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THE VANCOUVER SUN

Expand provincial immigrant nominee program: TD economist

By Heather Yundt, Postmedia News February 7, 2012



**New Canadians take the citizenship oath.
An economist says an expansion of the
provincial immigration nominee program
could improve the incomes of newcomers.**

OTTAWA — The income and employment gaps between newcomers and native-born Canadians are growing, but expanding the provincial nominee program could change this, a top TD economist argues.

TD chief economist Craig Alexander said the provincial nominee program, which allows potential immigrants to apply directly through a province when looking to immigrate to Canada, would help attract more marketable candidates.

Provinces, except Quebec, accept immigrants' applications which are then fast-tracked through the Citizenship and Immigration Department. The use of the program varies from province to province. Quebec handles its own immigration.

Alexander said the income and employment gaps show how poorly Canada is integrating newcomers into the economy. **In January, the unemployment rate for recent immigrants was 12.8 per cent, compared with 8.2 per cent for all immigrants and 5.6 per cent for Canadian-born workers, according to the Toronto Immigrant Employment Data Initiative.** Census data show recent immigrants earn, on average, slightly more than half the average earnings of native-born workers, despite often having higher education.

Alexander said immigrants who arrived in the late 1970s and early 1980s initially would earn about 80 or 85 cents to the dollar earned by a Canadian-born individual and eventually would close that gap. The disparity, he said, grew for immigrants arriving between 2000 and 2005 — who earn only about 62 cents to the dollar earned by a Canadian-born employee, with "virtually no chance of the gap closing within the person's lifetime."

Despite this gap, Alexander said most immigrants are happy with their decision to come to Canada.

"They'll tell you that they came to give a better life for their kids, and of course that's not the ideal outcome," he said. "The ideal outcome is to provide not only a higher standard of living for the children, but also provide a better outcome for the parent, as well."

One way to improve this outcome would be to expand the provincial nominee program, Alexander said, as the provincial programs result in better employment numbers.

"At the end of the day, I think the provinces know what their labour markets need best."

Still, Alexander said Canada is better than most countries at integrating immigrants into the economy.

"Other nations are having the same sorts of struggles as Canada in terms of integrating newcomers," he said. "In some cases, other countries are actually looking at Canada as a model."

"In relative terms, we're doing quite well. In absolute terms, we're not doing so well."

Alexander suggested this gap also could be decreased by putting more weight on the language skills of immigrants and improving settlement services.

"We absolutely need newcomers . . . businesses desperately need immigrants, but they also need immigrants with the right skills."

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