
The development of employment standards legislation in Ontario has historically been shaped by a tension between the competing goals of establishing a minimum floor of protections for employees and minimizing interference with employers’ business practices. This tension has resulted in the establishment of numerous exemptions from the legislated minimum standards based on the perceived needs of particular industries, sectors or occupational groups. The growth of the patchwork of exemptions has been accompanied in recent decades by the spread of precarious employment, with particular effects on women, recent immigrants, and young people. By examining specific occupations subject to an exemption from or special rule regarding the minimum wage, this article reveals the disproportionate costs of exemptions for certain groups of employees. Through an in-depth look at the cases of homecare employees, liquor servers, and agricultural employees, it demonstrates how exemptions and special rules can exacerbate insecurity for those in occupations characterized by high degrees of precariousness, and often otherwise subject to disadvantage in the labour force.