

# Need for more immigrants in Canada

Elli Heikkilä



The Embassy of Canada in Helsinki and the International Cultural Centre Caisa organized the seminar "Making Diversity Work" in Helsinki, January 17th 2007. Mr. Robert Orr, Minister (Immigration) and head of the Canadian Immigration program at the Canadian High Commission in London, pointed out in his presentation "Canada's Immigration and Integration Programs" that Canada has a positive attitude towards immigration and multiculturalism. 18 per cent of population of Canada was born outside the country and in numbers there are 5.4 millions immigrants. Four millions identify themselves as visible minorities.

Canada's goal, according to Mr. Orr, is to foster the development of a strong viable economy in all regions of the country, but metropolitan areas are still main destination areas for immigrants. Almost half of all immigrants move to the Toronto region, with the vast majority of the rest going to Montreal and Vancouver. Immigrants want what Canadians want, i.e. to live where economic opportunities exist. Smaller communities have thus less experience of immigration. Immigrants are important in the labour market and 60 per cent of them are economic immigrants and 40 per cent non-economic (family reunion, refugees).

The Canadian Model is integration and as quickly and comfortably as possible. Immigrants have rights and responsibilities.

Ms. Susan Brown, Senior Policy Advisor, City of Toronto, stressed that ageing population is increasingly dependent on immigration. There will be skill and labour force shortage for all occupations. City of Toronto has 2.6 millions population of which half were born outside of Canada. Over 100 languages are spoken in the city and there also exists religious diversity. Canada uses so-called point system, which values education and skill.

Immigrants are more educated than persons born in Canada. Immigrants are representing growing proportion of labour force, suppliers, customers and the Canadian population. Government sponsored refugees are hardest to integrate, because there can be for example victims of torture and vulnerable situations.

Ms. Brown also asked what working life should do for making diversity work. Her opinion was to include immigrants in a more positive way. For example, big banks have developing programmes in Toronto, and also City of Toronto employs many immigrants. There are huge ranges of programmes ensuring that employers are not tak-

ing risk of employing immigrants, instead immigrants should be seen as positive human resource.

The third speaker in the seminar was Ms. Ratna Omidvar, Executive Director of the Maytree Foundation, Toronto-based private foundation that works to accelerate the settlement of refugees and immigrants in large urban centres in Canada. She classified Canadian immigration into four different phases: 1970s "Mosaic", 1980s "Level playing field", 1990s "Belonging", and 2000s "Two-way street".

Her point was that diversity is in our DNA like bilingualism and immigration. Immigrants create new markets and demand in the society. There are also emerging problems like poverty and many immigrants are working below their talents and qualifications. She was also asking for the development of practical programs.

Internships could be the way to get first immigrant to work in a company or a working place. The target is to gain the first Canadian work experience for immigrants, and lacking it is the most difficult barrier for immigrants. The internship program, Career Bridge, have proved to be extremely successful. Further, mentoring creates understanding between people and also employer training is important.