Digital Mobility and Young Immigrants in Quebec: Toward a Typology of Platform Work

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Young immigrants constitute an increasingly significant segment of Canada's population, yet persistent disparities in employment opportunities remain between them and native-born workers. A growing number of these young individuals turn to digital mobility platforms—Uber, Uber Eats, Skip the Dishes, and DoorDash—that offer flexible income opportunities compatible with their academic, professional, familial, and personal commitments.

This paper explores the profiles and working conditions of young immigrants who engage with these platforms, and the challenges they face in this context. It presents qualitative data from interviews with 21 young immigrant workers, to deepen understanding of their work and employment realities.

Keywords: gig economy, digital mobility, young immigrants, Quebec, Canada, platform economy

INTRODUCTION

Quebec and Canada are among the preferred destinations for immigrants, who now represent a growing share of the local population. Immigrant populations contribute significantly to Canada's (and Quebec's) growth. Their average age and educational level make them a vital force in the economy and the labor market (Leclerc, 2018). In fact, many people leave their countries of origin in pursuit of better living conditions—financial, security-related, or tied to personal freedoms (Colin, 2018).

However, disparities in opportunity and wages between immigrants and native-born Canadians have persisted and even worsened over the years. According to Statistics Canada data, immigrants admitted in 2016 reported a median entry wage of $25,900 in 2017, while the median income for the general population that year was $36,100.

The rise of the "Gig Economy," characterized by short-term contracts and temporary jobs—often accessed via digital mobility apps—appears to offer a solution to young immigrants seeking independence

and/or aiming to support their families. Many combine studies with low-wage jobs or take on multiple jobs simply to ensure decent living conditions—or, in some cases, to survive.

Today, digital mobility apps continue to grow. Services such as Uber, Uber Eats, Skip the Dishes, and DoorDash are widely used, and their "efficient" model has been replicated in various sectors, including transportation, food, and hospitality (Martin, 2015).

In our research, we focused on the profiles of these Quebec-based immigrant youth participating in these "new types of work." The study aims to understand the realities surrounding this work in the digital mobility context—a common form of employment for many immigrants in Quebec, Canada, and beyond. Our objective is to identify their profiles and working conditions, understand their motivations for choosing this kind of work, and explore the challenges they experience from multiple angles.

We looked into the perceived advantages and disadvantages of this work, including autonomy (Mazmanian et al., 2013) and the balance between various aspects of social life—personal and professional (Tremblay, 2024)—to determine how the living and working conditions of these young people could be improved in the new work context (Tremblay & Soussi, 2020).

Our research problem is rooted in the evolving platform-based economy, which has emerged in recent years and is associated with increasing precariousness and difficulties in balancing different time commitments (Tremblay, 2015).

We will show that young people value the flexibility and autonomy offered by this work, key factors in their decision to engage with these platforms. However, all interview respondents indicated they do not view such jobs as part of their long-term future; they see them as temporary or complementary activities to supplement their income.

The goal of our research is to understand how young workers perceive their working conditions—including working hours, autonomy, and work-life balance—to identify the reasons behind their job choices and to explore the advantages and disadvantages associated with this kind of employment. These insights will be discussed after a brief literature review and presentation of our methodology.

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The Situation of Immigrants in Canada

The desire to improve one's living conditions—whether financially, in terms of safety, or personal freedoms—is generally at the heart of why individuals choose to leave their countries of origin. This pursuit of better conditions takes many forms. In 2016, immigrants accounted for 21.9% of Canada's population (Statistics Canada, 2017).

Canada has historically been known for its openness to immigrant integration, making it a preferred destination, although some limitations have been introduced in 2024-25. According to the *Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration* (2020), "Permanent and non-permanent immigration accounted for over 80% of Canada's population growth," and "approximately 58% of permanent residents were admitted under the economic immigration category"—meaning they came to work in Canada. Immigrant populations help fill labor shortages in various sectors and contribute to raising Canada's educational attainment levels (Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration, 2021, pp. 3, 6, and 8).

The immigrant population can be subdivided into three groups based on how long they've been in Canada: very recent immigrants (less than 3 years), recent immigrants (3 to 10 years), and long-term immigrants (more than 10 years). Each of these groups shows distinct trends in terms of education level and place of study (Statistics Canada, 2017).

IMMMIGRANT POPULAITON AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN CANADA

Immigrant populations in Canada tend to have, on average, higher levels of education than the Canadian-born population, with very recent immigrants exhibiting even higher educational attainment than more established cohorts. The majority of these individuals are qualified (often trained in their country of origin), economically active (aged between 25 and 69), and equally represented in terms of gender. Among

very recent immigrants, approximately 75% have completed post-secondary education, with more than 87% of them having done so abroad. For recent immigrants (in Canada for 3–10 years), 70% have completed post-secondary studies, 73% of which were undertaken outside Canada. Among long-term immigrants (in Canada for more than 10 years), 60% have completed post-secondary education, with 38% of them having studied abroad (Statistics Canada, 2017).

