for immigrants employment services. As a result of discussions between the municipal and upper levels of government, it was found that there was an overemphasis on funding for very *general* job search assistance programs. However, with the high numbers of skilled and professional immigrants in the Toronto region, there is a greater need for *specific* job placement services to help give these service-users the Canadian work experience that employers are looking for. The upper levels of government are reallocating funds to more appropriately match service needs.

One of the advantages of being located in the main economic centre of Canada is that TRIEC has access to many large head offices, which have the capacity to take on immigrant interns. Almost all of the big banks have become active stakeholders and supporters of TRIEC initiatives. It has proved more of a challenge for TRIEC to influence small and medium-sized employers because smaller employers often do not have as great a capacity to dedicate personnel to human resources. Thus, with the extra steps that are frequently involved in assessing immigrants' qualifications, small and medium-sized employers are often less inclined to consider immigrants as potential employees. TRIEC is attempting to devote greater attention towards assisting these employers in hiring immigrants.

The work of TRIEC is certainly commendable, especially in the way it is very effective at implementing meaningful change in skilled immigrants' employment outcomes. To date, TRIEC has placed 660 immigrants with 225 employers in the Toronto region (through the Career Bridge program).<sup>41</sup> Over 80% of these immigrants have found full-time employment in their fields of expertise. In addition, the Mentoring Partnership program has placed over 2,600 immigrants with mentors in their fields. Over 70% of immigrants who participated in the program have found full-time employment. Through its work with employers, TRIEC has engaged over 370 employers, increasing their awareness of immigrant labour market integration, through the hireimmigrants.ca program.

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<sup>41</sup> TRIEC Web Site.

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TRIEC works both towards the immediate goal of assisting immigrants attain jobs in their fields and in initiating and fostering more responsive policy change.<sup>42</sup> However, a closer examination of how TRIEC *conceptualizes and communicates* the issue of low labour market integration for skilled immigrants is necessary. It is important to analyze the language that TRIEC uses and the way it communicates to the public the nature of the problem it is working to address. The way it conveys the problem as an issue of public concern affects how the public understands it—as a political issue or not. In the next section I analyze how TRIEC conveys the issue and the implications this has for broader social justice concerns.

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<sup>42</sup> Manea, L., Communications Manager, TRIEC (personal communication via e-mail, 19 February 2008).

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## The 'r' and 'd' words: Tackling structural racism and discrimination

An examination of TRIEC's website, pamphlets and annual reviews reveals that it takes a very solution-oriented but de-politicized approach to the issue of poor economic outcomes for skilled immigrants. Official communication materials refer to the "barriers" that immigrants face when trying to obtain appropriate employment.<sup>43</sup> In working with employers, TRIEC refers to the necessity of "changing perceptions" regarding how immigrants can contribute to the workplace. All of these materials deliberately employ neutral language. Certainly immigrants face significant barriers in entering the Canadian labour force. But what is left out of the discourse is any reference to the role that discrimination or structural racism plays. At least some of the "barriers" that immigrants face have to do with simple non-recognition of valid credentials and overseas work experience. "Changing perceptions" on how employers and stakeholders "value" and "work with" immigrants does not refer to instances and possibilities of xenophobic perceptions regarding immigrants, particularly immigrants of colour. In discussing internship possibilities with employers, TRIEC employs a language of risk in reference to hiring immigrants as interns. It is "low-risk" because internships are for a limited period and immigrants are "pre-screened" to ensure they meet basic language and credential requirements.

The underlying causes of lower employment success for immigrants are absent from discussion of the issues. There is certainly no mention of the words 'racism' or 'discrimination' in any of TRIEC's literature or with stakeholders.<sup>44</sup> These discussions and words are intentionally left out for strategic reasons—to de-politicize the issue. The absence of these discussions is not due to a lack of awareness of the existence of structural racism. TRIEC's executive director has co-authored an article that explicitly mentions racial discrimination as a partial cause of low labour market integration for skilled immigrants.<sup>45</sup> Why does TRIEC leave this discussion out? TRIEC's secretariat

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<sup>43</sup> TRIEC Web Site.

<sup>44</sup> Manea, L., Communications Manager, TRIEC (personal communication, 29 October 2007).

<sup>45</sup> Alboim, N., & McIsaac, E. (2007). Making the connections: Ottawa's role in immigrant employment. *Institute for Research on Public Policy Choices*, 13(3).

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tries to emphasize the valuable contributions that skilled and professional immigrants can bring to employers, and that this cohort of employable individuals should not be overlooked.<sup>46</sup> From a tactical perspective, it is easy to see why TRIEC would want to couch their discussions in neutral terms and avoid explicit reference to the reality of racism and discrimination in the Canadian labour market. TRIEC must frame their communications to be palatable to stakeholders—especially employers. Emphasizing the positive allows TRIEC to avoid implicating employers for their role in perpetuating discrimination and labour market inequality.

### Media coverage of TRIEC and the immigrant experience

An analysis of two *Toronto Star* special sections also reveals the underlying assumptions about the role of employers and the expectations of immigrants. These articles feature TRIEC and its programs and cover anecdotes of skilled immigrants' experiences of finding work in Canada. The front covers of each of the special sections from May 2006 and September 2007 feature a skilled immigrant who had recently moved to Toronto. In each of the articles their experiences are recounted, from when they first arrived in Canada to their eventual landing of a job. While they both encountered difficulties at first and had to take low-level jobs and seek assistance in crafting a resume and covering letter, the main message of the articles is that they eventually succeeded because they were proactive and they persevered. The positive tone of these articles is apparent in the graphically conveyed upward trajectories of these two individuals, as illustrated by the paths that go up the page. What about the lived realities of many other highly educated and experienced immigrants who do not manage to achieve the same success?

