

Immigrants working in regulated occupations

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In 2006, there were 3.8 million immigrants in Canada's labour force, many of whom were highly educated. Education levels of more recent immigrants have risen in recent years such that, by 2006, 52% of immigrants who had landed in Canada since 2001 had a university degree. At the same time, 30% of the Canadian born had university degrees. In addition to high levels of education, many of these immigrants also came with foreign work experience.

One of the principal goals of Canadian immigration policy is to fill gaps in the labour market. With the aging of the baby boomers, a number of occupational shortages have emerged in the Canadian labour market particularly in health care professions (such as physicians, nurses and pharmacists) and in management occupations. Shortages are projected to continue as boomers exit the labour market (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada 2007). Some projections imply that immigrants could account for nearly all labour force growth as soon as 2011 (Statistics Canada 2005).

Despite their high levels of educational attainment, many recent immigrants struggle in the labour market. In 2006, immigrants who had been in Canada for less than 10 years had higher unemployment rates and lower employment rates than those born in Canada. Furthermore, many of these immigrants were unable to find jobs in their chosen fields. And, in recent years, immigrants have become more likely to be in low income (Pew, Hox and Goolbsy 2007).

New immigrants to Canada indicate that they faced a number of challenges in the Canadian labour market, most importantly not enough Canadian job experience, lack of connections in the job market and foreign credentials not being recognized (Schellhagen and Mabeus 2007). Others suggest that newcomers may lack knowledge about getting their skills recog-

nized, employers may lack knowledge about foreign credentials, and there may be real differences in the quality of foreign credentials relative to domestic qualifications (Korac, Thompson and Xie 2007).

For many occupations, hiring is based on the employer's decision that the candidate has an acceptable combination of education and experience to do the job. For those seeking work in regulated occupations, another hurdle is added. Regulated occupations are governed by provincial regulatory bodies and/or professional associations and have very specific requirements regarding the credentials necessary to practice the occupations. This study focuses on the regulated occupations since a clear relationship exists between educational credentials and the ability to meet the requirements of the occupation.

Many occupations for which immigrants have trained are regulated occupations. These include engineering, medicine, nursing and teaching. For immigrants who wish to work in a regulated occupation, practicing that occupation outside Canada is not considered sufficient and they must prove that their foreign credentials meet Canadian standards.

In 2006, of the 1.1 million university educated, working-age immigrants (25 years of age and over), 41% had worked in fields that would typically place them in regulated occupations compared to 30% of Canadian-born university graduates.

This study examines the extent to which immigrants in 2006 with a field of study that typically leads to a regulated occupation were working in that occupation (see *Data notes and definitions*). For example, how likely are immigrants with engineering degrees to find work as an engineer? It then examines how this match rate varies across provinces and by the immigrants' source countries, and the amount of time they spent in Canada. Finally, it looks at the type of work performed by those not working in the occupations for which they studied.

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