TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE CANADA

Dr. Ayman Al-Yassini is the Executive Director of the Canadian Race Relations Foundation. He is a graduate of Loyola College in Montreal, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from McGill University, with a specialization in International Relations and Politics of Developing Areas.

1- QUEL EST LE REGARD GLOBAL QUE VOUS PORTEZ AU SUJET DE L'IMMIGRATION ?

Immigration is an international phenomenon impacting virtually every country in the world. A number of factors have influenced immigration in recent decades, including population growth, market globalization, advances in technology, ease of transportation, political and economic conditions, and regional conflicts. Canada is one of the countries that benefited from the flow of immigrants, who built a strong economy and prosperous nation.

United Nations studies project that between 2000 and 2050, the world's population will grow by 2.6 billion people, but almost all of that growth will be in developing and least-developed countries. Industrialized countries, such as Canada, will continue to be faced with an aging population, and a decrease in the overall population. Moreover, and as stated by Statistics Canada, sometime between 2025 and 2030, the number of births in Canada will equal the number of deaths. In other words, if Canada's population is to continue to grow, immigration will be the source of this growth. Our productivity, prosperity and growth are dependent on immigration.

Immigration is also the fabric that enriches Canadian culture and society. The contribution of Francophone and Anglophone immigrants to arts, theatre, and literature, to name a few areas, has turned Canada into an international cultural center. It is important that our immigration strategy continues to attract adaptable and a competitive labour force, adopt a proactive recruitment and effective integration, and strengthen our refugee protection system.

2- SELON VOUS, QUELLES SONT LES PRINCIPALES DIFFICULTÉS QUE RENCONTRENT LES IMMIGRANTS SUR LE MARCHÉ DU TRAVAIL ET POURQUOI ?

Although a number of factors may impact the newcomer's ability to integrate in the marketplace, we can note the importance of language ability in one of Canada's two official languages and education. Language ability is a vital skill which is needed to secure work and to integrate into society. Despite the high number of newcomers landing in Canada with higher levels of education and professional qualifications, newcomers continue to experience lower incomes and higher rates of poverty. The economic performance of immigrants is usually linked to their competency in one or both official languages at arrival.

Immigrants, who landed with a university degree, were employed at a higher rate than the Canadian average and received unemployment insurance and welfare payments at a lower rate than the Canadian average. However, we can also site many examples of immigrants with high education who are not able to secure employment that matches their skills and training, because of the constraints which are imposed by licensing bodies in recognizing these credentials. It is quite encouraging that the Federal Government is addressing this issue, along with offices of the Fairness Commissioners in Ontario and Manitoba. The vicious cycle many immigrants are confronted with is that employers do not hire foreign-trained professionals unless they acquired "Canadian experience" and attained membership in appropriate professional association, while professional associations do not grant membership unless the applicant has acquired Canadian work experience.

3- QUELLES SONT LES PISTES DE SOLUTION MISES DE L'AVANT POUR CONTRER CES DIFFICULTÉS ?

As a starting point, addressing these difficulties requires an understanding that integration is a two-way process that involves commitment on both sides. We need to recognize that it is not sufficient that Canada welcomes immigrants and refugees through symbolic gestures of multiculturalism and legislation. It is necessary to have an enforcement of these legislations, such as the Employment Equity Act, and facilitate the integration of immigrants and refugees in the social and economic life of the country. Newcomers have the responsibility of adapting to the Canadian reality, which entails freedom of expression, commitment to human rights, democratic institutions and equality of sexes, among other values. The ability of newcomers to communicate in one, or both, of Canada's official languages is a fundamental step towards effective integration in the workplace. It is also important for different cultural communities to assist newcomers to participate in Canadian life. Finally, there is a need for organizations such as the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, to continue the work to eliminate discrimination and strengthen Canadian identity.

4- COMMENT DÉFINISSEZ-VOUS L'INTÉGRATION ?

