

# WHERE ARE THE GOOD JOBS?



Ten case stories  
of “working rough,  
living poor”



2013 Summary



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## About the Income Security, Race and Health Research Working Group

This report is based on the third phase of a multi-phase research agenda conducted by the Income Security, Race and Health (ISRH) Research Working Group. The ISRH group is an interdisciplinary research group comprising of academics, service providers, and peer researchers interested in examining economic and health inequalities faced by racialized groups in Canada. The group was established in Toronto in 2006 under the leadership of Access Alliance. ISRH team conducted multi-phase qualitative research projects to investigate the systemic causes of growing economic inequalities faced by racialized groups, and to document the damaging health impacts of these inequalities. The team strives to use this evidence to catalyze progressive policy solutions to promote employment and health equity for racialized communities in Canada.

In the first phase of our research, we used an arts-based photovoice method to document the impacts of poverty and racism on racialized residents of Black Creek community. Photo-narratives and results from this study are presented in our report titled 'Exposed: Impacts of Poverty and Racism.' We have incorporated some of these photos in this report. In the second phase (2008-2009), we conducted 8 focus groups with diverse groups of racialized residents from the Black Creek community (n=78) to explore labour market barriers, income insecurity and health impacts facing racialized people living in a marginalized neighborhood. Findings from this second phase led to our report titled 'Working Rough, Living Poor.'

This 'Where are the Good Jobs?' report is based on findings from the third phase research (2010-2011) and closely builds on our previous reports.

Access Alliance has also brought together another interdisciplinary research team to investigate the gendered barriers and de-professionalization that racialized immigrant women face. This fourth phase of our inquiry is one of the six case studies of the Poverty and Precarious Employment in Southern Ontario (PEPSO) project funded by Community University Research Alliance (CURA) grant. Results from this study will be released in mid-2013.

All the reports can be downloaded from [www.accessalliance.ca](http://www.accessalliance.ca)

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## About this report

This is a summary version of the *Where are the Good Jobs?* report. Full version of the report is available for download from [www.accessalliance.ca](http://www.accessalliance.ca). The report contains ten powerful case stories of immigrant families from racialized backgrounds who are struggling to find stable employment in Canada. It is based on results from the third phase of a community based research project conducted by the Income Security, Race and Health (ISRH) team in Toronto. The case stories reveal the multiple factors pushing racialized immigrants into precarious work including systemic discrimination, limited professional network, information gaps, immigration related barriers, temp agencies, policy gaps, ineffective services, and conditions of precarious employment itself.

The ‘case study’ format of the stories means that you get insight into the everyday forces and challenges that people are facing in finding good jobs. This level of detail is not often captured in other research methods.

You should read this report if you are a public service worker, government agency, policy maker, advocate, activist, community worker, service provider, professor/teacher/educator, researcher, student, or simply a citizen concerned about the rise in precarious types of work, and about the wellbeing of immigrant and racialized communities. The report is made for a wide audience, and can be used in a variety of ways.

Policy makers can use these case stories to develop better social indicators for measuring the success or gaps in their policies. Government and community agencies that work with immigrant communities and/or with low-income families can use these case stories for professional development training for their service provider staff (e.g., settlement agencies funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Children’s Aid Society, Ontario Works). This report and its case stories will also make excellent course reading material for university and college courses to better prepare future leaders to find solutions to complex real world problems.

We invite you to tell us how you use this report. Please send your feedback and ideas to: [research@accessalliance.ca](mailto:research@accessalliance.ca)

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## Introduction: Where are the Good Jobs?



This report contains ten powerful case stories of immigrant families from racialized background<sup>1</sup> who are struggling to find good jobs in Canada. The case stories are based on results from third phase of a multi-phase community based research project conducted by the Income Security, Race and Health (ISRH) team in Toronto. Findings from this phase build on our ‘Working Rough, Living Poor’ report released in 2011.

The ten families represent a diversity of backgrounds, experiences and aspirations. Participants range widely; a highly skilled male immigrant from India with an engineering degree and an MBA from the UK hoping to get a fulfilling management level job; a female immigrant from Egypt with an Islamic Studies degree aspiring to work as a teacher/educator on Islamic issues; a young male immigrant from Argentina wishing to become a male nurse. The study also includes families who came to Canada through temporary immigration streams including through live-in caregiver program and as refugee claimants. Two of the participants in this study are children of families who came to Canada as refugees; the father of one of these participants was deported. There is diversity in terms of family composition from a single mom (whose “ends don’t meet”) to a multi-family household sharing resources just to get by. Study participants include people who have been in Canada less than 5 years and those who came here as children and have lived here over 20 years.

All adult family members who were interviewed actively participate in the labour market and have strong work ethics. They have exhausted all

available employment services and conventionally recommended job search strategies, including job boards, resume clinics, soft-skill trainings, Canadian workplace preparedness trainings, online or in-person resume drop offs, cold-calls, volunteering, networking and as well as randomly asking people they meet in the bus or streets. One participant has sent over 1,500 job applications while another did over one year of volunteer work in four community agencies in hopes of finding a stable job.

Yet, in spite of exhaustive job search efforts, none have been able to find a stable job that reflects their skills or aspirations. Instead, they share the same experience of being stuck in “horrible jobs” (in the words of one participant) that are low-paying (barely above minimum wage) and temporary (“which never become full-time” mentioned another participant) with little security or benefits. These jobs are also often marked by unsafe and exploitative working conditions; many have had debilitating workplace injuries. The only participants with full-time equivalent jobs were working night shifts, odd hours, or split shifts.

The main question all ten families kept asking was **“Where are the Good Jobs?”**

Employment with limited job security, benefits and protections is broadly referred to as precarious work or non-standard employment. There is growing evidence that non-standard types of employment are on the rise in Canada, and that this negatively affects a substantial proportion of Canadians. A recently released report *It’s more than Poverty* found 40% of workers in the Greater Toronto Area – Hamilton region are in precarious types of employment (McMaster University and United Way Toronto, 2013). The Law Commission of Ontario report (2012) *Vulnerable Workers and Precarious Work* documents how lax employment standards and occupational health and safety regulations are making an increasing number of workers more vulnerable to bad working conditions and exploitation. Several reports by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and the Conference Board of Canada point to growing income inequality in Canada largely due to downward push on wages and claw backs on income supports. During the last

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada and other mainstream agencies use terms like “visible minorities” or “ethno-racial groups” to refer to people from non-White/non-European backgrounds. These terms relate primarily to number and color. They assume dominant groups are free from race/ethnicity. Such terms also lead to ‘minoritization’ even in contexts where racialized groups are a majority. In line with Canadian Race Relations Foundations, we use “racialized groups.” This term recognizes the dynamic and complex process by which racial categories are socially produced by dominant groups in ways that entrench social inequalities (Galabuzi, 2001).

decade, the percentage of people earning minimum wage has more than doubled to one in ten Canadian workers; half of all minimum wage earners are in Ontario (Yalnizan, 2013). These trends are fueled by ‘free-market’ policies. While these trends negatively affect all Canadians, racialized immigrants and Canadians are severely impacted.

The ten case stories in this report provide granular everyday details of how and why hard working immigrant families get unfairly streamed into low-paying, high risk, precarious types of jobs. This level of qualitative evidence is missing in Canada. Study findings indicate that racialized immigrant families are getting stuck in the worst forms of precarious employment. These experiences go hand in hand with deep structural processes of racialization and alienation of newcomers. There are profound negative socio-economic and health impacts on immigrant families, and ultimately on Canada.

**Our Method:** Our study design and process was grounded Community-based research (CBR)/Participatory Action Research (PAR) principles. We trained and engaged precariously employed racialized people in leadership capacity as co-researchers (‘peer researchers’) and subject matter experts at all phases of the research, starting from research design, data collection, analysis, co-authoring reports, as well as in knowledge exchange and advocacy work (as Knowledge to Action leaders).

In the previous phase of our study, we conducted 8 focus groups with racialized residents living in Black Creek area and 3 focus groups with service providers from employment, settlement and community sectors. Results from these focus groups are presented in our *Working Rough, Living Poor* report released in 2011 (available for download from [www.accessalliance.ca](http://www.accessalliance.ca) ).

