Ukrainians finding hope in Sask.

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SASKATOON -- For more than 100 years, Ukrainians have been immigrating to Saskatchewan for the same reason -- opportunity. And according to a survey of recent Ukrainian immigrants to the province, they're finding good fortune and bushels of hope.

The promise of free land is no longer attracting them here, as it did at the turn of the 20th century. Rather, the fertile economy and an established Ukrainian community in the province are the major draws.

The survey, conducted by Serhiy Kostyuk, a doctoral candidate in sociology and the immigrant settlement program co-ordinator for the Ukrainian Canadian Congress' Saskatoon branch, found about 80 per cent of the 139 recent immigrants polled do not regret coming to Canada.

Kostyuk also belongs to what he's calling the "Fifth Wave" of Ukrainian immigration to Canada. The first wave came to the country between 1891 and 1914 looking for hope. This new wave is doing the same, he said.

Many Ukrainians became disgruntled when they didn't feel their country had changed under the leadership of Viktor Yushchenko after the Orange Revolution, he said.

"My understanding is this is how people vote. They vote with their feet," he said. "For workers, people were just not happy with day-to-day life and they decided to leave that system."

According to the survey, 80.6 per cent immigrated to Saskatchewan to improve the quality of life for their children.

Between May 2006 and October 2007, 300 Ukrainian immigrants settled in Saskatoon while another 200 scattered across the province, Kostyuk said. The majority come as part of the immigrant nominee program, which focuses on attracting skilled workers of various professions.

The survey found that the recent average Ukrainian immigrant is a 31-year-old married male who works as a welder, mechanic or driver.

"Ukrainians have good values, they are good workers, they are Christians,

they have nice attitudes and they will be very good citizens, and why don't we encourage this?" he said, adding the Ukrainian Canadian Congress is expecting to help about 500 to 600 more Ukrainians during the next year.

Saskatchewan is the same size as Ukraine but has about 45 million fewer people, he said, adding more Ukrainian immigration to the province would help solve labour shortages.

"So why don't we try to boost it? We have to think broader otherwise our (population) figure will be one million always."

Alexandra Pawlowsky, a professor at the University of Manitoba's Centre for Ukrainian Canadian Studies, said the strong Ukrainian community will definitely draw Ukrainians to Saskatchewan, but the numbers won't be like the waves of the past.

"There is some debate whether actually to call it a fifth wave because the fourth wave was so small it's often referred to as just a trickle and not actually a wave. It wasn't a lot of people so this might be like wave 4B," she said.

"I think they will enrich both the Ukrainian-Canadian and the Canadian communities overall but how and to what extent is still too soon to tell."

During the last year, Rev. Father Taras Makowsky of Saskatoon's Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral of the Holy Trinity has already seen an impact in terms of the size of his congregation.

"I think it's very nice that the immigration is having a positive impact on not only the Ukrainian community at large but also on our church community," he said, adding it is helping to re-establish the language as well as the culture for Ukrainians born in Canada.

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