

Socio Economic Challenges/Solution to Immigrant Women's Economic Security in Small Cities and Rural Alberta

Executive Summary

The gap between rich and poor is increasing in Canada and Alberta, and this gap is attenuated in immigrant women who have low employment rates and income, are over-represented in precarious employment, and who face multiple levels of discrimination based on sex, race and class.

Programs and services are not often designed to take into account women's gendered and unequal status in our society. As such, this report uses a gender analysis to ensure that the needs and concerns of women are highlighted, and that suggested solutions keep in mind the systemic and intersectionality of discrimination against women in areas like employment.

Focus groups were used to talk to immigrant women and men, and representatives from government, private, and voluntary sectors across Southern Alberta (Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Brooks and High River), to gain an understanding of how they interpret economic security and how to achieve it. Most of the immigrant respondents did not feel that they were economically secure, and, in addition to well-paying permanent jobs with benefits, they felt that to be economically secure, people also needed low cost housing, free daycare, and access to education for upgrading and re-skilling.

Barriers exist to achieving economic security also included: a lack of knowledge of Canadian labour laws leading to unfair treatment in the workplace; the need for 'Canadian' experience; a push to start working as soon as they arrive regardless of whether or not the job is commensurate with their education and experience; lack of opportunities for professional training and upgrading; language issues and nonrecognition of international credentials and lack of information about services available.

As found in previous research and echoed in the present study, the main barriers to economic security for immigrant women are:

- precarious employment and/or low income
- lack of affordable and accessible childcare

lack of affordable and adequate housing

language skills

lack of credential recognition

lack of community supports

cultural barriers and isolation

Canada continues to attract the best and brightest in the world, and yet has failed to provide the supports, immigrant women (and men) too need to contribute to this country by participating equally in the workforce through good employment and education opportunities. Absence of this opportunity leads to an economic underclass of people who have so much more to offer our communities. Community action plans that bring together government services, employers, and voluntary services are recommended to address these issues, and specific suggestions are provided in the report. It is noted though that any action plan developed must use a gender-based analysis in order to provide an appropriate response for immigrant women