For this phase of our study, our community partners and peer researchers recommended that we focus on in-depth interviews in order to map in detail the everyday pathways and processes that push people into bad jobs. They also suggested that we use a ‘family lens’ instead of focusing on individuals only. They highlighted that many of gaps in policies, services and research is due to the exclusive focus

on individual oriented interventions, with little or no consideration of the role of family/household.

We conducted two rounds of in-depth family interviews with ten precariously employed racialized families living in the Black Creek area. Two key members of each family/household were jointly interviewed in both rounds (n=19). In other words, instead of interviewing just the husband, we interviewed the husband and wife together and asked relevant details about all other members of the family/household (children grandparents, siblings as well as transnational relationships). In the case of one family, (the Pérez family) we interviewed two sisters who were living with their families in the same household. For the Wilson family, we only interviewed one person since it was a single mother headed household.

A key requirement for participating in the study was that the family had to be actively involved in the labour market but experiencing precarious employment. People dependent on social assistance for lengthy periods were excluded from the study. We recruited families for diversity in terms of ethnicity, country of origin, education level, occupation, family composition, and how long they have been in Canada. We originally wanted to include Canadian-born participants as well; however, the two Canadian-born families we recruited dropped out in the middle.

For each family, the study generated 4 to 7 hours of very rich interview transcripts (a total of 58 hours). For participants with limited English language fluency, the interviews were conducted in their first language. Peer researchers were paired with academic partners or research staff to jointly conduct the interviews. The interviews were translated and transcribed and then coded and analyzed using NVIVO qualitative data analysis software.

The research team decided that the first report from this study will be written in an accessible plain language format using a case story framework. Peer researchers took a lead in writing many of the case stories. The fact that this report is written in a case story format does not mean in any way that the evidence presented in this report is less rigorous. The research team utilized very rigorous data collection and qualitative analysis framework to generate the results.

**Stories as telling evidence:** The case stories of these ten families provide heart-wrenching accounts – and telling evidence – of what it is like to be trapped in a vicious cycle of bad jobs, near-poverty conditions, and deteriorating health.

Take, for example, the Adani family<sup>2</sup> who came to Canada from India. The husband has an Engineering degree and an MBA from the United Kingdom. He assumed that Canada was a country that values people with multiple qualifications. Thus he had high hopes for a management level job in the engineering field in Canada. Instead he has been stuck in one factory job after another (e.g. welding, making boxes, baker). Not surprisingly, but sadly, he has suffered multiple workplace injuries. His wife has a graduate degree in Commerce and over 10 years of experience in accounting. She thought accounting would be a readily transferable skill in Canada (“*accounting is same everywhere*” she noted). However, even after sending 1500 applications, the best she has been able to get is a part-time “office clerk” level job. She keeps a copy of all of the 1500 job application emails for her own record and for her sanity. The office clerk job never becomes full-time no matter how hard she works or how many times she asks to make it full time.

Two other families in this study (the Kumar and Sharma families) seem to have met very similar fate. The male members have taken up night jobs in factories that make you work “*more than human capacity*,” as one put it, while the female members struggle to find decent non-factory type job.

Then there is the story of the Omar family who came from Egypt. The husband is an aspiring graphic design artist. He learnt the hard way that in Canada his degree from Egypt was “*not even worth the paper it is printed on.*” After 5 years of going from one unstable job to another, he got fed up and decided to start a sign-making business of his own even though he had no previous business experience. Though somewhat related to design field, he feels that he is using only bare minimum of what he is really capable of. He lost many of his clients during the recent recession making him realize how risky running a small business can be. His wife has a

degree in Islamic studies from Egypt and hoped to be a teacher/educator on Islamic education in Canada. However, there are no prospects within her means to do so in Canada. Instead, like many immigrant women, she is stuck doing home based catering and babysitting.

The story of two sisters from Peru (Pérez family) surviving as single mothers and living together in the same household is very telling as well. Both sisters came to Canada through the live-in caregiver program (one in the early 1980s and the second one a decade later). Both faced immense hardship and exploitation working as live-in caregivers. Both faced acute isolation. Since then, the two sisters have been stuck in part-time shift jobs in the hospitality field for over 10 years. Sadly, the fact that they both work in unionized environment has not helped to improve their employment conditions.

The fate of two Vietnamese families (Nguyen and Tran families) who came to Canada as refugees is very hard hitting. Both families face acute linguistic barriers and are struggling to find effective programs and support to help improve their English language skills. Since coming to Canada, the male members in both families have been stuck in highly precarious jobs as self-employed home renovation construction workers. The recent recession has had a devastating impact on their work and income.

The difficulties that immigrant parents face in getting good jobs have negative intergenerational impacts on the employment outcomes of their children. This is brought to light by challenges faced by two young families in our study (the Bolivar and Suárez families) whose parents came to Canada as refugees and faced excessive difficulties in getting their permanent residency status and in securing stable employment. Another case story that adds to this evidence is the experience of the Tanya Wilson (see the Wilson family), a single Black mother barely struggling to make ends meet.

We end the report with the case story of the youngest family: the Bolivar family. Like many young families, this family had bold career and life aspirations. However, this family is already being pushed into a precarious employment track. The critical question is whether this young immigrant family will end up in the same difficult conditions and poor health as others in this report.

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<sup>2</sup> Pseudo names used for confidentiality reasons.

**Deep structural barriers:** The ten families live in the Black Creek community – a low-income neighborhood located in the peri-urban region of Toronto (adjacent to York University). The case stories, therefore, capture the struggles of racialized families living in marginalized “priority neighborhoods” in metropolitan cities like Toronto, where poverty and inequalities are geographically concentrated. At the same time, this condition of being stuck in “horrible jobs” is a pervasive trend and reflects the harsh reality for racialized Canadians all over Canada.

Census after census provides national-level data showing that, compared to other groups, immigrants and Canadian-born from racialized backgrounds:

- persistently face 2 to 3 times higher rates of unemployment;
- are up to 4 times more likely to be underemployed;
- have higher representation in non-standard jobs;
- face a wide wage gap (racialized workers earn 84 cents for every dollar that non-racialized workers make); and,
- face low-income rate that is 2 to 20 times higher

Analysts at Statistics Canada, Toronto Immigrant Employment Data Initiative (TIEDI), and Office of Ontario Fairness Commissioner have produced a wealth of evidence about barriers and inequalities that immigrants face in the labour market.<sup>3</sup> A key barrier is the non-recognition of foreign credentials and experiences by professional licensing bodies and employers. Researchers at Statistics Canada have highlighted that current cohorts of immigrants have much higher levels of education than Canadian-born workers and previous cohorts of immigrants, and yet are experiencing a declining earnings return on their high educational qualifications (Picot et al, 2007; 2009). Evidence shows that immigrant workers face very high rate of under-employment and are over-represented in low-wage and temporary types of

jobs; this, in turn results in higher rates of poverty and low-income among immigrant communities (Aydemir and Skuterud, 2004; Picot et al, 2009). A large number of other quantitative and qualitative studies across Canada have highlighted that getting stable employment continues to be the most pressing concern for immigrants (Chun and Cheong, 2011; Goldring and Landolt, 2009a; OCASI, 2012; Oreopoulos, 2009; Sakamoto et al, 2010).

Immigrants from European/White background, on the other hand, have similar levels of unemployment and low-income rate as Canadian-born people. Racialized immigrant men, for example, make 68.7 cents for every dollar that non-racialized immigrant men make (Block & Galabuzi, 2011). Galabuzi (2006), Ornstein (2006) and Block and Galabuzi (2012) remind us that the Canadian labor market is very “colour-coded” and that racialized workers (immigrants and Canadian-born) persistently fare worse compared to their non-racialized counterparts in many socio-economic measures.

These economic inequalities in turn lead to health disparities. For example, compared to other groups, racialized immigrants are more than twice as likely to transition from excellent and good health to fair and poor health (Hyman and Jackson, 2010; Ng et al, 2005). Reports by the Public Health Agency of Canada and Toronto Public Health show that immigrants, particularly those from racialized backgrounds, experience rapid deterioration of mental health and several chronic health conditions, including diabetes and some cancers.<sup>4</sup>

These ten families represent the human faces of people unfairly caught in this problem of persistent racialized inequalities in Canada. The case stories help to fill important evidence gaps about how and why racialized immigrant families are getting caught in precarious jobs. Economic, social and health impacts are captured in great detail. The stories also reflect feelings, aspirations, responses and voices of people stuck in bad jobs. This level of detail has not been captured by other research projects.

