

NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT

MOVING TOWARDS DECENT EMPLOYMENT FOR **SOUTH ASIAN** IMMIGRANTS IN TORONTO



PREPARED BY:



FUNDED BY:



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA) would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the following organizations and individuals for their support and guidance throughout the research process:

1. Our funder: United Way Greater Toronto
2. Outreach support: Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC), The East Scarborough Storefront, South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO), Bangladeshi-Canadian Community Services (BCS), Frontline Community Services and Settlement Assistance & Family Support Services (SAFSS).
3. Our trustee: Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention (ASAAP)
4. Research and Outreach Assistants: Aashima Ahuja, Aiman Khan, Akshana Asokan, Azreen Sikder, Chareena Varatharajan, Hiranya Nakandala, Lamia Akbar, Mehathie Sivakumaran, Rafay Syed, Qudsiya Jabeen, Sajane Puvaneswaran and Tasmeea Islam.
5. Development of research questions: Dr. Rana El Kadi from Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS), Dr. Patricia Landolt from the University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC), Abetha Mahalingham from ACCESS Employment and Sathya Gnaniah from Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC).
6. Focus group support: The East Scarborough Storefront, Frontline Community Services, North York Community House, Markham Christian Worship Centre, and Centre for Immigrant and Community Services (CICS) Canada.
7. Key informant interviews support: Frontline Community Services, The East Scarborough Storefront, CICS Canada, Global Skills Hub, South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO), Better Way Alliance and Workers' Action Centre.
8. Editing: Collidoscope Consulting Inc.

All three parts of this research including the Literature Review, Needs Assessment Report, and the Policy Recommendations Report would not have been made possible without the support of all of these organizations and individuals.

Most importantly we would like to thank the South Asian immigrant communities in Toronto for trusting CASSA to take on this research and sharing their lived experiences and vision for a better future with us. This work would not have been possible without their contribution.

Samya Hasan
Executive Director
Council of Agencies Serving South Asian

COUNCIL OF AGENCIES SERVING SOUTH ASIANS (CASSA)

The Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA) is an umbrella organization of agencies, groups, and individuals that provide services to South Asian communities. CASSA envisions and strives for a Canada free from all forms of discrimination in which all communities are free from marginalization and are fully empowered to participate in defining Canadian society. CASSA's mission is to facilitate the economic, social, political, and cultural empowerment of South Asians by serving as a resource for information, research, mobilization, coordination, and leadership on social justice issues affecting South Asian populations. CASSA works to create social change by building alliances and working collaboratively with those who share a vision of empowering all communities to participate in defining Canada's future. There are six values that CASSA follows as guidelines for conduct when implementing projects and these include social justice, anti-racism, anti-oppression and anti-homophobia, responsiveness, diversity, collaboration, solidarity, and accountability.

CONTACT

Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA)
5200 Finch Ave East, Suite 301A
Toronto, ON
cassa@cassa.on.ca
416-932-1359
www.cassa.on.ca

© 2020 Council of Agencies Serving South Asians. All Rights Reserved.

The contents of this report may only be used to support further research, policies and programming with permission from the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians.

Disclaimer:

While financially supported by United Way Greater Toronto, the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians is solely responsible for all content in this report.



CONTENTS

• Introduction	5
• Methodology	7
• Limitations	9
• Literature Review	10
• State of Employment in the South Asian Immigrant Communities in Toronto	11
• Major Barriers and Challenges	14
• Suggested Changes from Research Participants	21
• Policy Recommendations Report	23
• Conclusion	23

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Since 2018, Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA) has been working on the Research on Employment Equity for South Asian Immigrant Communities in Toronto (REESAICT) which is funded by United Way of Greater Toronto. This initiative is a three-year community-based research on the employment needs, barriers, and recommendations for employment equity for South Asian immigrant communities in Toronto. By conducting this needs assessment study, CASSA aimed to identify the needs and barriers that South Asian immigrant communities in Toronto face in their search for meaningful employment. The first phase of this initiative took place during its first year and focused on collecting data on the barriers that South Asian communities living in Toronto face when it comes to seeking and maintaining meaningful employment in their chosen field of work.

The second phase included developing a comprehensive policy report which highlights suggested public policy changes as well as recommendations for business process improvements to help meet the needs and alleviate the barriers faced by South Asian communities. Data and input were collected from community members, subject matter experts, employers, employment equity groups, and South Asian advocacy groups on recommendations for public policy changes. The third and final stage is a six-month long advocacy campaign to engage communities and disseminate information of this study to advocacy groups, regulatory bodies, policy makers, and employers. In this phase, we are engaging with the South Asian immigrant communities in Toronto in advocacy efforts targeted to all three levels of government, regulatory bodies, and employers, to address public policy and business process changes to eliminate barriers to meaningful employment and to advocate for sector wide changes.

CASSA intends to support South Asian immigrants through policy and regulatory changes by helping to create upward mobility in the workforce and to create conditions for more meaningful employment that is commensurate with the qualifications and experience of the applicant. The long-term intended effect of this initiative is to bring changes to policy that will lead to better paying and meaningful jobs for South Asian immigrants. These job opportunities will play a significant role in helping them improve their socio-economic status and can support upward mobility of those living in poverty. Although this study focuses on South Asian immigrants, the changes that may come from can also be beneficial to other racialized immigrants in Canada.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT

The Needs Assessment Report was led and managed by a team of staff and interns at CASSA. The purpose of this study is to identify barriers that South Asian immigrant communities face in their employment search and to advocate for removing such barriers in the business sector and through public policy changes. The research for this project was conducted by Mathura Karunanithy with interns and co-op students from the University of Toronto, Canada Summer Jobs, and Centennial College. The data was analysed through analytics software on SurveyMonkey, Dedoose, and by Samya Hasan; Executive Director of CASSA. The report was written by Cynthia Saxena and Samya Hasan and designed by Mahdiba Chowdhury.

REESAICT TIMELINE

2018

Literature Report:
outlining the objectives and reasoning behind this study

Collecting data on the barriers that South Asian communities living in Toronto face

YEAR 1

Needs Assessment Study:
identify the needs and barriers that South Asian immigrant communities face in their search for meaningful employment

YEAR 2

Data and input were collected from community members, subject matter experts, employers, employment equity groups, and South Asian advocacy groups on recommendations for public policy changes

2019

Developing a comprehensive **policy report** which highlights suggested public policy changes and recommendations for business process improvements

2020

Advocacy Campaign:
engaging with the South Asian immigrant communities in Toronto in advocacy efforts targeted to all three levels of government, regulatory bodies, and employers to advocate for sector wide changes

YEAR 4

Adapt campaign efforts to be COVID-19 mindful

Use social media, print media, ethnic media, webinars, virtual events, etc.

METHODOLOGY

CASSA employed a mixed-methods approach employing both qualitative and quantitative research for this study. The purpose of this primary research was to identify the barriers that South Asian immigrant communities face in their job search and highlight what businesses and stakeholders can do to support these communities in securing decent employment.

SUMMARY



For the purpose of this research, the definition of decent employment has been adopted from the International Labour Organization (ILO). According to ILO, decent employment “involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men”.¹

First, since this research was rooted in key principles of community engagement of consultation, involvement, and empowerment, CASSA conducted seven key informant interviews with CASSA member agencies, community agencies, employers, stakeholders, and subject matter experts working with South Asians on employment related issues. The interviewees were asked for their perspective on the barriers to decent employment that South Asians in Toronto face and possible solutions, as well as policy levers that could alleviate these barriers. Key informant interviews were conducted over the phone or were completed in-person from 2018 to 2019.

