

# To the city, then beyond

## Greeks to Chomedey, Arabs to Laval: immigrants in search of space

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THE GAZETTE

Bulgarian-born Totka Delcheva is part of a phenomenon in Quebec: Immigrants like her are boosting the province's population, compensating for what until lately has been a stagnant birthrate and a steady, though slowing, loss of people to other provinces.

Since 2001, Quebec's population has grown by 4.3 per cent – that's three times faster than it did in the previous five years and the second-highest growth rate since the baby boom of the mid-1960s, according to new 2006 Canadian census data.

The growth has been especially pronounced in Montreal's suburbs and neighbouring cities like St. Eustache, 50 kilometres north of Montreal, where Delcheva, trained as a chemist but now selling real estate, lives with her family.

"In Montreal, housing is very expensive, but not here," said Delcheva, 45, who bought her home in St. Eustache after first settling in Côte St. Luc in 2002.

"We're near the highway for my husband to get to work (at a rubber company in Laval) and

we're near the train for my son to get to university (at McGill)," she said. "And selling real estate, I'm always on the road, so this is a convenient place to be."

Immigrant families like hers are the main reason Quebec has more people – 308,652 more, in fact – than it did five years ago, according to Statistics Canada.

About half of Quebec's 7,546,131 people live in Montreal and the nearly 100 communities surrounding it, the census shows. And at 5.3 per cent, the rate of population growth in the metropolis between 2001 and 2006 outpaced the 4.3 per cent registered for Quebec overall.

"International immigration was the main factor in the (Montreal region's) population growth, as over the five-year period it experienced a net loss in its migration exchanges with the other parts of the country," StatsCan said.

But on the island of Montreal itself, every municipality except Montreal East saw growth at a lower rate than the Quebec average – meaning the trend is a suburban phenomenon, not an urban one.

The city of Montreal's population grew by only 2.3 per cent, to

1.6 million. It's still the largest city in the province and the second-largest in Canada (after Toronto), but it's not growing fast.

The burbs are bursting with immigrants for a number of reasons:

- Many migrate out of the city centre as they move up the job ladder and earn more money.

- Others are recruited by suburbs like St. Eustache, which offer free orientation tours by bus.

- Quebec's Immigration Department encourages new arrivals to settle outside Montreal, in smaller cities suffering from an exodus of young people.

"People come and get the message, 'Hey, you don't have to stay in Montreal. There are regions ready to welcome you,'" said Gennaro Stabile, who runs the Centre Generation Emploi, a Park Extension agency that helps orient about 2,500 new immigrants a year.

"People from the Arab countries are turning to Laval – Moroccans, Algerians, Egyptians, and quite a few anglophones, too," he said.

From his foodstuffs factory in Laval, Clic Import-Export president Assaad Abdelnour has seen the trend first-hand. The Lebanese-born businessman has 180 employees on his payroll, and those who are immigrants at the bottom of the pay scale

generally start out living in Montreal before moving to the suburbs, he has found.

"The Greeks went to Chomedey and then the West Island. The Christian Lebanese are in Laval and now the Muslims are here, too. They all go through one wave or the other."

But new immigrants aren't all on the move. Algerian-born teacher Lamia Benloucif came here in October 2005, found temporary work at a job centre, and has had no luck since. She lives in the Ahuntsic district of north-end Montreal.

"I send out my CV but get no response," said Benloucif, now married to an Algerian-born stock trader who's been here much longer than she has.

"The problem with all immigrants is we count on people to help us out for a little while after we get here, and most of those people are in the city centre," Benloucif said.

"The city centre is where we go first. It becomes our first reference point, and it's hard to break out and be adventurous if you're still struggling."

**For more on the 2006 census,** go to StatsCan's website at [www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/release/index.cfm](http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/release/index.cfm)

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McGill student Danail Delchev and his mother, Totka Delcheva, take an afternoon walk in their St. Eustache neighbourhood just north of Montreal yesterday. Totka Delcheva is a new immigrant from Bulgaria and she and her family are part of a phenomenon of international immigration that has swelled Quebec's population in the past five years, especially in Montreal's suburbs.

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