

Newcomer Youth and Labour Market Access

This issue of Migration Matters looks at the employment outcomes of newcomer youth, their unique barriers to accessing the labour market, and best practices for working with newcomer youth.

Introduction

Almost half of immigrants to Canada are under 25 years of age.¹ Newcomer youth have a unique experience of migration, resettlement, and employment. While employment rates for immigrant youth aged 15-24 increased significantly between 2014 and 2017, they still lag behind their Canadian-born counterparts. Although it's narrowing, the gap in unemployment rates between immigrant and Canadian-born youth remains wide.² While there is extensive research done on labour market outcomes for newcomers and some research done on youth, there is very little on the topic of newcomer youth and their access to the labour market.

Definitions

Youth— Different studies use different age ranges for defining a “youth.” Because of the labour context, most use the age of 15* as a marker, and go up to anywhere between 19 and 29.

Unemployment—Unemployment is defined as any individual who is available to work and is searching for work (including those who have been laid off).

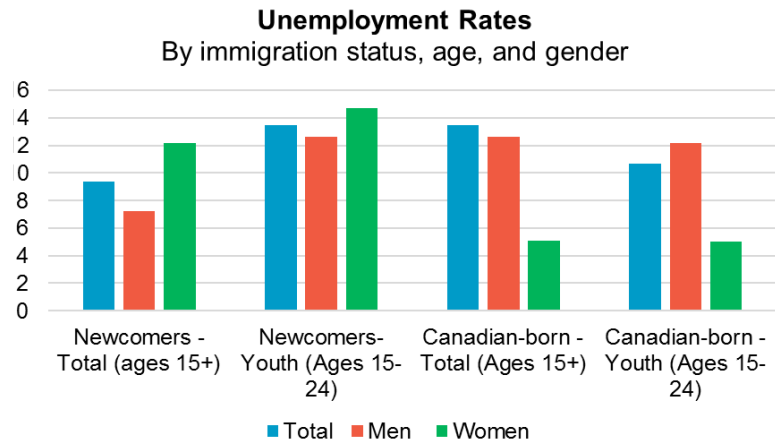
Immigrant class— There are different pathways to immigrating to Canada which may affect settlement and integration outcomes. Categories include refugees, economic immigrants, and family-class immigrants.

* As of 2019, BC is changing the minimum legal age to work to 16.

Rates of employment and unemployment

Among newcomers (landed less than five years ago) ages 15+, the unemployment rates are higher than their Canadian-born counterparts. Youth (age 15-24) have higher unemployment rates than the average in both groups. The highest unemployment rates were among female newcomer youth, which was higher than their male youth counterparts and female Canadian-born youth counterparts. It is almost three times higher than the average of all Canadian-born women aged 15+.³

Unemployment, immigration status & gender



School-to-work transitions

Labour market access often hinges on level of education, especially for youth who may be coming to Canada while they are still completing their secondary or post-secondary education. A longitudinal study of youth arriving at ages 15-29 to four Canadian cities (Vancouver, Toronto, Winnipeg, and Hamilton) found that the biggest indicator of success is entrance class.⁴ Refugee youth are at a greater disadvantage than those entering in other immigrant classes. Refugee youth are also five times more likely to leave high school without a diploma. This in turn impacts their access to the labour market as a high school diploma is necessary for many jobs. Many refugee youth come from contexts of conflict or war and may have significant gaps in their education or in their documentation as a result. Often, newcomer youth have to repeat grades, courses, or learning upon arriving in Canada, which can lead to frustration and self-esteem issues. It can also serve as a delay or barrier in accessing post-secondary education and/or access to the labour market.

Other important indicators are fluency in an official language and gender. Young men are more likely to leave high school early or to struggle than their female counterparts, likely partly in due to a lack of specialized supports for their unique needs.

