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Table of contents

Summary	5
Introduction.....	6
Defining skill levels	7
The skill level of jobs held by immigrants	8
All adult immigrants	8
Recent immigrants.....	9
Differences between men and women	13
Variation by immigrant class.....	14
Formal educational attainment and the skill level of the job held	15
Immigrant groups that provide the most lower or higher skilled labour to the labour market	31
Summary and Discussion	39
Summary of findings	39
Discussion.....	40
Why do some university-educated immigrants hold lower skill jobs?.....	43
References	45
Appendix A: List of the occupational major groups included at each skill level.....	47

Summary

The extent to which immigration should be oriented towards filling higher or lower skilled jobs in the Canadian economy is garnering increased attention. In particular, some COVID-19 induced labour market conditions, including increased difficulties filling jobs in some industries and occupations, are driving the debate. Specifically, there is discussion regarding the possibility of increasing lower skilled immigration by altering the economic class selection system. This study aims to inform this discussion by examining the current contribution of immigrants to higher and lower skilled labour in the Canadian labour market. While information on the educational attainment of immigrants is readily available, as is that on the intended occupation for a small share of immigrants, these type of data are not a good indication of the kinds of jobs filled by immigrants. Little is known regarding the extent to which immigrants actually fill higher or lower skilled jobs. This paper addresses that shortcoming. Before contemplating any significant shifts in immigrant selection, it is useful to know the role currently played by immigrants in the Canadian labour market.

The analysis is based on the integrated 2016 Census and Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB) and focusses on the occupational skill outcomes of employed immigrants aged 20 to 64 in 2016. For this study, occupations at National Occupational Classification (NOC) levels O, A and B are considered to be higher skilled, while those at levels C and D are considered to be lower skilled.

Findings show that in 2016, immigrants were slightly more likely to fill lower skilled jobs (40%) than were their Canadian-born counterparts (36%). By category of admission, almost one-third (31%) of economic principal applicants (PA) and 37% of economic spouses and dependants (SD) contributed to lower skilled employment. This tendency towards lower skilled employment is particularly strong among provincial nominees; 40% of recent immigrants (in Canada for five years or less) entering via that program were in lower skilled jobs. Among all adult employed immigrants who landed as refugees or family class, roughly 50% were in lower skilled jobs and 50% were in higher skilled employment. Most of the higher skilled jobs held by refugee and family class immigrants were NOC B trades and technical jobs, whereas the economic class immigrants were more evenly distributed between NOC B and NOC A professional jobs.

The correlation between formal educational attainment and holding a higher or lower skilled job is not as high as might be expected, whether among the Canadian-born or immigrants. For more highly educated immigrants, country of education is one of the best predictors of their economic outcomes. Most of the difference between Canadian-born and immigrants in the tendency to fill lower skilled jobs was accounted for by immigrants whose highest level of education was received in countries other than developed English-speaking /Northern/Western European countries.

Overall, the results of this analysis show that the immigration system currently represents a significant share of lower skilled labour in Canada, more than half of it currently coming through the economic class. These results raise two issues that are discussed in the conclusion. First, if the balance between lower and higher skilled immigrants is to be altered, what factors should be considered? Second, are a significant number of lower skilled jobs filled by highly educated immigrants, and if so, why?

Introduction

There is presently considerable debate regarding the extent to which immigration should be oriented towards filling higher or lower skilled jobs in the Canadian economy (e.g., Alboim, Cohl, and Pham 2021; Banerjee and Hiebert 2021; Esses, McRae, et al. 2021; Alboim and Cohl 2020). This discussion has garnered increased attention during the present COVID-19 pandemic as the focus has shifted to those who are referred to as “essential workers”, and who are often considered lower skilled. Traditionally, economic immigrants in particular have been selected based on a “human capital model”, which orients immigration towards higher educated individuals.¹ However, not all economic immigrants occupy higher skilled jobs. For some, their education and training is oriented towards intermediate or lower skilled jobs. In addition, a few highly educated economic immigrants end up as intermediate or lower skilled workers. This outcome may occur for several reasons, including for example, foreign credential recognition issues or deficiencies in skills relevant for the Canadian labour market.² This particular issue is discussed in more detail in the conclusion. Family class immigrants and refugees are not selected based on their human capital and, with lower educational levels on average, are more likely to enter intermediate or lower skilled jobs, although many also likely enter higher skilled occupations.

While information on the educational attainment of immigrants is readily available, as is that on the intended occupation for a small share of immigrants, these type of data are not a good indication of the kinds of jobs filled by immigrants. Little is known regarding the extent to which immigrants actually fill higher or lower skilled jobs. This paper addresses that shortcoming. Before contemplating any significant shifts in immigrant selection, it is useful to know the role currently played by immigrants in the Canadian labour market.

This report relies on the integrated 2016 Census and Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB) to examine occupational skill outcomes of immigrants.³ The focus is on the occupational skill distribution among employed workers aged 20 to 64 in 2016. The skill levels are based on the definitions imbedded in the National Occupational Classification (NOC), specifically NOC skill levels O, A, B, C and D, defined below. The focus is on examining the skill levels of the jobs held by immigrant men and women, immigrants in different immigrant classes (economic, family, and refugee), with different levels of educational attainment, and educated in different source regions. Comparisons of these outcomes are made with the types of jobs held by Canadian-born workers. Two issues raised by the results are discussed in the conclusion.

¹ Per discussion in Picot, Hou and Qiu 2016.

² For instance, this could be with respect to either (1) hard skills (e.g., competencies that employees possess such as numeracy, literacy, fluency in a foreign language, and specific job-related technical abilities (operating a machine, creating a spreadsheet, touch-typing, driving, dressing a wound, and so forth); typically these skills are relatively easy to measure, and are often validated with some form of qualification); and / or (2) soft skills (e.g., competencies that employees possess associated with activities such as customer handling, communication, problem-solving, and team-working). [Definitions source: Oxford Reference](#) online, accessed January 14, 2022.

³ The data are from a linked 2016 Census-IMDB file. The immigrant class variable is from the IMDB. This information is known only for immigrants who entered Canada since 1980. All other variables are from the census and are available for all immigrants.

Defining skill levels

The 2016 Census provides information on the job held by each respondent during the reference week in May 2016. Based on the 2016 National Occupational Classification (NOC) system, each job is assigned a four digit occupational code. The NOC has established skill levels for each occupation, based primarily on the education and training required to do the job. The NOC skill levels include:

- NOC O: management occupations including legislators.
- NOC A: professional occupations requiring a university degree, either a BA, MA, or PhD.
- NOC B: occupations requiring 2 to 3 years of postsecondary education at a college or technology school, or requiring 2 to 5 years of apprenticeship training, or 3 or 4 years of secondary school plus at least 2 years of on-the-job training.
- NOC C: occupations requiring at least 3 or 4 years of secondary school and short duration on-the-job training.
- NOC D: occupations with no formal educational requirement and some limited on-the-job training.

In this paper, occupations at NOC levels O, A and B are considered to be higher skilled, those at levels C and D lower skilled. See the appendix for a detailed list of the occupational major groups included at each skill level.

The skill level of jobs held by immigrants

All adult immigrants

Overall, in 2016, employed immigrants aged 20 to 64 demonstrated roughly the same tendency to fill lower and higher skilled jobs as their Canadian-born counterparts.⁴ Among all immigrants, 60% were in higher skilled jobs (NOC O, A, or B) and 40% in lower skilled (NOC C or D) occupations. Among the Canadian-born, the comparable numbers were 64% and 36% respectively.⁵ In terms of the types of jobs filled, immigrants were marginally more likely than the Canadian-born to be filling professional jobs (NOC A), less skilled jobs requiring some secondary school (NOC C), and unskilled jobs with no formal educational requirements (NOC D). Immigrants were less likely than the Canadian-born to be in skilled jobs requiring college or apprenticeship training, such as the trades and technical jobs (NOC B), as well as to be in management positions (NOC O).

Table 1a: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among all employed workers aged 20 to 64, 2016

Immigration status		Estimated population	Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	
Non-immigrants*		11,698,700	1,409,300	2,212,800	3,908,400	3,061,700	1,106,500	
All immigrants	Immigrants admitted before 1980	492,100	74,500	102,000	152,000	124,100	39,500	
	Immigrants admitted since 1980	Economic immigrants - PA	913,100	110,700	272,300	244,300	214,100	71,700
		Economic immigrants - SD	902,100	93,800	222,300	250,000	237,700	98,300
		Family class	992,100	88,000	135,300	276,600	338,900	153,300
		Refugees	474,900	37,800	58,400	138,100	160,300	80,300
		Other immigrants~	34,100	3,100	4,200	9,600	11,500	5,700
Total - Immigrants admitted since 1980	3,316,400	333,500	692,500	918,600	962,500	409,300		
Total - All immigrants		3,808,400	408,000	794,500	1,070,600	1,086,600	448,700	
Non-permanent residents**		232,600	19,200	55,600	60,200	63,800	33,800	
Total		15,739,800	1,836,500	3,062,900	5,039,200	4,212,100	1,589,100	

*Canadian citizens by birth

**Includes persons from another country who have a work or study permit or who are refugee claimants.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

⁴ Persons who are 'Canadian citizens by birth' are referred to as 'non-immigrants' in the Tables. The term 'Canadian-born' is used throughout this analysis to refer to non-immigrants.

⁵ These distributions are a little different from what might be expected based on educational attainment. Among employed individuals aged 20 to 64 in 2016, 36% of immigrants had a high school education or less, compared to 46% of the Canadian-born. Regarding those more likely to find themselves in higher skilled jobs, 64% of immigrants had at least some postsecondary education, compared to 54% of the Canadian-born. It is well known that some degrees held by immigrants, particularly those from non-Western countries, are not as portable to the Canadian labour market as are degrees from Canada or other Western countries. The possible reasons for this outcome are discussed in the conclusion.

Table 1b: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among all employed workers aged 20 to 64, 2016 (by percentage)

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	Higher skilled (O, A, B)	Lower skilled (C, D)	
Non-immigrants*		12.0%	18.9%	33.4%	26.2%	9.5%	64.4%	35.6%	
All immigrants	Immigrants admitted before 1980	15.1%	20.7%	30.9%	25.2%	8.0%	66.8%	33.2%	
	Immigrants admitted since 1980	Economic immigrants - PA	12.1%	29.8%	26.8%	23.4%	7.8%	68.7%	31.3%
		Economic immigrants - SD	10.4%	24.6%	27.7%	26.3%	10.9%	62.8%	37.2%
		Family class	8.9%	13.6%	27.9%	34.2%	15.4%	50.4%	49.6%
		Refugees	8.0%	12.3%	29.1%	33.8%	16.9%	49.3%	50.7%
		Other immigrants~	9.2%	12.2%	28.1%	33.7%	16.8%	49.5%	50.5%
Total - Immigrants admitted since 1980	10.1%	20.9%	27.7%	29.0%	12.3%	58.6%	41.4%		
Total - All immigrants		10.7%	20.9%	28.1%	28.5%	11.8%	59.7%	40.3%	
Non-permanent residents**		8.3%	23.9%	25.9%	27.4%	14.5%	58.0%	42.0%	
Total		11.7%	19.5%	32.0%	26.8%	10.1%	63.1%	36.9%	

*Canadian citizens by birth

**Includes persons from another country who have a work or study permit or who are refugee claimants.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

The result is that immigrants played a significant role in the labour market at all skill levels, with, if anything, a slightly higher tendency of immigrants to be in lower skilled jobs. Immigrants aged 20 to 64 accounted for one-quarter (24%) of all employment in 2016. There was some variation by skill level. A high of 28% of very low skilled jobs (NOC D) were filled by immigrants, with a low of 21% among skilled trades and technical jobs (NOC B). About one-quarter (26% each) of professional (NOC A) and lower skilled (NOC C) jobs were filled by immigrants.

Overall, in terms of their distribution in occupational skill levels, immigrants are not considerably different than the Canadian-born. Of course, this is a very high-level view of skills and jobs. Immigrants no doubt fill particular niches and types of specific occupations, as do the Canadian-born. This paper presents a broad overview of occupational skill levels.

Recent immigrants

Perhaps not surprisingly, recent immigrants (in Canada for five years or less) are more likely to be in a lower skilled job. Almost one-half of recent immigrants (48%) were occupying lower skilled jobs in 2016. There may be many reasons for this result. Some recent immigrants have difficulty locating appropriate employment during the first few years in Canada.⁶ However, there was significant variation by immigrant class. Principal applicants entering under the Federal Skilled Worker Program (FSWP), Canadian Experience Class (CEC)⁷, and Quebec Skilled Worker Program (QSWP), were less likely to be in lower skilled jobs than the Canadian-born (28%, 15%, and 33% respectively, compared to 36% among the Canadian-born).

Economic principal applicants (PA) entering under provincial nominee programs, “other” programs (mostly caregivers), as well as spouses and dependants (SD) of economic PA, the family class and refugees all had higher rates of lower skilled employment than the Canadian-born (ranging from 40% to 72%). Among

⁶ This negative entry effect is mostly attributed to recent immigrants' lack of human capital specific to the domestic labour market (e.g. language skills, education and training, work experience, etc.). Labour market outcomes typically improve with more years since immigration, as the period of time spent in Canada increases, immigrants add to their foreign human capital by acquiring domestic labour market knowledge and skills.

⁷ The Canadian Experience Class (CEC) was implemented in September 2008, but no immigrants were admitted under this class in that year – 2009 is the starting year for this category.

longer-term immigrants (in Canada for 10 years or more), 61% held higher skilled jobs and 39% held lower skilled jobs in 2016.

