

The Risk and Depth of Poverty in Calgary: A Socio-Demographic Profile. 2016.

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Enough for All is Calgary’s community-driven poverty reduction strategy.

As the stewards of Enough for All, Vibrant Communities Calgary actively promotes poverty reduction efforts in Calgary and works to make change within policy and at the systems level.

The strategy is in place to raise awareness of poverty in our city and to convene and connect individuals, organizations, and collaboratives working in various ways to reduce poverty throughout Calgary.

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The Risk and Depth of Poverty in Calgary

A Socio-Demographic Profile



1. Highlights

Poverty exists along a continuum from those not at immediate risk of poverty to those living in conditions of deep poverty. This report examines the characteristics of those at risk of living in income poverty with income just above the poverty line, as well as those in shallow and deep poverty. Some key findings from this research include:

- **Seniors live at greater risk of poverty**, being more likely to have income just above the poverty line. Those living in deep poverty are more likely to be youth or pre-retirement.
- **Marital status** has an important effect on the risk and depth of poverty. Those not married or living common-law are at greater risk of poverty and of being in greater depth of poverty.
- **Immigrants** comprise a larger share of those at risk of poverty or in poverty compared to non-immigrants. Among those living in deep poverty, a disproportionate share are non-permanent residents.
- Among immigrants, those who arrived between 1991-2001 are more likely to be at risk of poverty while those who arrived between 2011-16 are more likely to be in deep poverty.
- Among racialized persons, those who identify as **Visible Minorities** are more likely to be at risk of poverty while **Indigenous persons** are more likely to be in deep poverty.
- **Employment income** remains the primary source of income for all income groups. Government transfer payments are lowest for those in the deepest poverty.
- All income groups remain **strongly attached to the labour force**. Labour force participation rates varied from just under 60% among those at risk of poverty to 61% among those in deep poverty, while unemployment rates varied from 12% to 19% respectively.
- Of those who were employed, just over one-third of those at risk of poverty were employed full-time for the full-year. Workers at risk of or in poverty were **disproportionately in lower waged occupations and industries**.
- Policies and programs, such as **childcare**, that support greater participation in the labour force may be critical to poverty alleviation and prevention.
- Roughly half of all income groups had completed some **post-secondary education**.

2. Introduction

According to the federal census, there were 133,045 people living in low-income households in Calgary in 2016, accounting for 11% of the population.¹ Poverty is primarily concentrated among indigenous, visible minority and recent immigrant households, along with lone-parent families and persons with disabilities. Recognizing, however, that all people are at risk of poverty to some degree, the population can be segmented to describe their level of vulnerability along a poverty continuum.

¹ In this report, poverty is defined as those living in households with incomes below the 2016 Market Basket Measure (MBM).

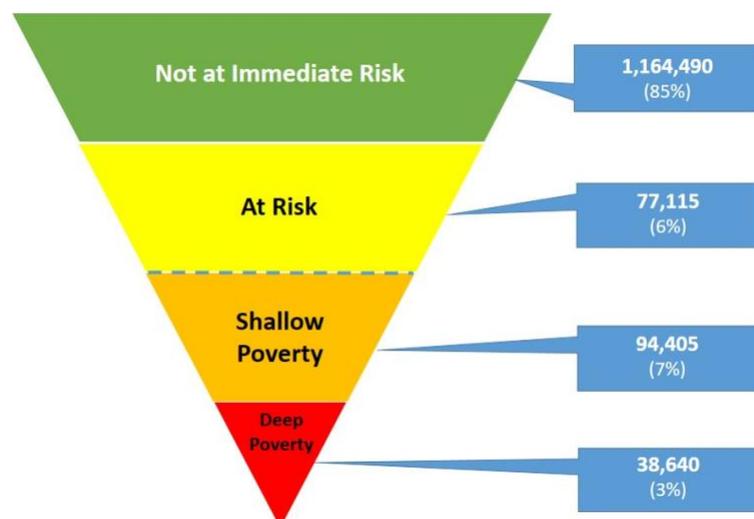
- **Not At Immediate Risk** - Although all are vulnerable to poverty to some degree, the presence of various protective factors provides a buffer for many people which would mean that they are not at immediate risk of poverty. One important buffer is income. For the purposes of this report, those not deemed at immediate risk of poverty are those with incomes of at least 125% of the poverty line or greater.
- **At Risk of Poverty** - Those not currently in poverty but at risk of falling into it include those lacking important protective factors, including income. For the purposes of this report, this segment includes those with incomes of between 100 to 125% of the poverty line.
- **Shallow Poverty** - This segment includes those whose incomes are below but near the poverty line. For the purposes of this report, this includes those with incomes of between 50 to 100% of the poverty line.
- **Deep Poverty** - This segment includes those whose incomes are significantly below the poverty line. For the purposes of this report, this includes those with incomes of less than 50% of the poverty line.

This report provides a social and demographic profile of those at risk of poverty, and those living in conditions of shallow or deep poverty. Understanding the characteristics of each segment is important for determining potential strategies to either prevent people from falling into poverty or to support their exit from it.

3. The Depth of Poverty

In 2016, the vast majority (85%) of Calgarians had incomes of more than 125% of the poverty line, meaning that they would not be considered at immediate risk of poverty. At the same time, however, roughly one in six Calgarians were either at risk of poverty or with incomes below the poverty line. That year there were just over 77,000 Calgarians with incomes just above the poverty line, rendering at higher risk of falling into poverty.

Meanwhile, of the 133,045 Calgarians in poverty, most (94,405) were living in conditions of shallow poverty, having income of between 50% and 99% of the poverty line, while 38,640 persons were in deep poverty, surviving on income of less than half of the poverty line. Combined, the total population living in or near poverty in Calgary was 210,160 accounting for 15.2% of the population.



