

Gig platforms help immigrant care workers find jobs, but they are only a temporary solution

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

For internationally trained healthcare professionals faced with unemployment and underemployment in the Canadian labor market, digital platforms offer the possibility of finding jobs in the industry they are trained in.

Even though Canada is in the [midst of a health-care labor shortage](#), immigrant care workers are struggling to find jobs and are looking for alternative solutions. One of these solutions is gig platforms, where [immigrants are over-represented as workers](#).

Take, for example, a newly arrived nurse from the Philippines who is awaiting her registered nurse license. Without her license, she is unable to work as a [registered nurse](#), so in the meantime she might pick up a gig from a digital care [platform](#) like [care.com](#) to care for a client with dementia twice a week.

Many immigrant [care workers turn to these platforms while waiting for accreditation](#) to find meaningful employment. Considering the Canadian [health sector is so chronically short-staffed](#), this suggests that Canada is struggling to support the integration of immigrant workers into the care sector.

Canada's immigrant care professionals

Immigrant care workers are overwhelmingly represented in Canada's health-care system. According to Statistics Canada, they make up [over 40 percent of Ontario's nurse aides and support workers](#).

Personal [support workers](#), nurse aides and orderlies are needed to support the dearth of care workers in Canada. But many are facing barriers to obtaining quality occupations in the care industry.

Despite [Canada's merit-based point system](#), which is meant to select immigrants to contribute to the skilled labor market, immigrants often run up against regulatory, employment and policy barriers.

Some immigrants, for example, [struggle to get international professional degrees recognized](#) in Canada. [Other barriers include](#) long wait times

from licensing authorities, restrictive testing requirements and a lack of training opportunities.

For immigrant care professionals facing employment barriers, care platforms seemingly offer an opportunity for them to work in their field. But while digital platform work can be [a stepping-stone for new immigrants in Canada](#), for some it only offers them a temporary reprieve while they figure out how to find permanent jobs in the health-care industry.

A different type of platform work

Our forthcoming research in the [Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies](#) about platform workers finds that there are two different types of platform work: relational and non-relational.

Digital care platforms are different than casual, one-off gig platforms like ride-hailing or food delivery. These latter forms of work are non-relational, since there is neither a need nor a possibility of relationships forming between customers and service providers.

The immigrants we interviewed found that engagement on digital platform work, like Uber and SkipTheDishes, offered them opportunities to practice their language abilities or expand their networks, but didn't provide opportunity for deeper relationships. But care or domestic platform work is different.

This is because [the work of care is innately relational](#) and demands a connection between care workers and receivers. This creates both opportunities and motivation for care workers to engage more deeply with their care recipients, in hopes of cultivating a lasting relationship with regular clients.

Immigrant care workers felt more fulfilled when they were able to find work on platforms that offered relational forms of work. These temporary jobs allowed their professional identity to be formally recognized by performing caring-related tasks. Even if the tasks were below the expertise of the workers, their ability to fulfill them was affirming to their professional identity.

But while digital care platforms might allow immigrants to find work that aligns with their field of expertise, it comes with consequences. Workers on care platforms are [incentivized to put themselves at risk for their employers](#), creating a power imbalance between them and the platforms they work for, and between them and care receivers.

Quality care work is needed

Policy and regulatory changes are needed to help immigrant care workers find jobs within their field of expertise. In Ontario, for example, [international nurses are allowed to start practicing](#) while they wait for their full registration. Yet, the journey to full credentialing is a long and expensive process.

The [Government of Canada recently announced its new immigration target of welcoming 500,000 new immigrants a year by 2025](#). Will this new immigration target help address labor shortages in the care sector? It should—the large number of immigrants will surely include highly educated care professionals. But unless barriers to care work are addressed in a timely manner, the care sector labor shortage will persist.

Alternative working arrangements like gig platforms might be a temporary solution, but many care professionals are still unable to put their skills and experience to use in permanent jobs. Canada needs to work with these new [immigrants](#) to understand how regulatory barriers can be assuaged. We have to ask: are [immigrant](#) care workers able to

thrive, or will precarious alternative forms of work, like gig platform jobs, become the norm?

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