Table 2a: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed recent immigrants (in Canada for 1 to 5 years) and aged 20 to 64 by gender, 2016

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D
All	Federal skilled workers - PA	5,900	20,200	12,900	11,600	3,200
	Canadian experience - PA	4,800	12,000	8,900	3,300	1,100
	Provincial Nominee Program - PA	6,800	13,000	19,600	18,200	8,100
	Quebec skilled workers - PA	3,700	14,700	12,800	11,300	3,900
	Other economic class - PA*	2,300	1,600	4,900	16,700	6,200
	Economic class - SD	8,200	18,700	30,600	40,700	28,300
	Family class	9,100	15,100	34,100	44,200	28,100
	Refugees	1,400	1,900	8,900	12,900	11,400
	Other immigrants~	400	400	1,900	2,800	1,700
	Total	42,700	97,600	134,600	161,700	92,200
Men	Federal skilled workers - PA	4,500	13,900	8,100	6,900	1,800
	Canadian experience - PA	3,400	8,700	5,900	1,900	700
	Provincial Nominee Program - PA	4,800	8,600	14,400	11,400	4,400
	Quebec skilled workers - PA	2,500	9,300	7,900	6,500	2,600
	Other economic class - PA*	1,600	700	1,500	1,200	500
	Economic class - SD	4,400	7,900	14,500	20,100	13,500
	Family class	5,600	7,200	19,900	22,700	13,100
	Refugees	1,000	1,000	6,100	7,800	6,200
	Other immigrants~	300	200	1,200	1,300	700
	Total	28,100	57,500	79,500	79,800	43,600
Women	Federal skilled workers - PA	1,400	6,300	4,800	4,700	1,400
	Canadian experience - PA	1,500	3,300	3,000	1,400	400
	Provincial Nominee Program - PA	2,000	4,500	5,300	6,800	3,700
	Quebec skilled workers - PA	1,200	5,300	4,900	4,800	1,300
	Other economic class - PA*	700	900	3,400	15,500	5,700
	Economic class - SD	3,800	10,800	16,100	20,600	14,800
	Family class	3,600	7,900	14,200	21,500	15,000
	Refugees	300	900	2,700	5,100	5,200
	Other immigrants~	100	200	700	1,500	1,000
	Total	14,600	40,100	55,100	81,800	48,500

*Mostly in caregiver programs.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 2b: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed recent immigrants (in Canada for 1 to 5 years) aged 20 to 64 by gender, 2016 (by percentage)

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	Higher skilled (O, A, B)	Lower skilled (C, D)
All	Federal skilled workers - PA	10.9%	37.6%	23.9%	21.6%	6.0%	72.4%	27.6%
	Canadian experience - PA	16.0%	39.8%	29.5%	10.9%	3.8%	85.3%	14.7%
	Provincial Nominee Program - PA	10.4%	19.8%	29.9%	27.6%	12.3%	60.1%	39.9%
	Quebec skilled workers - PA	8.0%	31.7%	27.6%	24.4%	8.4%	67.2%	32.8%
	Other economic class - PA*	7.3%	5.0%	15.5%	52.7%	19.6%	27.8%	72.2%
	Economic class - SD	6.5%	14.8%	24.2%	32.2%	22.4%	45.5%	54.5%
	Family class	7.0%	11.6%	26.1%	33.8%	21.5%	44.6%	55.4%
	Refugees	3.7%	5.2%	24.4%	35.4%	31.3%	33.3%	66.7%
	Other immigrants~	5.4%	5.0%	26.8%	39.2%	23.6%	37.2%	62.8%
	Total	8.1%	18.5%	25.5%	30.6%	17.4%	52.0%	48.0%
Men	Federal skilled workers - PA	12.8%	39.5%	23.0%	19.6%	5.2%	75.3%	24.7%
	Canadian experience - PA	16.3%	42.1%	28.9%	9.1%	3.6%	87.2%	12.8%
	Provincial Nominee Program - PA	11.1%	19.7%	32.9%	26.2%	10.1%	63.7%	36.3%
	Quebec skilled workers - PA	8.7%	32.3%	27.4%	22.6%	9.0%	68.4%	31.6%
	Other economic class - PA*	29.1%	12.7%	27.3%	21.8%	9.1%	69.1%	30.9%
	Economic class - SD	7.3%	13.1%	24.0%	33.3%	22.4%	44.4%	55.6%
	Family class	8.1%	10.5%	29.0%	33.2%	19.1%	47.7%	52.3%
	Refugees	4.5%	4.5%	27.6%	35.2%	28.1%	36.7%	63.3%
	Other immigrants~	7.0%	5.1%	32.8%	36.0%	19.1%	45.0%	55.0%
	Total	9.7%	19.9%	27.6%	27.7%	15.1%	57.2%	42.8%
Women	Federal skilled workers - PA	7.3%	34.0%	25.6%	25.3%	7.7%	67.0%	33.0%
	Canadian experience - PA	15.4%	34.8%	30.9%	14.8%	4.1%	81.1%	18.9%
	Provincial Nominee Program - PA	9.0%	20.2%	23.8%	30.5%	16.5%	53.0%	47.0%
	Quebec skilled workers - PA	6.9%	30.3%	28.0%	27.4%	7.4%	65.1%	34.9%
	Other economic class - PA*	2.7%	3.4%	13.0%	59.2%	21.8%	19.1%	80.9%
	Economic class - SD	5.7%	16.3%	24.4%	31.2%	22.4%	46.4%	53.6%
	Family class	5.7%	12.8%	22.8%	34.5%	24.2%	41.3%	58.7%
	Refugees	2.4%	6.1%	19.3%	35.6%	36.5%	27.9%	72.1%
	Other immigrants~	3.7%	4.8%	20.5%	42.6%	28.4%	29.0%	71.0%
	Total	6.1%	16.7%	22.9%	34.1%	20.2%	45.7%	54.3%

*Mostly in caregiver programs.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 3a: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed immigrants aged 20 to 64 by gender, and who arrived 10 to 35 years ago, 2016

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D
All	Economic immigrants - PA	66,600	154,900	135,200	109,000	34,200
	Economic immigrants - SD	75,100	179,600	183,200	156,200	49,500
	Family class	68,200	102,300	205,600	249,000	101,600
	Refugees	34,300	53,500	117,600	131,700	56,700
	Other immigrants~	2,200	3,300	5,500	5,800	2,400
	Total	246,300	493,700	647,100	651,600	244,400
Men	Economic immigrants - PA	51,700	106,700	90,200	58,500	18,100
	Economic immigrants - SD	37,900	74,300	79,100	60,200	20,200
	Family class	37,900	40,000	104,000	112,300	39,200
	Refugees	23,000	26,800	73,400	76,400	29,700
	Other immigrants~	1,400	1,700	3,200	3,000	1,200
	Total	151,800	249,300	350,100	310,400	108,300
Women	Economic immigrants - PA	14,900	48,200	45,000	50,500	16,100
	Economic immigrants - SD	37,200	105,300	104,000	96,000	29,300
	Family class	30,300	62,400	101,600	136,700	62,400
	Refugees	11,300	26,800	44,200	55,300	27,000
	Other immigrants~	800	1,600	2,200	2,800	1,200
	Total	94,600	244,300	297,000	341,300	136,100

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.
Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 3b: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed immigrants aged 20 to 64 by gender, and who arrived 10 to 35 years ago, 2016 (by percentage)

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	Higher skilled (O, A, B)	Lower skilled (C, D)
All	Economic immigrants - PA	13.3%	31.0%	27.1%	21.8%	6.8%	71.4%	28.6%
	Economic immigrants - SD	11.7%	27.9%	28.5%	24.3%	7.7%	68.0%	32.0%
	Family class	9.4%	14.1%	28.3%	34.3%	14.0%	51.8%	48.2%
	Refugees	8.7%	13.6%	29.9%	33.4%	14.4%	52.2%	47.8%
	Other immigrants~	11.4%	17.3%	28.6%	30.2%	12.4%	57.4%	42.6%
	Total	10.8%	21.6%	28.3%	28.5%	10.7%	60.8%	39.2%
Men	Economic immigrants - PA	15.9%	32.8%	27.8%	18.0%	5.6%	76.4%	23.6%
	Economic immigrants - SD	13.9%	27.3%	29.1%	22.2%	7.4%	70.4%	29.6%
	Family class	11.4%	12.0%	31.2%	33.7%	11.8%	54.6%	45.4%
	Refugees	10.0%	11.7%	32.0%	33.3%	12.9%	53.7%	46.3%
	Other immigrants~	13.0%	16.1%	31.0%	28.7%	11.1%	60.2%	39.8%
	Total	13.0%	21.3%	29.9%	26.5%	9.3%	64.2%	35.8%
Women	Economic immigrants - PA	8.5%	27.6%	25.8%	28.9%	9.2%	61.9%	38.1%
	Economic immigrants - SD	10.0%	28.3%	28.0%	25.8%	7.9%	66.3%	33.7%
	Family class	7.7%	15.9%	25.8%	34.8%	15.9%	49.4%	50.6%
	Refugees	6.9%	16.3%	26.8%	33.6%	16.4%	50.0%	50.0%
	Other immigrants~	9.5%	18.7%	25.8%	32.1%	13.9%	54.0%	46.0%
	Total	8.5%	21.9%	26.7%	30.7%	12.2%	57.1%	42.9%

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.
Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Differences between men and women

Among both immigrants and the Canadian-born, women are marginally more likely to be in lower skilled jobs than men, although the difference is not great. Again, this is at an aggregate level, and a focus on specific occupations would no doubt indicate a clustering of women in particular types of lower skilled occupations, and men in others. However, the focus of this analysis is on the contribution of immigrants to lower and higher skilled jobs in general. Among immigrants, 37% of men and 44% of women occupied a lower skilled job in 2016. This difference was largely due to a higher proportion of women filling NOC C jobs, those with somewhat higher skill requirements in the lower skill category. These numbers are somewhat higher than those observed for the Canadian-born, where 34% of men and 37% of women held lower skilled jobs. While a similar pattern was evident among recent immigrants, the proportion with lower skilled jobs was, not surprisingly, higher (43% of men and 54% of women held lower skilled jobs).

Table 4a: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed workers aged 20 to 64, by men and immigration status, 2016 (by percentage)

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	Higher skilled (O, A, B)	Lower skilled (C, D)	
Non-immigrants*		14.4%	15.1%	36.1%	24.1%	10.4%	65.6%	34.4%	
All immigrants	Immigrants admitted before 1980	18.3%	19.3%	32.3%	22.5%	7.6%	69.9%	30.1%	
	Immigrants admitted since 1980	Economic immigrants - PA	14.7%	32.3%	27.9%	18.9%	6.2%	74.9%	25.1%
		Economic immigrants - SD	12.2%	23.5%	28.1%	25.2%	11.0%	63.8%	36.2%
		Family class	10.6%	11.7%	30.7%	33.6%	13.4%	53.1%	47.0%
		Refugees	9.2%	10.6%	31.4%	33.6%	15.2%	51.2%	48.8%
		Other immigrants~	10.9%	11.3%	31.7%	31.5%	14.7%	53.9%	46.1%
Total - Immigrants admitted since 1980	12.1%	21.0%	29.3%	26.8%	10.8%	62.4%	37.6%		
Total - All immigrants		12.9%	20.8%	29.7%	26.3%	10.4%	63.4%	36.6%	
Non-permanent residents**		9.9%	26.6%	28.5%	21.5%	13.5%	65.0%	35.0%	
Total		15.0%	17.9%	37.0%	26.4%	3.8%	69.8%	30.2%	

*Canadian citizens by birth

**Includes persons from another country who have a work or study permit or who are refugee claimants.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 4b: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed workers aged 20 to 64, by women and immigration status, 2016 (by percentage)

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	Higher skilled (O, A, B)	Lower skilled (C, D)	
Non-immigrants*		9.6%	22.9%	30.6%	28.4%	8.5%	63.1%	36.9%	
All immigrants	Immigrants admitted before 1980	11.8%	22.3%	29.4%	28.1%	8.4%	63.4%	36.6%	
	Immigrants admitted since 1980	Economic immigrants - PA	7.9%	25.8%	24.8%	31.0%	10.6%	58.5%	41.5%
		Economic immigrants - SD	9.0%	25.5%	27.4%	27.2%	10.8%	62.0%	38.0%
		Family class	7.3%	15.4%	25.3%	34.7%	17.3%	48.0%	52.0%
		Refugees	6.2%	14.7%	25.8%	34.0%	19.3%	46.7%	53.3%
		Other immigrants~	7.3%	13.2%	23.9%	36.3%	19.3%	44.4%	55.6%
Total - Immigrants admitted since 1980	7.9%	20.8%	25.9%	31.4%	14.0%	54.6%	45.4%		
Total - All immigrants		8.4%	20.9%	26.4%	31.0%	13.3%	55.7%	44.3%	
Non-permanent residents**		6.1%	20.5%	22.6%	34.9%	15.9%	49.2%	50.8%	
Total		9.3%	22.4%	29.5%	29.1%	9.8%	61.2%	38.8%	

*Canadian citizens by birth

**Includes persons from another country who have a work or study permit or who are refugee claimants.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Variation by immigrant class

There is significant variation in the utilization of immigrants by occupational skill level, depending on their immigrant class. When generalizing, one often thinks of economic immigrants, particularly principal applicants, as highly educated and hence filling higher skilled jobs. In contrast, family class immigrants are likely seen as a combination of lower and higher skilled, and refugees as more likely on the lower end of the skill spectrum.

The census data suggest a somewhat different picture. Employed economic immigrants aged 20 to 64 were as likely as the Canadian-born to be in a higher or lower skilled job. In 2016, 34% of all immigrants landing via the economic category (including principal applicants, spouses, and dependants, and in Canada since 1980⁸) were contributing to employment in lower skill jobs, 66% to higher skilled jobs.⁹ The split for the Canadian-born is virtually the same (Table 1). As expected, a somewhat higher share of principal applicants held higher skilled jobs (69%). However, a significant share of economic immigrants fill lower skilled jobs. Even among longer-term economic immigrants who have been in Canada for over 10 years, 31% were in lower skilled jobs (Table 3) (29% among longer-term economic principal applicants and 32% among longer-term economic spouses and dependants). A recent policy paper by Banerjee and Hiebert (2021) recommended that 10% to 20% of economic immigrants - notably principal applicants - should be lower skilled (NOC C or D) to help meet the demand for lower skilled workers in Canada. However, one-third of economic principal applicants already fill lower skilled jobs. There may be a number of reasons for this occupational outcome. These reasons are discussed in the summary and discussion section below.

Among all adult employed immigrants¹⁰ who landed as refugees or family class, roughly 50% were in lower skilled jobs in 2016, and 50% were in higher skilled, mainly NOC B, employment (Table 1). These two classes contribute significantly to higher skilled employment in Canada. Most of the higher skilled jobs held by refugee and family class immigrants were NOC B skilled trades/technical jobs (close to 30% each), with fewer in NOC A professional jobs (less than 15%), whereas those in the economic class were more similarly distributed between NOC A and B jobs (at about 30% each).

