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This study was jointly conducted by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and Statistics Canada.

Abstract

Using the 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability, this study examined differences in educational attainment and employment between immigrants with and without disabilities. Immigrant men with and without disabilities had similar levels of educational attainment, while immigrant women with disabilities had lower levels of educational attainment than immigrant women without disabilities. Immigrant men and women with disabilities had lower levels of employment than their counterparts without disabilities. Much of the gap in employment between immigrants with and without disabilities was found at lower levels of education. Among those with a bachelor's degree or higher, there was a smaller gap in employment between immigrant men with and without disabilities, and no difference in employment between immigrant women with and without disabilities. These patterns in employment were mostly similar to those between Canadian-born persons with and without disabilities.

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Introduction

Persons with disabilities face disadvantages in employment, and these have implications for their well-being (Hardy & Vergara, 2025; Pettinicchio & Maroto, 2024; Schimmele, Jeon, & Arim, 2025). The gap in employment between persons with and without disabilities is a widely used measure of inequality. Persons with disabilities encounter socially imposed barriers that reduce their chances of educational success, such as a lack of accommodations or special programs in schools (Schimmele, Jeon, & Arim, 2021). Low levels of educational attainment among persons with disabilities are one of the known factors that partly explain their lower employment rates (Albinowski, Magda, & Rozszczypała, 2025). On average, persons with disabilities who have a postsecondary education have better chances of employment than those with lower levels of education (Albinowski, Magda, & Rozszczypała, 2025; Ballo, 2020).

This study examines gaps in educational attainment and employment between immigrants with and without disabilities, using data from the 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD). To account for the role of educational attainment, differences in employment between immigrants with and without disabilities are estimated separately for those with a high school diploma or less, a postsecondary certificate or diploma below a bachelor's degree, and a bachelor's degree or higher. Differences in employment between Canadian-born persons with and without disabilities are also estimated to compare whether the employment gaps between immigrants with and without disabilities are similar to or different from those of their Canadian-born counterparts.

The CSD identifies persons with disabilities as persons whose daily activities are limited because of a long-term health condition (Pianosi et al., 2023). The CSD is a postcensal survey and is linked to 2021 Census variables on education, employment and demographic characteristics. The data on employment were measured in May 2021, when employment rates were still generally lower because of restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic (Statistics Canada, 2021). The analysis focuses on individuals aged 18 to 64 years and is conducted separately for men and women to account for gender differences in educational attainment and employment.

Educational attainment among immigrants with disabilities

The gaps in educational attainment between immigrant men with and without disabilities were small and statistically not significant. In 2021, 37% of immigrant men with disabilities had a bachelor's degree or higher, which was similar to immigrant men without disabilities, among whom 44% had this level of education. The percentage of immigrant men with disabilities who had a bachelor's degree or higher was twice that of Canadian-born men with disabilities (16%) and higher than that of Canadian-born men without disabilities (22%) who had the same level of education.

About 26% of immigrant men with disabilities had a postsecondary certificate or diploma below a bachelor's degree, which was similar to immigrant men without disabilities (23%). Around 36% of Canadian-born men with disabilities had a postsecondary certificate or diploma below a bachelor's degree, which was about the same as Canadian-born men without disabilities. A similar percentage of immigrant men with disabilities (37%) and without disabilities (33%) had a high school diploma or less. About 47% of Canadian-born men with disabilities and 42% of those without disabilities had a high school diploma or less.

Almost 35% of immigrant women with disabilities had a bachelor's degree or higher, which was a lower percentage than that among immigrant women without disabilities (46%). But the percentage of immigrant women with disabilities who had this education level was higher than that among Canadian-born women with disabilities (24%) and similar to that among Canadian-born women without disabilities (32%).

A similar percentage of immigrant women with disabilities had a postsecondary certificate or diploma below a bachelor's degree (31%) as those without disabilities (26%). Similar percentages of Canadian-born women with disabilities (36%) and without disabilities (35%) had this level of education. About 35% of immigrant women with disabilities had a high school diploma or less, which was similar to those without disabilities (28%). About 40% of Canadian-born women with disabilities and 33% of those without disabilities had this level of education.

Immigrants with disabilities had lower employment rates than immigrants without disabilities

In 2021, there was a gap in employment between immigrant men with disabilities and their counterparts without disabilities. About 62% of immigrant men with disabilities were employed, compared with 79% of immigrant men without disabilities—a 17 percentage point gap in employment. The employment rates of Canadian-born men with disabilities (61%) and without disabilities (79%) were similar to those of their immigrant counterparts.

There was also a large gap in employment between immigrant women with and without disabilities. About 55% of immigrant women with disabilities and 67% of immigrant women without disabilities were employed—a 12 percentage point gap. The gap in employment between Canadian-born women with disabilities (62%) and without disabilities (75%) was about the same as that among immigrant women.

Having a bachelor's degree or higher was associated with a smaller gap in employment between immigrant men with and without disabilities

About 51% of immigrant men with disabilities who had a high school diploma or less were employed in 2021, which was 18 percentage points lower than the percentage for immigrant men without disabilities with this level of education, after accounting for differences in age, mother tongue and residence in a population centre or rural area (Table 1).¹ At this level of education, Canadian-born men with disabilities had an employment rate that was 23 percentage points lower than the rate among Canadian-born men without disabilities.

1. Age group was defined as 18 to 34, 35 to 54 and 55 to 64 years. Mother tongue was defined as English or French, another language and English or French, or another language. A population centre has a population of at least 1,000 persons and a population density of no less than 400 persons per square kilometre. Population centres were measured as centres of 1,000 to 29,999 persons, 30,000 to 99,999 persons, and 100,000 persons or more. Other areas were defined as rural.