References

¹ Statistics Canada. (2016). *Census Profile, 2016 Census*

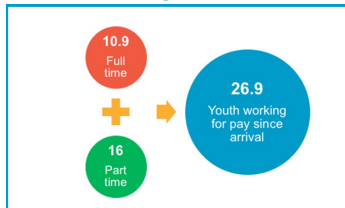
² ³ Statistics Canada (2016). *Labour force characteristics by immigrant status, by detailed age group.*

⁴ Wilkinson, L., Yan M., Chung, A., Tsang K., Tat, Sin R., and Lauer, S., (2012). *The school-to-work transitions of newcomer youth in Canada- Canadian Ethnic Studies*

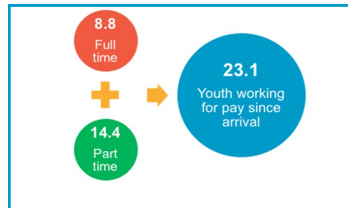
Percentage of refugee youth working for pay

Refugee youth often become breadwinners when parents can't find a job, which tends to cut into their own study time and lower their educational aspirations and attainment.⁵ These students may be inclined to combine education and employment in order to finance the family and their own educational expenses. They may orient themselves toward immediate income-producing jobs and reject schooling as a route to better future employment.

Not attending school



Attending school



*Numbers are in percentages

Barriers

In a study of 150 diverse BC youth aged 15-29 (including newcomers) more than one in five participants (22%) reported that barriers to employment included having a mental health condition, substance use addiction, and precarious housing.⁶ The most common barriers were transportation challenges, lack of skills/education, and a shortage of jobs in the community. Youth found that they had trouble accessing conventional employment programs due to factors such as age limitations and waiting times. Other barriers included employers discriminating based on age and not having access to job postings, as well as not having ID, a SIN card, and/or a phone. Barriers to maintaining employment included poor working conditions, shift patterns, hostility or harassment at work, safety concerns, and seasonal or short term employment.

Despite higher involvement in the labour market, racialized workers face higher unemployment rates than their non-racialized counterparts.⁷ Racialized immigrants in particular face distinct barriers and have worse labour market outcomes than other immigrants. This indicates that in addition to the barriers faced by all youth, these groups also may be facing barriers to employment such as racism, discrimination, and/or language barriers.

References

- ⁵Shakya, Y., Guruge, S., Hynie, M., Akbari, A., Malik, M., Htoo, S., Khogali, A., Mona, S., Murtaa, R., and Alley, S. (2012). Aspirations for higher education among newcomer refugee youth in Toronto: Expectations, challenges and strategies. *Refuge: Canada's Journal of Refugees*, 27(2): 65-27.
- ⁶McCreary Centre Society. (2014). Negotiating the Barriers to Employment for Vulnerable Youth
- ⁷CCPA. (2019). *Canada's Colour Coded Income Inequality*

Resources and Promising Practices

- [Report: The Needs of Newcomer Youth and Emerging Best Practices to Meet Those Needs - CERIS](#)
- [Report: Immigrant Youth in Canada: A Literature Review of Migrant Youth Settlement and Service Issues - CERIS](#)

These reports do not focus on labour market access but do focus on promising practices for the resettlement needs of newcomer youth.

- [Video: Promising Practices - ACCES Employment Barista Training for Newcomer Youth with Starbucks Canada - P2P](#)

This video outlines the promising practices from the ACCES Employment barista training for newcomer youth in partnership with Starbucks.

- [Report: 13 Ways to modernize youth employment in Canada - ESDC](#)
- [Program: Bladerunners - WorkBC](#)

This program started for at-risk youth in the Downtown Eastside and has for the past 25 served youth between 15 and 30 with multiple barriers.

- [Self-Employment Training \(SET\) for Young Entrepreneur program](#)

- [Info Sheet: Newcomer Youth: Challenges and Strengths - AMSSA](#)
- [Info Sheet: Service Delivery Improvements—AMSSA \(upcoming\)](#)