

# **The ‘Gender Gap’: Findings and Directions for Addressing the Position of Immigrant Women in the Labour Market**

## **1. Background**

Since 2009, the Toronto Immigrant Employment Data Initiative (TIEDI) has sought to meet the data needs of non-profit organizations whose goals include the better integration of immigrants into Greater Toronto’s workforce. The project has produced a range of reports, factsheets and updates; all are available on the project’s website:

[www.yorku.ca/tiedi](http://www.yorku.ca/tiedi).

With further support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), TIEDI initiated a public outreach program from October 2011 to April 2012 (<http://www.yorku.ca/tiedi/events.html>). The outreach program sought to engage key stakeholders in discussing the project’s findings. The purpose was to explore the implications of data generated by TIEDI for program planning and policy-making. Topics were identified at a forum in October 2011, and then in January-April 2012, four roundtable discussions were held with leaders and frontline workers from settlement agencies, advocacy groups, labour and employer organizations and all levels of government.

This report is one of a series providing highlights from the discussions at these roundtables. It contains the primer material that was sent to roundtable participants, as well as key points that arose during discussions. Reports from other roundtables are available at: <http://www.yorku.ca/tiedi/roundtable2012.html>

## **2. The Issue**

On average, immigrant women have higher unemployment rates, lower pay, and lower labour force participation than Canadian-born women<sup>1</sup>. Even when employed, immigrant women are more likely to be working part-time than immigrant men, regardless of immigration class (Figure 1)<sup>2</sup>. The gap is most pronounced for women who are refugees or business class immigrants.

