



Canadian Council on Africa  
Conseil Canadien pour l'Afrique

**Facilitating Business  
Travel to Canada**  
Making Canada Competitive in Africa



## Canadian Council on Africa

The Canadian Council on Africa (CCAfrica) is a national association representing the Canadian private sector (companies, universities, colleges, business associations, and NGOs involved in economic development work) in Africa.

CCAfrica members are active in Africa as investors, executing agencies, service providers, joint venture partners of African companies, exporters-importers, sustainable development promoters and, ultimately, friends of Africa.

CCAfrica's mission is to facilitate and promote sustainable increased trade and investment between the Canadian and African private and public sectors, according to appropriate corporate social responsibility (CSR) guidelines, for the mutual benefit of all organizations and for the sustainable economic development of Africa.

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# Facilitating Business Travel to Canada: Making Canada Competitive in Africa

## Introduction

The Canadian Council on Africa (CCAfrica), created in the footsteps of the G7 Summit in Kananaskis in 2002, is devoted to work with Canadians committed to the economic development of Africa. CCAfrica regroups over 125 Canadian companies, universities, colleges, governments departments both at the federal and provincial levels and institutions. The Council works very closely with its members and Africans from many of the 53 nations in Africa. We have been approached many times both by the Canadians and the Africans, on the difficulty of obtaining visas to come to Canada.

This paper focuses on an important human dimension of Canada's evolving relations in the field of international commerce and development aid. The short-term movement of visitors from Africa to Canada plays a vital role in supporting commercial and non-commercial (aid related) ventures that contribute to Canada's prosperity and Africa's development. Non-tourist visitors typically enter Canada for short periods of time to familiarize themselves with products or services that Canadian companies are trying to sell in Africa; to receive management training and other forms of training related to the sale of plants and equipment (e.g. infrastructure projects); and to participate in strategy and planning meetings, contributing essential information about local conditions and requirements. The paper argues the following points in regard to such flows:

- (1) That Canada's competitiveness in Africa would be enhanced by streamlined visa procedures;
- (2) That Canada is not capitalizing on its "brand" as a leader in the field of immigration and diversity – a powerful, strategic advantage that it enjoys worldwide by virtue of its longstanding, intensive investments in immigration and multiculturalism;
- (3) That Canadian policy in Africa is misaligned – specifically, that visa procedures impede the attainment of Canada's laudatory, new trade and development priorities; and
- (4) That a win-win solution – better domestic protection and visa facilitation – can be achieved through careful, structured cooperation between private and public stakeholders with an interest in Africa.

The report is divided into three sections. First, a broad, public policy case is made for streamlining certain procedures governing temporary entry to Canada. Second, problems resulting from the application of these procedures are identified using

information supplied by Canadian companies and development projects. Third, the problems are analyzed and ideas are put forward for resolving the tension between protection, on the one hand, and facilitation, on the other. Collaboration between government and stakeholders is seen as an essential component of an expansive, reinvigorated and receptive immigration program operating in the broad, national interest. In this context, it should be noted that while the paper focuses on Africa, the proffered solutions are equally relevant for other developing regions where Canada has interests.

Lucien Bradet  
President

## I Capitalizing on our investments in immigration and diversity

Africa constitutes a region of vast potential and high priority for Canada. As a market, Africa comprises fifty-three countries and over 800 million people. Important links already exist between Canada and Africa, a result of changing trade patterns, African development and growing transnational connections, including the personal ties that bind African migrants in Canada to friends, families and institutions in their original homes. These connections will intensify with time.

The mix of Canadian goods exported to Africa, roughly \$1.3 billion annually, has been shifting towards value-added products. These include manufactured goods, construction equipment, oil and gas machinery, pharmaceuticals and communications equipment. In addition, there are very substantial service flows, including business services and training. The market for these goods and services is expected to grow significantly as a result of higher resource prices, economic and political reform and increased aid and debt forgiveness. Canadian firms believe they are well positioned, by virtue of their expertise, to capitalize on these emerging opportunities at a formative stage in Africa's development. Accompanying this expansion in business, public agencies concerned with international development have identified Africa as a priority region for Canadian international aid and investment. The result is a **remarkable congruence between private and public interests in fostering the conditions that will nourish Canada's growing involvement in Africa.**<sup>1</sup> Critically, these involve policy coherence and an easing of barriers to the exchange of people and ideas.

