

Selected but neglected: Projecting labour market and retention outcomes for 2027 immigrants

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Executive Summary

Canada plans to admit 380,000 new permanent residents in 2027 under its 2027–2029 Immigration Levels Plan.[1] We estimate that approximately 190,000 (50%) of these will be university-educated and between the ages of 25 and 64 at the time of admission. These immigrants are selected to help address specific skilled labour shortages and contribute to Canada's economic growth. However, it is not known how many of these educated immigrants will be able to do the skilled jobs for which the immigration system selected them. This research demonstrates that 20 years after admission, 17.4% are projected to have left Canada, and just 35.9% will work in jobs that make full use of their educational qualifications.

This underutilization of immigrant talent even exists in fields where demand for skilled labour is acute, such as health care. Among working-age immigrants admitted in 2027 whose highest degree is in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine or optometry, just half (50.9%) are projected to remain in Canada and work in occupations that match their educational qualifications – even two decades after admission.

This contrast between the intentions of Canada's immigrant selection practices and the actual work these immigrants end up doing after admission is stark. Canada selects these highly educated immigrants for admission on account of their specific skills. Yet after admission, the majority do not work in the fields for which they were selected. This is particularly concerning in regulated professions, such as health care, where the demand for skilled labour is high and foreign credential recognition and professional licensing can create additional barriers to practice.

IN 2027, CANADA EXPECTS

380,000

new permanent residents

APPROXIMATELY

190,000

will be university educated and of working age

20 YEARS AFTER ADMISSION

35.9%

will work in jobs that make full use of their qualifications

17.4%

are projected to have left Canada

These findings suggest that the Government of Canada should devote more focus to what happens after immigrants arrive, to maximize professional integration and ensure that highly educated immigrants are able to contribute in the ways the economy needs, and for which they were hand-picked.

1 Our forecast excludes permanent resident admissions under the government's one-time initiatives and time-limited measures. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, "Supplementary Information for the 2027–2029 Immigration Levels Plan."

Recommendations

01

Advance the Fair Licensing Act and Canada Fair Licensing Transfer

For regulated professions that require licensing, government should consult with stakeholders to develop a *Fair Licensing Act*, accompanied by a *Canada Fair Licensing Transfer,* as proposed by ICC in 2026, which rewards provinces and territories that effectively and comprehensively remove barriers preventing qualified immigrants from practising in their fields, while withholding funds from provinces that do not comply.

02

End discriminatory hiring practices and enhance supports for employers to address barriers to hiring immigrant talent

Employers should equip themselves with better training, tools and systems to end discriminatory hiring practices and identify and assess immigrant talent, as highlighted by ICC in 2024. We also recommend that federal and provincial governments provide greater supports for employers to discover, recognize, and utilize immigrant talent, particularly small and medium-sized businesses that may lack the necessary resources and expertise.

03

Systematically monitor immigrant job overqualification rates and set measurable targets

Government should establish regular monitoring of immigrant job overqualification rates, alongside existing employment measures. Measurable targets should be set for improving qualification-matched employment and licensing outcomes in regulated professions.

04

Strengthen the monitoring and analysis of immigrant onward migration trends and invest in immigrant retention

Government should monitor and analyze immigrant onward migration to better understand who leaves Canada and why, and develop targeted policies to improve immigrant retention. We also recommend greater investment in integration activities that strengthen immigrants' sense of belonging and economic stability, thereby supporting their long-term retention in Canada.

Introduction

Immigration policy in Canada can feel like a game of numbers, reduced to public debates over how many immigrants should be admitted and under which categories. Yet immigration levels plans and admissions targets mask many of Canada's deeper challenges with immigration. In our previous *Leaky Bucket* reports, we highlighted the challenge of immigrants leaving Canada after admission, including those selected to fill critical talent pipelines. But retaining immigrants is only part of the story. What happens to those who stay? Are they able to fully contribute to the Canadian economy in the fields for which they were selected?

Canada's newly announced 2027–2029 Immigration Levels Plan reveals the government's goal to admit 380,000 new permanent residents annually over the next three years. Based on historical patterns, we estimate that approximately 190,000 (50%) of these immigrants will be university-educated (holding a bachelor's degree or higher) and between the ages of 25 and 64 (referred to as working-age, university-educated immigrants throughout this report) at the time of admission.[2] These immigrants represent a substantial pool of human capital, most of whom are selected to address specific skilled labour shortages, fill critical positions in key sectors, and contribute to Canada's long-term economic growth. But admitting highly educated immigrants is only the first step. Once in Canada, will they find commensurate employment and contribute to the economy as intended? While immigration levels plans tell us how many people Canada aims to admit, they reveal little about how effectively their skills will be utilized in the years that follow.

2 Following several Statistics Canada studies examining socioeconomic and labour market outcomes, we define the working-age population as individuals aged 25–64. Schimmele and Hou, "Trends in Education–Occupation Mismatch"; Stick, Leanage, and Arim, "Socioeconomic Profile of Working-Age Immigrants"; Wall and Kow, *A Portrait of Educational Attainment and Occupational Outcomes*.

This question is particularly important given Canada's changing economic landscape. In response to growing trade uncertainty and economic challenges, the federal government has launched several initiatives, such as Team Canada Strong, to strengthen Canada's workforce and support economic growth. As outlined in Budget 2026, Canada continues to prioritize attracting and selecting immigrants with the skills and expertise required to address labour shortages in key sectors.[3] Many of the occupations prioritized through Canada's immigration policies require university-level education. For example, seven of the nine occupation-based selection categories under Express Entry in 2026 include occupations that typically require a bachelor's degree or higher.[4] Recent reforms to Express Entry introduced on November 3, 2026, allow candidates to receive 70 additional points for qualifying Canadian work experience or 100 points for a qualifying job offer in the highest-wage occupations.[5] Of the 31 occupations eligible for these points in the highest-wage category, 28 (90%) are classified as typically requiring a bachelor's degree or higher.[6]

Attracting highly educated immigrants alone will not deliver these economic benefits. Canada must also retain the talent it attracts and ensure that immigrants have opportunities to put their education and skills to full, productive use. When these immigrants leave Canada or are unable to find jobs that match their qualifications, Canada loses the very economic contributions that its immigration policies aim to generate. Even without accounting for those who leave the country, RBC estimates the cost of immigrant talent integration barriers at up to $50 billion annually.[7] The success of Canada's immigration strategy should therefore be measured not only by the appropriateness of the number of immigrants it will admit, but also by whether they stay and are able to contribute to their full potential.

$50 billion

Annual estimated cost of immigrant integration barriers

To shed light on this question, this report uses historical data from the Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB) and Censuses to forecast the onward migration and labour market outcomes of immigrants expected to be admitted in 2027 according to the 2027–2029 Immigration Levels Plan. By examining the experiences of previous immigrant cohorts, we project how many incoming working-age, university-educated immigrants are likely to leave Canada over time and, among those who stay, how many are likely to work in occupations that match their educational qualifications, over the first 20 years following their admission to Canada. To put these numbers into perspective, we also compare the projected labour market outcomes of immigrants who remain in Canada with those of Canadian-born individuals of similar ages and educational attainment.

3 Department of Finance Canada, *Budget 2026*.
4 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, "Express Entry: Category-Based Selection."
5 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, "2026 Changes to Points for Canadian Work Experience and Job Offers."
6 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, "High-Wage Occupations and How We Assess Them."

7 RBC's estimate is based on the potential economic gains from closing gaps in wages and employment rates between immigrants and Canadian-born workers. Agopsowicz and Billy-Ochieng, *Untapped Potential*.

Our projections demonstrate that a significant proportion of this talent will not have the opportunity to apply the very skills for which they were selected. Among the 380,000 permanent residents Canada plans to admit in 2027 under the 2027–2029 Immigration Levels Plan, approximately 190,000 (50%) are projected to be working-age and university-educated at the time of admission. The size of this group is expected to increase over time due to younger immigrants reaching working age and obtaining higher levels of education. Three years after admission, we forecast that only 56,000 (29.2%) of the 2027 cohort will be working in a job that matches their educational qualifications. The remainder are projected to have left Canada (2.9%), be not employed (25.1%) or be working in occupations marginally below (20.1%) or significantly below (22.8%) their educational qualifications. Even 20 years after admission, just 35.9% (85,000) of working-age, university-educated immigrants admitted in 2027 are expected to be working in an occupation matching their education, with 17.4% having left Canada and the remaining 46.7% staying in Canada but either not being employed (14.0%) or working in occupations marginally below (19.0%) or significantly below (13.7%) their educational qualifications.

This underutilization of immigrant talent exists even in fields such as health care, where demand for skilled labour is very high. More than one in five Canadians — an estimated 6.5 million people — do not have a family physician or nurse practitioner that they can see regularly,[8] and nearly 28,000 people died in 2024 awaiting medical care.[9] Yet despite these pressures on Canada's health-care system, only 50.9% of all immigrants admitted in 2027 whose highest degree is in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine or optometry (referred to as immigrants with health-related professional degrees throughout this report) are projected to remain in Canada and work in occupations that match their educational qualifications even 20 years after admission. Among those who remain in Canada, this share rises to 61.6%, still 26.5 percentage points lower than that of comparable Canadian-born individuals.

