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Harper hears from immigrants

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Mike Adler, Staff Writer - [More from this author](#)

Canada's immigration system isn't working, Conservative leader Stephen Harper said Friday as he opened a fact-finding tour on immigration issues in Markham.

"We're trying to get to the bottom of what's wrong," Mr. Harper said before meeting with representatives of 25 cultural groups and service providers at Markham Village Community Centre.

He said he expected to hear in the closed meeting about difficulties immigrants have with professional credentials being recognized and about lower per-person federal support for Ontario immigrants, compared to those in other provinces such as Quebec.

"I know we'll hear it from some of the groups involved in immigration settlement, but the problem is more than dollars," he said, arguing how the federal Immigration Department operates produces many problems.

After around 15 sessions, the party will produce a report by April recommending "fixes" for Canada's immigration system.

It makes no sense to bring people to Canada without helping them find work in their chosen fields, Ron Banerjee of the Toronto-based Hindu Conference of Canada said before the meeting.

He said prospective immigrants should be evaluated and their skills matched to the Canadian marketplace.

In 2001, 39 per cent of York Region residents were foreign-born, with concentrations ranging from 52.7 per cent in Markham to 11.3 in Georgina.

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Staff Photo/Sjoerd Witteveen

Conservative leader Stephen Harper discusses immigration with community representatives at Markham Village Community Centre Friday.

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