4. Vulnerability Factors

One way of understanding the multi-dimensional nature of poverty is through the lens of resilience. Resilience is our ability to “*cope and thrive in the presence of obstacles, challenges and continual change.*”² Resilience can be understood at both an individual and systemic level; individuals are resilient when the communities they live in are resilient, and communities are resilient when their members are resilient.

Resilience involves the interplay between shocks and stresses. Stress refers to the long-term changes in the environment to which an individual or system is subject. Shocks are experienced as sudden disruptive changes in the environment to which an individual or system must respond. The impact of a shock is often determined by the long term stress which an individual or system has experienced as well as the degree to which the individual or system has adapted to that stress, understood as protective factors.

While all people may be vulnerable to poverty to a certain extent, based on a review of current trends and issues affecting vulnerable persons in Calgary, the following factors have been identified as critical underlying causes of poverty. These represent critical vulnerabilities that reduce the resilience of individuals, households and communities to chronic stress or unforeseen shocks.

- Individual Factors

Individual factors that contribute to poverty include the personal attributes of individuals that provide protection against stresses and shocks which can buffer them from poverty such as skills, education, and health. Individual challenges being experienced by people in Calgary include:

- Lack of education (high school completion / post-secondary).
- Lack of English language ability.
- Low-wage / precarious employment.
- Lack of employability skills.
- Mental health challenges including (inter-generational) trauma.
- Low financial empowerment / literacy.

- Life Stage

Where a person exists in the life course greatly affects their vulnerability to poverty. Persons in life stages of dependence, particularly children, youth and seniors, are at greater risk of poverty. Similarly families with children or those with caregiving responsibilities are also at greater risk of poverty. Challenges associated with life stage in Calgary include:

- Lack of quality, affordable childcare and early childhood development opportunities.
- Lack of positive relationships and supports for children and youth.
- Adverse events and family dysfunction experienced by children and youth.
- Lack of material supports for youth such as employment, transportation, food ...

² The Region of Waterloo (2010). Building Resilient Communities: A Literature Review and Demographic Overview. Waterloo: Regional Municipality of Waterloo, Social Services Department.

- Barriers to high school completion for vulnerable youth including immigrant, indigenous and LGBTQ2S youth.
- Inadequate retirement income for seniors and poor financial literacy.

- **Social Connection**

Isolation is both a cause and impact of poverty. People who lack connections to others or to supports and services are at greater risk of poverty. This is due to the fact that they have fewer resources to draw upon to buffer against stresses and shocks. Social factors impacting poverty in Calgary include:

- Social isolation related to spatial inequality, mobility, stigma and sense of safety.
- Barriers to accessing services including scattered or uncoordinated services, lack of information about services, and unwelcoming or culturally inappropriate services.
- Single persons and single-parent families lack adequate social and financial supports.
- Decreasing acceptance of diversity and growing incidents of hate.
- Declining levels of trust in leaders and institutions.

- **Systemic Factors**

Systemic factors include those features of our social, economic and political systems that intentionally or unintentionally increase peoples' vulnerability to poverty or impede their chances of leaving poverty. Current systemic challenges experienced in Calgary include:

- Economic restructuring leading to unemployment and precarious work driven by the trend towards hiring more part time and contractual employees without benefits, with wages that do not meet the cost of living.
- Growing economic, social and spatial inequality.
- Inadequate social assistance rates and restrictive regulations.
- Inadequate social infrastructure including affordable housing, mental health and justice services arising from a stressed civil society.
- Racism, sexism and discrimination particularly affecting racialized and indigenous persons, LGBTQ2S persons, women and persons with disabilities.

This report examines selected vulnerability factors for the population according to their risk or depth of poverty.

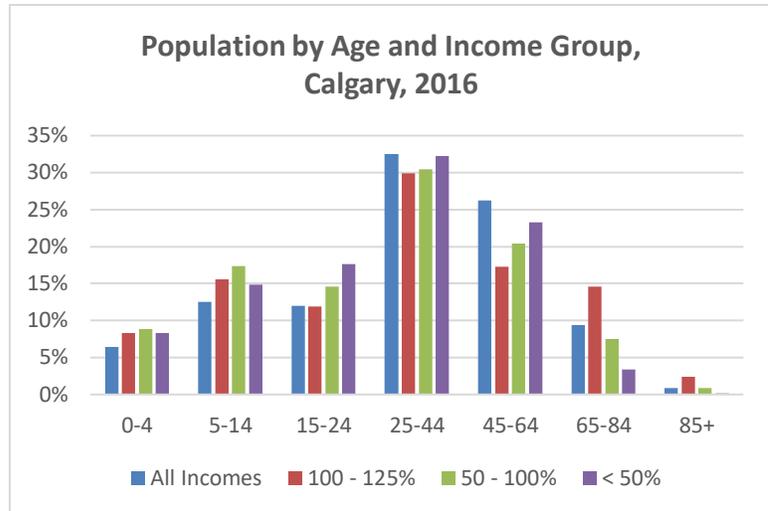
5. Socio-Demographic Profile

Based on the vulnerability factors discussed above, this report provides a profile of the population at risk of poverty, in shallow poverty and in deep poverty. Profiled are age and gender, marital status, equity seeking groups, income, employment and education.

