



Recognizing the Problem:

Workplace credentials and the newcomer experience in B.C.

June 2019

Highlights

Foreign credentials recognition is a common problem for many newcomers to Canada. A Vancity and Angus Reid Global survey of 400 new Canadians in B.C. found that:

- Most say their work experience (70%), professional qualifications (67%) and education (66%) from their countries of origin are less respected than the Canadian equivalents, leading to economic difficulties and employment exclusion.
- Less than half (49%) of those seeking employment in their chosen field found work at levels that matched their workplace credentials, while the rest took work in junior positions or in different fields.
- The vast majority (90%) say they are glad they immigrated to Canada, and 86% feel that Canadians are generally welcoming of them. But 62% believe they had to overcome racism in order to land a job.

A parallel Vancity and Angus Reid Global general population survey of 800 B.C. residents found that:

- Almost two-thirds (65%) say it is urgent that employers treat foreign credentials the same as Canadian credentials for professional work, and 59% say it is urgent that employers treat foreign credentials the same for trades and semi-skilled work.

And a third-party analysis of Canadian census data conducted for Vancity by an independent, professional economist found that:

- In B.C., newcomers earn 8% less than workers who are at least third generation Canadian (third-plus generation), while nationally, newcomers earn 4% less than third-plus generation Canadians.
- Newcomers in B.C. with the same credentials and language abilities as third-plus generation Canadians earn 9% less (“the credentials devaluation rate”) on average. Nationally, the credentials devaluation rate is 18%.
- In Metro Vancouver, immigrants earn 18% less than third-plus generation Canadians.
- The children of immigrants – second generation Canadians – earn 2% more than third-plus generation Canadians in B.C.
- Immigrants in B.C. with manual labour jobs are five times more likely than their third-plus generation Canadian counterparts to have university degrees.
- B.C.’s immigrant wage gap represented \$4.8 billion of unachieved potential income in 2016, with a corresponding income tax value of \$1.3 billion.



Welcome to Canada. Check your credentials at the door.

British Columbia is known around the world as a welcoming, inclusive place, where people can prosper and live peacefully. It's no wonder the province attracts almost 40,000 newcomers from different countries every year. B.C.'s population surpassed five million in 2018; almost one-third of its current residents were born outside of Canada.¹

B.C. offers many advantages. But moving here from another country and settling into a local community isn't always easy. One of the most formidable challenges a newcomer can face is finding meaningful work that matches the education, experience, trade and professional certifications they received in their country of origin. Often, workplace credentials obtained outside Canada are overlooked or discounted by local employers.

This is true even as different levels of government acknowledge the problem and take steps to address it. Newcomers across the country "continue to encounter barriers to the recognition of their skills, education and experience, despite the number of efforts underway both within and across jurisdictions," the federal government acknowledges. "The reality for many is that they are faced with a complex and often frustrating system."²

The consequences are serious. Pushed into jobs for which they are over-qualified, immigrant workers are more likely than others to report mental health problems.³ Stress, isolation, financial pressures and other problems can linger for years and can become intergenerational. Canadian society as a whole suffers because of foreign credentials devaluation; negative outcomes include talent flight, lost productivity, lost tax revenue and lost opportunities.

Strength of character, international experience and informed perspectives are just some of the positive attributes that newcomers bring to our communities. As noted in a 2015 Vancity research report, immigrants tend to strengthen local economies and create jobs, while government-assisted refugees report even higher rates of employment than immigrants.⁴

Their contributions to local economies and labour markets are particularly felt in large urban centres. Already, 43% of Metro Vancouver's labour force consists of immigrants, according to Statistics Canada. Only Toronto has a higher proportion, at 50%. Nationally, the figure is 24%.⁵

Immigration will only become more important in the future. Demographic trends and economic expansion mean that provinces such as B.C. are experiencing labour shortages in key industries. In its 2018 Labour Market Outlook, the B.C. government said 288,000 new jobs will be created in the province by 2028, and 615,000 existing workers will leave the workforce, mainly through retirement. Immigrants are expected to fill 27% of the openings.⁶

It's important to remember that immigrants chose to live in Canada; for many, obtaining Canadian citizenship is the fulfillment of a long-held dream. This despite the fact that newcomers – often with abundant workplace credentials – are typically paid less than their Canadian-born counterparts over the long term in certain job categories, including high-skilled work. Immigrants are sometimes told their lack of "Canadian work experience" limits their suitability for specific jobs, or that it disqualifies them entirely.

Efforts to address the so-called experience deficit include a controversial federally funded program that encourages newcomers to "volunteer" their labour at local businesses such as fast-food outlets and pharmacies.⁷

As a society, we can do better.

Brain waste, bias and earnings gaps: the current picture

At more than 140 pages, the Government of Canada's official guide for newcomers is not a quick read. But it's filled with useful tips and advice for the more than one million people who will settle permanently in Canada over the next three years. One of the first things a new Canadian should do, the guide says, is learn how to get their educational and professional qualifications recognized in this country.

