

Changing landscapes: managing migration and skills

Canada's newcomer integration programs

Rosaline Frith

Introduction

I would like to start by stressing the significant role that integration plays in Canada. It is key to social cohesion in a country built on multiple identities. In most countries, social cohesion arises from a shared identity, a long history of shared ethnic or community kinship. However, in Canada, we do not share as individuals, a common history. We share Canada's history, a story of immigration and a changing environment. We share values of freedom, respect and belonging. Our linguistic duality, regional and cultural diversity, challenging geography and proximity to the United States make us unique.

Integration fosters relationships of trust that enable Canadians to take joint and collective action and peacefully resolve conflicts. Canada's integration policies build mutual respect amongst

immigrants, refugees and native-born Canadians. Integration is the basis of our social cohesion.

Overview

Our experience shows that an effective and efficient immigration program works best when supported by a comprehensive legal framework, a liberal democratic tradition and programming to ensure immigrants have a level playing field with native born Canadians. Canada has been and continues to be built by immigrants who represent a significant and growing part of the Canadian population and labour market. Highly skilled immigrants are essential to meeting the Canadian Government's skills and innovation priorities. But Canada's immigration program is more than just a quest for highly skilled workers. It is a balanced program that takes into account economic, family and humanitarian issues and that promotes social inclusion. Integration is achieved over a long period of time, perhaps generations. For immigrants the first step to integration is when they feel that they belong and become full citizens of Canada.

This article describes our integration framework and presents

some employment-related challenges that remain to be overcome. For example, Toronto is one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the world. It has a very low crime rate, a vibrant economy and a high degree of social harmony. On the surface, it is a good example of integration. However, Toronto also faces absorption or capacity challenges daily.

Our system is not perfect – it continues to evolve and will, I hope, be able to overcome faults in the Canadian social fabric that appear with time.

Our legal framework

Immigration has always played a central role in Canada's history. However, immigration was not always open to everyone. In the early 1900s, Canada's legal framework supported a shared identity, based on ethnic or community kinship that excluded diversity. Pre-1960, immigration policies favoured Britons and other Europeans. Whenever the majority felt threatened, laws were adjusted to limit access to the country. For example, because there was a concern that Chinese would not assimilate to "Anglo conformity", Chinese immigration was curtailed in 1902.

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In response, business leaders brought in Japanese and Indian labourers. This led to the 1907 anti-immigration riots in Vancouver followed by a further curtailment of non-white immigration through the 1910 Immigration Act.

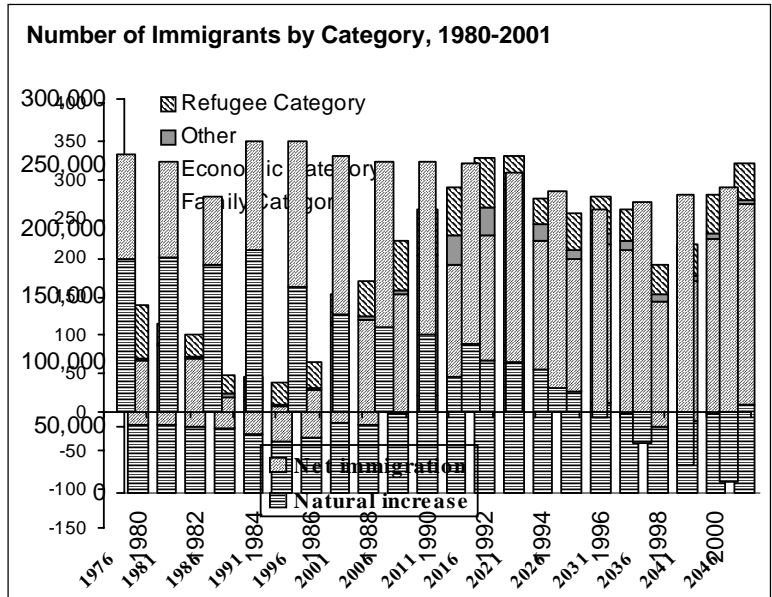
There was always a tension between the need for labour and fears that immigrants would undermine the "British character" of Canada. In Quebec, immigration was seen as a potential threat to the already tenuous status of the French in Canada.

