



Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés
et Citoyenneté Canada

2020-21 Annual Tracking Study/ Qualitative Research

Interim executive summary (Fall 2020)

Prepared for: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

Supplier Name: Ipsos

Contract Number: B8815-21-0030/001/CY

Contract Value: \$250,000.00 (including HST)

Award Date: 2020-07-29

Delivery Date: 2020-12-14

Registration Number: POR 019-20

For more information on this report, please contact IRCC at:

IRCC.COMMPOR-ROPCOMM.IRCC@cic.gc.ca

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Canada 



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

Mike Colledge
President
Ipsos Public Affairs

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, immigrants and the broader public, the Department gains insights into important policy areas related to the mandate of the Department and related services.

Research Objectives

This year's study explored views of members of the Canadian general population, including newcomers and Indigenous Canadians, in the context of COVID-19. More specifically, the research objectives of this study included the following:

- Measure perceptions of the resumption of immigration to Canada once borders reopen;
- Measure perceptions of the number of immigrants coming to Canada;
- Measure perceptions of the impact of immigration on Canada;
- Measure perceptions of Canada's immigration system and priorities;
- Measure perceptions of the settlement and integration of immigrants;
- Compare differences between online and telephone results and establish baseline online results where appropriate.
- Qualitative research to explore underlying sentiments, and to test statements pertaining to the reopening of Canada's borders, and future immigration levels.

Attitudes of Canadians on issues such as immigration, settlement, integration, and citizenship as well as IRCC services are of key importance to IRCC's policies and programs. By gauging and exploring attitudes about key elements of the department's mandate, this research supports IRCC in ensuring high quality policy options, program design; encouraging and effectively managing citizen-focused services; managing organizational and strategic risks proactively; and gathering and using relevant information on program results.

The research project included two phases: a series of qualitative online focus groups and two waves of quantitative surveys conducted online and by telephone. The value of this contract, including HST, is **\$250,000.00**. This interim report presents the results for the qualitative online focus groups and the first

wave of quantitative surveys. The second wave of quantitative surveys is scheduled to be undertaken in the coming months.

Qualitative Methodology

Ipsos conducted 14 online focus groups in total with the following research audiences:

- Members of the Canadian **general public** 18 years of age or older (including those living in more rural areas of the country)
- **Newcomers** (immigrants who have lived in Canada for less than ten years)
- **Indigenous Canadians** (mix of regions)

Ipsos made use of special screening questions to ensure an appropriate mix of focus group participants based on income, age, education level, years in Canada and other relevant socio-demographic variables. Fieldwork took place between October 1st and November 2nd, 2020. Two focus groups were conducted each day, as per the following schedule:

1. October 1st, 2020
 - Group 1: **Greater Toronto Area**
 - Research audience: General public
 - Language: English
 - Group 2: **Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Regina**
 - Research audience: General public
 - Language: English
2. October 5th, 2020
 - Group 1: **Calgary, Edmonton**
 - Research audience: General public
 - Language: English
 - Group 2: **Metro Vancouver**
 - Research audience: General public
 - Language: English
3. October 6th, 2020
 - Group 1: **Greater Montreal**
 - Research audience: General public
 - Language: French
 - Group 2: **Smaller centres in Quebec**
 - Research audience: General public
 - Language: French
4. October 7th, 2020
 - Group 1: **Atlantic (mix of larger and smaller centres)**
 - Research audience: General public
 - Language: English

- Group 2: **Smaller centres in Western Canada, including Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP) Communities**
 - Research audience: General public
 - Language: English
- 5. October 13th, 2020
 - Group 1: **Smaller centres in Ontario, including Ontario RNIP Communities**
 - Research audience: General public
 - Language: English
 - Group 2: **Indigenous Canadians, National (mix of regions)**
 - Research audience: Indigenous Canadians
 - Language: English
- 6. October 14th, 2020
 - Group 1: **Greater Toronto Area**
 - Research audience: Newcomers (immigrants who have lived in Canada for less than ten years)
 - Language: English
 - Group 2: **Metro Vancouver**
 - Research audience: Newcomers (immigrants who have lived in Canada for less than ten years)
 - Language: English
- 7. November 2nd, 2020
 - Group 1: **Metro Vancouver**
 - Research audience: General public
 - Language: English
 - Group 2: **Greater Toronto Area**
 - Research audience: General public
 - Language: English

Online focus groups were approximately 2 hours in duration. A total of 103 participants took part in the discussions, out of 112 recruited to participate. Participants from the newcomer groups were provided a \$125 incentive to encourage participation among these low incidence audiences. Other 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 valued for uncovering the depth and range of opinions in the population on the issues.

Quantitative Methodology (Wave 1)

Ipsos conducted a 14-minute telephone survey with a nationwide sample of n=1,500 Canadian adults between August 21st and September 21st, 2020, and a 10-minute online survey with 1,503 respondents between August 28th and September 21st, 2020.