This contrast reveals a broader weakness in Canada's immigration policy: the country selects these highly educated immigrants for admission on the basis of their specific skills. However, after admission, many are unable to work in the fields for which they were selected. This is particularly acute in regulated professions, such as health care, where demand for skilled labour is very high but internationally trained professionals often face additional barriers related to professional licensing and foreign qualification recognition. To address these challenges, we propose several policy recommendations aimed at improving immigrants' labour market integration and reducing onward migration, with a particular focus on those trained in regulated professions.

The rest of this report begins with an overview of our forecasting methodology, followed by detailed projections of onward migration and labour market outcomes for both the broader population of working-age, university-educated immigrants admitted in 2027 and those with health-related professional degrees. Finally, we discuss our policy recommendations in greater detail.

8 Duong and Vogel, "National Survey Highlights Worsening Primary Care Access."
9 El-Assal, *Ready to Contribute*.

Methodology Overview

This report focuses on working-age, university-educated immigrants (those aged 25–64 who hold a bachelor's degree or higher) during the first 20 years following their admission to Canada. University-educated immigrants have become an increasingly prominent part of recent admission cohorts and are an important focus of Canada's economic immigration policies. According to 2021 Census data, 40% of immigrants admitted between 2016 and 2021 were working-age and university-educated, which is 26.7 percentage points higher than the share in the Canadian-born population. These immigrants represent an important source of human capital and are selected to address specific skilled labour shortages, strengthen key sectors, and contribute to Canada's economic growth. Understanding whether Canada can retain these immigrants and effectively utilize their skills is therefore particularly relevant to assessing the long-term outcomes of its immigration policies.

At incremental points in time over the first 20 years following admission, we forecast the percentage of working-age, university-educated immigrants in three categories:

(1) **onward migration**: those who have left Canada;
(2) **labour market underutilization**: those who remain in Canada but are either not employed or working in occupations that do not require a bachelor's degree;
(3) **qualification-matched employment**: those who remain in Canada and work in occupations that require a bachelor's degree or higher.

By examining these outcomes over the first 20 years following admission, we aim to understand how immigrant onward migration and labour market outcomes evolve over time, rather than focusing solely on the immediate post-arrival period.

To translate these percentages into actual numbers in the 2027–2029 Immigration Levels Plan, we also project how many immigrants admitted in 2027 under the Plan will be aged 25–64 and hold a bachelor's degree or higher at incremental points in time during the first 20 years following admission. We then apply the estimated percentages for each outcome category to calculate the corresponding number of immigrants.

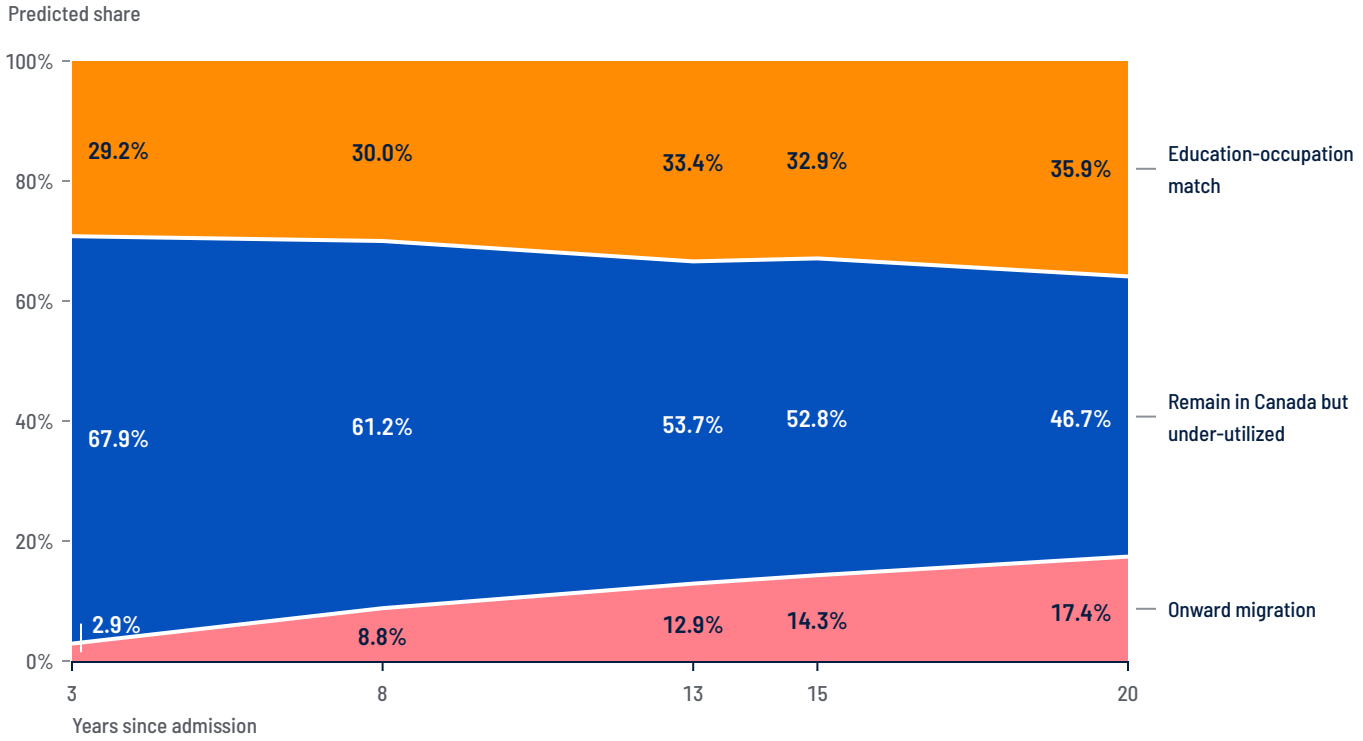
At a high level, our forecasts draw on historical patterns observed in the Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB) and previous censuses. The projections assume that historical patterns in immigrant characteristics, onward migration, and labour market outcomes will remain informative for immigrants admitted in 2027. The detailed methodology, data sources, and technical assumptions underlying each component of our projections are outlined in Appendix A and a separate technical supplement.

Immigrant Talent Remains Underutilized Even Decades After Admission

Figure 1, below, presents the projected onward migration and labour market outcomes of working-age, university-educated immigrants over the first 20 years following admission. Consistent with the findings of our previous *Leaky Bucket* reports,[10] onward migration remains a significant challenge: 17.4% of these immigrants are projected to leave Canada within 20 years, meaning Canada loses out on the economic contributions they could have made had they remained.

10 Dennler, *The Leaky Bucket*; Monteiro, Guccini, and Hamman, *The Leaky Bucket 2024*; Conference Board of Canada, The, *The Leaky Bucket 2025*.

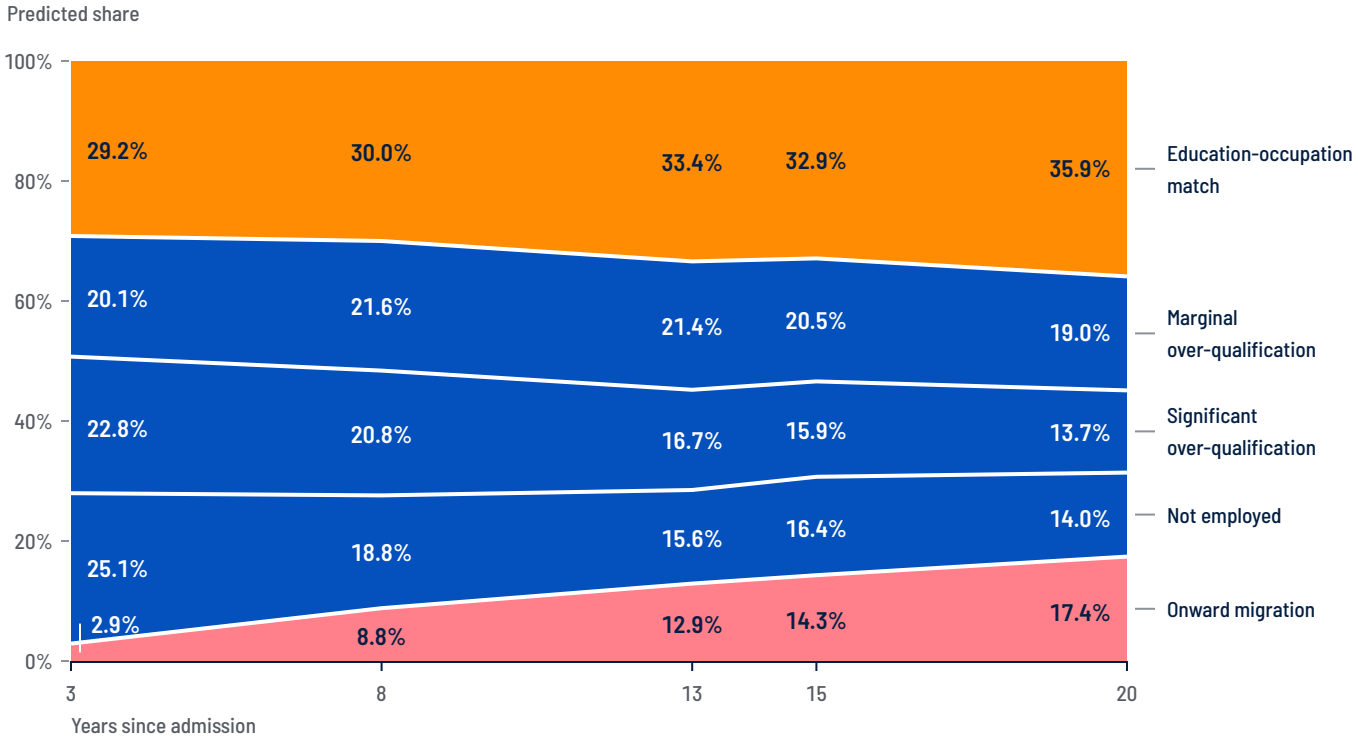
Figure 1: Projected Onward Migration and Labour Market Outcomes of Working-Age, University-Educated Immigrants, by Years Since Admission



Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 and 2021 Censuses; Longitudinal Immigration Database.

