

**The Labour Market Transitions of Newly Arrived Immigrant Youth:
A Tri-Provincial Study**
Draft 5 July 7 2010

A Report Submitted to the National Metropolis Secretariat

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Executive Summary

- This project examines pertinent aspects of the school-to-work transitions among a group of recently arrived newcomer youth. Using Statistics Canada's Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC) and a matched sample of 82 youth from Vancouver, Winnipeg, Hamilton and Toronto, we use quantitative and qualitative methods to uncover the transition from school to work among newcomer youth who arrived in Canada between October 2000 and September 2001. These combined data sources allow us to follow the initial integration experiences of youth aged 15 to 29 years over a 7 year period immediately after arrival.
- Newcomer youth are highly educated at arrival. Just over 60% of the LSIC sample reported some education beyond the high school diploma with over one-quarter reporting holding a Bachelor's degree. Nearly one in five has some high school education but has not obtained a high school diploma. Another 16.7% have completed the high school diploma without attempting any post-secondary education. Very few respondents arrived in Canada without formal education (0.3%), while another 2.8% reported having some or completed elementary education. The educational characteristics of the LSIC sample closely match those of the interview group.
- When examining only those newcomers who have entered high school up on arrival, 71% are at least one or more years behind in their education when compared to Canadian-born students. Typically, a Canadian-born student would enter Grade 9 at age 14 or 15. Findings from LSIC indicate that newcomers, regardless of their gender, entrance category or country of origin, are more likely to be behind in their high school education. Some do 'catch-up' however; two years after arrival, 56% of newcomer students remain one or more years 'behind' in their high school education. Four years after arrival, only 55% of those aged 15 to 19 at arrival (who would now be 19 to 23 years at the time of the conclusion of LSIC) will have finished high school, significantly lower than the 82% of similarly aged Canadian-born students (Statistics Canada, 2008). This has significant policy implications as most provinces have an age cap policy at which time students are forced to leave publicly funded education.
- There are sex, area of origin, language proficiency and other factors that influence the high school trajectories of immigrant youth. Males, particularly those from Africa and the Caribbean, are the most 'behind' in their high school education starting, on average, 2 years behind their similarly aged Canadian-born peers. Females from African and Caribbean countries start off disadvantaged as well, but their trajectory through high school is steeper, meaning they 'catch-up' to similarly aged Canadian-born females faster than males. Those arriving as refugees or who are placed in FCLS/EAL/ESD classes are most likely to be placed in grades too low for their age and have difficulties completing high school.
- While the newcomers are overwhelmingly returning to schooling once they enter Canada, they are having a difficult time completing their education. Over 80% of newcomer youth who arrive in Canada without a high school diploma have not completed their secondary education four years later. Another 89% arriving with some post-secondary education also have not completed their studies four years later. Three-quarters of those arriving with a high school diploma have not advanced in their education during this time period.

- Those arriving in Canada with completed trade certificates or other diplomas, and particularly those with completed university degrees, have difficulty having their credentials recognized in the education system and labour market. One-third of those with completed university degrees are in some sort of post-secondary training even four years after their arrival, some even returning to high school. The qualitative interviews corroborate the LSIC findings. Young migrants with post-secondary credentials prior to arrival are having difficulty having their education evaluated and in making a transition to the labour force.
- Several of the participants in the matched qualitative interviews mentioned the difficulties they faced having their secondary and post-secondary credentials recognized. We interviewed several university students who were forced to return to high school for up to three years in order to gain entry to a Canadian university. Some were told prior to their arrival to Canada that having their university education recognized would not be difficult.
- The economic returns for migrants returning to school in Canada are uneven. Some youth, particularly those from France and the United States, have significantly positive returns to the education they attain in Canada. For others, particularly those from Taiwan and Hong Kong, have more years of education in Canada but have very low income once they enter the labour force. For others, a small investment in an education in Canada has netted significant economic returns.
- Females, racialized minorities, those arriving at younger ages and those without secondary or post-secondary credentials at arrival had the most difficulty finding work (full- or part-time) six months, two years and four years after arrival. The effects of entrance class are mixed, though those arriving in the business or refugee classes were the least likely to find work in the six months, two and four years after arrival. Those proficient in either of Canada's official languages were significantly more likely to find work over the three time periods. Social capital effects were also mixed, though having family in Canada prior to arrival made finding employment significantly more likely in all three time periods.
- Females, racialized minorities, those without high school diplomas or university degrees at arrival also found it more difficult to obtain full-time work six months, two years and four years after arrival. Entrance class and language proficiency had no statistically significant effect on finding full-time work, though having a sponsor did help those six months and two years after arrival. The effects of social capital are dependent on the number of years after arrival.
- While family social networks appear to have a significant influence on labour force participation and finding full-time work, the newcomer youth interviewed downplayed their significance. Youth tended to discount the importance of family networks in finding a job on the grounds that their parents and loved ones often lacked the social networks necessary to find good work. Friendship networks were more valued by the participants in the qualitative interviews.
- Many of the participants indicate they use government employment services and non-government immigrant serving organizations to help them find work. Most were satisfied with the assistance they received but some felt that many of the programs did not successfully deal with the unique issues faced by newcomers. Many of the interviewees indicated that campus employment services needed to become more aware of the special needs of newcomer youth in order to provide better assistance.

