



Immigration, Refugees  
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés  
et Citoyenneté Canada

# 2018-19 Annual Tracking Study (Winter)/Qualitative Research

## Executive Summary

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**Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.**

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This public opinion research report presents the results of a survey and focus groups conducted by Ipsos on behalf of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. The research was conducted with 2,000 Canadians by telephone, 2,004 Canadians online, and 103 Canadians in 14 focus groups, between February 20, 2019 and May 2, 2019.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : Étude de suivi annuelle de 2018-19 (Hiver)/Recherche qualitative.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Colledge".

Mike Colledge  
President  
Ipsos Public Affairs



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## Executive summary

Ipsos Public Affairs is pleased to present this report to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

## Background

Since 1994, when it was established as a new department bringing together immigration services and citizenship registration, Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) has played several key roles: admitting immigrants, foreign students, visitors and temporary workers; resettling refugees; helping immigrants adapt to Canadian society and become Canadian citizens; and managing access to Canada.

IRCC conducts an ongoing research program to help the Department develop a better understanding of Canadian attitudes toward the issues surrounding citizenship and immigration. By gauging and analyzing the opinions of newcomers and immigrants, the Department gains insights into important policy areas related to the mandate of the department and related services.

IRCC identified a need to conduct quantitative research (telephone and online surveys) and qualitative research (focus groups) among the general public, newcomers and settled immigrants.

## Research objectives

The qualitative and quantitative research was intended to explore the views of members of the Canadian general population and attitudes of newcomers and settled immigrants on issues such as immigration, integration, settlement, multiculturalism and citizenship as well as IRCC services that are of key importance to IRCC's policies and programs. Research was intended to support IRCC in ensuring high quality policy options, program design and advice to ministers; encouraging and effectively managing citizen-focused services; managing organizational and strategic risks proactively; and gathering and using relevant information on program results. The value of this contract, including HST, is **\$249,822.69**.

## Methodology

The research project included two phases: a series of qualitative in-person focus groups and a quantitative survey conducted online and by telephone.

### Qualitative

Ipsos conducted a series of 14 focus groups with two research audiences:

- **newcomers** (immigrants who have lived in Canada for less than twenty years) from Chinese, Indo-Canadian, Middle Eastern, Filipino, Caribbean, African communities
- members of the Canadian **general public** 18 years of age or older (including immigrants who have lived in Canada for twenty years or more)

Ipsos made use of special screening questions to ensure appropriate mix of focus group participants based on income, age, education level, years in Canada and other relevant socio-demographic variables. The

fieldwork was conducted between April 23<sup>rd</sup> and May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019. Two focus groups were conducted in each of seven communities, as follows:

1. **North York, ON** (April 23, 2019)
  - Group 1:
    - Research audience: Newcomers
    - Community: Chinese
    - Language: Cantonese
  - Group 2:
    - Research audience: General public
    - Language: English
2. **Toronto, ON** (April 25, 2019)
  - Group 1:
    - Research audience: Newcomers
    - Community: Top source Caribbean countries
    - Language: English
  - Group 2:
    - Research audience: Newcomers
    - Community: Top source African countries
    - Language: English
3. **Mississauga, ON** (April 27, 2019)
  - Group 1:
    - Research audience: Newcomers
    - Community: Top source Middle Eastern countries
    - Language: English
  - Group 2:
    - Research audience: Newcomers
    - Community: Indo-Canadian (Punjabi)
    - Language: English
4. **Moncton, NB** (April 29, 2019)
  - Group 1:
    - Research audience: Newcomers
    - Community: Ethno-cultural (Mix immigrants)
    - Language: English
  - Group 2:
    - Research audience: General public
    - Language: French
5. **Montreal, QC** (April 30, 2019)
  - Group 1:
    - Research audience: Newcomers
    - Community: Arabic community

- Language: French
- Group 2:
  - Research audience: General public
  - Language: French
- 6. **Winnipeg, MB** (May 1, 2019)
  - Group 1:
    - Research audience: Newcomers
    - Community: Filipino
    - Language: English
  - Group 2:
    - Research audience: General public
    - Language: English
- 7. **Vancouver, BC** (May 2, 2019)
  - Group 1:
    - Research audience: Newcomers
    - Community: Chinese
    - Language: Mandarin
  - Group 2:
    - Research audience: General public
    - Language: English

Focus groups were approximately 2 hours in duration. A total of 103 participants took part in the discussions, out of 140 recruited to participate. Participants from ethno-cultural communities were provided a \$125 incentive to encourage participation among these low incidence audiences. General public participants received an \$85 incentive for their participation.

**Note to reader:** It should be noted that qualitative research findings are exploratory and directional in nature. Consequently, all qualitative findings cannot and should not be extrapolated to the Canadian population, rather, they should be considered directional in nature.

