Immigration and the Economy

Experiences and Perceived Impact of Immigrants

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The Future Skills Centre (FSC) is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to driving innovation in skills development so that everyone in Canada can be prepared for the future of work. We partner with policymakers, researchers, practitioners, employers and labour, and post-secondary institutions to solve pressing labour market challenges and ensure that everyone can benefit from relevant lifelong learning opportunities. We are founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint, and The Conference Board of Canada, and are funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

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The Diversity Institute conducts and coordinates multi-disciplinary, multi-stakeholder research to address the needs of diverse Canadians, the changing nature of skills and competencies, and the policies, processes and tools that advance economic inclusion and success. Our action-oriented, evidence-based approach is advancing knowledge of the complex barriers faced by underrepresented groups, leading practices to effect change, and producing concrete results. The Diversity Institute is a research lead for the Future Skills Centre.

Funder

Funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program | Canada

The Future Skills Centre – Centre des Compétences futures is funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program. The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

Publication Date:
January 2026

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The Survey on Employment & Skills

The Survey on Employment and Skills is conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research, in partnership with the Future Skills Centre and the Diversity Institute at Toronto Metropolitan University.

In early 2020, the Survey on Employment and Skills began as a project designed to explore Canadians' experiences with the changing nature of work, including technology-driven disruptions, increasing insecurity and shifting skills requirements. Following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the survey was expanded to investigate the impact of the crisis on Canadians' employment, earnings and work environments. A second wave of the survey was conducted in December 2020, a third wave in June 2021, a fourth wave in March–April 2022, a fifth wave in March 2023, a sixth wave in October–November 2023, a seventh wave in May–July 2024 and an eighth wave in March–April 2025. Each wave of the study consists of a survey of over 5,000 Canadians aged 18 years and over, conducted in all provinces and territories. A total of 46,198 Canadians were surveyed across the eight waves.

The survey includes oversamples of Canadians living in smaller provinces and territories, those under the age of 34 years, racialized Canadians and Canadians who identify as Indigenous, in order to provide a better portrait of the range of experiences across the country. Unless otherwise indicated, the survey results in this report are weighted by age, gender, region, education, racial identity and Indigenous identity to ensure that they are representative of the Canadian population as a whole.

See all Survey on Employment & Skills reports:

The Environics Institute for Survey Research website

The Future Skills Centre website

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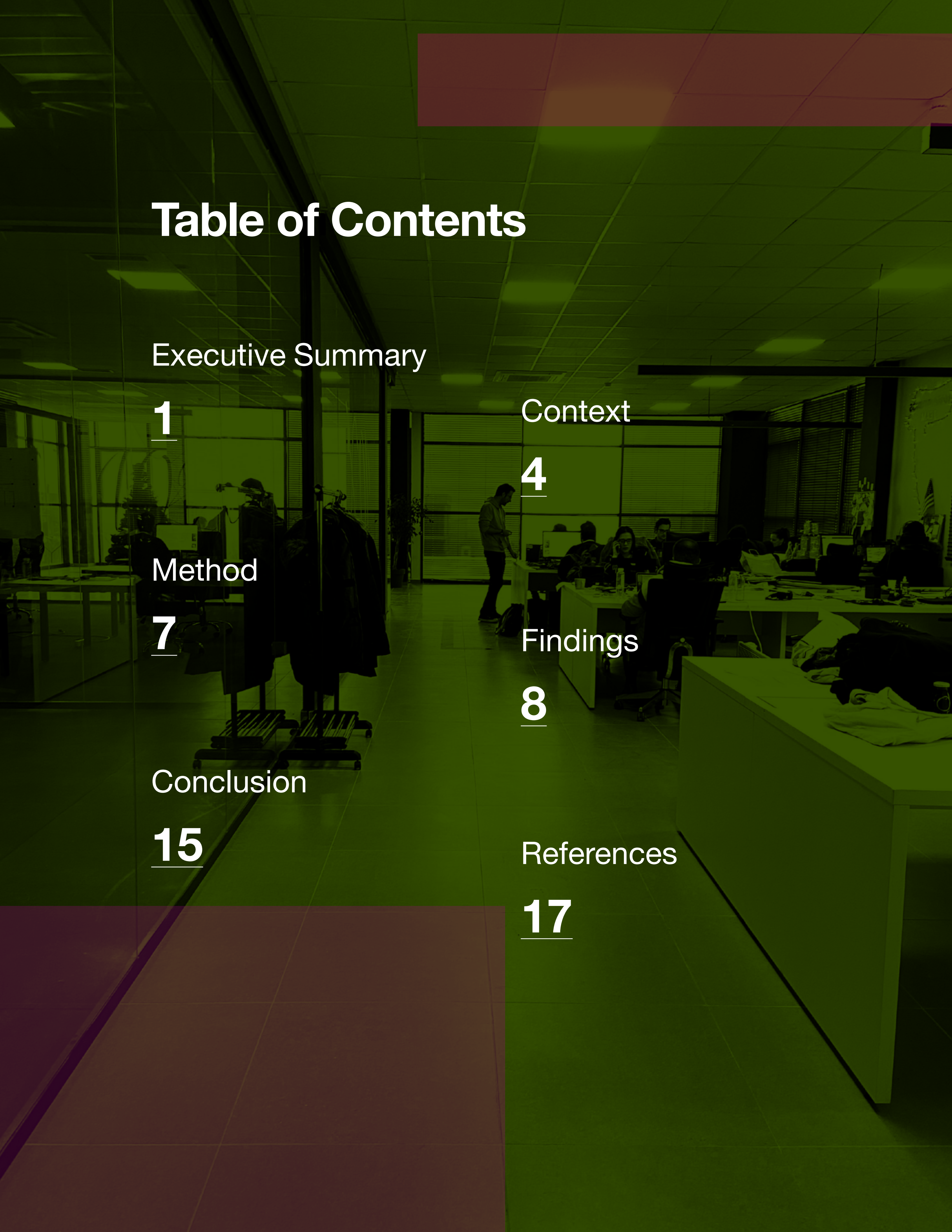