Despite Canada's relatively low unemployment rate—around 6% in recent years (6 % for Québec and 6.9 % for Canada in April 2025)—employment disparities remain significant. Nevertheless, a marked gap persists between the unemployment rates of immigrants and native-born residents. According to a study by the Comité consultatif personnes immigrantes (CCPI), "In February 2018, the unemployment rate for people born in Quebec was 5.1%. For immigrants who had arrived less than five years prior, this rate was nearly triple, approaching 14%" (Nadeau, 2019). In fact, since 1980, the gap in employment outcomes and wages between native-born Canadians and immigrants has continued to widen (Picot, 2008).

These growing disparities have led—and sometimes compelled—immigrants to seek alternative forms of employment that offer easier access to income. Many turn to supplemental or flexible jobs that can be adapted to their personal or professional schedules, often opting for more independent work arrangements. These options allow them to balance economic needs with family and personal responsibilities.

It is within this context that our research is situated. We focus on the integration of immigrants—particularly young immigrants—into a specific labor sector: the digital mobility app sector. We explore this industry before presenting the findings of our study.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF DIGITAL APPLICATIONS AND THE RISE OF THE GIG ECONOMY

Over the past several years, we have witnessed a significant expansion in the use of digital tools, mobility apps, and on-demand services such as ride-hailing (Uber, Lyft, Turo, etc.) and delivery platforms for food and groceries (Uber Eats, DoorDash, Instacart, SkipTheDishes, etc.). The development of digital technologies has enabled the creation of new job opportunities within the platform economy (Hashemi et al., 2023; Motaghi, 2023).

The number of service platforms has continued to increase, a trend driven by the growing sophistication of information systems and enhanced data security standards. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated the adoption and use of such applications.

This new economic model—often referred to as the "gig economy"—is particularly attractive to job seekers in precarious situations, such as students and immigrants. It offers a flexible and autonomous way to secure either primary or supplementary income.

From a theoretical standpoint, the precarity of such work relates to the broader transformations in the knowledge economy and the segmentation of the labor market (Tremblay, 2015, 2022). It also connects to the debate on whether precarious employment acts as a bridge to more stable opportunities or rather as a trap that prevents access to secure jobs—a debate especially relevant to youth (often framed in the literature as "bridge or trap?").

Our study also examines the process of "uberization" and the rise of the gig economy concerning job quality and employment precarity—core themes in labor market segmentation theory (Tremblay, 2022; D'Amours, Soussi & Tremblay, 2015).

This new employment model, when formalized by a contract at all, raises several economic, legal, social, and ethical concerns. Critics have pointed to poor working conditions, ambiguous legal status, low wages, and misclassification of workers as self-employed, which excludes them from social benefits and paid leave.

One of the most acute indicators of job precarity in the gig economy is workers' dependence on fluctuating demand. Delivery drivers are paid per completed order; if no orders come in, they earn nothing. A similar dynamic exists in ride-hailing services (Léouzon, 2022). As a result, these workers face not only employer oversight but also direct performance pressure from customers (Motaghi et al., 2023).

The pressure to meet customer expectations—often by minimizing delivery or ride times—is intense. Poor ratings from clients, even when not justified, can result in account deactivation and, therefore, job loss. Nevertheless, for many immigrants, these platforms offer a necessary (albeit precarious) source of income. The labor market upheavals triggered by the pandemic heightened the demand for couriers, drawing many immigrants to this sector despite the unstable conditions (Alberio & Tremblay, 2021).

While several studies have explored the platform economy—such as Rabih (2018) on Uber—few articles have specifically focused on immigrants, and even fewer on young immigrants in particular. Some research (e.g., Delvik & Jesnes, 2018) argues that mobility platforms facilitate the rapid integration of newcomers into host societies and labor markets. Others (e.g., Ens, Stein & Jensen, 2018; Mazmanian, Orlikowski & Yates, 2013) underscore the downsides of platform-based work, including ambiguous employment status and related precarity.

Our study seeks to address this gap by focusing exclusively on young immigrants in Quebec. We adopt a qualitative approach through interviews to provide a new and constructive perspective on the working conditions and challenges associated with these emerging forms of labor. Given the limited academic literature on this topic, we also relied on grey literature to contextualize the phenomenon and develop our interview framework.

METHODOLOGY AND RESPONDENTS

The research was conducted between December 2021 and May 2022. Data collection relied primarily on social media "groups," particularly Facebook, where couriers working for various delivery apps connect and communicate. Twenty-one (21) immigrant individuals living in Quebec (6 women and 15 men, aged between 21 and 30) agreed to participate in the study under the condition of full anonymity. Table 1 presents a summary of respondent profiles.