Even among those who remain in Canada, a substantial share of immigrants cannot put their educational qualifications to full use. Three years after admission, 67.9% of working-age, university-educated immigrants are projected to be either not employed or working in occupations that do not require a bachelor's degree, while only 29.2% are expected to work in occupations that match their educational qualifications. Even 20 years after admission, just 35.9% are projected to be working in qualification-matched occupations, with 17.4% having left Canada and the remaining 46.7% staying in Canada but having their educational qualifications underutilized.

Figure 2: Projected Onward Migration and Detailed Labour Market Outcomes of Working-Age, University-Educated Immigrants, by Years Since Admission



Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 and 2021 Censuses; Longitudinal Immigration Database.

Figure 2 provides a more detailed breakdown of immigrants whose educational qualifications are underutilized in the Canadian labour market.[11] This group is further divided into three categories:

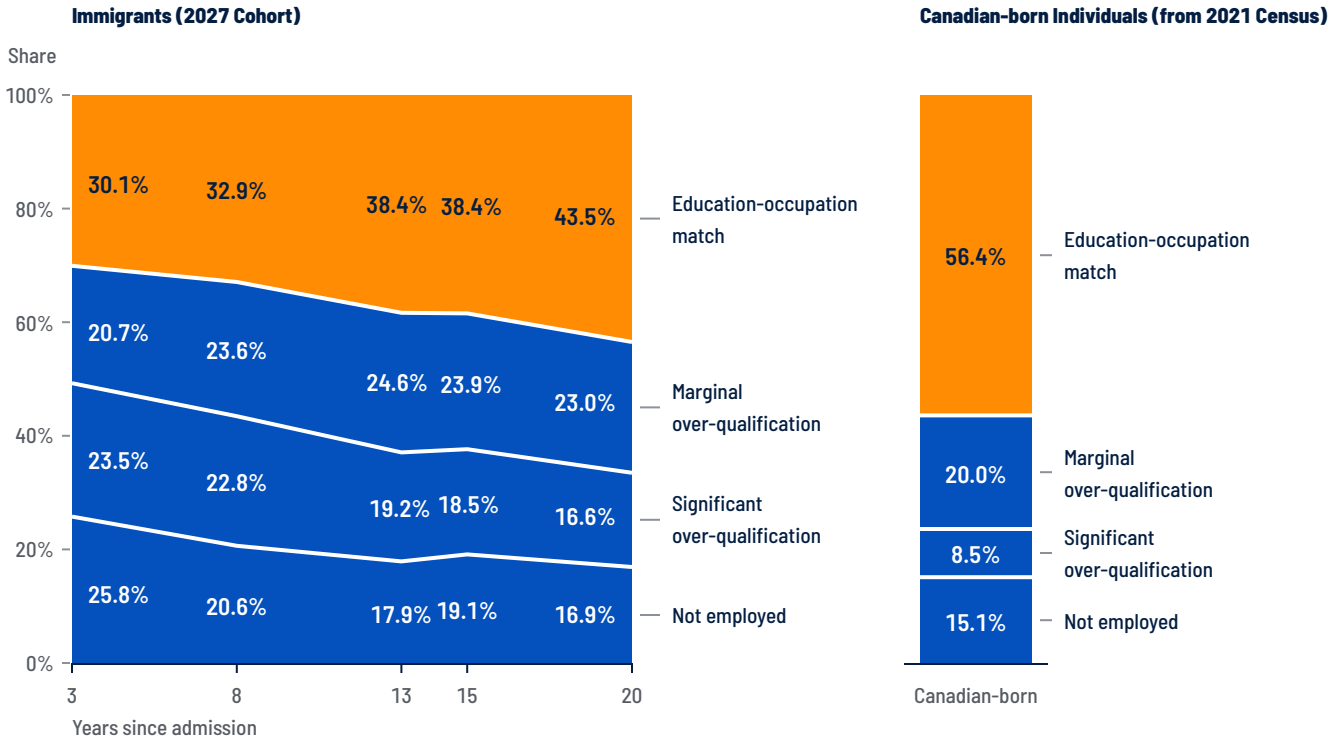
(1) **not employed**;[12]
(2) **marginally overqualified**: those working in occupations that require some postsecondary education below a bachelor's degree, such as a college diploma or apprenticeship training;
(3) **significantly overqualified:** those working in occupations that typically require a high school diploma or less.

Three years after admission, of the total population of working-age, university-educated immigrants, 25.1% are projected to be not employed, 20.1% to work in marginally overqualified occupations, and 22.8% to work in significantly overqualified occupations. Although non-employment and significant overqualification rates are projected to decline as immigrants spend more time in Canada, these challenges persist even 20 years after admission, with 14.0% projected to be not employed and 13.7% working in significantly overqualified occupations.

11 Our classification of education–occupation match outcomes follows the methodology used in previous Statistics Canada studies. Schimmele and Hou, "Trends in Education–Occupation Mismatch"; Hou, Schimmele, and Lu, *Recent Trends in Over-education*.

12 This category includes both unemployed individuals (those who are without work but actively seeking employment) and individuals outside the labour force, such as students, retirees, and those caring for family members. Statistics Canada, "Classification of Employed Status."

Figure 3: Labour Market Outcomes of Working-Age, University-Educated Immigrants Remaining in Canada (Projected) and Canadian-Born Individuals (2021 Census)



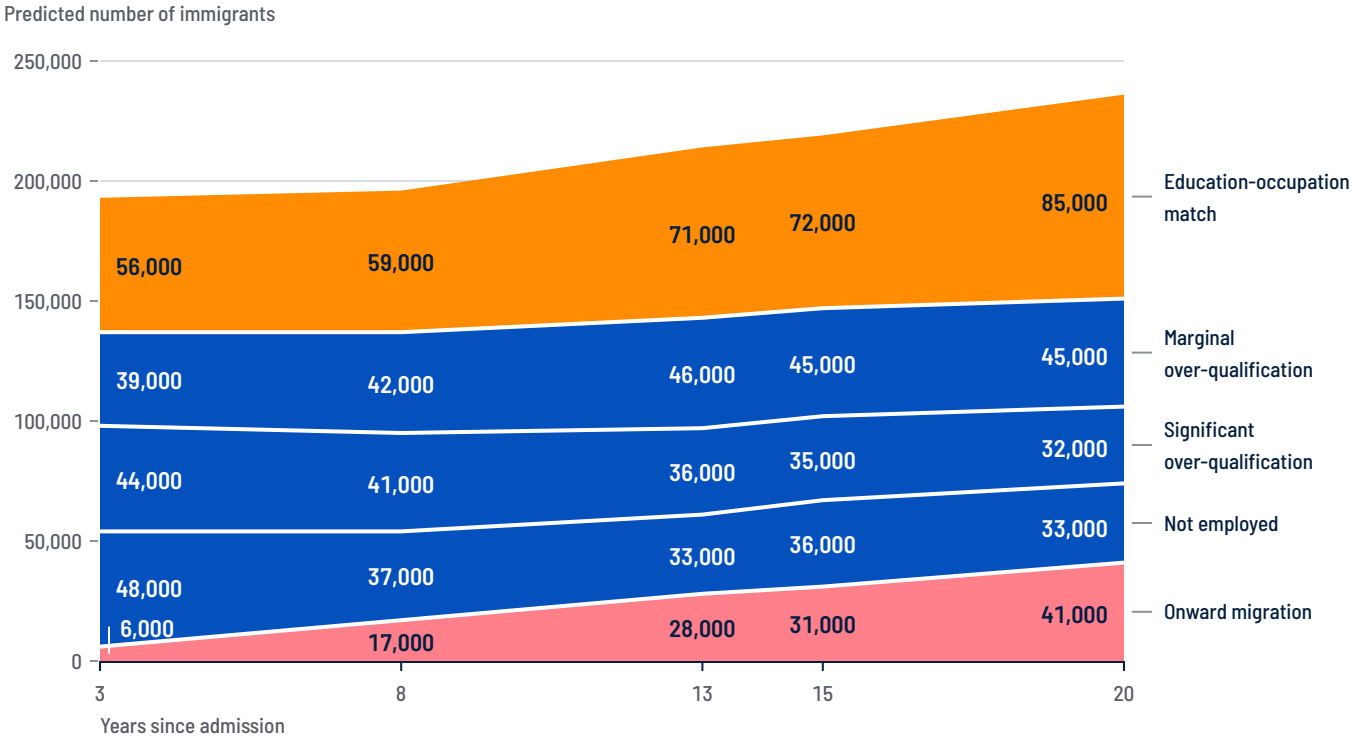
Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 and 2021 Censuses.

