

News

**Many skilled immigrants aren't staying; Report details newcomer 'brain drain' 1 in 6 males leaves Canada in first year**

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Toronto Star

880 words

2 March 2006

The Toronto Star

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English

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One in **six male immigrants** leaves Canada for better opportunities elsewhere within the first year of arrival, and those most likely to emigrate are the cream of the crop: businessmen and skilled workers.

Those findings are part of a Statistics Canada report released yesterday, the first national study to get a firm handle on the extent of out-migration and "brain drain" among the country's new arrivals. Anecdotal evidence for several years has suggested **immigrants** are leaving in droves because they can't land suitable jobs in Canada.

Experts say the findings highlight the need for an integrated approach that focuses not only on selecting the right **immigrants** but also on keeping them by matching them with suitable opportunities.

"The people who are leaving the country are true migrants. They move by choice for pure economic reasons," said Jean Lock Kunz, associate project director of Policy Research Initiative, an Ottawa-based think-tank.

"In our global economy, there is a greater movement of people and businesses. We are going to see more and more people moving in and out. Every country will be competing for skilled workers. The key to keep them here is to match them up with the needs of the labour market, so they have a reason to stay."

Basing their findings on landing records, census data and income tax files over the past two decades, researchers found one-third of **male immigrants** aged 25 to 45 at the time they arrived in Canada left within 20 years. More than half of those who left did so within the first year.

The study's subject group amounts to about 50,000 newcomers a year, said report co-author Abdurrahman Aydemir. Of those, 17,000 immigrant men in that age range will end up leaving Canada eventually.

The most mobile and sought-after group of working-age immigrant men - those who arrive via the business investment and skilled-worker categories - are leaving at an even higher rate: 40 per cent depart within 10 years.

Interestingly, **immigrants** fluent in both French and English tend to stay for a shorter period than those who aren't.

**Male** migrants from Hong Kong and the United States were the most likely to leave Canada, followed (in order) by those from South America, Central America, the Middle East, and Oceania and Australia.

"In the increasingly global labour market, it may be more appropriate to treat international migration more like internal migration. Individuals may move around from place to place for job-related or other reasons several times in a lifetime," Aydemir noted in the 49-page report.

The findings don't surprise sociologist Jeffrey Reitz, chair of the University of Toronto's Munk Centre for International Studies.

"It is no secret among those in the field that some people come to Canada with the intention of returning

home. The idea that used to exist was that the world consisted of a lot of highly educated people who wanted to come here, and Canada got to pick and choose - but that's something of a myth," he noted.

"When it comes to immigration, we are in a very competitive market. We have to recruit them and make sure they stay."

University of Western Ontario economics professor Chris Robinson, who co-authored the report, said the study underlines the fact that an international move isn't necessarily a permanent one any more.

"It's a very competitive market for **immigrants**, and it's going to be even more competitive in the future with the international mobility being so fluid," he explained.

"We have to figure out how to keep them. People used to say America's a land of opportunity - they would come and never go. The fact is, they do."

A key factor pushing newcomers out of the country is the state of the local economy, Robinson said. Immigrant retention rates in the recession years of 1981 and 1991 were lower (at 80.9 per cent and 72.6 per cent respectively) than in the boom years of 1986 and 1996 (at 90.2 per cent and 76.3 per cent).

Nikhath Rasheed, co-ordinator of the Policy Roundtable Mobilizing Professionals and Trades, a national advocacy group for foreign-trained professionals, said a big frustration is getting Canadian employers to recognize overseas credentials.

Kunz downplays the notion that the **immigrants** who stay behind might not be those Canada most wants and would unnecessarily burden the settlement system.

(People who arrive through family reunification have a 30 per cent departure rate, while refugees have the lowest at 20 per cent.)

The bottom line, Kunz said, is newcomers need to feel welcomed in Canada and have the ability to get established here.

According to the study, married **immigrants** stay about 25 per cent longer than singles, and are 40 per cent more likely to stay than those widowed, divorced or separated.

One way to keep newcomers here, U of T's Reitz suggests, is for Canada to carefully balance immigrant numbers between the family and business/skilled worker categories.

"People stay where their families are," he noted.

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