
Recession hit newcomers hardest in job market

NICHOLAS KEUNG
IMMIGRATION REPORTER

Immigrants, particularly recent newcomers, have borne the brunt of unemployment as a result of the recent recession, a new study says.

The gap between immigrant and Canadian-born workers has grown since the global economic meltdown began, and Greater Toronto newcomers were hit hardest, says the study being released Friday.

It is part of a project by the Toronto Immigrant Employment Data Initiative, made up of researchers from York University, the University of Toronto and Ryerson University who study the integration of immigrants in the labour force.

"Recent newcomers already experience significant marginalization in the labour market. What is surprising is they are more badly affected than the other groups and the gap has kept widening," said York University geography professor Philip Kelly, the report's lead investigator.

Using Statistics Canada survey data, researchers found the unemployment rate for Canadian-born and established immigrants (those in Canada for more than five years) was around 5 per cent at the onset of the recession in November 2008.

The jobless rate for newcomers — those in Canada for less than five years — was 10 per cent.

By March 2011, a gap had emerged in the first group, with the established immigrants' unemployment rate 2 to 2.5 per cent above that of Canadian-born workers. The jobless rate for recent immigrants shot up to almost 15 per cent.

The gap was more pronounced in Greater Toronto, where Canadian-born workers had a 5 per cent unemployment rate in March 2011 — almost 4 per cent lower than that of established immigrants and 10 per cent below the newcomers' rate.

Kelly attributed the widening gap in the GTA to job losses in the goods-producing sector, including manufacturing and construction, where employment fell by 14 per

cent from its 2006 level. Across Canada, job loss in the sector averaged 5 to 6 per cent.

Kelly said what is most worrisome, as an impact of the economic downturn, is the erosion of Canada's overall full-time employment.

While there has been a longer-term trend toward a slightly lower rate of full-time employment for Canadian-born and established immigrants in the last five years, the percentage of recent newcomers working 30 or more hours a week fell from 86.1 to 82.9 per cent.

This suggests new immigrants have found themselves with precarious part-time employment in larger numbers, the report says.

Toronto Star, Friday, July 15, 2011, (GT2)