



Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés
et Citoyenneté Canada

Executive summary

Evaluation of the Start-Up Visa (SUV) pilot

Evaluation Division

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Canada

Research and Evaluation

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Purpose of the Evaluation

The evaluation of evaluation of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's (IRCC) Start-Up Visa (SUV) pilot was conducted in fulfillment of a departmental commitment to conduct an evaluation of the pilot, with the purpose of assessing its early outcomes. The evaluation covered a three-year period, starting with the launch of the pilot in April 2013, through to the end of April 2016 and used multiple lines of evidence to examine the relevance and performance of the program.

Start-Up Visa Pilot

Launched on April 1, 2013, the Start-Up Visa pilot was the first pilot program implemented through Ministerial Instructions. The Start-Up Visa was designed to attract innovative foreign entrepreneurs who would contribute to the new and innovation needs of the Canadian economy and facilitate entry of innovative entrepreneurs who would actively pursue business ventures in Canada.

There are currently 32 venture capital funds, six angel investor groups and 14 business incubators that have been designated to participate in the Start-Up Visa program. They are represented by their respective industry associations: the Canadian Venture Capital and Private Equity Association (CVCA), the National Angel Capital Organization (NACO), and the Canadian Acceleration and Business Incubation Association (CABI). These industry associations recommend entities for designation to the Minister and convene peer review panels to assist IRCC visa officers in case determinations.

Evaluation Findings

Program Management

Finding #1: The pilot was implemented as intended, in that there were no major deviations in the design and core elements. However, a number of implementation and design challenges were identified that may have an impact on the future success of the pilot.

Finding #2: Overall, communication and coordination within IRCC and between IRCC and stakeholders was viewed as effective. However, more coordination and collaboration between IRCC, ISED and GAC is necessary to maximize the success of the pilot.

Performance

Finding #3: While the pilot received fewer applications and admitted fewer foreign entrepreneurs than the previous entrepreneur program, the evaluation found that SUV immigrants brought more human capital to Canada in terms of age, education, and knowledge of official language compared to immigrants under the previous program.

Finding #4: The SUV pilot successfully facilitated the access to Canada for innovative entrepreneurs who have secured business commitments with designated entities. Timely processing and the availability of the work permit were noted as key elements that have contributed to the success of the pilot.

Finding #5: Admitted SUV entrepreneurs are actively pursuing innovative business ventures in Canada. To date, positive progress was made by SUV entrepreneurs in either business growth, obtaining additional investment, increasing networks and business connections, or selling their business for a profit.

Finding #6: In total to date, SUV pilot entrepreneurs received over \$3.7M in investment capital from designated entities.

Finding #7: While the support provided by designated entities was generally viewed as positive, some key informants noted a lack of transparency and delivery of agreed-upon support by some business incubators.

Finding #8: There were minimal levels of fraud and misuse associated with the SUV pilot and the integrity mechanisms employed were successful in identifying issues. However, there is a potential program integrity gap regarding the monitoring of designated entities' SUV activities.

Finding #9: The cost to administer the SUV pilot was less than the previous entrepreneur program. The design of the Pilot, which requires designated entities to select innovative foreign entrepreneurs instead of IRCC visa officers, was advantageous from a cost-efficiency perspective.

Relevance

Finding #10: There is a need for an entrepreneur immigration program like the SUV pilot to attract and retain innovative entrepreneurs that contribute to the innovation needs of the Canadian economy.

Conclusions and Recommendation

Overall, the findings of this evaluation are positive. IRCC implemented an innovative, low-cost program that has the potential to bring high-value entrepreneurs to Canada to start innovative businesses that contribute to the innovation needs of the Canadian economy. While the pilot was implemented as planned with low levels of reported program misuse, the evaluation found there were a number of implementation and design challenges that need to be addressed if the pilot were to become a Program. Based on these findings, the evaluation made four recommendations:

Recommendation #1: The Department should implement measures to ensure that: the peer review process is risk-based, transparent and procedurally fair; the department has a clear mechanism for the de-designation of entities and implements a regular review process to ensure designated entities continue to qualify for designation; and, necessary program integrity measures related to industry associations and designated entities are in place.

Recommendation #2: The Department should revise its current engagement approach with other relevant departments and stakeholders and develop a targeted Start-Up Visa promotion strategy.

Recommendation #3: The Department should develop and implement a plan to increase awareness of the pilot and the related work permit requirements among frontline staff.

Recommendation #4: The Department should develop a strategy that enables the consistent collection and reporting of pilot performance.