But that's no simple task. "Getting a job that matches your qualifications and interests is one of the biggest challenges of settling in Canada," the guide notes. "For many people, the first job in Canada may not be the most satisfying. It may take time to build your qualifications and gain Canadian experience before finding the job you really want."⁸

This frank acknowledgement from the federal government should remove any doubt – if it still exists – that international credentials recognition is a common obstacle for newcomers. In fact, the problem impacts every Canadian, new or established. According to one oft-quoted 2013 academic study, the "underutilization of Canada's immigrants – 'brain waste' – emerged as a problem in the 1990s...The value of work lost to the Canadian economy grew from about \$4.8 billion annually 1996 to about \$11.37 billion in 2006."⁹

An investigation published three years later found that 844,000 new Canadians were "not getting the jobs they should because their credentials are not being recognized." As a result, they earned \$17 billion less than they could have, and their fellow Canadians were denied their full set of accomplishments, skills and services.¹⁰

Despite numerous government-led efforts to address the problem, it persists. An analysis of 2016 census data, conducted for this report by an independent, professional

economist, reveals that the immigrant earnings gap between immigrants and those who are at least third-generation Canadian (third-plus generation) is 4%. In other words, newcomers were paid four percent less for their work, on average, than third-plus generation Canadians. The gap in B.C. is much wider, at 8%. And in Metro Vancouver, the immigrant earnings gap is an alarming 18% (see Figure 1).

About this report

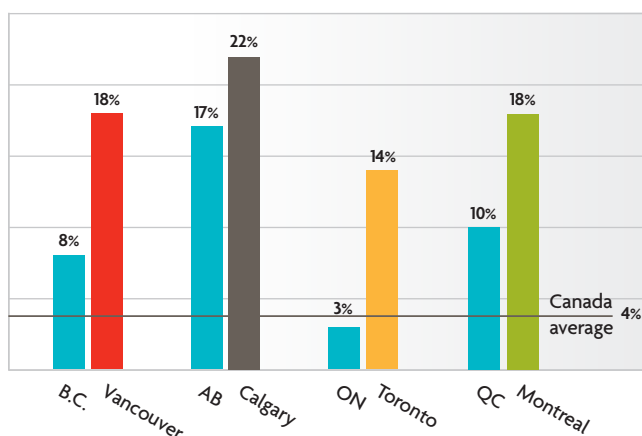
Recognizing the Problem: Workplace credentials and the newcomer experience in B.C. uses existing research and 2016 census data to calculate and analyze the immigrant earnings gap in Canada and in B.C., and identifies key factors behind them. Census data calculations and analyses were conducted and reviewed for Vancity by an independent, professional economist. The report is also informed by two unique public opinion surveys conducted earlier this year in partnership with Angus Reid Global. In one survey, 400 new Canadians in B.C. were asked to describe their employment experiences in this province, and how the work credentials they obtained in their countries of origin were – or were not – recognized in this province. The second survey asked 800 B.C. residents – 82% of them Canadian-born – to share their impressions of foreign work credentials and employment challenges faced by newcomers.

The findings demonstrate the degree to which credentials devaluation in B.C. can impact an immigrant's employment, earnings and outcomes.

This report offers recommendations for governments, businesses, financial institutions and individuals that, if acted upon, should put new Canadians to work more quickly, in jobs that match their experiences, skills sets and expectations.

A note about terminology: The report uses the terms "immigrant," "new Canadian," "first generation Canadian" and "newcomer" interchangeably, with the same intended meaning. According to Statistics Canada, an immigrant is anyone who was born outside of Canada and now resides in Canada, and who has been granted to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities. An immigrant does not include temporary foreign workers, non-permanent residents, refugee claimants, Canadian citizens born outside Canada and those with student or working visas.¹¹ The report also refers to individuals born in Canada to two immigrant parents as second generation Canadians, and refers to all other Canadians, including Indigenous peoples, as third-plus generation Canadians.

Figure 1: First generation wage gap, %, by region



Source: 2016 Canadian Census

How is this possible? What needs to be done? Could more awareness and greater acceptance of foreign workplace credentials help close the gaps?

Of course, every situation is different; new Canadians in B.C. do not have identical experiences when looking for work and presenting their credentials. Factors that influence an immigrant's employment and earnings situation in B.C. – and which may prevent them from reaching outcomes similar to those experienced by third-plus generation Canadians with similar job qualifications – include:

- their English language proficiency
- their length of residency in Canada
- their place of settlement
- whether they have obtained Canadian citizenship
- their gender
- their place of origin
- their education
- where their credentials were obtained and
- whether they have encountered a biased employer.

Another important factor is an immigrant's entry "class" or "category" as determined by the federal government. There are four: economic immigrants, who are considered skilled workers and business people; family-class immigrants, who are closely related to Canadian residents living in Canada; refugees; and those who fall into the "other" category.¹² Between 2011 and 2016, 60% of immigrants to Canada were admitted under the economic category and of those, almost half qualified as skilled workers.

But coming to Canada with a skill, some training or prior work experience – or a combination of all three – does not necessarily lead to a commensurate job. For example, research and empirical evidence demonstrate that Canadian employers place a higher value on Canadian work experience than on foreign work experience.¹³ English language proficiency also influences an immigrant's ability to find work relevant to their skills and background.

