

Low-income earnings among immigrants

Percentage of immigrant families to Canada with an annual gross income below \$26,800 (the adjusted low-income threshold for a family of four), broken down by region of origin.

In Canada 10 years or less

In Canada one year

North America					
2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	
18.1	15.3	15.4	16.3	15.8	
13.7	13.1	14.5	15.9	11.6	

Europe (excluding Eastern Europe)					
2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	
20.8	19.2	20.3	20.5	19.6	
21.7	22.5	25.4	24.8	21.4	

Eastern Europe					
2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	
23.3	22.5	23.4	24.4	23.4	
36.1	38.1	38.3	39.6	38.8	

Caribbean, South and Central America					
2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	
28.0	26.3	27.2	28.1	27.5	
29.0	31.7	33.5	37.2	35.8	

East Asia					
2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	
44.4	42.5	44.9	45.3	44.1	
47.6	46.6	56.1	59.7	59.9	

Africa					
2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	
38.8	37.3	39.1	39.7	37.3	
46.3	45.6	48.9	50.6	47.8	

South Asia					
2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	
33.0	31.6	32.8	33.9	31.7	
36.4	35.8	39.6	39.7	35.9	

Source: Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Administrative Database and Longitudinal Immigration Database

VANCOUVER SUN

LANGUAGE, COMPETITION FORM STUMBLING BLOCKS

BY MICHAEL SCOTT
VANCOUVER SUN

Language difficulties and more competition from a better-educated Canadian workforce may be the real reason new immigrants to Canada — even those who are highly educated — are having a harder time becoming established.

According to a new federal study released Tuesday, the family incomes of new immigrants are deteriorating, despite the fact that immigrants are arriving with higher levels of education than ever before.

The study, the first to examine the income levels of new immigrants since 2000, reports that during their first full year in Canada, immigrants are at least three times more likely to have a low income than their Canadian-born neighbours, worse than at any time during the 1990s.

The study suggests that an economic downturn in the information technology sector caught many immigrants who had come to Canada with those skills, but lead author Garnett Picot says other factors must also be considered, including historic high levels of education in the Canadian population and more immigrants arriving without fluency in either English or French.

"Educational attainment among the Canadian population, especially women, has just skyrocketed," said Picot, who is director-general of the social and economic studies branch of Statistics Canada. "Since about 1980, and through the '80s and

'90s, the number of women with university degrees, in the labour market, has basically quadrupled. If you look at the number of women in 2000 in the labour market with a university degree, there are four for every one that existed in 1980.

"We've done a very, very good job of producing a very highly educated labour market.

"So the educational attainment of the population in the labour force, aside from immigrants, has been rising incredibly rapidly — even though the educational attainment of immigrants is rising it's also rising among people born in Canada. So the immigrant has to compete with those people, and that's another factor."

Picot pointed out that while immigrants are better educated, he education has not necessarily included fluency in English or French.

"Certainly we see that recent immigrants are highly skilled," Picot said.

"This is not new. We've known this for some time. The immigration system in '93 changed its selection system to try to attract more highly educated immigrants, and it was very successful.

"The proportion of entering immigrants who have a university degree went from about 17 per cent in 1992 to about 45 per cent by 2004.

"Now, a highly educated immigrant still does better than a less-educated immigrant — there's still an advantage to them to having a university degree. But it hasn't significantly affected the overall outcomes.

In spite of this shift toward a more highly educated immigrant and in spite of the fact that they do better than their less educated counterparts, we haven't seen an improvement in outcomes overall, including among Asians."

While Picot's study, co-authored with Feng Hou and Simon Coulombe, does not break out regional figures, it does show that immigrants from East Asia — many of whom do settle on the West Coast — are suffering the worst. In 2004, close to half the East Asian immigrants who had been in Canada for less than 10 years were struggling with low incomes, compared to just over 13 per cent in the general population. If you look at East Asian newcomers in their first year in Canada, the income level is even worse, with almost two-thirds struggling in poverty.

Picot is hard pressed to explain why this is occurring, since Canada is still pinched for skilled workers. "That's an issue that not many researchers have looked at yet," he said. "It would be interesting to see more people focusing on that question. But we really know very little about that."

Picot's report was a low-income study, not an earnings study, but he said it flags the gap between an entering immigrant and his or her Canadian-born counterpart. If immigrants are able to land a decent job in their first year in Canada, they stand an excellent chance of escaping years of low income, Picot said. But why there is so much difficulty to start out well must be

the direction of future study, he added.

Many observers feel that a lack of recognition of foreign credentials is another root cause of income woes for educated and skilled immigrants.

"The data clearly show the failure to find the first job can trap people into successive years of underemployment," Vancouver immigration lawyer Richard Kurland told *CanWest News Service*.

Kurland proposed developing an employer-driven system through which prospective immigrants such as Polly Nahar would get accreditation approved in advance of their arrival in Canada.

He also advocates allowing more specialized foreign workers into Canada on work permits and then making it easier for them to convert that permit to permanent resident status. "Let the private sector manage the accreditation process with strong government oversight," Kurland said.

Until the problem is solved, skilled immigrants are going to continue to suffer. "They are going to bleed their savings, and it's a cascading, horrible train ride to economic devastation," Kurland said.

msscott@png.canwest.com
With CanWest News Service

THE VANCOUVER SUN DIGITAL

You can now listen to every Vancouver Sun story on our new digital edition. Free to full-week print subscribers or register for a seven-day free trial. www.vancouversun.com/digital.