

Quality of Life in Canadian Communities: Immigration and Diversity in Canadian Cities and Communities

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The report considers the differences experienced by non-immigrants, established immigrants, and recent immigrants during the period of 2001-2006. It identifies the trends and issues faced by the 24 QOLRS – Quality of Life Reporting System – communities, which are Canada's 24 largest communities. Overall, the study finds that immigration is vital to the local economies of municipalities but that municipal governments are faced with the challenge of attracting and retaining the most qualified and skilled immigrants.

Immigration and Settlement Patterns

- the 24 QOLRS communities received the majority of immigrants between 2001-2006, and accounted for 80% of population growth in these communities
- population growth in the 24 QOLRS communities is dependent on immigration due to low fertility rates and significant out-migration of certain groups
- while the first point of entry for new immigrants is larger city centres, many are moving to the suburbs and smaller municipalities; this is especially true of the economic class
- municipalities are being forced to keep up with the growing demands such as settlement services and affordable housing

Diverse and Welcoming Communities

- the 24 QOLRS communities are five times more culturally and ethnically diverse and the proportion of the total population of the 24 QOLRS communities born outside Canada is significantly higher than the rest of Canada
- a total of 16 per cent of the QOLRS population reported speaking a language other than English or French at home

Employment and Labour Force Integration

- Canada's largest municipalities can expect to see long-term declines in their labour force population
- the proportion of recent immigrant families with young children is higher than the rest of Canada suggesting a need for recreation, health, and education services
- these immigrant children could improve the labour force population
- language proficiency in French or English is a barrier to employment for recent immigrants
- although recent immigrants have higher educational attainment than the Canadian-born population, they have a higher unemployment rate and lower labour force participation; these trends decrease significantly the longer an immigrant is in Canada
- recent immigrants are more likely to work in lower-earning occupations

Basic Needs of Recent Immigrants

- immigrants living in the 24 QOLRS communities are more likely to rely on social assistance for income
- both recent and established immigrants are likely to be renters of housing and find it challenging to find affordable housing in the 24 QOLRS communities, heightening their risk of homelessness

- immigrants are at risk of obesity and physical inactivity after being in Canada a few years

Catching up and Closing the Gap

- recent immigrants need time to 'catch up' to non-immigrants
- unemployment rates for recent immigrants fall within the first five years after arrival
- average incomes increased in 2001-2006 but the growth in average income of recent immigrants was either stagnant or declined
- recent immigrants are more likely to have low incomes than the rest of Canada
- rates of home ownership for all immigrants was substantially higher in the rest of Canada than in the 24 QOLRS communities
- recent and established immigrants face more home ownership affordability challenges than non-immigrants

Key Stats:

*Immigrant low incomes: "Recent immigrant households with low incomes accounted for 43 per cent of all persons living in recent immigrant households in 2006, nearly three times the rate of non-immigrant households" (p. iv).

*Population growth: "Immigration between 2001 and 2006 accounted for more than 80 per cent of total population growth in the 24 QOLRS communities" (p. 2).

*Language barriers: "In 2006, just over nine per cent of recent immigrants to QOLRS communities were proficient in neither English nor French" (p. 19).

*Recognition of education and training: "Despite this relatively high level of educational attainment, the unemployment rate among university-trained recent immigrants aged 25 to 54 in QOLRS communities was four times greater than that of their non-immigrant counterparts" (p. 21).

*Housing affordability challenges: "While close to 40 per cent of non-immigrant renter households were spending more than 30 per cent of their income on shelter in 2006, this proportion was closer to 50 per cent among recent immigrant households, with more established immigrants falling somewhere in between" (p. 29).

*Immigrant low incomes: "Whereas average incomes for recent immigrants were just under 60 per cent of non-immigrant incomes in 2001, this number had fallen to 51 per cent by 2006. Foreign-born residents also saw a relative deterioration in their incomes, which were close to 90 per cent of non-immigrant incomes in 2001 but had fallen to 82 per cent by 2006. This relative decline for both recent immigrants and foreign-born Canadians was felt in 20 of the 24 QOLRS communities" (p. 41).

*Immigrant low incomes: "Recent immigrant households with low incomes accounted for 43 per cent of all persons living in recent immigrant households in 2006, nearly three times the proportion in non-immigrant households; the proportion of established immigrant households with low incomes (19 per cent) was substantially lower than that of recent immigrants, though still higher than that of non-immigrant households" (p. 42).