

# Industry Perspectives Op-Ed: Industry must seize immigration opportunity

Nadia Todorova April 27, 2023

Ontario's economic growth and prosperity depend on attracting skilled workers from around the world who can help build up our province for the future.

Both the provincial and federal governments have recognized immigration will be a key factor in addressing the current labour shortage in the construction industry. Recent immigration reforms aim to make it easier for industry to recruit the skilled tradespeople they need to keep up with the demand for new critical infrastructure projects and housing to support Ontario's growing population.

The Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO) has been leading advocacy efforts with industry partners such as LIUNA Local 183, as well as contractors, builders and subtrades in an effort to increase the number of people with skilled trades and construction experience being welcomed to immigrate to Ontario.

The first immigration reform to address the skilled labour shortage in the construction industry is the expansion of the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program (OINP). Under the new provincial-federal immigration agreement, Ontario will double the number of economic immigrants it welcomes to the province to over 18,000 in 2025. This program allows Ontario to select and nominate economic immigrants who have the skills and experience most needed in the province's labour market and is a critical tool for employers looking to fill skilled labour shortages in the construction industry.

This expansion of the OINP provides companies, both large and small, with a greater pool of skilled workers to choose from.

The construction industry is facing a critical shortage of skilled labour. This decade will see the anticipated retirement of more than 86,000 construction workers in Ontario.

Considering the projected volume of work, industry will need to hire, train and retain almost 100,000 additional workers by the end of the decade.

The labour supply shortage is one of the single biggest challenges facing the Ontario construction market today and threatens our ability to build the critical core infrastructure and homes Ontarians need. With the OINP expansion, construction companies will have access to more skilled tradespeople, which will help them to complete projects on time and within budget.

In addition to the OINP expansion, the Government of Canada has extended and expanded the out-of-status construction workers program in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The pilot program, which was launched in partnership with the Canadian Labour Congress in 2019, provides permanent residency to 500 out-of-status construction workers in the GTA.

Under the expanded program, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada is doubling its scope to 1,000 out-of-status construction workers in the GTA. The expansion will help to address the current labour shortage in the construction industry by providing a pathway for out-of-status workers to obtain permanent residency and continue working in the industry.

The expansion of the out-of-status construction workers program is a significant development for the construction industry in Ontario. It provides an opportunity for companies to retain skilled workers who may have been working in the industry for years but were unable to obtain permanent residency due to their status. These workers have already proven their worth and make valuable contributions to the industry.

The program can also benefit businesses by providing a more stable and reliable workforce.

By regularizing the status of out-of-status workers, businesses can reduce the risk of turnover and disruptions to their operations, which can have a significant impact on project timelines and budgets.

The immigration reforms being implemented in Ontario provide industry with a range of tools to address the skilled labour shortage.

With the new provincial-federal immigration agreement enabling the expansion of the OINP and the expansion of the out-of-status construction workers program, Ontario's construction industry will have access to a broader pool of skilled workers to choose from.

Thus, we must all seize the opportunity to grow our industry.

To take full advantage of these reforms, it is important industry and government work together to ensure the immigration process is streamlined and efficient, and that necessary supports and resources are in place to help newcomers succeed in their new careers.

By doing so, we can help to ensure the construction industry in Ontario continues to thrive and contribute to the economic growth and prosperity of the province for years to come.

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