The census data analysis conducted for Vancity reveals that newcomers in B.C. who speak English at home earned 3% less than their third-plus generation counterparts. But newcomers who do not speak English at home earned 24% less than third-plus generation Canadians who speak English at home. Second generation Canadians in B.C. who do not speak English at home fared even worse, earning a staggering 47% less than third-plus generation Canadians who speak English at home (see second generation sidebar on page 9).

Newcomers typically earn more the longer they remain employed in Canada. The median wage for an immigrant rose 35% in the first five years after their admission to Canada, and another 23% after the next five years, according to a 2018 Statistics Canada report.¹⁴ This should not surprise,

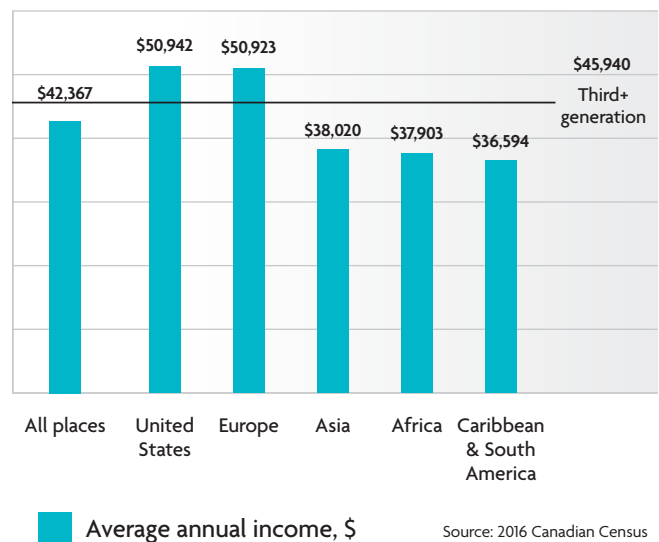
as earnings power usually increases with age, experience and seniority of position, regardless of one's country of birth. However, 2016 census data demonstrates that while immigrant wage gaps tend to narrow as newcomers accumulate more years in Canada, they do not disappear.

Census data reveals that the gaps are particularly acute in Canada's four largest population centres: Greater Montreal, the Greater Toronto Area, the Calgary Metropolitan Area and the Metro Vancouver Regional District. Immigrant wage gaps in all these centres are significantly higher than their corresponding provincial rates (see Figure 1) and much higher than the national rate of 4%. This is important, as the four cities have a combined 61% of Canada's total immigrant population. Vancouver's total share is 13%.¹⁵

Why is the immigrant wage gap so pronounced in Canada's four largest urban centres? "Immigrants who do not have jobs tend to go to the urban centres, especially the three largest cities," explains one federal government report, adding that "Vancouver offered the greatest challenge for immigrants looking for work, in comparison to the Canadian-born."¹⁶ This explanation seems incomplete, and it raises additional questions. More research is required to better understand this particular situation (see Recommendations).

The census data analysis conducted for Vancity reinforces the fact that country of origin is another important factor behind the immigrant earnings gap. Of the 1.3 million British Columbians who are immigrants, a majority (61%) were born in Asia. Europe is the second most common place of birth (25%). The 2016 census reveals that adult, working immigrants from Europe earned \$50,923 in B.C., which was 11% more than their third-plus generation counterparts, who earned \$45,940.

Figure 2: First generation income in B.C., by place of origin



Newcomers from Asia, on the other hand, earned 17% less than third-plus generation Canadians in B.C. Immigrants from the African continent also earned 17% less than third-plus generation Canadians in the province. The earnings gap was even wider for newcomers from Central and South America; they earned 20% less than third-plus generation Canadians. Meanwhile, U.S.-born newcomers in B.C. earned 11% more than third-plus generation Canadians (see Figure 2).

These findings suggest that economic outcomes for immigrants are sometimes influenced by cultural bias or discrimination, from employers or society at large. For example, a 2012 study by the University of Toronto and Ryerson University found that job applicants with “Asian” names were 45% to 60% less likely to be granted a job interview than applicants with Anglicized names.¹⁷