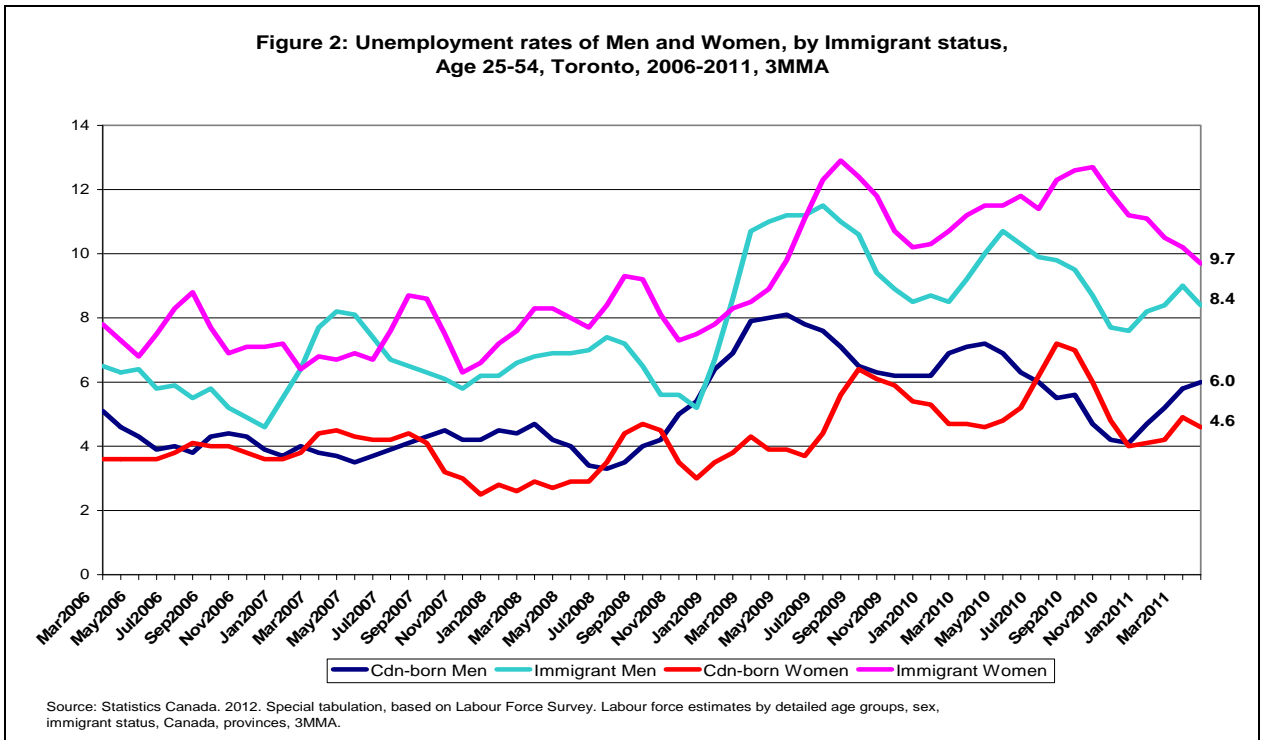
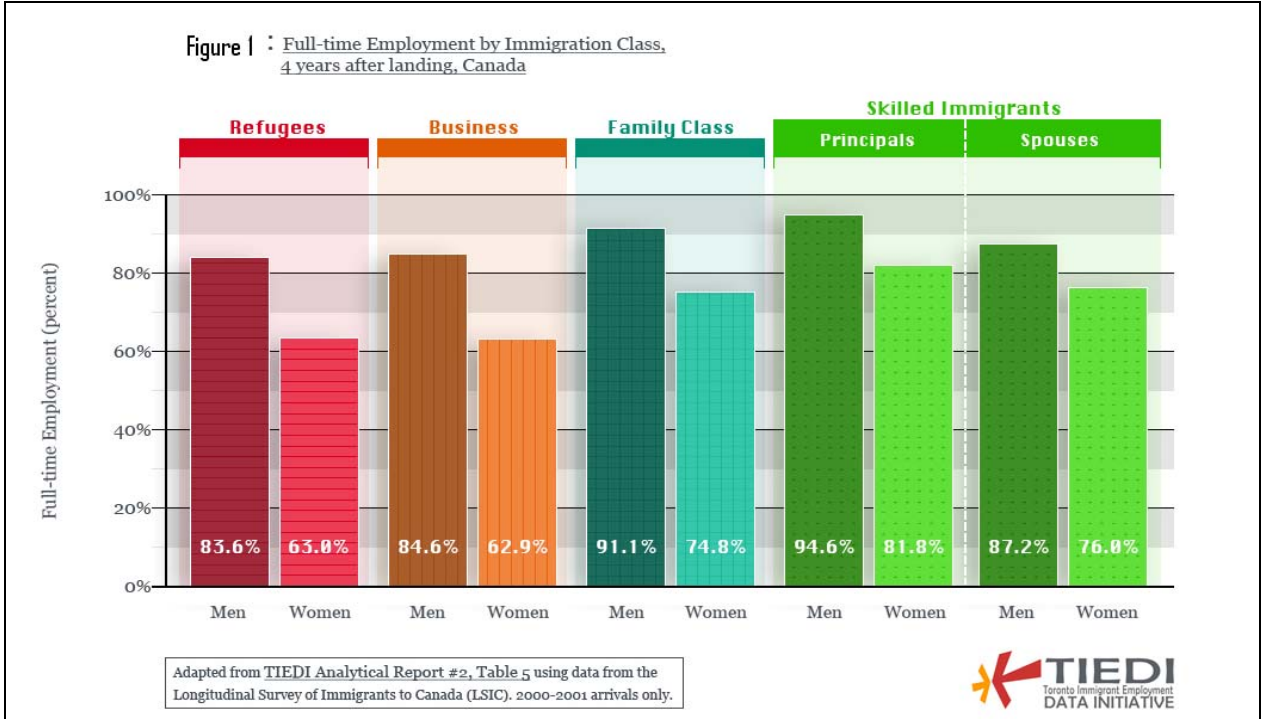
During the 2009-2010 recession, the gender gap in unemployment between immigrant women and immigrant men widened (Figure 2). To this day, immigrant women continue to have higher unemployment rates than immigrant men, Canadian born women and Canadian-born men.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Do educational attainment, gender and age affect labour market outcomes of immigrants?’ *TIEDI Analytical Report 16, January 2011*.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Do immigrant class and gender affect labour market outcomes for immigrants?’ *TIEDI Analytical Report 2, January 2010*.

