



## *Language Training and Education Help Adult New Immigrants Exit Poverty*

### About the Brief

This research brief is based on "[Do Host Country Education and Language Training Help Recent Immigrants Exit Poverty?](#)" by Lisa Kaida, published in *Social Science Research* 42, no.3 (2013): 726-741.

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### Summary

New immigrants to Canada are particularly vulnerable to poverty, but a study of data from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada finds participation in English/French language training has a positive impact. The federally-funded official language training, a unique feature of Canada's immigrant settlement policy, helps new immigrants overcome their initial economic hardships. In addition, education in Canada helps low-income adult newcomers with international postsecondary credentials lift their families out of poverty. As the highly educated comprise a majority of entering immigrants, facilitating their ability to return to school is a promising policy option for their economic well-being.



### Target Audience

- ◆ Researchers
- ◆ Policy Makers
- ◆ Immigrant Settlement Service Providers
- ◆ Graduate Students

### Key Findings

- ◆ For immigrants experiencing family poverty 2 years after arrival, taking English/French lessons helps raise their chance of exiting poverty 2 years later.
- ◆ For immigrants experiencing family poverty 2 years after their arrival, obtaining additional formal education has a positive impact for those with overseas postsecondary credentials.
- ◆ Increasing the provision of information and financial support to new immigrants and expanding education and training programs targeting highly educated adult immigrants may be effective policy options.



### What helps new immigrants exit poverty?

Previous research has identified a number of factors contributing to immigrant poverty, including deficiencies in host country education and language skills. However, we know little about what helps immigrants overcome poverty. Can we facilitate their economic well-being by providing education and language training upon arrival?

### About the study

This study deals with the issue of immigrant poverty exit with a focus on the effects of acquiring Canadian education and language training. It analyzes data from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC), a survey of people immigrating between 2000 and 2001. A total of 12,040 participated in the Wave 1 interview, about 6 months after arrival, followed by Wave 2 (N=9,322) and Wave 3 (N=7,700) interviews, 2 and 4 years after arrival respectively. Of these, the analysis considers only those aged 25 to 54 whose family income in Wave 2 is below the Low Income Cutoff (LICO).

### What is the Low Income Cutoff (LICO)?

The LICO is set at 20% above the average percentage of family income spent on essentials (e.g. food, shelter, clothing), currently fixed at 44% based on the 1992 Family Expenditure Survey in Canada. Therefore, if a family spends more than 64% (=44% + 20%) of its income on essentials, all family members are considered to have low income. The 64% threshold is converted into 35 cut-offs according to family and community size.

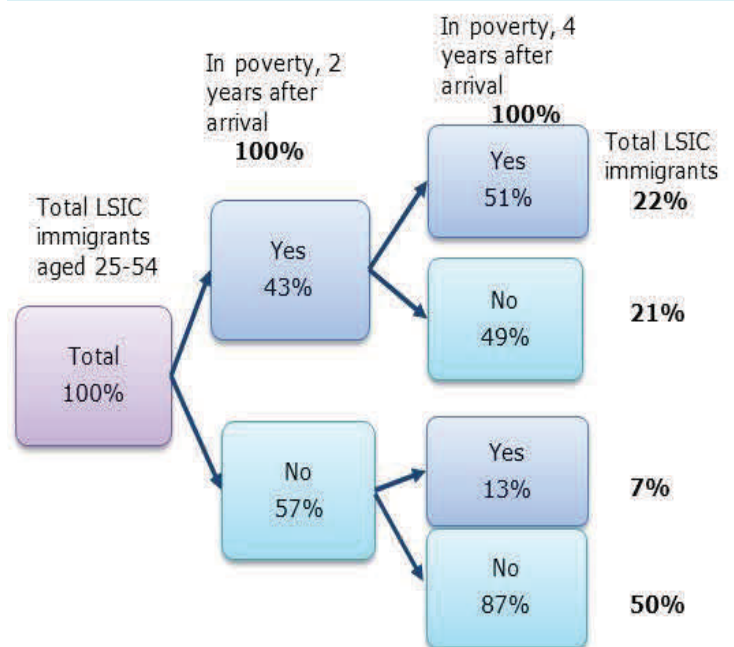
### Methods

The outcome variable is an indicator of whether immigrants who experience family poverty 2 years after arrival (Wave 2) have exited poverty 2 years later (Wave 3). The two independent (explanatory) variables are: participation in English/French language lessons and formal education (e.g. high school, trade school, college, university) between 6 and 24 months after arrival (between Waves 1 and 2). For its analysis, the study uses both a bivariate probit model and a propensity weighting approach.