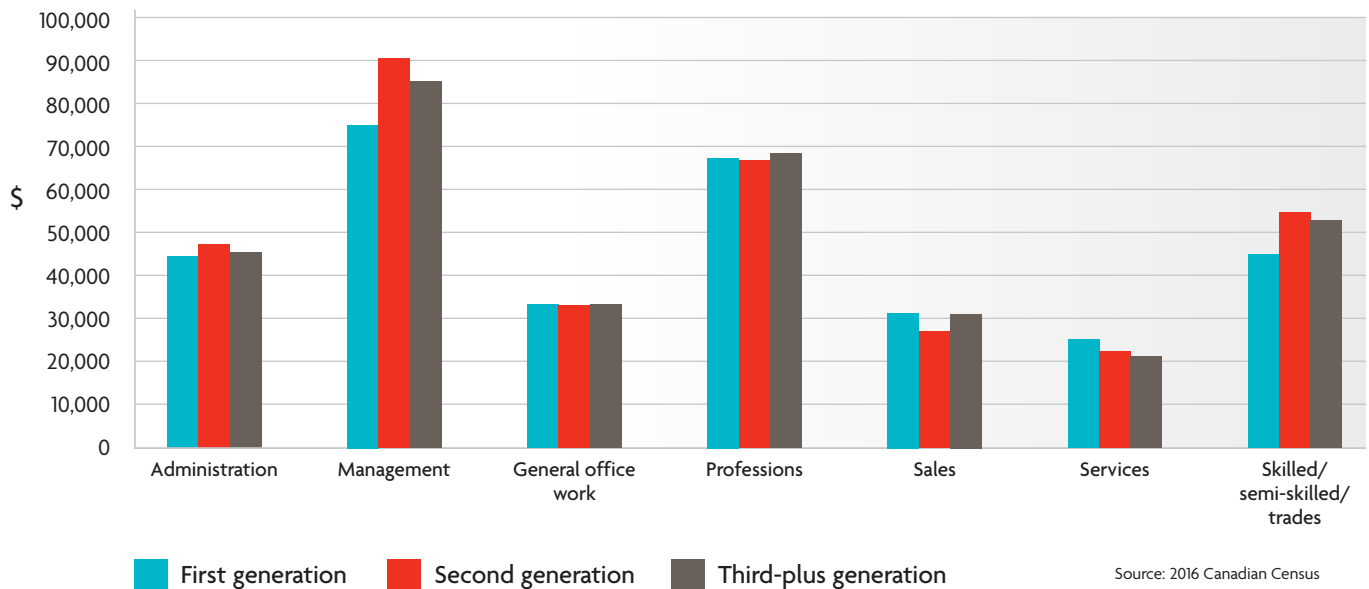
Concerns about potential bias and credentials devaluation also arise when looking at economic outcomes related to education attainment. The 2016 census data reveals that newcomers in B.C. with university degrees – about 40% of immigrants aged 25 to 64 – earn 15% less than third-plus generation workers with university degrees.¹⁸ And an immigrant in B.C. with a manual labour job is five times

more likely to have a university degree than a third-plus generation person with a manual labour job, according to Vancity’s third-party census analysis.

The census data analysis conducted for Vancity also found that immigrants in B.C. with manual labour jobs earn 7% less than third-plus generation workers with manual labour jobs, and newcomers in skilled and semi-skilled jobs earn 21% less than their third-plus generation counterparts. On the other hand, immigrants working in several other occupational groups – management, professions, sales and services – earn more than third-plus generation British Columbians (see Figure 3).

While employer bias and discrimination can be difficult to measure, verify and quantify, it is possible to explore how newcomers and their workplace credentials are perceived by others. It is also possible to better understand the immigrant employment experience in B.C., and the degree to which newcomers feel their workplace credentials are – or are not – recognized in this province. Two public opinion surveys conducted this year by Vancity and Angus Reid Global examine these perceptions and experiences, with results that may surprise.

Figure 3: Earnings by occupation group



Women and wage gaps

Gender-based employment and earnings gaps are a well-known and persistent problem in Canada, particularly in B.C. A 2018 Vancity report found that women working in this province are paid less per hour than the national average for women, and their average employment income per year is 35% less than men in B.C.¹⁹

First generation women in B.C. are especially challenged. The census data analysis conducted for Vancity reveals that female new Canadians in the province are paid 4% less than third-plus generation women, and 40% less than third-plus generation men. This is in stark contrast to second-plus generation women in B.C., who earn 5% more than third-plus generation women – although they still make 34% less than third-plus generation men.

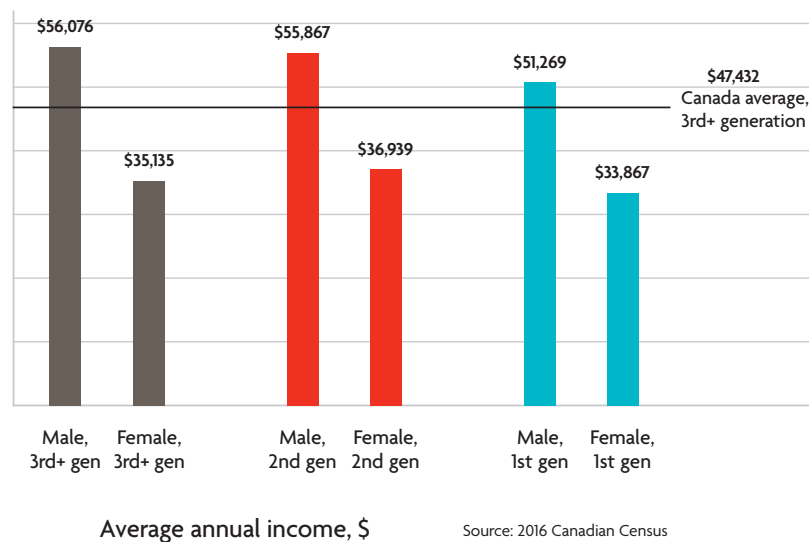
Large earnings gaps and negative employment outcomes are a common reality for first generation women across the credentials spectrum.

