

[Pakistani-Canadians: Falling below the poverty line](#)

[Murtaza Haider](#)

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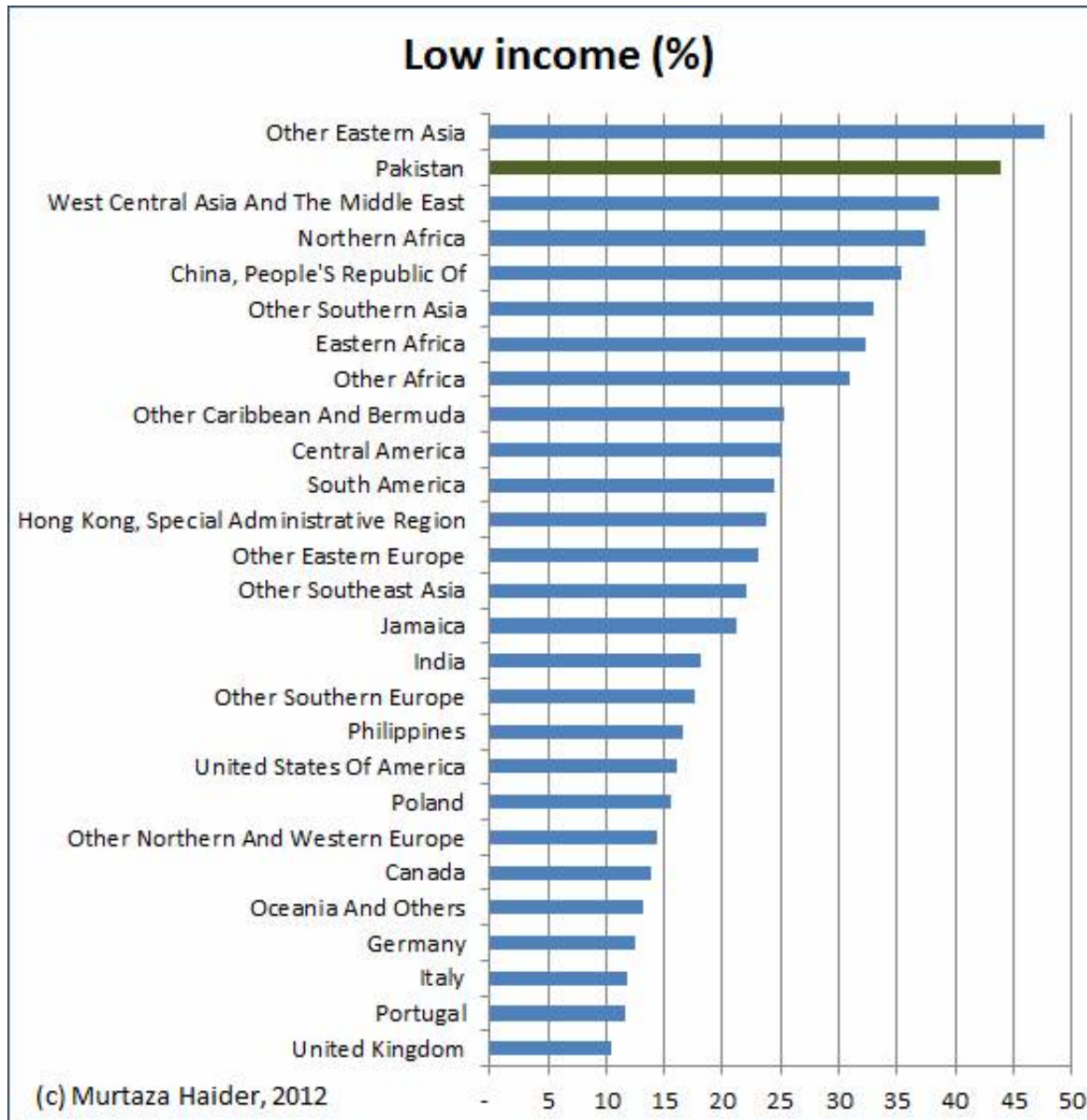


Pakistan-born immigrants are the new face of poverty in urban Canada. The Canadian census revealed that 44 per cent of Pakistan-born immigrants fell below the poverty line making them the second most poverty prone group of immigrants in Canada.

While they may project an aura of opulence during their visits back home, their life in Canada, however, is often full of struggle and frustration. Thousands of Pakistani trained engineers, doctors, and PhDs are driving taxis or are working as security guards in large cities. In fact, [one in three](#)

[taxi-drivers](#) in Canada was born in either India or Pakistan. Several others are unemployed thus becoming a burden on Canadian taxpayers.

The latest Census data for income for 2005 revealed that Pakistan-born immigrants reported the second highest incidence for the low-income cut-off, a proxy for poverty line in Canada. In comparison, only 18 per cent of India-born immigrants in Canada reported being a low-income person or belonging to a low-income economic family. Immigrants born in the United Kingdom, Portugal, Italy and Germany reported the lowest incidence of poverty in Canada.

