Canada launches its first-ever Tech Talent Strategy

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On June 27, 2023, the Government of Canada announced its first-ever Tech Talent Strategy aimed at using immigration to strengthen Canada's tech sector. Under this strategy, the Government of Canada will be launching a number of ambitious immigration program improvements and new initiatives to attract top tech talent to Canada. Canadian employers in the technology sector should take note, as the Government of Canada's new strategy will be transformative in attracting and retaining top talent in Canada.

In this article, we outline key actions projected in the announcement.

Existing and new initiatives

The Government of Canada has reviewed a number of its existing programs to improve processing times and increase tech immigration. Below is a summary of these improvements:

1. The Government of Canada will be implementing a new Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA)-exempt innovation stream under the International Mobility Program by the end of 2023. This stream will include employer-specific work permits in companies identified by the Government and open work permits for highly skilled worked in select in-demand occupations. Both will apply for up to five years.
2. The Global Skills Strategy (GSS) program was launched by the Government of Canada in 2017, with a focus on hiring highly skilled talent from around the world. However, GSS program processing targets were not met during the pandemic. The Government of Canada has indicated its intention to meet the two-week standard for processing Global Talent Stream LMIA assessments for employers processed by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), while Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) will meet the two-week standard for routine work permit applications. Resuming expedited processing time will be instrumental in ensuring Canadian employers can access talent more quickly and efficiently.
3. Canada's Start-up Visa (SUV) Program leads to permanent residence for foreign entrepreneurs who gain support from designated Canadian investors. The SUV

program has also been hampered by longer wait times. To improve the program, the Government of Canada will allow entrepreneurs to apply for open work permits for up to three years (instead of the current one year) and the Government of Canada is planning to increase the spaces under this program from 1,000 to 3,500.

In addition to improving existing programs, the Government of Canada has also created several innovative programs and initiatives to attract top tech talent to Canada:

4. Effective July 16, 2023, U.S. non-immigrant H-1B speciality visa holders will be able to apply for an open work permit valid for a period of up to three years, while their accompanying dependents will be able to apply for a work or study permit, valid for the same duration. The stream will operate for one year or until the government receives 10,000 work permit applications. This new work permit stream was designed to expand the opportunities available for highly skilled workers to continue to pursue their careers in the tech sector in North America while contributing to Canada's economic growth and prosperity.
5. Effective May 31, 2023, the first-ever category-based selection for Express Entry in Canada was launched. There is now a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) stream, which will focus on data scientists, software developers & programmers, mathematicians, statisticians & actuaries, and electrical & electronics engineers. More information regarding this initiative can be found in our previous insight.
6. The Government of Canada will allow digital nomads with foreign employment to work in Canada under a visitor visa for up to 6 months. If the digital nomad receives a job offer in Canada during their time in the country, they will be able to apply for a work permit or permanent residence.

For more information about how employers can take advantage of these new programs and program improvements in order to bring top talent into Canada, please reach out to the contacts below or any BLG lawyer from our Business Immigration Group.

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