

Intelligence MEMOS



From: Tingting Zhang and Parisa Mahboubi
To: The Honourable Sean Fraser, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship
Date: May 4, 2023
Re: **IMPROVING CANADA'S IMMIGRATION CONSULTING INDUSTRY**

Canada plans to accept approximately 1.5 million immigrants by 2025 – an ambitious [target](#) that adds pressure throughout the system and also increases the demand for immigration consulting services.

Canada currently has 11,324 domestic and 199 internationally regulated Canadian immigration consultants (RCICs), not enough to meet the potential demand for professional advice as applications soar. Canada received approximately 5.1 million applications for temporary and permanent residency in 2022, almost twice the number in 2021.

So even though it is illegal for an unlicensed consultant to charge fees, the gap between supply and demand continues to incentivize unlicensed consultants (even [repeat offenders](#)) to continue to flourish.

Canada's immigration system is complex, with various temporary and permanent resident programs and differing pathways to permanent residency. Selecting the right program and navigating the application process can be daunting. Many people seek professional advice and help with the process, which opens the field for unlicensed consultants to exploit uninformed applicants for their private gain.

Unlicensed consultants can be travel agents, labour recruiters, or educational agents who illegally provide immigration services, with a fee.

The consequences of using an unlicensed consultant can be [serious](#), and [stories](#) abound of people losing money and even their chance to come to Canada.

In 2019, the federal government [decided](#) to hold immigration and citizenship consultants to account by “improving oversight, strengthening enforcement, and increasing accountability to protect the public from dishonest consultants who take advantage of vulnerable people.”

But unlicensed consultant regulation remains weak. The Immigration Consultants of Canada Regulatory Council (ICCRC) [said](#) it had no jurisdiction over unauthorized practitioners (i.e. unlicensed consultants). The [issue](#) worsened during the pandemic and in late 2021, ICCRC was replaced by the College of Immigration and Citizenship Consultants as the [official regulator](#) of immigration and citizenship consultants.

With increased powers, the new college appeared to have some success: complaints against licensed consultants fell by 3.5 percent from 2021 to 2022. However, the reports of unauthorized practitioners [increased](#) from 40 in 2021 to 65 in 2022, which almost certainly fails to reflect the extent of the problem. For example, some applicants might choose not to file a complaint due to fear and personal concerns. Others might not be able to or know how to proceed, or even be aware that a complaint process exists.

But the college has no direct role in stopping unlicensed consultants. It can only refer complaints to the Canadian Border Services Agency or the RCMP. And as long as unlicensed consultants continue practicing, many people who wish to live and work or study in Canada can be at risk.

The college needs to expand its role to prevent unlicensed consultants from practicing and abusing the system by detecting unlicensed consultants and holding them accountable for their actions. Stricter rules and steeper fines should be applied to ensure the integrity of our immigration system.

Canada also needs to increase the supply of licensed consultants. Since 2020, however, the college has made several changes that limit that supply. For example, to improve the quality of accreditation, it stiffened education [requirements](#) and has allowed only one English-language [university](#) to offer the needed training – a 12-month, \$14,500 online diploma – instead of several colleges. The college should increase the number of institutions offering the programs.

Meanwhile, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) needs to make the [Public Register](#) of RCICs more accessible on its website. Currently, navigation is difficult. The register is buried under a “Protect yourself from immigration fraud” [section](#), after which one has to click on “Learn more about fraud.” Without any suspicion about or encountering a case of fraud, it is very unlikely that a client would seek information on that page. And it would be too late to do so if fraud has occurred.

The department needs to proactively prevent prospective applicants from being victims of fraudulent practices. Its website should point people to professional help in the first place. It should be user-friendly and easy to navigate, especially for prospective applicants whose first language often is not English. Providing the right information accessibly on the website helps them to decide whether they need formal advice on the programs they applied.

Raising awareness about immigration fraud is also important. Both the college and IRCC can educate newcomers and prospective applicants more about immigration fraud through community outreach or online presence. As Canada welcomes more people to our country, its reputation needs to hold.

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