TABLE 1
PROFILE OF INTERVIEWED RESPONDENTS

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Country of Origin	City	Higher Education (University)
Pseudo 1	M	29	Algeria	Montreal	Yes
Pseudo 2	M	30	Tunisia	Saint-Laurent	Yes
Pseudo 3	M	27	Pakistan	Montreal	No
Pseudo 4	F	22	Algeria	Montreal	Yes
Pseudo 5	M	26	Algeria	Outaouais	Yes
Pseudo 6	M	27	Algeria	Outaouais	Yes
Pseudo 7	M	24	Algeria	Outaouais	Yes
Pseudo 8	M	26	Algeria	Sherbrooke	Yes
Pseudo 9	F	25	Algeria	Montreal	Yes
Pseudo 10	F	28	Morocco	Outaouais	Yes
Pseudo 11	M	29	Egypt	Outaouais	Yes
Pseudo 12	M	27	Mauritania	Montreal	Yes
Pseudo 13	M	25	Morocco	Outaouais	Yes
Pseudo 14	M	28	Morocco	Montreal	Yes
Pseudo 15	M	29	Mauritania	Montreal	Yes
Pseudo 16	F	30	Tunisia	Montreal	Yes

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Country of Origin	City	Higher Education (University)
Pseudo 17	M	28	Egypt	Laval	Yes
Pseudo 18	F	23	Turkey	Sherbrooke	Yes
Pseudo 19	M	30	Tunisia	Montreal	Yes
Pseudo 20	M	21	Algeria	Montreal	Yes
Pseudo 21	M	29	Algeria	Capitale-Nationa	

Although the number of participants is relatively small—insufficient for establishing statistically representative trends—it nonetheless reveals strong patterns. We also reached a point of data saturation, suggesting a certain consistency across the interviews.

It is worth noting that the average age of respondents (26.8 years) aligns closely with the average age of the immigrant population in Quebec (30.4 years, according to the Québec Statistical Institute – i.e. Institut de la statistique du Québec).

Furthermore, in terms of the local age distribution of individuals engaged in gig work, we observed a replication of the population profile reflected in statistical data ((Caron Malenfant, 2011). The results of our study confirm a strong concordance between the statistical data and the data collected in the field. And although there is a fourteen-year gap between the two studies (Statistics Canada and ours), the reproduction of the same profile indicates that Canada continues to experience a predominantly young migratory influx.

Additionally, over 85% of the young immigrants interviewed had completed at least one year of university studies, with 50% holding qualifications above a bachelor's degree (master's level or higher). This finding aligns with existing literature that characterizes migratory flows as predominantly young and often composed of individuals with higher education backgrounds.

It is worth noting that the majority of our respondents belong to the categories of recent or very recent immigrants. Their average length of residence in Quebec—and in Canada more broadly—was approximately three years, with a minimum of a few months and a single case reaching nine years. This trend can be explained by the digital nature of this type of work, which particularly appeals to the younger generation—those born after 1995—who have grown up during the digital boom. Moreover, our respondents were all between the ages of 21 and 30, and most were recent immigrants, as shown in their demographic profiles. It is possible that expanding the age range might reveal other patterns or trends.

Regarding the methodology employed, it consisted of three complementary phases. First, we conducted observations within online discussion groups, allowing for a discreet, non-participant observational approach. We regularly reviewed exchanges among young immigrants in several dedicated Facebook groups. From these platforms, we gathered a wealth of data from numerous testimonies and posts concerning working conditions, the daily lives of delivery drivers, and their plans within this type of employment.

Next, we developed an interview guide. As mentioned earlier, much of the so-called "grey literature" helped us document the situation and inform the construction of our interview framework. We then conducted semi-structured interviews via phone calls or other means (three young participants answered our questions through audio recordings they sent in response to the questions we had previously shared, as they were unavailable during the study period). All interviews were recorded (except for the three audio submissions), with the participants' prior consent, and were subsequently transcribed. This process helped minimize interpretive bias and ensured that potentially crucial information was not overlooked.

In addition to the interviews, three respondents agreed to be shadowed for an entire workday. This allowed for field observation "under real conditions," enabling us to experience a fragment of their daily reality. These observations enriched our understanding and helped us either reinforce or temper certain conclusions drawn from the interviews.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The first part of the interviews aimed to establish a demographic profile of the young immigrant respondents. Participants were between the ages of 21 and 30, with an average age of 26.8 years. The majority were either very recent immigrants (less than 3 years in Canada) or recent immigrants (between 3 and 10 years). All respondents, with one exception, held higher education credentials. Notably, only two participants held Canadian citizenship. Eight (8) were permanent residents, and seven (7) were international students.

