

The hidden power of provincial and territorial immigration programs in shaping Canada's immigration Landscape

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Abstract

The Canadian government has set a target to welcome 500,000 permanent immigrants by 2025. While the Immigration Levels Plan has gained significant attention, the expansion of Provincial Nominees Programs (PNPs)—which will select more economic immigrants than federal programs—has gone largely unnoticed. PNPs empower provinces and territories (PTs) to actively select (“nominate”) economic immigrants and have expanded tremendously in the last few decades. This paper scrutinizes the significance of PNPs, exploring key developments and policy outputs, with a focus on inter-provincial variations. Notably, the PNP landscape has undergone significant transformations since earlier research (for example, Pandey & Townsend, 2011, 2013; Paquet, 2016; Seidle, 2014).

Conducting a policy-oriented analysis of over 75 active PTs' immigration programs (policy outputs), we examine the choices made by provinces in terms of policy design, requirements, and nominations. Based on a qualitative content analysis of policy documents and immigration streams in 2021-2022, we aim to investigate whether PNPs follow a divergent or convergent trend compared to the federal level in selecting economic immigrants, specifically in relation to three key evolutions: (1) the shift from a human capital-oriented model to a more employment-based/occupation-driven model, (2) the transformation into a two-step system, and (3) the preference of high-skilled individuals.

Preliminary findings suggest that the majority of immigration programs designed by PTs are employment-based. Indeed, over 60% of provincial nominees were selected through streams that required a job offer for consideration. The influence of PNPs on the transformation of economic immigration into a two-step system appears to be moderate, as approximately 50% of the nominees were selected through streams that required previous Canadian experience. However, these results should be tempered given that a job offer or experience in Canada—while not being an explicit requirement—can still be taken into account and factored into the selection criteria and grids. The preference for high-skilled individuals remains, but PNPs provide an avenue for selecting a few low-skilled individuals to obtain a permanent residence (PR). We observed that the shift toward an employment-based/occupation-driven model and two-step access to PR is more pronounced in programs designed for low-skilled individuals. Generally, we noticed significant variations in the ways PTs select their economic immigrants. As a result, a comprehensive understanding of the Canadian economic immigration system requires a detailed examination of the programs and dynamics at the provincial and territorial levels.

Biography

Catherine Xhardez is an assistant professor in the department of political science at the Université de Montréal. She holds a PhD in political science (Université Saint-Louis – Bruxelles and Sciences Po Paris). Before joining Université de Montréal, she was a FWO postdoctoral researcher at the Brussels School of Governance of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (2020-2022) and a postdoctoral fellow at Concordia University (2018-2020). With a background in political science and in public law, her research focuses on immigration, public policy and federalism. Catherine is currently developing a research program on immigration federalism and immigration-related public policies in federal states and at the level of federated entities. She is a member of the Équipe de recherche sur l'immigration au Québec et ailleurs (ERIQA) and affiliated with the Centre d'études et de recherches internationales (CÉRIUM) and the Centre de recherche sur les politiques et le développement social (CPDS) at the Université de Montréal. Her PhD thesis focused on the relationship between substate nationalism and the integration of immigrants in Flanders and Quebec. In this context, she carried out research stays at Yale (2015-2016), McGill (2016) and Oxford (2018). Her research has been published in *Regional Studies*, *Citizenship Studies*, *Politics and Governance* and *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, among others, as well as in several edited volumes.