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Executive summary

An educational portrait of postsecondary educated immigrants, 2006 Census

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September 2010



Canada

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Acknowledgement

The authors wish to acknowledge and thank Eden Crossman, Research and Evaluation Branch for her significant contribution to the final report.

Executive summary

Drawing upon the newly available information captured in the 2006 Census, this study looks at statistical variations in country of highest educational attainment and field of study among postsecondary educated (PSE) immigrants. This paper examines the following research question: What is the picture of postsecondary degree holders in terms of field of study and place of the highest degree among various immigrant groups? The study is comprised of two main sections – first, a comparison of immigrant and Canadian-born demographic and educational profiles, and second, an examination of highest level of educational attainment, location and field of study of PSE immigrants. What follows are selected highlights from the results of this analysis:

Demographics: immigrants compared to the Canadian-born

- Of the 4,076,705 immigrants enumerated in the 2006 Census between the ages of 25 and 64 years, 70% were established immigrants (those who had been in Canada for more than 10 years), 14% were recent immigrants (those who landed in Canada during 1996-2000), and 17% were very recent immigrants (those who landed in Canada after 2000).
- Compared to the Canadian-born population, immigrants had a higher share of females and were older. While older individuals aged 55-64 were over represented among established immigrants, recent immigrants and very recent immigrants were much younger than the Canadian-born and established immigrants.

Education: immigrants compared to the Canadian-born

- Overall, nearly two thirds of working-age (25-64 years) immigrants (65%) had a postsecondary diploma or degree, 6 percentage points higher than their Canadian-born counterparts. Immigrants were more likely than the Canadian-born to have a bachelor's degree or university certificate or diploma above the bachelor level as their highest educational attainment. The concentration in higher education is more obvious for recent cohorts.
- While the vast majority (98%) of the Canadian-born obtained their highest degree or diploma in Canada, nearly half of PSE immigrants also had a Canadian degree (47%). However, this proportion decreased significantly for recent arrivals.
- The United States was one of the most popular countries of study for both immigrants and the Canadian-born.
- About one in five PSE immigrants studied business, management, marketing and related support services (21%), comparable to the ratio among their Canadian-born counterparts (20%). Driven by recent and very recent immigrants, engineering followed as the second most popular field of study among immigrants (12%) – for the Canadian born, the rate was less than 3%. Computer and information sciences and support services was also favoured by immigrants as a field of study (5%), compared to 3% for the Canadian-born. In contrast, people who studied education were under represented among immigrants (5%), compared to 8% among the Canadian-born population.

Highest level of educational attainment

- Nearly half (48.7%) of PSE immigrants had a bachelor's degree or university certificate or diploma above the bachelor level as their highest educational attainment. Younger age

PSE immigrants was balanced; however, male immigrants were overrepresented relative to females among the higher educational levels.

- The percentages with university degrees were highest among immigrants from Pakistan, Russia, China and South Korea and lowest among those from Sri Lanka, the United Kingdom, Poland and the Philippines. Educational attainment was much higher among recent and very recent cohorts compared to established immigrants.

Major field of study

- Business, management, marketing and related support service was the top postsecondary field of study for immigrants from most main source countries. The postsecondary fields were more concentrated in natural and applied sciences including engineering and computer sciences among immigrants from the current leading source countries. For immigrants from Romania, Russia, China and Iran, engineering was the most common field of study. For immigrants from the Philippines, the percentage in the field of health professions and related sciences was double that of the average

Location of highest level of education

- More than half of PSE immigrants attained their highest level of education in their country of birth. A significant proportion of recent and very recent immigrants obtained their highest degree in the leading source countries, e.g. China, India, and the Philippines. The shifts in countries of highest educational attainment across immigrant cohorts reflect the compositional changes in source country during the last two decades. Sizable proportions of non-US born PSE immigrants received their highest level of education in the United States.

This paper takes advantage of the first available information on location of highest education in the 2006 Census to draw a detailed educational portrait of postsecondary educated (PSE) immigrants. This study is the first part of a three part project using the 2006 Census micro data to examine interplaying associations between labour market outcomes and educational characteristics among PSE immigrants. It is mainly descriptive. The second part of this project will explore employment and occupational outcomes by educational characteristics, the main focus being on the transferability of foreign degrees by field of study and country of highest post secondary degrees. A third investigation using multivariate analyses will separate out independent effects of country of study and field of study on occupational outcomes and earnings, controlling for other socio-demographic factors.