

Last month, CIRANO published a report documenting the challenges immigrants face integrating into the Quebec labour market. Publication of this report received intense media coverage throughout Quebec and Canada. To some, the difficult integration of immigrants into the Quebec labour market is the “real veil” we need to address. Others focussed on the paradox of immigration to Quebec: we embrace highly-qualified, young, Francophone immigrants, but they struggle finding work.

On the occasion of the May web event (cf: <http://www.cirano.qc.ca/immigration>), we talked with Brahim Boudarbat and Maude Boulet, the two analysts who conducted the study *Immigration au Québec : Politiques et intégration au marché du travail* about their principal conclusions.

#### **Educated Immigrants who are Fluent in French**

First, they recognize that the portrait of immigration has changed a great deal in recent decades.

Indeed, the level of education of immigrants to Quebec has increased phenomenally in 20 years. While 15.4% of the most recent arrivals in Quebec had a bachelors degree or better in 1981, that had risen to 51% in 2006.

Furthermore, immigrants to Quebec are more fluent in French. Thus, 23.4% of immigrants accepted in Quebec in 2008 were unilingual French, and another 37 % spoke French and English.

Finally, immigrants to Quebec also belong to the population group that is most active on the labour market. The proportion of immigrants aged 25 to 44 years accepted in Quebec in 2008 was up 10 percentage points from its 1998 level.

#### **ALL THINGS CONSIDERED, MORE DIFFICULTY INTEGRATING**

Notwithstanding these developments, immigrants moving to Quebec struggle to find work. In 2006, the employment rate of native Quebecers was 11.4 percentage points higher than that of immigrants.

By way of comparison, this gap was 5 percentage points in Ontario, 5.1 points in British Columbia, and 4.9 points in Canada as a whole.

This greater difficulty integrating into the labour force has coincided with a proactive involvement by the Quebec government in the immigration policies applied in the province. While these policies may have had a positive impact on the level of education and French fluency of immigrants moving to Quebec, an impact on labour force integration has yet to be observed. The authors suggest that we need to examine the causes of this apparently pronounced handicap.

#### **Avenues for Future Policy**

Among the factors liable to have an impact on the integration of immigrants into the labour market, Brahim Boudarbat and Maude Boulet identify the country in which they received their degree, their age on arrival, and their region of origin.

These observations support the notion that the policies of the Government of Quebec to promote the retention of foreign students, who are younger and have obtained some of their education in la Belle Province, are a step in the right direction for facilitating better labour market integration. Subsequent studies will reveal whether these measures are adequate or whether more needs to be done.

