A BMRC RESEARCH DIGEST
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Gender, Immigration and Commuting in Metropolitan Canada

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What you need to know

Transportation and urban infrastructure are key sources of social resilience that help migrants find relevant resources and develop successful strategies to overcome integration challenges. This research investigates differences between immigrant women and men in the transportation modes used to commute to work as part of a larger investigation of migrant social resilience. The findings underscore immigrant women's reliance on public transportation and active commuting during the first ten years living in Canada.

What is this research about?

Geographical access to employment is key for immigrant integration. The availability of affordable, reliable, and frequent public transport, the proximity of workplaces to migrants' residences, congestion, and access to private cars influence where migrants work, their job opportunities, and how they get to work. Workers' social and economic characteristics, especially their marital status, the presence of dependent children in their homes, their earnings, and hours of work also influence work trips. We examine the extent to which well-known gender differences in men's and women's commutes are also found among immigrant men and women.

How was the research carried out?

Using individual records from the 2016 Census Public Use Microdata File, we describe the social, economic, and housing characteristics and typical commute modes of immigrant workers living in Canada's metropolitan areas. The frequency with which men and women commute by driving; public transit; walking and cycling; and as passengers are evaluated. Regression analysis is used to assess the determinants of commute modes for all immigrants and, separately for men and women who lived in Canada ≤ 10 years at the time of the census. The analysis identifies gender differences in commute mode and key social, economic, and housing characteristics associated with the differences.

What have we learned from the research?

In their first decade living in Canada, immigrant men and women are less likely to drive to work than established immigrants and Canadian-born workers. Recent immigrants' reliance on public transportation, active commute modes, and being driven to work persists across all metropolitan areas, from the three gateway cities of Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver to mid-sized metropolitan areas with populations of more than 230,000 and small metropolitan areas. Although more recent immigrants drive to work in mid-sized and small metropolitan areas than in the large gateway cities, immigrant women are much less likely than men to drive to work in all metropolitan areas. Immigrant women's low earnings and propensity to work part-time explain only part of their reliance on alternative modes. Household responsibilities affect commute mode, but immigrant women's reliance on alternative modes persists even after we take account of marital status and the presence of dependent children in the home. The factors influencing immigrant women's commute modes also vary across large, mid-sized, and small metropolitan areas, underscoring the significant impact of place on recent immigrants' geographical access to employment.

How can you use this research?

This research highlights the importance of urban infrastructure for recent immigrants' integration. Given the key role of employment in migrant integration, providing alternative commuting modes, especially reliable and frequent public transportation, and pedestrian-friendly and walkable urban environments with mixed land uses are crucial to facilitate recent immigrants' employment. This infrastructure is especially important for connecting recent immigrant women to employment opportunities. The study raises important concerns about the regionalization of immigrants to metropolitan locations without accompanying investments in infrastructure.

Who is leading this research?

Valerie Preston, York University, Sara McLafferty, University of Illinois, and Monika Maciejewska, Vrije Universiteit Brussel collaborated.

Learn more

For more information about this research, see Preston, V., McLafferty S., and Maciejewska, M. (2022) "Gender, Immigration, and Commuting in Metropolitan Canada." Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie, Vol. 113, No. 4, pp. 348–364 which has been published in final form at: DOI:10.1111/tesg.12521. A pre-print is available here.