To put these findings into perspective, we also compare immigrants' labour market outcomes with those of Canadian-born individuals of similar ages and educational attainment. Since our analysis does not include comparable emigration estimates for Canadian-born individuals, the comparison focuses on people who remain in Canada. Figure 3 (a) shows the projected labour market outcomes of immigrants who remain in Canada, and Figure 3 (b) presents the corresponding outcomes for comparable Canadian-born individuals.[13] We can see that even 20 years after admission, only 43.5% of working-age and university-educated immigrants who remain in Canada are projected to work in occupations that match their educational qualifications, which is 12.9 percentage points lower than the share in the comparable Canadian-born population. At the same time, 16.6% are projected to work in significantly overqualified jobs, about twice the share among comparable Canadian-born individuals. This gap highlights the persistent underutilization of immigrants' educational qualifications and suggests that immigrants potentially face additional labour market barriers, such as difficulties with foreign credential recognition, limited Canadian work experience, and discrimination, as documented in existing studies.[14]

13 Unlike the preceding figures, which present percentages relative to the entire immigrant population, these figures calculate percentages only among individuals who remain in Canada.

14 Hardy, *Labour Market Experiences of Recent Working-Age Immigrants*; Oreopoulos, "Why Do Skilled Immigrants Struggle in the Labor Market?"; El-Assal, *Ready to Contribute*.

Figure 4: Projected Numbers of Working-Age, University-Educated Immigrants Admitted in 2027, by Onward Migration and Labour Market Outcomes



Sources: Statistics Canada, 2006, 2016 and 2021 Censuses; 2011 National Household Survey; Longitudinal Immigration Database.

Finally, we translate these percentages into projected numbers based on the 2027 admission target outlined in the 2027–2029 Immigration Levels Plan. Figure 4 presents the projected number of working-age, university-educated immigrants in each of the outcome categories over the first 20 years following admission. We estimate that approximately 50% (190,000) of immigrants admitted under the Plan will be working-age and university-educated at the time of admission, increasing to 62.2% (236,000) 20 years after admission. This population is projected to grow over time as younger immigrants enter the working-age population and bring different educational attainment patterns. Of this population, approximately 131,000 (67.9%) are projected to remain in Canada but have their educational qualifications underutilized three years after admission, either because they are not employed (48,000; 25.1%) or are working in occupations significantly below (44,000; 22.8%) or marginally below (39,000; 20.1%) their educational qualifications. Although labour market outcomes are projected to improve over time, approximately 110,000 (46.7%) are still expected to fall into these circumstances even 20 years after admission. By that point, an additional 41,000 (17.4%) immigrants are projected to have left Canada.

Even 20 years after admission, just **35.9%** are projected to be working in qualification-matched occupations, with **17.4%** having left Canada and the remaining **46.7%** staying in Canada but having their educational qualifications underutilized.

These projections demonstrate that occupational overqualification remains a persistent challenge among working-age, university-educated immigrants, even decades after arrival in Canada. The underutilization of immigrants' qualifications not only represents a missed opportunity for immigrants themselves but also a loss of contributions to Canada's economy. This is particularly concerning in fields where Canada faces significant labour shortages.

To examine this issue more closely in fields with high demand for skilled workers, we take a closer look at immigrants with health-related professional degrees.[15] These immigrants have specialized professional training in fields where skilled workers are in high demand: according to Employment and Social Development Canada's Canadian Occupational Projection System (COPS), family physicians, veterinarians, and optometrists are projected to face a strong risk of labour shortages over 2026–2035.[16] For example, there are an estimated 58,200 job openings for family physicians but only 23,800 job seekers during this period, leaving a shortage of 34,400 (approximately 59% of projected job openings).[17] In the following section, we examine the labour market outcomes of immigrants with a health-related professional degree and the specific occupations in which they work to assess the extent to which their educational qualifications are utilized in Canada.

15 This category includes persons who have obtained degrees in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine or optometry (e.g., Doctor of Medicine, Doctor of Dental Surgery, Doctor of Veterinary Medicine, Doctor of Optometry and Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery) granted by a degree-granting institution. It excludes persons who have also obtained a master's degree or an earned doctorate. Statistics Canada, "Classification of Highest Certificate, Diploma or Degree."

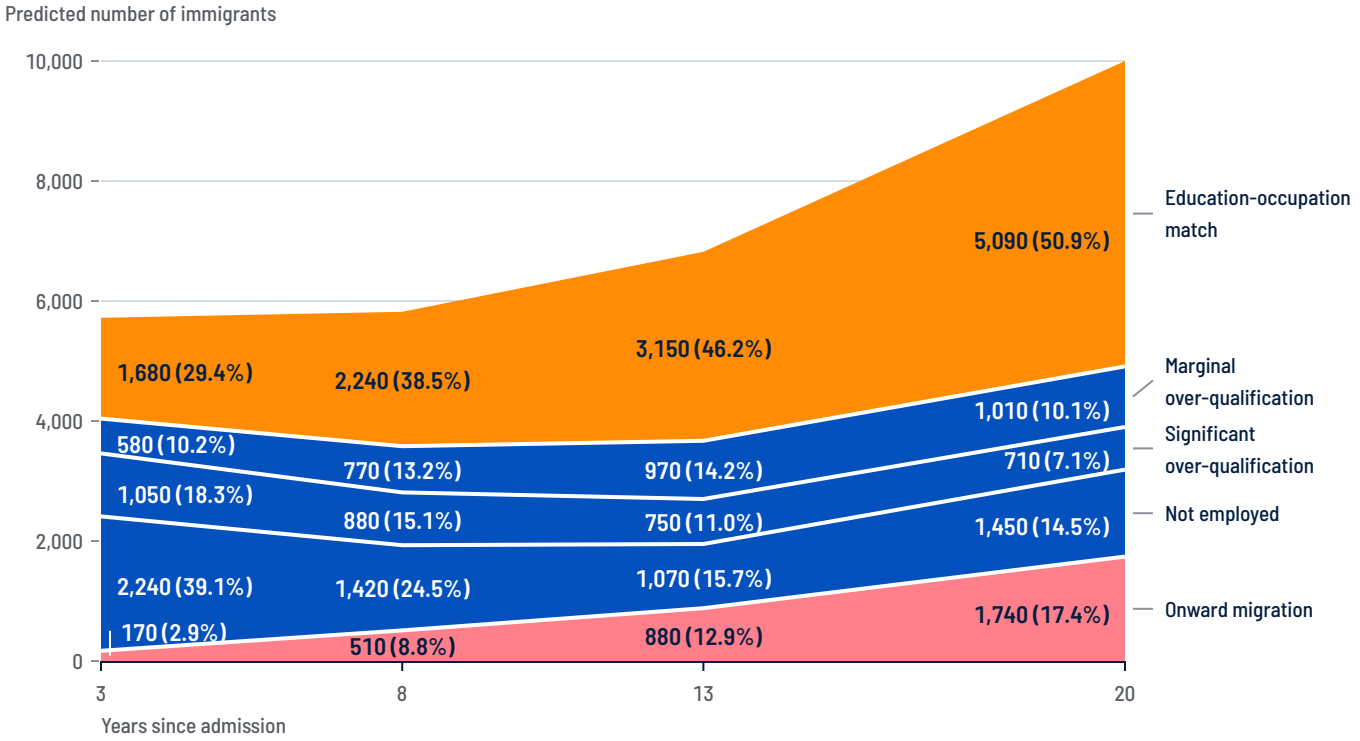
16 Employment and Social Development Canada, "Summary of Results (2026–2035)."

17 Employment and Social Development Canada, "Summary of the Components, 2026–2035."

Immigrants with Degrees in High-Demand Health-Related Professions **Face Persistent Labour Market Underutilization**

Despite strong demand for their skills, immigrants with health-related professional degrees (medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine or optometry) face substantial labour market underutilization, particularly during their early years in Canada. Based on historical patterns, we estimate that approximately 5,000 to 6,000 immigrants admitted in 2027 will be working-age and hold a health-related professional degree at the time of admission. This population is projected to increase over time as the cohort's age and educational composition evolve. Figure 5 presents their projected onward migration and labour market outcomes, both as percentages and absolute numbers. Despite strong demand for their skills, their initial labour market outcomes are even less favourable than those of the broader university-educated immigrant population. Three years after admission, an estimated 39.1% (2,240) of immigrants with these professional degrees are projected to be not employed, 14.0 percentage points higher than the share in the broader university-educated immigrant population. This may partly reflect the barriers and discrimination that immigrants face when obtaining professional licences and having foreign qualifications recognized in Canada.