The language of the *Star* articles echoes that of the TRIEC communications materials. One article refers to the “experience barrier” that many skilled immigrants face when trying to get a job.<sup>47</sup> Another article from the same section refers to the “attitude shift” that is helping PEO, Professional Engineers Ontario, enable more foreign-trained

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<sup>46</sup> Manea, L., Communications Manager, TRIEC (personal communication, 29 October 2007).

<sup>47</sup> Funston, M. (2007, September 13). Employment breakthrough. *Toronto Star*, p. X2.

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engineers become licensed to practice in the province.<sup>48</sup> The discourse around risk and fear is also apparent in the language of stakeholders. A spokesperson for hireimmigrants.ca (a TRIEC initiative) says that “it’s still a perceived *risk* to hire an immigrant because of concerns about language skills, verifying credentials or other things. You *fear* what you don’t understand and take the path of least resistance.” (my emphasis).<sup>49</sup>

### De-politicizing racism and discrimination

Taken together, TRIEC communications and popular media on the subject of poor labour market participation rates of skilled immigrants both convey the same message. The issue is pitched in a way that downplays and even ignores the existence of structural racism in the labour market. Instead, the focus is on the need to ‘educate’ employers about the relevance of the skills immigrants possess. Immigrants are posed as representing a latent pool of talent that employers would be wise to tap into. At the same time, skilled immigrants are encouraged to find mentors in their fields, who may help them learn job-specific terminology, Canadian workplace culture, or give them personal references to specific employers. The issue is posed as stemming from individual actions—more individual employers should hire immigrants; and more individual immigrants should adapt to the Canadian workplace. The language around ‘risk’ also enables companies that hire immigrants to be framed as benevolent employers, who are being particularly progressive in their willingness to hire immigrants. The immigrant advocacy sector has pointed out an underlying tendency for employers to feel they are doing immigrants a “favour” when they hire them.<sup>50</sup>

Effectively, what this does is detract from the more complex and difficult discussions on systemic inequalities in the work force and the colour dimension of these inequalities. There is no discussion of the broader problem of racism and discrimination; the issue is completely de-politicized. As others have found, this is a general tendency in Canadian

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<sup>48</sup> Grewal, S. (2007, September 13). Engineers breaking new ground. *Toronto Star*, p. X6.

<sup>49</sup> Girard, D. (2006, May 25). How much do foreign credentials count? *Toronto Star*, p. K3.

<sup>50</sup> Shakir, U. (personal communication, 29 November 2007).

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media.<sup>51</sup> In an analysis of newspaper articles on immigrant settlement, Abu-Laban and Garber find that only one article (from the *Toronto Star*) makes explicit mention of racial discrimination.

The article stresses the “hostile reception” many of Toronto’s immigrants receive....This is because for immigrants, “the promised jobs don’t exist; their qualifications aren’t recognized; employers demand Canadian experience they can’t get; the racial discrimination is obvious.”<sup>52</sup>

Abu-Laban and Garber go on to state that “the lack of discussion on contemporary racism is in itself a stunning finding given the history of Canada as a settler colony and the everyday lived experiences of minorities in the country.”

### Multiculturalism and anti-racism

Indeed, the silence on racism in both TRIEC material and *Toronto Star* coverage of TRIEC’s programs and related issues is highly problematic. Part of the reticence to talk about race stems from Canada’s policy and ethic of multiculturalism, which emphasizes nation-building. As an ideology, multiculturalism began to take shape with Prime Minister Trudeau’s 1971 pronouncement of “multiculturalism within a bilingual framework.”<sup>53</sup> Multiculturalism was initially employed as a strategic policy to harmonize French-English relations, as the Quebecois were advocating for greater formal recognition.<sup>54</sup> With the increased presence of ‘ethnic minorities’ in Canada, multiculturalism was a way for the state to both deflect demands from the Quebecois and recognize the distinct value and contribution of other ethnic minority groups. With the enshrining of multiculturalism in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in 1982 and the passing of the *Multiculturalism Act* in 1988, it has become an integral (though contested) part of Canadian national discourse and identity.

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<sup>51</sup> Henry, F., & Tator, C. (2002). *Discourses of domination: Racial bias in the Canadian English-language press*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

<sup>52</sup> Abu-Laban, Y., & Garber, J.A. (2005). The construction of the geography of immigration as a policy problem: The United States and Canada compared. *Urban Affairs Review*, 40(4): 520-561.

<sup>53</sup> As quoted in Mitchell, K. (1993). Multiculturalism, or united colors of capitalism? *Antipode*, 25(4): 263-294.

<sup>54</sup> Kobayashi, A. (1993). Multiculturalism: A Canadian institution. In (eds.) Duncan, J., & Ley, D., *Place/Culture/Representation*. pp. 205-231. New York: Routledge.