A 2015 University of Western Ontario thesis paper found that even highly skilled professional women “are often forced to accept jobs after they immigrate and may experience a downward shift both in their career and in their quality of life. This has particular implications for highly skilled immigrant women who strive to maintain their professional identities and balance the demands of family and work.”²⁰

The author cited previous research showing that foreign credentials and work experiences for professional immigrant women are “often not accepted by employers and employment agencies in Canada,” and that as a result, “these women tend to qualify for manual, low status jobs that require few skills, pay poorly, and offer few advancement opportunities.”²¹

Other studies have found that immigrant women of all ages in Canada are more likely than Canadian-born women to live in low-income situations; however, their situations tended to improve the more years they spent in Canada.

Figure 4: Income by gender in B.C.



Experiences, perspectives and perceptions

In general, Canadian immigration policies and practices prioritize applicants who possess strong post-secondary educations and job skills; as noted earlier, 60% of immigrants to Canada were admitted under the economic category from 2011 to 2016, and of those, almost half qualified as skilled workers.

But as this report and other studies demonstrate, employment outcomes for many newcomers, including those with university educations and work experience, can be lacklustre at best. Credentials devaluation – also known as deskilling – is a problem across Canada. Statistics gleaned from census data and other sources tell only part of the story. It's important to hear from newcomers themselves, and from other Canadians.

Early in 2019, Vancity and Angus Reid Global surveyed 400 new Canadians in B.C. about their experiences since immigrating, their workplace credentials and their employment situations.

The newcomers surveyed see Canada in a positive light and think it's a place where they can prosper. The vast majority (90%) say they are glad they immigrated to Canada, and 86% say they feel Canadians are generally welcoming of them. However, 62% say they had to overcome racism in order to land employment.

Among those who have sought employment in their chosen field in B.C., only half (49%) say they were able to find jobs at levels that match their workplace credentials. The rest say they took work in junior positions (27%) or found work in different fields (24%) (see Figure 5). And most of the 400 people surveyed agree that their education (66%), work experience (70%) and professional qualifications (67%) are less respected in Canada than the Canadian equivalents. Those most likely to agree that their credentials are less respected have emigrated from Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and Central/South America (see Figure 6).

Given these findings, it's not surprising that a large portion of the 400 newcomers surveyed say they have experienced some financial hardship since coming to Canada. More than one-third (34%) say they have amassed debt due to employment difficulties experienced in this province, and 44% say it has been difficult to provide for their families. This corresponds with recent reports showing that the child poverty rate in B.C. for recent immigrant children is almost twice the provincial average.²²

Figure 5: Newcomers who have found work in their chosen field

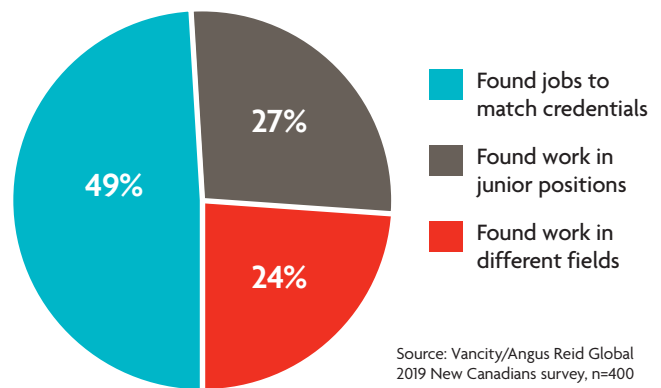
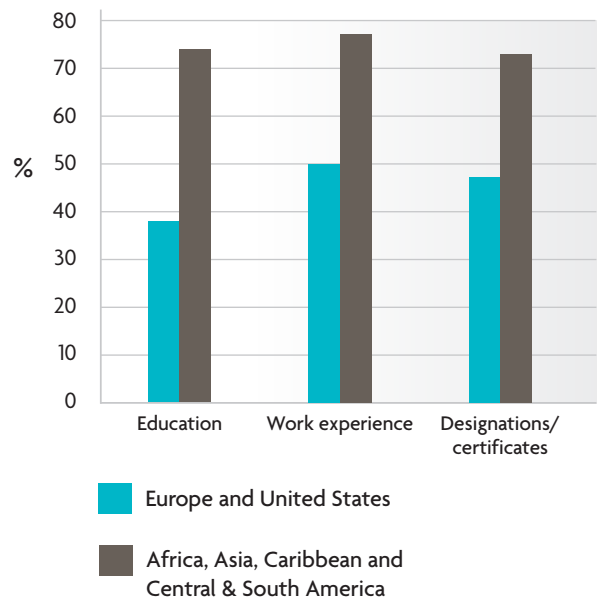


Figure 6: Workplace credentials in my place of origin are less respected in Canada than the same Canadian credentials (% agree, B.C. immigrants, by place of origin)





New Canadian **Shadi Haghighidoost** received support from the Immigrant Services Society of BC through the Foreign Credential Recognition Loan Program, which helped have her work credentials recognized.

