



Hybrid Immigrant-Selection Systems: The Next Generation of Economic Migration Schemes

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I. Introduction

The process of selecting “economic immigrants,” that is, immigrants chosen explicitly to fill labor-market needs and otherwise enhance a country’s skills pool, is always in flux. While a handful of English-speaking countries, such as Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, are the largest players in one type of immigrant selection, a *points system*, a number of other countries have also adopted the practice and several more, including the European Union,¹ are considering it.

Even the United States considered a points system — albeit a particularly awkward and ill-conceived one — during an unsuccessful attempt to pass comprehensive immigration reform in 2007. However, the United States and several other major countries — including some that are currently investing heavily in economic migration, such as Sweden and Norway — have chosen not to adopt points systems. And, most tellingly, the major points systems players have been adapting their systems to be more responsive to their employers’ needs and/or adding demand-driven components to their overall selection schemes by empowering their employers to select the foreign workers they need from abroad.

The present analysis focuses exclusively on the selection of economic immigrants and discusses how the various systems that major users of foreign workers employ have been evolving. As governments think more seriously about attracting and selecting immigrants for their education and skills, but also for their ability to plug specific holes in the labor market, we are seeing the emergence of hybrid systems that combine ideas drawn from points systems with other, more demand-driven and employer-led methods of selection. We are also seeing a tendency toward using multiple avenues of recruitment simultaneously — points tests *and* direct recruitment by employers *and* direct recruitment of foreign students studying in the receiving country’s universities *and* signing bilateral agreements for temporary and circular migration. We thus seek to unpack what is happening to the selection of skilled immigrants. To do so, we first assess where points systems “fit” in the continuum of immigrant selection schemes before exploring the different elements that make up an economically responsive selection system in today’s, and tomorrow’s, increasingly competitive world.

The economic immigration stream is separate and distinct from the other two major *legal* streams that comprise a country’s total immigration flow: The humanitarian stream, composed of refugees and asylum seekers, and the “social” stream, composed of family members seeking (re)unification. (Illegal immigration is overwhelmingly an economic stream and, many argue, an important and flexible supplement to overall economic immigration. It is not, however, part of this analysis).

Legal economic-stream immigrants may be either permanent or temporary, with the former being the most common in the “traditional” countries of immigration (the United States, Canada, Australia, etc.) and the latter in the rest of the world. Increasingly, however, traditional immigration countries are also admitting some economic immigrants initially as

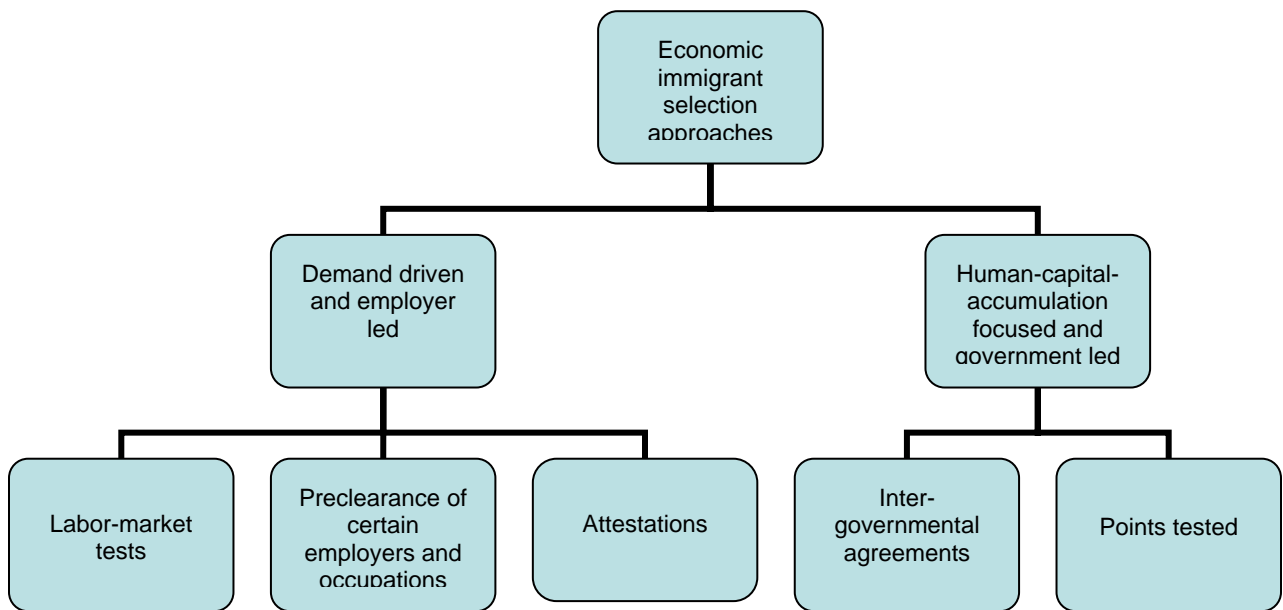
¹ The European Union’s so-called “Blue Card” is slated for a final vote in the first half of 2009, but would not be implemented before 2011 due to concerns from newer Member States that have restricted access to some older Member States’ labor markets until then.

temporary workers and then allowing them to convert their status to permanent — thus treating certain temporary statuses as probationary or provisional ones, that is, as bridges to permanent status. Similarly, most of the other countries that engage in economic-stream immigration also often allow many of those who have served as temporary immigrants to earn permanent status after several years of employment in these countries. *Both sets of practices point toward an increasing, if not always visible to the naked eye, convergence in the selection of economic-stream immigrants.*

II. Selecting Economic Immigrants

There are two fundamentally different approaches to selecting economic immigrants: those that are *demand driven and employer led* and those that are *human-capital-accumulation focused and government led*. The demand-driven approach places the labor market’s immediate needs front and center and allows employers to select individuals to fill specific vacancies and petition the government for a visa for the chosen individual. The human-capital-accumulation approach emphasizes the nation’s broader and arguably longer-term human capital needs, putting government bureaucracies directly in charge of both identifying and assessing such needs and of “choosing” those to be admitted.

Figure 1. The Two Principal Approaches to Selecting Economic Immigrants



I. Demand-Driven Approaches

The demand-driven and employer-led approach has three major variants: labor-market tests, precleared occupations and employers, and attestation-based decisions. Labor-market testing requires employers to demonstrate they have searched for a worker in the local, national, or

regional labor market and failed to find a suitable candidate who is authorized to work before they can hire a foreign worker. This process varies in intensity (and bureaucratic intrusiveness) but typically involves providing proof that the employer has searched for a candidate by working with the government's jobs placement services and (usually) through placing ads in relevant newspapers, magazines, and/or job websites, and has found no suitable candidates. For example, US employers must obtain a "labor certification" from the federal Department of Labor to sponsor an immigrant worker for permanent residency or to sponsor certain temporary workers.² In many ways, the just-implemented Swedish approach to economic migration is a "pure" case of this practice, but distinguishes itself by its simplicity, clarity, transparency, and efficiency (the employer/employee match can be as quick as one day).

The second variant of demand-driven and employer-led immigrant selection precertifies certain "trusted" employers, such as university faculties, and thus defers to the selection procedures they follow. And in some instances, certain occupations are declared "shortage" occupations, effectively allowing employers seeking workers in the covered employment categories to bypass most of the procedural scrutiny typically required of employers under the first variant. For instance, the French have precleared about 60 job classifications and allow nationals from countries with which France has bilateral labor agreements access to these jobs. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) similarly gives nationals of the United States, Canada, and Mexico access to each other's labor markets across about 65 professions requiring a university degree or its equivalent.

The third variant of this approach is attestation based, a US innovation. Under this method, an employer is allowed to recruit foreign workers without a labor-market test or other procedural constraints but in accordance with a specified set of conditions. Specifically, employers sign a legally binding declaration known as an attestation, which stipulates the employment terms, and submit to random postrecruitment auditing by government officials. In the United States, employers who petition the government to hire an individual under the H-1B "specialty occupation" temporary visa (over half of petitions in this category are for computer and mathematical occupations³) must use the attestation method. Variants of this practice have spread to many other visa categories.

To summarize, all three major demand-driven and employer-led variants (there are subvariations within each) recognize the need to satisfy a specific employment need,⁴ particularly in sectors where the local supply of qualified workers is thought to be inadequate and/or where labor demand is high. Simultaneously, however, all three approaches are

² In the case of an H-2B visa application, for instance, the state workforce agency places the job description in its job bank system for ten calendar days, and the employer advertises the job offer in a newspaper for three consecutive days. See US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, "Procedures for H-2B Temporary Labor Certification in Non-Agricultural Occupations," <http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGL/TEGL21-06.pdf>.

³ James Sherk and Guinevere Nell, *More H-1B Visas, More American Jobs, A Better Economy* (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, 2008), <http://www.heritage.org/research/labor/cda08-01.cfm>.

⁴ For a description of skills shortage, see Sue Richardson, *What is a skill shortage?* (Adelaide, Australia: National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2007), <http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/proj/nr4022.pdf>.

sensitive to the need to protect both the jobs and the wages of native workers, if to differing degrees.⁵

2. Human-Capital-Accumulation Focused and Government-Led Approaches

Government-led selection systems may also be split into two major types: intergovernmental agreements and points systems. In the first type, sending and receiving governments sign agreements allowing the employment of foreign workers in specific sectors or jobs. Some of these agreements are reciprocity based and some open entire occupational or industrial sectors to workers from the other nation(s). In each instance, the role of employers at the receiving end varies enormously — as does the scrutiny under which foreign workers are recruited and employed. The end result is that some of these approaches can be closer to the demand-driven model discussed immediately above than the human-capital-accumulation model discussed in this section.

For instance, many governments offer reciprocity-based visas in numerous professions or seasonal jobs in agriculture or construction. In the United States, the TN visa (for Canadians and Mexicans), the H-1B1 visa (for Singaporeans and Chileans), and the E-3 visa (limited to Australians) allow foreign nationals from the specified country to take up temporary employment in increments of one year (but without an upper limit of years) in about 65 professional occupations. (All these countries have free-trade agreements with the United States, and the visa categories identified here were created under these agreements). Canada fuels its Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) through agreements with Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Mexico, and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States. More importantly, Mexico has recently negotiated bilateral labor agreements directly with Canadian *provinces* that allow Mexican workers to be employed in hard-to-fill jobs with participating employers (of course, under the more-or-less watchful eyes of Canadian federal authorities). In another example, the United Kingdom offers entry to its Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS) to nationals from the European Union's (EU) newest Member States, Romania and Bulgaria, who do not yet enjoy EU-wide employment rights. And France's bilateral migration/mobility agreements and "partnerships" (along with those of many other EU Member States) can easily fit both under this classification and the demand-driven approaches outlined earlier.

The second type of government-led system is the points system, a form of immigrant selection that admits or denies an individual entry into a country for temporary or permanent residence and employment on the basis of how many points that person scores on a test measuring such characteristics as age, education, skills, experience, and language ability, among others.

⁵ See Demetrios Papademetriou and Stephen W. Yale-Loehr, *Balancing Interests: Rethinking the US Selection of Skilled Immigrants* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1996)

III. Understanding Points Systems

The Rise of Points Systems

Points systems originated in Canada in 1967 and remain a “growth area” in the migration business. Table 1 provides an overview of countries that now employ such systems.

Points systems do not match immigrants with jobs but focus instead on selecting immigrants with desirable (and mostly very high) human capital. At their core, points systems are education and skills-accretion mechanisms. As a rule, immigration bureaucracies determine the level of human capital applicants possess based on the number of points they score on certain individual characteristics, although online applications have been making the process more streamlined and less labor intensive. Applicants who score at or above the government-set “pass mark” are deemed sufficiently qualified and are thus admitted for either temporary or permanent settlement. Those who score below it are almost always rejected.

Points systems do not as a rule engage employers in the process beyond some often *pro forma* “consultations.” However, an increasing number of systems allocate points to applicants who have secured a job offer or sponsorship from an employer. Unlike the explicitly demand-driven and employer-led approaches, however, governments do not typically give priority to existing job offers in the admission decision.

This makes the points system first and foremost a human-capital-accumulation program that allows countries to emphasize the applicant characteristics they deem the most valuable for economic growth.

Table 1. Countries with Points Systems

Country	Name of points system	Introduced	Validity of visa/work permit	Number of immigrants (2005)	Foreign born as share of total population (2005)***
Canada	Canada Skilled Workers	1967	Permanent	6,105,722	18.9%
Australia	General Skilled Migrant Program	1979*	<i>Skilled Independent and Skilled Sponsored Visas:</i> permanent residence. <i>Skilled-Regional Sponsored visas:</i> provisional residence w/ option for permanent status after two years of residence and one year of full-time work in a specified region.	4,097,204	20.3%

New Zealand	Skilled Migrant Category	1991	Permanent	642,164	15.9%
United Kingdom	Highly Skilled Migrant Program (HSMP); Points Based System (PBS)	(HSMP) 2002; PBS Tier 1 from 2008	Temporary visa for three years; renewable in the same subcategory for another two years. After five years, an individual can apply for permanent residency.**	5,408,118	9.1%
Czech Republic	Selection of Qualified Workers	2003	Provisional visa for one-and-a-half years for highly qualified workers or two-and-a-half years for other workers. Visa holders can apply for permanent residency after these time periods.	453,265	4.4%
Singapore	S-Pass System	2004	Up to two years for first-time applicants; renewable for up to three years. An S-Pass holder can apply for permanent residency in Singapore through the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority at any point.	1,842,953	42.6%
Hong Kong	Quality Migrant Admission Scheme	2006	One year, renewable for a year or more on a case-by-case basis. After seven years of residence in Hong Kong, individuals admitted under the General Points Test or the Achievement-based Points Test of the scheme can apply for permanent residency.	2,998,686	42.6%
Denmark	Danish Green Card	2007	Three years with a possible extension	388,535	7.2%

			for up to four years if the individual has worked for the past 12 months for at least 10 hours per week. Individuals are eligible for permanent residence if they have a residence and work permit and resided in Denmark for at least seven years.		
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Notes: *Known as the Numerical Multifactor Assessment System (NUMAS) when first introduced.

