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## **Immigrants and Cities: Making the Most of an Advantage**

**Ottawa** – The latest Statistics Canada data show that Canada’s major cities are some of the most ethnically diverse in the world. That’s a real plus in the new economy – as long as we create the conditions for full inclusion of immigrants in the life of their cities.

That’s the thrust of a new paper from CPRN. *Immigration, Diversity and Social Inclusion in Canada’s Cities*, by Family Network Research Associate, Martin Papillon, underlines the importance of immigration to the future of Canada’s cities and outlines what needs to be done to see that Canada’s diversity remains an asset.

“The increasing diversity and concentration of the immigrant populations in our largest urban centres today presents us with new challenges, and new risks,” says Papillon, “but it can also be our greatest asset.”

While immigrants constituted 18.4% of Canada’s population in 2001, they made up 44% of the population of Metropolitan Toronto, 37.5% in Vancouver and 18.5% in Montreal.

“Immigration adds to the human and cultural capital of our cities, and the cultural mix in a city like Toronto is a source of creativity and innovation,” Papillon says. “However, there is nothing automatic about this. We have to ensure the conditions that allow newcomers to contribute fully to the economic, social and cultural life of their city.”

“There is evidence that we are falling short in that regard.”

Recent data suggest that today’s immigrants are facing greater difficulty adjusting to life in Canada than their predecessors. They experience higher than average levels of poverty and unemployment, and face difficulty accessing affordable housing and skilled jobs. Racial discrimination and linguistic and professional barriers exacerbate the situation.

“These are signs that we are not doing enough to ensure the inclusion of newcomers.”

The challenge of integrating new immigrants into the country is shared by federal, provincial and municipal governments, as well as community-level NGOs. Papillon identifies two areas that need special attention: the duration, type and level of support to new arrivals, and; the need for

better coordination, planning and distribution of resources among the different actors.

Among his recommendations:

#### Settlement Services

- Be responsive to the variety of situations in different cities and communities.
- Expand the current short-term emphasis on language and orientation to include medium- to long-term services for those most at risk of exclusion – job training, access to affordable housing, additional language training and support for children.
- Standardize the assessment and recognition of foreign credentials.
- Better efforts to target and counter discrimination.
- Urban revitalization programs to strengthen community infrastructure and institutions that foster strong civic networks and community initiatives.

#### Collaboration

- Greater intergovernmental collaboration that balances concern for equity with the need for sensitivity to local conditions.
- An increased role in policy planning and priority setting for local governments and NGOs to allow more local responsiveness.
- Additional resources for municipal and local service providers.

“Ensuring inclusion and fostering diversity at the same time is a multi-level challenge,” says Papillon. “It can only be accomplished with a high degree of cooperation among all actors.”

“And we cannot afford to fail. Sustaining diversity is too important to the future of our cities.”

The current paper is one of four in a forthcoming volume edited by Family Network Research Associate, Leslie Seidle, that examines the federal role in Canada’s cities. Other papers deal with urban poverty (forthcoming), urban Aboriginal people (Dec. ’02) and housing (Jan. ’03).

- 30 -

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- 2 -