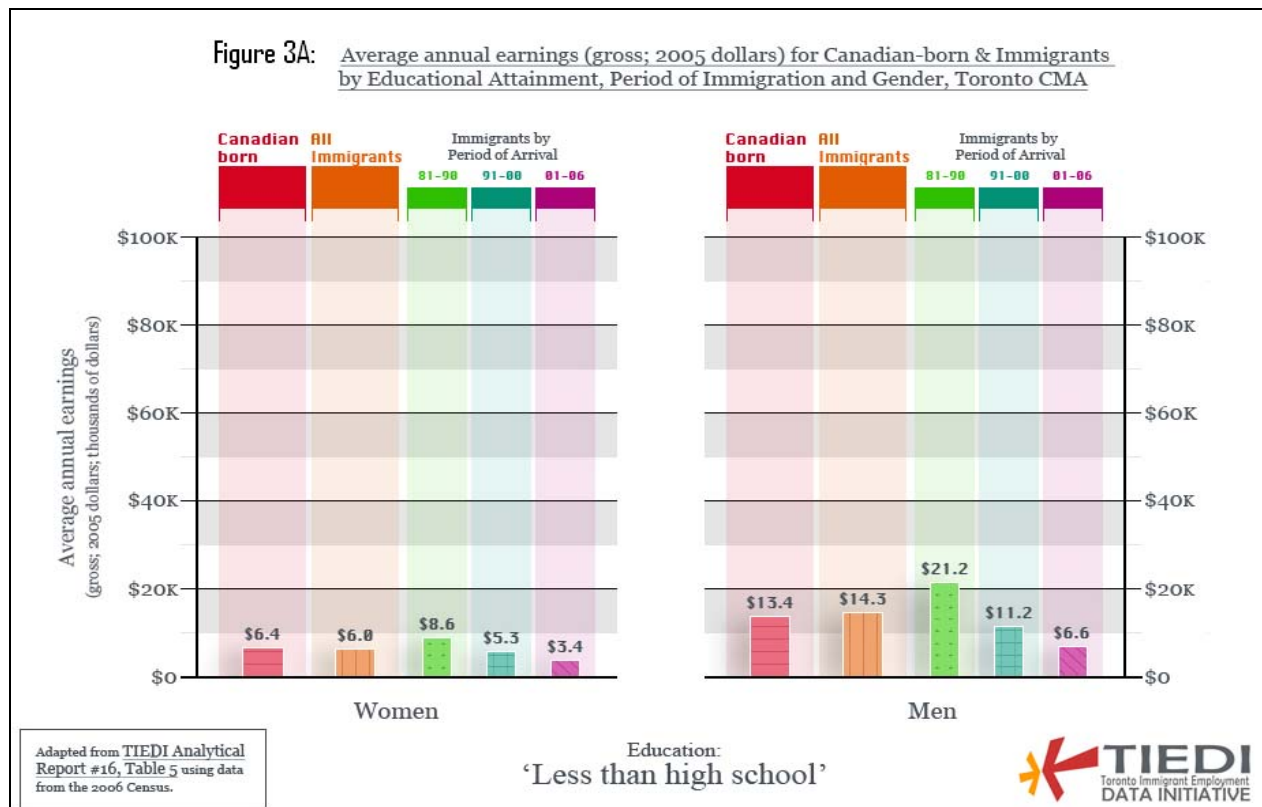
The purpose of this roundtable session was to discuss the policy and program implications of these gender gaps. How can policy makers and service providers reduce the economic disadvantage experienced by immigrant women?



