Towards the Integration of Immigrants in Quebec's Qualified Workforce: an Overview of the First Years Following Their Arrival and the Effects of Selection Policies

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The recognition of foreign credentials and the lengthy registration procedures to join the professional order have been the topic of many public debates in Quebec and throughout the rest of Canada over the past few years. The Quebec Immigration Ministry has taken measures to enforce the access to regulated professions (MICC, 2006), giving importance to the economic integration of immigrants and making the most of their contribution to the host country's economy, especially in the case of migrants selected for economic purposes. Although most of the attention has been focused on job training as it relates to job occupancy, little is known about whether or not jobs held by immigrants match their skill level during the first years following migration, and the factors helping or hindering the situation. This paper will contribute to the existing research by analyzing longitudinal data on selected immigrant workers in Quebec. First, we will examine the history of immigrants in qualified jobs after they migrated. Second, this study will allow us to understand the effectiveness of Quebec's selection grid.

Even though many immigrants come to Quebec for humanitarian reasons or to reunite with their families, most of Quebec's migration flow (approximately 60%) is a selected migration. Being a mostly French-speaking province justifies the importance and the reason why as early as 1978, but formally since 1991, Quebec has been granted full authority on the selection of its economic immigrants, as well as how best to integrate them into this province. Quebec's government follows similar guidelines to the Canadian system on this matter; it has developed a selection grid based on a point system. Immigrant workers are allowed to settle in Quebec as long as they meet specific criteria determined by their score on the selection grid such as adaptability (i.e. personal qualities, motivation, knowledge of Quebec, having stayed in Quebec and having relatives or friends living in the province), knowledge of French and English, training, occupation, professional experience, age, and financial autonomy. Their spouse's characteristics (i.e. age, training, professional experience, and knowledge of French) as well as the presence of kids under 18 years of age are also taken into account. This system is designed to facilitate the selection of candidates with promising profiles for labour market integration. Thus, they should be able to contribute to the host country's economy and to meet the demand for qualified manpower within a short period of time.

We will study to which extent this policy, largely based on human capital and to a lesser degree on social capital, succeeds in explaining the economic insertion process of selected immigrant workers in Quebec by focusing on the access to jobs matching their skill level and their ability to retain these jobs. Obtaining and maintaining a job on the labour market cannot be considered as the end of the economic integration process. The level of qualification required for the job and the migrant's skills still need to be taken into consideration.

Few studies have been able to directly assess the relation between the initial training of the migrant and the level of education required by the jobs occupied in the host society because of the lack of adequate data. For this reason, most research has been based on indirect indicators of job qualification, focusing on the link between the socioeconomic status of the job in the host country compared to the one occupied in the country of origin (Crespo, 1993;

Renaud and Crespo, 1994; McAllister, 1995; Raijman and Semyonov, 1995; Bauer and Zimmermann, 1999). However, this approach fails to include migrants who do not have work experience prior to migration.

Renaud and Cayn (2006) were able to use a direct indicator which included all immigrants, regardless of whether or not they had work experience prior to migrating. They were also able to assess the level of education upon arrival in Quebec and the required level of education for a given job. Consequently, they were able to verify the timespan between looking for a job and obtaining one for which immigrants qualified. The present study takes Renaud and Cayn's research in a new direction by evaluating this situation beyond the first steps to a qualified job. Are new immigrants able to retain these jobs? Is job retention linked to the migrant's skills and selection policies? How does the presence in qualified jobs, under-qualified jobs and unemployment evolve over time?

Indeed, looking at the first access to a qualified job informs us on only one of the facets the relationship between skills and employment can take. This description alone is insufficient to build a complete image of a phenomenon we may assume to be most complex. This study aims at completing this vision using longitudinal data on qualified migrant workers in Quebec by addressing the job history in qualified, under-qualified jobs and unemployment form different standpoints.

The data comes from a study of a representative sample of 1541 selected workers, aged 18 and over, who migrated to Quebec between January, 1997 and June, 2000. There are two types of data used in this study. The main interest in the first type of administrative data lies in the fact that all the points given to the respondent on each criterion of the selection grid, effective at the time of the study, have been recorded. The second type of administrative data has been added to survey data from which the history of the first years of settlement of the respondents has been retrospectively reconstructed. Depending on the time of arrival in Quebec, this data covers anywhere between 21 to 63 months of settlement in the province. It also contains dated information on each of the jobs and training programs immigrants experienced after their arrival. It is therefore possible to identify the beginning and end dates of each job (and training), and to know the employment status of each individual for every week observed by the study. Moreover, for each job, the job title and responsibilities have been listed. From this information, a code administered by the National Occupational Classification (NOC) has been attributed to each job held by the respondent. A number associated with this code determines the skill level of the job depending on the type of education and the training required. The level of education attained prior to migration will be compared to the skill level required for each job, which will allow us to deduce whether or not the job matches the skill level of the migrant, or if he or she is over-qualified. With this information, we can evaluate the impact of the selection criteria on the migrant's professional integration in the host society.

The immigrant's post-migration job history will be described through various methodological approaches, each one giving us a different but complementary vision of the reality. Event history analysis will illustrate the firsts the labor market transition in and out of unemployment, under-qualified and qualified jobs. Then, time-series will provide a general overview of the relation between the immigrant and the qualified jobs, followed by sequence analyses determining if some qualified job profiles can emerge.

The final analysis will attempt to pinpoint the factors determining the membership in one of the qualified job profiles previously identified. From the results obtained in multinomial logistic regressions, we will see the effects of each criterion from the selection grid on having a qualified job over time and the overall impact of the grid.