

Alberta Social Union Framework Agreement Mobility Report

Introduction

The Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA) was signed on February 4, 1999, by First Ministers from all Canadian jurisdictions (except Quebec). The agreement concluded a series of negotiations in which governments sought to find ways to work together to renew social programs, improve accountability to the public for public spending, and ensure that programs are efficient, effective, and adequately and predictably funded in the long term.

This document is Alberta's second social mobility report, prepared in accordance with Section 2 of the agreement. Alberta reaffirms its commitments to promote mobility within Canada, to be accountable to Albertans on the social programs and services Alberta delivers, to work in partnership with other governments where appropriate in joint planning and collaborative action, and to work towards social and labour mobility.

Section 2 SUFA Mobility Provisions

Signatories to the SUFA recognize that the ability to move freely throughout Canada to pursue opportunities is a fundamental characteristic of Canadian citizenship. In Section 2 of the agreement, Alberta joined with the other participating governments in specific commitments to eliminate unreasonable barriers to social mobility. Jurisdictions agreed to:

- Ensure that no new barriers to mobility are created in new social policy initiatives;
- Eliminate, within three years, any residency-based policies or practices which constrain access to post-secondary education, training, health, and social services and social assistance unless these can be demonstrated to be reasonable and consistent with the principles of the SUFA;
- Ensure full compliance by July 1, 2001, with the mobility provisions of the Agreement on Internal Trade; and
- Report annually regarding residency-based barriers, and the actions taken or planned to eliminate them.

Results of First Stage of Review Process

In May 2000, Alberta released its first mobility review, in accordance with its SUFA commitments. A working group from seven departments surveyed the range of social programs delivered by the Government of Alberta, concluding that as of March 2000, potentially unreasonable barriers existed in three areas:

- ***Alberta Community Development, Home Adaptation Program:*** Prior to the SUFA mobility review, individuals who wished to access funding to make their homes wheelchair accessible were subject to a twelve-month residency requirement.

- *Alberta Human Resources and Employment, Skills Development Program*: The Skills Development program provides basic education and skills training for eligible individuals. Persons who otherwise met the guidelines were subject to a twelve-month residency requirement before their participation could begin.
- *Alberta Learning, Alberta Student Loans*: While Alberta graduate students who wished to study in institutions outside the province were eligible to receive Alberta Student Loans, the same was not true for Alberta undergraduate students.

Alberta has taken the following actions in response to these findings:

- *Alberta Community Development* initiated steps to reduce the Home Adaptation Program's residency requirement to three months, consistent with the SUFA Mobility review. When responsibility for the program subsequently moved to the *Alberta Seniors* ministry, the residency requirement was eliminated.
- *Alberta Human Resources and Employment* has reduced the residency requirement for the Skills Development Program to three months.
- *Alberta Learning* has revised Alberta Student Loan guidelines to confirm full portability of Alberta Student Loans, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Alberta Learning provided an additional \$5million in its 2002-2003 Business Plan to cover costs.

Results of Second Stage of Review Process

In preparation for a second mobility review, Alberta ministries were again approached to review any new initiatives for potential unreasonable barriers to social mobility. No such barriers were found.

In some sectors, ministries delegate to regional authorities a combination of service delivery responsibilities and governance autonomy. As these authorities may administer thousands of individual contracts through a number of separate programs, ministries were asked to review the legislative and regulatory framework under which the authorities operate to identify potential mobility barriers rather than examine each contract individually.

In the course of this review, no unreasonable barriers were identified.

Labour Mobility

Worker mobility continues to be a key issue for Alberta. As highlighted in the SUFA, the Labour Mobility Chapter of the Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT) provides a framework to ensure that any workers qualified for an occupation in their home province will have similar occupational opportunities in other provinces.

In advance of many other jurisdictions, Alberta's relevant legislation was substantially in compliance with the AIT by the July 2001 deadline. Fully ninety percent of the professional regulatory bodies in Alberta had come to agreements with their counterparts in other provinces/territories to recognize the qualifications of each other's workers.

This substantial achievement marks the beginning of phase two of the AIT implementation, as the remaining professional bodies develop qualification recognition agreements, and existing agreements are reviewed for effectiveness and potential improvements.

Conclusion

Alberta's second social mobility review reinforced the findings in the 2000 report. With very few exceptions, Alberta's social programs, whether delivered directly or by delegated authorities, do not include unreasonable barriers to mobility. Moreover, where barriers have been identified, Alberta has taken swift remedial action to ensure that if they are deemed to be unreasonable, they are eliminated.