



Many New Immigrants Opting for Prairie Provinces Over Toronto Changing immigration programs responsible for shift, says StatsCan

By Kaven Baker-Voakes | March 19, 2015

OTTAWA—Canada’s immigration patterns have radically altered in recent years, with western provinces — particularly the Prairies — overtaking Toronto as the primary destination for new immigrants.

Statistics Canada reports this week that compared to 2000 levels, the number of new immigrants settling in Canada’s largest city has fallen, with more new arrivals opting for destinations such as Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

“In the past it was Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver as the designation. Now we are seeing Saskatchewan and Alberta,” said Aneta Bonikowska, an analyst at Statistics Canada and one of the authors of the report.

“Our main interest in this study was what could have accounted for this shift.”

In the 2000s, Toronto was the destination for half of all new immigrants to Canada, but according to recent figures, 33 percent of new arrivals are forsaking Toronto for other destinations.

Statistics Canada suggested that the change coincides with a shift in provincial programs.



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— Victoria Esses, Centre for Research on Migration and Ethnic Relations

“In particular, the share entering through Provincial Nominee Programs increased from less than 1 percent in 2000 to 13 percent in 2010, with this most evident in the western provinces,” Statistics Canada researchers reported.

The agency said immigration programs accounted for nearly all the increase in the share of new immigrants settling in Winnipeg and Saskatchewan, as well as for an increase in smaller locations in Alberta outside of Calgary and Edmonton.

The report also suggested that the change in source countries from which immigrants arrived to countries such as the Philippines could be impacting.

“These immigrants had more diverse destinations, partly because their pre-existing communities were more dispersed across Canada,” the report states.

“There have been two changes: one is that people are moving outside of the large centres to smaller communities, and definitely western provinces are getting more immigrants in recent years, possibly because of labour market conditions,” said Victoria Esses, director of the Centre for Research on Migration and Ethnic Relations at the University of Western Ontario.

Statistics Canada analysts also found that the number of recent arrivals going to larger cities has decreased, with many opting for smaller locations. Most immigrants, the agency reported, are also arriving in the locations they have intended in the first year.

“The dispersion has a lot of benefits in terms of immigrants going where jobs are available to them so they don’t come into Canada and find that they can’t use the skills that they have,” said Esses.

Esses explains that in recent years there has been a rise in organizations that are trying to make communities more appealing to newcomers.

“I’d say some of these communities really need immigrants and they are going to great lengths to attract them and retain them. That includes what they need to do to make them more welcoming at times,” she said.

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