

HOW DOES IMMIGRATION CLASS AFFECT IMMIGRANTS' EXPERIENCES WITH CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION?

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KEY POINTS:

- Skilled immigrants are most likely to check if their credentials are recognized, either before or after arrival. Refugees experience the most difficulty in having their credentials accepted.
- Immigrant men are more likely to have applied to have their credentials recognized than immigrant women
- The two most common reasons immigrants gave for not checking their credentials was lack of time or the fact that it was not necessary. Principal applicants and business class immigrants are more likely than other groups to report that it was not necessary to check, while family class immigrants were most likely to have no time.
- Refugees are more likely than other groups to say that they cannot afford to have their credentials recognized
- Principal applicants under the skilled immigrant class have the highest levels of credential recognition.
- Refugees and business immigrants tend to have the lowest levels of credential recognition of all groups.
- Female refugees have the lowest percentages of credential recognition at every level of education.

INTRODUCTION TO TIEDI

The Toronto Immigrant Employment Data Initiative (TIEDI) seeks to assist organizations whose mandate includes the better integration of immigrants into Toronto's labour force. Such partner organizations include immigrant service agencies and advocacy groups, labour organizations, regulatory bodies, professional associations, training organizations, and credential assessment agencies.

The purpose of the project is to provide organizations with free access to statistical data and analysis on various aspects of immigrant labour market integration. The goal is to help organizations access the quantitative data they need in order to: identify priorities, develop programs and services, compose proposals and reports, and carrying out advocacy and public education endeavours.

TIEDI provides a unique service in which community organizations' data needs are met by a team of academic researchers and student analysts. Our partners define the data that they need - the project is thus driven by their agendas and not by academic research priorities.

TIEDI is based at York University, with a team of academic researchers drawn from York, the University of Toronto, and Ryerson University. Core members of the project team also include representatives of the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI), the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) and World Education Services. The project is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada under its Knowledge Impact in Society program, and by York University.

The datasets used by the project include a range of large-scale surveys such as the Census, the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada, the Ethnic Diversity Survey, the Workplace and Employee Survey, the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics, the Labour Force Survey and the Permanent Residents Data System.

TIEDI Analytical Reports provide tabulations of data, some brief analysis and contextualization, and some necessary caveats about the limitations of the data and analysis. Since the data presented have not been treated to detailed statistical analysis, any conclusions must be seen as preliminary and as starting points for further, more detailed, research.

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While the research and analysis are based on data from Statistics Canada, the opinions expressed do not represent the views of Statistics Canada.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How does immigration class (and gender) affect the experiences of immigrants in terms of their efforts to have credentials assessed and recognized?

BACKGROUND

Studies have shown that credential recognition is a major hurdle for new immigrants in Canada (Kustec, Thompson and Xue, 2007). These studies argue that the lack of recognition of immigrants' foreign education and work experience is the main contributing factor to their downward mobility (Guo, 2007). This stands as a commonly-noted contradiction in Canada's immigration system, which calls for highly skilled workers who then have significant problems integrating into the labour market (Khan, 2007). Of the total intake of immigrants admitted to Canada, more than half (58%) were economic immigrants (Hawthorne, 2008), among whom skilled workers and their dependants represent the largest groups.

Issues with accreditation are not, however, limited to economic immigrants. For example, refugees, like all other immigrant classes, have to present original certificates and documents in order to be accredited, even though "many such documents may have been destroyed or lost in their flight from persecution, and (...) they cannot return to their countries of origin to retrieve them or request new ones" (Brouwer, 1999: 6). Difficulties in credential recognition may in turn lead to underemployment and reduced income.

Immigrant women, in particular, may face barriers to credential recognition due to familial obligations and gender bias:

"The most common difference between men and women in the accreditation process is that women frequently delay applying for recognition of their qualifications until their spouse/partner has completed the process. This may mean delaying the learning of the language of the destination in the first instance and remaining at home to attend to the needs of the family as a whole. Second, if the accreditation process is costly women often postpone their application" (Iredale, 2005: 162).

Recent immigrants appear to fare the worst, but the situation improves for immigrants who have been in Canada for more than 10 years (Boyd and Thomas, 2001; Boyd and Schellenberg, 2007). More recently, however, it has been suggested that immigrant labour market outcomes have worsened to the point where it may take up to 20 or 30 years for immigrant earnings to match the earnings of Canadian-born employees (Hawthorne, 2008).