### **Quantitative**

To meet the research objectives, Ipsos conducted a telephone survey and an online survey. The 16-minute telephone survey was conducted among a nationwide sample of n=2,000 Canadian adults between February 20<sup>th</sup> and March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The telephone survey sample was a probability sample generated through random digit dialing obtaining an overall margin of error of +/-2.1 percentage points (calculated at a 95% confidence interval). The 15-minute online survey was conducted among 2,004 respondents between March 4<sup>th</sup> and March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019, drawn entirely from Ipsos' proprietary panel, iSay. As the online survey used non-probability sampling, a margin of error cannot be calculated. Respondents were offered the survey in the official language of their choice.

A full quantitative methodology report, including all information about the execution of the fieldwork that is needed to replicate the research initiative, may be found in Appendix 3. The quantitative survey

research instruments in English and French may be found in Appendix 4. A set of tabulated results from the quantitative surveys are provided under a separate cover.

## Key qualitative findings

### Immigration and Canada

Notwithstanding concerns expressed by some participants, most participants were of the view that immigration has a positive impact on our economy and serves to foster greater cultural diversity within Canada.

Among general public participants, familiarity with Canada's immigration system and policies is best defined as limited. Top of mind awareness tended to focus on stories they had heard related to Syrian refugees and in some cases asylum seekers coming to Canada. Not surprisingly, participants from newcomer groups had higher levels of awareness and knowledge of Canadian immigration policies and processes than their general public counterparts. A number of newcomers spoke about hearing of "tightened" immigration rules, issues with foreign credential recognition, racial discrimination in the workplace, and family reunification quotas filling up quickly.

Both general public and newcomer audiences acquired information on immigration through traditional media such as TV and print media, exchanges with family and friends, and social media posts. Participants from newcomer groups also referenced IRCC (IRCC website and emails) and community-specific media sources.

### Canada's immigration levels

There was general agreement with Canada's immigration levels, though few participants knew what the current levels are. Though most participants found the current level surprising (310,000 in 2018), many trusted that the government has a plan in place to manage this number. Most participants agreed that the mix of immigration classes made sense, with more economic immigrants admitted than other immigrant classes.

Conversely, participants felt that the number of refugees coming to Canada in recent years was high. Many framed their views in the context of Syrian refugees, and expressed that they were happy to help those in need, but wondered about Canada's capacity to welcome more. Concerns related to the economic, social or security related impacts of welcoming these individuals – specifically the necessary supports and programs needed to assist these individuals with their integration into Canadian society.

Though participants tended to agree with overall immigration levels, they wondered whether the plan considers where immigrants settle (i.e. outside of large cities) and how they integrate (i.e. matched with an available job, knowing English or French, learning the Canadian way of life). They felt this would help fill labour gaps while reducing negative impacts of larger population on health care, housing, roads and public transit.

## **Benefits and challenges of immigration in their community**

Many participants in both the general public groups and newcomer groups recognized immigrants' contributions to their community's economy and cultural diversity. They mentioned the wide variety of restaurants, languages, architecture, culture and new ideas they bring to their community. Others spoke of economic benefits derived from immigration such as investments in businesses and the creation of employment opportunities. Some participants from the general public groups also spoke of skilled workers who bring their work experience and expertise to supplement labour shortfalls in their community.

Although there is general recognition of the benefits of immigration in their community, participants reiterated their concerns related to their community's capacity to welcome new immigrants (i.e. the impact on health care, housing, roads, jobs), immigrant integration (i.e. language barriers and differences in values), and in a few cases, crime.

In terms of advice participants would give to newcomers on how to integrate into Canadian society, general public participants focused on learning Canada's official languages and taking an active role in local community events and organizations. Participants from newcomer groups recommended seeking out community mentors who could provide newcomers with information related to housing, hospitals, schools and other community resources. Some also suggested that this would assist with learning Canadian social norms and etiquette in order to integrate into Canadian society.

## **Irregular migration**

Although a number of participants in both the general public and newcomer audiences had heard of asylum seekers crossing the Canada-U.S. border, they lacked clear information about the situation as well as the government's plan and efforts to address irregular migration. To address their concerns, there was a desire for more information related to the levels of asylum seekers coming from irregular vs. regular channels, how asylum seekers undergo security screening, as well as steps taken to either remove failed claimants or to ensure successful claimants are settled and efficiently integrated into Canadian society.

Participants viewed this situation through the lens of fairness and were hard pressed to come to a consensus. Some felt Canada should be fair to the asylum seekers and find a way to screen and welcome those who need our help. Others felt that the situation is unfair to Canada because they feel that these individuals are safe in the U.S. and should follow regular processes.

## **Message testing**

Each group was presented with six messages and participants were asked to rank the messages from the most preferred to the least preferred and were asked to highlight the phrases they liked in green and the phrases they disliked in red.

Participants tended to support messages that covered a number of aspects: allowing asylum seeker claims to be heard, giving them access to due process and timely removals. However, given the lack of consensus

view on how to manage asylum seekers crossing the Canada-U.S. border, a mix of messages could be beneficial. Some participants who felt strongly that Canada should welcome asylum seekers preferred messages of protection and honouring international obligations. Those who felt strongly that asylum seekers should be deterred preferred messages describing U.S. responsibilities and ways to remove failed claimants more quickly.