TABLE 2
PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Demographic Variable	Categories	Frequency
Length of stay in Canada	Up to 1 year	4
	1 to 3 years	8
	3 to 6 years	2
	More than 10 years	2
Level of education	Bachelor's degree	5
	Vocational diploma (DEP)	1
	Graduate diploma (DESS)	1
	High school diploma	1
	Master's degree	4
	University level (unspecified)	7
Legal status in Canada	Canadian citizen	2
	Permanent resident	8
	International student	7

The gender composition of the group is also noteworthy and appears to reflect a broader trend in this line of work. Approximately two-thirds of those engaged in this form of employment are men, compared to one-third who are women—six (6) women and fifteen (15) men among the 21 respondents.

The second part of the interviews explored the use of digital mobility applications and the work habits of the young immigrants who use them. A large majority—19 out of 21 respondents—reported working with Uber. Some respondents indicated working with two platforms simultaneously, most commonly Uber and another application. **Table 3** provides further detail on the platforms used and other work-related variables such as duration of engagement and means of transportation. All respondents had been working with these applications for three years or less—a relatively short time frame. In fact, eight (8) had been using the applications for a year or less. A majority (13) used a car as their primary means of transportation for this work.

TABLE 3
RESPONDENT PROFILES (PART 2 : USE OF DIGITAL MOBILITY APPLICATIONS)

Variable	Category	Frequency
Digital platform(s) used	Uber	19
	SkipTheDishes	2
	DoorDash	2
	Uber Eats	1
	Turo	1
Length of time working with these platforms	Less than 6 months	5
	6 months to 1 year	3
	1 to 2 years	9
	2 to 3 years	4
Average number of hours worked per week	Fewer than 10 hours	1
	10 to 20 hours	3
	20 to 30 hours	5
	More than 30 hours	12
Primary mode of transportation	Car	13
	Bicycle	4
	Public transit (STM)	2
	Electric scooter	1
	Walking	1

Work Conditions and Motivation

The final section of the interview guide focused on the working conditions and motivations of young immigrants engaged in this type of work.

When asked about the reasons for choosing this form of employment, respondents most frequently cited the **flexibility** and **ease of entry**. For some, these jobs serve as **a temporary solution** while they search for a position more aligned with their education or previous work experience. For others, it is a **means of financial support during their studies**.

Some participants emphasized the **autonomy** offered by platform work, stating that the ability to choose their own schedules helped them manage multiple responsibilities, including academic, family, and professional commitments. However, many also mentioned the **instability** of income, the **lack of social protections**, and the **absence of a formal employment contract** as major challenges.

In particular, the issue of **algorithmic management** emerged as a point of concern. Respondents described how their access to delivery or driving opportunities—and, ultimately, their income—is controlled by the platform's rating systems and customer feedback. Several participants noted the stress of maintaining high ratings, with some fearing account suspension if their performance metrics dropped below certain thresholds.

Despite these constraints, the vast majority of respondents (17 out of 21) considered the work **useful or necessary**, even if not ideal. This reflects a form of **pragmatic engagement** with the platform economy—one that is not necessarily chosen out of preference, but rather due to structural barriers in accessing stable employment.

Platforms Used and Rationale For Choice

While the majority of respondents reported working with Uber, several had opted for alternative platforms, most notably *Skip the Dishes* and *DoorDash*. Their preferences were often based on perceived financial benefits or structural differences in how these platforms operate. For instance:

"I chose to work with DoorDash because they pay much better than Uber, and there's less competition as well."

"Yes, absolutely. I prefer Uber because there's no time restriction—you can work whenever you want, at any time of day. With Skip, there are four-hour shifts that become available, so if you want to work for six hours, it's broken into time slots, and you have to reserve them in advance."

"The main difference lies in the tips. On Skip, each order has a fixed amount—about $7—whereas on Uber it's around $3, so the tip really matters with each delivery."

Working Hours

Most respondents indicated that their daily working hours do not exceed six hours on average. Seventeen out of twenty-one participants reported working six hours or less per day. This aligns with the finding that many respondents combine delivery work with another primary activity—whether employment or academic studies. Flexibility was repeatedly cited as a central advantage, allowing platform work to function as a secondary source of income or a means of supplementing monthly expenses.

The number of hours worked varied depending on whether the respondent treated delivery as a part-time or full-time activity. Some individuals, especially those who considered delivery their main occupation, reported longer hours. In certain cases, the accumulation of work hours could even contribute to elevated stress levels:

"I do this work part-time to make ends meet. On average, I work about an hour and a half to two hours a day—roughly 10 hours a week—because I also have another job."

"Yes, at times my work causes me stress. Especially when I need money and have had a hard day, and I know I'll have to do two or three more hours of delivery afterward. It's an added stress—something layered on top—because I know I'll have two or three hours of headache ahead. So yes, it stresses me out."

Moreover, seven of the twenty-one respondents reported having another job in addition to their work as couriers:

"Yes, I definitely have another job. I'm in charge of logistics at a private company."

"Uber is really just a side income to round out the month. It's not my main or core job. Ideally, one should have a stable, full-time job with fixed hours and supplement it with something like delivery work."