Obtaining employment is especially difficult for immigrants if their occupation is regulated and they have to acquire a license before being employed in their field (Kustec, Thompson and Xue, 2007). This is further complicated if immigrant professionals do not know how to have their skills recognized. Little information is provided to prospective immigrants, especially prior to their arrival, concerning the Canadian equivalency of their credentials. The Canadian government has only recently started offering employment orientation through its Canadian Immigration Integration Project. Currently, the project only has offices in India, China and the Philippines.

The problems associated with accreditation lead to disappointment on the part of immigrants, entails an underutilization of human resources, and limits the supply of professional labour in certain fields (Boyd and Thomas, 2001; Alboim, Finnie and Meng, 2005).

THE DATA: LONGITUDINAL SURVEY OF IMMIGRANTS TO CANADA

This report uses data from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC), which was a joint undertaking between Statistics Canada and Citizenship and Immigration Canada under the Policy Research Initiative.

The LSIC is a comprehensive survey designed to study the process by which new immigrants adapt to, or integrate into, Canadian society. As part of adapting to life in Canada, many immigrants face challenges such as finding suitable accommodation, learning or becoming more fluent in one or both of Canada's official languages, participating in the labour market or accessing education and training opportunities. The results of this survey provide indicators of how immigrants are meeting these challenges and what resources are most helpful to their settlement in Canada. The survey also examines how the socio-economic characteristics of immigrants influence the process by which they integrate into Canadian society.

The topics covered by the survey include language proficiency, housing, education, foreign credentials recognition, employment, health, values and attitudes, citizenship, the development and use of social networks, income, and impressions about life in Canada. The questions address respondents' situation before coming to Canada and since their arrival.

The survey involved a longitudinal design, with immigrants being interviewed at three different times: six months, two years, and four years after landing in Canada. The target population for the survey consisted of immigrants who arrived in Canada between October 1, 2000 and September 30, 2001, were age 15 years or older at the time of landing, and landed from abroad (i.e. they must have applied through a Canadian Mission Abroad). Individuals who applied and landed from within Canada are excluded from the survey (Statistics Canada, 2007).

The LSIC was conducted from 2001 to 2005. This time period was marked by economic growth, strong employment gains, and earnings growth in Canada (Lin, 2008). Existing economic conditions (see table 1 for basic economic data) and government policies may affect the trajectories of respondents. The outcomes of the respondents presented in this report may not therefore be comparable to the experiences of immigrants who landed in different time periods. It is also important to note that this report examines solely the relationship between immigrant class and gender on the one hand, and labour market outcomes on the other. Clearly, a great many other variables are involved in shaping labour market integration and mobility for immigrants. Finally, it should be noted that the data presented in this report include only immigrants who had been in Canada for 4 years, and does not therefore capture longer term outcomes.

Table 1: Economic Performance Indicators, Canada, 2001-2005

| | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | Overall average |
|--------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----------------|
| Growth in Real GNP | 1.8 % | 2.9 % | 1.9 % | 3.1 % | 3.1 % | 2.6 % |
| Unemployment Rate | 7.2 % | 7.6 % | 7.6 % | 7.2 % | 6.8 % | 7.3 % |

Source: Maslove, 2008: 228

The sample design for LSIC used a "funnel-shaped" approach. Thus, only immigrants that responded to the Wave 1 interview (at six months) were traced for the Wave 2 interview (at two years) and only those that responded to the Wave 2 interview were traced for the Wave 3 interview (at four years) (Statistics Canada, 2007).

Because of limited sample sizes, the data used in this report are for all of Canada. Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents to the LSIC, by immigrant class. Male principal applicants under the skilled immigrant class constitute the largest single category in the survey at 31.7%, followed by female spouses of these immigrants at 18.6%. Together, all principal applicant skilled immigrants and their spouses constituted 64.5% of the sample. Combining both genders, family class immigrants represented 23.4% of the sample compared with 5.1% for the business class and 7.1% for refugees.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by immigrant class, Canada

| | MEN | | | | | WOMEN | | | | |
|---|-----------|--------|--------------|----------|---------|-----------|--------|--------------|----------|---------|
| | SKILLED | | FAMILY CLASS | BUSINESS | REFUGEE | SKILLED | | FAMILY CLASS | BUSINESS | REFUGEE |
| | PRINCIPAL | SPOUSE | | | | PRINCIPAL | SPOUSE | | | |
| N | 40,970 | 6,120 | 12,150 | 3,440 | 5,110 | 12,260 | 24,030 | 18,040 | 3,080 | 3,960 |
| % | 31.7 | 4.7 | 9.4 | 2.7 | 4.0 | 9.5 | 18.6 | 14.0 | 2.4 | 3.1 |

Note: 'Business' class immigrants include entrepreneurs, investors and self-employed categories. 'Refugees' refer mostly to government-assisted refugees and privately sponsored refugees. LSIC excludes refugees claiming asylum from within Canada.