Note to reader: numerical ordering herein is not meant to imply any preference in messages tested. Ipsos ensured that the presentation order of messages was rotated from one session to the next in order to guard against any potential ordering bias.

**Message #1: “Like many other countries, in a reality of increasing global migration, Canada is experiencing a rise in the number of people claiming asylum. Our system offers protection to those fleeing persecution, but removes those who seek to use it for other purposes. It is fair that Canada should continue to honour international obligations and hear asylum claims from individuals who arrive at our border.”**

This message tended to strike the right balance between compassion for those who need protection from Canada while acknowledging the importance of defending the integrity of Canada’s immigration system. Mentions of Canada honouring international obligations resonated positively with some participants as it represents the Canada they know. Participants also liked the idea that everyone would have a chance to be heard. On the other hand, a few participants also thought this message failed to provide enough background information on international obligations, and consequently found it difficult to understand.

**Message #2: “60% of individuals who enter Canada between ports of entry are arriving from the U.S. with a valid U.S. visitor or student visa. For example, individuals enter the U.S. legally after travelling by air from Africa, Asia or Europe and then make their way to Canada. It is only fair that the U.S. take responsibility for these individuals.”**

This message appeals to those who expressed concerns related to safety and security, particularly the mention of the U.S. taking responsibility. Some participants suggested that the time and resources Canada saves by not accepting claims from those who hold a U.S. visa could go towards helping others in need. The few participants who were aware of the Safe Third Country Agreement said the U.S. should honour the agreement and take responsibility for the asylum seekers.

**Message #3: “The number of irregular asylum claims Canada received since 2017 (~41,000) is lower than what some media reports have said the U.S. received last month (~100,000) or what Europe received in 2018 (~600,000). It is fair that Canada should continue to honour international obligations and hear asylum claims from individuals who enter Canada between ports of entry.”**

In general, this message garnered mixed reactions. For some, references to the number of irregular asylum claims that U.S. and Europe received provided the context needed to make Canada’s situation appear relatively under control. For those who already thought Canada received too many asylum claims,

this message stressed the severity of the problem as they considered 41,000 to be a high number of irregular asylum seekers.

**Message #4: “Individuals who enter Canada between ports of entry are arriving from the U.S., which has its own refugee determination system. Canada should turn these individuals back or refuse to hear their asylum claim. It is fair that they should make their asylum claim in the U.S. instead of Canada, as that’s where they landed first.”**

This message mostly resonated positively with those who hold a more negative position on irregular migration. These participants expressed their concerns on safety and security especially strongly, and liked the mention that irregular asylum seekers should seek asylum where they first landed. For most others, using words like “turn...back” or “refuse” to hear their claim was too extreme, and they felt that everyone deserved a chance to be heard.

**Message #5: “Canada’s process to determine the eligibility of asylum claims is fair, as individuals are entitled to due process before the law, including various levels of appeal. The timely removal of failed claimants supports the integrity of Canada’s immigration system and contributes to Canada’s security and public safety.”**

Many preferred this message as it speaks to offering due process while stating that those who compromise the integrity of Canada’s immigration system are not welcome in Canada. References to supporting “the integrity of Canada’s immigration system” and contributing to “Canada’s security and public safety” resonated positively with those who expressed security and safety concerns. However, some preferred to have more information on the process of removing failed claimants, in particular the number or levels of hearings or appeals before failed claimants are removed.

**Message #6: “If an individual arrives in Canada who has already made an asylum claim in a country with a similar immigration system (i.e. the United States, Australia, New Zealand or the UK), they should not have access to Canada’s full asylum system. This will help ease the backlog at the independent board that hears refugee cases. These people would still get a hearing with the government to ensure that they are not sent back to a country where they would be in risk of danger, persecution, or torture.”**

Most participants agreed to not giving access to Canada’s full asylum system if they already applied in another safe country. In particular, they liked that this option would help ease the backlog. For some, this was contingent on the idea that asylum seekers still have a hearing with the government and would not be sent back to a country where they would be in danger. Nonetheless, some participants disagreed that other countries have a similar immigration system, and did not feel that this was a valid reason to deny access to Canada’s full asylum system.

### **Refugee resettlement**

Participants acknowledged that their knowledge of refugee resettlement is limited, often to what they know of the Syrian refugee initiative. They use this context to frame their views of the selection criteria for resettling refugees, and note that in the absence of additional information they assume the system is



working as it should. However, when pressed, participants felt that many criteria for resettlement are important, and were generally torn between helping as many people as possible and preventing those most vulnerable from suffering.

### **Client service**

Newcomer participants had a wide range of immigration application experiences, some positive and some negative. To improve the immigration application experience, newcomers wanted to see increased transparency. They wanted to know how the immigration officers would evaluate their application and to be able to track their application status. The majority mentioned that they prefer to track the application online through a mobile application or on the government website. A number of participants also wanted easier access to immigration related information and communication via electronic means (email or government website) or more traditional channels (phone).

### **Should you have any questions or comments, please contact:**

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