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed the launch of the modern phase of Canada's immigration policies. Several factors came together to push Canada toward the creation of a non-racial immigration system:

- Canada's wish to play a more prominent role in international affairs, especially at the United Nations and within the Commonwealth;
- Quebec's desire to play a more active role in the recruitment of immigrants;
- passage of a Canadian Bill of Rights in 1960;
- a new Immigration Act in 1976;
- the beginnings of Canada's current policies on bilingualism and biculturalism;
- and the recognition of the multicultural fact of Canada.

In 1982, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was adopted. It is a crucial element to our non-racial legal system. And on June 28, 2002, Canada promulgated a new modern immigration law, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

But the legal framework is not enough, we still have to achieve a



level playing field for true social and economic inclusion.

Changing immigration flows

With non-discriminatory policies, immigration has been drastically different from what it had been prior to 1960. Immigration levels rose dramatically in the 1990s. Over 2.4 million immigrants arrived between 1991 and 2001. Now 5.4 million, or 18.4% of Canada's population of 30 million are foreign-born. The mix of immigrants has also changed from family class predomination to more people being admitted under the economic category. And, about two-thirds of immigrants now come from so-called non-traditional source countries primarily in the Asia-Pacific region.

In 2001, out of a total of about 250,000 immigrants, 62% were admitted under the economic category, 27% family class and 11% refugees.

While there is no probability

that the "traditional" European residents of Canada will be outnumbered, it is projected that "visible minorities" will constitute 20% of the Canadian population by 2016. "Canada's 'mosaic' now includes most races, religions and cultures. It is expected to become more diverse with time.

Definition of integration in Canada

So how does one celebrate diversity, promote social inclusion, and live in respect and peace. This is not an easy objective. In Canada, our integration policies are intended to help us attain this goal.

The term "integration" is defined as "a two-way process of accommodation between newcomers and Canadians". It encourages newcomers to adapt to Canadian society without requiring them to abandon their cultures or to con-

form to the values and practices of the dominant group, as long as adherence to their cultures does not contravene Canadian laws. While at the same time, Canadian society and its institutions are expected to change over time to reflect the new Canada that is constantly in evolution.

Canadian integration policy promotes the acquisition of citizenship. It consciously welcomes all immigrants into the Canadian family and strives to ensure their full participation across the important economic, social, political and cultural dimensions of our country.

Managing in partnerships

Integration in Canada is managed in partnership with all levels of government, non-governmental associations and the public. Through bilateral agreements some provinces design, deliver and administer selection and settlement programs. These agreements vary considerably. The provinces' interests differ depending on the levels of immigration to their regions. Those receiving smaller numbers want more immigrants and focus on dispersion issues, while those receiving larger numbers seek more funding of integration programs. A major integration issue of provinces is the cost associated with second language training of children.

The voluntary or not-for-profit sector would like more control over program design and more services for refugee claimants. The regulatory and licensing bodies want to ensure standards are met and are leery of losing control. The employers are not well enough in-

formed about foreign work experience and bridging programs are insufficient or non-existent.

Municipalities would like to be more involved in policy decisions on immigration levels that impact on their infrastructure, especially housing and community services.

To complicate matters even more, the public has to be accepting of immigration. This requires a high level of confidence in the integrity of the immigration program. September 11, 2001 shook that confidence and placed much of the blame wrongly on our refugee asylum system. We must ensure that overall confidence in our immigration system is strong if our integration model is to continue to be successful.

The integration model

The model is a continuum beginning with information provided to immigrants overseas, orientation and adaptation services in Canada, to the acquisition of citizenship after a relatively short period of time. All three categories of immigrants – skilled, family class and refugees – are eligible for settlement services. Skilled immigrants integrate more quickly and are seen as immediately helping to build the nation. Immigrants who come under family reunification criteria take longer to integrate economically but form the core needed for social integration. Refugees are admitted for protection and it is accepted that they may need additional assistance to settle and integrate. As long as the public feels that the immigration program is well managed, the cost of integration is viewed positively.

Information overseas and on arrival:

Immigrants and refugees when asked what can be done better have told us that more information on life in Canada is needed before they come to Canada. "Canadian Orientation Abroad" was developed to do this. Orientation sessions are delivered by non-governmental organizations in Kenya (with outreach to surrounding countries), Pakistan, Vietnam, Eastern Europe, and soon expanding to Syria. Information is provided on topics such as education, climate, housing, cost of living, and employment.