**Individuals in the Highly Skilled General, Investor, or Entrepreneur Tier 1 subcategories may renew their visas for an additional two years in the same subcategory if they score enough points again. Entrepreneurs must demonstrate that they have invested in and registered a business within three months of entry and created at least two full-time jobs for at least 12 months. Investors must show that they have invested at least 750,000 pounds within the first three months upon entry and that they have maintained their investment throughout their residency period. Those under the Post-Study Work Tier 1 subcategory can only extend their stay if they switch to a different Tier 1 subcategory or a different tier. However, the period of residence accrued under the Post-Study Work subcategory is not included in the five-year requirement.

***For comparative purposes, the proportions are from the United Nations *World Migrant Stock: The 2005 Revision Population Database*. However, according to national statistics bureaus, the foreign born represented 19.8 percent of the total population in Canada in 2007 (Statistics Canada); 24 percent in Australia in 2006 (Australian Bureau of Statistics); 22.9 percent in New Zealand in 2006 (Statistics New Zealand); and 8.3 percent in the United Kingdom in 2001 (UK Office of National Statistics). In Singapore, 34.6 percent of the population in 2008 was a permanent foreign resident or “nonresident” (Statistics Singapore). In Denmark, 8.8 percent of the population was foreign born or a descendant of a foreign-born individual in 2007 (Danish Immigration Service).

Sources: Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Immigration New Zealand, UK Border Agency, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, Ministry of Manpower of Singapore, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Immigration Department, the Danish Immigration Service, and United Nations Population Division.

Policy Aims of Points Systems

The primary aim behind all points systems is to select foreign-born individuals with attributes considered necessary for effectively meeting the recruiting country’s present and future interests. These interests often go beyond directly economic ones to include dealing with the consequences of demographic change (which, of course, has important economic consequences); addressing population distribution imbalances; pursuing sociocultural priorities, such as maintaining a bilingual heritage; redressing the labor and skills needs of less appealing parts of the receiving country; and building up the country’s overall human-capital infrastructure.

Despite these multiple goals, the desire to *accrue human capital*⁶ remains at the heart of points systems, and education's centrality in points tests clearly illustrates this emphasis (as we discuss in detail later, education is the most important variable, on average, across all points systems). In fact, policymakers have often used points systems to address the inability of their higher-education systems to produce enough native-born professionals with the needed (or desired) credentials to fuel their nation's economic growth.

The emphasis on human-capital accumulation is reflected most tellingly in the rise of education levels among immigrants in countries that use points systems. For example, 37 percent of immigrants in Australia who arrived between 1990 and 2000 had a tertiary education as opposed to 22 percent of either natives or immigrants who arrived before 1990.⁷

The *demographic imperative* in points systems can be seen most directly in the relative importance of immigrants' age in points systems. In some instances, the demographic factor is a vague one. For instance, while Canadian policymakers have expressed concern with fertility declines since the late 1980s, age has not been particularly prominent in their points system's selection formula.⁸ In contrast, in New Zealand, where 47.3 percent of native emigrants between 1999 and 2008 were under age 40,⁹ the desire to offset the emigration of young and skilled natives is a clear policy priority. An interesting variation of the demographic imperative is Hong Kong's points system, which awards points to principal applicants who bring unmarried dependent children under age 18 (see Appendix 1 for the points-systems charts of the countries discussed here).

Policymakers are also increasingly using immigration systems to expand the supply of workers in *areas experiencing labor shortages and/or high job growth*. Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom use independent bodies or ministry professionals to produce, review, and update lists of occupations that reflect the country's evolving economic needs. Australia, for example, produces a Shortage Occupation List (SOL) and a Migration Occupations in Demand List (MODL), a subsection of SOL. Applicants for Australia's General Skilled Migration Program *must* nominate an occupation on the SOL that is relevant to their skills and qualifications.¹⁰ In fact, by having a job offer listed on MODL, applicants can earn one-

⁶ Rooted in such an impulse was the United Kingdom's decision in 2006 (discontinued since February 2008) to allow graduates from a list of 50 top business schools worldwide to enter the country almost automatically (they were still required to demonstrate English proficiency). For more information, see Home Office, "Master of Business Administration (MBA) Provision," <http://www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/policyandlaw/ecis/hsmpecaseworkerguidance/mba.pdf?view=Binary>.

⁷ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, "Chart I.12, Percentage of immigrants and native-born persons aged 15 and above with a tertiary education, circa 2000," in *SOPEMI 2007 Edition* (Paris: OECD, 2008).

⁸ See Alan G. Green and David A. Green, "The Economic Goals of Canada's Immigration Policy: Past and Present," *Canadian Public Policy* 25, no.4 (1999): 425-451.

⁹ Immigration New Zealand, "Departures: D1b – All departures by month," <http://www.immigration.govt.nz/NR/rdonlyres/494E22C7-31C0-44C7-AC5D-6AD616E69CBE/0/D1bDeparturesincgenderupdated04Nov2008.zip>.

¹⁰ Since 1999, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations in Australia has been responsible for reviewing twice annually MODL and recommending changes, if any, to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. See Bob Birrell, Leslyanne Hawthorne, and Sue Richardson, "Operational

fifth of the points required to pass. Similar concepts are applied in the United Kingdom (through the Migration Advisory Committee)¹¹ and Singapore, which develops a “Strategic Skills List”¹² in consultation with stakeholders.¹³

Finally, points systems allow governments to continually and systematically adapt selection criteria to changing needs and priorities. When Canada created the points system in 1967, its objective was to move from a race-based approach to immigration to a race-blind one with an explicit economic and labor-market focus accounting for a substantial part of the overall inflow.¹⁴ The points system offered the advantage of addressing evolving economic policy priorities by redistributing the relative weights attached to a variety of desirable attributes.¹⁵ In 2002, Canada, through legislation, stipulated another goal of its immigrant-selection scheme: improving immigrant integration outcomes. This goal had been gaining importance since the mid-1990s, when Canada began to study longitudinally the economic performance of different immigrant groups and entry classes. The resulting New Immigration and Refugee Protection Act of 2002 also focused, among other things, on selecting skilled workers with transferable skills, rather than on intended occupation, and on specific work experience, rather than experience in a skilled occupation. It also placed even greater importance on language skills.

Australia has also adjusted its points system to increase the emphasis on traits that allow immigrants to find jobs, rather than more general human-capital traits.¹⁶ At the end of the 1990s, it expanded premigration English-language tests to family-skill categories and made

Issues in Skilled Migration,” in *Evaluation of the General Skilled Migration Categories Report* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, March 2006), <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/research/gsm-report/TitleandContents.pdf>. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations’ Skills in Demand research issues lists of shortages and recruitment difficulties in skilled occupations at the national, state, regional, and metropolitan levels. For more information, see Australian Government, Employment and Workplace Relations Services for Australians, “State and Territory Skill Shortage Lists,” <http://www.workplace.gov.au/workplace/Publications/LabourMarketAnalysis/SkillShortages/StateandTerritorySkillShortagelists/>; Australia Government, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 2006-07 Annual Report* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2007), http://www.dewr.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/7B403DC4-D775-43FC-B9C5-ADDA2CCACDEF/0/DEWR_AR0607_part2_workforce_participation.pdf. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship also considers surveys of employers who have advertised vacancies for selected skilled occupations that typically require at least three years of training. See Australian Government, Department of Employment and Work Relations, “Skills in Demand Lists: States and Territories – 2006,” <http://www.workplace.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/BF83E4CC-1E8F-4630-95C7-D9F3A6108A9A/0/SkillsinDemandMarch2006.pdf>.

¹¹ Home Office, UK Border Agency, “The Migration Advisory Committee,” <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/aboutus/workingwithus/indbodies/mac/>.

¹² Ministry of Manpower, “Strategic Skills List,” November 15, 2007, http://www.mom.gov.sg/publish/momportal/en/communities/employees/Job_Assistance_and_Training/Strategic_Skills_List.html

¹³ Unlike Australia, which identifies shortages in both occupations of different skill levels, Singapore’s list solely identifies those in mid-skilled occupations and applies only to applicants for the S Pass. For more information on the S Pass, see Singaporean Ministry of Manpower, “About the S Pass,” http://www.mom.gov.sg/publish/momportal/en/communities/work_pass/s_pass/about_the_s_pass.html.

¹⁴ Green and Green, “Economic Goals of Canada’s Immigration Policy.”

¹⁵ See Papademetriou and Yale-Loehr, *Balancing Interests*, for a thorough discussion of these matters.

¹⁶ Bob Birrell, Leslyanne Hawthorne, and Sue Richardson, “Operational Issues in Skilled Migration.”

credentialing assessments mandatory to reduce the incidence of nonrecognition of skills upon arrival.¹⁷

Advantages of Points Systems

First, points systems make clear to always skeptical publics that *their government is firmly in control* of what is arguably the most important (but often also contentious) part of any immigration system — economic-stream immigration. The explicit focus on human capital and long-term economic growth is thought to increase public confidence that only qualified applicants whose contributions help grow the economy are admitted. This focus also dampens concerns about immigration's effects on the public purse or its potentially adverse effects on low-income domestic workers. When policymakers use empirical evidence on outcomes from immigration to adjust the system further, they boost the impression of objectivity and control.

Second, a points system allows an immigration regime to set and implement a *strategic vision* that places national economic interests front and center by constantly adjusting the inflow valve of economic-stream immigrants.

Third, a points system is *transparent*. Potential immigrants, employers, and interested members of the public can examine the criteria, and understand and critique the characteristics and priorities the immigration system values most. This transparency has the additional benefit of discouraging challenges to individual admission decisions, a serious problem in complex and highly bureaucratized systems.

Finally, points systems are *flexible* for both users and governments. Applicants can meet the pass mark in a variety of ways. For some, the deciding factor in admissions may be their ability to speak the designated language proficiently; for others it may be the level of education or a specific skill. Points systems can also be used for admitting permanent, provisional, and temporary immigrants, as well as individuals at all levels of the skills spectrum.

Critiques of Points Systems

Nevertheless, important *and increasing* concerns about points systems should not be discounted. Among the most notable is that because the worlds of government planners and employers are often far apart, points systems do not meet employers' real-time needs for workers with a particular skill set. Policymakers typically think in terms of broad immigrant characteristics while employers have specific vacancies that need to be filled. For employers, the overall economic value of these jobs is of more consequence than building up a country's labor pool with generically talented immigrants. This is a legitimate disagreement.

¹⁷ Assessing authorities in Australia are government-approved bodies responsible for judging whether an applicant's qualifications meet Australian standards for working in a particular skilled occupation. Leslyanne Hawthorne, *The Impact of Economic Selection Policy on Labour Market Outcomes for Degree-Qualified Migrants in Canada and Australia* (Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy, May 2008), <http://www.irpp.org/choices/archive/vol14no5.pdf>; Department of Education, Science and Training, *Good Practice Guide for the Assessment and Recognition of Overseas Qualifications and Skills for the Purposes of Migration* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2006).

However, in selection systems whose outcomes are closely observed through ongoing evaluations, this issue need not be a completely insurmountable problem. Policymakers can fine-tune their system based on its performance across several variables that could include the points system's greater sensitivity to employer needs and requirements.

A second concern is that some of the categories used in the selection system may be insufficiently refined to capture the most useful among potential entrants. For example, "years of education" may be less important to employers than the quality of the educational institution(s) an immigrant has attended or the content of his/her education (i.e., theoretical versus practical). As we discuss in more detail later, it is very difficult to compare the quality of academic and vocational qualifications. However, policymakers can again attempt to overcome some of these problems by addressing them explicitly in the system's design. What they cannot do is capture "soft" skills and other hard-to-measure characteristics that employers value most.¹⁸

In other words, government-set criteria are no substitute for demand-driven and employer-led processes. And while a particularly responsive policy framework can mitigate some of the weaknesses of points systems, it can do so only to a degree.

A third critique of points systems is that they are still open to some manipulation despite their transparency. Points systems have good protections against subjective and arbitrary decisions, in that selection is based on meeting the pass mark. However, the criteria policymakers choose, and where and how they invest processing resources,¹⁹ can shape both the volume and composition of the flow. As with a system's language requirement, such criteria can result in outcomes that offer distinct advantages to applicants from certain countries.

A fourth concern about points systems is the way they affect the aspirations and behaviors of potential immigrants, and, less directly, of some of the countries that seemingly engage in producing workers for the global labor market. Since points systems essentially serve as an announcement to would-be immigrants about the skills that can win them a work visa, what some call a "signaling effect,"²⁰ interested individuals tailor their educational and occupational choices based on such opportunities. While this may be understandable, a wholesale shift in developing countries' education and training systems to accommodate the

¹⁸ For more on soft skills, see Elizabeth Collett and Fabian Zuleeg, "Soft, Scarce, and Super Skills: Sourcing the Next Generation of Migrant Workers in Europe," in *Talent, Competitiveness & Migration* (Guterslau: Bertelsmann, 2009).

¹⁹ In systems where processing requires interviews with immigration officials, increasing or reducing the number of consulates, and expanding or contracting processing staff will shape how many applicants can succeed from any given country.

²⁰ Such signals, however, can also have salutary effects in that they may motivate more students to work harder in order to become eligible for a visa. And since in all but the most extreme cases most graduates will not win a visa, their country of origin can benefit from a better educated and energized workforce. See Oded Stark and Yong Wang, *Inducing Human Capital Formation: Migration as a Substitute for Subsidies* (Vienna: Institute for Advanced Studies, 2001), <http://www.ihs.ac.at/publications/eco/es-100.pdf>; and Oded Stark and C. Simon Fan, "Losses and Gains to Developing Countries from the Migration of Educated Workers: An Overview of Recent Research, and New Reflections" (Discussion Papers on Development Policy, No. 116, The Center for Development Research, University of Bonn, 2007), http://www.zef.de/fileadmin/webfiles/downloads/zef_dp/zef_dp_116.pdf.

resulting demand may divert precious (and scarce) national resources with substantial (and possibly adverse) social and developmental results. The government of the Philippines, for instance, through its Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, facilitates the movement of enormous numbers of nurses abroad. While the remittances of these nurses are essential lifelines for their families in the Philippines, we have not even begun to systematically evaluate the implications of large numbers of workers in developing countries pursuing qualifications or work experiences primarily geared toward passing a given points test — or of its counterfactual, that is, of producing skills geared primarily toward domestic use. This is an extremely complicated issue that must be treated with particular thoughtfulness both in the examples one uses and the implied zero-sum configuration of the arguments, both of which lead to more heat than light.