In a recent report<sup>2</sup> focusing on entrepreneurship and African development, the Canadian Council on Africa (CCAfrica) offers suggestions for harnessing private sector expertise and resources. Many of these suggestions would apply equally well to non-business situations. Three core ideas underpin the Council's recommendations. They centre on: (i) The centrality of knowledge transfer in dealings between Canada and Africa; (ii) The importance of leadership and horizontally aligned policies by government agencies; and (iii) The need to build durable relationships between African and Canadian businesses, public agencies and mixed public-private enterprises. As this

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<sup>1</sup> This discussion draws on *Dialogue on Africa – Focus on Investment and Trade*, a set of roundtable discussions hosted by the African Working Group. The Working Group comprises Export Development Canada, Canadian Commercial Corporation, National Resources Canada, CIDA, International Trade Canada and CCAfrica, representing a diverse group of Canadian companies working in Africa. The summary report was tabled on October 26, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> The report in question built on the work by the United Nations' *Commission on the Private Sector and Development*. This body was chaired by Prime Minister Paul Martin and former President of Mexico, Ernesto Zedillo. Their report focuses on unleashing entrepreneurship and involving the private sector in Africa's development.

report makes clear, **immigration policy and service delivery play a vital role in promoting each of these ideas.**

Canada's immigration and multiculturalism policies, coupled with Canada's very considerable investments in diversity, have 'branded' Canada as much as the country's physical size. Internationally, Canada enjoys the reputation of being a large, extraordinarily diverse and peaceful country that has been uniquely successful in integrating newcomers, free of the tensions that have surfaced in other societies. This produces enormous goodwill and receptivity to Canadians and to Canadian enterprise.<sup>3</sup>

**The singularity of Canada's position constitutes a unique strategic advantage in the global economy.** As such, it has the potential to help Canadian firms to penetrate overseas markets, gain access to foreign suppliers, and come to grips with different regulatory regimes and market Canadian products and services throughout the world. **Unfortunately, this advantage is not sustained. There is a marked disparity between the image that Canada has worked so hard to create and the manner in which it comports itself abroad.** Instead of openness and flexibility, foreign visitors encounter (what they perceive to be) suspicion, indifference and closed doors. Would-be business visitors, students seeking entry for short-duration stays and visitors needing access in order to receive training or to participate in events organized by their Canadian sponsors are regularly frustrated by slow service, complex procedures and (seemingly) arbitrary decisions regarding short-term visas. This negatively affects the ability of Canadian firms and aid projects to conduct their business abroad and to compete with countries whose images are not as exalted as Canada's but whose services far exceed ours. **This erodes Canada's strategic advantage and dissipates the benefits produced by the enormous investments that governments, non-governmental organizations and the public at large have made in diversity.**

Trade diversification and business development - particularly development that advances Canada's stake in emerging markets and the knowledge-based economy - have been repeatedly identified as key federal priorities. At the same time, the federal government has made strong, public commitments in its International Policy Statement to double assistance to Africa within four years and to bolster African, private sector development. Pronouncements associated with the G8, the WTO and the UN's Millennium Development Goals offer further support for Africa and for increasing the role of the private sector in contributing to African economic progress.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>This occurs despite the view in some quarters that Canada's unabashed recruitment of the best and the brightest depletes scarce brainpower in the developing world.

<sup>4</sup> See the previous reference to the Martin-Zedillo report.

In order for Canada to realize its goals in Africa and for Canadian business to capitalize on the strategic advantage that diversity confers in the increasingly competitive African marketplace, **it is essential that the Canadian government align its policies and eliminate discrepancies between words and actions.** At present, there is a tension between Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) and the policy goals expressed by Industry Canada, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and agencies such as CIDA. This tension is not so much a function of CIC's policies as the manner in which they are implemented. This will need to be repaired if Canada is to promote trade and build relations with Africa's civic and business leaders. The issue is one of trust.

**Trust constitutes an essential feature of all business relationships.** And, like any human sensibility, it must be nourished through face-to-face contact, including important exchanges and visits to Canada by potential buyers, their partners (including public sector actors) and their stakeholders. Citizenship and Immigration Canada presides over these visits, hence the focus of this report on facilitating the movement of business visitors and other person-based business flows from Africa to Canada.

## II

### Perceptions of Canada through a visa lens

This section presents results from a series of meetings and interviews with senior business officials, leaders of development projects that receive support from CIDA and other development agencies, including the World Bank, as well as federal and provincial officials working in the field of immigration. Written responses were also solicited to a questionnaire that examined Canada's visa issuance process in Africa. The focus was on: (i) business visitors whose entry can be directly linked to commercial activities by Canadian companies exporting goods or services or making large investments in Africa; (ii) visitors seeking to attend short training courses or entering in connection with trade promotion initiatives not directly connected to specific business ventures; and (iii) visitors seeking to attend conferences or receive training in connection with non-commercial activities by Canadian organizations involved in African development. None of these flows impinge on the Canadian labour market. They are job-making rather than job-taking. Visitors do not displace Canadians and do not receive payments from Canadian companies or their overseas subsidiaries. This distinguishes visitors from temporary workers where Canadian jobs are potentially at risk. In the latter case, the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada plays an important vetting role.

