

By Laura Di Mascio

Toronto's visible minority groups will more than double in the next two decades, increasing to more than five million in 2031, from about two million in 2006.

The South Asian community will represent the largest visible minority group, representing 24 per cent of Toronto's population by 2031, according to a new Statistics Canada report, *Projections of the Diversity of the Canadian Population*.

In 2006, less than 14 per cent of Toronto's population was South Asian, said Patrice Dion, an analyst for Statistics Canada. He also said Whites made up 56 per cent of the population in 2006, but it is projected the group will represent a little less than 37 per cent in 2031.

Dion said the most predominant factor affecting this diversity increase is immigration.



“The current levels of immigration are among the highest throughout history. Immigration of course increases diversity, especially since now the immigration comes from the Asian countries, and a lot of them come to Toronto.”

But diversity also increases among the Canadian-born population.

“Diversity is not only seeable to the immigrants, but also to Canadian-born people,” he said, adding fertility as another major factor. The fertility rate of South Asians is a bit higher than for other groups, he said.

The study, which looks at current trends and uses them to paint a portrait of what diversity will be in Canada in the future, will be useful, said Dion.

“We think that these data will be likely to help the debate and the decision-makers who have to make decisions about issues in racism and discrimination or social integration,” said Dion.

But Kazi Hoque, executive director of South Asian Family Support Services, said the growing number of South Asians is causing a higher demand for services and resources for that population, but that there isn’t enough funding.

“We are providing services to the most vulnerable groups – newcomers who don’t know many things, we give them information, counselling services, information about housing, health cards and employment,” he said.

Anita Khanna, community engagement co-ordinator for the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA), said resource centres and services for South Asians are important because they deal with issues of equity and inclusion.

“We hear stories and interact with people who are facing challenges relating to race and culture and ethnicity, who are looking for equitable employment to have their credentials recognized,” she said. “South Asians work very hard by and large to be part of the community.”

But there have been quite a few cuts made to services and resources, Khanna said. “Service use is something that is continually in demand, so cuts that occur to services that are offered

make a big impact on people,” she said, adding the more services for these immigrants the better.

“There could be more services and agencies serving South Asians, there could be more youth-based programs, there could be more programming for women.”

Hoque said although his organization has already expanded, more funding is needed. “It has expanded a lot, but we want to expand over the next year in Markham and the Peel Region, subject to funding,” he said. “Because of the recession and the federal budget shortage, funding is a challenge.”

There are many services that need to be expanded to meet demands. For example, he said he would like to provide services for the increasing number of immigrants coming from Arabic-speaking countries. “We wanted to have counsellors assisting those clients, but we don’t have funding,” he said.

In fact, Hoque said the government is asking them – along with all other non-profit agencies that are funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada – to cut their budget up to five per cent in April.

“This is a big challenge. A five per cent cut is a significant cut and I hope things will improve over the next year. So far we have been trying to do as much as possible with whatever we are getting, but, they’re asking more and more, to do more with less,” he said. “It is ironic. Statistics show the minority population is going to grow, but at the same time the budget situation is not getting healthy, so people at the policy level have to think about it.”

Madona Mokbel, senior communications advisor for Citizenship and Immigration Canada, said “there will not be an overall reduction in funding to service providing organizations.” Mokbel said the organizations were asked to identify up to five per cent of their budget from the previous year funding that could be used to target specific priorities such as newcomer youth, and elderly.

Mokbel said Citizenship and Immigration Canada's annual spending on settlement programs and services in Ontario has almost tripled since 2006. "We have expanded services to fast-growing and previously under-served areas and launched innovative programs for newcomer youth, professionals, seniors and women," she said.