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<sup>3</sup> See insightful series of reports by analysts at Statistics Canada including Chui, 2003; Picot et al, 2007; Picot and Sweetman, 2005; Galarneau and Morissette, 2004. See analytical reports by TIEDI researchers such Preston and D’Addario, 2008; Preston et al, 2011; Kelly et al, 2001. See *A Fair Way to Go* report by Office of Ontario Fairness Commissioner as well as their annual reports.

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<sup>4</sup> See Health Canada’s *Health Policy Research Bulletin* Issue 17 focused on Migration Health. See *The Global City: Newcomer Health in Toronto* report published jointly by Toronto Public Health and Access Alliance.



**Pathways and Impacts:** Private corporations and ‘temp agencies’ are often blamed for the rise in precarious employment and immigrant underemployment. In reality, businesses and ‘temp agencies’ are mediators and beneficiaries of these trends. The root causes go deeper and have more to do with discrimination, structural inequalities, policy and enforcement gaps, information gaps, and ineffective services. The shared experience of these ten families reveals seven crosscutting causes of why and how racialized immigrant families get pushed into precarious job pathways:

(1) Racialized immigrant families face deep structural barriers to getting good jobs: systemic discrimination and distrust in the labour market, limited/insular professional network, limited economic capital, and immigration related barriers. This is why even after sending 1500 applications and using all job search strategies, immigrants are unable to get stable employment that they want. .

(2) Current employment and settlement services do not really work because these services focus on modifying individual behaviors of immigrant workers (reshuffle people’s resumes, offering Canadian workplace preparedness trainings) rather than on overcoming structural labour market barriers that immigrants face.

(3) In absence of effective services, immigrants become unwittingly dependent on sources that lead to precarious types of jobs (‘temp agencies’ or friends stuck in precarious jobs themselves). Study findings show that immigrant families get initially linked up to ‘temp agencies’ through their immediate networks. This underscores the deep structural nature of the problem at hand: high incidence of precarious employment among racialized families streams newcomer racialized families into precarious employment pathways.

(4) After a certain period, some immigrants – particularly those with higher education – begin using what can be called ‘high investment job search strategies.’ This includes strategies such as going back to school, making a career change, and doing unpaid internships and volunteer work. In most cases, only one member of the family can afford to do this. These high cost - high effort strategies offer somewhat better outcomes compared to other

strategies. However, the jobs still tend to be part-time, odd hour shifts or well below their skill level.

(5) Marginalized immigrants with low education and limited English language fluency tend to be ‘fast tracked’ into precarious manual labour jobs, with little opportunities to improve their career paths. Immigrants who came through temporary pathways (e.g. as a refugee claimant or through the live-in caregiver program) and faced hurdles in getting permanent residency status are also at risk of being pushed into low-paying manual labour job pathways.

(6) Immigrant families who opt for self-employment (because of difficulty finding stable wage employment) also face high levels of precarity.

(7) The experiences of these ten families highlight that being stuck in low-paying precarious jobs in turn creates negative structural conditions (irregular income, irregular work hours, workplace injuries, jobs-skills mismatch etc.) that further prevent immigrant families from getting stable employment in their field. This finding point to another deep structural nature of the problem: precarious employment conditions leads to more precarious employment. Further, study findings reveal that economic recession makes precarious jobs held by immigrant workers even more precarious.

In all measures of employment quality – job insecurity (permanent or not), job status (full-time or part-time), low wage and earnings uncertainty, work hours uncertainty, number of jobs people are juggling, job satisfaction, presence or absences of unionized environment, relationship with employers and colleagues, control over work hours/load, types of employee benefits – study findings show that these ten racialized immigrant families face very severe levels of precarious employment conditions. Most were stuck in low-paying, part-time positions that *“never become full time.”* Those in shift-work based positions faced the worst levels of employment insecurity. Services and opportunities to improve employment conditions were not available to these families.

The economic impacts are severe. Being caught in a vicious cycle of precarious jobs results in high degree of economic insecurity and livelihood deprivation. Although these families are not unemployed, they face similar level of economic

difficulties as those who are unemployed and on social assistance. They are living in near-poverty conditions in spite of working very hard.

The social impacts are equally troubling. Study findings show that precarious job conditions (irregular work hours, always looking for jobs or juggling multiple jobs etc.) creates social uncertainty in people's lives (*"makes everything feel temporary"*; puts everything *"on hold"*). Being stuck in precarious jobs also directly causes strains and gaps in family relationship and communications. Participants were most concerned with relationship and communication strain with their children.

This study adds to our previous evidence that precarious jobs cause damaging impacts on health and prevents healthcare access. Participants linked the root cause of many of their health concerns to the unstable and unsafe jobs they are stuck in. Some of the health impacts are immediate and direct such as workplace related injuries (burns, injured hands and legs, hearing loss, etc.) and musculoskeletal pains due to overworking. Chronic and long-term health concerns begin to unfold with prolonged exposure to negative risk factors associated with precarious employment conditions (e.g. not taking scheduled work breaks, not being able to eat well or get adequate sleep, not having time to exercise). Chronic issues include gastro-intestinal complications (e.g. ulcers, ongoing stomach aches), mental health issues (depression, anxiety), and worsening of chronic health risks and conditions (diabetes, high blood pressures, heart conditions).

In other words, bad jobs are making Canadians very sick. The growth in precarious types of employment is a major risk to the health of Canadians.

The main photo on this report cover was taken by one of our community researchers (Safy). She titled this photo "The Canadian Dream" and wrote the following narrative: *"The Canadian dream is thought of as being accessible to everybody but in actuality, like the flag in the picture, the Canadian dream is too high to reach."* This report could interchangeably be titled *'Where is my Canadian Dream?'* Like many immigrant families, these ten families came to Canada with earnest aspirations of getting a good job and living a life of prosperity and good health. All of them knew that they would have to struggle a little bit to resettle in a new country, but

did not expect that the challenges would be so severe and never ending. Participants described their lives in Canada as *"always struggling"* and *"too hard."* Their Canadian dream has been shattered (*"ninety percent disappointing"* in the words of one participant). Families who have been in Canada for over 20 years and grew up here did not necessarily fare better. Difficulties that immigrant parents face in terms of getting permanent residency status or good jobs directly undermined the educational and employment outcomes for their children.



**Photovoice 1: Where is my Canadian Dream?**  
(Photo by Safy).

Canada cannot become a nation where racialized immigrants are brought just to do the dirty work, treated as *"disposable"* labour (in the words of one participant), excluded from prosperity and opportunities, and pushed into negative socio-economic and health pathways across future generations. This makes us a very unhealthy nation. The socio-economic loss and healthcare costs to Canada from this is profound.

We argue that the growth in precarious employment and the deepening of racialized inequalities in Canada are closely linked processes. The problems we face are deep and severe and thus Band-Aid solutions that attend to symptoms won't work (such as poverty alleviation). We need bold cross-sectoral action and solutions from all levels of government with strong participation from non-profit/community sector and private sector. All of us have a role to play in rebuilding Canada as a great nation founded on good jobs, progressive immigration policies, equitable and healthy workforce, transformative social programs, and good health for all.

## Key Findings

### Pathways into Precarious Jobs

1. Racialized immigrant families face deep structural barriers to getting good, stable employment (systemic discrimination, non-recognition of credentials, limited/insular professional network, limited economic capital, immigration related barriers,).
2. Current employment and settlement services are largely ineffective because these services focus on modifying individual behaviors of immigrant workers rather than on overcoming structural barriers.
3. Because existing services don't work, immigrants become unwittingly dependent on sources that lead to precarious types of jobs ('temp agencies' or friends stuck in precarious jobs themselves). Tangible services and supports to enable precariously employed workers improve their employment conditions are missing.
4. Even when immigrants use 'high investment job search strategies' (like going back to school), employment outcomes are not much better. Private colleges appear to be taking advantage of immigrants without offering them better employment prospects.
5. Marginalized immigrants with low education and limited English language fluency tend to be 'fast tracked' into precarious manual labour jobs, with little opportunities to improve their career path.
6. Immigrant families who opt for self-employment and small enterprises (because of difficulty finding stable wage employment) also face high levels of precarity.
7. Conditions of precarious employment (irregular hours, low and irregular pay, juggling multiple jobs etc.) lead to more precarious employment; recession makes precarious employment even more precarious.

