

Introduction

In the past few months, more and more attention has been given to immigration and its purported effects on local economies. In September of 2022, 5% of Canadians rated immigration as one of the top 3 issues facing Canada, in September of 2024, 21% did, a four-fold increase (Angus Reid Institute, 2024a). As this issue has gained more prominence in the public eye, misinformation has flourished, with immigrants being blamed for many social and economic issues. The purpose of this FACT sheet is to dispel a lot of the misinformation surrounding immigration to Canada and its effects on jobs, employment, and housing.

Immigrants are an essential part of Edmonton's fabric. According to the 2021 Census of Canada, almost one-third (32.6%) of people living in the city of Edmonton were immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2023a). Aside from Indigenous Peoples, everyone living in Canada is a descendant of immigrants. Conversations surrounding immigration often boil down to an "us" versus "them" mentality – "they" are coming into "our" country and destroying "our" labour and housing markets. We need to recognize that immigrants are not outsiders, but part of what makes our communities vibrant. As this FACT sheet will illustrate, many of these issues are really the fault of government policy and

systemic inequities.

Immigrants are not stealing jobs

Immigrants are often blamed for stealing jobs from Canadian citizens. In reality, immigrants do not have significantly higher employment rates than people born in Canada. In 2023, 68.4% of landed immigrants (permanent residents) living in Alberta were employed, compared to 64.6% of those born in Canada. It is important to note that economic immigrants are accepted on their ability to meet needs in the labour market (Government of Canada, 2023). Immigrants in Alberta are most likely to be working in wholesale and retail trade (15.1%), health care and social assistance (12.2%) or professional, scientific, and technical services (10.8%) (Government of Alberta, 2023).

Immigrants face lots of barriers to getting hired in Canada, including not having their credentials recognized, a lack of Canadian work experience, and lack of Canadian references or connections. As a result, immigrants often work in jobs they are overqualified for (Business Council of Alberta, 2024). When they are employed, immigrants are more likely to experience discrimination, harassment, and isolation in the workplace (City of Edmonton, 2022).

Immigrants also play an important role in creating jobs. According to the 2021 Census of Canada, across Canada, almost one-third (32%) of businesses with paid staff are owned by immigrants (Government of Canada, 2024).

There is a common belief that Temporary Foreign Workers (TFW) in particular are “stealing” jobs from Canadians. An Angus Reid poll found that 54% of Canadians believed that the TFW program was bad for the labour market of Canadians (Angus Reid Institute, 2024b). These beliefs obscure the reality of jobs that recipients of the TFW program do.

Among temporary foreign workers who were working in 2020, the vast majority (45.4%) worked in agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting; work which tends to be seasonal and thus temporary. The next highest industries were accommodation and food services (10.2%), manufacturing (8.4%), and transportation and warehousing (5.0%); all of which tend to have low wages (Lu & Hou, 2023). This is all work that Canadian citizens tend to not want to do.

Temporary Foreign Workers are also often vulnerable to exploitation. Since their immigration status is tied to their employer, their employers can treat them unfairly with little recourse (City of Edmonton, 2023). TFWs often do not have

access to basic workplace protections. It is not immigrants' fault for taking these jobs – but inequities in our economic system that allows exploitation to flourish.

The exploitative situation has compelled a United Nations special rapporteur to condemn the Temporary Foreign Worker program as a "breeding ground for contemporary forms of slavery" in a report that details the ways migrant workers have experienced mistreatment in the workplace, including excessive work hours, limited breaks, and physical abuse (Murray, 2024). Although the federal government has announced plans to reduce the size and scope of the program, several industries are exempt from changes to the program, including food processing. This is particularly relevant to the situation in Alberta where 70% of all the beef in Canada is slaughtered in two facilities in High River and Brooks. 72% of workers in Alberta's meat-packing sector are immigrants. An additional 10 to 30% of the workforce are temporary foreign workers (Bragg and Hyndman, 2024).



Immigrants are not responsible for the housing crisis

The relationship between immigration and the housing crisis is complicated.

Immigration accounts for the majority of population growth in Canada, and as the population grows, the housing market will get tighter if new home construction does not keep up (Aidous, Turner, & Gupta, 2024). However, it would be incorrect to place blame on these immigrants for issues in the housing market. Instead, we should be examining the policies that make housing inaccessible, such as restrictive bylaws that make it hard to build multi-family developments, skyrocketing interest rates and building costs, the financialization of housing, and a lack of investment in affordable housing. Our society tends to view housing as a commodity rather than a social good, a trend which leaves marginalized families in the dust.

Immigrants are especially vulnerable to the housing crisis. Canada wide, immigrants who are permanent residents (9.2%), and non-permanent residents such as temporary foreign workers and international students (13.4%) are more likely to be in core housing need than people born in Canada (6.3%) (Statistics Canada, 2023b).

Critics have argued that the federal government is using immigrants as scapegoats to detract from larger issues in the housing market. For example, the federal government has recently put a cap on the number of international students it will accept, under the guise of alleviating the housing crisis. Critics argue this does not address the underlying issues that led to the shortage of housing in the first place and will likely have a marginal effect on housing costs. There is a severe lack of purpose-built, affordable housing for students, and as a result, many end up in market housing that is overcrowded (Rana, 2024).

In fact, immigrants may play an important role in alleviating the housing crisis, 6.9% of immigrants are employed in the construction industry (Government of Canada, 2024). Their labour is essential to build the vast amount of new homes Canada needs (Aidous, Turner, & Gupta, 2024).



Conclusion

Misinformation about immigration and its effects on our labour and housing markets has flourished in recent months. The purpose of this fact sheet was to dispel some of these myths. Immigration is essential to the vibrancy of our communities, and immigrants need to be recognized for their strengths.

Immigrants are not “stealing jobs,” immigrants do not have significantly higher employment rates than people born in Canada, and actually face many barriers in getting adequate employment in Canada. Furthermore, as many start small businesses, they are responsible for a lot of job creation. Temporary Foreign Workers in particular are working jobs that Canadian citizens do not want to do, often in exploitative conditions. Immigrants are also not responsible for the housing crisis, while an increase in population does put a strain on our market, the real issue lies in governmental policy that makes it hard to build housing. Immigrants are feeling the effects of the housing crisis too.

A lack of job opportunities and adequate housing is ultimately the responsibility of our various levels of government and the policies they create, and it is unfair to shift this blame to immigrants. Proposed solutions of limiting the number of new immigrants admitted to Canada do not

get to the root of the problem and in fact can have unintended consequences. More productive policy changes directed at improving the well-being of immigrants and addressing exploitative circumstances they face at the workplace would be a better direction for governments to pursue.





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