Second, for collecting qualitative data on the lived experiences of employment seeking for South Asian newcomers, CASSA conducted ten focus group interviews in different parts of the city and within various organizations, places of worship, community agencies, and education institutions. CASSA worked with project partner agencies and member agencies for conducting outreach to recruit participants. Through these efforts, a diverse group of South Asians from various age, gender, religion, language and country of origin cohorts were able to participate in these focus groups.

1. Decent work. <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm>.

FOCUS GROUPS

PARTICIPANTS WHO HAD IMMIGRATED FROM

42

PARTICIPANTS



-  GUYANA
-  BANGLADESH
-  NEPAL
-  INDIA & SOUTH INDIA
-  PAKISTAN
-  SRI LANKA

IMMIGRATION STATUS OF THE PARTICIPANTS



- PERMANENT RESIDENTS
- CITIZENS
- LANDED IMMIGRANTS
- WORK PERMITS
- REFUGEES
- REFUGEE CLAIMANTS
- STUDENT VISA

AGE OF IMMIGRANTS



- 19-71 YEARS OLD
- HAD BEEN IN CANADA FOR LESS THAN 10 YEARS.

Immigrants who had been in Canada for less than 10 years were chosen since newcomers (very recent immigrants) have historically had lower employment rates compared with other landed immigrant groups. Focus groups were conducted in 2018.

Third, CASSA developed a quantitative survey to be completed by South Asian immigrants living in Toronto that arrived in Canada between 2008 and 2016. These surveys aimed to gather quantitative data on social determinants of health about participants' immigration status, educational level, income, work experience, experiences in Toronto, and their lived experiences around finding employment. To ensure a wide range of South Asian community participation, outreach for these surveys was conducted online and in-person through CASSA project partners, member agencies in Toronto, social media posts, ethnic media (OMNI and other language specific media), places of worship, cultural festivals, and community events. Based on the demographic composition of South Asians in Toronto, the surveys were also translated into Tamil, Bangla, Urdu, and Punjabi to make it easier for participants with language barriers to complete. CASSA outreach staff also attended South Asian events and gatherings in Toronto in the summer of 2019 to secure survey respondents. Some member agencies of CASSA that serve South Asian clients supported the collection of survey responses by supporting their clients in filling out the surveys. All participants were given a consent form and the choice to remain confidential. Finally, all respondents; both online and in-person, were given a \$10 Tim Hortons gift card as incentive to complete the survey.

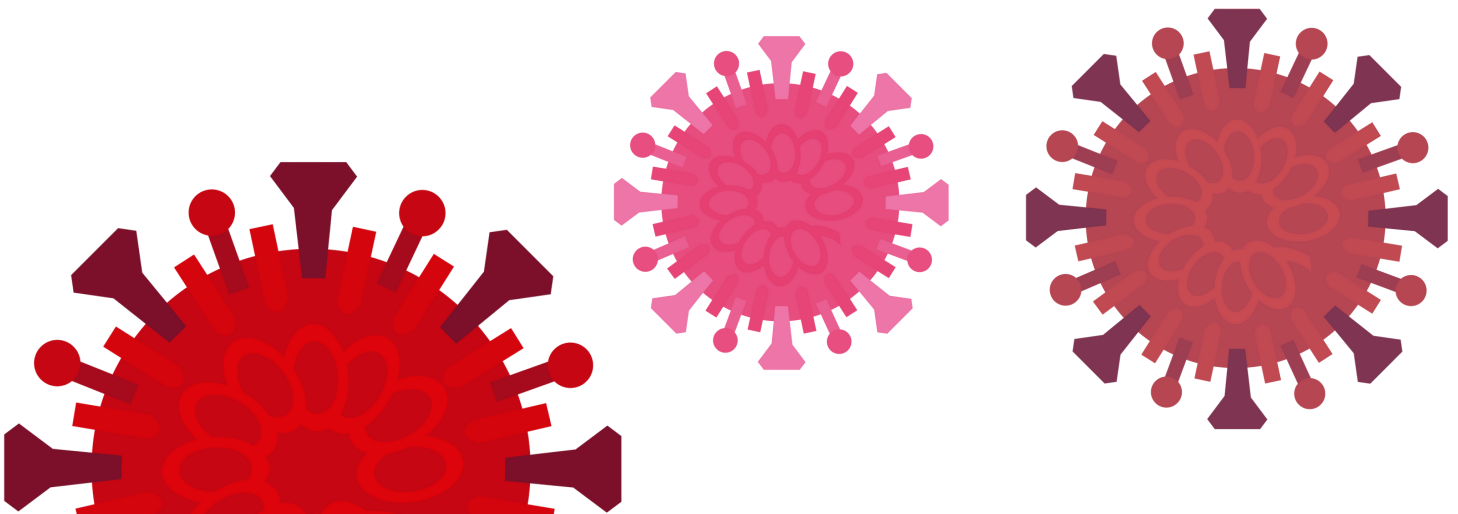
LIMITATIONS

As with any community-based research with scarce resources, there were some limitation to this research including the controlled area scope of the study, the possibility missing representation from some South Asian groups, and the fact that this research was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the additional effects on decent employment for South Asians that were likely exacerbated by COVID-19 measures may not have been captured within our data and reports.

Our research focused specifically on South Asian immigrant communities living in the City Toronto; as such, most research participants in the study were Toronto residents. Restricting our sample to Toronto residents allowed us to make best use of our study resources available and allowed us to gain a valid and reliable sample. Although the research only documented South Asians in Toronto, some findings may be applicable with some caution to other municipalities in the Greater Toronto Area and also in similar high South Asian immigrant concentrated cities such as Vancouver, Montreal, Edmonton, and Calgary. Although the study focused on South Asian immigrants who have been in Canada for 10 years or less, some findings may (with caution) be applicable for South Asians who have been in Canada for a longer period, are second generation immigrants, or immigrants from other racialized communities.

Since the target was to highlight the experiences of South Asians in Toronto in regards to their experience with employment equity and decent employment, all attempts were made to reach the vast diversity of people within the South Asian diasporic community in the City of Toronto. CASSA partnered with ethnic media, ethnic-specific agencies, and also translated surveys and focus group questions into various South Asian languages to recruit participants from all segments of South Asian communities. However, despite best efforts, it may be possible that we were unable to reach some segments of our target population.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted life everywhere and has changed reality for all aspects of life, including employment. COVID-19 has impacted employment for everyone in Canada and has exacerbated the negative employment experiences of South Asian communities in Canada during this difficult time. Since the research was conducted pre-COVID, the study does not take into account the changed environment and additional barrier that COVID has proven to be for South Asian immigrants seeking decent employment. However, we have made an attempt to do a secondary research scan of the data that is currently available on the impact of COVID-19 on employment of South Asian communities. Some of this data and plans for the recovery period have influenced our Policy Recommendations report to make it more relevant to the current employment issues for South Asian immigrant communities in Toronto.