Part of the reason for the relatively high contribution to lower skilled labour among the economic class relates to the pattern observed among the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP). Since this program had been in existence for a relatively short while at the time of the 2016 census¹¹, the focus here is on the outcome of “recent” economic immigrants (in Canada for five years or less). Only 20% of the economic principal applicants (recent immigrants) selected via the PNP occupied professional jobs at NOC skill level A, compared to almost 40% among those who entered via the Federal Skilled Worker Program (FSWP) or the Canadian Experience Class (CEC) (Table 2). The other significant difference between the PNP and principal applicants in other economic programs was the share in lower skilled jobs; 40% of PNP entrants compared to 28% of FSWP and 15% of CEC entrants. Economic class spouses and dependants also had a relatively high likelihood of being in a lower skilled job as a recent immigrant, with over one-half doing so (55%) in 2016. Among recent immigrants, this roughly matches the outcomes for the family class (55% in lower skilled jobs); refugees had a much higher likelihood of being in lower skilled (two-thirds were in such jobs).

⁸ Immigrant class comes from the IMDB and is known only for immigrants entering Canada since 1980.

⁹ Calculations based on Table 1.

¹⁰ Immigrants entering Canada since 1980.

¹¹ Manitoba, New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador were the first provinces to start operating provincial nominee programs in 1999. This was followed by Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia (2001), Alberta and Yukon (2002), Nova Scotia (2003), Ontario (2007) and the Northwest Territories (2009) (CIC 2011).

Hence, while the majority of economic class immigrants hold a higher skilled job, a significant proportion contribute to lower skilled employment, even among longer-term economic immigrants. In particular, provincial nominees have a relatively high likelihood of filling lower skilled jobs. As expected, lower skilled employment is more prevalent among refugees and family class.

Formal educational attainment and the skill level of the job held

The correlation between educational attainment and holding a lower or higher skilled job was not as high as one might expect. Some postsecondary educated individuals, whether Canadian-born or immigrants, hold lower skilled jobs. Conversely, many high school educated individuals hold what are classified as higher skill level jobs. This is in part because some higher skilled jobs are based on apprenticeship or on-the-job training. For example, in 2016, among the employed Canadian-born aged 20 to 64 with a high school education or less, about one-half (49%) were in jobs classified as higher skilled and one-half in lower skilled jobs. Most were at either NOC B (higher skilled) or C (lower skilled). NOC B occupations includes, among other occupations, sales and service supervisors, manufacturing supervisors, bakers and other skilled trades (refer to the Appendix), many of which require high school education and at least two years of apprenticeship/on-the-job training.

Less educated immigrants – those with a high school education or less – were slightly more likely to hold a lower skilled job than their Canadian-born counterparts, at 59% compared to 51%.

Among individuals with some postsecondary education, which includes college/trade school completion or some uncompleted postsecondary education, the majority held a higher skilled job, as would be expected, but about one-third of the Canadian-born held a lower skilled job. Among immigrants, this number was 41%. While a significant proportion of university educated individuals held professional jobs at the NOC A level (53% of the Canadian-born and 41% of immigrants), a significant number still held lower skill jobs (12% of Canadian-born and 24% of immigrants were employed in NOC C and D occupations). Possible reasons for this outcome are discussed in the conclusion.

Recent immigrants were more likely to hold lower skilled jobs at any educational level than immigrants as a whole. In particular, almost one-half (48%) of university educated recent immigrants held a lower skilled job in 2016, compared with one-quarter of all university educated immigrants (Table 5, Table 6).

Country of education is one of the best predictors of the outcomes of more highly educated immigrants (Fortin et al 2016; Li and Sweetman 2014; Bratsberg and Terrell 2002; Friedberg 2000). The likelihood of holding a higher or lower skilled job, conditional on educational level, varies significantly depending on country of education. Immigrants whose highest level of education was received in Canada or in developed English-speaking/Northern/Western European countries¹² had patterns of lower and higher skilled employment very similar to Canadian-born individuals. Most of the difference between immigrants and the Canadian-born was concentrated among those immigrants whose highest level of education was received in countries other than developed English-speaking/Northern/Western European countries.

¹² Includes the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and countries in Northern and Western Europe.

Table 5a: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed workers aged 20 to 64, by education of high school or less, 2016

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	
Non-immigrants*		566,800	175,800	1,906,600	1,893,000	853,700	
All immigrants	Immigrants admitted before 1980	28,400	8,900	72,800	76,400	31,000	
	Immigrants admitted since 1980	Economic immigrants - PA	15,600	5,600	54,300	55,200	26,800
		Economic immigrants - SD	21,300	11,100	68,100	88,200	51,000
		Family class	33,900	10,500	129,400	195,500	111,100
		Refugees	16,800	4,900	69,800	98,900	62,000
		Other immigrants~	1,300	300	4,800	6,700	4,400
	Total - Immigrants admitted since 1980	89,000	32,400	326,300	444,500	255,300	
Total - All immigrants	117,400	41,300	399,100	520,900	286,300		
Non-permanent residents**		3,400	2,600	17,700	22,500	14,300	
Total		687,500	219,700	2,323,400	2,436,300	1,154,300	

*Canadian citizens by birth

**Includes persons from another country who have a work or study permit or who are refugee claimants.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 5b: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed workers aged 20 to 64, by education of high school or less, 2016 (by percentage)

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	Higher skilled (O, A, B)	Lower skilled (C, D)	
Non-immigrants*		10.5%	3.3%	35.3%	35.1%	15.8%	49.1%	50.9%	
All immigrants	Immigrants admitted before 1980	13.1%	4.1%	33.5%	35.1%	14.2%	50.6%	49.4%	
	Immigrants admitted since 1980	Economic immigrants - PA	9.9%	3.6%	34.5%	35.1%	17.0%	47.9%	52.1%
		Economic immigrants - SD	8.9%	4.6%	28.4%	36.8%	21.3%	41.9%	58.1%
		Family class	7.0%	2.2%	26.9%	40.7%	23.1%	36.2%	63.8%
		Refugees	6.7%	1.9%	27.6%	39.2%	24.6%	36.2%	63.8%
		Other immigrants~	7.3%	1.9%	27.5%	38.3%	25.1%	36.6%	63.4%
	Total - Immigrants admitted since 1980	7.8%	2.8%	28.4%	38.7%	22.2%	39.0%	61.0%	
Total - All immigrants	8.6%	3.0%	29.2%	38.2%	21.0%	40.9%	59.1%		
Non-permanent residents**		5.6%	4.4%	29.2%	37.2%	23.7%	39.2%	60.8%	
Total		10.1%	3.2%	34.1%	35.7%	16.9%	47.4%	52.6%	

*Canadian citizens by birth

**Includes persons from another country who have a work or study permit or who are refugee claimants.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 5c: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed workers aged 20 to 64, by education of some postsecondary education, 2016

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	
Non-immigrants*		371,500	428,600	1,433,100	858,000	196,300	
All immigrants	Immigrants admitted before 1980	19,800	22,100	54,100	35,200	6,600	
	Immigrants admitted since 1980	Economic immigrants - PA	18,400	21,900	60,400	53,400	16,400
		Economic immigrants - SD	20,300	24,300	75,100	62,800	20,800
		Family class	20,100	25,900	80,100	80,100	23,700
		Refugees	9,200	12,700	42,600	40,900	12,700
		Other immigrants~	700	800	2,700	2,800	900
	Total - Immigrants admitted since 1980	68,600	85,600	261,000	240,100	74,600	
Total - All immigrants	88,500	107,700	315,100	275,300	81,200		
Non-permanent residents**		3,400	3,700	15,100	15,100	6,700	
Total		463,300	540,000	1,763,200	1,148,400	284,200	

*Canadian citizens by birth

**Includes persons from another country who have a work or study permit or who are refugee claimants.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 5d: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed workers aged 20 to 64, by education of some postsecondary education, 2016 (by percentage)

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	Higher skilled (O, A, B)	Lower skilled (C, D)	
Non-immigrants*		11.3%	13.0%	43.6%	26.1%	6.0%	67.9%	32.1%	
All immigrants	Immigrants admitted before 1980	14.4%	16.0%	39.3%	25.5%	4.8%	69.7%	30.3%	
	Immigrants admitted since 1980	Economic immigrants - PA	10.8%	12.8%	35.4%	31.3%	9.6%	59.0%	41.0%
		Economic immigrants - SD	10.0%	12.0%	36.9%	30.9%	10.2%	58.9%	41.1%
		Family class	8.8%	11.3%	34.8%	34.8%	10.3%	54.9%	45.1%
		Refugees	7.8%	10.8%	36.0%	34.6%	10.8%	54.6%	45.4%
		Other immigrants~	8.7%	9.7%	34.5%	35.8%	11.2%	53.0%	47.0%
	Total - Immigrants admitted since 1980	9.4%	11.7%	35.8%	32.9%	10.2%	56.9%	43.1%	
Total - All immigrants	10.2%	12.4%	36.3%	31.7%	9.4%	58.9%	41.1%		
Non-permanent residents**		7.7%	8.4%	34.3%	34.4%	15.2%	50.4%	49.6%	
Total		11.0%	12.9%	42.0%	27.3%	6.8%	65.9%	34.1%	

*Canadian citizens by birth

**Includes persons from another country who have a work or study permit or who are refugee claimants.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 5e: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed workers aged 20 to 64, by education of a University degree, 2016

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	
Non-immigrants*		471,000	1,608,500	568,700	310,700	56,500	
All immigrants	Immigrants admitted before 1980	26,200	70,900	25,100	12,500	1,900	
	Immigrants admitted since 1980	Economic immigrants - PA	76,700	244,800	129,600	105,500	28,500
		Economic immigrants - SD	52,200	186,800	106,800	86,600	26,500
		Family class	34,000	98,900	67,200	63,400	18,500
		Refugees	11,800	40,800	25,700	20,500	5,500
		Other immigrants~	1,200	3,100	2,100	2,000	500
Total - Immigrants admitted since 1980	175,900	574,500	331,300	278,000	79,400		
Total - All immigrants		202,100	645,400	356,500	290,500	81,200	
Non-permanent residents**		12,500	49,200	27,500	26,300	12,800	
Total		685,700	2,303,100	952,700	627,400	150,600	

*Canadian citizens by birth

**Includes persons from another country who have a work or study permit or who are refugee claimants.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 5f: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed workers aged 20 to 64, by education of a University degree, 2016 (by percentage)

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	Higher skilled (O, A, B)	Lower skilled (C, D)	
Non-immigrants*		15.6%	53.3%	18.9%	10.3%	1.9%	87.8%	12.2%	
All immigrants	Immigrants admitted before 1980	19.2%	51.9%	18.4%	9.2%	1.4%	89.5%	10.5%	
	Immigrants admitted since 1980	Economic immigrants - PA	13.1%	41.8%	22.1%	18.0%	4.9%	77.1%	22.9%
		Economic immigrants - SD	11.4%	40.7%	23.3%	18.9%	5.8%	75.4%	24.6%
		Family class	12.1%	35.1%	23.8%	22.5%	6.5%	71.0%	29.0%
		Refugees	11.3%	39.1%	24.7%	19.6%	5.3%	75.1%	24.9%
		Other immigrants~	13.4%	34.9%	23.5%	22.8%	5.3%	71.9%	28.1%
Total - Immigrants admitted since 1980	12.2%	39.9%	23.0%	19.3%	5.5%	75.2%	24.8%		
Total - All immigrants		12.8%	41.0%	22.6%	18.4%	5.2%	76.4%	23.6%	
Non-permanent residents**		9.7%	38.4%	21.4%	20.5%	10.0%	69.5%	30.5%	
Total		14.5%	48.8%	20.2%	13.3%	3.2%	83.5%	16.5%	

*Canadian citizens by birth

**Includes persons from another country who have a work or study permit or who are refugee claimants.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 6a: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed recent immigrants (in Canada 1 to 5 years) aged 20 to 64, by education, 2016

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D
High school or less	Federal skilled workers - PA	170	160	1,010	680	330
	Canadian experience - PA	460	170	1,640	550	330
	Provincial Nominee Program - PA	1,040	160	5,850	4,190	2,070
	Quebec skilled workers - PA	299	267	2,109	2,609	1,397
	Other economic class - PA*	587	154	977	3,342	1,583
	Economic class - SD	1,640	1,080	8,280	13,020	12,820
	Family class	2,640	1,070	14,610	21,480	17,540
	Refugees	670	320	5,460	8,090	8,850
	Other immigrants~	170	80	1,170	1,720	1,310
Total	7,680	3,460	41,110	55,680	46,230	
Some postsecondary education	Federal skilled workers - PA	450	730	1,920	1,400	350
	Canadian experience - PA	860	860	2,550	950	260
	Provincial Nominee Program - PA	1,260	950	4,680	4,020	1,970
	Quebec skilled workers - PA	479	1,025	2,995	2,447	864
	Other economic class - PA*	455	330	1,508	5,412	1,905
	Economic class - SD	1,500	1,520	6,660	8,750	5,770
	Family class	1,780	1,620	7,200	9,090	4,640
	Refugees	310	400	1,820	2,700	1,580
	Other immigrants~	80	100	510	660	230
Total	7,190	7,530	29,840	35,420	17,550	
University degree	Federal skilled workers - PA	5,270	9,360	9,950	9,540	2,570
	Canadian experience - PA	3,500	960	4,710	1,800	540
	Provincial Nominee Program - PA	4,540	1,930	9,100	9,940	4,040
	Quebec skilled workers - PA	2,916	13,361	7,713	6,211	1,670
	Other economic class - PA*	1,267	1,134	2,408	7,983	2,740
	Economic class - SD	5,100	16,100	15,700	18,930	9,700
	Family class	4,710	2,450	12,240	13,630	5,960
	Refugees	380	1,160	1,610	2,120	1,010
	Other immigrants~	130	170	230	400	140
Total	27,810	16,640	63,670	70,550	28,370	

*Mostly in caregiver programs.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 6b: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed recent immigrants (in Canada 1 to 5 years) aged 20 to 64, by education, 2016 (by percentage)

