

Evolving family living arrangements of Canada's immigrants

by Derrick Thomas

Many people who move to a new country face uncertainty: they make sacrifices and sometimes suffer diminished social status. Many endure these hardships in what they believe are the long-term interests of their children and other family members. More often than not the entire purpose of migration is to accompany or rejoin family. On average, three-quarters of the immigrants admitted to Canada between 1980 and 1995 entered on the strength of their family relationship with someone who came with them or who already lived in Canada.¹ In short, the migratory behaviour of individuals frequently makes most sense when seen in the context of a family strategy.

Families can employ two basic immigration strategies, the choice of which is determined to some extent by immigration regulations. They can migrate together as a unit, relying on the skills and resources of one or more members to qualify for admission to Canada and to get established quickly. Or some members can migrate first, leaving more dependent members behind, to be sent for once a secure base has been established. People who come to Canada together tend to be members of nuclear families consisting of husband and wife with or without children. Many persons who join a family member later are spouses, particularly wives (25%), but a substantial proportion (40%) are extended family members such as parents, grandparents and siblings.

Clearly immigrant families and their relatives in Canada feel they benefit by living together. It is also believed that the migration and reunification of families is in the interest of the wider public. Families are thought to offer a source of support as immigrants get settled, learn an official language, or upgrade their qualifications. Newcomers may also lend a hand to relatives already established in Canada by providing

household labour or earnings and may free other family members to participate in the labour market or pursue higher education. By pooling their resources, families generally ease the adjustment process for new immigrants and minimize social costs for all concerned.

This article uses data primarily from three censuses to examine the family living arrangements of people aged 15 and over who immigrated in 1985, 1990 or 1995. It focusses on how these living arrangements evolve over time, with special emphasis on immigrants who joined relatives already in Canada compared with those who came with family.

Migrating together or separately

Data from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) for the years 1985 to 1995 indicate that about 40% of immigrants aged 15 and over came to Canada alone or traveled as individuals;

1. Of late, more immigrants have been selected for their skills, but in 1998, the last year for which complete information is available, over two-thirds of immigrants were admitted because they accompanied a relative or had family ties in this country.

This article relies primarily on data from the 1986, 1991 and 1996 Censuses of Population. It also uses some data from the Landed Immigrant Data System (LIDS) collected by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). The study population comprises persons who immigrated to Canada in either 1985, 1990 or 1995 at age 15 and over.

The LIDS database provides information about immigrants at the time that they immigrate to Canada and employs CIC administrative categories to classify immigrants into the basic categories of “independent,” “family” and “refugee.” The Census collects data about which members of a household are immigrants and the year they immigrated, but not the CIC classification under which they entered the country.

The immigrant population captured in the Census was divided into categories that reflect increasing levels of support from relatives. To avoid double-counting, immigrants who live in an economic family with more than one type of relative (for example, a later arrival and a Canadian-born adult) were classified according to the relative who is longest-established in Canada or who should be able to lend the most support. The six categories of living arrangements are immigrants who live: (1) alone as unattached individuals; (2) in economic families with children only; (3) with an adult or adults who immigrated in a year later than themselves; (4) with an adult or adults who immigrated in the same year; (5) with immigrants who migrated in a year previous to them; and (6) with Canadian-born adult relatives.

Immigrant: person from another country permitted to live in Canada permanently.

Economic family: a group of two or more persons who live in the same dwelling and are related to each other by blood, marriage, common law or adoption.

Established relatives: adult economic family members who were born in Canada (*Canadian-born relatives*) or immigrated in a year prior to the immigrant population under study (*established immigrant relatives*).

Accompanying adult: adult immigrants who were admitted in the same year as the arriving immigrant.

Later arrivals/immigrants: adult immigrants who entered Canada after the immigrant.

Probability: the estimated likelihood that an immigrant will experience a given living arrangement, expressed as a percentage.