LITERATURE REVIEW

We conducted a literature review in 2018, prior to starting research activities for this project, to develop an understanding of current trends. Generally, there was a lack of Canadian disaggregated race-based data on the employment outcomes for South Asian communities in any parts of the country. We found this gap in research to be the case for most racialized immigrant communities. Below is some research and data on the employment outcomes of immigrants in Canada in general and the profile of South Asian immigrants in Toronto.

Decent and meaningful employment is a necessity for any individual to maintain a standard of living and meet their needs and requirements. Unfortunately, despite having adequate academic and work experience, many South Asian immigrants face a huge hurdle in finding decent work in Toronto. Moreover, many racialized and immigrant communities, including South Asian immigrants are employed in precarious work and are either living in or are at high risk of falling in poverty.³

BACKGROUND ON CANADA'S IMMIGRATION

Canada's immigration continues to grow with each passing year. The proportion of immigrants in Canada has never fallen below **13%** since the Canadian Confederation in 1867.⁴ Prior to the 1970s, immigrants who settled in Canada were mostly from Europe and the United States. Since immigration has continued, the diversification of Canadian immigrants has increased largely to meet economic needs. The majority of immigration to Canada from 2011 were from Asia, in particular the Philippines, China and India.⁵ As of 2011, the largest racialized groups in Ontario were South Asian (**29.5%**), Chinese (**19.2%**), Black (**16.4%**), Filipino (**8.4%**), and Latin American (**5.3%**).⁶

BACKGROUND ON TORONTO'S WORKFORCE

Immigrants will continue to be a major component of Toronto's workforce. Moreover, the portion of prime working age population, ages 25 to 54, in Toronto will be comprised of immigrants.⁷

With such continuing patterns, immigrants will come largely from racialized populations, especially younger people. Therefore, immigration to Toronto will continue to be increasingly composed of racialized people. The majority of people aged 15 to 34 years in Toronto are from racialized communities and about three-quarters or **76%** are first-or second-generation immigrants compared to about **40%** in all of Canada.⁸ Additionally, as the labour force born in Canada declines, immigrants will continue to play a key role in the labour market. The Canadian-born labour market has declined (from **78%** in 2006 to **74%** in 2017), while the numbers of incoming immigrants has steadily increased (from **22%** to **26%** during the same period).⁹

3. Ayer, S. (2020). *Toronto's Vital Signs: Growing Pains and Narrow Gains* (pp. 1–142). Toronto, ON: Toronto Foundation. Retrieved from: <https://communityfoundations.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Toronto-VitalSigns2019.pdf>

4. Yssaad, L., & Fields, A., 2018

5. Ayer, S., 2020

6. Ayer, S., 2020

7. Ayer, S., 2020

8. Ayer, S., 2020

9. Ayer, S., 2020

Despite continued growth in immigrant population since 1980, newcomers and racialized populations have not witnessed any inflation adjusted increases in income.¹⁰ In comparison, Canadian-born white residents have had up to a **60%** in income growth.¹¹ Additionally, racialized communities and immigrants are also over-represented in the precarious job sector which also translates to a lack of income growth.¹²

SOUTH ASIAN PROFILE IN TORONTO

Based on the 2016 census data from Statistic Canada, South Asians represent the largest visible minority population in Toronto at **338, 965** or **25%** of all visible minorities which make up over half of the city.¹³ They mostly reside in the East and West of Toronto.¹⁴ From the 2016 census, Toronto, followed by Montreal and Vancouver, was identified as the dominant residency choice for immigrants to settle in Canada.¹⁵

STATE OF EMPLOYMENT IN THE SOUTH ASIAN IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES IN TORONTO

Our survey received a total of 208 entries, out of which 174 were valid, complete, and reliable (met all participant criteria) and were analyzed for this report. Approximately 100 surveys were conducted in person and the remaining were online. The surveys gathered data on the employment, education, and social determinants of health patterns of South Asian immigrant communities in Toronto. Questions in the survey were about job search experiences, job satisfaction, pay satisfaction, educational attainment, mental health, commute, immigration status, career aspirations, barriers to decent work, support systems, and impact of gender and/or disability on employment outcomes. Below are some highlights of what survey respondents indicated.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

52% of the survey respondents identified as female and **48%** identified as male. Respondents immigrated from diverse South Asian countries (India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Nepal) and spoke various languages (including Bengali, Gujarati, Telugu, Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu, Tamil, Nepali, and Dari). Their religious backgrounds also varied between Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, and Christian, while some did not identify with a particular religion.

GENDER ANALYSIS

In terms of educational attainment, **40%** of male and **43%** of women from the survey respondents had a Master's degree and **41%** of men and **43%** of women had an undergraduate degree. **57%** of the males and **69%** of females indicated that they were not working in the field that they had planned for. **43%** of the males and **63%** of the females surveyed made less than \$30,000 annual salary. According to these figures, majority of our respondents who live in households of 2 or more persons, are faring

10. Parkin, A. (2018). Immigration: Ontario's Uneven Success (pp. 1–21). Toronto, ON: Mowat Centre - MUNK. Retrieved from https://munkschool.utoronto.ca/mowatcentre/wp-content/uploads/publications/182_ADO_immigration.pdf

11. Parkin, A., 2018

12. Colour of Poverty. (2019). Racialized Poverty in Employment. <https://colourofpoverty.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/cop-coc-fact-sheet-5-racialized-poverty-in-employment-2.pdf>

13. Ayer, S., 2020

14. Yssaad, L., & Fields, A., 2018

15. Yssaad, L., & Fields, A., 2018

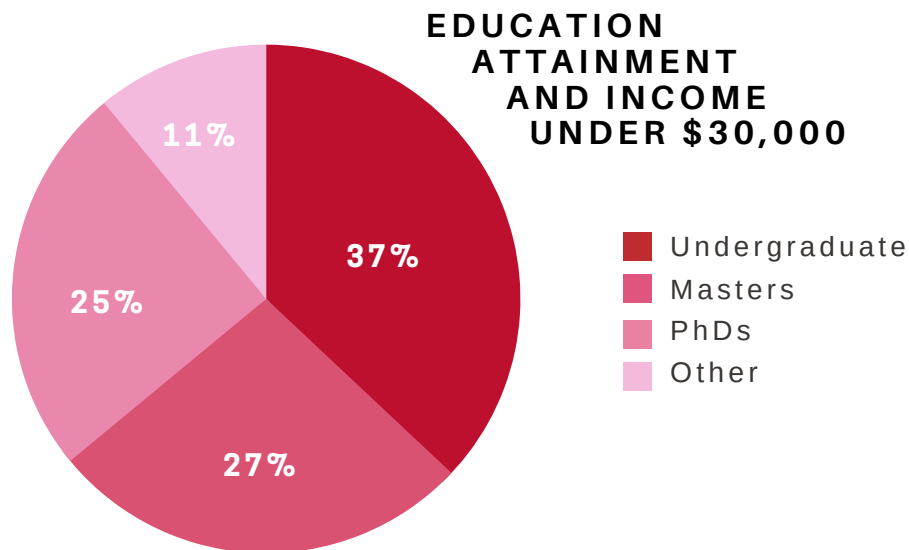
below the 2018 low-income measure (LIM) of \$34,200 in Canada.¹⁶ Furthermore, our sample size is disproportionately represented in low income compared to only **14.4%** of the total Ontario population living in low income in 2015.¹⁷ **32%** of males and **55%** of females indicated that they had mental stress of navigating employment in Toronto. More males than females had full-time and/or permanent jobs whereas more females indicated working in on-call, part-time, non-unionized, and contract work. Of those working multiple jobs, **60%** were female.