Finally, points systems cannot fulfill all of a country's economic immigration needs. They often reward education at the expense of occupations both crucial to the real economy and in short and contracting supply in many rich countries — such as most trades, for instance, plumbing, electricity, carpentry, etc. Of course, points systems neither constitute the only entry route nor the main one in most of our case study countries. In Canada, only 21.5 percent of immigrants in 2003 and 2004 were admitted under the points system, and that proportion has not changed markedly since then. One in five immigrants to New Zealand since 2004 has used the points system. Australia, the country with the highest proportion of economic immigrants admitted under the points system, admitted 51 percent by this route in 2005 to 2006. Other economic selection mechanisms, such as demand-driven and employer-led systems, remain crucial to meeting all of a country's immigration needs. (And, as noted earlier, overall immigration has other major streams). Demand-driven systems do a more effective job of evaluating prospective immigrants' individual abilities and directing them to specific market openings. As we discuss later, each selection method has distinct merits, but this section of the analysis makes clear one of our key points: that the most complete selection system will borrow what works best from each approach to economic-stream immigrants and use the resulting hybrid formulas to its fullest advantage.

IV. The Architecture of Points Systems

In order to understand how a hybrid system might develop, it is necessary to understand more fully the building blocks of points systems. The following three questions do so:

- How many variables are included?
- What is the pass mark?
- How much importance is assigned to each variable?

The Variables in Points Systems

There are 12 significant variables in the points systems of the six countries we analyze: the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Hong Kong, and Denmark.²¹ The first five variables are the most important ones because they typically garner more points and point to the direction in which every system seems to lean, even if the point allocation does not yet reflect that in all cases. We designate them as *first-tier* variables. The remaining seven variables are less important in several ways. The point allocation tends to be lower, at least when judged across all points systems; they may be supplementary in terms of a system's main thrust; and they may be important but only for a subset of countries. We designate this group of variables as *second tier*. Finally, the order in which the variables are presented in both tiers is only approximate, primarily a function of the fact that not all variables appear in all systems.

First-Tier Variables

A. Education

Education is measured by the number of years of study or one's level of education (bachelors, masters, or PhD degree). Both academic and formal vocational qualifications tend to earn points, but academic credentials are typically ranked much higher. Hong Kong's General Points Test awards the highest number of points to applicants with two or more doctorate degrees.

B. Work Experience²²

Work-experience points are usually awarded for years in the primary occupation or profession in which an applicant seeks to work. Australia awards ten points (out of a total 100 or 120, depending on the visa sought) to applicants who have worked for at least three of the previous four years in an occupation closely related to their area of formal qualification. Several countries award additional points if that previous experience took place in their country (see variable 5).

C. Age

Selection by age is common to all points systems. Most award points for age on a sliding scale: the younger the applicant, the more points he or she receives (younger workers contribute longer to the economy — before they start to draw retirement benefits — and do more to balance aging native populations). An exception had been Hong Kong's points system between 2006 and 2008; younger age groups received fewer points in order to protect recent native graduates from unwelcome competition.²³ In 2008, Hong Kong adjusted its

²¹ We chose the four countries that have administered a points system for the longest time—the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand —and two (Hong Kong and Denmark) that have only recently implemented one.

²² As can be seen, variables 2, 5, 6, and 7 are related and reflect efforts to make points systems more relevant to employers and get better employment *and mobility* outcomes for points-selected immigrants.

²³ Immigration Department, the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, "Quality Migrant Admission Scheme," <http://www.immd.gov.hk/ehtml/QMAS.htm>.

points allocation to award the most points to the 18-to-39 category, bringing it closer in line with other countries' systems.²⁴

D. Language

All points systems take language ability into account, albeit in different ways. The level of language competency required to earn points varies from country to country. Australia currently requires a lower level of language competence for individuals applying for trade occupations than for those applying for other positions (5.0 instead of 6.0 on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS)).²⁵ The United Kingdom demands a 6.5 on the same test for all highly skilled immigrants selected under Tier 1 of the points test. And some countries provide points for knowledge of a second language (e.g., French or English in Canada or any of the designated languages in Australia).

E. Prior Work Experience or Education in the Country of Proposed Immigration

Most points systems now award points to immigrants who have had prior experience in the prospective country of immigration. This criterion is thought to facilitate both economic integration (finding employment) and social integration (understanding cultural and social norms). Employers are also likely to value experience or education in the host country, thus reducing skill underutilization and significant salary disparities for similarly prepared workers. The route from international student to worker (where immigrants study in the host country and transition to an economic visa) has become particularly popular.

Second-Tier Variables

A. Job Offer

Rewarding candidates for having a job offer in the host country gives the points system an element from the demand-driven approach and increases the likelihood that immigrants will match employers' needs and, as a result, that they will have better employment outcomes. Australia, Canada, and New Zealand award additional points to applicants with an offer in their specified occupation.

²⁴ New Zealand offers the most points in the age category to those between ages 20 and 29, Canada to those between 21 and 49, Australia to those between 18 and 29, and the United Kingdom to those under 28 or 31, depending on the scheme.

²⁵ IELTS is an English language test accepted by most English-speaking countries that administer points tests. It has listening, reading, writing, and speaking components; most points systems require a certain score in all four areas. An individual who scores a 5.0 is deemed as having "vocational" English competency and a 6.0 as "competent." However, IELTS is not the only accepted test. The United Kingdom also accepts scores from the Points Based System English Test; Test in English for International Students; International ESOL Diploma; English for Business Level 4; EDI Level 2 Certification in ESOL International JETSET Level 6 (C1); Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL); Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC); EIKEN Test in Practical English Proficiency; International Legal English Certificate (ILEC); International Certificate in Financial English (ICFE); ESOL Skills for Life (Level 2); ESOL for Work; Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE); Certificate in Advanced English (CAE); Business English Certificate (BEC); and the University of Bath English Language Test. See UK Border Agency, "Points-based calculator," <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/pointscalculator>.

B. Occupation in Demand

Points can be awarded to applicants with skills in certain high-demand occupations or sectors, as well as occupations that are projected to grow rapidly or in which the country seeks to build a “strategic-skills reserve.”

C. Partner Characteristics

In many cases, the partners of points-tested immigrants share a number of the principal applicant’s attributes, and some points systems have come to award credits for these characteristics. Hong Kong awards points for an accompanying married spouse if he or she has an equivalent or higher degree than the principal applicant. Canada awards points based on the spouse’s or common-law partner’s qualifications.

D. Previous or Proposed Earnings

Previous salary²⁶ is used as a proxy for high human capital in some countries — including countries without fully articulated points systems — as high earners are likely to be skilled applicants. In the United Kingdom, this feature accounted for 42 percent of the total points available in the system as it existed in December 2007. Singapore’s S Pass system, which targets midskilled professionals, only considers applicants who receive a guaranteed monthly salary of at least US\$1,203 (SG\$1,800).²⁷ Some demand-driven selection systems — for example in Germany — “select” on the basis of whether or not the immigrant has a job offer but add the criterion that the attendant salary must be above a certain, typically very high, threshold.

E. The Presence of Close Relatives

The presence of relatives is widely thought to provide newcomers with necessary information about the host society, particularly how to access the labor market and the hosts’ social-protection system, and generally to facilitate integration.²⁸ Families can also serve as a buffer against unforeseen events, such as the loss of a job or health emergencies, thus reducing the risk of costs to native taxpayers. (In many cases, sponsoring relatives are legally liable for most of these costs). Finally, extra points for relatives are also a concession to family-immigration politics; many families feel that the emphasis on skills squeezes out their ability to (re)unite with their more distant loved ones.²⁹ New Zealand, Canada, Australia, and Hong Kong currently award points on this basis.

²⁶ Wage differentials between countries are broadly accounted for. In the United Kingdom, there are five “bands.” For more detail, see Appendix 1.

²⁷ Exchange rate used is 1 Singaporean dollar = US\$0.66835.

²⁸ Note that this view is disputed, with some researchers arguing that relatives and social networks reduce an immigrant’s long-term integration. See Gustavo Mesch, “Between Spatial and Social Segregation of Immigrants: The Case of Immigrants from the FSU in Israel,” *International Migration Review* 36, no. 3 (2002):912-934.

²⁹ In all instances, the economic immigration stream is distinct from the family-immigration stream, which continues to be the dominant means through which immigration grows in virtually all countries.

F. *Settlement Stipulations*

Settlement stipulations award points to immigrants settling in a particular part of the country that is deemed to have a greater need for immigrant labor. Currently, only Australia uses this policy although Canada runs Provincial Nominee Programs (PNP), which allow provinces to select their own immigrants,³⁰ and the United Kingdom administers a separate scheme for Scotland (Fresh Talent), which the new points-based system has incorporated. Québec, among other Canadian provinces, has the authority to select permanent immigrant workers through a points system separate from Canada's national program. The Canadian government, however, retains the authority to admit those Québec selects.³¹

Such policies aim to address highly localized demographic deficits and anomalies due to low fertility, high emigration of young workers, or declining numbers of speakers of a particular language, such as French-speaking Canadians in non-Francophone areas across Canada. Through these policies, Canadian policymakers are also trying to discourage immigrants from settling in only a few metropolitan areas, where infrastructure may be overburdened, while also attempting to bring diversity to regions where few immigrants live.

G. *Investment with Job-Creation Responsibilities and Retirement*

Extra points can be awarded to applicants who will invest in job-creating ventures or provide for their own retirement. The accompanying requirements are typically set at substantial levels and offer the applicant automatic admission to the country. The United Kingdom's Tier 1 Investor subcategory admits applicants who possess at least 1 million pounds in liquid assets in a regulated financial institution. Typically, few investors are admitted on this basis in order to reduce concerns about immigrants "buying" their way into the country. This variable is best seen as a *separate immigration scheme* that has in some cases been tagged on to points systems. In most instances, in fact, it is a separate and distinct admissions category.

The two sets of variables discussed above form the basis of points systems. How do policymakers use these elements? We turn next to the pass mark and the weighting of variables.

³⁰ PNPs, however, do not award extra points and are not binding. Thus, an immigrant chosen by a particular province is not obligated to remain in that province (or even ever go there) under the mobility provisions of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which is part of the Canadian Constitution.

³¹ Immigration et Communautés culturelles Québec, "Immigrate and Settle in Québec," <http://www.immigration-quebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/index.asp>.

V. Balancing the System

The Pass Mark

The pass mark is crucial in determining the “quality” and the number of economic immigrants a country will admit through its points system. Governments can and do adjust the pass mark to reduce or increase flows.

Policymakers can have additional control over economic immigrant flows by supplementing the pass mark with a “pool mark” — a threshold score lower than the pass mark that qualifies applicants to remain in a reserve pool for a limited period. During this period, the government may choose to admit applicants from the pool in order to boost total arrivals. Government officials in Australia and New Zealand use pass and pool marks to help them regulate points-based immigration flows.³²

Weighting the Variables

Which criteria do countries value most? The answer to this question depends on each country’s policy priorities. In order to draw out some of those priorities, we measure the relative value of each characteristic, or variable,³³ within and across the points systems of the same six countries we used to determine the 12 major variables: the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Hong Kong, and Denmark. In particular, we consider the following questions:

- How frequently is the variable used?
- How important is the variable in each country (the variable-to-pass-mark ratio)?
- How important is the variable on average, across countries?
- What are the trends over time?

Some countries use more variables than others, and some variables are more common than others (see Table 2). Education and age appear in all cases; work experience and qualifications or experience gained in the host country are also prominent.

³² For a historical summary of changes in the pass and pool marks in New Zealand, see New Zealand Immigration Service, “History of Selection Points,” July 30, 2008, <http://formshelp.immigration.govt.nz/SkilledMigrant/ExpressionOfInterest/HistoryOfSelectionPoints.htm>; New Zealand Immigration Service, “2007 History of Selection Points,” <http://formshelp.immigration.govt.nz/SkilledMigrant/ExpressionOfInterest/2007eoi.htm>; New Zealand Immigration Service, “2006 History of Selection Points,” <http://formshelp.immigration.govt.nz/SkilledMigrant/ExpressionOfInterest/2006eoi.htm>; New Zealand Immigration Service, “Archival Selection Points,” <http://formshelp.immigration.govt.nz/SkilledMigrant/ExpressionOfInterest/archivalselectionpoints.htm>.

³³ We do not include “Investment with job-creation responsibilities and retirement” in our analysis as achieving points in this category typically gains the applicant automatic admission. It can therefore be seen as its own admissions category.

Table 2. Frequency of Variables in Six Points System (as of August 2008)

	UK	Australia ^b	Canada	New Zealand	Hong Kong	Denmark	Total
Education	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Age	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Prior work experience or education in country	1	1	1	1	0	1	5
Work experience	0	1	1	1	1	1	5
Language	0 ^a	1 ^a	1	0 ^a	1	1	4
Occupation in demand	0	1	1	1	0	1	4
Partner characteristics	0	1	1	1	1	0	4
Close relatives	0	1	1	1	1	0	4
Job offer	0	1	1	1	0	0	3
Settlement stipulations	0	1	1 ^c	0	0	0	2
Previous or proposed earnings	1	0	0	0	0	0	1

Notes: "1" denotes that the country assigns points to this variable; "0" denotes no points are assigned.

^a English is a prerequisite for Tier 1 in the United Kingdom, the New Zealand points system, and the Skilled Independent migrant visa in Australia.

^b All variables marked "1" appear only in the points test for the provisional Skilled-Regional Sponsored Visa, not for the permanent Skilled Independent Visa or the Permanent Skilled Sponsored Visa.

^c The Canadian approach is similar, in spirit, to the Australian one and we stipulate it as 1.

Sources: Numbers are based on authors' calculations using information from the UK Border Agency, Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Immigration Department, and the Danish Immigration Service.

Of course, the presence of a variable does not necessarily tell us much about its importance *within* points systems. In order to test this, we use a new measure — the variable-to-pass-mark ratio — to highlight the relative importance of each variable in the six points systems we examined. The ratio comprises the maximum number of points a variable can contribute as a percentage of the pass mark. For example, in the United Kingdom, education can win an applicant a maximum of 50 points toward a pass mark of 75 points. The variable therefore has a variable-to-pass-mark ratio of 66.7 percent.

