
Special Feature: Immigrant Population of Canada

Highlights:

- In 1991, the immigrant population represented 16% of Canada's population.
- Of these immigrants, 48% arrived in Canada before 1971, 24% between 1971 and 1980, and 28% between 1981 and 1991.
- The proportion of European born immigrants declined from 62% in 1986 to 54% in 1991, while the proportion of Asian born immigrants increased from 18% to 25%.
- In 1991, B.C. had the second largest immigrant population after Ontario. The B.C. share of the total Canadian immigrant population was 16.7%, compared to 54.6% for Ontario.

According to the 1991 Census, 4.3 million, or 16%, of the Canadian population was born outside Canada. While this proportion has been stable over the last few decades, many characteristics of this population have changed.

Over half of all the immigrant population arrived after 1971. Due to a steady increase in the level of immigration since the mid 80's, more than 30% of the immigrants who came to Canada in this period (1971-1991) arrived between 1988 and 1991.

The influx of Asian immigrants during the last few decades has altered the ethnic mosaic of the foreign born population in Canada. For example, more than half the immigrants who arrived during the early 70's came from European countries, while only 15% came from Asian countries. This proportion has now reversed with more than 57% of the immigrants who landed in 1993 coming from Asia while only 18% came from Europe. As a result, the proportion of Asian born immigrants in the overall foreign born population in Canada has increased from 0.7 million persons (18%) in 1986 to 1.1 million (25%) in 1991.

British Columbia attracted a higher proportion of Asian immigrants. One third of the foreign born population of B.C. came from Asia and the Middle East, compared to 25% at the national level. In fact, Asian immigrants made up of 76% of all landings in British Columbia in 1993 with Hong Kong, India, Taiwan, Philippines and China-Mainland being the top five source countries.

In 1991, 94% of all immigrants resided in just four provinces: Ontario (55%), B.C. (17%), Quebec (14%), and Alberta (9%). More than half (57%) of all immigrants were concentrated in the three major metropolitan areas of Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. In B.C., 66% of the immigrant population reside in the Vancouver metropolitan area.

In 1991, 18% of the foreign born population were over 65, compared to only 10% of the Canadian born population. Also, only 5% of those who were foreign born were younger than age 15, compared to 10% for those born in Canada.

In contrast to the observation that recent immigrants tend to have a lower median age than the overall population in Canada, the foreign born population taken as a whole

has a higher median age than those born in Canada. In 1991, the median age for the Canadian born population was 31.0 years, whereas that for the foreign born population was 44.5 years.

As a result of having a relatively higher proportion of elderly in the foreign born group, and a smaller proportion of immigrants who are children, the child dependency ratio for those who were foreign born was lower than that for those born in Canada, while the reverse was true for the elderly dependency ratio¹. In 1991, the child dependency ratio was 6.9% for the foreign born population and 38.3% for the Canadian born population, and the elderly dependency ratio was 22.9% for those who were foreign born and 12.5% for those who were born in Canada. A combined effect is that a higher proportion of the foreign born population is of working age, which lowers the overall dependency ratio of the entire Canadian population. In 1991, the total dependency ratio for the Canadian born population was 52.9% and that for the foreign born population was 29.8%. With the two populations combined, the total dependency ratio is 48.1%.

The 1991 Census also shows that the immigrant population is slightly better educated than the Canadian born population. In 1991, of those aged 15 and over, 14% of the immigrant population had a university degree compared to 11% of those born in Canada. In addition, recent immigrants tend to have higher education qualifications than those who came earlier. In 1991, 17% of recent immigrants aged 15 and over had a university degree, compared to 9% of those who came before 1961.

Other differences, according to the 1991 Census include; those who were foreign born are more likely than those born in Canada to be married; the immigrant population has a slightly lower overall labour force participation rate than the Canadian born population; and men who are immigrants are more likely to be employed in the professional/administrative/managerial occupations than men born in Canada, while women who are immigrants are more likely than Canadian born women to be engaged in the manufacturing/services occupations.

¹ Child Dependency Ratio = Ratio of population aged 0-14 to population aged 15-64; Elderly Dependency Ratio = Ratio of population aged 65+ to population aged 15-64; and Total Dependency Ratio = sum of Child and Elderly dependency ratios.

