



# The Economic Mobility Pathways Project

Exploring labour mobility as a complementary pathway for refugees

## Economic Mobility Pathways Project Overview

The Economic Mobility Pathways Project (EMPP) was launched in April 2018 and aimed to identify approximately 10 to 15 skilled refugees in the Middle East and East Africa who meet the requirements of Canada's economic immigration programs. Refugee candidates who appeared to have strong economic settlement potential were referred to participating jurisdictions for a possible nomination under existing Provincial Nominee Programs (PNP) or to apply under a federal economic program (that is, Atlantic Immigration Pilot [AIP]).

## Background

With record high levels of human displacement and insufficient resettlement spaces worldwide, international discussions with the United Nations Refugee Agency and other countries now increasingly include consideration of complementary pathways for refugees. Complementary pathways offer refugees protection and durable solutions outside of traditional refugee resettlement. Complementary pathways can take many forms including labour mobility, family reunification and education.

In alignment with the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, Canada has committed to expand the number and range of pathways available to refugees for admission to or resettlement in third countries and is advocating for other countries to do the same. A program scan conducted by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's (IRCC's) Refugee Affairs Branch (RAB) in late 2018 revealed the possibility of leveraging existing programs, in particular economic immigration programs, to provide alternative and additional pathways for skilled refugees to come to Canada outside of traditional humanitarian resettlement streams. Under these programs, immigrants are selected based on their human capital or ability to fill Canadian labour market needs rather than their vulnerability and need for protection.

The EMPP was launched as a feasibility study and intended to provide evidence on the ability of refugees to access Canada's economic immigration programs and to document the challenges they face in doing so.



## Project partners: Roles and responsibilities

### Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)

IRCC's role in EMPP was largely to set the policy direction for the project and to coordinate between all partners involved. Within IRCC, several branches were involved.

- The Immigration Program Guidance Branch, as project lead, is responsible for operational oversight and functional guidance, as well as project implementation and coordination among project partners.
- The RAB, responsible for guidance related to refugee protection and resettlement policy, and as complementary pathways policy lead, supports the EMPP by grounding the project in the principles outlined in the GCR.
- The Immigration Branch is responsible for Canada's economic immigration programs, acts as policy lead for developing and managing economic immigration pathways, and ensures that the EMPP is aligned with the national immigration policy direction.
- The Settlement and Integration Policy Branch leads the policy work on identifying employment and settlement needs of refugees arriving through complementary pathways, the ability of the Settlement Program to meet those needs, and engages with settlement stakeholders (for example, pre-arrival and post-arrival Service Provider Organizations [SPOs]) to leverage existing expertise in support of refugees using complementary pathways.
- The International Network (IN) is responsible for the processing of the applications submitted under the EMPP at IRCC offices abroad. IN staff receive EMPP candidate permanent residence applications directly via email, ensure the applications are tagged with the EMPP special program code in the Global Case Management System, and facilitate the eligibility and admissibility assessments of each application.

### Provincial and Territorial Governments

The role of participating provincial and territorial governments, which include Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Ontario and the Yukon, has varied, depending on existing jurisdictional legislation, the immigration programs available and how closely connected they were to prospective employers. While employer connections were primarily established through partner organizations RefugePoint and Talent Beyond Boundaries, provinces and territories were an integral part of ensuring candidates were able to apply to their respective economic immigration streams.

Each participating province or territory had various successes throughout the process from screening referred candidates to nominating them to apply for permanent residence once a formal job offer had been extended to a candidate. The operational accommodations provided by the provinces and territories were critical to understand how the provincial economic immigration process needed to account for the unique circumstances that skilled-refugee candidates faced. It should be noted that the considerable operational accommodations afforded by provincial and territorial governments, while operational in-terms of practical delivery, related to complex policy considerations to facilitate the nomination of EMPP candidates to the next step in the immigration process.

### United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)

The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) grounded the project in the broader context of the GCR, informing the underlying policy principles and protection safeguards. UNHCR field offices provided

assistance by confirming refugee status of all potential EMPP candidates residing in both the Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya – this was not possible for candidates residing in the Middle East.

### RefugePoint

As a valuable resettlement referral partner, RefugePoint has an extensive refugee-serving network in Kenya and other East African countries. For EMPP, RefugePoint reached out to the refugee community in Nairobi and in Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps to recruit potential candidates for referral to Canada. This entailed gathering and reviewing CVs, interviewing candidates, and hosting workshops and information sessions. RefugePoint has been dedicated to providing the facilitation, preparation and submission of immigration applications for EMPP candidates from within Kenya throughout the first phase of the EMPP.

### Talent Beyond Boundaries

Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB) connects skilled refugees with countries and companies that need their skills, forging new sustainable solutions for refugees to rebuild their lives while boosting the global economy. TBB's role in EMPP ranged from recruiting and referring refugee talent from Lebanon and Jordan to Canada, to engaging directly with employers in Canada. TBB also assisted refugees throughout the application process by providing interview support and disseminating information. Joining the TBB team was Jumpstart, a non-profit organization focused on connecting refugees with employment opportunities in Canada and the domestic labour market integration of refugees, primarily in Ontario. Similar to RefugePoint, a core element of TBB's activities over the course of the first phase of the EMPP was to facilitate the preparation and submission of immigration applications.