Other sources of information include:

- "A Newcomer's Introduction to Canada" distributed by visa offices at time of visa issuance;
- a "Welcome to Canada Kit" provided to newcomers at five major entry airports that includes information on how to access services and resources in local communities; and
- In-person reception services provided by 'service-provider organizations' to government-assisted refugees arriving at major airports (Ports of Entry).

Programs in Canada

As stated earlier, program delivery is mostly done by the not-for-profit sector. Programs are in place to help immigrants and refugees to orient and adapt to life in Canada. These programs also seek to battle xenophobia by dispelling myths. Integration programs in Canada attempt to address cultural awareness, foreign credential recogni-

tion, prior work and learning experience, and other factors that would lead to better understanding and respect.

For example, upon arrival government assisted refugees are met at the airport to ensure they have proper clothing and that they are able to travel to a reception house. There, they will receive temporary accommodation and basic orientation services for up to 6 weeks. This allows them to find more permanent housing, enroll their children in schools and start a new life. Government assisted refugees receive income support for a specified period, usually one year, through the "Resettlement Assistance Program".

"Private Sponsorship" is another avenue for refugees to gain access to Canada. Groups in Canada provide the necessary financial and emotional support for resettling refugees from abroad. These groups promote respect of immigrants by learning about their cultures and helping refugees to learn about Canadian values.

All immigrants and refugees are eligible for services under the "Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program", the "Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada" and the "Host Program". These programs provide social and economic bridging through orientation sessions to local community services, trauma counseling, job hunting clubs, translation and interpretation services, language instruction for adult newcomers in English or French, transportation and child-minding to participate in language courses, and a Buddy-type program which matches newcomers with an in-Canada host to sup-

port settlement and integration. This Host program is a good candidate for expansion into schools and with employers. Host exemplifies the two-way exchange to build respect and trust that is at the core of integration.

Dispersion

Segregation and ghettos are signs that tell us that integration may not be occurring. There are no such signs in Canada at present. Immigrants are free to settle anywhere in Canada. And clearly, Canada's immigrant and refugee populations prefer large urban centres. Immigration today is a largely urban phenomenon with more than 85% of immigrants settling in cities compared with 57% of the Canadian-born. Over three-quarters of all immigrants go to three major cities: Toronto, Vancouver and Montréal.

Canada destines resettled refugees. They are for the most part sent to medium and large communities across the country taking into account such elements, as special service needs, family connections, skills, and presence of similar ethnic community. Some communities in Canada receive only refugees resettled from abroad, as this is the only group for whom Canada plays a role in selecting a community of final destination. In spite of all good planning, many refugees leave their original destination for the major urban centres that provide more employment, educational and cultural opportunities.

First generation immigrants tend to settle together initially but integrate into the broader communities with time. Issues related to

access to housing, health care, schools, and other infrastructure inadequacies sometimes exacerbate discrimination or expressions of intolerance. Whenever absorption capacity is exceeded, the majority has a tendency to fear the pressures of immigration.

Many communities and provinces seek a more even distribution of immigrants across Canada. To achieve such a goal will take enhanced community involvement to ensure employment opportunities and a welcoming environment.

Population on the decline

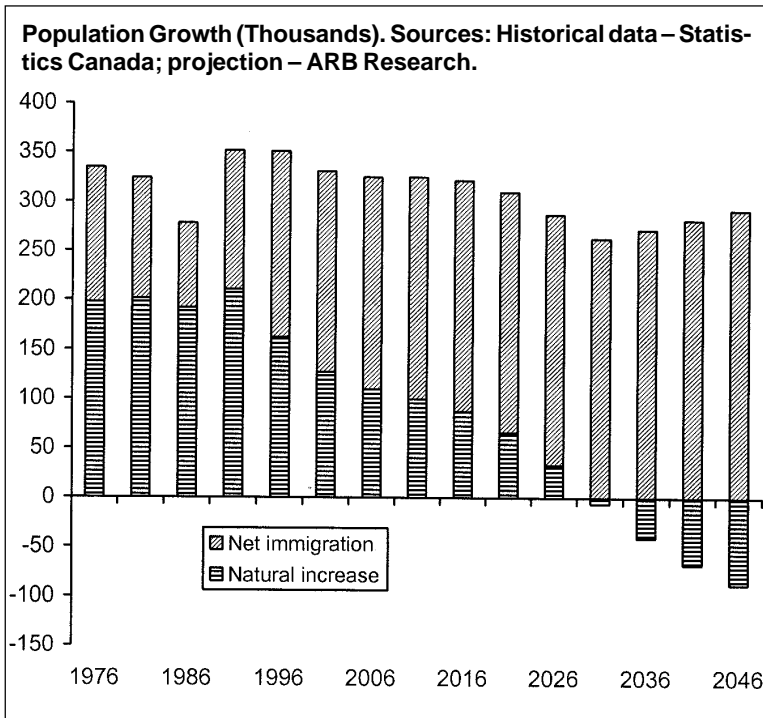
All developed countries, including Canada, are facing slowing population growth and aging workforces. By 2031, all population growth in Canada will be due to immigration. We are not in danger of a population explosion through managed migration.