### Negative Impacts of Precarious Jobs

Economic/Income Uncertainty: Precarious jobs lead to very irregular and unpredictable income cycle that makes everyday and long-term economic planning very difficult. During lean months (winter months for people working in manual labour jobs and summer months for those in social services) families can face acute levels of food and livelihood insecurity. Families cannot afford or are forced to make cut backs to important things like furniture, better accommodation, children's extracurricular activities, healthcare needs (e.g., prescription medicine, dental care), and leisure activities. Income irregularity can lead to debt dependence; half of the participants had high levels of debt. Some families had to rely on resources sent by their relatives 'back home' just to survive.

Family Relationship Strain and Social Uncertainty: Although immigrant families develop high levels of family empathy and resilience, precarious employment conditions can severely strain and damage family relationship and communication. Lack of family time, poor communication, crowded housing conditions, and income insecurity make it difficult for families to make and achieve social plans or plans for the future (i.e. "makes everything temporary" and "on hold"). Families were most concerned about lack of time to spend with their children. In turn, children were aware and concerned about the hardships their parents were going through and tried not to bother parents with their own problems. This, however, led to communication gaps between parents and children. Due to economic difficulties, several families had given up their plans to have additional children.

Health Impacts: Precarious employment has damaging impacts on health and prevents healthcare access. Participants linked being stuck in bad jobs as the main cause of many of their physical illnesses (burns, injured hands and legs, hearing loss etc.), musculoskeletal pains, gastro-intestinal complications (eg ulcers, stomach aches), mental health issues (depression, anxiety, sleep disorder, low self-esteem), and worsening of chronic health risks/conditions (diabetes, high blood pressures, heart conditions etc.).



### Policy Solutions for Promoting Good Jobs for all

Build Equitable and Healthy Labour Market: Introduce labour market policy reforms to create more equitable workforce and to stop the rise of bad jobs. Introduce provincial Employment Equity legislation and workplace anti-discrimination legislation, expand pay equity legislation, effectively enforce Employment Standards and Occupational Health and Safety regulations, and adopt Fair Wage and Benefits policy and Good Jobs policy.

Immigration as an Engine for Nation-building: Stop treating immigrants as source of cheap, disposable labour to meet short-term labour market needs. Instead, we need a humanist vision of immigration policy in which immigrants – and diversity of ideas and skills they bring – are inclusively integrated as engine for building a healthy nation and a healthy labour market.

Create Empowering Social Programs: We need accessible, inclusive and empowering educational programs, daycare, healthcare, and social safety nets that can effectively promote equity, while creating opportunities and sustained support for the most marginalized people get good jobs and achieve prosperity.

### What Service Providers and Concerned Citizens can do:

1. Report and take proactive action against racism and discrimination in the labour market; promote anti-discrimination and employment equity practices in your workplaces.
2. Report and take action against unsafe and exploitative working conditions. Train and support precariously employed workers to use their rights to improve their employment conditions (e.g. get holiday pay and overtime pay, and negotiate for better working hours, adequate breaks, timely pay raise, promotions, professional development opportunities, benefits). Enable vulnerable workers to use rights and protections offered through Employment Standards Act, Occupational Health and Safety Act, and Unions.
3. Enable marginalized newcomer and racialized families build strong professional networks/linkages through programs that help to overcome social isolation and structural barriers to information, knowledge, resources and opportunities. Promote bridging, networking, integration and mentorship programs that create positive relationships across occupations, class, race, social positions, geography and other divides.
4. Build stronger links with the educational sector (universities, colleges and training institutes) and employers (private, government and non-profit) to promote newcomer-friendly academic/professional bridging programs, mentorship programs, paid internship programs, apprenticeship programs, and on-the-job learning programs that can lead to stable employment pathways. On-the-job English learning programs are essential to enable people with low education and limited English language proficiency to build better employment/career pathways.
5. Stop offering services that focus on individual behavioral modifications of racialized immigrant workers (e.g. reshuffling their resumes) or those that stream them into low-paying unstable jobs (e.g. child minding, catering) or passive job search services. Replace these with skilled job developers with proven ability to link racialized immigrants to safe, stable, well-paying and discrimination free employment pathways.
6. Since bad jobs lead to damaging health and socio-economic impacts, practitioners working in healthcare and social services need to become champions for promoting stable, secure and safe employment for all.
7. Use your citizen power (voting, advocacy to your local constituency representatives, deputations, petitions) to make government accountable for creating and effectively implementing policies that promote discrimination free labour market, equitable workforce, healthy jobs, empowering social programs and a humanist immigration program in Canada.





## The Kumar Family

*When we come to Canada, we had full hope that we will get some good work as part of our education...and we have a lot of years of experience, twenty-three years of experience for our field, accounting field. So, we just hoped that we would not get any problem to get the job. Yes, it will take some time to get the job, but it will not get that difficult. I don't understand one thing... that accounting is same everywhere. Debit and credit is same everywhere. I don't know why they want so much, so keen on having the Canadian experience. It's not going to become vice versa in here. It's going to remain the same. We are not able to get the job with our degrees and when we go for the jobs that we get our degrees in, everybody required the Canadian experience...**Our degrees are worth zero here**...and how long are we have to suffer because we have to survive our families, and we are forced to start the labour job-Akshay*

*We did have the expectation like you know, every person has a dream. So, we had started dreaming about our big house and our child's, and we also had the expectation that I'll have a second child too. But with all the stress... and now, it's not possible. It is not possible at all. I'm mentally tired, stressful, physically tired, [I] go home, make some dinner, and go to bed immediately. The life is totally worse here. Sometimes, I am so full [of pain] and I just burst out like crying. But, [Akshay] is so positive...*

**Summary:** The Kumar<sup>5</sup> family immigrated to Canada in 2004 through the Skilled Workers and Professionals class. They came for better job prospects and a better future. Akshay, 49 years old, his wife Rani, 46, and their 13 year old daughter Karishma, settled in the Black Creek area of Toronto because of its central location. Rani has a Bachelor of Commerce and a computer programming diploma from India and many years of work experience in office administration and accounting. After being unable to get a job in her field, she took on survival jobs in bakeries and warehouses to make ends meet. In 2007, however, she made a firm decision not to do any more labour jobs and decided (with encouragement from Akshay) to go back to school. She got a Social Service Worker diploma from a private college only to find out that degrees from private colleges are “useless” in terms of getting jobs. After that, she did volunteer work in four community agencies. The last one led to her getting a job as a program coordinator for an after-school program. However, this is a part-time (20 hours/week) low-paying contract job with no security or benefits. And every summer, Rani worries about whether the contract will be renewed. Akshay has a Bachelor of Commerce, a diploma in Industrial Purchase and Material Management (IPMM) and 23 years of work experience in accounting from India. When he could not find a job in his field, Akshay was “forced” to take on manual labour jobs through temp agencies. After suffering a work place hand injury in 2007, and a slip and fall in 2009, he is now unemployed. He is not able to do labour jobs even if he wants to. In spite of their strong qualifications, the Kumar family has become stuck in precarious jobs and is ‘working rough, living poor.’

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<sup>5</sup> Pseudo-names used to protect confidentiality of participants. See full report for complete version of the case story.



