

IMMIGRANT WOMEN

EMPLOYMENT FACTS FROM ACTEW



Well Educated

- 73% of immigrants arriving in Ontario are university educated.^[1]
- 18% of immigrant women have a university degree, in comparison with 14% of Canadian-born women.^[2] In addition, young immigrant women are more likely than their non-immigrant peers to be enrolled in school.^[2]
- Three quarters of recent arrivals classified as spouses and dependents of the economic class plan to get further education or training.^[1] Seventy-two percent of economic class spouses and dependents are women.^[1]

Immigration Terms and Trends

“economic class” – skilled workers and business immigrants, as well as their “spouses or dependents”; women are a third as likely as men to be admitted as the principal applicant in the economic class; 10% of economic immigrants are women, while 37% of all immigrant women are classified as “spouses or dependents” of economic immigrants [2]

“family class” – people in this category are sponsored by close family members in the economic class; 36% of all immigrant women are family class immigrants [2]

“refugees” – people who are persecuted in their homeland or displaced and seek refuge in Canada; 10% of all immigrant women are refugees; women refugees are slightly less likely to be admitted for humanitarian reason than men [2]

“non-status” – people without legal immigration status living in Canada [12]

Higher Unemployment Rates

- Six months after their arrival, only 32% of women in the family class are employed, compared with 54% of men. Men who are classified as economic class spouses or dependents are 8% more likely to be employed than women in the same class (of which more than two-thirds are unemployed).^[1]
- In 2001, immigrant women had an unemployment rate of 8.1%, compared 7% with Canadian-born women, and 6.8% for immigrant men.^[2]
- Newer immigrants of both sexes have are facing greater difficulties getting work and securing stable, well-paying positions than previous generations of immigrants^[3,4] and unemployment rates among ethno-racial groups vary dramatically, from as high as 35% to as low as 2.5%.^[3]

Underemployed and Unprotected

- Immigrant women identify access to suitable employment as a key issue in their lives.^[5,6]
- After their arrival in Canada, three out of five women work in an occupation different from their field prior to immigrating.^[1]
- Well more than half of immigrant women who arrived in Canada between 2001 and 1991 work part-time.^[2]
- The vast majority of home-workers and contract shop employees in Canada's garment industry are immigrant women of colour. This sector is unregulated with very low pay, irregular work, and no option for benefits.^[7]
- Domestic workers are almost exclusively immigrant women. Often living in the homes of their employers, they are particularly vulnerable to economic exploitation and human rights abuses.^[8]
- The numbers of non-status workers in Canada is unknown, but the vast majority are likely women and girls.^[11] They are at high risk of abuse because they have limited access to information, and contacting authorities puts them at risk of deportation.^[12]

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Alarming Low Incomes

- Recent immigrants make significantly less than other women. In 2000, women who immigrated to Canada in the previous decade had an average income of just \$16,700. This is about \$6,000 less than the average for all foreign-born women (\$22,400), as well as Canadian-born women (\$23,100).^[2]
- In 1980, immigrant women were paid 23% less than Canadian-born women of similar ages and education. By 2000, this gap had doubled to 45%.^[4]
- In 2000, 35% of women who immigrated to Canada between 1991 and 2001 were living in a low-income household. Forty-two percent of female immigrants under the age of 15 were living in a low-income household (almost three times as many as their non-immigrant counterparts at 17%).^[2]

The Barriers to Employment

- Language barriers and the transferability of foreign credentials are the most common challenges for both immigrant women and men as they seek employment.^[1]
- Immigrant women have difficulty accessing employment and training services due to eligibility criteria.^[9, 10] Refugee women, in particular, are frequently denied access to services because they are not permanent residents.^[8]
- Lack of child care is a barrier for immigrant women trying to accessing employment and training services^[5, 10] and a tremendous challenge for the many immigrant women employed in seasonal, irregular and shift work positions.^[8, 13]
- Studies link racial prejudice and unemployment.^[3, 8, 9] From 1991 to 2001, 74% of all immigrant women were visible minorities, compared with 52% in the decade between 1971 and 1980,^[2] and since this time the income and employment gaps between immigrants and Canadian-born people have increased.^[3] Since the 1970s, income for most racialized groups of women has steadily declined in relation to non-racialized women's income.^[3]

Very Limited Access to Old Age Pension

- Immigrant women must live in Canada for ten years between the ages of 18 and 65 before they can collect 25% of Old Age Pension (OAP). To collect full OAP, they must reside in Canada for forty years or more between ages 18 and 65.^[14] This applies even if they have Landed Immigrant Status or are a Canadian Citizen and is a policy contravenes the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.^[14] In 2001, women made up 54% of the immigrant population aged 65 and over.^[2]

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