ADVANCEMENT OF CREDENTIALS/EDUCATION

25% of the survey respondents indicated that they were spending over **20%** of their income on upgrading their education in hopes for better employment, whereas **47%** indicated they could not afford to take on courses at the time. Only **21%** of the respondents surveyed had full-time permanent jobs at the time of completing the survey. Over **35%** of respondents who indicated they were not in the field they had planned for indicated suffering significant mental health issues as a direct result of job navigation in Toronto on a scale ranging from significant mental health issues to no mental health issues. Over **60%** of those who made under \$40,000/year indicated they did not have the time to get another job along with all of their responsibilities.

EDUCATION COMMENSURATE WITH PAY

When comparing pay levels with levels of education, we found disparities in all levels of education. **25%** of those who had a PhD were earning less than \$30,000/year. **27%** of those with a Master’s degree made less than \$30,000/year and **22%** indicated they had no income. **37%** of those with an Undergraduate/Bachelor’s degree indicated they made less than \$30,000/year while **22%** in this category indicated spending more than **20%** of their income on upgrading their education. Compared to the median income for varying levels of education, these figures are significantly lower. According to the 2016 Census, the median earnings for people with a Bachelor’s degree was \$85,645 and with a College diploma was \$67,576 in Ontario.¹⁸



16. Statistics Canada. [Table 11-10-0232-01 Low income measure \(LIM\) thresholds by income source and household size](#)

17. Statistics Canada. [Income Highlight Tables, 2016 Census](#)

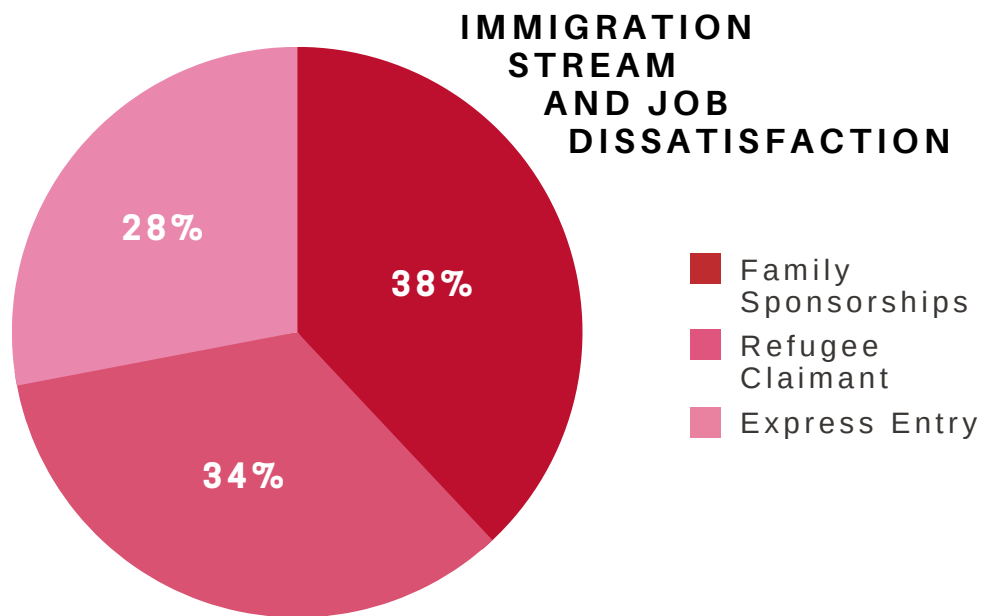
18. Statistics Canada. (2017). (issue brief). Does education pay? A comparison of earnings by level of education in Canada and its provinces and territories. Ottawa, ON. Retrieved from: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016024/98-200-x2016024-eng.cfm>

AWARENESS OF EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS

Over **30%** of the respondents surveyed indicated that they did not know their employment rights on a scale with varying levels of employment rights awareness. This includes people in sectors such as natural resources, arts and culture, education, natural/applied sciences, and management; with the largest number of people feeling unsafe at work in the arts and culture sector. Specifically, **40%** of those with no income, **35%** of those with income under \$30,000, **35-64%** of those with \$30-\$70,000, and **66%** of those with income under \$80,000, indicated that they were not aware of their employment rights.

WORKING IN FIELD OF STUDY AND IMMIGRANT STREAM

When comparing the immigration stream participants immigrated through and working in their desired field in Canada, **82%** in the family sponsorships category, **60%** in the express entry category and **72%** in the refugee claimants category indicated that they are not working in the jobs they planned. Of those who indicated they are not working in jobs they had planned or studied in, **60-70%** were between the ages of 35-54 years. Among those who indicated no income, the majority in this category were those who came to Canada as refugees or refugee claimants.



TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT AND EARNINGS

An overwhelming majority (over **85%**) of the survey respondents were not unionized. The small minority that indicated they had full-time permanent employment indicated a salary between \$30-\$70,000/year. Close to **40%** of respondents earning under \$40,000/year indicated they were working in multiple jobs.

MAJOR BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

Some of the main barriers and challenges that were highlighted in our focus groups and key informant interviews are listed below:

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Being proficient in English (and French in Quebec) is a basic requirement for almost all jobs in Canada.¹⁹ Many immigrants may not know or be fluent enough in English if they have recently immigrated from non-English speaking country, hence creating obstacles in finding adequate employment. Focus group participants also indicated that they felt their accents were a barrier to securing decent employment in Canada.

Focus group participants indicated that they believe employers in Canada prefer candidates with a high English language proficiency. Based on focus group data, language barriers were sometimes more pronounced for participants who immigrated from certain countries of origin such as Sri Lanka, or for linguistic backgrounds such as Tamil-speaking participants. There was also higher indication of language or accent barriers from participants who immigrated to Canada through the refugee streams.

INACCESSIBLE RESOURCES AND INFORMATION FOR EMPLOYMENT

Key informants told us that there is a lack of accessible resources due to the difficulty some immigrants may face to navigate online systems. Focus group participants highlighted that this was especially a barrier for older South Asian women who did not have much experience with technology and were in the labour market or searching for employment. Navigating through the plethora of documents was especially challenging coupled by a lack of sector knowledge. This inaccessibility can also be amplified due to the language barrier as immigrants not proficient in English may not be able to understand these resources.

ACCREDITATION OF SKILLS AND EDUCATION

If foreign education is recognized and not penalized by Canadian employers, immigrant wages are expected to improve by 4.3%.²⁰ In particular, focus group participants stressed the difficulties in regulated sectors such as medicine, pharmacy, accounting, law, and engineering, where they face multiple barriers to having their education and credentials recognized from their country of origin. This was especially the case if they earned their credentials or education in countries outside of North America or Europe. There was a sentiment among key informants that this was a highly discriminatory approach in which the Canadian regulatory bodies consider Canadian education to be “better” because it is “Western or Eurocentric”. Key informants indicated that their clients who are highly educated and qualified South Asian immigrants continue to struggle to align their qualifications and education with the standards required by provincial accreditation organizations.

