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## Canada Immigration: How a decade of policy change has transformed the immigration landscape

The temporary foreign worker program and stepped-up border enforcement are two major features of Canada's immigration policies today.

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Looking back on Canada's last decade of immigration, two trends are obvious:

One is the exponential growth of temporary foreign workers. Tens of thousands of migrant workers fill the endless labour shortage in jobs and places of which Canadians typically have no interest.

Second is the federal government's stepped-up effort on border control, from a crackdown on fraudulent marriages to fake visa students, illegitimate citizens and bogus refugees — all under the pretext of national security in light of global terrorism.

While the Seasonal Agricultural Worker and Live-in Caregiver programs have long provided a staple stock of foreign migrant workers in Canada, the temporary foreign workforce is now also seen on factory assembly lines, in food processing plants and other service industries.

Successive governments have eased the process for employers to bring in migrant workers, with the current Tory government passing new rules that let employers pay temporary high-skilled foreign workers up to 15 per cent less (5 per cent for low-skilled workers) than the prevailing local wage.

In the past decade, the number of temporary migrant workers in Canada has tripled from 101,100 to 300,210. The fact that only a minority of them have access to permanent resident status has had some critics likening this disposable workforce to modern-day slavery.

Ottawa, to its credit, has introduced transition programs to allow migrants workers and foreign students to acquire permanent immigrant status in Canada through the Canada Experience Class and Provincial Nominee Program, though the initiatives favour high-skilled workers.

Coupled with a booming economy in the Prairie provinces, these programs have helped “spread the benefits of immigration” across Canada, sending newcomers to settle in smaller urban centres as opposed to traditional gateway cities like Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver.

Between 2002 and 2011, all provinces and territories, with the exception of Ontario, saw their immigration numbers rise — threefold for Manitoba, double in Alberta, five times higher in Saskatchewan and 17 times higher in Prince Edward Island.

In Ontario, immigration numbers dropped from 133,600 to 99,500, mainly due to the loss of manufacturing jobs and active recruitment efforts by other provincial governments.

Historically, Canada has used regular immigration to meet its economic needs, but recruitment efforts specifically for skilled workers, entrepreneurs and investors have become more prominent.

As a result, the so-called 'economic' class of immigrants has grown from 137,860 to 156,120 in the past decade, while newcomers arriving under the family reunification class have dropped from 62,300 to 56,450.

Although there has been a slight increase of refugees accepted into the country, from 25,110 to 27,870, more pressure is being put on ordinary Canadians and religious groups to bring in United Nations-sanctioned refugees under the privately sponsored refugees program, which brought in 5,582 asylum seekers in 2011, up from 3,040 refugees 10 years ago.

Since taking power in 2006, the Tory government has made dramatic changes to eliminate the immigration backlog and tweak the federal skilled workers program by raising the language requirements, restricting eligibility to specific professions and pre-screening applicants' foreign credentials.

With the boom in China and India remaining strong and economies in Europe still weak, along with Canada's changing language requirements, immigration from China and India have slowed down.

Since 2010, the Philippines has become Canada's top immigrant source country with almost 35,000 arriving in 2011, even though highly skilled British, Irish and French began arriving here to escape high unemployment. Tagalog was the most spoken mother tongue among new arrivals in 2011.

To crack down on fraudulent marriages, Ottawa introduced a provisional visa that compels a sponsored husband or wife to remain in the marital relationship with their sponsoring Canadian spouse for at least two years before they can receive permanent status.

Also, to prevent unscrupulous foreigners from arriving here as visa students, it has asked the provinces to certify educational institutions that enrol foreign students.

As of January, visitors from 29 countries and a territory must pay an extra \$85 to cover the cost of Ottawa collecting fingerprints and photos when they apply for visas — a measure being expanded to other nations to tighten border entry into Canada.

Ottawa has also revised the citizenship test and stepped up efforts to enforce residency and language requirements of applicants.

With many changes having only come into effect the last few years, it is too early to say if they are a good or bad move for Canada. We may never know, now that the long-form census is gone.

One thing is certain: the bar for permanent residents, refugees and would-be citizens to enter Canada and become Canadians has risen and will continue to get higher as the enforcement agenda prevails.