#### 1. Issues pertaining to the visa process

The issues discussed below frequently overlap. This is not surprising as they are often generated by the same underlying factors. Generally, the quality of service received by business visitors does not differ from the services provided to trainees or to visitors seeking entry in connection with development aid projects. As a result, the comments below do not distinguish between different visitor categories.

#### 2. Clashing cultures

Two kinds of cultural disparity were reported. The first centres on the **cultural differences between business and government**; the second, on the **lack of sensitivity by government (chiefly CIC) to the special situations encountered in Africa**.

In regards to the former, there is a consensus among business clients that processing problems are systemic in nature and that Citizenship and Immigration Canada needs to develop a service orientation that is more 'business-friendly'. As one respondent noted, "every case is treated with suspicion, as if we were trying to circumvent the system."

Business clients expect quick, customized service and ready access to decision-makers. The overburdened bureaucracy they encounter is, however, better suited to mass production and works in a tightly constrained regulatory environment that is not well

suited to discretion and tailored solutions. This reticence is compounded by the fact that officials are schizophrenically responsible for controlling the entry of undesirables as well as facilitating legitimate flows. Not surprisingly, business and government cultures clash.

Setting aside the discrepancy between business and government cultures, respondents also felt that there was a need to “adapt the requirements related to visas to the African context, country by country”. As it stands, there is “a lack of sensitivity to history and culture.” Current requirements are viewed by African dignitaries, senior officials and business persons as discourteous (or offensive). As a result, business is lost, networks are impaired and the ability of Canadians to partner and to leverage support is curtailed. From an African perspective the difficulties they face in procuring visas are at odds with stated business and project objectives touting opportunities for exchange, training and partnership. The resulting ‘disconnect’ places both commercial and aid ventures at risk. Furthermore, it leads to reciprocal treatment of Canadians by Africans (i.e. poor service) as well as hostility to Canada.

### **3. Losing to the competition**

What is particularly puzzling to Africans doing business with Canada is that other countries are able to provide better service, more cheaply, more predictably and more quickly. In contrast to Canada, which requires between three and six weeks to issue a visa (the latter figure is more prevalent), the United States, with few exceptions, issues visas within days. There is also a special U.S.-based service to help American businesses sponsor visitors and similar measures exist in Australia. Public service standards state that it may take Australia up to one month to issue a visa in Africa but in practice, it generally takes in the neighbourhood of a week. Even Europe is faster than Canada.<sup>5</sup> Visas to France and Belgium take about five days on average with the possibility of same day service. It is hardly surprising, in light of these differences, that **Canadian companies are losing business which represents a net loss for all Canadians.**

### **4. Problems regarding timeliness**

As noted above, Canada’s slower processing times create significant difficulties for Canadian businesses and aid projects, particularly in Africa where prospective visitors are often required to obtain numerous approvals from a range of organizations before they can travel. Tacking three to six weeks on to the end of this process is highly problematic. **A substantial acceleration in processing to roughly one week was seen as an acceptable standard by nearly all respondents.**

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<sup>5</sup> African colonial ties to Europe create ‘natural’ pathways for business development. Visitor visa problems divert potential business development by Canadian companies to European firms.

Recent processing trends in Africa were viewed as regressive. Embassy closures coupled with the transfer of work to already overburdened missions such as Abidjan have produced longer than advertised processing times, refusals following extremely long waits, lost documents, uneven standards of service, and visas that arrive late or at the last minute. Many respondents attributed the problems they face to the fact that **business flows do not receive priority over other visitor flows.**

More rapid service can sometimes be obtained if early warnings are given - in some instances, CIC has requested as much as six month lead times – however, the serial involvement of numerous actors, such as, on occasion, the World Bank or the UNDP, makes it very difficult to provide advance notice. The ensuing visa problems result in a loss of revenue and, more insidiously, a loss of future business.

### **5. Excessive and arbitrary refusal rates**

There is a perception of widespread, unwarranted and arbitrary rejection of business visitors by Canada. This is coupled to the view that Canadian refusal rates are markedly higher than those of the U.S. or the UK and that Ottawa, in some instances (Nigeria was cited) “... expects refusals”.

