

Study confirms job gap faced by foreign-trained newcomers

[Final Edition]

The Record - Kitchener, Ont.

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Date: Sep 11, 2007

Start Page: B.2

Section: LOCAL

Text Word Count: 362

Document Text

Professionally trained immigrants are more likely to not have a job in their field than their Canadian-born counterparts, Statistics Canada reported yesterday.

The study which looked at Canada's immigrant labour market found that immigrants who settled here in the last five years have a more difficult time finding a job in their field than those born in Canada.

In 2006, the national unemployment rate for these immigrants was 11.5 per cent, more than double the rate of 4.9 per cent for similarly trained residents born in Canada.

But the longer immigrants were in Canada, the more likely they were to have jobs in their fields, the study found.

Maria Alvarez, executive director of the YMCA's cross cultural services in Kitchener, said a large gap still remains for foreign-trained immigrants who can't find work they are qualified for.

"They are getting jobs but not meaningful ones," she said.

Rich Janzen, research director for the Kitchener-based Centre for Research and Education in Human Services, said efforts are being made by all levels of government to close the gap.

But institutions and professional organizations need to get on board and offer courses to assist qualified immigrants, he said.

Statistics Canada also found that immigrants are more likely than Canadian-born residents to work in manufacturing jobs.

Immigrants from 25 to 54 years of age are also more likely to have a university education than Canadian-born men and women.

"We are wasting so much talent, wasting the education of these people," Alvarez said.

She said more fast-track programs are needed for immigrants who already have the education but need experience.

Earlier this spring, the provincial government announced money for a first-ever program for internationally trained optometrists at the University of Waterloo's school of optometry.

The province also gave money to the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce to expand the Waterloo Region Immigrant Employment Network, known as WREN. The money goes toward connecting employers with skilled immigrants.

Executive director Peter McFadden said the community-based network, which started just over a year ago, focuses on engaging employers in the hiring of skilled immigrants.

"Our role is to bring employers to the table," he said.

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