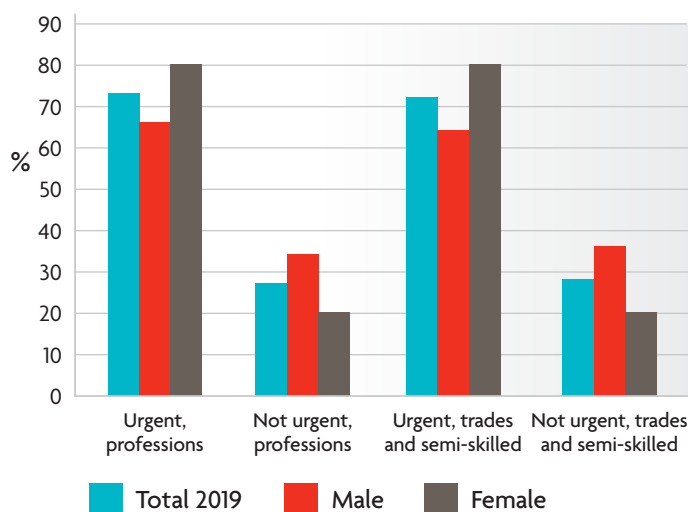
Results from the Vancity/Angus Reid Global general population survey of 800 B.C. residents (82% of whom are Canadian-born) reveal a significant degree of awareness and concern with respect to foreign credentials recognition and the impacts that credentials devaluation have on newcomers. For example, almost two-thirds (64%) agree that local employers should treat foreign credentials the same as Canadian credentials. Most agree that the matter is urgent (see Figure 7).

The survey also makes clear that British Columbians value new Canadians. An overwhelming majority (85%) of B.C. residents surveyed agree that Canada benefits from newcomers who bring their foreign credentials to this country, and 83% think that Canadians are generally welcoming of newcomers.

Looking more closely at the survey results, women are statistically more likely than men to agree that immigrants in the province face employment difficulties and negative outcomes. Women (72%) are also statistically more likely than men (60%) to agree that racism plays a role in an immigrant’s inability to find a job.

When studied in combination, the two surveys reveal some starkly different perspectives. While most newcomers (53%) surveyed say that education standards in their countries of origin are better than education standards in Canada, just 31% of B.C. residents agree that immigrants are better educated than Canadian-born individuals. Meanwhile, 78% of B.C. residents agree that immigrants should get additional education when they come to Canada.

Figure 7: How urgent is it for Canadian employers to treat foreign credentials the same as Canadian credentials?



Source: Vancity/Angus Reid Global survey of general population in B.C. n=800

On the key subject of English language proficiency, nine of 10 B.C. residents say they think it is a source of employment difficulty for many immigrants, while less than half say that new Canadians possess good to excellent English language reading (43%), writing (31%) and conversation (37%) skills. Among newcomers surveyed, however, 69% say they had good to excellent English language skills when they entered the country. This result may have been influenced by the fact that newcomer survey participants were English proficient.

It’s important to note that in Canada, the federal government requires anyone aged 18 to 54 applying for citizenship to demonstrate “adequate knowledge” of English or French. Almost half of newcomers (48%) surveyed say they took some action to improve their English proficiency after arriving in Canada.

The surging second generation

Census data and survey results put forward in this report demonstrate that first generation newcomers in B.C. face numerous employment-related barriers, and often see their workplace credentials discounted or devalued. Poor outcomes for immigrants, including lower-than-median earnings, might suggest that similar situations await their children, as the two leading predictors of intergenerational poverty are underemployment and low wages.

And yet, according to numerous studies, many second generation Canadians outperform their first generation parents with respect to education, employment and earnings.²³ The census data analysis conducted for Vancity demonstrates that, overall, children of immigrants in B.C. earn 10% more than their first generation parents. They also outpace third-plus generation workers, earning 2% more than them on average. The positive wage gap for second generation British Columbians is highest in the administration, management, professional and service occupation groups.

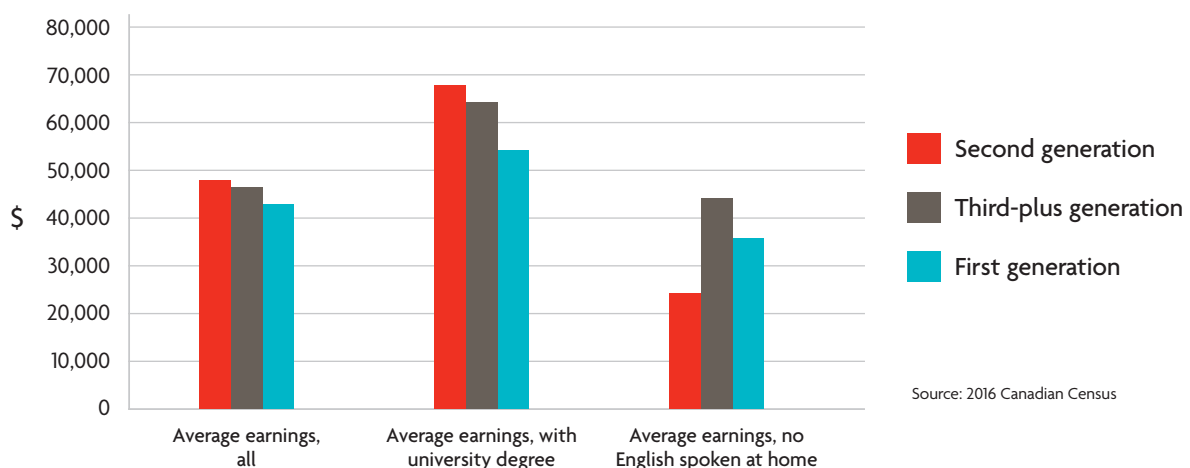
This encouraging discovery finds some explanation in a February 2019 Statistics Canada analysis of the same 2016 census. It notes that “since members of

the second generation were raised and educated in Canada, common labour market barriers that adult immigrants often face, such as language or foreign credentials recognition, do not apply to them.”