Table 1
Employment among Canadian men with and without disabilities aged 18 to 64 years by immigrant status and educational attainment, 2021

	High school diploma or less			Postsecondary certificate or diploma below a bachelor's degree			Bachelor's degree or higher		
	95% confidence interval			95% confidence interval			95% confidence interval		
	mean	lower	upper	mean	lower	upper	mean	lower	upper
Immigrant men									
Immigrants with disabilities	50.9 *	39.2	62.5	61.8 *	51.7	71.8	73.2 *	63.1	83.3
Immigrants without disabilities	68.7	66.2	71.2	82.8	80.7	85.0	85.4	83.7	87.0
Canadian-born men									
Canadian-born persons with disabilities	47.3 *	44.0	50.6	69.8 *	66.1	73.4	83.2	78.7	87.6
Canadian-born persons without disabilities	70.5	69.3	71.7	83.2	82.1	84.3	87.0	85.7	88.2

* significantly different from men without disabilities in the same immigrant status and educational attainment categories ($p < 0.05$)

Note: Regression models controlled for age group, mother tongue and residence in a population centre or rural area.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2022.

Having a postsecondary certificate or diploma below a bachelor's degree was associated with a higher level of employment among immigrant men with disabilities. Almost 62% of immigrant men with disabilities who had this level of education were employed. However, their employment rate was still 21 percentage points lower than the rate among immigrant men without disabilities with this level of education. Among those with a postsecondary certificate or diploma below a bachelor's degree, Canadian-born men with disabilities also had a lower employment rate (70%) than their counterparts without disabilities (83%).

The gap in employment between immigrant men with and without disabilities was smaller among more highly educated individuals. Among immigrant men with a bachelor's degree or higher, 73% of those with disabilities were employed, compared with 85% of those without disabilities—a 12 percentage point gap. Among Canadian-born men with a bachelor's degree or higher, the employment gap between those with disabilities (83%) and without disabilities (87%) was small and not statistically significant.

One question that arises is whether these employment gaps were different for immigrant men with and without disabilities than for Canadian-born men with and without disabilities. At all levels of educational attainment, the size of the employment gap between immigrant men with and without disabilities was not significantly different from the gap between Canadian-born men with and without disabilities.

There was no employment gap between immigrant women with and without disabilities who had a bachelor's degree or higher

The employment gap between immigrant women with and without disabilities occurred at lower levels of education. Among those with a high school diploma or less, 36% of immigrant women with disabilities were employed in 2021 (Table 2). This was 17 percentage points lower than the employment rate of immigrant women without disabilities who had the same level of education. There was a similarly large employment gap between Canadian-born women with and without disabilities with the same level of education.

Table 2
Employment among Canadian women with and without disabilities aged 18 to 64 years by immigrant status and educational attainment, 2021

	High school diploma or less			Postsecondary certificate or diploma below a bachelor's degree			Bachelor's degree or higher		
	95% confidence interval			95% confidence interval			95% confidence interval		
	mean	lower	upper	mean	lower	upper	mean	lower	upper
Immigrant women									
Immigrants with disabilities	36.4 *	27.9	44.9	54.2 *	44.7	63.7	76.9	70.0	83.8
Immigrants without disabilities	53.5	50.9	56.1	69.8	67.2	72.5	73.3	71.3	75.4
Canadian-born women									
Canadian-born persons with disabilities	44.5 *	41.5	47.6	68.0 *	64.9	71.1	81.7	78.6	84.7
Canadian-born persons without disabilities	60.7	59.2	62.3	79.0	77.7	80.2	84.5	83.3	85.7

* significantly different from women without disabilities in the same immigrant status and educational attainment categories ($p < 0.05$)

Note: Regression models controlled for age group, mother tongue and residence in a population centre or rural area.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2022.

Among immigrant women with disabilities, having a postsecondary certificate or diploma below a bachelor's degree was associated with higher employment, compared with their counterparts with a high school diploma or less. However, a large gap in employment persisted between immigrant women with disabilities (54%) and those without disabilities (70%) who had a postsecondary certificate or diploma below a bachelor's degree. There was a similar employment gap between Canadian-born women with and without disabilities who had this level of education.

Having a bachelor's degree or higher was also associated with a higher rate of employment among immigrant women with disabilities. At this level of education, the employment gap between immigrant women with disabilities (77%) and those without disabilities (73%) was small and not statistically significant. The employment gap between Canadian-born women with disabilities (82%) and those without disabilities (84%) who had a bachelor's degree or higher was also small and not statistically significant.

Conclusion

It is important to determine where and when immigrants with disabilities encounter barriers to educational attainment and employment. Immigrant men with and without disabilities had similar levels of education, while immigrant women with disabilities had lower levels of educational attainment as their counterparts without disabilities. The largest gaps in employment between immigrants with and without disabilities were found at lower levels of educational attainment. In fact, among those with a bachelor's degree or higher, there was a smaller employment gap between immigrant men with and without disabilities and no employment gap between immigrant women with and without disabilities. These patterns in employment between immigrants with and without disabilities were mostly similar to those between Canadian-born persons with and without disabilities. In some cases, increasing support for persons with disabilities to achieve higher education may improve their employment outcomes. Education-specific differences in employment among persons with disabilities may reflect the greater job opportunities that are available at higher levels of education. There may also be fewer job opportunities at lower levels of education because of the restrictions that disabilities impose on manual labour (Albinowski et al., 2025).

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