Reference immigrant: the reference immigrant reflects the statistical model’s controlled characteristics held constant at their most common value. For instance, the most common age at immigration is 30 to 49, the most common place of birth is Asia, the most common level of education is some postsecondary without a university degree, and the most common official language spoken is English. To isolate the effect of one variable, age at immigration for example, age at immigration is allowed to fluctuate while all the other characteristics are held constant at birthplace Asia, postsecondary education and English language ability. Estimates are usually presented for living arrangements prevailing five years after immigration, but education and language ability are presented for one year after.

just under 60% were accompanied by other adults. Overall, about one-third came with children under 15. About 57% of immigrants who arrived in 1985 were sponsored by relatives in Canada; in 1995, this proportion was close to 54%.

It appears, however, that not all of these newcomers actually lived with the family members who sponsored them, or if they did, that such arrangements were comparatively short-lived. Census data show that in 1986, just over half of 1985

immigrants were living with relatives who were already established in Canada; five years later, fewer than 40% did. Most of the decline appears to have been among those who joined previous immigrants. The comparatively small proportion living with

Living arrangements	Living alone	With children only	With later arrivals only	With accompanying family %	With established relatives		
					Immigrants (1)	Canadian-born (2)	Either (1) or (2)
at immigration in 1985	18	1	--	24	--	--	57
1986	13	2	1	33	43	11	51
1991	11	4	8	40	29	11	38
1996	11	4	11	36	26	13	38
Average	11	3	7	36	32	12	42

-- Data not collected.
 Note: Totals may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Categories (1) and (2) are not mutually exclusive.
 Sources: Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Landed Immigrant Data System; and Statistics Canada, Censuses of Population.

Canadian-born adults actually grew over the period.

In contrast, the proportion of 1985 arrivals living with family who immigrated in the same year as themselves was fairly stable. The proportion who lived with immigrants who arrived in later years increased quickly, from less than 1% in 1986 to 8% in 1991 and 11% in 1996.

It seems that persons who migrate together are more likely to live together in Canada. This undoubtedly stems, in part, from the fact that persons who move together are likely to be more closely related than persons who join them later.

Many factors influence immigrant living arrangements

The living arrangements of immigrants are influenced by a number of factors. Gender and gender roles often dictate family arrangements and the timing of migration for family members. Age at immigration, length of time in Canada and changes over the life course also play a role. Differences in culture are additional considerations. Other more complex effects include level of education and official language ability.² Last but not least, the immigration regulations and the

relative social and economic conditions prevailing in Canada and the source country at the period of immigration are important.

These characteristics were used to develop a statistical model that estimates the probability (or likelihood) that an immigrant will reside in an economic family with a particular type of co-resident. The model isolates the effect of each characteristic on those probabilities; in other words, all the other factors in the model are “controlled for” or held constant while the influence of one is being considered. Probabilities are estimated for a benchmark reference immigrant, a simulated “typical immigrant” against whom the impact of change in a given characteristic is measured. Separate estimates were calculated for men and women because they have such different experiences. For simplicity’s sake, when describing the probabilities the term “immigrant” is employed rather than “reference immigrant,” with the understanding that it refers to an immigrant with the most typical characteristics.

Women join households, men bring their families with them

Men and women have different living arrangements at different stages in

their lives. Women generally marry at younger ages, are more often single parents and more often live alone in old age.

It is clear from Census data that a person’s age at immigration exerts a powerful effect on living arrangements. As expected, though, there are clear differences between men and women. Women have a greater tendency to live with adults who had immigrated in a previous year; for their part, men more often live with persons who migrated with them or who joined them later. To the extent that a family immigrates over a period of years, men more often lead the way to Canada and are joined later by women and children.

Even after five years in Canada, both women and men who immigrated as teenagers have the highest likelihood of living with adults who migrated in the same year (probably their parents). Young women, though, have a slightly higher probability of living with established immigrants.