## The Suárez Family

*Money is driving me crazy. I feel like somebody is burning me from the bottom, from below. The 'clouds of rain' is the sense I have bad luck and I can't find something better. I don't have good money so everything is related to my job. If one doesn't have a good job then one can't sleep thinking 'how we are going to make ends meet?' I don't have any chance for a better opportunity in my job; it's a very boring job. It's routinely. You can't have a better opportunity because that is what the job offers. It is routine. . . I am always looking for a better job. – Andreas*

*That [our son] studies and that he becomes a professional. Even our budget is so tight we are saving so that he goes to study. That at least he has good money to go to study for the first 2 years [of college/university]. Then he can find a scholarship or something. That he has a house, that he has his own car and that he doesn't have the problems we are having right now. - Martina*

**Summary:** Martina (from Chile; 29 years old) and Andreas (from Argentina; 28 years old) settled in Canada through multiple insecure migration processes.<sup>6</sup> They both came to Canada in 2001 to reunite with their respective parents who had come to Canada in the 1990s as refugees. Martina's father's refugee application was successful and he sponsored Martina to join him after being apart for 11 years. Andreas's father was deported in 2001 shortly after Andreas arrived in Canada. Andreas and Martina met and married in Canada. With families located in different countries, the young Suárez couple was unsure about the best place for them to settle. In 2004, they went to Chile for a couple of months and then to Spain (Andreas had some relatives there) where they lived for 3 years. In Spain, they were shocked to face "intense racism" and so decided to return to Canada in 2006. Since they had limited financial means, the pair lived for a couple of years with Martina's father, Juan, in his house located in the Black Creek area. Their son, Ricardo, was born in 2007. Martina's career plan is to be an accountant while Andreas hopes to join the armed force or to become a nurse. However, because of having to move so often, they were unable to pursue post-secondary education. After coming back to Canada, financial difficulties forced them to sideline their educational goals and start working instead. Andrea tried to join the Canadian Armed Forces but bureaucratic barriers prevented him from doing so. He then got a forklift operator certificate and managed to find a full-time job through a friend as a Shipper/Receiver in a housing material distribution company. Though the job is full-time with benefits, he is unsatisfied with this job because the work is night shift (4pm to 1am), low paying (\$13.50/hour), and consists of heavy and routine type of work. Whenever he can, Andreas works cash labour jobs to supplement the income. Along with taking care of their son and studying, Martina juggles different part-time jobs including working in a donut factory and cleaning. The young Suárez family has big dreams but is 'working rough living poor.'

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<sup>6</sup> Pseudo-names used to protect confidentiality of participants. See full report for complete version of the case story.



## The Nguyen Family

*We wanted to come to Canada to have a better life and be more prosperous here. I hoped I could find good job here in Canada, but it is not easy when I have my daughter who is not in very good health condition. I have to stay at home to take care of my [disabled] daughter. It is very very difficult, for example, if I want to work at the factory I have to wake up very early and leave the house at 6am. I have to feed her and pick up my daughter and not sure I would have enough time... – Phuong*

*There have been 3 or 4 months [Giang] had had no job. We've got [no work] since several months. I just want the Canadian economy to go up so that they have enough jobs for my husband. If he has a stable and a good job, we accept it. We would find another solution – Phuong*

**Summary:** The Nguyen<sup>7</sup> family came to Canada hoping for a better life, better health care and support for their daughters; particularly their eldest who has a severe disability. Giang, 50 years old, came to Canada in 1999 as a refugee, leaving behind his wife Phuong, and daughters Kim, 6, and Lien, 2. Giang got permanent residency status for Canada in 2005; for the first couple of years he had “no papers” and the remaining years were spent waiting for his refugee claim to come through. During this period, Giang went from one “cash job” to another in order to support himself and send money back home. Once he got his refugee claim approved in 2005, Giang sponsored his wife Phuong, now 36, and daughters, now 17 and 13. They joined him in 2007 after being apart for 8 long years. The Nguyens settled in the Black Creek area of Toronto because of its large Vietnamese population, making it easier to keep in touch with community members about available jobs and other supports. Giang worked in a factory in Vietnam and was hoping to get a better job in Canada. Until he received his permanent residency status, Giang was forced to work in jobs where they pay cash or don’t ask for “papers”. The only jobs he could get were in small factories and construction companies. Also, because he lacked legal status, Giang did not have access to English language classes or other formal skill training programs. Whatever skills he learnt, he did so through his Vietnamese friends. Currently, he works as an on-call contract worker for a small hardwood flooring company run by another Vietnamese family. The company has been hit hard by the recent recession and the number of contracts Giang gets has significantly decreased since 2009. His limited English language fluency restricts the types of jobs he can get. Phuong had hoped that she would be able to work in Canada. Without social supports, however, she has to dedicate all of her time to taking care of her disabled daughter. After six years of living with insecure immigration status, facing acute language barriers, and being stuck in a very precarious type of job, the Nguyen family is ‘working rough, living poor.’

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<sup>7</sup> Pseudo-names used to protect confidentiality of participants. See full report for complete version of the case story.



## The Omar Family

*I didn't think it would take so much time to take a job, although I can assure you that I spend all the time looking for job, everything. Like I [sent] hundred and hundred and hundred of resumes out there. Sometime, most of the times I don't hear back from them, and few times some nice guys send me a letter and say 'thank you,' that's it. Maybe a hundred or 150 resumes just to get one or 2 interviews... and it seems like from the people around me it seems like... forcing me to the labour job, to make a living, you know what I mean – Sayed*

*I don't think...those places for helping to find jobs like...like resumes, sending faxes, this stuff...I think they missing something... I know they spend a lot of money on them...but, I don't know. I tried them so many times. I didn't get no jobs from them – Sayed.*

**Summary:** Sayed Omar<sup>8</sup>, currently 44 years old, came to Toronto, Canada from Egypt in 1997 through the Federal Skilled Workers and Professionals program. He has a Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts from Egypt and was expecting "a better future, financially and career wise" in Canada. However, everything was the opposite of what he expected. In spite of trying all strategies, he was not able to get a good stable job. The initial years were the most difficult and the \$10,000 in savings that he brought from back home got used up very quickly just to survive. He got his first job in 1999 in an orthotics factory. Though the job asked for someone with artistic skills, Sayed felt it did not make good use of his capacity. Shortly after, he got an offer for a full-time job as a graphic designer for a local newspaper in a small town in Nova Scotia. Though he did not want to move to a small town, he accepted this job because it was in his field. He worked in this company for one and half years but got laid off as part of "downsizing." He then came back to Toronto but still could not get a stable job. In 2001, he returned to Egypt to marry Hanem, currently 30 years old, and then sponsored her to immigrate to Canada. Hanem has a BA in Islamic Studies. They currently have three children, ages 7 years, 5 years, and 14 months. The Omars settled in Black Creek because of its central location. Sayed got fed up of juggling precarious jobs. A friend who was operating a self-employed sign-making business encouraged them to do the same. Sayed started his own sign making business in 2005. This business did fairly well for the first two years. However the recession hit in 2008 and Sayed watched his client base, particularly other small business owners, dwindle rapidly. While raising three children, Hanem tries to also contribute financially by running a small baby-sitting service in her home and doing odd catering jobs. However, these jobs have been hard to get lately. Hanem helps with office work for their family business. Their income has been decreasing while expenses have been increasing substantially with three children. The sign-making work has led to many injuries for Sayed and is a constant source of stress. Like many self-employed small business workers, the Omar family is 'working rough, living poor.'

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<sup>8</sup> Pseudo-names used to protect confidentiality of participants. See full report for complete version of the case story.





## The Wilson Family

*Many times my ends don't meet. And I don't think my ends will ever meet because I don't really have a steady job. I have a job that is on and off and that's not really paying me much. You can't even buy the basics all the time because you don't have the money to buy it. You would want to have at least a decent couch or something to sit on and you can't afford it because you don't have the money to buy it. A lady needs certain things for the month, you can't be buying it all the time; you have to ask people for it. And for me that is a bit degrading, you feel less than a woman.-Tanya*

*We have positive times to keep the positive-ness and even when there is nothing, we try to keep it positive. I am a person that doesn't really give up that easily. Most of the time when I go on social assistance, I don't want to go on it but I've reached to the point when I can't do more, so I have to go on it and me while I'm on it, I'm still out there looking for something. I still try my best to go out there – Tanya*

**Summary:** Tanya Wilson<sup>9</sup>, currently 37 years old, came to Canada in 1991 from Jamaica at the age of 16, with her one year old son Jason, now 22 years old. Tanya was sponsored to immigrate to Canada by her parents. Arriving as a “kid,” she did not have specific expectations about Canada when she arrived here. Her dream was to become a nurse. However, as an immigrant and a single mom in her teens, she quickly realized that all the odds were against her. She was working during the day to support her family and doing night school to finish high school. Tanya found it almost impossible to juggle work, school and taking care of her baby. She stopped high school in grade 11. She did a series of unstable, low-paying jobs including as a woodworker, baby sitter, and caterer. She had her second son, Chris, in 1999. She started focusing exclusively on working to support her family and gave up on her dream to become a nurse. The Wilson family settled in Black Creek after receiving subsidized housing in the area. As a long-time resident of Black Creek (over 20 years), Tanya has endearing views about her neighborhood and is concerned that the negative stereotypes about Black Creek is hindering her and other residents from getting good jobs. Since none of the previous job search strategies (applying online, dropping off resumes etc.) led to a stable job, Tanya realized that she needed to go back to school. Since nursing was not an option for her anymore, Tanya decided to become a Personal Support Worker (PSW). She successfully completed the PSW program from a private college only to find out that the certificate was not widely recognized and did not help her get a job. She had no choice but to go on social assistance (Ontario Works). In 2010, through the job development program within Ontario Works, Tanya got her current part-time job as a receptionist at a community agency that pays minimum wage, barely enough to survive. This job is a one-year contract. Tanya is afraid that she won't be able to find another job after this and will probably end up back on social assistance again. Tanya's story represents the experience of a single Black mother living in a low-income neighborhood who is ‘working rough, living poor.’

