

BACKGROUND

At the end of January 1990, the Standing Committee on Labour, Employment and Immigration began an investigation of demographic change and immigration levels. This study reflected increasing public interest in the question of immigration levels for Canada and coincided with the Minister's expanded consultations with members of the public. Equally important, the Committee's inquiry followed directly on the release of the results of the Demographic Review, a study conducted by Health and Welfare Canada to analyze the relationships between population characteristics, such as population aging and immigration, and a range of social and economic variables. The Review and its findings are expected to assist federal policy development for the 1990s and beyond.

The Committee invited a number of academic experts to appear as witnesses to share their research results on the implications of demographic trends, the effect of immigration on these trends, the impact of immigration on the Canadian economy, the contribution of immigrants to Canadian society, the composition of our immigration flow, and future levels. In the next phase of the study, the Committee plans to invite witnesses from ethnic, cultural and other organizations to hear their views on these important matters.

The Committee is issuing this interim report now at the express request of the Minister of Employment and Immigration in order that she may consider the Committee's views before tabling her report on immigration levels for 1991-95 by the end of June. Following this interim report, the Committee will continue the study and complete its final report.

TESTIMONY

Most of the witnesses the Committee has heard to date addressed the issue of the aging population and what could be done, if anything, to counteract or delay it. All agreed that an aging population was an inevitable consequence of declining birth rates, a trend occurring in all western industrialized countries. Most stated or implied in this regard that population aging could only be counteracted by an increase in fertility, yet they also noted that it could be delayed slightly by higher levels of immigration, giving us a longer period of time to adjust to the changes that aging will bring. Similarly, although Canada's population will eventually begin to decline, given current low levels of fertility, it was estimated that each additional 60,000 immigrants per year would delay that decline by eight or nine years.