

Halifax: A City of ‘Hotspots’ of Income Inequality – Executive Summary

Although income trends show less inequality and polarization in the HRM than other major Canadian cities, both have increased between 1980 and 2015, and the municipality has several low-income neighbourhoods.

When we look at the municipality as a whole, we see that inequality and polarization increased rapidly during the 1990s. This corresponds to an economic downturn and the loss of many high-paying and normally stable jobs in the region. This was followed in the 2000s with a hollowing-out of middle-income earners. The impact of the changes seems to have created ‘hotspots’ of lower-income neighbourhoods across the municipality.

Groups of low-income earners are dispersed across the municipality rather than concentrated in a consistent socio-spatial pattern. This makes Halifax different than cities like Toronto, where lower-income areas are concentrated in rings of inner and outer suburbs with wealthier and higher income in the downtown core. Instead, Halifax’s lower-income areas are dispersed throughout the municipality in places like the area around the Woodside Ferry Terminal, North Dartmouth, the ‘rural east’ of the municipality, Fairview, Spryfield, and parts of downtown Dartmouth and Halifax.

Analysis of demographic patterns in the North Dartmouth, Fairview, Spryfield, Preston, and ‘rural east’ areas showed that low income is linked to families with children, those who are renting, being a visible minority, lower rates of post-secondary education, higher rates of unemployment, and employment in lower-paying sectors. In North Dartmouth, Fairview, and Spryfield people also spend a greater proportion of their income on shelter.

Taken together, these findings offer seven key areas for policy intervention, including:

- Income inequality and polarization appear lower in the HRM, but the municipality has hotspots of lower income.
- Focusing on neighbourhood specific programs rather than ones for the municipality as a whole is likely to have greater impact.
- Income dynamics are different in the rural versus urban areas of the municipality.
- Low-income neighbourhoods are linked to families with children. For this reason, programs that offer child and family support are likely to have great impact on alleviating inequality in the city.
- Low-income neighbourhoods have higher rates of unemployment. Considering the link to family and children, programs that support child care may improve employment in low-income neighbourhoods.
- Low-income neighbourhoods are tied to lower levels of education. Programs for skill upgrading and opportunities to complete high school and pursue post-secondary education in such areas could alleviate precarious employment and unemployment in the municipality’s lower-income areas.
- Low-income neighbourhoods are tied to higher rates of renting and a greater share of income spent on shelter costs. A focus on affordable housing with units that can accommodate families and children should be a priority.