

Immigration

Language proficiency a must for immigrant success | Sergio R. Karas

By **Sergio R. Karas**

Sergio R. Karas

(April 3, 2023, 1:59 PM EDT) -- Canada is a diverse country that attracts immigrants from all over the world. As a result, there are many different levels of language proficiency among immigrants. Language proficiency refers to an individual's ability to use a language effectively and accurately in various situations. The level of language proficiency among immigrants in Canada can have a significant impact on their ability to integrate into Canadian society and the workforce.

The government has imposed mandatory language requirements via the use of language proficiency tests for some categories of immigrants wishing to enter Canada. Canada currently offers immigrant applicants the option between three tests: the Canadian English Language Proficiency Index Program (CELPIP), the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) for English speakers, and the Test d'évaluation de français (TEF) for French speakers. They test the listening, speaking, writing and reading skills of the examinee. The Pearson PTE Essential test is another language proficiency test that is set to be implemented at the end of 2023.

These tests are meant to help determine how easily an immigrant will integrate into Canadian life. One shortcoming of the English tests is that each one is designed with a different dialect of English in mind. CELPIP is geared toward Canadian English while IELTS is designed to test British English, though both tests accept American and British English spelling and grammar. Some applicants may also find difficulty comprehending the listening portions of the test when they are not familiar with certain accents.

Not all immigrants are required to fulfil a language requirement. Spousal or family sponsorships do not require that applicants take an English language proficiency test. This is not something that is consistent globally, as some countries like the Netherlands and the U.K. require language proficiency testing for all immigration applications. One defect of the exemption policy in Canada is the lack of integration those applicants will face when entering the country compared to their counterparts who are required to complete language proficiency testing.

Language requirements are vital to determining whether an immigrant will be likely to assimilate into Canadian society and culture. Their employment prospects are also affected. A study by the Institute for Research on Public Policy found that a lack of proficiency in an official language with insufficient access to cultural knowledge can lead to limited opportunities for immigrants to fully integrate into Canadian society.

One of the most important factors influencing the level of language proficiency among immigrants is their country of origin. For example, immigrants from countries where English or French is the primary language may have a higher level of language proficiency upon arrival in Canada compared to immigrants from countries where English or French is not widely spoken. Immigrants who arrive in Canada with a higher level of language proficiency are more likely to find employment, interact effectively with Canadian society and integrate more easily into their new communities. To bridge the gap between languages, the Canadian government could create language classes catered specifically

for those most linguistically distant from English or French and require their completion before their immigration status can become final.

The level of language proficiency among immigrants can also have significant implications for their ability to access government services and participate fully in Canadian society. For example, immigrants with limited language proficiency may have difficulty understanding government documents, participating in community events or accessing healthcare services. In some cases, this may lead to social isolation and exclusion from Canadian society.

To address the issue of language proficiency among immigrants, the Canadian government has implemented several initiatives aimed at improving language skills among new immigrants. These initiatives include language classes, online resources and community-based programs. By providing access to these resources, the government is working to ensure that immigrants have the tools and support they need to develop their language skills and integrate fully into Canadian society.

The level of language proficiency among immigrants in Canada is influenced by a number of factors, including their country of origin, the amount of time they have spent in Canada and the availability of language resources. Language proficiency tests such as the CELPIP and IELTS provide standardized assessments for immigration officials to determine the level of integration an applicant will face upon landing. Improving language skills among immigrants is equally important for ensuring their successful integration into Canadian society and the workforce. The requirement to have at least some level of proficiency in the official languages by sponsored immigrants, refugees and others who are currently exempt may have to be revisited given the large numbers that are now coming to Canada before their status becomes permanent. This will incentivize integration into the labour force and allow them to function in society, at least at a basic level.

Sergio R. Karas, principal of Karas Immigration Law Professional Corporation, is a certified specialist in Canadian Citizenship and Immigration Law by the Law Society of Ontario. He is co-chair of the ABA International Law Section Immigration and Naturalization Committee, past chair of the Ontario Bar Association Citizenship and Immigration Section, and past chair of the International Bar Association Immigration and Nationality Committee. He can be reached at karas@karas.ca. The author acknowledges the contribution to this article by Lina Siddiqui, student-at-law.

The opinions expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the author's firm, its clients, LexisNexis Canada, Law360 Canada, or any of its or their respective affiliates. This article is for general information purposes and is not intended to be and should not be taken as legal advice.

Interested in writing for us? To learn more about how you can add your voice to Law360 Canada, contact Analysis Editor Richard Skinulis at Richard.Skinulis@lexisnexis.ca or call 437-828-6772.