

CANADA'S IMMIGRATION SCORE: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A WIN-WIN

Ratna Omidvar

How do the hundreds of thousands of immigrants who arrive each year in Canada fare in the immigration process? The president of Maytree, Ratna Omidvar, examines the extent to which our immigration policy succeeds in the short, medium and long terms for both Canada and the immigrants, using a number of economic, social and political indicators. She finds that Canada is doing well in the medium and long terms, but must do better in the short term. "Canada's score on this front is abysmal," she says, "We make several recommendations to increase the benefits of immigration in the first few years of arrival, notably by strengthening the federal Skilled Worker Program."

Comment se portent les centaines de milliers d'immigrants qui s'installent chaque année au Canada une fois franchies les étapes du processus d'immigration? Ratna Omidvar, présidente de Maytree, analyse l'efficacité à court, à moyen et à long terme de la politique d'immigration canadienne du point de vue du Canada et des immigrants eux-mêmes. À l'aide d'indicateurs économiques, politiques et sociaux, elle conclut que le pays fait bonne figure à moyen et à long terme mais qu'il doit absolument améliorer ses résultats à court terme. Elle formule plusieurs recommandations visant à multiplier les avantages de l'immigration dès la première année d'installation, notamment le renforcement du Programme fédéral des travailleurs qualifiés.



I applied for immigration to Canada in June and arrived in Canada with my family in June 1980. We were eager to assimilate our values to our new country, but instead we had to adjust ourselves. Canada was in a recession — and we were in survival jobs.

Despite our struggles, after two years, we bought a house; after five we became citizens; and after ten years we sponsored my brother and his family to come to Canada. Gradually it became more involved in local political and civil society organizations.

Today, both my daughters are university graduates and in a career; the other works in market research. My nephew serves in the Canadian Armed Forces.

One story is not unusual. Hundreds of this story could be told by the hundreds of thousands of immigrants who arrive in Canada each year. The question I sometimes pose to myself is, how did my country fare in the economic balance sheet of Omidvar versus Canada? (It perhaps does magnificently.) How do Canada and the hundreds of thousands of immigrants who arrive each year fare as a result of the immigration process?

While there is no scoreboard for such things, if there were I suspect points would be given for integration indicators over the short, medium and long terms.

While the first few years in Canada, there is no doubt about its attachment to the labour market is problematic. It does not occur to Canada or the immigrant until if the immigrant is unemployed or underemployed. The Conference Board of Canada has found that if all immigrants' foreign training and learning credentials were recognized, between \$1.4 billion and \$2 billion could be added to the Canadian economy every year.

In the short term, we can maximize immigration success by existing earnings, labour market attachment and the number of people working in a field commensurate with their training and experience.

Unfortunately, Canada's score on this front is abysmal. Despite the fact that recent immigrants are more highly educated than previous cohorts and than the Canadians themselves, they have lower wages and more difficulty entering the labour market. The number of new immigrants to Canada with bachelor's degrees is equivalent to