Flexibility, Job Satisfaction and Perceptions of Work L

The third part of the interviews focused on satisfaction, the subjective valuation of platform work, and longer-term outlooks regarding this type of employment.

Contrary to common assumptions, many participants highlighted the **flexibility** of the job as a significant positive aspect. The unrestricted schedule enables workers to combine courier work with another job, university studies, or family responsibilities—all while maintaining an additional income stream:

"It's a good job that gives me a certain freedom and schedule flexibility. It helps me cover some of my expenses."

"Yes, certainly—on that front (schedule flexibility), this job is great. You can open the app whenever you want and log out whenever you want. There's definitely more freedom and fewer constraints compared to jobs with fixed working hours."

"This field offers a good income, is less demanding, and very flexible. Overall, I'd say it's good—it allows me to make money, so it's a good job."

The organizational autonomy and freelance nature of the work were also highly valued. A strong **sense of independence** emerged as a recurring theme in how participants assessed their platform work experience:

"I really feel like I'm an independent worker."

"I don't feel manipulated or constantly supervised by an algorithm. I think the app just offers us jobs, and it's up to us to accept or reject them. Even after accepting a delivery, you can cancel it if you change your mind. So I don't feel controlled—I feel totally free and independent."

"I'd say I'm completely free—you work when you want in this kind of job."

However, despite the freedom to choose their hours, workers remain dependent on fluctuating demand, which tends to peak at certain times of day. This represents an underlying constraint that workers must navigate to secure a viable income.

Additionally, while many respondents expressed satisfaction with platform work, this was often because it was **temporary** and perceived as the most viable option **given their current circumstances**. For students or individuals with another stable job, delivery work offered useful supplemental income and flexibility. Nonetheless, several respondents explicitly stated that they would leave the job if a better opportunity presented itself:

"If I find another job, I'll quit this one immediately."

"As a student, this job works well for me—I can manage my hours, and frankly I can't do better right now due to lack of Canadian experience and credentials. Once I finish my degree, I'll never do this job again."

"No, I don't plan to stay in this job for long. Right now, I'm in a transitional phase—like many immigrants starting over from scratch. We have to climb the ladder one step at a time. Once I've moved forward in my career or in my chosen field and I'm earning a good salary, I'll stop doing this."

Integration Into the Labor Market

When asked about integration—both into Canadian society and the labor market—several respondents felt that courier work had helped them develop **social and linguistic familiarity**. Brief interactions with clients, for example, provided opportunities to practice the local language or become familiar with different neighborhoods. However, this was not a universal perception, and immigrants have a diversity of expériences of the labour market (Harvey & Tremblay, 2024). Some participants felt that such work offered **no meaningful advantage** in terms of professional integration or job market value:

"No, I don't think it adds value in a way that could benefit me in a future job search. I don't think this kind of work qualifies as Canadian experience. I can't imagine it making a difference on my CV if I'm applying for a coordinator role, for example."

"Yes, it helped me get to know the streets, alleys, and neighborhoods—I got used to the road system, signage, and highways. Also, just saying hello to people and getting a greeting in return—there's always that human warmth."

"It helps with integrating into society and discovering different cultures. You meet people and talk to clients."

"Yes, I gained a lot of experience and I've integrated into Quebec society. As I said, I've learned a lot about their culture and way of life."

Income

The question of income is crucial when discussing working conditions. Regarding income, it was particularly difficult to obtain precise data. The young respondents were more reluctant to speak about this topic. Overall, opinions were divided:

"It corresponds to the effort provided, so no problem, it's fine."

"Yes, that's all, so it's not really stable and you're not well paid, so you're not protected, you don't have any rights."

"Honestly, I wish they would increase the pay."

In general, the apps offer the possibility for customers to leave tips for the couriers. This feature is meant to encourage couriers to provide better service. However, it appears that clients rarely make use of it:

"We don't receive tips often, it's pretty rare."

Several negative aspects of this work experience also emerged from the interviews. Unsurprisingly, some mentioned that the earnings were too low in relation to the effort required, and that workers remain dependent on demand, which they must adapt to in order to ensure a minimum income. Other issues mentioned were logistical in nature.

For couriers, every minute counts, and even a small delay in one order can cause them to miss other delivery opportunities, thus reducing their potential earnings. For example, when an address is difficult to find or if the client has provided the wrong address, the delivery time is extended or effectively "wasted." Even though the apps now offer some compensation:

"Sometimes I can't find the address, and that wastes a lot of time searching for it."

"It's true that sometimes we struggle to find clients' addresses. Let me give you an example: some clients register their work addresses in the app to get deliveries at work during the day. But they forget to change it when they want something delivered to their home. So, I arrive at the location indicated by the app and find no one. Then I have a choice: either I deliver to the correct address for an extra 4 dollars, or I keep the order for myself, which makes for a free meal (in addition to the delivery fee)!"

Similarly, wait times at restaurants for order preparation, or difficult traffic and parking conditions, can cost couriers valuable time:

"Waiting times for orders at the restaurant cause us real delays."

