Immigrants and Precarious Employment: A Report from Peel Region


This report was prepared by Anam Ahmad and Sagi Ramaj for the Peel Social Lab (PSL) using an original research report by Cynthia Cranford, Tasmia Khan, Yang-sook Kim, and Youngrong Lee (2021). Their paper was supported by funding from the PSL.
Introduction & Methods

Although 25% of immigrants in the Greater Toronto Area live in Peel Region as of the 2016 census, there is little empirical research on Peel immigrants’ labor market experiences. The researchers aimed to understand the barriers that Peel Region immigrants face in the labor market and how they navigate them. Their main research question was “How are immigrants sorted into jobs within a labour market characterized by growing and deepening precariousness?”

The Peel Migration and Employment Database (PMED) consists of 75 interviews conducted by University of Toronto-Mississauga undergraduate students as part of sociology courses taught by Dr. Cranford in 2016, 2018, and 2019, which were subsequently analysed for this report. Most of the interviews were conducted in English, and others were conducted in the study participants’ primary language and later translated into English by the interviewer.
Findings

Migration and Citizenship

Most of the interviewees left their countries of birth and immigrated to Canada in the past three decades. However, several respondents did not have a direct transition from their birth country and Canada, but instead travelled to a different country first, or moved back and forth between their birth country and elsewhere. Forty percent of respondents departed their birth countries due to economic constraints, 34% for gendered family reasons (e.g., care responsibilities), 19% due to political crises, and 7% because of a “culture of migration” where migrating was normalized.

The most common reason (43%) for immigrating to Canada was that the interviewee already had social networks there. Some chose Canada because they perceived it as easy to immigrate to (21%), providing more quality-of-life opportunities (21%), having values they agreed with (e.g., democracy; 11%), or being safe (3%). Most interviewees immigrated to Canada in their prime working ages with relatively secure citizenship pathways (e.g., as permanent residents). However, many of them, especially women, were sponsored by family members, which can introduce insecurity through dependency.
Labour Market History

Interviewees from a range of countries and class backgrounds experienced downward occupational mobility upon arrival in Canada. For example, many participants who had managerial or professional class occupations in their birth countries worked in sales and service jobs in Canada, which are often more precarious and lower-paid. Additionally, many respondents did not experience any upward mobility throughout their time in Canada, instead becoming “stuck” for years in jobs that were below their education and experience levels. As the Canadian labor market itself becomes more precarious, well-paid, stable, unionised jobs for these immigrants is increasingly harder to obtain, especially for immigrants with lower levels of education or Canadian work experience. Many of the interviewees, especially those in sales and service jobs, also experienced racialization from their employers, co-workers, and costumers.

Some respondents were able to (eventually) get jobs that were like those they had in their birth country, and this was often aided by gaining additional education or training in Canada. This was often because their existing credentials were not recognised by Canadian employers. However, obtaining further education/training was challenging for some respondents, especially when balancing familial or childcare responsibilities, which often fell to women.
Many of the respondents, including permanent residents, experienced some level of precarity in their job at the time of interview. Almost a quarter of the interviewees held multiple jobs, generally because they could not meet their basic needs financially with one job. Only 53% of respondents were in full-time permanent employment. The rest were in less secure jobs, such as 15% in part-time temporary employment, and 21% as independent contractors.

Almost 40% had no employment benefits (e.g., dental coverage). Sixty percent had annual earnings that were below the 2018 Toronto average ($49,300), and 46% were not satisfied with their earnings. Only 40% of respondents had stable schedules; others had unstable (38%) or flexible (22%) schedules. Most participants (69%) had jobs without union protection.