

Globe editorial

These immigration targets are sensible

From Thursday's Globe and Mail

Last year, Canada welcomed 280,636 immigrants to the country. That is the highest level in 57 years, surpassing Ottawa's target.

However, this is not enough to satisfy critics of the Conservatives, who have labelled the party "immigrant-unfriendly" – a harsh and unfair judgment in a country where one in six people was born elsewhere.

In fact, Ottawa's immigration target for 2011 is the same as it was last year: 240,000 to 265,000.

"Canada's post-recession economy demands a high level of economic immigration," said Immigration Minister Jason Kenney. "While other Western countries cut back on immigration during the recession, our government kept legal immigration levels high."

True, the estimated number of visas for grandparents and parents of Canadian residents has dropped to 11,200 (compared with 16,800 last year), and the target for skilled workers has dipped, while targets for provincially-nominated immigrants and business immigrants have risen.

But it is appropriate for Ottawa to adjust annual immigration targets in different categories, according to the country's needs.

While family reunification is an important part of Canada's immigration program, it is not the only goal. Immigrants must also contribute to economic growth.

Canada has one of the world's most generous family reunification programs, and allows permanent residents to sponsor parents and grandparents. Already, about 60 per cent of Canada's overall newcomers are either family-class, or spouses and dependants of economic immigrants.

The government began capping the number of parents and grandparents in 2004, once policy-makers realized they are unlikely to work, and more likely to draw on social support programs. "As Canada faces a growing aging population crunch, adding more elderly individuals to an already overtaxed system puts more pressure on it," notes Sergio Karas, an immigration lawyer.

Annual targets for newcomers are not set in stone. Rather, they allow Ottawa to manage a complicated program. Maintaining historically high levels of immigration, while trimming targets in some categories, does not make the government anti-immigrant.