"Traffic is a common issue we face, because in Montreal, there's a lot of traffic and a lack of parking."

Customer Attitudes

Interactions with customers are sometimes unpleasant: couriers may be blamed for long delivery times or for food arriving cold (often due to the conditions described above), or tensions may arise for other reasons. This issue was significant enough to be mentioned by several respondents:

"There are different kinds of customers. Some are very hard to please."

"Customers are often stressed and difficult to satisfy."

Yet it is the customers who leave ratings and reviews of the couriers. These ratings may not accurately reflect the overall quality of service, especially when couriers are blamed for things beyond their control. After receiving a certain number of negative reviews and a warning from the app, the courier's account can be deactivated, preventing them from working on the app again—regardless of the time, energy, and even money (as the equipment and vehicles are self-funded) they've invested.

"The review system is always present in the app—it's entirely up to the discretion of the customers and restaurants, in other words, the users."

"If the client isn't satisfied, they have the right to file a complaint, and I'd say the employer bases their actions on the client's feedback—as they say, the customer is always right, so we have to satisfy them."

"There will be consequences, and if you consistently provide poor service, you'll get warnings and then your account will be suspended."

"For example, if you refuse an order—because you can always choose whether or not to accept an order—if you refuse too many, you'll face certain sanctions like receiving fewer orders in the future. Also, if you get poor feedback from customers or restaurants, you'll get warnings asking you to improve your customer service."

"Uber only listens to the client. They have the final say, and even if they call us to hear our side, they don't really take it into account."

Gender Differences

The analysis presented above has enabled us to highlight the conditions under which young immigrants work, as well as the various difficulties and specificities associated with their labor. Observing a predominance of men among the workers, we sought to explore gender-based differences.

The observation of a male predominance prompted us to investigate the potential reasons for this imbalance, particularly given that the numbers of men and women immigrating to Canada are roughly equivalent. This disparity can be partly explained by the harsh working conditions: the requirement for substantial physical effort, working late at night, and dealing with potentially dangerous clients.

Additionally, female respondents reported other factors, such as fear, which all women interviewed experienced at least once during their work. One interviewee mentioned that she often avoids working at night to reduce the risk of encountering dangerous situations, especially since many women had experienced difficult situations, such as transporting heavily intoxicated passengers, which posed considerable risks.

"Sometimes, I fear working at night or in remote areas. I risk having bad encounters or breaking down in the middle of the night. It is not entirely safe for a woman."

"Although my family encourages me to be independent, my mother constantly reminds me to take precautions and avoid working late at night."

Balancing Personal or Family Life and Work And Studies

The reconciliation of work with personal or family life can also constitute a significant challenge for women.(Salehi &Tremblay, 2025; Tremblay, 2024)

Despite flexible schedules and a sense of autonomy, the study revealed that balancing work with family life or studies is not always easy. One respondent confided that he rarely spoke with his wife due to the mismatch in their professional schedules. Others reported feeling misunderstood by their partners, while some felt supported by their families. Nevertheless, even within this latter group, several individuals indicated that their children had asked them to be more present.

"It is very difficult (to reconcile family life and work) because each of us must really make concessions and be aware of the financial need. Both my wife and my son understand this need very well, so we each make compromises. However, it's not exactly joyful when I leave for an additional two or three hours after already completing my eight-hour shift, knowing that I will have less time to dedicate to my family. It is quite burdensome."

"You really cannot reconcile family life and work at the same time; it is good that I am single so I can work."

"Yes, this job is very stressful, and I cannot spend more time with my children."

The issue of family commitment and the reconciliation of private and family life emerges as a critical concern. However, these two complementary notions may appear contradictory in such contexts. Family commitment entails meeting the various needs of one's relatives, which is a driving force behind some immigrants' decision to work on these platforms. Conversely, reconciling private life and work requires reorganizing one's day to be present when family needs or desires it. Yet, this reorganization may limit the ability to generate sufficient income.

Although platform work offers young immigrants considerable schedule flexibility, it also entails diverse challenges that this study has highlighted.

DISCUSSION

We have observed that the immigrant population in Canada, and particularly in Quebec, is growing steadily. However, their working conditions and income remain precarious, and inequalities in access to employment and wages persist when compared to native Canadians. The rise of the "Gig Economy," propelled by rapid advances in new technologies, appears to be a favored option—especially among young immigrants—to secure a degree of financial and professional independence.

On-demand service applications for rides or deliveries, such as Uber, Uber Eats, and Skip the Dishes, despite numerous drawbacks—primarily linked to the independent contractor status of couriers—seem to constitute attractive options due to the flexibility they offer. These platforms provide temporary income sources, often supplementing university studies or other professional activities.