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	Higher skilled (O, A, B)	Lower skilled (C, D)
High school or less	Federal skilled workers - PA	7.3%	6.8%	43.1%	28.8%	14.1%	57.1%	42.9%
	Canadian experience - PA	14.6%	5.4%	51.9%	17.5%	10.6%	71.9%	28.1%
	Provincial Nominee Program - PA	7.8%	1.2%	44.0%	31.5%	15.5%	53.0%	47.0%
	Quebec skilled workers - PA	4.5%	4.0%	31.6%	39.1%	20.9%	40.0%	60.0%
	Other economic class - PA*	8.8%	2.3%	14.7%	50.3%	23.8%	25.9%	74.1%
	Economic class - SD	4.5%	2.9%	22.5%	35.3%	34.8%	29.9%	70.1%
	Family class	4.6%	1.9%	25.5%	37.5%	30.6%	32.0%	68.0%
	Refugees	2.9%	1.4%	23.3%	34.6%	37.9%	27.6%	72.4%
	Other immigrants~	3.9%	1.8%	26.3%	38.7%	29.4%	32.0%	68.0%
Total	5.0%	2.2%	26.7%	36.1%	30.0%	33.9%	66.1%	
Some postsecondary education	Federal skilled workers - PA	9.3%	15.1%	39.6%	28.9%	7.1%	64.0%	36.0%
	Canadian experience - PA	15.7%	15.7%	46.5%	17.3%	4.8%	77.9%	22.1%
	Provincial Nominee Program - PA	9.8%	7.4%	36.3%	31.2%	15.3%	53.5%	46.5%
	Quebec skilled workers - PA	6.1%	13.1%	38.3%	31.3%	11.1%	57.6%	42.4%
	Other economic class - PA*	4.7%	3.4%	15.7%	56.3%	19.8%	23.9%	76.1%
	Economic class - SD	6.2%	6.3%	27.5%	36.2%	23.8%	40.0%	60.0%
	Family class	7.3%	6.6%	29.6%	37.4%	19.1%	43.6%	56.4%
	Refugees	4.6%	5.8%	26.7%	39.7%	23.2%	37.2%	62.8%
	Other immigrants~	5.3%	6.6%	31.9%	41.9%	14.3%	43.9%	56.1%
Total	7.4%	7.7%	30.6%	36.3%	18.0%	45.7%	54.3%	
University degree	Federal skilled workers - PA	14.4%	25.5%	27.1%	26.0%	7.0%	67.0%	33.0%
	Canadian experience - PA	30.4%	8.3%	40.9%	15.6%	4.7%	79.7%	20.3%
	Provincial Nominee Program - PA	15.4%	6.5%	30.8%	33.6%	13.7%	52.7%	47.3%
	Quebec skilled workers - PA	9.1%	41.9%	24.2%	19.5%	5.2%	75.3%	24.7%
	Other economic class - PA*	8.2%	7.3%	15.5%	51.4%	17.6%	31.0%	69.0%
	Economic class - SD	7.8%	24.6%	24.0%	28.9%	14.8%	56.3%	43.7%
	Family class	12.1%	6.3%	31.4%	34.9%	15.3%	49.8%	50.2%
	Refugees	6.1%	18.5%	25.7%	33.7%	16.0%	50.3%	49.7%
	Other immigrants~	11.9%	15.9%	21.1%	37.7%	13.4%	48.9%	51.1%
Total	13.4%	8.0%	30.8%	34.1%	13.7%	52.2%	47.8%	

*Mostly in caregiver programs.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

For example, 88% of employed Canadian-born individuals with a university degree held a higher skilled job in 2016. Among immigrants whose highest level of education was obtained in Canada, 83% were in a higher skilled occupation, and among those educated in a developed English-speaking/Northern/Western European country this share was 88%. In comparison, 65% of immigrants who received their university education in other nations held a higher skilled job. Even among recent immigrants, the difference between those educated in Canada or a developed nation and the Canadian-born is relatively small. However, there is a large difference between Canadian-born and recent immigrants educated in a developing nation¹³ (Table 8).

¹³ In 2016, 17% of recent immigrants receiving their university degree in Canada were in lower skilled jobs (compared to 12% of the Canadian-born, Table 7), as were 15% of recent immigrants educated in a developed English-speaking/Northern/Western European country. However, among recent immigrants receiving their university education in other countries, 45% held lower skilled jobs (Table 8).

A similar pattern holds for individuals with some postsecondary education (which includes college/trade school completion or some uncompleted postsecondary education). The difference with the Canadian-born for immigrants receiving such education in Canada or a developed English-speaking/Northern/Western European country is relatively small, while the difference is quite large for immigrants educated in other countries.¹⁴ This result holds regardless of the immigrant class - economic, family or refugee.

Table 7a: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed workers aged 20 to 64, by some postsecondary education in Canada, 2016

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	
Non-immigrants*		367,920	425,390	1,424,050	852,140	194,640	
All immigrants	Immigrants admitted before 1980	18,200	20,570	50,220	32,330	5,820	
	Immigrants admitted since 1980	Economic immigrants - PA	4,550	8,200	21,700	17,960	3,640
		Economic immigrants - SD	12,100	16,880	52,390	38,100	8,660
		Family class	11,100	18,090	53,300	47,820	10,180
		Refugees	6,380	10,600	32,530	29,140	7,130
		Other immigrants~	430	540	1,820	1,710	420
Total - Immigrants admitted since 1980	34,560	54,310	161,740	134,730	30,020		
Total - All immigrants		52,750	74,880	211,960	167,070	35,840	
Non-permanent residents**		1,420	1,470	7,170	5,560	2,450	
Total		422,090	501,730	1,643,180	1,024,760	232,930	

*Canadian citizens by birth

**Includes persons from another country who have a work or study permit or who are refugee claimants.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 7b: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed workers aged 20 to 64, by some postsecondary education in Canada, 2016 (by percentage)

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	Higher skilled (O, A, B)	Lower skilled (C, D)	
Non-immigrants*		11.3%	13.0%	43.6%	26.1%	6.0%	67.9%	32.1%	
All immigrants	Immigrants admitted before 1980	14.3%	16.2%	39.5%	25.4%	4.6%	70.0%	30.0%	
	Immigrants admitted since 1980	Economic immigrants - PA	8.1%	14.6%	38.7%	32.0%	6.5%	61.5%	38.5%
		Economic immigrants - SD	9.4%	13.2%	40.9%	29.7%	6.8%	63.5%	36.5%
		Family class	7.9%	12.9%	37.9%	34.0%	7.2%	58.7%	41.3%
		Refugees	7.4%	12.4%	37.9%	34.0%	8.3%	57.7%	42.3%
		Other immigrants~	8.8%	10.9%	37.0%	34.8%	8.5%	56.7%	43.3%
Total - Immigrants admitted since 1980	8.3%	13.1%	38.9%	32.4%	7.2%	60.3%	39.7%		
Total - All immigrants		9.7%	13.8%	39.1%	30.8%	6.6%	62.6%	37.4%	
Non-permanent residents**		7.8%	8.1%	39.7%	30.8%	13.6%	55.7%	44.3%	
Total		11.0%	13.1%	43.0%	26.8%	6.1%	67.1%	32.9%	

*Canadian citizens by birth

**Includes persons from another country who have a work or study permit or who are refugee claimants.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

¹⁴ In 2016, 68% of the Canadian-born with a college or some postsecondary education were in higher skilled jobs, compared to 63% of immigrants who received their highest education in Canada, 71% among those educated in developed English-speaking/Northern/Western European country countries, and 48% of those who received their highest education in other countries (Table 7). In the latter case, over half of the "some" postsecondary educated employed individuals provided lower skilled labour.

Table 7c: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed workers aged 20 to 64, by some postsecondary education in developed English speaking, Northern and Western European countries, 2016

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D
Non-immigrants*		3,300	2,900	8,220	5,110	1,460
All immigrants	Immigrants admitted before 1980	1,050	970	2,220	1,370	300
	Immigrants admitted since 1980	5,620	4,470	10,180	4,550	840
	Economic immigrants - PA	2,450	1,680	4,780	3,930	740
	Economic immigrants - SD	3,250	2,850	7,790	5,740	1,300
	Family class	140	100	360	430	100
	Refugees	10	40	90	130	30
	Other immigrants~	11,470	9,140	23,210	14,780	3,010
Total - All immigrants		12,520	10,110	25,430	16,150	3,310
Non-permanent residents**		1,010	900	2,760	1,750	510
Total		16,840	13,900	36,410	23,010	5,270

*Canadian citizens by birth

**Includes persons from another country who have a work or study permit or who are refugee claimants.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 7d: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed workers aged 20 to 64, by some postsecondary education in developed English speaking, Northern and Western European countries, 2016 (by percentage)

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	Higher skilled (O, A, B)	Lower skilled (C, D)
Non-immigrants*		15.7%	13.8%	39.2%	24.4%	6.9%	68.7%	31.3%
All immigrants	Immigrants admitted before 1980	17.8%	16.4%	37.6%	23.2%	5.1%	71.7%	28.3%
	Immigrants admitted since 1980	21.9%	17.4%	39.7%	17.7%	3.3%	79.0%	21.0%
	Economic immigrants - PA	18.0%	12.4%	35.2%	28.9%	5.4%	65.7%	34.3%
	Economic immigrants - SD	15.5%	13.6%	37.2%	27.4%	6.2%	66.4%	33.6%
	Family class	12.6%	8.7%	31.9%	38.0%	8.7%	53.2%	46.8%
	Refugees	4.3%	11.2%	30.3%	43.1%	11.1%	45.8%	54.2%
	Other immigrants~	18.6%	14.8%	37.7%	24.0%	4.9%	71.1%	28.9%
Total - All immigrants		18.5%	15.0%	37.7%	23.9%	4.9%	71.2%	28.8%
Non-permanent residents**		14.6%	12.9%	39.8%	25.3%	7.3%	67.4%	32.6%
Total		17.6%	14.6%	38.2%	24.1%	5.5%	70.4%	29.6%

*Canadian citizens by birth

**Includes persons from another country who have a work or study permit or who are refugee claimants.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 7e: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed workers aged 20 to 64, by some postsecondary education in other countries, 2016

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D
Non-immigrants*		290	320	810	790	240
All immigrants	Immigrants admitted before 1980	590	560	1,660	1,480	470
	Immigrants admitted since 1980					
	Economic immigrants - PA	8,190	9,250	28,570	30,930	11,960
	Economic immigrants - SD	5,720	5,770	17,920	20,800	11,430
	Family class	5,790	4,930	19,010	26,530	12,220
	Refugees	2,650	2,040	9,710	11,370	5,520
	Other immigrants~	240	190	790	970	430
	Total - Immigrants admitted since 1980	22,590	22,190	76,000	90,590	41,570
Total - All immigrants		23,180	22,750	77,660	92,080	42,040
Non-permanent residents**		940	1,320	5,120	7,770	3,730
Total		24,410	24,390	83,590	100,640	46,010

*Canadian citizens by birth

**Includes persons from another country who have a work or study permit or who are refugee claimants.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 7f: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed workers aged 20 to 64, by some postsecondary education in other countries, 2016 (by percentage)

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	Higher skilled (O, A, B)	Lower skilled (C, D)
Non-immigrants*		11.8%	13.0%	33.1%	32.2%	9.9%	57.9%	42.1%
All immigrants	Immigrants admitted before 1980	12.3%	11.7%	34.8%	31.2%	9.9%	58.9%	41.1%
	Immigrants admitted since 1980							
	Economic immigrants - PA	9.2%	10.4%	32.1%	34.8%	13.5%	51.8%	48.2%
	Economic immigrants - SD	9.3%	9.4%	29.1%	33.7%	18.5%	47.7%	52.3%
	Family class	8.4%	7.2%	27.8%	38.7%	17.8%	43.4%	56.6%
	Refugees	8.5%	6.5%	31.0%	36.3%	17.6%	46.0%	54.0%
	Other immigrants~	9.1%	7.4%	30.3%	36.8%	16.3%	46.8%	53.2%
	Total - Immigrants admitted since 1980	8.9%	8.8%	30.0%	35.8%	16.4%	47.8%	52.2%
Total - All immigrants		9.0%	8.8%	30.1%	35.7%	16.3%	48.0%	52.0%
Non-permanent residents**		5.0%	7.0%	27.1%	41.2%	19.8%	39.1%	60.9%
Total		8.7%	8.7%	30.0%	36.1%	16.5%	47.4%	52.6%

*Canadian citizens by birth

**Includes persons from another country who have a work or study permit or who are refugee claimants.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 7g: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed workers aged 20 to 64, by university degree in Canada, 2016

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	
Non-immigrants*		447,830	1,530,210	548,240	300,250	54,590	
All immigrants	Immigrants admitted before 1980	23,600	63,450	22,000	10,560	1,460	
	Immigrants admitted since 1980	Economic immigrants - PA	17,020	72,180	20,190	11,190	1,770
		Economic immigrants - SD	28,310	118,280	45,170	29,280	4,300
		Family class	12,490	49,710	20,060	12,460	1,810
		Refugees	6,880	29,600	13,500	8,880	1,600
		Other immigrants~	630	2,190	1,130	900	120
Total - Immigrants admitted since 1980	65,330	271,960	100,050	62,700	9,610		
Total - All immigrants		88,930	335,410	122,050	73,260	11,070	
Non-permanent residents**		2,900	14,870	7,910	6,600	2,240	
Total		539,660	1,880,500	678,200	380,110	67,900	

*Canadian citizens by birth

**Includes persons from another country who have a work or study permit or who are refugee claimants.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 7h: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed workers aged 20 to 64, by university degree in Canada, 2016 (by percentage)

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	Higher skilled (O, A, B)	Lower skilled (C, D)	
Non-immigrants*		15.5%	53.1%	19.0%	10.4%	1.9%	87.7%	12.3%	
All immigrants	Immigrants admitted before 1980	19.5%	52.4%	18.2%	8.7%	1.2%	90.1%	9.9%	
	Immigrants admitted since 1980	Economic immigrants - PA	13.9%	59.0%	16.5%	9.1%	1.4%	89.4%	10.6%
		Economic immigrants - SD	12.6%	52.5%	20.0%	13.0%	1.9%	85.1%	14.9%
		Family class	12.9%	51.5%	20.8%	12.9%	1.9%	85.2%	14.8%
		Refugees	11.4%	49.0%	22.3%	14.7%	2.6%	82.7%	17.3%
		Other immigrants~	12.6%	44.2%	22.8%	18.0%	2.4%	79.5%	20.5%
Total - Immigrants admitted since 1980	12.8%	53.4%	19.6%	12.3%	1.9%	85.8%	14.2%		
Total - All immigrants		14.1%	53.2%	19.4%	11.6%	1.8%	86.6%	13.4%	
Non-permanent residents**		8.4%	43.1%	22.9%	19.1%	6.5%	74.4%	25.6%	
Total		15.2%	53.0%	19.1%	10.7%	1.9%	87.4%	12.6%	

