



Immigrant Workforce and Employment Quick Guide

Immigrant Employment Trends, Occupations, and Services in Surrey

Surrey is a vibrant and diverse city, where cultures intertwine and opportunities abound. Immigrants play a pivotal role in shaping the occupational landscape, bringing their skills, experiences, and aspirations to contribute to the Canadian economy. Challenges exist, but the city has a significant support network including the collective effort of the Surrey LIP membership, working to overcome barriers and supporting the community to better integrate newcomers into the workforce. This profile explores top occupational sectors, traces employment patterns, identifies guides and resources, and offers solutions to the challenges faced.

Top Occupational Sectors of Immigrants Living in Surrey

Census Canada identifies the sectors in which immigrants work. Census 2021, found that immigrants and recent immigrants (arriving between 2016 and 2021) largely worked alongside Canadian-born, yet, some significant differences exist.

- Recent immigrants are especially prominent in the professional, scientific and technical sector, in part a reflection of their high education levels.
- Immigrants dominate transportation and warehousing, as well as manufacturing, compared to the Canadian-born.
- In turn, the Canadian-born are more likely to work in educational services.
- Among the largest employment sectors, retail trade, construction, and healthcare and social assistance, there is little distinction between immigrants and the Canadian-born.

| Industry - North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Industry | Canadian Born | Total Immigrants | Recent Immigrants |
| 62 Health care and social assistance | 11% | 13% | 9% |
| 48-49 Transportation and warehousing | 7% | 12% | 13% |
| 44-45 Retail trade | 13% | 10% | 12% |
| 31-33 Manufacturing | 6% | 10% | 9% |
| 23 Construction | 10% | 9% | 11% |
| 54 Professional, scientific and technical services | 7% | 7% | 10% |
| 72 Accommodation and food services | 5% | 6% | 7% |
| 56 Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services | 5% | 5% | 6% |
| 61 Educational services | 8% | 5% | 4% |
| 81 Other services (except public administration) | 4% | 4% | 3% |

Distribution of Top Ten Occupations - By % labour force population aged 15 years and over. Sorted by % immigrant labour force

Recent immigrants in Surrey's have a much higher employment rate than either immigrants or Canadian-born.



Labour Force Participation

In the 2021 Census, immigrants accounted for half or more of Surrey's work force.

- Total immigrants and recent immigrants represented 50% and 8% of the labour force, respectively, a marginal increase from 49% and 7% in Census 2016. In addition, about 9% of the labour force consisted of non-permanent residents, including students and temporary workers.
- Unemployment levels of about 9% were similar for all – immigrants, recent immigrants and the Canadian-born. Those numbers were temporarily elevated due to the Covid 19 pandemic.
- Recent immigrants had a much higher participation rate than either immigrants or the Canadian-born.

Income

Immigrants' income levels have increased significantly and are now comparable to those of the Canadian-born.

Total income

- In Census 2021 all groups showed notable increases.
- However, the most dramatic rise occurred among recent immigrants, where incomes doubled from \$17,331 in 2015 to \$35,600 in 2020.
- Surrey residents generally earned slightly less than their counterparts in Greater Vancouver.

Employment Income

- The dramatic increase for recent immigrants was largely due to better employment outcomes. About 30% of recent immigrants worked full-time for an entire year with employment income in 2020, up from just 17% in 2015.

| | Surrey | | | Greater Vancouver | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| | Canadian Born | Total Immigrants | Recent Immigrants | Canadian Born | Total Immigrants | Recent Immigrants |
| Population aged 15 years and over | 193,040 | 239,985 | 33,630 | 1,035,580 | 1,053,850 | 135,165 |
| In the labour force | 125,185 | 155,190 | 24,760 | 708,255 | 655,110 | 101,265 |
| Participation rate (%) | 64.8% | 64.7% | 73.6% | 68.4% | 62.2% | 74.9% |
| Employment rate (%) | 58.8% | 59.2% | 66.7% | 62.8% | 56.5% | 68.1% |
| Unemployment rate (%) | 9.3% | 8.5% | 9.3% | 8.2% | 9.0% | 9.1% |

Employment / unemployment rates for population aged 15 years and over (Census 2021)
The participation rate is the proportion of working-age residents who are in the labour market working or actively looking for work.
The employment rate is the proportion of working-age residents who are working (employed).

