



Why Canada Is Putting Out the Welcome Mat for Immigrants

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Editor's Note: This article is part of an ongoing series

(<https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/series/26/immigration-and-integration-policy>) on immigration and integration policy around the world.



A protest against white supremacist groups in Toronto, Aug. 11, 2018 (Sipa photo via AP Images).

In its annual report

(<https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/ircc/migration/ircc/english/pdf/pub/annual-report-2018.pdf>) to Parliament on immigration, Canada's government laid out a three-year plan to welcome more than 1 million immigrants to the country over the next three years. The target of 350,000 immigrants in 2021 represents almost 1 percent of the Canadian population. The report, released in late November, made headlines (<https://www.cbcnews.com/2019/01/canadas-goal-of-1-million-new-permanent-residents-turning-heads-worldwide-0111743.html>) last week, in part because it comes at a time when anti-immigrant sentiment is leading many other countries to close their borders and otherwise limit immigration. In an email interview with WPR, Kareem El-Assal, a senior research associate and senior network manager for immigration at the Conference Board of Canada, and Sara Rose Taylor, a research associate for immigration at the Conference Board of Canada, discuss the reasons behind Canada's pro-immigration policies, and its approach to integrating immigrants once they enter the country.

World Politics Review: What is the rationale for welcoming so many immigrants to Canada?

Kareem El-Assal and Sara Rose Taylor: For the simple reason that immigrants are crucial to Canada's prosperity. There are two ways to grow an economy: by adding more workers and using those workers more productively. Because Canada has one of the world's lowest birth rates and an aging population, it needs immigrants to contribute to economic activity. Otherwise, as the Conference Board of Canada's research shows, the country's labor force will shrink and economic growth will stagnate. In addition, Canada faces a large wave of retirements from the baby-boom generation over the next decade. So it will need immigrants to strengthen the tax base to help fund cherished social programs such as universal health care, which is only becoming more expensive as Canada's senior population grows.

Our research shows that Canada will require even more immigrants over the next two decades to compensate for the fact that deaths will eventually exceed births by the early 2030s. We argue that increasing the immigration rate to 1 percent of the population by the early 2030s—up from 0.8 percent today, meaning an increase of more than 100,000 newcomers—will help support modest growth of the labor force and the economy. Evaluating measures to boost Canada's birth rate is an option, but the evidence in Canada and elsewhere shows that it is difficult to achieve this objective given the societal factors that have caused lower birth rates across most Western economies. This is why immigration, in conjunction with tapping into Canadian talent and boosting productivity, will be vital to maintaining Canada's positive economic trajectory.

WPR: Canada has a global reputation as a country that welcomes immigrants, but does that reputation match reality? What is the extent of discriminatory and anti-immigrant attitudes among Canadians?

EI-Assal and Rose Taylor: The majority of Canadians are supportive of immigration. The results from a fall 2018 survey by the Environics Institute, a polling firm, show that 76 percent of Canadians believe that immigration has a positive impact on the economy. Canadians expressed similar views even during the major recession of 2008-2009. Environics also notes that in comparison with other countries, Canadians are among the most accepting of immigrants. Discriminatory and anti-immigrant attitudes do exist in Canada, as they do elsewhere; OECD survey data show that 12 percent of immigrants experienced some form of discrimination in Canada in the past five years. However, this rate has declined over the past decade.

Public support for immigration in Canada is a function of three factors. First, Canada was built on accommodation, and Canadians have learned since World War II to become even more accommodating of newcomers from all corners of the globe.

Second, Canada's relative geographic isolation from the rest of the world enables it to exercise great control over who it welcomes—a luxury that its peer countries do not always have. This control is vital to maintaining high levels of public support, as it demonstrates that Canada welcomes newcomers in an orderly and rules-based manner that protects the economic, security and health interests of Canadians.

Third, Canada's policies have played a formative role in building public confidence. It was the first country in the world to assess newcomers through an objective and competitive points system in 1967. This has helped improve the odds that an immigrant will integrate economically and socially. In addition, Canada provides various means of support for settlement and integration—such as language training and mentorship to help find a job—so that newcomers can contribute to the country quickly.

WPR: Have immigrants and asylum-seekers generally been able to smoothly integrate into Canada? How might the government improve on current integration policies?

El-Assal and Rose Taylor: Several indicators show that immigrants smoothly integrate into Canadian society. Surveys conducted by Statistics Canada, a government agency, have found that over 90 percent of immigrants feel a sense of belonging in Canada. In addition, Canada has one of the world's highest citizenship acquisition rates at 85 percent, with immigrants voting at approximately the same rate as Canadian-born citizens.

From an economic integration perspective, however, there is room for improvement. According to our research, immigrants make up about 75 percent of Canadians whose qualifications and skills are undervalued by the labor market. We estimate that immigrants would gain between \$10.1 billion and \$12.7 billion more in annual income if they worked in jobs commensurate with their skills.

Canada has made tremendous efforts over the past two decades alone to improve labor market integration. These efforts include introducing a more competitive online application process whereby the highest-scoring applicants are invited to immigrate. Employers are playing a larger role in selecting immigrants. Canada's provinces are more engaged in the immigration system than ever before, which is beneficial because they are able to select immigrants that meet their local labor market needs. The country is also welcoming more international students and helping them stay in Canada after their studies—research indicates they have very positive integration outcomes. As mentioned, Canada also offers very comprehensive support for settlement and integration, with the federal government having quadrupled its spending in this area over the past 20 years. These efforts appear to be bearing fruit, as recent Statistics Canada data show that newcomers are more active in the labor market than previous cohorts.

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