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Executive Summary

Context

Immigration has long been central to Canada's economic and demographic strategy, with governments and business groups emphasizing its importance in addressing an aging population and declining birth rate. However, attitudes shifted after the pandemic, with more Canadians than at any point in the past two decades saying there is too much immigration. In response, the federal government's 2025–2027 Immigration Levels Plan reduced permanent resident admissions by 20% and, for the first time, capped temporary residents, reversing earlier growth targets. These changes have unfolded alongside persistent labour market challenges: first-generation immigrants often face "brain waste," where their skills and credentials are underutilized, while second-generation immigrants encounter identity struggles and discrimination that weaken belonging. Despite having higher average levels of education than Canadian-born workers, immigrants experience lower employment rates and earnings, with internationally educated professionals in health care and science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields frequently unemployed or working below their skill level. These patterns highlight the disconnect between Canada's economic need for immigration and the barriers that limit the full use of immigrant talent, underscoring the importance of understanding how immigrants and non-immigrants view immigration's economic impact.

To better understand how lived experience shapes views on immigration, this report explores how first-generation immigrants differ from children of immigrants and non-immigrants in their perceptions of immigration levels, economic contributions, job opportunities and the state of the economy. Using survey data, we examine attitudes toward immigration and the workplace realities of immigrants, offering insight into how personal and generational context influence economic outlooks and public opinion. To date, there has been little research making this kind of direct comparison between immigrants and non-immigrants within the same dataset. This survey captures perspectives on immigration while also providing a closer look at immigrant experiences in the labour market and their views on the current state of the economy, which could help inform industry and government policy for a more inclusive and innovative workforce.

Methods

The report draws on data from the Survey on Employment and Skills. The survey has gathered responses from 46,198 individuals over eight waves. The findings in this report are based on the most recent wave (conducted March 12 to April 15, 2025), which garnered a total of 5,603 respondents with 1,233 respondents being first-generation immigrants, just under half of whom (n = 582) are recent immigrants to Canada (10 years or less). Second-generation immigrants make up 1,015 of the respondents. There were also 3,286 non-immigrant respondents in total.

> *The findings show that about **70% of individuals in Canada believe that there is too much immigration**, with regional variation ranging from 79% in Calgary and Edmonton to 61% in Montreal.*

Findings

The findings show that about 70% of individuals in Canada believe that there is too much immigration, with regional variation ranging from 79% in Calgary and Edmonton to 61% in Montreal. First-generation immigrants are less likely than second-generation and non-immigrants to view immigration as excessive.

Despite the data showing that most Canadians perceive immigration levels to be too high, it also shows that the majority view its economic impact favourably, with perspectives differing by occupation, working conditions and demographics. Respondents with a university degree (57%) are the most likely to view immigration positively, compared to those with a college diploma (47%), a trades certificate (44%) or a high school education or less (45%).

Support is also higher among individuals reporting that they make “sufficient” income and union members.

Younger individuals, particularly those under 35 years, are more likely to see immigration as economically beneficial. Recent immigrants have the most positive outlook, with about 73% seeing immigration as beneficial (vs. 61% first-generation, 47% second-generation and 45% non-immigrants). Support is also higher among English speakers and immigrants with older children. The data shows that white individuals are the least likely to see immigration as having a positive impact on the economy, while South Asians show the highest support; however, South Asians are also the group most likely to say there is too much immigration.

Perceptions on the state of the economy and employment prospects vary across groups. First-generation immigrants report the highest satisfaction with life and work in Canada, yet they are the least likely to say that it is a good time to find work. Moreover, first-generation immigrants, especially recent immigrants, express higher concern about job security, automation and external economic pressures such as U.S. tariffs. However, economic anxieties are widespread, with about 83% of those surveyed reporting concern about the state of the economy, a trend that is consistent across all groups.

Conclusion

The following themes emerge from the data:

- Despite concerns about the levels of immigration, the majority of respondents continue to think that immigration is good for the economy.
- First-generation immigrants show greater work satisfaction than others; however, recent arrivals are more concerned about job security, and non-immigrants are more likely to perceive immigration as less positive for the economy overall.
- Education and age influence perceptions, with university graduates and younger Canadians being most supportive.
- Across immigrant generations, there is a shared sense of economic concern and job market anxiety.