Table 3. Variable-to-Pass-Mark Ratios in Six Countries

Variables	Country Variable-to-Pass Mark Ratio (%)						Frequency
	UK	Australia ^a	Canada	New Zealand	Hong Kong	Denmark	
Education	66.7	56.7	37.3	53.6	56.3	105.0	8.0
Work experience	n/a	28.3	31.3	42.9	62.5	15.0	7.0
Prior work experience or education in country	33.3	61.4	14.9	25.0	n/a	10.0	7.0
Age	26.7	28.3	14.9	21.4	37.5	15.0	8.0
Language	n/a ^b	28.3	35.8	n/a ^b	25.0	35.0	6.0
Job offer	n/a	18.9	22.4	57.1	n/a	n/a	5.0
Partner characteristics	n/a	11.4	22.4	14.3	18.8	n/a	6.0
Previous or proposed earnings	66.7	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1.0
Occupation in Demand	n/a	18.9	14.9	14.3	n/a	15.0	6.0
Close relatives	n/a	8.3	7.5	7.1	6.3	n/a	4.0
Settlement stipulations	n/a	11.4	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	3.0

Notes: ^aAustralia has three visas within its points system, and the points required for each visa differ. We list the average variable-to-pass-mark country across the three systems. See Appendix 2 for the breakdown by visa type.

^bThe United Kingdom and New Zealand make language proficiency a prerequisite to applying for a points test.

Sources: Numbers are based on authors' calculations using information from the UK Border Agency, Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Immigration New Zealand, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Immigration Department, and the Danish Immigration Service.

The variables with the highest ratios highlight what policymakers value most among potential immigrants' attributes. To take some examples: Australia puts the most weight on prior work experience or education in Australia, as well as on an applicant's educational credentials (the type of degree earned, such as a master's degree, *and* the field of concentration). The next most important variables are work experience outside of Australia, language, and age. Canada's most important variables according to this measurement tool are education, language skills, and work experience. In fact, applicants who score maximum points in all three of these categories will garner enough points to qualify under the Canadian points system. Denmark places extremely high value on education. An applicant who gains the maximum score (105) for education can pass the 100-point pass mark for the Danish Green Card scheme simply by virtue of his or her academic background.³⁴ This is unique to Denmark: no other country has a variable-to-pass-mark ratio over 100 percent.

³⁴ An applicant can earn 80 points for having a PhD, 15 bonus points for graduating from a Top 100 university ranked in The Quacquarelli Symbols (THE-QS) World Ranking, and 10 bonus points for

An Evolving Concept

Countries constantly adjust their point allocations because their policy needs evolve, perceptions change as to the best way to meet the same needs, and/or because they want to achieve better economic and integration outcomes.³⁵ Such dynamism is one of a points system's most valuable attributes. We can see five broad trends in that regard.

First, education has been ever-present but has waxed and waned in popularity in some systems. For example, when Canada introduced the points system in 1967, an applicant was able to satisfy 40 percent of the pass mark with high education credentials, in large part reflecting the government's emphasis on building up its raw human-capital pool with a particular focus on its universities. From the late 1970s to the mid-1990s, Canada decreased the overall number and proportion of points that applicants could obtain through education, in part by refocusing its program to be more responsive to projected labor-market needs. In 1996, Canada, armed with ever-more sophisticated research evidence and eager to pull itself out of that period's economic malaise, began to reverse its approach by increasing the weight of education to levels higher than in the 1970s. Finally, Canada raised the weight of education again in 2003. Canada's current variable-to-pass-mark ratio for education is 37.3 percent — not far from the original level of 40 percent. Most systems, though, have consistently placed priority on education.

Second, language proficiency has become an increasingly important part of the calculus in most countries. For example, Canada increased the number of points allocated for language proficiency between 1978 and 2008, from a 24 percent variable-to-pass-mark ratio in 1978 to 37 percent in 2008. A similar upward trend was evident in the UK system before making English language proficiency mandatory. (New Zealand also employs the same prerequisite).

Third, regardless of whether addressing demographic deficits has been a selection priority or not, policymakers have never assigned more than a quarter of all points to age. At its inception in 2001, the UK system assigned just 2 percent, as calculated in the variable-to-pass-mark ratio, of its total available points to age before increasing it to 17 percent in 2007. In 2006, New Zealand decreased the value of age. However, the emphasis on age has remained constant over time in most countries. This implies that while the core objective of points tests is to attract qualified workers, demographic concerns remain a constant theme.

Fourth, awarding points for work experience has become more popular. Until 1996, work experience comprised only 8 of the available 100 points in the Canadian points system, but since 2003 it has constituted more than a fifth of total available points and accounts for nearly one third of the total variable-to-pass-mark ratio.

Fifth, the occupation-in-demand category is a relatively new variable. Five countries — Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Denmark, and Singapore — have already adopted this category, indicating that addressing specific labor needs is becoming increasingly important

possessing a qualification that allows the applicant to work in a shortage field in Denmark. In reality, it is unclear how many people actually score 105 points.

³⁵ For the history of Canada's shifting policy objectives, for instance, see Green and Green, "Economic Goals of Canada's Immigration Policy," and Papademetriou and Yale-Loehr, *Balancing Interests*.

in points systems and paving the way to hybrid selection systems, our principal finding and recommendation.³⁶

Finally, some variables, despite their ubiquity, are the least likely, on average, to singly assist an applicant to qualify under any of the selection systems discussed here. They are partner characteristics, previous or proposed earnings, having close relatives in the country, and, with some exceptions, regional settlement stipulations.

VI. Adjusting Selection on the Basis of Economic Outcomes for Immigrants

Evidence on short- and long-term economic and labor-market outcomes for immigrants selected through points systems has important policy implications. The more sophisticated users of such systems continuously adjust their selection formulas based on such evidence.

Many factors influence labor-market outcomes. They include the precise human capital of the selected immigrants, the family support systems and networks of which they are part, and economic conditions in the communities in which they settle. Policy decisions about the precise content of the selection formula, nonetheless, are important drivers of such outcomes. Consider the following comparison between economic immigrants to Canada and Australia.

In the mid-1990s, economic immigrants to Canada and Australia shared comparable employment outcomes, with approximately 60 percent employed after six months in both countries. By the turn of the century, the employment rate of economic immigrants to Australia had greatly improved, to 81 percent, but not in Canada, where it declined from 64 percent in 1994 and 1995 to 60 percent in 2000 and 2001.³⁷ In addition, those who had traditionally encountered difficulties in finding employment within six months upon arrival in Australia had also improved their outcomes enormously. Eastern Europeans, for example, saw their employment rates grow by more than two-and-a-half times, from 31 percent between 1993 and 1995 to 79 percent between 1999 and 2000.³⁸

Researchers believe the divergence in outcomes is at least partially the result of policy, in particular Australia's decisions to do the following:

- create a flexible list of occupations in demand, and use it materially in its selection process;
- delegate responsibility to assessing authorities for determining the validity, compatibility, and level of foreign skills;

³⁶ Denmark uses its Positive List and Singapore its Strategic Skills List to identify skills shortages. For more information, see the Danish Immigration Service, "New to Denmark: The Positive List-Overview," http://www.nyidanmark.dk/en-us/coming_to_dk/work/positivelist/positive_list_overview.htm; Singapore Ministry of Manpower, "Strategic Skills List," http://www.mom.gov.sg/publish/momportal/en/communities/employees/Job_Assistance_and_Training/Strategic_Skills_List.html.

³⁷ Hawthorne, *Impact of Economic Selection Policy*.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

- require applicants to demonstrate before departure their language proficiency through internationally recognized tests.³⁹

While many determinants of outcomes for immigrants are beyond policymakers' direct control, understanding up-to-date analytical evidence (and using it wisely) can better inform policy judgments. In particular, it is important to review the selection factors most likely to lead to success and to constantly ask the question of whether economic immigrants do better if they enter through a "points portal" or if employers bring them in directly.

Immigrant Performance through Demand-Driven and Government-Controlled Entry

The route through which an immigrant enters a country — employment, family reunification, asylum, etc. — can affect how that immigrant performs since different groups have different characteristics and access to different "resources," and those characteristics and resources ultimately shape labor-market outcomes.⁴⁰ However, evidence is limited to just a few countries, which in turn undermines the robustness of some of the conclusions.

Points systems have clearly produced a more educated immigrant intake. As noted earlier, recent immigrants to Australia are about 15 percent more likely to have a tertiary education than those who entered Australia before 1990.⁴¹ Canada has shown similarly impressive results in recent years.

Points-tested immigrants experience higher earnings earlier on than non-points-tested immigrants (including non-economic-stream immigrants), but this gap recedes over time. The evidence for this view comes mostly from Canadian studies. At the outset, points-tested immigrants enjoy higher earnings, but looking at this group over time, and factoring in human-capital differences, the earnings gap shrinks.⁴² In fact, many skilled economic immigrants in Canada enter low-income occupations and are chronically low income compared to their family-class counterparts. By the late 1990s, half of all chronically poor immigrants in Canada had entered as skilled economic immigrants, and over two in five were holders of bachelor's degrees.⁴³ Conversely, Australia's Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA) reveals that points-tested immigrants there (Independent and Skilled Australia Sponsored) have relatively strong labor-force participation rates and income outcomes.⁴⁴ The largest part of that difference can be attributed to three factors: (a) the progress Australia has made on the issue of employers not recognizing foreign credentials and the resulting "discounting" of foreign education and

³⁹ Bob Birrell, Lesleyanne Hawthorne, and Sue Richardson, "Operational Issues in Skilled Migration"; Hawthorne, *Impact of Economic Selection Policy*.

⁴⁰ Barry R. Chiswick and Paul W. Miller, *Post-immigration Qualifications in Australia: Determinants and Consequences* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1992); Paul W. Miller, "Immigration Policy and Immigrant Quality: The Australian Points System," *The American Economic Review* 89, no.2 (1999): 192-197.

⁴¹ OECD, "Chart I.12."

⁴² Richard A. Wanner, "Entry Class and the Earnings Attainment of Immigrants to Canada, 1980-1995," *Canadian Public Policy* 29, no.1 (2003): 53-71.

⁴³ Hawthorne, *Impact of Economic Selection Policy*.

⁴⁴ Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship, "The Labour Market: Summary of findings for LSIA 2," http://www.immi.gov.au/media/research/lisia/lisia06_8.htm.

experience (an issue in which Australia has a long lead over all other immigrant-destination countries); (b) Australia’s earlier and greater emphasis on language skills; and (c) its recruitment of increasing shares of economic-stream immigrants directly from the ranks of foreign graduates from Australian universities.

Economic immigrants who enter with a job offer have remarkably high labor-force participation rates, but the difference becomes smaller over time. Based on Australian evidence, those coming with a job offer have — perhaps unsurprisingly — exceptional labor-market attachment rates. This pattern continues over time, but the difference in participation rates shrinks significantly relative to other skill-stream immigrants. Table 4 shows labor-force participation rates for two cohorts of immigrants to Australia. As intimated, points-tested immigrants (Independent and Skilled Australia Sponsored) initially experienced higher unemployment rates than those entering Australia with a job offer (Employer-Nominated Scheme), but points-tested immigrants closed most of the gap over time.

Table 4. Labor Force Participation Rates by Immigrant Category among Principal Applicants Six and 18 Months after Arriving in Australia (between September 1999 and August 2000)

	LSIA 1*			LSIA 2**	
	Six months after arrival	18 months after arrival	42 months after arrival	Six months after arrival	18 months after arrival
Skill stream					
Business Skills	61.0%	84.0%	88.0%	54.0%	80.0%
Employer Nomination Scheme	95.0%	99.0%	98.0%	99.0%	100.0%
Independent	88.0%	91.0%	93.0%	89.0%	92.0%
Skilled Australia Sponsored	80.0%	85.0%	90.0%	85.0%	87.0%
Other streams					
Family	49.0%	55.0%	58.0%	53.0%	62.0%
Humanitarian	48.0%	58.0%	67.0%	18.0%	32.0%

Note: Points-tested categories are shaded.

*LSIA1 is the first cohort of immigrant survey respondents; they arrived in Australia between September 1993 and August 1995.

**LSIA2 is the second cohort of immigrant survey respondents; they arrived in Australia between September 1999 and August 2000.

Source: Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

Factors of Success

Language

Strong evidence suggests that fluency in the host-country’s language is a crucial factor in economic performance. A recent Australian study showed that earnings closely tracked language ability, with immigrants who spoke English only “well” earning 30 percent less than those who spoke it “best.” For immigrants with tertiary degrees, not speaking English “very well” doubled the chance they would take a relatively low-skilled job that did not match their formal qualifications.⁴⁵ However, the research evidence also shows that skilled principal applicants who spoke English “not well” or “not at all” six months after arrival experienced the largest increases in employment (31 percent) a year later.⁴⁶ This seems to suggest that

⁴⁵ Birrell, Hawthorne, and Richardson, “Operational Issues in Skilled Migration.”

⁴⁶ See Table 2.2 in Birrell, Hawthorne, and Richardson, “Operational Issues in Skilled Migration.”

over time, skilled immigrants' labor-force participation rates increase even in the relative absence of excellent language skills.

Research also shows that skilled immigrants with higher levels of English proficiency are more likely to use their qualifications than those with lower English skills. For example, 60 percent of skilled immigrants who speak English "best" or "very well" use their formal qualifications often, and only 16 percent use them rarely or never. Only 40 percent of those who speak English "well," "not well," or "not at all" use their qualifications often while 30 percent use them rarely.

Studies also indicate that both points-tested and other skilled immigrants experience substantial "deskilling" after immigrating.⁴⁷ This could reflect another area in which the interests of policymakers and employers may diverge: Policymakers may prefer immigrants with high language skills in part for political and cultural reasons while employers probably care mainly about the narrower question of job skills and productivity.