## Economic Immigration Program Accessibility for Skilled Refugees

In the first phase of the EMPP, Canada landed 6 skilled refugees, plus 9 family members, allowing them to immigrate to Canada through existing permanent programs. There were also 5 additional arrivals delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

These arrivals confirmed that while skilled refugee candidates may be able to meet Canadian labour market needs and economically establish themselves in Canada, it was not without significant operational accommodation to ensure that candidates were screened sufficiently to promote both program integrity and application processing timeframes typical for economic immigration programs.

To date, applicants have only applied under the PNP or the AIP. This can be partly attributed to the fact that the eligibility requirements, compared to those federal programs managed by Express Entry, were more compatible to those individuals' skill profiles. A number of applicants with applications still under review were also able to qualify under the AIP and successfully obtained provincial endorsement.

So far, no applicant has utilized pathways managed by Express Entry, which is an electronic system to manage the intake of applications for permanent residence under the following economic immigration programs:

- Federal Skilled Worker Class
- Federal Skilled Trades Class
- Canadian Experience Class, and
- Enhanced Nomination Provincial Nominee Class high-skilled streams (NOC A, B and O)

## Findings

The EMPP has allowed the department to identify certain Canadian economic immigration programs which warrant further consideration as complementary labour mobility pathways, particularly during policy and operational development. The initial findings of the EMPP Phase 1 have demonstrated that there are skilled refugees who are able to meet the program requirements of economic immigration streams, effectively establishing a proof of concept and also shed light on the challenges refugees face when applying as economic immigrants, such as:

1. **Regulatory and legislative obstacles** – While not the norm or requirement, some of Canada’s economic immigration programs include an option for the issuance of work permits to facilitate the arrival of foreign nationals and allow employers to fill urgent labour market demands swiftly while a permanent residence application is being processed. Currently, regulatory requirements prohibit the issuance of work permits for those who are unable to meet the requirements outlined under the law, namely under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations.
2. **Operational accommodations** – Further examination is required related to how EMPP applications could integrate a workflow of application intake, eligibility and admissibility assessments, securing travel and exit permits, access to the Immigration Loans Program, ensuring access to sufficient arrival or settlement services, and processing times of EMPP applications into the existing integrated processing network.
3. **Identification of refugee skills** – Most refugee information is captured during the initial registration stage with UNHCR. The absence of skills and employment-focused data entries within existing refugee databases affects the ability to undertake the systematic identification of refugee skills and employment experience which in turn, are required to determine eligibility for job opportunities and economic immigration.
4. **Access to information and awareness** – As complementary pathways are a relatively new initiative, globally, many refugees have limited awareness of other immigration pathways available to them outside the traditional humanitarian pathways. This impedes their ability to autonomously elect to seek out more information.
5. **Job-matching with employers in destination countries** – Refugees residing in host countries are often limited in their ability to make connections to prospective employers and communities in potential destination countries, and may lack access to the technology required to make these linkages effectively (for example, a stable internet connection to conduct a remote interview). Likewise, employers are unaware of the talent present in the overseas refugee populations and can be intimidated by the immigration process to internationally recruit refugees.
6. **Financial requirements** – There are a number of costs associated with economic immigration. Owing to the circumstances of their displacement, refugees may not have the funds necessary to meet these costs. These may include application fees, fees related to language and medical testing requirements, translation costs, travel costs, and legal requirements for proof of funds.

## Next Steps

Phase 1 of EMPP has been able to prove that there are skilled refugees who can meet existing economic immigration program criteria and who potentially represent an untapped talent pool. As the EMPP evolves into its second phase, the research focus will shift to investigate how these results can be scaled

up by addressing challenges that have been identified in Phase 1 in a way that fosters autonomous uptake into existing immigration and settlement pathways.

EMPP Phase 2 – Planned activities in summary for the upcoming year (2020– 2021) include:

- **Continued intake of applications identified during Phase 1:** During Phase 2, IRCC will continue intake of refugee applications under economic immigration pathways, and is committed to resettling 500 skilled refugees to be admitted over the next 2 years to fill long-standing Canadian labour market needs while also providing solutions for skilled refugees.
- **Conduct 2 test initiatives:** Building on the momentum and findings of the EMPP research, IRCC will undertake 2 experiments to explore how larger targeted cohorts of skilled refugees could access existing immigration and settlement pathways by testing:
  - **A community-driven model**, similar to that of the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot, is connecting local employers with chronic labour market needs in Pictou County, Nova Scotia, to refugees with relevant skills. The department will explore how this model can be applied to other communities across Canada.
  - In the mid-term, a **sector-driven model** leveraging lessons learned from the Atlantic Immigration Pilot will target chronic labour market needs in Canada’s in-demand sectors to match skilled refugees to job opportunities.
- **Research project:** Talent Beyond Boundaries was awarded \$135,000 through the department’s International Migration Capacity Building Program for this second phase of the project. This will develop a sustainable and scalable model for provincial and territorial governments to recruit, integrate and retain skilled candidates coming from refugee circumstances. The results and lessons learned from this work will help inform future policy advice and programming.

As IRCC moves forward with Phase 2, additional activities may also be considered under the EMPP in order to further document and expand our findings, if necessary.