



*Institute for
Research on
Public Policy*

*Institut de
recherche
en politiques
publiques*

For immediate distribution – June 25, 2009

NEWS RELEASE

Language proficiency on arrival key to immigrants' success

New study finds English fluency is an even greater factor in economic integration than education in Vancouver

Montreal – Language plays the central role in shaping the economic opportunities available to newcomers, and if selection policies do not change – and there is no indication that they will in the near future – more attention must be devoted to the provision of high-quality English-language education to immigrants to Vancouver as soon as they arrive, according to a new study from the Institute for Research on Public Policy.

Vancouver's immigrant population has a particularly unique make-up in that the vast majority of its newcomers come from Asia, 42 percent of its newcomers from East Asia, and 29 percent from South and Southeast Asia. The study, "The Economic Integration of Immigrants in Metropolitan Vancouver," found that the largest group of immigrants, those from East Asia – many of whom are admitted through the business class program – have poor economic outcomes. Business class immigrants arrive with a much lower level of education and less proficiency in English or French. Of all the immigrant groups, they have the lowest rate of labour-market participation, the lowest employment earnings and the lowest total-income levels, which raises questions about whether this is the most effective way of injecting capital and entrepreneurial energy into the Canadian economy.

Immigrants who qualify to enter Vancouver as skilled workers are, in general, well educated and proficient in English or French. Yet, relative to the native-born, they receive lower earnings, at least initially, and this earnings gap is much wider for those who do not speak an official language. Family class immigrants appear to benefit significantly from their social networks, and they have relatively high rates of labour-market participation and earnings levels given their level of education and language proficiency. Also, while refugees have a lower level of education than immigrants generally, and a lower degree of proficiency in English or French, their labour-market participation is surprisingly high compared with that of other immigrants.

"Without an official language, immigrants with a university education earn little more than those who only attended high school," notes Hiebert. "There's no question that landing without official language proficiency is associated with significant long-term penalties in the labour market."

"The Economic Integration of Immigrants in Metropolitan Vancouver," by Daniel Hiebert, can be downloaded free of charge from the Institute's Web site (www.irpp.org).

-30-

For more details or to schedule an interview with the author please contact the IRPP.

To receive our monthly bulletin *Thinking Ahead* via e-mail, please subscribe to the IRPP e-distribution service by visiting our Web site.

Media Contact: Kate Shingler Tel: 514-787-0737 Cell: 514-235-8308