Country of Origin

We noted above that immigrant outcomes in the Australian and Canadian labor markets have diverged since the 1990s. Beyond selection criteria and broader policy decisions, the difference in immigrants' countries of origin can also partly explain the variations in outcomes. In Australia, increasing proportions of immigrants have come from countries with an English speaking background (ESB).⁴⁸ These include, among others, the United Kingdom, Ireland, South Africa, and New Zealand. The Canadian trends do not follow this pattern as closely. Between 1996 and 2001, for example, only 6 percent of doctors, 4 percent of nurses, 2 percent of engineers, and 2 percent of IT professionals who immigrated to Canada were from ESB countries. In Australia, the proportions were 30 percent, 43 percent, 22 percent, and 18 percent, respectively.⁴⁹

By 2001, in both Canada and Australia, immigrants from ESB countries with bachelor's degrees were substantially more likely to obtain professional work than immigrant degree-holders from non-ESB countries:⁵⁰ migration from ESB countries thus is positively correlated with positive labor-market outcomes. Similar outcomes can be observed in the United States. Immigrants from El Salvador or Mexico, who generally have fewer years of schooling than their US counterparts, earn 40 percent less than US natives while immigrants from Australia or the United Kingdom, who generally have more years of education than US natives, earn 30 to 40 percent more.⁵¹ The pattern for educated Mexicans, however, does not follow that for Australians or citizens of the United Kingdom,⁵² reminding us that explanations are often more complicated than they may first appear.

⁴⁷ See for instance the US study by Jeanne Batalova and Michael Fix, *Uneven Progress: The Employment Pathways of Skilled Immigrants in the United States* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2008).

⁴⁸ Hawthorne, *Impact of Economic Selection Policy*.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ George J. Borjas, *Heaven's Door: Immigration Policy and the American Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999): 43.

⁵² See Batalova and Fix, *Uneven Progress*.

These correlations suggest that applicants from ESB countries may be more attractive to employers overall, and hence better able to integrate and succeed economically. However, market failures could also come into play, for example, as with English-proficient, non-ESB immigrants being more likely to have their qualifications “discounted” by employers for various reasons, including discrimination.

Qualifications

Research on economic outcomes for immigrants suggests that in both Australia and Canada, individuals with general degrees (e.g., in society, culture and creative arts, or management) experience inferior labor-market outcomes than those with vocational degrees (e.g., in information technology, accounting, engineering, or nursing).⁵³

In other words, all degrees are not equal. While policymakers in many countries now recognize the value of degrees gained in the host country (as discussed above), they typically make only the most general distinctions between the type of degree (field of specialization) and the type of institution (vocational, professional, or liberal arts) in which it was earned. In addition to pursuing non-points-based admissions of international students through provisional worker visas — a common practice in many advanced industrial societies in recent years — governments could attempt to attract the “best-prepared” students by distinguishing more carefully between types and origin of degrees.

But the concept of qualifications should not get reduced to educational credentials: work experience also matters. International students, for example, are often seen as a valuable source of labor as they are likely to have gained some work experience in the country in which they are studying. However, employers do not always view work experience positively, especially if it is gained in a developing country.⁵⁴

Labor Demand and the Recession

A variety of factors outside the control of immigrants can also affect their economic performance, including the slackening of labor demand, overall labor-market conditions, and the levels of social and economic support for immigrants in the host country. In light of the current, sharp economic downturn, the economy is likely to be uppermost in the minds of policymakers.

Many recent immigrants in both Australia and Canada have succeeded in finding employment in occupations and sectors that have shown sustained demand. In fact, Australia’s experience in the medical field over the past decade has demonstrated that high demand for workers in a particular field can, in some cases, trump credentialing concerns among employers. For example, 78 percent of recently arrived international medical graduates in Australia were employed in the medical field even though only 41 percent of them had secured full accreditation.⁵⁵

⁵³ Hawthorne, *Impact of Economic Selection Policy*.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Lesleyanne Hawthorne, Graeme Hawthorne, and Brendan Crotty, *The Registration and Training Status of Overseas Trained Doctors in Australia* (Melbourne: Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences, The University of Melbourne, 2007).

When the jobs immigrants were trained to do are not in demand, labor gluts could form, leading to unemployment.⁵⁶ Evidence indeed suggests that immigrants arriving in Canada during times of high unemployment experience “economic scarring” that persists well beyond the end of the economic downturn.⁵⁷

On some level, the Canadian experience indicates that policymakers should consider countercyclical approaches to immigration and be willing and able to curb immigration flows during recessions and expand them in times of growth. However, time lags and administrative constraints make such adjustments a difficult proposition. Furthermore, indiscriminately restricting the number of immigrants may be counterproductive. Some schemes — like the Australian General Skilled Migration Program — require applicants to apply for occupations in shortage, demand, or high-growth areas. Other points systems require applicants to have a job offer before applying, or they assign a high variable-to-pass-mark ratio for a job offer. These approaches indicate that policies aimed at effectively filling labor demand through points systems depend on growth prospects across different sectors of the economy, itself enormously difficult to predict. Therefore, one’s policy toolkit should also include access to approaches other than points systems.

Regional Differentials

Settlement stipulations for admissions have not improved labor-market and broader economic outcomes for immigrants. Moreover, in Australia, immigrants in regional areas are more likely to be working in associate professional trades and other lower-skilled occupations than in professional or managerial ones, while immigrants in the major cities experience the opposite,⁵⁸ resulting in regional-sponsored immigrants typically faring worse than those settling in major urban areas.⁵⁹ In addition, Australia’s regional visas do not effectively recruit or retain immigrants in needed areas, as new entrants typically prefer to move to large urban areas where other immigrants have settled.

Some of these poorer outcomes may also be due to the profiles of immigrants who apply for regional visas, as such visas have a lower pass mark in the points system than independent visas. However, the poorer economic results for immigrants who remain in out-of-the-way regions could also reflect a lack of infrastructure for supporting immigrant workers and their families.

⁵⁶ Hawthorne, *Impact of Economic Selection Policy*.

⁵⁷ Arthur Sweetman, “Let’s tie immigration to the economy,” *Globe and Mail*, April 16, 2004, http://www.immigrationwatchcanada.org/index.php?module=pagemaster&PAGE_user_op=view_page&PAGE_id=98.

⁵⁸ Graeme Hugo, Siew-Ean Khoo, and Peter McDonald, “Attracting Skilled Migrants to Regional Areas: What Does it Take?” *People and Place* 14, no. 3 (2006).

⁵⁹ Hugo, Khoo, and McDonald, “Attracting Skilled Migrants to Regional Areas”; Jewel Topsfield, “Flaws in Bid to Bring Migrants to Bush,” *The Age*, November 8, 2005.

Summary

Although the evidence on outcomes remains fragmented and incomplete, it nonetheless points to a number of factors that should inform economic-selection policymaking.

- Australian evidence indicates that immigrants who enter with a job offer have better labor-market participation in the short and medium term than those who enter through points systems. However, by the medium term, the differences narrow significantly.
- Canadian evidence indicates that the higher earnings of points-tested immigrants versus non-points-tested immigrants recedes over time.
- Language skills play a key role in outcomes, but it is important to look beyond the short term.
- Failures in the recognition of qualifications have led to major skill underutilization. The type of degree (general versus vocational) and where it was earned (in the origin country or destination country) are key predictors of economic success.
- *Individual attributes*, rather than method of entry, remain key predictors of long-term economic success across the whole immigration system. Nonetheless, tying entries more to an economy's labor needs is important, especially as it takes time for new immigrants entering through the points system to find (appropriate) jobs and points-tested immigrants may suffer economic scarring if they arrive during a downturn.
- Regional migration schemes need further examination as the economic performance of those entering through them is systematically weaker.

VII. Conclusion: Rethinking Points Systems

This analysis opened with an outline of two broad philosophies that shape economic-migration selection systems: one strongly values human capital and leads with government bureaucracies; the other focuses on labor demand and leads with private firms.

Government-led selection systems, best illustrated by points systems, apportion numerical values to human-capital characteristics that are thought to best advance a society's longer-term economic interests while also being increasingly sensitive to the needs of the labor market. In reality, however, government administrators cannot match abstract sets of skills to the always dynamic and specific labor needs of employers. Evidence on outcomes for immigrants entering through points systems also suggests that the selection process needs constant fine-tuning. Yet points systems serve a useful purpose in expanding a country's human-capital base and advancing important priorities (such as local language proficiency and broader immigrant-integration goals) — even if employers may at times value such attributes less than policymakers and the broader society. Furthermore, evidence on long-term outcomes indicates that by monitoring which characteristics are more highly correlated with success, policymakers can perform the adjustments that define the most agile — and successful — points systems. Finally, points systems also provide transparency and greater governmental control over a key component of any immigration system, an essential element of winning over skeptical publics.

In contrast, explicitly demand-driven and employer-led systems give greater emphasis to market forces and employers' vetting processes, which can take into account soft skills and small differences in qualifications that often make large differences in one's success as an employee and in the profitability of a firm. Demand-driven immigration, therefore, plays a crucial role in an effective strategy for meeting skill needs in real time and enhancing a firm's competitiveness although it may be shortsighted in terms of the society's longer-term interests, especially when recruiting workers with limited or dated skill-sets.⁶⁰

Hybrid Immigrant Selection Systems

The selection of economic-stream immigrants does not take place in a policy or political vacuum. Rather, it is part and parcel of economic growth and competitiveness strategies that look first at the human resources a country already possesses, demographics (especially the challenge of fast-aging societies), and the capabilities of training and educational institutions to produce the workers today's and tomorrow's economies will need most. It is only in this context that decisions about economic-stream immigrant-selection systems make sense. And, indeed, the countries that are most successful in engaging the broader international immigration system are wise to constantly keep the larger picture in mind.

Nor can the immigration choices countries make be far removed from their on-the-ground social and political realities. For instance, well-organized societies have a strong sense of

⁶⁰ The latter concern can be addressed through circular migration programs in which temporariness is the default but permanence is permitted if some of the program's participants can earn permanent status by meeting stringent (yet clear and fair) requirements that enhance their prospects for longer-term success in the labor market and can meet explicit integration goals.

social responsibility and playing by the rules, often expressed in mostly formal pacts among “social partners,” that is, the government, the business community, and worker organizations. When these norms are backed up by adequate governmental resources to enforce such pacts, as well as traditions of effective job-placement services at both national and local levels, one can better understand that certain countries may choose demand-driven selection systems, with the near assurance that the probability of employer misbehavior (in terms of offering inadequate wages and other inappropriate workplace conditions) will likely be low. Sweden and Norway are excellent examples of this societal model, which may well explain why they have opted for a demand-driven and private-sector-led system for selecting economic immigrants.

Such a system is also the norm for the United States. In the United States, however, tradition and economic ideology are behind its immigrant-selection choices and, as a result, decisions about selection are highly politicized and almost always contested. By this reasoning, Canada and Australia may have found what for them may well be the “golden mean” — constantly evaluated and more-or-less easily adaptable points systems supplemented by additional selection mechanisms that increasingly give employers more of a say in selecting workers. And these countries’ willingness to also adopt additional methods of direct recruitment by employers may be seen as a sign of realism as international competition heats up and firms seek to recruit workers when and where they are needed.

The weaknesses and at times competing priorities of demand-driven and human-capital-focused systems thus suggest that hybrid systems are the future in immigration policy. They already exist, if sometimes in tentative forms, in a number of countries.

Hybrid systems combine the advantages of both currently dominant systems by allowing market forces to remain at the core of selection while providing thoughtful government controls. For instance, they can combine job offers with two key attributes found to predict longer-term success: language skills and a system that reliably recognizes credentials. (In the case of formal qualifications, effective credential-recognition programs could be just as valuable as points systems in expanding the host country’s human-capital pool by identifying the immigrants whose skills are underutilized).⁶¹ In a time of a fast-worsening economic downturn, a job offer provides some reassurance that incoming immigrants will be employed and not be economically “scarred” until well after the economic crisis passes.

Hybrid immigration selection systems can be constructed in a number of ways. Among them are the following:

- Awarding large numbers of points for an existing job offer or making an existing job offer a prerequisite for application through the points system, as in the Czech Republic, thus balancing market forces with government filters. This requirement would probably decrease the pool of eligible applicants, but it would doubtless improve economic outcomes for those admitted, and, by extension, improve immigration outcomes for the host economy and society. If the ultimate goal is to quickly match and fill jobs with

⁶¹ See Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, *Good Practice Guide for the Assessment and Recognition of Overseas Qualifications and Skills for the Purposes of Migration* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2006).

immigrant workers soon after they arrive, assigning a high variable-to-pass-mark ratio for a job offer makes the most sense.

- Ensuring rigorous premigration language assessments, setting up effective frameworks for recognizing foreign credentials, and investing more heavily in making more refined judgments about education level, type, and quality.
- Facilitating non-points-based admissions programs that have key elements of the human-capital, points-system logic. For example, creating better pathways from student to worker status, as in Australia, Canada, and several other advanced industrial economies.
- Experimenting systematically with probationary and provisional temporary work visas that allow their holders to earn permanent status if they meet clear and fair-minded criteria.⁶²

For hybrid systems to be truly successful and relevant to changing needs, however, their adjustments must always be based on consistent and long-term evaluation evidence. Not all countries, however, collect data appropriate to this task. (The United States is particularly and irresponsibly inept at this task). Longitudinal data providing breakdowns by admission category, the distribution of points awarded to individual applicants, and employment and mobility outcomes are essential. Such data allow policymakers to draw conclusions about which selection avenues and human attributes correspond best to positive and negative labor-market outcomes and to tailor their selection for the labor-market and integration results they value most.

Improving Economic Immigrant Selection

If hybrid selection systems and increasing reliance on direct labor recruitment are the future, our analysis also suggests several elements that would improve all economic-stream migration measurably.

Place Adaptability and Simplicity at the Core of Selection Systems

Hybrid systems need to be as simple and adaptable as possible, though this will inevitably be limited by a country's political culture. While parliamentary democracies with only two major political parties (like the United Kingdom or Australia) can administer a system that can be (and often is) tweaked on an ongoing basis, such principles are unlikely to work in multiparty and highly fragmented parliamentary systems, where complicated coalitions can lead to paralysis on tough issues. These principles are also difficult to implement in the United States, where competition between different centers of power in the political system — and particularly the plenary power of the US Congress over immigration — leads to inflexible policies. For this reason, the introduction of a hybrid selection system in the United States, should it occur, may be best accompanied by the establishment of a Standing Commission on Immigration and Labor Markets that would have strong and ongoing input on changes to the system.⁶³

⁶² For more on this recommendation, see Doris Meissner, Deborah W. Meyers, Demetrios G. Papademetriou, and Michael Fix, *Immigration and America's Future: A New Chapter* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2006), 35-39.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 35-43.