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<sup>9</sup> Pseudo-names used to protect confidentiality of participants. See full report for complete version of the case story.



## The Adani Family

*Efforts? I have more than 1,500 emails I have done. I can show you my Inbox. I took a diploma course [in Canada] and I completed my graduation in the year 2008. And went back home to drop my daughter there [in India] because it was hard with her...like we cannot afford babysitting and it was hard with her to ...I cannot go out for work. I drop her back with my mother, when I came here and I started looking for job I have done more than fifteen hundred of emails. Fax and even I went to agencies. So still I have that email, that was for my, you know I want to keep in mind all the time. – Hasina*

*How long it takes to get settle down one year two year three year, how long, this is fourth consecutive year going on but still we haven't seen any end of the settlement – Zamir*

**Summary:** The Adani<sup>10</sup> family came to Canada in 2007 with high expectations that their strong qualifications would lead them to good jobs and prosperous life. Hasina Adani, 28, her husband Zamir, 33, and their daughter Varshini, 6, settled in the Black Creek area of Toronto because of the area's affordability and its central location. Hasina has a Master's degree in Commerce from India. Zamir has a Master's degree in Business Administration from the UK and a Bachelor degree in Mechanical Engineering from India. Both had many years of work experience. They had been told by friends that they would be able to get really good jobs in Canada with these high qualifications. They immigrated to Canada through the Federal Skilled Workers and Professionals class with high points in the "points system" assessment. However, the Adani family was shocked to find out that their degrees and years of experience carried little value in Canada. Hasina was hoping for a full-time permanent job in accounting but has been unsuccessful even after sending over 1,500 job applications. She currently has a part-time job (less than 20 hours/week) as an office clerk at a marketing company. Getting this part-time job was challenging: she went back to school in 2008 to get a Canadian diploma in accounting. She did an "unpaid co-op" placement, and was laid off from 2 jobs before ending up in her current job. Her current employer refuses to expand her hours and keeps giving her "silly tasks" that are well below her skill level. Zamir was expecting that his engineering degree combined with his MBA would be highly valued in Canada and would lead to a management level position. Sadly, in spite of pursuing all avenues, he has been unable to get a job in engineering or management. Instead, he has been stuck in a series of low-skill manual labour jobs, making boxes, welding and working in a bakery. The jobs have led to de-skilling and resulted in multiple injuries. Zamir is now pursuing a Chartered General Accounting (CGA) degree while juggling on-call labour jobs. In spite of trying out numerous job search strategies, the Adani family is still struggling to find stable employment and is 'working rough, living poor.'

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<sup>10</sup> Pseudo-names used to protect confidentiality of participants. See full report for complete version of the case story.



## The Tran Family

*I'm self-employed. I work for myself, for the past several years. When I first worked in Canada the thing I liked most is I made a lot of money compared to Vietnam. Huge money. And luckily that I worked at a place they don't require lot of English. So they teach me how to do things and I learn from that and just do the routine work. Because the economy isn't good now and the tax goes up, I lost all my jobs. – Vinh*

*Right now I don't have any job to work, just to help friends [in their contract jobs] sometime when they need me. . . Sometimes 3 weeks I get one day work. Sometimes every week I get 2 days job. . . Because right now we still live on our savings. We don't really need the support from the government. But when we need we will definitely go and apply for it. Our savings kind of close to the end. Right now we hope that we'll get a job soon. So our life will be better. - Vinh*

**Summary:** Vinh Tran<sup>11</sup>, 42 years old, came to Canada from Vietnam in 1989 as a government assisted refugee. He risked his life and fled Vietnam and lived in a “prison-like” refugee camp in Indonesia for 13 months before coming to Canada as a sponsored refugee. When he left Vietnam, he had finished grade 9. Vinh imagined that it would be “like heaven” in Canada. But things were far from it. He tried to complete his high school diploma in Canada. However, due to his limited English fluency and other issues, things got “very difficult” and he quit when he was one course short of getting his diploma. From when he was young, Vinh had always wanted to do construction. So he learnt a range of skills including installing drywall, flooring and plumbing from other Vietnamese friends involved in this sector (“learnt everything, but no certificate”). Initially, Vinh worked as a general worker. Later, he started specializing in flooring jobs and eventually opened his own flooring business. In mid-2000, during his visit to Vietnam, Vinh met Mai and they got married. He then sponsored Mai to immigrate to Canada and she arrived in 2006. Mai had finished grade 6 in Vietnam. Her dream was to be an elementary school teacher as she loved teaching little children. Like Vinh, she tried to finish her high school and take English classes in Canada but stopped because it was more difficult than she thought. She started working part-time in a factory and occasionally in a nail salon run by a Vietnamese family. In 2009, their son, Tony, was born. Since they could not afford daycare, Mai quit her job at the factory in order to take care of Tony. At one time, Vinh's business was thriving. However, since the recession of 2009, there was a major drop in contracts. His limited English language fluency makes it particularly difficult to get contracts when competition is high. Instead, now Vinh mostly works on-call for his Vietnamese friends who are more successful at getting contracts. Job availability is very limited and irregular. Sometimes there is work for 2 to 3 days per week while at other times there is 1 day of work in three weeks. Consequently, things have become “very difficult.” Physical health concerns are rising (back pain, dizziness) and mental health is rapidly deteriorating. Like many families that came as refugees, the Tran family is “working rough, living poor.”

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<sup>11</sup> Pseudo-names used to protect confidentiality of participants. See full report for complete version of the case story.



## The Pérez Family

*The child minding job from the community agencies, they call you in for a couple hours when they need you. The hospital is the same. So at times, they give you two shifts or three shifts. So if anyone gets sick, or a full-time doesn't go, there you are. So many years have passed. How I would have liked, because I was a teacher in Peru and I had ten years of service, and a person starts to develop a level of calmness but here no, they just call you and you have to run, with such little time, and they tell you 'no' over here and the next day they don't call you because you left on bad terms. A person can't be so disposable. – Carmen*

*"I always feel headaches and pain as a result of my job. Not having enough money since I have so many different jobs and each of them paying me very little, very little. It gives me a headache because I don't have a stable schedule. It makes it very difficult to plan anything out. Sometimes I'm busy from Monday to Sunday and I don't even have one day to rest. The tiredness, sometimes there are weeks that I'm exhausted from the tension, because all of us have to coordinate ourselves, from the exact moment on the exact day. - Elena*