2. Employment and income are related in even more complex ways, and will be discussed in a forthcoming article.

Canada has an evaluation system that helps immigration officers assess the suitability of people who want to live here. Independent immigrants are evaluated on the point system; many others, such as refugees and family class applicants, are not. Family reunification enables the close family of a landed immigrant to join him or her in Canada. Close family is defined as a spouse, dependent children, parents, grandparents, orphaned brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces, or grandchildren under 19 and unmarried, fiancé(e) and dependent children. It accounts for roughly half of all newcomers to Canada.

Family reunification has long been a key objective of Canadian immigration policy and legislation. Canada has resisted the trend in other immigrant-receiving countries to restrict family immigration. Family class immigration permits both recent immigrants and long-established Canadians to be reunited with close family members from abroad, assists them in achieving self-reliance and supports the building of communities.

Although family class immigrants are not assessed by the point system, they must prove to the visa officer in their country of residence that they meet Canada's health standards and are of good character. Also, they must be sponsored by a close relative who is a citizen or permanent resident of Canada. Sponsors must sign an undertaking of financial responsibility, which may extend from one to ten years, to provide housing and care for the people they bring in. People who do not qualify under the family class criteria but who have close relatives here may apply to enter as skilled workers and receive points for having a relative in Canada.

Strengthening the family unit is important in helping newcomers adjust to Canada. Still, studies show that family class immigrants often have more difficulty settling in because they are less able to speak English or French or have fewer job skills. The support from close relatives can be crucial in helping a newcomer meet these challenges successfully.

The effect of cross-border marriages may be discerned in people migrating in their twenties. All else being equal, there is a one in three chance that a woman immigrating at this age will live with an immigrant who was already established in Canada, and a one in four chance for men. An estimated 20% of the men in this group will live with a person who followed them to Canada, compared with 11% of the women. However, 15% of men who immigrate in their twenties will live alone.

Among both men and women, but especially men, people who immigrate in their prime working years between the ages of 30 and 49 have a high probability of continuing to live with persons who immigrated with them, at almost 60% after five years.

Thereafter as the age at migration increases, the probability that an immigrant will live with established

relatives also climbs. There is a 48% likelihood that those who arrived as seniors will be living with immigrants who preceded them. Women admitted after age 65, however, also have the highest probability of living alone of all age groups. After five years in Canada, an estimated 23% will live alone, compared with 4% of men. It does not appear, however, that many of these women were widowed in Canada. More women than men migrate at an older age, and the probability that they will live alone is high even one year after their arrival. This suggests that the death of their partners abroad may prompt the immigration of older women.

Families evolve and change with time in Canada

Family arrangements also change as immigrants adjust to life in their new country, and the number of years since

their admission to Canada has a profound impact on the type of household they live in. Holding constant all factors except length of residence, the probability that an immigrant will live with established immigrants falls over a decade by almost half for men (from 30% in the first to 17% in the tenth year), and by over one-third for women (from 34% to 22%). Given that over half of all immigrants migrate on the strength of a sponsor in Canada, and that the drop in the probability of living with previous immigrants is most precipitous between one and five years after arrival, the data suggest that living with established relatives is an interim arrangement for many.

The probability that an immigrant man will be joined by someone who arrived in a year later than himself increases from 2% after one year in Canada to 12% after five years and to almost 20% after 10 years. The

Age at arrival	Living alone	With children only	With later arrivals only	With accompanying family	With established relatives	
					Immigrants	Canadian-born
%						
Men						
Under 20	5	2	4	65	22	2
20-29	15	1	20	32	26	5
30-49	7	1	14	59	16	3
50-64	4	†	4	59	29	3
65 and over	4	†	2	40	48	4
Women						
Under 20	5	3	6	55	27	3
20-29	10	4	11	34	35	6
30-49	9	5	8	55	20	3
50-64	12	1	6	37	40	4
65 and over	23	†	5	17	48	6

† Less than 1 percent.