RESULTS

A) Experiences with Credential Recognition

Table 3 presents the experience of respondents with respect to credential recognition in their first 4 years in Canada, by immigration class and gender.

Table 3: Experiences with Credential Recognition by Immigrant Class and Gender, Canada

| | MEN | | | | | WOMEN | | | | |
|---|-----------|--------|--------------|----------|---------|-----------|--------|--------------|----------|---------|
| | SKILLED | | FAMILY CLASS | BUSINESS | REFUGEE | SKILLED | | FAMILY CLASS | BUSINESS | REFUGEE |
| | PRINCIPAL | SPOUSE | | | | PRINCIPAL | SPOUSE | | | |
| Ever checked if credentials are recognized ¹ | 77.3 % | 66.2 % | 57.6 % | 41.8 % | 58.4 % | 75.1 % | 53.5 % | 53.2 % | 53.8 % | 48.6 % |
| Checked credentials before arriving in Canada | 20.1 % | 11.9 % | 9.7 % | 17.1 % | 16.9 % | 18.6 % | 17.8 % | 16.1 % | 19.8 % | 12.9 % |
| Need license or certification to work in profession/trade in Canada | 54.2 % | 57.6 % | 57.8 % | 52.1 % | 62.7 % | 51.8 % | 56.5 % | 54.9 % | 56.9 % | 50.0 % |
| Experienced difficulties in getting credentials accepted | 33.5 % | 33.5 % | 34.3 % | 30.6 % | 49.6 % | 36.7 % | 39.7 % | 35.0 % | 50.6 % | 55.0 % |

¹ Survey questions asked about checking credentials with any person, organization or employer. Recognition is not limited to credential recognition organizations.

The experiences of immigrants vary according to their immigration class. While more than half of immigrants need certification or a license to work, the proportion of those who have had their credentials checked varies significantly among immigration classes.

Principal applicants under the skilled immigrant class are the most likely to check if their credentials are recognized (77.3% for men and 75.1% for women). Immigrant men who arrived under the business class and refugee women were the least likely to have had their credentials checked by employers, organizations or individuals (with 41.8% and 48.6%, respectively)

Less than 1 in 5 immigrants had checked their credentials before arriving in Canada. Principal applicants, business class immigrants and female spouses under the skilled immigrant class were the most likely to have checked their credentials, while immigrant men under the family class and refugee women were the least likely to have checked them.

Refugees are most likely to experience difficulties in getting accreditation. Half (49.6%) of refugee men experienced difficulties in getting their credentials accepted, compared to about a third of immigrants who arrived under other immigrant classes. More than half of female refugees and female business class immigrants experience difficulties in having their credentials accepted (55.0% and 50.6%, respectively).

Looking at gender differences, immigrant men are more likely to need licensing and to have checked if their credentials would be recognized than immigrant women, except in the case of business immigrant women. Immigrant women also experience more difficulties with accreditation than their

male counterparts, although only in the case of business class immigrants are these gender differences substantial.

Reasons for not Seeking Credential Assessment

Table 4 presents the reasons given by respondents for not having checked their credentials within their first 4 years in Canada.

*Table 4: Reason for not checking credentials** by Immigrant Class and Gender, Canada*

| | MEN | | | | | WOMEN | | | | |
|--|-----------|--------|--------------|----------|---------|-----------|--------|--------------|----------|---------|
| | SKILLED | | FAMILY CLASS | BUSINESS | REFUGEE | SKILLED | | FAMILY CLASS | BUSINESS | REFUGEE |
| | PRINCIPAL | SPOUSE | | | | PRINCIPAL | SPOUSE | | | |
| Don't know how to | 17.6 % | 21.9 % | 20.4 % | 20.6 % | 22.1 % | 18.0 % | 16.5 % | 25.4 % | 17.4 % | 24.5 % |
| No time | 35.5 % | 33.7 % | 47.9 % | 29.6 % | 50.0 % | 30.8 % | 41.7 % | 43.2 % | 23.7 % | 42.1 % |
| Know assessment will not be recognized by employers | 9.0 % | 10.3 % | 6.5 % | n/a | 5.2 % | 6.7 % | 8.6 % | 7.4 % | n/a | n/a |
| Told would not be accepted (by word of mouth) | 18.2 % | 30.2 % | 22.9 % | 24.6 % | 19.3 % | 17.8 % | 23.7 % | 15.5 % | 21.1 % | 20.4 % |
| Not necessary (credentials are good) / not needed (not looking for work) | 42.0 % | 36.5 % | 40.3 % | 52.9 % | 20.0 % | 46.4 % | 39.2 % | 27.1 % | 58.0 % | 29.6 % |
| Returning to school | 7.8 % | 13.6 % | 11.0 % | n/a | 10.0 % | 8.9 % | 10.2 % | 11.0 % | 14.4 % | 12.9 % |
| Cannot afford it | 6.9 % | 8.4 % | 4.6 % | n/a | 10.1 % | 7.9 % | 6.9 % | 7.2 % | n/a | 8.7 % |
| Know credentials will be accepted | 18.3 % | 13.2 % | 13.7 % | 11.2 % | 5.8 % | 21.1 % | 9.6 % | 9.8 % | n/a | 7.0 % |
| Not main priority | 6.7 % | 11.1 % | 13.8 % | 17.3 % | 21.9 % | 5.6 % | 16.4 % | 16.1 % | 15.5 % | 28.9 % |
| Other reasons | 17.2 % | 21.7 % | 15.8 % | 13.7 % | 20.7 % | 16.3 % | 14.7 % | 13.0 % | 21.3 % | 16.6 % |