### 3. Research on Immigrant Women’s Labour Market Experience

Education affects the labour market experiences of immigrant women. According to 2006 Census data, the wage gap between the Canadian-born and immigrants is larger for adults with more education (Figure 3A-Figure 3D).<sup>3</sup> Although both Canadian-born and immigrant women earn less than their male counterparts, the earnings gap between immigrant men and immigrant women increases with education. It is also usually larger for immigrant women who settled in Canada after 1990. In addition:

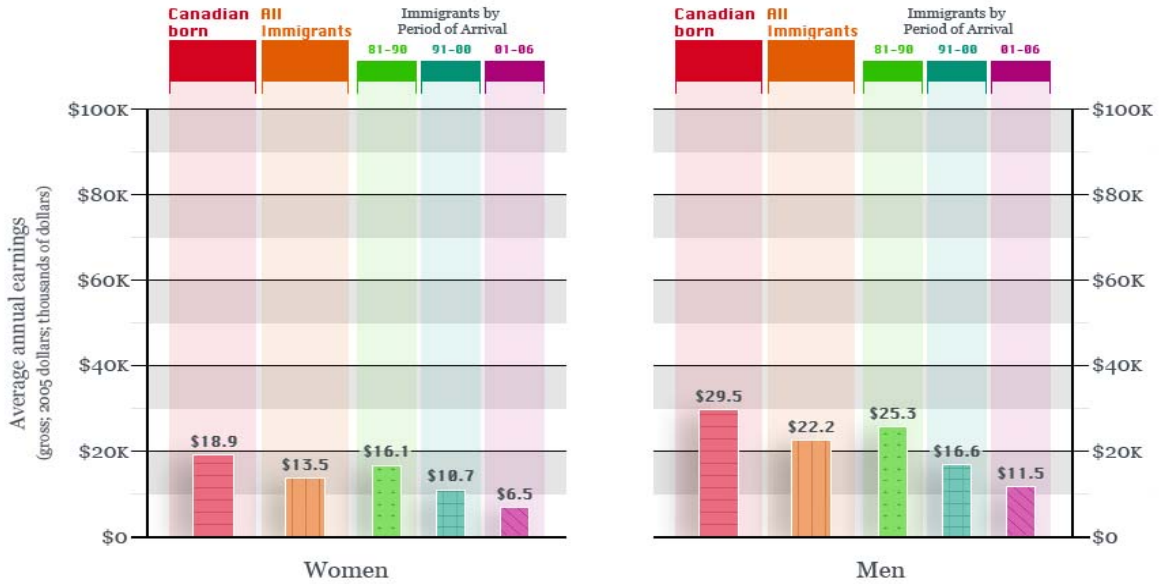
- Immigrant women with college or university education have lower unemployment rates than immigrant women who are less well educated.
- Nevertheless, for women who are university graduates, the unemployment rate for immigrants remains high, exceeding that for the Canadian-born by nearly 4 percentage points (7.8% vs. 4.1%).<sup>4</sup>



<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> 'Do educational attainment, gender and age affect labour market outcomes of immigrants?' *TIEDI Analytical Report 16*. January 2011.

**Figure 3B:** Average annual earnings (gross; 2005 dollars) for Canadian-born & Immigrants by Educational Attainment, Period of Immigration and Gender, Toronto CMA



Adapted from TIEDI Analytical Report #16, Table 5 using data from the 2006 Census.

Education: 'High school'

