

Immigration and its effects on canada



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These days, a trip across the northern border of our country may mean an encounter with a person speaking Chinese or the sight of a Hindu mosque. Immigration to Canada, both legal and illegal, has had major repercussions throughout the country including a change in demographics, socio-economics and the labor force. The country of Canada, which is the second largest in area in the world, is considered to be neutral.

Consequently, it is safe haven for many immigrants from around the world who seek to leave behind the war and economic strife in their homeland and make their home in a country that provides a nationwide system of healthcare, stable economy and diverse culture. According to the Citizen and Immigration division of Canada's government one out of every six citizens in the country was born elsewhere. While this philanthropic bent for helping people of other nations has earned a generous reputation for the country, it is ill-prepared to fully cope with this continually increasing population of foreigners.

Canada offers an open door policy to immigrants but does impose a quota on the number of new citizens it will receive each year. Although they have never before completely met this quota, recent events in other countries have brought an influx of applications to the Immigration office in numbers that are extraordinary and difficult to process. Speculation is now increasing as to how this situation will affect illegal crossings into Canada. As the world continues to change, so, too, will Canada and its population of citizens who reside there both legally and illegally.

Research regarding the effects of immigration on the country currently as well as those anticipated in the future, is the focus of this study. Positive effects include the reversal of population aging and regional strengthening of the economy while adverse effects include the cost of social services and high unemployment. Along with a background on the recent history and policies of immigration in Canada, a look at current statistics, the further effects of illegal immigration and plans for the future will be included.

Immigration: Policies and Background According to the Citizenship and Immigration department of Canada, “ the level of immigration since 1990 has been the highest experienced since before World War I – the only other time in Canada’s history when immigration levels were at or above 200, 000 for any consecutive set of years” . Between 1981 and 1996, 2. 1 million immigrants stormed Canada bringing their hopes of becoming citizens, with an average of 235, 000 coming to the country each year in the early 1990’s.

These immigrants accounted for 17% of the population , which was a higher percentage of immigration in any other OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development) country with the exception of Australia.

According to a study done on the 1996 census in Canada, four out of ten immigrants who arrived on Canadian shores were considered part of the economic class (or those with professional backgrounds and education), another four out of ten came to join family members already residing in Canada (considered family class) and the remainder were refugees.

The majority of them settled in Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal, the country’s three largest metropolitan areas. During the time period studied in

the survey, there was a minute percentage of immigrants who came to Canada from East Asia, but by the year 1996, that number had gone up astronomically, to represent one in every two, or half of all immigrants. This was presumably due to the violence occurring in that part of the world; it was only a few short years after the Gulf War and Operation Desert Storm.

One of the problems with this population influx was the strain on the national resources. Statistics showed that many of them did not have full-time jobs and of those who did, most were in low wage positions in industries such as hospitality, processing, manufacturing and service. The language barrier and general lack of education in Eastern Asian females were cited as two reasons to account for this disparity, when compared to the rest of the population.

One half of them had no income or an annual level of income less than \$10,000 . In the past 10 years, an average of 220, 778 immigrants and refugees have been welcomed into Canada annually. By 2001, 18% of the country's population was composed of immigrants (by contrast, immigrants accounted for only 11% of the population of the U. S.). Economic immigrants that year made up nearly half of all those entering the country.

Between 2000 to 2002, more than 26, 800 government-assisted refugees settled in the country. In 2002, Citizenship and Immigration officials issued over 211, 570 work permits to residents requesting at least temporary citizen status and “ more than 138, 500 visas to economic immigrants and their dependants” . Low Income and high unemployment rates among immigrants continued to be a problem and the same barriers mentioned earlier – language and education – attributed.

According to the Citizenship and Immigration department in 1998, “Canada’s immigration policy is based on the premise that immigration contributes to Canada’s economy and society and that there is a responsibility to manage immigration in the public interest”. Admittedly, the effect on an economy undergoing major structural changes of this open door policy resulted in high unemployment with Canada picking up the tab for healthcare, English as a Second Language education for children of immigrants, and other benefits.

Short term priorities at that time included “ new regulations for the Investor and Skilled Worker programs, a review of the Citizenship Act, war criminals, federal-provincial relations, removals and Settlement Renewal”. At that time, the country was concerned with its “ absorptive capacity” and struggling to determine the actual cost of immigration and whether or not it could afford to continue to welcome citizens from other countries with open arms. Of all classes of immigrants, only those in the family class are integrated into the country at no cost to the Canadian taxpayer.

