

Canada to Admit Fewer Immigrants, Screen for Skills

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Body

Canada announced today that it will accept ***fewer immigrants*** each year and overhaul immigration guidelines to give less emphasis to family members and more to those with marketable ***skills***.

The action came in response to widespread sentiments that **Canada**, which accepts proportionately more ***immigrants*** than any other major industrial nation, has become too generous to those who seek to come here. It marked a policy reversal for the governing Liberal Party of Prime Minister Jean Chretien, who promised when he was campaigning just over a year ago that he would keep immigration at about 1 percent of population and give priority to the families of those already in this country.

In announcing the new rules, Immigration Minister Sergio Marchi said 1995 immigration totals will not exceed 215,000, a decline from 1994's ceiling of 250,000 ***immigrants***. One percent of **Canada's** population would be about 290,000 ***immigrants***. Unlike the United States, **Canada** does not have a significant problem with illegal immigration.

Marchi said the plan did not mark a change of course because the government remained committed to keeping immigration at 1 percent of population "over a long period." Eight months of public consultations had indicated that the public wants "the ability and capacity to manage our immigration programs," Marchi said.

Of all the countries in the world, only **Canada**, the United States, Israel and Australia are receiving significant numbers of people to become legal residents and eventually citizens, according to Jeff Passel of the Urban Institute in Washington. Except for Israel, which is obliged under law to accept all Jewish ***immigrants***, **Canada** allows the most people in as a percentage of population.

Under **Canada's** Conservative Party governments, immigration increased from 84,300 in 1985 to 245,800 in 1993. In recent years, however, as the economy went through a severe recession and a ***few*** high-profile crimes were committed by legal ***immigrants*** and refugees, anti-foreigner sentiment has increased. In a poll taken by the Angus Reid Group last year, 47 percent of respondents said **Canada** was allowing in too many ***immigrants***.

In addition, the rise in political power of **Canada's** conservative west, represented by the Reform Party, has given a voice to those views. Reform wants to curtail legal immigration to 150,000 a year, and the party's immigration critic, Art Hanger, today said the new government plan was "pure smoke and mirrors."

The rules will place numerical limits on ***admitting*** family members of current legal ***immigrants***, as U.S. rules do now. In **Canada**, once one family member obtains legal residency, he or she can sponsor not only spouse and

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children, but parents and grandparents, who in turn can sponsor other children or siblings. Such family members now account for 51 percent of all immigrants; the new rules aim at reducing that proportion to 44 percent by 2000.

Applicants for immigrant status also will be more closely examined as to their skills that could help them support themselves and to determine that they have a good command of English or French. At present, about 44 percent of those entering Canada speak neither of the country's official languages. Immigrants who sponsor family members also may be required to post a bond.

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