Context

For decades, Canadian immigration policy has been based on a strong economic and demographic rationale, supported by the federal government and major business groups, as the evidence is clear that with an aging population and declining birth rate all work force growth will come through immigration.[1]

A dramatic shift in Canadian attitudes to immigration occurred post pandemic. For the first time in two decades, more Canadians felt there was too much immigration.[2]

Recently in response to shifting attitudes, the government has introduced significant cuts to immigration levels. Immigration levels fell dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic, and after a high intake from 2021 to 2023 and widespread media outcry, the federal government announced a significant policy reversal in its 2025–2027 Immigration Levels Plan on October 24, 2024.[3, 4]

The new plan stabilizes and then reduces permanent resident admission targets by 20% and, for the first time, introduces caps on the number of new temporary residents.[5]

To date, about 26.4% of Canada's population was born in another country (first-generation) according to the 2021 Census.[6] Another 17.6% are children of immigrants (second-generation) and 56% are their children (non-immigrants).[7] Research has suggested that immigrants' attitudes to immigration are actually more complex than we might expect. First-generation immigrants are particularly susceptible to the phenomenon of brain waste, where Canada attracts skilled immigrants but struggles to integrate them into the labour market.[8] The lived experiences of the second-generation are also shaped by issues of identity and discrimination, where discrimination is significantly associated with a weaker sense of belonging to Canada.[9]

This report seeks to address the following research question: ***How do immigrants, children of immigrants, and non-immigrants differ in their perceptions of immigration levels and their contributions to the economy, as well as job opportunities and the overall state of the Canadian economy, compared to others?***

Despite being born and raised in Canada, many racialized second-generation youth report that their Canadian identity is frequently questioned by others (e.g., being asked "Where are you really from?"). [10, 11] Research also shows that bicultural identity can either amplify or mitigate the psychological distress associated with discrimination.[12]

Despite the obvious need for immigrants to sustain economic growth, quite apart from our humanitarian commitments, the evidence is clear: immigrant talent is under-utilized. Immigrants, who have higher levels of education than the average for Canadian-born workers, nevertheless experience lower employment rates and earnings in the job market.[13] The lack of recognition of international credentials (despite human rights rulings deeming it illegal), the cumbersome processes for accreditation and the structure of the economy, where the private sector is dominated by small and medium-sized enterprises which often lack formal processes for recruitment, selection and development, are all contributing factors.[14,15,16,17,18]

There are also issues with prioritization and selection of immigrants. In Canada, internationally educated professionals have significantly less earnings than Canadians. For example, 70% of internationally educated health care professionals who arrived in Canada between 2009–2016 earned less than one-half of the median income of Canadian-born individuals in the same fields.[19] Similarly, more than half of immigrant professionals in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) are unemployed and many work in positions below their skill level.[20] In addition, despite claims of gaps in immigrant skills and experience, there is evidence that bias and discrimination play a significant role in reducing access to employment.[21, 22, 23, 24]

While much has been written about attitudes toward immigration levels, it is not clear whether the recent shift in sentiment also extends to perceptions of immigration's economic impact. Moreover, differences between immigrants and non-immigrants in their labour market experiences are not well understood in the current context, particularly since the turn toward more restrictive immigration policy. These experiences may provide crucial context for understanding why views on immigration and its economic effects diverge across groups. To better understand the experiences of immigrants and newcomers in the workplace, as well as their perceived impact on the Canadian economy, this report seeks to address the following research question: How do immigrants, children of immigrants, and non-immigrants differ in their perceptions of immigration levels and their contributions to the economy, as well as job opportunities and the overall state of the Canadian economy, compared to others?

To explore this question this study draws on survey data to compare first-generation immigrants, children of immigrants, and non-immigrants in their perceptions of immigration levels, economic contributions, job opportunities and the state of the economy. In doing so, it examines attitudes toward immigration and the workplace realities of immigrants. To date, there has been little research enabling such direct comparison within the same dataset. This study captures both sides of the Canadian population while also shedding light on the lived experiences of immigrants in the Canadian labour market.

This study draws on survey data to compare *first-generation immigrants, children of immigrants, and non-immigrants in their perceptions of immigration levels,* ***economic contributions, job opportunities and the state of the economy.***

Method

This report answers the research questions by drawing on data from the Survey on Employment and Skills, a collaboration between the Environics Institute, the Diversity Institute at Toronto Metropolitan University and the Future Skills Centre which has been administered in several waves. A total of 46,198 respondents Canadians have been surveyed across the eight waves of the survey to date. The survey includes oversamples of Canadians living in smaller provinces and territories, those under the age of 34, racialized Canadians and Canadians who identify as Indigenous, to provide a better portrait of the range of experiences across the country.

Data presented in this report is based on Wave 8 of the survey (n = 5,603) collected between March 12 and April 15, 2025. This wave included questions about participants' general economic outlook, the impact of tariffs, employment and unemployment, and workplace-related topics such as AI use and equity, diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

In this study, we look at immigrants' experiences *and the differences in the experiences of different groups of immigrants.*

In this study, we look at immigrants' experiences and the differences in the experiences of different groups of immigrants, including first-generation (n = 1,233), particularly recent immigrants (n = 582), children of immigrants or second-generation immigrants (n = 1,015) and non-immigrants who include third-generation and beyond, as well as people who identify as Indigenous (n = 3,286).