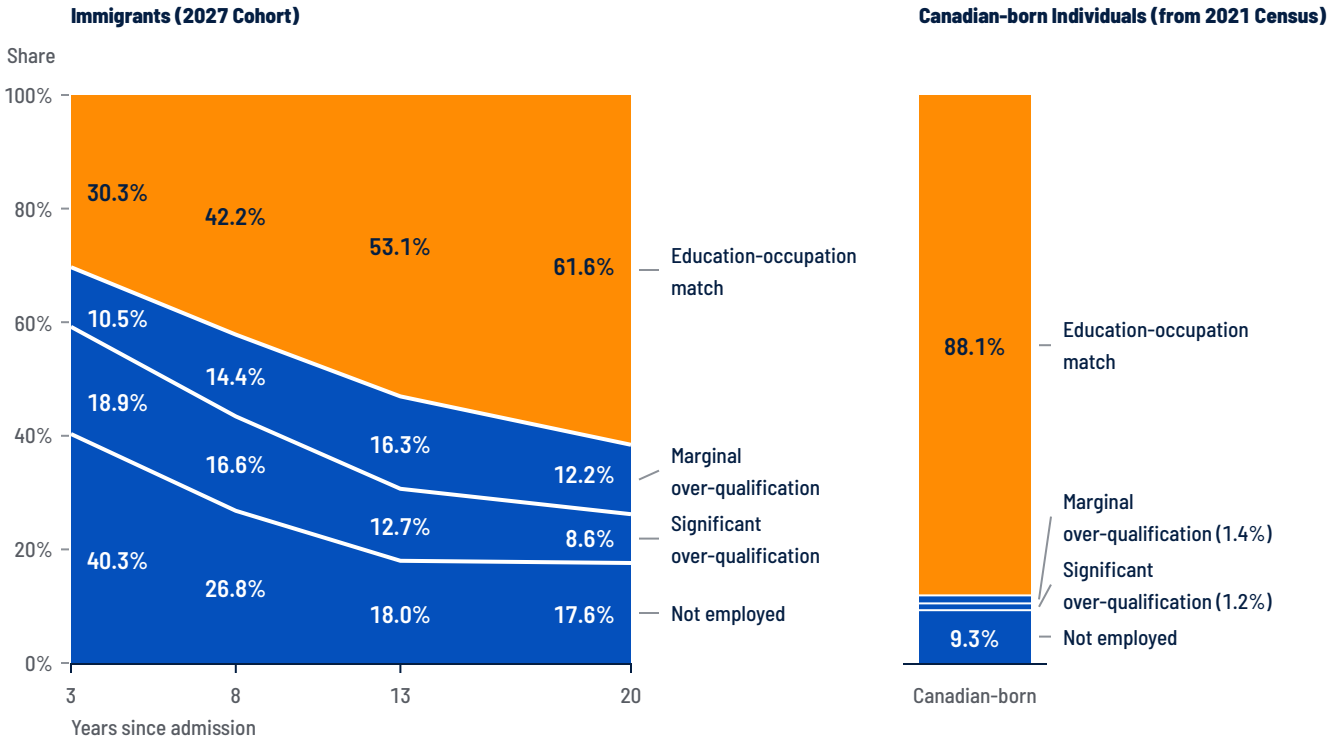
Figure 5: Projected Onward Migration and Labour Market Outcomes of Working-Age Immigrants Whose Highest Degree Is in a Health-Related Profession, by Years Since Admission



Sources: Statistics Canada, 2006, 2016 and 2021 Censuses; 2011 National Household Survey; Longitudinal Immigration Database.

The labour market underutilization of immigrants with health-related professional degrees is particularly pronounced when compared with that of Canadian-born individuals of similar ages and educational attainment. Figure 6 compares the projected labour market outcomes of immigrants admitted in 2027 who remain in Canada with those of comparable Canadian-born individuals, based on 2021 Census data. Although immigrants' labour market outcomes are projected to improve over time, they remain substantially less favourable than those of their Canadian-born counterparts. According to the 2021 Census, 88.1% of working-age Canadian-born individuals whose highest degree is in a health-related profession work in occupations that require a bachelor's degree or higher, 26.5 percentage points higher than the projected share for immigrants even 20 years after admission. If immigrants with these professional degrees achieved the same qualification-matched employment rate as their Canadian-born counterparts, approximately 2,190 additional immigrants from the 2027 admission cohort alone would be working in occupations that match their educational qualifications 20 years after admission.

Figure 6: Labour Market Outcomes of Working-Age Immigrants Remaining in Canada (Projected) and Canadian-Born Individuals (2021 Census) Whose Highest Degree Is in a Health-Related Profession



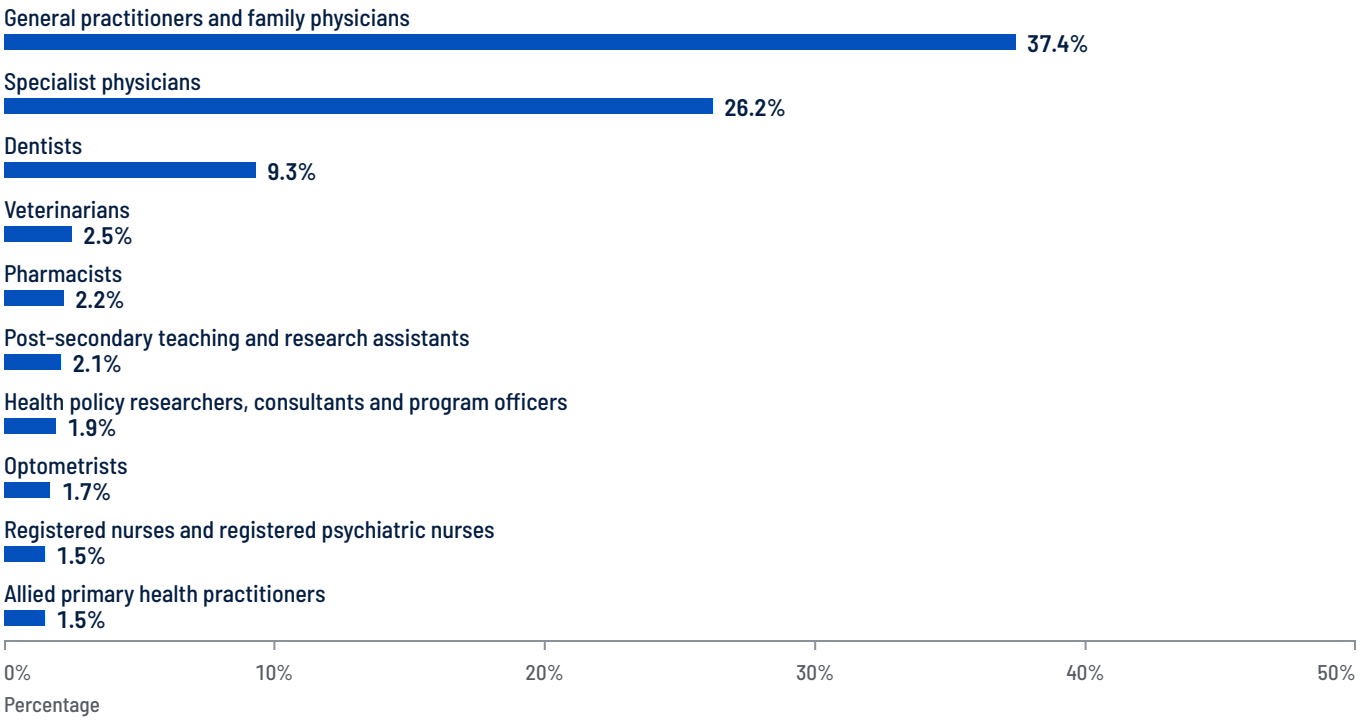
Sources: Statistics Canada, 2016 and 2021 Censuses.

These findings are particularly concerning. We know that approximately one in five Canadian adults did not have a regular health care provider in 2024, and 36% of Canadians who had an initial specialist consultation waited three months or longer.[18] Yet only 50.9% of immigrants with the highest degree in a health-related profession work in occupations that match their educational qualifications, even 20 years after admission. This represents a missed opportunity for Canada to utilize the specialized skills and training of immigrants who could help address these health-care challenges. However, overqualification alone does not tell the full story. Even immigrants who work in occupations that match their educational level (an occupation that requires a bachelor's degree or higher) may not necessarily be working in fields related to their health-related training. To better understand the extent to which these immigrants can utilize their specialized education, we take a closer look at the specific occupations in which they are employed.

18 Canadian Institute for Health Information, "Most Canadians Have a Regular Health Care Provider"; Statistics Canada, "Wait Times to See a Medical Specialist."