Simplicity can also be a virtue, as it can reduce the entire formula to the two or three most relevant variables. For instance, for a number of reasons that have to do with the “social content” of certain jobs, numerous trades across several advanced economies are experiencing persistent worker shortages. When one adds to this the fact that many of these jobs are held by immigrants who came to these countries in the 1960s and 1970s, the aging of that workforce seems poised to create a vacuum that will need to be filled. Plumbers, electricians, carpenters, and technicians of all types are indispensable — and yet their supply is becoming increasingly short. Opening some of these occupations directly to foreign applicants (within numerical limits) but also requiring them to demonstrate some attributes measurable by “points-systems-like” selection schemes may make increasing sense.

Focus Points Systems More to Strategic Growth Areas

The fact that hybrid systems will always be partly at odds with the market can be used to expand policymakers’ long-term vision for economic growth. In the current downturn and the likely period of greater government involvement in the real economy, hybrid systems can facilitate longer-term and even strategic economic and societal aims.

Already, several countries using points systems award points to high-demand and future growth skills. And some see the value of using simple points-like systems to quickly fill areas of strategic priority.⁶⁴ Such approaches have much potential. Governments can use hybrid systems to invest in developing regional industry clusters (like Silicon Valley or Bangalore) that specialize in certain economic sectors. A recent Brookings Institution report noted that in the United States, such industry clusters remain underdeveloped and uneven.⁶⁵ As awarding points allows governments to give priority to particular sectors and occupations, points-like systems can also be used to build up a reserve of talent in these fields. Examples may include energy security or climate change, where markets alone are unlikely to be able to respond to government priorities in a timely fashion and with the essential critical mass.

There are also many areas in large and small countries alike where immigration could revitalize the economy and community. Cautiously, governments can experiment with using points systems and provisional visas to direct immigrants to particularly underserved locations with a well-thought-out economic development and immigrant reception plan.

The link between universities and the expansion of knowledge-based sectors also deserves further analysis and suggests hybrid systems could manage student inflows and post-graduation employment more creatively and in a much more strategic framework than is the case today.

Make the Case for the Value of Immigration to All Societal Actors at All Times

One of the strongest arguments in favor of government-driven systems, from a policymaker’s point of view, is that they tend to be politically safe — and even popular. They create the impression of scientific and thus objective decisions. Also, they are transparent and flexible in the face of changing economic needs. In particular, since publics are generally more receptive to skilled than unskilled immigration, a hybrid system that emphasizes skills

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶⁵ Karen G. Mills, Elisabeth B. Reynolds, and Andrew Reamer, *Clusters and Competitiveness: A New Federal Role for Stimulating Regional Economies* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, April 2008).

(even if in practice many of the individuals it admits are stuck at the mid and low ends of the earnings-to-education ratio spectrum) is likely to remain popular. On the other hand, certain sectors of society will inevitably oppose such systems. The June 2007 US Senate bill that proposed a points system was not particularly popular with any segment of American society. A hybrid system that emphasizes job offers and guarantees the flexibility to experiment with different forms of entry for different types of economic-stream immigrants might lead to a better outcome next time.

Above all, governments considering experimenting with multiple immigrant-selection systems must be sure to make the case at all times for such systems — and more broadly, for economic immigration — to the general public and respective stakeholders. Whatever the selection system, it must be transparently resilient in order to demonstrate its value to skeptical publics. Otherwise, key segments of society will likely oppose the mandate for accepting economic immigrants in substantial numbers.

Appendix I. Overviews of Points Systems in the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Hong Kong, and Denmark

UK Points System for Tier 1 (as of April 2008), First Introduced on February 29, 2008

The United Kingdom's new immigration system is a five-tiered structure:

- Tier 1: For highly skilled migrants, entrepreneurs, investors, and graduate students. It replaces the Highly Skilled Migrant Program (HSMP), the Entrepreneur and Investor schemes, and the International Graduates Scheme.
- Tier 2: For skilled workers who have a job offer. This tier encompasses the current UK Work Permit rules.
- Tier 3: For a limited number of lower skilled workers to fill temporary shortages in the labor market.
- Tier 4: For students.
- Tier 5: For youth mobility and temporary workers, such as those who come under Working Holiday agreements with other countries.

So far, points criteria for Tier 1 have been set. All migrants applying under Tiers 2-5 will be required to have sponsorship from a licensed sponsor (an employer or educational institution). The certificate of sponsorship assures that the migrant is able to perform the particular job or course of study. Highly skilled Tier 1 migrants do not require a job offer and thus do not require sponsorship.

Tiers 3 and 5 are temporary migration schemes, and migrants who fall under these tiers will not be able to switch to a different tier from within the country. The United Kingdom has also suspended Tier 3 in favor of migrants from the European Union; however, this may change depending on labor market demands. Tiers 1, 2, and 4 will be eligible to switch to another tier once they are in the United Kingdom if they can meet the requirements of that tier. Tiers 1 and 2 can potentially lead to settlement if the permanent residence requirements are met at the time of application.

Dependents are allowed to come to the United Kingdom with the main applicant. However, they will not be allowed to work if they accompany a student under Tier 4 or a temporary worker under Tier 5 if — in both cases — the individual has been given less than 12 months leave to remain in the country.

Tier 1

Tier 1 applicants must score at least 75 points to be admitted (as of April 2008). This is designed to attract top talent from outside the European Union who can contribute the most to the UK economy. As Tier 1 applicants do not need a job offer or a sponsor, they can work anywhere they wish. Individuals in the Highly Skilled General, Investor, or Entrepreneur Tier 1 subcategories may renew their visas for an additional two years in the same subcategory (described below) if they score enough points again. Entrepreneurs must demonstrate that they have invested in and registered a business within three months of entry and created at least two full-time jobs for at least 12 months. Investors must show that they have invested at least 750,000 pounds within the first three months upon entry and that they have maintained their investment throughout their residency period. Those under the Post-Study Work Tier 1 subcategory can only extend their stay if they switch to a different Tier 1 subcategory or a different tier. However, the period of residence accrued under the Post-Study Work subcategory is not included in the five-year requirement.

Tier 1 has four subcategories: 1) General Highly Skilled Migrants; 2) Entrepreneurs; 3) Investors; and 4) Post-Study Work.

1) General Highly Skilled: Those arriving under the General Highly Skilled Migrant category earn adequate points on their qualifications, previous earnings, age, and UK experience.

2) Entrepreneurs: Those arriving under the Entrepreneurs category must hold at least 200,000 pounds of disposable capital in a regulated financial institution.

3) Investors: Those arriving under the Investors category must hold at least 1 million pounds of disposable funds. Investors are exempt from the English language requirement and the requirement to prove the ability to support themselves and any dependents.

4) Students: The Post-Study Work subcategory attempts to retain foreign students who have studied in the United Kingdom (under current rules or Tier 4 once implemented). It replaces the International Graduates Scheme. Those accepted under this subcategory are expected to switch into another part of the points system, and residence is granted for a nonrenewable two years that cannot be counted toward permanent residence (five-year requirement). Students must apply within 12 months of receiving their degree.

There are certain requirements and restrictions when renewing a Tier 1 visa. Migrants must apply for the same subcategory under which they originally applied and score enough points again, except for the English language and maintenance requirements.

Entrepreneurs must show that an investment in business was made and registration of the business was undertaken within three months of entry. They must be actively engaged in the business and have created two full-time jobs positions for at least 12 months.

Investors must show that 750,000 pounds was invested within three months of entry and that the investment has been maintained throughout the period of leave.

All individuals applying for admission under any of the Tier 1 subcategories must score at least 75 points to be admitted.

Individuals applying under all Tier 1 subcategories except the Investor category must satisfy the English language prerequisite (10 points). Applicants must show they are proficient in English in one of three ways:

- 1) Passing a test in English equivalent to level C1 of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework for Language Learning (or grade C or better at General Certificate of Secondary Education or score of 6.5 on the International English Language Testing System).
- 2) Coming from a country where English is the majority language spoken: Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Canada, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, New Zealand, St Kitts and Nevis, St Vincent and The Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United States. Canada is not included on this list.
- 3) Earning a degree that satisfies the English language requirement based on UK NARIC, the national agency responsible for providing information and expert opinion on vocational, academic, and professional skills and qualifications from over 180 countries worldwide.

Necessary points to qualify under Tier 1 (all subcategories)	75
Tier 1: The General Highly Skilled Migrant Subcategory	
1. Education (maximum 50 points)	POINTS
Bachelor's degree (e.g., BA, BSc)	30
Master's degree (e.g., MA, MSc, MBA (from a school not on the set list))	35

Doctoral degree (PhD)		50
2. UK experience (maximum 5 points)		
Previous earnings under the HSMP or Tier 1 (General) Migrant was 16,000 pounds or more		5
Qualification was obtained in the United Kingdom		5
If 16,000 pounds or more of the previous earnings for which points are claimed were earned in the United Kingdom		5
3. Previous earnings or past income (maximum 45 points)		
Band A ⁶⁶	16,000 to 17,999 pounds	5
	18,000 to 19,999 pounds	10
	20,000 to 22,999 pounds	15
	23,000 to 25,999 pounds	20
	26,000 to 28,999 pounds	25
	29,000 to 31,999 pounds	30
	32,000 to 34,999 pounds	35
	35,000 to 39,999 pounds	40
	40,000-plus pounds	45
Band B ⁶⁷	Multiplier of 2.3	
Band C ⁶⁸	Multiplier of 3.2	
Band D ⁶⁹	Multiplier of 5.3	
Band E ⁷⁰	Multiplier of 11.4	

⁶⁶ Countries in BAND A have a multiplier of 1 for converting foreign currencies and include Andorra; Aruba; Australia; Austria; Belgium; Bermuda; Canada; Cayman Islands; Channel Islands; Denmark; Finland; France; French Polynesia; Germany; Gibraltar; Guam; Hong Kong (Province of China); Iceland; Ireland; Italy; Japan; Kuwait; Liechtenstein; Luxembourg; Monaco; Netherlands; Norway; Qatar; San Marino; Singapore; Sweden; Switzerland; United Arab Emirates; United Kingdom; United States; and the Vatican.

⁶⁷ Countries in BAND B include American Samoa; Antigua and Barbuda; Argentina; Bahamas; Bahrain; Barbados; Botswana; Brunei Darussalam; Chile; Costa Rica; Croatia; Cyprus; Czech Republic; Estonia; Faroe Islands; Greece; Greenland; Grenada; Hungary; Israel; Korea (South); Latvia; Lebanon; Libya; Macao (Province of China); Malaysia; Malta; Mauritius; Mexico; Netherlands Antilles; New Caledonia; New Zealand; Northern Mariana Islands; Oman; Palau; Panama; Poland; Portugal; Puerto Rico; Saudi Arabia; Seychelles; Slovak Republic; Slovenia; Spain; St Kitts and Nevis; St Lucia; Taiwan (Republic of China); Trinidad and Tobago; Turks and Caicos Islands; Uruguay; Venezuela; and the Virgin Islands (British and US).

⁶⁸ Countries in BAND C include Albania; Algeria; Belarus; Belize; Bolivia; Bosnia & Herzegovina; Brazil; Bulgaria; Cape Verde; China (People's Republic of); Colombia; Dominica; Dominican Republic; Ecuador; Egypt; El Salvador; Fiji; Gabon; Guatemala; Honduras; Iran; Jamaica; Jordan; Kazakhstan; Lithuania; Macedonia; Maldives; Marshall Islands; Micronesia; Morocco; Namibia; Nauru; Paraguay; Peru; Philippines; Romania; Russian Federation; Samoa; South Africa; St Vincent and The Grenadines; Suriname; Swaziland; Syrian Arab Republic; Thailand; Tonga; Tunisia; Turkey; Turkmenistan; Vanuatu; and the West Bank and Gaza.

⁶⁹ Countries in BAND D include Angola; Armenia; Azerbaijan; Bangladesh; Benin; Bhutan; Burma; Cameroon; Comoros; Congo (Republic of); Cuba; Djibouti; Equatorial Guinea; Gambia; Georgia; Guinea; Guyana; Haiti; India; Indonesia; Iraq; Ivory Coast (Cote d'Ivoire); Kenya; Kiribati; Lesotho; Mauritania; Moldova; Mongolia; Montenegro; Nicaragua; Pakistan; Papua New Guinea; Senegal; Serbia; Solomon Islands; Sri Lanka; Sudan; Timor L'Este (East Timor); Ukraine; Uzbekistan; Vietnam; Yemen; Zambia; and Zimbabwe.

⁷⁰ Countries in BAND E include Afghanistan; Burkina Faso; Burundi; Cambodia; Central African Republic; Congo, (Democratic Republic of); Chad; Eritrea; Ethiopia; Ghana; Guinea-Bissau; Korea

4. Age allowance (maximum 20 points)		
Applications for residence (leave to remain) where an applicant has, or last had, leave as a Tier 1 (General) Migrant		
Under age 31		20
Age 31 or 32		10
Age 33 or 34 years		5
Applications for residence (leave to remain) where an applicant has, or last had, leave as a Highly Skilled Migrant		
Under age 28		20
Age 28 or 29		10
Age 30 or 31		5
Other applications for residence (leave to remain)		
Age 28		20
Age 28 or 29		10
Age 30 or 31		5
Tier 1: The Entrepreneur Subcategory		
Maintenance prerequisite for applicants from outside the country (maximum 10 points):		
Start-up costs	Funds	Total
400 pounds	2,400 pounds	2,800 pounds
Two-thirds of the 2,400 pounds is required for first dependent of the main applicant, and one-third for each subsequent dependent		
Applicant has at least 200,000 pounds		25
Funds are held in a regulated institution		25
Funds are disposable in the United Kingdom		25
Tier 1: The Investor Subcategory		
Applicant has at least 1 million pounds of their own money in a regulated financial institution in the United Kingdom.		75
Applicant has money of at least 1 million pounds under their control held in a regulated financial institution and disposable in the United Kingdom which may include money lent to them provided it was lent by a financial institution regulated by the Financial Services Authority		75
Tier 1: Graduate Students – Post Study Work Subcategory		
Maintenance prerequisite for applicants from outside the country (maximum 10 points):		
Start-up costs	Funds	Total
400 pounds	2,400 pounds	2,800 pounds
Two-thirds of the 2,400 pounds is required for first dependent of the main applicant, and one-third for each subsequent dependent. Most Post-Study Work migrants are expected to switch from the Student (or Tier 4) category from within the United Kingdom, in which case the Maintenance test will only require the migrant to show they have 800 pounds in funds plus additional funds for dependents.		