*Canadian citizens by birth

**Includes persons from another country who have a work or study permit or who are refugee claimants.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 7i: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed workers aged 20 to 64, by university degree in developed English speaking, Northern and Western European countries, 2016

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	
Non-immigrants*		22,210	75,130	19,240	9,450	1,670	
All immigrants	Immigrants admitted before 1980	1,910	5,930	1,610	630	140	
	Immigrants admitted since 1980	Economic immigrants - PA	16,850	48,400	16,280	8,340	1,520
		Economic immigrants - SD	5,510	17,720	7,400	4,030	650
		Family class	8,150	20,630	10,160	5,610	950
		Refugees	580	1,770	800	600	160
		Other immigrants~	210	430	160	120	20
	Total - Immigrants admitted since 1980	31,300	88,950	34,790	18,710	3,310	
Total - All immigrants	33,210	94,870	36,400	19,340	3,440		
Non-permanent residents**		5,340	16,490	6,920	3,640	1,030	
Total		60,750	186,490	62,560	32,430	6,140	

*Canadian citizens by birth

**Includes persons from another country who have a work or study permit or who are refugee claimants.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 7j: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed workers aged 20 to 64, by university degree in developed English speaking, Northern and Western European countries, 2016 (by percentage)

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	Higher skilled (O, A, B)	Lower skilled (C, D)	
Non-immigrants*		17.4%	58.8%	15.1%	7.4%	1.3%	91.3%	8.7%	
All immigrants	Immigrants admitted before 1980	18.7%	58.0%	15.8%	6.2%	1.3%	92.5%	7.5%	
	Immigrants admitted since 1980	Economic immigrants - PA	18.4%	53.0%	17.8%	9.1%	1.7%	89.2%	10.8%
		Economic immigrants - SD	15.6%	50.2%	21.0%	11.4%	1.8%	86.7%	13.3%
		Family class	17.9%	45.3%	22.3%	12.3%	2.1%	85.6%	14.4%
		Refugees	14.7%	45.2%	20.4%	15.4%	4.2%	80.4%	19.6%
		Other immigrants~	22.2%	45.9%	16.8%	13.2%	2.0%	84.8%	15.2%
	Total - Immigrants admitted since 1980	17.7%	50.2%	19.7%	10.6%	1.9%	87.6%	12.4%	
Total - All immigrants	17.7%	50.7%	19.4%	10.3%	1.8%	87.8%	12.2%		
Non-permanent residents**		16.0%	49.3%	20.7%	10.9%	3.1%	86.0%	14.0%	
Total		17.4%	53.5%	18.0%	9.3%	1.8%	88.9%	11.1%	

*Canadian citizens by birth

**Includes persons from another country who have a work or study permit or who are refugee claimants.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 7k: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed workers aged 20 to 64, by university degree in other countries, 2016

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	
Non-immigrants*		970	3,120	1,230	970	270	
All immigrants	Immigrants admitted before 1980	730	1,570	1,520	1,320	300	
	Immigrants admitted since 1980	Economic immigrants - PA	42,860	124,230	93,100	85,940	25,160
		Economic immigrants - SD	18,380	50,830	54,220	53,300	21,500
		Family class	13,350	28,570	36,950	45,310	15,690
		Refugees	4,350	9,460	11,450	11,010	3,750
		Other immigrants~	350	450	780	980	330
	Total - Immigrants admitted since 1980	79,280	213,550	196,500	196,540	66,440	
Total - All immigrants	80,010	215,120	198,020	197,870	66,740		
Non-permanent residents**		4,260	17,860	12,670	16,040	9,540	
Total		85,250	236,110	211,920	214,880	76,550	

*Canadian citizens by birth

**Includes persons from another country who have a work or study permit or who are refugee claimants.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 7l: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed workers aged 20 to 64, by university degree in other countries, 2016 (by percentage)

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	Higher skilled (O, A, B)	Lower skilled (C, D)	
Non-immigrants*		14.8%	47.5%	18.8%	14.8%	4.1%	81.2%	18.8%	
All immigrants	Immigrants admitted before 1980	13.3%	28.9%	27.9%	24.3%	5.5%	70.2%	29.8%	
	Immigrants admitted since 1980	Economic immigrants - PA	11.5%	33.5%	25.1%	23.1%	6.8%	70.1%	29.9%
		Economic immigrants - SD	9.3%	25.6%	27.4%	26.9%	10.8%	62.3%	37.7%
		Family class	9.5%	20.4%	26.4%	32.4%	11.2%	56.4%	43.6%
		Refugees	10.9%	23.6%	28.6%	27.5%	9.4%	63.1%	36.9%
		Other immigrants~	12.1%	15.5%	27.0%	34.0%	11.4%	54.6%	45.4%
	Total - Immigrants admitted since 1980	10.5%	28.4%	26.1%	26.1%	8.8%	65.0%	35.0%	
Total - All immigrants	10.6%	28.4%	26.1%	26.1%	8.8%	65.1%	34.9%		
Non-permanent residents**		7.1%	29.6%	21.0%	26.6%	15.8%	57.6%	42.4%	
Total		10.3%	28.6%	25.7%	26.1%	9.3%	64.7%	35.3%	

*Canadian citizens by birth

**Includes persons from another country who have a work or study permit or who are refugee claimants.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 8a: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed recent immigrants (in Canada 1 to 5 years) aged 20 to 64, by some postsecondary education and country of education, 2016

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D
Canada	Federal skilled workers - PA	50	160	360	270	30
	Canadian experience - PA	440	460	1,420	640	130
	Provincial Nominee Program - PA	290	320	1,030	1,210	320
	Quebec skilled workers - PA	150	330	1,030	820	230
	Other economic class - PA*	10	60	310	1,090	190
	Economic class - SD	280	410	1,820	2,450	950
	Family class	440	460	2,230	2,550	830
	Refugees	120	210	840	1,240	450
	Other immigrants~	30	60	280	310	90
Total	1,820	2,460	9,330	10,570	3,230	
Developed English speaking, Northern and Western European countries	Federal skilled workers - PA	140	100	320	120	30
	Canadian experience - PA	210	180	370	60	10
	Provincial Nominee Program - PA	300	190	570	290	60
	Quebec skilled workers - PA	230	310	810	270	70
	Other economic class - PA*	20	10	70	40	-
	Economic class - SD	330	280	910	780	180
	Family class	540	570	1,400	1,210	430
	Refugees	10	10	40	80	10
	Other immigrants~	10	10	30	40	10
Total	1,770	1,650	4,520	2,880	800	
Other countries	Federal skilled workers - PA	260	480	1,240	1,010	290
	Canadian experience - PA	210	220	750	250	120
	Provincial Nominee Program - PA	670	440	3,070	2,520	1,590
	Quebec skilled workers - PA	100	390	1,160	1,350	560
	Other economic class - PA*	420	260	1,130	4,280	1,710
	Economic class - SD	900	830	3,930	5,520	4,630
	Family class	800	580	3,570	5,330	3,380
	Refugees	180	180	940	1,380	1,120
	Other immigrants~	40	40	200	320	130
Total	3,590	3,420	15,990	21,970	13,530	

*Mostly in caregiver programs.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 8b: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed recent immigrants (in Canada 1 to 5 years) aged 20 to 64, by some postsecondary education and country of education, 2016 (by percentage)

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	Higher skilled (O, A, B)	Lower skilled (C, D)
Canada	Federal skilled workers - PA	5.7%	18.0%	41.5%	31.3%	3.6%	65.2%	34.8%
	Canadian experience - PA	14.3%	14.8%	46.1%	20.6%	4.3%	75.1%	24.9%
	Provincial Nominee Program - PA	9.3%	10.1%	32.6%	38.1%	9.9%	52.0%	48.0%
	Quebec skilled workers - PA	5.9%	12.9%	40.2%	32.0%	9.0%	59.0%	41.0%
	Other economic class - PA*	0.6%	3.6%	18.7%	65.7%	11.4%	22.9%	77.1%
	Economic class - SD	4.7%	6.9%	30.8%	41.5%	16.1%	42.5%	57.5%
	Family class	6.8%	7.1%	34.3%	39.1%	12.7%	48.2%	51.8%
	Refugees	4.2%	7.3%	29.4%	43.4%	15.7%	40.9%	59.1%
	Other immigrants~	4.2%	7.7%	36.5%	40.3%	11.3%	48.4%	51.6%
	Total	6.7%	9.0%	34.0%	38.6%	11.8%	49.7%	50.3%
Developed English speaking, Northern and Western European countries	Federal skilled workers - PA	20.1%	13.6%	45.7%	16.6%	3.9%	79.5%	20.5%
	Canadian experience - PA	25.0%	21.7%	44.7%	7.0%	1.5%	91.5%	8.5%
	Provincial Nominee Program - PA	21.1%	13.2%	40.7%	20.8%	4.2%	75.0%	25.0%
	Quebec skilled workers - PA	13.6%	18.3%	47.9%	16.0%	4.1%	79.9%	20.1%
	Other economic class - PA*	14.3%	7.1%	50.0%	28.6%	0.0%	71.4%	28.6%
	Economic class - SD	13.3%	11.3%	36.7%	31.5%	7.3%	61.3%	38.7%
	Family class	13.0%	13.8%	33.8%	29.1%	10.4%	60.5%	39.5%
	Refugees	4.7%	9.1%	28.3%	52.6%	5.2%	42.1%	57.9%
	Other immigrants~	8.6%	9.7%	33.3%	40.2%	8.2%	51.6%	48.4%
	Total	15.2%	14.2%	38.9%	24.8%	6.9%	68.3%	31.7%
Other countries	Federal skilled workers - PA	8.0%	14.6%	37.8%	30.8%	8.8%	60.4%	39.6%
	Canadian experience - PA	13.6%	14.2%	48.4%	16.3%	7.6%	76.2%	23.8%
	Provincial Nominee Program - PA	8.1%	5.3%	37.0%	30.4%	19.2%	50.4%	49.6%
	Quebec skilled workers - PA	2.8%	11.0%	32.6%	37.9%	15.7%	46.3%	53.7%
	Other economic class - PA*	5.4%	3.3%	14.5%	54.9%	21.9%	23.2%	76.8%
	Economic class - SD	5.7%	5.2%	24.9%	34.9%	29.3%	35.8%	64.2%
	Family class	5.9%	4.3%	26.1%	39.1%	24.7%	36.2%	63.8%
	Refugees	4.8%	4.7%	24.7%	36.4%	29.5%	34.2%	65.8%
	Other immigrants~	6.0%	5.0%	27.0%	43.7%	18.2%	38.1%	61.9%
	Total	6.1%	5.8%	27.3%	37.6%	23.1%	39.3%	60.7%

*Mostly in caregiver programs.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 8c: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed recent immigrants (in Canada 1 to 5 years) aged 20 to 64, by university degree and country of education, 2016

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D
Canada	Federal skilled workers - PA	460	2,760	490	390	90
	Canadian experience - PA	1,300	4,480	1,820	810	120
	Provincial Nominee Program - PA	1,120	4,650	1,610	1,260	210
	Quebec skilled workers - PA	760	4,100	1,530	1,020	220
	Other economic class - PA*	30	40	40	110	30
	Economic class - SD	530	2,780	1,170	1,210	290
	Family class	640	2,400	1,400	960	180
	Refugees	50	290	240	220	70
	Other immigrants~	20	50	60	80	10
Total	4,910	21,540	8,370	6,060	1,220	
Developed English speaking, Northern and Western European countries	Federal skilled workers - PA	1,190	3,360	1,110	810	170
	Canadian experience - PA	930	2,450	780	210	70
	Provincial Nominee Program - PA	860	2,240	790	370	60
	Quebec skilled workers - PA	1,240	4,720	2,060	1,090	250
	Other economic class - PA*	90	90	50	40	10
	Economic class - SD	1,100	3,270	1,930	1,210	230
	Family class	1,870	4,890	2,900	1,730	290
	Refugees	50	100	80	80	30
	Other immigrants~	30	40	10	20	10
Total	7,380	21,150	9,700	5,560	1,120	
Other countries	Federal skilled workers - PA	3,610	13,250	8,350	8,340	2,310
	Canadian experience - PA	1,270	4,030	2,110	780	340
	Provincial Nominee Program - PA	2,560	5,050	6,710	8,310	3,770
	Quebec skilled workers - PA	920	4,540	4,130	4,100	1,200
	Other economic class - PA*	1,150	1,010	2,320	7,830	2,710
	Economic class - SD	3,460	10,050	12,590	16,500	9,180
	Family class	2,190	5,170	7,940	10,940	5,490
	Refugees	280	770	1,290	1,820	910
	Other immigrants~	70	80	150	310	130
Total	15,520	43,950	45,590	58,930	26,030	

*Mostly in caregiver programs.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 8d: Occupational skill (NOC 2016) distribution among employed recent immigrants (in Canada 1 to 5 years) aged 20 to 64, by university degree and country of education, 2016 (by percentage)