Yet only **50.9%** of immigrants with the highest degree in a health-related profession work in occupations that match their educational qualifications, even 20 years after admission.

Figure 7: Top 10 Occupations of Working-Age Immigrants with Health-Related Professional Degrees in Qualification-Matched Employment (2011–2016 Admission Cohorts)

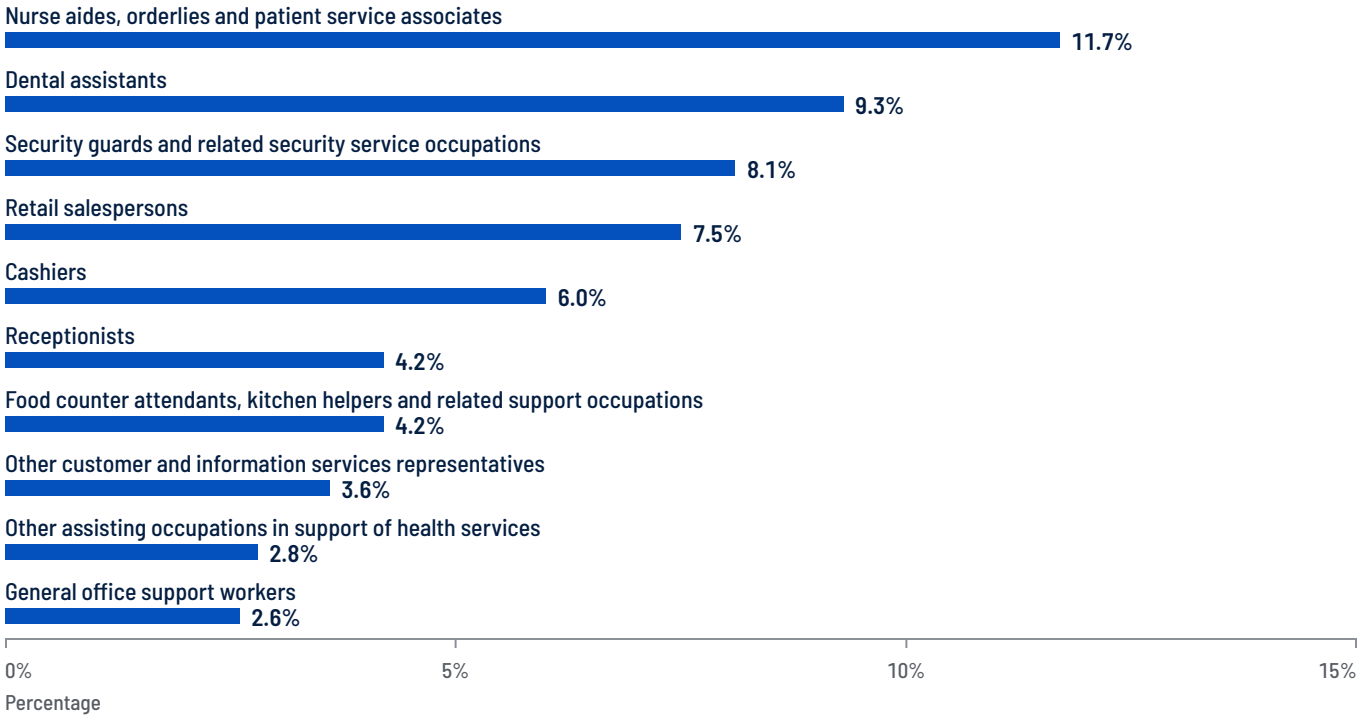


Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census.

Based on the 2016 Census, Figure 7 shows the top ten occupations among immigrants with the highest degree in a health-related profession who were admitted between 2011 and 2016 and found jobs that match their educational level (jobs that typically require a bachelor's degree or higher). These ten occupations account for 86.3% of all qualification-matched jobs held by this population. As shown in the figure, these occupations are predominantly health related. This demonstrates that when these immigrants manage to secure employment matching their educational level, they usually land in fields related to their field of study, allowing them to put their specialized training to use.

Figure 8 presents a contrasting picture. It shows the top ten occupations among immigrants with health-related professional degrees who were admitted between 2011 and 2016 and were working in significantly overqualified occupations (i.e., jobs that typically require a high school diploma or less). Among these immigrants, some work in lower-skilled health-related occupations (e.g., nurse aides and dental assistants). While these jobs contribute to health care delivery, they do not fully utilize the specialized professional training these immigrants have received. Others work in occupations completely unrelated to their educational backgrounds (e.g., security guards and retail salespersons), suggesting an even greater disconnect between their education and the work they perform.

Figure 8: Top 10 Occupations of Immigrants with Health-Related Professional Degrees Who Are Significantly Overqualified for Their Jobs (2011–2016 Admission Cohorts)



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census.

Taken together, these patterns point to a striking disconnect between Canada's demand for highly trained professionals and its ability to put the skills of immigrants who already possess relevant educational qualifications to work. Health Canada projects a shortage of 25,642 family physicians in 2030.[19] Yet only 29.4% (1,680) of working-age immigrants with a health-related professional degree planned to be admitted in 2027 are projected to be working in an occupation that matches their educational qualifications in that year. While not all these immigrants would be qualified to practise as family physicians without additional training or licensing, reducing barriers to foreign qualification recognition and professional licensing could allow more of them to contribute to the fields for which they were trained. To illustrate the potential impact, if one third of the projected underutilized group (approximately 1,290 additional immigrants from the 2027 admission cohort) were able to practise as family physicians in 2030, the additional supply from this single admission cohort alone could fill approximately 5.0% of Canada's projected family physician shortage in 2030.[20]

19 Health Canada, *Caring for Canadians: Canada's Future Health Workforce*.

20 Health Canada projects a supply–demand gap of 25,642 family physicians in 2030. We estimate that about 3,870 immigrants with health-related professional degrees from the 2027 admission cohort will remain in Canada but not be working in a job matching their qualifications in 2030 (three years after admission). If one third of them (about 1,290) were practising as family physicians, they would fill about 5.0% (1,290/25,642) of the stated projected shortage. Health Canada, *Caring for Canadians: Canada's Future Health Workforce*.

Conclusion and Recommendations

If Canada delivers on its 2027–2029 Immigration Levels Plan, it will admit 380,000 new permanent residents annually over the next three years. Of these, approximately 190,000 (50%) are estimated to be working-age and university-educated at the time of admission. These immigrants represent a substantial pool of talent and are selected to address specific skilled labour shortages and contribute to Canada's long-term economic growth. Our projections show, however, that Canada will fail to fully realize the economic contributions it expects from the immigrants it admits.

Three years after admission, approximately 131,000 (67.9%) of working-age, university-educated immigrants are projected to be either not employed or employed in occupations below (significantly or marginally) their educational qualifications. Although outcomes are expected to improve over time, approximately 110,000 (46.7%) are projected to remain in these circumstances even 20 years after admission. By that point, another 41,000 (17.4%) are also projected to have left Canada. This underutilization of immigrant talent exists even in fields such as health care, where demand for skilled labour is very high. Only 50.9% of all working-age immigrants admitted in 2027 with a degree in a health-related profession are projected to remain in Canada and work in occupations that match their educational qualifications 20 years after admission. Among those projected to remain in Canada, this share is 61.6%, still 26.5 percentage points lower than that of their Canadian-born counterparts.

This comes at a cost of up to **$50 billion** annually to Canada's GDP.

These findings reveal a weakness of Canada's immigration policy: Canada selects these highly educated immigrants for admission on account of their specific skills, but after admission, many are unable to work in the fields for which they were selected. This comes at a cost of up to $50 billion annually to Canada's GDP.[21] Previous research has identified several labour market barriers that prevent immigrants from finding jobs that match their qualifications, including difficulties with foreign credential recognition, limited Canadian work experience, and discrimination.[22] Among these barriers, professional licensing and qualification recognition are particularly important for immigrants trained in high-demand regulated professions (e.g., health care). These immigrants often face discriminatory Canadian work experience requirements for certain jobs or licensing pathways, lengthy or unclear credential assessment processes, and substantial costs to obtain Canadian credentials and licences.[23] These barriers may not only prevent immigrants from fully utilizing their skills but also contribute to their decisions to leave Canada in search of better opportunities elsewhere.[24] Addressing these barriers is therefore important for both reducing immigrants' onward migration from Canada and ensuring that Canada makes full use of the specific talent that the policy is designed to attract. To this end, we propose several policy recommendations aimed at improving immigrants' labour market integration, with a particular focus on those trained in regulated professions, many of which face acute labour shortages in Canada.

21 RBC's estimate is based on the potential economic gains from closing gaps in wages and employment rates between immigrants and Canadian-born workers. Agopsowicz and Billy-Ochieng, *Untapped Potential*.

22 Hardy, *Labour Market Experiences of Recent Working-Age Immigrants*; Oreopoulos, "Why Do Skilled Immigrants Struggle in the Labor Market?"; El-Assal, *Ready to Contribute*.