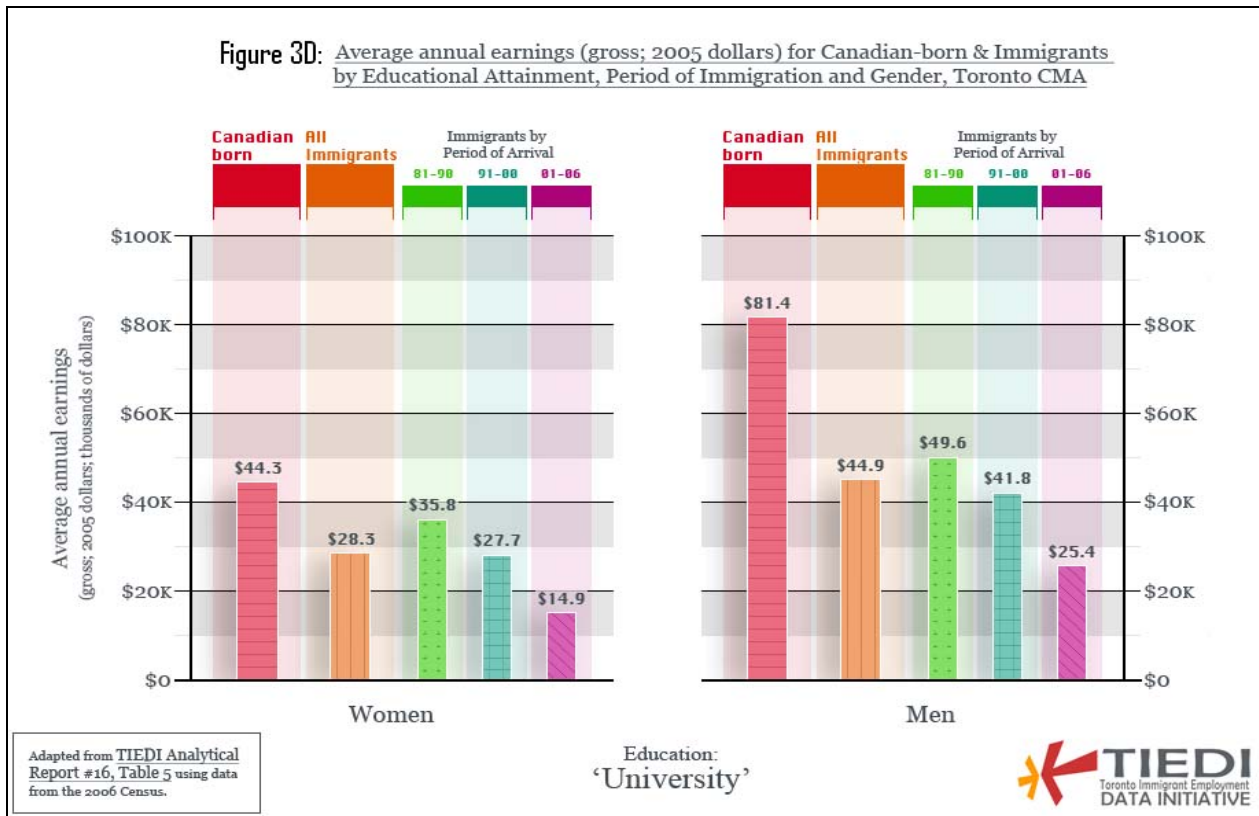
**Figure 3C:** Average annual earnings (gross; 2005 dollars) for Canadian-born & Immigrants by Educational Attainment, Period of Immigration and Gender, Toronto CMA



Adapted from TIEDI Analytical Report #16, Table 5 using data from the 2006 Census.

Education: 'College'

Figure 3D: Average annual earnings (gross; 2005 dollars) for Canadian-born & Immigrants by Educational Attainment, Period of Immigration and Gender, Toronto CMA



In addition to the effects of education on gender differences in employment outcomes, TIEDI research has found that:

- For each measured employment outcome, immigrant women fare worse than their male counterparts but the gender disparity varies with language skills. Immigrant women speaking English or French very well or fluently have labour outcomes much closer to those of men with comparable language skills than immigrant women with poorer language skills. Speaking English or French very well or fluently narrowed gender gaps in participation rates, unemployment rates, duration of jobless spells and relevance of main job<sup>5</sup>.
- Immigrant women are more likely than immigrant men to use *non-official languages in the workplace*.<sup>6</sup>
- Labour market outcomes differ by gender and immigration class, with the highest unemployment rates among women in the refugee class at 27.8% after four years in Canada compared with 16.5% for men in the same class.<sup>7</sup>
- Immigrant women are less likely to have their credentials recognized than immigrant men<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> "How do language skills affect the labour market outcomes of immigrants?" *TIEDI Analytical Report 11*, July 2010.

<sup>6</sup> "How do language skills affect the labour market outcomes of immigrants?" *TIEDI Analytical Report 11*, July 2010.