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The roots of Canadian multiculturalism have left it open to critiques from scholars and advocates who point out that it is more symbolic than substantial. Indeed, critics of the multiculturalism policy pointed out that it was weakest on policy areas related to the elimination of racial and ethnic discrimination. In addition, multiculturalism has been critiqued for its close, but often less obvious, connection with the logic of liberalism, particularly as it relates to the free movement of capital. This critique is crucial to the analysis presented by this paper. The chief point of these critiques is that multiculturalism, as both a policy and a general Canadian value, is employed to boost Canada's capacity to attract international capital and is "part of a much broader strategy of hegemonic production in the interests of multinational capitalism."<sup>55</sup> Mitchell points this out very effectively in her analysis of a speech by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, made at a 1986 conference. He is "unambiguous and unapologetic" in his message that

[w]e as a nation need to grasp the opportunity afforded to us by our multicultural identity, to cement our prosperity with trade and investment links the world over.... Canadians, who have cultural links to other parts of the globe, who have business contacts everywhere are of the utmost importance to our trade and investment strategy.<sup>56</sup>

Multiculturalism's overemphasis on the logic of liberal individualism elides some essential issues.<sup>57</sup> It presumes that Canadian society is generally a level playing field and that people have equal access to social goods. Certainly "[m]ulticulturalism's silence on the issue of class"<sup>58</sup> is highly problematic, especially as it relates to labour market inequalities. It is worth repeating the findings that income inequalities exist between white Canadians and visible minority Canadians, even after taking into account differences in education, occupation, industry type, work experience, official language knowledge, and region.<sup>59</sup> These 'earnings penalties' indeed support critics' claims<sup>60</sup> that

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<sup>55</sup> Mitchell, *Multiculturalism, or united colors of capitalism?*, p. 288

<sup>56</sup> Elliot & Fleras. (1990). *Immigration and the Canadian ethnic mosaic*. In (ed.) Li, P., *Race and ethnic relations in Canada*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.; as quoted in Mitchell, *Multiculturalism, or united colors of capitalism?*, p. 282.

<sup>57</sup> Goldberg, D.T. (1993). *Racist culture: Philosophy and the politics of meaning*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

<sup>58</sup> Warburton, R. (2007). Canada's multiculturalist policy: A critical realist narrative. In (eds.) Hier, S.P., & Bolaria, B.S., *Race and Racism in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Canada: Continuity, complexity, and change*. pp. 275-290. Peterborough: Broadview Press.

<sup>59</sup> Pendakur, K., & Pendakur, R. (1996). *Earnings differentials among ethnic groups in Canada*. Ottawa: Department of Canadian Heritage, Strategic Research and Analysis.; Li, P. (1998). The market value and social value of race. In (ed.) Safzewich, V., *Racism and social inequality in Canada: Concepts*,

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multiculturalism policy has failed to eliminate structural racial discrimination barriers in the labour market or combat class inequalities along racial and ethnic lines.

Anti-racist scholarship asserts that “[d]enying race is both theoretically and politically suspect.”<sup>61</sup> Dei says that there is discomfort surrounding naming and speaking race “but this must not be confused with the urgency of addressing racial problems.”<sup>62</sup> Anti-racism is based on the assumption that racial inequalities are a result of power imbalances embedded in institutions and practices.<sup>63</sup> Anti-racism’s focus on structural racism and discrimination diverges from more mainstream views that regard racism as stemming from irrational individual prejudices. Reform aimed at educational attempts to change attitudes that are incongruent with the multicultural ethic of tolerance and value in diversity does not address fundamental inequalities and power imbalances that make it difficult for marginalized groups to access social goods, such as jobs. Such attempts do not necessarily transform social relations, nor do they challenge systems of privilege and disadvantage. They tend to gloss over embedded racial and ethnic inequalities. As Srivastava says, this can undermine more comprehensive attempts to contest structural forms of racism.<sup>64</sup>

## TRIEC as part of Canada’s ethic of multiculturalism and neoliberalism

How does TRIEC place itself within the multicultural society and what is its connection with neoliberal ideology? Neoliberalism is characterized by a valorization of “private and personal responsibility and initiative, deregulation, privatization, liberalization of

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*controversies and strategies of resistance*. pp. 115-130. Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing.; Guppy, N., & Lautard, H. (1999). The vertical mosaic revisited: Occupational differentials among Canadian ethnic groups. In (ed.) Li, P., *Race and ethnic relations in Canada*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Don Mills: Oxford University Press. Also see sources from footnote 19.

<sup>60</sup> For example, see Bannerji, H. (2000). *The dark side of the nation: Essays on multiculturalism, nationalism, and gender*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press.

<sup>61</sup> Dei, G.J.S. (2007). Silence, salience, and the politics of anti-racist scholarship. In (eds.) Hier, S.P., & Bolaria, B.S., *Race and racism in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Canada: Continuity, complexity, and change*. pp. 53-66. Peterborough: Broadview Press.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p.54

<sup>63</sup> Srivastava, S. (2007). Troubles with “anti-racist multiculturalism”. In (eds.) Hier, S.P., & Bolaria, B.S., *Race and racism in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Canada: Continuity, complexity, and change*. pp. 291-312. Peterborough: Broadview Press.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

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markets, free trade, downsizing of government, draconian cutbacks in the welfare state and its protections.”<sup>65</sup> The foregoing discussion on TRIEC’s lack of explicit engagement with structural racism and discrimination indicates that it conforms to the general model of Canadian multiculturalism, with its emphasis on neoliberal values. In this section I explicitly analyze the connection between TRIEC, multiculturalism, and neoliberalism.