23 El-Assal, *Ready to Contribute*.

24 Conference Board of Canada, The, *The Leaky Bucket 2025*.

01 Advance the Fair Licensing Act and Canada Fair Licensing Transfer to address foreign credential recognition barriers at scale

Canada's current foreign qualification recognition system for regulated professions imposes discriminatory barriers on internationally trained professionals, such as Canadian work experience requirements and the devaluation of foreign credentials, preventing many qualified immigrants from practising in their fields. The system is also highly decentralized, with approximately 500 licensing bodies across the country, making oversight difficult and licensing requirements inconsistent.[25] To address these challenges, ICC's 2026 report, *Ready to Contribute,* proposes a federal Fair Licensing Act, modelled on the Canada Health Act, accompanied by a Canada Fair Licensing Transfer.[26] The Act would establish national standards for fair, transparent, and timely recognition of foreign qualifications, while the transfer would provide long-term federal funding conditional on provincial and territorial compliance and measurable improvements in licensing outcomes.

Unlike existing frameworks that largely rely on voluntary cooperation, the proposed Act would be legally binding and backed by meaningful financial incentives, including withholding funding from non-compliant jurisdictions. It would also encourage greater harmonization of licensing standards, improving labour mobility across Canada.

Our projections reinforce the importance of these reforms. If historical patterns continue, an estimated 3,870 (67.7%) working-age immigrants with health-related professional degrees admitted in 2027 according to the 2027–2029 Immigration Levels Plan will be either not employed or employed in overqualified (significantly or marginally) occupations three years after admission. Addressing licensing barriers through coordinated national reforms could help Canada better utilize immigrant talent as the immigration policy intended and alleviate labour shortages in critical sectors.

25 El-Assal, *Ready to Contribute*.
26 El-Assal, *Ready to Contribute*.

02 Enhance supports for employers to address barriers to hiring immigrant talent

Employers also have an important role to play in improving immigrants' labour market outcomes. To start, employers across Canada must put an end to discriminatory hiring practices like Canadian experience requirements, which unfairly penalize immigrant job applicants and more often have the effect of leaving valuable talent untapped. Beyond this, employers can also adopt more effective hiring practices to better recognize and utilize immigrant talent. ICC's 2024 report, *Talent to Win*, developed in collaboration with Deloitte, identifies several such practices that employers can adopt.[27] We encourage employers to adopt these practices, including shifting from credential-based to skills-based hiring, using cluster hiring to diversify workforces and better support immigrant employees, and conducting internal research and sharing success stories to demonstrate the business benefits of hiring immigrants. By making better use of underutilized immigrant talent, businesses can address their workforce needs, strengthen their competitiveness, and ultimately contribute to Canada's economic prosperity.

Governments can also play a role in supporting employers to make better use of immigrant talent. As highlighted in *Talent to Win*, many employers face challenges in assessing foreign qualifications and work experience, connecting with settlement services that can support immigrant recruitment and integration, and navigating Canada's complex immigration system. We recommend that governments provide greater support to employers in these areas, particularly small and medium-sized businesses that often lack the resources and expertise to recruit and integrate immigrant talent effectively.

27 Institute for Canadian Citizenship and Deloitte Canada, *Talent to Win*.

03 Systematically monitor immigrant job overqualification rates and set measurable targets

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's (IRCC) existing performance monitoring and targets for immigrants' labour market integration emphasize employment outcomes.[28] Although Statistics Canada periodically measures overqualification and education–occupation mismatch through the Census and Labour Force Survey supplements,[29] these outcomes are not built into departmental performance indicators. To the best of our knowledge, there are no formal national targets for reducing immigrant job overqualification.

A more frequent and systematic approach to monitoring overqualification would show more clearly how fully immigrants' qualifications are being used in the Canadian labour market. Such a system could track overqualification by years since admission, admission cohort and category, sector, and demographic group, and report on it regularly alongside existing employment indicators. This would make it possible to detect emerging disparities early and to investigate the barriers behind them so that policy responses can be directed where they are most needed.

Beyond monitoring, we recommend that IRCC establish measurable targets for improving qualification-matched employment among immigrants, alongside its existing employment indicators. These targets could guide improvements to economic immigration selection criteria, employer engagement, and settlement and employment supports, while providing benchmarks for evaluating whether immigration programs are delivering their intended economic benefits.

For immigrants seeking to enter regulated professions, the 2009 *Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications* established a goal of informing internationally trained applicants within one year whether their qualifications would be recognized, what additional requirements they must meet, or which related occupations they might pursue.[30] However, receiving an assessment decision does not necessarily mean that an applicant can obtain a professional licence and begin practising. We recommend that Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) work with provincial and territorial governments and professional regulatory bodies to establish outcome-based targets for improving licensing outcomes, such as reducing the time required to obtain a licence and increasing licensure rates among qualified internationally trained applicants. These targets would strengthen accountability for addressing barriers to professional practice and ultimately help improve qualification-matched employment among immigrants in regulated professions.

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28 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, *2026–27 Departmental Plan*.

29 Lovei, "Job Mismatch Among Core Working Age Immigrants"; Zhong and others, "Occupational Match and Economic Outcomes"; Hou, Schimmele, and Lu, *Recent Trends in Over-education*; Schimmele and Hou, "Trends in Education–Occupation Mismatch."

30 Forum of Labour Market Ministers, *Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications*.

04 Strengthen the monitoring and analysis of immigrant onward migration trends and invest in immigrant retention

Beyond the underutilization of immigrants' skills in the Canadian labour market, onward migration represents another source of skilled talent loss. Our projections suggest that approximately 17.4% of immigrants will have left Canada within 20 years of admission, and the ICC's 2025 *Leaky Bucket* report suggests that some leave because of unsatisfactory labour market outcomes or better opportunities elsewhere.[31]

We recommend that IRCC make onward migration a priority by adopting clear retention targets and ongoing monitoring of which immigrant groups are more likely to leave Canada and why. Such efforts would serve two purposes. First, they would inform more targeted policies aimed at reducing immigrant onward migration. Second, to the extent that some immigrants leave Canada due to unsatisfactory labour market outcomes, understanding their reasons for leaving could shed light on labour market barriers that may also affect immigrants who remain in Canada, helping policymakers identify and address these challenges.

Finally, government should invest in additional research, policies, and integration activities that support long-term immigrant retention. ICC's 2025 report, *Here to Stay*, finds that a stronger sense of identity, belonging, and stability is associated with immigrants' intentions to remain in Canada.[32] To foster these connections, governments should support programs and activities that provide immigrants with opportunities to participate in social and civic life and build relationships with other Canadians. For example, ICC's Canoo app offers newcomers free or discounted access to more than 2,000 cultural and nature experiences across Canada, helping them explore their communities and develop a stronger sense of belonging.[33] Additionally, initiatives that support newcomers' skills development and labour market integration can strengthen their economic stability and contribute to long-term retention.

31 Conference Board of Canada, The, *The Leaky Bucket 2025*.

32 Goel, *Here to Stay*.

33 Institute for Canadian Citizenship, "The Free App That Welcomes Newcomers to Canada."

Appendix A: Methodology

This appendix provides a high-level overview of the methodology and datasets used to project the onward migration and labour market outcomes of working-age (25–64), university-educated (bachelor's degree or higher) immigrants admitted in 2027 under the 2027–2029 Immigration Levels Plan, over their first 20 years after admission.

For more detailed technical documentation and assumptions, please see our technical supplement.

Our projections follow a three-step approach:

1. Forecasting immigrant onward migration.

We estimate immigrants' onward migration using tax-filing records from the Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB) as a proxy for their presence in Canada. Under the methodology used in *The Leaky Bucket 2025*, immigrants who stop filing taxes for at least two consecutive years and do not resume filing within the observation period are generally considered to have onward migrated.[34] Using this approach, we calculate annual onward migration rates by years since admission for immigrants admitted between 1982 and 2020. For each year since admission, we average the onward migration rates across admission cohorts with available observations and sum these annual onward migration rates to obtain cumulative onward migration rates.

Note that only immigrants who filed taxes at least once after admission are included in the analysis. This excludes a non-trivial number of people, potentially up to 10%, who never filed taxes, and many of them may have left Canada soon after admission.[35] In this regard, our estimate of onward migration is conservative. Additionally, our onward migration rates are estimated for all immigrants, rather than specifically for those who are working-age (25–64) and university-educated (bachelor's degree or higher) at incremental points in time over the first 20 years following admission. Estimating onward migration rates for our target population is challenging because this population is defined by age and educational attainment at each year since admission, rather than at admission, and the IMDB does not provide updated information on educational attainment after admission.

2. Forecasting labour market outcomes.

Non-Employment

We use the 2016 and 2021 Census data (Tables 98-10-0441-01 and 98-400-X2016198) for the forecast of non-employment rates by years since admission. As these tables report outcomes for grouped admission cohorts, we approximate years since admission using the midpoint of each admission period and the Census reference date, obtaining estimates at 3, 8, 13, 15, and 20 years after admission.[36] Where estimates from both Censuses are available for the same years since admission, we take their simple average.