Findings

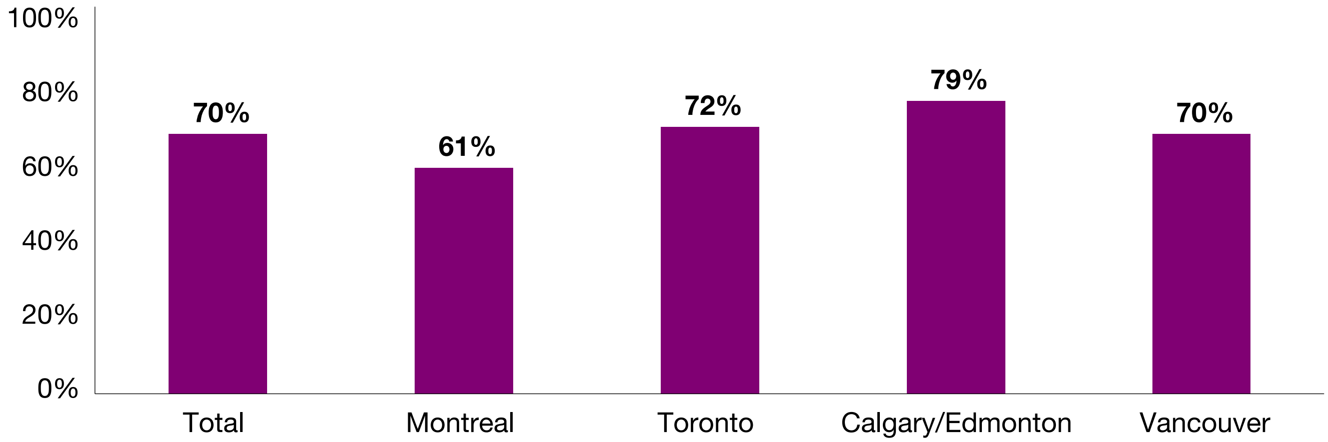
Our findings offer a nuanced view of how first-generation, second-generation and non-immigrants respondents perceive immigration and its economic implications. While a majority of Canadians now believe immigration levels are too high, most still recognize its positive impact on the economy. At the same time, views vary significantly across regions, occupational sectors and demographic groups, including age, race and immigration status. These patterns highlight the complex and sometimes contradictory ways that lived experience, generational context and economic conditions shape attitudes toward immigration and the labour market.

Attitudes to immigration levels

This survey confirms findings from other research showing that there has been a shift in attitudes to immigration levels, with a majority of Canadians thinking there is too much immigration for the first time in decades.[25] Although more recent surveys have suggested that the attitudes have shifted a bit in response to the cuts in immigration levels[26], at the time of the survey—March and April 2025—overall 70% of Canadians agree or strongly agree that "there is too much immigration in Canada" compared to 23% who disagree and 7% who are uncertain. However, there were regional differences. For example, agreement is highest in Calgary and Edmonton (79%) and lowest in Montreal (61%) when asked: "Do you agree that overall, there is too much immigration to Canada?" (Figure 1).

Figure 1

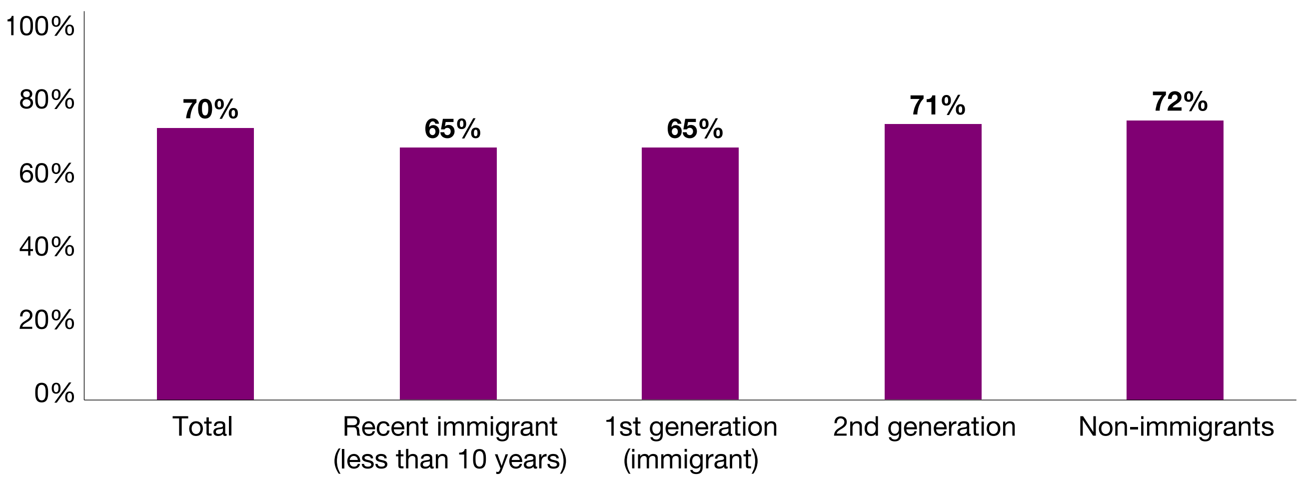
Regional differences in attitudes toward immigration levels (Strongly Agree and Somewhat Agree combined)



Among immigrants there is a modest but statistically significant split. First-generation—including recent immigrants—fall below the survey average (65% vs. 70%). Meanwhile, among non-immigrants, 72% agree there is too much immigration to Canada (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Attitudes toward immigration levels by immigrant status



The proportion of white Canadians who agree there is too much immigration overall (70%) is the same as the share among all participants. However, agreement among white respondents decreases with immigration status, from 72% among non-immigrants to 70% for second-generation and 58% for first-generation immigrants.

