

# Immigration



**Background Briefs**  
Development issues and efforts

## The issue

Immigration played an important role in Canada's history. With our aging population and declining birth rate, it continues to play an important part in building our country. Unless you are from a First Nations family, someone in your family was an immigrant at one time. Like the United States and Australia, Canada is a country of immigration. All three countries are proud of being nations of immigrants and lands of opportunity for newcomers. Until the last half of the 20th century, almost all immigrants in Canada came from Europe. After that, large-scale immigration from Asia, the Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean began.

**Immigration** is the process of a person moving to another country to live. **Emigration** is the process of leaving one's home country. Unlike refugees, immigrants choose to leave their homeland. They are not fleeing for their safety. People decide to choose a new homeland for many reasons. There are push reasons a person chooses to emigrate. There are pull reasons a person chooses to immigrate to a particular country. If employment opportunities or living conditions are very poor, for example, a person may feel pushed to emigrate. If the economy in another country offers chances for a better job, higher wages and many employment opportunities, a person is pulled to immigrate there.

Sometimes people immigrate because of family or friends. The first person emigrating from an area tells people back home about jobs, housing or schools in the new country. More people emigrate and help others from the home country to settle in the new country. Whatever the individual reasons might be, all are looking for a better life. Governments develop policies about who may immigrate into their country. A person may apply to immigrate to find work or reunite family members.

Canada accepts new immigrants based on a set of criteria. If a person is immigrating to find work, the main factor will be whether or not the country needs workers in that category. In reuniting families, preference is given to spouses and children.

There is a huge period of adjustment for immigrants when they settle in their new country. They leave behind everything that is familiar as they adjust to a new culture. This may cause additional stresses in the family. Young people who make new friends at school often learn the new culture more quickly than their parents. On the other hand, their parents do not want the young people to forget their own culture. Women often feel isolated because they remain in the home while the husband and children go about their busy new lives. Another difficulty arises when people in the new country are resentful towards or reject the immigrants.

## The road to assisting immigrants

Most difficulties for immigrants stem from cross-cultural misunderstanding. Cross-cultural misunderstanding occurs when people think that someone else is wrong or disrespectful because they do not follow our customs and beliefs. People often view immigrants' customs as wrong or "uncivilized." Unfortunately, we tend to think that our own way is the right way, or even the only way.

If the new culture is very different from their own, immigrants may feel it is wrong to adopt some of the new ways. Or they may interpret something in a different way. A number of years ago, for example, some Vietnamese children arrived in a small town in B.C. They had nothing of their own and spoke no English. On their arrival, a welcoming group presented them with a box of clothing. All the clothing seemed strange except for the pyjamas—



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these were similar to the kind of clothing everyone in their home country wore every day. On their first day of school, the children wore the pyjamas. How do you think the “new” children and the “resident” children reacted?

We can best help immigrants by not passing judgment on their customs or ways of doing things, and by patiently helping them to adapt to our culture.

### Projects to help immigrants adjust to their new culture

Fortunately, there are groups to help newcomers immigrate and adapt to their new culture. Some of these groups help immigrants come to Canada. Some help them begin their new lives once they arrive. Canadians work through nonprofit societies and charities to help immigrants settle into their new way of life. The Canadian government, working through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), provides an avenue for young people to immigrate to Canada.

**Honouring immigrants:** Between 1928 and 1951, almost every person who came to Canada to live arrived at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Reopened in 1999 as Canada’s immigration museum, Pier 21 celebrates Canada’s unique stories of immigration and nation building. In 2009, the Government of Canada created a National Museum of Immigration at Pier 21. It is only the second national museum outside of the National Capital Region. Over 50,000 people from all over the world visit the museum. In 2010, international development ministers of the G8 nations met at Pier 21 for discussions that could impact millions in developing countries.

**Assisting newcomers to Canada:** The Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) assists immigrants through government-funded programs. The programs offer support, guidance and education to help newcomers adjust to life in Canada. The YMCA Cross-cultural and Immigration Services has been helping for over 150 years. Immigrants can go to the YMCA to get help with job search skills, career planning or guidance from a mentor.

There are also programs for children, teens and women. The YMCA also offers English-language instruction and programs for cultural awareness.

**Providing cross-cultural peer support for women:** The Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISS of BC) provides mental, physical and social support to immigrant and refugee women who are experiencing challenges during their integration process. Because the program focuses on women helping women, it also provides training for the newcomer women to go back into their communities to offer support to other newcomer women who are having difficulties adjusting to their new lives in Canada.

**Promoting the well-being of immigrants:** Founded in 1973, S.U.C.C.E.S.S. is a nonprofit charitable organization dedicated to helping immigrants settle in their new country. The three levels of government supply approximately 70 percent of S.U.C.C.E.S.S.’s funding. The rest comes from donations and fund raising. The organization provides counselling and support to families and individuals with personal issues. Programs promote personal development of children and youth and facilitate the social participation of parents and seniors in the community. The group also helps the unemployed in job and career development.

Find more information about:

- CIDA’s connection to the National Museum of Immigration at <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/acdi-cida/ACDI-CIDA.nsf/eng/NAT-426115142-LLV>
- the YMCA’s programs at [http://www.ymcaimmigrantservices.ca/en/kitchenerwaterloo/Employment\\_How\\_We\\_Help.asp](http://www.ymcaimmigrantservices.ca/en/kitchenerwaterloo/Employment_How_We_Help.asp)
- the Peer Support Program for Women at <http://bipt.ca/resources/swis-resource/cross-cultural-peer-support-program-immigrant-and-refugee-women-ccpsp>
- the S.U.C.C.E.S.S programs at [http://www.successbc.ca/eng/component/option,com\\_mtree/task,listcats/cat\\_id,110/Itemid,26/](http://www.successbc.ca/eng/component/option,com_mtree/task,listcats/cat_id,110/Itemid,26/).