Economically, it was determined that immigrants provided only a small, but positive, contribution to the country’s financial state of affairs. Demand for housing and durable goods by immigrants also contributed to the economy as far as providing jobs but left a shortage of these commodities for natural citizens. Clearly, the Citizenship and Immigration department recognized in 1998 that reform was needed but the goals focused more on gathering further data and examining economic impact rather than stemming the flow of immigrants.

Currently, the only requirement to gain admittance to Canada and apply for citizenship is to fill out an application based on status as either a professional, an investor, a sponsor for family members, provincial nominee or as a Quebec “selected skill worker”. Canada’s Department of Justice website contains the full text of the current “Immigration and Refugee Act” (issued in 2002), which declares that it is open to accepting any and all refugees, as long as they are not engaged in criminal behavior.

The document plainly indicates that few individuals would ever be denied citizenship based on anything else. For a full listing of the tenets of this Act, please refer to Appendix A. Current Immigration Statistics and Situation

Currently, the immigration office is headed by Diane Finley, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, who was appointed to the post in January of this year after serving two terms in Parliament under a Conservative government. The country is doing well in some aspects, especially economically.

The Canadian dollar, or the “loonie” as it is nicknamed, has seen its value increasing against the American dollar for the past six months, making travel costs more reasonable for residents. Of the estimated current population of 33,390,141, over 60% of this is the result of immigration. Nearly 59 percent of Canada’s 250,000 some immigrants who arrived in the last year are in the skilled worker and business immigrant categories, although only half of them are issued work permits (see Appendix B for a breakdown by area).

Immigrants from all countries, but particularly Mexico and East Asia continue to arrive daily. By early 2007 Canada became home to the largest Tamil

population outside of Sri Lanka. The Citizenship and Immigration office is having a particularly difficult time keeping up with the processing requirements of all these new would-be citizens. Currently, Canada is experiencing a backlog of 850, 000 immigration applications which have gone unprocessed.

While Canada's federal government will allow admittance to a maximum of 265, 000 immigrants next year, even if they halted further applications from entering the system it would leave a deficit of 585, 000 applications waiting to be processed eventually. Canada has no plans, however, to stop accepting new applications of immigrants desiring to relocate. According to news reports, Immigration Minister Diane Finley knows full well the severity of the situation.

In her yearly report to Parliament she states that this logjam has had the effect of compromising many of Canada's social services as well as causing natural citizens to lose confidence in the country's policies: " Looking ahead, actions to control application intake and bring down the inventory are critical" . Despite Finley's predictions, the president of the Canadian Association of Professional Immigration Consultants, Phil Mooney claims that the solution to the problem of application backup is to just start admitting more immigrants.

" We're set up for 265, 000 people and we've got this mass of workers already in the system. All the department can do is whittle away at the edges and hope Parliament increases the number of people who can come in" Should the country's government not agree with this strategy, the

anticipation is that many of those applying for temporary work permits will just not leave the country and continue to live there illegally. Another option for those wishing admittance is by finding a province that will nominate them. This is the most direct way of applying for citizenship and such applications go directly to the front of the queue.

And while some of the applicants will choose not stay in the country illegally, it will cause a labor shortage, which has been one of Canada's worst problems and the reason behind their door open policy of immigration. The problem with such an influx of applications was non-existent several years ago. In 2002 the new Liberal government imposed stricter rules for allowing entry to skilled workers with a 12-month transition program. Consequently, there was a rush to apply under the old rules and nearly half a million people sent in an application for immigration status.

At the end of the transition period, almost 100, 000 applicants were rejected. In response, the rejected applicants launched a class action suit against Ottawa. They eventually won the case with a federal court judge ordering the Canadian government to assess all applications “ under both the old and the new rules” by September of 2005 . The influx of immigrants into Canada has had the effect of replacing the socio-economic factors of the country. Because the immigrants are unevenly distributed, their migration to urban centers such as Montreal and Vancouver have greatly increased the population in these areas.

“ Immigrants have lower proportions in the labour force, lower average income, and higher proportions with low income status” Although Canada

welcomes the increase in a younger populace to maintain its population levels, or even increase them, much of the immigrants coming across its borders are not self-sufficient. The Effects from Illegal Immigrants Illegal immigrants are coming across the border in increasing numbers in part due to the long waits for applications to be approved and in part because of their unwelcome status in the United States.

Illegal immigrants include failed refugee claimants and people with expired visas who have chosen to stay in the country anyway. Of the estimated 200, 000 – 300, 000 who are living in Canada illegally, most are failed refugee claimants (see Appendix C for statistics on total refugees coming into the country annually). Some were visiting tourists who just never left and approximately 8% overstayed their visas. It is estimated that nearly 8% of all immigrants who journey to Canada do so forgoing the legal process. The Canadian-U. S. border has gotten even busier as of late.