It is important to be aware of our context because it points out how important immigration is to Canada and therefore the significance of effective integration.

Labour market

The level of importance of immigration to the labour market is growing. In 2001, immigrants accounted for 20% of the Canadian labour force and almost 70% of Canada's net labour force growth since 1991. By 2011, labour force growth is likely to depend solely on immigration.

Occupations requiring post-secondary education accounted for three-quarters of labour force growth between 1991 and 2001. By 2004, it is projected that over 70% of new jobs created are expected to



require at least some post-secondary education. Immigrants are particularly well set to meet those requirements. In 2001, 53% of the Canadian working age population (ages 25-64) had post-secondary level education while 61% of working age immigrants 25 to 64 had post-secondary qualifications.

Employment rates

One of the measures we use to monitor economic integration is labour market performance. Labour market performance includes factors such as attachment to the labour market, wage scales, recruitment, retention and promotion rates. Where effective economic integration is occurring we would expect to find rates of employment that match the Canadian-born and rates of remuneration that match

levels of experience and training. We would also expect to find that newcomers are hired, retained and promoted at rates that match the Canadian-born.

Evolving gender differences in employment rates. Employment rates are discouraging for women:

Gap between Canadian-born men and very recent immigrant men between 25 and 54 years of age grew from 10% in 1990 to 13% in 1995 but returned to 10% in 2000.

Gap between very recent immigrant women and Canadian-born women between 25 and 54 years grew from 11% in 1990 to 22% in 1995 and remained at 21% in 2000.

Employment earnings

Research has shown that, in spite of higher average education than the Canadian-born, recent immi-

grants are taking longer to catch up to the wages of their Canadian educational and experiential peers than previous immigrant groups. Researchers have also detected significant underemployment and wage inequity in the Canadian labour market as they affect newcomers:

- Immigrants with university degrees take approximately 9-10 years to catch up to the earnings of Canadians with university degrees;
- Immigrants with university degrees earn less than half of the amount earned by the average Canadian with a university degree one year after landing;
- Family immigrants and refugees take 15 years to catch up to the Canadian earnings average; and
- Immigrants with no knowledge of either official language at landing take 15 years to catch up to Canadian earnings average.

Risk of exclusion

The percentage of recent immigrant families falling below low-income cut-off increased significantly from 1985 to 1997, from 23% to 39%. This increase did not occur for more established immigrants nor for native born Canadians.

Major issues facing newcomers:

So we know, as illustrated above, that integration is not happening as effectively as we would like. The question is why. Is it due to systemic or structural barriers – is it linked to discrimination? Is it just a result of economic changes, new needs of a knowledge economy and a period of recession? No mat-

ter what the cause, there is broad consensus that certain barriers to integration must be addressed in order for immigrants to make the transition to full participation.

Language barriers

Immigrants must have the necessary skills to find jobs and effectively participate in the labour market in any occupation. Current integration programs provide basic language skills to newcomers. In today's knowledge economy, occupationally specific language training and higher levels of language fluency are essential to maximum performance both in the labour market and in one's community.

Labour market access

The higher their level of education, the better immigrants perform. The issue in Canada today is a fragmented system of foreign credential and experience recognition. There is no one consistent process to ensure that qualified immigrants can practice in regulated or licensed occupations. We need to systematize, across provinces and territories, the recognition of foreign educational and professional qualifications, as well as experience. When credentials and experience are evaluated, it is necessary to have programs in place to fill the educational, qualification and experience gaps. Immigrants should not be required to complete an entire degree program when only one course is missing. Prior learning assessments combined with practical work experience should be available to ensure that, for example, an experienced and

skilled plumber does not have to restart his or her career at the entry level.