Generally, in the eyes of respondents, sponsored, mass visas tend to be dealt with more consistently than individual applications. Notwithstanding this observation, it is frequently the case that some applicants are accepted while others are refused. This is especially problematic as decisions are not clearly explained - standard letters are used to indicate the reasons for refusal – and there is no clear, publicized policy that describes how applications are evaluated. **This unpredictability causes donor agencies to lose their deposits for applicants who are not allowed to travel. This has led to projects and business decisions being cancelled or set at risk.**

### **6. Unpredictable outcomes**

Predictable decisions - with regard to outcome and timing – are essential for business and project planning, for course scheduling and for travel arrangements (taking advantage of cheaper fares). The **general perception is that decisions are arbitrary** – it is not clear to clients why some are accepted and others not when groups are proposed – with considerable variance across posts. This is problematic. To quote one of the business respondents, “We expect straight answers on criteria for acceptance (or refusal), timely communication ... the courtesy of a reply ... and a fair and thorough process ... which does not discriminate because of their [lack of] affluence.”

## 7. Excessive respondent burdens

The prevailing view is that an exorbitant amount of information is sought for short visits. The instruments are complicated to complete; they require a great deal of personal information; they pose inappropriate questions; and they entail problematic procedures, such as sending passports to another country. Some of these procedures are perceived as debasing and humiliating.<sup>6</sup> **Many of the demands are not well adapted to the African cultural context where documents may be hard to procure.**

Another source of difficulty for Africans arises from the costs associated with travel (to attend interviews)<sup>7</sup> and processing. Added to this are the costs incurred when applicants are refused: the loss of airline deposits, course deposits and so on. This is perceived as unjust given the wealth of Canada relative to that of African countries.

## 8. Restricted access and poor service

Embassy closures have aggravated the already difficult situation in Africa, adding to processing delays and boosting costs. More fundamentally, **embassy closures have reduced Canadian influence leading companies to search for other ways to demonstrate interest and commitment, including bringing key African officials and business leaders to Canada. Unfortunately, such compensatory responses are compromised by the quality of business visitor services.** Bottlenecks have created a “compromised situation where projects that were projected near-term must be pushed out to long-term with unsatisfactory conclusions” including the displacement of business to other countries. As one participant pointed out, “It is easier to take people from Guinea to the UK or France”. Problems are particularly acute during the summer (which is when Africans prefer to travel to Canada) when business and training visas compete with other visitor flows for scarce processing capacity.

**The lack of access to decision-makers is, according to business and project respondents, one of the main problems compromising the effectiveness of the business visitor program.** Many respondents cited “the total opacity of the process for analyzing (business) visitor applications”. Communication with visa posts is, largely, confined to the telephone or internet (sometimes only the latter) in a vast region characterized by less than perfect communications. This results in enormous frustrations, especially as businesses and projects are not given the opportunity to add or to clarify information in the event that visas are refused. As one respondent put it, Canadian businesses operating in Africa expect “accessibility for inquiries to properly filed, formal requests for information [and] a personal approach for those organizations attempting to do business or to partner with local organizations.” Business is frankly

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<sup>6</sup> Asking the Minister of a foreign government to provide bank account and personal details (an example that was cited) is unacceptable.

<sup>7</sup> Visa interviews are conducted at only a few locations, resulting in considerable expense for interviewees and their sponsors.

puzzled by the unwillingness of ambassadors to intervene in the immigration process and to intercede on behalf of Canadian companies pursuing business opportunities that will benefit Canada.

### **9. Lack of flexibility**

Canada's visitor visa service tends to follow a 'one-size-fits-all rule.' **Services are not adapted to the category of visa being requested (e.g. tourist vs. business) and no priority is given to different categories. All respondents agreed on the need for more flexible and personalized services adapted to the needs of business organizations. Currently, little flexibility is exhibited and "staff are unwilling to offer help that is the norm in Canada".**



## Modernizing visa delivery: producing quality decisions fast

Most problems, whether occurring in government or the private sector, can be solved by pouring in resources. Clearly, this is not a viable option for improving Canada's visa operations in Africa. Consulates and embassies are not about to be opened in the forty plus African countries where Canada does not have an on-site visa service. Instead, solutions will require new ways of doing business - fresh approaches to existing problems – such as the formation of new strategic partnerships, the rationalization of scarce resources and collaboration between private and public sectors around the visa process. Of course, not everything must be newly invented. Many of the ideas cited below are not novel. Some, like financial performance bonds, are already used by Canada, albeit in different contexts. Others, like corporate rosters<sup>8</sup> and fee-based premium services, are being tried elsewhere by our competitors and meeting with success.