TRIEC’s guiding statements and its programs are designed to help immigrants adapt to arguably unfair hiring standards, rather than naming and challenging these structural barriers. For example, the main goal of the Career Bridge program is to help immigrants obtain Canadian work experience; and the Mentoring Partnership gives immigrants access to employer networks. Absent from these programs is any acknowledgement that the demand for Canadian work experience or the use of personal networks in hiring practices are unfair towards immigrants. TRIEC focuses on skills-building rather than on challenging such systemic obstacles.

This focus on personal capacity-building is apparent in how immigrant settlement and integration organizations, including TRIEC, works with immigrants. Earlier I discussed how media coverage of the issue of poor labour market integration of skilled immigrants is framed in a way that minimizes the effects of structural racism and highlights the importance of individual initiative. Featuring a successful immigrant on the front pages of the *Toronto Star* sections effectively emphasizes to the reader that proactive individual action is essential for an immigrant to obtain an appropriate job. While individual agency is certainly necessary, the article prioritizes it without giving substantial attention to the role and responsibility of the state. The individual internalization of responsibility is one of the key principles of neoliberalism. Rose says that advanced democratic liberal societies “work” best when they are able to “[implant] in individuals the aspiration to pursue their own civility, well-being and advancement.”<sup>66</sup> At the same time, society provides individuals with the means to pursue their own advancement. Credential

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<sup>65</sup> Harvey, D. (2000). *Spaces of hope*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.; as quoted in Keil, “Common-sense” neoliberalism.

<sup>66</sup> Rose, N. (1996). Governing “advanced” liberal democracies. In (eds.) Barry, A., Osborne, T., Rose, N., *Foucault and political reason: Liberalism, neo-liberalism and rationalities of government*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

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assessment service providers, like World Education Services (a TRIEC stakeholder), provides immigrants with the means to have their credentials translated into equivalents that Canadian employers recognize. The neoliberal reliance on “clientelism”<sup>67</sup> positions immigrants as clients consuming services in order to obtain work. Furthermore, immigrants must increasingly assume the cost of their own settlement, including having their credentials recognized.

In its work with employers, TRIEC’s goal is to change the way they “value and work with skilled immigrants.”<sup>68</sup> Implicit in this is the desire to ‘educate’ employers on the value that skilled immigrants represent. TRIEC’s program, hireimmigrants.ca, aims to do just that, and to assist employers in assessing skilled immigrants for possible employment. Multiculturalism’s focus on the supposed ignorance of individuals—or employers in this case—allows programs such as those of TRIEC to operate under the assumption that employers are simply unaware of the value that foreign-trained individuals can offer. Again, this allows TRIEC stakeholders to sidestep addressing deeper problems of structural inequalities.

Indeed, this analysis of TRIEC and its guiding principles and the way it engages stakeholders indicates that TRIEC’s main concern is to facilitate the entry of skilled and professional immigrants into the labour market *for the benefit of business and employers*. My research on the organization indicates that it leans towards this position. In opening up discussion with stakeholders, TRIEC’s secretariat “prefer[s] to use the business dimension of the issue, rather than the social justice dimension.”<sup>69</sup> TRIEC’s formation through the Toronto City Summit Alliance (which has strong connections with the business community) as well as the strong presence of employer stakeholders (as opposed to immigrant-serving agencies) within TRIEC signifies its strong business connection.

In this way TRIEC is perfectly aligned with the neoliberal model of multiculturalism, which promotes national *economic* prosperity. Closely tied to the ideology of

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<sup>67</sup> Keil, “Common-sense” neoliberalism.

<sup>68</sup> TRIEC Mission Statement

<sup>69</sup> Manea, L., Communications Manager, TRIEC (personal communication via e-mail, 19 February 2008).

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neoliberalism is the discourse of globalization. Globalization is associated with the integration of world markets and the mobility of international capital. The primacy of maintaining market competitiveness in a globalized market is a key neoliberal value. TRIEC is centrally concerned with the “business case for hiring skilled immigrants....There are no obligations or rights involved, just common sense.”<sup>70</sup> One of the messages that TRIEC promotes in its work with employers is that immigrants have connections and experience with overseas markets. The implication is that if businesses in the Toronto region want to remain competitive in a globalized world, they need to hire more immigrants, who have valuable international connections. This encourages an environment of “competitive urbanism”<sup>71</sup>, in which cities compete for talent and capital investment. Indeed, the ease of getting the major banks to become TRIEC supporters is indication of the valuable international connections immigrants bring to global capitalist interests.

This discussion on neoliberalism merits mention of Ontario’s previous Progressive Conservative government, led by former Premier Mike Harris. As an “uncompromisingly”<sup>72</sup> neoliberal party, Harris based much of his election platform on a plan termed the ‘Common Sense Revolution’, implementing reforms that would enable him to run the province ‘like a business’. Upon his election in 1995, his government rescinded employment equity legislation that had been put in place two years earlier, by the previous government.<sup>73</sup> Rejecting the veracity of systemic discrimination, the government passed the ‘Bill to Repeal Job Quotas’.

### ‘Managing Diversity’

TRIEC is by no means unique in the way it promotes the importance of diversity and the value of immigrants to the contemporary workforce. There is a very large literature from the human resources field that champions the importance of diversity in the workplace.

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Peck, J., & Tickell, A. (2002). Neoliberalizing space. *Antipode*, 34(3): 380-404.

<sup>72</sup> Keil, “Common-sense” neoliberalism. p.588

<sup>73</sup> Henry & Tator, *Discourses of domination*. p.95.

