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Canada not welcoming to immigrants, study finds

Program cutbacks slow integration

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Canada is undermining the integration of immigrants and contributing to their social isolation despite the fact that the country relies on immigration for population and labour market growth, says a new report obtained by The Globe and Mail.

The latest waves of newcomers are better educated than their predecessors, but they have had a more difficult time obtaining employment, reuniting with their families and getting language training, proper housing and even health services.

Some of the more than three dozen immigrants interviewed said they are worse off than they were in their homelands, according to the report, which was undertaken on behalf of Community Foundations Canada and the Law Commission of Canada.

"I interviewed one woman from Bulgaria whose husband is now back in Bulgaria sending money to support the family here. To waste human resources like this is a crime," says Sarah Wayland, author of *Unsettled: Legal and Policy Barriers for Newcomers to Canada*, which will be released tomorrow. "To fail at social inclusion also has costs in terms of ethnic and race relations, human rights, the settlement process and mental health."

Every year, between 230,000 and 260,000 immigrants come to Canada. The RBC Financial Group recently found that immigrants who have arrived during the past two decades have had a harder time catching up to their Canadian-born counterparts, a trend attributed in part to cutbacks in settlement programs and difficulty finding work.

One in six young, highly educated male immigrants leaves Canada within a year due to the job market, a 2006 Statistics Canada study shows. "That is quite shocking. Canada should be trying to keep those people," says Ms. Wayland.

Ottawa and the provinces have acknowledged the difficulty immigrants face getting their foreign credentials recognized and have created initiatives to overcome these barriers. The federal Conservatives' first budget called for the creation of an agency to help foreign professionals integrate into the work force. The Ontario government has announced a \$14-million investment in two dozen programs to help foreign-trained professionals and tradespeople upgrade their skills and training.

However, these efforts fail to address other obstacles. The selection system can be onerous, forcing many immigrants to wait a long time for family reunification. The average time to bring in parents and grandparents has increased to as much as a decade, and the federal government is facing a lawsuit that accuses it of discriminating against certain kinds of applicants and causing unacceptable delays.

Other difficulties include lack of access to language classes, according to Faye Wightman, CEO of the Vancouver Foundation, which supports programs for immigrants. Federal funds to teach English and French as second languages have not increased since 1996, and newcomers say the

classes are not sophisticated enough.

The study's conclusions reflect other research that has found a lack of civic engagement among second-generation immigrants. "You cannot assume people are becoming more integrated, the longer they're here," says Ms. Wayland. "The children of immigrants who grow up here may have a more jaded outlook. Many have experienced discrimination in school or just feel disengaged."

Ms. Wightman says her foundation funds a successful leadership training program for immigrant youths, who then train others. "It was so popular that 90 youth applied for 18 available spaces," she says. "We need more of this."

The study outlines several other recommendations to assist newcomers including the following:

Reduce processing times for immigration and family sponsorships;

Build capacity of educators to meet language needs of immigrant children and youth;

Provide interpreters in hospitals and schools;

Improve access to regulated professions.

It also says prospective immigrants should be given more accurate information about the Canadian job market.

Canada's selection criteria for skilled workers could also be adjusted. Currently, the system favours highly educated white-collar workers, even though blue-collar workers are needed.

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