An important point to keep in mind during the current exercise is that **visa processing is all about managing information**: acquiring it; analyzing it; validating it; and organizing it so informed decisions can be made. **If solutions are to be found to the problems that Canadian companies and development initiatives face in Africa, they will necessarily involve better ways of obtaining and handling information with a view to producing a faster, more predictable, more accessible and higher quality visa process.** Before turning to specific solutions, however, a short excursion is needed to consider the question of risk management and information quality.

Returning to the earlier point regarding coverage of Africa, it should be obvious that a small number of officials confined to a handful of locations spread across an entire continent can have only limited knowledge of conditions and circumstances a thousand miles away. Yet this detailed knowledge is essential for making informed decisions about business and visitor visas. **The challenge is to identify who has the necessary, in-depth, local information, to obtain it, and then to establish its validity. In the case of business visitors, the required information is, typically in the hands of Canadian companies operating on the ground. The only possible way for Citizenship and Immigration Canada to make an informed decision about issuing a visitor visa is to get this information and to verify it – not directly, which is impossible in the circumstances, but indirectly by establishing whether to trust the source, in this case, the company that is prepared to vouch for its validity.** There are several ways to

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<sup>8</sup> A corporate roster is a list companies and other agencies that have been screened according to prescribed performance criteria. Organizations listed on the roster receive 'special' treatment by virtue of having already gone through a screening process.

evaluate whether this trust is merited including the following: the existence of a long-standing, documented history of providing accurate information; a system of financial guarantees that imposes penalties for inaccuracy; and a roster<sup>9</sup> system that offers ‘truthful’ companies premium service and consigns ‘untruthful’ ones to the regular, undifferentiated stream. Premium service translates into corporate profits thus creating an incentive for companies to provide accurate information. By managing the roster and who is on it, Citizenship and Immigration Canada would manage the quality of the information on which it bases its decisions.

Regardless of what ‘system’ is adopted, a closer relationship with Canadian businesses and development projects will ensue. This is a good thing. It will contribute to a more balanced assessment of the benefits and risks associated with visa decisions. Currently, the risk calculation weighs the short-term benefits of entry against the potential, longer-term costs of visa-holders failing to return. **Little or no attention is paid longer-term concerns associated with business development and ‘branding’. Building a closer relationship between Canadian interests operating in Africa and the immigration authorities will sensitize officials to these broader strategic objectives while, at the same time, sensitizing corporations and other entities to risks that need to be managed in the national interest.**

The balance of this section lists ideas that originated in discussions with business and project leaders, federal and provincial officials working in the area of migration and economic development and representatives of foreign governments. While the ideas were by no means universally endorsed, they all received a degree of support. Below they are grouped under four pillars: (i) Creating speed; (ii) Creating predictability and consistency; (iii) Creating access; and (iv) Creating expertise. These will now be elaborated.

## 1. Creating speed

The best way to accelerate visa processing by Citizenship and Immigration Canada is to improve the quantity, quality and certainty of information available to decision-makers. In large measure, this can be accomplished by developing collaborative relations among key federal and provincial agencies, large international organizations, business firms, and development enterprises.<sup>10</sup> These organizations have local knowledge that is not readily available to visa officers.<sup>11</sup> Assembling this knowledge routinely and efficiently

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<sup>9</sup> See footnote 8.

<sup>10</sup> Information is needed about both visa applicants and sponsoring institutions.

<sup>11</sup> Increasing the reliance on sponsors is a way of injecting local knowledge into the decision process. The physical remoteness of visa operations from applicants – such as processing North African visa applications in Paris as opposed to Algiers – tilts the basis for visitor visa decisions away from specific local information towards general profiles. Introducing sponsoring institutions into the ‘information chain’, corrects this imbalance.

- having it available early in the visa process - is essential for rapid service. Provincial ministries of immigration or economic development will often be familiar with the companies that are sponsoring business visitors from Africa just as CIDA will be familiar with aid projects. Similarly, many businesses can form reasonable judgments about the persons whom they are sponsoring. Neither Canadian companies nor their African counterparts want to waste resources on persons who will not return home. The same holds for development projects. The World Bank, for example, does not want to expend scarce funds training would-be immigrants - so agencies dealing with the Bank, and wanting to continue this association, try to ensure that the visitors they sponsor return to Africa.