- Volunteering was a popular past-time for the newcomer youth. Many discussed their volunteering experiences in a positive way. Some were able to locate employment due to their experiences and some indicated that the ability to practice French or English 'on the job' was an invaluable experience. Others, however, were highly dissatisfied. Volunteering was suggested as a way of gaining entry to the Canadian labour force by many government- and non-government organizations. The problem is that many of the volunteer opportunities were exploitive (such as volunteer dishwasher) and did not offer any opportunity to increase language or technical skills.
- Discrimination was a common experience for many of the newcomers who participated in the qualitative interviews. Participants indicated that racially motivated discrimination occurs at job interviews and on the job. Others felt that their status as immigrants negatively affected their ability to find employment, particularly in the government where permanent residency is required for some jobs.
- Linguistic barriers and discrimination due to accent were the biggest barriers to employment identified by the youth in our study. Accent affects their ability to secure employment and negatively influences some of the interactions they have with clients once they are employed. The ability to be understood by other Canadians is one of the most frustrating experiences of integrating.
- There are many similarities in the school-to-work transitions of newcomer and Canadian-born youth. There is anxiety about finding work, particularly in the 2009 recession, finding work that matches their training, and the issue of working low-end or dead-end jobs to 'get by'.
- There is transborder movement among the newcomer youth in our sample. Many leave Canada as they are frustrated in not finding employment in their field of choice. Some return to Canada after months or years elsewhere as the global labour market shrinks. There are a number of respondents indicating significant discontent at not finding good work in Canada and are seriously considering leaving the country.
- What is clear from the LSIC analysis and interviews is that there is no single 'pathway' from school-to-work. Just as the paths for Canadian-born youth are varied, so are the trajectories of newcomers. Their paths may be complicated in terms of the challenges of repeating schooling, having foreign credentials recognized, learning a new language and culture. They also have similarities with Canadian-born youth such as being frustrated about the difficulties of finding good employment and living through the recession.
- More programs and services aimed specifically for newcomer youth in making the transition from school-to-work are needed. These programs should focus on issues related to foreign credential recognition, gaining suitable "Canadian" experience, language and accent training and information about how the Canadian school system and labour market works are needed in order to ease the transition to the labour market.
- Significant effort must be made to assist newcomers in completing high school. Programs that help refugees, males, those from African and Caribbean countries as well as those taking language classes may help increase the school completion rate for these groups. School boards may reconsider the

mandatory age-caps or increasing the funding for older youth to complete their high school diplomas. We are aware of several 'best practices' among school boards and immigrant-serving agencies. The problem is that there are few mechanisms for sharing these ideas. Additional investment in disseminating this knowledge would be helpful.

- School boards should work closely with immigrant serving organizations to provide more programming regarding post-secondary education and labour market realities for newcomers. Those having experience in these 'bridging' programs rate them very highly and may help youth negotiate these institutions.
- Credential recognition is not just an issue for adult immigrants. It is clear from the LSIC and interview results that schools are ill-equipped to evaluate both high school and post-secondary education for newcomers.