The telephone survey sample was a probability sample generated through random digit dialing obtaining an overall margin of error of +/-2.5 percentage points (calculated at a 95% confidence interval). The online survey sample was non-probability, meaning that 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, can be found in Appendix 1. The quantitative survey research instruments and a set of tabulated results from the quantitative surveys are provided in English and French under separate cover.

Key Qualitative Findings

The role of immigration in the COVID-19 economic recovery

- Across all groups, many viewed immigration as more likely to be helpful than harmful to the COVID-19 recovery. This view was underpinned mostly by the perceived net economic contribution of newcomers in general and in reference to the pandemic response (i.e., newcomers' contribution to essential services and long term care homes).
- Having said that, there were a number of participants who were more likely to point to the potential harmful impact of immigration during the economic recovery from COVID-19. This included a small group of participants who declared themselves as usually pro-immigration but were unsure or hesitant in the context of COVID-19. Much of this sentiment was primarily driven by economic concerns as opposed to public health concerns.
- Concerns related to the potential economic harm of immigration during the COVID-19 recovery stemmed from the current state of Canada's economy and labour market, with some emphasizing that we need to *"look after people already in Canada first."*
- Overall, the net effect of the tested statements on the role of immigration in the COVID-19 recovery shown in the group discussions was to largely reinforce participants pre-existing views towards immigration. The statements' core points rung true for many – especially in reference to immigrants' contribution to the healthcare system – but this did not always translate into emphatic support for resuming immigration.
- The same participants who were sceptical towards immigration responded negatively to what they perceived as overly positive language and/or tone of messaging on the benefits of immigration.

Canada's immigration levels

- There was general support for the proposed 2021 levels (presented in the first twelve groups as 351,000 immigrants, based on the then-current 2020-2022 Immigration Levels Plan, and as

401,000 in the final two groups, which took place after the revised 2021-2023 Immigration Levels Plan was tabled in Parliament). The large proportion allocated to skilled immigrants and the inclusion of immigration levels phrased as 0.92% of Canada's population were key in underpinning support.

- Still, there was a view among some participants that the proposed levels are too high due to the current economic climate. This led to calls from some to “take a pause” on immigration and prioritize Canadian workers until Canada's economy recovers from the pandemic.
- Reactions to admitting 500,000 immigrants (or 1.3% of the Canadian population) were similar to those expressed regarding the 2021 immigration levels, whilst the option of doubling levels was typically met with some hesitation and more red flags being raised. The preference was for increases to be slow and gradual, which for some would prevent drastic changes to the fabric of society.
- All in all, it was evident that participants somewhat struggled with what the “right” level of immigration should be and were much more comfortable in voicing a preference on which classes of immigrants should be prioritized and the need to divert newcomers to rural areas.
- When shown the breakdown of different immigration classes, there was general agreement with the distribution. Some were pleasantly surprised that the economic class makes up the highest proportion, and by the smaller proportion of spaces being awarded to other categories, including refugees.
- There was strong consensus that skilled workers should be prioritised. Participants' definition of 'skilled' encompassed highly educated professionals such as doctors as well as other skills where there are shortages.
- References to the family and refugee classes tended to result in more divisive conversations than the economic class.

Messaging on increasing levels

- Overall, messages on Canada's low birth rate and its ageing population were most effective in garnering a broad base of support and in communicating a sense of urgency around the need for immigration and to some extent higher levels of immigration.
- The statistic that there are '4 Canadian workers for every retired Canadian, but by 2035, there will be only 2 workers for every retiree' was especially “powerful” in making the case for increasing levels.
- Individually and collectively though the messages shown in the discussions had a limited effect on the few participants who were decidedly negative towards immigration; they did not challenge the issues presented, rather they pushed back at the seeming portrayal of immigration as the main or only solution and repeated calls for looking after Canadians first.

Impact of immigration

- Measures for successfully welcoming newcomers tended to skew more towards alleviating the added pressures on communities receiving newcomers than on settlement supports for

newcomers. More affordable housing and transport infrastructure were top-of-mind, followed by less frequent mentions of funding for more teachers and reducing wait times in the healthcare system.

- Finally, this qualitative study provided the opportunity to explore the factors that lead some Canadians to say that immigration is causing Canada to change in ways they do not like. There was a general consensus that this sentiment is by and large underpinned by the cultural impact of immigration, though the majority of focus group participants reported that they did not feel this way.
- A few participants were willing to explain why someone would hold that view: feeling like they are “the only English guy at work” and a perception that not all newcomers make an effort to learn/use English or French, lamenting the “loss of traditional Canadian ways of living” and traditions whilst newcomers stay in their “ethnic enclaves,” and the perception that Canadians are asked to make a strong effort to “accommodate their cultures”, as opposed to the other way around.
- A notable number of participants meanwhile were quick to label this sentiment as “racism” which they attributed to “ignorance”, misunderstanding and discomfort with the changing make-up of Canada’s population and customs.

Should you have any questions or comments, please contact:

Marc Beaudoin
Vice President Qualitative, Ipsos UU
1 Nicholas, Ottawa Ontario
Telephone: (613) 688-8973
Email: marc.beaudoin@ipsos.com