Such activities also seem to facilitate the integration of young immigrants into society, albeit indirectly (through contact with the local population, use of local languages which are often unfamiliar or not fully mastered upon arrival, etc.) as well as into the labor market by providing initial, empowering work experiences that demonstrate autonomy.

Noiseux aptly notes: “It must be recognized that young workers are at the heart of a centrifugal dynamic which may allow employment integration, but one marked by precariousness” (Noiseux, 2012, p. 50). Indeed, these new jobs are a ‘double-edged sword’ situated within a context of profound transformations in work and employment (D’Amours, Soussi, and Tremblay, 2015; Tremblay and Soussi, 2020).

Most studies conducted thus far on this topic take a pessimistic view, highlighting ethical, social, or legal concerns. These service applications exploit, to some extent, the “loopholes” in legislation, which remains ill-adapted to this burgeoning market, to maximize profits (Hashemi et al., 2023; Motaghi et al., 2023).

Couriers become a temporary labor force, providing their own equipment (bicycle, delivery materials, compliant vehicle) at their own expense for short-term contracts (rides, deliveries). Once the task is complete, the contract ends without any investment from the platform—this amounts to hiring disposable labor that only serves for brief periods.

Working conditions are thus minimally regulated and rarely favorable to couriers. The primary objective is performance, optimizing the available workforce: cost-minimization strategies focus on the fastest possible delivery to satisfy often demanding customers. Despite calls for improved human resource management in the sector, companies continue to prioritize cost reduction, which partly relies on technological innovations rather than organizational innovations and investment in the workforce (Tremblay and Rolland, 2019).

Yet, the majority of these young workers are educated and qualified—among the young people interviewed, twenty out of twenty-one were either in the process of obtaining or had already obtained a higher education diploma (most being students). Given that the educational level of immigrants arriving in Canada exceeds that of native Canadians and that most interviewees have a strong educational background, this work could be meaningful if it allows them to acquire new skills and eventually leads to better employment.

Our results support the thesis that jobs offered by digital mobility platforms are generally used as “buffers” between studies and securing a job related to their education, between two jobs, or as a fallback solution to generate income alone or supplementary to a primary job or academic pursuits. Most respondents indicated that they do not envision a future in this type of employment, consistent with the notion that this precarious work is a stepping stone to better employment, at least for educated individuals.

This likely explains why so little attention is given to these jobs and why legislation has been slow to establish protections for these workers: such employment is precarious and will likely remain so for a long time, simply because it is not designed to attract workers for medium- or long-term retention or career advancement, unlike most “traditional” or stable jobs (Tremblay, 2022). Uber, Uber Eats, Skip the Dishes, and DoorDash are unlikely to face recruitment difficulties, regardless of working conditions, because individuals experiencing significant precarity will continue to accept courier roles and associated constraints in exchange for a guaranteed, albeit low, income. It remains to be seen whether governments will intervene to improve working conditions.

“Work more to earn more” encapsulates the perception many immigrants have about this digital mobility employment. This trend emerged from observations of typical workdays of young immigrants, interviews, and consultations of social media groups dedicated to these workers.

Interviews revealed that young immigrants are generally not attached to this work, as for most it is part-time and not seen as a long-term career. However, the duration spent in such jobs often exceeds two years, which might seem contradictory. This might also challenge the idea that this work leads to better jobs later and acts as a bridge towards better employment. Yet, the extended duration can be explained by the need to work or the inability to find suitable alternative employment. Some reported working ten-hour days to meet their needs—a heavy workload but often the only option available. This is compounded by a sense of entrapment: immigrants “freely” choose long hours, fully aware that after a ten-hour shift the primary desire is rest, leaving little time to plan for the future beyond returning to work. This cycle forms a vicious circle difficult to escape for many.

Surprisingly, some young immigrants expressed satisfaction with their work despite acknowledged issues such as stress, low wages, and limited social protection. This satisfaction contrasts with some media

portrayals but is understandable in the context of aspirations for better employment given their education. Many, often from developing countries, view such jobs as short- or medium-term lifelines—easily accessible work enabling income generation and networking. These jobs are doubly beneficial: they foster social skills and accelerate integration into the Canadian society. Additionally, the employer-employee relationship is often regarded as fair, possibly due to relatively easy access to employer assistance during incidents. In practice, these young immigrants are the driving force behind these service platforms, warranting respect—something often lacking in their countries of origin.

However, the employer-employee relationship is mediated by clients through the star-rating system. Young immigrants sometimes face low ratings or complaints, yet are rarely given opportunities to defend themselves, which they find frustrating.

On-demand service work is recognized and legal, involving payment for service provision. Since earning money is the main goal, remuneration is critical. Underpayment hampers quality service. Hence, tipping systems are used to incentivize better service quality. In driver and courier social media groups and during field observations, tips were shown to significantly motivate workers.