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Much of this discourse comes from the business sector perspective of ‘managing diversity’. Human resources literature has emphasized business reasons for having and managing diverse workforces.<sup>74</sup> These include increased creativity and teamwork, better customer service and increased competitiveness and profitability. Litvin notes that this rationale has become a “mega-discourse.”<sup>75</sup> This discourse has been repeated so many times in business publications and company training manuals that this way of thinking has become “sedimented as ‘common sense’.”<sup>76</sup>

Kirton and Greene say that measures to address employment equity, including diversity training initiatives, have met with varying degrees of success.<sup>77</sup> Tung notes that one reason diversity training may have limited impact on changing workplace cultures is because it tends to reinforce dominant norms and values.<sup>78</sup> Members of non-dominant groups are pushed to adapt to the majority. Many initiatives have failed to fundamentally transform value systems and organizational cultures. As I have discussed throughout this section, TRIEC’s strategy has relied most heavily on ‘selling’ immigrants to employers. While this may be most effective for getting immigrants hired, it may not necessarily create more equitable workplaces. While TRIEC’s main goal is to promote the *hiring* of skilled immigrants, this goal is (presumably) part of a wider objective to improve employment and workplace equity. TRIEC may be successful in fulfilling its short-term objectives to match more skilled immigrants with appropriate jobs, but may be doing so without due consideration for longer-term objectives to create more equitable workplaces.

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<sup>74</sup> For example, see: Dib, K. (2004). Diversity works. *Canadian Business*, 77(7): 53-54.; Henry, P.K. (2003). *Diversity and the bottom line: Prospering in the global economy*. Austin: TurnKey Press.; Carnevale, A., & Stone, S. (1994). Diversity beyond the golden rule. *Training and Development*, 48(10): 18-22.; Cox, T.H., & Blake, S. (1991). Managing cultural diversity: Implications for organizational competitiveness. *Academy of Management Executive*, 5(3): 45-56.

<sup>75</sup> Litvin, D.R. (2006). Diversity: Making space for a better case. In (eds.) Konrad, A.M, Prasad, P., Pringle, J.K., *Handbook of workplace diversity*. pp. 75-94. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>77</sup> Kirton & Greene, *The dynamics of managing diversity*.

<sup>78</sup> Tung, R. (1993). Managing cross-national and intra-national diversity. *Human Resource Management*, 32: 461-477.; as cited by Kossek, Lobel, Brown, *Human resource strategies to manage workforce diversity*.

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## The paradox of democratic racism<sup>79</sup>

My critique of TRIEC's approach in improving the labour market outcomes of immigrants would not be fair without giving due credit to the very real progress it has achieved so far in helping many immigrants in the Toronto region. Dei's assertion that avoiding discussion of racism is "unproductive"<sup>80</sup> contradicts the results TRIEC is achieving. In fact, TRIEC's board and secretariat are finding it most productive *not* to engage in discussions around structural and systemic racial discrimination in the labour market, especially with employers.<sup>81</sup>

This contradiction is a telling indication of how pervasive the tendency to evade acknowledgement of structural racism is in Canada's social environment. In fact, this is the main feature of 'democratic racism'. Democratic racism, as defined by Henry and Tator, is an ideology that "reduces the conflict between maintaining a commitment to both egalitarian and non-egalitarian values."<sup>82</sup> TRIEC's resistance to engaging in critical discourse on the effects and manifestations of structural racism in the labour market are part of the "the discursive practices, [that] result in communal denial, distancing, defensiveness, and a determination to maintain the status quo—the structural privilege of Whiteness."<sup>83</sup> This is how TRIEC can appear to be both working towards combating structural racism, through its programs and initiatives, while also actively maintaining the power differentials that underlie the Canadian labour market.

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<sup>79</sup> Heading is borrowed from chapter title of Henry, F., & Tator, C. (2006). *The colour of democracy: Racism in Canadian society*. Toronto: Nelson.

<sup>80</sup> Dei, *Politics of anti-racist scholarship*.

<sup>81</sup> Manea, L., Communications Manager, TRIEC (personal communication, 29 October 2007).

<sup>82</sup> Henry & Tator, *The colour of democracy*. p.15.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 328.

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## Conclusions: Planning multicultural cities

Thus far I have made little direct reference to (urban) planning in relation to the subject of this paper. Planning's role is still primarily conceived of as concerning the *built* form of cities. However, this paper is centrally about the same thing that traditional planning is concerned with—that is, how to contribute to creating the conditions for the well-being of city dwellers. The integration of immigrants, especially visible minority immigrants, is essential to the success and liveability of increasingly diverse Canadian cities.

Sandercock addresses how planning can contribute to making more inclusive “mongrel cities.”<sup>84</sup> In discussing what planning can do integrate immigrants, Sandercock presents a number of policy directions. TRIEC's progress in each of these areas varies.

She says there should be more in the way of partnerships between the state and community-based organizations and NGOs. In this respect, TRIEC represents an innovative initiative in addressing the problem of poor labour market integration of skilled immigrants. This locally based partnership is developing solutions that are making a difference in many immigrants' lives. The cooperation and collaboration of a breadth of organizations are, according to Sandercock, key to their success.

