

IMMIGRATION – CHINESE MIGRANTS

KEY MESSAGES

Human Smuggling: Between late July and early September last year, four unmarked and derelict vessels were intercepted off the coast of Vancouver Island. The operators of these vessels were attempting to smuggle 600 illegal migrants from Fujian Province in China to Canada.

Immigration Canada: As each vessel was intercepted, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) arrested and transported the migrants to CFB Esquimalt. Subsequently, as numbers rose, some of the migrants were moved to detention facilities in the Lower Mainland and others were transferred to the Regional Correctional Centre in Prince George.

Refugee Claims: Canada's Immigration Act allows foreign nationals in Canada to make claims for convention refugee status. The federal Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) is responsible for the refugee determination process in Canada. All the migrants have made claims for refugee status.

Assistance: Although responsible for refugee claims, the federal government provides no assistance to refugee claimants. It is the provincial government that provides Hardship assistance to persons awaiting determination of their refugee claims. Figures for December 1999 show that there were 1,902 cases of refugee claimants receiving Hardship assistance in BC. At an average cost of \$613 per person, the cost to the province is a minimum of \$1.2 million per month or \$14 million per year.

Hardship Costs: While approximately 70 migrants from the first vessel did apply for assistance, the hardship costs associated with last summer's Chinese migrants are negligible. After the first month of benefits, many of the 70 cases were closed due to failure to appear for scheduled hearings. The hardship costs associated with all of the migrants are believed to be under \$120,000.

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Other Impacts: Aside from the financial impact on SDES, the arrival of these migrants also had the following impacts on the province:

- SDES faced operational and service-delivery pressures in finding accommodation and social supports in the local community as 76 individuals were released in Victoria at once.
- Close to 100 juvenile migrants were turned over to the care of the Ministry for Children and Families (MCF), which was forced to open previously closed facilities at Dogwood Manor and Markham Lodge to accommodate the large numbers.
- The Ministry of Education has spent close to \$500,000 to provide ESL and other schooling for the juveniles under MCF care.
- As the number of migrants intercepted increased, the expanding temporary detention facilities at CFB Esquimalt created public concern over health and social safety issues.
- The Ministry of the Attorney General became involved as the Prince George Regional Correctional Centre was required to detain some of the migrants.
- Community service providers are concerned about increased pressures on their services should any number of migrants be released from detention and need assistance.

International Concern: The smuggling of Fujian and other Chinese migrants is of international concern, as both Australia and the United States have intercepted a number of vessels transporting illegal migrants to their shores.

Continuing Trend: In December 1999 and early 2000, more Chinese migrants were intercepted in Seattle, Washington and Vancouver, as smugglers shifted to transporting illegal migrants in sealed containers on cargo ships from Asia.

Federal-Provincial: SDES continues to work with the Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism and Immigration in raising provincial concerns regarding refugee issues with Citizenship and Immigration Canada.