34 Refer to ICC's 2025 *Leaky Bucket* report for further technical details on the measurement of onward migration. Conference Board of Canada, The, *The Leaky Bucket 2025*.

35 Qiu, Hou, and Crossman, *Estimating Immigrants' Presence in Canada*.

36 For example, the labour market outcomes for immigrants admitted between 2016 and 2021, measured at the time of the 2021 Census, are treated as outcomes approximately three years after admission.

Education–occupation Match

We classify occupations into education–occupation match, marginal overqualification, and significant overqualification based on the educational requirements of occupations, following Schimmele and Hou (2024).[37] Specifically, we use the educational requirements associated with their occupations under the 2016 National Occupational Classification (NOC) to classify working-age, university-educated immigrants' education–occupation match outcomes into three categories:[38],[39]

- **Qualification-matched employment:** Individuals working in occupations that typically require a university degree (NOC skill level A, senior management and specialized middle management occupations).
- **Marginally overqualified employment:** Individuals working in occupations that typically require some postsecondary education below a bachelor's degree, such as a college diploma or apprenticeship training (NOC skill level B and middle management occupations in retail and wholesale trade and customer services and in trades, transportation, production and utilities).
- **Significantly overqualified employment:** Individuals working in occupations that typically require a high school diploma or less (NOC skill levels C and D).

The forecast is conducted using the 2016 and 2021 Census data (Tables 98-400-X2016368 and 98-10-0316-01). As with non-employment rates, these tables report outcomes for grouped admission cohorts. We therefore approximate years since admission using the midpoint of each admission period and the Census reference date, obtaining estimates at 3, 8, 13, 15, and 20 years after admission. Where estimates from both Censuses are available for the same years since admission, we take their simple average.

Note that the non-employment rates from the Census data are measured based on employment status during the Census reference week (May 1–7, 2016, for the 2016 Census and May 2–8, 2021, for the 2021 Census).[40] Due to data limitations, job overqualification outcomes are measured among individuals who had worked at least once since January 1, 2015, for the 2016 Census and January 1, 2020, for the 2021 Census.[41]

37 Schimmele and Hou, "Trends in Education–Occupation Mismatch."

38 The 2016 NOC does not assign educational requirements to management-level occupations. Following existing studies, we treated senior management occupations and specialized middle management occupations as jobs that require a bachelor's degree. Middle management occupations in retail and wholesale trade and customer services and in trades, transportation, production and utilities were treated as jobs that require some postsecondary education. Schimmele and Hou, "Trends in Education–Occupation Mismatch."

39 We use the empirical concordance tables published by Statistics Canada to convert occupational classifications from NOC 2021 to NOC 2016. When a NOC 2021 occupation corresponds to multiple NOC 2016 occupations, we distribute the number of workers in that occupation across the corresponding NOC 2016 categories using the proportions provided in the empirical concordance tables. Statistics Canada, *Empirical Concordance*.

40 Statistics Canada, "Employment Rate," *Dictionary, Census of Population, 2016*; Statistics Canada, "Employment Rate," *Dictionary, Census of Population, 2021*.

41 Statistics Canada, "Occupation by Highest Level of Education, Period of Immigration and Admission Category," Table 98-10-0316-01; Statistics Canada, "Occupation – National Occupational Classification (NOC) 2016 (693A), Highest Certificate, Diploma or Degree," Table 98-400-X2016368.

Consolidation

Taken together, immigrants who remain in Canada fall into one of four labour market outcome categories: (1) not employed; (2) employed in a significantly overqualified job; (3) employed in a marginally overqualified job; and (4) employed in a qualification-matched job. When presenting the results, we group the first three categories under "labour market underutilization" for some of the figures, which refers to immigrants who remain in Canada but are either not employed or working in occupations that do not typically require a bachelor's degree.

For some figures, we also present the labour market outcomes of comparable Canadian-born individuals. For these comparisons, we use data from the 2021 Census (Tables 98-10-0330-01 and 98-10-0442-01) and restrict the sample to Canadian-born individuals aged 25–64 who have a bachelor's degree or above.

3. Estimating the size of the working-age, university-educated immigrant population and calculating projected numbers.

To translate these percentages into actual numbers in the context of the 2027–2029 Immigration Levels Plan, we also project how many immigrants admitted in 2027 according to the 2027–2029 Immigration Levels Plan will be aged 25–64 and hold a bachelor's degree or higher in each of the first 20 years following their admission. This allows us to estimate the size of the population whose onward migration and labour market outcomes we seek to understand.

Using the Public Use Microdata Files from the 2006, 2016, and 2021 Censuses and the 2011 National Household Survey, we estimate the proportion of immigrants who are working-age and university-educated through a logistic regression model that predicts the proportion of immigrants who are working-age and university-educated based on a linear admission-cohort trend and years-since-admission fixed effects. Specifically, the linear admission-cohort trend captures changes in the proportion of working-age, university-educated immigrants across admission cohorts. The years-since-admission fixed effects capture changes in this proportion over time for a given admission cohort. Such changes may reflect younger immigrants entering the working-age population with different educational attainment patterns, as well as changes in educational attainment after admission among those remaining in the 25–64 age range.

The regression is estimated with person-level sampling weights provided in the Census and NHS Public Use Microdata Files. We use the fitted model to project the proportion of immigrants admitted in 2027 who will be working-age and university-educated over their first 20 years after admission. These projected proportions are then combined with the 2027 admission target under the Immigration Levels Plan to estimate the size of the target population. Finally, the onward migration and labour market outcome rates estimated above are applied to calculate the projected number of immigrants in each outcome category.

The forecast for immigrants whose highest degree is in a health-related profession (medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine or optometry) follows the same methodology described above, with one exception. The 2021 Census table 98-10-0316-01, which we use to estimate education–occupation match outcomes for the broader university-educated immigrant population, does not provide a sufficiently detailed breakdown for this group. Therefore, the education–occupation match forecast for immigrants with health-related professional degrees relies solely on the 2016 Census table (98-400-X2016368).

Appendix B: Glossary

1. Immigrant populations and characteristics

Admission cohort: A group of immigrants who became permanent residents of Canada in the same year, including those who obtained permanent residence while already living in Canada.

Years since admission: The number of years that have passed since an immigrant obtained permanent resident status in Canada.

Working-age, university-educated immigrants: Immigrants aged 25 to 64 who hold a bachelor's degree or higher. In this report, this population is defined at each point after admission, so its size and composition may change over time.

Immigrants with health-related professional degrees: Immigrants whose highest degree is in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine or optometry. This category does not include nursing degrees or other health-related qualifications.

2. Onward migration

Onward migration: When an immigrant leaves Canada to return to their country of origin or move to another country. In this report, onward migration is estimated using immigrants' tax-filing records.

Cumulative onward migration rate: The estimated percentage of immigrants who have left Canada by a given number of years after admission, based on historical onward migration patterns.

3. Labour market outcomes

National Occupational Classification (NOC): Canada's system for classifying occupations based on the work performed and associated occupational requirements. This report uses the educational requirements associated with NOC 2016 to assess education–occupation match.

Not employed: Individuals who are not working, including those who are unemployed and actively seeking work and those outside the labour force, such as students, retirees and people caring for family members.

Qualification-matched employment: Employment among individuals holding a bachelor's degree or higher in occupations that typically require a bachelor's degree or higher. Based on NOC 2016, this includes skill level A occupations, as well as senior management and specialized middle management occupations.

Marginal overqualification: Employment among individuals holding a bachelor's degree or higher in occupations that typically require some postsecondary education below a bachelor's degree, such as a college diploma or apprenticeship training. Based on NOC 2016, this includes skill level B occupations and middle management occupations in retail and wholesale trade and customer services, and in trades, transportation, production and utilities.

Significant overqualification: Employment among individuals holding a bachelor's degree or higher in occupations that typically require a high school diploma or less. Based on NOC 2016, this includes skill levels C and D occupations.

Labour market underutilization: In this report, immigrants holding a bachelor's degree or higher who remain in Canada but are either not employed or are working in occupations that do not typically require a bachelor's degree. This includes individuals who are marginally overqualified or significantly overqualified for their jobs.

4. Others

Regulated professions: Occupations that require individuals to meet specified qualifications and obtain a professional licence or registration from a regulatory body before they can practise.[42]

Foreign qualification recognition: The process of assessing education, training and professional qualifications obtained outside Canada to determine whether they meet Canadian requirements.[43]

Projection (or forecast): An estimate of future outcomes based on historical patterns and specified assumptions. The projections in this report assume that historical patterns in immigrant characteristics, onward migration and labour market outcomes remain informative for future admission cohorts.

42 Employment and Social Development Canada, *Evaluation of the Foreign Credential Recognition Program, 2025*.
43 El-Assal, *Ready to Contribute*.

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About the ICC

The ICC is a national charity that aspires to a Canada where immigrants don't just come, but stay, become citizens, and contribute to their fullest potential so that Canada can grow and succeed.

We are Canada's leading source of thought leadership on citizenship and immigration. Through our Canoo Access Pass, we give over 1 million newcomers free access to Canada's best culture, nature and sport experiences.

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