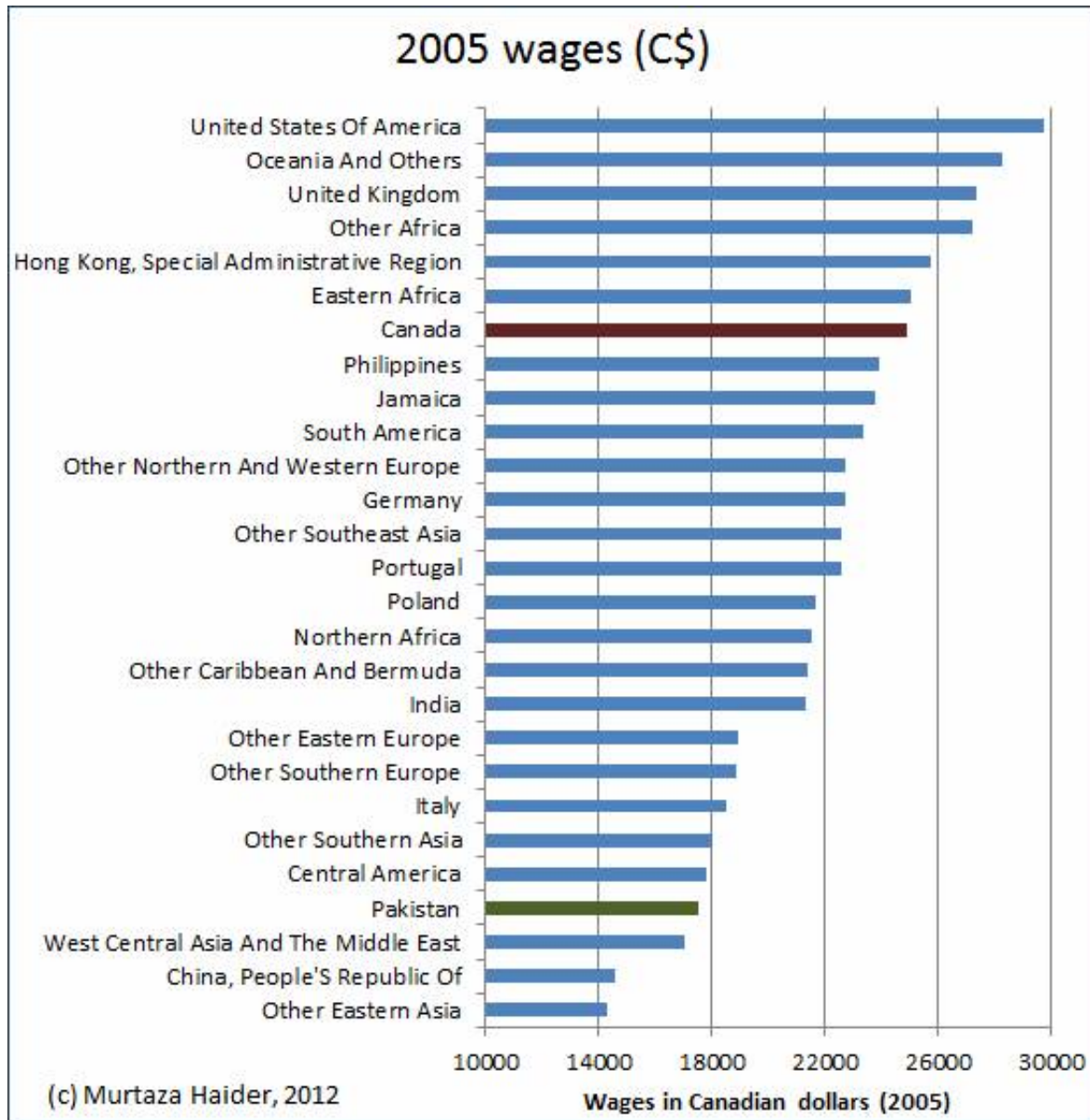


Source: 2006 Public Use Microdata File, Statistics Canada.

Unlike in the Middle East where the Arab governments do not allow assimilation of migrant workers, the Canadian government and the society to a large extent does not create systematic barriers that may limit the immigrants' ability to succeed and assimilate in Canada. This is not to suggest that immigrants face no barriers at all in Canada. They in fact do. For instance, Pakistan-trained doctors cannot practice medicine without completing further training in Canada. The shorter duration of medical training in Pakistan necessitates the additional certification for doctors. Engineering

graduates from Pakistan, however, face no such barrier because the engineering curriculum and the duration of training in Pakistan is similar to that in Canada.

Despite the opportunities (and constraints), Pakistani-Canadians have not prospered as much as immigrants from other countries have. In 2005, wages earned by Pakistan-born immigrants were on average 70 per cent of the wages earned by those born in Canada. In comparison, wages earned by the India-born immigrants were 86 per cent of the wages earned by Canadians. At the same time, immigrants born in America earned 20 per cent more in wages than those born in Canada. Similarly, UK-born immigrants also reported on average higher wages than that of Canadian-born.



Source: 2006 Public Use Microdata File, Statistics Canada.

Because of lower wages, the Pakistan-born immigrants reported as one of the lowest home-ownership rates. Only 55 per cent of Pakistan-born immigrants reported owning their homes. In comparison, 75 per cent of the India-born immigrants owned their homes. At the same time, while only 12 per cent of the India- and Philippines-born immigrants had never worked in the past, 22 per cent of the Pakistan-born immigrants in Canada reported never being in the workforce.

The difference in wages, home-ownership rates, and employment rates between immigrants from India and Pakistan extend beyond the economic spheres. For instance, Pakistani-born immigrants live in large-sized families. Whereas only 13 per cent of India-born immigrants live in households of five persons or more, 44 per cent of the Pakistan-born immigrants live in households with five or more people. Given the lower wages, high unemployment rates and rental units, Pakistan-born immigrants experience severe crowding at homes where the number of residents per room is perhaps the highest owing to the large family sizes.

Given similar cultural endowments, education, and language skills, it is important to explore why Pakistan-born immigrants in Canada have lagged behind their Indian counterparts. The Indian diaspora is much larger in size and has been established in Canada for over a longer period, which has allowed immigrants from India to benefit from the social networks required to establish oneself in employment markets.

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