Relevant labour market information on the Canadian workplace and employment services is key for immigrants. This allows them to make better choices about where to reside in Canada, as well as to equip themselves prior to arrival in Canada. Although the information and services provided under the Canadian Orientation Abroad program are a good start, this is an area where the level of information could be improved.

Public/employer attitudes

Public and employer attitudes are key to promoting rapid inclusion and integration into the society and economy. Lack of knowledge often results in rejection or fear of the unknown. Expanding the range of our Host program to match more youth, as well as employers with immigrants and creating more bridging type programs would help Canadians to be even more accepting of immigrants. Public education programs may also be required where discrimination is suspected. A good example of our efforts in this area is the development of cultural profiles for sharing with service providers, police officers and university education faculties.

Multicultural citizenship

Whether immigrant or refugee, the ultimate Canadian policy objective is full citizenship within an officially bilingual and multicultural polity. Canada encourages newcomers to adopt Canadian citizenship as an official symbolic act of alle-

giance and attachment. About 85% of immigrants take this step. Accession to official citizenship is not seen as the end of the journey, however. It is recognized that integration may require a lifetime; indeed, research shows that full integration sometimes requires a couple of generations.

Becoming a citizen

I will not go into the details of becoming a citizen of Canada. However, there are some clear requirements including language and knowledge acquisition. The person must learn about rights and responsibilities, voting procedures, the political system and Canada as a nation; be 18 years of age, a permanent resident, and must have lived in Canada for at least three years. The grant of citizenship is normally done during a formal ceremony where the individual swears the oath of citizenship.

Becoming a Canadian citizen means accepting common values and respecting Canadian laws. Becoming a Canadian citizen also means exercising the right to vote. When asked at citizenship ceremonies, the most important aspects of becoming Canadian, most immigrants respond – I am now free to vote, to practice my religion, to express my views, to participate in politics. My children, boys and girls, will grow up to be whatever they would like to be!

Canadian values

As a liberal democracy, Canada espouses certain core values to which it expects all its citizens to

adhere. Values such as mutual respect, the rule of law, equality and the peaceful resolution of disputes are seen as non-negotiable minimum expectations. In return, Canada guarantees such basic human rights as individual autonomy, freedom of association, freedom of religion, etc. It is clear that there are some things that Canadian society will not tolerate, such as the subjugation and abuse of women and children. Changes to fundamental values can only occur through the democratic process.

To be part of that process, one must vote and some must be more politically active. Running for elected office is a valid index of integration. Here we find that immigrants tend to participate in governments at rates slightly below or equal to the levels of the Canadian-born. In federal politics, power is still firmly in the hands of politicians of British or French origins. However, about 33% of federally elected politicians can claim some minority background and many of these politicians are immigrants.

A stable multicultural society depends upon the cultivation of a "common sense of belonging" among all citizens, not just those who govern. This sense of belonging cannot be ethnically based

since Canada is such a diverse society. Instead it must be political and "based on a shared commitment to the political community." Such a commitment to Canada's continuing existence and well being, implies that one cares enough for our country and its system of government not to harm its interests or undermine its integrity.

The sense of belonging must be fostered by according equal citizenship to both newcomers and the Canadian-born. This means that all citizens must know that there is a real chance that they can influence the evolution of Canadian society; in a sense, they must feel not only that they belong to Canada, but that Canada belongs to them.

A sense of belonging

In addition to targeted settlement programs, Canada depends on its educational system to impart citizenship values to newcomers as well as the Canadian-born, because if substantive citizenship is our goal, then all Canadians must be "integrated" in a real sense. Labour market ministries also develop programs to assist Canadians to develop an attachment to the labour market while ministries of citizenship and heritage conduct

public education campaigns and support initiatives that foster pride and respect for Canadian institutions and cultural products. Special programs are also in place to encourage new Canadians to vote.

We attempt to create a welcoming attitude toward diversity by teaching the value of diversity in our schools, through public campaigns such as the Federal Government's "Canada: We All Belong" initiative and through diversity promotion and anti-racism campaigns conducted by our sister department of Canadian Heritage.

Our success

Canada remains a cohesive society with low rates of inter-ethnic conflict and low rates of crime. Our long history of integrating immigrants and our recent history of welcoming immigrants without regard to race or ethnicity has been a successful experiment. Canadians are not complacent, however. We recognize that societal stability is ensured only by constant vigilance and sensitivity to the potential fault lines that might divide us. Canada's multicultural experiment remains a work in progress.