

The Frustration of Canada's Over-Credentialed Working Class

Renze Nauta and Sean Speer | October 2024

Key Points

- We define Canada's working class as those in jobs that do not require a post-secondary credential.
- A majority of people in the working class are over-credentialed for the job they hold. Fifty-six percent of them have a post-secondary credential. Nineteen percent even have a university degree.
- The proportion that is over-credentialed has grown steadily over the last two decades, from 42 percent in 2006 to 56 percent in 2024. The proportion with a university degree specifically has more than doubled, from 9 percent in 2006 to 19 percent in 2024.
- Working-class women and working-class immigrants are more likely to be over-credentialed than their male and non-immigrant counterparts.
- Those in the working class earn substantially less than those in the professional and management class and the technical class (classes that over-credentialed working-class workers would belong to if they had jobs that aligned with their education level).
 - Those holding a university degree earn less than half the wage earned by those in the professional and management class (whose jobs require a university degree).
- The situation, due in part to the phenomenon of "credential inflation," has significant economic, political, and social implications.
 - It represents an opportunity cost both to these workers and to the economy as a whole.
 - This population may be disproportionately represented in the growing share of Canadians that is dispirited about its prospects and pessimistic about the future.
- To address this situation:
 - Governments should ensure that working-class families have access to the kinds of childcare that work best for them.
 - Governments, civil society, and universities should work together to better align post-secondary programs to labour-market needs, improve foreign-credential recognition, and promote a pluralist vision of education and labour that is characterized by greater parity of esteem for alternate career paths and greater transferability between types of education.
 - Public funding for different forms of education may need rebalancing.

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For the full publication, see Nauta, R., and S. Speer. "The Frustration of Canada's Over-Credentialed Working Class." Cardus, 2024. <https://www.cardus.ca/research/work-economics/reports/the-frustration-of-canadas-over-credentialed-working-class/>.