Focus group participants expressed their frustration with the fact that no matter their educational level, experience, or overall qualification, most immigrants have to start from scratch when they immigrate to Canada. Some key informants questioned the point system that is used to welcome immigrants into the country. The point system is not matched for the right jobs in Canada and is misleading to potential immigrants. Focus groups participants shared the sentiment that if they are good enough to pass the point system before entry, they should be good enough to be hired for decent work in their field without the requirement of re-accreditation or “Canadian experience”. This barrier to decent employment was connected to the disproportionate numbers of low-income, underemployed, and unemployed South Asian immigrants in Toronto.

19. Pagtakhan, R. (2016, May 5). Language requirement for citizenship unnecessary, Reis Pagtakhan writes. CBC. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/immigration-language-requirement-reis-pagtakhan-1.3568590>

20. The Institute for Competitiveness & Prosperity. (2017). Immigration in Ontario: Achieving best outcomes for newcomers and the economy. Retrieved from https://www.competeprosper.ca/uploads/2017_Immigration_in_Ontario_Achieving_best_outcomes_Full_report.pdf

LACK OF "CANADIAN EXPERIENCE"

The lack of "Canadian experience" came up as a barrier to decent employment throughout every segment of the participants in the focus groups and key informant interviews. Between 30-70% of focus group participants from all backgrounds indicated that the lack of "Canadian experience" has been a barrier to securing employment for them. More females than males and those living outside of the Downtown core were more likely to indicate the lack of "Canadian experience" was a significant barrier to decent employment.

Key informants who provide job-readiness training to South Asian immigrants noted that they sometimes advise clients to volunteer to earn "Canadian experience" if they are not able to secure paid work. However, they also noted that volunteering is not an option for most clients who have families to feed and provide shelter for. Focus group participants expressed that even small local businesses usually prefer or require candidates to have Canadian work experience as it indicates to them that the candidate is familiar with the Canadian work culture. The expectation that focus group participants had, especially those who are highly qualified, is that they will easily land a good job soon after they settle in Canada. It was quite shocking for most participants to realize that they needed "Canadian experience" to be able to get a 'good job' that was comparable to the ones they had in their home country. Key informants pointed out that the notion of needing Canadian experience and disregarding their home country's experience should be questioned, along with why Canadian experience is better and more prestigious than extensive experience in other countries.

I FELT ISOLATED AND FRUSTRATED. I WAS VERY SHOCKED AND WHEN LOOKING FOR JOBS. I CALLED MY WIFE AND TOLD HER NOT COME HERE. I CAME HERE BY MYSELF JUST TO SEE WHAT IT WAS LIKE. MY FRIEND TOLD ME YOU CANNOT GO BACK BECAUSE IT IS BETTER FOR EDUCATION FOR THE KIDS. SO, I TOLD MY WIFE TO COME WITH THE KIDS. – FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

CHILD CARE

The lack of adequate and affordable childcare was raised by almost all key informants working with South Asian immigrant women. Without support from extended family coupled with the inability to afford safe childcare options, the main responsibility of childcare falls on parents, especially women. This acts as a barrier for South Asian immigrant women from pursuing a career in Canada. Key informants told us that among their clients, lack of affordable childcare forces the dominant caretakers to stay at home or to start a business from home such as catering, stitching, child minding, etc. In cases of domestic abuse, we were told this barrier can lead to even more dangerous consequences for the abused women. They are forced to stay home and are dependent on the income of their abuser.

WITH IMMIGRANT WOMEN, HAVING AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE IS ALWAYS A BARRIER, SO THEY ARE UNABLE TO DO THINGS BECAUSE OF CHILDCARE. – KEY INFORMANT

INACCESSIBLE TRAINING AND/OR EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

Many focus group participants indicated that they were not able to access additional training and education due to financial constraints and conflicting responsibilities during times which training/education opportunities are offered. In order to fulfill their immediate need of supporting their

families financially, most participants and key informants indicate that their clients accept immediate work opportunities, even if it is precarious or low-income work. Participants indicated that they know volunteering, participating in workshops, and attending training or education sessions is highly recommended for immigrants seeking job opportunities, however, these are not always possible for them for various reasons. For instance, these activities often coincide with their working hours, they cannot afford childcare during those hours, and/or they simply cannot afford to pay for the opportunities on their extremely tight budgets.

Moreover, many key informants indicated that their clients are unaware of the concept and importance of networking, as it is usually not a norm or practice in their country of origin. This is especially a barrier for recent immigrants who may not have the social networks to know who to network with, or the confidence or comfort in their English-language capacity to network with strangers.

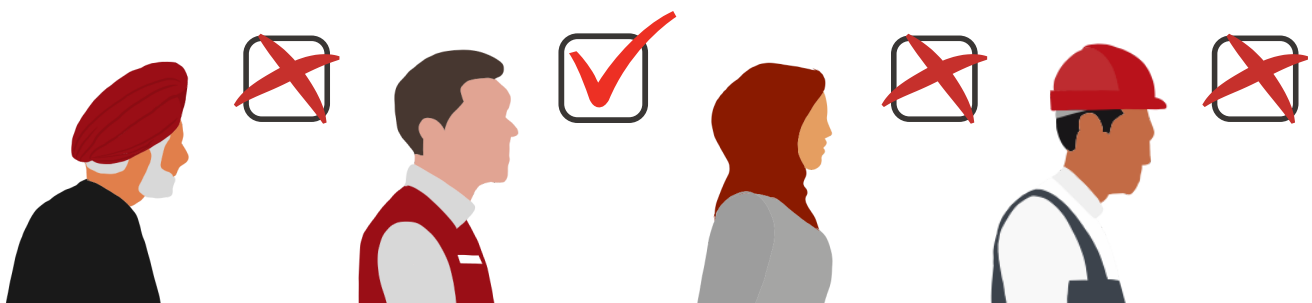
LACK OF ACCESS TO TRANSPORTATION

Focus group participants living outside of the Downtown core of Toronto expressed transportation as an additional barrier to decent employment. Key informants also indicated this was a barrier their clients expressed. Lack of access to adequate transportation really hinders some clients' growth as they may not be able to afford to live near a public transportation route, may not have a license, and/or be able to afford a car with high insurance rates. Not only does this prevent them from attending training/educational workshops and networking events before or after work, but it may also be seen negatively by employers who wish for their employees to have reliable and quick transportation.

DISCRIMINATION IN HIRING AND PROMOTIONS

Even for focus group participants who immigrated from countries in which they had jobs that required proficiency in English or they came from a country where English is predominantly spoken (i.e. Guyana), having a "strong accent" often acted as a barrier to decent employment. This was especially true for newcomers who indicated that employers may judge their ability to communicate effectively solely based on their accent. Moreover, some participants felt that being reminded of their accent led to loss in self-confidence and also led to feeling self-consciousness in presence of "Canadian accents".

Additionally, key informants serving South Asian immigrant clients noted that systemic racist hiring practices do, in fact, exist. For instance, one key informant noted that based on their experience, while screening candidates and resumes for a job, Asian sounding names had a 30% less chance to be called for an interview. Systemic barriers also exist in promotion and upward mobility of South Asian immigrants. Key informants noted that many hard-working South Asian clients are stuck in entry-level low paying work and are often passed up for promotions to their non-racialized counterparts. Even for immigrants who end up securing a good job soon after they arrive in Canada, many report to have been stuck in their position for multiple years without having access to mechanisms to support their upward mobility. Another inherent systemic racist practice that was brought up during the key informant interviews was witnessing the wage gaps between Canadian born white employees and non-Canadian born racialized employees.



