

LABOUR MARKET

# Educated immigrants have trouble finding jobs

Report says problems rise even for those with U.S. or Canadian university degrees

CARLA WILSON  
Times Colonist

Victoria immigrants have degrees in commerce, finance, economics, engineering, and English, plus many also possess post-graduate training and years of work experience.

But a new Statistics Canada report tells us immigrants are less likely to find a job in this country than those born here, even if they've earned educational credentials in Canada or the U.S.

The study found that 90 per cent of Canadian-born university graduates were employed in 2007, compared with 77 per cent of immigrants educated in the U.S. and 75 per cent educated in Canada.

Among university-educated immigrants to Canada who arrived from 2002 to 2007, those with degrees from African universities had the lowest employment rate in Canada, at only 51 per cent. Latin America was next, with an employment rate of 59.7, then Asia at 65.5, and Europe at 73.8 per cent.

Viet Tran, director of the employment transition program at the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre isn't surprised, saying yesterday,

"It's an old, old story."

It's a complex issue. Barriers to jobs include language and communication, reluctance due to cultural influences to promote themselves in interviews, and gaps in expectations between employers and potential employees.

Immigrants filled with hope for themselves and their children come to the centre for training on how to find work in Canada.

In their favour is the fact that Victoria's unemployment rate is just three per cent, the lowest in the country.

"It's a tsunami of labour shortages," Tran said yesterday.

"It is a wonderful market for job seekers."

A recent study done for the centre found that 97 per cent of the 96 employers surveyed see immigrants as an important labour source. But some employers fear workers stay only a short time, before moving on to professional jobs. Other barriers include language, communication skills and recognition of credentials.

Immigrants, no matter where they graduated, are often five years younger than Canadian-born degree holders. "Given their age, it's possi-



ADRIAN LAM, TIMES COLONIST

Nicole Pan and her husband Eugene, background, are university educated immigrants. She demonstrates her web design skills.

ble they have less overall work experience," said Jason Gilmore, a Statistics Canada analyst. "Also, if you've just arrived in Canada, you likely don't have as much Canadian experience."

However, the federal agency found that gaps shrink for immigrants who have been in this country longer.

Vijay Palavajhala, 37, has just recovered from jet lag after arriving in Victoria from India on July 10 with wife Gayathri and their three-year-old son.

He's hoping for a basic job to help get settled and to eventually work in information technology. Most recently, Palavajhala worked in software development at the non-profit Institute of Health Systems in Hyderabad.

He holds a bachelor degree in commerce, a master's in finance, a diploma in computer applications, and a passion for Canada, even celebrating Canada Day in India years ago. The family did not arrive in this country in time for Canada Day but he says, "We won't miss B.C. Day on August 4."

Jack Tong, 41, arrived Sunday from China to join wife Ella and son David, six, already in Victoria. Both parents are seeking jobs.

Ella holds a master's degree in urban planning and Tong has two bachelor degrees, one in engineering and the other in English. Tong, who said he was a CEO in a firm with 50 employees in China, is friendly and outgoing. "I love to interact with people."

Nicole Pan, 32, speaks with her daughters, ages four and one-and-a-half years old, every night via a camera-equipped computer.

The youngsters are in Taiwan with her in-laws and Pan and husband Eugene are in Victoria getting settled, eager for the girls to join them.

The Pans have been in North America for several years but just moved to Victoria in June. But even with degrees, it takes time to find work and make a home. Nicole Pan, holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from Taiwan, earned a master's degree in finance in the U.S. and studied web design in Ontario, where the girls were born. She does web design part-time and makes sandwiches to hone Eng-



ADRIAN LAM, TIMES COLONIST

Viet Tran says it's a great market right now for job seekers.

lish skills with customers and fellow staff.

It's hard being apart from her girls. "I have to sacrifice in order to give them a better life here," she said.

—With files from CanWest News Service