

Lifting All Boats: Promoting Social Cohesion and Economic Inclusion in the Toronto Region
Toronto Board of Trade, June 2010

This article examines the reasons why immigrants are socially and economically excluded from the larger population of Toronto. The article presents existing challenges and proposes some potential solutions to work toward greater social cohesion and economic inclusion of immigrants in lower income neighbourhoods.

- Wages earned by Canadian immigrants are lower and rates of involuntary part-time work, temporary employment, and over-qualification are all higher than non-immigrants
- Having foreign credentials and non-Canadian experience unrecognized by Canadian employers is a primary barrier for immigrants to find work
- The failure to recognize the qualifications and experience of new immigrants costs the Toronto region approximately \$1.5 to \$2.5 billion each year
- Local governments could look to the diversity of the Toronto region in their economic development and job creation strategies which would also provide increased knowledge of foreign cultures to governments and help investors from other countries feel welcome in Toronto's business community
- The "Middle Ring" is the phenomenon where an affluent urban core is surrounded by a "middle ring" of marginalized and vulnerable populations, which is then encircled by an outer layer of affluent suburbs
- Those in Toronto's "middle ring" communities are disconnected from prosperity and suffer disproportionately when the economy is weak and employment opportunities within these areas are scarcer than in affluent neighbourhoods
- The majority of affordable housing in the Toronto region is found in "middle ring" neighbourhoods
- The poor state of housing in these neighbourhoods is directly related to workers' physical and mental health
- Improving the conditions of housing presents a number of opportunities for the government to work with the private sector to improve social conditions and generate positive returns to the Toronto region's economy
- The City of Toronto plans to unveil several programs that will revitalize existing housing in low income neighbourhoods by making them more energy efficient and creating retail facilities and community space on the ground floor
- Government and commercial services such as employment, recreational facilities, and grocery stores are scarcer in low income neighbourhoods resulting in residents being disconnected from these services
- Research shows that families whose children receive free access to recreational programs have lower rates of unemployment as the parents have more time for training and employment
- Engaging the community through government programs to plan and organize recreational programming could have a direct economic impact as the parents would have more time to find employment and receive training
- The public transit system in the Toronto region has not kept pace with the diversifying and expanding region
- This is of concern as public transit is often the only way for residents to access employment opportunities