5.1 Age and Gender

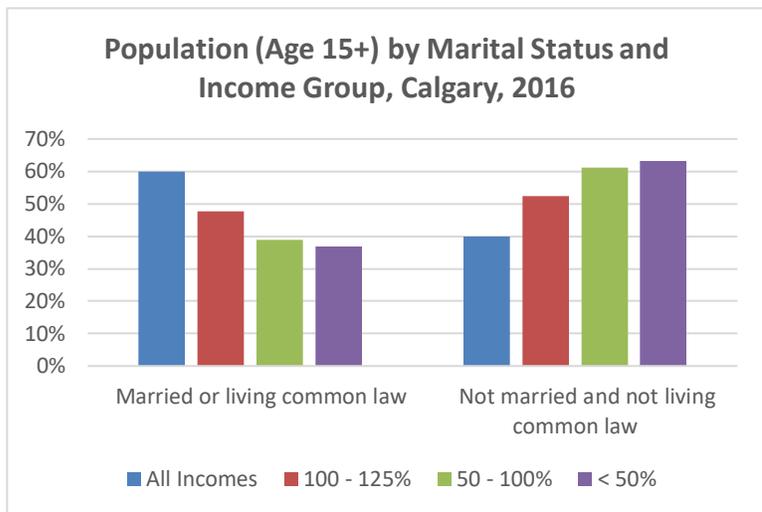
- Women were slightly more likely than men to be at risk of or in shallow poverty (53% to 47%) while among those in deep poverty the population was evenly divided between males and females.

- Compared to the total population, those at risk of or in poverty tend to be either younger (children and youth) or seniors (age 65+). Those at risk of poverty tend to be disproportionately comprised of seniors (age 65+) compared to those in shallow or deep poverty. Conversely, those in deep poverty are more likely to be youth (15-24) or in pre-retirement ages (45-64).



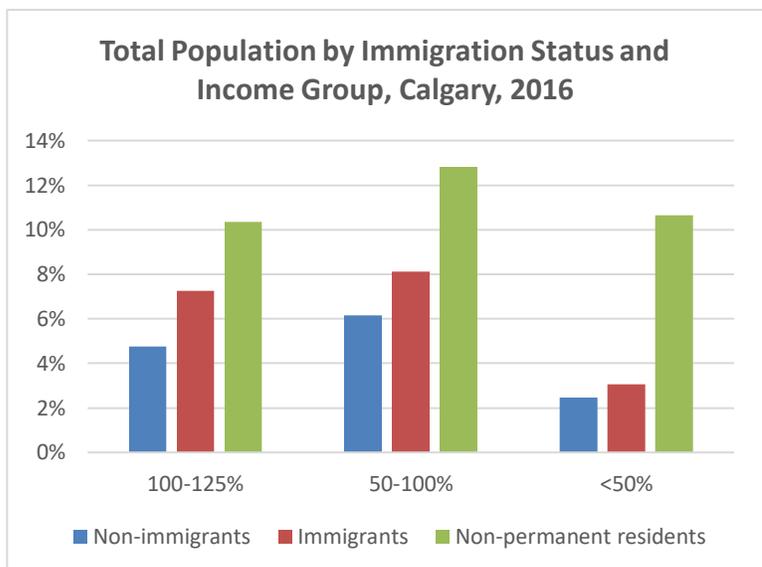
5.2 Marital Status

- Marital status is associated with the depth of poverty. Those who are not married or living common law are more likely to be at risk of poverty, or in conditions of poverty. Generally, the deeper in poverty a person is, the less likely they are to be in a marital or common law relationship.



5.3 Persons From Equity Seeking Groups

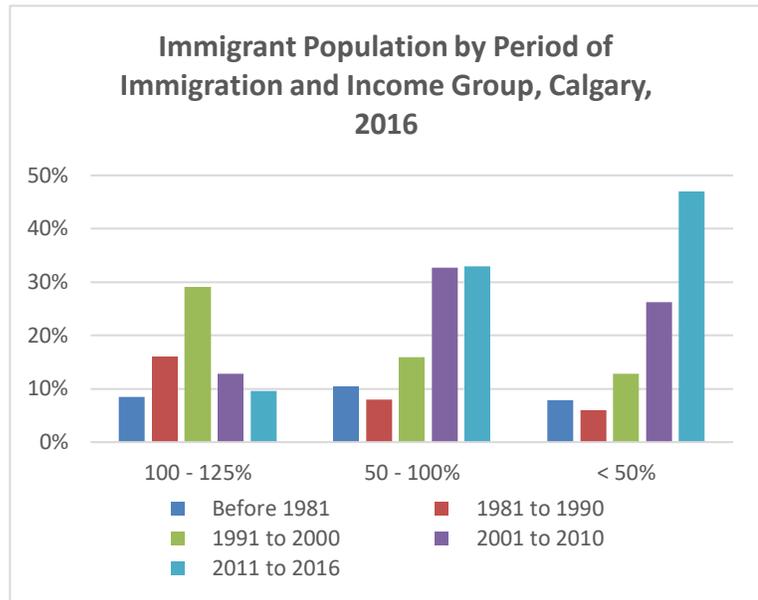
Equity-seeking groups include "those that identify barriers to equal access, opportunities, and resources due to disadvantage and discrimination and actively seek social justice and reparation. This marginalization could be created by attitudinal, historic, social, and environmental barriers based on age, ethnicity, disability, economic status, gender, nationality, race, sexual orientation and transgender status, etc."³ For the purposes of this report, the focus on equity seeking groups is on recent immigrants, visible minority and indigenous persons.