**Categories are not mutually exclusive

n/a: Data suppressed due to reliability and/or confidentiality issues

Across all immigration classes, the two most common reasons given for not checking credentials were lack of time and the fact that it was not necessary to have their credentials checked, either because they knew that their credentials were accepted, or because they were not looking for work.

Principal applicants under the skilled immigration class are most likely to not check their credentials because they know they will be accepted or because it was not necessary (42.0% for men and 46.4% for women), along with business class immigrants (52.9% for men and 58.0% for women) and male spouse under the family class (with 40.3%).

Among immigrants who did not check their credentials due to lack of time, immigrants who arrived under the family class (47.9% for men and 43.2% for women), refugees (50% for men and 42.1% for women) and female spouse under the skilled immigrant class (41.7%) came first.

Compared to other immigration classes, refugees are more likely than other groups to say that they cannot afford having their credentials recognized (10.1% of men and 8.7% of women), or because it is not their main priority (21.9% and 28.9%, respectively). A quarter of immigrant women who arrived under the family class and refugee women (25.4% and 24.5%, respectively) did not know how to check their credentials. Finally, spouses who arrived under the skilled immigrant class are more likely to not check their credentials because they know the assessment will not be recognized by employers (10.3% for men and 8.6% for women) or secondly, because they have been told informally that their credentials would not be accepted (30.2% and 23.7%, respectively).

Types of Credentials being Recognized

Table 5 presents the kind of credentials that were recognized for respondents within their first 4 years in Canada, by immigrant class and gender.

Table 5: Credentials recognized² by Immigrant Class, Canada

| | MEN | | | | | WOMEN | | | | |
|---|-----------|--------|--------------|----------|---------|-----------|--------|--------------|----------|---------|
| | SKILLED | | FAMILY CLASS | BUSINESS | REFUGEE | SKILLED | | FAMILY CLASS | BUSINESS | REFUGEE |
| | PRINCIPAL | SPOUSE | | | | PRINCIPAL | SPOUSE | | | |
| % with Highest level of education recognized | 60.2 % | 43.6 % | 37.5 % | 25.6 % | 35.2 % | 58.3 % | 36.5 % | 38.2 % | 29.1 % | 30.3 % |
| % with other degrees, diplomas or certificates recognized (excluding highest their degree or diploma) | 65.9 % | 39.0 % | 48.7 % | n/a | 59.3 % | 58.2 % | 47.9 % | 47.2 % | n/a | 39.4 % |
| % with other professional or technical credential recognized | 64.7 % | 45.2 % | 50.8 % | 36.1 % | 27.2 % | 64.7 % | 43.3 % | 39.1 % | n/a | 25.2 % |

n/a: Data suppressed due to reliability and/or confidentiality issues

²: Refers to partial or full recognition by employers, work-related or professional association, immigration officer or educational institution. Percentages are calculated out of all immigrants, whether they tried to have their credentials assessed or not.

Principal applicants under the skilled immigrant class, both men and women, have higher proportions of credential recognition than other groups. Among skilled principal applicant men, 60.2% of immigrants had their highest degrees recognized partially or fully, compared to 58.3% of skilled principal applicant women.

Refugees and business immigrants have among the lowest levels of credential recognition of all groups, with slightly more than a quarter of business immigrants (25.6% for men and 29.1% for women) and a third of refugees (35.2% and 30.3%, respectively) having their highest level of education recognized. Female refugees fare the worst among immigrant classes, with low percentages of recognition at every level of education.

