

Using data from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada over the period of 2000-2004, the authors of this study seek to determine whether different postsecondary education pathways have varying results for the labour market success of recent immigrants. The authors looked at skilled immigrants seeking credentials in non-university institutions; those who enrol in university to pursue the same field; those who seek a university degree in a different field; and those with no education or no postsecondary education or training.

Key Findings

- recent immigrants experience higher unemployment, lower wages, and those who are employed are often working in jobs for which they are overqualified compared to their Canadian-born counterparts
- these gaps are mostly attributed to human capital in terms of language skills, education, and foreign credential recognition
- immigrants who attend postsecondary education after arrival in Canada are more likely to fare well in the labour market because they gain useful skills through interacting with native-born students and faculty
- creating social networks and social capital greatly increases the chances for labour market integration of immigrants
- immigrants investing in host-country education are more likely to have their credentials recognized and trusted by employers making their labour market integration more successful and earning them higher wages
- the study found the following socio-demographic factors: women are less likely to pursue postsecondary education after arrival, especially at the university level; younger immigrants are more likely to pursue postsecondary education; immigrants with foreign graduate degrees are more likely to engage in university in Canada; and postsecondary participants generally have proficiency in one of the official languages
- the highest participation rates in postsecondary education are in the fields of engineering and health, likely because these professions require licensing
- those seeking a degree in the same field and those seeking a degree in a new field were most likely to feel that their skills were not being utilized when they found employment
- almost half of the participants in each pathway were unsuccessful in negotiating their prior work experience to employers
- overall, one third of highly educated immigrants perceive their employment situation as worse than before they immigrated to Canada
- skilled worker/principal applicants are more likely to find employment than family-class immigrants and refugees
- those seeking a degree in the same field and those seeking a degree in a new field were most likely to be employed in their preferred occupations
- the improvement of employability over time is highest for those seeking university degrees either in their field or in a new field
- those with previous degrees in business or mathematics are more likely to gain employment

Policy Implications

- Canada should pay more attention to the settlement and adjustment process if it is to significantly increase the number of immigrants admitted in order to remain competitive in the global search for talent
- immigrants are drawn to non-university programs due to cost and time effectiveness and immigrant-specific services whereas universities have few programs tailored for immigrants
- all postsecondary institutions should be sensitive to the needs of immigrants, in particular language and cultural needs, in order to assist in integration and deter marginalization
- efforts to improve the student experience for immigrants will engage them in school but also help to integrate them into the labour market

Key Stats:

*Barriers to employment: A study by Schellenberg & Maheux found that, “During the period between 7 and 24 months after arrival, 62% of recently arrived immigrants aged 25 to 44 sought a job and during the period between 25 to 48 months, 53% did so. LSIC respondents were asked to identify the nature of the problems they encountered in looking for work. The lack of work experience was mentioned most often (50%), followed in descending order by lack of job contacts and networks (37%), lack of recognition of foreign experience (37%) and foreign qualifications (35%)” (p. 3).

*Impact of source country on employment: Gilmore and Le Petit found that, “Immigrants educated in the United States (77.8%), Canada (75.3%), and Europe (75.3%) had the highest employment rates. On the other hand, newcomers who obtained their degrees or diplomas from Asia (65.5%), Latin America (59.7%), and Africa (50.9%) had considerably lower rates of employment” (p.4).

*Link between desired occupation and education in the host-country: “There is a clear relationship between the chosen occupation at arrival and plans for further education. Over 70% of the immigrants who intended to find jobs in business, finance, or administration (77%), in natural and applied sciences (70%), or in health (79%) showed an interest in taking further education in Canada” (p. 9).

*Employment linked to education in the host-country after arrival: “Four years after arrival, 58% of participants were employed part-time and 54% of participants were unemployed but looking for a job. Among those with no plans for further education after four years in the country, 15% were employed part-time and 17% were unemployed. In contrast, four years after arrival, 43% of full-time employed immigrants had been PSE participants at some point, and the proportions of full-time employed with no plans for further education decreased from 45% to 30% and 25% over the settlement period” (p. 11).

*Underutilization of skills: “Of those who had found employment by Wave 3, about 50% of the non-participant and Recycling groups – compared to 35% to 40% of the Value Added and Start Anew groups – believed that their skills were not fully utilized in the current job held” (p. 16).