Immigrants rely less on established immigrants the longer they live in Canada

Years of residence	%					
	Men					
1	11	2	2	53	30	2
5	9	1	12	55	20	3
10	8	1	20	49	17	4
Women						
1	11	2	1	48	34	3
5	9	4	8	49	25	3
10	12	6	11	45	22	4

Immigrants from some non-traditional source regions are more likely to be living alone or with children only

Place of birth	%					
	Men					
United States	11	2	2	31	5	49
Latin America/Caribbean	11	2	16	44	20	7
Europe	10	1	13	57	9	10
Africa	17	1	17	47	11	6
Asia/Pacific	7	1	14	59	16	3
Women						
United States	12	8	1	22	7	50
Latin America/Caribbean	10	15	12	36	20	7
Europe	11	6	4	55	14	10
Africa	10	11	7	52	17	3
Asia/Pacific	9	5	8	55	20	3

Note: Percentage refers to estimated probabilities for a reference immigrant at five years after immigrating to Canada. See "What you should know about this study." Totals may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Source: Statistics Canada, Censuses of Population.

Highest level of education	Living alone	With children only	With later arrivals only	With accompanying family	With established relatives	
					Immigrants	Canadian-born
Men						
Primary/secondary	6	1	13	58	19	2
High school graduation	7	1	15	58	17	2
Some postsecondary	7	1	14	59	16	3
University degree	7	1	13	64	12	2
Women						
Primary/secondary	6	3	1	55	31	3
High school graduation	6	3	1	57	31	2
Some postsecondary	10	3	1	54	30	3
University degree	9	2	2	58	26	3

Note: Percentage refers to estimated probabilities for a reference immigrant at one year after immigrating to Canada. See "What you should know about this study." Totals may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Source: Statistics Canada, Censuses of Population.

corresponding figures for women suggest that they are less likely to sponsor new immigrants.

In contrast, the likelihood of living with other adults who immigrated in the same year is much more stable over time, although after 10 years it too has declined a little. Again, it seems that family members who migrate together are inherently more likely to remain living together than relatives who are separated by migration.

Immigrants differ by period of immigration

The social and economic conditions that push migrants out of their own country, or pull them toward Canada, vary over time. They determine who will move in a given period and they condition the behaviour of these migrants. Of special importance are the regulations governing migration in the country of origin and in Canada.

In 1985, Canada curtailed the selection of skilled workers in view of high rates of domestic unemployment, and family reunification became virtually the only means of entering the country. With the boom of the late

80s the emphasis shifted to selecting independent migrants, and by 1990 a smaller proportion of immigrants were being admitted to join family members already in Canada. The early 90s witnessed a new recession and by 1995, family reunification was again an important component of immigration.

This cycle suggests that immigrants who came in 1985 and in 1995 differ in their living arrangements from those who arrived in 1990. Holding other factors constant, five years after immigration, 1990 immigrants were more likely to be living with accompanying adults who had come in that same year, while 1985 arrivals had the highest probability of living with established family.

People born in different regions have different family migration patterns

Migrants born in different source countries also differ considerably in terms of their living arrangements in Canada. These differences reflect historical connections to Canada as well as cultural traditions surrounding gender roles, marriage and extended family living arrangements.

All other things being equal, immigrants born in Latin America or the Caribbean, in Asia and in Africa are the most likely to live with established immigrants. Immigrants from these regions also have the highest likelihood of living with immigrants who arrived later. For Americans and Europeans, the probabilities of living with immigrants from a previous year are lower but they are much higher for living with Canadian-born adults. American-born immigrants seem to choose Canadian mates: both men and women have about a 50% likelihood of living with a Canadian-born person within five years of coming to Canada. The probability is about 10% for Europeans and it is almost nil for immigrants from most other regions of origin. Cross-border marriages apparently drive much of the immigration to Canada from the United States.

Immigrants born in Asia and Europe have the highest probabilities of living with someone who immigrated in the same year, at over 50% five years after arrival for both men and women. In contrast, men from Africa

have the greatest likelihood of living alone; young African men rival senior women in their propensity to live alone. Since a relatively high proportion of African women are still living with children only, these findings suggest that migrants from this region might be having difficulty reuniting their families. The scattering of refugee families resulting from turmoil in some African countries during the 1980s and 1990s may well be responsible.

