

Multiculturalism

History

The groundwork for a multicultural Canada was laid early in the country's history. Aboriginal society was multicultural and multilingual. The first French and British explorers who came to Canada in the 16th and 17th centuries interacted with the First Nations to build a unique Canadian heritage.

During the final decades of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th, many eastern and northern Europeans immigrated to Canada in search of land and freedom. During this same period, large numbers of Chinese and South Asians also came to Canada as labourers to work in the mines, on the railroad or in service industries.

Individuals from all over the world have settled in Canada, making it a truly multicultural country. In 1991, over 11 million Canadians (including Aboriginals), or 42 percent of the Canadian population, reported having a least some ethnic origin other than British or French. Among the larger groups are German, Italian, Ukrainian, Dutch, Polish, Chinese, South Asian, Jewish, Caribbean, Portuguese and Scandinavian.

Education

Canada's education system has had to respond creatively to the cultural diversity of the people. Over 60 languages are spoken by more than 70 ethnocultural groups across the country. Many schools have students from 20 or more distinct ethnocultural groups. In Toronto and Vancouver, over half the students in public schools can speak languages other than English or French.

Multicultural and anti-racist education programs challenge the educational system at all levels to adapt itself

to the diversity of its clientele to ensure equity and inclusiveness. At school, teachers bring their students to an understanding and appreciation of other cultures.

Heritage language instruction is available in many communities. In some provinces and communities, heritage language classes are available in the schools. The federal government funds projects designed to promote innovative approaches to the teaching of heritage languages. It also supports the development of Canadian resources, expertise and educational materials for heritage language schools.

In addition, the Government has programs to promote institutional change in the educational system, multicultural research, ethnic histories and other documentary resources, and the development of courses and the creation of chairs of study on multiculturalism at Canadian universities.

Media

Active for more than 80 years, ethnic newspapers flourish across Canada. In Toronto alone, there are more than 100 daily, weekly, monthly or quarterly ethnic-language publications. More than 40 cultures are represented in Canada's ethnic press; many of these publications are national in scope.

Ethnic radio and television broadcasting in Canada is also thriving. Nine radio stations in five cities broadcast a large percentage of their weekly programming to specific ethnic groups, notably Italian, Ukrainian, German, Greek, Portuguese and Chinese. Toronto has a full-time ethnic television station. Three ethnic specialty television services are licensed, and more than

60 radio stations include ethnic broadcasting in their schedules. Numerous cable companies carry programming in a variety of languages on community channels.

Canada's Broadcasting Act, which obtained royal assent in 1991, enshrined the concept of access by minorities. The legislation affirms that the Canadian broadcasting system should, through its programming and the employment opportunities arising out of its operations, serve the need of a diverse society and reflect the multicultural and multiracial nature of Canada.

Business

Canada's diversity is increasingly recognized as an asset in both the domestic and international market, and as a major contributing factor to Canadian economic prosperity. Canadians who came here as immigrants have gained international acclaim in the business world and continue to make decisive contributions to Canada's wealth. According to data compiled by Canadian Heritage:

- in 1988, they brought some \$6 billion to Canada;
- they are 50 percent more likely to be self-employed than other Canadians;
- they save more, thereby expanding the pool of investment capital available in the country;
- they tend to consume less in public services, and few of them receive social assistance;
- immigrants have higher than average incomes and higher wages, therefore they pay more in taxes.