She also asserts that host societies need to be prepared to work with emotions that drive conflicts over integration – including attachment to the status quo. She says that the

racialization of identities of non-white or non-Anglo people in western liberal democracies, even the most officially multicultural among them (Canada and Australia), has had the effect of bracketing them as minorities, as people whose claims can only ever be minor within a national culture...usually read as histories of white belonging.<sup>85</sup>

Challenging the status quo means that organizations like TRIEC must take a stronger position as to the “rights” and “obligations” of immigrants, employers and other stakeholders.<sup>86</sup> Immigrants have a right to expect fair recognition of their credentials and overseas work experience; and employers and licensing bodies are obliged to fairly

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<sup>84</sup> Sandercock, L. (2003). *Cosmopolis II: Mongrel cities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. London: Continuum.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>86</sup> Manea, L., Communications Manager, TRIEC (personal communication via e-mail, 19 February 2008).

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consider immigrants for employment and licensing. Taking a stronger stance in this regard will help to fundamentally challenge unequal power relations. Immigrants should not have to remain forever at the margins, depending on the ‘largess’ of the host society.

As TRIEC is a highly regarded organization and has made some important progress, it can and should begin to incorporate a more politicized message into its policies and programming. Specifically, its secretariat should include a discussion of the reality of racism and discrimination in the labour market, rather than focus on simply ‘selling’ immigrants. Admittedly, this will be a challenge. There is significant resistance to even acknowledging the existence of systemic racial discrimination. As Beck *et al.* point out, “[t]here are many who believe that actually, racial discrimination is not really hidden, it simply does not exist as a significant factor of Canadian life.”<sup>87</sup> Certainly, many TRIEC stakeholders do not believe racism is an issue in Canada.<sup>88</sup>

How might TRIEC begin to convince them otherwise? Recent and emerging research and scholarship in the management literature indicates some possible avenues of change. Until recently, most of the human resources literature on ‘managing diversity’ has stressed the business imperative for encouraging and maintaining a diverse employee base. However, there are indications that employer initiatives to encourage diversity in the workplace do not necessarily lead to a commensurate ‘return on investment’. A study by Kochan *et al.* failed to demonstrate a definitive link between diversity and increased organizational performance.<sup>89</sup> Kochan *et al.* suggest that it is time to reframe the business-case argument for workplace diversity. Instead of solely aspiring to maximize profits, organizations might consider diversity as an opportunity for employees to learn from each other how to more effectively accomplish their work. In the long-term, this will define more successful organizations. Litvin says that it is time to readjust priorities. Instead of seeing people within organizations as the means to achieve organizational

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<sup>87</sup> Beck *et al.* *Addressing systemic racial discrimination in employment.*, p.375.

<sup>88</sup> Shakir, U. (personal communication, 25 February 2008).

<sup>89</sup> Kochan, T., Bezrukova, K., Ely, R., Jackson, S., Joshi, A., Jehn, K., Leonard, J., Levine, D., Thomas, D. (2003). The effects of diversity on business performance: Report of the Diversity Research Network. *Human Resources Management*, 42(1): 3-21.; as cited in Litvin, *Diversity: Making space for a better case.*

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goals, an alternative perspective places organizations as “the instruments [to serve] the needs of their members and of society at large.”<sup>90</sup> She says that these are not merely utopian aspirations. Citing a study of 39 ‘visionary’ business leaders, she says that many of these leaders see their firms as aiming to fulfill broader goals, beyond simply maximizing shareholder profits.

Given this emerging research on labour force diversity, it seems rather backward that TRIEC so steadfastly adheres to the business-case for hiring skilled immigrants. Even if the impetus for starting TRIEC was not solely grounded in the moral reasons for helping skilled immigrants obtain appropriate employment, there is a clear ethical basis of TRIEC’s work. Might not some of the stakeholder employers see their firms as being on the forefront of pursuing broader goals for an equitable society? I think TRIEC’s board can afford to adjust how it articulates the purpose of the organization. It does not necessarily have to rely so heavily on the bottom-line interest of businesses—it can appeal to the more visionary purposes of organizations. Furthermore, perhaps TRIEC might remind employers of the purpose of employment equity legislation and their obligations under it.

In order to start communicating to stakeholders this shift in direction, TRIEC’s board should host an open session for all stakeholders. Such a session might be pitched in the same way that ‘managing diversity’ training seminars are commonly marketed (as an appeal to the business case) but also offer information on new findings and trends in human resources management (as discussed above). TRIEC’s secretariat can use this forum to communicate to stakeholders these new developments in management research and also indicate that it will be shifting its vision and communications strategy to reflect these views. In addition, this conference should include a session on anti-racism. Recognizing that anti-racism is not the preferred approach that most (corporate) employers like to take when they address ‘cultural awareness’ issues or engage in ‘sensitivity training’, Butler has done research on how diversity training consultants in Toronto have incorporated a more direct, political anti-oppressive approach into their

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<sup>90</sup> Litvin, *Diversity: Making space for a better case*, p. 88.

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training, in such a way that, for the most part, is still acceptable to employers who hold these sessions.<sup>91</sup> One strategy that these experts find useful is to discuss relevant case studies on workplace discrimination and inequality. Because these case studies are grounded in the reality of employees' experiences, they are able to see how racism can often subtly be manifested in the practices and norms of organizations. The diversity consultants also find it very productive to get participants to engage in critical reflection, rather than lecturing them. For example, to avoid alienating white participants by positioning them as 'oppressors', most of the consultants Butler interviewed use a very well-known and widely cited piece by Peggy McIntosh, *Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*<sup>92</sup>, to get participants to realize that racial inequality and discrimination can also come from (white) privilege when it remains unexamined.

