

Many Versions of Work in Ottawa-Gatineau's Labour Market: A profile of immigrant workers and their economic status in a post-industrial city

Executive Summary

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This report profiles the immigrant population residing in the Ottawa-Gatineau metropolitan area, with an emphasis on the labour market involvement and employment earnings of women and men who have settled recently in Canada. Information from the 2016 Canadian census highlights the complexity of the immigrant population and its economic activities. The Ottawa-Gatineau metropolitan area is unusual in several ways – the division of the region between two provinces; an almost complete absence of manufacturing; high median employment earnings; and the federal government as the region’s largest industry. This report is a point-in-time snapshot of immigrants’ socio-economic and employment status in an urban economy dominated by services with unique employment challenges created by the federal government.

The social and cultural diversity of immigrant population in the Ottawa-Gatineau region has grown; consequently, different characteristics of the immigrant population are considered (including admission class, time since permanent residence attainment, language heritage, birthplace, educational attainment, and visible minority status). It is important to recognize from the outset that Ottawa-Gatineau’s immigrant population is highly educated. Over half of recent immigrants age 25-54 have a university-level degree (56.2%) compared to 39.1% of Canadian-born individuals in the same age group. In this study, the Canadian-born population constitutes a benchmark group. The analysis focuses on full-time and full-year workers between the ages of 25 and 54 and is largely restricted to individuals who attained permanent residence status between 2000 and the first five months of 2016. Very recent immigrants who have been permanent residents for five years or less are distinguished where possible. Important differences between residents in Ottawa and Gatineau are discussed.

The report has two large sections. The first describes the demographic and social characteristics of the immigrant population living in Ottawa-Gatineau, with an emphasis on recent immigrants. The second section shifts to examine labour force integration and earnings among relatively

recent immigrants, as well as more well-established individuals who have lived in Canada for decades.

In Ottawa's labour market, there is considerable variation between groups of immigrants, as well as between women and men. The major findings are:

- Labour force participation is strong for all admission classes, although it is lower among refugees and their rate of unemployment is higher.
- The region's largest industrial sector is public administration and employment in the federal government constitutes the vast majority of all jobs in the sector. Among Canadian-born individuals aged 25-54, 18.3% work in the federal civil service compared to 10.1% of recent immigrants and 3.5% of the newest arrivals (2011 to 2014).
- Employment earnings emphasize differences in work status between immigrants with equivalent qualifications. The median employment earnings of those who arrived between 2011 to 2014 is only \$50,263 compared to \$65,673 for Canadian-born workers. Among economic immigrants who have held permanent residence since at least 2001, their median income is \$64,845 – less than \$1,000 behind that of their Canadian-born counterparts. The earnings of refugees are considerably lower and lag those of other groups even as length of residence in Canada increases.
- Regardless of arrival class, an earnings gap exists between immigrant women and men. The same is true among Canadian-born workers. While for the most part, the earnings gap is in favor of Canadian-born individuals, as length of residence increases the earnings of men who arrived through the economic admission class begin to eclipse those of Canadian-born men. The same is not true for women.
- Considerable variation in earnings exists between visible minority groups. Consistently, Chinese and South Asian immigrants have higher earnings than their Black and Arab counterparts. White immigrant men lead other ethno-racial groups in employment earnings.

Many relatively recent immigrants in Ottawa-Gatineau achieve considerable success in finding well-paid opportunities. There is inequality between groups and between women and men in terms of earning gaps even when equivalent educational attainments are controlled. The gaps point to inequality of opportunity, and raise the spectre of hiring and workplace discrimination.