³ Canada Council for the Arts. <https://canadacouncil.ca/glossary/equity-seeking-groups>

Immigration

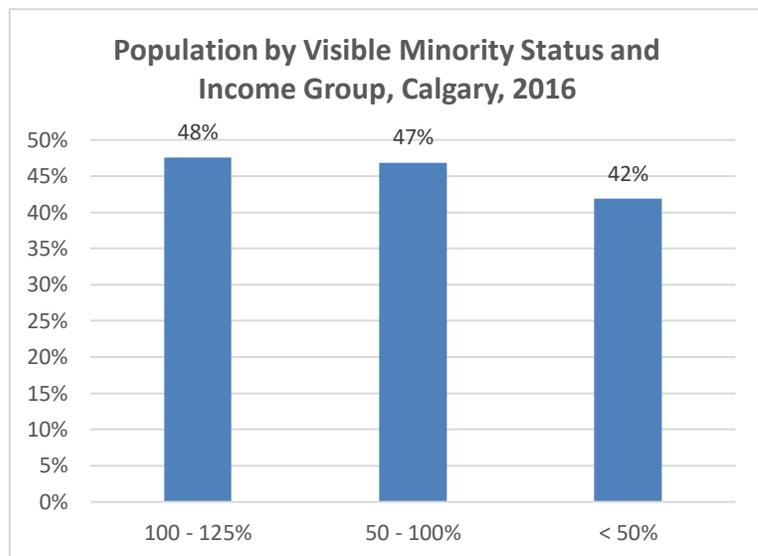
- Immigrants and non-permanent residents are more likely than non-immigrants to be at risk of poverty or living in conditions of poverty. In 2016, 7% of immigrants and 10% of non-permanent residents were at risk of poverty compared to 5% of non-immigrants. Meanwhile 11% of immigrants and 24% of non-permanent residents were living in poverty compared to just 8% of non-immigrants.



- The depth of poverty varies by period of immigration. A greater proportion of those in deep poverty are recent immigrants while among those most at risk of poverty a greater proportion are immigrants who arrived between 1991 and 2000, and between 1981 and 1990.

Visible Minority Persons⁴

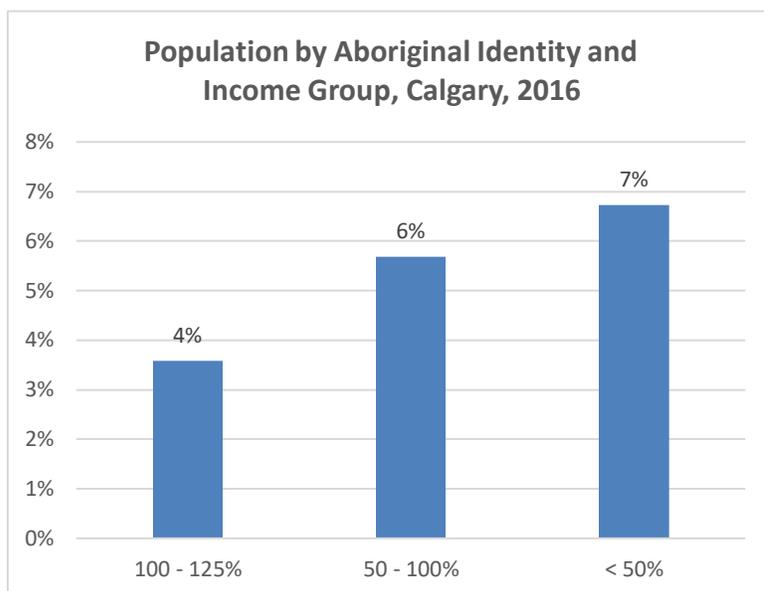
- Visible minority persons are slightly more likely to be at risk of poverty, with 8% reporting incomes of between 100 and 125% of the MBM, compared to 6% of the total population.
- While visible minorities make up just over one-third (34%) of the total population they account for almost half (48%) of those at risk of poverty. Among visible minority groups, those of Filipino identity are slightly more likely to be at risk of poverty, while those of Black or Arab identity are more likely to be in poverty, particularly deep poverty.



⁴ According to Statistics Canada, Visible minority refers to whether a person belongs to a visible minority group as defined by the Employment Equity Act and, if so, the visible minority group to which the person belongs. The Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities as "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour". The visible minority population consists mainly of the following groups: South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Arab, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean and Japanese. <https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3Var.pl?Function=DEC&Id=45152>

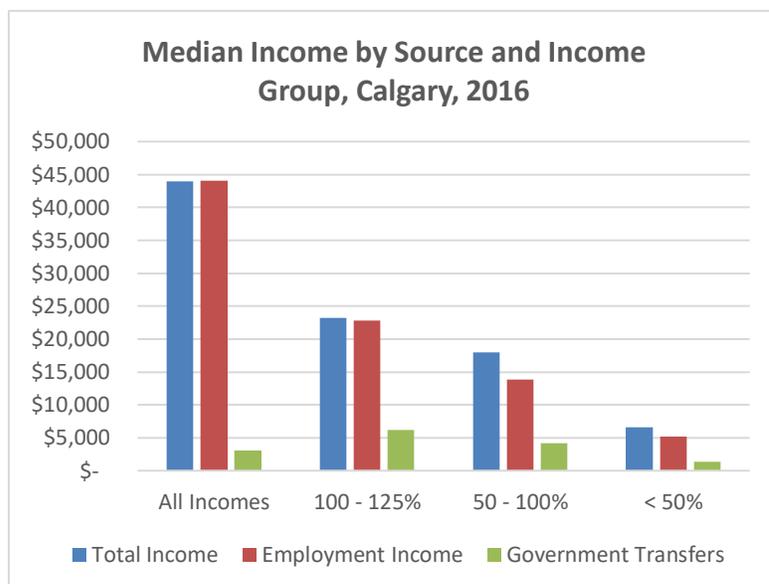
Indigenous Persons⁵

- Among indigenous persons, 7% are at risk of poverty compared to 6% of the non-indigenous population, while 13% are in conditions of shallow poverty and 6% in deep poverty, roughly double the rate of non-indigenous persons.
- Although indigenous persons comprise only 3% of the total population, they account for 7% of those living in deep poverty, 6% of those in shallow poverty and 4% of those at risk of poverty.



