

# Canada's New Immigration Policies: Fixing the Problems or Creating New Ones?

IRPP/Maytree  
September 2008  
Naomi Alboim

# Overview of presentation

- ◆ Recent policy changes
- ◆ Context
- ◆ Options for intervention
- ◆ Challenges of new directions
- ◆ Recommendations

# Recent policy changes

- ◆ Increased focus on short term labour market needs at expense of longer term nation building
- ◆ Greater role of provinces in selection without a national framework
- ◆ Increased numbers of temporary workers, many at low end, at expense of permanent residents
- ◆ Introduction of Canadian Experience Class at expense of overseas applicants in inventory
- ◆ Increased Ministerial discretion

The cumulative impact of the changes is a fundamental shift in Canadian immigration policy in the absence of evaluation or public debate.

# Canadian context

- ◆ Immigration as means to end: one tool in kit
- ◆ Economic objectives paramount: short term/long term
- ◆ Population realities: net growth vs. dependency ratio
- ◆ Labour market realities: labour and skill shortages
- ◆ International competition for skilled workers
- ◆ Immigration to build nation, community and labour force
- ◆ Selecting citizens, not just workers

# Who's coming?

- ◆ Number of permanent residents down (236,758) in all categories despite huge inventory and labour/demographic needs
- ◆ Only 17% of immigrants (41,253) assessed on skilled worker points system (Skilled Worker Principal Applicants)
- ◆ Within economic class only Provincial Nominee Program going up
- ◆ While 47% still going to Ontario, all provinces gaining at expense of Ontario and BC

# ...Who's coming?

- ◆ Almost 71% from Asia/Pacific and Africa/Middle East
- ◆ More educated than Canadian born (92% of SWPA have some Post Secondary Education)
- ◆ Largest group 25-44 years of age, but fewer 0-14, and increased numbers of 45-64 and 65+
- ◆ 67% have some official language capacity (SWPA 89%)

# How are recent immigrants doing?

- ◆ Worse than previous cohorts, longer to catch up
- ◆ More unemployed than Canadian born, but most working
- ◆ More underemployed than Canadian born
- ◆ More in part time/part year employment than Canadian born
- ◆ More in low paying jobs than Canadian born
- ◆ More in low income than previous cohorts
- ◆ More than twice the incidence of low income relative to Canadian born

# Possible causes

- ◆ Changing characteristics of immigrants (language, culture, education, country)
- ◆ Discounting of credentials and experience
- ◆ Increased competition with educated Canadian born and other “new entrants”
- ◆ Discrimination
- ◆ Business cycle “scarring”, economic restructuring
- ◆ Lack of alignment between selection criteria and labour market needs

Different possible policy interventions for each

# Preliminary research findings

- ◆ Immigrants not integrating economically as well as expected given education levels
  - 60% of recent immigrants not in jobs using their experience and education
- ◆ Some classes doing better than others
  - Skilled Worker Principal Applicants do better than other classes. Human capital matters.
  - After SWPAs, refugees do better than other economic categories. Services matter.
  - Family class members do better than other economic categories, particularly in their first year. Social capital matters.
- ◆ Language and communications matter most

# ...Preliminary Research Findings

- ◆ Refugees and Family Class members stay in Canada more than Economic Class (40% of economic class leave)
- ◆ If low income avoided in first year, likelihood only 10% or less in subsequent years
- ◆ 34-41% exited low income after one year; approx one third still in low income after 3 years (two thirds not in low income)
- ◆ Services can shape economic integration: early interventions, language, social networks, top-ups reverse discounting

# Options for Intervention

- ◆ Focus on the immigrant
  - Levels/mix/source countries
  - Selection criteria (language, age, education, credentials, occupation)
  
- ◆ Focus on programs and services
  - Bridge gap faced by immigrant before and after arrival
  - Information, qualification assessment, language and bridge training, mentorships, work experience programs, loans

## ◆ Focus on systems and attitudes of host society and institutions

- Bridge gap faced by the institutions:  
awareness/recognition of skills, cross-cultural/anti-racism training, supports, incentives, legislation
- Regulatory bodies, employers, schools, universities, community colleges, community agencies
- Multi-stakeholder vehicles
- Intergovernmental collaboration

Governments have invested in programs and systems, but instead of evaluating impact or fixing SWPA criteria.....