**Summary:** Sisters Carmen and Elena Pérez<sup>12</sup> came to Canada from Peru for a better future. Elena, 43, was the first one in the family to come to Canada in 1987 when she was 20 years old. She left her work at a travel agency in Peru and entered Canada through the live-in caregiver program. However, there were many complications with her employers and she was not able to fulfill the 2 year work requirement for live-in caregivers to apply for permanent residency status. Luckily, she managed to get permanent residency status by applying through humanitarian and compassionate grounds. A couple of years after Elena came to Canada, their parents also entered Canada as visitors and later succeeded in getting permanent residency status. Older sister, Carmen, 46, has a Bachelor of Education degree from Peru and was working as a teacher there. She also decided to come and join her family in Canada. She also aspired for a better economic future since she was only making \$100/month as a teacher in Peru. However, she was refused a visa to Canada repeatedly. With other options running out, she applied through the live-in caregiver program and was accepted to come to Canada in 1997. While working as a live-in caregiver, Carmen faced similar difficulties and exploitation like her younger sister Elena. Carmen managed to get her permanent residency paper after 7 long stressful years. For the Pérez sisters, the delays and difficulties in getting permanent residency status had long-term negative impacts on their employment pathways. Among, other things, it "super-isolated" them, as Elena put it, in ways that prevented them from improving their English language skills and developing other skills. The career pathway for both sisters and their parents has been very precarious. As Carmen put it, they are stuck in "horrible jobs." Currently, Carmen works as a part-time food services staff at a hospital while Elena works as a part-time banquet staff at a hotel. Since both of these jobs offer limited hours, the Pérez sisters juggle several other casual jobs (on-call banquet staff for functions, on-call child-minding, house cleaning etc.) to make ends meet. Both sisters are divorced and are raising children as single mothers. The Pérez sisters managed to pool their savings with their parents and purchase a house together in the Black Creek area. They all live together along with their children: Elena's 23 year old daughter, Gabriel (also a single mother with a 1 year old son), and 15 year old son, Rueben, and Carmen's 8 year old daughter, Monica. They share costs, household responsibilities, and provide emotional and other support to each other. However, the acute difficulties caused by their jobs that "never become full-time" are taking a severe toll on everyone and forcing them to continue "working rough, living poor."

<sup>12</sup> Pseudo-names used to protect confidentiality of participants. See full report for complete version of the case story.





## The Sharma Family

*Not having enough money, not being able to afford healthy food and so it does affect me and causes weakness overall in the body . . . and because of financial insecurity from job and the income is not enough so that stresses me and that stress again affects my behavior towards my children and causes conflict and argument with my wife. . . because of the jobs, just in between us, husband and wife, we have tension and that gets transferred to children and they also express their tensions in terms of anger ... so it is affecting them, our anger is affecting them mentally – Daruun*

*We are keeping our future in mind. We are hopeful. We know that our situation is not going to [be] forever. My son for example if he gets a good education and in the future things will improve. We sit down and discuss our situation with our son, planning for the future so that teaching him also how to manage and cut down on extra unnecessary expenses, and also manage with what you have... And also concentrate on education so that he can improve his life and get a better education and not be in our situation.—Daruun.*

**Summary:** The Sharma<sup>13</sup> family came to Canada in 2006 “thinking of family and children’s future.” Daruun Sharma, currently 39 years old, his wife Nutan, 32 years old, live together in the Black Creek area with their two sons, Rafat, 15 years old, and Naadir, 9 years old. Their relatives living in the US encouraged them to apply to immigrate to Canada through the “points system” (Federal Skilled Worker and Professional class) and ensured them that “there are good job opportunities, good money” here. Nutan was born with one kidney and one lung and was excited that she will receive good healthcare for this in Canada. Daruun has a Master’s degree in Chemistry from India and 15 years of work experience in big steel companies. Nutan has a Bachelor’s degree in Economics from India. In addition to taking care of their sons, Nutan was tutoring and doing beautician work on a part-time basis. They were not rich but were “living comfortably” in India. They wanted more for themselves and especially for their two sons. They pooled in all their savings and took loans from family and friends to cover for their move to Canada. Once they got here, their high hopes quickly disappeared. Daruun was particularly saddened that his 15 years of professional work experience did not mean anything in Canada. After doing a variety of survival jobs, he finally got a full time job in 2007 as a machine operator in a chemical factory. The main reason he got this job was he was willing to take the night shift (11:30pm to 7:30am). The job is far below his skill level but he was at least glad to have a full time stable job. However, from 2010, his hours have been much reduced (2 days per week) and his work schedule is constantly changing. For Nutan, her health conditions make it difficult to do manual labour jobs. However, manual labour factory jobs are the only types of jobs she has been able to get. Currently, she works in a bakery doing packaging. Both Daruun and Nutan feel that discrimination and language barrier are the key reasons why they are unable to get good jobs. A year ago, Nutan’s brother and his family also immigrated to Canada against Nutan’s advice. Nutan’s brother has a nursing degree from India but is stuck in doing labour jobs while he goes through the long process of getting his degree accredited. They are currently living with the Sharma family in the small apartment. The Sharma family finds their life in Canada to be “too hard.” Like many immigrant families with shattered dreams, the Sharma family is “working rough, living poor.”

<sup>13</sup> Pseudo-names used to protect confidentiality of participants. See full report for complete version of the case story.



## The Bolivar Family

*In [my] job, there is no security... I have seen through the experiences of a lot of workers where they have done their jobs, but they are asked to do more than what the job requires. There have been many people who they have [been] fired, or terminated ... A lot of stress because we're always thinking 'Okay, this week I'm here, you know?' I made it until the end of the week. Now it is like a war is going to start in order to hold on to this job, in order to survive, in order to make it to the next week. And this turns into a vicious cycle. Everything feels temporary because at any given time, it can end whether it is your fault or not. – Carlos*

*What I plan to teach [my son] is that we have one shot at life. Just one. There's no do-over's. I don't believe we'll return to see if we can do it better the next time. You're here once. Make it count. Don't just be satisfied with surviving. Always push to be something bigger. To be great. –Carlos.*

**Summary:** Carlos Bolivar's<sup>14</sup> parents migrated to Canada from Ecuador in 1987 when Carlos was just one year old. Now he is 24 years old. Carlos thought that growing up in Canada would make things smoother for him to find a decent career job. However, Carlos's experience has been anything but smooth. Fresh out of high school, Carlos had dreamt of serving with the Canadian Armed Forces. In spite of completing the necessary training and working there part-time for three years, he could not get the promotions to get a stable full-time posting. He quit this dream and completed a Police Foundations diploma in 2007. Sadly, the only job he could get was working as security guard in buildings. During a visit to Ecuador, Carlos met Alicia, currently 23 years old, and the two decided to get married. He then sponsored Alicia to immigrate to Canada through the spousal sponsorship program, and she joined him in Canada in 2008. Alicia was pursuing an accounting degree in Ecuador which she hoped to continue in Canada. In 2009, they had a baby boy, Jose. Due to unaffordable childcare costs, Alicia decided to be a stay-at-home mother to take care of Jose. To help out with looking after Jose and share costs, Carlos's mother invited the young couple to stay with her in her apartment. In 2008, Carlos got a job in a major courier company. At first, the job seemed good. It offered good wage rate (currently at \$19/hr) and hours (40 hours per week), enough to make a decent living; plus, it offered "tons of benefits." However, the recession hit and hours were steadily cut back to 25 hours per week. Worse, the company expects him to do "split-shifts." Carlos feels like he is making equivalent of minimum wage because of the limited hours and split shifts. The good benefits plan is the only reason why he still wants to keep this job. Though they really want to get their own place, Alicia and Carlos are pressed to continue living with Carlos's mother. Recently, Carlos's brother lost his call centre job and also started living there. Carlos's mother who works as a janitor got injured at work and is currently on sick leave. Though sharing housing and other costs eases things financially, five people living in a two bedroom apartment makes it extremely crowded and is leading to family tensions. This is the everyday experience of the young Bolivar family 'working rough living poor.'

<sup>14</sup> Pseudo-names used to protect confidentiality of participants. See full report for complete version of the case story.

# **Recommendations: Pathways to Good Jobs for all**



Results from our study indicate that racialized immigrants get pushed into precarious job trajectory soon after they come to Canada, and end up getting stuck in the worst forms of precarious employment conditions. Canada cannot become a nation where immigrant families come just to do “dirty work” and become poor and sick. This literally makes Canada an unhealthy nation. Each aspiring immigrant family streamed into a precarious employment pathway is one too many. There is an urgent need to reverse this trend. We need to rebuild Canada as a great nation of opportunities, good jobs and prosperity for all, not just for dominant groups and wealthy immigrants.

As discussed in the report findings, there are deep structural barriers preventing immigrant families from getting good jobs. However, all of the socio-economic factors that lead to precarious jobs and poor health are modifiable. To overcome these deep structural barriers and inequalities, we need bold actions and solutions geared at catalyzing system level change. Crucially, we need to mobilize important reforms in our policies related to labour market, immigration and social programs.