- Recent immigrants who worked full time and for an entire year earned \$49,600, up 43% from \$34,685 in 2015.
- Full-time recent immigrant workers earned 11% less than immigrants and 26% less than the Canadian-born. In 2016, the comparable gaps were 23% and 30%

Low Income

- Recent immigrants were still more likely to live on a low income. In 2020, 13.8% of Surrey’s recent immigrant population aged 15 years and over were in the low-income bracket, compared with 9.3% of all immigrants and 7.1% of the Canadian-born. Overall, Surrey had a slightly smaller proportion of low-income residents than did Greater Vancouver.
- Surrey has seen a significant reduction in the percentage of low-income residents since 2015, when 31.4% of recent immigrants and 17.0% of immigrants lived on a low income.

Barriers faced by immigrant job seekers

Immigrants face various barriers and challenges when trying to restart their careers in Canada. While the country is known for its welcoming immigration policies and diverse workforce, there are still several obstacles that newcomers may encounter. These are some of the common barriers and challenges:

Recognition of foreign qualifications

One of the most significant challenges is the recognition of foreign education and work experience. Many professional regulatory bodies in Canada have different standards and requirements, making it difficult for immigrants to have their credentials fully recognized, leading to potential retraining or further education. There are signs these barriers are beginning to ease somewhat, especially in health care.

Language barriers

Proficiency in English or French is crucial for career success in Canada. Immigrants who are not fluent in one of these languages may find it challenging to communicate effectively in the workplace and access job opportunities that require strong language skills. It should be noted, however, that almost 90% of immigrants speak English at work, a proportion that has been steadily growing.

Lack of Canadian work experience

Employers often value Canadian work experience, which can be challenging for newcomers who have relevant experience from their home countries but lack local experience. This catch-22 situation can hinder their ability to find suitable employment.

Limited professional networks

Building a professional network is vital for career advancement. However, immigrants may face challenges in establishing connections due to their recent arrival in the country and the absence of existing contacts.

Cultural differences and workplace norms

Each country has its own workplace culture and norms. Immigrants might find it challenging to adapt to the Canadian work environment, including communication styles, hierarchy, and expectations.

Discrimination and bias

Despite Canada’s diverse and inclusive society, discrimination can still occur in the job market. Studies show that immigrants may face prejudice or bias based on their ethnicity, accent, or cultural background.

Access to information and resources

Newcomers may find it difficult to navigate the Canadian job market and access relevant resources, such as government programs, settlement services, and job search assistance.

Financial constraints

Moving to a new country can be costly, and immigrants may face financial challenges during their initial settlement period. This can impact their ability to invest in education or training that could help them restart their careers.

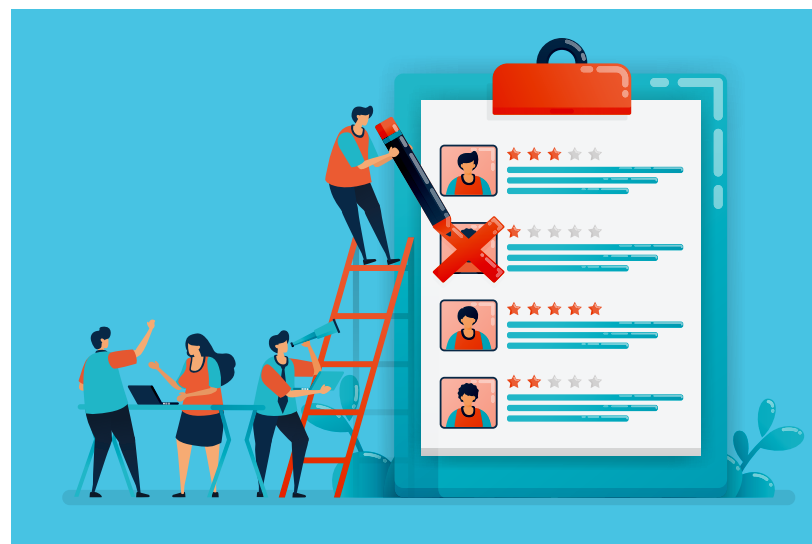
Uncertain or limited employment opportunities