5.4 Income

- Those at risk of poverty reported a total median income of \$23,214, compared to \$17,987 among those in shallow poverty, and only \$5,625 among those in deep poverty.
- Market income⁶ is the primary source of income for all income groups, even those living in deep poverty. Among those at risk of poverty, 70% of total income was derived from market income, while market income accounted for 64% of all income among those in shallow poverty and 66% for those in deep poverty. Conversely, government transfers provided only one-third of total income for those in deep poverty, 36% for those in shallow poverty and 29.5% of income for those at risk of poverty.

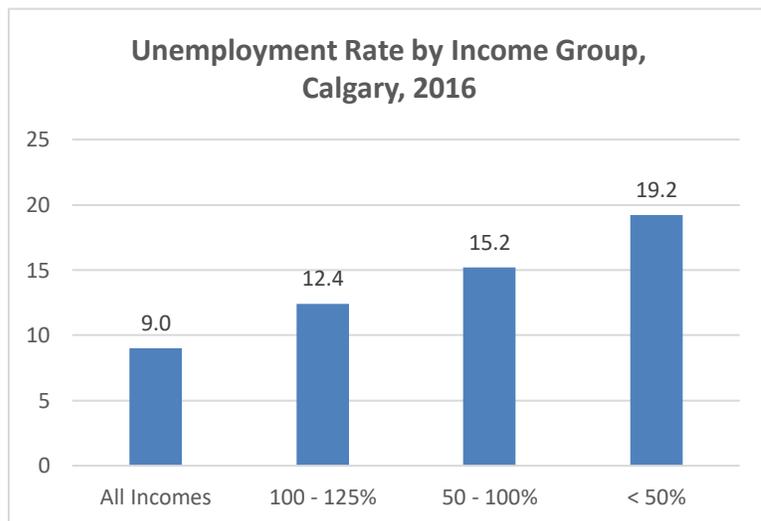
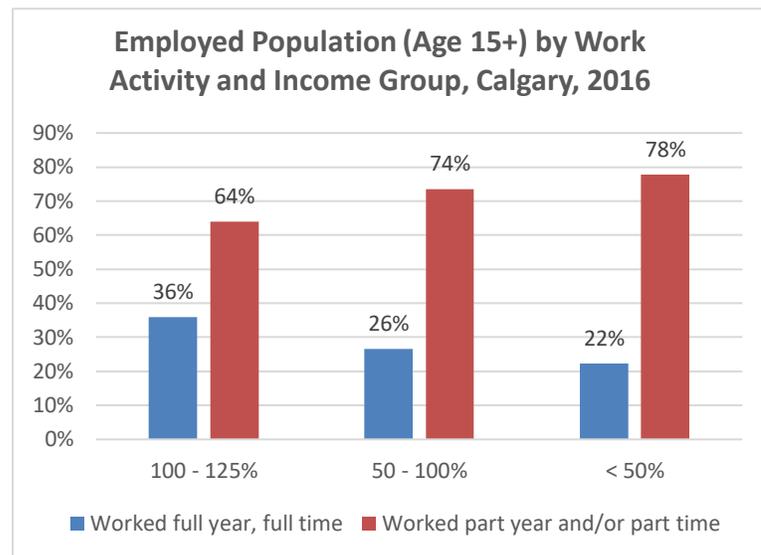
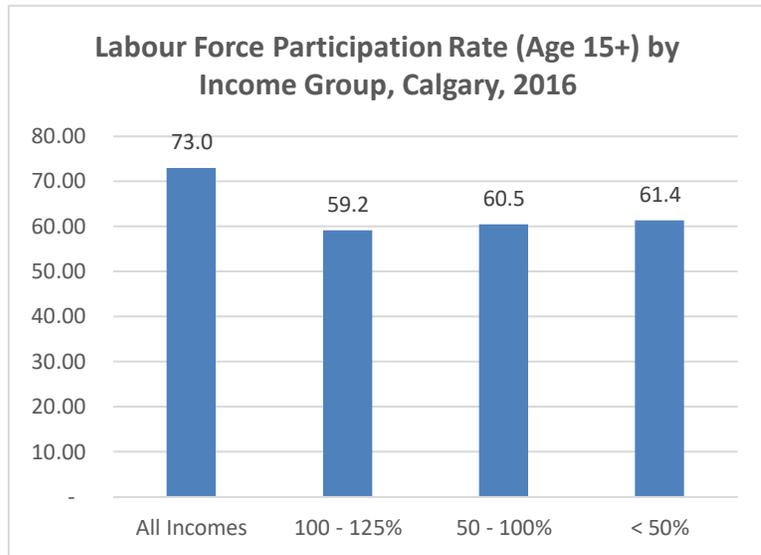


⁵ For this report Indigenous persons refers to those classified by Statistics Canada as being of “Aboriginal Identity”.