(North); Kyrgyz Republic; Laos; Liberia; Madagascar; Malawi; Mali; Mayotte; Mozambique; Nepal; Niger; Nigeria; Rwanda; Sao Tome and Principe; Sierra Leone; Somalia; Tajikistan; Tanzania; Togo; Uganda.

<p>Applicant has obtained one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UK recognized bachelor's degree • UK recognized postgraduate degree • UK postgraduate certificate or diploma • HND from a Scottish institution 	20
<p>At a UK institution that is either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a recognized or listed UK body • on the Tier 4 sponsors register (once implemented) 	20
<p>Obtained the qualification while in the United Kingdom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • as a Student (Tier 4, once introduced) leave; or • as a dependent of someone with valid leave in an immigration category permitting dependents in the United Kingdom 	20
<p>Made the application within the last 12 months of obtaining the qualification</p>	15

Australian Points System for the General Skilled Migration Program (GSM) (as of April 2008),⁷¹ First Introduced in 1989

Under the General Skilled Migration Program (GSM), visas are divided into offshore and onshore visas, depending on whether applicants apply from outside or within Australia. Visas are further separated into independent (for people without an employer sponsor and who have skills in occupations that Australia needs to fill labor shortages) and sponsored visas (for those with an employer sponsor). Among the offshore visas, applicants must score 100 for the Skilled Sponsor (subclass 176) visa⁷² and Skilled Regional Sponsored (subclass 475)⁷³ or 120 points for the Skilled Independent (subclass 175)⁷⁴ to pass the points test. Among the onshore visas, applicants must score 100 points for the Skilled Sponsored (subclass 886) visa⁷⁵ as well as the Skilled Regional Sponsored (subclass 487) visa⁷⁶, and 120 points for the Skilled Independent (subclass 885) visa.⁷⁷ Applications that do not meet the pass mark for their respective visa categories but that score above their respective “pool marks” will be held in a pool for up to two years upon assessment. If the pass mark is lowered during these two years and, as a consequence, the application score becomes equal to or higher than the new pass mark, the application will be processed.

⁷¹ From September 1, 2007, Australia introduced changes to the General Skilled Migration Program. Any applications made on or before August 31, 2007, were not affected by these changes and processed as before. Changes included increasing the English language threshold for GSM visa applicants; rewarding GSM visa applicants who have very good English language proficiency; placing greater emphasis on skilled work experience; introducing a new temporary work visa for graduates; and simplifying the GSM visa structure. The threshold level of English language proficiency was raised from an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score of 5 (vocational) to 6 (competent) on all four components.

However, applicants applying for trade occupations are required to meet the current threshold of an IELTS score of 5. Under the points-test system, bonus points are given to applicants who achieve English language scores above the threshold level, and additional points are allocated for skilled work experience in Australia.

⁷² On September 1, 2007, the Skilled Sponsored permanent visa replaced the State Territory Nominated Independent (subclass 137) visa, the Skilled-Australian Sponsored (subclass 138) visa, and the Skilled Australian Sponsored New Zealand Citizen (subclass 862) visa. The pool mark for the Skilled Sponsored (subclass 176) visa is 80, and the pass mark is 100.

⁷³ On September 1, 2007, the Skilled Regional Sponsored (subclass 475), which is valid for three years, replaced the Skilled-Independent Regional (subclass 495) visa, the Skilled-Designated Area Sponsored (subclass 496) visa, and the Skilled-Designated Area New Zealand Citizen (subclass 863) visa. Skilled-Regional Sponsored visa holders can apply for a permanent Skilled-Regional visa once they have lived for two years and worked full-time for one year in a specified regional area of Australia. There is no pool mark for the Skilled-Regional Sponsored (subclass 475) visa, and the pass mark is 100.

⁷⁴ On September 1, 2007, the Skilled Independent (subclass 175) replaced the Skilled-Independent (subclass 136) visa and the Skilled-Independent New Zealand (subclass 861) visa. The pool mark for the Skilled Independent (subclass 175) is 100, and the pass mark is 120.

⁷⁵ The Skilled Sponsored (subclass 886) is very similar to the Skilled Independent (subclass 885) visa, but requires sponsorship from an Australian relative or State/Territory government. On September 1, 2007, the Skilled Sponsored (subclass 886) replaced the Skilled-Australian Sponsored Overseas Student (subclass 881) visa. There is no pool mark for the Skilled Sponsored (subclass 886), and the pass mark is 100.

⁷⁶ On September 1, 2007, the Skilled-Regional Sponsored (subclass 487) visa, which is valid for three years, replaced the Skilled-Independent Regional (subclass 495) visa and the Skilled-Designated Area Sponsored (subclass 496) visa. Skilled Regional Sponsored (subclass 487) visa holders can apply for a permanent Skilled-Regional visa once they have lived in Australia for two years and worked full-time for one year in a specified regional area of Australia. There is no pool mark for the Skilled-Regional Sponsored (subclass 487), and the pass mark is 100.

⁷⁷ On September 1, 2007, the Skilled Independent (subclass 885) visa replaced the Skilled-Independent Overseas Student (subclass 880). There is no pool mark for the Skilled Independent (subclass 885), and the pass mark is 120.

1. Skill level (based on nominated occupation) (maximum 60 points)	POINTS
Training specific to the occupation (qualification degree or trade certificate; meets Australian registration requirement)	60
General professional occupations (qualification equivalent to Australian bachelor's degree or higher)	50
Other general skilled occupations (qualification equivalent to Australian diploma or advanced diploma)	40
2. Age (at time of application) — must be under age 45 (maximum 30 points)	
Ages 18 to 29	30
Ages 30 to 34	25
Ages 35 to 39	20
Ages 40 to 44	15
3. English language ability⁷⁸ (maximum 25 points)	
Proficient (ability to use and comprehend complex language well and understand detailed reasoning.) Must meet at least a score of 7.0 in each of the four components on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). They may also obtain a score of B or higher on the Occupation English Test (OET).	25
Competent (ability to use and understand fairly complex language, especially where used in a familiar situation). Must meet at least a score of 6.0 in each of the four components (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) on IELTS. They may also obtain a score of B or higher on the Occupation English Test (OET).	20
Vocational (have a reasonable command of English, coping with overall meaning of the language in the most situations). Must meet at least a score of 5.0 in each of the four components on IELTS.	15
Applicants for the Skilled-Regional Sponsored (subclass 487 or 475) visa will meet the English language requirement if they have competent English, vocational English and nominated a trade occupation, or a score of 5.5 on IELTS and have paid, at the time of application, to attend English language tuition in a participating territory or state	15
4. Specific work experience	
Applicants with 60 points for a nominated occupation and three years of work (in the four years immediately prior to application) in the nominated occupation or a closely related occupation on the Skilled Occupation List ⁷⁹ (SOL) receive full points.	10
Applicants who have been employed in any occupation on SOL (regardless of relevance to the nominated occupation) for at least three of the four years immediately before application receive points.	5
5. Australian employment	
Employed for at least 20 hours a week in a nominated paid skilled occupation or closely related skilled occupation (on SOL) for one of the last four years.	10

⁷⁸ Those who hold a passport from the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, the United States, or Republic of Ireland are not required to take the IELTS test to demonstrate level of English ability. In addition, those who apply for a trade occupation or who have applied for a Skilled-Regional Sponsored (Provisional) visa and have paid to attend English language tuition in a participating state or territory are given exceptions to the English requirement.

⁷⁹ SOL specifies the skilled jobs an applicant can apply for through the General Skilled Migration Program. It states the amount of points awarded for an occupation as well as the organization that assesses the applicant's skills and qualifications.

Completed specified Professional Year in nominated skilled occupation or closely related skilled occupation in the last four years as specified by the minister.	10
6. Occupation in demand/job offer⁸⁰	
Occupation in demand on Migration Occupations in Demand List (MODL) or closely related occupation) for one of the last four years, with full-time job offer in MODL occupation in an organization with at least 10 full-time employees in the two years immediately prior to the application, and the applicant has been employed in that skilled occupation or a closely related skilled occupation for at least one year in the four years immediately prior to the application	20
Occupation in demand (on MODL or closely related occupation) for one of the last four years, but no job offer.	15
7. Australian qualifications	
Australian doctorate degree, minimum of two years of full-time study in Australia	25
After at least three years of study, the applicant obtained one of the following <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australian bachelor's and master's degree after pursuing each degree in Australia for at least one year • Australian bachelor's and honors (upper second-class Honors degree or higher) after pursuing each degree in Australia for at least one year • Australian bachelor's with honors (upper second-class Honors degree or higher) after pursuing this degree in Australia for at least three years 	15
Australian qualification: study full time for at least two academic years in Australia toward the receipt of an Australian postsecondary degree (or higher qualification), diploma, advanced diploma, or trade qualification	5
8. Regional Study: Australia/low population growth metropolitan area	
Points are awarded if the applicant has studied for at least two years in a regional or low population growth metropolitan area of Australia	5
9. Partner skills	
Points are awarded if the applicant's spouse is also able to satisfy the basic requirements of age, English language ability, qualifications, nominated occupation, and recent work experience/two years' study. In addition, the spouse must obtain a skills assessment. Only spouses of individuals who are not permanent residents or citizens of Australia can obtain these points.	5
10. State/territory sponsorship (for Skilled-Sponsored and Skilled-Regional Sponsored visas)	
If the applicant or the applicant's spouse is sponsored by a participating state or territory government	10
11. Sponsorship by a relative	
Provisional Visa applicants sponsored by a relative: If the applicant is sponsored by an Australian relative living in a designated area (Skilled-Regional Sponsored subclass 475 or 487)	25
12. Designated language	
Professional level language skills in a designated language (one of Australia's community languages other than English)	5

⁸⁰ Occupations in demand are specified by Australia's Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) in its Migration Occupations in Demand List (MODL).

Pass and pool marks for various visa categories⁸¹		
Visa category	Pass mark	Pool mark
Skilled-Independent (subclass 175)	120	100
Skilled-Sponsored (subclass 176)	100	80
Skilled-Regional Sponsored (subclass 475)	100	None
Skilled-Regional Sponsored (subclass 487)	100	None
Skilled-Independent (subclass 885)	120	None
Skilled-Sponsored (subclass 886)	100	None

⁸¹ Applicants for the Skilled-Recognized Graduate visa (subclass 476), Skilled-Graduate visa (subclass 485) and Skilled-Regional visa (subclass 487) will not be points tested. Applicants who hold a Skilled Independent Regional visa (subclass 495), a Skilled-Designated Area-Sponsored visa (subclass 496), or a Skilled-Regional Sponsored visa (subclass 475 or 487) who are applying for a Regional-Skilled visa (subclass 887) or for a 12-month extension of their provisional visa will also not be points tested.

Canadian Points System (as of April 2008)⁸²

Applicants must have at least 67 points to qualify for admission	
1. Education (maximum 25 points)	POINTS
Applicants who have completed a master's or PhD and at least 17 years of full-time study	25
Applicants with at least 15 years of study and two or more bachelor's degrees; or with a three-year diploma, trade certificate, or apprenticeship	22
Applicants with a bachelor's degree of two or more years and 14 years of study; or with a two-year diploma, trade certificate, or apprenticeship	20
Applicants with at least 13 years of study and a one-year bachelor's degree; or a one-year diploma, trade certificate, or apprenticeship	15
Applicants with at least 12 years of study and a one-year diploma, trade certificate, or apprenticeship	12
Applicants who are high school graduates	5
2. Language ability⁸³ (maximum 24 points)	
First official language (maximum of 16 points)	
High proficiency	4
Moderate proficiency	2
Basic proficiency	1 or 2
No proficiency	0
Second official language (maximum of 8 points)	
High proficiency	2
Moderate proficiency	2
Basic proficiency	1 or 2
No proficiency	0
3. Work experience: Points are awarded for work experience acquired in a recognized occupation (full-time paid employment) during the previous ten years. Only occupations from Canada's National Occupational Classification List are recognized by the Canadian government⁸⁴ (maximum 21 points)	
One year	15
Two years	17
Three years	19
Four years or more	21
4. Age at time of application (maximum 10 points)	

⁸² Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC): <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/skilled/qual-5.html>

⁸³ An applicant claiming language proficiency on his/her application must provide conclusive proof of the claimed level either by providing test results from an approved language-testing organization or by providing written documentation that supports the claim. Applicants choose the language (English or French) with which they are most comfortable as their first official language. The remaining language is counted as the second language. Points are awarded according to the applicant's ability in four areas: reading, writing, listening to, and speaking both languages. A maximum of 16 points can be earned for the first official language, and a maximum of 8 points can be earned for the second official language.

⁸⁴ From time to time, Citizenship and Immigration Canada has a list of so-called restricted occupations for which no points could be awarded. The list aims to protect the Canadian labor market, i.e., makes sure Canada does not have too many people with the same skills. There were no restricted occupations listed as of November 2006.

Age 17 and younger	0
Age 17	2
Age 18	4
Age 19	6
Age 20	8
Ages 21 to 49	10
Age 50	8
Age 51	6
Age 52	4
Age 53	2
Age 53 and older	0
5. Arranged employment (maximum 10 points)	
Applicants applying from abroad who have a permanent job offer approved by Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) can earn 10 points	10
Applicants working in Canada on a temporary work permit who obtained a permanent job offer for an HRSDC-approved position ⁸⁵	10
Those applying for jobs that are exempt from HRSDC's approval on the basis of an international agreement; a significant benefit to Canada; or related to public policy on Canada's academic or economic competitiveness	10
6. Adaptability	
Spouse or common-law partner's level of education	
Secondary school (high school) diploma or less	0
A one- or two-year diploma, trade certificate, apprenticeship, or university degree and at least 13 years of education	3
A three-year post secondary program and at least 15 years of education, or a three-year university degree and at least 15 years of education	4
A master's degree or PhD and at least 17 years of full-time or full-time equivalent studies	5
Previous study in Canada: The applicant or accompanying spouse has completed a postsecondary program of at least two years in Canada since the age of 17 ⁸⁶	5
Previous work in Canada: The applicant or accompanying spouse has had at least one year of full-time work on a valid permit	5
Relatives in Canada: The applicant or accompanying spouse has a relative in Canada who is a citizen or a permanent resident	5
Arranged employment: The applicant has arranged employment as described in the <i>arranged employment</i> section ⁸⁷	5

⁸⁵ In some cases, temporary workers are exempt from the requirement to attain HRDC approval. These workers include individuals working on the basis of an international agreement (e.g., NAFTA or GATS), those who represent a significant benefit to Canada (e.g., intracompany transferees), or individuals who will contribute to Canada's academic or economic competitiveness (e.g., postgraduate work). They are also eligible for 10 points.