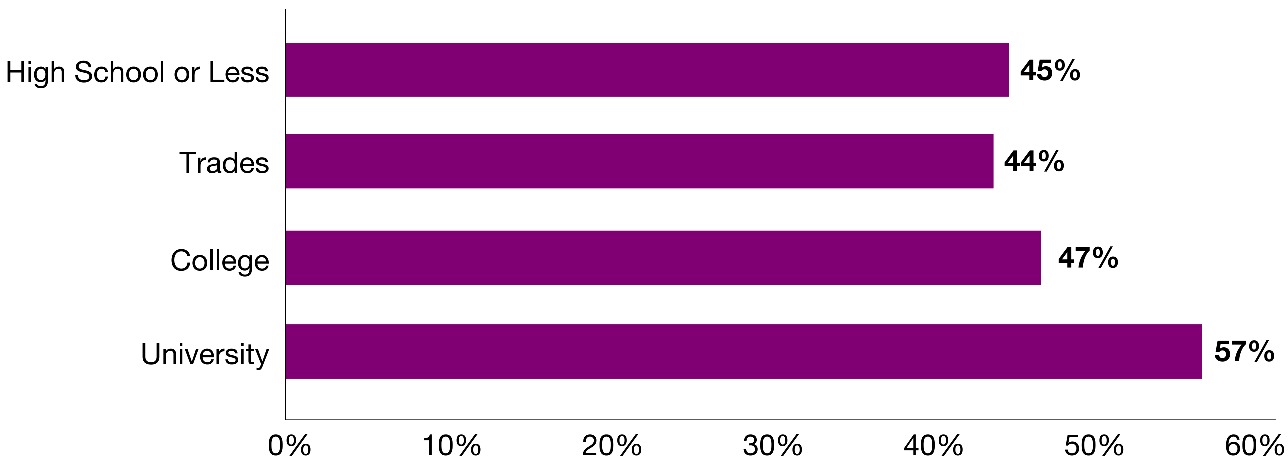
Economic contributions of immigration

While the dominant view at the time of the survey appears to be that immigration levels are too high, overall, respondents believed that immigration has a positive impact on the Canadian economy, though this view varies across regions, demographics and education.

When asked whether they agreed with the statement: “Overall, immigration has a positive impact on the economy of Canada,” university graduates were the most supportive of immigration at 57%, while college graduates (47%), those with trades training (44%) and those with high school or less (45%) were all significantly less likely to say immigration has a positive impact on Canada’s economy (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Attitudes toward impact of immigration on the Canadian economy by educational attainment

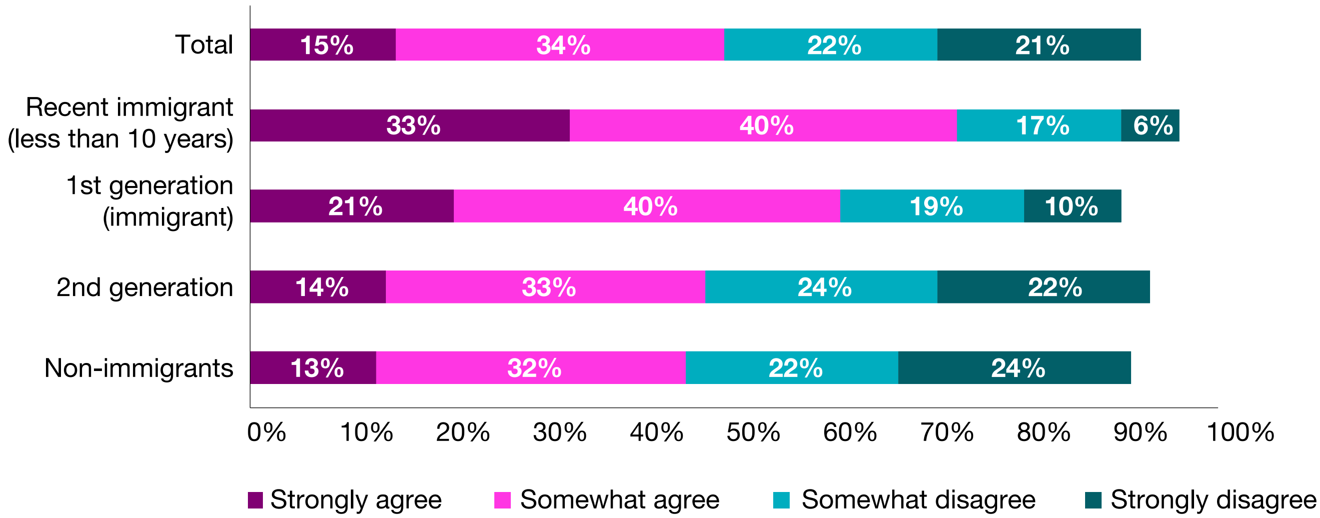


Age is another factor, as 54.5% of Canadians under 35 have a favourable view of immigration’s economic impact, compared to about 46% among those aged 35 and older. Views on immigration’s economic impact also vary by income and union membership. Among those who feel their income is sufficient, 53% express support, compared to 41% of those who say their income is not enough. Union members are the most supportive at 57%, while non-union workers align with the national average at 48%.

