

CONSULTATION 2008-2010

**SUMMARY OF THE CONSULTATION
DOCUMENT RESPECTING PLANNING
FOR 2008-2010 QUÉBEC IMMIGRATION LEVELS**

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*Immigration
et Communautés
culturelles*

Québec 

This document was prepared by the Direction de la recherche et de l'analyse prospective of the Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles.

Note : All terms referring to individuals are generic and refer to both genders.

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SUMMARY

This public consultation focuses on planning in respect of permanent immigration to Québec for the period 2008-2010. For several years, immigration planning has been carried out for three-year periods and has given rise to extensive consultations that afford an opportunity to rebuild consensus around the key objectives of Québec's immigration policy. Pursuant to an amendment in 2004 to the *Act respecting immigration to Québec*, policy directions governing immigration must now be tabled in the National Assembly for study by the appropriate parliamentary committee.

In this perspective, the consultation document assembles information on the factors to be considered in conjunction with this exercise. After briefly reviewing the government's key policy directions, it sets out the issues related to immigration, the main challenges stemming from the reception and integration of immigrants, and the constraints and perspectives pertaining to the management of immigration. It presents several scenarios concerning the volume and composition of immigration for the period 2008-2010.

Government policy

Québec specifically defined for the first time its major policy directions in these areas in 1990 in *Vision – A policy statement on immigration and integration*. The policy statement, adopted unanimously by the National Assembly, attributes to immigration four key objectives, i.e. to contribute to the recovery of Québec's demographic situation, economic prosperity, the long-term survival of its French character, and its openness to the world. The policy statement presents a long-term perspective and specifies that the pursuit of these objectives must be carried out in keeping with the principles according to which Québec is a modern, democratic society in which French is the common language of public life, pluralistic and open to outside contributions, within the limitations imposed by respect for basic democratic values and the need for intercommunity exchange. While they have been updated since then, these objectives and principles are still timely ones.

Issues related to immigration

Immigration is associated, first, with a **demographic issue**. Population growth in Québec is slowing and the population is ageing markedly and rapidly. The foreseeable impact of these trends is striking, i.e. a decline in total population, a marked reduction in the working-age labour force, manpower scarcity, a slowdown in economic growth, increased pressure on public finances, and a decline in Québec's relative weight in Canada. While immigration is not a panacea, it can, combined with other initiatives, help to mitigate such impact, especially by delaying the onset of population decline and slowing the reduction in the working-age labour force.

Immigration is also linked to an **economic issue**. Both for immigrants and the host society, employment is usually the first condition for the success of immigration. Current conditions are fairly favourable: labour force participation and employment rates are high, unemployment is relatively low, and there are many jobs available. Under the circumstances, immigration can serve as a key incentive and asset. It can delay or even prevent the decline in the working-age labour force, satisfy manpower needs, broaden Québec expertise and entrepreneurship, promote access to foreign markets, and have a positive impact on public finances.

The **perennial reality of French language and culture** is also a key issue in Québec. Ongoing efforts are being made from the standpoint of selection and linguistic integration to ensure that immigration contributes to the vitality of the French language and culture. By making knowledge of French a decisive factor in the selection of qualified workers and by increasing the number of these workers, Québec has substantially increased the proportion of newcomers who know French upon arrival. This proportion was below 40% 10 years ago and stood at 58% in 2006. However, the language issue continues to demand extreme vigilance and francization efforts must be pursued and tailored to needs.

Lastly, immigration is contributing to **Québec's openness to the world**. In addition to bringing with them a culture, knowledge and know-how that enrich Québec's sociocultural heritage, immigrants foster the growth of networks and help broaden the influence of French-speaking Québec.

Challenges posed by reception and integration

The success of the immigration policy is closely linked to the success of integration. The planning process must take into account the challenges facing the host society, in particular with regard to the integration into the labour market of immigrants, francization, regionalization, the maintenance of the social consensus and organizational ability, and the management of diversity.

As for employment, the labour market seems to be able to absorb newcomers and will, indeed, need them to sustain economic growth. Their contribution will be all the more beneficial since they include individuals selected according to labour market needs. However, despite the favourable context, it is sometimes difficult for newcomers to enter the labour market, even those who possess the desired socioeconomic traits. We must, therefore, redouble our efforts to surmount the obstacles stemming from the recognition of prior knowledge and skills and respond adequately to needs for reception and integration services. The recent revision of the selection grid should also facilitate such integration.

