

Regardless of the reason for immigration, economic integration in the country of destination is essential to the migrant. A secure economic status plays an important role in social integration of an immigrant. It improves the immigrant's sense of pride and enhances his or her motivation to do well in the country of choice.

The Role of Networks in Economic Integration of New Arrivals

ATHER H. AKBARI
Saint Mary's University

According to *Global Issues*, there are about 191 million people in the world today who are not living in their country of birth.¹ People leave their country of birth to live in a new country for many reasons. These reasons could include religious, ethnic and gender persecutions in the country of origin; lack of individual freedom; or simply the desire to improve their current economic conditions. Regardless of the reason for immigration, economic integration in the country of destination is essential to the migrant. A secure economic status plays an important role in social integration of an immigrant. It improves the immigrant's sense of pride and enhances his or her motivation to do well in the country of choice. At the same time, the host country also benefits from economic assimilation of new arrivals. By participating in the labour force, immigrants add to the diversity of the labour force, help meet skill shortages and contribute financially to the provision for such public goods as research and development, arts and culture, developmental infrastructure, national defence, etc.

Past experience shows immigrant groups tend to have a spatial distribution in their host countries that differs sharply from that of the native born. Bartel (1989) identifies three important features of an area that immigrants consider while making their destination choice in the host country. The first is "ports" of entry, near seaports in the past, near airports nowadays. The second is where family and

friends (co-ethnics) from earlier migrations live. The third is where the jobs are, that is, where the immigrants are most able to gain employment that makes best use of their skills, or lack thereof. In the present research we argue that the second and third reasons are connected since family and friends could play an important role in economic integration of new arrivals. With the passage of time "ports of entry" and "family and friends" may become less central in deciding where to live in the host country, and immigrants may disperse, to some extent, in the host country.

The obvious questions are: Why do immigrants look for areas where co-ethnics from earlier migration live and what role do co-ethnics play in their settlement? According to Chiswick (2004), when a new immigrant group initially arrives in the new country the members of the group may be indifferent to alternative regions of the destination country that are equally attractive in terms of job opportunities and ports of entry. The initial settlers would tend to be immigrants with a lower demand for what are called "ethnic goods."² Subsequent immigrants from this ethnic group will not be indifferent to the alternative destinations as ethnic goods will be cheaper where their co-ethnics have already settled. If an ethnic community is already established, immigrants

¹ www.globalissues.org/HumanRights/racism/immigration.asp.

² Chiswick (2004) defines ethnic goods as the consumption characteristics of an immigrant/ethnic group not shared with the host population, broadly defined to include market and non-market goods and services, including social interactions for themselves and their children with people of their same origin.

By participating in the labour force, immigrants add to the diversity of the labour force, help meet skill shortages and contribute financially to the provision for such public goods as research and development, arts and culture, developmental infrastructure, national defence, etc.

with a higher demand for ethnic goods would find immigration that much more attractive.

Another important role of immigrant/ethnic concentrations, according to Chiswick (2004), is that they provide information networks that can be very valuable in social interaction, consumption and employment activities. Original residents of an area possess location-specific human capital, which includes information obtained directly and indirectly through established networks. "Not being connected to host country information networks when they arrive, immigrants have an incentive to create or 'import' information networks by living in geographic concentrations with other new and longer term immigrants of the same origin."

Empirical research has confirmed the important role of immigrant communities in attracting immigrants to the region where they live (for example, Akbari and Harrington (2007) for Canada and Zavadny (1999) for the United States).

The purpose of this research is to investigate how important ethnic networks are in the economic integration of new arrivals of "co-ethnic" in smaller regions of Canada, with a focus on Atlantic Canada.³ The research is important because of: 1) the recent interest among immigration policymakers to obtain wider spatial distribution of new arrivals, 2) an increased interest among smaller communities of Atlantic Canada to attract more immigrants and to retain them, and 3) the important role of potential rapid economic integration in an immigrant's location choice. The research is being conducted in different phases.

The first phase analysis is preliminary and is based on a focus group whose details have been provided in the inserts of other domains. New arrivals in the African-Francophone community of Moncton do not appear to be closely connected to original residents of the community. These new arrivals felt that the local Anglophone community

was more welcoming toward them. They also thought that the resident Acadians considered their knowledge of the French language superior. University students arriving from African countries do not feel welcome in the African-Francophone community. On the other hand, there is a greater interaction of new arrivals from Lebanon with members of the resident Lebanese community of Halifax. This could be possibly because the Lebanese community has been present in the region for more than 100 years and is well established. Their modes of interaction include churches, the Denham association, the Canadian Lebanon Society and honorary consuls. New arrivals also establish their own personal networks. For those involved within the community, the community provides a lot of support if it is needed – particularly financial. Community members help them find a job. As well, the churches have helped some people out – and that is kept very private. Some also believe that the community would come through to help an individual in need if it were something that very much needed, such as surgery, and this is done on an impersonal basis.

The immigrant community of Charlottetown is very small.⁴ Hence, it is difficult to find a particular immigrant community within this population. Our focus group included people from Columbia, Congo, Indonesia and Korea. None of them felt as if they had a community in the town, either because they were all newcomers or because there were no families from their country of origin. Individuals in the group were either professionals or had a business. Based on the responses, it can be implied that these individuals did not achieve their present economic status due to community networks, but through their own individual efforts.

Finally, the Indian community of Newfoundland also appears to have similar characteristics, as does the Lebanese community

³ Previous sections of this article provide a list of ethnic communities that are being studied.

⁴ According to the 2006 Census, only 4,785 immigrants live in Prince Edward Island (P.E.I.), more than half of them in Queen's county.

of Halifax, in interacting with new arrivals from the Indian subcontinent. This community appears to be more mobile and provides more exposure to its youth. University students from the subcontinent find it easier to interact with the community.

In summary, results of our focus group indicate that while greater opportunities for economic integration exist in the region through community networks for immigrants arriving from Lebanon and the Indian subcontinent, those arriving from African-Francophone countries lack this advantage. Reasons for this disadvantage need to be explored; the next two phases of the CDI project may shed light on the same. The immigrant community of Charlottetown appears to be too new to provide a network connection to new arrivals. It remains to be explored how immigrants in that city perform relative to those in larger cities with established networks (such as Halifax or Moncton).

References

- Akbari, A. H., and J. S. Harrington. 2007. "Initial Location Choice of New Immigrants to Canada." Atlantic Metropolis Centre Working Paper.
- Bartel, A. 1989. "Where Do the New Immigrants Live?" *Journal of Labor Economics* 7, 4 (October), p. 371-391.
- Chiswick, B. R., and P. W. Miller. 2004. "Do Enclaves Matter in Immigrant Adjustment?" Paper presented at the 2004 conference on Immigration organized by the Economics Domain of Atlantic Metropolis Centre.
- Zavodny, M. 1999. "Determinants of Recent Immigrants' Locational Choices." *International Migration Review*. 33, 4, p. 1014-1030.