Despite this, respondents felt their pay was insufficient and should be increased. For young immigrants relying solely on delivery or passenger transport jobs, working eight to twenty hours weekly is inadequate to meet their needs. Consequently, they tend to work longer hours, which carries risks—notably medical risks from extreme physical exertion and from driving without recommended rest breaks. A less visible challenge is the irregular work schedule: weekdays have low demand before noon, with a lunch peak and a dip after 3 p.m., followed by a rise during evening or major televised events. For passenger drivers, activity peaks when public transit is minimal, such as at night or early morning.

Many young immigrants are still students. Does this work interfere with their studies? If so, this could have negative impacts on their academic results. However, many prefer working to fund their education, sometimes at the expense of academic progress.

Moreover, “work more to earn more” often means shifting work hours to nights, weekends, and holidays, which pay better than off-peak times. Many reported needing to work these periods even part-time. This increased workload and work during usual rest times disrupts work-life balance and can harm family cohesion. Several respondents reported familial tensions with partners.

Finally, despite their youth, immigrants demonstrate strong family commitments, having built lives and even started families. Those who continue to work on these platforms do so out of necessity and with the hope that it facilitates access to better employment.

TOWARDS A TYPOLOGY OF PLATFORM WORK

The interview responses revealed a variety of ways in which young immigrants engage with digital labor platforms, suggesting the emergence of distinct user profiles. Based on the data collected, we propose a preliminary typology of platform workers composed of four main categories:

1. **The Transitional Worker**: These individuals use platform work as a **temporary strategy** while actively seeking employment in their field of study or prior expertise. They often hold **university degrees** (sometimes obtained abroad) and see platform labor as a stopgap. Their goal is to eventually integrate into the formal labor market in Canada. Platform work is thus instrumental—serving as a financial bridge.
2. **The Student-Worker**: This group includes **international students** or recent graduates who work with platforms **part-time** to support themselves during their studies. Their engagement is often **limited in time** and highly influenced by academic schedules. For them, the **flexibility** of platform work is a key advantage, but they often express concerns about balancing study and work demands.
3. **The Entrepreneurial Worker**: These respondents view platform work as a **business opportunity**. Some lease or rent vehicles to others, or work across multiple platforms in a coordinated manner to maximize income. This group demonstrates **strategic engagement** with

platform economies, with some expressing aspirations to formalize their activity into a small business.

4. **The Constrained or Enduring Worker**: This category includes those for whom platform work has become a **longer-term necessity** due to barriers in the traditional job market, including non-recognition of foreign credentials, language barriers, or lack of social networks. Although they may not have initially planned to remain in such work, platform labor becomes the main or sole source of income over time. For this group, frustrations around **precarity**, **lack of advancement**, and **digital surveillance** are most pronounced.

This typology highlights the **heterogeneity of experiences** and motivations among young immigrant platform workers. While all participants shared a relatively recent migratory trajectory and youth, their relationships to platform labor, as well as their aspirations and constraints, differ significantly.

These findings support existing literature indicating that digital labor platforms serve as **adaptive mechanisms** in contexts of socio-economic transition, particularly for immigrants facing structural barriers to integration into the formal labor market. However, they also reveal the **limits of flexibility** and the **risks of long-term precarity**, especially when such work becomes the only viable option.

CONCLUSION

This research has enhanced our understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by young immigrants working through digital mobility applications. These platforms offer valuable opportunities to meet financial needs, but also conceal drawbacks, particularly regarding job difficulty and compensation.

Firstly, it should be noted that most immigrants working through delivery apps have university education. Thus, unlike the level of education required for their current jobs, these young immigrants are well-educated. Their situation may be explained by limited access to jobs matching their qualifications or by their status as students opting for flexible work to balance study and employment.

Furthermore, many immigrants do not envision a future in this type of work, seeing it as temporary despite working in it for years.

Work-life balance is challenging to achieve despite flexible hours and a sense of autonomy reported by most immigrants. In practice, young immigrants indicated considerable difficulty reconciling professional and family life.

This study invites reflection on the integration of young immigrants in Quebec, suggesting the need to improve their working conditions and better support them in finding jobs aligned with their education and aspirations. It appears that most young people “choose” this type of work more out of necessity than preference; lacking better options, they resort to these digital platforms to survive, even though they qualify for better jobs. Most continue seeking employment more suited to their skills.

Nevertheless, some students find that, given their circumstances, such work offers a better means to earn money flexibly and independently.

The results reveal some surprising findings: despite dissatisfaction with pay and precarious conditions, the young respondents express satisfaction with their digital mobility work, which they view as temporary, a supplementary income source for a limited period. This represents a stopgap or survival strategy, offering greater flexibility and adaptability than traditional employment and a non-negligible source of income.

However, many difficulties remain. The absence of hierarchy, human resources services, or unions to address grievances or injustice makes working in these conditions challenging. One major drawback is the lack of humanity: from courier employment and career progression to client-courier interactions, everything is governed by algorithms designed to optimize platform performance, often at the expense of workers who perform their duties under frequently difficult conditions.

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