CONCLUSIONS

Clearly only tentative conclusions can be reached from the data compiled in this report. The questions included in the LSIC survey do not differentiate *who* recognized the respondent's credentials, nor whether they were full or only partially recognized. It is also worth bearing in mind

that the data presented here represent only a very specific cohort of immigrants – arriving in a narrow window of time and within a particular set of macro-economic circumstances.

In terms of the process of credential recognition examined, the following conclusions emerge:

- The two most common reasons immigrants gave for not checking their credentials was lack of time and the fact that it was not necessary to have their credentials checked. Principal applicants and business class immigrants were most likely to report that it was not necessary, and family class immigrants were most likely to have “no time.”
- Principal applicants under the skilled immigrant class are most likely to check if their credentials are recognized (as well as checking before arriving in Canada).
- Immigrant men are more likely to need license and have checked if their credentials would be recognized than immigrant women
- Refugees experience the most difficulty in having their credentials accepted in part or fully. Refugees are also more likely than other groups to say that they cannot afford having their credentials recognized or because it is not their main priority.
- Principal applicants under the skilled immigrant class, both men and women, have the highest levels of partial or full credential recognition. Refugees and business immigrants tend to have the lowest levels of credential recognition of all groups. Female refugees fare the worst among immigrant classes, with the lowest percentages of credential recognition for every level of education.

APPENDIX

RELEVANT QUESTIONS FROM LSIC SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE:

1. Gender – from CIC immigration records
2. Immigrant class – from CIC immigration records
3. Trade or occupation that respondent practiced or intended to practice when applied for immigration to Canada – from CIC immigration records
4. In what month and year did you arrive in Canada as a landed immigrant, a refugee or other type of immigrant? (wave 1)
5. When you decided to come to Canada, did you plan to work here? (wave 1)
6. Did you have an idea of what kind of job you wanted? (wave 1)
7. What kind of job did you want when you came to Canada? (wave 1)
8. Do you or did you plan to have your credentials assessed or checked? (wave 1)
9. Did you check with any person, organization or employer to see if your credentials would be accepted as equal to one received in Canada? (wave 1)
10. Why have you not had your Credentials assessed or checked: (waves 1-3)
 - a. Don't know where/how to get my credentials assessed
 - b. Haven't had time/been too busy
 - c. Assessments are not recognized by employers even if an assessment was done
 - d. I know my credentials would not be accepted (friend told me, common knowledge, etc.)
 - e. More interested in having my highest degree assessed - not necessary
 - f. My credentials are good - not necessary
 - g. Not looking for a job - not necessary
 - h. Planning to return to school
 - i. Cannot afford to have them assessed
 - j. I knew my credentials would be accepted
 - k. No need/want to work in another field
 - l. Not my main priority (need to learn or improve language skills in English and/or French first)
 - m. Other
11. Did an employer (inside Canada) / a work-related or professional organization (inside Canada) / an Immigration Officer (inside Canada) / an educational institution (inside Canada) / a work-related or professional organization (outside Canada) / a visa officer (Canadian official outside Canada) / an educational institution (outside Canada) / fully accept, partially accept or not accept your credentials? (waves 1-3)

12. Do you need to obtain a license or certification to work in this profession or trade or to use the professional or trade title in your province? (wave 3)
13. Did you have any problems or difficulties trying to get this credential accepted? (wave 3)
14. Number of members in household (waves 1-3)
15. When did you start working for (the) employer? (waves 1-3)
16. Are you still working for (the) employer? (waves 1-3)
17. When did you stop working for (the) employer? (waves 1-3)
18. How many hours per week do you usually work? (waves 1-3)
19. “Is/Was” this job related to any education or training you have taken or are currently taking? (wave 2-3)
20. Since you came to Canada, how much income in total, have “you and your family” received from all sources? (Both inside and outside Canada if applicable.) (wave 1)
21. Could you give me an estimate of the total income that “you/you and your family” received before taxes and deductions from all sources inside and outside Canada in the last 12 months? (waves 2-3)

Questionnaire (wave 1): http://www.statcan.gc.ca/imdb-bmdi/instrument/4422_Q1_V1-eng.pdf

Questionnaire (wave 2): http://www.statcan.gc.ca/imdb-bmdi/instrument/4422_Q1_V2-eng.pdf

Questionnaire (wave 3): http://www.statcan.gc.ca/imdb-bmdi/instrument/4422_Q1_V3-eng.pdf

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FURTHER READING

For data on foreign credentials and credentials recognition, see
<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-614-x/2005001/findings-resultats/4079120-eng.htm>