

Foreign-Born Population in Canada at a 75 Year High

Cicnews.com

By David Cohen

December 17, 2007

The most recent Statistics Canada report focuses on “immigration, citizenship, language, mobility and migration” in Canada, based on the 2006 census. It paints a picture of an increasingly diverse Canadian society and highlights the important contribution of immigrants to Canada’s growth and development.

Canada’s foreign-born population grew four times as fast as the Canadian born population over the past five years, now accounting for one out of every five Canadian residents. Since the last census in 2001, over 1.11 million immigrants have settled in Canada, an increase of 13.6 per cent. Not in 75 years has the foreign-born population been so high.

In 2006, nearly two thirds of these newcomers were from Asia and the Middle East, marking the first year that the foreign-born population from Asia and the Middle East exceeded that from Europe. European-born immigrants, who made up the bulk of immigrants 35 years ago, accounted for only 16 per cent in 2006.

The change in major source countries has had a significant impact on the makeup of first languages (mother tongues) spoken in Canada. In 2006, Canadians spoke 200 languages and four out of five newcomers had a mother tongue that was neither English nor French. For the first time in Canadian history, allophones (people whose first language is neither of Canada’s official languages) made up 20 per cent of the Canadian population. After English and French, the Chinese languages were the most widely used, having grown by 19 per cent since the 2001 census. In fourth and fifth places were Italian and German. The number of Canadians who spoke Punjabi, the sixth most common mother tongue, grew by 34 per cent since 2001. Rounding out the top ten were Spanish, Arabic, Tagalog, and Portuguese.

These diverse languages and cultural backgrounds are most apparent in Canada’s three largest urban areas: Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal. More than two thirds of newcomers head to one of these cities upon landing in Canada. In the Toronto area, nearly one of every two people is foreign-born. Nevertheless, a growing proportion of new immigrants are settling in smaller urban areas such as Calgary, Winnipeg, Ottawa-Gatineau, Edmonton, Hamilton, and London. These cities are working to become more attractive immigration destinations by investing in immigrant services and developing social networks and economic diversity - the main attractions of the larger cities.

Regardless of where new immigrants came from, separate Statistics Canada surveys have found that Canada was the only choice for 98 per cent of them. The largest proportion said they came to Canada for the quality of life and to improve the future for their family.

Recent Statistics Canada reports maintain that by 2030, Canada will be completely dependent on immigration for population growth.