As noted above, it is all well and good for decision-makers to have additional information, but they must also be able to trust it. Several methods with a proven track record can be used to increase the reliability of information provided by *sponsoring institutions*: Canadian businesses and other organizations could be asked to monitor and report on the compliance of visitor visa holders; they could also be asked to post performance bonds guaranteeing the departure of their clients. Based on their performance, a roster of organizations (businesses and projects that merit trust) could be established and managed.<sup>12</sup> Visitors sponsored by these organizations would then be routinely processed more quickly, and with considerably more confidence.

Another way to speed up visa service is to encourage private sector involvement in the visa process (not in visa decisions which must remain unfettered). Private companies can assist applicants to assemble and complete documents and can speed up transactions between applicants and visa posts. Specialty services have long been available from lawyers and consultants but recently a new service has been introduced in India to ease the application process for temporary visas. For a surprisingly small fee, prospective visitors can send their applications to privately-run processing centres that handle all exchanges with the Canadian High Commission in New Delhi or the Canadian Consulate General in Chandigarh. Applicants no longer have to rely on mail, travel agents or messengers to submit applications. And they no longer have to stand in line to receive service. If interviews are required, they are scheduled at times convenient to the applicants. A similar service might be possible in Africa.

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<sup>12</sup> Australia has created a roster system of businesses that are allowed to sponsor visa applicants. Prospective company sponsors are carefully scrutinized. Under this system, (sponsored) visa processing has been "repatriated" to Australia where it is easier to work with applicants through their sponsors (who are the real clients). Overseas posts are brought into the picture when there are doubts about an applicant's bona fides. Visas are issued with or without a security bond and visa holders are monitored to ensure departure. If visa holders do not abide by their conditions of entry, the business sponsors forfeit their security bond (where applicable) and may have their sponsorship rights withdrawn. The system has been successful in providing both better service and higher levels of compliance.

### Recommendations

- (1) Work more closely with stakeholders and sponsoring organizations in order to enhance the quantity, quality and certainty of information (particularly local knowledge) on which visa decisions are made.
- (2) Create a roster of trusted organizations and a performance-based system for managing roster membership which provides trusted organizations with speedier processing for sponsored visitors.
- (3) Develop and implement mechanisms for verifying trust, including mandatory monitoring of visitors and the posting of compliance bonds by sponsoring institutions.
- (4) Encourage private sector participation in visa handling, emulating new arrangements in India.

## **2. Creating predictability and consistency**

Two distinct approaches are needed to improve the stability – both timing and outcomes - of non-tourist, visitor visa flows: The provision of technical assistance in completing documents and navigating the visa process and the creation of a distinct processing stream for visitor visas based on dedicated or prioritized resources.

The United States has recently introduced Business Visa Centres in the United States with a view to facilitating business travelers. This follows the highly successful U.S.-China Business Initiative pilot. The response has been overwhelmingly positive. The Centres do not intercede in visa decisions. Their role is limited to helping American businesses prepare and submit the documents that support business visa applications.

Other, less costly methods for improving the quality of information and assisting applicants and sponsors could build on private sector arrangements, such as those employed in India. They could also be obtained by a concerted effort on the part of Citizenship and Immigration Canada to develop and disseminate more detailed and better-tailored (to local conditions) information about the visa assessment process and the evidence on which decisions are based. In this regard, Citizenship and Immigration Canada's manuals and guidelines need to be clarified and better aligned with present legislation and regulations. The former blur the distinction between temporary workers (who take jobs in Canada) and business visitors (who do not), possibly leading to the use of inappropriate standards for business visitor processing.

The second important change that is needed to produce stability focuses on the resources that are available for visitor visa processing. Under the current system all processing resources are fungible. As a result, non-tourist, visitor visa processing is frequently displaced (especially in summer) by such things as unexpected shifts in demand for immigrant, temporary and tourist visas. Dedicated resources – or

appropriately prioritized resources - would stabilize processing times and reduce fluctuations.

Recommendations

- (5) Develop and disseminate more detailed, customized (to local conditions) information about the visa assessment process and the evidence on which decisions are based.
- (6) Investigate the use of private sector arrangements, such as those employed in India, for assisting visitor visa applicants and their sponsors abroad.
- (7) Assess the value of introducing special business centres or business services in Canada along the lines of those recently introduced by the U.S..
- (8) Clarify the descriptions and treatment of business visitors in Citizenship and Immigration Canada's manuals and guidelines in order to better align them with present legislation and regulations.
- (9) Differentiate visitor visa streams and dedicate specific (or appropriately prioritized) resources to the processing of non-tourist, visitor visas.