I WENT TO THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO AND DID A COURSE AFTER IMMIGRATING BUT I DID NOT GET A GOOD JOB. I WAS ONLY GETTING ONE TO TWO SHIFTS ON-CALL AND TEACHING ONLY TWO COURSES FOR A FEW HOURS. I KNOW IT WAS MY ACCENT. I TALKED TO FOLKS WHO WORK AT THE SCHOOL, THEY SAID IT WAS MY ACCENT. I WAS EVEN TEACHING AT A TORONTO SCHOOL BEFORE THAT BUT THEY DIDN'T LIKE IT. THEY WANTED A CANADIAN ACCENT. – FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

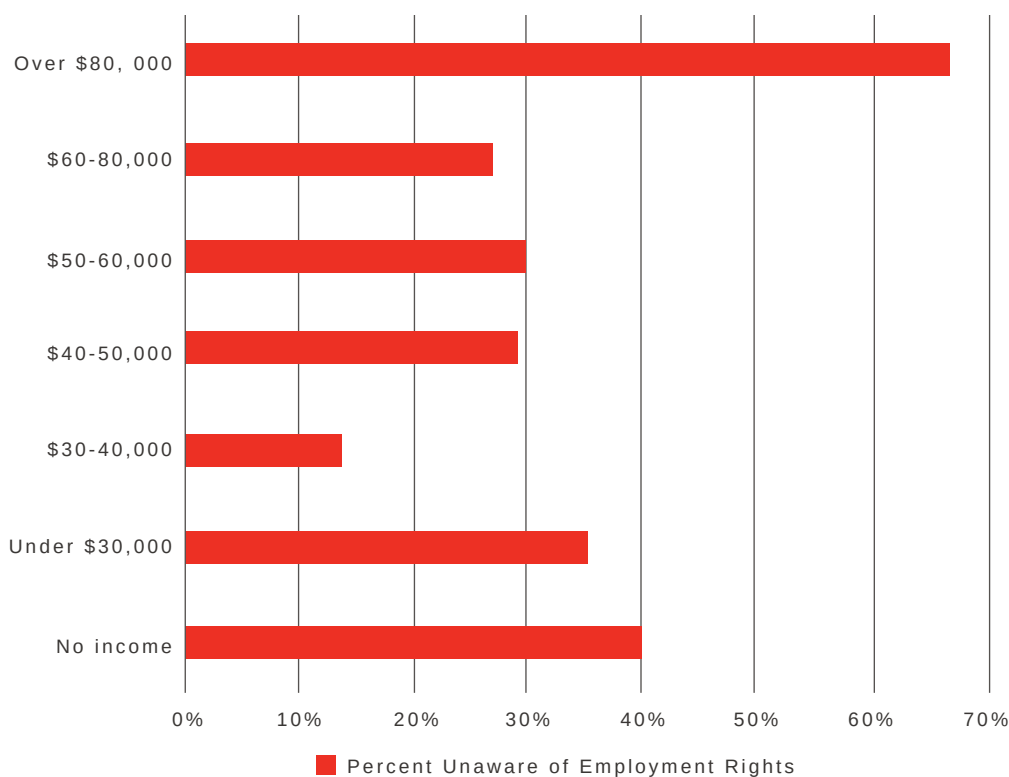
LACK OF AWARENESS OF EMPLOYEE RIGHTS AND EMPLOYER RESPONSIBILITIES

Key informants indicated that many immigrants and newcomers are usually unaware of their employment rights in the workplace, especially when they are still new to the country. This is particularly true for those working in precarious low-wage jobs such as in the service industry, food, retail, factory, white collar, and administrative work. One major reason for this is the fact that this information and other employment resources are not generally accessible to them, as it is not provided in languages that they are proficient in. Apart from their own rights, many South Asian immigrants are also unaware of what the employers' responsibilities are towards ensuring employee safety and human rights. This is extremely concerning and can lead to uninformed employees working in dangerous and hazardous circumstances or can lead to workers being taken advantage of in terms of being overworked and underpaid. Focus group participants highlighted this is a barrier to them reporting abuse at work as they may not have the right information on reporting mechanisms.

LEGISLATIONS THAT DO NOT LEAD TO CHARGES

Key informants highlighted that majority of complaints from South Asian immigrant clients about employers come are in the form of safety and human rights abuse, lack of compensation for injuries, sexual harassment, and direct discrimination on the bases of race and identity.

EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS AWARENESS AND INCOME LEVEL



Focus group participants note that those who hold precarious immigration status, such as students, those on work permits, or refugee claimants, are especially hesitant to pursue legal action against their employer for abuse due to fear of losing their difficult-to-secure job, complications in their visa processing, or even being forced to leave the country. As a result, the abused employee continues to work in the difficult or dangerous conditions and the employer remains unreported.

For those participants who are unfairly terminated, their first priority is to immediately find another job in order to continue to provide for their family. They forego getting involved in a legal battle due to financial constraints and family obligations. The view that most key informants and focus group participants held was that legislations that currently exist to protect workers do not even lead to charges unless a large group of employees files the claim. Therefore, most employees who are unfairly treated at work do not even bother challenging the employer because of this unequal balance of power.

LACK OF OPPORTUNITIES COMMENSURATE TO SKILLS AND EDUCATION

Although there is competition to attract and retain highly qualified new immigrants to provide economic leadership provincially, many employers in Ontario still expect applicants who are immigrants to have “Canadian experience”. Majority of the focus group participants indicated that the lack of opportunities that are commensurate with their skills and education from back home is a significant barrier to securing decent employment. The responses for this varied by the location in Toronto, by country of origin, and immigration status. This barrier was most frequently noted by focus group participants who are living in Scarborough (52%), by those who immigrated from Nepal (54%) and India (51%), and by those who were Canadian citizens (36%).

Frustration around educational merits from immigrants’ home countries not being recognized or not being considered equal to their Canadian counterparts was expressed in most focus groups and key informant interviews. An overwhelming number of participants revealed that since their work experience and qualifications were not Canadian-based, their existing employment was not proportionate to their actual education and/or experience from their country of origin.

LACK OF LEGISLATION TO PROTECT TEMPORARY WORKERS

Key informants brought attention to the alarming issue of the trend towards the increasing number of temporary workers. Many employers are opting to hire foreign workers to fill temporary labour and skill shortages that they cannot fill with domestic workers. This increase in demand for temporary foreign workers has not been coupled with built in mechanisms to protect the rights of temporary workers. Key informants with clients that are temporary workers indicated that their clients have even fewer rights than those working under student visa and are sometimes even paid below the minimum wage. The growing population of temporary workers is troubling since they are the most vulnerable, and face the most significant employment abuse due to lack of legislation and reporting mechanisms which can protect them.