In the first six months of 2007, 3, 043 Mexicans had put in applications to the Citizenship and Immigration department. Due to the recent crackdowns by the United States government, many Mexicans are fleeing to Canada under visa-free conditions under the misguided notion that once there they can claim, and receive, asylum. Many are erroneously claiming that they have family in the country in order to be received under the family classification. Canada is unable to deport these people back to the U. S. due to an agreement between the countries which disallows it.

As a result, even more refugee claims are entering the already overworked processing system of the Citizenship and Immigration office . The idea of

Mexican people immigrating to Canada was first vigorously promoted by an organization in Naples, Florida which claimed to help Mexicans who had come to the United States illegally receive refugee status in Canada for a fee. Word spread quickly about this option, largely through the Internet, and illegal Mexicans began flocking in droves to our northern neighbor. Forced to live in shelters and unable to find work, many of them now regret the exodus.

Approximately 8, 700 people are removed from Canada every year. Although the government has vowed to deport all illegal immigrants, the effort and its results, so far, have been largely ineffective. The city of Windsor, in Ontario, has been the hardest hit city recently, with immigrants arriving daily and costing the city \$230, 000 so far, or about 20 percent of its yearly budget for shelters . In September Canada's Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day claimed consequences would be imposed for " any illegal refugees who try to enter Canada without proper documentation" .

Many Canadian citizens are fed up with this system of allowing anyone and everyone access to their country and its benefits and social services. The question they are asking is " Does Canada have a high acceptance/non-deported rate because Canada's system is smarter than that in other countries or is it because our immigration industry has rendered Canada's system impotent? " Many are finding the answer uneasy to swallow and believe that their country's government has been duped by international politics into accepting more immigrants than it can comfortably handle. The Future: Planning and Solutions

Canada, with a growth rate of less than 1% annually, still requires the need for more citizens to replace its shrinking natural population. Fertility rates have not kept up with decline to cover replacement of citizens since the 1970's. However, should immigration rates continue at the same rate as they were in 2003 and net migration yield a 50% increase per year, number of births annually will not outnumber deaths until the year 2025 .

While many in the country worry about immigrants taking away jobs from citizens, Islam suggests in his research that demand (for housing, goods, services, etc.) may outstrip supply and asserts that many of the immigrants who come across Canada's border take lower-paying, nonprofessional positions that natural citizens are unlikely to accept. The strain will also be felt by the growing population of aging baby boomers who will require more services of the public health care system while less people are able to work and pay the costs of this benefit. The recent immigration debate in the United States has exacerbated a situation that was already out of control.

Workers who were illegally residing in the U. S. and cross the northern border to seek refugee status there are effecting Canada's social services by putting a strain on these resources and also increasing the national unemployment rate. One solution proposed is that of grass roots efforts to make a Safe Country of Origin list for Canada, which would not allow people from other countries that are considered to be safe (such as the United States, Mexico, Europe, etc.) ask for refugee status and make asylum claims. Such a list would have disallowed people from many safe countries from making asylum claims and alleviate some of the problem from Mexicans surging across the border.

Canadian citizens never lobbied for the adoption of the country's current liberal policy and consequently Canada continues to see thousands of people coming from countries that do not persecute their citizens for political beliefs seeking asylum in Canada . The first effect to be addressed by future policy will be shifting the immigration policy's emphasis from economic to social objectives will necessitate better cooperation between different levels of government whose responsibilities address the need for community, education, housing, and social support systems.

Secondly, immigration policy must address other issues that will benefit the country overall by more accurately setting the ideal number of immigrants to be allowed into Canada and revamping the selection criteria for those immigrants they choose to target for admittance. A last goal for future immigration policy would involve readjusting the process of settling and adjusting recent immigrants into society while “ promoting the effective integration of permanent immigrants into the Canadian labour market and society” .

These issues will involve the participation of all federal departments, not just Citizenship and Immigration Canada in addition to mutual arrangements with government at the provincial and municipal levels. Conclusion Canada's immigration policies have been the subject of study in many other nations due to its liberal admittance procedures. While natural citizens often decry the addition of foreigners, it has been shown that the country actually needs to maintain a steady input just to keep its population levels even and replace a rapidly deteriorating work force.

The next year or so will prove to be a critical time period as the United States finally legislates a reasonable plan to deal with its own immigration issues.

Should Canada refuse to change its policies, the problems of determining where the money to pay for social services will come from and continued unemployment woes will plague the country in a greater degree. With a new government and a new Minister of Immigration and Citizenship in place, perhaps a much-needed overhaul of the system will occur.