Sociologically, there are two extremes to describe the participation of newcomers in society. The first is assimilation, which means the newcomer may abandon cultural differences in order to fit into the new society. The second is segregation, which means living in isolation from the larger society. Integration is a process of mutual adjustment by both newcomers and society. Newcomers are expected to understand and respect basic Canadian values, and Canadians are expected to understand and respect the cultural differences newcomers bring to Canada. Integration is a gradual process that requires an active commitment from both newcomers and society. Canada favours integration. With the introduction of the Federal Immigrant integration Strategy in 1990 as part of the five-year Immigration Plan, overall integration of newcomers to Canada became the central focus in Canada's immigration policy. The Strategy introduced initiatives such as the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program, which seeks to provide immigrants the linguistic tools to integrate into society. It also placed emphasis on helping immigrants learn about Canadian values and on helping Canadians understand the diverse backgrounds of newcomers. Thus integration is seen as a continuum that starts when the immigrant or refugee comes to Canada and continues in the early days and months after arrival and beyond, obtaining citizenship and achieving full participation in Canadian society.

5. À VOTRE AVIS, QUELLES SONT LES MEILLEURES PRATIQUES POUR FACILITER L'INTÉGRATION DES IMMIGRANTS ?

One of the best practices to assist immigrants to integrate are the services offered through Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program. This program provides necessary services to facilitate the integration of immigrants in Canadian society and the workplace. The program takes the immigrant from the entry point, to providing community resources related to economic, social, health, cultural, educational and recreational. In addition, the program offers an orientation program related to the day to day life in the country and offers para-professional counseling, employment related services, as well as language training.

A second example is the Canadian Immigrant Magazine which provides immigrants practical tools to overcome the many obstacles related with employment and social integration. The Magazine profiles the story of immigrants who succeed in carving a place for themselves in Canada by acquiring the necessary skills, perseverance and commitment to succeed.

A third example is found in two Quebec-based organizations. The first is PROMIS (Promotion, Intégration – Société nouvelle), which offer newcomers the means to fully succeed in their integration. The organization facilitate the harmonious establishment and integration of newcomers to Quebec society, provide families and individuals, both immigrants and refugees, the necessary assistance for adaptation, and develop harmonious relationships among members of Quebec society. The success of PROMIS may be attributed to their comprehensive approach to assisting immigrants, which includes individual and family support.

We may also provide the example of Carrefour BLE, an NGO which received the CRRF's Award of Excellence in 2008. The mandate of this organization is to facilitate the social and professional integration of new immigrants seeking employment in their field of specialization. Carrefour BLE is known for its creative and innovative approaches to ensure that new immigrants find their niche within Quebec's job market and society. Their training programs assist foreign trained immigrants and refugees in finding positions with agricultural and environmental sectors throughout Quebec.

A successful best practice is also found among institutions that work on the elimination of racism and discrimination in Canada and promote Canadian identity and citizenship. The Canadian Race Relations Foundation is an example of a Canadian institution that is dedicated to the strengthening of a harmonious Canada and the promotion of Canadian identity which includes all members of society regardless of their background. The Maytree Foundation is an additional example. Through its programs, the Foundation deals with refugee issues, immigrant integration in the workplace, and immigrant integration in the boardrooms of Ontario.

6- COMMENT DÉFINISSEZ-VOUS LES RESPONSABILITÉS DES IMMIGRANTS ET DE LA SOCIÉTÉ D'ACCUEIL AU REGARD DE L'INTÉGRATION ?

Integration is a two-way process that involves commitment on the part of newcomers to adapt to life in Canada and on the part of Canadians to adapt to new people and cultures. Immigrants and the host society have a shared responsibility. A fundamental aspect of this shared responsibility is the promotion of civic education and participation, which engages newcomers in community problem-solving, leadership development, and democratic practices. Participation of a newcomer often starts with the community—through its schools, access to health care, affordable housing, and cultural awareness and sensitivity. In other words, strong community-based institutions are essential to engage newcomers in the community. Such organizations serve as networks of recruitment into civic life. The newcomer has the responsibility of civic participation, taking initiative and engaging in the two-way process of community building.