



# Canadian Labour Market and Skills Researcher Network

## Working Paper No. 91

### Age at Migration, Language and Fertility Patterns among Migrants to Canada

*Alicia Adsera*  
Princeton University

*Ana Ferrer*  
University of Calgary

January 2012

CLSRN is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) under its Strategic Knowledge Clusters Program. Research activities of CLSRN are carried out with support of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC). All opinions are those of the authors and do not reflect the views of HRSDC or the SSHRC.

# **Age at Migration, Language and Fertility Patterns among Migrants to Canada**

## **Abstract**

This paper explores the fertility patterns of immigrant children to Canada using the 20 percent sample of the Canadian Census from 1991 through 2006. Fertility increases with age at immigration, with a sharp rise for those immigrating in their late teens and this pattern is similar for all countries of origin. Proficiency in official languages does not seem a key mechanism through which age at immigration affects fertility – fertility of immigrants with an official mother tongue also differs from that of natives. Formal education, however, matters as college graduates who arrived to Canada at any age before adulthood show similar fertility patterns as their native peers, whereas fertility of those who did not reach tertiary education rises with age at migration.

JEL: J13, J15

Keywords: Fertility, Migration, Age at Migration, Language

## Executive Summary

In recent years, the number of immigrants arriving in OECD countries has increased considerably. At the same time, many of these countries face increased demographic pressure on social services, as the baby-boom generation retires. In this context, the contribution that immigrants can make to the welfare state has motivated a significant body of research examining differences in fertility between the immigrant population and the native born and whether these tend to converge over the medium to long term. Further, since childbearing decisions impact the well-being of households and are related to education and labor market participation choices, the analysis of immigrant fertility differentials helps to understand the socio-economic integration of immigrants, particularly women, and the changing shape of family structure in immigrant recipient countries.

In Canada as well, international migration was responsible for about two-thirds of total population growth (2006) and was the main contributor to Canadian labour force growth (70%). In the context of rising demographic dependency ratios due to low population growth and the aging of the baby boom generation, immigration is a key factor to sustaining current levels of public services in Canada. However, this strategy not only relies on the direct relief that new entering population provides to dependency ratios, but also on the ability of immigrants to economically assimilate into Canadian society. In this context, the interplay of fertility and immigration rates has also an important role in determining the future economic growth of Canada. Although high fertility rates among first generation immigrants may help boost overall fertility rates and sustain population growth, they could also hinder the economic assimilation of female immigrants and impact the economic wellbeing of immigrant families and the human capital investments of their children. On the other hand, highly educated immigrants may exhibit low fertility behaviour depressing the rate of population growth but will, presumably, integrate better in the economy. Our analysis highlights the importance of this trade-off in devising immigration policies.

Given the difficulties in analyzing the interplay between fertility and other decisions, such as education and labour market participation, we examine the fertility outcomes of those immigrating as children. Because child immigrants usually arrive with their parents, their decision to immigrate is plausible independent of other variables affecting fertility such as labor market participation, education or their own family formation. Further, for individuals who migrated as children, the link between migration and subsequent behavior should be less complicated by any short-term, disruptive effects of the migration experience. Overall, a child migration decision is bound to be less biased by selection and simultaneity bias than that of adult immigrants.

Our study shows that immigrant fertility is generally higher than that of Canadian born women, though not by much. We uncover an increasing relationship between fertility and age at immigration that accelerates in the late teens. This assimilation profile is present among immigrants coming from different cultural backgrounds, although their actual fertility levels vary by country of origin.

We further explore whether these fertility patterns are associated with language acquisition. This does seem unlikely as we find that fertility behaviour of immigrants with

an official mother tongue also differs from that of natives. This is contrary to previous literature in immigrant assimilation outcomes which finds strong correlation between speaking an official mother tongue and fertility convergence. Education appears as a much more promising channel through which fertility convergence occurs, as immigrants that achieve post-secondary education show fertility patterns that are almost identical to those of the Canadian-born regardless of their age of arrival. Child immigrants who do not pursue post-secondary education, however, show increasing rates fertility with age at immigration