**3. Creating access**

Given current resources and priorities, posts are not in a position to offer special services or to engage in extended exchanges with applicants or sponsors around particular cases. (This is not to say that limited opportunities could not be found to solicit or feed additional information into the decision process.) This said, the option does exist to provide tailored services, *providing these could be fully charged*. For a \$1,000 processing fee the U.S. offers a Premium Processing Service that allows employers to request faster processing for certain employment-based petitions. A similar – though less costly – service could, in principle, be introduced for business visitors. It remains to be seen whether there is demand for such services, which would depend on the overall success of a revamped visitor visa process. A significant improvement in visa processing would obviate the need for a premium service.

Recommendations

- (10) Introduce limited opportunities for information exchanges between Citizenship and Immigration Canada and (non-tourist) visitor visa sponsors.
- (11) Investigate the possibility of (and demand for) a fee-based, special process to provide firms and other sponsors of non-tourist visitors with customized, premium service.

#### 4. Creating expertise

The most important way to augment the expertise of decision-makers is to create institutions and behaviours that increase their collaboration with 'experts', particularly those (Canadian and African institutions) with knowledge of local conditions. Immigration officers should be encouraged to work more closely with their colleagues who are involved in commercial operations and trade promotion in order to share information and to create an improved strategic focus for Canadian actions abroad. This idea is developed extensively in the earlier discussion on 'creating speed' leaving the current item to focus on training and increased familiarity with business and development needs and activities.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) focuses mainly on selecting new Canadians and protecting Canada from undesirable intrusions. CIC does not have a strong business orientation and few officers possess business expertise. One way to build understanding and sensitivity to business needs is to involve business in training programs that equip officers with a better understanding of business interests and methods. This could include participation in course design, in training delivery and in refining manuals and guidelines. (Similar changes could be introduced for development initiatives.) Both business and development projects are expected to increase sharply in the coming years with a concomitant effect on non-tourist visitor visas. Through their participation in training, Canadian companies and development projects may also develop a better appreciation of the challenges facing visa officers.

#### Recommendations

- (12) Involve the Canadian business community and development assistance organizations in designing and delivering training programs to visa officers.
- (13) Encourage immigration officers to work more closely with colleagues responsible for commerce, trade and development in order to benefit from their expertise and to create a shared strategic focus within Canada's overseas missions.

#### 5. Translating ideas into actions

The recommendations set out above are reasonable and doable, many with a proven 'track-record'. They build on the premise that the aims of Canada's government are largely congruent with those of Canada's corporations. There is a shared interest in strengthening Canada's strategic advantages and equipping Canadian companies to compete internationally. A similar impetus exists among government agencies to align policies and actions in order to strengthen support for Canada's trade, development and foreign policy objectives.

Three things are needed to translate the ideas contained in this report into actions:

- (1) **A threshold political decision by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration** that problems facing Canadian companies, development initiatives and African business travelers to Canada will be resolved.
- (2) **A commitment by Citizenship and Immigration Canada to work collaboratively with key stakeholders** including the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, CIDA, members of the business community and representatives of development initiatives.
- (3) **A timetable that inspires confidence** in stakeholders that their concerns are being taken seriously and that relief is on the way.

It should be noted that while the paper focuses on Africa, the ideas and principles it contains could be applied to other developing regions with equally favourable results.

## IV Concluding remarks

It is always tempting when confronting a problem to start by allocating blame. A concerted effort should be made by all parties to avoid this trap. There are no guilty culprits apart from shifting strategic priorities and growing international competition. Meeting these challenges will require a spirit of cooperation and a willingness by all parties to collaborate, to modify practices and to look for new and better ways of doing business and realizing objectives. Canada has a unique strategic advantage resulting from its successful and early adoption of diversity, an advantage that its competitors are struggling to procure. This window will remain open for a decade, perhaps less. While it lasts, **Canada must capitalize on its strategic asset and the investment it represents by ensuring that Canadian practice lives up to internationally 'advertised' Canadian ideals.** Governments and corporations, including development initiatives, have a shared strategic interest in making this happen. This paper establishes a framework for this collaboration and proposes a series of ideas to help launch the discussion.



## Executive Summary

This report focuses on the short-term movement of visitors from Africa to Canada. Visitors play a vital role in supporting commercial and non-commercial (aid related) ventures that contribute to Canada's prosperity and Africa's development.

Non-tourist visitors typically enter Canada for short periods of time to familiarize themselves with products or services that Canadian companies are trying to sell in Africa, to receive management and other forms of training relating to the sale of plants and equipment (e.g. infrastructure projects), and to participate in strategy and planning meetings, contributing essential information about local conditions and requirements.