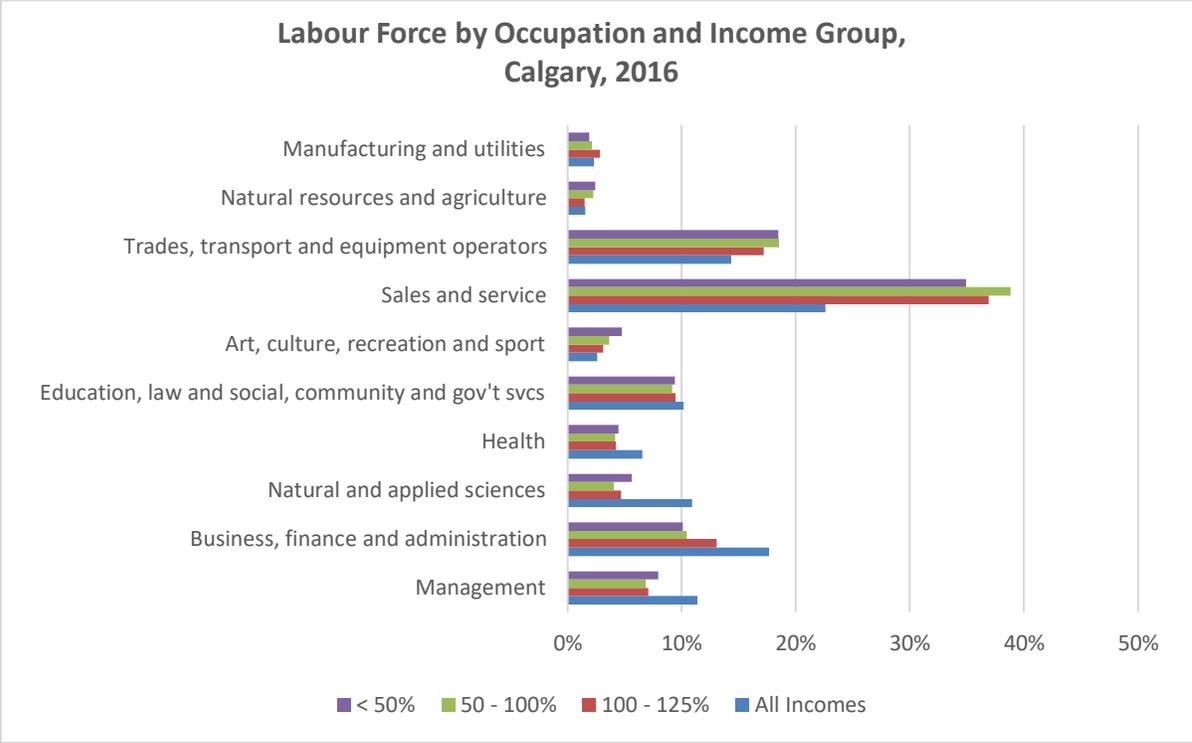
⁶ Market income is total income received from all sources less income from government. It includes employment income as well as any investment, pension, business, professional or other non-government income.

5.5 Employment

- Although employment income remains the dominant form of income for those at risk of or in poverty, the labour force participation rate among these groups remains below the Calgary rate. In 2016, the participation rate for those at risk of poverty was 59% compared to a rate of 73% for the total population. For those in shallow poverty, the participation rate was 60.5%, while those in deep poverty had the highest participation rate at 61%.
- Those at risk of poverty or living in shallow poverty were more likely to have worked during the previous year than those in deep poverty. Among those with incomes just above and below the poverty line, almost two-thirds (61%) had worked, while 59% of those in deep poverty had also worked. This compares to 75% of those in the total population who had worked in the previous year.
- Of those who worked, over one-third (36%) of those at risk of poverty had worked full-time for the full year, while 64% had worked part-time or only part of the year. Among those in shallow poverty, only 26% had worked full time for the full year and those in deep poverty were least likely to have had full time work for the year with only 22% reporting full-time full-year employment.

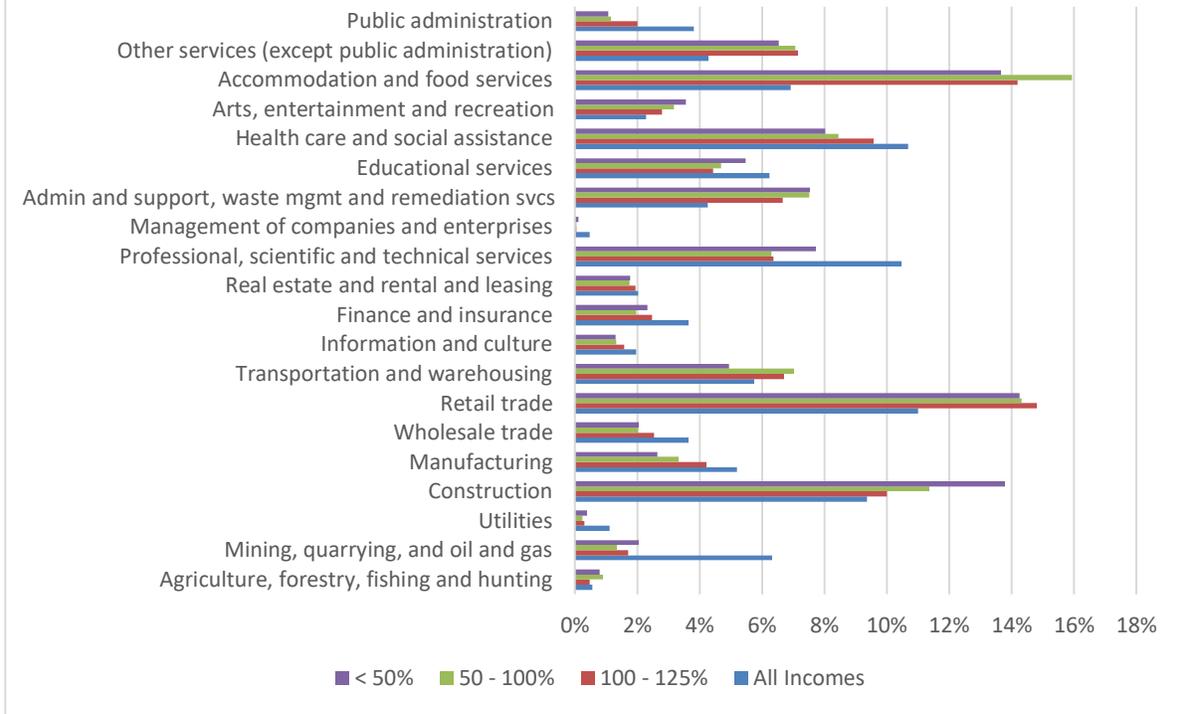


- Unemployment rates also rose with the depth of poverty. Among those at risk of poverty, the unemployment rate was 12.4% compared to a rate of 9.0% for the total population. Among those in shallow poverty, the unemployment rate was 15.2%, rising to 19.2% among those in deep poverty.
- Compared to the total labour force, workers among the lower income segments were disproportionately concentrated in sales and service occupations, followed by trades, transport and equipment operation.