Immigration status		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	Higher skilled (O, A, B)	Lower skilled (C, D)
Canada	Federal skilled workers - PA	10.9%	65.8%	11.8%	9.3%	2.1%	88.6%	11.4%
	Canadian experience - PA	15.3%	52.5%	21.4%	9.5%	1.5%	89.1%	10.9%
	Provincial Nominee Program - PA	12.7%	52.5%	18.2%	14.2%	2.4%	83.4%	16.6%
	Quebec skilled workers - PA	10.0%	53.7%	20.1%	13.4%	2.9%	83.7%	16.3%
	Other economic class - PA*	12.0%	16.0%	16.0%	44.0%	12.0%	44.0%	56.0%
	Economic class - SD	8.9%	46.5%	19.6%	20.2%	4.8%	74.9%	25.1%
	Family class	11.5%	42.9%	25.1%	17.2%	3.2%	79.6%	20.4%
	Refugees	6.0%	33.3%	27.7%	24.6%	8.4%	67.0%	33.0%
	Other immigrants~	10.8%	23.6%	26.5%	35.3%	3.9%	60.9%	39.1%
Total	11.7%	51.1%	19.9%	14.4%	2.9%	82.7%	17.3%	
Developed English speaking, Northern and Western European countries	Federal skilled workers - PA	18.0%	50.5%	16.7%	12.2%	2.6%	85.1%	14.9%
	Canadian experience - PA	21.0%	55.2%	17.5%	4.7%	1.6%	93.7%	6.3%
	Provincial Nominee Program - PA	19.9%	51.9%	18.2%	8.6%	1.3%	90.0%	10.0%
	Quebec skilled workers - PA	13.2%	50.4%	22.0%	11.6%	2.7%	85.7%	14.3%
	Other economic class - PA*	32.1%	32.1%	17.9%	14.3%	3.6%	82.1%	17.9%
	Economic class - SD	14.2%	42.2%	24.9%	15.6%	3.0%	81.4%	18.6%
	Family class	16.0%	41.8%	24.8%	14.8%	2.5%	82.7%	17.3%
	Refugees	15.5%	30.0%	22.7%	23.9%	7.9%	68.2%	31.8%
	Other immigrants~	27.7%	33.4%	13.2%	17.3%	8.3%	74.4%	25.6%
Total	16.4%	47.1%	21.6%	12.4%	2.5%	85.1%	14.9%	
Other countries	Federal skilled workers - PA	10.1%	36.9%	23.3%	23.3%	6.4%	70.3%	29.7%
	Canadian experience - PA	14.9%	47.2%	24.7%	9.2%	4.0%	86.8%	13.2%
	Provincial Nominee Program - PA	9.7%	19.1%	25.4%	31.5%	14.3%	54.2%	45.8%
	Quebec skilled workers - PA	6.2%	30.5%	27.7%	27.5%	8.1%	64.4%	35.6%
	Other economic class - PA*	7.7%	6.7%	15.4%	52.1%	18.0%	29.8%	70.2%
	Economic class - SD	6.7%	19.4%	24.3%	31.9%	17.7%	50.4%	49.6%
	Family class	6.9%	16.3%	25.0%	34.5%	17.3%	48.2%	51.8%
	Refugees	5.5%	15.2%	25.5%	35.9%	17.9%	46.2%	53.8%
	Other immigrants~	10.0%	11.2%	20.6%	41.3%	17.0%	41.8%	58.2%
Total	8.2%	23.1%	24.0%	31.0%	13.7%	55.3%	44.7%	

*Mostly in caregiver programs.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Immigrant groups that provide the most lower or higher skilled labour to the labour market

To this point, the focus has been mainly on the likelihood of some particular group – immigrant or Canadian-born – occupying a higher or lower skilled job. But some groups are relatively large, while others are relatively small. The extent to which any particular group provides lower or higher skilled labour to the labour market depends both on its size and the likelihood of the group members holding a particular type of job. Three major points are made below.

First, formal educational attainment should not necessarily be equated with the provision of lower or higher skilled labour. A notable share of the lower skilled labour in the Canadian labour market is provided by individuals with a postsecondary education, and a notable share of the higher skilled labour by individuals with only a high school formal education. More specifically, among the adult population as a whole (e.g., immigrants and Canadian-born) in 2016, employed individuals with a postsecondary education (college certificate, university degree, or “some” postsecondary education) accounted for well over one-third (38%) of the lower skilled jobs held in the Canadian labour market. Conversely, fully one-third of those in higher skilled jobs had a high school education or less (given the skill definitions described earlier, this is likely attributable to those with two years or more of post-high school industry-specific apprenticeship or on-the-job training). The immigrant population displayed similar patterns. Almost one-half of the lower skilled jobs held by immigrants were accounted for by those with a postsecondary education. In contrast, about one-quarter of the higher skilled jobs held by immigrants were held by individuals with a formal high school education or less.

Second, as noted earlier, country of highest level of education plays a role in the provision of lower and higher skilled labour. Here, the observations are focused on recent immigrants in order to account for more current trends among immigrants by country of highest level of education. Of the lower skilled labour provided by recent immigrants with a postsecondary education, fully 75% was accounted for by individuals whose highest level of postsecondary education was received in a country other than developed English speaking/Northern/Western European countries.¹⁵ Very little (25%) lower skilled labour was associated with recent immigrants whose highest level of education was obtained in Canada or a developed country.

Third, staying with recent immigrants, perhaps surprisingly, the economic class plays by far the largest role in providing lower skilled labour to the Canadian economy. While the likelihood of a refugee or family class immigrant filling a lower skill job is highest, as noted earlier in the paper, the economic class spouses and dependants are not far behind on this measure, as are provincial nominees. Furthermore, the economic class is the largest single class; 68% of employed 20 to 64 year old recent immigrants were in the economic class in 2016. The result is that the economic class accounted for 60% of the lower skilled labour provided to the Canadian labour market by recent immigrants aged 20 to 64. Very little of this share is accounted for by FSWP (6%) or CEC (2%) principal applicant immigrants. Provincial nominee principal applicants accounted for 10%, “other” principal applicants (including those under the QSWP), 15%, and economic class spouses and dependants accounted for 27% (Table 9). Refugees accounted for only 10% of the lower skilled labour provided to the Canadian economy by recent immigrants because they are the relatively smaller group. Family class accounted for 29% of the lower skilled labour provided by recent immigrants in 2016.

¹⁵ Among all immigrants, the share was 50%. This lower number was likely driven by the fact that a smaller share of immigrants in Canada for, say, 20 years or more, came from “other” countries (as opposed to developed English-speaking/Northern/Western European countries).

As noted, recent immigrants are more likely than more established immigrants to fill lower skilled jobs. However, of the lower skilled labour provided by all immigrants as a whole, 46% was accounted for by those in the economic class, with roughly an equal amount provided by both the principal applicants and the spouses and dependants.

Table 9a: Characteristics of all employed workers aged 20 to 64, by occupational skill (NOC 2016) level, 2016

Characteristics		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D
Age group	20-29	44,430	124,980	252,150	245,810	120,660
	30-39	103,090	214,990	309,720	212,310	69,420
	40-49	131,430	198,110	295,960	230,450	75,870
	50-64	172,710	214,950	384,220	349,850	129,840
Gender	Male	276,520	329,780	684,240	489,540	210,320
	Female	175,140	423,250	557,800	548,880	185,460
Education	Less than high school	29,570	2,940	84,420	130,010	87,740
	High school	139,640	52,290	490,990	473,910	201,870
	Some postsecondary	114,390	134,140	434,510	282,430	69,890
	Bachelor's degree	111,790	334,870	182,010	122,500	29,220
	Graduate degree	56,260	228,780	50,110	29,560	7,070
Country of education	Canada	267,920	595,480	786,540	451,190	110,670
	Developed Western countries	20,090	49,240	27,740	15,310	3,370
	Other countries	27,750	63,920	78,060	81,570	32,460
	No post-secondary education	135,900	44,380	349,690	490,350	249,290
Immigration status	Non-immigrants*	347,630	545,650	967,300	759,480	279,210
	Immigrants who landed before 1980	18,170	24,930	37,000	30,100	9,540
	Non-permanent residents**	4,610	13,100	14,240	15,020	7,870
	Economic immigrants - PA	27,040	66,590	59,480	51,900	17,240
	Economic immigrants - SD	22,870	54,440	61,100	58,100	23,930
	Family class	21,390	33,060	67,070	82,130	37,090
	Refugees	9,190	14,240	33,530	38,900	19,520
	Other immigrants~	770	1,020	2,340	2,800	1,380

*Canadian citizens by birth

**Includes persons from another country who have a work or study permit or who are refugee claimants.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 9b: Characteristics of all employed workers aged 20 to 64, by occupational skill (NOC 2016) level, 2016 (by percentage)

Characteristics		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	Higher skilled (O, A, B)	Lower skilled (C, D)
Age group	20-29	9.8%	16.6%	20.3%	23.7%	30.5%	17.2%	25.6%
	30-39	22.8%	28.6%	24.9%	20.4%	17.5%	25.7%	19.6%
	40-49	29.1%	26.3%	23.8%	22.2%	19.2%	25.6%	21.4%
	50-64	38.2%	28.5%	30.9%	33.7%	32.8%	31.5%	33.4%
Gender	Male	61.2%	43.8%	55.1%	47.1%	53.1%	52.7%	48.8%
	Female	38.8%	56.2%	44.9%	52.9%	46.9%	47.3%	51.2%
Education	Less than high school	6.5%	0.4%	6.8%	12.5%	22.2%	4.8%	15.2%
	High school	30.9%	6.9%	39.5%	45.6%	51.0%	27.9%	47.1%
	Some postsecondary	25.3%	17.8%	35.0%	27.2%	17.7%	27.9%	24.6%
	Bachelor's degree	24.8%	44.5%	14.7%	11.8%	7.4%	25.7%	10.6%
	Graduate degree	12.5%	30.4%	4.0%	2.8%	1.8%	13.7%	2.6%
Country of education	Canada	59.3%	79.1%	63.3%	43.4%	28.0%	67.4%	39.2%
	Developed Western countries	4.4%	6.5%	2.2%	1.5%	0.9%	4.0%	1.3%
	Other countries	6.1%	8.5%	6.3%	7.9%	8.2%	6.9%	8.0%
	No post-secondary education	30.1%	5.9%	28.2%	47.2%	63.0%	21.7%	51.6%
Immigration status	Non-immigrants*	77.0%	72.5%	77.9%	73.1%	70.5%	76.0%	72.4%
	Immigrants who landed before 1980	4.0%	3.3%	3.0%	2.9%	2.4%	3.3%	2.8%
	Non-permanent residents**	1.0%	1.7%	1.1%	1.4%	2.0%	1.3%	1.6%
	Economic immigrants - PA	6.0%	8.8%	4.8%	5.0%	4.4%	6.3%	4.8%
	Economic immigrants - SD	5.1%	7.2%	4.9%	5.6%	6.0%	5.7%	5.7%
	Family class	4.7%	4.4%	5.4%	7.9%	9.4%	5.0%	8.3%
	Refugees	2.0%	1.9%	2.7%	3.7%	4.9%	2.3%	4.1%
	Other immigrants~	0.2%	0.1%	0.2%	0.3%	0.3%	0.2%	0.3%

*Canadian citizens by birth

**Includes persons from another country who have a work or study permit or who are refugee claimants.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 9c: Characteristics of non-immigrant* employed workers aged 20 to 64, by occupational skill (NOC 2016) level, 2016

Characteristics		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D
Age group	20-29	35,330	95,650	214,120	201,420	98,450
	30-39	78,760	157,270	242,230	148,620	45,570
	40-49	98,960	135,960	218,270	154,390	46,810
	50-64	134,580	156,760	292,680	255,060	88,380
Gender	Male	211,410	221,310	532,800	357,010	156,760
	Female	136,220	324,340	434,490	402,470	122,460
Education	Less than high school	23,850	2,410	63,720	99,400	63,650
	High school	116,070	42,140	410,790	372,990	153,280
	Some postsecondary	92,100	106,940	354,140	211,910	48,630
	Bachelor's degree	80,830	251,800	117,000	66,140	12,140
	Graduate degree	34,780	142,360	21,640	9,040	1,500
Country of education	Canada	229,790	490,190	681,290	375,860	93,930
	Developed Western countries	6,390	19,170	7,300	3,890	870
	Other countries	320	830	600	490	150
	No post-secondary education	111,130	35,470	278,120	379,240	184,260

*Canadian citizens by birth

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 9d: Characteristics of non-immigrant* employed workers aged 20 to 64, by occupational skill (NOC 2016) level, 2016 (by percentage)

Characteristics		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	Higher skilled (O, A, B)	Lower skilled (C, D)
Age group	20-29	10.2%	17.5%	22.1%	26.5%	35.3%	18.5%	28.9%
	30-39	22.7%	28.8%	25.0%	19.6%	16.3%	25.7%	18.7%
	40-49	28.5%	24.9%	22.6%	20.3%	16.8%	24.4%	19.4%
	50-64	38.7%	28.7%	30.3%	33.6%	31.7%	31.4%	33.1%
Gender	Male	60.8%	40.6%	55.1%	47.0%	56.1%	51.9%	49.5%
	Female	39.2%	59.4%	44.9%	53.0%	43.9%	48.1%	50.5%
Education	Less than high school	6.9%	0.4%	6.6%	13.1%	22.8%	4.8%	15.7%
	High school	33.4%	7.7%	42.5%	49.1%	54.9%	30.6%	50.7%
	Some postsecondary	26.5%	19.6%	36.6%	27.9%	17.4%	29.7%	25.1%
	Bachelor's degree	23.3%	46.1%	12.1%	8.7%	4.3%	24.2%	7.5%
	Graduate degree	10.0%	26.1%	2.2%	1.2%	0.5%	10.7%	1.0%
Country of education	Canada	66.1%	89.8%	70.4%	49.5%	33.6%	75.3%	45.2%
	Developed Western countries	1.8%	3.5%	0.8%	0.5%	0.3%	1.8%	0.5%
	Other countries	0.1%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
	No post-secondary education	32.0%	6.5%	28.8%	49.9%	66.0%	22.8%	54.3%

*Canadian citizens by birth

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 9e: Characteristics of all immigrant employed workers aged 20 to 64, by occupational skill (NOC 2016) level, 2016

Characteristics		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D
Age group	20-29	7,510	23,360	31,150	37,340	18,130
	30-39	22,850	52,640	62,880	59,110	21,720
	40-49	31,490	60,660	75,720	73,680	27,960
	50-64	37,570	57,600	90,730	93,770	40,880
Gender	Male	62,020	100,340	142,690	125,970	49,510
	Female	37,400	93,920	117,800	137,930	59,170
Education	Less than high school	5,570	510	20,040	29,560	23,350
	High school	22,930	9,560	76,670	96,670	45,980
	Some postsecondary	21,460	26,320	76,800	66,940	19,680
	Bachelor's degree	29,400	78,680	60,670	51,870	14,870
	Graduate degree	20,060	79,190	26,300	18,850	4,820
Country of education	Canada	37,050	101,430	101,370	72,220	15,550
	Developed Western countries	12,120	25,900	17,730	9,980	2,070
	Other countries	26,140	58,580	72,820	75,160	29,040
	No post-secondary education	24,110	8,360	68,560	106,530	62,030
Source regions	United States	3,980	8,150	7,680	5,920	1,790
	Caribbean, Central and South America	9,630	18,740	35,520	38,560	17,490
	Europe	28,560	48,040	67,970	48,170	17,490
	Africa	7,290	21,100	21,810	23,770	8,840
	Asia	49,950	98,230	127,510	147,470	63,090
Language	Not speaking English or French	2,180	660	7,210	7,820	7,480
	Spoke English or French, other mother tongue	64,800	132,800	177,170	184,770	78,400
	English or French mother tongue	32,440	60,810	76,100	71,300	22,800
Length of residence in Canada	5 years or less	13,760	31,990	43,210	50,790	28,320
	6-10 years	12,860	28,990	38,360	40,790	18,570
	11-15 years	14,070	34,060	38,140	37,600	14,140
	16-20 years	12,190	27,040	31,800	33,490	11,860
	Over 20 years	46,540	72,180	108,980	101,230	35,800