But the same analysis also found that, despite “optimistic overall results, large variation exists among different groups of the second generation...not all second generation groups outperform the third-plus generation.”²⁴ For example, certain second generation ethnic and visible minorities in this country – including Filipinos and those whom Statistics Canada and Canada’s Employment Equity Act refer to as “Blacks” and “Latin Americans” – have lower earnings than third-plus generation “Whites.”

For some second generation groups, high educational achievement does not translate to high employment and above-average earnings. Second generation West Asians and Southeast Asians, for example, “enjoyed significant upward intergenerational mobility (particularly among women) and achieved high university completion rates,” according to the same Statistics Canada report. “Among those who were employed, they were more likely than third-plus generation Whites to work in high-skill jobs. However, they had below-average earnings among men.”²⁵

Figure 9: Annual earnings by generation in B.C.



Source: 2016 Canadian Census

The shared costs

As demonstrated throughout this report, dismissing or devaluing workplace credentials that newcomers bring to Canada can have negative consequences on those individuals and their families.

There are also consequences for our society as a whole. These include labour shortages, which have been described as chronic in provinces such as B.C. A recent report by the Business Development Bank of Canada found that 45% of employers surveyed in this province have had trouble hiring new workers. This, in turn, impacts their business results and future growth opportunities. According to the bank's chief economist, local employers need to "change their perceptions" and start hiring more newcomers.²⁶

Efforts have also been made to measure the impact that credentials devaluation has on the Canadian economy. A common metric used is the aggregate earnings gap, or the total amount of wages lost annually to immigrants due to credentials devaluation. The total varies by year and by calculation method, but all estimates put the figure in the billions of dollars. And they are rising.

Using Canadian census data, economists at Western University determined the "aggregate earnings losses due to immigrant skill underutilization" to be \$4.8 billion in 1996, and \$11.37 billion in 2006.²⁷ Another study, published in 2011 using 2006 census data, put the gap even higher, at \$13 billion.²⁸

The census data analysis conducted for Vancity found the immigrant earnings gap in B.C. to be \$4.8 billion, which represents approximately \$1.3 billion in lost income tax

revenue to the province (see Methodology, page 12). It's worth noting that \$1.3 billion is the amount of funding the provincial government has committed to childcare in B.C. over the next three years.²⁹

The analysis also examined whether newcomers in B.C. in the same occupations as third-plus generation Canadians and with the same credentials – regardless of where they were obtained – receive the equivalent wages. It found that under this equivalency scenario, new Canadians earn an average of 8% less than their third-plus generation counterparts. While significant, B.C.'s credentials devaluation rate is actually half the national average, and compares favourably to devaluation rates in Quebec (22%), Ontario (19%) and Alberta (15%).

Working towards solutions

Concerns about "foreign" credentials devaluation and how it impacts new Canadians have been raised for more than a decade. Programs meant to address the issue have been – and continue to be – introduced by federal, provincial and territorial governments, through specific programs and legislation, yet success rates are unclear and problems associated with international credentials recognition remain.

As one Canadian law journal put it, recent initiatives "have fallen short of their goals. They have failed to produce any significant recognizable change in the lives of foreign-trained professionals who are struggling to have their credentials recognized in Canada. Good intentions alone are not enough in this critically important area."³⁰



Vancity provided a \$1-million capital grant and a \$200,000 pre-development loan to Immigrant Services Society of B.C. for the development of the Welcome House Centre, a fully integrated facility for newly arrived refugees in Vancouver. The facility includes a banking kiosk operated by Vancity to help refugees open bank accounts. In 2019, the credit union expanded its services to new Canadians by offering a broad range of onsite services for a second Welcome Centre in Surrey.

Left: a Vancity employee provides an introduction to banking services offered at a downtown Vancouver branch.

Currently, the federal government offers funding to a variety of organizations that offer specific credentials recognition programs and projects. Organizations include regulatory bodies, national associations and credential assessment agencies. In 2018, Employment and Social Development Canada funded 14 programs directed by different groups across the country.³¹

Some of these organizations partner with financial institutions and direct loans to eligible newcomers; the loans are typically used to help cover expenses related to credential assessments and other foreign recognition activities. In B.C., for example, Vancity became a financial partner of the Foreign Credential Recognition Loan Program. Vancouver-based settlement agencies, including Immigrant Services Society of BC, S.U.C.C.E.S.S. and the Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society provide newcomers with career-pathing support and refer them for low-interest loans through Vancity credit union to help them complete courses and examinations needed to get their foreign credentials – certifications, education and work experience – recognized.