- In terms of industry, workers at risk of or in poverty were disproportionately employed in the retail trade, and accommodation and food services.

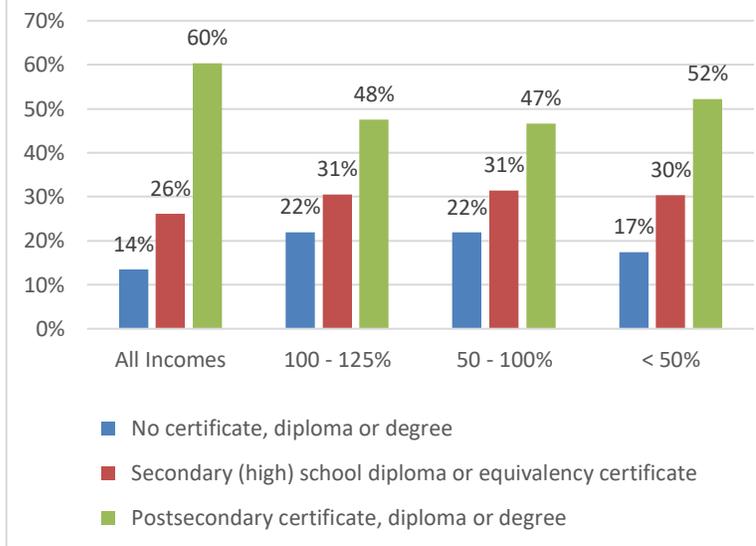
Labour Force by Industry and Income Group, Calgary, 2016



5.6 Education

- Of those at risk of poverty, about one in five (22%) had not completed high school while around the same proportion (21%) had completed a university degree. Interestingly, those in deep poverty were slightly more likely to have completed a university degree (28%) and slightly less likely to have not completed high school (17%) compared to those at risk of or in shallow poverty.

Population by Educational Attainment and Income Group, Calgary, 2016



6. Concluding Observations

This report has highlighted the fact that, in addition to the large number of people in Calgary who are experiencing poverty on a day to day basis, there is a significant portion of the population that survives just above the poverty line. If we are to make an impact on poverty in the city it will be important to pay attention to this group of people in order to ensure that they do not fall into poverty. Prevention therefore should be as important a strategy as alleviation.

One important aspect of an effective poverty prevention and alleviation strategy is a robust social safety net, including income support. This report suggests that, while generally insufficient, government transfers provide the most protection for those with incomes just above the poverty line and the least for those in deep poverty who should presumably require the most support. This may be due to the fact that those at risk of poverty are more likely to be seniors and therefore in receipt of federal seniors income benefits whereas those in deep poverty may be more likely to be in receipt of provincial social assistance whose benefits tend to be lower. This suggests the importance of government transfers in preventing poverty, while highlighting the need for increased support among those who are in the deepest poverty.

The plight of those in pre-retirement ages is noted as those between the ages of 45 – 64 are disproportionately represented among those in deep poverty. This may reflect the situation where older workers may experience difficulty in the labour market but do not yet qualify for federal pension and seniors benefits that can stabilize their income. It also speaks to the challenges of an income security system with a patchwork of supports targeted at different ages and population groups. Providing specific supports to this population should be an important aspect of poverty reduction strategies, as well as further exploration of a basic income that could provide adequate income regardless of age.

Immigrants and racialized persons are not only disproportionately represented among those who are in poverty, but also among those at risk of it. Policies that aim to reduce structural barriers for equity seeking groups are thus important not only for reducing the number of people experiencing poverty, but also for preventing it. Of particular concern noted in this report is the disproportionately high number of recent immigrants and non-permanent residents who are experiencing deep poverty. Special attention needs to be paid to these groups in order to ensure that their basic needs are being met.

Social support matters. Where individuals are living in a family context, either married or common-law, their risk of poverty diminishes. Even among those living in poverty, the depth of poverty is lower where there is the presence of a domestic partner. This may be due in part to the fact that those in couple households have the potential of dual incomes which can buffer against poverty, particularly its deepest form. Accordingly, policies and programs, such as childcare, that enable households to engage both partners in the labour force may be critical not only to poverty alleviation but also prevention.

While employment is an important buffer against poverty, this report highlights the fact that for many people employment does not in fact provide a sufficient income. Workers at risk of or in poverty are largely employed, disproportionately in lower waged industries and occupations. The need for not just employment but quality employment that provides an income sufficient for people to meet their daily needs is required. This speaks for the need to target lower waged industries and occupations in order to raise the quality of work in them.

Like employment, education is also looked to as an important buffer against poverty. This report, however, highlights the fact that the majority of those at risk of or in poverty have some level of post-secondary education. Poverty alleviation and prevention therefore does not primarily hinge on improving education. Rather, other factors highlighted in this report may be as, or more, important for making a meaningful impact on poverty.

Data Sources and Notes

All data referenced in this report has been provided by Statistics Canada. The data is a custom profile of 2016 Census data based on total household income as a percentage of the Market Basket Measure. Throughout this report, all references to Calgary are to the Census Metropolitan Area (CMA).