When it comes to whether immigration has a positive impact on Canada’s economy, we see wide gaps between non-immigrants (45%) and second-generation immigrants (47%) compared to first-generation (61%) and recent immigrants (73%) (Figure 4). Language also plays a role, with English speakers more likely than French speakers to say that immigration has a positive impact on the Canadian economy (50% vs. 43%). Employment context matters as well, with public sector workers (56%) expressing more favourable views than those in the private sector (49%).

Figure 4

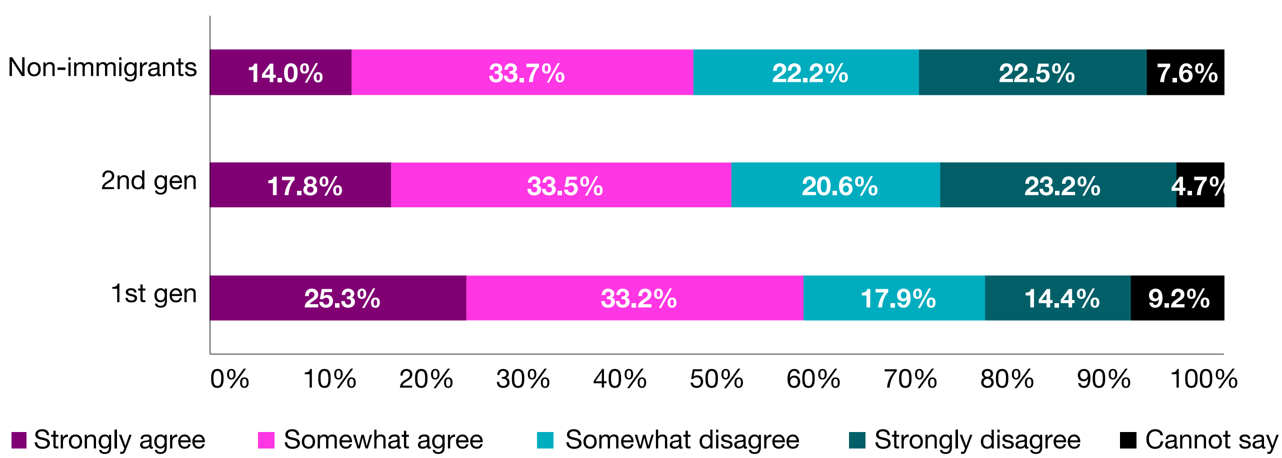
Immigrant attitudes toward whether immigration has a positive impact on the Canadian economy



Compared to the total of all participants, white Canadians are less likely to view immigration's impact on the economy positively, with just 43% agreeing overall. Among white respondents, support increases with immigration status, rising from 48% among non-immigrants to 51% for second-generation and 59% for first-generation immigrants (Figure 5).

Figure 5

Views of white Canadians on whether immigration has a positive impact by immigration status

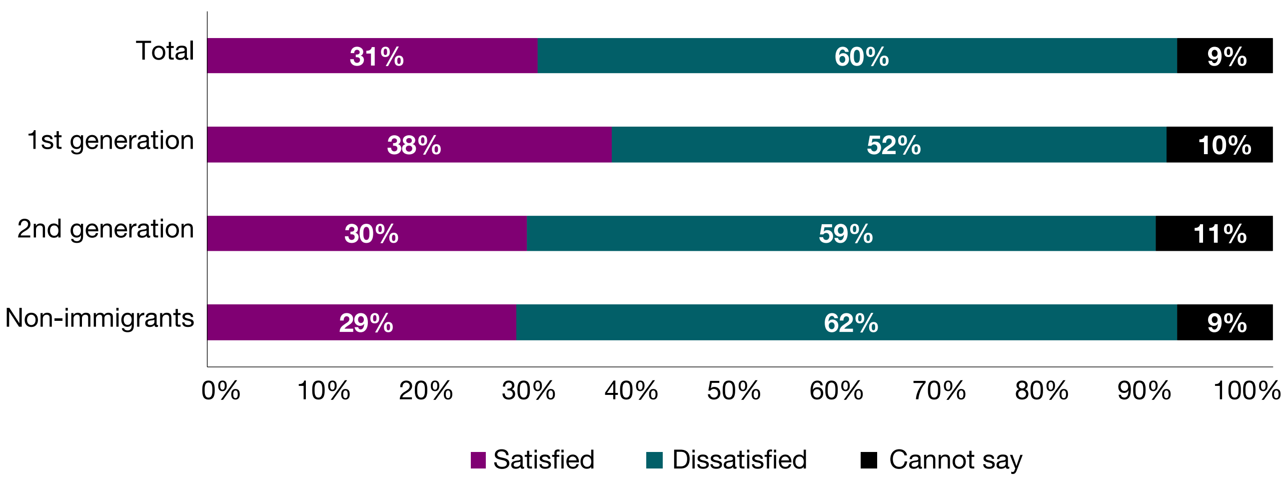


Attitudes to the state of the economy and job prospects

First-generation immigrants report the highest satisfaction with the current state of the economy and their ability to secure jobs in Canada (38%), compared to 30% of second-generation and 29% of non-immigrant Canadians (Figure 6). When it comes to job satisfaction, it is high among first-generation and non-immigrant respondents (around 80%), but drops to 73% among second-generation respondents.