A number of planning scholars, including Sandercock, focus on the importance and power of frank discussion that acknowledges and fully accepts social identities, such as race, gender, and class—and the way these identities shape power relations and inequalities.<sup>93</sup> They recognize that combating these inequalities means being political—and that planners and other policy makers should not shy away from this.

They believe that distortion and misinformation are institutionally pervasive in capitalist democracies and have to be resisted. They believe that honest, clear, and accurate communication has a liberating quality; it releases ideas and energies that spur additional understandings and redefines spaces of collective action. Finally, these planners embrace deliberative democracy, the nesting of dialogues that produce legitimate and effective policies and plans.<sup>94</sup>

As an organization that includes stakeholders from all relevant sectors, I argue that TRIEC is actually in a position to more actively challenge the systemic barriers that skilled immigrants face in entering the Canadian labour market. Though individual stakeholders may be very reluctant to include a discussion of racism and discrimination in their engagement with the public, under the TRIEC 'umbrella' all stakeholders could agree to acknowledge the broad problem of structural discriminatory barriers, which are

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<sup>91</sup> Butler, A.C. (2005). *Addressing race in workplace cultural diversity training*. MA Thesis, University of Toronto.

<sup>92</sup> McIntosh, P. (1990). Unpacking the invisible knapsack. *Independent School*, 49(2): 31-36.

<sup>93</sup> Sandercock, *Cosmopolis II.*; Forester, J. (1989). *Planning in the face of power*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

<sup>94</sup> Beauregard, R.A. (1998). Writing the planner. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*. 18: 93-101.

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not caused by any one sector. The 'burden' of discussing these difficult issues would then be shared by all sectors and stakeholders. Though some stakeholders may be resistant at first, they would lose nothing by attaching their names to the cause. If anything, they would gain credibility for doing so, showing they are committed to combating inequality and discrimination in the labour market and in Canada generally. TRIEC is in a very good position to pose a counterview to the dominant tendency to minimize or skirt discussions of racism in Canada. TRIEC's high-profile position makes it well-placed to advance such discussions and help move national discourse towards a more honest and productive engagement with these issues.



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## **Appendix A: TRIEC's structural organization**

TRIEC is composed of a board, council, working groups, and a secretariat.

Founding board members represent individuals and organizations that have displayed leadership as TRIEC continues to develop and implement practical solutions that lead to meaningful employment for skilled immigrants. The Board is composed of:

Ratna Omidvar (chair)

Executive Director, The Maytree Foundation

Naomi Alboim

Fellow and Adjunct Professor, School of Policy Studies, Queen's University

Mario Calla

Executive Director, COSTI Immigrant Services

Murray Coolican

Vice President, Corporate Affairs, Manulife Financial

Sue Cummings

Senior Vice President, Human Resources, TD Canada Trust

Zabeen Hirji

Chief Human Resources Officer, RBC Financial Group

Diane Jeffreys

Partner, Advisory Services, KPMG LLP

Kamran Niazi

Division Director, Robert Half Financial Services Group

Yezdi Pavri

Managing Partner, Deloitte

David Pecaut

Chair, Toronto City Summit Alliance

Alan Rego

Manager, External Relations, Proctor & Gamble Canada Inc.

Sanish Samuel

Treasurer, Avana Capital Corporation

Phil Schalm

Program Director, Gateway for International Professionals, Ryerson University

Shelley White

President, The United Way, Peel Region

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Council members represent various groups: employers, labour, occupational regulatory bodies, post-secondary institutions, assessment service providers, community organizations, and all three levels of government. Council members include:

### **Employers**

ACE Bakery	LEA International
Adecco	Manulife Financial
AIM Trimark Investments	MDS Inc.
Avana Capital Corporation	The Mississauga Board of Trade
BMO Financial Group	Motorola Canada
Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters	Ontario Power Generation
CIBC	Procter & Gamble Canada
Colt Engineering	Public Service Commission
Deloitte	RBC Financial Group
Enterprise Canada	Retail Council of Canada
Equitek Employment Equity Solutions	Robert Half International
Ernst & Young	Rogers Wireless
GE Canada	St. Michael's Hospital
Green and Spiegel	TD Bank Financial Group
The Hospital for Sick Children	The Toronto Board of Trade
JW Associates	

### **Labour**

Toronto-York Regional Labour Council  
Ontario Federation on Labour  
Canadian Labour Congress

### **Occupational Regulatory Bodies**

Association of Professional Geoscientists of Ontario  
Canadian Council of Professional Engineers  
Certified General Accountants Association of Ontario  
College of Medical Radiation Technologists of Ontario  
College of Nurses of Ontario  
College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario  
Consulting Engineers of Ontario  
The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ontario  
Ontario Association of Architects  
Ontario Association of Certified Engineering Technicians and Technologists  
Ontario College of Teachers  
Ontario Securities Commission  
Ontario Society of Professional Engineers  
Professional Engineers Ontario  
Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario

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### **Post-secondary Institutions**

Centennial College  
Durham College  
George Brown College  
Humber College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning  
The Michener Institute  
Ryerson University  
Seneca College  
University of Toronto  
York University

### **Community Organizations**

Accessible Community Counselling and Employment Services  
Association of International Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario  
CARE For Nurses Project  
Career Edge  
Centre for Language Training and Assessment  
Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement  
Chinese Professionals Association of Canada  
Community Information Toronto (211toronto.ca)  
COSTI Immigrant Services  
Council for Access to Professional Engineering  
Hispanic Development Council  
JVS Toronto  
Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants  
United Way of Greater Toronto  
Policy Roundtable Mobilizing Professions and Trades  
Progress Career Planning Institute  
Skills for Change  
Social Planning Council of Peel  
South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario  
Yee Hong Centre for Geriatric Care  
Yee Hong Community Wellness Foundation  
YMCA  
York Neighbourhood Services