⁸⁶ The applicant must have done this after age 17 and with a valid study permit.

⁸⁷ Applicants who did not have *arranged employment* in Canada must show that they have sufficient funds. The amounts vary according to the number of individuals in each family unit: one person C\$10,168; two persons C\$12,659; three persons C\$15,563; four persons C\$18,895; five persons C\$21,431; six persons C\$24,170; and seven persons or more C\$26,910.

New Zealand's Points System for the Skilled Migrant Category (as of April 2008), First Introduced in 1991

Applicants start with a self-assessment to see if they meet the Skilled Migrant Category threshold before submitting any application. With a score of 100 points or higher they can submit an Expression of Interest (at this point with no supporting documents) to be included in the "pool." All applicants must speak sufficient English to qualify for admission under the points system by demonstrating a score of at least 6.5 or better on IELTS, hold a recognized qualification from a course taught entirely in English, or have been employed in New Zealand for the past 12 months.

Applications in the pool are ranked from highest to lowest points. Every two weeks, applicants scoring over 140 points are automatically accepted to apply. Those with points between 100 and 140 but with a job offer or current employment in New Zealand in a skilled area are still selected in order of points ranking to meet New Zealand's Immigration Program requirements. The remaining applications remain in the pool for the next six months; if not selected during that time, they are removed from the pool. All applying must be under age 56.

Successful applicants receive an invitation to apply for permanent residency, at which point all supporting documents have to be sent to Immigration New Zealand. The documents are verified for authenticity as well as for applicants' ability to "settle successfully and make a real contribution to New Zealand." Successful applicants are granted a Permanent Visa/Permit. Some applicants who are not granted a permanent visa might be issued a temporary work visa or permit (with future eligibility to apply for permanent residence).

1. Skilled employment⁸⁸	POINTS
Current skilled employment in New Zealand for 12 months or more	60
Offer of skilled employment in New Zealand, or current skilled employment in New Zealand for less than 12 months	50
Bonus points if employment offer is	
an identified future growth area ⁸⁹	10
an area of absolute skills shortage ⁹⁰	10
a job offer/Employment in a location outside of Auckland	10
partner has a skilled job or job offer	20
2. Skilled work experience	
Two years	10
Four years	15
Six years	20
Eight years	25

⁸⁸ Skilled employment refers to work that requires considerable specialist, technical, or management expertise and that is relevant to the applicant's recognized qualification or previous work experience. Skilled employment cannot be self-employment. Entrepreneurs wishing to apply for permanent residence may apply under one of the business categories.

⁸⁹ Future growth areas refer to industries considered important for future prosperity of New Zealand. Currently, three broad areas are recognized as future growth areas: biotechnology, information communications technology, and creative industries.

⁹⁰ These are occupations in which New Zealand experiences a significant shortage of skilled workers. They are listed on the Long-Term Skill Shortage List.

Ten years	30
Bonus points if prior work experience in New Zealand amounts to	
One year	5
Two years	10
Three years or more	15
Bonus points if prior work experience in future growth area or identified cluster amounts to	
Two to five years	10
Six years or more	15
Bonus points if prior work experience in an area of absolute skills shortage amounts to	
Two to five years	10
Six years or more	15
3. Recognized qualifications	
Recognized undergraduate qualification	50
Recognized postgraduate qualification: master's degree or higher	55
Bonus points for	
Two years of full-time study in New Zealand toward a recognized qualification	5
Recognized basic New Zealand qualification (trade qualification, diploma, bachelor's degree, bachelor's degree with honors)	5
Recognized postgraduate New Zealand qualification (master's or doctorate)	10
Qualification in an identified future growth area and a job or job offer in that area	10
Qualification in an area of absolute skills shortage ⁹¹	10
Partner with a recognized qualification	20
4. Age (minimum age 20, maximum age 55 inclusive)	
Ages 20 to 29	30
Ages 30 to 39	25
Ages 40 to 44	20
Ages 45 to 49	10
Ages 50 to 55	5
5. Close family in New Zealand⁹²	
Close family	10

Sources: New Zealand Immigration Service,
<http://www.immigration.govt.nz/migrant/stream/work/skilledmigrant/caniapply/claimingpoints/default.htm>;
<http://www.immigration.govt.nz/migrant/stream/work/skilledmigrant/caniapply/eoi/pointstable.htm>;
<http://www.immigration.govt.nz/migrant/stream/work/skilledmigrant/caniapply/eoi/bonuspoints.htm>;
<http://www.immigration.govt.nz/pointsindicator>.

⁹¹ If the job or job offer is not in an area of absolute skill shortage, the applicant can only obtain these points if the qualification is listed on the Long Term Skill Shortage List. The applicant must also meet any of the other requirements on the list.

⁹² Only applicant's/partner's adult brother or sister, adult child, or parent who is either a resident or a citizen and currently resides in New Zealand qualifies as close family.

**Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's Points System:
General Points Test (as of April 2008)**

There are two schemes under the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme: the General Points Test and the Achievement-Based Points Test

The pass mark required for the General Points Test is 80. All applicants must satisfy the basic criteria of age, financial ability, good character, language proficiency, and basic educational qualifications. It is not available to nationals of Afghanistan, Albania, Cambodia, Cuba, Laos, North Korea, Nepal, and Vietnam. Those with exceptional talent or skill may apply under a separate points test called the achievement-based points test. Those who are accepted under the scheme obtain 165 points under a single scoring factor. Points under the achievement-based points tests are given if

- a) the applicant has received an award of exceptional achievement (e.g., Olympic medal, Nobel prize, national/international awards); or
- b) the applicant can show that his/her work has been acknowledged by his/her peers or has contributed significantly to the development of his/her field (e.g., lifetime achievement award from industry).

1. Age (maximum 30 points)	POINTS
Ages 18 to 39	30
Ages 40 to 44	20
Ages 45 to 50	15
Below 18 years or above 51 years	0
2. Academic/professional qualifications (maximum 45 points)	
Two or more doctorate degrees	45
Doctorate degree/Two or more master's degrees	40
Master's degree/Two or more bachelor's degrees	35
Bachelor's degree/professional qualification awarded by a nationally or internationally recognized or acclaimed professional body which demonstrates that the holder has a very high level of technical expertise.	30
3. Work experience (maximum 50 points)	
At least ten years' graduate or specialist level work experience, including at least five years in a senior role.	50
At least five years' graduate or specialist level work experience, including at least two years in a senior role.	40
At least five years' graduate or specialist level work experience	30
At least two years' graduate or specialist level work experience	10
4. Language proficiency (maximum 20 points)	
Proficient in written and spoken Chinese (Putonghua or Cantonese) and English	20
Proficient in at least one foreign language (written and spoken) in addition to written and spoken Chinese (Putonghua or Cantonese) or English	15
Proficient in written and spoken Chinese (Putonghua or Cantonese) or English	10
5. Family background (maximum 20 points)	
At least one immediate family member (married spouse, parents, siblings,	5

children) is a Hong Kong permanent resident residing in Hong Kong	
Accompanying married spouse is educated to the equivalent level of a degree or above	5
5 points for each accompanying unmarried dependent child under the age of 18 years, maximum 10 points	5 / 10

Danish Green Card Scheme (as of August 2008)

The pass mark required for the Danish Green Card is 100. All applicants must have full health insurance to cover them and any dependents until the Danish national health insurance covers them. Applicants must also be able to prove that they can support dependents by providing proof that they have 4,200 Danish kroner per month. A job offer is not a prerequisite for this scheme.

The Green Card offers residence and a work permit for up to three years, extendable for up to one year if the applicant has a permanent job or has held a permanent job which he or she lost due to uncontrollable circumstances no more than three months before submitting the application for an extension. Holders of a Green Card can also have their spouse, registered partner or cohabiting partner, and/or children under age 18 apply for residence, provided family members can support themselves and will reside together in Denmark. The applicant's spouse, registered partner, or cohabiting partner is also permitted to work full time for the entire period of the residence permit.

Finally, students completing a higher educational program in Denmark will obtain a six-month extension on their residence permit upon completion of their program to allow them to look for employment in Denmark.

1. Education⁹³ (maximum 105 points)	POINTS
PhD	80
Master's degree	60
Bachelor's degree followed by one-year master's degree	50
Bachelor's degree/graduated from medium-length education	30
Bonus points if applicant graduated from a university in the THES-GS World Ranking ⁹⁴	
Top 100	15
Top 200	10
Top 400	5
Bonus points if the academic credential qualifies the applicant to work in a field where Denmark is currently experiencing a shortage of qualified professionals ⁹⁵	10

⁹³ The Danish Immigration Service asks CIRIUS in the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, to assess the applicant's academic degree according to Danish standards.

⁹⁴ The THES-GS World Ranking is available at:
http://www.topuniversities.com/worlduniversityrankings/results/2007/overall_rankings/top_400_universities/

⁹⁵ The list of shortage occupations are listed in the Positive List and is available at:
http://www.nyidanmark.dk/en-us/coming_to_dk/work/positivelist/positive_list_overview.htm

2. Language proficiency⁹⁶ (maximum 30 points)	
Level corresponding to Study Test in Danish as a Second Language (Studieprøven) or higher	20
Level corresponding to Danish Language Test, Level 3 (Prøve i Dansk 3)	15
Level corresponding to Danish Language Test, Level 2 (Prøve i Dansk 2)	10
Level corresponding to Danish Language Test, Level 1 (Prøve i Dansk 1)	5
3. Work experience (maximum 15 points)	
Three to five years within the past five years as a researcher/in field listed on the Positive List	15
One to two years within the past five years as a researcher/in field listed on the Positive List	10
Three to five years within the past five years as a researcher/in field listed on the Positive List	5
4. Adaptability (maximum 15 points)⁹⁷	
Completion of at least three years' study at a higher educational program in an EU/EEA country or Switzerland	10
Completion of at least one year's study at a higher educational program in an EU/EEA country or Switzerland	5
At least two year's legal residence and work in an EU/EEA country or Switzerland	10
At least one year's legal residence and work in an EU/EEA country or Switzerland	5
Bonus points for possessing Danish language skills demonstrated by passing an exam in Danish Language Test, Level 2 (Prøve i Dansk 2) or higher	5
5. Age (maximum 15 points)	
Age 34 and younger	15
Ages 35 to 40	10

⁹⁶ Applicants earn points for language proficiency by passing an exam in either Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, English, or German and earn a score equivalent to at least Danish Language Test, Level 1 (one of the official Danish language proficiency tests for foreigners). Applicants can only receive points for one Scandinavian language and for either English or German. The Danish government recognizes only the foreign language exams listed at http://www.nyidanmark.dk/en-us/coming_to_dk/work/greencard-scheme/language-tests.htm; the corresponding levels for the recognized languages are at http://www.nyidanmark.dk/en-us/coming_to_dk/work/greencard-scheme/language-tests.htm. An applicant may also acquire points for language proficiency by submitting a statement from a previous employer affirming that the applicant has used Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, English, or German on the job for at least one year. Alternatively, the applicant may submit proof of completion of at least one year of studies at a higher educational program taught in one of these languages. These two alternative methods will be accepted as a level equivalent to the Study Test in Danish as a Second Language (Studieprøven).

⁹⁷ Applicants can earn points for either education or work.

Appendix 2. Australia's Variable-to-Pass-Mark Ratios

Australia	Maximum Points	Variable-to-pass mark ratio for Permanent Skilled Independent Visa	Variable-to-pass-mark ratio for Permanent Skilled Sponsored Visa	Variable-to-pass mark ratio for Provisional Skilled Regional Sponsored Visa
Prior work experience or education in country	65	54.2%	65.0%	65.0%
Education	60	50.0%	60.0%	60.0%
Work experience	30	25.0%	30.0%	30.0%
Language	30	25.0%	30.0%	30.0%
Age	30	25.0%	30.0%	30.0%
Close relatives	25	n/a	n/a	25.0%
Occupation in demand	20	16.7%	20.0%	20.0%
Job offer	20	16.7%	20.0%	20.0%
Regional	5* or 15**	4.2%	15.0%	15.0%
Partner characteristics	5* or 15**	4.2%	15.0%	15.0%
Previous or proposed earnings	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Passmark	120*** or 100****	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Notes: *5 points maximum for the Skilled Independent Visa; **15 points maximum for the Skilled Sponsored Visa and the Skilled-Regional Sponsored Visa; ***The pass mark is 120 for the Skilled-Independent visa;

****The pass mark is 100 for the Skilled-Sponsored and Skilled-Regional-Sponsored visas.

Source: Numbers based on authors' calculations using information from Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship, "Skilled-Independent (Migrant) visa (subclass 175)," <http://www.immi.gov.au/skilled/general-skilled-migration/175/eligibility-applicant.htm>.

VIII. About the Authors

Demetrios G. Papademetriou is President of the Migration Policy Institute (MPI). He is also the convener of the Transatlantic Council on Migration and its predecessor, the Transatlantic Task Force on Immigration and Integration (co-convened with the Bertelsmann Stiftung). Dr. Papademetriou also convenes the Athens Migration Policy Initiative, a task force of mostly European immigration experts that advises EU Members States on immigration issues. He is the Co-Founder and International Chair Emeritus of “Metropolis: An International Forum for Research and Policy on Migration and Cities.” Dr. Papademetriou has been Chair of the Migration Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development; Director for Immigration Policy and Research at the US Department of Labor; and Chair of the Secretary of Labor’s Immigration Policy Task Force. He was also Executive Editor of the *International Migration Review*. Dr. Papademetriou has published more than 250 works (books, articles, monographs, and research reports) on migration topics. He advises senior government and political party officials in more than 20 countries.

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