

# media release

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*For Immediate Release – June 21, 2019*

*West Kootenay, BC*

## West Kootenay chosen for rural immigration project

Pilot will allow employers to hire foreign workers for jobs that have gone unfilled locally

West Kootenay employers will benefit from a new federal pilot aimed at bringing immigrants to smaller communities.

The Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot, [announced last week](#), named eleven Canadian communities who would benefit from increased immigration to address local economic development needs. Among those selected was the West Kootenay, which includes the communities of Nelson, Castlegar, Trail, Rossland, and surrounding areas.

[Community Futures Central Kootenay](#) will deliver the project, which kicks off in Fall 2019 with the first immigrants arriving in 2020. Over a three-year period, the pilot aims to attract up to 250 immigrants of various skill levels to fill full-time, year-round positions.

“This project is community-driven. We’ll be talking to local employers to find out the type of skills shortages they’re experiencing and setting the region-specific application criteria based on their needs,” explained Andrea Wilkey, Executive Director of Community Futures Central Kootenay. “We’ll be looking to attract immigrants for jobs that have gone unfilled locally.”

The Kootenays currently have an unemployment rate of 6.3%, which is above the provincial average of 4.5%. Yet jobs remain unfilled. Since January, more than 1,000 vacancies have been advertised on the Kootenay Career Development Services [job board](#). Some local businesses are operating with an employee shortage because they can’t find anyone to fill their open positions.

“We embrace the announcement of this pilot supporting West Kootenay communities. We are determined to see our local businesses succeed and this is a major step for all stakeholders,” said Doug Sutherland of [Sutco Transportation Specialists](#). “As baby boomers leave the transportation industry, a gap is being created that our local labour pool can not sufficiently fill. For many organizations, filling these gaps helps grow and create more opportunities for locals looking for other positions.

“For our team members, we are committed to transporting community products to market as well as transporting essential product to our communities. This program will definitely support these commitments for the long term.”

In the past, Sutco has hired drivers through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program. The Rural Immigration pilot helps immigrants gain permanent resident status and bring their families, which strengthens their long-term commitment to the region.

[Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy](#) (CBAL) provides settlement and integration services for newcomers across the Kootenay Boundary region. CBAL Executive Director, Desneiges Profili, said getting the whole community involved in this project will help to enhance understanding of the immigrant experience and create a more inclusive workplace and community.

“Immigrants help enrich our community culturally, socially, and economically,” Profili said. “When employers, community members, and service providers have more knowledge and awareness, it helps to ensure that immigrants have the wrap-around support required to settle successfully within the community. This results in strong connections to the community and the region.”

In the fall, Community Futures will hire a coordinator to manage the immigration pilot and work with employers to identify positions that could be filled by newcomers. Then, those employers will be able to hire employees from outside of country or those who are within Canada but are not yet citizens or permanent residents. Once a prospective immigrant has a job offer, they apply for endorsement from the community.

“We’ll have a committee of community stakeholders help set our local criteria for endorsing our ‘best fit’ candidates. We’ll be looking for people with a genuine employment opportunity who intend to stay in the community and help grow our local economy,” Wilkey explained.

The endorsed candidates will be eligible to apply to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and if they meet the federal selection criteria, they will get their permanent residence and be able to move to the community to start their new job.

The other ten communities chosen to participate in the immigration pilot project are Vernon (BC), Claresholm (AB), Moose Jaw (SK), Brandon (MB), Rhineland, Plum Coulee, Gretna, Altona (MB), Thunder Bay (ON), Sault Ste. Marie (ON), Sudbury (ON), Timmins (ON), and North Bay (ON).

More information about the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot Project can be found at <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/immigrate-canada/rural-northern-immigration-pilot.html>.

This past March, the West Kootenay communities of Nelson, Castlegar, Trail, and Rossland were among 30 BC communities selected to participate in the BC’s new Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) Entrepreneur Immigration Regional Pilot, which targets foreign entrepreneurs to establish businesses in rural communities. Details about that program can be found at <https://www.welcomebc.ca/Immigrate-to-B-C/BC-PNP-Entrepreneur-Immigration/Entrepreneur-Immigration-Regional-Pilot>.

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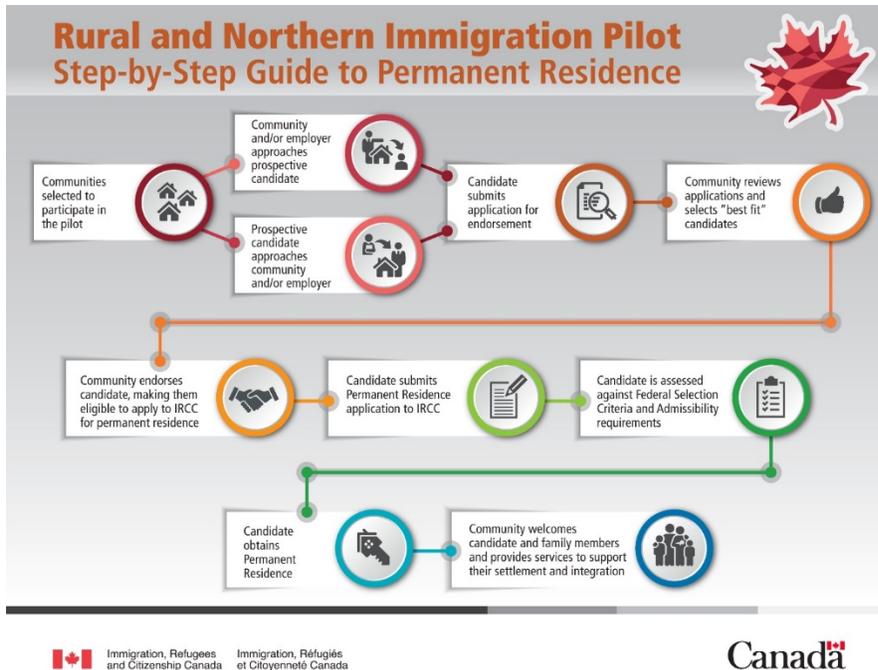
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**Press Photos:**

Download a copy of these images [here](#) and [here](#).



**Image caption:** The Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot will allow the community to choose the “best fit” candidates to endorse for permanent residence and allow them to move into their community to fill a job vacancy.



**Image caption:** Community Futures Central Kootenay Executive Director Andrea Wilkey.