

Immigration and the Economy: Perceptions and Experiences



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☰ Executive Summary

Immigration has long been central to Canada's economic and demographic strategy, but recent years have seen a shift in public attitudes. More Canadians now say there is too much immigration, even as the majority continue to recognize immigration's economic benefits. This project examined data from the eighth wave of the National Survey on Employment and Skills, conducted in March and April 2025, with 5,603 respondents across all provinces and territories. The dataset included first-generation immigrants, children of immigrants, and non-immigrants, enabling direct comparison across groups.

The findings reveal a complex picture. While most Canadians believe immigration levels are too high (70%), most also agree that immigration has a positive impact on Canada's economy (58%). First-generation immigrants are more optimistic than second-generation and non-immigrants (61% vs 45%), and recent arrivals are especially positive about economic contributions. At the same time, immigrants express higher levels of concern about job security, automation, and external pressures such as U.S. tariffs.

These insights matter because they highlight both the value placed on immigration and the barriers that limit immigrant talent from being fully utilized. For policymakers and practitioners, the evidence underscores the importance of addressing underemployment, discrimination, and credential recognition, while also recognizing that support for immigration's economic role remains strong across the population.

KEY INSIGHTS

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Seven in ten Canadians (70%) believe there is too much immigration, yet more than half (58%) at the same time say immigration strengthens the Canadian economy, showing that concerns about levels coexist with recognition of economic value.

- 2 Immigrants are far more optimistic than non-immigrants, with six in ten first-generation immigrants (61%) saying immigration is good for the economy compared to less than half of non-immigrants (45%); among recent immigrants, optimism is even higher, though this group also reports the greatest worry about job security.
- 3 Views differ sharply by education and age, as nearly two-thirds of university graduates (64%) and over half of younger Canadians under 35 (55%) say immigration benefits the economy, compared to just 42% of older Canadians and 39% of those with only a high school education or less.

The Issue

Immigration has historically been framed as essential to Canada's growth, with governments and employers emphasizing its role in addressing an aging population and filling labour shortages. However, since the pandemic, attitudes have shifted. For the first time in two decades, more Canadians now say there is too much immigration. This change has coincided with affordability challenges, housing pressures, and policy shifts. The federal government's 2025–2027 Immigration Levels Plan reduced permanent resident admissions by 20% and introduced caps on temporary residents, marking a reversal of earlier growth targets.

Despite these concerns, immigrants remain central to the workforce. First-generation immigrants often arrive with higher average levels of education than Canadian-born workers but experience lower employment rates and earnings. Internationally educated professionals, particularly those in health care and STEM, frequently remain unemployed or underemployed. Children of immigrants also face barriers, including identity, need for immigration, and the lived realities of immigrants in the labour market – struggles and discrimination that weaken their sense of belonging. These patterns highlight the disconnection between Canada's economic

At the same time, public debate often oversimplifies attitudes toward immigration. While concerns about levels have increased, there is less clarity about how Canadians view immigration's economic contributions and how those views differ by immigrant generation. This project responds to that gap by examining national survey data to better understand perceptions of immigration's role in the economy alongside the workplace experiences of immigrants themselves.



What We Investigated

The project set out to explore how Canadians—immigrants, children of immigrants, and non-immigrants—perceive immigration levels, economic contributions, job opportunities, and the overall state of the economy. It examined both general attitudes and the specific workplace realities of immigrant groups, with a focus on how lived experience shapes views.

The research was guided by the following questions:

- How do immigrants, children of immigrants, and non-immigrants differ in their perceptions of immigration levels and contributions to the economy?
- How do experiences in the workplace and broader economic conditions shape these views?

To address these questions, the project drew on the Survey on Employment and Skills, conducted by the Environics Institute in partnership with the Diversity Institute and the Future Skills Centre. The eighth wave, carried out between March 12 and April 15, 2025, included 5,603 respondents: 1,233 first-generation immigrants (582 of them recent), 1,015 second-generation immigrants, and 3,286 non-immigrants. Oversamples of younger Canadians, racialized groups, and those in smaller provinces and territories ensured diverse perspectives were represented.

This approach provided a unique opportunity to compare immigrant and non-immigrant perspectives within the same dataset. It also allowed for analysis of how education, age, income, region, and employment context intersect with immigration status to shape attitudes toward the economy and the labour market.

✓ What We're Learning

The findings show that attitudes toward immigration are marked by both concern and recognition of benefit. Seven in ten Canadians agree there is too much immigration, yet most also believe immigration strengthens the economy. Recent immigrants are the most optimistic, with nearly three-quarters saying immigration benefits Canada's economy, compared to just under half of non-immigrants.

Generational differences are evident. First-generation immigrants report higher satisfaction with life in Canada and stronger belief in immigration's contributions, but also higher anxiety about job security, automation, and external economic pressures. Second-generation immigrants are less likely to view immigration as positive for the economy and express greater pessimism about job prospects. Non-immigrants fall in between, with lower concern about external pressures but limited recognition of immigration's benefits.

Education and age also shape perspectives. University graduates and younger Canadians are significantly more likely to see immigration as good for the economy compared to those with less education or older age groups. Income sufficiency and union membership also correspond with more positive attitudes.

A key lesson is that support for immigration's economic role coexists with concern about levels and widespread economic anxiety. These findings suggest that attitudes are not simply pro- or anti-immigration but are influenced by lived experience, workplace realities, and broader economic conditions.

★ Why It Matters

The results from this project matter because they challenge simplistic narratives about immigration. While many Canadians express concern about levels, most continue to recognize immigration's economic value. This duality underscores the importance of distinguishing between volume debates and economic impact debates when shaping policy and practice.



**State of Skills:
What Works for Newcomer
Integration**

For practitioners, the evidence highlights both opportunity and challenge. Employers and service providers can build on the strong belief in immigration's economic benefits, while also addressing the underemployment, discrimination, and credential-recognition barriers that undermine immigrant contributions. Recognition that most Canadians see economic value in immigration can provide confidence for organizations seeking to diversify their workforces.

Despite the overall success of Canada's immigration system, a number of challenges persist. When compared to other nations, labour market mobility for newcomers in Canada is not as strong as other dimensions of migrant integration.

Read Thematic Report

For policymakers, the findings suggest that reducing immigration levels may not align with broader economic realities. Canada's labour market needs remain acute, and immigrant talent continues to be underutilized. Policies that strengthen integration—such as faster credential recognition, targeted training, and anti-discrimination measures—are critical to ensuring that immigration delivers on its economic promise. The findings also show that attitudes vary by generation, education, and economic security, pointing to the importance of tailoring policies to different groups.

In short, the project demonstrates that immigration remains central to Canada's economy, but barriers to full participation persist. Addressing these barriers while communicating immigration's benefits will be essential for building both economic resilience and public confidence.

► What's Next

Tracking perceptions of immigration over time would provide valuable insight as economic conditions and government policies evolve. The results also highlight the importance of continued focus on ensuring data and evidence are understood and drive public policy. Additionally, continuing to track the role of immigrants in the labour market as well as in entrepreneurship, business ownership and international trade. Continued work on employment practices as well as approaches to international skills recognition, language training, wraparound supports and mechanisms to support immigrant workforce integration are critical to ensure that skills, education, and talent are not wasted. These insights can inform training, employer practices, and policy development, reinforcing immigration's role as a driver of growth and innovation.

Have questions about our work? Do you need access to a report in English or French? Please contact communications@fsc-ccf.ca.

How to Cite This Report

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