Depending on the region and industry, certain job markets might be saturated or have limited demand for specific professions, making it more difficult for immigrants to find suitable job opportunities.

Emotional and psychological stress

The process of resettling in a new country and facing career challenges can be emotionally and psychologically taxing for immigrants and their families.

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Immigrant Employment Service Providers

Fortunately, help exists. Despite the many challenges, various organizations, government initiatives, and community support groups work hard—and increasingly successfully—to help immigrants integrate into the workforce. These service providers offer valuable assistance, including job search support and preparation, interview coaching, help getting credentials assessed, mentorship programs, and networking opportunities, all aimed at supporting immigrants in restarting their careers and contributing to the Canadian economy.

This is a list of key immigrant employment service providers in Surrey. For a list of all immigrant-focused services, visit: [NewToBC NewToBC Inventory of Immigrant Programs and Services](#)

Immigrant Employment Programs and Services

- [Career Paths](#)
- [DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society](#)
- [Options Community Services Society](#)
- [MOSAIC](#)
- [Progressive Intercultural Community Services \(PICS\)](#)
- [S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Surrey-Delta Service Centre](#)
- [Surrey Newcomer Welcome Centre](#)

In addition to these immigrant-focused employment services, Surrey also has five WorkBC Centres; these Centre are funded by the province and deliver employment services to all B.C. residents.

WorkBC Centres located in Surrey

1. [Surrey – 56 Avenue](#)
2. [Surrey – 152 Street](#)
3. [Surrey Newton](#)
4. [Surrey Whalley](#)
5. [Surrey Guildford](#)

Occupational Guides and Profiles

In addition to the services provided by the agencies listed above, there are several websites that provide guides to assist newcomers in understanding how their occupations are practiced in B.C., while outlining the steps they need to take to re-enter their fields.

- [WelcomeBC – Work in BC](#)
- [WorkBC Explore Careers](#)
- [Skilled Immigrants InfoCentre – Vancouver Public Library](#)
- [National Occupational Classification 2021](#)

Who's working in Canada and how they arrive

Most immigrants arrive in Canada as Permanent Residents (PRs), meaning that they are eligible to work almost immediately. The majority of new immigrants to Surrey arrive within the Economic Category—58%, according to Census 2021. Other PRs are those sponsored by family, and refugees. In addition, a significant proportion of newly arrived workers come as international students and temporary foreign workers (TFWs). All categories are eligible to work. Although we do not have exact numbers of international students and TFWs in Surrey, in 2022, Canada-wide, there were more than 807,000 international students holding valid study permits — a record high. Also, in 2022 a record 608,000 temporary work permits took effect.



Surrey has many organizations, government initiatives, and community support groups to help immigrants succeed in the work force.



About the Surrey LIP

Surrey Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) is a collective of community partners, bringing diverse voices together to build a fair and inclusive city where all immigrants, refugees, and citizens thrive. Through dialogue and research, Surrey LIP's 40+ members collaborate on innovative and community-driven strategies to meet the changing needs of one of the fastest-growing cities in B.C. They work collaboratively to develop strategies to prepare the community welcome new immigrants and refugees through an equitable and inclusive approach.

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For more info on the Surrey Local Immigration Partnership, visit our website at www.surreylip.ca

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