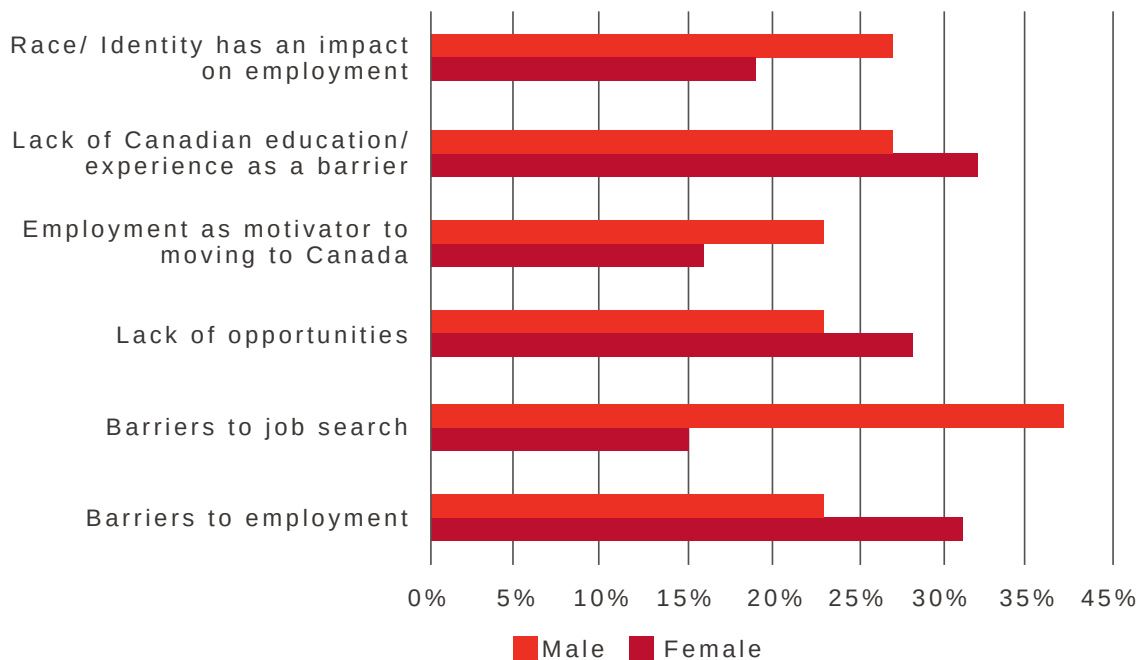
FOCUS ON TEMPORARY WORK INSTEAD OF DECENT WORK

Key informants indicated that many of their South Asian immigrant clients do not come from wealthy backgrounds or their wealth from their country of origin does not translate into much wealth in Canada. As a direct consequence, most immigrants need to find employment very quickly to be able to support themselves and their families. In these cases, sometimes in desperation, immigrants tend to take up short-term survival jobs to meet their financial requirements. This predicament was also noted by many focus group participants. Through recruitment agencies, participants indicated that they often settled for part-time jobs as lunch-time supervisors, food delivery, or even as warehouse clerks. They understood that these precarious jobs were much below the level and pay of the jobs they had anticipated when making the decision to immigrate to Canada and for the most part, were not aligned with their education or experience. However, most settle for these types of precarious jobs to pay the bills and support themselves and their families and are often stuck in these positions for the long-term.

GENDER IMPACT IN THE WORKFORCE

Apart from the general challenges that immigrants face in their job search, our research found that women faced compounding barriers to securing decent employment. Female participants in this research study indicated that they face unique and specific barriers to finding adequate employment such as language barriers, limited transportation, childcare responsibilities, difficulty in accessing technology and navigating online spaces.

GENDER AND BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT



As the primary caretaker of the family in many South Asian immigrant families, the burden of family responsibilities and childcare continues to fall on women’s shoulders even when they immigrate to Canada. The unaffordable cost of childcare is a significant barrier to women in low-income families who want to secure employment and support their families. In some cases, some female participants in the study resorted to operating their own businesses from home including selling clothing, stitching clothes, or catering services.

Female participants also indicated that they struggled more to find decent work due to language barriers. Since they are required to be at home to take on family and childcare responsibilities, while their male counterparts venture out to look for employment, their exposure to the outside world is limited. They are not able to practice their English language skills or boost their confidence through interactions with potential employers. Moreover, some female participants indicated that they are not familiar with navigating online information or networking sites such as LinkedIn, putting them at a disadvantage compared to those who are internet and social media savvy.

Key informants raised another alarming issue in that their female clients in general face more bullying, harassment, and racism than their male counterparts in the workplace. This is even worse for immigrant and newcomer women. This kind of treatment leads to more damage to confidence, so they do not tend to speak up or raise their voice against unfair treatment towards them. This is especially true for older South Asian women.

Finally, a gender-race wage gap continues to persist even with all of the work that has gone in for 'equal pay for equal work'. For example, a racialized woman earns 58 cents to \$1 earned by their non-racialized male counterparts even when controlled for similar roles and responsibilities.²¹

SOUTH ASIAN IMMIGRANTS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE WORKFORCE

Research participants also highlighted heightened challenges for those members of South Asian communities with disabilities. Participants with disabilities indicated that they usually pursue precarious or survival jobs due to fear of being discriminated against not only in the job searching process but also in the workplace. They are also afraid or hesitant to reveal their disabilities for fear of being rejected from the position. Consequently, accommodations are not given which puts the performance of the disabled workers at a disadvantage.

Key informants revealed that their clients who are South Asians immigrants with disabilities face a lot of discrimination and harassment in the workplace and there is a significant lack of awareness of their human rights and regulations that are supposed to protect them. As a result, they have significant difficulty in trying to incentivize their employers to make workplaces more accessible. It was also noted that clients of key informants sometimes find it discouraging to take on part-time work as it can result in significant reductions in their Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).



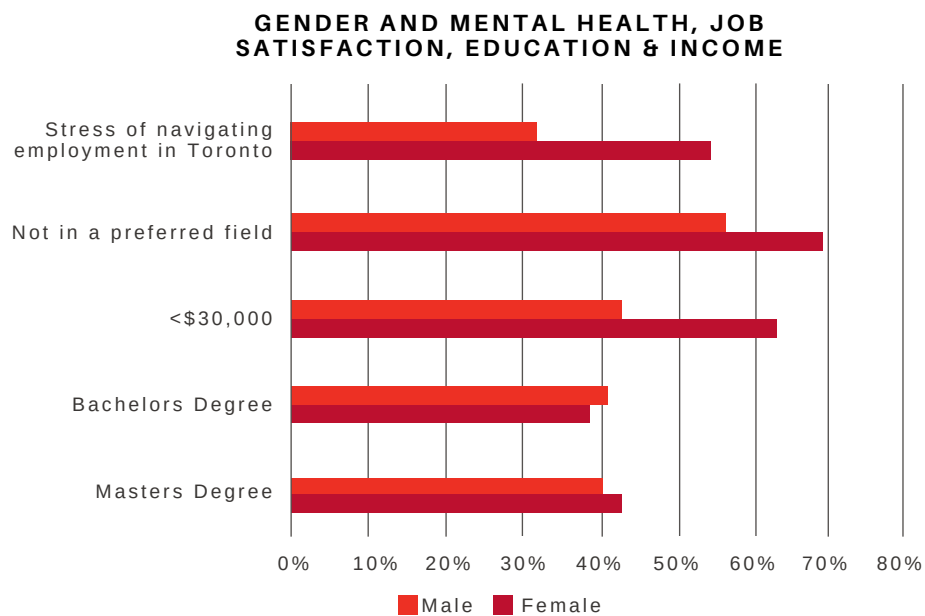
21. Block, S., Galabuzi, G. E., & Tranjan, R. (2019). *Persistent Inequality: Canada's Colour Coded Income Inequality*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Retrieved from <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Ontario%20Office/2018/12/Persistent%20inequality.pdf>

SUGGESTED CHANGES FROM RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

There are many barriers and challenges that South Asian immigrants and newcomers face when searching for meaningful employment. To alleviate these barriers and challenges, research participants also had their own suggestions for changes in the employment sector. These suggestions also influenced the Policy Recommendations Report.