Women from Latin America and the Caribbean are most likely to be single parents. Compared with other women, there is a higher probability that women from these regions will lead the migration of their families. This is indicated, for example, by the comparatively higher likelihood that they will live with immigrants who are later arrivals than themselves.

With education comes increased independence

Both education and language ability interact with economic family arrangements. For example, five or ten years after arrival, it can be difficult to say whether an immigrant lives in a particular type of family because they speak an official language or whether they have learned an official language because of their living arrangements. Accordingly, the probabilities related to education and language ability are estimated for one year after immigration.

People with a higher level of education exhibit less reliance on family members already established in Canada. All else being constant, the probability of living with established immigrants decreases with education among both sexes. It is also clear that the higher the level of education, the higher the probability that an immigrant will be living with others who came at the same time. The chances of living alone also increase with schooling.

The impact of official language ability is quite similar to that of education. Those who speak neither of Canada's

official languages have the greatest likelihood of living with immigrants who preceded them to Canada. Those who speak both official languages have a high probability of living alone or with persons who migrated in the same year.

Summary

The general living arrangements of immigrants, and in particular their propensity to live with established relatives, is conditioned by gender, life stage and culture. It is also conditioned in more complex ways by education and language ability. It must be acknowledged, however, that Canadian immigration policy plays an important role in determining the characteristics of immigrants and can directly or indirectly influence their subsequent living arrangements.

Clearly, an adjustment in the economic family arrangements of immigrants takes place over time. Most immigrants are able to rely on the support of family in Canada, but some seem to lack such assistance. They include women immigrating after age 65, young African men and single mothers from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. Furthermore, it seems that families divided by the migration process are more likely to live apart after a short time in Canada than are families who arrive in the same calendar year. The decision to migrate together may itself imply closer bonds and the intention to live together after arrival.



Derrick Thomas is a senior analyst with Housing, Family and Social Statistics Division, Statistics Canada.

Need more information
from Statistics Canada?



Call our **NATIONAL ENQUIRIES LINE:**
1 800 263-1136

To order publications:
NATIONAL ORDER LINE: 1 800 267-6677
INTERNET: order@statcan.ca
National TDD Line: 1 800 363-7629

STATISTICS CANADA HAS 9 REGIONAL REFERENCE CENTRES TO SERVE YOU:

Newfoundland, Labrador
Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island
Halifax, Nova Scotia – (902) 426-5331
Fax number (902) 426-9538
Quebec and Territory of Nunavut
Montreal, Quebec – (514) 283-5725
Fax number (514) 283-9350
Ontario
Toronto, Ontario – (416) 973-6586
Fax number (416) 973-7475
Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba – (204) 983-4020
Fax number (204) 983-7543
Saskatchewan
Regina, Saskatchewan – (306) 780-5405
Fax number (306) 780-5403
Alberta and Northwest Territories
Edmonton, Alberta – (780) 495-3027
Fax number (780) 495-5318
Southern Alberta
Calgary, Alberta – (403) 292-6717
Fax number (403) 292-4958
British Columbia and Yukon
Vancouver, British Columbia – (604) 666-3691
Fax number (604) 666-4863
National Capital Region
(613) 951-8116
Fax number (613) 951-0581

STANDARDS OF SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC

To maintain quality service to the public, Statistics Canada follows established standards covering statistical products and services, delivery of statistical information, cost-recovered services and service to respondents. To obtain a copy of these service standards, please contact your nearest Statistics Canada Regional Reference Centre.

If You're On the Move...

Make sure we know where to find you by filling out the inserted reply card in this publication. If the reply card is no longer attached, please forward the necessary information (subscriber's name, old address, new address, telephone number and client reference number) to:

**Operations and Integration Division
Circulation Management
Statistics Canada
120 Parkdale Avenue
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0T6**



We require six weeks advance notice to ensure uninterrupted delivery, so please keep us informed when you're on the move!