<sup>7</sup> "Do immigrant class and gender affect labour market outcomes for immigrants?" *TIEDI Analytical Report 2*, January 2010

<sup>8</sup> "What are Immigrants' Experiences with the Accreditation Process in Different Occupations?" *TIEDI Analytical Report 15*, January 2011.

## **4. Discussion Questions**

1. What factors contribute to lower labour force participation, higher unemployment and lower wages for immigrant women? When examining gender gaps, how much do we need to differentiate women on the basis of their educational attainments and language skills?
2. How well do current policies, programs, and regulations reduce the disparities in employment outcomes between immigrant women and immigrant men? What policies and programs are working now and which ones need to change?
3. As the Toronto economy restructures with fewer semi-skilled manufacturing jobs and more temporary and part-time service jobs, how do policies and programs intended to address the impacts of gender roles on immigrant women's experiences in the labour market need to evolve?
4. How can policies and programs concerning education, language training, other employment supports, and employment equity address the diverse needs of immigrant women?

## **5. Key points**

Three key issues were identified; recent funding cuts, the design and delivery of some current programs, and information gaps.

### **1) Impact of recent funding cuts**

Service providers recognize that specialized programs targeting community-defined problems and specific groups of women are needed, yet budget cuts and lack of resources make it difficult to deliver specialized programs. The lack of specialized services is a particular issue for women because their access to services may be limited by their family roles and responsibilities. In addition, it is costly and time-consuming to provide information about their rights and available services to individual women who are isolated at home.

As a result of budget cuts, employment programs are being amalgamated. Consequently, many immigrants have to move from one program to another, often with long waiting periods between programs. These delays and associated changes in schedule and location can have severe impacts on women whose child care responsibilities often make it difficult for them to change the time and location of their programs. Women may not be able to travel to different service locations. Asking women who are already isolated in the home and who often have sparse social networks, to move from one program to another and redevelop social networks is also detrimental to their progress.

Limited funding also leads to competition between organizations and encourages evaluation based on outputs rather than outcomes. For example, the decision to reduce the funding and hours for a program because client numbers are declining does not always consider the *impact* of the program for those who are enrolled.

## **2) Design and delivery of programs**

The current format of many training programs reduces participation by immigrants, particularly by immigrant women. Training programs are held during the day, often restricting students' participation in paid work and forcing them to rely on family members or social assistance for support. To avoid such dependence, some immigrants look for any job to support themselves and their family. They often settle for survival jobs that offer little security and few opportunities for advancement and salary increases. Without any training in Canada, immigrants can be trapped in poorly paid and insecure survival jobs.

Immigrant men and women often encourage men to access employment services and training before their female partners. For example, in the skilled worker class, women are often sponsored spouses and many take survival jobs to support their husbands while they retrain and search for jobs. As a result, many highly educated women become "deskilled" by their work experience in Canada. In addition, by privileging men's access to training and employment programs, women jeopardize their own eligibility for services. By the time many women are in a position to start using services, many have become citizens so they are no longer eligible. Often, they are not aware of the potential impact of becoming a citizen.

## **3) Information gaps**

More detailed information about immigrant women's participation in the labour market would be useful. Specifically, disaggregate data that distinguished full time and part time workers and self-employed versus employed workers would indicate how much of the earnings gap is a result of immigrant women working fewer hours than immigrant men and how much is due to their participation in self-employment. Labour market trends suggest that immigrant women are concentrated in different occupations than immigrant men. Again, disaggregate data could be used to investigate whether women's lower earnings are due to their overrepresentation in female-dominated occupations.

Many participants requested information about immigrant class, language proficiency and ethno-racial background. Participants wanted to know if the gender gap could be explained by immigrant class, particularly, whether a woman came as the principal applicant or spouse. In addition, information about language proficiency rather than measures of an immigrant's self-reported knowledge of an official language would contribute to more detailed understanding of how language skills affect earnings and employment. Finally, several participants noted that discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity and religion may compound the gender gap, so they requested disaggregate data that would allow the gender gap to be compared across ethno-racial and religious groups.