## ◆ Recent policy changes

- Reduce skilled worker permanent admissions in favour of provincial nominees and temporary entrants
- Focus almost exclusively on short term labour market needs (Ministerial instructions)
- Devolve responsibilities to provinces, educational institutions, and employers

# Challenges of New Directions

# Provincial nominee program (provinces)

- ◆ Federal-Provincial Agreements in absence of national framework
- ◆ Patchwork of criteria, costs, processes, downloading to provinces
- ◆ Respond to regional needs but mobility rights guaranteed
- ◆ Provide priority processing but no caps and growing significantly (17,095 in 2007)
- ◆ Testing ground for new approaches but no evaluation

# International students (PSE institutions)

## ◆ Context

- 74,009 in 2007 ( 10% increase over 2005)
- Provides workforce on and off campus; during and after graduation
- Pool of potential immigrants. Credential, language, integration costs borne by students and PSE institutions

## ◆ Concerns with Canadian Experience Class:

- May attract non-students
- Could facilitate brain drain
- Impact on PSE institutions and domestic students
- Impact on skilled worker applicants

# Temporary foreign workers (employers)

- ◆ Numbers increasing
  - 165,198 in 2007 (increase of 19% over 2006)
  - Newfoundland, Alberta, BC, and Territories received more TFWs than immigrants in 2007
- ◆ Employer driven
  - No caps or targets tabled in Parliament
  - Priority processing, new offices, reduced employer requirements to get approval, 2 year work permits
  - Used strategically, effective labour market tool at high end
  - Employers using TFWs to fill permanent vacancies more quickly than with Skilled Workers
  - Increasing use of TFWs to fill low-skilled and unskilled jobs

# ...Temporary foreign workers

## ◆ Concerns

- Used inappropriately could discourage investment in training, hiring of under or unemployed permanent residents and citizens, could suppress wages
- Ineligibility for services, mobility restrictions, dependency on employer, lack of enforcement create vulnerabilities at low end
- Canadian Experience Class: transition to permanent residence only at high end
- Undocumented underclass at low end if don't leave; employer concerns if do

# Recommendations

## Levels and mix

1. Sustain balanced mix and levels for permanent immigrants (Economic, Family and Refugee).

## Skilled worker program

2. Evaluate and strengthen the skilled worker program by changing selection criteria
  - language test, age, family, demand occupations
3. Create a searchable skilled worker applicant inventory and expedite applicants with job offers or in demand occupations.

# ...Recommendations

## Provincial nominee program

4. Evaluate the provincial nominee programs and work with the provinces to create a common framework.

## Canadian experience class

5. Increase levels and resources to accommodate the Canadian Experience Class. Define roles and responsibilities of employers and post-secondary institutions. Monitor implementation.

# ...Recommendations

## Family class

6. Expand the family class to include working age siblings (Perhaps only in areas of labour shortage).

## Refugee class

7. Expand the refugee class with a refreshed private sponsorship program.

# ...Recommendations

## Temporary foreign workers

8. Require employers to review inventories of persons in Canada and applying from abroad before requesting approval for skilled temporary workers.
9. Restrict the use of the program at the low end and offer protections and services to prevent exploitation.
10. Identify separate targets and resources for permanent residents and temporary workers in annual plans tabled in Parliament.

# ...Recommendations

## Integration

11. Evaluate labour market programs and make successful interventions available across Canada
  - overseas orientation, bridging programs, internships, mentorships, higher language/communication training
12. Focus beyond the short term labour market needs. Create opportunities for participation of first and second generation immigrants and their families.
  - language, recreation, cultural, and social programs targeted at youth, women and elderly

# Conclusion

- ◆ The cumulative impact of changes is potentially enormous
- ◆ In the absence of evaluation, good policy development and consultation, we may be creating worse problems, rather than fixing the ones we currently face
- ◆ Need for public debate and overall vision
- ◆ The decisions we make today reflect our values and will determine who we become tomorrow