### **Expert Advisors**

Naomi Alboim (Queen's University)  
Usha George (Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration)  
Jennifer Lynn (Lynn Communications)  
David Pecaut (Toronto City Summit Alliance)  
Jeffrey Reitz (University of Toronto)  
Ravi Seethapathy (Engineers Without Borders)

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## **Funders**

The Maytree Foundation  
Toronto Community Foundation  
United Way of Greater Toronto  
United Way of Peel Region  
United Way of York Region

## **Government**

### *Federal Government*

Canadian Heritage  
Citizenship and Immigration Canada  
Human Resources and Skills Development  
Industry Canada  
Infrastructure Canada

### *Provincial Government*

Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities  
Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration  
Ministry of Economic Development and Trade

### *Municipal Government*

Town of Markham  
City of Brampton  
City of Toronto  
Town of Oakville  
York Region  
Region of Peel  
Regional Municipality of Halton

The working groups are dedicated to finding solutions to the barriers immigrants face when trying to enter the labour market. They are task-oriented, each chaired by a Council member with group membership composed of both Council members and non-members who have particular relevant expertise. Some working groups have developed their programs and are now advisory committees. Terms of reference have been determined for the Council and for each working group to frame their actions and objectives.

A Governance Committee has been established to develop the policies concerning the inner workings of the Council.

TRIEC's Intergovernmental Relations Committee (IGR) consists of representative from all departments and ministries in all three levels of government that have an interest in the issue of immigrant integration.

The secretariat performs the day-to-day functions of TRIEC. Funded by and housed under the Maytree Foundation, a private charitable foundation, the secretariat provides project management, administrative support, communications and networking capabilities, as well as research and policy analysis expertise.

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## **Appendix B: Interview guides**

### Interview guide for Communications Manager

#### **General introductory questions**

1. What is your position at TRIEC?
2. Can you tell me about the mandate of TRIEC?
3. Can you tell me briefly how TRIEC started?

#### **Programs**

4. What are some of the most successful programs developed by TRIEC?
5. Has TRIEC come across any challenges in attempting to implement programs and initiatives? If so, how has TRIEC responded?

#### **TRIEC Initiatives**

6. Other than coordinating internship and mentorship programs to help connect immigrants directly to appropriate employment opportunities (which seems to be TRIEC's largest focus), can you discuss other initiatives TRIEC has pursued to address the difficulties associated with foreign credential recognition?
7. Has TRIEC made much headway in developing government policy tools to address the difficulties associated with foreign credential recognition?
8. Has TRIEC made much progress towards developing an equivalency determination system of foreign credentials to Canadian ones?
9. Can you describe what steps, if any, occupational regulatory bodies affiliated with TRIEC have made towards making it easier for foreign-trained professionals to enter professions in Canada?

#### **TRIEC views**

10. Is there a particular viewpoint that TRIEC takes in regards to why so many skilled and professional immigrants cannot obtain employment in their fields? *(Prompt if needed: Is it largely a problem with recognizing foreign credentials, or is it more of a problem with other barriers?)*
11. What part, if any, does the issue of racism or discrimination play in the discussions between TRIEC stakeholders?

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**Employers**

12. How does TRIEC make connections with Toronto employers and bring them on board with the mentorship/internship programs?
13. How would you describe employers' willingness to participate in TRIEC's initiatives? *(Prompt if needed: Are they generally quite interested in taking part?)*

**Future directions**

14. Are there any other initiatives TRIEC is planning on pursuing?

**Concluding questions**

15. Has an outside evaluation been done of TRIEC? (If yes: Is it possible for me to obtain a copy of this evaluation?)
16. Can you refer me to anyone else you think might be able to share some information with me?
17. Do you have any questions for me?

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Follow up questions:

1. Can you clarify for me how TRIEC pitches the issue of low labour market integration for skilled immigrants? What (if any) is TRIEC's political position on the issue? (By 'political', I'm referring to the rights and/or obligations of immigrants, employers, stakeholders).
2. At this time does TRIEC perceive its main role as working to promote long-term structural or institutional change or in working to address the immediate need to help skilled immigrants obtain appropriate employment?
3. a) Was there a deliberate decision to avoid referring to structural/systemic or institutional forms of racism or discrimination in TRIEC's official communications? b) If so, where did this decision come from and how was it reached?
4. a) As a multi-stakeholder organization, has TRIEC ever experienced competing or conflicting demands from its different stakeholders? (e.g. to do more activism work or to focus on connecting with employers? b) If so, how has TRIEC negotiated these?

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Interview guide for Project Development Coordinator:

1. What is your position at TRIEC?
2. Can you describe what progress has been made regarding developing government policy tools to address FCR (foreign credential recognition)?
3. Where do you think TRIEC can make the most difference to helping immigrants connect with job opportunities? (in government policy tools, in the employment bridging programs?)
4. Other than engaging strategies to help connect immigrants with employment opportunities (e.g. through internships) has the government considered using affirmative action policies?
5. Given the common discussions around the fiscal imbalance, have there been any discussions between the municipal, provincial, and federal governments to “upload” some of the services (like settlement services) to higher level of governments or for the municipal governments to receive more money?