For immigrants who had university degrees, some of the disparity in earnings between immigrants and their Canadian-born counterparts could be a result of *where* they received their education. Recognizing that country of origin and country of education are poor measures of educational quality but they may be salient to employers, workshop participants recommended that information about the institution granting each university

degree should be collected in future surveys.

Several participants questioned the emphasis on average earnings in many studies of immigrants' economic outcomes. They argued that the shift from no income to a minimum wage income is a substantial material change for someone in poverty. From a poverty-reduction perspective, raising immigrant women from no employment into minimum-wage, part-time employment can dramatically affect their everyday lives even when their total income remains low. Several participants argued that the issues raised from a poverty reduction standpoint are very different from those discussed in labour market analyses.

Finally, the age of the data being used to inform policies was discussed. What changes have occurred since the 2006 Census that would invalidate its findings? Though there have been changes in the classes of immigrants coming to Canada, overall patterns are the same in 2012 as in 2006. Since 2006, newcomers have come from different countries of origin and the number of temporary residents, particularly temporary workers, has increased. There has also been a decline in the number of newcomers settling in Toronto. Finally, recently arrived immigrants are generally better informed than earlier waves of immigrants before they arrive in Canada.

## **6. Recommendations**

Policies and programs need to recognize that settlement is a highly individualized process. For example, from a poverty-reduction perspective, helping women move from no income to some income is a major change that may contribute to the women's long-term economic success.

More detailed and accurate information about gender roles, women's rights, and women's involvement in the Canadian labour market should be provided prior to arrival in Canada:

- The Canadian Immigrant Integration Program (CIIP) should be expanded to include more information about gender norms and roles in Canada.
- The geographical coverage of the CIIP should be expanded perhaps by greater use of the internet and videoconferencing.
- Administrative tasks such as registering for OHIP, searching for housing, and enrolling children in schools should be undertaken at Canadian embassies and consulates prior to departure for Canada.

To reduce the impact of gendered norms and roles that often limit immigrant women's involvement in the labour market, four strategies are recommended:

- Settlement programs should inform women about their rights in Canada and women's involvement in paid work. These programs could also provide detailed information about services targeting women and children such as child care subsidies and shelters for victims of domestic violence.



- Child care should be recognized as a shared and essential responsibility, particularly at the city and provincial levels, and made available to immigrant women as they need it.
- To reduce the social isolation of many immigrant women, agencies serving immigrants should encourage informal networks by documenting existing facilities and programs such as Early Years centres, libraries, and ESL classes and drawing on them to encourage social interaction wherever possible.
- Training allowances would enable women to obtain language and occupational skills soon after arrival, reducing the chances that they will take survival jobs while their husbands train.

Greater involvement of employers in settlement is crucial. It should include:

- Education about the value of immigrant workers' experience and credentials.
- Regulation and enforcement of employment equity.
- Expansion of the mentoring and internship programs that settlement service providers use to match employers and clients.
- More coordination within the immigrant-serving sector of efforts to link clients and employers.
- Funding for employment services should allow more flexibility on the part of service providers who seek to match employers and clients since narrow program requirements limit the success of many initiatives.

Detailed and disaggregate data are needed to design policies and programs since women arrive with different educational and work backgrounds and they come from diverse gender regimes in their source countries. Specifically,

- Data need to be disaggregated by occupation, foreign educational attainments, and educational attainments in Canada so we can determine whether immigrant women's low earnings result from working in underpaid female-dominated occupations or unequal treatment.
- More detailed information would allow service providers to understand the needs and experiences of women from specific class backgrounds, ethnic and racial backgrounds and source countries.
- Information about self-employment would also be valuable for understanding the nature of immigrant women's involvement in the labour market. These data would reveal how many immigrant women are setting up small businesses and their earnings from these businesses over time. Although low earnings may be expected initially, we ask whether earnings from self-employment increase over time or plateau.
- Recent information is needed so service providers can adjust programs on a timely basis as their clients and the labour market change.

Funders should continue to support women-specific services and programs, and strive to maintain funding for such services and programs.