

L'Intégration des immigrés sur le marché du travail à Montréal : politiques et enjeux

Marie-Thérèse Chicha (Université de Montréal) and Éric Charest (Université de Montréal)

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Written by Jean-Simon Farrah (Research Assistant, IRPP)

In this study on the situation of immigrants in Montreal, Marie-Thérèse Chicha and Éric Charest review the policies adopted to promote the integration of newcomers into the labour market in Quebec's largest city. Using existing data, the authors find that for immigrants integrating into Quebec is fairly problematic, especially for visible minorities. The high unemployment rates, skill downgrading and the discrimination experienced by many visible minorities contrasts with the fact that most immigrants to Quebec are selected according to their professional qualifications and their adaptability. Of the 26,000 economic immigrants settling in Quebec each year, only 2,000 have access to labour market integration programs that are considered effective.

Highlights

- The authors note a mismatch between employers' recruitment approaches and the needs of immigrants. Due to hiring practices and to the difficulties immigrants face in having their education and their work experience recognized, newcomers must cope with various obstacles, often resulting in skill downgrading.
- It seems difficult to ensure consistency among all the policies aimed at integrating immigrants into the labour market. The lack of coordination among government departments and agencies, private organizations and community groups results in an incoherent, disjointed system.
- The authors point to widespread underfunding of integration programs. They note that the federal government's total transfer to Quebec for immigration exceeds the budget of the Ministry of Immigration and Cultural Communities (MICC) by \$70 million. The MICC budget has increased only slowly over the years, while Quebec has been receiving growing numbers of immigrants each year.
- The large number of immigrant support programs and the low level of funding per immigrant support the fact that Quebec places the emphasis on support and assistance services that cost less and also have short-lived benefits. These programs are also the least effective.
- The most effective programs are those focusing on training and occupation-specific internships, because they compensate for the lack of Canadian experience and help newcomers familiarize themselves with their new work environment. However, these programs reach only a small number of immigrants due to the lack of business community involvement and constraints on the public funding of internships.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

Three elements limit the scope of current programs. First, the fragmentation of the programs targeted at immigrants means they do not have the continuity and consistency to enable newcomers to deal with the complex task of looking for employment. Second, existing services tend to focus on the development of immigrants' personal skills rather than on the demand for labour. Policies cannot truly achieve the goal of integrating immigrants into the labour market unless employers play their proper role. Third, budgetary constraints result in a gap between the needs expressed by immigrants and the money invested to meet those needs. As a result, there are growing numbers of immigrants who do not have access to the type of support that would give them the best prospects of finding jobs in line with their skills. The authors make a number of recommendations to overcome these shortcomings:

- Establish an independent agency with a mandate to ensure better coordination among all policies.
- Increase funding for integration policy to ensure the provision of stable and ongoing resources to community organizations, which are key actors in the implementation of labour market integration programs aimed at immigrants.
- Quickly increase the number of the programs that are effective, especially bridge training programs and internships.
- Combat employment discrimination more effectively and ensure that programs promoting equal access to employment are implemented in the public, semi-public and private sectors.

Comment by the IRPP

This study is part of a series of research papers to be published by the IRPP on the subject of the integration of immigrants into the labour markets in Canada's largest cities (Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver). An earlier study published in November 2007, "Détérioration des salaires des nouveaux immigrants au Québec par rapport à l'Ontario et à la Colombie-Britannique," by Brahim Boudarbat and Maude Boulet, shows that the earnings of recent immigrants on entering the labour market have deteriorated in a large portion of the country. Wage deterioration in Quebec is less severe than in British Columbia but more pronounced than in Ontario. These findings highlight the need to take these negative trends into account in the design and implementation of future policies aimed at integrating newcomers into the labour market.

In tabling its 2008-09 budget, the Quebec government announced that it would increase funding for immigration support by \$20 million over two years and that this amount would be focused on labour market integration and apprenticeship programs. The government also announced that a larger portion — but not all — of the federal financial transfer earmarked for immigration would be given to MICC. These developments are consistent with some of the recommendations made by the authors of this study.