

Study: Trends in the citizenship rate among new immigrants to Canada

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Canada has one of the highest immigrant citizenship rates among major Western countries. However, over the past 20 years, the percentage of recent immigrants acquiring Canadian citizenship has declined considerably, mainly among immigrants with lower family incomes and lower levels of education. Citizenship is a key marker of integration, allowing immigrants to vote, run for political office, and may also improve immigrants' job opportunities.

A new Statistics Canada study examines the trend in the citizenship rate among recent immigrants and how the trend varied by family income, education, knowledge of official languages, and source region. Using long-form census data from 1991 to 2016 and the 2011 National Household Survey, the analysis focuses on immigrants aged 18 and older who arrived in Canada five to nine years prior to a given census, making them eligible for citizenship.

Among recent immigrants, the citizenship rate rose from 68.6% in 1991 to 75.4% in 1996, and then declined to 60.4% in 2016. Much of the 15 percentage-point decline occurred after 2006.

Lower family income, lower knowledge of official languages, and lower educational attainment were associated with a larger decline in citizenship rates. Among recent immigrants in the lowest family income category (adult-equivalent adjusted income of \$10,000 or less), for example, the rate declined from 75.0% in 1996 to 51.5% in 2016. In comparison, the rate among recent immigrants in the highest family income category (over \$100,000) dropped from 69.7% to 66.7%.

Over the 1996-to-2016 period, the citizenship rate declined from 69.2% to 61.0% among recent immigrants whose mother tongue was English or French, compared with a decline from 79.7% to 63.4% among immigrants whose mother tongue was not English or French but who could speak English or French.

Among recent immigrants with a bachelor's or higher degree, the citizenship rate decreased from 80.9% to 67.1% over the 1996-to-2016 period. Among high school graduates, the rate declined from 75.7% to 55.4%.

The magnitude of the decline also varied considerably by source region. The citizenship rate was stable or declined slightly among immigrants from the United States, Western Europe and South America, whereas the rate among East Asian immigrants fell from 82.9% in 1996 to 44.8% in 2016. This decline was driven mostly by Chinese immigrants, partly reflecting their changing preferences in light of China's rapid economic growth since the late 1990s.

The research article "[Trends in the Citizenship Rate Among New Immigrants to Canada](#)," which is part of the *Economic Insights* series ([11-626-X](#)), is now available.

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