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 9f: Characteristics of all immigrant employed workers aged 20 to 64, by occupational skill (NOC 2016) level, 2016 (by percentage)

Characteristics		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	Higher skilled (O, A, B)	Lower skilled (C, D)
Age group	20-29	7.6%	12.0%	12.0%	14.1%	16.7%	11.2%	14.9%
	30-39	23.0%	27.1%	24.1%	22.4%	20.0%	25.0%	21.7%
	40-49	31.7%	31.2%	29.1%	27.9%	25.7%	30.3%	27.3%
	50-64	37.8%	29.7%	34.8%	35.5%	37.6%	33.5%	36.1%
Gender	Male	62.4%	51.7%	54.8%	47.7%	45.6%	55.0%	47.1%
	Female	37.6%	48.3%	45.2%	52.3%	54.4%	45.0%	52.9%
Education	Less than high school	5.6%	0.3%	7.7%	11.2%	21.5%	4.7%	14.2%
	High school	23.1%	4.9%	29.4%	36.6%	42.3%	19.7%	38.3%
	Some postsecondary	21.6%	13.5%	29.5%	25.4%	18.1%	22.5%	23.3%
	Bachelor's degree	29.6%	40.5%	23.3%	19.7%	13.7%	30.5%	17.9%
	Graduate degree	20.2%	40.8%	10.1%	7.1%	4.4%	22.7%	6.4%
Country of education	Canada	37.3%	52.2%	38.9%	27.4%	14.3%	43.3%	23.6%
	Developed Western countries	12.2%	13.3%	6.8%	3.8%	1.9%	10.1%	3.2%
	Other countries	26.3%	30.2%	28.0%	28.5%	26.7%	28.4%	28.0%
	No post-secondary education	24.2%	4.3%	26.3%	40.4%	57.1%	18.2%	45.2%
Source regions	United States	4.0%	4.2%	2.9%	2.2%	1.6%	3.6%	2.1%
	Caribbean, Central and South America	9.7%	9.6%	13.6%	14.6%	16.1%	11.5%	15.0%
	Europe	28.7%	24.7%	26.1%	18.3%	16.1%	26.1%	17.6%
	Africa	7.3%	10.9%	8.4%	9.0%	8.1%	9.1%	8.8%
	Asia	50.2%	50.6%	49.0%	55.9%	58.0%	49.7%	56.5%
Language	Not speaking English or French	2.2%	0.3%	2.8%	3.0%	6.9%	1.8%	4.1%
	Spoke English or French, other mother tongue	65.2%	68.4%	68.0%	70.0%	72.1%	67.6%	70.6%
	English or French mother tongue	32.6%	31.3%	29.2%	27.0%	21.0%	30.6%	25.3%
Length of residence in Canada	5 years or less	13.8%	16.5%	16.6%	19.2%	26.1%	16.1%	21.2%
	6-10 years	12.9%	14.9%	14.7%	15.5%	17.1%	14.5%	15.9%
	11-15 years	14.2%	17.5%	14.6%	14.2%	13.0%	15.6%	13.9%
	16-20 years	12.3%	13.9%	12.2%	12.7%	10.9%	12.8%	12.2%
	Over 20 years	46.8%	37.2%	41.8%	38.4%	32.9%	41.1%	36.8%

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 9g: Characteristics of recent immigrant employed workers aged 20 to 64, by occupational skill (NOC 2016) level, 2016

Characteristics		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D
Age group	20-29	1,770	4,390	7,190	9,410	6,440
	30-39	4,790	13,040	15,160	16,190	7,560
	40-49	2,590	4,910	7,590	9,460	5,230
	50-64	1,140	1,380	2,560	3,860	2,950
Gender	Male	6,760	13,950	19,120	19,170	10,480
	Female	3,520	9,770	13,380	19,750	11,690
Education	Less than high school	270	50	1,840	2,720	3,140
	High school	1,580	790	8,020	10,690	7,980
	Some postsecondary	1,690	1,830	7,220	8,510	4,220
	Bachelor's degree	3,710	8,730	9,910	11,670	5,090
	Graduate degree	3,020	12,310	5,510	5,330	1,750
Country of education	Canada	1,660	5,840	5,280	5,080	1,460
	Developed Western countries	2,340	5,580	4,060	2,250	540
	Other countries	4,730	11,590	16,120	20,560	10,310
	No post-secondary education	1,550	710	7,040	11,020	9,870
Source regions	United States	440	1,020	660	540	200
	Caribbean, Central and South America	790	1,940	3,710	4,410	2,890
	Europe	2,170	4,370	5,610	3,560	1,510
	Africa	800	3,140	3,790	5,180	2,640
	Asia	6,080	13,240	18,730	25,230	14,940
Language	Not speaking English or French	510	200	1,340	1,510	1,720
	Spoke English or French, other mother tongue	6,430	15,980	22,710	28,400	16,440
	English or French mother tongue	3,340	7,540	8,450	9,020	4,020
Immigration class	Federal skilled workers - PA	1,430	4,930	3,130	2,810	770
	Canadian experience - PA	1,150	2,900	2,130	790	270
	Provincial Nominee Program - PA	1,630	3,140	4,710	4,350	1,920
	Quebec skilled workers - PA	889	3,564	3,092	2,718	938
	Other economic class - PA*	563	387	1,186	3,970	1,486
	Economic class - SD	2,010	4,570	7,460	9,870	6,850
	Family class	2,190	3,680	8,220	10,660	6,810
	Refugees	330	450	2,120	3,080	2,740
	Other immigrants~	90	90	460	680	400

*Mostly in caregiver programs.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Table 9h: Characteristics of recent immigrant employed workers aged 20 to 64, by occupational skill (NOC 2016) level, 2016 (by percentage)

Characteristics		Level O	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	Higher skilled (O, A, B)	Lower skilled (C, D)
Age group	20-29	17.2%	18.5%	22.1%	24.2%	29.0%	20.1%	25.9%
	30-39	46.6%	55.0%	46.6%	41.6%	34.1%	49.6%	38.9%
	40-49	25.2%	20.7%	23.3%	24.3%	23.6%	22.7%	24.0%
	50-64	11.1%	5.8%	7.9%	9.9%	13.3%	7.6%	11.2%
Gender	Male	65.7%	58.8%	58.8%	49.3%	47.3%	59.9%	48.5%
	Female	34.3%	41.2%	41.2%	50.7%	52.7%	40.1%	51.5%
Education	Less than high school	2.6%	0.2%	5.6%	7.0%	14.2%	3.2%	9.6%
	High school	15.4%	3.3%	24.7%	27.5%	36.0%	15.6%	30.6%
	Some postsecondary	16.5%	7.7%	22.2%	21.9%	19.0%	16.2%	20.8%
	Bachelor's degree	36.1%	36.8%	30.5%	30.0%	22.9%	33.6%	27.4%
	Graduate degree	29.4%	51.9%	17.0%	13.7%	7.9%	31.4%	11.6%
Country of education	Canada	16.2%	24.6%	16.3%	13.1%	6.6%	19.2%	10.7%
	Developed Western countries	22.8%	23.5%	12.5%	5.8%	2.4%	18.0%	4.6%
	Other countries	46.0%	48.9%	49.6%	52.8%	46.5%	48.8%	50.5%
	No post-secondary education	15.0%	3.0%	21.7%	28.3%	44.5%	14.0%	34.2%
Source regions	United States	4.2%	4.3%	2.0%	1.4%	0.9%	3.2%	1.2%
	Caribbean, Central and South America	7.7%	8.2%	11.4%	11.3%	13.0%	9.7%	11.9%
	Europe	21.1%	18.4%	17.3%	9.1%	6.8%	18.3%	8.3%
	Africa	7.8%	13.2%	11.7%	13.3%	11.9%	11.6%	12.8%
	Asia	59.2%	55.8%	57.6%	64.8%	67.4%	57.2%	65.7%
Language	Not speaking English or French	4.9%	0.8%	4.1%	3.9%	7.7%	3.1%	5.3%
	Spoke English or French, other mother tongue	62.5%	67.4%	69.9%	73.0%	74.1%	67.9%	73.4%
	English or French mother tongue	32.5%	31.8%	26.0%	23.2%	18.1%	29.1%	21.3%
Immigration class	Federal skilled workers - PA	13.9%	20.8%	9.6%	7.2%	3.5%	14.3%	5.9%
	Canadian experience - PA	11.2%	12.2%	6.6%	2.0%	1.2%	9.3%	1.7%
	Provincial Nominee Program - PA	15.8%	13.2%	14.5%	11.2%	8.7%	14.3%	10.3%
	Quebec skilled workers - PA	8.6%	15.0%	9.5%	7.0%	4.2%	11.3%	6.0%
	Other economic class - PA*	5.5%	1.6%	3.6%	10.2%	6.7%	3.2%	8.9%
	Economic class - SD	19.5%	19.3%	23.0%	25.4%	30.9%	21.1%	27.4%
	Family class	21.3%	15.5%	25.3%	27.4%	30.7%	21.2%	28.6%
	Refugees	3.2%	1.9%	6.5%	7.9%	12.4%	4.4%	9.5%
	Other immigrants~	0.9%	0.4%	1.4%	1.7%	1.8%	1.0%	1.8%

*Mostly in caregiver programs.

~Includes immigrants granted PR status in another category such as public policy and humanitarian and compassionate cases.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population and Longitudinal Immigration Database

Summary and Discussion

Summary of findings

The educational attainment of immigrants is well known.¹⁶ However, much less is known regarding the types of jobs immigrants hold, notably their contribution to lower skilled labour. This paper addresses that shortcoming by using census data on the actual occupations held by individuals aged 20 to 64 in 2016. The goal of this statistical portrait is to provide background information for the discussion of the selection of lower and higher skilled immigrants. Higher skilled occupations refer to those classified as NOC O, A or B, while lower skilled jobs are those classified as NOC C or D.

In 2016, immigrants were roughly as likely as the Canadian-born to fill lower skilled and higher skilled jobs in the Canadian economy. The difference was slight, as 40% of immigrants filled lower skilled jobs, compared to 36% of the Canadian-born. In terms of the types of jobs filled, immigrants were marginally more likely than the Canadian-born to be filling professional jobs (NOC A) and less skilled jobs at both the NOC C and D levels. Recent immigrants (in Canada for five years or less) were more likely to be filling a lower skilled job than immigrants as a whole. This is likely in part because it takes some time for many immigrants to establish themselves in a higher skilled occupation after arriving in Canada.

When generalizing, it is often assumed that economic immigrants tend to fill higher skilled jobs. However, almost one-third (31%) of economic principal applicants and 37% of economic spouses and dependants¹⁷ contributed to lower skilled employment in 2016. Banerjee and Hiebert (2021) recommended that 10% to 20% of economic principal applicants should be lower skilled to help meet the current demand for lower skilled workers in Canada. However, almost one-third of economic principal applicants already occupy lower skilled jobs. This tendency towards lower skilled employment is particularly strong among provincial nominee immigrants.

Among all adult employed immigrants who landed as refugees or family class, roughly 50% were in lower skilled jobs and 50% were in higher skilled jobs, mainly NOC B trades and technical jobs. Higher skilled jobs held by economic class immigrants were more likely to be NOC A professional jobs.

Country of education is one of the best predictors of the economic outcomes of more highly educated immigrants (Friedberg 2000; Fortin et al 2016; Boyd and Tian 2018; Picot and Hou 2019). Immigrant university graduates educated in a developed English speaking or Northern/Western European country were highly likely to hold a higher skilled job (87% did so), as were the Canadian-born (87%). Degree-holding immigrants educated in other countries were less likely to be in a higher skilled job (65%); around one-third held lower skilled employment. The possible reasons for this difference are outlined below.

The observations above relate to the likelihood of an individual in an immigrant class holding a particular type of job. But any class's (e.g. economic, family, or refugee) contribution to the lower or higher skilled labour pool depends not only on the likelihood of holding such a job, but also on the size of the class. The economic class is a major provider of lower skilled labour. It accounted for 53% of all adult immigrants, and

¹⁶ Among the population used in this study – employed 20 to 64-year-olds in 2016 – 36% of immigrants had a high school education or less compared to 46% of the Canadian-born, and 64% of immigrants had at least some postsecondary education compared to 54% of Canadian-born.

¹⁷ Data on the immigrant class originate with the IMDB and refer to immigrants entering Canada since 1980.

provided almost half (46%¹⁸) of all lower skilled labour provided by immigrants aged 20 to 64¹⁹ in 2016. Although economic immigrants were slightly less likely than those in other classes to be in a lower skilled job, they provided the most lower skilled labour because they constituted the largest class. The family class, accounting for 31% of adult immigrants, provided a little over one-third (36%) of lower skilled labour. Refugees accounted for 15% of adult immigrants and 18% of the lower skilled labour provided by immigrants.

There is considerable discussion regarding the possibility of increasing lower skilled immigration by altering the economic class selection system. Following are a few points related to this topic.

Discussion

Many observers believe that in its current design, the immigration system and its largest component, the “human capital” driven economic class, is primarily intended to provide higher skilled labour to the Canadian economy. However, the data presented in this study suggest that at an aggregate level, immigrants are filling lower skilled jobs at about the same rate as the Canadian-born. Moreover, there is only a small difference between economic immigrants and the Canadian-born in this regard.

These results raise two significant issues. First, the observations described above outline the current situation, but tell us nothing about what the balance between lower skilled and higher skilled immigrant labour “should” be, based on labour market and other considerations. Notably, should the share of lower skilled labour increase? Relevant considerations, notably labour market conditions and other labour market impacts, are discussed below. Second, the relatively high number of immigrants in lower skill jobs is due in part to some higher educated immigrants filling such jobs. A discussion regarding why this is happening is found below.