Figure 6

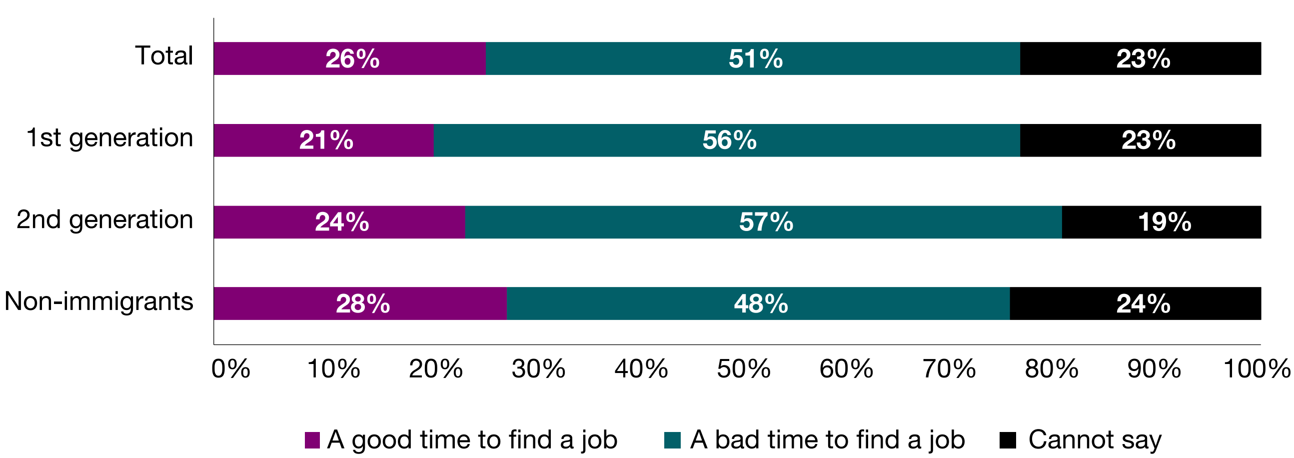
Satisfaction with the state of the economy and job prospects in Canada by immigration status



When it comes to job prospects, non-immigrants are the most optimistic, with 28% saying it is a good time to find work, compared to 24% of second-generation and 21% of first-generation respondents. Second-generation are the most pessimistic, with 57% saying it is a bad time to look for a job (Figure 7).

Figure 7

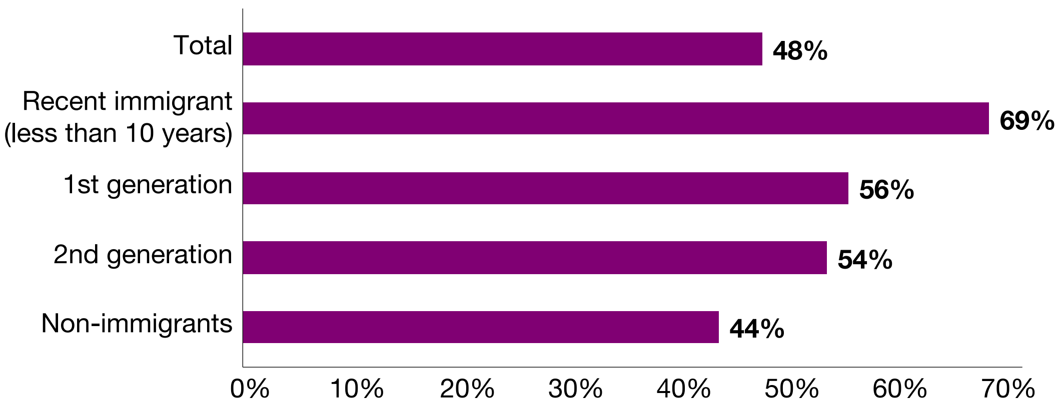
Perceived job prospects by immigrant status



Immigrants in Canada report notably higher levels of economic anxiety and job-related concern compared to non-immigrant Canadians. Over half of first-generation (56%) and second-generation (54%) immigrants worry about themselves or a family member maintaining stable full-time employment, compared to 44% of non-immigrants (Figure 8). Concern is highest among recent immigrants, reaching 69%. The most common reason cited is that “jobs are changing or there are fewer good jobs available,” reported by 36% of first-generation respondents and 24% of second-generation and non-immigrant Canadians. General concern about the economy was the second most common reason, mentioned by roughly 14% across all groups.

