



**Title:** Immigrants and Low-Paid Work: Persistent Problems, Enduring Consequences

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### **Research Question:**

This paper investigates the costs and consequences of low-paid work for immigrants. Using data gathered during four community-led focus groups, we examine why immigrants tend to become trapped in low-income jobs and identify potential strategies and solutions for overcoming social and economic disadvantage.

### **Importance:**

Since the mid-1980s, immigrants face higher levels of unemployment and poverty, tend to become “stuck” in low-wage and insecure jobs, and have more difficulty meeting the rising cost of living standards than domestically-born Canadians. While many issues in this report are well known, we bring attention to the everyday experiences of social and economic disadvantage, the chronic nature of these issues and the inadequacy of existing legislation and immigrant services.

### **Research Findings:**

The majority of immigrants who participated in the study described a clear gap between their expectations of economic opportunities in Canada and their actual labour market experiences. Despite relatively high educational levels and professional work experience, many immigrants found themselves in “survival employment” – that is, jobs that support basic livelihood needs rather than jobs that utilize one’s education, skills, and work experience. Limited English skills, non-recognition of international credentials, and lack of “Canadian experience” were the most commonly cited reasons. More significant, however, was the disconnect between Canada’s immigration policy, which actively recruits skilled and educated immigrants, and restrictive employment policies and practices that confine many immigrants to low-paid, insecure work.

### **Implications:**

Proposed solutions for change include: (1) increased dialogue between immigrant communities and the government; (2) addressing the needs of long-term immigrants in immigrant settlement services and programs; (3) affordable childcare to both immigrants and BC residents; and (4) more community spaces for immigrants to discuss shared problems and develop collective solutions.