Needs in respect of francization remain important. Because of the increase in the overall volume of immigrants admitted, many immigrants do not know French when they arrive in Québec, although the relative percentage of newcomers who speak French is rising. Similarly, the level of mastery of French required of newcomers is often higher than in the past because of the complexification of the labour market. In this context, the ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles has already sought to diversify the array of francization services that it offers and to encourage promote the learning of French by future immigrants prior to coming to Québec. We must pursue and step up these efforts.

Better distribution of immigrants throughout Québec is another challenge to be met. The heavy concentration of immigrants in Montréal is placing on the city considerable responsibility and depriving other cities or regions of the economic and cultural contribution that immigration makes. The measures that the Ministry and its partners have adopted have begun to bear fruits. The number of immigrants admitted residing outside the Greater Montréal area is rising. Once again, we must pursue our efforts, in collaboration with the partners concerned.

The maintenance of a social consensus on immigration must be a constant concern. Until very recently, the findings of surveys on perceptions of diversity were positive. However, in recent months, debate has occurred in Québec on accommodation or adjustment practices related to cultural differences. Quebecers have expressed concern, especially with regard to the undermining of identity and the place of religion in public space. Immigration will obviously continue to increase religious, ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity in Québec society. Many specialists regard this as one of the important challenges that will have to be met in the coming years. The Bouchard-Taylor Commission will contribute to this reflection. At the same time, measures aimed at making newcomers aware of the social choices that characterize modern Québec and the importance accorded to the democratic values defined by the Québec *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*, especially as regards the equality of the sexes, must be pursued and stepped up, along with efforts to prevent exclusion and promote intercultural rapprochement.

Management of immigration

In addition to the foregoing, immigration planning must also take into account constraints and perspectives concerning the management of immigration, in particular the limitations placed on Québec's ability to intervene.

Under the *Canadian Constitution*, the federal and provincial governments share jurisdiction over immigration, although federal law predominates. While Québec has acquired significant responsibilities, the federal government maintains responsibility for structuring factors, including the definition of the general categories of immigration and certain conditions that apply to these categories. Consequently, the volumes of immigrants admitted in certain categories do not depend, or hardly depend, on Québec's decisions. This is true of the family component and individuals whose refugee status is recognized by Canada in response to an asylum request. For these two groups, the volumes of immigrants admitted depend essentially on forecasting rather than planning.

In actual fact, Québec's latitude to intervene with regard to the volume and characteristics of the immigrants it admits focuses on components of the movement subject to selection, i.e. primarily applicants in the economic component (workers and businesspeople) and refugees whose applications are processed abroad. As for the economic component, the pools of applicants corresponding to the profile sought by Québec, especially as regards the knowledge of French, are not infinite and competition for economic immigration continues to grow between Western nations that are facing the same challenges as Québec, in particular from a demographic and economic standpoint.

Over the past 10 years, the volume of immigration to Québec has risen significantly, from 27 684 in 1997 to 44 686 in 2006. This growth in immigration stems, by and large, from an increase in economic immigration, in particular immigrant workers, the number of whom increased from 7 600 in 1997 to some 23 500 in 2006.

Scenarios contemplated

The consultation document presents five scenarios respecting changes in immigration for the period 2008-2010 and each scenario's impact. In relation to the volume of admissions forecasted for 2007 (between 43 800 and 46 000 immigrants), the scenarios can be broken down as follows:

- Scenario 1: a reduction in immigration (40 000 admissions in 2010);
- Scenario 2: the stabilization of immigration (46 000 admissions in 2010);
- Scenario 3: a slight increase in immigration (50 000 admissions in 2010);
- Scenario 4: a moderate increase in immigration (55 000 admissions in 2010);
- Scenario 5: a large increase in immigration (60 000 admissions in 2010).

Regardless of the scenario, the volumes of admissions vary solely in respect of qualified workers, business people and refugees selected abroad, since it is with regard to these groups that Québec exercises its latitude.

The impact of the scenarios varies. Any reduction in immigration would necessarily reduce the contribution made by immigration to the demographic issue, all the more so as such a reduction can only be achieved through a reduction in the size of the economic component. Conversely, an increase in immigration combined with other measures could delay the beginning of the decline in total population and slow down the drop in the working-age labour force, which would have a positive effect on population growth and the economy. Moreover, since the success of immigration is linked to the success of integration, any increase in immigration will lead to a corresponding increase in needs and the efforts required in respect of francization, reception and integration support services, and measures designed to broaden receptiveness to diversity and encourage intercultural rapprochement and dialogue.