Newcomers with qualifications in regulated professions and trades – about 20% of all occupations in Canada – must have those qualifications assessed in the province where they wish to work.³² To that end, B.C. offers ‘bridge’ training, designed to assist internationally trained workers to fill gaps in their qualifications, so that they can meet provincial requirements.³³

That’s one step in what is often a lengthy and complicated process. In B.C., more than 200 occupations are regulated; each one has a different qualification standard. At a minimum, having one’s professional or trade qualifications assessed requires the individual to:

- determine which regulatory body is responsible for the assessment and contact them directly
- complete an application form and provide required documentation
- provide education credentials to the regulatory body, a step that may involve payment to an outside agency
- take exams and perform interviews with the regulatory body
- pay fees to the regulatory agency
- wait for the regulatory body to conduct its own investigation and either accept the application, ask the applicant to provide additional details or take additional steps, or deny the application.

“The process can be complex,” says the provincial government, “but is manageable through patience and determination.”³⁴ By some accounts, it can take two to three years for the process to unfold, with no guarantee it will lead to a job in one’s field of work.

Recognizing this, the provincial government also suggests that applicants “consider an alternative career....Choosing an alternative career allows immigrants the option to become employed faster, while earning valuable Canadian work experience.”³⁵ As this report has demonstrated, many newcomers do take the “alternative career” route, and not necessarily by choice. Deciding to pursue a junior position in one’s chosen field or abandoning that field completely can become a permanent situation.

For newcomers who aren’t looking for work in regulated professions or trades, the path to employment may seem more direct. But barriers still exist. When applying for work, most, if not all, job seekers are asked to present information related to their education and work experience. As noted earlier, credentials earned outside of Canada, and especially from certain regions, are more likely to be ignored or devalued than those earned inside Canada.

Again, bias can be a factor. For that reason, some advocates have suggested employers not inquire about “Canadian experience” when hiring new workers. A 2018 report from the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council notes that the term “Canadian experience” has “sometimes been used [by employers] as a catch-all term for broader concerns about ‘cultural fit.’” The report also notes that in 2013, the Ontario Human Rights Commission “determined that a ‘strict requirement’ for ‘Canadian experience’ is prima facie discrimination and can only be used in very limited circumstances.” The Commission recommended that “instead of asking for Canadian experience, employers should describe the specific knowledge and skills they require of candidates and assess people individually.”³⁶

In other words, just as job applicants should be selected on the basis of merit, not on their place of origin, workplace credentials should be considered the same way. Assuming that credentials obtained in Canada are inherently better or more valuable than those obtained on a different continent is not only uninformed and unfair, it is poor business practice. That perspective should be kept in mind when considering the following recommendations.

Recommendations

Governments

- Commit to reducing steps and wait times for professional and trades qualification assessments.
- Review pre-arrival services to ensure newcomers can begin the credential recognition process before coming to Canada.
- Develop clear and transparent roadmaps for recertification assessments, and make them accessible in plain language and online.
- Track and report outcomes for existing and future programs designed to help newcomers with qualifications assessments, employment searches and credentials recognition.
- Introduce independent oversight bodies to provide more transparency, direction and fairness to credentials recognition and assessment processes.

Companies and organizations

- Offer mentorship programs in the workplace that match established workers with new Canadian employees.
- Introduce unconscious bias training in the workplace.
- Remove “Canadian experience” requirements from job applications.
- Review employee compensation rates and eliminate earnings gaps based on place of origin and gender.
- Host “workplace open houses,” in partnership with settlement agencies, as a way for newcomers to meet others working in their professions.

Financial institutions

- Offer loans for re-credentialing training and assessment processes; look for advice from local settlement agencies.
- Pair loans with financial literacy coaching, and partner with settlement agencies to meet newcomers where they access settlement services.
- Ensure all materials are written in plain and accessible language, and ensure a diversity of frontline employees with diverse cultural and language assets.

Newcomers

- Learn about and take full advantage of existing qualifications assessment and credentials recognition programs and opportunities.
- Engage with “mentor connect” programs to meet Canadian colleagues in your profession or trade.
- Highlight relatable or transferable skills on your resume so employers can more easily map their needs to your assets.
- Consider taking advanced courses in one or both of Canada’s official languages.

Methodologies

In partnership with Vancity, Angus Reid Global conducted two online surveys in parallel to better understand the climate surrounding B.C. immigrants and their experiences finding employment in Canada. The first survey was conducted January 14-19, 2019 among a randomized sample of 400 immigrants to B.C. who arrived after 15 years of age. For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 4.9 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The second survey was conducted January 24-28, 2019 among a representative sample of 800 adult residents who reside in B.C. For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 3.3 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The respondents are members of Angus Reid Forum.

Primary and secondary data and research were used in this report. Earnings, earnings gaps, lost income tax revenue and credentials devaluation rates were calculated for this report by Arvind Magesan, professional economist, using data from Statistics Canada’s 2016 Census of Population (Public Use Microdata Files). Linear regression was used to determine credentials devaluation rates.

Vancity recognizes that this report discusses gender in binary terms – as male and female – and does not examine the experiences of people with other identities and expressions, such as trans+, gender variant and two-spirit, who represent about 1 in 200 people.³⁷

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