



# Immigrants and Precarious Employment



## HIGHLIGHTS

- Precarious jobs are bad jobs. They are unstable and insecure, offer limited rights, protections, and benefits to workers. They allow workers little control over their schedules and hours, and give them little say in decisions on how work will be done.
- The Index of Precarious Work (IPW) is a powerful measurement tool for research and policy work. It brings into a single summary measure a complex set of conditions that characterize work in the new economy labour market. The IPW can be used compare the quality of jobs between groups, and over time for groups and individuals.
- Precarious work has a significant negative effect on immigrants' well being. Survey respondents who had precarious jobs during their first year in Canada were more likely to work with chronic pain, experience harassment on the job, and be asked to perform dangerous tasks.
- A person's first job in Canada lays the foundation for subsequent employment opportunities. People who had precarious jobs during their first year in Canada were more likely to have them in the year of the survey, regardless of time in Canada.
- Education – whether it is obtained in the home country or Canada – does not predict the kind of job an immigrant gets and does not protect immigrants from precarious work. This applies to their early jobs and their later ones.
- Immigrants use a range of strategies to improve work. On the job training is associated with less precarity. Government education and training strategies do not guarantee good jobs or income security. Settlement services cannot be expected to solve labour market problems.
- Precarious immigrant workers live in poverty. Fifty percent of workers with medium or high rates of job precarity paid more than 30% of their income in rent, rendering them in “core housing need”. Half of them said they were unable to put aside savings. Respondents worked multiple jobs and many hours a week to make ends meet.

## Immigrants and Precarious Employment in the New Economy

Globalization has an enormous effect on work. Stable jobs that offer benefits and room for growth are disappearing. So, too, is the aspiration to even find such jobs. New strategies, aimed at keeping employers competitive, have reshaped the world of work. Changes in technology, government regulations, and international trade and financial systems have had a big impact on the workplace. The new 'knowledge-based' economy has transformed labour markets in Canada and around the globe. The number of both high-end and low-wage occupations has grown. But middle-income jobs are on the decline, and full-time and stable jobs are difficult to find and keep. The regulation of labour markets by the government has also changed.

As part of this shift, Canada's immigration policy has moved to meet the demands of the new economy labour market. The policy tends to pick highly educated newcomers to be permanent immigrants. Migrants who do not fit this profile, on the other hand, fill low-skilled jobs, often through temporary worker programs. This lets governments and employers meet labour demands in a flexible way. In addition, the labour standards of the provinces have come to carry less and less weight. Recent changes to regulations have reduced the scope and strength of these standards, and budget cuts have made the enforcement of violations difficult.

All of these changes have helped to create **vulnerable workers**. Vulnerable workers are those who are in no position to question an employer's behavior or to seek a better job. Such workers often hold **precarious jobs**. These jobs are not full-time, and offer no workplace rights or benefits. They lack security and a living wage. They often involve subcontracting or self-employment. The scheduling and hours of precarious jobs can be unpredictable, as well. In short, vulnerable workers in precarious jobs have little control over their work. As a result, the new economy can pose a challenge to working families. Precarious jobs have a negative impact on physical and

mental health, stress, personal security, income, and wellbeing.

Precarious jobs have an impact on both immigrant and native-born workers. Still, immigrants and racialized groups tend to experience a tougher time. In the last two decades, newcomers have had to face the prospect of precarious jobs. They have also seen their income deteriorate. Their credentials go unrecognized, and they find few jobs that provide long-term stability and growth. The jobs that are available rarely match the skills and education of immigrants. The gap in pay between immigrants and native-born workers has also increased. So, too, has the gap in income and security between workers in different racialized groups. And yet there have been surprisingly few studies of the ways in which the precariousness of the work of newcomers differs from that of the native-born. Our research helps to fill this gap.

### The Research Project

In 2005 and 2006, our team, led by Professors Goldring and Landolt, held face-to-face interviews with 300 Caribbean and Latin American immigrant workers. These workers arrived in Canada between 1990 and 2004, and were living in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The survey helps us to answer key questions including:

- How common is precarious employment among immigrants?
- What factors explain whether a newcomer has very precarious employment or decent work?
- How do newcomers, looking for jobs, make contact with social institutions and community organizations?
- How well does this contact help them to integrate into the labour market?
- How does precarious employment affect wellbeing more generally?

## Profile of survey respondents

### Region of origin:

- 49% Caribbean
- 51% Latin American

### Sex:

- 53% Women
- 47% Men

### Age:

- 21% Under 30
- 40% 30 to 39
- 39% 40 and up

### Education in home country:

- 6% No schooling or only elementary school
- 35% High School
- 32% College or some University
- 27% University degree

### Years in Canada:

- 40% 1 to 5 years
- 31% 6 to 10 years
- 24% 11 to 15 years
- 5% 15 to 20 years

### Current Occupation in Primary Job

- 29% Professional or Managerial
- 29% Clerical, and skilled & intermediate sales and services
- 19% Trades and construction
- 8% Processing and manufacturing

specific job for an individual. As a result, the IPW allows us to compare the precariousness of different jobs. It also lets us track the precarity of a newcomer's jobs over time. The IPW captures the vulnerability that workers (in general) and immigrants (in particular) face in the new economy.

### *Brief 2 - Immigrants and Precarious Work*

The second brief uses our survey data to look at the factors that cause higher and lower levels of precariousness among immigrant workers. This is measured by the IPW. The brief uses information about the first year for newcomers in Canada and for 2005, the year of the survey. The brief identifies the factors associated with the precariousness of jobs obtained by newcomers at two points in time.

### *Brief 3 - Strategies for Improving Work and Reducing Poverty*

The third brief looks at the strategies that newcomers use to improve conditions at work. These strategies include training and education, networking and contact with institutions as well as working longer hours. It provides findings about the effect that the strategies have on reducing precariousness and poverty. The three research briefs aim to support policy analysis, advocacy, and public debate on precarious employment. The briefs also support strategies that promote "decent jobs for all." By using the IPW, we can better understand precarious jobs. And we can identify those groups and sectors that need targeted policies and advocacy work.

## Three Research Briefs

We have broken our findings down into three research briefs.

### *Brief 1 - The Index of Precarious Work: A Measure to Track Progress Toward Decent Work*

The first brief looks at the many sides of precarious work and introduces the Index of Precarious Work (IPW). Many things can come together to make a job precarious. These include an unpredictable schedule, part-time hours, a short-term contract, and pay in the form of cash. The IPW brings these components together and assigns a 'score' to a

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## Community Partners

Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services

Center for Spanish Speaking Peoples

Community Social Planning Council of Toronto

Conflict Mediation Services of Downsview

Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre

Doorsteps Neighbourhood Services

FCJ Refugee Centre

Mennonite New Life Centre-Toronto

St. Christopher House

Workers' Action Centre

## Policy Partners

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