### Findings

As Figure 1 shows, 43% of the LSIC respondents aged 25-54 are in poverty 2 years after their arrival in Canada in Wave 2. Two years later in Wave 3, 49% have successfully exited poverty.

**Figure 1—Transition into/out of low income between Waves 2 and 3, immigrants aged 25–54, 2002–2005.**





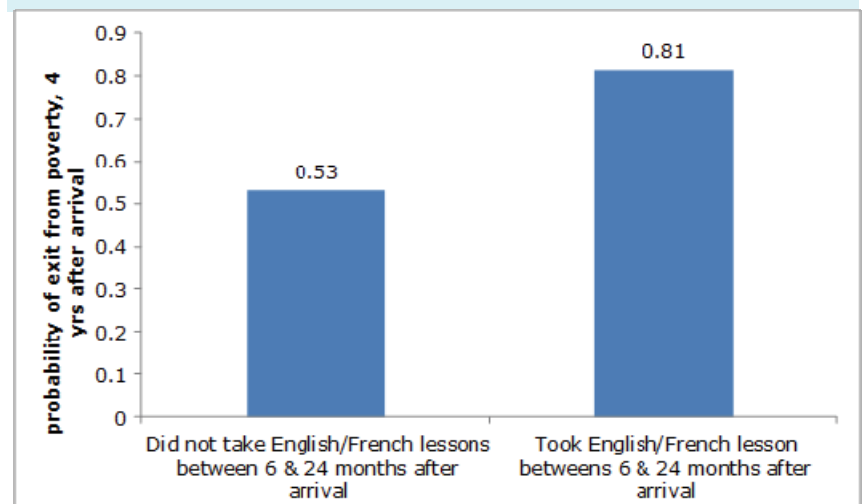
### Who are these immigrants?

The numbers are interesting, but exactly who are these immigrants? Consistent with the majority of today's newcomers to Canada, most are highly skilled. Three-quarters had obtained postsecondary education before their arrival, and more than 70% were admitted under the economic class (e.g. skilled worker category). Yet their initial language skills are limited; less than 30% speak French (for Quebec residents) or English (for residents in the rest of Canada) fluently or very well. This is much lower than the percentages of all immigrants in the LSIC and the Wave 2 non-poor (40% and 47% respectively).

### Does language training in Canada help?

When other demographic and socioeconomic factors are taken into account, enrolment in language training has a positive economic impact. Since the extent to which the language training helps immigrants exit poverty varies by individual demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, this study considers a hypothetical immigrant: a female who immigrates from East Asia (e.g. China, South Korea) at age 36 in the economic class (e.g. the skilled worker class) with limited English skills and who settles in Toronto. Figure 2 shows, her probability of exit from poverty 4 years after arrival rises by 53% (or 28 percentage points from 53% to 81%) if she takes English lessons between 6 and 24 months after arrival.

**Figure 2 -Probability of exit from family poverty 4 years after arrival, for females who immigrated from East Asia at age 36 in economic class with limited English skills and settled in Toronto**



### Does education in Canada help?

On the whole, for Wave 2 poor immigrant families, obtaining additional education does not lead to economic improvement 2 years later. But when we look only at those arriving with postsecondary credentials, we find acquiring Canadian education has a positive impact (1.3 times the odds of exiting poverty).



## Conclusion

This study evaluates the benefit of Canadian education and language training for recent immigrants experiencing family poverty during early settlement. An analysis of data from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC) finds 43% of the low income new immigrants aged 25-54 are in poverty 2 years after their arrival; of these, 49% exit poverty 2 years later. Participation in English/French language training has a positive impact on this improvement. In addition, acquiring some Canadian education has a positive effect for those with postsecondary credentials from their home countries.

## Policy Implications

Access to Canadian education and language training helps the integration of new immigrants facing economic challenges. Increasing the provision of information and financial support, as well as expanding education and training programs targeting adult immigrants, are effective policy options.

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