Figure 8

Percentage of respondents worried about overall job security by immigration status

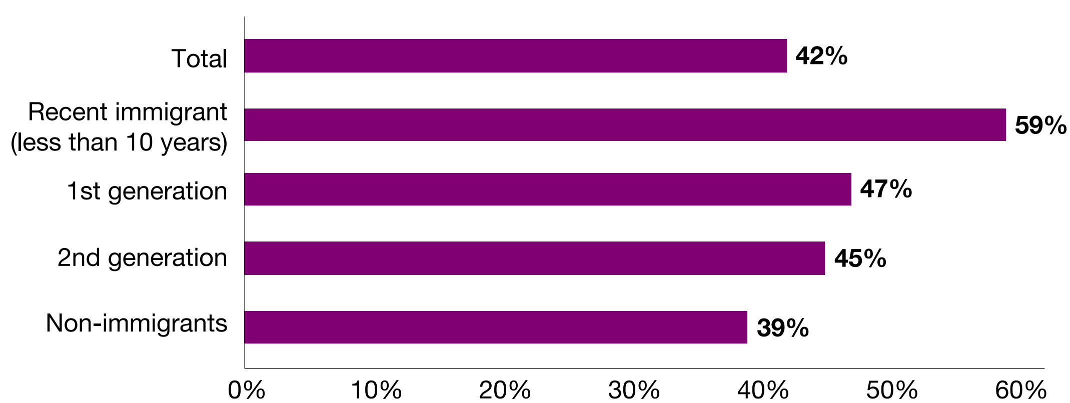


Automation and lack of training further heighten these concerns, with 48% of first-generation respondents and 45% of second-generation respondents stating they fear losing their jobs to automation, compared to 39% of non-immigrant respondents (Figure 9). Among recent immigrants, this number rises to 59%.

Many feel unprepared for technological change, with 59% of first-generation immigrants and around 47% of second-generation and non-immigrant respondents agreeing they have not received enough training to benefit from new digital tools.

Figure 9

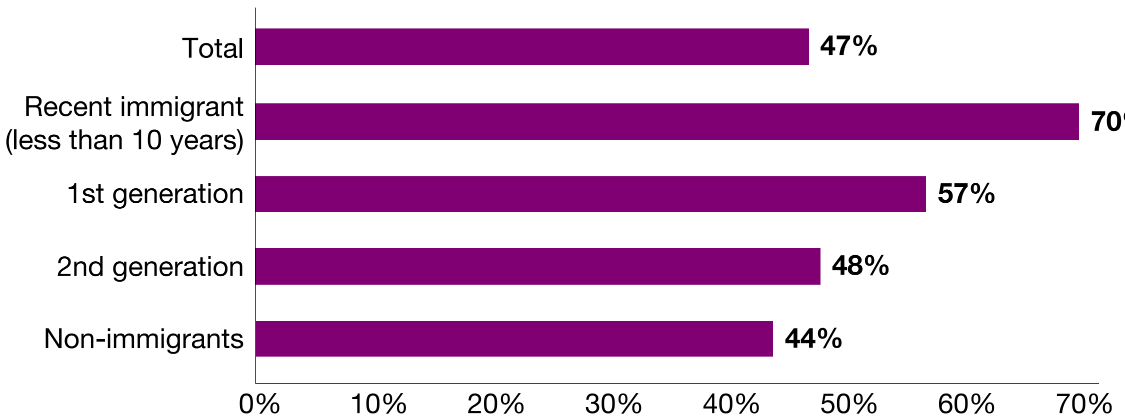
Percentage of respondents worried about being replaced by automation at work by immigration status



Worry about the impact of external economic pressures such as U.S. tariffs on job security is also more pronounced among immigrants. While 47% of Canadians overall express concern, this rises to 57% among first-generation immigrants and 70% among recent immigrants. Second-generation respondents align closely with the national average, while non-immigrant Canadians are the least concerned at 44% (Figure 10). This decline in concern from recent arrivals to non-immigrant respondents suggests that perceived vulnerability decreases with time spent in Canada. Broader economic anxiety is widespread, with 83% of Canadians worried about the state of the economy, a pattern that holds across all groups regardless of immigrant status.

Figure 10

Percentage of respondents worried about impact of U.S. tariffs on their job by immigrant status



Overall, we see a mixed picture, with immigrants generally positive about the levels of immigration, the impact of immigrants and their economic future. However, there are big differences among subsets. Consistent with other research, we see that second-generation immigrants are less enthusiastic about immigration and less positive about its impact, and we also see significant differences based on race.

Conclusion

Key takeaways

> **Survey results reveal a nuanced picture of Canadian attitudes toward immigration, marked by concern over levels and acknowledgement of economic benefits.**

Despite widespread agreement that immigration levels are too high, most Canadians also believe that immigration benefits the national economy. This contrast underscores the complexity of public attitudes, where concerns about numbers coexist with recognition of economic value.

> **Differences among first-generation, second-generation and non-immigrants reflect diverging experiences of optimism about the labour market and the economy overall.**

First-generation immigrants tend to express greater satisfaction with their work and outlook on the country, while recent arrivals report high concern about job security and economic vulnerability. Second-generation Canadians and non-immigrants are more likely to perceive immigration as less positive for the economy overall.

> **Education and age shape views of immigration's economic impact.**

University graduates and younger Canadians are the most likely to see immigration as beneficial for the economy, while support is notably lower among those with less education and among older age groups. These differences point to the role of generational outlooks and educational attainment in shaping attitudes toward immigration.

> **Across immigrant generations, there is a shared sense of economic concern and job market anxiety.**

Despite some differences in outlook, immigrants, children of immigrants, and non-immigrants express broad agreement that this is not a good time to find a job.

Worry about the overall economy, fear of job loss and concern for family members' employment are common across all groups. Recent and first-generation immigrants report the highest levels of anxiety about automation and trade-related job impacts, while children of immigrants are the most likely to say the job market is worsening. This consensus across immigrant and non-immigrant Canadians reflects a widespread sense of economic vulnerability, regardless of how long someone has lived in Canada.

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