Contradictions in Recent Quebec Immigration Policy: Giving with one hand, taking with the other

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A Refresher on Quebec Settlement and Integration Policy

• Quebec is the only majority-francophone jurisdiction in North America – 8.4 million people

• Before Quebec gained control of immigrant selection and settlement, immigrants tended to integrate into anglophone minority

• 1991: Canada-Quebec Accord relating to Immigration and Temporary Admission of Aliens

• Since then, control over levels of immigration, selection and integration services
Strong Community Settlement Sector

- Active umbrella organization: TCRI. [http://tcri.qc.ca/](http://tcri.qc.ca/)
- Heavy focus on Greater Montreal region (more so than rest of Canada)
- Well-organized, neighbourhood-focused, established settlement organizations – funded by Quebec government
- Classic services for permanent residents:
  - Reception and orientation (school, health, housing)
  - Employability
  - Immigration applications
  - French courses
Election of CAQ in 2018

- New party to government – election platform with negative focus on immigration
- Change of name: Ministère d'immigration, francisation et intégration - MIFI (replacing MIDI’s Diversity and Inclusion)
- After years of problematic public rhetoric (from all parties), succession of rapid and controversial changes
- However, « giving with one hand, taking with the other »…
Contradictory Changes in Policy

- Permanent residents
- Refugee claimants
- Migrant workers
- International students
- Various « sponsorship » programs
Permanent Residents

Problems
• Commitment to reduce to 40,000 per year in context of major labour shortage
• Introduction of « Values Test »
• Freeze and thaw of immigration applications in 2019

Contradictions
• Numbers not reduced in practice
• Expansion of settlement services
• Financial support for participating in French courses
• Values test can be taken multiple times
Refugee Claimants

Problems
• Negative public rhetoric
• Exclusion from subsidized daycare (under Liberals in 2017)

Contradictions
• Major public investment in shelter, health and social services
• Opening eligibility for French classes
• New, limited employment services
• New eligibility for Housing Allowance
Migrant Workers

Problems
• Proposals to limit access to Permanent Residence
• Freeze of applications under the Quebec Experience Class in 2019
• Very high levels of French required
• Reopened under existing rules in November 2019

Contradictions
• New eligibility for all settlement services
• Introduction of new French courses for their schedules
• Special measures for long-standing caregiver applications
• PR still possible for all levels of occupations (i.e. «low-skilled») after only 12 months of work
International Students

Problems
• Proposals to limit access to Permanent Residence
• New applications frozen in summer 2019
• Freeze of applications under the Quebec Experience Class in 2019
• Reopened under old rules in November 2019

Contradictions
• New eligibility for all settlement services
• Introduction of new French courses for their schedules
• Still recognized as desirable immigrants
Various Sponsorship Programs

Problems
• Framed as a charitable act, a potential burden on the state
• Repeated freezing of applications for:
  • Parents & Grandparents
  • Private Sponsorship of Refugees
• Problematic procedures when open

Contradictions
• Lower financial criteria than in rest of Canada
• More flexible formula for private sponsorship of refugees
How to respond? Permanent residency

- Repeated need to mobilize around surprise announcements
- Sense of insecurity for people working towards PR (i.e. migrant workers, international students)
- Clear need in province for continued immigration – restrictions don’t make any economic sense
- But settlement support for PRs is expanding
How to respond? Settlement services

- Expanded eligibility very welcome - a longstanding demand
- But struggle with rapid increase in numbers
- Training on specific needs of migrant workers and international students lacking – TCRI and allies are responding
- Still no funding for the organizations that do the important grassroots outreach and advocacy
How to respond? Refugee claimants

• Numbers still very high in Quebec – although immediate sense of « crisis » is diminished
• Apart from the daycare exclusion, government response has been very positive
• Class action to fight daycare exclusion being mounted, led by TCRI
How to respond? City of Montreal

• New engagement by the City of Montreal to offer direct services to immigrants in relation to settlement
• Particular commitment to precarious status migrants – including undocumented
• Limited mandate, but changing the landscape
How to respond? Public rhetoric

• Negative public rhetoric requires active mobilisation and resistance:
  • Bill 21 on symbols of faith in the public sector
  • Values Test
  • General rise in xenophobia
• Most enduring problem - difficult to predict the future around this
Thanks

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