Appendix: Data Tables

	Total	Percent of Population
At risk of poverty	77,115	6%
Shallow poverty	94,405	7%
Deep poverty	38,640	3%
Total	210,160	15.2%

	100 - 125%	50 - 100%	< 50%
0-4	8%	9%	8%
5-14	16%	17%	15%
15-24	12%	15%	18%
25-44	30%	30%	32%
45-64	17%	20%	23%
65-84	15%	8%	3%
85+	2%	1%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%

	100 - 125%	50 - 100%	< 50%
Male	47%	47%	50%
Female	53%	53%	50%

	100 - 125%	50 - 100%	< 50%
Married or living common law	48%	39%	37%
Not married and not living common law	52%	61%	63%

	100 - 125%	50 - 100%	< 50%
Non-immigrants	58%	62%	60%
Immigrants	38%	35%	32%
Non-permanent residents	4%	4%	7%
Before 1981	8%	10%	8%
1981 to 1990	16%	8%	6%
1991 to 2000	29%	16%	13%
2001 to 2010	13%	33%	26%
2011 to 2016	10%	33%	47%

	100 - 125%		50 - 100%		< 50%	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Population	77,115	100%	94,405	100%	38,635	100%
Non-visible minority population	40,415	52%	50,185	53%	22,460	58%
Visible minority population	36,700	48%	44,220	47%	16,175	42%
South Asian	9,720	26%	11,310	26%	3,470	21%
Chinese	5,765	16%	6,065	14%	2,735	17%
Black	6,215	17%	8,395	19%	3,150	19%
Filipino	4,775	13%	4,265	10%	1,200	7%
Latin American	1,855	5%	2,515	6%	1,100	7%
Arab	2,545	7%	5,110	12%	1,920	12%
Southeast Asian	1,860	5%	1,745	4%	630	4%
West Asian	1,315	4%	1,670	4%	490	3%
Korean	995	3%	1,275	3%	870	5%
Japanese	365	1%	260	1%	155	1%
Visible minority, n.i.e.	305	1%	435	1%	120	1%
Multiple visible minorities	980	3%	1,180	3%	350	2%

	100 - 125%		50 - 100%		< 50%	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Population	77,115	100%	94,400	100%	38,640	100%
Aboriginal identity	2,760	4%	5,360	6%	2,600	7%

	100 - 125%	50 - 100%	< 50%
Median Total Income	\$ 23,214	\$ 17,987	\$ 6,625
Median Employment Income	\$ 22,815	\$ 13,842	\$ 5,179
Median Government Transfer Income	\$ 6,221	\$ 4,169	\$ 1,349
Market income	70.5%	64%	66.8%
Government transfers	29.5%	36%	33.2%

	100 - 125%	50 - 100%	< 50%
Total population aged 15 years and over	58,665	69,665	29,660
Did not work	23,050	27,130	12,135
Worked	35,615	42,530	17,525
Worked full year, full time	12,805	11,265	3,895
Worked part year and/or part time	22,805	31,265	13,630
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Total population aged 15 years and over	100%	100%	100%
Did not work	39%	39%	41%
Worked	61%	61%	59%
Worked full year, full time	36%	26%	22%
Worked part year and/or part time	64%	74%	78%

	All Incomes	100 - 125%	50 - 100%	< 50%
Management	11%	7%	7%	8%
Business, finance and administration	18%	13%	10%	10%
Natural and applied sciences	11%	5%	4%	6%
Health	7%	4%	4%	4%
Education, law and social, community and gov't services	10%	9%	9%	9%
Art, culture, recreation and sport	3%	3%	4%	5%
Sales and service	23%	37%	39%	35%
Trades, transport and equipment operators	14%	17%	19%	18%
Natural resources, agriculture and related production	2%	1%	2%	2%
Manufacturing and utilities	2%	3%	2%	2%

	All Incomes	100 - 125%	50 - 100%	< 50%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	1%	0%	1%	1%
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas	6%	2%	1%	2%
Utilities	1%	0%	0%	0%
Construction	9%	10%	11%	14%
Manufacturing	5%	4%	3%	3%
Wholesale trade	4%	3%	2%	2%
Retail trade	11%	15%	14%	14%
Transportation and warehousing	6%	7%	7%	5%
Information and culture	2%	2%	1%	1%
Finance and insurance	4%	2%	2%	2%
Real estate and rental and leasing	2%	2%	2%	2%
Professional, scientific and technical services	10%	6%	6%	8%
Management of companies and enterprises	0%	0%	0%	0%
Admin and support, waste management and remediation services	4%	7%	8%	8%
Educational services	6%	4%	5%	5%
Health care and social assistance	11%	10%	8%	8%
Arts, entertainment and recreation	2%	3%	3%	4%
Accommodation and food services	7%	14%	16%	14%
Other services (except public administration)	4%	7%	7%	7%
Public administration	4%	2%	1%	1%

	100 - 125%		50 - 100%		< 50%	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total population aged 15 years and over	58,665	100%	69,665	100%	29,660	100%
No certificate, diploma or degree	12,860	22%	15,265	22%	5,170	17%
Secondary (high) school diploma or equivalency certificate	17,935	31%	21,925	31%	9,010	30%
Postsecondary certificate, diploma or degree	27,875	48%	32,475	47%	15,480	52%
Apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma	3,900	7%	4,440	6%	1,715	6%
Trades certificate or diploma other than Certificate of Apprenticeship or Certificate of Qualification	1,730	3%	2,225	3%	780	3%
Certificate of Apprenticeship or Certificate of Qualification	2,165	4%	2,210	3%	930	3%
College, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma	9,550	16%	10,770	15%	4,435	15%
University certificate or diploma below bachelor level	1,935	3%	2,350	3%	945	3%
University certificate, diploma or degree at bachelor level or above	12,490	21%	14,905	21%	8,380	28%
Bachelor's degree	8,670	15%	10,345	15%	5,590	19%
University certificate or diploma above bachelor level	715	1%	840	1%	535	2%
Degree in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine or optometry	345	1%	425	1%	280	1%
Master's degree	2,385	4%	2,860	4%	1,735	6%
Earned doctorate	360	1%	435	1%	240	1%

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

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