Labour market issues

There is some tension in Canadian immigration policy between using immigration to meet short-term demand and using it for longer term structural goals such as building the overall skill level of the workforce. At different times in Canadian immigration policy history, one or the other of these goals has dominated—though both are typically at play to some extent (Green and Worswick 2017). In the current environment, one concern is that addressing short-term needs may come at the cost of longer-term labour market requirements. The selection of new immigrants to prioritize short-term demand, currently concentrated in lower skilled industries, may weaken longer-term competitiveness and human capital development. Analyses of longer-term structural labour market shortages tend to focus on higher skilled jobs (e.g. COPS²⁰). Current labour market conditions are putting pressure on the short-term demand function of the immigration system. This issue is discussed here, as are some of the associated considerations.

Many employers in accommodation and food services, retail trade, and other industries, are currently facing hiring difficulties, thus fuelling the discussion of the need to increase lower skilled immigration. However, it is important to recognize that employers’ serious hiring challenges may be temporary. The labour market is at a unique time, having gone from a business cycle peak (2019) directly into the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated negative impact on the supply of “essential” workers (2020 and 2021). It appears as if the pre-

¹⁸ Economic principal applicants - accounting for 25% of adult immigrants in 2016 – provided 21% of the lower skilled immigrant labour. Spouses and dependants of economic principal applicants – accounting for 28% of adult immigrants provided 25% of lower skilled immigrant labour and 2016.

¹⁹ Immigrants entering Canada since 1980.

²⁰ The Canadian Occupational Projections System (COPS) is run by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC).

pandemic labour market peak strength is continuing in 2022, as the unemployment rate has fallen to historical lows (5.3% as of March). Labour shortages are most evident at business cycle peaks when the economy is the strongest. For example, longer-term job vacancies doubled between 2015 and 2019²¹, indicating that hiring difficulties that employers face became more severe as the economy reached its peak, as one would expect. This is a shorter-term cyclical rather than a longer-term structural shift in hiring issues. Typically cyclical labour market tightness is temporary and does not persist beyond a few years at most. There have been other unique periods. Recall the high-tech business cycle peak “boom” of the late 1990s when STEM immigration was increased considerably, only to be followed by the high-tech “bust” during which time the new STEM immigrants had very poor economic outcomes. A similar pattern was evident during the oil boom in Alberta, when high levels of immigrants and temporary foreign workers were encouraged. This cyclical peak also did not last.

The pandemic has also led to hiring difficulties for many firms, particularly those employing “essential workers.” The reasons behind these difficulties are mostly distinctive to the pandemic. They include: worker fatigue of re-occurring layoffs and uncertainty in work hours and schedules; restrictions in place to protect public health; concerns among workers about Covid-19 infection; strong government financial support to individuals; the decline in immigration levels in 2020; and a possible desire to change jobs. Most of these factors will resolve themselves when the pandemic abates. With inflation rising, central banks are raising interest rates throughout 2022 to slow consumer demand and economic activity. This may bring the business cycle peak, and the associated extraordinarily high demand for essential workers to a halt. If the pandemic were to abate simultaneously (hopefully), along with its negative effects on labour supply essential workers, the situation regarding the labour shortages of those workers could change (improve) substantially.

Given that most of these drivers - both cyclical and pandemic related – are expected to be relatively short-term, temporary foreign worker programs may be a more reasonable means of meeting such potentially temporary demand. It is also useful to remember that a shortage of lower skilled labour is like a double-edged sword. The wage increases and improvements in working conditions that often occur in order to attract workers lead to higher employer costs and hence higher consumer prices, but they also reduce poverty and inequality.

In response to the current reports of labour shortages, some analysts are turning to an aging population and slower labour force growth as an explanation of current outcomes. However, this possibility is highly unlikely because the age distribution of the population and the resulting impacts to the labour supply occur very slowly. It takes many years, if not decades, for significant change to occur. The current concern regarding labour shortages came upon us very quickly. As noted, the number of job vacancies associated with potential labour shortages doubled between 2015 and 2018/2019. Furthermore, many of the industries reporting labour shortages – notably food and accommodation services, retail sales, etc. – have relatively young workforces. It is unlikely that labour force aging is a driving force for current labour shortages in these industries. Finally, the Canadian Occupational Projection System (COPS) projected longer-term structural shortages to 2028. The projections resulted in the conclusion that there may be some labour shortages in some higher skill occupations (e.g. computer related professions, mechanical/aeronautical engineering). However, most occupations are not expected to have longer-term structural labour shortages, notably lower skill occupations. The projections did not predict widespread longer-term labour shortages in most occupations.

²¹ “Job vacancies, payroll employees, job vacancy rate, and average offered hourly wage by provinces and territories, quarterly, unadjusted for seasonality”, catalogue number 14-10-0325-01, Statistics Canada. Job vacancies that lasted more than 30 days and were for full-time jobs were considered to be related to labour shortages. Such vacancies increased from 120,000 in Q4 of 2015, to 236,000 in 2018, and 220,000 in 2019.

Recent research has also altered somewhat our understanding of how the immigration system is currently functioning regarding lower skilled labour. As noted above, immigrants are at least as likely to fill lower skilled jobs as are Canadian-born individuals. There has also been a significant change in the way permanent residents are selected; many are now previous temporary foreign workers. There are concerns that pathways to permanent residency for lower skilled temporary foreign workers are extremely limited relative to those for higher skilled workers, thus reducing the number of lower skilled immigrants available to the labour market (e.g., Alboim, Cohl, and Pham 2021; Banerjee and Hiebert 2021; Esses, McRae, et al. 2021; Alboim and Cohl 2020). However, recent STC-IRCC research indicates that lower skilled temporary foreign workers are at least as likely to become permanent residents as the higher skilled, and often more likely.²² At least half of temporary foreign workers who become permanent residents were lower skilled. This results in a significant contribution to the provision of lower skilled labour in Canada.

Longer run considerations

There are other possible longer-run issues to be considered when contemplating an increase in lower skilled immigration. Technological change will eliminate a number of jobs, and recent research indicates that lower skilled jobs are most at risk (Frenette and Frank 2019; Chernoff and Warman 2020). This could reduce the demand for lower skilled workers, and raises concerns regarding their employment and economic outcomes. Papademetriou, Benton, and Hooper (2019) caution that governments should avoid selecting workers for sectors or occupations likely to be negatively affected by technological change. Lower skilled Canadian workers already experience unemployment rates that are roughly double that of higher skilled workers.²³ Perhaps a precondition to permanently admitting large numbers of lower skilled immigrants could be determining why less educated Canadians are unemployed at relatively high levels. Moreover, less educated immigrants have a poverty rate 1.7 times that of the higher educated.²⁴ In the medium- and longer-run, more highly educated immigrants do better economically than the less educated.

A significant and long-term shift towards lower skilled immigrants could have an impact on the characteristics of the Canadian labour market. All Western countries seek a highly educated labour market for reasons related to innovation and productivity. Canada has been very successful, more than most, at achieving high levels of educational attainment among the children of immigrants. This is in part because highly educated immigrant parents (with degrees) are roughly twice as likely to have university-educated children compared to high school educated immigrant parents.²⁵ Switzerland learned first-hand that the educational attainment of immigrants significantly affected the educational outcomes of the children.²⁶ A significant move away from highly educated immigrants would weaken the tendency for the children of immigrants to attain high education levels, a major success for Canada compared to other countries.

In addition, a long-term move to higher shares of lower skilled workers can affect the wage structure of the economy. The United States, with a significant pool of lower skilled immigrant labour, has the lowest wage economy in the Western world, with the highest level of wage inequality. The Scandinavian countries have high wage economies and as a result much less income inequality. These countries rely more on technology

²² Picot, Hou, Crossman, and Lu 2022.

²³ "Unemployment rate, participation rate and employment rate by educational attainment", annual, catalogue number 14-10-0020-01, Statistics Canada.

²⁴ Poverty study, forthcoming paper.

²⁵ Educational outcomes of childhood immigrants study, forthcoming paper.

²⁶ Switzerland, with an immigration rate roughly equal to that of Canada, experienced very poor schooling outcomes among the children of immigrants, and so decided in the mid-1990s to shift their immigration policy away from the less towards the more highly educated, and altered language requirements. The result was a significant improvement in the educational outcomes among the children of immigrants. Source: Cattaneo and Wolter 2015.

to carry out many lower skilled labour market functions, and pay higher wages. Canada, as is often the case, is between these two poles.²⁷ Some discussion of which direction Canada should move (i.e. increase the low-wage labour pool or move more towards the Scandinavian model) might be useful.

Finally, the perception of immigrants by the Canadian-born may shift if there is a significant and long-run change in the characteristics of immigrants. In many countries the population generally has a more positive attitude towards highly skilled immigrants than the lower skilled.²⁸ Any change that negatively affects Canadians' perception of immigration could put a damper on its success.

The human capital immigrant selection model has to-date provided Canada with successful immigrant integration compared to most countries (OECD 2019). If there is to be a move towards more lower skilled immigration, a discussion about the resulting trade-offs would be helpful. A movement away from the human capital immigrant selection model would provide more lower skilled labour to the low-wage sectors of the economy, as many are suggesting, and reduce some of the near-term labour market tightness. However, responding to unpredictable and likely short-term hiring challenges is perhaps best addressed with the flexibility inherent in the temporary foreign worker programs. There are many possible longer-term consequences to a major shift towards higher shares of lower skilled immigration, including possibly poorer outcomes for the lower skilled immigrants themselves, in the medium and longer-run.

Why do some university-educated immigrants hold lower skill jobs?

Why are some lower skill jobs filled by university-educated immigrants? This is the second issue raised by the data presented in the paper. This issue has been around for decades, characterized by the proverbial PhD graduate immigrant driving taxi. How big an issue is this type of phenomenon? The vast majority (80%) of lower skilled jobs (NOC C or D) filled by immigrants²⁹ in 2016 were occupied by those with lower levels of education. However, 20% of these jobs were held by those with a university degree. Among the Canadian-born, this figure was 10%. Why is this figure 10 percentage points higher among immigrants than among the Canadian-born?

An alternative perspective is gained by focusing on the share of highly educated individuals in lower skill jobs, a slightly different statistic. Existing research shows there will always be some share of university graduates working in lower skilled jobs (e.g., Uppal and LaRochelle-Côté 2014). Using the results for the Canadian-born as an “expected” level, one can ask why the share of immigrant degree holders in lower skill jobs is 12 percentage points higher than that of Canadian-born degree holders.³⁰ Unfortunately, there appears to be no definitive answer to why this occurs.

²⁷ The results for the United States, Scandinavian countries, and Canada are based on US dollars using purchasing power parity comparisons and refers to the mid-2000s. Source: Kirkegaard and Moran 2015.

²⁸ Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010; Hebling and Kriesi 2014; Naumann, Stoetzer and Pietrantuono 2018.

²⁹ Focusing on immigrants aged 20 to 64.

³⁰ 24% of immigrant degree holders are in lower skilled jobs compared to 12% of the Canadian-born.

There are number of potential reasons outlined in the research, including:

- foreign credential recognition issues (e.g., Damelang and Ebensperger 2020; Banerjee et al 2021),
- discrimination (e.g., Oreopoulos 2011),
- poorer quality of education, particularly among immigrants educated in some developing nations (e.g., Friedberg 2000; Fortin et al 2016; Li and Sweetman 2014; Banerjee et al 2021),
- lower ability levels in English or French, which may be particularly important in higher skill jobs (e.g., Ferrer et al 2005; Warman et al 2015),
- a potential oversupply of highly educated immigrants in Canada (field of study matters) (e.g., Lu and Hou 2020),
- the inability of employers to assess foreign qualification levels, even if qualifications are at or above the Canadian level,
- the tendency of employers to hire individuals with familiar rather than unfamiliar backgrounds (in the face of no overall shortage of highly skilled workers), and
- a lack of the knowledge among immigrants of the networks or job search strategies that lead to higher skill employment (particularly during the first few years in Canada).

The research suggests that each of these factors contribute somewhat to the increased tendency of highly educated immigrants to hold lower skill jobs compared to their Canadian-born counterparts, but unfortunately none of them provides a complete explanation. There appears to be no single explanation, and the research does not allow an assessment of the relative contribution of each factor.

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Appendix A: List of the occupational major groups included at each skill level

Level O: Management

- Senior management occupations
- Specialized middle management occupations
- Middle management occupations in retail and wholesale trade and customer services
- Middle management occupations in trades, transportation, production and utilities

Level A: Professional, occupations usually require university education

- Professional occupations in business and finance
- Professional occupations in natural and applied sciences
- Professional occupations in nursing
- Professional occupations in health (except nursing)
- Professional occupations in education services
- Professional occupations in law and social, community and government services
- Professional occupations in art and culture

Level B: occupations usually require college education or apprenticeship training

- Administrative and financial supervisors and administrative occupations
- Finance, insurance and related business administrative occupations
- Technical occupations related to natural and applied sciences
- Technical occupations in health
- Paraprofessional occupations in legal, social, community and education services
- Occupations in front-line public protection services
- Technical occupations in art, culture, recreation and sport
- Retail sales supervisors and specialized sales occupations
- Service supervisors and specialized service occupations
- Industrial, electrical and construction trades
- Maintenance and equipment operation trades
- Supervisors and technical occupations in natural resources, agriculture and related production
- Processing, manufacturing and utilities supervisors and central control operators

Level C: occupations usually require secondary school and/or occupation-specific training

- Office support occupations
- Distribution, tracking and scheduling co-ordination occupations
- Assisting occupations in support of health services
- Care providers and educational, legal and public protection support occupations
- Sales representatives and salespersons - wholesale and retail trade
- Service representatives and other customer and personal services occupations
- Other installers, repairers and servicers and material handlers
- Transport and heavy equipment operation and related maintenance occupations
- Workers in natural resources, agriculture and related production
- Processing and manufacturing machine operators and related production workers
- Assemblers in manufacturing

Level D: on-the-job training is usually provided for these occupations

- Sales support occupations
- Service support and other service occupations, n.e.c.
- Trades helpers, construction labourers and related occupations
- Harvesting, landscaping and natural resources labourers
- Labourers in processing, manufacturing and utilities

Source: Statistics Canada, Variant of NOC 2016 Version 1.0 - [Analysis by skill level](#)