

# Mobility: Immigration alert

June 2023

## Canada

### Canada's new Tech Talent Strategy

#### Executive summary

On 27 June 2023, the Honourable Sean Fraser, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) announced Canada's new Tech Talent Strategy, which introduces new measures and improvements to existing programs aimed at attracting and retaining tech talent in Canada.

#### Key developments

Canada's new Tech Talent Strategy contains six initiatives, all aimed at enhancing immigration pathways for highly specialized tech talent. These initiatives include:

- ▶ Return of two-week processing for Global Skills Strategy (GSS) work permit applications for skilled foreign workers, employed in a Training, Education, Experience and Responsibilities (TEER) classification 0 and 1 occupations and two-week processing of Global Talent Stream Labour Market Impact Assessment applications. IRCC's commitment is that GSS' target processing times are met in 80% of complete applications and is focused on the time required for IRCC to issue a passport request letter once an applicant has provided biometrics.

Recall that GSS processing only applies to applicants outside of Canada that are filed through the Canadian visa office. Due to backlogs created by the COVID-19 pandemic, IRCC has not met this two-week processing standard in several years. A return to the target processing standard will support employers in getting

skilled talent to Canada in a more expedient way.

- ▶ STEM-specific invitation rounds under the Express Entry program will begin on 5 July 2023. IRCC announced in May 2023, that they will start occupation-specific draws under the Express Entry system. This would be the first targeted occupation draws to take place since Express Entry was launched in 2015. The most recent draw by IRCC was held on 27 June 2023, inviting candidates with scores above 486 points. Targeted occupation draws may see a decrease in the overall points threshold as selection can be based entirely on occupation profile.
- ▶ Introduction of a new temporary work permit stream for H-1B specialty occupation visa holders in the US to apply for an open work permit valid for three years in duration. This new work permit stream will open on 16 July 2023 and remain in effect for one year or until IRCC meets a quota of 10,000 applications. Specific criteria for this new category have not yet been released. According to USCIS there are over 400,000 H-1B visa holders in the US and as such, it is possible that the 10,000 cap will be reached shortly after the program opens. Dependent family members will not be counted within the cap.
- ▶ Creation of a new Innovation Stream is expected to be launched later in 2023. The goal of the Innovation Stream under the International Mobility Program is to attract highly skilled individuals. The stream would offer employer-specific work permits to eligible candidates, valid for up to five years. Eligible workers would be destined to work for a company that is



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identified by the Government of Canada as contributing to Canada's industrial innovation goals. An open work permit, valid for up to five years may be available for highly skilled workers in Canada in select in-demand occupations. IRCC will be holding consultations to define and develop the new Innovation Stream throughout the coming months.

- ▶ Launch of a digital nomad visa, which is available for foreign nationals, who want to work in Canada for a foreign employer for up to six months. IRCC will collaborate with public and private partners to determine if additional policies to attract digital nomads to Canada are desirable.
- ▶ Reduction of lengthy processing times under the Start-Up Visa program by increasing annual permanent resident (PR) quotas under the program and prioritizing certain applications, as well as a new three-year open work permit stream under the program to bridge work authorization gaps while waiting for the PR application to process.

In addition to Canada's Tech Strategy, Minister Fraser also announced a new temporary three-year policy that removes the six month limit on the length of a study program that temporary foreign workers can enrol in without a study permit. Foreign workers can now study full time or part time while their work permits are valid, with no restrictions on the length of the program. As part of this initiative, foreign workers will not require a CAQ to enrol in a program of study in Quebec. This change took effect on 27 June 2023.

### What this means

The Canadian government continues to look at ways to enhance the current immigration program so that the policies can support attracting and retaining highly skilled talent and talent for in-demand occupations. This new strategy is just one of many recent initiatives that are focused at supporting skilled immigration into Canada.

### Key steps

EY will continue to monitor these developments. Should you have any questions, we encourage you to contact one of our immigration professionals.

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