## **1. Building an equitable labour market**

First, we need a number of urgent reforms related to labour market policies in order to make it more equitable, to stop the rise of precarious jobs, and promote safer and better workplace conditions. This will benefit all Canadian workers, but particularly immigrant workers. In line with recommendations put forth by Law Commission of Ontario, Workers Action Centre and Color of Poverty, we call for the following policy solutions/actions:

- i. Re-introduce the employment equity legislation in Ontario (and in other provinces). Reinstating employment equity legislation at the provincial levels will be the single most important step in promoting good jobs for racialized Canadians and in

- overcoming persistent racialized inequalities in Canada.
- ii. Introduce comprehensive workplace anti-discrimination legislation that ensures that all workplaces have accessible and proactive anti-discrimination policies (in terms of hiring, promotions, pay and treatment of employees). Anti-discrimination legislation needs to be applied to accreditation and recertification bodies as well to stop these agencies from creating unnecessary barriers for qualified immigrant professionals.
- iii. Ensure more effective enforcement of Employment Standards regulations and Occupational Health and Safety regulations to promote safe exploitation-free work environments; extend these protections specifically for those in non-standard, non-unionized precarious work environment (see Law Commission Ontario’s report on Vulnerable Workers and Precarious Work for very concrete set of recommendations on this)
- iv. Expand Canada’s pay equity legislation to stop the widening pay inequities faced by racialized groups.
- v. Increase minimum wage rate periodically to account for inflation and introduce a Fair Wage and Benefits Policy to prevent ‘race to the bottom’ in terms of employee wage and benefits.
- vi. Introduce a Good Jobs Policy with concrete incentives and regulations to promote ‘race to top’ in creating good, stable types of jobs, even in times of recession and global competition.

Progressive businesses and community agencies can take leadership in implementing employment equity, pay equity, and anti-discrimination policies within their workplaces even when progressive government legislations are lacking.

## **2. Immigration as an engine for nation building**

Our immigration and settlement policies continue to be fundamentally based on outdated colonial rationality that instrumentally views immigrants as source for cheap, disposable labour to meet short-term labour market demands; a labour market that is highly discriminatory and increasingly marked by precarious types of employment. This is the heart of the problem. Using immigration purely as supply side labour market strategy is not just problematic in an ethical sense, it also does not work. Labour market trends and needs are marked by high degree of imperfect information that market-driven immigration policies cannot overcome. The current government is making things worse by making immigration even more restrictive for those who want to settle here and by expanding the influx of temporary foreign workers.

Instead, we need to shift to a *humanist policy vision* on immigration which sees immigrants as an *engine for nation-building, and for promoting global equity*. Immigration/immigrants should become agents and catalysts for the nation we want to create, not just for meeting labour market needs. To quote Kwame McKenzie “workers can build an industry, but people build a country.” We need to start treating immigrants as people and nation builders.

Immigration needs to become inclusive and empowering in ways that welcome aspiring immigrants with diverse knowledge and skills, including those from marginalized backgrounds. We then need to develop a battery of services and supports that can effectively recognize and utilize the diverse knowledge and skills to make our labour market, economy and our society more innovative and dynamic.

Settlement services should not just be about helping immigrants access and navigate services. Rather, settlement sector needs to take a leadership role in reshaping services and Canadian society to better respond to the needs and potentials of diverse immigrants. This involves taking proactive role to orient/train other sectors to become not just immigrant-friendly but immigrant-driven. It involves taking bold actions to overcome the deep

structures of discrimination and disadvantages facing immigrants from racialized backgrounds.

Settlement sector needs to build stronger links with the educational sector (universities, colleges and training institutes) to ensure that effective educational and training programs are accessible to marginalized newcomers. We need to promote collaboration between education, labor market, settlement and community sector to create innovative newcomer-friendly professional bridging programs, mentorship programs, paid internship programs, apprenticeship programs, and on-the-job learning programs that can lead to stable employment pathways. On-the-job English learning programs are essential to enable people with low education and limited English language proficiency to build better employment/career pathways.

We need to shift from employment/settlement services focused on making individual behavioral modifications of immigrant workers (e.g. reshuffling their resumes or Canadian workplace preparedness trainings) towards those that help to catalyze system level changes. For example, instead of simply giving immigrants a list of job vacancies, we need more job developers that can assess the quality and fit of jobs vacancies, and proactively link immigrants to good employers. Instead of accepting precarious jobs as a given reality for immigrant families, service providers need to work together with these families and their employers to negotiate for more job security, benefits and protections. We need employment and settlement counselors to proactively take action against discriminations and exploitations that their immigrant clients are facing in the labour market.

Importantly, immigrant families need to be trained and supported to use their rights to achieve and negotiate good jobs free of discrimination and exploitation.

We need to substantially expand professional mentorship and bridging programs in order to break the vicious cycle of limited/insular professional network among racialized families. Further, the key focus of employment and settlement programs should be to enable immigrant families to build strong and diverse professional and social networks and help them overcome social isolation and structural barriers to information, knowledge,



resources and opportunities. Promote bridging, networking, integration and mentorship programs that create positive relationships across occupations, class, race, social positions, geography and other divides. Doing so will link immigrants to successful people in their field, create longer term employment security (and not just one off opportunity for a decent job), and prevent insular labour chain supply into precarious jobs or racialized occupations.

We need to establish Canada as a great nation where even the most marginalized immigrants can get good jobs, achieve prosperity and contribute actively to nation building. Canada needs to meaningfully draw on the diverse knowledge and aspirations of immigrants to build healthier labor market, and become a global leader in driving innovation and in promoting global equity.

Take, for example, the immigrant woman from Egypt (Hanem from the Omar family) with a degree in Islamic studies who is currently stuck doing occasional babysitting and catering work out of her home. Imagine if we can proactively create professional work opportunity for her to achieve her aspiration to teach about Muslim faith and culture to our children and to be a community educator against Islamophobia. That will definitely make us a better, healthier nation.

## **1. Empowering Social Programs**

Social programs (education, housing, childcare etc.), healthcare services and social safety nets (Employment Insurance, Ontario Works, tax system, and other government transfers) should not just be about alleviating the negative impacts of a highly unequal labour market. Instead, they need to be catalysts for promoting equity in ways that transform labour market and economic spheres towards more progressive directions. These services need to become drivers for breaking viscous cycles of poverty and precarious employment, for overcoming deep inequalities, and for empowering the most marginalized people to achieve prosperity. As noted in this report, poverty, income insecurity and income inequality are key factors that stream

people into precarious jobs, over generations. Specifically, it allows companies/employers to create and sustain non-standard, low-paying bad jobs since they see that there are always going to be marginalized people ready to take these precarious jobs. Leaders within social services sector need to take bold action to break this vicious cycle.

Affordable and accessible education, housing and daycare are essential in promoting good jobs and economic prosperity for all

Employment insurance and social assistance programs need to be expanded and made more empowering with strong supports and linkages to stable employment/career pathways. Excessive restrictions and unfair claw backs should be removed from these programs to avoid forcing people into hastily taking up bad jobs. Expanding progressive tax instruments (tax breaks and rebates for low-income families) and introducing guaranteed income supplement for working families are vital in bridging income inequalities and in promoting economic prosperity of hard working low income families.

Healthcare practitioners need to proactively identify and talk about the damaging health impacts from precarious jobs and work with clients to find immediate and long-term solutions. Moreover, healthcare practitioners need to become champions for good jobs and economic wellbeing for all.

We need to establish Canada as a great nation founded on good jobs, progressive immigration policies, equitable and healthy workforce, transformative social programs, and good health for all. Doing this requires strong policy environment and incentives to promote a 'race to the top' in terms of workforce diversity, working conditions, wages, and employee benefits, health and equity. The problems we face are deep and severe. However, citizen advocacy to make government accountable and seamless inter-disciplinary collaboration between settlement, education, health, community agencies, and private sector can catalyze bold and workable solutions.

## Solutions Mapping Tool

For each family, list the key barriers they face in getting a good job that match their career goals and aspirations. Then identify concrete solutions that can enable them to overcome these barriers and get stable employment.

Family Name and their Goals	Barriers they face to good jobs	Solutions for Individual Family	Crosscutting solutions

## Solutions Mapping Tool

Family Name and their Goals	Barriers they face to good jobs	Solutions for Individual Family	Crosscutting solutions

List below three actions you or your agency plan to take, and the timeline for taking action.

1.

2.

3.

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