The paper argues the following points:

- (1) That Canada's competitiveness in Africa would be enhanced by streamlined visa procedures;
- (2) That Canada is not capitalizing on its "brand" as a leader in the field of immigration and diversity – a powerful, strategic advantage that it enjoys worldwide by virtue of longstanding, intensive investments in immigration and multiculturalism;
- (3) That Canadian policy in Africa is misaligned – specifically, that visa procedures impede the attainment of Canada's laudatory, new trade and development priorities; and
- (4) That a win-win solution – better domestic protection and visa facilitation – can be achieved through careful, structured cooperation between private and public stakeholders with an interest in Africa.

Africa constitutes a region of vast potential and high priority for Canada. In this regard, there exists a remarkable congruence between private and public interests in fostering the conditions that will nourish Canada's growing involvement in Africa.

Canada's strategic diversity advantage is being eroded in Africa by the disparity between Canada's image and the manner in which it comports itself. Non-tourist visitor visa processing, presided over by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, is seen as especially problematic. It is essential that the Canadian government align its policies and eliminate discrepancies between words and actions.

Important challenges affecting the quality and speed of visitor visa processing were identified through interviews with federal and provincial officials, business leaders, development initiatives and representatives of foreign governments, notably:

- (1) Challenges resulting from cultural differences between business and government and insensitivity by Canada to the special situations that prevail in Africa.

- (2) Challenges resulting from the fact that other countries with whom Canada competes are able to provide faster, cheaper and more predictable service. A substantial acceleration in processing to roughly one week was seen as an acceptable standard by nearly all respondents.
- (3) Challenges resulting from the widespread perception of unwarranted and arbitrary rejections of business visitor applications.
- (4) Challenges produced by excessive respondent burdens (including cost) in relation to the demands by competitor countries.
- (5) Challenges associated with restricted access to decision-makers, opaque decision processes, limited service and a lack of flexibility

Modernizing service delivery and solving the problems facing Canadian companies and development initiatives in Africa requires better ways of obtaining and handling information. The challenge lies in identifying who has the necessary, in-depth, local knowledge, getting it, and establishing its validity – not directly, which is impossible, but indirectly by establishing whether to trust its source.

### **Recommendations**

Below, thirteen recommendations are made for accelerating visa processing, making it more consistent, improving access to decision-makers and building expertise:

- (1) Work more closely with stakeholders and sponsoring organizations to enhance the quantity, quality and certainty of information (particularly local knowledge) on which visa decisions are made.
- (2) Create a roster of trusted organizations and a performance-based system for managing roster membership (which provides trusted organizations with speedier processing for sponsored visitors).
- (3) Develop and implement mechanisms for verifying trust, including mandatory monitoring of visitors and the posting of compliance bonds by sponsoring institutions.
- (4) Encourage private sector participation in visa handling, emulating new arrangements in India.
- (5) Develop and disseminate more detailed, customized (to local conditions) information about the visa assessment process and the evidence on which decisions are based.
- (6) Investigate the use of private sector arrangements, such as those employed in India, for assisting visitor visa applicants and their sponsors abroad.
- (7) Assess the value of introducing special business centres or business services in Canada along the lines of those recently introduced by the U.S..
- (8) Clarify the descriptions and treatment of business visitors in Citizenship and Immigration Canada's manuals and guidelines so as to better align them with present legislation and regulations.

- (9) Differentiate visitor visa streams and dedicate specific (or appropriately prioritized) resources to the processing of non-tourist, visitor visas.
- (10) Introduce limited opportunities for information exchanges between Citizenship and Immigration Canada and (non-tourist) visitor visa sponsors.
- (11) Investigate the possibility of (and demand for) a fee-based, special process to provide firms and other sponsors of non-tourist visitors with customized, premium service.
- (12) Involve the Canadian business community and development assistance organizations in designing and delivering training programs to visa officers.
- (13) Encourage immigration officers to work more closely with colleagues responsible for commerce, trade, and development in order to benefit from their expertise and to create a shared strategic focus within Canada's overseas missions.

The thirteen recommendations build on the premise that the aims of Canada's government are largely congruent with those of Canada's corporations. A similar impetus exists among government agencies to align policies and actions so as to strengthen support for Canada's trade, development and foreign policy objectives.

Three things are needed to translate the ideas contained in this report into actions:

- (1) A threshold political decision by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration that problems facing Canadian companies, development initiatives and African business travelers to Canada will be resolved.
- (2) A commitment by Citizenship and Immigration Canada to work collaboratively with key stakeholders including the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, CIDA, members of the business community and representatives of development initiatives.
- (3) A timetable that inspires confidence in stakeholders that their concerns are being taken seriously and that relief is on the way.

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