SUGGESTIONS FOR NEWCOMER AND EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES TO HELP RECENT IMMIGRANTS INTEGRATE INTO THE EMPLOYMENT SECTOR WITH A SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH APPROACH

According to the World Health Organization, the social determinants of health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. These circumstances in Canada can be shaped by the distribution of power, resources and privilege, history, and systemic racism.



- More **affordable education and training programs** are needed since new immigrants have financial constraints that prevent them from accessing these programs. Training programs should also be **language accessible** for South Asians and available for all working schedules.
- **Affordable childcare** will allow parents, especially women, to not only search and pursue employment, but to also get involved in other training activities, such as ESL, volunteering, etc. In order to increase female participation in the workforce for South Asian newcomers, ensuring affordable childcare is critical.
- **A temporary tax bracket for newcomers** should exist which will allow them to support themselves and get settled. More **subsidized housing for newcomers** is needed so that most of their income does not go towards rent or mortgage payments.
- Greater **networking and resume building workshops** with **easier referral systems** offered by support workers who can speak the same language or have the same background as the newcomers is essential. Having a shared language or background can allow clients to feel more comfortable and less stressed.

22. World Health Organization. (2017, September 25). About social determinants of health. World Health Organization. https://www.who.int/social_determinants/sdh_definition/en/.

- **Culturally appropriate mental health support for immigrants** is also strongly needed. The process of immigrating to a new country, handling financial constraints, and looking for employment are just some of the stresses and anxieties that new immigrants go through. They need strong and relevant mental health support. Culturally targeted public awareness is also needed to target stigma around mental health as it is very strong in the South Asian community.

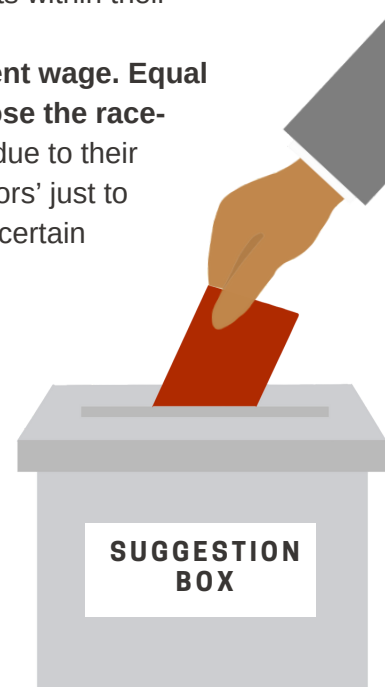
SUGGESTIONS TO HELP IMMIGRANTS UNDERSTAND THEIR EXISTING EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS AND STRENGTHENING LEGISLATIONS FOR EMPLOYEE PROTECTION

- South Asian immigrants, especially newcomers, are often unaware of their rights in the workplace. One major reason for this is the inaccessibility of legislation content due to language barriers. **Language- appropriate ways to inform immigrants of their rights** at the workplace must be developed and disseminated to South Asian immigrants with language and/or accessibility barriers.
- More **awareness and outreach is needed about the Employment Standards Act for employers, and penalties need to be laid swiftly** for breaking of regulations. Penalties for not addressing health and safety issues, especially for temporary agency jobs, should be laid swiftly.
- Systems - level changes are needed to protect employees including **creating an Employment Equity legislation in Ontario** and strengthening it at the Federal level which protects not only citizens and permanent residents but also those on work permits, international students, and temporary workers.

Our clients face discrimination on a day to day basis, comments about their appearance, how they smell, how they look. They are not being promoted and are being passed up for others. The evidence is not being collected, but there is discrimination at play there. – Key Informant

SUGGESTIONS FOR EMPLOYERS TO HELP IMMIGRANTS THRIVE IN THE EMPLOYMENT SECTOR

- Development of **accessible and culturally tailored mentorship programs**, particularly for women. This will initiate networking and shadowing opportunities for immigrants within their fields with more experienced people.
- Businesses need to plan for the long-term to see the benefits of having a **decent wage. Equal pay for equal work** should be implemented, not just for gender but also to **close the race-based wage gap**. Workers' compensation for the same work should not vary due to their gender or race. Employers should also not be able to call employees 'contractors' just to shoulder off the risks/responsibilities of having employees and even providing certain benefits.
- Workers should be given **paid sick days**. This can lead to greater profit as there is then less chance of others getting sick and missing work or reducing productivity, if the sick employee had stayed home in the first place. Employers should also practice fair scheduling including advance scheduling, not cancelling shifts, and not keeping employees on call without pay.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT

In the second phase of this project, CASSA developed policy recommendations that have been informed by the data collected in this Needs Assessment Report. These were also supplemented by an environmental scan of which policies currently exist, which legislations are working, and what other changes employment equity advocates are calling for. Our Policy Recommendations Report offers the context for policy reforms for employment equity for precarious workers by reviewing relevant legislations and recent policy developments. It also presents three policy goals identified through the Needs Assessment: 1.) proactive labour market policies to help recent immigrants integrate into the employment sector; 2.) proactive labour market policies to ensure immigrants' job security after settlement; and 3.) legislation with enforcement mechanisms to ensure non-standard employment has the same hourly pay, benefits, and protections as permanent, full-time employment. These policy recommendations call for all levels of government (particularly provincial and federal), employers, education institutions, immigration and settlement sectors, and the communities to work together to support South Asian immigrant communities in Toronto to move towards decent employment.

The full Policy Recommendations Report can be found [here](#).

CONCLUSION

South Asian immigrants in Canada face a myriad of barriers and challenges to finding decent and meaningful employment opportunities that are in line with their educational and professional work experiences. Despite high levels of language proficiency, education, and having years of experience in their field, most South Asian immigrants have to start from scratch when they immigrate to Canada due to invalidation of their experiences as “not Canadian” by employers, and dismissal of their education credentials as “not good enough” by education institutions. Women and people with disabilities face additional barriers and challenges to finding decent work.

South Asians immigrants in Toronto are not content with survival jobs; they aspire to have a career which is sustainable and offers benefits to support their families. The path forward can only be that of decent employment. Significant reforms in employment legislation that protect precarious workers, international students, and temporary workers are needed to better protect these marginalized individuals in the labour market. Changes also need to be made in business processes, settlement assistance, and education regulatory bodies so that South Asian immigrants have their foreign credentials recognized as being worthy enough for the Canadian labour market. If they are good enough to pass the immigration system, they are good enough to have the same employment outcomes as their non-racialized counterparts.

In the late 1980s, CASSA was founded on the principle of supporting South Asian immigrants with credential recognition. Over three decades later, we still see qualified South Asian immigrants struggling to find decent employment. South Asian immigrants have faced enough of this systemic racism, it is high time that all actors and stakeholders work together to improve their employment outcomes.

WHEN YOU FIRST COME TO CANADA, THERE IS THIS BOOKLET FOR NEW IMMIGRANTS WITH A BRIGHT PICTURE OF LIFE IN CANADA. BUT IN REALITY, YOU DON'T SEE THAT. - FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

PREPARED BY:



FUNDED BY:

